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A STUDY ON CORPORATE BRAND IMAGE AT FIRST-TIME ADOPTER BEHAVIOR

This study demonstrates that brand is generally applied by enterprises as the medium to communicate with consumers and most consumers would equally relate a brand and an enterprise. In this case, brand is not merely a name, mark, color, title, or symbol. Motivation behind consumer's first-time adoption would largely assist in promotion of a brand so that the strategies of brand extension, product line extension, or brand licensing would be developed. Having the first-time users of Apple tablet computers as the research subjects, this study applies on-site questionnaires distribution and collection. Total 500 copies are distributed and 372 valid ones are retrieved with the retrieval rate 74%. The research outcomes show that brand image presents positive correlations with loyalty, switching intention, external response, internal response, in first-time adopter behaviors. The research outcomes are expected to provide enterprises with suggestions and reference in building brand image.

Keywords: corporate brand image; first-time adopter behavior; switching intention; brand value; brand attributes; loyalty.

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СПРИЙНЯТТЯ КЛІЄНТАМИ КОРПОРАТИВНОГО БРЕНДУ ПРИ ПЕРШОМУ ЗНАЙОМСТВІ З ФІРМОЮ

У статті продемонстровано, що підприємства при спілкуванні з клієнтами використовують бренди, при цьому більшість споживачів не роблять відмінностей між брендом і підприємством. В цьому випадку бренд — не просто ім'я, знак, колір, назва або символ. Мотивація при першому знайомстві з товаром фірми дає значну перевагу у просуванні бренду, при цьому найбільш важливими є розширення бренду, збільшення продуктової лінійки бренду і ліцензування бренду. Об'єктами дослідження стали покупці планшетів "Apple", для яких цей товар став першим придбаним товаром корпорації. Опитування проведено у магазинах за допомогою анкет, всього було роздано 500 копій, заповнено 372 з відсотком відгуку 74%. Результати дослідження показали, що імідж бренду при першому знайомстві з продукцією має прямий вплив на формування лояльності; намір клієнта змінити бренд; зовнішній і внутрішній відгук. Висновки дослідження можуть бути використані підприємствами при розробці іміджевої політики.

Ключові слова: імідж корпоративного бренду; реакції першого знайомства з брендом; намір змінити бренд; характерні риси бренду; лояльність.

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ВОСПРИЯТИЕ КЛИЕНТАМИ КОРПОРАТИВНОГО БРЕНДА ПРИ ПЕРВОМ ЗНАКОМСТВЕ С ФИРМОЙ

В статье продемонстрировано, что предприятия при общении с клиентами используют бренды, при этом большинство потребителей не делают различий между брендом и предприятием. В этом случае бренд — не просто имя, знак, цвет, название или символ. Мотивация при первом знакомстве с товаром фирмы дает значительное преимущество в продвижении бренда, при этом наиболее важными являются расширение бренда, увеличение продуктовой линейки бренда и лицензирование бренда. Объектами

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исследования стали покупателями планшетов "Apple", для которых этот товар стал первым приобретенным товаром корпорации. Опрос был проведен в магазинах с помощью анкет, всего было роздано 500 копий, заполнено 372 с процентом отклика 74%. Результаты исследования показали, что имидж бренда при первом знакомстве с продукцией имеет прямое влияние на формирование лояльности; намерение клиента сменить бренд; внешний и внутренний отклик. Выводы исследования могут быть использованы предприятиями для выстраивания имиджевой политики.

Ключевые слова: имидж корпоративного бренда; реакции первого знакомства с брендом; намерение сменить бренд; характеристики бренда; лояльность.

Introduction. Brand is regarded as a medium to communicate with consumers and most consumers are likely to equally relate a brand and an enterprise. It is a complicated symbol able to deliver 6 meanings to consumers, including attribute, profit, value, culture, personality, and users. Brand would affect consumers' perception and reception of product attribute and function, which would stay in consumers' minds. For consumers, association and awareness of a brand is regarded as brand image. When consumers precede decision evaluation on first-time adoption, they are likely to collect relevant information from internal and external sources. The integration of internal information and external information is the awareness of consumers related to the brand image of the first-time adoption, including brand products, brand enterprise, brand sources, and brand users. Consumers therefore would evaluate a product with the awareness, further show adopter motivations, and finally make the decision for the first-time adoption behavior.

The effect of brand image on consumers' first-time adoption behavior could be explained by classical conditioning theory in psychology which utilizes unconditioned stimulus (UCS) to generate unconditioned response (UCR) relationship and applies it to consumers' first-time adoption behavior. Brand image is considered as a conditioned stimulus which, after a series of marketing activities, would be resulted in positive emotion and reaction from unconditioned stimulus and further generates the association with a brand. Stimulus generalization principle derived from such a theory would stimulate consumers to the motive of first-time adoption and assist in promotion of a brand so that the strategies of brand extension, product line extension, or brand licensing could be developed. Such descriptions explain the way of brand delivering messages. However, the effect of brand image on consumers' first-time adoption behavior is not mentioned in details. This study therefore considers how consumer awareness of brand image affects the first-time adoption behavior being a worth discussing issue.

Literature review.

I. Brand Image.

Ballantyne, Warren and Nobbs (2005) defined brand image as the material property related to association and brand, such as the name of commodity and packing being able to generate profit or characteristics reception for consumers and brand being able to enhance the descriptive property. Lee (2009) proposed that brand is not merely consumer ownership but could bring information of the market meaning; brand is not just a name or a mark, but a relationship with consumers.

Magid and Cox (2006) regarded brand image as containing the response of consumers toward brand name, mark, or image as well as the symbol of a product quali-

ty. In conclusion, a successful brand would provide a stable listing basis of new products for an enterprise (Wang, 2010), which would offset the declination of market share during price wars and promotion (Wang, 2010), assist an enterprise in competition (Aaker & Keller, 1990), and maintain high acceptance of consumers (Chiang, 2011). Aaker (1996) also considered brand image as a given brand style and the overall brand reputation which consists of (1) the image provided by products or services (corporate image), (2) user image, and (3) the image of products and services. 3 dimensions applied by Aaker (1996), namely 1) brand value, 2) brand attributes, and 3) brand association, are utilized for measuring brand image in this study.

II. First-time Adopter Behaviors.

Tu (2009) proposed that consumers' first-time adoption behaviors were the process of studying individuals or groups on selecting, purchasing, using, managing products, services, concepts, or experiences in order to satisfy their demands and desires. Aiming at the research on consumers' first-time adoption behaviors, several consumers' behavior models were proposed. 1. EKB model was often applied to discuss consumer behavior models first-time adoption behaviors because of the wide coverage and details (Wang, 2009; Chan, 2009; Liu, 2010; Chiu, 2010). It became the mainstream model for the research on consumer behaviors. 2. In Hawkins Model, Wang (2011) proposed 3 types of consumers' first-time adoption behaviors. (1) Affection: It does not divide brand into pieces for separate evaluation, but focused on the feeling of use. (2) Product attribute: It is required to understand well the correlations of product classification and to compare the product attributes of different brands. (3) Attitude decision: It referred to ordinary attitude, image, instinct, or inference, rather than product attributes.

After the literature review, the following consumer behavior dimensions utilized by Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman (1996) were adopted in this study. 1. Loyalty referred to the relationship between consumers and service providers and the possibility of consumers willing to precede more transactions. 2. Switching intention indicated the possibility of consumers willing to consume in the same store even when the prices of products or services being enhanced. 3. External response referred to the possibility of consumers complaining to others or turning to other stores when encountering problems in the service process. 4. Internal response referred to the possibility of consumers complaining to staff and turning to other stores when encountering problems in the service process.

III. The relationship between brand image and consumers' first-time adoption behaviors.

Jen (2009) mentioned that brand image would affect the preference or attitude of consumers to a brand when searching information. At this time, consumers were at the program evaluation stage and they would carefully compare the values of products among different brands in order to make the best choice. Not until the image evaluation of a specific brand being higher than others would they make the final decision for the first-time adoption behavior. Aaker (1996) indicated that consumers would connect the memories about the brand at the optimal time so as to generate positive attitude, feeling, and purchase intention for the first-time adoption behaviors. Blackston (1995) also explained that with higher benefits, a strong brand could enhance consumers' first-time adoption behaviors, i.e., strong brands could steadily

develop even when the market is not booming. Prus and Brandt (1995) regarded consumer loyalty as consumer commitment to a specific brand or a company which could result in repurchases or recommendations to others and word-of-mouth and further lead to consumers' first-time adoption behaviors. Lee (2009) pointed out that the higher brand image of customers's, the higher first-time adoption behaviors are.

From the above researchers' points of view, the following hypotheses are proposed for this study.

H1: Brand image presents significantly positive correlation with loyalty in first-time adopters behavior.

H2: Brand image appears to have remarkably positive correlation with switching intention in first-time adopters behavior.

H3: Brand image shows notably positive correlation with external response in first-time adopters behavior.

H4: Brand image reveals significantly positive correlation with internal response in first-time adopters behavior.

IV. Demographic variables. Based on the above research on brand image and first-time adopter behavior, the following hypotheses are further proposed.

H5: The correlations between brand image and first-time adopter behavior demonstrate outstanding differences by gender.

H6: The correlations between brand image and first-time adopter behavior display notable differences by age.

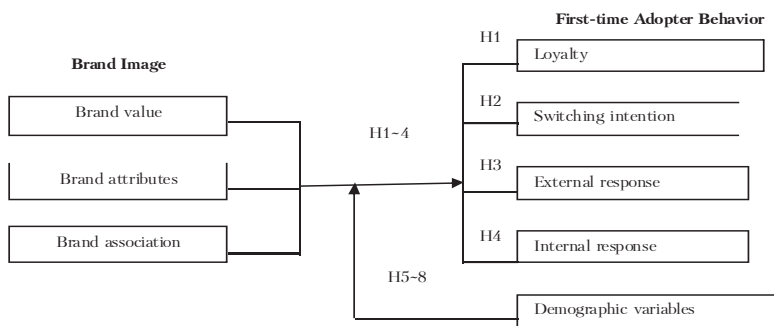
H7: The correlations between brand image and first-time adopter behaviors show remarkable differences by educational background.

H8: The correlations between brand image and first-time adopter behaviors present significant differences by occupation.

Research method.

I. Research framework.

According to the domestic and international research on brand image and first-time adopter behaviors, the research framework is proposed for this study to discuss the correlations between brand image and first-time adopter behaviors.



II. Research subjects and sampling.

The first-time consumers purchasing Apple tablet computers were selected as the research subjects. With the self-researched and developed A4 processors, Apple Inc. promoted tablet computers, iPads, in 2010, with which users could enjoy a large screen, more conveniently operate pictures, view the contents in YouTube, and com-

plete the applications of calendar, e-mail, and Google maps. With on-site questionnaire distribution and collection, the first-time consumers purchasing Apple tablet computers were given the questionnaires. With convenience sampling, total 500 copies were distributed, 372 valid ones were retrieved, with the retrieval rate of 74%.

Analysis and discussion.

I. Factor Analysis of Brand Image.

With factor analysis of brand image scale, 3 factors were abstracted. Brand value (eigen value=3.788, $\alpha=0.86$) contained different brands, better image, better quality, and different characteristics. Brand attributes (eigen value=2.947, $\alpha=0.90$) contained feeling relieved, brand marks, frequently consumed brands, and high awareness. Brand association (eigen value=2.381, $\alpha=0.88$) contained relevant products, specific brand, promotions, and original brand. The commonly accumulated variance explained of the 3 factors achieved 79.799%.

II. Correlation Analysis of Brand Image and Loyalty in First-time Adopter Behaviors.

With multiple regression analysis to test H1, the results are listed in Table 1. The regression equation achieved significance ($F=10.681$, $p<0.001$). Brand image appeared to have remarkable effects on loyalty, where brand value, brand attributes, and brand association presented significantly positive effects on loyalty; and, all of them achieved significance ($\beta=0.216$, $p<0.01$; $\beta=0.204$, $p<0.01$; $\beta=0.187$, $p<0.05$), H1 was partially agreed.

III. Correlation Analysis of Brand Image and Switching Intention in First-time Adopter Behaviors.

With multiple regression analysis to test H2, the results are listed in Table 1. The regression equation achieved significance ($F=12.716$, $p<0.001$). Brand image shows notable effects on switching intention, where brand value, brand attributes, and brand association demonstrated remarkably positive effects on switching intention in first-time adopter behaviors; all of them reached significance ($\beta=0.173$, $p<0.05$; $\beta=0.165$, $p<0.05$; $\beta=0.238$, $p<0.01$), H2 is partially agreed.

IV. Correlation Analysis of Brand Image and External Response in First-time Adopter Behaviors.

With multiple regression analysis to test H3, the results are listed in Table 1. The regression equation achieved significance ($F=16.925$, $p<0.001$). Brand image reveals outstanding effects on external response, where brand value, brand attributes, and brand association show remarkably positive effects on external response in first-time adopter behaviors; and all of them reach significance ($\beta=0.169$, $p<0.05$; $\beta=0.212$, $p<0.01$; $\beta=0.156$, $p<0.05$), H3 is partially agreed.

V. Correlation Analysis of Brand Image and Internal Response in First-time Adopter Behaviors.

With multiple regression analysis to test H4, the results are listed in Table 1. The regression equation achieves significance ($F=23.460$, $p<0.001$). Brand image presents notable effects on internal response, where brand value, brand attributes, and brand association show remarkably positive effects on internal response in first-time adopter behaviors; all of them reach significance ($\beta=0.233$, $p<0.01$; $\beta=0.242$, $p<0.01$; $\beta=0.191$, $p<0.05$), H4 is partially agreed.

Table 1. Multiple regression analysis of brand image and external response in first-time adopter behaviors

Independent variable	First-time adopter behaviors (Dependent variable)			
	Loyalty	Switching intention	External response	Internal response
Brand image				
Brand value	0.216**	0.173*	0.169*	0.233**
Brand attributes	0.204**	0.165*	0.212**	0.242**
Brand association	0.187*	0.238**	0.156*	0.191*
F	10.681	12.716	16.925	23.460
Significance	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***
R2	0.312	0.264	0.337	0.384
Regulated R2	0.068	0.047	0.075	0.125

*p<0.05 **p<0.01 ***p<0.001

Note: * stands for p<0.05, ** for p<0.01.

VI. Intervention effects of demographic variables.

1. The effect of gender on the relationship between brand image and first-time adopter behaviors.

With the analysis of variance, the empirical results are listed in Table 2, in which gender shows significant differences on the relationship between brand value (p<0.01), brand attributes (p<0.01), brand association (p<0.05) and loyalty; between brand attributes (p<0.01), brand association (p<0.01) and switching intention; between brand value (p<0.01), brand association (p<0.05), brand association (p<0.05) and external response; and between brand attributes (p<0.01), brand association (p<0.05) and internal response, H5 is partially agreed.

2. The effect of age on the relationship between brand image and first-time adopter behaviors

With the analysis of variance, the empirical results are listed in Table 3, where age shows remarkable differences on the relationship between brand value (p<0.05), brand association (p<0.01) and loyalty; between brand value (p<0.01), brand attributes (p<0.05) and switching intention; between brand value (p<0.01), brand association (p<0.05) and external response; and between brand value (p<0.05), brand attributes (p<0.01) and internal response, H6 is partially agreed.

Table 2. The effect of gender on the relationship between brand image and first-time adopter behaviors

Brand image	Loyalty	Switching intention	External response	Internal response
Brand value	p<0.01	p>0.05	p<0.01	p>0.05
Brand attributes	p<0.01	p<0.01	p>0.05	p<0.01
Brand association	p<0.05	p<0.01	p<0.05	p<0.05
Hypothesis test	H5 partially agreed			

Table 3. The effect of age on the relationship between brand image and first-time adopter behaviors

Brand image	Loyalty	Switching intention	External response	Internal response
Brand value	p<0.05	p>0.05	p>0.05	p>0.05
Brand attributes	p>0.05	p<0.05	p<0.01	p<0.01
Brand association	p<0.01	p<0.01	p<0.05	p<0.05
Hypothesis test	H7 partially agreed			

3. The effect of education background on the relationship between brand image and first-time adopter behaviors.

With the analysis of variance, the empirical results are listed in Table 4, in which education background reveals outstanding differences on the relationship between brand value ($p < 0.05$), brand association ($p < 0.01$) and loyalty; between brand attributes ($p < 0.05$), brand association ($p < 0.01$) and switching intention; between brand attributes ($p < 0.01$), brand association ($p < 0.05$) and external response; and between brand attributes ($p < 0.01$), brand association ($p < 0.05$) and internal response, H7 is partially agreed.

Table 4. The effect of education background on the relationship between brand image and first-time adopter behaviors

Brand image	Loyalty	Switching intention	External response	Internal response
Brand value	$p < 0.05$	$p < 0.01$	$p < 0.01$	$p < 0.05$
Brand attributes	$p > 0.05$	$p < 0.05$	$p > 0.05$	$p < 0.01$
Brand association	$p < 0.01$	$p > 0.05$	$p < 0.05$	$p > 0.05$
Hypothesis test	H6 partially agreed			

4. The effect of occupation on the relationship between brand image and first-time adopter behaviors.

With the analysis of variance, the empirical results are listed in Table 5, where occupation presents significant differences between brand value ($p < 0.05$), brand attributes ($p < 0.05$) and loyalty; between brand value ($p < 0.05$), brand attributes ($p < 0.01$) and switching intention; between brand value ($p < 0.01$), brand association ($p < 0.05$) and external response; and between brand attributes ($p < 0.01$), brand association ($p < 0.01$) and internal response, H8 is partially agreed.

Table 5. The effect of occupation on the relationship between brand image and first-time adopter behaviors

Brand image	Loyalty	Switching intention	External response	Internal response
Brand value	$p < 0.05$	$p < 0.05$	$p < 0.01$	$p > 0.05$
Brand attributes	$p < 0.05$	$p < 0.01$	$p > 0.05$	$p < 0.01$
Brand association	$p > 0.05$	$p > 0.05$	$p < 0.05$	$p < 0.01$
Hypothesis test	H8 partially agreed			

Conclusion. To sum up the data analyses, the research conclusions and suggestions on practical applications of brand image are listed below.

1. Creating product differentiation from consumer demands to enhance first-time adopters' purchase behaviors. Enterprises therefore are suggested to focus on the innovation of products and to consider how to satisfy the life style, living pleasure and taste of consumers, according to consumption demands of target customers.

2. Social responsibility of an enterprise could build a favorable corporate image and promote the sense of identity. Enterprises should continuously stress the management of corporate image. In addition to the development of professional capability, social responsibility of an enterprise has become another key issue when environmental protection is gradually emphasized in Taiwan.

3. Applying the asset of brand image to expanding the management range — Enterprises should establish a unique brand image and generate positive effects on the

consumers who are highly involved in relevant products. With such an enterprise asset to precede diversification, the present products would be expanded to develop relevant products as well as the brand asset and loyal customers could be applied to creating a new industry.

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