

Competing on Branding

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Branding has long been an interesting area for marketers. The ability of branding to endorse behavioral intention requires special emphasis in determining how powerful branding acts to support top notch creations. In the hotel industry, several concepts have exceptionally proven like personality, experiential value, social responsibility, and green branding. Somehow, the research effort in the branding topic remains imperative and received special attention from scholars especially to tackle the question of “How to build a strong brand?”, “How the strong brand maximizes customer satisfaction?” and “How the strong brand will in turn endorse behavioral intention?”

Humans usually consume products and services that in accordance with their lifestyle, characteristics, preference, experience and personality. Many branding categories are based upon the concept of “fitness” between brand and the aforementioned human traits. Furthermore, the evolution of branding can be seen trying to fit the variance of generation characteristics so that brand remain relevant regardless of the generation gap. In the service industry, high degree of human interaction has opened the door to marketers to introduce several brand categories. Brand acts as a competitive weapon to differentiate services offered by the player in the service industry especially when the market is saturated with high quality products and services. This can be clearly evidenced in the five-star hotel segment where the traditional marketing mix of product, price, place and promotion were not necessarily be the tools to ensure survival growth.

Hotel industry is unique that it requires meticulous preparation prior to the hotel commencement. Financial capabilities alone will not guarantee successfulness of the hotel operation. The tedious analysis that encompasses general market characteristics, site evaluation and economic information are just part of the initial process. In short, the hotel players must carefully address internal and external information before launching the hotel products. The most difficult part is to decide the branding category that the hotel is competing because it involves huge investment in terms of designing the interior and exterior of the building, and must stay intact for a long period of time. With the high variance in human characteristics require hotel to concentrate on one branding category. Findings showed that brand categories like personality, experiential value, social responsibility and green branding were influential in promoting behavioral intention.

In designing branding study, the overall framework must consider the ability of the branding to influence future guest's behavioral intention. From the review of branding article, the common effects of branding towards five-star hotel are satisfaction; trust; behavioral intention like intention to re-patronage and word-of-mouth; brand loyalty in the form of attitudinal and behavioral; and adaption or practice in daily life. It is important to include the right outcome determinants in the overall study framework to get the utmost desired result. Several researchers argue on the outcome determinant considering the fact that behavioral intention is motivational in nature and arguable to represent long term relationship for brand loyalty. There is argument that brand loyalty, in the form of attitudinal and behavioral, is the ideal outcome determinant in branding study especially for the service industry.

Intense competition in the hotel industry requires marketers

to choose the right branding for their customer. As a result, many international chain hotel brands offer different brand to different market segmentation. This practice is popular in the United States and European countries but had just started to take place in Asian countries. The ability of different branding from the same organization in attracting different market segmentation is unique that the study should be undertaken to measure the effect towards the organization prime brand. Regardless of the various brand names, hotel must ensure the highest quality delivered to the customer to portray the overall organization's image.

The advancement in information technology requires hotel players to collaborate with service intermediaries. Currently, the role of internet in assisting booking and getting information is without a doubt influential for the guests. Internet companies give better value in terms of wide selections, better bargain, and assortment of services. The way this business model works for the hotel is powerful that the majority of the hotels are available in the internet company's website. Internet Company provides one-stop centre for booking of the hotel, flight, car rental, trip, and holiday package. This has given dilemma for marketers on finding ways to promote hotel branding in the Internet Company's website. Previously, studies showed that hotel's website was important in promoting hotel's image and encourage patronization; however, with the attractiveness of the Internet Company, the ability of the hotel's website in promoting hotel is questionable and requires study to be conducted in this area.

Currently, with the effect of global warming to the living life has prompted researchers to highlight the importance of environmental friendly products or usually terms as “Green” product. The new business model for most of the service companies are based on three perspectives namely economic, social and environment or usually known as “triple bottom line” strategy. Hotel participation in this strategy is no exception because of the pressure from various key stakeholders to respond to the need of saving the nature for future generation. The rise of nature activists, environmental-friendly agency, and the awareness towards green products require hotel to significantly involve in this campaign. It is a smart move to promote green branding to take advantage of the popularity of this issue in today's environment. In fact, research showed that guests were keen to participate in the environmental-friendly programs, however the effects towards brand loyalty and self practice remain anonymous.

As for conclusion, the role of branding in the five-star hotel segment

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is without a doubt imperative and, measures to reenergize hotel branding is required from marketers and scholars especially to come out with the new branding strategies. The tradition in the academic

world of revisiting branding topic must be changed to reenergizing branding.