



Brand Management: A Brief Study

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ABSTRACT

Brand management means defining the brand, positioning the brand, and delivering the brand. Brand management is nothing but an art of creating and sustaining the brand. A successful brand can only be created if the brand management system is competent. Rather than define brand semiotics as a supplement to the traditional marketing toolbox of product, price, promotion and placement, I propose that brand equity management is entirely semiotic. As a sign system, brand communication is achieved through a complex matrix of signifying elements, including material, structural, conventional, contextual, and performative dimensions. In this paper, the conclusion is that By locating the meaning of logo, packaging, and advertising messages in the broader system of the brand positioning discourse, semiotic analysis enables marketers to tie brand communication to marketing strategy and brand legacy, and remain relevant in a changing cultural environment.

Keywords : Brand; Brand management; Branding

Introduction

Branding includes developing a promise, making that promise and maintaining it. It means defining the brand, positioning the brand, and delivering the brand. Brand management is nothing but an art of creating and sustaining the brand. Branding makes customers committed to your business. A strong brand differentiates your products from the competitors. It gives a quality image to your business.

In case of product brands, the tangibles include the product itself, price, packaging, etc. While in case of service brands, the tangibles include the customers' experience. The intangibles include emotional connections with the product / service.

Branding is assembling of various marketing mix medium into a whole so as to give you an identity. It is nothing but capturing your customers mind with your brand name. It gives an image of an experienced, huge and reliable business.

It is all about capturing the niche market for your product / service and about creating a confidence in the current and prospective customers' minds that you are the unique solution to their problem.

The aim of branding is to convey brand message vividly, create customer loyalty, persuade the buyer for the product, and establish an emotional connectivity with the customers. Branding forms customer perceptions about the product. It should raise customer expectations about the product. The primary aim of branding is to create differentiation.

Strong brands reduce customers' perceived monetary, social and safety risks in buying goods/services. The customers can better imagine the intangible goods with the help of brand name. Strong brand organizations have a high market share. The brand should be given good support so that it can sustain itself in long run. It is essential to manage all brands and build brand equity over a period of time. Here comes importance and usefulness of brand management. Brand management helps in building a corporate image. A brand manager has to oversee overall brand performance. A successful brand can only be created if the brand management system is competent.

Semiotics and Brand Equity

Over the past ten years or so, brand strategy researchers have come to recognize the importance of brand communication in building and sustaining brand equity, the value attached to a brand name or logo that supercedes product attributes and differentiates brands in the competitive arena (See Sherry 1987, Umiker-Sebeok 1987, Aaker 1991, 1995; Schmidt 1995, Floch 2005, Holt 2004, Mick & Oswald 2007, Ries & Trout 2000). The contribution of brand meanings and perceptions to profitability – the Coca Cola brand is valued at over \$70 billion - testifies to the power of symbolic representation to capture the hearts and minds of consumers by means of visual, audio, and verbal signs. The semiotic dimension of brands is therefore instrumental for building awareness, positive associations, and long-term customer loyalty, and contributes to trademark ownership and operational advantages such as channel and media clout. Consequently, managing brand equity means managing brand semiotics.

Thus rather than define brand semiotics as a supplement to the traditional marketing toolbox of product, price, promotion and placement, I propose that brand equity management is entirely semiotic, and that a brand can be defined as a system of signs and symbols that engages the consumer in an imaginary/symbolic process that contributes tangible value to a product offering. This process may include a vicarious experience, a relationship, or need fulfillment and may operate at the levels of product, price, promotion, or placement. Semiotics is thus a cornerstone of brand equity management, since symbolic communication ties consumption to the form of brand communication in advertising, packaging, and brand logo.

The Complexity of Marketing Sign Systems

As a sign system, brand communication is achieved through a complex matrix of signifying elements, including material, structural, conventional, contextual, and performative dimensions. Let me illustrate this reference to the logo for the McDonald's.



Material – a visual icon.

Structural – golden arches, red background, brand name superimposed on the arches in white, squared font. The arches located to the left of the square so the logo moves off to the right, suggesting movement.

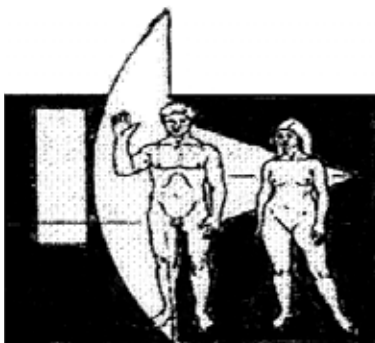
Conventional or Codified – the golden arches, the color scheme, and the brand name consistently signify the company and brand offerings for the McDonald's company. Anywhere in the world, in various languages, this logo tells the consumer that a burger and fries are of far away.

Contextual – The time and place in which the logo is situated contributes to the subjective connotations of this sign system. For example, while some consumers in the U.S. market may associate McDonald's with cheap, unhealthy fast food, in many markets in the world, such as China, McDonald's represents a special treat. The contextual environment may also embed brand communication in cultural archetypes and myth, creating either positive or negative associations derived from local interpretations of the message. (Example below) □ Performative – Marketing sign systems engage consumer/spectators in a communication vent by means of codes inscribing subject positions for I and you in representation. is imension is crucial for building brand relationship and for calling the consumer to action, .e. making a brand choice.

Controlling for Cultural Nuances

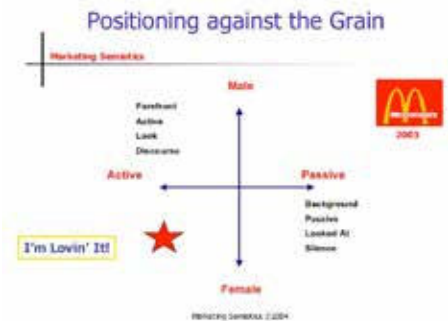
Marketers have more or less control over the material, structural and conventional elements of brand communication, but risk miscommunication and ambivalence at the levels of the ontextual and performative elements. A case in point is the representation of women in an nnuual report for the McDonald's corporation dating back to 1996. y decoding gender archetypes in the ads, I reveal an unfortunate tereotype about the role of women

that could tarnish the brand. Before I show that case, I will introduce the reader to elementary semiotic analysis of a cultural archetype that was placed on the side of a Pioneer Satellite in 1970, with the express purpose, according to NASA scientists, of communicating universal meanings about mankind to the potential interlocutors from outer space. (Image, right) A two-stage semiotic analysis reveals the difficulty of this task. Even if there were space creatures who 'read' visual communication in the expected way, they would not obtain an objective, universal understanding of mankind but a stereo-



typical communication about the dominance of the white male in the West at the end of the millennium.

A cursory binary analysis of the organization of the figures in the frame, the direction of their looks, and the details of their presentation, leads to paradigmatic oppositions linking the male to power, speech, action, and self-control, and linking the female to passivity, silence, inaction and lack of control. The male stands upright and strong in the foreground, feet planted squarely on the ground, looking out with authority towards the spectator and communicating with his right hand. The female slouches in the background, looking to him (is "spoken" through him?), relaxed, hands at her sides. The binary analysis is summarized in the following grid:

Implications for Brand Equity

A quick look at the representation of women in an old (1996) annual report for the McDonald's corporation illustrates the implications of the cultural context for brand communication. In an ad, the two men engage in a power play – shaking hands, addressing each other with speech and looks, standing strongly and securely in the foreground of the image. The woman sits silently in the background, at a level below the men, eyes looking up to them as if to silence her own voice by listening to the men. The majority of the ads in this particular annual report repeat this pattern, supporting a discourse about the role of women in the brand legacy that belies the marketing strategy of a brand targeted, at that time, to moms and kids. The following binary grid demonstrates how the representation of cultural archetypes translates into brand positioning, and suggests ways a more relevant brand positioning in 2003 transcended cultural stereotype and included active females. McDonald's made the correction in future advertising, signaling a strategic response to the changing cultural environment. In following years, both the annual report and advertising communicated multicultural, assertive women looking straight into the camera, reflecting the post-modern nuances of global consumer culture.

Conclusions

Semiotics has important applications to strategic brand management by helping researchers clarify brand identity, personality, and associations the brand communicates in relation to its history (in diachronic perspective) and in relation to the current competitive environment (in synchronic perspective). By locating the meaning of logo, packaging, and advertising messages in the broader system of the brand positioning discourse, semiotic analysis enables marketers to tie brand communication to marketing strategy and brand legacy, and remain relevant in a changing cultural environment.

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