CULTURAL HERITAGE TOURISM IN NIGERIA: STRATEGIC APPROACHES TO HOTEL BRANDING AND POSITIONING IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
This study examines strategic hotel branding and positioning within Nigeria's cultural heritage tourism sector, with particular emphasis on how culturally heritage branding influences tourist attraction and customer loyalty. Anchored in Brand Equity Theory, the study seeks to assess whether integrating cultural heritage elements into hotel branding enhances differentiation and competitive advantage in a culturally rich but competitive hospitality market. A quantitative research design was adopted for the study. Data were collected from 250 respondents comprising tourists, hotel managers, and tourism stakeholders across selected major cultural heritage destinations in Nigeria.Structured questionnaires were administered, and data were analyzed using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) with SPSS Version 25 to determine the relationships between cultural heritage branding, customer attraction, and customer loyalty. The findings revealed a very weak negative relationship between cultural heritage branding and customer attraction ($r = -0.050$, $p > 0.05$). The relationship was not statistically significant, indicating that cultural heritage branding does not significantly influence tourist attraction among the sampled respondents. Similarly, a very weak positive relationship was found between cultural heritage branding and customer loyalty ($r = 0.047$, $p > 0.05$). This relationship was also not statistically significant, suggesting that cultural heritage branding alone is insufficient to significantly influence customer loyalty or repeat patronage. The results imply that while cultural heritage branding may contribute to differentiation and cultural authenticity, factors such as service quality, pricing, convenience, and modern hospitality amenities play a more substantial role in shaping customer attraction and loyalty. This study contributes to the limited empirical literature on cultural heritage hotel branding in Nigeria by providing evidence that cultural heritage branding, although valuable for creating a distinctive identity, does not significantly influence tourist attraction or customer loyalty when implemented in isolation. The study offers practical insights for hotel managers and tourism policymakers by emphasizing the importance of combining cultural authenticity with superior service delivery, and contemporary hospitality standards to enhance competitiveness and sustainability within Nigeria's cultural heritage tourism sector.

Keywords: Cultural heritage tourism, customer loyalty, experiential tourism, hotel branding, tourist attraction.

1.0 Introduction

Cultural heritage tourism has emerged as an important component of economic development, destination competitiveness, and cultural preservation across many developing economies. In Nigeria, the sector possesses significant growth potential due to the country's rich and diverse cultural resources, including traditional festivals, indigenous architecture, historical monuments, cultural landscapes, museums, arts, crafts, and ethnic traditions. These cultural assets provide opportunities for tourism businesses, particularly hotels, to create distinctive market identities and offer authentic visitor experiences. As key service providers within tourism destinations, hotels are expected not only to provide accommodation but also to serve as platforms through which visitors experience local culture, traditions, and heritage. Consequently, strategic hotel branding and positioning based on cultural heritage have become increasingly important for enhancing destination attractiveness and promoting sustainable tourism development (Amaeze & Otabor, 2024).

Globally, there is growing recognition that the integration of cultural heritage into hotel branding strengthen market differentiation and improve organizational performance. Yang et al. (2025) contend that cultural heritage branding enhances brand loyalty, tourist attraction, and occupancy rates by creating memorable and authentic experiences for visitors. Similarly, Addis et al. (2024) argue that culturally themed hotels enrich destination appeal by offering immersive experiences that connect tourists with local traditions and history. In the same vein, Pongoh and Mandagi (2025) maintain that hotels that successfully align their brand identity with cultural narratives achieve stronger market positioning and competitive advantage within increasingly saturated hospitality markets.

Despite these potential benefits, the implementation of cultural heritage branding remains a complex and unresolved strategic issue. Dolasinski and Roberts (2025) observe that incorporating cultural heritage into hotel branding requires substantial investment in cultural preservation, facility design, staff training, and marketing, with no guarantee of immediate financial returns. Likewise, Dragona, Argyropoulou, and Papapetropoulos (2024) note that while cultural branding attracts heritage-oriented tourists, it may not necessarily appeal to travelers who prefer standardized international hospitality experiences. Furthermore, the dominance of multinational hotel chains and internationally recognized brands continues to challenge the visibility and competitiveness of locally branded heritage hotels (John & Alexander, 2025).

The Nigerian context presents even more significant challenges. Although Nigeria possesses numerous cultural tourism destinations such as the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove, Sukur Cultural Landscape, Benin cultural heritage sites, Argungu Fishing Festival, New Yam Festivals, and various traditional kingdoms, many hotels operating within or around these destinations have not effectively incorporated local cultural elements into their branding and positioning strategies (). Instead, a large proportion of hotels continue to adopt generic branding approaches that mirror international hospitality standards without reflecting the unique cultural identity of their host communities. As a result, many hospitality establishments struggle to differentiate themselves from competitors, create memorable tourist experiences, and capitalize on the growing demand for authentic cultural tourism experiences.

Empirical evidence further suggests that Nigeria's hospitality industry continues to face operational and structural constraints that limit the successful implementation of cultural heritage branding initiatives. These challenges include inadequate tourism infrastructure, inconsistent service quality, insufficient investment in heritage preservation, weak destination

marketing, poor collaboration between tourism stakeholders, and limited government support for cultural tourism development (Adesua-Lincoln, 2025). In addition, the absence of comprehensive standards and regulatory frameworks for cultural heritage tourism often results in inconsistent representation of cultural assets, thereby undermining authenticity and reducing the effectiveness of branding efforts. Consequently, many hotels fail to transform Nigeria's rich cultural resources into sustainable competitive advantages despite the country's considerable tourism potential.

Recent studies have highlighted the growing importance of digital marketing, storytelling, experiential tourism, and strategic partnerships in enhancing the effectiveness of cultural heritage branding (Ohenhen et al., 2024). Similarly, Ofurumazi (2024) reports that contemporary tourists increasingly seek authentic cultural experiences that allow meaningful interaction with local communities and traditions. These developments suggest that significant opportunities exist for Nigeria hotels to strengthen their market position through culturally driven branding strategies. However, evidence from the Nigerian hospitality sector indicates that the translation of cultural heritage resources into effective hotel branding remains limited, fragmented, and largely underutilized.

The empirical problem, therefore, is not the absence of cultural heritage resources in Nigeria, but the inability of many hotels to strategically incorporate these resources into their branding and positioning activities in ways that enhance competitiveness, improve tourist patronage, and support sustainable tourism development. While existing studies have largely focused on cultural tourism promotion, destination marketing, and general tourism development, there remains limited empirical attention on how hotels can effectively leverage cultural heritage as a strategic branding tool within the Nigerian hospitality industry. This gap has created uncertainty regarding the most effective branding approaches for hotels operating in cultural heritage destinations. It is against this background that this study investigates strategic approaches to hotel branding and positioning in Nigeria's cultural heritage tourism sector, with a view to providing empirical evidence that can guide hospitality practitioners, policymakers, and tourism stakeholders in enhancing the competitiveness and sustainability of the industry. The specific objectives include:

i. To analyze the role of cultural heritage branding and its impact on tourist attraction.
ii. To identify the challenges associated with implementing cultural heritage branding and customer loyalty in the Nigeria hospitality industry.

2.0 Literature Review

The Brand Equity Theory developed by Aaker (1991) provides an appropriate theoretical basis for explaining how cultural heritage branding influence hotel positioning and customer responses. The central proposition of the theory is that a brand possesses value beyond the functional attributes of the product or service because consumers develop associations, awareness, perceived quality, and loyalty towards it. In the context of hotels, therefore, cultural heritage does not automatically constitute brand equity simply because a hotel is located in a culturally rich destination. Rather, cultural elements must be deliberately incorporated into the hotel's identity and communicated in ways that create favourable and distinctive consumer associations. The theory identifies mechanisms through which branding generates customer responses. Brand awareness enables customers to recognize and recall a hotel when considering accommodation alternatives. Brand associations allow customers to connect the hotel with particular meanings, symbols, stories, traditions, or experiences. Perceived quality influences whether customers interpret the culturally branded hotel as capable of delivering both authentic cultural experiences and acceptable hospitality standards.

The relevance of this perspective is particularly strong in Nigeria, where hotels operate within a culturally diverse environment but compete increasingly with standardized local, regional, and international hospitality brands. A Nigerian hotel may possess access to valuable cultural resources without necessarily converting them into brand equity. The strategic issue is consequently one of how hotels transform cultural resources into recognizable brand associations, favourable perceptions, customer attraction, and sustained patronage. This theoretical position provides a stronger basis for examining cultural heritage branding as a strategic marketing activity rather than merely as an element of destination development.

Cultural Heritage Branding

Cultural heritage branding refers to the deliberate incorporation of historical, traditional, artistic, architectural, culinary, linguistic, and other culturally significant elements into a brand's identity and market communication (Okonkwo et al., 2023). In the hotel industry, this involve the use of indigenous architectural designs, local cuisine, traditional décor, cultural narratives, indigenous languages, locally produced crafts, festivals, music, and forms of hospitality to establish a distinctive hotel identity (Ogundare et al., 2024; Obijuru, 2023). The strategic purpose is not simply to decorate or theme a hotel with cultural symbols, but to create a coherent brand meaning that customers can recognize, understand, and associate with the hotel.

The literature suggests two broad positions concerning the value of cultural heritage branding. The first position views cultural heritage as a differentiation resource. Where competing hotels offer broadly similar accommodation, food, and basic services, culturally distinctive brand associations provide customers with an additional basis for choosing one hotel over another. Okonkwo et al. (2023), for example, associate cultural branding with destination distinctiveness, while Madandola and Boussaa (2023) connect cultural heritage tourism with broader economic and community benefits. However, these findings should be interpreted cautiously because evidence concerning destination distinctiveness does not necessarily demonstrate.

The second position emphasizes the limitations and possible negative consequences of cultural branding. Ogundipe (2024) points to the financial costs associated with redesigning facilities, obtaining culturally appropriate materials, and training employees. Similarly, concerns have been raised about cultural commodification and the possibility that commercial use of heritage weaken authenticity (Coşkun, 2021). These findings introduce an important qualification to the differentiation argument: cultural distinctiveness does not automatically generate positive brand perceptions. If customers perceive cultural representations as artificial, stereotypical, or excessively commercialized, the cultural association may fail to generate the favourable brand meaning anticipated by management.

The contradictory evidence indicates that the effectiveness of cultural heritage branding is conditional rather than automatic. Its influence depends on whether cultural elements are perceived as authentic, relevant, distinctive, and compatible with expected standards of hospitality. This observation is particularly important for Nigerian hotels. Nigeria's cultural diversity provides a large pool of potential branding resources, yet the existence of these resources does not establish that hotels are successfully converting them into customer-based brand equity (Adetunji and Connock, 2024). There remains a need for empirical investigation of whether and how cultural heritage branding creates awareness, favourable associations, perceived quality, and loyalty among hotel customers.

Cultural Heritage Branding and Tourist Attraction

The relationship between cultural heritage branding and tourist attraction can be explained throughthe process by which branding reduces tourists' uncertainty and creates expectations about the experience they will receive. A culturally distinctive hotel communicates a recognizable image before the customer arrives. Through architecture, storytelling, imagery, cuisine, cultural activities, and promotional communication, the hotel signal what makes the experience different from standardized accommodation. Studies on cultural heritage destinations emphasize historical identity, authenticity, sense of place, and experiential value as sources of tourist attraction (Liu et al., 2022; Genc & Gulertekin Genc, 2023; Leong et al., 2024). These findings are relevant to hotel branding but cannot automatically be generalized to hotel customer behaviour.

Cultural Heritage Branding and Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty represents another potential outcome of cultural heritage branding, but the mechanism linking the two requires greater theoretical clarification. Madandola and Boussaa (2023), for example, demonstrate the wider developmental potential of cultural heritage tourism, but evidence concerning local economic development does not directly establish hotel customer loyalty. Similarly, literature showing that tourists value authentic cultural experiences provides support for the importance of authenticity but does not by itself establish that culturally branded hotels achieve higher repeat patronage.Cultural branding appeals strongly to tourists seeking authenticity but is less attractive to customers who prioritize standardized facilities, international brand familiarity, convenience, luxury, or predictable service(Ohenhen et al., 2024). The implication is that cultural heritage branding produces customer segmentation rather than universally higher loyalty. For Nigerian hotels, the issue is particularly significant because hotels must balance local cultural distinctiveness with customers' expectations concerning cleanliness, technology, comfort, security, service reliability, and contemporary hospitality standards. A hotel may therefore possess a culturally distinctive identity while failing to develop loyalty if the overall service experience does not meet customer expectations.

Challenges of Cultural Heritage Branding

The major challenge identified is the tension between authenticity and commercialization. Cultural heritage becomes a branding resource when it is made visible and meaningful to consumers, but excessive commercialization reduces complex cultural practices to simplified marketing symbols (Muthuswamy & Esakki, 2024; Chaudhry (2024) while Coşkun (2021) raises concerns about the commodification of cultural resources. The strategic problem for hotels is therefore to commercialize cultural heritage sufficiently to create market value without undermining the authenticity that makes the heritage attractive in the first place.A second challenge concerns financial and operational capability. Cultural branding require investment in architectural adaptation, staff training, local sourcing, cultural programming, storytelling, and marketing. Ohenhen et al. (2024) identify resource limitations as a constraint within cultural tourism development. For hotels, however, the relevant question is not merely whether funding for cultural tourism is inadequate, but whether the financial returns from hotel-level cultural branding justify the required investment. Evidence addressing this cost-benefit relationship remains limited.

A third challenge is stakeholder and community participation. Cultural heritage is not simply a marketing asset owned by hotels; it is connected to communities and cultural groups. Where local communities are excluded from decisions concerning the representation and commercialization of their heritage, branding initiatives encounter resistance or produce representations that lack cultural legitimacy (Okpoko, Emeafor & Onyeka 2021). This is

particularly important in Nigeria, where cultural identities and traditions are diverse and locally embedded. A fourth challenge concerns standardization and regulatory protection. Cultural branding requires hotels to represent heritage consistently and responsibly while maintaining contemporary hospitality standards. Weak institutional frameworks can make it difficult to determine appropriate standards for authenticity, intellectual property, cultural representation, and community benefit. The absence of clear mechanisms for protecting indigenous cultural expressions can also create risks of unauthorized appropriation and commercialization.

Cultural Heritage Tourism and Hotel Branding and Positioning: Empirical Review

Empirical evidence becomes more useful when studies are distinguished according to their unit of analysis**,** methodology**,** variables**,** and relevance to hotel branding. A substantial proportion of existing studies examine cultural heritage at the destination, community, or national level. For example, Nobre and Sousa (2022), using qualitative interviews in Portugal, found that cultural heritage contributed to nation branding by strengthening national identity and tourism appeal. While the study demonstrates the symbolic value of heritage for branding, its unit of analysis is nation branding rather than hotel branding. Its findings therefore provide contextual support but do not establish how hotel customers respond to cultural heritage-based hotel brands.

Similarly, Madandola and Boussaa (2023), in their mixed-method study of Old Oyo Town in Nigeria, found that cultural heritage tourism support local economic development through employment and small-business opportunities. The study is directly relevant to Nigeria and demonstrates the developmental potential of heritage tourism. However, its primary concern is sustainable development at the heritage-destination level rather than customer-based hotel brand equity. It consequently leaves unanswered whether hotels operating in or around Nigerian heritage destinations can convert that cultural attractiveness into stronger brand positioning and customer loyalty.

Okpoko, Emeafor, and Onyeka (2021) provide further evidence of the institutional dimension by comparing heritage tourism management in Rome and Nigeria. Their findings associate successful heritage tourism with preservation policies, public-private partnerships, community participation, infrastructure, and funding. The study is important because it identifies structural conditions affecting heritage tourism in Nigeria. Nevertheless, its focus on heritage management means that it provides limited evidence concerning the branding strategies of individual hotels or the behavioural responses of hotel customers.

Nomishan, Tubi, and Gubam (2023) similarly examine cultural heritage management from an institutional perspective and identify accountability, political interference, inadequate investment, and shortages of specialized expertise as constraints on heritage preservation in Nigeria. Their findings reinforce the argument that the wider institutional environment constrain the availability and credibility of cultural resources for tourism. However, institutional weaknesses should not be interpreted automatically as evidence of weak hotel branding because the study does not directly measure hotel brand positioning, customer attraction, or customer loyalty.

In contrast, Ranjbaran et al. (2022) provide evidence that is more directly relevant to hotels. Their qualitative study of independent hotels in Iran found that cultural differences influence brand co-creation and customer engagement. The study suggests that hotel brands are not created solely by management; customers' cultural expectations and interactions influence how brand meaning develops. This supports the Brand Equity Theory proposition that brand value is ultimately connected to consumer perceptions. Nevertheless, the Iranian context and

qualitative design limit direct generalization to Nigerian hotels, particularly given Nigeria's distinct cultural diversity and hospitality environment.

3.0 Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research approach to examine the relationship between cultural heritage branding and tourist attraction in selected cultural heritage destinations in Nigeria. The study focuses primarily on tourists as the unit of analysis, because tourist attraction is measured through visitors' awareness, perceptions, interest, visit decisions, and responses to culturally branded hotel and tourism offerings. The target population therefore comprises tourists who have visited selected cultural heritage destinations and/or stayed in hotels operating within or around those destination**s** in Lagos, Osun, Kano, and Calabar. These locations are selected because of their cultural and tourism significance and provide different geographical and cultural settings for examining heritage-oriented branding. Eligible respondents must have sufficient direct experience of the destination or relevant hotel services to assess the cultural heritage branding practices and their influence on tourist attraction.The study sample 250 tourists**.** The study employs a multistage sampling procedure**.** First, the selected cultural heritage destinations are identified purposively based on their relevance to cultural heritage tourism and the presence of hospitality establishments serving visitors. Second, tourist-access points such as heritage sites, hotels, tourism centres, and designated visitor areas are identified within the selected destinations. Third, respondents who meet the eligibility criteria are approached at the identified locations. Primary data are collected using a structured questionnaire designed around the study variables. Items are measured using a Likert scale. The questionnaire is subjected to validity and reliability at a threshhold of 0.70.The collected data are coded and analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)**.** Descriptive statistics like means and standard deviations are used to describe respondents' responses to the questionnaire items. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) was employed to determine the strength and direction of the association between cultural heritage branding and tourist attraction. The analysis is conducted at the 5% significance level, with the null hypothesis rejected where the probability value is less than 0.05. Because PPMC measures association rather than causation, the findings are interpreted as evidence of a relationship between the variables and not as proof that cultural heritage branding causes tourist attraction.

4.0 Results of Data Analysis

Descriptive Statistics

The table below presents the mean and standard deviation of the three variables measured in the study.

Table 1:
Cultural Heritage Branding

Question	**SA (5)**	**A (4)**	**N (3)**	**D (2)**	**SD (1)**	**Mean**	**StdDev**
The hotel's cultural heritage theme influences my booking decision.	46	69	58	34	43	3.164	1.345
The hotel's use of local traditions and history enhances my experience.	50	57	58	40	45	3.108	1.377

Source: SPSS Version, 25, 2026.

Table 1 presents respondents' perceptions of cultural heritage branding in relation to hotel booking decisions and customer experience. The descriptive results suggest that respondents generally expressed moderately favourable perceptions of cultural heritage branding**.** The mean values (3.164 and 3.108) suggest that most respondents view cultural heritage branding

as a positive factor in hotel selection. However, the standard deviations (1.345 and 1.377) show some level of disagreement among respondents, suggesting that while cultural heritage branding is generally appreciated, its effectiveness depend on individual preferences. This finding implies that hotels need to strategically incorporate cultural elements in ways that resonate with a broader audience to maximize their appeal.

Table 2:
Customer Attraction

Question	**SA (5)**	**A (4)**	**N (3)**	**D (2)**	**SD (1)**	**Mean**	**StdDev**
CA1: The cultural branding of the hotel makes it more attractive to visit.	46	75	48	42	39	3.188	1.339
CA2: I prefer hotels that emphasize cultural heritage branding.	50	60	53	40	47	3.104	1.393

Source: SPSS Version, 25, 2026

Table 2 presents respondents' perceptions of customer attraction in relation to cultural heritage branding.Customer attraction is linked to cultural heritage branding, with mean scores of 3.188 and 3.104, indicating that a significant proportion of customers prefer hotels that emphasize cultural heritage. The standard deviations (1.339 and 1.393) suggest some variability in perceptions, which is due to cultural differences among respondents. The descriptive statistics indicate that respondents tended to perceive cultural heritage branding positively in relation to hotel attractiveness and preference. However, these descriptive results is not interpreted as evidence that cultural heritage branding significantly influences customer attraction.

Table 3:
Customer Loyalty

Question	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean	StdDev
The cultural heritage of a hotel makes me return for future stays.	43	57	53	22	75	2.884	1.480
I am more likely to recommend a hotel with strong cultural heritage branding.	61	70	31	43	45	3.236	1.446

Source: SPSS Version, 25, 2026

Table 3 presents respondents' perceptions concerning customer loyalty towards culturally branded hotels. The findings on customer loyalty present a mixed response. While one item has the highest mean score (3.236), the otherhas the lowest (2.884). This suggests that while cultural branding encourages word-of-mouth recommendations, it does not necessarily guarantee repeat visits. The high standard deviation (1.480) further indicates strong disagreement among respondents, which may be due to factors such as pricing, service quality, or accessibility.The two items therefore reveal a mixed descriptive pattern**.** Respondents were less inclined to associate cultural heritage branding with their intention to return for future stays, but showed somewhat greater agreement regarding recommendations. This difference suggests that cultural heritage branding is perceived positively as part of a hotel's identity without necessarily being sufficient to generate repeat patronage.

Pearson Correlation Matrix

Table 4:

Cultural Heritage Branding and Customer Attraction

Variable	Cultural Heritage Branding	Customer Attraction
Cultural Heritage Branding	1.000	-0.050
Customer Attraction	-0.050	1.000

Source: SPSS Version, 25, 2026

Table 4 presents the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation between Cultural Heritage Branding and Customer Attraction. The result shows a correlation coefficient of r = -0.050, indicating an negligible negative relationship between the two variables. The coefficient is very close to zero, suggesting that there is virtually no linear association between respondents' perceptions of cultural heritage branding and customer attraction in the sample.For the reported sample size of 250 respondents**,** the corresponding two-tailed significance value is approximately p = .431**.** Since p > .05, the relationship is not statistically significant at the 5% level.Since p = .431 > .05, the null hypothesis is not rejected. Therefore, the result does not provide sufficient statistical evidence of a significant relationship between cultural heritage branding and customer attraction.

Table 5:

Cultural Heritage Branding and Customer Loyalty

Variable	Cultural Heritage Branding	Customer Loyalty
Cultural Heritage Branding	1.000	0.047
Customer Loyalty	0.047	1.000

Source: SPSS Version, 25, 2026

Table 5 presents the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation between Cultural Heritage Branding and Customer Loyalty. The correlation coefficient is r = 0.047**,** indicating an negligible positive relationship between the two variables. The coefficient is extremely close to zero, indicating that cultural heritage branding and customer loyalty have almost no linear association in the sample.Based on the reported sample size of 250 respondents, the corresponding two-tailed significance value is approximately p = .458**.** Since p > .05, the relationship is not statistically significant at the 5% significance level.

Discussion of Findings

The result of the correlation analysis shows a negligible negative relationship between Cultural Heritage Branding (CHB) and Customer Attraction (CA), with r = -0.050. The coefficient indicates that there is no linear association between the two variables in the study sample. More importantly, the relationship is not statistically significant (p = .431 > .05). Therefore, the finding does not provide sufficient evidence to conclude that cultural heritage branding significantly influences customer attraction. This finding differs from the view held Chandra and Bose (2024) that argue that cultural branding provide hotels with distinctive identities and attract customers seeking culturally immersive experiences. Similarly, Brown and Osei (2023) associate cultural heritage branding with experiential tourism and suggest that authentic cultural narratives contribute to positive tourism experiences. These perspectives provide a theoretical basis for expecting a positive relationship between cultural heritage branding and customer attraction.

However, the present finding does not empirically confirm that expectation within the study sample. One possible interpretation is that cultural heritage branding may not, on its own, be sufficient to determine whether customers are attracted to a hotel. This remains a possible explanation rather than a finding of the present study**,** because factors such as service quality, price, convenience, facilities, location, and modern amenities were not measured in the analysis. Similarly, the suggestion in previous literature that different customer segments may respond differently to cultural branding provides a possible avenue for explaining the negligible correlation, but the present study did not measure age groups, travel purposes, generational differences, or customer segments in a way that would permit such conclusions.

The result therefore indicate that cultural heritage branding should not automatically be assumed to translate into customer attraction. Although respondents recognize or appreciate cultural elements, such perceptions do not necessarily produce a measurable linear relationship with their attraction to the hotel. The finding is particularly important because it demonstrates the difference between positive descriptive perceptions and statistically established relationships**.** The descriptive results showed moderately favourable responses to cultural heritage branding, but the correlation analysis indicates that these perceptions were not significantly associated with customer attraction.

Cultural Heritage Branding and Customer Loyalty

The correlation analysis also indicates a negligible positive relationship between Cultural Heritage Branding (CHB) and Customer Loyalty (CL), with $r = 0.047$**.** The coefficient is extremely close to zero, indicating no linear association between cultural heritage branding and customer loyalty. Furthermore, the relationship is not statistically significant ($p = .458 > .05$)**.** Thus, the result does not provide sufficient evidence to conclude that cultural heritage branding significantly influences customer loyalty.

The finding is consistent with the descriptive results, which showed a mixed pattern concerning customer loyalty. While respondents recorded a mean score above the midpoint for recommending hotels with strong cultural heritage branding, the mean for returning to a hotel because of its cultural heritage was below the midpoint. These descriptive findings suggest that respondents may view cultural heritage positively without necessarily translating that perception into repeat patronage. However, the descriptive results should not be interpreted as evidence of a causal relationship.

Theoretically, cultural heritage branding may contribute to customer loyalty by creating distinctive brand associations and emotional connections. Brown and Osei (2023), for example, suggest that storytelling and culturally based experiences can strengthen consumers' emotional engagement with hospitality brands. From the perspective of Brand Equity Theory, such associations could potentially contribute to favourable brand evaluations and loyalty. Nevertheless, the present correlation result does not provide empirical support for a statistically significant relationship between CHB and CL.

The weak coefficient may have several possible explanations. For example, customer loyalty may depend on a broader combination of factors than cultural identity alone. Previous literature, including Kotler et al. (2024), identifies factors such as service quality, value, personalization, and convenience as potentially relevant to customer retention. These factors may interact with cultural branding in determining customer loyalty. However, because these variables were not measured in the present study, their effects cannot be established from the current findings. Similarly, the possibility that cultural branding appeals more strongly to some customer segments than others may be investigated in future research, but the present

data do not provide sufficient evidence to conclude that age, generation, travel purpose, or customer type explains the weak correlation.

5.0 Conclusion

The findings of this study provide a nuanced understanding of the relationship between Cultural Heritage Branding (CHB) and customer behaviour in the hospitality industry. Although the descriptive findings indicate that respondents generally expressed moderately favourable perceptions of cultural heritage branding, the inferential results did not establish a statistically significant relationship between CHB and Customer Attraction (CA). Specifically, the correlation coefficient of ($r = -0.050$) represents a negligible negative association, while the corresponding significance level (($p > .05$)) indicates that the relationship is not statistically significant. Therefore, the finding should not be interpreted as evidence that cultural heritage branding deters customers or reduces customer attraction. Rather, the result indicates that, within the context of this study, variations in cultural heritage branding were not meaningfully associated with variations in customer attraction. The study also does not provide sufficient evidence to conclude that cultural heritage branding affects mainstream and niche tourist groups differently. Such differences would require appropriate group-based analysis and additional variables measuring tourist characteristics and preferences.

Similarly, the weak positive correlation between CHB and Customer Loyalty (CL) indicates only a negligible association, and the absence of statistical significance means that the study does not establish cultural heritage branding as a significant predictor of repeat patronage or customer loyalty. While cultural heritage branding may theoretically contribute to brand differentiation, authenticity, and emotional engagement, the present findings do not provide sufficient empirical evidence to confirm these effects on customer loyalty.

Consequently, cultural heritage branding should be viewed as one component of hotel branding and positioning rather than as a demonstrated determinant of customer attraction or loyalty. Hotels may integrate cultural heritage elements with their broader branding and service strategies, while future research should examine whether factors such as service quality, perceived value, authenticity, customer satisfaction, tourist characteristics, and hotel attributes moderate or mediate the relationship between cultural heritage branding and customer outcomes. This would provide a more comprehensive basis for understanding the conditions under which cultural heritage branding may contribute to customer attraction and loyalty.

Recommendations

Base on the findings and conclusion, the study recommend that:

i. Hotels should maintain and appropriately communicate their cultural heritage branding. Although the descriptive findings indicate that respondents generally had moderately favourable perceptions of cultural heritage branding, the negligible and statistically insignificant relationship with customer attraction suggests that cultural brandingaloneis not sufficient to increase customer attraction. Hotels should therefore ensure that cultural heritage elements are clearly presented as part of their overall hotel identity without assuming that such branding will automatically translate into increased patronage.

ii. Hotels should avoid relying exclusively on cultural heritage branding as a basis for attracting customers. The finding of a negligible and statistically insignificant relationship between Cultural Heritage Branding and Customer Attraction indicates that cultural branding, by itself, was not strongly associated with customer attraction in the study. Management should therefore regard cultural heritage branding as one

component of the hotel's overall positioning rather than as the sole basis for attracting customers.

iii. Hotels should strengthen the clarity and consistency of their cultural heritage presentation. Since respondents reported moderately favourable perceptions regarding the influence of cultural themes on booking decisions and the enhancement of guest experience, hotels should ensure that their cultural heritage themes are presented consistently across relevant aspects of the hotel experience.

iv. Hotels should regularly obtain customer feedback on their cultural heritage branding. The mixed descriptive responses, particularly the lower mean relating to customers' intention to return because of cultural heritage and the relatively more favourable response concerning recommendations, indicate that customers may respond differently to different aspects of cultural branding. Hotels should therefore use appropriate feedback mechanisms to determine which cultural heritage elements customers perceive positively and which require improvement. This will enable management to make evidence-based adjustments to their branding practices rather than relying on assumptions about customer preferences.

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