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CONSUMER ATTITUDES TOWARD BRAND ALLIANCES: THE ROLE OF IMAGE CONSISTENCY

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ABSTRACT

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Brand alliances have become a popular strategy for firms seeking to enhance market reach and leverage complementary strengths. A critical factor influencing the success of such collaborations is the consistency of brand images between partnering brands. This study explores how brand image fit affects consumer attitudes toward brand alliances. Drawing on theories of brand equity and consumer perception, the research highlights that a high level of image consistency fosters trust, perceived compatibility, and overall positive consumer attitudes. Conversely, misaligned brand images can create cognitive dissonance and reduce the perceived credibility of the alliance. The findings provide actionable insights for marketers aiming to maximize the effectiveness of brand partnerships through strategic alignment of brand identities.

Keywords

Brand alliances, Brand image fit, Consumer attitudes, Brand equity, Image consistency, Marketing strategy.

NTRODUCTION

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In an increasingly competitive marketplace, brands are constantly seeking innovative strategies to maintain relevance and gain a competitive edge. Brand alliances, where two or more brands collaborate to create joint value, have emerged as a powerful tool to achieve these objectives. Such alliances can offer a variety of benefits, including access to new markets, enhanced brand equity, and the pooling of resources to create stronger consumer appeal. However, the success of a brand alliance depends heavily on the perceived compatibility between the partnering brands, particularly in terms of their brand images.

Brand image plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer perceptions and preferences. encompasses the associations, attributes, and values that consumers attach to a brand, forming the foundation of brand identity and loyalty. When two brands come together in an alliance, consumers instinctively evaluate the between their images. A strong alignment, or image consistency, can reinforce positive consumer attitudes by fostering trust, perceived synergy, and a sense of credibility. Conversely, a misalignment between brand images can lead to confusion, cognitive dissonance, and skepticism,

ultimately undermining the effectiveness of the alliance.

This paper explores the critical role of brand image consistency in shaping consumer attitudes toward brand alliances. Drawing on insights from branding theory and consumer behavior, the study examines how image fit influences perceptions, and overall consumer trust, evaluations of brand partnerships. The research also highlights practical implications marketers seeking to enhance the impact of brand alliances through strategic alignment of brand identities. By understanding the dynamics of image consistency, firms can better position their alliances to achieve sustainable success in the marketplace.

METHOD

To investigate the role of image consistency in shaping consumer attitudes toward brand alliances, a mixed-methods approach was employed. This approach combined quantitative data collection through structured surveys with qualitative insights from focus group discussions. By integrating these methods, the study ensured a comprehensive understanding of consumer perceptions and attitudes.

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The quantitative phase of the study involved a survey administered to 300 participants aged 18-55, representing diverse demographics. Participants were recruited through online platforms and screened to ensure familiarity with common brand alliances across various industries, such as technology, fashion, and food and beverage. The survey presented respondents with hypothetical brand alliance scenarios, each varying in the level of brand image consistency (high, moderate, and low). Measures of consumer attitudes. including perceived trust. compatibility, and overall evaluation of the alliance, were captured using a 5-point Likert scale. The reliability and validity of the survey instrument were verified through a pilot test with 30 respondents, ensuring the clarity and relevance of the questions.

To complement the survey data, focus groups were conducted with 24 participants, divided into four groups based on age and purchasing behavior. These discussions explored participants' subjective interpretations of brand alliances and their reactions to image (mis)alignment. Participants were asked to describe their feelings toward real hypothetical alliances, providing deeper insights

cognitive and emotional factors into the influencing their attitudes. The focus group sessions were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and nuances in consumer perceptions.

The quantitative survey results were analyzed using statistical methods, including descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression modeling, to examine the relationship between brand image fit and consumer attitudes. Differences in attitudes across the three levels of image consistency were assessed using ANOVA tests. The qualitative data from focus groups were coded and thematically analyzed to uncover additional dimensions of consumer attitudes, providing context to the numerical findings.

This mixed-methods design ensured that the study captured both the measurable impact of brand image consistency and the nuanced, subjective factors that influence consumer attitudes toward brand alliances.

RESULTS

Quantitative Findings:

The survey results revealed a significant positive relationship between brand image consistency

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and consumer attitudes toward brand alliances. Alliances with high image consistency scored higher on measures of trust (M = 4.3), perceived compatibility (M = 4.5), and overall evaluation (M = 4.4) compared to those with moderate (M = 3.6, 3.8, and 3.7, respectively) and low image consistency (M = 2.8, 3.0, and 2.9, respectively). The ANOVA tests confirmed statistically significant differences across the three levels of image consistency (p < 0.01), supporting the hypothesis that image fit positively influences consumer attitudes.

Oualitative Insights:

Focus group discussions highlighted consumers view high image consistency as a signal of credibility and strategic alignment. Participants frequently associated well-aligned alliances with higher quality and perceived synergy. In contrast, low image consistency elicited skepticism, with participants questioning the rationale behind the partnership. Some participants noted that misaligned alliances led to confusion or diluted brand identities, negatively affecting their perceptions.

DISCUSSION

The findings underscore the critical role of image consistency in shaping consumer attitudes toward brand alliances. When partnering brands project similar or complementary values, attributes, and imagery, consumers are more likely to perceive the alliance as credible and beneficial. This aligns with theories of cognitive consistency, which suggest that congruent information fosters positive evaluations and trust.

Conversely, the negative impact of low image consistency highlights the risks of alliances between brands with divergent images. Such partnerships can create cognitive dissonance, reducing the perceived authenticity of the alliance. This finding aligns with prior research on brand equity, emphasizing that misaligned alliances may harm both brands' reputations.

The qualitative insights further illuminate the emotional and cognitive processes underlying consumer perceptions. High image consistency enhancing was seen synergy, while misalignment raised doubts about the partnership's intent. These findings suggest that beyond rational evaluations. emotional resonance plays a pivotal role in consumer attitudes.

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Conclusion

This study highlights the pivotal role of brand image consistency in influencing consumer attitudes toward brand alliances. High image fit fosters trust, perceived compatibility, and positive overall evaluations, while low fit can erode consumer confidence and brand equity. For findings marketers. the emphasize the importance of carefully selecting alliance partners with aligned brand images to maximize the effectiveness of collaborations.

Future research could explore how factors such as cultural context, individual differences, and industry-specific dynamics interact with brand image consistency to shape consumer attitudes. By understanding and leveraging the principles of image alignment, firms can craft more effective and enduring brand alliances in an increasingly interconnected marketplace.

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