

Brand Image and Its Influence on the Purchase Decision for Packaged Fast Foods: An Empirical Study

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Abstract

Through an empirical investigation of customer perceptions and behaviour, this study investigates how brand image affects consumer purchasing decisions in the packaged fast food business. Using a descriptive research approach and information gathered from 200 respondents using structured questionnaires, the study finds that important elements of brand image—like consistency, perceived quality, trust, and emotional appeal—have a major impact on decision to make purchases by consumers. According to the study, customer loyalty and a great brand image are strongly positively correlated, especially for younger and wealthier consumers. For marketers and brand managers looking to boost customer engagement and increase brand preference in a cutthroat market, these insights are invaluable.

Keywords: Brand Image, Consumer Behavior, Packaged Fast Foods, Brand Trust, Purchase Decision, Brand Loyalty, Perceived Quality, etc.

Introduction

The packaged fast food sector has experienced exponential expansion in today's fiercely competitive and consumer-driven market due to shifting lifestyles, urbanisation, and rising demand for convenience-focused meal alternatives. Due to the increased demand and the entry of new competitors, it is now more crucial than ever for companies to set themselves apart from the competition via strong branding techniques. Brand image has become one of the most important determinants affecting customer behaviour and buying decisions among the many brand-related elements.

Customers frequently develop brand loyalty and preference by associating a brand with psychological and emotional qualities that transcend the product's physical characteristics (Keller, 2003). Brand image may have a big impact on customers' tastes and, eventually, their purchasing decisions when it comes to packaged fast meals, which are typically purchased impulsively and are seen as low-involvement items.

With so many options available to them, today's consumers are more knowledgeable and discriminating. As a result, people base their choices not only on the usefulness of the product but also on the brand's symbolic worth and level of trust. Particularly in food goods where safety and quality are crucial, a strong and positive brand image may generate trust, positive attitudes, and a decrease in perceived risk (Aaker, 1996). In order to convey quality assurance and win over customers, packaged food firms are depending more and more on their brand image as health and food safety concerns grow.

Marketers and brand managers must comprehend this link in order to match their tactics to customer expectations. Furthermore, the study's findings may offer helpful guidance for improving brand positioning in a market where many local and foreign companies are vying for consumers' attention, especially in a sector as dynamic as packaged fast meals.

Literature Review

According to Aaker (1991), brand image is influenced by a number of brand equity factors, such as perceived quality, brand associations, brand loyalty, and brand awareness. It has been discovered that customer attitudes and behaviours are particularly influenced by perceived quality and brand trust in the packaged food industry. Erdem and Swait (2004) claim that perceived quality lowers decision-making uncertainty, especially in categories like food where it isn't always possible to test products before buying. Strong brand perceptions are frequently seen by consumers as an indication of exceptional quality and dependability, which facilitates quicker and more certain purchasing choices.

According to Bian and Forsythe (2012), customers' desire to purchase is influenced by perceived value, which is strongly impacted by brand image. This is especially true in markets

for fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), where branding frequently serves as the primary point of differentiation. Chen's (2001) research also shows that a favourable brand image increases customer satisfaction and loyalty, particularly when customers believe the brand to be reliable and stable over time. Because customers are worried about ingredients, hygiene, and potential health effects, trust and dependability are even more important in the food market. Consumers are more likely to select a packaged food brand they are familiar with and link with pleasant feelings and prior happiness, according to studies like those conducted by Schiffman and Kanuk (2007).

In the context of impulsive purchasing, the connection between brand image and customer purchase choice has also been investigated. Since packaged fast food is frequently bought with little thought beforehand, brand perception is crucial. Prendergast, Tsang, and Chan (2010) discovered that customers tend to choose well-known brands, particularly those with positive perceptions, when time and mental resources are few. In addition to making decision-making easier, a strong brand image may put customers in a psychological comfort zone.

Additionally, in the context of packaged food items in emerging economies, Rahman, Haque, and Ahmad (2010) discovered a positive association between brand image and brand loyalty. Due to the abundance of alternatives and sometimes unclear quality standards in these marketplaces, consumers are more likely to use brand image as a heuristic when making judgements about what to buy. Yoo and Donthu (2001), who emphasise the impact of socioeconomic and cultural aspects on how brand image is viewed and acted upon, have further verified this.

Understanding how brand image influences buying behaviour is essential given the quick changes in customer preferences and the increased focus on quality and health in the fast food industry. The dynamics in the fast food industry provide brand managers particular possibilities and difficulties, even though the majority of the research that is currently available is on luxury or high-involvement goods. By providing actual data on how consumers view and react to brand image in the context of packaged fast meals, this study seeks to close that gap.

Objectives:

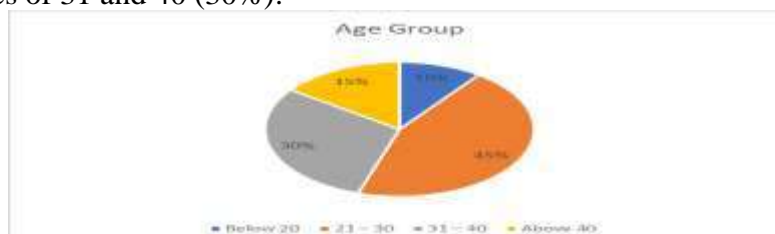
The primary objective of this study is to examine the relationship between brand image and consumers' decisions to purchase packaged fast food, with a focus on significant factors such as perceived quality, brand loyalty, and brand trust. The study's objective is to provide empirical insight into how branding affects consumer behaviour in a fiercely competitive industry.

Methodology:

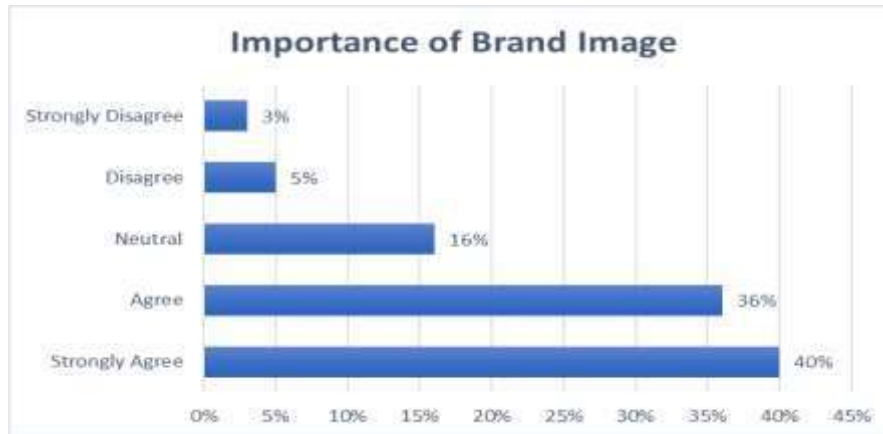
A descriptive research approach is used in this study to examine how brand image affects consumers' decisions to buy packaged fast food. Customers were given a standardised questionnaire to complete in order to gather data. Convenience sampling was used to choose a sample size of 200 respondents, guaranteeing accessibility and relevance to the intended customer category.

Data Analysis:

200 respondents completed a methodical questionnaire, and the data was evaluated to see how brand image influenced their decisions to purchase packaged fast food. Demographic information indicates that 58% of respondents were men and 42% of respondents were women. The plurality (45%) were between the ages of 21 and 30, with the next largest group being between the ages of 31 and 40 (30%).



Only 8% of respondents disagreed with the statement that brand image is important when it comes to their decision to buy packaged fast food, whereas 76% agreed or strongly agreed. This suggests that customers have a strong opinion on how branding affects trust and quality control.



Subsequent investigation showed that the most important elements influencing the brand image were perceived quality and brand trust. 55% of respondents said that trust is a major factor in their loyalty, while 65% of respondents said that consistent quality is the main reason they pick a packaged fast food brand.

A significant correlation value ($r = 0.74$), which indicates a strong association between the two variables, was obtained from a correlation analysis between brand image and purchase decision. This implies that customers who have a favourable opinion of a brand are more likely to use it again and refer others to it.

Furthermore, a cross-tabulation of brand loyalty and income levels revealed that while middle-class customers often compared different brands based on price and promotions, higher-income consumers (making above ₹50,000/month) were more inclined to stick with a premium packaged food brand.



In summary, the information is consistent with the theory that customer purchasing decisions in the packaged fast food market are greatly influenced by brand image. Important elements like emotional appeal, perceived quality, and brand trust are important factors in creating a positive brand image, which in turn affects customer loyalty and purchasing decisions.

Conclusions:

The results of this study unequivocally show that, in the packaged fast food industry, customer purchasing decisions are significantly influenced by brand image. Consumer preferences and loyalty were shown to be strongly correlated with key brand image elements such as perceived quality, trust, emotional appeal, and consistency. Customers' purchase decisions are significantly influenced by their propensity to link well-known brands with greater quality and

dependability. Additionally, brand loyalty is influenced by demographic parameters like age and income level, with younger and wealthier customers exhibiting a stronger preference for premium and trusted brands. Overall, the study demonstrates that in a cutthroat fast food industry, a strong and good brand image boosts customer trust and encourages repeat business.

Recommendations:

Companies in the packaged fast food sector are advised to make investments in creating and preserving a powerful, reliable, and consistent brand image in light of the study's conclusions. Consumer impression may be considerably improved by highlighting product quality, open communication, eye-catching packaging, and successful advertising techniques. In order to improve emotional ties and boost brand memory, brands should also interact with consumers on digital channels. Brand loyalty and trust may be increased by consistent feedback gathering and responsiveness to customer demands. In order to enhance brand resonance and impact purchasing decisions across various customer categories, businesses need also adjust their marketing methods in accordance with demographic preferences.

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