

Chapter 79

The Power of Associations in Creating, Building, and Sustaining Brand Value

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ABSTRACT

Establishing connection with consumers or making existing communications more powerful is crucial to attain sustainability in today's branding world. Day by day competition is getting more fierce, and the variety of products in the market even for one simple need is extraordinary in range of span. Consequently, brand managers go through rough times lately, constantly looking for alternative ways to differentiate themselves from brands of competition such as focusing on different aspects such as strengthening their images, placing associations in consumer minds, and designing better positioning to differentiate themselves apart from their competitors. Since literature is scarce with respect to pinpointing the role of brand associations in attaining brand reputation, this chapter attempted provide an overview to pinpoint the relationship between brand associations and purchasing behavior and the effects of brand associations on consumer perception to emphasize the role of associations in acquiring brand reputation.

INTRODUCTION

Today, the concept of a brand is not just a name, a symbol, or a sign on a product. The progress of information technologies, globalization and the cultural changes led brands to expand their target groups; that is why brand as a concept now refers to the communication between producers and consumers. Claiming that the brand name on a package is not the same as the mental brand name, Al Ries ve Laura Ries (1998) drew attention to the fact that brand concept is more likely to be based on a number of abstract perceptions than the product's physical presence and physical appearance. The benefits, functions, features and quality of the products of a brand are very valuable but, it is the consumers who appraise

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the value of a brand because brand associations created by the brand itself in the perception of consumer minds directly influence the brand's image and reputation. Developing a brand's reputation positively is a challenge that needs long years. Businesses that could build a strong brand, earn positive brand reputation, and make this reputation sustainable do not have to compete with too many rivals. At the forefront of the concepts that come to mind, when it comes to reputation can be stated as trust, prestige, perceptions of various groups of stakeholders, value, quality, credibility, honesty, image and transparency. In other words, anything that makes a brand unique and meaningful affects reputation. In order to be a reputable brand in the eyes of all stakeholders, all the concepts mentioned above should be provided. In order to build trust, a brand should possess a positive image in terms of awareness and impression. The concept of trust, which significantly affects reputation, can not be established only by gaining the trust of the consumer. Even if a very valuable trust is built in consumer mind, a trustworthy and therefore reputable brand can not be created unless the trust is gained by employees. From the consumer's point of view, the brand image is divided into two as service quality and functional quality (Grönroos, 2001). Technical quality responds to the the question of what the consumer gets and functional quality answers the question of why the consumer purchases it. According to Grönroos (2001), the quality of service is related to customer satisfaction whereas perceived service is the service perceived by consumers in the direction of brand image.

Factors Affecting Brand Reputation

A brand's reputation is directly related to how it is positioned in the consumer's mind. In what codes the consumer creates the brand in his mind, what feelings he / she feels about the brand, what the name of the brand evokes are important in positioning strategies because brand awareness is made up of embedded associations. Aaker's (1996) brand awareness pyramid explains the situation as follows: the awareness of a brand starts with the unawareness of the brand in the mind of the consumer, then after meeting the brand and creating the first impression, goes into the stage of being able to identify the brand. The identification of a brand occurs through the brand experience by the consumer; the experience creates remembering. In other words, the stage of remembering is completed when the brand is experienced by the consumer and some connotations of the brand are formed in the consumer's mind. In terms of consumer influence, brand associations can be divided into 3. These are the strength, uniqueness and preference of associations. In addition to these 3 divisions, the appropriateness and number of associations should also be considered (Till, 2011). Till, for example, states that the red color used by Coca-Cola is strongly associated with the brand, but it is not clear how motivating this association is for consumers. Till analyzes the color, preference, distance, uniqueness, thickness, strength, size and appropriateness of associations in the strategic brand association map. Brand awareness is required for the brand's connotations. To earn consumer loyalty, a brand must primarily embed positive associations in the consumer's mind because, people resort to acquired associations on the basis of existing attitudes and feelings when assessing reputation. The connotations to be created by the brand in the perception of the consumer constitute the personality inventory about the brand. Like every individual, brands have their own personalities. According to recent researches on brand personality, anthropomorphism is one of the examples which attributes human characteristics and characters to non-human objects and events.

1) The brand image is a collection of ideas about the abstract features of the brand in the consumer's mind rather than the functional features of a brand. All the connotations that occur in the consumer mind as soon as the consumer encounters with the brand are brand images. Consumers fulfill their psychologi-

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