

ENHANCING CUSTOMERS' BRAND COMMITMENT: A MULTIDIMENSIONAL PERSPECTIVE OF BRAND CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOR IN EGYPTIAN HOTELS

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to determine how four dimensions of employees' brand citizenship behaviors (BCBs)—brand helping behavior, brand acceptance, brand missionary, and brand advancement—relate to customers' brand commitment (BC), taking customers' brand trust (BT) into consideration as a mediator factor. Data were collected from 16 independent hotels in the Greater Cairo region in Egypt. Two different versions of the surveys were distributed to collect data: one for customers and the other for employees. Both employees and their customers were asked to answer the surveys, which were then matched. A total of 240 matched surveys were collected and analyzed. The findings revealed a significant correlation between the four dimensions of BCBs and customers' BC; however, only two of the BCBs—brand helping behavior and brand missionary—were significantly related to customers' BC. In addition, customers' BT did not fully mediate employees' BCBs and customers' BC. This study could help hotel managers develop strategies to enhance customers' BC. The study may also deepen understanding of the BCB concept in a hotel context as well as aid in the establishment of new links between internal and external customers of organizations.

Keywords: *Brand Citizenship Behavior, Brand Commitment, Hotels*

INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that a strong brand plays a vital role in the success of an organization. A brand can be defined as a name, sign, or symbol that distinguishes products or services of an organization from those provided by competitors (King and Grace, 2008). It is not just a tool for differentiating products and services; it also makes a strong impression in the minds of customers, promoting the originality and uniqueness of a product or service while also working to convey a trusted promise (Kapferer, 2012). Moreover, researchers have recognized that a strong brand has a vital role in building the long-range competitive advantage of an organization (Kapferer, 2008; Keller, 1998; Santos-Vijande *et al.*, 2013

Hotels are considered as one of the most complex industries as they deal with various types of customer services, which are characterized by intangibility and inseparability (Lashley and Lee-Ross, 2003). Although hotel services cannot be seen or touched by customers, they are nonetheless experienced; yet, these experiences may vary depending on an employee's behavior during the rendering of services. For example, even though a front desk employee is required to be friendly and

cheerful while interacting with clients, he or she might not feel this way at the time; consequently, emotional dissonance may be experienced, which could in turn negatively affect service delivery. Such negative employee performance might drive away customers, who tend to evaluate and differentiate the services of providers in the market (De Chernatony and Riley, 1999). A trusted brand can serve as a lifeboat for customers, guarding them against falling in the phantom of new service experience and helping them make better purchase decisions.

A wide range of literature on branding has relied on an external perspective, which assumes that organizations ought to embrace strategic ways of attracting customers (Kim and Kim, 2005; Kim, Magnini and Singal, 2011; Nam, Ekinci and Whyatt, 2011; Roh and Choi, 2010). Organizations have concentrated their marketing activities on communicating with customers by means of outer channels (Chong, 2007; Hankinson, 2004; Lee and Back, 2008; Nam, Ekinci and Whyatt, 2011); for instance, through promotions, advertising, and spokespersons. However, regardless of whether organizations have promoted the distinctiveness of their brands to customers, their employees—who are part of service delivery and, of course, part of the

brand—may indeed not know it (Mitchell, 2002).

The human-oriented characteristics of the nature of hotel services makes employees a crucial instrument in delivering service experience; which, in turn, provide the customers with the basis for evaluating the service (King and Grace, 2010). In addition, employee behaviors are a primary means by which customers' expectations toward a brand are shaped (Morhart, Herzog and Tomczak, 2009). The actual brand experience, whereby customers' overall satisfaction is compared with their expectations, is derived from employee attitudes and behavior (O'Neill and Mattila, 2010). Accordingly, employees reflect the essence and culture of the brand (Boo, Busser and Baloglu, 2009; King and Grace, 2010) and this could enhance brand experience tested by customers. In other words, customers often rely on service employees' behavior when judging the quality of a service (Hennig-Thurau, 2004) and thus employees become part of the business (Dortok, 2006). Considering service employees as an essential component of the brand delivery process is the core of the internal branding concept. Internal branding is a process whereby employees are well trained with brand knowledge to shape their brand-related attitudes and behaviors, which could consequently affect brand strength (Punjaisri, Wilson and Evanschitzky, 2009).

As a result, internal branding has been used to align employees' brand-related attitudes and behaviors with the brand promise, which is delivered externally (Xiong, King and Piehler, 2013). Thus, internal branding encourages employees to deliver a brand-aligned service experience that meets customer expectations (Burmah and Zeplin, 2005; Punjaisri, Wilson and Evanschitzky, 2008). Previous research has attempted to determine how employees' behaviors enhance brand performance in the hospitality industry. Researchers have investigated management and employees' perspectives toward brand performance as well (Punjaisri, Wilson and Evanschitzky, 2009; Punjaisri and Wilson, 2007). However, Erkmen and Hancer (2015) reported that no consideration has been given to how employees brand related behaviors affect customers' perceptions of the brand.

Egypt relies on tourism and the hospitality industry as major economic contributors. Hotels generate significant revenue by accommodating tourists and other visitors. To attract and retain hotel customers, employees working in the Egyptian hotel industry should be committed to adopting specific brand citizenship behaviors to provide quality service that will

in turn reinforce customers' commitment to Egyptian hotel brands. However, there are few studies that have explored such a novel branding concept: brand citizenship behaviors and their influence on customers' loyalty to brands in the Egyptian hotel industry. Therefore, the current study investigated the effect of employees' brand citizenship behaviors (BCBs) on customers' relationship with the brand, and more specifically, on customers' trust and commitment to the hotel brand about the multidimensionality of BCBs. Ultimately, this study bridges the gap that exists in the literature on the relationship between employees' BCBs and customers' brand trust (BT) and brand commitment (BC) in the hotel industry. Consequently, understanding of the BCB concept in the context of the hotel industry and for establishing new links between internal and external customers of relevant organizations may be deepened.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The hospitality management industry in Egypt

The tourism industry plays a vital role in the economic development of many countries, and Egypt is no exception. Tourism is a significant contributor to the Egyptian economy, representing an average of 4.9% (USD 14.5 billion) of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) as of 2016 (World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), 2016). In addition, travel and tourism accounted for over 11 million job opportunities in the same year (WTTC, 2016). Around this time, Egypt witnessed a drop-in tourism due to political instability in the region. However, the Egyptian hospitality and tourism market recovered in 2017, as evidenced by the development of several hospitality-related projects, worth USD 5.3 billion, across the country (BNC Network, 2017). In March 2017, 655,000 more tourists arrived as in previous years. Furthermore, the GDP is projected to increase by 4.5% to EFG 187.7 billion by 2025 (WTTC, 2016).

The arrival of tourists encourages hotels to thrive. As of 2013, Egypt had more than 1100 hotels, resulting in 54 million hotel stays (Colliers International, 2014). A report on hotel performance in four main Egyptian cities—Cairo, Sharm El Sheikh, Hurghada, and Alexandria—showed an average occupancy rate of 40–75%, with average daily rates (ADR) ranging from USD 35 (Sharm El Sheikh) to USD 105 (Cairo).

Since Egypt continues to rely on tourism and hospitality as a major economic contributor, the country's hotel industry and its employees should be

committed to providing good quality services to tourists. A study performed by Attallah (2015) showed that tourists were satisfied with the responsiveness and empathy of employees in five-star hotels. However, another study demonstrated that employees of tourist companies in Egypt were dissatisfied with the quality of tourism services and, importantly, that tourists were dissatisfied with services provided at hotels (Eraqi, 2006). Consequently, there is a need to provide hotel employees with a better environment and tourists with better services.

Brand citizenship behavior: Concept and dimensions

A brand citizenship behavior (BCB) demonstrates how employees can enhance their brand-related performance by aligning their attitudes and behaviors with the organization's brand. The concept of BCB first appeared in research by Burmann and Zeplin (2005), where it was described as the final and desired outcome of internal branding. In their study, Burman and Zeplin (2005) introduced a comprehensive conceptualization of BCB considering the exchange between organizational citizenship behaviors and internal branding contexts. They defined BCBs as various, non-specific, and voluntary employee behaviors that enhance brand identity. In other words, a BCB is “the intention of each employee to voluntarily exhibit certain generic behavioral characteristics outside the formally defined role expectation system, which strengthen the identity of the brand” (Burmann, Zeplin and Riley, 2009).

Studies on the dimensions of BCBs have slightly agreed in some respects, yet the issue of dimensionality remains controversial. Seven dimensions of BCBs as proposed by Burmann and Zeplin (2005) are as follows: brand helping behavior, brand consideration, brand enthusiasm, brand sportsmanship, brand endorsement, brand self-development, and brand advancement. However, an explorative, empirical study conducted by Burmann, Zeplin and Riley (2009) to test the holistic model presented in Burmann and Zeplin (2005) revealed that of the seven dimensions, only three—namely, helping behavior, brand enthusiasm, and brand development—significantly explained BCBs. Another attempt to validate Burmann and Zeplin's model was made by Piehler (2011), who identified only three dimensions that could significantly explain BCBs: brand missionary, which has the same meaning as brand endorsement; brand acceptance, which is equivalent to brand consideration; and brand advancement. Nevertheless, Burmann, Zeplin and Riley (2009) confirmed that employees' brand helping behavior is an important, explanatory dimension of

BCBs. The role of brand helping behavior has also been verified by recent empirical analyses (i.e., Ravens, 2013; Shaari, Salleh and Hussin, 2011; Shaari, Salleh and Hussin, 2015; Verma and Dhar, 2015).

In her work on the management of internal brands in an international context, Ravens (2013) revealed four dimensions that can significantly explain BCBs: brand helping behavior, brand missionary, brand acceptance, and brand advancement. The present study conceptualized BCB as a four-dimensional construct as proposed by Ravens (2013). Ravens (2013) explored the dimensionality of BCBs and evaluated whether the role of employees' brand helping behavior could be legitimately disregarded as it had been by Piehler (2011). Ravens (2013) concluded that brand missionary may be placed under the umbrella of brand helping behavior. The present study attempted to shed more light on which dimensions adequately represent BCBs, which can in turn generate further insights into BCBs in the Egyptian hotel industry.

Customers' brand trust (BT) and brand commitment (BC)

The commitment–trust theory of relationships proposed by Morgan and Hunt (1994) suggests that trust and commitment are key relative factors that energize partners in a relationship to maintain that relationship, bypassing alternate relations with different partners while diminishing risk perceptions related to the primary relationship. Morgan and Hunt (1994) added that to explain one's interest in remaining in a long-term relationship, as with a brand, trust is a key concept. In a service context, they defined brand trust (BT) as customers' readiness to rely on a certain service brand due to confidence in the reliability and integrity of that brand. BT is important insofar as it persuades customers to have a more favorable attitude towards a specific brand, which simultaneously also creates a commitment to the brand (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman, 2001).

Commitment can be conceptualized as a psychological state by which customers desire to maintain their relationship with a brand. Alternatively, “it is a generalized sense of positive regard for, and attachment to the brand” (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman, 2001). In other words, BT is thought to be a key and underlying factor in explaining and clarifying commitment by customers to a brand (Morgan and Hunt, 1994); therefore, commitment is a part of the ongoing process of guaranteeing and protecting such a relationship, with trust as the prerequisite for its creation (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2002).

According to social identity theory, individuals are inclined towards a sense of belonging to and social identity with a group, subsequently engaging in behaviors appropriate to that group. Put simply, they behave in accordance with expected group behaviors. Such an inclination would not only be associated with mutual recognition, support, and loyalty among members of an organization, but other key constituents as well, e.g., customers (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). About hotel branding, hotels tend to embody the brand promise concept on their premises to reflect relevant cultural and core values; consequently, employees are more inclined to feel like they are a part of this brand identity. Such a feeling motivates employees to behave more appropriately and effectively towards encouraging brand development. In other words, employees are better able to adjust their attitudes and behaviors at work once they clearly understand the goals and values of the brand they belong to (Yang, Wan and Wu, 2015). If employees find that their performance is not aligned with these goals and values, then they will then be able to enhance corporate products or services to improve the brand experience of customers. Conversely, unaligned behaviors will lead to a gradual decrease in brand equity (Nam, Ekinici and Whyatt, 2011; Tsai, Cheung and Lo, 2010). Selnes (1998) proposed that when employees fulfill the brand promise, they contribute to customer trust and, consequently, strengthen customers' commitment to the brand. Thus, customer trust and commitment evolve in tandem with brand experience, which depends on how employees behave toward the brand.

Brand citizenship behaviors in the hospitality industry

Because of its nature, the hospitality industry relies heavily on manpower to deliver a successful brand experience. Employees' role in consolidating customers' brand experience extends to all employees who contribute either directly or indirectly to the brand, not just those who work in sales, marketing, or customer service (Burmam and Zeplin, 2005). All employees thus function as brand ambassadors (Erkmen and Hancer, 2015); in other words, they serve as relationship builders whose role is to turn the brand promise into reality for customers by meeting their expectations (Henkel *et al.*, 2007). Moreover, O'Neill and Mattila (2011) argued that hospitality employees' attitudes and behaviors play an important role in determining whether customers are satisfied with the brand after they have compared their actual brand experience to their expectations. Therefore, employees are integral in building loyalty to the hospitality brand through the

enhancement of relationships with customers (Kim, Jin-Sun and Kim, 2008).

Since Burmann and Zeplin (2005) first proposed BCBs, a few studies have been conducted to explore the concept in the hospitality industry. Shaari, Salleh and Hussin (2011, 2015) revealed that BCBs consist of employees' brand helping behavior, brand acceptance, brand endorsement, and brand advancement. However, research on how employees' BCBs affect customers' BT and BC from a multidimensional perspective is absent within the hospitality industry.

Two studies by Xie, Peng and Huan (2010); Xie, Peng and Zhang, (2014) are unique insofar as their adoption of the BCB concept from a tri-dimensional perspective. These studies revealed the significant, direct, positive impact of brand enthusiasm and brand helping behavior on customers' BT. Brand advancement was also shown to positively influence BT, indirectly, through brand enthusiasm and brand helping behavior. Regarding BC, as opposed to the indirect influence of brand helping behavior and brand enthusiasm on customers' BC, brand advancement influences customers' BC directly. For instance, employees who adopt brand helping behavior are willing to assist their customers, solving brand-related problems by actively answering questions about the brand in addition to helping them meet their expectations about it. Such behavior on the part of employees thus promotes and reinforces the attractiveness and desirability of the brand (Keller, 1993); and, along these lines, stimulates more confidence in the brand, fostering customer commitment. However, no studies on the relationship between BCBs and customer BT and BC exist regarding the hotel industry in Egypt.

Hypotheses and conceptual model of the study

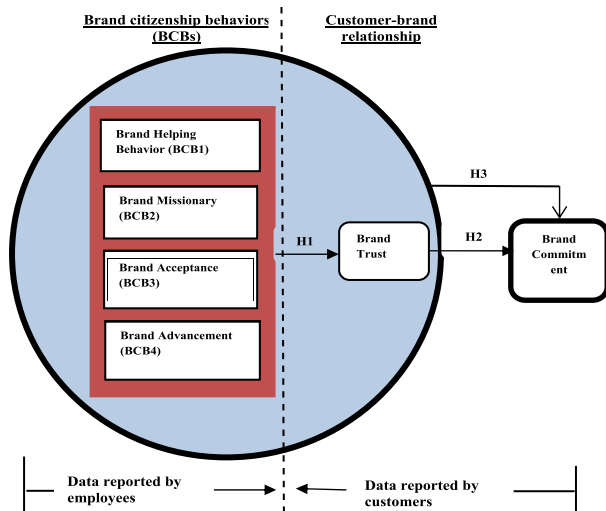
Relying on the theoretical foundation and objectives of this study, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H₁: Employees' brand citizenship behaviors (BCBs) are positively related to customers' brand trust (BT).

H₂: Customers' BT is positively related to customers' brand commitment (BC).

H₃: Customers' BT has a mediating effect on the relationship between employees' BCBs and customers' BC.

Ultimately, a conceptual model was developed (see Fig.1) to illustrate how employees' BCBs relate to customers' BT and BC.

Figure 1: Conceptual model of the study

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sample

Compared to hotel chains, independent hotels may not be able to successfully implement the brand awareness tool, because chain hotels share resources to cover expenses in terms of marketing and guest loyalty programs (O'Neill and Carlback, 2011). The brand awareness tool is a key benefit because customers look for brands that can meet their expectations for service and product quality, specific amenities, and security, which may be lacking at more obscure properties (Bharadwaj, Varadarajan and Fahy, 1993). Ultimately, the data were collected from independent hotels. A random sample of 16 independent hotels located in the Greater Cairo region in Egypt was chosen for investigation.

Survey instrument development

Previous reliable and valid measurement scales were adopted to measure the constructs. A 25-item scale was used to measure employees' perception of BCBs (Ravens, 2013; Shaari, Salleh and Hussin, 2011). Brand helping behaviors were measured based on nine items; for example, "My associates at work have a positive attitude towards their customers." Brand missionary was measured with five items, including "My colleagues would acknowledge additional work whenever our brand image was positively impacted." Brand acceptance was assessed via five items, such as "My colleagues are committed to the rules and instructions related to the image of our hotel brand." Brand advancement was evaluated with six items; for instance, "My colleagues request feedback proactively from the customers." In addition, a four-item scale adapted from Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2002) and

Erkmen and Hancer (2015) was used to measure customers' BT, e.g., "I have trust in this hotel brand." Furthermore, to measure customers' BC, Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman's (2001) three-item scale was used, e.g., "I see myself as loyal/faithful to this hotel brand." A five-point Likert scale was used to obtain responses in a range from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

Pilot study and reliability test

Once developed, the questionnaires were reviewed by two academic experts, one of whom had more experience on the topic of brand management and internal branding in the hospitality industry, while the other had experience designing surveys. These two experts were asked to assess content validity and clarify the questionnaires. Their feedback showed that a few statements were vague, and others were too long or complex; in addition, they suggested adding questions to collect more demographic information from guests. Proper modifications were made accordingly. Next, a pilot study was carried out on 20 customers and 25 employees to recognize survey deficiencies and formatting and design issues, obtain recommendations from both employees and customers, test the proposed time limit for filling out the questionnaire, and examine respondents' level of understanding of the developed questionnaire. Respondents for the pilot study were recruited from a hotel at which the primary investigator had previously established some working relationships.

Data collection

After collecting pertinent background information from the investigated hotels, telephone calls were made to the managers of the hotels' human resource departments to obtain permission to visit and distribute the questionnaires on their premises. All questionnaires were distributed at the end of 2016.

Public relations agents at the hotels oversaw distributing the questionnaires to guests, who were asked to return them to the front desk after completion. Since the employees should not have exchanged the questionnaires among themselves, especially if they were supervisors, the primary investigator of the study oversaw distributing and collecting them.

Two different structured surveys were distributed to collect data for final analysis. While one of the surveys was developed to collect employees' demographic information and investigate their perception of their BCBs, the other was administered to hotel guests to assess their trust and commitment towards the hotel brand in addition to collecting their demographic

information. Both employees and customers were asked to complete the surveys, which were subsequently matched.

Data analysis

Data analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS v. 22). The Cronbach Alpha reliability was computed, showing that the scales were reliable: 0.717 for customers' BT, 0.897 for customers' BC, and 0.914 for employees' BCBs. To describe and summarize the data, descriptive statistics (i.e., means and standard deviations) were applied. Inferential statistics (including correlation and regression analysis) were used to measure the degree and strength of the relationship between employees' BCBs and customers' BT and BC. A p -value of .05 was considered significant.

RESULTS

Respondents' profiles

After matching employees' data with their customers' data, an aggregate of 240 matched surveys were acquired. For the employees' sample, just over 79% ($n = 190$) of respondents were male, around 83% ($n = 200$) were 22–39 years old, roughly 61% ($n=145$) had bachelor's degrees, and 39.6% ($n = 95$) had 4–7 years of work experience in their hotels.

For the customers' sample, one-third ($n = 80$) of respondents were female, 77.1% ($n = 185$) were 22–39 years old, the same percentage had bachelor's degrees, 58.3% ($n = 140$) had stayed in the hotel 2–4 times, and about two-thirds ($n = 155$) had stayed for rest and relaxation. Most of the customers ($n = 170$; 70.8%) were Egyptian, 12.5% ($n = 30$) were German, 4.2% were Ukrainian ($n = 10$), and Jordanians, Americans, British, Italians, and United Arab Emirate nationals comprised 2.1% ($n = 5$) of each of the preceding nationalities made up the sample of customers; the minority of customers were Kuwaitis ($n = 3$) and Sudanese ($n = 2$), representing 2.1% together.

Participants' perceptions about the study variables

Table 1 illustrates slight differences between the mean scores of employees' BCBs: 3.50, 3.30, 3.55, and 3.25 for BCB1, BCB2, BCB3, and BCB4, respectively. The table also shows that the mean score is 3.74 ($SD = 0.56$) for customers' BT and 3.40 ($SD = 1.03$) for customers' BC.

Table 1: Mean score of study variables (N = 240).

Study Variables	Mean	St. Deviation
Employee Brand Citizenship Behavior: Helping Behavior (BCB1 – 9 items)	3.50	0.93
Employee Brand Citizenship Behavior: Brand Missionary (BCB2- 5 items)	3.30	0.91
Employee Brand Citizenship Behavior: Brand Acceptance (BCB3- 5 items)	3.55	1.0
Employee Brand Citizenship Behavior: Brand Advancement (BCB4- 6 items)	3.25	0.94
Customer trust towards the hotel brand (4 items)	3.74	0.55
Customer commitment towards the hotel brand (3 items)	3.40	1.0

Note: Five-point Likert Scale: 1 = Strongly disagree; 3 = Neither agree or disagree; 5 = Strongly agree.

Correlation analysis between study variables

The figures in Table 2 illustrate a significant (p value = 0.000) moderate correlation between BCB1, BCB2, and BCB4 of hotel employees with respect to customers' BT (where the correlation coefficients are 0.527, 0.513, and 0.432, respectively) and a significant (p value = 0.000) weak correlation with BCB3, where the correlation coefficient is 0.293.

Table 2: Correlation matrix of study variables (N = 240).

Study Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Helping Behavior (BCB1)	1.000					
2. Brand Missionary (BCB2)	0.845(**)	1.000				
3. Brand Acceptance (BCB3)	0.474(**)	0.578(**)	1.000			
4. Brand Advancement (BCB4)	0.781(**)	0.763(**)	0.479(**)	1.000		
5. Guests' Brand Trust	0.527(**)	0.513(**)	0.293(**)	0.432(**)	1.000	
6. Guests' Brand Commitment	0.563(**)	0.543(**)	0.294(**)	0.513(**)	0.776(**)	1.00

(**) The correlation is significant at the (0.01) level.

The table also reports a significant weak to moderate correlation between BCB1, BCB2, BCB3, and BCB4 of hotel employees with respect to customers' BC. In addition, a significant strong correlation exists between customers' BT and BC towards the hotel brand, where the correlation coefficient is 0.776 (p -value = 0.000).

Regression analysis among study variables

(A) Employees' BCBs and customers' BT

Table 3: Effect of employees' BCBs on customers' brand trust (N = 240)

	Model Summary		ANOVA		Coefficients		
	R	R 2	F	Sig.	Beta	T	Sig.
Dependent Variable: Brand Trust Predictors: (Constant), BCB4, BCB3, BCB1, BCB2	0.542	0.294	24.436	0.000			
BCB1					0.333	2.980	0.003
BCB2					0.238	2.072	0.039
BCB3					0.003	0.038	0.970
BCB4					-0.010	-0.113	0.910

The figures tabulated in Table 3 show the results of multiple regression analysis, which was conducted to measure the effect of employees' BCBs on customers' BT. The R square value is 0.294, which means that the model (which includes BCB1, BCB2, BCB3, and BCB4) explains 29.4% of the variance in customers' trust towards the hotel brand. The model also indicates that the highest beta coefficient values are 0.333 and 0.238, which are for BCB1 and BCB2, respectively ($P < 0.05$). This means that these two BCBs significantly contribute to explaining the customers' trust towards the hotel brand. However, neither BCB3 nor BCB4 makes any significant contribution to explaining customers' trust towards the hotel brand.

Table 4: Mediating role of customers' BT on the relationship between employees' BCBs on customers' BC

	Model Summary		ANOVA		Coefficients		
	R	R 2	F	Sig.	Beta	T	Sig.
Phase 1: Dependent Variable: Brand Commitment Predictors: (Constant), BCB4, BCB3, BCB1, BCB2	0.583	0.340	30.293	0.000			
BCB1					0.295	2.729	0.007
BCB2					0.202	1.820	0.040
BCB3					-0.031	-0.471	0.638
BCB4					0.144	1.604	0.110
Phase 2: Dependent Variable: Brand Commitment Predictors: (Constant), BCB4, BCB3, BCB1, BCB2, Brand Trust	0.803	0.644	84.831	0.000			
BCB1					0.076	0.941	0.348
BCB2					0.046	0.557	0.578
BCB3					-0.032	-0.675	0.500
BCB4					0.150	2.285	0.023
Brand Trust					0.656	14.151	0.000

Table 4 illustrates a two-phase multiple regression conducted to measure the mediating role of customers' BT on the relationship between employees' BCBs and customers' BC.

Results of the first phase illustrate that the R square value is 0.340, which means that the model (which includes BCB1, BCB2, BCB3, and BCB4) explains 34% of the variance in customers' commitment toward the hotel brand. The highest beta coefficient values are 0.295 and 0.202, which are for BCB1 and BCB2, respectively ($P < 0.05$), meaning that these variables make statistically significant contribution towards explaining customers' commitment to the hotel brand.

Results of the second phase show that the R square value is 0.644, meaning that the model (which includes BCB1, BCB2, BCB3, BCB4, and customers' trust) explains 64.4% of the variance in customers' commitment to the hotel brand. The effect of BCB1 and BCB2 was statistically insignificant ($P < 0.05$). This suggests that customers' BT does not fully mediate employees' BCBs or customers' commitment to the hotel brand. Only two dimensions of BCBs (BCB1 and BCB2) demonstrated a mediating effect.

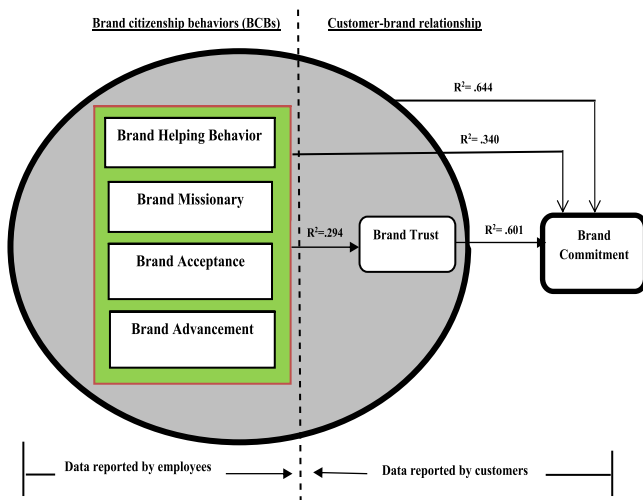
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Due to the nature of the hospitality industry, in which a high level of employee–customer interaction exists, employees play a vital role in brand success. Therefore, the aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between employees' BCBs and customers' BC, in addition to customers' BT as a mediator in explaining this relationship. A conceptual model was developed and tested to empirically investigate these relationships (see Fig. 2) and the results from testing the study hypotheses are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Results of testing study hypotheses

Hypotheses	Testing Result
H1: Employees' brand citizenship behaviors (BCBs positively relates to consumers' brand trust (BT).	Supported
H2: Consumers' BT positively relates to customer brand commitment (BC).	Supported
H3: Consumers' BT has a mediating effect on the relationship between employees' BCBs and consumers' BC.	Partially supported (only BCB1 and BCB2 showed mediating effect)

Figure 2: Final relationship diagram



The results showed that the hypothesized relationship between hotel employees' BCBs and customers' BT was supported. The results were consistent with the findings of Erkmen (2014), who reported that BCBs are positively related to customers' BT. The more employees demonstrated behaviors supportive of the hotel brand, the more customers had trust in the brand. When the brand was delivered by employees as promised, customers' confidence towards the brand increased, which in turn helped build customers' trust in the brand (Kimpakorn and Tocquer, 2010; Papsolomou and Vrontis, 2006).

The study also revealed that not all dimensions of BCBs have the same effect on customers' BT. These results were also somewhat consistent with what was reported by Xie, Peng and Huan (2014). The current study revealed that employees' brand helping behavior and brand missionary behavior were positively related to customers' BT. When hotel employees actively engaged in solving customers' problems, i.e., via active helping behavior, customers obtained additional knowledge about the hotel brand, which consequently provided them with a clear indication about hotel's brand performance. Furthermore, employees tend to adopt greater initiative to guard, defend, endorse, and exhort the brand to others; they also tend to become more committed to the guidelines formulated to protect the hotel brand's reputation. Promoting the hotel brand in such a missionary manner may also help clarify any misunderstandings about the brand and thus reduce the likelihood of customers perceiving any discrepancies between the

hotel brand and their expectations of it.

The study findings also revealed that customers' BT showed a significant positive relationship with their BC. The more customers had trust in the hotel brand, the more commitment they had towards it. This result is consistent with Morgan and Hunt's (1994) trust–commitment theory of relationships as well as with previous studies by Keller (1993) and Erikman and Hancer (2015). Customers who have trust in the brand are more likely to be emotionally connected and committed to it (Mattila, 2001).

Additionally, customers' BT as reported by the current study does not fully mediate employees' BCBs or customers' commitment towards the hotel brand. Only two dimensions of BCB (BCB1 and BCB2) showed a mediating effect. For a hotel brand to perform as expected via employees' BCBs, customers need to first develop trust and commitment towards the hotel brand and must also develop a relationship with it. Therefore, it can be argued that employees' BCBs are important for enhancing relationships with customers in the long term. Particularly, those behaviors that increase customers' BT (specifically, helping behavior and brand missionary) will in turn positively increase customers' BC.

The low mean scores of BCBs for employees working in the independent hotels reported by this study could be interpreted according to the findings of previous studies (i.e., Dortok, 2006; Kimpakorn and Tocquer, 2010; Yang, Wan and Wu, 2015). These studies argued that independent hotels are investing less in their internal branding practices than those exerted by chain hotels. Internal branding significantly influences employees' brand-related behaviors because it tends to improve employees' recognition and commitment towards the brand. The more effective internal branding is, the more it enhances customers' trust and commitment towards the brand, which may explain the low mean scores of customers' BT and BC in the independent hotels.

In the context of the present study, Egyptians encounter substantial stress in their day-to-day lives; for instance, traffic problems, work stress and the current economic and political situation (Hafez, Sahn and Farrag, 2013). On the one hand, Egyptian employees may have a fear of being financially insecure because of the uncertain and unstable economic environment in Egypt; accordingly, they

may pay more attention to helping behaviors at work to accrue more benefits, either directly from customers in terms of tips or indirectly from the hotel management. For instance, when a customer expresses a positive attitude in a comment card because of an employee's assistance, this employee may consequently accrue benefits. On the other hand, Egyptian customers are also attempting to mitigate or escape from life stress via rest and relaxation (about two-thirds of the present study sample stayed at the hotels for this reason). Staying in hotels may consider a mean for smoothing anxiety associated with stress and motivates customers to reduce the tension (Desarbo and Edwards, 1996). Thus, Egyptian customers (as most of the study sample) tend to be attracted to hotels whose employees exhibit positive, supportive, and empathetic behavior towards customers; and hence, their trust will be obtained. This could explain why two BCBs in particular—brand helping behavior and brand missionary—were significantly related to customers' BT within the Egyptian context.

As the independent Egyptian hotels lack marketing applications to build relationships with customers (Essawy, 2011; Essawy, 2012), they could adopt training programs to provide brand-related skills to employees. Such programs would facilitate satisfactory brand experiences for customers as they could shape/reshape employees' attitudes and behaviors towards their hotel brand, and this would in turn improve the brand-related values they convey to customers (Yang, Wan and Wu, 2015).

Due to the critical role that employee performance plays in the success or failure of a hotel brand, the findings of this study could help hotel managers develop strategies to enhance customers' trust towards the hotel brand by focusing on internal branding practices that encourage hotel employees to display more BCBs, such as brand helping and brand missionary behaviors. Hotels should care about their employees' well-being and, despite the ambiguity and instability of their future in Egypt, convince them that they are secure if they belong to the hotel; doing so could generate positive attitudes and behaviors among employees towards the hotel brand. Consequently, employees would be more motivated to practice BCBs, and these efforts would facilitate the delivery of the brand promise to customers, in turn encouraging customers' trust and commitment in the hotel brand and stimulating long-term relationships with the

hotel. Furthermore, hotels should begin branding activities from the inside to enable their employees to deliver the brand promise properly; in other words, a promise that is congruent with external branding activities for customers. By doing so, customers' trust and commitment in the hotel brand could increase and simultaneously reduce the expenditure of resources to attract new customers. Thus, hotels should appreciate the importance of internal branding for the sake of their success.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

In this research, the concept of BCB was investigated within the Egyptian sociocultural context. The study relied on matching questionnaires completed by employees with those completed by customers to generate data for empirically testing the relationship between the study variables: BCB, BT, and BC. The study had some limitations. First, employees and customers in independent hotels were investigated, and thus the results may not be generalizable to other types of hotels, such as chain hotels. Further research could examine these findings about hotel chains and different hospitality businesses (e.g., restaurants). Second, the study investigated the BCB–BC relationship by only taking BT into consideration as a mediator. Further research could examine the potential antecedents of BCBs; for example, internal communication and leadership. It might also be beneficial to acknowledge that other factors could affect the relationship between BCBs and BT, such as brand prestige and brand equity of customers.

CONCLUSION

This study utilized a self-report survey and therefore a social desirability bias might have prevented participants from being honest about their responses. In addition, the questionnaires were written in English only; thus, employees and tourists who had limited English language skills were excluded. Improving customers' knowledge about the hotel brand can reduce their perception of potential danger and increase confidence in the brand's ability to satisfy their desires and needs.

Moreover, in terms of concerns over how employees talk about their workplace to non-employees, independent Egyptian hotels should be aware that internal branding practices could help attract employees who would potentially have greater job

motivation, which could in turn reduce costs associated with recruiting improper employees and employee turnover rates.

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