

Brand Perception & Brand Equity of Baby Accessory Products in Working Moms' Perspective

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A paper is aiming to investigate how to create brand perception and brand equity by using the different marketing communication tools. It also studies the relationship between brand perception and brand equity. This study is focused on baby accessory product in order to realize what working moms think, conceive, feel, and learn upon brands. Brand perception is consumers' ability to identify the brand under different condition defined by their brand recognition or recall performance. On the other hand brand equity is the added value endowed to products and services. The research results show that brand perception of working moms for baby accessory products are different when considered by marketing communication program regarding above and below the line activities. In addition, brand perception and brand equity is positive relationship. This finding is value in how consumers aware and perceive effecting to brand acceptability and brand attitude by the different marketing programs.

Field of Research: Marketing communication of multinational brand toward Brand Perception & Brand Equity

1. Introduction

Recently, people have been changed attitude toward getting baby in one or two babies on maximum basis. These information relative with Thai Department of Provincial Administration that birth rate of Thailand in 2003 is 778,000 babies, 2004 is 823,000 babies and 2005 dropped to 810,000. With higher disposable income and with more affluent working parents having their first child related products has been increasing as well. These desires for parents are contributing to baby accessory product producers in positive ways. According to the Thai market segmentation of baby accessory products there are 4 segments consisted of super premium, premium, standard, and economy markets. The imported products from Europe such as Avent, Chicco, and Piyo Piyo are the super premium market. Premium segment has Pigeon dominated this segmentation. Natur, Pur', Disney, and Angle stony are in the standard market.

The economy market represented with many brands such as Ju Ju, Joob, Toddy, and Pencil. Criteria of market separating by price point positioning of each product. (Marketing plan 2007, of Moong Pattana Marketing Co.,Ltd, Solely distributor of Pigeon Brand in Thailand)

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According to the competitive market, the producers implement the marketing communication on both above and below the line activities to create the brand perception and brand equity to stimulate the customer loyalty. The return of marketing communication investment is translated into not only the tangible assets but also intangible assets such as brand awareness, image, and loyalty.

The main customers for the baby accessory products are separated into two groups. Firstly, the end-users are the babies who are unable to make the decision to buy which brand. They are not affected by any marketing communication programs and they did not perceive the brand of their uses. Opposite to the second group, the moms who are the decision makers to purchase products to their baby based on the perception of good quality products and the brand of product. They might not have any loyalty if they think the new one is better than existing products that they used. The marketing program for both above and below the line will differently affect the decision of working moms to buy the products to their babies. Therefore, the marketers of baby accessory products will compare the cost and effectiveness of marketing communication programs to the level of brand perception and brand equity of their customers.

The research has main objective to investigate the effect of different marketing communication program toward brand perception and brand equity. The relationship between brand perception and brand equity is another objective to answer for the research question of how the relationship between brand perception and brand equity is. The conceptual model examines consumer demographic, marketing communication program and brand perception components as figure 1. To realize the relationship of demographic factors consists of age, occupation, income, education, baby ages, brand used and marketing communication programs consists of above and below the line toward brand perception and brand equity.

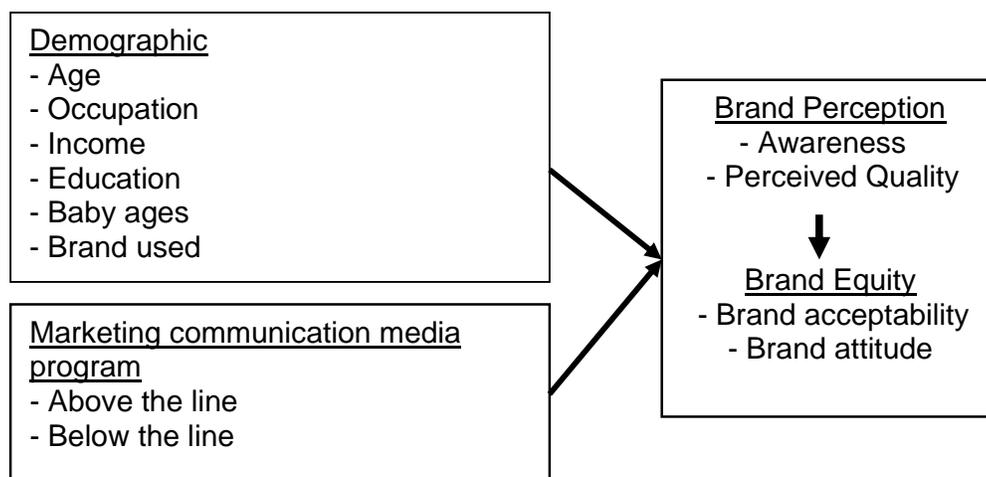


Figure 1: Conceptual Models

2. Literature Review

Theoretical of Branding

Brand is the image that consumers have in mind (Aaker, 1991). It is also the unique characteristics that have been developed all the time in order to differentiate actual products from the competitors (Murphy, 1990). In addition, The American Association defines a brand as “a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of them intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors. “A brand is thus a product or service that adds dimensions that differentiate it in some way from other products or services designed to satisfy the same need. These differences may be functional, rational, or emotional or intangible related to what the brand represents. Brand concepts must address customer interests and lifestyles. Factors that affect its brand image and brand perception among marketing communication program that implementing to the public to create brand perception, brand characteristic, brand image and brand equity.

Brand Perception

Brand perception is consumers' ability to identify the brand under different conditions, as reflected by their brand recognition or recall performance (Kotler & Lane, 2006). Brand recall refers to consumer's ability to retrieve the brand from the memory (Keller, 1993). According to the improvement of measurement for brand equity, consumer-based brand equity was described for four dimensions; brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty (Pappu, et al, 2005). Brand awareness was defined as the consumers' ability to identify or recognize the brand (Rossiter and Percy, 1987). It refers to the strength of a brand presence in consumer's minds. Brand awareness has several levels starting from the less recognition of the brand to dominance (Aaker, 1991). Perceived quality was evaluated and decided by consumers. Perceived quality is another valuation of brand to push the customer to buy products.

Brand building has been around for centuries as a means to distinguish the goods of one producer from those of another. The earliest signs of branding in Europe were the medieval guilds' requirement that craftspeople put trademarks on their products to protect themselves and consumers against inferior quality. In the fine arts, branding began with artists signing their works. Brands today play a number of important roles that improve consumers' lives and enhance the financial value of firms (Kotler & Lane, 2006). Brand awareness and brand perceived quality as the significant factors to create and maintain brand equity. There are positive relationship among brand awareness, perceive quality and brand equity (Aker, 1996, Buzzell & Gate, 1987). The marketing program has effect to improve the perceive quality of brand for different customers.

Brand Equity

Brand equity is the added value endowed to products and services. Aaker (1991) defined the brand equity as a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to brand that adds or detracts the product or service value based on the customers perspectives. This value may be reflected in how consumers think, feel and act with respect to the brand that consumers had perceive from marketing programs. Brand equity is an important intangible asset that has psychological and financial value to the firm. The value of brand equity depends on the number of same people who buy regularly (Aaker, 1996). The brand loyalty, brand awareness, and brand perceived quality are necessary to maintain the brand equity (Motameni & Shahrokhi, 1998). There are two different perspectives of brand equity; financial and customer based. The first perspective evaluates the asset value of a brand name that creates to the business (Farquhar et al, 1991). Brand equity increased the discounted future cash flows and revenue comparing to the same product did not have the brand name (Motameni & Shahrkhi, 1998).

According to the second perspective, the premise of customer-based brand equity models is that the power of brand lies in what customers have responded, seen, read, heard, learned, thought and felt about the brand over time. In other words, the power of brand lies in the minds of existing or potential customers and what they have experienced directly and indirectly about the brand. The customer-based brand equity finally drives the financial return to the company (Lassar et al, 1995). The valuation of brand has been studied for different approaches, for example, marketing, premium pricing market value, customer factors, replacement cost perspective. According to the valuation based on consumer factors, the measurement of customers' preference and attitude can be used to value the brand equity (Aaker, 1991 and Kapferer, 1992).

Marketing Communication

The marketing communication is considered as the strategic activities for brand managers to build and maintain the brand image of targeted customers (Duncan & Mulhern, 2004). It is a significant driver of competitive advantage to create the ability of companies to attract, retain, and leverage customers (Kitchen, Joanne, & Tao, 2004). Duncan (2002) explained that marketing communication is a process for managing the customer relationship that affects brand value lastly. Marketing communication programs are not only above the line activities such as advertising and sales promotions but also below the line activities such as public relations. Regarding recent concept of marketing communication, two-way communication as well as one way communication is a key determinant of brand strategies to stimulus the brand orientation process (Aaker, 1996 and Urde, 1994).

3. Methodology & Research Design

Population & Sample

The target population was the working moms who are using baby accessory products and are living in Bangkok of Thailand since Bangkok was number one of total birth rate in Thailand. In 2005 total birth rate is 111,868 babies contributed to total birth rate of Thailand equivalent 14%. The research was aiming to study working mom perspectives toward only international brand consists of Pigeon, Avent, and Chicco based on the different marketing communication program included above and below the line activities.

Research Instrument

The study applied and modified "Likert Scale" to measure brand perception and brand equity of baby accessory products. For instance, this method also touched upon psychometrics that examines the field of study concerned with the theory which included the measurement of knowledge, abilities, perceptions, attitudes and personality traits.

A typical test in a Likert scale is a statement. The respondent was asked to indicate his or her degree of agreement with the statement or any kind of subjective or objective evaluation of agreement. According to the questionnaire, a five-point scale was used, however many psychometricians advocate using a seven or nine point scale (Likert, 1932).

The questionnaires were distributed to 400 working moms who had only one baby. The working moms were defined as working and feeding their baby simultaneous. The questionnaire was composed of 4 sections as follow:

Section 1: Demographic profiles of respondents, this part of the questionnaire were designed to obtain the needed information about demographic consists of age, occupation, income, education, number of baby and baby ages.

Section 2: A Product and marketing communication program that directly affects your perception, the questionnaire contained 2 questions regarding the existing product used and media aspects that affect brand perception in term of above and below the line activity.

Section 3: The working mom' perceptions, the questionnaire contained 12 questions regarding the brand perceptions and perceived quality of baby accessory products in working' mom perspective. Measures of brand perception allow working moms to focus attention what is the media likely to have most impact to gain their awareness and perceived quality. Brand perception was measured by both the functional and emotional perception. Firstly, functional perception consists of innovation, quality, packaging, easy to clean, durability, variety. Secondly, emotional perception composed of image, differentiation, expertise, modernization and safety.

Section 4: The working mom' brand equity, the questionnaire contained 8 questions regarding the brand equity, acceptability and brand attitude of baby accessory products in working mom perspective.

Research Hypotheses

The researcher had set the hypothesis in order to study the relationship between the demographic of working moms and brand perception and brand equity for baby accessory products as following:

H_0 : There is the relationship between the demographic of working moms and brand perception for baby accessory products

H_0 : There is the relationship between the demographic of working and brand attitude toward baby accessory products

In addition, the study of the relationship between marketing communication programs and the brand perception and brand equity of working moms' perspective for baby accessory products was set as follow:

H_0 : There is the relationship between marketing communication programs and the brand perception of working moms' perspective for baby accessory products.

H_0 : There is the relationship between marketing communication programs and the brand equity of working mom's perspective for baby accessory products.

Finally, the relationship between brand perception and brand equity of working moms' perspective for baby accessory products was studied in this research as following hypothesis:

H_0 : There is the relationship between brand perception and brand equity of working mom's perspective for baby accessory products.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to describe the basic of the data in a study. The research used descriptive method to explain the characteristics of the respondents, the type of marketing communication program that they known, and the brand that they were using for their babies.

Inferential statistics were used to making inferences or judgments about a population on a basis of sample. The Analysis of Variance ANOVA (One-Way ANOVA) was applied to identify whether what are the relationship between demographic and marketing communication programs toward brand perception and brand equity of working mom perspective upon international brands of baby accessory products.

4. Discussion of Findings

Regarding demographic, the study showed that working mom with aging between 26-32 years was contributed highest proportion of 49.3%. Office professional worker was contributed highest proportion of 49.5%. Over half of correspondents are monthly income above 30,000 baht of 55%. Level of education was bachelor degree contributed 55.3%. In term of baby ages below 12 months was performed significantly of 50.5%.

According to brand used, working mom who has been using 68.5% of Pigeon, 20.3% of Avent and 11.3% of Chicco brand.

Due to media consuming, this study was divided with two types that represents as below the line and above the line activities. The study found that, "Magazine" which representing above the line was contributed with highest value at frequency of correspondents of 24.6%. In part of below the line "Recommendation" in other words "Worth of month" was contributed highest proportion of 21.2%.

Marketing communication programs, "above the line media" that consisted of magazine, newspaper, radio, television and public relation contributed 28.3%, "Below the line program" that consisted of marketing event, point of sales, hospital, and recommendation contributed the highest proportion of 41.8%.

Regarding the questions of brand perception, the results showed that easy to clean is key factors of brand perception, innovation was the second ranking, and variety was third ranking respectively. Based on emotional perception questions, safety was first ranking, modernization was the second, and the third was differentiation. Moreover, the working moms have perceived that Pigeon was easy to clean products, innovation, and safety respectively, Avent was easy to clean product, modernization, and safety accordingly, and Chicco was variety, capability, and safety respectively.

Brand equity upon baby accessory products, working moms have attitude of good feeling toward brand, good attitude and recommending others people to use. According to Pigeon brand the working moms feel good toward brand, accept the brand and feel that Pigeon brands supporting them to feed and treat their baby easier. Working moms feel good and had good attitude and accept upon Avent brand. Brand equity upon Chicco products, they felt good and familiarity with brand. They also accepted Chicco brand.

Based on the first group of hypothesis test of the relationship between demographic and brand perception and brand equity, there is the relationship between brand perception of working moms and brand's usage. In addition, the study found that there is the relationship between brand equity and working moms' income.

The second group of hypotheses investigated the relationship between marketing communication program (above and below the line activities) toward brand perception and brand equity of working moms for baby accessory products. The study was found that there was statistically

significantly different between marketing communication programs (above & below the line activities) toward brand perception of working moms. However, the marketing communication program was no different effect on brand equity

The third group of hypotheses studied the relationship between brand perception toward brand equity by using regression analysis. The result was shown that there was a positive relationship between brand perception and brand equity. Moreover, there was approximately 58.6% of relationship between these variables.

5. Conclusion

Due to findings, working moms who were using differences brand would be perceived their brand with difference ways. Working mom who were using Pigeon perceived that Pigeon was innovating, Avent was modernizing and Chicco was safety for their babies. These results were based on marketing communication programs that have been implementing from each brand in order to create their brand characteristic and brand differentiation from other players.

By the way, in this sense totally contrast with brand equity, demographic that creating differences in working moms were income. The different level in monthly income created different attitude baby accessory products. The working mom who had high income preferring to choose brand used via emotional appearances more than functional appearances they were choosing brands that reflect their taste, characteristic and social status. As this study working mom has perceived Pigeon as “brand acceptance” and they also had well attitude, well feeling and also believed this brand is contributed them to feed and treat their babies much more easier than others. Similarity to Avent working moms had well feeling, and well attitude toward Avent brand. Chicco had a little contrast from others there was less well feeling and less well attitude.

According to marketing communication programs, below the line and above the line activities were different based on the brand perception but were not different regarding brand equity. It means both tools are key factors to build brand awareness and perceived quality simultaneously. However, the different marketing programs did not affect the brand acceptability and brand attitude.

Finally, the result was found that there was the positive relationship between brand perception and brand equity. The brand perception is consumers' ability to identify the brand under different conditions, as reflected by their brand recognition or recall performance (Marketing Management; Philip Kotler and Kevin Lane, 2006). In other word, brand perception is messaging that conveying from brand builder to consumer and creating awareness upon each branding while brand equity is the added value endowed to products and services. This value may be reflected in how consumers think, feel and act with respect to the brand that consumers had perceive from marketing

programs. Brand equity is an important intangible asset that has psychological and financial value to the firm.

The premise of customer-based brand equity models is that the power of brand lies in what customers have seen, read, heard, learned, thought and felt about the brand over time. In other words, the customers start to aware the brand, perceive the quality of brand and then to accept the brand and finally have good attitude toward brand. The awareness and perceived quality is a significant component of brand perception while the acceptability and good attitude of brand are the important factors of brand equality.

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