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Systematic review of hospitality CRM research

Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to comprehensively and systematically review the state of customer relationship management (CRM) research on hospitality and propose future research agenda.

Design/methodology/approach – All hospitality-related CRM articles since its introduction as a concept in 1988 were collected. The retrieved articles were then chronologically and thematically analyzed.

Findings – Hospitality CRM research has rapidly grown from the initial relationship marketing concept into social CRM. Five research foci were identified including CRM planning and implementation process, organizational support, technology and tools, customer perspectives and characteristics, and outcome and impact. Three potential pitfalls were observed in the existing literature. A comprehensive research framework incorporating the five research domains and three key players was proposed.

Practical implications – Hospitality practitioners should take an integrated perspective on the five major domains of CRM and the three key players to ensure that informed decisions can be made.

Originality/value – This study contributes to the literature through its qualitative and critical assessment of existing hospitality CRM literature, which can guide future research.

Keywords – Customer relationship management, CRM, relationship marketing, hospitality, review

Article classification – Literature review

1. Introduction

In a highly competitive environment, the effort of hospitality firms to constantly enhance product and service quality is necessary but insufficient to improve their businesses. A key success factor is the quality relationships that a firm can maintain with its customers considering that the cost of acquiring new customers is higher than that of retaining existing ones (Peppers and Rogers, 1993). Customer relationship management (CRM) is rooted in the relationship marketing (RM) philosophy introduced and defined by Berry (1983) as "attracting, maintaining, and enhancing customer relationships" (p. 25), which denotes a paradigm shift from a transactional marketing approach emphasizing operational efficiency and sales volume to a relationship-oriented approach (Kim *et al.*, 2001). Practitioners implement CRM to maintain intimate relationships with their customers, from which valuable insights into their needs, behaviors, and preferences can be drawn (Josiassen *et al.*, 2014). Such implementation ultimately aims to identify and retain the most profitable customers and improve the profitability of less profitable ones (Wang, 2012). Firms implement CRM to perform better in terms of customer satisfaction and business performance (Kim *et al.*, 2006a; Sigala, 2005; Wu and Lu, 2012).

Hospitality CRM studies have rapidly surged in recent years because of its appeal as a source of competitive advantages for practitioners (Lo *et al.*, 2010), although efforts in reviewing and assessing the state of knowledge have been lacking (Maggon and Chaudhry, 2015; Rahimi *et al.,* 2017). This paper attempts to fill this void through a systematic and comprehensive review on the existing literature on hospitality CRM. The present study mainly aims to provide an overview on the evolution of hospitality CRM research since its emergence and to identify salient research themes and trends. Specifically, this study focuses on "what has been done" and

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"how things have been done" thus far, thereby proposing "what can be done" and "how things should be done" in the future to advance the discourse. The results will guide future studies, and more importantly, inform hospitality practitioners on the effective construction and maintenance of customer relationships. This research supplements previous reviews (Maggon and Chaudhry, 2015; Rahimi *et al.,* 2017) by collecting and reviewing a larger number of articles from a broader range of academic journals and extended temporal coverage resulting in a more comprehensive picture of hospitality CRM research.

In the following sessions, the concept of CRM and existing review studies are discussed, followed by the methodology used to conduct the current study. Findings are presented based on chronological and thematic dimensions. Three potential pitfalls are identified and critically discussed. Drawing on all observations, an insightful research framework is proposed to advance hospitality CRM with a new research agenda.

2. Literature review

The concept of RM was introduced in the 1960s when airlines pioneered their frequent flyer program to reward loyal customers (Xiong *et al*., 2014). RM focuses on directing the marketing activities of firms toward establishing and maintaining relationships with customers by creating mutual benefits (Kim and Cha, 2002; Kim *et al.*, 2001). Subsequent research has transformed this concept into CRM, which encompasses a wide range of perspectives from a technological solution (Payne and Frow, 2005) to a customer-centric process (Garrido-Moreno and Padilla-Melendez, 2011) and a management philosophy (Vaeztehrani *et al.*, 2015). Despite their conceptual differences, the essence of "attracting, maintaining, and enhancing customer relationships," as Berry (1983) suggested, is still prominent in RM and CRM. Therefore, both

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terms have been interchangeably used in the literature. Both RM and CRM denote a paradigm shift from transaction- to customer-based approaches, in which the role of information technology (IT) is widely acknowledged. In this study, CRM is used to represent RM and CRM.

The expanding research on CRM has been the subject of various literature review studies. Ngai (2005) categorized CRM research into five major areas including general CRM, marketing, sales, service and support, IT, and information system (IS). The review showed that a large proportion of articles focused on the application of IT and IS in implementing CRM. Kevork and Vrechopoulos (2009) developed a framework of nine mutually exclusive CRM research areas using a keyword classification technique. After an extensive literature review, Agariya and Singh (2011) concluded that trust, commitment, satisfaction/experience, loyalty, communication, and service quality are the most frequently studied constructs related to CRM; however, their work only focused on banking, insurance, and health care sectors. Boulding *et al.* (2005) conducted an in-depth review on existing CRM knowledge and identified potential research gaps related to CRM implementation. Their study presents valuable insights, but focused only on ten articles published on a special issue of the *Journal of Marketing*, which limits the soundness of their propositions and arguments.

Other studies have focused on identifying ways for retailers to leverage the customer data obtained through customer relationships to improve firm performance (Anderson *et al.*, 2007; Verhoef *et al.*, 2010). Soltani and Navimipour (2016) reviewed CRM studies from 2009 to 2015 on five major CRM techniques, namely, knowledge management, data quality, data mining, e-CRM, and social CRM. The advantages and disadvantages of each study were identified and discussed. These studies also provided in-depth assessment inclined toward the IS aspect of CRM. The census study of RM research from 1994 to 2006 by Das (2009) revealed that most

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RM studies are related to construct definitions and RM tools, which imply that RM research has mostly focused on theory building.

Thus far, scholars have produced numerous CRM-related studies in hospitality and tourism. However, efforts to review existing knowledge have been scant. Some review studies have only concentrated on a single component of CRM that includes customer loyalty (Kandampully *et al.*, 2015) and loyalty programs (McCall and Voorhees, 2010), whereas only two studies have reviewed CRM as an individual research area in hospitality. Based on a categorization of 78 CRM articles published in hospitality and tourism journals from 2001 to 2013, Maggon and Chaudhry (2015) found that CRM research mainly focused on the predictors of successful customer relationships, the role of IT applications in maintaining relationships, and the outcomes of customer relationships. A more recent study by Rahimi *et al*. (2017) discussed the current state of CRM knowledge and contrasted the research themes between hospitality and tourism literature. These studies are limited in scope in terms of the periods and journals in which the reviewed studies were published. The current study supplements existing works by providing a comprehensive review of all hospitality CRM-related articles that have been published since the concept first appeared in 1988. By providing a holistic view on the research progress and prominent research themes, critical insights and future research directions will be offered.

3. Methodology

Hospitality CRM articles were collected from three databases including Scopus (www.scopus.com), EBSCOHost (http://search.ebscohost.com), and ScienceDirect (www.sciencedirect.com) from March to August 2017. The researchers used a combination of

keywords including "customer relationship management", "relationship marketing", "CRM" and

"hospitality," or "hotel" appearing in the "titles, keywords, or abstracts" to identify articles in the

databases. All hospitality-related articles published in various fields were included for analysis.

Three conditions determined the final inclusion of each article. First, only full-length papers in

English were retrieved. Other publications such as book chapters, research notes, and conference

papers were excluded from the analysis. Second, the authors read the title and abstract of each

article to determine its relevance to hospitality CRM. Finally, the authors reviewed each article

and screened out irrelevant papers when a consensus is reached among the researchers. For

example, papers that apply the concept of RM to business-to-business relationships were

excluded during the second and final stages of article selection to maintain strong coherence to

the research topic, that is, the relationship between hospitality firms and individual customers.

The above procedures resulted in 111 papers for subsequent analysis. These papers were then

read and sorted into four categories according to the methodological orientation, namely

conceptual (18), qualitative (16), quantitative (66), and mixed methods (11). Table 1 shows the

list of academic journals in which the reviewed articles were published. Hospitality CRM

research publication has been scattered, with most listed journals contributing only one article

over the extended period. Among them, *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality*

Management (22) contributed the largest amount of CRM research, followed by *International*

Journal of Hospitality Management (18), and *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research* (13).

Insert Table 1 here

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4. State of hospitality CRM research

An inductive thematic analysis was manually performed to identify prominent patterns in the literature. The authors read and analyzed each paper and assigned codes to represent major research foci and findings. The initial codes were then studied to search for patterns. Subsequently, five research themes were generated including (1) CRM planning and implementation, (2) organizational support, (3) technology and tools, (4) customer perspectives and characteristics, and (5) outcome and impact. Personal bias may exist during the processes of article selection and categorization, but the consensus among the researchers should have minimized this possibility. Following the approach of Getz (2008), a chronological review was initially presented on how hospitality CRM research evolved from its advent to the development of different concepts and research domains, followed by a discussion on the five research themes and a thematic framework.

4.1 Evolution from RM to social CRM

4.1.1 1980s to 1990s – rise of RM

Although CRM was practiced by airline companies in the form of frequent flyer programs in the 1960s, hospitality research only appeared in late 1980s after Berry (1983) introduced RM as a long-term marketing strategy as opposed to transactional marketing. As one of the few pioneers, Haywood (1988) first started to explore the values of customer relationships and repeat customers to hospitality businesses based on exchange theory. Scholars have realized that the previously dominant marketing mix approach is inadequate in explaining all customer contacts, which led Gronroos (1990) to integrate the role of relationship into marketing activities

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and advocate an extension of marketing functions beyond the marketing department to customer-contact employees. However, no evident line of research exists among the few pioneering articles as practitioners and scholars have remained skeptical about the potential of RM during these decades. Early topics distributed around complaint handling techniques (Manickas and Shea, 1997), performance measurement of RM (Gummesson, 1998), and effect of RM on word-of-mouth (Lindberg-Repo and Gronroos, 1999). These conceptual and exploratory studies transcended hospitality marketing research attention from attracting new customers (transactional) to retaining existing ones (relational) and from increasing market share to increasing customer share of purchase.

4.1.2 2000s – from RM to CRM and e-CRM

Hospitality CRM rapidly expanded as a research topic in the 2000s. Becker (2000) and Gilbert and Tsao (2000) began their studies by investigating the impact of culture on the relationship building initiatives of firms. Geddie *et al.* (2002, 2005) applied the concept of "Guanxi" in Chinese culture into the formation of customer relationships. Three influential research themes were established in the first half of this decade including the cause-and-effect of relationship quality (e.g., Kim *et al.*, 2001), customer segmentation (e.g., Guilding *et al.*, 2001), and strategic use of websites for customer relationships (e.g., Gilbert and Powell-Perry, 2001).

The literature on CRM was in its early stage as scholars extended the concept of RM beyond a simple strategic marketing initiative into a complex management philosophy. The RM literature is considerably advanced with the conceptual development of CRM and e-CRM. The e-CRM (or e-RM) is "a strategic marketing practice of establishing, maintaining, enhancing, and commercializing networked customer relationships through promise fulfillment communicated

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or implemented over certain electronic channels such as the Internet" (Bai *et al*., 2007, p. 35). The past decade witnessed extensive e-CRM research mainly from the perspectives of practitioners. These studies have sought to integrate IT into the CRM capabilities and processes of a firm (Essawy, 2007; Gan *et al.,* 2007; Law and Kua, 2009). Customer knowledge and segmentation studies were more popular in the first half of the decade, whereas impact research attracted more attention from the mid-decade onward, including the impact of CRM efforts on customer satisfaction and performance of firms (e.g., Kim *et al*., 2006a).

4.1.3 Current decade (2010s) – from e-CRM to social CRM

In the current decade, most hospitality firms employ CRM systems and practices to a different degree. Scholarly literature on hospitality CRM research has propelled this upward trend by expanding research topics. Although the effects of CRM implementation on business performance and customer outcomes (e.g., repurchase and positive word-of-mouth) have become well established, new research themes have emerged including departmental co-alignment between CRM and revenue management functions (e.g., Wang, 2012), service recovery process (e.g., Kim *et al*., 2012), role of corporate social responsibility (CSR) on customer loyalty (e.g., Liu *et al.*, 2014), and perceived RM investment of customers (e.g., Ryu and Lee, 2017).

Technology plays an indispensable part in the entire CRM process. Although researchers noticed the emergence of social media in the last decade (Bareham, 2004), studies that provide insights into its impact on CRM have emerged only in 2013, which is a landmark year for this topic. Representative works included the article of Rosman and Stuhura (2013) who investigated how social media affects customer complaint communications, study on the response strategies of hotels to online reviews by Park and Allen (2013), and analysis on hotels' use of social media

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for customer interaction by Escobar-Rodríguez and Carvajal-Trujillo (2013). In the current

decade, CRM was further transformed into what Greenberg (2010) referred to as "social CRM"

or "CRM2.0," which is "a philosophy and a business strategy supported by a system and a

technology, designed to engage the customer in a collaborative interaction that provides mutually

beneficial value" (p. 414). Social CRM is the response of the management to the ownership of

firm-related conversations of customers. However, systematic research in this new concept has

not been observed.

4.2 Hospitality CRM research themes

4.2.1 Theme 1: CRM planning and implementation

Although a substantial body of research has investigated CRM system and process

implementation generally, the planning and strategy development processes have not been well

explored. Existing research has endeavored to explore customer segmentations based on various

customer information such as demographic features, satisfaction, and behaviors (Min *et al.*,

2002), profitability and value (Guilding *et al.*, 2001), involvement level (Hansen *et al.*, 2010),

and loyalty level (Osman *et al.*, 2009; Tideswell and Fredline, 2004), which mostly adopted

cluster analysis and data mining techniques. A recent attempt by Solnet *et al.* (2016) applied the

association rule mining technique to segment tourists based on their purchase patterns among

different hospitality services. Depending on the recency, frequency, and monetary features of

customer consumption, Dursun and Caber (2016) identified eight mutually exclusive clusters of

customers. Customer segmentation aims to correspond strategies to achieve marketing cost

effectiveness (Guilding *et al.*, 2001). However, most studies have focused on how customers can

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be segmented, and the effectiveness of customizing strategies for each identified customer segment have not been explored. By contrast, the role of competitors in the planning and implementation process has been overlooked. Racherla and Hu (2008) showed that the perceived pressure of hospitality firms from competitors may increase the usage level of CRM systems. However, the interaction between firms and competitors remained less understood.

An effective service recovery process from failure may reinforce loyalty if fair treatment to customers is perceived in the process (Kim *et al*., 2012; Wen and Chi, 2013). Justice theory is frequently used to theoretically support this argument (Kim *et al*., 2012; Ok *et al*., 2005; Wen and Chi, 2013). Other theories, such as emotion theory, can be applied to further explore the other influencing factors during the service recovery process.

4.2.1 Theme 2: Organizational support

The organizational support domain has been less represented in the hospitality CRM literature. Studies have mostly focused on high-level factors such as organizational culture (e.g., Rahimi, 2017; Rahimi and Gunlu, 2016), ownership, and managerial structure (Essawy, 2007; Piccoli *et al.*, 2003), whereas operational-level factors such as employee behaviors and managerial perceptions and attitudes have received less attention (Hyun and Kim, 2014; Kim *et al*., 2006a). The CRM and revenue managers in the same organization hold divergent priorities and interests (Wang, 2012). The two sides should be co-aligned to ensure CRM success, but limited research has explored how this can be achieved. Furthermore, regular and consistent communication with staff on the goals of CRM strategies will move the organizational culture toward being more customer-centric (Lo *et al.,* 2010; Rahimi and Gunlu, 2016), but studies

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investigating different leadership styles (e.g., transformational leadership) have been lacking. In addition, customer orientation as a general organizational culture is important (Kim and Cha, 2002; Kim *et al.,* 2006b), and future studies can investigate whether customer orientation behaviors will trickle down from management to employee through multi-level analysis.

4.2.3 Theme 3: Technology and tools

Technology is connected to each stage in the CRM planning and implementation processes. As opposed to the findings of Ngai (2005), this domain has received less research attention in hospitality. Existing efforts have focused on the effect of different technical tools such as e-mail, websites, and social media in managing customer relationships (e.g., Law and Kua, 2009; Park and Allen, 2013). The features of a hotel website (a.k.a., e-CRM features) signals hotel initiatives in maintaining long-term relationships with customers (Tian and Wang, 2017). Service providers initially only used websites to maintain a basic level of relationship with customers as reflected from the basic features available on their websites (Essawy, 2007). As customers gain additional experiences on the use of technology, basic e-CRM features on websites became less effective, and extra effort must be devoted to add idiosyncratic features such as live chat and fan page to maintain customer interests and relationships (Bilgihan and Bujisic, 2015; Escobar-Rodríguez and Carvajal-Trujillo, 2013; Tian and Wang, 2017). With the growing number of customer-facing channels, innovative means of synthesizing customer knowledge and presenting complete customer profile should be developed. Hospitality firms use social media to interact more frequently with their customers, which increases their commitment to firms (Li and Chang, 2016; Su *et al*., 2015a; Su *et al.,* 2015b). Although studies have been carried out on the usefulness of website in maintaining customer relationships, the role of social

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media has not been well researched. Thus, social CRM in hospitality will attract attention in the near future. The role of other concurrent technologies such as mobile technology and artificial intelligence in fostering customer relationship may also generate knowledge.

4.2.4 Theme 4: Customer perspectives and characteristics

The characteristics of customers influence their willingness to stay in a relationship with firms. For example, customers with increased consumption experiences with the firm tend to develop social bonds and thus, remain in the relationship (Bowden, 2009; Bowden and Dagger, 2011). Other customer characteristics such as age (Namkung and Jung, 2009) and culture (Swanson *et al.*, 2014) may also affect customer loyalty behaviors. These findings further support the notion that customers should not be treated the same in CRM. Customer perceptions toward different CRM dimensions have also been explored. For example, customers develop their perception on the RM investment of hospitality firms based on the service quality and benefits offered by the firm (Ryu and Lee, 2017), which will influence their subsequent behaviors (Lee *et al.*, 2014). Grounded on identity theory, Liu *et al.* (2014) and Swimberghe and Wooldridge (2014) found that the corporate social responsibilities of firms perceived by customers will influence their relationship with the firm. More studies have explored the perceptions of customers toward how the relationships with hospitality firms should be managed, of which the results can be compared with the perceptions of managers to generate useful insights and implications. Moreover, understanding what types of value customers seek to maintain a mutual relationship with hospitality firms is also interesting.

4.2.5 Theme 5: Outcome and impact

The outcome and impact domain has received attention from scholars, with studies that have mainly focused on identifying the effect of CRM initiatives on two interrelated outcomes, including customer responses and firm performances. Research on customer satisfaction in response to the relationship building efforts of a firm has not reached a common understanding. Some studies have supported the positive effect of customer satisfaction (Bahri-Ammari *et al.*, 2016; Bowden and Dagger, 2011), whereas some have challenged its limited effect on customer relationships (Bowden, 2009; Lee *et al.*, 2014). Furthermore, some studies have advocated "customer delight" as a superior measure of customer loyalty over satisfaction because satisfied customers are not necessarily loyal but delighted customers are (Loureiro and Kastenholz, 2011; Torres and Kline, 2006). Some studies have grouped together customer satisfaction, trust, and commitment to form a higher order latent construct called "relationship quality," of which its effect on customer relational behaviors is consistently demonstrated (e.g., Castellanos-Verdugo *et al.*, 2009; Kim *et al.*, 2001; Lo *et al.,* 2017; Sui and Baloglu, 2003). Recently, researchers have turned their attention from relationship quality to other psychological factors such as gratitude and perceived psychological ownership (Asatryan and Oh, 2008; Bowden and Dagger, 2011). A more systematic study on the antecedents and consequences of the affective states of customers is necessary to increase insights into what truly constitutes customer relationship. Mechanisms other than commitment-trust theory explaining customer reciprocal behaviors should be explored. For example, based on self-justification theory (or escalation of commitment), the time and involvement that customers invested in a firm represent sunk cost, which may contribute to understanding their loyal behaviors (Staw, 1976). Moreover, theoretical constructs such as

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customer delight remain conceptual without much operationalization and empirical testing (Kao *et al.,* 2016), and thus, its role in customer relationship is not well understood.

By contrast, resource-based view theory proposed by Wernerfelt (1984) has been frequently employed to theoretically support the relationship between CRM dimensions and business performances. Research has shown that CRM dimensions including customer orientation, knowledge management, and technology represent important firm resources which can be transformed into distinctive capabilities, thereby enhancing firm performances (Garrido-Moreno and Padilla-Melendez, 2011; Garrido-Moreno *et al.*, 2014). To measure CRM performance, Racherla and Hu (2008) suggested using the perceived improvements of service providers in process efficiency and usage intensity as measures of successful CRM implementation. Several studies have proposed measuring the return on customer relationships using the balanced scorecard approach to assess the financial aspect and the dimensions of customer, internal process, and learning and growth (Gummesson, 1998; Wu and Lu, 2012). Recently, Josiassen *et al.* (2014) introduced "technical efficiency" as a quantifier of CRM return. Such quantifier is an objective method of measuring the improved ability of a firm to maximize outputs (revenue) given a certain level of inputs (number of staff and production and operational costs). Business performance should encompass financial, operational, and organizational performances, and thus, an integrated measure representing CRM performance has yet to emerge.

The concepts of e-CRM and social CRM have attracted increasing research attention. Existing literature has rarely assessed the individual performances of e-CRM and social CRM and their role in contributing to general firm performance. Specifically, whether the same or different measurement tools should be used for CRM, e-CRM, and social CRM remained unanswered.

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5. Potential pitfalls in hospitality CRM research

5.1 Superiority of CRM over transactional approach

The underlying pre-conceptions of most, if not all, existing hospitality CRM research is that CRM is a more superior approach than traditional marketing and that customers also wish to maintain relationships with firms because of the benefits offered. Among the few scholars who have questioned the appropriateness of such assumptions, Osman *et al*. (2009) challenged this widely held belief and argued that transactional marketing approaches may not be less favorable than CRM in achieving the purpose of customer loyalty because "the emotional tie which customers have with a hotel brand does not necessarily depend on a relational approach to marketing and service delivery" (p. 248). Furthermore, Geddie *et al*. (2002) indicated that customers often prefer one-way communication with firms as they have no desire to devote extra effort in maintaining relationships. Customers exhibiting loyalty behaviors may not necessarily perceive a particular relationship with firms, but may just be driven by alternative factors such as service quality and prices (Osman *et al*., 2009). Therefore, the limited research attention paid on investigating the relative and combined effects of transactional marketing and CRM practices simultaneously suggests that CRM strategy may just be another repackaging of the traditional marketing mix. The complementary or substituting roles between the two approaches should be explored and debated more frequently.

5.2 Superfluous attention on positive aspects

The right recipe to achieve CRM success in hospitality is well documented by the obsolete amount of studies demonstrating the satisfaction–loyalty and effort–performance links.

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Hospitality firms will "succeed" by following the extensive list of critical success factors available in the literature. However, the benefits of implementing CRM remain an illusion to some industry practitioners as reflected by a high failure rate (Rahimi and Gunlu, 2016), which necessitates a shift from the superfluous devotion on understanding the positive aspects of CRM (e.g., favorable reciprocal behaviors) to the negative counterparts (e.g., customer churn and disloyalty). This shift is based on the argument that customer loyalty may not be asymmetrical to customer defection (Colgate *et al.*, 1996), given that the former represents both attitudinal and behavioral perspectives (Xie and Heung, 2012), whereas the latter indicates switching intentions and behaviors (Chuang and Tai, 2016). Thus, a low level of loyalty is not equivalent to disloyalty. As such, their corresponding antecedents and consequences may also be different. Chuang and Tai (2016) explored the relationship between the relationship benefit and the switching intentions of customers. They showed that the loss of functional benefits may encourage customers to switch service providers unless psychological benefits are perceived. However, the presence of such benefits may not automatically generate loyalty. The entire line of research from conceptualization to operationalization, and its role in CRM leaves minimal trace in hospitality literature (Han *et al.*, 2011; Hyun and Perdue, 2017), thereby providing limited evidence on answering such questions as "Why do people switch?" and "What are the consequences of customer switching behaviors?" This study suggests a shift to the negative pole of hospitality CRM, such that customer dissatisfaction, defection, and negative word-of-mouth behaviors should be explored more frequently. In a similar vein, as opposed to the generally preferred topics related to customer acquisition and retention, customer termination should also be studied more frequently, as it represents an untapped mine which should generate a series of interesting research.

5.3 Methodological hysteresis

The findings from this study showed that approximately 60% of existing CRM studies in hospitality may be classified as quantitative. The main themes being studied include (e-) CRM effort, knowledge management, channel management, relationship quality, favorable reciprocal behaviors, and performance. The predominant focus on the "cause-and-effect" of CRM-related constructs drives the extensive use of questionnaire surveys and structural equation modeling in conducting these studies, which is consistent with previous literature (Maggon and Chaudhry, 2015). However, the ubiquitous replications of similar studies rather than innovative ideas limit the depth of understanding on CRM. As Boulding *et al.* (2005) stated, "Though constructs relevant to CRM may be conceptually distinct, their effects may be empirically indistinguishable" (p. 162). Although the constituents may have differed in the tested constructs, the cause-and-effect relationships among CRM activities, relationship quality, and customer behavioral intention have been repeatedly recreated and retested using similar approaches (Castellanos-Verdugo *et al.*, 2009; Kim and Cha, 2002; Kim *et al.*, 2001; Kim *et al.*, 2006b). Most quantitative studies have collected data on endogenous and exogenous variables from a single source, which represents the potential problem of common method bias. By contrast, qualitative and mixed-method approaches have only been adopted occasionally. Qualitative studies have been largely dominated by interviews. Most mixed-method research focused on using interviews or focus groups to validate survey instruments (e.g., Chuang and Tai, 2016; Xie and Heung, 2012), which jeopardized the purpose of methodological triangulations.

Based on the above observations, hospitality CRM research has fallen short of its audience's expectation in terms of its width of methodological applications. Therefore, more

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sophisticated and innovative methods should be adopted to escalate research soundness and robustness. For example, Rahimi and Kozak (2017) integrated interviews with managers together with content analysis of customer e-mail communications to study the overlaps and gaps between goals of CRM initiatives and expectation of customers. Tian and Wang (2017) obtained data from three different sources including content analysis of hotel websites, laboratory experiments, and social media to examine the signaling effects of e-CRM. These studies have alleviated the potential common-method bias observed in previous studies and have contributed more in-depth and generalizable insights into the literature. Furthermore, qualitative methods are suggested to be applied after quantitative analysis, which may explain unexpected patterns that emerged from the data or clarify mechanisms that are still not well understood (Shah and Corley, 2006). This foreseen result may refine existing theories and offer a comprehensive understanding of hospitality CRM.

5.4 Hospitality CRM framework

Based on the extensive literature review, five identified themes are evident and the research gaps of hospitality CRM research are connected with the key stakeholders of customer relationship including (1) hospitality firms, (2) customers, and (3) competitors. Figure 1 presents a thematic framework to systematically understand and create future knowledge on hospitality CRM. Customer relationship is the center of the framework and is linked to CRM planning and implementation (Theme 1). Hospitality firms have control over organizational support (Theme 2) and technology and tools (Theme 3), which will directly or indirectly influence customer relationship. Customers play a dynamic role in influencing and being influenced by customer

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relationship (Themes 4 and 5). As mentioned, competitors, who will potentially influence relationship between firms and customers, are significantly ignored in the discourse of hospitality CRM. The complex interaction among these three parties results in enhanced or diminished firm performance, which is associated with outcome and impact (Theme 5). A list of key research questions addressing the research gaps and pitfalls for each research theme is provided in Table 2.

Insert Figure 1 and Table 2 here

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6. Conclusion and limitations

6.1 Conclusions

CRM has become a prominent topic among hospitality researchers and practitioners, given that maintaining lucrative customer relationships enhances business performance (Kim *et al.*, 2006a; Wu and Lu, 2012). Chronological analysis revealed that the simple concept of RM as a marketing approach introduced by Berry (1983) has evolved into a multi-dimensional notion in hospitality. The thematic analysis identified five salient research themes that have received uneven attention in the literature; potential pitfalls and research gaps are identified and a framework is proposed. Previous research has assumed that CRM is superior over traditional marketing approaches, and empirical evidence has been lacking. Moreover, research attention on the negative aspects of CRM such as customer termination is missing in the scholarly conversation. Methodological diversification and innovation are necessary to investigate more

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complex issues related to CRM. The literature is still growing, and more effort is required to shift the focus from reinventing the wheel to initiating breakthroughs. This study starts off by offering a general overview of the existing literature and a roadmap for future studies.

6.2 Theoretical implications

CRM has rapidly grown into a rich body of knowledge featuring multiple facets, albeit scholarly efforts reviewing this important research topic have been sparse (Maggon and Chaudhry, 2015; Rahimi et al., 2017). Existing literature has suggested that successful CRM implementation involves integrating the components of people, process, and technology (Rahimi, 2017), or the alignment of IT, internal and external relationship, and knowledge management (Sigala, 2005). This paper supplements previous review studies by providing a holistic view on the essence of CRM and developing the hospitality CRM research framework that integrates the three key players with the five emerging themes in the literature. This framework serves as an important roadmap for hospitality researchers to appreciate current trends and stimulate future research efforts toward non-traditional directions. The framework also demonstrates the multi-disciplinary nature of hospitality CRM research including IS, marketing and consumer behavior, strategy and planning, and organizational behavior. Thus, research efforts should enhance the theoretical underpinning of hospitality CRM by incorporating theories from other disciplines, through which a complete monograph of hospitality CRM research can be depicted.

6.3 Practical implications

Ensuring the success of CRM requires extensive efforts. This study serves as a reference for hospitality practitioners to comprehensively understand the multi-faceted feature of CRM.

The study results suggest that following the tide with implementing CRM, e-CRM, or social CRM strategies may not succeed. An integrated approach should be applied to understand the dynamic inter-relationships among the three key players and the five key domains as indicated in the proposed framework. Practitioners can review each form of CRM domains, evaluate the effectiveness of their existing strategies, and identify weaknesses in the entire process so that up-to-date practices can be deployed to maintain lucrative relationships with customers and achieve business outcomes. For example, hospitality researchers should develop different CRM strategies targeting different clusters. Furthermore, environmental factors such as competitors should be taken into consideration in the process of CRM planning and implementation. Strategies and relational tools of CRM should also be updated to align with the behavioral changes of customers such as the increased use of social media and mobile applications to achieve effective CRM. Based on the pitfalls identified in this study, practitioners should not overlook the segment of defected customers. Understanding why customers leave the relationship may help prevent future customer churn, which may affect business performance.

CRM is an attempt for hospitality firms to enhance the satisfaction, relationship quality and loyalty of customers (Kim *et al.*, 2006a). The roles of social media and mobile technologies have empowered customers, which transforms the communication between hospitality firms and customers. Currently, CRM paradigms encompass new aspects such as response strategies to online reviews and customer engagement through social media. Thus, the relational approach, which evolved from previous transactional approach, will converge into interactional approach. Hospitality firms should proceed from simply fostering passive loyal customers to nurturing emotionally engaged brand ambassadors through innovative communication mechanisms in social media.

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6.4 Limitations and future research

The current study represents one of the first attempts to review this important research avenue. Despite the wide coverage of academic journals within and beyond hospitality and tourism, the present study may have missed some relevant studies which do not contain the keywords used for data collection. However, the method outlined in this study can be easily replicated to advance the proposed framework with prominent themes. Given the qualitative nature of the adopted method, generalizability and interpretation of the results should be performed with caution. Thus, future endeavors can conduct quantitative studies such as meta-analysis and bibliometric analysis to allow generalizable insights as the hospitality CRM literature progresses.

After all, customer behaviors have inevitably influenced firms and researchers. The rise of the Internet (or Web 1.0) has supported the implementation of CRM 1.0 which led to the advent of e-CRM, and the popularity of social media has led to the emergence of CRM 2.0 (social CRM). With Web 3.0 underway, the authors are curious to know "What's next?"

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Table 1. Hospitality CRM articles from 1988 to August 2017

Journal name	Total
International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	22
International Journal of Hospitality Management	18
Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research	13
Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management (formerly "Journal of Hospitality and Leisure Marketing")	7
Cornell Hospitality Quarterly (formerly "Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly")	6
Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing	4
Tourism and Hospitality Research	3
Total Quality Management and Business Excellence (formerly "Total Quality Management")	2
International Journal of Culture, Tourism, and Hospitality Research	2
Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology	2
Journal of Marketing Management	2
Journal of Relationship Marketing (formerly "Journal of Customer Service in Marketing and Management")	2
Journal of Services Marketing	2
Australasian Marketing Journal (formerly "Asia-Australia Marketing Journal")	1
Asian Social Science	1
Electronic Commerce Research and Applications	1
EuroMed Journal of Business	1
Information and Management	1
International Journal of Electronic Customer Relationship Management	1
International Journal of Economics and Management	1
International Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Administration	1
International Journal of Information Technology and Decision Making	1
International Review of Management and Marketing	1
Journal of Business Research	1
Journal of Management Policy and Practice	1
Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality and Tourism	1
Journal of Revenue and Pricing Management	1
Journal of Tourism Challenges and Trends	1
Journal of Tourism and Services	1
Journal of Travel Research	1
Journal of Travel and Tourism Research	1
Journal of Vacation Marketing	1
Managerial Auditing Journal	1
Journal of Service Theory and Practice (formerly "Managing Service Quality: An International Journal")	1
Studies in Physical Culture and Tourism	1
Technovation	1
Tourism Management Perspectives	1
Tourism	1

1

| *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes* | 1 |
| *Total* | *111* |

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Table 2. Research questions

Research theme	Key research questions:
Theme 1: CRM planning and implementation	- How do transactional and CRM strategies complement/substitute each other? - How should CRM strategies be customized toward the needs of different market segments? - How should customer relationship be terminated? What is its subsequent effect on firm performance? - What roles does each stakeholder play in the process of CRM strategic planning? - How can competitor-focused strategy be integrated into CRM? - What other factors affect the service recovery process and outcomes? - How should e-CRM and social CRM be positioned in the CRM strategies of a hospitality firm? Do they complement or substitute each other?
Theme 2: Organizational support	- How can the diverse objectives of different departments be aligned to ensure CRM success? - How does a leadership style affect CRM planning and implementation process? - What forms of training should be provided to employees to achieve the goal of CRM? - Are there any trickle-down effects from management to employee in terms of customer orientation behaviors? - How should employees engage in the design and planning of the CRM process?
Theme 3: Technology and tools	- What constitutes social CRM in the context of hospitality? - How does social CRM complement the existing CRM and e-CRM systems of firms? - What role do social media play in the management process of customer relationships in hospitality firms? - What are the most effective relational tools? - How will other innovative technologies affect the CRM process?
Theme 4: Customer perspectives and characteristics	- What constitutes customer intentions or behaviors to build long-term relationship? - How do customers describe their relationships with hospitality firms? How do these relationship descriptions differ from the perceptions of managers? - What are the different classifications or levels of relationships perceived by customers? - What is the value of relationship to customers? - How do customer-to-customer online and offline interactions affect firm-customer relationship? - How do the perceptions of customers on the CRM effort of firms change across time? - How do new customers differ from repeat customers in their perceived

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	value of relationship? - What are the perceptions of customers toward the technological aspect of CRM?
Theme 5: Outcome and impact	- How is "customer delight" operationalized as a CRM performance measurement construct? - What causes customer switching intentions? What are their consequences? - What constitutes CRM failure? - How do firms react to CRM failure? What measures should they take to address such failure? - How should (e-) or (social) CRM performance be measured?

PERFORMANCE

Theme 5: Outcome & impact

HOSPITALITY FIRMS

Theme 2: Organizational support
Theme 3: Technology & tools

CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP

Theme 1: CRM planning & implementation

CUSTOMERS

Theme 4: Customer perspectives & characteristics
Theme 5: Outcome & impact

COMPETITORS

Assess performance

Response to firms' efforts

Influence on performance

Influence on relationship

Influence on customers

Influence on relationship

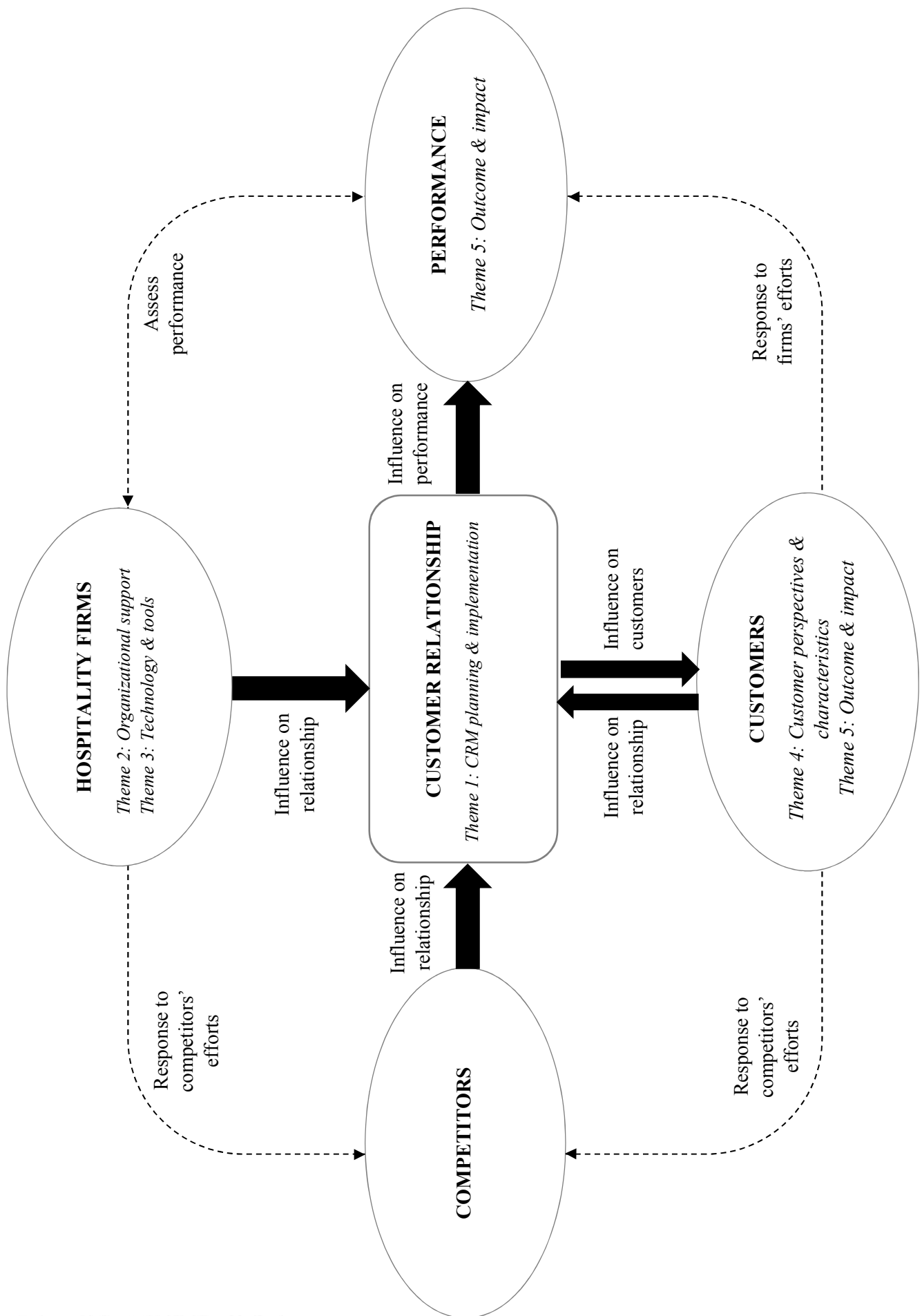Influence on relationship

Response to competitors' efforts

Response to competitors' efforts

Figure 1. Hospitality CRM framework