Branding essay essay sample

Purpose: This dissertation aims to link the brand literature with the three ' search, experience and credence' attributes and empirically analyze their impact on consumers' perception of product quality.

Design Methodology: To accomplish this, brand equity, brand awareness and brand differentiation are analyzed in the light of solid literature. The research is conducted using the products used in almost daily use manufactured by P&G. A survey of almost 100 consumers' between ages 18-25 was conducted and the results were analyzed and measured accordingly.

Limitations: The study makes use of only three products belonging to various categories. The research is conducted in the university and student accommodations. The study should not be generalized for all the products and the results should be further tested in varying surroundings.

Findings: The survey conducted for this research depicted strong relation between the search, credence and experience attributes with brand equity, awareness and differentiation. The findings confirmed that before branded products were tried out, the search, experience and credence attributes did generate expectations about product quality. Search attributes playing a major role in it. However, after trial, this seemed to reduce considerably and credence and experience attributes generated more vibes in consumers' minds, thus fulfilling their promise of providing quality product to the consumers.

Benefits: Responses to various brand names are of importance in brand management. The effect of search, experience and credence attributes on consumers' minds has been analyzed using actual products being used in

the market, which can eventually test the theory put forth by Srinivasan & Till (2002).

Chapter 1: Introduction

Synopsis of the Dissertation

The chapter introduces the dissertation question and lays down a foundation of the intended research by using literature to support arguments. It states the link between the search, experience and credence attributes and the consumer perception about the products itself. The choice of the three products, limitations of the research, the aims of the research and the hypotheses are stated, thus developing a sound reasoning for the research to be conducted, as not a lot of work has been done with the real life products actually being tested.

In the second chapter, to get an idea of the research that has been done in relation to brand, brand equity, consumer purchase process, brand awareness and differentiation a review of the literature has been presented. Moreover, the researches conducted in the field of brand-consumer relation, are mentioned just to give an idea about the work already done in this vast field. The work done by Srinivasan & Till (2002) is appreciated along with other researchers.

However, in the third chapter, the research methodology to be adopted is highlighted. Various sorts of research methodologies (deductive/inductive, qualitative/quantitative) available and adopted are critically analyzed using literature. Inductive approach is adopted along with the qualitative

methodology to collect the data. However, quantitative approach is used to generate graphs in more detail for further analysis. The sample size and the target audience is also mentioned.

The last chapter analyzes all the findings obtained after conducting the research. The anchors used to conduct the survey and the scales used to evaluate them are mentioned. The graphs used to depict findings in detail drawn and are discussed in detail. The managerial implications and the possible future research are used to draw the curtain on the chapter which falls after conclusions eventually.

Introduction

The chapter starts off by giving an insight into the research question and the issue surrounding it. It provides an in-depth knowledge about the intended research and the three products used. The specific reasons behind choosing all the three products are highlighted. Moreover, the limitations currently associated with this project are mentioned along with the reasons which support the conduction of this research using solid literature. Search, experience and credence attributes are defined and are successfully linked with the literature to establish solid reasons for conducting this research. Using the literature and the arguments stated the hypotheses are created and the approach required to analyze them is briefly highlighted.

Introduction to the Research Question

Although a lot of hard work is put into, towards marketing the best products for consumers, backed up by a well knit advertising strategy, but

organizations put in little effort to highlight the quality associated with the branded products. Piling on the misery, consumers' are not able to detect the quality by just looking at the products, but require some experience to shape up their perception about the product quality. However, it is perceived that despite of any trail of products, the brand name does generate some sort of expectations about the quality of the product amongst the consumers' (Srinivasan & Till, 2002).

A lot of research has been conducted in enhancing brand image and implementing brand extensions but its the work of Aaker (1990, 1996) and Keller (1998) which has put forth concepts, models to analyse the benefits consumer's seek through the purchase of branded products thus, shaping their attitude towards the product. However, a very few have made any attempt to actually test their concepts by using the established products for this research.

With the aide of literature produced by Aaker (1996, 1998), Keller (1998) and other researchers and by using the work of Srinivasan & Till (2002), a research is conducted to actually test " that after product trial whether the established brand names hold superior perceived quality in consumers minds or not, by analyzing the effect of search, experience and credence attributes". Brand equity, Brand image and consumer awareness helps to understand what sort of an effect brand itself can have on consumers. In order to test the hypothesis in the light of the literature available few products manufactured by P & G are used which are :-

* Head & shoulders,

* Oral -B and

* Pringles.

Limitations surrounding the research topic

Although the research revolves around the concept put forth by Srinivasan & Till (2002) and uses extensive literature from Aaker (1990, 1997, 1996, 1998), but the factors such as target consumers and region have laid forth another test for the concept of consumers perception of product quality to be analysed (Bolton et al, 2003). The consumers being targeted here are students in the range from 16 – 25, who despite having less buying power, have got more awareness about the products and their benefits. However, basing assumptions on this factor, the products selected are established brands and well known around the globe. This would help draw conclusions and provide an insight about the search, experience and credence attributes ability to mould consumer's perception about product quality. Moreover, the research conducted with the set of students, would also provide an insight into the way future of brand marketing could be predicted. The research is conducted in Sheffield with the three products stated above and all the assumptions are confined to them only.

Importance of the Problem

According to Aaker (1989), brands might generate competitive advantages for firms in the global market. It is only possible if the consumers perceive that the specific brands generate added advantage to them. However, In order to achieve this, brands have to be shaped and managed in such a

manner that consumers are able to distinguish and identify them from the rest (Crawford, 1993). Although distinct identity is of paramount importance, but efforts have to be made to associate quality with the brand (Piron, 2000). Aaker (1991) insists that quality has to be integrated in the brand, because failure to do so will result in tarnished image in the evolving product market.

Therefore, in order to succeed, quality has to be associated with the brand name which could help customer remember the identity of the product and their perceived benefits. Moreover, factors that can affect brand and its association with quality have to be analyzed. Experience and credence attributes can play a major role in determining the overall outcome of the brand building strategy, as lack of effectiveness of the product and bad experiences can wipe out the added perceived quality associated with the brand.

Thus, all these factors point out the importance of the analysis which needs to be conducted that whether well known brands such as head n shoulders, Pringles and Oral – B are perceived the same way by students in Sheffield or not. In order to test this, the three attributes search, experience and credence have been chosen.

* Search

The Search attribute comes into action before a product is purchased (Nelson, 1970; 1974). However, it is believed that consumers' get attracted to attributes such as colour, design, outlook, price of the product (Simon & Sullivan, 1993) which forces them to base their decision to buy the product.

Though, factors such as personal recommendations, behavioural trends (Morgan, 2000) do have the effect on eventual product perception.

* Experience

According to Ford et al (1990) product quality can only be analyzed if it has been tried out. Thus, underlining the significance of this attribute which gives an in depth knowledge about consumer's perception. It is experience with the product which would eventually help generate an opinion about a product.

* Credence

Lastly, credence attribute is very difficult to measure as consumers' cannot tell exactly the effectiveness of the products by looking at it, but rather can be identified with minor differences felt (Wright & Lynch, 1995). However, this does depends on individuals and the opinion is bound to vary from person to person due to personal experiences (Biel, 1993).

The outcome of this research would significantly highlight the facts which require attention in the field of brand management to be worked upon associated the selected products.

Importance of the work of Srinivasan & Till (2002)

In spite of the availability of a lot of consumer marker research available only few have actually performed a research to test which attributes shape up consumers attitude and perception about the branded products. Srinivasan & Till (2002) performed a similar research, using the two products fruit cocktail

and facial tissue. They compared the national and the local brands before and after product trial. Even though they highlighted an important issue, but the need to test their hypothesis using actual P & G products was a tempting task. Srinivasan & Till (2002) identified the search, experience and credence attributes as the main enforcer when it come to product purchase and trial. Research was performed using the same methodology but the choice of different products already raised questions about the generalization of Srinivasan & Till (2002) work.

Srinivasan & Till (2002) adopted a very simple and an effective methodology to gather data by taking a leaf out of Shimp et al (1991)'s proposed method. However, an in-depth analysis about the way research was conducted wasn't made available and it remained to be seen where the research was conducted and how well it could be generalized. Keeping in mind these issues a more refined version of this activity was carried out, adopting the same research methodology but using real life products, thus to give a more realistic outlook to the dissertation.

However, as far as the findings are concerned, although Srinivasan & Till (2002) made considerable intelligent findings, but they were put to test and in the conclusions section quiet a few deductions were found to disagree with their work.

Aims and Objectives of the Research

However, brand equity, awareness and knowledge, all play varying roles in analysing search, experience and credence attributes. While conducting search, consumers take into account various aspects such as packaging,

colour and design of the product (Oliver, 1997). However, it is perceived by King (1991) that it does influence them while buying the product but other factors such as personal recommendations can also strongly influence consumer behaviour. Despite of all this, we still have to make sure whether after product trial consumers do take these things into account or other factors take over their decision making process. In order to analyse the search attribute Head & shoulders, Pringles and Oral – B, manufactured by P & G are used.

H1a: Before product trial, the brand name, colourful packaging and design of Head & shoulders, Pringles and Oral – B, influence consumers' to try out the branded product, and build their expectations about its quality.

H1b: After the branded products are tried out, the colourful logo and design of the products do not attract the consumers and their search criteria changes.

H1a & H1b would give us an insight into the minds of the customers, and how their minds are shaped while doing shopping. Though, we might come across reasons and factors which have different level of importance in consumers' minds individually. We would specifically be looking for factors that have a direct or and indirect effect on their criteria of searching for the three products.

Similarly, experiencing a product involves trying out the product, develop knowledge about it and then shaping the perception about its quality accordingly (Jacoby et al, 1971). However, branded products do seem to generate some expectations but do they really last after trial remains to be

seen. However, previous experiences, with similar products do have an influence on new trials (Hutchison, 1983). The following assumptions are to be tested in this regard:

H2a: Head & shoulders, Pringles and Oral – B, generate expectations amongst the consumers about their superior quality and unique product features before trail over other products belonging to the same category.

H2b: After product trial, consumers don't really care what the brand name is and only look for good quality basing their opinions solely on the experience they had with the product.

The experience attribute tested with these hypotheses will help deduce whether the products loose their competitive edge generated though their brand equity when they are tried out. It is expected that the consumers' loose interest in branded products if they conclude that that the quality is not the one which they expected. However, Knight (1999) advocates the same behaviour and further adds that brand awareness and knowledge can't alone help maintain the high reputation the products boast about. It has to be met with high standards of product quality to sustain the market image and brand equity.

Similarly, credence attribute cannot be measured without trying out the product. Though its measurement is a little difficult and is dependant upon individual opinions, which can be influenced by any changes in external factors (Park and Srinivasan, 1994). However, individuals when tend to feel a little change, they do make up their minds immediately. In case of head & shoulders, its effectiveness to reduce dandruff can be felt by consumers. The

unique taste of Pringles can also differentiate the product. However, Oral – B's effectiveness seems to be difficult to gauge as consumers cannot really closely observe the difference in cleaner teeth.