Corporate branding as a trust-building mechanism in the insurance services market

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Abstract. The insurance market is characterised by high uncertainty, information asymmetry and limited opportunities for customers to evaluate service quality before purchase. Under these conditions, the corporate brand becomes more than a visual or promotional element. It acts as a signal of reliability and helps customers form expectations about the future behaviour of an insurer. This paper examines corporate branding as a trust-building mechanism in insurance services. The study relies on the concepts of brand equity, service branding, relationship marketing and brand trust. The analysis shows that the value of an insurance brand is closely connected with corporate reputation, perceived service quality, transparent communication and the customer's experience of claims handling. The paper argues that insurance companies should manage the corporate brand as a strategic trust asset and align brand promises with actual service delivery.

Keywords: *corporate branding, brand trust, insurance services, customer trust, brand equity, corporate reputation, customer loyalty.*

Introduction

Competition in the insurance sector increasingly depends on the ability of companies to create stable and trustworthy relationships with customers. Insurance differs from many other services because the customer pays for protection that may be used only in the future. At the moment of purchase, it is difficult to verify whether the insurer will provide fair and timely support when a claim occurs. For this reason, the customer evaluates not only the policy conditions and price but also the credibility of the company itself. In such a market, the corporate brand becomes an important source of information and confidence.

Classical brand theory explains brand equity through awareness, associations, perceived quality and loyalty. Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993) show that brands create value by influencing what customers know, feel and expect. However, in insurance these elements have a special meaning. Awareness is important because an unknown insurer has limited credibility; associations shape expectations about reliability and fairness; perceived quality reflects the customer's experience of service; and loyalty becomes a behavioural expression of trust. Therefore, the traditional elements of brand equity should be interpreted through the specific trust-intensive nature of insurance.

Corporate brand as a signal of reliability

The theoretical importance of corporate branding is especially visible in services where the company itself represents the main brand. Balmer (2001) emphasises that a corporate brand is connected with organisational identity, reputation, values and stakeholder relationships. Berry (2000) also notes that in services customers often evaluate the provider rather than a physical product. This idea is particularly relevant to insurance, because the customer purchases an intangible promise of future protection.

Insurance can be viewed as a credence service. Its quality is difficult to assess before purchase and may remain difficult to assess even after purchase. A customer may never experience a claim and therefore may not have a complete opportunity to test the insurer's promise. This creates information asymmetry between the company and the customer. Under these conditions, the corporate brand works

as a market signal. It summarises previous experience, reputation, financial reliability and expectations of fair behaviour. A trusted brand reduces uncertainty because the customer believes that the insurer has both the ability and the intention to fulfil its obligations.

The signalling role of the brand also explains why price alone cannot create a sustainable competitive advantage. A lower premium may attract attention, but it does not automatically reduce doubts about future claims handling. A recognised and trusted corporate brand can provide customers with a stronger reason to choose one insurer over another, even when competing companies offer similar products. This is especially important in developing insurance markets, where public knowledge about insurance may be uneven and customers may rely strongly on reputation and personal recommendations.

Brand trust and customer relationships

Relationship marketing places trust at the centre of long-term cooperation. Morgan and Hunt (1994) define trust as confidence in the reliability and integrity of an exchange partner. In insurance, this confidence is fundamental because the customer accepts present costs in exchange for uncertain future benefits. Trust reduces perceived risk and makes the insurance promise believable.

Brand trust includes both rational and emotional elements. The rational element concerns the customer's belief that the insurer is financially and operationally capable of fulfilling its obligations. The emotional element concerns confidence that the company will behave fairly when problems arise. Delgado-Ballester (2004) describes brand trust through reliability and intentions. These two dimensions are highly relevant to insurance. Reliability is visible in payment discipline, responsiveness and service consistency, while intentions are reflected in fairness, transparency and willingness to support customers in difficult situations.

The development of trust depends on the whole customer experience. Advertising can increase awareness, but it cannot substitute for actual service quality. If the brand promises simplicity and care but the customer experiences delays, unclear explanations or indifference, trust can quickly weaken. In contrast, consistent and respectful treatment strengthens the brand because customers compare communicated promises with real behaviour. Claims handling is especially important. Before a claim, the customer mainly evaluates expectations. During a claim, the customer directly tests the credibility of the insurer. This moment can therefore strengthen or damage the corporate brand more strongly than many promotional campaigns.

Implications for insurance companies

A trust-oriented approach to corporate branding requires coordination between marketing, customer service, claims departments, digital channels and employees. The brand should not be managed only by the marketing department because every contact with the customer contributes to brand meaning. Employees and agents represent the organisation and influence whether customers perceive the company as competent, honest and customer-oriented.

Insurance companies should pay particular attention to transparency. Policy conditions, exclusions, payment procedures and claims requirements should be explained in clear language. Complex communication can increase uncertainty, while understandable information can strengthen confidence. The same principle applies to digital channels. Websites, mobile applications and social media can improve accessibility, but they should provide consistent information and easy contact with responsible staff. Digital efficiency is useful only when it supports, rather than replaces, the human dimension of trust.

Corporate reputation should also be treated as a strategic resource. Positive customer experiences, fair claims handling and consistent communication create reputational capital over time. This capital helps the insurer reduce customer hesitation and strengthens loyalty. At the same time, negative episodes can have a strong effect because dissatisfied customers may share their experiences

with others. In a relational service such as insurance, reputational damage is particularly costly because the relationship is built slowly but can be weakened quickly.

Conclusion

Corporate branding in insurance performs a much broader function than product identification or promotion. It reduces uncertainty, signals reliability and supports the formation of customer trust. The corporate brand combines reputation, perceived service quality, communication, employee behaviour and customer experience into a single set of expectations about how the insurer will act in the future.

For this reason, insurance companies should manage the brand as a strategic trust asset. Strong branding requires consistency between what the company says and what it actually does. Transparent communication, reliable service, fair claims handling and professional employee behaviour should reinforce the same promise. When these elements are aligned, the corporate brand can strengthen customer loyalty and support competitiveness. In developing insurance markets, including Uzbekistan, this approach can also contribute to wider public confidence in insurance as a financial service.

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