

# Unveiling the dynamics between consumer brand engagement, experience, and relationship quality towards luxury hotel brands: Moderating investigation of brand reputation

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## ABSTRACT

Although insights into *consumer-brand-engagement* (CBE), *experience*, and *relationship quality* are recognized as significant research priorities, **limited remains recognized** about the dynamics of these, and individual/organizational factors, as therefore, investigated in this research. Employing resource-based-view and relationship-marketing-theory, we develop and test a theoretical model that unveils the effect of organizational-related factor (e.g., service environment) and individual-level factor (e.g., consumer-brand-experience) on CBE, which have consequent impact on brand-relationship quality and brand equity with luxury-hotel brands. To examine these matters, we analyze a sample of luxury hotel consumers by deploying structural-equation-modelling. First, advocated that service environment and consumer-brand-experience positively impacts CBE. Second, findings revealed CBE's positive influence on relationship quality and equity. Third, results confirmed the mediating effect of CBE among the anticipated links. Finally, brand reputation is revealed to moderate the relationship of these factors. Our study offers key theoretical/practical implications in developing CBE, experience, relationship quality, and equity for luxury-hotel brands.

## 1. Introduction

The global COVID-19 pandemic has had a worldwide influence on business, economy, health, or tourism and hospitality on different nations including India (Statista, 2021; UNWTO, 2022). The pandemic has drastically influenced consumers consumption behavior, approach and attitudes (e.g., Bonfanti et al., 2021; Miao et al., 2022; UNWTO, 2022), generating new challenges for luxury hotel marketers. Since the beginning of COVID-19 pandemic, customers have exhibited stockpiling behaviours, increased health concerns, un-expected regulations via social distancing, changing shopping habits/behaviours, and adoption of new technology (Eger et al., 2021; Huang et al., 2021; Peco-Torres et al., 2021; Sheth, 2020). For example, 81% of customers satisfied that their shopping behaviour/habits had changed because of COVID-19 pandemic in India (Statista, 2022). Similarly, due to technological advancements various major hotel brands in India are generating about

10–25% of their total occupancy through websites that was inconceivable at pre-pandemic era (Economic Times, 2022).

Recently, luxury hotels in emerging markets (e.g., China/India) have attracted consumer due to increase in number of international events, uprising disposable incomes and explosive growth and expansion (Li, 2021; Roy et al., 2019). Further, hotel market in India like domestic, inbound, and outbound was calculated around USD 32bn in fiscal year 2020 and is likely to achieve USD 52bn by fiscal year 2027, propelled by rising demand from tourists (IBEF, 2022). In luxury hotel service brands, consumer brand engagement (CBE) research has gained growing interest because of its crucial role in generating desirable marketing-based outcomes, including brand satisfaction trust, loyalty, and (re-)purchase or behavioral intent (Le et al., 2021; Rather and Camilleri, 2019; Yen et al., 2020). Luxury hotel brands have accredited CBE as an important driver for sales and marketing performance (Kumar et al., 2019; Touni et al., 2022). Consumer's engagement can result in positive

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consequences like to assist hotel service brands in attaining their brand/firm value, whereas organizational-based tactics operate in conjunction with CBE's role in producing such value (Itani et al., 2019; Kumar et al., 2019; Ou et al., 2020). Practical support also revealed that luxury hotel brands, which do not adopt strategies to engage guests, have low consumer churn and lower return rates. For example, Gallup research report argued that fully engaged consumers do visit their hotel/restaurant brands more than 56% compared to dis-engaged consumers (Gallup, 2017). Likewise, contrasted to engaged hotel consumers, yearly average-expenditure of their dis-engaged patrons falls about 46% lesser (Le et al., 2021). Further, although research has exposed that servicescape and atmosphere can develop customer engagement, perceived value, or satisfaction with hotel brands (Choi and Kandampully, 2019; Li, 2021), researchers have not yet given sufficient attention to explore the dynamics of service environment and brand experience that can benefit luxury hotel brands to increase CBE and associated relationship quality and equity (Itani et al., 2019; So et al., 2020). As noted, because of the scarcity of empirical confirmation to explore the relationship relating to consumer engagement and firm attributes/strategy in luxury hotel brand contexts (Chathoth et al., 2015; Choi and Kandampully, 2019; Le et al., 2021), Pansari and Kumar (2017) call for an increased insight of the association between inter-disciplinary subject of consumer engagement and the improvement of organizational-value propositions (Brodie et al., 2011; Van Doorn et al., 2011).

Despite the researchers continuous efforts in developing CBE domain, many limitations also remain unexplored. Firstly, empirical-led research highlights mostly on the CBE antecedents and consequences, which are resulting from the personal dispositions (Harrigan et al., 2019; Le et al., 2021; Ou et al., 2020), therefore, consumer actual behavioral-based CBE outcomes are usually unaddressed. Secondly, majority of empirical studies examines CBE's nomological network on the basis of individual-level variables (Le et al., 2021; Rather et al., 2018, 2021; So et al., 2020). Individual-level approach is imperative, because it develops the fundamental foundation of consumer-based brand engagement and brand experience concepts. However, the effects of organizational-strategic initiatives are mostly overlooked, whereas organizational-related situational variables are hardly evaluated. Thus, we focus on firm-based initiatives/resources, as these are strategic-boundary conditions (propositions), which can simply be justified and managed (Choi and Kandampully, 2019; Ou et al., 2020). Amid several organizational drivers in our study setting (i.e., luxury hotels), service environment has been underscored as one of crucial aspects that engage and attract consumers (Van Doorn et al., 2010).

Like CBE, generation of strong consumer brand experience (CBX) is an important theme in the field of service marketing (Homburg et al., 2015; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016), including hospitality and luxury hotel brand context (Bonfanti et al., 2021; Kim and So, 2022; Rather and Hollebeek, forthcoming). Corresponding, hotel industry-led research indicated that shaping better CBX is a top research priority for marketers/managers (e.g., Forbes, 2019). As per Kandampully et al. (2018) research, 89% of firms place consumer's service experience as a key factor for firm competitiveness - in fact, by offering unique and positive consumer experience, luxury hotels like Starwood, Hilton and Marriott are becoming successful and superb franchises. Additional to the raising focus on consumer brand experience, the luxury hotel brands try to alter consumers in brand ambassadors who not merely use the service-offerings, but also operate as story-tellers of such offerings via differing engagement behaviours (Li et al., 2021; Roy et al., 2019). Further, though, hospitality research lacks consensus about the CBX's conceptualization or measurement (Brakus et al., 2009; Homburg et al., 2015), and how CBX links to or associated with key marketing factors like consumer brand engagement or brand relationship quality/BRQ (Le et al., 2021; Itani et al., 2019; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). In view of, Lemon and Verhoef (2016, p. 85) confess the need "to investigate how existing marketing factors, like engagement [or] brand equity (BEQ).

relate to consumer experience," as studied in luxury hotel brand and marketing contexts (Miao et al., 2022). Certainly, nowadays, both CBE and CBX have been underscored as topmost research priorities of contemporary luxury-hotel brand management, as noted (e.g., Ahn and Back, 2018; Islam et al., 2019; Satar, /b et al., 2023a).

Brand reputation (BRP) is recognition by other individuals based on certain characteristics and/or overall quality (Su et al., 2016). BRP can be believed as a worthwhile strategic-resource, which adds towards hotel brand's sustainable competitive benefits (Ahn et al., 2021; Su et al., 2016). From a reputation management view, BRP assists to develop firms/brands' performance including consumer's commitment and trust (Su et al., 2016), relationship quality (Akdeniz et al., 2013), satisfaction (Nyadzayo and Khajezadeh, 2016), purchase intent/loyalty (Ahn and Back, 2018) and improve consumers positive behaviours (Ahn and Back, 2021). In a similar way, BRP plays a significant role in the creation of consumer's engagement, attitudes and behaviour in hotel and service brand contexts (Cambra-Fierro et al., 2021; Touni et al., 2022). The above-mentioned studies have underlined BRP as a driver or mediator factor. However, despite this preliminary knowledge, little remains known relating to BRP's moderating effect in impacting the proposed links, as thus, examined here. Relatedly, existing research explored the influence of various moderators on the associations relating to consumer engagement and its consequences (Ahn and Back, 2018; Li, 2021; Yen et al., 2020), however very limited studies investigated BRP as a moderator in the association between CBE/BRQ and CBE/BEQ (Le et al., 2021; Touni et al., 2022). Consequently, brand reputation's moderating role requires further exploration. To sum up, there are various important gaps in hospitality-marketing research examining the associations, as outlined above.

The present study intends to fulfill the aforesaid gaps by combining both individual-level behaviors/dispositions and organizational-related factors in an integrated theoretical framework in luxury hotel brand context, as shown in Fig. 1. Particularly, the current study aims to investigate the interface of three important organizational strategic factors i.e., service environment (Bitner, 1992; Hightower et al., 2002), brand-equity (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993), and brand reputation (Akdeniz et al., 2013; Touni et al., 2022; Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2010) with individual-related factors - CBX, CBE, and BRQ. Following the resource-based view (RBV) and relationship marketing theory (RMT), the present research investigates the direct effect of organizational-related factor (e.g., service environment) and individual-level factors (consumer brand experience) on CBE. Second, this study explores the impact of consumer brand engagement on individual level related-relationship quality and organizational-related factor-brand equity. Third, this study inspects the mediating effect of CBE in the links between service environment/BRQ, service environment/BEQ, CBX/BRQ, and CBX/BEQ. Fourth, the current research also explores the moderating impact of brand reputation in proposed associations, revealing a key managerial insight.

The current study intends to contribute towards hospitality and service-marketing literature. First, this study underlines the dynamics of a dyadic-approach to explore CBE by integrating both organizational-related as well as individual-related factors. Second, this research makes a novel research trend of CBE by combining organizational-based service (luxury hotel brand) initiatives to best understand the consumer behaviors. By this means, we respond many calls for research to extend CBE/CBX insights in the time of rising complex consumer behaviors in view of COVID-19 pandemic (Hollebeek et al., 2021; Miao et al., 2022; MSI, 2020). Third, by investigating various key marketing service constructs (CBE, CBX, BRQ, BEQ), we develop the groundwork for most nuanced theory formation and testing in this imperative research area.

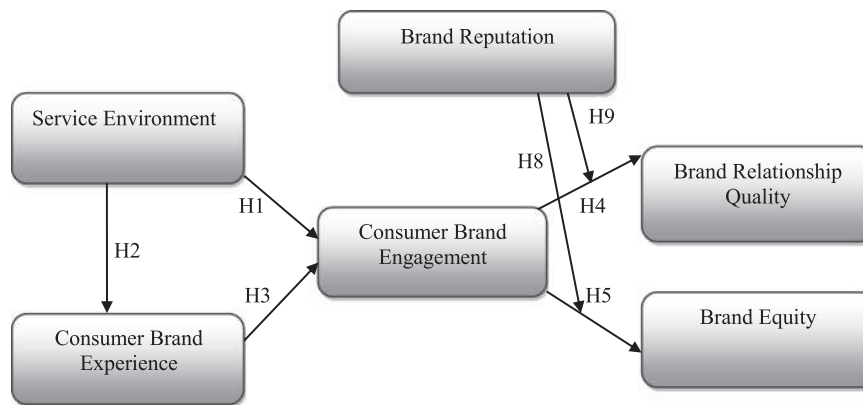


Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework. Note: Mediating effects are H6a/b; H7a/b.

## 2. Conceptual background and hypotheses

### 2.1. Relationship marketing theory

The relationship marketing notion is rooted into the postulation that sustaining and developing quality relationships with consumers (Berry, 1983), and it can generate favorable firm/brand-related outcomes like, consumer satisfaction, value, word-of-mouth, trust, and sales performance (Palmatier et al., 2006). Relationship marketing intends to develop long-standing relationships with valued consumers (Su et al., 2016). It is also defined as developing, attracting, and retaining customer relationships (Berry and Parasuraman, 1991). RMT is one of the perspectives due to which scholars have conceptualised CBE (So et al., 2020; Vivek et al., 2014). Brodie et al. (2013) and Vivek et al., (2012, 2014) employed the expanded domain of RMT to clarify and understand the effect of CBE on various relational-outcomes including, satisfaction, loyalty, trust, affective commitment and emotional bonds. The findings of these studies substantiated that RMT offers an appropriate theoretical framework and foundations to frame CBE (see also Touni et al., 2020).

As outlined, CBE is considered as an “expansion to the relationship marketing domain” (Vivek et al., 2012, p. 128) and can aid in attaining a competitive advantage. CBE acts as a key construct integrated into relationship marketing paradigm, which facilitates a wealthier outlook of interactions amongst brands/firms, organizational-networks, and existing/potential consumers (Vivek et al., 2012). It is due to such engagement, which develops relationship quality (i.e., commitment, trust), and consequent relationships between consumers and brands (Harmeling et al., 2017; Vivek et al., 2014). Further, Harmeling et al. (2017) clarified the crucial role of CBE in relationship marketing- strategies by extending RMT into CBE and advocated the theory of consumer engagement marketing. With regards to Harmeling et al.’s (2017) theory of consumer engagement marketing, a firm/brand may capture the benefit of consumer experience and include consumers in diverse engagement initiatives, like experiential-engagement initiatives, and task-based engagement initiatives that guide long-standing CBE. Therefore, RMT and theory of consumer engagement might contribute to the expected associations between CBX-CBE-BEQ/BRQ in luxury service brand contexts.

### 2.2. Resource-based-view

The resource-based-view advocates how a firm/brand uses various resources to maintain and sustain a competitive advantage (Wang and Kim, 2017). RBV leads to improved performance on account of unique, valuable and specific resources available within the firm/brand (Choudhury and Harrigan, 2014). Such resources include assets, processes, and knowledge, which help the firm to understand particular

strategies that intends to develop effectiveness and efficiency (Barney, 1991; Wang and Kim, 2017). RBV also suggests that defining a firm based on its resources and resulting value-creating processes provides a strong foundations for strategies (Hollebeek, 2019). Such value-creating processes, consecutively leads to firm performance, as revealed by competitive advantage (Barney, 1991) and/or brand equity (Christodoulides and De Chernatony, 2010).

Based on RBV (Ou et al., 2020) that considers organizational- initiatives and resources as described in organizational realm, we argue service environment (SEN) and BEQ could be operationalized and conceptualised at the organizational perspective (Arend and Lévesque, 2010). This reiterates with the research by arguing firm/brand initiatives as organizational- strategies and assets (Chathoth et al., 2015; Verhoef et al., 2011; Van Doorn et al., 2011). To sum up, the present study attempts to develop the research by offering novel research avenues into CBE by means of an integrated exploration of individual-related behaviors and firm-related initiatives to frame CBE. Further, we extend Van Doorn et al.’s (2011) CBE conceptual framework by underlining the moderating role of brand reputation in proposed links within hospitality (e.g., luxury hotel brand) context.

### 2.3. Consumer brand engagement

The significance of CBE has been increasingly recognized in marketing and hospitality research, since 2005 (Abbasi, /b et al., 2022a; Ahn and Back, 2018; Kumar et al., 2019). CBE offers a novel insight in consumer management practice and an efficient framework for assessment of consumer/brand relationships (Harmeling et al., 2017; Lim et al., 2021; Vivek et al., 2014). Various perspectives have been adopted to conceptualise CBE. First perspective regarding CBE as consumers’ non-transactional behaviours with a brand/firm propelled by individual motivations including, making referrals, writing reviews, blogging, or sharing knowledge (Le et al., 2021; Van Doorn et al., 2011). The second perspective views CBE as consumers’ psychological process that leads to their brand loyalty (Bowden, 2009). The final perspective conceptualizes CBE as “a consumer’s positively-valenced brand-related cognitive, emotional, and behavioral activity during or related to brand interaction” (Hollebeek et al., 2014, p. 154). The conceptualization recommended by Hollebeek et al. (2014) broadly explains psychological as well as behavioural facets of CBE. Based on it, we consider that CBE comprises affective, cognitive, and behavioral facets (see also, Li, 2021). Affective brand engagement depicts the level of consumer’s pride, inspiration, and passion, with a firm/brand, cognitive brand engagement explains customer’s level of brand-related elaboration and thought processing into a specific consumer-brand interactions, while behavioral brand engagement describes customer’s level of energy, effort, or time-spent with the brand/firm (e.g., Hollebeek et al., 2014; Li, 2021).

Published literature has widely examined the various antecedents

and/or consequences of engagement. For instance, Li (2021) acknowledged the role of servicescape elements and functional/wellness values in deriving customer engagement. Choi and Kandampully (2019) identified atmosphere and customer satisfaction as antecedents of consumer engagement in upscale hotels. Le et al. (2021) revealed that brand commitment, attachment and satisfaction significantly affect CBE. Touni et al. (2022) identified the role of customer engagement in stimulating consumer-perceived value and consumer/brand relationship. Research also claimed that consumer-based gender moderates the relationship linking service quality and consumer engagement (Islam et al., 2019). Though, limited research underscores the impact of service environment and consumer brand experience on CBE, and consequent brand-relationship quality and brand equity with luxury-hotel brands. As per So et al. (2020) and Touni et al. (2022) CBE is an important subject in hospitality marketing research and future works are suggested to unearth its drivers/predictors as well as consequences from different perspectives, thus examined here.

#### 2.4. Effect of service environment on consumer brand engagement

Baker and Cameron (1996) define service environment as built, physical facilities (exterior and interior) within which a service is provided. Baker and Cameron (1996) suggested a typology illustrating three basic factors or components, which frame service environments: ambient (i.e., background conditions like temperature, lighting, music), design (i.e., customers' awareness, like color, layout) and social factor, which comprises employees as well as other consumers (see also Baker et al., 2020; Hightower et al., 2002). Bitner (1992) also defines service environment as a firms' strategic imperative, which intends to stimulate desirable responses, and it generally includes tangible or technical elements of service quality (Parasuraman et al., 1991). Tangible environment involves a range of physical aspects like artifacts, color, floor, lighting or furnishing. Physical attributes provides a stimulus to consumers' emotion/experience whereas to keep them engaged with the hotel brand (Li, 2021; Choi and Kandampully, 2019). Research illustrate that physical surroundings operates as a crucial factor for consumer's service assessment (satisfaction and trust) and has a significant effect on consumer purchase behaviours and emotions (Ali et al., 2016; Bitner, 1992).

To obtain competitive benefits over competitors, hospitality (e.g., casino, hotel) brands make every effort to promote consumer loyalty/patronage, including constructing a favorable service environment (Ou et al., 2020). Existing literature uncovered that different service quality elements like (physical environment quality, outcome quality or interactional quality) are key predictors of consumer satisfaction and loyalty in cruise service context (Chua et al., 2015). Han and Hyun (2017) also explored the role of physical environment/service quality in developing customer satisfaction with luxury hotel/restaurant contexts. Sensory and physical CBX ensuing from consumers' perceptions of service environment could generate positive behaviors with the service brand (Bitner, 1992). These arguments thereby settle that service environment can impact the consumer's emotional states (Ali et al., 2016). Van Doorn et al. (2011) suggested in their conceptual study that, firms' characteristics can affect engagement behaviors. Following this, Ou et al. (2020) examined the role of service environment in effecting customer engagement in casino service context. Choi and Kandampully (2019) recognized the impact of hotel atmosphere (e.g., social elements, public design, room design, and ambience elements) and customer satisfaction in deriving consumer engagement within upscale hotels, while Li (2021) explored the importance of servicescape aspects (e.g., hotel's functional clues and human characteristics) and values in developing customer engagement with hotels. For that reason, we propose that service environment exercises a positive effect on customer brand engagement and experience with luxury hotel brands in India:

**H1.** : Service environment has a positive effect on CBE.

**H2.** : Service environment has a positive effect on CBX.

#### 2.5. Effect of consumer brand experience on consumer brand engagement

Lemon and Verhoef (2016, p. 71) define CBX as a "customer's cognitive, emotional, behavioral, sensorial, and social responses to a firms' offerings during consumer's entire purchase journey". Based on experiential marketing perspective, CBE starts once consumers experience specific brands, services or products. Thus, researchers consider consumer brand experience an important driver of CBE (Ahn and Back, 2018; Vivek et al., 2014). Providing functional advantages is not adequate to stimulate consumers in purchasing services or products (Roy et al., 2021). Thus, firms (brands) marketing (service) strategies not only focusing on product's advantages; however reliant on experiential marketing to provide pleasant experiences to consumers who are emotional as well as rational individuals (e.g., Brakus et al., 2009; Rather and Hollebeek, forthcoming). Consumers seek brands/firms, which can offer them a memorable experience (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021), hence, brands provide services/products to consumers in building unforgettable and unique consumer experience (Jaziri and Rather, 2022; Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Homburg et al., 2015). In hospitality context, this service-marketing practice intensely contributes to strengthening CBE, as it allows that consumer understanding is increased by consumer experience towards the brand at touch-points between an individual and firm (Ahn and Back, 2018). Existing literature has continually revealed that consumers' satisfactory experience has been linked to consumer engagement behaviour like, helping organisations, recommendation behaviours, or positive word of mouth (Kumar et al., 2019; Roy et al., 2021).

Few hospitality authors have theoretically proposed the link between consumer experience and engagement (e.g., Bowden, 2009; Kandampully et al., 2018). The other researchers including Ahn and Back (2018) and Brodie et al. (2011) affirmed that CBE is a psychological-state, which articulates due to the collection of enjoyable consumer experiences with a brand. Consequently, those consumers who are having pleasurable experiences might be engaged with a luxury hotel-brand and reveal favorable engagement behavior/s. Thus, we incorporate CBX as a predictor of CBE with luxury hotel brands in India,

**H3.** : CBX has a positive influence on CBE.

#### 2.6. Impact of consumer-brand-engagement on brand-relationship-quality

CBE is conceptualized as level of cognitive (knowledge), emotional (passion), and/or behavioral (activation) investments in particular brand interactions (Hollebeek et al., 2019). CBE is also defined as a mechanics of customer's value addition with firm/brand, due to either direct- or indirect- contributions (Pansari and Kumar, 2017). Similarly, brand relationship quality includes the evaluation of several aspects of consumer-brand relationship (Palmatier et al., 2006). As per Hennig-Thurau et al. (2002), BRQ is defined as overall strength of relationship and the extent to which the relationship fulfills the needs and expectations of the actors involved. Consumer-brand relationship is a higher-order factor, which contains satisfaction, commitment and trust (Itani et al., 2019). These variables are mostly employed dimensions to signify the strength of customer/brand relationship (Crosby et al., 1990; Morgan and Hunt, 1994).

Several marketing researchers have proposed that RMT-based CBE is important in developing more stable, stronger and longer-term consumer-brand relationships (Vivek et al., 2014; Wongsansukcharoen, 2022). Published research argued that consumer-brand relationships (i.e., commitment, trust, and loyalty) are key consequences of RMT-based CBE in social media and relating contexts (Dessart, 2018; Vivek et al., 2012). Khan et al. (2022) scrutinized the influence of consumer engagement on customer's relationship-quality and loyalty intention relating to desktop browser- and mobile app-based interactions. In

banking industry, Wongsansukcharoen (2022) denoted CBE develops brand-based trust and loyalty. In the tourism and hospitality literature, Harrigan et al. (2019) asserted that CBE plays an essential role in increasing consumer-brand relationships, like self-brand connection and loyalty in tourism social media context. Touni et al. (2020) proposed that customer engagement builds brand-relationship quality towards hotel-brand communities on Facebook. Moreover, So et al. (2020) verified that more the CBE, greater is the service relationship quality including trust and satisfaction. Thus, based on these arguments, we posit CBE develops BRQ with luxury hotel brands in India:

**H4.** : CBE has a positive influence on BRQ.

## 2.7. Effect of consumer brand engagement on brand equity

Building a strong brand transforms as substantial competitive edge (Aaker, 1991). Service marketers constantly seek to measure brand-based effectiveness through brand equity concept of Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993). Various authors refer brand equity as a relational market-based asset formed through relationships and interactions among brands and their customers (Huang et al., 2022; Yoo et al., 2000). Thus, in experiential services including hospitality, active customer engagement and interaction is advised (Cambra-Fierro et al., 2021). Iglesias et al. (2020) offers an empirical foundation for a significant effect of consumer's sensory brand experience/affective commitment on brand equity within banking sector. Brodie et al. (2011) recommended that, CBE can result in developing organizations' brand equity, consumer value, retention, and new product development. Algharabat et al. (2020) suggested the process of brand equity formation and relationships through CBE-based cognitive processing, activation, and affection with mobile phone service brands. These authors proposed a direct effect of CBE-based cognitive processing, activation and affection on brand equity. Kumar et al. (2019) established that when customers are engaged with the brand, they recommend the brand, which consequently generates brand equity and value for both customers and service providers. We argue that relationship marketing theory (Vivek et al., 2012, 2014) is a fitting theoretical lens to investigate brand equity. Brand equity is especially important for hotel brands, as different consumers have diverse perceptions regarding the same hotel brand (Huang et al., 2022; Sürücü et al., 2019). The highly engaged customers are completely invested in service/brand interactions (Hollebeek et al., 2014) and thereby build a long-term bond towards the brand (Cambra-Fierro et al., 2021). As per relationship marketing theory, it is apparent that an engaged consumer may build more positive attitudes with the brand/firm, which in turn develops loyalty towards the firm (Vivek et al., 2012; Van Tonder and Petzer, 2018). Based on these suggestions, we suggest:

**H5.** : CBE has a positive influence on BEQ.

## 2.8. The mediating role of consumer brand engagement

Extant research contended that in the consumer-brand relationship, CBE acts as a mediator relating to customer perceptions and behavioural intents (Abbasi et al., 2023; Le et al., 2021; Rather et al., 2018; Yen et al., 2020). Given that CBE acts as a psychological state transpires in service-led experience processes (Bowden, 2009), various researchers have employed CBE as a mediator (Harrigan et al., 2019). As noted, consumer brand experience is better characterized as direct (or indirect) interactions with the firm/brand, market actors, affected by emotional, cognitive, physical, social and sensorial aspects within this process (Verhoef et al., 2011), which we expect to influence CBE, BRQ and BEQ. Irrespective of various developments, limited remains acknowledged about CBX's and service environment's possible indirect effect on BRQ and BEQ. For example, prior literature advises the direct effect of CBX on CBE (Le et al., 2021; Touni et al., 2020) or service environment's influence on CBE (Ou et al., 2020). Likewise, existing research has also

verified that consumer-brand relationship/relationship quality and brand equity as consequences of CBE (Harrigan et al., 2019; So et al., 2020; Vivek et al., 2014). Though, these effects may be mediated through other factors. For example, CBE completely mediates the influence of consumer involvement on (re)purchase intent with the service brands (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Rather et al., 2023b), while consumer engagement mediates the relationship between customer's innovativeness and their participation behaviours with coffee brands (Yen et al., 2020).

Even though extant research stressed the direct link between CBX, CBE, BRQ, and BEQ in service and hospitality industries (Harrigan et al., 2019; Ou et al., 2020; So et al., 2020; Vivek et al., 2014), the indirect linkage through CBE is still remained unknown with luxury hotel brands among the modeled links. Following the direct relationship between service environment and CBE; CBX and CBE; CBE and BRQ; as well as CBE/BEQ, we propose that CBE acts as a key mediator between the proposed links. Hence, we put forward that CBE can assist to advance BRQ and BEQ with luxury-hotel brands in India.

**H6.** : CBE mediates the link between SEN and BRQ (H6a); SEN and BEQ (H6b).

**H7.** : CBE mediates the link between CBX and BRQ (H7a); CBX and BEQ (76b).

## 2.9. Moderating role of perceived brand-reputation

BRP is consumer expectation about the brand, which is ascertained by consumer opinions of its internal identity and external image (e.g., Dahlén et al., 2009). Thus, BRP refers to consumer's judgments and evaluation regarding the characteristics of brand/firm (e.g., Lai, 2019; Su et al., 2016; Touni et al., 2022; Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2010). Hotel-BRP is developed due to management-led credible activities and reliable services provided by employees eventually (Herbig et al., 1994). BRP offers competitive advantage (Akdeniz et al., 2013) that relies upon entirety the firm does as an entity, including all the prior and recent marketing activities/efforts (Touni et al., 2022). It is critical for brands/firms to increase modest brand reputation, as BRP is a useful intangible asset (Touni et al., 2020), which develops over time (Cambra-Fierro et al., 2021). BRP is regarded as an important variable to elucidate consumer-brand relationships in marketing and hospitality (Touni et al., 2022; Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2010). Generating a positive BRP has a significant impact on brand's success (Ahn et al., 2021; Su et al., 2016), and also plays a key role in building long-term relationships with consumers, including increasing consumer loyalty, brand trust and relationship quality (Akdeniz et al., 2013; Touni et al., 2020). Service brands with higher reputation are expected to yield greater levels of consumer engagement (Cambra-Fierro et al., 2021; Ou et al., 2020) as well as higher relationship quality obtained from the certain brand (Touni et al., 2020).

Akdeniz et al. (2013) demonstrated the moderating role of brand reputation between effectiveness of marketing cues and customer quality perception in car brand context. Further, Nyadzayo and Khajezadeh (2016) substantiated that brand image (closely related to BRP) moderates the association between consumer value (satisfaction) and consumer relationship management quality in motor dealership brand context. Recently, Touni et al. (2022) examined the moderating effect of BRP between consumer engagement/perceived value on consumer-brand-relationship within hospitality/brand context. Following these suggestions, BRP is thus anticipated to strengthen the impacts of CBE on brand equity and brand relationship quality. Overall, hotel-BRP moderates the effect on the proposed associations. Thus, we propose (refer Fig. 1):

**H8.** : BRP moderates the positive association between CBE and BRQ.

**H9.** : BRP moderates the positive association between CBE and BEQ.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Measurement

The assessment of all the measurements items in our anticipated model was measured on seven-point-Likert scale (See Appendix). To measure *consumer brand engagement*, 10-items and 3 dimensions (affective-CBE, behavioral-CBE, and cognitive-CBE) were modified through Hollebeek et al. (2014).

A 12-item measurement scale was adopted from Brakus et al. (2009) to test *consumer brand experience*, contains 4-dimensions (sensory, intellectual, affective, and behavioral experience). To assess *brand relationship quality*, we use 3-items adopted from Itani et al. (2019). To measure *hotel brand reputation*, 3-item scale was employed from (Lai, 2019). Further, to measure *service environment*, we employ 17-item measurement scale adopted from Hightower et al. (2002). Finally, to evaluate *brand equity*, we use 4-item scale developed by Yoo et al. (2000).

Prior to final data collection, following the advices of Nunnally (1994), critical evaluation of measurement items were carried out by five academics and five hospitality practitioners recognized for hospitality-led research. Pre-test was also executed on thirty consumers' who had been prescreened to make sure that they had once experienced the hotel brand where final collection of data occurred. The entire measurement scales discovered satisfactory reliability values derived from pre-testing (i.e.,  $\alpha > 0.70$ ; Nunnally, 1994).

#### 3.2. Research design and data collection

The data was collected through a survey administered to luxury hotel-brand (e.g., Radison Blue, Vivanta by Taj, Hyatt, Khyber Resorts) consumers in six Indian destinations/cities, including Gulmarg, Srinagar, Phalgam, Kokernag, Verinag and Jammu. These cities are popular and main tourism-destinations, which raises a major contribution to region's GDP (Rather, 2020). The luxury hotel brands are located in these particular cites/destinations, and were chosen for our study. In line with (Choi and Kandampully, 2019; Li, 2021), the population for the present study was limited to those participants who had stayed at these luxury hotel-brands at least once in the last one year, during their visits in these popular destinations/cities. We selected luxury hotel-brands for many reasons. First, recent trends in hospitality industry including global-COVID-19 pandemic, technological advancements, sharing economy-based accommodation services, rapidly growing competition, increasingly fickle customers, and rising of new brands leads to adopt price discounts amongst these hotel brands (Peco-Torres et al., 2021; So et al., 2020). Though, as some of these practices are un-sustainable in long-term, hotel brands should identify means to promote consumer's brand relationship and loyalty, which we propose could be attained due to the elevated CBE (Choi and Kandampully, 2019; Touni et al., 2020). Second, several hotel brands have actively focusing on CBE to cultivate enduring customer/brand relationships in its extremely challenging markets (e.g., Harrigan et al., 2019). Third, while it has been advised that each hotel have to do their best to engage with guests, the process CBE indeed appears to be more crucial for luxury hotel brands compared to lower-priced brands (Le et al., 2021). Fourth, given CBE's context-specific characteristics, we focus on luxury hotel brand context that reveal a high experiential disposition and related service environment expectations (Le et al., 2021; Touni et al., 2022). Finally, luxury-hotel brand industry is a growing sector that has marked speedy growth and development (Ahn and Back, 2018; Li, 2021; So et al., 2020), not only in developed market places, but also in developing (emerging) markets including India (IBEF, 2022; Rather and Hollebeek, 2019; Roy et al., 2019).

We used purposive non-probability-sampling method to accumulate the survey data from consumers to the aforementioned cites/destinations, an extensively utilized approach in social science research (e.g.,

Itani et al., 2019; Sirakaya et al., 2003). Specifically, non-probability (purposive) sampling acts as a proper approach for theory-testing marketing research (e.g., Hollebeek and Rather, 2019; Sirakaya et al., 2003), as in our case, and is also frequently used in hospitality (tourism) research (e.g., Han and Hyun, 2017; Rather et al., 2021). Furthermore, non-probability sampling has been documented as a robust data collection method (Ahn and Back, 2018; Rather, /b et al., 2022a; Itani et al., 2019). Self-reported surveys were operated in December, 2021-January, 2022. To accomplish high quality data, three-field investigators including lead author, collected the data from visitors approached in the region's key tourism hotspots such as attraction, sites, or destinations. All the respondents were approached in similar conditions and the purpose/nature of research were uncovered to them in order to reduce coverage error (Ahn and Back, 2018). G\*Power was employed to compute the minimum sample-size of our model, which was  $n = 141$  at a statistical-power of 0.80 (e.g., Faul et al., 2009), as surpassed by achieved sample size. Out of 600 dispersed questionnaires, we attained 372 valid responses, denoting 62% response rate. About respondent's profiles, 57% were male and 43% included female. Also, most were 19–29 years (35%) followed by 30–40 years (27%). The sample demographics are presented in Table 1.

Next, common-method-bias (CMB) was assessed following Podsakoff et al.'s (2003) remedies. At the outset, Harman's single factor analysis was carried out wherein the initial factor involved a 28.71% variance in data (below 50%), denoting CMB is not a concern for our analysis (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Secondly, multi-collinearity was determined by employing variance-inflation-factor (VIF). Results in Table 2 indicated that, VIF scores (anchored from 1.376 to 2.814), which are below the cut-off value of 5.0 (Hair et al., 2010), verifying the lack of CMB issues.

### 4. Results

We employed two stage structural equation modelling (SEM) approach to evaluate the proposed hypotheses/model by using AMOS-software version 21 (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988; Bagozzi and Yi, 2012).

#### 4.1. Confirmatory factor analysis

First, we used confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) measurement-model consists all the latent factors and 49 measurement items that denote the fit indices as: [ $\chi^2 = 741.369$ ;  $df = 260$ ,  $\chi^2/df$  (2.85); comparative-fit-index [CFI] = 0.95, normative-fit index (NFI) = 0.94; goodness-of-fit-index [GFI] = 0.93, and root-mean-square-error-of-approximation [RMSEA] = 0.053], showing reasonable measurement model fit (Bagozzi and Yi, 2012).

**Table 1**  
Sample Characteristics.

Variable	Categories	Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	212	57
	Female	160	43
Age (years)	19 – 29	130	35
	30 – 40	100	27
	41 – 51	86	23
	Above 52	56	15
Educational level	Higher secondary	41	11
	Undergraduate level	145	39
	Post-graduate level	130	35
	Others	56	15
Length of stay	One night	93	25
	Two nights	175	47
	Three or more nights	104	28
Previous visit	One time	171	46
	More than 1 times	201	54

**Table 2**  
Construct's reliability and validity.

Construct and Item	Loading	CR	AVE	$\alpha$	VIF	S	K
<b>Consumer Brand Engagement (CBE)</b>							
<b>Affective brand engagement (AbE)</b>		0.863	0.763	0.897	2.507		
AbE1	0.914					0.191	0.305
AbE2	0.861					-0.157	-0.819
AbE3	0.813					-0.341	-0.271
AbE4	0.825					-0.071	-0.349
<b>Cognitive brand engagement (CbE)</b>		0.910	0.843	0.913	2.105		
CbE1	0.906					0.233	0.552
CbE2	0.920					-0.292	-0.493
CbE3	0.831					-0.481	0.792
<b>Behavioral brand engagement (BbE)</b>		0.813	0.855	2.616			
BbE1	0.913					-0.174	1.873
BbE2	0.782					-0.275	-0.546
BbE3	0.924					0.256	-0.814
<b>Service Environment (SEN)</b>		0.753	0.886	1.876			
SEN1	0.886					0.582	-0.642
SEN2	0.918					-0.145	-0.575
SEN3	0.894					-0.254	-0.021
SEN4	0.823					-0.339	-0.572
SEN5	0.827					0.365	-0.170
SEN6	0.836					-0.073	-0.042
SEN7	0.895					-0.053	-0.062
SEN8	0.872					-0.501	-0.731
SEN9	0.813					0.025	-0.756
SEN10	0.782					-0.381	-0.863
SEN11	0.794					0.631	1.442
SEN12	0.781					-0.543	-0.16
SEN13	0.813					-0.214	0.861
SEN14	0.919					-0.196	-0.541
SEN15	0.923					0.466	0.435
SEN16	0.913					-0.571	0.571
SEN17	0.902					0.525	1.141
<b>Consumer Brand Experience (CBX)</b>							
<b>Sensory brand experience (SbX)</b>		0.922	0.834	0.806	0.925	2.814	
SCX1	0.832					-0.521	-0.826
SCX2	0.848					0.016	-0.657
SCX3	0.872					-0.671	-0.867
<b>Affective brand experience (AbX)</b>		0.814	0.795	0.907	1.963		
ACX1	0.783					0.711	1.495
ACX2	0.792					-0.423	-0.275
ACX3	0.824					-0.274	0.684
<b>Intellectual brand experience (IbX)</b>		0.792	0.842	0.915	2.148		
ICX1	0.914					-0.286	-0.631
ICX2	0.905					0.656	0.211
ICX3	0.922					-0.761	-0.383
<b>Behavioral brand experience (BbX)</b>		0.833	0.778	0.891	1.973		
BCX1	0.914					0.515	1.041
BCX2	0.895					-0.251	-0.063
BCX3	0.834					-0.281	-0.073
<b>Brand Equity (BEQ)</b>		0.897	0.763	0.927	2.492		
BEQ1	0.914					-0.061	-0.128
BEQ2	0.792					0.142	-0.041
BEQ3	0.913					0.161	-0.052
BEQ4	0.855					-0.422	1.264
<b>Brand reputation (BRP)</b>		0.826	0.885	2.672			
BRP1	0.887					0.591	-0.681
BRP2	0.911					-0.752	1.451
BRP3	0.886					-0.671	0.477
<b>Brand relationship quality (BRQ)</b>		0.783	0.891	1.376			
BRQ1	0.883					0.551	-0.75
BRQ2	0.897					-0.762	1.471
BRQ3	0.848					-0.631	0.357

Note: \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\alpha$  = Cronbach's alpha, AVE = average variance extracted, CR = composite reliability, VIF = variance inflation factors, S = Skewness, K = Kurtosis

#### 4.2. Constructs reliability/validity

The measurement model was evaluated in support for reliability and validity. Firstly, we calculated Cronbach's Alphas for all factors, extended from 0.855 to 0.927, which is above 0.70, upper limit as recommended by (Hair et al., 2010). Second, to assess convergent-validity, we check the item-loadings and constructs average-variance-extracted or (AVE). Item-loadings of all variables surpassed threshold limit of

0.50, suggesting reasonable convergent-validity (Bagozzi and Yi, 2012). Third, we confirmed composite-reliability or (CR) to our proposed factors by examining their particular values surpassed 0.60, as demonstrated in Table 2 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). In addition, we employed discriminant-validity assessment derived from Fornell and Larcker's (1981) technique. The Table 3 implies that AVE of our constructs exceeds their particular squared correlations, therefore corroborating discriminant-validity of the present research.

**Table 3**  
Inter-construct correlations and square root of AVE.

Construct	CBE	CBX	SEN	BRQ	BEQ	BRP
CBE	<b>0.86</b>					
CBX	0.55	<b>0.82</b>				
SEN	0.62	0.61	<b>0.84</b>			
BRQ	0.61	0.54	0.60	<b>0.85</b>		
BEQ	0.60	0.55	0.56	0.59	<b>0.80</b>	
BRP	0.58	0.61	0.55	0.61	0.57	<b>0.87</b>

Note: Bold figures indicate square root of AVE. Off-diagonal are correlations among factors.

4.3. Results of structural equation model and hypothesis testing

Next, we evaluated the conceptual model (see Fig. 1) that produced following model fit indices as: [ $\chi^2 = 845.156, df = 287, \chi^2/df = (2.94), CFI = 0.94, NFI = 0.94, GFI = 0.91$  and  $RMSEA = 0.058$ ], indicating adequate model fitness.

We confirmed the research hypotheses (path coefficients) employing SEM, which tests the empirical data in our proposed conceptual model. Our SEM results advocate that service environment (SEN) impacts CBE and CBX, exercises high impact (CBE;  $\beta = 0.58, t = 9.24$ ; CBX;  $\beta = 0.55, t = 7.34; p < 0.001$ ), hence confirmed H1/H2. The model explains 68% of CBE and 65% of CBX variation. Second, results denote that CBX has a positive effect on CBE, which also implements a high impact ( $\beta = 0.59, t = 9.86, p < 0.001$ ), supports H3, with 68% of observed variance in CBE.

Third, as projected in H4-, CBE capitulates increased brand relationship quality (BRQ), disclosing a high affect ( $\beta = 0.61, t = 10.37$ ). Lastly, predicted in H5-, the effect of CBE on brand equity (BEQ) is very high ( $\beta = 0.64, t = 12.68$ ). CBE explained 69% and 71% of observed variation in BRQ and BEQ respectively (refer also Table 4/Fig. 2).

4.4. Mediation testing of consumer brand engagement

To assess the mediation effects, we investigated covariance-based structural-model by adopting bootstrapping technique (e.g., Zhao et al., 2010). Additionally, we used Brown (1997) method to verify the direct, indirect as well as total mediation effects (see also, Itani et al., 2019; Rather et al., 2019). Mediation arises while an independent construct impacts a dependent construct simultaneously that it affects the mediator, which further impacts the dependent construct (Hair et al., 2010). Taking into the demonstration of mediating (indirect) and direct effects in our modeled relationships, consumer brand engagement demonstrated a modest mediating (indirect) influence (H6a,  $\beta = 0.32$ ) and direct effect ( $\beta = 0.20$ ) into the link of SEN and BRQ, while CBE identified a smallest mediation (indirect) effect (H6b,  $\beta = 0.29$ ) and direct effect ( $\beta = 0.19$ ) between SEN and BEQ. Further, consumer brand engagement exercised the strongest mediating (indirect) effect (H7a,  $\beta = 0.54$ ) and direct effect ( $\beta = 0.21$ ) in the relationship of CBX and BRQ, while CBE also recognized the powerful mediating effect (H7b,  $\beta = 0.51$ ) and direct effect ( $\beta = 0.18$ ) between CBX and BEQ, as depicted in Table 5.

**Table 4**  
Structural model results.

	Relationship	R <sup>2</sup>	$\beta$	t-value	Result
H1	SEN → CBE	0.68	0.58 ***	9.24	S
H2	SEN → CBX	0.65	.55 ***	7.34	S
H3	CBX → CBE	0.68	.59 ***	9.86	S
H4	CBE → BRQ	0.69	.61 ***	10.37	S
H5	CBE → BEQ	0.71	.64 ***	12.68	S

Note: \*\*\* Significant at  $p < 0.001$ ; S = Supported.

4.5. Moderating effect of brand reputation

In testing H8-H9 (i.e., brand reputation’s moderating effect), the sample was divided in 2 sub-groups - high and low reputation. Initially, brand reputation items are assessed on a scale, and then we created a categorical-measurement to encompass low/high group of brand reputation. We achieved this by investigating distribution of the scale and, after that, allocating consumers to low-group if mean value was  $\leq 4.98$ ; else, consumers would be in high-group. Ultimately, the participants were split in low- (n = 192) and high- (n = 182) brand reputation groups. Structural equation modelling-led multi group causal testing was employed to match the variances of structural path coefficients for 2-sample groups (e.g., Rather and Hollebeek, forthcoming; Prebensen et al., 2015). The research model (with brand reputation) depicted suitable fit [ $\chi^2 = (523.178); df = (182); \chi^2/df = (2.87); CFI = 0.94; NFI = 0.92$ ; and  $RMSEA = .058$ ]. We observed a greater impact of CBE on BRQ for highly- ( $\beta = 0.51; t = 9.46; p < 0.05$ ) verse low- reputed consumers ( $\beta = 0.37; t = 7.52; p < 0.05$ ), thereby sustaining H8. Correspondingly, we observed a stronger effect of CBE on BEQ for highly- ( $\beta = 0.53; t = 9.89$ ) verse low- reputed consumers ( $\beta = 0.35; t = 6.17$ ), substantiating H9 (see Table 6). Further, we investigated Chi-square distributions that illustrated a significant-difference among path coefficients representing high: [ $\chi^2 = 4.317, df = 1, p < 0.05$ ] verse low-reputed subsamples ( $\chi^2 = 5.143, df=1, p < 0.05$ ).

5. Discussion and conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has radically influenced consumer’s engagement, consumption behavior and approach (Miao et al., 2022; UNWTO, 2022), constructing pioneering challenges for hotel brand marketers. To curb these challenges, hotel marketers are increasingly adopting CBE/CBX and relationship marketing strategies (Hollebeek et al., 2021; Kim and So, 2022; Miao et al., 2022). Since the previous decade, CBE/CBX has generated escalating interest among hospitality researchers and practitioners (Kumar et al., 2019; Rather et al., 2023a; Touni et al., 2022). This research satisfied gaps in existing hospitality literature by proposing and testing a theoretical-model that investigate the dynamics of organizational strategic factors i.e., service environment, brand equity and brand reputation and individual-related factors i.e., CBE, CBX, and brand relationship quality within luxury hotel brand context, which reveal various intriguing implications. The testing findings uncover that all the proposed relationships are supported.

Therefore, the current research certainly offers researchers with particular understanding about the processes of how to generate consumer’s brand relationship quality, brand equity, and/or consumer lifetime-value (Kumar et al., 2019; Touni et al., 2022) by describing a clear pathway to win the minds and hearts of luxury hotel brand consumers. This pathway is encompassed four stages of consumer experience and engagement process. In first phase, hotel’s better service environment yields consumer’s brand engagement. In second phase, positive consumer brand experience towards a luxury hotel brand generates CBE. In third stage, CBE exerts positive impacts on luxury hotel brand relationship quality and brand equity. In the final phase, CBE mediates the link between service environment and BRQ/BEQ and consumer brand experience and BRQ/BEQ with luxury hotel brands. Therefore, this research shed light on novel links, and offers marketers/managers with practical insights on how to craft consumers more engaged and develop relationship/equity towards the luxury hotel brands. Following our findings and discussions, this paper explains important theoretical and practical contributions as follows.

6. Implications

6.1. Theoretical implications

This study spawns the following contributions to hospitality and



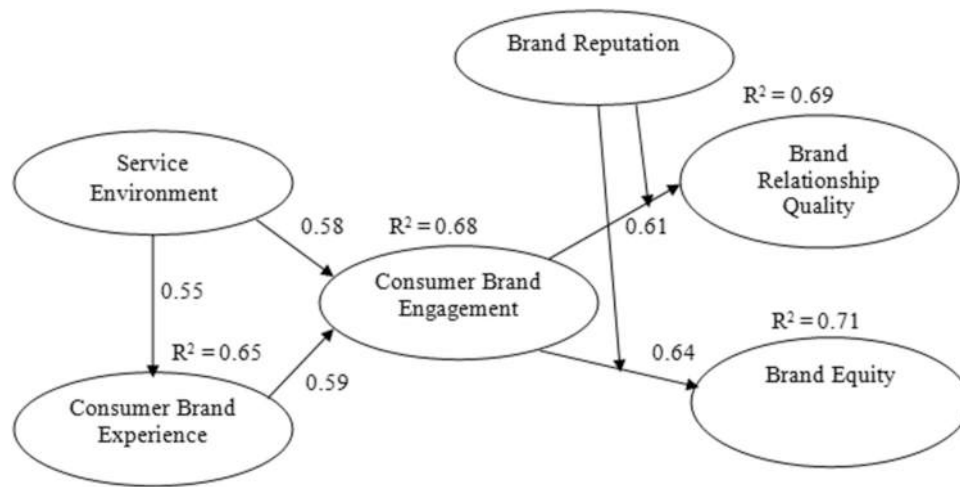


Fig. 2. Structural Model.

Table 5  
Mediation model analysis.

	Indirect	Direct effects	Total effects	
	direct			
H6a: SEN → CBE → BRQ	0.322	0.206 ***	0.528	
H6b: SEN → CBE → BEQ		0.295	0.197 ***	0.492
H7a: CBX → CBE → BRQ	0.546	0.218 ***	0.764	
H7b: CBX → CBE → BEQ	0.513	0.185 ***	0.698	

Note: \*\*\* 0.001

Table 6  
Path comparison results across high/low reputation.

Hypotheses	High reputation		Low reputation		Result
	β	t-value	β	t-value	
H8 CBE → BRQ	0.51	9.46 *	0.37	7.52 *	Supported
H9 CBE → BEQ	0.53	9.89 *	0.35	6.17 *	Supported

Note: \*p < .05.

service marketing literature, and has offered groundwork for future research in service environment, CBE/CBX and BEQ domain. First, given the inclusion of these concepts on the Marketing Science Institute (2020) research-priorities, the progression of more understanding of these constructs and their linkage depicts a crucial advancement in service marketing, branding and hospitality literature, as described. Second, this research contributes to RMT and RBV by investigating the integrated model included with the theoretical concepts regarding service marketing and brand management, which is another key contribution of our research. However, a few researchers have underlined the significance of CBE in hospitality and tourism contexts (Harrigan et al., 2019; Rather and Hollebeek, forthcoming; So et al., 2020), the predictors and outcomes of CBE have been limited to hotel contexts, like organizational-based service environment and individual-related CBX. Thus, this research aids to supplement research domains with regard to service environment (Ali et al., 2016; Bitner, 1992) and branding (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993; Rather et al., 2022), regarding how physical environment effect CBE, CBX, and behaviors. Particularly, this study fulfils the gap between organizational-based situations and individual-related behaviors/dispositions in hospitality context (Choi and Kandampully, 2019; Li, 2021; Ou et al., 2020). The research puts novel research avenues by stressing a symbiotic perspective of CBE-research, which considers both macro-level (organizational) and micro-level (individual) properties towards a more extensive insight into

the role of CBE in luxury hotel brand context.

Third, findings highlight that CBX acts as a critical factor for hotel-based consumer engagement, as hospitality business belongs to distinctive experience of goods/services. This substantiates the existing findings beyond the hospitality setting, including Roy et al.'s (2021) retail and Li's (2021) online brand communities (OBC) context. Fourth, results verified that CBE significantly and positively impacts brand relationship quality and brand equity. This also validates the existing research exterior to the hotel context, like Algharabat 2) et al. (2020) and Dessart's (2018) social media context; Iglesias and Wongsansukcharoen (2022) banking or Vivek et al.'s (2014) retail context. Although, to our best knowledge, the combined impact of BRQ and BEQ as an important consequences of CBE have not been explored empirically till date in luxury hotel brands. In other words, this finding offer an enhanced knowledge of the antecedents/consequences of CBE, which can contribute in mounting the hotel-based BRQ/BEQ and achieving improved competitiveness among luxury hotel brands. Thus, strong hotel-related service environment and CBX produces consumers' most productive assessment in building sustainable relationship/connection with a hotel brand (Miao et al., 2022; So et al., 2020).

Fifth, existing research typically emphasized on investigating the direct relationships between CBE and its consequences; although, authors including Ou et al. (2020), Rather et al. (2021) and Touni et al. (2022) recommended that the particular association can be mediated or (moderated) due to various different factors. Furthermore, to our best knowledge, limited extant research explored the role of mediator/s between CBE and its outcome(s) (So et al., 2020; Touni et al., 2022). Thus, to address this limitation, we explored CBE as a key mediator and established that service environment and CBX have not only the direct effects on CBE, however also has an indirect impact on BRQ and BEQ through consumer brand engagement. This implication facilitates authors in understanding the significance that hotel-based CBE, sustains in revitalizing the associations among luxury hotels and their engaged consumers. Finally, hotel-based BRP generates a significant/positive moderating role in increasing the association between CBE and BRQ/BEQ. Thus, we contribute to the existing hospitality marketing literature by investigating the CBE's mediating impact and hotel-based BRP's moderating effect, revealing a plethora of future research prospects. For example, to what level do our anticipated links comprising the moderating influence of brand reputation on guest's avoidance-behaviour in post-COVID-19 (Huang et al., 2021), as elaborated further in 6.4 section.

## 6.2. Practical implications

The study's findings present imperative implications for luxury hotel marketers in considering both macro-level (organizational) and micro-level (individual) perspectives to develop CBE. First, our findings support the execution of CBE in combination with both macro-level (organizational, i.e., service environment) and micro-level (individual i.e., CBX) strategies produces best results (e.g., Hollebeek et al., 2021; Le et al., 2021; Miao et al., 2022). It is thus important for luxury hotel (marketing) brand marketers to identify the dynamics unveiling organizational-based and consumer-perceived brand-performance indicators (e.g., Aaker, 1991; Cambra-Fierro et al., 2021; Keller, 1993). Knowing the significance of these issues, we investigated the roles of service environment and CBX in the advancement of consumer-brand engagement that was established to consequently affect BRQ and brand equity, generating key practical implications.

Firstly, representing H1-H2, we discovered that service environment and consumer-brand experience are essential in burgeoning consumer-brand engagement. In optimizing service environment, nurturing CBE is crucial (Li, 2021; Ou et al., 2020), which focuses on consumers' value-laden (hotel) brand interactions. Consecutively, such hotel-based brand interactions would transform into valued laden consumer-brand relationships. Furthermore, to cultivate CBX, we advise marketers to fabricate (hotel) marketing services and campaigns, which accelerate many of the consumer's senses, comprising via auditory (e.g., music), visual (e.g., video), and other stimuli (Rather and Hollebeek, 2021). Such experiences could be derived from consumer interactions in real (or fictitious) service (physical) environment or online ecosystem, that might also be mingled with new technologies, digital or social media, (like augmented/virtual reality-based virtual planet; Algharabat et al., 2020; Dessart, 2018; Touni et al., 2022). The content/s might focus on providing social (e.g., user-connecting) hedonic (e.g., entertainment, recreational), or informational (e.g., historic, heritage, cultural) benefits (Bozkurt et al., 2023; Rather et al., 2023b; Voss et al., 2003). Luxury hotel marketers should also direct their differing marketing strategies with regard to CBE through strengthening consumers' emotional-, cognitive-, and behavioral engagement. To engage customers efficiently, hotel markets can develop business performance, attain a competitive advantage, create robust relationships with consumers, boost revenue, and decrease their operational costs (Li, 2021; So et al., 2020).

Secondly, H3 explored that consumer brand experience adds to their brand engagement, which in turn contributes to BRQ and brand equity (H4/H5). Results, thus, expose the extreme strategic significance of CBX, which we advise luxury hotel-brand marketers to spotlight, not just in building their service offerings, but also into their market- research. Due to the multifaceted features of CBX (Brakus et al., 2009; Kim and So, 2022), luxury hotel marketers have an option of which particular brand-experiences they want to cultivate in their consumers (e.g., sensorial, cognitive, physical, or intellectual), based on the disposition of their offerings. Luxury hotel managers should also recognize how to deliver memorable, unique, compelling, and unforgettable experiences (Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Homburg et al., 2015). Similarly, we advocate the tactical execution of *experiential marketing* that accentuates the crucial role of customer's experience through personalized services (like customized travel packages), make-your-own-products, educational-site-visits (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016), or due to content marketing (Rather and Hollebeek, forthcoming; Touni et al., 2020). Luxury hotel marketers should also uncover suitable incentives (nonmonetary and monetary) to compensate their engaged consumers so as to increase their long-standing engagement and develop a strong brand relationship quality and brand equity.

Finally, luxury hotel marketers may not simply make efforts to understand the dynamics and importance of sustaining brand relationship quality and equity, however the significance of maintaining and developing a positive (favorable) hotel brand reputation. Once the BRP is high, CBE would have greater effects on brand relationship quality and

equity. If these consumers' reputation levels are elevated, their re-purchase or referral value would escalate equally (Kumar et al., 2019), increasing their (lifetime-) value with the luxury hotel brand. Further, a favorable (positive) brand reputation will ultimately stimulate future firm/brand-based consumer relational exchanges (e.g., Cambra-Fierro et al., 2021; Touni et al., 2022).

## 6.3. Limitations and future research avenues

Albeit, theoretical and practical implications, the current study has few limitations, which yields various future research prospects. First, the present work is restricted to hospitality (luxury hotel) industry, thus, future scholars might explore other hospitality and tourism-based contexts including theme parks, resorts, tourist-destinations, attractions, restaurants etc. Second, we collected data from a single country (i.e., India), that confines our finding's generalisability. Therefore, future investigations may check our results in other nations and outside hospitality context (off/online). Third, since we carried out a cross-sectional survey-based research, future authors can perform other research designs like experimental and/or longitudinal studies to broaden our findings in post-COVID-19 pandemic context (Rather, 2023).

Fourth, this study only evaluates different sets of dependent variables: consumer brand engagement, brand relationship quality and brand equity, hence future studies would inspire to investigate other potential consequences like impulsive behavior, brand loyalty, or consumer citizenship behaviour (Algharabat et al., 2020; Cifci et al., 2023; Rather, 2021, 2022; Touni et al., 2022). In other words, different variables may be employed for instance, brand loyalty (Rather, 2018, 2019; Wongsansukcharoen, 2021) and/or travel avoidance (Huang et al., 2021) that can construct extra insights. Fifth, while we considered organizational-related service environment/brand equity and individual-related CBX/relationship quality, future works can examine other organization-based factors (Chathoth et al., 2014; Van Doorn et al., 2011), which may also act as a boundary condition to our framework.

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## Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

## Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

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None.

## Appendix: Scale Items

### Service Environment (SEN)

This hotel brand's physical environment is one of the best in its industry.

I think that this hotel brand's physical environment is superior.

This hotel brand has more than enough space for me to be comfortable.

This hotel brand has a pleasant smell.

This hotel brand is clean.

The lighting is excellent at this hotel brand.  
 The temperature at this hotel brand is pleasant.  
 The background noise level at this hotel brand is acceptable.  
 The background music at this hotel brand is appropriate.  
 This hotel brand's interior layout is pleasing.  
 This hotel brand's physical facilities are comfortable.  
 The restrooms are appropriately designed.  
 The signs used are helpful to me.  
 The color scheme is attractive.  
 The architecture is attractive.  
 The materials used inside this hotel brand are pleasing and of high quality.  
 The style of the interior accessories is fashionable.

#### Consumer Brand Engagement (CBE)

*Affective brand engagement (AbE).*  
 I feel very positive when I stay this hotel brand.  
 Staying in this hotel brand makes me joyful.  
 I feel good when I stay this hotel brand.  
 I'm proud to stay this hotel brand.  
*Cognitive brand engagement (CbE).*  
 Staying in this hotel brand gets me to think about it.  
 I think about this hotel brand a lot when I'm staying it.  
 Staying in this hotel brand stimulates my interest to learn more about it.  
*Behavioral brand engagement (BbE).*  
 I spent a lot of time staying this hotel brand compared with other brands.  
 Whenever I'm staying in hotel, I usually stay at this hotel brand.  
 I stay this hotel brand the most.

#### Consumer Brand Experience (CBX)

*Sensory brand experience (SbX).*  
 This hotel brand makes a strong impression on my senses, visually and in other ways.  
 I find this hotel brand interesting in a sensory way.  
 This hotel brand appeals to my senses.  
*Affective brand experience (AbX).*  
 This hotel brand induces feelings and sentiments.  
 I have strong emotions for this hotel brand.  
 This hotel brand is an emotional area.  
*Behavioral brand experience (BbX).*  
 I engage in physical activities and behaviors when I am on this hotel brand.  
 This hotel brand gives me bodily experiences.  
 This hotel brand is activity oriented.  
*Intellectual brand experience (IbX).*  
 I engage in a lot of thinking when I am on this hotel brand.  
 This hotel brand makes me think.  
 This hotel brand stimulates my curiosity and problem solving.

#### Brand Relationship Quality (BRQ)

Overall, I am satisfied with this hotel brand.  
 I am committed to this hotel brand.  
 This hotel brand is trustworthy.

#### Brand Equity (BEQ)

It makes sense to go to this hotel brand instead of any other brand, even if they are the same.  
 If there is another brand as good as this hotel brand, I prefer this brand.  
 Even if another brand has the same features as this hotel brand, I

would prefer this brand.

If another brand is not different from this hotel brand in any way, it seems smarter to go to this brand.

#### Brand Reputation (BRP)

I believe this hotel brand has a good reputation.  
 I see hotel brand as being well known.  
 In my opinion, this hotel brand enjoys the admiration of its customers.  
 I consider this hotel brand to be prestigious.

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