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Preliminary communication

THE INFLUENCE OF THE PROMOTIONAL MIX WITH THE APPLICATION OF INTEGRATED MARKETING INSTRUMENTS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CORPORATE BRANDING STRATEGIES IN FUNCTION OF COMPETITIVE POSITIONING OF THE BRAND

**Valentina Mucunska Palevska¹
Sashko Gramatnikovski
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Abstract

This paper interprets and analyzes the innovative paradigm of creating and applying a strategic concept and approach to branding and brand communication. The modern business environment affirms the need for continuous research and analysis of current trends in business in order to create and implement efficient branding strategies, supported by a promotional mix of integrated marketing communication instruments. Branding strategies implemented through integrated marketing communication tools are fundamental to effective brand positioning and customer relationship management.

According to the standards and values of the scientific-research public, the focus of interest of companies should be customers whose needs, attitudes and interests are distinctly sophisticated, which generates the need to adapt the corporate business process to the individual needs and expectations of each customer separately, which means that the content of the messages should be personalized to reach them and influence the creation or strengthening of brand awareness. Based on scientific knowledge, this paper, using analytical methodological research, confirms the correlation and proves that creating and implementing brand strategies using integrated marketing communication instruments is a prerequisite for successful brand positioning and sustainability of brand competitiveness.

Keywords: brand, strategies, integrated marketing communications, competitiveness, sustainability

JEL classification: M 31, M 37

INTRODUCTION

In the modern business environment, companies focus on the application of efficient marketing instruments and tools that will contribute to ensuring sustainable development and competitiveness. From a diachronic point of view, exactly created brand strategies are modified, which indicates significant aspects of scientific and empirical indicators that are generated by external, technical-technological innovations. The dominance of digital media has changed the paradigm of brand management by creating an innovative marketing concept according to which successful positioning and maintenance of a brand requires its launch with the application of heterogeneous promotional mixes.

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Corporations that want to maintain competitive positioning must follow innovations and apply them adapted depending on the specifics of the business. In such a business environment, a marketing approach to brand management based on the attitudes and decisions of management is an anachronism. The business orientation is changing and with it the marketing approach from establishing one-way communication with consumers to permanent interactive communication that contributes to identifying the indicative needs, attitudes and expectations of consumers. The aim is to influence the behavior of the selected audience, using all forms of communication that are considered acceptable (Mikolon, et al. 2015).

1. STRATEGIC BRAND MANAGEMENT

Considering that corporations exist and operate to make a profit, economic principles promote a brand management approach as an integral part of the marketing mix to promote the product. According to David Aaker, who has a global reputation in terms of his expertise in brands and brand management, a brand is a promise given to the customers in terms of functional, emotional, and social dimensions instead of a single name and/or logo (Aaker, 2014). According to this principle, marketing managers are focused on creating and increasing the value and capital of the brand. Conceptually, the value of the brand is internally defined and evaluated, and as such it is promoted to target consumers who are recipients of marketing messages. According to this concept, the needs, attitudes and expectations of consumers are not the focus of interest of corporations. The brand launch model using one-way marketing communication of corporation-consumer relationship is an integral part of the concept based on brand identity as part of corporate identity. The modern, innovative concept of brand management is created to meet the expectations and needs of consumers by establishing continuous, interactive two-way communication with consumers. That marketing concept is focused on consumers and is based on previous research and analysis of consumer psychology in terms of their opinions and attitudes about the brand. The model emphasizes the humanistic and personalized approach to the brand from the point of view of consumers, i.e. the brand with its signs creates associations in the mental map of consumers, who interpret it as a cognitive semantic. The purpose of this concept is for the brand to influence and cause intense, impressive-unique emotional associations in the minds of consumers. With that approach, the brand is personified and affects the impressions of customers who establish an emotional connection with the brand. That multidisciplinary approach in creating the brand concept is based on the psychology of the person. The personalized approach in brand positioning metaphorically depicts experiencing the brand as a partner, i.e. the brand influences the creation of partnership relations with consumers. It is also influenced by the multicultural brand management model that maps the cultural environment in which the brand is promoted and positioned. Personalization is supported by the creation and launch of brand icons based on social interaction as a reaction to globalization in which understanding the social aspect of consumption is particularly important to interpret and understand the role of the brand. In the era of industrial culture, a brand is a cultural artifact, a product of modern imperialism, or a brand icon that affects the provision of a comfortable life for consumers and the interpersonal relationships of targeted consumers.

Competitive corporations in brand management prefer a cognitive model that contributes to building brand equity. The fundamental difference is in a paradigm shift from a transaction, ie. exchange between the corporation, i.e. products/services and consumers in building long-term partnership relations with consumers. The effectiveness of this concept contributes to protection from unfair competition, from markets of imitations of original brands, intensification of promotions and changes in consumer needs. In that context, the trend is for corporations to focus on managing consumer satisfaction. From a strategic point of view, the positioning and management of the brand is in function of providing perfect comfort and convenience to the consumers. In particular, the application of sensory branding is intensified, which reaches all the senses of the personalized consumer, thus generating his strong emotional reactions and building a strong relationship between the consumer and the brand. The cognitive-emotional relationship is the result of the identity of the brand's values and the values that the consumer expects from the brand. From that aspect, when creating and implementing branding strategies, modern companies start from identifying the characteristics and specifics of target groups. In the process of launching and positioning the brand, an appropriate brand strategy is applied, which is supported by integrated marketing instruments through which personalized messages are transmitted through interactive media. In that process, opinion makers have a special importance in promoting the brand as an integral part of the community by informing about specific, innovative experiences that meet the expectations and demands of consumers.

1.1. Branding strategies

Branding strategies are effective tools for brand launch and positioning, as well as brand life cycle management. The application of appropriate branding strategies ensures efficient management of the brand and its competitive positioning. Through that approach, the fundamental values of the brand are promoted, which influence building and increasing the capital of the brand. Increasing brand equity depends on the value the brand has at its launch and effective management of the brand life cycle. The increase in brand equity is conditioned by the permanent addition of brand values expected by consumers. The strategic approach of adding brand values is aimed at permanently maintaining a high level of consumer satisfaction for their loyalty to the brand, which is manifested by consumer satisfaction with the quality and functionality of the product or service. The brand value addition model motivates consumers to make purchasing decisions not only for one but also for multiple products of that brand which contributes to increasing brand equity. This model in the focus of the strategic management of the brand positions consumers, ie. their needs, expectations and attitudes, without which the modern market functioning of corporations is impossible.

Strategic brand management aims at creating branding strategies that integrate defined goals based on market research and targeted consumers in order to identify relevant indicators on the basis of which the brand identity is designed and marketing instruments are applied to effectively brand launch and positioning. Exactly for those reasons, a choice is made and a combination of several media with which the maximizing effect of marketing communication is maximized (Fulgoni, and Lipsman 2014). That approach contributes to achieving the desired effect for competitiveness, building a

partnership relationship with targeted consumers and maintaining their loyalty to the brand. Branding strategies are an important instrument that contributes to building and maintaining the credibility of companies, maintaining the desired influence, penetrating new markets, building long-term relationships with business partners, as well as building loyalty to the brand that contributes to facilitating the adoption process. of purchase decisions.

The effects of the application of branding strategies in terms of positioning and brand recognition are measured by researching the opinions and attitudes of target consumer groups. Their opinions are the most relevant indicator of the effectiveness of brand positioning, which indicates whether the design of the brand identity has attracted the attention and interest of consumers, whether it has succeeded in causing an incentive to make a decision to purchase the brand. Interactive company-consumer communication provides feedback on whether consumer awareness of the brand has been created and at what position it is in consumer consciousness. Those measurement and analysis approaches contribute to effective brand lifecycle management that contributes to the continuous increase of brand value and equity, brand market share and consumer brand loyalty. The meaning of brands for consumers and the influence of it in terms of customers' behaviors and attitudes have gained a large interest from both scholars and practitioners, and in turn, the brand literature is a mature academic field (Gil-Saura et al, 2013; Pappu and Quester, 2006)

The effectiveness of a branding strategy depends on the values that are incorporated into the brand and their impact on consumers. In that context, the value of the brand is at a high level if consumers identify in it a need that will satisfy their expectations for facilitating functioning in a certain segment of life. In modern, dynamic and turbulent conditions of living and working, consumers permanently modify and increase their needs and expectations to improve personal and business functioning, through the use of brands that are functional, high-quality and at an optimal price. Consumers also perceive the value of the brand cognitively through the reflection of the brand identity, i.e. the signs by which the brand is positioned and recognizable in the mental map of consumers in which the brand also has its own image, which consumers have built in their minds, and which is the result of the elements of the brand identity.

The positioning of the brand in the consciousness of consumers is aimed at influencing the consolidation of its position in the mental code, a tactic by which companies position themselves in the market and make products or services transparent and intensely visible to target groups. The success of that concept depends on the quality of market and consumer research regarding their needs for certain products or services and based on that to create, launch and position a certain brand. For this purpose, the brand must occupy an extremely important position in the mental map of consumers in order to achieve a level of brand awareness and make a decision to purchase the brand. Products will have a well-defined position in customers' mind depending upon their brands, thus the life cycle of the products are also shaped by their brands (Aaker and Keller, 1990). This is realized by creating and applying differentiation strategies to the target market segment and the target target groups. The fact that brand positioning is a mix of objective and subjective psychological entities contributes to building consumer awareness of the brand through features that are different from competing brands. Branding, in the most general sense, is the process to gain a brand identity to a given

non-labeled product (Keller and Aaker, 1992). Generally, the first and most important step of marketing is the branding of a product. This means that by launching the brand identity as an objective category in the minds of consumers, the image of the brand is built, which is a subjective category, i.e. subjective opinion of consumers regarding the characteristics, values and quality of the brand. Marketing communications enable the communication process between the company and the consumers through the physical shape that they have and the visual aesthetic content (Coviello, Winklhofer, and Hamilton 2006). The brand image is a sensitive psychological construct in the consciousness of consumers, a subjective image of the brand that is created by each consumer separately depending on the socio-cultural, demographic, economic and other characteristics that influence the creation of the brand image in the consciousness of each consumer.

2. APPLICATION OF INTEGRATED MARKETING TOOLS FOR BRAND MANAGEMENT

The concept of integrated marketing communications integrates promotional activities, as well as promotional instruments that are applied in the process of promoting the brand as a function of market positioning. It is an innovative promotional strategic approach in marketing communication of the brand.

The basic forms of IMC are (Fulgoni, and Lipsman 2014):

- Economic propaganda ;
- Sales promotion ;
- Public relations and publicity ;
- Personal sales;
- Direct marketing.

In addition to the new ones, there are secondary forms of IMC, such as: shaping, packaging, additional services that cannot be programmed and controlled by the company (Pozzi 2012). A distinctive feature of the concept is the coordinated approach in combining promotional instruments and media in order to build an impressive and effective perception of the corporate brand. For efficient and effective implementation of integrated marketing instruments, corporations should focus on explicitly defining the target groups, creating communication compatible with the target groups, as well as choosing appropriate media for brand communication. Creativity in communication is recognized by (Meyer, Gremler, and Hogreve 2014):

- The interesting content of the message that is aimed at the target group;
- Presenting the messages that should be original, recognizable, inspiring, unusual, impressive;
- The impact on the change of attitude among consumers;
- increasing sales effects.

By definition, the alignment of communications with stakeholders, through various media and the use of communication tools, constitutes integrated marketing communication.

Kotler defines integrated marketing communications as: "A concept in which the company carefully integrates and coordinates all communication channels in order to

achieve a clear, consistent and acceptable message of the company and its products ."

To create effective IMC strategies, the following should be approached (Amenc, Goltz, and Lodh 2012):

- Identification of the target audience;
- Determining the goals of communication ;
- Determining the stages of the purchasing decision process;
- Creating the message;
- Media selection.

3. RESEARCH

In order to prove the impact of integrated marketing communication instruments on the efficient and effective implementation of branding strategies, a survey was conducted that included 60 marketing managers of marketing agencies in the Republic of North Macedonia. The purpose of the research was to identify the concept of promotional mix in the process of applying branding strategies. To conduct the empirical research, a survey questionnaire was created, containing 18 statements with a scale of attitudes from 1 (disagree) to 6 (completely agree). From the conducted survey, the results of the statements that are fundamental to the research are listed in the paper.

On the claim: Integrated marketing communication instruments influence the effective application of the brand positioning strategy, the following results were obtained:



Figure 1. Percentage overview of the impact of integrated marketing communication instruments on the effective application of the brand positioning strategy

Overview of the influence of integrated marketing communication instruments on the effective application of the brand positioning strategy. According to the data obtained, 48% of the respondents fully agree with the statement that integrated marketing communication instruments have an impact on the effective application of the brand positioning strategy, 10% of the respondents strongly agree that they have an impact on

the effective application of the brand positioning strategy, 17% of respondents agree, while 20% of respondents partially agree that integrated marketing communication tools have an impact on the effective application of brand positioning strategy, and 5% of respondents have an opinion that integrated marketing communication tools have little or no impact affect the effective application of the brand positioning strategy . The analysis indicates that the majority of respondents are of the opinion that integrated marketing communication instruments affect the effective positioning of the brand. On the claim: The promotional mix of interactive marketing and digital PR contribute to the effective application of the brand positioning strategy, the following results were obtained:

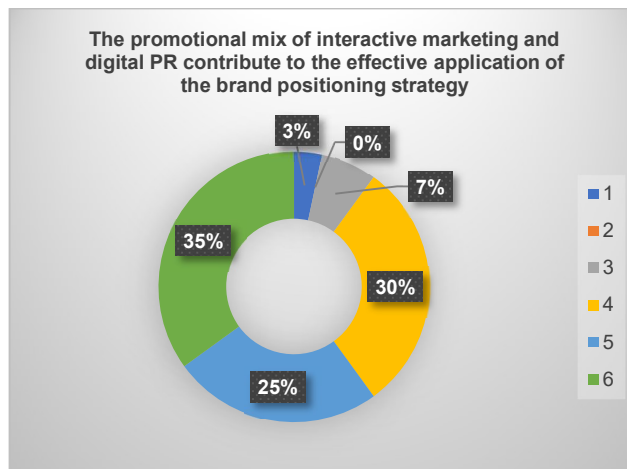


Figure 2. Percentage overview of the influence of the promotional mix of interactive marketing and digital PR on the effective application of the brand positioning strategy

An overview of the impact of the promotional mix of interactive marketing and digital PR on the effective application of the brand positioning strategy. According to the data obtained, 35% of the respondents completely agree with the statement that the promotional mix of interactive marketing and digital PR have an impact on the effective application of the brand positioning strategy, 25% of the respondents strongly agree that the promotional mix of interactive marketing and digital PR have an impact on the effective application of the brand positioning strategy, 30% of the respondents agree, while 7% of the respondents partially agree that the promotional mix of interactive marketing and digital PR have an impact on the effective application of the brand positioning strategy, and 8% of respondents have an opinion that the promotional mix of interactive marketing and digital PR has little or no effect on the effective application of the brand positioning strategy. The analysis indicates that the majority of the respondents are of the opinion that the promotional mix of interactive marketing and digital PR influence the effective positioning of the brand.

On the claim: List in order of priority the instruments of integrated marketing communications that contribute to the effective application of the brand positioning strategy, the following results were obtained:

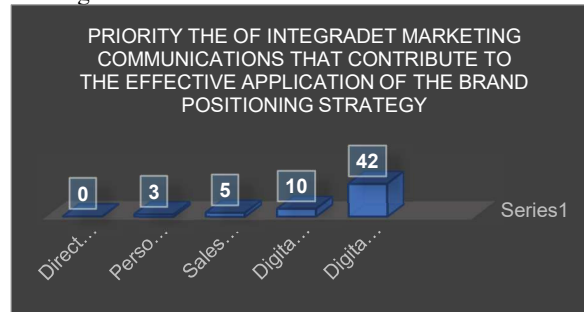


Figure 3. Percentage overview of the priority of the instruments of integrated marketing communications that contribute to the effective application of the brand positioning strategy

Review by priority of the instruments of integrated marketing communications that contribute to the effective application of the brand positioning strategy. According to the data obtained, 30% of respondents indicated digital marketing, personal selling and sales promotion as priority marketing instruments, 46% of respondents indicated direct marketing, sales promotion and personal selling as priority marketing instruments, 12% of respondents indicated interactive marketing, personal selling and sales promotion, while 7% of respondents cited interactive marketing, sales promotion and digital PR as priority instruments, 2% of respondents cited personal selling, direct marketing and PR as priority instruments as key to the effective application of the positioning strategy of the brand, 3% of respondents cited digital marketing, PR and sales promotion as priorities. The analysis indicates that the majority of respondents have an opinion that the priority marketing instruments that should be integrated for effective positioning of the brand are digital marketing, personal selling, direct marketing and sales promotion. On the claim: Integrated marketing communication instruments influence the effective application of the brand repositioning strategy, the following results were obtained:



Figure 4. Percentage overview of the impact of integrated marketing communication instruments on the effective application of the brand repositioning strategy

Review of the impact of integrated marketing communication instruments on the effective application of the brand repositioning strategy. According to the data obtained, 18% of the respondents fully agree with the statement that integrated marketing communication instruments have an impact on the effective application of the brand repositioning strategy, 37% of the respondents strongly agree that they have an impact on the effective application of the brand repositioning strategy, 28% of respondents agree, while 10% of respondents partially agree that integrated marketing communication tools have an impact on the effective application of brand positioning strategy, and 7% of respondents have an opinion that integrated marketing communication tools have little or no impact affect the effective application of the brand repositioning strategy. The analysis indicates that the majority of respondents are of the opinion that integrated marketing communication instruments affect the effective repositioning of the brand.

On the claim: The promotional mix of interactive marketing and digital PR contribute to the effective application of the brand repositioning strategy, the following results were obtained:

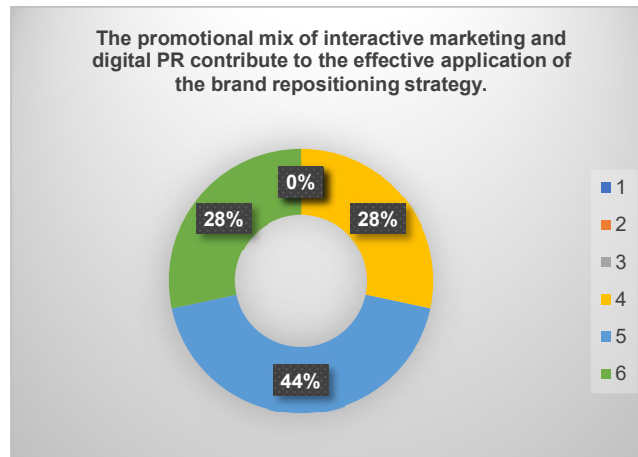


Figure 5. Percentage overview of the promotional mix of interactive marketing and digital PR based on the effective application of the brand repositioning strategy

An overview of the impact of the promotional mix of interactive marketing and digital PR on the effective application of the brand repositioning strategy. According to the data obtained, 28% of the respondents fully agree with the statement that the promotional mix of interactive marketing and digital PR have an impact on the effective application of the brand repositioning strategy, 44% of the respondents strongly agree that the promotional mix of interactive marketing and digital PR have an impact on the effective application of the brand repositioning strategy, 28% of the respondents agree that the promotional mix of interactive marketing and digital PR influence the effective application of the brand repositioning strategy. The analysis indicates that all respondents

are of the opinion that the promotional mix of interactive marketing and digital PR influence the effective repositioning of the brand.

Regarding the statement about the impact of the promotional mix of interactive marketing and digital PR on the effective application of the brand positioning strategy, where 20% of respondents partially agree that integrated marketing communication instruments have an impact on the effective application of the brand positioning strategy, and 5% of respondents have an opinion that integrated marketing communication instruments have little or no influence on the effective application of the brand positioning strategy, on the statement about the impact of the promotional mix of interactive marketing and digital PR on the effective application of the brand repositioning strategy, all respondents are of the opinion that digital marketing and PR are a priority in the brand repositioning process.

On the statement: List by priority the instruments of integrated marketing communications that contribute to the effective application of the brand repositioning strategy, the following results were obtained:

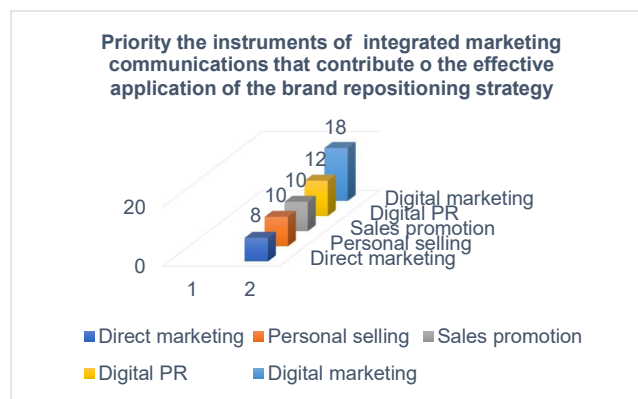


Figure 6. Review by priority of the instruments of integrated marketing communications that contribute to the effective application of the brand positioning strategy

Review by priority of the instruments of integrated marketing communications that contribute to the effective application of the brand positioning strategy. According to the data obtained, 75% of respondents indicated digital marketing as a priority marketing instrument, 17% of respondents indicated digital PR as a creative instrument, and 8% of respondents indicated sales promotion as a priority instrument for effective brand repositioning. The analysis indicates that the majority of respondents are of the opinion that the priority marketing instruments that should be integrated for effective repositioning of the brand are digital marketing, digital PR and sales promotion.

The indicators from the research point to the fact that integrated marketing instruments are of great importance for efficient positioning and repositioning of the brand. The analysis also indicates that when implementing the brand positioning strategy, digital marketing, personal selling, direct marketing and sales promotion are the priority integrated marketing instruments that influence successful positioning, while when

implementing the brand repositioning strategy, integrated marketing instruments are the priority that influence the successful repositioning of the brand are digital marketing and digital PR.

CONCLUSION

Modern business affirms an innovative business paradigm that is the result of intensive scientific, technical and technological innovations. In order to be able to position themselves in the market, but also to maintain competitiveness, they must follow those changes that affect the needs of internal and external stakeholders. Modified and even drastic forms of reengineering are the only way for them to exist and be profitable. Since the focus of interest in the scientific paper is on the marketing sector, it interprets and analyzes from a scientific-theoretical and empirical point of view the current tendencies in the advertising of products and services that companies offer on the market. The science of strategic brand management emphasizes branding strategies as one of the fundamentals that influence the launch, positioning and competitiveness of the brand in the market. Depending on the indicators resulting from research, scientific thought creates the strategy of positioning, repositioning, extension and co-branding. These branding strategies can be applied separately, but also in combination, which primarily depends on the specifics of branding and market conditions. The creation of the brand's identity and architecture is essential for its personalization and recognition by the target consumers for whom the brand is intended. The brand will be competitive in the market if its design, identity and personalization manage to attract the attention and interest of consumers who will create a perceptual and cognitive map for it, thus making a decision to buy and use it. It is an indicator that the company has created and implemented brand strategies compatible with market conditions and the needs and expectations of consumers, thus they become loyal to the brand and to the company. Branding strategies are an integral part of any company's marketing program. They have an important role in building and maintaining a partnership relationship with consumers.

In correlation with the interpretation and empirical research on the impact of brand positioning and repositioning strategies is the application of integrated marketing communications in the process of competitive positioning of the brand. Science proves that branding strategies can be perfectly created, but if in the phase of their implementation on the market, appropriate promotional communication instruments are not applied that will enable efficient and effective communication of the brand with consumers, then the competitive positioning of the brand is debatable. Integrated marketing communication instruments that are effective in different market environments and that are the subject of interest in the scientific paper are interactive marketing, digital PR, sales promotion and personal selling. The empirical research of marketing managers leads to the conclusion that branding strategies are a key factor for competitive positioning of the brand. According to the results of the research for the implementation of the positioning strategy, digital marketing, personal selling, direct marketing and sales promotion are the priority efficient communication tools that promote the brand on the market, while digital marketing and digital PR are the priorities for repositioning the brand. Those promotional mix models contribute to the communication of the brand by the customers, increase of the brand equity and

competitive positioning of the companies. That's why companies need to follow and implement innovations to create branding strategies and tools of integrated marketing communications to succeed in the tendencies to increase profitability and productivity.

From the theoretical and empirical analyzes it follows that despite the fact that in terms of the activity they deal with they are heterogeneous and as such they create the heterogeneous market, every company should practice the creation of a marketing program by competent professionals who will design action plans in dependence on scientific and business trends to succeed in companies' tendencies to build and increase brand equity that affects competitive positioning in the market.

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