



Article Title

The Effects of Image Congruence on Customers' Brand Loyalty in the Upper Middle-Class Hotel Industry [Summary]

Citation

Back, K.-J. (2005). The Effects of Image Congruence on Customers' Brand Loyalty in the Upper Middle-Class Hotel Industry. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 29(4), 448–467. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1096348005276497>

Abstract

This empirical article explores the effects of image congruence on customers' postpurchasing behaviors, focusing specifically on customer satisfaction and brand loyalty in the lodging industry. Key findings indicate that social and ideal social image congruence has significant direct effects on customer satisfaction and indirect effects on attitudinal brand loyalty. The proposed model is tested following a systematic approach to mediation analysis as part of a structural equation modeling. Furthermore, the article discusses the theoretical and managerial implications of the findings as well as future research ideas.

Summary:

This study has provided empirical evidence for the development of customers' repurchasing behaviors involving social and ideal social IC, CS, and attitudinal BL in the hotel industry. It has provided strong empirical support for Sirgy et al.'s (1997) IC theory. Hotel customers' perceptive matching process between their social and ideal social concept and hotel brand image can be used to explain their postpurchase behaviors, including levels of CS and BL. Based on this study, a customer's perception of a similar image between his or her social self-concept and the hotel brand image positively influences the satisfaction level toward the hotel. Furthermore, when satisfied with the service, the customer becomes brand loyal, holding a positive attitude toward the brand. The mediating effect of CS was evident in that customers form BL when they actually experienced positive outcomes from the service delivery process.

The findings provide some practical implications for hotel operators. The results of the present study suggest that hotel marketers should develop marketing information systems that continuously monitor hotel customers' perceptions of a hotel brand image. Selective target marketing should be carefully considered when using a hotel's own brand image. Lodging services are characterized by intangibility, so the act of creating and maintaining a consistent brand image with overall images of a prime target market is crucial. Specifically, this is more applicable for the upscale market segment, where customers purchase not only the products but also the symbol of luxury, pride, and status (Chon, 1990).

In addition, advertising should be carefully developed based on the results of the research. If the target market indicates that a major personality trait is up to date, the hotel advertising manager should develop advertising featuring a modernized layout of furnishings, colors, and logos. A good example is the change in the brand logo of the Hyatt hotels. Hyatt hotels changed their logo after they found out that it implied a conservative image, whereas their major target markets' ideal image was more modern.

The implications of this study are not limited to advertising. The décor, architecture, and appearance of personnel also increase the degree of CS by appealing to a consistent image for the hotels' target market.