

A Study on the Persuasive Effect of Power-Matching and Persuasion on Hotel Reservation

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Abstract: Hotel reservation is an important part of the travelers' travel process, and hotel employees and customers are the main participants. Based on the power-matching effect and the agentic-communal model of power, this paper analyzes the power-matching effect between hotel employees and customers and the choice of persuasion by using SPSS method through three scenario simulation experiments. Research shows that high-power hotel employees are more likely to convince high-power customers, whereas low-power hotel employees are more persuasive to low-power customers. Because the high-power hotel employees are more likely to use the competence-skewed persuasion, while the high-power customers are more likely to be persuaded by the competence-skewed persuasion, while the low-power hotel staff tend to use the warmth-skewed persuasion. Low-power customers are more likely to be persuaded by the warmth-skewed persuasion. This study extends the theoretical application of power-matching and persuasion in hotel reservation scenarios and provides practical guidance for improving hotel reservation efficiency.

In the daily consumption situation, the consumers' ambivalent attitude is widespread. For example, if a customer desire to stay in a hotel, she/he will go to the OTA to view the comments from others. Positive and negative comments blur consumers' attitude and rise their ambivalent attitudes. In the hotel consumption scenario, these consumers are defined as the ambivalent booker. In the actually, hotel employees need to persuade ambivalent bookers to stay in the hotel and make a deal.

The persuasion of the hotel employees on the ambivalent booker is actually the process of information transmission and communication between the two. The game of power and the way of communication of the two sides affect the communication effect mainly. Therefore, the purpose is studying the power-matching effect and the persuasive effect between ambivalent booker and hotel employees and applied to the hotel practice.

1. Literature Review and Hypothesis

1.1 Power-Matching Effect.

Power is defined as asymmetric control over valued resources in social relationships ^[1, 2]. Researchers have studied power as a psychological state or mindset that can arise from both structural differences in socioeconomic status ^[3] and situational factors such as one's social role (e.g., boss vs. Employee) ^[4].

The sense of power reflects the long-term sense of the individual's own power and the individual's psychological feeling in certain specific situations ^[5]. The personal sense of power is the self-perceived ability to influence others ^[6]. Having or lacking the personal sense of power produces a set of characteristics and tendencies that are expressed in the form of cognition, emotion, and behavior. The difference in the personal sense of power is general ^[5] and can spill over into how consumers plan their purchase and make decisions ^[7].

Nowadays, scholars have studied the influence of power on information communicator and audience. Regarding communicator power, Lammers et al. found that compared to baseline

applicants, high-power applicants were seen as more persuasive and low-power applicants as less persuasive [8]. With regard to audience power, Brinol et al. found that an audience's power would influence their response to persuasion in two distinct ways. First, increasing the power of audience before accepting a message led to less scrutiny of the message and a weaker discrimination between weak and strong arguments. Second, when the power of audience was increased after accepting a message, they became more confident in their message-related thoughts. [9].

In past studies, it was generally accepted that high-power communicator are more persuasive than low-power communicator. However, in recent research, Dubois et al. proposed a new perspective: power can fundamentally form a dynamics of the value of information, form different type of message sent by the communicator and different attitude to the message by the audience [10].

In hotel reservation, hotel employees will persuade the customer to stay in the hotel and upgrade room type. The communication between the hotel employees (communicator) and the customer (audience) is a process of persuasion. High- or low-power hotel employee persuade customer to stay in the hotel and upgrade depending on whether they are communicating to a high- or low-power customer.

1.2 An Agentic-Communal Model of Power and Persuasion.

In an earlier study, Bakan introduced the ideas of agency and communion to reflect two fundamental modalities of human thought and behavior. The characteristics of agency are: focus on the self and produce the result of independence or individual struggle. In contrast, the feature of communion is focusing on others and enhances the individuals' attention to getting along with others and others' needs. [11]. Rucker et al. proposed the agentic-communal model of power, which influences people's perception of the world and behavior through power, and is realized by agentic or communal orientation [7,12,13]. Because people with power are less dependent on others, they can achieve their own goals and interests with little constraints (they are full of agency). On the contrary, the dependency of such people who lack power requires them absorb the advice of others (they require communion) [10]. Therefore, high power promotes agentic orientation and low power promotes communal orientation.

Rucker et al. found that agentic orientation is related to competency information, and communal orientation is related to warmth information [10].

Agentic orientation leads people to focus on the information about other people's abilities, such as skillfulness, efficacy intelligence and confidence (ie, competency information). In contrast, communal orientation motivates people to focus on the information associated with how good natured, trustworthy, tolerant, friendly, and sincere a target is perceived to be (i.e., warmth information).

Based on the agentic-communal model of power, power changes attention rate of each dimension of information. Power affects the diagnosticity of warmth and competency information by communicator and audience, and the extent to using warmth and competency information in generating and evaluating messages [10].

Based on previous research, the persuasion influenced by power is divided into the competence-skewed persuasion (using more arguments and information related to ability) and the warmth-skewed persuasion (using more arguments and information related to warmth). High-power communicators are more likely to use the competence-skewed persuasion, high-power audiences are more likely to be persuaded by competence-skewed persuasion; whereas low-power communicators are more likely to use the warmth-skewed persuasion, low-power audiences are more likely to be persuaded by the warmth-skewed persuasion.

1.3 Hypothesis and Theoretical Model.

1.3.1 The influence of power-matching on the persuasion effect of ambivalent booker

In previous studies, scholars proposed "ambivalent consumers" [14]. In the hotel consumption situation, the ambivalent attitude of customers is widespread, and the customers' ambivalence is "A combination of positive and negative cognitive evaluation, emotion and emotional experience of

hotel products or services.” Such customers are defined as ambivalent bookers.

Based on the power-matching effect theory, when the power of both sides of communication is matching, (when a high-power hotel employee communicates with a high-power customer, and a low-power employees communicates with a low-power customer, the persuasion effect will be enhanced, thus increasing the customer's reservation intention. Based on the above analysis, hypothesis 1:

H1: Compared with low-power customers, high-power employees have a greater persuasive effect on high-power customers; compared with high-power customers, low-power employees have a greater persuasive effect on low-power customers.

1.3.2 Persuasion method: The influence mechanism of power-matching on persuasive effect

Previous study proposed that information formation is an important factor of consumers' ambivalence [14] and directly influenced by the individual characteristics and the mode of the information transmission^[7]. The persuasion for the ambivalent bookers is essentially the persuasive communication between the communicator (hotel employees) and audience (customers), so the persuasive effect will also be influenced by the individual characteristics and persuasion method.

Feldman and Lynch distinguish two dimensions of attitude formation: the extent to which an individual readily and easily retrieves a piece or type of information (hereafter, accessibility) and the extent to which an individual finds a piece or type of information relevant for the task at hand (hereafter, diagnosticity)^[15]. With regard to the accessibility-diagnosticity perspective,

Dubois et al. argued that because of the relationship between high power and agency, the high-power states can improve the diagnosticity of the competence-related arguments. In contrast, Because of the association between low power and communion, the low power increases the diagnosticity of warmth-related argument^[10].

In summary, when hotel employees form messages, high-power hotel employees are more inclined to choose competence-related arguments (such as emphasizing skills and intelligence). Conversely, low-power hotel employees are more inclined to choose warmth-related arguments (Such as emphasis on friendliness and trustworthiness). High-power customers are more likely to be stimulated by competence-related arguments. Conversely, low-power customers are more susceptible to warmth-related arguments. Based on the above analysis, this study proposes hypothesis 2 and hypothesis 3:

H2: high-power employees tend to use competence-related persuasion, and low-power employees tend to use warmth-related persuasion.

H3: high-power customers tend to accept competence-related persuasion, and low-power customers tend to accept warmth-related persuasion.

Based on the theoretical model, this paper will verify the hypothesis through three scenario simulation experiments. Experiment 1 verifies the persuasion effect in an oral transmission context, corresponding to hypothesis 1; Experiment 2 verifies the persuasive effect in a written context, corresponding hypothesis 2; Experiment 3 verifies the persuasive effect of the persuasion method o corresponding to hypothesis 3.

2. Experiment 1: Power-Matching Effect

2.1 Purpose and Design.

Experiment 1 is intended to verify hypothesis 1 in an oral persuasion context.

152 participants were randomly assigned to play a high-power hotel employee, a high-power customer, a low-power hotel employee, or a low-power customer. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the following four situations, power-matching: high-power hotel employees and high-power customers, low-power hotel employees and low-power customers; power-mismatching: high-power hotel employees and low-power customers, low-power hotel employees and high-power customers. Each customer was combined with a hotel employee and asks the hotel employee to persuade the customer to stay at the hotel.

2.2 Procedure.

First all, participants are randomly assigned to the role of hotel employees or customers; each participant is grouped with another participant who plays a different role. Participants are required to complete an experimental questionnaire.

The hotel employees first need to read the introduction of the role setting. This is actually a method of mindset priming power thought a role-playing. Secondly, hotel employees have 5 minutes to read the information of a hotel and think about how to speak to a customer. Then the hotel employee has 1 minute to communicate with a customer, to persuade her/him to stay at the hotel. Finally, all participants complete the power manipulation check scale which adapts three items from Generalized Sense of Power Scale (GSPS) ^[16,17]

The customer first complete a word-search task [18] to conceptual priming power, then communicate with a hotel employee. Two 7-point likert scales were used to evaluate the persuasiveness of the hotel employee and reported their likelihood of staying at the hotel in order to test the persuasive effect. Finally, all participants completed the power manipulation check scale.

2.3 Variable Manipulation and Measurement.

2.3.1 Sense of power

For the participants acted hotel employees, prime their power by the role-playing^[10]. Mindset prime participants' high power by acted a director of front office, and low power by acted a receptionist. For the participants acted a customer, prime their power through the word-search task^[18]. Customers are provided 16 words, and asked to search and circle these words from a 12 * 12 Chinese character matrix. 13 of the words are related to high- or low- power, and the other 3 are neutral.

2.3.2 Persuasion effect

The customers reported the extent to which they found the hotel employee to be persuasive (anchored at 1= extremely unpersuasive and 7= extremely persuasive) and how likely they would be to stay at the hotel on a 7-point scale anchored at 1=very unlikely and 7=very likely.

2.4 Experimental Result.

2.4.1 Manipulation checks

At the end of the task, all participants completed the power manipulation check scale. An independent sample t-test analysis revealed that participants feeling significantly less powerful in the low-power condition ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 0.89$) compared to the high-power condition. ($M = 4.97$, $SD = 1.04$, $t=6.732$, $p<0.001$).

2.4.2 Persuasive effect of power-matching

A two-way analysis of variance on the persuasive effect showed that the hotel employees' power * customers' power had a significant interaction, $F(1,76)=11.09>F_{0.05}(1,76)$, $p=0.001$. The persuasive effect of high-power hotel employees on high-power customers ($M=5.55$, $SD=0.86$) is better than the low-power customers ($M=4.05$, $SD=1.43$). By the same token, the low-power hotel employees' persuasive effect on low-power customers ($M=4.28$, $SD=1.38$) is better than the persuasive effect on high-power customers ($M=3.92$, $SD=1.21$).

3. Experiment 2: The Choice of Persuasion for Employees' Power

3.1 Purpose and Design.

Verify the persuasive effect in written context by experiment 2 and verify hypothesis 2. 4 independent participants who don't know the purpose evaluated the extent to which the messages generated by hotel employees contained warmth and competency information to verify the use of the competence-skewed persuasion and the warmth-skewed persuasion by hotel employees in

different sense of power

This experimental procedure was similar to Experiment 1, with 56 volunteers participating in the experiment. Because of the written context, experiment 2 separated two parts between the hotel employees and the customers, so that the 4 independent participants could evaluate the messages generated by the hotel employees and we had sufficient time to convert the handwritten messages into electronic document, avoiding the persuasive effects caused by chirography, while hiding the identity.

3.2 Experimental Procedure.

All participants finished an experimental questionnaire and 28 participants acted as hotel employees. Similar to experiment 1, firstly, participants read the character settings displayed on paper and the hotel information on big screen. Secondly, participants wrote a persuasive mail to a hotel's potential customer to persuade him/her to stay at the hotel. There is no restrictions on the length of messages which have no effect on persuasion^[10]. Finally, all participants completed the power manipulation check scale same as experiment 1.

The messages written by the 28 hotel employees were transcribed into Word documents before presented to four independent participants to evaluate the messages on a 7-point likert scale.

Next, another 28 participants acted as customers, and prime their power through the word-search tasks same as experiment 1. They will then received a mail written by a hotel employee randomly .finally, all customers completed the power manipulation check scale and reported persuasiveness and likelihood same as experiment 1.

3.3 Variable Manipulation and Measurement.

Same as experiment 1, prime participants' power and let them report persuasiveness and likelihood. 4 independent participants evaluated the extent to which hotel employees used the different persuasion methods.

The four independent participants will evaluate the extent of use of different persuasion methods in the mail generated by hotel employees in two dimensions: the competence information (four items: capable, skillful, intelligence, self-confidence) and the warmth information (five items: good natured, trustworthy, tolerant, friendly, sincere)^[15]. All items were evaluated through a 7-point scale.

3.4 Experimental Result.

3.4.1 Power manipulation check

In the same experiment 1, the participants completed the power sense manipulation test scale, participants feeling significantly less powerful in the low-power condition ($M=3.65$, $SD=1.13$) compared to the high-power condition. ($M = 4.97$, $SD = 0.87$, $t=6.732$, $p<0.001$).

3.4.2 Persuasion effect

Same as experiment 1, the two-way analysis of variance was applied to the persuasion effect of customers on hotel employees. The results showed that there was a significant interaction between the power of hotel employees and customer, $F(1,28)=8.35>F_{0.05}(1, 28) = 4.2$, $p = 0.007$. Mails written by high-power hotel employees are more convincing for high-power customers ($M=4.45$, $SD=0.98$) than low-power customers ($M=3.17$, $SD=1.4$). By the same token, Mails written by low-power hotel employees are more convincing for low-power customers ($M=4.28$, $SD=1.003$) than high-power customers ($M=3.19$, $SD=1.25$).

3.4.3 Persuasion of employees

A two-way analysis of variance was conducted on the comment of the hotel employees' persuasion methods by 4 independent participants. The results showed that there was a significant interaction between the hotel employees' power * information type, $F(1,56)=20.49>F_{0.05}(1) , 56$, $p < 0.001$. High-power hotel employees transmitted more competence information ($M=3.98$, $SD=0.79$) than the warmth information ($M=2.56$, $SD=0.88$)in the mail (tended to use the

competence-skewed persuasion). Low-power hotel employees transmitted more warmth information ($M=3.05$, $SD=1.01$) than the competence information ($M=2.06$, $SD=0.72$) in the mail (tended to use the warmth-skewed persuasion).

4. Experiment 3: The Preference of Persuasion for Customers' Power

4.1 Purpose and Design.

Hypothesis 3 was verified by Experiment 3. All participants in Experiment 3 acted as customers and asked them to evaluate the persuasiveness of warmth messages or competency messages, and to verify the customer's choice of the competence-skewed persuasion or the warmth-skewed persuasion in different sense of power.

74 participants acted the customer, and were randomly assigned to one of four situations: high-power customers and competence information, high-power customers and warmth information, low-power customers and competence information, low-power customers and warmth information.

4.2 Experimental Procedure.

Participants completed an experimental questionnaire. First, used the same way of experiment 1, priming customers' power through the word search task. Draw on the arguments proposed by David Dubois and other scholars, select three of the competence arguments and three warmth arguments, and adapt the six arguments to hotel scenario. The three competence arguments form a complete competence message, and the three warmth arguments form a complete warmth message. All the participants read one of these messages. Finally, the participants completed the power manipulation check scale and reported the persuasiveness of the message same as experiment 1.

4.3 Variable Manipulation and Measurement.

Same as Experiment 1, prime participants' power and let them report persuasiveness and likelihood. Different message type means different persuasion method. All participants received a complete message randomly, one of which is a competence message containing 3 competence arguments; the other is a warmth message containing 3 warmth argument.

4.4 Experimental Result.

4.4.1 Power manipulation test

Using the same method, the results showed that participants feeling significantly less-power in the low-power condition ($M=3.88$, $SD=0.91$) compared to the high-power condition ($M=4.97$, $SD=1.03$), $t=2.78$, $p=0.007$)

4.4.2 Persuasion effect test

A two-way analysis of variance for the persuasion effect showed that the message type * customers' power had a significant interaction, $F(1,74)=20.27 > F_{0.05}(1,74)$, $p < 0.001$.

High-power customers believe that the competence-skewed persuasion ($M=4.5$, $SD=1.41$) is more persuasive than the warmth-skewed persuasion ($M=3.07$, $SD=1.15$). On the contrary, low-power customers believe that the warmth-skewed persuasion ($M=4.05$, $SD=1.50$) is more persuasive than the competence-skewed persuasion ($M=2.76$, $SD=1.24$)

5. Conclusions and Discussions

5.1 Conclusion.

This study validated 3 hypotheses proposed by three scenario simulation experiments. Experiments 1 and 2 validated hypothesis 1 in the oral and written context. When the hotel employee and the customer are power-matching, the persuasive effect is greater. Experiment 2 verified hypothesis 2. Compared to low-power hotel employees, high-power hotel employees are more inclined to use the competence-skewed persuasion. Compared to high-power hotel employees,

low-power hotel employees are more inclined to use the warmth-skewed persuasion. Finally, experiment 3 verified hypothesis 3. High-power customers are more likely to accept the competence-skewed persuasion than low-power customers; low-power customers are more likely to accept the warmth-skewed persuasion than high-power customers.

In this study, the power-matching effect was applied to hotel reservation situation, and proves that the sense of power affects the hotel employees' choice and the customer's preference for persuasion. Accomplished a study on the persuasive effect of power-matching and persuasion on hotel reservation

5.2 Management Proposal.

This study expands the research situation of the personal sense of power, confirms the role of power-matching effect in hotel situation, and enriches the research on power and the personal sense of power. In a hotel, when communicating with a ambivalent booker, the hotel employees could understand the customer's sense of power during the communication or from the guest history, hence increase persuasiveness by matching the power with the customer, such as high-power customers are persuaded by high-power hotel employees (such as hotel department managers), and low-power customers are persuaded by low-power hotel employees (such as hotel receptionists) to increase the chances of staying at the hotel and make a deal

In addition, based on previous research, this study extended the persuasion of hotel employees to the competence-skewed persuasion and the warmth-skewed persuasion in the hotel reservation situation, and confirmed that high-power customers prefer the competence-skewed persuasion, low-power customers prefer the warmth-skewed persuasion. Therefore, in a hotel, when the hotel employees communicate with a ambivalent customer, they could understand the customer's sense of power through communication or guest history, and choose the appropriate persuasion method. In the face of high-power customers, hotel employees use the competence-skewed persuasion, such as introducing the hotel's facilities or quality products. When facing low-power customers, hotel employees use the warmth-skewed persuasion, such as introducing the hotel's service concept or provide personalized care to the guests.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research.

First of all, all the participants in this study were undergraduate students in tourism or hotel management of Sichuan Agricultural University. The participants who acted as hotel employees don't have enough knowledge about hotel, so the actual communication process cannot be restored to the maximum extent during the experiment. The participants who play the customers are not completely characterized by ambivalent customers. Therefore, future research could choose a hotel, inviting hotel employees and customers to participate the experiment, and explore the impact of the power-matching and persuasion effect.

Secondly, this study did not consider the impact of the hotel type, such as budget hotels or full-service hotels, business hotels or resorts. Different types of hotels attract different types of customers, which have different demands for products and services. Therefore, different types of customer have different sense of power and preference for persuasion. Future research should explore whether there are differences in the power-matching and persuasion effect between different types of hotels.

Finally, this study doesn't explore the reasons for customers' ambivalence and the effect of customer ambivalence. Feng et al. have proposed that when consumers show high-ambivalence, the warmth-skewed persuasion can help the consumer to make decision rapidly; In contrast, when consumers show low-ambivalence, emphasizing the function of products may be more conducive to facilitating a deal in the purchase situation^[19]. This shows that customers' ambivalence will affect their preference for persuasion. Future research can also combine the power and customers' ambivalence to explore the impact of them on the choice of persuasion method.

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