The Impact of Website Quality and Perceived Trust on Customer Purchase Intention in the Hotel Sector: Website Brand and Perceived Value as Moderators

Kuo-Chien Chang, Nien-Te Kuo, Chia-Lin Hsu, and Yi-Sung Cheng

***Abstract*—This study investigates the relationships among website quality, website brand, perceived trust, perceived value, and purchase intention in the hotel industry. The study sample was a target chain hotel in Taiwan (i.e., Sheraton). A statistical analysis of the collected questionnaires was computed from a web-based survey. Using the structural equation modeling (SEM) technique, the results reveal that perceived trust is positively influenced by website quality, and purchase intention is positively influenced by perceived trust. Therefore, purchase intention is indirectly influenced by website quality through the mediator of perceived trust. Furthermore, the relationship between website quality and perceived trust is stronger for customers who perceive better website brand while the relationship between perceived trust and purchase intention is found to be stronger for customers who perceive high service value. According to the findings, the implications and future research directions are provided.**

***Index Terms*—Website quality, website brand, perceived trust, perceived value, purchase intention.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Since hotel industry rapid growth in using the Internet, the concept of website quality has been regarded as an important role in increasing customer's intention to purchase online [1]. Hotels built websites to explore the potential customers and focus competitive strategies on improving website quality, because improved website quality leads to make customers trust them and finally retain existing customers [2]. In order to meet customers' expectations, recognizing the effect of website quality on website users' purchase intentions therefore is necessary for hotel industry [3].

Furthermore, plenty of studies have proved that customer perceived trust is the fundamental determinant in business transaction [4]. It is an important step in building long-term relationship between buyer-seller [5]. In relation to Internet and e-business, it is essential in improving trust for customers, without trust, customers will avoid shopping online [6].

Kuo-Chien Chang is with the Leisure and Recreation Management Department, Chihlee Institute of Technology, New Taipei City, Taiwan (e-mail: kcchang@mail.chihlee.edu.tw).

Nien-Te Kuo is with the Travel Management Department, National Kaohsiung University of Hospitality and Tourism, Kaohsiung City, Taiwan (e-mail: nkuo01@yahoo.com).

Chia-Lin Hsu is with the Department of International Business Administration, Chinese Culture University, Taipei City, Taiwan (e-mail: xjl6@ulive.pccu.edu.tw).

Yi-Sung Cheng was with the Tourism Department, Ming Chuan University, Taoyuan County, Taiwan (e-mail: rick20939@hotmail.com).

Although previous researchers have proposed that website quality [7] and perceived trust [8] can directly influence customer purchase intention. A further understanding of the relationships between website quality and purchase intention in the present study is to investigate whether the impacts are mediated by the variable of trust.

Besides, this study introduces a moderating variable – website brand – which is also a critical factor affecting perceived trust and customer purchase intention [9]. In order to acquire a competitive advantage in the online context, hotels may focus their competitive strategy on building a website brand, because a strong website brand helps to create distinctiveness and to engage customers. Some authors have noted that website brand can have a direct effect on perceived trust [10], but little research has done to explore website brand as a moderating variable in the relationship between website quality and perceived trust. If the interaction between website quality and website brand has a significant impact on perceived trust, it can assume that customer perceptions of brand strengthen the website quality-perceived trust link, and help hotels to regulate their businesses in a more customer-oriented service, create loyalty and thereby bring more sales. For this reason, this study investigates how website brand interacts with website quality to affect perceived trust.

Another important concept discussed in this study is perceived value. Perceived value is one of the most powerful drivers of today's marketplace [11]. The concept of perceived value has been recognized as one of the most important measures when hotels are attempting to obtaining a competitive edge in the market [12]; it has been suggested that perceived value is the best indicator of repurchase intentions [13]. Although researchers have identified the customer perceived trust and perceived value as major driving factors for customer purchase intention, the interrelationships among these constructs is a key concern in the hotel industry. This study therefore aims to clarify that perceived value functions as a moderator on the relationship between perceived trust and customer purchase intention in the online context.

Accordingly, this study has three objectives. First, to examine the moderating effect of website brand on the relationship between website quality and perceived trust. Second, to determine the moderating effect of perceived value on the relationship between perceived trust and purchase intention. Third, to develop a research model based on the extant literature, apply the model to the hotel industry and then identify the interrelationships among each of the research constructs mentioned above.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. The Mediating Role of Perceived Trust on the Relationship between Website Quality and Purchase Intention

Website quality is a key factor in electronic commerce because the customers' perceptions of website quality positively impact their intentions to use a site [10] and directly affect purchase intentions [14]. Several researches have indicated great methods for measuring website quality by hypothesising about their own dimensions of website quality. Reference [15] has proposed that "In spite of characteristics of website quality in the business-to-consumer e-commerce context, website quality is a multi-dimensional construct comprising information quality, system quality, and service quality." According to [15], the scale of a three-dimensional website quality model is used, in which both information and system quality are defined from a technical perspective while service quality is defined from a customer-oriented perspective.

Besides, understanding customer trust in Internet shopping is very important [16] because "trust was considered as one of the action triggers that guide exchanges among the counterpart firms in anticipation of reciprocal and long-term relationships" [9]. Thus, how the website quality that arouse customer trust toward the hotel website which then further lead to customer purchase intention is the concern in the present study. According to [17], "purchase intention is defined as the situation which manifests itself when a consumer is willing and intends to become involved in online transactions." The major challenge for the hotel industry is to convert the website visitor into a buyer when the visitor views the website for the first time in the online context.

Several studies have examined a theoretical framework in which website quality leads to perceived trust, which in turn affects purchase intention [10]. In the hotel website context, it is therefore reasonable to predict that customer perceived trust toward a hotel website works as a required mediating construct between website quality and purchase intention. The first research hypothesis is therefore as follows:

H1. Customer perceived trust toward a hotel website mediates the relationship between customer perceived website quality and purchase intention toward the hotel.

B. The Moderating Role of Website Brand on the Relationship between Website Quality and Perceived Trust

Website brand is one of the fundamental factors involved in increasing perceived trust and maintaining long-term customer relationships on the Internet [18].

A primary brand is a symbol of a firm's name, which stands for the difference between other competitors. Many models have been developed to measure customer perceptions of website brand. Reference [10] has identified two dimensions of website brand: website awareness and website image. A website which generates high customer awareness will affect customer decision making, since most customers believe that a well-known website is more likely to complete their needs [10]. According to [10], website image is defined as, "the perceptions about a website name as reflected by the website associations held in customer memory." Researchers suggest that a well-known website brand has an impact on customers' overall purchase decisions by impacting their trust, and that this in turn increases purchase intentions for a website [19], [20].

Website brand has been explored in the service and tourism literature [21]. In the [19]'s study, their results indicate that a well-establish website brand could positively affect online trust and customer purchase intention. Nevertheless, little study has done to explore website brand as a moderating variable for the relationship between website quality and perceived trust. Accordingly, for example, when customers intend to book a hotel room on the hotel website, the hotels which provide superior website quality and customers evaluations of brands will evoke more positive customers' trust toward the hotel website and facilitate them to make purchase decision of the hotel. Thus, the second research hypothesis is made as follows:

H2. Customer perceived website brand toward a hotel has a significant moderating effect on the relationship between customer perceived website quality and perceived trust toward the hotel website.

C. The Moderating Role of Perceived Value on the Relationship between Perceived Trust and Purchase Intention

According to [22], "suppliers and customers are motivated by the potential value of the relationships to engage and maintain close and coordinated interactions." Thus, in order to maintain buyer-seller relationship, service providers must create value for customers. There has been some research into the positive relationships among perceived trust, value, and purchase intention [5]. The results suggest that the relationship between perceived trust and purchase intention will be strongest when customers have a positive perception of service value. That is, good customer perceived value not only influences on augmenting customers' trust, but also affects online buyer behavior. Therefore, the third research hypothesis is made as follows:

H3. Customer perceived value toward a hotel website has a significant moderating effect on the relationship between customer perceived trust toward the hotel website and purchase intention of the hotel.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Framework

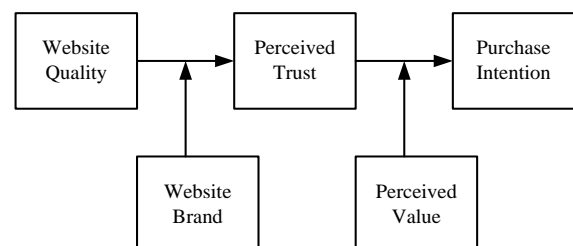Fig. 1 displays the research model presenting the aforementioned assumptions.

Fig. 1. Research model.

B. Measurement

The website quality questions were modified from [23]. This scale measures three dimensions of website quality: information quality (four-item), system quality (five-item), service quality (five-item).

The six items for website brand were modified from [10]. They were "The name of a hotel's web site is well-known in the online retail industry", "The hotel's web site is relatively easy to remember for me", "I can recognize this hotel's web site among other competing web sites", "The hotel's web site is known as one that takes good care of its customers", "In comparison to other retailers' web sites, this hotel's website is known to consistently deliver very high quality", and "The hotel's web site is made by an organization I would trust."

The questionnaire includes the items for perceived trust were modified from [10], including six items. The six items are "Hotel's web site is competent", "Hotel's web site knows how to provide excellent service", "Promises made by hotel's web site are likely to be reliable", "I expect that hotel's web site will keep promises they make", "I expect that hotel's web site has good intentions towards me", and "I expect that hotel's web site's intentions are benevolent."

Concerning other questions in the questionnaire, perceived value questions were modified from [11]; they are, "After I browse this hotel's website, I think products purchased at this hotel will very good value for money", "I think I will get what I pay for at this hotel after I browse this hotel's website", "After I browse this hotel's website, I think products purchased at this hotel will worth the money paid", and "Compared to alternative hotel, I think the hotel will charge me fairly for similar products / services after I browse this hotel's website". Purchase intention was measured by three items slightly modified from [24]; they are, "It is likely that I will transact with this website in the near future", "Given the chance, I intend to use this website", and "Given the chance, I predict that I should use this website in the near future". Each item was measured on a seven-point Likert scale from "1 = strongly disagree" to "7 = strongly agree".

C. Sample and Data Collection

Hotel websites served as the objects of this study, because of the importance of hotels in the service industry. As regards chain hotels, Sheraton is a US-established international-brand. Ernest Henderson and Robert Moore operate three wholly owned branches in Taiwan. Using the chain hotel as the study sample could add to our understanding of the service-management-related issues concerned in this study.

The study conducted a web-based survey to collect the samples with experience of browsing the Sheraton website, using a convenience sampling method to participants of Free Online Survey Questionnaire Research by my3q (http://www.my3q.com/). Before starting the investigation, the questionnaire would introduce the hotel website's functions to let the respondents fully understand the content of the questionnaire. This criterion was employed to ensure a basic understanding of the Sheraton on the part of the sample.

D. Pilot Test

In order to examine our questionnaire's reliability and validity, 110 questionnaires were used to pretest. The questionnaires were modified after pretest in order to ensure reliability and validity. The results of the pilot test in terms of scale reliability are as follows: website quality (Cronbach's alpha = 0.858), website brand (Cronbach's alpha = 0.823), perceived trust (Cronbach's alpha = 0.900), perceived value (Cronbach's alpha = 0.863), and purchase intention (Cronbach's alpha = 0.908). Hence, the reliability of the survey instrument was deemed adequate.

An exploratory factor analysis was employed to identify the website quality dimensions of the scale, resulting in three factors. The three factors (as shown in Table I) that explained 60.49% of the variance were extracted (KMO = 0.884, $p < .001$). The three dimensions can therefore be used as a basis for hotel website quality.

For the formal survey, the method of data collection was similar to that of the pre-test, conducted in the selected website over a twelve-week period with a total of 625 respondents participating.

TABLE I: FACTOR ANALYSIS RESULTS OF HOTEL WEBSITE QUALITY MEASUREMENT

Dimension	Items	Factor loading		
		1	2	3
System quality	Q07 The hotel's website can be adapted to meet a variety of needs.	0.701		
	Q06 The hotel's website is reliable.	0.690		
	Q08 In terms of system quality, I would rate the hotel's website highly.	0.671		
	Q09 The hotel's website makes it easy to get anywhere on the site.	0.592		
	Q05 The hotel's website enables me to get on to ii quickly.	0.588		
Service quality	Q13 The hotel's website understands the needs of its customers.		0.835	
	Q14 The hotel's website delivers services exactly as promised.		0.768	
	Q12 When I access my account I feel secure, the hotel's website instills confidence.		0.638	
	Q10 The hotel's website is prompt in responding to my queries.		0.582	
	Q11 I can speak with a representative at the hotel's website in case I have problems with my account.		0.574	
Information quality	Q03 The information provided by the hotel's website is accurate.			0.798
	Q02 The hotel's website provides me with all the information I need.			0.704
	Q01 The hotel's website produces the most current information.			0.686
	Q04 In general, the hotel's website provides me with high-quality information.			0.659
Eigenvalues		5.862	1.435	1.031
% of Variance		20.964	19.774	19.750
Cumulative %		20.964	40.738	60.488
Cronbach's alpha		0.799	0.808	0.793
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin			0.884	

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

A. Descriptive Analysis

A statistical analysis of the collected questionnaires was computed based on the 452 usable responses. The effective response rate is 72% (452/625). SPSS 16.0 and Amos 16.0 statistical software was used to conduct the following empirical analyses. Of these 452 questionnaires, 28.1% of the responses were from male respondents, while 71.9% were from females. A substantial majority of the respondents were below 45 years of age but over 25 (66.4%), and had a bachelor's degree (58.2%). The largest category of respondents had a biggest income bracket was NT$20,001 to

NT$30,000 per month (25.2%).

B. *Structural Equation Model*

This study aims to identify the relationships among website quality, website brand, perceived trust, perceived value and purchase intention. Hence, a structural equation model (SEM) was used to test and verify the research framework and to describe the relationships among the construct variables. The reliability of each construct (measured by the coefficient alpha) exceeds 0.7 [25], thus reaching an acceptable level for all constructs. The Cronbach's alpha values for wensite quality (0.861), website brand (0.886), perceived trust (0.872), perceived value (0.869), and purchase intention (0.905) indicate that the constructs for these scales have acceptable reliability.

Structural equation model testing was conducted, with path analysis, using AMOS 16.0 (as shown in Fig. 2). The χ^2 statistic is too high, due to the large sample size [26], the SEM statistics as listed in Table II, including AGFI (0.822), IFI (0.916), TLI (0.908), CFI (0.916), RMSEA (0.062) and CMIN/DF (2.518), largely match the suggested values to demonstrate goodness-of-fit.

The results of the path analysis using Amos indicate that website quality has a positive impact on perceived trust (β = 0.594, $p < .001$) and that perceived trust has a positive impact on purchase intention (β = 0.447, $p < .001$). Table III lists the information on the partial mediating effects of perceived trust among endogenous and exogenous constructs. This analysis followed the process recommended by [27]. According to Table III, after adding the mediator (i.e. perceived trust) to the prediction of the dependent variable (i.e. purchase intention) in the second regression analysis, the effect of the independent variable (i.e. website quality) decreased in value (0.497). Thus, the results support **H1**, in which perceived trust functions as a required mediator between website quality and purchase intention.

The model also indicates that website brand has a significant impact on website quality (β = 0.144, $p < .005$) and perceived trust (β = 0.183, $p < .005$). Another objective of this section is to examine if website brand influences the relationship between website quality and perceived trust. The regression results (as shown in Table IV) indicate that the interaction between website quality and website brand has a significant effect on perceived trust (β = 0.763, $p < .05$). Thus, the results support **H2**.

Furthermore, the model indicates that perceived value has a significant impact on perceived trust (β = 0.400, $p < .001$) and purchase intention (β = 0.292, $p < .001$). The regression results (as shown in Table V) indicate that the interaction between perceived trust and purchase intention has a significant effect on perceived value (β = 0.540, $p < .05$). Thus, the results support **H3**.

TABLE II: INDICATORS OF FIT FOR THE STRUCTURAL MODEL

Measure	Recommended value	Results
Adjusted goodness-of-fit (AGFI)	>0.80 [28]	0.822
Incremental fit index (IFI)	>0.90 [29]	0.916
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	>0.90 [29]	0.908
Comparative fit index (CFI)	>0.90 [30]	0.916
Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)	<0.08 [31]	0.062
Chi-square/degrees freedom (CMIN/DF)	<5.00 [32]	2.518
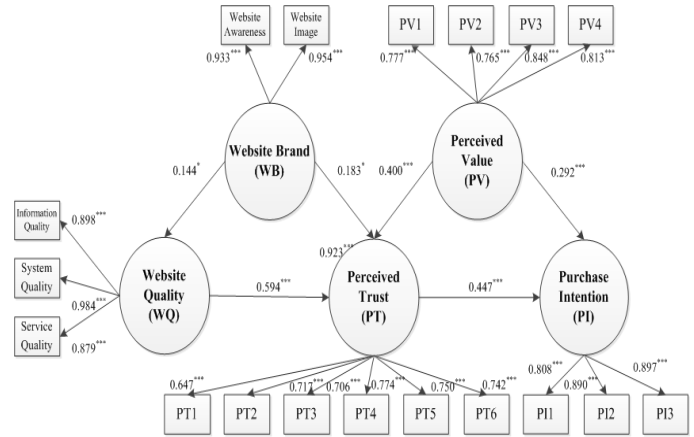
Notes: $^{***} = p < .001$; $^* = p < .05$

Fig. 2. Results of structural modelling analysis.

TABLE III: REGRESSION RESULTS FOR THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF PERCEIVED TRUST

Mediating effect	Model 1	β	Model 2	β
	Constant	1.739***	Constant	1.040***
	WQ	0.629***	WQ	0.282***
	(PI as the DV)		PT	0.497***
WQ→PT→PI			(PI as the DV)	
	R^2	0.263***	R^2	0.374***
	Adjusted R^2	0.261***	Adjusted R^2	0.371***
	ΔR^2		ΔR^2	0.111***
	F	140.884	F	117.688

Notes: WQ = Website quality; PT = Perceived trust; PI = Purchase intention; DV = Dependent variable; S.E. = Standard error; Sig.= Significance; β and S.E. are unstandardized coefficients; $^{***} = p < .001$

TABLE IV: REGRESSION RESULTS FOR THE MODERATING EFFECT OF WEBSITE BRAND

Moderating effect	The effect of WQ on PT		
		Model 1	Model 2
	Independent variable		
	WQ	0.320***	0.014
	Moderator		
WB	WB	0.867***	0.155
↓	Interaction term		
WQ → PT	WQ×WB		0.763*
	R^2	0.809***	0.811*
	Adjusted R^2	0.808***	0.810*
	ΔR^2		0.002*
	F	838.189	564.183

Notes: WQ = Website quality; WB = Website brand; PT = Perceived trust; $^{***} = p < .001$; $^* = p < .05$

TABLE V: REGRESSION RESULTS FOR THE MODERATING EFFECT OF PERCEIVED VALUE

Moderating effect	The effect of PT on PI		
		Model 1	Model 2
	Independent variable		
	PT	0.683***	0.185
	Moderator		
PV	PV	0.723***	0.190*
↓	Interaction term		
PT → PI	PT×PI		0.540*
	R^2	0.623***	0.631*
	Adjusted R^2	0.620***	0.627*
	ΔR^2		0.008*
	F	203.475	139.753

Notes: PT = Perceived trust; PV = Perceived value; PI = Purchase intention; $^{***} = p < .001$; $^* = p < .05$

V. CONCLUSIONS AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study elucidate some significant issues relating to website quality, website brand, perceived trust, perceived value, and purchase intention that have not been

given sufficient attention in prior studies. The major objectives of this study are to identify the interrelationships among website quality, website brand, perceived trust, perceived value, and purchase intention. The SEM model produces three main conclusions.

The first conclusion of this study is that perceived trust works as a mediating variable in the relationship between website quality and purchase intention (H1 is supported). These findings are consistent with previous literature [10]. That is to say that website quality will influence customer purchase intention, and this relationship will be mediated through perceived trust as a necessary mediator. From a managerial standpoint, when customers trust it's safe to shop online, they will have higher intention to purchase. Therefore, in order to raise customer purchase intention, hotels need to continually maintain and renew websites, and make much of perceived trust is a necessary intermediate stage when customers consider a purchase transaction.

Second is the role of website brand: the empirical results support a moderating effect of website brand on the relationship between website quality and perceived trust (H2 is supported). When both website quality and website brand are high, customers will perceive high trust toward the hotel website. Thus, high website awareness and positive image encourages customers to continue a business relationship with the same hotel, and then increases purchase intention. Therefore, to maintain a competitive advantage and raise customer purchase intention, hotels must continuously improve their e-branding strategies of their websites to attract customers.

Third is the role of perceived value: the empirical results support a moderating effect of perceived value on the relationship between perceived trust and purchase intention (H3 is supported). Perceived value is a moderator when customers compare the perceived benefits versus perceived costs from a hotel's website and then derive an overall perceived value. Thus, when both the customer perceived trust and perceived value are high, they are willing to purchase from the hotel's website and intend to continue a business relationship with the same hotel. The managerial implication here is that hotels must improve customer perceived trust and perceived value toward their websites, finally gain higher customer purchase intention.

VI. LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The limitations of this research suggest directions for future research. The literature review concluded that website quality is a multi-dimensional construct. This study used three dimensions – information, system, and service quality – to measure website quality. Nevertheless, different dimensions of website quality may bring other results. Hence, future studies could use other website quality measures to test and verify the research model. Second, some other moderating variables that may influence the relationship between website quality and purchase intention were not included in the present study. Thus, in addition to the variables of website brand and perceived value, future research could explore a wider range of variables, such as perceived risk and switching costs, and develop a more

comprehensive model that would apply across a range of service industries. For example, application of this research model in different industries, such as the travel or restaurant industries, could extend the validity of these findings.

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Kuo-Chien Chang is an associate professor in the Department of Leisure and Recreation Management at Chihlee Institute of Technology. His research interests focus on service marketing, service quality, and consumer behavior. He has published papers in the Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research, Industrial Management and Data Systems, Information Systems and e-Business Management, International Journal of Hospitality Management, International Journal of Tourism Research, Systems Research and Behavioral Science, and Total Quality Management and Business Excellence.

Nien-Te Kuo is an associate professor in the Department of Travel Management at National Kaohsiung University of Hospitality and Tourism. His research interests focus on travel management, hospitality management, service marketing, consumer psychology and behavior. He has published papers in the Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research, Journal of China Tourism Research, Total Quality Management and Business Excellence, and Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality and Tourism.

Chia-Lin Hsu is an assistant professor in the Department of International Business Administration at Chinese Culture University. His research interests focus on service marketing, e-commerce, consumer psychology and behavior. He has published papers in the Information Systems and e-Business Management, Systems Research and Behavioral Science, Human Factors and Ergonomics in Manufacturing and Service Industries, International Journal of Hospitality Management, International Journal of Tourism Research, International Journal of Operations and Production Management, Total Quality Management and Business Excellence, Industrial Management and Data Systems, Trends in Food Science and Technology, Food Quality and Preference, Journal of Quality, Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics, and Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality and Tourism.

Yi-Sung Cheng was a postgraduate student and obtained his master's degree in the Department of Tourism, Ming Chuan University, Taiwan. His research interests focus on service marketing, service management, consumer psychology and behavior. He has published papers in the Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research, and Journal of China Tourism Research.