

A FOCUS GROUP STUDY ON THE INVESTIGATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PRODUCT INNOVATION AND BRAND PERCEPTION OF THE EMPLOYEES¹

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, companies want to be deeply involved in markets they entered, local firms are forced to compete with stronger international companies and face the threat of being forced out of the market. Thus, the impact of product innovation on brand perception is at the point of changing consumers' habits. The effects can also be seen in the staff of the company implementing the innovation. In this study, therefore, it is aimed to examine the opinions of the staff of the companies applying successful product innovation about the company and the brand perception of the company. In line with this main objective, the focus group discussion was held with the staff of a company that implemented Product Innovation in Istanbul province and data were collected. The research was conducted as an exploratory research. As a result of the study, product innovation was found to be positively reflected in company employees who successfully implemented innovation. In addition, this positive effect is reflected in the positive sense of the employees' brand perception, and it is reflected not only in this but also in the positive motivation of the employees.

Keywords: Product Innovation, Brand, Brand Perception, Motivation

1. THE BRAND AND THE BRAND PERCEPTION

The word "brand" is etymologically derived from the words in French "marque" and the German Word 'marc' (border / borderline). The words 'brand-branding' in Anglo-Saxon languages; has been used to describe the process of identification of farm animals by special labeling. When word meaning is taken into account; It was seen that the word 'brand' was marked to indicate where the first use of a particular product was made or by whom it was made. (Taskin & Akat 2012, p.4)

According to the definition of the American Marketing Association (AMA), a trademark is a "name, term, design, symbol, or other feature that identifies a merchant's product or service differently than other merchants". (<https://www.ama.org/resources/Pages/Dictionary.aspx?dLetter=B>).

According to Erdil and Uzun, various symbols are used to make products stand out, to make them different and to create a special identity in themselves. These symbols include name, logo, design, and the perception that the customer wants to create. While creating this identity, it must be focused on specific brand elements, because each consumer / customer would interpret the brand concept differently, therefore the elements to be brought forward when brand value is created must be positioned correctly. At this point, importance should be given to brand awareness, brand

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associations should be strengthened and a positive brand sense should be revealed. To be able to do this, the mark must be memorable, meaningful, likeable, transferable, adaptable and protectable. (Erdil & Uzun, 2009, p.24)

According to Keller; brand divides into two as, brand elements and criterias. Major criteria include; rememberability, meaningfulness, likability, transferability, adaptability and legal protection. (Keller, 2013). When the features are examined, the major points of the brand are highlighted. We can sort them like logo, slogan, name and packaging. Brand elements and criteria are explained in more detail in the following figure below.

Figure 1: Brand Features (Keller, K.L., 2013, pp.143)

Criterion	Brand Element				
	Brand Names & URLs	Logo & Symbols	Characters	Slogans & Jingles	Packaging and signage
Memorability	Can be chosen to enhance brand recall and recognition	Generally more useful for brand recognition	Generally more useful for brand recognition	Can be chosen to enhance brand recall and recognition	Generally more useful for brand recognition
Meaningfulness	Can reinforce almost any type of association, although sometimes only indirectly	Can reinforce almost any type of association, although sometimes only indirectly	Generally more useful for non-product related imagery and brand personality	Can convey almost any type of association explicitly	Can convey almost any type of association explicitly
Likability	Can evoke much verbal imagery	Can provoke visual appeal	Can generate human qualities	Can evoke much verbal imagery	Can combine visual & verbal appeal
Transferability	Can be somewhat limited	Excellent	Can be somewhat limited	Can be somewhat limited	Good
Adaptability	Difficult	Can typically be redesigned	Can sometimes be redesigned	Can be modified	Can typically be redesigned
Protectability	Generally good but with limits	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Can be closely copied

According to Kotler, brands have different meanings in consumer. He emphasizes that good brands benefit the consumer and the brand has a unique identity. (Kotler, 2000, p. 404). The consistency of the brand elements ensures that the brand identity is formed correctly. Thus, brand awareness increases and brand image becomes stronger. Supporting each other by all these concepts ensures that brand value is formed correctly. Odabaşı and Oyman have separated the brand elements into two physically and psychologically based on the above information. These elements are related to the customer as they focus on the physical dimension (packaging, logo, color) and on the psychological dimension (abstract concepts) as much as possible for customer tactical and visual influences, focusing on feelings, pleasure, beliefs, values and feelings. (Odabaşı & Oyman, 2003, p.366)

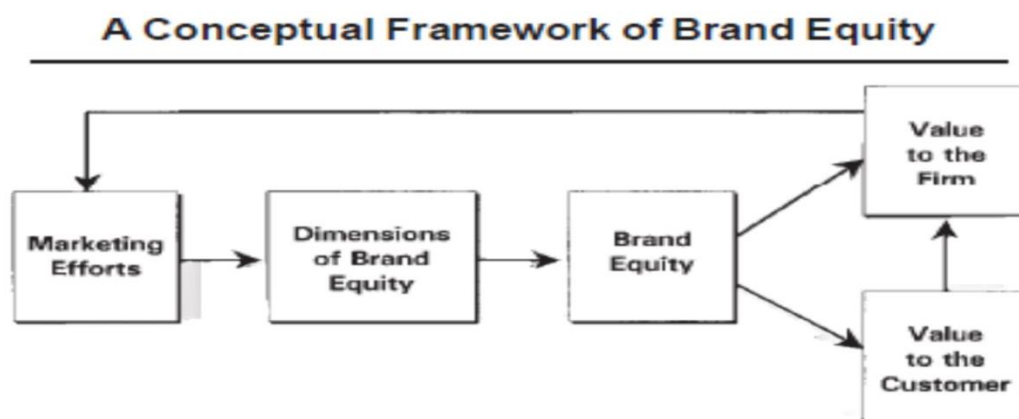


Figure 2. Consumer Based Brand Value, Conceptual Structure

Boonghe Yoo, Naveen Donthu & Songho Lee (2000), "An Examination of Selected Marketing Mix Elements and Brand Equity", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol:28, No:2, p.196

Yoo, et al. (2000) examined consumer-based brand value and emphasized that there are many side effects in the formation of brand value. The structure of the value dimensions have been mentioned above in Figure 2. All elements in this value chain follow each other in a spiral. Wood, who examines the conceptual value structure, has also investigated the relationship between consumers and brands affinity. The concept of brand value is born while the consumer prefers to choose the closest brand to him/her. (Wood, 2000, p. 663). Keller states that there is no clear statement about "brand value" in the literature.

This lack of rhetoric emphasizes that the value of the subject differs from person to person. (Keller, 2007, pp. 720). Another important factor in brand value is the financial consumer-based approach. (Kim, 2003, p. 336). The financial approach is the sum of the overhead costs from the first appearance of the brand to the last customer launch. The amount that the customer pays for the product when the brand perception is formed is influential in the formation of the brand value. (Kriegbaum, 1998, pp. 9).

Consumer information (Keller, 1993, p.5), brand value (Lassar, 1995, p.13), brand value as a consumer's value (Aaker, 1991, p.4) name (Farquhar, 1989, p.27); (Agarwal and Rao, 1996, p. 238), brand loyalty, brand awareness, and brand awareness as a whole (Srivastava and Shocker, 1991, brand equity (Feldwick, 1996, p.12), increased utility (Simon and Sullivan, 1993, p. 30), perceived quality, brand associations, other private brand assets (Aaker, 1991,) and total utility (Swait, 1993, p. 24) are the concepts of the front-line holding of the consumer-based approach.

Brand value; brand assets linked to the brand name and symbol that are added to the values offered by the company to the customers with the product or service (Aaker,1991,p.12) According to another definition, brand value; "Is the effect that makes a difference in consumer response of brand knowledge" (Keller, 1993, p.3) Definitions done by Aaker 1991 and Keller 1993 are the most common approaches used in order to explain brand value. Aaker (1991) model; brand quality is defined as the difference of the marketer's brand from other brands, the associations evoked in the customer, and the quality perceived from the service offered or received. In Keller's (1993) model, the positive brand image and the brand awareness of the customer are high. When determining the brand value, it is necessary to determine the value that the customer perceives correctly. In addition, according to Huang and Zhang, if we can awaken the perception that the brand is functional in many respects and that it is difficult to replace another brand, it is not only customer value, but also a loyal customer portfolio is created. (Huang ve Zhang, 2008, p. 102).

Brand awareness; can be defined as the place where the brand is bought in the minds of consumers when compared to other brands. Consumers; brand recognition, remembering, giving priority to other brands in mind is also a correct definition for brand awareness. (Aaker, 1990). (Aaker, 1991), (Aaker, 2009). Brand awareness is to recognize and remember the brand. Recognizing a brand refers to consumers who are able to distinguish and recognize brands of consumers who have knowledge about the brand sensibly faster than others. Brand recall takes care of how the consumer remembers the brand when giving a hint to the consumer in the product category. (De Chernatony & McDonald, 2003, p. 444); (Uztuğ, 2003, p. 29), (Müller & Chandon, 2003, p. 211), (Pappu, Quester & Cooksey, 2006, p. 145) According to Erdil and Uzun; there is a direct correlation between consumer awareness and awareness of the brand and their tendency to buy that brand (2010).

Perceived quality; can be defined as the total quality perception of the consumer about the dominance of the products or services compared to the competitors of the enterprises. (Aaker, 2009, p. 106). Consumer perceptions are a variable and personally-specific awareness, so there is no fixed specification established. The value of a product or service may not be the same as the opinion of different consumers (Tosun, 2014, p. 230). Customer satisfaction, customer attitude and perceived quality are different from each other. For a customer with a low performance expectation, the

mediocre performance offered by the product may create satisfaction, but in the opposite case, we may not be satisfied. Again, while a low quality product creates a positive attitude to the customer because it is cheap, a high quality and more expensive product may not cause the same positive hold for another consumer. (Aaker, 2009, p. 106-107)

Brand association is; data that helps consumer's purchase preferences and plays a major role in organizing and adopting them. (Kwun & Oh, 2007, p. 82) Brand association is the link (bridge) between consumers' mind and the brand. (Erdil & Uzun, 2009, p. 244). The world known brands and their popular associations are as follows; McDonald's Gold Belt symbol, Mercedes and BMW, luxury and prestige, Porsche success and money, the Volvo solidity and confidence. (James, 2006, p. 15), (Erdil & Uzun, 2009, p. 244).

Brand loyalty; can be defined as consumer behavioral who have eliminating their choices into one (brand) after several trials about the other brands. Loyalty is a tendency not only in today's conditions but also in the future, (İmrak, 2015, p. 97)

Brand loyalty is a combination of the consumer's non-random reaction and psychological approach from many brands, making the purchase directly conscious. (Tosun, 2010, p. 141) In other words; it is important for the customer to develop the emotional tendency of customer loyalty and satisfaction of the quality of the service with the consumer and in this respect the customer's commitment to the brand is defined as brand loyalty. (Kandampully, 1998, p. 431-443).

Brand loyalty approaches are classified as behavioral approach, attitudinal approach and mixed approach in marketing literature. When we examine brand loyalty at the behavioral level, we can characterize it as repetitive buying behavior. This determines the frequency of the consumer's spending on a particular product, the time spent last, and the monetary value spent for a particular brand. However, it is necessary to analyze properly the various situational factors that may influence the reason for purchasing behavior. Consumer attitudes and behaviors may vary due to different usage situations, customer desire for diversity or bad experience. (Oyman, 2002, p. 171)

According to the attitude approach; consumers who are loyal to the brand, the perception and attitude of the consumer towards the brand is higher than the degree of dependence or addiction. In the attitudinal approach, customers are asked to purchase more frequently than the behavioral approach. For this reason, it is very important to create a feeling of belonging that customers can not give up on the brand by adopting the attitude approach while creating customer loyalty. (Devrani, 2009, p. 409) In Yıldız's article, Keller's brand perception approach is defined as the power in the consumer's mind (memory). If the target group is desired to be created according to the perception; brand awareness, associations and brand definition must be determined accordingly. (Yıldız, 2013, p. 136) Therefore, the brand sense creates a positive or negative feeling of the brand in the memory of the customer. If this emotional feeling is positive, a brand-related commitment occurs in the customer, which triggers the brand sense. Because of this, brands sell their perceptions of what they create in consumers mind. If customers have a positive experience with the brand, believe that the product they buy is valuable, and they feel a psychological or socio-cultural benefit / bond between them and the brand, they will feel a sense of belonging to the brand. It is more difficult to change the brand perception after the formation. So, perceived value has a big influence on brand concept. Consumers make a comparison about the money and the time they would spend while they buy a product or service. If spent money and time returns back (physical, sociocultural, or psychological) beneficially to the customer, brand perception positively takes place in the customer's mind. (Zeithaml, 1988, p. 7)

The perceived value consist of four different sections, which diversifies from consumer to consumer. These sections are; emotional value, social value, quality value and price value. (Parasuraman, 1997, p. 156) Emotional value; it is interpreted as the feeling that the product evokes to the customer. Social value; it is the benefit obtained from the business to gain more respect in the society by way of reputation or to increase the sense of self-confidence. Quality is the value of the product. Since the raw materials used in the product are of high quality, it plays an effective role in

the preference of the product in the perception of the consumer. Finally, price value can be defined as the customer benefits from the product in short and long term. (Sweeney, 2001, p. 208) Physically this can be stated as a direct proportionate relationship between the money paid to the product and the life expectancy of the product, but the emotional value often remains much higher in the customer's mind than the product lifetime. (Hall, 2000, p. 457).

Confidence to the brand: The trust in the brand is derived from the experiences of consumers in their perception of the brand, good or bad. A great deal of brand confidence is formed if the customer is provided with a unique experience and firstly consumers are able to believe in the brand, except that they make everything perfect on the product or service. (Doney ve Cannon, 1997, p.35). Customer confidence in the brand is a factor that will accelerate decision making in complex situations (Lewiss ve Weigart , 1985, p. 968). According to Swaen, proximity and positive feelings to the brand before buying a product create a sense of belonging to the customer. This well-intentioned approach transforms the brand into a particular identity in the customer's point of view, and this identified entity brings long-term confidence to the customer. Confidence and perceived value go in direct proportion to each other. When one is high then the other is positively affected. Considering all this, it can be deduced that the customer will be pleased with the experience felt in confidence. As the perceived value increases, loyalty also increases. Confidence is the prerequisite of the perceived value. Factors such as trust in the brand, value of the brand, quality, brand associations create brand awareness for the customer. This awareness creates the brand perception of the customer. Customer shows positive or negative attitudes depending on that brand recognition. (Swaen ve Chumpitaz, 2008, p. 13)

2. INNOVATION

Latin-based innovation word is believed to be derived from the word "innovatus", which means using new methods in social, cultural and administrative areas, or the word 'innovare' which is a root verb, means "to do something new and different". (Açıkğöz & Gürsel 2014, Özdevecioğlu & Biçkes 2011). The use of the 'innovation' word was preferred within the scope of this study, as 'newness' (anything new) do not always involve creating added value.

The essence of "innovation" lies in the fact that the elements that are newly defined are transformed into social and economic change and therefore benefit. (Uzkurt,2008). Some authors who say that the word "Innovation" should be used in the Turkish literature as "Inovasyon" argues that the relevant word should be accepted as a technical word and placed in Turkish, just like the word 'motivation (motivasyon)'. (Eraslan et al., 2008: p. 9-10)

Having the basic functions of innovation, progress, development, benefit by using different methods, creating added value, the concept of innovation has increased day by day in parallel with the development of mankind and has come to the fore with scientific work and definitions of economist Joseph A. Schumpeter. Karl Marx's theories of surplus value originated in Schumpeter, which deals with the ideas of innovation in the context of the creative destruction approach in the book 'Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy', published in 1942. According to Schumpeter, who examines Karl Marx as a leader, educator, social scientist and economist;

"... the working and sustaining of the capitalist mechanism; new consumption methods, new transportation methods, new markets, new types of industrial organization, all created by capitalist enterprise. Opening of new national markets or foreign markets; the transition from handicrafts workshops to intensive and large enterprises keeps the capitalist system in a constantly revolving fashion without tireless, all these elements constantly destroy old factors and create innovations. This 'Creative Demolition Development' is the basis of capitalism; whether or not every capitalist undertaking has to keep pace with this development soon "... (Schumpeter, 2003, p..32)

One of the first definitions of innovation was done by Austrian economist J.A. Schumpeter. According to Schumpeter; it is more important to replace the new products and processes with the existing ones, than the price competition between firms and the products. For example; the impact

of new product developments on economic growth is greater than they would have achieved with reductions in existing product prices. (Akyos, 2006) Schumpeter (1934) has gone five different ways of classification: entry of new products, introduction of new production methods, opening of new markets, development of new supply sources for raw materials and other inputs, creation of new marketplaces in an industry.(Yavuz, 2010)

In our point of view; innovation has been an important leverage, especially in industrial development, with the period of forced development after the war to stop and even abolish the social and economic ruin created by the Second World War. Europe owes a significant portion of its development and wealth to Innovation not only in the Renaissance but also in the 2000s. The evolution of industrial collective transformation has been influential with the support of innovation in the formation of the identity of Continental Europe and its cultural values.

We believe that; The concept of innovation in Turkey has always been an important part of the development efforts, even though it has not been mentioned with this word 'innovation' for a long time and since 2005, many authors have become more conspicuous with publications in serial. It is believed that on the basis of people becoming more aware of innovation is, the aggravated competition conditions around the world, and efforts to innovate, differentiate and make more useful in order to market products or services.. An important discussion about innovation is; Every 'newness' (anything new) in the enterprise is concerned with whether Innovation is counted or not. In the past, the idea of 'everything new fort he company should be accepted as innovation' has been spoken. Today, innovations are evolving towards preserving financial results such as creating value added and gaining market share in the business, while significant changes and improved business models and business processes have gained importance.

Kırım (2006) defines innovation as; "Putting new ideas that have not been considered before into practice commercially, and expressing increased competitive power on this". Every new thing and and even invention can not increase profit and / or sales revenue. The commercialization of significant changes in the product, service, process, business model or experience that distinguishes innovation from newness. Therefore Kırım made a unique definiton about innovation; 'newness which makes you to make more money'. Kırım also refers innovation as; putting new ideas that have not been considered before into commercial practice in order to mean increase competitive power on this side.

There should be a discussion about if 'anything which is new for he company should be regarded as Innovation'. We believe that; It is necessary to distinguish innovations that do not directly or indirectly reflect on the production process of the product or service, and which do not bring differentiation and therefore increase in added value. Updating a product or service, in the technical term of renewal, 'launching the new version' will not always bring innovations, nor will it add value. For example, the walls of the room painted into the color 'purple' without a reason should not be considered within the scope of Innovation because it is a new situation that does not create an added value although it is unprecedented. It is just painting the walls into purple.

If we continue with the example of purple colored walls; in case those walls are located in a clinic, whereas the purple color has a scientifically proven effect on the psychological or sensory meaning and among the all others if the clinic is being preferred by the patients just because of this color, then the painting of the walls action can only be considered as Innovation. In response to Innovation, the words newness or improvement are used in Turkish also quite often in academical studies. The notion of innovation is not sufficient by itself because the notion of innovation includes improvement as well as the creation of added value and commercial benefit.

It is not a coincidence that J. A. Schumpeter, one of the most important names in entrepreneurship as well as innovation in the sense of literature, worked in these two supporting fields. It is a logical fact that entrepreneurs who are trying to make breakthroughs by making radical changes in products or services in the open and developed areas of virginity and development use Innovation as an important means of development.

The definition of innovation has been agreed upon and one of the accepted definitions is found in the Oslo Manual (2005) published jointly by the OECD and Eurostat. According to Oslo Manual Innovation is; "The application of a new or significantly improved product (goods or service) or process, new marketing method or new organizational method to in-house applications, workplace organization or external relations".

Nevertheless according to this definition, innovation is not only explained by radical changes in products and services. Innovative and value-added approaches in product and service production processes, marketing methods, organization itself and even external relations are taking place within the concept of innovation.

Ten years before the Oslo Guide was published, the EU and the OECD have pointed out that innovation means the process of "transforming an idea into a marketable product or service, a new or improved manufacturing or distribution method, or a new method of social service". The concept of innovation, in its final analysis, explains how to turn science and technology into economic or social benefits. Moving from here, it can be said that the most important point is to develop the technologies which are included in the products and the production methods that we use, or to develop new products and new production / distribution methods based on the emerging new technologies. (Tusiad, 2003)

Today's intense competition conditions oblige innovation to be an important part of corporate culture. In other words, Innovation is more than a contemporary and trendy concept, it is a leverage that the company uses to increase its market share with competitive power. Innovations that arise from needs, maybe just because of the never ending needs, keeps the business alive and dynamic,

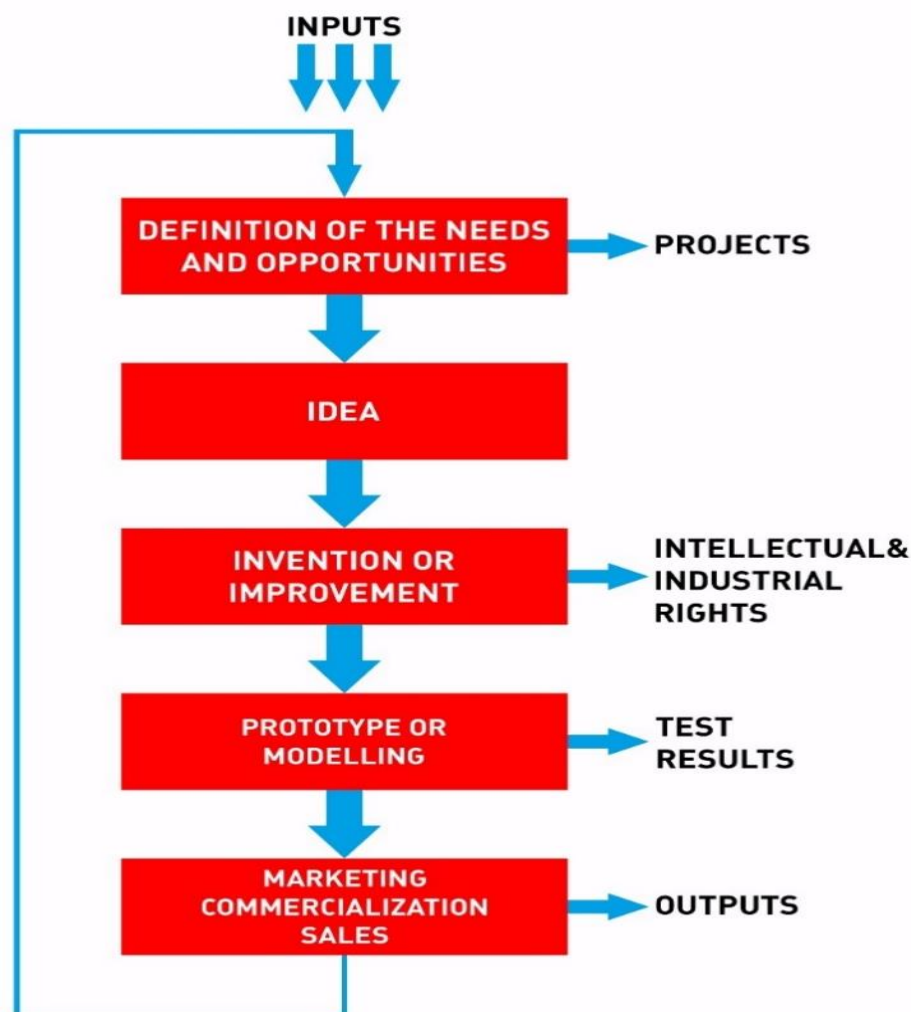


Figure 3. Innovation Process Cycle

2.1. Correlation Between Invention and Innovation

The invention is based on the intellectual and industrial rights of an idea, a method, a product or a service which has not been put forth before, and is made available for human use. By its nature, invention is based on; innovation, different perspective of thinking, being unique, providing benefit. It can be said that inventions are very strong innovations. However, not every innovation is obliged to be an invention. Most of the stunning and disruptive innovations are made up of products and services from the inventions.

2.2. Types of Innovation

One of the main misconceptions about innovation is; the belief that innovation is only concerned with brandly new developed products or services. Yet innovations in many ways, such as processes, business models, experiences, customer relationships, as well as products and services, creating value. According to Geoffrey A. Moore, some of the innovation types are listed below.

- a. **Disruptive Innovation:** Innovations that have changed the dynamics of the market radically no longer allow nothing to become like the current situation. Smartphones are a good example of destructive (disruptive) innovation. Smartphones were not launched as phones with better features, but as a completely different 'device'. At that time, after 2007, almost all of the existing mobile phone models had been withdrawn and destroyed.
- b. **Stunning Innovation:** Innovations that do not determine market conditions as disruptive innovations but change market structure to a significant extent. For example, digital cameras that take the place of traditional photography machines can do the same job much more easily and economically.
- c. **Incremental Innovation:** They are Innovations which are usually not as powerful as the first effect of disruptive Innovation, but the continuation of Innovations. An example of incremental innovation is the introduction of a new model every year by improving the products of smartphone brands.
- d. **Product innovation:** Aims to increase the market share by improving the existing products in the market by significantly improving the consumer demands and needs. Both electric and fossil fuel-powered hybrid automobiles, computers' connectivity to wireless internet and camera function of smartphones are examples of product innovation.
- e. **Application innovations:** virtual applications that are used for another purpose are made adaptable and usable for the new purpose. The use of computer technology in banks' ATMs is an example of application innovation.
- f. **Process Innovations;** making significant or radical changes in the processes of products or services can be seen as a productivity enhancing factor affecting the profitability of the company. Improvements to processes, shortcuts, new methods that have not been implemented before are examples of process innovation. converting communication processes from regular phone to smartphone will require many innovative approaches as well as re-organizing processes.
- g. **Business Model Innovations** Apart from the usual business model, business model innovations consist of differentiating business model and increasing profitability and productivity by using different technologies, mostly internet and information technology. Instead of working with wholesalers by building a good infrastructure, working directly and without intermediaries with dealers, or transferring the business model into internet can be accepted as business model innovations.
- h. **Organizational Innovation:** In addition to classical organizational structures, organizational innovation aims to develop organizational structures that will work faster and more efficiently than traditional ones and targets to transform the business management into an innovative dimension. Particularly, the digital, new economy companies are in need of simple structured lean organizations, which emphasize the matrix structure instead of classical, multi-layered and hierarchical structures.

2.3. Open and Closed Innovation Concepts

The concept of closed innovation is that the employer uses its own research and development facilities to carry out innovation activities without resorting to exploration or use of external resources. In this approach, 'my laboratory is my world' approach is valid. Closed Innovation is closed to the outside world because it works with its own possibilities and capabilities, there is no purpose to transfer information from very different and unrelated businesses, to develop new products and services inspired by changes and developments in those sectors. It is aimed to increase the possibilities of the company in R&D and innovations. (Chesbrough, H. 2003)

Open innovation is an innovation model approach that emphasizes the development of new products, services and technology by utilizing both outsider and insider sources and also the value of its own resources by others in different markets. (Özdemir & Deliormanlı, Tüsiad 2013) Open Innovation is a generic term that encompasses all the different means, tools, and platforms that enable companies to use resources outside of themselves.

As a conclusion we believe that; Closed Innovation embraces the 'open world' approach to 'my laboratory is my world', open Innovation adopts the 'whole world is my laboratory' approach.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. The Subject of the Study, Its Importance, Purpose and Scope

As consumer brand associations continue, brand value perceptions in consumers will continue to occur. Manufacturers and retailers will continue to work to better understand the consumer's point of view and continue to increase their sales. (Bell et al. 2001). Today, the mode of consumption is not limited to only requirements, but is defined in a broad concept of social and symbolic relations and emotional experiences. (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Much of the research on experience has focused on the valuations of customers in the western world, with a much smaller portion dealing with the attitudes of consumers in Asia (Seo & Lee, 2008, Chao & Gupta, 1995). According to the findings obtained in the research; the perceptions of the experience of consumers with different cultural backgrounds living in different countries and regions may vary. (Liao et.al. 2009).

In the study, because of the cost, time and sample constraints, it was impossible to reach the whole of the main body; the study was delimited with a company that successfully implemented Innovation and the data were collected by Focus Group Interview method. Because Focus Group Interviews can not be made with all company employees, it is necessary to limit the work to managers only. Thus, the scope of the study included managers who were involved in the entire process before and after the product innovation. Despite all the constraints of the research outputs, the product innovation is in line with the brand awareness of employees. It seems possible to offer significant and sufficient contributions to both the academy and the retail sector.

3.2. Research Method

In the study, a "focus group interview" as a qualitative research methods was chosen in order to deeply determine the managerial approach of a company that already implemented Product Innovation. The purpose of focus group discussion is; to provide a healthy discussion environment and to obtain a rich content compiled from different perspectives, ideas, evaluations and experiences related to the subject (Baş et.al., 2008; p. 103) The most significant benefit of focus group interviews is; the ability to acquire in-depth knowledge of the research topic chosen by the researcher is based on a broader range of participants' attitudes and opinions in a particular context, with personalized statements and definitions, even though fewer people are reached than survey studies (Tozkoparan & Vatanserver, 2011; p.97). The questions asked in the focus group interviews are answered as a result of the interactions of the individuals in the group. This feature of focus group negotiations is also important in that it also helps to obtain rich data in such negotiations (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006; p.151) The reason for choosing the method of focus group interviews in the study, Turkey is not yet sufficiently assimilated product innovation as a concept, therefore it

was important to look through the eyes of employees of companies applying innovations. It was assumed that the process of product innovation itself and managers working on this process would be more effective in the focus group work on discovering brand perceptions about the company. Limiting focus group work to only one company constitutes a constraint on the generalization of research results. However, it is thought that the results are important for practitioners and academicians, because it is difficult to generalize each company that implements product innovation having a separate organizational culture. Therefore the number of companies implementing product innovation is low and that's why the effect on employees in companies implementing product innovation is considered.

3.3. Designing the Focus Group

In the survey, 10 employees were selected through a sample from a national company that has recently successfully implemented Innovation (company name was disclosed) Managers were invited to work over the phone. All of them have agreed to participate in the work, all participants are gathered in one go. Thus, the group created for the study consists of the managers and employees of different departments of the enterprise. Participants; R & D, Sales, Finance, HR, Planning, Design, Logistics departments of a company that is active in carpet and textile sector.

Optimum number of participants to focus group are as follows; according to Byers and Wilcox (1988), 8-12 people, according to MacIntosh (1981), 6-10 people, according to Kitzinger (1995), 4-9 people, Goss and Leinbach 15, and to Edmunds (2000), 8 to 10 people, according to Morgan (1997) and Gibbs (1997) 6-12 people (Adapted from, Tozkoparan and Vatansever 2011; p.98) Although there are different views on the optimum number of participants, it can be said that the within the scope of the study sufficient number of participants has been reached.

3.4. Implementation of Focus Group Process, Data Collection and Analysis Method

The research was conducted in October, 2017. Participants were contacted by telephone one week before the interview and information was provided on the subject. The focus group interview was held in a meeting room of a company in Istanbul. Participants sat around a table with the shape of 'U'. The interview was arranged in the presence of a moderator with the researchers. During the interview, there were no interventions to the participants and the moderators encouraged participants to interact with each other. The moderator, who directed the questions in accordance with the interview instructions, was recorded with the voice recorder by informing the participant in advance and taking permission, and all of the interviewers were noted by the researchers. At the end of the interview for one and a half hours, the data recorded by the voice recorder were converted into letters, compared with the notes kept, and then evaluated by the researchers.

3.4.1. Questions Asked in Focus Group;

The questions were derived from two main topics;

- A. The impact of product innovation (Atlas Hali) on brand perception in Atlas Hali employees
- B. The impact of product innovation on occupational motivation in Atlas Hali employees

Part A.

1. Before you started working at Atlas Hali, how was your brand perception about Atlas Hali?
2. After starting to work at Atlas Hali, before the product innovation was done, what was the brand change of Atlas Hali?
3. After working at Atlas Hali, after product innovation, what was the brand change about Atlas Hali and how did it change?
4. Was the reason for the positive / negative changes you mentioned just innovation, if you can count other factors?

5. Are there any concrete thoughts, examples, or events in your mind about the change of brand reputation after innovation?
6. When you started to work in Atlas Halı, what were the thoughts of people you are close to, such as friends-relatives-neighbors?
7. Have you experienced a positive suggestion or a negative 'neighborhood print' especially about the carpet industry?
8. Have you received positive negative feedback from friends, relatives, neighbors or other employees in the sector after innovation?
9. Have you been impressed by the change of brand perception in these people as well? Could you explain these impressions?
10. How did advertising after the Invention and other promotions affect the branding?
11. Could you compare the impact of advertising / promotions made after pre-innovation ads on brand presence or change power?
12. If Atlas Halı had not been a well-established brand for almost half a century, would the innovation have the same or similar effect on brand perception? Or can innovation be a more powerful factor in changing perception of brands that are already new?
13. Do you think innovation has contributed to the increase in the brand awareness of the company?

Part B.

1. What were the factors motivating you when you started to work at Atlas Halı before the innovation?
2. What were the motivating factors after the innovation?
3. Did you feel that your in-house career plan has become clearer after the inauguration?
4. If you felt that innovation was the only driving factor in this regard, were there other side effects? (such as salary increases, promotion, etc.)
5. Did you feel the possibility of higher salaries and / or side-benefits increased with innovation? (in parallel with the increase of the company's capabilities)
6. Did the increase in advertising and promotions cause you to increase your motivation as an occupation?
7. Does the increase in advertising promotions and awareness activities help motivate people you are related to, such as friends in family-relative-neighboring competitors?
8. Do you think that your professional and personal development together with innovation is influenced positively?
9. Did the innovation lead to an increase in team work? How was it?
10. How does working in an innovative company generally affect your motivation?
11. Have you been working on a company that has been stunningly innovated? Is there any positive effect when you enter the company you worked after Atlas Halı or during the job search process?
12. Did innovation motivation have an increasing role in relation to dealers and other business partners?

3.5. Results of the Study

The results of the study were analyzed on the basis of previously planned interview instructions, questions asked and answers given. In the focus group discussion with related company employees, it was stated that the company was founded in 1967, bankrupted in 2006 and started its activities

again in 2011 under another group of companies. It is stated that the awareness of the brand has always been high level despite the interruptions and it is accepted as an old and reputable brand before the striking product innovation in the society.

From 2011, when the brand came to life for the second time, the employment started again in the company, and employees were impressed by the professionalism and vision of the management staff as well as the brand awareness of the relevant firm during their business negotiations. The employees who joined the business at that time expressed that they did not feel a negative reaction from the social circles such as friendly relatives and neighbors because of the habitual static structure of the carpet industry. But they also observed that the stability of the industry is also known in society and that the brand is now in the position to renew itself.

The participants of Focus Group Interview expressed that the infrastructure of many inland innovation work, ranging from organizational structure to sales channel structure, has been consciously prepared until the year 2013, when stunning product Innovation was realized. After a long time, the first entry into the market was not successful, but the company gained great momentum following the product innovation, and this was a positive change in the outlook, and they said they improved the brand perception. It was stated by the employees who started work before the innovation they had a first impression that company has ambitious and big targets, and as a brand perception they realized that a rejuvenation effort extending from logo change to differentiation of the carpet designs were realized.

Apart from sales and marketing staff who are in more contact with consumers and dealers, it has been stated that creating a democratic environment by top management where all employees can freely express their ideas and taking these ideas into management's evaluation lead to a higher level of brand awareness in the eyes of employees.

The positive effects of the management team coming from outside the carpet sector (CEO from telecommunication sector) have not limited the innovation efforts to product innovation. The results emerging from different fields have been perceived by a classical carpet branding perception, which has been emphasized by the participants as a trade worth to the consumer.

The positive effects of the management team coming from outside the carpet sector (e.g CEO from telecommunication sector) have not limited the efforts to product innovation, the results emerging from different fields have been perceived by a classical carpet branding sense. It has been emphasised by the participants that this perception has turned to a commercial value on the consumer side.

It has been stated that the brand perceptions of the employees are supported by the idea of "I am a part of a very well known and up-to-date (trendy) brand" with the promotion activities that started with the stunning innovative product launched to the market in 2013 and turned into a positive direction. Similarly, it has been stated that positive reactions have been expressed in employees' social environment and they have carried their own brand perception in these reactions.

After the innovation, employees are encouraged to express themselves better, to provide personal development and to increase their self-confidence.

It has been stated that the competitive power of the vendors has increased considerably in comparison with the past, as well as the carpet designs evolution changed with the innovative product and made a hit. This competitive advantage has strengthened the sales channel, and a greater number of dealers have been reached, both in number and quality. After the Stunning Product Innovation, it was stated that the number of dealers which was 49 has reached to 199 in first step and then to 440 in second step. It has been expressed that the brand perception of consumers and employees is also positively affected by the fact that the product meets consumers at more Point of Sales.

At the same time, the employees' experience with the innovative product as a consumer, the positive results they observed while using the product strengthened both the brand perception and the belief in innovation.

In interview with employees; It has been emphasized that not only product innovation itself but also changing the organization in the related company was effected an the successfull results.

It is stated that the sales department used to think that carpet industry is one of the weakest rings in terms of dealer channel structure and power and general industrial dynamics among the related sectors such as white goods, furniture and curtains. It is stated that the nano carpet innovation that emerged unexpectedly changed the general perception of the sector and the sales teams.

Employees have reported that they have received very positive responses from close social circles such as friends, relatives and neighbors after innovation.

After the introduction of striking product innovation and the introduction of the innovative product, the competitors' efforts to imitate the nano carpet were a result of offering a product at a cheaper price, which in turn stimulated the consumer's positive perception and turned into a commercial demand. Employees agree that when a consumer who is aware of nano carpet innovation enters a carpet store, they will first ask to the dealer about the nano carpet product.

Employees say that advertising and promotional activities after product innovation provide sales simplicity, but as the advertising budget was not enough, product awareness was limited and brand perception would be much higher if the promotional budget were sufficient.

Employees agree that the same innovation will not create the same effect as the current situation if it is carried out with a new brand of carpet. The new carpet brand will be unknown and new to the market, rather than the company concerned, which is supposed to have high brand awareness under the same conditions. These thoughts; with anxiety that an unknown brand will have problems with trust when it comes to innovation in hygiene.

When it comes to motivation, employees who first start working have expressed that they are influenced by the high qualification and distant vision of the CEO and top management rather than to work with a high brand awareness. The carpet design team has stated that they are freed about the preparation of original (unique) designs, that no competitor company is imitated, that a comfortable working environment is created by not being followed and that they are motivated by this.

After striking stunning product innovation, the employees found themselves as; energetic, innovative, powerful and advantageous. It has motivated them to take initiative on an innovative approach from the beginning of the process.

According to the statements of employees, the loyalty to the company has increased with innovation, but the sectoral dynamics and the stationary nature of the industry as a whole, away from institutionalism, have kept them from feeling 'I can work in this company until I got retired.

After the innovation has occurred, the increase in sales, along with the increase in company revenues has encouraged employees to be able to earn more Money and have better conditions, but the increases in monthly wage growth have remained unexpected.

Advertising and promotional activities made before and after the innovation have influenced the motivation of employees positively. Unlike traditional media, airline companies and IDO ferryboats and boat advertisements, which are considered as unusual channels, have increased awareness of the brand and has influenced employees' motivation positively.

The participants were stated that the innovation contributed to the personal development of the employees and increased the team work.

A prestigious case for the Nano carpet business was observed when compared to the leading companies in terms of the sales volumes indicated by field salespeople. Nevertheless this innovation

alone was not sufficient to express the product and it should be supported with other characteristics, aesthetics and commercial conditions.

It has been stated that the increase in the number of potential franchisees to the company and the brand after innovation has a positive effect on brand perception.

Again, it has been stated that other components, such as products and commercial conditions, which are perceived to be highly negative by the sector in the early establishment period of the company and in the previous period of innovation, have completely reversed over time with the product innovation.

With innovation, employees are more likely to find work at other companies. They think that Stunning innovation would add value to their resume.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the scope of the study, an exploratory research was conducted to examine the effects of product innovation on brand perception of company employees. It is thought that the research will be a guide for academicians who want to work in this field and at the same time for professionals.

As a result of the research, it can be said that the brand perceptions of the employees of the companies applying product innovation can change positively. The result obtained may vary depending on the sector in which the business operates, the organizational structure and culture of the firms, the fields of activity of the enterprises. Within the scope of the research, it is emphasized that product innovation affects the brand perception of employees positively. Not only on managers but also on employees.

It was seen here that the managers and staff were extremely confident in their opinions and that they had no hesitation in this regard

Another interesting point is that, despite the significant age differences between some employees and managers, the answers to the brand perceptions of post-innovation workers do not change with age group. This situation can be evaluated in such a way that a successful product innovation has importance on the brand perception and motivation both for employees and managers.

Unfortunately it was not possible to compare this study with another study because of being a pioneering study for the future studies and innovation is still in the stage of maturation in our country. The number of enterprises implementing product innovation is very small, and the implementing companies usually want to do product innovation due to demands from senior management or due to tough competition conditions, but the number of enterprises that can achieve this in practice is very small.

Despite the rapid progress in the world, it can be said that the work on product innovation is far from the desired level in our country in the findings obtained as a result of the study. The topic of product innovation is very widespread in the world, but the number of applications in our country's businesses is limited and the work done in this regard is limited. On the other hand, as Vice versa, The limited number of studies is also provides an important area of application for researchers. Qualitative and quantitative studies to be carried out on this subject in the future are expected to contribute not only to the spread of applications related to product innovation but also to important contributions to future studies on product innovation's brand perception and brand work.

In the future studies, it is suggested that product innovation and employee brand perception relation be investigated quantitatively by using the findings obtained in this study.

In addition, within the scope of the research, the concept of motivation as well as product innovation has frequently been included in the participants' discourses. It may be suggested that practitioners and academicians who will work on the subject in the future should examine the interaction of innovation and employee motivation together.

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