# Effect of Hedonic and Utilitarian Goals in Similarity Judgment of a Hotel-Restaurant Brand Alliance

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## Abstract

The perception of fit between two entities in a brand alliance is an important factor in affecting consumers' evaluations of the partnership. Drawing from goal theories, the authors examine the role of consumption goals in driving consumers' fit perceptions in the context of hotel-restaurant brand alliances. In particular, they study two types of consumption goals—hedonic and utilitarian. The authors argue that consumption goals moderate the effect of image congruency on consumers' perceived fit between a hotel and a restaurant in an alliance. The results of this study indicate that a partnership involving incongruent brand images between a hotel and a restaurant can enhance the perceived fit ratings. However, the types of consumption goals seemed to moderate these effects. Specifically, our results show that incongruent brand images enhance consumers' perception of fit for hedonic consumption goals. Conversely, incongruent brand images failed to influence perceived fit ratings in the utilitarian goal condition. The findings of this study have several important implications for service organizations in search for ideal brand alliance partners.

## 1. Introduction

Partnering with well-known restaurant chains is becoming increasingly common, particularly for mid-priced hotels. For example, Hampton Inn has installed Pizza Hut Express outlets in lobbies, Holiday Inn has formed an alliance with TGI Friday's, and Ramada Inn has partnered with Bennigan's. As hotel companies have incorporated virtual tour in their world-wide web and consumers are capable of evaluating the hotels prior to their purchase, an alliance with an appropriate restaurant is therefore a challenge to hotel marketers. In particular, the perceived fit between the two entities is an important factor in affecting consumers' evaluations of the partnership. The goal of this paper is to examine the role of consumption goals in guiding consumers' fit perceptions in the context of hotel-restaurant brand alliances.

## 2. Review of Literature

The effect of perceived fit in influencing consumer evaluations is robust across different contexts, such as brand extensions [1], celebrity endorsements [2], event sponsorships [3], and brand alliances [4]. Indeed, previous research has investigated several ways brands can be linked together—feature-based, usage-based, and schema- or concept-based. However, these bases of fit have their limitations. For example, a common consumption situation fails to explain the perceived compatibility of products that do not share a common usage occasion. On the other hand, feature-based fit and concept consistency lack a theoretical basis for identifying which product features or brand concepts are critical to the determination of congruency [5]. Overall, the bases of fit are often assumed as alternatives to, or exclusive of, one another. Furthermore, past research has generally neglected the possibility that incongruous brands may in fact fit.

Following the means-end model, Peterman [6] suggested that goal categories form a continuum from concrete to abstract. Some other researchers have further differentiated the abstract level of goals into hedonic and utilitarian types [7] [8] [9] [10] [11]. According to this group of researchers, a hedonic goal is the purchasing motivation for symbolism, value-expression, affective consideration, and the satisfaction of sensory or emotional wants. The focus of concern is on the enhancement of self, subjective meanings, and intangible features. Hence, the symbolic processing is holistic, synthetic, and image-based. Conversely, a utilitarian goal refers to functional and cognitive purchasing motivations. An individual whose consumption is motivated by utilitarian goals focuses on product functional performance, costs to benefits ratio, and tangible product features. For this type of goal, then, an individual generally processes information in a logical and rational manner.

Consumption goal theory is important in addressing the above issues. As has been widely documented, goals provide the context in which a consumer organizes information processing, makes categorizations, and reaches similarity judgments [12] [13]. Martin and Stewart [5] further demonstrate that perceived compatibility is a multidimensional construct and that product features, common usage situations, and brand concept are all linked by a shared goal. The number and structure of the bases of fit are different when products vary in the degree of goal congruency.

Previous studies demonstrated that situational goals (goal-derived categories) can enhance the perceived similarity of products that are visually quite different [14] [15] [16] [17]. Yet, prior research has failed to investigate the impact of hedonic and utilitarian goals on consumers' category representations. For example, can hedonic goals

diminish the perceived similarity of products that highly resemble each other? Or are these similarity representations so rigid as to preclude any top-down intervention? We address these questions by systematically varying the surface resemblance of brand alliance partners and the salience of hedonic and utilitarian goals in a given consumption context.

Drawing from goal theories, we argue that brand alliances involving partners with incongruent brand images (e.g., a classy hotel with a funky restaurant) can result in high perceived fit ratings as long as the two brands are consistent with consumers' consumption goals. Particularly, we hypothesize that

H1: When the restaurant image is consistent with customers' hedonic goals, the perceived fit ratings for a partnership with an image-incongruent restaurant are expected to be at least as high as with an image-congruent restaurant.

H2: When customers' utilitarian goals are unrelated to the restaurant image, the perceived fit ratings are expected to be greater for a partnership with an image-congruent restaurant than with an image-incongruent restaurant.

H3: When the image between hotel and restaurant is congruent, the perceived fit ratings are expected to be greater for hedonic than for utilitarian goals.

H4: When the image between hotel and restaurant is incongruent, the perceived fit ratings for hedonic goals are expected to be lower than that for utilitarian goals.

## 3. Methodology

A series of pretests were conducted for two purposes. First, the pretests were to determine two different types of restaurants that have either a calm (congruent image with the hotel) or lively image (incongruent image with the hotel). Second, they were to find realistic consumption goals or situations. All subjects were hospitality students enrolled in a large northeastern university.

The current study employed a 4 x 2 between-subjects factorial design. The components were consumption goals (hedonic: calm dining, dining in a lively environment; utilitarian: convenience, saving) and restaurant image (congruent and incongruent image with the hotel). A total of eight treatments were conducted.

### 3.1 Subjects

Participants were 350 travelers (25.3% of the total number of travelers approached) waiting for their planes at a national airport in the United States. These subjects were deemed appropriate because they are actual or potential hotel guests. Because the videos were of a hotel and restaurants in a northeastern university town, the subject pool is unlikely to be familiar with the actual hotel and restaurant operations shown in the video clips.

Consequently, potential confounding variables, such as familiarity and attached attitude, were minimized.

### 3.2 Instrument and Procedures

Subjects were randomly given one of the eight versions of questionnaire. The questionnaire contained two parts. In the first part, subjects were asked to evaluate a national hotel and restaurant chain. Subjects first viewed a video clip of a mid-priced hotel chain before answering a series of questions regarding the hotel image, their attitudes toward the hotel, and their behavioral intentions. Next, they viewed another video clip, one of a mid-priced chained restaurant. Neither the hotel nor the restaurant brand was disclosed to respondents. Each subject watched a clip of one of the two types of restaurant (calm or lively). A series of questions pertaining to the restaurant's image, subjects' attitudes toward the restaurant, and congruency ratings between the hotel and the restaurant followed the video clip.

In the second part of the questionnaire, subjects read a cover story explaining the brand alliance situation. Subsequently, subjects were asked to imagine themselves in one of the four consumption situations described in a scenario. They were told to imagine that the hotel they viewed in the video clip shown earlier was the one they stayed in, and that it had partnered with a national restaurant chain, which corresponded with the restaurant video they had been shown. Then, subjects were asked to indicate their perceptions of fit between the hotel and the restaurant. At the end of the survey were questions about socio-demographics.

### 3.3 Independent Variables

The first factor (consumption goals) involved the manipulation of four different consumption situations. The four levels of manipulation included (1) a calm goal, in which consumers were looking for a calm dining experience; (2) a fun goal, in which consumers were seeking to dine in a lively environment; (3) a convenience goal, in which consumers were only concerned about the location of the restaurant; and (4) a savings goal, in which consumers were on a tight budget. The first two goals are hedonic goals that involve a symbolic image-based mode of processing. Convenience and savings goals, however, reflect utilitarian goals in which functional performance, costs/benefits, and tangible features are the focus of concern.

The second factor refers to the restaurant's image. The two levels of manipulations were (1) a restaurant with a calm and relaxing image (similar to the hotel), and (2) a restaurant with a lively image (different from the hotel). In order to determine the image congruency between the hotel and the restaurant brand, a video clip about the hotel brand was included.

### 3.4 Dependent Variable

Three seven-point semantic differential scales developed from literature in event sponsorship, celebrity

endorsement, and brand extension [3] [18] [19] were used to assess brand compatibility. The question was: "In reference to your dining needs, what do you think about Hotel X and Restaurant Y?" The three semantic differential scales included: do not belong together/belong together, are not compatible/are compatible, and do not fit well/fit well.

## 3.5 Manipulation Checks

To ensure that the independent variables were perceived as intended, this study included four scales for manipulation checks: (a) image congruency, (b) restaurant attitude, (c) hotel attitude and behavioral intention, and (d) consumption needs. The first two were directed toward the hotel and the restaurant while the last tapped into the scenario manipulation.

### 3.5.1 Image congruency

To check if the hotel and restaurant images were congruent, the approach developed by Martin and Stewart [5] was employed: "What do you think about the image between Restaurant Y and Hotel X?" The seven-point semantic differential scales included: highly dissimilar/highly similar, and not at all alike/very much alike.

### 3.5.2 Attitudes

Consumers' attitudes toward the restaurant were measured via a series of seven-point semantic differential scales: bad/good, unfavorable/favorable, and negative/positive [20]. Similarly, these attitude scales were also used in measuring consumers' attitudes toward the hotel prior to the alliance.

### 3.5.3 Behavioral intentions

The behavioral and word of mouth (WOM) scales were composed of a series of seven-point semantic scales [21]. Consumers were asked about their likelihood to: "say positive things about Hotel X to other people", "recommend Hotel X to someone who seeks your advice", "encourage friends and relatives to do business with Hotel X", "stay in Hotel X again", and "consider staying at Hotel X in your travels."

### 3.5.4 Consumption needs

To determine if subjects prioritized their consumption needs according to the scenario descriptions, four questions on the manipulation of scenario were included. Based on the situation described in the scenario, subjects were asked to answer "to what extent do you want to dine in a peaceful environment", "to what extent do you want to dine in a lively environment", "to what extent is the restaurant being located in the hotel critical to you", and "to what extent is menu pricing a concern to you." They gave responses on a scale of 1 = not at all to 7 = very much so.

## 4. Results

The profile of the participants shows that nearly two-thirds ($n$ = 231) of the participants were male. The average age of the respondents was 38.88, and the overall range was from 18 to 65. The majority of the participants were married (59%) and have at least a Bachelor's degree (79%). Only less than five percent of the respondents, 0.3% and 2%, were a widow/widower or had only some high school education, respectively. Approximately 57% of the participants earned more than 75K in annual household income. Overall, participants represented both genders, were married, and tended to be relatively young, well-educated, and affluent.

### 4.1 Manipulation Checks

A factor analysis of the participants' overall attitudes toward the hotel brand suggested a single underlying factor averaging the three attitude items (Cronbach's $\alpha$ = .967). Similarly, the five behavioral intention items were combined to generate a single behavioral intention index (Cronbach's $\alpha$ = .959). The manipulation checks for pre-alliance attitudes and behavioral intentions toward the hotel brand yield insignificant analysis of variance (ANOVA) results across all eight treatments ($p > .05$).

A factor analysis of the participants' overall attitudes toward the restaurant brand also suggested a single underlying factor averaging the three attitude items (Cronbach's $\alpha$ = .978). The two similarity items were also combined to generate a single similarity index with a high Pearson correlation, $r$ = .929 (Cronbach's $\alpha$ = .963).

The t-test results for restaurant brand image show that the image-incongruent restaurant ($M$ = 2.704) was rated significantly more dissimilar from the hotel ($t(348)$ = 12.457, $p < .05$) than was the image-congruent restaurant ($M$ = 4.725). Specifically, the image-incongruent restaurant ($M$ = 5.825) was rated more lively ($t(347)$ = 18.369, $p < .05$) than was the image-congruent restaurant ($M$ = 3.601). On the other hand, the pre-alliance restaurant attitudes shows an insignificant t-test result between the two types of restaurant image ($t(348)$ = 1.662, $p > .05$). Participants' attitudes toward the image-congruent ($M$ = 4.545) and incongruent restaurants ($M$ = 4.799) were not different. Hence, the manipulations of restaurant attributes (image, similarity to the hotel image, and attitudes) were successful.

In terms of consumption goal manipulation, all scenarios were perceived as realistic (mean > 4 for all scenarios, $p < .05$). Four manipulation checks focusing on the importance of each consumption goal (calm, lively, convenience, savings) were included. The repeated measures results yield only significant effect of consumption goals on scenario manipulation ($F(8.722, 991.354)$ = 44.193, $p < .05$).

### 4.2 Perceived Fit

A factor analysis of the three perceived fit items confirmed a single underlying factor. Thus, the items

**Table 1. Means and standard errors of perceived fit as a function of consumption goal and restaurant image**

| Consumption goal | Restaurant image | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Calm (Congruent) | | | Lively (Incongruent) | | |
| | $\underline{n}$ | Mean | $\underline{SE}$ | $\underline{n}$ | Mean | $\underline{SE}$ |
| Calm | 49 | $4.96_a$ | 0.23 | 45 | $2.86_b$ | 0.24 |
| Lively | 31 | $4.75_a$ | 0.29 | 35 | $4.12_a$ | 0.27 |
| Convenience | 47 | $5.54_a$ | 0.24 | 46 | $3.52_b$ | 0.24 |
| Savings | 51 | $5.03_a$ | 0.22 | 46 | $4.00_b$ | 0.24 |

Note. Means in the same row that do not share subscripts differ at $\underline{p} < .05$.

were averaged to form a general perceived fit index (Cronbach's $\alpha = .979$).

H1 asserted that when a restaurant image is consistent with consumers' hedonic goal (lively dining environment), the perceived fit ratings for a partnership with an image-incongruent (lively) restaurant would be at least as high as that for image-congruent (calm) restaurant. On the other hand, H2 predicted that the perceived fit ratings would be greater for a partnership with an image-congruent restaurant than with an image-incongruent restaurant when utilitarian goals are satisfied.

Table 1 summarizes the perceived fit ratings for all the experimental treatments. The ANOVA results reveal a significant interaction effect between consumption goals and image congruency on perceived fit ($\underline{F}(3, 338) = 4.193$, $\underline{p} < .05$, $\eta^2 = .036$). Specifically, planned contrasts show that a partnership with an image-congruent (calm) restaurant ($\underline{M} = 4.96$, $\underline{SE} = 0.23$) was rated significantly more fit ($\underline{F}(1, 338) = 40.203$, $\underline{p} < .05$, $\eta^2 = .106$) than with an image-incongruent (lively) restaurant ($\underline{M} = 2.86$, $\underline{SE} = 0.24$) when a peaceful environment was the participant's dining goal. However, when the consumption goal was to dine in a lively environment, the perceived fit ratings for a partnership with an image-incongruent restaurant ($\underline{M} = 4.12$, $\underline{SE} = 0.27$) and an image-congruent restaurant ($\underline{M} = 4.75$, $\underline{SE} = 0.29$) were not significantly different ($\underline{F}(1, 338) = 2.525$, $\underline{p} > .05$, $\eta^2 = .007$), in support of H1.

For utilitarian goals, the planned contrasts indicate that a partnership with an image-congruent (calm) restaurant ($\underline{M} = 5.54$, $\underline{SE} = 0.24$) was rated significantly more fit ($\underline{F}(1, 338) = 37.042$, $\underline{p} < .05$, $\eta^2 = .099$) than with an image-incongruent (lively) restaurant ($\underline{M} = 3.52$, $\underline{SE} = 0.24$) when the participant's consumption goal involved convenience. Likewise, when participants were concerned about price, the perceived fit ratings for a partnership with an image-congruent restaurant ($\underline{M} = 5.03$, $\underline{SE} = 0.22$) were significantly greater ($\underline{F}(1, 338) = 10.001$, $\underline{p} < .05$, $\eta^2 = .029$) than the fit ratings for an image-incongruent restaurant ($\underline{M} = 4.00$, $\underline{SE} = 0.24$). Hence, H2 was also supported.

H3 postulated that the perceived fit ratings would be greater for hedonic goals than for utilitarian goals when the partnership involved an image-congruent restaurant. On the other hand, H4 hypothesized that the perceived fit ratings would be lower for hedonic goals than for utilitarian goals when the partnership involved an image-incongruent restaurant.

To test these hypotheses, the cell means for the appropriate conditions were compared using a planned contrast procedure. Contradictory to H3, the perceived fit ratings for a partnership with an image-congruent restaurant were not significantly different between hedonic and utilitarian goals ($\underline{d} = -0.329$, $\underline{F}(1, 338) = 1.386$, $\underline{p} > .05$, $\eta^2 = .004$). However, the perceived fit ratings for a partnership with an image-incongruent restaurant were significantly lower for hedonic goals than for utilitarian goals ($\underline{d} = 0.903$, $\underline{F}(1, 338) = 9.450$, $\underline{p} < .05$, $\eta^2 = .027$). Hence, the result supports H4.

## 5. Discussion

The results of this study show that the perceived fit ratings for a partnership with an image-congruent restaurant were higher than the fit ratings for an image-incongruent restaurant. However, a partnership with an image-incongruent restaurant could be perceived as compatible if the incongruent restaurant image matched up to the hedonic consumption goals. For example, participants whose consumption goal was to dine in a lively environment judged the image-incongruent partnership as compatible as the image-congruent partnership. These findings are consistent with previous study [17].

When comparing the effect of hedonic and utilitarian goals, the perceived fit ratings were higher for utilitarian goals than for hedonic goals when a partnership involved an image-incongruent restaurant. On the other hand, the perceived fit ratings for hedonic goals were not different from that for utilitarian goals when a partnership involved an image-congruent restaurant.

Considered as a whole, these results suggest that, first, congruent image is not affected by any top-down intervention. Second, the effect of consumption goals is significant when hotels partner with image-incongruent restaurants. Specifically, hedonic goal-consistent image-incongruent partnership can alter the mental representations of two distinct brands. Image incongruent restaurant has lower negative impact when consumers' consumption goals are utilitarian than when they are hedonic.

## 6. Summary and General Discussion

The results for H1 support the general proposition that hotels partnering with image-incongruent restaurants may

not automatically be perceived as incompatible. These results are consistent with goal theories discussed previously, suggesting that consumption goals provide a context in which consumer process information and make similarity judgments [5] [12] [13]. Following these theories, hedonic goals direct consumers' attentions to symbolic aspects of brand image. Therefore, when the consumers' goals were to dine in a lively environment, a hotel with a calm image partnering with a lively restaurant appeared compatible, and subsequently would be favorably evaluated. However, results for H2 indicate that the effect of goals on consumers' perceptions of fit is dependent upon the types of consumption goals.

The current research provides empirical evidence for the development of hotel-restaurant brand alliance involving image congruency, consumption goal, perceived fit, attitude and behavioral intention toward the hotel brand, and image transference. This study broadens the latitude of goal-driven theory, as well as its application in several respects.

First, prior research has strongly suggested the intrinsically conspicuous role of surface level resemblance between two allied brands in the similarity judgments [4] [18]. Such a perspective implies considerable rigidity for shifts in similarity or compatibility perceptions based on factors such as individuals' goals. Previous researchers [17] demonstrated that personal goals and situational goals enhance the perceived similarity of goal-appropriate products even if the surface resemblance between the products is low. The present study extends the support for the notion that goals can enhance the perceived compatibility of two seemingly distinct brands for hedonic goals.

Second, goals are known to provide a context for information processing and similarity judgments. This study further sheds light onto the importance of distinguishing the types of consumption goals in future research. Specifically, it suggests that the effect of utilitarian goal is dependent upon the image discrepancy between two partnering brands in consumers' service brand evaluations.

Third, the effect of consumption goals on consumers' perceptions of fit of a brand alliance also differs between hedonic and utilitarian goals. In particular, utilitarian goals may attenuate the negative effect of an incongruent restaurant image on perceived fit ratings when the incongruent restaurant image is inconsistent with the hedonic goal. However, when the incongruent restaurant image is consistent with the hedonic goal, utilitarian goals are not capable of altering the perceived fit ratings. On the other hand, hedonic goal can enhance the perceived compatibility of two seemingly distinct brands.

## 7. Limitations and Future Study

There are several caveats and qualifications to the conclusions and interpretations of the current research findings. First, although this study sought to make a contribution by demonstrating an empirical support for

hypotheses derived in part from the goal-driven, only a limited set of consumption goals and only two specific types of restaurant image were investigated. Thus, generalizations must be made with caution.

Second, experimental approaches to examining marketplace phenomena are often criticized for lacking realism. In a real-life context, a brand name signifies additional information, such as familiarity, trust, predictability, and consistency. This brand equity may be a competitive factor to image congruency in influencing consumers' evaluations of a hotel brand. Therefore, future research employing real brands is greatly needed to shed light on the relative importance of brand name and image.

Third, it should be noted that the present research did not examine the effect when participants' utilitarian goals were not satisfied or the effect of utilitarian goal, per se. Although it is reasonable to infer from the current study that the symbolic image is more influential than the functional aspect of brand image for utilitarian goals, a definite conclusion can be drawn only when utilitarian goals are not met. Research attempting to validate the importance of image congruency, particularly in the service industry, would represent a substantial contribution to knowledge about service brand alliance.

Finally, hotel market segments are generally categorized into leisure, business, and convention types. The present study focused on leisure travelers and disclosed that restaurant brand recognition was not as important as expected. However, it seems plausible that business travelers do not usually spend a proportionate amount of time looking for a place to dine at. Familiarity and consistency of quality of a brand may be more critical to them. Thus, generalizability of the current results to business travelers must be made with further study.

Based on the results of the current research and its limitations, several avenues of further research are recommended. For example, future research can investigate the effect of hotel-restaurant brand alliance on consumers' evaluations of the hotel, as well as the possible image transference.

Besides the differences between leisure and business travelers, another interesting future area of research involves cross-cultural study. For example, hotel restaurants in Asia are generally considered as prestigious. Dining in a hotel restaurant is perceived as a luxury, even though the quality of food may be mediocre. On the other hand, mid-priced international restaurant chains receive equally high favorable attitudes among the consumers, but are limited in their number of outlets. If the idea of partnership between the two brands is well-accepted, it will be a means for international restaurant chains to venture into the foreign markets.

Finally, another challenging area of future research is the deep understanding of consumers' definitions of fit. Particularly, the type of relationship consumers contemplate between the hotel and the restaurant, whether a marriage, an affair, friendship, or master-slave, as well as the essential elements for the success of the

alliance are important. Qualitative research methods, such as the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique [22] [23] [24] could be useful in discerning more fully consumers' below surface thoughts and feelings relating to the alliance.

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