
Introduction to Service Branding and Servicescapes

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The importance of branding services has been highlighted by various researchers (Berry 2000; Grace and O’Cass 2005). Service branding has been conceptualised as a ‘covenant’ or set of promises (Balmer and Gray 2003; Brodie et al. 2006). All the processes that deliver service value will influence the consumers’ experiences and perceptions of the service brand. It should be noted that the ‘service brand’ goes beyond the mere branding of services (Brodie 2009). The service brand is integrative and applicable to all marketing offerings. Service branding has been differentiated from product branding where with services, the focus is on the corporate brand as compared to the latter where the product is the primary brand (Berry 2000; McDonald et al. 2001). The intangible nature of services and corporate branding was highlighted by McDonald et al. (2001).

Branding of services is critical because it influences consumer satisfaction, attitude and behavioural intentions towards the brand (Grace and O’Cass 2005). In fact, services brands represent the principal success driver for service organizations (Berry 2000). According to Brodie et al. (2006: 373) “service brands facilitate and mediate the marketing processes used to realize the experiences that drive co-creation of value. They provide sign systems that symbolize meaning in the marketing network, and hence are a fundamental asset or resource that a marketing organization uses in developing service-based competency and hence competitive advantage.”

An important component of service brand is servicescape. Bitner (1992: 58) described servicescape as “the built environment (i.e., the manmade, physical

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surroundings as opposed to the natural or social environment)” which affects both consumers and employees in service organisations. These occur in consumption settings such as hotels, retail stores, leisure settings, restaurants, etc.

Research has also shown that servicescape quality has an impact on determining customer affective and behavioural responses to services. For example, a strong positive perception of servicescapes has been linked to higher satisfaction and repeat patronage levels in leisure services (Wakefield and Blodgett 1994). The importance of servicescapes was highlighted by Johnstone and Todd (2011). According to them, servicescapes are places which “satisfies one’s need for emotional support and sense of community”. They are in fact places where increasingly busier people are using to connect with others.

This section presents five very unique cases that cover service branding and servicescapes. The Malaysian Airlines versus AirAsia case study examines how the two Malaysian companies serving different segments of customers, differentiate their service offerings. Both airlines serve different segments of customers and offer different customer experiences. Malaysian Airlines as a national carrier with premium price offerings with a heavy reliance on the service quality attributes while AirAsia branding itself as a low cost carrier. However, AirAsia has emerged as a major competitor to Malaysian Airlines both nationally and internationally.

The Haagen Dazs case examines the challenges of entering and consolidating its position in the Chinese market. The company has positioned itself as a luxury service brand and provides a complete service-product package that is extends beyond servicescapes—which the authors term ‘luxury experiencescape’.

Next, we take a look at the case of the iGaranti mobile application which was launched by Garanti Bank of Turkey. Despite receiving awards and acclaim from the industry, their penetration rate among active mobile banking users in the market remained low.

The next case deals with the dilemma faced by Micheal who takes over his family business called Happy Textile. He examines the changing demographic profile of his customers and has to make a decision whether to re-design the store atmosphere.

The final case study analyses the various social media vehicles used by the online site MakeMyTrip.com to engage and retain customers and build loyalty. It is hoped that these cases would lead to an understanding of the various issues related to service branding and servicescapes that marketers must consider in order to best satisfy customer needs and achieve a competitive advantage.

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