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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.

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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

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