

DETERMINING AND PRIORITIZING THE KEY INDICATORS TO CHOOSE A HOTEL FROM THE IRANIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to investigate the relationships between brand prestige, customer brand identification, well-being perception, and brand loyalty. A review of the current literature in these areas revealed thirteen theoretical hypotheses, from which the authors derived a structural model. The model was tested utilizing data collected from 252 passenger. Confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling were utilized to test the proposed theoretical relationships. Data analysis indicates that brand prestige bears a positive impact on well-being perception, customer brand identification and brand loyalty. Also, it was revealed that well-being perception and customer brand identification have positive impact on brand loyalty. In addition, it was found that brand prestige is the most powerful factor that affects brand loyalty. In spite of impact that well-being perception has on brand loyalty, it also has positive impact on customer brand identification. The findings emphasize the significance of the study variables in maximizing brand loyalty and determine most important factors to choose a hotel in Iran. Since there has been little study of brand loyalty in the Iran hotel industry, the model verified here may serve as a guide for future research aimed at understanding the formation of brand prestige, well-being, customer brand identification and their potential impacts on other marketing variables in the Iran hotel industry. The model verified in this study is the first that explains the formation of brand prestige, well-being perception, customer brand identification and their impacts on brand loyalty. Also, this study is the first that indicates key factors to choose a hotel from Iranians perspective.

Key Words: brand prestige; brand loyalty; well-being perception; customer brand identification

Introduction:

Nowadays, those producers are successful in obtaining the profit, if their efforts satisfy the customers in the target markets and build customer loyalty to their brand. Satisfied customers tend to be loyal and show supporting behavior (Shu-Ching Chen, 2006). According to Keller (2008), brand will help customers to identify a firm's products or services and makes itself differentiate from other competitors. A brand is a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a

combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors (Kotler, 2000; Walley et al., 2007). Also, marketers have become more interested in learning about, organizing, and facilitating brand communities (Algesheimer et al., 2005). One outstanding area of interest for brand management is that of meaning for consumers via identification with their favorite brands (Aaker and Fournier, 1995; Golder and Irwin, 2001). In the modern competitive environment, a good name of brand that reflects a brand identity and reminds all functions of enterprises interact with their customers, is important. In Persian, the brand word has several translations, including the brand, the commercial brand, and its unique identity. Brand is means dignity of a company and to the phrase reputation of the organization.

Placing the brand has been as a way to distinguish the goods of one manufacturer to the other manufacturers along time, while modern branding is being from the nineteenth century. Brand can be threatening legal, logo, company, identity systems, prestige, character, value-added or relationships (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007). Brands are intangible assets of a company that create a high value for the company. Brand is considered as mutual advantage in view of supply and demand (Pike, 2009). Brand relationship theory suggests that brand acts as a means of connecting for both consumers and suppliers (Chang & Chieng, 2006; Davis, Oliver, & Brodie, 2000). Smith and Brynjolfsson (2001) argued that brand is an important factor affecting consumers' choice, and brands help customers find a vendor for a given product or service. Therefore, brand has been emphasized an important marketing tool to distinguish a brand from its competitors. Lately, brand prestige, customer brand identification, and well-being perception are recognized as important factors that lead to brand loyalty (Jinsoo Hwang, Heesup Han, 2014). Despite the importance of such factors in brand loyalty, little empirical research has been conducted how brand prestige, customer brand identification, and well-being perception affect brand loyalty. Therefore, findings from this study will provide marketers and practitioners with better understanding of roles of brand prestige, customer brand identification and well-being perception in creating brand loyalty. Such understandings, consequently, will be critical and helpful in gaining and retaining a competitive position by keeping customers being loyal in this extremely competitive market. Hotel firms have increasingly recognized that branding strategies constitute a strategic weapon to secure a competitive edge in the global hotel industry. To extend current understanding of hotel brand management, this study investigates the role of brand prestige and its antecedents, customer brand identification, and well-being perception in the formation of hotel brand loyalty. The design of this study intends to answer the following two research questions:

1- Are there any relationship between brand prestige, well-being perception, customer brand identification and the brand loyalty?

2-What are the key criteria to choose a hotel from the Iranian point of view?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND HYPOTHESES

Brand Prestige:

As defined earlier, brand prestige can represent the relatively high status of product positioning associated with a brand (Steenkamp, Batra, & Alden, 2003; Truong, McColl, & Kitchen, 2009). An inherent, unique know-how, which concerns a specific attribute or the overall quality and performance of the product, is the key criterion for a brand to be judged prestigious (e.g., Dubois & Czellar, 2002). In other words, consumption of prestigious brands may vary according to the

susceptibility to others (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). Wong and Zhou (2005) found that perceived brand prestige has a greater effect on purchase intention when the product category is high social display value (Zhou & Wong, 2005). Consumers often receive benefits from marketing exchanges that go beyond basic economic benefits. Prestige is a subjective evaluative judgment about the high social status of people or inanimate objects such as brands. Research on affect shows that evaluative judgments (appraisals) are often followed by emotional reactions (Bagozzi et al., , 2013, 1999). By prestige is meant the perceptions that other people, whose opinions are valued, believe that the organization or brand is well regarded, i.e. respected, admired, or well-known (Bergami and Bagozzi, 2000).

Customer brand identification:

The concept of identification originates from social identity theory, which maintains that the self-concept comprises a personal identity, consisting of idiosyncratic characteristics such as abilities and interests, and a social identity, encompassing salient group classifications (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Tajfel and Turner, 1985). Identification is essentially a perceptual construct (Mael and Ashforth, 1992), implying identity fit and identity matching. Individuals tend to go beyond their self-identity to develop a social identity by classifying themselves and others into various social categories (e.g., organizational membership and sport clubs) (Mael and Ashforth, 1992). Identity theory can be used to provide a better understanding of exchange processes (Arnett et al., 2003). Although Social identity essentially is a perception of oneness with a group of persons (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Kuenzel, & Halliday, 2008), Social identity theory maintains that in addition to a personal identity, the self-concept is also composed of a social identity (Bhattacharya et al., 1995). The notion of identification differs from the related notions of brand loyalty and organizational commitment that have been discussed in the marketing literature (Bhattacharya et al., 1995). Identification occurs when an individual sees him or herself as psychologically intertwined with the characteristics of the group. From a consumer perspective, identification is an individual's "perceived oneness with or belongingness to an organization" (Bhattacharya et al., 1995). In an attempt to determine why and under what conditions consumers enter into strong, committed, and meaningful relationships with certain companies, investigators have proposed that strong consumer-company relationships are based on consumers' identification with the companies that help them satisfy one or more important self-definitional needs (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). In addition, such consumer-company identification is active, selective, and volitional on consumers' behalf and motivates them to engage in favorable as well as potentially unfavorable company-related behaviors (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003).

Brand identification is defined as the degree of integration of a brand into a consumer's self-concept (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). When a consumer feels a high level of identification with a brand, he/she feels that the brand's image is congruent with his/her self-image (Sirgy, 1982). Therefore, when someone praises the brand, the consumer takes it as a personal compliment, and feels that the brand well-reflects his/her personality/characteristics (Fournier, 1998). Social identity theory provides theoretical backgrounds for brand identification (Donavan, Janda, & Suh, 2006; Jones & Kim, 2011; Kuenzel & Halliday, 2008). According to social identity theory, when two or more people have shared attributes that distinguish them collectively from other people, they feel an emotional bond between each other (Hogg, 2006) and consequently feel a high level of identification with each other and feelings of closeness. In other words,

identification is created when an individual integrates another person into his/her self-concept (Kuenzel &

Halliday, 2008). Customers purchase a prestigious brand's products because they feel that the brand's prestigious image reflects their self-concept (Steenkamp et al., 2003). Bizman and Yinon (2002) explained that prestige-seeking customers are eager to connect a prestigious brand image to their own identity. Therefore, if a hotel brand provides an impression of strong prestige, hotel passengers feel that the brand is congruent with their self-images.

Well-being perception:

Consumer well-being perception is defined as "customers' perception of the extent to which a brand positively contributes to a quality of life enhancement" (Grzeskowiak & Sirgy, 2007). For instance, if a traveler feels that his/her quality of life is enhanced by residence in hotel, the experience has satisfied the traveler's well-being needs. In recent years, it has been increasingly important to customers to enhance their quality of life in various areas, such as higher levels of life satisfaction, overall happiness with life, absence of ill-being, greater social well-being, and greater travel well-being (Grzeskowiak & Sirgy, 2007; Lee & Sirgy, 2004). For this reason, customers have given greater weight to quality of life enhancement when making purchase decisions about products/ services (Lee & Sirgy, 2004; Samli, Sirgy, & Meadow, 1987; Sirgy, 2001; Sirgy, Lee, & Rahtz, 2007). Sirgy et al. (2007) stated that consumers prefer to purchase products/services that can satisfy well-being needs.

Customer well-being refers to how much a brand positively contributes to a quality of life perception (Grzeskowiak and Sirgy, 2007). The concept of customer well-being has been in the spotlight for practitioners and scholars in the field of marketing recently as consumers have begun more and more to consider quality of life as an important goal (Lee and Sirgy, 2004; Samli et al., 1987; Sirgy, 2001; Sirgy et al., 2007). The concept of customer well-being, which is also referred to as "quality of life" (Dagger and Sweeney, 2006; Endres, 1999; Yuan, 2001) is somewhat vague (Samli et al., 1987) and multi-dimensional in existing marketing literature. The term "customer well-being" might be considered similar to "satisfaction". However, the existing theoretical background shows a distinction between consumer satisfaction and customer well-being. Based on Oliver's (1980) expectancy-disconfirmation theory, customer satisfaction is largely determined by customer expectations, which become the powerful driver of repurchase intention, positive word-of-mouth, and customer loyalty (Fornell, 1992; Fornell et al., 1996; Szymanski and Henard, 2001). CWB also plays a bridging role between consumer satisfaction and quality of life, but satisfaction does not always lead to CWB, which is determined by the perception of how the consumption of a product/service has enhanced patron quality of life in various domains (e.g. social life, work life, leisure life) (Sirgy et al., 2007).

Brand loyalty:

Brand loyalty can be defining level of a positive attitude of customer to brand, his/her commitment to the brand and the intention of purchasing more in the future. Loyalty to the brand name directly is influence satisfaction or dissatisfaction that gain during time and is also affected product quality (Hosseini, Abolfazli, Rahimi & Rahimi hlry, 2009). Thinking they are so loyal to the brand name: 1. are committed to the brand 2. Willing to pay more for a brand than other 3. Recommend the brand to others (Motameni& Shahrokhi, 1998).

Brand loyalty is defined as consistent repeat patronage of a particular brand over time (Back, 2005). Oliver (1997) explained that brand loyalty indicates not only simple repurchasing, but

also long-term psychological commitment to repurchase a particular brand's products/services consistently in the future. Because of the psychological commitment involved, loyal customers: (1) are willing to spend more money even though the prices may be higher than expected, (2) already have trust in the brand and thus consider the brand's products/services first (priority is given to the brand), and (3) have less intention to switch to other brands (Anderson & Narus, 1990; Bowen & Chen, 2001; Bowen & Shoemaker, 1998; Ladhari, Brun, & Morales, 2008; Reichheld & Sasser, 1990). For these reasons, developing and strengthening brand loyalty has long been a critical issue in the success of a business (Wilson, 1995). Prestige-seeking consumers tend to show long-term repurchase behaviors toward particular brands (e.g. BMW, Porsche, Louis Vuitton) (Hwang & Hyun, 2012) and seek to express a more distinctive personal image by wearing/possessing prestigious brands (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). In other words, prestige brand seekers seek to connect their self-concepts to social image by purchasing prestigious brands (Alden et al., 1999). Such image congruence leads to the formation of brand loyalty (Han & Back, 2008). In summary, there is a theoretical causal relationship between brand prestige and brand loyalty.

The effect of customer brand identification on brand loyalty:

Social identity may influence individuals' perceptions, cognitions, and evaluations of issues and events, and consumers' increased identification with a product offering or brand can lead to enhanced customer outcomes, such as stronger loyalty to the brand (Underwood et al., 2001). While research concerning customer and hotel brand identification is very limited, parallel understanding can be drawn from other related research settings. For example, sports teams may create a strong level of brand loyalty on the part of fans despite the strengths and weaknesses of the organization (Parker and Stuart, 1997), possibly because of the strong identification between the fan and the sports team. Researchs also indicate that customer- company identification increases product utilization (Ahearne et al., 2005) as well as repurchase frequency (Bhattacharya et al., 1995). Similarly, customers who identify with a brand community are more likely to recommend the brand (Algesheimer et al., 2005). Customer brand identification, originating from social identity theory, can lead to a range of consumer outcomes, including brand loyalty (He et al., 2012). Investigators also believe that the concept of customer brand identification provides a richer understanding of brand management (Kuenzel and Halliday, 2008), and propose that a strong customer brand identification can induce customers' favorable evaluation of the brand (Ahearne et al., 2005; Donovan et al., 2006; Underwood et al., 2001).

Effects of brand prestige on brand loyalty:

Consumers decrease information costs by receiving prestigious brand signal (Baek, Kim, & Yu, 2010). Similarly, Brakus et al. (2009) argue that brand prestige decreases time spent for searching other brands, which leads to decrease information costs. The findings may imply that consumers who hold a positive evaluative judgment toward brands (brand prestige) will be more dependable and rely more particular brand. Building repetitive business is vital to long-term profitability of business entities. Therefore, businesses endeavor to build customer loyalty. Brand loyalty is considered as a consumer's inclination to repurchase the service/ product of specific brand (Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978). Later, Oliver (1997) defined customer loyalty as "a deep held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts that have the potential to cause switching behavior".

In the highly competitive hotel industry, where products and services have reached “commodity” status (Mattila, 2006), hoteliers are required to find ways to set their products and services apart from others (Choi and Chu, 2001). This need has given rise to the use of branding strategies as a source of differentiation (Pappu et al., 2005) and competitive advantage (Kim and Kim, 2005), making branding one of the most dominant trends in the global hotel industry (Kayaman and Arasli, 2007). Building strong hotel brands creates value for both the firm and the customer. From the hotel’s perspective, a strong brand enhances the property’s market value (O’Neill and Xiao, 2006), financial performance (Kim and Kim, 2005; Kim et al., 2003; Kwun and Oh, 2007), and other key performance indicators such as average price, occupancy, revenue, and return on investment (Forgacs, 2003). Research also indicates that branded hotels achieve higher net operating income during economic recession (O’Neill and Carlback, 2011). From the customer’s perspective, strong hotel brands reduce perceived risks and search costs (Kayaman and Arasli, 2007) and provide a signal of quality assurance (Prasad and Dev, 2000), simplifying the consumer’s pre-purchase evaluation of the service. One commonly used indicator of brand strategy success is the strength of customers’ brand loyalty. For many years, the development and maintenance of brand loyalty has been the ultimate goal of marketing activities of many organizations. The topic of brand loyalty has been researched extensively, with studies largely focused on the examination of key marketing concepts that serve as loyalty antecedents, such as service quality (e.g., Bloemer et al., 1999; Kandampully et al., 2011), perceived value (e.g., Chen and Hu, 2010; Ryu et al., 2008; Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002), customer satisfaction (e.g., Back and Lee, 2009; Back and Parks, 2003; Li and Petrick, 2008; Ryu et al., 2008), and brand trust (e.g., Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Han and Jeong, 2013).

Food quality:

Food quality in a hotel plays a critical role in the evaluation of the overall hotel experience. In the most generic sense, quality refers to the combination of characteristics that establish a product’s acceptability. In the food industry, this is usually an integrated measure of purity, flavor, texture, color, appearance and workmanship. According to Bosselman (2007) a well-run food and beverage operation within a hotel, regardless of the size, makes a profit and increases overall hotel revenue. He further proposed that one of the misconceptions about food service in hotels is hiring a good chef and leaving the operation to him, since he stressed the importance of a team approach in hotel food and beverage operations to get consistent quality food. To highlight the importance of quality in food and beverage operations, Hart and Casserly (1985) indicated that quality, and TQM programs, in particular, are considered as major requirements in the restaurant industry to achieve competitive advantage, operating efficiencies, and high-quality dining experiences. Thus, the quality of well-prepared food represents a key element in restaurant success (Blum, 1997). Consequently, it is important for restaurant establishments to ensure and balance the quality of their tangible and intangible products to achieve customer satisfaction (Soriano, 2003). Food production is the transformation of raw ingredients by food production staff into final dishes and meals (Medlik, 1999; Davis et al., 2001; Ball et al., 2003; Hayes and Ninemeier, 2006) and takes place in the food production area (Dittmer and Griffin, 1997). The food production area is headed by an executive chef or food production manager who carries out various duties (Powers and Barrows, 2003). Murray-Gibbons and Gibbons (2007) argued that the chef profession represents the most stressful profession amongst hospitality industry careers. The head chef should not spend all his/her time cooking in the kitchen and s/he

requires skills beyond technical skills to undertake administrative work, management, developing staff training, purchasing functions, stock control, staff selection, supervision through good communication and leadership, designing menus, and overall maintaining the quality of the food leaving the kitchen. Thus, the main duties of the head chef are organizing, supervising and administering not cooking (Kotas and Jayawardena, 1994; Pratten, 2003 a; Pratten, 2003b; Stutts and Wortman, 2006). The responsibility of developing and changing menus is ascribed to the executive chef who in turn identifies which items are in demand and should be left on the menu and which items are less popular and should be removed from the menu (Kivela, 2003). The majority of restaurants change their menus every three to six months-no less -to ensure stability (Morrison, 1996). According to Davis et al. (2001) since food production has a very short operational cycle providing little time to correct mistakes, it is critically important to achieve quality food right first time. To discuss this further, Kotas and Jayawardena (1994) listed the following principles which should be taken in mind to achieve excellent food production: Develop a proper attitude towards cooking. Use standard recipes. Use the right technique and equipment. Train employees accurately. Supervise employees properly. Maintain production equipment. Schedule food production according to needs. Have variety of menu items.

Service quality:

Scholars (e.g. Bitner, Booms, & Tetreault, 1990; Hennig-Thurau, 2004; Hyun, 2010) have empirically verified the critical role of service quality in evaluating the overall excellence or superiority of brands in various industries (e.g. retail, airline, travel, hotel, restaurant). When customers receive high-quality service, they feel that they are being treated respectfully, which enhances social self-concept (Park, Chung, & Rutherford, 2011). In the service industry, definitions of service quality tend to focus on meeting customer expectations and how well the services delivered match their expectations (Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988; Munhurrin et al., 2009). However, due to the intangible nature of service products, measuring service quality may be more difficult than measuring the quality of physical products (Babakus and Manngold, 1992; Bouranta et al., 2009; Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Karatepe et al., 2005). Began to study service quality using disconfirmation, i.e. focusing on the gap between customers' expectations and perceptions. Service quality was perceived to be higher when the gap between customer expectations and perceptions of performance was small or nonexistent (Barringer, 2008; Parasuraman et al., 1985). Parasuraman et al. (1985) identified ten dimensions in assessing service quality which were later reduced to five dimensions: tangibles; reliability; responsiveness; assurance; empathy (Barringer, 2008; Parasuraman et al., 1988). Service quality is defined as how well the service meets or exceeds the customers' expectations on a consistent basis (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1985). Hotels with good service quality will improve their market share and profitability (Oh and Parks, 1997). In the face of increasing competition, the hotel business is seeking new tools to create competitive advantages. Therefore, it is putting a large amount of effort into selecting the best tools or methods to measure service quality development. In hotels, the tangible and intangible products are highly intertwined and have greater impact on guests' assessment of service quality (Alzaid and Soliman, 2002).

Room quality:

Hotel passengers spend relatively large amounts of time in their rooms to relax and sleep, and room quality is therefore a critical issue in the hotel industry. According to existing studies, room quality is largely determined by five dimensions: (1) size (Min & Min, 1997; Qu & Ping, 1999),

(2) cleanliness (Qu & Ping, 1999; Teye & Leclerc, 1998), (3) quietness (Heung, 2000), (4) bedding comfort (beds, mattresses, pillows) (Choi & Chu, 2001), and (5) toiletries (Choi & Chu, 2001). Hotel management research indicates that room quality is an important element affecting brand prestige. For instance, Min, Min, and Chung (2002) investigated the Korean luxury hotel industry. Based on data analysis, they concluded that impressive room quality helps to create and further enhance a luxurious hotel brand image. High quality rooms create a luxury atmosphere, thus leaving a prestigious brand image in guests' minds (Min & Min, 1997).

Staff/crew attractiveness:

The physical attractiveness of a brand's employees has a critical impact on customers' overall experiences with the brand (Bitner, Booms, & Mohr, 1994). Customers tend to favorably evaluate products/services delivered by physically attractive employees (Kahle & Homer, 1985). In the retail setting, the physical attractiveness of employees increases the likelihood of product purchases (Bower, 2001; Bower & Landreth, 2001; Nichter & Nichter, 1991; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty & Wegener, 1998; Scott, 1994). For this reason, service companies often seek to hire physically attractive employees (Berger, Fisek, Norman, & Zelditch, 1977). Moreover, the physical attractiveness of employees plays a critical role in the formation of a prestigious brand image, because physical attractiveness helps to create a favorable attitude toward a brand in customers' minds (Kotler, Bowen, & Makens, 2003). Empirical studies further support this theoretical argument (Koernig, 2000; Luoh & Tsaor, 2009; Nickson, Warhurst, & Dutton, 2005). For instance, Luoh and Tsaor (2009) examined how employees' physical attractiveness influences customers' service quality perceptions. They found that employees' physical attractiveness induces a prestigious brand image such that customers' perceptions of service quality were enhanced by physically attractive servers compared with those of average looks. Luoh and Tsaor (2009) further posited that attractive employees give the impression of sensitivity, kindness, sociability, and prestige, thus improving the overall image of a company.

Facilities:

Hotels have typically been equipped with a variety of facilities such as sports/fitness rooms, pools, shopping arcades, theaters, casinos, and other convenient and appealing facilities. Empirical studies further support this theoretical argument. Nguyen and Leblanc (2002) examined how physical environment influences brand image by using data collected from two service industries (272 clients of an insurance company and 238 hotel travelers). Based on the results of data analysis, they found that a high-quality physical environment helps to create a favorable and luxurious brand image. Similarly, Hwang and Ok (2012) found that high-quality restaurant facilities induce favorable attitudes toward a firm, which help to induce a prestigious brand image.

Entertainment:

Entertainment is defined as the action of providing amusement or enjoyment (Oxford Dictionaries, 2013a, 2013b). An appealing entertainment program serves to motivate travelers to choose a hotel. High-quality entertainment offerings create favorable and unforgettable memories, thus helping to create a prestigious brand image (Hyun & Kim, 2011). Empirical studies further support this theoretical argument. Nguyen and Leblanc (2002) examined how physical environment influences brand image by using data collected from two service industries (272 clients of an insurance company and 238 hotel travelers). Based on the results of data

analysis, they found that a high-quality physical environment helps to create a favorable and luxurious brand image.

Programs/places for children:

It is typically challenging to travel with young children, who can be disruptive and difficult to please. Without satisfactory amenities for children, parents and other travelers can become frustrated by children's loud disruptions in corridors, dining facilities, and other shared areas. In contrast, if children have enjoyable amenities geared specifically toward their needs, parents and other passengers can enjoy uninterrupted leisure time in hotel. Effective programs/places for children can allow adult passengers to enjoy elegant, adult-oriented facilities.

On this basis, we propose the following hypothesis:

1. Passengers understanding of food quality has positive impact on the brand prestige.
2. Passengers understand of service quality has positive impact on the brand Prestige.
- 3- Passengers understanding of physical attractiveness of staff has positive effect on the brand prestige.
- 4- Passengers understanding of hotel entertainment has a positive impact on the brand prestige.
- 5- Passengers understanding of high quality hotel amenities has positive impact on the brand prestige.
- 6- Passengers understanding of location and effective programs for children has positive impact on the prestige.
- 7- Passengers understanding of the quality of the room has positive impact on the brand prestige.
- 8- Perceived brand prestige has positive impact on the passenger's well-being perception.
- 9- Perceived brand prestige has positive impact on brand identification by passengers.
- 10- Passengers well-being perception has positive impact on brand identification by passengers.
- 11- Perceived brand prestige has positive impact on the brand loyalty.
- 12- Passengers well-being perception has positive impact on brand loyalty.
- 13- Passengers brand identification has positive impact on the brand loyalty.

Proposed model:

Based on the hypothesized relationships, this study proposed a conceptual model. In the literature review section of this research, 13 theoretical hypotheses were derived based on the existing theoretical/empirical backgrounds. Integrating the 13 theoretical hypotheses, a conceptual model was developed (Figure. 1).

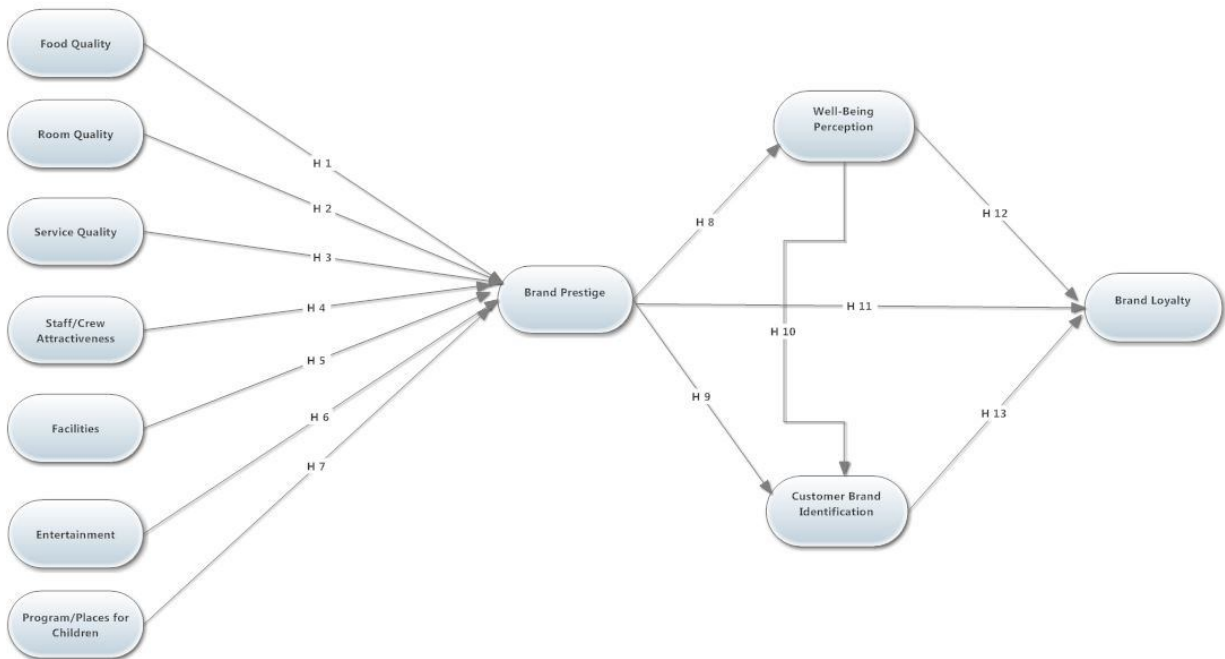


Figure.1- Conceptual model (Research Model is taken (Jinsoo Hwang, Heesup Han, 2014).

Measures and instrument development:

An initial draft of the questionnaire was crafted with validated measurement scales from previous studies that examined constructs in query in the present study. The questionnaire consisted of food quality, service quality, room quality, entertainment, facilities, staff/crew attractiveness, program/place for children, customer brand identification, well-being perception, brand prestige, brand loyalty, and demographic information. Measurement items are listed in Table 5. All items were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Demographic information included gender, age, income, and education.

Pre- and pilot test:

Prior to finalizing the questionnaire, a pre-test was conducted to refine the research instrument with ten Hospitality Management graduate students and faculty in Iran. Participants' suggestions (e.g., wording changes) were incorporated accordingly in the revision of the questionnaire, and, then, a pilot-test was conducted with thirty hotel customers (passengers) in an attempt to assess the reliability of the measures. Reliability coefficient of measures of each construct were assessed using Cronbach's alpha, and all values were higher than the cutoff value of .7 (Hair et al., 1998).

Sample and data collection:

Questionnaire was distributed to 337 hotel passenger. A total of 269 responses were returned, and seventeen responses with missing information were eliminated. Consequently, 252 usable responses were used for further data analysis. The sample size was above the acceptable level for SEM models containing five or fewer constructs (Hair et al., 2006), and therefore was considered appropriate.

Measurement:

To empirically test the constructs in the proposed model, questionnaire items were developed based on multiple item measurement scales that had been validated by previous studies as follows:

- Food quality was measured with four items cited from Hyun (2010) and Petrick et al. (2006).
- Service quality was measured with four items developed by Hyun (2010) and Petrick et al. (2006).
- Staff/crew attractiveness was measured with three items employed by Luoh and Tsaur (2009) and Tews, Stafford, and Zhu (2009).
- Entertainment was measured with four items adapted from Petrick et al. (2006).
- Hotel facilities were measured with five items cited from Qu and Ping (1999) and Petrick et al. (2006).
- Programs/places for children were measured with three items adapted from Petrick et al. (2006).
- Room quality was measured with five items cited from Choi and Chu (2001) and Petrick et al. (2006).
- Hotel brand prestige was measured with three items employed by Baek, Kim, and Yu (2010).
- Well-being perception was measured with four items developed by Grzeskowiak and Sirgy (2007).
- Customer brand identification was measured with three items cited from Mael and Ashforth (1992).
- Brand loyalty was measured with three items adapted from Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, and Gremler (2002) and Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman (1996).

Data analysis:**Profile of the sample**

Table 1 describes the respondents' demographic profile. The sample (n=252) collected for the study were 54.2% male (137) and 45.8% female (115).

Percent	frequency		
2.9	7	Diploma	Education
8.6	22	Associate degree	
42.9	108	Degree	
45.6	115	Post graduate and over	
54.3	137	Under 2000 \$	Income
25.7	65	Between 2000 and 3000 \$	
11.4	29	Between 3000 and 4000 \$	
8.6	22	4000 \$ and over	
2.9	7	Under 20 years old	Age
31.4	79	20 to 30	
45.7	115	30 to 40	
20	50	40 and over	
54.2	137	male	Sex
45.8	115	female	

Table 1- Demographic characteristic

Data inferential analysis

In table 1, the results of crossed-loading suggest that, the structure of each criterion shows the maximum amount of factor loading and each structure or latent variable possess the most factor loading of their criterion, therefor, the latent variables are distinct to each other. Table 2 shows the correlation matrix and validity and stability criterions. The matrix square root demonstrates average variance extracted on the main diagonal of a matrix. In accordance to existing criterion, the variation of each latent variable shall be more for its measures in comparison with other criterions. In order to determine this approach, first the AVE root of latent variable is calculated, then the value compared to the amount of correlation of this latent variable with other latent variables, this approach is applied to other latent variables. Confirmation of the discriminant validity demands the greater amount of square root of AVE than all correlation coefficient of related variable with the rest of variables. Fornell-Larcker criterion (1981) represents the bottom of main diagonal of correlation coefficient. Positive and coefficients represent respectively a positive relation, a negative and reverse relation between two variables. All correlation coefficients are significant and less than positive 5% error level. Table 2 displays convergent validity and discriminant validity, CA inner consistency and mean response. AC measures simultaneous loading of the latent or structure variables while detect variable increases. The amount of the criterion is 0 to 1 and less than 7% (Chin,1998). This paper is considered the diagnostic validity, in which the indicators of each structure, in terms of measurement, provide more appropriate separation than other structures of the model. In other words, each indicator measures its structure in which all structures well separated from each other in their combination. The AVE criterion demonstrates that all studied structures have a higher than 5% AVE. The amount of responses represented in a row of table 2. Considering that the quintuple likert scale is selected for research variables questionnaire, after investigating the values of respondent's comments, it becomes evident whether the mean responses shows significant difference with 4 (the middle number of likret scale) in average or not? As the row of the table represents, all of the research variables are above average which suggests satisfactory situation.

Evaluation of Fit

When it is said that the model fits to series of data suggest that the model implied covariance matrix is equivalent to the observed data covariance matrix, in other words, when residual matrix and its factors are close to zero. This fit depends on estimation method, model, observed data features, etc. Chi-square test is the goodness of fit. However, this test involves observing a series of assumptions that in some cases this assumptions can be violated. The increasing dissatisfaction of Chi-square test, results a series of adjunct fir indexes, such as: normed fit index, goodness of index and adjusted goodness of fit indexes. As the value of this kind of indexes increases, the model would be better. The fit evaluation indexes suggests the proportional fitting. The last row of table 2 represents the goodness of fit test. All of this indexes suggest that the fit test and observed data. In other words, the general model and framework is significant and acceptable and indicates that the research data possess an appropriate fitting to factor structure and research theoretical foundations, which indicates a convergence among research question and structures.

Above motioned figures, show model estimating standard and significant coefficients. This model endogenous and exogenous variables are as follows, respectively: food quality, room quality, service quality, staff/crew attractiveness, facilities, entertainment, program/ places for

children and brand prestige, well-being perception, brand loyalty, customer brand identification. The right model shows significance of coefficients; the amount of 1.96 of t- test suggests the significance of coefficient less than 0.05% error level.

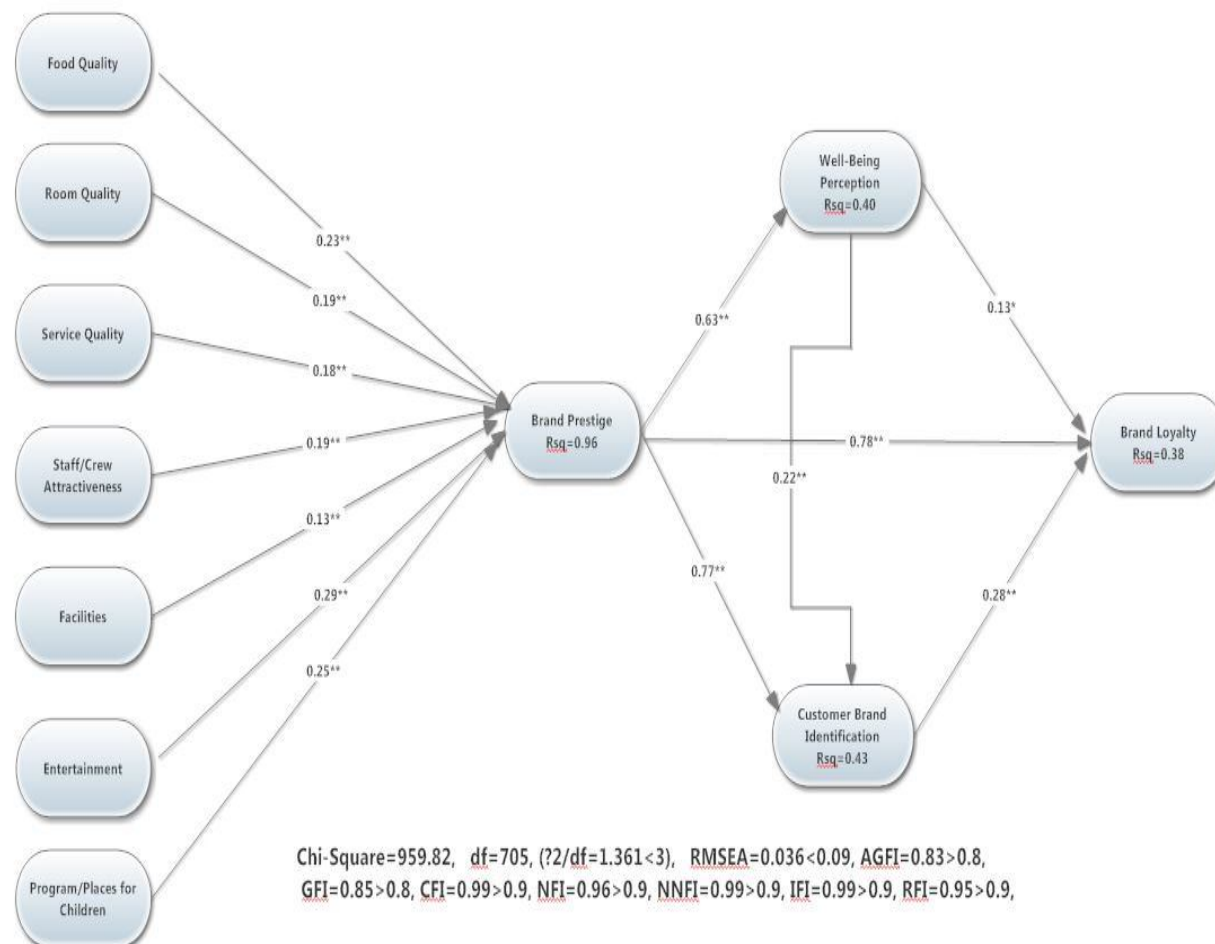


Figure 2. The Lisrel Algorithm Results

Table2

Confirmatory factor analysis: items and loadings

Construct and scale items (mean, standard deviation)	Standardized loading
Hotel experience attributes	
Service quality	
The employees of the hotel were always willing to help me.	0.892
The employees of the hotel had the knowledge to answer my questions.	0.910
The employees of the hotel had my best interests in mind.	0.884
The employees of the hotel were dependable.	0.903
Food quality	
The food served on the hotel's restaurant was fresh.	0.895
A variety of menu options was offered in the hotel's restaurants.	0.890

The food presentation on the hotel's restaurant was attractive.	0.880
The hotel's restaurant provided flexible dining hours.	0.892
<u>Room quality</u>	
The room sizes were large enough.	0.882
The rooms were very clean.	0.878
The rooms were quiet.	0.891
The beds/mattresses/pillows were comfortable.	0.901
A range of toiletries were available in the bathroom.	0.899
<u>Staff /crew attractiveness</u>	
The staff/crews of the hotel were visually attractive.	0.906
The staff/crews of the hotel were physically attractive.	0.912
The staff/crews of the hotel were handsome/pretty.	0.892
<u>Hotel facilities</u>	
The furniture on the hotel was of high quality.	0.877
Overall, the layout of the hotel made me feel comfortable.	0.869
The sport/fitness facilities and pools on the hotel were nice.	0.903
The shopping facilities on the hotel were attractive.	0.903
<u>Programs/places for children</u>	
The programs offered for children were well-organized.	0.898
The hotel provided a variety of things for children to do.	0.863
Overall, the hotel is a good place to bring children.	0.897
<u>Entertainment</u>	
I liked the shows provided on the hotel.	0.828
The comedians on the hotel were humorous.	0.888
The hotel provided great entertainment.	0.861
The hotel provided top-notch shows.	0.885
<u>Brand prestige</u>	
The hotel was very prestigious.	0.817
The hotel had high status.	0.856
The hotel was very upscale.	0.869
<u>Customer brand identification</u>	
When someone praises this hotel brand, I take it as a personal compliment to me.	0.892
I am very interested in what others think about this hotel brand.	0.880
I feel good when I see a positive report in the media about this hotel brand.	0.885
<u>Well-being perception</u>	
This hotel met my overall well-being needs	0.896
This hotel played a very important role in my social well-being.	0.885
This hotel played an important role in my travel well-being.	0.888
This hotel played an important role in enhancing my quality of life.	0.870
<u>Brand loyalty</u>	
I consider this hotel brand my first choice when deciding on hotel choosing	0.859
I would like to use this hotel brand more often.	0.896
I would like to revisit this hotel brand in the future.	0.863

Note: A total of 252 respondents evaluated each measurement item.
All factors loadings are significant at $p < .001$.

	Food Quality	Room Quality	Service Quality	Staff/Crew Attractiveness	Facilities	Entertainment	Program/Places for Children	Brand Prestige	Well-Being Perception	Customer Brand Identification	Brand Loyalty
x1.1	0.895	0.372	0.404	0.308	0.358	0.355	0.355	0.413	0.372	0.469	0.311

x1.2	0.890	0.291	0.378	0.305	0.330	0.354	0.364	0.378	0.304	0.482	0.374
x1.3	0.880	0.314	0.370	0.297	0.289	0.310	0.282	0.336	0.293	0.421	0.335
x1.4	0.892	0.286	0.401	0.282	0.308	0.324	0.353	0.364	0.336	0.420	0.349
x2.1	0.298	0.882	0.283	0.266	0.284	0.260	0.257	0.312	0.260	0.363	0.333
x2.2	0.305	0.878	0.280	0.240	0.301	0.324	0.230	0.330	0.260	0.353	0.323
x2.3	0.318	0.891	0.342	0.218	0.269	0.251	0.264	0.280	0.246	0.389	0.318
x2.4	0.315	0.901	0.272	0.214	0.264	0.273	0.255	0.279	0.281	0.349	0.338
x2.5	0.348	0.899	0.260	0.217	0.301	0.272	0.273	0.352	0.310	0.356	0.291
x3.1	0.368	0.240	0.892	0.206	0.264	0.305	0.242	0.346	0.330	0.339	0.283
x3.2	0.398	0.301	0.910	0.189	0.321	0.327	0.258	0.397	0.340	0.325	0.233
x3.3	0.383	0.287	0.884	0.194	0.337	0.370	0.267	0.317	0.374	0.355	0.304
x3.4	0.420	0.322	0.903	0.282	0.333	0.348	0.335	0.361	0.355	0.412	0.287
x4.1	0.336	0.297	0.268	0.906	0.251	0.308	0.263	0.332	0.330	0.309	0.309
x4.2	0.278	0.205	0.194	0.912	0.195	0.330	0.249	0.310	0.314	0.260	0.301
x4.3	0.292	0.195	0.191	0.892	0.193	0.294	0.220	0.286	0.324	0.242	0.283
x5.1	0.286	0.255	0.279	0.176	0.877	0.290	0.182	0.225	0.342	0.255	0.258
x5.2	0.298	0.221	0.278	0.176	0.869	0.320	0.198	0.206	0.362	0.270	0.286
x5.3	0.346	0.326	0.329	0.240	0.903	0.312	0.297	0.299	0.342	0.291	0.361
x5.4	0.347	0.312	0.338	0.232	0.903	0.325	0.280	0.297	0.339	0.327	0.337
x6.1	0.379	0.269	0.298	0.283	0.320	0.828	0.194	0.354	0.376	0.348	0.242
x6.2	0.300	0.246	0.367	0.295	0.291	0.888	0.263	0.364	0.472	0.313	0.212
x6.3	0.319	0.285	0.291	0.275	0.301	0.861	0.240	0.364	0.374	0.381	0.238
x6.4	0.317	0.279	0.340	0.334	0.304	0.885	0.256	0.405	0.434	0.353	0.284
x7.1	0.360	0.257	0.261	0.239	0.236	0.255	0.898	0.369	0.283	0.310	0.348
x7.2	0.306	0.213	0.277	0.217	0.228	0.230	0.863	0.320	0.256	0.279	0.322
x7.3	0.349	0.289	0.279	0.261	0.273	0.247	0.897	0.374	0.336	0.299	0.346
Y1. 1	0.354	0.253	0.360	0.253	0.272	0.313	0.346	0.817	0.238	0.216	0.277
Y1. 2	0.341	0.352	0.351	0.281	0.197	0.402	0.356	0.856	0.297	0.222	0.229
Y1. 3	0.376	0.288	0.303	0.338	0.284	0.376	0.319	0.869	0.228	0.275	0.279
Y2. 1	0.344	0.260	0.298	0.317	0.344	0.440	0.321	0.309	0.892	0.191	0.177
Y2. 2	0.323	0.280	0.329	0.302	0.326	0.373	0.251	0.249	0.880	0.204	0.130
Y2. 3	0.312	0.275	0.407	0.329	0.359	0.454	0.303	0.236	0.885	0.246	0.170
Y3. 1	0.447	0.392	0.351	0.284	0.287	0.366	0.310	0.291	0.240	0.896	0.311
Y3. 2	0.438	0.361	0.372	0.245	0.313	0.349	0.306	0.231	0.193	0.885	0.280
Y3. 3	0.453	0.355	0.343	0.252	0.294	0.352	0.289	0.217	0.226	0.888	0.302
Y3. 4	0.452	0.326	0.343	0.283	0.256	0.356	0.278	0.251	0.189	0.870	0.269
Y4.	0.261	0.277	0.286	0.241	0.310	0.215	0.288	0.224	0.127	0.250	0.859

1											
Y4. 2	0.430	0.336	0.267	0.315	0.327	0.260	0.357	0.346	0.169	0.327	0.896
Y4. 3	0.283	0.320	0.251	0.300	0.291	0.262	0.349	0.212	0.173	0.272	0.863

Table3: Cross Loading (Item-to-construct correlation vs. correlations with other constructs)

Table 4: Discriminant Validity, Convergent Validity (Reliability and inter-construct correlations for reflective scales)

,Construct	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1.Food Quality	0.889										
2.Room Quality	0.357	0.890									
3.Service Quality	0.437	0.321	0.897								
4.Staff/Crew Attractiveness	0.335	0.260	0.243	0.903							
5.Facilities	0.363	0.321	0.349	0.237	0.888						
6.Entertainment	0.379	0.311	0.375	0.344	0.351	0.866					
7.Program/Places for Children	0.383	0.287	0.307	0.271	0.278	0.276	0.886				
8.Brand Prestige	0.421	0.352	0.398	0.344	0.296	0.430	0.401	0.848			
9.Well-Being Perception	0.369	0.306	0.388	0.357	0.388	0.479	0.331	0.300	0.886		
10.Customer Brand Identification	0.506	0.406	0.397	0.301	0.325	0.402	0.334	0.281	0.241	0.885	
11.Brand Loyalty	0.384	0.359	0.306	0.330	0.355	0.283	0.383	0.308	0.181	0.329	0.873
Average Variance Extracted	0.791	0.792	0.806	0.816	0.789	0.750	0.785	0.718	0.785	0.783	0.762
Composite Reliability	0.938	0.950	0.943	0.930	0.937	0.923	0.916	0.884	0.916	0.935	0.906
R Square	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.354	0.090	0.106	0.161
Cronbach's Alpha	0.912	0.935	0.920	0.888	0.912	0.889	0.863	0.804	0.863	0.908	0.846
Mean	4.170	4.137	4.472	4.255	4.449	4.423	4.379	4.976	4.470	4.498	4.716
Chi-Square=959.82, df=705, ($\chi^2/df=1.361<3$), RMSEA=0.036<0.09, AGFI=0.83>0.8, GFI=0.85>0.8, CFI=0.99>0.9, NFI=0.96>0.9, NNFI=0.99>0.9, IFI=0.99>0.9, RFI=0.95>0.9,											

Note: Diagonals represent the square root of the AVE while the off-diagonals represent the correlations

Table 5: Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Beta	t-value	R ²	Sign	Results
Food Quality -> Brand Prestige	0.23	3.96	0.96	+	Supported
Room Quality -> Brand Prestige	0.19	3.83		+	Supported
Service Quality -> Brand Prestige	0.18	3.53		+	Supported
Staff/Crew Attractiveness -> Brand Prestige	0.19	3.74		+	Supported
Facilities -> Brand Prestige	0.13	2.6		+	Supported
Entertainment -> Brand Prestige	0.29	5.04		+	Supported
Program/Places for Children -> Brand Prestige	0.25	4.61		+	Supported
Brand Prestige -> Well-Being Perception	0.63	7.33	0.40	+	Supported
Brand Prestige -> Customer Brand Identification	0.77	6.77	0.43	+	Supported
Well-Being Perception -> Customer Brand Identification	0.22	2.68		+	Supported
Brand Prestige -> Brand Loyalty	0.78	5.31	0.38	+	Supported
Well-Being Perception -> Brand Loyalty	0.13	2.02		+	Supported
Customer Brand Identification -> Brand Loyalty	0.28	2.91		+	Supported

|t|>1.96 Significant at P<0.05, |t|>2.58 Significant at P<0.01,

Discussion and conclusion:

The purpose of this study was to examine the antecedents and consequences of brand prestige in the hotel industry. A review of the existing literature suggested seven key determinants of hotel brand prestige: (1) food quality, (2) service quality, (3) staff/crew attractiveness, (4) entertainment, (5) hotel facilities, (6) room quality, (7) programs/places for children. In addition, based on the theoretical background, three consequences of hotel brand prestige were derived: (1) well-being perception, (2) customer brand identification, and (3) brand loyalty. Integrating the proposed theoretical relationships, a conceptual model was created and tested using empirical data collected from 252 hotel passengers. The results of data analysis provide key theoretical and managerial implications. Data analysis indicates that the perceived food quality has a positive impact on hotel brand prestige ($\beta=0.23$, $t=3.96$, $p < .05$). This study extends the existing body of knowledge by empirically finding the effect of food quality on brand prestige in the hotel industry. Specifically, hotel passengers feel that a travel is very prestigious when they perceive a high level of food quality.

This result has many implications for hotel marketers. First, as shown in the CFA results (see Table 4), food freshness has the highest factor loading. In other words, the respondents considered food freshness as the most important factor when evaluating food quality during their travel. Since it can be difficult to procure fresh ingredients, passengers are particularly concerned with this issue, and it is therefore critical for hoteliers to obtain fresh ingredients. Furthermore, hotel managers should emphasize to passengers that fresh ingredients are supplied daily. It is also critical to obtain an appropriate quantity of fresh ingredients with regard to the number of passengers. In addition, it is important to carefully manage food storage facilities to maintain freshness. Second, as shown in Table 3, flexible dining hours are important to many passengers, since they want to relax and enjoy their vacations without worrying about running out of time to make scheduled meal times. Therefore, if a hotel's restaurants provide extended operating hours, passengers can enjoy meals at any time and are more likely to feel that their hotel is prestigious. Third, the variety of menu options is also an important factor. It is recommended that a variety of restaurant choices be offered on a hotel restaurant. In addition, it is beneficial to change menu items based on menu engineering (Kasavana & Smith, 1982) or rotations of seasonal menu items (Kim & Ok, 2010) so that passengers can have many menu options to choose from. Finally, hotel passengers feel that food presentation is an important factor. That is, food presentation has been deemed an important aspect of food quality and it is therefore necessary to achieve attractive food presentation in hotel, perhaps by hiring a professional food stylist with impressive food decoration skills (Hwang & Hyun, 2012). Data analysis indicated that the perceived service quality also positively affects hotel brand prestige ($\beta=0.18$, $t=3.53$, $p < .05$). For many years, service quality has been considered the most important factor in the success of a service business (e.g. Brady & Cronin, 2001; Jain & Gupta, 2004; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). In particular, recent studies have found that service quality is a key factor affecting brand image and thus enhancing long-term marketing effectiveness (e.g. Castellanos-Verdugo, Oviedo-Garcia, Roldan, & Veerranpermal, 2009; Chen, Shi, & Dong, 2008; Kim & Cha, 2002). As a first attempt to test the effect of service quality on brand prestige in the hotel industry, this research replicated and further expanded the existing literature by empirically finding a positive relationship between service quality and brand prestige in the hotel industry. In other words, when passengers receive a high level of service quality during their residence in a hotel, they are

more likely to feel that the travel has high status. Hotel managers therefore should place great emphasis on improving employee service quality. As shown in Table 3, an employee's knowledge related to his/her job is the most important factor in the evaluation of service quality during residence in the hotel. A number of previous studies have also emphasized the role of employee knowledge in affecting customer satisfaction (e.g. Andaleeb & Anwar, 1996; Crosby, Evans, & Cowles, 1990; Kim, Jeon, & Hyun, 2011). Therefore, all hotel employees should be required to undergo regular training, and annual employee performance evaluations should be undertaken in order to assess how well employees understand their roles and duties. More importantly, poorly trained employees should be excluded from receiving incentive pay. In addition, conducting passenger surveys is recommended in order to motivate employees to provide excellent service, to enhance overall service quality, and to give managers valuable feedback on the type of service that passengers expect in the hotel. It was revealed that staff/crew attractiveness has a positive influence on hotel brand prestige ($\beta = 0.19$, $t = 3.74$, $p < .05$). It has been widely believed that employee attractiveness plays an important role in inducing customers' positive emotional responses (Luoh & Tsaur, 2009; Pettinger, 2004). This study replicated and further extended the existing theory by finding a significant relationship between staff/crew attractiveness and hotel brand prestige. It can be interpreted that physically attractive employees play an important role in the formation of a prestigious hotel brand image. This finding provides key practical implications for hotel managers. First, when recruiting/hiring employees, it is necessary to consider not only traditional criteria (e.g. education, language skills, personality, and enthusiasm) but also appearance. In-person interviews should be conducted and sufficient emphasis should be placed on candidates' physical attractiveness. In addition, hotel managers must manage/upgrade employees' appearance and dress. It may be beneficial to provide regular gym time for all front-line employees to stay fit. More importantly, it is critical to continually check that employees wear ironed uniforms before starting shifts, and it is highly recommended to invest expenditure on uniform design. The data analysis results revealed a positive relationship between entertainment and hotel brand prestige ($\beta = 0.29$, $t = 5.04$, $p < .05$). When passengers go to a hotel and reside there, they expect fantastic entertainment programs which leave unforgettable memories. Expanding on hotel passengers' expectations about entertainment, this research found the effect of entertainment on hotel brand prestige: when the passengers experienced topnotch shows, they felt that the hotel was very prestigious. Therefore, hoteliers should develop an appealing variety of high-quality entertainment programs. More specifically, it is necessary to develop differentiated entertainment programs. In addition, it can be beneficial to organize exciting events such as a movie premiere or fashion show attended by famous celebrities (e.g. movie stars and supermodels), leaving passengers with unforgettable memories of their vacations. Through experiencing such high quality entertainment/events, passengers are more likely to have a prestigious impression of a hotel. The study results revealed that hotel facilities had the positive impact on hotel brand prestige ($\beta = 0.13$, $t = 2.06$, $p < .05$). This study replicated and further extended the existing argument by empirically testing the relationship between hotel facilities and brand prestige in the hotel industry. It was found that, when hotel passengers perceive high-quality facilities, they feel that the hotel is prestigious. Hotel managers should therefore invest marketing expenditures into hotel facilities. For example, as shown in Table 3, sports/fitness facilities should be stocked with the newest equipment and should provide enjoyable/helpful exercise and personal training programs. Other important facilities in hotels are

pool and water entertainments (water games, water parks). It is also necessary to have well-designed, tax-free shopping malls that offer prestigious brands. Data analysis indicates that satisfactory programs/places for children significantly enhance hotel brand prestige ($\beta=0.25$, $t=4.61$, $p<.05$). Effective and attractive amenities for children allow adults to enjoy travel without disturbances. For this reason, travelers highly consider amenities for children when selecting a hotel. Expanding the existing argument, this study found the effect of children's programs/places on hotel brand prestige. That is, when a hotel provides a variety of appealing programs and attractive places for children, adult passengers can enjoy leisure time without interruptions and thus feel high levels of brand prestige. Hoteliers should place great emphasis on providing excellent quality care and programs for children and adolescents. For instance, creating comfortable environments, such as youth clubs and indoor theme parks, where children can easily make friends, is a beneficial strategy. In particular, hotel managers should take age ranges into consideration since children of different age groups have different interests. In addition, since parents want to create good memories with their children during a travel, it is recommended to develop programs in which parents can join in with their children. Finally, many parents dine in restaurants with their, so restaurant managers should offer separate menus designed specifically for children. When hotels offer such concessions and amenities to keep children happy and occupied, adult passengers can feel that hotel is a good place to bring children, which enhances hotel brand prestige. The results of the study showed that the perceived room quality positively affects hotel brand prestige ($\beta=0.19$, $t=3.83$, $p < .05$). Since passengers spend relatively large amounts of time in their rooms for sleeping and relaxing, room quality is a key factor that affects the overall hotel experience (Qu & Ping, 1999; Teye & Leclerc, 1998). This study replicated and further extended the existing literature by finding a significant relationship between room quality and brand prestige in the hotel industry. That is, when passengers perceive a high level of room quality, they feel that hotel is prestigious. This finding provides key practical implications for hoteliers. First, as shown from the CFA results (Table 2), comfortable beds/mattresses/pillows possess the highest factor loading in room quality. Passengers can become fatigued on their travel, so comfortable sleeping accommodations are important. Therefore, hoteliers should invest expenditure in order to equip rooms with high-quality beds, mattresses, and pillows. Second, passengers also reported the importance of quietness in a room. Passengers want relaxing vacations and therefore do not want any disturbances when in their rooms. Hoteliers should place emphasis on soundproofing rooms during the hotel design process. In addition, as shown in Table 2, rooms size is an important factor in the evaluation of room quality. Finally, the housekeeping department plays an important role in ensuring the highest standards of cleanliness and in preparing a range of toiletries in bathrooms. Thus, effective training programs for housekeeping employees should be developed and executed. Another key contribution of this research is clarifying the role of brand prestige in the hotel industry. The results of the study showed that brand prestige is a key predictor of well-being perception ($\beta=0.63$, $t=7.33$, $p < .5$). In other words, when travelers feel that a hotel is prestigious, they experience enhanced quality of life. Many hotel passengers take hotel in order to express their social status (Douglas & Douglas, 1999). When such social needs are satisfied, people feel quality of life enhancement (Steenkamp et al., 2003; Vigneron & Johnson, 1999). This study empirically verified the theory using data collected from the hotel industry. The findings also showed the positive relationship between hotel brand prestige and customer brand

identification (beta= 0.77, $t=6.75$, $p < .05$). It can be interpreted that, when a hotel has high status, passengers feel that the hotel's brand image is congruent with their self-image. Hotel passengers are typically concerned about self-image and place great importance on what other people think of them. Therefore, they seek to connect their self-image to the prestigious image of the hotel brand. Finally, the results of the study showed that hotel brand prestige positively affects brand loyalty (beta=0.78, $t=5.31$, $p < .05$). When a hotel is perceived as upscale, passengers are more likely to choose this hotel brand more often. These findings have practical implications, since data analysis indicates that brand prestige is a critical factor in the success of a hotel. Thus, it is important to develop a prestigious brand image via effective advertising strategies. Well-being perception have been enhanced by choosing a hotel with a prestigious brand. Given that a proper understanding of brand prestige is critical to achieving hotel marketing competency and that brand prestige is directly related to hotel passengers' loyalty, the model developed in this study could help hotel managers to maximize profits by retaining existing hotel passengers and attracting potential passengers. The results of the study verified that well-being perception positively affects brand loyalty (beta=0.13, $t=2.02$, $p < .05$). In addition, the results of the study showed that customer brand identification positively affects brand loyalty (beta=0.28, $t=2.91$, $p < .05$). Finally, the results of the study showed that Well-being perception positively affects customer brand identification (beta=0.22, $t=2.68$, $p < .05$).

Results suggest that while the customer may identify with a particular hotel brand, hotel loyalty still depends on the customer's positive evaluation of factors relating to brand prestige, well-being perception, and customer brand identification. However, as consumers' identification with a hotel brand affects their evaluation of these factors, hoteliers should leverage customers' brand identification to engender positive consumer evaluation of the hotel brand and, ultimately, increase brand loyalty. This study presented a theoretical model to empirically validate roles of brand prestige, well-being perception and customer brand identification on brand loyalty using data collected from hotel customers in Iran. This study revealed that hotel experience attributes (food quality, room quality, service quality, entertainment, facilities, staff/crew attractiveness and program/place for children) positively influence brand prestige. Finally, brand prestige directly and indirectly through well-being perception and customer brand identification affected brand loyalty.

Major theoretical contributions:

This study made a major theoretical contributions to the existing body of knowledge. Although previous studies have examined the importance of brand prestige in the retail context, no previous study has examined tourists' prestige-seeking behavior and their loyalty to a brand in the travel market. This is the first approach to apply the concept of brand prestige in the luxury travel market. According to Bacharach (1989), it is contributable and meaningful to apply an existing theoretical concept to other boundaries. By doing so, the concept can have greater validity and reliability by being evaluated/applied in a wider boundary. In this regard, this study replicated and further expanded the existing literature by empirically testing the role of brand prestige in forming of brand loyalty in the hotel industry. This study adopted symbolic meanings of prestige (used terms 'prestigious,' 'high status,' and 'very upscale') to measure brand prestige. The findings in the study related to the brand prestige imply that brand prestige should not be understood solely in terms of economic/financial superiority. Therefore, hospitality entities that serve customer on regular basis should not ignore the importance of building brand prestige to be

competitive and to ensure positive brand-related outcomes. Next, was examined impact of brand prestige directly and indirectly on brand loyalty.

Study limitations and future research:

This study is not free from limitations possibly caused by demographic characteristics of respondents, the data collection method, and the nature of service. Although the authors strongly believe that the study provides some interesting theoretical and empirical findings, some limitations should be paid attention to throughout this research as follows:

Firstly, when a hotel is selected probably many factors are at play. This study is limited to four factors: brand prestige and its antecedents, customer brand identification, customer well-being perception and brand loyalty.

These limitations may lead to miss out some other important factors that may efficiently explain passenger electing likelihood. In addition, the roles of satisfaction, trust and benefits should also be explored in the next study. Secondly, the sample of this study was focused on hotel passengers in Iran and there are some cultural differences between Iranians and people of other nations. Therefore, data used in this paper could not represent consumers' perception as a whole in all countries and it may cause some unexpected biases. Future research should expand beyond Iran to verify the results in other countries.

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