



BRAND ASSOCIATIONS UNVEILED: A THEORETICAL INQUIRY THROUGH LITERATURE SYNTHESIS

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ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this research is to conduct thorough theoretical investigations into brand associations, as they play a crucial role in brand equity. The rationale behind exploring brand associations lies in their significant impact on various components of brand equity. The research adopted a comprehensive approach to examining brand associations and the various factors that can influence them. The key outcomes of this study have made valuable additions to the existing knowledge base within the realm of brand management. Furthermore, the findings of this study are expected to serve as a valuable resource for future researchers, offering a consolidated literature review focusing on different aspects of brand equity. Within the discussion section, the authors have elaborated on the managerial and theoretical implications arising from the study.

KEYWORDS: Brand associations, Brand equity, Brand Management, Perceived innovativeness

INTRODUCTIONS

Brand associations are the thoughts and feelings that individuals hold regarding a particular brand, encompassing the mental and emotional responses evoked when encountering or contemplating it. These associations play a crucial role in shaping perceptions of the brand, influencing the overall image that individuals construct in their minds, and potentially impacting their evaluations of whether a new product aligns with the established brand identity.

These associations may pertain to various aspects such as the values and principles that the brand represents or the types of products and services it offers to consumers. They serve as a lens through which individuals interpret and evaluate the brand, contributing to the construction of a multifaceted brand image that resonates with consumers on different levels.

(Michel & Donthu, 2014)The formation of brand associations is a complex process that is influenced by a variety of factors, including individuals' perceptions of what is fundamental to the brand's essence, such as its core values and unique selling propositions. Additionally, consumers' experiences with the brand, the information they receive through various channels, and the knowledge they acquire from social interactions can all play a role in shaping these associations.

Furthermore, the alignment between a brand and a new product can significantly impact how the brand is perceived by consumers. The extent to which a new offering resonates with the core ideas and attributes of the brand can influence its acceptance and integration into the existing brand identity, potentially enhancing or detracting from the brand's overall image.

Measuring the strength of brand associations involves assessing the degree of connection that individuals feel towards the brand, even in the absence of direct product experience. This emotional and cognitive bond that consumers establish with a brand reflects the depth of their engagement and loyalty, providing valuable insights into the brand's positioning and resonance within the marketplace.



LITERATURE REVIEW

Categorization Theory

The theory of categorization, originating from the field of cognitive psychology, delves into the intricate mechanisms through which individuals establish connections between novel pieces of information and pre-existing knowledge constructs that reside within their cognitive framework. This theoretical framework serves as a pivotal tool in unraveling the cognitive processes that underlie the perception of new products by consumers, particularly in the context of contrasting brand extensions with established brands that occupy a space in the consumer's consciousness. When an individual encounters a new product that aligns harmoniously with an established brand that holds a significant place in their mental schema, the individual is inclined to attribute similar sentiments and perceptions to the new product; however, in cases where such alignment is lacking, the individual is more likely to evaluate the new product based on its intrinsic qualities and merits, independent of any existing associations. The intricate process of information processing within the realm of categorization theory can be elucidated through the dichotomy of non-analytic processing, characterized by the tendency to group entities based on perceived similarities, and analytic processing, which involves a meticulous comparison of distinct features and attributes. In the initial stages of information processing, individuals tend to swiftly form judgments based on their immediate emotional responses; subsequently, they engage in a more deliberate and contemplative evaluation, directing their attention towards specific nuances and intricacies embedded within the information at hand.

Brand Associations

Brand associations can be described as a complex network of cognitive connections that are intricately linked to a particular brand within the confines of our memory. These associations encompass a wide range of perceptions, encompassing aspects related to the product's overall quality, as well as the brand's overarching image and the various symbols that it represents. When individuals engage in the act of shopping, these brand associations play a pivotal role in influencing their decision-making processes, ultimately guiding them towards selecting specific products or brands over others. It is worth noting that advertisements and in-store displays serve as powerful tools in reinforcing and revitalizing these brand associations within the minds of consumers. The extent to which shoppers engage in a thorough analysis of these associations or opt for more impulsive decision-making strategies is contingent upon the salience and conspicuousness of the brand's distinctive features as portrayed in advertisements and store displays.

Perceived Innovativeness

Consumers perceive the novelty of a product to be a crucial element when corporations are introducing new iterations of their products. This perception of newness plays a significant role in shaping consumer behavior and preferences towards the product offerings in the market. Despite the fundamental importance of this aspect, there is a scarcity of comprehensive research studies that delve into the intricate nuances of how consumers perceive and evaluate newness in product updates. Understanding consumer perceptions of newness is imperative for companies aiming to achieve success in the competitive marketplace.

Newness, from the consumer's perspective, can encompass a variety of dimensions, including unique features, functionalities, or benefits that differentiate a product from its competitors. These distinguishing characteristics are pivotal in influencing consumer perceptions and attitudes towards the product. Moreover, the concept of newness extends beyond mere physical attributes to encompass the overall experience of novelty associated with a product. This experiential dimension of newness is crucial for both the company introducing the product and the target market it seeks to attract.

Furthermore, the perception of newness can also serve as a yardstick for evaluating a company's competency in research and development. Consumers often associate high levels of newness with innovation and technological advancement, thereby attributing a positive image to companies that consistently deliver novel products. This underscores the importance for companies to continuously innovate and introduce new features to maintain a competitive edge in the market.

While existing research predominantly focuses on tangible goods, it is equally essential for service-oriented companies to cultivate an image of newness and differentiation. Service companies must also strive to offer innovative solutions and unique value propositions to meet the evolving needs and preferences of consumers. By embracing newness as a core value, service companies can enhance their competitiveness and appeal to a broader consumer base.



In some instances, what a company perceives as novel may not necessarily align with consumer perceptions of newness. This dissonance in perspectives can be exemplified in scenarios such as the introduction of computer chips versus the advent of the internet. While a company may view the development of computer chips as groundbreaking, consumers may not perceive the same level of novelty compared to transformative innovations like the internet. This disjuncture highlights the importance of aligning company perceptions of newness with consumer expectations to effectively resonate with target audiences.

Contextual Salience

Information has a significant impact on the evaluation of a brand when it possesses qualities such as being easy to recall (accessible) and pertinent (diagnostic). The ease of memory retrieval and relevance of the information play a crucial role in shaping consumers' perceptions and attitudes towards a particular brand.

Consumers frequently rely on the information that is readily available to them, such as advertisements, in order to make informed judgments about various products in the market. The content of these advertisements often serves as a primary source of information that consumers use to form opinions and make decisions regarding their purchases.

Judgments concerning brands can either be made based on a singular brand in isolation or through a comparative analysis involving multiple brands. Consumers may engage in a mental process of comparing and contrasting different brands in order to identify the most suitable option for their needs and preferences.

In some instances, individuals may not actively seek out all available information about a brand, instead, they tend to rely on information that is easily accessible to them. This selective process of information retrieval can significantly influence how consumers perceive and evaluate a brand in the marketplace.

Advertisements play a crucial role in enhancing the visibility of brand information, thereby influencing consumers' judgments and decisions. The strategic placement and content of ads can make certain brand information more prominent and memorable in the minds of consumers.

In the absence of advertisements, individuals often rely on their memory and cognitive processes to determine the key aspects that are deemed important about a particular brand. This internalized information retrieval process can shape individuals' perceptions and attitudes towards a brand in the absence of external stimuli. (Boisvert & Burton, 2011)

The associations that consumers have with a brand are subject to change over time, especially in response to new advertisements or product offerings introduced by the brand. These evolving brand associations can impact consumers' preferences and choices in the market.

The extent to which a well-established and widely recognized brand influences consumers' judgments and evaluations of new products remains a topic of uncertainty and debate within the field of consumer behavior. The intricate relationship between brand recognition and new product judgments warrants further research and exploration in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of consumer decision-making processes.

Types of Brand Associations

Corporate associations (CA) encompass the perceptions, emotions, and overall evaluations that individuals hold towards a company, constituting a multifaceted cognitive and affective construct that shapes their attitudes and behaviors towards the organization in question. These associations are pivotal in shaping the reputation and identity of the company in the eyes of consumers and stakeholders, playing a crucial role in influencing their decision-making processes and loyalty towards the brand.

The development of brand associations serves to craft a distinctive and enduring mental representation of a brand in the minds of consumers, thereby differentiating it from rival offerings in the marketplace. By fostering a set of unique and salient associations, a brand can carve out a distinct positioning in the competitive landscape, enhancing its appeal and relevance to target audiences while fostering brand loyalty and preference among consumers.

While brand associations center on cultivating a comprehensive and holistic perception of the entire company, product associations are more specific in nature, focusing on individual offerings or product lines within the brand



portfolio. These associations serve to delineate the unique attributes, benefits, and value propositions associated with particular products, influencing consumers' purchase decisions and perceptions of the brand as a whole.

Recent empirical investigations conducted by scholars such as Brown and Dacin have underscored the robust impact of Corporate Associations (CA) on shaping individuals' perceptions of a company, demonstrating its heightened influence compared to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives, particularly in the context of emerging technological products. These findings highlight the significance of CA in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviors towards innovative products and technologies, emphasizing the pivotal role of corporate reputation in driving market success and competitive advantage.

Scholarly inquiries led by Dean and other esteemed researchers have illuminated the transformative potential of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) endeavors in fortifying a company's image and reputation, especially in times of crisis or uncertainty. By engaging in socially responsible practices that benefit society and stakeholders, companies can bolster their credibility, trustworthiness, and goodwill among consumers, mitigating reputational risks and enhancing their resilience in the face of adversities.

Individuals' preexisting beliefs and perceptions regarding a brand's Corporate Associations (CA) or Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives can exert a profound influence on their responses to negative publicity or adverse information concerning the brand. These ingrained associations and attitudes shape individuals' interpretations and evaluations of brand-related events, affecting their trust, loyalty, and overall engagement with the company in times of controversy or reputational challenges. (Jeon & Baeck, 2016)

The theoretical framework of Cognitive Response Theory provides insights into how individuals' preexisting cognitions and mental schemas can act as cognitive filters, influencing their receptivity to new and potentially contradictory information regarding a brand's Corporate Associations (CA) or Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) practices. This theoretical perspective elucidates the complexities of consumer information processing and decision-making, shedding light on the mechanisms through which prior beliefs and associations can either reinforce or attenuate the impact of new information on individuals' perceptions and attitudes towards brands.

Self-Brand Association (SBA)

Self-Brand Association pertains to the extent to which an individual perceives a brand as an intrinsic component of their personal identity, such as when an individual believes that a specific brand aligns well with their self-concept or individual characteristics. This psychological phenomenon is significant due to the fact that individuals frequently opt to make purchases from brands that they believe mirror their self-perception or with which they share a profound emotional bond. (Li et al., 2020)

This phenomenon carries considerable weight as it influences consumer behavior and purchasing decisions significantly. Individuals with a robust Self-Brand Association are inclined to acquire goods and services in order to showcase their affiliation with a particular social group or to articulate and manifest their unique identity and self-expression through the consumption of specific products and brands.

Stakeholder Brand Associations

Stakeholder brand association pertains to the perceptions and emotions held by individuals towards a brand, which are formulated as a result of their various encounters and engagements with said brand within the market. The associations established can manifest in the form of verbal expressions, emotional states, or cognitive reflections that are evoked when contemplating a particular brand entity. It is noteworthy that diverse categories of stakeholders such as customers, employees, or investors may harbor distinct perspectives regarding a brand due to the unique nature of their interactions and engagements with the brand entity across different touchpoints and contexts.

Functional Brand Associations and Symbolic Brand Associations

Functional brand associations pertain to the perceptions regarding the efficacy and quality of a product, encompassing considerations of its functionality and practical utility as perceived by consumers who engage with it. These associations encapsulate the extent to which a product is deemed effective, reliable, and beneficial in fulfilling its intended purpose, thereby shaping the perceptions and attitudes of individuals towards the product in question. (Esmailpour, 2015)



Symbolic brand associations delve into the realm of the abstract constructs, encompassing the multitude of ideas, values, and ideologies that individuals attribute to a brand, reflecting and shaping their self-concept and identity. These associations extend beyond the functional attributes of a product to encompass the symbolic meanings and societal representations that a brand conveys, such as its affiliation with particular social strata or its perceived embodiment of prestige and affluence.

The Significance of Brand Association

Brand association pertains to the cognitive process wherein individuals form mental connections with specific attributes upon encountering a brand, such as associating a red can of soda with Coca-Cola. This phenomenon is of utmost importance within the realm of marketing and brand management due to its profound impact on consumer behavior and brand perception. (Koll & von Wallpach, 2014)

The crucial nature of brand association lies in its ability to facilitate brand recall and recognition among consumers, consequently influencing their purchase decisions. By establishing strong and positive associations with a brand, marketers can effectively enhance brand loyalty and drive consumer preference towards their products or services.

Fundamental Components of Brand Equity

According to the renowned marketing strategist Aaker, brand equity is predicated upon a multifaceted framework encompassing various key elements, including brand association, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand loyalty, and other tangible assets like patents. These components collectively contribute to the overall value and perception of a brand in the eyes of consumers and stakeholders.

Brand awareness represents the extent to which consumers can readily recall and identify a brand across diverse touchpoints and contexts, underscoring its pivotal role in brand building and market positioning.

Cultivating Brand Association

The process of fostering brand association necessitates a strategic approach wherein brand familiarity is established as a precursor to consumer engagement and purchase intent. Brand association serves as the initial phase in the consumer decision-making journey, laying the foundation for brand preference and loyalty.

The Intensity of Brand Association

The strength and durability of brand association are contingent upon the frequency and depth of consumer exposure to the brand across various channels and touchpoints. The more immersive and consistent the brand experience, the stronger the associations formed in the minds of consumers.

Fostering Positive Brand Association

Brands can cultivate favorable associations by showcasing positive attributes, values, and benefits associated with their products or services. By emphasizing desirable qualities and benefits, brands can shape consumer perceptions and attitudes towards their offerings, thereby influencing purchase behavior.

Influence of brand associations on brand equity

Brand equity, denoting the overall value and perception of a brand in the marketplace, is intricately linked to the associations and attributes consumers associate with the brand. Consumers' perceptions of a brand's reputation, quality, and distinctiveness significantly impact its equity, encompassing factors such as brand awareness, brand associations, and brand loyalty. (Jayswal & Vora, 2019) The initial stage of brand-customer interaction involves brand awareness, wherein consumers recognize and acknowledge the existence of a brand before forming deeper connections through brand associations. These associations, shaped by consumer experiences and perceptions, play a pivotal role in influencing purchase decisions and brand loyalty. The robustness of a brand's associations is contingent upon the frequency and diversity of consumer interactions with the brand, encompassing both tangible and intangible aspects that define the brand's identity and value proposition. These associations encapsulate the essence of what the brand represents and the perceived benefits it offers to consumers.

Relationship Between Brand Associations and Social Representations

Brand associations can be likened to small fragments of information that individuals retain regarding a particular brand, encompassing aspects such as the brand's core values and the products or services it provides. These associations serve as mental cues that individuals use to form perceptions and judgments about a brand. On the other hand, social representations can be viewed as collective beliefs or opinions held by a community or group



of individuals regarding a specific entity, aiding in their comprehension and discourse on the subject matter. These shared representations facilitate communication and interaction among group members, shaping their collective understanding and perspective. (Erjansola et al., 2021) The recognition of a brand's logo plays a crucial role in enabling individuals to evoke thoughts and associations related to the brand and its underlying significance. However, the establishment of a strong connection between the logo and the brand itself may require a certain amount of time to solidify. Over time, repeated exposure and interaction with the logo contribute to the reinforcement of these brand associations in individuals' minds, enhancing their recognition and understanding of the brand.

In essence, both brand associations and social representations serve as cognitive frameworks that assist individuals in structuring their thoughts and perceptions regarding a brand. By categorizing and organizing information about a brand, these mental constructs enable individuals to articulate their views and opinions coherently and to align their perspectives with those of others within their social sphere. Through the shared understanding facilitated by brand associations and social representations, individuals can engage in meaningful discussions and interactions, fostering a sense of unity and commonality within the group.

Institutional Theory

Institutional theory, a prominent framework in organizational studies, elucidates the manner in which entities navigate and adhere to societal expectations and established norms to attain legitimacy and credibility within their respective industry or field of operation. This theory posits that organizations, as entities existing within a broader social context, encounter significant pressures to conform to these norms emanating from diverse sources such as clientele, suppliers, and industry rivals. These pressures, as delineated by the theory, are broadly categorized into three distinct types: normative, wherein organizations voluntarily emulate the behaviors and practices of others within the industry; coercive, which necessitates compliance with regulations and directives imposed by external entities or influenced by political factors; and mimetic, denoting the phenomenon whereby organizations imitate and replicate the strategies and approaches of successful competitors in a bid to achieve similar levels of success and recognition. (Virutamasen et al., 2015)

How Social Enterprise Strengthens Brand Association?

Social enterprises are dedicated to pursuing social and environmental objectives, a distinctive approach that portrays a brand as compassionate and accountable, thus appealing to a clientele that esteems these attributes. This strategic focus enables organizations to cultivate a favorable perception and establish emblematic representations associated with their brand, consequently fostering a more profound and enduring rapport with their target audience. Being recognized as a social enterprise augments a company's credibility and engenders confidence among the general public, thereby fortifying the bond and sense of identification individuals develop with the brand.

How Advertisement Affects Brand Associations?

Advertisements that are predominantly focused on promotions and discounts have the potential to negatively influence consumers' perceptions of a brand, leading to a decrease in their overall evaluation of the brand's image, quality, and general attitude towards it. When advertising campaigns heavily emphasize savings and deals, individuals may shift their attention towards the cost aspect rather than the intrinsic value and characteristics of the brand itself, consequently diminishing its perceived worth. Despite the fact that consumers may extensively engage with such promotional content, it appears that their emotional connection and sentiment towards the brand remains largely unaffected in comparison to advertisements that do not prioritize pricing discussions. The impact on brand quality appears to be the most pronounced when marketing efforts predominantly revolve around promotional strategies, surpassing the influence on consumers' perceptions of the brand or their assessments of its modernity and popularity. (Clayton & Heo, 2011)

DISCUSSION

It is imperative for organizations to direct their efforts towards the development of advertisements that accentuate the distinctive characteristics and advantages of their products, rather than merely concentrating on the promotion of discounts and offers. By doing so, companies can effectively communicate the value proposition of their offerings to potential customers, thus enhancing brand awareness and differentiation in a competitive market environment.

Establishing a resilient brand identity necessitates the association of the brand with positive sentiments and principles, a task that can be accomplished through the implementation of coherent and top-notch communication



practices. This approach not only helps in cultivating a favorable brand image but also fosters emotional connections with consumers, leading to increased brand loyalty and advocacy over time.

In order to uphold a perception of superior quality, enterprises should refrain from excessively highlighting price-based promotions in their promotional campaigns, as this strategy has the potential to erode the perceived value of the brand among consumers. By focusing on communicating the intrinsic value and utility of their products or services, companies can reinforce their positioning as providers of premium offerings in the market.

CONCLUSION

Active engagement with customers on a regular basis and gaining insights into their preferences and requirements play a pivotal role in customizing marketing messages that reinforce positive brand associations. By aligning their messaging with consumer expectations and aspirations, companies can strengthen brand relationships and foster a sense of trust and loyalty among their target audience.

Organizations are advised to carefully evaluate the enduring effects of their advertising strategies on brand equity, with an emphasis on cultivating lasting customer relationships and nurturing a perception of exclusivity and prestige around their brand. By prioritizing initiatives that focus on building brand loyalty and enhancing brand reputation in the long run, companies can position themselves as trusted and preferred choices in the minds of consumers.

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