

**CREATING UNIQUE BRAND ASSOCIATIONS: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE USE OF NATIONALISM OF CONSUMERS FOR BRANDING PRODUCTS IN SRI LANKA**

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The inclusion of nationalism into product branding is increasingly evident in the context of the current global market. As it is vital to create a positive brand image using a cluster of unique brand associations, marketers progressively attempt to transfer the love customers hold for his/her nation (i.e. nationalism), towards their brand with the aim of creating strong attachments between the brand and the customer. Highlighting the ability of nationalistic brand associations to generate purchase intention and to create a unique brand image, this paper investigated the impact of creating unique brand associations with special reference to the use of nationalism for branding products in Sri Lanka.

Data for the study was collected by administering a survey questionnaire to 100 respondents in the age group between 20-24 years selecting a sample from final year undergraduates of the Business Administration degree programme of the University of Colombo. The product category for the study was taken from the soft drink industry where two hypothetical brands were used to eliminate effects of brand familiarity on respondents' judgments. One brand was designed to reflect a product with nationalistic brand associations and the other was designed to reflect a product without nationalistic brand associations. The study was operationalized using two constructs: the attitude towards nationalistic brands (predictor variable) and purchase intention (outcome variable).

Results show that even though nationalism as a brand association influences purchase intention positively, and serves as an attraction point while attracting higher attention among other associations related to the same product, nevertheless, it does not necessarily provide a competitive edge to the product over its competitors. This is because even though nationalistic brand associations trigger an attachment between the brand and the customer, if competitors succeed in creating stronger brand images directly linked to the target market, the effect of nationalism has on customers will be outweighed. Thus, the findings of the study suggest that marketers should carefully evaluate the potentiality and sustainability of the associations linked to their brands and not trap themselves in popular associations instantly.