

**BRAND NAMING PRACTICES:
AN ASSESSMENT OF HOTELS IN ADDIS ABABA**

By

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ABSTRACT

A brand in general and brand name in particular form the perception or personality consumers attach a company. A brand name is a core indication of the brand. Therefore a careful selection of a brand name could communicate various product or service attributes desired by the producer/provider like ruggedness, sophistication, friendliness or sincerity. For the hotel industry in particular, the brand name is an integral component of all marketing efforts. Research also suggests that a hotel's brand name should be intense and vibrant that is able to relate to multiple level of the senses while at the same time serve as a reminder of pleasant experience. Despite the rapid growth of the hotel industry in Addis Ababa, a peculiar observation suggests that a well thought of branding/brand naming practice is not in place. This research therefore will attempt to understand the brand naming practice of hotels in Addis Ababa with the aim of improving the practice. Two sets of questioners will be used to see owners/brand manager's perception of the importance of brand names and the process used will be assessed from the owners/brand managers of the hotels using the first set of questionnaires. The second set of questionnaire will be used to understand how the brand names of those hotels were perceived by their clients. Even though the objective of the research is to understand the practice, a comparison of the findings with other empirical research in the area and theoretical guidelines will be done.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The concept of brands and branding has been around for a long time. It cannot however be said that all present-day businesses have mastered it. A brand is name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers (American Marketing Association). Chiaravalle and Schenck (2015, p.12) on the other hand defines it as “a promise about who you are and what benefits you deliver that gets reinforced every time people come in contact with any facet of you or your business”. A brand comprises tangible and intangible features of a business that it stands for. A successful brand is an identifiable product or services that customers perceive as relevant or unique. A brand is the sum total of all functional and emotional assets that differentiate it among the competition and distinguish it in the audience’s mind. A brand therefore develops characters in the minds of its audience such as a brand identity which is the visual and verbal articulation of a brand, brand image the customer’s beliefs about what the brand stands for, brand equity which is the value of the brand as an asset (Landa, 2006).

Branding on the other hand is a process in which the organization uses a name, phrase, design, symbols, or combination of these to identify its products and distinguish them from those of competitors (Kerin and Hartley, 2013). It include the entire development process of creating a brand, brand name, brand identity, and, in some cases, brand advertising (Landa, 2006).

A brand is a valuable asset for any company that its product or service marketing success hangs on it. A well-established brand is an intangible asset creating a strategic advantage. A successful brand communicates a message about the quality, cost, performance and distinction from other

competing products. For the customer a brand must be reassuring or risk minimizing which in return improves the likelihood of purchase.

Brands in general influence or form the perception or personality consumers attach to it. According to Murphy (1987) on Wai-sum Siu and Yi Zhang (n.d.), a brand name is a core indication of the brand. Klink and Athaide (2012) on the other hand has indicated that a careful selection of a brand name could communicate various product or service attributes desired by the producer/provider like ruggedness, sophistication, friendliness or sincerity. Understanding the significance of brand names, many research have attempted to develop a guideline to develop the appropriate brand name ((Klink, 1999; Klink, 2000; Klink and Athaide, 2012; Siu and Zhang, n.d.; Shipley, Hooley, and Wallace, 1988; Kohli and LaBahn, 1997). Research also suggests the consideration of the firm's marketing strategy in developing a brand name.

The choice of a brand name also applied to the hospitality industry where perception and image are of vital importance. Research also suggests that a hotel's brand name should be intense and vibrant that is able to relate to multiple level of the senses while at the same time serve as a reminder of pleasant experience (O'Neill and Mattila, 2010).

Yibeltal (2014) indicates that Addis Ababa is the third largest host of diplomatic missions and UN organizations stressing the need to a hotel industry ready to serve this community. The General Assembly of the European Council on Tourism and Trade (ECTT) has also recently selected Ethiopia as World Best Tourist Destination for 2015 (MOCT, 2015). Addis Ababa being the only gate way to Ethiopia for the international community, this brings significant traffic to Hotels in Addis Ababa.

According to Addis Ababa City Administration Culture and Tourism Bureau, the hotel industry in Addis Ababa at its current level have 128 star level hotels which are not yet given their stars pending the final outcome of the current rating attempt. The industry can be considered booming with a 20% growth from last year. Twenty five newly constructed hotels have joined the industry in the last two years only (AACA Culture and Tourism). The primary market these hotels tend to serve is foreign nationals. Hence, the role of branding and brand image to these hotels is of significant importance. The brand name is an integral component of their branding efforts. A high level of observation around the city however shows mostly functional brand names that mean more to the owners themselves than the potential customers. Foreign sounding hotel brand names are also plenty.

The aim of this research is therefore to explore the brand naming practice of these hotels with an intention of understanding the thinking behind the brand names. The research therefore will assess the perceived importance of brand names by the hotel management, explore the brand naming process followed, if any, and see the performance of the brand names through the eye of customers to understand their impact if any.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

O'Neill and Mattila (2010) claim that the value of brand names in hospitality industry is undisputed. Brand name has been a well endorsed component of the marketing strategy in the hotel industry. O'Neill and Mattila (2010) further suggest a brand name should be intense and vibrant that is able to relate to multiple levels of the senses while at the same time serve as a reminder of pleasant experience. A brand names ability to expand geographically is another consideration. Research in the area of sound symbolism also suggests that a carefully constructed brand name brings inherent strength to a brand and adds other desirable characters to services.

The highly expanding hotel industry in Addis Ababa is seeing lots of new brand names every day. In contrast to research findings and guidelines, a simple stroll in the streets of Addis Ababa shows hotel brand names such as ‘Bed and Breakfast Hotel’, ‘KZ Hotel’, ‘NT International Hotel’, ‘Top Ten Hotel’ ... where the intension of the names is just to signal that the facility is a hotel. Such types of hotel names are neither catchy nor does not speak about the character of the hotel. For example, out of a sample of hotel names considered majority are names of historic places, names of individuals and towns (Lalibela Hotel, Kaleb Hotel, Pacific Hotel, Dessie Hotel, Washington Hotel). Although one cannot claim an inherent problem in those brand names, it signals a loss of great opportunity to develop a brand name that could grow to become the hotel’s strong asset while at the same time raises the question about the process followed in developing those brand names.

This research will therefore attempt to answer the following questions:

- What is the level of importance placed on the branding practice by the management or owners of those hotels?
- What is the process followed in developing those brand names?
- How have the brand names performed from the perspectives of customers’ of those hotels?

1.2 Objective of the Study

In light of the importance of image in general and brand name in particular in the hospitality industry, this research in general intends to understand the brand naming practice of owners or managers of hotels in Addis Ababa with the aim of improving the practice.

Further, the specific objectives of this research are to:

- Understand the degree of importance the owners or management placed on the role of a brand name
- Identify the brand name development process used if any
- Explore the performance of the brand name from the view point of the customers' of those hotels

1.3 Significance of the Research

Given the lack of research in the area of brand names, particularly in this part of the world, this research will be the first to explore the practice of developing brand names in the hotel industry. Further, understanding brand naming process as well as how brands are perceived by customers, will enable hotel owners and brand managers to better connect or influence their existing and potential customers. This research also creates the opportunity to identify improvement areas to maximize the opportunity to create a new brand name that can assist the hotels' image and possibly expand further geographically as well as in to other products. The research can also serve as a basis for further research in the area.

1.4 Scope and Limitation of the Study

Research in to brand names covers linguistics and the attempt to create a better sounding brand name. Sound symbolism that looks at the direct linkage between sound and meaning is also explored in relation to brand names. The effect of the service provided on the perception of the brand name is also another study area. The scope of this study however is limited to the considerations taken or process used in developing a brand name. The researcher therefore can only draw inference on the care taken or rigorousness of the methodology employed in developing the brand name and not the quality of the brand names.

On the other side, finding the primarily responsible resources that are responsible for the development of the brand names is a big challenge. Hence the quality of the findings will therefore be limited to the extent of the quality of the data collected.

1.5 Work Plan

The time schedule until completion of the research will be as follows, if the final thesis is based on this proposal.

Activities	August				September				October				November	
	W1	W2	W3	W4	W1	W2	W3	W4	W1	W2	W3	W4	W1	W2
Complete proposal	■	■	■	■	■	■								
Develop questionnaire							■	■						
Data Collection									■	■	■			
Data Analysis												■	■	
Data Interpretation												■	■	
Completion of Draft Paper												■	■	
Completion of Final Project Paper													■	■

Table 1: Timeline of activities

1.6 Financial Plan

The researcher expects to handle most of the activities including conducting interviews with managers/brand managers by himself. University students however will be used to get questionnaires filled by hotel customers. The following table therefore indicates high level costs expected to be incurred while preparing the final thesis.

Types of Expense	Expected Costs(in Birr)
Communication expenses; such as telephone	300.00
Typing, printing and photocopying	500.00
Transportation and different working materials	500.00
Data collectors fee	5000.00
Miscellaneous Expenses	200.00
Contingency	200.00
Total Expected Cost	6700.00

Table 2 Breakdown of anticipated expenses

1.7 Organization of the Study

The first chapter begins with an introduction to the study and goes on to discuss the problem statement that initiated the researcher to conduct the study. The first chapter also covers the objective of the study along with other relevant considerations such as the significance of the study, the scope and limitation, work plan of the researcher, and financial plan. The second chapter covers the literature review canvassing the issue followed by the third chapter presenting the methodology to be used. The methodology describes the population, the sample size, sampling technique as well as the method of analysis. Ethical considerations taken are also indicated.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1. Brand

Landa (2006, p 4) define a brand as “... a brand is a proprietary name for a product, service, or group is used to denote a company, organization, corporation, social cause, issue, or political group”. According to Kotler et al. (2005, p. 315) a brand comprises a name, sign, symbol, design, or a combination of these elements that are expected to differentiate a product or services from other similar products (Oh and Pizam, 2008). Landa (2006) differentiates between the three integrated meanings of a brand as:

- The sum total of all characteristics of the product, service, or group, including its physical features, its emotional assets, and its cultural and emotional associations;
- The brand identity as applied to a single product or service, an extended family of products or services, or a group; and
- The ongoing perception by the audience (consumer or public) of the brand.

Lim and O’Cass 2001 cited on Hosany, et al. (2006) agree by saying that a strong brand can differentiate a product from its competitors and help the customer make easy decisions that could reduce cost of searching the appropriate product. Consumers place greater confidence in a particular brand than another brand enhancing loyalty and willingness to pay a higher price for the brand. It is therefore possible to conclude that a brand is a mean of maintaining relationship with the consumer, a promise to the consumer and source of products and services.

Chiaravalle and Schenck (2015) further list the following as a must be known terms:

Brand identity: The name and visual marks that present the brand, usually in the form of a logo, symbol, or unique typestyle, as well as all other identifying elements including colors, package shape, even sounds and smells associated with the brand.

Brand image: The beliefs about what the brand is and what it stands for that exist in the customer's mind as a result of all encounters, associations, and experiences with any aspect of your business or organization.

Brand position: how the brand fits in with and relates to various other brands within the competitive market.

Brand management: Controlling the presentation of the brand identity, message, and promise across your entire organization and through all communication channels, and protecting your brand identity against infringement or misuse.

2.2. Branding

Branding on the other hand is a process in which the organization uses a name, phrase, design, symbols, or combination of these to identify its products and distinguish them from those of competitors. Branding is therefore practically a marketing function that attempts to build a competitive advantage (Holt, 2003a). Branding has grown to include the entire development process of creating a brand, brand name, brand identity, and, in some cases, brand advertising.

2.3. Brand Names

A brand name is any word, device (design, sound, shape, or color), or combination of these used to distinguish a seller's products or services. Some brand names can be spoken while others cannot. A brand name assists a consumer in the process of recalling a brand or maintaining a favorable image to it. Research by Klink and Athaide (2012) has indicated that

consumers develop a non-neutral opinion about a product based on the brand name. Usunier and Shaner (2002) also note influence of the linguistic content of the brand name on its verbal, auditory and intellectual meaning and its interpretation by consumers. As a brand name is the first experience of a brand, a good brand name can communicate with customers in a positive way and identify the service offering. A brand name is a powerful source of identity and carry an incorporated virtue in to the brand. It also differentiates a firm from its competitors, raise curiosity, and help the consumer memorize the brand. Failing to do a good job in the brand naming process, if not misleading the customer, it will fail to make a positive impression. It should also be understood that if a product or a service fails to deliver the attributes evoked in the name, it could potentially backfire.

2.4. Brand Name Selection Process

The development of a brand name should consider the core value of the organization and the characteristics it plans to project. Failing to develop a brand name right the first time might entail an expensive rebranding exercise at a later stage of the life of the company. The name should be able to connect with its target audience rather than just the personal test of the owner. The use of is descriptive and abstract names are the two broader classifications of brand names.

Descriptive Names: these are names that clearly describe the goods or services being offered. According to Clifton and Simmons (2003), the use of a descriptive or abstract brand names depends on the history, culture of the organization, and the competitive situation. While descriptive names are the easiest to come up with and easily make sense, their usage and expansion to other products and geographic areas could be very constraining. For example a descriptive name that is well accepted in one region may

have difficulty getting acceptance due inability to relate to its meaning. Descriptive names are often preferable if the company runs on a limited marketing budget.

Fanciful/abstract names: this kind of names are made up or a real name used out of context. Clifton and Simmons (2003) also explains that abstract brand names are difficult to introduce but could prove to be more memorable and relatively easy to expand in to other products and geographic area. Such names are easy to trade mark because of their distinctiveness however it would require proper marketing to help customer connect with the name (Catchword, 2012).

According to Catchword (2012) a brand name could originate from other languages, acronyms, numbers or a construction from a combination of words. Developing new acronyms of an already existing brand name could possibly result in a loss of brand personality and character. Clifton and Simmons (2003) also share the opinion that brand names should be expandable. Other criteria include memorability, enable customers understand what the product/service is about, easily pronounceable on other languages as well, and have no negative connotation in other languages.

Brand naming could be a very long and expensive process for some. For example, the use of a creative development company could be very expensive. The brand naming process indicates the methodical approach implemented to come up with the name. The process should follow a degree of deliberation and testing to assure the proper name is chosen. McNeal and Zeren (1981) studied the process deployed by companies in developing a brand name. Their study outlined a six step process followed by most. Their study noted the development of branding objective and branding criteria. Kohli and LaBahn (1997) further explored the process and came up with a more condensed five stage process. Their study identified that most managers use a formalized

process but frequently undermined a thorough adherence to it. In their conclusion they recommended the the following (figure 1) five step process to help managers undertake the naming properly.

Step 1: Set out clear objective for the naming process that reflects the company's desider for the brand.

Step 2: Develop as many candidate names as possible to allow proper selection.

Step 3: Conduct thorough evaluation of the candidate names.

Step 4: Systematically apply the objective identified in step one to choose the final brand name.

Step 5: Register the trademark. Consider few alternative names from the final pool in case of rejection.

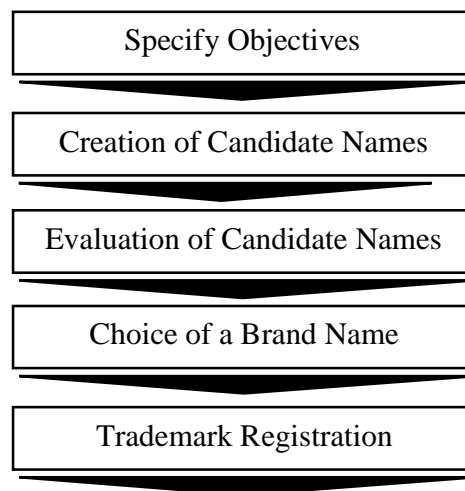


Figure 1: The brand name development process (Kohli and LaBahn, 1997)

2.5. Brand Name in the Hotel Industry

Hospitality service providers need to understand that their value propositions to their customers are communicated at every opportunity of interaction with their customers. Hospitality consumers show a clear influence by the brands and brand images and this affects the consumer behavior as it reduces the perceived risk incorporated into their hospitality purchases (Williams, 2002). For quite some time now, the concept of branding has been center stage to the hotel industry's marketing effort. For hotels, developing a brand that serves different segments has become a common experience. Permarupan et al. (2013) has revealed brand strength of hotels will provide benefit to their customers such as greater customer loyalty in choosing a hotel (Keller, 2001).

In today's dynamic hotel market place where traditional distribution channels are under threat from the online re-sellers and from new brands appearing all the time, it becomes more imperative for a hotel to build and strengthen its own brand in order to keep the hotel at the top of the traveler's mind and minimize the threat for the hotel to be commoditized and equalized with its competitors (Churchill, 2005).

Kayaman and Arasli (2007) further indicate brand names are so important in the hotel industry that majority of hotels prefer to join a well recognized hotel brands rather than be independent. This allows them to beat their rivals as well as charge a premium price over and above the other competitors.

2.6. Empirical Research in to Brand Naming Process

There are various kinds of research conducted in the area of branding and the process of brand name development. Although none of the researches conducted deny the relevance of brand

naming and the use of the right process, the empirical research conducted can be observed to follow three different issues or perspectives. Some researchers have looked at the impact of efficient marketing or the quality of service provided by the hotel on the brand name itself (Permarupan et al. 2013; Kayaman and Arasli, 2007). Other researchers have studied if brand names can carry the desired product attributes from a sound symbolism perspective (Klink, 1999; Klink, 2000; Klink and Athaide, 2012). The third groups of researchers have studied the actual processes followed in the development of a brand name (Siu and Zhang, n.d.; Shipley, Hooley, and Wallace, 1988; and Kohli and LaBahn, 1997).

2.6.1. Study in to Brand Names and the Process of Naming

Research in to the process of developing a brand name is a relatively less researched area (Kohli and LaBahn, 1997). One of the pioneers in the area were McNeal and Zeren (1981) who assessed the practice of 82 brand managers to come up with the process used. Shipley, Hooley, and Wallace (1988) followed suite and did a minor extension of the first model by McNeal and Zeren (1981). Kohli and LaBahn (1997) further explored the process and came up with a more condensed five stage process. Their study identified that most managers use a formalized process but frequently undermined a strict adhernace to it. The five steps in their process include specifying brand objective, develop candidate names, evaluate candidate names, choose the brand name and register it.

Another study that looked at Chinese enterprises have identified a four step approach (Siu and Zhang, n.d.). The steps idetified were generating brand names, screening brand names, choosing brand names and apply for registration. The research identified that the differnce in approach could be the result of differences in institutional factors, legal system or socio-cultural values. Siu and Zhang (n.d.) further indicate that the selection of brand names is based on the

consideration of cultural, linguistic and marketing potential. Cultural dimensions such as 'good luck' and 'foreign sounding' were noted to be of importance to Chinese enterprises.

2.6.2. Study in to Brand Names and Sound Symbolism

Another area of brand naming research is sound symbolism that looks at the direct linkage between sound and meaning. Plenty of research has been done in this area. For example, Klink (1999) conducted a research to see if how a brand name sounds could communicate an inherent product feature. Their study concluded that a direct relationship existed between sound and meaning. For instance a brand name with higher acoustic frequency was perceived to be smaller, faster, thinner and lighter. Such relationship was observed to hold not only for variety of products but also for service. Similarly, a research by Klink and Athaide (2012) also concluded that 'ruggedness' is better created by using vowels at the back than in the front. It also concluded that 'sophistication' and 'sincerity' are better communicated by brand names with front vowels rather than back vowels.

Such researches imply that while developing a brand name, the character or personality of the product desired to be communicated at the onset should be kept in mind. In this regard, carefully considering the brand name influences on the future of the product.

2.6.3. Study in to Brand Names and Quality of Service

Permarupan et al. (2013) argue that a brand is a valuable resource for a hotel in differentiating it from others. However, he claimed that a brand's strength is a reflection of the service. In line with this, his research evaluated what customers value the most in selection of a hotel from the brand, the service or the strategy used to influence customers. Permarupan et al. (2013) based on a survey result of 200 tourists, he concluded that the service quality weight more than the brand.

Similarly, Kayaman and Arasli (2007) also conducted a research to evaluate the impact of the seven dimensions of service quality on the customers' perception of the brand image. Their results indicated that the service quality reflects a lot on the brand.

Such findings are agreeable and make sense. The choice of a hotel for its service rather than its brand based on previous experience of the service is a common practice. However, such research does not explain the choice of hotels by tourists or foreigners with no prior knowledge the hotel industry in their destination area.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

This chapter presents the research design, population, the sampling technique and data collection instruments along with the method of analysis.

3.1 Research Design

Research in to brand names are very few. The researcher has found no other similar research in an in the hotel industry late alone in an Ethiopian context. In light of this no test of hypothesis or model formulation can be undertaken. On the other hand, a descriptive research used whenever the characteristics of a population are either unknown or partially known (Kumar and Singh, 2006). This research is therefore designed as a descriptive research with cross sectional data.

3.2 Population of the Study

The population of this study covers hotels in Addis Ababa city. According to the Addis Ababa City office of hotel and tourism, Addis Ababa currently have 125 registered star level hotels. Of these, about 5 are international brands or hotel chains and hence not part of the study. Since the study is attempting to explore the methodologies used in the development of those hotel's brand names, subjects of the study should be able to provide their account of the naming process. This implies that hotels who has been in the industry for long or those that had changed hands (brand naming not done by them) will not be able to provide this information. This study population therefore will consider new hotels that joined the industry in the last two years. According to AACCA Culture and Tourism, 25 new hotels have joined the industry in 2007 while 37 new hotels registered in 2006.

The research also attempts to see the performance of the brands names of those hotels from the perspective of customers'. Accordingly, the population includes guests staying at these hotels.

3.3 Sampling and Sample Size

As described above the brand naming practice will cover relatively new hotels in the industry that have developed their brand names recently. This gives us with 62 hotels who have joined the industry in the last two years satisfying the criteria. Pilot testing of the instrument indicated that much variability will not be expected between different hotels. It is therefore the researcher's judgment that no more than 25 hotels (40%) will be required for this study. Due to the unavailability of a city wide map showing geographic location of each hotel coupled with proximity challenges to the researcher, the sampling method to be used is a non-probability sampling method particularly a convenience sampling where hotels located in the metropolitan area will be studied.

The second group of respondents are customers' of those hotels. The customers are considered for the purpose of providing their perception of the hotel's brand name. For a descriptive study with a categorical data, Berkowitz and Lynch (n.d.) suggest the use of the formula $N = 1/E^2$ (where E stands for allowable margin of error). Accordingly, for 95% confidence with a 10% margin of error, the suggested sample size will be 100. Considering the fact that hotels in general will not be open and willing to allow access to their guests, a non-probability sampling method of convenience will be implemented. Kumar (2006) points out that for a descriptive study with a non-probability sampling design, sampling strategy do not play a significant role.

3.4 Data Collection Methods

Primary data will be collected using two sets of questionnaires will be developed. For the purpose of collecting information about the process used for the development of brand names, a questionnaire will be developed based on McNeal and Zeren (1981) study of brand naming process. The second set of questionnaires to be delivered to customers of those hotels will be developed by the researcher. This questionnaire will include questions relating to their perception of the brand name of the hotel they are staying at.

3.5 Data Analysis Method

The development of those questionnaires by the researcher raises the issue of validity and reliability. Reliability, according to Polit & Hungler (1999) refers to the degree of consistency with which the instrument measures an attribute. One way of assuring the reliability of the instrument is Cronbach's Alpha. The researcher will therefore calculate Cronbach's Alpha to test the reliability. Validity on the other hand looks at the instrument has measured what it sets out to measure. Principal component analysis will be done to measure the validity of the construct.

Descriptive statistics will also be used to analyze and characterize the demography of the participants. Further, since the research is designed to be a descriptive research, descriptive statistics will also be used to compare preferences and comparison of the facts to the findings of previous empirical studies will be employed to derive inferences.

3.6 Ethical Consideration

The objective of the data collection instruments (questionnaire and interview) are solely intended to understand the thinking and process used behind the brand names we see in the hotel industry in Addis Ababa. To this end, only relevant questions will be asked. All responses will be kept confidential unless revealing them is relevant upon which the consent of the subject will be acquired. If the participating hotels/individuals are interested, a version of the finding could be shared with them.

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