

CORPORATE BRANDING THROUGH FUNCTIONAL ALIGNMENT**Swapnil Chaurasia
Dr. Vinod Patel****Abstract**

In this dynamic modern era companies are looking forth for multi-facet approach to problem solving, especially the ones which are directly related to the company's brand name and identity in the market. In this ever increasing competition organizations are trying to build an overall package with the entire brand elements possible so as sustain with a considerable amount of brand equity gained through its internal and external processes. It is now imperative for organizations to treat its functional departments namely marketing and HR departments to push forth the diverse elements of the organizations that bind it together and make an impact on its brand value. The paper aims to describe the challenges organizations today are facing in order to build a corporate brand by modifying its internal and external processes and aligning them in order to achieve synergy. How does marketing and HR go hand in hand in the process of corporate brand building and what are the elements and area of considerations for these two domains during the interplay.

Keywords: Corporate Branding, Functional Alignment, Branding, Brand trust, Brand perception, Brand association, Brand loyalty, Brand Image.

I. INTRODUCTION

Now-a-days organizations are competing head to head not only in terms of profits or gaining a large piece of the available market share but also in terms of gaining a competitive edge by modifying and revamping their external and internal processes. In order to create a sustainable growth platform companies bank upon the marketing and the human resource domain heavily as these domains are considered to be the most dynamic of all as these departments are made up and rely heavily on the innovativeness and creativity of the work force deployed by the organization who are responsible for most of the interaction between the external clients and the internal stakeholders that a company has. In order to maintain an efficient as well as effective inter-departmental system the organizations have to pay equal weightage to both these important domains. On one hand it needs to acquire new customers and clients by retaining its previous ones through constant feedback mechanism regarding its offering be it in any form, and on the other hand it has to keep its internal stakeholders especially the employees that does the work of bridging this gap of market to the company and

back to the market. In order to be an attractive center of growth and prosperity an organization must understand the importance of brand building and building strategies that can result in magnifying the output that an organization is generating from the same set of people and clients. Taking example of Aetna.Inc, a highly reputed name in accident and health insurance, employing a workforce of more than 45000 and has been listed in fortune 500 in the year 2009 greatly relies upon its integration strategies of external and internal corporate branding with its core value being building an integrated organizational culture that involves high level of employee involvement that results in building brand trust among its huge customer base.

Most of the times it has been found that external branding is given more importance than internal branding and organizations fail to develop skill sets and capabilities that are required to build it from the other way round that is brand building from within. In order to create an internal brand an organization has to focus on its human resource department and its core activities like recruitment, placement, orientation, training and development and the like. With increasing dominance of the service sector in today's world these concepts have taken a new form and play a crucial part in corporate branding as a whole, as corporate branding is not about what your product is and how is it being perceived by the world but also the kind of inner strength that an organization can utilize in order to build the entire corporate as a Brand.

Now let's see what a brand is and how various elements of the brand can be aligned to that of the organization corporate brand building process in order to form a concrete linkage between the two. According to American Marketing Association a brand is a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of these, intended to differentiate the goods and services of one seller and to differentiate them from their competitors. We might recall or recognize a brand mostly as a product or a service and the utility that we derive from using it but it is not all that it has it is way more than that. There always exists a difference, a gap between the external brand management of a product and the internal brand management of the people working in the system. In order to reduce the gap between the desired corporate brand identity and that perceived by the company's stakeholders (Vallaster&Chernatony, 2004; Papasolomou&Vrontis, 2006), it is frequently pointed out that employees across functions and levels, play a crucial role. Researchers have also recognized that the success of a brand is not only dependent on the perceptions and performance of the internal stakeholders but all stakeholders.

In this regards the organizational culture play a dominant role inculcating the values and beliefs upon which the organization stands and is reflected in decision

making and problem solving approaches adopted by the organizations. Thus term Corporate Branding has therefore gained significant importance in the past few years and can be considered as an incubator for external and internal branding activities performed by an organization. Many literature provided by research scholars and company professionals advocates the direct relationship between the organizational culture and brand building that is, the stronger and efficient the organizational culture is stronger is the brand. This becomes possible through employer and employee branding together contributing to corporate branding. Thus going by the notion- 'live the brand to build the brand'.

Corporate branding concerns the systematic planned management of behavior, communication, and symbolism in order to attain a favorable and positive reputation with all target audiences of an organization (Einwiller and Will, 2002). Corporate Branding is hence an amalgamation of organizational efforts to communicate, differentiate, and enhance the brand vis-a-vis key stakeholder groups and networks (Balmer, 2001). A Corporate brand is therefore an explicit promise between an organization and all its key stakeholder groups (Balmer, 1998). Thus corporate branding encompasses all the activities, tasks and procedures that are related to the behavioral aspects that are required for creating and delivering the communication in order to accomplish communicational objectives which would result in forming a symbolic meaning in the minds of the stakeholders. These stakeholders include the external as well as the internal stakeholders like the vendors, clients, customer, government, employees, staff, shareholders and the like. These stakeholders act as the target audience for the corporate branding campaign that an organization takes up. Thus embarking on a sustainable corporate branding that not only focuses on the present clients and stakeholders, but also on attracting the new ones in the form of customers, clients, vendors, investors and employees.

<Figure: 1>

II. CORPORATE BRANDING: THE MARKETING STANDPOINT

We all come across brands. We have brands for almost everything that we use day in and day out in the form of products and services. The definition of a brand given by American Marketing Association provides an objective view about a brand and there are many other aspects that may be related to a product or a service that may have been acting on the product to make it a brand. Brands are considered to be a synonym for a quality product, that is using a brand makes a customer feel that he/she has availed the product which is best in class for what a customer has paid for. A branded product or a service is always preferred by a customer than a non-branded one. Today when we have millions of products & services that could cater our never ending need each product having many

competing products, we can say that brands are shortcut to purchase decisions. There are many aspects that stand as eligibility criteria to make a product a brand. These aspects can be considered as components of the brand. Unlike brand elements like name, symbol, sound, logo or picture, these components act as enablers that strengthen a brand. These aspects empower a product with the power that makes the product to qualify as a brand. Some of these components or aspects are brand trust, brand loyalty, brand identification, brand perception and brand association. Though there are other aspects like brand equity, brand resonance, brand salience, brand personality and the like the former components are crucial to determine the behavioral and attitudinal dimension of the customers and clients. These brand aspects are very crucial as they result in forming the base of the external branding of the corporate branding dimension. The stronger these aspects the stronger will be the corporate brand overall.

- ***Brand Trust***

Trust, in general, is the willingness to rely on a party based on beliefs about the characteristics and behavior of that party in the face of risk (e.g. Jevons and Gabbott, 2000). Similarly, brand trust is the willingness to rely on a brand, based on beliefs about that brand, despite the risk or uncertainty associated with that brand (e.g. Becerra and Korgaonkar, 2011; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001, 2002; Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003). Brand trust empowers a brand by taking the customers into confidence that the brand would provide the solution that the customer or the client is looking for and will satisfy the customer in the best possible manner. The trust or the confidence that a company gains by its product or service of through continuous innovations and better customer experience as compared to the available competition directly adds to the trust that the customer or the client has for the organization as a whole. Brand trust is composed of cognitive beliefs (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003) as well as affective perceptions about the brand (Elliott and Yannopoulou, 2007). Brand trust about the product or the organization may go beyond the likeability factor as it is not restricted to the functional benefits derived of the product provided by the company but also the psychological benefits attached to it that related to the emotional and behavioral quotient like Colgate from Palmolive (USA) as a brand is one of the most trusted brand in oral care segment since many years in Indian market despite presence of other well-known competing brands of national and international repute. Brand trust can be formed and strengthened through integrity, honesty, and humbleness and developing stakeholder centric approach. Brand trust influences consumers' attitudes and brand related behaviors including purchases, attitudinal and behavioral loyalty, perceptions of brand value, brand commitment, and brand referrals (e.g. Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001, 2002; Delgado-Ballester et al.,

2003;Elliott and Yannopoulou, 2007). Thus, brand trust triggers many dimensions of corporate branding that bank upon stakeholder's decisiveness.

- ***Brand Identification***

Consumer-brand identification in layman's words refers to the state of belongingness towards a particular brand. This state of belongingness is to a very large extent a psychological state. Purchase and consumption of brands enable consumers to construct their identities. It is about how a brand is being identified by the customer. What are the dominant attributes of the brand that has made a unique and differentiating dent and can be considered as recognizing factor? Usually there is interplay between the customer identity and brand identity when we talk about brand identification. That is the characteristics by which the customer or the client identifies itself, same characteristics make a mark in identifying a brand. Thus, there exists a psychological relationship between them. Same can be applied to corporate branding as organization as the stakeholders identify the organization as they identify themselves. For example, a set of value driven stakeholders would identify an organization with the benevolent characteristic of the organization rather than its profitability like Patanjali Ayurved Limited which is into consumer goods has made a very strong brand identity in Indian market and has surpassed many of the competitors in the industry like Dabur, Himalaya and the like. Customers strongly feel a sense of belongingness to the brand and derive a great deal of perceived value from the brand. Though corporate brand identification helps the organization to closely relate to its stakeholder and act as a two way mirror, lot of care has to be taken in defining the core attributes of the brand which has to be highlighted as it may also result in reflecting other negative attributes of the brand that would totally change the identity of the brand in the eyes of the customers and may deter current stakeholders and block new ones to get associated with the company or the brand.

- ***Brand Association***

Brand Association can be defined as the way in which people think of a particular brand of product when they think of a particular activity because they are closely connected with each other. Brand association is related to the cognitive frame of mind of the customers that propel them to get associated with the brand activity that resembles very closely to the brand. It's a kind of bond that is shared by the customer and the brand. Brand association develops over the intangibles rather than the tangibles of the brand that is what emotionally glues the traits of the customers and the traits of the brand. This forms a strong linkage between the customer and the brand events and happenings to which they can easily and strongly relate to. For example Royal Enfield have very strategically replaced long drives and travelling with its wide range motorbikes. Consumers today associate

themselves to the brand when it comes to long rides, adventure tours and lone travelling. The company has successfully leveraged this aspect of the brand in building a strong consumer base across India.

The customers form association on the perception they have about the product/service. Corporate branding relies heavily on brand association as it helps in creating the feeling of belongingness among the stakeholders towards the organization and this generates the feeling of being one. The areas of consideration while assessing corporate brand association are, the nature of association, whether it is positive or negative association and the degree of the association. It is imperative for the organization to create corporate brand association for something positive event or activity or happening than something may form bad or a negative linkage between the stake holders and the organization.

- ***Brand Loyalty***

Brand loyalty is one of the most important elements of branding; it has been one of the key areas of interest for researchers and academicians. Several researches and studies have been conducted in the past and many are on the go right from its measurement to its inevitable association with what we call as the crux of branding. Brand loyalty “a deeply held commitment to re-buy or re-patronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, causing a repetitive same brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior.”

Behavioral aspects of brand loyalty used to be given more consideration earlier than the attitudinal aspects or brand loyalty. But, today a lot of importance is given to the attitudinal aspects of brand loyalty. Wide range of studies proved that the attitudinal aspects of brand loyalty play a vital role in determining the brand performance. Where behavioral dimension takes into account the purchase intention and post purchase behavior, the attitudinal dimension of brand loyalty gives idea about the mindset of the customers and how a customer sees a product or a service. It also gives the idea about how impactful a product or a service has been positioned in customer's mind and thus one can easily guess how positive the behavioral dimension would be for the same product or the service. Apple Inc. stands at the epitome of brand loyalty in its segment of electronics, especially hand held devices and laptops. It continued to be in top 5 companies of the world with largest share of loyal customers. Apple Inc. topped the list of the companies with highest brand loyalty in 2017 with its innovative technology and strong customer service (Courtesy-Top brands Marketing Charts).

According to them, attitude used to evaluate an object/ brand position on a continuum favorable, so brand attitude range from high to low. A consumer might have a high or a low altitude to a brand, however situation might affect attitude. Even if customers have high attitude, they might not buy the brand because comparatively great attitude for other brands, Dick & Basu (1994). Attitude is a comparative concept and there is no objective measurement. According to them brand loyalty is the result of relatively high altitude and high repeat patronage. Building Brand Loyalty through corporate branding is no different from building brand loyalty through a product or a service. Brand loyalty in corporate branding is built considering the entire corporate as a single product. Thus, it entails the entire functional dimension that a company has and the way the departments work in the organization. Major aspects that strengthen corporate brand loyalty are recruitment, selection, induction, training and development, retention policies, organization structure, compensation schemes and most importantly prospect for career growth.

- ***Brand Identity***

De Chernatony's Brand Management model conceptualizes the internal brand building process as revolving around the identification and narrowing of gaps between a brand's identity and its reputation. The brand identity is conceptualized as an interplay of six basic components viz., Brand Vision, Organization Culture, Brand Positioning, Brand Personality, Relationships (staff to staff, staff to customer, staff to other stakeholders) and Presentation (to reflect consumer / stakeholder self-image & aspirations). While the brand's identity depends on how it is perceived by its stakeholders as being different from competition, the brand's reputation is presented as a resultant of the all its past and present actions over time (de Chernatony, 1999). Corporate brand identity is composed of internal as well as external brand components. The external brand elements include brand image, brand perception, brand salience, brand concept and the like, whereas internal brand elements include brand knowledge, brand commitment and brand involvement. Harley Davidson is one such brand that has always come up with most creative ways of projecting the brand as sturdy, rough and tough motorbikes. It goes with a tagline 'Harley Davidson- The Rebel's Brand', stands out to its advocacy as brand calls out that it does not have customers, it has fans.

Corporate Branding aims at creating a perfect blend of these external and internal brand elements so as to have a magnified result through their leverage. Brand identity impacts from two facets and result in development of a corporate brand. Since, it considers two facets it takes into consideration the internal and external stakeholders. Corporate brand identity is the way the company is looked upon,

what for the company is known for, and what for the company is desired to be known.

III. CORPORATE BRANDING: THE HR STANDPOINT

As marketing standpoint of corporate branding deals with external brand building exercises, techniques, activities and strategies, the HR standpoint of corporate branding deals with internal brand building ideologies, strategies, activities and strategies. This means that corporate branding when it comes to brand building of the company utilizing or deploying its human capital, it is branding 'to the people, for the people and by the people'.

According to Baumgarth, C., & Schmidt, M. (2010) the key determinants of internal brand equity constitute Internal Brand Knowledge (IBK), Internal Brand Commitment (IBC) & Internal Brand Involvement (IBI).

- ***Internal Brand Knowledge (IBK)***

Internal Brand Knowledge (IBK) deals with the orientation that an organization has in the form of its culture. It reflects the ideology of work and values which laid the foundation of every organization. It consists of the intricate knowledge about the internal dynamics, levels, policies, work principles that is present in an organization. The more transparent an organization, the better is its internal brand knowledge quotient, i.e. an employee is well aware of the Position, Consistency, & Value system of the organization that helps the employee to tackle complex work schedule in an efficient manner. Internal brand knowledge encompasses almost all the activities carried out which are related to personnel or the workforce that an organization has. This includes recruitment, selection, induction, training and development, performance appraisal, succession planning and the like. Corporates today are making diligent efforts to make their internal process transparent so as to add up to the knowledge reservoir of the organization that would enhance the brand knowledge of not only the existing employees but also for employees who are aspiring to be a part of that particular organization. If an employer brand is strong enough, the smartest people will queue up to be hired, that would improve the quality of hiring significantly.

- ***Internal Brand Commitment (IBC)***

Internal Brand Commitment (IBC) refers to the commitment that employees show towards their work, towards their individual goals and towards the goal of the organization as a whole. Unlike Internal Brand Knowledge (IBK) which is at corporate or organizational level, Internal Brand Commitment (IBC) is reflected at individual level. It deals with incorporating activities and strategies that would result in enhanced level of commitment towards the organization. Earlier, one of the easiest and effective ways of raising commitment level of employees was to

include monetary rewards. Monetary rewards were given more importance and included incentives, commissions, bonuses and the like. But today apart from monetary benefits, non-monetary benefits play equally important role in enhancing the level of commitment. Internal Brand Commitment (IBC) reflects bond that gets established between the inner character of an employee or an individual and the core character of the organization. Organizations overhaul their internal processes as well as external processes so as to raise the level of commitment in the employees which would increase the part of internal brand equity of the corporate. Regular employee surveys and summarizing scorecards act as control system that can be used to keep a check on employee commitment towards work.

- ***Internal Brand Involvement (IBI)***

Internal Brand Involvement (IBI) like Internal Brand Commitment deals with individuals characteristics that pertain to work performance and indulgence. Internal Brand Involvement (IBI) reflects the potential of the work and work related aspects of the organization that has a lasting positive effect on the cognitive framework of an employee mindset towards work. This aspect of internal corporate branding deals with strategies and methods that can be used to make job and job related dimension engrossing, involving and interesting. Internal Brand Involvement (IBI) encompasses rigorous research and development from the company's side to design the work system in the best possible manner. Innovative products and services are result of such exercises as the employees develop very strong association to the work that they are doing. It is not the organization's policies and framework that defines their limits but the core nature of the work. Open channel of communication, establishing and managing proper incentive systems, need specific training programs and leadership programs helps enhancing Internal Brand Involvement (IBI) quotient of the organization. Organizations are coming up with employee centric policies that would drastically enhance Internal Brand Involvement (IBI) like work from home, flexible working hours, individual recreational programs etc. Internal Brand Involvement (IBI) is one of the most important components of internal corporate branding as it is aimed at improving the performance based activities of the organizations.

IV. CONCLUSION:

Corporate Branding is a composition of Internal Corporate Branding and External Corporate Branding. Where, external corporate branding deals with brand building exercises through products and services offered by the company and the way company serves its external stakeholders like customers, dealers, suppliers, vendors, clients, community and the government. Internal corporate branding deals with branding through internal capabilities and resources that the

organizations possess like human capital, activities through which these human capital are acquired and honed, the communication channel, the work environment, ability to withstand and adapt to change. Today, organizations are striving to strike a perfect balance of the components of internal and external branding. These components interplay to produce a magnified result for overall all corporate branding. The functional departments like marketing and human resource have to be realigned so as to boost the corporate branding strategies. This realignment is not only of the functional departments but also the activities and the process that are carried out within them. Transparency in HR activities like recruitment, selection, induction, training and development and the like will lay foundation for internal corporate branding enhanced Internal Brand Knowledge (IBK), Internal Brand Commitment (IBC), and Internal Brand Involvement (IBI). Whereas, Brand loyalty, Brand identification, Brand Trust, Brand Association and Brand Identity should be pondered upon for better External Corporate Branding. Thus, integration of the two would result in building a robust corporate brand.

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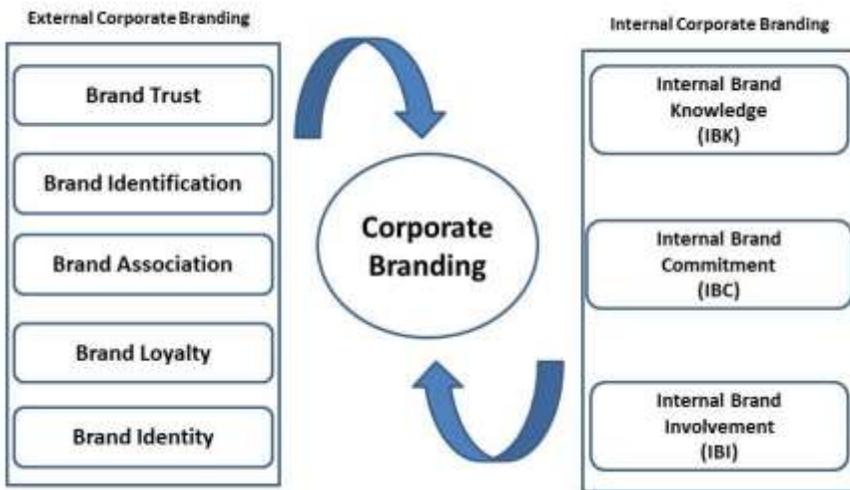
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APPENDIX:

Figure: Interplay of Internal and External Corporate Branding components



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