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A land for all season: The effect of travelers' orientation on awareness, satisfaction, place image, and travelers' loyalty

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A land for all season: the effect of travelers' orientation on awareness, satisfaction, place image, and travelers' loyalty

Learning outcomes

At the end of this chapter, readers should be able to:

1. What is traveler orientation?
2. The importance of travelers' orientation.
3. The role of travelers' orientation on the awareness, place image, satisfaction, travelers' loyalty.
4. The moderating role of digital marketing in the travelers' orientation in the relationship of awareness, place image, satisfaction, and loyalty.
5. What is the moderating role of gender in the relationship of awareness, place image, satisfaction, and travelers' loyalty?

Introduction

This research investigates the impact of customer/travelers' orientation on awareness, place image, travelers' satisfaction, and travelers' loyalty. By collecting data from 397 travelers in Thailand, this research analyzes the impact of customer/travelers' orientation on travelers' awareness, place image, travelers' satisfaction, and place loyalty by the moderating role of digital marketing. The results show that travelers' orientation impacts positively on the travelers' awareness, place image, travelers' satisfaction, and travelers' loyalty. Moreover, the results show that while awareness and traveler satisfaction positively influence the place image and travelers' loyalty, respectively, place image has no influence on the travelers' satisfaction. The research yields useful guidance for the hospitality manager to apply more efficient loyalty programs. The outcomes add new insight into the loyalty process with the moderating role of digital marketing.

The findings suggest that through travelers' orientation tourism managers can establish and enhance travelers' loyalty.

Research background

Travelers' orientation is a widely accepted construct for firm/place survival, which each tourist company adapts to maintain the strong association with travelers and to satisfy their needs.

Travelers' orientation is the main effective plan that allows organizations to continually improve their offerings to their users (Lukas & Maignan, 1996; Narver & Slater, 1990; Zhu et al., 2017).

It is a critical factor in the success of customer relationship management (King & Burgess, 2008) which has a positive influence on marketing planning capabilities (Morgan et al., 2009), helps to

upsurge perceived service/product quality in order to improve their performance (Kim et al.,

2006; Sin et al., 2005), and ultimately raises traveler loyalty. Hillebrand et al. (2011)

conceptualized travelers' orientation as the level that a tourism firm tries to achieve in order to identify and accommodate its travelers' needs.

What distinguishes hotels' travelers' orientation that has an enormous impact on the traveler-hotel relationship? What is the essence of the relationships that create awareness, place image, satisfaction and travelers' loyalty? How does digital media impact the relationships? How and when are such associations likely to happen? A wide extent of research, ranging from travelers' orientation (Tajeddini et al., 2017), digital media (Cheng & Foley, 2018), awareness (Foroudi, 2018), place image (Kim et al., 2018), satisfaction (Wang et al., 2018), and place loyalty (Kim et al., 2018), tried to answer to such questions.

This paper contributes to the growing study on consumer/visitor/guest associations within the hotel industry. Furthermore, based on the theory of social identity (Brewer, 1991), it attempts to provide a proper understanding of which visitors are likely to recognize and feel loyal to the

hotel/place. It will also present a traveler view about the online tourist relationship and examine whether online marketing is a useful tool for this relationship. This study aims to provide some contribution to the hotel industries, specifically to Thailand. With the data from various sources, hotel managers can use this research to implement their strategies and to understand the attitude of participants towards their marketing.

To date, the concept of travelers' orientation has been studied in Europe and the US, and there are a limited number of researchers studying the effectiveness of travelers' orientation and its necessary consequences in the hotel industry (Kasim et al., 2018; Tang, 2014). Also, based on the authors' knowledge, although Thailand is one of the world's most famous destinations (WTTC, 2018), there is a limited study.

The following sections draw on an existing study to discuss the nature of travelers' orientation and articulate our travelers' level conceptual framework, which provides a more profound understanding regarding the important consequences of such adjustment in the marketplace. Then, method, methodology, and analysis are discussed. Later, theoretical significance, implications, and limitation are explained.

Theoretical framework and hypothesis development

Travelers' loyalty

Travelers' loyalty is defined as a situation where visitors/tourists visit the same place/brand/hotel repeatedly. The services/products can be the same or various, but the main point is the visitors are loyal to the brand, not a product or services (Moisescu, 2006). Authors (Khoshsima et al., 2013) defined brand/place loyalty as when consumers have a good attitude with the place and also tend to visit the place in the future. Travellers' loyalty refers to the state of visitors who

always choose one hotel brand over a long period, although there are a variety of brands (Haryanto et al., 2016; Jacoby & Kyner, 1973; Touzani & Temessek, 2009).

In the world of competition, hotels survive mainly because of existing customers and attracting new customers. Therefore, they have to persuade customers to repurchase items with them. A customer loyalty program is, consequently, very special as it could encourage customers and increase the number of visits. The hotel can attempt to build customer loyalty in two ways. First, the hotel should use the right strategies to find loyal customers. This can depend on the consistency of purchase. In this way, the hotel tends to get potential customers and reach the market share, and a customer loyalty program will protect these target customers from competitors. Another way is to look for new customers. Doing it this way, however, the company/place has to invest much more money than in trying to keep existing customers/visitors.

According to Kumar and Shah (2004), although it is very hard to maintain travelers' loyalty, it is worth doing so because businesses could get sustainable benefits from loyal customers. For example, it is found that existing customers tend to be less price sensitive than new customers (Godey et al., 2016). Besides, loyal customers might forgive the hotel more easily if they are not satisfied with something (Bruwer et al., 2014). Additionally, regular visitors/customers will make more and more transactions if they still have a good relationship with the place. Another benefit the hotel/company will get from loyal customers is the power of word-of-mouth (Hemsley-Brown & Alnawas, 2016). To illustrate, these loyal customers will recommend the brand to their friends and family (Yen & Tang, 2019) or post their positive attitude toward the brand on social media (Kim et al., 2016), which may attract many new customers. Besides, the

loyal customers tend to believe and trust the brand, so that they will buy different types of products from the brand (Hwang et al., 2019).

Some advantages they could get are (a) practical benefits – these benefits, such as saving money, are a great motivation for customers to be loyal. The company can offer many such promotions, like cash back and coupons to customers (Mimouni-Chaabane & Volle, 2010). Previous studies (Mimouni-Chaabane & Volle, 2010; Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995) stated that the obstruction that makes customers feel that it is inconvenient to be loyal to the brand is that they do not have enough experience with firms. With the practical benefits, consumers might see the value of a loyalty program, so it will help customers get more used to the brand (Berry, 1995; Bolton et al., 2000; Mimouni-Chaabane & Volle, 2010). This helps customers search and find products more easily.

Therefore, the connection feels convenient and customers believe that using a certain company can save time. For instance, with a service desk exclusively for the loyalty program, loyal customers do not need to wait so long and can make an exclusive reservation. (b) Hedonic benefits – customers will get updated news of products, promotions or events (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003; Baumgartner & Steenkamp, 1996; Mimouni-Chaabane & Volle, 2010). Some hotels will also provide activities for customers to join (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Mimouni-Chaabane & Volle, 2010; Tauber, 1972). The loyalty program tends to affect customers concerning their experience, such as collecting points (Mimouni-Chaabane & Volle, 2010). (c) Symbolic benefits – loyal customers might feel unique or privileged if the brand which they are loyal to tends to provide many opportunities to them before other customers who are not members or loyal to the brand (Beatty et al., 1996; Gwinner et al., 1998; Mimouni-Chaabane & Volle, 2010). They can also receive offers that are different from those offered to ordinary

customers (Mimouni-Chaabane & Volle, 2010). This program has a social benefit for the brand (Mimouni-Chaabane & Volle, 2010). Customers will feel privileged and feel that the brand is a part of them (Mimouni-Chaabane & Volle, 2010; Muniz & O'guinn, 2001).

Traveler orientation

Travellers' orientation is when companies first pay attention to travelers' needs and attempt to satisfy them (Lee & Hwang, 2016). According to Taleghani et al. (2013) in the past, businesses considered their profits only from selling as many products or services as possible. However, companies now focus on selling satisfaction and loyalty, as they offer what is 'value' for the customers. Travellers' orientation comprises three concepts. First, companies should know and understand the travelers' needs from the past and into the future (Kao et al., 2016). Second, the information about the travelers' needs should be comprehensive and useful for the production team (Seilov, 2015). Third, the knowledge about tourists should be analyzed by various departments to create a better way to develop products (Tang, 2014). With these features, travelers could be attracted and would select the companies that could fulfil their demands (Li & Huang, 2017). Therefore, it can be summarized that travelers' orientation could impact the effectiveness of market orientation (Lee et al., 2015; Ruizalba et al., 2014).

According to Narver and Slater (1990), travelers' orientation leads to a seller realizing and understanding the travelers' needs and situation. Sellers should know their customers with regard to political, social, economic, and environmental concerns. These factors must be discussed and forecasted to summarize the present position and future trend. McEachern and Warnaby (2005) stated that travelers' orientation is an element of market orientation that attempts to have a customer as the company's focus or at the center of their attention (Asikhia, 2010). Travellers'

orientation is also defined as the activities and efforts of companies with the purpose of meeting a customer's expectation and fulfilling a customer's wants (Mehrabi et al., 2012).

Also, companies should focus on the competitor's situation, including the skills or things they do that are right or weak, and the abilities and strategies they have currently and may have in the future. This information also helps tourist's companies to know the market trend, what is new and what is next in the market, and how to compete with the new strategies of the competitors. In other words, if the competitor's potentials and trends are analyzed correctly, and companies could manage the current and future situation correctly, they may become or stay at the very first position in the market (Narver & Slater, 1990). It means that competitor orientation affects the market orientation, as the companies know the market situations and could create the strategies that tend to increase and keep customers in the long term (Maydeu-Olivares & Lado, 2003).

According to O'Cass and Ngo (2009), market orientation may not work if there is no involvement from various sections of the company to share information and opinions from their views or positions. Therefore, every department has to sit together and help each other to find the strategies or solutions that are most effective and can reach the goal of market orientation, which is to generate new customers and to retain the existing ones.

Travellers' orientation, awareness, and place image

Awareness is defined as the ability of consumers to recognize or differentiate the hotel that is in their mind (Keller, 1993; Moisescu, 2009), or the familiarity of the hotel (Malik et al., 2013), which finally makes them prefer that hotel. Tourism's Company's performance is related to awareness. According to Tuominen et al. (2009) and Yin Wong and Merriles (2008), company performance will be enhanced if the business has well-planned strategies including market orientation. It could be summarized that robust market orientation strategies can have a positive

impact on awareness (Ewing & Napoli, 2005; Tuominen et al., 2009). As discussed earlier, hotels, which are customer oriented, tend to have good performances because they sell products based on actual customers' needs. When companies have a good performance, they tend to be reliable. It could lead to good images of the companies and hotels (Tuominen et al., 2009). Also, organizations which are customer oriented tend to have good performance because they can sell products based on actual customer needs. When companies have a good performance, they tend to be reliable which could lead to good images of the companies (Tuominen et al., 2009). Thus, based on what has been discussed, these hypotheses are proposed,

H1: The more favorable the hotel travelers' orientation, the more awareness is created among travelers.

H2: The more favorable the hotel travelers' orientation, the more favorable attitude travelers have towards the place's image.

Travellers' orientation, traveler satisfaction, and traveler loyalty

Travellers' orientation could affect travelers' satisfaction (Alhelalat et al., 2017) and travelers' loyalty (Lo et al., 2017). The first reason is that, with strong market orientation, companies which have a customer-focused strategy could respond to tourists needs (Chow et al., 2015) by offering what they want. Second, due to the competitor orientation, the hotels tend to be aware of their competitors in many respects, including the quality of the products, services, and price (Herrero et al., 2018). This intense competition does benefit customers. For example, customers could pay less to get a particular product. Concerning hotels, companies are supposed to look after their staff with regard to developing their proficiency including their cross-functional skills, offering good welfare and benefits, and providing a good work environment and conditions to make sure they are ready to deal with all situations. According to Krepapa et al. (2003), the concept of value creation is linked to marketing orientation and customer satisfaction. To

illustrate, customers tend to view companies which provide products or services to them from different positions and environments. Therefore, the business needs to understand the perception of the customers and create value in its products to fulfil customer expectations, which will undoubtedly lead to customer satisfaction.

Currently, the stiff competitive market tends to cause many companies to be more focused on offering products and services to loyal customers (Kotler, 1984; Maydeu-Olivares & Lado, 2003) as it is harder and more expensive to attract new customers. Moreover, maintaining regular guests can also affect the sustainable competitive advantage of organizations (O’Cass & Sok, 2015). To build and keep loyalty among the customers, market orientation should be applied. Deshpandé et al. (1993) and Maydeu-Olivares and Lado (2003) stated that the concept of market orientation is based on the profit which comes from customer satisfaction and relationship with the brand. When the companies have a strong market orientation, focusing on what customers want, understanding strengths and weaknesses of the competitors, and knowing the situations in the organization, they tend to succeed in customer loyalty, which leads to good performance (Herrero et al., 2018). Kohli and Jaworski (1990) and Maydeu-Olivares and Lado (2003) agreed that there is a relationship between market orientation and customer loyalty. An intensive market orientation could positively impact customer satisfaction, while customer satisfaction could make customers loyal to the brand. Moreover, the number of customers repurchasing with market-oriented firms is higher. Therefore, it can be summarized that market orientation could be a factor that builds customer loyalty (Dick & Basu, 1994; Kamakura et al., 2002; Loveman, 1998; Maydeu-Olivares & Lado, 2003).

H3: The more favorable the hotel travelers’ orientation, the more satisfied the travelers are.

H4: The more desirable the hotel travelers’ orientation, the more loyal the travelers are.

Travellers' orientation, digital marketing, awareness, and place image

Travellers' orientation influences the structure of social media as a company wants to learn more about their customers and to make them feel more comfortable with the online experience (Dolan & Goodman, 2017). According to Habibi et al. (2015) travelers' orientation, which is a part of the market adjustment, affects digital marketing in the way that the programmer tries to design the website to fulfil the company's and customer's wants. Lewrick et al. (2011) stated that competitor orientation is another factor that has a significant impact on digital marketing development. According to Antioco and Lindgreen (2003), internet marketing is designed partly because of employee convenience, to gather as much data as possible and to access available information 24/7. Digital marketing is also considered a useful and low-cost tool for employees to communicate with other employees and customers.

Raofi (2012) stated that the stronger market orientation strategy the company implements, the more potential they have to win over competitors. The company will have a sufficient market orientation if it selects digital marketing as its marketing tool to cover marketing activities, with the aim to achieve travelers' orientation, competitor orientation, and inter-functional orientation. Digital marketing could increase the effectiveness of market orientation and company performance because it is an innovation that helps the company to generate the data faster and more accurately. According to Zaman et al. (2012), digital marketing is essential to the market orientation as it could support companies to update the market situation and customer preference. Therefore, it is easier for an organization to analyze the customers' needs. Online marketing is also used to update the competitors' information so that the company could compete with its rivals. Besides, companies also apply digital marketing to ensure the competencies of the staff and support them to work efficiently.

Digital marketing is defined as a kind of marketing which uses technologies such as email, mobile phones, and social media to create a relationship with customers and to carry out actions that increase customer awareness by fulfilling the customer's wants (Chaffey & Chadwick, 2012; Khan & Siddiqui, 2013) for the purpose of making a profit and enhancing customer loyalty (Mustafi et al., 2011).

According to Carlsson (2010), digital marketing, especially social media, is valuable because it can create a relationship and awareness among consumers. There are various activities on social media that companies use to promote their brands. For instance, the company website represents the company's identity and provides information about corporate philosophy, which may include vision, mission, and goal so that customers can understand and easily take part in the business's activities (Zhang et al., 2016). Another example is Facebook and YouTube. Both are mostly used to create a viral campaign and post videos or photos to attract consumers with the purpose to create awareness among new clients and refresh existing customers. Nowadays, it is mandatory for a company to have a digital marketing strategy to create place awareness, as there are more and more internet users who are customers of the company. Hotels can advertise their brands online, send information to customers to convince them to choose their brands, and make them recognize the brand names and products all the time by keeping updated and existing in the online world.

According to Francoeur (2004), social media is used to represent the brand and connect with global customers rather than to compete with competitors. Therefore, it is essential for companies to take this into consideration when using digital marketing to communicate with the brands and customers as it could impact the brand images. Francoeur (2004) stated that a brand image would be strong or weak depending partly on how the organization manages its online

content. Social media is also designed for customers to share their opinions and create strong word-of-mouth (Hur et al., 2017). To illustrate, customers will recommend the brand to others, which brings an excellent image to the brand. However, the company should also consider the content and proper strategies before using social media. For example, the information that the hotels want to share should be correct and interesting for the audience. The hotels also have to balance between organization information and consumer's opinions because there might even be some negative feedback which could be spread quickly and severely impact brand image.

H5: Digital marketing strengthens the relationships between travelers' orientation and awareness (H5a), and place image (H5b)

Travellers' orientation, digital marketing, satisfaction, and loyalty

The term satisfaction is used when the customers personally judge the brands by means of the expected and experienced products and services (Oliver, 1997; Sondoh et al., 2007) which could be high or low, depending on the level of the customer's fulfilment and expectation (Kotler & Keller, 2009). Brand/place loyalty is explained when customers select to buy particular products or services from the same brand over and over again (Moisescu, 2006), or the situation where customers have a strong potential to be engaged with the brand and promise to purchase products at any time (Khoshsima et al., 2013). Brand loyalty is considered a biased reaction because customers prefer to buy products or services from the selected brand, instead of any other brand (Touzani & Temessek, 2009).

It can be seen that the number of retailers using digital marketing, namely social media, is increasing. Apart from creating awareness and selling products, they also use digital marketing to fulfil consumer needs such as answering questions and providing areas for customer feedbacks, to increase satisfaction which could lead to positive word-of-mouth (Caner & Banu,

2015; Zhang & Daugherty, 2009), and high customer loyalty (Caner & Banu, 2015; Devaraj et al., 2002). According to Caner and Banu (2015) and Liang and Lai (2002), digital marketing could support the company to increase customer satisfaction. For instance, a well-designed website can attract attention from consumers and reflect the quality of the brand, which could impress the customer since it is the first touching point. Besides, the search engine function on the website could also satisfy the customers (Caner & Banu, 2015; Otim & Grover, 2006). Moreover, customers like to use digital marketing as it is convenient and takes less time (Caner & Banu, 2015; Torkzadeh & Dhillon, 2002). To illustrate, the customers might feel more comfortable to use online services, taking time to research the facilities and product details including pictures of the products (Oliver, 1999). Online shopping also provides 24/7 service, which means customers can see the information about a service or make a transaction whenever they want (Hung et al., 2014). According to Caner and Banu (2015), customer satisfaction with online experience and the brand depends on many factors, such as attitude and computer skills. Online marketing is a potential tool to create brand loyalty as it could help companies achieve customers' expectations more easily by integrating market orientation and customer relationship. A company can get in touch with their customers at all times. It could survey what customers want. Moreover, the company can still update information, particularly any special offers to the customers. Therefore, the clients might feel privileged, keep in touch with the company, and remain loyal to the organization (Pratminingsih et al., 2013). Erdogmus and Cicek (2012) also stated that companies should use digital marketing to build loyalty among customers as there are some studies showing that social media users tend to communicate about the brands, suggest the brands to others, or buy the brand items more often if they feel more engaged with the brand online marketing tools, especially the social media. According to Shankar et al. (2002), the

company could use digital marketing to build customer loyalty in two ways. First, the company might use digital marketing to find existing customers who might potentially become loyal, for example, the customers who regularly make contact with the brand, and invite them to join the loyalty program. Another way is by the use of digital marketing to attract new customers.

H6: Digital marketing strengthens the relationships between travelers' orientation and satisfaction (H6a), and place loyalty (H6b).

Awareness, image, satisfaction, and loyalty

Awareness is a necessary part of building a place image as the more tourists remember the brand, the more they can get attached and related themselves to the brand. Awareness differs according to gender (Westwood et al., 2000). Although women and men are not different in the process of remembering a brand, they are different in what they recall from a brand (Valkenburg & Buijzen, 2005). Place image is an interpretation that tourists have about the place (Keller, 1993; Korchia, 2015), which may not represent where the place is, in reality (Aaker, 1991).

H7: The more awareness is raised among the hotel's travelers, the more favorable the attitude they have towards the place/hotel's image.

H7a: The effects of the hotel traveler's awareness and the place image are stronger for female travelers than for male travelers.

According to Ranjbarian et al. (2012), a good place image could positively affect customer satisfaction. To illustrate, customers always have their attitude toward the place in their mind and then set their expectation. As the image is a mental picture based on different dimensions, gender plays a vital role in influencing the perception of a hotel both in male and female travelers (Beerli & Martín, 2004). Besides, the masculine and feminine image of a place can have an impact on the relationship between image and satisfaction (Grohmann, 2009). If their hope is aligned with their experience, the positive perception can influence customer behavior, and

customers will be satisfied with the brand (Chen & Chen, 2010). However, if not, customers will develop dissatisfaction and negative brand attitude instead.

H8: The more favorable the place/hotel's image, the more satisfied the travelers are.

H8a: The effects of the hotel guest's image and satisfaction are stronger for female travelers than for male travelers.

Previous studies have shown that customer satisfaction impacts loyalty in many ways (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993; Bloemer & De Ruyter, 1998; Chiou et al., 2005; Sondoh et al., 2007; Vinhas Da Silva & Faridah Syed Alwi, 2006; Yang & Peterson, 2004). First, Bennett and Rundle-Thiele (2004) stated that when customers are satisfied with the brand (products and service), they might recommend the brand to friends, families, or others. Second, they tend to repurchase or use the brand again. Third, there is less possibility that customers will change to another brand. There is some evidence proving that customer satisfaction has strongly affected customer loyalty in many aspects, such as repurchasing (Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2000; Sondoh et al., 2007), recommendation (Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2000; Nguyen & LeBlanc, 1998; Sondoh et al., 2007), and returning to the store again (Bloemer & De Ruyter, 1998; Sondoh et al., 2007). The result of satisfaction is significant and influences loyalty. For instance, the excellent experience of previous purchases may affect the future purchase (Jones & Suh, 2000; Pritchard et al., 1999; Russell-Bennett et al., 2007). Gender difference can have an impact on the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty. Different researches (e.g., Chang & Chen, 2008; Ha et al., 2007; Hong & Tam, 2006) suggest that what makes women satisfied is different from what makes men satisfied. Consequently, gender difference can have an impact on the relationship between satisfaction and gender (Figure 7.1).

H9: The more satisfied the travelers are towards the hotel, the more loyalty travelers have in the hotel.

H9a: The effect of the hotel travelers' satisfaction and loyalty is stronger for female travelers than for male travelers.

<COMP: Place Figure 7.1 Here>

Methods and measurement

A research survey was developed based on 46 item measurements. The first section contained five questions regarding the participants' demographics and background (frequency of visit, gender, age, employment, and degree). The next section includes six constructs where the participants were requested to specify on a seven-point Likert-type scale, ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree. It offers satisfactory properties, which are concerned with the underlying distribution of replies to the hotel industry in Thailand. Travellers' orientation was investigated with nine validated items based on previous studies (Kumar et al., 1998; Lado et al., 1998; Tomaskova, 2009) and digital marketing with ten items (Khan & Siddiqui, 2013; Sarwar et al., 2013). Awareness (Aaker, 1991; Buil et al., 2013; Cornwell et al., 2011; Yoo & Donthu, 2001) and place image (Foroudi et al., 2014, 2017, 2018) scales were measured based on the items from earlier studies. Satisfaction was examined via five items recommended by Sondoh et al. (2007). Loyalty (Christodoulides et al., 2015; Ekinci et al., 2011; Yoo & Donthu, 2002) was adopted according to the context (Table 7.1).

<COMP: Place Table 7.1 Here>

Data collection

The research hypotheses were tested with a sample of hotel travelers from Thailand. The current research was conducted employing a non-random sampling (namely, convenience sampling technique) to remove the possible bias regarding the generalizability and validity of the measurement scales (Bell & Bryman, 2007). In total, 650 questionnaires were printed and

distributed to the hotels' participants, and 397 usable surveys were returned and assessed. In addition to improving response rate, the sample size and to ensure that the sample involved the most well-informed informants, non-probability 'snowballing' was employed as a distribution technique by requesting the initial participants to recommend other guests who could provide additional information (Goodman 2011). Table 7.2 illustrates a summary of the demographic characteristics. The majority of the respondents have visited the hotel brand more than two times (37.3%). In total, 56.4% of the participants were male; the respondents were between 30 and 39, 20 and 29, and 40 and 49 years old (28.0%, 20.4%, 19.6%, respectively). Also, 35.3% were students; 12.1% were lawyers, dentists, or architects; and 10.1% were retired. A high proportion was holding a postgraduate degree or above (57.4%).

<COMP: Place Table 7.2 Here>

The preliminary measurement items were subjected to a series of reliability and factor investigations as initial examinations of their performance within the sample. We followed a two-stage procedure, suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). Exploratory factor analyses (EFA) were run to identify inter-relationships between the factors and to explain such factors regarding their common underlying factors (Hair et al., 2006) which contribute to six theoretically recognized constructs and demonstrates which the item measurements fit within the theoretical factor structures. According to Tabachnick and Fidell (2007), the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling appropriateness ($.905 > .6$) recommends the association among items as statistically acceptable and suitable for EFA to convey a parsimonious set of factors. Cronbach's α measured the consistency of each element with its appropriate items and confirmed that the items in each factor (.916 to .962) were internally consistent (Nunnally, 1978). The descriptive information for the research constructs is illustrated in Table 7.2.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used as a most appropriate method which allows a stricter valuation of the study's construct uni-dimensionality and measures discriminant validity (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Based on suggestions of previous studies (Dillon & Goldstein, 1984; Fornell & Larcker, 1981), each factor was compared to the square of each off diagonal-value in the Phi-matrix for the elements, and the findings demonstrate average variance extracted (AVE) for each factor ranged from .642 to .865, and the items suggest a distinctive underlying concept. AVE (a good rule of thumb of .5 or higher) specifies satisfactory convergent validity (Table 7.3).

<COMP: Place Table 7.3 Here>

Following the measurement model step, we examined the structural model fit via goodness-of-fit by employing Windows AMOS 24.0 to test the model and inspect hypotheses. The root mean squared approximation of error (RMSEA) provides adequate distinctive data to estimate the research model (.064 < .08 indicates acceptable fit) (Byrne, 2001; Garver & Mentzer, 1999; Hair et al., 2006). Comparative fit index (CFI) is an incremental index that assesses the fit of a model with the null baseline model (.962 > .08 indicates good fit). Normed fit index (NFI) tests the proportion by which a model is enhanced concerning fit compared to the base model, which is not controlled for degrees-of-freedom (.940 > .08 indicates good fit) (Hair et al., 2006). Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) compares the χ^2 value of the model with that of the independent model which takes degrees-of-freedom for the model into consideration (.955 > .08 indicates good fit). Relative fit index (RFI) and incremental fit index were .929 and .962, respectively, higher than the suggested threshold of .90 and each criterion of fit, so specified that the projected measurement model's fit was acceptable (Byrne, 2001; Hair et al., 2006; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

According to the standardized parameter assessments for the research hypothesized association among the constructs, the results show that the more favorable the hotel travelers' orientation, the more awareness is created among customers, so hypothesis 1 was fully accepted ($\beta = .421$, $t = 7.065$). Furthermore, to the hypothesized effects, directed by the hotel consumer's perception, the relationship between travelers' orientation and hotel's image (H2) was fully accepted ($\beta = .236$, $t = 4.283$). Hypotheses 3 and 4 illustrate the significant relationship between hotel's travelers' orientation and satisfaction (H3: $\beta = .430$, $t = 5.833$) and loyalty (H4: $\beta = .507$, $t = 8.007$). Hypothesis 5a demonstrates that digital marketing strengthens the positive association between travelers' orientation and awareness. However, digital marketing dampens the positive relationship between travelers' orientation and image (H5b) and satisfaction (H6a) and loyalty (H6b). Hypothesis 7 examines the relationship between awareness and image and the results illustrate the significant relationships. Hypothesis 7 was supported fully ($\beta = .147$, $t = 3.105$). The results of hypothesis 7a show that the effect of hotel guest's awareness and the image is stronger among female guests ($\beta = .166$, $t = 2.466$) than among male guests ($\beta = .129$, $t = 1.947$, $p = .052$).

Hypothesis 8 (image \rightarrow satisfaction) was not confirmed for the hypothesized associations between image and satisfaction. The result is statistically different from 0 at the .05 significance level, and this may not be effective concerning a participant's perception ($\beta = .094$, $t = 1.305$, $p = .192$). Interestingly, the result of hypothesis 8a illustrates that the effect of hotel guest's image and satisfaction is stronger among female guests ($\beta = .224$, $t = 1.958$, $p = .050$, partially accepted) than among male guests ($\beta = .023$, $t = .253$, $p = .800$). It can be a challenge for the global hotel industry to upsurge their consumers' satisfaction with the products and services. The hypothesized examination demonstrates that the more satisfied the guests are towards the hotel,

the more loyalty guests have to the hotel (H9a: $\beta = .290$, $t = 6.202$), and, therefore, hypothesis 9 was accepted. However, the effect of hotel guest's satisfaction and loyalty (H9a) was confirmed from female ($\beta = .212$, $t = 3.185$) and male guests ($\beta = .331$, $t = 5.438$) (Tables 7.4 and 7.5).

<COMP: Place Table 7.4 Here>

<COMP: Place Table 7.5 Here>

Discussion

In the current era, due to the sweeping changes in the micro/macro environment, tourism managers have to cope with wide ranges of difficulties as travelers' and customers' needs are becoming more challenging than before (Kastenholz et al., 2012; Ritchie et al., 2000).

Consequently, with such drastic changes, knowing the factors which can have an impact on loyalty is becoming more crucial than before.

Making a customer loyal is one of the essential worries for all of the tourism businesses (Han et al., 2017). Consideration such as this highlights the importance of the question of what distinguishes the hotels' travelers' orientation that has struck association-gold from the other hotels? What is the nature of the relationships that create awareness, image, satisfaction, and loyalty? How do digital media impact the relationships? When and why are such associations likely to occur? To answer such questions, there have been wide ranges of scholars to respond to such a crucial issue. Different researchers and travelers' managers tried to come up with the answers, so they can find the most prudent and effective strategy for such enormous changes in the hotel and tourism industry. Based on the above discussion, the prime aim of this research is to analyze an integrated model by investigating the impact of travelers' orientation toward loyalty, which, in turn, has an effect on awareness, image, satisfaction, and ultimately loyalty.

This study offers valuable insight into the demand part of the hotel industry in Thailand. The results show that travelers' orientation has an impact on awareness. This finding is consistent with the previous research studies (Chandon et al., 2016; Lui et al., 2018), suggesting that orientation has a positive impact on awareness. This outcome informs tourism managers on the importance of the travelers' orientation regarding being more aware of their business. In this regard, as companies try more to accommodate their customers' needs, customers become more aware of the market (Chow et al., 2015).

Travellers' orientation was found to have an impact on image. It was found that being customer oriented for hotels can give them a better image among travelers who use them. Previous studies in the tourism sector (e.g., Dolan & Goodman, 2017; Lin et al., 2018; Thomas-Francois et al., 2017) suggest that travelers' orientation can be built on a tourism firm's image. A traveler-orientated hotel can distinguish and accommodate their travelers' needs. Doing so can result in the hotel's having a customer-orientated image. Hotel managers should pay attention to having such an image which can bring many sustainable benefits to their hotels (Tassiello et al., 2018). As expected, travelers' orientation was also found to be effective on satisfaction. Previous research studies suggest that when a firm can identify and accommodate their customers' needs, they can make their travelers and customers more satisfied (Yolal et al., 2016). The findings of this research support the outcomes of Dhar (2015), Lui et al. (2018), and Youn et al. (2018) that travelers' orientation has a positive impact on satisfaction. This finding helps tourism managers to understand the importance of travelers' orientation and its considerable impact on the travelers' satisfaction. As hotels become more customer orientated, they can meet their travelers' needs, and this can have an impact on their satisfaction and also their future visit intention.

Travellers' orientation was also found to be effective on loyalty. As previous scholars have suggested, knowing and being able to satisfy travelers' needs can result in making a traveler more loyal (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Maydeu-Olivares & Lado, 2003). As loyal travelers are a good and sustainable source of income (Molina-Azorín et al., 2015), the hotel managers should try to make their customers loyal by knowing their needs and trying to accommodate them. Furthermore, as Lai and Hitchcock (2017) suggested, owing to the importance of loyal travelers, they should be provided with superior service.

Digital marketing can have an impact on the relationship between travelers' orientation and awareness (H5a), place image (H5b), satisfaction (H5c), and finally loyalty (H6a). As hotels use social media to interact with their travelers (Hudson et al., 2015), this can have an impact on how much they can promote themselves as consumer orientated, and it can also affect the relationship between travelers' orientation and awareness, and image of a hotel. This interaction with travelers can help hotels and hotel managers to understand their travelers' needs (Filieri et al., 2015) resulting in making visitors more satisfied. Besides, as social media shows hotels should have more consistent interaction with their travelers and visitors, travelers can perceive how customer orientated a hotel is, which can make a visitor more loyal (Erdogmus & Cicek, 2012). As discussed above, because nowadays travelers use social and online platforms (Hung, 2018) to have access to the service/products of a firm, it is vital for every hotel to handle its social media efficiently and adequately.

Awareness was found to have a positive impact on the place image. This result supports the previous research studies (Barreda et al., 2016; Esch et al., 2006; Nicolau & Sharma, 2018). In other words, awareness can boost image (H7). Also, the results suggest that being a woman can positively influence the relationship between awareness and place image (H7a). As a female

traveler's perception is different from a male's (Guimarães & Silva, 2016), and women pay more attention to details (Brosnan & De Waal, 2003), they remember the brand differently as compared to the men, and this can result in the relationship between awareness and image. Hotel managers can apply this idea in their advertising campaigns and plans to impact on both male and female visitors. Also, hotel managers can try to provide a superior service for their female travelers, resulting in having a better and better hotel image.

The place image was found to have no impact on the satisfaction of travelers. Contrary to previous research studies (e.g., Bloemer & De Ruyter, 1998; Kim et al., 2013) this study did not support the relationship between place image and satisfaction. As travelers have an image of services and products of a place, their satisfaction forms on their previous images (H8).

However, due to the advancements in technology and new peer-peer accommodation sites such as Airbnb, a hotel's images have changed, resulting in the visitor's satisfaction. Furthermore, as the perceptions of men and women are different, due to their cognitive and emotional differences (Aslan, 2016), this gender difference can strengthen or weaken the relationship between image and satisfaction. However, this effect is partially supported in women and was not supported in men. As the image perception is different in women and men, women tend to remember what they experience in a hotel more easily, and this can result in how satisfied they are. This result can add invaluable insight to hotel managers about forming the image of their male and female travelers. As this image is distinctive in male and female tourists, their satisfaction with the received services/products is different (H8a).

Ultimately, consistent with previous research studies (Gao & Lai, 2015; Han & Hyun, 2018), satisfaction was found to have an impact on loyalty (H9). Furthermore, gender was found to have an impact on the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty. This result supports the study of

Tran et al. (2018). As females find exclusion harder as compared to males (Hwang & Mattila, 2018), they show more signs of being loyal to a hotel. Thus, hotel managers can apply this notion to have more loyal female visitors (H9a).

Future research directions

This research has been conducted to examine the effectiveness of travelers' orientation, digital media, and customer relationship in the hotel industry in Thailand. First, the hotels for selection should be more varied in terms of the hotel grades, international or local brand, and locations so that the data are more available for comparison and to see whether or not the types of hotel, the locations, and the estimated amount of investment affect the effectiveness of digital marketing. Second, the sampling should be expanded. The number of participants should be increased, and the respondents should come from varied backgrounds as, currently, most are Thai, with similar age, education, and salary. There might be additional questions asking about their occupations as well. The suggestion is provided to make the results of future research more reliable. Finally, the questionnaire might offer open questions for the participants to provide their opinion regarding the constructs to evaluate the feeling or attitude of the customers that could not be assessed by the questions provided.

For future research, this study might be one of the information backgrounds that the researcher can use and develop. The topic of future research in hotel industries might be expanded to various types of hotels and locations, such as in Southeast Asia or even in Asia and comparing with other continents like Europe, as the characteristics of companies and customers from a different culture may affect the attitude of each construct. Also, future research might focus on the five-star hotels or the local hotels. Another choice is that the investigation may be conducted with the case study in other industries. Besides, researchers may compare the effectiveness of

digital and traditional marketing towards the market orientation and customer relationship. Apart from types of business, research methodology should also be considered. Quantitative research might be conducted as well as qualitative research. There should be more analysis of the factors that may affect the constructs, such as gender, work background, and age. Sampling may be more varied regarding gender, age, education, and income for a different perspective. It is true that there are so many constructs to evaluate, but the questionnaire should be shorter. Otherwise, the respondents may lose their attention to the survey.

Regarding limitations, there are only a few choices of hotel industries in Thailand. Next, the respondents should be chosen from various backgrounds, and lastly, the questionnaire should provide open questions for multiple answers for a better comparison. For future research, the research can be expanded to the hotel industry in Asia or to another industry. There might be a comparison between digital and traditional marketing towards market orientation and customer relationship as well.

Conclusion

The increase in tourism competition and the hotel industry is becoming a challenge for many hotels. Due to such an increase in the competition, many hotels are trying to make their travelers more loyal using the tools they have, such as social media. Having a loyal visitor is directly associated with the profit increase and future hotel success. As customers are becoming interested in sharing experiences (Ha & Lee, 2018), making visitors loyal using social media is becoming more critical than ever. The first and the most important contribution of the study is analyzing the consequences of customer orientation by the moderating role of social media. This research tries to suggest that customer orientation and other essential attributes of a hotel can result in loyalty.

Theoretical contribution

Since digital marketing plays an essential role in the marketing world, its effectiveness should, therefore, be studied and evaluated to ensure the value of the investment in this kind of marketing and to further understand the expectation and satisfaction of customers towards digital marketing. The research framework has been proposed to make a clear relationship among constructs and to develop the hypotheses for further measurement. This research has contributed the knowledge of the relationship among digital marketing, market orientation, and customer relationship, which includes place awareness, brand image, customer satisfaction, and brand loyalty. In total, 13 hypotheses cover all aspects of the relationship. This research proposes that digital marketing itself affects market orientation, place awareness, brand image, customer satisfaction, and travelers' loyalty. Focusing on market orientation, it is found that market orientation is not only impacted by digital marketing, it also could be an antecedent of digital marketing and other constructs as well. Concerning the customer relationship, the research shows the association among elements. To illustrate, the level of awareness impacts on the level of a place image. Place image affects customer satisfaction, and customer satisfaction influences the degree of brand loyalty.

It might be concluded that the relationships among variables are related and linked to one another. In explanation, the greater awareness the customers have, the better place image customers perceive, and the stronger the brand image is, the more customers are satisfied and loyal to the brand. In other words, if the company fails to provide an excellent digital marketing and market orientation, including travelers' orientation, competitor orientation, and inter-functional coordination, there might be a lack of place awareness, negative place image, lower customer satisfaction, and a lower level of brand loyalty.

Managerial implications

The current study provides managerial implications to the companies that are investing in travelers' orientation and using digital marketing, to influence their customer relationship. This research also helps businesses to understand better the whole picture of how they can increase the efficiency of digital marketing and market orientation. They will learn more about how to raise awareness, place image, customer satisfaction, and brand loyalty, which might be considered as one of the goals of the service industry, including hotels. Regarding the effectiveness of digital marketing, the result shows that digital marketing is significant among all elements, i.e., market orientation which includes travelers' orientation, competitor orientation, and inter-functional coordination, place awareness, place image, customer satisfaction, and brand loyalty.

Moreover, travelers' orientation is also an essential factor to increase the potential of digital marketing and the level of place awareness, place image, customer satisfaction, and brand loyalty. In other words, if businesses have a strong digital marketing and market orientation, their relationships with customers tend to be positive. Regarding customer relationship, it is found that the higher the awareness is, the better image customers have towards the place.

Moreover, place image has a potential impact on customer satisfaction, and customer satisfaction effectively increases brand loyalty. Therefore, it could be summarized that the data collected from the questionnaire are aligned with the literature review. The company could trust and might invest in digital marketing and travelers' orientation, which are the factors of a successful customer relationship.

Key construct definitions

Travellers' orientation: this refers to the time when companies first pay attention to travelers' needs and attempt to satisfy them (Lee & Hwang, 2016).

Awareness: this is defined as the ability of consumers to recognize or differentiate the hotel that is in their mind (Keller, 1993; Moisescu, 2009), or the familiarity of the hotel about the place (Malik et al., 2013).

Place image: place image refers to the tourist interpretation about the place (Keller, 1993; Korchia, 2015).

Satisfaction: the term satisfaction is used when the customers personally judge the brands by means of the expected and experienced products and services (Oliver, 1997; Sondoh et al., 2007).

Loyalty: loyalty is explained when customers select to buy particular products or services from the same brand over and over again (Moisescu, 2006).

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Figure 1: The research conceptual model

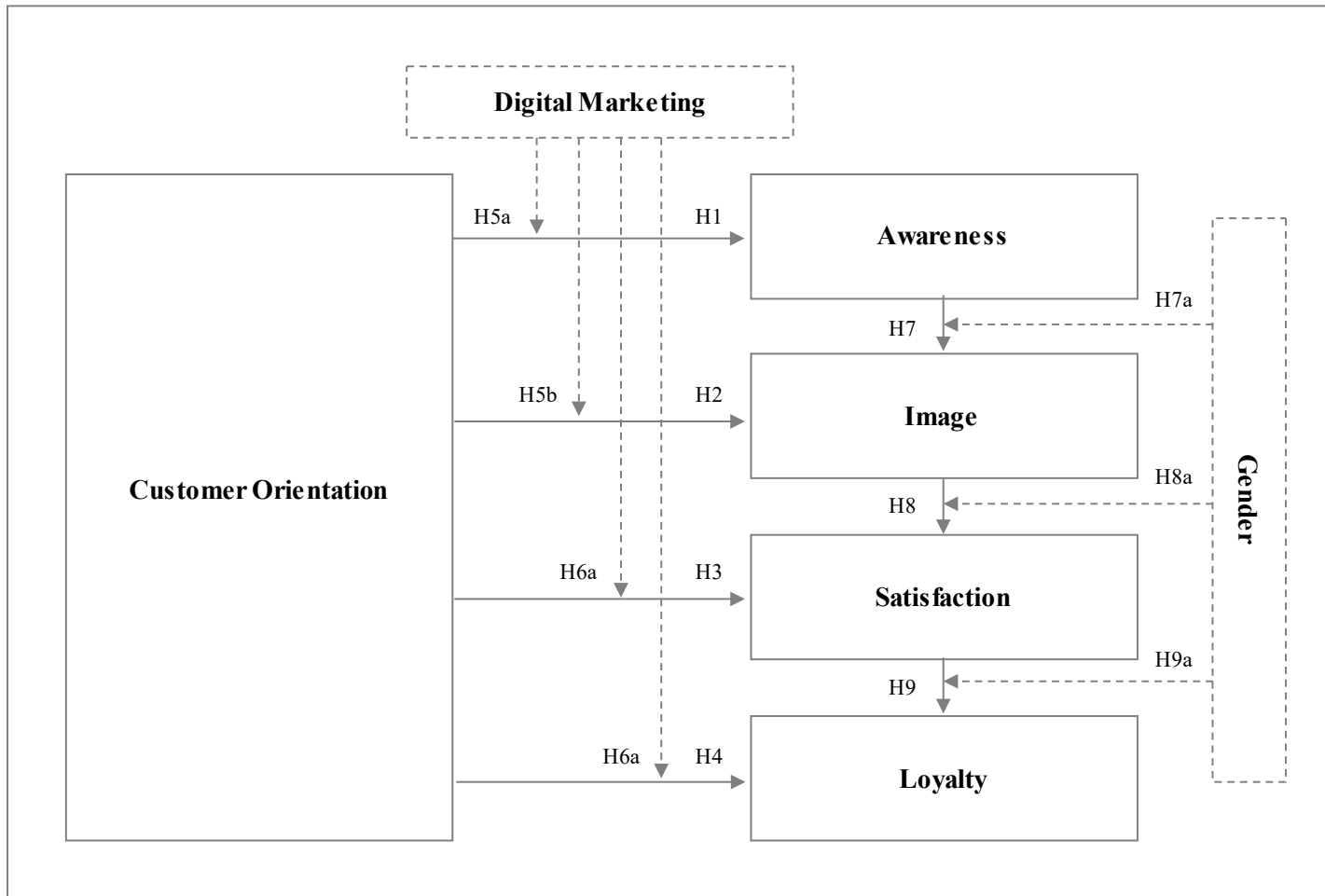


Table 1: Construct, codes, item measurement, and references

Code	Construct and items	Factor		Std.	Reference
		analysis	Mean	Dev.	
Customer orientation					Cronbach @.916
MCUS1	I think the Hotel regularly analyses factors, which influence purchase behaviour of customers.	.705	5.4408	1.28497	Tomaskova (2009)
MCUS2	I think the Hotel determines why potential customers have not bought the product yet.				
MCUS3	I think the Hotel systematically and frequently measures customer satisfaction	.796	5.4987	1.22809	Lado et al. (1998)
MCUS4	I think the Hotel systematically evaluates the impact of the environment on the customers				
MCUS5	I think the Hotel periodically analyses the customers' current and future needs	.801	5.4106	1.34472	
MCUS6	I think the Hotel periodically measures the customers' image of the product/service	.789	5.3728	1.36221	
MCUS7	I think the Hotel develops monitoring of the changes in preferences of its customers' system				
MCUS8	I think the Hotel creates services that offer value for me	.840	5.6297	1.17052	Kumar et al. (1998)
MCUS9	I think the Hotel has customer satisfaction as a primary objective	.794	5.4962	1.13178	
Digital Marketing					Cronbach @.917
DM1	I think the Hotel social media accelerates revenue growth.	.715	5.5668	1.24467	

DM2	I think the Hotel social media has low investment.				Khan and Siddiqui (2013)
DM3	I think the Hotel social media provides customer's participation.	.820	5.8791	1.21460	
DM4	I think the Hotel social media generates immediate response from customers.	.838	5.7028	1.26024	
DM5	I think the Hotel social media attracts attention very quickly				
DM6	I think the Hotel social media is much more measurable.				
DM7	I think I get information about certain product/services through social networking sites				
DM8	I think the information I get from the sites persuades me to buy the product/service	.755	5.3929	1.29753	
DM9	I am satisfied with the service/product that I ordered through the social network				
DM10	I agree that social network influence people nowadays in buying products/services	.838	5.5743	1.26037	
Awareness					Cronbach @.962
AW1	I am interested in this Hotel	.828	5.6877	1.26058	Aaker (1991); Cornwell et al. (2011)
AW2	I know what this Hotel looks like				
AW3	Compared to other people, I know more about this Hotel				
AW4	This Hotel is a brand of hotel industries I am very familiar with	.921	5.8816	1.27469	Buil et al. (2013)
AW5	When I think of hotel industries, this Hotel is one of the brands that come to mind	.912	5.8892	1.27041	
AW6	Some characteristics of this Hotel come to my mind quickly				
AW7	I can quickly recognise the symbol or logo of this Hotel	.899	5.8589	1.26940	Yoo and Donthu (2001)

Image					Cronbach @.925
IM1	I like this Hotel	.827	5.4257	1.16889	Forouidi et al. (2014; 2017; 2018)
IM2	I like this Hotel compared to other hotels	.847	5.3199	1.32228	
IM3	I think other consumers like this Hotel as well				
IM4	The Hotel's logo communicates about the Hotel to its customers				
IM5	The Hotel's logo enhances the Hotel's image	.901	5.4232	1.15569	
IM6	I think this Hotel helps me feel accepted				
IM7	I think this Hotel improves the way I am perceived by others				
IM8	I think this Hotel prevents me from looking cheap				
IM9	I think the usage of this Hotel is effective to my needs than other brands.				
Satisfaction					Cronbach @.940
SAT1	I think that I did the right thing when I used this Hotel	.879	5.0403	1.32703	Sondoh et al. (2007)
SAT2	I believe that using this Hotel is usually a very satisfying experience	.874	5.0630	1.27270	
SAT3	I am very satisfied with my decision to use this Hotel	.881	5.0655	1.33361	
SAT4	My choice to use this Hotel has been a wise one	.908	5.0655	1.32029	
SAT5	This Hotel does a good job of satisfying my needs				
Loyalty					Cronbach @.909
LOY1	Compared to other hotels that have similar features, I am willing to pay a premium (higher) price for this Hotel				Christodoulides et al. (2015)

LOY2	Even if another hotel has the same features as this Hotel, I would prefer to use this Hotel	.764	5.2972	1.32662	Yoo and Donthu (2002)
LOY3	If another brand is not different from this Hotel in any way, it seems smarter to purchase	.828	5.3929	1.24793	
LOY4	I consider myself to be loyal to this Hotel				
LOY5	This Hotel would be my first choice of hotel industries	.838	5.2191	1.38164	
LOY6	I think I am more likely to return to this Hotel in the future	.804	5.1562	1.44976	Ekinci et al. (2011)

Table 2: Demographic profile (N=397)

Frequency				Per cent			
Visit				Employment			
Once	107	27.0	Business person	4	1.0		
Twice	142	35.8	Lawyer, dentist or architect etc.	48	12.1		
More than two times	148	37.3	Office/clerical staffs	39	9.8		
Gender				Worker	24	6.0	
Female	173	43.6	Civil servant	24	6.0		
Male	224	56.4	Craftsman	32	8.1		
Age				Student	140	35.3	
19 years old or less	31	7.8	Homemaker	38	9.6		
20 to 29 years	81	20.4	Retired	40	10.1		
30 to 39 years	111	28.0	Unemployed	8	2.0		
40 to 49 years	78	19.6	Degree				
50 to 59 years	48	12.1	High school	55	13.9		
60 years old or more	48	12.1	Undergraduate	114	28.7		
			Postgraduate and above	228	57.4		

Table 3: Construct relationships and discriminant validity

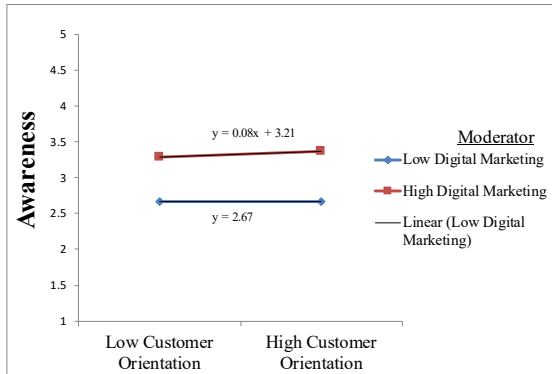
	CR	AVE	MSV	IMAGE	CUSORIENT	AWARENESS	SATISFACTION	LOYALTY
Image	0.927	0.763	0.095	0.873				
Customer Orientation	0.915	0.641	0.287	0.304	0.801			
Awareness	0.962	0.865	0.138	0.264	0.372	0.930		
Satisfaction	0.934	0.779	0.222	0.169	0.349	0.250	0.882	
Loyalty	0.915	0.730	0.287	0.308	0.536	0.346	0.471	0.854

Table 4: Results of hypothesis testing

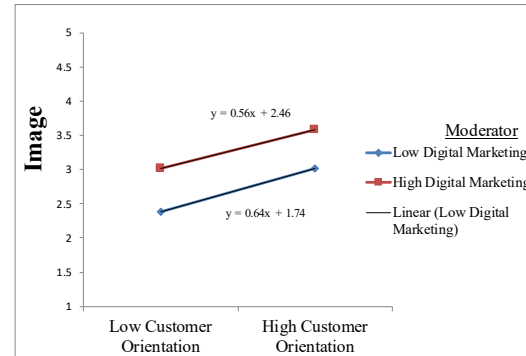
Standardised regression paths				Estimate	S.E	C.R	<i>p</i>	Hypothesis	
H1	Customer Orientation	--->	Awareness	.421	.060	7.065	***	Supported	
H2	Customer Orientation	--->	Image	.236	.055	4.283	***	Supported	
H3	Customer Orientation	--->	Satisfaction	.430	.074	5.833	***	Supported	
H4	Customer Orientation	--->	Loyalty	.507	.063	8.007	***	Supported	
H7	Awareness	--->	Image	.147	.047	3.105	.002	Supported	
H8	Image	--->	Satisfaction	.094	.072	1.305	.192	Not-Supported	
H9	Satisfaction	--->	Loyalty	.290	.047	6.202	***	Supported	
Moderator (Gender)									
H7a	Awareness	--->	Image						
				Female	.166	.067	2.466	.014	Supported
				Male	.129	.066	1.947	.052	Not-Supported
H8a	Image	--->	Satisfaction						
				Female	.224	.114	1.958	.050	Partially Supported
				Male	.023	.091	.253	.800	Not-Supported
H9a	Satisfaction	--->	Loyalty						
				Female	.212	.067	3.185	.001	Supported

		Male	.331	.061	5.438	***	Supported
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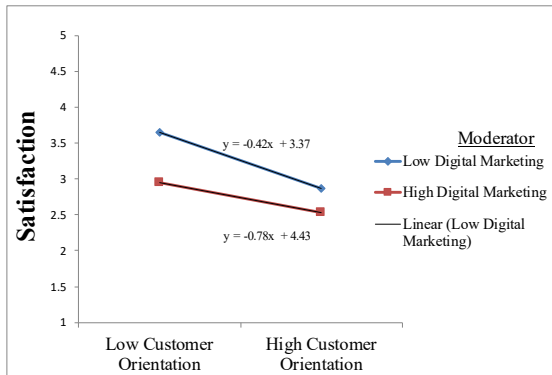
Table 5: Results of moderation impacts (digital marketing)



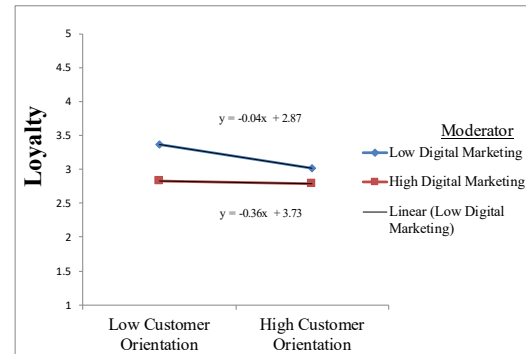
Digital Marketing strengthens the positive relationship between Customer Orientation and Awareness.



Digital Marketing dampens the positive relationship between Customer Orientation and Image.



Digital Marketing dampens the negative relationship between Customer Orientation and Satisfaction.



Digital Marketing dampens the negative relationship between Customer Orientation and Loyalty.