

Inconsistent organizational images of luxury hotels: Exploring employees' perceptions and dealing strategies ¹

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores employees' perceptions regarding the inconsistent images of luxury hotels. Based on individual interviews with 16 employees (front and backline staff), 4 managers, and 2 hospitality experts from Pakistan, the study found that five-star hotels' employees experienced wide inconsistencies between their organizations' external hotel image and internal employer image. This external-internal image inconsistency not only played a major role in forming employees' perceptions towards the attractiveness of their organizations as an employer, but also influenced their organizational attachment levels (e.g., intention to quit) and recommendation behaviors (e.g., referring the organization to others). The paper also explores different ways through which employees deal with these perceived inconsistencies. Three distinct employee clusters were identified, as employees adopted different strategies to deal with these inconsistencies, based on their inclination toward either or both of the external and internal image. Practical implications in terms of hotel branding and talent management are discussed.

Keywords: Organizational image; Employee perceptions; Perceived inconsistencies; Luxury hotel; Employer attractiveness; Dealing strategies; Intention to quit; Recommendation behaviors

1. Introduction

The music from the tea-room in the new building beat in syncopation from mirror to mirror along the walls (...) The porter felt a strange weakness in his knees and he stopped a moment in the doorway, arrested by the bright gleams of the coloured lights behind the blocks of ice (...) Feeling somewhat oppressed, (he) made his way straight across the Lounge, where there was now a throng of movement. Here the jazz band from the tea-room encountered the violins from the Winter Garden, while mingled with them came the thin murmur of the illuminated fountain as it fell into its imitation Venetian basin, the ring of glasses on tables, the creaking of wicker chairs and, lastly, a soft rustle of the furs and silks in which women were moving to and fro. A cool March air came in gusts through the revolving doors whenever the page-boy passed guests in or out (Baum, 1947, p.1).

This excerpt from a hotel novel portrays the opulent and fascinating image of a luxury hotel. Majestic exteriors, grand architectures, lavish cuisines, and flawless customer services are some of the key hallmarks of any five-star luxury hotel in the world. In fact, the need to communicate an attractive image remains one of the key priorities of the whole hospitality industry, let alone the five-star luxury hotels (Bailey & Ball, 2006; Kandampully & Hu, 2007). Using an amalgamation of various organizational images, like hotel's physical image, corporate image, product/service image, or corporate social performance (CSP) image, hotels today strive to picture a favorable image of themselves in the eyes of customers as well as other external stakeholders (Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2003; Lai, 2019; Liu, Wong, Tseng, Chang, & Phau, 2017; Martínez & Nishiyama, 2019; Sürücü, Öztürk, Okumus, & Bilgihan, 2019).

Interestingly, customers or outsiders are not the only ones who are attracted to this external image. Employees too are appealed by this and might also consider it in perceiving the attractiveness of their organizations as a place to work (Williams & Connell, 2010).

Indeed, three decades ago, Wood (1990) highlighted the captivating external image of luxury hotels that not only attracts customers but also prospective industry entrants and employees.

However, along with the external image, employees are also exposed to the internal employer image of these hotels. This internal employer image is the image of an organization as a “place to work” from the eyes of its current employees (Van Hove, 2008). In terms of the internal image, many have noted that the hotel industry has lagged far behind in terms of creating an attractive and appealing employer image (Baum, 2019a; Brien, Thomas, & Brown, 2017). Hotel work is frequently characterized by low pays, poor working conditions, excessive work, and sometimes even referred to as “modern slavery” (Armstrong & Matters, 2016; Baum, 2019b). As a result, the industry has always found itself short of talented human resource and has witnessed overwhelmingly high turnover rates and low commitment and satisfaction levels of its employees (Iverson & Deery, 1997; Stamolampros, Korfiatis, Chalvatzis, & Buhalis, 2019; Wells, 2018).

Hence, clearly the external and internal image of these organizations do not align. Whereas conceptual papers assert the need to maintain consistency between the external and internal images of an organization, so that the employees experience the same values and organizational traits inside the organization that are promoted outside (Hatch & Schultz, 2001; Mosley, 2007), empirical evidence in this regard is scarce. Moreover, little is known about what happens when the images of an organization are perceived inconsistent or misaligned with one another, since in general, the task of processing or attending to multiple, competing signals is considered complex and challenging (Drover, Wood, & Corbett, 2018). Knowing this becomes even more important from the perspective of employees working in a service-based industry like luxury hotels. Specifically, based on perceived inconsistencies between images, hotel employees might not only form their own impressions about the attractiveness of their organization as employers and their attachment with them, but can also influence

outsiders' perceptions about their organization as a place to work (through their word-of-mouth and recommendation behaviors) (Harris & Ogbonna, 2013; Van Hoya & Lievens, 2009).

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of five-star luxury hotel employees regarding the inconsistent images of their organizations to understand the nature and effects of these inconsistencies on employees. By means of a qualitative design, the study sought to understand how holding multiple inconsistent and contrasting organizational images affects employees' attitudes and behaviors towards their organizations as well as the attractiveness and appeal of an organization as an employer. To this end, individual interviews were conducted with 16 employees from five different luxury five-star hotels in Pakistan. To contextualize our findings and further understand the topic, we also interviewed some managers and hospitality experts.

Additionally, the paper aimed to identify ways through which hotel employees deal with these perceived inconsistencies. Given the increased complexity and dynamism of today's work environment, especially in the context of customer-oriented luxury hotels, perceiving and experiencing such image inconsistencies might be a regular part of employees' work lives (Mignonac, Herrbach, Serrano Archimi, & Manville, 2018). Hence, it is meaningful to document the strategies that hotel employees use to cope with these inconsistencies. The specific objectives of this study were:

1. To explore hotel employees' perceptions and experiences about the various organizational images that their organizations hold to understand possible inconsistencies between them.
2. To learn how perceived inconsistencies between organizational images impact employee-related outcomes such as hotel employees' perceptions regarding the attractiveness of their organizations as an employer, employees' organizational

attachment levels, and their recommendation behaviors.

3. To understand how hotel employees deal with these image inconsistencies.

2. Literature review

2.1 Multiple organizational images and perceived inconsistencies

Many scholars have concluded that an organization can have many different images (Dichter, 1985; Dowling, 1988; Lievens, 2006). These organizational images can be based on the different aspects of an organization, or its different roles or areas of distinction, such as the image of an organization as an employer, or as a producer of goods/services, or as a financial performer, or social and environmental actor (Highhouse, Brooks, & Gregarus, 2009). Moreover, unlike organizational reputation (which represents how the general public feels about an organization), an organization's image is based on an individual's own perceptions and impressions of an organization (Brown, Dacin, Pratt, & Whetten, 2006; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). Hence, the multiple images of an organization can be perceived positively or negatively by the individual.

These organizational images play an important role in the success or failure of an organization because based on these images, people choose to act and respond toward an organization (Lemmink, Schuijf, & Streukens, 2003). Good organizational images can yield positive advantages for an organization for instance, increased customer loyalty, enhanced access to capital markets, investor support, and increased attractiveness of the organization as an employer (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Zhang, He, Zhou, & van Gorp, 2019). This employer attractiveness (the focus of this paper) is a relevant and significant area of interest for both the industry practitioners as well as academic scholars, who aim to understand ways of recruiting and retaining talented employees for an organization (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). While researching the attractiveness of an organization as an employer, we came across five organizational images that extant literature has

identified. They are corporate image, product/service image, financial performance image, corporate social performance (CSP) image, and employer image. Hence, based on our review of the organizational image literature as well as the tourism and hospitality studies (see Table 1 for references), we decided to include all these in our study to comprehensively understand how inconsistencies between these five images might affect an organization's attractiveness as an employer. Table 1 presents the definitions and research findings about each of these organizational images in relation to employer attractiveness.

Organizational image	Description	Link with organizational attractiveness as an employer	
		Positive effects	Negative effects
Corporate image	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The net result of all experiences, impressions, beliefs, feelings, and knowledge people have about a company” (Worcester, 2009, p. 578) • Includes many organizational factors such as organization’s heritage, values and affinities of company founders, assets and capabilities, and accomplishments (Aaker, 2004; Balmer & Gray, 2003) • Primarily directed at external audiences (e.g. customers, job seekers etc.) (Lai, 2019; Theurer, Tumasjan, Welp, & Lievens, 2018) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A positive corporate image may help attract job seekers toward an organization and can also impact their intentions to apply (Cable & Turban, 2003; Gatewood, Gowan, & Lautenschlager, 1993; Lemmink et al., 2003) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A negative corporate image (characterized by organizational ruthlessness and dominance) correlates negatively with employees’ perceptions about their organization as an employer as well as their organizational satisfaction levels (Davies, Chun, da Silva, & Roper, 2004)
Product/service image	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “A seller’s promise to consistently deliver a specific set of features, benefits, and services to buyers” (Kotler, 1997, p. 443) • Is the image of an organization as a producer of quality goods and services • Usually called “hotel image” in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A favorable product image may increase job seekers’ familiarity with the organization and may form positive perceptions about the organization as an employer (Collins, 2007; Highhouse, Zickar, Thorsteinson, Stierwalt, & Slaughter, 1999) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative aspects about the product/service image of an organization may lead to decreased attractiveness of an organization as an employer. For instance, some hospitality students reject working in hospitality organizations owing to the demand of serving

	<p>hospitality literature and conceptualized as guests' perceptions about the general and specific dimensions of a hotel (Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2003)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job seekers and employees not only prefer to work for organizations with a strong product/service based image (DelVecchio, Jarvis, Klink, & Dineen, 2007) but may also sacrifice financial rewards to be employed there (Williams & Connell, 2010) 	<p>alcohol to the guests, a central part of these organizations' product/service image (Afifi, 2015)</p>
Financial performance image	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People's perceptions of "a company's financial viability, or the extent to which a company achieves its economic goals" (Orlitzky, Schmidt, & Rynes, 2003, p. 411) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being financially stable enables organizations to be perceived as distinguishable and attractive by job seekers (Cable & Graham, 2000) 	
Corporate social performance (CSP) image	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People's perceptions of "the organization's commitment to principles, policies, and practices relating to its social responsibilities and relationships with stakeholders" (Jones, Willness, & Madey, 2014, p. 383) • Includes social involvement image and pro-environmental image as two core ingredients of an organization's CSP image 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job seekers and employees perceive organizations with a positive CSP image as attractive employers (Backhaus, Stone, & Heiner, 2002; Greening & Turban, 2000; Kim, Lee, Lee, & Kim, 2010) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job seekers and employees can be repelled by an organization, if they are skeptical and cynical about its CSR activities and motives (Glavas & Godwin, 2013; Jones, Willness, & Heller, 2016)

Employer image	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “It is a mixture of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the employing company” (Ambler & Barrow, 1996, p. 187) • By proposing a unique combination of benefits or value propositions, an organization tries to create a distinct and desirable employer image both within the organization (referred as “internal employer image”) and outside the firm (called “external employer image”) (Theurer et al., 2018) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizations that can portray an attractive and distinguishable image of themselves as employer are perceived more positively by job seekers and employees (Lievens, 2007; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An organization that is perceived negatively as a place of work, based on evaluations about its different employment factors like pay, working conditions etc., struggles hard to attract and retain its employees (Dreier et al., 2018; Kuslivan & Kuslivan, 2000)
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Table 1: Organizational images in relation to the attractiveness of an organization as an employer

Interestingly, alongside positive organizational images, negative images of an organization also occur. Numerous examples exist where poor financial performance, defective products, corporate scandals, or organizational malpractices create negative perceptions about an organization. The same is true in the context of the hotel industry where studies show a negative employer image of these organizations (Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000; Stamolampros et al., 2019). Hence, as one might imagine, the multiple images of an organization might not always coincide. Organizational images might be perceived differently. In fact, perceptions about one organizational image might be completely inconsistent or conflicting with the perceptions about another organizational image. Some of the images might be perceived more positively, whereas others might be completely negative. For example, an organization might hold a very positive CSP image due to its community or social activities, whereas it cannot maintain a positive employer image for its employees. Conversely, an organization might be perceived as an attractive employer, however it might not have a positive product/service image due to any of its controversial products (like tobacco, contraceptive products etc.) or affiliation with a certain industry (like pornographic industry, sex industry etc.). Hence, we see that an organization might end up with several inconsistent organizational images, which might be based on the positivity or negativity of these images, conflicting goals of these images, or contrasting values and traits that these images might promote (Ashforth, Schinoff, & Brickson, 2020).

Prior research has adopted a fragmented approach to investigate these multiple organizational images. Images are studied in isolation to one another, which makes it difficult to understand the consistency or inconsistency between them. Only a few studies have explored multiple organizational images together (Cromheecke, 2016; Dineen & Wu, 2014; Kim, York, & Lim, 2011; Lemmink et al., 2003). However, none of these studies included all five discussed organizational images or were conducted in a hospitality context. Moreover,

the focus was on the external stakeholder perspective, specifically job seekers. However, employees represent a particularly valuable source of information to understand these image inconsistencies. This is because unlike external stakeholders, who rely on limited information and cues (mostly positive) provided by the organizations themselves (Kanar, Collins, & Bell, 2010), employees are exposed to all of the organizational images. This allows them to experience the underlying inconsistencies between these images that might affect their perceptions about the attractiveness or unattractiveness of their organization as employer and other important employee-related attitudes and behaviors (a point we will elaborate more in the next section). Exploring all the organizational images together and their underlying inconsistencies is particularly relevant in the context of a service-based and customer-oriented industry like luxury hotels (Grissmann, Plank, & Brunner-Sperdin, 2013), where employees serve as a critical interface between the organization and the outsiders to portray an attractive image of their hotels (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2017). Hence, the first objective of the paper was to explore how the ambassadors of this attractive hotel image i.e. hotel employees themselves perceive the multiple images of their organization to understand organizational image inconsistencies.

2.2 Effects of inconsistencies on employees

The need to attend to and interpret multiple signals with competing valences (positive and negative) is difficult and demanding (Drover et al., 2018). Individuals experience cognitive and emotional difficulties trying to process and interpret inconsistent information or messages (Abraham, 1998; Festinger, 1962). For employees too, facing multiple inconsistent organizational conditions, messages, or situations is challenging and can lead to negative employee attitudes and behaviors (Ashforth, Rogers, Pratt, & Pradies, 2014). Studies have shown that employees who face inconsistent organizational conditions or situations are more cynical and suspicious about their organizations (Mignonac et al., 2018), display reduced

innovation and learning behavior (Lee, Edmondson, Thomke, & Worline, 2004) and experience high levels of negative affectivity, emotional exhaustion, and burnout that generates depressive symptoms and leads to higher absenteeism (Diestel & Schmidt, 2011; Visser & Van der Heijden, 2015).

Resultantly, several scholars have emphasized the need for consistency between multiple organizational conditions, messages, and practices (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Erdem & Swait, 1998). The same idea has been iterated in terms of organizational images where conceptual papers recommend to bring close alignment between the different images of an organization (e.g.: a company's corporate, product, and employer image) so that the organization promotes similar goals, values, and traits in front of its external and internal stakeholders (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Hatch & Schultz, 1997). Specifically in terms of the internal employer image of an organization, it is important that the organization practices the same values or standards within the organization that it promotes outside (Foster, Punjaisri, & Cheng, 2010). This may avoid any negative employee-related outcomes such as negative employer attractiveness perceptions, intention to quit, or even negative recommendation behaviors (such as negative word-of-mouth or not referring others to work in the organization). Hence, we believe that an important yet overlooked avenue in terms of understanding the employer attractiveness and employee-related outcomes of luxury hotels consists of the "perceived inconsistencies between its images" that can drastically affect how employees act and behave toward their organizations.

However, limited empirical evidence exists to understand this phenomenon. Research is not informative about how perceived inconsistencies between the multiple images of luxury hotels impact its workforce. Hence, as second objective, the study sought to empirically analyze the effects of these image inconsistencies on various employee-related outcomes such

as employees' perceptions regarding the attractiveness of their organization as an employer, organizational attachment levels, and their recommendation behaviors.

2.3 Dealing with inconsistencies

Given the fact that employees are not merely passive recipients of the less-than-ideal conditions of inconsistencies (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009), it seems plausible that they employ some strategies to deal with these. This is particularly true for employees working in luxury hotels, where the notion of customer-orientation prevails and experiencing aesthetic and emotional labor might be part of an employee's daily routine (Pugh, Groth, & Hennig-Thurau, 2011). Hence, it is worthwhile to look for ways through which hotel employees deal with these perceived inconsistencies.

In general, there exist two streams of literature that propose different ways of dealing with perceived inconsistencies (Sengupta & Johar, 2002). The first one aims for the reconciliation of perceived inconsistencies such as purported in balance theory (Heider, 1959) or cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1962). This perspective posits that human beings are motivated to reconcile inconsistencies. Hence, following the notion that inconsistencies generally tend to be discomforting, studies have identified a number of reduction strategies such as avoidance, compromise, or domination of one perspective over the other, that help employees mitigate the effects of perceived inconsistencies (Ashforth et al., 2014). However, an opposing theoretical perspective posits that people may be capable of maintaining inconsistencies such as the information processing models proposed by Hastie (1980) and Srull and Wyer (1989). This perspective suggests that instead of reducing the perceived inconsistencies, people are spontaneously motivated to make sense of these inconsistencies. Hence, exposure to inconsistencies might allow individuals to carefully process the negative and positive items of information or signals to reach an integrated judgement or evaluation about an entity.

In terms of organizational images, no research has so far explored how employees deal with the inconsistent images around them. Hence, as third objective, this paper sought to make a theoretical contribution in that regard.

Altogether, this qualitative study sought to explore the perceptions of five-star luxury hotel employees regarding the inconsistent images of their organizations and to understand the impact of these inconsistencies on employer attractiveness, employees' organizational attachment, and their recommendation behaviors. The paper also present a conceptual framework for organizing employees' responses and strategies to deal with these perceived inconsistencies.

3. The research context

The five-star luxury hotels currently operating in Pakistan provided an ideal context to investigate our research objectives. This is because in terms of images, Pakistan's luxury hotel industry can be associated with multiple organizational images that often seem to conflict or contrast with one another.

In general, the luxury hotel sector of Pakistan holds an attractive image, owing to the nature of its hotels (i.e. five-star), glamorous industry image (due to the type of guests such as celebrities, government officials, business tycoons, and other elite-class customers), and solid financial and business reputations of its organizations. The industry's strong position and flourishing circumstances are also evidenced by the increased number of hotel investments and infrastructure development projects that are happening throughout the country. Many renowned international hotel chains have entered the market. For instance, the Swiss International Hotels & Resorts which opened a 350 room five-star luxury hotel in Lahore in 2019 (Töre, 2018) or the Radisson Hotel Group which has announced the opening of a 400 room luxury hotel by the end of 2022 (Radisson Hotel Group Media, 2019). Moreover, the existing hotel chains are also investing heavily in different hotel ventures such as Hashoo

group, one of the leading hospitality groups in Pakistan which launched seven different, five-star luxury hotels in different cities of the country in 2018, two of which have already started operating (Haq, 2018).

Consequently, the sector demands and attracts people to work in its organizations and provides employment opportunities to a sizeable number of people. According to World Travel and Tourism Council (2018), the travel and tourism sector in Pakistan directly created 1,493,000 jobs (2.5% of total employment for the economy) in 2017, with an estimation to account for 2,008,000 jobs directly by 2028, a yearly increase of 2.7%.

However, despite commercial wins and the industry's need for talent, the condition of human resource working for this industry is at a sad dismay. Pakistan was ranked 121st out of 140 countries in the Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index 2019. More specifically, its position in the Human resources & Labor market parameter of the index was 135th out of 140, posing serious questions about the internal workplace image and working conditions of this industry (World Economic Forum, 2019). The employer image of Pakistan's five-star hotel industry, in particular, has also failed to leave a substantial mark. Bashir and Nasir (2013) found that employees working in this industry experience a marked psychosocial contract violation, since they pointed out false promises being made by the management about career prospects and other benefits that ultimately resulted in the formation of organizational cynicism and increased commitment of employees towards union activities. As a matter of fact, the industry has evidenced several union strikes in the past, with employees protesting for their welfare and rights, being arrested and dismissed, and filing cases against their employers (The International Union of Food, 2016). Hence, against this interesting backdrop, the paper sought to advance current knowledge about organizational image inconsistencies, its effects on employee-related outcomes such as employer attractiveness, organizational attachment, and recommendation behaviors, and employees' dealing strategies.

4. Method

4.1 Data collection

Since the concept of perceived inconsistencies between the multiple images of an organization from an employee perspective lacks clear understanding and knowledge (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016; Theurer et al., 2018), a qualitative approach was adopted. Qualitative research - due to its innate explorative nature - allows for more detailed insights into a topic, as it builds upon the perceived realities of its target population (Creswell, 2014). It enables the researcher to explore those intricacies and nuances that cannot be grasped through quantitative studies (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Hence, this study sought for a qualitative exploration into the phenomenon by investigating the perceptions and experiences of employees about their organization's multiple images, their underlying inconsistencies, and resultant dealing strategies. Moreover, in order to facilitate the respondents to freely share their experiences and perceptions about their organizations (that might include some negative perceptions, personal accounts, or sensitive information), individual semi-structured interviews were chosen to collect the data (King & Horrocks, 2010).

The lead author conducted 22 individual semi-structured interviews during a two-month period from December 2018 to January 2019 in five different five-star luxury hotels of Pakistan, located in four different cities. Since the focus of the study was to explore the employee perspective about these organizational images, the majority of the interviews (16 out of 22) were conducted with employees who worked in different departments of these luxury hotels. Special attention was given to also include frontline employees, as they deal directly with the guests and might be more exposed to these conflicting organizational images. In addition, along with getting the employee perspective, the researcher also interviewed four managers of these hotels to understand the organization's perspective toward these inconsistencies and thus further contextualize our findings with respect to the

employees. Moreover, two independent hospitality experts, with approximately 20 years of experience with multiple five-star luxury hotels of Pakistan, were also interviewed to develop a complete picture about the research topic. Altogether, 16 employees, 4 managers, and 2 hospitality experts were interviewed for this study. In terms of respondents' characteristics, the sample comprised of 15 male and 7 female participants, all working on full time basis, with experiences with working in the hotel sector ranging from less than one year to more than 20 years. See Table 2 for the detailed profile of each participant.

Sample group	No.	Hotel	Gender	Experience in current hotel ^b	Age	Nature of job
Employee	E1	1	F	2 months	23	Front
	E2	1	F	1 month	33	Back
	E3	1	F	20 years	44	Back
	E4	1	M	20 years	43	Front
	E5	1	M	3.5 years	24	Front
	E6	1	F	1.5 years	33	Front
	E7	1	M	12 years	37	Front
	E8	2	F	7 years	28	Front
	E9	2	M	6.5 years	28	Back
	E10	3	M	1 year	29	Back
	E11	3	M	14 years	45	Back
	E12	4	F	4 months	31	Front
	E13	4	M	2 months	24	Front
	E14	4	M	4 months	31	Front
	E15	4	M	12 years	38	Front
	E16	5	M	4.5 years	33	Front
Manager	M1	1	M	23 years	-	Front
	M2	1	M	27 years	-	Front
	M3	3	M	7 years	-	Back
	M4	3	F	10 years	-	Back
Expert	Exp1	-	M	19 years	-	Front
	Exp2	-	M	22 years	45	Front

Table 2: Profile of participants

^b Experts' experience denotes their total experience in Pakistan's five-star hotels.

In order to recruit participants, the HR offices of the leading five-star hotels in Pakistan were contacted to participate in the research. Right from the beginning, the research team observed reluctance and delay in nearly all of the hotels' responses to allow their employees to participate. We thought this could be due to many reasons, for instance the context of the country being developing with less information about research studies, centralized administrative and decision making structure of these hotels, stiff hotel-union relations, or management's fear of jeopardizing the current goodwill and reputation of their hotels. This led us to build more trust with the hotels' management through personally meeting the higher managers and ensuring them about the scientific nature, anonymity, and confidentiality of their data. Therefore, after getting permission from the hotel, the lead author asked the hotel's employees or managers to participate in the study. Those who expressed their interest to participate were individually interviewed in a face-to-face setting, mostly outside the premises of their organizations (in neutral locations), with a few who preferred to be interviewed inside the premises (in that case, in participants' own offices, after their working hours). The study employed a non-probability, purposive, judgmental sampling technique to recruit and select the participants. Purposive sampling is used to identify and select participants whose features fit the scope of an investigation (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003) and each participant is expected to provide unique and rich information of value to the study (Etikan, 2016). It is intended for projects where the limited population and restricted access to the study's informants pose a challenge (Giudici & Filimonau, 2019). Since the aim of our study was to understand the topic through multiple sample groups' perspectives (employees, managers, experts) and line of operations (front and backline), and we faced immense challenges in terms of contacting and getting access to the study's participants, purposive sampling seemed to be the appropriate choice. Additionally, in order to avoid delays, we also used personal contacts and offered chocolates as an incentive to expedite the data collection process. None of the

respondents was recommended or appointed by the hotels. Special caution was taken to avoid identification or tracking of each participant as well as the participating hotels. Names of each participant and participating hotels were substituted with numbers. Personal details or information discussed by each participant were considered strictly confidential and in no circumstance communicated to the participants' employer.

The sample size was determined based on the theoretical saturation criterion (Saunders et al., 2018). In purposive sampling, the size of the sample depends on data saturation (i.e., obtaining a comprehensive understanding of the topic by continuing to sample until no new substantive information is acquired) (Etikan, 2016). Following upon that, the researcher kept interviewing respondents from a certain hotel as long as new information emerged. This resulted in the first hotel having the highest number of interviews since different respondents kept discussing different organizational images in terms of how they perceive the underlying inconsistencies and their dealing strategies. However, once the data reached theoretical saturation in one hotel, the researcher moved to the next one in search of new insights as well as comparative information to enlighten the research objectives. The inclusion of five different hotels was also meant to bring rigor into the research by grasping the prevalence of the phenomenon in a wide range of hotels, by a variety of different employees, rather than making it a case about a certain hotel situation (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002).

An interview protocol was developed to guide the researcher to stay abreast with the relevant research objectives (See Appendix A). In order to avoid priming the participants' response towards a certain organizational image or perceptual extremity (negativity or positivity about their organization), general questions were asked about the image of their organization such as "Do you have an image of this organization? How is it like?" and "If I ask you to describe your organization in three words, what would those be?" This enabled the

participants to candidly describe and discuss their organizations using any of the images they associate with their organizations. Next, they were asked to discuss whether they perceived those images to be consistent or inconsistent with each other, further trying to delve into the details and effects of those inconsistencies on employer attractiveness, employees' organizational attachment (intention to quit) and their recommendation behaviors (referring their organization as a place to work to others). Finally, they were asked about ways through which they cope with these perceived inconsistencies.

Interviews averaged about 32 minutes with length, varying from 15 minutes to more than 1 hour. The lengths of interviews varied based on the amount of information respondents shared and the availability of their time. Each interview was audio recorded with the permission of the respondent. Interviews were taken in the native language Urdu, with a few taken directly in English due to respondent's preference. Pakistan has two official languages, Urdu and English. Whereas Urdu is the national language of Pakistan used in everyday conversations, English is also its official language, which is extensively used in public and private organizations for oral and written communication (Manan, David, & Dumanig, 2016). The use of English language is also dominant in Pakistan's luxury hotel industry, in which employees are expected to have a good command of the language. Hence, some of the respondents said that they were more comfortable in being interviewed in English than Urdu. The rest of them chose to speak in Urdu. Interviews taken in Urdu were translated into English by the lead author (proficient in both languages), and were developed into a transcript for analysis (Regmi, Naidoo, & Pilkington, 2010). Translations were also verified by a native speaker who served as a faculty member in one of the universities in Pakistan. At the end of each interview, the researcher restated/summarized the information obtained from the respondents to let them check the adequacy and validity of the data that they provided (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). Moreover, in order to capture the researcher's own

observations about the respondents and the data collection process, field notes were also maintained (Montgomery & Bailey, 2007). Finally, the researchers searched for deviant cases and alternative explanations/interpretations throughout the data collection and analysis phase to enhance the study's trustworthiness (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

4.2 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the six-step thematic analysis approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). First, the interviews were read several times in order to get familiar with the data and its content. Second, initial codes were generated that emerged from the data as well as from the literature. This step was particularly helpful in identifying the major organizational images (along with their individual image dimensions) discussed by the respondents and how they perceived the inconsistencies between them. Third, the initial codes were clustered into overarching themes and subthemes to reflect those features of the data that were pertinent to the research questions. Resultantly, we came up with a number of themes and subthemes that captured the different forms of perceived inconsistencies, the impacts of perceived inconsistencies on various employee-related outcomes (i.e. employer attractiveness, employees' organizational attachment, and their recommendation behaviors), and different strategies that employees use to deal with these perceived inconsistencies. Next, the themes were reviewed to check whether they work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set. This step was particularly helpful in grouping the employees into three main clusters based on their dealing strategies. Next, the themes were defined and named, prior to writing a report about the analysis as a final step. Although most of the employees shared instances of perceived inconsistencies in one way or the other, particular attention was paid to the weight participants gave to either the external or internal image or both in order to decide their dealing strategies' cluster. Nvivo 12 was used to support coding and data analysis. Appendix B presents the thematic analysis map consisting of the four overarching themes that emerged

from this process and forms the basis of the findings section. Additionally, Appendix 1 in Supporting information presents the project's final coding tree.

All data and the thematic analysis were shared with the co-author to check the analysis reliability and validity. Additionally, in order to check the credibility of our analysis, we contacted the respondents a year later to verify our study's findings and receive feedback (all correspondence with the study participants was direct and not through their employers). This follow up measure was particularly helpful in confirming our analysis regarding the dealing strategies' clusters, to check whether the employees also identify with the cluster that the researchers have assigned them. Some employees confirmed the cluster they have been assigned, whereas others provided extra information. Hence, this strategy enabled us to not only confirm our study's results, but also made us shift certain employees from one cluster to the other, in an effort to integrate their feedback and co-construct knowledge with our participants (Morrow, 2005). Hence, the researchers adopted a "constructivist" view to understand reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). According to the constructivist (or interpretivist) paradigm, reality is subjective and is driven by context, such as the individual's experiences and perceptions, the social environment, and the interaction between the individual and the researcher. Accordingly, we consider our data as socially constructed, based on the perceptions and experiences of the respondents who helped inform our research objectives, as well as the researcher-respondent interactions that enabled us to build an in-depth understanding about the phenomenon (Ponterotto, 2005). The role of the researchers can be considered as facilitators who strived to understand the topic from multiple dimensions and perspectives, throughout the data collection and analysis phase.

5. Findings

This section starts with a brief introduction about the different organizational images discussed by the hotel employees followed by an account of the inconsistencies perceived and experienced between them. The next section presents how different employees deal with these perceived inconsistencies, highlighting the major employee-related outcomes such as employer attractiveness, employees' organizational attachment, and recommendation behaviors that these inconsistencies affect.

5.1 Inconsistent organizational images

Our first research objective was to explore how employees perceive and experience the various images of their organizations to understand possible image inconsistencies. We found that while describing their organizations, employees discussed a number of different images that their organizations hold. Our thematic analysis confirmed the presence of the five major organizational images identified in the literature (i.e. corporate image, product/service image, financial performance image, corporate social performance (CSP) image, and employer image) in our sample (See Figure 1). Moreover, the analysis enabled us to identify the specific image dimensions that comprise each organizational image as well as the words that employees used to describe each one (For representative quotes about each of these organizational images, see Appendix 2 in Supporting information).

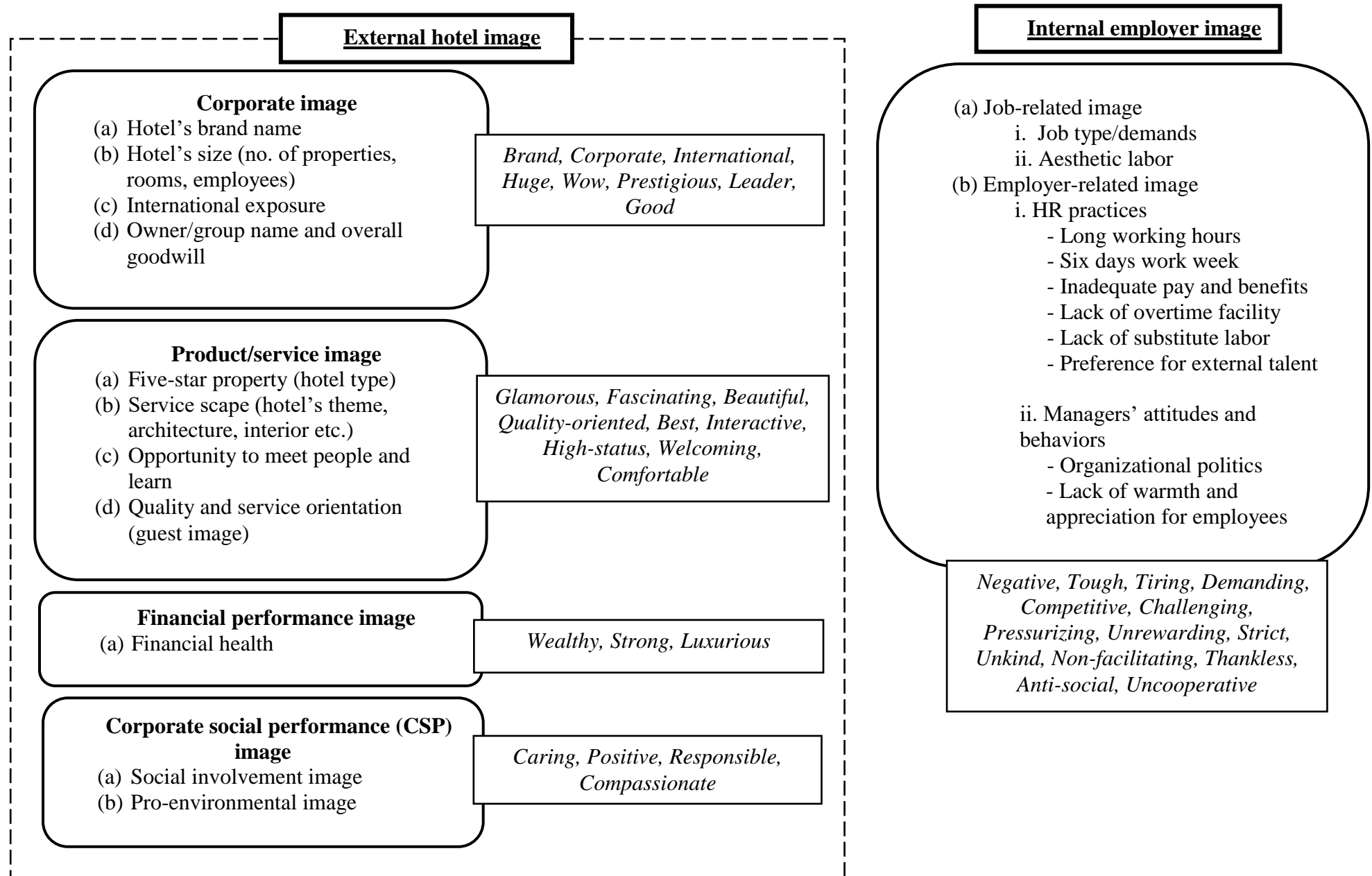


Figure 1: Organizational images (with specific image dimensions) discussed by hotel employees

We noticed a clear divide between these organizational images as employees expressed their perceptions regarding the positivity or negativity of these images. Whereas nearly all the employees expressed positive perceptions and favorable opinions about the corporate image, product/service image, financial performance image, and corporate social performance (CSP) image of their organizations and used words like corporate, quality-oriented, luxurious, and compassionate to describe these images (respectively), the internal employer image was perceived more negatively and unfavorably, as employees used an altogether different set of words like negative, tough, tiring, pressurizing, non-facilitating and unrewarding to explain this image. Hence, based on perceptions shared by a vast majority of employees and the words they associated with these organizational images, we themed these multiple organizational images into two main categories, namely the “External hotel image” and the “Internal employer image” to illustrate the perceived inconsistencies between these:

5.1.1 The external hotel image includes employees’ perceptions and experiences about the corporate, product/service, financial performance, and corporate social performance (CSP) image of their organizations. Since this image is primarily targeted to the external stakeholders of an organization such as hotel guests, investors, community members, we named this overall image “External hotel image”. However, we noticed that the internal stakeholders i.e. employees also considered this image as important in assessing the attractiveness of their organization as an employer. The idea of working in a corporate, prestigious hotel chain with strong international presence, renowned organizational/founder’s heritage, solid financial/market footing and a positive CSP image seemed attractive to many employees of our sample. Most of them expressed their excitement to work in a beautiful and luxurious setting with a few recalling their love for the fascinating image of working in a five-star hotel that eventually made them choose these as their preferred workplaces. Hence, we noticed a strong “spillover effect” (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016, p. 430), of the external hotel

image on employees' employer image perceptions. The phenomenon has also been observed in some other industries such as the retail industry, where high-end retail brands are successful in attracting and hiring workers for their jobs by appealing to their consumer interests (Williams & Connell, 2010). Hence, a strong external image plays an important role in attracting individuals toward working for an organization (DelVecchio et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2011; Sen, Bhattacharya, & Korschun, 2006). As one employee explained that this external hotel image is so overpowering and attractive that it also makes these hotels appear as attractive places to work:

Lot of people join and work in this organization because they are attracted to its corporate image. [Hotel name] has a (big) name. It has its own image (and reputation in the market), and this image is what makes people work here. (E3)

5.1.2 The internal employer image includes employees' perceptions and experiences about the internal image of their organization as a place to work. Based on a number of job-specific and employer-related factors, a vast majority of employees described their organizations as tough, pressurizing, and unrewarding places to work in. Employees in our study identified the nature of their work, the vast amount of aesthetic and emotional labor they undergo while dealing with the guests, but more importantly their organization's HR malpractices and negative attitudes and behaviors of the hotel management as important factors that foster a negative and unattractive employer image of their organizations¹. This is in line with previous studies that discussed various challenging aspects of working in the hotel industry (Gamor, Amissah, & Boakye, 2014; Walters & Raybould, 2007; Xu & Cao, 2019). As one employee summarized:

The employee faces pressures from all sides. From the hotel's management who does not seem to support the staff, from the audit team which is very difficult to handle, and also the guests who are so hard to please.

¹ Alongside many negative employer image dimensions, a few positive ones were also mentioned. For example, the training and development opportunities provided to the employees, discounts offered to them to avail the hotel services, and employee-related activities such as sports days, birthday celebrations, and employee of the month awards.

For instance, unlike our competitor, our hotel follows a strict late checkout policy, in which the employee ultimately becomes a punching bag for all. We face the guests who become so angry that the hotel is not facilitating a late checkout, we face the audit team for not complying with the hotel's audit policies, and we also get scolded by the management if a late checkout happens. (E13)

5.2 External-internal image inconsistency

Nearly all employees identified external-internal image inconsistency as a major form of inconsistency they perceived between the multiple images of their organization. We define the "external-internal image inconsistency" as *the inconsistency that employees perceive between the external image (that includes the corporate, product/service, financial, and CSP image) and the internal image (that includes the internal employer image) of their organizations.*

Our thematic analysis showed that whereas employees described a prestigious, attractive, and compassionate external image of their organizations, they expressed the lack of a similar internal image, marked with similar words and attributes that would make the internal employer image consistent with the external hotel image. At several instances, respondents compared their internal employer image with different external organizational images to highlight these inconsistencies. For instance, in terms of the *financial performance image*, employees shared that whereas their organizations hold a very luxurious image externally, the same luxuriousness is not shown internally, since the organization pays low wages and is perceived as quite exploitive by its employees.

In profit margin, five-star hotels never compromise. Not only mine, but also all the other five-star hotels operating in this city are earning a lot of revenue. However, the salaries they pay are too low and [on top of that] our jobs are also extremely tough, both mentally and physically. (E16)

Or in terms of the *corporate social performance (CSP) image*, where their organizations portray a very compassionate role in society, however fail to spread the same compassion inside.

The organization claims that it wants to help someone and therefore it conducts various charity activities and events. However, if our organization sees within itself, it will realize that there are so many people inside the

hotel, who are also needy. Therefore, the organization should think about helping them first. The employees should be the first priority of the organization [to receive this compassion]. (E4)

Or in terms of the *product/service image* which appears to be so perfect as an outsider, however the same perfection is not realized for the employees of these organizations.

The organization's image is very good if you consider it from the guest point of view. However, when you become an employee here, then the image changes [and you say] that Ah! This is how I perceived it and this is how it is in reality (...) When I used to come to this hotel as a guest, everything was good, but when I became an employee here [my image changed] because the internal environment is not good. Outsiders think that this hotel might also be a good place [to work], but the employee who is actually experiencing the internal image is the one who really understands. (E2)

A few other researchers have also hinted at this external-internal image inconsistency as a factor that further complicates the employer attractiveness of hospitality organizations (Barron, Maxwell, Broadbridge, & Ogden, 2007; Wood, 1990). As Riley, Ladkin, and Szivas (2002, p. 17) rightly pointed out that employment in tourism and hospitality organizations "is blighted by the confusing complexity of its own image. On the one hand, the image of tourism employment is of glamour while, on the other hand, there is evidence of low pay and low status". Hence, whereas the powerful external image of these hotels makes them appear as "Wow experiences for the employees", the internal employer image is so conflicting that many employees eventually deem these organizations as unattractive places to work, since they provide no real value to the employees.

People perceive that since we work in a big organization with a big brand name, we can compromise on financials. This surprises me and I tell them that I do not work for an external, luxurious image. I have financial responsibilities and a house to run. (E12)

5.2.1 *Guest-employee image inconsistency*

Another image inconsistency widely discussed under the theme of external-internal image inconsistency was the "guest-employee image inconsistency", which was reported as an important and frequently experienced image inconsistency while working in five-star luxury

hotels. This subtheme of the external-internal image inconsistency was discussed in terms of the product/service image of five-star luxury hotels and its stark contrast with the internal employer image of these organizations. We define guest-employee image inconsistency as the *extent to which employees perceive the image, attributes, and values aimed toward the guest as inconsistent or opposing with the image, attributes, and values aimed toward the employee.*

While discussing the *product/service image* of their organizations, respondents identified a distinct “guest image” that highlighted the customer and performance orientation of their organizations. Nearly all of the respondents re-iterated the industry’s golden rule of “*The customer is always right*” in different ways and nuances. “*Not saying no to the guests*” was a programmed script that we heard in all of the interviews, be it of managers or employees, as one employee elaborated:

For us, the ultimate goal is to achieve the guest satisfaction. We cannot say no to our guests. Anybody who is joining the hospitality industry is being informed about these things at the first day. The management believes in “do whatever it takes” philosophy to please the guests. If [the employees] think that they can do it, then it is a good place for them. If they want a 9 to 5 work routine, then this place does not suit them. (E14)

However, many employees mentioned that this guest image is maintained at the cost of the internal employer image and interests of the employees. The organizations fail to create a consistent image within the organization for its employees, as they adopt a one-sided customer-oriented approach to run their business. They mentioned prioritization of guest image over the internal employer image, quoting various instances of poor managerial styles and organizational policies that negatively affect the psychological well-being and benefits of employees.

I used to cover my head and this was a personal choice. When I joined this hotel, the first thing I was asked was to remove it. I argued that since I do it in a graceful way, they should let me do it. However, they constantly reminded me that my headscarf stops the guests. Sometimes, I really want to ask that what kind of

hindrance they want to remove for the guests. I have been asked to abandon it so many times that now at several occasions; I do not cover my head. (E6)

Especially the frontline employees mentioned taking verbal abuse and scolds from the guests as well as management, as regular parts of their jobs (Grandey, Kern, & Frone, 2007). They highlighted a number of organizational malpractices that make the guest-employee image inconsistency more evident in front of them.

If guests complain about us that, [for instance] we have used abusive words for them, the management always believes the guests. It says that the guest is right and we must have committed that mistake. Its actions are always based on guests' perspective. Over here, only the guest is believed and favored, be it a woman, man, or even a kid. (E5)

Management does nothing for the employees. Recently, a guest misplaced PKR 25k³ in the hotel. The management believed the guest's story and asked the employees to pay the guest from their own salaries. Now just imagine that since the employees themselves earn PKR 21k or 22k monthly, so paying PKR 25k from their own pockets is a huge problem for them. (E16)

These findings are in line with prior research that highlighted the preference for customers over employees among hospitality organizations (Ram, 2018). The unequal power in customer-employee transactions and normalization of guest-employee image inconsistency are key aspects that might trigger various incidents of guest misbehavior, customer aggression, employees' sexual harassment, and experiences of emotional and aesthetic labor (Alola, Olugbade, Avci, & Öztüren, 2019; Grandey, Dickter, & Sin, 2004; Kensbock, Bailey, Jennings, & Patiar, 2015). Consequently, many employees of our sample urged for consistency between the two images and expressed their desire for warmth and appreciation from their employers.

There is a limit to being a guest. Over here, when the guest is right, the guest is right. However, balance is important (...) People do not dare to change the trend. Innovation is not just that you put digital LEDS in hotel rooms or that you give a luxurious environment to the guest. Innovation also lies in how you gain the

³ PKR stands for Pakistani Rupee, the official currency of Pakistan. At the time of the study, 1 Euro was equivalent to 171 PKR (approx.). Hence, PKR 25k was equivalent to Euro 146 (approx.).

loyalty of your employees and how you attract them, so that they work for you and not just for the money.
(E15)

Not all employees' stories were of inconsistencies. Three of the 16 interviewed employees (*E3, E9, and E11*) perceived their internal employer image as more or less aligned with the external hotel image. However, all of them belonged to the back office.

5.3 Perceived inconsistencies – Effects on employees and dealing strategies

While stressing the need to maintain consistency in an individual's organizational life, Bowen and Ostroff (2004) warned organizations about the severe consequences of inconsistencies that can drastically influence how employees think and behave towards their organization. Our findings also revealed that inconsistent organizational images had a significant impact on employees' attitudes and behaviors, such that the perceived image inconsistencies not only influenced their perceptions regarding the attractiveness of their organization as employers but also their organizational attachment levels and recommendation behaviors (our second research objective). We found that out of 16 employees that we interviewed, 11 of them showed their intentions to quit their organizations. Moreover, while soliciting participants' feedback about the study's findings (as discussed earlier); we came to know that two of the employees (*E6 and E15*), both of whom had reported perceived image inconsistencies, had already left their organization. This led us to witness the high turnover rate of these organizations frequently reported in the literature (Goh & Okumus, 2020), further supporting our finding that the observed image inconsistencies relate to important employee-related outcomes such as intention to quit and turnover.

However, despite similarities in employees' intentions to quit their organizations, their responses differed once we started analyzing their ways to deal with the perceived inconsistencies. We noticed that whereas the gap between the external hotel image and the internal employer image was experienced nearly by all, the way employees perceived the relative importance of these contrasting organizational images in order to counter these

inconsistencies highly differed. Whereas some respondents preferred the internal employer image as a focus of their perceptions and decisions to deal with these image inconsistencies, others focused on the external hotel image or both to make sense of these disparities. The findings are in line with Sengupta and Johar (2002), who highlighted different ways of dealing with inconsistencies. Moreover, in terms of tourism and hospitality organizations, Riley et al. (2002) suggested to consider the role of personal interpretations in understanding how employees and job seekers make sense of the vast disparities and ambiguities lying between the external and internal image of these organizations.

Our thematic analysis identified three distinct employee clusters, with each cluster comprising a group of employees who focus on the same organizational image as a basis of their evaluations and employ similar dealing strategies to cope with the image inconsistencies (our third research objective). The names of the clusters were based on the patterns of employees' dealing strategies and their responses to important employee-related outcomes. Interestingly, we noticed variety in each of the clusters based on employees' personal characteristics (e.g., gender, age) and their association with a certain area of operations (front or backline) or hotel of our sample. This provides evidence on the robustness of the proposed framework. Note that the results are based on the perceptions of 13 employees (out of 16), who reported inconsistencies and discussed their strategies to deal with these.

5.3.1 Cluster 1 (Vocal reactors) (includes three employees i.e. E2, E6, and E16)

This cluster consists of those employees whose perceptions and reactions towards the external-internal image inconsistency were based on the negative internal employer image. Rozin and Royzman (2001) discussed individuals' tendency to prefer negative information, events, or situations to positive ones. They posit that negative perceptions and experiences are more dominant and influential in combinations of positive and negative elements. We found that the employees of this cluster conformed to these findings, since the existence of

inconsistencies was particularly discomforting to them (Festinger, 1962) and they expressed much frustration and resentment towards these. By means of various reactive strategies, employees in this cluster tried to deal with these inconsistencies. For instance, first employees shared that owing to these inconsistencies; they perceive very low attractiveness of their organization as employer and intend to quit their organization. They believed that such image inconsistencies affect the financial and psychological wellbeing of the employees and, hence, employees and even job seekers should avoid working in organizations with such high external-internal image inconsistencies. Second, employees mentioned that they talk about these inconsistencies with others. Employees told that not only do they share their feelings and opinions about these inconsistencies with their families, friends, and outsiders (negative word-of-mouth), but they also do not refer other people to work in their organizations (negative recommendation behaviors).

This organization has a lot of money and they love to spend that on diplomacies [to build their external image] but unfortunately, they do not think about their employees. They can easily spend 2 million, 3 million PKR on one [image building] event, but when there is anything that they have to do in favor of their employees, they become constipated. Because they are not good people. They do not love their employees. (E6)

Q: If I ask you to describe your hotel as a person, how will you do it? A: I would describe the hotel as a very bad person, very very bad (...) [Over here], I really get upset, but I keep assuring myself that I am here until I find my next opportunity. However, I take all of that anger out at my home. Q: so do you complain about all this to your family or friends? A: Yes, I talk about it to my friends (...) and I suggest that one should never come here to work. (E2)

Having seen the internal picture of their employers, these employees seemed to discredit and discard the attractive external hotel image of their organizations; a concept we conceptualize as the “reverse spillover effect” (the effect of the negative internal employer image perceptions on the external hotel image perceptions)

For employees, [the benefit of the external image] may be that they get a plus point on their CVs that they have worked in an international brand because in reality, there is nothing for employees in this industry. The scope of hospitality industry in general is diminishing, in my eyes and in the eyes of job seekers (...) (People) think that the employees might be earning high salaries here, because it is a five-star hotel, our uniforms, the hotel's ambiance [is so attractive] but in reality, it's totally artificial. It's just a plastic world.

Q: Do you refer people to work in this industry? A: No, I never refer. (E16)

Hence, by means of different reactive strategies (such as sharing negative word-of-mouth, negatively recommending their organization as an employer, and expressing high intention to quit), these vocal reactors tried to mitigate the discomfort they experience from the external-internal image inconsistency.

5.3.2 Cluster 2 (Discreet Leapers) (includes five employees i.e. E5, E10, E12, E13, and E14)

This cluster consists of those employees who prioritized the positive external hotel image to deal with the image inconsistencies. Instead of solely focusing on the negative internal employer image (as the previous cluster did), this cluster's employees chose to adopt an integrated approach by considering the merits of working with an organization that holds an attractive external image.

This does not mean that they did not perceive any inconsistency between the organizational images. Employees in this cluster also reported multiple instances of external-internal image inconsistency; however, they chose the external hotel image to counter these inconsistencies. This is because, to them the most attractive part of working in these five-star hotels is the professional exposure and industry career prospects that these organizations offer, owing to their attractive external images. Hence, in order to build their career and professional profile, employees in this cluster seek or maintain their employment with these high-end hotel chains, with high intentions to leap outside the organization as soon as they accomplish their personal and professional goals. The results are in line with studies that highlight a job-hopping culture in service-based organizations like hotels, with employees

staying with their organizations “till they find a real job” (Brien, 2004; McKenna, 2005).

It's a corporate brand. They are in 127 countries in the world. Therefore, for the whole workforce that wants to go abroad and work there, the best available resource is [hotel name]. Whoever has worked here is in a better position in their careers. (For me also), [hotel name] is just one of the steps that I have to take to achieve my personal goals. I have to spend some time here and then I have to move on. (E14)

A manager shared witnessing this “jumping platform strategy” several times over his career, as many talented employees leaped outside the organization. Although he disliked this strategy and called it a major barrier to retain employees, he also regretted the negative employer image of the luxury hotels, not being able to improve and catch up with the other industries' employer images.

It is like we hit and try. We try with five people and just one of them can be retained (...) People who have the inclination of working in hotels do come. However, there are also people who do not follow through. They use the organization and its name as a jumping platform to excel themselves, because people are getting smart. Other organizations and industries are giving those things to their employees that we are currently not offering, and it is not just my hotel, it's everywhere in the industry. (M1)

To sum up, the discreet leapers adopted a careful and tactful approach towards perceived inconsistencies, as they complemented the negative employer image with the attractive external hotel image to make sense of the attractiveness of their organization as a place to work. However, we could not find much evidence or enthusiasm among them about recommending their employers to others, since most of them considered their organizations as temporary places, unfit for talented employees to stay and thrive.

5.3.3 Cluster 3 (Suffering actors) (includes five employees i.e. E1, E4, E7, E8, and E15)

This cluster consists of those employees who had accepted and submitted to the prevalence of the opposing organizational images and their underlying inconsistencies. Instead of resisting (like vocal reactors) or trying to make sense of the perceived inconsistencies (like discreet leapers), these employees chose to surrender to these inconsistencies by deeming them as part of their organization's culture, job nature, and

industry image. Although these employees (like the previous two clusters) also shared with the interviewer the detrimental effects of the image inconsistencies on their own interests and well-being, they stated that in order to deal with these inconsistencies, they tend to evade, deliberately deny, and personally adapt to these. We noticed these employees using a mix of evasive, defensive, and adaptive strategies such as choosing not to compare the two images and trying to adopt the customer-oriented practices and preferences of their organizations, to alleviate the discomfort that these inconsistencies impart on them.

There is a huge discrepancy but the person who learns to adapt will groom and polish himself (...) Over here, [owing to perceived inconsistencies] people either get very disturbed [and eventually quit] or they continue to work but are mentally rebelled. However, there are also people who balance these things and do not compare them with each other (...) In other words; you can say that they are good actors! You have to act! I mean if you are not a good actor, then this is not the right industry for you. (E15)

This evasion and avoidance was significantly present in their reactions to these perceived inconsistencies (like word-of-mouth and recommendation behaviors), since employees mentioned that they avoid sharing these inconsistencies with others. In fact, it seemed as if they had turned actors in their real lives as well, since in addition to acting in front of the guests, they also pretended in front of outsiders, even their friends and family members to evade reality and save face.

It is a thankless job. The person is left with no ego and he can compromise anywhere (...) Q: Do you discuss these things with your family or friends? A: No, I never complain because since I am doing my job here, I cannot tell my family that the job is too tough or any other problem. Especially among my friends or in a social gathering, I never discuss such things. Instead, I always say that I am very happy. I tell them that, despite long hours and workload, I have no issue because (I work in a luxury hotel) and I wear a business suit. So that's how we (employees) console ourselves (*laughs and quotes a famous verse that means "it is just a lie I tell myself to make myself happy"*). (E4)

However, inside these actors silently suffered but choose not to share their despair with others and take most of the blame on themselves (Saunders, Scaturro, Guarino, & Kelly,

2017).

I do not talk negative about my organization. I am being very honest with you, but if my friends have asked me, I would not have discussed all this. This is because everybody has a different potential and maybe, it is just me who finds the timings hectic. Perhaps, my friends might be able to manage all this. Q: And with your family? A: I feel that the negative things about my workplace can make my family a bit concerned; therefore, I do not share those things with them. (E1)

Moreover, they also shared their intentions to leave their organization with a few expressing their desire of “I wish I had left earlier”.

If you talk to the organization, the management says that they will improve the things and the employees should stay and wait. Therefore, we keep waiting. I have been waiting for an improvement for 20 years. Ideally, I should have looked around and honestly, I am still looking for a good opportunity. However, it remains a strange thing in my career that I just continued working here, waiting for opportunities and already 20 years have passed by. (E4)

To sum up, our findings revealed that inconsistencies perceived between the external hotel and internal employer image of five-star luxury hotels play a significant role in shaping hotel employees' attitudes and behaviors towards their employers such as their employer attractiveness perceptions, intention to quit, and recommendation behaviors. Researchers have already discussed the dichotomy that prevails between the multiple images of tourism and hospitality organizations in understanding the attractiveness of these organizations as employers (Riley et al., 2002; Barron et al., 2007). Our results also showed that whereas externally, these organizations appear to be glamorous and attractive due to their attractive external image, the same glamor and gloss is not realized internally, since the organizations hold negative internal employer image. Employees not only intended to leave such organizations, but also used different strategies to deal with these inconsistencies. Some of them preferred to react to these inconsistencies by openly expressing their discontent by means of negative word-of-mouth and employer recommendations. Others choose to be discreet about it, and opted to make sense of these conflicting images for their own career

advancement. A final group of employees tended to evade and deny these inconsistencies in order to save face and tried adapting to these circumstances, as they continue to suffer miserably inside. Figure 2 illustrates our model of five-star hotel employees' perceptions regarding the inconsistent images of their organizations and dealing strategies. The model's first portion presents how hotel employees perceive different organizational images and how these images exert spillover effects on one another (as indicated by the arrows between these images). The second portion highlights the perceived inconsistencies that stem from these contrasting organizational images, with the last portion illustrating the effects of these inconsistencies on important employee-related outcomes (i.e. employer attractiveness, employees' organizational attachment, recommendation behaviors) and the ways through which employees deal with them.

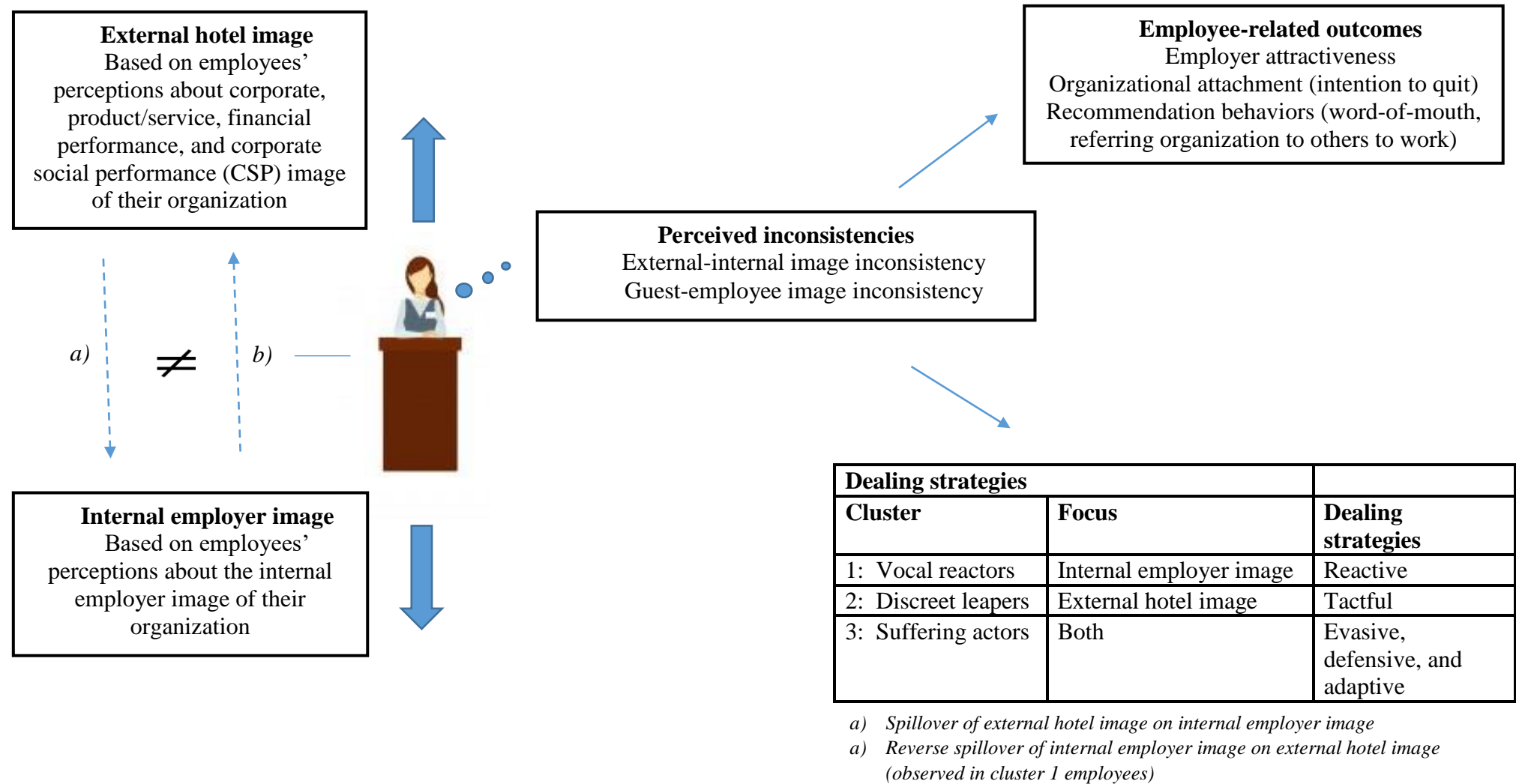


Figure 2: A model of hotel employees' perceptions towards inconsistent organizational images

6. Conclusion

Five-star luxury hotels have been subject to many inconsistencies once it comes to the organizational images that are associated with these hotels. Whereas five-star hotels hold an attractive hotel image for its external stakeholders (Kandampully & Hu, 2007), the internal employer image of these organizations is considered unattractive and dissatisfactory for its internal stakeholders (i.e. employees) (Brien et al., 2017). These employees remain an important stakeholder group for these organizations. This is because; five-star hotels not only rely on their employees to deliver and portray this attractive hotel image to outsiders (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2017), but also face severe talent shortages, owing to the high turnover rate of their employees (Stamolampros et al., 2019). Hence, the primary goal of this study was to explore hotel employees' perceptions regarding the multiple, inconsistent images of their organization to understand how they experience and deal with these image inconsistencies. Results show that hotel employees perceive the external hotel image of their organization as positive, and consider it in determining the attractiveness of their organization as an employer. However, the internal employer image is perceived as negative and inconsistent with the external hotel image, specifically in terms of the values and traits that these images promote. This external-internal image inconsistency affects employees' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors towards their employers, encompassing a wide range of employee-related outcomes such as employer attractiveness, intention to quit, and recommendation behaviors. The paper also documents employees' dealing strategies namely reactive, tactful, and adaptive strategies that they use to cope with the image inconsistencies. Implicit in this paper is a call to key stakeholders (industry practitioners, hotel operators, and managers) to consider how their employees perceive the internal employer image in relation to the other organizational images in order to get new and meaningful insights about the long-term retention and talent management issues of this industry.

6.1 Theoretical implications

This study seeks to make three key contributions to the existing literature. First, this is the first study that empirically explored the concept of inconsistencies between the multiple images of an organization, from an employee perspective. Until now, the idea of aligning the various images of an organization, such as its corporate image, product/service image, or employer image has been conceptual or theoretical in nature (Mosley, 2007). However, there have been calls for research, especially in the employer branding literature, to empirically investigate the extent and effects of inconsistent organizational images (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016; Theurer et al., 2018). Hence, by situating the study in a customer-oriented and labor-intensive industry like luxury hotels, this study offered an initial insight into the concept by building on the perceptions and experiences of hotel employees to empirically investigate it.

Second, this study contributed to the hospitality literature by presenting a theoretical framework that explores the role of multiple images held by its luxury hotels and their underlying inconsistencies to understand the attitudes and behaviors of its human resources. Several papers in the hospitality literature have already discussed the negative employer image as a catalyst for the low employer attractiveness of its organizations (Baum, 2019b; Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2019). However, this paper emphasized that in order to get a complete picture about the employer attractiveness of these organizations and other employee-related outcomes, we should also study the other images held by these organizations, such as corporate image, product/service image, financial performance image, and corporate social performance (CSP) to understand the role of perceived inconsistencies between them. This is because we found that hotel employees were also attracted to these other organizational images (collectively labelled as the external hotel image). The results are in line with Williams and Connell (2010), who discussed the spillover effects of an appealing brand image on employees' employer image perceptions. In addition, what is even more

interesting is that hotel employees compared the external and internal images of their organization to see whether their organizations portray a consistent and equally attractive image inside the organization as they do outside. This helps them to decide about the employer attractiveness of their organizations, intention to remain or quit them and recommendations they give to others about choosing their organization as a potential place to work.

Third, this study identified several strategies that hotel employees use to deal with these image inconsistencies. The variety in these strategies demonstrated that different people can use different strategies to cope with inconsistencies. For instance, we noticed that for some employees experiencing the image inconsistencies was particularly disturbing (Abraham, 1998; Festinger, 1962). Hence they tended to reconcile the image inconsistencies, either by using reactive strategies like spreading negative word-of-mouth and not referring their employers to others (cluster 1) or by being evasive and adaptive in their opinions and actions towards these inconsistencies (cluster 3) (Ashforth et al., 2014). However, there were some who instead of reconciling or reducing these perceived inconsistencies, opted to make sense of these (Srull & Wyer, 1989; Weick, 1995). Hence, some employees chose to be tactful and considered the positive external hotel image, in addition to the negative employer image to make sense of these disparities (cluster 2) (Sengupta & Johar, 2002). An interesting aspect about these clusters was that in each one, employees focused on different organizational images to deal with the inconsistencies. Employees in cluster 1 focused on the negative internal employer image to react towards the inconsistencies (Rozin & Royzman, 2001; Skowronski & Carlston, 1987). Employees in cluster 2 prioritized the positive external image to make sense of them, and employees in cluster 3 opted for a status quo between the two images to deal with them. This showed that often it is not just one but many organizational images that affect employees' attitudes and behaviors towards their organizations. Hence, the

consistency or inconsistency between these images is a valid point to consider while examining an organization's attractiveness and understanding how employees act and respond to it.

Lastly, the paper provided some interesting insights into the spillover effects of these organizational images on one another. The paper discussed how employees' perceptions about the external hotel image exert a spillover effect on the internal employer image of their organizations and vice versa (see Figure 2). More specifically, we found that whereas some employees mentioned how the positive external hotel image played a significant role in developing positive perceptions about the internal employer image of their organizations (a concept conceptualized as "spillover effects") (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016), there were also some who discussed how the negative internal employer image fostered negative perceptions about the external hotel image of their organizations (a concept we conceptualize as "reverse spillover effects"). This might be due to the perception-based nature of these organizational images. Since organizational images are a product of an individual's own cognitions and impressions, perceptions about one organizational image can influence or inspire perceptions about another organizational image. Whereas previous studies have explored the effects of multiple images on job seekers' perceptions of employer attractiveness and intentions to apply (Cromheecke, 2016; Dineen & Wu, 2014; Kim et al., 2011; Lemmink et al., 2003), this paper demonstrated the effects of these organizational images on one another among employees. This also suggests that the relationship between employer attractiveness and the multiple images held by an organization is more complex than what is often assumed in quantitative studies.

6.2 Practical implications

The study has several practical implications. First, the study informs hotel employees and job seekers about how an organization's external image can affect their perceptions regarding

its employer attractiveness. Prior research has also shown that organizations that hold attractive external images are perceived as attractive employers (Rosengren & Bondesson, 2014; Sen et al., 2006). This is particularly true for individuals belonging to transition/developing countries, who are more inclined to follow their consumer values and identities in forming impressions about an organization as an employer (Puncheva-Michelotti, Vocino, Michelotti, & Gahan, 2018). Therefore, while selecting and evaluating an organization as an employer, employees and job seekers should reflect on whether they are forming their perceptions and subsequent decisions merely on the basis of the external image of the organization or are also paying due attention to its employer image. This is because the external image is basically designed to attract external audiences (such as customers, investors, or community members), whereas the employer image of an organization is aimed toward an organization's human resource (prospective and existing employees) and can communicate relevant and reliable information about the "employment" conditions of an organization (Theurer et al., 2018). Hence, paying attention to all the organizational images associated with an organization, particularly its employer image, might not only help employees and job seekers make better and well-informed decisions about their job selection and career development, but might also save them from experiencing psychological contract violations and high turnover intentions (Li, Wong, & Kim, 2016).

The suggestion is equally relevant for five-star hotel operators and managers. This is because on the one hand, they should realize the importance of the external hotel image of their organizations in attracting and keeping their talent. Whereas on the other, they should also play a more responsible role in managing it, owing to its huge spillover effect on employees' employer image perceptions and its perceived inconsistencies with the internal employer image. Our findings revealed that hotel employees expect to see a similar and consistent face of the organization inside (in terms of its internal employer image) as they see

outside. For instance, if the employees see that the organization is caring, competent, or affectionate in terms of its external image, they expect the same care, competence, or affection in its internal employer image as well. Hence, managers should realize that whereas this spillover can have positive effects on the organization's recruitment in the short run, it can have detrimental longer-term effects on turnover when expectations are not met. Additionally, we found that inconsistencies experienced between the external and internal image of five-star hotels bore significant consequences for the organization, especially in terms of employees' low employer attractiveness perceptions and high turnover intentions. The results are in line with those by Mignonac et al. (2018) who found that discrepancies between an organization's external and internal image lead to employee cynicism and silence behavior. Hence, managers should understand their employees' perceptions regarding the various images of their organization to identify those image inconsistencies that might affect employees' attitudes and behaviors towards their employer. Hospitality consultants can help organizations/managers in this regard, by conducting or facilitating these image audits in order to develop concrete plans to reduce these image inconsistencies and improve the employer attractiveness and retention rates of these organizations.

Secondly, the paper draws managers' as well as the hotel industry's attention towards the need to develop an explicit, carefully crafted, and attractive employer image for their organizations in order to attract and retain valuable talent. Brien et al. (2017) urged that the hotel industry needs an immediate "image-makeover" to overcome its human resource problems. Hence, academic experts as well as hospitality consultants, related to talent management and employer branding, can help organizations/managers develop unique and attractive employer images for their organizations, that not only create a positive, but also a more realistic picture of working in hospitality organizations. Moreover, managers can provide realistic job previews and organize open days to communicate more openly about the

organization's image as an employer to create the right expectations in the minds of employees and job seekers (Goh & Okumus, 2020; Phillips, 1998).

Third, managers can benefit from the dealing strategies' clusters outlined in the paper to identify which of their employees are vocal reactors, discreet leapers, or suffering actors to understand their anticipated attitudes and behaviors towards the organization. Doing this will enable them to design various cluster-level strategies for their employees, regarding their career development, retention, and talent management. For instance, managers can expect that those employees who belong to the first cluster can seriously impair the external reputation of their organization, through their negative word-of-mouth and employer recommendations. This is particularly relevant in today's era of social media, where more and more employees are using online platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Glassdoor to share their reviews about their employers (Saini & Jawahar, 2019). Hence, managers can use various motivation and stress reduction techniques to rebuild trust and relationship with these employees and improve their workplace experiences in order to utilize their capabilities for the benefit of the organization and turn these vocal reactors into powerful organizational ambassadors and influencers (Van Hove, 2013). Similarly, in terms of the second cluster, managers can introduce various career-related initiatives such as providing clear career paths, mentoring, internal promotions, and additional benefits to assure their employees that the organization is committed to their future (Kong, Cheung, & Song, 2012). Additionally, they can involve these discreet leapers in their talent management and (if possible) high-potential programs to avoid losing their valuable talent (Hughes & Rog, 2008; Silzer & Church, 2010). Regarding the third cluster, managers can arrange various counselling and stress management interventions that offer adequate support and advice to these suffering actors to maintain a good balance in their personal and professional lives and avoid experiencing emotional labor and burnout (Choi, Mohammad, & Kim, 2019).

Lastly, the paper is a call to the industry practitioners, policy makers, and the research community to devote more attention to the hospitality workforce (Baum, Kralj, Robinson, & Solnet, 2016), and to understand and acknowledge the employee mindset and experience in relation to other stakeholder groups such as customers, investors, or the general public. This industry has always been very customer-oriented. In fact, being customer-oriented is not a matter of choice but a matter of survival for these service-based organizations. However, our findings highlighted several red flags in terms of external-internal image inconsistencies, more specifically the guest-employee image inconsistency which negatively affects the employees' wellbeing and interests. Other papers have also discussed this stark contrast, normalization of preference of guests over employees, and the dissatisfactory role of the hotel management that further aggravates hotel employees' job experiences and employer image perceptions (Grandey et al., 2004; Ram, 2018). Hence, academics, researchers, and policymakers should exert joint efforts to enable and emphasize a warm and employee-oriented work culture in hospitality organizations that signifies that employees matter as well in order to facilitate them in delivering the desired hotel image to the outsiders (Zhang, 2010). Otherwise, it is probable that employees' perceptions regarding these out of sync images reach the customer level, ultimately hurting the hotel's external reputation, financial performance, and guest satisfaction and loyalty.

6.3 Limitations and Directions for future research

In terms of the limitations of the study, several provide the basis for future research. First, the purposive sampling technique adopted to recruit the study's participants and the limited sample size implies that the generalization of the results should not be made without due caution. However, since we reached theoretical saturation, the data were rich, and the sample included five different luxury hotels, further interviews were not conducted. Second, since the study chose individual interviews as the primary source of data; the chances of selection and

social desirability bias remain, as we interviewed only those respondents who agreed to participate. Third, the potential loss of meaning due to the language differences between Urdu and English poses another challenge. As mentioned earlier, some interviews were directly conducted in English. The rest were conducted in Urdu, which were further translated and analyzed in English. Hence, the issue of language barriers between the two languages remains. Furthermore, since the translated text depended on the researcher's ability and vision to translate and interpret it, this language difference might also hinder the transfer of the original shades of meaning and emotional connotations attached to the original texts. Fourth, the study's results are based on the perceptions and experiences of employees working in the five-star luxury hotel industry in Pakistan. This context was chosen to fully explore the concept of perceived inconsistencies and its consequences for employees and organizations. Hence, the study has documented inconsistent organizational images in a particularly problematic setting. Additionally, the findings are based on the constellation of organizational images (external hotel vs internal employer image) that emerged from the data; however, other constellations of organizational images are also possible. Hence, future research might examine other contexts such as less challenging settings (e.g. industries with less direct customer contact like IT companies, companies providing online products/services etc.), other types of hotels (e.g. three or four-star properties, family-run hotels), developed countries, and other constellations of organizational images to further discover the topic and get interesting points of comparisons.

Furthermore, in light of the recent fair trade movement, there is a growing concern among customers to be aware about the internal employer image of organizations and how they treat their employees (Zerbini, Vergura, & Latusi, 2019). Hence, future research could focus on customers' perceptions to understand the effects of image inconsistencies on customers. Moreover, it would also be interesting to explore whether/how employees' perceptions

regarding inconsistencies reach the customer level, for instance, in terms of whether or not employees recommend their organizations to customers as a place to visit. Future research could also explore employees' clusters of dealing strategies in terms of demographic and personality-based linkages of individuals to a particular cluster, or could investigate the stability of these clusters over the course of an individuals' life or career stages. A quantitative investigation of the clusters might also yield further insights, especially in terms of some other significant employee-related outcomes such as employee health and well-being. Lastly, future research could also integrate the occupational or industry image of hospitality firms to learn about perceived inconsistencies further. Our study investigated image at the level of an organization. However, studies have discussed the challenges of working in hospitality and tourism industry in general. This might be helpful in further understanding employees' dealing strategies and their attitudes or behaviors (e.g. recommendation behaviors). For instance, one of our respondents mentioned that she suggests other girls to work in her organization only because she wants society to know that working in this profession is not disrespectful or immoral.

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Appendix A: Interview protocol

Topic	Questions
Image of the organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have an image of this organization/hotel? How is it like? • If I ask you to describe your hotel in three words, what would those be? • Is this image positive or negative and why? • How do you feel about this image? Good or bad? • Are there any other images that your hotel holds (for instance, corporate, financial performance, product/service, CSP, or employer image)? • What are your thoughts about those? How do you think/feel about those?
Employer image	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the image of this organization/hotel as a place of work or an employer? • If I ask you to describe your hotel as an employer, in three words, what would those be? • What are the good or bad things of this hotel as an employer? • How do these things about your employer make you feel?
Perceived inconsistencies and dealing strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you perceive/experience a difference between these images of your organization? • What are your thoughts about these inconsistencies (if any)? Reasons? • How do these inconsistencies (if any) make you feel? Does it affect your behavior? How do you deal with these inconsistencies?

Note: Questions were never asked in a sequential way. The researcher followed the respondents' lead to discuss any of the organizational images they perceive/experience and their underlying inconsistencies (if any).

Appendix B: Thematic analysis map