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The Effect of Front-Desk Employees' Characteristics on Customer Satisfaction:
An Empirical Evidence From Norwegian and Pakistani Respondents

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Master's Thesis

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Foreword

This thesis represents the findings of a study which is carried out during the last semester of the Masters in International and Hospitality Management program at University of Stavanger, Norway. The selected topic of the report was chosen by the researchers on the basis of present issues faced by the hotel industry concerning better satisfying their customers. During the period of whole study, the researchers had received help and guidance from different individuals, without which it was not possible to complete this research project on proper time. Thus, following words of devotion are expressed with great happiness towards the help and support which they had received from:

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Moreover, expressed gratitude is for all those people who have helped the researchers in data gathering phase during pandemic situation of COVID-19 within Norway and Pakistan. These people provided special assistance to researchers out of their valuable time from their busy schedules. At last, an immense gratitude is dedicated to the family members, relatives and friends of both researchers who have been provided great support and instill courage to complete this project in proper time frame.

Abstract

In today's competitive business environment, customer's satisfaction is a valuable aspect to achieve for hotel industry. The present study intended to check the effect of front-desk employees' characteristics on customers' satisfaction. Whenever a person enters into a hotel, he/she meets with the front-desk staff first and want to get answers of all queries. Therefore, front-desk employees should possess certain characteristics that can better satisfy the needs of all customers. As, front-desk employees are important resource of hotel industry, that serve basis for first impression on customers' mind. For study purpose, four characteristics of front-desk employees were identified through literature namely friendliness, problem solving, empathy and enthusiastic service. In addition, study also aimed to find out whether the level of customer's satisfaction with service attitude of front-desk employees differ significantly among Norwegian and Pakistani customers. To validate the study hypotheses, sample of 142 respondents was selected conveniently (i.e. 68 Norwegians and 74 Pakistanis). Pearson correlation, regression analysis and T-test were applied by using SPSS. Findings revealed that three characteristics i.e. friendliness, empathy and enthusiastic service has positive and significant influence on customers' satisfaction. While, problem solving showed insignificant influence on customer's satisfaction. In addition, no significant difference were found among the satisfaction level of Norwegian and Pakistani respondents concerning front-desk employees' characteristics. This study will provide practical implications for human resource managers, marketers and academia that can enhance satisfaction of the hotels' guests effectually.

Keywords: Front-desk employees, Friendliness, Problem solving, Empathy, Enthusiastic service, Customer satisfaction

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1. Introduction

The hospitality and tourism industry is among one of the most important sectors of economy around the world. Universally, transportation systems make it easy for individuals to access all countries of the world either for leisure purposes or for business work. For many countries, hospitality and tourism is a major source of national income and employment (Bakhtiar & Vinogradov, 2019, p. 87). According to World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), travelling sector has generated 10.4% of global gross domestic product (GDP) and currently employs 319 million people while representing one job out of ten worldwide (WTTC, 2020). In Norway, hospitality and travel sector accounts for 2.44 million tourists in the fourth quarter of 2019, which represents the significance of the tourism industry in Norway (Statistics Norway, 2020). Travel and Tourism industry contributes $1/10^{th}$ part to the gross domestic product (GDP) of Norway (Ridder, 2019). Since 2014, Norway's tourism industry has grown rapidly, more tourists are coming to the country and spending money there, thus resulting in positive signs for further development for the industry (Froyd, 2016). These statistics highlighted the importance of hospitality and tourism sector in terms of financial affairs. By focusing on the present requirements of this diverse sector, it can develop noticeably and will boost the overall economy of the world. Therefore, it is extremely important to understand the essential factors that can affect this particular sector.

Despite the fact of positive signs of development in the hospitality industry, it still faces a lot of challenges due to the diverse nature of the hospitality customers (Froyd, 2016). The hospitality industry totally depends upon the number of billion customers from the whole world. As a result, the hospitality and tourism industry focuses on customers' satisfaction by providing

products and services that meet their needs (Tourism Review News, 2020). This industry is very competitive, since it consists of various types of products and services which include several dining options, variety of beverages, diverse cuisines, different hotel's theme, and exclusive experiences etc. Therefore, it is very significant for service providers to develop and maintain a good relationship with their customers, so that in future they will come back for similar services.

1.1 Background of the Study

Customers give importance to certain products and services, so, identifying and understanding those demands reflects the success in business (Chu & Choi, 2000, p.364). The need to "be economical" and offer "competitive edge" to customers has been widely recognized in various business sectors. In hotel setting, where competition is dominant, service providers must learn the strengths and weaknesses of their goods and services, and accurately measure which features will best satisfy the guests. Superior and excellent service quality enable an organization to distinguish itself from its competition, allow to enhance efficiency and gain an ecological competitive position in the market (Mei, Dean & White, 1999; Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2000). However, providing outstanding service quality and accomplishing customer's satisfaction is the most significant and challenging concern which is presently being faced by the existing service industry (Hung, Huang & Chen, 2003).

In addition, a number of studies highlighted that customer's satisfaction is mainly reliant upon employee's service attitude (Bach & Milman, 1996; Kriegl, 2000) and different guests served by the international service sector require unique emphasis on customer service (McColl-Kennedy & White, 1997). Enhanced service quality provides several benefits which includes positive words-of-mouth, increased customer satisfaction, improved customer retention, decreased

operational costs, reduced employee turnover, increased profitability, larger market share and better financial performance (Rust & Zahorik, 1993; Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2000; Cronin, Brady & Hult, 2000; Janda, Trocchia & Gwinner, 2002; Duncan & Elliot, 2002; Yoon & Suh, 2004; Kang & James, 2004). Resultantly, the concept of service quality has been a subject matter of greatest interest for service marketing and management researchers.

Service attitude of employees play an important role in customers' satisfaction, because guests and hotel employees have close interaction with each other. Number of studies show that employee's service attitude is a significant factor for guest's satisfaction (Tas, 1983; Jaworski & Kohli, 1993; Bach & Milman, 1996; Heskett & Schlesinger, 1994; Kriegl, 2000). Geller's study (1985) demonstrated nine key factors for successful running of hotels, out of which employee's service attitude was the most important. Thus, there has been vast amount of researches that empirically tested the relationship between these two concepts, while reporting service quality of employees exerts influence on customers' satisfaction. However, only few studies examined this relationship in hotel industry on customers' satisfaction effected by service attitude (Markovic & Jankovic, 2013, p.149)

Furthermore, hotel services always begin at the front-desk; when customers come into the hotel for check-in or getting information, they meet front-desk personnel first. Front-desk employees are the main face of the hotel, they have to offer positive and professional services to all the customers, so that their desires can be satisfied in well manner (DePaulo, 1992). In addition, it is the prime responsibility of front-office employees to fulfill the customer's needs, as they are one of the most significant departments of a hotel. These employees can contribute to repeated business if they provide friendly and exceptional care to the customers. Front-desk employees are

the representatives of hotels from whom, all guests can foresee inspiring features of the hotels (DePaulo, 1992).

In hospitality industry, there are number of employee's behavior that can happen within the organizations and work settings. Hanna, Backhouse & Burns' (2004) definition of employee's behavior includes various series of actions that can carried out by the employees within their workplace. Some of these behaviors can be positive that reflect constructive actions of staff for customers on behalf of their respective organizations and workers, while some behaviors can be of negative nature that can destroy the whole image and work environment of the organizations. (Bowen & Shoemaker, 1998). However, from customer's point of view, service attitude depends upon what customers expect from employees and what they get out of their services (Seijts, Billou & Crossan, 2010).

The importance of interaction process can be identified by the findings of service researches where findings revealed that customers measure their service experiences on the basis of employee's behaviors and attitude including friendliness, personal attention and service punctuality (Mittal & Lasser, 1996; Hartline & Ferrell, 1996; Homburg, Wieseke & Hoyer, 2009). In every transaction, interaction process always start with the conversation of two or more persons with each other. When two unfamiliar persons come across for the first time, they have some initial feelings about each other (Bergmann, Eyssel & Kopp, 2012), mostly these feelings based on what they see including facial expressions, actual appearance and clothing.

Additionally, one of the foremost things is the facial expressions of two individuals. During interaction, these initial facial gestures can affect the satisfaction and dissatisfaction level of people. For instance, a general perception is that a smile can make people feel comfortable and

warmness with a happy mood. Kim (2008) recommended that in hotels, management also expect from service employees to demonstrate friendly and cheerful attitude during serving or interacting with customers. According to Girard (2013) study, front-desk staff is the initial marketing and strategic point for hotels to impress the customers. Therefore, front-desk employee's service attitude has an important relationship with customer's satisfaction (Tornow and Wiley, 1991).

Furthermore, national differences occur in evaluating employees' service attitude. As stated by Hofstede (1980), cultural differences exist and affects the behavior of people. He recognized four cultural dimensions which are universally accepted today and are frequently used as the basis for cross-cultural studies. Cross-cultural studies can be used to explain the nationality differences. Norma (2002) highlighted that national culture is one of the significant features in a successful hotel business. Saunders and Renaghan (1992) also stressed that it is a big challenge for hospitality managers to serve customers of different ethnicities. Successful operations of international hotels demand understanding of cultural differences for hotel managers and consider it very important for their future development (Pizam, Jansen-Verbeke & Steel, 1997; Hope, 2004). Consequently, exploring different choices of international tourists about employees' service attitude and customers' satisfaction concerning these characteristics are important phenomenon to study.

1.2 Significance of the Study

Service quality can be divided into two parts i.e. tangible and intangible (Gupta, 2017, p.302). Tangible services include building, furniture, lodgings and decor etc. and intangible services are comprised of surprises, personal interactions, special offerings and feelings etc. Further, Gupta highlighted that in today's modern era, all hotels are nearly same in their tangible

aspects, although the feature which attracts and impresses the consumers considerably, are the intangible services provided by hotels. In most service industries, the battle for customers, transfers from tangible items to intangibles, when market matures, competitors offer same feature products or services then battle shifted toward price (Davidow & Uttal, 1989). In all this process, inefficient companies drop down and focus moves towards quality of service. Consequently, the stress turns towards the customers, services as a way of satisfying their needs and wants. So, exploration of elements of service attitude of employees is crucial, the missing of which can cause dissatisfaction or low satisfaction of customers. One should identify the reasons behind low satisfactory attitudes of customers in order to improve these features in future services.

According to Kuo (2007, p.1083), during peak hours, hotels use number of part-time employees that are not well trained in serving different customers. These employees give different services to diverse customers on the basis of their clothing while thinking that well-dressed customers will give tip better than others. As a consequence, they do not pay attention to the service quality and demands of customers, which results in dissatisfied customers and low retention. Thus, there is need to identify characteristics of front-desk employees that can better satisfy the customers' needs.

1.2.1 Significance for Human Resource, Marketing and Academia

Awareness of front-desk employees' characteristics will help to provide guidance for human resource managers about the interpersonal aspects where they can make positive assertion by training the new or existing front-desk staff. Recognition of expectations and meeting needs of different customers will help the hotels to accommodate more diverse guests and improve their marketing strategies for better competitiveness. In addition, the academia can also get knowledge

from this study that will support to teach the students of different educational institutions. The findings will help the students in future while making interpersonal dealing with their prospective customers and can enhance the reputation and profits of their hotel business.

1.2.2 Contribution to the literature

Review of literature reveals that most of the studies discussed the service attitude from employee's point of view (Tornow & Wiley, 1991; Larsen & Bastiansen, 1991) and few have studied it from guest's point of view. None of the studies were found in Norway that specifically addressed the service attitude of front-desk employees and satisfaction of international hotels' customers while focusing on nationality aspect of tourists. In addition, there is no study available that directly compare the choices of two diverse nationalities i.e. Norwegians and Pakistanis. Comparison of two dissimilar countries can provide beneficial findings in the literature. For that reason, this study will fill literature gap by identifying features of front-desk employees that can satisfy customer's needs in better way and will also explore whether these characteristics differ significantly among different nationals around the globe.

1.3 Scope of the Study

This study is broad in nature and includes a comprehensive literature review of the previous researches. It can be viewed as relevant from the perspective of all service industries where employees serve their customers from main receptions and front-desk offices. However, it more specifically relates to the hotel sector where customers always get first information from the front-desk. This study follows the three main aspects in the literature included in this study i.e. customers' satisfaction, employees' characteristics and nationality differences. The population

scope of this study is people of Norway and Pakistan, who visit hotels frequently for their business purposes or for spending their holidays. This study took a timeline of 6 months for completing the final report for submission.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The present study has two main objectives i.e. one is general and second is specific. *First,* the general objective of this study is to focus on customers' satisfaction while recognizing several characteristics of front-desk employees that can enhance the satisfaction level of the customers. *Second*, more specifically, this study highlights the characteristics of front-desk employees including friendliness, problem solving skills, empathy and enthusiastic service attitude, which can influence the customers' satisfaction.

On one hand, the research highlights the factors that influence the satisfaction level of hotel's customers. On the other hand, the study also explores the differences among different nationals (Norwegians & Pakistanis) to analyze whether satisfaction level of different countries' customers vary about the characteristics of front-desk employees or not.

1.5 Research Questions

The present study has two main research objectives which can be described as:

A) What are the main characteristics of front-desk employees that have significant influence on satisfaction of hotel's customers?

A1) Do front-desk employees' friendliness have significant and positive influence on the satisfaction of hotel customers?

A2) Do front-desk employees' problem solving skill have significant and positive influence on the satisfaction of hotel customers?

A3) Do front-desk employees' empathy have significant and positive influence on the satisfaction of hotel customers?

A4) Do front-desk employees' enthusiastic service have significant and positive influence on the satisfaction of hotel customers?

B) Does the level of customer's satisfaction with service-attitude of front-desk employees differ significantly among customers from Norway and Pakistan?

1.6 Outline of Subsequent Chapters

The following sections are comprised of four chapters which include literature review, methodology, findings, discussion and conclusion. Chapter two (Literature review) summarizes the previous researches and literature on customers' satisfaction, front-desk employees' characteristics (i.e. friendliness, problem solving, empathy and enthusiastic service attitude) and national differences of hotel customers. Chapter three discusses the methodology used in this study. Chapter four presents the major findings and analysis of the data followed by discussion in Chapter five and six present the conclusion and practical implications, limitations of the present study and suggestions for future research. In the end, a list of references which are used in this study are displayed followed by appendix.

2. Literature Review

This chapter reviews the literature in order to gain an insight about the study variables. The chapter starts with the overview of studies that worked on customer satisfaction and service quality of employees. The next sections of the chapter represents the characteristics of front-desk employees and research hypotheses accordingly.

2.1 Customer Satisfaction and Service Quality

From marketing and management perspective, customer satisfaction is the comparison between the customers' needs and services provided by the service providers. Numerous studies define customer satisfaction differently, as Hunt (1975) considers customer satisfaction as an evaluation of the services to be as good as customers thought it should be after experiencing it. Likewise, Oliver (1981) explained satisfaction as an emotional response of customers after use of specific products or services (p. 27). Similarly, Lam and Zhang (1999) found that customer satisfaction is attained when needs and desires of the customers are fulfilled in a well-organized way. Whereas, Anton (1996) explains the concept of customer satisfaction by adopting more contemporary approach. Anton describes customer satisfaction as a state of mind in which customer's expectations, needs and desires exceed by the quality of product or service which results in repurchase behavior and customer's trustworthiness. In the same way, Dimitris, Nikolaos & Petros (2007) characterized customer satisfaction as a measure of how products and services perform in comparison with expectations of customers.

In the hospitality industry, hoteliers have recognized that customer satisfaction plays a significant role in the successful operations and strategies of business. The main purpose of focusing on customer satisfaction is to achieve greater retention rate of customers which boost the

company's profitability and result in high market share (Gilbert & Horsnell, 1998). However, attaining high customer satisfaction by providing excellent service quality is the most challenging aspect for service industries (Hung, Huang, & Chen, 2003). A number of studies on the hospitality industry have widely argued that there is evident link between customers' satisfaction and service quality of hotels (Miguel, Edward & Dick, 2004; Heskett, Sasser & Schlesinger, 2004; GreatHouse, Gregoire, Skanklin & Tripp, 1996; Larsen & Batistiansen, 1991). In addition, the quality of services is highly dependent upon the emotional interaction between employees and customers (Davidow, 2000).

It is a widely accepted phenomenon that service employees are primary representatives of their respective firms and resultantly, crucial for affecting perceptions of customers about service (Rachel, Yee-Andy, Yeung & Cheng, 2008; Hartline & Ferrell, 1996). The importance of service employees can be explored by taking into consideration two key aspects which are highlighted in the study of Gracia, Cifre & Grau (2010), findings revealed that service employees and organization-customer link as an active player of the service. For this reason, service employee's behavior is vital to improve future relationships with customers and enhancing customer's service loyalty (Dimitriades, 2007). In addition, employees of service organizations are considered significant because they are responsible for providing such services that not only meet the customer's expectations but also exceed hopes (Zeithaml, Berry & Parasuraman, 1996). Moreover, employees can also accomplish customer's satisfaction by gratifying the promises made to the clients (Kattara, Weheba & El-Said, 2008).

According to Gronroos (1990), employees' behavior is important in the service sector as they are the main source of making connection between organization and its customers and they

represent a crucial role in maintaining the effective and working relationship with customers (Gwinner, Gremler & Bitner, 1998). Additionally, customer satisfaction is an alternative name of emotional status that results in the form of long-term relationship between service providing firms and customers (Umasuthan, Park & Ryu, 2017, p. 620). However, customer's behavioral intentions are part of a complex process that widely swings between two levels i.e. customers' satisfaction and dissatisfaction (Umasuthan, Park & Ryu, 2017, p. 620). This complexity can be reduced by improving the behaviors and attitudes of service staff, enhancing employee's responsiveness and competency to adapt change according to client needs (Sharpley & Forster, 2003). Resultantly, service attitude of front line employees is essential and key for the success of the service industry (Jui-Min, Jen-Shou & Hsin-His, 2009). In a nutshell, positive attitude of front line employees makes favorable impression on customers and negative attitudes reflect unfavorable imprints on customer's mind. Accordingly, a quality service attitude is vital for both business success in common and for customers' satisfaction in particular (Doucet, 2004; Pugh, 2001; Hofmeyr, 1997).

2.2 Front-Desk Employees' Characteristics

This study identifies several characteristics of front-desk employees from previous researches, like problem-solving, knowledge, empathy, friendliness, skills, competence, and enthusiastic service that are important for service providers to satisfy their customers. Hotel front-desk employee's problem solving, competence and working performance was shown important in the study of Sundaram & Webster (2000) and Webster (2006). Hotel front-desk employee's professionalism, devotion and friendliness was shown as significant in the study of Seijts, Billou & Crossan (2010).

In addition, Kuo's study (2007) found service-attitude as the most important aspect of service industry which includes front-desk employee's style, kindness, politeness, empathy, patience and carefulness. Front-desk employee's knowledge refers to the hotel specific skills, knowledge and other relevant information that one have about their specific job and area of field (Shaw-Brown & Sulzer-Azaroff, 1994) which results in enthusiastic service to the hotel customers (Kuo, 2007). Resultantly, four dimensions of service quality were identified on the basis of Kuo's study (2007, 2009 & 2012) to check the impact of these aspects on hotels customer's satisfaction. The next sections will highlight the importance of four dimensions, namely: Friendliness, Problem solving, Empathy and Enthusiastic service on the basis of aforementioned researches.

2.2.1 Friendliness

In the perspective of service industries, friendliness refers to be acting like a friend i.e. being pleasant, welcoming, kind and outgoing in customer interactions (Shaw-Brown & Sulzer-Azaroff, 1994). Researchers provide different aspects in a friendly service attitude which includes politeness, kindness, passionate conduct, neat appearance and gracious temperament (Larsen & Bastiansen, 1991; Lele & Sheth, 1993; Tsa, 1994; Lin, 1999; Shu, 1999). Having a friendly employee is the most effective and best way to impress the hotel guests while showing them dedication and professionalism (Seijts et al., 2010). For that reason, friendliness is not only vital in hotel industry but it is also important to any service areas (Sundaram & Webster, 2000, p.35).

Front-desk employee is the person who is the doorway to the rooms and other areas of the hotel (Seijts et al., 2010), thus, he/she meets every day with the guests on reception and main lobby. These employees are the main contact person between the hotel and guests before giving the access to other places within the hotel, for that reason, employees must always be friendly and

professional (Sundaram & Webster, 2000). They should stay calm under pressure showing a gesture of kindness, even when they are dealing with emotional and personal issues (DePaulo, 1992). By being friendly, front-desk employees make the customers to stay longer and come back to the same hotel in future, in addition, such customers become more willing to bring new customers in the form of their friends or family members, which will enhance the profitability of the hotel (Barnum & Wolniansky, 1989).

Moreover, Front-desk employees represent that the hotel will serve their guests with best services in a kind manner before spending their money and time (Seijts et al., 2010). When people are pleasant and friendly, other people will also become benevolent and open to deliver mutual benefit, hence, they will learn friendliness from each other and create perfect atmosphere of conversation (DePaulo, 1992). In addition, friendliness enhances the interaction and relationship with each other. According to Mayo (1997), employees should be encouraged to deliver service that go beyond the expectations of hotel guests. In hospitality sector, offering customers to help in need, smiling at customers and engaging with the guests that in-line next to you are all good examples of being friendliness (Sundaram & Webster, 2000). If employees neglect the aspects of friendliness such as courteousness and smiling, then it will make the customers to feel uncomfortable (Kuo, 2007). Therefore, researchers agree on this feature that friendly service attitude includes rapid and effective customer service that meet their expectations and satisfy them (Gronroos, 1990; Heskett and Schlessinger, 1994; Tsa, 1994). Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Front-desk employees' friendliness has a positive effect on hotel's customers' satisfaction.

2.2.2 Problem Solving

For creating higher value, the primary and essential thing is to solve the problems of the business customers in an efficient way (DeSena, 2020). Problem solving includes all types of issues whether these are faced by the customers at present or can arise in future because of continuously evolving needs and change. Solving customer's issues in an active manner allow the businesses to boost their sales, admiration from customers and driving profit levels through the roof (DeSena, 2020). According to Business Dictionary (2020), problem solving is a process of reaching at the solution of a problem through detail work and critical thinking skills of individuals. It means that at workplace, one is capable and has required degree of skills for performing a desired task in well manner. Additionally, it indicates that the employees understand the area of assigned task and are prepared to handle and manage the problems that may come in the line of their designated work (Sundaram & Webster, 2000).

According to the department of Tourism, Leisure, Hotel and Sport Management of Griffith University in 2015, the hospitality workplace requires skills such as problem solving, emotional intelligence, critical thinking, take care of professional and ethical standards together with leadership (as cited in McKay, 2017). Therefore, a competent front-desk hotel employee understands his/her responsibilities and is capable to use the learned skills for delegated tasks and hotel advancement (Sundaram & Webster, 2000). Front-desk employee must pay close attention to the customer's needs, mood, emotion and satisfaction, so that they can judge what type of customers they are dealing with and accommodate them accordingly(Meijerink, Bondarouk, & Lepak, 2016). If customers need help and guidance, front office staff should be able to provide basis services, along with addressing extra concerns of customers on the basis of their working

performance and problem solving skills (Mast, 2007). This spirit reveals that hotel care for the emotions of their customers and is trying to offer its best image in front of them (Liu & Liu, 2008).

Staff ability to solve problems and their working performance show the degree of customer's trust in services. If customers trust the services of hotel staff, it is equivalent that they will trust the services of entire hotel as well (Sundaram & Webster, 2000). Resultantly, if hotel employees provide their high quality and genuine services, then it will benefit in future for marketing and good reputation of hotels (DePaulo, 1992). For that reason, Dabholkar (1996) suggested that employees who have skills of quality services, solve the problems actively, deals situation patiently, in an organized manner and make sure of extra efforts for their customers eventually leads toward their satisfaction (Lele and Sheth, 1993; Shu, 1999; Lin, 1999). Problem solving of customers is an advanced service technique, which help employees to solve customers' complaints and those factors which cause dissatisfaction (Kuo, 2007). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Front-desk employees' problem solving skills have a positive effect on hotel's customers' satisfaction.

2.2.3. Empathy

Empathy is another essential feature of hotel's Front-desk employees. Several definitions found in various conceptual studies about empathy by different authors described this notion in diverse ways. According to Hogan (1969), empathy plays a significant role in human behavior while understanding their mental states. Similarly, Watson, Grisham, Trotter & Biderman (1984) described empathy as the ability to sense other person's emotional state by own self. Hollin's study

(2002) explains empathy in another way by stating that it is a power to see own acts from other person's point of view. Empathy can be viewed as the act of understanding other person's emotions, feelings, point of view and mental condition so that individuals can respond accordingly (Smith, 2006). Therefore, understanding these emotional and empathetic service requirements of diverse customers is a key part of the empathy dimension. The care of individual persons and displaying empathy in service has been recognized as the significant intangible feature of the employee's service quality in hotels (Umasuthan, Park & Ryu, 2017). Empathy is related to giving personal attention and care to the customers by demonstrating the fact that employees recognizes the personalized needs of guests as well (Rauch, Collins, Nale & Barr, 2015).

At international level, research has proved that customer-oriented employees who understands customers, show empathy, treat them with interpersonal care, reveal trustworthiness and instill competent behavior are more able to develop a constructive image for the hotel and maintain a long-term relationship with customers (van-Dolen, de-Ruyter & Lemmink, 2004). In addition, understanding customers' emotions and viewpoints can help and guide the employees to improve guests' experiences and change the future services in positive directions (Fairweather, 2013), and it will serve as significant determining factor that can enhance the satisfaction level of customers and their loyalty (Williams, 2013). Quality service attitude of employees require empathy which demonstrates concern for customers' needs, their safety and privacy, respect, individualized service and offering care (Tsa, 1994; Lin, 1999; Larsen and Bastiansen, 1991). As a result, employees are expected to show expressive presentation of services while attending the guests (Barsky and Nash, 2002).

Furthermore, according to Decrop (1999), marketing and social psychological literature have theorized that emotional experiences and perception of customers regarding a specific product or service determine their future decision making and intentions of revisit. Understanding individual's emotional and service expectations suggests the designers and service providers to create pleasant and affective services (Lin, 2004). This analysis clearly revealed that by fulfilling the empathetic service expectations of guests, not only satisfy the customers but also serves a critical factor to address in future services for food and lodging companies. Similar, findings in the study of Chu & Murrmann (2006), revealed that displaying genuine feelings and deep concern for customers' needs is an essential ingredient for quality services and winning customers' loyalty in hotel business. For that reason, empathy is an essential component of service attitude for front-desk employees in all service industries (Juwaheer & Ross, 2003; Jui-Min, Jen-Shou & Hsin-His, 2009). Employees need to understand the individualized customer's necessities, their privacy and well-being, as it is the first priority of all service employees (Kuo, 2007). In summary, literature revealed that customer service requirements are highly associated with empathetic service approach for customer's satisfaction. On the basis of this conception, following hypothesis is proposed.

H3: Front-desk employees' empathy has a positive effect on hotel's customers' satisfaction.

2.2.4 Enthusiastic Service

The fourth important aspect of front-desk employees' characteristics is enthusiastic service, which is the key ingredient in the success of hotel industry. This component of employee behavior is essential for gaining and retaining customers. When an employee interacts physically, attends a phone call, sends email or chats on web, level of enthusiasm is apparent to customers

(Errol Allen Consulting, 2012). Enthusiastic service includes keenness, providing assistance, knowledge about hotel's products and services, recognition of customer's needs and wants (DePaulo, 1992; Olorunniwo, Hsu, & Udo, 2006; Kuo, Chen, & Lu, 2012). More precisely, enthusiastic service encompasses various components of how front-desk employees present themselves to customers, including their good manners, elegance, kindness and passion (Kuo, 2007) and their empathy, carefulness and tolerance as well (Kuo, 2009). Enthusiasm is a powerful emotion which incorporates in the delivery of quality services to increase the chances of preserving repeat customers for the business. Every customer has emotions, and main goal of the service provider is to serve in a manner that create great experience for them (Errol Allen Consulting, 2012).

Enthusiastic employees feel passionate about knowledge, work and their life. They do everything in a positive, good and energetic manner while enjoying their work and feel satisfied with what they do (Exploring your mind, 2020). People with enthusiasm create an atmosphere in the workplace which help them to overcome obstacles and contribute important part in customer's life (Exploring your mind, 2020). In hotel setting, having knowledge about hotel, its equipment, tools and operations indicates to customers that employees are knowledgeable about their workplace and have ability to serve in an efficient way (DePaulo, 1992). In hospitality industry, employees feel responsible about every single task and make their time full of fun at work. For making their service more enthusiastic, employees should be aware with all equipment, services, and promotional schemes of hotels and be attentive in response of customers' needs, even working extra time, if necessary (Kuo, 2007). Customers can also tell if front-desk employee is enthusiastic and knowledgeable about his/her hotel by how effectively and efficiently they manage incoming

calls and emails which will make customers satisfy and offer a sense of feel that they will get the similar treatment in case of need (Sastry & Ramsingh, 2011).

Furthermore, if the receptionists show helpful service attitude during their communication, it may change the customers' impression of employees and hotels, which in turn affects the revisit and repurchase decisions (Girard, 2013). A confident front desk employee can build trust with their field knowledge and expertise while serving the customers, that creates a good impression on customer's mind (Seijts et al., 2010). This perception builds customer's confidence in the employees and hotel as well, which can contribute to build customer's satisfaction. In 2004, Kuo's study found five dimensions crucial to guest's perceptions regarding hotel employee's expertise: professional skills, industry knowledge, communication skills, management ability and an enthusiastic service attitude, out of these five characteristics, Kuo's findings found that enthusiastic service attitude is critically very important for hotel staff (Kuo, 2004). Therefore, on the basis of previous researches following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Front-desk employees' enthusiastic service has positive affect on hotel's customers' satisfaction.

2.3 Nationality Differences, Service attitude and Customers' Satisfaction

Literature review highlighted numerous studies that deal with the service attitude of employees and customers' satisfaction in different ways, while identifying the core problematic issues (Kuo, 2007; Norma, 2002; Saunders & Renaghan, 1992). Among these areas, nationality of international tourists is an important aspect that should be considered in evaluating customer satisfaction by focusing on employee's personality attributes. Therefore, several cross-cultural

studies can be used to explain the differences among diverse nationals. According to Kuo's study (2007), research on cross-cultural issues began in 70's and much developed in 90's.

In the textbooks of marketing (Kotler & Keller, 2009) and consumer behavior (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007), authors identified the implications of cultural aspects on different behaviors of customers such as consumer purchase, consumption and decision making behaviors, customer's satisfaction, dissatisfaction and complaint behavior etc. In successful hotel operations, national culture is one of the important aspects while discussing customers (Burgess, Hampton, Price & Roper, 1995; Huang, Huang & Wu, 1997). Similarly, Hope (2004) indicated that understanding the cultural differences of customers is very important for managers while operating international hotels, as it is a big challenge for managers to serve the customers of diverse ethnicities (Becker & Murrmann, 1999; Mok & Armstrong, 1998; Pizam & Sussmann, 1995).

Furthermore, Weiermair (2000) discussed the connection between behavior of tourists and national culture. He highlighted that dimensions of Hofstede's national culture have been widely applied to various international researches about customers. The five cultural dimension of Hofstede's study (1980, 2001) named as uncertainty avoidance, power distance, individualism vs collectivism, masculinity vs femininity, and long-term vs short-term orientation have been well-known as main approaches to deal with cross-cultural differences of customers behaviors. Studies carried out by Kuo (2007, 2009 & 2012) have found that service attitude of employees is important for service and overall level of satisfaction while the services vary considerably among the consumers of diverse nationalities. For example, Kuo's findings revealed that Taiwanese customers place importance on employee's empathy; treating customers politely and kindly

irrespective of their clothing and outfits. Taiwanese perception was that they are treated unfairly by the employees due to expecting huge tips from well-dressed customers (Kuo, 2007, p. 1084).

On the other hand, American customers emphasize that employees should be able to solve their problems in an effective way and provide appropriate services by focusing on individual needs. American nationals feel dissatisfied when employees are lacking command of English and are not capable to resolve the customer's issues (Kuo, 2007, p.1083). In addition, Kuo (2007) found that Japanese tourists stress importance on employee's quick problem solving skills and being able all the time to handle the accidents and incidents efficiently. These findings help the service managers with useful information for employee's service training in future and making plans for marketing purposes.

Thus, above mentioned literature revealed that characteristics of employees' service attitude have meaningfully affected the customers' satisfaction of each nationality, which is represented by Kuo's study as well. Therefore, this study assumes that satisfaction of different nationals (customers) about elements of service attitude is differ for each nationality. On the basis of this proposition and Kuo's findings the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: The level of hotel customers' satisfaction with service-attitude of front-desk employees differs significantly among Norwegian and Pakistani customers.

3. Research Methodology

This chapter represents the methodology used in this research, starting with a research model, which is developed on the basis of study's hypotheses. The next sections of this chapter discusses the overall research design, target population, planned and achieved sample, data collection technique, survey instrument, relevant measurements, sample size and analysis planned to choose for explaining the major findings of the study.

3.1 Research Model

The importance of service attitude of front-desk employees and its role in hotel customers' satisfaction has been analyzed by in-depth analysis of the previous literature. Five research hypotheses were proposed after reviewing the literature of this study. On the basis of before-mentioned hypotheses the conceptual research model is developed, which is shown in Figure 1. Conceptual model of this study illustrates the association between independent and dependent variables with the help of connected and pointed arrows. Left side of the model shows the independent variables about front-desk employees' characteristics i.e. friendliness, problem-solving, empathy and enthusiastic service. Right side of the model depicts the dependent variable namely customers' satisfaction.

Moreover, the downside area of figure shows that level of customer satisfaction of different nationalities can vary significantly about the characteristics of front-desk employees. For instance, cross-cultural differences exist among different nationals around the globe. Therefore, all the proposed relationships among variables are demonstrated by representing the conceptual research model.

Front Desk Employees' Characteristics
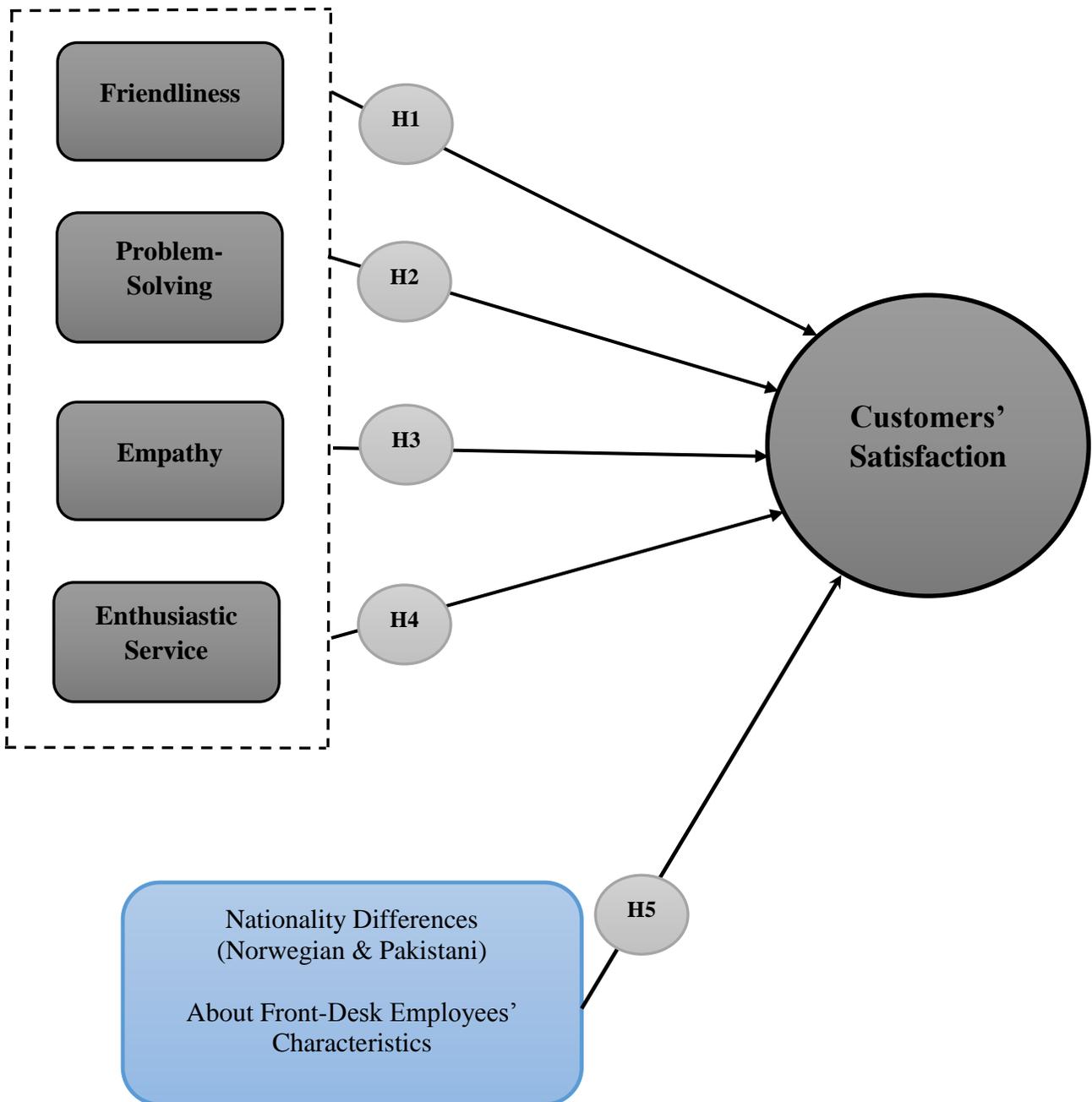
Figure 1. Conceptual Research Model

3.2 Overall Research Design

Research design of a study helps to determine when the study is to be carried out, from where data will be collected, how it will be analyzed and finally, drafting the obtained results to answer the research questions (Cooper & Schindler, 2008). The overall purpose of every research is to be able to collect empirical data in an organized manner and to observe patterns of data so that phenomenon under study about social life can be better understood and clarified (Neuman, 2014, p.14). Since previous studies relevant to service attitude of employees and customers' satisfaction have suggested a number of possible answers for the main questions of this research, however it is motivating factor to retest the proposed hypotheses and available findings by using different population and research method. As Neuman (2014, p.183) stated, test, retest, verify or falsify a research hypothesis which is already in the researcher's mind is one of the most popular technique for quantitative oriented research.

The present study uses the quantitative research design by making a clear indication of dependent and independent variables by the use of a conceptual research model. For instance, Neuman (2014) highlighted the important characteristic of a quantitative research that stresses on accurately evaluating the variables, making it possible to gather clear data which bases on scales and numbers, and will lead to organized analysis of the data. In addition, this study adopted deductive approach, in which researcher formulates a set of hypotheses at the beginning of research, then uses appropriate research methods and applies to test the hypotheses to verify them as right or wrong (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2005). More precisely, deductive reasoning leads "from general to particular" (Wilson, 2010, p. 7). So, the plan of present study reflects that it is the most suitable design to achieve the purpose of this thesis. Figure 2 depicts deductive research approach in a more precise manner.
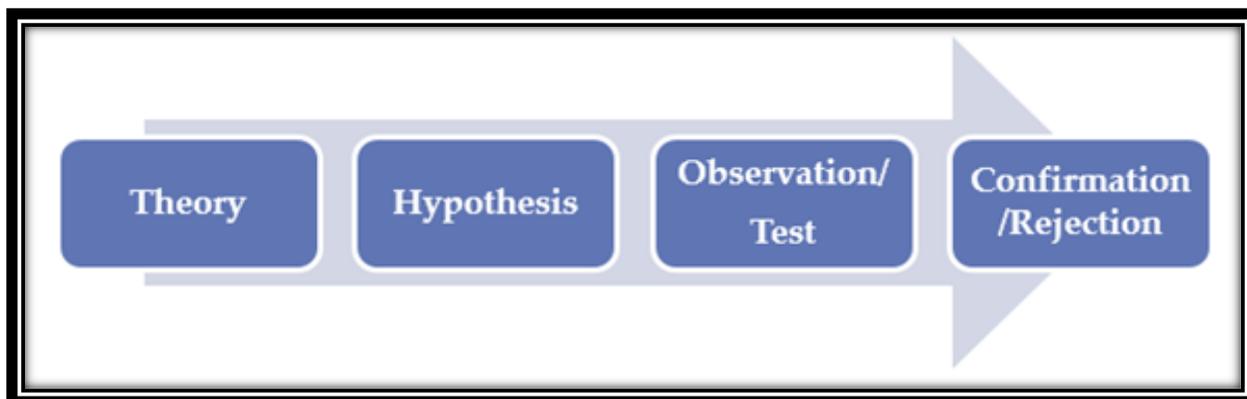
Figure 2. "Deductive Approach (Deductive Reasoning)", av, Research Methodology. (https://research-methodology.net/research-methodology/research-approach/deductive-approach-2/). CC By 2019 Necessary Knowledge to conduct a business research.

3.3 Data collection strategy and method

Survey is selected as most appropriate strategy to collect data from the respondents according to the purpose of this study. It has direct connection with deductive approach and commonly used by the investigators in quantitative studies (Sekaran, 2003). Survey is applied when researcher wants to study large number of population, and needs to examine the subset of population that is called sample. After studying the sample, findings discovered from the sample can be generalized to the entire target population (Sekaran & Bougie, 2009). According to Cohen & Manion (1989), surveys are widely used as research technique by the academic researchers to get the desire results of the study. Therefore, survey is selected as most suitable data collection technique for this research.

Furthermore, for the purpose of collecting data from the study sample, questionnaire is selected as most useful method. According to Sekaran & Bougie (2009), questionnaire is a data collection method that helps to get answers from respondents of the study on pre-written questions about research problem. It is an efficient method of data collection in which researcher beforehand

knows what data he/she actually wants and variables of interest are quantifiable in a systematic way (Sekaran, 2003). Distribution of questionnaires can be possible in multiple ways i.e. personal administration, send by post, through email or online survey etc. For present study, two methods were adopted to get maximum responses from the respondents, namely online survey and self-administration of questionnaire.

During planning phase of thesis, it was decided to get the data from Gardermoen Airport, Oslo and Stavanger Airport, Sola by self-administering the questionnaires to the respondents. As, most of the incoming and out-coming travelers are the best sources to provide the information about study purpose including different nationalities. However, in March 2020, before the beginning phase of data collection, a pandemic situation raised due to Covid-19, and it was not possible to administer the questionnaire (personally) to the intentional locations. Consequently, the planned criteria for gathering data was changed with the guidance and approval of research supervisor. Major changes that were approved are as follows:

➤ Self-administer questionnaire was converted into an online survey by using Google forms.
➤ Multiple nationalities were altered to only two main nationals i.e. Norwegian and Pakistani.
➤ Students from University of Stavanger, social media groups and known persons to researchers were selected for gathering data instead of international and local travelers at airports.

In addition, the present thesis is time constrained, therefore, data is collected only once. According to time, this type of research is known as cross-sectional study (Sekaran, 2003), in which the data is gathered only one point of time. This type of study takes lesser time than longitudinal studies (in which data usually gather at different point of times or intervals).

3.4 Target population and sampling method

The target population of present research was all international and local travelers from Norway and Pakistan who visit hotels. These people visit hotels, get information, check-in and check-out by visiting the front-desk offices and receptions. They meet employees over the counter, interact with each other and get different experiences from front-desk employees. For that reason, these people are the rational target population that can give the best suitable answer for front-desk employees' characteristics and their satisfaction level.

In this thesis, non-probability sampling is chosen as sample selection method from the target population. In non-probability sampling method, convenience sampling is used to get the desired information from the respondents. This sampling strategy is best known in practice, when researchers want to collect data from whom they consider suitable for providing the appropriate information (Neuman, 2014). As this study aims to get outlook of different people about their satisfaction, that can effect by the front-desk employees' characteristics and this satisfaction can vary significantly within different nationalities about service attitude of employees. This sampling method is economical and less time consuming (Sekaran & Bougie, 2009), thus, suitable for the present study.

3.5 Planned and Achieved Sample

This section represents the planned sample of the thesis and actual sample which is achieved during data collection period. In research, it happens most of the times, achieved sample always be different from what researchers plan to do. Therefore, following subsections explain the planned and reason behind achieved sample of the study.

3.5.1 Planned Sample

Before starting data collection phase, it was planned to collect the data from 250 respondents as a minimum, so that generalization of the findings can be made up to a greater extent. In addition, this present study planned to compare different nationalities i.e. Scandinavian countries with European nationals to check the cross-cultural differences about choice of front-desk employees' characteristics that can affect their level of satisfaction regarding hotel visits. Planned sample was achievable from two main Norwegian Airports, as mentioned earlier, but was not achieved in reality due to current restrictions of tourists and guests from airports and hotels respectively. For that reason, the sample was not possible to achieve according to planned and decided criteria.

3.5.2 Achieved Sample

Due to pandemic situation of COVID-19 and while keeping in mind the economic and time limitations of the thesis, the planned sample was changed and modified, so that the present study can complete in reasonable time. After, necessary changes and modifications, the new chosen sample of study was mostly based on students from university of Stavanger, both from Norwegian hotel school and other departments. As these students were easily accessible from online sources including e-mail and social media groups. In addition, for getting maximum responses the survey was posted on different social media groups and platforms while highlighting the main purpose of the research. The new modifications allow the researchers to gather data from Pakistani and Norwegian students, residents and citizens of Norway, as these people were easily accessible to provide the responses on the survey. Consequently, focus of cross-cultural study shifted from Scandinavian and European nationals to only Norwegians and Pakistanis. In addition, researchers

of this study belong to Pakistan, so it was more convenient and easy to contact the Pakistani nationals as compare to Europeans.

The total achieved sample includes 152 respondents, in which 82 responses were from Pakistani nationals and 70 responses from Norwegian nationals. However, after making thorough and detail analysis of the filled surveys, it was evident that 8 responses from Pakistani nationals out of 82 and 2 responses from Norwegian nationals out of 70 were incomplete, so omitted from the achieved sample. This whole process reduce the total achieved sample to 142 complete responses which comprised of 74 Pakistani and 68 Norwegians. The reason for nearly equivalent number of responses from both nationalities is the comparison of responses to get the clear picture about their choice of characteristics that effect satisfaction level.

Visibly, the achieved sample is not random and thus, it might affect the generalization of the study findings. However, the selected group possess the certain characteristics that can represent the majority of independent and young hotels' visitors and customers, which is the actual target research group in this research thesis. Moreover, students and young experts represent the majority of independent travelers, since they represent Cohen's (1972, as cited in Hyde & Lawson, 2003) explorers and drifters. For these reasons, it can be thoughtfully reasoned that the achieved sample represent the target research population and therefore, allow the possibility of generalizing the results of the research to approximate extents to both nationalities including Pakistani & Norwegians.

3.6 Development of Survey Instrument

The survey questionnaire was constructed by using interval and nominal scales. The questionnaire is consisted upon two main parts (See Appendix). First portion shows the five

questions about demographic and personal information of the respondents including gender, age, purpose of travel, education level and nationality by using the nominal scale. According to Sekaran & Bougie (2009) nominal scale allows the investigator to categorize the study subjects and provides basic categorical data about the study variables. Second part of the survey ask questions concerning employees' characteristics and customers' satisfaction by using the interval scale. Interval scale not only categorize the individual responses but also provide order of this categorization. It also demonstrate the magnitude of differences that can found among the answers of individuals (Neuman, 2014). Furthermore, a type of interval scale (5 point Likert scale) is used in the questions related to independent and dependent variables. Five point Likert scale ranges from strongly disagree to strongly agree in the survey instrument.

3.7 Measurements

This study used four independent variables related to front-desk employees' characteristics and one dependent variable hotels' customers, so that ultimate goals and answers of the research questions can achieved. The four independent variables include: friendliness, problem solving skills, empathy and enthusiastic service. The dependent variable includes customers' satisfaction.

3.7.1 Friendliness

The characteristic of front-desk employees' friendliness was measured with five questions adapted from Kuo's Study (2007). Participants of the study were asked to select the best option that fits their answer on a 5-point Likert-scale that ranges from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The questions were:

1. The employees always smile.
2. The employees greet you courteously.

3. The employees have neat, well-groomed appearance.

4. The employees offer service with enthusiasm.

5. Employees are affirmative servers.

3.7.2 Problem solving

The feature of front-desk employees' problem solving skill was measured with thirteen questions adapted from Kuo's Study (2007). Participants of the study were asked to select the best option that fits their answer on a 5-point Likert-scale that ranges from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The questions were:

1. When you complain or feel dissatisfied, the employees solve the problems patiently.

2. When you complain or feel dissatisfied, the employees make an effort to solve the problem quickly.

3. The employees provide prompt and efficient service.

4. The employees offer appropriate service.

5. The employees solve customer's problems well and quickly.

6. When you complain or feel dissatisfied, the employees listen carefully and offer their apologies.

7. Employees follow up on requests and complaints to make sure everything is OK.

8. Employees answer your demand immediately.

9. Employees solve the problems efficiently.

10. Employees keep alert to all possible incidents and accidents.

11. The employees are willing to help customers to solve problems.

12. Employees anticipate your need of help through your body language.

13. Employees treat customer politely regardless of their attire

3.7.3 Empathy

The feature of front-desk employees' empathy was measured with six questions adapted from Kuo's Study (2007). Participants of the study were asked to select the best option that fits their answer on a 5-point Likert-scale that ranges from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The questions were:

1. The employees consider the individual needs of customers and offer personal service.

2. You are always given the first priority.

3. Employees are always concerned about your needs.

4. Employees are always concerned about your safety and privacy.

5. Employees always think of the customer while serving.

6. Employees act in a friendly manner.

3.7.4 Enthusiastic service

The feature of front-desk employees' enthusiastic service was measured with four questions adapted from Kuo's Study (2007). Participants of the study were asked to select the best option that fits their answer on a 5-point Likert-scale that ranges from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The questions were:

1. Employees inform customers of hotel promotions.

2. Employees pay as much attention as possible to customers' demands.

3. Employees offer information on available hotel services and equipment.

4. Employees' behavior is polite during the service.

3.7.5 Customers' Satisfaction

The dependent variable customers' satisfaction was measured with four questions adapted from the popular four emotion-laden items presented by Westbrook and Oliver (as cited in Olorunniwo, Hsu, & Udo, 2006) with minor modifications. Participants of the study were asked to select the best option that fits their answer on a 5-point Likert-scale that ranges from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The questions were:

1. I am satisfied with my decision to visit that hotel

2. My choice to stay at that hotel was a wise one

3. I think I did the right thing when I chose to stay in that hotel

4. I feel that my experience with that hotel has been enjoyable

3.8 Ethical and Privacy Concerns

While developing the questionnaire, all ethical and privacy issues have kept in mind by the researchers. In the beginning of survey, a consent form is given for the respondents that includes the introduction of the researchers, purpose of the study and all necessary information regarding this research project. Simple English language was used to be easily understand by the respondents. Moreover, before administering and mailing the survey, questionnaire was assessed by the thesis supervisor and Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS (NSD). The NSD has evaluated that the handling of personal data in this thesis is in accordance with the data protection legislation of Norway.

Moreover, it was clearly mentioned at the top of the survey that data will not misused, and it will only use for academic purpose. All information before and after data processing

will be kept confidential. In addition, the literature and all other data that is used in this thesis have been referenced properly according to the APA 6 Format.

3.9 Handling of Other Issues

Survey was designed in such manner that can reduce the common method and social desirability biasness at maximum level, so that variance and inaccuracy caused by single method and cross-sectional research design can minimized. Podsakoff, MacKenzie & Podsakoff (2012) tips for reducing common method bias was adopted in designing the questionnaire. For this purpose, psychological separation were made between the questions regarding independent and dependent variable. A short paragraph was added right after the measures of independent variables, which depicted short memory recall of past hotel visit within a period of one year. This proximal and temporal separation allow the respondents to forget the former elicited information of variables over newly recalled information. Moreover, ambiguous items in the survey often increase the chances of systematic responses (e.g. extreme or midpoint responses), as respondents do not understand the vague and difficult terms, which cause unusual responses and biasness. Therefore, all questions were asked in simple and easy wording while being specific to actual meaning as possible, to reduce the ambiguity.

Furthermore, social desirability biasness also caused in social science surveys, where respondents feel to respond in certain way while providing socially accepted and desirable responses (Randall & Fernandes, 1991). Several strategies were adopted (Nederhof, 1985) to reduce the impact of social desirability biasness. *Firstly*, in the beginning of the survey respondents were addressed about their anonymity and privacy. No personal information e.g. name, address, phone number and email id were asked from respondents for maintaining responses as anonymous

as possible. *Secondly*, respondents were informed that there is no right and wrong answer, they can choose option that best fit their choice. *Thirdly*, all respondents were communicated that their responses will remain confidential and will only use for study purpose, and after completion of thesis, all information will be discarded. Such types of techniques help to get more truthful responses and provide less skewed results. Therefore, skewness in the descriptive statistics is within normal and acceptable limit (See Table 7).

3.10 Planned Data Analysis

This thesis is based on quantitative research, therefore researchers have planned to use different statistical techniques by using software namely Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

➢ Face validity of the questionnaire is evaluated by the research supervisor, as expert can best review that measurements are made according to the requirement of actual constructs.

➢ Internal consistency of the survey is checked by calculating the Cronbach's alpha. As Sekaran & Bougie (2009) explained that reliability test helps to show the items of the questionnaire are how closely connected to each other and provides assistance about how scales consistently measure the specific concepts.

➢ Descriptive statistics are used to describe the study sample in great detail. In which, at first, Frequency tabulation is used to examine the demographics of respondents in an easy and fairly concise manner (Sekaran, 2003). In addition, mean and standard deviation calculated for the interval scale data of survey. These descriptive statistics benefits to demonstrate where the average population falls and tells how much sample can differ from the average of the population (Sekaran & Bougie, 2009).

➢ Inferential statistics are applied on the questions that are measured by using interval scale. In which, Pearson correlation is calculated to examine the correlation among the front-desk employees' characteristics and customers' satisfaction. It helps to show the strength of relationship between variables and depicts the linear movement between two variables (Ganti, 2020). This test is most suitable for variables that are constructed by using five-point Likert scale (Sekaran, 2003).

➢ T-test is used to check the difference between the level of satisfaction of customers of different nationalities, i.e. Norwegian and Pakistani. It is s statistical technique that measures the possible differences in a scale-level dependent variable due to a nominal-level variable usually having 2 categories (Turner & Thayer, 2001). This test is most suitable when researchers want to determine if there is significant differences among the groups. In this study, 5th research hypothesis attempts to determine "The level of hotel customers' satisfaction with service-attitude of front-desk employees differs significantly among customers of different nationalities". Therefore, t-test is best fit to check the desire differences in choice of different nationals regarding front-desk employees' characteristics.

➢ Multiple regression analysis is used to study the effect of front-desk employees' characteristics on customers' satisfaction. Hair, Anderson, Tatham & Black (1998) illustrated that multiple regression analysis is a powerful technique to predict the variance in the unknown value of dependent variable from the known values of one or more independent variables. This test is most appropriate when researchers want to investigate the association between one dependent and multiple independent variables. Hence, this analysis is adopted to analyze the effect of front-desk employees' characteristics on customers' satisfaction.

4. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This chapter of the thesis will present the analysis of the data after computing different statistical techniques to attain the research objectives and main purpose of the study. The whole chapter is divided into multiple sections to explain each area of interest in a comprehensive way.

4.1 Demographic Information

The demographics information of the respondents have been discussed in the subsequent paragraphs after calculating the frequency distributions from SPSS. Results are shown in the form of different tables. First question in the survey instrument was related to the gender of the respondents. Table 1 shows the gender of respondents that comprised of 60.6% males and 39.4% females.

Table 1

Gender of the Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	86	60.6	60.6
Female	56	39.4	100.0
Total	142	100.0	

Note: Based on Researchers' Findings

Second question in the survey instrument was related to the age limit of respondents. Table 2 depicts that majority of the respondents are between 25-34 years of age by showing that they make up of 42.3% of the whole sample. Additionally, 27.5% and 14.8% respondents of the study

are between the age limit that ranges 16-24 and 35-44 respectively. The whole table demonstrates that majority of the respondents fall within young and mid-aged people who fill up the questionnaire in the period of approximately two months. Remaining respondents of the survey fall within the age limit of 45-74 years, representing 15.4% of the total sample.

Table 2

Age of Respondents

Age Limit (In Years)	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
16-24	39	27.5	27.5
25-34	60	42.3	69.7
35-44	21	14.8	84.5
45-54	8	5.6	90.1
55-64	9	6.3	96.5
64-74	5	3.5	100.0
Total	142	100.0	

Note: Based on Researchers' Findings

Third question in the research instrument was related to the nationality of the respondents. Table 3 shows that total sample of 142 comprised of 74 Pakistani nationals and 68 Norwegians. Two nationalities were selected to compare the results and findings to reveal the significant differences and similarities among Pakistanis and Norwegians.

Table 3

Nationality of the Respondents

Nationality	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Pakistani	74	52.1	52.1
Norwegian	68	47.9	100.0
Total	142	100.0	

Note: Based on Researchers' Findings

Table 4 illustrates the purpose of travel of the respondents. Findings reveal that a majority of the respondents travel to different hotels for leisure purpose which represents 59.2 %. Only 15.5 % respondents travel to different destinations for business purposes. However, one fourth (25.4%) respondents travel to different destinations including hotels neither for leisure nor for business purposes.

Table 4

Purpose of Travel

Purpose	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Business	22	15.5	15.5
Leisure	84	59.2	74.6
Other	36	25.4	100.0
Total	142	100.0	

Note: Based on Researchers' Findings

Table 5

Education Level of the Respondents

Education	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Lower Secondary	-	-	-
Upper Secondary	18	12.7	12.7
Vocational High School	17	12.0	24.7
Bachelor's Degree or Equivalent	51	35.9	60.6
Master's Degree or Equivalent & Higher	56	39.4	100
Total	142	100.0	

Note: Based on Researchers' Findings

The fifth question about demographic information of the respondents was education level. Table 5 demonstrates that 39.4% and 35.9% respondents have higher degree background representing Master's and Bachelor's degree respectively. However, only 24.7 % respondents have vocational and upper secondary education background which represents 12.0% and 12.7% respectively. In addition, no respondent was under upper-secondary education level which represents that sample of the study was fairly educated to understand the questions of the survey and elicit their most appropriate responses. The language of the survey was also in simple English so that all respondents can understand it without any problem of complicated vocabulary.

4.2 Validity and Reliability Analysis

4.2.1 Construct Validity

Construct validity of an instrument explains whether the operationalized definition of the variables actually reveal the correct meaning of concepts that are going to measure (Sekaran,

2009). Thus, to check the construct validity, face validity of the survey variables is evaluated qualitatively. Face validity of a survey refers to the judgement by the experts and scientific community that the items tapped the constructs authentically. The face validity of a measure in survey instrument helps to determine how well measurement is constructed, it concerns with the relevant question and how well the method of measurement fit to the concept (Neuman, 2014). In this thesis, the measures for all variables are adopted from pre-existing scale which is used by Kuo's Study (2004, 2007, 2009 & 2012) several times to check the profile of international tourists, their satisfaction and service quality of employees in Japan, USA and Taiwan. The questionnaire was made after several interviews with hotel managers and trainers of the department of Hotel Management at Jin Wen Institute of Technology. It was also based on the study of Chen (1999). Therefore, constructs validity was evaluated in well manner previously in Kuo's study.

In addition, face validity of the instrument of the present study was also checked by a professor in the hospitality and tourism field, along with the convenient sample of 5 students from the Norwegian Hotel School of Management. In the first phase, constructive suggestions were received from the professor about minor changes in the items of constructs that best fits for the purpose of the study. These changes were adopted and questionnaire was revised. In the second phase, it was distributed among the fellow students to get the constructive recommendations for better version of survey instrument. After getting the suggestions, changes were made and final version of the survey instrument was finalized. At last, it was again checked by the supervisor for approval before administering it to actual sample of the study. However, after getting approval and prior permission to the NSD, the survey was converted into Google Form and forwarded it to the actual sample of the study.

4.2.2 Reliability

Internal consistency of the measures was also verified by using reliability analysis through SPSS. Cronbach's alpha was used to calculate the reliability of all measures in the study. According to Taber (2018), when Cronbach's alpha value for each individual construct exceed the level of 0.7, it shows that each construct symbolized by the scale has an acceptable reliability. Table 6 shows the reliability analysis of all the constructs by using representative number of items. Table indicates that Cronbach's alpha values of all variables are far above the acceptable limit. However, only one variable i.e. enthusiastic service having 4 items, has a value of 0.70 that accurately up to the cut-off limit, but still acceptable for the relevant construct. The reliability of the constructs was acceptable so analysis proceeded by computing the mean scores of items within constructs (See Table 7).

Table 6

Reliability Analysis

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Friendliness	0.769	5
Problem Solving	0.884	13
Empathy	0.820	6
Enthusiastic Service	0.700	4
Customer Satisfaction	0.873	4

Note: Based on Researchers' findings

4.3 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics computed for all variables which are measured by using interval scale on the survey. Mean values of all characteristics of front-desk employee and customers' satisfaction are greater than 3, which means on average all respondents agreed on the items that are demonstrated by the measures. The values for skewness and kurtosis are between -1.96 and +1.96, which are considered acceptable in order to verify the normal univariate distribution (George & Mallery, 2010; Gravetter & Wallnau, 2014). Table 7 shows the result of descriptive statistics in detail.

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics

Statistics / Variables	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Friendliness	2.20	5.00	3.940	.535	-.268	.203	.459	.404
Problem Solving	1.92	5.00	3.740	.525	-.214	.203	.613	.404
Empathy	1.83	5.00	3.514	.639	-.211	.203	.084	.404
Enthusiastic Service	2.50	5.00	3.780	.609	-.052	.203	-.295	.404
Customer Satisfaction	2.00	5.00	3.931	.582	-.065	.203	.348	.404
Valid N	142							

Note: Based on Researchers' Findings

However, values of skewness and kurtosis should be zero for a normal distribution which is a rare situation to be encountered by the researchers (Hair, Hult, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2017). A general guideline for skewness is that it should between +1 and -1, which indicates substantially skewed distribution. And for kurtosis which is greater than +1 considers too peaked and lesser than -1 indicates too flat distribution. Therefore, according to Hair et al., (2017, p.61) the values that are achieved according to above mentioned guidelines will be considered as normal.

The values for friendliness ranges between 2.20 to 5.00 with an average score of 3.940 which indicates that on average all respondents agree that the hotel they visited always have friendly employees on the reception area. Standard deviation shows that responses can differ on both sides equally by 0.535. The scores for problem solving ranges 1.92 to 5.00 with a mean score of 3.740. It reveals that on average respondents are agree that employees solve their problems whenever they move to front-desk. However, these responses can differ between disagree (2) and strongly agree (5) having a standard deviation 0.525. The values for empathy ranges 1.83 to 5.00 with a mean value of 3.514, it shows that on average respondents are between neutral and agree to depict their response on empathetic feature of employees. However, standard deviation shows that responses on empathy can deviate between disagree and strongly agree by 0.639. In addition, the values of enthusiastic service ranges 2.50 (close to neutral) to 5.00 (strongly agree) with a mean value of 3.780. It means that on average all respondents are agree that front-desk employees provide enthusiastic services on the reception in hotels and this response can differ 0.609 from mean value on both directions either positive or negative.

In addition, the responses on customers' satisfaction ranges between 2.00 to 5.00 with an average score of 3.931, which shows that on average all respondents are satisfied with their visit to hotels where front-desk employees provide quality services by their interpersonal skills.

Nevertheless, these responses can deviate by 0.582 on five-point Likert scale between disagree and strongly agree. Lower standard deviation reveals that variation in the values of responses above and below the mean is little and it falls closely to the average scores which depicts more reliable scores. The standard deviation of all the variables shown in the descriptive tables is near 0.5 to 0.6 which is reasonable to consider.

4.4 Correlation Matrix

The Pearson correlation matrix was computed to check the linear association and strength of relationship between the study variables. Table 8 illustrates the correlation between four front-desk employees' characteristics and customers' satisfaction. All values of correlation matrix are statistically significant on 1% (i.e. 0.01). Pearson R values depict that friendliness and enthusiastic service have strong positive correlation with customers' satisfaction by representing 0.556 and 0.543 respectively. It shows that when friendliness and enthusiastic service increase by 1 then customer satisfaction will increase positively in upward direction. Whereas, the other two features of front-desk employees i.e. problem solving and empathy have moderate correlation with customer satisfaction with values 0.489 and 0.457 correspondingly. It shows that when problem solving skills and empathy increases in the employees attitudes then customer satisfaction also increases positively.

Furthermore, all four characteristics of front-desk employees are positively correlated with each other while representing strong correlation. All values of Pearson R for front-desk employees characteristics are greater than 0.5 and lesser than 0.70. However, only one variable namely problem-solving has a value of 0.710 in strong correlation with friendliness, which is 0.01 above the cut off value 0.70. This cut off value is commonly used to check the multi-collinearity issue

among the variables under study (Molala, 2019). If two variables are highly correlated with each other, while representing e.g. 0.95 correlation, then, such two variables are consider same, will be measured again and will consider as one variable. This whole issue is known as multi-collinearity that affects the power and prediction of whole regression model (Landau & Everitt, 2004). Moreover, according to general rule of thumb, the value should not exceed 0.75. Similarly, several researchers (Allison, 1999; Cooper & Schindler, 2003) indicated that if Pearson R values are greater than 0.80, then it is problematic. In summary, all four variables are positively and significantly associated with customers' satisfaction, and all values of Pearson R within the normal limit and do not depict any multi-collinearity issues.

Table 8

Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variables	Friendliness	Problem Solving	Empathy	Enthusiastic Service	Customer Satisfaction
Friendliness	1				
Problem Solving	.710**	1			
Empathy	.530**	.685**	1		
Enthusiastic Service	.523**	.505**	.547**	1	
Customer Satisfaction	.556**	.489**	.476**	.543**	1

*Note: **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Table based on Researchers' Findings*

4.5 Regression Analysis

The present study uses the multiple regression analysis to check the effect of front-desk employees' characteristics on customers' satisfaction. Four characteristics of front-desk employees, namely friendliness, problem solving, empathy and enthusiastic service, were used as independent variables to check the association with customers' satisfaction as dependent variable. The whole regression analysis was computed multiple times to check which model depicts the best and significant results. In the first attempt, separate regression analysis was run on both sample groups to check the significantly different coefficients. Results show that same variables are significant by depicting approximately same regression coefficients. For that reason, data of the both groups (Norwegian and Pakistani respondents) were pooled and regression analysis was performed.

In the second attempt, all four variables were used as independent variables, but results showed that two variables are statistically significant i.e. friendliness and enthusiastic service. Remaining two characteristics were showing higher insignificant values. Therefore, third time, regression analysis was run by eliminating the extremely insignificant variable i.e. problem solving from the model. The following tables show the results of three variables out of which two variables are highly significant at 1% and third variable is significant at 10%.

Table 9

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.640*	0.409	0.396	0.45227

*Note: *Predictors: (Constant), Enthusiastic Service, Friendliness, Empathy*

Table 9 shows the summary of entire multiple regression analysis by using three variables of front-desk employees as predictor variables and customer satisfaction as target or predicted variable. R value reveals the complete change in dependent variable which is caused by three characteristics of front-desk employees by 0.640. Values of R square and adjusted R square shows that if employees provide enthusiastic service with friendliness and empathy then customer satisfaction can enhance by 40.9% and 39.6% respectively. The summary table represents that linear regression explains 40.9% of the variance in the data. On the other hand, it means that combination of three characteristics of front-desk employees i.e. friendliness, empathy and enthusiastic service can boost up the hotel guest's satisfaction positively.

Table 10

ANOVA Table

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	19.540	3	6.513	31.843	.000[b]
Residual	28.228	138	0.205		
Total	47.768	141			

Note: a.   Dependent Variable: Customer-Satisfaction
   b.   Predictors: (Constant), Enthusiastic Service, Friendliness, Empathy

Table 10 reveals the overall result of the variance analysis which is depicted by F-Test of significance. The value of significance level is 0.000 which is statistically significant at 1%. It shows that the variables used in the regression analysis are best fit to explain the variance in dependent variable. F value of 31.843 is statistically significant at 0.001 and it explains that all

three characteristics of front-desk employees significantly depicts 39.6% variance in customer satisfaction.

Table 11

Coefficients Table ***

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	1.014	.304		3.338	0.001		
Friendliness	.356	.089	0.327	4.005	0.000*	.642	1.559
Enthusiastic Service	.281	.079	0.295	3.560	0.001*	.626	1.598
Empathy	.129	.076	0.141	1.698	0.092**	.619	1.616

Note: *0.001 (1%) Significance Level, ** 0.010 (10%) Significance Level, ***Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction. Table based on Researchers' findings

Table 11 shows the result of coefficients with significance values and collinearity statistics. Beta value of 0.327 of friendliness is significant at 1%. It shows that if friendliness increases 1% in employees' behavior then customer satisfaction of hotels can increase by 0.327. Friendly behavior of employees with customers while serving them always leave positive image on guests' mind and allow them to feel gratified. Similar findings were revealed in the studies of DePaulo (1992) and Kuo (2007), where they found that smile, friendly gestures and being pleasant to all

customers create comfortable and pleasing atmosphere in the hotels. Therefore, H1 is verified true and findings are statistically significant. However, H2 was not verified and p-value was not statistically significant, therefore, H2 (problem solving) was rejected and relevant variable was removed from the model. Additionally, the beta value of enthusiastic service is also statistically significant at 1%. Results show that when employees provide services enthusiastically to the hotel guests then satisfaction level of the customers increase by 0.295. It means that one unit increase in enthusiastic service of employee can affect 29.5% increase in the satisfaction of hotels' customers. Several researches (Depaulo, 1992; Olorunniwo, Hsu & Udo, 2006; Kuo, Chen & Lu, 2012) found the same findings where they highlighted recognition of customer's needs and wants, providing assistance and knowledge about hotels' product and services with keenness can enhance satisfaction of the customers in positive way. So, H4 is also proved true and substantiated by statistically significant results.

In addition, beta value of empathy 0.141 is statistically significant at p-value of 10% which is above the most commonly used significance level of 5%. However, 10% significance level is among all common significance levels which use in different social sciences research. According to Statology (2019), commonly used significance levels to test the hypotheses include 0.1, 0.5 and 0.01. Therefore, empathy with 0.1 significance level included in the model and not removed from the regression model. Results show that if employees depict empathetic behavior with customers, then it will increase the satisfaction level of hotel customers by 14.1% (p-value 0.1). So, H3 is verified at 10% significance level and verified true by the study findings. Similar results in the study of Chu & Murrmann (2006) revealed that displaying genuine feelings and deep concern for customers' needs is an essential ingredient for quality services and winning customers' loyalty in hotel business. In addition, employees need to understand the individualized customer's

necessities, their privacy and well-being, as it is the first priority of all service employees (Kuo, 2007). For that reason, empathy is an essential component of service attitude for front-desk employees in all service industries (Juwaheer & Ross, 2003; Jui-Min, Jen-Shou & Hsin-His 2009).

Furthermore, result of collinearity statistics shows that there is no multi-collinearity found among all three variables of front-desk employees. All values of variation inflation factor (VIF) are less than 10 which show that no collinearity exists among the study variables. It is generally assumed that any VIF exceeding 10 and tolerance value lower than 0.10 signifies a potential problem of multi-collinearity (Hair et al., 2010). The rule of the thumb states that if VIF exceeds the value 4, then it warrants for further investigation for collinearity, and if VIF exceed the limit of 10, then it signs for serious problem of multi-collinearity which requires correction (Ringim, Razali & Hasnan, 2012). The results of table 11 shows that problem of collinearity does not exist among all characteristics of front-desk employees because VIF is less than 10 and tolerance values are also more than 0.10. The results suggests that study variables do not have any issue of multi-collinearity.

4.6 Independent Sample T-Test

Independent sample t test computed for both nationalities i.e. Norwegian and Pakistani, to determine whether there is statistically significant evidence that satisfaction level of both nationalities concerning front-desk employees' characteristics is different. Table 12 reveals the group statistics of each nationality by demonstrating their mean values and standard deviation. Analysis of whole table depicts that mean values of all variables in both nationalities are approximately same, only minor differences can be seen in the mean values. However, standard deviation from mean values is greater for Norwegians than Pakistanis. Mean values of friendliness

and problem solving are similar for each nationality group. Friendliness depicts mean values 3.91 (Pakistani) and 3.96 (Norwegian), which are approximately same for both groups. Similarly, all other variables of front-desk employees show almost the same averages for both nationalities, which reveals that there is no major differences among the choices of Norwegians and Pakistanis.

Table 12

Group Statistics

Variables	Nationality of the Respondents	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Friendliness	Pakistani	74	3.9162	0.46228	0.05374
	Norwegian	68	3.9676	0.60703	0.07361
Problem Solving	Pakistani	74	3.7391	0.49898	0.05800
	Norwegian	68	3.7410	0.55484	0.06728
Empathy	Pakistani	74	3.4775	0.57492	0.06683
	Norwegian	68	3.5539	0.70502	0.08550
Enthusiastic Service	Pakistani	74	3.8176	0.56783	0.06601
	Norwegian	68	3.7390	0.65425	0.07934
Customer Service	Pakistani	74	3.8581	0.51365	0.05971
	Norwegian	68	4.0110	0.64275	0.07794

Note: Based on Researchers' Findings

In addition, there is difference of approximately 0.15 between the means values of both nationalities for customer satisfaction, where Norwegian mean value is 4.01 and Pakistani

mean value is 3.85. It shows that satisfaction level of Norwegian customers on average is greater than Pakistani customers when measured with front-desk employees' characteristics. However, the standard deviation of Norwegian responses is much higher than Pakistani responses on customer satisfaction, as shown in last rows of Table 12.

Table 13

Independent Sample T-Test of Nationality
(Pakistani and Norwegians)

Variables		Levene's Test F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Friendliness	Equal variances assumed	3.207	.075	-.571	140	.569
	Equal variances not assumed			-.564	124.887	.574
Problem Solving	Equal variances assumed	1.232	.269	-.021	140	.983
	Equal variances not assumed			-.021	135.104	.983
Empathy	Equal variances assumed	1.925	.168	-.710	140	.479
	Equal variances not assumed			-.704	129.515	.482
Enthusiastic Service	Equal variances assumed	1.141	.287	.766	140	.445
	Equal variances not assumed			.762	133.255	.448
Customer Satisfaction	Equal variances assumed	3.574	.061	-1.572	140	.118
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.557	128.193	.122

Note: Based on Researchers' Findings

Table 13 shows the result of t-test with significance level. This test helps to determine the variance of two groups is same or not. For this purpose, results of Levene's test for equality of

variances will consider. Equal variances consider when p-value is greater than 0.05 (P>0.05) and unequal variances consider when variances shown in the table are less than 0.05 (P<0.05). The results of Levene's test and t-values reveal that there is no significance difference between two groups of Norwegians' and Pakistanis' responses. All values of significance level (2-tailed) are exceeding the cut off limit i.e. 0.05 (5%) or 95% confidence interval. The negative t-values shows a reversal in the directionality of the outcome, which has no effect on the significance of the differences between two groups (Gujarati & Porter, 2008). Thus, the complete t-test analysis rejects the H5, that there is no significance difference found in this study among the satisfaction level of the Norwegian and Pakistani respondents concerning front-desk employees characteristics.

Table 14

Summary of Results

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Expected Sign	Actual Sign	Hypothesis Accepted/Rejected
Friendliness	Customer's Satisfaction	+	+	H1 Accepted*
Problem solving		+	?	H2 Rejected
Empathy		+	+	H3 Accepted**
Enthusiastic Service		+	+	H4 Accepted*
Nationality Differences (Norwegian & Pakistani) Concerning Front-Desk Employees' Characteristics		Significantly Different	No Statistical Difference	H5 Rejected

*Note: *Significant at 0.01 and **Significant at 0.1. Summary based on Researchers' Findings*

Table 14 shows the overall summary of study findings. Results reveals that out of 5 proposed hypotheses, 3 hypotheses are verified significantly and 2 hypotheses are not verified statistically, therefore, refuted. Summary table reveals that if hotel employees provide enthusiastic services with empathy and friendliness on front-desk office/reception to hotel guests then it will increase their satisfaction level noticeably. However, no significant difference exist in the choice of Norwegian and Pakistani respondents concerning front-desk employees' characteristics, thus, satisfaction level of both nationalities is similar relevant to all characteristics of employees, as depicted by identical mean values.

5. DISCUSSION

This chapter of thesis shows the results of different statistical techniques of the chapter four as the starting point for discussion. Afterwards concluding remarks present with limitations and further future research.

This study has developed a conceptual model on the basis of previous literature that showed the expected relationship between independent and dependent variables. The independent variables of the research included four characteristics of front-desk employees namely friendliness, problem solving, empathy and enthusiastic service, whereas, dependent variable included customers' satisfaction of people who visit hotels frequently. The study established two major goals to reach within the period of approximately 5 months. The first goal was to check the relationship between front-desk employees' characteristics and customers' satisfaction. The second goal was to check the significant difference of level of satisfaction among Norwegian and Pakistani respondents concerning the importance of front-desk employees' characteristics.

The results revealed that front-desk employees are important service providing resource of any hotel, as they provide assistance on reception to all incoming and out-going guests. Whenever people feel any query or want to get information regarding hotel's services, they visit hotel's reception first. It is one of the essential departments of the hotel, which directly interacts with people. This front-desk office connects all the other departments of the hotel and provides an interaction facility to customers. Outsiders get the knowledge about each and every corner of the hotel from front-desk employees. For that reason, reception can be called an image generating department of the hotel (DePaulo, 1992). Employees who are serving from reception area, must possess specific characteristics that can enhance the service quality and satisfy the customers.

Findings showed strong evidence that friendliness of employees is among the most crucial factors of hotel industry. Friendly behavior of employees can instill positive impact on the customer when he/she first comes to the reception area. When people interact with front-desk employees, if employees always smile, greet courteously and offer services with enthusiasm then customers feel contentment from their dialogue. In addition, employees in a neat, tidy and well-groomed appearance pose good impression in a first look on the customers. All these features belong to dimension of friendliness and prove employees as affirmative servers in the hotel. Similar aspects were found in numerous studies (Larsen & Bastiansen, 1991; Lele & Sheth, 1993; Tsa, 1994; Lin, 1999; Shu, 1999), which showed that kindness, politeness, neat appearance, being pleasant and welcoming attitude during customer's interactions was considered as important for being friendly with customers (Shaw-Brown & Sulzer-Azaroff, 1994). Moreover, Seijts et al., (2010) stated that having a friendly employee is the most effective and best way to impress the hotel guests while showing them dedication and professionalism. The present research also found the significant positive association between front-desk employees' friendliness and customers' satisfaction. It shows that friendly employees can satisfy the customers in an effective manner.

The second feature of front-desk employees that showed significant result is enthusiastic service. It is the key ingredient for the success of hotel industry. When employees talk with other persons physically or attend phone call, level of enthusiasm is clearly observable by the customers. Employees' chat on web portals, their promotional emails and interactional messages to different customers reveal the understanding of customers' needs and wants. Every service from hotels' front-desk demands knowledge of hotel equipment, technology awareness, information about promotional schemes and updated employees all the times. Similarly, findings revealed in the studies of Kuo (2007; 2009) showed that up-to-date knowledge of hotel, carefulness and tolerance

of front-desk staff enhances the enthusiastic service in the eyes of international tourists. For that reason, enthusiastic service is considered as a persuasive tool that incorporates in the delivery of quality services to increase the chances of repeat customers for the business. Same results were found in the regression analysis of this study which reveals that enthusiastic services provided by employees increase the customers' satisfaction positively and significantly. These findings were also presented in the study of Girard (2013). Results demonstrated that if the receptionists show helpful service attitude during their communication, it may change the customers' impression of employees and hotels, which in turn affects the revisit and repurchase decisions.

The third characteristic of front-desk employees was empathy that showed positive relationship with customers' satisfaction. Results reveal that if front-desk employees are empathetic then their services can increase the satisfaction of the customers in hotels. People usually go to the reception to get the relevant information and fulfill their needs. Empathetic employees always try to satisfy customer's needs and offer personal services often beyond the designated responsibilities. Employees who care for customers' privacy and show concern about safety of the guests keep the good impression on customers' mind. Therefore, such empathetic behavior from front-desk employees allow the customers to feel that their all needs are satisfied and on next visit try to come in the same hotel, whose service quality was best in previous experience. Similar results were found in the study of Decrop (1999), where findings speculated that emotional experiences and perception of customers regarding a specific service determine their future decision making and intentions of revisit. Consequently, displaying genuine feelings and deep concern for customers' needs is an essential ingredient for quality services and winning customers' loyalty in hotel business (Chu & Murrmann, 2006). As a result, empathy is an essential

component of service attitude for front-desk employees in all service industries (Juwaheer & Ross, 2003; Jui-Min, Jen-Shou & Hsin-His, 2009).

The fourth variable of front-desk employees i.e. problem solving is also important factor which is revealed by the literature. For instance, Kuo (2007) illustrated that problem solving of customers is an advanced service technique, which help employees to solve customers' complaints and those factors which cause dissatisfaction. Similarly, DeSena (2020) demonstrated that solving customer's issues in an active manner allow the businesses to boost their sales, admiration from customers and driving profit levels through the roof. For that reason, problem solving skills of employees are considered as important factor for customers' satisfaction. Therefore, result of correlation matrix shows that there is significant positive association between problem solving skill of employees and customers' satisfaction. If employees are more prone toward solving the issues of hotel guests, then more happy and satisfied customers can be gained in future by the hotels.

However, results of regression analysis revealed that there is no significant effect in the sample of this study of front-desk employees' problem solving skills on customers' satisfaction in hotels. It shows that sample population wants friendly front-desk employees having empathetic feelings and provide enthusiastic services over the reception areas. In addition, problem solving may be considered as important feature for other staff in the hotels, as depicted by regression model. For this insignificant result, multi-collinearity was also checked among the independent variables. Values showed that there is no collinearity issue that can cause the model to predict weak and insignificant coefficients. For making better model, problem solving was removed from the regression analysis which revealed the stronger significant effect of all three characteristics on customer's satisfaction.

Furthermore, comparison were made between Norwegian and Pakistani responses, to check the difference of choices among both nationalities concerning front-desk employees' characteristics. As, Hofstede (2001) said that differences exist among the cultures of different countries. For example, culture can be different on multiple dimensions that are presented by Hofstede's study like some cultures can be individualistic or collectivist, some cultures have masculine features and some possess femininity characteristics. Similarly, findings of Kuo's study (2009) revealed that difference of culture exist among Japanese, Taiwanese and Americans, when she compared all four features of service employees namely: friendliness, problem solving, enthusiastic service and empathetic feeling. On the basis of Hofstede's cultural studies and Kuo's findings that differences exist among different countries, the present study also tried to find out the cultural differences between Norwegian and Pakistani respondents.

On the other hand, results showed that there exist no statistically significant difference among both nationalities concerning front-desk employees' characteristics and customers' satisfaction. The possible reason for such insignificant results are small sample size of the study which only consisted of 142 respondents (i.e. 68 Norwegians and 74 Pakistanis). A larger sample size might depict major differences between countries. As, different cross-cultural studies (e.g. Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede Insights, 2020) depicted that cultural difference exist between Scandinavian and Asian countries. However, this difference is not revealed by the present study due to certain difficulties in data collection. It was not possible to gather the data from actual planned sample of the study, since the travel was banned, due to which international and local tourists were not accessible by the researchers at various airports in Norway. For that reason, convenience sampling was used to gather the required data from accessible Norwegian and Pakistani respondents. Moreover, due to difficulty in finding the desired respondents, not majority

of older age groups were included in the achieved sample, which influenced the findings of the study up to a certain extent. Hence, in such a highly unexpected situation (COVID-19), several significant results are achieved by using the acquired sample of the study, which still provides worthwhile results that can serve as a basis for further future research.

In summary, overall findings depicted that friendliness, empathy and enthusiastic services of the employees have strong influence on the satisfaction of customers. Therefore, marketers and service providers must communicate their front-desk employees to provide services in such a manner that can enhance the customers' satisfaction. Employees should provide proper training sessions that teach them how to act friendly with customers, which empathetic feelings they should learn and what type of enthusiastic services they have to provide to their hotel customers. In addition, academia can take research findings into consideration while teaching the students about certain characteristics that a front-desk employee must possess to satisfy the customers.

6. CONCLUSION

This chapter of the thesis will portray the overall conclusion on the basis of findings and discussion of the study. This chapter includes the research limitations and recommendations for further future research.

The present study aimed for two main objectives i.e. one is general and second is specific. *First,* the general objective of this study was to focus on customers' satisfaction while recognizing several characteristics of front-desk employees that can enhance the satisfaction level of the customers. *Second*, more specifically, this study highlighted the characteristics of front-desk employees including friendliness, problem solving skills, empathy and enthusiastic service attitude, that can influence the customers' satisfaction. In addition, the research also tried to explore the differences among two nationalities (Norwegians and Pakistanis) to analyze whether the satisfaction level of customers of both countries vary about the characteristics of front-desk employees or not. On the basis of the literature review, five hypotheses were developed out of which four hypotheses were related to the characteristics of front desk-employees and customers' satisfaction. Whereas, the fifth hypothesis was associated with nationality difference of Norwegian and Pakistani nationals. Data was gathered through a survey from 68 Norwegians and 74 Pakistani respondents, while making a whole sample of 142 respondents.

Research was based on a quantitative approach, therefore, a statistical software SPSS was used to compute all the relevant tests on the achieved data. Results of multiple regression analysis revealed that three characteristics of front-desk employees have significant and positive influence on customer's satisfaction. It showed that if employees serve customers enthusiastically by portraying friendly and empathetic attitude, then the satisfaction of the customers can improve in an efficient manner. People demand friendly and empathetic employees that can meet their needs

and wants in a cooperative manner with smiling faces and neat appearances. Their empathetic behavior with customers reflects that employees care for the privacy and safety of the hotels' guests. They believe that personal attention beyond the designated responsibilities can better satisfy the customers and in future, revisit intentions can happen due to enthusiastic services. Whereas, the fourth characteristic of front-desk employees, namely problem solving, showed no significant influence on satisfaction of customers. A possible reason that problem solving was not shown as significant in this study could be that, respondents may believe problem solving is a feature of other hotel staff than the front-desk employees. On the other hand, the correlation matrix showed significant and positive association between problem solving and customers' satisfaction. This means that if employees solve problems quickly and efficiently, then satisfaction of the customers can increase capably.

However, overall findings revealed that front-desk employees are an important part of the hotels' main reception area and must possess certain interpersonal characteristics to meet the demand of incoming and outgoing customers. Human resource managers can use the study findings during the hiring and training phases of the employees, to make sure that employees must contain features of friendliness, empathy and enthusiastic service while serving the customers in hotels. Similarly, academia can apply the study results in learning of students, where proved results can be taught and specified features to satisfy customers can be learned for future success in business.

In addition, results of independent sample T-test showed that there exist no significant differences among satisfaction level of customers of both nationality groups in this study (i.e. Norwegians and Pakistanis) concerning characteristics of front-desk employees. These insignificant findings regarding nationality differences could possibly be due to small sample size

and sampling technique as well. Only 68 Norwegians and 74 Pakistanis cannot depict the major differences in choice, as most of the respondents were based on university students who are residing in Norway from last few years. Data was gathered through convenient sampling technique that can influence the generalizability of the findings. However, the found results are still valuable to make generalizations about what characteristics a front-desk employee must possess during his/her services on hotel's reception.

6.1 Limitations

This study is based on several limitations which are as follows. *Firstly*, the whole research is carried out in the pandemic situation of COVID-19. This resulted in complications for the data collection, therefore, smaller than expected sample size was achieved. *Secondly,* the present research is constrained by budget and it was not possible to get the data from diverse geographical locations. *Lastly,* non-probability sampling was used to select the sample from the target population, in which convenience sampling is applied to gather the data. The results of the study has limited generalizability due to convenience sampling, as majority of the data was gathered from university students and through social media groups.

6.2 Future Research

The present study has several recommendations for improved results and significant findings. The current study used a small sample size i.e. only 142 respondents, and it was not large enough to support all the hypotheses of the study. In future, similar studies can be possible with larger sample size, which may depict different perspectives and opinions regarding front-desk employees' characteristics. In addition, this research used only four characteristics of front-desk employees including friendliness, problem solving, empathy and enthusiastic service. Conversely,

other variables such as physical appearance of employees, their gender, ethnicity, and educational background also need to be analyzed. As there are several factors that can influence the hotel customers and their satisfaction, so it is necessary to include these variables in future research for further findings.

Moreover, in place of convenience sampling, random sampling technique can be used to find more accurate findings that can be generalizable to the whole Norwegian and Pakistani population. As a result, similar studies can also be done with randomly selected samples by using different demographics i.e. comparison between European and Asian respondents, age group of older people and more diverse education level etc. In a nutshell, further research on additional factors such as those suggested above may contribute to provide more insight into the present research findings.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

Information of Consent

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research project. We are a group of two students doing our Master's Degree in International Hospitality Management from the Norwegian School of Hotel Management, University of Stavanger. We are conducting a research on a particular topic to complete our master thesis. This survey will only take about 5 to 10 minutes to complete and there is no wrong or right answer to the questions.

Purpose of the study

This study aims to explore employees' interpersonal and service characteristics that affect the customers' satisfaction in hotels. Further, this study will also explore, if there is any difference in satisfaction level of different nationals concerning employees' characteristics? The target population for this research is all those customers who visit and stay at hotels during their journey either these people are on business trip or on a recreation tour.

Procedure of the research

This survey consists of questions about front-desk employee's characteristics including friendliness, problem solving, empathy and enthusiastic service, and questions about customer satisfaction. The survey also includes some demographic information about the respondents.

Anonymity & Voluntary Participation

Your participation is completely **voluntary** and you may discontinue at any time. Individual responses will not be identifiable. All information about you will be made **anonymous**.

Benefits and risks or discomforts

Your feedback will be used to promote front desk employees' performance. There are no major risks or discomforts we foresee by participating in this study, except time commitment.

Privacy Policy- How we will store and use your personal data

We will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified in this information letter. We will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act). Additionally, only the institution responsible for the project and student undertaking the research will have access to the information. The generated information will be encrypted so that no third party can access it.

Google Form will be employed for the online survey and SPSS statistical tool will be used to process the data. Participants in this research will not be recognizable in publications since

names will not be asked for. However, gender, age, level of education and purpose of travel will be made visible in the research work.

Personal data at the end of the research project

The project is scheduled to end on the 30th of September 2020. The collected data will be anonymized through encryption and protected. Additionally, all personal data will be deleted after the research project is ended.

Your rights:

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

The right to process your personal data

We will process your personal data based on your consent. Based on an agreement with Norwegian Hotel School in University of Stavanger, NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

Where can I find out more?

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:
• Norwegian Hotel School in University of Stavanger via
  Associate Professor: Dr. Tone Therese Linge
  tone.linge@uis.no
  Telephone: +47 51833743
• Our Data Protection Officer: personvernombud@uis.no
• NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, by email:
  (personverntjenester@nsd.no) or by telephone: +47 55 58 21 17

Personal Information and Demographics

This section will ask questions about demographic information of the respondents. Please tick the appropriate box and you can choose only one option that best fits to your answer.

Gender:

☐ Male
☐ Female

Age

☐ 16-24
☐ 25-34
☐ 35-44
☐ 45-54
☐ 55-64
☐ 65-74
☐ 75-84
☐ 85 or over

Nationality

☐ Pakistani
☐ Norwegian
☐ Other

Purpose of Travel

☐ Leisure
☐ Business
☐ Other

Education (Select your highest education from the options below)

☐ Lower secondary
☐ Upper secondary
☐ Vocational high school
☐ Bachelor's Degree or equivalent
☐ Master's Degree or equivalent and higher

On the following pages, you will find questions about front-desk employees' characteristics and customers' satisfaction. The purpose is to collect information about employees' characteristics that are important in the opinion of hotels' guests, so that future service quality can be improved by keeping in mind those satisfying features. You may answer by ticking the box with the answer option that best fits your opinion. You may only choose one alternative.

Front-Desk Employee's Characteristics

Please rate the extent of your agreement on the following: On the basis of your last visit to a hotel within one year, how will you respond to the following questions?

Choose one alternative and tick the answer option that best fits your opinion.

Friendliness	**Strongly Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
The employees always smile.					
The employees greet you courteously.					
The employees have neat, well-groomed appearance.					
The employees offer service with enthusiasm.					
Employees are affirmative servers.					

Problem Solving	**Strongly Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
When you complain or feel dissatisfied, the employees solve the problems patiently.					
When you complain or feel dissatisfied, the employees make an effort to solve the problem quickly.					
The employees provide prompt and efficient service.					
The employees offer appropriate service.					
The employees solve customer's problems well and quickly.					
When you complain or feel dissatisfied, the employees listen carefully and offer their apologies.					
Employees follow up on requests and complaints to make sure everything is OK.					
Employees solve the problems efficiently.					
Employees answer your demand immediately.					
Employees keep alert to all possible incidents and accidents.					
The employees are willing to help customers to solve problems.					
Employees anticipate your need of help through your body language.					
Employees treat customer politely regardless of their attire.					

Empathy	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
The employees consider the individual needs of customers and offer personal service.					
You are always given the first priority.					
Employees are always concerned about your needs.					
Employees are always concerned about your safety and privacy.					
Employees always think of the customer while serving.					
Employees act in a friendly manner.					

Enthusiastic Service	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Employees inform customers of hotel promotions.					
Employees pay as much attention as possible to customers' demands.					
Employees offer information on available hotel services and equipment.					
Employees' behavior is polite during the service.					

Customer Satisfaction

In the following table all questions are about the satisfaction of customers who frequently visit different local and international hotels either for business or leisure purpose. Recall your last visit to a hotel, think about the services which are provided by the front-desk employees. After recalling your last visit to a hotel within one year, how will you respond to the following questions?

Choose one alternative and tick the answer option that best fits your opinion. Again, there is no right or wrong answer.

Customer Satisfaction	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am satisfied with my decision to visit that hotel					
My choice to stay at that hotel was a wise one					
I think I did the right thing when I chose to stay in that hotel					
I feel that my experience with that hotel has been enjoyable					

------------------Thank you for your participation and time to respond ------------------