EXPLORING FACTORS AFFECTING BRAND MARKETING OF BANGLADESH STEEL INDUSTRY: A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

The steel industry of Bangladesh is now an emerging and one of the major industrial sectors of the country. Steel being a high-end product it is necessary to create a strong brand positioning of the steel brand in the customers mind in order to reap benefits and have a strong competitive advantage over other steel companies. This paper aims to explore the marketing communication factors that affect the brand marketing of steel industry in Bangladesh based on the perceptions of corporate firms and the retailers. To collect interview data, a total 10 in-depth semi structured interviews was conducted from the corporate firms and the retailers of Chittagong city which were further analyzed thematically through NVivo-11 software. Under the theme of corporate and retailers’ perceptions, this study found eight sub-themes such as brand value, brand activities, customer demand, direct communication, facilities, price, qualities, and workshops & seminar. Eventually, this study was concluded by providing few recommendations for organisational implication.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

On the word of Wood (2000), brands often provide the primary points of differentiation between competitive offerings in consumer marketing, and as such they can be critical to the success of companies. For consumers, brands can be used to identify the sources or manufacturers while let manufacturers or distributors to know their responsibility. Most importantly, the brands have a special meaning to consumers. Because consumers learned the brands based on the experiences of using the products and from the years of manufacturers marketing plans that they can find which brand is acceptable and which brand are not satisfy their needs. As a result, the brands become a kind of shorthand to simplify products purchase decision tools or methods. Therefore, as per the author, the brands can help consumers connect all the factors of the product. While brands have been widely used to identify products origin and its physical characteristics for many centuries (Farquhar, 1989), currently, the brand-related issues, such as, brand loyalty, brand image and brand equity are widely discussed, but being less concerned about the brand-related marketing to create brand value. In line with Keller (2001), the brand marketing includes many elements such as product strategy, price strategy, channel strategy and communication strategy, and use them to satisfy customer’s needs for creating brand value.
On the other hand, steel industry is now an established and growing industry in Bangladesh. Although there were few steel companies before the liberation war, but it took a revolution during the 90s. At that time developer companies and other construction agencies came forward to build modern infrastructure and countries other infrastructure projects and thus steel use increases rapidly. And now many steel companies have become successful and established themselves as a well-known brand in the steel industries for example, Bangladesh Steel Re-Rolling Mills (BSRM), Abul Khair Steel Re-Rolling Mills (AKS), Ratanpur Steel Re-Rolling Mills (RSRM), Kabir Steel Re-Rolling Mills (KSRM), GPH Ispat Limited, Baizid Steel Industries Limited etc. Among these steel industries, some of them are able to manage their desired economic growth while some of them are not able manage their economic growth up to the expectation due to lack of proper brand activities. By maintaining proper brand activities, any steel company can create a strong brand positioning in the customers mind to gain benefits and have a strong competitive advantage over other steel companies. If any company does not maintain strong brand marketing activities, then it will be a major drawback in creating brand awareness in the consumers mind because as said by Macdonald and Sharp (1996), brand awareness has significant effects on consumer decision making by influencing which brands enter the consideration set, and it also influences which brands are selected from the consideration set. To have strong brand awareness in the consumer mind, it is important to conduct brand activities continually even if it is a strong brand. And, more new companies are coming in the industry with more brand activities recently, so it is high time to examine the effects of stopping or not maintaining branding activities on the consumer mind. Thus, this study attempts to explore the marketing communication factors that affect the brand marketing of steel industry in Bangladesh.

LITERATURE REVIEW

DEFINING BRAND AND ITS COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGES

Along with Avis (2009), Moore and Reid (2008) from the thousands of years the word brand has arguably existed in this world. Nevertheless, in the late 19th century the new concept of brand began with the introduction of trademarks and attractive packaging as stated by Fullerton (1988) and McCrum (2000) and was developed as ‘a guarantee of authenticity’ (Feldwick 1991, p 21). By focusing on the tangible/physical brand attributes as a point of differentiation, in 1960, the American Marketing Association (AMA) defines the brand, which is: “A name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of the competitors”. Nonetheless, the earlier definition provided by the AMA in 1960 has been criticised for being too product-oriented, with emphasis on visual features as differentiating mechanisms. And later, in a more recent definition of brand, AMA in 1995 adds ‘any
other feature’ to the attributes that might differentiate, reflecting the developments in brand theory (Avis, 2009) and accepts intangibles attributes of the product, such as image, to be the point of differentiation. The value of this definition is that it focuses on a fundamental brand purpose, which is differentiation. It should not be forgotten that brands operate in a market environment where differentiation is crucially important. Even where monopolies exist, companies may choose to position their brand(s) with a view to future competition. The other key feature of this definition is that it takes the corporate perspective rather than emphasizing consumer benefits (Wang, & Tzeng, 2012).

Moreover, Ambler (1992) provides a consumer-oriented approach in defining a brand as, the promise of the bundles of attributes that someone buys and provides satisfaction. The attributes that make up a brand may be real or illusory, rational or emotional, tangible or invisible. Likewise, de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley (1997) defined brand as a multi-dimensional construct containing nine dimensions. And these nine dimensions were organised into 3 categories such as input, output and evolutionary perspectives where the input perspective is company oriented, the output perspective is customer oriented and the evolutionary perspectives is the long-term orientation of the brand as an evolving identity. The de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley’s (1997) nine dimensions of defining brand: legal instrument, logo, company, identity, image, personality, relationship, added value, and evolving entity.

Similarly, Goodyear (1996) hypothesised brand as a meaningful symbol for whole sectors of society evolving, or metamorphosizing through customer driven marketing. In the same way, Kunde (2000) noted brands are not static but evolve over time. Along with the author, branding moves from - being something the brand owner does to the consumer to something the consumer does with the brand. Besides, many other brand definitions and descriptions focus on the methods used to achieve differentiation and/or emphasize the benefits the consumer derives from purchasing brands. These include definitions and descriptions that emphasize brands as an image in the consumers’ minds brand personality (Wang, & Tzeng, 2012). Styles and Ambler (1995) identified two broad philosophical approaches to define a brand. The first is the product plus approach which views branding as an addition to the product while the second approach is the holistic perspective in which the focus is the brand itself. Using the marketing mix, the brand is tailored to the needs and wants of a specified target group. The elements of the marketing mix are unified by the brand such that the individual elements of the mix (such as price), are managed in a way which supports the brand message (Keller, 2003).

Additionally, Hoeffler and Keller (2003) stated that the value of a brand to an organization can be seen by recognizing some of the marketplace benefits that are created from having a strong brand. Few of such benefits are: enhanced product perceptions, better customer loyalty, less susceptibility to competitive marketing
actions and marketing crises, more elastic customer response to price decreases, in addition, inelastic customer response to price increases, better intermediary cooperation and support, augmented marketing communication effectiveness, and additional licensing and brand extension opportunities. Thus, firms will vary in their ability to realize these benefits depending on their own marketing skills and resources and the marketplace circumstances and context in which they operate. Some firms face strong competitive challenges that reduce the likelihood and nature of these branding benefits. Other firms are confronted by tough-minded or fickle consumers who similarly inhibit brand value creation. Nevertheless, if individual consumers or companies are making choices between different products and services, brands and thus brand management will matter to an organization (Keller, 2009).

NECESSITY OF BUILDING STRONG BRANDS

In accordance with the several studies from the marketing literature (Kay, 2006; Keller, 1998; Aaker, 1996), managers from all the business sectors are exceptionally engrossed in building strong brands for the reason that developing strong brands is a worthy independent marketing goal as well as autonomous from others concerns of the organisation (Kay 2006). Conversely, on the word of Aaker (1996), developing the strength of a brand is not deemed to be easy. Besides, as per the suggestions of the branding literature, brands that are poorly positioned, or associated with inferior products and services, could not able to build a strong brand by doing more advertisement only. Because it requires a wide-ranging analysis of market positioning, and hence the modes of research as well as the rules to follow in making branding decisions are the frightful tasks for managers (Kay 2006).

For a precise customer or market segment, Woodside and Walser (2007) define brand strength as the relative power of enticing customers to a given brand in comparison to other brands in terms of the product attributes and services. Increasing brand strength may lead to enhanced brand equity where according to Solomon (2009) brand equity includes the consumers’ feelings about a brand’s personality and indicates to what extent consumers hold strong, favourable and unique associations with a brand in memory. Similarly, Feldwick (1996) simplifies brand equity as a measure of the strength of consumers’ attachment to a brand. Correspondingly, according to Keller (1993), brand equity represents a condition wherein consumers are acquainted with the brand and recalls some favourable, strong and unique brand associations (Keller, 2003; Wood 2000).

Along with Keller (2001), there is four steps of building a strong brand, according to CBBE model (customer-based brand equity model) which are brand identity, brand meaning, brand responses and brand relationship. Hence all the four steps are inter-related to each other. As stated by the author. Because, the brand meaning cannot be established unless the brand identity has been created, likewise brand responses cannot be occurred unless the right meaning has been developed and a brand
relationship cannot be falsified unless the proper responses have been prompted. Moreover, Keller’s (2001) CBBE model also claims that in building a strong brand the four steps can also be a set of essential questions, where customers are being asked about brands. Hence it is important to keep in mind the ordering of those branding related questions for the brand builders where the first question deals with brand identity is ‘who are you?’ and then the next is brand meaning and enquiries ‘what are you?’. The third question deals with brand responses and inquires “What about you? Or What do I think or feel about you?” while the last question is about brand relationship i.e. “What about you and me? Or What kind of association and how much of a connection would I like to have with you?” (Keller 2003 pp. 75-76).

On the contrary, Aaker (1996) discourses dissimilar factors which create difficulties in building strong brands. According to his statement, these factors were: pressure on price competition, the competitors’ proliferation, market fragmentation, complex branding strategies and brand relation, temptation to change uniqueness, predisposition against innovation, pressures to invest elsewhere and compressions for interim outcomes. Against these downsides, Aaker (1996) suggests that two technical ways for building successful brand. Firstly, the brand builder should apprehend how to develop brand identity to know what the brand stands for along with effectively express the acquired identity. Secondly, to manage organisation’s internal forces and pressures, that is, to recognise organizational prejudice against true innovation and towards diversification and short-term results.

**DIFFERENT TYPES OF MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS IN BRAND MARKETING**

Marketing communication is a tactic by which firms are attempting to notify, convince and remind the consumers regarding the products and brands they sell directly or indirectly (Todorova, 2015, Kotler & Keller, 2012). Particularly, marketing communication signifies the ‘voice’ of the company as well as its brands. Through marketing communication, firms can start a dialogue and build relations with and among their consumers (Todorova, 2015). On the word of Reid, Luxton, and Mavondo (2005), in building and maintaining relations among stakeholders, plus in influencing these associations in terms of brand and channel equity, marketing communications can play a decisive role. Together with Dawar (2004), effective marketing communications have made brands as a central point of many company’s marketing efforts and considered as a basis of market power, competitive advantage and maximum returns. To know the role of diverse types of marketing communications for building a strong brand, Keller’s (2001) comprehensive and cohesive customer-based brand equity (CBBE) model can help business organisations. According to the CBBE model, basically brand equity is explained by the brand knowledge formed in consumers’ minds through several marketing programs and activities (Keller, 2008). As per this model, the activities under marketing communications contribute to brand equity and drive sales in various ways such as by forming awareness of the brand;
relating the right connotations to the brand image in consumers' mind; prompting positive brand judgments; enabling a robust consumer–brand connection (Keller 2001, 2008). As per Keller (2009), there are eight major modes of communications under the marketing communication mix where the first four are related to mass media types of communications and the later four are based on personal modes of communication (see table I).

Table I: Major Types of Marketing Communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Types of Marketing Communication</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advertising: Any paid form of non-personal presentation &amp; promotion of ideas, goods or services by an identified sponsor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales promotion: A variety of short-term incentives to encourage trial or purchase of a product or service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events and experiences: Company-sponsored activities and programs to create daily or special brand-related interactions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public relations &amp; publicity: A variety of programs to promote or protect a company’s image or its individual products.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct marketing: Use of mail, telephone, fax, email or Internet to connect directly with or solicit response or dialogue from specific customers and prospects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive marketing: On-line activities and programs to engage customers directly or indirectly raise awareness, improve image or elicit sales of products and services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word-of-mouth marketing: People-to-people oral, written or electronic communications which relate to the merits or experiences of purchasing or using products or services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal selling: Face-to-face interaction with one or more prospective purchasers for the purpose of making presentations, answering questions and procuring orders.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Keller (2009).

Even though, marketing communications can play several crucial roles, it must do so in an increasingly tough communication environment. The media environment has changed dramatically in recent years. Traditional advertising media such as TV, radio, magazines and newspapers are losing their grip on consumers due to rapid diffusion of powerful broadband Internet connections, ad-skipping digital video recorders, multi-purpose cell phones and portable music and video players have forced marketers to rethink a number of their traditional practices (Kaplan Thaler & Koval 2003; Kiley 2005). For example, on-line advertising was estimated at a little less than 6% of global ad spending in 2006 but is expected to jump to 10% to become a $25 billion business by 2009. The following table-II displays a representative set of 11 different interactive marketing communication options addressed by Keller (2009), however, many other communication options also exist on-line.

Table II: Interactive Marketing Communication Options in Building Brand Strength

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interactive Marketing Communication Options</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Websites – companies must design websites that embody or express their purpose, history, products and vision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microsites – a limited area on the Web managed and paid for by an external advertiser/company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search ads – paid-search or pay-per-click ads in Google, MSN and Yahoo!. Advertisers pay only if people click on the links.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Display ads – display ads are small, rectangular boxes containing text and perhaps a picture that companies pay to place on relevant websites.

Interstitials – interstitials are advertisements with video or animation, that pop up between changes on a website.

Internet-specific ads & videos – with user-generated content sites such as YouTube, MySpace Video and Google Video.

Sponsorships – many companies get their name on the Internet by sponsoring special content on websites that carry news, financial information and so on.

Alliances – when one Internet company works with another, they end up advertising each other through alliances and affiliate programs.

On-line communities – many companies sponsor on-line communities whose members communicate through postings, instant messaging and chat discussions about the company’s products and brands.

E-mail – e-mail uses only a fraction of the cost of a ‘d-mail’, or direct mail campaign.

Mobile marketing – in developing countries especially, mobile phone marketing will become increasingly important.

**Source:** Adapted from Keller (2009).

## RESEARCH METHOD

### DATA COLLECTION, SAMPLING TECHNIQUE, SAMPLE SIZE AND DATA ANALYSIS

Data were collected through semi structured in-depth interview from corporate firms and retail store interviewees. A total of 10 interviewees, 5 from corporate and 5 from realter, were selected using convenience sampling technique. The interview protocol for corporate firm interviewees contains 8 questions while the interview protocol for the interviewees from retail stores consists of 7 questions. All the questions were open-ended questions. Before conducting the interview, appointment was taken from them over phone and meeting them directly in their respective workplace. After selecting a convenient time from them all the interviews were conducted. The average time of conducted interview was around 15 minutes. All interviews were recorded through a voice recorder as per the permission of the interviewees. The data collected from the semi-structured in-depth interviews were analysed through NVivo Software 11. The NVivo software has the ability to export detailed coding information. It offers the potential to create data sets from the qualitative data which may then be exported to a statistical program, the advantage being that the researcher can then go back to the original text to seek further interpretation (Bazeley, 2004). The data gathered from the interviewees were furthered analysed thematically through NVivo-11 Software for the reason that thematic analysis allows a researcher to see and make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences in proportion to Braun, Clarke, and Terry, (2014).

## FINDINGS

### DATA TRANSCRIPTION

Most of the interviews were conducted in the native language (Bangla) for the convenience of the interviewees. During the interview, important notes and information were taken carefully in written form apart from the audio recording. After
completing all the interviews, the transcription of interviewees’ opinion was completed in order to analyse the data thematically. From the interview transcriptions, themes and sub-themes were extracted where some opinions, expressed by the interviewees in their interview, were highlighted under each sub-theme which were analysed through NVivo-11 software to get a vibrant and appropriate outcome for the present study.

**DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE INTERVIEWEES**

A total of 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted where 5 were from corporate firms and other 5 were from retailers based on Chattogram as most of the steel industries were based on Chattogram division. The demographic details of interviewees are presented below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Feature</th>
<th>No. of Interviewees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male: 10, Female: 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>30 – 35 Years: 6, 36 – 40 Years: 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Graduate: 5, Post Graduate: 5, Top Management: 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Engineers: 1, Retailers: 5, Total: 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The demographic profile of the interviewees is divided into 4 parts. They are gender, age, education and occupation. As mentioned in the above table, all the interviewees were male. 6 of the interviewees were in between 30 – 35 years who were mostly retailers and engineers, and rest of the 4 interviewees were in between 36 – 40 years who were engaged in top management of different corporate firms. Besides, all the retailer interviewees were graduated, and the interviewees of the corporate firms were post graduated. Lastly, out of 5 interviewees from the corporate firms, 4 were in top management of the firms basically engaged in purchase and procurement department and one were a senior engineer.

**THEME AND SUB-THEMES OF BRAND MARKETING**

From the interview of the interviewees, a list of sub-themes was explored and the summary of these theme and sub-themes as well as word frequency analysis are presented below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-Themes</th>
<th>No. of Interviewees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Corporate & Retailer Perceptions | 1) Brand Value 7  
2) Brand Activities 10  
3) Customer Demand 5 |
4) Direct Communication 10
5) Facilities 5
6) Price 6
7) Quality 9
8) Workshop & Seminars 4

Source: Developed from the data of the study

Fig. 1: Word Frequency analysis from NVivo-11 Software

BRAND VALUE

The findings of the conducted interviews reveal brand value as one of the valuable sub-themes of the steel industry based on the perception of the interviewees. A total of 7 interviewees out of 10 mentioned about brand value and consider it as an important tool to measure a company's overall brand in the market. Hence, one interviewee said that:

Looking into the steel industries, the name which comes to my mind without any doubt is the particular company that has created a high brand value in the market (Interviewee-1).

Another interviewee said that customer is considering the brand value of the steel company while purchasing their products. He said that:
Though qualities are almost same they prefer the steel company products which have more brand value than the other company (Interviewee-7).

Similarly, other interviewees also said that while thinking about the steel brand, they considered that company which has already created a high brand value in the market. Hence, interviewee 4 has expressed brand value in a different way than other. He said that:

Though sometimes we need to consider one specific company’s product for their projects, but people should buy products from those companies who has already created brand value in the market along with quality (Interviewee-4).

Rest of the interviewees (such as interviewee 2, interviewee 3, interviewee 5 and interviewee 10) also expressed analogous opinion like others regarding brand value that they always consider a company’s brand value as an influencing factor of steel brand. Thus, based on the understanding and experiences from the interviewees it is clear that brand value holds an important place while considering a company’s brand position. All the interviewees consider a steel brand position in terms of brand value at first then other factors, though they might not use the same brand.

BRAND ACTIVITIES

The second sub-theme which comes from the data of the study is brand activities. All the 10 interviewees have expressed their opinion regarding brand activities, which they consider while seeing a brand in the market. Interviewees suggest that brand activities of a company identify one’s own brand status in the steel industry. Absence of brand activities results in lagging behind in the market. Regarding this a corporate interviewee said that:

In this technological world, every company is following their respective techniques to capture the market. In that case the company who can highlight its own branding activities more than the other is more benefitted (Interviewee-2).
Another interviewee highlights the importance of branding activities in today’s competitive business market. Opining to increase branding activities of a company he said:

*Personally, I will believe that every company should increase their brand activities more and more to sustain in this competitive market place. Without doing enough branding activities it will be tough for them to get new buyers. Maybe some fixed buyers will buy from them but without proper brand activities they will not get new buyers (Interviewee-4)*

Interviewee 9 expressed his opinion differently than the others. He clarifies what results due to the lack of enough branding activities as following:

*Truly speaking I don’t see enough branding activities from the companies belong to steel industry except one or two. And that’s the reason customers do not know much about those companies with less brand activities. Consequently, these companies are losing their revenue due to lack of proper brand activities (Interviewee-9).*

In the same way, Interviewee 1 has expressed his opinion more precisely and added some examples of branding activities that is:

*I will suggest them (companies) to increase the direct communication and the other brand activities. For example, to sent gift vouchers during any occasions, sweets during Bengali New Year and some religious stuffs (like tasbih and jainamaz) during Ramadan to their existing customers as a part of their brand activities. In return, these activities will create good vibe to their customers’ mind and will be able to retain them (Interviewee-1).*

Likewise, other interviewees also gave similar perceptions regarding brand activities suggesting steel companies to increase their brand activities more so that people are aware about their brand.

**CUSTOMER DEMAND**

Another sub-theme of brand marketing on the basis of interviewees is customer demand. Though the corporate interviewees are not so much concerned about it but the retailers out of 5, 4 retailers expressed opinion about it. Only 1 corporate
interviewee said that they prefer that steel brand which customers demand them to use. He said:

*For any project our choice to buy steel products depends on our customer’s demand and their choice. When they prefer us to use a specific company’s product then we use it for our projects most of the time (Interviewee-3).*

But the retailers were more conscious about it. They said they need to use that steel product in their store which the customer always asks for, in a word which has more customer demand in the market. In this regard, one interviewee said that other factors may be not in favour of selecting a brand like price, if customers’ demand is high for that brand, we need to keep that branded product in our store to fulfil our customer’s demand. Hence the interviewee mentioned that:

*We are selling these brands because of the high customer demand for those brands. The rate is just the issue as it is high, but still customer wants it and we don’t find any problem selling their product (Interviewee-6).*

Other interviewees (Interviewee 9 and interviewee10) from retailers gave similar opinion about the customer demand of a specific brand saying that they need to keep that steel brand which customer wants more. So, it is clear from the perception of the interviewees that retailers always look for the customer demand of steel and prefer to sell that brand in their store. They prefer to see which steel brand actually customers want and based on that they keep the required steel brand in their store.

**DIRECT COMMUNICATION**

An important sub-theme from the interview data which every interviewee mentioned is direct communication. They mention the importance of direct communication in case of communicating a brand. One interviewee said in that regard:

*For communicating your brand, I think the most effective way is the face to face direct interaction with the sales representative, I mean the direct communication with the*
company’s representative. As it’s more useful than other types of communication. Moreover, advertisements are for limited period but the direct communications with the representatives always remain in the mind for a long time (Interviewee-2).

Sighting the importance of direct communication another interviewee said:

*I think the door to door communication from the company is more effective. The direct communication from the sales representative is effective than other communication ways. They need to come always and disturbs us and then we will be aware of the product. They can come without any reason no problem at all but must come and communicate (Interviewee-3).*

Interviewee 5 expresses his opinion clarifying the result of not communicating a brand properly to the people. When asking about steel brand names then he said:

*Truly speaking, we are not clearly aware about certain steel brand names, and how their products quality is. And that because they didn’t communicate their products details to us properly (Interviewee-5).*

The retail interviewees also expressed the same importance of direct communication in terms of communicating a brand. Seeing this medium as more effective than other communication medium one interviewee said:

*I think direct communication from the company is more effective to communicate a brand. See there are more ways to communicate your brand, but by those I think you cannot communicate properly. There always remain a gap between the brand and the people. But if company communicate directly through their representative, it’s more useful. By this, we can easily know about the brand more deeply (Interviewee-7).*

Seeing more opportunities in direct communication, one of the interviewees from retailers expresses his opinion more clearly by stating that:

*Since direct communication gives more opportunity to know the brand more than other ways. And also, through this direct communication, company can also know us as a retailer which is not possible if they communicate through a dealer. It’s better to communicate directly from the company’s sales representative whether it cost more to us but its better (Interviewee-8).*

Apart from this opinion, one more interviewee from retailers explains how important direct communication is, whether there is business relationship or not. He said in that regard:

*Business is a kind of relationship, we might not do business all the time but if you keep contact with us all the time might be not face to face, a call is enough. This is more effective in a business relationship. If you think that you are not in the business anymore with us and ends the relationship at that very moment I think it’s wrong. For all this I think the direct communication is more effective than any other ways (Interviewee-1).*
Similarly, other interviewees (Interviewee 4, 6, 9, and 10) also suggest that direct communication is the most effective brand communication medium. They put more importance on it regardless what other ways are there. Based on this analysis, it is clear that direct communication is one of the important dimensions to communicate a brand properly to the customers and other people involve in this.

**Facilities**

The sub-theme facilities derive from the interviewees speeches where they express their different opinions regarding some facilities both internal and external. Among different types facilities mentioned by the interviewees, the facilities which most of them have said were giving credit facilities. In this regard one corporate interviewee mentioned that:

*Whenever you want to maintain a long term business relationship, you need provide some facilities like credit and product facilities; unfortunately as a corporate customer we are not getting such facilities though we buy in bulk from them. They are giving us the product after we are giving cheque to them and that too in late which also make delay in our work (Interviewee-1).*

One more interviewee says about product availability where he said that sometimes he is unable to get some specific company product on time that because of product unavailability. About product availability the interviewee stated that:

*Sometimes they can’t deliver the product on time saying that the product is not available. So, I think they need to increase they production capacity to deliver products on time to the buyers (Interviewee-2).*

In the same mode, one retail interviewee clearly acknowledged that they kept that steel brand product who gave them more facilities such as credit, product a transportation facilities. Hence the interviewee added that:

*As a retailer, the steel company which gives us more facilities that comes to our mind at first. We prefer those brands which are giving us facilities like, giving credit facilities, transport facility, and other as per the market trends (Interviewee-8).*

He even said to compromise selling a steel brand if other steel brand gave him more facilities considering he can convince the customer. He further added:
The brand as I said you many times which gives us more facilities, we sell that brand’s product and convince the customer to buy that. If your company gives us more facilities than I will leave the brands which I am using now and start to use your brand right now (Interviewee-8).

So, it’s more than clear from this investigation that buyers always look for some extra facilities from the company to reap more benefits from selling their products. For which, company might give them some extra benefits both internally and externally in order to increase more market share.

WORKSHOPS & SEMINARS

Workshops & Seminars is another medium of communication for communicating a brand which some of the interviewees mention along with direct communication. A corporate interviewee thinks arranging workshops and seminars are more effective than direct communication. He said that:

Selecting steel brand is a technical thing, so I think it is very necessary to communicate to those persons who will take decisions about which steel brand should be used and which shouldn’t be. So, for me arranging seminars, workshops with the top management and the engineers is more effective to communicate a brand (Interviewee-5).

A retail interviewee thinks it’s important to communicate the brand to the root level workers along with the engineers and other top management. He said regarding this that:

Arrange seminars or workshops with the engineers and the contractor to convey their brand to them. Because after all they will suggest the land owner which steel they should use in the construction. And here in this area the construction workers are also important. (Interviewee-9)

Equally, interviewee 10 also thinks arranging workshops and seminars is helpful to convey a brand to all sorts of people from low level to top level who are associated with using steel. He added that:

And to reach the root level worker who plays their part in construction like engineers, contractor you can arrange workshop for them and tell them about the brand and the
product. Besides arranging seminars in engineering institutions is also effective to communicate the brand as it will help the students from their education life to know about the brand (Interviewee-10).

So, based on these understandings and opinions from the interviewees perceptions it can be stated that arranging workshops & seminars with the people associated with steel helps a company to convey about their brand to those people, as more often they are directly or indirectly related on decision making process of which steel brand need to be used.

![Diagram](image)

**PRICE**

The next theme derives from the study of the interview data is price, which most of the interviewee directly or indirectly mention about it in their interview. More than a few interviewees have mentioned the reason of switching from one brand to another is due to pricing factor. Hence the interviewee-4 and interviewee-7 revealed that:

*The main reason behind switching from one brand to another brand is pricing even though there is not that much difference in quality with one company’s product to another company’s product (Interviewee-4).*

*But when customer asked to give them a brand that is low price, I preferred them that specific brand’s products with low price, as its price is low than the other. Then I communicate directly to their factory and ask them whether they can afford me or not (Interviewee-7).*

Considering customer awareness about the quality of every steel brand that almost all are equal, they comparatively prefer to use lower price products. At this point, one interviewee from retailers added that:

*Customers here are not concern which steel is good for 50 years or 100 years, even not aware about the qualities of every steel brand. But they are looking for products with lower price (Interviewee-8).*

Likewise, interviewee 2 and interviewee 3 also think that when product of equal quality is available in the market, then the price of the product determines which need to be used. So, they consider RSRM is a better choice when pricing matter to them as its price is lower than other despite being equal in terms of quality. Thus, it can be said
that pricing is a big factor while choosing which steel brand need to be used. As because the qualities are almost same of all steel brands at present, so pricing plays a vital role in selecting a steel brand.

QUALITY

The last sub-theme gets up from the interview data of the study is quality. As selecting steel brand is a more technical thing, almost every interviewee agrees to consider the quality of a steel product at first before finally selecting it. Concerning this quality issue, interviewee-2 and interviewee-4 stated that:

See, determining a steel product is a technical thing. We cannot usually measure a steel product by only its brand. Rather we need to see the quality and other technical terms to see how that steel is (Interviewee-2).

Most of the time we prefer a specific brand product for our projects, but recently we are considering other brand product as well for our projects because from our market analysis we see that quality of other brands products are nearly same (Interviewee-4).

Another interviewee mentions the reason of satisfaction of using good branded products is because of its high quality. Hence the interviewee said that:

If you consider the company’s satisfaction yes as a company, we are satisfied with our existing brand as they are maintaining their product quality sincerely (Interviewee-3).

Nevertheless, two interviewees from the retailer expressed their opinions oppositely in terms of product quality. One interviewee from retailer thinks that their satisfaction depends on customer rather than how good quality a steel is. They said that:

As a retailer I prefer my customers’ satisfaction first rather than product quality. You need to see whether the customer is satisfied with your product or not. After all they are the end users (Interviewee-9).

And as far the satisfaction concern, it’s up to the customer. The particular steel brand with whom they are satisfied, they look for that brand to us and we try to sell those brands regardless of quality (Interviewee-10).

So there lies a mixed perception about considering quality of a steel brand before choosing which brand of steel need to be used. Though the corporate interviewees
agree that they look for quality at first when using a steel brand, but the retailers put this on totally upon the customer satisfaction by which they are satisfied and prefer to sell that brand which customer wants from them.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ORGANIZATION**

From the analysis, the present study has identified the factors that affect the brand marketing of steel industries. Though the product quality and price are satisfactory in both corporate firms and retail stores several important things were mentioned by the interviewees suggesting focussing on more so that they have high brand value in the market which are (i) increasing direct communication and (ii) branding activities. Corporate interviewees suggest increasing the direct communication which many steel companies recently stopped doing and thus creates a communication gap between steel company and the corporate firms. Though they were in contact with the corporate firms before, but as they are not communicating them as it creates a negative impact on their mind. Moreover, from the analysis of the study it was clearly seen that, some of the retailers were not aware about some steel brands still as they didn’t reach there. So, its high time for those steel companies to reach every corner of the retail market of steel industries and engage the retailers more to buy their products and make aware about them. And finally, steel companies need to plan their branding strategies differently to satisfy the customer. They were doing it more often before, but due to stop doing it recently it put effects on the market. Corporate firms and retailers both suggest them to do more branding activities, which are not doing presently, in order to compete with other steel brands that are far ahead from them in terms of doing branding activities.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

This research intends to explore the factors that affect the brand marketing communication of steel industry in Bangladesh based on the perception of corporate firms and the retailers. In doing so, primary data has been obtained through semi structured interviewees. A total of 10 in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted where the target interviewees were selected conveniently from the different corporate firms and retailers. After transcribed the interview data were coded using Nvivo-11 software and then analysed thematically. The findings of the study explored eight factors which have influence on the brand marketing communication of the steel industry in Bangladesh. Among the explored factors, brand activities and companies’ direct communication were the most vital factors of brand marketing communication for steel industry on the basis of corporate firms and retailers’ perceptions. Moreover, from the findings of the study it was also found that companies brand value, product quality and pricing of the product have been considered as the next most effective factors that creates effect on customers mind. After that consumer demand, various types of facilities and workshop and seminars on brand communication have considered as influencing factors of brand.
communication of steel industry. To conclude, steel industry should take all these explored brand marketing related factors into their consideration to sustain in this competitive market. Because though few companies are producing high quality steel products and selling at lower price than the other steel brands, still due to its low branding marketing activities, both the corporate firms and the retailers are not buying their products and not seeing them as a strong brand in the steel market. As such suggesting them to increase their branding marketing activities to sustain and capture more market share.

**STUDY LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE FOR FUTURE STUDIES**

First of all, the present study has only conducted 10 in-depth semi-structured interviews where interviewees were selected conveniently from the different corporate firms and retailers situated in Chattogram division. Besides, due to time constraints and lack of funds, it was not possible to collect data from the whole steel market of the country. Hence the results of the study may not be able to illustrate the consequences of whole steel industry in Bangladesh regarding their brand marketing communication. Thus future study can be done by increasing the number of the interview. And then future studies can gather data from the retailers and corporate firms around all the divisions of the country to make it more reliable and valid in order to get appropriate results from the whole steel market of the country.

**Reference:**


