THE IMPACT OF BRAND PERCEPTION AND BRAND IMAGE ON CONSUMER PURCHASING BEHAVIOR IN AZERBAIJAN

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ABSTRACT

Different perspectives are considered while evaluating branding strategies. Brand perception and brand image are one of them. These two components of brand are necessary part of performance of the firm. Brand perception is analyzed as a mental association, and brand perception plays an important role in creating emotional connections with perspective consumers. Consumers also consider their attitude toward brands when choosing between competing brands. On the other hand, brand image is another significant factor having positive impact on consumers' purchasing behavior. The main objective of the article is to conduct a research to look for the impact of brand perception and image on the buying behavior of consumers living in Azerbaijan. Author used questionnaire survey as data gathering method and non-probability sampling method was a subject to determine the samples. 300 questionnaires were distributed and only 251 proper replies were collected during the 1 month and 10 days. Research findings showed that brand perception and brand image have significant impact on consumer purchasing prosess and behaviour. Consumers of Azerbaijan, especially Azerbaijani youth are aware of the social status they have and it creates a reason to prefer branded products and in addition, brand perception also has super impression on Azerbaijani consumer's purchasing behaviour.

Keywords: brand, brand image, brand perception, consumer purchasing behaviour, brand equity

1. INTRODUCTION

Brand perception is one of the significant and vital components of branding strategies and it plays a crucial role in the profitability of the companies. As brand perception is owned by consumers, it contributes in building customer relationships (Oliver Koll and *et al*, 2009), hence it helps to formulate branding strategies. Serious companies always aim to formulate and develop positive brand perception to be perceived well by consumers. İt of course depends on how the firm can project itself. Negative and positive brand perceptions can be observed. İf the positive brand perception exists, it will influence consumers to give priority choosing the brand (Jonah Berger and *et all*, 2007), on the other hand, negative perceptopn will push the consumer to reject the brand.

As it is clear, brand is not only considered as the name of a company or the name of the product, but also brand illustrates culture, value, vision, mission and even a personality. It also suports to determine the market position and double check whether the vision is still relevant (Ahmed, Syed, 2018). All of the data collected is converted into a mental impression, which in turn influences the product's quality, value, and reputation in the eyes of customers (ibid).

On the orther hand, brand image is another factor contributing to brand equity of the company (Lu, A. C. C., Gursoy, D., & Lu, C. Y.,2015). The main objectve of marketing activities is to affect consumer thoughts and perspectives on a brand image in consumers' mind and to motivate current purchasing behaviour (ibid). As Bian and Moutinho (2011) mention, customers considers themselves with brands, hence brand image

and self image can be consistent. İn addition, in modern business, well formulated brand identity is more than important for perfectly positioned brand (Arslan and Zaman, 2015). Keller (2001) mention that one of the core objectives of businesses is to exert a strong impact on customers' psychological attachment and it depends on customers connection with a brand image.

According to Dowling and Uncles (1997), contemporary trade challenges in global markets is not only about price and cost, but also about loyalty, attracting customers, and building relationship. That is why, almost all marketing activites including brand image and brand perception are more than vital in the competetive market to be at least one step ahead than the rivals.

2.   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Consumer Behaviour and Decision Making

Jisana (2014) makes it clear that consumer behaviour reflects how human being intents to make decisions based on the various resources they have, such as time, effort, money and etc. According to Kumar (2016), consumer behaviour is defined as a term relating to the attitudes made by individuals or groups in making decisions about and benefiting services, ideas and products and even experiences. It is clear that shopping habits of the people has a significant impact on the economy of a country (Machova *et al*, 2021). Companies formulate marketing strategies to cover needs and wants of these people. Asiegbu *et al.* (2012), also defines consumer behaviour as a synthesis of purchasing and using items or services. Need recognition, informaton search, pre-purchase evaluation, purchasing, consuming and post consumption review and divest are the seven steps of consumer purchasing decision making process (Watson and Yan, 2013). People prefer branded products and perceive that higher prices are the symbol of higher quality and hence higher prices represent branded products in higher quality. On the other hand, status indicator can be defined by brand choice. İf the brand is managed well, then customers' perception for the brand, brand value and brand loyalty will be more stronger (Aaker, 1996).

According to Munthiu (2009), attitudes are formed by consumers and actions are also taken by them. Some part of consumers tend to form a positive opinion and a preference for a specific branded product. When faced with the difficult decision of which brand to choose, it appears that consumers are more likely to purchase the brand if it has received favorable ratings. This is based on brand preference; since brand-preferential clients pay closer attention to finding the necessary characteristics of their preferred brand while determining which brand offers the best price, they will be less sensitive to price than their preferred brand (Delvecchio, 2001).

Brand Image

Brand equity, which refers to consumers' overall perceptions and feelings about a brand and influences customer behavior, is mostly driven by brand image (Zhang, 2015). Newman (1957) also added that a brand's image is everything that consumers connect it with. The brand's perception is linked to consumer benefits, differentiating feelings, idiosyncrasies, and associations. The brand image focuses on how a specific group perceives a product, brand, policy, business, or event nation (Bivainienė, Šliburytė, 2008). Better strategic marketing judgments about a product's positioning and market segmentation are based on brand image. But numerous academics have used varying definitions and applications of the term "brand image." When assessing brand equity and positioning after measuring brand image, the several definitions used can be confusing (Lee ,L., J., James, J. D., Kim, Y. K., 2014).

In addition, Aaker (1991) mention that brand image adds value in a variety of ways, including through facilitating information processing on the part of consumers, differentiating the brand, driving purchase motivations, eliciting good emotions, and establishing a foundation for extensions. According to the cluster of associations that customers associate with the brand name in their memories, brand image can be described as consumer views of a product or service (Rio *et al.*, 2001). When a brand image is particularly pertinent to your customer, it is at its strongest. Customers' preferences while choosing a realtor determine relevance. It could be aggressive marketing, a strong reputation, or a specific area of competence. You can decide what kind of brand image and particular associations you want to build by conducting market

research, recognizing your capabilities, and learning about the needs of the market segment you find most alluring (Pulling, Ch. 2008).

Above mentioned definitions and descriptions, it can be concluded that positive image is associated with brand equity, loyalty, purchasing behaviour and brand performance.

Brand Perception

Brand Perception is a simple psychological factor that influences consumer behavior by playing a role in the purchase decision process. Consumers, not brands, control how people perceive brands. Whatever people are saying and thinking about your brand, regardless of your messaging, is your brand. A powerful brand wins over the prefrontal cortex. Additionally, it emphasizes how crucial it is to think about your customer's entire experience (Bian & Moutinho, 2011).

Customers base their opinions of a brand on a few embedded factors. According to Aaker (1991), your buyers judge a product based on its performance, features, conformity with specifications, reliability, durability, serviceability and fit and finish. If it's a service, according to Aaker (1991), your clients decide on quality based on tangibles, reliability, competence, responsiveness and empathy.

Every marketer nowadays must understand what perception means because a customer's decision to buy a product will be strongly influenced by how he or she perceives the product's quality. The features that the producer can add to the product through advertising and packaging also have an impact on how consumers perceive the product (Batler,1979). However, the choice made by the customer will thereafter be based on the brand's values. What factor(s) influences the consumer to select a specific brand of product at that moment is the question that emerges. Therefore, research into how consumer brand perception affects sales of goods and services as well as how it influences consumers' purchase decisions is necessary (Kolawole, 2003). This is due to the fact that numerous businesses have failed either as a result of insufficient study on the effects of consumers' brand perceptions or as a result of their casual attitude toward how consumers view their products.

The article studies two necessary factors of consumer purchasing behavior: Brand image and brand perception and related hypotheses are following:

Hypothesis №1: Brand image and customer purchasing behavior are closely intertwined

Hypothesis №2: Brand perception is significantly related to consumer purchasing behavior.
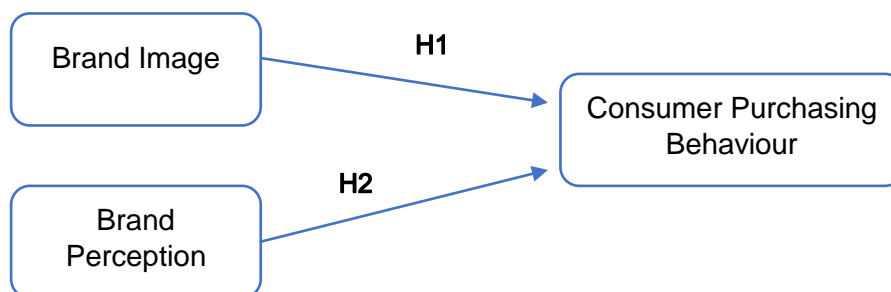
Figure 1. Hypotheses of the article

The ressearch has two independent variables and one dependent variable. Brand image and brand perception are independent varibles, but consumer purchasing behaviour is dependent variable. All these variables represent main aspects influencing consumer purchasing behaviour, that is why this framework can lead the research directions.

3. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH FINDINGS

Author used a questionnaire to analyse the influence of brand image and brand perception on consumer purchasing behaviour based on data gathered. The survey method was used in comparison with content

analysis as it has a capacity to examine attitudes and opinions of human being. Questionnaire concisted of two parts.

First part includes demographic information of the respondents, such as marital status, age, gender, education, income and etc analysed using a nominal value scale.

On the other hand, second part contains questions on brand image, brand perception and consumer purchasing behaviour. All these questions are graded on a five-point Likert chart.

Normal consumers were chosen by the author as his sampling frame. He used nonprobabilistic convenient sampling method.

Only 300 questionnaires have been distributed by the author, and 251 proper replies were collected. 155 respondents were female and the rest was male. İt represents 61.8% and 38.2%, respectively.

Below given tables clearly explain the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Table 1: Number of Questionnaire, and Responce Rate Frequncy.

	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Total number of questionnaire distributed	300	100%
Total number of proper replies received	251	83.7%
Number of questionaire missed	49	16.3%

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex		
Male respondents	46	38.2%
Female respondents	155	61.8%
Total	201	100%
Age Distribution		
16-20	122	60.7%
21-24	51	25.4%
25-30	9	4.45%
31-34	9	4.45%
35-40	6	3%
41+	4	2%
Total	201	100%
Marital Status		
Single	165	82%
Married	36	18%
Widow/Divorced	0	0%
Total	201	100%
Education		
Secondary school and Bachelor students	110	54.7%
Bachelor	68	33.8%
Master	18	9%
PhD	5	2.5%
Total	201	100%

Author used different regression models and Pearson correlations. These models allowed the researcher to measure the relationship between variables so as to study brand perception abd brand image and their effect on consumer purchasing behaviour. Author also calculated mean and standard deviation.

Table 3: Mean and Deviation

	Mean	Standard Dev.	N
Brand Image	3.801	0.429	201
Brand Perception	3.511	0.626	201
Consumer Purchasing Behaviour	3.299	0.859	201

According to Table 3, brand image's average score is 3.801 and it closes to 4. What it means is most of the answers of respondents are positive and respondents' reactions support the brand image on the five-point Likert scale. Standard deviation for the brand image is 0.429.

On the other hand, mean value of brand perception is 3.511 and it also closes to 4. This mean value shows that majority of respondents consider brand perception as a positive factor having enough impact on their purchasing behaviour. Standard deviation is 0.626 for the respondents' answers.

Table 4: Correlation Analysis

		Brand Image	Brand Perception	Consumer Purchasing Behaviour
Brand Image	P. Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	1	0.512	0.65
Brand Perception	P. Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	0.512	1	0.723
Consumer Purchasing Behaviour	P. Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	0.65	0.723	1

Correlation analysis shows that there is a positive connection between brand image and purchasing behaviour with the value of 0.65 and 1% siginificance. Brand perception and consumer purchasing behaviour are also positively correlated with each other, the value is 0.723, and siginicance of 1%.

Furthermore, Darbin-Watson test was used to make the nature of the association clear. This test is used to perform the regression analyses.

Table 5: Summary of the Model

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error for teh Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	0.583	0.349	0.322	0.8619	1.869

a. predictors: (Constant), Brand İmage, Brand Perception
b. dependent variable: Consumer Purchasing Behaviour

Table 5 shows that R-squared indicates the change in consumer purchasing behaviour as a dependent variable as a result of the impact of brand image and brand perception as independent variables.

The value of R-squared is 0.349 and independent variables have 34.9% impact on the dependent variables. Durbin-Watson was used to analyse the nature of the correlation between variables and the value is 1.869. This value is less than 2 and it means that there is a positive autocorrelation between variables.

Table 6: ANOVA test

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	32.689	2	16.399	270459	0.000
	Residual	103.001	173	0.616		

a. predictors: (Constant), Brand İmage, Brand Perception
b. dependent variable: Consumer Purchasing Behaviour

ANOVA test indicates whether the degree of significance can be accepted or not. According to the analysis shown in Table 6, it could be mentioned that the significant value is 0.000 and it is less than .05. It means it is acceptable and it shosw the substantial impact of brand image and brand perception on customer purchasing behaviour.

Table 7: Coefficients

Model		B	Standard Error	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sign.
				Beta		
1	Brand Image Brand Perception	-0.456 0.820 0.225	0.539 0.154 0.189	0.413 0.169	-0.839 5.569 2.221	0.398 0.000 0.28

Consumer Purchasing Behaviour – Dependent Variable

Above given Table 7 illustrates the impact of independent variables (brand image and brand perception) on the dependent variable (consumer purchasing behavior) as beta values. According to the research findings, brand image has an impact on consumer purchasing behavior with 0.413 beta value. This result proves why 41.3% of the disparity in consumer buying behavior is because of brand image and significant level is 0.000. That is why it supports the hypothesis 1 (H1).

On the other hand, consumer purchasing behavior is also influenced by brand perception with the beta value of 0.169. The significance is 0.28 and it means that brand perception makes 16.9% difference in purchasing behavior. Hence, it shows that hypothesis (H2) is partially supported on a weekly basis in comparison with H1.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In Azerbaijan, two different factors of brand, brand image and brand perception have been used in order to explore their effects on consumer purchasing behavior. Main aim of the author was to see if there was a connection between brand image and sales in this research, brand perception and consumer purchasing behavior. Researcher used questionnaire technique for this purpose and replies of the respondents were collected by using a non-probabilistic convenient sampling methodology. SPSS program was used to analyze all essential tests and the research findings proved that brand image has a super impact on consumer purchasing behavior and teenagers in Azerbaijan think that branded products can formulate specific symbols for their personality. Meanwhile brand perception also has a positive influence on consumer purchasing behavior.

The study's authors can draw a conclusion by noting that when consumers learn about a brand and form positive perceptions, loyalty, and connections with it, the brand's image is immediately reinforced in their brains and the consumers' purchasing behavior is altered. This study leads us to the conclusion that brand perception is a crucial branding technique for luring in new customers and keeping existing ones.

Furthermore, future research may improve the accuracy of this study. It is possible to expand the sample size. More cities will be researched in the near future because this study was restricted to residents of Baku city.

The research findings provides corporations and organizations with ideas on how to enhance their marketing efforts and branding techniques to get more customers. With the aid of this study, marketing executives may better understand the critical role that branding and marketing play in advancing any company. This portrayal of society, in which brand perception and brand image play an important role in influencing people's purchasing decisions, is correct.

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