

Application of Co-branding Strategies in Mass Rapid Transit System: A Case study of Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC)

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ABSTRACT

Branding is a process of creating identification of the products by creating a name, symbol, logo, etc. Co-branding is a strategic alliance between two or more brands with the purpose of leveraging benefits. A similar strategy of co-branding is adopted in Delhi Metro Rail Corporation also through naming different metro station, coach wrapping through advertisements, marketing through metro tokens, etc. The purpose of this study is to understand the co-branding strategies of DMRC and to study the perception of commuters towards this co-branding.

The study begins with a brief review of Co-branding as a concept and its various types through literature study. A brief understanding of DMRC, a multi-modal transport system of India's capital Delhi is discussed. Further, co-branding strategies adopted by DMRC is discussed in detail. The study is also intended to understand the perception of commuters towards co-branding. For the same purpose, a structured questionnaire was prepared. The sampling frame of the study is metro commuters of Delhi-NCR and is multi-level sampling focusing on systematic convenience sampling with a sample size of 100.

The study finds that the majority of respondents perceive that Coach wrapping enhances brand awareness of the Co-branding partner. 49% of the total respondents have noticed the brands promoted on smart cards and tokens. The majority of respondents have noticed the renaming of metro stations. The majority also believes that co-branding has enhanced the aesthetics of metro stations and given a unique identity to the co-branded metro stations. Further, 2-tailed Z-test has been used for testing six hypotheses.

The present study only covered the perception part of the Co-branding strategy with smaller sample size. The scope of the study may be broadened to study the effect of other parameters such as brand positioning, brand equity and brand innovation with larger sample size.

Keywords: Co-branding, Delhi Metro Rail Corporation, Commuters' Perceptions

1.0 Introduction

Co-branding is a strategic alliance between multiple brands. Marketers adopt the strategy, also known as brand partnership by utilizing multiple brand names of goods or services. This strategy includes branding alliances usually involving the brands of two or more companies. The strategy is beneficial for various businesses focusing on enhancing the market share, customer base, loyalty amongst existing customers, brand equity and image, profitability, perceived value, and cost savings. Eventually different retail outlets, restaurants, automobile companies, manufacturing units are adopting this strategy. The brands are collaborating with other brands in order to multifold their brand image by means of adopting strengths of various brands. In simple words, co-branding is a strategy that enriches market share and capitalize on increased customer awareness.

2.0 Literature review

Co-branding is an emerging area of academic interest especially with respect to an effective brand management strategy. The strategy encompasses combination of brands partnering together with focus on combining the competencies and reputations so that a state of mutual benefit could be generated (e.g. Faems, Van Looy, & Debackere, 2005; Park, Jun, & Shocker, 1996); Hilary & Nathalie (2015). Many previous researches has studied attitudes to co-brands, such as the familiarity (Levin & Levin, 2000), perceived quality (Rao, Qu, & Ruekert, 1999; Rao & Ruekert, 1994) and associative brand equity (Washburn, Till, & Priluck, 2000) of the partnering brands. In particular, the extent to which they are congruent in terms of brand perceptions and product categories, has been observed to shape consumer attitudes to co-branding (Helmig, Huber, & Leeflang, 2007; Lafferty, Goldsmith, & Hult, 2004; Simonin & Ruth, 1998). It may be expected that the similarity between the parent brands to increase the perceived congruence (Simonin & Ruth, 1998), however, moderate incongruity has been found to favor Co-branding (Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1989).

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2.1 Types of Co-branding strategies

A brief review of the types of Co-branding strategies are presented below to understand what kind of Co-branding strategy has been used by DMRC:

Ingredient Co- Branding- In this particular type of co-branding, one brand is applied as a component in the production of another brand. Largely, such Co-Branding takes place between existing suppliers or large buyers. For example, Intel Processors are used in the Dell computers.

Promotional/ Sponsorship Co-Branding– Such Co-Branding is usually adopted by **Entertainment Industry and Sports leagues** where well-known brands offers sponsorships to various award functions, sports events, social events, etc. in order to create brand image like sponsorship offered by DLF, Pepsi etc. in IPL matches.

Value Chain Co-Branding – This particular type of co-branding is a *Product Service Co-Branding*. For example, Air India and American Express Co- Brand Card offer several reward points and tailored benefits to the flyers of Air India. Similarly, *Supplier Retailer Co-Branding*-Barista Lavazza offers free Wi-Fi services at its cafe through the tie-up with spectra net, the Shyam Group; *Alliance Co-Branding*- Alliance of Etihad Airways and Jet Airways.

Innovation Based Co-Branding – This type of co-branding provides some innovative benefits in terms of product or services. For example, Nike and Apple have come together through the invention of Nike+ footwear in which iPod can be connected with shoes that will play music and will tell the time, distance covered, calories burnt and heart pace of an athlete.

Thus, co-branding is a widely adopted strategy that facilitates differential benefits to the parent brands. Past studies suggest the source of these differences may be due to the partners' relative market position, and characteristics such as brand familiarity, brand equity and proximity to the consumer. Hilary et al (2015) study the role of brand positioning in the context of Co-branding and its impact on customer perceptions. Usman et.al (2014) explore the combined brand equity after co-branding.

3.0 Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC)

Mass Rapid Transit System: the metro rail network is a mass rapid transit system, which, facilitates millions of commuters intra city travel economically and expeditiously in large

cities like Tokyo, London, Delhi and Mumbai etc. During the past decade, the metro rail network in India has been rapidly expanding across the country to include other large cities like Hyderabad, Kochi and Jaipur etc. The mass rapid transit system has proved to be a boon and one of the best urban transport solutions for India.

The Mass Rapid Transit System (MRTS) involving rail network is a capital and technology intensive project and has long gestation period before it becomes operational. It (MRTS) being a people oriented public transport system, there are constraints to the financial aspects of the project, particularly the Return on Investment (ROI) and Operating Income from Fare (charge per kilometer) etc.

DMRC, a multi-modal transport system for the India's capital Delhi was established in the year 1995 to build a metro in three phases serving Delhi and its neighbouring cities- Gurgaon, Noida and Ghaziabad, the network construction began in 1998, and the first section was opened in 2002 on the Red Line.

It is the 10th longest metro system in the world and the network consists of seven colour-coded regular lines and the faster Airport Express Line, with a total length of 288 kilometers (179 mi) serving 214 metro stations. The rail network consists of underground as well as elevated stations. The power output is being supplied through overhead catenaries. DMRC operates over 3,000 trips daily, with first trains starting at around 05:00am and last at 23:30 pm. DMRC's train comprises of 4, 6 as well as 8 coaches. In Delhi 270 sets of train are operational. It has an average daily ridership of close to three million passengers and served over 1.0 billion riders in total during the year 2018. Delhi Metro has revolutionized travel by providing a speedy, dependable, secure, and comfortable means of transport. An exclusive feature of Delhi Metro is its amalgamation with other modes of public transport, providing the commuters to expediently interchange from one mode to another.

DMRC today stands for steadfast and safer journeys, saves time, reduced atmospheric pollution, reduction in accident rates, reduction in fuel consumption, reduction in the vehicle operating costs and increase in the average speed of road vehicles, which has helped in improving the quality of life of people in Delhi, thus making the city more attractive for

economic investment and growth. DMRC has been a boon in removing vehicle congestion in the city.

DMRC has over 12000 employees and it operates 214 metro stations in Delhi-NCR region (Noida, Gurgaon and Ghaziabad). The annual revenue for the financial year 2018-19 is Rs.6462 crores as per their Annual report 2018-19. Its revenue registered Compounded Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of a little over 28 % over the past 10 year period (2009-19), an impressive growth rate for a Public Sector Undertaking. Despite its impressive revenue growth, the Operating losses have a Compounded Annual Negative Growth Rate of 18% over the same period (2009-2019).

DMRC had initiated Co-branding at 44 Metro stations in Delhi-NCR region and had signed draft license agreement (DLA) directly with 6 companies and 10 marketing agencies. The recurring annual charges ranged from Rs70 lakhs to approximately Rs2 crores depending on the location of a metro station and the space allocated.

3.1 Co-branding Strategies of DMRC

- DMRC provides co-branding opportunity by – (i) naming a particular Metro station by the name of the sponsoring company; (ii) Coach wrapping with the advertorial of the sponsoring company and (iii) Metro Tokens are covered with Micro advertisements providing wide publicity to the promoted brands.
- It was observed that DMRC has implemented the Co-branding strategy at 44 leading Metro Stations of Delhi and the stations have been named after the sponsoring companies. DMRC has a total of 214 Metro stations in Delhi- National Capital Region.
- On the basis of above segmentation, DMRC follows undifferentiated targeting strategy.
- Renaming of stations such as MG Road to Syska LED MG Road and Noida City Centre to Wave Noida City Centre etc., and DMRC is earning Rs.2 crore per annum per station.

4.0 Objectives and Methodology

The objective of the paper is to – (i) briefly review the Co-branding strategies as a marketing tool available in the literature; (ii) study the Co-branding strategies deployed by

DMRC; (iii) study the perception of commuters to the ongoing DMRC Co-branding project.

A structured questionnaire has been developed for studying the perceptions of the commuters. The questionnaire consists of 10 questions (3 questions relate to demographic data and 7 questions relate to perception of commuters) was pilot tested and the following sampling plan has been followed:

Margin of error: 9.85% (nearly 10 percent)

Confidence level: 95%

Population size: Unknown; to be used as 20000 (estimated daily ridership of over 3 million)

Response Distribution: 50% assuming normal distribution

Required sample size is calculated as 100.

The questionnaire was given to 100 commuters at 5 Co-branded Metro stations (20 commuters per Metro station) and the responses were obtained.

Six Hypotheses have been formulated and tested for its statistical significance. The three Hypotheses are as given below:

Hypothesis 1 (H_{01}): Nevertheless of gender category, the commuters do not perceive that Co-branding gives unique identity to the co-branded Metro stations.

Hypothesis 2 (H_{02}): Nevertheless of age group, the commuters do not perceive that Co-branding gives unique identity to the co-branded Metro stations.

Hypothesis 3 (H_{03}): Nevertheless of education level, the commuters do not perceive that Co-branding gives unique identity to the co-branded Metro stations.

Hypothesis 4 (H_{04}): Nevertheless of gender category, the commuters do not perceive that Co-branding provides long term benefits to the commuters.

Hypothesis 5 (H_{05}): Nevertheless of age group, the commuters do not perceive that Co-branding provides long term benefits to the commuters.

Hypothesis 6 (H_{06}): Nevertheless of education level, the commuters do not perceive that Co-branding provides long term benefits to the commuters.

5. Analysis and Results

The Questionnaire analysis and discussion are presented below:

5.1 The demographic profile of the respondents is presented below:

Table 1: Demographic profile of the respondents

Q1 Gender		Male 58	Female 42	Total 100
Q2 Age Group	20 and above but less than 40	50	29	44
	40 and above	8	13	9
	Total	58	42	100
Q3 Education level	Undergraduate	18	4	22
	Graduate and above	40	38	78
	Total	58	42	100

5.2 Commuters; perception of Co-branding

The responses to Questions 4 TO 10 are analyzed and presented below in Tables 2 to 8, which are self explanatory

Table 2: Responses related to Coach Wrapping (Q 4)

Description	Gender			Age Group			Education level		
	Male (52) ⁺	Female (48)	Total (100)	20 to Less than 40 (79)	40 and above (21)	Total (100)	UG (22)	Graduation & Above (78)	Total (100)
Respondents Demographic Profile Summary (Q1- 3)									
Q4:Coach Wrapping enhances brand awareness of the advertising company	Yes (38) 73% [§]	Yes (35) 73%	Yes (73) 73%	Yes (50) 63%	Yes (13) 62%	Yes (63) 63%	Yes (6) 27%	Yes (62) 80%	Yes (68) 68%
	No (9) 17%	No (7) 15%	No (16) 16%	No (18) 23%	No (5) 24%	No (23) 23%	No (4) 18%	No (8) 10%	No (12) 12%
	May be (5) 10%	May be (6) 12%	May be (11) 11%	May be (11) 14%	May be (3) 14%	May be (14) 14%	May be (12) 55%	Maybe (8) 10%	May be (20) 20%

+ figures in parentheses indicate total number of respondents in that category

§ indicates percentage of the respondents in that category

Observations:

- i. 73% of the total respondents perceive that Coach wrapping enhances brand awareness of the Co-branding partner.
- ii. 62% of the respondents in the age group of 40 years and above perceive that Coach wrapping enhances brand awareness of the Co-branding partner.
- iii. 80% of the respondents having Graduation and above level education perceive that Coach wrapping enhances brand awareness of the Co-branding partner

Table 3: Responses related to Brand noticing (Q 5)

Respondents Demographic Profile Summary (Q1-3)	Male (52)	Female (48)	Total (100)	20 to Less than 40 (79)	40 and above (21)	Total (100)	UG (22)	Graduation & Above (78)	Total (100)
Q5: Noticing the brands promoted on smart cards and tokens	Yes (28) 54%	Yes (21) 44%	Yes (49) 49%	Yes (48) 61%	Yes (13) 62%	Yes (61) 61%	Yes (8) 36%	Yes (56) 72%	Yes (64) 64%
	No (24) 46%	No (27) 56%	No (51) 51%	No (31) 39%	No (8) 38%	No (39) 39%	No (14) 64%	No (22) 28%	No (36) 36%

Observations:

- i. 49% of the total respondents have noticed the brands promoted on smart cards and tokens.
- ii. 39% of the respondents in the age group of below 40 years did not notice brands promoted on smart cards and tokens.
- iii. 73% of the respondents having Graduation and above education level have noticed the brands promoted on smart cards and tokens.

Table 4: Responses related to Metro station renaming (Q 6)

Respondents Demographic Profile Summary (Q1-3)	Male (52)	Female (48)	Total (100)	20 to Less than 40 (79)	40 and above (21)	Total (100)	UG (22)	Graduation & Above (78)	Total (100)
Q6: Noticing that some Metro stations have been sponsored by leading brands and the Metro station has been renamed (Co-branding)	Yes (39) 75%	Yes (43) 90%	Yes (82) 82%	Yes (63) 80%	Yes (13) 62%	Yes (76) 76%	Yes (12) 55%	Yes (61) 78%	Yes (73) 73%
	No (13) 25%	No (5) 10%	No (18) 18%	No (16) 20%	No (8) 38%	No (24) 24%	No (10) 45%	No (17) 22%	No (27) 27%

Observations:

- i. 90% of the female respondents have noticed sponsoring brands and renaming of the stations.
- ii. 80% of the younger age group (less than 40 years) have noticed sponsoring brands and renaming of the stations
- iii. Only 22% the respondents' undergraduate education level have noticed sponsoring brands and renaming of the stations

Table 5: Responses related to availing of services of sponsoring companies at Metro station (Q 7)

Respondents Demographic Profile Summary (Q1-3)	Male (52)	Female (48)	Total (100)	20 to Less than 40 (79)	40 and above (21)	Total (100)	UG (22)	Graduation & Above (78)	Total (100)
Q7: Availing the services of a Co-branding partner/company that has sponsored the metro station.	Yes (32) 62%	Yes 12 25%	Yes (44) 44%	Yes (44) 56%	Yes (8) 38%	Yes (52) 52%	Yes (4) 18%	Yes (41) 53%	Yes (45) 45%
	No (20) 38%	No (36) 75%	No (56) 56%	No (35) 44%	No (13) 62%	No (48) 48%	No (18) 82%	No (37) 47%	No (55) 55%

Observations:

- i. Only 44% of the total respondents availed the services of a sponsoring Co-branding partner availed its services at the C-branded Metro station.
- ii. 46% of the younger age group (less than 40 years age) availed the services of a sponsoring Co-branding partner availed its services at the C-branded Metro station.
- iii. 53% of the respondents having higher education level (Graduation and above) availed the services of a sponsoring Co-branding partner availed its services at the C-branded Metro station.

Table 6: Responses related to enhancing aesthetics of Co-branded Metro station (Q 8)

Respondents Demographic Profile Summary (Q1-3)	Male (52)	Female (48)	Total (100)	20 to Less than 40 (79)	40 and above (21)	Total (100)	UG (22)	Graduation & Above (78)	Total (100)
Q8: Co-branding has enhanced aesthetics (beauty) of the Metro stations	Yes (46) 88%	Yes (44) 92%	Yes (90) 90%	Yes (60) 76%	Yes (17) 81%	Yes (77) 77%	Yes (14) 64%	Yes (64) 82%	Yes (78) 78%
	No (6) 12%	No (4) 8%	No (10) 10%	No (19) 24%	No (4) 19%	No (23) 23%	No (8) 36%	No (14) 18%	No (22) 22%

Observations:

- i. 90% of the total respondents perceive that Co-branding has enhanced the aesthetics of the Co-branded Metro stations.
- ii. 76% of the younger age group (less than 40 years age) perceive that Co-branding has enhanced the aesthetics of the Co-branded Metro stations.
- iii. 18% of the respondents with higher education level (Graduation and above) perceive that Co-branding has enhanced the aesthetics of the Co-branded Metro stations.

Table 7: Responses related to unique identity of Co-branded Metro stations (Q 9)

Description	Gender			Age Group			Education		
	Male (52)	Female (48)	Total (100)	20 to Less than 40 (79)	40 and above (21)	Total (100)	UG (22)	Graduation & Above (78)	Total (100)
Respondents Demographic Profile Summary (Q1-3)									
Q9:Co-branding has given a unique identity to the Co- branded Metro stations	SA (37) 71%	SA (27) 56%	SA (64) 64%	SA (44) 56^	SA (11) 52%	SA (55) 55%	SA (9) 41%	SA (44) 56%	SA (53) 53%
	A (8) 15%	A (10) 21%	A (28) 64%	A (18) 23%	A (4) 19%	A (22) 22^	A (6) 27%	A (22) 28%	A (28) 28%
	N (2) 4%	N (4) 8%	N (6) 6%	N (8) 10%	N (0) 0%	N (8) 8%	N (2) 9%	N (5) 6%	N (7) 7%
	NA (3) 6%	NA (5) 10%	NA (8) 8%	NA (4) 5%	NA (4) 19%	NA (8) 8%	NA (3) 14%	NA (4) 5%	NA (7) 7%
	SNA (2) 4%	SNA (2) 4%	SNA (4) 4%	SNA (5) 6%	SNA (2) 10%	SNA (7) 7%	SNA (2) 9%	SNA (3) 4%	SNA (5) 5%
Mean Std. deviation	4.4423 1.0740	4.1458 1.2026	4.7000 1.1415	3.2900 1.1921	3.8571 1.4928	4.1000 1.2593	3.9523 1.3778	4.1538 1.0556	4.1700 1.1464

SA: Strongly Agree A: Agree N: Neutral (No Opinion) NA: Not Agree SNA: Strongly Not Agree

Observations:

- 64 of the total respondents strongly agree that Co-branding has given unique identity to the Co-branded Metro stations.
- 52% of the respondents in the age group of 40 and above strongly agree that Co-branding has given unique identity to the Co-branded Metro stations.
- 56% of the respondents having higher education lever (Graduation and above) strongly agree that Co-branding has given unique identity to the Co-branded Metro stations.

Table 8: Responses related to long-term utility of Co-branding to commuters (Q 10)

Description	Gender			Age Group			Education		
	Male (52)	Female (48)	Total (100)	20 to Less than 40 (79)	40 and above (21)	Total (100)	UG (22)	Graduation & Above (78)	Total (100)
Respondents Demographic Profile Summary (Q1-3)									
Q10: DMRC should continue with Co- branding since it is beneficial to	SA (34) 66%	SA (27) 56%	SA (61) 61%	SA (42) 53%	SA (9) 43%	SA (51) 51%	SA (8) 36%	SA (34) 43%	SA (42) 42%
	A (8) 16%	A (13) 28%	A (19) 19%	A (22) 28%	A (5) 24%	A (27) 27%	A (6) 27%	A (26) 36%	A (33) 33%

Description	Gender			Age Group			Education		
	Male (52)	Female (48)	Total (100)	20 to Less than 40 (79)	40 and above (21)	Total (100)	UG (22)	Graduation & Above (78)	Total (100)
Respondents Demographic Profile Summary (Q1-3)									
commuters in the long term.	N (3) 7%	N (2) 4%	N (5) 6%	N (7) 9%	N (2) 10%	N (9) 9%	N (1) 5%	N (7) 9%	N (8) 8%
	NA (5) 8%	NA (3) 6%	NA (8) 9%	NA (3) 4%	NA (2) 10%	NA (5) 5%	NA (3) 14%	NA (4) 5%	NA (7) 7%
	SNA (2) 3%	SNA (3) 6%	SNA (7) 6%	SNA (5) 6%	SNA (3) 13%	SNA (8) 8%	SNA (4) 18%	SNA (7) 7%	SNA (10) 10%
Mean Std. deviation	4.2884 1.1772	4.2083 1.1843	4.1500 1.2609	4.1772 1.1520	3.7143 1.4880	4.0400 1.2365	3.8571 1.4992	4.0128 1.2481	3.9000 1.3231

SA: Strongly Agree A: Agree N: Neutral (No Opinion) NA: Not Agree SNA: Strongly Not Agree

Observations:

- i. 61% of the total respondents strongly agree that Co-branding is beneficial to commuters in the long term.
- ii. 53% of the respondents in the age group of less than 40 years strongly agree that Co-branding is beneficial to commuters in the long term.
- iii. 36% of the respondents having lower education level (Undergraduate) strongly agree that Co-branding is beneficial to commuters in the long term.

5.1 Hypothesis Testing

The six Hypotheses outlined above (in 4.0 Objectives and Methodology) have been tested for its statistical significance as a 2-tailed Z-test and the results are given below (Table 9)

Table 9: Test results

Hypot thesis	Test statistic (z)	Critical value at 95% Confidence level	Inference
1	28.8216	Greater than +1.96 or Less than -1.96	Null Hypothesis rejected and Alternate Hypothesis accepted.
2	31.3847	Greater than +1.96 or Less than -1.96	Null Hypothesis rejected and Alternate Hypothesis accepted.
3	36.3761	Greater than +1.96 or Less than -1.96	Null Hypothesis rejected and Alternate Hypothesis accepted.
4	32.9137	Greater than +1.96 or Less than -1.96	Null Hypothesis rejected and Alternate Hypothesis accepted.
5	32.6733	Greater than +1.96 or Less than -1.96	Null Hypothesis rejected and Alternate Hypothesis accepted.
6	29.4761	Greater than +1.96 or Less than -1.96	Null Hypothesis rejected and Alternate Hypothesis accepted.

6.0 Conclusion and recommendations

The study highlights how a mega MRTS organization like DMRC has effectively used Co-branding strategies as an effective marketing tool for supplementing its revenue and reduce the operating losses to some extent. With enormous capital, technology and human resource assets, besides a ridership of over 3 million riders, it has adopted promotional/sponsorship type of Co-branding strategy which is found in the literature. From the empirical study conducted, it has been observed that the commuters are favorably disposed to the Co-branding project initiative of DMRC. The majority of commuters irrespective of gender, age group and education level perceive that Co-branding has enhanced aesthetic sense and renaming of the sponsored metro stations vided a unique identity. Further, the commuters also perceived that the Co0branding project will benefit the commuters in the longer term as they can avail the services of the sponsoring companies at the me sponsored metro station itself. Further, It is observed that the favorable perception of commuters towards other Co-branding initiatives such as Coach wrapping, metro smart cards are also reinforcing the Co-branding strategy of DMRC. The Co-branding strategy has enormous potential for revenue generation to DMRC as currently only 44 out of the 214 metro stations are covered ynder the project.

7.0 Scope for further research

The present study only covered the perception part of the Co-branding strategy with a smaller sample size. The scope of the study may be can be broadened to study the effect of other parameters such as brand positing, brand equity and brand innovation with a larger sample size.

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