

# Customer Relationship Management (CRM) in service firms: A model proposal to measure the impact of the implementation of CRM dimensions on Hotel Performance

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**Abstract:** The obvious lack of accepted and unified definition of Customer Relationship Management may lead to failures in the implementation of CRM projects, particularly when organizations adopt the limited technology perspective (Payne & Frow, 2005, p.168). In an attempt to review the different perspectives of CRM, this research paper focus on the definition that suggests that CRM implementations typically involve the four dimensions: (1) customer orientation (2) managing knowledge (3) organizing around CRM (CRM organization), and (4) incorporating CRM based technology. Recent studies on CRM focused more on service sectors for the importance of these strategies in such industries. Yet, it has been noticed that there is still a marked shortage of research on CRM in the hospitality industry (Luck and Stephenson, 2009; Wu and Lu, 2012). This research tends to investigate the impact of CRM dimensions on hotels performance. The impact of CRM dimensions on firms performance was assessed from several perspectives, including customer satisfaction (Abdulateef et al., 2010), market effectiveness and financial performance (Sin et al., 2005), customer performance and financial performance (Akroush et al., 2011), and customer retention and sales growth (Yim et al., 2005). One of the main measurements used to assess the overall performance of hotels is the occupancy rate. Therefore, a model proposal was developed to use the occupancy rate as a measure to evaluate the impact of CRM dimensions on hotel performance.

JEL classification: G32

**Keywords:** Customer Relationship Management, customer orientation, knowledge management, CRM organization), CRM based technology, Customer satisfaction, customer retention, Occupancy rate.

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## Introduction

The concept of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) has been brought to attention in late 90s as a result of relationship marketing that appeared among the academics and practitioners since the 1920s. This new approach gave birth to new marketing strategies including the necessity of direct relationship between customers and marketers, the importance of keeping current customers, as well as the need of building long-term relationships with customers (Ismail & et. al., 2007). Consequently, organizations have directed their attention to CRM and to heavy investments in necessary infrastructure, with special concern to the great advance in Information Technology. CRM was considered,

therefore, as a tool to improving performance (Malmi & et . al., 2004). CRM systems were used to improve electronic and direct marketing programs, a better management of selling teams, boosting sales and increasing investments revenue (Baran. 2008).

Though previous literature confirm the favorable effects of CRM on business performance (Crosby and Johnson 2001; Gruen, Summers, and Acito 2000; Kennedy 2004), actual results in the business world remain controversial the real outcomes of CRM and its effects on businesses investing in it (Payant 2004; Rigby, Reichheld, and Schefter 2002). Thomas et al (2004) convey that the widespread application of CRM programs has not led to substantially higher customer retention rates. Jeffery and Leliveld (2004) confirm that company investments in CRM projects are generally made in an uncoordinated manner. These Unrealized expectations pushed executives to make more efforts to learn from their mistakes and refine their CRM activities and objectives (Sheth 2002).

CRM literature reveals that ambiguous results can be attributed to disagreement and confusion regarding the exact domain of CRM (Rigby, Reichheld, and Schefter 2004). In other words, there is no agreement on what really constitutes CRM. While some view CRM as just a technology-focused database management approach to gathering and analyzing information about customers in order to create value for them (Krauss 2002), others believe that CRM includes all initiatives such as call centers, loyalty programs, Web sites, or personalized e-mails to implement one-to-one marketing. Broader views tend to see CRM as an overall mix of marketing strategy, organizational structure and processes, and technology (Hair, Bush, and Ortinau 2003).

The uncertainties about the precise implication and domain of CRM led to improper implementations of CRM and therefore to unimpressive results in improving customer relationships. James (2002) attempted to provide more conceptual clarity of CRM through identifying four key areas necessary for successful CRM implementation: (1) *strategy*, (2) *people*, (3) *processes*, and (4) *technology*. In other words, CRM can only be effective if all four dimensions work in harmony. More specifically and based on analyses previous CRM literature, it can be concluded that CRM implementations usually involve four specific ongoing activities: (1) focusing on customer-oriented strategies (Srivastava, Shervani, and Fahey 1999; Vandermerwe 2004), (2) managing knowledge (Stefanou,

Sarmaniotis, and Stafyla 2003), (3) organizing around CRM (Homburg, Workman, and Jensen 2000; Langerak and Verhoef 2003), and (4) incorporating CRM based technology (Bhaskar 2004; Chen and Ching 2004).

This research paper tend to bring attention to the application CRM dimensions in the hotel industry not only because very little attention has been given to CRM applications in the hotel industry in developing countries, but also since there is plenty of opportunity for extending the literature about CRM dimensions and hotel performance, both theoretically and empirically. The paper attempt to develop a model for applying CRM in the hotels industry based on previous literature.

### **The Concept of CRM**

CRM has been defined by many authors in recent decades, yet there has been a great divergence in formulating a unified definition for CRM. This divergence can be due to the differences in the scientific background of these authors. Stone & Findlay (2001) defined CRM as the organization carrying out a lot of information about the customer from various resources and keeping it in order to divide the territories, analyze and reuse. This definition limited CRM to only collecting and recording information about the customer. Later, Forss & Stone (2001) defined CRM as the company use of its skills in research methodologies, technology and e-commerce in order to manage customer relationships. This definition considers CRM as the ability to use technology in dealing with customers. Parvatiyar & Sheth (2002) came out with a broader definition to CRM, they viewed CRM as a broad strategy that includes the process of acquiring certain customers, keeping them and cooperating with them to create a distinguished value for both the company and the customer. This definition regards CRM as a strategy aiming to deliver a distinguished value to the customer through improving the marketing productivity. Payne & Frow (2005) demonstrated that there are various perspectives related to the concept of CRM. Whiles some points of view regard CRM as correspondence in direct mail, a diagram for customer loyalty programs or databases, others regarded it as an assistant office work or a call center. Still, some considered it as just data storage, search and processing.

The obvious lack of accepted and appropriate definition of CRM may lead to failures in the implementation of CRM projects, particularly when organizations adopt the limited perspective technology, the technological dimension (Payne & Frow, 2005). Therefore, the two authors tried to set a broader definition that pays attention on the strategic perspective. So

they defined CRM as a strategic method related to creating a distinguished value for the contributors through improving good relationships with the main customers and other customer categories. So, CRM seeks to combine the strategies of marketing using relationships and information technology in order to create profitable, long-term relationships with customers and other parties. Kumar & Reinartz (2006) agree with the above definition and define CRM as a strategic process by which the institution's more profitable customers are selected, and interactions between this institution and these customers are determined, in order to achieve the goal of maximizing the present and future values for customers. , Ramasesha ( 2006) defined CRM from the employment perspective as a procedure of achieving a continuous dialogue with each customer on their own, using all the available means to know the quantitative expected response of that customer, as a result of practicing marketing activities, to the degree that maximizes the general profitability of the organization. Yet, this definition mainly concerns CRM in the short-term and not in the long-term.

In the light of the above, and in an attempt to summarize the different definitions of CRM, we focus on the definition that states that CRM implementations usually involve the four dimensions: (1) focusing on customer-oriented strategies (Srivastava, Shervani, and Fahey 1999; Vandermerwe 2004), (2) managing knowledge (Stefanou, Sarmaniotis, and Stafyla 2003), (3) organizing around CRM (Homburg, Workman, and Jensen 2000; Langerak and Verhoef 2003), and (4) incorporating CRM based technology (Bhaskar 2004; Chen and Ching 2004).

### **The Four Dimensions of CRM Implementations**

The multi- dimensions concept of CRM can be considered relatively new, because of the limited studies focusing on CRM dimensions in some service sectors such as banking (Akroush et al., 2011; Sadek et al., 2011) and contact centers (Abdullateef et al., 2010). So based on this new concept, we deduce that CRM consists of four broad behavioral dimensions. These behavioral dimensions are: customer orientation, CRM organizations, Knowledge management and technology -based CRM. The cited dimensions must work systematically in an organization to guarantee its improved performance (Yim et al., 2005). In

this regard, several researches highlight the important effects of conducting studies on CRM dimensions in the hotel sector (e.g. Akroush et al., 2011; Sadek et al., 2011; Sin et al., 2005). Consequently, this study is being done with the aim of filling the gap that has been left because of the very little attention given to the above- mentioned dimensions in the hotel industry.

### **Customer Orientation**

Several studies have demonstrated that good customer -oriented behaviors, in an organization, definitely ensures a positive impact on its performance (Kim, 2008; Yilmaz et al., 2005). The main purpose behind customer –oriented behaviors is to increase customer long-lasting satisfaction and to create customer-loyalty. Vandermerwe (2004) argues that the ultimate goal of customer orientation is to achieve deep customer relationships through which the seller organization becomes vital to its most profitable customers. The delivery of service in any service company occurs when there is interaction between service providers (firms) and the service encounters (customers) (Ki Lee et al., 2006). Consequently, enhancing the service experience requires focusing on customer interaction. Jain and Singh (2002) argue that all interactions with key customers, who are often identified by “lifetime value computations,” must fully reflect this company-wide CRM focus. Moreover, several researches have revealed that service firms require a better understanding of customer orientation and its great importance for a better performance (Kim et al., 2006; McNaughton et al., 2002; Sin et al., 2005).

King and Burgess (2008) demonstrated that customer orientation is a crucial factor in the success of CRM projects. Customer orientation is also considered as one of the market beneficial sources to deeply understand the customer, and thus it helps in delivering an appropriate plan to satisfy customer needs. Besides the beneficial influence of customer orientation strategy on marketing-planning capabilities, this strategy also influences the successful implementations of marketing actions and innovations (Slater and Narver, 1998). Several other researches has supported the assumption that customer orientation leads to a better organizational performance (Asikhia, 2010; Liu et al., 2003; Zhou et al, 2009).

Equipped with internal support for key customer relationships, sales teams are generally better enabled and motivated to cultivate long-term customer relationships by offering more personalized products and services (Srinivasan, Anderson, and Ponnnavolu

2002). A customer-oriented strategy should permeate any organization to implement CRM successfully (Ryals and Knox 2001). Despite the numerous positive impacts of customer - orientation on organizations performance, there is still a shortage of literature about customer - orientation impact on hotel performance (Tajeddini, 2010).

### ***Organizing Around CRM (CRM organization)***

Previous literature argue that CRM cannot be successful without an appropriate working environment (Sin et al., 2005; Yim et al., 2005). Other studies demonstrate a positive impact of CRM organization on customer retention (Yim et al., 2005), and on financial and marketing performance (Akrouch et al., 2011). Many organizations nowadays fail to get satisfying outcomes even if they enjoy the most advanced technology and adapt a customer - oriented approach. Such organizations have to develop an apt operational environment for service in work including the use of modern tools and technology, customer-satisfaction tracking and complaints management systems, inspirational leadership, and appropriate rewards systems (Sheth, 2002). The organizational structure needs to be flexible and restructured to generate customer-centric values and improve coordination of cross-functional teams (Brown 2000). Ku (2010) confirms that CRM success does not only require technological quality or systems, but also an effective service concept as well as suitable operation procedures. In other words, all the organization resources have to be integrated in order to implement CRM successfully and, in turn, to improve organizations performance.

For a better use of CRM, there must be an organization wide commitment of resources. Richards and Jones (2008) argue that CRM organization may influence future marketing decisions, such as brand differentiation, price, communication, and distribution. Accordingly, with combined efforts by all organizational functions, companies continuously provide a stream of valuable actions and get outstanding customer outcomes (Ahmed and Rafiq, 2003). Sin et al (2005) convey that the main purpose behind collecting data about customers is to get a clear image about them from different perspectives. Such data can be used by organizations to establish and develop beneficial relationship with their customers (Zahay and Griffin, 2004). In this regard, Nunes and Dréze (2006) reported that many hotel chains flexibly quote their room prices according to the customer data that were collected previously. Hence, it can be concluded that Knowledge about customers plays a vital role in

enhancing the company's ability to satisfy customers' needs and build strong long-lasting customer relationships.

### ***Managing Knowledge***

As mentioned in the previous section, CRM can be successful only if customer information is effectively transformed to customer knowledge (Freeland 2003; Plessis and Boon 2004). Accordingly, information about customers should be gathered through interactions or touch points across all functions or areas of the firm (Brohman et al. 2003). Salespeople are generally equipped with customer knowledge to be used in order to adjust marketing offers to fit the individual needs of each customer (Armstrong and Kotler 2003). One of the criteria for deciding whether CRM is successful or not, is the ability of the organization to effectively transform customer information into customer knowledge (Plessis and Boon, 2004; Stringfellow et al., 2004). Accordingly, effective knowledge management can significantly help an organization to successfully build better customer relationship leading to a positive impact on the organization performance (Abdulateef et al., 2010; Akroush et al., 2011).

It should be noted that the success of relationship management depends heavily on analyzing the collected data and transforming it into highly personalized offerings (Sigala, 2005). With regard to the hospitality industry, a great lack of research about knowledge management can be noticed. Lo et al., (2010) recommend investigating the impact of knowledge management dimension on hotel industry in future research. Actually, hotels enjoying a good management of customer are more likely to implement successful marketing activities for meeting their customer needs (Noble and Mokwa, 1999). As well, Fan and Ku (2010) indicate that customer knowledge management significantly improves organizations 'ability to take strategic managerial decisions for improving customer relationships and therefore firms' performance.

### ***Incorporating CRM-Based Technology***

CRM-oriented activities cannot be optimized without leveraging appropriate CRM technologies. CRM applications help organizations to collect and analyze data about customers' attitudes and preferences, develop prediction models, respond with timely and effective customized communications, and efficiently deliver personalized offerings to their customers (Peppard 2000; Vrechopoulos 2004). Salespeople frequently depend on the latest software programs to better respond to their customers and build long-lasting customer

relationships. Such technologies help organizations to enhance customer satisfaction, increase customer retention, and strengthen profitable enduring customer relationships (Butler 2000).

Though the mentioned benefits of incorporating CRM technologies, CRM projects end up in failures if they are not used properly (Dutu and Halmajan , 2011) . Thus the suitable use of technology in marketing is one of the keys to the success of CRM projects. Kasim and Minai (2009) argue that CRM technology dimension is firmly related to service firms performance, particularly hotels. Other studies confirm the findings about the positive role of information technology in the success of CRM strategies (Abdullateef et al., 2010; Yueh et al., 2010; Eid, 2007). Thus, CRM based technology enables organizations to plan and implement successful marketing actions for retaining customers and making them more profitable. Chang , Park , and Chaiky (2010) confirm that CRM technology improves marketing capabilities by providing valuable information about customers, which help both managers and employees to achieve specific marketing goals more effectively .

In summary, successful CRM implementations depend on combining the four abovementioned dimensions—*customer orientation, organizing around CRM, managing knowledge, and incorporating CRM-based technology*—into an effective overall CRM strategy. Deficiencies in any of these areas can lead to lowering CRM projects performance or even to failures.

### **CRM and Hotel industry**

Recent studies on the CRM focused more on service sectors for the importance of these strategies in such industries. These studies were made on several industries such as banking (e.g. Akroush et al., 2011; Becker , Greve, and Albers 2009; Eid, 2007; Hussain et al., 2009; Krasnikov et al., 2009), telecommunication (e.g. Almotairi, 2009; Beldi *et al.*, 2010), healthcare (e.g. Bunthuwun et al., 2011; Hung et al., 2010), and contact center (Abdullatif et al., 2010). Yet, it has been noticed that there is still a marked lack of research on CRM in the hospitality industry (Luck and Stephenson, 2009; Wu and Lu, 2012). Vogt (2011) conveys that despite the ever-increasing use of CRM in the tourism sector, studies investigating its variety of applications in this industry are still limited. Furthermore, a number of researches stressed the importance of making studies on CRM strategies in the hotel sector (Akroush et al., 2011; Sadek et al., 2011; Sin et al., 2005). As a result of that, it is reasonable to investigate the impact of CRM dimensions on hotels performance.



Despite the fact that CRM brings lasting benefits to organizations, as a whole, some of them gain satisfying outcomes from implementing it while others consider this implementation as a failure. Mgyuen et al. (2007) demonstrate that CRM brings benefits to the organizations that generate a lot of information about customers. Accordingly, Gronroos (2004) confirm the necessity of using CRM strategies in service organizations to build enduring relationships with customers. Therefore, CRM is ideally fit the hotel industry, especially if implemented successfully and effectively.

Moreover, the growing customer- acquisition costs, rising customer expectations, price-sensitive clients, uncertain market and less brand loyalty are all key factors, which strongly push for the use of CRM as a useful strategy in hotels (Mylonakis, 2009; Wu and Li, 2011).. The great amount of data received in these businesses from each customer can be of great value if transformed into customer knowledge and personalized offerings (Nasution and Mavondo, 2008). Consequently, CRM is widely considered as one of the most effective ways to facilitate developing profitable long-lasting customer relationships and therefore enhancing hotels performance and profitability.

The impact of CRM dimensions on firms performance was assessed in a number of ways, including customer satisfaction (Abdulateef et al., 2010), market effectiveness and financial performance (Sin et al., 2005), customer performance and financial performance (Akroush et al., 2011), and customer retention and sales growth (Yim et al., 2005). Sin et al.(2005) suggest that the use of other measurements of performance in future studies can be beneficial. One of the main measurements of the overall performance of hotels is the occupancy rate. Therefore, this study will use the occupancy rate of the studied hotels to evaluate the impact of CRM dimensions on hotel performance.

### **Measuring hotel performance**

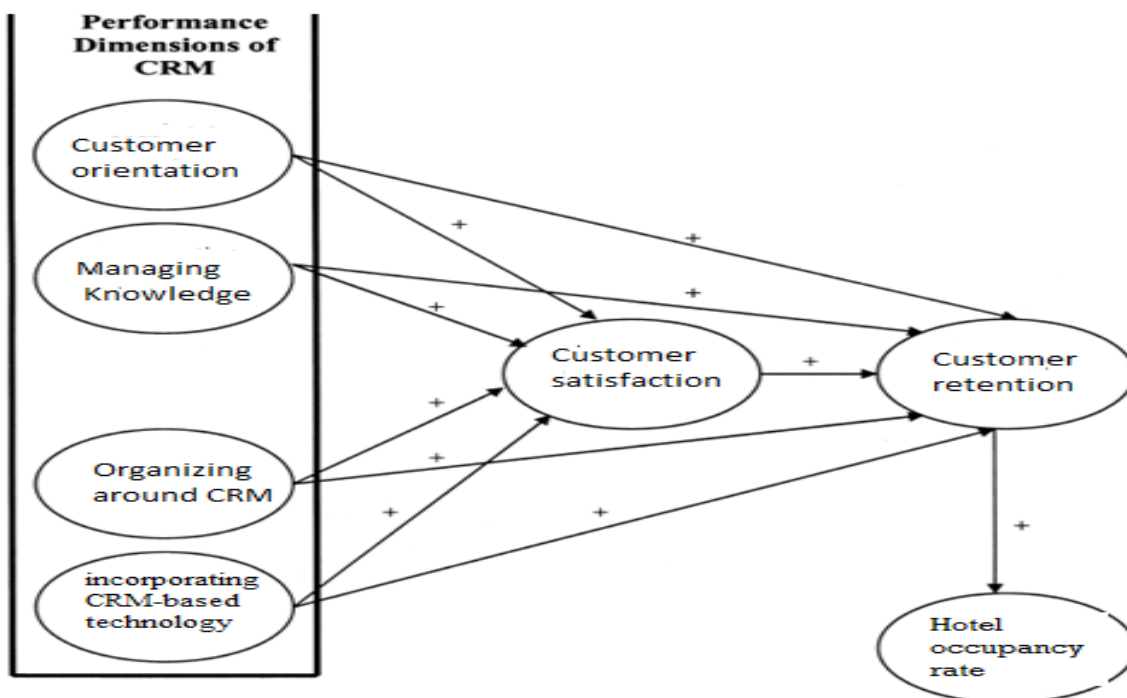
Measuring performance of a hotel operation or any other service oriented company is not as simple as measuring the performance of a manufacturing company. Services are intangible and to record the accuracy of their performance, two types of methods are normally used; the qualitative and quantitative methods and approach. Poon & Low ( 2005) demonstrated that the quality of products and services delivered by employees of a service oriented organization will determine the level of customer satisfaction. The authors strongly emphasized that businesses look seriously at the impact of customer's satisfaction on their operation. Satisfied customers are most likely to return and might bring in new customers as well. Consequently, a success or failure of a hotel depends heavily on customers 'satisfaction.

Though quality customer service is not the only determining factor, customers would surely return to the hotel if satisfied with the services and will eventually spread good words to their friends and families. This will lead to increasing the occupancy rate of the hotel which will then translate into growth in revenue (Poon & Low, 2005). Occupancy Rates are considered of utmost importance for the hotel's management in general, and for sales department in particular. Consequently, the present study will use occupancy rates as a measure to evaluate hotel performance.

### **Theoretical Background and Conceptual Model**

The proposed model of this study conceptualizes the relationship among CRM dimensions and hotel performance. The relationship is based on the resource based view that suggests that the use of CRM strategies positively affect firm performance. As mentioned earlier in this research paper, CRM implementations cannot be successful without the combination of the its four dimensions—*customer orientation*, *organizing around CRM*, *managing knowledge*, and *incorporating CRM-based technology*—into an effective overall CRM strategy (Abdullateef et al., 2010; Chang et al., 2010; Sin et al., 2005; Wu and Lu, 2012; **Abdul Alem & Basri, 2012**). Hence, this model involves the four dimensions of CRM previously mentioned. And is based on previous studies (Abdullateef et al., 2010; Wu and Lu, 2012; **Abdul Alem & Basri, 2012**). The relationship between variables in this model is based on **Resource-based-theory (RBV theory)** that conveys that organizations with valuable resources can successfully implement business strategy to create competitive advantage and accordingly improve organization performance (Barney and Delwyn, 2007). (See figure 1).

### **Figure 1. Conceptual Model of the impact of CRM Dimensions on Hotel performance**



## Hypothesis development

Having provided more conceptual precision to the CRM domain by exploring the critical aspects of successful CRM implementation and its four dimensions, we turn our attention to the desired consequences of adopting a CRM orientation within hotels — occupancy rate.

Customer satisfaction is a critical CRM variable that must not evade our empirical analysis. Indeed, customer satisfaction is central to successful application of the marketing concept. Customer satisfaction can be defined as “the extent to which a product’s perceived performance in delivering value matches a buyer’s expectations” (Armstrong and Kotler 2003). Customer satisfaction leads customer retention since satisfied customers would surely return to the hotel (increased customer retention) will eventually spread good words to their friends and families. Reichheld (1996) argues that satisfaction measures account for up to 40 percent of the variance in models of customer retention. High levels of customer satisfaction generally are considered essential to customer retention. Kotler (2003) confirms this since he expresses it succinctly: “The higher the customer satisfaction, the higher the retention” (2003, p. 41). This increase in customer satisfaction and customer retention eventually leads to increasing the occupancy rate hotels which will then translate into growth in revenue (Poon & Low, 2005). Occupancy Rates are considered of greatest importance for the hotel’s

management in general, and for sales department in particular. Therefore, the present study will use occupancy rates as a measure to evaluate hotel performance. From this perspective, the following relationships are hypothesized:

*H1: There is a positive relationship between “customer orientation” and hotels occupancy rate.*

*H2: There is a positive relationship between “organizing around CRM” and hotels occupancy rate..*

*H3: There is a positive relationship between “managing knowledge” and hotels occupancy rate.*

*H4: There is a positive relationship between “incorporating CRM-based technology” and hotels occupancy rate.*

Taking into consideration the four previous hypotheses to test each of the four CRM dimensions impact on hotel performance, we, therefore, set the following hypothesis to test CRM impact on hotel performance:

*H5: There is a positive relationship between CRM and hotel performance*

### ***Importance of the research***

The importance of this research is apparent in two aspects:

- The academic aspect, as this research represents an attempt to add to the hospitality industry libraries, which suffer from shortage in studies, which treat the question of CRM and its relationship to hotel performance. This shortage induced the researcher to treat this important issue in the present time.
- The practical aspect, as the topic of CRM has been one of the topics which gained much importance in service companies because of the general orientation to globalization, which made that topic the main touchstone to the success of service companies, in general and to hotels in particular.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

In conclusion, this research paper provides a theoretical model to show the relationship between CRM dimensions and hotel performance. It contributes extremely to the body of knowledge, as it provides a comprehensive framework that is used for explaining the impact of the CRM four dimensions on hotel performance.

Customer relationship management has not been fully empirically verified to improve hotel industry performance. Additionally, this research uniquely extends the body of knowledge by explaining the theoretical possibilities of testing the impact of CRM on hotel performance. This paper will also raise awareness among hotel managers to pay more attention to CRM dimensions when implementing CRM strategies in order to improve hotel performance and competitiveness. However, the present study has its limitations. First, because it is in dire need of additional verification by collecting data from the hotel industries to test the proposed model and further investigate the hypothesized relationships. Second, the model is more focused on the hotel industry and therefore, there is a need to test it in other sectors.

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