EMOTIONAL BRANDING AS TOOL FOR DISSONANCE REDUCTION: A STRATEGY FOR COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

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ABSTRACT

Human beings are innately determined to be very uncomfortable when faced with information that conflicts with what they believe. It's especially dis-comfortable when the beliefs are about themselves and the facts conflict. This discomfort is called cognitive dissonance. The human beings have a general tendency to shift from such psychological state to attain consonance. This consonance can be achieved either by the consumer himself or through other sources. Marketers do portray the shift of such psychological states of customers by using emotional branding as a front line tool and touching the emotional chords of customers which results in establishing a connection between brand and the Purchase decisions by the customers. Present paper is an attempt to study the basis of emotional branding and its concept with the help of a case study which highlights the importance of emotional positioning of brands to reduce dissonance.

Keywords: Cognition; Conation; Dissonance; Emotions

INTRODUCTION

Consumer response is not all cognitive and rational; much may be emotional and elicit different kinds of feelings. A brand or product may make a consumer feel proud, excited, or confident. An ad may create feelings of amusement, disgust, or wonder. Emotions can be defined as strong relatively uncontrolled feelings that affect our behaviour. Emotions do play a very important role in behaviour of consumers. Emotion is a term frequently and familiarity used as synonymous with feelings. For instance an individual, feeling a heave of happiness, may decide to buy a chocolate for himself and his friend. Many times consumers are indulge in excessive shopping when overwhelmed by depression.

Emotional branding is frequently utilized by competitive brands attempting to build on their performance benefits to strike an emotional chord with the hearts of their customers. Branding of emotions is a vital strategy that focuses upon the consumer and not the product at the very forefront; it researches how brands can communicate with people in a more sensible and humanitarian manner and affect people deeply at the varying degree of the feelings and senses. In this way, by enduring consumer brands are at last empowered themselves. 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.
Now days marketers tend to associate Cognitive Dissonance with 'Emotional Appeal' through their offerings. For quite a time now, the power of emotions in branding has stood up bold to employ Cognitive Dissonance to bond with the customer. Cognitive Dissonance and Emotional branding always rely on the fundamental rationale of the basic principle of striking human’s feelings. Creation of dissonance is always accompanied by some regret, desire or sorrow in customer’s mind, branding with emotions touches a chord with attacking views and in turn, makes a perfect association with the product. Therefore, it is imperative for marketers to use emotional branding as a strategic tool to reduce the cognitive dissonance and convert the dissonant behavior into consonant with the preoccupied psychological states. It is important that the marketer’s offering should have an emotional element, but it could choose between creating a dissonance or just plain appeal to the customer's emotions.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction of the cognitive dissonance theory by Festinger (1957) led the marketers to understand the motives of consumers behind their purchase. Ehrlich et al. (1957) and Engel (1963) attempted to investigate post-purchase dissonance and post-purchase interest in advertisements to reduce it. In both of the studies which were empirical, findings showed that increased attention of customers to advertisements after purchase decision is not related to consumers’ efforts to reduce the possibility of dissonance.

Kaish (1967) further expanded the concept of cognitive dissonance theory to redefine the three types of consumer goods which are convenience goods, shopping goods, and specialty goods. The study put forward a concept which showed that dissonance is not only a result of the assigning importance to a product, but it arises due to the functional performance differences amongst similar products. Oshikawa (1969) through his study claimed that the consumers are not interested in the information of particular product as their effort to reduce the possibility of dissonance. Hunt (1970) put forward the effectiveness of communication methods of post-purchase on lowering dissonance level and increasing the possibility of purchases in the future. Cummings and Venkatesan (1976) studied the measurement of the dissonance. They took the level of worry as a subject and studied its level amongst the respondents after the purchase made by them. The study also stressed on all factors that are responsible for dissonance.

Connole et al. (1977) focused that the previous studies on dissonance doesn’t have the analysis of dissonance that individuals experience through the various stages of product diffusion through the categories of consumers. Korgaonkar and Moschis (1982) elaborated the relationship between involvement level and post-purchase evaluations in case of products. The study highlighted that the more the expectations before the purchase, the more will be the favourable evaluation in products which involve high consumer involvement. Mowen and Minor (1998) studied the importance of emotions as an important component of attitude in their research. The emotional aspect has gain importance over the years and more and more studies are being carried out by keeping in mind the emotions in the purchases of customers. Hoyer and MacInnis (2001) found that humans engage in passionate relationships and even religious practices with unique brands because of the desire to overcome feelings of self-uniqueness and affiliation to their in-group.

Soutar and Sweeney (2003) studied the different segments with different levels of dissonance. The study was carried out to study different levels of dissonance amongst consumers. O’Neill and Palmer (2004) attempted to study the relationship between cognitive dissonance and the stability of service quality perceptions. From the study it was concluded...
by the authors that the gap between expectations from purchase and prior experience increases with time and this led to perceptions of the earlier experience to decline and hence causes cognitive dissonance. Thomson, MacInnis and Park (2005) studied the relationship between people and the brands and found that customers build up emotional relationships with a few selected brands that last long. M. Lindstrom (2005) highlighted through study that in an attempt to develop brand exclusiveness, it is very important to go through from traditional means of communication to sensual, emotionally-based communication.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study covers the objectives which can be listed as:

- To have an overview of branding of emotions and its impact on customers.
- To study the role of emotional branding as a tool of post purchase dissonance reduction.

**Binani Cement: A Case of Branding Emotions**

The depth of emotional branding today rests to a great extent on Cognitive Dissonance. The sole objective of cognitive dissonance in emotional branding, if it is precisely laid, employs the procedure of dragging the customer’s hearts so that they feeling complete without your brand. A sense of incompleteness is created in the customer’s mind by the company through a flurry of television commercials campaigns and point of purchase materials, creating pre-purchase intentions towards a particular product. A marvelous example of Cognitive Dissonance well used in the Indian context is the Binani Cement campaign of ‘Sadiyon ke Liye’.Unlike traditional cement advertisements, this campaign has an emotional connection that strikes a chord with every consumer. The television commercial features brand ambassador Amitabh Bachchan, conceived by Ogilvy & Mather, and is coroneted ‘Parental Love’. The commercial is filmed in the style of a soliloquy, with Amitabh Bachchan talking about parents. The message is that parents never leave their children; even it seems to be they have left. The actor discourses how parents belong to us; what they mean to us, things that we have known with and things that we never even realised so far. While he does this, he holds a review of paintings, motion pictures, gauds and even gesticulates what speak of his parents. There are vulnerable moments, abrupt glances into his thoughts and it makes the soliloquy germane. The actor concludes by stating that parents, through us, and our children will live for generations to come, thereby ingeminating Binani Cement’s tagline ‘Sadiyon ke liye’ (for generations to come). The hint is that shoot for Binani Cement has a much more to do than cement. It is more about long lasting values that is of prime interest for all. The tag line ‘Sadiyon ke liye’ also projects a strong brand promise for its customers, a tremendous dimension of emotions.

With the increasing customer base and unstated recognitions of imperfection due to emerging needs that doesn’t come out for some embarrassment concern, dissonance has penetrated deeply into the market. Creation of dissonance has been the main center of attraction for fairness creams customers till some time before but now it has entered into new segments like automobiles, cements and many more. Dissonance is created through different means of promotion by the company, more so because many products demand it so that it could be sold but it remains ambiguous with the Emotional branding. The level if dissonance created depends solely on the where the brand or advertisement puts the customer and not based on where the customer viewer sets the brand.
Emotional Branding and Dissonance

Dissonance in customers occurs due to a predetermined commitment to a chosen alternative which leads the customer to compromise with the attractive features of the alternative which has not been chosen. This is something which is not consistent with the desire for those features. Hence it can be said that the decision which are habitual and limited and do not include much of the customer involvement will not produce post purchase dissonance as in such decisions one hardly consider any attractive features in an alternative brand that do not exist in the selected brand. For example, a customer who has an aroused set of five brands of milk could consider each of them equivalent on relevant attributes in terms of its quality except price and therefore, always purchase the brand which is least in terms of price. Such purchase is habitual and involves limited decision making and hence would not produce post purchase dissonance. It can be said that the cognitive decision is the result of the compromise that a customer has to make; hence it is normal in purchase decisions. Cognitive dissonance leads to a feeling of uneasiness in customers about their beliefs or actions which they tend to change by adjusting their attitude to fit into the behaviour. The case of post purchase dissonance is the result of an attitude change which is the result of an action or behaviour. The information creating dissonance always follows a purchase, and is considered as the main contributor that socialise consumers to change their attitude towards the decision in order to make a balance between the dissonance felt and the consonance which arises due to purchase behaviour. The basic ways of dissonance formation can be summarized as:

![Figure 1. Basic ways of Dissonance formation](image)

Take the case of Mr. Jaideep who has purchased “Trucel” dual sim, 5MP camera android cell phone for his Father at a price of Rs. 8,400 after considering seriously other brands more or less in the same price range. In addition to his investment of hard earned money of Rs.8, 400 he has also invested invisibly in terms of much thinking and searching time for a gift to his old aged father and also considerable amount of ego in his purchase decision. Therefore the amount of stake visible and invisible-in this purchase is really significant. After evaluating the plus and minus points of each brand of mobile phones, he has selected the brand “Trucel”. After purchase, Mr. Jaideep finds his mobile having low battery life and the camera taking blurred pictures. Now he begins to doubt the wisdom of his purchase.

The above case of dissonance from cell phone can be reduced by two ways. One is by the person itself and secondly, by efforts of the marketer. Generally, a person feeling dissonant will try to satisfy himself from his purchase by following ways:
1. Brand Rationalisation

2. Searching for additional information that complies with the behaviour

3. Avoiding or changing the dissonant elements which can be achieved either by altering attitude, or by inhibiting elements of dissonance. Dissonance can be reduced with the help of any of these methods individually or it can be reduced by combining these according to choice.

The methods described above are medium of dissonance reduction by the customer itself. But in case of a marketer, the approach towards dissonance reduction is different. A marketer always tries to satisfy his customers by exploring various methods and new aspects in order to reduce post purchase dissonance. Post purchase dissonance occurs when a person makes a decision to buy a brand from among several alternative brands available within the same product category. This discomfort of consumers becomes very strong when the consumer makes large commitment in the purchase. Emotional branding is a tool which can be effective in positioning the product and also in reducing the dissonance of customers. The cognitive dissonance felt by Mr. Jaideep can be reduced by marketers of “Trucell” by touching his emotional chords.

During purchase decisions, dissonance can result when the consumer recognises alternative brands have both positive and negative characteristics. Hence, after making a decision, he realizes that he has acquired some relatively undesirable traits of the selected brand while foregoing some relatively desirable traits of the alternative brands. Hence the marketers can reduce this dissonance of Mr. Jaideep by positioning the as a unique product in its category having large display and dialler on the screen which makes cell phone easy to use even by the old persons. Also the company can reduce the dissonance factor by stressing on the fact that the cell phone is also characterised by the feature of speaking clock which speaks after every hour and gives information about time. The features of the cell phone make it a choice even for the old people and the persons who use the cell phones just as a device of communication without exploring its other features. By positioning the product in the said manner the company can reduce the post purchase dissonance of its customers and hence reduce the negative features of the product. The regret phase of post purchase in this case is
generally very brief and hence it can be reduced to the minimum with the help of emotionally branding the product.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The emotional strategy for a brand varies from company to company. In order to effectively utilize cognitive dissonance, marketers must make a two-pronged advertising campaign: (1) building a specific brand identity and (2) attachment of emotions with the brand. For a marketer, the main objective of the branding is to position the product effectively so to create a passion amongst consumers of possessing it. It is always said that human beings have powerful emotional drivers within that shape the nature of humans and allow them to identify themselves in the world in addition to giving them opportunity to interact with the world. These emotional chords which are driven by the passion towards the brand are universal and come across broad audiences. Successfully tapping into the emotional chords of customers is always rewarding, but challenging, marketing endeavour. So, the quality of product and its importance does not matter much when it is compared to the extent of emotions created in the minds of customers of purchasing it. Positioning brands in the minds of customers so as to create a passion about it is the real branding. By touching the right emotional chords, the marketer not only will succeed in positioning the brands successfully, but can also reduce the level of dissonance in the form of post purchase behavior. Therefore it can be said that while chalking out brand strategies, marketers should not only look upon the emotional aspects of the customers, but the post purchase behavior and the level of dissonance that may arise out of their purchase should also be noticed to identify the elements of brands they not only feel most comfortable with, but also what they are uncomfortable under different situations and to brand them to the product emotionally.

SCOPE FOR FUTURE STUDY

Emotional branding and cognitive dissonance are the two closely related fields which are continuously evolving in the marketing science. Therefore it is strongly recommended to start a new study where this research concludes. The present paper is about the effective utilization of emotional branding by the marketers in reducing the cognitive dissonance that arises as a result of post purchase. This study can work as solid base for further researches as it provide few new inspirations besides the topic which has been mentioned and can act as an initiator for the future development of this concept.

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