Chapter 1   The Problem

1.0   Introduction

Today, the increment of brand varieties with endorsement from media, the known deficiency of customer attention and specificities of services have increased the complexity of differentiating service brands, with the risk that many services become mere commodities. The priority of leveraging the service brand by using old formula consisting of traditional consumer goods branding tools seems to have serious limitations (Pine et al., 1999). In the experience economy especially sectors dealing with the service industry, each point of contact between the brand and its customers is an opportunity to communicate brand values and to enhance the brand. Such communications will enable a new branding model which will emphasize value through its employees, customers and stakeholders (Cretu et al, 2006).

Thomson et al. (1999) were amongst the many scholars and consultants who have emphasised the specific role of employees in building the service brand in order to make the brand 'come alive'. It is common that the customers nowadays used service brand names as the substitute for information where they made purchasing decisions (Ward & Lee, 2000). Moreover, Knox et al. (2000) argued that the internal complexities are augmented by the increasingly close relationships between organisations and their stakeholders, be it internal or external stakeholders. Other researchers also illustrated how

employees can enhance positively the perceptions that consumers have of the service brand (Martin et al., 2004). The said perceptions may lead to how powerful a service brand is formed not only through the support of traditional marketing activities but also by the employees' activities during service encounter (Hankinson, 2002).

1.1   Purpose of the study

The purpose of this research paper is to develop a strong understanding and foundations of employees' commitment to their company's brand by examining the factors that influence the said commitment. By further exploring these factors, studies on the relations between the brands as perceived by employees and the ability of employees to support the brand has been conducted. The employees were then become the significant brand ambassadors.

In most of the recent studies, the close consistency between a brand's identity and image is always the fundamental condition to build a powerful brand (Keller, 2003). According to Aaker (2001), the brand must be true to its identity or, in other words, the gap between brand identity and brand image should be tightened in any possible way. In order to ensure that the brand is true to the internal and external stakeholders, it is critical that employees not only understand the brand values, as expressed by top management, but also

to put into practice of these values during service encounter (Hardeker & Fill, 2005).

In the absence of employees' commitment, it is found that the brand values cannot be aligned with the customer experience to uphold their expectations towards the organisations.   It will therefore cause the lack of service delivery consistency whereby each touch point between the brand and its customers is not adopted in its best way.

1.2   Research problems

It is commonly seen that many service brands have applied a consumer-goods approach especially in branding its services, for instance services in the hospitality industry, in order to retain the larger market share in the competitive environment. The approach which has been studied by fellow researchers emphasises the role of advertising and promotions in building a strong brand, yet the role played by employees in developing the brand during their interactions with customers has always remain ignorance.

And also, the extent to which the words and actions of a firm's top management can be trusted and represent such service brand is seen as a major corporate issue in the turbulence time.   Concern over employees' commitment towards their own brands and the top-management's brand-

handling strategies has become more significant after years of being seen as the secondary elements in a firm.

1.3   Research questions

This research has been carried out to explore the employees' brand commitment in the hotel industry in a highly competitive market (the 5-star hotel category in Klang Valley). Employees' brand commitment towards the organisations is defined as the level of experience by employees through the sense of identification and involvement with the brand values of the company they work for (Kimpakorn & Tocquer, 2007). The dimensions of employer brand which involve a distinctive set of associations through the eyes of associates and potential hires (Slaughter et al., 2004) are used as independent variables in explaining the level of employee's commitment to their company's brand.

Due to the lack of studies in the said area, the research questions have been raised and listed as below:

- What are the several dimensions to be considered in building a successful employer brand?

- Do these employer brand dimensions explain the employees' brand commitment?

- Does leader's personality traits considered as one of the employer brand dimensions?

- What are the elements contribute to leader's personality traits?

- What are the most significant factors in explaining the employees' brand commitment?

1.4   Objectives of the study

Thus, the present study examines the concept of employer brand in relation to employees' brand commitment to serve as the purpose to the research questions above. The objectives of the study are:

- To examine the dimension of employer brand

- To determine the perceived factors of employer brand which influence employees' brand commitment towards their hotel brands

- To identify the elements of leader's personality traits towards employees' brand commitment

- To examine which of the perceived factor most significantly explain the employees' brand commitment

1.5   Summary

Brands are arguably the most valuable assets to one organisations and a source of differentiation that plays an integral in gaining success of service marketing strategy implementation. In an effort to share some insights of the influential factors that affect the employees' brand commitment, this study try to generalize on these potential factors and give a clear picture where it can be applicable in the service sector, specifically in hospitality industry.

In trying to identify the different factors and dimensions, the study gain a greater knowledge of the meaning on brand commitment by internal stakeholders, namely the employees. Hotel chains should be concerned with how their employees develop their likes and dislikes, so that it will save time and resources to instil strong, favourable and positive preferences towards their own hotel brands. Hence, viewing employer branding as the vital tool is used in this study to understand and manage the brand associations which has been long resided in the employees' mindset.