



UNDERSTANDING TATA AS A CORPORATE BRAND USING BRAND CONCEPT MAPPING

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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, favourable, and unique brand associations in consumer memory. An effort has been made to draw a Concept Map for Brand Tata, which would bring out the core associations of the corporate brand as well as the strength of these associations. Tata being India's largest conglomerative diversification, it would be interesting to know the core associations of Tata and the subsequent meaning derived out of it. This would be helpful in understanding to what extent consumers think about Tata.

KEYWORDS :

INTRODUCTION

A strong corporate brand can set the tone for the development of a company. Successful corporate branding is all about establishing a long-term vision for a company and crafting the company's operations to meet that objective. It is usually successful if the company is well known and sells reputable products with a positive image.

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.

As per (Ugla, 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 (Ugla, 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.

As per Ugla (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 “Tata” with the aid of concept mapping.
- To explore whether these core associations leverage Tata to endorse unrelated product categories.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design is exploratory in nature as the researcher explores the “core associations” of Tata with the aid of Brand Concept Map (BCM). For establishing the BCM, primary data is collected with a sample size of 203 respondents. Sampling frame representing the Target population where primarily youth, working professionals of an age group of 25+ from the region of Mumbai, who have somewhere or the other being exposed to brand Tata, either as a customer of its products, regardless of the product category or having a good knowledge of the brand.

The respondents were instructed to identify the associations they think are relevant to Tata 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).

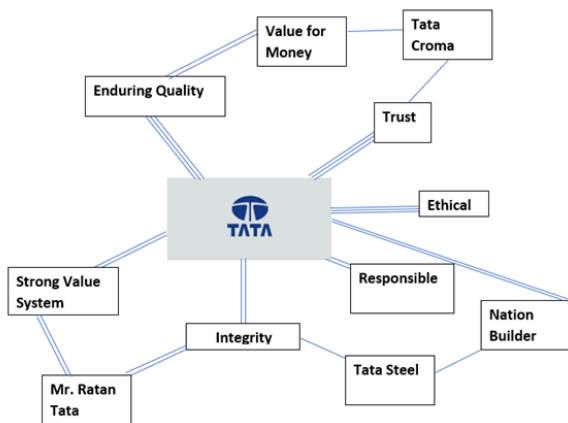


Fig 1: BCM for Corporate Brand Tata

DATA ANALYSIS

To analyse 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 Tata are “Trust”, “Integrity”, “Strong Value System”, “Ethical”, “Responsible” “Enduring Quality”, and “Nation Builder”. These are the first order association of Tata as a conglomerative group.

The strongest of which being “Trust” & “Ethical” and “Enduring Quality”, establishes a very strong association of Tata, regardless of any category or sector. Followed by the strong value system it possess, the “Integrity” it has shown over the years and Tata coming out as a “Responsible” brand. In the experiment of Brand Concept Mapping with the selected target audience in the sampling frame, 2 Brands of Tata’s came out in open which reflected in the BCM of Tata and that is Tata Steel and Tata Croma. But there has been a distinction observed in both the brands with the level of 2nd order association it is attached to. As per the above Fig1, Tata Steel is associated with “Integrity” and “Nation Builder”, where as Tata Croma is associated with “Trust” and “Value for Money”, because of the sector it belongs to delivering valley for money and enduring quality products in home electronics and appliances.

Mr. Ratan Tata comes out as a strong personality, strongly associated with Tata Brand, which once upon a time was associated with JRD Tata. Thus the legacy continues. Mr. Ratan Tata having a larger than life image comes out as a torchbearer for the Tata brand, much stronger than any celebrity endorsing any product of Tata. Mr. Tata is the 2nd order association with Integrity and Strong value system, that strongly reflects the personality of Mr. Ratan Tata.

DATA INTERPRETATION

Tata being a conglomerative corporate brand, having close to 100 brands under its wing, the Brand Concept Mapping of Tata, should come out as a good news for the parent corporate brand as none of the core association of the brand is associated with any of the product category. As one observes, Tata is strongly associated with Trust, corporate ethics, strong value system and Integrity, it cuts across all the various product and service categories be it automobiles or steel or retail or hospitality.

Which means that Tata as a brand has a strong potentiality to be a global leader in much diversified product categories, which is been felt looking at the past track record of the brand, the way they have expanded and diversified including the famous mergers and acquisition.

One can further go ahead and perform Pearson Correlations with the core associations of Tata and core characteristics of the unrelated product categories. A researcher can as well rate on a 5 or a 7point Likert scale the association of Tata with unrelated product categories.

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. As it is been observed in this case, the BCM

helps Tata to identify where it stands in the market and to what extent it can spread its wings. Thus Tata as per this research sets up an exemplary model to be a Conglomerate Brand 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.

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