CONSUMER PREFERENCES FOR HOTEL BRAND AND BRAND SUSTAINABILITY: LUXURY HOTELS IN KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA

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Abstract: The economic prominence of the Tourism industry is very huge which cannot be underestimated. Travel & Tourism is set for a milestone year as the industry's contribution to the worldwide economy during the year 2016 exceeded $7.2 trillion to world GDP, representing 9.8% of global GDP and created 284 million jobs. Tourism in Malaysia has grown from RM 32 billion in 2005 to RM 69 billion in 2015 with 16.4 million arrivals in 2005 to 25.7 million arrivals in 2015, placing Malaysia currently at 12th position in international tourist arrivals. Current research has focused on branding process of luxury international brand hotels and to find out actual influencing factors which create issues regarding brand loyalty for local hotels. Data was collected from six (6) luxury Five-star hotels in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia by using purposive sampling technique. In total 117 responses were collected from customers by using closed-ended survey instrument and 13 face-to-face interviews were conducted with hoteliers to capture the industrial perspective. SPSS version 23 was used to analyse the data. The findings suggest that brand marketing and brand awareness of the luxury hotels in Kuala Lumpur will effectively contribute to enhancing the brand sustainability of these hotels. Furthermore, the study shows that guest negative experiences will weaken the brand equity of these hotels.

Keywords: Consumer preferences, brand, equity, sustainability, luxury hotels, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Introduction

A brand is an image or a thought in regard to a specific item or management that is associated with the consumers through the distinctive evidence of the name, motto or the logo of the organization or the item sort. Marking is advertising those item pictures or thoughts to the clients to acquire acknowledgement from the general population. Marking is typically used to separate one item from the other. The brands are straightforwardly identified with the customers and in this way, have pulled in such a great amount of consideration from the specialists around the globe. As indicated by those analysts, marking is the essential method of separation from the rivals keeping in mind the end goal to acquire maintainable upper hand (Kotler et al, 2009). Because of quick changes in the market competitiveness and the current marketing process, brand representation assumes a key part in pulling in new clients while holding existing clients.

Because of the expanded competitiveness in the market, organizations have tended to actualize different brand administration practices to separate their items and management from their competitors. This specific research investigation anticipated that would separate how the brand picture consequences for customer conduct and basic leadership process. As per Kapferer (2012) brand administration is an arrangement of exercises that are utilised for situating the brand in the market, choosing target clients for the predetermined brand and hold the current notoriety of the brand. The brand administration is vital in light of the fact that it gives direction to pull in new clients while holding existing clients moreover.

As specified by Wood (2000) and Maurya & Mishra (2012), the general meaning of a brand is a name, a logo, a plan or a blend of them, which separates an association from different associations. Abratt, and Kleyn (2012) contended that a brand is more than a name, a picture or an image. Also, it is conceivable to contend that a brand is a known character of an association as far as items and services they offer to the clients. It can concur with this contention and clarification because of a brand is a guarantee of value and a guarantee made in the buyers' brain to satisfy their prerequisites. Marking is considered as a huge factor of the corporate methodology to build the productivity and the piece of the overall industry through upgrading brand picture by making client loyalty and product attractiveness. As indicated by De Pelsmacker, Geuens, and Van den Bergh, (2001), the interest in brand representation and the brand awareness can be considered as a vital and effective component in the advertising technique as they are imperative in accomplishing long-time productivity. Keller (2003) specified that brands are the significant representatives for separating the merchandise and amenities of the organization from the contenders and the brand equity has recognized the significance of the brand in the marketing, which gives useful insights to the organizations.

Hotel brand exemplifies a complete set of physical and socio-psychological characteristics and principles. The brand is built on the hotel's reputation for efficient service, consistency and quality. All of these features have great influence upon consumers' perception of the brand and the meaning they attribute to it. Ultimately, brand perceptions affect consumers' buying decision (Doyle, 1994). There are prospective financial profits and customer interests in hotel branding. Robust brands are thus significant to encounter the challenges of extremely unpredictable marketplaces nowadays. In order to improve their competitiveness, hotels need to generate exclusive features that differentiate their products from those of their contenders. An exceptional food quality from hotel restaurants can be a tactical methodology to their branding undertakings in order to guarantee that they are better able to deal with inconsistent market forces (Ismail, Muhammad, Yusoff & Shariff, 2016).

Hotel and Restaurants need to be careful with the quality of their products offered on their premises, as the better quality will attract both the domestic as well as the international customers. Malaysian hotel industry functions in an environment, which is categorized by an intense competition and high uncertainty (Ong, 2004). Hence, the hotels must ensure that their products, both Rooms and Food and Beverage, maintains excellent quality and this could be an effective approach to manage the inconsistent

marketplace and to stay in the competition. The management of branding activities and ensuring consistent quality are a prerequisite for improving performance. Providing high food quality is important in the way that a satisfied customer will return and become a loyal customer.

While, consolidating the hotel brand means improving the customer's consciousness and form a solid brand image in the mind of patrons, as current marketing and brand management strategies in hotel industries were limited to advertising, word of mouth and service performance (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998; Xu & Chan, 2010). This was accomplished by addition of value to the brand image, brand awareness, brand loyalty and the perceived quality to attract customers towards the hotel brand. Due to the large availability of luxury international brands in Malaysia, local brands are facing issues about promotion and to reach the target market a huge competition is available on almost same price and quality levels. Therefore, the purpose of current research is to get knowledge of branding process of luxury international brand hotels and to find out actual influencing factors that create issues regarding brand loyalty for local hotels.

Literature Review

Concept of branding

A brand is an image or a thought with respect to a specific product or organization that is associated with the clients through the distinguishing name, motto or the logo of the organization or the product variety. Branding is advertising those product images or thoughts to the clients to acquire acknowledgement from them. Marking is generally used to separate one item from the other. The brands are specifically identified with the customers and thus have pulled in a great amount of consideration from the scholars around the globe. As indicated by those scholars, branding is the essential method of distinction from the competitors in order to attain sustainable competitive lead (Kotler et al, 2009). Because of fast changes in the market rivalry and the current advertising process, brand representation plays an imperative part in enticing new clienteles while holding existing consumers. Cohen (2011) claimed that a brand is not just a title, an image, a pictogram or even a thought. Moreover, it is conceivable to contend that a brand is a known character of an association regarding items and amenities they offer to the clients. A robust brand distinctiveness that is well received and experienced by the clienteles helps in creating confidence, which, distinguishes the brand from competitiveness. A brand character is a communication conveyed by the brand. Brand personality additionally characterizes what must stay and what is allowed to change (Kapferer, 1997). From the customer's point of view, the brand delivers the guarantee for the customers concerning the quality and the trustworthiness of the product or service.

Brand Image

Musanje (2011) provided the definition of band image as "a unique set of associations in the mind of the customer concerning what a brand stands for and the implied promise the brand makes". According to Musanje (2011), brand image is a blend of all tangible and intangible qualities that impact how the customers perceive an organization. Kumar (2006) has discussed the difference between the brand image and brand identity. It is likely to contend that brand uniqueness is the thing that an

association desires individuals to accept their identity and brand image is the thing that individuals consider the association in realism. Thus, associations need to fortify the novel brand identity and esteem if they wish to change the way the brand image is passed on. The brand pictured influences the purchasing conduct of the customers as it effects the impression of the buyers with respect to the brand. In spite of the fact that the contenders have comparative items with the same quality or design, the brand representation of the organization can separate the brand from the products of other organizations. Schaefer and Burmann (2008) specified that brand image is a crucial determinant of customer purchasing conduct. Because of the importance of brand image for the customer behaviour, a significant consideration has been paid by advertising experts about the variables that can effect on the brand image of an organization.

Brand Awareness

Brand awareness is considered as a fundamental deciding component of brand value. The brand awareness is the capacity of a consumer to distinguish the brand and identify it with the associated item. For an item to be bought, it is vital that the customers are aware of the item, so it is incorporated into their buying decisions. Blackwell et al (2001) mentioned that it is largely for the reason that the item should be in the mindfulness stage before it goes to the consideration stage and the higher brand mindfulness will enhance the likelihood of the item into the consideration stage as well. Considering the above viewpoints, the brands with higher brand awareness will have a higher probability to be bought by the customers as compared to the alternative brands (Yasin et al, 2007). This is one reason the clients want to buy exceptionally imaged brands as opposed to the new brands.

There are a few vital elements, which can influence the brand awareness level. In some nations, for example, China, the governmental issues and the geographic area can influence the level of brand familiarity with the general population. Delong et al. (2004) said in their examination that some Chinese customers could not separate the brand names of United States items with the European item mark names. The brand mindfulness can be enhanced however consistent presentation to the brand by the purchaser. There are different approaches to generate brand awareness and it is likely to accomplish higher mindfulness through two primary assignments, which incorporate enhancing the character of the brand name and connecting the brand name with the product class. Additionally, various forms of advertisements are utilised for the expanding the brand awareness. As per the research conducted by Tsai et al. (2007), commercial affects the state of mind of the brand while influencing the purchaser's buying decision. Because of that reason, the promoting efforts have turned into a huge piece of the organization operates and the buyers have more assets to look at the products and services of each organization before purchasing the item (Alvarez and Casielles, 2005). Another significant instrument for improving the brand mindfulness is the endorsement from the celebrities. It is imperative to have VIP support, as it will enhance the attractiveness and the reliability. Those big names can disperse the messages to the specific group of shoppers to enhance the brand mindfulness as a wellspring of validity.

Brand and Corporate Relationship – Brand Building

The hospitality industry highlights the rise of the internet and social media sites for information that has transformed into a boon for customers and for companies to build their brands. This electronic data can be combined with information gathered through conventional research methods to assist in the effective brand management and to ensure that the brand is meeting customers' needs and is able to develop a loyal base (Myers & Shocker, 1981; Keller, 1993). Demirçiftçi and Kızılırmak (2016) suggested that branding is very important for hotels for being competitive. Hotels are using different bands to serve diverse market segments. In the hospitality industry, branding provides trust to the consumers, which helps to increase guest satisfaction. To a great degree, hospitality customers are seeking experiences, and brand should provide those experiences, or, more specifically, create the framework that allows guests to have the experience they seek. The internet and social media provide new tools and information to solidify the brand and provides the customer with valuable information that helps brand managers to offset the emerging buying trend and improve their brand's status (Dev & Withiam, 2011).

Hotel Brand Strategy

The brand's value is based on potential guests' awareness of the brand, their perception of its quality, and overall customer satisfaction. Consumers are typically willing to pay a price premium for brands they view as being high in quality (O´Neill, &, Xiao, 2006). Literature shows that brand affiliation, name recognition, and reputation for high-quality service together can contribute as much as 20 to 25 percent of the concerned value of a successfully operating hotel. As customers' loyalty grows, the brand owner/s can capitalize on the brand's value through price premiums, decreased price elasticity, increased market share, and more rapid brand expansion. They also share inputs on how companies with successful brands benefit in the financial marketplace by improving shareholders' value (Olsen, Chung, Graf, Lee, & Madanoglu, 2005). The brand-extension strategy works for the hotel industry in part, because guests choose different types of hotels depending on their purpose of travel, and a brand extension with a familiar name allows consumers who depend on trusted brands to economize on time and search costs (O'Neill & Mattila, 2010).

Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty is viewed as the reflection of a brand's strength as it is an essential output of what the brand awareness and brand image of a hotel can generate. It is both an input and a result of brand equity as the dimensions of brand equity, which is brand knowledge, influence it and the assets and liabilities linked to a brand. The customers were classified based on their actual brand loyalty using the Brown48 model where there are four categories to identify the various types of buyers that show loyalty towards a particular brand, a) hardcore loyalists, b) split loyalists, c) shifting loyalists, and d) switchers. A successful market strategy must be based on enhancing brand loyalty and all dimensions that aid to achieve this must be inter-connected (Moisescu & Vu, 2011). Brand loyalty is the inclination of the customers to the explicit products compared to the other comparable choices with the contenders. Even though the competitors offer highly convenient, superior featured or low-priced products, the customers still tend to buy the product, if the clienteles have solid brand loyalty towards the brand of a particular company. When the brand loyalty of the customer increases,

the vulnerability of the customer base decreases. Repeat buying is measured as one of the pointers of the customer's brand loyalty. However, this is not a correct pointer as some customers are customary buyers of a particular brand due to the promotions and prominence in stock.

The brand loyalty is influenced by the states of mind and the conduct of the consumer. There are different variables which influence the brand loyalty including the brand name, value, style, item quality, advancement, store condition and service quality (Lau et al, 2006). If the brand names are much admired, it will have higher advantages than the unfamiliar brand names. The shoppers like to purchase the much-rumoured brands and the repeat purchases are high for such brands. As indicated by Russel and Taylor (2006), the buyers tend to buy the product again if the product is meeting with their necessities. On the other hand, if the product quality is not great, there will be no brand reliability and the shoppers will switch the brands until the point they feel satisfied. For any purchaser, the cost is a vital factor and if the brand loyalty is high, the buyers will pay much higher cost than the competitors will. The solid brand loyalty will not be in this way influenced by the price competition and will be significant for the organization. Along with this, the store location, the design and the appearance in the stores additionally influence the brand dependability. The advertising promotions aids in building client faithfulness as this can make a positive image with respect to the brand in the psyches of the purchaser (Chioveanu, 2008).

Guest Satisfaction and Effects on Hotel Branding
Literature shows that there are two most crucial components that affect the branding of a hotel, either positively or negatively – Guest satisfaction and effects of room revenue on hotel branding. The guests today require consistency and quality at an optimum price and lodging operations have directed efforts to provide guest satisfaction and branding they seek (Naylor, & Kleiser, 2002). Brand names act as a shorthand for communicating information about the company and its offerings. The researchers have identified the relationship between branding strategies and the revenue indicators of Average daily rate and Occupancy percentages. Research conducted by O'Neill and Mattila (2010) concluded that hotels with higher guest satisfaction levels achieved greater revenues per room.

Brand Preferences and Purchase Intent
It is confirmed that brands with higher advertising yielded higher brand equity. The higher equity paved way for the greater brand preference by the consumer, which led to their intentions to purchase the better-marketed and advertised product (Cobb-Walgren, Ruble, & Donthu, 1995). As such, the consumer behaviour of individuals is directed towards enhancing their self-concept through the consumption of goods as symbols (Sirgy, 1982). Self-image has been considered a multidimensional construct, with various forms of the self, such as actual, ideal and social (among others). It is the actual and ideal self-image that has received the most attention and been shown to have the most significant effect on product evaluations (Sirgy, 1986; Graeff, 1997). Sirgy et al. (1997) have also provided evidence of self- and product-user-image congruency as being able to explain and predict consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions. Also, Dolich (1969) found congruence between self and product brand image to be positively related to the strength of preference for brands. The perceptions

within the user imageries often form a basis from which a brand personality develops (Plummer, 1985).

Assessing Markets and Marking Issues

Literature reveals several common marketing issues faced by corporate brands, top-level management and marketing professionals in effectively marketing their products and services to the target clientele (Naylor, & Kleiser, 2002). Various macro marketing issues and marketing strategies have been critically examined deduce the significance of these applications on the society and the contributions made by these guidelines to improve the marketing impacts of these companies (Stauss, & Bruhn, 2008). The tasks of top management to manage their corporate portfolio of businesses to achieve the goals have been reviewed to formulate suitable market combinations as per different resource requirements and profit opportunities. The Marketing Mix model, which is widely applied in every sector and industry, is the foundation of the core marketing concepts has been suggested as the basis to improve a company's marketing position and provide a competitive advantage (Coulson, Wind, & Claycamp, 1980).

Future for Hotel Branding

The brand performance of hotels, their performance measuring tools and the brand extensions that allow hotels to establish themselves in the market effectively Keller and Lehmann (2006) illustrated more on concepts of brand management, also categorized several techniques for strategically managing a hotel brand (Cai, & Hobson, 2004). Today branding is increasingly being conducted on a global landscape and is synonymous with image building and diversifying to the maximum extent plausible. The 'Choice Model' involves understanding the utility of the product or service and it influences the consumer choice to understand the impact of brands (Daun, & Klinger, 2006). The brand acts as the catalyst through which the words and actions of a company, its competitors, and the environment, in general, are converted into an emotional connect with the local target market. From the above review of literature and discussion, the following hypotheses were generated;

H1: Brand marketing leads to higher brand equity of the hotel.
H2: Higher brand awareness leads to higher brand equity of the hotel.
H3: Guests negative experience leads to lower brand equity of the hotel.

Research Design

While keeping the purpose of the study in mind, the Dual methodology was applied. Six (6) luxury Five-star hotels were selected in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia by using a purposive sampling technique. The instrument was consisting two sections, first with demographic and general descriptive equations including, the purpose of the stay, duration of stay, factors affecting guest stay and preferences while choosing the hotel. The second section was incorporated to collect data regarding different variables of the study, the measurement scale of a questionnaire for all items in the second section was based on 5-point Likert scale, ranging from '1' for 'strongly disagree' to '5' being 'strongly agree'. Section two included total 23 items for (3) independent variables such as 'Brand marketing (7-items)', 'Higher brand awareness (4-items)', 'Guest negative experience (5 items)' to evaluate one (1) dependent factors 'Brand equity (7-items). All

items have been derived/adapted from Atwal and Williams (2009); Kayaman and Arasli (2007); Park and Srinivasan (1994) and Kotler and Gertner (2002).

For the current research, 175 survey questionnaires were distributed based on a non-probability convenience sampling technique (Amick & Walberg, 1975). Of these, 147 questionnaires were returned and only 117 questionnaires were found to be useful. A qualitative approach was used, and one to one interviews were conducted with 13 sales/ marketing/ public relations manager and brand managers of the hotels to capture industrial perspective. An open-ended questionnaire was prepared to contain questions related to the importance of brand sustainability, branding strategy of the hotel and performance measure scale in the hotel. The reliability and validity of the instrument was tested by using SPSS applications and questionnaire was given to academic and industry expert for review. Four main questions are listed below;

- *What are the key strategies used in branding the hotel distinctively from competitors?*
- *What methodology is followed to effectively promote the numerous hotel brands and sub-brands?*
- *What are the various challenges encountered while marketing and creating a USP for the brand?*
- *How can a hotel enhance and capitalize its brand sustainability?*

Findings and Discussion

Demographic breakdown of the sample

The demographic breakdown of the sample in Table 1 shows that male respondents (76) were in majority as compared to female respondents (41), with regards to age group, the majority of the respondents were in age group of 30-39 years (93) followed by 40-49 years (17). For nationality, interestingly UK (57) was on top followed by Singapore (22), India (11) and 10 or less than 10 respondents (each country) were from USA, Pakistan, and Australia. More than 100 respondents travelled to Kuala Lumpur for MICE related activities.

Interestingly it was found out that 58.1% of the respondents stayed 2 to 3 times at an average per month and 23% of the respondents stayed 4 to 5 times a month at the various luxury hotels across the city. There were several factor respondents considered before choosing the hotel including loyalty programs offered by luxury hotels was on the top followed by location and meal packages, room tariff rates, quality of service and the brand value of the hotel chain. It was found out that 48.6% of the respondents do not give any feedback regarding their stay in the luxury hotels, 51.4% of the respondents always give their feedback and suggestions for better improvements, which can ornamental their stay experience. For the question regarding brand preference alterations in the occurrence of a negative experience during their stay and the further consequences of shifting to another hotel in the following visits thereafter. The majority of the respondents (52.1%) voted in favour and agreed to a new hotel establishment in case of an unpleasant incident at the previous hotel. This strengthened the belief of guests switching to alternate properties if they are unsatisfied with their stay experience. Where 23.7% of the respondents disagreed with the statement and

reiterated their belief to continue staying in the same hotel despite the drawbacks, due to their affiliated loyalty with the respective brands. Moreover, 24.2 % of respondents remained neutral to the proposed question and did not support either of the statements.

Table 1. Demographics of the study (n=117)

	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	76	64.9%
Female	41	35.1%
Total	117	100%
Age		
Below 30 years	3	2.6%
30-39 years	93	79.5%
40-49 years	17	14.5%
50 years and above	4	3.4%
Total	117	100%
Nationality		
UK	57	48.7%
Singapore	22	18.8%
India	11	9.4%
USA	10	8.6%
Pakistan	8	6.8%
Australia	9	7.7%
Total	117	100%
Purpose of travel and stay		
MICE	103	88.0%
Leisure	12	10.3%
VFR	2	1.7%
Total	117	100%
Duration of stay		
Less than 2 nights	10	8.5%
2 – 3 nights	68	58.1%
4 – 5 nights	27	23.0%
More than 5 nights	12	10.4%
Total	117	100%
Factors affecting guest stay		
Loyalty programs	57	48.7%
Location	22	18.8%
Meal packages	19	16.2%
Room Tariff rates	3	2.6%
Quality of service	11	9.4%
Brand value	5	4.3%
Total	117	100%

Reliability of study variables

Table 2 demonstrates that the overall reliability (internal consistency) of the study as given by a coefficient alpha 0.95, was deemed acceptable (Churchill, 1979; Nunnally, 1978), which suggests that the "measures [were] free from random error and thus reliability coefficients estimate the amount of systematic variance" (Churchill, 1979). Reliability analysis is well known as to test the "degree of consistency between measures of the scale" (Mehrens & Lehman, 1987), when each factor (study variables) such as 'Brand marketing', 'Higher brand awareness', 'Guest negative experience, and 'Brand equity' were examined, it was found to be reliable with coefficient alpha more than 0.70 at aggregate level, cut-off point (Churchill, 1979; Nunnally, 1978). The high alpha values indicate good internal consistency among the items, and the high alpha value for the overall scale indicates that convergent validity was met (Parasuraman, Berry & Zeithaml, 1991).

Table 2. Reliability Analysis

Variables	Cronbach Alpha	Number of Items	Mean
Brand marketing	0.87	7	2.90
Higher brand awareness	0.78	4	3.44
Guest negative experience	0.81	5	3.31
Brand equity	0.92	7	3.01
Total	0.95	23	

Regression Analysis

Since regression analysis is "the technique used to derive an equation that relates the criterion variables to one or more predictor variables; it considers the frequency distribution of the criterion variable, when one or more predictor variables are held fixed at various levels" (Churchill, 1995, p. 887).

Table 3 shows that the regression analysis was analysed having 'Brand equity as the dependent variable and 'Brand marketing', 'Higher brand awareness', 'Guest negative experience' as the independent variables. It was necessary to use the regression analysis for hypothesis testing and the obtained results showed that there was a positive effect with R^2 of 0.719 and F-value of 64.9 at a significance level $p < 0.05$. There is not such autocorrelation as the Durbin-Watson value is 1.94 and variance inflation factor is below 3, which is clearly showing there is no multicollinearity problem. It was found that 'Brand marketing ($\beta = 0.584$)' and 'Higher brand awareness ($\beta = 0.333$) leads to higher equity of hotel, hence hypothesis H1 and H2 are accepted. However, it was found that 'Guest negative experience ($\beta = 0.0.531$)' leads towards lower brand equity of the hotel, thus making Hypothesis H3 accepted. Moreover, all the independent variables jointly explain 72% of the variance (R^2) in the 'Brand equity of the hotel, which is very good. **Table 3. Regression Analysis** (Dependent variable: Brand equity)

Variables	B	t – value	p – value	Hypothesis
Brand marketing	0.584	3.248	0.001	Accepted
Higher brand awareness	0.333	3.698	0.000	Accepted
Guest negative experience	0.531	3.613	0.000	Accepted
Note: $R^2 = 0.719$, F = 64.9, $p < 0.05$				

Findings from Qualitative Approach

The managers at Hilton, PJ and Grand Millennium emphasized more on the contextual analysis undertaken by the luxury hotels in terms of location, latest trends in hospitality industry technological advancements and revenue generated in the previous quarters. These parameters determine the alterations in the branding strategies and the mechanism used to develop them. The strategies that are developed these companies focus on their theme and Unique Selling Point (USP) offerings. At Hilton, PJ, the strategies are driven by their commitment towards environmental sustainability and green initiatives. For Grand Millennium service quality and unmatchable stay and meal experience are the core of strategies. Grand Hyatt maximizes on its décor and ambience while Novotel and Mandarin Oriental tiers on its royal legacy. All the hotels formulate their strategies keeping a competitive advantage in mind and they have been quite successful at it. It has made each luxury hotel achieve an individual segment base that is distinct from their counterparts.

Quantitative approach findings show that majority of customers visited Kuala Lumpur for MICE related activities and they have chosen the hotel as per their loyalty programs, the location of the hotel and meal packages offered.

For Hotel Istana, existing customer base is relatively very high and hence they do not concentrate much on the detailed marketing of the brands but more on the events that take place every day. In addition, all their brands are fairly well recognized in the hotel industry from the luxury to star category. Shangri-La does not have sister entity and has few branches in Malaysia, their marketing efforts are highly concentrated towards their foreign guests. Ritz Carlton uses the marketing value of Marriott International as the parent company and their lineage of luxury service experience offered globally. Marketing for the luxury hotel brand and allied brands can be achieved through innovative means of advertisements on travel websites, online travel agencies, positive word of mouth, and reviews on trip-advisor and through the efforts of the sales and marketing teams. These techniques would create higher marketing of the hotel in the minds of the potential guests. Almost all the managers concluded with same opinions of not experiencing serious challenges as all the brands are already well established in the market. They all have distinct unique selling point (USPs) that highlights their company's policies, be it sustainable environment management, truly unmatched luxury, supreme dining, and entertainment experience or intricate personalization of services. They do experience challenges in maintaining those propositions time to time as the trends in the industry are ever changing and the needs of the customers are highly dynamic and unpredictable. Other common challenges they face pertain to growing number of hotel brands and increasing competition, alternate options amongst the guests to try newer avenues and rising costs of inventory and resources. In researcher's opinion, while creating a USP for a hotel ensures higher brand recall which indirectly leads to higher brand awareness and brand equity in the customer mindset. It must be in relation to the vision and mission of the hotel company and must stand out as a distinctive attribute to uphold the hotel's integrity and guest base always. It was also found out that, for brand managers, the biggest task is to search for innovative ways to enhance this sustainability and retain the existing business repeatedly. Shangri-La, a new entrant on the block is surviving on low occupancy at present but has made a mark for itself steadily. The chain's rankings in World's Top 10 Chains and the largest

room inventory tag have given them sufficient publicity to create a strong foothold in the hotel industry in Kuala Lumpur. The personnel at Istana hotel explicated about capitalizing on brand sustainability through their eco-friendly initiatives, non-negotiable beliefs in community work and the need to provide luxurious services responsibly. This has been their motto to deliver sustainability in all their endeavours. To build a bright sustainable future for all hotels in Kuala Lumpur, seeking solutions on customer requirements' anticipation, strong loyalty programs with multiple redemptions, launching creative measures that attract customer attention and judicious usage of available resources are the key pre-requisites.

Conclusion

Brand preferences, brand equity and brand value of the luxury hotels in Kuala Lumpur will effectively contribute to enhancing the brand sustainability of luxury hotels. Gaining an understanding of these preferences and analysing the drawbacks would lead to the higher growth of these properties and pave way for advanced sustainable operations. Sustainability of a hotel can be increased through higher marketing of the hotel services amongst the target clientele, the creation of a niche Unique Selling Point (USP) to gain a competitive advantage and capitalizing on the existent customer base to ensure higher guest retention. Just like other studies, current research faced time constraint, only six hotels were selected, and few responses were received from an industry perspective. Concerning avenues for future research, the concept of brand management is enormous and there are numerous components, which could be researched upon. The various variables of brand awareness, brand presence, brand essence, and brand architecture are some crucial tools on which further studies could be conducted to analyse their effect on hotels performing better and earning higher revenues. In addition, a study on brand sustainability and brand enhancement could be conducted in luxury hotels across various cities of the country.

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