

Entrepreneurial Cluster Branding Influencing Sustainable Cashew Market: A Case Study

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[Submitted on: 7.6.23; Revised on: 5.11.23]

DoI: 10.23862/kiit-parikalpana/2023/v19/i2/223462

Abstract:

Entrepreneurs who express their unique individuality tend to remain competitive in the market as they confront challenges and cultivate a strong brand image. Cluster branding, a strategy that unites businesses within a specific geographic region under a common brand, is a rare occurrence, as seen in the case of cashew production in Palasa, Srikakulam district, Andhra Pradesh. Despite Palasa's well-known reputation, cashew entrepreneurs predominantly opt for individual branding instead of harnessing the location's image for cluster branding. This silence surrounding cluster branding implies that there are both positive and negative attitudes toward the idea of collectively promoting all cashew merchants under a single brand. The study's primary objective is to identify various determinants, categorized as either promoting or hindering cluster branding within this context. The research methodology employs a descriptive design and a quantitative approach. Data is gathered from the target population of Palasa's cashew entrepreneurs through a semi-structured questionnaire, using stratified random sampling and a cross-sectional survey. The collected data is analyzed using descriptive statistics to assess demographic characteristics. Additionally, a factor analysis is conducted to extract key variables that are likely to have a significant impact on the sustainability of the cashew business in Palasa. The findings not only identify factors that positively influence cluster branding but also shed light on negative factors that can complicate individual business development. These insights offer valuable guidance for management decisions, and recommendations are put forth to pave the way for sustainable progress in the cashew industry.

Keywords: Palasa Cashew, Cluster Branding, Positive determinants, Negative Determinants, Factor Analysis

1. Introduction

The introduction of cashew trees to India can be attributed to the Portuguese. They initially introduced cashew cultivation in Goa, and from there, it spread throughout the country. Today, commercial cashew farming is practiced in eight Indian states, with a concentration along the west and east coasts. Notably, Andhra Pradesh stands as a significant contributor to cashew plantations, while Maharashtra leads in both production and productivity.

The cashew processing industry is categorized as an agro-based sector, playing a pivotal role in the Indian agricultural landscape. However, it is important to note that this industry remains highly unorganized and fragmented. Despite its decentralized nature, it plays a crucial role in generating employment for a substantial portion of the population, directly or indirectly providing wages. An interesting aspect is that the cashew industry largely relies on a female labor force, constituting approximately 90% of its workforce, thus making it a source of improved living standards for both men and women.

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic had a profound and adverse impact on the global cashew market. The global lockdowns, which were imposed to curb the spread of the virus, disrupted distribution channels, negatively affecting the cashew industry. This disruption hindered value addition activities and subsequently reduced the availability of cashew nut end-products in the market.

Cluster branding presents numerous advantages to the cashew industry in Palasa. It fosters high sales volume, unites entrepreneurs, enhances competencies, and provides geographical recognition. Furthermore, it leads to market expansion, facilitates export marketing, reduces overall costs, stabilizes pricing, promotes shared infrastructure, suppliers, and distribution networks, and unlocks a plethora of market opportunities. Cluster branding also elevates brand trust, fosters brand awareness, visibility, and loyalty, while promoting growth and competitiveness for regional products. This approach enables scalability, increased productivity, and rapid growth, thereby reducing consumer search costs. It also enhances the industry's reputation, fosters knowledge sharing among partners, reduces risks and complexity, and strengthens product brands. Cluster branding promotes transparent market price information, lowers operational costs, fosters opportunities for innovation, new business ideas, expansion, and paves the way for international market penetration.

The focus of this research study is to comprehensively analyze the factors influencing cluster branding in the Palasa cashew industry, specifically exploring the positive and negative determinants affecting this region's cluster branding. The research aims to offer insights and recommendations for the implementation of cluster branding in the Palasa cashew industry, shedding light on its potential benefits and challenges.

2. Research Objectives

The objective of the study is:

- To study the overall operations of cashew industry in Palasa.
- To identify the absolute factors influencing cluster branding in Palasa Srikakulam District.
- To assess the impact of extracted positive and negative factors influencing cluster branding.

3. Literature Review

Numerous scholars and experts have delved into the intricacies of branding and cluster branding, shedding light on the significance, challenges, and potential benefits of these concepts. Let's explore and expand on the insights provided by these scholars.

Clusters represent concentrated geographical hubs comprising a network of closely interlinked companies, specialized suppliers, service providers, and associated institutions, all operating within a specific industry or field. This concept, as introduced by Porter in 1990 and further elaborated in 1998, highlights the geographical proximity of these entities as a crucial factor in their interactions and collaborations.

In the extensive body of cluster literature, there is a consensus that firms located within clusters stand to gain a multitude of benefits directly related to their geographic proximity. These advantages, in turn, have a positive impact on a firm's competitiveness and its prospects for international expansion. Notable scholars like Enright (1995)

and Porter (1998, 2000) have affirmed the existence of these benefits.

Scholars and experts in the field have underscored the significance of cluster reputation as a driving force in the success of firms operating within clusters. Research conducted by Porter (1998), Lundequist and Power (2002), and MacGregor and Hodgkinson (2007) has emphasized the pivotal role of cluster reputation.

Farhan (2012) emphasized the multifaceted nature of a brand, defining it as a blend of name, symbol, and offer. This amalgamation creates a unique brand identity that stands out among various choices. Different brand strategies aim to build brand awareness, which is crucial for customer recall during the purchase process. This underscores the importance of crafting a distinct and memorable brand image.

Marcus Anersson (2012) highlighted the advantages of cluster reputation, including recognition, reduced risk, and complexity. Managing a brand's identity, positioning, and audience targeting are key responsibilities of the brand owner. However, cluster branding presents challenges related to ownership and control. While often seen as a communication challenge, the strategic aspects and place-making elements are sometimes overlooked, leading to difficulties in differentiation.

Hongbo Tu (2011) emphasized the objective of the cluster-brand clusters model: increasing brand recognition at all levels, particularly focusing on cluster brand development and delivering high-

value market offerings. This approach aims to establish a strong and pervasive brand identity across various segments of the market.

Aihua Xiong & Fuhua Wang (2007) underscored the exponential development of competitive abilities through cluster branding. Continuous competition under a shared brand fosters mutual respect and credibility. The cluster brand can drive businesses into a more cooperative phase, moving away from harmful competition and toward a deeper understanding of the market.

Kasabov, Edward and Usha Sundaram (2016) acknowledged the mixed results of promoting a brand aligned with geographical identity. They suggested that effective management of conflicts, differences, and discord is essential for such branding endeavors. However, in cases where a cluster, such as Palasa cashew, has a strong and cohesive identity, achieving success may be less challenging.

Ozlem Ozkanli and Erdal Akdeve (2006) stressed the importance of innovation in clusters for enterprise competitive advantage. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) within clusters stand to gain the most from innovation. The benefits of clustering extend to increased profits, exports, economic growth, competitive advantages, innovations, knowledge diffusion, technological growth, and productivity.

Zhao Jing's study in 2012 delved into the realm of enterprise branding within the context of cluster branding.

Employing signalling theory, Zhao Jing investigated the intricate relationship between cluster branding and the brand value of individual enterprises. This research provided valuable insights into how the broader cluster branding efforts influenced the perception and value of each enterprise's brand.

In a parallel exploration, Liu Qin, in 2004, adopted game theory as the foundational framework for a study examining the decision-making processes of enterprises within clusters. The research aimed to elucidate how the presence and dynamics of cluster branding influenced the strategic choices of individual enterprises operating within the cluster environment. The application of game theory shed light on the intricate interplay between cluster branding and enterprise strategies.

Zhao Guanghua, in 2009, conducted a comprehensive analysis of the evolution mechanism and potential avenues for enhancing industrial cluster branding. This research culminated in the formulation of the rapid development diamond model, a conceptual framework designed to accelerate the growth of clustered enterprises. By delving into the mechanisms that propel the evolution of cluster branding, this study contributed to the development of effective strategies for industrial clusters.

Shifting the focus to the consumer perspective, the impact of cluster branding on consumer behavior came into sharp relief. In 2009, Bi Nan employed empirical analysis to establish that cluster branding exerted a significant

influence on consumers' perceptions of product quality under specific conditions. The study highlighted the intricate interplay between the cluster brand and consumer perception and suggested that these perceptions were shaped by certain contextual factors.

Niu Yongge, in 2011, embarked on an in-depth data analysis endeavor to discern the multifaceted impact of cluster branding on consumers. His findings were particularly illuminating, revealing that the effect of cluster branding on consumers was not universally positive. Instead, the impact varied depending on the nature of the industrial cluster. Some clusters were found to be well-suited for the development of cluster branding, while, for others, it was deemed less appropriate due to potential negative effects on consumers.

The exploratory analysis in this study seeks to uncover the significance of branding by investigating the specific contexts and the types of consumers for whom branding holds importance. Through this examination, the analysis identifies and distinguishes three distinct clusters of buyers: the "branding receptive" cluster, the "highly tangible" cluster, and the "low interest" cluster (Susan Mudambi, 2002).

In summary, these insights from various scholars featured the intricate nature of branding and the promising prospects of cluster branding. They also accentuate the challenges associated with cluster branding and the potential for substantial benefits in terms of innovation, competitiveness, and economic growth. Understanding these

perspectives is essential for businesses and regions considering cluster branding as a strategic approach.

4. Method Mix

This research project was carried out in the vibrant and significant region of Palasa in the Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh, India. Palasa, with its population of over 57,000 residents, stands as a notable municipality in the northern coastal region of the state. The economy of Palasa is primarily driven by agriculture, including cashew cultivation, which has gained prominence over the years. The cashew industry is one of the major economic activities in the region, and it has contributed to the town's growth and recognition. It is home to a thriving cashew industry, boasting many processing units and numerous cashew factories. Palasa's cashews have gained a strong brand image in the market due to their quality and geographical origin. The name "Palasa Cashew" is recognized and sought after by consumers worldwide.

The researcher adopted a positivist stance, which seeks to uncover reality, causality, relationships, and outcomes through systematic and empirical investigation. The research was grounded in the belief that by understanding the underlying factors influencing loyalty, it would be possible to draw meaningful conclusions and make informed decisions. To achieve this, a combination of research methods, including surveys and the application of descriptive and inferential statistics, was employed to collect and analyse data.

The study followed a mixed research approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, primarily relying on survey questionnaires. The research population encompassed entrepreneurs within the Palasa cashew industry. With a total of 500 cashew processing units of organized and unorganized, distributed across societies as follows

1. The Palasa Manufactures Association, Palasa, established in 1954 has 298 registered member as of now
2. Andhra Pradesh Industrial Infrastructure Corporation Ltd- Industrial Area Local Authority (APIIC – IALA) Palasa, established in 2004 with registered members of 148
3. Sri Chandeswari Cashew Association, Bahadapalli an unregistered association, established in 2017 is having 9 members
4. Haripuram Cashew Manufacturers, Haripuram, is having No of companies 22
5. Mandasa Cashew Manufacturers Association, Mandasa is having No of companies:23

For the population of 500, the size is determined through the formula:

$$\text{Sample Size } (n) = [Z^2 * (p) * (1 - p)] / E^2$$

$$n = (1.96^2 * 0.5 * 0.5) / 0.05^2$$

$$n = (3.8416 * 0.25) / 0.0025 = 384.16$$

So, for a population of 500, a sample size of approximately 384 would be sufficient to achieve a 95% confidence level with a margin of error of 5%.

Researchers randomly selected 385 individuals from the population of 500 by using a random number generator to ensure that your sample is representative of the population.

To achieve the research objectives, both primary and secondary data sources were utilized. The reliability of the data, as measured by a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.703, indicates a good level of internal consistency, providing confidence in the data's reliability. Additionally, the validity of the research instruments was ensured through thorough validation tests conducted by experienced consulting experts.

The primary statistical analysis methods applied in this study was the Factor Analysis to identify the high loading factors through extraction process.

5. Analysis and Interpretation

5.1 Factor Analysis: The study has undergone with the factor analysis since the central aim is the methodical simplification of a number of interrelated measures which describes the data using many fewer dimensions than original variables. This is conducted to verify the data decreased to smaller set to understand more and better as well as the hidden patterns are found so as the overlaps.

Table 5.1: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.916
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1.684E4
	Df	528
	Sig.	.000

As shown in table 5.1, the value of The KMO Measure indicates the variance proportion in the variables triggered by underlying factors is 0.916 which is good enough to undergo factor analysis

with the data. Significant level of 0.005 signs sound to get along with factor analysis which may be useful with the data.

Table 5.2: Communalities

	Initial	Extraction
1. High sales volume will be generated through cluster branding	1.000	.735
2. Unity among entrepreneurs with respect to business operations is possible with cluster branding	1.000	.762
3. Competencies from outsiders will be increase and business will be developed through cluster branding	1.000	.789
4. Geographical identity of cluster branding will be advantageous	1.000	.712
5. There is a possibility of market expansion through cluster branding	1.000	.782
6. There are ample chances of export marketing through promoting cluster brand	1.000	.617
7. Overall costs are decreased while promoting the product through cluster branding	1.000	.700
8. Logistical resources are used with high optimization through cluster branding	1.000	.750
9. There is a Stability in pricing through cluster branding	1.000	.724
10. There is a chance of sharing infrastructure , suppliers and distribution network	1.000	.581
11. Strategies can be made jointly to promote cluster branding	1.000	.644
12. There is a possibility of brand trust through cluster branding	1.000	.791
13. There is a possibility of increasing brand loyalty through cluster branding	1.000	.782
14. There is a chance of independent dynamic development of region through cluster branding	1.000	.819
15. There is a possibility of providing the product with high and unique quality through cluster branding	1.000	.815
16. There is possibility of scaling the real growth of palasa cashew	1.000	.696
17. There is a possibility of increasing productivity through cluster branding	1.000	.814

18. Cluster branding reduces the consumer search cost	1.000	.861
19. Cluster branding boosts the industry reputation as a whole	1.000	.802
20. There is a possibility of high exchange of knowledge among the business players through Cluster branding	1.000	.676
21. Cluster branding reduces the business risk	1.000	.645
22. Cluster branding reduces the complexities in businesses	1.000	.725
23. Cluster branding enables the consumer to identify the brand easily without any confusion	1.000	.804
24. There is a possibility of guaranteed business volume through Cluster branding	1.000	.773
25. It creates confusion and conflict for ownership among marketers through cluster branding	1.000	.779
26. There is a possibility of not having control on operations	1.000	.702
27. There is a possibility of conflict for individual profit and growth	1.000	.791
28. Different Production processes with quality differences can't be promoted with cluster branding	1.000	.749
29. Individual branding will be completely damaged with negative image.	1.000	.757
30. There is no common agreement for different level of investors for cluster branding	1.000	.752
31. There is a possibility of conflicts in Overall operations through cluster branding	1.000	.792
32. Cluster branding does not allow any individual branding to have a positioning strategy	1.000	.664
33. Unorganised selling practices will be taken place through cluster selling	1.000	.809
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.		

As can be seen in Table 5.2, the communalities specified as the variance estimates in all variables accounted for by the components. It can be understood that the communalities are considerably high and thereby shows extracted components representing variables to

the considerable extent. Communalities of "Cluster branding reduces the consumer search cost" is high with 0.861 and "There is a chance of sharing infrastructure, suppliers and distribution network" is low in principal components extraction with 0.581

Table 5.3: Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	19.970	60.514	60.514	19.970	60.514	60.514	13.486	40.866	40.866
2	3.609	10.935	71.449	3.609	10.935	71.449	7.482	22.673	63.538
3	1.018	3.085	74.534	1.018	3.085	74.534	3.628	10.995	74.534
4	.913	2.766	77.300						
5	.820	2.486	79.786						
6	.707	2.144	81.929						
7	.588	1.783	83.712						
8	.550	1.667	85.379						
9	.497	1.505	86.884						
10	.432	1.309	88.193						
11	.392	1.189	89.383						
12	.362	1.096	90.478						
13	.346	1.048	91.526						
14	.309	.937	92.463						
15	.282	.854	93.318						
16	.262	.795	94.112						
17	.253	.768	94.880						
18	.222	.674	95.554						
19	.204	.617	96.171						
20	.181	.547	96.719						
21	.149	.453	97.172						
22	.142	.430	97.602						
23	.124	.375	97.977						
24	.108	.328	98.305						
25	.098	.298	98.603						
26	.088	.267	98.870						
27	.080	.244	99.114						
28	.071	.215	99.329						
29	.057	.174	99.502						
30	.052	.156	99.658						
31	.050	.151	99.810						
32	.040	.120	99.930						
33	.023	.070	100.000						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

There is a clear understanding that the requested extracted initial eigenvalues greater than 1 has resulted into three first components extending 74.534 percent of cumulative initial eigenvalues. Among the 33 listed variables, three

components show the variability of 75% approximately. So the complexity of the dataset can be reduced through these three components with almost 25% of lost information.

Table 5.4: Rotated Component Matrix^a

	Component		
	1	2	3
High sales volume will be generated through cluster branding	.779		
Unity among entrepreneurs with respect to business operations is possible with cluster branding	.822		
Competencies from outsiders will be increase and business will be developed through cluster branding	.805		
Geographical identity of cluster branding will be advantageous	.780		
There is a possibility of market expansion through cluster branding	.767		
There are ample chances of export marketing through promoting cluster brand	.636		
Overall costs are decreased while promoting the product through cluster branding	.644		
Logistical resources are used with high optimization through cluster branding	.603		
There is a Stability in pricing through cluster branding	.810		
There is a chance of sharing infrastructure , suppliers and distribution network	.530		
Strategies can be made jointly to promote cluster branding	.772		
There is a possibility of brand trust through cluster branding	.822		
There is a possibility of increasing brand loyalty through cluster branding	.825		
There is a chance of independent dynamic development of region through cluster branding	.694		
There is a possibility of providing the product with high and unique quality through cluster branding	.862		
There is possibility of scaling the real growth of palasa cashew			.578
There is a possibility of increasing productivity through cluster branding	.832		
Cluster branding reduces the consumer search cost			.710
Cluster branding boosts the industry reputation as a whole	.816		
There is a possibility of high exchange of knowledge among the business players through Cluster branding	.701		

Cluster branding reduces the business risk	.669		
Cluster branding reduces the complexities in businesses	.733		
Cluster branding enables the consumer to identify the brand easily without any confusion			.598
There is a possibility of guaranteed business volume through Cluster branding	.823		
It creates confusion and conflict for ownership among marketers through cluster branding		.840	
There is a possibility of not having control on operations		.813	
There is a possibility of conflict for individual profit and growth		.761	
Different Production processes with quality differences can't be promoted with cluster branding		.830	
Individual branding will be completely damaged with negative image.		.834	
There is no common agreement for different level of investors for cluster branding		.799	
There is a possibility of conflicts in Overall operations through cluster branding		.821	
Cluster branding does not allow any individual branding to have a positioning strategy		.684	
Unorganised selling practices will be taken place through cluster selling		.850	

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.

The first rotated factor is highly correlated with “high and unique quality through cluster branding”, “increasing productivity through cluster branding”, “increasing brand loyalty through cluster branding”, “guaranteed business volume through Cluster branding” “These variables are not specifically correlated with other components.

Second component correlated with “Unorganised selling practices will be taken place through cluster selling”, “confusion and conflict for ownership among marketers through cluster branding” , “Individual branding will be completely damaged with

negative image”, “Different Production processes with quality differences can't be promoted with cluster branding”.

Third component is correlated with “Cluster branding reduces the consumer search cost”, “Cluster branding enables the consumer to identify the brand easily without any confusion”, “There is possibility of scaling the real growth of palasa cashew”.

6. CONCLUSIONS

- Palasa, a well-recognized region, boasts a bountiful cashew land, and its cashews are esteemed by consumers worldwide, owing to

the strong brand image associated with its geographical identity. This brand image, acquired from its geographical origin, presents an opportunity that could be harnessed to benefit all entrepreneurs, and it warrants attention and support from the government.

- While the concept of Cluster Branding, exemplified by “Palasa Cashew,” has the potential to boost sales, it may not necessarily translate to increased individual profits. Furthermore, there may be challenges, including unauthorized pricing and underselling practices that could undermine the stability of the industry, necessitating robust regulatory measures by both the societies and the government.
- Cluster branding offers numerous advantages, including enhanced search ease, reduced confusion, streamlined distribution, and cost-effective promotion strategies, all of which can contribute to overall profitability. These benefits deserve attention and concerted efforts from all industrial entrepreneurs.
- The concept of ensuring a common baseline business for all entrepreneurs has the potential to empower smaller players, promoting their sustainability alongside larger enterprises. This harmonious integration could be a significant step toward fostering inclusivity within the industry.
- The collaborative approach of shared investment in certain promotional practices could significantly reduce promotional costs, creating a win-win scenario for entrepreneurs and the industry as a whole.
- Pricing fluctuations are a common occurrence in the world of branding, and this is particularly expected in cluster branding. Therefore, proactive planning and strategies should be put in place to address these fluctuations effectively.
- However, it's important to note that maintaining control over operations may prove challenging with cluster branding. A loss of control can lead to a negative image and potential damage to the geographical identity of the product. Careful management is essential to ensure that cluster branding maintains its positive impact.

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