



MANAGER'S PERCEPTION TOWARDS THE IMPORTANCE OF BRAND AWARENESS AND BRAND IMAGE

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Abstract

Branding has emerged as a top management priority in the last decade due to the growing realization that brands are one of the most valuable intangible assets that firms have. Brand awareness plays a major role in a consumer's buying decision-making process. Having a unique and memorable brand, helps the company to build brand awareness and create a long-term position in the marketplace. Creating brand awareness is usually the first step in building advertising objectives. The product that maintains the highest brand awareness compared to its competitors will usually get the most sales.

Branding strategy is an activity performed by the companies to manage their portfolio, so that they could be visible, differentiated and preferred in the market. Companies have many options regarding branding strategy, they can use name of their company, give independent name, or mixed both for branding their offerings.

The main objective of this study is to know the promotional activities of the companies in creating brand image. The study also determines the main tools to measure marketing communications which helps to increase sales. This study helps to explain the attitude of many managers to the concept of brand awareness.

Key words: Brand awareness, Brand image, Branding strategy, Promotional activities, marketing communications.

INTRODUCTION

Rossiter and Percy (1987) describe brand awareness as being essential for the communications process to occur as it precedes all other steps in the process. Without brand awareness occurring, no other communication effects can occur. For a consumer to buy a brand they must first be made aware of it. Brand attitude cannot be formed, and intention to buy cannot occur unless brand awareness has occurred (Rossiter & Percy 1987; Rossiter et al. 1991).

In memory theory, brand awareness is positioned as a vital first step in building the "bundle" of associations which are attached to the brand in memory (Stokes 1985). The brand is conceptualized as a node in memory which allows other information about the brand to be "anchored" to it (Aaker 1991b). The conceptualization of a network of brand associations in memory with the brand as a central core has been put forward by many others (e.g. Keller 1993; Holden 1993; Holden & Lutz 1992).

BRAND AWARENESS

Brand awareness is the extent to which a brand is recognized by potential customers, and is correctly associated with a particular product. Brand awareness is related to the functions of brand identities in consumers' memory and can be reflected by how well the consumers can identify the brand under various conditions. Brand awareness includes brand recognition and brand recall performance.

Brand recognition: Brand recognition refers to the ability of the consumers to correctly differentiate the brand they previously have been exposed to. This does not necessarily require that the consumers identify the brand name. Instead, it often means that consumers can respond to a certain brand after viewing its visual packaging images.

Brand recognition reflects the ability of consumers to confirm prior exposure to the brand (i.e., recognize that it is an "old" brand that they have seen before and not a "new" brand that they are seeing for the first time). In a recognition task, consumers see a stimulus (e.g., an ad for the brand, a brand name) and must say whether they have seen it before (e.g., last night on television, in magazine X, etc.).

It is important to make the task as realistic as possible by allowing only a short amount of time to answer the recognition question and by using realistic stimuli and context. If you want to use recognition as a measure of the performance of different marketing decisions (say, different logos or ads), you should expose one group to one version of the target stimulus and another group to the other version of the target stimulus. However, to make the task more realistic, both groups should also be exposed to other stimuli (e.g., competitors' brands). In a second step, people see the "old" stimuli again, along with completely new ones, and are asked to decide if each stimulus is "old" or "new" (i.e., if they have seen them before or not).

Brand recall: Brand recall refers to the ability of the consumers to correctly generate and retrieve the brand in their memory.



It is important to measure not only the depth of recall (the percentage of people who know the brand) but also the width of recall (the cues that lead to brand recall). Therefore, it is important to ponder the choice of the cue that will be used in the recall question. A good start is to think about who, when, where and how the brand will be bought or used). Typical cues are:

- Subcategories (beverages/soft drinks/colas/diet colas, etc.).
- Consumption occasions/goals (beverages that you would consider purchasing for a romantic date, etc.).
- Places (available in a supermarket, in a bar, etc.).
- People (drink alone, in a group, etc.)

BRAND IMAGE

Brand image is the current view of the customers about a brand. It can be defined as a unique bundle of associations within the minds of target customers. Brand image is defined as consumer perceptions of a brand and is measured as the brand associations held in consumers' memory. To measure brand image, you can either use and adapt an existing list of brand associations or start from scratch by eliciting brand associations and then measuring the strength of these associations. Brand image develops and conveys the product's character in a unique manner different from its competitor's image. The brand image consists of various associations in consumers' mind - attributes, benefits and attributes. Brand image is the objective and mental feedback of the consumers when they purchase a product. Positive brand image is exceeding the customer's expectations. Positive brand image enhances the goodwill and brand value of organization. Brand image has not to be created, but is automatically formed.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is the empirical investigation on manager's perception towards the importance of brand awareness and brand image. Among 90 marketing managers, 75 were responded where Personal in-depth interviews were carried out with 12 marketing managers initially. The final questionnaire was administered over the phone to 63 marketing managers in Hyderabad and all were regarded as valid responses. The managers represented a variety of organizations from service and manufacturing fields, government and private sector.

LIMITATIONS

- The study was limited to Hyderabad only.
- Sometimes respondents were not co-operative in answering a few questions which affects the accuracy of the research.

OBJECTIVES

- To know the promotional activities of the companies in creating brand image.
- To study how the brand name helps to increase sales.
- To determine what main tools are being used to measure marketing communications.
- To explain the attitude of many managers to the concept of brand awareness.

PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE COMPANIES IN CREATING BRAND IMAGE

Small businesses often refer to promotion as all marketing communication and selling activities, include advertising, sales, event sponsorships, social media, public relations, discounts and contests. It's a catchall word for businesses that don't have dedicated marketing, advertising, sales, public relations and promotions departments. In its narrow sense, promotion refers to sales activities other than advertising and public relations.

Some promotion activities aren't intended to directly increase sales based on the promotion, but instead attempt to keep your business, product or service in front of your target customer. This ensures that when they're ready to buy, they remember you. For example, sales and coupons are retail promotions intended to directly increase sales during a specific time period. Sponsoring a youth sports league is a promotion intended to increase brand awareness over a longer period of time. Promotions can also introduce you to new customers. Giving free samples lets potential customers try your product or service risk free, increasing their awareness of your company. Social media campaigns seek to increase brand awareness by encouraging customers to refer you to their contacts.

BRANDING STRATEGY

Branding strategy is an activity performed by the companies to manage their portfolio, so that they could be visible, differentiated and preferred in the market. The marketer's goal is to set the brand apart from its competition, to single it out and convince consumers of the brand's merit. To that end a company should develop a brand strategy that includes the following 5 steps:

1. Establish A Simple, Consistent Brand Message

This should be the core message behind the brand, the one thing that the marketer wants customers to remember. This message should be repeated in all materials and advertising. It should be easy to understand and short, but getting the message across clearly nonetheless.

2. Use A Distinctive, Timeless Logo

This is the most basic aspect of branding and plays a key role in enabling consumers to easily identify a product. The main goal of the logo is to convey the attributes of the brand to potential customers. The logo is in itself a small advertisement for a business. Logos inform customers about the brand and thus make the products on which it is placed distinctive. Constantly changing a logo defeats its purpose, so a logo should be designed to last a long time without becoming dated.

3. Develop An Internet Presence that Supports the Brand Strategy

Most marketers are aware of the Internet's power, which means that a modern marketer will need a thorough understanding of online technologies and marketing tactics in order to compete. They will need to know how to use social media and have an understanding of search engine optimization as both of these things are needed to build brand awareness in the modern era. The internet provides vast resources and its brand-building possibilities are limited only by the creativity of advertisers. If successful, an Internet presence can provide a means to effectively get the attention of a large number of people without spending a lot of money.

4. Build Brand Loyalty With Target Market

Creating a community around a brand is one of the basic principles of brand awareness. This involves connecting with people and creating positive feelings about the brand. Community-building can be done via offers of free merchandise, coupons and even sponsored local events. Engaging social media users is another important aspect of building brand loyalty. Of course, providing a consistently good product or service is essential. The object is to make the brand memorable in a good way and to keep it memorable by constantly reminding consumers of the brand message and logo.

5. Excel at Customer Service

Being efficient and courteous is no longer enough. Adequate customer service is the standard for most businesses, it will therefore be necessary to consistently go above and beyond to build brand awareness. This means excellent customer care both before and after the sale along with exceeding expectations in all areas of service.

HOW THE BRAND NAME HELPS TO INCREASE SALES?

Brands serve several valuable functions. At their most basic level, brands serve as markers for the offerings of a firm. For customers, brands can simplify choice, promise a particular quality level, reduce risk, and/or engender trust. Brands are built on the product itself, the accompanying marketing activity, and the use (or non-use) by customers as well as others. Brands thus reflect the complete experience that customers have with products. A number of companies have successfully created a brand that stands out in customer's minds. Their brands have a positive association, a recognized name, and a higher perceived value than their competitors. Branding is not just for large corporations. All businesses can use branding to win a place in both the customers' hearts and minds.

Brands also play an important role in determining the effectiveness of marketing efforts such as advertising and channel placement. Finally, brands are an asset in the financial sense. Thus, brands manifest their impact at three primary levels – customer-market, product-market, and financial-market. The value accrued by these various benefits is often called brand equity. Effective branding can result in higher sales of not only one product, but of other products associated with that brand. For example, if a customer loves Pillsbury biscuits and trusts the brand, he or she is more likely to try other products offered by the company - such as chocolate-chip cookies, Pillsbury wheat-flour and so on.

Brand awareness should be an important goal of the marketing communications efforts of a firm as it has a number of important functions. It is widely acknowledged that without brand awareness occurring, brand attitude and brand image cannot be formed. However, equally important but less widely recognized is the importance of brand awareness as a heuristic which can affect inclusion in the consideration set, and in many situations may be sufficient by itself to determine choice from the consideration set i.e., brand awareness can determine not only entry to the consideration set, but can also determine which brand is chosen from the consideration set. For a market strategist, active brand management provides the platform for increasing consumer acceptance of new products and brand extensions.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The results of the questionnaire are presented in the order of the questions that were asked.

1. MEASURES OF MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS ACTIVITIES

Table1: Measures of marketing communications used (Unprompted)

s.no.	Types of Measures	Respondents	Percentage
1	Sales level	32	42.6%
2	Mail response (i.e. coupons)	11	14.6%
3	Customer comments / feedback	8	10.6%
4	Customer enquires	10	13.3%
5	Phone enquires	7	9.3%
6	Market share	1	1.3%
7	Attitude	1	1.3%
8	Retention	0	0%
9	Awareness	10	13.3%
10	Other	5	6.6%

Interpretation: 42.6% of the marketing managers claimed that they used their sales figures. The measures that they were used mostly coupons response, brand awareness, customer feedback and enquires.

Table2: Measures of marketing communications used (Prompted)

s.no.	Type of Measures	Respondents	Percentage
1	Sales level	36	48.0%
2	Customer's perceptions	10	13.3%
3	Market share	2	2.6%
4	Brand awareness	11	14.6%
5	Ad awareness	11	14.6%
6	Attitude	5	6.6%

Interpretation: not surprisingly, the number of managers claimed that they use their sales figures. The measures that they were used mostly coupons response, brand awareness, customer feedback and enquires.

Table3: Comparison of unprompted ranking versus prompted

s.no.	Measures considered	Unprompted	Prompted
1	Sales level	1	1
2	Customer's perceptions / comments	2	4
3	Market share	4.5	6
4	Brand awareness	3	2.5
5	Ad awareness	Not applicable	2.5
6	Attitude	4.5	5

Interpretation: Sales level was consistently ranked as the most useful measure of a firm's marketing communications in both the cases prompted and unprompted, brand awareness and ad awareness was ranked equally with second place in prompted where as in unprompted customer perceptions was ranked second, attitude and market share rated quite highly.

2. LEVEL OF UNDERSTANDING OF BRAND AWARENESS

Table-4. Level of understanding of brand awareness

s.no.	Level of understanding	Response(yes)	Percentage
1	Brand identity	30	40%
2	Confused with brand image, etc.,	5	6.6%
3	Familiar	7	9.3%
4	Trust	19	25.3%
5	Loyalty	14	18.6%

Interpretation: majority of the marketing managers could provide a reasonable definition, though few showed a clear understanding.

3. MEASURING BRAND AWARENESS

Table5: Frequency of measuring brand awareness

s.no.	Measurement duration	Responses	Percentage
1	Monthly	5	6.6%
2	Quarterly	17	22.6%
3	Annually	33	44%
4	Every Few Years	20	26.6%

Interpretation: Most of the managers reported measuring brand awareness will done annually and every few years and they do not measure their brand awareness continuously at all.

Table6: Measurement of brand awareness (unprompted)

s.no.	Measurement tools	Responses	Percentage
1	Carry out a questionnaire	30	40%
2	Face-to-face at point of contact	19	25.3%
3	Look at sales figures	16	21.3%
4	Using a competition	10	13.3%

Interpretation: not surprisingly, 40% of managers said they use a questionnaire and 25.3% of managers said they ask face-to-face at point of contact. More surprising, is the 21.3% of managers who claimed to use their sales figures to determine their brand awareness. What this really means is that they do not measure their brand awareness at all. Brand awareness is only measured if something appears to go wrong with the brand.

CONCLUSION

The study explained that branding and brand management has clearly become an important management priority for all types of organizations.

The research interpretation is that amongst a great many managers, gaining brand awareness is regarded as a once-off battle which must be fought, and once it is won, it can be forgotten. Managers give little consideration to the idea of maintaining and monitoring brand awareness on a continuous basis.

While brand awareness offers a great deal of potential value to the marketing manager, the difficulty lies in its measurement. Managers' lack of interest is partially justified by the insensitivity of existing measures of brand awareness.

While determining the breadth of a brand's awareness (i.e. the percentage of the population who recognize the brand) is quite easy, measuring depth of brand awareness is extremely difficult. Yet it is the depth of brand awareness, that is, the level of accessibility or "salience" of the brand in the consumer's mind, which is of most interest to mature markets. A need exists for more extensive research in this area so that greater sensitivity in measures of brand awareness can be developed.

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