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Brand elevation in supply chains

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Abstract.

In the last decades supply chain management has been explored from different perspectives fueling a myriad of research in the field. Although the literature on supply chain management (SCM) is vast, major gaps requiring scientific exploration still exist. Among these, interaction of branding and supply chain concepts clearly stands out. The aim of this paper is to investigate the power of brand in supply chains by taking literature devoted to supply chain management into consideration, relationship marketing and brand management. This paper explores the power of brand in terms of SCM and it defines the concept of "brand elevation in supply chain". The objectives of this study are thus twofold: identifying "brand elevation in supply chain" concept and proposing a conceptual model associated to the power of brand in supply chains.

Keywords: Supply chain, brand management, brand elevation in supply chains.

JEL Classification: M10, M30, M31.

Özet. Tedarik zincirlerinde marka kaldıracı

Son yıllarda, tedarik zinciri yönetimi kavramı farklı yaklaşımlarla incelenmiştir. Tedarik zinciri yönetimi çok geniş bir kavram olmasına rağmen, halen bu alanda bilimsel araştırma gerektiren yazın boşlukları mevcuttur. Bu boşluklardan arasında yer alan ve önemi büyük olan bir konu da markalaşma ve tedarik zinciri kavramları arasındaki etkileşimdir. Bu bağlamda makalenin amacı, tedarik zincirlerinde marka gücünü tedarik zinciri yönetimi, ilişkisel pazarlama ve marka yönetimi alanındaki mevcut çalışmalar temelinde incelemektir. Bu çalışma, tedarik zinciri ve tedarik zinciri yönetimi kapsamında, marka gücünü "tedarik zincirinde marka kaldıracı" kavramını tanımlayarak araştırmaktadır. Bu bağlamda çalışmanın iki temel amacı olup bunlar; "tedarik zincirinde marka kaldıracı"nı tanımlamak ve tedarik zincirlerinde marka gücünü açıklamaya yönelik kavramsal bir model önermektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tedarik Zinciri, marka yönetimi, tedarik zincirlerinde marka kaldıracı

JEL Sınıflaması: M10, M30, M31 .

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Introduction

The philosophy of business has evolved during the last decades. Through its course of development from a production focus to an orientation of relationships, businesses are now more likely to consider coordination and cooperation in the market. In this context, relationship marketing and relationship management appear to be significant concepts for companies in SCM practices.

Over the last decades, coordination has expanded beyond the single firm to inter-firm integration within the supply chain, as the ultimate network of firms plays a vital role in delivering value to the customers (Maloni & Benton, 2000). Christopher's (1992) frequently cited statement "...competition takes place between supply chains rather than between individual companies" best explains the relationship between SCM and competition among the companies. In this context, SCM has gained great attention from industry as well as from the academia supported by the belief that supply chain management brings competitive advantages to the firms. While SCM is vital for firms to survive in the market, another potential tool is the power of the brand which may help companies to gain profit, achieve sustainable development and enhance value.

Surprisingly, literature lacks a comprehensive discussion on SCM and brand interaction. The main reason underlying this fact is that SCM is mostly based on the collaborative operations of the supply chain players, while brand management is considered an internal management activity. However, the brand of the focal company in a supply chain is a common asset among supply chain members and it offers mutual benefits to the firms in terms of supply chain management approach.

Although the literature on supply chain management is vast, there is need for more knowledge and research regarding to which supply chain processes are consistently relevant across firms (Bregman, 1995; Cooper et al., 1998). Obviously, one of these processes entails the impact of brand on SCM. To this aim, the objectives of the study are twofold: to define the leveraging power of brands from a supply chain framework, as available definitions of brand leverage do not consider the supply chain perspective, and to explain in detail how brands can lever the supply chain and how supply chain members can receive mutual benefits from a strong brand in the chain. This discussion is supported by a conceptual model.

Market and Supply Chain Orientation: A Brief Look on Relationships

Marketing concept has been essential for firms since decades, and it forms the basis of supply chain orientation and integration. It is a common belief that firms have to gain profit in order to survive. Unfortunately making profit is

not enough in today's business environment. On the other hand businesses are obliged to create value for their customers in order to accomplish sustainability in the market. As the competition is severe, all firms have to pay attention to the marketing concept. Today firms desire to identify and satisfy the customer needs more effectively and faster than their competitors (Armstrong & Kotler, 2005). The marketing concept, which is the pillar and a milestone for market orientation, helps firms to satisfy the needs of their customers.

Market orientation is defined as the "organization wide generation, dissemination, and responsiveness to market intelligence" (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990 p.3). According to Narver & Slatter (1990, p.21) market orientation involves three behavioral components, which are customer orientation, competitor orientation, and inter-functional coordination. Apparently, such inter-functional coordination has currently expanded to cover all members of the supply chain. Market orientation is a unilateral approach, which generally utilizes the intra-firm resources. Although the focal point of market orientation is the company itself, it also considers the existence of other players in the market.

In today's fierce competitive environment, businesses require even a more holistic approach, which may be embodied in supply chain orientation. Supply chain orientation is defined as "the recognition by an organization of the systemic, strategic implications of the tactical activities involved in managing the various flows in a supply chain" (Mentzer et al. 2001). In this context, it can be suggested that a company that engages with supply chain management activities inevitably has developed a supply chain orientation (Yurt, 2007). In other words, the supply chain orientation is the antecedent of supply chain management.

Supply chain management is a broad construct which can be approached from a multitude of perspectives (Croom, Romana & Mihalıs, 2000). Besides numerous definitions offered in literature, Council of Supply Chain Management (2006) asserts that "supply chain management is an integrating function with primary responsibility for linking major business functions and business processes within and across companies into a cohesive and high-performing business model. It includes all of the logistics management activities, as well as manufacturing operations, and it drives coordination of processes and activities with and across marketing, sales, product design, finance and information technology". According to Lambert, Cooper & Pagh (1998), the core objective of supply chain management is "to maximize competitiveness and profitability for the company as well as the whole supply chain network including the end customer. In this integrative framework, cooperation, collaboration, information sharing, trust, partnerships, shared technology, and an essential shift away from managing individual functional

processes appear as the main facets to success (Akkermans, Bogerd & Vos, 1999). In this context, it can be suggested that supply chain management approach not only generates a range of benefits for the single firm, but also produces positive outcomes for all members of the chain.

In supply chains, mutual benefits basically arise from the need for outsourcing, as the firms are compelled to concentrate on their core competencies due to environmental challenges. Many of these outsourcing oriented partnerships basically depend on the potential to accomplish cost savings and decreased replication of logistical effort for both partners (Herbig & O'Hara 1994; Zinn & Parasuraman, 1997). An increasing trend in outsourcing activities results in more partnerships founded between the associated chain members, which evolve to mutually beneficial long-term relationships in time (Christopher, 2003).

The extent and effectiveness of supply chain relationships depend on a few factors. One of these factors is obviously the power structure within the chain. Obviously, firms operating in a supply chain do not always match in the power that they hold, creating a power asymmetry within the network. In general, power asymmetry increases the likelihood of abusing channel members lesser in power. The power that is not equal among the supply chain members could create a serious barrier to success (McDonald, 1999), which necessitates a more or less equal balance of power to establish a healthier relationship (Tuten & Urban, 2001). However, power asymmetry may also serve to better ends from a symbiotic perspective, as the power may also be exploited as a tool to encourage supply chain coordination and effectiveness (Maloni & Benton, 2000). In this case, power asymmetry may enable stronger supply chain integration, while the firms lesser in power benefit from the structuralizing and profit generating power of the greater firm. The firm with greater power may also support the smaller firm to undertake several investments, which significantly influence the relationship quality (Skarmeas et al., 2008). A particular form of these investments is known as transaction-specific investment, which refers to the pass on the assets that are exceptionally committed to a particular relationship and cannot be easily used in other exchange relationships (Williamson, 1985). For instance, a packaging supplier may be required to change its technology to meet the specific demand of the soft drink producer on package form and materials, which necessitates a considerable amount of investment in new technology. Such an investment is transaction-specific and it may be of no use for satisfying the demands of another company in the chain.

According to Cox (2001), power structures can also be discussed with regard to dominancy, interdependency and independency. Within these, interdependency is highlighted as a critical factor for efficient supply chain

relations. Notably, existence of a strong brand within the chain can ultimately serve to the development of interdependent relationships, as the value and benefits derived through the brand can play an integrating role. Similarly, brand power that exists in a particular supply chain is a major factor that defines the likelihood of undertaking transaction-specific investments. Moreover, as Franke, Stockheim & König (2005) imply, reputation and trust are of significant importance to establish long-term business-to-business (B2B) relations. In this context, we propose a novel approach that entails utilizing the integrative power of brands to enhance gaining and possessing competitive advantages by all members of the supply chain.

The rise of brand power in supply chains

Strong brands are a good indicator for competitive advantage and act as the main basis of a company's present and future earnings (Baldauf, Cravens & Binder, 2003). Moreover, branding is one of the main ways for companies to innovate, along with networking, supply chain, organization, value capture, customer experience, platform and solutions (Sawhney, Wolcott & Arroniz, 2006). From the customers' perspective, the brand functions as a risk reducer, while it enhances purchase confidence and customer loyalty (Aaker, 1991; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Ozturk, 2006).

While the value of the firm traditionally was based on financial analysis of asset dependence and profit margin, contemporary views on the issue suggest that the value of the firm is now expressed through intangible assets like leadership quality, innovative capability, brand equity, and competencies in partnerships (McPhee & Wheeler, 2006; Akbulut & Paksoy, 2007). In this context, the value of a firm may well exceed the figures shown on the balance sheet as can be observed in companies like Apple and Google, particularly due to the value of the brand, which is a main asset of these companies (Barwise, 1993; Schocker, Srivastava & Ruekert, 1994; Aaker, 1996;). The hinge of brand power relies on the common "language" that consumers share worldwide; the supremacy of the branded products in the car market, fashion, electronics, cosmetics, fast food, soft and alcoholic drinks are amongst the well known ones (McAuley, 2001).

Despite the significance of brand as a competitive tool, an overwhelming amount of previous research is devoted to branding in consumer markets (Kim et al., 1998; Michell, King & Reast, 2001), while little academic interest is directed to the impact of branding as a creator of value for the members of a supply network (Lynch & Chernatony, 2004). Yet, apart from the benefits for the firm and consumers, a strong brand obviously brings added value and the opportunity for sustainable development in the supply chains. The impact of branding on the value of the supply chain is closely connected to the fact that

the value generated by the strong brand in the chain is ultimately reflected in the value of the entire network. In other words, existence of a strongly branded firm within the chain may function as a leverage to increase the value of other system members.

The impact of brand within the supply chain may be investigated from a relationship approach due to a number of reasons. First, supply chains are relational structures by nature, while the extent and quality of inter-firm relationships is dependent on the power of firms. Secondly, this power possessed and exercised within the network is highly influenced by the brand value of the firms. Third, firms with greater power may compel other firms to undertake specific investments, which in turn may add up to the value of the entire chain. Similarly, it may be suggested that the firm with a stronger brand has the capability to influence other chain members, generating a higher value to be shared by the firms in relation and elevating the chain entirely in value.

In the same regard, such an investigation is essential as the current brand literature is largely focused on business-to-consumer markets, ignoring the effect of brands in industrial contexts. However, as stated by Glynn, Motion & Brodie (2007), brands secure financial, customer related and managerial benefits for the companies through their relationships with the reseller. This relationship may create brand satisfaction and brand commitment, as well as dependence on the brand and cooperation with the manufacturer in a B2B context. In other words, the role of both the manufacturer and the reseller are significant in sustaining the brand power. Therefore, either in consumer or industrial markets, brand power and its relationships should be assessed multilaterally. To this aim, the next section develops a new framework to examine the effect of brand across the supply chain.

Brand Elevation in Supply Chains

Competitive market conditions compel companies to explore ways to elevate their supply chains (Kannan & Tan, 2006). Such an elevation refers to an increase in the overall performance of the system and may be realized by the existence of a tool that adds value to all elements of the chain. These levers intangibly lift the system entirely and bring numerous advantages, including gaining profits, lowering costs and obtaining reputation. In this context, brands may be considered as significant levers in supply chains.

In this context, this paper offers a new concept of “brand elevation” to address this effect and defines it as:

“the leveraging power of a brand that is owned by a focal chain member and that act as a generator of value for each firm that operates in the supply chain”.

In this definition, the “focal chain member” refers to any member of the supply chain that has a stronger brand compared to other members. In this context, it may either be the supplier, manufacturer or the intermediary. A better understanding into the concept of focal chain member necessitates the explanation of downstream and upstream chain members. In an attempt to define upstream and downstream relationships, any member in the chain may be considered as the starting point. In other words, from the viewpoint of a manufacturing firm, all chain members which are positioned in the earlier stages of the supply chain are called the upstream members, corresponding to the suppliers. On the contrary, entities which are positioned at succeeding stages, i.e intermediaries, are defined as downstream members.

It should additionally be noted that brand elevation is not to be used interchangeably with a pre-existing concept found in literature, namely “brand leverage”. Brand leverage refers to “a strategy that uses the power of an existing brand name to support a company’s entry into a new, but related product category” (Giddens & Hofmann, 2002). In general, it is “capitalizing on pre-founded brand equity and brand knowledge in consumer memory” (Keller, 2002, 2003; Aaker, 2004), which is more likely to relate to brand extension strategies. On the other hand, brand elevation across the supply chain occurs when the power of the focal company’s brand enables the other supply chain members to better perform in the market, improve their business processes, take proactive actions against demand fluctuations, strengthen their competitive position and increase their reputation.

In the competitive marketplace of the new millennium, manufacturing abilities of firms become less significant for success than their abilities to understand consumers and to manage the brand. Such a tendency is also reflected in the fact that businesses prefer to outsource their activities other than their core competencies to a greater extent (Rajagopal, 2008), relying more on brand management as an essential competitive tool.

Conceptually, a brand encompasses all the values that add to the meaning of the product and therefore contains the efforts of all organizations that are linked to the value creation process. From such a perspective, all the companies in the supply chain contribute to branding efforts. Notably, this contribution is more visible in some cases, such as licensing or co-branding activities (e.g. Dell computers with Intel processors). Additionally, the perceived quality of a product is likely to be higher given the alliance of that two or more well-known companies, such as Coca Cola Light with NutraSweet sweetener, Adidas shoes with Goodyear soles, or BMW with Bose hi-fi systems and iPod. Obviously, in some of these examples one brand cannot be used without or separated from another, while in others brands create a synergy although they can be consumed independently from the other (Bulik, 2004).

Nevertheless, this is one side of the medallion that illustrates the positive effect of brand interactions. Conversely, benefits produced by a brand may also work the other way around, which this paper refers as brand elevation. In such a case, there usually exists one powerful brand within the chain that extends benefits for the other members of the supply chain, no matter they are branded or not. For instance, when a firm begins to produce for Nike, the company gains reputation as the manufacturer of Nike adding to the overall value of the business. Alternatively, fabric and leather suppliers of Nike's manufacturer also benefit from the relationship, as in general terms they become the supplier of Nike. In other words, the existence of Nike provides advantages for the upstream members of the chain, i.e. the suppliers. In a similar manner, downstream members gain competitive advantage since they offer Nike shoes on their shelves. Obviously, the power of Nike brand enhances the value of all units in, and hence, the entire chain. In this case, Nike assumes the brand operator role as the manufacturer. However, it is also possible that the supplier, or even the supplier's supplier may act as a brand operator. For instance, Unilever and P&G are the brand operators as the suppliers within consumer packaged goods industry and the presence of these giants within the supply chain helps their distributors to attract more consumers. Similarly, within its petroleum supply chain British Petroleum (BP) is the ultimate supplier and manages the entire network. Other units in the chain gain advantages from the existence of BP, while in time, they even may acquire sufficient know-how to build their own brands. Neumann Petroleum, which is now a major player in Australian petroleum industry, has benefited from such a relationship while it acted as a distributor of BP in 1980s.

Consequences of brand elevation can be expressed through other benefits as well. Firstly, brand elevation leads to better performance management not only for a focal supply chain member but also for the other members in the chain. For instance IKEA, which is the market leader in home appliance industry, manages its performance through a holistic framework. In this context, IKEA is a downstream member of the supply chain due to its retailer role and it helps its upstream chain members to determine their performance metrics and monitors the performance of the chain in a coordinated and integrated manner (Holmberg, 2000). IKEA also follows a supplier development strategy in a similar context. The ease and effectiveness of such implementations are based on the brand power of IKEA which elevates other chain members. Such an elevation provides a powerful competitive tool for each unit in the chain.

Secondly, brand operator enhances business process improvements of other chain members. For example, annual reports of Ekol Logistics, a third party logistics services provider with a prominent position in Turkey,

highlights that the success of the firm is evaluated on improvement of business processes of their partners. Accordingly, adjacent parties work together and direct each other to mutually improve business processes by reducing costs, increasing availability in the market and therefore obtaining a sustainable competitive advantage.

Another benefit of brand elevation is enhancement of the ability to take proactive actions against demand fluctuations. Based on previous experience, brand operators are able to better foresee the fluctuations in the market and take necessary measures. In this context, they also enhance other chain members' abilities to better protect themselves from demand uncertainty and unanticipated costs (Uludag & Erol, 2008). Vendor-managed inventory (VMI) approach, which is employed to prevent the bullwhip effect arising from mismanagement of possible demand fluctuations, can illustrate this benefit. Vendor-managed inventory (VMI) is a supply-chain based technique where the supplier has the right to manage inventories of agreed-upon stock-keeping units at retail locations. In VMI, distortion of demand information transferred from the downstream supply-chain member (e.g., retailer) to the upstream member (e.g., supplier) is kept at a minimum level, stockout situations are less likely to occur, and inventory-carrying costs tend to decrease (Cetinkaya & Lee, 2000). One of the recent applications of VMI is carried by Tesco PLC, British retail giant. Tesco is a downstream chain member and it uses VMI with 14 different suppliers including Coca-Cola (Watson, 2005). Close coordination with the focal chain member, which is the retailer here, helps other chain members to take proactive against seasonality and demand fluctuations.

Brand elevation also acts as a medium to increase the reputation of other chain members. A firm with a branded supplier or retailer will gain advantages from decreased costs of branding for consumer markets, a benefit that cannot be easily afforded per se. Examples include Intel Corporation, Gorotex, Lycra, NutraSweet, Teflon, Shimano or Tetrapak as upstream members in the chain, as well as IKEA, Tesco, or Digiturk as downstream members. The existence of these firms in the chain motivate many end users to consume the products that use the ingredients provided by these firms (such as Intel-Inside), or retailed by them.

Clearly, partner selection of the focal company, i.e. the owner of the powerful brand, should be realized on several criteria, such as capacity, flexibility or development potential. Provided that the partners comply with such criteria, the focal company generally puts effort in chain partner development activities. These activities may range from supporting the supplier and the retailer in product design, order processing, inventory management or forecasting, as exemplified above. Consequently, all members

of the chain benefit from the reputation and support of the brand, elevating the whole system. This novel approach to brand elevation in supply chains is depicted in Figure I. As stated by Christopher (1992), today companies do not compete with each other, but the competition rather takes place between supply chains. This novel model of brand elevation in supply chains extends this statement to explain the contemporary business environment where “the brands compete with brands while their supply chain structure helps them to protect their position in the market”.

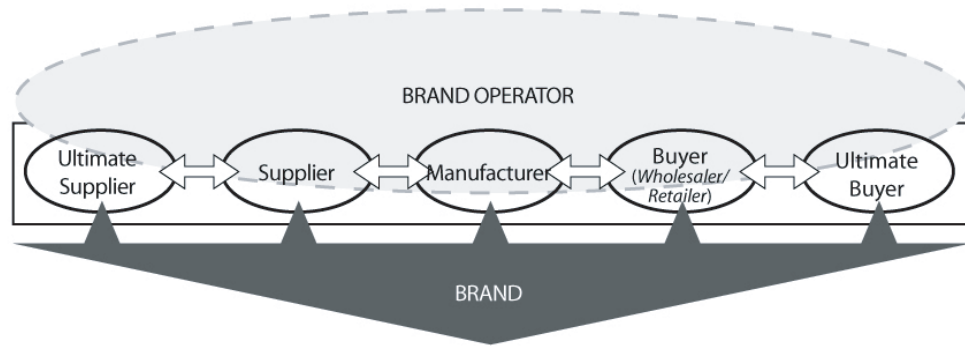


Figure I. A Model of Brand Elevation in Supply Chains

The model illustrates a typical supply chain involving supplier, manufacturer, wholesaler, retailer and end user with two-way arrows in between. These arrows symbolize the tangible and intangible flows between the entities including materials, service, information and capital.

From a brand elevation framework, we introduce two new constructs to this structure: brand operator and the brand. Brand operator basically refers to the owner of the brand and may either be one of the typical units such as manufacturer or the retailer or it may act as a chain member with an integrator role. This latter case is especially prominent in network or virtual organizations, where the brand operator functions as an integrator. For instance, Markafoni, a “private shopping” website where only distinguished members can get access to, is a classical example to such a virtual organization. Markafoni brings buyers and suppliers together in a virtual environment, and the brand power of the firm enables many unknown suppliers to reach potential consumers. In either case, the brand operator influences the operations of and the relationships between other units, which is signified with a dashed line penetrating into the chain. Brand, on the other hand, refers to the intangible

asset that elevates the entire chain. As shown in the model the elevation effect may appear individually on each firm or collectively on the whole system. Figure II provides a better understanding of how different chain members can act as a brand operator by integrating examples from the industry.

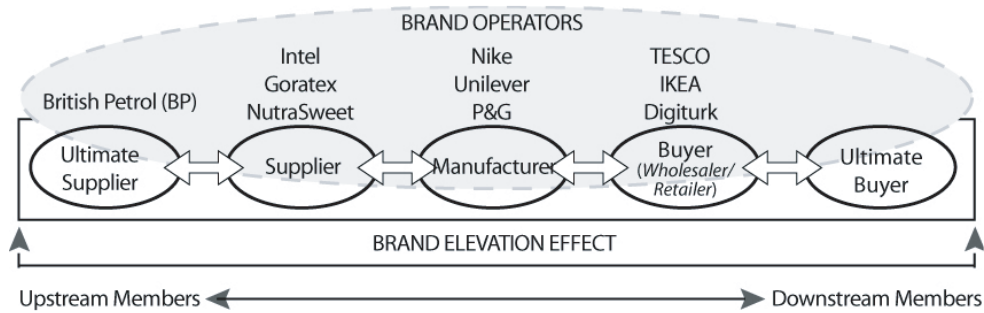


Figure II. Brand Elevation Model with Industry Examples

In order to better illustrate the applicability of the conceptual model, two different supply chains from the Turkish economy are also examined below.

The first case is from the denim manufacturing industry. During the growth of the textile industry in Turkey, many Turkish denim manufacturers gained remarkable experience while they operated as the subcontractors of global brands (Goncu & Er, 2008). Acting as an upstream member of the focal company's chain (e.g. Tommy Hilfiger, Wrangler, Joop), these firms achieved better performance in the market, improved business processes, learned to take proactive actions against demand fluctuations and increased their reputation. These benefits urged a number of firms to build their own brands and Mavi Jeans is one of these.

Mavi Jeans is one of the most famous brands in Turkish denim market today. Before the creation of Mavi brand in 1994, ERAK clothing has been manufacturing blue jeans for global brands such as Mustang, Lee, Wrangler, His, Otto, Chevignon, Old Navy, Tommy Hilfiger, Canoe, Joop, Edie Bauer and Esprit (Goncu & Er, 2008). In 1991, ERAK decided to create its own brand, Mavi, and run its own marketing & retailing activities. Until 2009, they opened new stores in numerous countries including the U.S., the U.K., Canada, Germany, Switzerland, Denmark, Belgium, Australia, France, Italy, Netherlands and Austria. In 2006, Times magazine declared Mavi Jeans as the 16th biggest denim brand in the world.

Currently, ERAK operates as the brand operator in its chain and assists

its chain members using its previous experience. Apparently, other chain members enjoy the priority to be included in the network of ERAK. The case of Mavi implies that such assistance will be guiding for the other chain members, making it possible for them to build their own brands. Such a collaboration will obviously lead to an increase of business in the denim industry and provide several benefits for other chain members through brand elevation (Bardakci, Saritas & Aygoren, 2007).

Another case to demonstrate the effect of brand elevation may be provided from the Turkish airline industry. Until 2003, Turkish Airlines (THY), the national flag carrier, was the only firm that operates in this industry. When Turkish Regional Civil Aviation policy was revised in 2003, the industry was liberalized and welcomed new players. Sun Express was one of these firms to enjoy its own brand after this revision and owes much of its success to brand elevation.

Sun Express was actually founded in 1989, but operated as both a supplier and intermediary to THY until liberalization. In service supply chains such a case is quite common due to the nature of services: Because the consumption of services occurs simultaneously with their production, suppliers to the focal firm may act as a retailer at the same time (Baltacioglu et al, 2007). Until 2003, Sun Express realized its flights for Turkish Airlines, which is the brand operator in this chain, but continued to bear its own brand name on board. As a member of THY's supply chain, the firm gained remarkable reputation during this period and Sun Express turned into a strong brand in the airline industry benefiting from the brand elevation effect. The company now operates its own flights and has achieved the market follower position after THY in 2008, with a 22% market share.

The model presented in this study highlights the significance of two concepts: branding and supply chain. More essentially, the model focuses on the interaction of the supply chain and branding. In this context, this study fills the literature gap on the relationship between the fields of supply chain management and brand management. More specifically, the study sheds light on the effect of brand as an elevator of the supply chain. A new and potential supply chain member which is the brand operator is offered and its role in the chain is emphasized. The study also underlines the role and effect of brand in an industrial context.

Conclusion and Further Recommendations

This paper examines the mutual benefits in supply chain, particularly from the viewpoint of the rise of brand power in the supply chain and the impact of brand as an elevating agent. The brand as a leverage in the supply chains does not only refer to the focal chain member's brand, but also the additional

inputs such as collaboration, trust, dependency, interdependency and power.

As mentioned in the review of literature, several gaps related to interaction of brand and supply chain management are still present. In this context, this paper pioneers in examining the power of focal company's brand from a supply chain perspective. The conceptual model and statements presented in this paper develop opportunities to further explore the concept of brand as an elevator in the supply chain within business-to-business markets.

The implication of this paper for the industry is to create a stance to pay more attention to the power of the brands in the chain, either owned by the focal chain member or other members of the system. The managers should invest more into the company's brand and support other supply chain members in order to have mutual benefits and better business performance, as each supply chain member significantly contributes to the value of the product. Also, the focal chain member, which plays brand operator role, should be accepted as the integrator in the supply chain. In this extent, brand operators should manage the relationships between the members of their supply chains. On the other hand, other supply chain members rather than brand operator should also support the cooperation between the supply chain units in order to gain the advantage of brand elevation. Thereby, all members of the supply chain benefit from the advantage of having the brand power and they may adopt themselves along with volatile market conditions. According to the brand elevation concept, brand operators' chain member selection and evaluation processes become more significant. They should select their chain members based on various criteria, such that this selection will ultimately affect the power of brand. As mentioned in previous examples, brand operator can be either an upstream or a downstream member. The difficulties in chain member selection process is valid for all type of industries, however when any type of chain member will be involved in the brand operator's supply chain, they become more responsible to maintain the power of the focal chain member. During the selection process, in order to enable the existence of the powerful brand, the brand operator helps the other chain members to get integrated in the chain. Here, it is useful to note that not only chain member selection but also evaluation of the existing chain members is a challenging business process for the brand operator.

From a theoretical framework, this study brings a new approach to the supply chain and brand management interaction. Yet, it is clear that the model presented in this paper needs to be supported with further research on the topic. Another promising research area is investigating the bilateral relationship of other supply chain members' brands. While the study shed lights on brand as an elevator in supply chain, the future research should be based on providing empirical support for the suggestions developed in this paper. In empirical

studies, the dyadic approach may be helpful (the focal company and the other chain members) to determine the dimensions of brand elevation effect in the supply chain.

Research questions directing future research are likely to be as follows: a) The contribution of the brand elevation to the brand equity and its elements such as brand awareness and brand image, b) Exploring the brand equity phenomenon for the entire supply chains, c) Exploring the metrics that may assess the brand elevation effect in the supply chains, and d) Investigating the important brand relationship outcomes from the supply chain members' point of view.

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