

The Effect of Brand Association and Brand Image on the Brand Awareness of Lithuanian Companies of Digital Products

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Purpose: Brand awareness enables brand recognition in different market conditions, which is very important for companies selling digital products or providing digital services. Purpose of this paper is to determine the effect of brand association and brand image on the brand awareness of Lithuanian companies of digital products. These factors are important and have an impact on brand awareness, but their impact on the brand awareness of digital products in particular has not been investigated.

Methods: A questionnaire was conducted to a sample of 403 consumers who buy and use digital products in Lithuania. The Multiple Linear Regression (MLR) model was created and a statistically significant direct positive impact of brand association and brand image on brand awareness of companies of digital products was determined.

Results: The empirical research of the effect of brand association and brand image on the brand awareness of Lithuanian companies of digital products revealed a statistically significant direct positive impact of brand association and brand image on brand awareness of companies of digital products. The strongest direct positive impact of brand image on brand awareness than brand association.

Conclusion: The findings of research provide valuable insights into the crucial role played by brand association and brand image in building brand awareness for companies of digital products.

Keywords: *Brand Awareness, Brand Association, Brand Image, Digital Products*

1 Introduction

Brand awareness is one of the most important factors for companies of digital products, as it influences consumer recognition and familiarity with their brands in the highly competitive digital marketplace. Brand awareness is closely related to brand recognition and consumer memories of the brand (Ramadani and Rachmawati, 2022), which is very important in the digital space with high competition between digital products or services. Building and

maintaining strong brand awareness can lead to increased customer trust, loyalty, and a competitive edge, enabling digital product companies to attract and retain customers effectively. Effective digital marketing strategies, consistent branding, and engaging content play pivotal roles in enhancing brand awareness for companies offering digital products, fostering lasting connections with their target audience and driving business growth. Brand awareness indicates that consumers can identify and remember a brand, which establishes a foundation for future long-term commitment between consumers and brands (Liu et al., 2020).

Organizations are facing frustration in measuring brand perceptions like brand awareness (Phulpoto et al., 2018) because the market of digital products has its own specifics and with the rapid growth of this market, not enough research has been done on brand awareness of companies of digital products. Although new digital products can penetrate the market much more quickly which can raise brand awareness much faster than for physical products (Basu and Muyllé, 2023), ensuring a high brand awareness is quite difficult due to the large number of competitors. If the research carried out on the market of usual physical products shows that brands association for many products is similar for consumers and non-customers of a product especially for mobile phones (Phulpoto et al., 2018), then in order to identify and improve the brands association of companies of digital product, many additional challenges. Researchers studying brand awareness of usual physical products indicate that there are two main constructs that are most important in improving brand awareness: these are brand association and brand image, which have strong links with brand awareness (Shabbir et al., 2017; Bilgin, 2018; Bernarto et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2020; Abbas et al., 2021).

Considering the aforementioned relevance of brand awareness for companies of digital products and the problems arising from it, the aim of this paper is to determine the effect of brand association and brand image on the brand awareness of Lithuanian companies of digital products.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Brand Awareness of Companies of Digital Products

Brand awareness of companies of digital products refers to the extent to which consumers recognize and are familiar with a particular brand and its offerings in the digital marketplace. Brand awareness is the ability of a potential customer to recognize or remember that a brand is part of a particular digital product (Ilyas et al., 2020; Mahaputra and Saputra, 2021; Pina and Dias, 2021). Brand awareness refers to the awareness of a brand's existence and its association with a specific product (Clarissa and Bernarto, 2022). Brand awareness enables brand recognition in different market conditions, which is very important for companies selling digital products or providing digital services. The higher the brand association in the digital product, the more it will be remembered by the consumer and be loyal towards the brand (Sasmita and Mohd Suki, 2015). Brand awareness indicates that consumers can identify and remember a brand, which establishes a foundation for future long-term commitment between consumers and brands (Liu et al., 2020).

2.2 Link between Brand Association and Brand Awareness of Companies of Digital Products

Brand association is important to the customer, especially when there are too many products on the market, as digital products or digital services proliferate. Brand association helps the customer identify the digital product brand they need that best meets their needs and expectations (Shamsudin et al., 2020). The link between brand association and brand awareness in companies of digital products lies in the power of consumer perceptions and associations (Das, 2020; Supiyandi et al., 2022).

Positive brand associations established through effective marketing campaigns and positive customer experiences contribute significantly to the overall brand awareness of companies offering digital products, as consumers are more likely to identify and engage with brand they hold favorable associations with (Wirtz et al., 2013; Schivinski et al., 2016; Hamzah et al., 2021). Results show that there is correlation between brand awareness, brand association and brand loyalty (Phulpoto et al., 2018).

Companies of digital products can strategically leverage brand association to enhance brand awareness by creating meaningful connections with their target audience, thereby solidifying their position in the competitive digital sector.

In the light of the mentioned explanations the following hypothesis can be proposed: *H1. Brand association has positive effect on brand awareness of companies of digital products.*

2.3 Link between Brand Image and Brand Awareness of Companies of Digital Products

Brand image and brand awareness are two major brand variables that measure the effectiveness of marketing strategies in brand management practice (Esch et al., 2006; Liu et al., 2020).

The relationship between brand image and brand awareness in digital product companies highlights the importance of overall brand perception and visual representation in influencing consumer recognition and awareness (Marques et al., 2020; Makrides et al., 2020; Pina and Dias, 2021).

A well-designed and consistent brand image across all digital platforms increases brand awareness by allowing consumers to quickly recognize and differentiate a company's products from competitors in the digital realm. Companies producing digital products must invest in developing a positive and attractive brand image that matches the preferences of their target audience, thereby enhancing

brand awareness and creating a lasting impression in the minds of consumers (Shahid et al., 2017; Febriyanto, 2020; Zaqi and Pradini, 2022).

There are studies that examine the relationship between brand image and brand awareness and it is empirically supported that the higher the brand awareness, the higher the brand image (Bilgin, 2018; Bernarto et al., 2020). Brand awareness has some connection with brand image (Abbas et al., 2021). A strong connection between brand awareness and brand image has been established (Liu et al., 2020). Using structural equation modeling approach, brand loyalty and brand image are found to have positive effects on brand awareness (Shabbir et al., 2017).

In the light of the mentioned explanations the following hypothesis can be proposed: *H2. Brand image has positive effect on brand awareness of companies of digital products.*

3 Methodology

3.1 Measures

The research was carried out using a quantitative survey – a written questionnaire. The questionnaire was constructed on the basis of an analysis of the scientific literature dealing with the three main constructs: brand awareness (BAW), brand association (BAs) and brand image (BI). The questionnaire consisted of three scales measuring brand awareness, brand association, brand image and a block of demographic questions.

A 5-item scale designed to measuring brand awareness (example of a scale item “I aware this particular product / brand that appeared in the social media”) and a 5-item scale designed to measuring brand association (example of a scale item “This particular product / brand that appeared in the social media has its own personality”) were adopted from Severi and Ling (2013). A 6-item scale designed to measuring brand image (example of a scale item “This brand has a high quality”) were adopted from Ansary and Nik Hashim (2018). A 5-point Likert Scale is applied for measuring brand awareness, brand association and brand image, where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 – strongly agree.

The questionnaire contains demographic information: age, gender, position in the company, company size.

3.2 Research Sample

In this research, quantitative method has been used and research data has been obtained via online questionnaires shared on social media. A total of 403 Lithuanian residents who buy and use digital products participated in this research.

Demographic characteristics of the sample. The re-

search included 403 respondents subjected to analysis: 56.33% of the sample (N=227) were female; the other 43.67% (N=176) were male. Respondents were divided by age as follows: 27.79% of the sample (N=112) were 18-28 years old; 34.00% (N=137) – 29-38 years old; 26.55% (N=107) – 39-49 years old; 10.67% (N=43) – 49-59 years old; 0.99% (N=4) were over 59 years old. The distribution of respondents by position in the company was as follows: business owners / directors – 10.17% (N=41), heads of department – 19.11% (N=77), specialists – 44.67% (N=180), workers – 17.37% (N=70); “other” was indicated by 8.68% (N=35) of respondents. 37.72% of the sample (N=152) work in a Micro enterprise, 33.0% (N=133) work in a small enterprise, 20.1% (N=81) work in a Medium enterprise, 9.18% (N=37) work in a Large enterprise.

3.3 Data Analysis

The statistical data analysis of quantitative research was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics 25.0 software.

The following main data analysis methods were applied in the research. Firstly, the descriptive statistics analysis of the research data was performed. Secondly, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (N=403>50) indicated that the results have a normal distribution. The reliability of the empirical research was assessed applying Cronbach’s alpha criterion. In the next stage, the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) were performed, to check the validity of the constructs. Data suitability for factor analysis is tested using Bartlett’s Test / Criterion of Sphericity and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy. After that, the Multiple Linear Regression (MLR) model was performed. Regression modeling is one of the most widely used statistical processes to estimate the relationships between dependent and independent variables (Etemadi and Khashei, 2021).

The Multiple Linear Regression (MLR) model allows the effect of brand association and brand image on the brand awareness of Lithuanian companies of digital products. The aim of this MLR method is to explain the relationship between the dependent variable (brand awareness) and two explanatory variables (brand association and brand image). The Multiple Linear Regression model (MLR) are defined by the equation (Formula 1) (Olive, 2017; Bangdiwala, 2018):

$$y = \beta_0 + \beta_1x_1 + \beta_2x_2 + \dots + \beta_nx_n + \varepsilon, \quad (1)$$

where:

y – dependent variable;

x_i – independent variable;

β_i – parameter;

ε – error

4 Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to obtain an overview of the initial characteristics of the three constructs (brand awareness, brand association and brand image) studied. Analysis includes minimum values, maximum values, average values and standard deviations. Table 1 presents the results of testing descriptive statistical analysis.

4.2 Normality, Reliability and Validity Test

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test ($N=403 > 50$) indicated that the results have a normal distribution.

The reliability of the empirical research was also assessed applying Cronbach's alpha criterion. In the research, the scales for measuring the constructs of brand awareness, brand association and brand image are compatible and reliable ($\alpha=0.853$, $\alpha=0.905$ and $\alpha=0.941$, respectively) (Table 2).

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics (N=403)

Constructs	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
BAw	2.20	5.00	4.01	0.57630
BA _s	2.60	5.00	3.84	0.55664
BI	2.71	5.00	4.18	0.55061

Table 2: Reliability and Validity Test (N=403)

Constructs	Items	Rotated Component Matrix ^a / Factor Loading	Cronbach's Reliability Coefficients
BAw	BAw1	0.733	0.853
	BAw2	0.598	
	BAw3	0.704	
	BAw4	0.661	
	BAw5	0.636	
BA _s	BA _s 1	0.718	0.905
	BA _s 2	0.746	
	BA _s 3	0.753	
	BA _s 4	0.765	
	BA _s 5	0.717	
BI	BI1	0.729	0.941
	BI2	0.798	
	BI3	0.811	
	BI4	0.675	
	BI5	0.819	
	BI6	0.796	

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 7 iterations.

KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy =0.916; $p=0.000 < 0.05$; $df=630$

Bartlett's Test of Sphericity / Approx. Chi-Square =5513.157

To check the validity of the constructs, the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) of the obtained data was performed applying the Principal Components Analysis with Varimax rotation to determine the factor loadings. Discriminant validity was evaluated through inter-construct correlation coefficients. Data suitability for factor analysis is tested using Bartlett's Test / Criterion of Sphericity and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy. It was found that the quantitative research data are suitable for the Exploratory Factor Analysis when Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is significant, since the KMO coefficient is 0.916 ($p=0.000<0.05$; $df=630$). By estimating the factor loadings from Rotated Component Matrix the convergent validity of the measurement items was obtained and composite reliabilities as standardized factor loadings are between 0.598 to 0.819 which are above than suggested level of 0.40 so they all are at significant level (Raubenheimer, 2004).

4.3 Correlations and Collinearity Statistics

Before the Multiple Linear Regression analysis, we performed a correlation analysis of the independent variables (Table 3).

The results of the correlation matrix analysis showed that the average correlation between each independent var-

iable is between 0.617 and 0.674. The correlation coefficients of the independent variables are found to be related to the dependent variable.

The Variance inflation factors value $VIF=1.630<4$ (VIFs exceeding 4 warrant further investigation), and the tolerance value is 0.614, exceeding 0.10. The results show that the data variables used in this study did not have multicollinearity problems.

4.4 The Multiple Linear Regression (MLR) Model

The regression analysis in this study is carried out using Multiple Linear Regression (MLR) analysis. Table 4 presents the results on the fit of the MLR model – Model Summary. R-squared (the coefficient of determination) is a statistical metric that is used to measure how much of the variation in outcome can be explained by the variation in the independent variables.

As can be seen from Table 4, the value of R Square is 0.518, which means that the model explains 51.8 percent of brand awareness.

The information presented in Table 5 helps to assess the statistical significance of the MLR model. The statistical value of F criterion is 53.651 and the model reaches statistical significance with $Sig.=0.000$, $p<0.0005$. This regression model is indeed statistically significant.

Table 3: Correlations of Constructs and Collinearity Statistics (N=403)

Constructs		BAw	BAs	BI	Collinearity Statistics	
					Tolerance	VIF
Pearson Correlation	BAw ^a	1.000				
	BAs	0.617	1.000		0.614	1.630
	BI	0.674	0.622	1.000	0.614	1.630

a. Dependent Variable: Brand Awareness
 $p=0.000<0.05$

Table 4: Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.719 ^a	0.518	0.508	0.40425

a. Predictors: (Constant). Brand Image. Brand Association
 b. Dependent Variable: Brand Awareness

Table 5: ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	17.535	2	8.767	53.651	0.000 ^b
	Residual	16.342	100	0.163		
	Total	33.877	102			

a. Dependent Variable: Brand Awareness

b. Predictors: (Constant). Brand Image. Brand Association

Table 6: Multiple Linear Regression Test Results – Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error			
1	(Constant)	0.652	0.326		1.998	0.048
	BAs	0.334	0.092	0.322	3.637	0.000
	BI	0.495	0.093	0.473	5.337	0.000

a. Dependent Variable: Brand Awareness

MLR is based on the assumption that there is a linear relationship between the dependent (brand awareness) and both independent variables (brand association and brand image). The MLR provides an indication of which of the variables included in the model contributed to the prediction of the dependent variable. This requires estimating the Standardized Coefficients Beta. As can be seen from Table 6, the highest Standardized Coefficients Beta is 0.473 (brand image), which means that this variable explains more of the variance of the dependent variable (brand awareness) than brand association (Standardized Coefficients Beta is 0.322). All variables are statistically significant, so all can be included in the equation of the regression model.

According to the values of the coefficients in Table 6, the equation of the MLR model can be constructed (Formula 2):

$$y = 0.652 + 0.334x_1 + 0.495x_2 + \varepsilon, \quad (2)$$

where:

y – Brand Awareness (dependent variable);

x_1 – Brand Association (independent variable);

x_2 – Brand Image (independent variable);

ε – error.

The explanation of the Multiple Linear Regression (MLR) equation above is as follows:

- The constant value of 0.652 in the equation represents the predicted value of brand awareness when all the independent variables are equal to zero.
- The value of the coefficient β_1 has a value of 0.334, which means that for every one unit increase in brand association, the predicted value of brand awareness increases by 0.334 units with the assumption that other independent variables still have the same value. The obtained results confirm the hypothesis H1. Brand association has positive effect on brand awareness of companies of digital products.
- The value of the coefficient β_2 has a value of 0.495 which means that for every one unit increase in brand image, the predicted value of brand awareness increases by 0.495 units with the assumption that other independent variables have the same value. The obtained results confirm the hypothesis H2. Brand Image has positive effect on brand awareness of companies of digital products.

5 Discussion

Digital products often face intense competition in the market (Goyal et al., 2021; Tiwari, 2022). Strong brand

association helps differentiate a company's products from competitors, making it easier for consumers to identify and choose the brand they trust and prefer (Shamsudin et al., 2020). When consumers have positive associations with a brand, they are more likely to recognize and recall the brand when making purchase decisions.

The effect of the brand association variable on the brand awareness of digital product companies shows that the brand association variable has a positive coefficient relationship with brand awareness, suggesting that the higher the brand association, the higher the brand awareness. The results obtained in this study are in agreement with those of the results of the other authors' research (Wirtz et al., 2013; Schivinski et al., 2016; Hamzah et al., 2021), stating that positive brand associations significantly to the overall brand awareness, as consumers are more likely to identify and engage with brands, they hold favorable associations with.

The effect of the brand image variable on the brand awareness of digital product companies shows that the brand image variable has a positive coefficient relationship with brand awareness, suggesting that the higher the brand image, the higher the brand awareness. The results obtained in the research agree with the results of other authors' research, e.g. brand image is found to have positive effects on brand awareness (Shabbir et al., 2017); brand awareness has some connection with brand image (Abbas et al., 2021); a strong connection between brand awareness and brand image has been established (Liu et al., 2020) and etc.

The results of the study show that it is important for companies to actively manage their brand association and brand image in order to maximize the positive effect of brand association and brand image on brand awareness.

6 Conclusion

The empirical research of the effect of brand association and brand image on the brand awareness of Lithuanian companies of digital products revealed a statistically significant direct positive impact of brand association and brand image on brand awareness of companies of digital products. Strongest direct positive impact of brand image on brand awareness than brand association.

Theoretical and practical implications. The paper is related to a deeper understanding of the brand awareness of companies of digital products phenomenon and its connections with brand association and brand image. As a practical implication, derived from the research findings, formulated the MLR model equation for brand awareness allow digital marketing professionals to better understand the influence of brand association and brand image on brand awareness and purposefully shape brand awareness.

Limitations and future research. The paper has limi-

tations to consider when interpreting the mentioned findings. The research was carried out and the Multiple Linear Regression analysis was performed only in Lithuania, i. e. the respondents only of one country participated in the research. It is likely that cultural, economic, social, technological, and other differences would affect the results of research conducted in another country / region / continent. Thus, further research could be extended to other regions.

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Vpliv povezave z blagovno znamko in podobe blagovne znamke na prepoznavnost blagovne znamke litovskih podjetij digitalnih izdelkov

Namen: Prepoznavnost blagovne znamke omogoča večjo prepoznavnost v različnih tržnih razmerah, kar je izredno pomembno za podjetja, ki prodajajo digitalne izdelke ali ponujajo digitalne storitve. Namen tega prispevka je raziskati učinek povezovanja z blagovno znamko in podobe blagovne znamke na prepoznavnost blagovne znamke litovskih podjetij, ki prodajajo digitalne izdelke. Ti dejavniki so pomembni in vplivajo na prepoznavnost blagovne znamke, vendar njihov vpliv na prepoznavnost blagovne znamke, še posebej v primeru digitalnih izdelkov, doslej ni bil podrobneje raziskovan.

Metode: Vprašalnik je bil izveden na vzorcu 403 potrošnikov, ki kupujejo in uporabljajo digitalne izdelke v Litvi. Izdelan je bil model večkratne linearne regresije (MLR), ki je pokazal statistično pomemben neposreden pozitiven vpliv povezovanja z blagovno znamko in imidža blagovne znamke na prepoznavnost blagovne znamke podjetij digitalnih izdelkov.

Rezultati: Empirična raziskava je pokazala statistično pomemben neposreden pozitiven vpliv povezovanja z blagovno znamko in podobe blagovne znamke na prepoznavnost blagovne znamke litovskih podjetij digitalnih izdelkov. Najmočnejši neposreden pozitiven vpliv na prepoznavnost blagovne znamke ima povezovanje z blagovno znamko.

Zaključek: Ugotovitve raziskave zagotavljajo dragocen vpogled v ključno vlogo, ki jo imata povezava z blagovno znamko in podoba blagovne znamke pri gradnji prepoznavnosti blagovne znamke za podjetja, ki ponujajo digitalne izdelke.

Ključne besede: *Prepoznavnost blagovne znamke, Povezava z blagovno znamko, Podoba blagovne znamke, Digitalni izdelki*