

HOW SELF-IMAGE CONGRUENCE IMPACTS CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IN HOTELS

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The importance of self-image congruence for product selection has been established across a number of purchase contexts, but the research that has included postpurchase evaluations is limited to a few examples, including a tourist destination, jewelery, and the use of ATMs. Despite recognition of the role of self-image congruence for hotel consumption, no research has been identified that addresses the affect self-image congruence has on postpurchase evaluations. This article reports an empirical analysis of the importance of self-image congruence to the postpurchase evaluation of hotels. The results indicate that self-image congruence affects the level of customer satisfaction. The results also indicate that the impact of self-image congruence varies with purpose of trip and gender.

Key words: Hotel industry; Customer satisfaction; Self-image congruence

Introduction

The hotel industry is a large, complex, and increasingly competitive industry that comprises a number of industry sectors based on quality, usage, and location (Go & Pine, 1995; Littlejohn, 2003; Olsen, 1996). Due to the diversity of the industry and the lack of perceived differentiation between hotels of any given standard (Bowen & Shoemaker, 1998; Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2000), customer satisfaction is critical for business success and customer retention (Bowen & Chen, 2001; Pizam & Ellis, 1999). To gain highly satisfied customers hotels need to understand the aspects of the hotel experience that create satisfac-

tion, and this article extends previous research by integrating the role of product congruity with the elements of hotel performance.

The hotel consumption experience, unlike most other consumption activities, involves a high level of intimacy between the hotel product and the consumer and between staff and the consumer. As a consequence, the importance of product congruity as a component of customer satisfaction is likely to be high. The use of a hotel for accommodation, by definition, involves the customer's immersion in the bedroom and the associated components, such as the bed and the bathroom, and therefore, the importance of the match of the room quality with personal standards and self-image is high.

Customers all too often have hotel experiences that they find unacceptable. Over half of both business and leisure travelers have stayed in a hotel to which they would never return (Knutson, 1988). Most identified dirty rooms and poor maintenance and repair as the reasons. Consumers are unlikely to choose a hotel, or any product, they expect to be incongruous with self-image, that is, people select a hotel, often from extrinsic cues (Dube & Renaghan, 1999; Krishnan & Hartline, 2001; Morgan, 1991), they believe will be in concert with their self-image and especially, as hotel consumption is a public activity, social self-image.

This article addresses the impact of self-image congruence on customer satisfaction with the hotel experience. The application of self-image congruence to customer satisfaction, as opposed to product choice, has received limited attention (Sirgy, Grewal, Mangleburg, Park, Chon, Claiborne, Johar, & Berkman, 1997). The article will continue by reviewing the relevant literature before detailing the research methodology and results. Following the Results section the implications for the hotel industry will be discussed.

Literature Review

The importance of customer satisfaction has long been recognized, both in hospitality research and in the broader research environment (Iacobucci, Ostrom & Grayson, 1995; Oh & Parks, 1997; Oliver, 1980; Pizam & Ellis, 1999; Szymanski & Henard, 2001; Yeung, Ging & Ennew, 2002). The focus of most research has been on the antecedents of customer satisfaction, that is, the links to service quality (Buttle, 1996; Caruana, 2002; Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985, 1988), or the sequential links to consumer loyalty (Bloemer & Kasper, 1995; Buttle, 1996; Caruana, 2002; Chiou, 2004; McDougall & Levesque, 2000; Oliver, 1980).

Research suggests that customer satisfaction derives from a comparison of actual experiences with prior held expectations (Oh & Parks, 1997; Oliver, 1980) and that, prior to the service encounter, the customer forms expectations about the forthcoming experience using a number of intrinsic and extrinsic cues that give indication about the likely performance standards (Clow & Vor-

hies, 1993; Gould-Williams, 1999). Previous research also suggests that the overall level of a consumer's satisfaction derives from the component satisfactions that are generated by the individual aspects of the consumption experience (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999).

Previous research into customer satisfaction in the hotel sector has reported that dimensions of hotel performance related to the areas of food and beverage, customer service, and hotel product contribute to the levels of satisfaction (Barsky & Laghagh, 1992; Cadotte & Turgeon, 1988; Choi & Chu, 2000; Gunderson, Heide & Olsson, 1996). Consequently, a regression model of customer satisfaction (dependent variable) with hotel product, customer service, and food and beverage (independent variables) should produce a good level of explanation.

Although the importance of product and self-image congruity is well established (Jamal & Goode, 2001; Malhotra, 1988; Sirgy, 1982, 1985; Sirgy et al., 1997; Sirgy, Johar, Samli, & Claiborne, 1991), research has focused on prepurchase evaluations, rather than postpurchase consumer evaluations (Jamal & Goode, 2001; Sirgy et al., 1997). The importance of self-image congruence for product selection has been established across a number of purchase contexts, but the research that has included postpurchase evaluations is limited to a few examples, including a tourist destination (Sirgy et al., 1997), jewelry (Jamal & Goode, 2001), and the use of ATMs (Goode, Moutinho, & Chien, 1996). An important element of these influences on behavior is the symbolism associated with the product purchased (Belk, 1988; Hirschman, 1990; Solomon, 1983). Consumers generally select products that are consistent with self-perception, and reject those that are incongruous (Foxall & Goldsmith, 1994; Landon, 1974; Malhotra, 1988; Mowen, 1987; Sirgy, 1985; Sirgy et al., 1991).

The impact of product congruence varies with product type and the impact is greater for products that are highly visible and rely on discretionary expenditure (Jamal & Goode, 2001; Mehta, 1999). The purchase and consumption of quality hotels is a highly visible activity that would fit the above description. Hotels, and particularly luxury hotels, have distinct social meaning and product symbol-

ism associated with a highly visible consumption process (Gillespie & Morrison, 2001a, 2001b). Therefore, product congruity is anticipated to contribute to the selection process.

The importance, theoretically, of product congruity within the hotel context suggests that the regression model proposed earlier might be improved by the addition of product congruity as an additional independent variable.

An additional aspect that also may affect the impact of self-image congruence is the purpose of the trip. Leisure activities, being freely chosen, have greater expression of self identity (Haggard & Williams, 1992). Leisure travelers are anticipated to show greater import of product congruence in the impact on pre- and postpurchase evaluation of hotels than will business travelers. In addition, research into the impact of gender on hotel consumption has identified differences between males and females in product usage (McCleary, Weaver, & Lan, 1994), although not in the evaluation of the service encounter (Ndhlovu & Senguder, 2002).

On the basis of the literature product congruity is hypothesized to act as a moderating variable on the relationship between the dimensions of hotel performance and the levels of customer satisfaction.

H1: The inclusion of product congruity as a moderating variable between hotel performance and customer satisfaction increases the level of explanation of customer satisfaction.

The impact of other variables, such as purpose of travel and gender, may also affect the relationship between product congruity and customer satisfaction. As leisure travel comprises self-funded and selected travel, a difference is also hypothesized in the impact of product congruity on customer satisfaction for leisure and business travelers. For leisure travelers product congruence is anticipated to have more influence on satisfaction than for business travelers.

H2: The impact of product congruity as a moderating variable between hotel performance and customer satisfaction is greater for leisure travelers than business travelers.

Finally, previous research has indicated that gender may impact on aspects of hotel usage. As

a result, gender is hypothesized to affect the impact of product congruity on customer satisfaction.

H3: The gender of the respondent influences the impact of product congruity as a moderating variable between hotel performance and customer satisfaction.

Research Methods

Consumers in four- and five-star, or first class and luxury hotels were asked, as part of a survey into perceived service quality, customer satisfaction, and behavioral loyalty intentions, to identify their self-image congruence with the hotel across the actual, ideal, actual social, and ideal social self-image. The approach used was a replication of work by Sirgy et al. (1997) with some modification to include the multiple dimensions of self-image as suggested by Malhotra (1988). The method of measuring self-image congruence, identified by Sirgy et al. (1997), improved the predictive ability on product selection across six product categories.

The survey was conducted through a self-completion questionnaire distributed by eight hotels in Queensland, Australia. The survey gained 664 completed usable responses, with an approximate equivalence between four-star, or first class, consumers and five-star, or luxury, consumers. To gain equal representation of both five-star or luxury hotels, and four-star or first class hotels, an equal number of hotels from each category were approached to participate in the data collection process. The hotels were selected to provide a balanced respondent sample, with the hotels overall providing a good balance of business and leisure in each quality category. Slightly over half the responses were from leisure consumers, while business and convention travelers comprised the majority of the rest.

Three composite variables, entitled product, service, and food and beverage, were developed from a total of 63 items in the questionnaire related to hotel performance. An initial exploratory factor analysis grouped the items into eight factors. The between factor correlations and conceptual evaluation were used to group the factors into three composite dimensions with confirmatory factor analysis being used to test the robustness

Table 1
Scale Descriptives

Scale	No. of Items	Cronbach α	Variance Explained
Product	21	0.93	58.5%
Service	16	0.93	74.6%
Food & beverage	4	0.84	67.2%
Product congruity	4	0.94	86.2%
Customer satisfaction	4	0.95	85.4%

of the composite variables. In Table 1 the scale descriptives including Cronbach's alpha are provided, and in Table 2 examples of the type of item and factor loadings are included. The confirmatory factor analysis results are shown in Table 3 and identify fit characteristics that are within recommended guidelines (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998).

The data were analyzed using hierarchical mul-

Table 2
Sample Items and Factor Loadings

Scale/Item	Factor Loading
Product	
The ambience of the hotel is relaxing	0.89
Range of toiletries available in the bathroom	0.88
Lots of large fluffy towels	0.88
The mood is restful	0.84
Service	
Respectful and polite staff	0.95
Not being kept waiting for more than a minute	0.93
Immediate service	0.93
Being recognized in the lobby	0.91
Food and beverage	
Exquisite food presentation	0.88
Provision of fine dining restaurant	0.84
Good range of bars to buy a drink	0.81
Provision of a sumptuous buffet breakfast	0.76
Product congruity	
This type of hotel is consistent with how I believe others see me	0.96
This type of hotel is consistent with how I would like others to see me	0.94
This type of hotel is consistent with how I like to see myself	0.93
This type of hotel is consistent with how I see myself	0.89
Customer satisfaction	
I made the right decision to use this hotel	0.93
I am happy with the hotel	0.93
I am very satisfied with this hotel	0.92
This hotel satisfies my needs	0.92

Table 3
Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Composite Variables

Composite	Chi-Square/ <i>df</i>	RMR	GFI	AGFI	NFI	RMSEA
Product	2.1	0.06	0.99	0.99	0.99	0.04
Service	3.0	0.13	0.99	0.98	0.99	0.05
Food & beverage	2.3	0.11	0.99	0.98	0.99	0.04

tle regression. This analysis enables the inclusion of direct and moderating effects as sequential components, thus enabling the identification of the additional explanation provided by the moderating variables (Aguinis, 1995; Francis, 2004; Hair et al., 1998; Pedhazur, 1997; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). The use of hierarchical multiple regression or incremental partitioning of variance (Pedhazur, 1997) is a recommended approach in moderated multiple regression, in which the impact of a moderating variable on the relationship between two variables is measured (Aguinis, 1995).

In moderated multiple regression it is normal to include new variables formed from the product of the predictors (product * product congruity, service * product congruity, food & beverage * product congruity) (Aguinis, 1995). In this research, although the addition of the moderating variables increased the value of R^2 by 5.7%, the level of multicollinearity between the independent variables reduced the level of significance through the sharing of impact between variables. The collinearity statistics indicated that the inclusion of the moderating variables raised the level of collinearity above recommended values. The tolerance value and variance inflation factor indicate the extent to which an independent variable is correlated with the other independent variables. All the moderating variables, when the moderating variables were included, were below the recommended tolerance value of 0.19 and above the recommended VIF value of 5.3 (Hair et al., 1998). The moderating variables were excluded from the regression model.

Respondent Profile

After removal of incomplete survey responses, the usable number of completed surveys numbered

Table 4

Respondent Profile: Gender and Purpose of Travel

	Business		Leisure		Missing		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Male	134	64	181	48	38	51	353	53
Female	75	36	200	52	36	49	311	47
Total	209	100	381	100	74	100	664	100

664. There was a reasonably even distribution of respondents in relation to hotel quality, gender, and purpose of travel. In Table 4 the gender mix of respondents and purpose of travel is identified.

Results

The first hypothesis identified that the inclusion of product congruity as a moderating variable between hotel performance and customer satisfaction would increase the level of explanation of customer satisfaction. As recommended by Sirgy et al. (1997), the correlation of product congruity with customer satisfaction and other independent variables was obtained (Table 5).

A hierarchical multiple regression was performed, with customer satisfaction as the dependent variable, the dimensions of hotel performance as the independent variables, and product congruity as the additional variable in the second regression. The results for this hierarchical regression are provided in Table 6.

The element of customer satisfaction explained by the predictor variables, as measured by R^2 , is increased by 6.5% through the inclusion of product congruity in the model. This increase thus supports the hypothesis that product congruity is an

Table 6

Hierarchical Multiple Regression of Customer Satisfaction

Model	R	R^2	R^2 Change	F Change	Sig. F Change
1	0.557 ^a	0.310	0.310	103.06	0.000
2	0.613 ^b	0.375	0.065	72.32	0.000

^aPredictors: (Constant), Product, Service, Food & Beverage.

^bPredictors: (Constant), Product, Service, Food & Beverage, Product Congruity.

important aspect of customer satisfaction. This compares favorably with the results obtained for a tourist destination by Sirgy et al. (1997).

The regression coefficients indicate that Food and Beverage as an independent variable is not significant ($p > 0.05$) while all other independent variables are significant ($p < 0.01$). Product congruity shows the highest standardized β coefficient value (0.28), followed by product (0.27) and service (0.22). The addition of product congruity as an independent variable reduces the value for both product (from 0.35) and service (from 0.27).

The second hypothesis suggested that the importance of product congruity would be greater for leisure travelers than business travelers.

As can be seen from Table 7, the hierarchical regressions indicate that product congruity is important for both business and leisure travelers, although the hypothesis is not supported with product congruity being more important for business travelers than leisure travelers. Product congruity is of more importance for business travelers, explaining an additional 8.5% of customer satisfaction, while for leisure travelers it only provided explanation for an additional 5.8%.

Table 5

Correlations of Customer Satisfaction With Independent Variables

	Customer Satisfaction	Product Congruity	Product	Service	Food & Beverage
Customer satisfaction	1	0.47*	0.51*	0.49*	0.36*
Product congruity		1	0.40*	0.36*	0.28*
Product			1	0.62*	0.65*
Service				1	0.52*
Food & beverage					1

*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

Table 7
Hierarchical Multiple Regression of Customer Satisfaction for Business and Leisure Travelers

Purpose of Trip	Model	R	R ²	R ² Change	F Change	Sig. F Change
Leisure	1	0.559 ^a	0.313	0.313	58.490	0.000
	2	0.609 ^b	0.371	0.058	35.864	0.000
Business	1	0.555 ^a	0.308	0.308	58.490	0.000
	2	0.627 ^b	0.393	0.085	35.864	0.000

^aPredictors: (Constant), Product, Service, Food & Beverage.
^bPredictors: (Constant), Product, Service, Food & Beverage, Product Congruity.

The regression analysis indicates some difference between business and leisure travelers. Leisure travelers rank product ($\beta = 0.30$) ahead of product congruity ($\beta = 0.27$) and service ($\beta = 0.19$). Business travelers reflect the reverse, with product congruity ($\beta = 0.32$) being more important than product ($\beta = 0.28$) and service ($\beta = 0.21$). Food and Beverage is not significant ($p > 0.05$) as an independent variable in either case. All other independent variables are significant ($p < 0.01$).

The third hypothesis suggested that gender would affect the influence of product congruity on customer satisfaction. This hypothesis is also supported with product congruity being more important for female (change in $R^2 = 0.078$) than male travelers (change in $R^2 = 0.06$). The results are shown in Table 8.

The regression analysis indicates some difference between male and female travelers. Female travelers rank product congruity ($\beta = 0.31$) ahead

Table 8
Hierarchical Multiple Regression of Customer Satisfaction for Female and Male Travelers

Gender	Model	R	R ²	R ² Change	F Change	Sig. F Change
Female	1	0.532	0.283	0.283	40.324	0.000
	2	0.601	0.361	0.078	37.404	0.000
Male	1	0.575	0.330	0.330	57.396	0.000
	2	0.625	0.390	0.060	34.049	0.000

^aPredictors: (Constant), Product, Service, Food & Beverage.
^bPredictors: (Constant), Product, Service, Food & Beverage, Product Congruity.

of product ($\beta = 0.27$) and service ($\beta = 0.16$), while male travelers ranked service ($\beta = 0.30$) ahead of product congruity ($\beta = 0.27$) and product ($\beta = 0.24$). Food and Beverage is not found to be significant ($p > 0.05$) as an independent variable in either case. All other independent variables are significant ($p < 0.01$).

Discussion

For both purpose of trip and gender, product congruity is an important aspect in the formation of customer satisfaction. The results indicate that between 5% and 9% of the level of customer satisfaction can be explained by the extent to which the customer feels “in tune” with the hotel product. Although it is not an easy task for hotel marketers to influence the level of product congruence, it does highlight the importance of the premise “don’t promise what you can’t deliver.” Frequently, the hotel selection process is completed on the basis of extrinsic cues delivered through marketing communication channels, and it is on this basis that the customer makes the hotel selection.

The other independent variables comprised the dimensions of product, service, and food and beverage quality. The product dimension included aspects such as room quality, as well as areas such as the hotel lobby, the service dimension included the quality of hotel staff as well as the level of personalization and speed of service, and food and beverage quality dimension included the range and provision of bars and restaurants. Note that across all customers the food and beverage dimension was not important, with it having a low β value and falling well outside the accepted level of significance. Also worthy of note for hotel managers is the importance male travelers place on the service dimension, with this dimension having a standardized β value of 0.30 in contrast to a value of 0.16 for female travelers. In contrast, however, female travelers find the product and product congruity more important in their evaluation of satisfaction. There is little distinction in the contrast of results for business and leisure travelers, although business travelers do find product congruity slightly more important.

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