Chapter 1
Significance of Brand Image on SME Survival in Digital Competition

Esra Güven

https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3233-9714

Celal Bayar University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

With the digitalization of the world and the spread of social media, competition conditions are also changing, and SMEs must keep up with this rapid transformation. SMEs that use these digital platforms correctly and reflect their brand images properly will achieve their goals at a minimal cost. This chapter aims to give required descriptions and explanations about the significance of the brand image of an SME as well as the things to do to build a brand image in a sequence from the widespread content to the digital environments. Brand, image, and brand image concepts have been explained, respectively. The related topic has also elaborated on the kinds of brand image. Social media and its effect on brand image and the things to do to build a brand image in digital environments have been discussed in detail in the chapter. There are also some brand image development activity examples from successful SMEs worldwide.

INTRODUCTION

Brand as a concept in the center of marketing is known to be a complex structure that hosts many different elements in itself. SMEs are in a great effort of developing strategies that will differentiate themselves from their rivals so that they can build their own brands as a face looking at the society and the consumers. At that point, they aim at analysing the consumer perceptions and creating favourable and striking images in the eyes of the consumers, because it is urgent for SMEs to have a positive brand images to be able to survive in today's competitive world. In this process, the attributes and the benefits as well as the consumer attitudes should be taken into consideration, as it wouldn't be impossible to understand

the consumer and create favourable images in the minds of consumers as long as the related factors effective in purchase preferences are handled unilaterally.

Throughout the history of marketing activities, marketers have always taken steps to build positive brand image in the eye of consumers so as to compete with the rival companies or brands. The advertising activities and promotion campaigns through TV, radio or other traditional methods have always aimed at coming to the fore in the preferences of consumers. In all this traditional process, a passive role of the consumer and the effort of the brands to give message actively have been regarded as the main characteristic of the consumer- brand communications.

The growth of digital marketing since the 1990s and 2000s has altered how companies and brands use technology for marketing. Digital marketing efforts are becoming more common and effective as more and more people use digital devices instead of going to physical stores and as digital platforms are integrated into marketing strategies and daily life (Desai, 2019). Together with the digital technologies surrounding everywhere, a great number of fundamental changes have been seen in every part of life. In this new world where internet is regarded as the most basic power to give direction to the life, traditional consumer profile has been replaced by digital consumer profile. Among too many alternatives, this new digital consumer profile prefers the brands which attract him or her the most, communicate in the best way, give fast and effective feedbacks, and for all, use the technology properly. Together with this digital transformation, the traditional passive consumers have become a completely active and self-confident ones.

Individuals have started to spend much of their time in social networking sites just after the introduction of social media platforms. The virtual environments such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, brand communities and fan groups and entertainment platforms have become indispensable platforms for leisure time activities. This great and extraordinary potential of social media and digital platforms has attracted the marketers and researchers in an unexpected manner. The digital environment has undergone changes. Traditional media has been rendered ineffectual and inefficient at introducing brands to consumers, due to the increased reliance of the customers on electronic media. The brands having been trying to affect the consumers bearing high costs have found opportunities to do marketing activities in much more inexpensive ways. We Are Social and HootSuite (2021) claim that the internet, which serves as the foundation for digital development (websites and social media), has touched more than half of the world's population (59.6%) and changed consumers' media consumption preferences. The saying "If a company cannot be located on Google, it does not exist" properly captures how modern consumers behave, and this tendency is in line with it (Suryani et al, 2021). It also highlights how important it is for businesses to use digital platforms, so that small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) must keep up with technological changes in order to remain competitive (Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015).

It is often disregarded that there are some strategies for the SMEs about the move of the consumers into digital environments and the communication with them by joining the activities in digital platforms. The first thing to be seen in digital environments and create a difference there is that companies or brands should build a strong and consistent brand image in the minds of the consumers. While building this image, primarily the brand websites, social media platforms and other online environments should be analysed in detail. During this analysis, it should be known that the consumers are not the traditional ones any longer, and the contents created in these platforms should be handled carefully. Both in social media ads, viral videos and brand communities or consumer websites, the most important point is that the contents should be able to attract the consumers and make them listen to the given brand messages. It should also be known that advertising is not the only factor to affect the consumer purchase decision, and the new consumer profile is affected by many factors combined. Such kind of awareness will con-

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