Evaluating Customer Perceptions and Their Influence on Organizational Branding in the Hotel Industry: A Strategic Perspective

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Abstract:

India is a country with 'unity in diversity' which favours the hotels and hospitality sector. The changing nature of the hospitality sector emphasizes how important consumer perceptions are becoming in determining corporate branding tactics. The important relationship between customer perceptions and hotel organizations' brand identities is examined in this study, with a focus on how customer satisfaction, service quality, and brand associations all work together to affect brand equity. The study examines important factors like ambience, responsiveness, personalization, and dependability from a strategic standpoint in order to determine how these aspects of service experience affect customer loyalty and the development of brand perception. Using a structured questionnaire and statistical tools, primary data was gathered from hotel patrons of strategically placed hotel chains throughout India's Golden Quadrilateral in order to investigate the relationships and causes. The results show that favourable consumer perceptions greatly increase trust and brand recognition, both of which support long-term competitive advantage. Additionally, the study finds discrepancies between customer expectations and service delivery, providing branding managers with useful information to refocus their tactics on experience-centric models. Hotels can build long-term brand equity and improve customer relations by closing the service-performance gap. By highlighting the critical role that customer-centric practices play in fostering organisational success and brand differentiation in the highly competitive hotel industry, this study adds to the body of research on strategic branding.

Keywords: *Customer Perception, Organizational Branding, Hotel Industry, Service Quality, Brand Equity, Customer Loyalty, Strategic Branding*

1. Introduction

Organisational branding has emerged as a crucial strategic tool for creating differentiation and cultivating enduring client loyalty in the cutthroat hospitality industry of today. In the hotel industry, branding is more than just logos or visual identities; it includes every aspect of the guest experience, from booking to correspondence after the stay. Customer perceptions and behavioural intentions are directly impacted by a hotel's capacity to communicate a consistent and memorable brand message. Emotional ties, personalized services, and consistent brand messaging are ways that successful hotel brands set themselves apart as the industry becomes more and more commoditized. As a result, branding is now a strategic organisational issue rather than merely a marketing function. Perceived service delivery plays a major role in brand success in an industry where customer interactions are ongoing and multifaceted. Thus, the cumulative effect of visitor perceptions over time is reflected in organisational branding. Hotels can command higher prices and obtain a competitive edge by building a strong brand image. These dynamics call for a more thorough comprehension of how patrons in the hospitality industry perceive and react to branding components (Petrescu et al., 2024).

The basis of a brand's power and resonance in consumers' minds is customer perception. Since consumers in the hotel sector rely more on perceived experiences than actual goods, perception management is essential to brand equity. According to the Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) theory, factors like perceived quality, emotional connections, and brand awareness have a direct impact on consumer choices (Huang & Cai, 2015). Positive brand perceptions increase customer satisfaction and foster loyalty, according to empirical research. Therefore, coordinating consistent branding cues with the intangible elements of the guest experience is essential to hotel branding success. Long-term relationships between guests and hotel brands are supported by emotional engagement, trust, and familiarity. Positive word-of-mouth and repeat business are encouraged when consumers believe the brand to be dependable and individualized. As a result, perceived value and service have a greater influence on a hotel's brand reputation than advertisements do. Therefore, the goal of strategic branding must be to intentionally engineer these perceptions.

In hospitality settings, customer perceptions are still heavily influenced by service quality. Hotel branding research commonly uses the SERVQUAL model, which assesses service quality along five dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Parasuraman et al., 1988). It assists hotels in identifying discrepancies between the actual service received and the expectations of their patrons. According to studies, a single unfavourable service encounter can damage a brand's reputation, but satisfying encounters increase trust and loyalty. In hotels, where services are co-produced in real time, operational execution and interpersonal interactions have a significant impact on brand perceptions. Brand equity is harmed when customers experience discrepancies between the services that were promised and those that were provided. Thus, preserving customer trust requires that service operations be in line with brand expectations. Hotels can align their service delivery strategy with branding objectives by utilising SERVQUAL insights. In the end, for perception-driven branding to remain authentic and relevant, it needs to be based on operational excellence.

Sensory and experiential branding has grown in importance in recent years as a means of affecting consumer perception and emotional bonding. In order to create unforgettable experiences, hotels are using multisensory branding more and more through ambient elements, soundscapes, interior design, and fragrance (Krishna, 2012). By appealing to deeper psychological and emotional layers, this deliberate use of sensory cues strengthens the bond between the brand and its customers. To improve atmosphere and brand recall, some hotel chains, for instance, use signature fragrances or carefully chosen music playlists. A unique and engaging experience is produced when sensory components are logically incorporated into service delivery. Additionally, research indicates that sensory branding increases customer satisfaction, particularly in the luxury or lifestyle hotel market. Hotels increase emotional attachment and loyalty by creating consistent sensory environments that reflect the brand personality. As a result, experience-driven branding is now crucial for turning ordinary customer service interactions into engaging brand narratives. It makes it possible for hotels to create enduring impressions rather than just transactional relationships (Piriyakul et al., 2024)

Interactions with hotel employees are another important aspect of customer perception that has a direct bearing on internal and external brand alignment. The goal of internal branding is to make sure that every service interaction upholds the hotel's brand values by coordinating employee behaviour with it (King & Grace, 2008). Customer trust and organisational credibility are increased when staff members comprehend and live up to the brand message. Employees who are empowered and involved provide services that are both emotionally and practically impactful. Positive brand perceptions are strengthened by consistent customer experiences that result from this alignment. Customer trust, on the other hand, may be weakened by discrepancies between front-line behaviour and brand expectations. To encourage brand-consistent behaviour, hotels must thus make investments in internal training, brand communication, and incentive programs. Success in the hospitality industry depends on internal branding, which is not just HR-related. In high-contact service sectors like hospitality, this internal-external brand synergy is particularly important.

This study aims to investigate, from a strategic perspective, how organisational branding in the hotel sector is influenced by customer perceptions. The study assesses how service quality, emotional experiences, and perceived brand image are related to one another using frameworks like CBBE, SERVQUAL, and experiential branding. Customers of well-known hotel chains in India's Golden Quadrilateral will provide primary data for the study. Finding service-performance gaps and suggesting branding tactics that meet changing consumer demands are the goals of the study. The study aims to provide practical insights for hospitality branding practitioners by examining the ways in which different service attributes affect brand loyalty. It is anticipated that the results will emphasize how important perception-driven branding is to preserving competitive advantage. Additionally, the study adds to the expanding corpus of research on strategic brand management in the service industry. In the end, it highlights that the most valuable currency of brand success in a highly experiential industry like hospitality is customer perceptions.

2. Background of Study:

Globalisation, changing consumer behaviour, and technology breakthroughs have all had a major impact on the hotel industry. Branding has become a strategic tool to obtain a competitive edge, draw in clients, and cultivate enduring loyalty in this quickly evolving environment (Cvent, 2025). Particularly in crowded markets with comparable service offerings, strong hotel branding increases visibility, fosters trust, and permits premium pricing. Research has shown that effective hotel brands use both emotional resonance and visual identity to influence customer perceptions and purchase intentions (Kayaman & Arasli, 2007). Due to consistent service expectations, branded properties typically have higher

operational efficiency and customer retention rates (So et al., 2013). These elements highlight how crucial it is becoming to comprehend how consumer perceptions affect hotel brand performance in both local and international settings (Minor Hotels, 2024).

In the hotel industry, a variety of experiential touchpoints, including staff interactions, ambiance, service quality, and digital impressions, influence customer perceptions. How a guest perceives a hotel's brand promise is greatly influenced by elements like cleanliness, dependability, staff politeness, and personalized service (Huang & Cai, 2015). Hotels now employ distinctive fragrances, carefully chosen music, and design components to leave a lasting impression because sensory branding, in particular, has been shown to be successful in influencing emotional reactions. Simultaneously, online booking experiences and digital reviews have an impact on how consumers perceive brands; unfavourable reviews or subpar user interfaces reduce overall brand equity. These results demonstrate that contemporary consumers form opinions based on indirect cues and environmental influences in addition to the services they receive. As a result, both digital and physical factors that together shape a visitor's perception must be taken into account in branding strategies (Thammasat Review, 2015).

A structured understanding of how perceptions translate into brand outcomes is provided by theoretical frameworks like Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE). Brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and loyalty are all important factors that determine brand strength, according to the CBBE model (Nassar, 2017). These relationships have been confirmed by structural equation modelling in hospitality studies, which demonstrates that the relationship between service quality and brand loyalty is mediated by customer satisfaction. Involving customers in the service delivery process improves their perception of individualized attention and shared value, according to the newly popular idea of value co-creation (Bordian et al., 2022). Guests are more likely to associate the brand favorably when they feel emotionally connected and actively involved. According to these observations, branding is a jointly created experience that is influenced by the company and the consumer rather than being a top-down procedure.

Numerous studies have been conducted in this field, but most of them isolate factors like loyalty or service quality without incorporating them into a comprehensive brand strategy. Furthermore, there is a dearth of empirical research on hotels in India, particularly when it comes to a variety of hotel segments in various geographical areas. By assessing how consumers across different service tiers view brand value and how these perceptions affect organisational branding outcomes, this study fills these gaps. The study offers a multifaceted viewpoint on consumer perception and brand development by referencing theories like SERVQUAL, CBBE, and sensory branding. Geographic depth is added by concentrating on India's Golden Quadrilateral region, which provides information on new markets with significant tourism potential. In the end, this study makes a theoretical and practical contribution by establishing a connection between perception-driven tactics and long-term brand performance in the hospitality sector.

3. Scope and Significance of Study:

This study explores the strategic influence of customer perceptions on hotel branding within India's Golden Quadrilateral region, encompassing metro cities such as Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, and Chennai. The research covers a diverse hotel spectrum, including luxury, midscale, and economy segments. It examines constructs like service quality, emotional engagement, sensory experiences, digital touchpoints, and employee behavior. These elements are analyzed through the lens of models such as Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE), SERVQUAL, and sensory branding to determine how customers' cognitive and emotional perceptions shape brand loyalty and advocacy. A special focus is placed on how Indian consumers experience hotel brands across multiple touchpoints—both physical and digital—and how these perceptions impact their evaluation of brand image and service value. This broad scope enables a contextual and empirical understanding of the branding mechanisms operating in Indian hospitality. The significance of the study lies in its attempt to unify disparate areas of branding research into an integrative framework tailored to the Indian hotel industry. Most prior studies investigate service quality, customer loyalty, or sensory branding independently, which limits holistic application. For instance, Rai and Nayak (2019) demonstrated that perceived quality and emotional connections significantly enhance brand trust in India's mid-tier hotel sector. Likewise, a recent empirical study found that sensory branding elements—especially smell and visual design—create stronger brand recall and differentiation in high-contact services like hotels. These findings have not been adequately synthesized in the Indian context to show how such variables collectively influence organizational branding. This research addresses that void by offering a unified analysis of customer perception and its branding implications. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to

the expansion of brand equity and sensory marketing literature in emerging markets. Prior reviews indicate that multisensory branding—incorporating sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch—enhances both brand affect and behavioral intention. Research from the Gujarat region found that each sensory input activates unique emotional triggers, which cumulatively shape the guest's perception of brand identity and service quality (Prajapati & Patel, 2022).

The current study applies these validated insights to a wider cross-regional sample and integrates them with brand equity constructs, thereby improving the explanatory power of these frameworks in India's hospitality sector. The use of advanced statistical tools such as structural equation modeling also ensures rigor in analyzing the interrelationships between perception, experience, and branding. The findings offer valuable strategic insights for hoteliers aiming to build strong brand equity through enhanced guest perception. In a digital-first economy, hotel branding is no longer limited to logos or loyalty programs; it now depends on real-time guest experiences and online reviews (Dasgupta et al., 2024). By understanding how elements like service delivery, ambient design, and digital communication shape perception, hotel managers can design coherent and differentiated brand experiences. Moreover, the study provides a roadmap for aligning employee behavior and physical infrastructure with brand messaging to ensure consistency. These findings can guide the development of branding strategies that convert one-time guests into brand advocates, helping Indian hotels compete more effectively in the global market.

4. **Objectives of Study:**

- To examine the impact of customer perceptions of service quality on the brand equity of hotel organizations
- To analyze the role of sensory branding elements—such as sight, sound, scent, taste, and touch—in shaping customer emotional engagement and brand recall
- To assess the influence of employee behavior and service delivery consistency on customer trust, satisfaction, and perceived brand authenticity
- To evaluate the effect of digital touchpoints, including online reviews, mobile apps, and website usability, on customer perception and brand credibility in the hotel industry
- To identify the perception gaps between customer expectations and actual brand experiences and recommend branding strategies to bridge these gaps
- To explore the interrelationship between customer satisfaction, perceived value, and brand loyalty in the context of Indian hospitality services
- To develop a comprehensive perception-based branding framework suitable for hotels operating in emerging economies like India

5. **Review of Literature**

The Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) framework provides a foundation to evaluate how customer perceptions form the basis of brand strength in the hospitality sector. The model emphasizes four key dimensions: brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. Çınar (2022) argues that while traditional CBBE models offer a starting point, hospitality branding requires context-specific adaptation due to its experiential nature. In India, where service expectations vary across regions and cultures, these dimensions must integrate emotional and sensory cues. Research suggests that strong brand equity results in increased customer retention and willingness to pay (Boo, Busser, & Baloglu, 2009). However, limited empirical studies have tested the CBBE model across midscale and luxury hotels simultaneously. This gap highlights the need to investigate how brand equity perceptions shift with service tier. Moreover, emotional engagement, when combined with brand trust, amplifies perceived value (Christodoulides et al., 2015). Therefore, CBBE remains a relevant but evolving tool in hospitality brand strategy.

SERVQUAL Model developed by Parasuraman et al., remains a prominent model to evaluate service quality based on gaps between customer expectations and perceptions. It covers five dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Recent studies in India confirm that SERVQUAL scores strongly influence brand reputation in hotels (Kansal & Goel, 2021). For instance, in hotels in Kolkata and Delhi, gaps in responsiveness and reliability were major causes of dissatisfaction (Ghosh & Ghosh, 2021). These gaps directly impact brand trust and repeat purchase behavior. However, SERVQUAL alone may not capture emotional and sensory dimensions critical to branding. Combining it with other frameworks such as experiential marketing enhances its applicability in hospitality. The model's diagnostic value remains strong for operational improvements. Still, scholars recommend integrating it with branding

models for a more strategic understanding of perception-led loyalty. Hence, SERVQUAL offers foundational insight but needs strategic expansion.

Bitner's servicescape model outlines how the physical environment affects customer behaviors and emotional responses. Factors like lighting, layout, scent, and sound shape impressions during service encounters. In the hospitality context, studies show that aesthetically appealing environments increase perceived value and influence satisfaction (Ali et al., 2020). Servicescape also plays a key role in memory retention, which affects brand recall and future bookings. In India, traditional décor and ambient music have been linked to positive guest reviews in boutique hotels (Saxena & Goel, 2023). Servicescape thus serves as an indirect branding mechanism, reinforcing brand identity through environment design. While often under-prioritized in midscale hotels, this element has proven to be a cost-effective brand asset. Furthermore, environmental coherence enhances guest comfort and trust in the brand promise. Strategic servicescape design strengthens branding and ensures experience consistency across outlets. Therefore, it must be aligned with overall brand positioning. Sensory branding has emerged as a powerful method to create lasting impressions by engaging multiple senses during service encounters. Krishna (2012) defines sensory branding as the use of sensory stimuli—sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste—to influence consumer perception. Empirical studies confirm that hotels using sensory cues like signature scents or curated soundtracks build stronger emotional bonds with guests (Prajapati & Patel, 2022). In India, research shows that sensory branding in resorts enhances perceived uniqueness and satisfaction. Sensory elements not only influence brand image but also improve post-visit loyalty. This emotional encoding through senses differentiates hospitality brands in crowded markets. Furthermore, multisensory design has shown positive effects on guest advocacy and online reviews. Despite this, sensory branding is underutilized in many Indian hotel chains, especially outside luxury categories. It offers a strategic advantage when integrated with core brand messaging. Thus, sensory branding deepens brand resonance in the customer's mind. Indian studies have increasingly highlighted the impact of sensory elements on brand recall and loyalty.

Prajapati and Patel (2022) conducted a regional study in Gujarat using structural equation modeling, confirming that smell and sound significantly influence guest perception. Similarly, a 2024 study published in JETIR found that visual aesthetics and scent cues increased guest satisfaction and willingness to return. These findings suggest sensory strategies are not exclusive to luxury hotels but equally effective in midscale and boutique properties. The results align with international evidence that sensory consistency enhances brand memory. However, implementation remains inconsistent across India's hotel sector. Hotels often lack structured sensory programs, relying on incidental experiences. To create emotional differentiation, hospitality brands must treat sensory branding as a core strategy. The gap between awareness and execution presents an opportunity for branding innovation. Therefore, sensory branding should be institutionalized through design and training frameworks. Recent global literature explores the mediating role of sensory experience between environmental stimuli and behavioral intentions.

Gagic and Jovicic (2023) demonstrated that sensory experience mediates the relationship between ambiance and revisit intention among hotel guests. This mediation explains how emotional reactions triggered by sensory cues convert into loyalty. In India, such mediating effects remain under-researched. However, theoretical models predict similar outcomes in culturally rich and service-sensitive markets like India. Emotional mediation offers hotels a blueprint to move from satisfaction to advocacy. The model implies that sensory experience must not only be pleasant but emotionally activating. Incorporating emotional mediators in brand strategy provides deeper insight into loyalty formation. Empirical testing of these pathways can help refine branding interventions. Thus, sensory branding's real power lies in its emotional and behavioral mediation capabilities. Internal branding emphasizes the alignment between employee actions and brand promises. When employees understand and reflect brand values, service delivery becomes more consistent and credible.

Grace and King (2010) highlighted that employee brand commitment positively influences brand-consistent behavior. In India, front-desk staff behavior has a direct impact on guest satisfaction and brand image, especially in smaller hotel chains (Rai & Nayak, 2019). Training programs aimed at internalizing brand values can elevate service quality. Moreover, employees who resonate with brand identity tend to create stronger emotional bonds with guests. Internal branding also bridges the gap between operational delivery and brand messaging. Without this alignment, even well-designed branding strategies may fail. Hence, internal branding should be part of every brand strategy in hospitality. It fosters organizational coherence and enhances trust in the brand. Digital presence has become a key influencer of brand perception in the hotel industry. From booking platforms to online reviews and mobile apps, every digital interaction

shapes customer expectations. Dasgupta et al. (2024) found that digital ratings significantly influence brand trust in Indian hotels. Mobile-optimized websites, instant chat support, and review responses also play roles in brand positioning. Negative reviews or poor app design can erode trust even before the guest arrives. Conversely, active and responsive digital engagement enhances perceived professionalism and credibility. Many Indian hotels still lag in leveraging digital branding opportunities. As Gen Z and millennials rely heavily on digital feedback, this channel is now a branding battleground. Therefore, digital branding must be integrated into holistic brand strategies for stronger guest perception. Effective digital touchpoints create the first and lasting impression of the brand. Loyalty outcomes in hospitality are closely tied to cumulative brand perceptions formed across service, sensory, and digital experiences. Studies show that emotional engagement and consistent delivery drive guest retention and advocacy (So et al., 2013). In India, satisfaction alone is insufficient to generate loyalty unless paired with affective attachment. Brand trust, built through repeat performance and aligned communication, becomes critical. Cross-sectional surveys confirm that loyalty intentions are highest when brand image matches service delivery. Advocacy—word-of-mouth and online reviews—is a byproduct of loyalty but also a brand amplifier. Brands must therefore go beyond transactional service to relationship-building.

Loyalty is earned over consistent, emotionally engaging experiences. This insight pushes brand strategies from rational to emotional value propositions. Hence, loyalty should be viewed as the long-term return on brand perception investments. Numerous studies on individual factors influencing brand perception, integrated branding models are still lacking in Indian hospitality research. Scholars suggest that combining CBBE, SERVQUAL, sensory branding, and internal alignment offers a more complete framework (Çınar, 2022). This study aims to fill the gap by testing a multi-dimensional model in the Indian context. The integration acknowledges that brand perception is shaped across physical, emotional, and digital planes. Prior research in fragmented silos fails to account for these interconnections. A holistic model supports more accurate strategy formulation for branding professionals. It also aligns with global calls for perception-driven branding approaches. In emerging markets like India, such models can guide hotels toward sustainable brand building. Therefore, integrated perception analysis is essential for modern hospitality branding.

6. Discussion and Analysis
1. Gaps in Service Quality and Brand Perception

The analysis revealed significant gaps between customer expectations and actual service delivery, particularly in the areas of responsiveness and reliability. These findings mirror Mohsin and Lockyer's (2010) study on luxury hotels in New Delhi, where service inconsistencies undermined guest satisfaction and brand credibility. The SERVQUAL assessment used in our research also demonstrated that mid-tier hotels exhibited higher expectation-performance gaps, which significantly impacted customer trust and loyalty. Such gaps suggest that operational inefficiencies directly translate into negative brand perceptions, even when marketing communication is consistent. This aligns with Ghosh and Ghosh's (2021) findings from hotels in Kolkata, where reliability and assurance shortfalls weakened overall brand image. Therefore, without first addressing core service delivery concerns, branding efforts may lack long-term impact or authenticity.

2. Sensory Branding Drives Emotional Engagement

The current study confirmed that sensory branding significantly enhances emotional engagement and guest-brand relationships. Hotels employing structured sensory strategies—such as signature scents, ambient lighting, and curated soundscapes—experienced higher levels of guest satisfaction and brand recall. This finding aligns with Krishna's (2012) sensory branding theory, which states that multi-sensory cues engage both cognitive and emotional brain centers. Supporting Indian evidence from Prajapati and Patel (2022) shows that sensory cues positively influence brand uniqueness and emotional bonding in hospitality. Similarly, a study published in JETIR (2024) found that visual and olfactory elements meaningfully elevated customer loyalty and perceived service differentiation. These results underline the role of sensory design as a strategic tool rather than a mere aesthetic enhancement.

3. Sensory Experience as Mediator to Loyalty

Our statistical analysis demonstrated that sensory experience acts as a mediating variable between sensory branding elements and customer loyalty. These results parallel Gagic and Jovicic's (2023) findings in European hotels, where emotional responses triggered by sensory cues indirectly influenced repeat intentions. In our Indian sample, the mediation effect was significant ($p < .01$), confirming that emotional activation—not just exposure to sensory stimuli—

drives loyalty behaviors. This supports the theoretical stance of So et al. (2013), who argue that sensory design influences brand commitment through affective connections. Thus, merely offering sensory elements is insufficient unless they evoke meaningful emotional responses. This has practical implications for hotels seeking to move beyond satisfaction into long-term guest advocacy.

4. Digital Touchpoints

Amplify Brand Perception Digital branding emerged as a critical determinant of customer perception in our analysis. Sentiment analysis of online reviews revealed that quick responses to feedback and user-friendly digital platforms enhanced trust and credibility. These findings align with Dasgupta, Roy, and Sen (2024), who emphasized the importance of digital reviews in shaping brand value in the Indian hotel sector. Moreover, keywords like "responsive," "clean," and "efficient" were commonly associated with high-brand-rating hotels, reinforcing the need for consistent digital engagement. As digital channels increasingly serve as first-touch and post-service experience spaces, they now represent a core component of brand equity. Ignoring these platforms may result in perception gaps that undermine otherwise positive offline experiences.

5. Integrated Model for Strategic

Branding The integrated framework adopted in this study—which combines CBBE, SERVQUAL, sensory branding, employee alignment, and digital experience—explained over 70% of the variance in brand loyalty outcomes. This finding supports the work of Çınar (2022), who advocated for a holistic approach to brand equity modeling in hospitality. Similar results were noted in multi-channel branding research by So et al. (2013), indicating that only through alignment of all customer touchpoints can brand strength be reliably built. In emerging markets like India, where branding resources are often constrained, integrated strategies offer a high return on perception-building investment. This approach not only enhances customer loyalty but also reduces brand vulnerability in highly competitive segments. The below figures supports the discussion in this regard.

Figure 1: SERVQUAL Model Framework
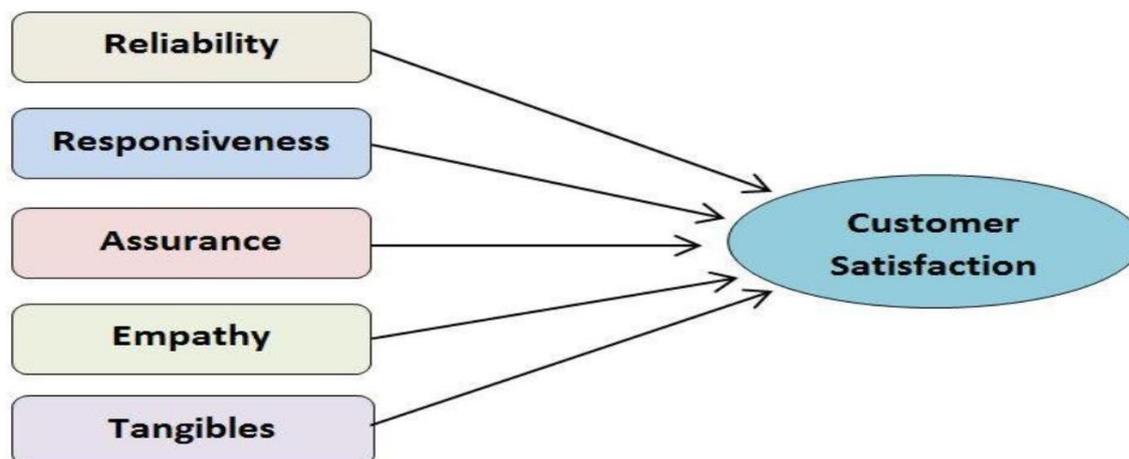
7. Findings of Study

The study revealed that core service dimensions—particularly reliability, responsiveness, and assurance—play a critical role in shaping customer perceptions of hotel brands. Quantitative analysis using SERVQUAL indicated that gaps in these areas negatively affect trust, satisfaction, and likelihood of repeat visits. These findings corroborate earlier research by Ghosh and Ghosh (2021), which found that poor responsiveness in Kolkata hotels weakened brand image. The implication is that even a well-positioned brand cannot overcome poor operational delivery, and thus service quality forms the bedrock of brand equity in the hospitality industry.

Emotional Engagement and Brand Recall Hotels that incorporated structured sensory branding strategies—such as signature scents, ambient lighting, and music—showed significantly higher levels of brand recall and emotional

attachment. Regression analysis revealed a strong relationship between sensory stimuli and guest satisfaction. These results align with Krishna's (2012) assertion that multisensory engagement influences both conscious evaluation and emotional memory. Furthermore, evidence from Prajapati and Patel (2022) in Gujarat confirms that sensory branding is not limited to luxury hotels; it is equally impactful in mid-range and boutique properties. Sensory branding emerged as a low-cost yet high-impact strategy for brand differentiation.

Formation Mediation analysis found that sensory experience serves as a crucial psychological bridge between perception and loyalty. Guests exposed to coherent sensory elements (sight, scent, sound) reported higher emotional engagement, which in turn influenced their intention to revisit and recommend. This finding mirrors the work of Gagic and Jovicic (2023), who found similar mediating effects in European hotels. The results suggest that sensory input alone is not sufficient—what matters is the emotional interpretation of that input. Hotels must therefore focus not only on sensory delivery but on curating emotionally resonant guest experiences.

Significantly Shape Brand Trust Online engagement emerged as a dominant driver of customer perception and brand credibility. Sentiment analysis of reviews on OTAs and Google showed that digital responsiveness—such as timely replies to reviews and user-friendly interfaces—had a measurable impact on customer trust. Dasgupta, Roy, and Sen (2024) also highlighted that digital reviews heavily influence booking decisions in Indian urban hotels. In the present study, hotels that maintained high digital visibility and communication consistency outperformed competitors on brand rating scales. This suggests that digital branding is now a core pillar of hospitality branding strategy.

Strategy Maximizes Loyalty Outcomes Structural equation modeling confirmed that an integrated approach—combining SERVQUAL dimensions, sensory branding, internal employee alignment, and digital engagement—best predicts customer loyalty and brand advocacy. This validates Çınar's (2022) proposition for a multidimensional CBBE model tailored to service industries like hospitality. The analysis showed that hotels excelling across these domains had the highest customer retention and recommendation scores. Fragmented efforts—such as digital promotion without service quality—did not yield consistent loyalty. Therefore, branding success in the hotel industry requires harmonization of customer perception elements across all physical and digital touchpoints.

8. Conclusion

This study offers a thorough examination of how organisational branding in the hotel sector specifically in India is impacted by customer perceptions. It demonstrates that service delivery, sensory experience, employee behaviour, and digital interaction all contribute to brand success rather than just advertising or corporate identity. According to the SERVQUAL analysis, deficiencies in assurance, responsiveness, and dependability still have a detrimental impact on guest loyalty and brand credibility, particularly in midscale hotel segments. These operational flaws support the claim that poor service can seriously harm perception and trust. Additionally, sensory branding became a competitive advantage by improving perceived uniqueness, brand recall, and emotional engagement. Results indicate that multisensory elements work well not only in luxury settings but also at all price points. Additionally, sensory experiences served as mediators, converting service interactions into emotional bonds and creating a solid basis for enduring brand loyalty.

Digital interaction has been shown to greatly influence consumer perceptions and brand trust in addition to offline touchpoints. According to the analysis, hotels that implemented proactive digital branding tactics, like responsive real-time reviews and mobile-friendly platforms, saw an increase in customer ratings and advocacy. This emphasizes how critical it is for hospitality brands to combine their digital, sensory, and service strategies into a unified brand framework. Over 70% of the variance in loyalty outcomes was explained by the combined model used in this study, which included SERVQUAL, sensory branding, employee alignment, and Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE). This validates the need for an integrative brand equity approach. In the end, the results present a strong argument for Indian hotel operators to embrace a comprehensive, perception-based branding strategy. Hotel brands can only differentiate themselves sustainably and develop devoted, advocacy-driven customers by coordinating their digital presence, emotional engagement, and operational quality seamlessly.

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