

Modeling consumer-based brand equity for multinational hotel brands – When hosts become guests



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HIGHLIGHTS

- CBBE models for multinational hotel brands are tested with Chinese middle-class consumers.
- Different relationship patterns between brand knowledge and consumer response are found.
- Different patterns between brand knowledge and consumer response across China and U.S. are found.
- Chinese travel motives to the U.S. moderates relationships between brand image and travel intent.

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses global expansion challenges faced by multinational hotel companies under the backdrop of the booming international travel. Grounded upon theories pertaining to brand equity, this study develops the consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) model for multinational hotel brands, which examines the effects of brand knowledge on consumer response to these brands. The conceptual model is empirically tested using a sample of the Chinese middle-class consumers in their home country – China and when they travel to the foreign country as their host country – the United States. Three U.S.-based multinational hotel brands are selected: Hilton, Holiday Inn, and Super 8. Different relationship patterns between brand knowledge and consumer responses in home and host countries are exhibited. In addition, this study examines the role of Chinese consumers' travel motivation to the United States in the CBBE model.

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1. Introduction

Globalization has led to a dramatic rise in the scope and complexity of international brand management (Dinnie, 2005). Many hotel companies are beginning to adopt the global branding strategies and to expand their market to the entire world. For instance, Marriott has over 3000 properties all over the world, including the U.S. and 67 other countries and territories (www.marriott.com). For some companies, foreign markets have become even more profitable than home markets. Originating in Malaysia, Shangri-la hotel brand has 81 properties in the world as of today. 47 are located in mainland China, which is the most

profitable market for this hotel company (<http://www.shangri-la.com>). Global expansion not only brings business opportunities to multinational hotel companies but also challenges. One of the key branding challenges faced by many hotel companies is to achieve brand consistency across countries with different culture and customer preferences (Gelder, 2005).

Booming international travel and the increasing transparency of travel information in the last decade has increased this challenge for multinational hotel companies with regard to brand consistency vs. brand customization (Matthiesen & Phau, 2005). Tourists tend to carry their understandings of a hotel brand formulated from brand messages and direct experiences that they acquired in their home country when traveling. They may feel confused about the brand when they travel to foreign countries, where not only the hotel brand image but also even the products and services differ from those in their home country. Failure to meet these expectations in the new environment often results in

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the consumer's dissatisfaction with the hotel brand. Such negative feelings adversely affect the consumers' perception of and attitude toward the hotel brand, which in turn, affect the hotel brand equity.

Existing research on multinational hotel brands has largely focused on global expansion and branding strategies from the perspective of businesses and organizations. Three major topics have been covered in the following studies: 1) entry mode choices of multinational hotel companies to foreign markets, with the specific focus on factors that affect the entry modes (e.g., [Chen & Dimou, 2005](#); [Rodriguez, 2002](#); [Zhao & Olsen, 1997](#)); 2) factors that influence the global brand expansion strategies, such as locational factors (e.g., [Johnson, 2005](#)), market factors (e.g., [Whitla, Walters, & Davies, 2007](#)), business environment factors (e.g., [Altinay & Altinay, 2003](#)); and 3) impacts of global expansion on hotel brand value and performance (e.g., [Lee, 2008](#); [Xiao, O'Neill, & Wang, 2008](#)). Yet, the hotel customers' perspective of global expansion and branding strategies remains unexplored. The present study attempts to address the aforementioned challenges faced by multinational hotel companies in their global expansion from the perspective of consumers. In particular, this study aims to investigate how Chinese consumers understand U.S.-based multinational hotel brands in their home country of China, which is the host country of the hotels, and how such understandings affect their responses toward these brands in China and when they travel to the U.S., which is the home country of the hotel brands. The home–host framework as the research background of this study is illustrated in [Fig. 1](#).

Three research questions will be addressed in the present study:

- 1) What is Chinese consumers' awareness of U.S. hotel brands? To what extent does such awareness affect their responses toward these brands in their home country – China and when they travel to the host country – the U.S.?
- 2) What is the image of U.S. hotel brands as perceived by Chinese consumers? To what extent does such image affects their responses toward these brands in their home country – China and when they travel to the host country – the U.S.?
- 3) What is the role of Chinese consumers' motivation for traveling to the U.S. in the relationship between their knowledge of and responses toward the U.S. hotel brands?

2. Literature review

2.1. Consumer-based brand equity

The concept of consumer-based brand equity comes from the economic term of “brand equity”, which refers to the brand's added value to a product from the financial perspective of investors, manufacturers, and retailers ([Biel, 1992](#)). Yet, it has been gradually learned that this value will not be realized unless the brand is

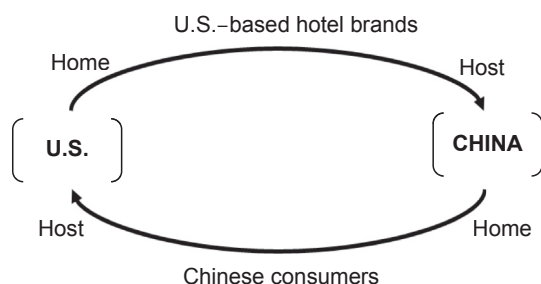


Fig. 1. Research background.

meaningful to consumers ([Cobb-Walgreen, Ruble, & Donthu, 1995](#); [Crimmins, 2000](#)). Consumer-based brand equity concept was therefore brought up to address the brand equity from the perspective of consumers, which reflects the power of a brand that lingers in the mind of customers. A brand with positive consumer-based brand equity might cause consumers to return, spread favorable word-of-mouth, and be less sensitive to price increases ([Aaker, 1991](#); [Biel, 1992](#); [Keller, 2002](#)). As the marketing thinking is shifting from one-time transactions to a long-term relationship between providers and consumers ([Pike, 2012](#)), the significance of consumer-based brand equity in retaining customers draws more attentions from the academic society. The last two decades have witnessed numerous activities on consumer-based brand equity research in marketing and management area (e.g., [Aaker, 1991](#); [Biel, 1992](#); [Carmen, Garrido, & Vicente, 2010](#); [Cobb-Walgreen et al., 1995](#); [Keller, 1993, 2002](#); [Kim & Kim, 2004](#); [Kim, Kim, & An, 2003](#); [Konecnik & Gartner, 2007](#); [Lee & Back, 2008, 2010](#); [Orth & Lopetcharat, 2005](#); [Pappu & Quester, 2006](#)). These studies ranged from consumer goods brands (e.g., [Cobb-Walgreen et al., 1995](#); [Keller, 2002](#); [Orth & Lopetcharat, 2005](#)) to service brands, such as hotels ([Hsu, Oh, & Assaf, 2011](#); [Kim & Kim, 2005](#); [Kim, Jin-Sun, & Kim, 2008](#)), restaurants ([Kim & Kim, 2004](#)), conferences and exhibitions ([Carmen et al., 2010](#); [Lee & Back, 2008, 2010](#)), and tourism destinations ([Boo, Busser, & Baloglu, 2009](#); [Hornig, Liu, Chou, & Tsai, 2012](#); [Konecnik & Gartner, 2007](#)).

The majority of studies on consumer-based brand equity (hereafter “CBBE”) in the last two decades has more or less been developed on the basis of two theoretical frameworks: Aaker's brand equity model and Keller's consumer-based brand equity theory. Aaker was the first to tackle the brand equity concept from the consumer perspective, though the term of consumer-based brand equity was not specified in his work. He brought up the brand equity model in his seminal book of *Managing Brand Equity* in 1991. In the book he suggested that the concept of brand equity consists of four major components: brand loyalty, name awareness, perceived quality, and brand associations in addition to perceived quality. In Aaker's framework, CBBE was represented by the combination of several brand attributes including brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality, and other brand associations in the minds of consumers, while the interrelationships between these four constructs were not considered. He argued that the CBBE of a brand is strong if consumers are familiar with a brand, perceive positive image including great product quality of the brand, and are loyal to the brand. Keller extended Aaker's brand equity concept and brought forward the first official definition of CBBE: “the differential effect that brand knowledge has on consumer response to the marketing of that brand” ([Keller, 1993](#), p. 2). Brand knowledge including brand awareness and brand associations was stated as the source of CBBE. He argued that CBBE occurs when “a consumer is familiar with a brand and holds some favorable, strong, and unique brand associations in memory” ([Keller, 1993](#), p. 2). The major difference between these two models lies in brand loyalty. According to Keller, brand loyalty is an outcome of CBBE, while Aaker argued that brand loyalty is a source of CBBE. These two models have been adopted by many academic articles, research reports, and books in the past two decades, with the focus on conceptual development of the CBBE concept (e.g., [Anselmsson, Johansson, & Persson, 2007](#); [Durme, Brodie, & Redmore, 2003](#)), empirical examination of the CBBE model in various settings (e.g., [Pappu, Quester, & Cooksey, 2005](#); [Yoo & Donthu, 2001](#)), and application of the CBBE concept in marketing and branding strategies (e.g., [Washburn, Till, & Priluck, 2000, 2004](#)). Recent studies have indicated that Aaker's model was more adopted than Keller's, particularly on empirical examinations of CBBE. Yet, attentions to the CBBE of service brands are insufficient whereas most of the

studies have been devoted to fast-moving consumer goods brands (Bailey & Ball, 2006; Krishnan & Hartline, 2001).

The CBBE concept emerged in tourism and hospitality domain in 2000s and attentions to this concept from the academia have been growing fast in recent years. Most of the CBBE studies in the HTM domain have empirically investigated the value of a brand or multiple brands in the minds of consumers. Similar with CBBE studies on consumer goods brands, Aaker's model is more accepted and adopted in these studies, which regard CBBE as the combination of four brand attributes including brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand associations. The majority of studies grouped four components together through exploratory factor analysis to represent CBBE and even used the factor score created in EFA to serve as the value of CBBE in further empirical examinations (e.g., Kim & Kim, 2004, 2005). Studies on Keller's CBBE model that examines the dynamic relationship between consumers' knowledge of and responses toward a brand are rare. Moreover, a large amount of existing studies failed to construct the CBBE concept or establish specific measurement scales for CBBE dimensions that specifically feature the hospitality and tourism context. Several studies have recognized the importance of such work and integrated HTM-related theories or characteristics into the proposed CBBE models. For example, Konecnik and Gartner (2007) integrated Cai's (2002) destination branding model and Gartner's (1993) destination image model into the CBBE dimensions of a destination. Hsu et al. (2011) added the construct of trust in the CBBE model for luxury hotel brands in China as a result of focus-group interviews and surveys with luxury hotel managers and customers in China. Recent studies on CBBE in HTM domain also indicated more demands for further investigations of CBBE concept in the context of growing international activities of tourists and hospitality businesses (Pappu & Quester, 2006), which is becoming an increasingly important issue for the hospitality and tourism industry.

2.2. The conceptual framework and hypotheses

While Aaker's brand equity model has been more frequently adopted in existing research, particularly empirical studies, two research gaps remain unexplored in his model. First, the interrelationships between the four brand attributes are not considered. Second, Aaker's model does not integrate the effectiveness of marketing programs into the consumer-based brand equity concept (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). Keller's CBBE theory extends Aaker's work by filling these two research gaps. In his CBBE definition, Keller highlights the importance of marketing programs in linking consumers' awareness, desired thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and opinions to a brand. He stated that "a brand is said to have positive consumer-based brand equity when consumers react more favorably to a product and the way it is marketed" (Keller, 2002, p. 60). In addition, Keller's CBBE theory is more dynamic in discussing the interrelationship between constructs. It stated that consumers' knowledge of a brand including awareness and perceptions will result in their attitudes and behaviors to that brand. Keller argued that CBBE can largely be captured by four blocks that form a hierarchy pyramid, which are from the bottom (the lowest level) to the top (the highest level) as follows (Keller, 2002; Keller & Lehmann, 2006):

Awareness: brand identity;

Brand associations – tangibles: brand performance and imagery;

Brand associations – intangibles: judgment (attitude) and feelings;

Responses to the brand: resonance (loyalty, attachment, community, and engagement).

Grounded upon Keller's CBBE theory, this study proposes a CBBE model for multinational hotel brands in the context of globalization. The effects of Chinese consumers' brand knowledge formed through their exposure to brand marketing messages in China on their responses to these hotel brands when they are in China and in the U.S. will be examined. In addition, the moderating effect of travel motivation from China to the U.S. on Chinese consumers' responses to these hotel brands when traveling to the U.S. will be tested in the proposed model. Fig. 2 illustrates the conceptual framework of this study with three sets of hypotheses as proposed below.

2.2.1. Consumer response to the marketing of a brand

Consumer response to the marketing of a brand could be reflected in their attitudes toward the brand, recall of the brand from an advertisement, choice of the brand, evaluations of the brand extension, and so forth (Keller, 2002). Consumer response has been used in general marketing literature and specified in different studies by a broad range of constructs, including brand attitudes (e.g., Park & Young, 1986; Smith, 1993), consumer satisfaction, loyalty, purchase intention (e.g., Espejel & Fandos, 2009), as well as consumers' willingness to pay a premium price, recommending the brand to others, and accepting brand extensions (e.g., Rio, Vazquez, & Iglesias, 2001).

In the present research, the concept of "consumer response" is constructed differently in the two countries because Chinese consumers have different experiences with the hotel brands in China and in the United States, which in turn, result in different responses toward these brands. It is represented by "brand resonance" in the China model. According to Keller, brand resonance is characterized by the level of consumers' emotional attachment and behavioral engagement toward a brand. It comprises of four dimensions: "behavioral loyalty, attitudinal attachment, sense of community and active engagement" (Keller, 2002, p. 92). Simply to state, behavioral loyalty refers to the repeat purchase; attitudinal attachment describes consumers' personal attachment to a brand, viewing the brand as something special. Sense of community denotes consumers' feelings of kinship or affiliation with people who are associated with a brand. Finally, consumers are willing to invest extra time, money, and other resources in a brand refer to active engagement. In China, the brand resonance is resulted from Chinese consumers' knowledge of the brands formulated from their experiences and exposure to these multinational hotel brands in China. However, Chinese consumers do not have direct experiences with these brands or exposure to marketing communications of these brands in the U.S. They carry the same knowledge of the multinational hotel brands when traveling to the U.S., which is formulated based on their experiences in China. Considering the specific situation of international travel, the brand knowledge carried by Chinese tourists would affect their purchase intention of the hotel brands when they travel to the U.S. Thus, consumer response to brands in the U.S. is indicated by behavioral intentions toward the brand.

2.2.2. Brand awareness

Brand awareness, or brand familiarity, has been pursued as one of the primary goals of many marketing programs in practices. "Brand awareness is the ability of a potential buyer to recognize or recall that a brand is a member of a certain product category" (Aaker, 1991, p. 61). Brand awareness is not only about customers knowing the brand name, but also involves linking the brand to certain associations in memory (Keller, 2002). There has been a consensus that brand awareness includes two components of brand recognition and brand recall (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 2002; Percy & Rossiter, 1992). Brand recognition refers to consumers' ability to identify the brand when the brand name or logo is provided as a

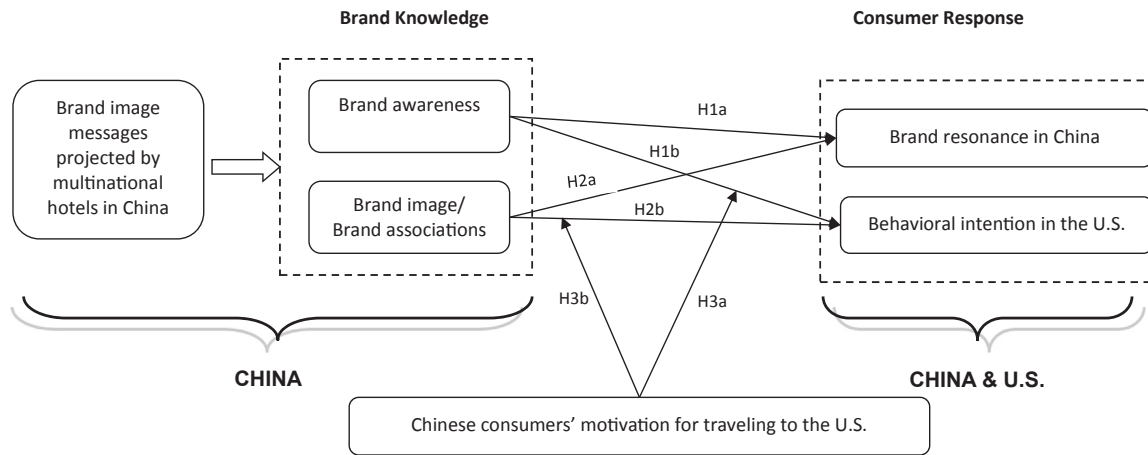


Fig. 2. The conceptual framework.

cue. It is the minimal level of brand awareness and particularly important when a buyer chooses a brand at the point of purchase. Brand recall refers to consumers' ability to identify the brand without giving out the name of the company or when given the product category.

Studies on the role of brand awareness in consumer purchase decision making process could be traced back to the 1940s in psychology literature (Guest, 1942). Research on this topic began to receive considerable attentions since the 1990s (Hoyer & Brown, 1990; Percy & Rossiter, 1992). As one component of brand equity, brand awareness helps the brand in numerous ways: attaching associations to the brand name, providing a sense of familiarity or liking, acting as a signal or heuristic of commitment, and helping the brand to enter the consumer consideration set in the decision making process (Aaker, 1991; Macdonald & Sharp, 2003). Brand awareness was often identified as one important goal of marketing communications and preconditioned measurement of advertising effectiveness (Macdonald & Sharp, 2003; Percy & Rossiter, 1992). More importantly, brand awareness has been widely recognized as a significant determinant of consumer affect and purchase decisions toward a brand (e.g., Hoyer & Brown, 1990; Macdonald & Sharp, 2000). It has been argued that high brand familiarity or brand awareness tends to form positive affect (Baker, Hutchinson, Moore, & Nedungadi, 1986; Berlyne, 1970) and is more likely to motivate purchase behavior (Hoyer & Brown, 1990; Macdonald & Sharp, 2000; Moore & Hutchinson, 1985). Zajonc (1980) indicated that familiar stimuli tend to be better preferred than unfamiliar ones, and lead to positive affection and attitudes toward the brand. Therefore, the first set of hypotheses on the relationship between brand awareness and consumer response to the brand is proposed as below:

- H1: The brand awareness and consumer responses to the brand
 H1a: Chinese consumers' awareness of the multinational hotel brands positively affects their brand resonance toward the brands in China.
 H1b: Chinese consumers' awareness of the multinational hotel brands positively affects their behavioral intention toward the brands in the U.S.

2.2.3. Brand image

Investigations into the concept of brand image in the marketing domain emerged in the 1950s, when advertising effectiveness was intensely discussed in marketing and advertising literature (Padgett & Allen, 1997). Consumers' perception of the brand was emphasized

in these discussions as one of the important goals of advertising (Blain, Levy, & Ritchie, 2005; Gardner & Levy, 1955). As an important concept in marketing in the last several decades, brand image has been defined differently in various disciplines. Gardner and Levy (1955) stated their understanding of brand image in their seminal work of "The Product and the Brand": brand image represents not only a variety of ideas and attributes but also the symbolic meaning associated to the brand. The image provides "a mental representation of meaning" (Paivio, 1969). Brand image usually refers to a combination of brand associations, or the consumer's perceptions of the brand's tangible and intangible attributes (Spense & Engel, 1970). On a macro level, brand image comes from consumers' synthesis of all the signals sent out by the brand (Kapferer, 2008). On a micro level, brand image refers to consumers' cumulative understanding of the brand's marketing communications (Roth, 1992). In summary, brand image offers the tangible and intangible associations of the brand to consumers and differentiate the brand offerings from its competitors in the marketplace.

Brand image has been used interchangeably with brand associations in recent branding literature (e.g., Keller, 2002), representing consumers' perceptions of a brand. One of the biggest challenges in brand image research is to identify the different groups of meanings or dimensions of it. Keller suggests three major categories to classify brand associations: attributes, benefits, and attitudes. This trilogy has been extensively adopted in delineating consumer perceived image (e.g., Huitt & Cain, 2005; Silva & Alwi, 2006). Brand image plays an important role in affecting consumer response to a brand. It has been posited that mental images of products form the basis of the selection process in interpreting information and guiding consumer behavior, as people act upon what they believe to be true (Papadopoulos, 1993; Spense & Engel, 1970). Individuals' perceptions of a brand affect their attitudes, preferences, purchase intentions, and loyalty toward the brand (e.g., Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995; Rio et al., 2001). Substantive evidence regarding the positive relationship between brand image and consumer response has also been provided in the hospitality and tourism area (Barsky & Nash, 2002; Horng et al., 2012). Therefore, the second set of hypotheses on the relationship between brand image and consumer response to the brand is proposed as follows:

- H2: The brand image and consumer response to the brand
 H2a: The hotel brand image dimensions perceived by Chinese consumers have significant effects on their brand resonance toward the brand in China.

H2b: The hotel brand image dimensions perceived by Chinese consumers have significant effects on their behavioral intention toward the brand in the U.S.

2.2.4. Moderating effect of travel motivation

The moderating effect of Chinese consumers' travel motivation to the U.S. on their purchase intention toward the multinational hotel brands when traveling to the U.S. is proposed in the model. It has been stated that consumers' psychographic constructs, such as perceived value, motivation, and perceptions, strongly affect the formation of emotions and attitudes, and accordingly behaviors (Lazarus, 1991). According to the cognitive-motivational-relational theory (Lazarus, 1991), one's psychological activities and responses to a brand would change as the relationship between the person and the environment changes over time and situations. In this study, when the external environment is changed from the home country of China to the guest country of the U.S., Chinese consumers' responses toward the same multinational hotel brands are highly possible to change. Travel motivation as an indicating element of this external environmental change significantly affects tourists choice of hotels in destinations (Zins, 1998). The third set of hypotheses about the moderating effect of travel motivation is therefore proposed.

H3: The moderating effect of Chinese consumers' travel motivation to the U.S.

H3a: Dimensions of Chinese consumers' travel motivation to the U.S. significantly affect the relationship between their brand awareness and behavioral intention toward the brand in the U.S.

H3b: Dimensions of Chinese consumers' travel motivation to the U.S. significantly affect the relationship between their brand image and behavioral intention toward the brand in the U.S.

3. Methodology

3.1. Sampling and data collection

Three U.S.-based multinational hotel brands were selected to examine the conceptual model in this study. They are Hilton, Holiday Inn, and Super 8, which represent the upscale, mid-scale, and budget hotel brands in the United States. These three hotel brands were chosen according to the following two steps. First, U.S.-based hotel companies that have properties in the U.S. and China and operate websites on English and Chinese platforms were selected. A website in the .com domain (e.g., www.marriott.com) was considered the English platform; and one in the .cn domain (e.g., www.marriott.com.cn) was considered the Chinese platform. There are seven in total: Marriot, Starwood, Days Inn, Holiday Inn, Hilton, Hyatt, and Super 8. Second, a thorough review was conducted among websites on the two platforms to examine whether different brand image messages were communicated to consumers in the two countries (Huang & Cai, 2010). Three hotel brands were finally chosen as examples in the present study: Holiday Inn, Hilton, and Super 8. Hyatt was excluded because it does not have a specific Chinese website. The Chinese website of Hyatt is actually a translated Chinese version of the English website. Marriott, Starwood, and Days Inn were excluded because their websites feature different sub-brands under the company brand and no specific Chinese websites for an individual sub-brand are available.

Data used in this study were collected through the face-to-face questionnaire survey. The sample used in this study was selected from the middle-class population in China. Shanghai was selected to conduct data collection because middle-class people in this

largest city and the economic center of China well represent this population in China. It has been reported that the middle-class accounts for around 7% of the Chinese population and is expected to reach 25% by 2020 (Li, 2008). Most of them congregate in first-tier cities, have significant disposable income (with an annual income of over 60,000 RMB), and serve as the primary source of huge and still rising purchase power of Chinese consumers. It has been widely recognized that the Chinese middle-class population fuels the China tourism industry, not only at home, but also abroad (Li & Cai, 2012). To approach this market segment, the surveys were randomly distributed in mid-scale and upscale shopping malls in Shanghai. The following three criteria were used in the beginning of the survey to select the qualified respondents. First, the respondent was aware of one of the three hotel brands in China. Second, the respondent must have annual income over 60,000 RMB. Third, considering the definition of middle-class both in China and in the world (Farrell, Gersch, & Stephenson, 2006; Li & Zhang, 2008), the age of qualified respondents ranged between 20 and 60 years old.

An individual questionnaire was provided for each of the three hotel brands. Most of the questions in these three questionnaires were same except for the statements that measured the brand image construct, because these statements were designed based on the content analysis results of the hotel websites on the Chinese platform and previous literature. Each respondent was asked by a professional interviewer to answer questions about the hotel brand he or she was aware of. Six professional interviewers were hired to collect data for this study. These professional interviewers received professional training on quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. They also had several years' experiences in interviewing Chinese consumers to collect data via structured questionnaires. In addition, each of them attended a specific training workshop conducted by the first author on the data collection procedures for this study. One respondent or one household can only be interviewed once. A total of 601 complete questionnaires was collected and used in this study: 203 for Hilton, 203 for Holiday Inn, and 195 for Super 8.

3.2. Instrument development

Hotel brand awareness was measured by four items on a 7-point Likert scale. The statements were developed based on the branding literature in general (Hoyer & Brown, 1990; Percy & Rossiter, 1992; Yoo & Donthu, 2001) and particularly in the hospitality and tourism domain (Boo et al., 2009; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Lee & Back, 2008; Oh, 2000). Because consumers' perceptions of hotel brands usually vary by different brands, it is not appropriate to directly adopt existing scales. The measurement items of brand associations were developed based on hotel Chinese website content analysis results as well as the review of related literature (Jones, Mak, & Sim, 2007; Kim & Kim, 2005; Kim et al., 2003). Totally, 23 items for Hilton brand, 23 items for Holiday Inn brand, and 21 items for Super 8 brand were generated to measure the hotel brand associations on a 7-point Likert scale, respectively. Three hotel websites on the Chinese platform were analyzed by using ICTCLAS and ANTCOCON programs. Webpages up to three layers linked from the homepage (totally 106 plain text documents) were collected, cleaned up, and stored for the content analysis. The homepage was regarded as the first layer. The ICTCLAS program calculated the frequency of the meaningful key words and the ANTCOCON program conducted the word clustering. Themes were identified for each hotel brand and used to measure the hotel brand associations. Some themes were shared by different hotel brands. For example, Hilton and Holiday Inn shared several common statements, such as "xx offers convenient internet connections", "xx offers good banquet facilities", "xx has high quality conference and meeting facilities", "xx has diverse

quality restaurants”, “xx is luxury”, and so on. Some statements were unique for specific hotel brands. For the Hilton brand, the unique items include “Hilton staff are well-trained and professional”, “I feel safe in Hilton”, and so on. The unique items for Holiday Inn brand are “Holiday Inn has convenient business center including booking tickets, fax, internet, print, rental cars, etc.”, “Holiday Inn provides consistent service”, “I feel comfortable about Holiday Inn”, and so on. The unique statements for Super 8 brand include “Super 8 is economy”, “Super 8 gives me an impression of being clean and friendly”, “Super 8 is an economy chain hotel brand”, “Super 8 provides quality food and beverage service”, and so on.

Chinese consumers' travel motivation to the U.S. was measured by 23 items on a 7-point Likert scale adapted from Li and Cai's (2012) Chinese outbound tourist travel motivation measurements. The sample questions include “feeling inner harmony”, “having others know that I have been to the U.S.”, “experiencing something different”, “meet new people and socialize”, “being away from the daily life”, “indulging in luxury”, and so on. Brand resonance was measured using eight items on a 7-point Likert scale adopted from Keller's (2002) brand resonance statements. These eight statements are: 1) I like *** brand, 2) I have positive opinions about ***, 3) *** is one of the hotel brands I prefer, 4) I would choose *** if possible, 5) It is worthwhile to pay more to stay with *** than other hotel brands, 6) I am proud to have others know I stay with ***, 7) I would like to say positive things about *** hotel brand to other people, and 8) I would like to recommend *** brand to someone who seeks my advice. Behavioral intention was measured by consumers' purchasing intention and their willingness to recommend the hotel brand to their relatives and friends. Respondents were asked to evaluate four statements on a 7-point Likert scale: 1) I would choose *** hotel brand if possible, 2) It is worthwhile to pay more to stay with *** hotel brand than others, 3) I would like to say positive things about *** hotel brand to other people, and 4) I would like to recommend *** hotel brand to someone who seeks my advice.

The questionnaires were first developed in English and then translated into Chinese, using the method suggested by Willgerodt, Kataoka-Yahiro, Kim, and Ceria (2005). First, the English instruments were translated into Chinese by the first author, who is a bilingual researcher, and then another bilingual tourism researcher blindly translated them back from Chinese to English. Second, another three bilingual researchers in the lodging management area were asked to independently examine the Chinese version and two English versions of the instruments for errors that might lead to differences in meanings. Third, the instruments were revised based on the results of the second step. Finally, about 30–40 Chinese consumers were asked to work on the Chinese instruments and provide feedback on the questions for the purpose of detecting any inappropriate usage of words or expressions in the questionnaires.

3.3. Data analysis procedures

SPSS and AMOS were used to analyze the data. First, the normality of the data was tested by Skewness and Kurtosis. The measurement models were then examined. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was used to extract the underlying constructs of variables. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was then employed to validate the factorial structure with necessary modifications and adjustments. A structural equation modeling technique with maximum likelihood estimation was used to examine the causal relationships among the latent variables as proposed in the conceptual framework in Fig. 2. All the tests were conducted using three subsamples for the three hotel brands, respectively. The model fit was assessed by using the following indices: ratio of chi-

square to degrees of freedom, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), comparative fit index (CFI), and normed fit index (NFI).

4. Findings

4.1. Profile of respondents

The profile of respondents is shown in Table 1. There were more female respondents than the male. Over 70% of the respondents held the college degree or above. Across the three subsamples, over 85% of the respondents reported their profession as government officials, professionals or technical, clerical or sales, manager or executive, self-employment or owners, and retirement. Over 90% of the respondents reported that they never stayed in the hotel with the brand mentioned by the interviewer. As confirmed in the beginning of the survey, all the respondents must have at least 60,000 RMB as the annual income. There are three dimensions to characterize the middle-class in China: occupation, education level, and income (Li, 2008; Li & Zhang, 2008). Generally speaking, they work as government officials, professionals or technical, clerical or sales, manager or executive, owners, and teachers. They are well-educated, holding college or associate degree and above, and have a relatively higher income. According to Forbes in 2010, annual income of middle-class population in China ranges 10–60 thousand US dollars (63–480k RMB). Therefore, the sample of this study well represents the middle-class population in China.

4.2. Data examination

The normality of the data was tested by Skewness and Kurtosis. Skewness in the range of -2 to $+2$ and Kurtosis in the range of -3 to $+3$ indicates the normal distribution of the data (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2009). Testing results indicated that Skewness ranged from -1.333 to $.048$ and Kurtosis ranged

Table 1
Profile of respondents.

Profile	Percentage		
	Hilton (N = 203)	Holiday Inn (N = 203)	Super 8 (N = 195)
Gender			
Male	49.8	49.8	48.7
Female	50.2	50.2	51.3
Occupation			
Government officials	10.3	9.9	11.3
Clerical or sales	12.3	11.8	14.4
Labor	2.0	3.0	1.0
Professionals or technical	22.2	23.6	18.5
Manager or executive	26.1	22.2	17.4
Self-employment or owner	11.4	9.8	12.8
Retirement	10.3	12.3	17.4
Student	2.0	1.0	3.1
Teacher	3.0	5.9	3.6
Education level			
Less than high school	2.0	2.5	2.1
High school	25.1	26.1	20.5
College or association degree	61.6	63.1	68.2
Master and above	11.3	8.4	9.2
Age			
20–29	26.6	25.6	25.7
30–39	23.6	25.1	28.8
40–49	26.1	24.6	20.9
50–59	23.6	24.6	24.7
Previous patronage of the hotel brand			
No	90.6	90.1	93.3
Yes	9.4	9.9	6.7

Table 2
Chi-square analysis across three subsamples.

Variables	Chi-square values	Degree of freedom	Sig.
Gender	.057	2	.972
Occupation	23.349	20	.272
Education level	3.321	6	.768
Age	2.277	6	.893

from -8.77 to 3.000 . This suggested that all variables across the three brands were normally distributed. In addition, to facilitate the multi-group analysis and comparisons of CBBE models across three multinational brands and avoid the bias resulted from the subsample profiles, a Chi-square analysis on socio-demographic variables was carried out. The result indicated that there were no significant differences across the three subsamples (as shown in Table 2). The data were good for the multi-group analysis and comparison in the following steps.

4.3. Measurement estimation

Prior to the structural equation modeling, constructs of variables in the proposed models were identified and verified using a two-step approach to estimate the measurement model. An exploratory factor analysis was conducted to determine the underlying constructs of latent variables. Items with low factor loadings ($<.4$), high cross-loadings ($>.4$), or low communalities ($<.5$) were deleted (Hair et al., 2009). A two-step confirmatory factor analysis approach

suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) was employed to estimate the measurement models. The model fit indices of the three measurement models satisfied the cut-off points: CFI were above .90, NFI were above .80, and RMSEA were below .08 (as shown in Table 3). This indicated that the measurement models fit with the data well. Table 3 also demonstrates the construct reliability and validity of each variable in three subsamples. The majority of constructs identified in EFA was validated in three measurement models for the three brands with AVE above .50 and C.R. above or very close to .70. Composite reliability above .70 suggests good reliability, while C.R. between .60 and .70 can be acceptable if the other indicators of the validity are good (Hair et al., 2009). This rule has been widely adopted in many tourism publications in recent years (e.g., Jin & Weber, 2013; Kim, Uysal, & Sirgy, 2013; Zhou, Zhang, & Edelman, 2013). The construct of *Affective* in Hilton brand associations, which includes two items (e.g., Hilton is able to provide consistent service. I feel comfortable about Hilton), was removed in the measurement model because the C.R. and AVE were far below the cut-off values.

4.4. Structural models

Two models were examined for each hotel brand, in terms of the host country (China) and the home country (the United States). The CBBE model proposed in this study for three U.S.-based multinational hotel brands was supported by results of structural equation modeling. As shown in Table 4, the model fit indices satisfied the cut-off points: CFI were above .90, NFI were above .80, and RMSEA

Table 3
Results of EFA and CFA.

EFA			CFA		
Brand name	Construct	Cronbach's alpha	Construct	Composite reliability	AVE
Hilton	Brand awareness	.86	Brand awareness	.87	.68
	Brand associations		Brand associations		
	F1: Tangibles	.93	F1: Tangibles	.70	.52
	F2: Intangibles & Prestige	.86	F2: Intangibles & Prestige	.67	.51
	F3: <i>Affective</i> ^b	.67			
	Brand resonance in China	.87	Brand resonance in China	.68	.51
	Behavioral intention in the U.S.	.92	Behavioral intention in the U.S.	.72	.54
	Travel motivation to the U.S.	.87	Travel motivation to the U.S.		
	F1: Novelty	.86	F1: Novelty	.67	.51
	F2: Escaping	.73	F2: Escaping	.67	.50
	F3: Boasting	.81	F3: Boasting	.80	.61
	Holiday Inn	Brand awareness	.80	Brand awareness	.81
Brand associations			Brand associations		
F1: Tangibles		.90	F1: Tangibles	.86	.51
F2: General Evaluations		.88	F2: General Evaluations	.84	.51
F3: Intangibles & Prestige		.87	F3: Intangibles & Prestige	.87	.57
Brand resonance in China		.92	Brand resonance in China	.92	.58
Behavioral intention in the U.S.		.87	Behavioral intention in the U.S.	.87	.62
Travel motivation to the U.S.			Travel motivation to the U.S.		
F1: Novelty & Socialization		.89	F1: Novelty & Socialization	.87	.50
F2: Escaping		.71	F2: Escaping	.77	.53
F3: Boasting		.84	F3: Boasting	.84	.51
Super 8		Brand awareness	.85	Brand awareness	.91
	Brand associations		Brand associations		
	F1: Tangibles	.93	F1: Tangibles	.88	.59
	F2: Intangibles	.90	F2: Intangibles	.88	.56
	F3: General Evaluations	.87	F3: General Evaluations	.86	.60
	Brand resonance in China	.94	Brand resonance in China	.94	.67
	Behavioral intention in U.S.	.90	Behavioral intention in U.S.	.91	.73
	Travel motivation to U.S.		Travel motivation to U.S.		
	F1: Boasting & Escaping	.89	F1: Boasting & Escaping	.89	.51
	F2: Novelty	.88	F2: Novelty	.88	.55
	F3: Socialization	.82	F3: Socialization	.82	.54

Notes: a. Cronbach's Alpha: cut-off .70; C.R. (Composite Reliability): cut-off .60; AVE (Average Variance Extracted): cut-off .50. b. Italicized items were dropped for the reasons explained in the text. c. Hilton measurement model fit indices: $p = .000$; CFI = .931; NFI = .796; RMSEA = .044.

Holiday Inn measurement model fit indices: $p = .000$; CFI = .937; NFI = .806; RMSEA = .043.

Super 8 measurement model fit indices: $p = .000$; CFI = .919; NFI = .812; RMSEA = .056.

Table 4
Structural model testing results.

CBBE model for Hilton in China	CBBE model for Hilton in the U.S.
Chi-square/df = 1.41, $p = .000$, RMSEA = .045, CFI = .958, NFI = .872	Chi-square/df = 1.42, $p = .000$, RMSEA = .046, CFI = .965, NFI = .892
CBBE model for Holiday Inn in China	CBBE model for Holiday Inn in the U.S.
Chi-square/df = 1.45, $p = .000$, RMSEA = .047, CFI = .957, NFI = .874	Chi-square/df = 1.65, $p = .014$, RMSEA = .033, CFI = .981, NFI = .904
CBBE model for Super 8 in China	CBBE model for Super 8 in the U.S.
Chi-square/df = 1.75, $p = .014$, RMSEA = .062, CFI = .951, NFI = .894	Chi-square/df = 1.70, $p = .014$, RMSEA = .060, CFI = .960, NFI = .908

Notes: means the significant linkage; means the insignificant linkage.
*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .05$; * $p < .1$.

were below .08. This indicated that the structural models fit with the data well. Different relationship patterns between brand knowledge and consumer response across the two countries were exhibited for the Hilton and Holiday Inn hotel brands. Identical linkages were demonstrated on the example of Super 8 brand between the two countries.

A close look at the CBBE models in China across three multinational hotel brands identified two common linkages, which could be explained by the unique characteristics and psyche of Chinese middle-class consumers. First, the linkage between *Intangibles & Prestige* and *Brand Resonance* showed positive relationships in all three models. This indicated that Chinese consumers tend to establish attachments to multinational hotel brands that are able to satisfy their needs for belonging and esteem from the society. They

love the hotel brand, choose the brand even if it costs more, feel proud of staying at the hotel with the particular brand, and spread favorable impressions of the brand, because this hotel brand provides the sense of being special and prestigious, which shows their social status and face. Social economists have stated that when a nation's resources are limited and personal income is low, consumers may focus heavily on price and performance attributes of products and brands (Kim, Forsythe, Gu, & Moon, 2002). When more resources become available, consumers may desire more hedonic or emotional features. The statement echoes Maslow's theory. People tend to pursue the higher level psychological needs when their basic needs are satisfied. This is actually happening to Chinese middle-class consumers, whose increasing disposable income allows them to pursue and satisfy the experiential needs.

Moreover, the improved living standards and Confucius-centered cultural values, such as having face and thinking much of relationships with others, drives the upper class in the society to seek more symbolic values in consumption. Material and wealth possession is one way how Chinese people show their face, status or pride, and it is one of the most important reasons for Chinese consumers to purchase products or services with luxury brands. This also explains the different coefficients of the relationship between *Intangibles & Prestige (or Intangibles)* and *Brand Resonance* across the three hotel brands. It is the most important factor for Chinese consumers to choose Hilton and Holiday Inn in China, but not Super 8. All Hilton and Holiday Inn are perceived as luxury brands in China (the majority is four-star and five-star hotels), while Super 8 is perceived as a budget hotel brand.

The second common linkage was shown between *Tangibles* and *Brand Resonance*. In fact, there was no relationship between these two constructs among the three CBBE models in China. This result is attributed to Chinese consumers' holistic perceptions of foreign brands: high quality and trustworthy. Chinese middle-class consumers show favorable attitudes not only toward foreign hotel brands but also brands in other business settings. They believe that foreign branded products or services are unquestionably good. Therefore, facilities and services provided by international hotel brands do not concern Chinese consumers much in their decision making process, even though they never stay in these hotels.

4.5. Testing of moderating effects

The backward selection procedure was used to investigate the significant interaction variables step by step (Hair et al., 2009). Starting with the whole model including all latent variables, interaction variables, and moderating variables, the most insignificant interaction variable was thrown away and the new model was rerun. This step was repeated until all the interaction variables demonstrated significant effects and cannot be discarded any more. The final model contained the significant interaction variables and the related independent latent variables.

With regard to the CBBE model of Hilton brand in the U.S., two interaction effects between Chinese consumers' motivation for traveling to the U.S. and brand awareness, as well as between motivation and Hilton brand image dimension of *Tangibles*, were tested in structural equation modeling. The backward selection procedure was undertaken to trim the insignificant interaction variables one by one. The model was run six times. It was found that for the example of Hilton, motivation did not have moderating effects on the path *Brand Awareness* → *Behavioral Intention* or *Tangibles* → *Behavioral Intention*. With regard to the CBBE model of the Holiday Inn in the U.S., the interaction effect between Chinese consumers' motivation for traveling to the U.S. and brand image dimension of *General Evaluations* was tested. It was found

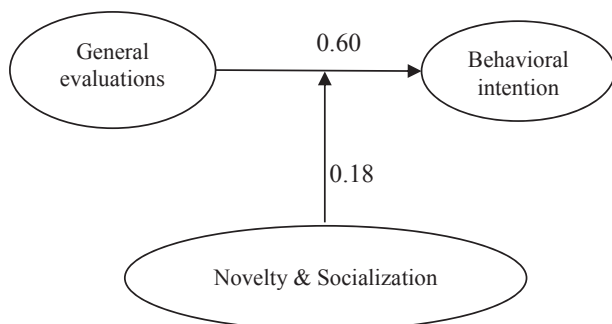


Fig. 3. Interaction effect of motivation: Holiday Inn.

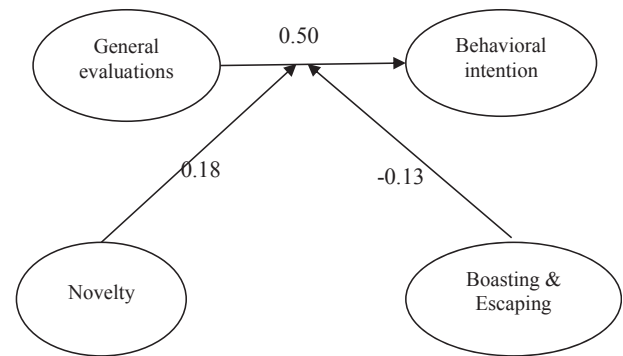


Fig. 4. Interaction effect of motivation: Super 8.

that the motivation variable of *Novelty & Socialization* had a significant and positive moderating effect on the path *General Evaluations* → *Behavioral Intention* ($\beta = .18$). With regard to the CBBE model of Super 8 in the U.S., two interaction effects between Chinese consumers' motivation for traveling to the U.S. and brand image dimension of *General Evaluations*, as well as *Intangibles* were tested. The model was calculated five times to discard insignificant interaction variables. It was found that the motivation variable of *Novelty* had significant and positive moderating effects on the path *General Evaluations* → *Behavioral Intention* ($\beta = .18$). In addition, the motivation factor of *Boasting & Escaping* exerted a negative interaction effect on the path *General Evaluations* → *Behavioral Intention* ($\beta = -.13$) (Figs. 3 and 4).

It is worth noting that in the example of Super 8 hotel brand, the more Chinese consumers wanted to show off the great travel experiences in the United States to their friends after the trip or escape the routine life, the less likely they would choose Super 8 based on the general evaluations of this brand. The negative moderating effect of *Boasting & Escaping* was exhibited probably because the Super 8 brand is generally positioned and perceived as a budget hotel brand in China. Such brand image of Super 8 conflicts with Chinese middle-class consumers' travel motivation of boasting and showing off their travel experiences in the U.S.

5. Conclusions and discussions

This study develops the Chinese consumer-based brand equity model for U.S.-based multinational hotel brands in the context of the fast-growing international travel from China to the United States. Three U.S.-based multinational hotel brands (Hilton, Holiday Inn, and Super 8) are selected to empirically test the model. CBBE models are developed for three hotel brands across two countries through the structural equation modeling. Different relationship patterns between brand knowledge and consumer responses in the two countries are exhibited for Hilton and Holiday Inn brands, but not for Super 8 brand. China CBBE models across the three brands consistently demonstrate a positive relationship between *Intangibles & Prestige (or Intangibles)* and *Brand Resonance*. However, no relationship exists between *Tangibles* and *Brand Resonance* across the three China CBBE models. This finding indicates that Chinese middle-class consumers strongly believe that multinational hotel brands are reliable and in high quality in terms of the tangible features. They associate symbolic values to these brands that can satisfy their needs for belonging, self-esteem, and acceptance from the society. This tendency is attributed to a key component of Chinese culture: saving face and showing status. The finding suggests that multinational hotel companies need to understand cultures and values that are important to local consumers when expanding to foreign countries.

In addition, this study indicates that Chinese consumers' motivation for traveling from China to the United States has moderating effects on the relationship between brand associations and behavioral intention in the United States, and such effects vary by the different hotel brands. For the Hilton brand, motivation did not have moderating effects. With regard to the Holiday Inn brand, motivation variable of *Novelty & Socialization* has a positive moderating effect on the path *General Evaluations* → *Behavioral Intention* ($\beta = .18$). With regard to the Super 8 brand, motivation variable of *Novelty* has a positive moderating effect on the path *General Evaluations* → *Behavioral Intention* ($\beta = .18$). Motivation variable of *Boasting & Escaping* exerts a negative interaction effect on the relationship between *General Evaluations* and *Behavioral Intention* ($\beta = -.13$). These findings indicate that Chinese tourists' hotel purchase decisions could be affected by their travel motivation to the United States. Consumers are motivated to make travel decisions because they expect a vacation to satisfy their physical and psychological needs. Lodging experience at the destination should be considered as one part of the tourist travel experience that significantly affects the individual's satisfaction. As such, U.S. hotel industry should go the extra mile to understand more about Chinese inbound tourists, such as their travel motivation, travel characteristics, and so on.

5.1. Theoretical implications

The present study makes several important contributions to the existing literature. First, the research extends the body of knowledge on consumer-based brand equity in the hospitality and tourism area. Built upon Keller's CBBE model, the study's findings reveal different relationship patterns between Chinese consumers' brand knowledge and their responses toward three tiers of U.S.-based multinational hotel brands in their home country – China and the host country – the United States that they travel to. As Aaker's brand equity model is extensively adopted in CBBE research in the hospitality and tourism field, the present study is among the first attempts to employ Keller's CBBE model as the theoretical foundation and empirically examined this model in the HTM domain. Different with Aaker's brand equity model, Keller's CBBE model stresses the dynamic relationship between consumers and the brand, suggesting that CBBE is created by brand knowledge (brand awareness and brand image) and results in consumer responses toward the brand.

Second, the present study integrates the globalization perspective into branding in hospitality and tourism; at the same time it considers the unique features of this industry. Globalization in current research was indicated in two aspects: global expansion of hospitality businesses and international travel of tourists. One of the key issues faced by today's brand management of many multinational hospitality businesses is how to deal with the brand expansions across multiple societies and nations (Gelder, 2005). Substance of extant literature on global hospitality has focused on topics such as finance, entry mode, and branding strategies in today's borderless marketplace from the perspective businesses and organizations (Altinay & Altinay, 2003; Chen & Dimou, 2005; Lee, 2008; Whitla et al., 2007; Zhao & Olsen, 1997). However, the increasing mobility of customers, which differentiates hospitality and tourism industry with general consumer goods industry, has been greatly ignored in the current global branding research scheme. We are not able to ship our products or services to customers; instead they have to travel to our properties to consume the hospitality and tourism services. The home–host framework brought up in this study pinpoints the significance of booming international travel for the global branding issue of multinational hotel businesses. In particular, different CBBE models between the

home country and host country suggest that consumers tend to make purchase decisions based on different dimensions of hotel brand knowledge when they stay in their home country and travel to a foreign country. According to the environmental psychology theories, an individual manifests different attitudes and behaviors when his external environment changes (e.g., traveling from the home country to a foreign country). The present study suggests that international travel tends to affect consumers' preferences and consumption styles in booking hotel services when traveling in foreign countries. It sheds new lights on addressing global branding issues in the hospitality industry, such as brand consistency, maintaining customer loyalty globally, mapping out global branding strategies, etc.

Third, findings of this study on the moderating effects of travel motivation indicate that consumers' purchase decisions of hotel services at tourism destinations could be affected by their travel motivation. For example, this study finds that Chinese consumers who have the travel motivation of boasting their luxurious travel experiences would be less likely to choose a budget hotel brand such as Super 8. Extant literature has provided evidence to support such finding. Travel motivation has been well documented as a product of tourists' needs and expectations (Li & Cai, 2012). Tourists tend to feel satisfied when their expectations are met or exceeded by travel experiences. Travel behaviors, including participating activities and consumption behaviors, could be determined by travel motivation, expectations, perceptions, attitudes, and so forth (Mill & Morrison, 2006). Consumers make travel decisions because they expect a vacation to satisfy their physical and psychological needs. If the real travel experience meets or exceeds those expectations, they are satisfied; otherwise, they may be unsatisfied. Experiences of staying in hotels during the trip, as one important component of the whole travel experience, should be managed to contribute to the formulation of a satisfactory travel experience. However, the majority of studies has neglected the relationship between these two types of experiences. The present study takes these two aspects into account by integrating the travel motivation into the CBBE model examination.

The fourth theoretical contribution of this study rests on the innovative approach to developing hotel brand image measurement scales. Most of the measurement items in the present study come from the content analysis of image messages delivered by each hotel website, supplemented by related literature. Extant studies have confused the measurements of hotel brand image with service quality (e.g., Choi & Chu, 2001; Jones et al., 2007), whereas these two concepts have been explicitly differentiated in previous literature (e.g., Cronin & Taylor, 1994; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985). Some studies utilized dimensions of consumer experience, such as brand recall, consumer value, or a combination of these constructs, to develop the measurement scales of hotel brand image (Kayaman & Arasli, 2007; Kim et al., 2008; Prasad & Dev, 2000). The customized approach to analyzing projected image messages of hotel websites avoids confusion and overlapping among a variety of variables. In addition, unique features of different hotel brands are reflected in the instrument.

5.2. Practical implications

Results of the present study offer several important practical implications to hospitality and tourism industry both in the United States and in China. First, the present study brings up attentions to the dilemma of choosing between brand consistency and customization, which many multinational hotel companies are facing in today's global branding process. On the one hand, standardized products and services are required across different countries in global expansion of hotel companies. On the other hand, the

necessity of regionalization or localization to meet the local needs has been widely recognized (Kapferer, 2005). Booming international travel and the advent of information technology discussed in this study add to the complexity of globalization. Multinational hotel companies have been communicating different brand messages with consumers in different countries, such as Hilton, Holiday Inn, and Super 8 in China and the United States (Huang & Cai, 2010). Chinese consumers form their perceptions of these hotel brands based on their exposure to the messages of these brands in China. Findings of this study indicate different dimensions of consumers' perceived image play an important role in affecting consumer responses to the brand in their home country and foreign countries where they travel.

Furthermore, this study suggests the positive effects of hotel brand image dimension of *General Evaluations* on consumer response, particularly on *Behavioral Intention* when Chinese consumers travel to the United States. This finding suggests that Chinese middle-class consumers tend to choose the international chain hotel brand that is famous and reliable in quality when they travel to the United States. Hotel brand reliability and consistency play an important role in the consumer decision making process when they travel to a foreign country. Such finding highlights the necessity of using a common brand name worldwide, primarily to address the "intangible" feature of hotel services. An international brand provides a "uniform image" with a relatively standard nature to consumers, which would assure their purchase decision and reduce consumption risks. Therefore, this "uniform image" or the core value of the brand should be delivered globally through constant brand logo as the brand expands across countries, which to an extent signals consistent products, services, prices, quality, etc.

While the brand identity or core value remains constant throughout the world, products and services may be not. The same brand could be "organized and supported in a different manner in each market" (Gelder, 2005, p. 185). Most of the international hotel companies have accepted the rationale of local market adaptations. Findings of the present study suggest the multinational hotel companies understanding and adapting to various local cultures and market situations. Results show a positive relationship between *Intangibles & Prestige* and *Brand Resonance* across three CBBE models in China. Chinese consumers tend to establish attachments to multinational hotel brands that are able to satisfy their needs for belonging, self-esteem, and esteem from the society. This tendency is determined by a key component of Chinese culture: face saving and status showing. Therefore, in addition to communicating constant brand identity or core value across different societies, multinational hotel companies need to understand various cultures and values that are important to consumers in host countries. These values should be delivered through featured products and services, positioning and communication messages.

Second, the present study suggests that Chinese consumers' motivation for traveling from China to the U.S. affects the relationship between brand knowledge and their behavioral intention to these brands in the U.S. As more Chinese middle-class consumers travel abroad, multinational hotel companies should take China booming international travel into account when mapping out the global branding strategies. China had 83.2 million outbound tourists in 2012, making it the first tourism source market in the world ("The 10th Forum of China Outbound Tourism", 2013). U.S. hotel industry should not limit their understandings of Chinese inbound tourists to the needs, expectations, and preferences for lodging services in the U.S. when they travel to this country. More investigations are needed on Chinese tourists' travel motivation for traveling to the U.S., expectations of the travel experiences, travel characteristics, such as travel parties and travel purpose. For example, Chinese business tourists visiting Chicago for conventions

and exhibitions want to stay in luxury hotels in downtown, while most of the leisure tourists choose mid-scale hotels in the suburbs. Findings of the present study suggest the U.S. hotel industry regarding itself as a part of the destination mix, understanding Chinese outbound tourists in a systematic approach, and engaging their lodging experience to the entire travel experience at the destination.

The third contribution of this study lies in the exploratory insights into Chinese middle-class consumers' knowledge and their perceptions of U.S.-based multinational hotel brands. The relationship between brand knowledge and consumer response to the brand was examined. Chinese consumers tend to feel attached to multinational hotel brands by the symbolic values elicited from the brand communications, reflected in their emotional feelings of prestige, self-respect, acceptance by a social circle, comfort, relaxation, and warmth. However, tangible features of foreign hotel brands are not a concern of Chinese consumers as they build a relationship with these brands. On the other hand, functional values of the hotel brands, such as quality facilities and general evaluations of brands, are more important in driving their purchase intentions when they travel to the United States. The unique consumption culture of Chinese middle-class consumers is applied to explain these findings. Different tiers of multinational hotel brands would benefit from this study in terms of effective branding strategies to communicate with Chinese middle-class consumers.

Finally, the present study highlights the importance of Chinese middle-class consumers for multinational hotel companies, not only in the hotels' host country of China but also the home country of the United States. The features of the Chinese middle-class include being middle-aged, well-educated, holding high income, having more disposable income and leisure time, open to Western culture, and curious to learn new things. This segment is considered as the primary target market of multinational hotels in China, as well as China outbound tourism (Li & Cai, 2012). Chinese outbound tourists are becoming more attractive in both volume and spending power to foreign destinations including many states in the U.S. Yet, understanding of this market segment remains limited. The U.S. hospitality and tourism industry is not well prepared to capitalize on this lucrative market. The present study calls for more attentions from the U.S. hospitality and tourism businesses and organizations to acquire better understandings of middle-class population in China. Chinese middle-class consumers' psychological features including motivation, expectation, preferences, cultural values, consumption culture and so forth, need to be further investigated. As an increasing number of Chinese leisure tourists are visiting the United States, such agenda becomes more immediate and urgent.

5.3. Limitations and future research

The present study has limitations. First, the model developed in this study focused on examining the relationship between brand knowledge and consumer response. Effects of respondents' socio-demographic variables on CBBE, such as age, income, gender, married status, occupation, etc., were not examined in this study. Future research can conduct further investigations into the differences on the CBBE model between various market segments divided by income, gender, etc. The second limitation rests on how the concept of brand awareness was operationalized in the survey. The present study adopted measurement scales of brand awareness from previous studies (e.g., Konecnik & Gartner, 2007). The survey started with one screening questions as "do you know about *** hotel brand", which essentially implied the specific brand name to the respondents. Therefore answers to brand awareness questions were biased to some extent, such as "when I am thinking about

hotel brands, *** comes to my minds immediately". Future studies can adopt open-ended questions to measure brand awareness. Finally, consumers' previous patronage of the hotel brand should have influences on the CBBE model. Since no more than 10% of the respondents are experienced consumers of the respective hotel brand in each subsample, such experience was not considered in the current research. Future research can examine the different CBBE models as reported by first-time customers, frequent customers, and loyal customers.

This study opens up several avenues for future inquiries on applications of CBBE concept and the relating theories to branding issues in the hospitality and tourism area. For example, the Adaptive Control of Thoughts theory as the root theories of CBBE concept argues that consumers' memory is structured as a network of individual or interconnected nodes. This theory could be used in HTM research to investigate how consumers formulate, structure, and retrieve their perceptions of hospitality and tourism services in their memory. It also sheds a new light on future studies on brand image in the HTM realm. In addition, the present study initiated the integration of globalization into the CBBE model and examined the role of Chinese consumers' motivation for traveling to the U.S. in the model. To better understand and address the impacts of globalization on multinational hotel brands, further investigations are needed on the role of such factors in the CBBE model as Chinese consumers' perceptions of the destinations in their outbound travel (both country image in macro level and destination image in micro level), as well as their expectations and preferences of hospitality and tourism services in destinations.

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