

Exploring consumer brand name equity: gaining insight through the investigation of response to name change

Abstract

Purpose - Academic literature generally regards the brand name element as central to consumer brand equity (e.g. Keller, 2003). Unfortunately scant research has been carried out to justify such a position for established products and services. The purpose of this study was to address this research gap.

Methodology - A series of 25 semi-structured qualitative interviews was carried out with consumers, exploring functions performed by the brand name for established products and services. In order to isolate the brand name element this focused upon global marketing induced brand name changes.

Findings - Many of the corporate led functions performed by the brand name within the literature received validation. This suggests that a concept of consumer brand name equity for established products and services can be justified. The study also indicated that a material proportion of the equity from a brand name was determined by the consumer. It revealed that many consumers had created their own associations for the brand name, positive and negative, independent of and different from those driven by the corporation.

Originality/value - It provides needed empirical support for the concept of consumer brand name equity for established products and services. It also suggests that this may be usefully considered as a co-creation between corporation and consumer.

Keywords Brand, Brand Name, Brand Equity

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Do consumers care what name a brand possesses? Or to use the language of branding does the brand name element provide equity in its own right? An examination of the branding literature would leave the reader in no doubt about the importance generally accorded to the brand name element.

Of all the marketing variables it is the brand name which receives the most attention by consumers. (de Chernatony and McDonald, 2006)

For many businesses the brand name and what it represents are its most important asset... (Aaker, 1991)

Consider brand names-perhaps the most central of all brand elements... (Keller, 2003)

It would be reasonable to assume that the brand name's proclaimed importance is supported with empirical data. Surprisingly this is not the case. Such research that there has been limited itself to new or fictitious brands (Friedman and Dipple, 1978; Gibson, 2005; Mehrabian and Wetter, 1978) or was centred on the entire brand entity rather than the brand name in isolation (Muzellec and Lambkin, 2006; Jaju *et al.*, 2006). In addition doubts arise about whether such importance in the brand name is justifiable when the ongoing name change activity by corporations is considered (i.e. Marathon to Snickers, Bounty to Plenty etc.), given the lack of obvious ill-effects from such changes (e.g. Edwards, 2010).

There is plainly a problematic research gap covering the preponderance of products and services in the market; namely those that are already established. Can we justify giving

worth to the brand name element of established products when empirical research has solely looked at new products? It cannot be logically presumed that the brand name element retains its importance as a product moves from new to established and it has been argued that the accrual of the effect of marketing communication programmes supersedes the role of the brand name (Riezebos, 1994).

In order to address this a project was initiated with the research objective of gaining insight into the dimensions and importance of consumer brand name equity for established products and services. This report results from the initial exploratory stage of research. It highlights the methodological considerations, relevant theory and the approach adopted. Findings from the empirical study undertaken are then presented and implications are discussed.

Literature review

Approach to research objective

The branding literature was reviewed to determine the theoretical dimensions of consumer brand name equity. Following this, empirical work was performed centred on, but not limited to, confirmation or disconfirmation of this theory. However novel approaches were required to progress both the theoretical and the empirical.

Methodological issues

The first methodological consideration was that specific theory does not exist for the brand name element. Another issue was how consumer brand name equity could be identified empirically. To address these issues it was decided to adopt a function-based approach towards consumer brand equity, with theoretical consumer functions of brand name being derived from a synthesis of the brand equity literature. This approach is discussed below. A further issue was how the brand name element could be isolated for empirical study. Global marketing induced brand name change was identified as a segregational device that could best achieve this and this is also discussed below.

Function-based approach towards consumer brand equity

Since brand equity came to prominence (Keller, 2003; Kapferer, 2004) research has tended to be concentrated on two questions. Firstly how can it be measured? Secondly how can it be created? Two distinct approaches have developed. The first is financially based and focuses on how brands should be valued by corporations (Kapferer, 2004; Keller, 1993). The other approach is labelled customer based and considers that questions of measurement and creation need to be centred on the customer/consumer. Work within the second approach has tended to look at what corporations should do to create brand equity for the consumer and to measure how successful they are at achieving this (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993; Na *et al.*, 1999). For example brand equity research has often concentrated on the constructs of brand awareness and brand association (McCracken and Macklin, 1998; Friedman and Dipple, 1978).

It is arguable whether this latter approach is genuinely customer centric, as it tends to focus on what a corporation is doing rather than what consumers consider that they are getting. Indeed does the act of creating brand awareness by a corporation generate value for a consumer *in itself* unless and until this corporate action performs a value-generating function

for the consumer? With this criticism in mind this research adopted a function-based approach towards customer based brand equity. It is premised on the logical reasoning that a brand only provides equity to a customer if the brand performs a function for the customer. This is shown diagrammatically in Figure 1.

Take in Figure 1: Mediating brand functions

Under this approach brand awareness and brand associations should not be regarded as direct antecedents of consumer brand equity. Their effects are mediated through their impact on the ability of the brand to perform various functions for the consumer. The adoption of this approach provided a fertile way to explore the dimensions of brand name equity from the consumer perspective.

Theoretical consumer functions of the brand name

Academic literature typically considers the brand name as an integral element of the brand (Keller, 2003; Aaker, 1991; de Chernatony and McDonald, 2006) and as such it appears acceptable to assume that the functions of the brand name for the consumer are those of the brand entity.

Four functions of brand that can broadly be described as rational can be ascertained within the literature. Firstly branding can perform an identification function (Farquhar, 1989), enabling a consumer to quickly identify a product or service with which they are familiar. This identification function supports a second key brand function of search cost reduction (Jacoby *et al.*, 1977). Branding can simplify the purchase process not only for products with which consumers are already familiar but also for new products. This is because the branding process facilitates and enables the encapsulation of relevant purchase information, through brand communication and association. For example the association of a brand with particular service attributes, such as speed, allows a consumer to make a quick decision about whether it would meet their functional needs. Thirdly brand is often considered as having a specific role to play in signalling quality (Jacoby *et al.*, 1971; Kapferer, 2004; Brucks *et al.*, 2000), particularly for goods and services whose attributes cannot be assessed prior to purchase. Quality signalling can meet functional needs, such as durability, or be prestige related, meeting symbolic needs. Finally brands can perform a risk reduction function (Roselius, 1971; Aaker, 1991) through the provision of functional consistency or social risk reduction. For example branding can ensure that the clothes worn by a consumer do not alienate them from group membership.

A brand is sometimes believed to fulfil a relationship function, through the enablement of an ongoing relationship or emotional attachment between itself and a consumer. In such a relationship consumers place their trust and loyalty in a brand on the implicit understanding that the brand will satisfy their needs on an ongoing basis. Some scholars, such as Fournier (1998), see this as the main function of branding and of growing importance as a provider of stability and authenticity in a rapidly changing world. Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) have taken this notion further with the development of the brand love concept, where consumers are presumed to have love-like feelings for brands. A quotation contained within Roberts (2005) illustrates:

For more years than I can remember I have used the same shampoo: Head & Shoulders. Ridiculous, isn't it? I mean it's a shampoo to remove dandruff, which it does. But I've no hair, let alone dandruff! Still I love Head & Shoulders. I won't buy or use anything else.

A habitual function for branding has also been suggested because of its ability to support habitual consumer behaviour. This can be found where actions require minimal thought to implement, reflecting routine repetition of past acts that are cued by stable features in the environment (Wood *et al.*, 2002). An example might be where a consumer goes into the same shop everyday for their newspaper and a chocolate bar. Habitual behaviour offers the benefit to the consumer of reduced cognitive activity requirement thereby allowing other activities to be carried out and leading to stress reduction (Lin and Chang, 2003; Berger and Luckmann, 1966).

Finally it is asserted within the literature that the purchase of certain brands might perform a symbolic function to consumers through symbolic or psychological associations. It has been claimed that goods are rarely wanted for utilitarian reasons but for the meanings they possess (Douglas and Isherwood, 1996; McCracken, 1986), which provide consumer value. It is likely that many of the consumers purchasing Nike footwear are not driven by functionality. In particular it is argued that brands are used by consumers for identify development, both in terms of self-regard and perception within the social arena (Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998). For example such uses of brand are very prominent in the McAlexander *et al.* (2002) study on the Harley-Davidson community. Other examples of brands fulfilling symbolic functions can be found in Kapferer (2004) (*ethics*-where consumers obtain value from the responsible behaviour of a brand in its societal relationship) and Brown *et al.* (2003) (*nostalgia*).

Functions of the brand name contained within scholarly literature can therefore be synthesized into the following typology (Table I).

Table I. Theoretical consumer functions of brand name

Function	Benefit	Authors-(<i>examples</i>)
A-Rational		
Identification function	Enables consumer to quickly identify product/service with which they are familiar	Farquhar (1989)
Search cost reduction function	Simplifies purchase process providing them with time and resource saving benefits	Jacoby <i>et al.</i> (1977)
Quality signalling function	Enables consumer to establish quality attribute for goods and services whose attributes cannot be assessed prior to purchase	Jacoby <i>et al.</i> (1971), Kapferer (2004), Brucks <i>et al.</i> (2000)
Risk reduction function	Reduces perceived functional or symbolic risk from purchase	Roselius (1971), Aaker (1991)
B-Relationship		
Relationship function	Provides benefit to consumers of ongoing relationship and emotional attachment	Fournier (1998), Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) <i>brand love</i>
C-Habitual		
Habitual function	Supports habitual behaviour with benefit of reduced cognitive activity	Wood <i>et al.</i> (2002), Lin and Chang (2003), Berger and Luckmann (1966)
D-Symbolic		
Symbolic function	Provides benefit to consumers through symbolic associations	Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998), Douglas and Isherwood (1996), McCracken (1986), McAlexander <i>et al.</i> (2002) <i>brand communities</i> , Kapferer (2004) <i>ethics</i> , Brown <i>et al.</i> , (2003) <i>nostalgia</i>

Isolation of brand name element for empirical study

Global marketing induced brand name change can be defined as a change to the name of a product or service resulting from a corporate desire for the same name to be used globally, as opposed to any brand performance issues. Examples within the UK include the change of Marathon to Snickers and Jif to Cif. Typically corporations engaging in this exercise deliberately endeavour to maintain unchanged all the other aspects and elements of the brand (Kapferer, 2004; Pottker, 1995). By so doing any impacts on the consumer from the change can reasonably be attributed to the brand name element. This means that if the examination of this type of name change reveals that a change in function performed by the brand to the consumer has occurred then this would give reasoned support for the brand name element being involved in the provision of this particular function. Consequently empirical support for equity being provided by the brand name element to the customer is obtained.

Theoretical impact of brand name change and mitigation by corporate activity

In theory it would be expected that the ability of a brand name to perform the various functions shown in Table I would be impacted by a change in its name. For example the ability of a brand name to fulfil its rational identification function would be reduced if the name were to be changed from a well known to an unknown one.

However it is well documented that corporations engaged in global marketing induced

name change employ advertising and promotional programmes in an endeavour to transfer awareness and associations from the old to the new name (Kapferer, 2004; Pottker, 1995; Viscose, 2006). Does this mean that no change in the functions performed by brands would be expected to occur and therefore make empirical study pointless? It was decided that this mitigation by corporate activity did not a priori invalidate the approach of this study i.e. comparison of the original and changed brand name. In the case of rational functions it was argued that significant time and resources would be required to mitigate the impact of the name change due to the level of investment accrued in the original name. In the case of the habitual and relationship functions the very act of name change would be expected in itself to impact the ability of a brand name to perform these functions. A name change by definition forces the breaking of habit. The relationship function is predicated on a consumer expectation that the brand will meet their needs. A unilateral corporate imposed change in brand name is unlikely to be in line with these expectations. Kapferer (2004) sums this up graphically:

A brand transfer is always an act of violence...One does not lose a friend without harm and pain, even resentment

Finally symbolic associations are often linked to the particularity of a name (Collins, 1977) and will not be able to be transferred across to a new name regardless of the intensity of the advertising and promotional programme. As an example it would be difficult to transfer the Norwich (as a city) associations of Norwich Union to Aviva. For some customers of Norwich Union the loss of such associations is likely to be of importance. To recap, despite mitigation by corporate activity we could in theory still expect a change in brand name to cause a change in consumer functions performed.

Summary

In light of the various methodological considerations the overall approach of the research became:

a-the determination of the theoretical consumer functions of the brand name for established products, where functions are regarded as sources of brand equity to consumers. This is shown in Table I.

b-an empirical study centred on, but not limited to, confirmation or disconfirmation of this theory. This was primarily through the comparison of the consumer functions provided by a brand before and after a global marketing induced brand name change, where an identified change in function gave reasoned empirical support for the brand name element providing this function to the consumer. This empirical study is discussed next.

The study

As this is clearly not an area that has been well-researched (Kapferer, 2004; Keller, 1993) qualitative study was desirable to provide the necessary richness and depth for the subject. Whilst the limitations of such an approach are well discussed (Bryman and Bell, 2003) it is a constructive antecedent to any quantitative activity.

A series of 25 in-depth semi-structured interviews was carried out with consumers who considered that they had been impacted by a change in the brand name. The

demographic breakdown of those interviewed was 15 female and ten male, with seven aged under 25, nine aged between 25 and 40 and nine aged over 40. Participants were recruited through a variety of channels; university students (six), university administration staff (eight), newspaper and magazine advertisements (six) and previous research contacts (five).

Participants were asked about the ways in which they perceived that they had been impacted by global marketing induced name change, the influence of associated brand name change advertising and promotional activity, their cognitive and emotional responses and attitudinal/behavioural change.

All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed into NVivo8 software and analysed using template analysis. Template analysis is broadly a grounded approach that is used for the thematic organization and analysis of textual data. However unlike grounded theory initial themes are generally generated from the extant theory (Dey, 1993). Following the approach of King (2004) an initial thematic coding template was created for transcription analysis. This template was subsequently amended through consideration of the data. As an example one coding theme used was *habitual function impact*. The outcome of this analysis is discussed in the next section.

Findings-The functions of the brand name

A-Rational functions

Empirical support was provided for various rational functions performed by the brand name. One issue raised by participants [P] regarding the change of the brand name was concern over finding the product, thereby providing confirmation for its identification and search cost reduction functions. This is illustrated in quotations from two of the participants:

I don't think it actually says very much in the name, Ulay, but everybody knew what it was...[P19].

To me it seemed crazy that you spend your time building a brand and advertising it and encouraging people to buy it, and then you change its name <laughs> and then people can't recognise it and probably stop buying it even, if they don't recognise it as the thing they had before [P24].

A second issue provoked by name change was concern that the functional benefits of the product had changed, thereby revealing confirmation of the risk reduction and quality signalling functions of the brand name:

I think the name was part and parcel of the product and then you change one element of the product and basically think what else have they changed? [P10].

So you always suspect that something's changing because there's a problem [P18].

The above two quotations demonstrate suspicions about the motivation behind a change in name. Another consumer response to a brand name change was an assumption that the renamed brand was a fake:

..then I couldn't find Oil of Ulay anymore...and there was Oil of Olay and I thought it was someone trying to mimic the product...there is this fake brand that I'm not going to buy so I changed the product (switched brands)[P20].

Concern that a brand might be perceived as fake is heightened in a marketplace where brand mimicry is commonplace. The above participant was talking about her experience in Italy but such practices are prevalent elsewhere; for example amongst UK supermarket own-brands.

These rational function impacts were prominent within the interviews despite intensive advertising and promotional campaigns about the name change. Indeed the rational functions of brand name were second in terms of mentioned impacts, albeit rarely the only function identified. A number of reasons were suggested for the failure of advertising and promotion to achieve a full transfer of rational functions from the old to the new name. Firstly not all consumers had been aware of the advertising and promotion relating to the name change, as illustrated by the following two quotations:

I think it's probably something I wasn't aware of directly because I wouldn't have been looking...the first time I'd have been aware of it was probably when someone mentioned it in conversation, certainly not something I would have discovered myself [P14].

But you certainly weren't aware of it? [Int. to P20].

No, not at all and, I don't know, I mean I was reading in any case magazines, like feminine magazines...and I mean I'm not a careful reader of advertisements but when there is an advertisement maybe concerning the product or something, I have a look at this so I think I would have noticed [P20].

Secondly the original brand name continued to cause cognitive interference due to accrued awareness investment:

I'm always aware that even though they're called Starburst now, what I'm getting is an Opal Fruit. If someone asked me to describe a Starburst I'd say 'well it was an Opal Fruit' [P02].

...because I've known it as Jif for years and years, so I'm not suddenly going to start changing it to Cif because it, to me, it's Jif <laughs> It always will be [P19].

As well as demonstrating cognitive interference, these quotations are also of significance because they reveal the active role of the consumer within the branding process. Despite best corporate endeavours these consumers cognitively exclude the new brand name from the current brand entity.

B-Relationship function

Empirical support was obtained for the consumer brand name function of providing relationship benefit. One of the key reasons interviewees felt that they had experienced an impact from the change in the brand name was a perceived diminution in the relationship that they felt they had with the brand under its new name:

...does the new name mean something different to you than Opal Fruits? [Int. to P02].

Yeah, 'cause even though I know that it's the same sweet inside it's lost that history behind it, so it's almost like a new sweet, and the sweet might be the same and it tastes the same but you've got to start again with all that why you'd buy them as opposed to another sweet. It's now all the brands that were second and third behind Opal Fruits now have got more history than the Starbursts [P02].

Note the language used by the above participant “*start again*”: very much a relationship expression. The notion that Starburst has to go to the back of the relationship queue is also thought-provoking.

...I think on that emotional side you do feel a degree of loyalty and belonging with that, that identifies that brand and the question that, as I say, what have they done to my brand? Why have they done this? They haven't asked me [P10].

The quotation above highlights a grievance that the brand relationship that had been perceived as two-way was revealed as not actually so.

C-Habitual function

Empirical support was obtained for the habitual function of the brand name. Interviewees talked about the disbenefit that they felt as a consequence of having to address the implications of the name change:

So do you think that's part of it; the fact that with the name change it has forced you to change your habits? [Int. to P05].

Yes I think it's almost pulled me up short. Instead of say focusing in with my blinkers on, now it comes back in your face almost that and you think ooh no, maybe not! [P05]

...I think probably the reasons for not liking it (*the name change*) is a sort of laziness. You get used to something and then it changes and you have to grapple with that...[P06].

..but over time people just become accustomed to things because people are habitual, aren't they?..and it's a change in habit [P11].

Note the physicality of some of the language used: “*pulled up short*”, “*back in your face*”, “*grapple*”. This suggests that the change of name is uncomfortable for these consumers.

D-Symbolic function

Limited evidence was obtained for the symbolic function of a brand name as far as corporate driven symbolic functions were concerned. As discussed above corporations involved in brand name change use advertising and promotion to attempt to transfer symbolic associations across to the new name and this makes the paucity of empirical evidence plausible. However an important additional dimension of the symbolic function of the brand name was identified and is discussed below.

Findings-Symbolic function and personal associations

For over half of the consumers taking part in the research centring of the discussion on brand name change revealed that they had established their own symbolic functions for the brand name, based on their own personal non-corporate driven associations.

One category of personal associations was linked to the specificity of a particular name. For example Jif was associated with “in a Jiffy” whilst Cif was taken as shorthand for a venereal disease.

Jif to me comes from jiffy; so you'll do it in a jiffy; so you'll do it quickly. It helps you do it quickly [P16].

Cif, it doesn't mean anything. It's like the beginning of syphilis to be honest...[P24].

Opal Fruits were associated with precious gemstones whilst Oil of Olay was associated in the consumer's mind with the Olay plant (which does not actually exist!).

I mean I just thought it was some natural product coming from some Olay plant [P20].

Although these symbolic associations can be seen to be closely linked to a specific brand name they are not creations of the corporation. Despite this they add

They just sound more magical to me than Starburst [P04].

In what way? [Int. to P04].

Opal Fruits, they just sound, 'cause opals are precious and they glitter and shimmer in a strange way and so if you can put them into sweets...[P04].

or subtract symbolic value from the brand:

(Talking about Snickers) And to be honest it sounds like knickers doesn't it? <Laughs> It's just absolutely ridiculous. There's no street cred in that at all. It's an embarrassment [P05].

(Talking about Snickers) Well it's very American and it smells...it doesn't smell at all it smacks of trainers <laughter>, sneakers [P10].

A second category of personal associations consisted of meaningful events in consumers' lives, which had become associated with the name. For example a particular brand name might be associated with a happy childhood memory:

It's just a sense of comfort really. You know, you got picked up after school and your mum gave you some Opal Fruits. It was always that nice kind of history behind it that you want to carry on, so you keep buying Opal Fruits to get that feeling again [P02].

or a particular location where the consumer used the product:

When I hear the name Veet, however, it reminds me of when I spent a year abroad in France and Spain because Veet was what I saw then...and so Veet doesn't sound true to me that it should be Veet here. To me, Veet's European and it should be abroad [P23].

This association was different to a simple recall of product use. In the literature are examples of corporations attempting to increase the equity of a brand through nostalgia value bestowal (Brown *et al.*, 2003). Associations identified here are conceptually different as there was no corporate involvement. The idiosyncratic yet meaningful nature of the associations should be noted. In the above quote by participant P02 the fact that the personal symbolic association was powerful enough in itself for product purchase is worth contemplation. In a final quotation below, highlighting the change in meaning brought about by a change in the brand name, the name Century FM is associated with the pleasure of winning a competition and this is represented in physical form in the guise of a branded toaster. This example is unusual in that the original brand name continues its physical existence co-temporally with the new brand name.

Like for me I won...a Century FM toaster...but I was thinking in a few years' time when my children are older and they open the box and they see Century FM they're going to say 'Well, what's that?'...When I say 'Well Real Radio that I listen to, that used to be called Century FM' but it doesn't mean the same, you know [P23].

Discussion

It is worth reiterating why this research is considered significant and the merit of the approach adopted. No extant empirical work has investigated the brand name element for established products. Whilst importance is generally assumed within the literature, others raise doubts about whether it is actually of any value. Understanding the role and importance that the brand name element plays is not only vital for branding theory but also for managers making decisions about their brands.

The adopted approach of looking at global marketing induced brand name change, where only the name changes, ensures that the consumer functions identified in the empirical study relate to the brand name element rather than the brand entity as a whole. This can be confirmed through consideration of the participants' comments within the previous section. This empirical study offers support for a variety of functions that consumers perceive emanate from the brand name element; namely the brand name serves rational, relationship, habitual and symbolic functions. The findings from the study are notable in highlighting the non-rational functions that a brand name holds for consumers, evidenced in the discomfort caused by the change in name. If we accept that a brand holds personality (Aaker, 1997) then can this not be likened to changing a person's name and all the issues that would arise from that? It is highly unlikely that a parent would change the name of their child once a name had been given, yet this is something that brands have a history of doing. This paper provides qualitative evidence of some of the distress that such changes may induce.

An objection might be raised about whether the provision of a function is equivalent to the provision of equity. Semantic differences aside, this approach proved to be a very helpful for exploring the *dimensions* of consumer brand name equity, compared with alternative approaches such as brand awareness and brand associations or that of simply calculating a brand equity value.

Adopting this approach reveals the frequent personal symbolic associations that consumers hold with brand names. This suggests that much of the symbolic function of the brand name is determined by the consumer rather than the corporation and therefore also its equity. The active role of the consumer within the production/consumption creation process has long been recognised (e.g. Brown, 1995; Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Ligas and Cotte, 1999). Nevertheless the active consumer often tends to be marginalised within consumer brand equity literature.

Although the initial premise of the Customer Based Brand Equity model (Keller, 1993) asserts that brand equity lies "in the minds of customers", the *focus* of the model is the creation and management of this brand equity *by corporations*. Other leading authorities in the field devote a substantial part of their writing to "creating and sustaining brand equity" (Kapferer, 2004) or "...how brand equity should be managed: How should it be created, maintained and protected? How should it be exploited?" (Aaker, 1991).

Findings from this study provide empirical backing for the view that the equity from a brand name may be more fruitfully considered as determined partially by the corporation and

partially by the consumer. This is elaborated in Figure 2 below. Figure 2a represents a mainstream managerial view of the use of associations to create brand name equity. A corporation selects a brand name that inherently holds intended associations and then uses marketing programmes to reinforce this and develop new “strong, favourable and unique brand associations” (Keller, 2003). Figure 2b represents a co-creation process where the activities of the corporation are blended with the idiosyncratic and personal associations of the individual consumer to determine the equity of the brand name.

Take in Figure 2-Development of Brand Name Equity through Symbolic Associations

The foregrounding of the consumer within the brand equity creation process has wider ramifications, in particular for brand ownership. Even without attempting a detailed conceptualisation of such an ownership construct, it appears problematic to reconcile a position that regards ownership of a brand as exclusively that of a corporation with one where the corporation is not exclusively responsible for the creation of the brand equity. Belk (1988) argues that the maker of an object is entitled to ownership of it. To the extent that a consumer determines the equity of a brand name are they not also its maker?

Returning to the original question of whether consumers care what name a brand possesses, perhaps it is because the equity in the brand name has been co-created that causes consumers to care? Certainly this exploratory study starts to reveal a true richness and depth to the topic of consumer brand name equity.

Conclusion and future research

The research objective of the study was gaining insight into the dimensions and importance of brand name equity for established products and services. This has been met in that qualitative evidence for most of the theoretical functions of the brand name was obtained, thereby providing justification for consumer brand name equity as a concept. In addition the active role of the consumer within this process emerged. No attempt was made to quantify the importance of consumer brand name equity. However this will be addressed through future quantitative experimental work, building on this research. This will specifically examine the importance of the brand name element of established products to consumers, thereby placing the findings of this study within context.

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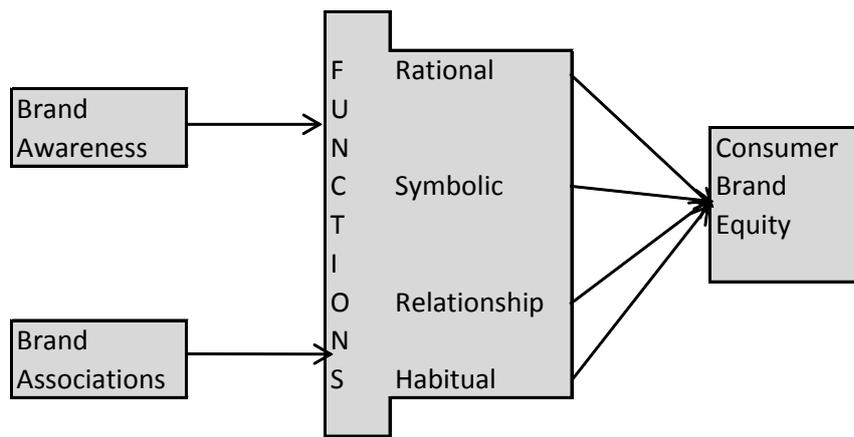
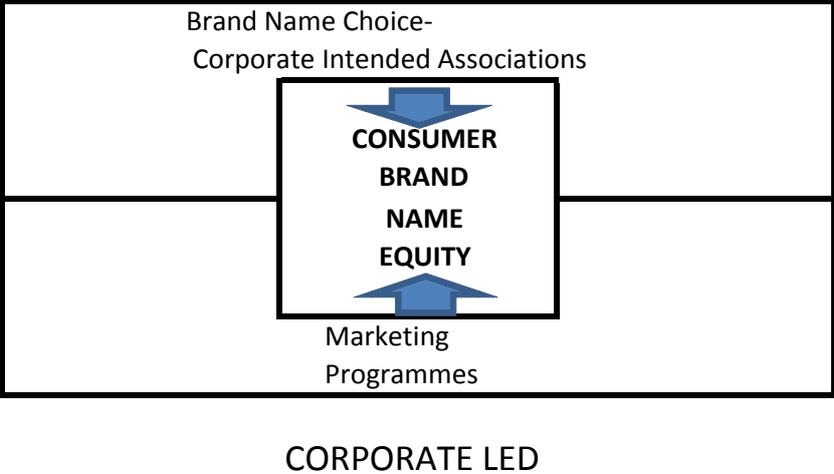


Figure 1: Mediating brand functions

a-Corporate creation model



b-Corporate/Consumer co-creation model

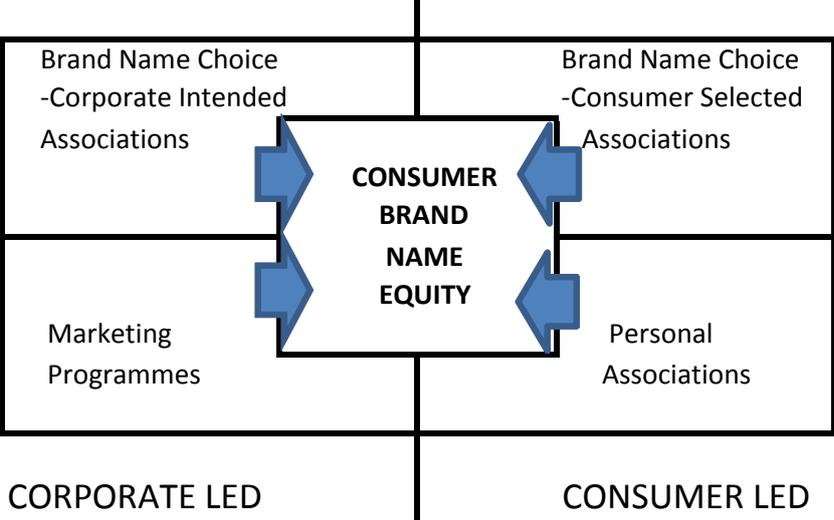


Figure 2-Development of Brand Name Equity through Symbolic Associations

