

The influence of brand personality dimensions on perceived service quality and perceived service value

Wananya Thongthip

Kawpong Polyorat

Khon Kaen University, Khon Kaen, Thailand

Keywords

Brand Personality, Perceived Service Quality, Perceived Service Value, Hotel Industry.

Abstract

Five brand personality dimensions: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness (Aaker 1997) can create identity to hotels while enabling customers to differentiate a hotel from another. Because customers' perceived service quality and perceived service value can lead to their choice of service, the present research, therefore, studies the influence of five brand personality dimensions (Aaker 1997) on the perceived service quality and the perceived service value. Data were collected data with a sample of 400 undergraduate students in Thailand. Results reveal that only three personality dimensions (sincerity, competence, and sophistication) have impacts on the perceived service quality and the perceived service value. Sincerity and competence affect both the perceived service quality and the perceived service value while sophistication solely affects the perceived service quality. These findings are useful for marketers and thus can serve as guidelines on drawing competitive marketing strategies for hotel industry.

1. Introduction

In the increasingly competitive hotel industry these days, hotel executives attempt to seek identity that distinguishes their hotels from competitors. Among a number of competitive strategies, there is a marketing tool called brand personality which relates human personality (Aaker 1997) to product features, thereby creating identity for a hotel, helping customers differentiate a hotel brand from another as well as understand emotions or feelings aroused by a particular hotel brand, and ultimately leading to customer satisfaction, decision to use services, and brand loyalty. Moreover, perceived service quality and perceived service value from the customer perspective are often placed priority in the business world as it can sharpen a competitive edge in service provision against business rivals. Concurrently, this can guarantee that customers are aware of service quality and value, resulting in their satisfaction and decisions to use services. Thus, recent researchers are interested in investigating the influence of brand personality on perceived service quality and service value in order to use the findings as a guide to marketing strategies for hotel industry. Research framework is presented in Figure 1.

2. Related Theories and Research

Brand Personality

Brand personality refers to a concept relating human personality to product brands by drawing on basic behaviors, psychological personality, attitudes and beliefs, and demography, both directly through linking people to brands e.g. the brand's user imagery which means creating human characteristics associated with users of a particular brand and indirectly through product-related attributes, product category associations, brand names, symbols or logos, advertising styles, price, and distribution channel (Aaker 1997)

Aaker (1997) developed five brand personality dimensions which were composed of 42 traits as follows:

1. *Sincerity* contains 11 traits: down-to-earth, family-oriented, small-town, honest, sincere, real, wholesome, original, cheerful, sentimental, and friendly;
2. *Excitement* contains 11 traits: daring, trendy, exciting, spirited, cool, young, imaginative, unique, up-to-date, independent, and contemporary;
3. *Competence* contains 9 traits: reliable, hard-working, secure, intelligent, technical, corporate, successful, leader, and confident;
4. *Sophistication* contains 6 traits: upper-class, glamorous, good-looking, charming, feminine, and smooth;
5. *Ruggedness* contains 5 traits: outdoorsy, masculine, Western, rugged, and tough.

Tran, X., Dauchez, C., & Szemik, A.M. (2013) studied the relationship between product quality and brand personality of hotels in the US. Results suggest that brand personality is relevant to service quality. That is, the sincerity dimension of hotel brand personality is related to sympathy. The excitement dimension is associated with tangible. The competence dimension connects with assurance. The sophistication dimension is related to reliability. Finally, the ruggedness dimension is linked to responsiveness.

Lee, J.-S., & Back, K.-J. (2010) examined brand personality in the high-end hotel segment by collecting data with five-star hotel guests in the south of US. The research found that a positive image and perceived negative price had effects on brand personality while perceived service quality had no impact on brand personality. Positive personality affected service users' trust and the positive service users' trust affected brand loyalty. In other words, along the road from brand personality towards product loyalty, any product needs to win trust from customers first, which suggests that brand personality indirectly supports the building of brand loyalty.

Perceived Service Quality

Perceived service quality is derived from results of the comparison between expected and perceived service [Parasuraman et al. (1985) referred in Cengiz., E.&Yayla.,H.E.,(2007)]. In other words, service quality is a gap between customer expectations and customer perception, which serves as a service evaluation. When such a gap is smaller, service quality will be better and customers more satisfied.

Perceived service quality [Stafford, 1996 referred in Cengiz., E, Yayla., H.E.,(2007)] can be measured by seven characteristics: atmosphere, relationships, available services, convenient service, reliability, honesty, and quality staff.

Positive perceived service quality of occurs when customers have a confidence and see benefits as well as the importance of services, resulting in good attitude, satisfaction and use of services. Therefore, building strong brand personality is to differentiate its brand from another and to make customers understand the emotions and feelings as created by a particular hotel personality so that customers will be satisfied and be able to better perceive the good service quality.

H1: The sincerity dimension of brand personality has an influence on perceived service quality

H2: The excitement dimension of brand personality has an influence on perceived service quality.

H3: The competence dimension of brand personality has an influence on perceived service quality.

H4: The sophistication dimension of brand personality has an influence on perceived service quality.

H5: The ruggedness dimension of brand personality has an influence on perceived quality.

Perceived Service Value

Zeithaml, [1988 referred in Cengiz., E. &Yayla., H.E., (2007)] stated that perceived service value takes place when customers evaluate benefits of products or services based on perception of “what to gain and what to give”. Perceived service value is also significant for buying decisions as Dodds et al.’s (1991) pointed out that perceived service value is an exchange between perception of quality and that of psychology, by which money value is concerned. Woodruff (1997) explained that the process of perceived value is derived from structures in terms of targets, frequency, and characteristics of customers.

Perceived service value [Cronin et al., 2000 referred in Cengiz., E, Yayla., H.E.,(2007)] can be measured by three factors: good value for money, acceptable price, and to be a good buy.

Customers’ buying decisions depend on whether or not the perceived service value is worth the charged money, or cost customers have to pay for. In addition, customers compare our products with those of competitors or alternative products by choosing something that is worth the best value. Among a variety of factors that cause such perceived service value, there are brands as well as brand personality which offer a marketing tool for creating identity so as to distinguish a product from competitors. This may enable customer to perceive the value to be gained from using such a service to be superior to that provided by competitors and worth the charged fee.

H6: The sincerity dimension of brand personality has an influence on perceived service value.

H7: The excitement dimension of brand personality has an influence on perceived service value.

H8: The competence dimension of brand personality has an influence on perceived service value.

H9: The sophistication dimension of brand personality has an influence on perceived service value.

H10: The ruggedness dimension of brand personality has an influence on perceived service value.

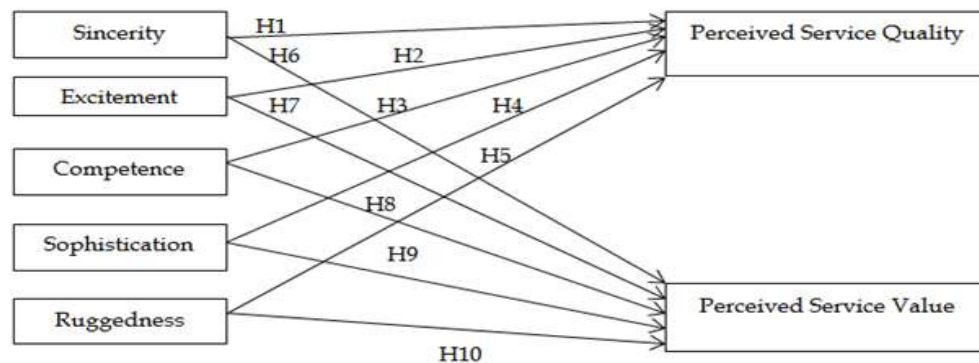


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

3. Research Method

The present research is a study of the relationship between independent variables which are five dimensions of brand personality (sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness), and two dependent variables (perceived service quality and perceived service value) using Multiple Regression Analysis in analyzing this set of relationship.

Research Sample

The research sample was 400 undergraduate business administration students. Most of them were women =79.5% with the average age of 20. They included sophomores (42.5%) and juniors (36.8%).

Measurement Tools

Pullman Khon Kaen Raja Orchid Hotel was selected for the research case. It is a well-known hotel in Khon Kaen province where the study was conducted. The measurement tools consisted of three parts: Part 1 contained 42 questions of brand personality (Aaker 1997); Part 2 asked seven questions of perceived service quality (Stafford, 1996) and three questions of perceived service value (Cronin et al., 2000), both of which employed 5-point Likert Scale (5=most likely; and 1=not at all); and Part 3 contains questions about personal data of research participants.

4. Results

	Mean	SD	α
Sincerity	3.08	.53	.81
Excitement	3.85	.63	.78
Competence	4.02	.61	.78
Sophistication	4.10	.58	.79
Ruggedness	2.50	.85	.86
Perceived Service Quality	3.97	.62	.79
Perceived Service Value	3.57	.74	.81

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Reliabilities

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable			
	Perceived Service Quality		Perceived Service Value	
	β	t-test	B	t-test
Sincerity	.17	3.34*	.34	4.88*
Excitement	.08	1.25	.00	-.05
Competence	.37	6.37*	.41	5.21*
Sophistication	.24	4.08*	.06	.80
Ruggedness	.01	.30	.03	.77

* $P < .01$

Table 2: Multiple Regression Results

As seen in Table 2, there were three personality dimensions: sincerity ($\beta = .17$, $t = 3.34$, $P < .01$), competence ($\beta = .37$, $t = 6.37$, $P < .01$), and sophistication ($\beta = .24$, $t = 4.08$, $P < .01$) which affected perceived service quality. Meanwhile, excitement ($\beta = .08$, $t = 1.25$, $P > .01$) and ruggedness ($\beta = .01$, $t = .30$, $P > .01$) did not affect perceived service quality.

As for perceived value of service, there were two personality dimensions: sincerity ($\beta = .34$, $t = 4.88$, $P < .01$) and competence ($\beta = .41$, $t = 5.21$, $P < .01$) which affected perceived service value. However, excitement ($\beta = .00$, $t = .050$, $P > .01$), sophistication ($\beta = .06$, $t = .80$, $P > .01$) and ruggedness ($\beta = .03$, $t = .77$, $P > .01$) did not affect perceived service value.

5. Summary, Discussion, Research Applications, Limitations and Recommendations

Summary

Results found that only three brand personality dimensions (sincerity, competence, and sophistication) influence perceived service quality and perceived service value. Sincerity and competence affect both perceived service quality and perceived service value whereas sophistication solely affects perceived service quality.

Discussion and Research Implications

The current research findings reveal that personality dimensions which affect perceived service quality and perceived service value include sincerity, competence, and sophistication. These findings can support marketers in drawing marketing strategies in branding, based on the three dimensions.

First, if hotels want to emphasize on the better perceived service quality, they should build their hotel brands on the basis of competence, sophistication, and sincerity personality. However, they should give more importance on competence over sophistication and sincerity as competence's value of standardized beta was higher ($\beta = .37$) than that of the other two dimensions. That is, sophistication's value was $\beta = .24$ and sincerity's value was $\beta = .17$.

Second, if hotels want to focus on increasing the perceived service value, they should design hotel brands drawing on competence and sincerity personality. Once again, they should pay more attention to competence as competence's value of standardized beta was higher ($\beta = .41$) while that of sincerity was lower ($\beta = .34$).

Third, if hotels want to focus on both perceived service quality and perceived service value, they should build hotel brands based on competence and sincerity dimensions, yet competence should be placed in the first priority for the aforementioned reasons.

Marketing strategies can be designed in accordance to each personality dimension as follows:

Sincerity can be communicated by the symbol of brands which shows sincerity and honesty of service. This may include, for example, friendliness, smiles, willingness to serve, and fair prices in commensurate with the service.

Competence can be built by personal communication, starting from recruiting competent staff, encouraging hotel executives to participate in community activities or to have a key role in voicing their opinions and thereby gaining social acceptance. This can promote for a good public relations as well as a competent organization image. Moreover, hotels should bring in innovations which are more advanced than those used by competitors. Providing services in compliance with the protocol is another way to win trustworthiness from service users.

Sophistication can be created by brands or symbols that display a sense of luxury while providing premium services. In terms of place, hotel areas should be well-organized while creating the luxurious ambience. For example, hotels can make use of aromatherapy or music to build a relaxing atmosphere, including introducing state-of-the-art technologies beyond customer expectations.

Recommendations for future research

The present study solely focuses on the relationship between brand personality of hotels and perceived quality of service as well as perceived value of service. Future research may explore the relationship between brand personality of hotels and marketing mix and well as word-of-mouth communication. Marketing mix or 4Ps is a marketing tool for achieving marketing objectives which include: product, price, place and promotion. It can lead to word-of-mouth communication (Cengiz, E. & Yayla, H.E.2007, p.80) which refers to a mode of person-to-person communication between the message sender and the recipient in which the sender's intention can be either positive or negative. If a brand can create positive word-of-mouth communication, that brand can be considered as successful in marketing.

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