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Experiential Brand Deployment: Improving Tourism Brand Evaluations

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the use of an experiential branding process to help leisure resort businesses evaluate their brand. We integrate experiential marketing and the quality function development (QFD) approach in combination to help understand the brand from the perspectives of both the consumer and firm, to help resort service businesses build their experience-oriented competitive brands. The value of this study is that it provides a real-world brand framework, especially those resorts with limited resources. Much is spoken about the influence of the brand and why it is important, but little is known about decisions related to developing a brand, especially for firms that have limited resources such as resort tourism operators. Tourism operators tend to be small-to-medium enterprises that do not necessarily have the capacity to do everything suggested. Therefore, we explore how firms assess the critical elements of their brand by using an integrated approach. For example, the study finds that: firstly, by using the QFD method resorts can identify the most critical brand elements; and secondly, we identify the associated strengths of each brand element and confirm the identified resort's critical brand elements for investment. Results show the potential strategies to create a more holistic set of experiences.

KEYWORDS: *experiential marketing; branding; service business; quality function development; resorts*

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I. Introduction

Firms have come to the realization that branding is more than just a business buzzword; instead, branding associated with products and services has become the crux of selling in today's more sophisticated consumer economy (Balmer, 2001; Ind, 2001; Balmer and Gray, 2003). To consumers, a brand can serve several functions, such as identifying the product source, assigning responsibility to manufacturers, reducing risk, and signaling quality (Keller, 2003; Herrmann et al., 2007). To firms, a brand represents a valuable piece of legal property, capable of influencing consumer behavior and providing the security of sustained future revenues (Keller, 2003). Firms can use intangible assets, such as a brand, to achieve long-term growth strategic goals. Consequently, the evaluation of what impact a brand has on customers and the firm has become a more important and more scientific process.

Brands are primarily used as identifiers, which include elements such as brand name, URLs, logos, symbols, characters, spokespeople, slogans, jingles, packages, and signage (Keller, 2003). However, this basic viewpoint of branding misses the very essence of a brand as a rich source of sensory, affective, and cognitive associations that result in memorable and rewarding brand experiences (Schmitt, 1999a, p.57). Pine and Gilmore (1998) suggested the benefit of staging experiences by the progression of economic value: commodities, goods, services and experiences. According to Pine and Gilmore (1998), firms should use the principles of staging experiences in order to build learning relationships with customers that can enhance their ability to retain their customers. At the same time, they also argue that leading-edge firms will find competitive advantage within

staging experiences. Schmitt (1999b) argues that, compared to traditional marketing, experiential marketing views consumers as rational and emotional human beings who care about functional features as well as pleasurable experiences. Thus, branding is a sum of customers' experiences with the firm's product, and a brand transmits experiences in every interaction with customers (Hogan, Almquist, and Glynn, 2005). As a result, firms are able to map their customers' experiences into brand-building programs (Topalian, 2003).

Branding is not only for products such as tangible goods but is also a principal success driver for service organizations (Berry, 2000; Debra and O'Cass, 2005; Rahman and Areni, 2010). Branding plays an important role in service firms, as strong brands increase customers' trust of the intangibles they purchase (Berry, 2000). De Chernatony and Segal-horn (2001) highlight that there is much literature published on the differences between goods and services, yet there are few contributions on how to establish a service brand. He and Balmer (2006) state: "corporate brand management and formation is still an emerging field of inquiry" (p. 246). Previous studies typically provide conceptual models for corporate brand building, but there is still little empirical work on brand building that enables a company to successfully engage in corporate brand management, particularly in service markets (He and Balmer, 2006; Konx and Bickerton, 2003; Urde, 2003). For example, previous studies on tourism (destination) branding generally focus on the destination image as opposed to brand development or building (Hosany, Ekinici and Uysal, Jetter and Chen, 2011).

Brand building elements such as product quality, providing customer service online, employee behavior, and community relations have been shown to be critical (Hogan,

Almquist, and Glynn, 2005). However, establishing the order of priority for brand elements is a challenge. Mizuno and Akao (1993) introduced the quality function development (QFD) in Japan in the late 1960s and this later spread to America and Europe in 1983. QFD has become the comprehensive quality design system for product, services and marketing programs in business processes (Al Mashari, Zairi and Ginn, 2005). Many organizations are devoted to continuous product improvement, embracing methods such as QFD, benchmarking and total quality management (TQM) in order to direct their efforts to maximize the quality of their products and meet customers' perceived qualities and values (Duh, Hsu, and Huang, 2012; Kakuro, 2004). Day (1994) argues that marketing does not take advantage of tools associated with TQM, such as QFD (Mohr-Jackson, 1996). Our proposition is that when brand managers examine the brand they should do it from a customers' needs perspective in addition to evaluating their position relative to their competitors. The QFD technique can help managers to examine brand elements from these perspectives and improve each of their brand elements in order of priority.

Studies related to tourism branding are mostly focused on examining the relationship between branding and destination image (Chi and Qu, 2008; Hosany, Sameer, and Yuksel, 2006; Jetter and Chen, 2011). For example, Qu, Kim, and Im (2011) used LISEL confirmation methods to examine the influences of brand image (cognitive, unique, and affective image) on tourists' intention to revisit and/or recommend. Further, others such as Juan, Gómez and Molina (2012) propose a branding model considering three groups of stakeholders (entrepreneurs, visitors, and local people), the presented brand, brand awareness, and brand meaning to enhance brand equality. They found differences in brand

dimension effects between entrepreneurs, visitors and local people. Others such as Clark, Clark and Jones (2010) highlight the need for a more accurate evaluation, whereby they use a 17-point branding process to help smaller destinations to build their brands; however, the process used in the study did not examine the experiential or competitive brand elements. What we suggest in our study is the need for a more rigorous methodology to evaluate a brand and its development, which is not just a process to establish a brand. We do this by combining two perspectives—consumers’ as well as the firm’s—to balance the strategic approach of brand evaluation. As highlighted previously, normally brand research and tourism brand research uses the brand as an identifier, which then misses the essence of the brand (Schmitt, 1999a). In this study we highlight an approach that would capture the richness of the essence of the brand when evaluating whether the brand is working in the most effective way for the firm. We now review the experiential brand process in more detail.

II. The experiential branding process

Mohr-Jackson (1996) argues that translating the voice of the customer into business process is critical for developing product, services and marketing programs that satisfy customers. The QFD technique helps brand managers by translating and diffusing customer needs into branding strategies (Mizuno and Akao, 1993). Figure 1 illustrates the experiential brand process used in this study. It is generally suggested that brand managers should address four major steps: “*situation analysis*”, “*branding planning*”, “*branding strategy and implementation*”, and “*brand evaluation*” (Coulter, 2000; Kotler, 2003).

<FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE>

In the first step—*situation analysis*—brand managers should determine the following: Who are our competitors? What is best practice in the industry? What is the company's current performance relative to the benchmark company? In the *branding planning* step, the key questions are: What is the performance of the benchmark organization? How can the firm determine its current performance? How might the firm benefit from the benchmark organization? In order to accomplish this task this study employs the QFD technique. QFD is a TQM planning tool that links business processes to customer satisfaction by translating customer needs and expectations into appropriate company requirements for the final product or service (Akao and Mazur, 2003). The upper part of Figure 1 shows that the “house of quality”—the basic design tool of QFD—includes four main parts: customer needs, brand elements, competitive benchmarking and relationship matrix. The house of quality technique helps managers by considering customers' needs, design attributes, and competitive assessment and building them into experiential brand-building strategies.

Next, the *branding strategy and implementation* step allows managers to develop branding strategies that combine the design attributes and customers' experiences. As mentioned earlier, service firms are especially concerned with customers' experiences (Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2009; Rahman and Areni, 2010; Schmitt, 1999a). According to Schmitt (1999a), the branding approach could start from sensory affective and cognitive associations that result in consumers' memorable and rewarding brand experiences. Schmitt (1999a,b) also proposes strategic experiential modules (SEMs) that

include SENSE, FEEL, THINK, ACT, and RELATE experiences. The SENSE module has the objective of creating sensory experiences through sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste. The FEEL module appeals to a customer's inner feelings and emotions, with the objective of creating affective experiences that range from mildly positive moods linked to a brand to strong emotions of joy and pride. The THINK module appeals to a customer's intellect with the objective of creating cognitive, problem-solving experiences that engage customers creatively. The ACT module enriches customers' lives by targeting their physical experiences, showing them alternative ways of doing things. Lastly, the RELATE module contains aspects of the SENSE, FEEL, THINK, and ACT modules. It expands beyond the individual's private sensations, feelings, cognitions, and actions by relating the individual self to the broader social and cultural context reflected in a brand (Schmitt 1999a). Schmitt (1999a) suggests that firms implement the SEMs by means of experience providers (ExPros).

In the final stage of this branding process—the *brand evaluation* step—managers should consider how branding strategies create and sustain customer loyalty. In other words, the objective of this stage is to evaluate whether the branding strategy achieves the strategic goals initially set. If the goals are not achievable, managers should go back to the *branding planning* and *branding strategies* steps and re-examine if these steps are suitable, with the aim of establishing a new strategy. Our experiential branding process is therefore a dynamic system, requiring managers to pay close attention to changes in the system to ensure strategy effectiveness and flexibility.

III. Methodology

3.1 Sampling design

Farm-based tourism has long been recognized throughout Europe as a form of rural tourism (Dernoi, 1983; Sharpley and Vass, 2006). In Asia, farm-based tourism has become more popular in recent years. For example, in Taiwan, due to financial aid, support, and the development of farm-based tourism provided by the government, the number of farm-based tourism enterprises has grown significantly since the 1990s (see Figure 2). Taiwan claims it is “the Heart of Asia” in their marketing campaign and total revenue from tourism between 2010 and 2012 grew by more than 12% (Taiwanese Tourism Bureau, 2013). However, farm-based tourism enterprises tend to be small-scale and highly seasonal. Thus, they face a number of challenges such as location, investment, marketing, and quality of products and services (Fleischer and Pizam, 1997). Unlike large farm brands that have more resources at their disposal, individual, small farm brands normally possess neither the skills nor the resources for effective marketing, especially for brand building (Clarke, 1999). For this reason we use a small-to-medium enterprise (SME) that has been relatively successful. The study attempts to develop an experiential branding process to help small service businesses to design effective branding strategies. To achieve this we conducted: a brand process analysis with a situational analysis; a brand planning stage (house of quality), as well as brand staging and an action assessment, which evaluates both the consumer- and firm-side of the evaluation.

<FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE>

Lavender Cottage, a “farm/resort” located in the Hsin–Chu County of northern

Taiwan is the firm chosen for the study (Lavender Cottage's Website: <http://www.lavendercottage.com.tw/>). Lavender Cottage is, in essence, a working farm that simultaneously acts as a scaled-down tourist resort, providing rooms, meals, tours, and opportunities to participate in farm tasks and activities.

The data were collected from Lavender Cottage. There were three procedures and an expert meeting: (1) a pre-testing was conducted to identify the leading farm/resort in the industry, with 100 visitors answering the following open-ended question: "Please list the farm/resort that performs best in your evaluation in Taiwan?"; (2) face-to-face interviews with 30 visitors were undertaken to identify consumer needs for the products or services of a farm/resort; and (3) a competitive assessment of Lavender Cottage against the leading organization and the SEM evaluations for each ExPro. Following this we distributed the survey to 250 Lavender Cottage customers. The questionnaire include five sections: the first section is the satisfaction of benchmarking farm; the second section is the satisfaction of the Lavender; the third section is the importance of each indicators (tertiary needs); section four: the evaluation of experiential module of Lavender Cottage; the last section was basic descriptive data. Next we deleted incomplete questionnaires; 205 questionnaires were valid, equaling a response rate of 82%. The sample comprised 43.5% male and 56.5% female respondents; 48.3% were under 25 years of age, with 9.5% over 40 years of age. Data from the brand process analysis are presented next.

3.2 The branding process analysis

3.2.1 Step 1: Lavender Cottage's situation analysis

A situation analysis formed step 1. Brand management at this step should identify the

benchmark organization in their industry in order to shape their branding strategies in accordance with the best practice organization in the industry. The result of the pre-test identified Ching-Jing leisure farm/resort in central Taiwan as being mentioned most frequently by the respondents (approximately 65%). In addition, according to the survey of Taiwan's Council of Agriculture executive Yuan, the Ching-Jing leisure farm/resort is the biggest farm and is rated as being the No.1 leisure farm in a consumer evaluation (Theme Tourism survey, 2012, Taiwan's Council of Agriculture executive Yuan). Therefore, Ching-Jing was identified as the "benchmark" organization for Taiwan's leisure farm/resort industry.

3.2.2 Step 2: Branding planning—house of quality

The first task of planning for brand development is to prioritize the brand elements in terms of improvement or redesign. The basic design tool of QFD (house of quality) technique helps management to accomplish this branding planning step. To complete the step, the brand manager should create the following tables: requirement quality table (customer needs), quality-planning table, brand element deployment table, and quality table.

To complete the requirement quality table we performed face-to-face interviews with 30 visitors to collect customers' needs. According to Griffin and Hauser (1993), interviews with 20-30 customers should identify 90% or more of the customers' needs. Generally, customer needs are derived based on descriptions of the customers' own words, therefore brand managers should structure customers' linguistic responses into meaningful hierarchies or categories (Griffin and Hauser, 1993), particularly since it is difficult for the

brand building team to deal with a list of 100-300 customer needs. The *KJ* method, developed by Kawakita (1991), helps managers make note of semantic similarities and draw parallels to create a set containing similar customer needs. Managers can structure customer needs into a hierarchy of primary needs (strategic direction), secondary needs (tactical needs), and tertiary needs (operational needs) (Al-Mashari, Zairi, & Ginn, 2005), as we have done in this case for Lavender Cottage.

The first column of Table 1 indicates the primary layer of the hierarchy of customer needs for Lavender Cottage. It includes two dimensions: “*the core functional*” dimension and “*the support*” dimension (strategic direction). Each primary layer is segmented into three secondary needs (tactical needs) (Table 1, Column 2). For example, participants highlighted “facilities”, “marketing activities”, and “information provided” which are secondary layer categories factoring into the *core functional* area, and “infrastructure”, “related industry”, and “general management” which are secondary layer categories in the *support* area. Finally, the third column of Table 1 identifies tertiary needs. These tertiary needs provide detailed information for the manager to develop products and services to satisfy the secondary needs.

<INSERT TABLE 1 HERE>

Next, we completed the quality-planning Table. In Table 1 the upgrade rate in the satisfaction level (U_i) is obtained by dividing the “planning level” value by the “satisfaction level value” (Pl_i / SL_i); the higher the U_i the worse the performance of Lavender Cottage. Equation 1 shows the relative importance rating (RI_i) of each tertiary

need:

$$RI_i = (PR_i \cdot U_i) / \sum_i (PR_i \cdot U_i) \quad (1)$$

where PR_i is the priority rating of the need i , and U_i is the upgrading rate of the satisfaction level of the need i . The higher the RI_i , the higher need i 's improvement priority will be. This table allows managers to see which parts of the product or service need most improvement, how well these needs are met or not, and whether there are gaps between the firm's performance and that of the leading benchmark organization. The empirical results of the survey of 205 valid visitors to Lavender Cottage are shown in Table 1. As can be seen, "Variety resources" and "Convenience of dining and shopping" have the highest RI compared with the other needs; that is, these two needs have the highest priority to be improved.

<INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE>

Next, we translated the identified customers' needs into technical specifications in order to obtain brand design requirements. Because design brand elements must reflect valid measures of customer requirements, joint consideration of requirement qualities and the design brand elements are required. Based on Schmitt's (1999ab) seven ExPros, the design brand elements are deployed into 2–3 design attributes. For example, the "Communication" element is broken to three secondary attributes: "effectiveness of the magazine advertisement", "effectiveness of the press ad and brochure", and "effectiveness of mass media". The secondary attributes are the so-called design brand elements that can be used to design the brand strategies.

We used two tourism industry experts, two marketing researchers, one brand management expert and the researchers of this paper to form a committee. These experts met, discussed, communicated, and brainstormed until everyone agreed on the results. Using Equation 2 below, we obtained the “*weighted importance*” W_j of each brand element j :

$$W_j = \sum_i (RI_i \cdot Y_{ij} / \sum_j Y_{ij}), \quad (2)$$

where RI_i is the relative importance rating of each tertiary need; Y_{ij} is the interaction degree between the i th requirement quality (customer need) and the j th brand element (design attribute). Therefore, if W_j for the j th design brand quality is large it indicates that the j th brand element (ExPro) is important and has stronger relationships with the customer needs. Lavender Cottage should therefore act upon the brand element first, as highlighted in Table 2.

<INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE>

By comparing the magnitudes of W_j in last row of Table 2 it can be seen that the “*People*” element (average $W_j = 8.40$) has the highest values, followed by “*Communications*” ($W_j = 6.78$), “*Spatial environments*” ($W_j = 7.51$), “*Product presence*” ($W_j = 4.64$), “*Web sites and electronic media*” ($W_j = 2.85$), “*Co-branding*” ($W_j = 2.44$), and “*Visual and verbal identity and signage*” ($W_j = 1.42$). As the results indicate the “*People*” element has the highest rank they therefore highlight that it is important and needs to be

improved or redesigned. These results are consistent with previous studies indicating that successful service branding depends on the top management commitment and on the training of customer contact staff (i.e., the “*People*” element) (Farnfield, 1999; Davis and Dunn, 2002).

Davis and Dunn (2002) suggest that design brand elements (ExPros) can be assigned a high priority, middle priority and low priority in accordance with their W_j values. However, how many ExPro factors in the high priority group are determined by how much attention and resources the company can allocate to the branding program.

3.2.3 Step 3: Branding strategies and actions

According to Schmitt (1999a), the two most essential concepts of experiential branding are ExPros and SEMs. Schmitt (1999b) introduces an “experiential wheel” to create a holistic experience for customers. The key issue in experiential wheeling is the identification and use of experiential connectors. However, SEMs are not self-contained and insular modules, rather they are interconnected. Consequently, knowing how and when to create them is difficult. This study employs a structural equations model (using LISREL) as shown in Equation 3 to examine the “association strength” among each of the SEMs as seen in Figure 3. The association strength can be obtained from the coefficients of each module. If the value of the coefficient between two modules is high then the interconnection between the two modules is strong.

$$\mathbf{X} = \Lambda_x \boldsymbol{\xi} + \boldsymbol{\delta}, \quad (3)$$

where $\boldsymbol{\xi}$ is a 5×1 random vector of latent independent variables (the five SEMs); Λ_x is a

10×5 matrix of coefficients of the regression of X on ξ ; X is a 10×1 vector of predictors (SEMs); and δ is a 10×1 vector of measurement errors (Jöreskog and Sörbom, 2003). According to Schmitt (1999a) the evaluations of each module (shown in Table 3) are also the observed exogenous variables in the LISREL model. Table 4 shows the parameter estimates for the model that are significant. As can be seen, Goodness of Fit (GFI) measures for the whole model are reasonably good, with GFIs larger than 0.95 and RMSEA values are at an acceptable level.

< INSERT FIGURE 3, TABLE 3 AND TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE >

This study illustrates the experiential branding strategies by focusing on the first three ExPros with the highest W_j values: People, Spatial environments and Communications. According to Table 4, THINK has the highest associated strength among the SEMs in all three ExPros. Therefore, Lavender Cottage should start by addressing the THINK experiential module. For example, in the People ExPro, Lavender Cottage can start with the THINK module and additionally add ACT, FEEL, SENSE, and RELATE modules in accordance with their associated strengths, which is the route of the interconnection evolution for the People ExPro. The route starts from the strongest association strength of two modules, and then is followed by the second largest and so on. Generally, the association strength between the THINK and the ACT modules is 0.99; indicating an improvement of the THINK module that could fully drive ACT module to about 99%. Similarly, Lavender Cottage's branding team could start with the THINK module for the Spatial environment ExPro and in addition add ACT, FEEL, SENSE, and RELATE modules accordingly. For the Communications ExPro, Lavender Cottage can start

with the THINK module and add the SENSE, ACT, FEEL, and RELATE modules one by one.

Considering the brand elements and the association strengths of the five SEMs this study highlights experiential branding strategies for Lavender Cottage. The empirical result shows the order of priority for the seven ExPros: People; Spatial environment; Communications; Product presence; Web sites; Co-branding; Visual and verbal identity and signage. Therefore, first Lavender Cottage should improve or redesign these brand elements in this priority order. Second, Lavender Cottage can adopt a breadth strategy (enriching vs. simplifying). The breadth issue concerns the management across ExPros (Schmitt, 1999b). This question arises: Should Lavender Cottage enrich a given experience by adding additional ExPros that provide the same experience, or simplify the experience by concentrating it into certain ExPros? Following on from our examination, the THINK module could largely enhance the rest of the SEMs across People, Spatial environment, and Communications. Therefore, Lavender Cottage could use an enrich strategy by designing a THINK experiential module across the three ExPros. The THINK module appeals to the intellect of consumers with the objective of creating cognitive, problem-solving experiences that creatively engage customers (Schmitt, 1999b). Lavender Cottage can: train staff to initiate customers' curiosity in looking for something different in the cottage (People ExPro); design a special dining room to stimulate customers' curiosity (Spatial environment ExPro); and use a THINK campaign that aims to help people to disconnect from their city lifestyle (Communications ExPro) and enrich the THINK experiences. In other words, Lavender Cottage could use an "enriching strategy" to create customers'

SEMs and allow its customers to feel good about Lavender Cottage.

Third, the depth issue (broadening vs. focusing) concerns management across SEMs. Table 4 shows that the average association strength of the five SEMs is higher than 0.80, indicating that Lavender Cottage could use a broadening strategy. For example, for the People element, Lavender Cottage can start with a THINK module and then add ACT, FEEL, RELATE and SENSE one by one. In other words, Lavender Cottage can train employees to create a positive surprise for the customers; that is, customers could get more than they ask for—a small gift that they did not expect or something very different from what they expected. Next, Lavender Cottage could target experiences and induce customers' lifestyle changes by adding an ACT module. For a FEEL experience, the staff could deliver an emotional element at the consumption point so that visitors feel warm, sentimental, and loving. For example, they could send a small cake and sing a happy birthday to their customers if the customers happen to have their birthday while visiting the farm-stay.

Finally, we highlight the importance of intensity-related concerns in individual grid cells (intensifying vs. diffusing). The question here is: Should the specific experience provided in a given ExPro be experientially enhanced or diffused? Following on from the suggestion of Schmitt (1999b), Lavender Cottage should test experience cells carefully until each of them has the right level of intensity. For example, Lavender Cottage could test the FEEL experience by using the People ExPro and then test it by using the Communications ExPro to see if it has overshoot or fallen behind its brand name or image. Without the right kind of testing one can overshoot the firm's mark or fall far short of the

brand promise (Schmitt, 1999a, 1999b). Our understanding of intensity is critical considering resort firms can highlight what would have the greatest impact across multiple brand elements, not just a singular focus on only one brand element.

VI. Discussion and implications

Building a strong brand name has become a critical marketing activity for tourism businesses. A strong brand can help firms attract, obtain, and retain their customers (Davis and Dunn, 2002; Keller, 2003). A strong brand can provide customers with confidence by reducing their purchase risk or uncertainty, especially for a service business such as farm-based resort (Berry, 2000). Experiential branding emphasizes the notion that a company can promote a product by not only communicating a product's features and benefits, but also by connecting it with a unique and interesting experience (Keller, 2003). Schmitt (1999a) postulates that brand strategies must not just look at products only in terms of their "feature-and-benefits" functions, because customers often take them as a given. Consumers want a marketing mix provided by the company that will touch their hearts, dazzle their senses, stimulate their minds, and be incorporated into their lifestyles (Schmitt, 1999b). Experiential branding is not intended merely to sell something, but to demonstrate how a brand can enrich a customer's life.

The purpose of this study was to glean insight into the development and method of brand-building strategy. The empirical study finds that firstly, according to the proposed branding model in this study, a farm-based tourism operator such as Lavender Cottage could first improve or redesign three "People", "Spatial environment", and

“Communications” brand element dimensions, because they have high priority to be improved. Secondly, in terms of the breadth issue, Lavender Cottage could use an “enriching” strategy by designing experiential modules that use People, Spatial environment, and Communications ExPros in that order. In other words, Lavender Cottage could improve their THINK experience by using the three ExPros of People, Spatial environment, and Communications. Thirdly, Lavender Cottage could apply a broadening strategy by implementing SEMs one by one according to their association strengths; that is, Lavender Cottage could broaden its experiential appeal from individual experiences to hybrid and holistic experiences. Finally, the intensity issue (intensifying vs. diffusing) concerns individual grid cells; that is, Lavender Cottage could carefully test the specific SEM several times in a given ExPro until it achieves the right level.

We argue that this paper makes two main contributions. Firstly, by using an integrated method this study combines QFD and experiential marketing, allowing the results to highlight the depth to which we can now understand the brand evaluation for firms. This is especially important for those firms that have limited resources and capacity to improve all their brand elements. The process allows for a more scientific understanding of the relative importance of these brand elements. We start with the consumer, where the process can extrapolate consumers’ perceptions of the critical elements of the brand experience and combine these with those of the marketing or brand experts. Hence, we can evaluate the brand elements from both sides rather than just one, giving marketers a more scientific, explicit, less subjective and more objective evaluation of the brand.

Secondly, for service firms this approach gives extra depth in relation to the experiential contextualization of the product. Not all products are the same. Resort tourism products by their very nature are different because they are products that consumers feel or experience. The approach or process used in this study gives an experiential marketing evaluation, allowing for a better understanding of product branding within the tourism category or experiential services. In isolation both methods have limitations, but together they give us the relative importance of each category and a prioritization, which can be used for experiential marketing of the product. Because not all firms, products and brands are the same this process can help resort tourism operators select only the important brand elements first, helping firms rank those brand elements that are critical, thus grouping composites of primary brand elements related to resort service experience products. Often research and brand managers only use customers as their source of information, without balancing this with that of the brand expert. To our knowledge, combining the QFD and experiential marketing approach within the tourism context has not previously been done. The value of this collective method is the accuracy with which brand elements can be highlighted for attention.

The study shows us that not all brand elements are of equal benefit for tourism operators and as such inbound resort tourism brands are idiosyncratic. Hence, we need to evaluate and assess what is critical for each particular resort brand. That is, each brand needs to be assessed independently to evaluate where scarce resources can be best allocated for resort brand performances or outcomes distinct for that firm.

This study does, however, have its limitations. Firstly, a limited number of service

resort firms examined. Secondly, familiarity with a destination has appeared to be a significant determinant of destination image (Baloglu, 2001), therefore future studies may include product familiarity in their examination. Thirdly, the frequency of sampling is limited. The survey conducted sampling only once; however, customers could have different perceptions in different periods, for example in spring or summer the gardens of the farm resort are green and full of flowers And as such the customers may stay outdoors longer compared to during wintertime. Therefore, customers may pay more attention to the scenery rather than on the service of an affiliated restaurant. Finally, the study needs a post-test to examine if customer loyalty increases as a result of Lavender Cottage implementing the recommended branding strategies.

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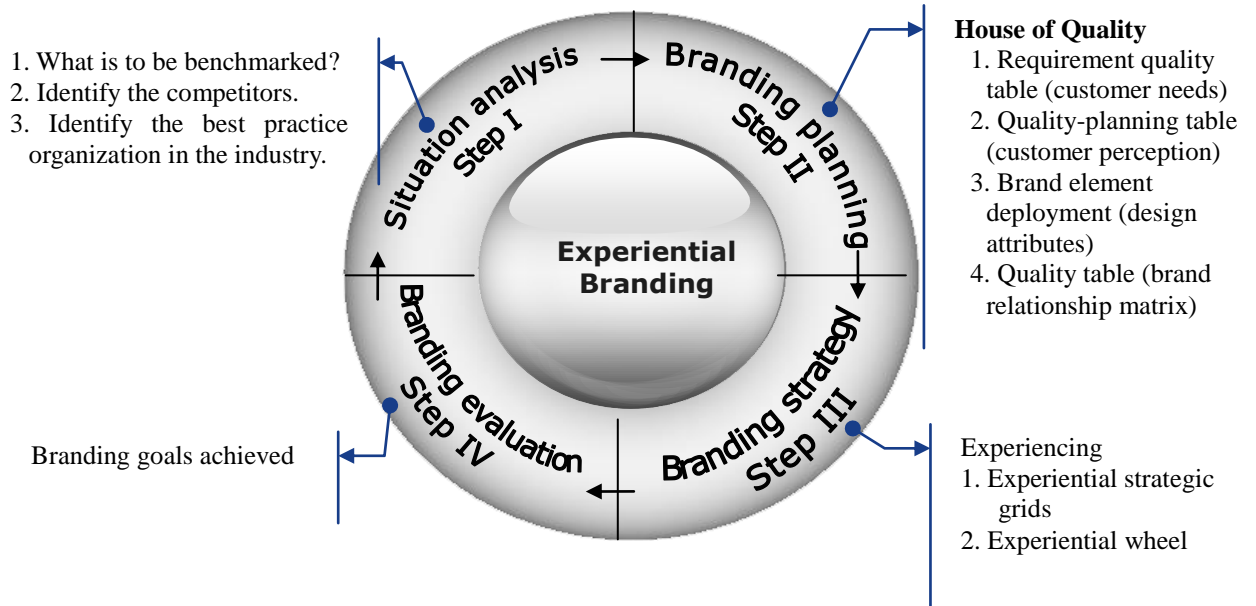
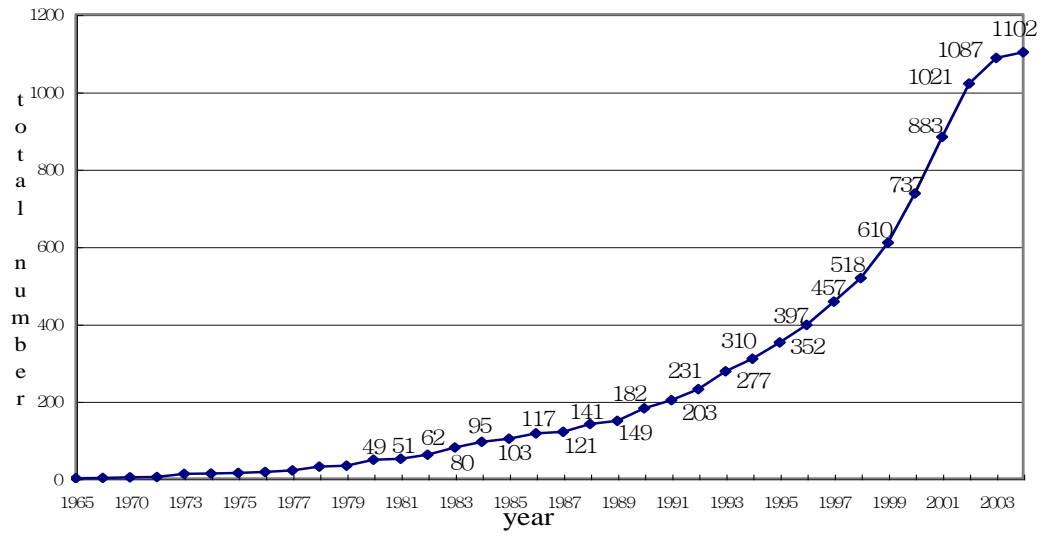
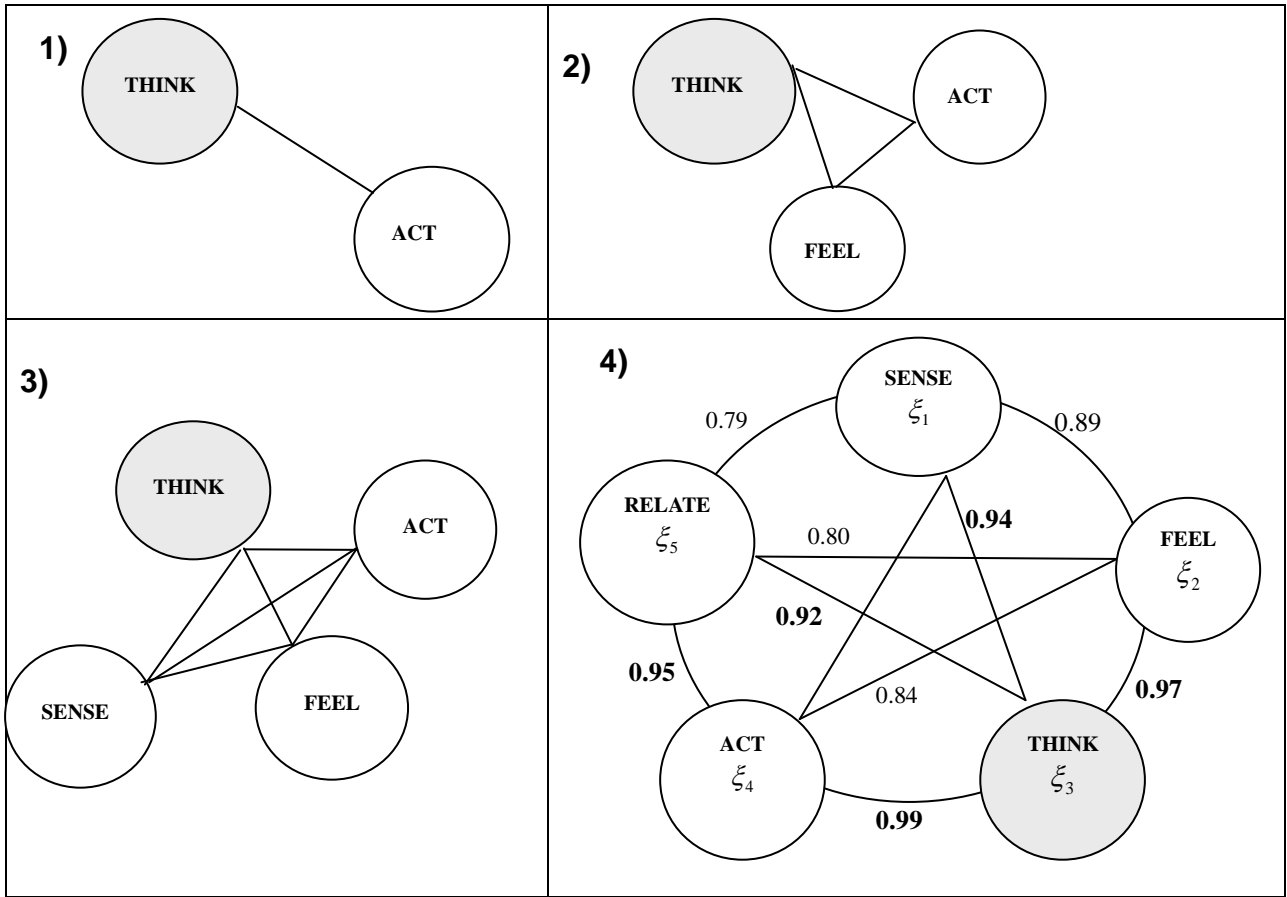


Figure 1 Experiential brand building process



Source: Council of Agriculture executive Yuan, R.O.C., 2005.

Figure 2 The supply of Farm-based tourism/resorts in Taiwan



Source: Schmitt (1999a).

Figure 3 Experiential Wheel of PEOPLE provider: experiential connectors

Table 1 Quality-planning table: customers' perceptions (branding planning stage)

Customer needs (Requirement qualities)			Ratio of importance						
			Priorities rating	Satisfaction with the Lavender Cottage	Satisfaction with benchmarking farm	Planning level	Upgrading rate of satisfaction level	Relative important rating	Cronbach's α
Primary needs (Strategic direction)	Secondary needs (tactical needs)	Tertiary needs (Operational needs)	PR_i	SL_i	SB_i	PL_i	$U_i = \frac{PL_i}{SL_i}$	RI_i	
Functional area	Facilities	1.Size of the farm	5.4	4.7	5.3	5.3	1.13	5.71	0.859
		2.Signs of directions	5.8	5.1	5.2	5.2	1.02	5.53	
		3.Number of resting places	5.7	4.6	4.9	4.9	1.07	5.70	
		4.Variety choice for visiting	5.7	4.5	5.1	5.1	1.13	6.02	
		5.Special landscape	5.8	5.2	5.3	5.3	1.02	5.53	
		6.Safety in the farm	5.9	4.9	4.9	4.9	1.00	5.52	
	Marketing activities	1.Festivity programs	5.4	4.8	5.0	5.0	1.04	5.71	0.834
		2.Farm information	5.7	5.0	5.2	5.2	1.04	5.53	
		3.Entrance fees	5.8	5.1	4.9	5.1	1.00	5.70	
		4.Convenience of dining and shopping	5.8	4.4	4.5	4.5	1.02	6.02	
		5.Theme restaurants	5.6	5.2	4.9	5.2	1.00	5.53	
	Information provided	1.Typical activities of the farm	5.4	4.6	5.2	5.2	1.13	5.71	0.839
2.Tourist guides in the farm		5.4	4.5	4.7	4.7	1.04	5.25		
3.Vicinity of tourism information		5.6	4.5	4.8	4.8	1.07	5.60		
4.Farm staff service		5.9	4.3	4.5	4.5	1.05	5.79		
Support area	Infrastructure	1.Convenience of transportation	5.5	4.6	4.9	4.9	1.07	5.50	0.778
	Related industry	1.The scale and development of other services near the farm	6.0	5.2	4.9	5.2	1.00	5.61	
		General management	1.Administrative and management system	5.9	5.1	5.0	5.1	1.00	

Note: 1. The operational needs (tertiary needs) are evaluated on a 7-point Likert scale of which 1 represents very unsatisfied and 7 represents very satisfied. In addition, the questionnaire also evaluated the importance of these operational needs. The importance was also measured on a 7-point Likert scale with 7 representing very important and 1 very unimportant.

2. KMO values are 0.913 for core function area and 0.684 for support area.

3. Planning level compares the satisfaction of Lavender with benchmarking farm and priorities rating accesses priorities.

Table 2 Quality Table: brand relationship matrix (branding planning stage)

Brand element deployment -Design attributes (ExPros) Customer needs -Requirement quality table	Communica-tions			Visual and verbal identity and signage		Product presence			Co-branding			Spatial environments			Web sites and electronic media			People			R_i	
	Effectiveness of advertisement	Effectiveness of press ad and brochure	Effectiveness of mass media	Brand name brand market, symbol, and logo	Recognition of colloquial language of the brand name	Attraction of brand mascot	Attraction of product packaging	Attraction of product design	Effectiveness of brand alliance	Frequency of sponsor non-profit organizations	Effectiveness of event marketing	Adequacy of leisure facilities layout f facilities	Artiness of leisure farm buildings	Comfort of interior design or environment	The interest appeal of lavender Cottage web site	Effectiveness of on line communication	Completeness of web site	Service attitude of personnel	Service level provided by middle manager	Service mindset of top manager	Relative importance rating	
◆ Core functional areas																						
◇ 1.1 External Environment																						
1.1.1 Size of the farm				△	△				○	○	◎	○								○	○	5.71
1.1.2 Signs of directions				○	○							◎	◎	◎								5.53
1.1.3 Number of resting places												◎	◎	◎								5.70
1.1.4 Variety choice for visiting	○	○	○				◎	◎	△	◎	△		△							○	6.02	
1.1.5 Special landscape	△	△	△			△		△	△			△	△	△						○		5.53
1.1.6 Safety in the farm												△		△								5.52
◇ 1.2 Marketing activities																						
1.2.1 Festivity programs	○	○	○					△		◎				○	○	○			○		5.71	
1.2.2 Farm information	◎	◎	△			○	○	○						◎	◎	◎	○				5.53	
1.2.3 Entrance fees	△	△	△				○	○					○				◎	○	○		5.70	
1.2.4 Convenience of dining and shopping	△	△					○	○					○	△		△	◎	○	○		6.02	
1.2.5 Theme restaurants	△	△					○	○						△		△			○	◎	5.53	
◇ 1.3 Information provided																						
1.3.1 Typical activities of the farm	△	△					○	○					△	△		△			○	◎	5.71	
1.3.2 Tourist guides in the farm	○			△		△	△			△	△	△	△						○		5.25	
1.3.3 Vicinity tourism information	◎	◎	◎											△	△	△	△				5.60	
1.3.4 Farm staff service			△														◎	◎	◎		5.79	
◆ Support area																						
◇ 2.1 Infrastructure																						
2.1.2 Convenience of transportation	△	△					○		△		△				△	△				○	5.50	
2.2 Related industry																						
2.2.2 The scale and development of other services near the farm	◎	◎	◎					△				◎	△	△	△	△				○	5.61	
2.3 General management																						
2.3.1 Administrative and management system	○	○	○	△	△	△	△	△	△	△	△	△	△	△	△	△	△	○	○	○	5.52	
Weight (W_j)	8.11	6.89	5.35	1.63	1.22	1.48	6.68	5.75	1.87	1.15	4.31	8.96	4.44	9.14	2.83	2.43	3.29	6.66	8.35	10.2	-	
Average W_j	6.78			1.42		4.64			2.44			7.51			2.85			8.40			-	

Note: In Table 2, the committee met and discussed the relationship of the 'requirement quality' and 'design attribute'. ◎ indicates a strong relationship and is given 5 points; ○ indicates a medium relationship and is given 3 points; △ indicates a low relationship and is given 1 point; and space indicates no relationship and is given 0 points.

Table 3 Variable definitions of LISREL model (branding strategy stage)

Latent exogenous variables	Observed exogenous variables	
SENSE (ξ_1)	X ₁ : The (ExPro) tries to engage my sense.	X ₂ : The (ExPro) is perceptually interesting.
FEEL (ξ_2)	X ₃ : The (ExPro) tries to put me in a certain mood.	X ₄ : The (ExPro) makes me respond in an emotional manner.
THINK (ξ_3)	X ₅ : The (ExPro) tries to intrigue me.	X ₆ : The (ExPro) stimulates my curiosity.
ACT (ξ_4)	X ₇ : The (ExPro) tries to make me think about my lifestyle.	X ₈ : The (ExPro) reminds me of activities I can do.
RELATE (ξ_5)	X ₉ : The (ExPro) tries to get me to think about relationships.	X ₁₀ : I can relate to other people through this (ExPro).

Source: Schmitt (1999a)

Table 4 Experiential strategic grid: Strength of SEMs for ‘People’, ‘Spatial environments’, and ‘Communications’ (branding strategy stage)

ExPros

Enriching vs. Simplifying

**S
E
M**

Broadening vs. Focusing

Association strength	People					Spatial environments					Communications				
	SENSE	FEEL	THINK	ACT	RELATE	SENSE	FEEL	THINK	ACT	RELATE	SENSE	FEEL	THINK	ACT	RELATE
SENSE	1					1					1				
FEEL	0.89*	1				0.83*	1				0.88*	1			
THINK	0.94*	0.97*	1			0.90*	0.97*	1			0.92*	0.91*	1		
ACT	0.78*	0.84*	0.99*	1		0.66*	0.78*	0.96*	1		0.74*	0.67*	0.85*	1	
RELATE	0.79*	0.80*	0.92*	0.95*	1	0.69*	0.77*	0.96*	0.98*	1	0.70*	0.72*	0.81*	0.93*	1
Average	0.880	0.900	0.964	0.912	0.892	0.816	0.87	0.958	0.876	0.88	0.848	0.836	0.898	0.838	0.832
Rank	5	3	1	2	4	5	4	1	3	2	2	4	1	3	5
GFI	0.97					0.95					0.97				
AGFI	0.93					0.89					0.92				
NFI	0.99					0.99					0.99				
RMSEA	0.039					0.078					0.052				

Note: 1. In the correlation matrix from the consumer survey *indicates the correlation coefficient is significant at 5%.

2. Seven-point ratings scale ranging from “not at all” to “very much”.

3. According to McDonald and Ho (2002) a structural model is good fit if RMSEA value is less than 0.05; however, the structural model is also acceptable if RMSEA value is less than 0.08.