

The Move From Building Brand Recognition And Brand Preference to Establishing Brand Relevance

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ABSTRACT :

Stories of Success and Failures of brands over the last century have thrown up a myriad questions. The reasons for their acceptance and causes of rejection have been debated within organizations and stakeholder groups. Awareness and Recognition leads to brand prominence, but does this prominence necessarily lead to an association or a bond? That was the moot point. It's one thing to appreciate and admire the brand from the outside ; and another thing to adopt it . It is more important for the Brand to speak for its audience than for the audience to speak about the Brand.

It's proven beyond doubt that Brand resilience and longevity are the benefits of establishing Brand relevance. That's Relevance to the consumers' life and relevant in the prevailing climate. Appreciating cultural mores as the root to human conscious and sub conscious judgement is the key. Jellying into and reflecting that culture while retaining the congenital identity of the brand is the balance all modern marketers should strive for.

This paper is in pursuance of a realization of its importance and imperativeness. It also attempts to reflect on the possible options available to establish Brand relevance and create the desired bond.

Introduction

In the present times, in-fact for some time now, having just a product is not enough to hold any position in the market, leave aside sustaining oneself. The broader aspect of product creation is product sustenance through value creation. But the question arises as to , when it should be done, how it should be done and how much should be done. It has been proven beyond doubt that mere products, when developed, face resistance for trial and of course purchase. The gestation period, therefore, gets prolonged till the time consumers gain confidence in its functionality. This confidence is usually a function of the positive experience of all those who have finally used it and shared their experience through word of mouth or in any other way .This gives enough time to imminent competition to either replicate or develop a superior product and gain acceptance. In a best case scenario, where products do not face smart competition , the products still loose sheen over time and environmental changes make the product either obsolete or irrelevant.

Birth of the Branding Concept

A clear identification of your offering highlighting its core benefits became a priority to create awareness and ensure recall.

The story of the product, its character, what it stands for and its relevance to the need has to be captured and labelled. Branding is the process to make that happen.

While products are governed by life cycles which can be extended but cannot be avoided, Brands have the ability to become immortal. Testimonies to this fact are 'Coca Cola', 'Fruit of the Loom', 'Levis' to name a few. The longevity of its existence is not the only proof, but the fact that its sheen seems to be ever increasing endorses the point that Brands can be forever sort after if handled well. But what is meant by 'Handling a Brand'?

Brand Image and its importance

Well, while giving birth to a brand is difficult, developing one is even more difficult. But growing and sustaining a Brand is by far the most daunting task. This is due to the constant changes in the environment. The volatility very often proves to be a deterrent to growth and the levels of acceptability by stakeholders diminish, sometimes at a very rapid pace. The result - The business model proves to be unviable and inappropriate for the present times. What a waste of precious time, strategic thinking and scarce resources.

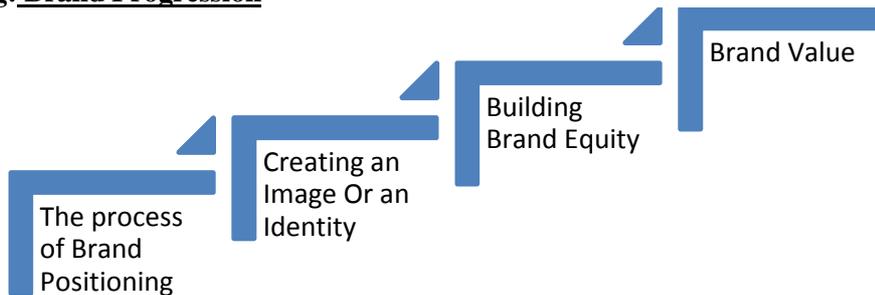
Over the years it has become exceeding clear that consumers do not buy products, but they buy image associations. Brand image as a concept has since long been one of the prime attributors to success. As it is said 'It's not what you see, but the way you see it' that counts. It's not only because brands need to be seen in a certain way but

because, if they are seen in a certain way the attitude of the viewer changes towards the brand. This attitude is the true en-cashable advantage that a brand enjoys.

Brand Equity – the fruits of Image

Turning this advantage into a cashable asset is the key to success. The result of the image is 'Equity'. It can also be called as the fruits of image. Equity is the differential effect that Brand knowledge has on consumers' response to marketing action. The 'Response' by consumers is a function of the 'Effect' that brand knowledge has on them. Again, the difference in the effect between brand & no-brand will determine the extent of Equity enjoyed by a Brand. The equities of 2 brands can similarly be compared by comparing the effect of brand image of these brands. This equity can be measured in many ways. It's a fallacy that equity is always the extra premium that the brand commands in terms of price for its products. It is NOT necessary that greater equity leads to higher price. It could though, if the image is built accordingly and accepted. Equity can be measured in several ways.

Fig: Brand Progression



Brand Anatomy

Brand Anatomy has 2 parts

- 1- Functionality
- 2- Representation

Functionality, as the word suggests, refers to the functional aspects of the solution to a or a set of functional purposes. These can be measure easily and could become criteria for judgement by informed buyers. Representation refers to all the benefits that are not functional. They are intangible and hit the senses on a different level. They are the match between the Brand appeal and representation with the self – concept and / or aspirations of consumers. The personality of a Brand is judged and congruence created between the Brand personality and the User personality. The personification of the brand makes selection easier as 'relevance to self' is created.

The Uniqueness Factor to create relevance

Consumers are unique and appreciate an offer which closely matches their uniqueness. Similarly consumer groups are created called as target segments with a set of uniqueness on some parameters. This homogeneity within elements of each group makes marketers focus better. Energies, Creativity and Resources are deployed to effectively develop offers and create messages best accepted, understood and interpreted by the target group. All Marketing strategies have to ensure relevance to the target audience. Relevance, in terms of both functionality as well as representation.

Importance of Brand Relevance in a Global or an International Business scenario:

In the advent of Globalization where the peoples of the world have realized the need to progress collectively rather than individually, companies are spreading their tentacles far and wide. This has enables businesses to grow exponentially by leveraging on global resources and seeking opportunities in global markets.

The International orientations of Business as per the EPRG framework are

- **Ethnocentric Orientation** (home country orientation)
- **Polycentric Orientation** (Host country orientation)
- **Regiocentric & Geocentric Orientation** (Regional & world orientation)

Among these, the companies with Geocentric and Regiocentric International orientations have a greater need for adaptation especially on the Marketing aspect of the enterprise. Adaptation of Marketing Strategies and decisions on the best-fit strategy for a region requires an in-depth understanding of

- 1) What drives Consumer Spending?
- 2) How purchase decisions are made
- 3) How brands are perceived

- 4) How information is gathered
- 5) How messages are interpreted
- 6) What builds loyalty?
- 7) What is the cultural ethos?
- 8) How does culture determines consumers life.
- 9) What can make them feel “it’s mine” or “it’s meant for me?”

In short, it’s essential to recognize the ingredients to be incorporated into your brand, which can help scream out the core essence that can propel associations for sustained growth.

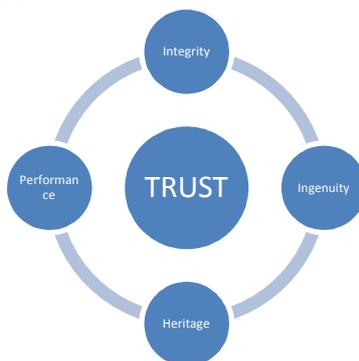
Therefore the aspect of the Relevance is particularly pertinent for a global brand. The world over consumers has expectations and affinities unique to their cultures and value systems. All aspects of the Marketing – Mix need to be tweaked to match these expectations. This includes Product, Price , Place (Distribution) and Promotion (Communication).

But, Are there any imagery cues that all Brands in a region or in a country need to possess, while keeping their core essence unchanged? The answer is yes, and there is no choice that Brands have now.

As per studies done by Young &Rubican (Y&R) the common expectations emanating from culture in different countries:

1. Germany- Quality & Performance
2. Japan- Friendliness
3. USA – Originality & Innovation
4. India – TRUST

A brand “Must” possess attributes as above to ensure success in the these countries . It is therefore interesting to note how consumers in India see each brand uniquely , yet associate them with Trust. There are 4 Distinct Paths to the ‘Holy Grail of Trust’.



This holds true for India. Your Brand has to speak these 4 qualities for itself to be acceptable. A sustained Image reflecting the above attributes could ensure business continuity, considering that other aspects remain the same. Any brand Not possessing this ‘Trust’ element will not be considered relevant to this environment.

Similarly in an International scenario the offer (whether product or service) needs to be modified while keeping its uniqueness in- tact. Let us look at McDonalds as an example.

- Its core competency and unique strength is “Fast Food & Fun”. However its food had to be modified to suite Indian tastes. Well this is about the product per se. Its positioning in India is quite different than that, sayin America. In India it is considered a typical snack or a meal for an urban elite (or at least an upper middle class). In the US its positioning is that of a very average person’s choice for a quick meal.

Enablers of Relevance Building

There are a few tools that can be used to build relevance and create a sense of belongingness with regional markets. Some of the main enablers are as follows :

- A) **Technology** –Technology is a game-changer in the case of most industries as it has revolutionized the way product & services are used or the way messages are accessed.

Mobility has the power to reach products , services , knowledge and information to the otherwise unreachable. Mobile makes it more personal too. Besides, access to the net and social media via mobile makes transmission faster. Ordering ease and expeditious service is further enhanced in the advent of the internet. This makes brands work to the benefit of individuals and groups in their language , on their person handset and in a way that is convenient to them . This in a way is like respecting them for their situation. Relevance gets established automatically.

In India , rural markets offer great opportunities , waiting to be tapped. By introducing technology accessible and usable by the rural public relevance can be created. Events in rural areas using technology have been

extensively used in the past for this purpose. Radio and Doordarshan in its present avatar have helped not just product brands but also Political parties to deep dive into local communities to create a bond. Backend technology like transportation , warehousing & storage , technology farming etc. help do business in ways that can be more inclusive creating a relevance to the regional societies . This instantly creates a desire in consumers to associate with the brand.

- B) **Corporate Social Responsibility**_ CSR is sure way of communicating about your corporate conscience. This display of sensitivity can do wonders in relevance building and establishing a personal connect. These are usually localised initiatives that can help build credibility and refine brand identity to make it locally pertinent. In India especially, touching the heart strings can create belongingness and loyalty.
- C) **Creative talent & Innovation**_ Innovation in product design, packaging , transportation, keeping regional consumption patterns in mind can be an enabler of relevance building. Innovation is not invention, but modifying offers to suite local needs and habits.

Creativity in design & style of both products and communication can help brand s create a perception about them. Creative talent is a resource that should be developed to help brand mesh-into the lives of people. International advertising has distinct challenges. Target audiences differ from country to country in terms of how they perceive or interpret symbols or stimuli, respond to humor or emotional appeals, as well as in levels of literacy and languages spoken.

How the advertising function is organized also varies. In some cases, multinational firms centralize advertising decisions and budgets and use the same or a limited number of agencies worldwide. International advertising can, therefore, be viewed as a communication process that takes place in multiple cultures that differ in terms of values, communication styles, and consumption patterns. At each stage in the process, cultural barriers may hamper effective transmission of the message and result in miscommunication. Advertising is a potent force for change and adaptation, while selectively reinforcing certain values, life-styles and role models , it can also reinstate its local relevance.

- 5) **Creating Categories & Sub- Categories** - Transformational innovation in marketing models is required to sustain and grow in the market given its dynamic. Sheer incremental competition could lead to brand preference. But as completion gets wiser , you could lose relevance. Or as new categories emerge your brand could become less relevant.

Innovatively developing new categories like SUVs in automobiles would could be a good thing to do as decision making may start with the selection of a category and brand preference could come later. But if the climate is tilted towards a particular category and you are not present in it – your brand may be redundant.

Conclusion:

The world over marketers and advertisers are trying to make people and communities see them in a certain way. This may be the need, as establishing its field of play and differentiating itself from others can build preference. This is a smart move or an act of intelligence. However wisdom lies in connecting to the root and infusing itself into the climate which prospective consumer groups have adapted to. And this has to be done while retaining their core identity. Testimonies to this fact are countless. Brand have tasted sweet success in some countries and failed to create an impact in others. That was only because they were a square peg in a round hole.

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