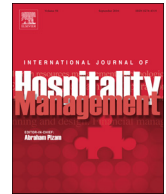




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# Influence of brand signature, brand awareness, brand attitude, brand reputation on hotel industry's brand performance

Pantea Foroudi\*

The Business School, Middlesex University London, United Kingdom

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## ABSTRACT

This paper develops a multi-disciplinary measure of the brand signature construct by means of literature review and primary data analysis. This study explains that brand signature involves (i) endorsement of consistent consumer attitude toward diffusion of a brand name and brand logo (consists of typeface, design, and color); (ii) the expression and pursuit of a distinct message and the quality of the organization to consumers as well as consistency in communication; and (iii) the implementation, support, and maintenance of hotel brand signature systems based on the use of online/offline media. SEM is employed in order to test the proposed model. The results indicate that brand signature includes dissemination of its dimensions; brand attitude with two components (brand association and brand belief); brand awareness consists of brand familiarity, and brand recognisability; and consistency in brand reputation and prefaced by hotel brand performance implementation. Brand signature is recommended as a tool useful for the service industry to manage their global hotel brand reputation and performance.

## 1. Introduction

Brand signature is an original, distinctive design based on the brand personality and identity that is carried across all brand communications. It comprises the essential communication, distinctiveness, and enduring features of a brand, which can reflect a brand's image and reputation (Henderson and Cote, 1998; Melewar and Saunders, 1998) globally. A brand signature can be an efficient management tool to orchestrate the desired features that an organization wishes to convey to its stakeholders, specific in global market. A brand signature can add value for stakeholders and should clearly connect the name and logo of the organization it represents in the global marketplace (Foroudi et al., 2014; Henderson and Cote, 1998). Brand signature management requires an understanding of company identity in terms of the name and logo as a root of corporate identity and visual identity.

Brown et al. (2006) state that studies on brand identity and image has two main levels. The first is an organizational level concerning how a company develops a unique, distinct and enduring corporate identity. The second, utilised here, is an individual level investigation, which aims to understand what company stakeholders think of it. Brand logo and name lie at the root of corporate identity (Balmer, 2001) to transmit the strategic, visual dimensions of identity to various audiences (Hatch and Schultz, 1997; Van Riel and Van den Ban, 2001; Van Riel and Balmer, 1997). The logo and name are the main element of

corporate visual identity (Balmer, 2001; Van den Bosch et al., 2006), used to condense firm personality and its values for effective stakeholder presentation (Bernstein 1986; Van Heerden and Puth, 1995; Van Riel and Van den Ban, 2001). The favourability of a brand signature appeals to the extent to which consumers positively regard it and there is a growing need for international marketing scholars not only to adapt to changing global market conditions but also to contribute to public discourse on branding practices.

For these reasons, global organizations spend substantial resources – money, time, and research on brand signature development, which reflects organizational identity and helps mold its image in a positive way (Olins, 1989; Van Riel and Van den Ban, 2001). International companies make an effort to create understanding and familiarity with the product via its brand logo and name (Bernstein, 1986) to increase both existing and prospective customers' recognition (Smith, 1990). In addition, brand logo and brand name are used for communicating image, cutting through clutter to gain attention and speeding up recognition of a company or product (Henderson and Cote, 1998; Van Riel and Van den Ban, 2001). For all these reasons, a brand signature should be chosen carefully. Significant investments are required and made as management expects an organizational logo and name to add value to their reputation across cultural borders (Van Riel and Van den Ban, 2001). The brand performance and reputation of a hotel therefore include the hotel's physical appearance, such as logo and name, brand

\* Corresponding author.

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attitude and awareness.

Design, marketing, and corporate identity research have paid attention to the importance of logos and names. In contrast to the theoretical assumptions and anecdotal evidence from practice, limited attention has been directed to the effect of brand signature on consumer evaluations of brand signature (Henderson and Cote, 1998; Pittard et al., 2007; Van der Lans et al., 2009) which influence on brand reputation and performance specific in global market (Foroudi et al., 2014, 2017). The result of this study aims to contribute to filling the gap of existing theory in this research field. The present study, therefore, extends past studies by examining the relationship between brand signature, brand attitude, brand awareness, brand reputation in order to increase the brand performance.

In UK, tourism is the economy's largest industry. According to Patricia Yates, VisitBritain's director, "tourism is one of the UK's most valuable export industries. It is also a fiercely competitive global industry and these results not only demonstrate Britain's continued ability to compete internationally for visitors, they are testament to tourism's importance as a driver of economic growth (Theguardian.com, 2018). Most people think of tourism as simply a leisure activity, the UK tourism industry is one of the main business sector to the country. Study shows that overseas residents made 40 million visits to the UK in October 2017; this has decreased by 6% when compared with £1.9 billion spent directly by domestic and international travelers in 2017; this is an increase of 2% when compared with October 2016 (ons.gov.uk, 2017). However, VisitBritain (2018) estimates that 'overseas visits to the UK are set to pass 40 m for the first time in 2018, according to VisitBritain (2018), which is predicting tourists will spend a record £27bn over the coming 12 months'. In addition, hotels and restaurants expect busy 2018 with inbound tourism to increase their visits.

Brand value of hotels can act as an intangible asset which helps to attract travellers towards the particular place. Though, UK hospitality industry as a highly service-based in which the travellers will not be able to view the services before booking them. So, hotel's signature is the first and main element to attract visitors which can assist in specifying the quality of the services provided by a specific hotel company in UK (Chang and Liu, 2009).

In addition, there is a lack of explanatory research and theory building studies in this area. This study examined consumers' perception-based attributes to the brand signature management that has received little attention – the issue of managing brand signature consistently across countries. This is attributed to the fact that the brand signature is a complex research area with various issues which need more in-depth investigation. As such, this research is a first attempt to collect empirical evidence in an effort to analyse whether brand signature favourably evaluation influences brand attitude, brand knowledge, brand reputation and trust creation in order to increase hotel brand performance from two countries.

Finally, this empirical study reveals the degree to which a signature of the brand elements, such as name and logo, succeed in expressing the values a company wishes to convey and its effects upon UK visitors and consumers. In other words, what are the factors that influence brand signature favourability globally? In addition, what are the main influences of such favourability on hotel brand performance globally?

The following section delivers a brief and overall discussion regarding the influence of nexuses between brand signature and its consequences, which express the consumer level conceptual framework. The next section describes the methodology employed by the authors to assess the proposed model. Lastly, the authors conclude with a discussion of the theoretical significance of this study, implications and limitations of the research.

## 2. Theoretical background

Brand signature is important as a means for companies to distinguish themselves from competitors. A brand signature enables

companies and brands to build image with stakeholders (Henderson and Cote, 1998), which adds value to their organisational reputation (Olins, 1989). A brand signature may be the first impression a consumer has of a company and can come to represent the corporate image. According to Henderson and Cote (1998) and Van Riel and Van den Ban (2001), the brand signature is significant for decision-makers. International corporate decision-makers should seek to increase favorable attitudes toward the organization by designing and adjusting communication activities (Dacin and Brown, 2002). The notion of brand signature is grounded in various subjects. For a long time, brand logo was used interchangeably with corporate image and identity (Bernstein, 1986; Olins, 1989; Van Riel and Balmer, 1997).

The preceding is based upon attribution theory (Graham, 1991; Weiner, 1992). Social psychologists (Weiner, 1986) developed attribution theory to understand how people make sense of their world. Attribution theory refers "to the perception or inference of cause" (Kelley and Michela, 1980, p.458), how individuals may succeed or fail in dynamic interactions and what causes inferences they may make about particular behavior (Kelley and Michela, 1980). Attribution theory has been applied extensively in marketing and consumer behavior studies (Mizerski et al., 1979), and used to explain consumer decision-making (Mizerski et al., 1979). Attribution method determines the likelihood of satisfaction of consumers' attitudinally (Weiner, 2000). Furthermore, image favorability impacts consumer attitudes and behavior (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001). This study applies attribution theory in relation to brand signature.

Brand signature can be the major tool for transmitting consistent knowledge and reputation to an audience. It can promote long-term favorable brand awareness, attitude, reputation, and internal/external communication properties of a brand signature can influence individual understanding and interpretation (Van Riel and Van den Ban, 2001). An attribute that is perceived as satisfying can be regarded as favorable and can result in positive attitudes toward a brand signature which increase hotel brand performance.

Brand signature are ubiquitous in the marketplace, and the average consumer encounters a multitude on any given day (Foroudi et al., 2014, 2016, 2017; Hagtvedt, 2011). The main elements of the brand signature are those factors that predict, strengthen or weaken perceived brand awareness, attitude, reputation, and performance. Businesses use communication to increase their significance as a product differentiator (Hatch and Schultz, 2001; Henderson and Cote, 1998; Olins, 1989; Van Riel and Van den Ban, 2001) through the elements of the brand signature which are i) corporate name (Leitch and Motion, 1999) and ii) brand logo. The three main components of brand logo are i) typeface (Henderson et al., 2004), ii) design (Alessandri, 2001), and iii) color (Bottomley and Doyle, 2006).

### 2.1. Brand signature, brand attitude, brand reputation

A company's brand signature can influence viewers' attitudes towards brand and over time, the brand logo and name offer symbolic representations of a brand. The brand signature is a key aspect of identification in branding. Brand signature can be constructed to attain particular responses dependent upon the nature of the communications and desired marketing objectives. The perceptions customers have of the corporate/brand should be shared, positive and consistent. A company's signature impacts on positive and desired attributes, which can add value to the reputation of an organisation (Van Riel and Van den Ban, 2001). However, attitudes toward brand differ between consumers and can be impacted by aroused associations and beliefs, which create reputation towards brand.

Consumers may rely on existing attitudes towards brand name and logo when forming attitudes towards a company or brand and can be changed over the time. Attitudes towards brand can be thought of as consumers' general liking or lack thereof. Advertising helps firms develop strategic positions to differentiate themselves and provide

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