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Influence of Brand Extension on the Updated Hotel Brand Personality Congruence and Attitude toward the Extended Brand

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KEYWORDS

Brand personality,
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ABSTRACT

This research focused on recognizing and empirically testing a relationship between brand personality congruence and brand extension, which can lead to effective marketing strategies for the hotel industry. The objective of this research was to identify how customer's brand personality congruence affect brand extension and to then address what the most appropriate brand extension types for hotel brands are. This study offered a better approach to assess the broader impact of extension strategy for the marketer managers. The methodology for achieving these objectives were described in the following sections: developing measurements based on extensive reviews of literature and analyzing data utilized a exploratory factor analysis and a series of simple linear regression analyses. The result of this study showed customer's brand personality congruence had a great impact on the customer's positive attitude toward core brand. However, customer's attitude toward core brand had no impact on the updated attitude. The findings provided some theoretical and managerial implications for hotel operators.

1. INTRODUCTION

Today the hotel industry is one of the largest service industries and one that continues to expand (Gabor, 2003). Since the hotel industry has reached the maturity stages of its life cycle (Lewis & Chambers, 2000), size of market already reached its' maximum capacity. To survive in this challenging environment, many marketers and researchers have developed various marketing strategies to help hotel survive in the competitive environment. Strategic, brand differentiation and brand extension are the key methods of brand characteristics, or a brand personality, that differentiates the brand from its competitors (Jiang, Dav, & Rao, 2002; Keller & Aaker, 1992). This research focuses on recognizing and empirically testing

a relationship between brand personality congruence and brand extension, which can lead to effective marketing strategies for the hotel industry. The objective of this research is to identify how brand personality congruence affects brand extension and to address how hotels should extend their brands. Many researchers have found that brand personality is the key issue in distinguishing a brand, developing an emotional side of that brand, and increasing the personal meaning of the brand to the customers (Crask & Laskey, 1990; Landon, 1974; Levy, 1959; Ouwersloot & Tudorica, 2001). Furthermore, Kotler (1991) stated that brand personality produces a more consistent and stable outcome than brand image in environmental stimuli. Aaker (1997) insisted that brand personality has a positive impact on customer brand choice.

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Brand personality may also be useful as an evaluation tool to identify customer brand acceptance. It is apparent then, that brand personality may have considerable on hotel brand extension. little research has been conducted about the relationship between brand personality and brand extension, before and after extension, in the hospitality industry. Therefore, this research is designed to empirically test a relationship between pre and post -brand personality congruence and brand extension, in the hotel industry. Findings of this study will allow us to better assess the broader impact of extension strategy for the marketer.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Brand Personality

Marketing researchers defined brand personality in various ways. Brand personality refers to the set of human characteristics associated with a brand (Aaker, 1997) and as one of the core dimensions of the brand identity (Aaker, 1996). Brand personality as the concept of self-expression is defined as "the totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to one self as an object" (Rosenberg, 1979). Customers use brands as symbolic devices to explain and express their own particular personality (De Chernatony & McWilliam, 1990). King (1973) suggested that "people choose their brands the same way they choose their friends; in addition to the skills and physical characteristics, they simply like them as people." Brand personality is created by the combination of all the experiences the consumer has with a brand (Ouwensloot & Tudorica, 2001; Kotler, 2003). A well-established brand personality can result in consumers having stronger emotional ties to the brand and greater trust and loyalty (Siguaw, Mattila, & Austin, 1999; Johnson, Soutar, & Sweeney, 2000). Many researchers have found that brand personality is the key issue in distinguishing a brand, developing an emotional side of that brand, and increasing the personal meaning of the brand to the customers (Crask & Laskey, 1990; Landon, 1974; Levy, 1959; Ouwensloot & Tudorica, 2001). Furthermore, Kotler (1991) stated that brand personality produces a more consistent and stable outcome than brand image in environmental stimuli. Ouwensloot and Tudoria (2001) argued that one advantage of having strong brand personality is that it helps consumers differentiate between brands. Aaker (1997) insisted that brand personality has a positive impact on customer brand choice. Brand personality may also be useful as an evaluation tool to identify customer brand acceptance. It is apparent then, that brand personality may have considerable on hotel brand extension.

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2.2. Brand Personality Congruence

Since Cooley (1902) suggested the self-concept theory, many researchers (Gardner & Levy, 1985; Onkvisit & Shaw, 1987; Sirgy & Samli, 1985) have studied self-congruency theory and also have concluded that consumers have a preference for products with images that are congruent with their self-image. Many marketing researchers have found a positive relationship between self-concept, ideal self-concept and brand choice. Birdwell (1968) was the first researcher to measure the extent to which self-image is congruent with purchase. He concluded that personality affects an individual's choice of automobile and purchasing behavior consistent with a particular brand that conveys symbolic meaning of a customer's physical extension of his/her personality. In many cases, consumers tend to express themselves by what they purchase. Consumers often purchase products or brands that maintain and/or enhance their self image (Graeff, 1996). Consumer self-concept links to higher order needs like social or self-esteem needs (Maslow, 1970). The consumer's desire to promote self-consistency and self-esteem motivates him or her towards positive evaluations of a brand if user imagery is congruent with his or her desired self image (Fournier, 1998; Hogg, Cox, & Keeling, 2000; Sirgy, 1986; Aron & Debra, 2003). Consumers achieve self-consistency by holding positive attitudes toward and purchasing brands that they perceive to be similar to their self-concept. Brand (and associated personality) let consumers express that they are what they are, where they are, and how they want to be viewed by other people (Timothy, 1996). Fournier (1998) also studied how consumers identify themselves with brand by using idiographic analysis. According to Sirgy's congruence theory, the customers tend to behave favorably toward the brand when making purchasing and repurchasing decisions

2.3. Brand Extension

During the last decade, brand extension strategy has been the core of strategic growth for a variety of firm (Aaker, 1991; Doyle, 1994). Brand extension strategy is performed on a brand's own products or services for which the brand was not originally created. Certain brands have such strong recog-

nition and identity that they can be used successfully to market other products. Aaker and Keller (1990) explained that brand extension involves the use of an established brand name to enter a new product category. Extensions are a natural strategy for the firm looking to grow by exploiting its assets. Kotler (1991) defined brand extension as any effort to extend a successful brand name to launch new or modified products or product line. Brand extension is the practice of introducing a new brand (differentiated by market segment) using a well-established brand name as leverage (Jiang et al., 2002). The leverage of a strong brand name can substantially reduce the risk of including a product in a new market by using consumer familiarity with and knowledge of an established brand. It also has been argued that when an extension uses well-established brand positioning, its chance of success is increased (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Boush & Loken, 1991; Sunde & Brodie, 1993). Well-organized brand extension substantially reduces introductory marketing expenses and enhances success by helping gain retailer and consumer acceptance (Keller & Aaker, 1992). Many managers use brand extension as a vehicle for growth (Springen & Miller, 1990). Aaker and Keller (1990) explored the assumptions in consumer behavior for success in brand extension: (1) consumers hold positive beliefs and favorable attitudes toward the original brand; (2) these positive associations help form positive beliefs and favorable attitudes about the brand extension; and (3) negative associations are neither transferred to nor created by the brand extension.

2.4. Brand Extension Fit

Previous brand extension research has emphasized primarily the role of "fit" or similarity between the two products as an evaluation tool involved in creating a brand extension. Tauber (1988) observed 276 actual extensions and concluded that perceptual fit, "Consumers perceiving the new item to be consistent with the parent brand." Categorization judgment and the transfer of parent brand associations to the extension are particularly affected by consumer perceptions of fit (Aaker & Keller, 1990). The extension needs to fit the brand. The customer needs to be comfortable with the concept of the brand name being on the extension. If the fit is poor, desired associations will not transfer but will instead, distract, or even precipitate ridicule. When fit increases, consumers can more confidently transfer their favorable associations to an extension product (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Ottesen

& Gronhaug, 2002) and reduce the perceived likelihood of negative outcomes (DeVccchio & Smith, 2005). Park, Milberg, and Lawson (1991) concluded that different types of brand extension fit, specifically brand concept consistency and product level similarity, moderate the evaluation of extension products using the direct brand extension strategy. Therefore, different types of brand extension fit also may have different effects on the degree office customer's evaluation of the brand extension. The impact of brand extension fit on brand personality depends upon the perceived quality of the core brand.

For instance, JW Marriott and Marriott Marques are using the same brand name, "Marriott" and these two brands also provide upscale service to customers.

2.5. Attitude Toward a Brand (Extended Brand Personality)

When extension is accomplished, marketers and consumers can evaluate the extended brand. The success of brand extension is mainly explained by how the consumers evaluate the extension (Klink & Smith, 2001). According to Aaker and Keller (1990), consumer evaluations of brand extensions are determined primarily by the quality of the parent brand and the fit between the original and extension products categories. For the most part, brand acceptance and favorable attitudes toward the extended brand are tools for measuring brand extensions. Ries and Trout (1981) provide evidence that the wrong kind of brand extension may strip away investments, time and resources, market opportunities, and brand trust. Loken and John (1993) also find that unsuccessful brand extension can dilute brand names by diminishing the favorable attitude beliefs that consumers have learned to associate with the brand name. Extending the brand could have an impact on the brand's personality dimensions (Diamantopoulos, Smith, & Grime, 2005). The similarity of brand personalities and the attitude toward the extended brand will be the evaluation tool to determine if a brand extension is successful. The ideal result would be that the extended brand personality would have the same brand personality or even improve the level of a personality trait. In light of this, brand personalities that define the brand extension should be used to evaluate successes or failures. According to the interpersonal relationship theory, when people evaluate another person, their personality is one of the most important factors of appraising that person's value. Kotler (2003) stated in his marketing ma-

nagement book that personality leads to relatively consistent and enduring responses to environmental stimuli. Therefore, using the core brand personality as an independent variable and the brand personality of extended brands as a dependent variable should measure a hotel brand extension's success.

2.6. Hypothesis Development

Based on the review literature, research hypotheses of the effect of brand personality congruence of brand extension are presented in this section. Because human personality and brand personality share many similar concepts (Epstein, 1977), brand personality can trigger a deep and strong relationship between customer and a brand, creating a special and personal meaning to a customer (Aaker, 1996). King (1973) claimed that brand congruence was useful in evaluating a consumer's attitude level toward a brand. Thus, the greater the congruence with the brand personality, the more appealing and favorable the attitude toward the brand will be. Therefore, hypothesis 1 is suggested.

H 1: Brand personality congruence is positively associated with attitude toward the core brand.

Extending the brand could affect the brand's personality (Diamantopoulos et al., 2005). Loken and John (1993) also found that unsuccessful brand extension could dilute a brand name by diminishing the favorable attitude and beliefs that consumers have learned to associate with the brand name. Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) stated that attitude directly influences behavior, so in this study, we expect that brand extensions (similar and less similar) will affect customer attitudes toward a brand with a concomitant change in customer behavior due to brand congruence level and brand choice.

H 2: Attitude toward the core brand is positively associated with updated brand congruence.

A customer's experience with brand extension leads to a cumulative knowledge of product or service. This knowledge is stored in the customer's memory as product or service related intimacy and information (Park, Mothersbough, & Feick, 1994). A new attitude forms or an existing attitude is retrieved from previous memory (Yi & Bagozzi, 1989). Extending the brand may impact the brand's personality dimensions and customer attitudes toward a brand and service.

(Diamantopoulos et al., 2005). Thus, the updated brand congruence formed by brand extension may affect the customer's post experience attitude toward a brand.

H 3: Updated brand congruence positively affects one's attitude toward the extended brand.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Measurement Development

Aaker and Maheswaran's (1997) 42 brand personality descriptors were adapted to represent respondents' self-congruency with a hotel brand. A pilot test was conducted with a convenience sample of 65 social members in a Midwestern university was asked to participate in the pilot test before their bible study as a preliminary test of the final questionnaire to ensure the appropriateness of measurements. One of the purposes of the pilot test was for modifying Brand personality trait (BPT) to make it suitable for application in the lodging industry. The participants were asked to "Take a moment to think about hotel, and then describe this hotel by personality adjectives such as friendly, confident, exciting, secure, original, or any personality expression listed below." Perceptions from the BPT were evaluated using a five-point Likert-type scale from 1, "not at all," to 5, "extremely." The four items to measure personality congruence was adapted and modified from Sirgy's congruence theory (1982). A 7-point Likert-type scale for personality congruence (e.g., "The typical guest at the Marriott hotel has personality characteristics similar to mine as perceived by others.") was used to assess brand personality congruence.

A factor analysis, descriptive analysis, and reliability analysis were performed on the consumption emotion measure for item reduction. A factor analysis was performed on the measure to identify the dimensions of brand personality in the lodging industry. The factor analysis showed the possible number of brand personality dimensions in the lodging industry. Following the pre-test, a pilot test of the instrument was conducted prior to data collection as a preliminary test of the final questionnaire. The pilot test was modified to further refine Aaker's (1997) BPT to increase construct validity for the lodging industry. A convenience sample of 65 social members in a Midwestern university was asked to participate in the pilot test. Personality descriptors were modified based on participant responses. One factor and 27 personality de-

scriptors were eliminated, leaving 13 brand personality descriptors for the questionnaire.

The sample population in this study was composed of include residences in Midwestern Southern area and, undergraduate/graduate students from a variety of majors as well as faculty members at a Midwestern and Southern universities. The questionnaire consisted of the modified 13 personality descriptors, 13 self concepts, 4 subject brand personality and 4 attitudes toward brand. After reading the instructions, participants responded to a series of brand personality and self personality describing adjectives, assessing attitude toward core and extended brand. 458 include residences in Midwestern Southern area and, undergraduate/graduate students from a variety of majors as well as faculty members at a Midwestern and Southern universities were asked to participate in the study. Two hundred sixteen responses were returned out of 458 distributed questionnaires, resulting 32% of response rate.

In this study, two extension scenarios were presented. Case 1 (retirement community) has the similar segment and provide comparable style service to the core brand (Marriott hotel). Bhat and Reddy (1997) stated that the more similar the extension is to a parent brand, the more likely are consumers to identify the parent characteristics with the extension. So, Case 1 names as a good fit. Case2 was initiated as bad fit. Organic food store is totally different segment and provide different type of service to customers. Extended brand personality was evaluated by assessing the respondents' attitudes toward the extended brand and the brand personality congruence to the core brand. Attitude toward the extended brand was adapted from Oliver (1993), Oliver, Rust, and Varki (1997). A 7-point Likert-type scale (e.g., "When I need to go to a hotel, this hotel brand is the first hotel brand in my mind") was used to discover the attitude toward the extended brand.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Demographic Information

The mean for respondents' hotel stay was 6 days per year and the standard deviation was 7.5. The majority of respondents (64.8%) indicated that their annual household income was in the range of \$20,001 to \$50,000. Fifty-six percent of the respondents were female, and the mean age was 27 years old. Also, most respondents (54%) were Caucasian.

4.2. Descriptive Analysis and Factor Analysis

Descriptive analyses were performed on all attributes of brand personality, personality congruence and updated brand congruence in the questionnaire. A factor analysis and descriptive analysis were performed on the brand personality measure for item reduction. The Kaiser-Meycr-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy, which indicates the appropriateness of using factor analysis, was .68, which is an adequate level for conducting factor analysis (George & Mallery, 2001). Principal component analysis with VARIMAX rotation extracted three components, which accounted for 68.1% of the total variance explained. The variables "sophistication" and "competence" were combined into one factor—"sophistication". The variable "ruggedness" did not have a strong relationship with any component. Thus, this brand personality descriptor was dropped. A total of 3 factors and 13 brand personality items were finalized after the factor analysis.

For Case 1, the mean for the Personality item, "successful", had the highest value (4.4), followed by "upper class" (4.3), "confident" (4.2), "good looking" (4.2), "Leader" (4.0), "glamorous" (4.1), "trendy" (3.9), "real" (3.9), "cool" (3.7), "exciting" (3.7), "sincere" (3.6), "spirited" (3.4), and "wholesome" (3.4). These mean values for the Marriott hotel brand personality

Table 1. Factor analysis result

	Component				
	Sophisti- cation	Excite- ment	Sincerity	Mean	Std. deviation
Upper class	0.85			4.2	0.84
Successful	0.83			4.4	0.87
Good looking	0.79			4.1	0.86
Leader	0.77			4.0	0.94
Confident	0.73			4.2	0.88
Glamorous	0.71			4.0	0.88
Exciting		0.85		3.7	0.96
Spirited		0.82		3.5	0.90
Trendy		0.73		3.9	0.93
Cool		0.63		3.7	0.97
Sincere			0.81	3.7	0.84
Real			0.81	3.9	0.98
Wholesome			0.80	3.5	0.90

The mean score stated as 1 (not at all descriptive) to 5 (extremely descriptive).

Table 2. Regression estimates of equations

	Independent variable	Dependent variable	Regression coefficients		t value
			Unstandardized	Standardized	
Regression 1	Brand congruence (case 1)		.87	.32	3.48**
	Attitude toward core brand				
	Brand congruence (case 2)		.91	.32	3.47**
	Attitude toward core brand				
		R^2 (adjusted R^2)=.104 (.096) (case1)			
		R^2 (adjusted R^2)=.100 (.920) (case2)			
Regression 2	Attitude toward core brand (case1)		.04	.11	1.16
	Updated brand congruence				
	Attitude toward core brand (case2)		-.01	-.02	-.25
	Updated brand congruence				
		R^2 (adjusted R^2)=.013 (.003) (case1)			
		R^2 (adjusted R^2)=.001 (-.009) (case2)			
Regression 3	Updated brand congruence (case 1)		.55	.17	1.72
	Attitude toward extended brand				
	Updated brand congruence (case 2)		1.01	.42	4.75**
	Attitude toward extended brand				
		R^2 (adjusted R^2)=.028 (.018) (case1)			
		R^2 (adjusted R^2)=.173 (.165) (case2)			
Regression 4	Attitude toward extended brand (case1)				
	Brand congruence		.61	.19	2.16
	Updated brand congruence		.10	.03	.36
	Attitude toward core brand		.68	.56	6.99**
	Attitude toward extended brand (case2)				
	Brand congruence		.09	.03	.30
	Updated brand congruence		1.02	.42	5.29**
	Attitude toward core brand		.51	.41	4.96**
		R^2 (adjusted R^2)=.421 (.404) (Case1)			
		R^2 (adjusted R^2)=.349 (.331) (Case2)			

** $p < .01$.

items indicated that respondents recognize the Marriott hotel brand as "successful", "upper class", "confident", "good looking", and "leader" in the hotel industry.

The results from regression model 1 showed that the coefficient (Standardized) value was .32 for Case 1 and .32 for Case 2. "The independent variable across two cases explained 10.40% and 10.00% of the total variance in attitude toward the core brand, respectively. In regression model 2, the effects of attitude toward the core brand on updated brand con-

gruence were found to be insignificant ($p > .01$). Thus, hypothesis 2 was not supported. These results indicate that attitude toward the core brand did not have a significant impact on updated brand congruence for both cases. In regression model 3, the results showed that while updated brand congruence for the retirement community was not significantly associated with customer attitude toward the extended brand ($p > .01$), updated brand congruence for the organic food store significantly affected customer attitudes toward the extended

brand ($p < .01$). Thus, hypothesis 3 was partially supported. The coefficient (Standardized) value for the updated brand congruence for Case 2 was .42 in the relationship between updated brand congruence and attitude toward extended brand. This result indicated that the updated brand congruence between customer self-image and a well-established brand personality for the organic food store enhanced customer attitudes toward the extended brand. However, this updated brand congruence did not influence customer attitude toward the extended brand in Case 2 (organic food store).

In regression model 4, the attitude toward the extended brand was regressed on all independent variables, including core brand congruence, attitude toward the core brand, and extended brand congruence. For both Cases 1 and 2, attitude toward the core brand exerted a significant influence on attitude toward the extended brand.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The objective in this study was fulfilled by investigating the relationship among brand personality, brand personality congruence, attitude toward core and extended brand. The results support the finding that brand personality congruence has a significant positive effect on customer attitude toward core brand. Also, the finding is consistent with the results of previous studies that customer's self-concept, matching concept might influence their attitudes and purchase decisions, which manipulates customer's behavior and attitude toward the brand (Aaker, 1999; Sirgy & Samli, 1985). And the customer's positive attitude will maintain and effect on attitude toward extended brand. The finding emphasized the important role of customers' personality congruence with a brand

personality to better understand customers' actual behaviors and attitudes toward a brand. Therefore, hospitality researchers should incorporate brand personality into brand extension studies. Also, this study defined the special needs for a descriptor for hotel brand personality. The Marriott hotel brand personality items, such as the ruggedness factor, included 5 personality descriptors that have the lowest mean value among 5 brand personality factors. Thus, to clarify true hotel brand personality, new brand personality descriptors are strongly needed. Brand personality congruence, based on Sirgy's congruence theory, had a greater impact on customers' attitudes toward core brand personality. Thus, marketers should focus on establishing a strong and unique brand personality and increase hotel brand personality by identifying the hotel's target customers and their personality in order to maximize customer positive attitude toward hotel brand. A customer with a positive attitude toward a brand may maintain or enhance their attitude toward an extended brand. For this reason, the brand extension study should emphasize the roles of positive attitude in branding.

The results of this study have several managerial implications for marketing directors and manager in the lodging industry. First, this study confirmed that brand personality congruence plays a significant role in customers' attitude toward a brand. As stated by Kotler (2003), a well-established brand personality can cause stronger emotional ties and congruence in customers. Also, Aaker (1999) argued that a customer's self-concept might influence their attitudes and purchase decisions. Thus a better understanding of the personality factors can help lodging managers develop more effective ways to enhance the customers' positive attitude toward core brand and extend this positive attitude to the brand. In

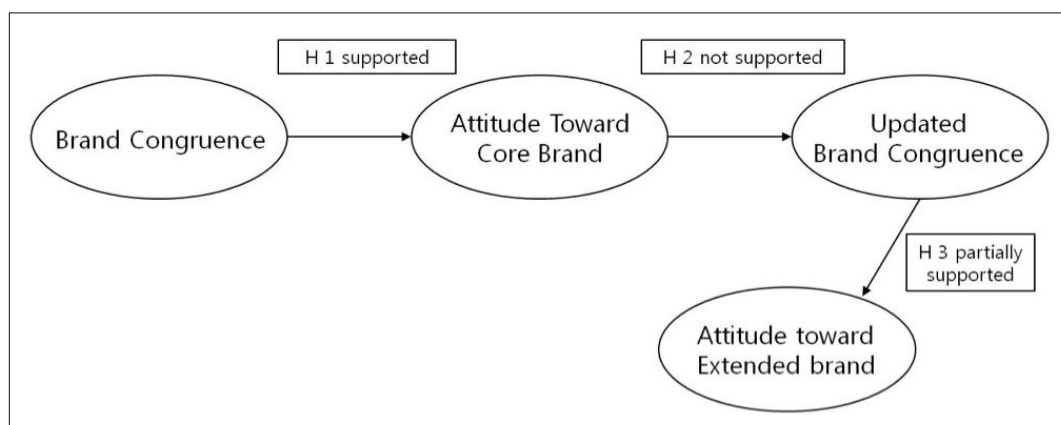


Fig. 1. The proposed hypotheses illustrated in the study model.

addition, advertising should be carefully developed based on research result. According to Timothy (1996), advertisement manipulation has a significant effect on image congruence relationships as well as one of the biggest impacts on the creation of brand personality for customers. Ouwersloot and Tudorica (2001) also argued that one advantage of having strong brand personality is that it helps consumers differentiate between brands. Brand personality congruence responses could be achieved via atmospheric hotel planning and personality congruence advertising.

Second, study findings revealed that when customers connect themselves to well-established brand personality, it has a greater impact on customers' attitude toward that core brand. Thus, to maximize customer's repeat visit intentions, marketers in the lodging industry should focus on establishing a strong and unique personality and increasing customers' brand congruence level by identifying the hotel's target customers and their major personality.

Study findings need to be interpreted with caution. First, although this study was carefully designed to recall participants' brand personality using a pictorial technique, personality was not always recallable, and brand extension was artificial setting of brand extension may not quit influence to customer's attitude. Higher external validity of the study results can be achieved by using actual hotel customers and actual brand extension case. Second, the majority of the sample population in this study was students and faculty members at a Midwestern university and residents of Midwestern and southern areas using a convenience sampling method. Also, the mean of age was low (27 years) to assume as actual hotel user age group. The interpretation and generalization of findings to all lodging purchase decisions should be done cautiously. In future studies, examination of the proposed model using a wider sampling range may complement the sampling limitation.

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