Reexamination of attendee-based brand equity

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A B S T R A C T

The significance of brand concept has been increasingly recognized in the MICE industry due to its ability to create a compelling competitive edge. Complementing the major limitation of a study on attendee-based brand equity [Lee, J. S., & Back, K. J. (2008). Attendee-based brand equity. *Tourism Management, 29*(2), 331–344], this study reexamines attendee-based brand equity by additionally sampling regional CHRIE conferences (RCs) and comparing the data with I-CHRIE's annual conference (IC) in the context of our theoretical model. This research not only increases the theoretical validity of the previous model of attendee-based brand equity, but also explores brand equity as captured through the differential brand knowledge effect by comparing IC and RCs.

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1. Introduction

Branding creates a competitive advantage – the brand reflects hallmarks of quality and a promise to the buyer, as well as specific features that may encourage consumers to purchase branded products/services (Prasad & Dev, 2000). The significance of a brand concept has been increasingly recognized in the MICE industry. Many meeting planners and organizers are now aware that branding their meetings can improve their return on investment (Ilsley, 2006; PCMA, 2002). Lee and Back (2008) investigated conference attendee behavior from the perspective of attendee-based brand equity – their work built on customer-based brand equity as investigated by Keller (1993). Keller (1993) conceptualized brand equity as "the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand" (p. 8), and suggested that brand knowledge, comprised of brand awareness and brand associations, affects customer perceptions, preferences, behaviors, and brand choices in the context of a broader marketing mix and in a way consistent with the "differential effect of brand knowledge." Adopting Keller's (1993) theory, Lee and Back (2008) conceptualized their theoretical model (see Figs. 1 and 2) to capture attendee-based brand equity through "the differential effect of brand knowledge" as manifested by brand satisfaction, updated expectation of brand value (UEBV), brand trust, and attitudinal brand loyalty, most of which are frequently used in the marketing literature to measure customer response to brand marketing. In this study, brand knowledge included five key brand associations,

professional education, social networking, site selection, staff service, and self-image congruence, as well as brand awareness.

However, a major limitation of the latter study was that the differential effect of brand knowledge was investigated by sampling only one branded conference (I-CHRIE's annual conference). In line with Keller's (1993) argument that a "differential effect is determined by comparing consumer response to the marketing of a brand with the response to the same marketing of a fictitiously named or unnamed version of the product or service" (p. 8), at least two branded meetings (strongly branded vs. minimally branded) in a similar discipline should be sampled to allow for meaningful comparisons. Such an approach would enable researchers to clearly demonstrate the differential effects of brand knowledge, providing not only high external validity but also an opportunity to identify which factors cause the differential effects of brand knowledge or brand equity. To enhance the theoretical validity of the previous model, this study aims to reexamine the differential effects of brand knowledge.

Building on two branded meetings (strongly branded vs. minimally branded) in the same discipline, this study sampled regional CHRIE conferences (RCs) to allow for comparison with I-CHRIE's annual conference (IC) within the theoretical model. The International Council on Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Education (I-CHRIE), a non-profit professional association, is a global supporter of hospitality and tourism education ranging from hotel and restaurant management, food service management, and culinary arts to recreation and travel services. I-CHRIE also acts as an international headquarters for hospitality and tourism education across the world, with international regional chapters (APAC CHRIE, EURO CHRIE) as well as national regional chapters (such as KOMA CHRIE, Southeast CHRIE, and PAC CHRIE). RC events are conferences

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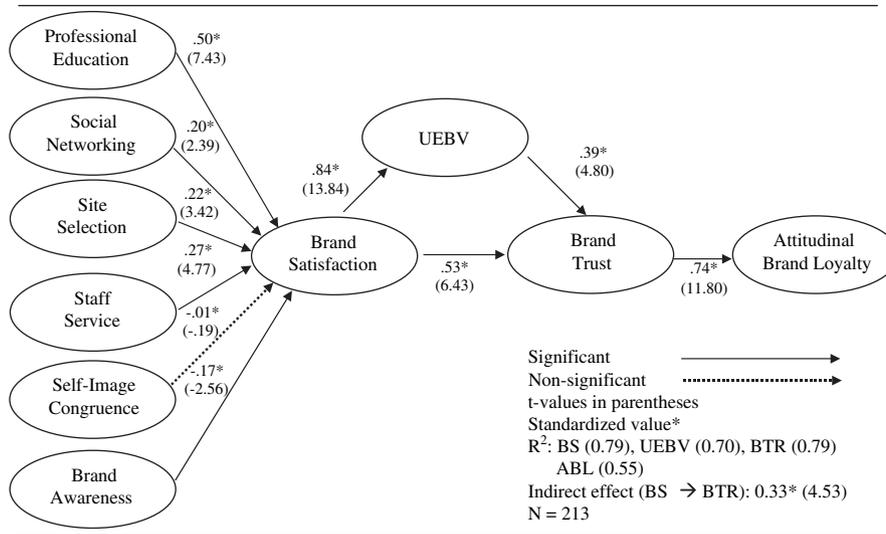
Fig. 1. Structural model of IC. BS (Brand Satisfaction), BTR (Brand Trust), UEBV (Updated Expectation of Brand Value), ABL (Attitudinal Brand Loyalty). Significant at an α level of 0.05.

organized by international and national regional CHRIE chapters. In contrast, IC is an annual conference organized by I-CHRIE. Comparing IC and RCs should allow us to determine which meeting has higher brand equity, as implied by the differential effects of brand knowledge, and which factors trigger the differential effect of brand knowledge between IC and RCs.

2. Reexamination of attendee-based brand equity

2.1. Testing Lee and Back's (2008) hypotheses on IC and RCs

To shed light on differential effects of brand knowledge, our conceptual model is identical for both I-CHRIE's annual conference (IC) and regional CHRIE conferences (RCs) – specifically, we use the same constructs as in Lee and Back's (2008) study. Since all of the hypothesized relationships draw on the same underlying rationale as that of the prior study, we summarize (see Table 1) Lee and Back's (2008) literature review to contextualize the following hypotheses.

H1 Professional education positively affects brand satisfaction.
H2 Social networking positively affects brand satisfaction.
H3 Site selection positively affects brand satisfaction.
H4 Staff service positively affects brand satisfaction.
H5 Self-image congruence positively affects brand satisfaction.
H6 Brand awareness positively affects brand satisfaction.
H7 Brand satisfaction positively affects brand trust.
H8 Brand satisfaction positively affects updated expectation of brand value (UEBV).
H9 UEBV positively affects brand trust.
H10 Brand trust positively affects attitudinal brand loyalty.

2.2. The differential effect of brand knowledge

Keller (1993) argued that customer-based brand equity is signified by the differential effect of brand knowledge. This notion links strong brand awareness with favorable, strong, and unique brand associations in the consumer's mind. This study assumes that
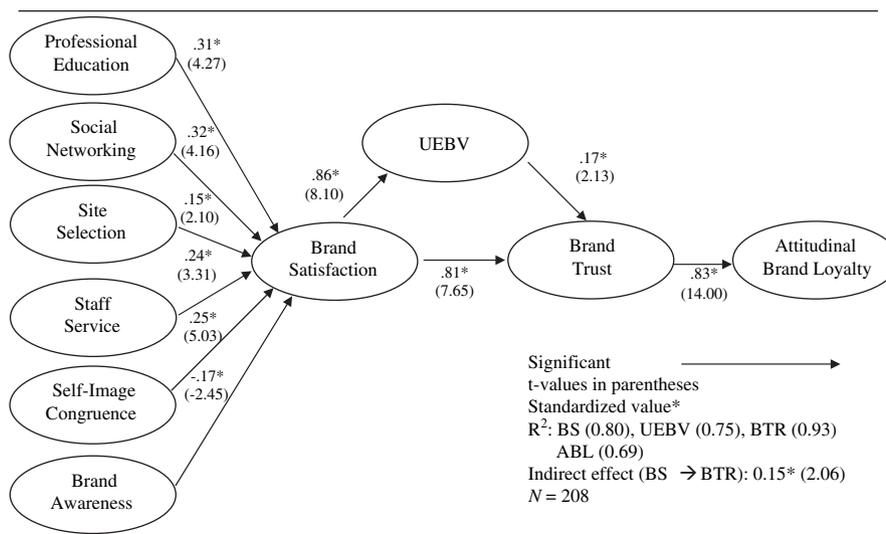

Fig. 2. Structural model of RCs. BS (Brand Satisfaction), BTR (Brand Trust), UEBV (Updated Expectation of Brand Value), ABL (Attitudinal Brand Loyalty). Significant at an α level of 0.05.