

**AN ASSESSMENT OF HOW BRANDING INFLUENCES THE
PURCHASE BEHAVIOUR OF FEMALE COSMETIC
CONSUMERS: A CASE OF CAREER WOMEN IN
THE WA MUNICIPALITY, GHANA**

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Abstract

The survival and growth of any organisation largely depends on the extent to which its brands dominate others in the industry and are accepted in the exercise of customers' purchasing power. The cosmetics market is one major area branding plays a major role in the success of products and for that matter 200 career women in the Wa Municipality were purposively sampled after randomly choosing the municipality. Questionnaires were personally administered on the career women and in that sense, survey method of collecting primary data was employed. In spite of the important role branding plays in differentiating and identifying organisations' products, nothing has yet being established as how branding influences the buying behaviour of female cosmetic consumers; especially, career women. It was found that perceived quality of cosmetic products greatly sways consumers buying decision than any brand equity dimension. Brand performance and cost are the major attributes that easily persuade career women's choice. It was also revealed that country of origin as brand associate is very effective in promoting a cosmetic brand among career women. The researchers among others recommended that future researcher should try to establish the scientific relationship between Corporate Social Responsibility and brand resonance.

Keywords: Branding, Cosmetics, Ghana, Purchasing behaviour, Career women

INTRODUCTION

In today's crowded market of cosmetic products, companies try to find better and innovative ways to create and sustain their competitive advantage, which helps them to better manage the commercial key success factors of their market (Trinquecoste, 1999). They continually look for up-to-the-minute means of exploiting their brands' capital to be managed with appropriate marketing tools and strategies. As mentioned by Palmer, Cockton and Cooper (2007), branding increased the value to a product as it often has more potential to differentiate one offer from another than the core and expected functional benefits sought by customers. What it means is that branding is one of the most effective ways of standing tall by way of differentiating and identifying your products in a cluttered industry or market.

The American Marketing Association (AMA) defines a brand as a "name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of them intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of other sellers. Therefore it makes sense to understand that branding is not about getting your target market to choose yours over the competition, but it is about getting your prospects to see you as the only one that provides a solution to their problem. Consumers view a brand as an important part of a product that can add value to a product, as a guarantee weapon to be sure of finding the same quality no matter where or when you buy the product and practically also save time and energy through identical repurchasing a loyalty. The brand name communicates great deal, greatly affecting brand awareness and brand image. According to Blois(2000),due to variation in consumers' needs in buying, behaviors may necessary to change element of the mix in order to ensure that the brand continues to be updated in terms of what it delivers to the consumer and how it is presented to the consumer. Palmer, Cockton and Cooper (2007) rightly intimated that product/ service brand development therefore needs to define brand quality while still on the drawing board.

Statement of Research Problem

Due to keen competition and similarity of functions and sizes of products in the cosmetic market, consumers face problems in choosing the product they want. This has pushed producers to adopt appropriate branding measures in order to differentiate and identify their products from competitors'. The study therefore intends to explore the practical influence of branding on the buying behavior of consumers of cosmetic products among the female gender with career women in the Wa Municipality in focus.

Research Objectives

- ❖ To ascertain the aspects of cosmetic brands that plays a major role in purchase decision making process.
- ❖ To establish which brand associate greatly influences the buying behavior of consumers of cosmetics products.

Research Questions

This study will be undertaken by the following research question;

- ❖ What are the specific features consumers take into consideration before purchasing a particular cosmetic brand?
- ❖ Which brand element is most effective in influencing the decision of consumers of cosmetic products?

Significance of the Research

The study will be of importance to various stakeholders in diverse ways. For manufacturers of cosmetic product, the research findings will enable them ascertain the extent, resources and attention that branding deserves their operation. Also, dealers in cosmetic goods will better opt for brands that possess the desired features to drive demand and to the consumers, the responses can serve as basis for manufacturers to concentrate on producing exactly how they (the consumers) want their cosmetic products to be and by so doing, enhancing their level of satisfaction which will lead to customer loyalty and retention.

Scope and limitation of the Study

The coverage of the research was looked at in terms of geography and context. For that matter it was limited to the career women in the Wa Municipality of Ghana. Contextually, the research does not go beyond branding. As the findings of the study was limited to the female gender and further narrowed to only reflect the views of career women in the Wa Municipality, it implies that the findings cannot represent the views of all women who use cosmetics.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview and definition of branding

A brand is define as a distinguishing name and/or symbol (such as logo, trademark, or package design) intended to identify the goods or services of either one seller or a group of sellers, and to differentiate those goods or services from those of competitors. A brand thus signals to the

customer the source of the product, and protects both the customer and the producer from competitors who would attempt to provide products that appear to be identical (Aaker, 1991). Branding thus, provide the basis upon which consumers can identify and bond with a product or service or a group of products or services (Weillbacher, 1995). Branding from the customer's point of view is defined as the total accumulation of all his/her experiences, and is built at all points of contact with the customer (Kapferer, 2004). A successful brand is an identifiable product, service, person or place, augmented in such a way that the buyer or user perceives relevant, unique added values which match their needs most closely (Chernatony and McDonald, 1998).

Keller (2003a) posits that consumer brand-knowledge can be defined in terms of the personal meaning about a brand stored in consumer memory, that is, all descriptive and evaluative brand-related information. Different sources and levels of knowledge such as awareness, attributes, benefits, images, thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and experiences get linked to a brand and its understanding by the consumer. The brand, in a sense, acts as a credible guarantee for that product or service, allowing the consumer clearly to identify and specify products which genuinely offer added value (Murphy, 1998). Powerful brands provide long-term security and growth, higher sustainable profits, and increased asset value to both producers and customers because they achieve competitive differentiation, premium prices, higher sales volumes, economies of scale and reduced costs, and greater security of demand (Temporal, 2000). The Brand "promise" is the essence of the benefits (both functional and emotional) that customers can expect to receive from experiencing a brand's products/services, which reflects the heart, soul, and spirit of the brand as stated by (Knapp, 2000).

An important factor influencing the selection of a brand concept is consumer needs. According to Park et al. (1986), many brands offer a mixture of symbolic, functional, and experiential benefits to the customer. Functional needs are defined as those that motivate the search for products that solve consumption related problems (e.g. solve a current problem, resolve conflict, and restructure a frustrating situation). A brand with a functional concept is defined as one designed to solve externally generated consumption needs. Symbolic needs are defined as desires for products that fulfill internally generated needs for self-enhancement, role position, group membership, or ego identification. A brand with a symbolic concept is one designed to associate the individual with a desired group, role, or self-image. Experiential needs are defined as desires for products that provide sensory pleasure, variety, and/or cognitive stimulation. A brand with an experiential concept is designed to fulfill these internally generated needs for stimulation and/or variety. A brand essence that is based on emotional and self

expressive benefits provides a higher-order basis for relationships which can be less vulnerable to product-related changes or easily applied to new contexts (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000).

Determinants of Brand loyalty

There a number of factors that influence brand loyalty some of which include perceived value, trust, satisfaction and price as determinants of brand loyalty.

Perceived customer value: Perceived customer value is defined as a consumer's perception of the net benefits gained in exchange for the costs incurred in obtaining the desired benefits. A customer perceived value is the pivot in relationship marketing and customer loyalty. Researchers often argue that perceived value is more complex and difficult to measure.

Utilitarian value which is integral part customer perceived value is defined as an overall measurement of functional benefits products and sacrifices made by the customer in obtaining the product (Overby & Lee, 2006). Utilitarian value involves more cognitive aspects of attitude, such as value for the money and judgments of convenience and time savings. The issue of time saving is another important shopping value for time pressured consumers. Meaning, the utilitarian value can be perceived by various modes from price saving, a quality product or service, time savings, convenience, and an assortment of merchandise selection. Hedonic value defined as an overall judgment of experiential benefits and sacrifices, such as entertainment and escapism is also an important determinant of brand loyalty (Overby & Lee, 2006). Hedonic value reflects worth or fun found in the shopping experience itself, while utilitarian value reflects task-related worth. Hedonic value can be obtained from the entertainment, the visual appeal, and the interactivity involved.

Trust: Trust implies the consumers' beliefs relating to products, brand, services, or salespeople, and the establishment where the products or services are bought and sold Belanger, Hiller, & Smith (2002). Several authors regard trust as a central construct to the development of successful service relationships in business to business markets and for the achievement of customer loyalty. Parasuraman et al. (1985) introduced trust as a critical success factor in successful service relationships. According to Parasuraman et al. (1985) customers need to feel safe in dealings with suppliers and need to be assured that their interaction is confidential in that they are able to trust their suppliers. The idea of relationship marketing is built on the premise of trust. In addition, trust is an important feature or aspect in the development of quality relationships built through a process of making and keeping promises where customers have assurances that the products they are buying is of good quality and in turn with repeat purchases they become loyal customers.

Empirically, there is evidence of direct effects of trust on customer loyalty to particular brand. Chaudhuri and Holbrook, (2001) demonstrated that trust plays an important role in the brand domain. They link (brand) trust to brand performance through brand loyalty. The view of brand trust as part of the brand domain recognizes that brand value can be created and developed through the management of some aspects of the brand that goes beyond consumer's satisfaction with the functional performance of the products and its attributes. Trust can offers an appropriate dimension of brand value. Brand trust has a direct effect on customer commitment and thus indirectly can affect the level of price tolerance.

Satisfaction: Kotler (1994,) argued that the key to customer retention is customer satisfaction. This view is also emphases by Aaker (1991) when he states that satisfaction is a key determinant to every level of brand loyalty. Satisfaction is often thought to affect the likelihood of repurchasing or reusing the service of a provider. According to Oliver (1997) there are three dimensions of satisfaction; cognitive, affective and cognitive, that culminates in action loyalty or repeat usage. There is a link between satisfaction and customer loyalty. Eriksson and Vaghult, (2000) posits that satisfied customers stay with and continue to buy from the firm. Their results showed that as satisfaction increases so does customer retention. Miniare and Engel (2006), stated that satisfaction occurs when consumer's expectations are matched by perceived performance. Whiles dissatisfaction occurs when experiences and performance fall short of consumer expectations. Satisfaction can lead to repeat purchase. Consumers possessing positive evaluations of a brand or product are much more likely to buy the brand or product again than those with negative evaluations.

Customer Satisfaction also increased word-of-mouth communication, which is important for brands image and reputation. Post-purchase evaluation not only affects consumers future buying behavior, but also influences other behaviors such as sharing consumption experiences, which known as word-of-mouth communication. Satisfied customers become loyal and dissatisfied customers end up switching to another seller Heskett et al. (1994).

Brand Price: Cadogan and Foster (2000) argued that price is probably the most important consideration for the average consumer. Consumers with high brand loyalty are willing to pay a premium price for their favored brand. The purchase intention of loyal customer is not easily affected by price.

Consumer's satisfaction is also influence by comparing price with perceived costs and values. If the perceived values of the product are greater than cost, it is observed that consumers will purchase that product. Loyal customers are willing to pay a premium even if the

price has increased because the perceived risk is very high and they prefer to pay a higher price to avoid the risk of any change (Yoon and Kim, 2000). A long-term relationship makes loyal customers more price tolerant, since loyalty discourages customers from making price comparison with other products by shopping around. Price has increasingly become a focal point in consumers' judgments of offer value as well as their overall assessment of the retailer (De Ruyter et al., 1999). Price communicates to the market the company's intended value positioning of its product or brand. Price consciousness is defined as finding the best value, buying at sale prices or the lowest price choice (Sproles and Kendall, 1986).

Brand Attributes

According to Peter and Olson (1996), there are major stimulants that influence consumer affection, cognition and behavior. These attributes may be evaluated by consumers in terms of their own value beliefs and past experience. This therefore means that the marketer should first study customers very well to know their exact beliefs and values and then brand their products to make customers' needs. The brand attributes has been outlined in the table from below by Boyd et al (1998).

Table 1: Categories of Brand Attributes

CATEGORY	SPECIFIC ATTRIBUTES
Cost attributes	Purchase price, operating costs, repairs cost of installations etc.
Performance attributes	Durability, quality of materials, safety efficiency and styling.
Social attributes	Reputation of brand status image, popularity with friends, popularity of family members and fashion etc.
Availability attribute	Carried by locals stores, credit terms, quality of service available from local dealer and delivery time

Source: Boyd et al (1998)

They went on to say that, consumers select the forms they perceive to be the best on those attributes most important to them. Their suggestions provide some insight to this study.

Brand Associations

According to Aaker (1991), brand associations are useful to marketers. Marketers use brand associations to differentiate, position, and extend brands, to create positive attitudes and feelings towards brands, and to suggest attributes or benefits of purchasing or using a specific

brand. However, brand associations are of more use to the customer than the marketers. The way a brand association creates value to the customer will depend on the customer's perceptions of value. For each individual, reality is a totality of personal phenomenon, based on the person's needs, wants, and personal experiences.

Aaker (1991) further stress that associations, represent the bases for purchase decisions and for brand loyalty. There are a host of possible associations and a variety of ways they can provide value. Keller (1998) considers brand associations as consisting of brand image, brand knowledge and brand awareness. He further says that brand associations include perceptions of brand quality and attitude toward the brand, these construct can be labeled as product attributes according to Kotler and Armstrong (1996). Aaker (1991), clearly says that the concepts relate to distinct categories of brand associations each signifying a different aspect of the brand. He argues that a brand manager will be primarily interested in those associations that directly or indirectly affect buying behaviour and whether they are strong and shared by many or weak and difficult from person to person.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A survey design involving both qualitative and quantitative research methodology was employed in the study. The target population of the study is constituted by all career women in the Wa Municipality in the upper west region of Ghana. The total population is estimated to be 2000 and the researchers assumed that all of them in one way or the other use cosmetics. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 200 career women in the Wa Municipality who are users of cosmetic products for the study.

Questionnaires with a total of eighteen (18) questions were administered to the women. These questions were made of ten (10) closed-ended and eight open-ended questions as the nominal scaling approach was employed by the researchers. Each woman was interviewed and asked to fill the questionnaire. The researchers personally administered the questionnaire and conducted the interviews as well. With respect to the secondary data, relevant literature on branding and cosmetic products from books and articles in journal were reviewed.

ANALYSIS

The study with the aid of a questionnaire dug into the "black box" of consumers of cosmetic products on a cross-section of the relevant areas of branding and how branding can drive consumer buying decisions. Some of the areas considered are brand equity dimensions, brand attributes, brand associates and brand loyalty or addiction.

Brand equity dimensions as determinants of choice of brand

From figure 1 of the analysis, it can be observed that almost half (97 out 200=48%) of professional women in the Tamale Metropolis said they are strongly influenced by brand perceived quality in their choice of cosmetic brands. Also, 22(11%) out of 200 respondents sampled indicated that their ability to identify a brand determines their purchase decisions. Sandwiched between are 47(23%) and 35(17.5%) represent the effect of brand awareness and loyalty respectively on career women's choice of cosmetics in the Municipality. What these simply means is that brands perceived quality is the strongest brand equity dimension whereas brand identity these women has the least of influence in their choice of cosmetics. Brand awareness and loyalty also moderately influence them as figure 1 has indicated 23.5% and 17.5% respectively for their level influence.

Figure 1: Brand equity dimension that strongly influence choice of cosmetic brands



The study seeks to know from the career women who consume cosmetic products as to what feature or attribute they look for in deciding on which brand of cosmetics to procure. It was found as demonstrated in figure 2 that the dominant features career women in the Wa municipality seek are low cost and performance which had a tie of 30% each (60 out of 200=30%). Only three out of two hundred (3/200=1.5%) respondents consider symbols/logos of brands in buying them. The numbers that also sought cosmetic products with features that enhance social status were equally encouraging with a response rate of 15% (30 /200). People, places or things that cosmetic brands are associated with are also sought-for features by career

women in deciding which product to buy as shown in the figure that 10% (20/200) are in that category.

Figure 2: Attributes of Cosmetics that influence consumer purchase decision.

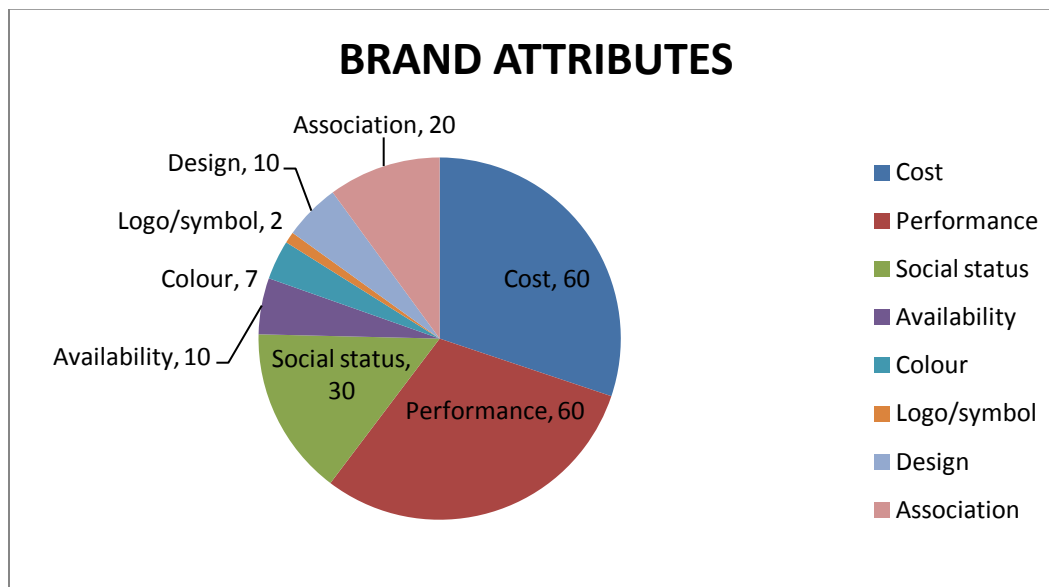


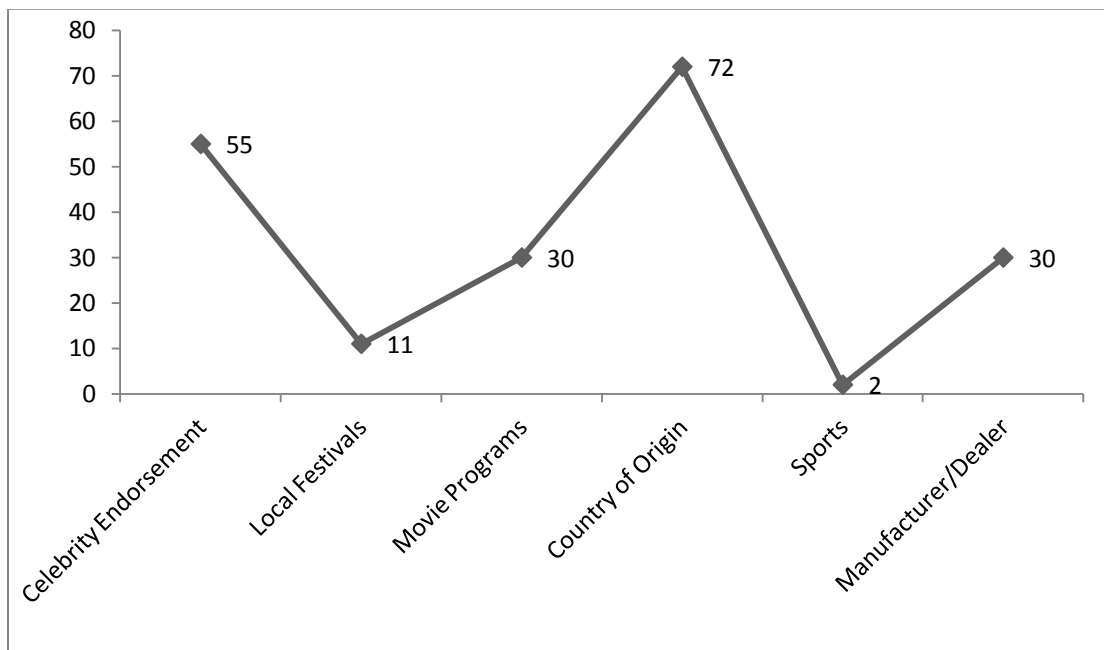
Figure 2 also portrays that brand Availability and Design has a role to play in decision of career women in the Wa Municipality consume cosmetics. This is in the sense that ten out of the two hundred (10/200) which represents 5% of the respondents interviewed said availability and design influence their options. According to the respondents colour of some cosmetic brands determines the scent of the products and for that matter 3.5% (7/200) of respondents said they consider colour as important feature in decision to buy.

Brand association strategies which influences choice of a Cosmetic brand

Perception is a complex concept in marketing generally and branding in particular as it has everything to do with the human mind. Therefore it is necessary for the study to be interested in knowing and bringing to the fore which brand association strategy moves career women in the case study area towards favouring a brand over another in the cosmetics market. Clearly from figure 3, the responses sharply indicates that associating a cosmetic product with its country of origin (72/200=36%) is most effective as a directly against associating it with a sporting event (2/200=1%) among career women in the Wa Municipality.

The career women who are consumer of cosmetic products in the study area made it clear in their responses that individual countries are known for varied cosmetic products so when the brand is associated with a country that already is known for it, fewer or no questions are asked.

Figure 3: Brand Association Strategy in Cosmetic Market



An appreciable of the respondents also expressed how moved they get into buying a cosmetic brand when it is linked to their local or international celebrity (Star). They (The career women) said they trust their individual celebrities and for that matter it can be seen from figure 3 that 27.5% (55/200) respondents said celebrities' endorsement communicates confidence and trust to consumers of cosmetics among career women. Still inferring from figure 3, female-driven movie programs and manufacture or dealer sources create brand awareness and identity; hence, 15% representing 30/200 indicated that associating a cosmetic brand with an interesting movie program on television or identifying it with a known credible manufacturer/dealer lead them in choosing a brand. Five percent and a half (5.5%) of the respondents also made it clear as it is indicated in line graph (figure 3) that they resonate well with cosmetic brands that are associated with their local festivals.

Purchase of Other Brands, when Preferred Brand is Unavailable

From the data gathered by the researchers from their fieldwork, 127 out of the 200 respondents sampled (63.5%) said they would not purchase any other brand when their preferred brand is readily unavailable whilst 60 respondents (30%) out of the same 200 respondents also made it clear that they would purchase other cosmetic brands when their brand cherished brand is

unavailable. This implies that, branding actually has an influence or effect on customer purchase behaviour. Lastly, 6.5% (13/200) responded that they did not know.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Inferring from the responses represented and interpreted above, the following conclusions can be made from the study: With respect to the brand-equity dimension that strongly determines the choice of a cosmetic brand by career women, perceived brand quality is the key determinant and brand identity has the lowest of value to consumers.

Regarding the dominant brand attributes that Career women in the Wa Municipality seek in their cosmetic buying decision making process

Cost-effective brands and high performing brands can also be considered as those attributes most cosmetic consumers look for in the choice of products. It was observed that whereas some are price sensitive, others seek nothing but brands that deliver high value. Symbols/logos are not considered as that significant as compared with other features of cosmetic brands.

The research also found that associating a brand of cosmetic product with its country of origin; especially if that particular country is globally known to be leaders in the production and sale of the brand is best way of promoting cosmetic brands among women. Country of origin according to the findings communicates brand reliability and expected quality. Associating a cosmetic product with a sporting activity is the worst strategy as a lot of the respondents (career women in Wa Municipality) said they did not have interest in sports. A good return can also be realised if in promoting a cosmetic brand to members of the area under study the marketer associates the brand with a credible dealer or manufacturer or a movie program that women are interested in.

Career women's level of loyalty to cosmetic brands that they use is found to emotional in nature

The respondents without hesitation described how emotionally attached they are to some brands of cosmetics. The study finds that some of respondents are always ready to put in extra effort to obtain their preferred brands.

CONCLUSION

The revealing nature of the responses obtained during the period of the study has informed the researchers' views on what need to be done by stakeholders involved. Manufacturers and retailers of cosmetic brands must begin to appreciate the exact taste and preferences of

consumers in all their processes. By so doing career women in particular need to be involved in determining the quality of the products they use. The views of a producer regarding the quality of a brand is not as important as the views those of the consumer or users of cosmetics. The right brand features from the consumer's need to be identified and embedded into the product.

Also, the findings of the research revealed that dealers of cosmetic products targeted at career women need to pay much attention to the places, people, and occasions they associate their brands with. This is because; brand associations speak image and credibility of the product. The brand associates should be chosen with certain critical success factors such as image, popularity, talent area, track records etc in mind.

To future researchers in area of branding, they deeply look into the relationship between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and brand resonance.

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