

BRAND IMAGE BENEFITS AND SATISFACTION: ROLES OF SYMBOLIC, FUNCTIONAL, SOCIAL, AND EXPERIENTIAL BENEFITS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to examine the effects of brand image benefits of symbolic, functional, social, and experiential on the overall satisfaction. A survey using 400 respondents is used to measure these effects. The theoretical and statistical relationships among these constructs are developed and verified by Smart Partial least square (PLS) statistical software. Results show that symbolic, experiential, and functional benefits are significant predictor of overall satisfaction, with experiential benefits as the most important followed by functional benefits. This study provides important implications on marketing and brand positioning.

Keywords: Symbolic, Functional, Social, Experiential, Brand Image, Satisfaction, Golf

Introduction

As the years progressed, brands have climbed and down the golf evolved way of life, some determined by development and innovation, others by progress on the expert and professional tours, or inventive promoting programs. Main concern, there is no single equation for mark achievement in golf products and brands. The formula comprises of numerous various components, all shaping the texture and surface of the brand's picture and character. All forming the fabric and texture of the brand's image and identity. The notion of brand image benefits has become one of the most important topics in the marketing literature (Wu, 2011; Aaker, 2013; Pinner, 2014; Zhang, 2015; Bhasin, 2016). For the consumers, many are becoming increasingly aware of the availability

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of brand image benefits, and some are even willing to pay more for them. The image that a brand conveys also associated with a measurement of success (Zhang, 2015). For that reason, many managers are relying and employing the brand image as a strategic feature in their promotional campaigns to gain better advantages over competitors (Chiu, Lin, Hsu, and Chen, 2011).

The present study builds on the concept of brand image and examines the relationships between brand image benefits and satisfaction. Majority of studies point out that a trusted and recognised brand image offer confidence and satisfaction for customers to use the products and services. Indeed, many successful brands continuously putting great efforts in building strong brand name, so that the brand could be represented consistently (Chen, *et al.*, 2011; Egan, 2014).

However, despite the interest of branding in sports (Alexanderis *et al.*, 2008; Bauer *et al.*, 2008; Pons & Richelieu, 2011) majority of the existing works on sports branding mainly focused on brand image from the contexts of sporting events, sponsorship, or media (Bodet & Chanavat, 2010). On the contrary, less has been paid to examine the role of brand image benefits from the context of specific type of sports. Specifically, we noticed that from the extensive review of marketing literature, little has been done to examine the perception of golfers towards brand image benefits and golfers' assessment of satisfaction. According to recent report by Bizjournal (2017), the global golfing market has been experiencing exponential growth over the years, and the industry is forecasted to continue growing for the next five years (Bizjournal, 2017). In light of this void, the main purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of brand image benefits (i.e., symbolic, functional, social, and experiential) on customer satisfaction towards golf brands (e.g., Titleist, Taylor Made, Callaway, Ping, and Nike). The specific objectives are twofold: (1) to examine the influence of symbolic, functional, social, and experiential benefits on the overall satisfaction; and (2) to identify which of the brand image benefits contribute the most towards enhancing customer satisfaction.

This study offers two key contributions. First, the study empirically integrates the dimensions of brand image benefits and satisfaction towards the golf brands. Second, the study proposes and tested the four specific brand image benefits (i.e., symbolic, functional, social, and experiential benefits). Some important managerial and practical implications on how to improve the brand image and satisfaction are discussed. Finally, we provide useful insights and information regarding the specific brand image benefits that brand owners and other industry leaders need to consider when devising a strategy to enhance consumers' satisfaction towards the branding of golf products.

Literature Review

Brand image has become widely accepted as an important marketing issue for every organization (Oliver, 1997; Keller, 2013), and it is used as a point of reference for customer satisfaction and company performance (Bennett & Rundle-Thiele, 2004; Schultz, 2005). The intangible values that associated with the brand image have become a significant feature and crucial asset for product differentiation and positioning strategy (Zhang, 2015). The character and symbolic value of a brand is portrayed by its image that also conveys as intrinsic component in the scheme of things. The notion of satisfaction, on the other hand reflects the emotional assessment of customer about the service and product (Oliver, 1997). The extant studies assert that both brand image and customer satisfaction are positively correlated and critically important to influence the direction of customers' decision-making and organizations' strategy of product positioning.

Brand Image and Customer Satisfaction

Brand image can be defined as “perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory” (Keller, 1993, p.3). Similarly, Bhasin (2016) point-out that a brand image is an impression or an imprint of the brand developed over a period of time in the consumer's mindset. The concept of brand image play integral role as it is an accumulation of beliefs

and views about that particular brand. Nevertheless, according to Na et al., (1999), “image cannot be measured by attribute measurements alone but must include measurements of consumers’ perceptions of the value and benefits attainable from using the brand” (p. 171). This showed the significance of inspecting the impact of image construct benefits in light of functional, experiential, and symbolic elements. Previously, Keller (1993) described that this image benefits can be classified into functional, experiential and symbolic benefits, which was originally derived from the work of Park *et al.*, (1986).

Satisfaction refers to customer’s evaluation of products and services after purchase as opposed to their expectation (Oliver, 1997). Conversely, Woodruff (1997, p. 143) asserts that satisfaction entails “customer’s feeling in response to evaluations of one or more use experiences with a product”. In similar view, Anderson, Fornell, and Lehmann (1994) describe satisfaction as “an overall evaluation based on the total purchase and consumption experience with a good or service over time” (p. 54). Most notably, the degree of satisfaction has been suggested to play a vital role on multitude of consumers’ behavioral. For instance, Yu (2007) indicates that satisfaction positively correlated with customer repurchase intention and company image and reputation. In another similar study, satisfaction has also been suggested to influence consumers’ perception of loyalty dispositions (Chandrashekar *et al.*, 2007).

Hypotheses Development

The golf market is an emerging segment in the tourism industry. Majority of marketing literature describes golfers’ as a unique type of consumers; whereby majority of golf players is often identified to be critical towards product values and satisfaction. However, Petrick and Backman (2002) argue that the current measures of perceived value may be inappropriate and suggested for different theoretical explication to better understand golfers satisfaction and intentions of repurchase.

According to Carpenter and Fairhurst (2005), there are two types of benefits (i.e., utilitarian and hedonic benefits) that highly desired by consumers when making retail branded purchasing. The authors suggest that both utilitarian and hedonic benefits have a positive effect on customer satisfaction. In another related study, Chiu *et al.* (2011) further assert that it is critical to implement appropriate branding management on both functional and hedonic attributes in order to enhance competitiveness. However, several studies attempting to determine the influence of image on satisfaction have produced inconclusive findings (Bloemer, de Ruyter & Peeters, 1998; Palacio *et al.*, 2002). Most probably because of the empirical support for the relationship between brands image in general and satisfaction are mixed for retail and services industry. In fact, how consumers react to experiences with the brand, both positive and negative, depend on how they become related to the brand in the first place (Aggrawal & Lerrick, 2012). For the present study, we posit that golfers perception towards golf brands are influenced by multitude of brands attributes. For instance, particular brand names may help to alleviate golfers standard and status, whereas there are also those who simply purchased or trusted a particular brand because of practicality. Specifically, we postulate that the brand image benefits of symbolic, functional, social, and experiential have direct and positive influence on golfers emotional assessment of satisfaction. From the preceding discussion, the present study puts forward the following hypotheses:

H1: *Symbolic image benefits positively influence perceived satisfaction*

H2: *Functional image benefits positively influence perceived satisfaction*

H3: *Social image benefits positively influence perceived satisfaction*

H4: *Experiential image benefits positively influence perceived satisfaction*

Methodology

The survey approach is employed for present study. We designed and distributed the questionnaires to test our hypotheses and understand the relationships between the constructs. This procedure allows us to empirically test the fitness of our proposed conceptual model.

Sample

The sampling procedure followed Hair *et al.* (2006) suggestion. The sampling frames for the study were golfers who reside in West of Malaysia. Data were collected from five (5) regional areas, and each region that we selected must meet the requirement of having at least one golf club membership with 18-hole course. Kota Kinabalu represents the North region, Sandakan and Tawau represents the East region, Keningau and Labuan represent the South region. Following Hair *et al.* (2006) recommendations, and taking into account the 20 measurement items that we employed in present study; the total sample size was set at 400 respondents.

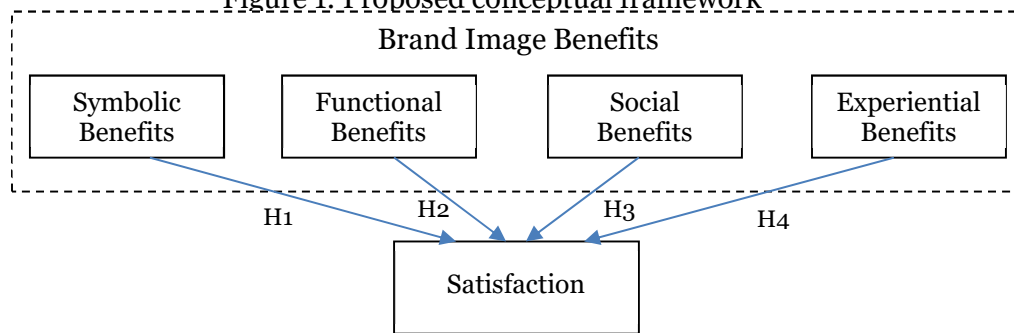
Measures

This study identifies the relationship between brand image benefits and customer satisfaction. The main theory underpinning the theoretical framework of the proposed study consist the brand image benefits (Keller, 1993) and satisfaction (Oliver, 1999). The hypothesis testing approach is selected as the research design. The survey questionnaire is used for data collection. By using the 5-point Likert-type scales (1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree), the present study used a combination of measurements items from Tsai (2005); Park *et al.* (1986); Sweeney and Soutar (2001); Grace and O’Cass (2005); Oliver (1999); Taylor and Baker (1994) to scrutinize this construct (refer to Table 1). Statistical methods (e.g., Partial least square (PLS) are employed respectively to examine the research hypotheses. The proposed conceptual framework of this study is depicted in Figure 1.

Table 1: Proposed questionnaire items:

No.	Construct	No. of Item	Sources
1	Symbolic Benefits	4	Tsai (2005).
2	Functional benefits	5	Park <i>et al.</i> (1986); Sweeney & Soutar (2001).
3	Social Benefits	3	Sweeney & Soutar (2001)
4	Experiential Benefits	3	
5	Overall Satisfaction	5	Grace & O’Cass (2005); Oliver (1980); Taylor & Baker (1994)

Figure 1: Proposed conceptual framework



Analysis & Results

The study used Smart PLS 2.0 software package to analyze the data and for testing the research hypotheses. Because of the study proposed conceptual model that contains several constructs, employing the Smart PLS offers better results as it capable to examine model with small sample size, non-normal data, and also to ensure data convergence. The procedure of analyzing data through the PLS approach was implemented in two sections of measurement model and the hypotheses testing.

Profile of Respondents

A total of 400 respondents participated in the study (see Table 2). Based on the responses collected, 89% of respondents were male, and the remaining 14.1% were female. Majority of the respondents were from high-income bracket, with more than 70% of our respondents earning RM5000 and above per month. The majority of our respondents worked in the private sector, which accounted for 44% of the sample. As for selection and favourite brand of golf clubs, the 'Callaway' has the highest number of preferred choice by golfers with 24%. The remaining brands are 'Taylor Made' (20%), Adidas (20%), Titleist (18%), PING (4%), Adams (6%), Cleveland (4%), and Cobra (4%).

Table 2: Profile of Respondents (n = 400)

Profile	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
• Male	344	86.00
• Female	56	14.00
Monthly income		
• RM1000 - 5000	72	18.00
• RM5001-10000	200	50.00
• RM10001-15000	104	26.00
• RM15001-20000 above	24	6.00
Occupation		
• Self-employed	32	8.00
• Private Sector	176	44.00
• Government Sector	192	40.00
Favourite golf brands		
• Callaway	96	24.00
• Taylor Made	80	20.00
• Adidas	80	20.00
• Titleist	72	18.00
• Adam	24	6.00
• PING	16	4.00
• Cobra	16	4.00
• Cleveland	16	4.00

Measurement Model Assessment

To evaluate the fitness of the measurement model, this study employed reliability and validity test. To assess construct reliability, this study used three sets criteria of factor loading, cronbach alpha, and composite reliability (CR). We first examined the factor loadings between the latent variables and their respective indicators. The results in Table 3 shows that all the items has greater loadings than 0.4 (Hulland, 1999) or 0.5 (Hair *et al.*, 2010), confirming sufficient item reliability of our model.

The internal consistency was evaluated by calculating the cronbach alpha and composite reliability (CR), with cut-off value of 0.7 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair *et al.*, 2010). Based on the

results (Table 4), all the cronbach alpha and CR values were greater than 0.7, indicating sufficient internal consistency. The adequacy of measurement model was measured using the convergent and discriminant validity. Based on the results in Table 4, the analysis shows that the average variance extracted (AVE) values are greater than 0.5, confirming the adequate convergent validity. Similarly, as presented in Table 5, the squared correlations for each construct are less than the AVE by the indicators measuring that construct indicating sufficient discriminant validity.

Table 3: Factor loadings

Construct	Symbolic Benefits (SB)	Functional Benefits (FB)	Social Benefits (SBB)	Experiential Benefits (EB)	Overall Satisfaction (OS)
SB1	0.8369	0.1357	0.2515	0.5235	0.2987
SB3	0.7191	0.5724	0.1333	0.3729	0.3466
SB4	0.6757	0.2689	0.6222	0.4113	0.2952
FB1,		0.8405	0.4535	0.5739	0.4804
FB2		0.8964	0.1866	0.1996	0.1846
FB3		0.9189	0.3255	0.2264	0.3044
FB4		0.7828	0.2998	0.1282	0.3603
SBB1			0.8917	0.4174	0.3577
SBB2			0.8299	0.4592	0.3780
SBB3			0.8198	0.2397	0.3583
EB1				0.9355	0.4610
EB2				0.7996	0.5687
EB3				0.8528	0.6220
OS1					0.9447
OS2					0.9124
OS3					0.9447
OS4					0.8860
OS5					0.8752

*Bold values are loadings for items which are above the recommended value of 0.5

Table 4: Internal Consistency and Convergent Validity

Constructs	No. of items	Communality	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Symbolic Benefits (SB)	3	0.558	0.699	0.789	0.655
Functional Benefits (FB)	4	0.741	0.886	0.919	0.741
Social Benefits (SBB)	3	0.718	0.803	0.884	0.718
Experiential Benefits (EB)	3	0.747	0.832	0.898	0.747
Overall Satisfaction (OS)	5	0.833	0.950	0.961	0.833

Table 5: Discriminant Validity

First-order Constructs	SB	FB	SBB	EB	OS
Symbolic Benefits (SB)	0.655				
Functional Benefits (FB)	0.307**	0.741			
Social Benefits (SBB)	0.429**	0.436**	0.718		
Experiential Benefits (EB)	0.523**	0.326**	0.446**	0.747	
Overall Satisfaction (OS)	0.228**	0.378**	0.381**	0.826**	0.833

**Correlation is significant at 0.01 (2-tailed)

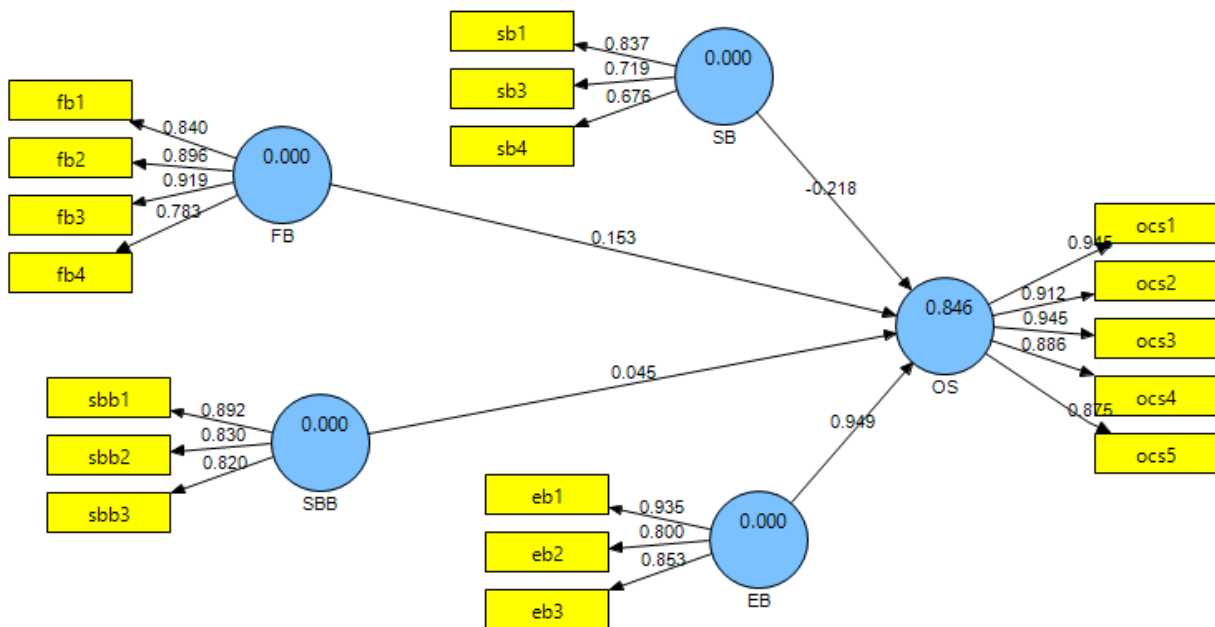
Hypotheses Testing

Table 6 presents the results of the hypothesis testing. The R² value was 0.846 suggesting that 84.6% of variance for satisfaction can be explained by symbolic, functional, social and experiential benefits. A closer look suggests that experiential benefits were positively related ($\beta = 0.949$, $p = 0.01$) to extent of satisfaction, and the same positive result was also found for functional benefits ($\beta = 0.153$, $p = 0.01$). Interestingly, symbolic benefits ($\beta = -0.218$, $p = 0.01$) were negatively related with satisfaction, whereas social benefits were not significant (see Figure 2 for path correlation analysis). Generally, H1, H2, and H4 of our study were supported whereas H3 was not. Most notably, the present study found that experiential benefits were the most significant predictor of satisfaction.

Table 6: Path coefficients and hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Coefficient	t-value	Supported
H1	Symbolic Benefits → Overall Satisfaction	-0.218	9.443	YES***
H2	Functional Benefits → Overall Satisfaction	0.153	7.377	YES***
H3	Social Benefits → Overall Satisfaction	0.046	2.115	NO
H4	Experiential Benefits → Overall Satisfaction	0.949	40.329	YES***

Figure 2: Results of the path analysis



Discussion

From the results of our analysis, the findings suggest that symbolic, functional, and experiential benefits are significant determinant of golfers sense of satisfaction. These results corroborate with earlier findings by Reynolds and Beatty (1999), Bergstrom (2012), and Priilaid and Rensburg (2010). In order to satisfy golf customers, managers should focus on improving customers' perceived functional and symbolic benefits (Chiu *et al.*, 2010). Firms should consider making the most of customer perceived experiential and symbolic benefits as part of the marketing elements and develop their competitive advantage to improve market share, sales, profit, and brand image

(Chiu *et al.*, 2011). On the same note, customers are also satisfied when he or she perceived having high functional benefits (Reynolds & Beatty, 1999).

The second finding from the study demonstrates that experiential benefits are the most significant predictor towards satisfaction. Experiential benefits refer to intangible characteristics such as how the brand makes you feel delighted and confidence. Through experiences, consumers are invited to get to know a brand via their senses. These unmistakable encounters can make more grounded bonds amongst individuals and items or products, as individuals can communicate with a brand genuiny and frame a positive supposition of it. Furthermore, experiential benefits in sports marketing are mostly emotional responses such as joy, pride and anger (Gladden & Funk, 2002; Ross, 2006). This, in turn, impacts positively on affective and behavioral attitudes. This finding is consistent with the concept postulated by Pinner (2014) that experiential, as part of an integrated communications strategy, can be a tangible way to build and deepen customer relationships. Additionally, if brands create valuable experiences, they will directly or indirectly affect the customers' satisfaction and loyalty (Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2009). A product or brand that creates value or extraordinary experience for customers becomes a loyalty enabling brand (Yoo & Bai, 2013).

Interestingly, our path correlation analysis indicates that symbolic benefits negatively influence golfers' sense of satisfaction. The result may suggest that for majority of reputable brands, the names itself would imply the essence of symbolic; thus, mitigating the needs for any of these well-known brands to be used for improving one's status. However, this effect may not be replicable when consumers' relation with a brand is based on price and value. Moreover, the result may also due to our respondents who do not see symbolic as an important element as image builder among community of golfers. In addition, when customers were approached with deference and pride, the individuals who had common associations with the brand reacted well, potentially in light of the fact that it consoled purchasers about the idea of their relationship with the brand

Conclusion & Future Research

The findings offer additional support to the importance of brand image benefits and highlight the power of branding in this prestigious product category. Critically, a great brand reduces a buyer's perception of risk and makes the purchase decision easier (Bullock, 2016). A brand instils confidence, creates satisfaction and can enable the business to command a premium price. As a result, the process of building a reputed brand image and attracting new customers remains an important task for the marketing managers in any organization. Nonetheless, this research investigated the proposed model for a single brand category (*i.e.*, golf brands). It is recommended that future researchers examine the model for other product and service categories. At the moment, challenges faced by the sports market are rising interest in fantasy games, seasonality of the game, and availability of counterfeit products. We posit that these scenario may introduce significant impact in the future towards brand and customer satisfaction.

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