



Sensory in Psychology Branding

Mohd Raziff Jamaluddin *, Mohd Hafiz Hanafiah,
Muhammad Izzat Zulkifly

Faculty, Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management,
Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia

raziff@salam.uitm.edu.my

Abstract

With the rapid growth of information communication technology, tangible benefit is considered to be the critical element in communicating brand and building long lasting relationship. This paper attempts to establish the connection between sensory attributes of human to cognitive and affective elements that consequently lead to the brand loyalty. The data is collected by using self-reported questionnaire to the respondents who had stayed in the selected Five-star hotels in Kuala Lumpur. It is concluded that human senses were significant and positively influence the decision to stay loyal with the Five-star hotel brand.

Keywords: Sensory, cognitive, affective, psychology

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1.0 Introduction

Building long lasting relationship is a core mission of every company. Brand provides competitive weapon to complement quality products in achieving this mission. Brand is often regarded as intangible benefits that usually outperforms the tangible benefits of a brand. Intangibility as it is commonly termed, brand is not only capable of encouraging tolerance of perceived risk but able to minimize switching to the competitor's brand. The abundance of branding topics can be seen in the literature with diversity of measurements that applicable to all types of business. Kotler (2003) defined brand as logo, symbol, name, or design that creates trademark or signature that distinguishes goods or services. The importance of brand is comparable to the importance of design in architecture. The reason is design enhances mood, motivation and performance of the individual that lead to the positive social behaviours (Ariffin, Bibon & Abdullah, 2011; Othman & Mazli, 2012). While Wardono, Hibino and Koyama (2011) agreed that on top of perceived social behaviours, emotional and behavioral intention also positively associated with interior design of the building. Having said that, the similarities in brand and design can be seen in the way they interact with customers five senses particularly sight and touch. Another important aspect of a brand is the strategic decision that involve in defining the right characteristic that need to be injected into the brand so that it will stay in the customer's mind forever. On the other side, Mohamed and Othman (2010) argued that image plays a decisive role in pulling visitors to get pleasure from the services rendered. Similarly image has successfully play the role of pulling the guests to become passionate to not only hotel room but also to the restaurant (Jamaluddin, Hanafiah & Hashim, 2011a; Wardono, Hibino and Koyama, 2011).

To be specific, this paper suggests three variables that form psychology dimension in particular sensory, cognitive and affective and their relation with brand loyalty. As commonly understood, sensory comprises of five human senses that is sight, hear, taste, touch and feel. For the next variable, cognitive is the thinking ability of human that is formed based on outcome or experience in the past while affective is the term used to represent feelings toward a thing or a situation. For a start, this framework is tested to the five-star hotel segment because of two reasons. The first reason is the character of the five-star hotels that represent luxurious and glamorous image that are suitable for guests to see and feel them, smell the delicate fragrance, taste the appetizing food, and get pampered with the enchanting services. The second reason is unavailability of research in this area that prompt the researcher to pursue this topic. A few researches looked on several determinants in the sensory for the restaurant entity as evidenced in Ariffin, Bibon and Abdullah (2011) and Wardono, Hibino and Koyama (2011). To complement overall framework of the psychology, cognitive and affective were included and tested in order to examine the association towards loyalty of the five-star hotel brand.

2.0 Literature Review

Sensory is without a doubt the most commanding forces that affects awareness and experience during the buying process. Mayhew et al. (2013) noted that the influence of

senses towards cognitive ability is immediate because brain received information continuously without a single pause thus produces instant behavioral response to deal with the situation in hand. Mood, feeling and emotion are influenced by the five senses that give feedback on surrounding. Soars (2009) found that sensory influence people be tranquil, relax, anti-stress, energetic, positive mood that influence decision making process and spending behavior. As a result, the ability to cater to this sensory will determine positive or negative the actual outcome. Human by nature eats, talks, listens, sees and touches almost every time and therefore everything should turn out to be memory, experience and attitude that shape the human's characteristics.

Human naturally loves to see beautiful and stunning things, otherwise hates to see bad things. This statement indicate that vision is the most powerful sense that enable human to appreciate good and bad of any circumstances thus, trigger other senses to react especially when it involves decision making. Wardono, Hibino and Koyama (2011) noted that interior elements that comprised of colors, lighting and décor were influential in creating a strong emotion in a sense of attachment to the surrounding. Heide and Grønhaug (2006) added that suitable light reflection and temperature create diverse emotion like playful, cherish, friendly, and relaxing. Different lighting arrangement promotes different mood such as bright lighting promotes confident, enthusiastic, and energetic; warm lighting suitable for romantic, socialize, and relaxing; and colorful lighting that symbolizes friendly, cheerful, fun and party.

Human often touch because of curiosity and naturally through hold and grip. Tangible products are exposed to be touched in order to get first hand information about the product. Quality is often predetermined through first impression and in this case through first touch. The significance of touch in the service industry is not as important as industrial and consumer products. However for five-star hotel segment, skin and body contact are felt through touch interaction with the furniture, equipments, machines and amenities. Citrin et al. (2003) noted that customers feel disappointed if they are restricted to touch the products. As a result, price of the room is often measured against the quality of bed, sofa and towel.

Apart from sight and touch, taste is another important attributes especially in the restaurant industry (Ariffin, Bibon & Abdullah, 2011). Taste is felt through the contact with tongue. Taste can be be divided into four categories namely sweet, sour, salty and bitter. Tongue interprets taste from different position specifically sweet at the front; salty at the right; sour at the left; and bitter at the back. Customer will go extra miles to buy tasty foods even they have to pay more for the small portion. Customers are willing to pay more for the price of food provided the taste is great and the ambience is delightful (Wardono, Hibino & Koyama, 2011).

Next, ears naturally act as hearing senses. Human responds to the sound by hearing or listening, and then act accordingly. The ability of music to affect human's mood is proven as proved by Garlin and Owen (2006). They found that people prefer quiet and calm place accompanied by soft and slow music because it stimulates mood of relaxing, tranquil and pleasure. In the hotel industry, Music usually used to release stress and accurate use of music will influence people to feel more comfortable and enjoyable. The emphasize of music in the five-star hotel segment is debatable due to lack of studies conducted in this topic.

From review of literature, smell often ignored by previous researches that usually

preferred to use touch, sight and taste. Naturally smell is felt through the nose and sensitive to aroma, scent and fragrance. Hultén (2012) stressed that smell allows human to memorize certain occasion especially one that involves emotion, feeling or memory. International brand like Kentucky Fried Chicken, Famous Amos, and Starbucks are known for their great smell.

The application of branding in the hotel industry was more on matching the human characteristics, lifestyles, and preferences with the brand. Little attempts emphasized on the psychological and philosophical side of the brand. Mamat and Mahamood (2010) suggested that to offer sustainable, the company must play its part to balance attitude and behavior with do's and don'ts that later create positive environment. With regards to psychology, the role of mind that forms human personality, character, and lifestyle is significant in the buying process. Mind determines the human orientation before, during, and post-purchase behavior.

Human personality usually comes from the soul inside the human heart that activates emotion, memory, and experience that in many brand scholars perceived will form behavioral intention. Voon (2011) stated that thoughtful consideration and reasonable resource allocation enhance skills knowledge, attitudes and relations that eventually form brand loyalty. Yusof, Musa and Rahman (2013) suggested that the overall shopping value is significant in determining the loyalty towards a brand. Nonetheless, it remains unclear how emotion, memory and experience act together to form the behavioral intention. With this broad set of objective in mind, this paper embarked on the several elements that form the psychological attributes that is predicted to be significant in brand building process.

3.0 Methodology

To get started with the integration of the measurement in the study, a series of expert panel interviews were conducted with the marketing and operation manager of several five-star hotel brands to probe their mindset about the predictor variables selected in the study. A self-reported questionnaire that consists of four sections was used to tap the actual opinion of the respondents approached in the study. In order to ensure standardized respond, 15 hotels with almost identical services were selected as part of the screening question to ensure reliability of the respond. Apart from that, convenience sampling technique were used because of its suitability in reaching guests who had experience stayed in the selected five-star hotel in the past two years. A total of 321 respondents agreed to participate in the study.

4.0 Results and Discussion

For the first part of analysis, the descriptive analysis was conducted to evaluate the customer orientation towards customer-based psychology measurement. Table 1 summarizes the descriptive statistic for measurement listed in the study. For sensory, the highest rating is vision ($M=5.96$, $S.D .810$). It is not surprising for five-star hotel since the image is critical to live up the status and the price paid for staying at the hotel. Furthermore, guest usually creates the perception about the hotel upon entering the hotel facilities and browsing the website. The second highest rating for sensory is taste ($M=5.93$, $S.D .865$). Having quality and tasty food is significant for five-star hotel because guest usually recall the taste of food

even when consuming similar food elsewhere.

Next is touch (M=5.88, S.D .789). Sense of touch is vital because of the friendly feeling to the skin will create a sense of tranquil and comfortable. Among the items listed in sensory, smell score the lowest rating (M=5.64, S.D .983). Though this might not be overlooked by the industry players, it is still relevant to complement the services provided during the stay at these hotels. Apart from sensory, cognitive and affective were rated as somewhat very important by the respondents. It is indeed imperative for the five-star hotel to ensure the services offered will be interpreted comprehensively by the guest as it will then transform into attitude and feelings.

Consequently, the strength of the relationship between dimensions listed in the overall customer-based psychological branding framework was assessed. Table 2 shows the result of the Pearson's correlation coefficient for this purpose. Among the three measurements used to predict the brand loyalty, sensory is the prominent one (r=.427, p<.01). Sensory experience is without a doubt a critical determinant in outstanding brand because mood, feeling and emotion, are all generated by the ability of the surrounding to influence the five senses. The value of cognitive (r=.386, p<.01) is also necessary because brand loyalty usually formed as a result of evaluations to overall stay in the hotel that later influence decision making process. Affective (r=.386, p<.01) is significant in the overall framework as the feelings usually determine the agreement or objection towards the brand loyalty.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation for Psychology Measurement

Measurement	M	S.D	95% CI	
			LL	UL
Sensory				
Vision	5.96	.810	5.84	6.08
Touch	5.88	.789	5.76	6.00
Taste	5.93	.865	5.87	5.99
Sound	5.71	.976	5.68	5.74
Smell	5.64	.983	5.51	5.77
Cognitive*	5.91	.792	5.79	6.03
Affective**	5.86	.843	5.77	5.95

Note. CI = Confidence interval; LL = lower limit, UL = upper limit
Likert-scale. 1-extremely not important to 7-extremely important

* Measurement: knowledge, beliefs and meanings

** Measurement: attitude, believe and feelings

Table 2: Correlation for Customer-based Psychological Branding

Measurement	1	2	3	4
1. Sensory	-			
2. Cognitive	.412**	-		
3. Affective	.335**	.417**	-	
4. Brand loyalty	.424**	.386**	.347**	-

Note. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

5.0 Conclusion

It is concluded that the sensory plays an influential role in promoting five-star hotel brand. From the findings, it shows the relationship between five senses and brand loyalty is essential and should be treated significantly. Senses of vision, touch, taste, sound and smell are able to influence the evaluation towards the hotel brand. The overall framework of customer-based psychology is indeed able to provide a new basis for highlighting brand in the future because hotel can understand the thinking and feeling from the customer point of view by knowing the force that stimulate these. Although this paper yielded several empirical findings, a couple of limitations applied. Firstly it is tough to find the hotels with similar characteristics for the dimension listed. 15 hotels with almost identical characteristics were chosen after careful considerations were made based on the interviews conducted. Secondly, since the setting is five-star hotel, the conclusion will only be applicable to this category. Customer-based psychology as a new tool for branding strategies is conducted to establish new dimension for marketing and consumer behavior studies thus future works may include other outcome determinants such as satisfaction, trust and behavioral intention to understand the perception of customer towards the criterion variable introduced in this study. Furthermore, this framework can be tested to other hospitality segment like restaurant and airlines to provide generalization of the customer-based psychology concept towards hospitality industry.

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