The Relationship between Emotional Attachment and Customer Loyalty: The mediating effect of Affective Commitment

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1. Introduction

The outbreak and spread of COVID-19 have a huge impact on the entire Chinese industry → To overcome this, social distancing and travel bans are implemented → This has serious impact on the hotel service industry. China's hotel industry has been most negatively affected by COVID-19, but in recent years, it has shown hope of recovery.(Hao et al,. 2020)→ The growth and revival of the hotel industry in the future lies in excellent customer management through the provision of services. In the preceding research on hotel service, it is difficult to evaluate the service before purchase due to the intangibility of its characteristics. In particular, in the case of high-involvement services such as luxury hotels, the perceived risk during initial use is high, so the quality of service experienced by customers is important(Chen and Peng 2019). However, with the emergence of various types of upscale hotels, it is difficult to do differentiation⇒ Therefore, it is more important to secure a stable profit base by attracting and retaining excellent customers. Since emotional attachment plays an important role in relationship on previous study, (Nath and Mukherjee, 2012), it was suggested that service companies should increase their relationship with customers in order to continue building relationship with customers (Kim et al., 2017), and the formation of emotional bonds is regarded as a key concept of building market differentiation and sustaining competitive advantage (Thompson et al., 2006).Various factors influencing emotional attachment are presented on this study (service quality, satisfaction, employee trust):

1) Service quality is said to have a high correlation with emotional attachment, confirming that perceived service quality has a positive effect on emotional attachment.(Han et al., 2020).

2) Satisfaction is the best criterion for judging the performance of customer response (Oliver, 2010), satisfied consumers form a strong emotional relationship, and service satisfaction has a significant effect on emotional attachment.(Batra et al., 2012).

3) As for services, interaction between customers and employees is important because of the inseparability between production and consumption (Li and Hsu, 2016), and trust in employees has

a significant effect on customers' emotional attachment.(Vlachos et al. 2010).

In research after 2000, affective commitment was suggested as a factor that has a strong influence on customer loyalty ⇒ Affective commitment in the hotel industry is an important factor influencing loyalty (Tanford,2013, 2016). Through this, it is necessary to verify the role of affective commitment between emotional attachment and customer loyalty.

2. Research Purpose

This study aims to determine the effect of customer's perceived service quality, service satisfaction, employee trust, and positive emotions on emotional attachment in China's hotel services. By examining the relationship between emotional attachment, affective commitment, attitudinal loyalty, and behavioral loyalty, this study also seeks to confirm the mediating effect of emotional commitment and explain its role.

3. Theoretical Review

1)Perceived Service Quality: Service quality is the overall evaluation or attitude of service excellence (Parasuraman et al., 1985). The experience during stay in the hotel will lead to different perceptions and expectations of service, which in turn has an important prerequisite for building customer relationships with perceived quality of service (Orel & Kara, 2014).

2)Service Satisfaction: Service satisfaction can be seen as the result of an overall assessment of the psychological or economic situation that positively reinforces customer relationships, considered an essential determinant of long-term customer relationship (Geyskens et al., 1999). Satisfaction is a process in which the results of products and services are perceived and compared with consumer's initial expectations, in accordance with the expectation disconfirmation theory.

3)Employee Trust: Employee trust is a willingness to rely on a trusted exchange partner (Moorman et al., 1993; Hadjikhani & Thilenius, 2005), relying on the other with positive expectations to achieve desirable outcomes (Beatty et al., 1996).

4)Emotional Attachment: The degree of emotional bond between an individual and an object (Bowlby 1979). It was confirmed that attachment to hotels has an important mediating role in the process of impacting hotel service performance (Peng and Chen 2018).

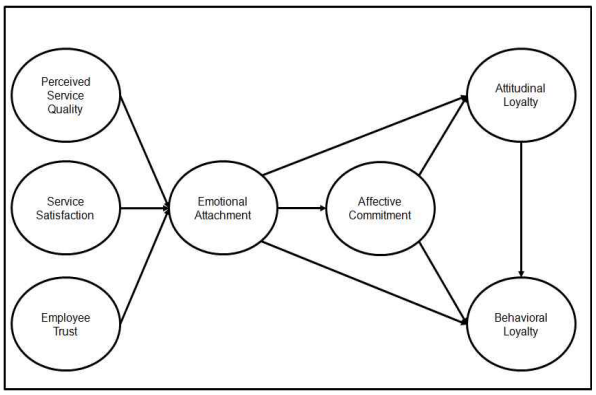
5)Affective Commitment: Customer's psychological identification and emotional response (Fullerton, 2003). Affective commitment as the base of customer attachment needs (Bansal et al., 2004) provides an important foundation for customer relationships (Fullerton, 2005).

6)Attitudinal Loyalty: The degree of personal attachment to a product or service (Fournier 1998), interpreted as customer preference or psychological commitment (Ahn KH 2011). Customer's attitudinal loyalty is not a guarantor that customers will directly purchase a product, but it helps

create a positive image for other customers through word of mouth (Chen 2011).

7)Behavioral Loyalty: An intention to maintain a relationship with a specific service provider by repurchasing the same products and services (Jones and Taylor, 2007). It indicates continuing purchasing behavior, recommendation to others, and continuing relationship (Johns and Sassor 1995). Customers with behavioral loyalty show repeated purchasing behavior for a certain period of time for a specific product/service (Bowen and Chen 2001)

4. Research Model



5. Convergent Validity Analysis

Result of Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Construct	CFA Before	CFA After	Item	Estimate	Standardized Regression Weights	C.R	p	AVE	C.R	α
Perceived Service Quality	5	3	SQ1	1.000	0.833			0.737	0.872	0.893
			SQ2	0.912	0.883	17.504	0.000***			
			SQ4	0.968	0.859	18.853	0.000***			
Service Satisfaction	5	3	SS1	1.000	0.765			0.674	0.813	0.859
			SS2	1.147	0.865	15.081	0.000***			
			SS5	1.088	0.830	14.498	0.000***			
Employee Trust	5	3	ET3	1.000	0.789			0.691	0.838	0.868
			ET4	0.978	0.870	15.147	0.000***			
			ET5	1.060	0.938	16.811	0.000***			
Emotional Attachment	5	3	EA1	1.000	0.882			0.746	0.881	0.895
			EA3	1.079	0.906	21.476	0.000***			
			EA4	0.888	0.800	17.524	0.000***			
Affective Commitment	5	3	AC1	1.000	0.840			0.716	0.873	0.882
			AC3	0.937	0.830	17.065	0.000***			
			AC5	0.895	0.868	16.861	0.000***			
Attitudinal Loyalty	5	3	AL1	1.000	0.794			0.708	0.850	0.879
			AL2	0.911	0.874	15.782	0.000***			
			AL3	0.985	0.854	17.475	0.000***			
Behavioral Loyalty	4	3	BL2	1.000	0.880			0.769	0.881	0.908
			BL3	1.086	0.913	20.989	0.000***			
			BL4	0.867	0.838	18.713	0.000***			
X^2/df =307.776/224=1.374, p=0.000, RMR=0.048, GFI=0.922, NFI=0.940, IFI=0.963, CFI=0.963, RMSEA=0.035										
KMO= 0.929, p=.000, Approx. Chi-Square= 9080.880, df=703										

Note: ***p<0.001, *p<0.

6. Discussion and implications

1)Research result

As a result of analyzing the research hypothesis, 1) Perceived service quality, service satisfaction, and employee trust, which are factors of emotional attachment. Had a positive effect on emotional attachment, 2) Emotional attachment had a positive effect on affective commitment and attitudinal loyalty. But Emotional attachment had no effect on behavioral loyalty, Affective commitment also had no effect on behavioral loyalty.

2)Discussion and Significance of Research Results

First, the perceived service quality, service satisfaction, and employee trust had a positive effect on emotional attachment for customers who experienced service in a upscale hotel. In a previous study, it was reported that service quality, service satisfaction, and employee trust, which are factors of emotional attachment, affect emotional attachment (Han et al., 2020; Batra et al., 2012), And that customer's intention to approach a hotel is increased (Baek et al., 2018). Upscale hotel managers need to identify target customers that are highly profitable to their company and actively implement reinforcement management through database of this research. Second, emotional attachment had a positive effect on affective commitment and attitudinal loyalty, and affective commitment also had an effect on attitudinal loyalty. It is important to enhance the relationship by making efforts to

encourage customers to feel emotionally attached to hotel services and to be emotionally committed in the service so that they have a positive attitude. Emotional attachment is an emotional factor that affects attitude or emotional elements, but it does not immediately induce behavior, so factors that induces customers' emotions should be developed.

9. Limitations and Future Research

Since the area of this study is limited to the service of China's upscale hotel, there may be a limitation on result generalization. Therefore, in future research, it is necessary to compare the composition of emotional attachment and behavioral reaction by classifying it into various high level service targets.