

Marketing strategies for building the brand image of table tennis paddles

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Abstract: the table tennis paddle is an essential tool used by table tennis players around the world, and continues to promote unceasingly along with increasing technology. In today's marketplace, the number of table tennis brand names is multitudinous, which causes the common consumer uncertainty in which brand to choose. Marketing is the key component that attracts the consumers to the brand's image and characteristics. Therefore, this article investigated past literature discussions, establishing the importance of brand image as well as the strategies in which companies use to sell table tennis paddles. It also presents how important the correlation between industry marketing and the populace's intentions to select and purchase the marketed items in the future is. The results indicated that first, the brand image may enhance the product quality recognition and improve negative images. Also, if the brand image is better, the consumer is more likely to have a positive attitude towards the quality of the product as well as promote consumer loyalty. Second, the strength of the brand image truly has the ability to influence the consumer product quality consciousness. Third, the marketing strategy for the brand image by using a model may set up unique brand characteristics and because of the promotion, the item becomes well-known and has product value which lets the consumer have the opportunity and the interest to purchase the product. Fourth, the various marketing strategies must be unified in order to promote the consumer's wish to purchase the item in question. This will occur if (1) professional athletes support the product; (2) there is brand movement correlation; (3) media marketing conducts the brand correlation; (4) they utilize the SWOT analysis; (5) there is a marketing strategy combination.

Key words: marketing strategies, brand image, table tennis paddle.

1. INTRODUCTION

Recently, world-wide health concerns have promoted exercise to become a much more popular hobby. Not only competitive exercise, but also leisure exercise has gained the attention of people. Table tennis is one of these activities in which has been realized a steady growth in attention [9]. Table tennis originated in the nineteenth century and has steadily developed since the first World Table Tennis Championship in 1926, and in fact became a craze after it was adopted in the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul. Moreover, it is a sport that is well-developed in Asian countries. Due to the improvement in skills and the progression of equipment, table tennis has transformed into a very skillful and competitive sport [20]. When playing table tennis, the paddle is one of the main pieces of equipment used during the game. The recognition of brands plays a very important part when consumers choose their paddles, based on their different needs. This recognition comes from the brand image of that particular paddle, and will affect people's purchasing will [10]. However, there are various needs that affect what they buy; so how companies use their marketing strategies to attract consumers is the crucial factor [19]. Since the brand image can affect how people make up their minds, the image the companies create plays an extremely important part in the purchasing intentions of the consumers.

Brand image is a series of combined perceptions that consumers hold of certain brands by gaining

information about and thus creating a feeling toward certain products. Consumers have their purchase intention based on the image created by the marketing strategies [1]. The spreading of positive images can establish brand positioning, helping consumers to recognize the brand from other rivals and raising the sales volume of a brand [24]. Based on consumer needs, it has been pointed out that "experience," "functions," and "symbolics" are the main elements affecting the brand image [26]. From above, the brand image does have certain positive influence in consumer's conception of the quality of a product [23, 8, 10, 18]. Therefore, the brand image not only raises the perception of the product quality, but also improves any negative images; that is to say, the higher the quality of the consumer cognition of the product is, the more effective the image is to increase consumer loyalty.

Slater and Olson [25] asserted that the purpose of marketing strategy is to meet the needs of customers by planning organized strategies and activities, reaching the marketing goal of a company [11]. Chen et al. [5] pointed out that consumers have a wider variety of products to choose from, and it makes marketing strategy a key factor in affecting purchasing behaviors. To promote the repurchase intention of consumers, the company marketing strategy plays a crucial role. It shows that marketing strategy is connected to consumers' expectations and needs. In facing various requirements, companies have to make different strategies according to different types of customers,

attracting wide-ranges of people and raising their repurchasing intentions.

The research on table tennis mainly focuses on how to build brand image through marketing strategies. However, the studies on brand image in table tennis are less abundant. It is worthwhile to discuss the equipment choices as well in order to promote the sport of table tennis. Therefore, through literature review, this article draws conclusions on the importance of brand establishing in table tennis paddle marketing and the concerned strategies, giving sport-related industries and general consumers a reference source.

2. BRAND IMAGE

According to the American Marketing Association, the definition of brand is to distinguish its symbol, name, design, sentence or message, in a combination which creates the brand [15]. In other words, brand is like the soul of the product, and what matters the most is having its uniqueness. Kotler [13] also showed that the word "brand" comes from the Scandinavia word "brandr," which indicates creating a "hot-stamp" in customers' minds so they can recognize the company and the seller of the product, and then have their preference. As a result, these three are tightly bonded [27].

The research of Aaker [1] and Keller [12] expressed that the positive image of a brand can increase the purchase intention among costumers, and then exceed the recognition and loyalty toward the brand [6]. Hence, the brand image can represent all of the information known about the product [23]. Although the brand image is the consumers' personal perceptions, not the brand itself, a high-grade brand can indeed promote loyalty, making itself stand out from the competition in a competitive market and create their own kingdom [7, 22]. All in all, the connection between brand and brand image is complementary. A positive image not only shows the characteristic of a brand, catching people's attention, but also promotes the positive merits and values of a brand, as well as the loyalty of consumers. Moreover, it can improve any negative images. In other words, brand image has a lot of influence on consumers, and effective marketing strategy is helpful in promoting the brand and its image. Brands can determine consumer's behavior because they show the reliable qualities, images and prices of the product. From above, there are three ways of improving the brand image.

(1) Strengthen the charity impression: it is possible to create feelings of antipathy in a product by over advertising. High degrees of exposure can easily translate to profits. Yet, if the company uses the influence of the brand well, taking social responsibility for charities, it can surely improve the brand image.

(2) Brand uniqueness: since there are numerous brands of table tennis equipment in the marketplace, each company must have their own uniqueness, helping people to distinguish them from a series of products, giving brands a remarkable soul. It must be pointed out that in order to help consumers identify and feel

satisfied, a brand must have a unique character, and it has to impress the consumers, getting an advantageous position by appealing to the target consumers [3].

(3) Image representation: a positive and professional spokesperson of a brand may increase its value. A qualified representative or a famous athlete can make consumers have faith in the product, identifying those celebrities as representers, making them want to know more about the brand. It increases the exposure of the brand, and makes people want to use it since famous athletes also do. Research also proved that the image of athletic representers can effectively promote the purchasing will of consumers [3].

Therefore, the brand image can help customers to know more about a brand by creating a public-minded awareness, by showing its uniqueness and by employing effective representation. This enables the brand to gain a positive impression, which in turn strengthens the consumer's purchase intentions.

3. MARKETING STRATEGY

Kotler [13] contended that marketing strategy is the basic decision about the combination and distribution of an enterprise's management marketing cost [11]. Wong and Merrilees [29] indicated that marketing strategy is letting an enterprise distribute its resources and its ability to deliver value to its target consumers [11]. The repurchase intention of consumers can be promoted through marketing strategies [21]. According to the American Marketing Association, the definition of marketing is creating the process of personal or organizational goals, including creation, product, and the combination of planning and executing concepts [3]. From above, marketing is a set of activities, and it includes many different aspects. And within this competitive market, creating unique and creative ideas, as well as using various marketing strategies is a way of appealing to customers, such as through advertising, using spokespeople, the approach of selling the product, the way of sales promotion, sponsor activities, and so on. All of these are used in an attempt to raise the sales volume. Nowadays, customers' needs in table tennis paddles can vary, as well as their taste and motivation, and therefore a single product cannot meet the demands of the market. And as the techniques are improved, there are more and more kinds of paddles in the market. When purchasing, customers will take different needs into consideration, such as flexibility, functionality, and so on, making the perception of brand much more important. There are plenty of table tennis brands: Butterfly, Donic, TSP, Nittaku, Joola, Stiga, and even Adidas. A famous sports brand has gradually extended their market in table tennis, resulting in a competitive brand rivalry. And this rivalry can confuse first-time customers, not knowing where to start. The key factors in marketing begin at this moment as each brand attempts to emphasize their own distinguishing parts, promote their brand image, and meet the needs of the consumers.

Generally speaking, marketing can be divided into environmental scanning, marketing strategy, and marketing mix. The following are further explained below [34].

(1) Environmental scanning: evaluating by SWOT, which stands for Strength, Weakness, Opportunities and Threat, can integrate and generalize both internal and external conditions in every aspect. Environmental scanning is a way of analyzing the pros and cons and the opportunities and dangers the company may confront, so they can best plan their strategy.

(2) Marketing strategy: the scheme of STP process is separated into following three steps:

a. "S" stands for segmentation: assures the segmentation variable, market segments and description of segments.

b. "T" stands for targeting: evaluates the attractiveness of the segments and choose the target market.

c. "P" stands for positioning: develops a positioning strategy for the segmental goal.

(3) Marketing mix: to establish good marketing strategies, the most common strategies are 4P and 4C, which help an enterprise to explore the market [2]. 4P is the supply-side of the marketing strategy: Product, Price, Promotion and Placement. 4C is the demand side of the marketing strategy: Customer, Cost to the customer, Convenience and Communication.

According to past research, the marketing strategy is categorized as the following [2, 4, 11, 3]:

(1) Image strategy: a celebrity can let customers notice the brand he or she uses. In addition to raising the perception of the proficiency of a brand, this strategy also enhances the fame of the brand. For example, a star or a famous athlete can be a suitable representer.

(2) Promotion strategy: a brand needs a specific marketing communication or promotion. For example, a sports brand related activity, or a campaign or contest based on a brand in which customers can participate in or watch. It can help people to gain more information about a brand and the sale of the related product.

(3) Media marketing strategy: other than just letting customers get the main idea of a brand, different ways of exposure can be used to make people aware of the appearance of the brand which may peak their curiosity. As for the people who already know the brand, they may be provided with further opportunities to understand more about the brand. This strategy also enhances the purchase intention of first-time consumers, as well as repurchase ones, allowing customers to clearly know the information of a brand and its related products. This can be done by updating the brand's latest news via advertisements, the internet, and even mass media.

(4) Multiple choices strategy: it means to integrate with the spirit of a brand, aiming for the personal tastes and the various needs of the consumers, and then to publish a brand series to meet those needs.

(5) Brand slogan: having a slogan with the spirit of a brand in it can stimulate the consumers, causing them to

have different feelings, as if sensing the enthusiasm of a brand, and thus giving them confidence in the product.

(6) Integrate the marketing channels: using the same quality of service and identical environmental design, this strategy lets consumers experience the exact same service wherever they are.

Good marketing strategies can help the brand have a systematic plan and proper development. It mainly lets people understand the brand, and it also satisfies the main needs of the customers. Among those strategies, we may integrate marketing placement through promotions of slogans, which can deliver the ideas, representers, and media, allowing consumers to have a more complete service.

4. MARKETING STRATEGIES IN IMAGE BUILDING OF TABLE TENNIS PADDLES

In order to enhance the fame of the paddle brand, marketing strategy is key. And building a brand image not only vitalizes a brand, but also helps people gain interest in the brand and brings loyalty from the consumers. The following are some strategies for brand image.

(1) Image representing: by inviting the world's best players or other suitable spokespeople, such as an Olympic gold medal winner in table tennis to help promote the company's products, it can give the brand an image of championship glory, which may attract consumers to purchase the item.

(2) Promotion strategy: let the professional athletes or celebrities use the product being promoted. When they use it during their own competitions, the exposure rate will rise. At the same time, it will also attract other participants and increase the audience's interest in the product. It is a more convincing strategy for consumers when a professional, famous image is used. The company can also set up a booth nearby the competition, placing related products of the brand there and allowing general people or those who like table tennis to experience the products in person which can promote the purchase intention.

(3) Media marketing strategy: a. Setting up a website of resources on the internet is a rather fast, time-saving marketing strategy. It can let consumers get information and answers to questions about a brand immediately. b. Publishing a magazine or writing a report about a brand can appeal to readers who like the brand. c. During the broadcasting of the Olympic Games or International Games, a brand can be seen by the whole world through players using its paddle or supporting the activity, and advertisements, which help the brand to be exposed.

(4) Multiple choices strategy: to make the biggest profit in brand marketing, a regional investigation needs to be done first, and then do an evaluation aimed at different groups and regions. After realizing the needs of the consumers, an analysis on the customers' requirements in a table tennis paddle need to be done to determine what they like in a paddle with regards to shape, functionality, and price. Finally, the company needs to

design their marketing strategies. For instance, a professional player will choose and purchase based on the functions of paddles; the people who can afford higher prices may have higher purchase intention in buying paddles with relatively higher prices.

(5) Brand slogan: take Double Happiness, or DHS, a table tennis brand in China, for example. It has a slogan, "A mighty brand creates a mighty player" showing its characteristics. Thus, other brands can think of a special slogan, making a rooted impression in consumers' minds, and allowing them to distinguish between and identify the products.

(6) Integrate a marketing channel: DHS provides "contest testing," allowing consumers to experience their product by having contests in stores. Like promoting the quality of service and consumers' satisfaction, a successful brand image can help consumers to distinguish a brand from the requirements of other brands. Therefore, there's an obvious interrelationship between brand image, consumers' satisfaction and repurchase intention.

On top of the promotion of image, marketing can help the name of the brand spread more smoothly. The marketing strategies used in building the brand image of a table tennis paddle can increase the fame of the brand, bringing identification, and stimulating the consumers to purchase. Meanwhile, it can provide consumers with various choices and meet their needs, which shows the integrity of an organization.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

5.1 Conclusions

Marketing strategy complements a brand image. Brand image can affect the perception of consumers, and a positive brand image can raise the purchase intention of potential customers. For example, a world champion as a spokesman of a table tennis paddle can increase the image of a brand. Consumers may think the brand of the paddle has proficiency, and the symbol of the brand image is successful, making customers have faith in it. As a result, the establishment of brand image has a strong effect on consumers. The conclusions of this study are as follows:

- (1) Brand is the characteristic and the value of the product; it has a special meaning to each individual consumer.
- (2) Brand image can raise the perception of the quality of products and improve any negative images. In other words, the more positive the brand image is, the higher identification of the product's quality can be; and therefore it enhances the loyalty of the consumers.
- (3) The content of a brand image indeed has a positive effect on a consumer perception of the quality of the product.
- (4) By building the uniqueness of a brand, as well as raising the fame and value of the product through sponsorship, a marketing strategy on brand image can help consumers to have preferences, interest and a sense

of identification in the product, which then increases the purchase intent.

(5) Brand image plays an important role in enterprise marketing because it can help increase the purchase intention of consumers. It has to collaborate with different kinds of marketing strategies such as image representing, promotion strategy, media marketing strategy, multiple choices strategy, brand slogan, and integrate marketing channels.

5.2 Suggestions

(1) Sponsoring international mega-sport competitions: supporting world games can let people from different countries know the brand being promoted, increasing brand exposure and gaining it a positive image. Also, it can make a much larger profit for the company behind the scenes. Therefore, sport sponsorship has a positive influence for brand image.

(2) Image representing: cooperation with famous athletes can increase the professional image of a brand, allowing consumers to have interest and brand preference, as well as boosting its reputation in the marketplace afterwards.

(3) Brand related activity: holding brand related activities can let more people know about the brand, in hopes of getting more people to join table tennis, raising the fame of the product and increasing the population of active table tennis players.

(4) Using SWOT: to understand the strength, weakness, opportunity and threat of a brand itself.

(5) Analyzing the market by the STP process of marketing strategy.

(6) Combination of marketing strategies: it includes product, price, channel and communication. Thus, in the aspects of designing, producing and the service of a product, consumers have to be assured that their requirements and expectations can be fulfilled so they can have a positive attitude towards the brand they have chosen, and then the company can build an advantageous brand image.

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