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A study on the relations between the brand image and customer satisfaction in catering businesses

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Facing with keenly competitive environment and vigorous change, sparing no efforts to keep customers has become the objectives of competition and the rare resources for catering businesses. Through service innovation, catering businesses gain the most trust of customers, win the extensive support of the society, and set up the brand image completely to acquire customers’ satisfaction and loyalty, as well as treat customers as existent value, the premise of the existence, and the foundation of development. This research aims to analyze the relations between brand image and customer satisfaction in catering industry. The samples contained the consumers who had the consuming experiences in the chain stores of a catering business. Questionnaires were distributed in the major business areas in Taipei City. With convenience sampling, 360 questionnaires were distributed and 264 were valid with the retrieval rate (73.33%). Having empirical analysis, brand value and brand characteristics presented positive relations to customer satisfaction, while brand association did not reveal notable relations. In addition, some demographic variables appeared interference on brand image and customer satisfaction in catering industry. The research findings are expected to provide some suggestions and reference for catering businesses.

Key words: Brand image, customer satisfaction, brand value, brand characteristic, brand association.

INTRODUCTION

Along with the vigorous change of the competitive environment, catering businesses regard attracting more customers as the final objective and the rare resources. Webster (1994) indicated that, due to the change of the environment, customers had already become the most important strategic resources for catering businesses. To increase the number of customers has become an important indicator for catering businesses to manage and make profits. With the promotion of service quality and the perceived value of customers, customers who have been served before are satisfied by the demands to enhance and further keep the satisfaction. This kind of competitive advantage will become the key to make profits for catering businesses. Fonvielle (1997) pointed out that, for sustainable management, catering businesses had no other alternatives but to enhance the customer satisfaction in such competitive market.

Research indicated that, attracting a new customer would cost five to seven times higher than maintaining an old customer in catering industry (Berry and Parasuraman, 1991). Besides, when 5% service defect was reduced, 100% profits would be increased (Reichheld and Sasser, 1990). It shows that keeping a long-term relationship with an old customer presents greater financial contribution than attracting a new customer. Swan and Oliver (1989) showed that most dissatisfied customers did not complain. Nevertheless, when those customers who turned to purchase in other stores, expressed their dissatisfaction to their relatives and friends, or complained to a third party, the enterprise did not only lose the profits from re-visit, but the enterprise image being damaged would be more severe for catering businesses. A brand provides customers with various clues, including the business, the culture, the appearance, the employees, the work process, and the trademark. Once a brand is accepted by customers,
marketing the “service” would become easier. When most catering businesses provide similar merchandise or service, the management of image, identity, and brand of the company has become an important method to distinguish a catering business from the others.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Customer satisfaction

Customers are likely to be affected psychologically by the decisions of the marketing organization, such as customer satisfaction, perceived service quality, perceived value, trust, and commitment. The concept of overall evaluations is often used by specific manufacturers to briefly explain the knowledge and experiences of customers and then lead them to following actions. For decades, customer behaviors have been predicted by overall customer satisfaction. Kotler and Keller (2006) suggested that the satisfaction of a customer depended on the performance of the goods conforming to the expectation of the customer after purchasing. Joewono and Kubota (2007) pointed out that customer satisfaction resulted from the measurement of products and service according to the customer's previous experiences as well as the overall evaluation on the consuming experience. Lin (2007) indicated that an enterprise providing a good service quality could really satisfy the diverse needs of customers, and customer satisfaction was the overall evaluation of the product and the service based on the customer's past experiences. Chi (2007) mentioned that customer satisfaction was the result of the customer purchase and the use of service. When the customer showed better satisfaction with the service quality, it indicated that the customer felt satisfied, and vice versa (Mevhibe and Erdoğan, 2009). Ostrom and Iacobucci (1995) thought that there were many dimensions in measuring customer satisfaction, including (1) price of goods, (2) service efficiency, (3) attendant attitude, (4) overall performance of the company, and (5) the closeness to the ideal company. Czepiel et al. (1974) proposed that satisfaction could be seen as an overall evaluation, representing the sum of customers’ subjective reactions to the different attributes of the product. Furthermore, Day (1977) claimed that satisfaction was a kind of overall and summary phenomenon which could understand customers’ overall usage of the product by measuring the satisfaction with a single overall product. Zeithaml and Bitner (2000) considered customer satisfaction as an overall evaluation on the actual product and the intangible service that service quality simply focused on the measurement of single dimension while customer satisfaction was multidimensional measurements, which included service quality, product quality, scenario factor, personal factor, and price factor.

Brand image

Brand image is indispensable for marketing where customers infer the quality of products by the brand image and are further stirred up the behavior of purchasing. Ballantyne et al. (2005) defined brand image as the material property associated with the brand, such as the product name and the packing, which could make profits or sense for customers and help or increase describing the characteristics. Ballantyne, et al. (2005) proposed reducing conceptual model verification with the effects of brand image and brand attitude. Three routes, in the model, were proposed to connect to brand right directly through the brand image and the brand attitude, and indirectly from the brand attitude through the brand image. Dobni (1990) treated brand image as the brand concept that customers held; and, Robert and Patrick (2009) stated that most brand image was subjectively perceived image, which was interpreted from the rationality or the sensitivity of customers. In addition, brand image did not exist in the technology, the function, and the product but affected by relevant marketing programs, campaign context, and the characters of the accepters. Wu and Fu (2009) said that while referring to a brand image, the perception presented by the fact would be more important than the fact itself.

Roth (1994) explained that brand image held by customers was the reactions mixed with marketing programs by the manufacturer. Magid and Cox (2006) also thought that brand image included customer responses to brand name, sign, or impression and also represented the symbol of the product quality. Meanwhile, Magid and Cox (2006) considered brand image as a set of assets and liabilities linked with brand name and sign that the assets and liabilities increased or reduced the value by the enterprise providing products or services for customers. Brand image included the customer responses to the brand name, sign or impression, and also represented the symbol of the product quality.

Porter and Claycomb (1997) measured brand image from two dimensions, namely the symbol and the function. With adjectives to measure the two dimensions, the measuring items mainly focused on the utility of the brand regarding the function, while words like symbolic, reputable, status symbol, and identifiable were contained in terms of symbolic image. Positive and negative adjectives, such as simple, romantic, successful, common, ordinary, obedient, calm, and elegant, were utilized to describe the characteristics of users. Aaker (1996) believed that brand image could be measured through three dimensions, including: (1) Brand value, in relation to functional benefits, also the basic condition required by the brand, (2) Brand characteristics, the connection between brand characteristics and customer perception
that appeared differences; (3) Brand associations, the associations the customers presented to the brand that the customer would expand to other merchandise and service of the brand. Graeff (1996) mentioned the method to measure brand image being that the customer made the evaluation with the scale which contained a series of languages with different meanings (Shahbaz et al. 2009). It combined the dimensions with personality characteristics to create a section with overall brand image, or made descriptive explanations on typical users' image to each brand. In the research, 16 items of languages with different meanings were applied, including, economy vs. toleration, easily excited vs. composure, comfortable vs. uncomfortable, tough vs. gentle, young vs. mature, thrifty vs. wasted, colorful vs. dull, boring vs. interesting, modern vs. old-style, extrovert vs. introvert, active vs. passive, joyful vs. not joyful, contemporary vs. not contemporary, self-confident vs. not self-confident, leader vs. followers, and cooperative vs. competitive. Biel (1992) considered three elements of brand image, namely the maker's image (enterprise image), the product image, and the image of competitor's brand. All of the three had great impact on customers' image of brand while brand image would then have influence on user image.

Relevant studies on brand image and customer satisfaction

Aaker (1991) and Rory (2000) pointed out that, with the construction of good brand image, customers were likely to increase the satisfaction of usage, and would like to recommend to others. Gensch (1978) considered brand image as having more influence on the purchase intention and the satisfaction of customers while the product attribute was not easily defined. Graeff (1996) mentioned that, when the customer's self-image was more similar to the brand image, customer satisfaction would be affected. Romaniuk and Sharp (2003) found the positive relation between brand image and customer satisfaction. Many scholars, such as Su (2005), Zhi (2005), Lin (2005), Chen (2005), Xu (2006), Shi (2006), Lin (2006), Yang (2006), and Zhang (2007), also confirmed the positive relations between brand image and customer satisfaction.

Yang (2002) proposed that customer satisfaction referred to the pleasant attitude when a customer accepting certain deal or service; and, customer satisfaction and brand value appeared notably positive relation. Gu (2005) suggested that customer satisfaction and brand characteristics presented significantly positive relation that customer satisfaction was the provided service higher than the expectation of the customer so that the customer was satisfied (Sang, 2009). Whereas, if the provided service was lower than the service expectation of the customer, he/she would then feel very dissatisfied. The schema memory of a brand included the interpretation of characteristics, from a target market, to the attributes and the advantages of the product, the use situation, the users, and the manufacturer/marketing personnel that people thought and felt after seeing and hearing the brand name. Consequently, it was substantially a set of associative thoughts that the customer learned about the brand. Therefore, customer satisfaction and brand image revealed notably positive relation (Hong Quang Zong, Hong Quang Yuen far, Zhu Zhi Zhong's, etc. translation, 2008). Customers tend to explain the internal and external attributes of products and the viewpoint of image, as well as the viewpoints of feeling and perception. Brand image constructs measurement variables with user image, product image, and enterprise image that customer satisfaction and brand image show remarkably positive relation (Zhang and Mo, 2008).

Huang (2000) regarded four dimensions in measuring customer satisfaction, as (1) customer expectation which reflected the expected product performance of customers whose previous consuming experiences before purchasing would become the expectation on product performance; (2) product performance, as a kind of comparison standard that customers would compare the actual product performance after purchasing with the expectation before purchasing; (3) disconfirmation, as a kind of major agent variable that a person's expectation would be confirmed to correspond the product performance to his/her expectation, and (4) customer satisfaction, as an output after purchasing that, when the actual product performance was larger than or equal to the expectation before the act, the customer would feel satisfied; or, when the actual product performance was smaller than the expectation before the act, the customer would feel dissatisfied (Emel and Nafiz, 2009). Besides, customer satisfaction and brand value appeared remarkable relation. Chen (2008) considered that the measuring dimensions of customer satisfaction contained the satisfaction with professional level and customer interaction, and the overall customer satisfaction and brand image presented significant relation.

Chen (2001) classified brand association into functional association (product attribute association), and non-functional association (non-product related attribute association). In addition, brand association also paid attention to organization association. Consequently, products were associated with functional attributes and non-functional attributes, while organizational association was divided into company ability and social responsibility association, and customer satisfaction and brand association revealed notably positive relation (Seyed et al., 2009).

Aaker (1991) defined brand image as a set of brand association types which were normally organized in a meaningful way. Brand association was divided into 11 kinds of characteristics, as product characteristic, invisibility, customer benefit, relative price, usage/application, user/customer, famous people/persons, life style/personality, product variety, competitors, and countries/
geographic districts. However, even if these associations are equally classified, various associations present characteristics with different strength (Jose and Mohammad, 2009). Therefore, various associations will appear different effects on brand image, but various brand associations present significantly positive relation with customer satisfaction.

Gensch (1978) thought that a market could simply be won by winning customers. With service innovation, the biggest trust of customers was obtained, the extensive social support was won, and the brand image was completely set up to acquire customer satisfaction and loyalty. Besides, regarding customers as the value of enterprise existence, the premise of existence, and the foundation of development, the entire company would have consensus. Therefore, customer satisfaction and brand image appear significantly positive relation.

China Unicom takes customer satisfaction as an objective with explicit customer orientation and pursues the ideal realm of total customer satisfaction (TCS). With service innovation, it gets affirmation from customers, acquires customer loyalty, and pushes brand image to develop forward. Apparently, customer satisfaction and brand value reveal notably positive relation. Based on the aforementioned depiction, the following hypotheses are proposed in this study:

H₁: The “brand value” in brand image and customer satisfaction in catering industry presents notably positive relation.
H₂: The “brand characteristics” in brand image and customer satisfaction in catering industry appears remarkably positive relation.
H₃: The “brand association” in brand image and customer satisfaction in catering industry shows notably positive relation.

Demographic variables

Studies on customer satisfaction indicated that younger generations and customers with higher educational background and higher income tended to higher customer satisfaction (Day and Landon, 1977; Zaichowsky and Liefeld, 1977; Bearden and Mason, 1984). Singh (1990) found that, beside ages, demo-graphic variables had limited explanation. Que (1990) showed in his research that the demographic variables had no notable relation to the satisfaction of customers. This research puts forth some hypotheses as follows:

H₄: The relativity of brand image and customer satisfaction in catering industry will present significant difference because of “customer gender”.
H₅: The relativity of brand image and customer satisfaction in catering industry will appear remarkable different because of “customer age”.
H₆: The relativity of brand image and customer satisfaction in catering industry will reveal notable difference because of “customer occupation”.
H₇: The relativity of brand image and customer satisfaction in catering industry will show great difference because of “customer educational background”.
H₈: The relativity of brand image and customer satisfaction in catering industry will appear significant different because of “customer monthly income”.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research framework

This research was undertaken according to domestic and international scholars’ literatures on brand image and customer satisfaction. The overall customer satisfaction was the dependent variable and three brand images, including brand value, brand characteristics, and brand association, were the independent variables. The correlations between each brand image and customer satisfaction were discussed as shown in Figure 1.

Research subject and sampling method

This research chose “Wang Pin Formosa Plastics Steak” as the research subject. "Wang Pin's Steak" symbolizes high-level service and establishes the impression of good service but reasonable price. With internal service replication, the high-level service is continued. Due to the diverse product modes and the establishment of brand, “Wang Pin” has been credited as a superb catering group, which meets a completely demanding standard of service quality. What’s more, “Wang Pin” combines high-level service with reasonable price to create a dominating catering business. “Wang Pin" leaves much positive impression to its customers. Therefore, this research chose “Wang Pin's steak” as the research subject. Besides, the samples of this research, were the customers with consuming experiences in Wang Pin's chain stores. The questionnaire were distributed in the major business areas in Taipei City. With convenience sampling, total 360 questionnaires were distributed and 264 were valid with the retrieval rate reaching 73.33%.

ANALYSES AND DISCUSSION

Factor analysis of brand image

In this research, the brand image scale was based upon the dimensions and the questionnaire proposed by Aaker’s (1996). With factor analyses, three dimensions were obtained. The Cronbach α of each dimension was 0.83 (brand value), 0.88 (brand characteristic), and 0.81 (brand association). The sample questionnaire was further proceeded factor analyses and oblique rotation; the explained variance was 83.864% as shown in Table 1.

The analyses of the correlation between brand image and customer satisfaction

With Pearson correlation analysis, the three dimensions ×
further proceeded factor analyses and oblique rotation; the explained variance was 83.864% as shown in Table 1.

The analysis of the correlation between brand image and customer satisfaction

With Pearson correlation analysis, the three dimensions in brand image and customer satisfaction achieved notably positive relation ($p < 0.05$), where brand value presented the highest correlation (0.322) with customer satisfaction. The followings were brand characteristics (0.247) and brand association (0.203). Through multiple regression analyses to check hypotheses $H_1$, $H_2$ and $H_3$, the results showed that brand value ($t = 2.955$, $p < 0.01$) and brand characteristics ($t = 2.467$, $p < 0.01$) appeared significant effects on customer satisfaction. In this case, $H_1$ and $H_2$ were agreed; yet, $H_3$ was not agreed as shown in Table 2.

The interference of demographic variables

With analyses of variance, it was found that brand value ($F = 3.846$, $p < 0.01$) and brand characteristics ($F = 3.164$, $p < 0.01$) and brand association ($F = 3.164$, $p < 0.01$) appeared significant effects on customer satisfaction.
Table 2. Multiple regression analyses of the factor in theater elements to customer satisfaction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predicted variable</th>
<th>Non standardized coefficient</th>
<th>Standardized coefficient</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Factor</td>
<td>2.564</td>
<td>0.338</td>
<td>8.715</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand value</td>
<td>0.283</td>
<td>0.089</td>
<td>2.955**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand characteristic</td>
<td>0.138</td>
<td>0.074</td>
<td>2.467**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand association</td>
<td>0.126</td>
<td>0.051</td>
<td>0.358</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01.

Table 3. Different demographic variables relate to the brand image and customer satisfaction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor to service</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Educational background</th>
<th>Monthly income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brand value</td>
<td>p &gt; 0.05</td>
<td>p &lt; 0.01</td>
<td>p &lt; 0.05</td>
<td>p &lt; 0.01</td>
<td>p &lt; 0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand characteristic</td>
<td>p &gt; 0.05</td>
<td>p &lt; 0.01</td>
<td>p &lt; 0.05</td>
<td>p &lt; 0.01</td>
<td>p &lt; 0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand association</td>
<td>p &gt; 0.05</td>
<td>p &gt; 0.05</td>
<td>p &lt; 0.05</td>
<td>p &lt; 0.05</td>
<td>p &lt; 0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The assumption examination</td>
<td>H₄: Not agreed</td>
<td>H₅: Partially agreed</td>
<td>H₆: Agreed</td>
<td>H₇: Agreed</td>
<td>H₈: Agreed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.164, p < 0.01) appeared significant differences on customer satisfaction. Different occupation presented notable differences on brand value (F = 2.916, p < 0.01), brand characteristics (F = 2.167, p < 0.01) and brand association (F = 1.851, p < 0.05). Different educational background revealed significant differences on brand value (F = 3.061, p < 0.01), brand characteristic (F = 2.834, p < 0.01), and brand association (F = 2.539, p < 0.01). Different monthly income levels showed notable differences on brand value (F = 3.437, p < 0.01), brand characteristic (F = 2.831, p < 0.01), and brand association (F = 2.069, p < 0.05). Therefore, H₄ was partially agreed; H₅, H₇, H₈ were agreed; however, H₄ was not agreed as sown in Table 3.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The important point of brand image in catering industry is the customer benefit brought by the brand that the brand essence is delivered to the customers. Based on the process to gradually establish the brand image in catering industry, studies on customer satisfaction and the integration of brand image could be applied to the establishment of brand image to thoroughly meet customer satisfaction.

Study on customer satisfaction

The brand image target in catering businesses is the targeted customers of the brand. Modern customer-oriented marketing theory requires an enterprise to take customer satisfaction into account when making decisions and establishing brand image. Because the establishment of brand image in catering industry lies in customer satisfaction, studies on customer satisfaction has become the first priority to establish brand image. Based on customer demands, studies on customer satisfaction could help understand, associate, and expect the products of the brand in catering businesses that would further benefit the conformation of brand image and the development.

Internalize the value of brand image

The brand image in catering industry presents
comprehensiveness that deeper key point of brand image, the connotation of the brand image, would be ignored when simply considering the superficial images of name and mark. Consequently, the establishment of brand image in catering industry is firmly established a brand image basis. It is crucial to internalize the spirit of the brand to brand image so as to meet customer satisfaction. The meaning that a brand holds for a long period of time lies in its value, from which the foundation of a brand is confirmed and the connotation of brand image is originated. To speak more concretely, the connotation of the brand image in catering industry consists of customer satisfaction.

**Integrated promulgation of brand image**

Integrated promulgation is important to establish brand in catering industry as it establishes a connection between customers and brand image. If only the core value of the catering business is delivered to the target customer and achieved customer satisfaction, the directivity of brand image in the catering business would be more explicit. That is, only when the core value of brand image spreads to a customer will the brand image in the catering business be clearly established in the brain of the customer.

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