The Impact of Brand Image on Consumer Behavior: A Literature Review

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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.

1. 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.

2. The Literature Review about Brand Image

According to Park *et al.* (1986), the construction and maintenance of the brand image is prerequisite to the brand management [1]. 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 [2], as displayed in **Table 1**.

3. 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.

3.1. 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

Table 1. Brand image concept in the brand literature.

Perspective	Sources	Definition of brand image
Blanket definitions	Herzog (1963) [3]	Consumers'general perception and impression of a brand
	Newman (1985) [4]	Consumers'perception of a product's total attributes
	Dichter (1985) [5]	Consumers'general impression of the product or service
Meanings and messages	Noth (1988) [6]	The symbolic meaning embedded in the product or service
	Sommers (1964) [7]	Consumers'perception and recognition of a product's symbolic attribute
	Levy (1973) [8]	The symbolic meaning of purchasing the product or service
Personification	Martineau (1957) [9]	Brand image reflects consumers'characteristics, and they purchase the brand to express themself
	Bettinger (1979) [10]	The personification of a product, which can be manifested as "adult" and "children"
	Sirgy (1985) [11]	Image of the brand resembles human personality
Cognitive or psychological elements	Gardner & Levy (1955) [12]	Brand image is consisted of consumers'opinion, attitude and emotion toward a brand, which reflects the cognitive or psychological elements of the brand
	Levy (1978) [13]	Consumers'overall impression about a brand or product, which includes recognition, feeling and attitude toward it
	Bullmore (1984) [14]	Consumers'general perception and opinion of a brand's total attributes
	Kapferer (1994) [15]	Consumers'general perception about the brand feature's association

consumers' memories about the brand through marketing campaigns [16]. 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 [17].

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 [18]. 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 dominant impact of brand equity on customer response toward the branding campaign [19].

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 [9]. 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 [20]. For marketers, examining the consistency between the brand image and consumers' self-concept is very important, because consumers might display various self-concepts 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 [21].

3.2. 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 [22]. According to Oliver (1980), customers' performance-specific expectation and expectation disconfirmation are the key indicators of customer satisfaction [23]. 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 [24].

Brand image has a significant impact on customer satisfaction especially across the E-banking, landline, mobile phone, bank and supermarket industries [25]. 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 [26]. Chitty *et al.* (2007) also empirically proved the dominant role of brand image in predicting customer satisfaction in the hospitality industry [27]. Moreover, the congruence between the brand image and customers' self-image would enhance customer satisfaction and customers' preference for the brand [28].

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 [29]. 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 [32], and Merrilees & Fry (2002) verified their relationship through surveys at e-commerce companies [33].

4. Suggestions for Future Study

4.1. Enrich the Connotation of Brand Image

In the last decade, emotional branding has become a very influential manner of brand management [34] [35]. 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 [36]. Even the traditional brand management pattern based on customer per-

ception 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.

4.2. 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.

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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