



Personality, satisfaction, image, ambience, and loyalty: Testing their relationships in the hotel industry



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ABSTRACT

This article appraises a theoretical model that relates personality, satisfaction, loyalty, ambience, and image in a hotel setting. The results of the structural equation modeling indicated that extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism among the Big Five Personality Factors significantly affect satisfaction. Satisfaction had a significant impact on hotel image and guests' loyalty. Compared to satisfaction, hotel image had a lesser impact on loyalty as well as being a mediator for the impact of satisfaction on loyalty. The moderating role of hotel ambience in the proposed theoretical framework was also identified. The results offer hoteliers potential strategies/tactics for loyalty enhancement.

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1. Introduction

Hotel guest loyalty is of the utmost importance given the competitive nature of the lodging sector. The increasing expansion of hotels into other hospitality and related areas amplifies the continuing importance of guest loyalty and the need to ensure guests' recurring reservations at a perceived favorite hotel. Articles that have focused on loyalty link it to customer satisfaction (Oliver, 1999), image (Kandampully and Hu, 2007), perceived value (Yang and Peterson, 2004), and customer characteristics (Durukan and Bozaci, 2011), such as personality (Lin, 2010a). Despite the presence of abundant studies on loyalty, the relationship between the antecedents of service customer loyalty, particularly in hospitality and tourism, are inconclusive. This is true, too, about the relationship between customer satisfaction and image and their impacts on loyalty. Some researchers perceive image as an antecedent to satisfaction that does not have an influence on loyalty (Lai et al., 2009) while others have perceived this relationship the other way around (Kandampully and Suhartanto, 2000). The variability in perceptions and guidance leaves hoteliers without sure ways to accurately strategize their efforts.

Since personality reflects an individual's psychological characteristics, it has been cited as having a significant role in consumer behavior (e.g., Mowen, 2000). In particular, the Big Five Factors of Personality that have been widely used in marketing and consumer

behavior studies have been noted to influence consumers' affective responses (Orth et al., 2010), satisfaction (Faullant et al., 2011; Lin and Worthley, 2012; Matzler et al., 2005), post-purchase behavior (Mooradian and Olver, 1994), and loyalty (Durukan and Bozaci, 2011; Lin, 2010a). Unfortunately, none of these studies have integrated personality with satisfaction, image, and loyalty in a single study to ascertain their relationships. Using hotel as the study context, Lin and Worthley (2012) noted that personality's influence on guests' emotions and impact on satisfaction consequently influenced their post-purchase behavior. Furthermore, the available literature seems to have neglected the interaction of person and environment in evoking their behaviors under hotel consumption situations despite the interaction being a common agreement (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2005).

Research on the effect of servicescapes on consumers has burgeoned after Bitner's (1992) seminal work on the servicescape. Ambience as a part of the servicescape that is sensorial in nature includes light, sound, smell, décor, and air quality—factors that influence customer behaviors such as time and money spent at a specific lodging location/on a specific lodging brand (Morrison et al., 2011) and desire to stay (Wakefield and Baker, 1998). Despite the informative nature of these studies, they appear to look only at the environmental aspects of consumer behavior or at individual characteristics at the expense of other behavioral facets (Eroglu and Machleit, 2008).

In filling the perceived knowledge gap, this study put forward the following objectives: (1) to develop a model of loyalty involving five personality factors (i.e., openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism), satisfaction, and hotel image, (2) to examine the moderating role of the appraisal of hotel ambience in the proposed theoretical framework, (3) to

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identify the relative importance of personality factors in generating satisfaction, and (4) to investigate the mediating impact of satisfaction and hotel image.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Personality and customer satisfaction

The psychological qualities that determine individuals' feelings, thinking, and behavior that are distinct and enduring are referred to as personality (Pervin and Cervone, 2010). Personality has been operationalized differently in different contexts; the commonly used operationalization in consumer behavior appears to be the Big Five Factors (Mowen, 2000) that include openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. Briefly, openness to experience pertains to the individuals' proactiveness in seeking and appreciating novelty; conscientiousness reflects individuals' achievement propensity; extraversion factors indicate individuals' quantity and intensity of interpersonal interaction; while agreeableness, on the other hand, deals with individuals' orientation toward being empathetic with others; and neuroticism relates to individuals' proneness to psychological distress (Mowen, 2000).

Previous research differs in the incorporation of personality, particularly the Big Five Factors. For instance, looking at hotel consumption studies, Lin and Worthley (2012) employed openness to experience and extraversion only, arguing that conscientiousness, agreeableness, and neuroticism were applicable to individual social-, achievement-, and sickness-related qualities, respectively, and thus not related to the consumption context. Selective use of the BFF was utilized by Matzler et al. (2005) and Faullant et al. (2011), who used extraversion and openness in explaining the consumption experience. In examining the evocation of feelings when viewing advertising, Mooradian (1996) used only extraversion and neuroticism because these two aspects of personality were more universal than others. Other researchers (e.g., Orth et al., 2010) used all Big Five Factors in relating brand attachment to results, indicating that all of the factors had a significant influence. Based on the latter study findings, this study reasoned that the use of all Big Five Factors would serve to elucidate the impact personality on hotel guest satisfaction in a more comprehensive way.

Customer satisfaction is a common research variable due to its culminating effect on customers' future behaviors such as repurchasing and spreading positive reviews to potential new customers about a particular product or service. Several researchers have found that customer satisfaction is dependent on factors such as service environments (Han and Ryu, 2009), perceived cost/price (Jani and Han, 2011), and consumption emotions (Ladhari et al., 2008), among other factors. Few studies have focused on the impact of personal variables such as personality on customer satisfaction (Gountas and Gountas, 2007)—for this reason, there is little evidence on the relationship. Among the few studies that have related personality and satisfaction, results are not converging (Vazquez-Carrasco and Foxall, 2006). Gountas and Gountas (2007), utilizing Jungian personality types of thinking, material, feeling, and intuitive as factors influencing satisfaction, noted a significant relationship. Faullant et al. (2011) in utilizing joy and fear as aspects of extraversion and neuroticism respectively, noted the joy to have a positive effect on overall customer satisfaction while the fear to have a negative effect on overall customer satisfaction. A study by Mooradian and Olver (1997) on automobile customers noted extraversion to have a positive impact on their satisfaction via positive emotions while neuroticism to have a negative effect through negative emotions. Lin (2010b) in studying toys and video game customers noted agreeableness to have a strong significant positive

effect on customers' affective loyalty and openness to experience to have a moderate significant positive effect on affective loyalty. Since loyalty emanates from customer satisfaction (e.g. Lee et al., 2009), then by extrapolation agreeableness and openness to experience have a potential positive influence on hotel guest satisfaction. Orth et al. (2010) noted openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, and agreeableness to have a positive relationship with satisfaction while neuroticism to relate with satisfaction in a negative way. Vazquez-Carrasco and Foxall (2006) using need for social affiliation that is an aspect of agreeableness and need for variety reflecting high scores in openness to experience observed an absence of a relationship between personality variables and service satisfaction, thus making the relationship between consumer personality and their satisfaction inconclusive. Therefore, due to this lack of concrete evidence on the influence of personality (Big Five Factors) on customer satisfaction, this study aimed to test the following hypotheses within hotel settings:

H1a. Openness to experience has a positive impact on satisfaction.

H1b. Conscientiousness has a positive impact on satisfaction.

H1c. Extraversion has a positive impact on satisfaction.

H1d. Agreeableness has a positive impact on satisfaction.

H1e. Neuroticism has a negative impact on satisfaction.

2.2. Customer satisfaction, hotel image, and loyalty

The overly researched construct of customer satisfaction emanates from its pivotal influence on future sales to satisfied customers or their post-consumption behavioral intentions to repeat consumption of a product/service and/or to spread good reviews about a consumed product/service. Customer satisfaction in general pertains to the evaluation of a product or its features (Hunt, 1977). This understanding of customer satisfaction implies that the concept can be applied at the micro and macro levels, with the former pertaining to product feature(s) and the latter to the overall product. This study takes the overall satisfaction aspect of a hotel service as it is perceived in determining guests' image of and loyalty to a hotel and its services. Despite the number of studies in this area, the relationship among customer satisfaction, image, and loyalty remains equivocal. Some researchers have cited image as an antecedent to customer satisfaction (Andreassen and Lindestad, 1998; Bloemer and Ruyter, 1998; Clemes et al., 2009; Lai et al., 2009; Milfelner and Korda, 2011; Prayag, 2008), with satisfaction having a consequential positive impact on loyalty. On the other hand, others have perceived satisfaction to be a precursor for image and image together with satisfaction being factors impacting loyalty (Helgesen and Nasset, 2007; Kandampully and Hu, 2007). Furthermore, Brunner et al. (2008) noted that the impact of customer satisfaction and image on loyalty varies with the nature of the customer—experienced customers are loyal due to their image of a service while new customers' loyalty is motivated by their level of satisfaction.

Image is the sum of individuals' beliefs, ideas, and impressions of a place (Baloglu and Brinberg, 1997). Countryman and Jang (2006) used impression in the hotel setting to connote guests' attitude toward a hotel. Despite the embedding of impression in the definition of image, such a concept appears to be short term-oriented compared to image, that is long term-oriented (Andreassen and Lindestad, 1998). One's impression of a hotel appears to be based on a reconnaissance of the environment while hotel image goes beyond mere reconnaissance to include all accumulated information, whether based on firsthand experiences or communication processes (Gartner, 1993). Countryman and Jang (2006), in researching hotel guests' impressions of the hotel lobby,

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