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Brand Image as a Strategic Lever for Mergers and Acquisitions in the Financial Services Sector in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

There were a number of mergers and acquisition (M&A) and hostile take overs in South Africa over the past decade and half. Companies in a M&A are in most instances preoccupied in pursuit of increasing the shareholder value and securing the biggest market share through effective branding. The research objectives of the study were to evaluate the effectiveness of mergers and acquisitions in relation to its image as a brand and to provide recommendations in respect of future merger and acquisition deals for an organisation. The study adopted the quantitative method of research by means of a survey questionnaire and the target population for this study was 310 managers (in the financial services sector) in Kwazulu-Natal. Relevant descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data collected. The research findings uncovered that from a turnaround perspective in mergers and acquisition deals, brand image should be skilfully and appealingly crafted to generate the desired return on investment. This study contributes to the body of knowledge by revealing that institutions who merge in the financial services sector consolidate their position in the market if brand image is aligned to the institution's strategy. A fortified brand image results in greater market share.

Keywords: Brand Image, Mergers and Acquisitions in South Africa, Rebranding; Branding for Business, Branding Strategies for the Financial Sector
JEL Classifications: M30, M31, G34

1. INTRODUCTION

Mergers and acquisitions (M&A's) are the acts of consolidating companies or assets, toward gaining competitive advantages, increasing growth and market share, or influencing supply chains (Palmer 2022). M&A activity has recently been driven by the surge in global competition which demands firms to become world class suppliers of quality products or service (Mohibullah 2019). Every organisation has its vision to become a reputable company which is achievable through maximising their market share and future growth (Snow, 2023). Synergy, or the potential financial benefit achieved through the combining of companies, is often a driving force behind an acquisition or merger. The expected synergy achieved through a merger or acquisition can be attributed to various factors, such as increased revenues, greater market share, cost reduction, or shared talent and technology (Bauer and Friesl, 2024). There have been a number of mergers and acquisitions and hostile take overs in South Africa over the past two decades (Ward, 2022). The study was conducted at Nedbank (a South African Financial Services Institution) because of convenience in terms of being in close proximity to the Durban head office. The reason for choosing Nedbank was that the institution acquired 51.1% of Imperial Bank in 2001, and the merger with Bank of Executors (BoE) followed in 2002. By that time, BoE also included the assets of NBS and Boland Bank (Mondliwa and Roberts, 2021; Havemann, 2021). Nedbank purchased South Africa's sixth-largest bank, BoE for 7.4 billion rand. "At the time, public confidence in the smaller South African banks was quickly declining and some, like BoE, were suffering a flight of liquidity. Nedbank acquired BoE to improve its retail operations but was forced to borrow 5.5 billion rand to finance the transaction just as interest rates were about to rise…" (Tushman and Kiron, 2013:3; Kemp, 2022).

In September 2003, the previous head of BoE, Tom Boardman was appointed as Nedbank's new chief executive officer (CEO). Boardman immediately began restrategising and focusing the bank on its South African business, selling off many global assets that the organisation had acquired under his predecessor. He led a massive restructuring effort that integrated both Nedbank's and BoE's client-base and sought to improve the bank's image of one that catered for the masses and not just elites. "During 2003, Nedbank's market capitalisation plummeted; its share price fell to an all-time low, shareholder animosity escalated, and 3000 layoffs (about 12% of all employees)" (Tushman and Kiron, 2013), making 2003 the bank's annus horribilis (horrible year) (Padayachee, 2021). On average, organisations refresh their corporate brands once every 7-10 years (Pollard, 2020). The institution relooked at its brand strategy for opportunities of enhancement over the next 5 years and assessed the changes that were occurring within the organisation to enhance client experiences. The bank believed it was now an opportune moment to project externally the positive changes currently happening within the organisation. To improve and enhance client service more holistically, a refreshment of the Nedbank brand was needed to reflect the momentum the bank is heading towards for the future (Pietrus et al., 2023). Through conversations with its clients the bank recognised the importance of money. Thus, its new tag line, "See money differently" evolved to reinforce the fact that where money is well managed, it has endless positive possibilities (Closing Bell, 2017; Zwakala and Steenkamp, 2021).

1.1. Research Objectives

The research objectives of the study were to evaluate the effectiveness of mergers and acquisitions in relation to its image as a brand (brand awareness) and to provide recommendations in respect of future merger and acquisition deals for an organisation.

1.2. Rationale and Significance of the Study

The rationale of the study was to undertake a review of mergers and acquisitions in the financial services sector in South Africa and the subsequent massive restructuring in terms of strategic importance and strategic levers from a turnaround perspective, hence the study then aimed to establish whether the mergers and acquisitions within that period has been effective based on return on investment, brand image and culture (people effectiveness). This research article will primarily focus on brand image as one of the strategic levers in M&A's from a business turnaround perspective.

The significance of the study is that one of the key strategic lever's identified from a turnaround perspective for M&A is brand image. If this lever is not in unison, the merger will not get the required ROI, and hence the merger can be an absolute failure. This research study adds to other significant scholarly research contributions (Ndlovu, 2018; Zwakala, 2020; Goldman and McCoy, 2020; Zwakala and Steenkamp, 2021).

The findings of this research study contributes to the body of knowledge and reveals that institutions that merge in the financial services sector consolidate their position in the market once their brand image is in sync (or aligned to the business's strategy) allowing them to fortify and defend their market positioning. Furthermore, as a result of greater market share this could allow firms to have greater leverage which lays the platform to launch into lucrative markets such as in Africa.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction to M&A's

A merger is a transaction whereby two companies combine to usually form a new company. An acquisition on the other hand is a takeover of a target company by an offeror or acquirer (Firer et al., 2021). This can be achieved either directly by becoming the owner of these assets or indirectly by obtaining control of the management of the company. A horizontal merger is a consolidation of firms that operate in the same industry with the same market offering (goods or services). The aim of this merger is to create synergy and, in the process, increase market share (Evans, 2021). This is the type of merger and acquisition that Nedbank undertook in terms of its acquisitions' of Bank of Executors (BoE), Natal Building Society (NBS), Permanent and People's Bank.

2.2. Key Benefits of M&A's

2.2.1. Synergy (1 + 1 = 3)

Every company has its vision to become a reputable company, which is attainable by maximising its market share and future growth (Abbas et al., 2019). M&A create synergies which mean that the two firms are worth more together than being apart. Synergy, or the potential financial benefit achieved through the combining of companies, is often a driving force behind an acquisition or merger. Return on investment (ROI) is the gain or loss to the investor resulting from an investment or acquisition (Firer et al., 2021). A high ROI means the investment gains compare favourably to investment cost. The overarching reason for combining with another firm is that the merger/union will provide for the attainment of strategic goals more speedily and inexpensively than if the company acted by itself. In today's modern era of intense and turbulent change, fierce competition fuelled by rapid technological advances and ever-increasing globalisation, M&A allows firms to gain flexibility, share resources, leverage competencies and create opportunities that otherwise would have been unimaginable and inconceivable (Marks and Mirvis, 2019; Schweizer et al., 2022).

2.2.2. Market share

Firms may merge to increase their market share and market power (Ray, 2022; Schweizer et al. 2022). The acquiring or merged company is bound to have a larger market share as profits can be enhanced through higher prices and reduced competition. M&A is a useful approach for organisations to enter in new markets (Kalimeris, 2010; Irwin et al., 2022). The fact that the consolidation of banks increased their financial capacity and enhanced their competitive advantage has been extensively researched globally (Abbas et al., 2019). Research evidence from the mergers and acquisitions literature, conducted by financial economists, measures performance in terms of cost efficiency, profit efficiency (revenue enhancement), and/or shareholder value. It does not typically consider branding issues, which are the domain of marketing academics.

2.3. Branding

There are numerous definitions of brands and branding, however all converge around the idea that a brand identifies a product that is distinct from its competitors (Kotler and Keller, 2022). A brand is a name, term, symbol, sign, design, or a combination of these, that identifies the seller or offeror of a product or service (Kirby and Kent 2020). There are various colours that hold different meanings and communicate a specific message to the customer (Bottomley and Doyle 2016). The colour green denotes sincerity of a brand. Brands that use darker colours with large, bolded letters with squares target an upper-class market. Certain logo shapes such as squares communicate stability and straight lines imply professionalism and efficiency (Christie, 2014). Nedbank's green colours and squares logo with straight lines reflects sincerity, professionalism and stability (Zwakala, 2016). Effective brands take years and enormous amounts of money to develop (Lambkin and Muzellec, 2019). Brand awareness is the ability of a brand to be at the top of the mind of a customer. Through sustained, aggressive marketing campaigns a brand may be propelled to becoming a leader in its category. In this way brand awareness increases the market value of a brand. The company's brand image should be mirrored in its culture, and the culture should be mirrored in the brand image (Cherian et al., 2021). Due to the world being highly interrelated, the brand image cannot differ from the culture.

2.4. Rebranding for Mergers and Acquisitions

On average, organisations refresh their corporate brands once every 7-10 years (Pollard, 2020) Rebranding is a result of constant changes in the external, internal or both environments in which the organisation exists. The goal of rebranding is to portray a change in an organisation (Plewa and Veale, 2011). The process of rebranding needs to occur at three levels of the organisation. Rebranding is a costly and time-consuming process and for it to be effective it needs to occur at three levels which include the strategic, corporate and product levels. Rebrands can occur as a result of M&A's. The merged entity should create a name for itself in the market place and needs to communicate this to its customers (Lambkin and Muzellec, 2019). In a study of 207 M&A deals in the United States of America (USA), Ettenson and Knowles (2006) found that in forty percent of cases the acquirer company's name replaced that of the target company immediately after an M&A. This strategy is commonly called "backing the stronger horse" which was by far the most prevalent approach (Ellahie et al., 2023). This was also the case with Nedbank's various M&A's.

The size and strength of the merged company, the types of products and services and the relatedness of markets and products form the key in determining which option for a rebrand should be adopted (Lambkin and Muzellec, 2019). A rebrand needs to occur after there has been sufficient research done. Brand repositioning is a costly affair and does not just entail changing the colour or logo of the organisation. The rebranding process has to have one overarching strategy-based plan formulated which sets clear objectives and milestones in implementing a new brand to an organisation's product or business, for this to be successful it is critical to secure buy-in from top management (Pollard, 2020). In South Africa, Nedbank very recently repositioned itself in the market. The rebranding comes after the bank had seen its brand value nose-diving for the past two consecutive years (Goldman and McCoy, 2020). According to Thulani Sibeko, Nedbank Group Executive for Marketing, the bank relooked at its brand strategy for opportunities of enhancement over the next 5 years and assessed the changes that were occurring within the organisation to enhance client experiences. The bank believed it was now (March 2017) an opportune moment to project externally the positive changes currently happening within the organisation (Closing Bell, 2017).

In an effort to improve and enhance client service more holistically, a refreshment of the Nedbank brand was needed to reflect the momentum the bank is heading towards for the future. Through conversations with its clients the bank recognised the importance of money. Thus, its new tag line, "See money differently" reflects and reinforces the fact that where money is well managed, it has endless possibilities for good. The bank has also realised that it has to appeal to the younger generation by being digitally and techno savvy (Zwakala and Steenkamp, 2021). It concedes that the organisation has not kept up with the pace of the latest advancement in technology. Thus, it will be making a concerted effort to allow for both old and young clients to transact according to their preferred channel of choice going forward (Closing Bell, 2017).

2.5. The Role of Social Media in the Consumer Decision Process

There are four stages that a customer goes through in the consumer decision process (Figure 1). Social media is a unique component of the consumer decision journey as it is the only form of marketing that can touch consumers at each stage of this process (Dwivedi et al., 2021). At the first stage, consumers are bombarded with information on products or services, from which they will systematically eliminate options from their initial consideration set. This is then followed (evaluation stage) by consumers seeking a variety of information sources whereby new brands are added to the mix while eliminating others. The third stage is the actual buying of a product which normally entails the consumer entering the store and getting key final information to aid them in making their choice. The final stage focuses on the interaction between the consumer and the actual product (enjoyment, advocacy and bonding) (Sharma et al., 2023). At this stage it is vital that a company effectively use all its touch points be it word-of-mouth, interactions on social media sites to reinforce the positive nature of the relationship between the consumer and the brand (West et al., 2019; Lundin and Kindström, 2023).

The social media focused brand manager has to be up to date with the latest technology that are evolving rapidly (Borges-Tiago et al., 2023). Furthermore he/she must be constantly monitoring the advent of new platforms which regularly spring up. The brand manager must be cognisant of the changes in the business environment and be able to adapt quickly to maintain viable connections to consumers (Czapran, 2023). A recent move to handle social media is the appointment of a 'ringmaster' who is a new type of executive that is both digitally knowledgeable and has the skill and expertise to coordinate marketing as well as consumer-facing activities. This ringmaster in an organisation should be able to keep the consumer abreast, interact with them seamlessly and keep them engaged with the brand (West et al., 2019).

3. METHODOLOGY

Aaker et al. (2020:77), summarise research design to be a comprehensive blueprint that is used to guide a study toward its ultimate objective. In essence it is (research design) an overall plan to connect conceptual research problems to the pertinent empirical research. The research methodology adopted in this study is desktop research (that includes reviews, critiques and analyses of literature based on the topic), as well as reuse of existing data from another research study. Desktop research involves research on existing literature to create new knowledge and insight on the relevant study (Torraco, 2016). Desktop research is the review of previous research findings to gain a broad understanding and gain more in-depth insight (Travis, 2022). The ability to reuse research data is gaining more momentum as it provides a key advantage to wider research (Travis, 2022). The study reused the information from a quantitative research study conducted with a target population of 310 managers of Nedbank in Kwazulu-Natal (KZN). Permission to conduct the study was obtained and the gatekeeper's letter was approved by the senior executive manager of the institution. For the purpose of this research, the non-random sampling technique was applied by specifically directing questionnaires at the managers in KZN. The type of sampling selected is termed "convenience non-probability sampling." The entire population was targeted; hence the sample size was 310 participants.

For this study, a survey questionnaire was used to collect data from respondents. The questionnaire is a flexible means to collect primary data and consists of a set of questions presented to the respondent. A valid questionnaire should enable accurate data that measure the concepts of interest to be collected for the research study. Furthermore, a reliable questionnaire refers to consistency in the data being collected. Close-end questions were used for the study. The Likert scale which was used in the study is one of the most common types of rating scale utilised in questionnaires. Generally, each question provides a statement that reflects a particular attitude or opinion. Respondents were then tasked with indicating their level of agreement or disagreement with each statement (Halperin and Heath, 2021: 261). Upon receipt of feedback from respondents (completed questionnaires), data analysis was undertaken. This is a key step of the data analysis stage as any patterns or trends can be identified here or isolated from the data. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2008:74), the process of data analysis begins with putting in place a plan to manage the large volume collected and reducing it in a meaningful way. The process is completed in identifying significant patterns and by constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data revealed given the purpose of the study. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data and answer the specific research objectives. The researchers endeavoured to ensure validity and reliability. The statistical program that would be used to analyse the data would be the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) as it is reliable and easy to work with. For the purpose of this study a logical link was established between the questionnaire and the research objectives, and this link was demonstrated by statistical analysis. This ensured that the research instrument was reliable and valid in proving the consistency and accuracy in the concepts being investigated.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The univariate statistics related to the study are analysed and discussed. The presentation of data is done per section of the questionnaire. One-sample *t* tests are also provided and discussed in the course of this section. The purpose of the *t* test is to establish significance of the test items in the questionnaire. This is done using a 95% confidence interval. A 95% confidence interval means that at least 95% of the confidence intervals tested would contain the mean value. Furthermore, if the average agreement score (mean) is >3 it implies agreement and if mean <3 it implies disagreement.

4.1. One-Sample Statistics

Tables 1 and 2, Figure 2 provide the descriptive statistics related to brand image. Table 2 shows that significant agreement exists among the respondents. The data for question 1 is not significant and means that there is neither significant agreement nor significant disagreement that respondents were involved in the rebranding process (M = 2.97, SD = 1.215), t (189) = −0.299, P = 0.766.

There is significant agreement that the recent rebranding initiative created a good brand image (brand awareness) for Nedbank (M = 3.85, SD = 0.846), t (190) = 13.946, P < 0.0005. Respondents

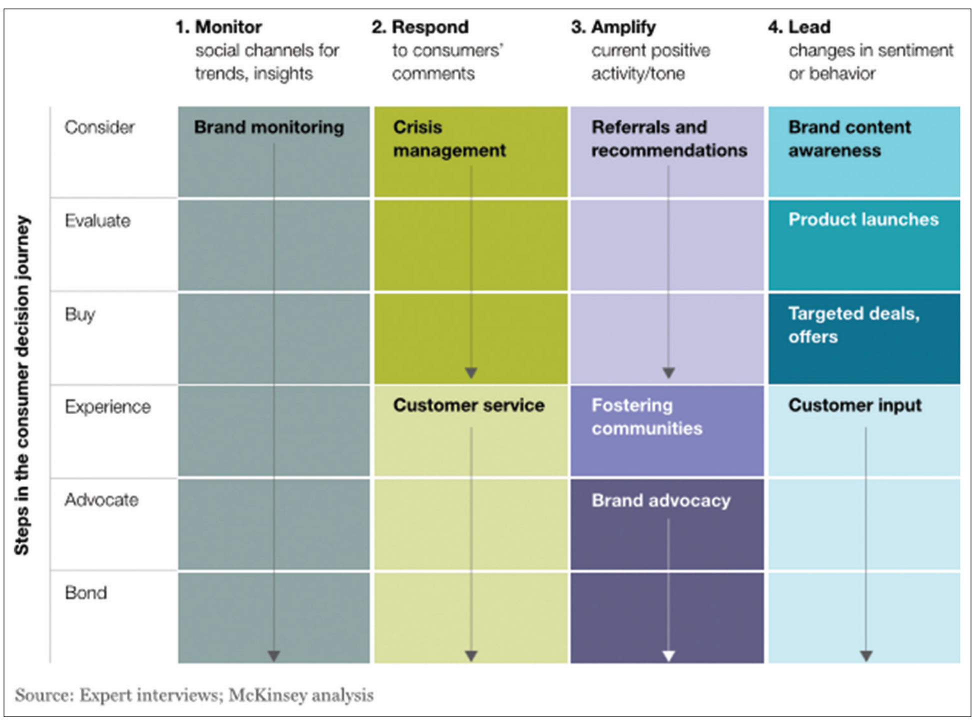
Table 1: Descriptive statistics for brand image

Questions	N	Mean	Standard deviation
1. I was involved in the rebranding process	190	2.97	1.215
2. The recent rebranding initiative created a good brand image (brand awareness) for Nedbank	191	3.85	0.846
3. I am enthusiastic about the bank's new tag line 'see money differently'	191	4.02	0.798
4. The brand is committed to customer service	193	4.03	0.756
5. I understand the company's brand architecture	191	3.92	0.760
6. I live the company's values on a day-to-day basis through my job function	193	4.27	0.647
7. I feel motivated by the brand	191	4.07	0.669
8. I am proud to be associated with the Nedbank brand	193	4.21	0.668
9. I 'live and breathe' the brand and consider myself to be a good brand ambassador of the bank	193	4.16	0.662
10. I do my best to educate my team on the company's brand	193	4.02	0.739
11. Social media has had a positive impact on promoting the brand image of the company	193	3.95	0.782
12. The brand manager is cognisant of the changes in the market and adapts rapidly to maintain viable connections to consumers	191	3.83	0.723
13. The company's brand-image is mirrored in its culture, i.e., the brand image does not differ from the culture	191	3.86	0.734

Table 2: One-sample test for brand image

One-sample test						
	Test value=3					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% confidence interval of the difference	
					Lower	Upper
1. I was involved in the rebranding process	−0.299	189	0.766	−0.026	−0.20	0.15
2. The recent rebranding initiative created a good brand image (brand awareness) for Nedbank	13.946	190	0.000	0.853	0.73	0.97
3. I am enthusiastic about the bank's new tag line 'see money differently'	17.594	190	0.000	1.016	0.90	1.13
4. The brand is committed to customer service	18.941	192	0.000	1.031	0.92	1.14
5. I understand the company's brand architecture	16.751	190	0.000	0.921	0.81	1.03
6. I live the company's values on a day-to-day basis through my job function	27.356	192	0.000	1.275	1.18	1.37
7. I feel motivated by the brand	22.181	190	0.000	1.073	0.98	1.17
8. I am proud to be associated with the Nedbank brand	25.102	192	0.000	1.207	1.11	1.30
9. I 'live and breathe' the brand and consider myself to be a good brand ambassador of the bank	24.374	192	0.000	1.161	1.07	1.25
10. I do my best to educate my team on the company's brand	19.082	192	0.000	1.016	0.91	1.12
11. Social media has had a positive impact on promoting the brand image of the company	16.840	192	0.000	0.948	0.84	1.06
12. The brand manager is cognisant of the changes in the market and adapts rapidly to maintain viable connections to consumers	15.814	190	0.000	0.827	0.72	0.93
13. The company's brand-image is mirrored in its culture, i.e., the brand image does not differ from the culture	16.258	190	0.000	0.864	0.76	0.97

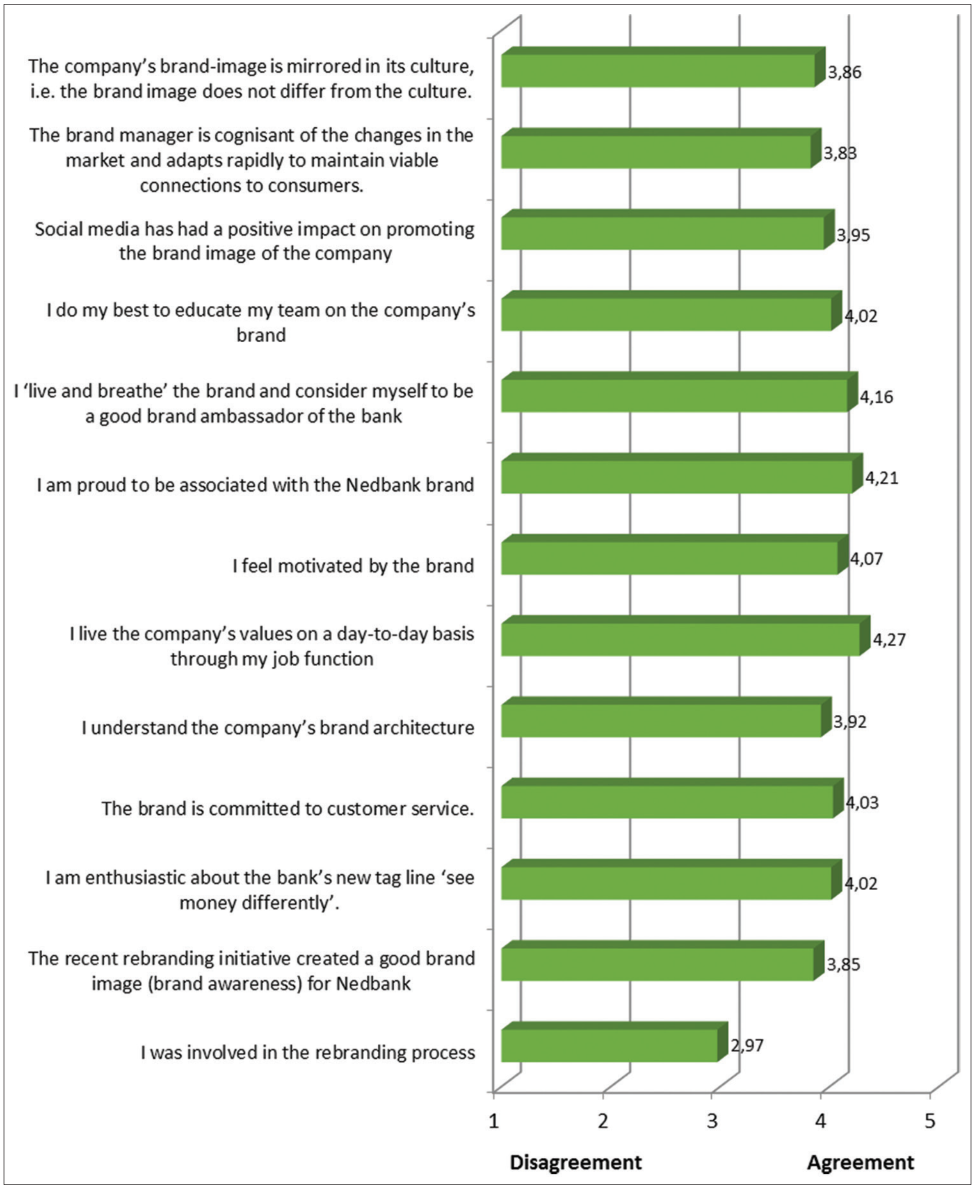
Figure 1: Steps in the consumer decision journey



Source: (McKinsey, 2016)

agreed that they are enthusiastic about the bank's new tag line 'see money differently' and is supported by significance at the 95% confidence level (M = 4.02, SD = 0.798), t (190) = 17.594, P < 0.0005. There is significant agreement that the brand is committed to customer service (M = 4.03, SD = 0.756), t (192) = 18.941, P < 0.0005. Significant agreement was obtained that respondents understand the organisation's brand architecture (M = 3.92, SD = 0.760), t (190) = 16.751, P < 0.0005. The mean values and *t* statistic show significance that respondents live the company's values on a day-to-day basis through their job function (M = 4.27, SD = 0.647), t (192) = 27.356, P < 0.0005. There is significant agreement that respondents feel motivated by the brand (M = 4.07, SD = 0.669), t (190) = 22.181, P < 0.0005. Respondents agreed that they are proud to be associated with

Figure 2: Mean values (Brand image)



the Nedbank brand and is supported by significance at the 95% confidence level (M = 4.21, SD = 0.668), t (192) = 25.102, $P < 0.0005$.

The mean values and *t* statistic show significance that respondents 'live and breathe' the brand by being a good brand ambassador of the bank (M = 4.16, SD = 0.662), t (192) = 24.374, $P < 0.0005$. Significant agreement was obtained that respondents are doing their best to educate their team on the company's brand (M = 4.02, SD = 0.739), t (192) = 19.082, $P < 0.0005$. Respondents agreed that social media has had a positive impact on promoting the brand image of the company and is supported by significance at the 95% confidence level (M = 3.95, SD = 0.782), t (192) = 16.840, $P < 0.0005$. There is significant agreement that the brand manager is cognisant of the changes in the market and adapts rapidly to maintain viable connections to consumers (M = 3.83, SD = 0.723), t (190) = 15.814, $P < 0.0005$. The mean values and *t* statistic show significance that the company's brand image is mirrored in its culture (M = 3.86, SD = 0.734), t (190) = 16.258, $P < 0.0005$.

The first research objective of the study was to evaluate the effectiveness of mergers and acquisitions in relation to its image as a brand (brand awareness).

The researcher found that 78.5% of respondents agreed that the recent rebranding initiative created a good brand image for Nedbank. This statement concurs with the literature that the repositioning of an organisation's brand displays its ability to keep abreast with the changing times and the commitment it has to its customers (Plewa and Veale, 2011). In order to test whether the rebranding was a worthwhile exercise, Nedbank's clients need to perceive the rebrand as increased value, quality excellence and genuine commitment in the service the bank offers.

In an effort to improve and enhance client service more holistically, a refreshment of the Nedbank brand was needed to reflect the momentum the bank is heading towards for the future. Here it must be noted that a majority of 83.7% of respondents are enthusiastic about the bank's new tag line that was introduced in March this year (2017).

Through conversations with its clients the bank recognised the importance of money. Thus, its new tag line, "See money differently" reflects and reinforces the fact that where money is well managed, it has endless possibilities for good (Closing Bell, 2017). Furthermore, the evidence from the research attested to the fact that in corporate branding, employees are key contributors to an organisation's values, as they represent what the brand communicates. The company's vision statement is considered the backbone of an organisation and provides a sense of direction to all stakeholders (Hansen, 2010:7). Managers and employees must have a clear understanding of the bank's vision and be committed to delivering on it.

Emotional motivators should be created between the client and the bank's employees. For this to happen employees need to be a part of the company's bigger purpose which is driven by collaboration into the branding process by executive management. This would entail providing managers and staff insight on the brand promise and training on how to communicate the brand in their daily tasks. There should also be recognition and rewards for outstanding work performance.

An overwhelming 87% of respondents agreed that they 'live and breathe' the brand and consider themselves to be good brand ambassadors of the bank. The mean values and *t* statistic show significance that respondents 'live and breathe' the brand by being a good brand ambassador of the bank. This supports the statement that brand ambassadors of an organisation should be passionate, positive, committed, and well educated professionals who think like owners of the business (Kapadia, 2019). Furthermore, living the brand must be embedded in the employee experience and daily work in an organisation (Wolfswinkel and Enslin, 2022).

With a majority of 80.9% of respondents in agreement, it can be established that respondents do their best to educate their team on the company's brand. This statement concurs with Merrilees and Miller (2008) that effective training and communication within the organisation should be undertaken to ensure the rebrand is successful. It is worth noting that 42.5% of respondents have a degree or higher qualification. In addition, the bank has a young management workforce as the majority of respondents (68.9%) are under 42 years of age but 43% of respondents have spent 5 or more years in a managerial position. The bank has a good blend of both young, enthusiastic as well as older, experienced managers thus the older and more experienced personnel are in a prime position to train, mentor and coach the younger management team members.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The second research objective of the study was to suggest potential benefits on future merger and acquisition deals to an organisation. The following suggestions are discussed below:

5.1. Successful rebranding

Emotional motivators should be created between the client and the bank's employees. For this to happen employees need to be a part of the company's bigger purpose which is driven by collaboration into the branding process by executive management. This would entail providing managers and staff insight on the brand promise and training on how to communicate the brand in their daily tasks. There should also be recognition and rewards for outstanding work performance.

Research has shown that moving customers of a bank from highly satisfied to fully connected could have up to 3 times the return of moving them from unconnected to highly satisfied clients. Customers who engage in an omni-channel experience, for example, are much more emotionally connected and therefore consistently more profitable (Magids et al., 2015).

5.2. Brand Emissary

It is imperative that managers "live and breathe" the brand and consider themselves to be good brand ambassadors/emissaries of the bank. If managers and employees do not feel part of the brand and cannot "live and breathe the brand" in their job function it could have an impact on customer service, external communication, and on employee productivity. Executive management needs to determine the reason if staff are not feeling a part of the brand and introduce initiatives, such as workshops, to reduce the gap. A complete overview of the company should be presented to new managers/employees upon joining the organisation, preferably at the induction phase. This workshop could be dubbed the "living the brand" induction seminar. This will allow personnel in managerial positions to make an easy transition into the company.

5.3. Social Media

Due to the world being highly connected and operating as one global village, the brand image cannot differ from the culture, i.e., the brand image of the company should be mirrored in its culture. In today's modern technologically advanced world, social media is playing a huge part in marketing, either positively or negatively. However as argued by West et al. (2015), social media is a unique component of the consumer decision journey as it is the only form of marketing that can touch consumers at each and every stage of this process. The brand manager must be cognisant of the changes in the business environment and be able to adapt quickly to maintain viable connections to consumers. Therefore, it is vital that a company effectively use all of its touch points, be it word-of-mouth or interactions on social media sites to reinforce the positive nature of the relationship between the consumer and the brand.

5.4. Creating Financial Synergies

The term financial synergy is closely linked to return on investment (ROI). Every organisation has its vision to become a reputable company which is achievable through maximising ROI. The evidence of this research study indicates that Nedbank should be considering growing further into Africa as opportunities arise to acquire control of smaller assets at reasonable valuations and although getting to scale in Africa may take a longer time, the seeds for this future growth should be planted on an opportunistic basis (Bonorchis, 2017).

In closing, a review of the literature supports the notion that customers need to perceive the image of a brand as increased value in the product or service the organisation offers. The significance of the study and the humble contribution of the researcher to new knowledge reveal that institutions that merge in the financial services sector will consolidate their position in the market only if their brand image is credible and appealing, allowing them to fortify and defend their positions. As a result of greater market share this could allow firms to muscle flex which lays the platform to launch into uncontested markets like Africa. For effective/successful M&A deals, both qualitative and quantitative aspects need to be considered in a balanced way.

The following are managerial implications for brand management during mergers and acquisitions in the financial services sector:

- Employee engagement and training: Brand managers will need to involve employees in the branding process, provide training on brand communication, and implement recognition to motivate alignment with brand values.
- Brand ambassadorship: Brand managers should be encouraged to embody brand values in all their actions and interactions across all touchpoints.
- Regular workshops and initiatives: Workshops and initiatives will need to be conducted to bridge the gap between employees and the brand, ensuring alignment with communication and customer service goals.
- Social media management: Brand managers will need to be cognisant of social media's impact on brand perception, ensuring that the brand image reflects company culture and values, whilst utilizing touchpoints to reinforce positive relationships.
- Financial synergies and market expansion: There should be careful consideration of opportunities for market expansion. Managers should evaluate M&A deals based on alignment with brand image and business strategy.
- Cultural alignment: Smooth integration of cultures and values should be ensured to maintain consistency in brand messaging and customer experience.
- Brand transition planning: Clear timelines and communication plans should be developed to inform stakeholders about changes to brand names, products, and services.
- Customer communication and engagement: Transparent communication with customers should be maintained throughout the merger or acquisition process to address concerns and solicit feedback.
- Brand reputation management: Media coverage and social media sentiment should be monitored to mitigate potential brand damage, as well as proactive reputation management strategies should be implemented.
- Regulatory compliance and legal considerations: Whilst implementing brand-related activities, compliance with applicable laws and regulations should be ensured, during M&A transactions, to minimize legal risks and liabilities.

By implementing these managerial implications, organisations can strengthen their brand image, improve customer relationships, and drive sustainable growth and profitability.

6. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

A review of the literature supports the notion that customers need to perceive the image of a brand as increased value in the product or service the organisation offers. The analysis uncovered that from a turnaround perspective in mergers and acquisition deals, brand image has to be in unison with an organisation's business strategy to generate the desired return on investment. The key findings of the study reveal that institutions that merge in the financial services sector will consolidate their position in the market only if brand image are in sync, allowing them to fortify and defend their positions. As a result of greater market share this could allow firms to have greater leverage which lays the platform to launch into uncontested markets. The evidence of this research study indicates that firms in the financial services sector should be considering growing further into Africa as opportunities arise to acquire control of smaller assets at reasonable valuations and although getting to scale in African markets may take a longer time, the seeds for this future growth should be planted on an opportunistic basis.

Future research endeavours emerging from this study could focus on strategic levers for mergers and acquisitions (M&A's) in other service sectors as well as a focus on multi and omni-channel experience of emotional marketing (brand image) to assess whether this ultimately impacts favourably on return on investment. Future research could explore strategic levers for M&A deals in various service sectors beyond financial services. Research studies can assess both qualitative and quantitative aspects of M&A deals to ensure a balanced approach that considers the impact on brand image and ROI. Further studies can focus on Multi and Omni-channel Experiences. Academic scholars should investigate the impact of emotional marketing (brand image) across multiple channels to gauge the return on investment. Additionally, an evaluation can be undertaken in terms of how providing an integrated and seamless experience across different channels enhances customer engagement and loyalty, ultimately driving financial performance.

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