

Brand Development via Digitalization and Social Media Usage in Hospitality Industry: A Theoretical Perspective

*Sergey Zuikin & **Professor Akın Aksu

*Akdeniz University master student

**Akdeniz University Faculty of Tourism

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Abstract: Branding is known over the time as an activity 'to distinguish the goods of one producer from those of another' (Keller, 2013:30). The word brand finds its origin from the Old Norse 'brandr', which means "to burn". It is clear that in ancient times farmers were concerned with the necessity to mark their cattle in order to identify own. As soon as times have changed, the idea to identify own production and differentiate it from competitors is still in the center of branding activity (Keller, 2013:30). According to the American Marketing Association (AMA) (<https://www.ama.org/topics/branding/> Access date: 21.04.2023), the term 'brand' means a "name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competition".

Keywords: Brand development, digitalization, social media usage

1. Introduction

Branding is known over the time as an activity 'to distinguish the goods of one producer from those of another' (Keller, 2013:30). The word brand finds its origin from the Old Norse 'brandr', which means "to burn". It is clear that in ancient times farmers were concerned with the necessity to mark their cattle in order to identify own. As soon as times have changed, the idea to identify own production and differentiate it from competitors is still in the center of branding activity (Keller, 2013:30). According to the American Marketing Association (AMA) (<https://www.ama.org/topics/branding/> Access date: 21.04.2023), the term 'brand' means a "name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competition".

Therefore, by creating a new product, image, design and name one can create a brand. There are certain elements to a brand, which are sometimes called brand identities, with the primary function in identifying and differentiating a brand. The major elements are brand characters, jingles, names, logos, URLs, symbols, spokespeople, slogans, packages, and signage. It is clear that forming a customer-based brand equity marketers need to select brand elements in order to stimulate brand awareness, encourage building a strong, recognizable and unique brand associations and, therefore, arise positive feelings and associations toward a brand (Keller, 2013:142).

2. Brand and Branding

Konecnik and Gartner (2007: 400) state that a brand can be seen as a 'legal instrument, logo, company, identity system, image, personality, relationship, and/or as adding value'. De Chernatony and McDonald (2011:19) define a successful brand the following way: 'a successful brand has a name, symbol or design (or some combination of these) that identifies the 'product' of an organization as having a sustainable, competitive advantage; for example, Coca-Cola, IBM, Tesco. A successful brand invariably results in superior profit and market performance' (de Chernatony and McDonald, 2011:19).

One of the major characteristics of a brand (not simply a tangible product) is a relationship with a consumer – 'a relationship that is personified either by the company's name or by the brand name on the product itself. IBM,

BMW and Shell are excellent examples of company brand names (de Chernatony and McDonald, 2011:16-17). In the hospitality sector the brand names are Hilton, Marriott, Intercontinental, Accor, to name a few. Obviously, there is an interrelation between two brand concepts in modern science: brand identity and brand equity concept. The word 'equity' in the second concept means a combination of factors (or 'dimensions') which makes up for a brand's value with a customer (Konecnik and Gartner, 2007:403).

Although the literature on brand building is enormous, Back and Parks (2003: 423) define three types of interactions, as Figure 1 shows. According to this classification, the first stage is cognitive and includes strategies associated with perception of the brand by its consumers such as brand image, brand reputation, brand awareness and brand influence. In the second (affective) stage there are relationships that the brand is developing with its customers and it includes brand satisfaction, experiences with the brand, brand trust and brand loyalty. Finally, the third stage, named 'conative', is translated into sales forming direct business value. The stage is being described through a behavioral context and includes interaction, intention, purchase and commitment. According to Back and Parks (2003: 423), the stages of brand building have direct influence on a relationship with customer in the hospitality context. These three stages define types of brand relationships and affect directly and indirectly on brand strategies.

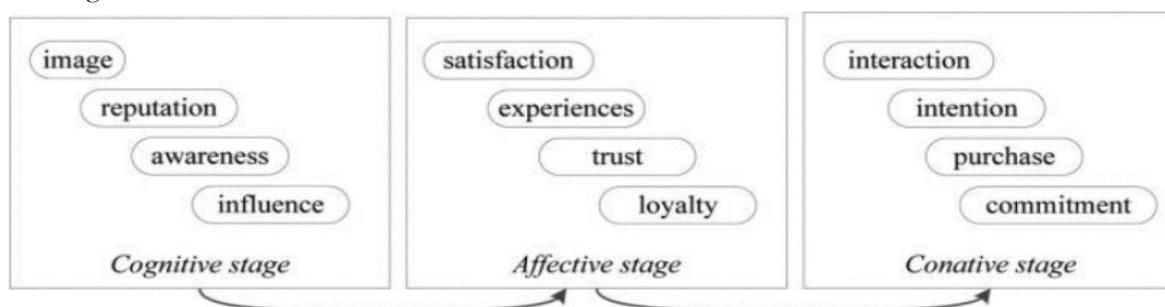


Figure 1 Stages of brand building. Adapted from Back and Parks (2003: 423)

3. Person Brands and Product Brands

In addition to brand elements mentioned before, brand equity could be achieved through related or secondary brand associations. Brands do not exist isolated – unlike that they are linked to other brands or entities which produce certain associations in consumers' minds. Brands can 'borrow' those associations from other brands and entities. According to Keller (2013:260), the variety of secondary brand associations looks as presented in the following diagram. The key element here is the linkage and interrelations between types of brands. As far as it is presented in the picture, various entities can be named and managed as brands such as products, things, places, etc. People can either represent (endorse) brands or become brands themselves.

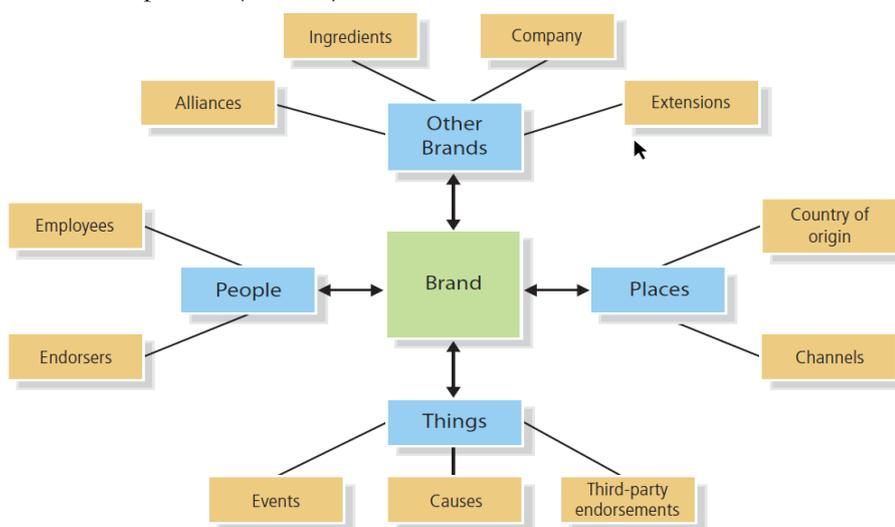


Figure 2 Secondary Sources of Brand Knowledge. Adapted from Keller (2013:260)

The first and the quickest association that comes to consumers' mind while saying 'personal brand' is the celebrity endorsement of a particular product or service. Actors, singers, media stars, politicians, any type of public people represent a product or a brand. According to Keller (2013:279), the major idea behind this activity is that a famous person can attract attention to the brand and form a particular perception of a product or brand through their image associations. Another aspect is that a celebrity has their own fan base which could be valued as potential consumers to the product of brand. To sum up, a person brand is the celebrity with 'high level of visibility and useful associations, judgments and feelings, credible in terms of expertise, trustworthiness, and likability or attractiveness, as well as having specific associations that carry potential product relevance'. Such celebrity can build a strong, 'highly credible person brand' (Keller, 2013:279). With the high level of visibility such celebrity can generate a positive and attractive image which would potentially affect brand equity and form specific associations. Oprah Winfrey, a well-recognized TV host and star, makes one of the most successful and valuable person brands. According to Keller (2013:279), Forbes magazine set an estimated net worth for this star at \$2.7 billion. Having a regular presence on national TV, Oprah Winfrey welcomes 12 million TV viewers in the US daily. Her shows are being aired in 144 countries so the effect of her endorsements grows dramatically as well as her audience. The list of celebrities is enormous and many famous people appreciate their interactions with brands and aim at setting contacts and deals whereas brands seek these contacts also. Based on such successful partnership, celebrities become brands themselves and be used to promote a certain product or product brands, which Keller defines as 'an existing brand that is related to a specific product such as Samsung Galaxy S 4G' or Sennheiser MK4, can be defined as a product brand (Keller, 2013:263).

Celebrities who have established a person brand tend to promote or endorse not only products but hotels, resorts and countries as tourist destinations. For example, Zooey Deschanel promotes a hotel group in especially-designed marketing campaign (<https://skift.com/2023/04/03/choice-hotels-calls-on-zooey-deschanel-to-promote-direct-bookings-in-new-advertising-campaign/> Access date 09.04.2023).

4. Brand identity

Brand identity together with brand image became a critical element for a successful destination brand (Cai, 2002: 270). According to Keller (2013:167) brand identity is a combination of multiple brand elements to brand image and brand awareness. Aaker (1991:70) states that gaining brand identity together with linking it to the product class are the two necessary tasks while achieving brand awareness. However, brand image is defined as 'consumer perceptions of and preferences for a brand, measured by the various types of brand associations held in memory' (Keller, 2013:549). Two concepts look similar; however, the difference exists. Florek et al. (2006:276) focus attention on the perspective used to view the notion. They offer two perspectives defining the view angle: sender's and receiver's. Thus, brand identity is created by the sender and brand image, naturally, is being maintained by the receiver. It becomes clear to define marketers and brand specialists as 'senders' of the 'impulse' whereas consumers become 'receivers' of the 'impulse which creates certain associations in their minds' (Florek et al., 2006:279).

It is necessary to mention that there is a two-way relationship between identity and image. Image plays an important role in creating brand image (Cai, 2002: 270), whereas brand image is a reflection of brand identity (Florek et al., 2006:277). In the case of destination branding a destination image is being created in minds of guests based on brand identity (Qu et al., 2011:467). Keeping this idea in mind, marketers stimulate and build brand identity based on the information and associations that guests have about a particular destination brand. Therefore, it is clear that this is vital to create a positive image which would be well-reputed and recognized. With this purpose they focus on highlighting strong, unique and valuable brand associations. As Qu et al. (2011: 467) mention for customers (or 'receivers') it means forming a specific range of associations based on positive perception of the brand image that suggests benefits of obtaining a product or service from a particular brand. Finally, this becomes a solid foundation for creating a variety of feelings and emotions toward a brand by forming brand unique image that will differentiate it from counterparts (Qu et al., 2011:467).

5. Brand image and associations

Brand image is defined as 'anything that is linked in memory to a brand' (Aaker, 1991:147). It also means customers' impressions of the brand and the reality they perceive (Celikkol, 2020:2479). A positive image created

for the brand enables customers to create awareness about the products and services offered on the market that has reached satisfaction. Brand image forms one of the elements that characterizes a brand focusing on its visual side. According to Aaker (1991:145), 'the features and benefits of the product or service, together with its package and distribution channel, are central to a brand image'. Cretu and Brodie (2007: 230) emphasize the influencing character of a brand image on customers' attitude and its relations and impact with company's reputation as 'brand's image has a more specific influence on the customers' perceptions of product and service quality while the company's reputation has a broader influence on perceptions of customer value and customer loyalty'. A unique image helps brands differentiate their product from rivals while maintaining customer satisfaction focusing on the critical role of a proper image (Hung, 2005:243). Naturally, in hospitality a brand image is being concerned as one of the critical elements. Kandampully and Hu (2007: 436) name image as an 'important factor' for the hospitality industry which has a dramatic effect on the guests' assessment of a destination. Moreover, Shankar et al. (2008: 567) state that nowadays one of the primary concerns for businesses is protecting their brands and invest into forming a strong well-reputable image. Therefore, hotels can benefit by having better chances for a broader market share and sustainable competitive advantage in the business environment which is characterized by a seasonal character of business activity and high competition.

Brand associations affect consumers' vision of the brand, its perception and, therefore, influence on intention to buy a product or service from that brand. Brand associations are the 'other informational nodes linked to the brand node in memory and contain the meaning of the brand for consumers' (Keller, 2013:72). According to Keller's (2013: 423) classification there are following categories of brand associations: common product attributes, benefits, or attitudes; people and relationships; programs and values; and corporate credibility. Attributes are the features which describe a brand. In other words, this is what a consumer thinks of a brand and what it must be according to their vision of a brand. It also includes the features which might be included in the purchasing package. Benefits are the personal value of the brand consumption that consumers associate with brands in the form of experiential, functional and symbolic attachments. In other words, this is what the brand can do for a customer in terms of usability. Finally, 'brand attitudes are customers' overall evaluations of the brand' and a foundation for customer behavior (purchasing intention) (Qu et al., 2011:467).

In terms of destination, Gu and Ryan (2008: 642) argue that brand image is a significant resource. An image can be seen as a starting point of customer's (traveler's) expectations which might convert into decisions and determine them. One of the significant change in the recent time caused by technology development is loss of control over brand image. Having a closer look at the changes one can come to a conclusion that 'it seems that the times in which it was possible to pursue control over the brand image are long gone' (Munar, 2015:26). The impossibility of control from a single hub either by a company or even society becomes a reality. This fact dramatically changes the situation making brand image and associations it causes a result of a 'huge unprecedented platform of communication and interconnection' (Munar, 2015:26).

In the literature related to tourism branding, it is widely accepted that the image of a destination (brand) is affected by affective and cognitive evaluations (Baloglu & Mangalolu, 2001:3). Cognitive evaluations mean information, knowledge and beliefs consumers have about the object. Unlike that, affective evaluations stand for feelings and emotions expressed toward the object. It is important to mention that the majority of researches focused on cognitive evaluations, although some concentrated on both types trying to form overall and complex picture of a brand image (Qu et al., 2011:467). Naturally, it is wise considering both aspects of brand image, cognitive and affective, to construct an effective branding model.

It is widely recognized that each aspect could have its own unique influence and contribution on brand image (Qu et al., 2011:467). According to Keller (2013:342) each evaluation has its impact on brand image but at a different level due to difference in perception by consumers in terms of performance.

6. Brand awareness

Brand awareness is defined as 'the ability for a buyer to recognize or recall that a brand is a member of a certain product category' (Aaker, 1991:61). It has become a crucial component of the brand equity and plays a significant role in Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model (Saeed and Shafique, 2019:1493). As a significant element in CBBE, large brand awareness has enormous impact on customer behavior and affects purchasing intention

heavily (Sürücü et al., 2019:115). San Martin et al. (2018: 15) come up with the definition of brand awareness as a “ticket to enter the market”. With this, it occupies a central position in the theory of customer behavior and management (Barreda et al., 2015:1). Moreover, there is an emphasis on the vitality and importance of brand awareness for the hospitality industry (Martinez and Nishiyama, 2017:9).

It has been proved by various researches that brand awareness has a lot of similarities with brand reputation. Hur et al. (2014:1) performed a study of 867 South Korean customers and found correlation between brand reputation and brand equity. Foroudi (2019:13) conducted a research of 379 hotel guests from the UK which proved positive relationship between brand awareness and brand reputation correspondently. According to Mishra (2019: 5), brand awareness and brand image form core elements of brand equity. Based on these arguments, Qalati et al. (2019:1) conclude that brand awareness has a significant influence upon brand trust.

Aaker (1991:61) argues that ‘brand awareness involves a continuum ranging from an uncertain feeling that the brand is recognized, to a belief that it is the only one in the product class’. At this step, a probable consumer has some general information about the existence of a brand but the connection and attitude to brand is at a low level. A customer might refer to the brand creating associations with a product because they begin to see the value when a customer starts to accumulate large amounts of information about the brand. Advertising, mailing, press releases, WOM and traditional promotion stimulate higher level of awareness in multiple ways (Grover and Srinivasan, 1992: 87). Naturally, the extent of brand awareness reflects in higher possibility of making a purchasing decision. In the hospitality sphere there is a high necessity to make a wide exposure to their products in order to stimulate the formation of a large group of brand-loyal customers with high-level of product consumption possibility (Tepeci, 1999:225). A great variety of places where products could be bought stimulate a repeat purchasing intention turning a single time consumer into a repeat customer with regular consumption history. The example of Holiday Inn is remarkable and demonstrates a dominating position of the brand in the business-travel market in the US.

7. Brand equity

Brand equity can be defined as a value added to a product or service which makes up a brand name (Hsu et al., 2012:357). Overall, there is an agreement among researchers that brand equity is a valuable and significant resource for businesses. Aaker (1991:35) has identified the dimensions of brand equity and Keller (2013:73) found out its sources, created the concepts of brand loyalty, brand awareness and brand associations, perceived quality and brand image which found direct and indirect correlation with brand equity. The relationship between these elements and brand equity was widely evaluated through multiple researches (Boo et al., 2009:224). According to Vazquez et al. (2002: 12) brand equity has a direct impact to company’s continuous profitability and build a solid basis for sustainable competitive advantage. It has been argued that brand equity has an influence on subjective perception and value of a product or service by consumer (Baldauf et al., 2003: 220). Moreover, it increases the value and usability of a brand name (Cobb-Walgreen et al., 1995: 28). The continuous effect is then being spread into building customers’ loyalty, brand choice and influences on decision-making process, i.e. purchasing intention (Jones et al., 2000:267). Bailey and Ball (2006: 18) proved that careful attention to building strong brand equity enables customers form a variety of benefits, emotional and functional, and, therefore, enables creating a strong and positive perception of the brand which subsequently results in favorable customer behavior.

Aaker (1991:27) comes up with the following definition of the brand equity as ‘a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, which add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm’s customers’. Here he identifies five types of brand equity: brand associations, brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality, and other assets. Thus, brand associations are a variety of impressions and details a consumer remembers about the brand while brand awareness makes up an ability of a potential customer to recognize a brand as a certain product category. Brand loyalty stands for the extent at which consumer is ‘attached’ to a brand and perceived quality is a subjective vision of a brand quality in terms of its functionality and in comparison, with counterparts. Finally, other brand assets, also called proprietary due to their business character, include channel relationship, patents and trademarks. Brand loyalty was one of the central elements of the multi-item brand measurement system (‘brand performance measure’) created by de Chernatony et al. (2004: 18) to evaluate consumer-based brand equity. Oh (2000: 61) states that brand awareness is a ‘core dimension’ of brand equity. Brand awareness is consumers’ ability to recognize and portray a clear image of a

brand over time and in continuously changing situations (van Riel et al., 2005:5). Konecnik and Gartner (2007: 403) suggest to use cognitive images to assess brand awareness of service-oriented products in hospitality context. Perceived quality, naturally, stands for opinions and judgments made by customer and evaluating the product in comparison with its counterparts (Netemeyer et al., 2004:210). Another significant element to evaluate brand equity is brand associations. Aaker (1991:233) defines brand associations as ‘anything mentally linked to the brand’. Aaker (1991:233) argues then that ‘an association can affect the processing and recall of information, provide a point of differentiation, provide a reason to buy, create positive attitudes and feelings, and serve as the basis of extensions’. Keller (2013:72) sees brand associations as ‘the other informational nodes linked to the brand node in memory and contain the meaning of the brand for consumers’.

There is an agreement in academia that brand equity is an essential notion in branding and highly interrelated with customer value (Lawer and Knox, 2006:122). The role it plays in contemporary brand theory is enormous (Kay 2006:757). It is clearly understandable because of the ‘customer value-oriented’ character of activity of modern brands (Zhou et al., 2009:1064). Although, there is a limited number of studies investigating the connection and influence that brand equity has upon branding strategies of organizations (Vargo and Lusch, 2004:14).

8. Brand strategies

According to American Marketing Association (<https://www.ama.org/topics/branding/> Access date: 21.04.2023) ‘a brand is a name, term, design, symbol or any other feature that identifies one seller’s goods or service as distinct from those of other sellers’. Branding includes analysis on how a brand is presented on the market, although branding strategy in the hospitality context helps to find out which elements of the brand a business needs to use for its products. Whereas brand management involves the analysis and planning on how a brand is perceived on the market, a branding strategy is defined as identification of ‘which brand elements a company chooses to apply across its various products’ (Moro and Rita, 2016:345). In this particular context digitalization affects dramatically brand elements. With the vast development of internet and new means of communication branding faces dramatic changes with customers who become empowered over managers (Christodoulides, 2009:141).

In changing circumstances branding starts to change its role and gain more significance for the global hospitality industry (Forgacs, 2003:2). Social media (Web 2.0) provides an instrument for customers to participate actively in branding activity and stimulating purchasing behavior. Though there is a variety of brand strategies, literature does not specify particular strategies which could be distinct (Moro and Rita, 2018:345). Kam Fung So and King (2010:605) examined the influence of branding strategies on brand equity and discovered that service experience, that customers have had, was the most affecting factor as a primary element that contributes to brand equity. Below the definitions of several brand strategies from the managerial point are presented.

With the idea to find agreement on interpretation of functions and impact among branding strategies, the explicit attention is given to definitions which circle particular characteristics in their notions. Thus, advertising is described as ‘a paid, mediated form of communication from an identifiable source, designed to persuade the receiver to take some action now or in the future’ (Richards and Curran, 2002:74). Co-branding is defined as pairing two or more branded products of constituent brands to form a separate and unique product composite brand (Park et al., 1996:453). Equity is often seen as “the marketing effects that accrue to a product with its brand name compared with those that would accrue if the same product did not have the brand name” (Ailawadi et al., 2003:1). Innovation is defined as the “aims to convey either direct or indirect experiences to consumers through every interaction of innovative concepts” (Chien, 2013:54).

Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001: 84) describe performance as “evaluated through outcomes such as market share and relative price”. Positioning finds its notion as “occupying a distinct position, relative to competing brands, in the mind of the customer” and brand promotion is being characterized as “creating differences ... helping consumers organize their knowledge about products and services in a way that clarifies their decision making and, in the process, provides value to the firm” (Singh, 2013:31). Finally, Merrilees and Miller (2008: 538) provide the following definition to rebranding as “the disjunction or change between an initially formulated corporate brand and a new formulation”. Understanding definitions helps us identify the commonalities among strategies to treat them from the similar angles.

Obviously, the major focus of the branding strategy is building a successful brand, the process that has been extensively studied, with the emphasis on social media and its influence on the brand construction (Moro et al., 2016:1). Therefore, there is a necessity to identify relevant drivers and channels (social media is one of those) in brand strategies.

9. Effects of Digitalization in Branding

Digitalization in branding started to play a much more significant role with the development and exposure of Web 2.0 – the social web – that benefits from widespread acceptance from visitors. The social web has dramatically changed the nature of the relationship between brands and tourists (Huerta-Alvarez et al., 2020:7). Customers prefer easy access, low-cost and comfortability of communication platforms. The changes are so dramatic that cannot be ignored or disagreed. Nowadays traditional communication media stops dominating in the information sphere (Mangold and Faulds, 2009: 359). On the contrary, social media empowers consumers with the ability to create, post and deliver information, and, therefore, control it. In a business context, social web allows brands to obtain a quicker access to a larger number of potential consumers, and enabling a more active interaction with clientele through social media channels. As a result, there is a great importance of careful and efficient usage of tourist-generated and customer generated communication through the social media channels (Huerta-Alvarez et al., 2020:1).

10. Effects of Social Media in Branding

Digitalization has invaded different spheres of life reconfiguring the basics and giving rise to a new paradigm of relationship between brands and their customers. The emerging significance of social media solutions have formed an instrument for mutual interaction (O'Reilly, 2007:30). On the other hand, the spread of digital means of communication exceeded expectations and nowadays prevail over traditional forms. With the idea to accelerate customer engagement, brands keep up with the latest trends in adopting digital IT technologies in their strategic plans (Tsimonis and Dimitriadis, 2014:337). Surprisingly, with the development of digital online communication solutions, brands are losing and somehow delegating some marketing functions to online communities. Losing control over the reachability of marketing initiatives, brands are being put at the mercy of online user engagement and viral reach (Mangold and Faulds, 2009: 365). Loss of control creates then a marketers' fear toward information spread by users and exchanging through e-word-of-mouth (Kietzmann and Canhoto, 2013:12).

Due to the nature of online activity, researchers focus attention on the shift from individual user to user communities. Davis et al. (2014: 477) evaluated the idea of social media communities for managing brands. They have identified five drivers that brand consumption demonstrates in social media: emotional, functional, self-oriented, relational and social. The study proposes that with demand of experiencing less problems, finding a better solution and services, customers contact brands via social media channels where they can find relevant information, assess the quality of the service before buying it and also access brand's promotional initiatives such as bonuses, giveaways, etc. Having a direct influence on a product design, quality and perception by other potential customers, online community members co-create brand equity and participate in the branding activity. Social interaction and building connections become drivers for a more expanded social brand consumption. According to Moro and Rita (2018:348), consumption relations between brands and consumers are described as a co-creation to services and personalization of a customer-brand interaction.

Usage of social media in the branding context rises certain aspects such as specific motivation that customers have toward consumption activity. For branding professionals, it becomes mandatory to have a presence and managing activity for the brand in social media. These days' strategies for a brand management need to be aligned with the social media activity (Fournier and Avery, 2011:195). Adapting a brand strategy with the social media reality and identifying the latest trends in Web 2.0 development become vital for branding professionals and understanding of it should be widespread and clear. Laroche et al. (2013: 81) argue that 'social media could be a platform for brands to achieve the same desired outcome from their brand community activities; that is having more loyal customers'.

Social media usage and management become now a reality in the business sphere. Consumer–brand relationships are in the focus of attention and brands need to find an effective formula to facilitate this relationship. Social

media plays here a dynamic role enabling large marketing potential that brands can exploit as an asset for managing their brands. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010: 59) define certain categories of social media such as virtual social worlds, collaborative projects, social networking sites, virtual game worlds, blogs and content communities.

Kietzmann et al. (2011: 243) have introduced building blocks of social media in the number of seven as follows: conversations, groups, identity, presence, relationships, reputation and sharing. Users are characterized depending on the extent to which they communicate to each other, which is 'conversations', participate in a community which is 'groups', and reveal themselves which is 'identity'. Furthermore, relating to each other makes up the relationships block and knowing their availability forms the presence whereas awareness of other users' social media position and content form the reputation block and receiving, distributing and exchanging content leads to sharing.

The notion 'community' has been researched for a long time in social sciences. Generally, the term is referred to any group of people without identification of the online or offline status. 'A brand community from a customer-experiential perspective is a fabric of relationships in which the customer is situated. Crucial relationships have typically included those between the customer and the brand, between the customer and the firm, between the customer and the product in use, and among fellow customers' (McAlexander et al., 2002:38). Muniz and O'Guinn (2001:412) provide a definition for a brand community as a 'specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand'. Brand communities play a significant role in forming a tight connection between brands and customers as 'in order to facilitate the creation of social and emotional ties, brand managers seek to create "brand communities" by proactively involving the targeted consumer' (Daldanise, 2020:2). In this sense, virtual communities play a significant role as they form connection through common interests and behavior patterns (Bekin et al., 2007:2).

Furthermore, McAlexander and Schouten (1998:5) state that these relationships assist to create 'consumption subcultures' where members can have similar and authentic needs. Consumption is naturally associated with a brand and the core element here is human affiliation where shared feelings or preferences play a uniting role for its members. For such consumers a brand becomes a common point for their specific interrelationships (Davis et al., 2014: 478). Therefore, several researchers would focus on a 'psychical' connection between consumers in brand communities, which become a union helping its members meet their emotional and non-emotional demands (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2002:17). Such principle is used in forming brand-related communities where brand becomes a central point and also an object of interaction. Famous hotel chains and resorts maintain a brand-oriented interaction promoting belongingness to a brand and forming emotional feedback with followers. Malta, Caribbean, Marriott and Hilton hotel chains have a wide representation over social media platforms encouraging emotional connection to their brands and therefore, having influence on community members.

11. Development of a Brand

Brand development is strongly connected with the process of building a brand logically continuing what is being established. Keller (2013:107) offers four stages of brand development:

1. identity;
2. meaning;
3. response;
4. relationships.

According to Keller (2013:107) the stages of brand development start with the 'identity' of a brand (Who are we?), which is located at the bottom of the chart presenting the initial stage of the process. Afterwards, the diagram goes vertically to the next stage called 'meaning' (What are we?). The following stage is called 'response' (What about you?) and, finally, the diagram finishes with 'relationships' (What about you and me?) on top.

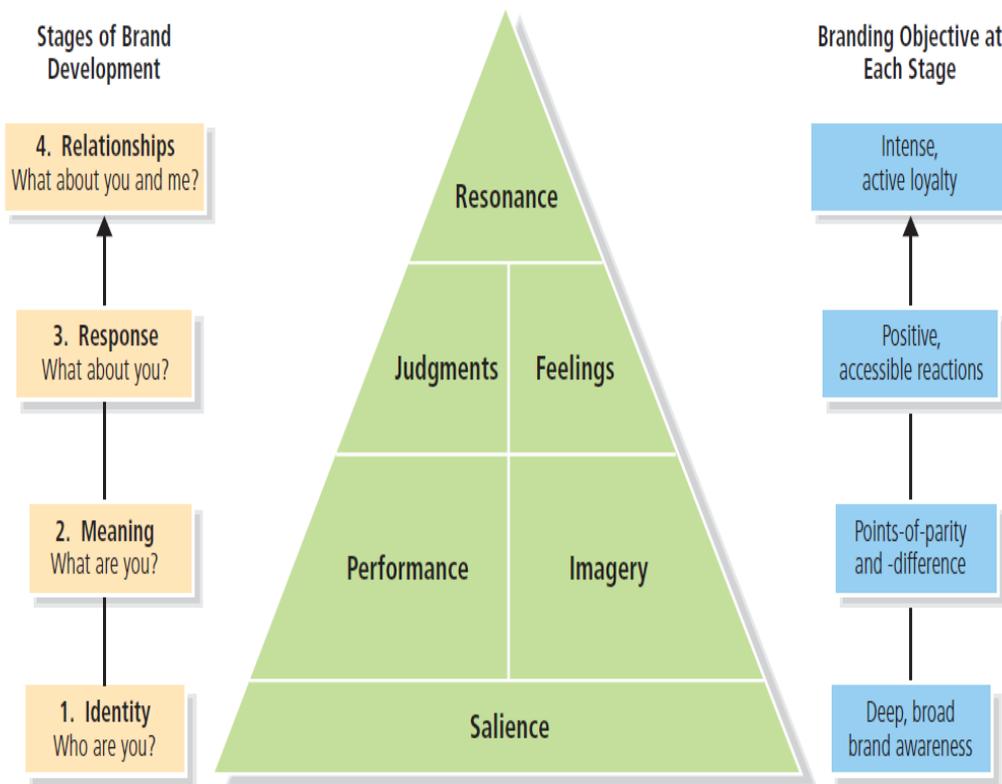


Figure 3 Brand Resonance Pyramid. Adapted from Keller (2013:108)

1. The first stage includes identification of a brand with customers and reflections it produces in customers’ minds and associations with its product; advantages it brings or fulfilling customers’ needs and demands.
2. The second stage is focused around the concept of a brand (brand meaning) it reflects in customers’ minds by linking tangible and non-tangible associations with a brand.
3. Appropriate response to a brand makes the third stage of the diagram.
4. Finally, the fourth stage is made of the conversion of responses into resonance, close relationship a brand has with its customers.

The diagram was named ‘a branding ladder’ because of its upward direction from the ‘meaning’ to building relationship. Each stage should occupy its own space in the logical order of levels they are presented on. In addition, Keller (2013:108) proposes the pyramid consisting of ‘building blocks’ stating that a brand can achieve success only if it reached the top of the pyramid. Figure 3 presents and Figure 4 describes in a more detailed way the meaning of each building block and demonstrate the brand-building process. It is necessary to mention that each stage in the process corresponds to a matching building block and its subdimensions. Building blocks on the left side of the pyramid make a more ‘rational way’ to the brand construction process while right-sided building blocks represent a ‘more emotional route’. Obviously, both ways are of the same significance and a lot of successful brands include both sides of the brand building process.

Each stage in the pyramid is characterized by its objective. Thus, at the initial ‘identity’ stage the major goal is creating a vast awareness of the brand on the market while at the second stage (‘meaning’) the main focus shifts to differentiation and parity. The third (‘response’) stage aims at achieving ‘positive and accessible reactions to fulfil judgements and feelings’. At the final stage, the major focus will be achieving ‘intense and active loyalty’ by maintaining closer relationships with brand customers (Keller, 2013:108).

Christodoulides (2009: 141) emphasizes a broad participation of a customer in each stage and their contributing role, especially for internet brands. This allows brands to handle the brand management process in an easier way by involving customers through creating and generating content that helps companies build a more solid brand (Christodoulides, 2009: 141).



Figure 4 Subdimensions of Brand Building Blocks. Adapted from Keller (2013:108)

Tewary and Mehta (2020: 167) propose an alternative model of brand development adapted for MSMEs (micro, small and medium enterprises) in Figure 5. They put additional emphasis on the role of the owner emphasizing that in SMEs the owner might have various roles (Tewary and Mehta, 2020:167). In such companies owners influence each stage of the brand development and their role is crucial. However, as the business grows, a team of professionals are to be included into brand development process as it lowers the chances for mistakes because of lack of competence and other factors.

With the help of creative marketing and influence from the market, companies are supposed to get involved into brand creation being careful with its name and attributes. Using financial assets through forming appropriate budget and creativity, brands have to invest into sound marketing activities and promotion. This will then reflect in market response, whether a brand can become successful on the market or not, and naturally, the profitability of a brand expressed by volume of sales. Such indicators might then reflect in exiting the policy for weaker brands which then leads to rethinking and redesigning of the whole structure of the company and analyzing the necessity of changes in the organization (Tewary and Mehta, 2020:168).

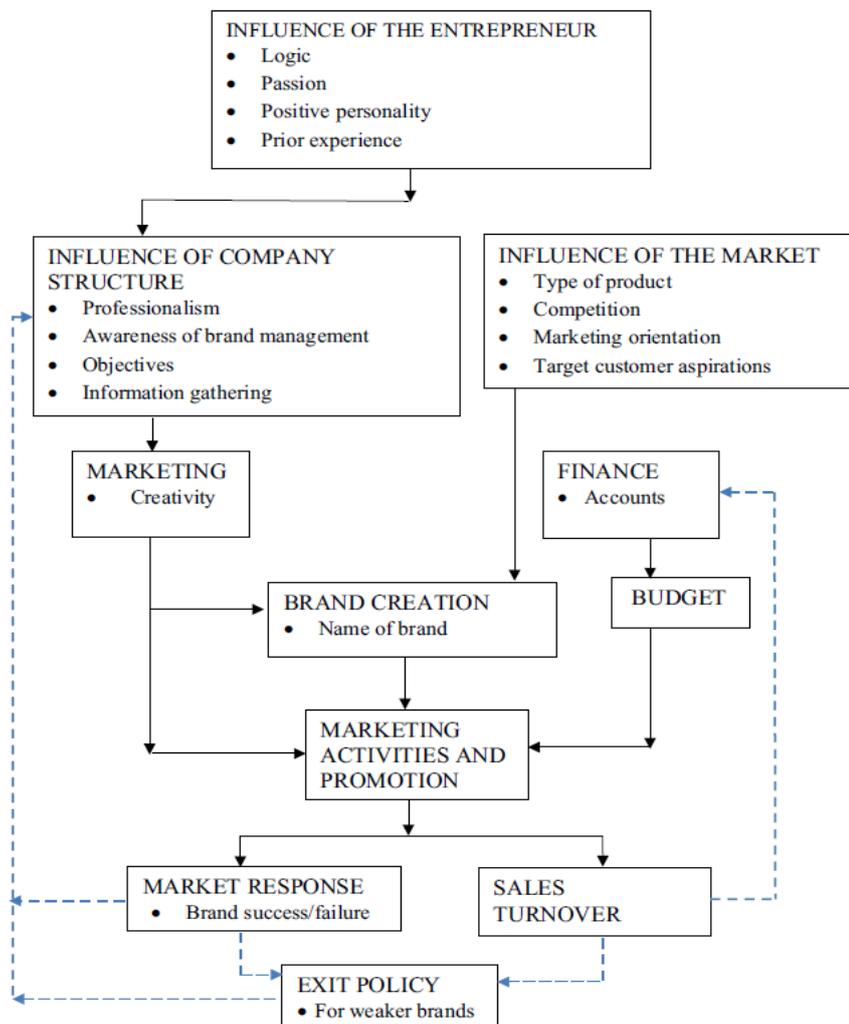


Figure 5 Brand development model for MSMEs. Adapted from Tewary and Mehta (2020: 168)

12. Academic Studies on Brand Development via Digitalization and Social Media Usage

A number of academic studies which enlightened branding and digitalization in conjunction with use of social media in the hospitality industry was given in Table 1.

Table .1 List of academic studies on brand development via digitalization and social media usage

Title	Focus on	Results	Source
‘The role of digital marketing in consumer behaviour: A survey’.	‘...the role of digital marketing plays on consumer behaviour ... in the tourism sector through three dimensions: (1) mobile apps, (2) social media platforms, and (3) electronic word-of-mouth.’; ‘guiding future developments of digital marketing in tourism’.	‘The reviewed literature thoroughly showed the importance of digital communication for tourism competitiveness, eWOM, tourists’ behavior, and their use of social media and mobile applications.’	Alghizzawi (2019)
‘Traditional Marketing	‘...main ways in which	‘Digital technologies can	Pascalau and

Versus Digital Marketing’.	users can be gained and retained through the use of digital marketing’; ‘...role of technologies in monitoring behaviours, analysis of requests, problems, assessment, on the company platforms and social networks.’	monitor behaviours, can analyse the content of requests, problems, assessments, both on the platforms of organizations and on social networks.’	Urziceanu(2020)
‘The influence of social media on the consumers’ hotel decision journey’.	‘...how social media influence consumer behaviour during hotel decision-making’; ‘dimensions of social media and their influence on the ‘Evaluation stage’ of the hotel decision journey’	‘The findings reveal refined dimensions of social media and their influence on the ‘Evaluation stage’ of the hotel decision journey. The findings revealed that the way consumers search hotel information have changes, as social media play an important role influencing their decision-making process.’	Varkaris and Neuhofer (2017)
‘5-star hotel Instagram performance as a Digital Marketing Strategy during the Travelling Restriction’.	‘enhance knowledge and improvement in online digital marketing, especially to increase domestic customers at 5-star luxury hotels in Nusa Dua, Bali, Indonesia’	‘Instagram has significant role in selling and promoting every brand of 5-star luxury hotels in Nusa Dua and its significant improvement following the updated technology progress and customer demand.’	Andriany et al. (2022)
‘Brand communities based in social media: How unique are they? Evidence from two exemplary brand communities’.	‘the social and networked nature of social media it is an ideal environment for brand communities’; ‘...the existence of brand communities on social media’; ‘five unique and relevant dimensions of brand communities’.	‘The article articulates the existence of brand communities on social media.’ ‘...it delineates five unique and relevant dimensions of brand communities based in social media.’	Habibi et al. (2014)
‘Customer-based brand equity and destination visit behaviour in the tourism industry: the contingent role of social media’.	‘the role of customer-based brand equity (CBBE) in relation to the intention to select a destination as a tourist destination with the moderating role of social media among international tourists’	‘The findings revealed that social media moderates the relationship between CBBE and the intention to select a destination.’	Saeed and Shafique(2019)
‘The effect of social media marketing on brand trust and brand loyalty for hotels’.	‘...the effect of social media marketing efforts on brand loyalty and brand trust for hotels, especially on hotels’ own websites’.	‘The results show the positive effects of a clear website, website security, online interactivity and collaboration with other useful websites on brand trust and the effect of brand trust on brand loyalty.’	Tatar and Erdogmus (2016)
‘The Effects of Social Media	‘...benefit factors of	‘...the results indicated that	Al-Msallam and

Marketing In the Hotel Industry: Conceptual Model for Development of an Effective Online Community’.	member participation and the relationships between community participation and brand commitment in hotel online communities.’	four benefit factors (functional, hedonic, social and psychological benefits) positively influenced member's community participation.’	Alhaddad (2016)
‘Strategic Brand Management’.	Brand building and management theory	Overall analysis and structuring of each aspect of brand building and management in a strategic mode.	Keller(2013)
‘The interplay between social media communication, brand equity and brand engagement in tourist destinations: An analysis in an emerging economy’.	‘...analysis of how – and to what extent – social media communication, both controlled and uncontrolled by the destination organization, has an impact on destination brand equity and destination brand engagement.’	‘... social media communication, both controlled and uncontrolled by the destination organization, has an impact on destination brand equity and destination brand engagement.’	Huerta-Álvarez et al.(2020)
‘Social media marketing influence on Boutique Hotel customers’ purchase intention in Malaysia’.	‘...relationship between different social media marketing practices and customers’ purchase intention in Malaysia’s boutique hotels.’	‘...factors including marketing activities and eWOM significantly impact customer purchase intention of the boutique hotels in Malaysia through the mediating variable perceived usefulness and the mediating variable perceived trust.’	Garg and Kumar(2021)
‘The Impact of Social Media Marketing Medium Toward Purchase Intention and Brand Loyalty Among Generation Y’.	‘study the impact of social media marketing medium toward brand loyalty and purchase intention in Generation Y.’	‘...online marketing communications, specifically, EWOM, online communities and online advertisement are effective in promoting brand loyalty and product purchase intention through company website and social media platforms.’	Balakrishnan et al.(2014)
‘Inside your social media ring: How to optimize online corporate reputation’.	‘...studying the impact of social media communication strategies on firms’ reputations ...in the hotel industry.’ ‘...insights regarding the challenges of developing online communication strategies that affect corporate reputation.’	‘The results offer insights regarding the challenges of developing online communication strategies that affect corporate reputation.’	Floreddu et al.(2014)
‘The potential of social media for luxury brand management’.	‘...the marketing potential of social media for luxury brand management.’	‘...understanding of the dynamic roles user-generated content and social media play in the formation and maintenance of the	Jin(2012)

		emerging consumer-brand-consumer triad culture.’	
‘Content, context and co-creation: Digital challenges in destination branding with references to Portugal as a tourist destination’.	‘...content analysis to identify and understand the way tourists and travellers perceive the country as a tourist destination’.	‘The findings highlight the tourist/traveller as an opinion maker with access to a plethora of information communication technologies to act as co-creators of brands.’	Oliveira and Panyik (2015)
‘Digitalization: A Strategic Approach for Development of Tourism Industry in India’.	‘factors that propel tourism industry to opt for digitalization and establish a hierarchical relationship among them’; ‘how digitalization impacts various stakeholders in tourism industry’	‘...customer demand for digitalization, growing essence of sharing economy and presence of social media are important contributors to the enhancement of digitalization in tourism industry.’	Kumar and Shekhar (2020)

13. Conclusion

'Digitalization' and 'social media now become more than just technological innovations but significant factors which have a value creation function, play important role in brand construction in business and in the hospitality sector particularly, and have an impact on brand building and brand management. Digital tools are used more actively in brand construction process and building a strong brand awareness and loyalty

Modern times, latest technological inventions, global spread of Internet and virtual reality give an incredible chance for brands to reach their clientele, dominate the market and build a strong brand image and loyalty with their audience.

Posting and sharing demonstrate that visitors, who are encouraged to interact, are actively involved into co-creation of value for a particular brand. Logically the benefit is that tourism organizations can establish their online presence on social media platforms and interact with their audience at a very little cost. The final goal for any tourist company is to meet their visitors' expectations before, during and after a visit, to fulfil their experiences, and encourage them to share those with potential visitors (e.g. by supporting travel bloggers and travel journalists) and therefore, to enable a more efficient destination brand management with a higher level of visitor involvement (co-creation of value). A successful tourist brand nowadays is being characterized by a broad customer involvement into value creation and exposing their influence upon customers globally. In other words, tourists' virtual experience, supported by online facilities, enhances the strength of a brand through solid online presence and stimulates formation of their loyalty to the brand.

The majority of researches marked the shift that was caused by digitalization and social media as one of its dimensions from 'abstract forms of brand communication to close and personal interaction' (Davis et al., 2014: 477). On the other hand, consumers received a tool that identifies a 'person behind the brand', enabling to personalize tangibility of a brand and create a feeling of participation. Moreover, social media revolutionized the business context enabling brands connecting to customers directly.

Brands received a platform via which their contact to customers becomes easy and cheap. With the vast development and wide spread of social media consumers become co-creators of brand equity and play a significant role in brand building. In the hospitality context, tourists and travelers can use their ideas, feelings and preferences and influence the brand and its elements. Not only tourism industry has dramatically changed its nature of the relationship between brands and customers.

We have also summarized knowledge on the phenomenon 'social media' and studied its implementation in the brand-building context. We are convinced that online communities as a central element in the framework of relationships between brands and consumers play a crucial role in attracting customers and enabling communication between customers and brands. The idea of common character of branding in social media was shared throughout the text.

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