

# The Effect of Human Brand Characteristics of Customer Service Employees on Brand Attitude

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## 〈요 약〉

Service industry performance and competitive advantage depend on the attitudes and behavior of customer service employees who produce and deliver services through contact with customers. Most studies on customer service employees so far have concentrated on kindness, attitudes, or benefits. This study focuses on the increasing importance of customer service employees and intends to study them from the viewpoint of human brands that recognize customer service employees as a brand. In addition to the role of the employee at the service contact point, the customer participation behavior affects the interaction process with the customer service employee. Ultimately, customers could no longer be excluded from control to improve service quality. This study based on theory that the human brand characteristics of the customer service employees lead the customer's participation, which has a positive effect on the relationship with the service brand and the service brand attitude surveyed and analyzed customers who use service brand. This study is summarized as follows. First, the relationship between the service brand and the customer is examined. Second, this study also expands prior studies by examining the human brand characteristics of customer service employees and customers' willingness to participate in providing information on the impact of the consumer-brand relationship.

The results of the study indicate that among the customer service employees' human brand characteristics reliability, familiarity, and empathy were found to affect the relationship between customers, the service brand, and the attitude toward the service brand the most. This study provides important implications for theoretical and practical strategies by examining the qualities and characteristics of customer service employees, which are the most important agents of marketing.

Key Words: Human Brands, Costumer Participation, Consumer-Brand Relationship, Brand Attitude

## I. Introduction

Service industry performance and competitive advantage depend on the attitudes and behavior of customer service employees who produce and deliver services through contact with customers(Yoon, 2014). Customer service employees are becoming increasingly important as a subject that influences the public, the subject of consumption, and leads their thoughts and actions. Attitudes and service behaviors of customer service employees are a key part of the service revenue chain, which leads to employee satisfaction, service quality, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and service organization profit(Heskett, Sasser & Schlesinger, 1997). In this regard, various studies on customer service employees have been conducted until recently and this study focuses on the increasing importance of customer service employees and intends to study them from the viewpoint of human brands that recognize customer service employees as a brand. We define celebrities as human brands that differentiate themselves from others based on their names, reputation, image, credibility, professionalism, reputation, and popularity(Thomson, 2006). The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of the characteristics of human brands on service brand attitudes.

In addition to the role of the employee at the service contact point, the customer participation behavior affects the interaction process with the customer service employee (Sierra and Mczuitty, 2005; Suh and Ahn,

2009). Ultimately, customers could no longer be excluded from control to improve service quality(Han, You and Gong, 2004; Suh and Ahn, 2009). Customer participation behaviors are also found to have a positive impact not only on customers themselves, but also on customer service employees(Ahn and Kim, 2016). Also Ahn and Chun(2016) suggested that friendship, which implies intimacy with customers, has a significant effect on customer behavior as well as customer citizen behavior.

Fournier(1998) emphasized efforts to strengthen the relationship between brand and customer in marketing. In relationship marketing, relationships are based on the assumption that a company is oriented toward customer retention, develops unique relationships with individual customers, and engages customers in their company's design, product development, and marketing processes (Sheth and Parvatiyar, 1995). This proposition is based on the philosophy of relationship marketing(Zeithami, Bitner, Gremler, 2006), which assumes that customers prefer to continue to engage with one organization rather than to continually seek value or benefit from the products and services it provides, suggesting a viewpoint of problem solving in customer purchase decision making.

Sheth and Parvatiyar(1995) describe the motivation for customers to engage with a company and the will and ability of the customer and the company to engage in the marketing relationship lead to higher marketing productivity.

As a result, this study could further expand

prior studies by examining the human brands characteristics of customer service employees and customers willingness to participate in providing information on the impact of the consumer-brand relationship.

The purpose of this study is to examine how the human brand characteristics of the customer service employees affect customers willingness to participate in providing information and the relationship with the service brand in the process of forming their attitudes toward the service brand. In this study, the customer service employees who have the most important influence on customer relationship formation and service brand attitude formation are regarded as having a human brand, and by examining what kind of human brand characteristics affect them. This examination will provide important implications.

## II. Literature review

### 1. Human Brand

Brand is becoming more important as a strategy to achieve management efficiency and a competitive advantage for companies in the face of acceleration in the growth of industry and facing intense competition. If the existing brand research had been confined to companies, products, or services, it has recently been expanded to various areas such as countries, cities, tourist attractions, universities, communities, and religions. The concept of

expanding brand space to human being is the human brand(Close, Moulard, and Monroe, 2011; Thomson,2006).

Thomson(2006) defines a human brand as a celebrity that distinguishes and influences others based on name, reputation, image, credibility, expertise, reputation, or popularity. He emphasized that the characteristics of celebrities can be managed professionally and systematically as intangible assets. Human brands show their influence by leading the public based on intangible assets differentiated from those of other people. In addition, it is said that human brands are valued as a corporate value and they generate tremendous profits through their relationship with the public. Recently, the importance of human brands is emphasized because the influence of human brands directly affects the attitudes and behavior of the public(Rindova et a., 2006).

Most of these studies are related to the relationship between the characteristics of a star and corporate image or product image(Kim, Seong Seop, Seo, Jung Mo and Kim, Mi Ju, 2009; Cho, Kyung Sub and Park, Chan Ho, 2006; Dean and Biswas, 2001). In addition, there is a study on behavioral guidelines for the establishment of personal brand by the public in view of practical aspects of human brand. In this study, it is suggested that the general public develops itself to become a differentiated brand in its field, assuming that the public can become a human brand(Rein, Kotler, Hamlin, and Stoller, 2005).

This study focuses on the importance of the customer service employee who plays a role to

represent the company, and has the viewpoint of the human brand that recognizes the customer service employees as one brand.

### 1.1 Human Brand Characteristics

The reason that celebrities can be named as human brands is that their characteristics have asset value, and celebrities can enhance their value through professional and systematic management of these characteristics and gain additional relevance (brand name, reputation, image) due to their brand characteristics (Thomson, 2006). To improve the value of their human brand, celebrities must manage their characteristics professionally and systematically. In order to explore various dimensions of the characteristics of human brands, human characteristics of human brands and human characteristics of other brands should be considered together. An, Eun Jung and Lee, Hyoung Tark(2014) newly define the characteristics of human brands as “a set of relatively stable and persistent human brand attributes associated with specific human brands”, and the results of this study were as follows: The brand personality traits were developed from six factors : reliability, professionalism, leadership, attractiveness, uniqueness, and intimacy.

In this study, the measurement items of the human brand characteristics scale suggested by An, Eun Jung and Lee, Hyoung Tark(2014) were modified to meet the characteristics of the human brand of customer service employees based on Aaker(1997), Magnini(2008) (reliability,

professionalism, attractiveness, intimacy, responsiveness, and empathy), and investigated what factors affect the relationship between the customer and the service brand.

## 2. Customer Participation

Lovelock and Young(1979) argued that customer participation contributes to the improvement of production from the perspective of the company and customer participation has expanded to include customers as co-producers or co-workers in the creation of products and services(Bendapudi and Leone, 2003 ; Chan, Yim and Lam, 2010 ; Miller and Monge, 1986 ; Prahalad and Ramasway, 2004). In addition, customers are encouraged to create meaning in their consumption experience and the consumption process(Cova, 1996 ; Firat and Venkatesch, 1995).

In the service sector, there are studies by Solomon, Surprenant, Czepiel and Gutman (1985) on the conceptualization of customer participation in the production and delivery of services. Since then, research has been conducted on customer participation(Bitner, Faranda, Hubbert and Zeithaml, 1997; Cermak, File and Prince, 1994) with the view of the customers as partial employees or employed customers of a service organization. There is research on service production, service contact, service quality, customer contribution and role in service delivery(Bitner, Booms and Mohr, 1994), customer interaction and consumer interdependence(Larsson and Bowen, 1989 ;

Lovelock and Young, 1979), and service encounter characteristics (Yoon, Mahn Hee, Kim, Jeong Seob and Kim, Jee Han, 2005 ; Choi, Woo Lee and Park, Jong Hee , 2009).

Yoon(2010) suggests that customers have the option to maintain or change their relationship with the company (Gwinner, Gremler and Bitner, 1998 ; Lengnick, Claycomb and Inks, 2000 ; Payne, Storbacka and Frow, 2008) by voluntarily providing their information to a loyalty program implemented as an enterprise customer relationship management activity (Cermak, File and Prince, 1994 ; Silpakit and Fisk, 1985).

In the marketing field, Bettencourt(1997) 's empirical study, which suggested the concept of customer voluntary performance, was based on the theoretical grounds that customer participation behavior and customer citizenship behavior are word of mouth, recommendations, feedback and helping behavior, and they commonly promote interaction at service contact points (Bitner, Boom and Mohr, 1994 ; Lovelock, 1983). In recent studies, there have been reports on the causal relationship between the degree of interaction with the customer, perceived benefit of the relationship, and the quality of the relationship (trust, satisfaction, commitment) (Park, Mi Young, Park, Jeong Eun and Lee, Sung Ho, 2010 ; Suh, Mun Shik and Ahn, Jin Woo , 2009).

Bendapudi and Leone(2003) emphasize the active role and involvement of customers as co-producers or co-workers in production of services, and that customer's right of choice makes the results more credible. Larsson and

Bowen(1989) suggested that services typically involve participation that reflects organizational - customer contact.

Miller and Monge(1986) reported that as customers participate in corporate marketing decisions, mutual understanding grows, resulting in better engagement with customers and hence better corporate performance. Yi, You Jae and Lee, Soo Jin(2006) suggested that customers' positive information-providing behavior can be promoted through rewards or incentives for participating in customer involvement.

Ahn, Jin Woo, Chun, Myung Hwan and Kim, Han Ju(2013) suggested that customer involvement positively influences normative commitment, persistent commitment, and emotional commitment, which are various dimensions of relationship commitment.

This theoretical review shows that interaction through customer participation in service contact forms positive emotions of customers.

### 3. Customer-Brand Relationships

Research on customer and brand relationship is rooted in research on relationship marketing between company and company, or between company and customer (Berry and Parasuraman, 1997 ; Crosby, Evans and Cowles, 1990 ; Dwyer, Schurr and Oh, 1987 ; Ganesan, 1994). Fournier(1994, 1998) argued that there can be different types and forms of consumer perception of brands, and her research fostered studies that focused on the intrinsic structure of relationships that capture the process and content of ongoing relationships between firms

or service providers and customers.

She argued that a customer's relationship with a brand means a solidarity that is created as a result of the interaction between the customer and the brand as equal partners, acting as partners to each other, and she observed that the relationship between the customer and the brand evolved through four stages of growth, maintenance, deterioration, and demolition as a series of repetitive exchanges. Her study made a theoretical contribution to the understanding of the process and context of the ongoing relationship between a company or service provider and its customer and the essential structure of the relationship.

Bendapudi and Berry(1997) proposed a relationship maintenance model for customer perspective, and Bettencourt(1997) argued that true customer orientation in relationship marketing results in voluntary performance.

Palmatier, Dant, and Grewal and Evans (2006) argued that the various dimensions of the relationship are synergistic, and that superior performance is only possible when the relationship is strong enough in many ways.

Kim, Byoung Jai , Kang, Myung Soo and Shin, Jong Chil(2005) suggested that consumers' involvement and attitudes toward relationship marketing positively influence brand and customer relationship formation, consumers' intentions to repurchase, and an increase in word of mouth. Yang, Suk Joon and Kim, Young Kyung(2008) suggested that consumers interact with service providers to form a relationship, which determines customer satisfaction and behavior after the transaction.

Kim, Youn Hwan(2013) suggested that the quality of the consumer-brand relationship, which is an attitude variable, may be a predictor of the customer-brand relationship strength, since the intensity of the relationship between the customer and the brand is a performance variable of the relationship including repurchase intention, word of mouth intention.

#### 4. Brand Attitude

Grace and O'Casss(2005) suggested that brand attitudes are the sum of positive or negative tendencies that result from the level of customer satisfaction and the perception of past service brand factors and in the case of dissatisfaction, customers show brand attitudes by reassessing all brands rather than showing immediate behavior. Yoon, Hoon Hyun(2005) suggested that brand attitude is a learned trend of consumers who consistently evaluate the brand, and that it can be viewed as a consumer's evaluation.

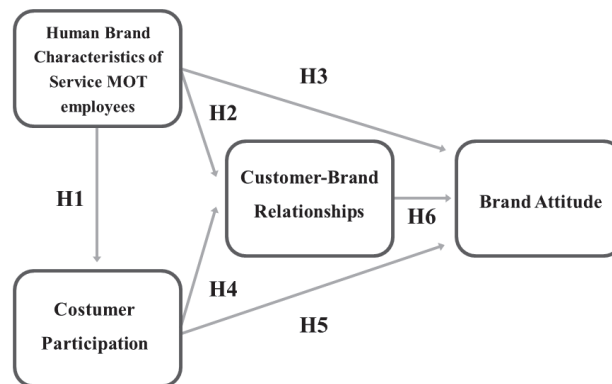
Finally, the brand attitude is an overall evaluation of the brand. The reason for measuring these brand attitudes is because of the assumption that attitudes are related to behavior; in general, the more favorable the consumer is to a particular brand, the more likely the consumer is to purchase the brand(Byoung Jai Kim, Myung Soo Kang and Jong Chil Shin , 2005). The likelihood of purchasing, that is, the purchase intent, is the customer's desire to buy (select) the brand to achieve the highest level of satisfaction after the customer evaluates the brand(Assael,

2007). In other words, a favorable brand attitude positively affects the quality and value of the product and positively affects the willingness to continue to select the brand (Dodds, Monroe and Grewal, 1991). Based on previous research showing that the consumers' attitude toward the brand has a direct effect on their choice, this study examines how the human brand characteristics of the customer service employees affect customers willingness to participate in providing information and the relationship with the service brand in the process of forming their attitudes toward the service brand.

### III. Method

#### 1. Research Model

This study examines how the human brand characteristics of the customer service employees (reliability, professionalism, attractiveness, intimacy, responsiveness, and empathy) affect customers willingness to participate in providing information and the relationship with the service brand in the process of forming their attitudes toward the service brand. The model of this study is presented as <Figure 1>.



<Figure 1> Research Model

## 2. Definition and Measurement of Major Variables & Hypothesis

### 2.1 Human brand characteristics of customer service employees

Thomson(2006) defines a human brand as a celebrity that distinguishes and influences others based on name, reputation, image,

credibility, expertise, reputation, or popularity. In the enterprise, the customer's attachment to the corporate brand was formed according to the competence of the employee working at the service contact point, and the customer repeatedly purchased the product and eventually became a loyal customer. From this point of view, this study defines employees who are in contact with customers

can be considered as one human brand.

In addition, since the service contact point is the process of delivering the value of the service(Choi and Kwon, 2002), the service contact point can not help but consider the factor of the service quality.

In this study, four factors(reliability, professionalism, attractiveness, intimacy) that fit the characteristics of the human brand of customer service employee among the six measurement items of the human brand characteristics scale presented by Ahn, Eun Jung and Lee, Hyung Tark(2014) and 6 factors(reliability, professionalism, attractiveness, intimacy, responsiveness, empathy) were reconstructed using two of PZB (1988) service quality factors that can measure service quality of service contact points.

In addition to the role of the employee at the service contact point, the customer participation behavior affects the interaction process with the customer service employee (Sierra and Mczuitty, 2005; Suh and Ahn, 2009). Ultimately, customers could no longer be excluded from control to improve service quality(Han, You and Gong, 2004; Suh and Ahn, 2009).

So, the following hypothesis can be drawn.

H1: The human brand characteristics of customer service employees will have a positive effect on customer participation.

Also, attitudes and service behaviors of customer service employees are a key part of the service revenue chain, which leads to

employee satisfaction, service quality, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and service organization profit(Heskett, Sasser & Schlesinger, 1997).

Fournier(1994, 1998) argued that there can be different types and forms of consumer perception of brands, and her research fostered studies that focused on the intrinsic structure of relationships that capture the process and content of ongoing relationships between firms or service providers and customers.

So the more favorable the consumer is to a particular brand, the more likely the consumer is to purchase the brand(Byoung Jai Kim, Myung Soo Kang and Jong Chil Shin , 2005). The likelihood of purchasing, that is, the purchase intent, is the customer's desire to buy (select) the brand to achieve the highest level of satisfaction after the customer evaluates the brand(Assael, 2007). In other words, a favorable brand attitude positively affects the quality and value of the product and positively affects the willingness to continue to select the brand(Dodds, Monroe and Grewal, 1991).

So, the following hypothesis can be drawn.

H2: The human brand characteristics of customer service employees will have a positive effect on customer and brand relationship.

H3: The human brand characteristics of customer service employees will have a positive effect on brand attitude.



## 2.2 Customer Participation

Yoon(2010) suggests that customers have the option to maintain or change their relationship with the company(Gwinner, Gremler and Bitner, 1998 ; Lengnick, Claycomb and Inks, 2000 ; Payne, Storbacka and Frow, 2008) by voluntarily providing their information to a loyalty program implemented as an enterprise customer relationship management activity (Cermak, File and Prince, 1994 ; Silpakit and Fisk, 1985).

Customer participation behaviors are also found to have a positive impact not only on customers themselves, but also on customer service employees(Ahn and Kim, 2016). Also Ahn and Chun(2016) suggested that friendship, which implies intimacy with customers, has a significant effect on customer behavior as well as customer citizen behavior.

Sheth and Parvatiyar(1995) describe the motivation for customers to engage with a company and the will and ability of the customer and the company to engage in the marketing relationship lead to higher marketing productivity.

In this study, the degree of agreement on four items was measured on a 7 - point scale as the constituent factors that determine the quality of customer information used by Song, 2001; Yoon, 2011), but as the study of Kang, Myeong-jae, Kim, Jae-chil(2007), which examined empirically whether six components constituting the existing consumer-brand relationship can be regarded as a single dimension construct, the consumer-brand

relationship is single.

So, the following hypothesis can be drawn.

H4: Customer participation will have a positive effect on customer and brandrelationship.

Also, as customers participate in corporate marketing decisions, mutual understanding grows, resulting in better engagement with customers and hence better corporate performance(Miller and Monge, 1986). Yi, You Jae and Lee, Soo Jin(2006) suggested that customers' positive information-providing behavior can be promoted through rewards or incentives for participating in customer involvement. This theoretical review shows that interaction through customer participation in service contact forms positive emotions of customers.

So, the following hypothesis can be drawn.

H5: Customer participation will have a positive effect on brand attitude.

## 2.3 Customer-Brand Relationships

As seen in the theoretical review above, a customer's relationship with a brand means a solidarity that is created as a result of the interaction between the customer and the brand as equal partners, acting as partners to each other(Fourier(1994, 1998).

Kim, Youn Hwan(2013) suggested that the quality of the consumer-brand relationship, which is an attitude variable, may be a

predictor of the customer-brand relationship strength, since the intensity of the relationship between the customer and the brand is a performance variable of the relationship including repurchase intention, word of mouth intention.

In this study, the degree of agreement on a total of 14 items used to study the quality dimension of consumers and brand relationships by Yoon(2010) was measured.

So, the following hypothesis can be drawn.

H6: Customer and brand relationship will have a positive effect on brand attitude.

### 2.4 Brand Attitude

Brand attitudes are the sum of positive or negative tendencies that result from the level of customer satisfaction and the perception of past service brand factors(Grace and O'Casss, 2005). In this study, Based on the research of Low and Lamb Jr(2000), Kim(2016), it is found that the emotional appeals were measured on a 7-point scale.

<Table1> Measurement Items

Variable		Measurement Items
Humanbrand Characteristics	Reliability	Honest
		Credible
		Responsible
		Trustworthy
		Reliable
	Professionalism	Competence
		Intelligence
		Skill
		Knowledge
		Experience
	Attractiveness	Attractive
		Cool
		Elegant
		Sophisticated
Favorable		
Intimacy	Friendly	
	Comfortable	
	Familiar	
	Intimate	
Responsiveness	Prompt	
	Active	
	Voluntary	

		Explicit
	Empathy	Considerate
		Warm-hearted
		Kind
		Sociable
		Gentle
Source	Aaker(1997), An & Lee(2014), PZB(1988)	
Participation		Provide appropriate information
		Provide enough information
		Provide reliable information
		Provide one's information change
Source	Berry & Parasuraman(1997), Song(2001), Yoon(2011)	
Customer-Brand Relationship		Heartbroken
		Empty
		Understanding
		Familiar
		Common
		Identity
		Personality
		Feeling
		Retrospection (Place)
		Retrospection (Time)
		Cathect
		Favorite
		Loved
		always Nice
Source	Fournier(1998), Kim, Kang & Shin(2005), Yoon(2011)	
Brand Attitude		Nice
		Valuable
		Favored
		Good
Source	Low and Lamb Jr(2000), Jun & Hyun(1997), Kim(2016)	

### 3. Sample Selection and Method

This study is based on the basic theory that the human brand characteristics of the customer service employees(reliability,

professionalism, attractiveness, intimacy, responsiveness, and empathy) affect customers' willingness to participate in providing information and their relationship with the service brand-Questionnaires were administered

to customers in their 20s, 30s, 40s, and 50s using a service for about 3 weeks from March, 2017. A total of 430 questionnaires were collected, of which 414 were used for the analysis, excluding questionnaires with unresponsive or untruthful replies.

#### 4. Reliability and validity of measurement items

This study used SmartPLS 2.0.3M and SPSS Statistics 20 to test the reliability and validity of our model. The reliability is judged to be reliable if the Cronbach's coefficient is 0.7 or more. There is convergent validity if the standard factor load is 0.7 or more, the composite reliability(CR) is 0.7 or more, and the average variance extraction value(AVE) (Hair et al., 1998), and the discriminant validity are evaluated by comparing the correlation between the constituent variables

and the AVE square root value. If the square root of the AVE is larger than the correlation coefficient between the

other components and 0.7 or more, it is judged to be valid (Barclay et al., 1995).

As a result of testing the measurement model based on the square root of the AVE, Cronbach's coefficient is more than 0.943, which is much higher than the reference value of 0.7, suggesting that the internal consistency is high. The standard factor loadings of all measured items were 0.703 or more, the CR value was more than 0.956, and the AVE value was more than 0.623, which exceeded the respective reference values, suggesting convergence validity <Table 2>.

In addition, the square root of AVE is 0.789 or more, which is larger than the correlation coefficient between the constituent variables, so it is judged that the discrimination is valid. <Table 3>

<Table 2> Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis<sup>1)</sup>

Variable	Measurement Items	Standardized Factor Loading	Cronbach's $\alpha$	Construct Reliability	Average Variance Extracted
Reliability	Rel1	.863	.943	.956	.814
	Rel2	.917			
	Rel3	.931			
	Rel4	.912			
	Rel5	.887			
Professionalism	Pro1	.926	.944	.957	.818
	Pro2	.881			
	Pro3	.944			

1) Diagonal elements are the square root of the average variance extracted(AVE).

Off-diagonal elements are the correlation among constructs.

All of the squared correlations are substantially less than the corresponding AVEs providing the evidence of discriminant validity. This approach demonstrates adequate discriminant validity of the constructs in the model.

	Pro4	.919			
	Pro5	.850			
Attractiveness	Attr1	.934	.957	.967	.853
	Attr2	.940			
	Attr3	.921			
	Attr4	.930			
	Attr5	.890			
Intimacy	Int1	.958	.970	.978	.919
	Int2	.965			
	Int3	.949			
	Int4	.963			
Responsiveness	Res1	.917	.955	.967	.880
	Res2	.955			
	Res3	.942			
	Res4	.938			
Empathy	Emp1	.924	.958	.968	.856
	Emp2	.921			
	Emp3	.928			
	Emp4	.918			
	Emp5	.936			
Participation	Par1	.952	.969	.977	.915
	Par2	.975			
	Par3	.968			
	Par4	.930			
Customer- Brand Relationships	Rel1	.752	.953	.958	.623
	Rel2	.736			
	Rel3	.819			
	Rel4	.841			
	Rel5	.860			
	Rel6	.741			
	Rel7	.714			
	Rel8	.829			
	Rel9	.703			
	Rel10	.851			
	Rel11	.769			
	Rel12	.837			
	Rel13	.830			
	Rel14	.737			
Brand Attitude	Atti1	.960	.972	.980	.923
	Atti2	.952			
	Atti3	.967			
	Atti4	.965			

&lt;Table 3&gt; Results of Discriminant Validity Analysis

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Reliability	.902								
2. Professionalism	.520	.905							
3. Attractiveness	.411	.388	.923						
4. Intimacy	.567	.592	.466	.958					
5. Responsiveness	.504	.482	.330	.464	.938				
6. Empathy	.613	.549	.506	.696	.579	.925			
7. Participation	.570	.472	.421	.575	.426	.593	.956		
8. Relationships	.427	.373	.303	.436	.319	.459	.424	.789	
9. Attitude	.606	.549	.454	.669	.481	.674	.605	.601	.961

#### IV. Discussion

The results of the research hypothesis are as shown in <Table 4>.

##### (1) The effect of human brand characteristics of customer service employees and customers willingness to participate in providing information

As a result of hypothesis 1, the path coefficients between reliability, intimacy, empathy and voluntary information provision were .244( $t=4.155$ ), .199( $t=2.994$ ), and .207( $t=1.183$ ), respectively, so they were statistically significance and the path coefficients between professionalism, attractiveness, responsiveness and voluntary information provision were .065( $t=1.183$ ), .088( $t=1.729$ ), and .030( $t=578$ ) respectively, so they were not.

In other words, the reliability, intimacy, and empathy of customer service employees have a significant effect on the voluntary information provision of customers.

As a result of analyzing intimacy, the

importance of relationship, and the influence of reliability as determinants of information provision of customers by Song, Mi Sun (2001), the higher the intimacy that the customer perceives of the company, the more trust the customer has, so the results of this study are supported. PZB(1988) also argued that a characteristic of empathy is a readiness to show considerable individual attention, so when customer service employees show that they are interested in a customer, the customer is more likely to voluntarily provide his/her information.

##### (2) The effect of the human brand characteristics of the customer service employees and the relationship between the customer and the service brand

As a result of hypothesis 2 the path coefficients between reliability, intimacy, and empathy and the relationship between the customer and the service brand were .137 ( $t=2.500$ ), .110( $t=2.320$ ), .162( $t=2.715$ ) respectively, so they were statistically significant and the

path coefficients between professionalism, attractiveness, and responsiveness and the relationship between the customer and the service brand were .065( $t=1.183$ ), .088( $t=1.729$ ), .030( $t=.578$ ) respectively, so they were not. In other words, the reliability, intimacy, and empathy of customer service employees have a significant effect on the relationship between the customer and the service brand.

Fletcher, Simpson and Thomas(2000) partly supported the hypothesis of this study by

suggesting reliability and intimacy were among the components of the quality dimension of the brand relationship with the customer, and Fournier (1998) also suggested intimacy was a component in the quality of the consumer-brand relationship. Like hypothesis 1 when customer service employees show that they are interested in a customer, the relationship between the customer and the brand is strengthened.

<Table 4> The Results of Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses	Paths	Estimate	t-value	Result
1-1	Reliability → Participation	.244	4.155***	Accepted
1-2	Professionalism → Participation	.065	1.183	Not Accepted
1-3	Attractiveness → Participation	.088	1.729	Not Accepted
1-4	Intimacy → Participation	.199	2.994**	Accepted
1-5	Responsiveness → Participation	.030	.578	Not Accepted
1-6	Empathy → Participation	.207	3.432***	Accepted
2-1	Reliability → Relationships	.137	2.500*	Accepted
2-2	Professionalism → Relationships	.070	1.278	Not Accepted
2-3	Attractiveness → Relationships	.026	.751	Not Accepted
2-4	Intimacy → Relationships	.110	2.320*	Accepted
2-5	Responsiveness → Relationships	.003	.118	Not Accepted
2-6	Empathy → Relationships	.162	2.715**	Accepted
3-1	Reliability → Attitude	.117	3.160**	Accepted
3-2	Professionalism → Attitude	.073	1.807	Not Accepted
3-3	Attractiveness → Attitude	.044	1.447	Not Accepted
3-4	Intimacy → Attitude	.207	4.807***	Accepted
3-5	Responsiveness → Attitude	.031	.738	Not Accepted
3-6	Empathy → Attitude	.172	3.548***	Accepted
4	Participation → Relationships	.142	2.391*	Accepted
5	Participation → Attitude	.135	3.685***	Accepted
6	Relationships → Attitude	.273	7.754***	Accepted

\*\*\*:  $p < .001$ , \*\*:  $p < .01$ , \*:  $p < .05$

### **(3) The effect of the human brand characteristics of the customer service employees on service brand attitude**

As a result of hypothesis 3, the path coefficients between reliability, intimacy, and empathy and service brand attitude were .117 ( $t=3.160$ ), .207( $t=4.807$ ), .172( $t=3.548$ ) respectively, so they were statistically significant and the path coefficients between professionalism, attractiveness, and responsiveness and service brand attitude were .073( $t=1.807$ ), .044( $t=1.447$ ), .031( $t=.738$ ) respectively, so they were not. In other words, the reliability, intimacy, and empathy of customer service employees have a significant effect on service brand attitude.

The hypothesis of this study is partly supported by copious research in the field of sports marketing claiming that professionalism, attractiveness and reliability as model attributes are important factors explaining product and brand attitudes. The majority of studies of human brands have shown that attractiveness and professionalism also have a significant impact on celebrities and CEOs, but when this study looked at customer service employees as human brands, not only reliability, but also intimacy and empathy influenced brand attitude formation.

### **(4) The relationship between customer participation, brand relationship, and brand attitude**

As a result of hypothesis 4, the path coefficient between customer participation and brand relationship was .142( $t=2.391$ ), so it was statistically significant, the path coefficient

between customer participation and brand attitude was .135( $t=3.685$ ), so hypothesis 5 was adopted. and the path coefficient between brand relationship and brand attitude was .273( $t=7.754$ ), so hypothesis 6 was adopted.

Fournier(1994) emphasized that interdependence between consumers and brands is a key factor in establishing a consumer-brand relationship. Interdependence among people is important in the formation of relationships, and consumers who have a strong relationship with a particular brand are expected to react more quickly to a particular branded product or service than those who do not.

Payne, Storbacka and Frow (2008) emphasized that service dominant logic highlights the development of customer-service provider relationships through interaction and dialogue, underscoring the benefits of customer involvement at all stages of product and service development. Peterson(1995) argued that consumers participate in exchange relationships based on the desire to increase the predictability of expected assets and exchange results.

Miller and Monge(1986) suggested that when customers participate in a company's marketing decision-making process, mutual understanding increases, so customers become more engaged, thereby improving corporate performance and customer relationships. The study of Vargo and Lusch (2004) explained service dominant logic as eight basic propositions by comparing products and services, and supports this study by suggesting that customers actively participate



in relational exchange and cooperation through interaction between company and customer.

Eun A Park, et al. (2004) supported the results of this study by claiming that consumers who feel high Brand Relationship Quality have a favorable brand attitude toward extended brands within the same product category.

## V. Conclusion

Based on the above research objectives, the conclusions drawn from this study are as follows.

First, reliability, intimacy, and empathy among the human brand characteristics (reliability, professionalism, attractiveness, intimacy, responsiveness, and empathy) of customer service employees had a significant effect on the voluntary information provision of customers.

Second, reliability, intimacy, and empathy influenced the strengthening of the relationship between customer and service brand. When customer service employees show that they are interested in a customer, the relationship between the customer and the brand is strengthened.

Third, the reliability, intimacy, and empathy of customer service employees had a significant effect on service brand attitude.

Fourth, customers' voluntary participation had a significant effect on customer and service brand relationship.

Fifth, customers' voluntary participation had

significant influence on service brand attitude.

Sixth, the degree of relationship between customer and service brand had a significant effect on service brand attitude.

As a result of analyzing intimacy, the importance of relationship, and the influence of reliability as determinants of information provision of customers, the higher the intimacy that the customer perceives of the company, the more trust the customer has, so when customer service employees show that they are interested in a customer, the customer is more likely to voluntarily provide his / her information. In the field of sports marketing claiming that professionalism, attractiveness and reliability as model attributes are important factors explaining product and brand attitudes. The majority of studies of human brands have shown that attractiveness and professionalism also have a significant impact on celebrities and CEOs, but when this study looked at customer service employees as human brands, not only reliability, but also intimacy and empathy influenced brand attitude formation.

This study is meaningful in that it has studied the general person, especially the employee at the point of service contact as a human brand rather than examining more common human brands such as sports stars or entertainers as in previous research. The customer service employees communicate reliability and intimacy to the customer which should make each customer feel that the customer service employees are interested in each of them. When the customer feels these

qualities, the customer participates in the marketing process him/herself and has a positive attitude to the service brand. This study provides important implications for theoretical and practical strategies by examining the qualities and characteristics of customer service employees, which are the most important agents of marketing and being aware of changes in the marketing environment that customers have the option to lead or switch to a particular corporate organization or service provider. In addition, corporate organizations and service providers need to find ways to utilize customer information acquisition systems to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of marketing activities and the degree of customer participation may depend on the reliability, intimacy and empathy of the service provider, so marketing efforts should be made to strengthen the consumer-brand relationship while seeking ways to increase voluntary customer participation.

The limitations of this study and future research directions are as follows.

First, the variables used in this study were selected based on previous studies, but since the study was conducted by selecting limited variables, the model of this study may not be an optimal research model. Therefore, in follow - up studies, researchers may expect more meaningful results if they study a greater diversity of variables that can be considered as human brand characteristics of customer service employees.

Second, this study did not reflect the

differences in individual characteristics or situational characteristics of the customers surveyed.

Third, if follow-up research is divided into individual service industries, it can expect more detailed case study results.

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## 국문 초록

### 서비스 접점직원의 휴먼브랜드적 특성이 브랜드 태도에 미치는 영향

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서비스 산업의 성과와 경쟁우위 확보는 서비스를 생산하고 고객과의 접촉을 통해 서비스를 전달하는 서비스 접점 종업원 태도와 행동에 달려 있다고 해도 과언이 아니며 지금까지의 서비스 접점직원에 대한 대부분의 연구는 친절함이나 태도 혹은 유익함과 같은 고객들과의 접촉에 관계된 것들이다. 본 연구는 증가되는 접점 직원의 중요성에 중점을 두어 접점 직원을 하나의 브랜드로 인식하는 휴먼브랜드의 관점에서 연구를 하고자 한다. 또한 서비스 접점에서 직원의 역할 뿐만 아니라 고객참여 행동이 접점직원과의 상호작용과정에 영향을 미치고, 궁극적으로 서비스품질을 향상시킬 수 있다는 결과는 더 이상 고객을 통제대상에서 제외시킬 수 없다는 결론에 이르게 되었다. 고객참여행동은 고객 스스로에게 뿐 아니라 접점직원에게도 긍정적인 영향을 미치는 것으로도 밝혀지고 있다. 따라서 서비스 접점 직원의 휴먼브랜드적 특성이 고객의 참여도를 이끌며, 이는 서비스 브랜드와의 관계와 서비스 브랜드 태도에 긍정적인 영향을 미친다는 것을 기본 이론으로 하고, 서비스 브랜드를 이용하는 고객을 대상으로 설문 조사를 진행하고 분석하였다. 서비스브랜드와 고객과의 관계 강화 형성에 미치는 영향에 있어 서비스 접점직원의 휴먼 브랜드적 특성과 고객의 자발적인 정보제공 참여도를 함께 살펴봄으로써 선행 연구들을 더 확장시킬 수 있을 것으로 판단하여 진행하였다. 연구 결과 접점직원의 휴먼 브랜드적 특성 중 신뢰성, 친숙성, 공감성이 고객과 서비스 브랜드와의 관계 강화와, 서비스 브랜드에 대한 태도에 영향을 미치는 것으로 나타났다. 본 연구의 검증으로 기업이 마케팅에 있어 가장 중요한 부분을 차지하는 접점직원의 자질 및 특성을 검토할 수 있게 함으로써 이론적 실무적인 전략에 중요한 시사점을 제공하리라 본다.

핵심주제어: 휴먼브랜드, 고객참여, 고객과 브랜드와의 관계, 서비스 브랜드 태도

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