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# The impact of other customer perception on consumer-brand relationships

Consumer-  
brand  
relationships

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – Extant research evidence demonstrates that customer satisfaction in a service encounter is influenced by other customer perception (OCP). However, scholarly research on the impact of OCP on brand love and the moderating influence of customers' attachment styles in the context of hospitality industry is scarce. The purpose of this paper is to fill this gap in the literature.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The data were collected from customers of five and three-star hotels in India. Regression-based process analysis (Hayes, 2013) was used to test the proposed set of hypotheses.

**Findings** – The data analysis shows that OCP predicts brand love through the mediation of satisfaction. Individual's anxious attachment style positively moderates "other customer perception-satisfaction" relationship, and avoidant attachment style negatively moderates the same relationship. Thus the effect of OCP is positively moderated by anxious attachment style, and negatively moderated by avoidant attachment style.

**Originality/value** – The value of this study lies in quantitatively investigating the roles played by OCP and individual attachment styles in shaping brand love in hospitality industry. In contrast to findings from previous research, the findings from this study suggest that anxious attachment style positively influences brand satisfaction and formation of brand love.

**Keywords** Satisfaction, Other customer perception, Attachment anxiety, Attachment avoidance, Hotel brand love, Moderated mediation analysis

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

James (a fictional character) searches for sophisticated dining experiences. Based on a rave review, he came to a pub with an expectation of enjoying a warm Saturday night in a sophisticated cocktail environment. He became very pleased after entering the pub and looking at its aesthetically appealing interiors. Things were pleasing till his eyes got stuck on an uncouth looking middle-aged person sitting just two tables ahead wearing a gross attire. James found the man very ill fitted with respect to the rest of the pub. He could not take his mind off this unrefined man, and what he thought would be a memorable evening of fine dine and wine turned out to be a torturous brooding over the sore in his eyes.

Brocato *et al.* (2012) state that customer's perception of other customers present in a service encounter can largely shape the focal customer's emotional response towards the



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service firm as depicted in the above mentioned situation. Brocato *et al.* (2012, p. 2) define other customers as “customers who are in the service facility simultaneously with – and who are unacquainted with – a focal customer”. Prior research largely supports that one’s evaluation of fellow customers significantly influences focal customer’s satisfaction (Wu, 2007; Grove and Fisk, 1997). This empirical study investigates the psychological mechanisms that underlie the impact of other customer perception (OCP) on focal customer’s service-brand relationship in the context of hospitality industry. As a major component of the hospitality industry, hotel operators face increasingly competitive environments across countries, making customer relationship marketing a strategic priority for hotel operators and a prime topic for scholarly research (Shoemaker and Lewis, 1999). Similar to other services, consumers of hotel services have become increasingly sophisticated and knowledgeable, thanks to consumer empowerment in the digital age, and have multiple options to choose from (Kandampully and Suhartanto, 2000). Therefore, it is important to investigate the impact of OCP on customer-brand relationship and satisfaction in the hotel sector (Grove and Fisk, 1997).

It is commonly understood that “hotel guests leave a hotel with only the memories of their experiences” (Kayaman and Arasli, 2007, p. 93). These memories reflect interaction not only with the hotel staff, but also with other customers. It is posited that consumers can form loving relationships with consumption objects referred to as brand love. Brand love reflects a “passionate emotional attachment a satisfied customer has for a particular trade name” (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006, p. 81). Therefore, repeated satisfaction with a brand is said to be a predictor of brand love (Roy *et al.*, 2013; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). Brand love has been extensively studied in consumer behaviour research (e.g. Tierney *et al.*, 2016; Huang *et al.*, 2014; Barnes, 2003). It is conceptualised to be structurally (in terms of its components) analogous to interpersonal love (Shimp and Madden, 1988; Sarkar *et al.*, 2015; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). However, the intensity of brand love depends on brand reciprocity and consumer-brand interactivity (Schultz and Bailey, 2000). When applied to the hotel environment it can be argued that satisfactory interaction with other customers present in a hotel environment (favourable OCP) can generate brand love depending on the level of reciprocity between focal customer and other customers. Brand love and brand attachment refer to the same concept, but represent different intensities of it. In the context of hotel services, Mattila and Enz (2002) has argued that customers often exhibit varied emotions when they use hotel services. Love represents such an emotion that reflects consumer’s persistent patronage towards the hotel (Tsai, 2014).

Since brand love represents a mental state of being emotionally attached to a brand (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006), it is very likely that consumers’ attachment styles play a role in shaping the developmental process of brand love. Individual attachment style is developed early in life as a result of interaction with significant others, i.e., caregivers (Bowlby, 2008). Objects of attachment can include consumption objects or brands also (Mende and Bolton, 2011). As such, consumer’s attachment style is a key driver of consumer loyalty (Huang *et al.*, 2014). Swaminathan *et al.* (2009) posit that consumers may exhibit one of two attachment styles, namely anxiety and avoidance. Anxious individuals fear rejection from relationship partner, whereas avoidant individuals do not seek an emotional relationship. Extending this concept to the consumer-hotel services encounter, it is possible to argue that an anxious individual may fear improper treatment by the other customers whereas an avoidant person may not care much about how he/she is treated leading to an detached relationship with the hotel. Therefore, OCP can play a major role in generating satisfaction and brand love. Empirical research investigating how OCP generates satisfaction and brand love, and the role played by individual’s attachment orientation in shaping this process in hotel services context is scarce. This study intends to fill this research gap.

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In what follows, we first provide a review of the extant literature on OCP, and other related theoretical constructs. The literature review is followed by the statement of hypotheses and the conceptual framework. We then discuss the methodology used for testing the hypotheses. Finally, we present the results and discuss theoretical and managerial implications of our findings.

### Literature review

A hotel stay is essentially an experiential or hedonic consumption practice (Prebensen and Rosengren, 2016). Since OCP may play a major role in shaping customer experience in a service context (Brocato *et al.*, 2012), it is important to gain a better understanding of its impact on customer satisfaction and brand love. More specifically, how brand love, as an experiential consumption construct (Batra *et al.*, 2012; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen, 2010), is impacted by satisfaction, OCP and individual attachment style can provide significant insights in managing customer experience in a hotel setting. The subsequent literature review aims at delineating the inter-relationships between the aforementioned constructs.

#### *OCP*

OCP defined as individual's perception of other customers simultaneously present in service setting in terms of his/her degree of identification or perceived similarity with them, perception of their physical appearances, and the perceived appropriateness of their behaviour, strongly influences customer satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the service provider (Brocato *et al.*, 2012; Anderson *et al.*, 2008). The extant research on service marketing shows significant interests in studying the roles played by verbal and/or non-verbal interactions with other customers in shaping the individual's attitudinal and behavioural responses (Grove and Fisk, 1997; Martin and Pranter, 1989; McGrath and Otnes, 1995). For example, Huang and Wang's (2014) study demonstrates that other customer misbehaviour, such as drunkenness and verbal abuse, leads to higher levels of dissatisfaction when the focal customer is with social companions, as opposed to when he/she is alone in a restaurant context. The study conducted by Wu *et al.* (2014) finds that different dimensions of customer-to-customer interaction impact individual's evaluation of the fellow customers, and this evaluation would in turn influence individual's satisfaction with the overall service experiences. Brocato *et al.*'s (2012) study shows that individual's favourable perception of other customers has a strong impact on individual's approach intention towards the service leading to increased satisfaction. Huang (2008) demonstrates that failure in generating favourable interactions with other customers negatively impacts focal customer's satisfaction with service firm. Customer satisfaction ensures that customers develop positive emotions towards brands, while customer dissatisfaction translates into negative brand emotions (Pizam *et al.*, 2016).

#### *Customer satisfaction*

Pizam *et al.* (2016, p. 14) define customer satisfaction in hospitality service context as "customers' overall satisfaction with a hospitality service encounter" capturing the sum total of the differences between their perceived outcomes and expectations along a number of attributes. OCP is one such attribute which can either detract or boost customer's overall satisfaction with the brand/service provider. In other words, the difference between focal customer's expectations in relation to OCP dimensions of similarity, behaviours and appearances (Brocato *et al.*, 2012) and his/her actual experience in a service setting influences his/her overall satisfaction with the brand/service provider. As such, OCP acts as an experiential cue predictive of overall brand satisfaction (Brakus *et al.*, 2009).

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Deriving satisfaction through favourable OCP is rooted in Festinger's (1954) theory of social comparison and the expectancy disconfirmation theory of Oliver (1980). The theory of social comparison states that social environmental elements act as the standards against which individuals form opinions and develop attitudes. The OCP can act as a seminal social element of comparison. Based on the expectancy disconfirmation theory, OCP, as a significant environmental cue, juxtaposes individual's prior expectation against his/her actual experience in a service setting leading to satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the brand/service provider.

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### *Brand love*

In a highly competitive marketplace, customer satisfaction alone does not guarantee a competitive edge in the marketplace as many satisfied customers frequently defect (Mittal and Lassar, 1998). Research evidence also shows that a percentage of satisfied customers develop an emotional attachment to the brand or brand love (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). According to Carroll and Ahuvia (2006), satisfaction and brand love are distinct, but related concepts. In other words, satisfaction is a lower-order construct that is an antecedent of the higher order brand love. It should also be noted that, depending on context, brand love could reflect a short-lived romantic feeling and passion towards brand rather than a long-term commitment (Sarkar *et al.*, 2012). Whatever the case may be, brand love as a key predictor of brand loyalty (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006), is a desirable outcome for the marketer.

The link between OCP and brand love can be supported by Latane's (1981) social impact theory. Social impact theory focusses on the effect of other persons present in a social setting on the individual. For instance, individual's emotional response towards a hotel brand can be impacted by the individual's interaction quality with other customers (social members) present at the hotel. Brocato *et al.* (2012) support that social presence (e.g. other customers) differing in size and proximity impact customers' emotions. Therefore, it is argued that satisfaction or approach intention generated based on favourable OCP (Brocato *et al.*, 2012) is predictive of brand love following a sequential attitude formation process from lower to higher order (Oliver, 1999). In other words, OCP predicts customer satisfaction (Brocato *et al.*, 2012), and satisfaction predicts brand love (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Roy *et al.*, 2013).

### *Anxious and avoidant attachment styles*

Since individual attachment style is said to influence consumer-brand relationship (Swaminathan *et al.*, 2009), it is necessary to review the relevant literature regarding attachment styles. According to Bowlby (2008), individual attachment styles refer to individual specific traits, formed since infancy, that determine individual's relationship orientations towards others while interacting with caregivers. Swaminathan *et al.* (2009) state, "The emotional bond that develops between romantic partners is based on the same motivational principles that give rise to the bond between the infant and caregiver" (p. 986) [...] and "That brands have personalities or human characteristics is now well established in the literature" (p. 985). This implies that consumer-brand relationship can be analogous to romantic interpersonal relationship, and individual attachment style dimensions can shape consumer-brand relationship in the same way they shape interpersonal relationships.

There are two broad attachment style dimensions: anxiety and avoidance (Swaminathan *et al.*, 2009). Anxiety orientation reflects low self-esteem, and the degree to which individual perceives that he/she would not be significantly loved by the relationship partner. On the other hand, avoidance orientation denotes high degree of self-reliance, distrust of relationship partner, and a tendency to avoid emotional relationship with the partner. It should be that anxiety and avoidance orientations refer to individual's perception about the nature of his/her relationship with partner. Simultaneously it is found that OCP

measurement scale includes such items as “The other patrons were friendly towards me” (Brocato *et al.*, 2012, p. 7) that capture individual’s perception of his/her relationship with others. Therefore, anxiety and avoidance orientations underlie OCP when “other customers” become an integral part of consumer-brand relationship.

Swaminathan *et al.* (2009) state that anxiety and avoidance orientations represent orthogonal or uncorrelated dimensions. Mende and Bolton (2011) state that “People can score high or low in either or both of these dimensions” (p. 286). This implies that an individual can be oriented towards both the attachment dimensions by varying degrees in relation to a focal object/partner. As anxiety orientation is positively related to consumer-brand emotional attachment (Vlachos *et al.*, 2010), and avoidant style is negatively related to emotional involvement in a relationship (Mende and Bolton, 2011; Swaminathan *et al.*, 2009), it is posited that anxiety and avoidance orientations would be negatively correlated, rather than being orthogonal dimensions. This implies that these dimensions are characteristically very different, but related. Therefore, it is important to examine their distinctive roles in consumer-brand relationship context rather than considering them together. This is unprecedented in the literature as Vlachos *et al.* (2010) tested the moderating roles of anxious attachment style independent of avoidance.

Based on the above literature review, we developed a series of hypotheses underlying the relationships between the concepts reviewed.

### Hypotheses formulation

In a service encounter context, customer-to-customer interaction has significant impact upon customer satisfaction (Grove and Fisk, 1997; Wu, 2007). Brocato *et al.* (2012) state, “The effects of some aspects of other customers influence on increasing customer satisfaction” (p. 1). Here, customer satisfaction refers to overall satisfaction towards the services provided by a service firm/brand, and OCP would act as an important experiential cue predicting such satisfaction. Prior research supports that different brand experiential cues impact customer’s overall satisfaction towards brand (Brakus *et al.*, 2009). Hence, we hypothesise:

*H1.* Favourable OCP has a direct and positive impact on overall hotel brand satisfaction.

Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) state that a percentage of satisfied customers end up loving the brand. In other words, satisfaction is a pre-requisite for brand love to occur (Roy *et al.*, 2013). Hence, we hypothesise:

*H2.* Overall hotel brand satisfaction has a direct and positive impact on hotel brand love.

*H1* states that OCP directly predicts brand satisfaction. *H2* states that brand satisfaction directly predicts brand love. Therefore, satisfaction mediates OCP-brand love relationship:

*H3.* Satisfaction with hotel brand mediates the relationship between favourable OCP and hotel brand love.

According to Oliver (1980), customer satisfaction is the result of a comparison between expected and actual consumption experiences. Individual’s pre-consumption expectation level can be influenced by individual personality traits (Oliver, 1980, 1999) such as individual attachment style which is posited as a personality trait that moderates the effects of brand perception on consumer response (Swaminathan *et al.*, 2009). Vlachos *et al.* (2010) demonstrated that “consumer-firm emotional attachment is more important in building loyalty in consumers who score high on interpersonal anxiety levels” (p. 1491). Therefore, it can be argued that attachment anxiety can very well moderate the relationships between OCP and brand satisfaction.

Anxious attachment style is “characterized by an individual’s belief that he or she is not worthy of love” (Swaminathan *et al.*, 2009, p. 986) from the relationship partner point of view

(i.e. hotel brand in this study). Therefore, highly anxious individuals tend to seek more approval from their relationship partner (Mende and Bolton, 2011). Due to such a self-inferiority feeling and approval seeking tendency, individuals scoring high on anxious attachment style are expected to exhibit low pre-consumption expectation level from the brand compared to those who score low on anxious attachment style. Therefore, highly anxious individual's post-consumption satisfaction is expected to be higher compared to those who score low on anxious attachment style after exposure to the same experiential cues in a service encounter, i.e., OCP. This is justified because satisfaction is the result of the perceived gap between actual and pre-consumption expectation level (Oliver, 1980), and a low pre-consumption expectation level increases this perceived gap. For example, a highly anxious customer who *a priori* expects to be negatively perceived by other customers present in a service encounter will be more highly satisfied if he/she is treated more favourably by other customers. In contrast, an individual who scores low on anxious attachment style will not be as highly satisfied under the same circumstances because his/her pre-consumption expectation level is comparatively higher. In other words, it is easier to satisfy a highly anxious customer by a service firm compared to a less anxious customer, given that the cues from other customers remain the same. Hence, anxious attachment style is expected to positively moderate the effect of favourable OCP on satisfaction. Therefore, we hypothesise:

*H4.* Attachment anxiety positively moderates the relationship between OCP and satisfaction.

Swaminathan *et al.* (2009) state "Avoidant individuals are reluctant to rely on others as they tend to maintain a greater degree of emotional distance in their interpersonal relationships. In other words, individuals with avoidant style tend to have relationships characterized by lower levels of emotional involvement, trust, and satisfaction" (p. 987). As such, a highly avoidant individual "strives for emotional and cognitive distance from partners" (Mende and Bolton, 2011, p. 286). Therefore, highly avoidant individuals are less likely to develop satisfaction, and emotional love towards a brand. They tend to distrust others, and largely rely on himself/herself (Mikulincer and Shaver, 2003). Given this lack of trust, highly avoidant individuals are less likely to rely much on the cues received from other customers present in a service encounter, it can be inferred that attachment avoidance negatively moderates the impact of OCP on satisfaction. For example, a highly avoidant individual tends to be sceptical of favourable treatment received from other customers thinking such treatment is largely deceptive or fake. Such perception inhibits satisfaction formation. Therefore, we hypothesise:

*H5.* Attachment avoidance style negatively moderates the relationship between OCP and satisfaction.

As indicated previously (see *H4* discussion) anxiety orientation positively moderates the impact of OCP on satisfaction. This indicates a pattern of positively moderated mediation of satisfaction by anxiety. Hence, we hypothesise:

*H6a.* Attachment anxiety positively moderates the mediation of satisfaction in OCP-brand love relationship.

Similarly, as discussed in formulating *H5*, effect of OCP on satisfaction is negatively moderated by attachment avoidance causing a negatively moderated mediation of satisfaction by avoidance. Therefore, we hypothesise:

*H6b.* Attachment avoidance negatively moderates the mediation of satisfaction in OCP-brand love relationship.

The hypothesised relationships discussed above are depicted in Figure 1 below where each single-headed arrow flows from an antecedent to a respective outcome. Arrow from a

moderator points to the path being moderated. The positive and negative signs adjacent to respective paths denote positive and negative natures of respective relationships.

The above hypotheses formulated were tested by conducting a series of data analyses described below.

## Research methodology

### Data collection

We collected data in collaboration with a large five-star hotel chain and four three-star independent hotels in India. The five-star hotel chain has seven properties in different tourist locations across the country each with different service portfolios such as luxury full service hotels, resorts, and palaces. The four three-star independent hotels are located across four different tourist locations in India. Inclusion of five-star hotels and three-star hotels with comparatively modest quality standards was deliberate on the part of the researchers in order to increase the variation in the data for the purpose of generalisation.

The study questionnaire was administered in the restaurants of selected hotels immediately after the customers finished their meals. The objective was to collect data from the respondents when the service experience was fresh on their mind and to minimise information loss due to memory lapse. Prior approval for data collection was obtained from the respective hotel administration by paying an agreed-upon fee. The researchers administered the questionnaire along with the meal tickets after the respondents finished breakfast, lunch or dinner. When customers were dining with other family members, only adult (aged above 18 years) members were requested to participate in the survey and received 20 per cent off their meal tickets for completing the questionnaire.

Respondents were instructed to respond to the survey questions in reference to their current restaurant service experience, other customers present at the time, and the particular hotel brand. The questionnaire also included an initial screening question requesting each respondent to state the approximate number of times he/she used the same hotel services in the last 12 months. Only completed questionnaires by respondents who had used a given hotel services more than once in the past 12 months were considered valid for analysis. The rationale for this screening was twofold. First, previous service encounter with a brand is necessary for developing satisfaction expectation (Oliver, 1980) against which the current experience can be compared. Second, the scale to measure the anxious attachment style used in this study contains certain items that are in reference to respondent's prior experiences with the brand. A total of 932 respondents were contacted over a period of six months. To maintain data normality, we removed the outliers list-wise. The incomplete questionnaires were discarded as well. This resulted in 510 valid responses for analysis.



**Figure 1.**  
Model for OCP-  
Satisfaction brand  
love relationships &  
attachment style  
dimensions as  
moderators



### *Measurement scales*

The scales used to measure the constructs in our conceptual framework were adapted from the existing literature with minor wording modifications to suit the hotel services encounter. The scales measuring OCP dimensions were adapted from Brocato *et al.* (2012) and consisted of three dimensions: perceived similarity (five items), appearances (four items) and behaviours (four items). Overall customer satisfaction measures (five items) were adapted from Brakus *et al.* (2009) and included both cognitive (i.e. I am satisfied with the brand and its performance) and affective (i.e. I feel bad about my decision to get this brand) items. Brand love was measured using Carroll and Ahuvia's (2006) ten-item scale. Scales measuring attachment anxiety (four items) and avoidance (four items) were adapted from Mende and Bolton (2011). Majority of the original satisfaction and avoidance scales were reverse worded. Since excessive use of reverse-worded items might negatively impact convergence and concurrent validities of a scale (Zhang *et al.*, 2015), we converted few originally reverse-worded items into direct-worded keeping the meanings intact. All constructs were measured using seven-point Likert type scales with 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree". All the scales were reflective. Total number of scale items was 36. Table I shows all the measurement items measuring respective constructs.

### **Sample profile**

In the first stage of the analysis we examined the descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations of the constructs) to develop a sample profile. Of the total 510 respondents, 265 were males, the age range was 18-62 and the average age was 34. The annual gross family income range of the sample was INR 963452-3143256. The average gross annual family income of the sample was INR 1723425.

### **Analysis**

#### *Validation of the measurement model*

Validating the measurement model involved computing the inter-factor correlations, average variance extracted (AVE) estimates, composite reliability (CR) and the measurement model fit for all study constructs. Means and standard deviations of constructs were computed by taking the average of all item scores for each construct per respondent. Inter-construct correlations were computed to see whether the study constructs are interrelated as hypothesised. Next, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed using LISREL 8.72 using covariance matrices to test the measurement model. All latent constructs were allowed to correlate with each other in the measurement model. AVE and CR values for each construct were computed based on the standardized CFA loadings obtained. The mean, standard deviation, CR, and AVE values are presented in Table II. All CR values were satisfactorily high (> 0.82) as per Hair *et al.* (2009). All inter-factor correlations were significant at 1 and 5 percent levels. This is sufficient proof of convergent and discriminant validities (Thomson *et al.*, 2005). Anxiety and avoidance are negatively correlated as conceptualised.

The measurement model achieved a good fit. CMIN/degrees of freedom, CFI and NFI values were 1.27, 0.97 and 0.90, respectively. The standardized CFA path loadings of different scale items on their respective latent factors ranged between 0.68 and 0.89 indicating convergent validity of all latent factors, as all standardized loading estimates were greater than 0.50 (Hair *et al.*, 2009). The scale items along with their standardized CFA path loadings on respective latent constructs and corresponding *t*-values are shown in Table I. AVE estimates for all constructs are shown as the diagonal values in the inter-factor correlation matrix in Table II. All AVE estimates were satisfactorily high and greater than 0.50 supporting the convergent validity of each construct (Hair *et al.*, 2009).

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Factors	Items	CFA item loadings	t-values
Hotel brand love	This is a wonderful hotel brand	0.72**	3.199
	This hotel makes me feel good	0.79*	4.124
	This hotel is totally awesome	0.74**	3.062
	I have neutral feelings about this hotel*	0.89**	5.204
	This hotel makes me very happy	0.71**	3.973
	I love this hotel	0.82*	4.753
	I have no particular feeling about this hotel*	0.76**	4.903
	This hotel is a pure delight	0.78**	5.217
	I am passionate about this hotel	0.81**	7.024
OCP appearance	I am very attached to this hotel	0.75**	3.061
	I like the appearances of other patrons present here	0.72**	5.853
	The other patrons are dressed appropriately	0.69**	7.451
OCP behaviour	The other patrons are looking nice	0.79*	3.902
	The other patrons look like they are my type of people	0.78**	4.064
	The behaviours of the other customers are appropriate for the setting	0.73*	3.526
	The other patrons are seeming to be friendly towards me	0.77**	4.746
OCP similarity	The other patrons are behaving well	0.74**	7.628
	The other patrons' behaviours are pleasant	0.69**	6.831
	I can identify with the other patrons present in this facility	0.72**	5.046
	I think that I am similar to the other patrons present in this facility	0.68**	4.926
	The other patrons are like me	0.71**	6.148
Satisfaction	The other patrons come from a similar background to myself	0.76**	4.716
	I fit right in with the other patrons	0.72**	5.710
	I am satisfied with this hotel and the experiences provided by it	0.81**	4.295
	If I come to this place again, I would choose a different hotel for staying and eating out in future*	0.73**	4.348
	My choice to come to this hotel has been a wise one	0.71**	5.824
Anxiety	I am feeling good about my decision to come to this hotel	0.75*	6.925
	I am not happy with the services provided by this hotel*	0.82**	3.761
	I worry about being abandoned by this hotel as a customer	0.76**	4.619
	I feel that this hotel may change how it will treat me for no apparent reason	0.74**	5.817
	I worry that this hotel may start disliking me as a customer	0.78*	6.294
Avoidance	I worry that this hotel may not care about me as much as I care about this hotel	0.72**	4.716
	It is a comfortable feeling to me to enjoy the services provided by this hotel*	0.75**	4.853
	I am not comfortable having a close relationship with this hotel	0.73*	7.218
	It is not easy for me to feel warm and friendly towards this hotel	0.77*	9.638
	I feel that I can turn to this hotel in the times of need*	0.74**	3.971

**Table I.**  
Construct items and standardized CFA path loadings between construct and respective items

**Notes:** In the second column, (\*) marked items were reverse-coded. In the third column, (\*) and (\*\*) marks denote that path values are significant at 1 and 5 per cent levels, respectively

An analysis of Table II would show that both AVE values of any two constructs are greater than the squared inter-correlation estimate between the pair of constructs which establishes the discriminant validity of the study constructs (Hair *et al.*, 2009).

### Test of hypotheses

To test the hypotheses of the study, all item scores were mean-centred to avoid multicollinearity problem (Aiken *et al.*, 1991). Then average score across items were calculated for each construct and for each respondent, as SPSS based process macro does not support multi-item scale (Hayes, 2013; Preacher *et al.*, 2007). These average scores were

Constructs	Composite reliability	Mean	SD	Inter-factor correlation matrix							
				BL	OCPA	OCPB	OCP S	CS	AX	AV	
BL	0.93	4.52	1.37	<i>0.60</i>							
OCP A	0.83	5.23	0.95	0.53**	<i>0.55</i>						
OCP B	0.82	4.61	0.72	0.45**	0.41**	<i>0.53</i>					
OCP S	0.84	6.27	1.13	0.36**	0.37**	0.46**	<i>0.51</i>				
CS	0.87	5.35	1.41	0.48**	0.42**	0.39**	0.43**	<i>0.58</i>			
AX	0.83	4.07	0.95	0.42**	0.44**	0.41**	0.47**	0.49**	<i>0.56</i>		
AV	0.83	4.73	1.62	-0.49*	-0.43*	-0.49*	-0.44*	-0.41*	-0.47*	<i>0.55</i>	

**Table II.** Descriptive statistics, composite reliability, AVE and inter-factor correlation estimates

**Notes:** The abbreviated forms for the construct names are used in the correlation matrix. The abbreviated forms for brand love, OCP appearance, OCP behaviour, OCP similarity, customer satisfaction, anxiety and avoidance are BL, OCPA, OCPB, OCP S, CS, AX and AV, respectively. The italic diagonal values in the inter-factor correlation matrix represent the AVE estimates of respective constructs. In case of correlation estimates, (\*\*) and (\*) marks denote that a value is significant at 1 and 5 per cent levels, respectively

then used as inputs into the final analyses. All hypothesised relationships depicted in Figure 1 were tested using Hayes (2013) Process macro into SPSS 22. The process macro runs ordinary least square regressions simultaneously involving moderators and mediator. Our model coincides with model 9 in the template provided by Hayes (2013). The template can be found at: <http://afhayes.com/public/templates.pdf>. Model 9 of Haye's (2013) template is a moderated mediation model that can estimate models involving one dependent variable, one explanatory variable, one mediator and two moderators each impacting the side of the mediation paths attached to explanatory variable.

The moderated mediation analysis was performed by using 5,000 bootstrapped samples. Bootstrapping involves multiple re-sampling of the data set non-parametrically for the assessment of both indirect effects and conditional indirect effects without making any assumption about the shape of the sampling distribution (Preacher and Hayes, 2004; Shrout and Bolger, 2002). This method was found to be appropriate, as prior research used this test of indirect effects along with bootstrapping suggested by Preacher and Hayes (2008) to examine the perceptual discriminations in hospitality sector (Wen and Madera, 2013).

Separate assessments of all hypothesised relationships for each OCP dimension (similarity, behaviour and appearance) were done. The results are described below.

Model 9 of Haye's (2013) was run three times once for each OCP dimension which generated two regression equations for each OCP dimension. The six estimated regressions are presented in Table III. As shown in Table III, five paths are estimated in the first regression for each OCP dimension: OCP dimension to satisfaction, anxiety to satisfaction, the interaction term of OCP dimension and anxiety to satisfaction, avoidance to satisfaction, and the interaction term of OCP dimension and avoidance to satisfaction. In the second regression for each OCP dimension, two paths are estimated: satisfaction to brand love, and OCP dimension to brand love.

Table III summarises the results of Haye's (2013) process analysis using Model 9. *F*-values of all regressions were significant at 1 percent level. Hence, all regressions achieved good model fit. Table III shows two regressions run for each of the three OCP dimensions. The first regression results for any OCP dimension show: significant positive impact of OCP dimension on satisfaction, significant positive impact of the interaction term of OCP dimension and anxiety on satisfaction, and significant negative impact of the interaction term of OCP dimension and avoidance on satisfaction. All other relations in the first regression for each OCP dimension were not significant. The first regression results thus support that OCP is the direct predictor of satisfaction, and this OCP-satisfaction relationship is positively and negatively moderated by anxiety and avoidance, respectively.

Consumer-  
brand  
relationships

OCP dimension	Model No. <sup>#</sup>	Paths estimated	Standardized coefficient	<i>t</i> -value	<i>F</i> -value	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>
OCP similarity (OCPS)	9	OCPS → CS	0.25**	6.32	194.37**	0.74
		AX → CS	0.13	0.82		
		OCPS × AX → CS	0.65**	8.96		
		AV → CS	-0.04	1.05		
		OCPS × AV → CS	-0.50**	6.01		
OCP behaviour (OCPB)	9	CS → BL	0.47**	6.82	2330.96**	0.88
		OCPS → BL	0.03	1.63		
		OCPB → CS	0.68**	10.8		
OCP appearance (OCPA)	9	AX → CS	0.18	0.42	2610.93**	0.89
		OCPB × AX → CS	0.53**	5.05		
		AV → CS	-0.19	0.36		
		OCPB × AV → CS	-0.47**	6.95		
		CS → BL	0.65**	8.34		
OCP appearance (OCPA)	9	OCPB → BL	0.07	0.72	206.35**	0.74
		OCPA → CS	0.71**	7.71		
		AXe → CS	0.06	1.07		
		OCPA × AXe → CS	0.20**	6.32		
		AV → CS	-0.08	0.34		
		OCPA × AV → CS	-0.20**	7.32		
		CS → BL	0.73**	10.81		
OCPA → BL	0.07	0.78				

**Notes:** The abbreviated forms for the construct names are used in the correlation matrix. The abbreviated forms for brand love, OCP appearance, OCP behaviour, OCP similarity, customer satisfaction, anxiety and avoidance are BL, OCPA, OCPB, OCPS, CS, AX and AV, respectively. In path column, arrow flows from explanatory to dependent construct. \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; <sup>#</sup>Model No. 75 as per Hayes' (2013) template: <http://afhayes.com/public/templates.pdf>

**Table III.**  
Model results with  
Attachment Anxiety  
and Attachment  
Avoidance as  
moderators

The second regression results for any OCP dimension show that the direct impact of satisfaction on love is positive and significant, but the direct impact of any OCP dimension on love is not significant. This supports the full mediation of OCP-brand love relationship by satisfaction.

Hence, all hypotheses were fully supported. The findings show that the effects of all OCP dimensions on satisfaction are statistically significant; anxiety and avoidance act as positive and negative moderators, respectively shaping the mediation of satisfaction.

### Conditional process analysis

The conditional process analysis (Hayes, 2013; Model 9) results support *H6a* by showing that OCP has a positive indirect effect on brand love through the mediation of satisfaction among customers who possess higher levels of attachment anxiety. The examination of the results supports that the product terms are (similarity × attachment anxiety: estimate = 0.11; boot SE = 0.06; 95% CI = 0.00 to 0.23; appearance × attachment anxiety: estimate = 0.13; boot SE = 0.05; 95% CI = 0.032 to 0.21; behaviour × attachment anxiety: estimate = 0.15; boot SE = 0.07; 95% CI = 0.02 to 0.28) statistically significant at higher level of anxiety, while all the product terms are not statistically different from zero at lower levels of attachment anxiety (similarity × attachment anxiety: estimate = -0.17; boot SE = 0.11; 95% CI = -0.38 to 0.04; appearance × attachment anxiety: estimate = -0.10; boot SE = 0.08; 95% CI = -0.25 to 0.05; behaviour × attachment anxiety: estimate = -0.11; boot SE = 0.10; 95% CI = -0.30 to 0.08). In addition, the index of moderated mediation tests examining the difference between the conditional indirect effects of all the three dimensions of OCP achieved statistical significance (similarity: estimate = 0.31; boot SE = 0.15; 95% CI = 0.02 to 0.60; appearance: estimate = 0.34;

boot SE = 0.13; 95% CI = 0.08 to 0.59; behaviour: estimate = 0.37; boot SE = 0.09; 95% CI = 0.19 to 0.54). This supports that the two conditional indirect effects estimated at different levels of attachment anxiety (high vs low) were statistically different from each other for all the three dimensions of OCP. More precisely, the positive moderated mediation index signifies that the effect of OCP dimensions on brand love through customer satisfaction increased with the increasing level of attachment anxiety. This implies that the indirect effect of OCP is positively moderated by attachment anxiety.

Supporting *H6b*, the conditional analysis results imply that OCP has a negative indirect effect on brand love through satisfaction among customers with higher levels (as opposed to lower levels) of attachment avoidance. The results support that the product terms are statistically significant both at a higher level of attachment avoidance (similarity  $\times$  attachment avoidance: estimate = -0.21; boot SE = 0.06; 95% CI = -0.33 to -0.09; appearance  $\times$  attachment avoidance: estimate = -0.18; boot SE = 0.03; 95% CI = -0.23 to -0.12; behaviour  $\times$  attachment avoidance: estimate = -0.28; boot SE = 0.09; 95% CI = -0.45 to -0.10), and at a lower levels of attachment avoidance (similarity  $\times$  attachment avoidance: estimate = -0.08; boot SE = 0.02; 95% CI = -0.12 to -0.04; appearance  $\times$  attachment avoidance: estimate = -0.06; boot SE = 0.02; 95% CI = -0.09 to -0.02; behaviour  $\times$  attachment avoidance: estimate = -0.14; boot SE = 0.06; 95% CI = -0.25 to -0.02). In addition, the index of moderated mediation tests examining the difference between the conditional indirect effects achieved statistical significance for all the three dimensions of OCP (similarly: estimate = -0.42; boot SE = 0.15; 95% CI = -0.72 to -0.12; appearance: estimate = -0.38; boot SE = 0.11; 95% CI = -0.59 to -0.16; behaviour: estimate = -0.48; boot SE = 0.17; 95% CI = -0.81 to -0.14). This supports that the two conditional indirect effects estimated at different levels of attachment avoidance (high vs low) were statistically different from each other. More precisely, the negative moderated mediation index signifies that the effect of OCP on brand love through customer satisfaction increased with decreasing levels of attachment avoidance.

## Discussion

### *Theoretical contributions*

Customer's emotional reaction to service encounters is an area that calls for further research (Brunner-Sperdin *et al.*, 2012). This research responds to this call by investigating the moderated mediation of OCP-satisfaction-emotional brand love relationships by attachment style dimensions in hotel services context. Brocato *et al.* (2012) invite future research investigating the impact of OCP based on varying individual difference parameters. This aspect is also addressed in this study by analysing the moderating effects of individual attachment style dimensions on OCP-satisfaction-love relationships.

Majority of prior research conceptualise that anxiety and avoidance attachment styles are not mutually exclusive (Swaminathan *et al.*, 2009; Mende and Bolton, 2011). This study deviates from this view and examines the distinct roles of anxiety and avoidance in shaping OCP-satisfaction-hotel brand love relationships for the first time in service research domain. As anxiety and avoidance have distinct measurement scales (Mende and Bolton, 2011), it is theoretically valid to conceptualise them distinctively by focussing on their distinct roles.

Though prior research investigated the link between customer's attachment styles and satisfaction (e.g. Swaminathan *et al.*, 2009; Mende and Bolton, 2011), the distinctive roles of individual's attachment style dimensions in influencing the impact of OCP on brand love has not been examined in the extant literature. Given brand love is an important facet of customer-brand relationship quality (Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen, 2010), the present study fills this neglected area of research. Our findings are partially in contrast to previous research findings (Swaminathan *et al.*, 2009; Mende and Bolton, 2011), particularly with regard to anxious attachment style. Our findings show that pre-occupied attachment style

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(i.e. high anxiety and low avoidance combination) (Swaminathan *et al.*, 2009) is a better moderator of the relationship between OCP and brand love via the mediation of satisfaction compared with secure attachment style (i.e. low anxiety and low avoidance combination). This is a very important finding of our study and is in line with Oliver's (1980) expectancy disconfirmation theory. The positive correlation between anxiety and emotional brand relationship is also supported by Vlachos *et al.* (2010). That is why our inter-factor correlation matrix (Table II) shows positive correlations between anxiety, satisfaction and love. However, our study results support Swaminathan *et al.* (2009) regarding the relationships between avoidance attachment style, satisfaction and love in terms of their negative associations. Our correlation table shows (Table II) significant negative correlation between anxiety and avoidance which is also in contrast to Mende and Bolton's (2011) conceptualization of orthogonal relationship between anxiety and avoidance.

### *Managerial implications*

The findings of this research have significant marketing implications for firms in the hospitality industries interested in building a loving customer-brand relationship "through managing customer-related social influences that impact customers" (Brocato *et al.*, 2012, p. 13). This research confirms the conclusions reached by Brocato *et al.* (2012) that OCP is an integral part of the perceived service quality in shaping the overall customer experience. In other words, focal customer's perception about other customers simultaneously present in a service encounters significantly influences focal customer's satisfaction and brand love. Furthermore, we found that OCP-satisfaction relationship is moderated by focal customer's anxiety and avoidance attachment style orientations. While, high anxiety positively moderates OCP-satisfaction response hierarchy, high avoidance style negatively moderates this response hierarchy. Consumers' approach intention (Brocato *et al.*, 2012), i.e., satisfaction towards the brand can be enhanced by pursuing consumers with a pre-occupied (Swaminathan *et al.*, 2009) attachment orientations.

In short, firms in the hospitality industries interested in building a long lasting emotional relationship with their customers are advised to develop a socio-demographic-economic profile of customers who fit the anxious attachment style and allocate a portion of their marketing resources to attract them. Furthermore, customer satisfaction and brand love can be enhanced by managing the "social norms expected by customers for issues such as appropriate dress, or suitable behaviours" (Brocato *et al.*, 2012, p. 13). Front-line employees should be trained in managing such social norms. As argued by Smith and Bolton (2002), "Service providers must be hired and trained for their ability to decode emotional cues. In other words, they must be able to recognize when customers are angry, disappointed, anxious, and so forth" [...] and "If such cues are not evident, service providers must encourage customers to verbalise their emotions so they can be recognized" (p. 19).

### *Limitations and future research directions*

The research presented in this paper is not without its limitations. Future research should be directed to address the limitations of this study in order to enhance the generalisability and theoretical contributions to the services literature. For example, this research is a cross-sectional investigation. A longitudinal panel data based research can provide deeper analytical insights into how OCP can lead to brand love via the moderated mediation of satisfaction by attachment styles over time following a progressive response hierarchy model. This research considered only OCP as a predictor of satisfaction in a hotel restaurant setting, and ignored other hotel services quality dimensions that can also predict hotel satisfaction. Future research should investigate the impacts of such other possible

antecedents of hotel satisfaction along with OCP by extending the proposed model. Using an experimental design to manipulate attachment style dimensions into varying levels and subsequently studying their effects on customer-brand relationship would also be useful to explore the dynamics of the progressive relationship stages.

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