INCONGRUENCY & RUTHLESS BRANDS: MODELLING THE EFFECTS OF TRUST ON THE CUSTOMER - COMPANY RELATIONSHIP

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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 and Chenting, 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 generally consisted of positive dimensions (e.g. sincere, rugged, competent, sophisticated, excited) 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' and 'agreeable' 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 organisation brand image (product and company) and CEO image. The management of this externally perceived image is clearly of significance to the field of corporate reputation management (Brown and Dacin, 1997). 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, organisation brand (product and company) and CEO image. The influence that brand trust as a moderator (Mayers et al., 1995) has on the consumer - company relationships is examined, and likewise the influence that brand trust has on the relational outcomes of intimacy, self-connectedness, commitment and purchase intention are discussed. The paper concludes with a discussion of implications for theory and managerial practice.

INTRODUCTION

As markets become more competitive, disseminated and difficult to manage it has become imperative that your company and brand occupy a definitive position in consumer's minds. There is a widely held principle in the literature that in order to be successful in today's markets that your company and brand must have a good image, and that management of your externally perceived reputation is paramount. Theoretically, good image is determined by having positive characteristics and traits associated with your brand in a bid to conjure up a good brand image of associations, so consumers hold your brand in a more favourable position to the alternatives (Graeff, 1996).

That said, brand image may be defined as the complete picture and association of a brand in the mind of the consumer (Berkman, Lindquist and Sirgy, 1997). We argue that the external perception that a consumer holds for your brand is really what constitutes image. The long-standing theoretical concept of congruence suggests that the more congruent a consumer's image is with a brand's image, the greater the satisfaction derived (Schiffman and Kanuk 2000; Oliver, 1997). Nevertheless, the image that is perceived by the consumer is a complex set of stimuli, which is ever changing, and subject to associations and lifestyle changes in a bid to enhance ones self. Recent developments in measurement scales to investigate brands have provided a fruitful arena for researchers. The approach taken in this paper is that of brand personality as a metaphor for image i.e. assigning human like characteristics to a brand in order to conjure up an image for the brand (Davies et al., 2001).

Aaker's (1997) Brand Personality Scale was validated for a variety of consumers and products, and generally consisted of positive dimensions (e.g. sincere, rugged, competent, sophisticated, excited) in the belief that a good image was determined by those brands which rated well on these positive dimensions. More recently, the metaphor of brand as person has been applied to corporate brands. The Corporate Character Scale (Davies et al., 2004) measures corporate brands across a number of personality dimensions (e.g. agreeableness, enterprise, competence, chic, ruthlessness, machismo, informality) in order to ascertain if a positive or negative image is present.

Nevertheless, it is still the belief that traditional good brand image is determined by those brands, which score higher on positive brand dimensions. Much attention has been devoted in the literature to the positive dimensions of brand imagery and the assumptions that a positive image will have positive effects and relational outcomes (Aaker et al., 2004; Hallowell, 1996; Anderson and Sullivan, 1993).

In addition, 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 good image is not about rating 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, but is determined by the level of consumer trust present with one or more parties of the corporate brand.

We introduce two dimensions of brand personality, namely agreeableness (Goldberg, 1990; 1992) and ruthlessness (Davies et al., 2004) in a bid to contrast the relationships and perceived images which consumers have with brands. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the interrelationship between consumer, the organisation brand (company and product) and the CEO of the organisation. The remainder of this paper discusses the conceptual model (*figure 1.*) and presents the influential literature underpinning this model with our hypotheses introduced throughout. We aim to examine the relational outcomes of consumer satisfaction, intimacy, self-connectedness, commitment and purchase intention when brand trust is a moderator to the relationship. The paper concludes with some research directions and a discussion of implications for theory and managerial practice.

CONCEPUTAL MODEL

The purpose of the conceptual model (*figure 1.*) presented is to highlight the influence which trust, as a moderator, has on the relational outcomes with corporate brands. The model aims to illustrate the interrelationship between consumer, organisation brand (company and product) and the CEO of the organisation. It is also the aim of the conceptual model to change the current perception of image as being good or bad, and define image as being a competitive tool that is company specific, and is always good regardless of classification (Fournier, 1998).

Consumer satisfaction is seen as the outcome of a congruent match between consumer and the corporate brand image (Davies et al., 2001). Consumer trust with the corporate brand is seen as a direct result of satisfaction with one or all parties of the corporate brand hence is a moderator to the relational outcomes of intimacy, self-connectedness, commitment and purchase intention.

The conceptual model (*figure 1.*) will be empirically tested on organisations and CEO's, that previously have been rated in initial qualitative studies, as either agreeable or ruthless using traditional brand personality scales.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model
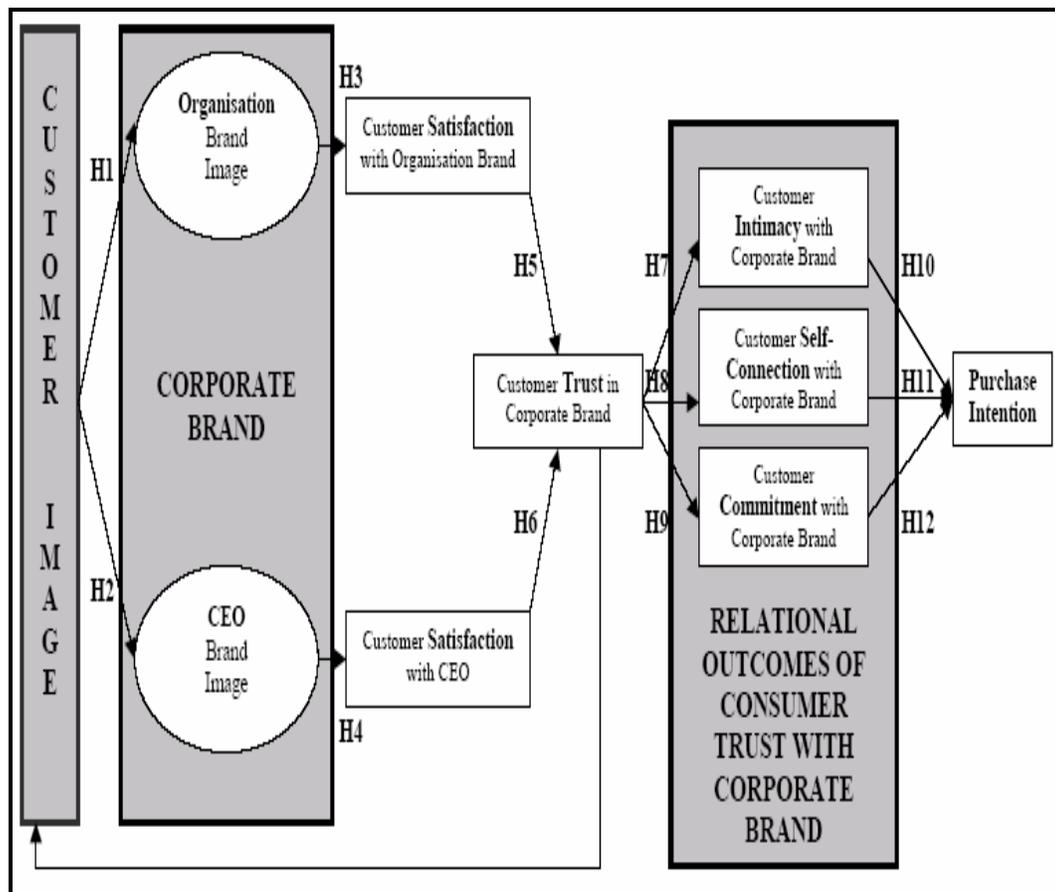
BRAND PERSONALITY

Research has shown that relationships between consumers and brands are influenced by the personalities of each partner (Aaker et al., 2004). Brand personality is the assigning of human characteristics and traits to describe a brand (Aaker, 1997). The general belief is that brands can be associated with personalities so as to aid self-enhancement of the consumer who is purchasing not only the functional brand but also the symbolic brand (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2000; Sirgy and Chenting, 2000). Brands are often measured by characterising them as people. This concept is referred to as the brand as person metaphor for image. The purpose of the brand as person metaphor for image is to aid the easier comprehension of a complex idea, thus allowing brands to be characterised as people with human characteristics (Davies et al., 2001).

Due to the lack of any objective research into brand personalities prior to Aaker's Brand Personality Scale (1997), personalities for brands were uncovered using qualitative and subjective means. Aaker's scale is made up of a number of traits and dimensions. These traits come from a number of sources including; personality scales from psychology, personality scales used by marketers, and original qualitative research. The personality dimensions, which Aaker developed include; excitement, competence, sophistication, ruggedness and sincerity.

Prior to Aaker's study there were two types of scales used to measure brand personality; ad hoc scales typically composed of a large number of traits, and scales which were developed from psychology literature and based on human personality.

Goldberg's (1990; 1992) Five Factor Model of Personality or Big Five is an example of such a human personality scale developed from human psychology. Goldberg's scale is made up of a number of dimensions including; extraversion, conscientiousness, neuroticism, openness to experience and agreeableness. It must be noted that there is a strong similarity between Goldberg's (1990; 1992) dimension of agreeableness and Aaker's (1997) dimension of sincerity.

These landmark studies have one message in common, that brand image can be measured using personality traits as a metaphor, and that good image is a result of scoring high on positive traits and dimensions. By creating a brand personality, marketers (organisations) are seeking to strike a fit between the brand's image and their target consumers' image (Aaker and Biehl, 1993).

IMAGE CONGRUENCE

Image congruence is a well-documented area of the marketing literature which has received significant attention by academics over the decades. According to Graeff (1996) the Image Congruence Hypothesis assumes that consumers should have a favourable attitude and purchase intention towards brands that are perceived to be congruent or matching with their self-image, and a relatively less favourable attitude towards brands perceived to be incongruent with their own self-image.

Malhotra (1981) developed the most commonly used method of measuring and evaluating self-concept. Malhotra's theory measures; self-concept, person concepts and product concepts.

The scale that Malhotra developed includes fifteen pairs of adjectives, used in conjunction with a semantic differential scale, that measures the adjectives across a seven-point scale. Congruence is assessed by measuring the gaps between the image of products and the image of the self. Research does supports the concept of image congruence i.e. that consumers purchase brands with similar personalities or image to their own self-image (Chon, 1992). However, we question this concept on a number of grounds.

Firstly, consumers will tend to rate their own self-image in positive terms and therefore, may in fact only show congruence with a brand, which also has a positive image. This may not be a true reflection. Secondly, the majority of research into image congruence has been centred around positive dimensions of brand personality in the belief that good image is a result of scoring high on positive brand dimensions. This does not address the many successful brands with strong negative but yet powerful images. Fournier (1998) suggests that in order to keep a relationship alive between consumers and brands there needs to be more that just the pull of positive congruent images and feelings.

Thirdly, we question the assumption that consumers always purchase brands that they view as similar or matching to their own self-image. Surely, it would not intuitively be the case for example, that all purchasers of Ryanair flights view themselves as being ruthless in the same way they view the brand, as per our initial qualitative work suggest. Fournier (1998) further emphasises this theory of incongruence and suggest that consumer-brand relationships are a matter of perceived goal compatibility rather than resemblance between discreet product attributes and personality trait images.

Finally, research to date has focused mainly on the congruence between the consumer and one particular entity of the brand. We argue that the corporate brand is the aggregate of the organisation (company and product) brand and the CEO brand. Therefore, must the consumer have congruent images with all parties of the corporate brand in order for positive relational outcomes to exist?

Based on the above discussion and arguments, we state the following hypotheses:

H1: *The more 'agreeable' the customer image the more 'agreeable' the organisation brand image.*

H2: *The more 'agreeable' the customer image the more 'agreeable' the CEO brand image.*

CORPORATE REPUTATION MANAGEMENT

Corporations develop personalities for brands in order for consumers to build closer relationships with their brands in a bid to increase loyalty and purchase intention (Fombrun and Shanley, 1990; Erdem and Swait, 2004). In order for a brand to have a good and trustworthy personality it must first have a brand reputation, which is credible and reliable (Theng Lau and Han Lee, 1999). Corporate reputation i.e. the reputation of the organisation (company and product) and the CEO, is defined as 'the overall estimation in which a company is held by its constituents' (Fombrun, 1996).

According to Fombrun (1996), the development of a positive corporate reputation creates strategic advantage or reputational capital. A positive corporate reputation aids the development of a good and trustworthy reputation for not only the entire corporate brand but also for the personality of the entire corporate brand.

Reputation management itself is a practice whereby the direct and indirect experiences of each public are managed so as to promote a positive image (Fombrun and Shanley, 1990). A bad corporate reputation can harm employee and customer loyalty, threaten a company's financial well-being and even a company's viability (Argenti and Druckenmiller, 2004). Therefore, the reasoning behind the creation of a positive corporate reputation is easily justified. However, the internal culture must also reflect what is portrayed externally.

Hatch and Schultz (2000) argue the importance that organisational culture plays in generating an image to outside stakeholders. They believe that corporate branding brings to marketing the ability to use the culture and vision internal to the company to create a unique selling proposition. Being able to manipulate your corporate reputation and consequently your image via publicising your internal culture allows companies to get closer to their customers in a time when customers want to know more than the brand. Barney (2002) agrees that organisational culture is an important dimension in the development of a competitive strategy today. Fombrun (1996) suggests that organisational culture is a major part of the non-economical aspects of corporate reputation. He argues that values such as credibility, reliability, trustworthiness, and responsibility are central to the way in which a corporate reputation is perceived.

One of the few empirical studies relating to the relationship between perceived culture and reputation was undertaken by Flatt and Kowalczyk (2000). Their study was based on the Organisational Culture Profile Instrument and Fortune's Most Admired Corporation Survey Instrument. Their results show a significant correlation between organisational culture and corporate reputation as it is perceived. Reflecting the internal culture of the organisation to your publics allows you the competitive advantage of developing a corporate brand personality unique to you.

Consumers are now not only purchasing the personality and associations around the product brand but also the personality and associations surrounding the entire corporate brand. This can only facilitate bringing the consumer closer to the brand and strengthening the relational outcomes of such relationships.

Some confusion is present with regard to an accurate definition of what is reputation management and where corporate brand image interacts (Dowling, 1993). From a marketing perspective reputation is often referred to as brand image (Fombrun and Van Riel, 1997). Reputation management from our perspective is the management of the corporate brand image. Our reasoning for this perspective is based upon the assumption that reputation from a consumers perspective is measured by rating the conjured up perceptions of the corporate brand, which results in the formation of a image of the overall corporate brand. In other words, image can be described as the overall impression made in the minds of consumers (Dichter, 1985), and a corporate brand image is therefore a powerful means for a firm to express themselves in a way that is not tied into their specific products or services (Keller, 2000), but can be used to further emphasise a brands image. Therefore, companies manage their reputations in order to harmonise their image and personality.

Davies et al. (2001; 2003; 2004) developed the Corporate Character Scale, which measures the personality of a corporate brand through the brand as person metaphor. The scale has been tested on both the internal and external perception of the corporate brand reputation through the testing of consumers and employees. The scale consists of a number of dimensions including; enterprise, competence, chic, machismo, informality, ruthlessness and agreeableness.

For the purpose of our study we are predominantly interested in the dimensions of ruthlessness and agreeableness, as these two dimensions are in a contrasting position. The scale developed by Davies et al. (2001; 2003; 2004) has built on the earlier work in the field of brand personality by Aaker (1997) i.e. agreeableness, but has removed much of the American-ism associated with the Brand Personality Scale.

A corporate brand image therefore refers to a holistic and vivid impression held by a particular group (consumers) towards a corporation, partly as a result of information processing carried out by the group's members (consumers), and partly by the aggregated communication of the corporation in question (Alvesson, 1990). On the other hand, reputation is a concept that is similar but distinct from image. Image tends to be shifting and transient whereas reputation is relatively stable and consists of many images (Corley and Cochran, 2001). For the purpose of this paper and our conceptual model (*figure 1.*) we propose that the aggregate of organisation brand image (company and product) and CEO image is corporate brand image. Thus, the corporate image of a company, which is externally perceived by customers, is the image that should be managed in order to hold a competitive corporate reputation.

The issue of corporate image and corporate branding becomes even more complex when an individual (CEO, company figurehead, or leader) is closely associated with the corporate brand. How strong an influence a CEO has on the organisational brand and corporate reputation will possibly depend on the level of public awareness of the CEO.

Lazarus (2003) argues that today's brands (corporate and product) are inextricably linked to the CEO's image and behaviour. In essence, the CEO is often an ambassador or endorser of the corporate brand and therefore, brand management of the CEO is now paramount. Bruijns (2003) argues that a correlation does in fact exist between CEO image, corporate reputation and corporate performance and that intangible assets (i.e. image, symbolic leadership) are significantly responsible in gaining competitive advantage in today's competitive markets.

A Burson – Marsteller study provides research to show that the role of the CEO in overall corporate reputation has increased from 40% in 1997 to 48% in 2002 (Gaines-Ross and Cakim, 2002). The study concludes stating that the CEO of a corporation directly influences a range of stakeholders including shareholders, potential shareholder, financial and industry analysts, potential employees, customers and naturally bottom line performance. Therefore, we argue that, in order for the CEO to enhance the image of the corporate or product brand, his or her own externally perceived image by consumers must be congruent with the image of the corporate brand. This idea would be in line with the current theoretical concept of image congruence.

Consumers do not just perceive the image of the brand they purchase but all the associations surrounding the corporation, the reputation that the corporation holds and the corporate brand itself (Flatt and Kowalczyk, 2000). The complex interaction of all these elements on overall image makes the specific reasoning behind the relational outcomes of satisfaction, intimacy, self-connectedness, commitment and purchase intention even harder to determine. However, it is important to keep in mind that when the corporate and brand promises are kept, this in turn will reinforce the corporate reputation and increase relationship strength due to the development of brand trust.

Based on the above discussion and arguments, we state the following hypotheses:

H3:   *The more 'agreeable' the organisation brand image the greater the customer satisfaction with the organisation brand.*

H4:   *The more 'agreeable' the CEO brand image the greater the customer satisfaction with the CEO.*

CONSUMER SATISFACTION

Research suggest that when a consumer has a similar or matching personality with the brand they purchase that this will in turn lead to satisfaction with the brand (Graeff, 1997). Garton (1995) argues that the greater the match between the consumer self-image and the perceived image of the brand the more significant the impact on the consumer - company relationship which results in greater satisfaction with the brand.

Therefore, the greater the similarity of images the greater the satisfaction. Satisfaction with a brand (organisation, product, company or individual) may be defined as the subjective evaluation of a chosen alternative brand, that meets or exceeds expectations (Bloemer and Kasper, 1995). Oliver (1997) defines consumer satisfaction as the difference between what we anticipate and what we accept. Within the literature satisfaction is seen as a post-purchase relational outcome, however we argue that satisfaction can be anticipated by the consumer prior to purchase due to the perceived self-enhancement expected from the purchase of the brand. Yi (1990) states that many studies have found that consumer satisfaction influences purchase intentions as well as post-purchase attitudes.

Anderson and Lindestad (1993) argue that reputation and customer satisfaction have been seen as interrelated. Hence, if a brand is anticipated to have a good and trustworthy reputation then this will enhance the consumer image, thus satisfaction can be derived prior to purchase of the brand. However, what happens when the consumer perceives the brand to be incongruent with his or her own image or to hold a traditional negative brand personality?

According to Davies et al (2003), if we expect an organisation to behave negatively but they treat us well we are likely to be satisfied. Does this mean that if we trust a brand that we perceive to be bad and they treat us good that we will be satisfied with that brand, even though the image of the brand is incongruent with that of our own? Furthermore, we argue can incongruency therefore drive customer satisfaction?

In general, there are two main types of scale, which can be used to measure consumer satisfaction levels, namely single item and multiple item scales (Yi, 1990). We propose to use a single item scale that seeks to uncover overall satisfaction with the organisation and CEO brand. We argue however, that overall satisfaction with both the organisation and the CEO brand is a driver of consumer trust with the corporate brand. When a brand promise is made and expectations are fulfilled then a customer is satisfied and consumer trust is evident with the brand. We believe that the more satisfied a customer is then the more likely they will purchase your brand. This is in line with Yi's (1990) theory of satisfaction and purchase intention. Nevertheless, having satisfied customers is not enough for today's competitive markets. A company wants to have a committed customer base that is trusting of their image, brand and reputation. Therefore, it is true to say, customer trust with the corporate brand is often the result of satisfaction with part or the entire brand (Theng Lau and Han Lee, 1999).

Delgado-Ballester (2004) suggests that overall satisfaction with a brand has a positive effect on brand trust. This is in line with our conceptual model (*figure 1.*) and the concept that brand trust is a moderator (Morgan and Hunt, 1994), which influences the relational outcomes of the consumer - company relationship. That said, we state the following hypotheses:

H5: *The greater the customer satisfaction with the organisation brand the greater the customer trust in the corporate brand.*

H6: *The greater the customer satisfaction with the CEO the greater the customer trust in the corporate brand.*

CONSUMER BRAND TRUST

Consumer brand trust is whereby one party in a relationship i.e. the consumer, has confidence in an exchange partners reliability and integrity (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Moorman et al. (1993) states that brand trust is a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence. In addition, Doney and Cannon (1997) stress that trust is only relevant in situations of uncertainty i.e. where image incongruity exists or in brands with negative / ruthless images. Trust therefore, is the moderator to reduce risk and to increase confidence in the consumer - company relationship.

In order for consumers to develop a relationship with a brand, the perceived image of the brand must be trusted. However, before a consumer can trust a brand there must be an element of satisfaction with the brand (Michell et al., 1998). Morgan and Hunt (1994) argue that there needs to be a sense of mutual trust between the parties i.e. the consumer, organisation and CEO. The brand trust literature suggests that commitment and trust are interrelated entities and generally lead to increased brand loyalty. Amine (1998) argues that commitment is a central factor to better understanding brand loyalty and consumer relationships with brands. Hallowell (1996) and Davies et al. (2003) agree that if a consumer trusts a brand, that there will be a stronger commitment to the brand, thus, increasing relationship strength.

Nevertheless, the brand trust literature generally takes the stand that consumers trust brands that are good and honourable, and hold positive brand images and personalities (Andreassen and Lindestad, 1997; Fornell, 1992).

Costa and McCrae (1995) suggest that the human personality dimension of agreeableness reflects trust and that consumers who are more agreeable tend to be more trusting. However, there is an apparent lack of literature surrounding consumer trust and brands with traditional negative brand images. We suggest that consumers can have committed relationships with brands that are perceived to have negative images or part thereof. We argue that consumers may be loyal because of a high level of trust, satisfaction or image congruence, but also because of high switching costs and lack of real alternatives. Hence, consumers need not trust all facets of the corporate brand at all times in order for a positive relationship to be evident.

Consumer brand trust can be measured using a number of methods. The literature suggests many scales and models to measure such a multi-dimensional construct. However, most scales suggest an apparent link between trust and commitment (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). We posit that commitment is a relational outcome and that trust with a brand must be established prior to long-term commitment. Morgan and Hunt (1994) developed a scale to measure brand trust using a seven point likert scale. The scale they developed is based on a number of statements with different traits describing trusting relationships i.e. honest, truthful, faithful, integrity. They suggest that the more trusting a consumer is with a brand that the more positive the relational outcomes derived. Therefore, we state the following hypotheses:

H7: *The greater the customer trust in the corporate brand the greater the customer intimacy with the corporate brand.*

H8: *The greater the customer trust in the corporate brand the greater the customer self-connection with the corporate brand.*

H9:   The greater the customer trust in the corporate brand the greater the customer

commitment with the corporate brand.

RELATIONAL OUTCOMES

Theoretical contributions suggest that the more congruent a consumer's image is with a brands image, the greater the satisfaction (Malhotra, 1981). Subsequently, the more satisfied a consumer is with a brand the more trusting they will feel toward the brand as risk is reduced. We argue that the greater the brand trust the more positive the relational outcomes of the relationship between consumer and company. However, we also argue that positive relational outcomes can be present when incongruity between consumer and company image exists.

Aaker et al. (2004) agrees that if the consumer is satisfied and trusting of the brand, that the relational outcomes of intimacy, self-connectedness and commitment will be greater, especially with sincere agreeable brands. The scale which Aaker et al. (2004) developed is a multifaceted likert scale with four relationship strength variables i.e. intimacy, self-connectedness, commitment and satisfaction. We argue that satisfaction with the brand is a driver of brand trust and positive relational outcomes and therefore omit this facet from this stage of our study and conceptual model.

We propose that the relational outcomes of intimacy, self-connectedness and commitment can be equally as strong with ruthless brands that are incongruent with consumer's own self-image.

We postulate that consumers can be satisfied and trusting of ruthless brands that hold traditional negative images. This paper aims to test this concept by testing both agreeable and ruthless brands and comparing the relational outcomes.

According to Aaker et al. (2004) sincere (agreeable) brands dominate the world of classic brands including; Ford, Hallmark and Coca-Cola. Brands which are perceived as sincere are generally trying to project an identity of down-to-earth, warm, caring and welcoming. Research however does suggest that sincere brands will earn relationship advantages similar to friendship development between humans, thus increasing relationship strength (Aaker et al., 2004). Sincerity can also spark inferences of partner trustworthiness and dependability (Aaker, 1999), which reduce the feelings of vulnerability and support relationship growth (Moorman et al., 1993).

On the contrary, ruthless brands are somewhat overlooked in the literature with regard to positive brand image and consumer - company relationships. According to Davies et al. (2003) the dimension of ruthlessness is a negatively valenced dimension of the Corporate Character Scale. This dimension correlates negatively with satisfaction and relational outcomes, however, we argue that this is context specific and should not be viewed as a negative dimension as image and personality are not about being good or bad but about being fitting and goal compatible (Fournier, 1998). Ruthless brands tend to be competitive, innovative, successful and hold good market share as per our initial qualitative research suggest. This is in contrast to the traits of the ruthlessness dimension of the Corporate Character Scale i.e. arrogant, aggressive, selfish, inward looking, authoritarian and controlling.

We therefore, are conceptualising that consumers can hold equally strong relationships with both agreeable and ruthless brands even when incongruity exists. Incongruity can exist between one entity of the corporate brand or the entire corporate brand. However, we argue that satisfaction can still be strong when incongruity is present and thus, we believe that trust can develop with all brands if satisfaction is present. Hence, if consumers can trust both agreeable and ruthless brands then there should be positive relational outcomes for both classifications of brands.

Furthermore, we argue that if a consumer has a positive relational outcome of intimacy, self-connectedness and commitment with a brand that this should have a positive effect on brand purchase intentions. When a brand promise is made and expectations are fulfilled, a customer is satisfied and will trust your brand, thus leading to positive relational outcomes. We believe that the greater the relational outcomes are, the more likely the consumer is to purchase your brand in the future. This follows on from Yi's (1990) theory of satisfaction and purchase intentions.

Based on the above discussion and arguments, we state the following hypotheses:

H10:   *The greater the customer intimacy with the corporate brand the greater the*

    purchase intention.

H11:   *The greater the customer self-connection with the corporate brand the greater*

    the purchase intention.

H12:   *The greater the customer commitment with the corporate brand the greater*

    the purchase intention.

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The conceptual model (*figure 1.*) outlined above will be tested using a number of scales from the image congruence, personality (human, brand and corporate), brand trust and the relational outcomes literature. The research study will be conducted on both agreeable and ruthless organisations and CEO's that have been identified from initial qualitative research.

Goldberg's (1990; 1992) agreeable dimension from his human personality scale, the Big Five, will be used to measure self-image. The justification for using this scale is its apparent compatibility with Davies et al. (2004) Corporate Character Scale. Therefore, respondents will be scored on the agreeable dimension of the Big Five and the ruthless dimension of the Corporate Character Scale. Respondents will then score organisations and CEO's using the same dimensions and scale. Congruence will be assessed by measuring the gaps between the image of brands and the image of the consumer, based on the dimensions of agreeableness and ruthlessness.

We propose to use a single item scale to measure overall satisfaction with the organisation brand and the CEO brand i.e. a seven-point scale from extremely satisfied to extremely unsatisfied. Following on from this, Morgan and Hunt's (1994) brand trust scale will be used to determine customers trust with the Corporate Brand. We argue that trust is a moderator to the overall relational outcomes, thus we are only scoring trust of the overall corporate brand. Aaker et al. (2004) will provide the scale as a means to measure customer intimacy, self-connectedness, and commitment with the corporate brand. These three relational outcomes are seen as drivers of purchase intent.

However, Aaker et al. (2004) only tested these relational outcomes on sincere (agreeable) brands with positive brand images. We aim to apply this theory to brands with traditional negative brand images. Finally, purchase intention will be measured using a single items scale, whereby respondents will score their overall purchase intent towards the corporate brand.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS & CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The theory that relationship strength and powerful brands are inextricably linked with good brand image is a concept that is reiterated throughout the literature for decades. However, there seems to be an apparent lack of literature and market research that can answer the question of, how brands that do not conform to traditional positive image can still be successful and sometimes, even more successful than the classic big brands.

Research to date would suggest to managers and academics alike, that the brand image of your company should be fitting and congruent with the image of your target audience. We argue that this concept is flawed and not truly reflective of today's competitive markets. Firstly, the majority of image congruence studies are based on positive dimensions under the assumption that good image is the result of scoring high on positive dimensions of brand image. That said, surely image is not about being good or bad but about being competitive, unique and goal compatible with your target markets needs and wants.

Secondly, image studies have failed to look at the broader picture and take into account the entire corporate brand so as to investigate the influence that these associations have on consumer's perceptions. Consumers are now more informed than ever about not just product brands but the entire corporate brand (organisation and CEO). Therefore, it is paramount that the management of the corporate brand and all externally perceived images surrounding the corporate brand is conducted in a harmonised and consistent manner.

The main focus of this paper has been to illustrate the influence that brand trust has on relationship strength when consumers are satisfied. We have conceptualised that consumers can be satisfied with a brand even when image incongruity exits. This paper endeavours to investigate the influence that each party of the corporate brand has on consumer trust with the corporate brand, and the impact that this has on the relational outcomes between consumer and company. Our conceptual model (figure 1.) would propose that if consumer brand trust were evident that there are strategic advantages to better relational outcome. Companies who can build a consumers brand trust through the complex interrelationship of the corporate brand will stand a greater chance of success in today's competitive markets and reap the rewards of greater relationship strength regardless of brand image classification.

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