

CORRELATION BETWEEN BRAND IMAGE & PUBLIC PERCEPTION: A STUDY

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Abstract

The paper deals with the relationship between brand image and public perception while choosing the Services/Product. In the changing socio-economical conditions, it is vital to understand the behavior /expectations of target group as it is the people who make judgment based on experiences over a period of time (about the product/organization). It affects the reputation of Business Group/Service Provider, positively or negatively which results into future prospects. The behavior of a person as consumer has always been a dynamic phenomenon. To understand this intriguing behavior in present situation, a survey was conducted by the researchers. It highlights some interesting behavior pattern of public and the reasons behind it.

Keywords: Image management, Reputation, Public, Public Relations, communication.

Introduction

The concept of corporate image has progressively been drawing in enthusiasm as distinguishing how they are seen by the public, and re-planning their procedures likewise is of most extreme significance for the proficient and compelling sensitivity of the business capacities, upgrade of corporate execution, and for the manageability of enterprises. In social insurance, corporate administration officials are increasingly mindful of the significance of corporate image and its suggestions for their partnerships' life prospects. This vital concept, be that as it may, has been drawn nearer and characterized by creators in numerous distinctive styles, and because of its generally covering characteristics, it has additionally normally been related with other related concepts, for example, corporate name and corporate personality.

Corporate reputation is the overall opinion in which an organization is seen by its internal and external stakeholders based on its past actions and probability of its potential behavior. While being something that is so significantly important, many companies do not give a second thought about corporate reputation. Even if a company is good at taking care of their existing customers, a business may not become aware of the possibility of more business if their reputation was handled well. A business can achieve its objectives rather easily if it has a fine reputation among its stakeholders, especially key stakeholders such as its main customers, opinion leaders in the business community, suppliers and current and probable employees.

Corporate brand image management is a key issue for any organization. Accordingly, its study is a research field of great significance. This questionnaire explores the concept of corporate brand identity from the consumers' point of view in purchase of a product and analyses the link between brand identity management and consumers' attitudes and behaviors. Results signify that organizations

should pay special attention to the corporate brand identity management, as it has influence on consumer' loyalty with their organizations, as well as their brand performance and satisfaction

Literature Review

Corporate image is described as the overall impression made on the minds of the public about a firm (Barich and Kotler, 1991; Dichter, 1985; Finn, 1961; Kotler, 1982). The Corporate image comprises all the visual, verbal and behavioural elements that make up the organization. As such, corporate image has two principal components: the functional and the emotional (Kennedy, 1977).

The earliest given definition for Public Relations, which still holds true, is that it is the attempt by information, persuasion and adjustment to engineer public support for an activity, cause, movement or institution (Bernays, 1955).

Public Relations is the process of “building good relations with the firm’s various publics by obtaining favorable publicity, building up a good corporate image, and handling or heading off unfavorable rumors, stories, and events” (ZainBooks.com, 2011).

Carthy (1992) has found that: “The public is divided into many smaller publics or audiences. These include employees, the community, customers, consumers, suppliers, distributors, politicians, public servants, financial institutions, stockbrokers, shareholders, financial analysts and opinion leaders” (1992 P5).

Although corporate websites, chat-rooms, email customer response facilities and electronic news release distribution are now viewed as standard aspects of public relations practice (Galloway, 2005) many public relations practitioners are struggling with the impact of new media, and especially the Internet.

Although various propositions are found in the literature as to how image is formed in people's minds, MacInnis and Price (1987) report that researchers in the field agree that corporate image is the result of a process. Image is the reflection of one's personality, values, attitudes, interests, abilities, uniqueness, roles and often goals.

Organizational researchers examine reputation as being a social identity and portray it as an important and intangible resource which may significantly contribute to an organization's performance, and even to its survival (Fombrun and Shanley, 1990; Hall, 1993; Rao, 1994).

Corporate reputation may be seen as a mirror of the firm's history which serves to communicate to its target groups information regarding the quality of its products or services in comparison with those of its competitors (Yoon et al., 1993).

Everything an organization does and does not do has an impact on the perception of that organization and its performance, products and services. According to Herbig and Milewicz(1993), corporate reputation is formed as a process that gathers the judgments over time of the various groups who interact with the firm.

The reputation of a firm is built through its trustworthy actions. It is also delicate because the impact of a bad action on the customer is much stronger than that of a good action (Herbig and Milewicz, 1994). The nature of a firm's reputation depends on the results of its perceived actions in this period. If the firm repeatedly succeeds to fulfill its promises, it should have a positive reputation; and inversely, the firm's failure to express its true intent may create a negative reputation (Herbig and Milewicz, 1993).

Herbig and Milewicz (1993, p. 18) define reputation as “an estimation of the consistency over time of an attribute of an entity”. A firm can have, therefore, multiple reputations - one for each aspect such as price, product quality, innovativeness, management quality - or a global reputation.

“The most critical, strategic and perhaps enduring asset that a corporation possesses is its reputation” (Cravens, Goad Oliver and Ramamoorti, 2003, p.201)

Corporate reputations influence and are influenced by all the ways in which the company projects its image, its behavior, communication and symbolism (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001)

Corporate reputation brings together marketing and organizational studies, strategic management and communications (Davies et.al.,2003).

Research Design

To understand the behavior of target group we adopted Survey as research methodology as primary quantitative data was required for this study. Besides

Survey method is usually helpful for describing certain aspects or characteristics of population

A sample size of 200 was taken for the survey from Delhi-NCR region. The questions were answered by various professionals and homemakers. Basically those people who take the daily decisions of purchasing products.

A set of two questions were made keeping in mind to find the importance of corporate image in the minds of actual consumers.

Research Questions

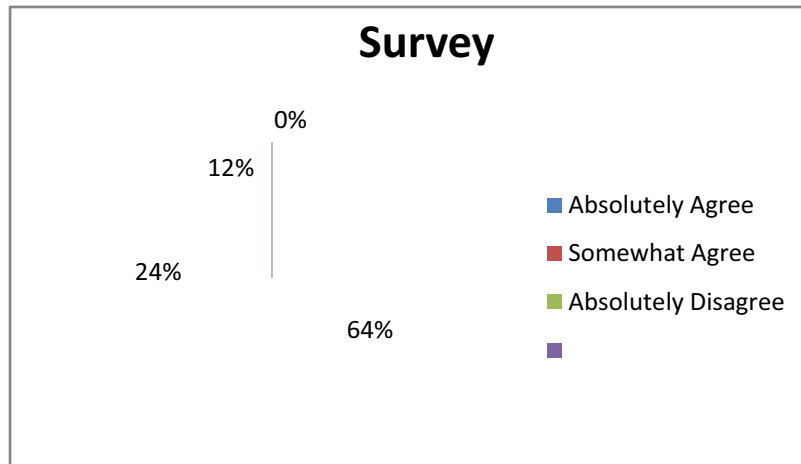
R.Q. 1 - Does the image of the company matter when Consumer is buying a particular product or service?

R.Q. 2-How does the self image of consumer affect the decision of consumer.

Data Interpretation & Analysis

When Researchers asked the end users that does the image of an organization affect their buying decision, a clear inclination is seen. Here out of 200, a majority of 128 people said they ‘Absolutely

agree' to the fact that yes it affects their decision. 48 people said 'somewhat agree' and 24 people were there who absolutely disagreed with this.



Survey result Q. 1

Two options of 'somewhat disagree and doesn't Matter' were surprisingly not touched by the respondents. A point that became clear that 'doesn't matter' is out of question which means something does matter and that is a very good sign especially for professionals who are constantly striving towards managing image for corporate organizations in order to make them sustain the cut-throat competition while carving a niche for them to stand-out among the rest of the competitors.

This was a very simple and easy question, just to get first glimpse of the importance of corporate image in the respondents' mind. It was like the first peek with a small candle in an absolutely dark room.

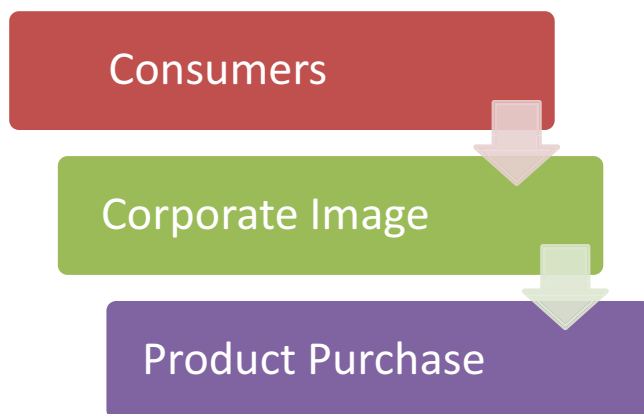
This was the first attempt and with all responsibility, a booster. The replies to this gave a confidence to take this research a step further and also gave a self-belief in the research being undertaken. The replies to this question kind of pushed the research in the desired direction.

This question is a general one that aims to get tickles the feelings of respondents on the subject matter in general or basic way. It is as simple as do you like silk cloth or put it like do you keep in mind the look or color of fruits when you buy them.

By the clear response to the fact that yes corporate image is of importance to respondents, atleast this has got clear the whole image of the brand thing has made its space in the minds of the consumers in case of purchase of a product.

Brand image is dominant to building reliability and loyalty among potential customers. If one constantly works at maintaining a stable brand image, be it the freshness of your food or your packaging, it contributes to a consumer's relationship with your brand. The more frequently you can

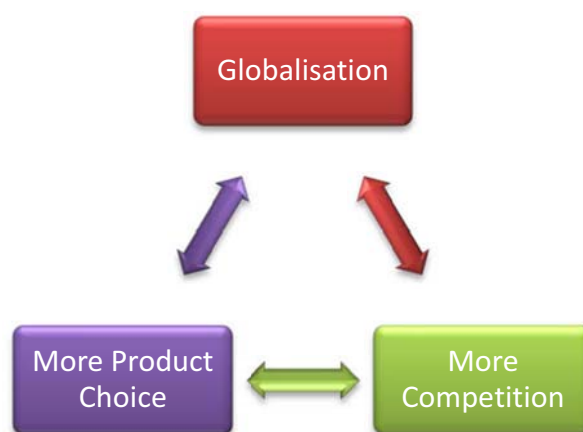
deliver on your brand promise with a tough brand image, the easier it will be for consumers to keep in mind your brand and what it stands for.



Corporate Image

Another fact to be noticed here is, that definitely the quality of the product must be of great importance but no lesser weightage can be given to now the strong factor 'image'. It is that edge to the brand that helps companies handle competitive products and their sales. Businesses looking to construct their reputations can do so in a numerous ways in order to increase profitability and establish themselves in the market. Having a good reputation can be advantageous to a business in a multiple ways.

Corporate image has become of great importance today. In previous times, it was not as huge a demand as it is today. It was because there was lesser competition. Today in the era of globalization, the whole world has become a global village. Consumers are at an advantage of having a wide variety to select from. Not only variety, consumers also have various options of the same product from various companies to choose from.



Globalization

When the respondents were asked that does the image of the company matter to them while they buy or purchase a product. They had five choices and had to choose one. The five choices were:

ABSOLUTELY DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	ABSOLUTELY AGREE	DOESN'T MATTER
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

The market is also filled with parity products, which means similar products, in similar quality but with a varied price range. So, if the price of your product is more than some similar products then why will the consumer buy it? For that an edge needs to be created to be able to score over others.

Results signify that organizations should pay special attention to the corporate brand identity management, as it has influence on consumer' loyalty with their organizations, as well as their brand performance and satisfaction.



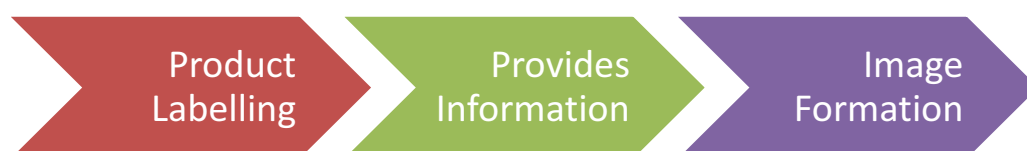
Product Sale

There is strong optimistic connection between people's opinion of a company and corporate image. Organizations are understandably apprehensive about managing their Corporate Image. This shows that there is a strong positive relationship between how people perceive an organization and the pro-corporate loyal behavior. Corporate images are perceived as the mind pictures of an organization. It is the sum total of these assumed characteristics of the corporation that we refer to as the corporate image. Every organization has its image whether the organization does anything about it or not. So, corporates must be consistent about maintaining a distinct and positive corporate image.

As a second question researchers asked "Do you get annoyed when you can't tell what company is behind a product?" The question aimed to understand the seriousness of a 'brand' for consumers.

When professionals work hard to establish a brand taking the whole concept of image so seriously, is it really that important for consumers also? If not, then this whole concept becomes insignificant.

There is major importance of labeling in image formation. In addition, labeling also aims to provide the information about a product to the prospective customer. This role meets informative purpose of using a mark. Labeling is used for packaging the product. This helps to spread awareness between the customers about the item they are using and labeling also helps to mention ingredients.



Labeling factor

Products need to be identified to help with classification and play a key role in company brand building programs. Branded Product Labels require to be securely bonded to the product surface in a method that is best suited to that product.

Another main point of the use of labeling and packaging is to amplify the product. A marketer needs to grasp the attention of a viewer to buy the product. Labeling and packaging must be able to beautify a product to attach to its visual appeal. This can instantly seize a viewer's attention for a product. You can stimulate interest in the mind of a customer towards a product by way of an attractively designed label. It is necessary to use a good quality material for the sticker.

No false or vague information can be placed on the label. The product must stick to the claims made on the label relating, for example, to type, quality, performance, aim, origin, and method of manufacture. As it said "No matter how good the quality and safety of a product, its reputation – and that of your business – will be tarnished if the information you provide to users is insufficient."

Importance of Labeling:

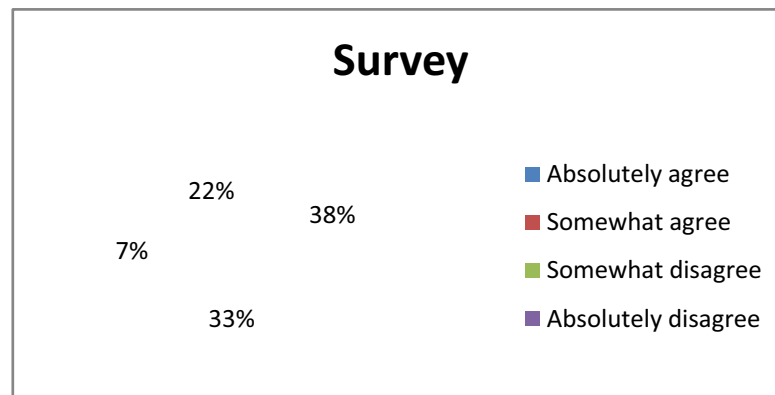
The function of packaging and labeling has become quite important as it helps to grab the attention of the audience.
Labelling and packaging can be used by marketers to persuade potential buyers to buy the product.
Packaging is also used for convenience and spread of information. Packages and labels converse how to use, transfer, recycle or dispose of the package or product.
The container for the product must be made, filled and displayed so that it is not misleading to the consumers about either the quality or quantity of the product.

A wide variety of industries employ labeling verification services specifically for their products. Label verification and product warning verification services can be used as stand-alone, one-off services or can be incorporated into a longer, more-strategic program that forms part of your risk management procedures. There are consultants in this who advise as to what is most suitable for company.

This survey brought to light the awareness of consumers with respect to labeling. They seemed to be conscious of the fact that they check the labeling of product before buying, not only for ingredients but also to check which company is making it. It is done because consumers are conscious of the image of the company making the product.

Respondents here seem to be aware of packaging and did not disappoint. A majority of people chose somewhat agree and absolutely agree as their choice which means that a company's name does affect their decision while buying a particular product. They do check product labels to see which company is behind the product they are buying. Out of 200, 77 people chose 'absolutely agree' and 66 people chose 'somewhat agree' as their choice.

It is very hard to manage reputation because it is a sum total of how the company is perceived based on its past actions which must have generated positive or negative reactions. It takes immense efforts to create a desired image and much more efforts to sustain that desired image. It is an ongoing task that requires constant efforts to be put in.



Survey results Q. 2

There were a portion of people chose 'somewhat disagree' (44 people) and 13 chose 'absolutely disagree' to state that it was not essential for them to check company's name while buying a particular product.

So there is a portion of people who are still not into checks and balances. It means a significant population is yet to get more aware of their right to choice and to exercise it with awareness. But then not all people have same nature, for some people it is actually not a big matter only. It simply doesn't matter to them. This means that there is a considerable amount of population that is still away from the image management concept which is such a huge thing for corporate organizations in these times

of globalization. But slowly and steadily, as the means of communication are increasing in the rural areas also, one must not underestimate the awareness of the rural consumer. Brands need to continually strive to register themselves in the minds of the people and that also for good

The limitation of these answers is that they are from the consumers and home decision makers who belong to the urban background. Although we cannot underestimate the rural consumer, but still their feedback is not included in this research. As the researcher found urban consumer more accessible, readily agreed to participate in the survey and more cooperative; the questionnaire was mainly filled by these respondents.

Conclusion

The research states that the brand image has become vital for decision making especially for urban consumer. Instead of checking the quality of the product, s/he relies on the image of the brand. Research also highlights that in place of tangible benefits, decision of consumer is driven by social or peer group pressure.

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