

The Real Impact of the Virtual World: The Effect of Metaverse Awareness on the Corporate Image of Hotel Businesses

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Keywords| Metaverse, Awareness, Corporate Image, Hotel, Tourism Technology

Introduction | The Metaverse, emerging from the acceleration of digitalisation, represents an immersive virtual space that merges real and digital environments, offering an enhanced user experience. This technology is seen as presenting significant opportunities in the tourism and hospitality sector, particularly in areas such as destination promotion, virtual service experiences, and customer communication (Buhalis et al., 2023). For hotel businesses, the Metaverse has become a crucial strategic tool for enhancing corporate image by shaping the organisation's perception in the external environment (Anna & Anna, 2021). This study aims to investigate whether awareness of the Metaverse positively influences the perceived corporate image of hotel businesses, addressing the existing literature gap in this field with an original approach.

Theoretical background | The Metaverse is commonly defined as a digital environment in which users interact through avatars, blending physical and virtual spaces (Moy & Gadgil, 2022). Its relevance in tourism and hospitality is increasing, with applications ranging from destination promotion to enhancing customer experience. By enabling potential tourists to explore hotels and destinations virtually before travelling, the Metaverse allows them to preview services, make more informed decisions, and shape expectations in advance. Such opportunities influence consumer perceptions and corporate image, as virtual interactions contribute to satisfaction and foster emotional connections with brands (Buhalis et al., 2023).

Corporate image, understood as the overall perception of a business held by stakeholders (Leblanc & Nguyen, 1996), is a crucial determinant of competitiveness in the hospitality industry. It has traditionally been shaped by service quality, customer experience, and digital visibility. Increasingly, however, immersive technologies such as the Metaverse are emerging as strategic tools that can enhance brand positioning and influence external perceptions. Metaverse experiences may fulfil hedonic motives, such as pleasure and enjoyment, or utilitarian motives, such as “try before you buy,” both of which can shape consumer perceptions of hotel brands (Gursoy et al., 2022). Despite this growing importance, the relationship between Metaverse awareness and corporate image remains insufficiently examined. To address this gap, the present study proposes the following hypothesis:

H₁: Metaverse awareness has a significant and positive effect on the corporate image of hotel businesses.

Methodology | The collected data were analysed using SPSS 28.0 and Mplus 8. Data were obtained from 310 individuals aged 18+ in Türkiye through simple random sampling with a two-part questionnaire: the Metaverse Awareness Scale (15 items) (Süleymanoğulları et al., 2022) and the Corporate Image Scale (7 items) (Derin et al., 2010), comprising 22 Likert-type items. A control question on prior Metaverse experience (yes/no) was also included. After removing 10 outliers using the Mahalanobis method and confirming normality (skewness and kurtosis within ± 1.5), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) revealed that two Metaverse items (m14 and m15) fell below the 0.30 loading threshold and were excluded, reducing the scale to a total of 20 items. Consequently, the final analyses were conducted on the responses of 300.

Findings | The demographic profile of the respondents (Table 1) indicates that the largest share was aged 31-40, with just over half being female and married. 41.7% held an undergraduate degree, and 30.3% reported monthly incomes exceeding 70.001 TL. This profile suggests that the sample largely represents mid-career, well-educated individuals with relatively high disposable income, characteristics that are often associated with greater digital literacy and receptiveness to emerging technologies.

Table 1. Participants Demographics

		N	%
Gender	Female	164	54.7
	Male	136	45.3
	Total	300	100
Marital Status	Married	161	53.7
	Single	139	46.3
	Total	300	100
Age	18-30	78	26.0
	31-40	118	39.3
	41-50	68	22.7
	51 and over	36	12.0
	Total	300	100
Education	High school and below	28	9.3
	Associate degree	43	14.3
	Undergraduate degree	125	41.7
	Postgraduate degree	104	34.7
	Total	300	100
Income	25.000 TL and below	56	18.7
	25.001 TL-40.000 TL	38	12.7
	40.001 TL-55.000 TL	49	16.3
	55.001 TL-70.000 TL	66	22.0
	70.001 TL and over	91	30.3
	Total	300	100

Source: Authors' own work

The reliability and validity of the scales were established, with Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted values surpassing recommended thresholds ($\alpha > 0.70$, CR > 0.70 , AVE > 0.50), confirming the robustness of the measures (Byrne, 2016). As presented in Table 2, correlation analysis revealed a moderate, positive, and statistically significant relationship between Metaverse awareness and corporate image ($r = 0.376$, $p < 0.01$). This finding suggests that individuals with higher awareness of the Metaverse tend to form more favourable perceptions of hotel brands.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Scales (Correlation)

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	1	2
Metaverse Awareness (1)	3.61	.757	1.00	
Corporate Image (2)	3.74	.924	.376*	1.00
*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).**				

Source: Authors' own work

CFA showed all factor loadings above 0.50. Reliability was confirmed with high Cronbach's Alpha values (Table 3). Convergent and discriminant validity were supported, as AVE values exceeded 0.50, CR values exceeded 0.70, and CR values were higher than AVE values (Byrne, 2016).

Table 3. CFA Results

Metaverse Awareness	Estimate	Cronbach α	AVE	CR
M1	0.777	0.930	0.560	0.954
M2	0.897			
M3	0.849			
M4	0.689			
M5	0.836			
M6	0.894			
M7	0.840			
M8	0.869			
M9	0.702			
M10	0.614			
M11	0.663			
M12	0.671			
M13	0.634			
Corporate Image		0.961	0.683	0.937
CI1	0.786			
CI2	0.906			
CI3	0.847			
CI4	0.677			
CI5	0.833			
CI6	0.890			
CI7	0.824			

Source: Authors' own work

After confirming the validity and reliability of the measurement model, the hypothesis was evaluated using a two-factor regression-based SEM, as shown in Table 4. The model demonstrated acceptable fit ($\chi^2/\text{df} = 2.73$, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.92, TLI = 0.90, SRMR = 0.05, RMSEA = 0.07), providing statistical support for the proposed relationship.

Table 4. Goodness-of-Fit Indices of the Scales

Variables	X ²	Df	CFI	TLI	SRMR	RMSEA
Metaverse Awareness	177.690	62	0.943	0.929	0.048	0.079
	X ² /Df: 2,86 P: .000					
Corporate Image	38.783	13	0.973	0.957	0.026	0.077
	X ² /Df: 2,98 P: .000					
Goodness of Fit Index Ranges	$0 \leq X^2 / \text{Df} \leq 2$		CFI $\geq 0,95$	TLI $\geq 0,95$	SRMR $\leq 0,05$	RMSEA $\leq 0,05$
Acceptable Goodness of Fit Ranges	$2 < X^2 / \text{Df} \leq 5$		$0,90 \leq \text{CFI} \leq 0,94$	$90 \leq \text{TLI} \leq 94$	$0,06 \leq \text{SRMR} \leq 0,10$	$0,06 \leq \text{RMSEA} \leq 0,08$

Source: Authors' own work

The results of the structural equation model, in Table 5, provide support for the hypothesis. Metaverse awareness was found to have a positive and significant effect on corporate image ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$), accounting for 17.6% of the variance. While this demonstrates that awareness of the Metaverse contributes meaningfully to perceptions of hotel brands, the proportion of explained variance suggests that other determinants, such as service quality, customer experience, and trust, continue to play an essential role in shaping corporate image within the hospitality industry.

Table 5. Two-Factor Simple Regression Structural Equation Model (SEM) Analyses

Hypothesis	Impact	Estimate (β)	Standard Deviation	T	p	R ²	Model
H1	M \rightarrow KI	0,420	0,066	6,387	***	0,176	Model
*** $p < 0,01$							

Source: Authors' own work

Contributions and implications | This study contributes to the literature by empirically linking Metaverse awareness with corporate image in the hospitality sector, thereby extending understanding of how digital technologies influence brand perception. It also directly responds to calls for empirical research on how the Metaverse influences consumer behaviour and brand-related outcomes in hospitality (Gursoy et al., 2022). Practically, hotels can enhance their corporate image by increasing visibility on Metaverse platforms, engaging with target audiences, and organising digital events.

Conclusion | The findings confirm a positive and significant effect of Metaverse awareness on corporate image, explaining 17.6% of the variance. Although moderate, this influence underscores the Metaverse as an emerging yet complementary driver of brand perception, alongside service quality and customer experience. Future research should consider mediators such as trust and loyalty and explore cross-cultural settings to capture the evolving role of immersive technologies in tourism and hospitality.

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