Chapter 13
Emotional Branding as a Strategy in Promoting Customer Loyalty

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ABSTRACT

In the past decade, emotional branding has been emerged as an extremely influential brand management paradigm and is widely heralded as a key dimension to marketing success. Branding of emotions focuses upon the consumer and not the product at the very forefront; it examines how brands can communicate with consumers in a more rational and humanitarian manner and affect people deeply at the varying degree of the feelings and senses. Due to the steadily growing competition in the international market, brands have become an important component. Therefore, the objective of marketers is to understand the people's emotional desires and increase the consonance of the brand personality for their brands with the self-image of their target customers. The purpose of the chapter is to recognize the potential nature of emotions in creating strong brand attachments between consumers and brands, and promote active participation as it leads to customer loyalty. It also articulates the effects of interactive features that enhance emotional branding elements in a virtual community.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, emotional branding has emerged as a highly influential brand management paradigm (Zaltman, 2003). Emotional branding is a consumer-centric, relational, and story-driven approach to forging deep and enduring affective bonds between consumers and brands (Roberts, 2004). Proponents of emotional branding proclaim that this high degree of consumer passion is seldom, if ever, cultivated through rational arguments about tangible benefits or even appeals to symbolic benefits, such as heightened self-esteem or status (Gobe, 2001). Rather, these persuasive consumer brand linkages classically

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emerge when branding strategies use narratives and tactics that demonstrate an empathetic understanding of customers' inspirations, aspirations, and life circumstances and that generate tepid feelings of community among brand users (Atkin, 2004; Muniz and Schau, 2005).

The most commonly accepted definition for brand is the one proposed by the American Marketing Association as "a name, term, sign, design, or a unifying combination of them intended to identify and distinguish a product or service from its competitors" (Kotler, Bliemel, and Keller, 2007). According to Chan-Olmsted (2006), brands add thoughts and feelings that are designed to enhance the value of a product beyond its product category and functional values. Thus, from an audience's perspective, we may understand a (media) brand as a construct carrying all the connotations of the audience in terms of the emotional, stylistic, cognitive, unconscious or conscious significations.

Emotional branding is frequently utilized by competitive brands attempting to build on their performance benefits to strike an emotional chord in the hearts of their customers. The emotional environment of branding leads the brands towards an unparalleled and complying strategic personality, which enables the brand to distinguish itself completely from the competitors and secure a unique place in the minds of consumers (Jamwal and Soodan, 2014). Many companies develop marketing strategies in order to improve their sales and to make their brands stand out among the competitive ones. For most firms, the ultimate goal of marketing success is to generate a brand, which can differentiate their companies from others. Aaker (1991) equates brand equity with the following elements: brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association, and other proprietary brand assets. According to Yoo and Donthu (2001), and Washburn and Plank (2002), however, brand equity, specifically consumer-based brand equity, can be measured according to four elements: brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand association.

With the growth of e-commerce and global competition, business-to-business (B2B) marketers are asking whether branding, especially corporate branding, can help improve their competitive position in the new economy. Branding may not be important to everyone, but as long as it is important to some of our customers, we want to know about it. Price and tangible attributes of products in highly competitive markets often differ only slightly. To prevent their products from becoming commodities, companies seek to differentiate themselves with service, with the company brand, and with brands at the product level. Organizational buyers have long been known to consider service and other more intangible aspects of the offer, in addition to price and product quality. Many industrial purchase alternatives tend to be toss-ups. The decisive factor then can turn upon what a brand means to a buyer (Aaker, 1991). Some industrial buyers may be more receptive to branding than others.

BACKGROUND

Emotional branding emerged in the late 1990s as a self-proclaimed corrective to the shortcomings of the conventional benefit-driven approach to branding (Gobe, 2001). Specifically, emotional branding gurus challenge the benefit-driven approach's fundamental claim that brand managers must establish a clear, consistent, and distinctive benefit position in the mind of the consumer (Aaker, 1997). Rather, proponents of emotional branding argue that a benefit-driven positioning cannot provide an enduring competitive advantage, because it is readily emulated, particularly when the benefits are tied to technological and product design features. They further contend that straightforward benefit appeals are unlikely to break through the clutter of a saturated marketing environment that a plethora of brands are fighting to claim

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