



Corporate association as antecedents of consumer behaviors: The dynamics of trust within and between industries

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to clarify the effects of consumers' corporate association (commercial expertise association and social responsibility association) on consumer citizenship behavior. In addition, the study examines the moderating effects of consumer trust and industry type on consumers' perceptions of corporate association. The sample consisted of 633 consumers in South Korea. The results showed that the consumers' perceptions of corporate association had a significant and positive effect on consumer citizenship behavior. In particular, commercial expertise association had a greater effect than social responsibility association. In addition, the moderating effects of consumer trust and industry type in the causal relationship between corporate association and consumer citizenship behavior were verified. The results revealed no moderating effect on the path between social responsibility association and consumer citizenship behavior. However, according to consumer trust and industry type, a significant moderating effect was found on the relationship between commercial expertise association and consumer citizenship behavior.

1. Introduction

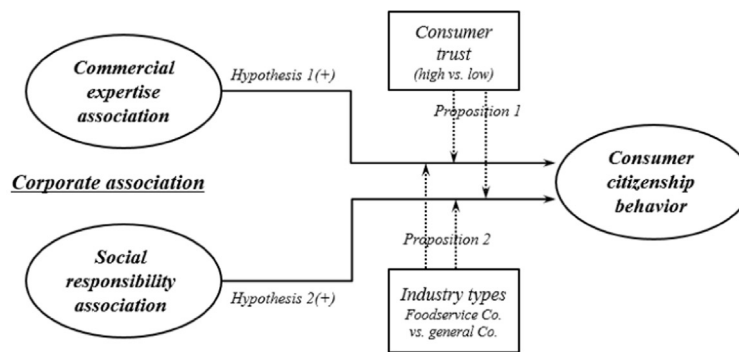
Corporate association refers to beliefs, attitudes, and emotions of a company obtained through direct or indirect experiences (Madrigal, 2000). Association with a particular company in the memory of a consumer plays an important role in shaping corporate image and perception. Today when the competition between companies has become fierce and the differentiation between products is gradually decreasing, the ways in which consumers associate with companies cannot be ignored. In particular, consumers evaluate products and make purchase decisions with limited access to the relevant information and knowledge (Kardes et al., 2004). If this information is insufficient, they evaluate products through the corporate association with relevant companies in order to reduce the risk of selection (Ozanne et al., 1992). Therefore, companies use various marketing strategies to evoke corporate association, thereby utilizing it as a strategic asset that cannot be easily imitated (Gupta, 2002; Walsh and Bartikowski, 2013). Consequently, controversy about the effects of corporate association on product evaluation can provide managers with strategies to implement the most important associations. Such controversies can lead consumers to associate relevant companies with their professional capabilities, which reinforce their social responsibility (Pina et al., 2006). Most previous studies on corporate association have examined only the effects of

corporate association on product evaluation (Berens et al., 2005; Gurhan-Canli and Batra, 2004), satisfaction (Walsh and Bartikowski, 2013), and purchase intention (David et al., 2005; Kim et al., 2017) as outcome variables. Also, no study has investigated the differences in associations according to the type of company. In addition, the extant research has presented only the result that corporate responsibility activities centered on social responsibility activities increased both consumer satisfaction (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; McDonald and Rundle-Thiele, 2007) and company's performance (Lee and Park, 2009).

In particular, unlike general companies, foodservice industries have the distinct characteristic that the goods they sell to consumers are food items. Corporate association is therefore considered to play a very important role in consumers' judgment regarding whether to use the relevant companies' services. Moreover, consumers may greatly affect service quality through their interactions with companies (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2000). Consumers of foodservice industries are significant human resource that can be regarded as employees partially, while voluntary and implicit consumer citizenship behaviors are highly important concept similar to extra-role behaviors of employees, as a significant consumer role at service encounter (Bendapudi and Leone, 2003; Gruen, 1995). Therefore, this study utilizes the variable of consumer citizenship behavior to determine whether it is affected by

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Hypothesis 3: Commercial expertise association has a greater effect on consumer citizenship behavior than Social responsibility association

Fig. 1. Research model.

corporate association (Yi et al., 2013). Because the consumer's active role in the process of services reduces companies' additional costs and improves service quality, consumer citizenship behavior has heightened significance as a form of competitive advantage (Groth, 2005).

Therefore, in the present study, general companies are selected as comparison targets for foodservice industries, and the corporate association perceived by consumers is divided into commercial expertise association (CEA), which is related to essential management ability and production capacity, and social responsibility association (SRA), which is related to company behavior in response to social issues. Commercial expertise association and social responsibility association were examined separately to determine whether they resulted in different consumer citizenship behaviors, proving basic data for corporate marketing strategies that could improve corporate association of consumers and increase consumer citizenship behaviors. Furthermore, the study aimed to clarify the moderating effects of corporate association and consumer citizenship behavior according to consumer trust and types of companies. Through such research results, we intended to provide realistic suggestive points by seeking for policy responses to the current issue of corporate association perceived by consumers.

2. Literature review and conceptual model

2.1. Corporate association, consumer citizenship behavior, and trust

Corporate association (Brown and Dacin, 1997; Walsh and Bartikowski, 2013) refers to all the information that a consumer possesses about a company; thus, it is a broad global concept that can encompass all the structures that have traditionally addressed corporate images (Brown, 1998). Brown and Dacin (1997) divided corporate association into corporate ability (corporate capability of producing and distributing products and services) and corporate social responsibility (consumer's images about social characteristics of the relevant company). Brown (1998) classified corporate association into six sub-dimensions, including corporate abilities, marketing association, product considerations, interaction with exchange partners, interaction with employees, and social responsibility. In this study, we divided corporate association into two sub-dimensions—commercial expertise association and social responsibility association, based on Perez et al. (2013). *Commercial expertise association* is defined as the perception of expertise and the capability to provide the products or services produced by a certain company. As related to innovation, this association indicates intrinsic capacity of a company linked to its research & development capability and production capacity of high-quality products (Keller, 2003) and is similar to the ability association presented by Brown and

Dacin (1997). *Social responsibility association* is defined as the perception of a company's characteristics related to social problems or issues (Berens et al., 2005), indicating what consumers perceive of charitable work, community participation, and environment-friendly management of a company (Perez et al., 2013).

Consumer citizenship behavior is exhibited through voluntary and discretionary actions by individual consumers, which are directly expected but may aggregate into higher service quality and promote the effective functioning of service firms (Fowler, 2013). Consumer citizenship behavior (Gruen, 1995, p. 461) refers to helpful, constructive gestures exhibited by consumers that are valued or appreciated by the firm but are not related directly to enforceable or explicit requirements of the consumer's role. Consumer citizenship behavior is expected to be more strongly predicted by consumer satisfaction and socialization (Groth, 2005), which can create a competitive advantage (Yi et al., 2013). The impact of consumer citizenship behavior on effective organizational performance has been studied by many researchers (Balaji, 2014; Bove et al., 2009; Gouthier and Schmid, 2003; Groth, 2005; Singh, 2000).

Trust refers to a psychological state that involves the intention to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations of the intentions or behaviors of another (Rousseau et al., 1998, p. 395). Trust reflects a firm's confidence and positive expectations about the service provider (Gounaris, 2005), and it is an important element of the perceived quality of the service (Turnbull and Moustakatos, 1996). In addition, the presence of trust means that consumers may have favorable attitudes toward a certain company in a highly risky situation (Elliott and Yannopoulou, 2007)

2.2. Conceptual framework

We set up a conceptual framework consisting of three hypotheses and two proposals, based on previous research. Commercial expertise association and social responsibility association are differentiated as types of corporate association in order to verify the effects of each association on consumer citizenship behavior. Hypotheses 1 through 3 are thus established. Regarding causal relationships between corporate association and consumer citizenship behavior, Propositions 1 and 2 concern the moderating effects on consumer trust and the types of companies. Previous studies that are relevant to this investigation are reviewed in the following sub-sections (See Fig. 1).

2.3. Corporate association and consumer citizenship behavior

In a study of the relationship between commercial expertise association and consumer behavior, Kia (2014) found that corporate ability

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