

Cross-Cultural Differences in Hotel Franchise Management

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Abstract: This study aims to explore the key aspects of successful hotel franchise management. In the context of cultural differences, the research focuses on the example of the Chinese market. The research goal is to identify the most effective approaches to the management of hotel franchises in conditions of cultural differences. A study on the management of hotel franchises in the context of cross-cultural differences combines the methods of statistical analysis, the use of error formulas, the Pearson coefficient, and mathematical calculations to examine the studied variables. The findings confirm the importance of cultural characteristics, the quality of communications, and the impact on the dynamics of income indicators in hotel management. The practical application of the research results lies in the possibility of developing and implementing effective hotel management strategies that can provide visible results and long-term sustainability in a variety of cultural environments. The scientific value of the study is a balanced approach to the management of hotel franchises in China. This approach includes an analysis of cultural characteristics, communication mechanisms, and personnel motivation strategies.

Keywords: China; cultural values; franchisees; management efficiency; tourism

Introduction

In today's rapidly developing world, there is an urgent need to attract and retain customers loyal to a specific hotel brand in the hotel industry. This task is especially relevant to hotels that use franchises of well-known hotel chains (Chen et al., 2012). In the global aspect, modern trends in the hotel business in the field of franchising are the following:

- Stable growth in the number of tourists (not counting some declines during the coronavirus pandemic), which increases the demand for hotel services, the number of trips, and, consequently, the demand for franchises (Sunet al., 2020);
- Attention to environmental sustainability when the hotel management pays attention to "clean" methods of operation and management;
- Development of digital marketing as an essential element of offering tourists the necessary information and a hotel complex;
- The modernized and well-developed booking methods offered by the franchise, a variety of mobile applications, and the latest technological innovations improve the quality of guest service;
- Design, interior, and the general concept offered by the franchise increases its recognition by guests; therefore, a hotel's level of its attractiveness and success are more dependent on these aspects (Eid & Agag, 2020).

The hotel management agrees to use the brand, trademark, and business features of its franchisor and become its franchisee. The franchise provides indisputable competitive rights with the support of a well-developed and recognizable brand. However, despite the numerous advantages of franchising in the field of the hotel industry, in particular in terms of attracting customers, there are some challenges. For instance, due to cultural differences, the perception of a franchise may vary, since it was originally developed and used in a specific country (Beydilli & Kurt, 2020).

Typically, this phenomenon occurs in hotels where the franchisor is a well-known American or European hotel brand, and the franchisee is a representative of an Asian or Arab hotel chain. In this case, cross-cultural differences may affect the management of a franchise hotel. These differences may include the value preferences of the host culture (traditional and religious principles), cultural characteristics and lifestyle, attitude to the status of guests, stereotypes in thinking, daily routine and attitude to personal hygiene. In some countries, certain services are provided by the hotel on a free basis (for example, wi-fi), while in others, the absence of these opportunities is normal (He & Filimonau, 2020).

Certainly, there are significant challenges in this area in terms of combining the standards required by the franchisor with the cultural, religious, and other aspects of the area where franchisees operate. Hotel management needs to adjust the service system (including financial aspects of settlements with guests) to the expectations of consumers in a particular country. In this regard, there is a possibility that in a specific area, the

hotel may not meet certain standards of service and operations offered by the franchisor. As a result, deviations from the original goals of hotel management may lead to a less than ideal perception of the hotel brand, which is then forced to adapt to local needs.

Thus, there is a need to address the difficulties in operating a hotel franchise in significantly different cultural spheres. The novelty of this study lies in its approach to calculating the possibility of successfully operating a hotel franchise at the lowest possible cost. This goal can be achieved by understanding cultural differences and harmoniously combining cultural characteristics.

Literature Review

In the modern hotel business, there are a variety of tactics and strategies that, with proper management, can be effective in almost any cultural environment (Alcock et al., 2017). Management features can only include adjustments to cultural and traditional approaches that characterize a specific environment (in this case, the difference in standards between the developed franchise and the place where it is implemented) (Shehawy et al., 2024). When increasing the profitability of the hotel complex, it is necessary to apply such approaches as stimulating and maintaining personalized services and offers (Agag et al., 2023). To maintain the high standard of services, the hotel staff receives special training. Innovative technologies also contribute to improving the infrastructure and overall quality of service in general, thereby helping to maintain customer loyalty (Bhardwaj et al., 2023). In this regard, it is essential to implement digital marketing management systems to ensure flexible pricing and monitor the competitive environment. These measures are necessary for the hotel sector to operate successfully.

The complexity of permanent control over the management process prompts the managers of hotels (both newly opened and those operating in the market for a long time) to resort to the help of a franchise agreement (Buhalis & Leung, 2018). A well-developed hotel brand solves many issues related to the marketing and promotion of hotel services. In addition, the franchisor provides access to the latest technologies to manage processes in the hotel (Chen et al., 2024). The franchisee, in return for the franchise fee, receives strict standards of the franchisor, support in the exchange of experience between personnel (training), and marketing strategies (Balderas-Cejudo et al., 2019). Consequently, the franchisee brand becomes more recognizable among travelers, tourists, and the local population due to the improved quality of hotel services (Bassano et al., 2019).

Despite noticeable benefits, different cultural environments may pose challenges that the management of hotel franchises must adapt to (Caber et al., 2020). It is important to consider the cultural background of the area in which the hotel operates, as the expectations, preferences, and behaviors of guests may differ depending on the country (Croes et al., 2020). For example, in China, it is customary to take off shoes before entering a hotel room, and therefore the presence of slippers is mandatory (Casado-Díaz et al., 2021). The organization of service, the design and interior of the hotel complex, personnel communication (tailored to specific cultural characteristics), menu development (for example, alcohol and pork cannot be served when settling in customers who follow halal dietary restrictions, such as Muslims) can be decisive (Fan et al., 2021). Therefore, the management of hotel franchises can create a unique experience for the franchisor as a whole and attract more customers (Hodbod et al., 2021). This approach can strengthen the reputation of the hotel complex and maintain customer loyalty, creating a positive image where the individual needs of each guest are valued and respected.

In the studies discussed in the literature review, it is difficult to find a clear understanding of cross-cultural characteristics when using a franchise in the hotel industry (Kirillova et al., 2020). Previous authors have widely described the legal aspects of franchising and operational nuances, as well as formed an idea about the features of franchising relations and models in the hotel business (Kumar et al., 2024). Nevertheless, there is a theoretical gap in the development and implementation of a management model for hotel franchises functioning in a specific (culturally different) environment. Thus, the main purpose of this paper is to study and analyze the franchise hotel market. The subject of the study is the specifics of franchise management in a cross-cultural environment (using the example of the Chinese market).

Materials and Methods

This research focuses on developing a way to overcome the managerial difficulties in the operation of a hotel franchise in a cross-cultural environment. This goal requires a thorough analysis of the hotel operating market and the development of tactics and strategies for hotel management. In addition, the study considers the peculiarities of the cultural environment of direct operation, specific marketing techniques in a cultural context, and the influence of economic, political, and environmental factors (Čaušević, 2019).

Data Collection

The main information resource for the study was a survey conducted in the form of a questionnaire. To determine the sample for the survey, the survey involved a sample of people who have mentioned the Marriott

hotel network in their reviews on Trip Advisor for China between 2021 and 2023. The total sample size was 1,100 questionnaires. The respondents were interviewed online, and quality control measures were implemented to ensure the accuracy of the data. These measures included repeated surveys and verifying the responses for accuracy. The survey collected demographic information, personal opinions, and preferences of visitors to the studied hotel. The questionnaire contained several sections, including general questions, preference questions, open-ended questions, questions about the hotel's prospects, and recommendations for further improvement. The average time to complete the questionnaire was about 25 minutes. Incomplete and erroneous questionnaires were excluded from the final sample. The data were processed using the AMOS24 software. The final sample consisted of 200 completed questionnaires.

Data Processing and Analysis

The study measured the effectiveness of the management of hotel franchises. The assessment methods were statistical analysis using error formulas, the Pearson coefficient, and other mathematical formulas to track the variables under study. These formulas can facilitate an objective analysis of the data collected through questionnaires.

$$p_{X,Y} = \frac{cov(X,Y)}{\sigma_X \sigma_Y} \quad (1)$$

$p_{X,Y}$ – Pearson coefficient for a set of hotel franchises

cov – Coefficient of covariance

$\sigma_X \sigma_Y$ – The standard deviations corresponding to the values X and Y (where the value X characterizes the physical parameters, and Y indicates the acquired parameters)

Further, due to the variables varying from the physical to acquired parameters of the hotel guests, it is possible to develop a graphical representation of the permissible values and their corresponding deviation curve. For a more specific approach to the studied issue, it is necessary to consider a specific group of family tourism, which is often practiced in Asian countries. This aspect may also affect age-related tourism data. This stage is necessary to determine the popularity of family tourism and its impact on the quality of the statistical study. The obtained data can help further determine the impact of age and other physical variables on the popularity of the franchise hotel.

$$Spending\ On\ Tourism_N = C_0 + C_1 Family\ Place_N + C_2 Control_N + e_N \quad (2)$$

where $Spending\ On\ Tourism_N$ indicate the level of family spending on traveling,

$C_1 F\ amily\ Place_N$ Represents the studied variable regarding the characteristics of family e (including age characteristics).

$C_2 Control_N$ is a variable that characterizes spending related to family needs.

This formula is necessary for the additional calculation of statistical data. It helps to provide an objective picture of the information analyzed during the study. Further, the design of the study tackles the influence on index indicators exerted by such qualitative factors as national culture, business culture of the hotel, official and functional cultures within the hotel, the main methods, strategies, and tactics used by management, and culture in the organization of the operating structure. In particular, cultural values are reflected in the tourism development index, which indicates the practices used in relation to cultural values. The GDP indicator, the values of gender, age, and internal characteristics of tourists are also important in this case. The coefficients of the formula are calculated using a matrix in mathematical calculations.

$$Cultural\ values = C_0 + C_1 Assertiveness + C_2 Institutional\ Collectivism + C_3 Group\ Assertiveness + C_4 Focus\ on\ the\ Future + C_5 Gender\ Perception + C_6 Focus\ on\ Human\ Needs + C_7 Focus\ on\ Results + C_8 Power\ Distance + C_9 Uncertainty\ Avoidance + C_{10} Production\ Unit\ Effect \quad (3)$$

The coefficients C_0 , C_1 and so forth are calculated based on the data obtained during the study using the matrix system. The effect of a production unit is calculated based on statistical calculations depending on the response of a specific user of hotel services (families in family tourism).

This economic indicator influences the decisions regarding the most optimal path for the development of the hotel franchise. The results are expressed not only qualitatively, but also quantitatively (as numerical data). The data collected during the calculation may suggest the need for continuing a particular management technique.

In addition, for hotel managers, it is necessary to analyze the occupancy rate of the franchise hotel at its place of operation. This indicator shows accurate quantitative and qualitative data on compliance with the

standards specified in the franchise agreement for a specific region. An auxiliary calculation in this case is the growth rate of hotel visitors (in %):

$$\text{Growth rate} = \frac{\Delta \text{current number of visitors}}{\text{initial number of visitors}} \quad (4)$$

This calculation is used to obtain tabular data on the network of Marriott hotels in China, including the number of rooms and their occupancy rate. The occupancy rate of the room stock is the ratio between the number of beds and the number of occupied rooms in the hotel. In practice, this study can help hotel managers to correctly determine the further tactics and strategies of operating in a cross-cultural context. Methodological limitations include limited access to operational data on Chinese hotel franchises to conduct a more in-depth analysis.

Results

It was necessary to consistently follow the methodological stages of the study and correlate the data obtained through surveys with the data from mathematical calculations and special analytical programs, such as Amos24. Therefore, a regression analysis was performed. Based on the results of this analysis, a correlation graph below shows the relationship between certain parameters, such as age, sex, and gender (physical parameters, X) and social status, income, and moral and ethical factors (acquired parameters, Y) (Figure 1).

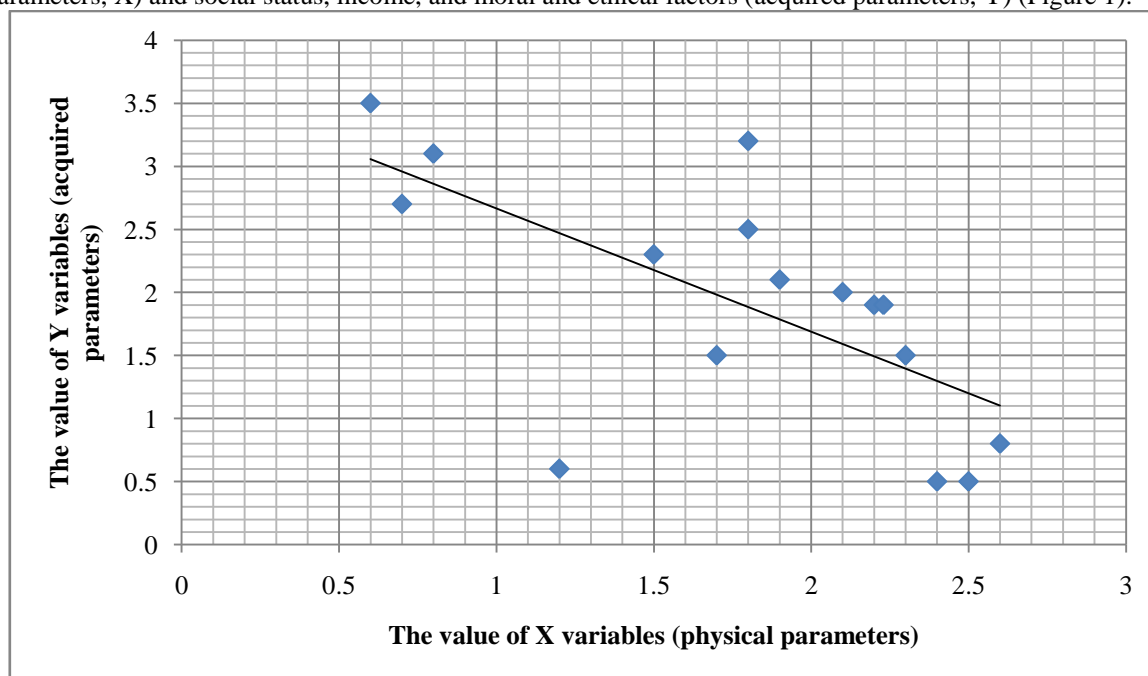


Figure 1 A graph of the correlation between acquired and physical parameters among respondents
 Source: developed by the author

This graph shows the data range from 0 to 4. The numerical values of the range are shown depending on the variable X and Y. The data range varies from 0.5 to 2.5 units in terms of physical variables (X) and from 0.5 to 3.5 units in terms of acquired variables (Y). According to the density of distribution, these variables are most densely located in the range from 1.5 to 2.1 units (Y). The least dense distribution is in the range from 0.7 to 1.5 units (X). Data values are distributed linearly, due to a sequential series of questions during the survey. Therefore, in the hotel management, it is essential to pay attention to the data that is most densely distributed, rather than those located at less dense points on the graph. Further, when determining travel costs, it is necessary to identify numerical values that reflect the travel costs of hotel rooms, the occupancy load factor, and the growth rate of tourism.

Table 1 The occupancy load factor of the hotel's room stock depending on the growth rate of hotel visitors

Indicator	2021		2022		2023	
	Absolute Unit	Absolute Unit	Absolute Unit	Growth Rate (%)	Absolute Unit	Growth Rate (%)
1	2	3	3	4 (array3/array2*100%)	5	6 (array5/array3*100%)
Number of rooms	200	150	150	0.75	126	0.84

Number of beds	198	142	0.717172	111	0.78169
Total number of overnight rooms	200	165	0.825	96	0.581818
Number of beds occupied overnight	195	120	0.615385	85	0.708333
Occupancy load factor	1.01538462	1.18333333	1.1654043	1.30588235	1.10356255

Source: developed by the author

Table 1 presents the data on the Marriott network, including the number of rooms, their occupancy rate, and the growth rate. The table also shows the occupancy load factor calculated as the ratio between the number of beds in the hotel and the number of occupied rooms. The data in the table show that the occupancy load factor remains approximately stable, without negative values (about 1.2). The lowest value of the indicator is 1.01, and the highest is 1.3. The growth rate is also positive, with maximum values of about 0.8 and minimum values of about 0.5 at different time intervals. This fact indicates the correctness of the franchise strategy introduced by the hotel management. In addition, the positive values of the tabular data indicate a positive coefficient in the formula (2) in place of the second coefficient in the graph - $FamilyPlace_N$. The positive occupancy load factor is associated with an increase in family tourism and, accordingly, tourist spending. In cross-cultural management, the calculations of growth rate indicators allow the hotel manager to determine the impact of the management approach on the coefficient of positive or negative hotel development.

An indicator of cultural values can provide a more comprehensive understanding of hotel management and its effectiveness when using a certain policy in a cross-cultural environment. This indicator is calculated in the program designed to process statistical data and perform mathematical calculations. At the same time, the coefficient C varies by country. For China, the following coefficients were conditionally selected and presented in matrix form:

$$C = \begin{bmatrix} 0.5 \\ 0.12 \\ 0.9 \\ 0.8 \\ 0.85 \\ 0.7 \\ 0.42 \\ 0.64 \\ 0.3 \\ 0.54 \end{bmatrix} \quad (5)$$

Further, the coefficients are used in the formula to calculate the indicator of cultural value, which is essential for further management operations.

Table 2 The influence of various factors on the formation of cultural values

Coefficient	Influence Factors	Value
C_0	0	0
C_1	Assertiveness	100
C_2	Institutional Collectivism	24
C_3	Group Assertiveness	180
C_4	Focus on the Future	160
C_5	Gender Perception	170
C_6	Focus on Human Needs	140
C_7	Focus on Results	84
C_8	Power Distance	128
C_9	Uncertainty Avoidance	60
C_{10}	Production Unit Effect	108
Total:		1154

Source: developed by the author

Table 2 shows the parameters of assertiveness (perception by hotel customers), the corporate culture expressed through institutional collectivism, group perception, the customer's orientation towards meeting their needs when using hotel services, as well as the hotel's strategy towards gender perception, maintaining managerial (power) distance, and accounting for GDP when setting pricing policies and other factors. These

parameters are multiplied by the necessary coefficient to obtain quantitative values. Each influence factor has different value characteristics (100, 24, 180, etc.). Some have the highest value of 180 (Group Assertiveness). The lowest value is 24 (Institutional Collectivism). The total sum of the values is a positive value (1154). This factor, in turn, indicates the effectiveness of the hotel management.

Thus, with proper hotel management, cultural factors serve as qualitative characteristics that affect the results of the calculations. Table 3 presents data in percentages from the survey of the respondents regarding each income point of the hotel, which operates 200 rooms with different occupancy and multicultural environment. In this case, organizational, corporate, industrial, and national culture, as well as multicultural and cross-cultural factors are considered. Each of these factors affects hotel functioning in the cultural environment where it operates. The numerical values in the table are expressed as percentages calculated from 200 rooms based on the data obtained during the survey for each item. Due to some limitations, the data are approximate with the possibility of the error.

Table 3 The influence of cultural factors on the main revenue indicators of the hotel industry

The main revenue sources, %	Organizational culture	Corporate culture	Industrial culture	National culture	Multicultural factors	Cross-cultural factors
Income from rooms	61	60.5	66	68	93.5	99
Additional services	64.5	61	67	68.5	92.5	95
Food and services	64	62	66.5	67.5	93	95.5
Fees for additional services	65.5	64	67.5	66.5	94	96
Conferences and events	63.5	64.5	69.5	70	90.5	94.5
Partnerships	63	61	68	71	91	93.5
Licensing fees and royalties	60.5	61.5	67	73	89.5	97.5
Rental income	66.5	64.5	69	75.5	88.5	94
Bonuses and loyalty programs	62.5	65.5	68.5	75	94.5	98.5

Source: developed by the author

Organizational and corporate culture had the least impact on the management of the hotel business (about 60%). In turn, the correct approach to multicultural and cross-cultural management has the greatest impact (about 95%). In addition, the main revenue indicators are most significant when using loyalty programs (about 95%), as well as licensing fees and royalties.

Discussion

According to the main calculations and the results of the study, cross-cultural differences are crucial in the management of a hotel with a franchise (Gunawardana et al., 2023). The study considered criteria for qualitative and quantitative assessment of data, various approaches to measuring profitability from the tourism business, methods to determine tourist expenses, errors in calculations, as well as qualitative data on factors influencing certain indicators in the process of a hotel franchise's functioning. These calculations can help hotel managers make decisions regarding the further strategy of a hotel's functioning in a specific environment (Ahn & McKercher, 2018).

Cultural differences are an important aspect of hotel franchise management (Hofstede, 2019). As noted in a previous study, the cultural context in which the hotel operates plays a decisive role in its success (Mattila, 2019). This fact confirms the need for an integrated approach to management, which includes both reactive and proactive methods (Tung, 2019). This approach helps to successfully manage conflicts arising from cultural differences and ensures the effective functioning of a hotel (Tung et al., 2020).

Effective management of a cross-cultural hotel also depends on the quality of communications. Well-established communications contribute to the high occupancy rate of the hotel, loyal customers, and a positive

reputation. These factors influence the long-term use of the franchise in a particular cultural environment (Yang & Tung, 2018).

The results of the current study also confirm the positive dynamics of the main revenue indicators of hotel franchises. The increase in the occupancy rate entails an increase in revenue and sales, as well as the overall dynamics of other hotel services. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the intercultural environment and ethical standards in hotel management.

The study by Chen et al. (2012) addresses the main cultural influences and the structure of the cultural hierarchy affecting the hotel management under the franchise. This approach is most important in terms of identifying the aspects of hotel management that require the most attention to improve their impact on a hotel's operation. Beydilli and Kurt (2020) emphasized that the demographic characteristics of the participants (guests) of the hotel affect the style of its operation. This fact was taken into consideration during the current research process, when compiling surveys and analyzing the data, in order to gain a more objective understanding of the issues in the management process. Other researchers have also studied the motivating factors for tourists and the potential for the development of specific tourist destinations (Zhang et al., 2019). However, only a thorough analysis and a step-by-step study can reveal how correctly certain directions can be applied in hotel management. In addition, researchers pay attention to various aspects of cultural influence on the management of the hotel franchise. For example, some studies emphasize the importance of the structure of family tourism, while others focus on the demographic characteristics of guests and their influence on a hotel's style of operation. This multidimensional approach to research provides a deeper understanding of the problems and opportunities associated with hotel franchises (Agyeiwaah et al., 2019).

Overall, this study highlights the significance of cross-cultural differences in the management of hotel franchises. Effective management in cross-cultural environments requires a balanced approach that includes an analysis of cultural characteristics, appropriate communication strategies, and staff motivation tools. This approach is the only way to achieve successful results and ensure the long-term sustainability of the hotel franchise in various cultural environments.

Conclusions

This study addressed the issues of hotel franchise management, focusing on the peculiarities of the Chinese market. The results led to several key insights of practical significance. First, the study underlines the importance of cultural differences when managing hotel franchises. The cultural context plays a crucial role in the success of hotel businesses. Therefore, an integrated mixed approach to management, employing both reactive and proactive management methods, is necessary. This approach allows hotel managers to effectively solve conflicts and ensure the stable functioning of the hotel. Second, the study confirms the significance of high-quality communications for the successful management of a cross-cultural hotel. Well-established communications contribute to the high occupancy rate, form loyal customers, and create a positive reputation, which affects the long-term prospects of the hotel. The third conclusion of the study concerns the dynamics of revenue indicators of hotel franchises. The increase in the occupancy rate entails an increase in revenue (including from additional hotel services). Consequently, it is essential to consider the intercultural environment and ethical standards in hotel management.

The practical application of the research results is the development and implementation of a balanced approach to managing hotel franchises in China. This approach includes an analysis of cultural characteristics, communication strategies, and tools for staff motivation. Using the proposed comprehensive strategy, hotel managers can ensure successful results and long-term sustainability of a hotel in any cultural environment. In general, the study emphasizes the importance of cross-cultural differences in the management of hotel franchises. The findings necessitate an integrated approach to the development of management strategies based on the analysis of cultural characteristics and effective communication with staff and customers.

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Conflict of interests

Authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Data availability

All data generated or analysed during this study are included in this published article.

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