

CHRIE FutureFund™ Introduces Soo Yeon Kwak



Hello everyone! My name is Soo Yeon Kwak, and I am a Ph.D. candidate at Purdue University's White Lodging School of Hospitality and Tourism Management. I am originally from Seoul, South Korea, but most of my academic and professional journey has been based in Houston, Texas. I earned both my bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Houston's Conrad N. Hilton College of Global Hospitality Leadership.

My research interests include social media marketing, consumer behavior, and relationship marketing. As social media becomes increasingly important for hospitality brands and consumers, it plays a critical role in shaping customer experiences and building brand–consumer relationships. This growing importance has motivated my dissertation, *Self-Disclosure as a Relationship Marketing Strategy in Brand–Customer Relationships*. My dissertation examines how brands communicate and build relationships with consumers through social media, with a particular focus on how brand self-disclosure influences consumers' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors.

The hospitality industry is closely connected to people's happiness and well-being, which is one of the main reasons I chose this career path. At the University of Houston, I developed a broad understanding of hospitality management through my coursework, while also gaining valuable hands-on experience through various internship opportunities.

My master's program at the University of Houston was a turning point in my academic journey, as it was during this time that I developed a strong research interest and discovered my passion for social media marketing.



After graduating from my master's program, I worked for one year as a front desk agent at a Forbes Five-Star hotel in Houston. This was one of the most valuable experiences in my career because it allowed me to experience the hospitality industry from the perspective of a frontline employee.

During that year, I learned what luxury service truly means and how guest experiences are shaped through daily interactions, teamwork, and cross-departmental collaboration. I also gained firsthand insight into guest complaints, operational challenges, and the realities frontline hospitality employees face. These experiences gave me a much more practical understanding of hospitality beyond what I had learned in the classroom.

After gaining professional experience in lodging management, I began my academic journey at Purdue University, drawn by its academically rigorous environment, strong faculty support for research and teaching, and solid foundation for developing knowledge and expertise in hospitality management. Throughout my Ph.D. program, I have been fortunate to work under the guidance of Dr. Seon Jeong Ally Lee, whose excellent mentorship, extensive academic expertise, and continuous support have played an important role in my academic and professional development.

At Purdue University, I have served as the Instructor of Record for Strategic Management last spring semester and for Customer Relationship Management during the current fall semester. In addition, I have gained teaching experience in Talent Management (Human Resources), Service Marketing, and Introduction to Lodging Management as a co-instructor and teaching assistant. I truly enjoy teaching because it allows me not only to share academic knowledge and my own professional experiences with students, but also to support them in developing the ability to learn and grow independently.

In the future, I hope to contribute meaningfully to both the hospitality industry and academic community by conducting rigorous and practical research that addresses real-world challenges. Through diverse research ideas and methodological approaches, I hope to advance academic knowledge while generating insights that can benefit the hospitality industry. At the same time, I hope to share the knowledge, experiences, and lessons I have gained throughout my journey with future generations, serving as a supportive mentor who can guide their academic and professional development and help them build their own paths in hospitality.