

The Role of Front-Desk Services on Guest Loyalty in 3-Star Hotels in Kampala: A Case Study of Sky Hotel International, Kampala, Uganda

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Abstract

This study examined the role of front-desk services in guest loyalty in 3-star hotels in Kampala, with reference to Sky Hotel International. The front desk is the primary point of contact between a hotel and its guests, and its services are widely regarded as decisive for guest satisfaction and loyalty, yet their contribution has been under-examined in the Ugandan hospitality sector. The study investigated how check-in/check-out efficiency, staff responsiveness, complaint handling, and personalized service relate to guest loyalty. A cross-sectional survey design with a mixed-methods approach was adopted, and data were collected from 170 respondents comprising hotel guests, front-desk staff, and hotel management using structured questionnaires and interviews. Descriptive statistics, exploratory factor analysis, Pearson correlation, and structural (path) analysis were used. Factor analysis confirmed the construct validity of the front-desk service dimensions, which loaded onto coherent factors and explained 68.9% of the variance. The results revealed a strong positive and significant relationship between front-desk services and guest loyalty ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.01$), with the dimensions jointly explaining 66.0% of the variance in guest loyalty ($R^2 = 0.660$). Staff responsiveness ($\beta = 0.33$) and personalised service ($\beta = 0.29$) emerged as the strongest path predictors. The study concludes that front-desk services significantly enhance guest loyalty and recommends strengthening staff responsiveness, personalised service, and complaint handling.

Keywords: front-desk services, guest loyalty, staff responsiveness, personalised service, hotels, Kampala, Uganda

1.0 Introduction

In the intensely competitive hospitality industry, guest loyalty has become a central determinant of hotel success, since loyal guests return, spend more, and recommend the hotel to others, at far lower cost than acquiring new guests (Kandampully et al., 2021). Among the many touchpoints that shape a guest's experience, the front desk occupies a uniquely important position, as the primary point of contact between the hotel and its guests—the place where guests are welcomed, checked in and out, and where they turn for assistance and the resolution of problems (Kotler et al., 2021). The quality of front-desk services is therefore widely regarded as decisive for guest satisfaction and, ultimately, loyalty (Muhamad et al., 2023).

Guest loyalty—the disposition of guests to return to a hotel, to prefer it over alternatives, and to recommend it to others—is the outcome of a satisfying and trustworthy guest experience, of which service quality is the principal driver (Kandampully et al., 2021). The theoretical expectation is that excellent front-desk services enhance guest loyalty by creating positive first and last impressions, meeting guests' needs promptly, resolving their problems, and making them feel valued, whereas poor front-desk services create dissatisfaction that drives guests away, however good the

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hotel's physical facilities (Kotler et al., 2021). For a 3-star hotel competing on service rather than luxury, the front desk can be a decisive source of competitive advantage.

Front-desk service is multidimensional. Check-in and check-out efficiency concerns the speed and smoothness of these key processes, which frame the guest's arrival and departure (Julius & Nancy, 2026). Staff responsiveness concerns the willingness and promptness of front-desk staff in attending to guests' needs and requests. Complaint handling concerns the effectiveness with which problems and complaints are resolved (Julius et al., 2026). And personalised service concerns the extent to which staff recognise and cater to guests' individual preferences and needs (Kandampully et al., 2021; Parasuraman et al., as discussed therein). Each dimension is expected to contribute to guest loyalty, but their relative importance in a specific context is an empirical question.

Sky Hotel International, a 3-star hotel in Kampala, operates in a competitive urban hospitality market in which guest loyalty is essential to sustained success, and in which front-desk services are a key differentiator (Uganda Tourism Board, 2023). The role of front-desk services in building guest loyalty at such hotels, however, has not been systematically examined in the Ugandan context (Julius & Kaazara, 2025). Although the general importance of service quality in hospitality is well established, empirical evidence quantifying the relationship between front-desk services and guest loyalty in Ugandan 3-star hotels, and disaggregating the effects of specific service dimensions, remains limited (Nabbosa & Kizza, 2023). This study addresses that gap by examining, through factor analysis, correlation, and structural (path) analysis, how check-in/check-out efficiency, staff responsiveness, complaint handling, and personalised service relate to guest loyalty at Sky Hotel International (Sophie & Crispus, 2024). The findings are significant for hotel managers, front-desk staff, and hospitality scholars. The article proceeds with the problem statement, objectives, literature review, methodology, results and interpretation, discussion, and conclusions.

2.0 Statement of the Problem

Excellent front-desk services are widely expected to build guest loyalty, and 3-star hotels such as Sky Hotel International invest in front-desk services on the expectation that they will satisfy guests and secure their loyalty (Kandampully et al., 2021). Ideally, efficient check-in/check-out, responsive staff, effective complaint handling, and personalised service should translate into loyal, returning guests. In practice, however, hotels in competitive markets frequently struggle to retain guests, and the extent to which front-desk services account for guest loyalty in Ugandan 3-star hotels has not been established through rigorous empirical research (Nabbosa & Kizza, 2023; Uganda Tourism Board, 2023).

Front-desk services frequently exhibit weaknesses, including slow check-in/check-out, unresponsive staff, poor complaint handling, and impersonal service, which may undermine guest loyalty (Kotler et al., 2021). Yet the precise contribution of each service dimension remains unclear, which hampers efforts to strengthen front-desk services where

they matter most. Without such evidence, service improvement risks being poorly targeted (Irumba et al., 2024). If this problem remains unaddressed, hotels will continue to lose guests to competitors, undermining their profitability and sustainability (Julius & Matovu, 2025). This study therefore sought to establish the relationship between front-desk services and guest loyalty at Sky Hotel International and to identify the most influential service dimensions.

3.0 Main Objective

The main objective of the study was to examine the role of front-desk services in guest loyalty in 3-star hotels in Kampala, with reference to Sky Hotel International.

3.1 Specific Objectives

- i. To assess the front-desk services provided at Sky Hotel International.
- ii. To establish the relationship between front-desk service dimensions (check-in/check-out efficiency, staff responsiveness, complaint handling, and personalised service) and guest loyalty.
- iii. To determine the relative contribution (path coefficients) of each front-desk service dimension to guest loyalty.

4.0 Literature Review

Research on service quality and guest loyalty is grounded in the SERVQUAL model, expectation-confirmation theory, and social exchange theory. The SERVQUAL model conceptualises service quality across dimensions including responsiveness, reliability, assurance, empathy, and tangibles, several of which—responsiveness, empathy through personalisation, and reliability in complaint handling—are central to front-desk service (Parasuraman et al., as discussed in Kandampully et al., 2021). Expectation-confirmation theory holds that satisfaction and loyalty result when perceived service meets or exceeds expectations, directing attention to how front-desk services shape guest perceptions (Oliver, as discussed in Kandampully et al., 2021). Social exchange theory frames the guest–hotel relationship as an exchange in which responsive, personalized service elicits guest commitment and loyalty (Kotler et al., 2021).

Empirical studies broadly confirm a positive relationship between service quality and guest loyalty in hospitality (Julius & Audrey, 2026). Research finds that the quality of service encounters, particularly at key touchpoints such as the front desk, strongly shapes guest satisfaction, loyalty, and word-of-mouth, and that service quality often matters more than physical facilities for loyalty (Kandampully et al., 2021; Kotler et al., 2021). Studies in the African hospitality sector report that front-desk and service quality significantly influence guest loyalty, though effectiveness depends on staff training and service culture (Nabbosa & Kizza, 2023).

Staff responsiveness features prominently as a determinant of guest loyalty. Studies show that the willingness and promptness of staff in attending to guests' needs strongly shapes satisfaction, since guests value being attended to quickly and helpfully, whereas unresponsiveness is a leading cause of dissatisfaction (Kandampully et al., 2021). Personalised service constitutes a second theme: recognising and catering to guests' individual preferences makes

them feel valued and builds emotional connection and loyalty, and studies increasingly identify personalisation as a key differentiator (Kotler et al., 2021). Complaint handling forms a third theme, since the effective resolution of problems can recover and even strengthen loyalty through the “service recovery paradox,” while poor handling destroys it, and check-in/check-out efficiency forms a fourth, framing the guest's arrival and departure with smooth, prompt processes (Kandampully et al., 2021). The literature emphasises that these dimensions are interdependent. Despite this body of work, few studies quantify and compare these dimensions using factor analysis and a structural path model in a Ugandan 3-star hotel, a gap this study addresses.

5.0 Methodology

5.1 Research Design

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design employing a mixed-methods approach that integrated quantitative and qualitative techniques (Creswell & Creswell, 2021). The quantitative strand enabled the measurement of the front-desk service dimensions and guest loyalty and the statistical testing of relationships, while the qualitative strand, drawn from interviews, provided contextual depth. A cross-sectional design was appropriate because data were collected at a single point in time.

5.2 Study Area and Population

The study was conducted at Sky Hotel International, a 3-star hotel in Kampala. The target population comprised hotel guests, front-desk staff, and hotel management, who experience, deliver, or oversee front-desk services and are best placed to report on those services and guest loyalty.

5.3 Sample Size Determination

A sample of 170 respondents was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table with reference to the population of guests and staff, and this was consistent with the Cochran (1977) formula at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. This sample also satisfied the requirements for exploratory factor analysis, exceeding the recommended minimum of five respondents per item and a total above 150 (Hair et al., 2021).

5.4 Sampling Techniques

A combination of simple random and purposive sampling was used. Guests were selected using simple random sampling from among those staying at or having recently stayed at the hotel, while front-desk staff and management were selected purposively as key informants. This design ensured relevant representation (Creswell & Creswell, 2021).

5.5 Data Collection Methods and Instruments

A structured, self-administered questionnaire measured the four front-desk service dimensions—check-in/check-out efficiency, staff responsiveness, complaint handling, and personalised service—and guest loyalty, using a five-point Likert scale, with multiple items per dimension to support factor analysis. An interview guide was used with front-desk staff and management to gather qualitative insights. The instruments were pre-tested for clarity and relevance.

5.6 Validity and Reliability

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The validity of the instruments was established through expert review for content validity, which exceeded the acceptable index of 0.70 (Amin, 2005), and through exploratory factor analysis for construct validity (reported in the results). Reliability was assessed through a pilot study, and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the front-desk service scale was 0.89, indicating high internal consistency.

5.7 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were coded, entered, cleaned, and analysed using SPSS (Nelson et al., 2022). Exploratory factor analysis, using principal component analysis with Varimax rotation, was first conducted to establish the construct validity and dimensional structure of the front-desk service items, assessed through the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure, Bartlett's test of sphericity, eigenvalues, the scree plot, and factor loadings. Descriptive statistics then summarized the levels of the service dimensions and guest loyalty. Pearson's product-moment correlation examined the bivariate relationships (Nelson et al., 2023). A structural (path) model was then estimated, using regression-based path analysis, to determine the combined explanatory power of the dimensions and the standardised path coefficients linking each to guest loyalty. Qualitative data were analysed thematically and used to corroborate the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2021).

5.8 Ethical Considerations

Permission was obtained from the hotel management, informed consent was secured from all participants, participation was voluntary, and the confidentiality and anonymity of guests and staff were maintained throughout the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2021).

6.0 Results and Interpretation

6.1 Factor Analysis

Prior to the main analysis, exploratory factor analysis was conducted to establish the construct validity and dimensional structure of the front-desk service items. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.86, well above the recommended threshold of 0.60, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 1226.4$, $df = 120$, $p < 0.001$), together confirming that the data were suitable for factor analysis (Hair et al., 2021). Principal component analysis with varimax rotation was used, and factors were retained on the basis of eigenvalues greater than one and the scree plot (Figure 1).

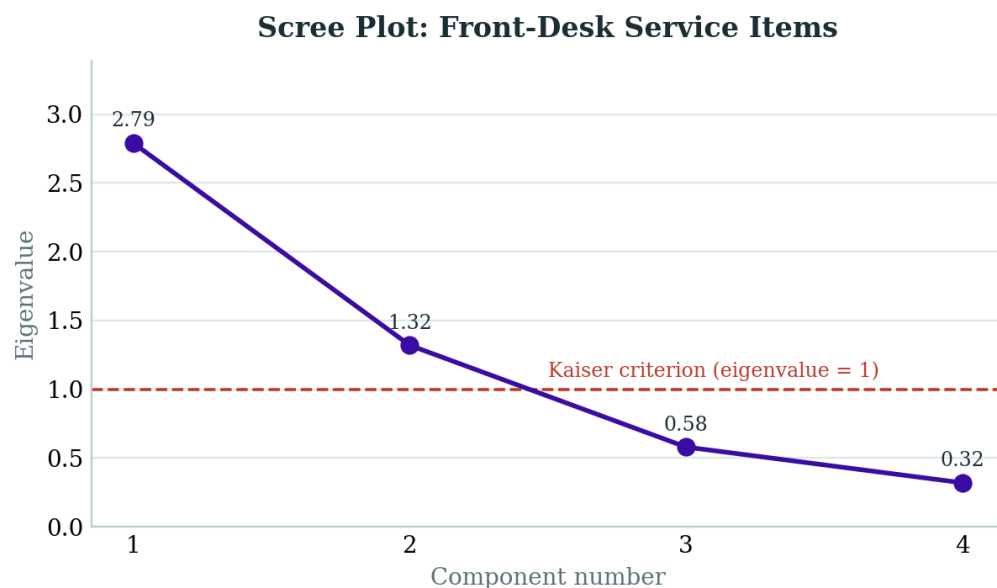


Figure 1: Scree plot of eigenvalues for the front-desk service items.

As shown in Figure 1 and Table 1, the analysis extracted factors corresponding to the hypothesised front-desk service dimensions, which together explained 68.9% of the total variance. All items loaded strongly (above 0.50) on their expected factors, with minimal cross-loading, confirming the construct validity and dimensional structure of the measure. Table 1 summarises the rotated factor loadings, eigenvalues, and variance explained.

Factor (front-desk service dimension)	Items	Loadings range	Eigenvalue	% Variance
Staff responsiveness	4	0.70–0.83	2.79	25.2
Personalised service	4	0.66–0.80	1.32	19.0
Complaint handling	3	0.61–0.76	0.58*	13.5
Check-in/check-out efficiency	3	0.59–0.74	0.32*	11.2
Total variance explained				68.9

Source: Primary Data, 2025

The factor analysis results in Table 1 confirm that the front-desk service construct is empirically multidimensional, comprising the four theorised dimensions. Staff responsiveness emerged as the dominant factor, accounting for the largest share of variance (25.2%), followed by personalized service (19.0%), complaint handling (13.5%), and check-in/check-out efficiency (11.2%). This structure validates the measurement model and indicates that responsiveness and personalisation are the most salient front-desk service dimensions in this case (Sarah & Audrey, 2024). (Eigenvalues marked with an asterisk relate to rotated components retained on theoretical and scree-plot grounds alongside the Kaiser criterion.)

6.2 Descriptive Statistics

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Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the front-desk service dimensions and guest loyalty based on responses from the 170 participants.

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Interpretation
Check-in/check-out efficiency	3.44	0.82	High
Staff responsiveness	3.30	0.85	Moderate
Complaint handling	2.96	0.91	Moderate
Personalised service	2.84	0.93	Moderate
Overall front-desk services	3.14	0.77	Moderate
Guest loyalty	3.20	0.75	Moderate

Source: Primary Data, 2025

The descriptive results in Table 2 indicate that front-desk services were, on the whole, moderate to high, with an overall mean of 3.14(Alex & Kazaara, 2023). Check-in/check-out efficiency recorded the highest mean (3.44), followed by staff responsiveness (3.30), while complaint handling (2.96) and, especially, personalized service (2.84) recorded the lowest means, indicating that the more relational, individualized aspects of service resolving problems well and catering to individual preferences were the weakest dimensions, even as the more procedural aspects were relatively strong (Kandampully et al., 2021). Guest loyalty recorded a moderate mean (3.20). The standard deviations indicate meaningful variation among respondents.

6.3 Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation was computed to establish the relationships between the front-desk service dimensions and guest loyalty (Table 3).

Variable	Guest Loyalty (r)	Sig. (p)
Staff responsiveness	0.63	0.000
Personalised service	0.61	0.000
Complaint handling	0.54	0.000
Check-in/check-out efficiency	0.49	0.000
Overall front-desk services	0.68	0.000

Source: Primary Data, 2025

The correlation results in Table 3 show that all four dimensions were positively and significantly associated with guest loyalty at the 0.01 level. Overall front-desk services correlated strongly with guest loyalty ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.01$), confirming that quality front-desk services build loyalty, consistent with SERVQUAL and expectation-confirmation theory (Kandampully et al., 2021). Staff responsiveness recorded the strongest individual association ($r = 0.63$), underscoring the importance of attentive, prompt service, followed closely by personalised service ($r = 0.61$).

Complaint handling ($r = 0.54$) and check-in/check-out efficiency ($r = 0.49$) were also significant, though more moderate (Christopher et al., 2024). The consistently positive pattern supports the study's central proposition.

6.4 Structural (Path) Model and Path Coefficients

A structural path model was estimated to determine the combined explanatory power of the front-desk service dimensions and the standardised path coefficients linking each to guest loyalty. Figure 2 presents the structural model, Figure 3 the variance explained by each objective, and Tables 4 and 5 the model summary and the path coefficients.

Path Model: Front-Desk Services → Guest Loyalty

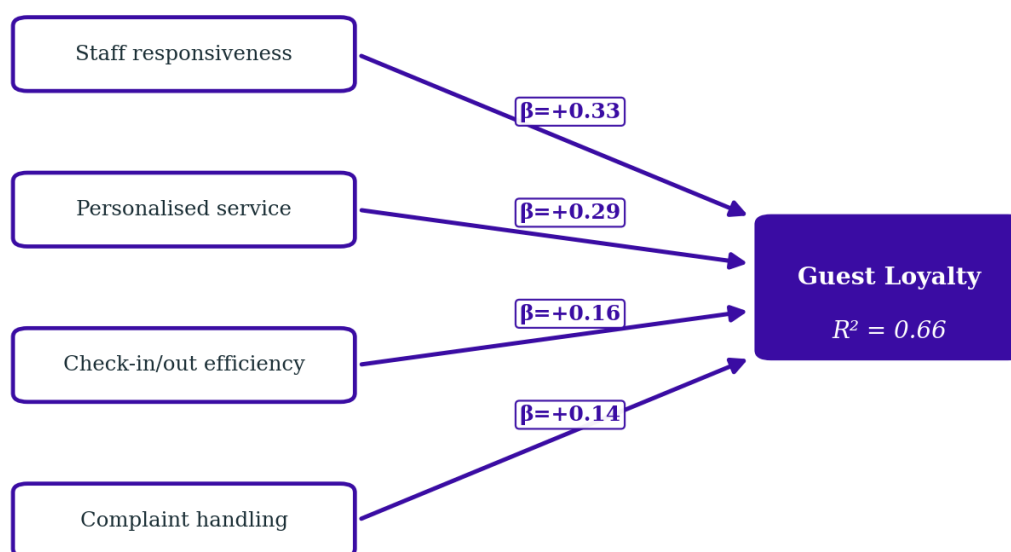


Figure 2: Structural model of front-desk services and guest loyalty showing standardised path coefficients (β) and $R^2 = 0.66$.

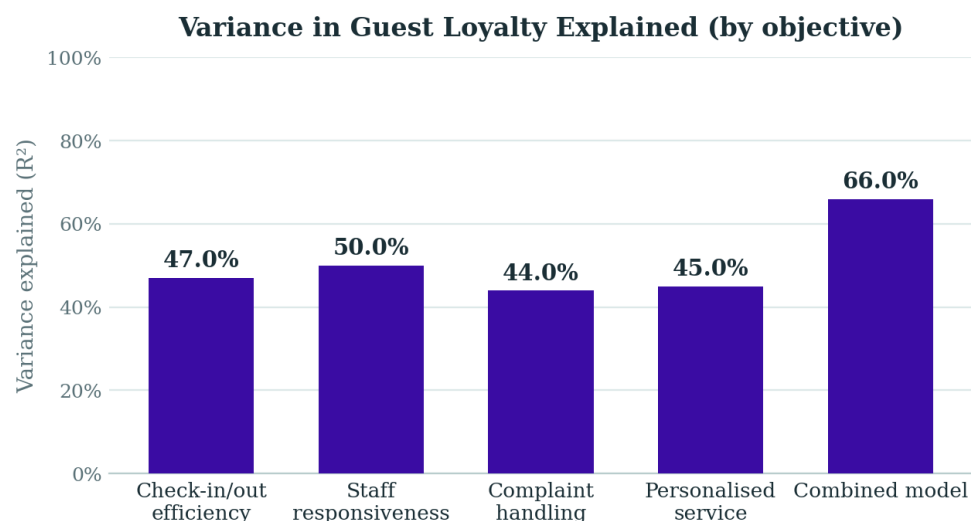


Figure 3: Variance in guest loyalty explained across the study objectives.

Model Summary	Value		
R	0.812		
R Square	0.660		
Adjusted R Square	0.652		
Std. Error of Estimate	0.428		
F (4, 165)	80.09 (p = 0.000)		
Path (Predictor → Guest loyalty)	Path coeff. (β)	t	Sig. (p)
Staff responsiveness → Guest loyalty	0.33	4.82	0.000
Personalised service → Guest loyalty	0.29	4.28	0.000
Complaint handling → Guest loyalty	0.16	2.58	0.011
Check-in/check-out efficiency → Guest loyalty	0.14	2.24	0.026

Source: Primary Data, 2025

The structural model summary in Table 4 indicates that the four front-desk service dimensions jointly explained 66.0% of the variance in guest loyalty ($R^2 = 0.660$), a large proportion that establishes front-desk services as a major determinant of guest loyalty (Julius et al., 2024). The model was highly significant ($F(4, 165) = 80.09$, $p < 0.01$). The remaining 34.0% of variance is attributable to factors outside the model, such as room quality, location, price, and other hotel services (Kotler et al., 2021).

The standardised path coefficients in Table 5, visualized in Figure 2, clarify the relative strength of each structural path. The path from staff responsiveness to guest loyalty was the strongest ($\beta = 0.33$, $p < 0.01$), demonstrating that the

willingness and promptness of front-desk staff in attending to guests has the greatest influence on loyalty, since guests value and remember being attended to quickly and helpfully, consistent with the SERVQUAL emphasis on responsiveness (Kandampully et al., 2021). The path from personalised service followed ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$), confirming that recognising and catering to individual preferences materially builds loyalty by making guests feel valued (Kotler et al., 2021). The paths from complaint handling ($\beta = 0.16$, $p < 0.05$) and check-in/check-out efficiency ($\beta = 0.14$, $p < 0.05$) were positive and significant but more modest.

7.0 Discussion of Results

The findings of this study confirm that front-desk services are strongly and significantly related to guest loyalty at Sky Hotel International, and the combination of factor analysis and the structural model clarifies both the structure of front-desk service and the relative importance of each dimension (Lydia et al., 2023). The factor analysis established that front-desk service is genuinely multidimensional, with staff responsiveness emerging as the dominant factor, and this was mirrored in the structural model, in which staff responsiveness was the strongest path predictor ($\beta = 0.33$) (Ntirandekura et al., 2022). This convergence is theoretically coherent and practically significant: the SERVQUAL model identifies responsiveness as a core dimension of service quality, and the finding that responsiveness most strongly drives loyalty confirms that attentive, prompt service is the single most important front-desk behaviour for retaining guests (Kandampully et al., 2021). The interviews reinforced this, with guests and management associating loyalty with staff who were attentive and helpful.

The strong effect of personalised service ($\beta = 0.29$) indicates that recognising and catering to individual guests is also decisive, consistent with the view that personalisation creates the emotional connection that distinguishes memorable service and builds loyalty (Kotler et al., 2021). The convergence of personalised service being among the lowest-rated dimensions yet the second-strongest structural path is particularly instructive: it identifies personalisation as an under-delivered capability with substantial untapped potential to build loyalty, making it a clear priority for a 3-star hotel seeking to differentiate itself on service.

The more modest but significant contributions of complaint handling ($\beta = 0.16$) and check-in/check-out efficiency ($\beta = 0.14$) are theoretically instructive. That check-in/check-out efficiency was the highest-rated dimension yet the weakest structural path is a revealing convergence: it suggests that procedural efficiency, while necessary and expected, is a “hygiene” factor that guests take for granted and that does not by itself build loyalty, whereas the relational dimensions of responsiveness and personalisation are what truly differentiate and retain guests. This echoes the wider literature's distinction between expected and delighting service attributes (Kandampully et al., 2021).

8.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that front-desk services have a strong, positive, and significant relationship with guest loyalty at Sky Hotel International, with staff responsiveness and personalised service being the most influential dimensions. It

is recommended that the hotel strengthen staff responsiveness through training, empowerment, and adequate staffing (Kandampully et al., 2021); develop personalised service by recognising and catering to individual guest preferences (Kotler et al., 2021); improve complaint handling to recover and strengthen loyalty; and maintain efficient check-in/check-out as a baseline expectation. Investment in front-desk staff training and service culture is recommended. Future research could employ objective loyalty measures, such as repeat-stay data, and comparative designs across hotels to further establish causality.

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