

**MODELLING THE INFLUENCE OF BRAND TRUST ON THE
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONSUMER, CEO &
CORPORATE REPUTATION**

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Authors:

**John Power
Waterford Crystal Centre for Marketing Studies
Waterford Institute of Technology
Waterford
Ireland**

Tel: +353 86 8187202
Fax: +353 51 302456
E-mail: japower@wit.ie

**Susan Whelan, PhD
Waterford Crystal Centre for Marketing Studies
Waterford Institute of Technology
Waterford
Ireland**

Tel: +353 51 302438
Fax: +353 51 302456
E-mail: swhelan@wit.ie

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ABSTRACT

The image congruity theory has received great interest by marketing academics over the decades (Bellenger et al., 1976; Malhotra, 1981; Sirgy et al. 2000). However, to date most of the research concerning image congruity is based on the assumption that the greater the image match between consumer and brand, the more favourable the relationship between the two (Malhotra, 1981; Aaker, 1997). Aaker's (1997) Brand Personality Scale was validated for a variety of consumers and products, and was generally made up of positive dimensions (e.g. sincere, rugged, competent, sophisticated) and proposed that a good image was determined by those brands which rated highly on positive dimensions. Recently, there has been an extension to the concept of image congruence and its application to corporate image (Davies et al., 2004; Argenti and Druckenmiller, 2004). However to date, the marketing literature has neglected to investigate brand-consumer incongruency, and more importantly to try to offer explanations for this with regard to outcomes such as satisfaction and purchase behaviour. We argue that success is neither about having an image which rates either positively (for example, highly agreeable) or negatively (for example, highly ruthless) on various dimensions of brand personality, nor is it about always having a congruence or "match" between brand image and consumer image as theoretical contributions have suggested. This paper aims to investigate this issue and offer such explanations by investigating brands traditionally viewed as "ruthless" on a measurement scale (Davies et al., 2002) through the development and testing of a conceptual model. That said, surely it is not only ruthless people who purchase ruthless brands.

We propose that corporate image is every dimension of the brand, which is externally perceived by the consumer. It is therefore the aggregate of product brand image, corporate brand image, and CEO image. The management of this externally perceived image is clearly of significance to the field of corporate reputation management. For instance, today there are numerous companies who are perceived as ruthless in their business operations but yet hold a positive image with their publics e.g. Ryanair. Similarly, there are numerous CEO's that hold somewhat ruthless images but these traditionally negative images are not influential over public perception of the corporate image e.g. Richard Branson (seen as ruthless) and Virgin (seen as an agreeable alternative). We use the metaphor of 'brand as person' to present a conceptual framework that illustrates the relationships between consumer, corporate brand, product brand and CEO image. The influence that brand trust as a moderator has on these relationships is examined, and likewise the influence that brand trust has on outcomes of satisfaction, purchase intention and brand loyalty are discussed. The paper concludes with a discussion of implications for theory and managerial practice.