Attendee-based brand equity

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Abstract

In designing the marketing and management of association meetings, associations are increasingly concerned with attendee behaviors. This study investigated CHRIE conference attendee behaviors from the perspective of brand equity defined as "the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand" [Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Marketing, 57*(1), 1–22]. Structural equation analyses indicated that professional education, staff service, site selection, and social networking were positively related to brand satisfaction, whereas brand awareness was negatively associated with it. Positive relationships existed on each path for brand satisfaction–UEBV (updated expectation of brand value), UEBV–brand trust, brand satisfaction–brand trust, and brand trust–attitudinal brand loyalty. Professional education was the strongest brand association to predict brand satisfaction, and UEBV served as a partial mediator on the brand satisfaction–brand trust path. The findings suggested significant implications for practitioners and academics.
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1. Introduction

Annual meetings of associations are highly profitable to the hospitality and tourism industry because of the large number of delegates they bring to conference destinations. Association meetings represent the most important segment of the convention industry, accounting for 71% of direct expenditures in the convention industry (Alkjaer, 1993), 78% of all attendees, and 80% of all conventions and meetings (Edelstein & Benini, 1994). Recently, more attention has been focused upon managing and marketing association meetings because of (1) the growing number of associations competing for attendees (Loverseed, 1993); (2) the high proportion of association revenue derived from annual meetings (about 30.2% of their annual income) (Shure, 2004); (3) the increasing conference expenses borne by association members (Oppermann & Chon, 1997); and (4) participant decision-making as influenced by the perception of meeting destination and participant needs

and finances (Oppermann & Chon, 1997). In hospitality and tourism research, interest has been therefore growing in association meeting attendee behaviors or attendee information processing that can be used to design competitive conference marketing and management strategies.

From the perspective of attendee behaviors, existing convention literature largely focuses on the site selection process (Go & Govers, 1999; Hu & Hiemstra, 1996) and the meeting participation process (Oppermann, 1995; Oppermann & Chon, 1997; Price, 1993; Um & Crompton, 1992). These studies identified criteria and factors of site selection and conceptualized the meeting participation process by examining motivators, facilitators, and inhibitors to convention attendance, which have contributed to managerial and research implications in the convention industry. However, relative to hospitality and tourism literature, convention lags far behind in-depth research. A more robust approach should be used to analyze attendee behaviors.

Conference selection involves high perceived risks arising from intangible attributes (e.g., education and social networking). Such characteristics make it difficult for a

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conference organizer to clarify service attributes and lower perceived risks. A key to success in service marketing is to "tangibilize the intangible" (Berry, 1986, p. 6). An effective way of increasing the tangible nature of a service is to use a brand as an extrinsic cue or an icon. As such, the brand becomes a symbol for customer perceptions of the firm, its products, and its services (Keller, 2003) and a powerful means of creating and sustaining competitive advantage (Aaker, 1997; Aggarwal, 2004; Fournier, 1998). It is also widely recognized that well-branded tradeshows, conferences, or other meetings will develop trust in participants and, thus, ensure committed repeat attendance (PCMA, 2002a).

Brand equity has been used as a barometer of brand strength through the use of its logo, symbol, or name (Farquhar, 1989; Morgan, 2000). Strong brands contribute to enhancing consumer trust of the intangible purchase, tangiblizing the intangible goods, and reducing the perceived risk for the service purchase by assisting customers in visualizing and understanding the intangible aspects of the service product (Berry, 2000). Cultivating strong brands with high equity improves (1) the probability of brand choice, (2) brand performance, (3) cash flow, (4) willingness to pay a premium, (5) marketing productivity, (6) product positioning, and (7) brand knowledge in consumers' minds (Kapferer, 2004; Keller, 1993; Simon & Sullivan, 1993). A conference with high brand equity would be, therefore, assumed to enhance marketing activities and brand loyalty, thereby maintaining high revenues and competitive positioning in the meeting market.

Despite the well-recognized significance of brand equity concepts in business (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004; Keller, 2003; Yoo & Donthu, 2001) and service literature (Berry, 2000; Kim & Kim, 2004; Prasad & Dev, 2000), no study has yet been published in convention literature to examine conference brand equity. However, several hospitality researchers have conducted brand equity research in the hotel and restaurant industry. For example, Kim and Kim (2004) investigated brand equity of fast food restaurants using four dimensions: brand loyalty, brand awareness, brand image, and perceived quality. Prasad and Dev (2000) examined what constitutes brand equity in the hotel industry through brand awareness and a brand performance index. Brand equity research provides a more detailed and comprehensive picture of consumer behavior because it spans various brand factors, including brand awareness, brand associations, brand image, brand trust, brand personality, and brand loyalty (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1993; Farquhar, 1989; Yoo & Donthu, 2001).

Conference brand equity from the perspective of attendees (attendee-based brand equity) is expected to capture a richer, more detailed portrait of attendee consumption experiences and paths to future intentions than the extant literature. Sampling CHRIE members who had previously attended the annual CHRIE conference, this study examined attendee behaviors from the concept of attendee-based brand equity. Specifically, the purposes of the study are (1) to identify key brand associations in brand knowledge and (2) to investigate attendee behaviors through the flow from brand knowledge (brand associations and brand awareness) to "the differential effect of brand knowledge" (brand satisfaction, updated expectation of brand value (UEBV), brand trust, and attitudinal brand loyalty). Furthermore, this study attempts to provide in-depth research and managerial implications about conference attendee behaviors from which sound conference management and marketing are derived.

2. Literature review

2.1. Definition of brand equity

Several researchers provide subtly different descriptions and definitions of brand equity. Brand equity has been described as (1) "a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name, and symbol, that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customers" (Aaker, 1991, p. 15); (2) "the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand" (Keller, 1993, p. 8); and (3) the power that a brand may command in a market by means of its name, symbol, or logo (Farquhar, 1989). However, for the purpose of study, this study builds on Keller's (1993) definition of customer-based brand equity.

2.2. Theoretical model

Keller (1993) delineated customer-based brand equity in a detailed manner, conceptualizing it as "the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand" (p. 8). Customer-based brand equity occurs when the consumer is aware of the brand with some favorable, strong, and unique brand associations in memory. The core concept of his model draws on "brand knowledge" comprising two dimensions: brand awareness and brand associations.

Brand awareness consists of both brand recognition and recall (Keller, 1993; Rossiter & Percy, 1987). Brand associations are informational nodes (e.g., tangible and intangible attributes, benefits, and attitude) linked to a brand node (e.g., brand name or logo), providing meaningful information about the brand for consumers (Keller, 1993). Krishnan (1996) argued that associations may be used as a general term to serve as a link between any two nodes, which suggests an association between brand node and other informational nodes in the consumer's mind.

The associative network model (Anderson, 1983) underlies the mechanism of brand association. According to the associative network model, memory of a concept consists of a network of nodes and links among these nodes. The nodes represent other stored information, including the brand node, and the links denote the strength of