

ELICITING CORPORATE BRAND ASSOCIATION NETWORKS USING BRAND CONCEPT MAPPING: A CASE ON PANASONIC

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ABSTRACT

A strong corporate brand acts as a focal point for the attention, interest and activity stakeholders bring to a corporation. The set of associations for which the parent corporate stands in the market, for what it is known for in the market, is of prime importance, as it was seen through the brand concept map of the corporate brand. A Brand Concept Map (BCM) is established for the Corporate Brand (CB) under study. The applications of brand associations is put use for understanding brand equity, as it involves identifying the network of strong, favorable, and unique brand associations in consumer memory. An effort has been made to draw a Concept Map for Brand Panasonic, which would bring out the core associations of the corporate brand as well as the strength of these associations. This would be helpful in understanding to what extent consumers think about Panasonic.

INTRODUCTION

A strong corporate brand acts as a focal point for the attention, interest and activity stakeholders bring to a corporation. The set of associations for which the parent corporate stands in the market, for what it is known for in the market, is of prime importance, as it was seen through the brand concept map of the corporate brand. There are various corporate brand associations that compose the overall corporate brand construct.

Brown and Dacin (1997) researched two types of corporate associations, which were corporate ability (CA) and corporate social responsibility (CSR). The limitation of the study is that they only investigated two variables and the products were highly technological. Consumers hold a wide range of corporate brand associations and it is important to include this fact in the research at hand.

Bhattacharya & Sen (2003) finds out that most of the strongest consumer-company relationships are based on consumer's identification with the company. This means that it is important for managers to identify which corporate brand associations are meaningful for its existing customer base.

Uggla (2006) created a strategic model that links the corporate brand to partner and institutions associations. The corporate brand association base is defined as "the links that a corporate brand establishes to internal and external partner associations

such as brands, persons, product categories and institutional that add to end customer image and equity derived from the corporate brand”

As per (Uggla, 2006), Corporate brands can broaden their brand architecture structures through the process of transferring brand image by borrowing or building brand equity. The corporate brand association base can be extended through transferring image of its own developed associations or transfer image from partner associations. The corporate brand, Virgin is an example of a corporate brand that has successfully expanded the core concept into different industries. Virgin has extended the brand association base through the transfer of its brand identity by focusing on its strong corporate brand associations (Uggla, 2006).

Aaker & Joachimsthaler (2000) claims that the company’s brand associations focus on ‘fun’ and being the ‘underdog’. Nike is an example of a corporate brand that has transferred image from partner associations. The corporate brand Nike associations focus on ‘excelling’ and ‘being active’, which could relate towards top athletes. Through the creation of Nike Air Jordan several aspects of the Michael Jordan brand image transferred to the corporate brand Nike.

As per Uggla (2006) Managers should use the corporate brand association base model to distinguish and reinforce the corporate brand. However, managers should be aware that there are risks involved by using the corporate brand association base model. The most salient risk is the loss of control of the corporate brand.

The applications of brand associations is put use for understanding brand equity, as it involves identifying the network of strong, favorable, and unique brand associations in consumer memory (Keller 1993). Consumers might associate a brand with a particular attribute or feature, usage situation, product spokesperson, or logo. These associations are typically viewed as being organized in a network in a manner consistent with associative network models of memory (see Anderson 1983). This association network constitutes a brand’s image, identifies the brand’s uniqueness and value to consumers, and suggests ways that the brand’s equity can be leveraged in the marketplace (Aaker 1996).

Brand Concept Mapping (BCM):

Consumers store brand information in the form of associative networks (Brandt et al., 2011; John et al., 2006; Keller, 1993; Krishnan, 1996; Schnittka et al., 2012; Teichert and Schöntag, 2010) and this association network form a brand's image, identifying the brand's uniqueness and value to consumers (Aaker, 1995). The graphical representation of such a brand memory is called a brand concept map (BCM). Two categories of techniques exist to measure brand association networks (John et al., 2006): a) Consumer mapping techniques (BCM and Zaltman's metaphors elicitation technique (ZMET)) and b) Analytical techniques. Schnittka et al. (2012) developed an advanced brand concept mapping approach for evaluating the favorability dimension of brand association networks. In consumer mapping techniques individual brand association networks are elicited directly from consumers whereby respondents reveal how the brand associations relate to the brand and

thereafter researchers can aggregate information to produce a consensus brand association network (John et al., 2006; Schnittka et al., 2012; Zaltman and Coulter, 1995).

All these techniques and studies employs consumer self-reports for eliciting brand associations and self-reports may be subject to one or more forms of bias. Existing literature shows that a number of useful perspectives concerning brand equity has been put forth such as, the firm perspective, product perspective (e.g., product, service, personal brands) and individual perspective (e.g., customer based brand equity , employee based brand equity (King and Grace, 2010).

Empirical brand mapping has been carried out for some time but the methodology underpinning their construction has been built on established but ultimately cumbersome, qualitative research such as the ZMET approach (Zaltman and Coulter, 1995). This changed with a new brand concept mapping (henceforth BCM) methodology whose merits include a simple protocol for the development of maps and the ability to develop a consensus concept map from individual ones (John et al., 2006).

OBJECTIVE FOR THE STUDY

- To identify the “core associations” for the corporate brand “Panasonic” with the aid of concept mapping.
- To explore whether these core associations leverage Panasonic to endorse unrelated product categories.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design is exploratory in nature as the researcher explores the “core associations “of Panasonic with the aid of Brand Concept Map (BCM). For establishing the BCM, primary data is collected with a sample size of 289 respondents. Sampling frame representing the Target population where primarily youth, working professionals of an age group of 23-39 from the region of Mumbai, primarily with high influential and decision making capability for the purchase of Consumer Electronics were selected.

The respondents were instructed to identify the associations they think are relevant to Panasonic and then linking these associations together to produce their own brand map. When they have done this, respondents indicate the strength of the link between associations by using single, double or triple lines. These can be shown as black, blue and red lines in descending order of association strength.

Respondents may also add the direction of their feelings with regards to these associations from -1 (negative), 0 (neutral) to +1 (positive). This allows for strongly held negative and positive views to be recorded on the individual and consensus

maps. To develop a consensus concept map from the individual maps, first and second order brand associations are classified as those that feature on the majority of individual maps. First order associations are those which are linked directly to the brand more often than not whilst the second order associations are those which link to the brand via the first-order associations. Tertiary associations are then included, based on their high frequency links to first and or second order associations (but not directly to the brand itself).

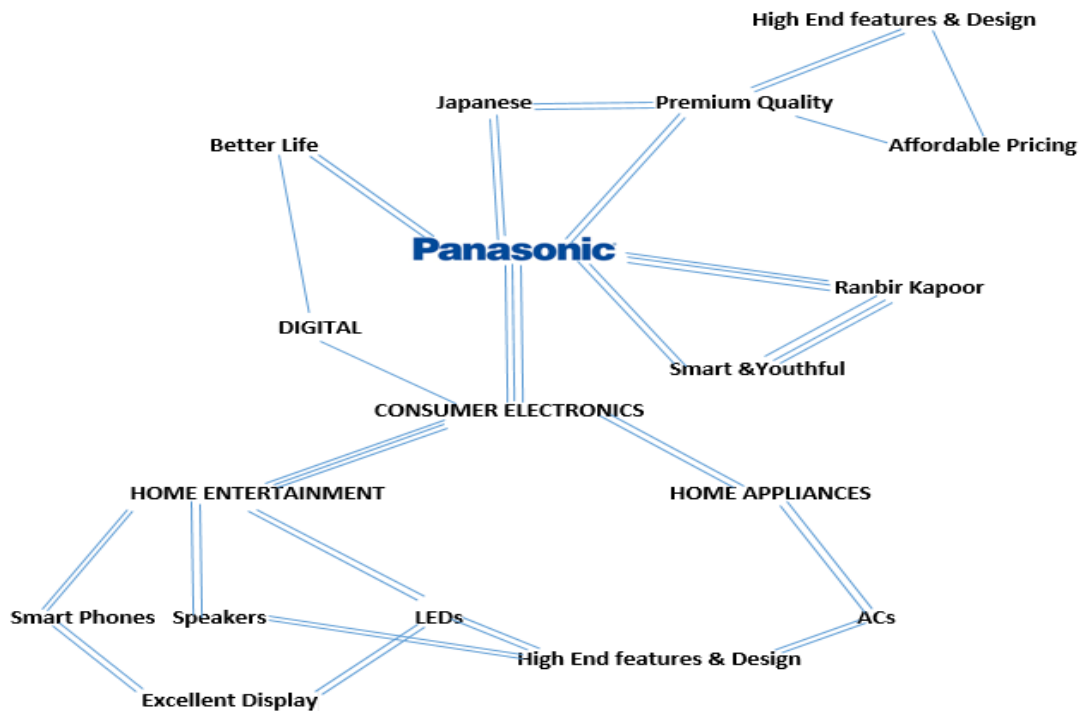


Fig 1: BCM for Corporate Brand Panasonic

DATA ANALYSIS

To analyze the data which were in the form of associations derived by the respondents in order to form the BCM at a later stage, descriptive statistics were used, such as frequency, frequency tabulation which helped the researcher in identifying the no. of times an association is repeated as well as the maximum no. of times an association is repeated. No. of lines indicated the strength of the relationship, were marked by the respondents. The average of the maps has been produced in Fig1.

Looking at Fig 1, the core associations for Panasonic are "Consumer Electronics", "Premium Quality", "C.O.O" (country of origin), the tag line - "Better Life", celebrity associated with the brand and "smart youthfulness". The strongest of which being "Consumer Electronics", establishes a very strong association of Panasonic in the consumer electronic sector, which includes both "Home Entertainment" as well as "Home Appliances". "Speakers", "Smart Phones",

“LED”s & “AC”s came out as strong associations wrt the product category. “Smart Phones”, “LEDs” are associated with “Excellent Display” & “Speakers” “LEDs” & “ACs” are associated with “High end features and design”. This BCM also gives us an understanding that consumers have a strong association with “Ranbir Kapoor” as a celebrity endorser and it gels pretty strongly with Smartness and youth which are the core associations of the brand. This further on strengthens the association of Ranbir Kapoor to Panasonic. The association “Digital” though is the 2nd level association; it somehow associates with “Better life” & “Electronics”. The C.O.O. though has medium associated with the corporate brand it does have a strong correlation with “Premium Quality” which stands as one of the core associations for Panasonic.

DATA INTERPRETATION

“Consumer Electronics” being the first level strongest association, is an advantage as well as disadvantage for Panasonic. Advantage being that when it comes to Consumer Electronics, people has the strongest association to Panasonic. Which can give the corporate brand a confidence to be in par with other leading Consumer electronics Manufacturers? The biggest disadvantage is people can’t think Panasonic beyond Consumer Electronics. So that would be a huge road block for the corporate brand to diversify into unrelated product categories. If for instance Panasonic wishes to manufacture and market, insurance product or stationary products the brand will fail eventually. One can further go ahead and perform Pearson Correlations with the core associations of Panasonic and core characteristics of the unrelated product category such as stationaries. A researcher can as well rate on a 5 or a 7point Likert scale the association of Panasonic with unrelated product categories.

Thus Panasonic as per this research fails to be a Conglomerate Brand such as Tata’s or Reliance, where the core association of the brand is not related to any product category but lays in the lateral identification of the brand such as “Trust”, “Quality” etc.

CONCLUSION

A strong corporate brand acts as a focal point for the attention, interest and activity stakeholders bring to a corporation. Like a beacon in the fog, a corporate brand attracts and orients relevant audiences, stakeholders and constituencies around the recognizable values and symbols that differentiate the organisation. The set of associations for which the parent corporate stands in the market, for what it is known for in the market, is of prime importance, as it was seen through the brand concept map of the corporate brand. This research paper gives a good scope for the academicians and brand managers to understand the concept of Brand Concept Maps, its applications and moreover understanding the criteria of leveraging the parent brand as an brand umbrella architecture, endorsing products unrelated to the parent brand, in this case being Panasonic. As it is been observed in this case,

the BCM helps Panasonic to identify where it stands in the market and to what extend it can spread its wings.

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