

The Influence of Hotel Chain Logistics on Customer Loyalty: A Case Study in the Chinese Hospitality Sector

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— *Review of* —
**Integrative
Business &
Economics**
— *Research* —

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the factors influencing customer loyalty within the Chinese hospitality sector, focusing on brand image, logistics communication channels, sustainability practices, transportation accessibility, and service quality. Data were collected from 385 customers with recent experiences in chain-operated hotels across various regions in China. A structured questionnaire facilitated the collection of quantitative data, which were analyzed using multiple linear regression. The results reveal statistically significant positive effects of brand image, logistics communication channels, sustainability practices, and transportation accessibility on customer loyalty. However, service quality did not demonstrate a statistically significant impact. The regression model accounts for a substantial proportion of the variance in customer loyalty, as indicated by a high R-square value ($R^2 = 0.850$). These findings underscore the importance of strategically managing these factors to enhance customer loyalty within hotel chains. While the results are specific to the Chinese hospitality industry, the core principles identified—such as the significance of brand image and logistics communication—are likely applicable to other countries and sectors. However, cultural, economic, and industry-specific factors should be considered when generalizing these findings to different contexts. This study contributes to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence on the drivers of customer loyalty in the Chinese hospitality industry and offers actionable insights for hotel chains looking to enhance their competitiveness and foster long-term customer relationships. Future research is encouraged to explore these dynamics in different cultural and industrial settings to assess the broader applicability of these results.

Keywords: Customer loyalty, Hospitality sector, Brand image, Service quality.

Received 9 February 2024 | Revised 26 August 2024 | Accepted 1 October 2024.

1. INTRODUCTION

The hospitality industry is undergoing a paradigm shift, propelled by evolving consumer expectations and the integration of advanced technologies. In this dynamic landscape, hotel chains are increasingly recognizing the pivotal role of logistics in shaping customer experiences and fostering loyalty (Smith & Johnson, 2021; Christopher & Peck, 2004).

As the Chinese hospitality sector continues to expand and diversify, understanding the intricate relationship between hotel chain logistics and customer loyalty becomes

paramount. Customer loyalty, a cornerstone of sustainable business growth, is influenced by a myriad of factors, among which the operational efficiency of logistics systems plays a pivotal role (Oliver, 1999). Brand loyalty represents a customer-created relationship that necessitates active customer engagement (Lu et al., 2023). Despite the recognized importance of logistics in the hospitality sector, there exists a notable gap in understanding the nuanced ways in which logistics practices influence customer loyalty in Chinese hotel chains (Gao & Fang, 2020). Previous studies have explored various dimensions of customer loyalty and logistics individually, but a comprehensive examination of their interconnected dynamics within the unique context of the Chinese hospitality sector remains scarce. This research seeks to bridge this gap by delving into the intricacies of logistics operations and their subsequent impact on guest loyalty.

This research is motivated by the need to fill the identified research gap and provide a holistic understanding of the relationship between hotel chain logistics and customer loyalty in the Chinese context (Zeithaml, 1988). Insights garnered from this study are anticipated to offer a roadmap for hoteliers, logistics professionals, and industry stakeholders to enhance operational efficiency and, by extension, cultivate enduring customer loyalty.

The rapid expansion of China's hospitality sector has heightened customer expectations, prompting a strategic reassessment of operational elements crucial for guest satisfaction and loyalty (Li & Han, 2010). Within hotel chains, the logistical framework, covering procurement, storage, and distribution of goods and services, plays a pivotal role in shaping the overall guest experience. The practices within the hospitality and tourism sectors are notably intricate, influenced by social and environmental factors, perishability, intangibility, and subjectivity. Most services prioritize the customer experience over mere product merchandising, leading service-oriented companies to compete primarily on experiential grounds (Choi, J. et al., 2024). From prompt delivery of room amenities to the streamlined efficiency of backend processes, each logistical facet contributes to the perceived value offered by a hotel, thus impacting customer loyalty. This study embarks on a comprehensive examination of how hotel chain logistics influence customer loyalty, with a specific emphasis on the Chinese hospitality landscape.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty represents a multifaceted construct of paramount significance within service industries, notably the hospitality sector. An in-depth comprehension of the intricate dynamics and theoretical underpinnings surrounding customer loyalty is imperative for elucidating the determinants influencing guests' enduring allegiance to a particular hotel or hotel chain. Customer loyalty can be delineated as the extent to which individuals consistently opt for a specific product or service over available alternatives, demonstrating unwavering commitment and preference (Oliver, 1999). In the hospitality context, customer loyalty typically manifests through recurrent visits, favorable word-of-mouth endorsements, and a genuine propensity to select a particular hotel despite competitive options.

Theoretical Foundations of Customer Loyalty

The Expectation-Confirmation Theory posits that customer satisfaction ensues from the affirmation or negation of preconceived expectations. Alignment between a guest's experience and their expectations culminates in confirmation and contentment, thereby

fostering loyalty (Oliver, 1999).

Relationship Marketing Theory underscores the cultivation of enduring relationships between service providers and customers. The establishment of robust, positive relationships is deemed instrumental in fostering customer loyalty, as contented customers are more predisposed to engage in repeat patronage (Berry, 1995).

Social Exchange Theory posits that individuals partake in relationships founded on the anticipation of mutual gains. In the hospitality realm, loyal customers perceive a reciprocal association with the hotel, wherein they derive value from exemplary service and personalized experiences (Blau, 1964).

Brand Loyalty Theory asserts that customers develop allegiance not only to the product or service per se but also to the brand. A favorable brand image, prominence, and consistent excellence contribute significantly to heightened customer loyalty (Jacoby & Kyner, 1973).

In summary, a profound understanding of the concept and theories of customer loyalty furnishes a foundational framework for scrutinizing the interplay of diverse factors shaping guests' enduring dedication to a hotel chain. Such comprehension is pivotal for devising efficacious strategies to augment customer loyalty within the Chinese hospitality sector.

Brand Image

Brand image holds significant importance in understanding consumer behavior within the hotel industry, as it shapes customer perceptions and preferences, ultimately influencing their choices and fostering loyalty. This section examines the concept and associated theories of brand image, highlighting its role in consumer decision-making and loyalty-building.

Brand image refers to the collective perception and impression formed by consumers about a brand, shaped by their interactions, experiences, and exposure to the brand's marketing efforts (Kotler, 1999). It encompasses the unique associations, emotions, and attributes associated with a brand, influencing how consumers identify and differentiate it from competitors.

Theoretical Frameworks

Aaker (1991) proposed a comprehensive model of brand equity, with brand image as a central component. According to Aaker, brand image is constructed through a blend of brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand associations. This model underscores the interplay of these elements in shaping consumer perceptions of a brand.

Keller's (1993) model posits that brand image drives brand resonance – the highest level of brand loyalty. The model emphasizes the significance of cultivating a strong brand image that fosters a deep emotional connection with consumers. Keller highlights the role of brand salience, performance, imagery, judgments, and feelings in crafting a favorable brand image.

Role of Brand Image in the Hotel Industry: Within the hotel industry, brand image profoundly influences consumer decision-making. Consumers often select hotels based on the perceived brand image, including factors such as service quality, consistency, and overall experience offered by the hotel chain (Chen et al., 2018). A positive brand image contributes to customer loyalty, as guests are more inclined to revisit a hotel that aligns with their favorable perceptions (Hankinson, 2007). Understanding the conceptual underpinnings and theoretical frameworks related to brand image is crucial for hotel chains aiming to cultivate a positive and enduring perception among their target audience. The subsequent section will delve into the concept and theories surrounding service quality, another pivotal determinant of customer loyalty in the hospitality sector.

Service Quality

In the hotel industry, service quality is a critical determinant of customer satisfaction and loyalty. This section explores the conceptual framework and key theories that underpin the understanding of service quality in the context of hotel chain operations. Service quality in hotels refers to the overall evaluation of the services provided by the hotel, encompassing various dimensions such as responsiveness, reliability, empathy, assurance, and tangibles (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). It reflects the extent to which the hotel meets or exceeds customer expectations regarding the delivery of services.

Theories of Service Quality

SERVQUAL Model (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988): The SERVQUAL model is widely used to assess service quality by identifying five key dimensions – tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. This model serves as a benchmark for measuring customer perceptions and expectations, highlighting the areas where service improvements may be needed.

Gap Model (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985): The Gap Model identifies several gaps that may exist between customer expectations and perceptions of service quality. These gaps include the knowledge gap, policy gap, delivery gap, and communication gap. Understanding and addressing these gaps are crucial for enhancing service quality and meeting customer expectations.

Causal Model of Service Quality (Brady & Cronin, 2001): This model suggests that customer perceptions of service quality directly influence their satisfaction, which, in turn, impacts loyalty. It emphasizes the mediating role of customer satisfaction in the relationship between perceived service quality and loyalty.

Application to the Hotel Chain Industry

In the hotel chain industry, the application of these theories involves a comprehensive assessment of the different dimensions of service quality. Hotel chains need to focus not only on the physical aspects (tangibles) but also on staff competence, reliability, responsiveness to customer needs, assurance of service, and empathy towards guests. Understanding and applying these theories contribute to the development of strategies that enhance service quality, thereby positively influencing customer satisfaction and loyalty in the competitive hotel industry.

Logistics Communication Channels

In the context of hotel chain logistics, effective communication channels play a pivotal role in conveying information to guests regarding various aspects of their stay. This section delves into the conceptual framework and relevant theories that govern logistics communication channels within the hotel industry. Logistics communication channels refer to the mediums and methods through which hotels disseminate information related to logistical aspects, including check-in/out procedures, amenities, and other relevant details. These channels aim to enhance guest understanding, facilitate a seamless experience, and contribute to overall customer satisfaction.

Theories of Logistics Communication Channels

Information Theory (Shannon & Weaver, 1949): This foundational theory emphasizes the process of communication, where information is transmitted from a sender (hotel) to a receiver (guest). Within logistics communication channels, the effectiveness of conveying

accurate and timely information is crucial for ensuring guests' understanding and satisfaction.

Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989): In the digital age, the acceptance and utilization of technology in communication channels are integral. This model posits that perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness significantly influence individuals' intentions to use technology. For logistics communication channels, user-friendly interfaces and accessibility are essential for effective communication.

Multi-Channel Integration Theory (Li & Kannan, 2014): With the proliferation of various communication channels such as websites, apps, and in-room systems, this theory underscores the importance of integrating these channels cohesively. The consistency of information across different channels contributes to a seamless logistics communication experience for guests.

Application to the Hotel Chain Industry

In the hotel chain industry, adopting a multi-channel approach that incorporates both digital and traditional communication methods is vital. The selection and implementation of technology, along with the clarity, consistency, and accessibility of information, directly impact guests' understanding and satisfaction with logistics processes. Understanding these theories provides a framework for hotel chains to optimize their logistics communication channels, ensuring an efficient and positive guest experience. This section establishes the theoretical groundwork for exploring the relationship between logistics communication channels and customer loyalty within the hotel chain context.

Sustainable Practice

Sustainable practices in the hotel industry have become increasingly crucial as environmental concerns grow globally. This section delves into the conceptual framework and theories underpinning sustainable practices, examining their relevance within the context of hotel chain operations. Sustainable practice, within the hotel industry, refers to the commitment and implementation of environmentally conscious measures across various facets of hotel operations. These measures encompass initiatives related to waste management, energy conservation, and the use of eco-friendly amenities.

Theories of Sustainable Practice

Triple Bottom Line Theory (Elkington, 1997): This theory suggests that sustainable practices should not only focus on economic aspects but also consider social and environmental impacts. In the hotel context, it implies that sustainable practices should contribute to the financial success of the hotel while also benefiting society and minimizing environmental harm.

Cradle to Cradle Design (McDonough & Braungart, 2002): This design approach emphasizes creating products and systems that are not only environmentally friendly but also contribute positively to ecological health. In the hotel industry, this theory encourages practices that go beyond mere reduction of environmental impact to actively enhancing ecological systems.

Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory (Barney, 1991): RBV theory suggests that sustained competitive advantage comes from a firm's unique resources. In the context of sustainable practices, hotels can achieve a competitive edge by developing distinctive environmentally friendly resources, such as efficient waste management systems or innovative energy-saving technologies.

Application to the Hotel Chain Industry

In the hotel chain industry, sustainable practices involve adopting and integrating these theories into daily operations. This may include waste reduction strategies, energy-efficient technologies, and partnerships with local communities to promote social responsibility. Understanding and applying these theories are vital for hotel chains aiming to contribute to environmental conservation, meet changing consumer expectations, and create a positive brand image associated with sustainability.

Transportation Accessibility

Transportation accessibility is a critical aspect of the hotel industry, influencing guests' ability to reach desired destinations conveniently. This section explores the conceptual underpinnings and relevant theories related to transportation accessibility within the hotel chain context. Transportation accessibility refers to the ease and convenience with which guests can access their desired destinations through either the hotel's transportation services or nearby public transit options. It encompasses the efficiency and availability of the hotel's transportation facilities, with a particular emphasis on the existence and functionality of shuttle services.

Theories of Transportation Accessibility

Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991): This theory suggests that individuals' intentions and behaviors are influenced by their attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In the context of transportation accessibility, guests' perceptions of the convenience and efficiency of the hotel's transportation services contribute to their intentions and decisions regarding their stay.

Travel Behavior Theory (Cascetta, 2001): Understanding travel behavior is essential for comprehending guests' choices related to transportation. This theory examines the factors influencing travel decisions, including mode choice and travel time. For hotel chains, providing efficient and accessible transportation options aligns with the principles of travel behavior theory.

Service Convenience Theory (Parasuraman et al., 1985): Convenience is a crucial factor influencing customer satisfaction. This theory posits that perceived convenience affects customers' overall service evaluations. In the context of transportation accessibility, guests' perceptions of the hotel's efforts to provide convenient transportation options contribute to their overall satisfaction.

Application to the Hotel Chain Industry

In the hotel chain industry, ensuring transportation accessibility aligns with enhancing the overall guest experience. By incorporating insights from the Theory of Planned Behavior, Travel Behavior Theory, and Service Convenience Theory, hotel chains can strategically design and promote transportation services that meet guests' expectations and preferences.

Based on the literature review, a conceptual framework has been developed as shown in Figure 1.

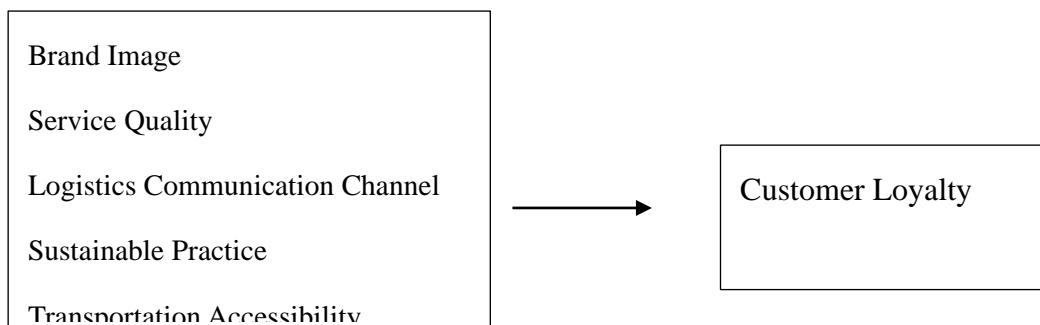


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

In conclusion, five hypotheses have been proposed as follows:

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between the brand image of the hotel chain and customer loyalty.

H2: There is a significant positive relationship between the service quality of the hotel chain and customer loyalty.

H3: There is a significant positive relationship between the logistics communication channel of the hotel chain and customer loyalty.

H4: There is a significant positive relationship between the sustainable practice of the hotel chain and customer loyalty.

H5: There is a significant positive relationship between the transportation accessibility of the hotel chain and customer loyalty.

3. METHODOLOGY

Population and Sample

The research targets customers within the Chinese hospitality sector, particularly those who have experienced services offered by chain-operated hotels across different regions of China. The intended sample size for the study is 385 individuals, selected from an unknown population size. Cochran's 1977 formula is utilized to determine the sample size, resulting in 385 individuals. Considering the unknown population, a z-value of 1.96 is applied, corresponding to a 95% confidence level. This calculation confirms the need for 385 participants to ensure statistical validity. The research sample consists of 385 individuals who have recently utilized services at a prominent hotel chain in China. The sampling approach employed was convenience sampling, enabling accessibility to participants based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study.

Variables

Dependent Variable is Customer Loyalty. This variable represents the degree of loyalty exhibited by customers towards a specific hotel chain within the Chinese hospitality sector. It encompasses behaviors such as repeat patronage, positive word-of-mouth recommendations, and a propensity to choose the hotel chain over alternatives.

Independent Variables:

1. **Brand Image:** This variable refers to the overall perception and impression formed by customers about the hotel chain. It includes aspects such as brand reputation, perceived quality, uniqueness, and attractiveness of the brand.

2. **Service Quality:** This variable reflects customers' perceptions of the quality of services provided by the hotel chain. It comprises dimensions such as responsiveness, reliability, assurance, empathy, and tangibles, as defined in the SERVQUAL model.

3. **Logistics Communication Channel:** This variable represents the effectiveness and efficiency of the hotel chain's communication channels related to logistics and operations. It includes aspects such as clarity, timeliness, and accessibility of communication regarding booking procedures, check-in/out processes, and other logistical aspects.

4. **Sustainable Practices:** This variable denotes the extent to which the hotel chain incorporates sustainable practices and environmental initiatives into its operations. It includes efforts such as energy conservation, waste reduction, eco-friendly amenities, and community engagement initiatives.

5. **Transportation Accessibility:** This variable measures the ease of access to transportation options available near the hotel chain's properties. It encompasses factors such as proximity to public transportation hubs, availability of shuttle services, and ease of access for private vehicles.

Research Instrument

The research instrument serves as the tool for collecting data to test the hypotheses and achieve the research objectives. In this study, a structured questionnaire was utilized to gather quantitative data from participants regarding their perceptions and experiences with the hotel chain within the Chinese hospitality sector. The questionnaire was designed to include sections corresponding to each of the independent variables (brand image, service quality, logistics communication channel, sustainable practices, and transportation accessibility), as well as the dependent variable (customer loyalty). Each section comprises multiple items or questions aimed at measuring the constructs of interest. 5-point Likert-type scales were predominantly employed to measure participants' responses to the questionnaire items. Participants were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with statements on a scale ranging from, for example, 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'.

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected using a structured questionnaire administered to participants who had recent experiences with hotels operating under a chain model in various regions of China. The structured questionnaire was administered to participants either electronically through online survey platforms or in person, depending on convenience and accessibility. Clear instructions were provided to participants regarding the purpose of the study, confidentiality of their responses, and voluntary participation. Participants were asked to respond to the questionnaire items honestly and to the best of their knowledge, reflecting their perceptions and experiences with the hotel chain.

Data Analysis

The analysis was conducted using statistical techniques to examine the relationships between the independent variables (brand image, service quality, logistics communication channel, sustainable practices, and transportation accessibility) and the dependent variable (customer loyalty).

Descriptive statistics, including measures of central tendency (mean) and dispersion

(standard deviation), were calculated for each variable to provide an overview of the data distribution and characteristics.

Multiple regression analysis was employed to further investigate the relationships between the independent variables (brand image, service quality, logistics communication channel, sustainable practices, and transportation accessibility) and the dependent variable (customer loyalty). This analysis allowed for the identification of significant predictors of customer loyalty and the quantification of their effects.

4. RESULTS

Table 1: Demographic Information (n = 385)

Variable	Items	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	196	50.9
	Female	189	49.1
Age	20-30 years old	50	13.0
	31-40 years old	78	20.3
	41-50 years old	90	23.4
	50-60 years old	147	38.2
	>60 years old	20	5.2
Education	Below Bachelor's degree	269	69.9
	Bachelor's degree	97	25.2
	Master's Degree	18	4.7
	Doctoral Degree	1	.3
Monthly Income (RMB)	2,000 or lower	19	4.9
	2,001-4,000	93	24.2
	4,001-6,000	117	30.4
	6,001-8,000	73	19.0
	Over 8,000	83	21.5
Marital Status	Single	40	10.4
	Married	335	87.0
	Others	10	2.6
Occupation	Student	9	2.3
	Employed full time	195	50.6
	Employed part time	3	.8
	Self-employed	58	15.1
	Retired	58	15.1
	Unemployed	5	1.3
	Others	57	14.8

The results from Table 1 demonstrate a diverse demographic profile among the participants. In terms of gender, there was a nearly equal distribution, with 50.9% male and 49.1% female respondents. Regarding age, the majority of participants fell within the 41-50 years old category (23.4%), followed by 50-60 years old (38.2%). The education level of the participants varied, with the majority having below a Bachelor's degree (69.9%), while

25.2% held a Bachelor's degree. Additionally, 4.7% had a Master's degree, and a small proportion (0.3%) had a Doctoral degree. Regarding monthly income, the largest proportion of participants (30.4%) reported earning between 4,001-6,000 RMB, followed by 2,001-4,000 RMB (24.2%). In terms of marital status, the majority of participants were married (87.0%). Occupation varied among participants, with the most common being employed full-time (50.6%), followed by self-employed (15.1%) and retired (15.1%). Overall, the findings highlight the diverse representation of demographics among the participants, providing a comprehensive understanding of the sample composition.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation for Each Variable

Variable	Mean	S.D.
Brand Image	4.381	.743
Service Quality	4.459	.725
Logistics communication channel	4.457	.742
Sustainability	4.401	.778
Transportation Accessibility	4.381	.780
Customer Loyalty	4.401	.764

Table 2 presents the mean and standard deviation for each variable investigated in the study. On average, participants rated the brand image of the hotel chain at 4.381, service quality at 4.459, logistics communication channel at 4.457, sustainability at 4.401, transportation accessibility at 4.381, and customer loyalty at 4.401. These mean scores suggest that participants generally held a high level of perception across all variables.

Table 3: Multiple Linear Regression For Factor Influencing Customer Loyalty

Variable	Model I		Model II		Model III	
	Beta	p-value	Beta	p-value	Beta	p-value
Gender	.011	.590	.010	.631	.014	.493
Age	.020	.381	.020	.395	.021	.363
Income	-.006	.800	-.005	.838	-.007	.772
Education	.010	.689	.014	.560	.011	.656
Occupation	.027	.210	.026	.216	.030	.166
Brand Image	.119	.006**	.145	.000**	.173	.000**
Service Quality	.112	.083	-	-	-	-
Logistics communication channel	.154	.013*	.216	.000**	.270	.000**
Sustainability Practice	.138	.017*	.145	.012*	-	-
Transportation Accessibility	.443	.000**	.459	.000**	.520	.000**
R-square	.850		.849		.847	

* p <.05; ** p <0.01

Table 3 summarizes the results of a multiple linear regression analysis exploring factors that influence customer loyalty. The analysis is presented in three models (Model I, Model II, and Model III), displaying the beta coefficients and corresponding p-values for each variable.

The demographic variables exhibit low beta coefficients and p-values greater than 0.05,

indicating that none significantly affect customer loyalty across the models. In contrast, Brand Image consistently shows a positive and significant impact on customer loyalty in all three models, with p-values below 0.01.

Service Quality is included only in Model I, where it demonstrates a positive but not statistically significant effect on customer loyalty. The Logistics Communication Channel demonstrates a strong, positive, and significant influence on customer loyalty across all three models, with beta coefficients increasing from Model I to Model III. The p-values for this variable are less than 0.05 in Model I and less than 0.01 in Models II and III, underscoring its strong impact on customer loyalty.

Sustainability Practices, included in Models I and II, also show a positive and significant effect on customer loyalty, with p-values below 0.05, highlighting the importance of these practices. Transportation Accessibility emerges as the most influential factor, with the highest beta coefficients across all models. Its p-values are less than 0.01 in each model, demonstrating a very strong and significant influence on customer loyalty.

The R-square values are high across all models, with Model I at 0.850, Model II at 0.849, and Model III at 0.847.

5. CONCLUSION

The multiple linear regression analysis provides crucial insights into the factors influencing customer loyalty within the Chinese hospitality industry. The analysis identifies brand image, logistics communication channels, sustainability practices, and transportation accessibility as significant predictors, each exhibiting statistically significant positive effects on customer loyalty. These findings emphasize the importance of strategically managing these factors to enhance customer loyalty within hotel chains. Investments aimed at improving brand image, optimizing logistics communication, adopting sustainable practices, and ensuring transportation accessibility are likely to lead to higher levels of customer loyalty. In addition, the analysis shows that demographic variables do not significantly influence customer loyalty, with low beta coefficients and non-significant p-values across all models. This suggests that operational and strategic factors, rather than demographic characteristics, play a more substantial role in shaping customer loyalty. Additionally, service quality does not demonstrate a statistically significant effect on customer loyalty, highlighting areas that may warrant further exploration or improvement.

These findings are particularly valuable for hotel chains in the Chinese market, offering actionable insights to enhance competitiveness and foster long-term customer relationships. However, the extent to which these findings can be generalized to other nations and industries warrants consideration. The cultural, economic, and industry-specific contexts of China may influence these results, and similar studies in different countries or sectors may yield different outcomes. For instance, the emphasis on transportation accessibility may be less critical in regions where travel infrastructure is less central to customer experience, or where different cultural values may prioritize other aspects of service. Nevertheless, the core principles identified—such as the importance of brand image, effective communication channels, sustainability, and accessibility—likely have broad applicability. While the specific impact of each factor may vary across different contexts, the overall emphasis on strategic management to enhance customer loyalty is likely relevant to a wide range of industries and geographical locations. Future research should explore these dynamics in different cultural and industrial contexts to test the generalizability of these findings and to identify potential moderating factors that may influence customer loyalty across various settings.

Overall, this study underscores the critical role of various operational and strategic factors in shaping customer loyalty within the Chinese hospitality sector. It provides valuable insights not only for domestic hotel chains but also for those operating in or expanding to different markets, emphasizing the need for context-sensitive strategies.

6. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study shed light on several important aspects related to customer loyalty within the Chinese hospitality sector. Firstly, the statistically significant positive effects of brand image, logistics communication channel, sustainability practice, and Transportation Accessibility on customer loyalty emphasize the critical role of these factors in shaping guests' perceptions and fostering long-term relationships with hotel brands. These results align with prior research emphasizing the importance of branding, effective communication, and sustainable practices in enhancing customer loyalty (Anas, 2022; Brady & Cronin, 2001; Hankinson, 2007). The strong relationship between brand image and customer loyalty highlights the need for hotel chains to invest in building and maintaining a positive brand reputation to attract and retain customers (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993). Similarly, the significant impact of logistics communication channels underscores the importance of efficient communication systems in ensuring seamless interactions and satisfying guest needs (Dong, 2019; Smith & Johnson, 2021). Moreover, the positive influence of sustainability practice on customer loyalty reflects the growing importance of environmental and social responsibility in consumer decision-making, with guests increasingly favoring brands that demonstrate commitment to sustainability (McDonough & Braungart, 2002; Óscar et al., 2019). Furthermore, the substantial influence of transportation accessibility on customer loyalty highlights the importance of convenient access to transportation options for guests (Cascetta, 2001). Hotel chains should consider factors such as proximity to transportation hubs, availability of shuttle services, and ease of transportation arrangements to facilitate guests' mobility and enhance their overall experience.

However, it is noteworthy that service quality did not demonstrate a statistically significant effect on customer loyalty in this analysis. This finding contrasts with previous research highlighting the pivotal role of service quality in driving customer satisfaction and loyalty (Parasuraman et al., 1985; Parasuraman et al., 1988). One possible explanation for this discrepancy could be the subjective nature of service quality perceptions, which may vary among guests based on individual expectations and experiences (Brady & Cronin, 2001). Additionally, it is important to consider the specific dimensions of service quality examined in this study and their alignment with guest preferences and priorities (Chen & Yang, 2014; Van et al., 2020).

In overall, the findings of this study contribute to our understanding of customer loyalty dynamics within the hospitality sector and have implications for hotel management and marketing strategies. By focusing on enhancing brand image, optimizing logistics communication channels, and integrating sustainability initiatives, hotel chains can effectively cultivate customer loyalty and gain a competitive edge in the market. Future research could explore additional factors influencing customer loyalty and investigate potential moderators or mediators of the identified relationships to provide further insights into guest behavior and preferences in the evolving hospitality landscape.

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