

Impact of Brand Image on Consumer Buying Behaviour

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Abstract – The concept “brand image” has drawn significant attention from academics and practitioners since it was put forward, because it played an important role in marketing activities. Although brand image was recognized as the driving force of brand asset and brand performance, few studies have elaborated on the relationship between brand image and brand equity. Based on the brand image theories, this study reviewed extant studies about the impact of brand image on consumer from perspective of customer equity. It also presented the shortcomings of current research and pointed out the trends for future study.

Keywords: Brand Image, Customer Equity, Consumer Behavior.

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INTRODUCTION

Brand image is the key driver of brand equity, which refers to consumer’s general perception and feeling about a brand and has an influence on consumer behavior. For marketers, whatever their companies’ marketing strategies are, the main purpose of their marketing activities is to influence consumers’ perception and attitude toward a brand, establish the brand image in consumers’ mind, and stimulate consumers’ actual purchasing behavior of the brand, therefore increasing sales, maximizing the market share and developing brand equity.

Brand equity is the focus of both academics and practitioners; however, there is no paradigm among the brand equity studies by now. Most studies measure brand equity from perspective of consumer or from the company itself. On one hand, some researchers believe that consumers’ subjective perception (e.g., attitude, assessment, satisfaction, etc.) of the brand is the key to brand equity. Although the consumption decision will be influenced by brand features and attributes, it is determined

by consumers’ perception about the brand image in a deeper sense. Despite the change of consumers’ life style and the way of information processing, brand image remains the dominant impact factor of consumption decisions. On the other hand, some researchers believe that brand equity should be evaluated in terms of market share, market value and cash flow.

Also, extant studies take financial performance and non-financial performance as the manifestation of brand equity. Financial performance can be described as brand premium and market share; non-financial performance refers to the brand awareness, brand reputation, brand loyalty and brand association. Following the brand equity analysis in the perspective of consumer and perspective of non-financial performance, this study analyzes the relationship between brand image and brand equity by examining consumers’ attitude and purchase intention.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Park et al. (1986), the construction and maintenance of the brand image is prerequisite to the brand management. Theoretically, all products and services could be demonstrated by functional, symbolic or experimental elements, through which brand image is established. Up to now, scholars haven’t come to an agreement on the definition of brand image. Throughout prior literature, researchers define brand image mainly from four perspectives: blanket definitions, meanings and messages, personification, cognitive or psychological elements.

BRAND IMAGE AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

Brand image has been studied extensively since the 20th century due to its importance in building brand equity. In

the increasingly competitive world marketplace, companies need to have a deeper insight into consumer behavior and educate consumers about the brand in order to develop effective marketing strategies. In the following paragraph, we will discuss the relationship between consumers' cognition of brand image and consumer behavior.

IMPACT OF BRAND IMAGE ON CONSUMER'S BEHAVIORAL INTENTION

Looking through extant researches, the most widely used predictors of consumer's behavioral intention are customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.

Customer satisfaction refers to customers' general evaluation of the overall shopping experience of some specific product or service. According to Oliver (1980), customers' performance-specific expectation and expectation disconfirmation are the key indicators of customer satisfaction. Specifically, when the product performance exceeds expectation, customer satisfaction increases; when expectation exceeds the product performance, customer satisfaction decreases. Since product performance is an important component of brand image, companies could infer the potential influence of brand image on customer satisfaction by identifying the perceptual difference toward a brand between the existing customers and non-users of the brand.

Brand image has a significant impact on customer satisfaction especially across the E-banking, landline, mobile phone, bank and supermarket industries. Chang et al. (2005) identified store infrastructure, convenience, store service and sales activities as the four components of store image, and they all impact customer satisfaction directly. Chitty et al. (2007) also empirically proved the dominant role of brand image in predicting customer satisfaction in the hospitality industry. Moreover, the congruence between the brand image and customers' self-image would enhance customer satisfaction and customers' preference for the brand.

Customer loyalty could be recognized as the extension of customer satisfaction. Earlier studies define customer loyalty as repeated purchasing behaviors in a narrow sense. Generally, customer loyalty stems from customers' approval of a brand, which leads to their continuously purchasing behavior of the brand and thus generates profits for the company. In the brand image literature, brand image is perceived as an important driving force of customer loyalty. For the supermarket industry, favorable store image is very helpful to foster customer loyalty [30] [31]. Even in the virtual context, the impact of brand image on customer loyalty remains significant, and Merrilees & Fry (2002) verified their relationship through surveys at e-commerce companies.

BRANDING FUNCTIONS

1. The brand creates value for both the consumer and the firm.
2. The brand provides value to the firm by generating value for the consumers.
3. Consumers brand associations are a key element in brand equity formation and management.

BRAND LOYALTY

Brand loyalty is a consumer's aware or unaware decisions that are expressed through the intention or behaviour to repurchase a particular brand frequently. There are many sets of definitions of brand loyalty. In general brand loyalty can be defined as the power of liking for a brand compared to other similar available options. Brand loyalty is a function of behaviour as well as attitudes. It is a consumer's first choice to buy a particular brand in a product group. It occurs when consumers perceive that the brand offers the right product features, image or level of quality at the right price at the right time. Brand loyalty has necessary conditions which are:-

The biased, behavioural response, expressed over time, by the decision-making units, with respect to one or more alternative brands out of a set of such brands, and a function of psychological process. Customers are loyal toward the brand because of high switching barriers related to technical, economical or psychological factors which make it costly or difficult for the customer to change and the other reason is that the customer may be loyal because they are satisfied with the brand that why they want to continue the relation with the brand. Brand attributes are viewed as important factors in a consumer's decision-making.

Brand Name: Well-known brand names can broadcast product benefits and lead to higher recall of advertised benefits than non-famous brand names. Consumers may prefer to rely on major famous brand names. Brand personality provides links to the brand's emotional and self-expressive benefits for differentiation.

Product Quality: Product Quality encompasses the type and characteristics of a product or service that bears on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs. In other words, product quality is defined as "fitness for use" or conformance to requirement.

Price: Price is the most important consideration for the average consumer. Consumers with high brand loyalty are willing to

pay a finest price for their preferred brand, so, their purchase intention is not easily affected by price.

Promotion: Promotion is a marketing mix component, which is a kind of communication with consumers. Promotion includes the use of advertising, sales promotions, personal selling and publicity. Advertising is a non-personal presentation of information in mass media about a product, brand, company or store. It greatly affects consumer's images, beliefs and attitudes towards products and brands, and in turn, influences their purchase behaviours.

IMPACT OF BRAND IMAGE ON CUSTOMER'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE BRAND

Keller came up with the concept "customer-based brand equity (CBBE)" in 1993, which refers to the various reactions to the branding campaign from consumers who have knowledge of the brand in varying degrees. In other words, brand image and brand awareness are the basis and sources of brand equity. According to Keller (1993), positive brand image could be established by connecting the unique and strong brand association with consumers' memories about the brand through marketing campaigns. In this regard, the brand knowledge should be built and understood before the consumers could respond positively to the branding campaign. If consumers have knowledge of a brand, the company could spend less on brand extension while achieve higher sales.

Following Keller (1993), Lassar et al. (1995) held the opinion that brand equity came from the customers' confidence in a brand. The greater the confidence they place in the brand, the more likely they are willing to pay a high price for it. Specifically, this confidence stems from five important considerations: first, the brand performs its functions as designed; second, the social image is associated with purchasing or owning the brand; third, consumers' recognition and sentimental attachment with brand; fourth, the balance between the brand's value and its functionalities; fifth, consumers trust in the brand. Netemeyer et al. (2004) also approved the do-minant impact of brand equity on customer response toward the branding campaign.

With the proliferation of brands in the market, consumers make their purchase decisions largely depending on the brand image rather than the product itself. Moreover, when the brand image is consistent with the consumers' self-concept, the consumers would give a preference to it. According to the self-concept theory, one's self-concept is a collection of perception about himself that includes elements such as capabilities, characteristics, shortcomings, appearance and personality. For marketers, examining the consistency

between the brand image and consumers' self-concept is very important, because consumers might display various selfconcepts in different social context. But whatever the context is, consumers would think better of the brand as long as the brand image is in line with the their self-concept.

Conclusion Brand image has strong positive impact on consumer buying behaviour as it's an implied device that can change people's buying behaviours positively and teenagers are becoming more and more conscious for branded products to show off their personality symbol. This is a real picture of society that brand image playing a crucial role to change the people's buying behaviour. It is suggested that companies that are targeting teenagers should focus more on developing their brand image because it was found that most of the teens were influenced by it.

SUGGESTIONS

Enrich the Connotation of Brand Image

In the last decade, emotional branding has become a very influential manner of brand management. As suggested by Roberts (2004), brand emotion is the cultural implication embodied in a brand, and emotional branding is a highly effective way to cause customer reaction, sentiments and moods, ultimately forming connection and loyalty with the brand. Even the traditional brand management pattern based on customer perception now has incorporated emotional branding into it. In the unprecedentedly competitive marketplace, brand emotion is the bond between the brand and the customer, and the key to expanding the market. Future studies could explore the relationship between brand image and consumer behavior from a brand new perspective brand emotion.

Brand Image, Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty

The relationship between brand image and customer satisfaction has been studied extensively. However, a majority of these researches were conducted in service industry, such as hotel, supermarket and bank, etc. Whether the results generated from the service industry can be applicable to other contexts (e.g., manufacturing industry, finance industry, real estate industry, etc.) remains to be examined.

Yi Zhang Moreover, although the positive impact of brand image on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty has been testified, there still exist minor disagreements between different researches. Specifically, some studies prove that brand image not only influences customer loyalty directly, but also impacts on it through other mediating factors. However, some research results demonstrate that brand image exerts no direct influence on customer loyalty, but it can impact on customer loyalty via customer satisfaction. Future studies

should further discuss the interrelationships among brand image, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, and identify a more comprehensive indicator for consumer behavior.

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