



Article Title

Psychological Ownership Theory: An Exploratory Application in the Restaurant Industry [Summary]

Citation

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Abstract

This exploratory study conceptualizes psychological ownership (PO)—a state in which individuals feel as though the target of ownership is theirs—and investigates how customers form PO toward a company. Considering the PO is a new concept to hospitality research, the study develops and empirically validates a conceptual model of PO and a PO measurement scale in the context of the restaurant industry. The model incorporates fundamental human relationship variables, such as sense of belonging, identification, and perceived control, as the antecedents of PO. The model also relates PO to several practically important consequences, such as relationship intentions, word-of-mouth communications, competitive resistance, and willingness to pay. The results generally support the proposed mediating role of PO between the antecedents and consequences, consistent with the initial conceptualizations. This study discusses the potential that PO may play in enhancing loyalty and relationship marketing research in the hospitality and tourism industry.

Summary:

Findings of this study offer an insight into the process of how psychological ownership (PO) is formed in customer psychology and how it affects various customer behaviors thereafter. The examination of reasons for developing such PO feelings found that greater customer involvement in cocreation of a dining experience through participation as well as feelings of belonging and identification with the restaurant (i.e., this is “my place”) seemed to affect the feelings of PO. The significant relationships between PO and the consequences thereof are consistent

with previous attitude–behavior research in psychology (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1970) on how attitudinal factors psychologically connect customers to service providers. This study, thus, adds to the amounting evidence on such relationships in the context of hospitality research.

Results of the study indicated possible significant effects of PO on various purchase-relevant behavioral intentions. Given the mediation role of PO, restaurant firms might consider emphasizing these special feelings in their advertising messages to appeal to the customer’s deep-seated motivation to buy hospitality products or services. Thus, restaurant firms are advised to invest in marketing tactics to evoke feelings of PO. For example, in Wendy’s advertising aired in the fall of 2005, the characters pitched a Wendy’s burger as “my burger.”

Furthermore, customer–company identification or value congruence appeared to be important in the formation of PO. Restaurant managers could develop a set of values represented by the restaurant (e.g., environmentally friendly) or create a vivid restaurant identity by learning about values of their customers. Enticing customers to participate in a panel or a focus group may provide more insight into the customers’ and the restaurants’ identities. This restaurant identity should then clearly be communicated to the customers and the general public.