

Hospitality branding in emerging economies: an Indian perspective

Shivam Rai and Jogendra Kumar Nayak

Shivam Rai and
Jogendra Kumar Nayak are
both based at the Indian
Institute of Technology,
Roorkee, India.

Abstract

Purpose – *Travel and tourism is an imperative economic activity in most countries around the world. The industry has momentous indirect and induced impacts apart from its direct economic impact. The purpose of this paper is to test the applicability of brand interaction and perceived quality theory in the formation of brand trust, and the impact of affective commitment and brand trust toward advocacy intentions in the context of the Indian hospitality industry. This study also examines how emotional, and experiential hospitality brand relationship with the consumers can be developed in the emerging economies.*

Design/methodology/approach – *A total of 430 respondents participated in the study. Empirical evidence from depth interviews and data were garnered into a conceptual model. The proposed model was tested using structural equation modeling.*

Findings – *The findings reveal that perceived quality and brand interaction forms brand trust and trust is the key factor in establishing emotional (affective) commitment between the customer and the hospitality brand. The study also suggests that emotional commitment in customers help them in becoming brand advocates. The findings of the research will help hospitality brand strategists in developing successful branding strategies.*

Research limitations/implications – *This research examines the advantage of customers' relationship and their meaningful brand connections in the hospitality context. The study establishes a relationship among antecedents of trust, trust and commitment which can lead toward brand advocacy.*

Originality/value – *The findings provide insight for hospitality brand managers in developing effective branding strategies for their organizations. This study inspects the advantages of cultivating meaningful brand connections and relationships with consumers in the Indian hospitality sector.*

Keywords *Perceived quality, Brand interaction, Trust, Affective commitment, Advocacy*

Paper type *Research paper*

Introduction

The tourism industry is the largest service sector and leading employment generator worldwide. The industry outpaced the global economic growth in 2016 and created 6m new jobs in 2016 itself. The revenue generation from the industry was \$7.6trillion and it supported a total of 292m jobs across the world, equivalent to 1 in 10 jobs in the world economy (WTTC report, 2017). Economic development of many countries is dependent on the tourism and hospitality industry. Therefore, emerging countries are considering this industry as the major growth drivers for their economic growth (WTTC report, 2017). However, branding is the biggest challenge in the tourism and hospitality industry. This study aims to conceptualize and examine a hospitality branding model for emerging economies like India.

Hospitality brands can permeate distinctive meanings to the customers. These meanings and self-experiences of customers with a hospitality brand may enkindle the emotional relationship between the brand and customer. Hospitality is an unspoken inward service experience and emotions of a customer play an inherent role in the process of decision making. The hospitality marketers focus on branding their services as unique experiences. The industry is advancing from a “delivery focused” service economy (emphasizes on the service offerings) to an “experience economy” (Pine and Gilmore, 1999) where offerings are considered as “stage”

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performances that create unique experiences for the customers engage their senses and treat them in a very personalized manner (Schmitt, 1999).

Hotels in India have evolved as a major factor in the sustainable development due to their robust associations with the other industries of the economy. Fooding and lodging industry is known as the provider of personalized services that deliver a unique customer experience. The direct contribution of travel and tourism industry in India is 6.8 percent of the total GDP, and it is expected to grow by 7.2 percent (Government of India, 2017). The tourism and hospitality industry in India is anticipating an unprecedented growth in the upcoming years. Further, with the rapid growth of information technology, the hospitality industry is facing unseen competitors (e.g. services of airbnb.com where you can rent unique places apart from hotels to stay at a tourist destination), leading to increased competition in the industry. Moreover, as the hospitality and tourism industry is competing on experiential outcomes, branding and marketing strategies will form fundamental roles in the success of a hospitality brand.

In response to the growing competition of developing a unique brand identity in the market, organizations have amplified efforts to strengthen their brands by adopting experiential techniques that cater unique and personalized experiences to the customer (Smilansky, 2009). A brand is not only an identity but a promise to the hotel customers that the hotel will bring in the quality of care and desired services (Speak, 1996). Hospitality branding demands planned dedication for delivering unique standards of consistency across product and services (Mangini, 2002). The brand strategists should focus on addressing issues like building trust between customer and brand and administering the senses and experiences of customers toward hospitality organizations (Mangini, 2002).

The hospitality is a highly personalized service industry. Brands create unique experiences in the mind of the consumer that serve as the primary basis for the brand preference (Brakus *et al.*, 2009). Schmitt (1999) proposed that customers of the twenty-first century are rational as well as emotional decision makers, and the emotions can be created through unique brand experiences. Fournier (1998) proposed that customer and brand carry a two-way relationship, and the values are co-created. Customers are seen as the equal partners in the value creation of the product and services through their emotions and experiences (Pralhad and Venkat, 2004). The customer and the brand relationship can be rationally or emotionally based (Brakus *et al.*, 2009). Moreover, the emotional attachment of a customer with the brand may offer organizations an additional competitive advantage because the customer may not prefer the other brands for consumption as the decisions will not be based on rationality.

Improvement of branding in hospitality organizations is vital because the industry is facing dynamic changes. For example, purchasing power in India has increased and people are ready to spend more and looking for better hospitality services. Customers are becoming very selective about the hotel and restaurant choices. Second, UNWTO report has forecasted that the travel and tourism Industry in India will grow by 8 percent per annum so the additional numbers of travelers will be needing tourism and hospitality services. From the investors' perspective, the government of India report states that tourism industry creates 78 new jobs per USD1m invested in the industry. The Government of India is promoting the travel and tourism industry by providing investor-friendly investment laws, so that unemployed skilled workers can get good jobs (Make in India, 2017).

This research is focused on examining the role of emotional and experiential hospitality brand traits and their relationship with the customers' behavioral outcomes. Moreover, this research will help hospitality managers in the identification of experiential traits in the hospitality and tourism industry from customers' point of view. The marketers will be able to understand the role of affect-based brand relationships in hospitality products and services. This study will also help in the approximation of possible market outcome by the promotion of certain experiences to the right segment of customers. The owners of the restaurant and hotels may create a benchmark by enhancing experiential traits that can contribute to the positive customer behavioral intentions.

Literature review and hypotheses development

Academia has proposed that high commitment and loyalty for a brand can be created by connecting the customers emotionally with the brand through experiential marketing or

affect-based brand relationships (Schmitt, 1999; Park *et al.*, 2009). Strong and meaningful brand association of customers can pull off a distinct and competitive gain in the hospitality marketplace for the respective organizations.

Hospitality branding “a service branding”

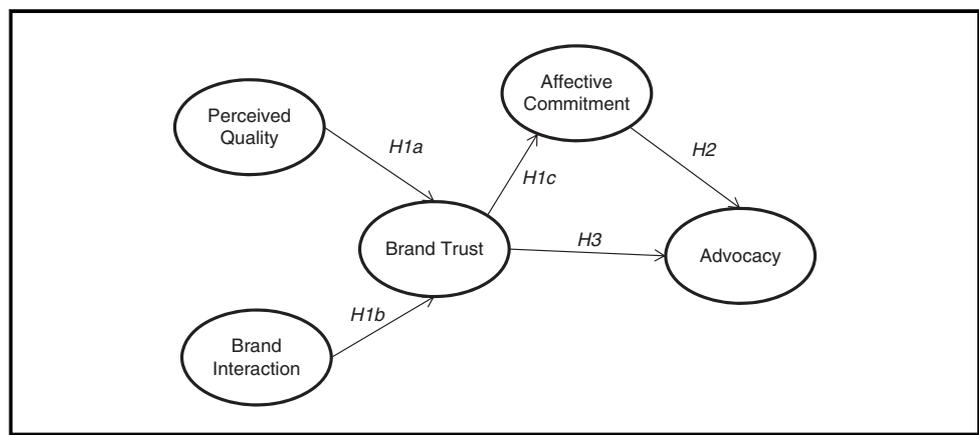
A brand in the service industry is the promise of future satisfaction to consumers (Berry, 2010). Hospitality industry is a highly personalized service industry, and it builds strong brands by engaging consumers emotionally (Berry, 2000). The branding of services is different from the products as it is not based on the feature and benefits, and the emphasis is placed on the unique characteristics of services. Due to its intangible nature, one very discerning factor of the service industry is lack of indicators in the evaluation factors by which a customer will avail or reject a particular service, thus branding holds utmost importance in the service industry (Zeithaml, 1988). Krishnan and Hartline (2001) proposed that a good service brand can assure customers about the service quality.

Perceived quality refers to the customer’s valuation of the products and services offered by a hospitality brand (Šerić *et al.*, 2016). Brand interaction refers to the interaction between the customer and the brand. Therefore, perceived quality deals with the expected offerings by a customer and brand interaction deal with the actual offerings delivered to the customer. The authors propose that the better understanding of perceived quality and brand interaction is necessary as it will help hospitality and tourism marketers in minimizing the gap between the expected and actual outcomes of a customer. Moreover, perceived quality and brand interaction have been closely associated with the customer’s trust, commitment, and loyalty (Xu *et al.*, 2015; Šerić *et al.*, 2016; Martínez and Nishiyama, 2017; Rai and Nayak, 2018). A conceptual framework for hospitality branding has been proposed by the authors (refer Figure 1).

Emotional commitment

The branding of products and services has gone beyond the feature and benefit branding and it has become experiential branding that sees customers as a rational as well as emotional decision makers (Schmitt, 1999). Berry (2000) and Aiello (2010) supported the argument and proposed that if a brand has the ability to influence the customers’ emotions, it will gain a competitive advantage over others. When a customer gets emotionally attached to the brand, a bond of commitment develops between the customer and the brand (Park *et al.*, 2009). Brand commitment is nothing but a lasting aspiration, and it maintains strong and healthy relationships with the hospitality brand (Lacy, 2007; Moorman *et al.*, 1993). Commitment can be created in three ways economically, emotionally and psychologically. Commitment is co-created and acts as a vital factor for the successful long-term consumer brand relationships (Morgan and Hunt, 1994).

Figure 1 Conceptual framework



There are two forms of commitment (Bansal *et al.*, 2004). One is known as an emotional commitment or affective commitment, and the other one is known as continuance commitment. In continuance commitment, the customer is more committed toward the product economically. Therefore, the economic benefits of a service or product decide the degree of commitment toward a brand. In emotional commitment, customer's commitment is decided by his emotions and experiences (Allen and Meyer, 1990). Moreover, the customer builds an emotional relationship with the brand (Allen and Meyer, 1990). Customers who are emotionally committed to the brand are loyal customers and trust the brand (Bolton *et al.*, 2000). Establishing emotionally committed customers in hospitality marketing can be very useful as the hospitality sector creates very personalized service experience.

Brand trust

Trust is one of the core features of emotional brand relationships. It refers to the positive conviction about the reliability of an object (Everard and Galletta, 2006). Branding in hospitality is very much dependent on trust (Lien *et al.*, 2015). Trust has been defined as a keenness to depend on a swap collaborator with whom the customer forms a self-belief (Moorman *et al.*, 1993, p. 82). Academia suggests, that Brand trust along with commitment is vital for a successful customer and brand relationship (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). A hotel can employ trust as a powerful marketing means to develop customer loyalty (Kim, Jin and Swinney, 2009). The combination of trust and emotional commitment positively impact the efficiency and effectiveness of the firm (Kim, Kim and Kim, 2009). Using the evidence from the existing literature, it is anticipated that trust in hospitality can be dependent on several factors: perceived quality, brand interaction (evolve from the interaction between consumer and organization's environment) and brand prestige.

Perceived quality

Zeithaml (1988) and Aaker (1991) described perceived quality as the customers' subjective estimation about competitive offerings. Similarly, perceived quality can be quoted as the quality service discernment, and it can be a customers' impression about the pre-eminence of an individual product or service (Bitner and Hubbert, 1994). There is a number of factors that can influence the perceived quality, for example, experiences, consumption and special desires of customers (Yoo *et al.*, 2000). Existing literature proposes that perceived quality is the primary factor that influences the customers' value proposition (Zeithaml, 1988). Perceived quality encourages customers to choose one brand over its competitors by establishing trust in the brand (Netemeyer *et al.*, 2004). Perceived quality has been seen as a catalyst in influencing the value perceptions of the customers that influence customers purchase decisions (Zeithaml, 1988). Perceived quality has been seen as the key element in the formation of customer brand equity in the hospitality and tourism sector (Aaker, 1996; Šerić *et al.*, 2016). It has been seen as the customer's verdict about the superiority or excellence of a specific product or service (Šerić *et al.*, 2016). Moreover, perceived quality is one of the main factors that helps customers in differentiating a hospitality brand from its competitors (Namkung and Jang, 2013). The literature suggests that a positive relationship exists among perceived quality, brand trust and advocacy (Martínez and Nishiyama, 2017). Therefore, the authors propose:

H1a. Perceived quality of the hospitality brand is positively related to trust.

Brand interaction

Brand interaction refers to the interaction between customer and hospitality personnel/ staff, where employees of the hospitality organization try to define and establish the trust between the brand and the customer (Berry, 2000). Therefore, an exhibition of customer-oriented behavior is critical for gaining the competitive advantage in the service industry (Hartline *et al.*, 2000). The customer-centric attitude of service personnel helps in increasing the customer-oriented behaviors (Suh *et al.*, 2011). A customer-centric tactic and focused approach on brand interaction by service organizations can enhance the

trust of the customers (Hoffman and Ingram, 1992; Rai and Nayak, 2018). Thus, it can be hypothesized:

H1b. Brand interaction displayed by the hospitality organization is positively related to trust.

Existing literature discusses that trust between the customer and the brand often results in long-term commitment (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). These relationships build up upon the emotional attachment between the two (Gounaris, 2005). Therefore, authors, propose that trust garners the emotional commitment in hospitality brand:

H1c. Trust is positively related to affective commitment for hospitality brand.

Emotional commitment in the hospitality industry can be enhanced by trust between the brand and customer. When a customer becomes emotionally attached to a brand, then it is possible that the consumer becomes a brand advocate (Fullerton, 2005). High brand loyal customers are defined as individuals who are frequent buyers of a product or service and show a strong commitment for that particular brand (Baldinger and Rubinson, 1996). A brand loyal customer is committed to the brand and displays the behavior of repeat purchases. Repurchase intentions are usually recognized with affective commitment. However, there is a metamorphosis between repurchase intentions and commitment. An effectively committed customer becomes emotionally attached to the brand and a relationship of friendship starts developing between them. Furthermore, in academia, it has been proposed that trust is one of the main factors in establishing emotional relationships between the brand and customer that may lead to the advocacy. Thus we propose that:

H2. Affective commitment is positively related to advocacy.

H3. Trust in the Hospitality brand is positively related to advocacy.

Methodology

For the rationale of the research and to test the proposed hypotheses, an online survey was conducted. Data was gathered through a convenience sampling technique. For the purpose of data collection hotels and restaurants of Delhi, Haridwar and Rishikesh were targeted. Delhi is the capital of India and a popular tourism destination for business as well as leisure tourists. Haridwar and Rishikesh are popular tourism destination for leisure and religious travelers. Therefore, the hospitality organizations from these three tourism destinations were targeted. The hospitality organizations were told about the research and once they agreed to participate in the study the e-mail ID of their customers was obtained. To make sure that the respondents were frequent travelers, only the contact information of such customers were obtained who had visited the respective organization at least two times. After obtaining the contact information of the guests a mail was sent consisting the online questionnaire. A total of 730 e-mails were communicated. The data were collected online from across India. The respondents were the frequent visitors to the hotels and restaurants. The respondents were asked to list their favorite hotel or restaurant they currently attend and then respondents were requested to fill the questionnaire. A total of 445 responses was obtained and after data purification the total 430 responses were taken into consideration for the data analysis. Out of 430 respondents, 290 were male and 140 were females. In total, 250 of the respondents were above 35 years of age and 180 were below 35 years of age. A structured questionnaire was prepared for the purpose of gathering the responses. For the purpose of developing a questionnaire, previous studies were explored. Two Academicians and three researchers in the hospitality domain were interviewed. After obtaining inputs from all the sources a structured questionnaire was developed, and with the help of Google form services sent to the prospective respondents in web link form. Emotional commitment items were derived from Allen and Meyer (1990), trust items were derived from the Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001). The items for the perceived quality were taken from Keller and Aaker (1992), and for the brand interaction, self-made questions were used. brand advocacy items were adopted from Phillips *et al.* (2011). All the items were in seven-point Likert scale wherein 1 being strongly disagreed and 7 strongly agreed. The responses were arranged in the excel sheet. The final data were then checked for any missing values and outliers. The final data

were analyzed using SPSS 20. Once the missing values were checked by using SPSS missing data imputation technique, outlier analysis was performed, and after that the normality of the data was checked. Kurtosis and skewness tests were performed in order to check the normality. All the computed values were between -1.96 and $+1.96$ as defined by Mardia (1970). Exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis were carried out using SPSS and AMOS.

Results

The drift of the data analysis for the current study is in the following manner: descriptive analysis was performed first, followed by the exploratory factor analysis. After the exploratory factor analysis, reliability and validity of the measurement model were checked using confirmatory factor analysis. After that measurement invariances were computed (Hair *et al.*, 2006). The structured procedure was followed as recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). The exploratory factor analysis was performed followed by confirmatory factor analysis to assess the model for construct and to check the discriminant validity and then the hypotheses were checked in the structural model.

Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics analysis was carried out to study the Brand interaction, Perceived quality, brand trust, affective commitment and advocacy dimensions. The minimum value was 1 and the maximum value was 7 for the items used in the study. The mean value of the items ranged from 3.98 to 5.65 and the standard deviation ranged from 1.110 to 1.848. "The staff at my hotel is willing to cheer up guests when they are down" was having the highest mean. "I seldom miss an opportunity to tell others good things" was having the lowest mean. The mean value of brand interaction was dominant over the perceived quality. Therefore, brand interaction may have more value to the customer than perceived quality in the formation of brand trust (Table I).

Exploratory factor analysis was performed to check the dimensionality of every individual items used in the study. The value of KMO test for sampling adequacy was 0.866 which is meritorious (Hair *et al.*, 2006). Then the communalities for the items were checked, and the extractions for each item were more than 0.4 which is considered as a good communality value (Hair *et al.*, 2006). Five factors were extracted and together they explained 68.32 percent of the total variances. Factor loadings, along with the average variance extracted were calculated for each latent variable to test the convergent validity. As recommended by the Hair *et al.* (2006) standardized factor loadings exceeded 0.6 (Tables II and III).

Table I Descriptive statistics

	<i>n</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
PQ1	430	1	7	5.53	1.498
PQ2	430	1	7	4.89	1.501
PQ3	430	1	7	4.79	1.311
BI1	430	1	7	5.04	1.324
BI2	430	1	7	5.65	1.628
BI3	430	1	7	4.32	1.184
BI4	430	1	7	5.11	1.257
BT1	430	1	7	4.64	1.156
BT2	430	1	7	4.84	1.432
BT3	430	1	7	4.53	1.110
AC1	430	1	7	4.71	1.701
AC2	430	1	7	4.21	1.604
AC3	430	1	7	4.36	1.285
ADV1	430	1	7	5.51	1.678
ADV2	430	1	7	3.98	1.848
ADV3	430	1	7	4.81	1.345
ADV4	430	1	7	4.43	1.325

Table II KMO and Bartlett's test

Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy		0.866
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Approx. χ^2	2,556.632
	df	105
	Sig.	0.000

Table III Exploratory factor analysis

	Component matrix ^a				
	1	2	3	4	5
PQ1	0.856				
PQ2	0.792				
PQ3	0.630				
BI1		0.801			
BI2		0.779			
BI3		0.721			
BI4		0.695			
BT1			0.830		
BT2			0.802		
BT3			0.605		
AC1				0.628	
AC2				0.614	
AC3				0.775	
ADV1					0.835
ADV2					0.650
ADV3					0.624

Notes: Extraction method: principal component analysis. ^afive components extracted

When the respondents were asked to grade perceived quality in different variables the results differed. PQ1 was the biggest contributor to perceived quality. It pointed out that care provided by the hospitality organization to their customers should be excellent, the second variable with highest loadings was PQ2 means the quality of the services matters a lot to the hospitality customer. Results show that ambiance and the interactive environment is also a vital variable and contributes to the customers' perceived quality.

The values of the final measurement model in confirmatory factor analysis came as CMIN value (2.994); *p*-value (0.000); CFI (0.899); NFI (0.873); AGFI (0.807); RMSEA (0.09); and SRMR (0.04) (Table IV). The proposed model showed adequate model fit as proposed by the Hair *et al.* (2006). To check the convergent validity AVE score was calculated. For each construct, the value came above 0.5 as suggested by (Hair *et al.*, 2006). Results showed that measurement error variance was lower than the variance in the construct. While checking the discriminant validity maximum shared squared variance (MSV) was compared to average variance extraction (AVE) as suggested by Hair *et al.* (2006). MSV should be less than the AVE and in our study, the proposed limit was achieved for each construct. Acceptable reliability limit of 0.7 prescribed by Nunnally and

Table IV Measurement model – goodness of fit measures

CMIN	DF	CMIN/DF	CFI	GFI	RMSEA
1,371.252**	458	2.994	0.899	0.807	0.09

Note: ***p* < 0.05

Bernstein (1994) was exceeded by all measures in this study. The hypotheses and structural model were assessed after procuring a validated measurement model. Results are presented in Tables V and VI.

The result shows that the perceived quality of the hospitality brand is positively related to trust. The brand interaction displayed by the hospitality organization is positively related to. It can be clearly defined from the results that trust and emotional commitment is strongly correlated for a hospitality brand. Hence, *H1c* was also supported. *H2* addressed the outcomes of emotional commitment toward brand advocacy and results supported that emotional commitment for the hospitality provider's brand is positively related to advocacy. The result for *H3* also testified that the trust in the hospitality brand is positively related to advocacy.

Discussion

This study identified a significant positive relationship between Indian customers' apprehension for trust and affective commitment on brand advocacy in hospitality settings.

This study presents a useful procedure to help companies in the hospitality sector to make decisions in the context of the experience economy. Perceived quality and brand interaction create unique experiences, with the earlier one deals with the desired experiences and the later one deals with the experiences that are created while interacting with the brand. These two factors constitute overall experiences of customers that form the basis for the creation of a brand trust platform. Hospitality companies can position themselves while utilizing upon these constructs. A relationship based on emotions between customer and hospitality brand may result in considerable profit for the hospitality organizations. This research examined how an emotional relationship can be developed between a customer and hospitality organizations. The findings reveal that trust is the key factor in establishing emotional commitment between the customer and the hospitality brand. As the hospitality is a very personalized form of service offering so the trust is essential. The result demonstrates that trust is formed and predicted on the perceived quality of the brand and the customer interaction with the hospitality brand. The findings suggest that perceived quality may be the customer expectation from the brand. Therefore, what a customer perceives and what he gets while interacting with the brand forms

Table V Means, standard deviation, reliability, average variance extracted and Pearson correlations

	<i>Means</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Reliability</i>	<i>AVE</i>	<i>PQ</i>	<i>EC</i>	<i>BT</i>	<i>BI</i>	<i>ADV</i>
PQ	5.07	0.90	0.84	0.740	1.000				
EC	4.86	0.86	0.89	0.685	0.361	1.000			
BT	5.08	0.92	0.87	0.715	0.624	0.423	1.000		
BI	4.39	1.24	0.81	0.514	0.102	0.122	0.477	1.000	
ADV	4.56	1.04	0.86	0.527	0.651	0.240	0.506	0.054	1.000

Table VI Hypotheses testing

<i>Effects</i>		<i>Estimate</i>	<i>t-value</i>
<i>H1a</i>	Perceived quality of the hospitality brand is positively related to trust	0.62**	3.63
<i>H1b</i>	Brand interaction displayed by the hospitality organization is positively related to trust	0.30**	2.90
<i>H1c</i>	Trust is positively related to affective commitment for hospitality brand	0.50**	5.27
<i>H2</i>	Affective commitment is positively related to advocacy	0.46**	3.80
<i>H3</i>	Trust in the Hospitality brand is positively related to advocacy	0.48**	3.85

Note: **Significant at $p < 0.05$

the brand trust. Moreover, the hospitality services are sometimes very personalized in nature, for example, combined fooding and lodging experiences are called home away from home experiences. Hence, developing and creating a trust factor for customers in the hospitality brand is essential for the marketers. The result also proposes that trust leads to advocacy and emotional commitment. Further, the result proposes that when a customer develops trust with a hospitality brand, he gets emotionally attached to that brand. Moreover, an emotionally attached customer starts being an advocate of the brand. The findings propose that the combination of trust and commitment forms a self-connection between the individual customer and the hospitality brand, and influences the customer to become a brand advocate. The brand advocate customer starts promoting the brand through word of mouth (Brakus *et al.*, 2009). Thus, strong emotional attachments with the customers will be priceless to hospitality organizations in the current cutthroat competitive market.

The results suggest that affective commitment is associated with brand trust and leads to advocacy of the hospitality brand, i.e. intention to revisit and word of mouth intentions. With commitment, a self-brand connection between the customer and the firm is built up. A self-brand connection helps an individual to identify a respective organization. In this study effect of affective commitment was checked on brand advocacy intentions. The study found that there was a strong connection between affective commitment and brand advocacy. Affective commitment is related to the customers' emotions and with stronger emotions, they become dedicated to the brand and do not opt for another alternative easily (Fullerton, 2005). Results propose that trust and affective commitment have an important effect on creating customer advocacy. Hospitality organizations should emphasize more in creating trust and affective commitment for their products and services. These results indicate that the customer may also begin to serve as brand advocates by frequently promoting, and even defending the brands to the others. So creating a healthy emotional connection with the customers will be priceless for the hospitality organizations. However, an affectively committed customer does not guarantee a brand advocacy intention. In order to make customers loyal to the hospitality brand, marketers should develop enough meaningful experiential attributes for their customers that may influence them for repetitive purchases. An enhanced experiential medium may serve as an effective medium to achieve brand advocacy in the hospitality industry.

Theoretical implication

The empirical findings of this research provide a new understanding of brand trust and its relationship with affective commitment and brand loyalty. The results suggest two significant antecedents of brand trust: perceived quality and brand interaction. The relational variable of brand trust, i.e. affective commitment has a significant contribution in brand advocacy creation. Perceived quality and brand interaction are found to influence brand trust that consequently influences affective commitment and brand advocacy. Our results are consistent with the findings of Chen and Myagmarsuren (2011) and Martínez and Nishiyama (2017). These authors proposed that perceived quality and brand interaction are the main strategic concerns in establishing long-term relationships with customers. The present research found that there was a significant effect of perceived quality and brand interaction on brand trust and advocacy. Our findings are in line with the previous studies like Šerić *et al.* (2014), Šerić *et al.* (2016) and Martínez and Nishiyama (2017), who identified perceived quality as one of the most relevant predictors of brand equity and brand advocacy in the hospitality and tourism industry.

Moreover, Kwon and Lennon (2009) found that in order to enjoy the benefits of brand loyalty hospitality and tourism organizations should focus on creating excellent brand interaction and service quality techniques. Furthermore, these results reveal that brand trust and affective commitment affect brand advocacy in the hospitality and tourism industry as previous studies demonstrate (Xu *et al.*, 2015; Šerić *et al.*, 2016). This research also expands the current hospitality and tourism research by confirming the role of brand interaction as a dimension of brand trust in the hospitality industry. To date, the role of brand interaction in brand trust creation is very limited and unclear in the hospitality and tourism context. However, the previous studies have revealed that brand interaction has the significant effect in creating the brand

loyalty and brand equity for the organizations (Ngelambong *et al.*, 2016; Martínez and Nishiyama, 2017). This study confirms that brand interaction is a significant construct affecting brand trust in the hospitality industry.

Managerial implication

This research can assist the hospitality and tourism marketers in the strategic planning of their hospitality brands and tourism destinations in many ways. The present study is focused on the cultivation of meaningful brand connection and emotional brand relationship with the customer in the hospitality industry. However, due to intense competition and many alternatives available in the hospitality industry, marketers should become more strategic in targeting desired customer segments. The features and benefits of the services in this competitive era is more or less same, and the marketers can only differentiate their services by delivering unique brand experiences to the customers (Brakus *et al.*, 2009). Customer's emotions play a major role in a hospitality organization where personal care and trust must co-exist. Emotions influence the buying decisions of the customer (Schmitt, 1999). Therefore, for the effective marketing of hospitality brands, the marketers should focus on enhancing customer emotions. The research proposes that trust is positively related to the emotional commitment of a hospitality brand. Marketers can target emotions of the customer to get the reference of the potential customers or can promote the existing customers to bring in new customers by creating a friendly environment.

Moreover, the environment of the hospitality brand constitutes the internal and external environment. Tourism marketers can enhance the experiential dimensions of the tourism destinations where the hospitality brand exist. An enhanced experience from both the internal and external environment may help the tourism and hospitality marketers in getting more business. Rai and Nayak (2018) proposed that tourism, event and hospitality marketers should work together for the future growth of an event destination.

These inferences for management exercise are noteworthy because the competition in the hospitality marketplace increasing and retention of customers have become a perilous component in hotel and restaurant business sustainability. This will entail hospitality managers to fathom the influence of the antecedents of trust and commitment development among different cultural groups (Chen, 2011). India is the land of cultural diversity and targeting the customers according to their cultural beliefs will help marketers to promote their brands in an effective manner.

This research offers insights into the understanding of the development of customer advocacy in hospitality brands. Advocacy has been measured to be attained either through meeting or exceeding service quality perceptions (Fullerton, 2005). This research shows that while dealing with Indian customers both perceived quality and brand interaction are important for their advocacy intentions.

At last, the events organized by the hospitality organizations like new year party or live events, etc., or to participate in socially responsible acts also creates an emotional brand as the customer thinks that organization is caring about the happiness of the society. Moreover, providing enhanced customer experiences may require improvement in the existing hospitality, but consequently, the enhanced system will help in achieving a competitive advantage for the hospitality organization.

Limitation and future research

Although this research makes an important contribution in understanding the trust, emotional commitment of customer and their relationship to the hospitality brand, future research is needed to validate the findings in different hospitality environment. The cross-sectional nature of the data prevented any causal relationships, future studies may overcome this weakness. Future studies may link the emotional commitment, trust and brand interaction with the satisfaction of the customer and check the relationship between customer and the hospitality brand.

Additionally, respondents of this study were from India only so future studies may overcome the geographical barriers, even a cross-cultural study may be more useful. Hospitality is a very personal form of service that customers enjoy very often in their lives building a relationship and creating unique experiences for the customer is very important. Hospitality and tourism area is very promising and one of the fastest growing industry in India and more research is warranted for exploring effective branding and marketing strategies for hospitality brands.

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Corresponding author

Shivam Rai can be contacted at: shivamrai1990@gmail.com

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