

## Internal Perspective towards Hotel' Reputation and Competitive Advantage: Vertical Job Classification

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### Abstract

The general goal of this study is to determine the influence of hotel reputation on competitive advantage) as perceived by employees. It also aimed to identify is employees' job class make a difference in their perception of hotel reputation and competitive advantage. Data were collected from eleven chain hotels located in Sharm El-Sheikh city in Egypt. This study based on survey methodology. A total of 366 surveys were collected and analyzed. PLS-SEM was applied using SmartPLS 3. The findings revealed that hotel reputation positively affects hotel competitive advantage. Findings also reported a moderate level of employees' perception toward hotel reputation and competitive advantage. A significant difference in employees' ratings toward the studied variables with regard to their job class was also reported. This study explored a gap exists in the hotel job hierarchy. A new link between internal and external customers of organizations could be established.

**Keywords:** Hotel Reputation; Competitive Advantage; Job Class; Hotel.

### Introduction

Hospitality and tourism industry is facing high pressure to survive due to the fast-paced changes and competitive business environment. Delivering a service or offering a bunch of benefits that competitors cannot match is one of the most important tenets of service organizations, which is to gain a competitive advantage (Porter 1996). While it is extremely difficult to gain and sustain a competitive advantage, especially in the hotel industry (Enz, 2008), firms work to create advantages through the differential development of resources and capabilities; the firm's reputation is a superior resource (Barney and Arikan, 2001).

Corporate reputation (CR) is a socially shared impression since it depends on an individual's perception of how other people view the firm (Helm, 2005). Employees' contributions to a particular corporate asset are useful in measuring employees' influence on corporate reputation. How employees regard the firm will determine how other stakeholders perceive it. Employees effectively shape other stakeholders' impression toward the firm (Harris and de Chernatony, 2001). Particularly in services industries, employees contribute to the development of corporate reputation through the quality of their interactions with customers (Helm, 2007). The more employees demonstrated supportive behaviors during hotel service delivery, the more customer trust in it. When the service was delivered by employees as promised, customers' confidence towards the hotel increased, which in turn helped build a positive customer perception toward the hotel in terms of trust and commitment (Khairy and Lee, 2018) and hence, improve the hotel reputation. The way employees and customers perceive the reputation of an organization will influence their behavior towards it (Feldman *et al.*, 2014). For a service business, the perspectives of employee and customer are viewed as related (Davies *et al.*, 2003). In this way, the key questionable aspect of interpretation CR is that it is perceived heterogeneous among various stakeholders (Matuleviciene and Stravinskiene, 2016). Because a generalized corporate reputation, originating from a global positive assessment, can generate positive consequences for a firm, it is particularly important in an uncertain context. For instance, Milgrom and Roberts (1986) argue that in an incomplete information setting, reputation works in attracting customers, as a result of the uncertainties of a company's services and products quality. Therefore, the

quality of a firm is signaled by the level of generalized reputation, and hence, affects a firm's competitive advantage. Although hotel executives believe that reputation is a very important immaterial corporate resource, still, the attention paid to reputation does not match its significance (Stavrinoudis and Chrysanthopoulou, 2017).

Within this context, the general aim of this study is to determine the influence of hotel reputation on competitive advantage (CA) and to come out with information that will further enhance the use of CR as a competitive tool. This paper will assess the internally perceived level of hotel reputation and CA; identify how hotel reputation relates to CA, and identify if there is a difference between employees' perception of hotel reputation and hotel CA with regard to their job classification.

## Literature review

### Corporate Reputation (CR)

The scientific argumentation about corporate reputation dates back to the 50s (Stavrinoudis and Chrysanthopoulou, 2017). Researchers became noticeably keen on CR in the 70s and to this day all they were talking about is what is meant by CR (Dolphin 2004). However, it is believed that the researchers who have tested CR did not rely on a consensus on a unique definition of such concept (Barnett *et al.*, 2006; Maden *et al.*, 2012). Conceptualizing the concept of CR has been analyzed individually by each scientist and the unanimity to bring up a construct for CR started much later (Matuleviciene and Stravinskiene, 2016). As a result, many definitions of CR have been found in the literature (e.g., Barnett *et al.*, 2006; Keh and Xie, 2009; van Riel and Fombrun, 2007).

Researchers (i.e. Iddrisu, 2013; Matuleviciene and Stravinskiene, 2016; Omar *et al.*, 2009) clustered all of these various definitions into three points of views which are utilized here to conceptualize the concept of CR. The first perspective looks at CR as an asset; it looks at economic and non-economic activities of an organization, in other words, it conceives as insiders' or/and outsiders' expectations towards specific organizational attributes. The second perspective looks at CR as a judgment; it is the stakeholder emotional reactions—in light of their general evaluation of the diverse parts of an organization. The last perspective considers the collective and multi-stakeholder “customers, employees, and investors” perception of the CR; stakeholder has a tendency to perceive the organization as good or bad based on their perception and information they obtained during experiencing organization' products and services.

Matuleviciene and Stravinskiene (2016) argued that from definitions of CR, it is seen that there is a wide range of diverse but similar meanings of CR. It can be suggested that CR is best described by Gotsi and Wilson (2001) as “stakeholder's overall evaluation of a company over time, based on the stakeholder's direct experiences with the company, any other form of communication and symbolism that provides information about the firm's actions and/or a comparison with the actions of other leading rivals” (pp. 29). Basically, Fombrun and Van Riel (2004) argued that in order to build a favorable CR, an organization needs to develop the following six key dimensions: emotional appeal, which means to have a positive think toward a company and to respect and trust in it; products and services, that is to have innovative and high-quality products and services in addition to balancing between quality and price; financial performance, this in regard to achieving profitability and having a strong chances for future growth; vision and leadership, refers to adopting clear and leading vision for future; workplace environment, which means having/attracting talented employees and ensuring good working conditions; and social responsibility, it is how organization respond to environment and society issues.

### **Competitive Advantage (CA)**

As the theory of competitiveness is constantly developing (Sachitra, 2017); competitive advantage appears to be a relative concept, it is based on circumstances of a certain situation and the measurement against competitors (Esen and Uyar, 2012). And thus, there is no common/uniform definition of the term CA (Grupe *et al.*, 2010; Piatkowski, 2012; Sigalas *et al.*, 2013). Competitiveness could be analyzed by using past performance indicators or potential competitiveness indicators (Frohberg and Hartmann, 1997). Studies on CA focused on the aspects of competitive abilities that organizations should have in order to be able to compete (Sukati *et al.*, 2011). For example, indicators of productivity, market share, and profitability, quality of products and services, reducing costs, exploring opportunities could represent the degree of competitiveness of a firm (Grupe *et al.*, 2010; Newbert, 2008; Sigalas *et al.*, 2013). The five dimensions of CA proposed by Li *et al.* (2006) and Thatte (2007) remain an important foundation for understanding and analyzing the CA of a firm; namely, price/cost, quality, delivery dependability, product innovation, and time to market. These dimensions are employed by the studies of (Awwad, 2010; Jie *et al.*, 2013, Lakhali, 2009; Newbert, 2008; Sukati *et al.*, 2011) to measure CA at the firm level.

For this study, the operational definition proposed by Sachitra and Chong (2015) for the CA will be used; it can be expressed as using the resources available and other precise activities in a specific way of in order to keep the firms distinct from its competitors and to keep it active and growing as well. Employees and CR are among the resources that have utmost value for all organizations in general and for service industry in particular. Thus, studying factors “i.e. reputation” which may affect the CA in a highly competitive business environment is substantially important.

### **Job Classes in Hotel Industry**

Due to the nature of the hospitality industry, it faces a subject of on-going change in the major labor market and skills implications (Baum, 2002). Vertical diversity in the hospitality workforce is represented by a traditional classification proposed by Riley (1996) that ranges from unskilled to semi-skilled, and from skilled to supervisory and management. This perspective suggested that the workforce in hospitality firms is breakdown into managerial, supervisory, craft (skilled), and operative (semi-skilled and unskilled) jobs. Eventually, the current study will follow the classification of hotel employees jobs into three classes; managers, supervisors, in addition to craft and operative workers.

### **Conceptual framework and hypotheses**

In order to build a good position for firms in an extremely competitive market, the CA is considered among the important goals that organizations pay a tremendous concern to obtain, as it is a rare and valuable intangible asset providing an opportunity to earn a higher level of financial benefits in comparison with other organizations (Roberts and Dowling, 2002; Majeed, 2011; Saeidi *et al.*, 2015). Consequently, the significant role of effective hotel managers is to acquire, develop, and manage all the potential resources which may have an effect on hotel CA. Researchers claimed that good CR is considered as an important asset that works in achieving a superior performance to a firm (Ajanović and Çizel, 2015; Cabral, 2012; Capozzi, 2005; Lange *et al.*, 2011; Pfarrer *et al.*, 2010; Shamsie, 2003). CR affect all facets of the life of the organization, is a vital strategic tool for those organizations that mainly rely on their intangible attributes in building competitiveness such as high levels of services (Kay, 2004), it also has become a strong

differentiation tool that organizations use to differentiate themselves from competitors (Gupta, 2002). Since reputation is built through consistent management behaviors over time and provides information on the overall esteem associated with a firm compared to its peers, its level may signal a firm's quality in general. A firm with a good quality, signaled by a high favorability, will ultimately achieve a superior performance in different aspects (Wang, 2013). Helm (2007) claimed that a company with a good reputation is perceived to be 'less risky than companies with equivalent financial performance, but with a less well-established reputation'. Firms with higher reputation enjoy higher sales growth, superior returns on assets (Surroca *et al.*, 2010), high corporate worth (Iwu-Egwuonwu, 2011), and also encourage a firm to increase its service or product's price premiums (Yacouel and Fleischer, 2012). Importantly, hotel reputation has been proven to be one of the factors that have affected the guests' willingness to stay; the guests had a positive opinion about hotels with good reputations and were willing to visit such hotels again despite experiencing a crisis (Ajanović and Çizel, 2015). Customer loyalty was also identified as a benefit of a good CR (Stavrinoudis and Chrysanthopoulou, 2017). Consequently, the formation of a good hotel reputation is a process that should begin from inside an organization in order to be difficult for competitors to imitate, and thus maintain CA. Accordingly, hypothesis 1 is proposed as follows:

*H1: hotel reputation positively affects hotel competitive advantage.*

Although the high CR gives value from transactions between an organization and the external stakeholders or between an organization and other internal stakeholders (Helm, 2011; Matuleviciene and Stravinskiene, 2016; Stavrinoudis and Chrysanthopoulou, 2017), increasing attention was paid to improve CR focusing on satisfying customer without paying the same attention to the important role employees play in reputation management.

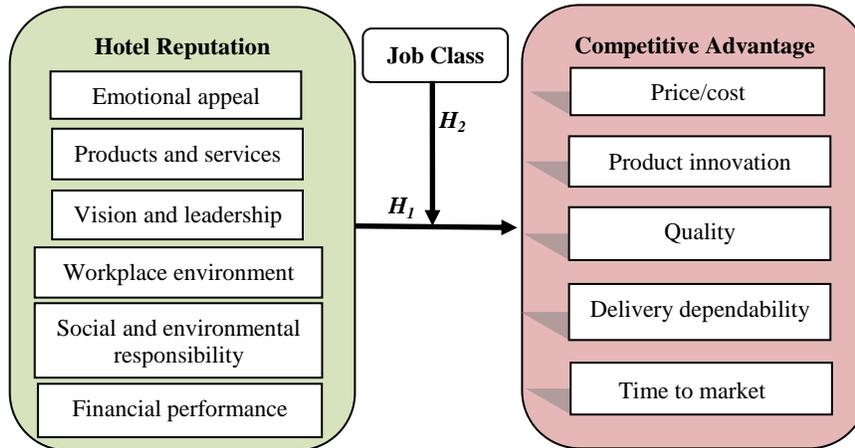
Based on their diverse contexts and on their interpretation of the information they received, different stakeholders of the firm may then have different perceptions toward it (Walker 2010). An organization may then have a good reputation among its stockholders and one not so good among its employees (Feldman *et al.*, 2014). This perception, which is separately formed inside each stakeholder, is equal to the overall CR (Matuleviciene and Stravinskiene, 2016). The heterogeneousness of CR' perception through different stakeholders is considered among the reasons that stand against interpreting and supporting CR (Matuleviciene and Stravinskiene, 2016).

Accessibility to information is essential for the creation of an informed workforce (Horton and Rapp, 2003). Management communicates with their employees for the purpose of reducing mistakes based on the more accurate information. However, due to the dynamic hospitality workplace, lack of information accessibility is one of the problems facing the workplace environment. King and Lee (2016) argued that access to certain communication channels is limited especially when working in an operational role. They also added that in a hospitality context, where labor-intensive 24/7 operation, most traditional electronic internal communication channels are ineffective, in addition, although face-to-face channels may be more appropriate it is not always feasible both temporally and financially. Thus, hospitality workplace faces a challenge of ineffective internal communication, this, in turn, affects the number of information employees receives. As a result of translating information into positive or negative actions, different perceptions of current hotel reputation and CA are to be shaped. Accordingly, hypothesis 2 is proposed as follows:

*H2: there is a difference in employees' perceptions of hotel' reputation and competitive advantage by job class.*

The conceptual framework of the study illustrated in figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the study



## Materials and Methods

### Sample

Out of the 15 major hotel chains operating in Egypt (Colliers International, 2014), 11 hotel chains located in the Sharm El-Sheikh city were randomly chosen for collecting data. Sharm El-Sheikh is marked as a tourist hotspot in Egypt. 440 of employees working in the investigated hotels “40 from each hotel” were asked to participate in the study. 366 valid responses were obtained representing 83.2% response rate.

### Survey instrument development

22-items scale adapted from Fombrun et al. (2000) and Partoon (2010) was used to measure the hotel reputation. Emotional appeal was measured based on five items (items A1, A2, A3, A4, A5); for example, “I have a good feeling about this hotel”. Products and services was measured with four items (items B1, B2, B3, B4), including “This hotel stands behind its products and services”. Vision and leadership was assessed via three items (items C1, C2, C3), such as “this hotel has a clear vision for its future”. Social and environmental responsibility was evaluated with three items (items E1, E2, E3); for instance, “this hotel is an environmentally responsible company”. Workplace environment was assessed via three items (items D1, D2, D3), such as “this hotel looks like a good company to work for”. Financial performance was evaluated with four items (items F1, F2, F3, F4); for instance, “this hotel has a strong record of profitability”. In addition, 20-items scale adapted from El-Garaihy *et al.* (2014) and Thatte (2007) was used to measure the hotel competitive advantage. Quality was evaluated with four items (items H1, H2, H3, H4); for instance, “this hotel is able to compete based on quality”. Price/cost was evaluated with three items (items G1, G2, G3); for instance, “this hotel offers competitive prices”. Delivery dependability was measured with four items (items I1, I2, I3, I4), including “this hotel delivers the kind of products and services needed by the market”. Time to market was assessed via five items (items K1, K2, K3, K4, K5), such as “this hotel is the pioneer in the market in introducing

new products”. Product innovation was measured with four items (items J1, J2, J3, J4), including “this hotel is capable of introducing new products and services in the marketplace”. All items were measured by a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

### Pilot study

Once developed, the questionnaire was reviewed by two academic experts, one of whom had more experience on the topic of reputation management and competitive advantage of hospitality businesses, while the other had experience in designing surveys. These two experts were asked to assess the content validity and clarify the questionnaire. Based on their feedback, proper modifications were made accordingly. Next, a pilot study was carried out on 30 hotel employees to recognize survey deficiencies and formatting and design issues, obtain recommendations from them, test the proposed time limit for filling out the questionnaire and examine respondents' level of understanding of the developed questionnaire. Respondents for the pilot study were recruited from a hotel at which the researcher had previously established some working relationships.

### Data collection

After collecting pertinent background information from the investigated hotels, telephone calls were made to the managers of the hotels' human resource departments to obtain permission to visit and distribute the questionnaires on their premises. All questionnaires were distributed at the end of 2017. Since the employees should not have exchanged the questionnaires among themselves, especially if they were supervisors, the researcher oversaw distributing and collecting them. A structured survey was distributed to collect data for the final analysis. The survey was developed to collect employees' demographic information and investigate their perception of hotel reputation and competitive advantage.

### Data analysis

Data analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS v. 23) and SmartPLS 3 Trial Version. To describe and summarize the data, descriptive statistics (i.e., means and standard deviations) were used. Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was also applied. A *p*-value of less than .05 was considered significant.

## Results

### Descriptions of participants

Out of 366 respondents, about one-third ( $n = 124$ ) of respondents were female and 66.1% were male ( $n = 242$ ); half of respondents ( $n = 186$ ) were less than 30 years old and 40.4% were from 30 to 40 years old ( $n = 148$ ); about two-thirds of respondents had bachelor's degrees ( $n = 210$ ) and a minority 6.8% ( $n = 25$ ) had master/PhD; 12.6% ( $n = 46$ ) belong to a managers' job class, 41% ( $n = 150$ ) supervisors' job class and 170 (46.4%) belong to craft and operative workers (Table 1).

Table 1: Respondents' profiles

|                          |                    | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------------------|--------------------|-----------|---------|
| <b>Gender</b>            | Male               | 242       | 66.1    |
|                          | Female             | 124       | 33.9    |
| <b>Age</b>               | Less than 30 years | 186       | 50.8    |
|                          | From 30:40 years   | 148       | 40.4    |
|                          | More than 40 years | 32        | 8.7     |
| <b>Educational level</b> | High School        | 131       | 35.8    |

|                  |                             |     |       |
|------------------|-----------------------------|-----|-------|
|                  | Bachelor degree             | 210 | 57.4  |
|                  | Master degree               | 25  | 6.8   |
| <b>Job class</b> | Managers                    | 46  | 12.6  |
|                  | Supervisors                 | 150 | 41.0  |
|                  | Craft and operative workers | 170 | 46.4  |
| Total            |                             | 366 | 100.0 |

### Descriptive statistics

Table 2 illustrates the mean scores of different study variables: 3.62, 3.54, 3.45, 3.49, 3.57, 3.59, 3.59, 3.50, 3.45, 3.37, 3.44, 3.49, and 3.54 for delivery dependability, emotional appeal, financial performance, price/cost, product innovation, products and services, quality, social and environmental responsibility, time to market, vision and leadership, workplace environment, overall hotel reputation, and overall competitive advantage, respectively. This indicates that employees were moderately perceived their hotel reputation and competitive advantage.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of study variables (N = 366).

| Study Variable                          | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|------|----------------|
| Emotional Appeal                        | 3.54 | .94            |
| Financial Performance                   | 3.45 | .82            |
| Products and Services                   | 3.59 | .93            |
| Social and Environmental Responsibility | 3.50 | .86            |
| Vision and Leadership                   | 3.37 | .95            |
| Workplace Environment                   | 3.44 | .98            |
| Price/cost                              | 3.49 | .91            |
| Product innovation                      | 3.57 | .80            |
| Delivery dependability                  | 3.62 | .77            |
| Quality                                 | 3.59 | .80            |
| Time to market                          | 3.45 | .86            |
| Hotel Reputation                        | 3.49 | .80            |
| Competitive Advantage                   | 3.54 | .74            |

Source: developed by the author using data from the output of SPSS v.23.

### The measurement model

For the current study, the Shapiro-Wilk test of normality was used and the results of SPSS outcome indicated that the *p*-value was less than 0.05. So, the alternative hypothesis can be accepted and conclude that the distribution of the data is not normal. The research model of Fig. 1 was analyzed using SmartPLS, a PLS structural equation modeling tool (Ringle *et al.*, 2015). It assesses the psychometric properties of the measurement model and estimates the parameters of the structural model. This tool allows the examination of extensive interactions among variables. The PLS-SEM is a nonparametric tool suitable in the case that the distribution of the data is not normal (Olya and Altinay, 2016).

Reliability results are given in Table 3. The data indicate that the measures are robust in terms of their internal consistency reliability as indexed by the composite reliability. The composite reliabilities of the different measures range from 0.91 to 0.96, which exceed the recommended threshold value of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978). In addition, consistent with the guidelines of Fornell and Larcker (1981), the average variance extracted (AVE) for each measure can be accepted as it exceeded 0.50. Hence, the entire requirement for convergent validity, construct reliability, and Cronbach alpha or internal reliability is achieved. Then, discriminant validity is the next step to be preceded as in Table 4.

Table 3: Assessment of the measurement model

| Variable constructs                     | Average Variance Extracted (AVE) | Composite Reliability | Cronbach's Alpha |
|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| Delivery dependability                  | 0.77                             | 0.93                  | 0.90             |
| Emotional Appeal                        | 0.84                             | 0.96                  | 0.95             |
| Financial Performance                   | 0.73                             | 0.92                  | 0.88             |
| Price/cost                              | 0.82                             | 0.93                  | 0.89             |
| Product innovation                      | 0.78                             | 0.93                  | 0.91             |
| Products and Services                   | 0.81                             | 0.94                  | 0.92             |
| Quality                                 | 0.81                             | 0.94                  | 0.92             |
| Social and Environmental Responsibility | 0.79                             | 0.92                  | 0.87             |
| Time to market                          | 0.73                             | 0.93                  | 0.91             |
| Vision and Leadership                   | 0.83                             | 0.94                  | 0.90             |
| Workplace Environment                   | 0.85                             | 0.94                  | 0.91             |

Source: developed by the author using data from SmartPLS 3 trial version.

The elements in the matrix diagonals (values in bold), representing the square roots of the AVEs, are greater in all cases than the off-diagonal elements (these values are the correlation between the respective constructs) in their corresponding row and column, thus the discriminant validity of scales is achieved.

Table 4: Discriminant validity (intercorrelations) of variable constructs

| Latent variables                           | 1           | 2           | 3           | 4           | 5           | 6           | 7           | 8           | 9           | 10          | 11          |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1. Delivery dependability                  | <b>0.88</b> |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |
| 2. Emotional Appeal                        | 0.71        | <b>0.92</b> |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |
| 3. Financial Performance                   | 0.69        | 0.64        | <b>0.86</b> |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |
| 4. Price/cost                              | 0.65        | 0.53        | 0.69        | <b>0.91</b> |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |
| 5. Product innovation                      | 0.81        | 0.67        | 0.67        | 0.63        | <b>0.88</b> |             |             |             |             |             |             |
| 6. Products and Services                   | 0.72        | 0.79        | 0.72        | 0.54        | 0.68        | <b>0.89</b> |             |             |             |             |             |
| 7. Quality                                 | 0.82        | 0.65        | 0.74        | 0.70        | 0.79        | 0.73        | <b>0.90</b> |             |             |             |             |
| 8. Social and Environmental Responsibility | 0.66        | 0.67        | 0.81        | 0.63        | 0.66        | 0.71        | 0.70        | <b>0.89</b> |             |             |             |
| 9. Time to market                          | 0.77        | 0.64        | 0.71        | 0.71        | 0.82        | 0.66        | 0.77        | 0.65        | <b>0.85</b> |             |             |
| 10. Vision and Leadership                  | 0.62        | 0.70        | 0.73        | 0.58        | 0.61        | 0.76        | 0.69        | 0.67        | 0.66        | <b>0.91</b> |             |
| 11. Workplace Environment                  | 0.68        | 0.72        | 0.75        | 0.62        | 0.64        | 0.68        | 0.67        | 0.67        | 0.66        | 0.79        | <b>0.92</b> |

Source: developed by the author using data from SmartPLS 3 trial version.

Convergent validity was also tested using SmartPLS by extracting the factor and cross-loadings of all indicator items to their respective latent constructs. These results, presented in Table 5, indicated that all items loaded: on their respective construct from a lower bound of 0.77 to an upper bound of 0.93; and more highly on their respective construct than on any other. Furthermore, each item's factor loading on its respective construct was highly significant ( $P < 0.001$ ) as indicated by the T-statistics of the outer model loadings in the SmartPLS output. According to Awang *et al.* (2010), unidimensionality procedure is achieved when the measuring items have acceptable factor loadings for the respective latent constructs, the factor loading for an item should be 0.50 or higher. Results confirm the convergent validity of the indicators as representing distinct latent constructs.

Table 5: Factor Loadings

| Hotel reputation | Loadings | Hotel reputation | Loadings | Competitive advantage | Loadings | Competitive advantage | Loadings |
|------------------|----------|------------------|----------|-----------------------|----------|-----------------------|----------|
| A1               | 0.92     | C3               | 0.93     | G1                    | 0.87     | J1                    | 0.89     |
| A2               | 0.90     | D1               | 0.91     | G2                    | 0.91     | J2                    | 0.86     |
| A3               | 0.92     | D2               | 0.93     | G3                    | 0.93     | J3                    | 0.87     |
| A4               | 0.92     | D3               | 0.92     | H1                    | 0.92     | J4                    | 0.91     |

|    |      |    |      |    |      |    |      |
|----|------|----|------|----|------|----|------|
| A5 | 0.92 | E1 | 0.90 | H2 | 0.88 | K1 | 0.86 |
| B1 | 0.87 | E2 | 0.88 | H3 | 0.91 | K2 | 0.86 |
| B2 | 0.90 | E3 | 0.89 | H4 | 0.90 | K3 | 0.92 |
| B3 | 0.92 | F1 | 0.80 | I1 | 0.86 | K4 | 0.77 |
| B4 | 0.91 | F2 | 0.86 | I2 | 0.86 | K5 | 0.87 |
| C1 | 0.91 | F3 | 0.89 | I3 | 0.91 |    |      |
| C2 | 0.90 | F4 | 0.88 | I4 | 0.88 |    |      |

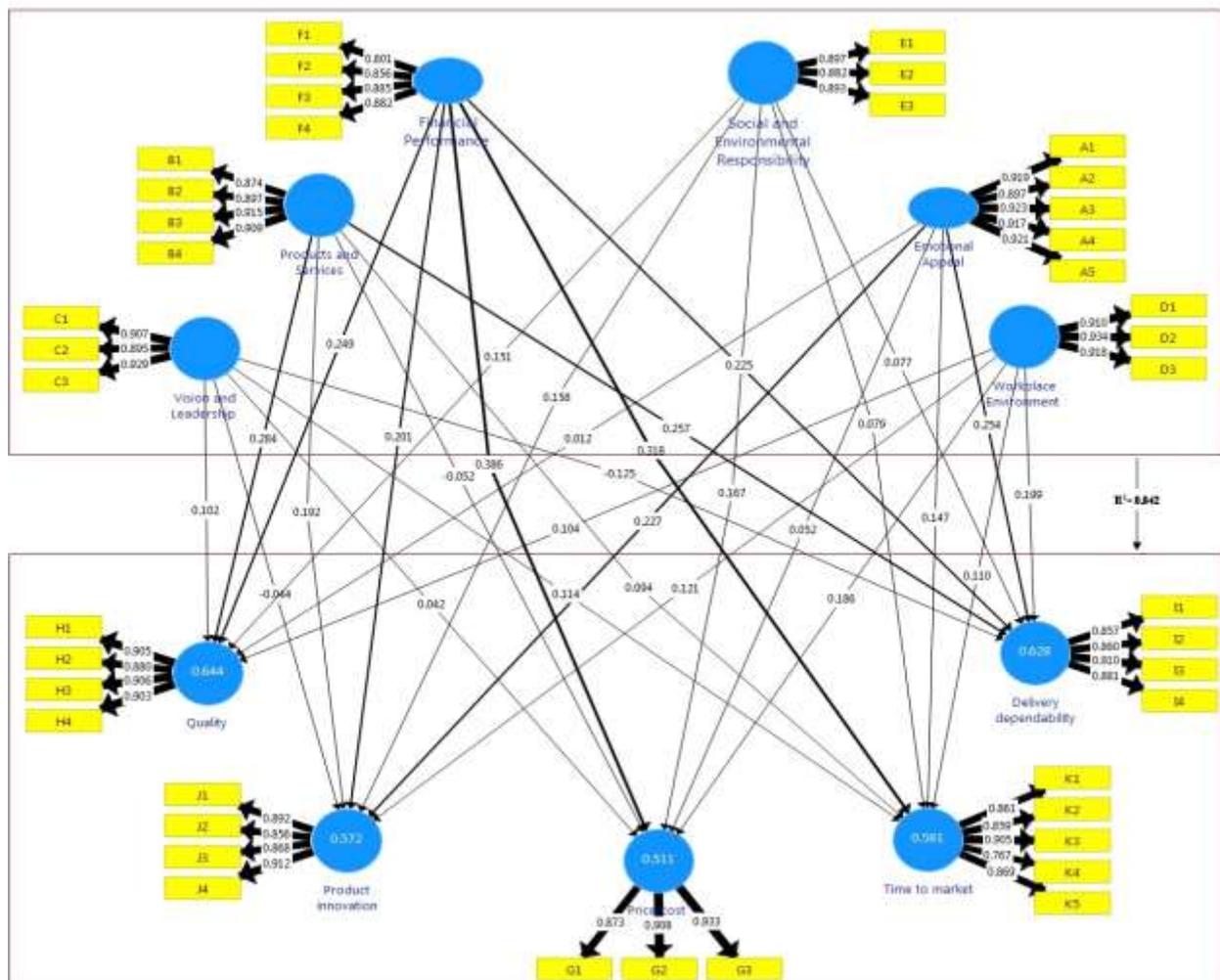
Source: developed by the author using data from SmartPLS 3 trial version.

Hence, it is important to examine whether collinearity problems exist in the structural model. In this example, no multicollinearity problems were observed (minimum 1.88 and maximum 4.47 for VIF).

### The structural model

Figure 2 and Table 6 show the results of the structural model with interaction effects. In Figure 2, the values inside the circles evidence the extent to which the latent variable is explained by the other latent variables in the structural model, while the values on the arrows, called path coefficients explain the strength of one construct's effect on the others.

Figure 2: Structural model results.



Source: developed by the author using data from SmartPLS 3 trial version

When assessing the degree of explanation of the variance in the endogenous target variables, the six reputation latent variables tested (emotional appeal, products and services, vision and leadership, workplace environment, social and environmental responsibility, and financial performance) explain 62.8%, 51.1%, 64.4%, 57.2%, and 58.1% of the variance in delivery dependability, price/cost, quality product Innovation, and time to market, respectively. In addition, the overall hotel reputation explains about 84.2% of the variance in overall hotel competitive advantage, where the  $R^2$  corresponded to 0.842

Table 6: T-Statistics of Path Coefficients

|   | <b>T Statistics</b> | <b>P Values</b> |
|---|---------------------|-----------------|
| Emotional Appeal -> Delivery dependability                        | 4.55                | <b>0.000</b>    |
| Emotional Appeal -> Price/cost                                    | 0.81                | 0.416           |
| Emotional Appeal -> Product innovation                            | 3.60                | <b>0.000</b>    |
| Emotional Appeal -> Quality                                       | 0.19                | 0.851           |
| Emotional Appeal -> Time to market                                | 2.33                | <b>0.020</b>    |
| Financial Performance -> Delivery dependability                   | 3.15                | <b>0.002</b>    |
| Financial Performance -> Price/cost                               | 5.04                | <b>0.000</b>    |
| Financial Performance -> Product innovation                       | 2.76                | <b>0.006</b>    |
| Financial Performance -> Quality                                  | 3.60                | <b>0.000</b>    |
| Financial Performance -> Time to market                           | 4.50                | <b>0.000</b>    |
| Products and Services -> Delivery dependability                   | 4.40                | <b>0.000</b>    |
| Products and Services -> Price/cost                               | 0.63                | 0.532           |
| Products and Services -> Product innovation                       | 2.91                | <b>0.004</b>    |
| Products and Services -> Quality                                  | 4.48                | <b>0.000</b>    |
| Products and Services -> Time to market                           | 1.13                | 0.260           |
| Social and Environmental Responsibility -> Delivery dependability | 1.31                | 0.189           |
| Social and Environmental Responsibility -> Price/cost             | 2.61                | <b>0.009</b>    |
| Social and Environmental Responsibility -> Product innovation     | 2.49                | <b>0.013</b>    |
| Social and Environmental Responsibility -> Quality                | 2.49                | <b>0.013</b>    |
| Social and Environmental Responsibility -> Time to market         | 1.20                | 0.229           |
| Vision and Leadership -> Delivery dependability                   | 1.84                | 0.067           |
| Vision and Leadership -> Price/cost                               | 0.53                | 0.596           |
| Vision and Leadership -> Product innovation                       | 0.64                | 0.522           |
| Vision and Leadership -> Quality                                  | 1.37                | 0.171           |
| Vision and Leadership -> Time to market                           | 1.64                | 0.102           |
| Workplace Environment -> Delivery dependability                   | 3.03                | <b>0.002</b>    |
| Workplace Environment -> Price/cost                               | 2.76                | <b>0.006</b>    |
| Workplace Environment -> Product innovation                       | 1.66                | 0.097           |
| Workplace Environment -> Quality                                  | 1.49                | 0.136           |
| Workplace Environment -> Time to market                           | 1.63                | 0.104           |
| Hotel Reputation -> Delivery dependability                        | 25.75               | <b>0.000</b>    |
| Hotel Reputation -> Price/cost                                    | 13.95               | <b>0.000</b>    |
| Hotel Reputation -> Product innovation                            | 22.55               | <b>0.000</b>    |
| Hotel Reputation -> Quality                                       | 33.23               | <b>0.000</b>    |
| Hotel Reputation -> Time to market                                | 23.23               | <b>0.000</b>    |
| <b>Hotel Reputation -&gt; Competitive Advantage</b>               | 30.52               | <b>0.000</b>    |

Source: developed by the author using data from SmartPLS 3 trial version.

Furthermore, statistically significant path coefficients were indicated between hotel reputation as a total variable and delivery dependability ( $t.value = 25.75, p < 0.001$ ), price/cost ( $t.value = 13.95, p < 0.001$ ), quality ( $t.value = 33.23, p < 0.001$ ), product innovation ( $t.value = 22.55, p < 0.001$ ), and time to market ( $t.value = 23.23, p < 0.001$ ). Path coefficients were also identified between

different hotel reputation factors and different hotel competitive advantage factors. Emotional appeal path coefficient was statistically significant with delivery dependability ( $t.value = 4.55, p < 0.001$ ), product innovation ( $t.value = 3.60, p < 0.001$ ), and time to market ( $t.value = 2.33, p < 0.05$ ). Products and services path coefficient was statistically significant with delivery dependability ( $t.value = 4.40, p < 0.001$ ), quality ( $t.value = 4.48, p < 0.001$ ), and product innovation ( $t.value = 2.91, p < 0.05$ ). Workplace environment path coefficient was statistically significant with delivery dependability ( $t.value = 3.03, p < 0.01$ ) and price/cost ( $t.value = 2.76, p < 0.01$ ). Social and environmental responsibility path coefficient was statistically significant with quality ( $t.value = 2.49, p < 0.05$ ), price/cost ( $t.value = 2.61, p < 0.01$ ), and product innovation ( $t.value = 2.49, p < 0.01$ ). Financial performance path coefficient was statistically significant with delivery dependability ( $t.value = 3.15, p < 0.01$ ), price/cost ( $t.value = 5.04, p < 0.001$ ), quality ( $t.value = 3.60, p < 0.001$ ), product innovation ( $t.value = 2.76, p < 0.001$ ), and time to market ( $t.value = 4.50, p < 0.001$ ). However, vision and leadership path coefficient was not statistically significant with any of hotel competitive advantage factors ( $p > 0.05$ ).

### Comparison of group-specific outcomes

PLS-Multi-Group Analysis (MGA) was conducted to compare the outcomes of the three job classes (managers, supervisors, craft and operative workers) as proposed by this study as shown in Table 7.

Table 7: PLS-MGA

|   | Path Coefficients-diff (Craft and operative workers - Managers) |         | Path Coefficients-diff (Craft and operative workers - Supervisors) |         | Path Coefficients-diff (Managers - Supervisors) |         |
|---|---|---------|--|---------|---|---------|
|   | 0.056   |         | 0.020  |         | 0.076   |         |
|   | p-Value   | t-Value | p-Value  | t-Value | p-Value   | t-Value |
| Hotel Reputation -> Competitive Advantage | 0.848   | 1.028   | 0.350  | 0.364   | <b>0.031</b>                                    | 1.965   |

Source: developed by the author using data from SmartPLS 3 trial version

Results indicate that the path coefficients difference was not statistically significant either between managers or supervisors and craft and operative workers, where  $p$ -values were more than 0.05. However, there was a path coefficients difference between managers and supervisors. Moreover, the SPSS output of Kruskal-Wallis Test illustrated in Table 8 indicate that employees' ratings regarding their perception of either hotel reputation factors or hotel competitive advantage factors were significantly affected by their job class (managers, supervisors, and craft and operative workers), where the  $p$ -value  $< .0001$ . Mean ranks for the three job class groups presented in the table figure out that the managers had the highest overall ranking that corresponds to the highest score on the continuous variables (hotel reputation factors and hotel competitive advantage factors) followed by supervisors and craft and operative workers come in lastly.

Table 8: Kruskal-Wallis Test results

|                        | Job class                   | N   | Mean Rank | Chi-Square | df | Sig. |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|-----|-----------|------------|----|------|
| Delivery dependability | Managers                    | 46  | 251.46    | 41.47      | 2  | .000 |
|                        | Supervisors                 | 150 | 200.01    |            |    |      |
|                        | Craft and operative workers | 170 | 150.54    |            |    |      |
| Emotional Appeal       | Managers                    | 46  | 261.37    | 41.22      | 2  | .000 |
|                        | Supervisors                 | 150 | 193.37    |            |    |      |
|                        | Craft and operative workers | 170 | 153.72    |            |    |      |
| Financial Performance  | Managers                    | 46  | 253.76    | 44.58      | 2  | .000 |
|                        | Supervisors                 | 150 | 201.37    |            |    |      |

|   |                             |     |        |       |   |      |
|---|-----------------------------|-----|--------|-------|---|------|
|   | Craft and operative workers | 170 | 148.72 |       |   |      |
| Price/cost                              | Managers                    | 46  | 213.76 | 9.54  | 2 | .000 |
|   | Supervisors                 | 150 | 192.61 |       |   |      |
|   | Craft and operative workers | 170 | 167.27 |       |   |      |
| Product innovation                      | Managers                    | 46  | 243.35 | 24.99 | 2 | .000 |
|   | Supervisors                 | 150 | 191.59 |       |   |      |
|   | Craft and operative workers | 170 | 160.16 |       |   |      |
| Products and Services                   | Managers                    | 46  | 268.70 | 55.40 | 2 | .000 |
|   | Supervisors                 | 150 | 199.37 |       |   |      |
|   | Craft and operative workers | 170 | 146.45 |       |   |      |
| Quality                                 | Managers                    | 46  | 238.43 | 38.63 | 2 | .000 |
|   | Supervisors                 | 150 | 205.12 |       |   |      |
|   | Craft and operative workers | 170 | 149.56 |       |   |      |
| Social and Environmental Responsibility | Managers                    | 46  | 265.49 | 43.90 | 2 | .000 |
|   | Supervisors                 | 150 | 192.48 |       |   |      |
|   | Craft and operative workers | 170 | 153.39 |       |   |      |
| Time to market                          | Managers                    | 46  | 230.43 | 19.91 | 2 | .000 |
|   | Supervisors                 | 150 | 195.92 |       |   |      |
|   | Craft and operative workers | 170 | 159.84 |       |   |      |
| Vision and Leadership                   | Managers                    | 46  | 234.22 | 24.94 | 2 | .000 |
|   | Supervisors                 | 150 | 198.23 |       |   |      |
|   | Craft and operative workers | 170 | 156.78 |       |   |      |
| Workplace Environment                   | Managers                    | 46  | 235.76 | 28.02 | 2 | .000 |
|   | Supervisors                 | 150 | 199.77 |       |   |      |
|   | Craft and operative workers | 170 | 155.00 |       |   |      |
| <b>Overall Hotel Reputation</b>         | Managers                    | 46  | 269.88 | 53.74 | 2 | .000 |
|   | Supervisors                 | 150 | 198.24 |       |   |      |
|   | Craft and operative workers | 170 | 147.12 |       |   |      |
| <b>Overall Competitive Advantage</b>    | Managers                    | 46  | 250.66 | 36.01 | 2 | .000 |
|   | Supervisors                 | 150 | 197.98 |       |   |      |
|   | Craft and operative workers | 170 | 152.55 |       |   |      |

Source: developed by the author using data from the output of SPSS v.23.

## Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate the influence of hotel reputation on hotel competitive advantage; the internally perceived level of hotel reputation and competitive advantage has been assessed, how hotel reputation relates to competitive advantage was identified, and difference between employees' perception of hotel reputation and hotel competitive advantage with regard to their job classification has been explored. A conceptual model was developed and tested to empirically investigate these relationships (see Fig. 2). The study results have supported the two proposed hypotheses.

The findings showed that a good hotel reputation positively affects hotel competitive advantage, it explained about 84.2% of the variance in CA. The results were consistent with the findings of researchers (i.e. Boyd *et al.*, 2010; Ajanović and Çizel, 2015; Keh and Xie, 2009; Fombrun and Van Riel, 1997; Stavrinoudis and Chrysanthopoulou, 2017; Matuleviciene and Stravinskiene, 2016; Barney, 1991; Deephouse, 2000; Hui *et al.*, 2014; Surroca *et al.* 2010; Iwu-Egwuonwu, 2010; Yacouel and Fleischer, 2012), who reported that reputation is an important mean by which firms can maintain CA.

Puncheva (2008) noticed that CR can have an influence on how organizations relate to their stakeholders, the high reputation organization have the more support for successful relationships with stakeholders (Omar *et al.*, 2009). Reputation focuses on what key stakeholders think about the organization and how their perception can be translated into sustained growth and profitability (Iddrisu, 2013). Furthermore, organizations with a more positive reputation would

be perceived as more attractive employers by potential applicants; attracting and sustaining a talented staff, thereby providing those companies with a CA over their competitors (Stavrinoudis and Chrysanthopoulou, 2017; Cable and Turban, 2003). Moreover, involving hotel internal stakeholders in building hotel vision enhances its reputation and contributes to customer satisfaction, which in its turn will have a positive impact on the number of repeat guests (Yoram and Herstein, 2007). It also has a positive outcome on the pricing of services and goods, for it offers a competitive advantage compared to competitors (Ajanović and Çizel, 2015). When one organization acquires a high reputation, this may negatively affect the other organization in terms of losing it (Varey, 2002). As a result, stakeholders tend to move from one organization to another. Eventually, it is much easier for a good reputable organization to compete with other similar organizations due to the confidence that stakeholders have in the activities and survival of the organization.

Findings also reported a moderate level of employees' perception of their hotel reputation and competitive advantage. In addition, there was a significant difference in employees' ratings toward the studied variables with regard to their job class; managers stand on the highest perception, whereas, craft and operative workers stand on the lowest. This finding is considered evidence on a gap exists in the hotel job hierarchy, this gap hinder the flow of information in between. This is interpreted by other findings that asserted the significant role internal communication plays to facilitate social exchange within organizations (Fombrun and Van Riel, 2004; Ruck and Welch 2012), in particular in the hospitality industry where a high dependency on human resources. It also provides management insight with respect to the need for internal communication within hospitality organizations to be smooth and dynamic in order to maximize the expected benefits. Researchers argued that communication have to be considered as a critical component of CR (Benthaus *et al.*, 2013; Guru *et al.*, 2013; Matuleviciene and Stravinskiene, 2016; Petrokaite and Stravinskiene, 2013; Podnar *et al.*, 2012), as it is based on hospitality service excellence which is to be created by the informed hospitality employees. Furthermore, Forman and Argenti (2005), while they were testing whether the effective communication impacts on CR or not, have concluded that CR arises primarily from how organization represents itself. Stakeholders tend to assess organizations according to self-presentation and the identity communicated to them. This separately formed assessment inside each stakeholder results in aggregate hotel reputation.

### **Conclusion and implications**

The study determined that a link exists between hotel reputation and competitive advantage, in addition, different perceptions of reputation and competitive advantage among employees in hotel chains. The findings of this study have a number of implications of using hotel reputation as a competitive tool. First, hotel management should consider reputation as among their top priorities and do their effort to develop, protect, and make use of its reputation. Consequently, it may be necessary to assign a specialized executive to be in charge of managing hotel reputation. At the same time, it is necessary to measure hotel reputation on a regular base and to monitor its progress constantly, in order to take action when adjustments are needed. Second, hotel management has to set up a well-tailored programme for CR management that should emphasize not only reputation building but also on reputation communication with employees to make sure that communication channels are streamlined. Lastly, great attention is to be paid to the internal operating environment and mainly to the human resources, regardless of their class and department. Without a good internal reputation, it is impossible to develop a good external CR,

as the more committed employees are a foundational resource for enhancing hotel's productivity and competitiveness. Beyond these practical implications, several limitations are acknowledged which could potentially be addressed in further research. Since this study was conducted on chain hotels within the Egyptian hotel industry, further studies on the current topic are to be done on other hotel segments "independent hotels" or even on the chain hotel but are located in a different geographic location, and hence, the comparison could be done. Moreover, this study investigated the influence of hotel reputation on hotel competitive advantage from an internal perspective; studies could examine additional effects that might moderate the relationships between the model variables "i.e. hotel strategy and organizational climate". Furthermore, the study investigated the subjective perception toward study variables, which may not necessary to be the reality itself; further studies needed to well define internal reputation and how to be built, what are actual employee behaviors that contribute to the formation of CR, in addition, how to integrate such behaviors into the daily work routines.

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