

Attendee-based brand equity

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Abstract

In designing the marketing and management of association meetings, associations are increasingly concerned with attendee behaviors. This study investigated CHRIE conference attendee behaviors from the perspective of brand equity defined as “the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand” [Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Marketing*, 57(1), 1–22]. Structural equation analyses indicated that professional education, staff service, site selection, and social networking were positively related to brand satisfaction, whereas brand awareness was negatively associated with it. Positive relationships existed on each path for brand satisfaction–UEBV (updated expectation of brand value), UEBV–brand trust, brand satisfaction–brand trust, and brand trust–attitudinal brand loyalty. Professional education was the strongest brand association to predict brand satisfaction, and UEBV served as a partial mediator on the brand satisfaction–brand trust path. The findings suggested significant implications for practitioners and academics.

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1. Introduction

Annual meetings of associations are highly profitable to the hospitality and tourism industry because of the large number of delegates they bring to conference destinations. Association meetings represent the most important segment of the convention industry, accounting for 71% of direct expenditures in the convention industry (Alkjaer, 1993), 78% of all attendees, and 80% of all conventions and meetings (Edelstein & Benini, 1994). Recently, more attention has been focused upon managing and marketing association meetings because of (1) the growing number of associations competing for attendees (Loveseed, 1993); (2) the high proportion of association revenue derived from annual meetings (about 30.2% of their annual income) (Shure, 2004); (3) the increasing conference expenses borne by association members (Oppermann & Chon, 1997); and (4) participant decision-making as influenced by the perception of meeting destination and participant needs

and finances (Oppermann & Chon, 1997). In hospitality and tourism research, interest has been therefore growing in association meeting attendee behaviors or attendee information processing that can be used to design competitive conference marketing and management strategies.

From the perspective of attendee behaviors, existing convention literature largely focuses on the site selection process (Go & Govers, 1999; Hu & Hiemstra, 1996) and the meeting participation process (Oppermann, 1995; Oppermann & Chon, 1997; Price, 1993; Um & Crompton, 1992). These studies identified criteria and factors of site selection and conceptualized the meeting participation process by examining motivators, facilitators, and inhibitors to convention attendance, which have contributed to managerial and research implications in the convention industry. However, relative to hospitality and tourism literature, convention lags far behind in-depth research. A more robust approach should be used to analyze attendee behaviors.

Conference selection involves high perceived risks arising from intangible attributes (e.g., education and social networking). Such characteristics make it difficult for a

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conference organizer to clarify service attributes and lower perceived risks. A key to success in service marketing is to “tangibilize the intangible” (Berry, 1986, p. 6). An effective way of increasing the tangible nature of a service is to use a brand as an extrinsic cue or an icon. As such, the brand becomes a symbol for customer perceptions of the firm, its products, and its services (Keller, 2003) and a powerful means of creating and sustaining competitive advantage (Aaker, 1997; Aggarwal, 2004; Fournier, 1998). It is also widely recognized that well-branded tradeshows, conferences, or other meetings will develop trust in participants and, thus, ensure committed repeat attendance (PCMA, 2002a).

Brand equity has been used as a barometer of brand strength through the use of its logo, symbol, or name (Farquhar, 1989; Morgan, 2000). Strong brands contribute to enhancing consumer trust of the intangible purchase, tangibilizing the intangible goods, and reducing the perceived risk for the service purchase by assisting customers in visualizing and understanding the intangible aspects of the service product (Berry, 2000). Cultivating strong brands with high equity improves (1) the probability of brand choice, (2) brand performance, (3) cash flow, (4) willingness to pay a premium, (5) marketing productivity, (6) product positioning, and (7) brand knowledge in consumers’ minds (Kapferer, 2004; Keller, 1993; Simon & Sullivan, 1993). A conference with high brand equity would be, therefore, assumed to enhance marketing activities and brand loyalty, thereby maintaining high revenues and competitive positioning in the meeting market.

Despite the well-recognized significance of brand equity concepts in business (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004; Keller, 2003; Yoo & Donthu, 2001) and service literature (Berry, 2000; Kim & Kim, 2004; Prasad & Dev, 2000), no study has yet been published in convention literature to examine conference brand equity. However, several hospitality researchers have conducted brand equity research in the hotel and restaurant industry. For example, Kim and Kim (2004) investigated brand equity of fast food restaurants using four dimensions: brand loyalty, brand awareness, brand image, and perceived quality. Prasad and Dev (2000) examined what constitutes brand equity in the hotel industry through brand awareness and a brand performance index. Brand equity research provides a more detailed and comprehensive picture of consumer behavior because it spans various brand factors, including brand awareness, brand associations, brand image, brand trust, brand personality, and brand loyalty (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1993; Farquhar, 1989; Yoo & Donthu, 2001).

Conference brand equity from the perspective of attendees (attendee-based brand equity) is expected to capture a richer, more detailed portrait of attendee consumption experiences and paths to future intentions than the extant literature. Sampling CHRIE members who had previously attended the annual CHRIE conference, this study examined attendee behaviors from the concept of attendee-based brand equity. Specifically, the purposes of

the study are (1) to identify key brand associations in brand knowledge and (2) to investigate attendee behaviors through the flow from brand knowledge (brand associations and brand awareness) to “the differential effect of brand knowledge” (brand satisfaction, updated expectation of brand value (UEBV), brand trust, and attitudinal brand loyalty). Furthermore, this study attempts to provide in-depth research and managerial implications about conference attendee behaviors from which sound conference management and marketing are derived.

2. Literature review

2.1. Definition of brand equity

Several researchers provide subtly different descriptions and definitions of brand equity. Brand equity has been described as (1) “a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name, and symbol, that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm’s customers” (Aaker, 1991, p. 15); (2) “the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand” (Keller, 1993, p. 8); and (3) the power that a brand may command in a market by means of its name, symbol, or logo (Farquhar, 1989). However, for the purpose of study, this study builds on Keller’s (1993) definition of customer-based brand equity.

2.2. Theoretical model

Keller (1993) delineated customer-based brand equity in a detailed manner, conceptualizing it as “the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand” (p. 8). Customer-based brand equity occurs when the consumer is aware of the brand with some favorable, strong, and unique brand associations in memory. The core concept of his model draws on “brand knowledge” comprising two dimensions: brand awareness and brand associations.

Brand awareness consists of both brand recognition and recall (Keller, 1993; Rossiter & Percy, 1987). Brand associations are informational nodes (e.g., tangible and intangible attributes, benefits, and attitude) linked to a brand node (e.g., brand name or logo), providing meaningful information about the brand for consumers (Keller, 1993). Krishnan (1996) argued that associations may be used as a general term to serve as a link between any two nodes, which suggests an association between brand node and other informational nodes in the consumer’s mind.

The associative network model (Anderson, 1983) underlies the mechanism of brand association. According to the associative network model, memory of a concept consists of a network of nodes and links among these nodes. The nodes represent other stored information, including the brand node, and the links denote the strength of

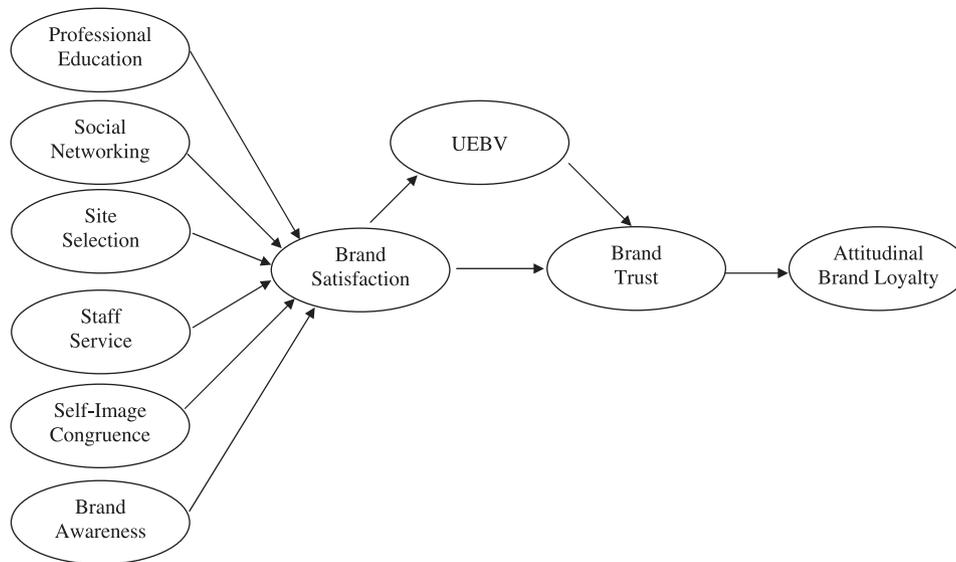


Fig. 1. Conceptual model of conference brand equity. UEBV (updated expectation of brand value).

associations among nodes. In the context of brands, consumers have a brand node linked to various other informational nodes (Keller, 2003).

Keller (1993) suggested that positive brand knowledge favorably transforms customer perceptions, preference, and behavior toward the marketing mix, thereby leading to positive brand attitude, brand choice, and brand loyalty. Such effects of brand knowledge represent a “differential effect” in the definition of customer-based brand equity. This proposition by Keller (1993) has been well supported in the marketing stream where brand equity improves price premium, market share, firm performance, and purchase intention (Baldauf, Cravens, & Binder, 2003; Kim & Kim, 2004; Park & Srinivasan, 1994; Smith & Park, 1992). Drawing on customer-based brand equity (Keller, 1993), this study conceptualized the theoretical model as depicted in Fig. 1 to capture attendee-based brand equity through “the differential effect of brand knowledge.” In this study, “the differential effect of brand knowledge” was manifested by brand satisfaction, UEBV, brand trust, and attitudinal brand loyalty, most of which have been frequently used in the marketing literature to measure customer response to brand marketing. UEBV and brand trust were adopted from the viewpoint of relationship marketing and the expectation mechanism. This allowed the study to postulate the mediating effect of UEBV on brand satisfaction–brand trust path, which awaits theoretical and empirical validation. Further elaboration on the model was presented through explications of constructs.

2.3. Explications of constructs and hypotheses

2.3.1. Brand satisfaction

Satisfaction has been defined in several ways. It is largely conceptualized as (1) “an evaluation rendered that the

consumption experience was at least as good as it was supposed to be” (Hunt, 1977, p. 459); (2) “the consumer’s response to the evaluation of the perceived discrepancy between prior expectations and actual performance of the product as perceived after its consumption” (Tse & Wilton, 1988, p. 204); (3) “an emotional response to the experiences provided by, associated with particular products or services purchased, retail outlets, or even molar patterns of behavior such as shopping and buyer behavior, as well as the overall market place” (Westbrook & Reilly, 1983, p. 256); and (4) “the summary psychological state resulting when the emotion surrounding disconfirmed expectations is coupled with the consumer’s prior feelings about the consumption experience” (Oliver, 1981, p. 27). These definitions reflect overall positive affect and a focal buyer’s overall contentment with the relationship with an exchange party.

In this paper, the definition of overall (cumulative) satisfaction was used: “an overall evaluation based on the total purchase and consumption experience with a good or service over time” (Anderson, Fornell, & Lehmann, 1994, p. 54). Overall satisfaction is characterized by a cumulative construct that has been evaluated by expectations and perceived performance as well as past satisfaction (Johnson, Anderson, & Fornell, 1995).

Overall satisfaction is distinct from transaction-specific satisfaction shaped by instant evaluative judgment of the most recent postconsumption experience (Oliver, 1993). Applied market research is more inclined to base customer satisfaction on the overall level of satisfaction with various facets of a company than episode-specific satisfaction (Czepiel, Rosenberg, & Akerele, 1974). Brand satisfaction in this study was operationalized as overall satisfaction with a brand based on previous conference attendance experiences that incur brand associations and brand awareness in an attendee’s mind.

2.3.2. Brand knowledge: brand awareness and brand associations

Brand knowledge is posited to serve as an invaluable contributor to enhancing marketing efficiency in that the knowledge that has been inextricably intertwined with the brand in a customer's mind significantly influences the consumer information process of a brand (Keller, 1993). Thus, it is worthwhile to examine how the dimensions of brand knowledge affect and predict conference attendee behaviors.

Consumer brand knowledge relates to the cognitive representation of the brand (Peter & Olson, 2001). Consumer brand knowledge can be defined in terms of the personal meaning about a brand stored in consumer memory, that is, all descriptive and evaluative brand associations and brand awareness (Keller, 2003). Brand knowledge consisting of strong brand awareness with positive (favorable, strong, and unique) brand associations favorably affects customer perceptions, preferences, and behaviors toward the marketing mix and consequently overall brand attitude, brand choice, and loyalty (Keller, 1993). This indicates that brand satisfaction is highly distinguished by positive brand knowledge composed of strong brand awareness with positive brand associations. Building on Keller's (1993) model, this study examined conference brand knowledge through brand awareness and associations based on the past experiences of conference attendees.

2.3.3. Brand associations–brand satisfaction link

Aaker (1991, p. 109) contended that brand associations are defined as “anything linked in memory to a brand,” which is consistent with Keller's (1993) line of reasoning that brand associations are other informational nodes linked to the brand node stored in consumer memory. Moreover, Keller (1993) pointed out that the favorability, strength, and uniqueness of brand associations are the dimensions discriminating brand knowledge that play a key role in underlying the differential response to the marketing of the brand, especially in high involvement decision settings. That is, brand equity is supported on a large scale by the associations that consumers attach to a brand (Rio, Vazquez, & Iglesias, 2001).

Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993) categorized brand associations into several types; the common types of brand associations are (1) attributes, (2) customer benefits, (3) usage and user imagery, (4) personality, (5) celebrity/endorser of product/service, and (6) geographic area. Attributes and customer benefits are deeply embedded in brand associations in that they characterize the product/service and provide a reason to buy the brand (Aaker, 1991). Each attribute pairs with the corresponding benefit since it supplies the benefit (Aaker, 1991). Usage and user imagery can be developed from consumer exposure to advertising, contact with brand users, and experience with the brand (Keller, 1993). Usage and user imagery reveal how consumers express life-styles, social positions, and themselves through

products (Aaker, 1991), which in turn arouses brand personality. Brand is often characterized by personality descriptors such as “young,” “tough,” and “glamorous” (Aaker, 1997).

Moreover, Keller (1993) classified celebrity/endorser of product/service and geographic area as secondary brand associations that occur when the brand node is linked to other information not directly related to the product/service in consumer memory. These secondary associations may reflect such global associations as credibility and attitude or more specific attributes and benefits for the product or service (Keller, 1993). The brand strategies associated with geographic area (e.g., Japanese automobiles and Swiss watches) or celebrity (e.g., Tiger Woods with Nike and Catherine Zeta Jones with T-Mobile) can indirectly transfer the information's credibility and reputation to the product/service. In the context of the conference, this study adopted attributes, customer benefits, self-image congruence, and geographic area, each of which was elaborated upon.

This study measured perceived quality of a conference in regards to its attributes and corresponding benefits. Perceived conference quality relates to four brand associations: professional education, social networking, staff service, and site selection (geographic area). Professional education, social networking, and site selection, especially, have all been considered important constructs in the convention literature because they are significantly involved in the conference participation decision-making process (Oppermann, 1995; Oppermann & Chon, 1997; Price, 1993).

Attendees are motivated to keep up with new trends in their fields or to attend a keynote session by a famous speaker. Professional education is a major benefit of attending conferences and thus motivates people to attend conferences (Oppermann & Chon, 1997; Price, 1993). Professional education can be construed from achievement motivation. According to Butler (1999), people's achievement goals affect their achievement-related attitudes, which include task-involvement. Task-involvement is a motivational state in which a person's main goal is to acquire skills and understanding for self-satisfaction (Butler, 1999). To increase satisfaction with a conference, the educational programs that association meetings offer should be designed to satisfy attendees' achievement motivation.

H1. Professional education is positively associated with brand satisfaction.

Attendees believe that conferences provide them with an opportunity to develop new business and professional relationships. According to Madsen (2003), social networking occurs when someone invites you to engage in relations, and a significant key competence in relationships is negotiation of personal meaning. Those who fail to establish this code of interaction may feel isolated and excluded, thereby reducing satisfaction (Brown, 2001). Expanding relationships with other colleagues or professionals serves to motivate participation in a conference

(Oppermann & Chon, 1997; Price, 1993). In addition, it contributes to satisfaction with the conference in that it provides attendees with informal, beneficial information on industry trends, job opportunities, and business events (Price, 1993).

H2. Social networking is positively associated with brand satisfaction.

Geographic area can be interpreted as site selection in the context of conferences; conferences are held in geographic areas. Site selection has been a key in conference management and marketing (Go & Govers, 1999) in that it determines the attendance level and thus the success of the meeting. Influential attributes in site selection have been identified as traveling costs, accessibility, safety/security, climate, and extra conference opportunities (e.g., shopping, sightseeing, recreation, and entertainment) that meeting planners consider in selecting a destination (Oppermann, 1996). Therefore, such attributes associated with conference destination can serve as an extrinsic cue that prospective attendees use as a basis for deciding to participate. Positive experiences with the conference venue contribute to overall satisfaction with the conference.

H3. Site selection is positively associated with brand satisfaction.

Service quality has been widely known to comprise five dimensions (reliability, assurance, responsiveness, empathy, and tangibles) (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). Cronin and Taylor (1992) initially hypothesized that satisfaction affects service quality. However, findings from multi-industry samples showed the reverse relationship. Such a relationship was further confirmed by Spreng and Mackooy (1996), who tested the revised version of model established by Oliver (1993), and by Deruyter, Bloemer, and Peeters (1997), who examined the relationship in the health care setting. In this study, staff service is closely related to all of the service quality dimensions but tangibles, and hence significantly contributes to the formation of attendee satisfaction with the conference.

H4. Staff service is positively associated with brand satisfaction.

User imagery is defined as “the set of human characteristics (traits) associated with the typical user of a brand” (Aaker, 1997, p. 348). Self-image congruence is defined as the congruence between product/brand user image and self-image construed from multiple self-concepts (Sirgy et al., 1997). According to Sirgy (1982), a multi-dimensional self-image is composed of (1) actual self-image—how an individual in fact sees himself/herself; (2) ideal self-image—how an individual would like to see himself/herself; (3) social self-image—how an individual feels others see himself/herself; and (4) ideal social-self image—how an individual would like others to see himself/herself.

This study adopted self-image congruence rather than user imagery for the following reasons. First, self-image congruence is a broader and more powerful brand association encompassing user imagery by looking at both user image and multiple self-images. Self-image congruence

strengthens the brand associated with a particular user image by identifying the user image congruent with target consumers’ self images (Sirgy et al., 1997). Second, considering social networking with other attendees motivates meeting participation, it is noteworthy to examine which dimension in self-image would be the most congruent with the generalized image of conference attendees. This would provide significant implications in (re)positioning a conference in target attendees’ self-images. Finally, relative to self-image congruence, user imagery is not enough to predict consumer behavior until it significantly affects brand personality that predicts trust and loyalty (Fournier, 1994). Self-image congruence, however, has been used to predict satisfaction in a tourist destination (Chon, 1990), a restaurant (Wang, 1990), and a hotel (Back, 2005). Self-image congruence has also been used to predict brand use, brand attitude, and purchase motivation in the marketing literature due to the correspondence arising from the psychological comparison between product/brand user image and consumer’s multiple self-concepts (Sirgy et al., 1997).

Self-image congruence is an important predictor of satisfaction. Back (2005) found out that self-image congruence significantly affects customer satisfaction in the lodging industry, suggesting that hotel guests enhance their satisfaction when perceiving high level of image congruence. In the jewelry market setting, Jamal and Goode (2001) empirically investigated the effects of image congruence on customer satisfaction. Their findings indicated that customers with higher levels of image congruence were more likely to be satisfied with the brand as compared to those with lower levels of image congruence. Self-image congruence–brand satisfaction relationship can be construed from a need for social approval and consistency (Sirgy et al., 1997). Specifically, to obtain social approval, people would be likely to behave in ways congruent with how significant others perceive them. Also, due to the need for social consistency, they would tend to be consistent with how others perceive them. That is, high self-image congruence meets the need for social approval and consistency, thereby leading to satisfaction (Back, 2005). Accordingly, the low gap between self-image and the image of generalized conference attendees would induce satisfaction with the conference by sustaining attendees’ social approval and consistency. That is, high self-image congruence can favorably influence overall evaluation of consumption experience with brand.

H5. Self-image congruence is positively associated with brand satisfaction.

2.3.4. *Brand awareness–brand satisfaction link*

Brand awareness is “the ability for a buyer to recognize or recall that a brand is a member of a certain product category” (Aaker, 1991, p. 61). Similarly, Keller (1993) postulated that brand awareness consists of recognition and recall performance for a brand. Specifically, brand recognition refers to the consumers’ ability to confirm prior

exposure to the brand using a given brand as a cue, while brand recall represents the consumers' ability to retrieve the brand in a given product category (Keller, 1993).

Pitta and Katsanis (1995) indicated that the most important aspect of brand awareness is the initial formation of a brand node in memory. A brand awareness memory node is necessary before any brand associations can be formed. Without an established brand node in memory, building a brand association is impossible. Brand awareness is related to the strength of the brand node as reflected by consumers' ability to identify the brand under different conditions (Rossiter & Percy, 1987), thus increasing the likelihood of the brand being selected as consideration set at the point of purchase (Yoo, Donthu, & Lee, 2000).

The reverse relationship is also viable. Brand satisfaction can affect brand awareness in the sense that consumers satisfied with a provider may easily recall the name of the provider (Pappu & Quester, 2006). However, because this study was founded on brand knowledge (brand associations and brand awareness) that impacts customer reactions (satisfaction, trust, and loyalty) to brand marketing, it is confined to the path from brand awareness to brand satisfaction.

The positive relationship of brand awareness with brand satisfaction can be derived from brand familiarity and the effect of recall on attitude. Brand awareness enhances brand familiarity as customers accrue direct or indirect brand experiences, such as exposure to brand advertisements and usage of the brand (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987; Kent & Allen, 1994). It should also be noted that awareness and familiarity have been used interchangeably in previous literature (Baker, Hutchinson, Moore, & Nedungadi, 1986). Increasing brand familiarity may create a better knowledge structure in a consumer's mind (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987; Campbell & Keller, 2003) and reinforce confidence about that brand (Laroche, Kim, & Zhou, 1996), thereby leading to positive brand evaluation (Sen & Johnson, 1997) and brand equity (MacKay, 2001). Thus, this study speculated that brand awareness can generate brand satisfaction through brand familiarity.

An empirical study by Chattopadhyay and Alba (1988) concluded that recall is a significant predictor of an attitude and correlates with attitude abstractions. Some researchers viewed satisfaction as an attitude: "It may be more parsimonious to consider satisfaction measures as post-consumption attitude measures" (LaTour & Peat, 1979, p. 434) and "Consumer satisfaction is an attitude in the sense that it is an evaluative orientation which can be measured" (Czepiel & Rosenberg, 1977, p. 93). However, other studies suggested that attitude is a broader construct than satisfaction. According to Oliver (1981), satisfaction is progressively melted into an overall attitude toward a product or service. Bolton and Drew (1991) also posited that satisfaction mediates the path from prior to post-consumption attitudes, suggesting that satisfaction influences post-purchase attitude. Although researchers have

different views about the satisfaction–attitude relationship, they suggest that strong brand awareness positively affects brand satisfaction to shape favorable attitude.

The proposed path is also supported by previous studies in the hospitality setting, particularly in the lodging (Kim, Kim, & An, 2003) and quick service restaurants (Kim & Kim, 2004). Authors showed that brand awareness is positively related to hotel financial performance and restaurant brand equity. This indirectly implies that strong brand recall and recognition are desirable strategic outcomes of marketing efforts (Robertson, 1987), which positively affect overall evaluation of the consumption experience with brand by rapidly recalling brand benefits.

H6. Brand awareness is positively associated with brand satisfaction.

2.3.5. *Brand satisfaction–brand trust link*

Moorman, Zaltman, and Deshpande (1992, p. 315) defined trust as "a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence." Another definition of trust is that it is a "generalized expectancy" of how an exchange partner will perform in the future (Anderson & Narus, 1990; Moorman et al., 1992). A "generalized expectancy" is elicited both from a type of cultural environment of how firms are expected to perform and from encounters within the relationship (Sabel, 1993).

These definitions embrace two general streams of trust in the literature (Dwyer & Lagace, 1986). First, considerable research in marketing regards trust as a belief, or expectation about an exchange partner's trustworthiness attributed to the partner's expertise and reliability (Anderson & Weitz, 1990; Schurr & Ozanne, 1985).

Second, trust has been treated as a behavioral intention that signifies a reliance on a partner and imposes susceptibility and uncertainty on the part of the trustor (Coleman, 1990; Schlenker, Helm, & Tedeschi, 1973). This perspective implies that, without susceptibility, trust is not needed because results are trivial to the trustor. It also suggests that uncertainty is an essential part of trust because trust would not be required if the trustor could exercise full control or knowledge over an exchange partner's actions (Coleman, 1990).

Therefore, the literature of trust indicates that trusted service providers are dependable and relied on with a "generalized expectancy" of delivering what they promise. In consonance with the definitions, this study slightly modifies Chaudhuri and Holbrook's (2001) definition and refers to brand trust as the confidence of average attendees in the reliability and integrity of the brand with a firm expectation that the brand performs its stated function.

The process by which consumers attribute a trust to the brand is founded on their postconsumption experiences with the brand. Trust is affected by various encounters (e.g., advertising, word-of-mouth, usage, satisfaction) with the brand (Keller, 1993; Krishnan, 1996). When attendees are satisfied with a particular conference, they shape the confidence that the conference will deliver what is promised

and see much less perceived risk associated with the conference than unfamiliar conferences. Transforming brand satisfaction into brand trust, however, requires repeatedly positive consumption experiences because a committed relationship between buyer and seller develops over time as they learn each other (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987). That is, the overall postconsumption experience has more effect on trust than other episodic contacts with the brand because it creates feelings that are more self-relevant and associated with certainty (Dwyer et al., 1987; Krishnan, 1996). Specifically, the overall satisfaction induces trust (Ganesan, 1994) by contributing to brand confidence in fulfilling its commercial promise and protecting consumer welfare and interest. Brand satisfaction is thus assumed to be positively associated with brand trust.

H7. Brand satisfaction is positively related to brand trust.

2.3.6. *Indirect link from brand satisfaction to brand trust via UEBV*

Customer satisfaction may not always lead to loyalty. Some studies have found that satisfaction directly affects repurchase, but other studies have shown that satisfaction does not necessarily lead to higher repurchase (Jones & Sasser Jr., 1995; Stewart, 1997). Much attention, therefore, has gone into the study of trust to shed light on such an inconsistent phenomenon. In this study, the construct of UEBV was coined as an exploratory approach in elaborating upon the brand satisfaction–brand trust path.

In addition, this study defined the brand value as the perceived brand benefit relative to its costs, assessed by attendees, of keeping up a relationship with a conference. Sirdeshmukh, Singh, and Sabol (2002, p. 21) defined value as “the consumer’s perception of the benefits (e.g., perceived quality and convenience) minus the costs (e.g., money, time, and efforts) of maintaining an ongoing relationship with a service provider.” This study draws on their definition to operationalize the brand value since the definition reflects a relationship perspective whereby trust is a cornerstone of relationship marketing (Berry, 1996) and commitment or loyalty (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

UEBV can be construed from the mechanism of expectation. An expectation is an “anticipation of future consequences based on prior experience, current circumstances, or other sources of information” (Tryon, 1994, p. 313). An expectation is updated to cumulative or current information during or after satisfaction, the overall evaluation of consumption experience (Oliver, 1997; Yi & La, 2004). The updated expectation becomes a prior expectation used as a standard in judging future consumption experience (Yi, 1990). This loop, moving back and forth between the prior and updated expectation, will be maintained as the learning of satisfaction (consumption experiences) continues to take place.

According to Oliver (1997), customers patronize services with expectations that the services will fulfill their values, desires, and needs. Specifically, the expectation of value,

desire, and need (three expectation components) shapes expectation, and those expectation components are presumed to be adjusted to transactional or cumulative satisfaction. Among three components, this study focused on the expectation of value from two perspectives. First, because value is inferred from satisfaction (Patterson & Spreng, 1997; Strandvik & Liljander, 1994), expectation of brand value is updated to satisfaction. On one hand, value is a cognitive-based construct determined by discrepancy from trade-off of benefit and sacrifice. The formation of value is in much the same way satisfaction is shaped by (dis)confirmation between performance and expectation. On the other hand, satisfaction is an affective response. Value can be perceived from satisfaction in the sense that cognitive process induces affective responses, according to seminal work in the social sciences (Weiner, 1986). Second, value serves as a crucial constituent of relationship marketing (Ravald & Grönroos, 1996) to affect brand trust (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001) by providing more (relational) benefits than sacrifice, which will be more elaborated from UEBV-brand trust path. In summary, the positive effect of brand satisfaction on UEBV rests on the premise that attendees favorably update the expectation of the brand value as they learn new and cumulative information from episodic or cumulative satisfaction.

H8. Brand satisfaction is positively associated with UEBV.

As noted earlier, the definition of brand trust in this study views trust as an expectation about confidence in an exchange partner. The positive effect of UEBV on brand trust builds on the reasoning that attendees’ favorable UEBV firms up the expectation about confidence in a conference through more (relational) benefits, perceived from UEBV, of sustaining an ongoing relationship with the conference. Relational benefits that enhance value (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002) especially contribute to favorable UEBV and hence brand trust by reinforcing the long-term relationship in a reciprocal manner (Gwinner, Gremler, & Bitner, 1998).

Relational benefits are conceptualized as the benefits customers gain from long-term relationships going beyond service performance (Gwinner et al., 1998). Gwinner et al. (1998) postulated that relational benefits consist of social benefits, confidence benefits, economic benefits, and special treatment benefits. Social benefits are represented by feelings of personal recognition, friendship, rapport, familiarity, and social support (Barnes, 1994; Berry, 1995). Confidence benefits suggest feelings of low risk and security. The concepts of confidence and trust may be inextricably intertwined and look similar. The confidence benefit, however, is regarded as a distinct benefit from long-term relationships, especially when customers evaluate service providers alike by quality (Gwinner et al., 1998). Economic benefits could include eligibility for special pricing awarded from long-term relational exchange. Lastly, special treatment benefits are perceived as additional favors or preferential treatment not normally available for

regular customers. The findings of the Gwinner et al. (1998) study showed that customers rated confidence benefits as the most important benefit, followed by social and special treatment benefits.

Similarly, Ravald and Grönroos (1996) posited that critical components of relationship value are safety, credibility, security, and continuity that enhance trust. Trust builds up as attendees feel safety, reliability, and confidence with a conference after a few positive consumption experiences. In conclusion, generalized expectancy of conference performance (brand trust) in the near future is further strengthened through (relational) benefits, as signified by UEBV that is based on cumulative brand satisfaction.

H9. UEBV is positively associated with brand trust.

2.3.7. Brand trust–attitudinal brand loyalty link

Oliver (1997, p. 392) defined brand loyalty as “a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior.” This definition manifests the two different aspects of brand loyalty: behavioral (Bloemer & Odekerken-Schroder, 2002) and attitudinal loyalty (Yang & Peterson, 2004). Behavioral brand loyalty is composed of repeated patronage of the brand while “attitudinal brand loyalty includes a degree of dispositional commitment in terms of some unique value associated with the brand” (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001, p. 82). Attitudinal brand loyalty is assessed by intention of word-of-mouth (Boulding, Kalra, Staelin, & Zeithaml, 1993), repurchase intention (Cronin & Taylor, 1992), and willingness to pay a premium price (Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996).

The findings of the study by Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) indicated that brand trust affects attitudinal brand loyalty. Their study builds on brand commitment in relationship marketing (Fournier, 1998; Gundlach, Achrol, & Mentzer, 1995; Moorman et al., 1992; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Commitment has been defined as “an enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship” (Moorman et al., 1992, p. 316). Moorman et al. (1992) and Morgan and Hunt (1994) found that trust leads to commitment in business-to-business relational exchanges because relationships characterized by trust are so highly valued that parties will want to commit themselves to such relationships (Hrebiniak, 1974). Trust is a major determinant of committed relationships (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). That is, a trusted conference brand would evoke a higher degree of dispositional commitment to the brand (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001), thereby enhancing repeat attendance intention to the brand—attitudinal brand loyalty.

H10. Brand trust is positively associated with attitudinal brand loyalty.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data collection

Using an online survey instrument, this study sampled CHRIE members who had previously attended the annual CHRIE conference. Originally, the survey was electronically distributed to 1249 CHRIE members; this was later reduced to 1094 CHRIE members due to undeliverable emails and partial responses. In the end, 213 members responded to the survey, a response rate of 19.5%. Respondents were mostly doctoral degree holders (67%) and academia occupants (91%). The gender ratio of the respondents was 58% male and 42% female. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modeling (SEM) analyses were used to check construct validity and the goodness-of-fit indices for measurement and structural models and to identify the relationships among constructs.

3.2. Scale development

Based upon previous literature, the instrument included questionnaires to measure all the constructs in the theoretical model. As shown in the appendix, the final version of instrument was elicited through a pilot test designed to enhance construct reliability and validity. Most items were measured on 7-point Likert-type scales, with anchors of 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree.

Building on convention and marketing literature (Oppermann, 1995; Price, 1993; Um & Crompton, 1992; Sirgy, 1982), each brand association had a three to four-item scale. Item scales for the remaining constructs were established from the literature of consumer behavior and marketing (Keller, 1993; Oliver, 1997; Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002; Yi & La, 2004) with two to three measurements.

4. Results

4.1. Measurement model testing

Cronbach’s alpha used to estimate the reliability of multi-item scales for each construct is listed in Table 1: professional education (.85), social networking (.78), site selection (.73), staff service (.96), self-image congruence (.97), brand awareness (.79), brand satisfaction (.95), brand trust (.92), UEBV (.92), and attitudinal brand loyalty (.93). All the alpha coefficients were above the cut-off point of .7 (Nunnally, 1978), indicating an acceptable level of reliability for each construct.

In line with Anderson and Gerbing’s (1988) two-step approach, a CFA was conducted to test a measurement model before testing the structural model. According to the goodness-of-fit indices ($\chi^2 = 814.36$, $df = 389$, $RMSEA = .07$, $CFI = .98$, $NNFI = .97$) from CFA, the measurement model proved parsimonious. Average variance extracted (AVE) was

Table 1
Correlations (squared correlation), reliability, AVE, and mean

	PE	SN	SS	SVC	SI	BA	BS	BTR	UEBV	ABL
PE	1.00									
SN	.58(.34)	1.00								
SS	.38(.14)	.49(.24)	1.00							
SVC	.56(.31)	.43(.18)	.54(.29)	1.00						
SI	.54(.29)	.55(.30)	.35(.12)	.45(.20)	1.00					
BA	.32(.10)	.65(.42)	.37(.14)	.27(.07)	.29(.08)	1.00				
BS	.80(.64)	.60(.36)	.58(.34)	.71(.50)	.52(.27)	.28(.08)	1.00			
BTR	.70(.49)	.53(.28)	.52(.27)	.63(.40)	.46(.21)	.25(.06)	.88(.77)	1.00		
UEBV	.61(.37)	.46(.21)	.45(.20)	.54(.29)	.40(.16)	.21(.04)	.76(.58)	.86(.74)	1.00	
ABL	.53(.28)	.40(.16)	.39(.15)	.47(.22)	.35(.12)	.19(.04)	.67(.45)	.75(.56)	.65(.42)	1.00
Reliability	.85	.78	.73	.96	.97	.79	.95	.92	.92	.93
AVE	.66	.57	.50	.89	.94	.66	.87	.80	.79	.81
Mean	4.23	5.31	5.02	5.07	4.72	6.36	5.06	4.61	4.68	4.90
Std. dev.	1.40	1.23	1.05	1.45	1.33	1.12	1.41	1.48	1.52	1.53

PE (professional education), SN (social networking), SS (site selection), SVC (staff service), SI (self-image congruence), BA (brand awareness), BS (brand satisfaction), BTR (brand trust) UEBV (updated expectation of brand value), ABL (attitudinal brand loyalty). Correlation coefficients are estimates from LISREL. All are significant at .01.

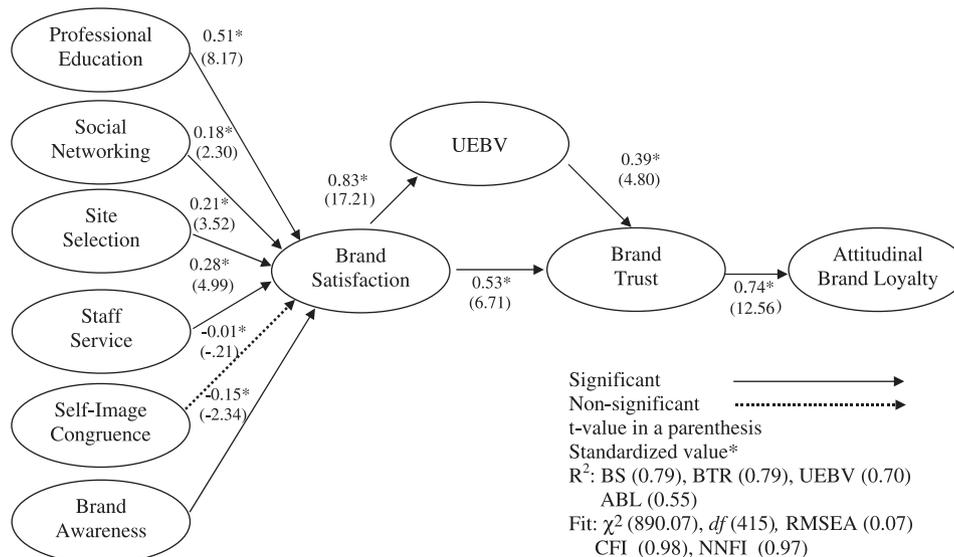


Fig. 2. Structural model testing. BS (brand satisfaction), BTR (brand trust), UEBV (updated expectation of brand value), ABL (attitudinal brand loyalty). Significant at α level of .05.

also employed to assess convergent and discriminant validity. As shown in Table 1, all AVE exceeded .5 with exception of site selection (.5), suggesting convergent validity was satisfied. Also, an AVE for each construct was greater than squared correlation coefficients for corresponding inter-constructs, which confirms discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Moreover, a descriptive analysis was run on each construct to measure their means: professional education (4.23), social networking (5.31), site selection (5.02), staff service (5.07), self-image congruence (4.72), brand awareness (6.36), brand satisfaction (5.06), brand trust (4.61), UEBV (4.68), and attitudinal brand loyalty (4.90). Attendee-based brand equity for the CHRIE conference was somewhat positive, as reflected by means of brand satisfaction, brand trust, UEBV, and attitudinal brand loyalty.

4.2. Structural model testing

SEM was conducted to test relationships among constructs. According to the goodness-of-fit indices ($\chi^2 = 890.07$, *df* = 415, RMSEA = .07, CFI = .98, NNFI = .97), the structural model was parsimonious. As shown in Fig. 2, all the hypotheses were supported except for relationships between self-image congruence and brand satisfaction ($\gamma_{15} = -.01$, *t* = -.21) and brand awareness and brand satisfaction ($\gamma_{16} = -.15$, *t* = -2.34). Additionally, brand awareness showed a negative relationship with brand satisfaction as opposed to H6 although it was significantly associated with brand satisfaction.

In summary, most brand associations positively influence brand satisfaction: professional education

($\gamma_{11} = .51$, $t = 8.17$); social networking ($\gamma_{12} = .18$, $t = 2.30$); site selection ($\gamma_{13} = .21$, $t = 3.52$); and staff service ($\gamma_{14} = .28$, $t = 4.99$). Professional education predicted brand satisfaction the most strongly. In addition, brand satisfaction positively affected both UEBV ($\beta_{21} = .83$, $t = 17.21$) and brand trust ($\beta_{31} = .53$, $t = 6.71$) while UEBV positively influences brand trust ($\beta_{32} = .39$, $t = 4.80$). These findings indicated that UEBV partially mediated the effect of brand satisfaction on brand trust with a significant indirect effect ($\beta_{IE} = .32$, $t = 4.53$) (Holland, 1988; Sobel, 1990). Finally, brand trust was positively related to attitudinal brand loyalty ($\beta_{43} = .74$, $t = 12.56$). The results of hypothesis testing are discussed in the following section.

5. Discussions and conclusions

SEM indicated that professional education, staff service, site selection, and social networking were positively related to brand satisfaction whereas brand awareness was negatively associated with it. Positive relationships existed on each path for brand satisfaction–UEBV, UEBV–brand trust, brand satisfaction–brand trust, and brand trust–attitudinal brand loyalty. Professional education was the strongest brand association to predict brand satisfaction, followed by staff service, site selection, and social networking. Brand satisfaction is a starting point in affecting UEBV, brand trust, and attitudinal brand loyalty, and therefore, these four brand associations are presumed to be major sources of “the differential effect of brand knowledge.” This suggests important implications for conference marketing and management.

First, in designing conference programs, associations should focus on various sessions that meet the needs of different groups rather than general programs for average attendees. The various educational sessions can be further facilitated with a variety of session formats—for example, panel discussions, small group discussions, interactive sessions, and videoconferences. Thus, conference organizers should spend more efforts on educational program design and invitation of outstanding keynote speakers, presenters, and facilitators rather than on lavish entertainment and social events (PCMA, 2005).

Second, meeting planners should provide adequate training and education to enable their staff to effectively interact with attendees and provide prompt service. During on-site operation, many conferences hire volunteers or temporary staff who usually lack experience and knowledge and thus are likely to mishandle conference operations. Providing a well-programmed orientation for volunteers and temporary staff will better prepare them for on-site operations. Conference rehearsals could also be an effective training program for staff, increasing their ability to respond to attendees and manage on-site operation.

Third, the conference venue is a critical factor because favored conference destinations alone can increase atten-

dance levels (Oppermann, 1995). Traveling costs, accessibility, safety, and sightseeing are significant criteria in site selection (Oppermann, 1996) that change attendees’ expectation about the destination. Associations, therefore, should identify and build on attendee perceptions about destination, thereby achieving desired attendance and financial returns for a conference.

Finally, attendees usually get together with acquaintances during conferences. Considering social networking also has positive effects on brand satisfaction, associations should develop strategies designed to encourage social networking among attendees. Social functions are good opportunities for associations to promote social networking. According to PCMA (2002b), Healthcare Convention and Exhibitors Association used a social function to facilitate networking. They designed each breakfast table with a photo of a Canadian icon: pictures of hockey teams, Canadian actors, and so on. Each attendee was to sit at a table matching a miniature photo each attendee receives, thus sitting with people she/he had never met. This was effective way to help attendees network with others and satisfy their attendance motivations.

Self-image congruence turned out to be a negatively non-significant antecedent to brand satisfaction. This fact leads to the presumption of negative suppression whereby one of independent variables has a negative beta weight when it is positively correlated with a dependent variable and other independent variables (Maassen & Bakker, 2001). Self-image congruence was positively correlated with brand satisfaction and other exogenous variables (see Table 1). Since other brand associations were more strongly associated with brand satisfaction, self-image congruence lost its statistical power to them, thereby resulting in the negative non-significant antecedent.

The negative path from brand awareness to brand satisfaction was opposed to the hypothesized relationship in this research. This unique finding, however, may suggest significant implications about attendee behaviors that would be explained using the contrast theory. Contrast theory presumes that customers exaggerate the discrepancy between actual performance and product expectations when the product performance does not satisfy their expectations (Anderson, 1973). Specifically, higher expectations than actual performance lead to lower evaluations, whereas lower expectations than actual performance result in higher evaluations. The level of magnifying disconfirmation between expectation and performance depends on the degree of consumer expectation.

Expectation is formed through preconsumption experience, advertising, word-of-mouth, and product cues (Oliver, 1997). Oliver (1997) also pointed out that brand name strongly affects expectations in consumers’ minds since it denotes customer perceptions of the firm, its products, and its services (Keller, 2003). The brand awareness of CHRIE conference is very high because survey respondents are CHRIE members who have previous experiences of the conference. This study thus

relies on the premise that attendees' high expectations arising from high brand awareness likely exaggerate disconfirmation when conference products and services do not measure up to their expectations. That is, high brand awareness leads to lower evaluations and less satisfaction with the conference, thus shedding light on the negative relationship from brand awareness to brand satisfaction.

UEBV served as a partial mediator on the brand satisfaction–brand trust path, suggesting that brand trust—the firm expectation that the brand will perform its promise—firms up through UEBV as well as through brand satisfaction. Brand value is a significant contributor to brand trust in the sense that customers seek an exchange partner providing maximum value (Kotler, 2000). Customers are also committed to developing and maintaining relationships with the brand because the exchange partner delivers highly valued benefits in the brand (Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). That is, favorable UEBV, derived from high brand satisfaction that is not provided by alternative brands, strengthens the expectation of the brand's integrity and reliability, which, in turn, affects repeat-attendance intention and dispositional commitment to the conference.

Generally, the CHRIE conference showed, to some extent, positive attendee-based brand equity. Four brand associations (professional education, staff service, site selection, and social networking) contributed to “the differential effect of brand knowledge.” A negative path from brand awareness to brand satisfaction indicated that conferences with high brand awareness should consistently deliver high quality service and product to meet attendees' high expectations. Persistently satisfied with key brand associations, attendees are likely to favorably update their expectations of brand value, to build up brand trust, and thus to cultivate loyalty to their conferences.

Retention of high loyal attendees presents invaluable benefits to associations in a situation where associations in similar disciplines compete for potential attendees. Benefits from brand loyal customers lead to declining marketing costs (Aaker, 1991). The reduced marketing costs are attributed to (1) lower cost to maintain loyal customers than to create new ones; (2) positive word-of-mouth by loyal customers; (3) low likelihood of switching to competitors; and (4) less price sensitivity (Reichheld, 1993). These benefits further enhance market share and profitability.

Thus, associations should build their conference marketing and management on brand loyalty by carefully incorporating brand associations attendees consider important. Persistent delivery of high quality education programs, staff training, venue selection, and networking would enable associations to obtain high attendee-based brand equity manifested by high differential effect of brand knowledge. Retention of brand loyal attendees would especially induce deep commitment to the conferences and great resistance to other conferences' marketing

strategies, thereby contributing to high revenue and market share.

Despite the importance of this study, its limitations cannot be denied. With one academic association meeting, the findings may not be generalized to various types of association meetings and may not rigorously reflect “the differential effect of brand knowledge.” “The differential effect of brand knowledge” would be better investigated by comparing multiple conferences to each other in terms of mean scores of brand satisfaction, UEBV, brand trust, and attitudinal brand loyalty. This would provide not only high external validity but also an opportunity to identify what factors cause “the differential effect of brand knowledge”, thereby enriching managerial and research implications. Hence, multiple conferences in similar disciplines are advised for the future study.

Self-image congruence was not significantly associated with brand satisfaction in this study. However, non-significant finding could have resulted from a suppressed effect. Considering the relevance and importance of self-image congruence in the literature review, future studies should reexamine the conceptual model by including self-image congruence without other brand associations.

Appendix A. Measurement scales (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)

Professional education

1. Keynote speakers at the CHRIE conference have generally promoted my attendance.
2. Session programs and topics at the CHRIE conference have generally promoted my attendance.
3. The CHRIE conference has generally provided high quality of education and research trends I need.

Social networking

1. Attending the CHRIE conference has generally developed my professional social networking.
2. Social functions (e.g., banquets and receptions) at the CHRIE conference have generally contributed to expanding relationships with others.
3. Attending the CHRIE conference has been generally helpful in gaining job information.

Site selection

1. The CHRIE conference sites have generally facilitated my attendance.
2. The CHRIE conference sites have generally had safe environments.
3. Generally, the CHRIE conference sites have been highly accessible.
4. The CHRIE conference sites have generally had affordable traveling expenses.

Staff service

1. The CHRIE conference staffs have generally had high service attitude.
2. Generally, the CHRIE conference staffs have been well trained.
3. The CHRIE conference staffs have generally had good knowledge of their jobs.

Self-image congruence

1. The typical attendees at the CHRIE conference have an image similar to how I see myself.
2. The typical attendees at the CHRIE conference have an image similar to how other people see me.
3. The typical attendees at the CHRIE conference have an image similar to how I like to see myself.
4. The typical attendees at the CHRIE conference have an image similar to how I would like other people to see me.

Brand awareness

1. I am aware of the CHRIE conference.
2. Some characteristics of the CHRIE conference come to my mind quickly.

Brand satisfaction

1. Overall, I am satisfied with the CHRIE conference.
2. As a whole, I am happy with the CHRIE conference.
3. I believe I did the right thing to attend the CHRIE conference.

Brand trust

1. I trust the CHRIE conference.
2. I rely on the CHRIE conference.
3. The CHRIE conference has high integrity.

Updated expectation of brand value (UEBV)

1. Having experienced a recent CHRIE conference, I expect the CHRIE conference to be worth the money.
2. Having experienced a recent CHRIE conference, I expect the CHRIE conference to offer benefits relative to the registration fee and traveling expenses I will pay.
3. Having experienced a recent CHRIE conference, I expect the CHRIE conference to provide high value.

Attitudinal brand loyalty

1. I consider myself loyal to the CHRIE conference.
2. I will keep attending the CHRIE conference.
3. I am committed to maintaining a valued relationship with the CHRIE conference.

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