

Foreword

With the growing awareness that brands are one of firms' most valuable resources, branding has emerged as a top management priority in the past decade. In this context, corporate branding strategies are gaining more and more importance. Companies regularly commit significant expenditures in order to guarantee a clear, non-contradictory and above all positive perception of their corporate brand in the minds of their stakeholders within their home market. However, with regards to other country markets, companies often neglect a consistent approach, e.g. branding activities are left to the autonomy of the subsidiaries. Many factors – such as a decentralized organization or the duration of the activity in a country – can lead to international variances in corporate brand management. Further, cultural factors exert a major influence on the process of interpreting brand-related information. International corporations are thus confronted with the problem of establishing a consistent understanding of the corporate brand within different cultures as the basis for their “glocal” corporate strategy.

Addressing these issues, the present dissertation deals with the often neglected effects attributed to corporate branding, whereby an international perspective is taken. On a national level, much has been written about the impact of specific corporate associations on consumers' product evaluation. However, the impact of corporate brand management on consumers has rarely been examined from an international perspective. In practice, companies lack knowledge on how to evaluate cross-nationally if their corporate branding strategy works. Focusing on the FMCG sector and considering consumers' product response in each case, Dr. Meierer analyzes firstly the role of specific corporate associations versus corporate image in determining consumers' product response and secondly the role of the reciprocal relationship between corporate and product image. In detail, the studies can be summarized as follows:

- *Does standardization of corporate branding across countries work?* Recently, internationally standardized corporate brands have gained in importance, even in industries historically dominated by product brands. Consumers gauge specific corporate associations and corporate image as an overall picture of the or-

ganization when deciding to repurchase a product. However, seldom do studies illustrate how both are interrelated or disentangle their effect on consumers' product response. Analyzing a multinational sample, results illustrate that specific corporate associations impact corporate image cross-nationally in a similar fashion. However, their direct impact on consumers' product response varies between countries, as does the impact of corporate image on consumers' product response. Concluding, standardizing firms' external portrayal works, but marketers must consider its varying relevance to consumers' product response.

- *Does endorsing product brands by corporate branding pay off? A multi-country study.* A growing number of firms use their internationally standardized corporate brands as an endorsement to their local, regional and international product brands. However, little attention has been given to cross-national effects. Further, the reciprocity between corporate and product brand has not been considered so far. Analyzing a cross-sectional consumer sample from Germany, France, Romania, Russia, and the USA and a longitudinal consumer sample from Germany and Romania, results emphasize that corporate and product brand are cross-nationally interrelated, but their impact on consumers' product response varies considerably between countries. Marketers should consider this if managing an international visible corporate brand.

With his work Dr. Meierer makes a significant contribution to marketing research. He advances knowledge on the effects of corporate branding in a cross-national context and disentangles the interrelation of corporate and product branding. His work impresses on the one hand with the extent of attention paid to the methodological details, using advanced methodology in an exemplary manner. On the other hand, he derives valuable insights for corporate brand managers.

Not only in his dissertation, Dr. Meierer has shown the remarkable ability to combine research and practice relevant issues. He never hesitated to invest time helping to improve other research projects. I thank him for working as a research assistant at the Chair for Marketing and Retailing and wish him all the best in his future endeavors.

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