Chapter 31
Understanding Doppelgänger Brand Image:
The Darker Side to Emotional Branding

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ABSTRACT

With ubiquitous digital growth in the last two decades, consumers' belief of authenticity has become robust. Empowered consumers voice their opinion boldly through internet medium. Antibrand activists, bloggers and loosely organized network of consumers continuously monitor the activities of deceitful marketers and one insidious tactic turns the emotional image to doppelgänger brand image (DBI) - disparaging images and stories about a brand. This article helps in giving insights about the concept of DBI and show the paradoxical side of emotional branding. The concept has been explained with illustrations and recent issues like net neutrality in India, Maggi ban, etc. In addition, the chapter also covers the motivations to create DBI, brands susceptible to DBI and location of such images. The work puts across the schemes where managers could turn this threat of DBI into an opportunity to tell a new brand story, thereby regaining the emotional appeal for the brand. Understanding the concept of DBI would help the readers appreciate the area of emotional branding in better light.

INTRODUCTION

Marc Gobé created the concept of emotional branding based on the philosophy that a connection with a brand at an emotional level endures longer (Lafferty, 2001). Creating an emotional bond with a customer requires a company to put the needs of its customers ahead of its own needs of selling its product. Relationships with an emotional dimension are more likely to resist the temptation to defect than relationship build for the purpose of convenience (Rossiter and Bellman, 2012). Emotional branding clearly differentiates companies from their competitors and helps to create deep intrinsic relationships between the brands and consumers (Akgün, et al., 2013).

In the times of Internet-based marketing where brands are marketed through social networks, it becomes all the more important to build connections with customers on a personal level. But, some loosely organized network of consumers, anti-brand activists, cultural jammers, bloggers, and opinion leaders, circulate disparaging images and stories about a brand. Over time, the brand-focused parodies and criticisms coalesce into a coherent set of opposing meanings that plague brands. This is considered as the "doppelgänger brand image" (Thompason, et al., 2006). With these images, the brands that have attained competitive success through emotional-branding strategies lose their trust amongst customers.

The face of marketing has changed with advancement of technology. Nowadays, consumers want to establish a multifaceted holistic relationship with a brand of their choice. Customers proactively suggest product improvements, participate in activities of new product development, write reviews on blogs and co-create whenever a situation demands. In the past, if people did not like a brand, they ignored and opted for competing products; however, with this new digital medium of internet customers voice their opinions. As digital imaging software gains wide spread diffusion, a number of brand parodies and culture-jamming satires circulate in cyberspace. They are now being recognized as a potentially serious brand image threat (Earle 2002; Walker 2003). This democratization has empowered consumers to create doppelgänger image of a brand and spread it through viral mediums on the Internet. These offensive images not just effect the company's own brand but also shatters the confidence of a loyal customer.

This primary goal of the chapter is to explain the concept of doppelgänger brand image and its various facets. The concept is explained through various illustrations and examples to highlight the paradoxical side of emotional branding. The significance of authenticity in the brands in the growing digital ecosystem has been emphasized. Also, the chapter delves deeper into this concept by covering brands susceptible to DBI, motivations to create DBI and the location of such images. Previous research studies, which have worked on the idea of DBI, have also been described. Finally, the work puts across the strategy using which managers could turn this threat of DBI into an opportunity to tell a new brand story. An understanding of this concept will help readers better appreciate emotional branding.

FOCUS OF THE CHAPTER

The ubiquitous digital growth in the last two decades has empowered consumers with greater accessibility to information, networking and broadcasting though various media. Empowered consumers demand authenticity for any claims portrayed by brands. Any misleading or inauthentic claim can be quickly uncovered due to the vast amount of information available over the Internet. False claims can put the brand in extreme negative light. Anti-brand activists continuously monitor the activities of Machiavellian marketers and one insidious tactic can turn the positive brand image to a doppelgänger image. Doppelgänger brand image is defined as a family of disparaging images and stories about a brand that are circulated in popular culture by a loosely organized network of consumers, anti-brand activists, bloggers, and opinion leaders in the news and entertainment media(Thompson, et al., 2006, p.50).

The world Doppelgänger is a mix of two words 'Doppel', which in German means double, and 'Ganger', which means someone who is walking, or in other words, double walker or alternate ego. This concept took birth in Germany in the 1500s. The Doppelgänger brand image (DBI) is the criticism of a certain brand that has become popular through emotional branding strategies. It is an effort to plague the image of the brand through focused parodies. The DBI can provoke a sense of incongruity between the inspirational intention of an emotional-branding strategy and the profit-driven motives of its spon-

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