

Chapter 5 Conclusion and Recommendations

5.0 Introduction

The recent research was studied to test on the hypothesis which was formed regarding the several factors contributed to employees' brand commitment in the 5 luxury hotel chains in Klang Valley. The framework was firstly developed to study on the several dimensions of employer brand towards employees' brand commitment. This chapter will then conclude the result of such study after data analysis based on the response from potential samples. It presents the summary of employer brand and its influence on employees' brand commitment followed by limitations, discussion of implication of the study and lastly, recommendations suggested to conclude the report.

5.1 Summary and conclusion

This recent study examined the several dimensions involved in forming a successful employer brand, in order to create the desired employees' brand commitment towards their own hotel brands. A framework has been developed and conceptualized to indentify the relationship in between. Based on the empirical analysis earlier, the findings will be further discussed as compared to the previous results done by past researchers.

Demographics of respondents

In this study, designed questionnaires have been distributed to the employees in the 10 selected hotels. The respondents were carefully selected from the middle-level management and above. The hierarchy of position available in the hotel is varied across the hotels. However, the said hierarchy is generalised as below:

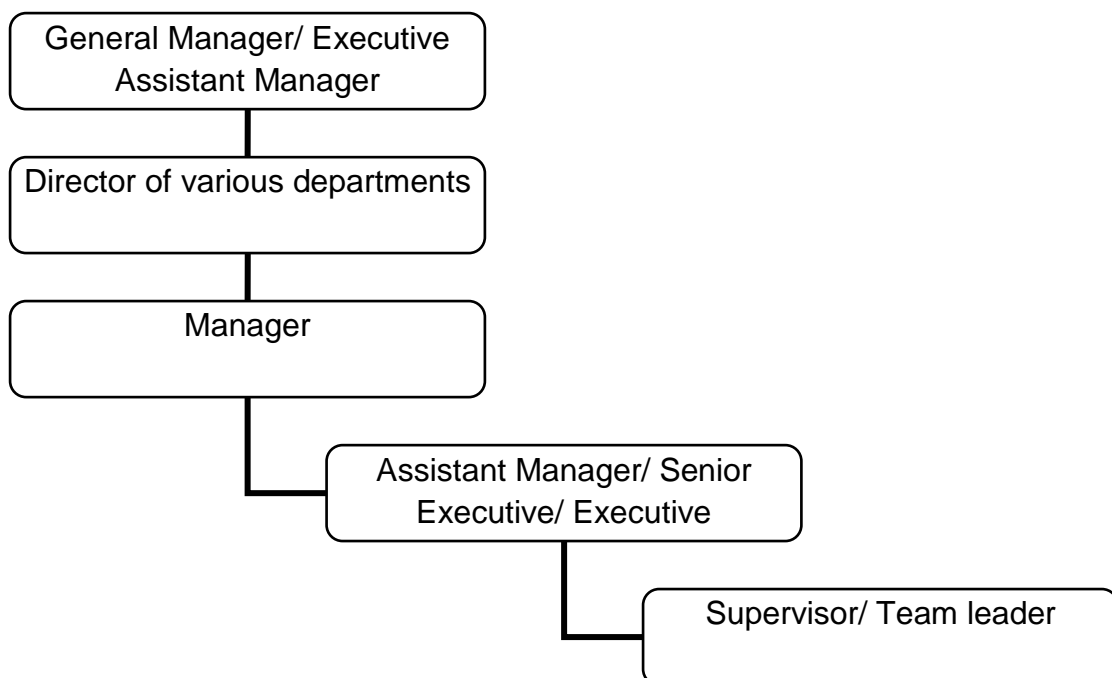


Figure 5.0 Hierarchy of top and mid-level management in hotel

In this recent study, respondents who had taken the questionnaires consisted from the team members of the above five-tier. The reason of not taking the employees as whole is due to the perceived brand knowledge against employer branding. The gap of brand knowledge and understanding had once more required the delegation of brand management authority to mid-

level managers so that the brand is well communicated with internal and external stakeholders (Herstein & Zvilling, 2011). According to King (2010), hotel managers should make an effort to develop brand-committed front-line employees, while the management employees should be encouraged to apply their brand knowledge, thereby “leading by example”.

Past research in assessing the perceptions of employees within different hierarchical positions has found that perceptions often differ between front line or lower level management and that of senior managers (Zhou et al., 2004). The findings from King (2010) revealed that front line and management employees have a different relationship with the brand based on their responsibilities within the organisation. In such a highly casualised workforce, it is no surprise to find that management reflect a stronger response to brand knowledge. Brand knowledge, which is a higher order form of knowledge when compared to basic standards and procedures, is seen to have more effect on those that expect more from the organisation, i.e. managers of mid-level and above.

Employer brand and its competitors

As previously noted by fellow researchers, the fierce competition of the labour market in hospitality industry caused the high rate of employees’ turnover. This has been discussed earlier by past researchers (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Davies, 2007). While re-visiting the main purpose of employer branding

on creating a positive perception in the mind of employees, the result in the recent study showed that it has a strong negative relationship in between.

This may also be explained that the more fierce the competition between the hotel and its competitors, the lower the employees' brand commitment towards their respective hotels. When competitors want to lure the employees from other hotels, they will tend to offer favourable benefits and perks packages in order to attract them. Hence, it is crucial for employer to establish some real differentiation from its competitors in employees' minds.

High employees' turnover rates in the hotels, for instance, have also been one of the factors contributing to the weak relationships of the above attributes. As mentioned by Zhang & Wu (2004), hotel employees' turnover rates are relatively high due to the lucrative perks and benefits offered from other hotels. Their research has shown that high calibre staff should be paid accordingly yet without financial increment in wages and benefits packages, it is almost impossible to retain good employees.

Past researchers such as Umashankar & Kulkarni (2002), disclosed that there is no secret hotel professionals, who enter the industry or exist in the industry today, did not choose to take up hotels as a first career choice. It is also not difficult therefore to see that if "Managers" cannot find meaning in what they do, and does not find any meaning or pride in what he/she does. It is thus

going to be important for not only the managers to find meaning and values in their daily tasks.

Apart from the materialized benefits, the employer brand itself stands a huge proposition in creating the positive image in the employees' mindset. It is supported by past study from Kimpakorn and Tocquer (2007) whom have always stressed that symbolic benefits of employer brand such as innovativeness and prestige are important to instill the hotels' image.

Employers' characteristics / leaders' personalities

The dimension of employers' characteristics and leaders' personalities often affiliated closely with the highest authority in the hotel, which has always been focus on CEO or Hotel General Manager. The different measurement which was studied in the recent research involved 'Achievement and Worklife Balance', 'Humanistic and Positive Thinking', 'Inclusive and Self-awareness' and 'Integrity and level of trust'.

This study underscores the importance of leader personalities in building a successful employer brand that ultimately lead to employees' brand commitment. Thus, the study implied that, when seeking to increase the employees' brand commitment, the Hotel Manager should be portraying a favourable role by spreading positive motivation or energy while carrying out the routine tasks.

Integrity and trust are words which often found in many company value statements. Through the recent study, out of the four personality traits, it is revealed that only the sense of integrity and level of trust is significantly influenced the employees' brand commitment in hotels. According to Rae and Subramaniam (2007), employees who work with a leader of high standards on integrity and ethics are more likely to adopt and enforce high performance at work. Fairness and integrity at workplace hereby, specifically in hospitality industry, often affiliate closely with the employees' retainment and commitment.

Abdullah (1992) in her book has also mentioned that in order to understand the Malaysian workforce, it is vital to look at the attributes of a manager. These attributes may consist of quality of leadership, decisiveness, creativity and a sense of reality. Another element which should not be neglected is the culture of management, which explained why this research has contributed weak relationship between employees' brand commitment and employees' brand knowledge, customers brand as perceived by employees and employer brand as experienced by employees.

The employees from the selected 10 hotels has been underlying the assumptions of holding the same values although implementation from the hotel chains from Western countries, However, the fact shown in this study disclose the contrary. In Western, a leader sets his goals and determines and through his own effort to fulfil these goals. He is motivated by competition and is able to separate ability from personality in his work.

The leader from Eastern countries, on the other hand, aimed at building interpersonal relationship. Relationships are highly hierarchical and people are treated according to their position hold in one company (Abdullah, 1992). And so, the problems rises from the lower management are often handled through intermediaries in order to avoid losing face.

Other employer brand dimensions

Surprisingly, viewing some of the employer brand's dimensions has been widely discussed by fellow researchers on their significant influence towards employees' brand commitment, the recent study, however, showed a weak relationship in between. Employer brand's dimensions such as employees' brand knowledge, customers brand as perceived by employees and employer brand as experienced by employees are seen not to be significantly affiliated with the level of employees' brand commitment in the hotel industry.

The importance of the engagement of employees with their respective hotels' values is often supported by scholars such as Zeithaml et al. (1988) and Dowling (1993). The idea for employees to become passionate brand advocates, they must firstly develop a significant level of brand knowledge by understanding the brand values and meanings. Without these particular knowledge, it is not sufficient for them to be committed and being supportive to the brand itself.

Both customer and employer brand as perceived and experienced by employees explained the importance to align the hotels' brand image from the customers' point of view with the said identity from the employees' point of view. Obviously, when employees find the customer brand to be positive, they are more likely to be identified with the hotel brand.

Same theory was applied to employer brand as experienced by employees. Thus, the employees' experiences encountered with the employer brand are largely influenced by hotel's management style, human resources management practices and cross-functional coordination, amongst others (Kimpakorn & Tocquer, 2007).

According to Kimpakorn & Tocquer (2007), the hotel industry is very specific in terms of culture and management practices. In Malaysia, particularly, employees' brand commitment is built largely through Human Resources management training and practice. Bell (2005) once stated that the employees' commitment towards their organisations does not uniquely belong to Human Resources function. Hence, such practice in Malaysia has proven to lead to a weak correlation between employer brand and employees' brand commitment.

Internal brand building, according to Mitchell (2002) has been viewed as a process to align staff's behaviour with a corporate brand's identity. Again, this practice is often fall under Human Resources management in the 5 hotel chains studied in the recent research. As known, internal branding has

recently been viewed as the main determinant for employees to deliver the brand promise. This brand building practice, hence, will need to be handled by the professionals from Marketing, whom appeared to be best spokesperson and personnels to create a successful brand, be it internally or externally.

5.2 Limitations

The main limitation of this recent study was that the data were obtained from the 5 luxury hotel chains in Klang Valley only. In general, the difficulty of accessing employees from 5 luxury hotel chains remained as a major problem. Data collection from 5 hotel chains which consists of 10 respective hotels required a significant time and resources, which is the main obstacle in the study.

As the recent study mainly focused on the relationship between employer brand and employees' brand commitment, the finding of this study, however, could not generalize the current trend in Malaysia, as a whole. This is due to its limited sample size and geographical constraints.

Lastly, the distribution of questionnaires was done with the assistance from Human Resources personnels from the respective hotels. Employees who responded to the questionnaires may find this survey as one of the Human Resources practice. Hence, the answers given were presumed to be

conservative, thinking that their responses might be marked as one of the criterias in annual Balance Scorecard (BSC).

5.3 Suggestion for future research

Since the study underestimates the role of employees' brand knowledge, customer and employer brand as perceived and experienced by employees, further research will need to be carried out on these particular dimensions as a means to understand the commitment of employees to make the brand alive.

In addition, future research that examines the relationship of employer brand and employees' brand commitment can be conducted in the context of different hotel brands. The study that will involve the differentiation among the hotel brands might possibly promote to the employer brand-building activities. The differentiation among the hotel brands can be further enhanced by engaging hotels from other states, for instance, by involving a larger geographical cover area to generalize the critical scenario in Malaysia.

5.4 Marketing Implications

In the recent research, the result found that the relationship in terms of employer branding (employees' brand knowledge, customers brand as perceived by employees and employer brand as experienced by employees)

and employees' brand commitment was lacking. And thus, the major strategic and operational emphasis of hotel management should not be placed solely on the functionality of human resources management, as discussed earlier.

In order to increase the level of employees' brand commitment, it is crucial for the internal marketing personnels, too, to work extra miles on brand enforcement of the hotel brand. Both customer brand and employer brand as perceived and experienced by employees can only be strengthened if the employees have the in-depth brand knowledge.

The most important direct recommendations that are identified from this study are the following:

- i) Keep the close distance with the employees by learning their needs, and ensure that these fundamental needs are met or are exceeded.

- ii) Taking the initiative to offer value-added features and consistently provide the high-quality services to external customers. It is proven that employees are deemed to be more committed to the brand when the brand is delivered to customers that appear beyond their expectations.

- iii) Carefully select and train potential employees in order to ensure that they are service-oriented and constantly acquire full knowledge and understanding of hotel brand values, respectively. This can be further supported by

communicating customer satisfaction data to fellow employees as a feedback system and motivational tool.

iv) Do not agree to the perception that employees' brand commitment to their hotel brand is just another internal communication exercise by human resources management. The internal marketing personnels, on the other hand, are the core professionals to deliver a better service to them. It is also essential to provide these exceptional better services to meet the rivalry from other hotel competitors.

5.5 Summary

This study firstly examines the several dimensions of employer brand and its relationship with employees' brand commitment, by focusing in the geographical area of Klang Valley. It has showed that the employer branding is still at a formative stage, whereby a weak relationship between the variables has been adequately described the current trend. However, re-visiting the literature review from past researchers in the West, these variables are well connected in forming the employees' brand commitment. It seems that these dimensions varied from country to country or even region, as well as different service sectors (Punjaisri, K. et al., 2009)

From the perspective of a hotel manager, it is vital to identify the several dimensions which are most important indicators to employees' brand

commitment. As always been emphasized, only happy employees can deliver their tasks more efficiently and eventually lead to increment of customer loyalty as it is seemingly the ultimate goal of one hotel.