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### **АННОТАЦИЯ к СТАТЬЕ**

#### **IN SEARCH OF BRAND IMAGE: A FOUNDATION ANALYSIS**

(статья приведена после аннотации)

В поисках имиджа бренда. Основы анализа.

В данной статье говорится о важности понятия имиджа в исследовании потребительского поведения начала 1950-х годов. С момента своего официального введения в 1950-х годах, понятие имиджа бренда стала обычным явлением в исследовании потребительского поведения. Критикуя предыдущие исследования за слишком поверхностные в силу своей нацеленности, стереотипные причины покупки, предположили, что пора поверхностно определить более прочную мотивацию для покупки. Их концепция была в том, что эти продукты имеют социальную и психологическую природу, а также физическое, и что наборы чувств, идей и взглядов, которые у потребителей в брендах, их "имидж" марки, имеют решающее значение для выбора покупки.

Гарднер и Леви были первыми, кто сумел захватить сущность имиджа бренда в письменной форме, основная идея которую они писали, была не совсем новая. Очевидно, что маркетологи в конце 19 века были более увлечены "брендом " гештальт" из прогрессивных разработок в области брендинга, рекламы и маркетинговых приемов, которые происходили в ту эпоху. Как уточнение, следует отметить, что во многих работах на эту тему,

авторы имеют тенденцию использовать слово "продукт" взаимозаменяемо с "брендом". Хотя и признается, что в маркетинге, как правило, важное различие между этими двумя понятиями, надписи на съемки размыли это различие, используя оба термина в контексте различия одного конкурента продукт от другого.

Многие потребительские теоретики считают, что потребительское поведение определяется взаимодействием покупателя самостоятельной концепции с "продуктом личности", и в этом контексте определительного отношения также особенно актуальны. Ассоциировать новый образ с личностью. Наиболее примечательно, что психологи имели в виду, что определения и измерения личности точно так же становится проблемой для тех, кто заинтересован в изучении имиджа бренда.

Анализ 28 предшествующих исследований показывает, что определение имиджа бренда не обязательно остается стабильным на протяжении 35-летнего периода времени. Распространение имиджа бренда исследований сопровождается некоторыми недостатками. Например, было высказано предположение, что с течением времени и в результате их чрезмерного использования, или неправильного использования, значение "имиджа бренда" испарилось и потеряло большую часть его богатства и значения.

## **IN SEARCH OF BRAND IMAGE: A FOUNDATION ANALYSIS**

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Brand image has been an important concept in consumer behavior research since the early 1950s. Our analysis of 28 prior studies indicates that the definition of brand image has not necessarily remained stable over a 35 year time period. Similarly, there exists little consensus concerning how the construct should be operationalized. An attempt is made here to identify the essential elements of brand image.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Since its formal introduction in the 1950s, the notion of brand image has become commonplace in consumer behavior research. Numerous studies of brand image have been reported, the phrase has been widely used in a variety of technical and casual applications, and practitioners and academics alike have embraced the concept as the embodiment of the abstract reality that people buy products or brands for something other than their physical attributes and functions.

This proliferation of brand image research has been accompanied by some drawbacks. For example, it has been suggested that over time and through overuse, or misuse, the meaning of "brand image" has evaporated and has lost much of its richness and value (Bullmore 1984). Others have similarly referred to such indiscriminate application as a debasement of the concept (Levy 1958). If these criticisms are true, then there is reason for concern.

Of primary concern is whether knowledge development has been impeded in this area due to the lack of a firm base or foundation on which to build. The way in which brand image is defined determines the nature of research questions that are posed, the methods that are used, and ultimately how findings are translated to the creative process (Reynolds and Gutman 1984). If there is no agreement at this

fundamental definitional level, it is very unlikely that comparable and generalizable results will be forthcoming from this stream of research.

These issues demonstrate the importance of foundations studies to consumer behavior theorists. By tracing definitions and justifications, which is a key element of foundational research (Kerlinger 1973), those within the discipline can examine the sorts of knowledge claims that are being made and determine if a consensus is developing, both in terms of conceptualization and in terms of measurement. If it is not, the findings are likely to provide insight for forging agreement and greater precision in future work.

This paper has three objectives. First, it seeks to provide a centralized collection of definitions and conceptions of brand image, and in so doing documents the evolution of this vital behavioral concept. Second, by identifying the major similarities and variations that exist in conceptualization, it will allow an assessment of whether there is a viable and foundationally secure definition of "brand image". And finally, some suggestions are made for guiding future research efforts in this important area.

## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Gardner and Levy have been credited (Levy 1958) with crystallizing "brand image" in a meaningful form in their classic 1955 article. Criticizing previous research for being too superficial in its focus on stereotypical purchase reasons, they suggested that it was time to scratch beneath the surface and identify more enduring motivations for purchase. Their conception was that products had a social and psychological nature as well as a physical one, and that the sets of feelings, ideas and attitudes that consumers had about brands, their "image" of brands, were crucial to purchase choice.

While Gardner and Levy were the first to capture the essence of brand image in writing, the underlying idea of which they wrote was not entirely new. It is obvious that marketers of the late nineteenth century were increasingly concerned with a "brand's gestalt" from the progressive developments in branding, advertising and marketing techniques that took place during that era (Murphy 1987). And in

1949 James Duesenberry had observed that the act of consumption as symbolic behavior was probably more important to the individual than the functional benefits of the product.

A survey of the literature that has followed Gardner and Levy's article reveals that considerable variation exists among authors on five separate, but related, aspects of "brand image". These include (1) the names which have been ascribed to this phenomenon, (2) the formal definitions that have been offered, (3) the components of brand image, (4) the instruments that have been used to measure it, and (5) perspectives on the origin, creation, formulation and manipulability of brand image.

Despite this academic multiformity, brand image has become a vital concept for marketing managers. This has been demonstrated by findings such as those which confirm that image considerations guide purchase choice (Dolich 1969), that products are often purchased or avoided not for their functional qualities, but because of how, as symbols, they impact the buyer-user's status and self esteem (Levy 1959), and that a product is more likely to be used and enjoyed if there is congruity between its image and the actual or ideal self image of the user (Sirgy 1985).

As a point of clarification, it should be noted that in many of the works on this subject, authors have tended to use the word "product" interchangeably with "brand". While it is acknowledged that in marketing there is normally an important difference between these two concepts, the writings on imagery have blurred this distinction by using both terms in the context of distinguishing one competitor's product from another. These terms are similarly used here (as synonyms), unless otherwise stated.

## THE CRITICAL REVIEW

### The Names Which Have Been Ascribed To This Phenomenon

Although the term "brand image" has become well established, there are several scholarly works that have not used the word although applying or studying very similar concepts. While these articles substantively agree that consumers

discriminate among products on other than purely physical dimensions, they differ in the names which they ascribe to this phenomenon. Based on Shakespeare's principle that 'That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet', it is appropriate to include these variants if a comprehensive foundational analysis is to be done.

One genre of works reflects on the symbolic nature of brands and products, adopting such labels as "symbolic utility" (Pohlman and Mudd 1973), "the symbols by which we buy" (Levy 1958) and "perceived product symbolism" (Sommers 1963) to describe the intangible aspect of consumer product evaluation.

Others have tended to emphasize human qualities and, accordingly, have coined such terms as "brand personality" (Hendon and Williams 1985), "brand character" (Hendon and Williams 1985), "personality image" (Sirgy 1985), and "the social and psychological nature of products" (Gardner and Levy 1955). As later discussion will show, this is a usage that has been welcomed by those who believe that there is an inextricable link between an individual's self concept and purchase.

Those who study this subject by focusing on the underlying meanings which consumers attribute to brands have described their object of inquiry as the "brand meaning" (Durgee and Stuart 1987), "the psychological meaning of products" (Friedmann and Lessig 1987), and "the messages communicated" by products (Swartz 1983).

## THE FORMAL DEFINITIONS OF BRAND IMAGE

A collection of definitions of 'brand image' is contained in Table 1. While not exhaustive, this collection does represent a good cross section of the definitions that have been offered in the past three decades. Journals have provided the source for most of these definitions, while a few were taken from textbooks, monographs or the popular press.

These definitions have been grouped into broad categories, although perhaps somewhat arbitrarily, on the basis of their principal emphasis, and within each group have been listed chronologically. This allows the major conceptual

developments and variations to be more easily identified, illustrated and traced. The five assigned categories include blanket definitions, and those which emphasize symbolism, meanings or messages, personification, and cognitive or psychological dimensions.

### Blanket Definitions

Several of the definitions are so broad that they seem to contribute little to a refined understanding of the brand image concept. While it is therefore difficult to compare these to other more systematic definitions, it is important to acknowledge them because they are rather effective expressions of the general sense of brand image as an abstraction.

Those that fall within this category include such references as "the sum of the total impressions (Herzog 1973), "everything the people associate with the brand" (Newman 1957), and "the product perception" (Runyon and Stewart 1987). In their simplicity and comprehensive totality, these usages highlight the fact that the notions that people have about a product or brand may not always coincide with its actual physical profile, and that what is important is how consumers see the product.

That the perception of reality is more important than reality itself is a theme which underlies most conceptualizations of brand image. As encapsulations of this theme, these blanket definitions are most felicitous.

### Emphasis on Symbolism

Probably as an offshoot of the motivation research era, several of the definitions relate commercial objects to symbols. A symbol has been defined as a "thing which stands for or expresses something else" (Levy 1958); in casual usage it has been said to be a general term for all instances where an object, action, word, picture or complex behavior is understood to mean not only itself but also some other ideas or feelings (Levy 1958).

The definitions within this category span a wide range of detail and emphasis. The simplest (Frazer 1983) uses the term "symbol" in a purely descriptive or associative manner, merely stating that a product is a symbol and

providing little or no insight into what brand image is taken to mean. Levy's (1958) elaborate conceptualization enlarges on the meaning and language of symbols, on their several dimensions, and on their relation to self concept. A more recent study (Noth 1988) has applied the concept of semiotics. From this perspective, objects of the marketplace are claimed to form semiotic systems, and commodities are studied as signs whose meaning is the consumer's "brand image".

While the reference to symbolism might ordinarily arouse connotations of the unconscious, these definitions seem generally to view this concept in a much broader and more public perspective. They imply that some personal or social meaning or value must be consciously attached to the product, and that products, as symbols, will only be used if they reinforce the consumer's self concept. These symbols are said to have several roles in that they represent personal attributes, goals, social strivings and patterns, and serve as communication devices between individuals and their significant referents.

#### TABLE 1

#### DEFINITIONS

In so implying the attachment of meaning and the matching of symbols to self concept, this group of definitions has some affiliation with those groups that focus on meaning and on personification. It is also noteworthy that conspicuous by absence are definitions which reference the Freudian symbolism of the product's design.

#### Emphasis on Meanings and Messages

The distinctive criterion associated with this category is a focus on the underlying meaning that consumers ascribe to a product. These definitions propose that because what each brand in a product category denotes or does may not be very different from what any other brand does, in order to differentiate itself each must rely on what it connotes or means to the consumer. As the following discussion will show, however, what "meaning" means can vary somewhat among researchers.

Durgee and Stuart (1987) suggested that each product or brand has a "meaning profile", which they define rather circuitously as the complex of key meanings associated with the product or brand, or what the product means symbolically in the eyes of consumers. Citing the work of those who have studied the philosophy of meaning, they proposed that there are three different ways in which a product could "mean" something -- causality, context and similarity .

Swartz (1983) proposed that to the extent that functional differences between brands of the same product were minimal, "message differentiation" could be used as a viable product differentiation strategy. This was said to involve distinguishing one brand from another based on the message communicated by the use or ownership of the brand. These messages were said to generate directly from the meaning or interpretation that was given to certain brands or products by the persons exposed to them.

Friedmann and Lessig (1987) adapt their notion of "psychological meaning" from existential-phenomenological psychology. They describe this concept as a mental position, understanding or evaluation of the product that develops in a nonrandom way from interaction between perceiver and product stimulus. Levy (1978) similarly talks about meaning as being learned or stimulated by the component experiences that people have with the product.

Reynolds and Gutman (1984) have defined product imagery in terms of the stored meanings that an individual has in memory, suggesting that what is called up from memory provides the meaning we attribute most basically to image. Still others have talked about a product as having "personal" and "social" meanings, but have provided no general framework to explain how these are derived or what they intend.

#### Emphasis on Personification

The personification of a brand and its image with human characteristics, a practice that has become especially popular in the 1980s, has been approached from two distinct perspectives. The first involves describing the product as if it were a human being, suggesting that the brand has a distinct personality of its own. Such

"personalities" as the Kodak Kolorkins and Betty Crocker are of this ilk. The second focuses on associating the consumer's personality or self concept with the image of the product or brand. This is exemplified by the "express your individuality" appeal of Calvin Klein jeans, or the fragrance industry's correlation of perfume use with fulfilled dreams, fantasies and aspirations.

Relating brand image to personality is intuitively appealing on many grounds. Both are multidimensional, and both appear to operate at the same level of abstraction. Personality has been said by some (Kassarjian and Sheffet 1975) to be best conceived of as a dynamic whole, which is consistent with the general sense that many have about brand image. Many consumer theorists are of the view that purchase behavior is determined by the interaction of the buyer's self concept with the 'product's personality', and in this context the definitional relationship is also especially apt.

Associating brand image with personality is not, however, without difficulty. Most notably, the struggle that psychologists have had with the definition and measurement of personality likewise becomes a problem for those interested in studying brand image. It is therefore not surprising that those who define brand image by reference to personality do not attempt to define the latter concept in any detailed way. They simply suggest that products have personality images, or they focus in on some distinctly human descriptor, such as "gender" image (Debevec and Iyer 1986), "age" image (Bettinger and Dawson 1979), or "social caste" image (Levy 1958).

#### Emphasis on Cognitive or Psychological Elements

Such unity as exists within this group stems from the fact that each stresses a cognitive or mental process by which brand image is said to be triggered. They concentrate on mental effects by naming any one of "ideas", "feelings", "attitudes", "mental constructs", "understandings" or "expectations" as the cardinal determinant of brand image. While most of these definitions may not be directly traceable to Gardner and Levy's initial conceptualization of brand image as "a

consumer's feelings, attitudes and ideas towards a brand", most seem to have been influenced by it.

The reference to "feelings" suggests a link between product and emotions (Reynolds and Gutman 1984), which is a particularly germane connection in circumstances where consumers have difficulty obtaining objective measures on product attributes, or where product clones can not be differentiated or positioned on the basis of a distinct benefit appeal. In either case, the emotional appeal of the product would seem likely to play a significant role.

Conceptualizing brand image as an "attitude" provides an orientation that is more amenable to measurement and evaluation. Perhaps because of the attitude measurement techniques that have been developed, it has been noted that definitions which employ this approach have a tendency to restrict image to a set of product characteristics (Reynolds and Gutman 1984). While such definitions might lead to the conclusion that a product's image can be approximated by the sum of its attribute values, there are surely abundant examples where two brands have the same attribute ratings but different market shares. The "attitudinal" definitions would therefore appear deficient because of their inability to explain this.

The terms "understandings", "expectations" and "mental constructs" are rather vague and noninstructive terms for capturing brand image. Nonetheless, they do form an interesting group in their restriction to intellectual or reasoned processes and in their contrast with those definitions which incorporate the "feelings" dimension.

#### THE COMPONENTS OF BRAND IMAGE

Because of the significance of brand image marketing, it is important to translate what we know about this concept, or think we know, into the details of what marketing practitioners should do. This is a task that has been complicated, however, by the lack of consensus concerning the components that make up brand image, and consequently, about how it should be managed.

As has been previously noted, those who conceptualize brand image as an attitude are unlikely to accept that it extends to factors beyond the physical product (Reynolds and Gutman 1984). Others, in contrast, have proposed that the "image" of a brand is composed of factors extrinsic to the product itself. Gensch (1978) made this separation clear when he proposed that product perception consisted of two components, the measures of the brand attributes and the "image" of the brand. He defined "image" as a purely abstract concept which incorporates the influences of past promotion, reputation and peer evaluation of the product.

A more moderate view is offered by those who suggest that working only with attributes, or only with abstractions, is not the way to measure or understand image. These authors propose instead that the objective or functional product qualities, as well as the psychological qualities of both user and product, must be accounted for. In this vein, Friedmann (1986) suggests that the "psychological meaning" of products is made up of the product's attribute bundle, the consumer's dominant perceptual mode, and the context in which the perceptual process takes place.

While Reynolds and Gutman (1984) confirm this synergistic effect, they discuss the components of brand image in terms of a means-end chain, identifying an implication network which reflects memory linkages as the fundamental component of brand image. They describe a means-end chain as the connection between product attributes, consumer consequences, and personal values, and theorize that image is represented by the synthesis of these components.

Stone, Dunphy and Bernstein (1966) distinguish between three main components of an image (its theme, its image proper, and its net evaluation). Levy (1978) talks about brand image as being composed of a mixture of the physical reality of the product and the beliefs, attitudes and feelings that have come to be attached to it. And rather exquisitely, Dichter (1984) describes magic and a product's morality as two of the basic components of its image.

**APPROACHES FOR MEASURING BRAND IMAGE**

Given the previous discussion on the theoretical formulation of brand image, it is not unexpected that the techniques for its measurement have not been standardized. Over the past three decades, several tools, routines and methods have been used to gain insight into the content and organization of brand images. Coincidentally, wide variations have occurred in the components of brand image that have been measured, the specific types of data sought, the manner in which data have been collected, classified, coded and analyzed, and the way in which results have been presented.

There has likewise been considerable diversity in the perspective from which brand image has been assessed. Some have measured the image of individual dimensions of a brand (Pohlman and Mudd 1973), while others have arrived at a single measure for brand image overall (Dolich 1969). The brand's image has been measured in isolation, relative to its competition (Boivin 1986), in relation to consumer ideal points and advertisement images (Keon 1984), and in relation to each of a person's actual self-image, ideal self-image, the social self image, and the ideal social self image (Sirgy 1985). It has been measured as a function of brand usage and brand conspicuousness (Bird, Channon and Ehrenberg 1970), for clarity and sharpness (Pohlman and Mudd 1973), for stability over time and for discriminating attributes (Green and Devita 1977), and has been assessed and compared from the perspective of the retailer versus that of the consumer (McClure and Ryans 1968).

While researchers have not agreed on the most appropriate tool for measuring brand image, there does appear to be a trend towards operationalizing this construct using quantitative techniques. This is not to say that the more nonstructured, qualitative methods of analysis are obsolete. In fact, a number of contemporary theorists have affirmed the conversational, projective and matching techniques that were first proposed by Gardner and Levy nearly forty years ago.

In 1986, for example, Boivin proposed a three stage 'free response' approach to brand image studies which was comprised of the collection, coding and scoring of free verbalizations. In 1987 Durgee and Stuart proposed techniques in which brand

personality would be explored by asking respondents to compare their brands to people, countries, occupations, fabrics, activities, cars, animals and magazines, or to write creative descriptions of brands or stories of interesting family experiences with them. And much earlier, content analysis was used by Woodside (1972) to study the image of selected consumer goods as reflected in the mass media.

While these qualitative methods have been lauded for allowing the contents of brand image to be uncovered by permitting feelings to emerge, they have been criticized for the difficulty they present in data handling and the statistical treatment of responses. While some have adopted tools such as 'linguistic coding' to address these difficulties, most have opted for more quantitatively oriented techniques.

Based on a composite of several articles, Table 2 represents some of the 'typical' approaches and techniques that have been used in quantitative brand image studies over the past thirty years. It should be noted that several questions remain unanswered regarding which of these are the most accurate and effective, and whether the differences that are generated from the use of different tools are critical.

## THE ORIGIN, CREATION, FORMULATION AND MANIPULABILITY OF BRAND IMAGE

Image building, image change, image monitoring and maintenance, product positioning, product differentiation and image segmentation are among the present generation of brand image management activities. While clearly such activities presuppose that a brand's image can be manipulated by marketing practice, the literature fails to agree on the extent to which this is possible. In fact, the debate is ongoing as to whether an image is something that is conveyed or something that is received.

### TABLE 2

Bullmore (1984), on the one hand, emphasizes the dependence of brand image creation upon the individual psyche. He refutes the assumption that the image belongs to the brand, and ripostes that an image, like a reputation, can only reside

in the minds of people. His contention is that the mind both contains and creates the image, and that it is mediated or stimulated by the consumer's experiences.

On the other hand, there are those who suggest that the consumer has a passive role where image creation is concerned. They propose that an image is projected to the consumer by the marketer, and that it can be selected, created, implemented, cultivated, and "managed" by the marketer over time. It has even been suggested that false or deceptive product images can be "ordered to be corrected", as if there is a simple transfuse between the image presented by the media and the consumer's mind (Scammon and Semenik 1983). In this context, advertisements have been regarded as a primary vehicle through which images can be imparted or "transferred" to a brand.

An amalgam of the above perspectives supports the view that product image is a function of the interaction between perceiver and product stimulus. The product's attributes, the sponsoring organization, the marketing mix, the modes through which people tend to perceive, personal values, experience, the types of people associated with use of the brand, and a number of context variables have all been said to be among the factors that contribute to the development of a particular brand's image.

## CONCLUSION

The term "brand image" is at once a label that has become somewhat impoverished because of widespread use, and a concept that has contributed richly to marketing practice. It is both a concrete and an abstract expression. Its definition and operationalization have been fairly irregular, although not without some patterns and commonalities. It is a growing, evolving term that has undergone considerable vicissitudes, some of which are enduringly useful.

This paper sought primarily to describe the shifting nuances of brand image, and therefore, has not rigorously analyzed the various shades of meaning of the definitions and conceptions under consideration. While in some cases the latter exercise may have been necessary to distinguish between substantive conceptual variations and those of form, this analysis has exposed examples of brand image

usage which are polarized. These contradictions, in turn, betray the foundational integrity of this vital term.

In closing, this paper seeks to prescribe the brand image concept. This delineation is based largely on the frequency of occurrence of nuclear ideas within the definitions cited in Table 1. While admittedly there is no absolute standard of rightness, common usage is accepted as the authority for correctness, as it has been by a number of contemporary linguistic scientists and lexicographers (Bishop 1971). In this context, the following emerge as the essential strictures of brand image:

- Brand image is the concept of a brand that is held by the consumer.
- Brand image is largely a subjective and perceptual phenomenon that is formed through consumer interpretation, whether reasoned or emotional.
- Brand image is not inherent in the technical, functional or physical concerns of the product. Rather, it is affected and molded by marketing activities, by context variables, and by the characteristics of the perceiver.
- Where brand image is concerned, the perception of reality is more important than the reality itself.

Despite conceptual deviations, it is clear that the concept of brand image has been of great significance in consumer behavior research, and there is every reason to suspect that its potential significance is even greater. As such, it is important that efforts continue to be made to more fully, completely and consensually understand this vital concept.

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