The Impact of Image Congruence and Social Norm on Employer Preference

Tor W. Andreassen a and Even Lanseng b
a Norwegian School of Management
b Agricultural University of Norway

Tor W. Andreassen is an Associate Professor of Marketing*
Even Lanseng is an Associate Professor of Marketing

* Corresponding author
Robert H. Smith School of Business
University of Maryland
3307 Van Munching Hall
College Park, MD 20742
USA

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Abstract

To service firms attracting and retaining the right people (e.g. competence, value, attitude) is critical. In this paper we are employing the self-image congruency hypothesis in the labor market and investigate the impact of 1) congruity between the self-image of potential employees and corporate image of potential employer and 2) subjective norm on employer preference. Based on data sampled and analyzed we find that both factors weigh in when deciding on the preferred employer. This study advances our understanding of the importance of branding service firms on brand equity and value equity. Second, this study builds a bridge between branding research and human resource management research. From this study service managers can learn that corporate image is just as important in the labor market as it is in the customer market.

Key words: image congruence, branding, corporate social responsibility,
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Introduction

Developing products with superior attributes or functionality is a well-trotted way in which companies can create value for its customers and in the process improve both relative attractiveness and existing customers future repurchase intention (Andreassen & Lervik 1998). However, as we move into the experience economy (Pine and Gilmore 1998) customers are looking for more than superior product attributes. For service companies an obvious source of creating customer value and experience is the firm’s service foundation (Schneider 1980; Schneider et al. 1998) and employees (Loveman 1998; Pfeffer 1998). As specified in the illustrious Service Profits Chain (Heskett at al. 1997) the performance of the employees is directly linked to service value, customer satisfaction and loyalty. In this perspective, customer’s experience and perception of value is to a large extent based on the interaction with and performance of the employees at the service encounter. However, there is also an indirect link between consumers and employees via corporate image. The brand literature suggests that consumers are not only concerned with the instrumental attributes and benefits of a brand, but will also consider it according to its symbolic or imagery aspects (e.g. Aaker 1997; Keller 1993; Park et al. 1986). Image attributes, such as for example typical product users (cf. Keller 1993), enable the consumer to identify with the brand and thereby express his or her self-concept (Solomon 1983). One important mechanism at play here is known as self-image congruence, i.e. a consumer values a brand on the
basis of how well its image match (in a cognitive sense) his or her self-image (Sirgy
1982). In short, consumers will gravitate toward brands which images are closer to
t heir own self-image or desired image. In the marketing literature image congruence
refers to a notion of the consumer as one that selects products and stores that
correspond to his or her self-concept, because this will enhance the consumers’
self-concept (Sirgy 1982, 1986). Image congruence has been used to explain and
predict product use and possessions, brand attitude and choice, purchase intention
and motivation, store preference and loyalty, (Clairborne and Sirgy 1990; Sirgy
1982; Sirgy 1985) and to understand symbolic as well as aesthetic consumption
(Bell et al. 1991; Salomon and Assael 1987). Finally, Sirgy et al (1997) claimed that
not only product images, but also the images of suppliers and services are
compared to consumers’ self-concepts. We will argue that this link between
consumers and brands might be extended to employees' choice of preferred
employer. Specifically, and in the same way as consumers might judge a product on
the basis of the congruence between the image of a service supplier and their self-
image, we will argue that employees might judge the same supplier as a potential
employer based on the fit between the company image and their conceptions of
themselves. This link is facilitated when employees engage in multiple roles, such
as customers, investors, and spokespersons, and thereby take the corporate values
outside the borders of the company. In these roles, employees can add value by
enhancing stakeholders image of the company. Consumers, for example, might
identify even more with the service provider for which they find the corporate image
favorable when they at the same time can identify with the employees involved in
the production of the service. On this background, the current research asserts that
companies should take a broader look at the impact of their brand on customer
value. Paraphrasing Ted Levitt (1969) we will claim that, “A business can’t stay in business if it can’t attract and hold on to the right employees no matter how efficiently it operates.” Companies should capitalize on the link between their employees and consumers established by the corporate image, by hiring the right people. Whereas current literature in marketing has established the relationship between image congruence and brand preferences, this paper is concerned with the link between image congruence and employee preference.

From the perspective of the company, then, recruitment of people that can transfer a certain image outside the boundaries of the firm, and also be inspired by the same image themselves, have the potential to increase customer equity through increased brand equity and value equity (Rust et al. 2000). If the company manages to attract and retain employees and customers who hold the same values as the firm and communicated through its brand, it has a unique platform to deliver outstanding shareholder value. On this matter, we suggest that for service firms the relationship between the company’s image and the self-image of the employees is crucial. To summarize, the present research investigates the role of image congruency between potential employees employing companies in formation of employer preference. Because employer preferences, like preferences for products, are likely to also be influence by the social atmosphere surrounding the employer, we also investigate the role of social pressure. Specifically we will try to answer the following research question: Is there a relationship between peoples’ conception of themselves (or their self image) and the image of the company, for which they prefer to be employed? This study will contribute to current understanding of the link between the firm’s service promise as reflected through its brand and the enabling
of this service promise through its employees in general and specifically how the brand may help in attracting the “right” kind of employees.

**Literature review**

*Self-image Congruence*

Research in marketing and consumer behavior involving self-image congruence has often focused on the evaluative outcomes, such as attitudes, preferences, choices, and brand possessions, of cognitive matching of product images and self-images (Dolich 1969; Hong and Zinkhan 1995; Onkvisit and Shaw 1987; Sirgy 1985). The congruity resulting from a psychological comparison of product-image and self-image produces a motivational or emotional state, which in turn prompts the consumer to evaluate alternative courses of action (e.g. prefer service supplier A over service supplier B). Specifically, it is assumed that purchasing or identifying himself/herself with a product that matches up with his/her self-image, the consumer would reach an emotional state that enhances his/her self-esteem motive and reinforces his/her self-consistency motive (Sirgy 1982 b).

Research in the field of organizational identity suggests that people also identify with organizations on the basis of perceived similarity between organizational attributes and individual attributes (Ashford and Mael 1989; Dutton et al. 1994; Tajfel and Turner 1985).

On a different note Super (1953) suggested that a persons self-concept was important with respect to vocational development, i.e. the process of occupational
choice. He stated that "The process of vocational development is essentially that of developing and implementing a self-concept: " (Super 1953) Super claims that through selection of the right occupation and thereby meet the approval of the superiors and peers, a person will be able to direct his self-concept in the desired direction. Later studies (England 1960; Morrison 1962; Ziegler 1970) demonstrated that the occupational preferences of college students were consistent with Super's theory.

Building on Super (1953), Holland (1966) put forth a somewhat similar theory for understanding vocational development. He assumed that emphasized congruence between the personality patterns and the image of the firm was a major determinant of organizational choice. According to this theory, the choice of organization is to a large extent based on personal and emotional factors. The Subjective Factor Theory can be seen as an extension of Super's (1953) theory into organizational choice. Later, Tom (1971) tested the Subjective Factor Theory empirically. Whereas earlier studies had focused on occupational choice Tom focused on organizational choice. In his study of 100 students he found evidence that people describe themselves more similar to organizations they prefer the most, than organizations they prefer the least.

In a study by Keon et al. (1982) testing the effect of positive versus negative self-image on image congruence and preferred organization, evidence supporting Korman's (Korman 1966) congruence hypotheses was found. That is, individuals with high self-esteem will choose organizations congruent with their self-image, while low self-esteem individuals will choose organizations incongruent with their
In a literature review on organizational search and choice Bretz et al (1989) found that little could be said about the drive to seek congruence. They support their argumentation with the conflicting results of Keon et al.'s study (1982) and the earlier study of Tom (1971). Whereas Tom proved that people seek organizations similar to themselves, Keon et al. (1982) demonstrated that people with low self-esteem would prefer organizations incongruent with their own image. The incongruence proved in Keon et al. could be explained by self-enhancement theory that suggests that everything people do is aimed at enhancing their self-concept image. People with low self-esteem will therefore seek to improve their perception of themselves by preferring organizations with a better image than they have themselves.

The self-concept on which self-image congruence is based, involves ideas and feelings that a person has about him-/herself in relation to others in a socially determined frame of reference (Onkvisit and Shaw 1987). The formation of the self-concept is a lifelong process that starts slowly, but dramatically picks up speed as the level of social interaction increases at pre-school age. It stabilizes when people get older and learn about their abilities and limitations. For many years marketing scholars have explored the content of self-concept (Sirgy 1982). Research has identified at least four actual components of the self-concept: (1) real self - the way a person actually is, (2) self-image - the way a person sees himself, (3) ideal self - the way a person would like to be, and (4) looking-glass self - the way a person thinks others regard him/her (Onkvisit and Shaw 1987). More recently self-concept and self-image has been treated as synonyms. In this research we will make use of the
terms self-image as proposed by Sirgy et al. (1997, p. 230), i.e. self-image as involving perceptions of one-self along image dimensions related to the product user.

The image congruence hypothesis proposed by Grubb and Garthwohl (1967), provides a framework for symbolic consumption which links the evaluation of product attributes with the interpretation of product meanings. The framework acknowledged the possible relevance of an audience on individuals' consumption choices, and that the consuming behavior of an individual will be directed toward enhancing self-concept through consumption of goods as symbols. Several studies (Dolich 1969; Hong and Zinkhan 1995; Onkvisit and Shaw 1987; Sirgy 1985) proved Grubb and Garthwohl's assumption through experiments showing that image congruence involves consumers holding more favorable attitudes and buying intentions toward brands perceived to be congruent with their self-image and accordingly less favorable against brands perceived to be incongruent with their self-image. Numerous studies have detected a positive relationship between image congruence and brand/product preferences, but only a limited number on image congruence and organizational choice.

The effect different consumption situations have on brand and product preference has been proven several times in the consumer research literature (Belk 1975; Graeff 1997; Stayman and Deshpande 1989). Brands contain special images which allows consumers to express who they are and how they want to be perceived by others. It is not sufficient to consume the product in a public setting, the symbol effect is dependent on the product or brand being a publicly recognized symbol
(Belk et al. 1982). Or most importantly a symbol recognized by those one want to be associated with.

Several companies have a brand that is a publicly recognized symbol, and an employer could be considered as a product "consumed" in a public setting. This combination makes an employer a great mean for influencing or maintaining a person's self-image. Summarizing the above discussion we hypothesize the following:

**HI: Image congruence, i.e. perceived distance between self-image and corporate- image, will positively affect the evaluators' preference towards the company as a potential employer.**

**Social influence**

Although the concept of image congruence as proposed by Sirgy and colleagues (Claiborn and Sirgy 1990; Sirgy 1982, 1985, 1986; Sirgy et al. 1997) contains both personal and interpersonal aspects, we are unsure that the operational use of it (e.g. Sirgy et al. 1997) sufficiently captures extra-personal factors. Specifically, we believe the social dimension such as the looking-glass self (Onkvisit and Shaw 1987), easily can be disregarded by respondents when responding to the instructions advocated by Sirgy and colleges (e.g. Sirgy et al 1997). Their proposed measurement method taps the dimension(s) of self-image that the respondent find relevant at the moment of response (Sirgy et al, p. 232). Contextual variability may then bias the self-image actually related to by the respondent. For example, if the stimulus used to elicit the self-image has a very private meaning to the respondent (e.g. the respondent knows only one single user of the stimulus product), the image
dimension retrieved by the respondent is likely to be of private nature. Hence, this measurement method may fail to capture the more public aspects of the self-image. Therefore we would like to draw more explicit attention to the consumers’ interpersonal contemplation in this regard.

Peoples’ self-image is not only a personal phenomenon. Also interpersonal factors are likely to play a role in how people choose to view themselves (Greenwald and Breckler 1985; Schenkler 1980; Swann 1983; Swann 1990; Tetlock and Manstead 1985). Humans are social beings that are integral parts of a structure comprised of culture, organizations, social categories, groups, and other individuals, that all exerts influence on the individuals’ self-image and related behaviors. Social influence has been defined as "change in one person's beliefs, attitudes, behavior, or emotions brought about by some other person or persons" (Raven and Rubin 1983) p. 8). Social influence includes phenomena such as social norms, conformity, compliance or obedience, and social facilitation (Cialdini and Trost 1998; Guerin 1993). Two of these social influence components – social norms and compliance- seem particularly important to the notion of self-image congruence.

Social norm can be thought of as a shared social belief about how we collectively ought to think, feel, and behave. One well-known specification of social norm is the subjective norm in attitude theory (Ajzen 1991; Ajzen and Fishbein 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen 1975). Subjective norm expresses the perception a person has of the social pressure from valued others, the person is under, to perform or not perform the behavior in question (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975). Conforming to a social norm has a number of advantages (Cialdini and Trost 1998) including making a good
impression on others (Fiske and Taylor 1991) and thereby conveying a positive self-image. The literature on impression management suggests that people engage in social interactions with others to regulate their selves (Schenkler 1980). By performing certain behaviors people can control and manipulate the impressions others form of them (Tedeschi and Riess 1981) and thereby project a positive image, both in one’s own and in other’s eyes (Schenkler 1980; Snyder 1977). A person behaving according to a certain social norm is therefore likely to bring about a positive image of oneself among others following the same norm. A person working in a company renowned for its commitment to the local society and environment, is portraying an image of a “socially responsible person.” More specifically, Goffman (1959) suggests that impression management involves attempts to present an "idealized" version of the front (i.e. the observable part of the person’s performance), more consistent with the norms, mores, and laws of society than the behavior of the actor when not before an audience. Conforming to situation norms, such as wearing black in funerals, is the best way of presenting the self in this situation. Alexander (1971) note that for every social setting there is a pattern of interactions that conveys the best identity for that setting.

Impression management efforts are not only undertaken to convey a positive image of the self in an audience, but also too impress the self itself. In many respect, the self is one’s best and most important audience (Greenwald and Breckler 1985; Tetlock and Manstead 1985). Elsewhere, it has been argued that norm-based behaviors are not a response to possible threats of social sanctions, but rather a vehicle for expressing internalized values (Schwartz 1977). People act in a value-consistent fashion as to enhance or preserve one’s self-worth and avoid self-
concept distress (Schwartz 1977).

Impression management is more likely to occur in situations of high social scrutiny. People are more likely to engage in self-presentation activities when they expect others to be aware of their actions (Fiske and Taylor 1991). Previous research (Diener 1979; Diener 1980; Singer et al. 1965) has shown that individuals adhere more to social norms about what constitutes appropriate behavior when their behavior is identifiable than when it is anonymous. Analogously, the marketing literature suggests that people self-symbolize with products (Levy 1959; Salomon 1983) and especially for conspicuous products (Bearden and Etzel 1982).

In social psychology, compliance refers to publicly acting in accord with a request from a social source of influence, and implies a change in behavior (Cialdini and Trost 1998). A person outwardly conforming to the wishes of some influencing social source, without changing his/her private beliefs or attitudes concerning this behavior, is performing a compliant behavior. Or simply stated, when you comply, you meet a demand you would not have met in the absence of social influence. For example, when confronted with a request from your parents in law to quit smoking, you refrain from smoking as long as they are physically present or in any other influential position. In attitude theory, compliance has been conceptualized as an integral part of social or subjective norm. Specifically, the strength of the normative beliefs is weighted by motivation to comply with the social referent in question (e.g. Ajzen 1991; Ajzen and Fishbein 1980). Compliance can be used for the purpose of managing the self-image (Cialdini et al. 1987). Swann (Swann 1990) suggests that compliance can be used to both enhance and verify our self-image. In a self-
enhancement situation, in which one wishes to promote a positive self-image, acquiescing to a social request to avoid being hired by a company that is under legal suspicion of violating accounting practices, can enhance one’s self-image as a socially responsible person. Or, in a self-verification situation, where the goal is to promote an accurate self-image, one’s already established self-image of a socially responsible person can be verified by being compliant with the request of not seek employment in companies under legal investigation.

Summarizing the above discussion we hypothesize the following:

**H2. Social norm in the form of how ones peers evaluate the firm will have a positive impact on the evaluators’ preference towards the company as a potential employer.**

Another relevant self-definitional aspect is the personal need for consistency. In addition to promote positive and accurate self-images, people strive to maintain consistency in their self-impressions (Swann 1983). Therefore, they are inclined to comply with the request that allow them to enhance or verify themselves as consistent (Cialdini and Trost 1998). Well-established evidence in social psychology suggests that people try to maintain consistency within their behaviors (Festinger 1957; Heider 1964; Heider 1958; Newcomb 1953). Research suggests that commitment is a central element in people’s effort to preserve consistency (Cialdini and Trost 1998). After making a commitment, one tends to behave in ways that are consistent with it (Shereman 1980). Therefore, individuals can be expected to comply with requests that are aligned with their existing commitments. The
motivation for commitment-consistent behavior can be exemplified by a strategy known as the foot-in-the-door technique (Freedman and Fraser 1966). Studies on the foot-in-the-door effect have shown that compliance with a request could be substantially increased by first gaining compliance with a smaller related request (Dillard 1991; Freedman and Fraser 1966). For example, complying with the request to only purchase “fair trade”-labelled products (e.g. products from companies committed to providing fair wages and good employment opportunities to economically disadvantaged workers and farmers worldwide), makes it easier to reject a subsequent available position in a company without any strategy to promote “fair trade.”

Peoples’ need for consistency in their self-conceptions also extends to consistency between the private and public self-images (Fiske and Taylor 1991). If one holds a conception of oneself as a socially responsible person, one also would like others to perceive one as a socially responsible person. Evidence from self-verification research suggest that people selectively interacts with persons that are likely to see them in the same way they see themselves (Swann 1990). Summarizing the above discussion we hypothesis as follow

**H3. Image congruence and social norm will affect employer preference in the same direction.**

In order to test the proposed hypotheses empirically we performed a survey. In the following section we will elaborate on the design of this study.
Participants and stimuli

Approximately 240 graduate business school students were intercepted on campus. Interviewers asked students to participate in a study regarding their perception about some potential employers. Participants were given as much time as they wanted to complete the questionnaire involving questions concerning six major companies (i.e. potential employers): Pan Fish (fish farming; b2b), Procter & Gamble (goods marketing company; b2c), Elkem (manufacturer of metals and materials; b2b), McKinsey & Company (management consultants; b2b), Osram (manufacturer of light products; b2b), and PricewaterhouseCoopers (auditing/management; consultants; b2b). These companies were chosen on the basis of Holman’s (1980) criteria of visibility, variability, and personality. In the context of the current study, this means that the companies were known to all participants, varied in industry sector, and conveyed different images. Moreover, since these companies are potential employers to many of the business school’s students, it was expected that the participants were highly motivate to carefully fulfill the questionnaire.

Measurement

Both Tom (1971) and Keon et al. (1982) assessed image congruence between the respondents and the organizations indirectly, e.g. Tom (1971) used a 300-word adjective checklist and by the Study of Values. The Study of Values is a scale developed to measure importance of six interests or motives in personality. When using indirect measures for assessing image congruence like Tom (1971) and Keon et al. (1982) did, there is a potential for the use of irrelevant images. Indirect
assessment also neglects the fact that people have different images for different situations.

**Dependent variable**

First, the participants were asked to think of the status of the current labor market as favorable, and that they were free to choose whatever company they desired to work for. Second, *employer preference* was measured by asking participants to respond to a 7-point Likert scale (1=totally disagree/7=totally agree) stating "I would very much like to work for …”

**Independent variables**

*Image congruence* was measured according to the “direct” or “global” method proposed by Sirgy et al (1997). In the current context, this method measures self-image congruence directly by inducing the participants to contemplate on the employer-image as they see it, and then ask them to indicate the degree of match or mismatch between this image (company image) and how they see themselves (self-image). The instructions were read as follows:

“Take a moment of time to think about (company x). Think about the kind of persons who typically works there. Imagine this person in your mind and describe this person using one or more personal adjectives such as young at heart, innovative, traditional, bureaucratic, or whatever personal adjective you can use to describe the typical person working for (company x).”

“Once you gave done this, indicate your agreement or disagreement to the following statement: I see myself as quite similar to the perception I have of a typical
employee in (company x)"

Responses were captured on a 7-point Likert scale (1=totally disagree/7=totally agree).

This method takes a gestalt-like view on perception of image rather than a more traditional atomistic view assuming that image is some sum of image dimensions. This method allows the company image and self-image to be perceived as intertwined concepts rather than as two separate concept. Also, it allows participant to invoke their own image of the employer rather than force them to respond to some pre-specified (and often irrelevant) image categories or dimensions. Empirically, this method has proven to give more valid predictions than the traditional atomistic approach (Sirgy et al. 1997).

In accordance with attitude research in the Ajzen and Fishbein tradition (Ajzen 1991; Ajzen and Fishbein 1980) subjective norm was assessed by asking about the social pressure that was perceived by the participants (normative beliefs) to apply for a job in company X as well as the individual’s motivation to comply with those perceived expectations (motivation to comply). Specifically, responses to the two following questions were multiplied to produce subjective norm: “To what extent do you think your friends and acquaintances would recommend you to apply for a job in company X?” and “To what extent are you willing to follow their recommendations.” Responses to both questions were collected on 7-point differential scales (1=to a very little extent/7=to a very large extent).
Results

A linear regression model, regressing employer preference on image congruency and subjective norm, was performed to test the hypotheses.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Pan Fish</th>
<th>P&amp;G</th>
<th>Elkem</th>
<th>McKinsey</th>
<th>Osram</th>
<th>PwC</th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Image congruence</td>
<td>.593**</td>
<td>.520**</td>
<td>.356**</td>
<td>.527**</td>
<td>.373**</td>
<td>.497**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective norm</td>
<td>.178*</td>
<td>.251**</td>
<td>.321**</td>
<td>.175*</td>
<td>.210*</td>
<td>.263**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.448</td>
<td>.437</td>
<td>.383</td>
<td>.376</td>
<td>.215</td>
<td>.408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj-R²</td>
<td>.442</td>
<td>.431</td>
<td>.332</td>
<td>.371</td>
<td>.208</td>
<td>.402</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-statistic(df)</td>
<td>84.3(2,208)</td>
<td>80.6(2,208)</td>
<td>44.8(2,208)</td>
<td>62.8(2,208)</td>
<td>28.5(2,208)</td>
<td>71.6(2,208)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p-value</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .01  
** p < .001

Notes: One-tailed tests for parameters.

All the hypothesized relationships are supported for all six companies (Table 1). The overall fit of the models was acceptable, the adjusted R² values for the equations amounted to .442 for Pan Fish, .431 for Procter and Gamble, .332 for Elkem, .371 for McKinsey, .208 for Osram, and .402 for PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC). Moreover, the F-statistic was significant for all models (p<.000). Across the six models, the patterns of regression coefficients were consistent with expectations. Both the two statistically significant terms, image congruence and subjective norm, showed the same positive signs in all models. Correlations between employer preference and image congruence and employer preference and subjective norm were, respectively, .593, p<.001 and .178, p<.001 (Pan Fish), .520, p<.001 and .251, p<.001 (Procter and Gamble), .356, p<.001 and .321, p<.001 (Elkem), .527,
Discussion of results

In this study we have tested the image congruency hypothesis in a new setting, i.e. the importance of firm image when employees make choices regarding preferred employer. Because choices are made in a social context, we also investigated the importance of social norm when employees decide on preferred employer. Based on the findings we conclude that both constructs impact prospective employees’ choice with regard to preferred employer. From this conclusion service managers may learn several things. First, the image of a service companies is to a large extent dependent on the impression employees create in the meeting with the customers. For this reason attracting the right employees is critical. Attracting employees who hold the company’s values which is communicated to prospective customers high, will create a positive loop with regard to customer satisfaction, loyalty and performance. Second, current word of mouth will be qualitatively strengthened as existing customers encounter a new reason to talk positively about the company. Talking positively about the company will simultaneously enhance one’s self-image. Whereas this argument is developed in the customer equity literature (Rust et al. 2000) by increasing brand equity, we argue the same effect in the labor market. Third, companies might improve their standing with respect to corporate social responsibility (CSR). In a resent article Maignan & Ferrel (2004) claim that organizations “act in a socially responsible manner when they align their behaviors with the norms and demands embraced by their main stakeholders.” By employing people that their customers straightforwardly identify with, the company engages in
a behavior that should be valued by two major stakeholder groups – customers and employees.

Fourth, an image valued by employees may help the firm reduce employee churn. If, for example, a company violates a norm in society (e.g. fraud, insider trading, pollution, etc) social norm may de-motivate prospective employees to choose the company in question. Worst-case scenario of violating social norms is that employees decide to leave the company due to its unethical conduct. Customers may decide to defect for the same reason. In summary, access to the best resources is critical to any firm. However, for service firms attracting and retaining the best people is essential as employees to a much larger extent is part of the experience. Being able to attract employees who share the same values as the firm strengthen the firms brand –something which will improve the firms relative attractiveness in the market. Customers and employees are attracted to companies which may help them to get somewhat closer to their ideal self-image. Whereas a good image may help the firm attract customers who are fascinated by the service promise a good image may help the firm attract those who will deliver the service promise. The answer to the question why some service companies (for example South West Airlines and Four Seasons Hotels) do not experience problems attracting a large applicant pool from which to recruit the “right” employees may be found in this argument.
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