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Editorial

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Biographical notes: Kamal Ghose is a Senior Lecturer in Marketing (Brand Management) and Proctor for Lincoln University, New Zealand. His research focus is in the area of international brand management and customer experience. He served in marketing, logistics and brand management roles in Steel Authority of India Ltd. before joining Institute of Management Technology (IMT), Ghaziabad (India) as Professor (Marketing) and Chairperson, Management Development Programme. He was the Head of Schools, Business, Travel and Tourism, Otago Polytechnic, New Zealand and Head of Business School, University of South Australia (Whyalla Campus). He is a National Executive Committee Member for the India–New Zealand Business Council.

Positioning a brand effectively leads to establish a brand image in the minds and hearts of customers. The roots of effective positioning lie in brand identity, representing a vision of how the brand would be perceived by its target audience (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000). It clarifies what the brand aspires to stand for.

With the rapid strides taken by the digital world, deep pockets traditionally required for integrated marketing communication to ensure positioning are no longer essential, though they do help. The goal posts are shifting and a significantly different level playing field is being created, levelling brands big and small. A lot depends on the target market's familiarity and access to an interactive, multi-media capable mobile virtual world. With such changes round the corner, brand positioning focus is now on Total Customer Experience (TCE) which has been defined as 'the user's interpretation of his or her total interaction with the brand' (Ghose, 2007). This is backed by 'customer-speak' with the traditional 'word of mouth' being replaced by the virtual 'word of mouse' (WOM) in the e-media. We have seen time and again that a single click of the mouse is sufficient to start a snowball 'Facebook' effect resulting in a dent to the brand image. On the other hand, positive WOM has the power to create brand salience and reinforce the brand's winning path. Brand values in the leisure industry can help in providing easy pathways for such digital WOM. Customers tend to look for leisure industry providers providing the 'best' experience and overall value for money. Business to customer brands should reinforce values that tend to create both rational and emotional customer experiences which start with identification of TCE elements. To do this, brands need to explore the 'Customer Corridor' and identify 'Customer Priority Areas' (CPAs) within this corridor. Brand value is reinforced when 'value-laden' interaction points are identified and constantly improved upon. This Kaizen-like organisational learning system improves TCE and keeps the brand consistently in the area of customer delight.

Understanding what market segments expect from their brands is another pillar for reinforcing brand values in the leisure industry. Does the brand have enough 'salience' to influence top-of-the-mind awareness and thus engage the target market segment during their decision-making process? To increase the likelihood of positive WOM, brands must simultaneously work on strengthening their Internal Brand Equity. This ensures that the brand experience provides customer delight and creates loyal customer advocates. Meyer and Schwager (2007) quote research done by Bain & Company which shows that only 8% of customers described their experience as 'superior', suggesting a big gap between the perception of the companies and their customers.

Customer Priority Areas are the key motivators compelling customers to behave as they do and social networking sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn give marketing researchers a revealing insight into such motivators. This is the new marketing philosophy that will guide brand values and help in creating sustainable competitive positioning. Brands that successfully identify the dynamic CPAs of each market segment, innovate process and products to consistently deliver on these CPAs raise the bar.

In the rapidly changing leisure industry, aligning CPAs, brand values and customer experience depends on the willingness, capability and motivation of knowledge workers. Organisational cultures that value employees and treat them as assets rather than merely as costs ensure profitable return on investments (ROI) and increased employee commitment (Pfeffer, 1998). Hosmer (2007) notes that treating employees as valued ends, rather than merely as means to organisational ends, is a vital element for effective and ethical management in organisations. 'Today branding is entering a new period where it engages not just customers and employees but all members of the enterprise of which it is a part' (Hatch and Schultz, 2008).

Reinforcing proactive brand values is based on the profit potential of market segments and all investment decisions must first consider this aspect. The five research papers in this issue come with a interesting and highly relevant variety of flavours. The first paper on wellness tourism is by Bertsch, Schobersberger, Blank and Ostermann and takes the reader through the wellness quality criteria and wellness cooperation brands. The authors explore the rapidly growing wellness industry and analyse the quality criteria of the wellness cooperation brands. They define high-level wellness in Ardell's (1977) terms as consisting of 'self-responsibility, nutritional awareness, physical fitness, stress management and environmental sensitivity'. The aim of their research was to 'investigate the differences between potential wellness guest groups regarding the importance of the quality criteria of wellness cooperation brands'. They make the reader aware of the risk of oversupply and poor quality of wellness hotels.

The second paper on destination image and destination brand by Otway, Chitan and Cornwall is a study of Grenada as a tourism destination. Tourism plays a vital role in this small country and the authors have used the adapted 7P's of tourism marketing (Rajagopal, 2011) to develop a competitive advantage. They conclude that destination branding 'is crucial because this is what differentiates one destination from another' and confirm that 'functional variables cannot be ignored if tourism is to increase its share of Grenada's GDP'.

Market orientation and business performance in the hotel industry in Germany is the focus of the third paper by Tajeddini, Remy and Pardo. Using Slater and Narver's (1994) scale of market orientation, the authors conclude that there are three subset dimensions of market orientation influence, profit goal achievement, ROI achievement and market share

achievement. The authors highlight the direct relationship between market orientation and performance which is consistent with prior research.

The next paper by Won, Park, Lee and Chung investigates motivational and constraining factors that affect participants in charity sports events involving a low-intense physical activity. Involving 247 participants in three MS Walk events, authors conclude that the most important motive is to support the cause, followed by socialising, enjoying sports and getting benefits. They suggest that market segmentation should be based on demographic characteristics.

The fifth paper by Arteaga and Medina is based in Mexico and explores the impact of service quality on customer satisfaction and repeat purchase attributes in the hotel industry. The authors have used the example of the Intercontinental Hotels Group to argue that customer loyalty can be achieved by a meticulous understanding of customer expectations and defining strategies to meet the expectations by continuously evaluating their performance.

We hope that the collection of papers in this issue of the journal would contribute to the existing literature on leisure and tourism marketing and provide directions for future research on the subject. This anthology of papers would drive thoughtful managerial implications in leisure and tourism activities around global destinations. The papers published in this issue demonstrate that leisure and tourism research has diversified scholarship.

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