



Serial Effects of Brand Image and Perceived Quality on Consumer Engagement and Online Purchase Intentions of Premium Hotels in China

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ABSTRACT

Tourists' purchase behaviours and habits have changed dramatically. They increasingly rely on the internet to search for information, identify, compare, and purchase tourist products or services through various online channels. The research aims to examine the effects of the serial mediation of perceived quality and consumer engagement on the relationship between brand image and online purchase intention. The formulation of the research model is done based on theory-planned behaviour. A total of 459 online survey forms were successfully collected and analyzed. Data analysis was performed using SmartPLS 3 in the research to test the hypotheses. The study finds a significant positive indirect relationship between brand image and online purchase intention, mediated by perceived quality and consumer engagement. This study has some limitations and suggestions to give future researchers and the online hotel business a better idea of how to improve premium hotel online booking in China.

Keywords: Premium hotel, brand image, consumer engagement, online purchase intention.

Introduction

The traditional hotel business is currently confronted with a number of very tough challenges as a direct result of the proliferation of new forms of Internet-based lodging. Because of the change, it is necessary to have an understanding of the primary factors that influence the decisions that travellers make regarding their online hotel bookings. According to the data for online hotel bookings made in China during the first quarter of 2019, OTA transactions accounted for 58.3% and ranked first, while bookings made through the hotel's official website or app accounted for 18.6%. (BigData Research, 2019). The fact that many hotels are placing an emphasis on expanding their market share through partnerships with online travel agencies (OTAs) demonstrates the significance of having such partnerships for hotels in order to leverage their sales (Laise et al., 2019).



On the other hand, OTAs came to dominate the online hotel market, which led to a variety of difficulties. For example, decreasing hotel profitability by 15–25% due to increasing commissions by the same amount (Liu, 2019). Second, it is detrimental to the hotel's membership system and decreases the amount of money spent by hotel loyalty members (Analysys, 2020). The rise of online travel agencies (OTAs) has presented hotels with a competitive challenge while also offering potential benefits (Xue et al., 2020). The nature of this relationship right now can be described as both cooperative and competitive. Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) have started investing in and constructing hotels in order to maintain control over the resources they offer, which presents a significant challenge for the hotel industry. Since 2016, online travel agencies have taken a greater number of steps to invest in hotels, establish hotel groups, and form joint ventures with hotel groups. These steps include: investing in hotels; establishing hotel groups; and forming joint ventures with hotel groups (LI, 2021). If they continue to develop in this manner, they will pose a significant threat to other hotels due to the low costs of their online marketing, improved integration and cooperation, and internal technology systems. If they continue to develop in this manner, they will continue to pose a threat.

Hotels need to maximise the potential of the online official channel and fight for the initiative in order to resolve the problems that have been outlined above (Teng et al., 2020). In order to make official bookings more competitive, it is essential to investigate OHR online booking behaviour, particularly the intention to make a purchase online.

Literature Review

Theoretical Underpinnings

This study derives its theoretical foundation from the theory of planned behaviour (TPB). Attitudes toward a behaviour are the favourable or unfavourable feelings a person has toward a behaviour based on their beliefs. Alam and Khan (2019), Carten et al. (2017), Kato and Tsuda (2018), and Lien et al. (2015) discovered that brand image and perceived quality can be used to measure Chinese consumers' attitude toward online hotel booking by employing the Theory of Planned Behavior. Perceived quality is how a product is evaluated or perceived from the consumer's perspective. Brand image is a cognitive process that can create a powerful reflection in the minds of consumers in terms of attitude, feelings, comprehension, and expectations (Kim et al., 2018). Significant incremental contribution of consumers' brand image beliefs to brand purchase intention (Plumeyer et al., 2019). A person's perception of how easy or difficult it is to perform a behaviour is referred to as perceived behavioural control. According to the Theory of Planned Behavior, a person's intention and behaviour can be predicted based on his or her perception of behavioural control over performing the targeted task (Ajzen, 1991). This investigation focuses on behavioural control. Previous research has uncovered differing perspectives. Some studies support the relationship between engaging behaviour and the intent to make a purchase online, while others argue that the correlation is insignificant (Blasco-Arcas et al., 2014, 2016; Prentice et al., 2019; Ji Wu et al., 2018; Yoong & Lian, 2019). This study therefore

utilises the Theory of Planned Behavior to examine China's online purchase intention. This study investigates the relationship between brand image, perceived quality, and consumer engagement and the likelihood that a person will book a hotel online.

Brand image

Studies of consumer purchasing behaviour frequently include brand image as one of their primary research objectives. This is due to the fact that consumers look for goods or services for reasons other than their inherent qualities and practical applications (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990). Furthermore, industry managers and marketers place a high value on brand image because it is a significant contributor to the generation of increased value and benefit (Wang and Tsai, 2014). As a result of an increased comprehension of the idea, Keller et al. (2011) proposed an expanded definition of brand image. They point out that the associations that consumers have with a brand are what ultimately determine its image in the market. Consumers at the basic level evaluate brand image in terms of specific performance, image attributes, and benefits. Consumers at the advanced level evaluate brand image in terms of overall judgments, attitudes, and emotions. It is important and advantageous for industry managers to differentiate between the two different levels of consumers. To put it another way, the overall feelings and connections that consumers have with a brand are based on how they perceive the brand's particular qualities and benefits, which demonstrates a strong relationship between basic and higher-level consumers (Melisa, 2018; Keller et al., 2011).

Online Purchase Intention

The term "intention" refers to the particular actions that a person has planned for themselves in the future (Ajzen & Driver, 1991). When an individual's willingness to behave is higher, the likelihood that they will behave positively is also higher (Alamoudi, 2016). The psychological factor known as purchase intention is a factor that influences the connection between a consumer's attitude and their actual purchasing behaviour (Miniard et al., 1983). In addition, Kim and Ko (2012) state that purchase intention is a variable that is related to consumer preferences and that can be used to measure the appeal of a brand to consumers. This information can be gleaned from the fact that purchase intention is related to consumer preferences. It is possible to view a consumer's intention to make a purchase as a component of their perception of a particular brand or product (Choon Ling et al., 2010). It is a term that describes the way in which a consumer intends to make their purchase. According to the findings of a number of studies that investigated consumers' intentions to make hotel reservations online, the factors that are most influential on purchase intention are information quality, website quality, perceived price, brand, and consumer trust (Bai et al., 2008; Chen & Chang, 2012; Chiang & Jang, 2006; J. Kim et al., 2009; Lien et al., 2015; J. Wong & Law, 2005; L. Y. Wu et al., 2014). According to research conducted by Lien et al. (2015), the purchase intention of a consumer is a good indicator of the likelihood that they will make a reservation for a room using an online website.

Perceived Quality

The level of quality of a good or service is one of the most important aspects that plays a role in the purchasing decisions of consumers. Businesses are working hard to provide higher-quality goods in more aesthetically pleasing environments in order to remain competitive in the cutthroat market (Soriano et al., 2002). The product's value meets and exceeds the expectations of the target market, which increases the likelihood that the consumer will be satisfied and make additional purchases (Shaharudin et al., 2011). Few researchers were of the opinion that goods or services ought to be distinctive and adaptable to the shifting requirements, lifestyles, and preferences of consumers (Badrudin et al., 2012; Wong, 2016).

Consumer engagement

Consumer engagement has been a prevalent topic of discussion in marketing research for some time. Consumer engagement is the psychological mechanism that is responsible for the generation of consumer loyalty (Bowden 2009). According to Van Doorn et al. (2010), the term "consumer engagement" refers to particular categories or patterns of activities that are considered to be focal engagements. They suggest that engagement results from the presence of motivational drivers and can be defined as consumer behaviour that is centred on a brand or company beyond the point of purchase. Both Jaakkola and Alexander (2014) and Pham and Avnet (2009) defined consumer engagement in their respective studies as various types or patterns of consumer behaviour.

Consumers engage in a series of actions that extend beyond purchasing behaviour and strengthen their relationship with a product, company, or brand (Gummerus et al., 2012). In addition, it is anticipated that engaged consumers will have a stronger preference for premium products and a lower price sensitivity than their non-engaged counterparts, which will result in greater profitability for the business (Rishika et al., 2013). Traditional marketing constructs such as price and quality are poor predictors of loyalty-related outcomes beyond the point of purchase. This is because traditional marketing constructs are unable to capture the depth of relationships that consumers form with the products that they purchase. However, consumer engagement is an excellent predictor of loyalty-related outcomes beyond the point of purchase (Bowden, 2009; Hollebeek, 2011). As a result, it is hoped that consumer engagement will contribute to the fundamental principle of relationship marketing, which is to encourage repeat business, consumer retention, and consumer loyalty (Verhoef et al., 2010). In-depth research conducted by Bowden (2009) looked into the question of whether or not engagement is helpful for understanding the behaviour or results of consumers in terms of loyalty-related outcomes.

The serial mediation model served as the basis for the conceptual framework that was developed for this study. In this investigation, the independent variable is a company's brand image, and the dependent variable is consumers' intention to make online purchases. The proposed intervening variables are a consumer's level of engagement and their

perception of the quality of the product or service. A graphical representation that helps with comprehension is shown in Figure 1.

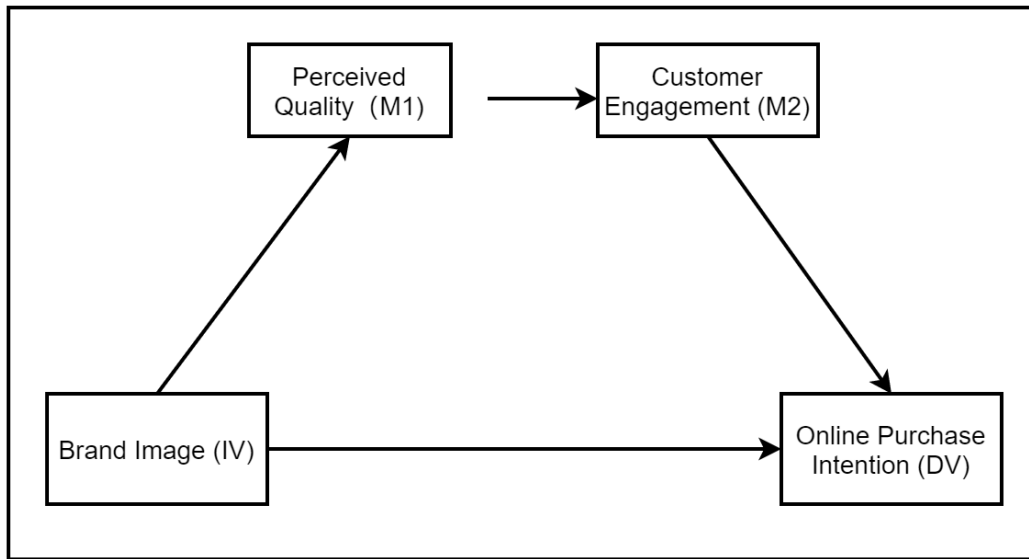


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

To examine the proposed model, the following hypotheses have been formulated:

H1. Brand image has a significant positive effect on online purchase intent.

H2: Perceived quality and consumer engagement have a serial mediating effect on brand image and online purchase intention.

Research Methodology

A cross-sectional design was used to conduct of this study by way of the administration of questionnaires in China. Throughout the entirety of the research, a questionnaire consisting of a closed-ended online survey with a 7-point scale was utilised. The data were subsequently analysed using the software SmartPLS 3.0. In terms of the size of the sample, Kwon (2018) suggests that a minimum of 300 samples is sufficient for quantitative research. According to Bukhari (2014), the ideal range for the size of the sample should be somewhere between 150 and 400, and this recommendation is based on the number of variables included in the framework. If the model contains more than six different variables, a larger sample size should be considered, and the number of participants could be increased to 500 if necessary. Because the conceptual framework of this investigation includes four variables, a total of 459 responses to an online survey were gathered and analysed.

Results

Participants' Demographic Profile

The study questionnaire included a few demographic inquiries to examine the respondent profile. Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics of the project managers who completed the questionnaire.

Table 1
Participant Demographic Profile

Measure		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	211	46%
	Female	248	54%
Age	Under 18	11	2.4%
	18-25	79	17.2%
	26-35	166	36.2%
	36-45	180	39.2%
	46-55	23	5.0%
	56-65	0	0%
	Above 65	0	0%
Education	Under High School	8	1.7%
	High School	38	8.3%
	College	121	26.4%
	Bachelor	224	48.8%
	Master	49	10.7%
	Doctor	19	4.1%
Occupation	Student	72	15.7%
	Government /Government-affiliated institutions staff	135	29.4%
	Private sector staff	109	23.7%
	Businessman/ Businesswoman	64	13.9%
	Freelancer	27	5.9%
	Retired	32	7.0%
	Unemployed	20	4.4%
Income	Under 3,000 RMB	48	10.5%
	3,000-5,000	96	20.9%
	5,000-7,000	156	34%
	7,000-9,000	81	17.6%
	Above 9,000 RMB	72	13.5%
	Dependent on others	16	3.5%
Experience with the internet	Less than 1 year	0	0.0%
	1-3 years	54	11.8%

	3-6 years	245	53.4%
	More than 6 Years	160	34.9%
Daily internet usage	Less than 1 hour	14	3.1%
	1-2 hours	68	14.8%
	2-3 hours	199	43.4%
	More than 3 hours	178	38.8%
Familiarity with the internet	Very Poor	17	3.7%
	Poor	43	9.4%
	Moderate	130	28.3%
	Good	146	31.8%
	Very Good	123	26.8%
IT proficiency	Very Poor	13	2.8%
	Poor	28	6.1%
	Moderate	91	19.8%
	Good	146	31.8%
	Very Good	179	39.0%
Online hotel booking experience in last 3 years.	Never	55	12.0%
	1-3 times	142	30.9%
	4 -6 times	176	38.3%
	7 times and above	86	18.7%
Preferred booking channel	Online Travel Agency	152	33.1%
	Group Buying	173	37.7%
	Non-standard hotel	71	15.5%
	Others	63	13.7%
Experience with hotel official channel	Yes	187	40.7%
	No	272	59.3%
Preferred payment method	Credit Card	89	19.4%
	Debit Card	106	23.1%
	Third party payment platforms	264	57.5%
	Other	0	0.0%

As seen, female respondents (54%) outnumber male respondents (46%). 75.4% of respondents were between the ages of 26 and 45. The majority of respondents were educated; specifically, 63.6% of respondents held a bachelor's degree or higher. The majority of the sample respondents were either government or government-affiliated institution employees (29.4%) or private sector employees (23.7%). A significant proportion of the sample's respondents (15.7%) were students. There were 13.9% business owners and 7.0% retirees. Approximately 34% of respondents had a personal income of 5,000–7,000

RMB per month after taxes, followed by 3,000–5,000 RMB (20.9%), 700,000–9,000 RMB (17.6%), 3,000 RMB (10.5%), > 9,000 RMB (13.5%), and dependent on others (3.5%).

In addition, among the 459 respondents, each claimed to have more than a year of Internet experience. 82.2% of them spend more than 2 hours per day on the Internet. About ninety percent of the participants rated their Internet and IT proficiency as moderate to excellent. The majority of participants (88%) had at least one online hotel booking experience. In terms of frequent hotel booking channels, 37.7% of respondents indicated group purchasing, followed by online travel agencies (33.1%), non-standard hotels (15.5%), and other channels (13.7%). Table 1 reveals that 40.7% of respondents had never reserved a hotel room through the hotel's official website. In terms of payment methods, the majority of respondents (57.5%) preferred third-party payment platforms, followed by debit cards (23.1%) and credit cards (19%).

Measurement model assessment

Table 2

Reliability and Validity

Constructs	Items	Loadings	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Brand Image	BI1	0.783	0.920	0.933	0.559
	BI2	0.787			
	BI3	0.74			
	BI4	0.72			
	BI5	0.675			
	BI6	0.574			
	BI7	0.811			
	BI8	0.76			
	BI9	0.776			
	BI10	0.754			
	BI11	0.812			
Perceived Quality	PQ1	0.775	0.932	0.941	0.554
	PQ2	0.763			
	PQ3	0.804			
	PQ4	0.766			
	PQ5	0.712			
	PQ6	0.547			
	PQ7	0.821			
	PQ8	0.776			



	PQ9	0.675			
	PQ10	0.741			
	PQ11	0.691			
	PQ12	0.785			
	PQ13	0.774			
Consumer Engagement	CE1	0.808	0.928	0.938	0.582
	CE2	0.78			
	CE3	0.74			
	CE4	0.713			
	CE5	0.747			
	CE6	0.633			
	CE7	0.808			
	CE8	0.781			
	CE9	0.776			
	CE10	0.761			
	CE11	0.822			
Online Purchase Intention	OPI1	0.81	0.817	0.872	0.577
	OPI2	0.766			
	OPI3	0.727			
	OPI4	0.741			
	OPI5	0.753			

Cronbach's alpha values for each of the constructs in Table 2 were greater than 0.8, indicating the scales' high reliability (Garson, 2016; Leguina, 2015; Tabri & Elliott, 2012). Factor loadings of at least 0.70 are regarded as exceedingly satisfactory. A loading value above 0.5 is considered acceptable, whereas a loading value below 0.5 should be eliminated (Chin, 1998). All indicator loading values were within the permissible range of 0.5 to 1.0. All of the constructs had higher AVE values, indicating that their indicators could account for more than fifty percent of their variance.

Table 3
Fornell-Larcker Validity Test Results

	BI	CE	OPI	PQ
BI	0.75			
CE	0.57	0.76		
OPI	0.52	0.47	0.76	
PQ	0.56	0.60	0.51	0.74

Fornell-Larcker confirmed discriminant validity when the square root of the average variance extracted value (AVE) of each construct is greater than its highest correlation values with other constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 3 presents correlation results based on the Fornell-Larcker criterion, with the square root values of each construct's (AVE) arranged diagonally (in bold) and the values of correlations between constructs tabulated off-diagonal. On the basis of these estimates, discriminant validity was established for each construct.

Structural model assessment

Table 4
 Summary of Hypotheses Testing

No	Relationships	Path Coefficient	T-Statistic	P values	Results
H1	BI -> OPI	0.371	7.098	0.000	Supported
H2	BI -> PQ -> CE -> OPI	0.257	3.701	0.000	Supported

This study is aimed at examining the serial mediation effects of perceived quality and consumer engagement in the relationship between brand image and online purchase intention. Table 4 demonstrates that brand image has statistically significant effects on online purchase intentions of consumers. The study also reveals a significant indirect positive relationship between brand image and online purchase intention. This association is sequentially mediated by perceived quality and consumer engagement. Figure 2 depicts the t-statistics, an alternate method for deciding whether to accept or reject the hypothesis.

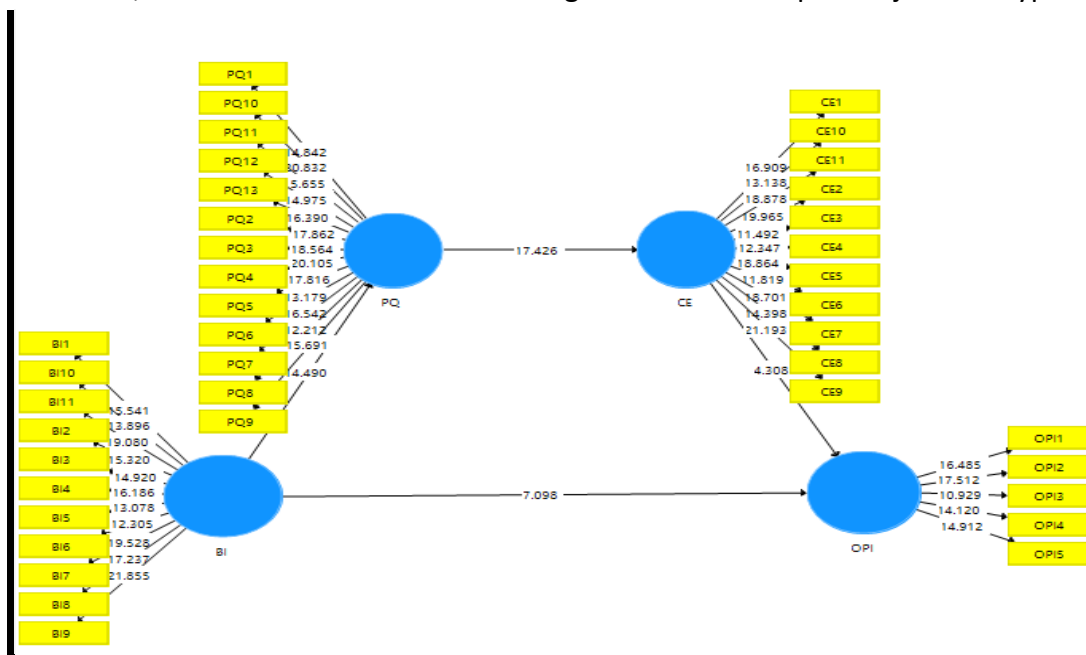


Figure 2. Bootstrapping results

Discussion

This study's objective is to empirically examine the relationship between brand image and consumers' online purchase intention of premium hotels in China via the mediation of perceived quality and consumer engagement. To establish the relationship between the variables of the study, we emphasised "the theory of planned behaviour." Two research hypotheses were formulated for the study. We conducted a cross-sectional study and collected data from online users of premium hotels in China in order to evaluate the proposed theoretical model. After validating the measurement model, the author evaluated the structural model and calculated the model's "path coefficients," "coefficients of determination," and "effect size." All hypotheses are empirically supported by the research.

A significant number of studies have demonstrated the significance of online hotel purchases (Huang et al., 2017; Law & Wong, 2010; Xue et al., 2020). Despite this, relatively few studies (Adukaite et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2020) investigate direct online channel booking. All of the direct effects in this study have significant positive associations. This study reveals a positive relationship between "brand image and online purchase intention, therefore supporting H1. In addition, the research identifies significant positive serial mediation effects of "perceived quality and consumer engagement in the relationship between brand image and online purchase intention, therefore supporting H2. This study's findings are consistent with previous research regarding the relationship between brand image and online purchase intent. The findings of this study support what is already known about the significance of the construct.

Limitation and Recommendation, and Conclusion

This study has significant managerial and theoretical implications, which should be examined in light of several limitations. First, the study employs a cross-sectional research design, which means that data were collected at a single time point. However, it is questionable to generalise the findings of a single-time-period study when the effect of the relationship on consumer behaviour, i.e. their intentions, must be determined. Although this study employs a cross-sectional research design, the selection of sample, sample size, and sampling and analytical techniques employed in this study justify the use of a cross-sectional design. To examine the proposed theoretical model, future studies may employ a longitudinal research design. Second, the study is conducted in a Chinese context with the objective of determining the influence of brand image on consumer engagement and online purchase intentions of Chinese tourists staying in premium hotels. Future research should evaluate the proposed theoretical model in various cultural contexts. Thirdly, the research investigates the online purchase intentions of Chinese tourists in the premium hotel industry in relation to brand image and consumer engagement. However, future research should investigate the relationship between brand image and online purchase intent by examining other variables that serve as mediators.

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