

Which Type of Brand Image is Important for Building Brand Trust? A Case Study on Starbucks

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ABSTRACT

To highlight the importance of brand image and enrich the limited study of brand trust, this paper primarily was aimed to investigate the influence of brand image on brand trust among customers of a global service brand. Data were collected from 230 Starbucks Thailand's customers, aged between 18 to 40 years old, through an online survey. The results of multiple regression analysis demonstrated that the functional image, symbolic image, and experiential image could predict the significance of brand trust ($R^2 = 0.586$). Among the three types, the experiential image had the highest influence on brand trust among Thai Starbucks' s customers ($\beta = 0.476$). Taken together, the findings suggest a role for brand image in promoting brand trust. The findings will be of interest to marketers, especially for service brands.

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Introduction

Businesses strive to build a strong brand in the marketplace because it enables the establishment of a wide range of organizational benefits (Assael, 2004). Furthermore, brand image and brand trust are frequently mentioned in marketing literature because they are becoming increasingly essential in creating brand equity, which can give competitive advantages to a brand (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020).

Brand image is the mental image inside consumers' mind, including the assigned meanings related to specific attributes of the products and services of brands (Cretu & Brodie, 2007; Padgett & Allen, 1997). Brand image is also considered as an accumulation of idea, rational assumption, and emotional value that consumers subjectively perceive a specific

brand to be (Assael, 2004). Brand image is a major area of interest within the field branding and marketing (Malhotra, 2010). It can be divided into three types: functional image, symbolic image, and experiential image (Hankinson, 2005).

For brand trust, it is a degree of tendency to believe that a brand would perform a promised function (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Brand trust is also a consumer's belief whether a brand would make an effort to meet their expectation (Cakmak, 2016). Trust is considered as the keystone and among most desired brand assets. However, little attention has been paid to brand trust (Delgado-Ballester, Yagüe, & Munuera-Alemán, 2003). The relationship between brand image and brand trust can play an effective role in improving the behavioral tendencies of consumers (Deheshti, Firouzjah, & Alimohammadi, 2016). Thus, to fill

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the research gap and to confirm the relationship between the two variables, this paper primarily attempted to investigate the influence of brand image on brand trust, specifically which type of brand image (functional image, symbolic image, and experiential image) has the greatest effect on brand trust.

Not only product brands that need to build brand image and brand trust, service brands should take brand image and brand trust into account. Starbucks, an iconic international coffee house chain, has endeavored to keep the same global standard to build their brand. Starbucks's brand elements and brand messages are consistently presented across channels. With its strength as a brand, Starbucks is a good candidate to study, especially in Thailand where coffee consumption is about 300 cups per person in a year, and Starbucks is still one of the top brands when consumers think about drinking coffee (Jitpleecheep & Hicks, 2019). Starbucks's first coffeehouse was opened in July 1998. Starbucks has expanded to 409 retail locations across Thailand; 221 stores are located in Bangkok (The Random Volume, 2019).

Considering the importance of brand image, inadequacy of brand trust research, and the booming of Starbucks at global and national level, this research aimed to study the influence of brand image on brand trust from Thai Starbucks customers' perspectives. The findings will be of interest to marketers, especially for service brands. The findings should also make an important contribution to the field of branding and marketing by increasing research on brand trust and highlight the importance of brand image.

Literature Review

Brand Image

Brand image has been discussed in marketing literatures for a long time (Cho, Fiore, & Russell, 2015). Brand image is an important element of brands, distinguishing a brand from other brands (Aaker, 1996; Kapferer, 1997). It also defines characteristics of a company's products and services (Cretu & Brodie, 2007; Padgett & Allen, 1997). Brand image is considered as an accumulation of idea, rational assumption and emotional value consumers subjectively perceive a specific brand to be (Assael, 2004; Malhotra, 2010). It helps consumers tell the difference between brands offered in a market. To put it simply, brand image is an overall perception of consumers toward a brand. Thus, brand image can have an influence on consumers to act in a certain way toward the service or product (Keller, 1993).

According to Hankinson (2005), brand image in tourism industry has three categories: functional, symbolic images, and experiential images. As shown in Table 1, Park's (1986) proposed that brand image has three types based on a long-term framework of a consumer's needs. There are three different needs during the process of consumers' brand selection, which are functional needs, symbolic needs, and experiential needs. Functional needs are seen as a consumer's motivation of searching products for fixing the problems related to their consumption. Symbolic needs are defined as the desires for products to fulfill a role of social approval such as, self-enhancement, role position, group membership, or self-identity. The last needs involve experience which is defined as desires for products to offer sensory pleasure, different responses, and cognitive activities.

Table 1 Types of Brand Image

Authors	Functional Image	Symbolic Image	Experiential Image	Brand Attitude
Park (1986)	Satisfaction of functional benefit	Satisfaction of symbolic benefit	Satisfaction of experience benefit	-
Keller (1998)	Functional benefit	Symbolic benefit	Experience benefit	A universal brand evaluation

Source: Hankinson, G. (2005) Destination brand images: A business tourism perspective, *Journal of Service Marketing*, 19(1), p. 25.

According to Keller's (1993) model, each category of brand image is based on benefits that a consumer thinks of what a brand can do for them. It is a consumer's personal value that connect with attributes of a product or service (Ergin, Ozdemir, & Ozsacmaci, 2006). Keller (1993) explained that these categories can be seen as three parts based on the motivations to which they relate, (1) functional benefits, (2) experiential benefits, and (3) symbolic benefits. Functional benefits are often related to product-related attributes, these benefits are the intrinsic advantages of a product or service consumption. Additionally, these functional benefits are sometimes related to basic motivations, such as safety needs and physiological needs (Maslow, Honigmann, & Mead, 1970), and desires to get rid of and avoid the problems. Experiential benefits refer to how consumers experience when using the product or service, and how these benefits meet the wants of experiential pleasure. The last facet is symbolic benefits, it's external advantages for consumption of product or service, and often related to non-product-related attributes. Brand attitude, however, is an overall evaluation toward a brand (Hankinson, 2005).

Drawing upon the existing literature, this study focused on three types of brand image, which are functional, symbolic, and experiential image. Whereas functional image shows tangible features of products or service, symbolic image represents intangible features, such as a consumer's self-expression or self-esteem. In terms of experiential image, it exhibits sensory experiential pleasure during product or service consumption (Janonis & Virvilaitè, 2007).

Brand Trust

Trust is one of the concepts that has gained much attention from academics in different fields. Trust is important in managing positive interpersonal relationships. It is the keystone and one of the most desired qualities in a relationship (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003). Trust is also important in many settings such as in organizational context; trust is the core strategic asset to get through the restructuring crisis (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Thus, trust is viewed as a go-between for people to interact with each other (Berscheid, 1994).

In terms of brand context, trust is also viewed as the most important attribute a brand can own (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003) and a factor that can affect consumers' relationships with a brand (E. Kim, S. Kim, & Lee, 2019). Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) considered

brand trust as a degree of tendency to believe in a certain brand's ability to perform a promised function. This definition is also in line with the definition of trust in previous research (Andaleeb, 1992; Doney & Cannon, 1997). Cakmak (2016) also defined brand trust as a brand's ability, capability, and capacity to access the needs of consumers, to take care of the customers' benefits, and to solve problems or any difficulties for customers.

Thus, brand trust is based on a consumer's belief that a certain brand has particular characteristics that make it consistent, qualified, truthful, and responsible. Therefore, when consumers have trust in a certain brand, repetitive buying behavior is most likely to occur, consumers' commitment is likely, leading to good relationship between a brand and consumers (Chinomona & Maziriri, 2017). Furthermore, brand trust is the only factor that can shape positive behaviors such as intentions to purchase and positive word of mouth (Lau & Lee, 1999). Thus, when a brand facing a certain degree of crisis or any unexpected situations, consumers that have trust in that brand still believe that it is able to perform effectively and reliably and has good intentions for the customer's best interests (Doney & Cannon, 1997).

Drawing upon research on brand trust developed by Delgado-Ballester et al. (2003), brand trust is viewed as a two-dimensional model. The first dimension of brand trust is brand reliability. Brand reliability is a sense of predictability that a brand consistently complies with consumers' demands in a positive way. Brand reliability has also viewed as a technical or competence-based quality, including the ability and willingness to keep brand promise and meet consumers' needs and wants (Andaleeb, 1992; Doney & Cannon, 1997). In other words, brand reliability involves consumers' perception that the brand fulfills or meets the consumers' demands. Hence, it is vital to gain trust from consumers because it shows how much consumers have confidence in that and how much a brand can fulfill their promises (L. Liu, Lee, R. Liu, & Chen, 2018).

The second dimension of brand trust is brand intentions. It is consumers' belief that a brand would focus on consumers' interests when unpredictable situations with the product or service consumption occur. As a result, it shows a consumer's view that a brand's actions are guided or motivated by good and positive intentions for the consumer's well-being and interests. (Andaleeb, 1992). In other words, brand intentions are a brand's good intentions

and sincere interests for the consumers' welfare to gain mutual benefits, even when unexpected problems with the product happen (Doney & Cannon, 1997).

As a result, a trustworthy brand is a brand that can continually deliver its promised values to consumers, even when facing crisis situations. (Jung, S. Kim, & S. Kim, 2014). According to a study from Deheshti et al. (2016), there was a significant relationship between brand image (suitability, services, brand, variety, quality, and atmosphere) and brand trust, and brand image could also predict the significance of brand trust among the buyers of foreign sports brands. On top of that, atmosphere and services had the highest influence on brand trust. As such, it is hypothesized that the three types of brand image, functional image, symbolic image, and experiential image have a positive influence on brand trust. However, since Starbucks is a service brand, atmosphere and services should be apparent, which can be viewed as experiential image. Hence, it is also expected that the experiential image will have the highest effect on brand trust.

Methodology

A quantitative approach was employed to investigate the influence of brand image on brand trust. An online survey was conducted with Thai Starbucks customers, focusing on the age gap of 18-40 years because they are the main target of Starbucks (Duncza, 2021). A total of 230 responses were collected and eligible for further analysis (Bujang & Baharum, 2016). Purposive sampling was employed to recruit the eligible participants; they must follow Starbucks Thailand Facebook page at least for the past six months, so that they would have enough experience with the page. They must also have purchased Starbucks' drink or merchandises for the past three months, so that they would be able to recall their memory about Starbucks.

In terms of measures, a total of 12 statements with five-pointed Likert scale were adopted from Wu and Wang (2014) to measure brand image. A slight adjustment was made for suitability. Functional image measures how Starbucks can help consumers solve their problems and meet their needs. Symbolic image looks at how Starbucks can satisfy consumers' inner desires such as enhancing self-value, social status, self-recognition. Experiential image measures whether Starbucks can satisfy consumers' experiential pleasures or not. The initial scale presented the reliability alphas of .83.

For brand trust, an eight-item, five-point

Likert scale, based on Delgado-Ballester et al. (2003), was employed. It looked at how much confidence consumers have in Starbucks through two dimensions: reliability and intentions. The initial scale presented the reliability alphas of .83.

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement, ranging from highly disagree (1) to highly agree (5). Although this study adopted previous validated scales, an additional testing for reliability was performed to ensure the measurement quality.

Findings

Among 230 Starbucks Thailand's customers, 25.7% of them were aged between 18 and 25 years old, 48.6% were 23-33 years old, and 25.7% were 34-40 years old. The majority of them were staying in Bangkok.

Before performing the regression analysis, the data were subject to a multi-collinearity diagnosis. The results indicated that the residual mean was 0.11, the Tolerance value of each type of brand image was greater than 0.1 (functional image = 0.611, symbolic image = 0.706, experiential image = 0.651) and the variance inflation factor (VIF) value was less than 10 (functional image = 1.636, symbolic image = 1.417, experiential image = 1.537). In addition, the condition index of each type of brand image was lower than 30. Thus, there was no sign of collinearity (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010).

The results of Pearson's test for testing the overall correlation between brand image and brand trust showed a significantly positive relationship between brand image and brand trust ($r = 0.73$). The results of Pearson's test for examining the relationship between each type of brand image and brand trust represented that the three types of brand image had a significantly positive relationship with brand trust (see Table 2).

In order to investigate the influence of brand image on brand trust, a multiple regression analysis with simultaneous entry method was employed. The results of the analysis showed that there was a high, significant correlation between brand image types and brand trust ($R = 0.766, p < 0.001$). The results also demonstrated that the functional, symbolic, and experiential images could predict the significance of brand trust among Starbucks' Thai consumers ($R^2 = 0.586$), suggesting that consumers with an increased brand image are more likely to trust in Starbucks. In addition, among the three types, experiential image had the highest effect on brand trust, lending a support for our hypothesis (see Table 3).

Table 2 Correlation of Brand Image and Its Types with Brand Trust

Variables/Types of Brand Image	Brand Trust
Brand Image	.73**
Functional Image	.63**
Symbolic Image	.49**
Experiential Image	.70**

Note: **Correlation is significant at $p < .01$

Based on the multiple regression analysis depicted in Table 3, the regression equation of brand trust, considering the predictor variables of brand image is as follows:

$$\text{Brand Trust} = 0.27 + 0.476 (\text{experiential image}) + 0.296 (\text{functional image}) + 0.134 (\text{symbolic image})$$

Table 3 Multiple Regression Analysis of Brand Image Types on Brand Trust

Types of Brand Image	Coefficients					Collinearity Statistics		
	<i>b</i>	β	S.E. <i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Tolerance	VIF	α
Functional Image	0.313	0.296	0.058	5.414	.000	0.611	1.636	.82
Symbolic Image	0.104	0.134	0.039	2.628	.009	0.706	1.417	8.9
Experiential Image	0.503	0.476	0.056	8.967	.000	0.651	1.537	8.9
Constant (a)	0.270	-	0.223	1.212	.227	-	-	-

$$R = 0.766 \quad R^2 = 0.586 \quad \text{Adjusted } R^2 = 0.581 \quad S.E. = 0.330 \quad F = 106.714 \quad df = 3 \quad \text{Sig} = .00$$

Discussion and Conclusion

The current study aimed at investigating the prediction of brand trust based on brand image types. The findings revealed that functional image, symbolic image, and experiential image altogether had a moderately high effect on brand trust. In other words, the three types of brand image can predict brand trust. In addition, among the three types of brand image, experiential image had the highest effect on brand trust. A plausible explanation could be that Starbucks is a service brand that really focusing on building good experience for its customers. So, Starbucks has put much effort into creating a good customer experience, especially when their customers are in the shops. Not only the variety of its products, the in-store

service of Starbucks also satisfies their customers. Starbucks is famous for building relationship and interaction with customers through its baristas. Greeting customers and writing their names are Starbucks' tradition which can be seen regularly inside its shops (Miner, 2019). Starbucks's misspelling customers' name also became the talk of the town. With a series of relaxing music, dim lighting, coffee scent, noise and scent from coffee grinding, Starbucks shop's ambience can also make their customers enjoy while drinking their coffee. In addition, Starbucks has positioned itself as the third place where it offers the feeling of connection and belonging wherever its customers experience (Starbucks, 2022). All of these elements combined together can provide a good experiential image of

Starbucks in the consumers' mind. Hence, when consumers have a positive mental image of Starbucks and perceive that they get pleasure and benefits, especially experiential benefits out of Starbucks, they are more likely to trust in Starbucks.

The findings support the notion that if consumers have positive perceptions toward a brand, they are more likely to build trust in that brand (Liu et al., 2018). The findings support the work of Deheshti et al. (2016), and Liao, Chung, and Widowati (2009), indicating that brand image had a significant positive effect on brand trust. Despite the different type of brand image, this study is consistent with a study of Roets, Bevan-Dye, and Viljoen (2014), indicating that social image had a significant positive influence on brand trust. In a similar vein, this study confirmed the important of brand image in building brand trust, which in turn can enhance brand loyalty (Chang, 2020).

Despite its significant effect, the symbolic image had the lowest effect on brand trust. One plausible explanation could be because of Starbucks is a café brand. Thus, compared to product brands such as iPhone (smartphone) or Channel (high-end bags), a café has less symbolic value to offer to customers. In other words, a café can reflect consumer's self-identity or social status less than iPhone, which is considered as a sign of wealth (Miller, 2018).

As a side note, although the descriptive findings showed that Starbucks' brand image and brand trust among middle aged Thai customers was both favorable ($M = 4.11$), there is a room for improvement to achieve a more favorable level of brand image in order to increase more trust. Particularly, the customers perceived that Starbucks is sometimes disappointing, and they showed a sign of unsure whether they could rely on Starbucks to solve their consumption problems.

Limitations and Future Research

This study collected data from Starbucks customers, so the level of their loyalty may have an effect on the findings; future research should take this into account. This study focused only on the age range of the respondents. Although previous studies showed that other demographic characteristics such as gender and education level had less effect on brand trust (Upamannya, Bhakar, & Gupta, 2015), future research should include other demographic information for a more detailed profile of the respondents. This study also focused on a limited geographical area and one service brand, so the results should be viewed as a foundation, or to complement another research.

Lastly, the findings of this study suggested that other factors that can affect brand trust such as brand reputation should be further tested. Also, further investigation on the significance of brand trust in relation to consumer-brand relationship is suggested.

Research Implications

This study adds to the literature on the field of branding and marketing by increasing research on brand trust and linking brand image with brand trust. The empirical findings in this study provide a confirmation that brand image has an effect on brand trust, yielding an increased support for prior studies.

In terms of practical implications, the overall findings suggest that brand image is important in building brand trust. Thus, a service brand, restaurants and cafés in particular, should design its marketing communication strategy to enhance its brand image, in terms of experiential image, functional image, and symbolic image. To do that, a service brand should create good customer experience by offering appealing and enjoyable environment, providing excellent services, and delivering a wide range of products that can serve customers' needs in daily life. To enhance the functional image, a service brand should provide product appearance and packaging that meet consumers' needs. Also, keep maintain and developing product quality is suggested. Lastly, to increase the symbolic image, a service brand should develop products that are on trend and suit customers' lifestyle, while putting an effort into building itself to be a leading brand.

Based on the descriptive results, the customers perceived that Starbucks is sometimes disappointing, and they showed a sign of unsure whether they could rely on Starbucks to solve their consumption problems. Thus, Starbucks Thailand should take these two issues into account. Starbucks Thailand should focus on delivering efficient service and product quality. Starbucks should be more concerned about the customer's problems by asking if they need any help or offering compensation in some way when customers have problems during the product consumption. This will increase more trust in Starbucks Thailand.

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