



Investigating the service brand: A customer value perspective

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ABSTRACT

Despite considerable interest in the nature and role of marketing using a service perspective [Vargo S., Lusch R. Evolving to a new dominant logic for marketing. *J Mark* 2004; 68 (1): 1–17] there is limited research about branding. Research to date tends to be qualitative [e.g., Berry L. Cultivating service brand equity. *J Acad Mark Sci* 2000; 28: 128–137; de Chernatony L., Segal-Horn S. The criteria for successful services brands. *Eur J Mark* 2003; 37 (7/8): 1095–1118] rather than quantitative. This research closes this gap by developing and testing a theory of the influence of the service brand on the customer value–loyalty process. The model includes the traditional influence of brand image plus three additional influences that more fully reflect the broader service perspective (company image, employee trust, and company trust). Using survey data of a sample of 552 airline customers, the analysis shows there is a direct influence of all the aspects of the brand on customers' perceptions of value. In addition brand image, company image and employee trust have a mediated influence on customer value through customers' perceptions of service quality. Finally the analysis shows that a service brand does not have a direct influence on customer loyalty but rather its influence is mediated through customer value. This paper concludes with a discussion of the managerial and research implications.

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1. Introduction

The majority of the research about brands, until recently, focuses on consumer goods settings and centers around understanding the influences of the awareness and image of the brand (Keller, 1993). However, there is an emerging stream of research about branding, which aligns with the Service Dominant Logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004), that focuses on the value-adding processes leading to creation of the customers' experiences (Berry, 2000; de Chernatony and Segal-Horn, 2003). Within this perspective the brand plays a broader role where it interfaces not just with end customers but the company, its employees and a network of stakeholders. Research articles (e.g., Padgett and Allen, 1997; Dall'Olmo Riley and de Chernatony, 2000) and text books (e.g., Kasper et al., 2006, p. 163) refer to this broader perspective of branding as the “service brand.”

It is important to note that the “service brand” does not mean the same thing as the branding of services. Rather, it follows the way Vargo and Lusch (2004, p. 2) use the term service marketing; “where the service-centered dominant logic represents a reoriented philosophy that is applicable to all marketing offerings, including those that involve tangible output (goods) and the process of service provision.” Hence the concept of the service brand is integrative where “service” is super-

ordinate to the branding of “goods” and/or “services” (Brodie et al., 2006).

The pioneering research of Berry (2000), which stems from the interpretation of his personal experiences with labor-intensive service organizations, provides initial insight into the way brands play a broader role. While Berry's model still recognizes that the awareness of the company's presented brand influences the brand's equity, Berry suggests the brand's “meaning” that the customers derive from their service experiences is more important. Hence, Berry (2000, p.128) states that “the company” becomes the primary brand rather than the product. This implies that the consumers' experiences with the organization and its employees delivering the service offer are the major determinants of brand meaning. Research by Dall'Olmo Riley and de Chernatony (2000) and Davis et al. (2000) expand on Berry's (2000) model. The Dall'Olmo Riley and de Chernatony (2000) research utilizes 20 personal interviews with senior executives in the UK who are experts in the area of service marketing. The findings from this study reveal that the service brand acts as a “relationship builder” or “relationship fulcrum.” They conclude that: “the service brand is a holistic process beginning with the relationship between the firm and its staff and coming alive during the interaction between staff and customers” (p. 138). Similarly, Davis et al. (2000) undertake a study to understand online consumer shopping experiences. Their qualitative study also reveals that the retail company is the primary brand. This defines the consumers' experiences when shopping online in terms of service attributes, symbolic meanings and functional consequences of

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