



The Role Of Relationship Management And Word Of Mouth In Building Trust And Revisit Intention At Hotels In Batam

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the effect of RM and WOM on revisit intention with trust as a mediating variable among customers of 4-star hotels in Batam City. A quantitative approach was used with the Structural Equation Modeling Partial Least Square (SEM-PLS) method. Data were obtained through a survey of 120 respondents who had stayed at 4-star hotels, using purposive sampling techniques. The results show that RM and WOM have a positive and significant effect on trust. However, trust does not have a significant effect on revisit intention. RM also does not have a direct effect on revisit intention. Meanwhile, WOM has a positive and significant effect on revisit intention. These findings indicate that promotion through customer-to-customer communication is more effective in encouraging revisit intention than relationship-based marketing alone. This study provides practical implications for hotel managers to strengthen WOM strategies, as well as opening up opportunities for further research by considering additional variables such as customer satisfaction and stay experience.

INTRODUCTION

Batam is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Indonesia. Batam is strategically located due to its proximity to Malaysia and Singapore (Fahlevi & Sinambela, 2024). Batam is always crowded with both domestic and foreign tourists (Sinambela et al., 2024). This condition has encouraged growth in the tourism business. One of the growing tourism businesses in Batam is the hospitality industry. There are many star-rated and non-star-rated hotels in the city of Batam BPS Batam, 2024)..

The high level of competition in the hospitality industry in Batam requires every hotel to maintain customer loyalty in order to create sustainability in their business (Purwianti, 2023). Therefore, it is necessary for hotel companies to increase consumer trust in their hotels. One of the challenges that has emerged in the hospitality industry in Batam is how to turn first-time

hotel guests into loyal customers. This is especially true now that consumers have many alternatives to choose from and easy access to information.

The urgency of this research is driven by changes in consumer behavior in the hospitality industry, where consumers are now heavily influenced by digital reviews and personal experiences (Isa et al., 2019). The long-term relationship between companies and consumers is considered the key to business sustainability. Failure of management to build customer trust will result in the loss of consumers who will move to competitors. Therefore, building trust is a strategy that must be implemented immediately.

However, empirical studies to answer this phenomenon still have gaps. Previous researchers have conducted studies on the influence of service quality and satisfaction (Wijaya & Anggraini, 2023) as well as perceived risk (Wijaya & Haryanto, 2022) on revisit intention. However, studies discussing social relations and interactions are still limited to the context of the hospitality business in Batam. Meanwhile, studies like this have been conducted elsewhere, such as in Ghana (Amoako et al., 2019) and Thailand (Kajornatthapol et al., 2024), which recommend Relationship Management (RM) and Word-of-Mouth (WOM) marketing as key strategies in building trust in the hospitality industry.

Based on these phenomena, urgency, and gaps, this study was designed to examine the relationship between Relationship Management and Word-of-Mouth Marketing on Trust, as well as the influence of Trust on Revisit Intention at star-rated hotels in Batam. This study is expected to have multiple contributions. Theoretically, the research will test and enrich the relationship model in service marketing with the new context of Indonesian urban tourist destinations. Practically, the results of the research will provide concrete strategic recommendations for hotel management, particularly in designing personalized RM programs and managing effective WOM marketing, in order to build trust and encourage long-term customer loyalty in a competitive market.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Relationship Marketing (RM)

According to Amoako et al., (2019) RM is a marketing strategy that focuses on long-term relationships between sellers and buyers. This strategy ultimately creates a mutually beneficial exchange, helping companies acquire, retain, and satisfy their customers. The relationship management strategy includes trust, satisfaction, and commitment, which are key indicators of a relationship (Santoso et al., 2024).

In addition, according to Salem (2021), RM plays a crucial role in business success. RM can create long-term relationships with consumers. Previous researchers have examined the relationship between RM and consumer trust in companies. According to Ghani et al., (2016), trust is one of the components of RM and the key to successful relationships between business owners and their customers, while the results of a study by Isa et al. (2019) show that RM and WOM are significant factors that increase the trust of hospital visitors in Penang, Malaysia. RM has a significant impact on the intention to repurchase luxury hotel services in Seoul, South Korea (Kim et al., 2001). Based on the above explanation, the following hypotheses can be formulated:

H1. Relationship marketing has a significant positive impact on trust in 4-star hotels in Batam City.

H4. Relationship marketing has a significant positive impact on the intention to revisit 4-star hotels in Batam City.

Word of Mouth

WOM is an important factor that contributes to fund efficiency in the hospitality sector (Leal & Ferreira, 2020). Responses from one person to another regarding the quality and services

offered by a hotel are more effective in increasing hotel revenue (Karim & Rabiul, 2024). In the context of marketing, WOM is very influential because consumers tend to trust recommendations from family, friends, or influencers more than conventional advertisements (Putri & Hayu, 2024). WOM can be considered the most effective form of promotion because customers are very open to the opinions of others. This definition is expanded with the existence of electronic WOM (e-WOM), which is the process of sharing consumer opinions and experiences through digital platforms such as social media, forums, or online reviews (Şehirli, 2021). According to (GILDIN, 2003), the reasons behind the importance of WOM communication in promotion are noise, skepticism, and connectivity. Many previous researchers have conducted studies on WOM and trust. The results of Jalilvand et al., (2017) study state that WOM supports customer trust among 300 hotel guests. Meanwhile, Sijoria et al. (2019) found that e-WOM has a significant positive relationship with trust in the Indian hospitality sector. On the other hand, WOM also has a significant positive impact on revisit intention among domestic visitors in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam (Phi et al., 2021). Finally, WOM has been proven to have a significant positive influence on the intention to visit hotels and restaurants in Bali (Gede et al., 2020). Based on the above explanation, the following hypotheses can be formulated:

H2. Word of mouth has a significant positive effect on trust in 4-star hotels in Batam City.

H5. Word of mouth recommendations have a significant positive impact on the intention to return to stay at 4-star hotels in Batam City.

Trust

In hospitality literature, consumer trust is defined as the belief of visitors that the hotel has sufficient reliability and integrity to provide the same level and quality of service in every exchange and encounter (Assaker et al., 2020; Liat et al., 2014). This is in line with the thoughts, feelings, emotions, and behavior of sellers in selling their products to customers who appear to be reliable through their actions and attract customer trust (Pambudi et al., 2021). A growing business is one based on trust and credibility. Trust is the foundation of business. Building customer trust is one of the important factors in creating customer desire to return (ALDIANSYAH, 2023). Trust reflects that both parties are vulnerable to uncertainty and expect the other party to respect their obligations, whether they are customers or sellers (Y.Chen et al., 2022). According to Ahn & Kwon (2020), customer perception through customer trust has an influence on customer revisit intention in hotel companies in the United States of America. However, Isa et al., (2019) found that trust does not influence revisit intention in the private hospital and hotel sectors in Penang, Malaysia, either partially or simultaneously (variable RM and WOM). Thus, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H3. Trust has a significant positive effect on revisit intention at 4-star hotels in Batam City.

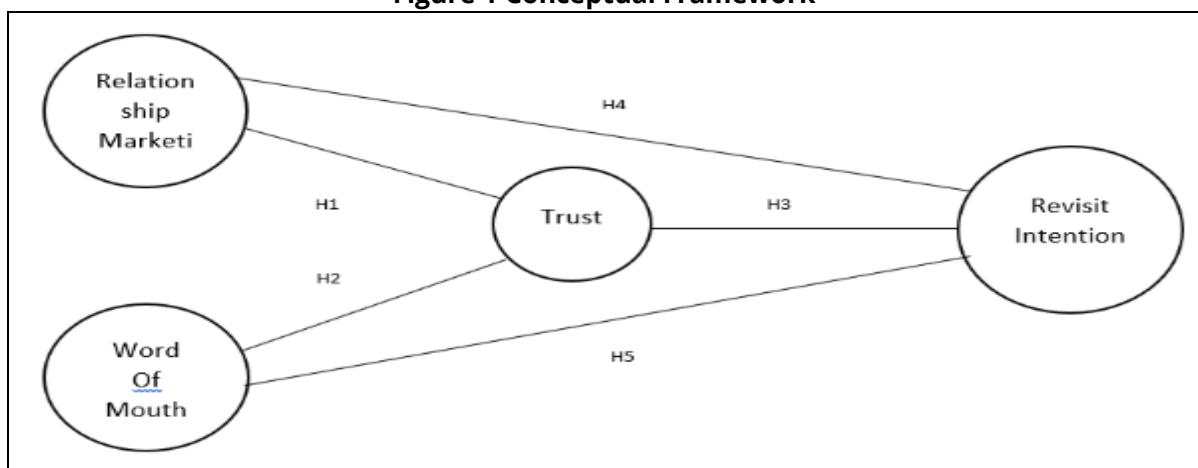
Revisit Intention

The term Revisit Intention refers to the desire of customers to return to a place or engage in repeated activities in the context of tourism (C. H. Chin et al., 2022). A literature review on revisit intention in the hospitality sector shows that factors such as RM, WOM, and trust are key determinants in shaping tourist loyalty (Isa et al., 2019; Yellys et al., 2024). In general, recent studies highlight a paradigm shift from mere functional satisfaction to the creation of revisit intention, which is not only a logical consequence of satisfaction but also a manifestation of affective experiences that are built continuously and consistently (Zhang et al., 2018). Research conducted by (Gregoriades et al., 2023) shows that two-star (2) and three-star (3) hotels have a much higher probability of repeat visits compared to four-star (4) and five-star (5) hotels because customers of 2/3-star hotels desire core functions more than 4/5-star customers desire experiences. Revisit intention has often been studied at the national, city, hotel, or tourist attraction level (Liu & Beldona, 2021). However, there is no effective and consistent way to measure revisit intention (Gregoriades et al., 2023).

METHODS

This study uses a quantitative approach with the Structural Equation Modeling Partial Least Square (SEM-PLS) analysis method to test the relationship between variables (Monica et al., 2025; Sentoso et al., 2024). SEM-PLS is used to estimate structural equation models and does not depend on data distribution assumptions (Hair et al., (2019). The sampling technique was carried out using the formula proposed by (Hair, 2021), namely the item multiplied by 10. With a total of 12 questions, the minimum sample size for this study was 120. Respondents were selected using purposive sampling with the main criterion being Batam residents who had experience staying at a 4-star hotel in Batam City. Data collection was conducted using a questionnaire via Google Form and adapted research variable questions from Yusuf et al. (2022) for RM, Rasheed & Rashid (2024) for WOM, Chetoui et al. (2021) for trust, and Torabi et al. (2022) for revisit intention. All variables were compiled into the following research model:

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework



RESULTS

Outer Model

Table 1 Validity and Reliability test

Variable	Loading Factors				AVE	CR	CA	R ²	R ² Adj
	RM	WOM	T	RI					
RM1	0.85				0.66	0.84	0.73		
RM2	0.77								
RM3	0.81								
WOM1		0.77			0.65	0.85	0.75		
WOM2		0.87							
WOM3		0.76							
T1			0.78		0.65	0.84	0.73	0.35	0.34
T2			0.81						
T3			0.82						
RI1				0.78	0.64	0.84	0.73	0.22	0.21
RI2				0.79					
RI3				0.83					

Source: Data Processed, 2025

Discriminant validity was assessed using two criteria, namely loading factor and average variance extracted. Data can be considered convergent valid if the loading factor value is above 0.6 (Chin & Marcoulides, 1998) and the AVE value is above 0.5 (Ghozali, 2016; Hair et al., 2015). As seen in Table 1, both criteria have been met, so it can be concluded that the data is convergent valid. In terms of reliability, the criteria used are Cronbach's alpha >0.6 (Hair et al., 2015), $\rho_A >0.7$ (Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015), and composite reliability >0.6 (J. Hair et al., 2015). As seen in Table 3, all three criteria have been met, so the data is reliable.

In addition, as seen in Table 1, the r-square value of revisit intention is 0.216, which means that 21% of the RM and WOM variables can explain revisit intention. There are other variables that have the potential to explain revisit intention besides relationship marketing and word of mouth, such as customer experience and customer satisfaction. Furthermore, the r-square value of trust is 0.346, which means that 34% of the RM and WOM variables can explain trust. There are other variables that have the potential to explain trust besides relationship marketing and word of mouth, such as website quality and experiential marketing (Amin et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2022).

Table 2 Hypotheses Test

Hypotheses	Coefficient	T Values	Result
Relationship Marketing > Trust	0.368	3.675***	Positive Significant
Word of Mouth > Trust	0.323	2.739**	Positive Significant
Trust > Revisit Intention	0.157	1.347	Positive Significant
Relationship Marketing > Revisit Intention	0.138	1.092	Positive Significant
Word of Mouth > Revisit Intention	0.465	3.762***	Positive Significant

Source: Data Processed, 2025

Table 5 shows that the hypothesis test results indicate that relationship marketing has a positive effect on trust, with significant coefficient and t-statistic values. Thus, hypothesis 1 is accepted. This finding is in line with the research by Isa et al. (2019), which reveals that relationship marketing has a positive and significant relationship with hotel customer trust. These results indicate that hotels that are able to maintain good relationships with visitors, both through direct and indirect communication, will increase the level of visitor trust in hotels in Batam City.

The hypothesis test results show that WOM has a positive effect on trust, with significant coefficient and t-statistic values, so hypothesis 2 is accepted. This finding is consistent with the research by (Sijoria et al., 2019), which states that WOM is an effective promotional strategy in building visitor trust, both for new and returning visitors. These results explain that WOM is one of the promotional strategies that can provide maximum results with relatively low operational costs in the hotel sector in Batam City.

The hypothesis test results show that trust has a positive effect on revisit intention, but with a non-significant t-statistic value, so hypothesis 3 is rejected. This finding is in line with the research by Isa et al. (2019), which states that trust is not a determining factor for customers to return to stay at a hotel (a study of hotels in Malaysia). However, a study conducted in Ho Chi Minh City by Loc & Thao, (2020) found a relationship between trust and revisit intention. The results of a study by Ahn & Kwon (2020) show that hotels in the United States with high levels of brand trust are able to encourage visitors to return. These differing results indicate that regional context and social characteristics can influence the role of trust in guests' decisions to revisit.

The results of testing the relationship marketing hypothesis on revisit intention have a positive coefficient value and a non-significant t value, meaning that hypothesis 4 is rejected. This result is inconsistent with the research (Kim et al., 2001), which states that relationship

marketing is an effective strategy for hotels to attract visitors who have stayed in Seoul, South Korea. This inconsistency leads to the conclusion that a country's economic level plays a significant role in determining the loyalty of hotel guests, although this can still be debated in further research.

The results of the word of mouth hypothesis test on revisit intention have a positive coefficient value with a significant t value, meaning that hypothesis 5 is accepted. These results are consistent with the research by Phi et al. (2021), which concluded that WOM is closely related to the psychology of visiting customers, thereby increasing their interest in returning to stay at the hotel. This result explains that when a customer or potential customer receives continuous information about a hotel, it will increase their desire to revisit the same hotel.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to analyze the effect of relationship marketing and word of mouth on revisit intention with trust as a mediating variable among customers of 4-star hotels in Batam City. Based on the results of SEM-PLS analysis, it was found that relationship marketing and word of mouth had a positive and significant effect on trust. However, trust was not proven to have a significant effect on revisit intention, nor did relationship marketing have a significant effect on revisit intention. Meanwhile, word of mouth showed a positive and significant effect on revisit intention. These findings indicate that informal communication between customers is more effective in encouraging revisit intention than relational marketing strategies or the level of trust itself. Therefore, managers of 4-star hotels in Batam City are advised to strengthen word of mouth strategies, both conventional and digital, as their main promotional tools. Additionally, although trust does not directly influence revisit intention, building trust remains important as the foundation for long-term relationships and positive customer experiences.

LIMITATION

This study has several limitations that need to be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the use of purposive sampling with 120 respondents, who were customers of four-star hotels in Batam City, limits the generalization of the research findings, so that the results cannot represent all hotel customer segments in other regions or different hotel classes. Second, the variables used in the research model only include relationship marketing, word of mouth, trust, and revisit intention, while the R-square value indicates that there are other variables that have the potential to influence, such as customer satisfaction, service quality, and customer experience, but these have not been analyzed in this study. Third, the data was collected through a perception-based online questionnaire, so the possibility of subjective bias cannot be completely avoided. Fourth, this study only uses a quantitative SEM-PLS approach without the support of qualitative data, so the depth of understanding of customer behavior is still limited. Therefore, further research is recommended to expand the sample coverage, include additional variables, use mixed methods, and conduct cross-regional and cross-hotel comparisons to obtain more comprehensive and generalizable results.

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