

Sensory Branding in Hospitality Enterprises— Gearing up for Global Competitiveness

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Abstract

Global competitiveness is the result of globalisation and it lobs a great challenge among all kinds of business organisations especially to Small and Medium Hospitality Enterprises (SMHEs) in the local market. With globalisation, entry and exit of the 'foreign brands' have become easier in the country. In this context, SMHEs have heavy competition from the organisations from foreign countries in the local market. The current study discusses about bringing the concept of sensory marketing which gives insights to the Hotels in building emotional attachments with their customers and also to compete in the globally competitive local market. The inputs have been taken from related research articles and other literature sources. While talking about the need of emotional branding and importance of “senses” in marketing, the research paper explains how they can be used by the hoteliers to connect them with the customers emotionally with the help of sensory branding.

Keywords: Small and Medium Hotels, Global Competitiveness, Sensory Branding, Senses, Emotional Attachment

Introduction

Hospitality industry is a most potential sector in the world recording highest growth rate in terms of income generating, employment generating and others. As the industry is growing rapidly, changes are necessary and are obvious in the running world. The service providers in the industry are increasing day by day. Advancement in technology development, financial ability and intellect of the business people have made the competition tougher. Using these advantages, many of the Foreign Hotel Brands and other large scale hospitality organisations have penetrated into the luxurious global market segments in urban, semi-urban and rural tourism destinations. This has invited a great challenge to the small scale hoteliers which is a question of 'existence' (survival) in the market. In this critical situation, in order to stand in the market, the SMHEs need to get a special and differential identity. Differentiating their services from the competitors, is best way of finding another way to get attached to the target customers.

Local Hotel Brands and Need for Competitiveness in the Market:

The world has become a global village and very small because of the information technology. The boundaries between countries, states have been vanishing with the effect of the advancement in communication system. The information can be passed to any wanted place within

seconds of time with the advancements in technology. With the effect of all the advancement in information technology, the tourism industry has also grown up enormously. So, in this context, the hotels who provide hospitality services to the global tourists, need to prepare themselves for global competitiveness. It is because of the increasing competition in the world market with a great number of brands who have already got established themselves in the world market and penetrated into the market as a result of globalisation. Multi National hotel brands and other large scale hospitality organisations have occupied a comfortable place in the daily lives of luxury class tourists.

Local Small and Medium Scale Hotels and Trepidations:

The large scale hotel organisations have so many advantages in Indian market. They have penetrated into the market with the help of all the financial and technological advantages. The way they promote their products with their intellectuality, value addition to the products, the quality of service system made them very closer (nearer) to the customers. And, they can even extend their investments on marketing research and get to know the perceptions of the customers regarding service, the prices from the target market and all other related things. Even the case of employees, there is always chance for big hotels' owners to take away the employees of small organisations by offering higher amount of salary and better opportunities.

So, SMHEs are in the danger of being extinct and which resulted in huge increase in foreign hotels in India.

The small local hotels, with their limited financial resources and human resource power, do face a great difficulty in convincing their customers to buy their products. Maintenance of the services, comfortable prices, promotional activities, advertising from digital media will surely be a great difficult to maintain. When it is difficult to maintain the above mentioned things, it means that, it is difficult to survive in the market. If we say that it is a question of survival, in order to protect their own existence, the small scale hotels need to think of the ways to stand in the competition.

All the above mentioned difficulties are like a set within the box. Now the time has come for them to think out of the box. It means that their way of marketing themselves should be modified. After this many number of years in the globalised market, even the traditional marketing practices had turned to become old. Branding the business organisation came into the picture when the competition was becoming very tight in the market.

In this juncture, the small scale hotels have a great challenge to face from larger scale hotels in the form of competition. Since the MNCs maintain global standards, in order to stand in the competition with them, the small hotels also need to raise the standards to their level with global competitiveness for their survival in the local market. Most Small and Medium Scale hotels simply cannot afford the expenses in long run in terms of sustained expenses, branding and image building, advertising etc., which only large corporations can fully afford. Small scale hotels must build their brands and market image with effective and consistent direct response marketing programs.

S&M Scale hospitality organisations, even though many of their market levels are restricted to local areas only, they need to grow to the standards of world class business organisations because of the globalisation. The S&M hotels have got a great competition from Large Scale hotels. Unlike multinationals, small hotels do not have enough resources or the access to business research and analysis which will help them to gain insights on business development opportunities. But, small scale hotels do prepare themselves with good business insights to expand their business in this tough economic environment. S&M hotels also know that they need to convert their image as a brand in the market in order to strengthen their competitiveness with global buyers. The beginning of new economic era, the environment in the market has changed drastically; for all kinds of business organisations, brand has gained importance as a tool to dominate the market – be it local, regional, national or international market.

Necessity of Service Differentiation:

The difference between a commodity and a brand is - a brand is an offering from a known source maintaining some standards and differentiated from other products (Philip Kotler, 2009) whereas, a “commodity” is an offering from an unknown source where the product or service is expected just to quench the need of customer and not more than that. Once customers are to decide a product or service to buy, price is the most important thing to them and that will provoke a race among the marketers to dominate one another by reducing the prices. Producers must meet the expected standards of quality with respect to comparatively lowest price to get orders from their buyers. Today many products, unless differentiated, run the risk of turning into commodities.

Relevance of Branding:

Branding is a better approach to product differentiation. It brings insights for the small scale hotels in order to compete with the other business organisations. The word 'branding' is all about “building emotional ties between customers and the product”. But how do the small scale hotels brand their products against the big competitors and how do they differentiate themselves in the market.

When faced with this kind of difficulties, marketing guru Martin Lindstrom (2005) advises the business organisations to look back for the basics of marketing and identify what actually appeals to human beings on an ordinary everyday basis. So, if we can observe the previous sentences, two things will be striking into one's mind i.e., emotional ties and appealing to the human beings on an everyday basis.

The concept of Emotional Branding can be brought into the picture where the business organisation to get connected to the customers in a unique way, thereby it can attain a comfortable and unique place in their hearts. And that becomes a unique way to differentiate their products from their competitors with that special identity. The strength of many small scale hotels is that they belong to the local place where they are marketing their products and services.

Since they belong to the locality, they all know the customs and traditions, culture, life style, habits, needs, requirements, experiences. Above all, as we were discussing about Martin Lindstrom, he observed that: almost our entire understanding of the world is experienced with our senses. These senses are the link to our memory system and can tap right into emotion. A fresh morning in a day has a specific smell to it. The businessmen and manufacturers try to bottle this feeling of life's renewal. After capturing it, they (marketers) use it as an emotional connection to the fresh morning in the spring season and start selling their products.

And following the similar path, taking all things into consideration, including some of the experiences, when they

market their products, the marketers have to serve the customers not only the product or the service, but the experience with it. That experience makes the point.

Involving 5 senses has been worked out successfully connecting people emotionally to the traditions and rituals of faith. Even the 6thsense is given a special place in the pantheon of world religions.

Senses and Introduction:

Victor Anandkumar (2011) had put the significance of each sense in a tabular format. The strengths and potentials have been explained very briefly.

Sense	Significance
Sight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most seductive sense • Often overrules the other senses • Colour plays an important role
Sound	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connected to mood • Only 4% of Fortune 500 brands use sound online • Role of music is important
Smell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evokes memory, alters mood and influences choice • 10,000 times more sensitive than taste • 75 percent of human emotions are generated by scent
Taste	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sweet, salty, sour or bitter • Hard to introduce but highly effective • Develops linkage in the memory
Touch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skin is the largest organ in the body • Alerts us to a sense of well-being or pain • Texture of products and experiences

Courtesy: (Anandkumar, 2008)

The business organisations which belong to the other industries may be wondering how they can go for emotional branding. Almost every industry has the potential and possibility to utilize sensory branding practices- by which they convert every possible touch point and every possible moment in the purchase environment into a branded experience. Even some details which were neglected would become powerful tools. The hotels can also touch the customers with their culture and traditions. If the product can give an identity to the community or to the individual, it can surely be preferred as many times it gives cultural pride to the customer. Along with the tradition, the colour of the clothes, the feeling of touch can also be an additional and unique advantage in the market.

Sensory Branding can really help the organisations to catch the market emotionally. Kahn Consulting describes it as “the purposeful design and deployment of the interaction between the senses in order to stimulate a consumer’s relationship with a brand; and to foster a lasting emotional connection that optimizes brand loyalty”(Annica Isacson, 2009). So, sensory branding is all about “involving or targeting the five senses of the customers with the product and also with the other promotional activities”. By senses we mean five human senses viz., Sight (vision), Small scale hotels, Sound (hearing), Taste and Touch sense. Many business organisations have succeeded in their businesses

with the help of sensory branding, they have earned place in the hearts of the people and they became a part in the daily lives of customers’.

As the importance of all the senses have been discussed very briefly, it will be very important to go a bit deeper into each sense.

Strengths and Potentials of the Senses:

Importance of the Sense of Sight:

The Sense of Sight is found to be the most seductive one and used by almost all of the brands. Visual factors play a crucial role in attracting the attention and impression from the viewer.

That way, the product by its appearance and all kinds of advertisements related to it brings out the visual identity that attracts the customer. If that promotional activity can catch the emotional way, - either by reminding the customer which he is missing for a quite long time or by connecting to the experience which the customer is already attached to, be it childhood, college lives, religious things or other rituals. Rieunier (2000) describes the components of visual factors- colours of the surrounding, materials, lights, layout (space, cleanness) can matter a lot in the business environment(Rieunier, 2000).

“The choice of colours and forms in the conception of a product, the layout of a point of sale, the realisation of promotion campaign are key factors of success (or failure), well understood by marketers”(Valenti, 2008). Sight incorporates fundamental design qualities such as aesthetic appearance and colours. Colour plays a very crucial role in this context.

The colour also makes the difference time to time, person to person and place to place. Using the chosen colours at particular place for a specific product in a specific industry has high chances of attracting the customers there by the global competition can be met.

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Sense of Smell:

Martin Lindstrom continues with his views regarding olfactory strengths. Smell plays a vital part of in our experience. In our daily lives, before drinking the milk, we first sniff it (whether deliberately or unexpectedly) in the refrigerator and sense a slightest indication of smoke, and then act accordingly(Lindstrom, 2005). It is through our sense of smell we choose the fresh food and avoid rotten so that it keeps us safe. The way we choose the fruits in a vegetable market every piece of fruit is picked and selected only after sniffing it for test.

Branding through Scent brings very interesting and significant development. The unique power of scent forges stronger emotional connections and brings distinctive identities. Among all of our senses, the sense of smell is the only one hard-wired to the emotional centre of the brain(Bevolo, 2011).

Smell is a primary and primitive sense. Smell has a strange and shorter path to our brain, by which makes it faster to process, once the actual molecules underlying the smells are converted by the olfactory receptors in the nasal membrane, in the nose. Smell is first processed in the brain when we compare with vision (Uchida, Kepecs & Mainen, 2006). Normally, visual information is processed in a hierarchical fashion from the retina to different parts of the brain.

Furthermore, the sense of smell obviously differs from the other senses in relation to memory. For example, a scientific finding established more than 35 years ago says that the smell stored in memory are often far longer-lasting from everyday behaviour (Engen & Ross, 1973). Most of the people will have an experience that smell and fragrances which will evoke their childhood memories. However, this long term memory for a situation seldom happens in terms of eyesight because visual perception connects to short-term memory.

Sense of Hearing:

We see music every place wherever it is possible these days. It has become very common in all of our lives. People carry music in every possible way especially through electronic gadgets i.e., mobile phones, cassettes, mp3 players, CDs, iPod, iPad, laptops, internet, FM Radio, TV, movies etc. Music has been shared, carried and used with the help of all the above things.

Most of the human beings are making use of music in every part of their life. For every different situations of life, be it the time of depression, happy time, and sad mood - and at different places like discotheques, meditation and yoga centres, eating places, parties and all others and all kinds of people have music is used as it stimulating, soothing, exciting and consoling. We can also find youngsters going to bed for sleeping with the headphones in their ears. Seeing all these, we are sure that the world has given a very important place to music.

Why are all the people giving this much importance to music in their lives? Because, music is a very powerful medium of communication at most of the levels among the living creatures. It is powerful at the level of the social group because it facilitates communication which goes beyond words, enables meanings to be shared, and promotes the development and maintenance of individual, group, cultural and national identities(The Powerful Role of Music in Society (research), 2013). It is powerful at the individual level because it can bring up multiple responses – physiological, movement, mood, emotional, cognitive and behavioural(Ego Edith Nwokenna, 2013)(Nagarjuna & Bushan Sudhakar, 2015). Many other stimuli can affect the human functions in a wide range. The brain's multiple processing of music can make it difficult to predict the particular effects of any piece of music on any individual(Tunajek, 2011).

Keeping this many strengths, music can be effectively used while promoting the products or the business organisation itself. As it has been mentioned as an advantage that Small Scale Hotels have is, the locality and belongingness to the market area. Taking that as an advantage, Sakthi Masala have given advertisement with Bharat Ratna M.S. Subbulakshmi's song “Kuraiondrumillai” by giving an

emotional touch, keeping their culture in the view. And they provide employment opportunities to the differently abled people. When we see the YouTube comments for this song, it will be amazing and the song is considered to be “one of the best songs” in most of their whole life time.

So, most of the people who watched their advertisement, when they hear that particular song, they remember Sakthi Masala more than M.S.Subbulakshmi. Emotional attachment!

Sense of Taste:

The sense of taste can also be used to brand a hotel or any business organisation. In the globally competitive market, taste can play an important role in order to protect their own identity for any organisation. It is because, some tastes are famous only in some areas. By using the famous recipe in a locality, Small and Medium Scale Hotels can make themselves brand by using that taste which makes the local people to be loyal to it because they are already attached to it by culture and nativity. After it has become famous in that area, it can be spread to other nearby areas thereby they expand their brand and get the customers attached to it emotionally. Kumbakonam betel leaves, Saravan Bhavanand other tastes have a great fame in Tamilnadu. By using the local tastes like these or by using specially manufactured recipes by themselves, the hotels and restaurants can have a place in the hearts of the customers as it can compete the large scale business organisations in an effective way.

Sense of Touch:

Researchers have shown that “touch is an important part of our social and emotional lives where both children and adults have an underlying urge to touch products”(Krishna, 2010). The sense of touch has been recognized as influencing customers shopping behaviour as well as their physical interaction with products(McCabe, 2003).Khadi and other handloom products are in need of using this touch sense and other sensory marketing techniques facing difficult situation in India.

Regarding the touch sense, temperature in the selling place, texture and smoothness of the product, weight of the product etc. will surely make the difference. The sense of taste can be used in any way once the Small Scale Hotels get a grip on the culture and other habits of the local area. Touching the human hearts with the sense of touch can bring a place in the lives of the people which, for a global competitor, is not possible to destroy it. That way, global competitiveness can be achieved with the help of sensory marketing in Small Scale Hotels. If this sensory marketing can be adapted, they can gain a special identity among the public, a better market share, there by spread the market and stand firm in the global competition.

Behavioural Intentions:

Pleasure and arousal are the two key things that we can observe as a result of the sensory environment. Pleasure is feeling of enjoyment and happiness or the relief which comes after experiencing something. Arousal is a state of the human situation where his/her desires are awakening.

The delight through the senses triggers the subconscious mind of the customer and will automatically make him/her to choose the service which suits well. The sensory environment helps the customer to spend more time in the environment where the service is being offered. The positive impression on the hospitality environment will make the customers to go for the extra purchases which he/she did not plan to make before they visit the place. The behaviour of the people will automatically change as they start enjoying the place.

The tempo of the music makes the customers to consume according to the speed of the music. As the emotions are drawn through touch of soft materials, furniture, temperature inside the environment, unique scents will make them to think positively, get social interaction, intention to visit the organisation and prefer when they want to visit afterwards. They even suggest their neighbours to visit the brand and they themselves will tend to visit again. The sensory environment can influence on many other behavioural intentions positively only when it can give the pleasure.

Discussion and Conclusion:

In a situation where the Small and Medium Scale hotels cannot compete with the large scale business organisations, one of the better options that is there in front of hotels is to differentiate their products in an emotional way. One of the best ways of differentiating the products is branding. Branding is all about building emotional ties between company and the customers. Senses are the link to our emotions. And branding through senses (Sensory Branding) is relevant for all products and services. As goods and services have become commoditized, the customer experiences that companies create will matter most (BJ Pine, 1998) and in order to create these experiences, sensory branding is essential.

The earlier researches have proved that if a brand appeals to more senses, the message of the brand will be strong and with the same strength consumers connect with that brand more strongly. When the customers get connected to it strongly, it means that they have stronger bonding and that stronger bonding is revealed directly in increased willingness to pay higher prices. And we have seen all the big organisations have been successful with the help of sensory marketing only. So every time business focuses on how their brand looks, have also to check with themselves how it sounds, smell and feels (Victor Anandkumar, 2011).

Sensory branding has many clear benefits to offer the marketers and their brands. Especially the power, strength and potential of each sense have been discussed above, it is clear that there is a possible chance for hotels to protect themselves (and dominate as well) in the market. They provide a greater impact for enhanced interruption and acquisition by longer attention, higher recall and by bringing the product experience into the communications.

Sensory appeal in the product offerings has not yet been defined as essential among even the world's famous companies, nor have they examined the major potential that sensory branding can make the businesses to reap. Through sensory branding is possible to achieve brand awareness in a better manner by offering multi-sensory experience, maintaining consistency, and effective processing in such a way that it can penetrate consumers' memories. Another it can do is generating new customers and more importantly returning and retention of the old customers. These returning customers do make a significant difference; in fact, they are the evidence of an effective and successful sensory branding technique.

As some Small and Medium Scale Hotels have already proved that they can compete in the globally competitive - local market, they can turn out to be a brand by using sensory marketing ideas in order to make them stand in the competition. If we observe Sakthi Masala, the way they projected themselves, the taste of their products and all other promotional activities have taken them to global level.

The problem of identity, existence and rivalry are the main things that are faced by Small and Medium Scale Hotels from global competitors. As the literature says, Small and Medium Scale Hotels have high chances of getting succeeded in business by making the customers connected emotionally with the help of sensory marketing. The unique identity and the special method of marketing can surely get the Small and Medium Scale Hotels or any other business organisation, can always become a crucial one in their success.

By using appropriate colour, design of the organisation and the design of the product, good ambiance in the selling environment, the visual advertisement, visual cues and all the other things related to sight can bring a special identity to the organisation. Associating the product with any particular sound, tune or any other traditional song, and also the type of music in the selling area will surely have a different positive impact on customers. Association of a pleasant smell which is made by the company itself or any other smell which can bring out the childhood memories or other memories which the customers are really missing can surely bring out emotional ties with product. The taste can be used more efficiently with food related things. Even other industry people can also take help from taste and make it closer. The

touch of the product, weather conditions at the selling places, textures, smoothness and other touch related things have a significant ability to stimulate the customers to buy.

Conclusion:

Sensory branding is useful to marketers to develop branding and touchpoint strategies and to strengthen capabilities in such areas as new product and retail space development. The concept of sensory branding has become an important aspect of the way brands will create sensible difference in increasingly competitive markets. Sensory branding holds the key to establish points of differentiation in the global market. After years of bombarding consumers with ads aimed at their eyes and their ears, marketers are focusing more on the nose, the skin and the mouth - with ads that rely on smell, touch and taste to get attention. Many organisations have been totally unaware of their major sensory touchpoint advantages. The companies which incorporate these senses in their products or services will have tremendous fruitful results in terms of increase in the new customers, loyalty of the existing customers, increasing the sales of the business.

However, excessive of usage of colour, lighting, different smells of scents, excessive sound of the music, and uneven taste of the food may result in negative influence on the brand.

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