The Myth and Reality of Hotel Brand and Food Quality: The Case of Hotel Restaurants in Malaysia

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Abstract

This study is to investigate the relationship between hotel brand attributes and food quality using the Brand Identity Prism model in the context of food service industry that has never been directly tested before. The attributes (physical, relationship and reflection) of Brand Identity Prism in food service industry which focusing on the food quality served at hotel restaurants are validated. Quantitative approach using questionnaire survey was conducted with a total of 129 hotel restaurants guests from four of five star rated hotels in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Result indicated that there was significant relationship between hotel brand identity and food quality.

Keywords: Hotel brand attributes; food quality; brand identity prism model; hotel restaurants

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1. Introduction

Hotel brand embodies a whole set of physical and socio-psychological attributes and beliefs. The brand is built around the hotel's reputation for efficient service, consistency and quality. All of these characteristics have great impact upon consumers' perception of brand and the meaning they attribute to it. Ultimately, brand perceptions affect consumers' buying decision (Doyle, 1994). There are potential economic benefits and consumer interests in hotel branding. Strong brands are therefore important to meet the challenges of highly volatile markets of today. In order to enhance their competitiveness, hotels need to create unique features that distinguish their offerings from those of their competitors. An excellent food quality from hotel restaurants can be a strategic approach to their branding activities in order to ensure that they are better able to deal with fluctuating market forces. This method of merging between brand and food quality has little to know being conducted in the previous marketing research or specifically in the hotel and tourism sector.

Hotel industry must be cautious with their food quality offerings because it is an important attraction for both local and international customers. It is important to ensure that the brand's characteristics of food quality match consumers' expectations during their dining experience. By creating food quality and brand with distinctive features and own individuality will distinguish them from their competitors. Furthermore, food quality has been generally accepted as a fundamental element of the overall restaurant experience in the literature (Kivela, 1999; Raajpoot, 2002; Sulek, 2004).

In Malaysia, hotel industry operates in a business environment that is characterized by an intense competition and high uncertainty (Ong, 2004). Hence, branding activities, food and beverage offerings and subsequently maintaining food quality can be effective strategies to cope with the ever fluctuating market forces and to remain competitive. The management of branding activities and ensuring consistent food quality are prerequisite for improving performance. Providing high food quality is important in the way that a satisfied customer will return and become a loyal customer.

While, strengthening the hotel brand means enhancing the customer's awareness and build a strong brand image in the mind of customers. However, hotel food quality and the significance of customer value including its relationship with hotel brand have seldom being studied empirically (Andersson & Mossberg, 2004; Jensen & Hansen, 2007). Food service and hospitality researchers largely ignore the aspects of food quality partly because these areas are inherently difficult to access and do not fit well with the assumptions of cognitive psychology on which most previous work is based (Chu, 2001). Spark et al. (2008) and Jensen and Hensen (2007) stated that future studies should empirically study the relationship between customer value and satisfaction and the related dimension of customer value after customers received food and beverage services.

The Brand Identity Prism developed by Kapferer (1997) was proposed as a model for this study, as current marketing and brand management strategies in hotel industries were limited to advertising, word of mouth and service performance (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998; Xu & Chan, 2010). This was achieved by adding value to the brand image, brand awareness, brand loyalty and the perceived quality to attract customers towards the hotel brand.

Despite the important of food quality factor, little study was found to focus on the significance of food quality as the core competency of a restaurant success (Namkung & Jang, 2007). Common approach taken by most hotel restaurant operators to improve restaurant success is mainly focussed on delivering a pleasant atmospheric and outstanding service delivery, which is not enough in today's competitive environment (Baker, 1986; Campbell & Smith, 1967; Hanefors & Mossberg, 2003; MacLaurin, 2000).Furthermore none of the study attempt to integrate the customer service factor with the hotel brand attributes. Therefore, an integrated marketing strategy between hotel brand and food quality warrant further investigation to deal with the intense competition and high uncertainty environment for hotel businesses

2. Literature review

In the new branding era, brand identity is emphasized in brand building process (Kapferer, 1997). Recently much attention has been devoted in the business and management literature to the concepts of brand identity (D. A. Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000) as cited by Konecnik (2008). In order to become, or to stay strong, brands must be true to their identity. The notion of brand image is both volatile and changing: its focus too much on brand appearance and

not enough on brand essence (identity). The identity concepts crucial for three reasons: a brands need to be durable, to send out a coherent signs and to be realistic. It is thus a defence against the risks of an idealised, inconsistent or opportunistic brand image (Kapferer, 1997).

A brand is a distinctive identity that differentiates a relevant, enduring, and credible promise of value associated with a product, service or organization and indicates the source of that promise (Scott, Larry, & Jonathan, 1999). A strong brand identity that is well understood and experienced by the customers helps in developing trust which, in turn, results in differentiating the brand from competition. Real brand management begin much earlier with a strategy and consistent integrated vision. Its central concepts are brand identity, which must be defined and managed. A brand identity is the message sent out by the brand. Brand identity also defines what must stay and what is free to change (Kapferer, 1997).

Kapferer (1997) has developed a model called "the Brand Identity Prism" which consist of six facet that will reflects the different aspects of building brand identity. The model is very extensive, and the focus in this study will be the six facets which are; physique, personality, culture, reflection, relationship and self-image.According to Kapferer (1992), the prism aims to distinguish one brand from another brand by examining and exploring each facet. These six facets are divided into three parts: the sender, the recipient and the medium used to send the message to the receiver. The six facets are also divided into two parts, the externalisation and the internalisation. The externalisation is a reflection of the internalization section. In this study, three facet was utilized namely physical, relationship and reflection to examine their influence towards food quality factor.
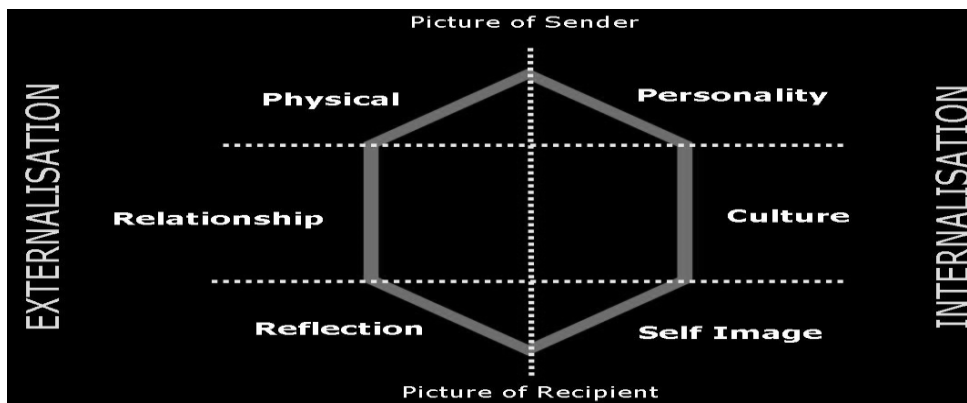

Fig. 1. Brand identity prism

(Source: Kapferer, 1992)

While brand attributes associated with tangibles goods has received a great deal of attention in the literature, a basic understanding of the nature of brand for service has yet to emerge (Rüçhan & Huseyin, 2007). In hotel sector the meaning of hotel brand attributes is still sparse, there is a gap in brand attributes literature as to what is means by hotel brand attributes, what perspective it should be view from, and how it should be operationalized (Bailey R., 2006; Rüçhan & Huseyin, 2007), furthermore there is still lack of empirical data in hotel brand attributes (Cobb-Walgren., 1995; Kim & Kim, 2005; Prasad, 2000). It is proposed that this confusion may affect the abilities of hotel companies to manage their brands effectively, as well as limit the development of a theory of a hotel brand attributes (Bailey R., 2006), this statement is in line with what is perceived to be the lack of consistent understanding of the concept of the brand by hotel industry executives and academics as mentioned by Olsen (2005). It is suggest that this situation occurs due to the lack of empirical study about the brand innermost substance that is identity. Furthermore the used of brand identity prism model in hotel industry is none being tested before.

Moreover, previous researchers have investigated the performance of restaurants in relation to customer satisfaction, emotion, and loyalty (Andersson & Mossberg, 2004; Arora, 2006; Hanefors & Mossberg, 2003; Lockyer T, 2005), service quality in restaurants (Jaksa, John, & Robert, 1999; Kivela & Crotts, 2006; Mohsin,

2005; Myung, 2008; Namkung & Jang, 2007; Oh, 2000; Park, 2004; Ryu & Jang, 2006; Van Djick & Kirk., 2007; Yuksel & Yuksel, 2002). However, nearly all studies have overlooked defining the concept of food quality. Most of the literature and research undertaken only focused on atmospheric and service delivery and neglected the significance of the food quality as a core competency of a restaurant business.

Furthermore, investigations about the important of food quality in the restaurant industry are limited (Kivela & Crotts, 2006). For example, current studies concerning customer satisfaction in restaurants (Andersson & Mossberg, 2004; Arora, 2006; Hanefors & Mossberg, 2003; Lockyer T, 2005; Oh, 2000; Yuksel & Yuksel, 2002) have investigated overall service quality and satisfaction rather than food quality and largely focused on independent restaurants/fast food operations and not in the hotel restaurants sector. Other studies, for example (Stevens, 1995), created a service quality measure, DINESERV, that focused on measuring the level of restaurant atmosphere and employee service. Caldwell (2002) examined the effect of music as one atmosphere element affecting restaurant patron behaviour and no element of food quality was added.

3. Methodology

This study employs quantitative approach in examining the nature of relationship between hotel brand and food quality in 5 star rated hotel in Malaysia. Self-administered questionnaire was applied which enables researchers to distribute numerous questionnaires to many respondents at different places simultaneously. This method was deemed suitable for collecting data from various hotels at different locations in a relatively short period of time. Ability to obtain first hand descriptions of the specified domain of the study (Hasting & Perry, 2000) was also considered for this study in order to explore the hotel BIP that conveys meaning to customers. Masberg and Silverman (1996) advise service brands should be derived from information gained directly from the consumers rather than from the direction of theories, laws, and concepts. Data were collected during the month of May and June 2014 in the city of Kuala Lumpur. The questionnaires used closed ended question with numerical Likert scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) to give more refined options to the respondents. Closed ended questions were employed to minimize the time taken to answer the questionnaire and to protect respondents' privacy. The data collection session lasted for 7 weeks. A total of 129 hotel restaurant guests had responded and participated in the survey. In this study, a hotel customer was referred to any individual or group who was a temporary visitor, staying overnight at the hotel, and involved an exchange of money for services rendered specifically for a hotel customer who dine at the hotel restaurant (Pei May et. al. 2005). The data obtained were analyzed by descriptive and inferential statistic using Statistical Package for Social Science Version 17.0 (SPSS).

4. 4. Results and discussion

4.1. Respondents' profile

The respondents consisted of 73 male respondents (51.0%) and 56 female respondents (49.0%). 34.2% of the respondents were 25-34 followed by 29.3% of 35-44, 22.6% of 45-54, 10.4% of 18-24 and 3.5% of 55 and over. Malay group led the ethnic group with 69.1%, followed by 14.7% - Chinese, 9.1% of Indian ethnic and 7.1% of others ethnic. 46.7% had a bachelor degree, 27.8% - diploma, 12.0% - master degree, 11.2% - high school and 2.3% had a PhD degree. In occupation, 41.1% of the respondents were government officer, followed by 30.7% - professional, 9.3% of others occupation, 7.1% - business owner, 6.8% - student, 2.5% retired and 2.5% is a housewife. 32.2% of them were occasionally dined at a hotel restaurant in a year, followed by 23.9% rare, 21.0% - very rare, 14.1% - often and 8.9% - very often. 36.9% of the respondents said that will bring family, 32.8% - friends, 16.4% - business associates, 10.8% - spouse and 3.1% would prefer to come alone. 36.1% of the respondents dine at the restaurants because of special occasion, followed by 26.6% - business meeting, 25.3% - family dinner, 6.4% because of curiosity and 5.6% because of other reasons. 74 respondents (55.8) stayed at the hotel, while 55 respondents (44.2%) are not staying in the hotel.

Table 1. Profile of respondents

Characteristics	Categories	N	%
Gender	Male	73	51.0
	Female	56	49.0
Age	18-24	12	10.4
	25-34	16	34.2
	35-44	31	29.3
	45-54	45	22.6
	55 and over	25	3.5
Ethnic group	Malay	45	69.1
	Chinese	32	14.7
	Indian	31	9.1
	Others	21	7.1
Education	High school	18	11.2
	Diploma	23	27.8
	Bachelor	28	46.7
	Master	31	12.0
	PhD	29	2.3
Occupation	Professional	20	30.7
	Student	19	6.8
	Retired	12	2.5
	Housewife	12	2.5
	Business owner	21	7.1
	Government	33	41.1
	Others	12	9.3
Dine per year	Very rare	21	21.0
	Rare	23	23.9
	Occasionally	25	32.2
	Often	27	14.1
	Very often	33	8.9
Who	Family	27	36.9
	Spouse	20	10.8
	Friends	35	32.8
	Business associate	32	16.4
	Alone	15	3.1
Reason	Family dinner	28	25.3
	Special occasion	34	36.1
	Business meeting	25	26.6
	Curiosity	22	6.4
	Others	20	5.6
Stay	Yes	74	55.8
	No	55	44.2

4.2. Result on relationship between hotels brand Identity and food quality.

An analysis was made to identify the contribution direction of independent variable(s) that has influence on food quality. The result is shown below.

Table 2. Regression results of hotel brand identity variables on food quality (N=482)

Variables	Beta	Std error	Std. Beta	t	Sig.
Physical	.056	.033	.099	1.712	.088
Relationship	.290	.042	.389	6.946	.000
Reflection	-.098	.043	-.128	-2.277	.023

* Sig. at α = .05 level

There is a significantly positive relationship between Physical and food quality because the calculated value of t is 1.712, p = .088, p > α = 0.05; It is conclude that hotel physical facet has a positive relationship with food quality. There is a significantly positive contribution between Relationship and food quality because the calculated value of t is 6.946, p = .000; therefore, There is significantly positive contribution between Relationship and food quality at the α = 0.05 level.

There is no significant relationship between Reflection and food quality because the calculated value of t is – 2.277, p = .023. This means that there is no significant relationship between Reflection and Food Quality.

According to the Table 2 above, based on the value of standardized beta, Relationship (.389) has the highest relationship with food quality, followed by Physical (.099) and, Reflection (-.128) respectively. Overall, it is conclude that hotel brand identity has a relationship with food quality.

4.3. Cumulative result on relationship between hotel brand identity and food quality

Table 3. Cumulative relationship of hotel brand identity and food quality

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
.718	.516	.510	.708	84.389	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Physical, Relationship, Reflection.
b.Dependent Variable: Food Quality

Table 3 shows that the multiple regression coefficients (R) of at least one independent variable of Hotel Brand Identity which have effect on Food Quality were .718 and the R square is .516. The results suggest that 51 percent of the variance (R Square) in food quality has been significantly explained by the group of three Hotel Brand Identity independent variables, as shown by the F value of 130.315, significant at the α= 0.05. This means that there is at least one independent variable is significantly contributed with food quality. There is both positive or negative relationship between independent variables (Hotel Brand Identity) and food quality.

5. Conclusion

Overall, food quality found to be significantly influence the Hotel Brand Identity in the context of this study. The finding provides valuable insight for the hotel brand managers in integrating brand attributes with food quality

factor. Therefore, it can provide the hotel in Malaysia with possible solution to increase profitability and enhance hotel brand image which characterized by an intense competition and high uncertainty of hotel business environment.

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