

The Relationship among Brand Personality, Brand Image, and Perceived Service Quality

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The purpose of this study is to probe the effect of brand image and brand personality on consumers perceived service quality. A survey was adopted, and the sample size was 500. The result showed that the concept of perceived service quality can be divided into two constructs; one is hardware and institutional perceived service quality, while the other is empathy perceived service quality. In addition, the result also showed that brand image is different from brand personality. The hardware and institutional perceived service quality is associated with the brand personality. Moreover, the empathy perceived service quality is related to brand image.

Field of Research: Marketing, Brand image, Brand personality, Service quality.

1. Introduction

The business of most industries involves both products and intangible services. Differences in each industry result in differences in the emphasis placed on either products or services. Regarding services, the Service quality perceived by consumers is closely related to their overall satisfaction (Fornell, 1992; Cronin and Taylor 1992). The satisfaction of consumers influences the business performance of the company, indicating that perceived service quality is an important issue.

Most related research of the past has focused on service employees and elements of service quality such as frontline staff, onsite facilities, and operational systems. These elements, however, are not only the factors that influence consumers' perceived service quality. Although various industries have improved in these areas to a similar degree, the service quality perceived by consumers still varies. Some companies cause customers to feel they are experiencing a high level of service quality, while other companies implement improvements to customer service to reach this goal. Regardless of the extent of improvement, however, many consumers remain dissatisfied with the quality of customer service.

Consumers perceive the same service quality in different ways. This difference in perception is most likely influenced by corporate image. Companies can plan corporate brand image and brand personality before implementing marketing communications, and shape brand image and personality through various marketing

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strategies. If companies could develop their understanding of the effect of brand image and brand personality on the perceived service quality, in addition to establishing their originally planned market position and product functions, this understanding could facilitate the development of brand personality and image as tools to strengthen perceived service quality.

This study aims to examine brand image, brand personality, and the impression companies leave on their customers, and explore whether and how these elements affect consumers' perceived service quality.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Perceived Quality

Perceived quality and overall satisfaction of consumers are highly correlated variables (Fornell, 1992; Cronin and Taylor, 1992). Objective quality and perceived quality, however, differ. Objective quality refers to quantifiable or certified standards for products. Perceived quality refers to consumers' subjective assessment of the benefits of a product. Perceived quality has a higher level of abstraction and is not a simple attribute; it is a holistic, broad assessment slightly similar to attitude. Consumers' assessment of products is usually a form of relative comparison (Zeithaml, 1988)

Consumers generally evaluate quality according to external and internal attributes of products. Internal attributes are the physical characteristics of the product, while external attributes are related to the product but are not its physical characteristics. Price, brand, and advertisement are examples of external attributes (Olson 1977; Olson and Jacoby, 1972).

The extent to which consumers emphasize internal or external attributes differs according to various circumstances. Consumers lack the motivation, cognitive ability, and time to assess internal attributes when information on internal attributes is insufficient. When consumption is related to experiential services (such as medical treatment) and assessing quality is difficult, consumers determine quality through external attributes such as product brand, word-of-mouth reference, and advertisement (Zeithaml, 1988).

When assessing product quality is difficult, especially in relation to the service quality in experiential consumption, consumers base their assessment of quality on external attributes. Brand is thus a critical reference for consumers.

2.2 Perceived service quality

Service quality is very subjective due to its intangibility, perishability, and high degree of customer participation (Sasser, Olsen, and Wyckoff, 1978). Service quality and quality of product significantly differ, and for consumers, service quality is harder to assess than product quality. The perceived service quality results from comparing customer expectations with actual performance of service. Assessment of service quality is based on not only the outcome of service, but also the process of delivery (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry, 1985).

Several academics have proposed various classifications of service quality. The five dimensions of service quality proposed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988), and Zeithaml and Bitner (2000), are some of the more representative classifications: tangibility (appearance of physical facilities, equipment, and personnel); reliability (dependable and accurate service); responsiveness (the desire to assist customers and provide prompt service); assurance (knowledge, courtesy and the ability to inspire trust), and empathy (giving of caring and individualized attention to customers).

Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1991) also proposed three dimensions of service quality: physical quality (quality of physical goods and practical product support), interactive quality (quality of interaction with customers), and corporate quality (how customers and potential customers assess the company and its image).

The dimensions of service quality could be categorized into a section relating to physical facilities and operational systems and a section relating to service and customer care. The former corresponds to what Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) termed 'tangible goods' and Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1991) described as 'physical quality.' The latter corresponds to the dimensions of 'reliability, responsiveness, care, and assurance' defined by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) and 'interactive and corporate quality' as proposed by Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1991).

2.3 Brand Image

Brand image is the brand belief developed by consumers from various product attributes. Multiple brand beliefs form a brand image (Kotler and Armstrong, 1996). Consumers use brand image to infer or maintain the perceived quality of products. Brand image can also represent all information related to the product. Thus, for

products with a strong brand image, the product quality perceived by consumers is higher (Richardson, Dick, and Jain, 1994). Brand image and perception of product quality are closely related and affect perceived service quality (Zeithaml, 1988).

Strong brand image reduces consumers' perceived risk. Consumers who are unfamiliar with a product will more readily trust well-known or more credible brands. Brands represent the extended accumulation of a company's past performance; therefore, products with strong brand image may perform better regardless of their functions, reliability, or service (Kotler and Armstrong, 1996).

As the quality of intangible services is difficult to evaluate objectively, the perceived risk increases, leading to an inability in consumers to accurately gauge service quality. Thus, when consumers rely more on brand image as an indicator of quality, especially in regards to the aspects of interaction or care as service qualities, which are difficult elements to evaluate, brand image heavily influences their assessment.

2.4 Brand Personality

Brand personality is the set of personality traits formed by consumer brand association. Consumer brand association develops from the perception of consumers towards the brand, the image promoted by the company, and product-related attributes (Aaker, 1997). Brand personality is an expression of the fundamental characteristics of a brand, described as human personality traits (Batra, Lehmann, and Singh, 1993); it is the combination of human qualities associated with the brand (Keller, 1993; 1998).

Many methods for gauging brand personality exist, but most methods focus on individual brands and therefore lack reliability, validity, and generality. (Keller, 1998). Scholars have attempted to devise a more reliable method for determining brand personality. Aaker (1997) designed a measurement framework for brand personality that offers reference value. This framework uses the "Big Five" human personality structure in psychology as a reference framework in constructing brand personality and developing a brand personality scale (BPS).

As brand personality is relatively similar to brand image, we can infer that it has similar functions for consumers. Brand personality could then be a basis for the evaluation of service quality. However, brand personality differs from brand image in that it attempts to personify and describe brands according to human personality. Brand personality focuses less on details and individual interactive experience, and so its effect on the perceived service quality is less significant in the dimensions of interactivity and care. Rather, brand personality influences satisfaction with integrity, physical facilities, and operational systems.

The following hypotheses are derived from the literature review above:

H1: Brand personality is positively correlated with perceived service quality as relates to physical facilities and operational systems.

H2: Brand image is positively correlated with the perception of empathy as a service quality.

H3: Satisfaction with the degree of empathy in service quality influences satisfaction with physical facilities and operational systems. These two variables are positively correlated.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Sampling

The research targets of this study were consumers in the banking industry. Three main factors were considered: 1) The banking industry has highly intangible services. To avoid the influence of the quality of physical products, banking industries with higher intangibility (Kotler and Armstrong 1996) that mainly offered purely financial services were preferred (Lovelock, 1983; Shostack, 1977); 2) The banking industry is an important industry among service industries; 3) The banking industry has a high degree of contact with customers.

This study used quota sampling with the aim of controlling the distribution of sample respondents and ensuring that the distribution was as close as possible to the actual circumstances of consumers within the banking industry. After discussion with industry experts and academics, this study used quota sampling based on gender and age variables. The ratio between males and females was 1:1. This study focused only on frequent banking customers between the ages of 20 to 49 years old. Quotas of 20-29 years old, 30-39 years old, and 40-49 years old were established, with a ratio of 3:4:3. Five hundred valid questionnaires were collected.

3.2 Measures

Service quality: A scale of service quality for banks was developed based on the SERVQUAL scale (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry, 1988), discussions with academics and experts, and pilot questionnaires.

Brand image: Industry attributes influence computation of brand image most significantly. This study conducted pre-survey testing by gathering 30 marketing or sales personnel from the banking industry to describe the image attributes of banks. After reference to overseas and domestic studies and discussion with experts and academics, researchers developed 11 variables for measurement of brand image.

Brand personality: Researchers referred to Aaker's (1997) BPS, and after consultation with scholars and academics, and appropriate modifications of meaning, six variables for measurement of brand personality were developed.

4. Results

This study used the linear structural relations model (LISREL) to verify the suitability of the scale and to further examine the effect of brand image and brand personality on perceived service quality.

4.1 Confirmatory factor analysis

This study first conducted exploratory factor analysis. Two major factors, competence and boldness, were extracted for brand personality. Two factors, professionalism and empathy, were extracted for brand image (see Table 1). Satisfaction with empathy as a service quality and satisfaction with physical facilities and operational systems were extracted as factors of perceived service quality (see Table 2). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) followed. The degrees of freedom were 419; chi-square value was 810.86. Results of the confirmatory factor analysis showed that the variables could represent the constructs needed for this study. The goodness of fit index (GFI) was 0.91, the comparative fit index (CFI) was 0.93, the non-norm fit index (NNFI) was 0.92, and the incremental fit index (IFI) was 0.93. T-tests for the variables also achieved a significant level (see Tables 1 and 2) which represented a good model fit.

Table 1: Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis and Confirmatory Factor--

Analysis of Brand Personality and Brand Image

| Construct | Factor | Item | Factor loading | t-value |
|-------------------|-----------------|------------------|----------------|---------|
| Brand personality | Competence | New and original | 0.54 | 11.02* |
| | | Family-oriented | 0.60 | 12.41* |
| | | Brave | 0.69 | 14.43* |
| | Boldness | Bold | 0.68 | 14.56* |
| | | Masculine | 0.71 | 15.24* |
| | | Outdoorsy | 0.68 | 14.48* |
| Brand image | Professionalism | Fresh | 0.73 | 18.43* |
| | | Practical | 0.73 | 18.40* |
| | | Multifaceted | 0.51 | 11.64* |
| | | Professional | 0.69 | 17.05* |
| | | Stable | 0.71 | 17.69* |
| | | Clean | 0.76 | 19.38* |
| | | Accessible | 0.79 | 20.41* |
| | | Metropolitan | 0.61 | 14.34* |
| | Empathy | Gentle | 0.53 | 11.69* |
| | | Leading | 0.71 | 16.30* |
| | | Personal | 0.61 | 13.64* |

* represent the achievement of significance level of 0.01

Table 2: Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis and Confirmatory Factor --Analysis of Perceived service quality

| Construct | Factor | Item | Factor loading | t-value |
|---------------------------|--|--|----------------|---------|
| Perceived service quality | Satisfaction with empathy as a service quality | Imitative from banks in understanding the needs of customers | 0.69 | 16.88* |
| | | Treatment of customers by bank employees | 0.65 | 15.63* |
| | | Reliability of bank employees | 0.67 | 16.19* |
| | | Ability to meet the individual needs of customers | 0.67 | 16.29* |
| | | Attitude towards protecting the rights of customers | 0.69 | 17.05* |
| | | Degree of assurance from banks | 0.62 | 14.84* |
| | | Degree of clarity in implementation of the bank's various services | 0.66 | 15.83* |
| | | Timeliness of service provided | 0.66 | 15.98* |
| | | Guarantee provided by bank | 0.53 | 12.23* |
| | | Ability to meet the needs of customers promptly | 0.70 | 17.35* |
| | Satisfaction for physical facilities and operational systems | Accuracy of bank operations and services | 0.71 | 16.12* |
| | | Open business hours | 0.58 | 12.69* |
| | | Attire of bank employees | 0.42 | 8.78* |
| | | Ability to clearly explain the services of the bank and required fees to customers | 0.67 | 14.89* |

* represent the achievement of significance level of 0.01

Testing the Hypothesized Structural Model

The acceptable fit of the structural model to the data: the degrees of freedom were 423; chi-square value was 816.52, the goodness of fit index (GFI) was 0.90; the root mean square residual (RMSR) was 0.042; the normal fit index (NFI) was 0.87; the (NNFI) was 0.92, and the comparative fit index (CFI) was 0.93. Testing of hypotheses followed.

Table 4 and Figure 1 show that aside from an insignificant relationship between the boldness of brand personality and perceived service quality in relation to physical facilities and operational systems, and other variable relationships were consistent with the hypotheses. The t-values reached a significant value of 0.01.

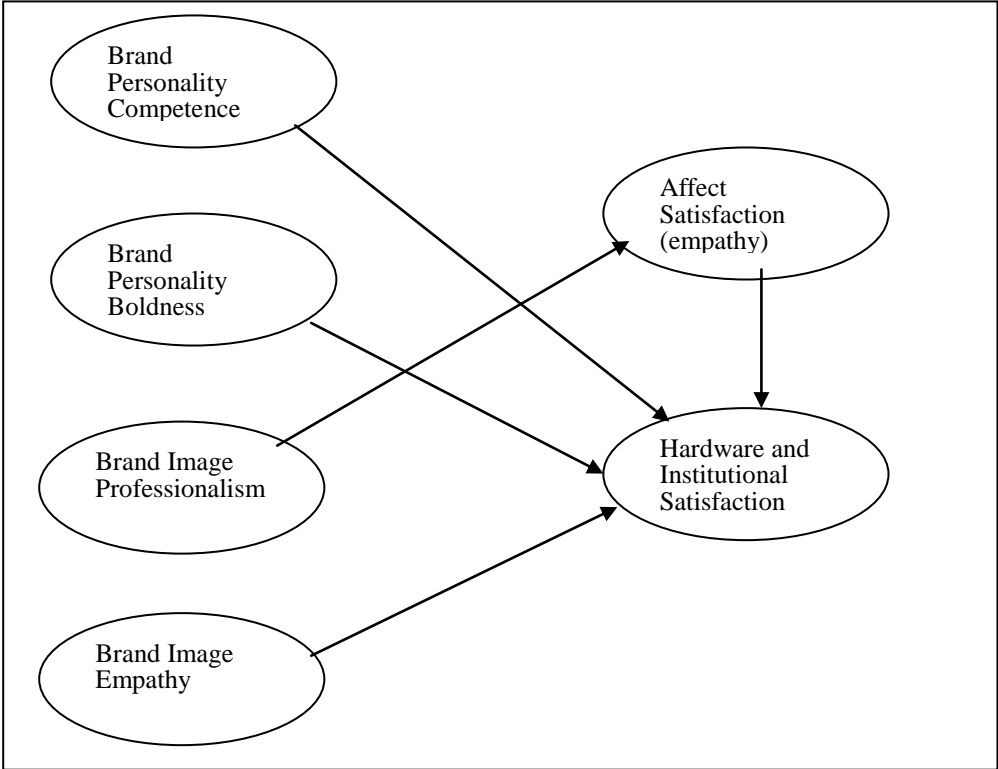


Fig. 1: Diagram for brand personality, brand image, and perceived service quality

Table 4: Overall Goodness of Fit

| Hypothesis | Coefficient | t-value | Result |
|--|-------------|---------|---------------------|
| Hypothesis 1: Brand personality affects the perceived service quality in relation to physical facilities and operational systems. | | | partially supported |
| 1a. Higher competence leads to improved perceived service quality in relation to physical facilities and operational systems. | 0.24 | 2.99* | supported |
| 1b. A higher degree of boldness leads to improved perceived service quality in relation to physical facilities and operational systems. | 0.00 | 0.01 | unsupported |
| Hypothesis 2: Brand image affects perception of empathy as a service quality | | | supported |
| 2a. Higher level of professionalism leads to higher satisfaction with empathy as a service quality | 0.43 | 4.77* | supported |
| 2b. Higher degree of empathy leads to higher satisfaction with empathy as a service quality | 0.33 | 3.58* | supported |
| Hypothesis 3: Satisfaction with empathy as a service quality affects satisfaction with physical facilities and operational systems, forming a positive correlation between the two variables. | 0.66 | 9.80* | supported |

5. Conclusion and Discussion

Many methods of classification for the dimensions of service quality exist. However, this study found that if perceived service quality were categorized into two sections, it could be distinguished as the section related to interaction, including satisfaction with empathy as a service quality; and the section related to physical facilities and operational systems in regards to the process of delivery of service. Examples of the former category are the treatment of customers by bank employees and the initiative of the bank in understanding the needs of customers. Examples of the latter category are the business hours of the bank and the attire of the bank employees.

The perceived service quality as relates to interaction also influences the perceived service quality in relation to physical facilities and operational systems. In evaluating

the services of physical facilities and operational systems provided by a bank, customers do not simply consider physical standards but are also influenced by the sense of empathy they experience. Positive interaction between the customer and bank employee improves the customer's assessment of the bank facilities and operational systems. Conversely, although a bank may provide quality physical facilities and operational systems, such as long business hours and sophisticated facilities, if the customer experiences poor interaction with a bank employee, his/her perception of the service quality of the banks' facilities and operational systems would be negatively influenced.

Although brand image and brand personality are similar, these elements clearly differ in this study, as observed from the different effect of these elements on perceived service quality. Brand personality influences only the perception of the service quality of facilities and operational systems, while brand image directly affects only the perception of empathy as a service quality. A stronger sense of empathy conveyed by a brand image implies a higher consumer perceived service quality. On the other hand, when a brand image reflects greater professionalism, the consumer perceived service quality in regards to professionalism also increases. These results may be because in relation to empathy as a service quality, aside from interaction between consumers and bank employees, a customized feeling of professionalism is also important. Thus, when the brand image of a bank reflects greater professionalism, consumers are more likely to feel that the bank is better able to understand and be attentive to their needs, enhancing the perception of empathy as a service quality.

While research targets in this study were consumers in the banking industry, research results could also provide reference for other service industries. Companies who wish to improve the perceived service quality, aside from actively improving the performance of front-line staff and the hardware and software of onsite facilities, could focus marketing strategy on strengthening the competence of brand personality. Strengthening the competence of brand personality could improve consumers' perception of the service quality of physical facilities and operational systems. In relation to product image, enhancing a caring and professional image could assist in improving the perception of empathy as a service quality. This study recommends that future studies research more industries to further confirm how brand image and brand personality affect perceived service quality and further investigate the conditions of various industries.

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