

BRAND MANAGEMENT IN SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISE: EVIDENCE FROM DUBAI, UAE

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to explore the owner-managers' attitudes and opinions towards branding and brand management in small and medium enterprises across Dubai, UAE. The study also explores the causes that are acting as barriers to brand building. The data collected is through questionnaires from a sample of 62 respondents and interviews with Small and Medium Enterprises owners-managers. The research found that many Small and Medium Enterprises do not practice branding strategies and most of the respondents believe that incorporating branding strategies is insignificant for the success of Small and Medium Enterprises (SME).

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KEYWORDS: Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), UAE, Marketing, Branding, Strategies

INTRODUCTION

United Arab Emirates also known as UAE, borders the Persian Gulf on the Saudi Peninsula is a federation of seven emirates (equivalent to principalities) - Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Fujairah, Ras al-Khaimah, Sharjah, and Umm al-Quwain. The capital of UAE is Abu Dhabi. UAE oil and natural gas reserves ranking 7th in the world is one of the most developed economies in Western Asia ranking 7th in the world top nations based on per-capita income. Dubai is a city in the United Arab Emirates, found within the emirate of the same name. Although Dubai's economy was historically built on the oil industry, the emirate's Western-style model of business drives its economy with significant revenues now coming from tourism, real estate development, and financial services.

Small and Medium enterprises (SMEs) play an important role in a nation's job creation, export performance and sometimes contribute significantly to a country's gross domestic product (Culkin & Smith, 2000). SMEs play an important role in the economy of UAE as a whole. In the Emirate of Dubai in particular, 72,000 SMEs exist accounting for 95 percent of enterprises and 40 percent of the workforce. Dubai's SMEs contribute 42 percent of the annual value-added output (DED, 2011). Most of the small to medium sized enterprises within the UAE are family owned. Regional legal regulations require UAE nationals having full or partial ownership of UAE business organizations (D&B South Asia Middle East Ltd, 2008).

Marketing of products and creating value to the customer by managing their brand is important for a SME. Past research proves SME marketing is haphazard and informal because of the way the owners/managers carry out business (Gilmore *et al.*, 2001). Owners usually decide on their own by responding to current opportunities and circumstances without planning, therefore, decision-making occurs in a chaotic way. Further, SME marketing is informal, loose, unstructured, spontaneous, reactive, built on conforming to industry norms. Storey (1994) suggested the main characteristic distinguishing small from large firms is the high failure rates of the small businesses. Often, businesses are susceptible to failure when they are still at the start-up stage and are small. According to the 'Enterprise and Small Business' only a small percentage of SMEs make it in a competitive market in the long-term, and over two thirds close a short while after they were opened (Carter and Jones-Evans, 2006).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Carson (1993) and Gilmore *et al* (2001) felt marketing during the life cycle of the SME, will continue to develop because of the demands for new commodities and markets, as customer needs are satisfied, bearing in mind the owners' inherent characteristics and behaviors and the size and life cycle stage of the firm. Stokes (2000) noted that, on the contrary, owners of SMEs focus on the significance of promotion and word-of-mouth communication. Further, he recognized the core of any business' selling strategy is the correlation between the company, customers, and the focus on four I's (Information gathering, Identification of target markets, Innovation and Interactive marketing methods). Gilmore and Carson (1999) agreed 'within the context of marketing decisions, there is an instinctive understanding networking with outside individuals, associations and companies enables entrepreneurs to be successful. Networking for SMEs could mean an array of connections. This revolves around personal contact networks, social networks, business networks, industry (Andersson and Soderlund, 1988) and marketing networks.

Hall (1995) pointed out small to medium sized enterprises are more vulnerable a changing competitive environment than larger firms. Smallbone *et al* (1993) present the opinion small businesses may cope with an unpredictable environment by continuously seeking market prospects and increasing the customer base of their business. Businesses should focus on market development, whereby, the likelihood of the survival rate of the small firm is much larger than those committing to their old habits of marketing. Berryman (1993) recognized marketing management as the fundamental internal factor that supports and sustains the survival of the company. Many owner-managers implied their company was dependent largely on word-of-mouth; therefore, do not have to invest their time and money in carrying out marketing strategies. Inadequate cash flow, marketing incompetence, company size, customer and strategic related issues are factors deterring the marketing role of SMEs (Doole *et al.*, 2006; Carson, 1985). SMEs rarely include brand management in their day-to-day activities (Krake, 2005). SMEs place their focus on their products and towards developing a marketing plan that places high turnover as an essential factor rather than the long-term goal of creating brand recognition. The owner of the SME plays a vital role in developing and gaining recognition for a brand. The owner is a representation of the brand; nevertheless, not often do they have the time to implement nor the expert knowledge about 'brand management'. To develop a strong brand in SMEs the concepts needed are brand orientation, brand distinctiveness, brand barriers and brand marketing performance (Ojasalo *et al.*, 2008).

Urde (1999) defined brand orientation as 'an approach in which the processes of the organization revolve around the creation, development, and protection of brand identity in a constant interaction with target customers with the aim of achieving lasting competitive advantages in the form of brands'. In a study, by Sashittal and Tankersley (1997) on SMEs, they found profitable results come from the efficient and effective execution of a brand-oriented strategy. Therefore, competitive advantage is attainable by the brand orientation strategy of the SME, which in turn will lead to further development and growth. Mosmans and van der Vorst (1998) write an SME should focus more on brand-based strategy, which is fundamental in choosing and sustaining a strategic direction.

Brand distinctiveness plays a significant role in brand management. A brand's unique features displayed to attract target consumers are a strategy used by companies. The characteristics and qualities display the distinctiveness, uniqueness and exclusivity of the brand in the market and brand distinctiveness is more than just the name of the brand placed on the product. The brand is less attractive to consumers if it does not entail special and distinctive features. Therefore, customers will not choose a certain brand in place of others if that particular brand is not identified as having different qualities (Aaker, 2003). McQuinston (2004) suggested organizations yearn to produce unique and distinctive products to evade being perceived as undistinguished goods. The vision of the SME needs to be comprehensive to support in planning brand-based strategies, thus, helping in the long-run sustained brand distinctiveness. SMEs could use brand distinctiveness to set them apart from competitors (Wong and Merrilees, 2008; De Chernatomy,

2001; Urde, 1994). It is fundamental for an SME, to prevail brand barriers, to examine what precisely is the role of the brand barriers. Wong and Merrilees (2005) explained SMEs have inadequate resources for building and developing their brands.

Brand Marketing Performance is a measure of how profitable a brand is. Brand awareness, reputation and loyalty are all significant and essential factors in measuring the performance of the brand (Chaudhuri *et al.*, 2001). Brand marketing performance is a measure based on its financial value or on its equity (Aaker and David, 1996), or through the brand report card or by the brand building (De Chernatony, 2001). Ghodeswar (2008) argues brand identity is a unique set of brand associations implying a promise to customers and includes a core and extended identity. Core identity is the central, timeless essence of the brand that remains constant as the brand moves to new markets and new products and broadly focuses on product attributes, service, user profile, store ambience and product performance. Extended identity is woven around brand identity elements organized into cohesive and meaningful groups that provide brand texture and completeness, and focuses on brand personality, relationship, and strong symbol association'. An SME would have to create a coherent, comprehensible and dependable brand identity by associating brand attributes conveyed which, without any difficulty be understood by consumers.

Anarnkaporn (2007) argues branding is an important competitive tool available to SMEs. This is true because branding provides the differentiation between the competitive offerings and is one of the critical success factors for companies (Mowle & Merrilees, 2005). Grant (2000), Ratnatunga & Ewing (2009) also believe brands add value and distinguish companies from their competitors. However, branding is a new concept for owners-managers in SMEs (Inskip, 2004). SMEs have many limitations and implementing conventional marketing practices becomes challenging (Uusitalo, Wendelin, & Mahlamäki, 2010). Limited resources can be finance (Ohnemus, 2009), time and knowledge of marketing; lack of specialist expertise as the owner-manager tend to be generalists rather than specialists with limited impact in the marketplace (Gilmore *et al.*, 2001). Given these limitations and challenges, many SMEs often ponder whether it is worth spending large amount of money, time, and energy in their marketing practices, adopting a strategic marketing approach (Noble, Sinha, & Kumar, 2002) and going through the branding exercise.

Branding and brand management are well-researched topics. Textbooks, research articles by academic researchers and marketing practioners across the world discuss and debate on this topic. However, research in this area is limited to large corporations. Research on branding and brand management in particular to SMEs is limited to a certain extent and this paper is one such attempt. This manuscript aims to study and understand: How brand is managed across SMEs in UAE? (2) What is the owner-managers attitude towards brand building? and (3) what are the barriers if any, for building a strong brand?

METHODOLOGY

Both qualitative and quantitative data is used for this study. The data was gathered using survey questionnaires and by conducting personal interviews with owners-managers of SMEs. The questionnaire is drawn from the theoretical information provided from the literature review and the objectives of the research. The questionnaire was pilot tested to ten respondents and changes suggested by the respondents are incorporated. The questionnaire is divided into seven sections:

Section 1: Questions 1, 2, and 3 intended to collect information about the owner's knowledge on brand management and understanding whether brand management is incorporated in the day-to-day activities of the company. Section 2: Questions 4 to 8 designed to understand fully the strategy the SME uses to create, develop and protect the brand identity. Section 3: comprises of questions from 9 to 14 are designed to identify if SMEs invested towards building brand distinctiveness to attract the target market. Section 4: Questions 15 to 20 measure the profitability of a brand in the SME. Section 5: (Questions 21

to 24) to understand the investment made by SMEs towards building a stronger brand. Section 6: Question 25 seeks to gain information from the SME manager's interpretation of what could be a barrier to build strong brands. Section 7: Question 26 understands the owners-managers attitude toward the importance of incorporating a branding strategy.

A simple random sampling method is used for this research. A list of SMEs was obtained from The Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI). The researchers contacted the owner-manager of the SMEs during September-December 2011, introduced the research, and asked their permission to participate. Once the owner-manager agreed to take part in the research, the questionnaire was mailed in January and February of 2012. In total, 120 questionnaires were mailed with a request to return the completed questionnaire by April of 2012 to the researchers. There were a total of 62 returned completed questionnaires. These 62 SMEs were approached with a request for a personal interview with either the owner or manager. Because of scarcity of time and resources, four respondents interviewed on a first-come-first serve basis. The details of the interviewed sample respondents are as follows:

Lighting Fixtures Industry - Interviewee 1 is the Sales Manager of a SME distributing designer lighting fixtures. The company is two years old. Food Chain Industry - Interviewee 2 is the General Manager of an SME that is a part of the food chain industry. The company had exclusivity to franchise a Canadian café within the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region. Steel Industry - Interviewee 3 is the Divisions Manager of a five-year-old SME in the steel industry. Entertainment Industry - Interviewee 4 is Marketing Manager of a SME that is a distributing company for media players and recorders.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The participants were interviewed and asked about the relevance of branding and brand management. The respondents were asked to rate the significance of incorporating branding strategies in their SME, using a Likert type scale with one being insignificant and five being most significant. Eighty three percent of the sample respondents think branding is important for the success of any business. All interviewees agreed that brand management and branding are vital for the survival of SME and it helps in launching and stabilizing the business, and to eventually grow the business.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The interviewees were asked questions revolving around topics essential in developing stronger brands and the attitude of owners towards the role and relevance of branding in SMEs. To build a strong brand the SME should have enough resources. Therefore, the interviewees were asked about the resources and their limitations. Respondents stated they included the strategy of building stronger brands in their corporate strategy, but each expressed their views of doing it differently. The respondents agreed financial limitations restricted them from investing towards building a strong brand. Interviewee 1 stated since SMEs are small it is hard to get financial aid from banks. He also mentions the company was a family business and the owner has complete control over decision-making. There were limitations to staff with expertise and professionalism. Interviewee 1 responded they were looking into building stronger brands by targeting high-end clientele and supplying quality products. Interviewee 2 agrees availability of cash is always a constraint to SMEs, making it hard to aggressively market and brand their products. Increased competition is another limiting reason. According to Murray (1981), when handling SME marketing, the main concern is the market positioning of the SME within the competitive environment. The existing competitors have found good locations, established loyal customers, created awareness and employed aggressive marketing strategies. Building stronger brands incorporated in the company's corporate strategy by buying new brands (stronger brands) and adjusting existing brands (diversifying the product lines).

Interviewee 3 stated they were not financially sound enough to invest towards aggressive marketing. The limit is the industry itself. The SME is the steel rolling company and there is low differentiation within the industry. The steel industry is an open market, which makes it difficult to brand their products. Brand distinctiveness is an important strategy a firm uses for its future growth and direction. Brand distinctiveness is also important in clarifying the direction about the role of the brand in the firm with an aim to achieving long-term strategic and financial growth. Interviewee 4 expressed the owner of the company is not aware of the benefits of brand management. Since the company had started, they have not invested towards launching any of their products. They advised the owner to advertise through radio stations, magazines, sponsorships of music/dance performances and barter but their suggestions faced complete rejections. Further, the employees were unprofessional and do not have necessary experience to market the brands the company carries. This confers to the opinion of Grant *et al* (2001), who states the core of the SME marketing is the continuous improvement of the owners expertise gained from carrying out the business and as a result, the marketing characteristics of the SME are consequential to both the knowledge of the owner and the company's characteristics (Carson and McCartan-Quinn, 1995).

Brand orientation is one of the good strategies that can establish competitive advantage for an SME. It constitutes customer orientation, competitor orientation and inter-functional coordination. Thus, the questions posed to the interviewees revolved around these topics to identify if SMEs had brand orientation. Interviewee 1 claimed because of a limited budget the company does not have the ability to invest towards identifying and understanding their target customers and the strengths and weaknesses of their competitors. To gain such information, the SME should hire an expensive specialized market research company. The owner of the SME in the past worked with many of the competing companies and has necessary knowledge of competition and the knowledge and information was used to the SME's advantage to gain customers.

Interviewee 2 said that their SME does many activities to increase their performance. The staff of the company periodically approach potential customers seeking their feedback on service and quality of the product, and propose changes to the SME's offerings. They also send ghost shoppers to all their cafes to collect the customers' perceptions and opinions. The interviewee expressed understanding their competitors' takes time and effort. The SME compares their service quality while continuously monitoring their own performance. All this information can create a competitive advantage. To create superior value, the interviewee explained they are renovating the outlet, reconsidering the seating plan to increase customer comfort, and by continuously updating and maintaining service and food quality.

Interviewee 3 mentioned personal meetings with their customers are used in identifying and understanding consumer needs. The reason for such actions is the steel industry in Dubai is small and there is no product differentiation. In the interviewee's words, 'there is no need to analyze the competitors' strengths or weaknesses as long as feedback is collected from clientele.' Such feedback is used to keep a proper inventory and to have awareness about market prices of their competitors. Interviewee 4 claimed it is not financially possible to conduct market research because of their limited financial resources. However, they had enough information about their existing customers from one-on-one interaction with them. Information is gathered from the market on pricing, product features, packaging, and accessories. This information is then analyzed to determine if a competitive advantage can be obtained. The SME provides extra value to the customers by installing free software and movies in their products and sometimes overlook the warranty due dates and provide the service free to their clients. This is in line with earlier findings a SME can compete aggressively by the continuous improvement of their products, which is dependent on precise market and customer information (O'Dwyer et al., 2009; Forrest, 1990; Low and MacMillan, 1988).

Brand distinctiveness plays a vital role in the branding strategy of an SME. It is what makes the product of the SME unique and desirable to the consumers. Interviewee 1 stated they distinguished their brands by

introducing new designer products and offering competitive prices. Interviewee 2 explained the atmosphere of the café; the quality of service and the food are the factors that distinguish them from competitors. Interviewee 3 mentioned because of their industry and its product (steel) differentiation was not viable. Interviewee 4 said they depend on displaying the strong features of their products as well as providing demonstrations to customers. Brand associations help brands in building a strong brand identity. Interviewee 1 stated knowing brand image is the customers' perception of the brand and its associations; they still did not achieve it as their company is a new start-up. Interviewee 2 stated by increasing the market share and diversifying they would gain a stronger brand image. Interviewee 3 mentioned because of competition they have not reached anywhere close to creating a brand image. Interviewee 4 stated a stronger brand image is achieved by building stronger customer relations.

Brand performance will measure the profitability and strategic performance of the brand. Interviewee 1 stated by providing quality service, high-end and prestigious products the name of the brand itself creates awareness. The company has not yet carried out any strategies to position their brand competitively because of their recent entry into the market. Interviewee 2 said location of the store, advertising in magazines and newspapers, reaching all the markets, networking, developing good relations with vendors, staff training, and quality control are used to position their brand competitively within the market. Their main strategy though consisted of reaching all target customers (such as Red Crescent, universities, retail stores and other public and private organizations in proximity to the café). Interviewee 3's company focused on quality and origin of product, plus performance and durability of the product. Interviewee 4 said their company competed aggressively by offering bundled packages with competitive pricing, as well as advertising in many of their retail stores. Their main activities to create brand awareness include networking, exhibitions, and distributing through powerful retailers.

Perceived quality is the consumer's judgment about the product's excellence. Interviewee 1 stated they influenced the consumer's choices by affecting perceived quality through supplying designer light fixture brands to their clients. Interviewee 2 stated it is vital to do so because quality portrays good service in their field of business. This is achieved by introducing a wide array of healthy food and services. Interviewee 3 mentioned most of their clients knew the product in their market; therefore, there is no need to instill their customers with a perceived quality which they should already be aware of. Interviewee 4 said it is achieved by providing magazines with their products to test and compare with the competitors' products. Then, printing an issue addressing their strongest features and recommendations. Narver and Slater (1990) argue market orientation consists of customer orientation; competitor orientation and inter-functional coordination. All in coordination with each other will help the SME create superior value for customers. During the early stage of planning a marketing strategy, gaining competitive advantage will rely significantly on the important role of brand orientation; whereby it will help in deciding whether a certain brand is to be used. Therefore, brand orientation is a strategy that can establish the SMEs competitive advantage, which results in a long-term, improved survival (Wong and Merrilees, 2005).

Quantitative Data Analysis

When the respondents were interviewed and asked about the relevance of 'branding' and 'brand management' it was clear they think it was an important strategy for the success of the business. The respondents were asked to rate the significance of incorporating branding strategies in their SME, 1 being insignificant and 5 being most significant. The probability standard normal distribution was used. Table 1 represents the frequency of the significance level selected, the mean (μ), variance (σ^2) and standard deviation (σ).

Table 1 : Measuring Mean, Standard Deviation & Variance

Level of Significance (x)	Frequency (F)	Relative Frequency F(x)	Mean (μ)= x f(x)	(x-μ)	(x-μ) ²	Variance (σ ²) = f(x)(x-μ) ²
1	3	0.048	0.048	-3.095	9.58	0.46
2	4	0.066	0.132	-2.095	4.39	0.29
3	6	0.097	0.291	-1.095	1.2	0.12
4	20	0.321	1.284	-0.095	0.09	0.003
5	29	0.468	2.34	0.95	0.902	0.422
Total = 62			μ= 4.095			σ ² = 1.295

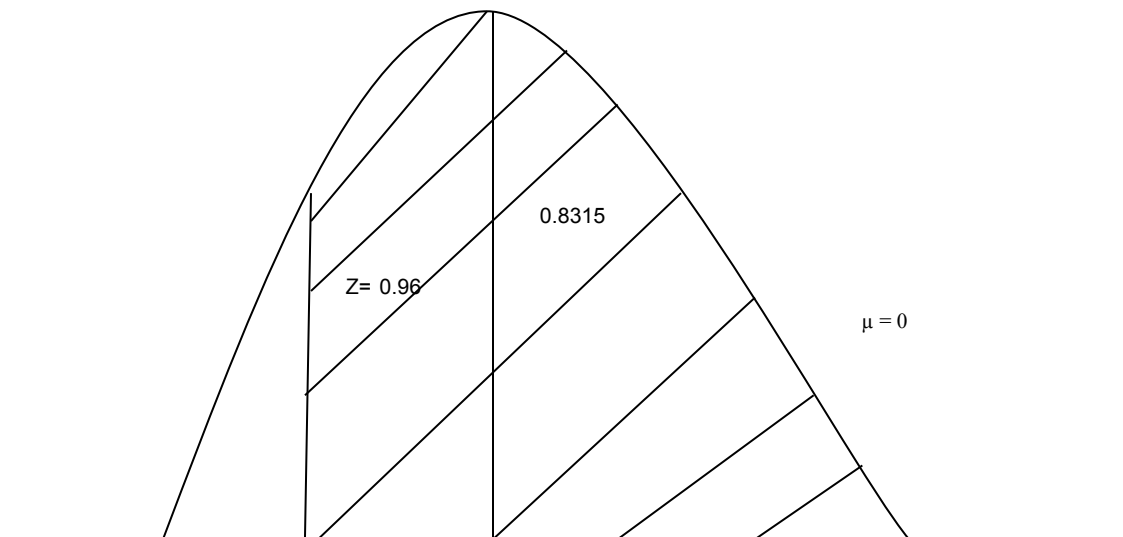
This table shows descriptive statistics.

Standard deviation (σ) = $\sqrt{\sigma^2} = 1.14$; $\bar{x} = (1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5) / 5 = 3$. In summary the sample size is 62, as per the central limit theorem, it can be estimated to probability standard normal distribution whereby the mean is 4 and standard deviation of 1.14. The standard deviation would assist in finding how densely connected the replies are to the mean or if they are highly dispersed. The next step is to examine the possibility of the confidence level for the significance level.

$$P(Z \geq \bar{x} - \mu/\sigma) = P(Z \geq 3 - 4.1/1.14) = P(Z \leq 0.96) = \Phi(0.96) = 0.8315.$$

This shows the area under the curve whereby $Z = 0.96$ from the standard normal distribution table is 0.8315. The shaded area represents the percentage of candidates that voted high significance for implementation of branding.

Figure 1 : Standard Normal Distribution Graph



This figure shows the standard normal distribution.

The area under the graph equals one and the value of 0.831, which implies that 83.1 percent of the respondents believe the incorporation of branding in SMEs is significant. This suggests the issues revolve mainly on how SMEs apply the branding strategies and handle the barriers limiting most of the SMEs aim at building stronger brands and achieving success.

Brand Barriers

Out of 62 respondents, 32 percent incorporate brand management in their marketing activities and 68 percent do not. This indicates that a majority of respondents do not have knowledge about branding and brand management. Many barriers can limit the SME from creating a brand. When asked why they did not incorporate brand management in their company activities, their responses include the following. Over dependence on the owner (23%) is the most popular barrier. This is followed by scarcity of financial resources (19%); lack of experienced staff (limitations of human resources) (15%); lack of experience in creating awareness among the customers about their product or service (13 %); shortage of organizational systems and control procedures (11%); inadequate marketing strategies (10%); and lack of technological skills (9%). The respondents when asked if their owners had enough knowledge about branding and brand management. Twenty-four percent of respondents stated they have enough knowledge. On the other hand, 53 percent respondents mentioned they lacked the knowledge and 23 percent noted they had partial knowledge.

Brand Orientation

Market Research is an important ingredient of branding. A question is asked whether their SME carries out market research about their customers. Only 39 percent carry out market research to foresee the opportunities of gaining new prospective customers and information about existing customers and 61 percent of the SMEs do not invest towards market research. When asked whether the SME conducts market research about their competitors, 73 percent said they have invested towards collecting competitor information; while, 27 percent admitted not being fully committed to collecting competitive information. From this, it is clear the participating SMEs spend time and effort towards conducting marketing research identifying the strengths and weaknesses of their competitors. When asked whether their SME allocates enough resources towards adding superior value to their customers, 53 percent said they invested resources towards adding value to their customers. Thirty-four percent of respondents did not invest their resources and 13 percent said they did add value, but not consistently.

Brand Distinctiveness

When asked whether the SMEs product has any unique and special features, 66 percent stated they do have products with special features. Only 11 percent stated they did not have special features and 23 percent stated it depended on the product. A question whether SMEs display and present their product's unique features in their marketing efforts was asked. Sixty-six percent of the respondents actively implement strategies identifying the product's unique features. Eleven percent does not put in any effort, 23 percent respondents admitted to display their features depending on their customer needs and market needs on a case-to-case basis.

Does the product and service associate with the ownership and represent, a symbol of their SME was asked. Eighty-nine percent stated their product did not represent a symbol of ownership while 11 percent responded otherwise. On understanding the respondents' strategy to create brand distinctiveness, it is noted 55 percent of respondents incorporate brand distinctiveness as a strategy and 45 percent of respondents do not implement it.

Brand Marketing Performance

When asked about the consumer's ability to recall the respondents brand and the popularity of the brand, 47 percent stated their customers recalled their product because of recognition. Twenty-six percent said it was because of recollection, 16 percent said their brand was top of mind recall and 11 percent stated their brand is the only brand that came to the consumers mind. The respondents are asked to choose -

identification, innovation, information and interaction - that best explained their marketing strategies. Innovation (incremental adjustments to existing products) was 39 percent; identification (of target markets) was 18 percent; interaction (ability to stay in touch with customers) was 23 percent; and information (informal information gathering for example, external market) 20 percent. When asked whether networking is used as a marketing tool, 68 percent admitted to using networking to market their products, 21 percent of the respondents stated they sometimes use networking but it is not a main tool and 11 percent did not use networking as a tool.

The respondent SMEs were asked to select the most popular marketing tool currently used to promote their products. Fourteen percent focused on customer relations; 16 percent on sales to promote their products; 6 percent implemented market research to seek available opportunities and mitigate threats in the marketplace. Ten percent focused on training their salespeople; 13 percent worked towards gaining good dealer relations; 11 percent worked towards providing good products and services; 6 percent participants focused on the packaging as a unique selling proposition; 6 percent promote their products through advertising; 10 percent adjust their prices to gain more customers; and 8 percent implement quality control. Seventy-three percent of respondents did not invest towards building stronger brands, while 27 percent do invest. Eighty-nine percent of respondents review their performances regularly, while 11 percent admitted that they do not. Forty-seven percent of respondents believe that building strong brands in SME is significant, and others believe it is of least significance.

CONCLUSIONS

It is evident from the findings of the study there exist many barriers limiting the owner-manager of the SME from investing towards building stronger brands. Scarcity of finances is a significant barrier, which prevents the SME from aggressively competing in the fast changing and competitive Dubai market. Unlike larger firms, SMEs do not have the ability to obtain enough financial support from banks to compete. Further, the interviews conducted reveal most of the owner-managers have limited knowledge on what brand management is and the importance of branding. The managers/owners admitted their strategy is to focus on networking, sales and dealer relations to build stronger brands. Market research is important in gaining information about the market, customers and competitors. There should be a change in the mind-set of the owners-managers of the SME about importance of branding and its right positioning in the minds of the consumers. Wyncarczyk (1993) explained SMEs are susceptible to the changing environments because of lack of market control and positioning, besides, their reliance on few customers.

Many of the SME owners-managers presume in order to build stronger brands, large investments are necessary; however, it is all about how the SME implements strategies to build and develop stronger brands. Obviously, SMEs in Dubai, UAE need to invest towards market research to understand and know their competitors' strategies, in particular, their strengths and weaknesses. It is not necessary the SME employ large research agencies to perform the study, on the contrary, by employing a qualified market researcher (internally) for the company to conduct the market research is necessary. The values, beliefs and assumptions of the firm are barriers of market orientation (Messikomer, 1987). It is essential and important to gain the full support and commitment of the members of the company to earn higher levels of market orientation (Harris, 1996). These theories speculated knowledge, internal resource limits, external factors, belief and dedication are the major sources of barriers of an adaptation of a business approach. The SME can implement many strategies with minimal investment, such as the owner could focus on one brand, which gains competitive advantage, highlight and focus on one or two unique and distinguished features and relate them to the brand. The company should employ well-informed and skilled personnel who would be responsible for brand management tasks and the owner could always associate their brand with a stronger brand (co-branding). For an SME to be able to reposition their brand in the market it is essential to implement the four main strategies: work towards providing unique and

distinctive characteristics, experiences and image; guiding the company towards brand management; identifying the superior performance of the products; besides, distinguishing the barriers that may limit the branding efforts. These factors proved effective in the form of increased sales and revenues. This in turn may work toward building a stronger image for the brand in the market.

Three factors influence branding in an SME. First, the influence of the owner on the SME should be better, clearer and more direct than in a larger company as brand needs to have a direct relationship with the owner. Second, the market plays a fundamental role in affecting brand management in an SME and the third is the number of competitors the SME has (Krake, 2005). To develop a successful brand, the owner's attitude and vision should be clear and direct. In addition, the manager should understand and internalize there is a direct link between the brand and the owner. The results of the study suggest SMEs do benefit from branding however, SMEs are more careful about the activity given their limitations. However, SMEs do marketing and branding activities given their resources by being innovative, using affordable means of communication, and focusing on the right segments (Vidic & Vadnjaj, 2013).

Study makes a significant contribution in understanding branding in SMEs in Dubai. This study clarifies the existing attitudes, opinions of the owner-managers of SMEs towards branding. It also explains how the SMEs do the branding activity and the implications of the same in their competitive position. This will contribute towards designing successful marketing and branding programs for owner-managers of SMEs. This study is limited only to selected industries and further research should be conducted across the spectrum of SMEs to better understand the implications and to narrow down the factors that are crucial for the successful implementation of branding strategies by SMEs.

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