CORPORATE IMAGE OF BANKS FROM THE GENERATION Y PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract


The paper deals with corporate image of banks perceived by Czech Millennials (generation Y) with emphasis on financial services area. First, paper presents the theoretical framework of corporate image and identity, subsequently strategies of positioning are described in the first chapter. The major part of paper is devoted to primary marketing research. For purpose of collecting data, the method of questioning was chosen. The questionnaire was given to 236 respondents living in the Czech Republic. Because the survey was focused on Millennials, respondents had to be 23 – 40 years old. The survey was distributed in the spring 2017. The primary research dealt with the factors which are supposed to be important in building the image of the bank from the Generation Y perspective. The aim of the paper is to investigate the relations between educational attainment and perceptions of Czech Millennials (Generation Y) in chosen factors, which can create the image of the banks. Results mainly showed that educational attainment is not the significant element for determining the perceptions of these factors.

Keywords: corporate identity, corporate image, financial services, generation Y, marketing, positioning, repositioning

INTRODUCTION

Banks didn’t pay so much attention to their customers in the past which is connected with slow accepting of marketing philosophy. From the end of nineties this approach is changing in the Czech Republic. Banks recognized that understanding of customers and their behavior including social trends and changes that exert influence on future customer behavior is the main key to success. Current trend is that banks deal more and more with targeted marketing. They try to provide financial products that suit to certain market segment. Then it is possible to address the segment by appropriate marketing programs. Dividing market into special segments and customizing marketing mix to these segments leads to appearance of so called customization in area of financial services. With the development of modern technology, it is expected that especially young people will increasingly use alternative banking products that offer attractive benefits at good prices. Therefore banks will have to build and retain their good corporate image and positioning among generation Y (Millennials).

In the Czech Republic, people under 40 years of age currently represent 25% of Czech population. This generation Y creates a significant target group. They are demanding, flexible and gradually growing rich people. The outputs of IPSOS marketing research during year 2015–2017 (IPSOS marketing research) show that their strengths are mainly enthusiasm, knowledge of technology and entrepreneurship. Millennials as consumers are self-confident, have high expectations and are oriented towards their success. They are highly mobile people who like to share information because they are constantly connected through smartphones and use online platforms like YouTube and so on. Members of Generation Y have been
described as well-educated, technologically savvy, sophisticated, mature, and structured (Syrett and Lammimam, 2003). They desire distinctive brands with traits of their own that will serve as a form of self-expression (Gupta et al., 2010). More so than previous generations, this cohort is characterized by an accumulated, materialistic, and consumer culture that is primarily a result of technological innovation (Hanzace and Aghasibeig, 2010).

Generation Y represents powerful aggregate spending (Cui et al., 2003).

Corporate image is very important for a company’s success as it influences the perception and behavior of target or relationship groups. In the case of a positive image, the relationship groups behave positively, for example, by purchasing products or spread positive WoM. A negative image can cause product boycotting, spreading negative news. It is therefore essential to create an acceptable idea of corporate identity and to develop it systematically. (Vysekalová, 2009) There is no standard method to analyze the image, individual methodological approaches and procedures are chosen in relation to a specific assignment. It is mostly a combination of qualitative methods, but quantitative methods can also be used where quantification and evaluation of statistical data can be done. The aim of the paper is to investigate the relations between educational attainment and perceptions of Czech Millennials (Generation) in chosen factors, which can create the image of the banks.

The concept of corporate image in the financial services market

Positive corporate image is one of the responsibilities of public relations as it deals with development of and maintenance of good relationships with different publics. The publics are the range of different groups on which a company is dependent. These include employees, investors, suppliers, customers, distributors, media, competitors and so on. While marketing traditionally focuses on markets or just three of the publics, i.e. customers, distributors and the competition, public relations are concerned with many more publics. (Smith and Zook, 2012)

According to Vysekalová (2009) image has the nature of a generalized and simplified symbol based on a set of ideas, attitudes, opinions, and experiences of a person in relation to a particular object. From the marketing point of view, it is important that what the consumer buys is the overall “personality” of the product or brand.

The corporate image is the result of the interaction of individual elements of corporate identity, i.e. corporate design, corporate communication, corporate culture and product. In addition, there are direct links between the elements and the overall corporate identity, and the elements and the corporate image. (Vysekalová 2009) According to Blythe (2003) the corporate identity is understood as outward manifestation of the organisation, a visual means of identification. It includes the corporate logo, but also includes the house style used on its letterheads and corporate publications, interior and exterior design of buildings, staff uniforms, packaging and products. Simões (2016) states that corporate identity is one possible route for establishing a corporate image among audiences. Corporate identity portrays a notion of identity transposed to organizations. Such concept conveys an abstract idea suggesting that every organization has its own personality, singularity and individuality – that is, its own character. Corporate identity can be a key tool for transmitting consistent images to internal and external stakeholders and has implications into business differentiation, survival and profitability. Maurya et al. (2016) state that corporate identity is important for consumer marketing for various reasons. Organizations are pressed hard to meet changing customer expectations in a fiercely competitive environment. Further, it no longer remains the issue of just focusing on customer alone, other stakeholders like channel partners, investors are equally getting demanding. Under these conditions, it becomes necessary for the organization not to be everything to everyone and lose its identity. Thus, the notion of identity of an organization (corporate identity) becomes very important.

Corporate image of an organization is believed to be the most important factor in developing and maintaining loyalty (Ishaq et al., 2014). However, corporate image of an organization refers to accumulating of consumption experiences on multiple occasions with emotional and functional principles of the products (Ryu et al., 2012). Bromley (2001) defined corporate image as an immediate mental perception of the organization held by an individual, group or network. Marketing managers can also use the framework to set clear policies that develop and consider corporate social responsibility as a necessary and essential driver in changing the corporate culture and accordingly reinforces customer value that consequently creates strong corporate image, which enhances marketing performance. (Alrubaiate et al., 2017)

In the present competitive environment, corporate reputation and corporate image are acknowledged as having the potential to impact on customer loyalty toward the firm. (Nguyen and Leblanc, 20001)

According to Ehrlich and Fanelli (2012) a strong company (brand) image has monetary value. It is a quantifiable corporate asset. This is true for several reasons. Company (brand) image translates into profits because a branded product can command a higher price than an equivalent generic product. A company (brand) image provides a shorthand way of letting constituents know what to expect from the company. This image has a personality, and a perceived level of quality is associated with particular brands. It is much cheaper to introduce a new product, or brand extension, if it is attached to a familiar company (brand) name. Most important
of all a company (brand) name is unique. It is one characteristic of the product that cannot be copied by competitors.

The corporate image is influenced by a number of factors. Kotler and Armstrong (2004) consider the product, services and properties of the product as factors. Marketing communication in all forms and price is also mentioned. Image is also affected by customer support and distribution. In addition to customer behavior, corporate image is also influenced by attitudes and behavior towards the environment. It is a way of managing a company, a way of negotiating and speaking to different partners, a relationship with employees, and a willingness to contribute to publicly beneficial projects. According to Pelsmacker et al. (2003), corporate identity and communication are important factors in the image building. The way companies communicate and how they behave towards external target groups affects how the company is perceived. Ang (2015) defines a set of possible corporate attributes as social environmental responsibility (ethical, environmentally responsible, cares for employees, a desirable place to work), financial performance (financially sound, with a proven track record), management and corporate strategy (competent top management, a clear vision for the future), emotional appeal (liked by stakeholders and the public), innovative capability (a leader in research and development, exploring cutting-edge technologies, with promising products in the pipeline), product and services (high - quality products and services, reliable, value for money), familiarity (a well-known company). The first six are the most commonly discussed in the literature. The seventh, called “familiarity” is important because it provides an identity to which all the positive aspects of attributes 1 to 6 must be linked.

Corporate image is built in the media and maintained in the mind of the consumer based on quality or lack thereof. Corporate image is based on consistency. Every time the company name is mentioned, the consumer has an image or specific qualities associated with it. It may seem obvious that before a brand can succeed, the target needs to be aware of its existence. But what is not always so obvious is that the target also needs to be aware of what the product or service has to offer, how it is different from competing brands, and how it can address their specific wants or needs. It is important that every product or service, whether new, old or mainstream, know its own product attributes and perceived image before making any claims against or comparisons to competing brands. Once the target is aware of the brand, the next logical step is for the target to form an opinion, based on the product, service, or corporation's image, and/or ability to fulfill a specific need or want. (Blakeman, 2007)

Corporate image is very closely related to the concept of positioning. Positioning relates to how the consumer thinks about and rates a product or service against the competition. Positioning requires highlighting target-relevant benefits for the company's features. Benefits must be tied to uses that will enhance the target's lifestyle or image. The position of a company (brand) is sometimes confused with company (brand) image, a position of company (brand) in the mind of the consumer is created via promotional efforts, and company (brand) image is created based on experience. (Blakeman, 2007)

Having selected a target market or markets, the organization then has to decide on what basis it will compete in the chosen segment or segments. This has to be done in such a way that consumers can allocate a specific position to the company's product or service within the market, relative to other products. Consumers have to cope with a huge amount of product information. Customers will position a product in their mind in relation to other products on the market based on their perception of the key attributes it contains. (Drummond and Ensor, 2005) Dibb and Simking (2004) state that marketing positioning is arranging for a brand or product to occupy a clear, distinctive and desirable place in the minds of targeted customers relative to competing products or brands. It is based on the product's or brand's attributes, standing, quality, the types of users, its strengths and weaknesses price and value, plus any other memorable characteristics, as perceived by the target market.

A strong position is a direct result of a strong corporate image. This position is built up over a period of time based on reliability of performance. Corporate image gives a product or service an air of exclusivity and a unique identity from its competitors within the product category. Blakeman (2007) indicates how to build and retain strong positioning of company (brand): originality, price level, sex of the consumer, age of the consumer, amount of product information. Customers will position the product have to be perceived to be credible by the target customers. Competitiveness: The product should offer the consumer benefits which competitors are not supplying. Consistency: A consistent message over time is invaluable in helping to establish a position against all the other products and services fighting for a share of the consumer's mind. Clarity: The positioning statement an organization chooses has to create a clearly differentiated position for the product in the minds of the target market. Complicated positioning statements are unlikely to be remembered.

A successful positioning strategy communicates to customers how the service firm distinguishes itself from competing alternatives. Effective positioning is particularly critical for service firms where intangibility clouds the consumer's ability to differentiate one service provider from the next.
Positioning requires an organizational commitment. It is not something that is constantly overhauled or changed. At the same time, it is important to regularly research the desirability, deliverability, and differentiability of the brand’s points-of-parity and points of difference in the marketplace to understand how the company (brand) positioning might need to evolve or, in relatively rare cases, be completely replaced. In assessing potential threats from competitors, three high-level variables are useful: share of market (the competitor’s share of the target market), share of mind – top of mind (the percentage of customers who named the competitor in responding to the statement “Name the first company that comes to mind in this industry”) and share of heart (the percentage of customers who named the competitor in responding to the statement “Name the company from which you would preface to buy the product”). (Kotler and Keller, 2016) A useful tool for determining the position of a brand in the marketplace is the perceptual map. Mapping has a variety of marketing purposes including market segmentation, identifying whether or not a product has any weaknesses as well as consumer preferences and perceptions. Perceptual mapping can also be used to determine how a company is perceived against variable perception attributed to its target audience. (Doyle, 2016)

Levens (2012) states three types of positioning: functional, symbolic and experiential. Functional positioning is based on the attributes of products or services and their corresponding benefits and is intended to communicate how customers can solve problems or fulfill needs. Symbolic positioning is based on characteristics of the brands that enhance the self-esteem of customers. Experiential positioning is based on characteristics of the brands that stimulate sensory or emotional connections with customers. Drummond and Ensor (2005) indicate several mistakes of positioning that can be made by an organization. The first one is underpositioning. In this situation consumers have only a very limited perception of the brand and are unaware of any distinguishing features. In the case of overpositioning, consumers have a perception that the brand is only active in a very focused area, when in fact the brand covers a much broader product range. And the last one is confused positioning, when consumers have an unclear view of how the brand relates to competitive offerings.

There are occasions when offerings need to be repositioned in the minds of customers. This may be due to market opportunities and development, mergers and acquisitions or changing buyer preferences, which may be manifested in declining sales. Research may reveal that the current position is either inappropriate or superseded by a competitor. However, repositioning is difficult to accomplish, often because of the entrenched perceptions and attitudes held by buyers towards brands and the media resources required to make the changes. (Fill, 2011) Repositioning should work to define a new or special niche in consumers mind. Occasionally a product or service will need to be repositioned because of changing customer tastes or poor sales performance. Repositioning involves changing the target markets, the differential advantage, or both. Using product differentiation and target market as the key variables, four generic repositioning strategies are image repositioning (unchanged target marketing and unchanged product), market repositioning (changed target market and unchanged product), product repositioning (unchanged target market and changed product) and total repositioning (changed target market and product at the same time). (Ennev and Waite, 2013)

MATERIALS AND METHODS

As the primary research method the questionnaire was used. There were overall 236 respondents participated. There were only two limitations in selecting respondents. Because the survey was focused on Millennials, respondents had to be 23–40 years old. Also they had to have an account in a bank. The survey was distributed in the spring 2017. The data were collected by offline questionnaire. As we mentioned the survey was focused on the segment of Millennials. It means that the sample of respondents was limited just by their age.

We questioned the respondents about their perceptions, satisfaction opinions and habits in the area of financial services. We questioned them about the factors, which they consider as important in image building of the bank. One of the most significant factors that can help to create and maintain the company’s image are promotional activities. We questioned them also about the satisfaction with their bank in the area of selected factors. In the literature we can find many surveys focused on the exploring the impact of educational attainment on the consumers’ perceptions. That is why the authors wanted to investigate the relation between educational attainment and perceptions of Millennials, who the paper is focused on.

The following two research questions were defined for the purpose of the research:

- RQ1: How does the educational attainment influence the perceptions of Millennials about importance of chosen factors in creating the image of the bank?

- RQ2: How do the respondents consider these factors in the most used banks – Česká spořitelna, ČSOB and Komerční banka?

For gaining the answer of the RQ1 of the study CHI-SQUARE TEST as a statistical method in MS EXCEL was used. Chi-square test was used for investigating the rate of importance of some factors creating the image of the bank according to educational attainment. For gaining the answer of the RQ2 comparison was used.

The structure of the respondents according to their bank account we can see on the Fig. 1.
1: The structure of respondents according to their bank account  
Source: Authors

2: The structure of respondents according to their age  
Source: Authors

3: The structure of respondents according to their status  
Source: Authors

4: The structure of respondents according to their educational attainment  
Source: Authors
The structure was 54.0% female and 46.0% male, dominated by 23–26 years old people (see Fig. 2).

The largest group according to status is represented by single people (70.76%), the second largest group is formed by married people (23.73%), group of divorced people was just 5.08% and one widow/widower (see Fig. 3).

In the area of education, the largest group represents the respondents with university education diplomas (see Fig. 4). Their share amounted to 63% of the total sample of respondents. The respondents with higher educational attainment were the second largest group (32%).

RESULTS

For the answering of the RQ1 some factors, which influence the image of the bank were tested. We questioned respondents about their perceptions of the importance of these factors. For the purpose of this study we tested behaviour of the employees of the bank, building the relationships with the customer, graphic design of the bank, frequent advertising, quality of the bank service, the length of the bank’s existence in the market, new technologies using and ambassador of the bank.

At the beginning the respondents were questioned about importance of the bank employees’ behaviour which was after tested across the categories of educational attainment. There was not found any relation between importance of the factor of the bank employees’ behaviour and the educational attainment of the respondents, because the number of significance was 0.4024. It means that we accept the null hypothesis: The educational attainment has no significant influence on the considering of bank employees’ behaviour importance (see Fig. 5).

Afterwards the respondents were asked about the relationships building with the customers and its importance. Also in this case no relation was found. The number of significance was 0.5447, what means that we accept the null hypothesis: The educational attainment has no significant influence on the considering of importance of the relationships building with the customers.

Another question was about the importance of graphic design of the bank. No relation was found there. The number of significance was 0.1532 and it means that we accept the null hypothesis: The educational attainment has no significant influence on the perception of importance of graphic design. And we reject the alternative hypothesis: The educational attainment has significant influence on the perception of importance of graphic design.

The importance of frequent advertising as the factor for making a good image was tested subsequently (see Fig. 6). The number of significance was 0.0534, so we accept the null hypothesis: The educational attainment has no significant influence on the perception of importance of frequent advertising. And we reject the alternative hypothesis: The educational attainment has significant influence on the perception of importance of frequent advertising.
As we can see from the Fig. 6 there is not a big contrast. In every category the opinions are almost equal. Also there is no significant evidence about relation between opinions about the importance of frequent advertising and educational attainment.

Another factor, which was tested, was quality of bank services. The respondents were asked, if they consider quality of bank services as an important factor in creating image of the bank. No relation was found there. The number of significance was 0.4216 and it means that we accept the null hypothesis: The educational attainment has no significant influence on the perception of importance of quality of the services. And we reject the alternative hypothesis: The educational attainment has significant influence on the perception of importance of quality of services.

The length of the bank’s existence in the market was another factor of testing. We questioned the respondents about their perceptions of traditions and long existence of the bank (Fig. 7).

The number of significance was 0.777 and it means that we accept the null hypothesis: The educational attainment has no significant influence on the perception of importance of length of the bank’s existence in the market. And we reject the alternative hypothesis: The educational attainment has significant influence on the perception of importance of length of the bank’s existence.

We were also asking about the new technologies using as the factor, which can create the image of the bank. In this case we found the relation between educational attainment and perceptions about using the new technologies (see Fig. 8). The number of significance was 0.013 and it means that we reject the null hypothesis: The educational attainment has no significant influence on the perception of importance of new technologies. And we accept the alternative hypothesis: The educational attainment has significant influence on the perception of importance of using new technologies.

The last factor, which was tested, was ambassador. We questioned respondents, if they think that ambassador of some brand is important factor in creating image of the bank. In this case no relation was found. The number of significance was 0.1962 and it means that we accept the null hypothesis: The educational attainment has no significant influence on the perception of importance of using the ambassador. And we reject the alternative hypothesis: The educational attainment has significant influence on the perception of importance of using the ambassador.

We have been comparing three most used banks in our survey in order to answer RQ2. We compared the factors, which we have been testing in RQ1. It means the factors, which can be significant in creating the image of the bank.
As we can see from Fig. 9 the respondents are satisfied on average, satisfied and very satisfied with the factor of behaviour of the Česká spořitelna employees. With the relationships building the clients are mostly on average satisfied, also with the graphic design. With the frequent advertising the clients are satisfied and satisfied on average. Quality of services is according to their clients mostly average and good. Česká spořitelna is in the market for a long time that is why the clients are mostly very satisfied. The new technologies using is mostly in an average and good level. And finally ambassador is the factor, which the clients can’t evaluate or consider this factor mostly as average.

According to Fig. 10 the clients consider the behaviour of the employees mostly as good or very good. The clients of ČSOB are mostly on average satisfied with relationship building. Graphic design of bank is mostly evaluated as average or good. The same situation is about the advertising frequency. Quality of services, length of existence and new technologies using are indicated by clients as good and very good. Also in this case the clients can’t evaluate the ambassador of their bank ČSOB.

With the behaviour of the employees of Komerční banka, the clients are mostly satisfied and very satisfied, what we can see on the Fig. 11. The relationships building with the clients is mostly average. Graphic design and frequent advertising are mostly considered as average or good. The quality of services and length of existence are mostly considered as good and very good. Within the new technologies using, the clients of Komerční banka are satisfied on average and mostly satisfied. The clients of Komerční banka also mostly can’t evaluate the ambassador of the bank.

**DISCUSSION**

Millennials present very attractive segment in today’s market. It is a big group of consumers, who have different needs, habits, perceptions, but they are connecting by the year of born and also the environment conditions, in which they were growing up or they are actually living in. That is why it is so important to identify the significant factors in which the Millennials are different and why. It is necessary to look for the causes of these differences and to find the solutions for that. Thanks to identifying these factors, segmenting the customers and then selecting the groups of customers, the companies can better respond to demand, which is coming out of these customers.

Corporate image is so important because it is created by subjects of the market. The companies are trying to represent their identity in the best way
to link the preferences and values of the customers. That is why it is necessary to identify these values and also the factors, which cause the difference among the members of one segment. By naming these elements the companies can offer their products in an appropriate way, by appropriate language and with appropriate content. So we focused on searching the relations between factor of the education and the perceptions of importance of creating image elements. By getting more and more information about the customers the companies can better meet their needs.

Almost 99% of respondents answered that the behaviour of the employees is important. It means that it is necessary to focus on this factor. The most satisfied customers with the behaviour of the employees are in Česká spořitelna. Frequent advertising is important factor of creating image for almost 41% of respondents. Just about 12% of respondents answered that the advertising is bad or very bad in all of three banks. And about 11% of respondents answered that they don’t know, it means they don’t mind this factor as an important. Almost 59% of respondents consider length of existence of the bank as an important. And between 11 – 13% answered that their satisfaction with the length of their bank is bad or very bad. Almost 85% of respondents answered that the new technologies using is important factor of creating an image of the bank. It is not so surprisingly in the recent fast changing world. But, there is a little bit strange that for example 20% of customers of Česká spořitelna answered that they can’t consider their satisfaction with this factor. Also about 18% of customers of Komerční banka answered that they are not able to consider their satisfaction with new technologies using. On one hand the respondents answered it is important factor on other hand they can’t consider that, what brings us to the question – is it really important for them? It could be the question of another research related to the cohort Millennials.

CONCLUSION

Image is usually considered as a complex, multidimensional structural system that is influenced by certain features of stability and persistence. Image consists of objective and subjective, correct and incorrect ideas, attitudes and experiences of an individual or a certain group of people about a particular object. The image has both cognitive and affective and behavioral, social and personal components. It is strongly emotionally colored and shows the specific effects of group action. Image is communicable and can be analyzed by scientific methods. Despite some stability it is influenced by the long-term concept. Image points at the psychological and social nature of the object, such as brands, firms, services and so on. (Vysekalová, 2009)

Banks are increasingly aware of the fact that it is not possible to create loyalty to their customers only through marketing communication tools such as advertising, sales promotion, direct marketing, online marketing communication but it is more and more important to use appropriate PR tools on a long-term basis to ensure positive corporate image among their customers. Millennials are currently becoming a very attractive target segment for banks. Inside this segment we can find many differences regarding the technologies using, perceptions of effectiveness of communication tools, using media and so on. These habits are mostly in relation with the identifying factors as gender, educational attainment, age, status. That is why we have focused in this survey on finding out the relations between educational attainment and perceptions of importance of some factors. These factors can be considered as elements, which create the image of the banks. The structure of sample is quite limited. There is just 1% of respondents with primary educational attainment. It is obvious because not so many people finish attending school after the primary school. It means that the number of respondents in the sample, against the number of members of in Millennials segment with just primary school, is relevant. That is why we decided to include these respondents into the survey.
As we can see from the findings, there is no relation between educational attainment and perceptions of these factors importance. We have been testing behaviour of the employees of the bank, the relationships building with the customers, graphic design of the bank, frequent advertising, quality of the bank service, the length of the bank’s existence in the market, the new technologies using and ambassador of the bank. Just in the case of new technologies using we have found the relation between educational attainment and considering the importance of this factor.

For the purpose of the study three banks were compared. In the comparison of three banks in the area of clients’ satisfaction with the factors testing in the first part ČSOB was considered according to their clients as the best. In the factors – behaviour of the employees of the bank, quality of the bank service, the length of the bank’s existence in the market, the new technologies using – ČSOB was indicated by their clients better than Česká spořitelna and Komerční banka. So, we can allege that the clients of the ČSOB are more satisfied with the tested factors than the clients of Česká spořitelna and clients of Komerční banka. It means that ČSOB is building a good image among the clients.

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