

## BRAND MESSAGE VS BRAND PERCEPTION

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ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
<p><b>History</b>  <i>Received: March 2019</i>  <i>Available online: June 2019</i></p> <hr/> <p><b>Keywords</b>  <i>Brand Massage</i>  <i>Brand Perception</i>  <i>Marketing Manager</i>  <i>Perception and Business</i></p>	<p><b>Purpose</b>            The objective of this research is to try to determine the reason behind the disconnection between the brand message and the perception that consumers hold and to suggest ways on how to diminish that gap.</p> <p><b>Methodology</b>            The methodology to be used is mixed (open and closed ended) questionnaires to be distributed amongst two groups of interest. The first group is brand managers and marketing managers from a selective few brands. The second group is students of business management who have a basic understanding of market.</p> <p><b>Findings</b>            Our study shows that even though brand managers do try to go for creating trust and synergy with the consumer in order to further their brand, they emphasize more on their market orientation, positioning and pricing. Some of the brand managers keyed satisfaction and trust of the consumer on their brand as an important element. With the findings of our research, we are in a position to state this firmly that in local market comprising of highly diversified brands portfolio, the spectrum of consumer preference is highly unpredictable</p> <p><b>Conclusion</b>            In order to get better and efficient results of marketing efforts that brand owners undergo for stated intended outcomes, it is of utmost importance to clearly communicate the intended message without any ambiguities to the target audience. Brand owners have a large set of strategic tools to create a profound impact, utilizing these to the optimal level may result in intended and desired better performance of the brand.</p>

## 1. Introduction

In today's day and age brands make assurances to try to generate an association with the customer and attain the edge against its competitors. This will lead to growth and sustainability for the brand, in the long run. However, sometimes that brand promise either gets lost in the message or does not play over the same way in the consumer's mind as the brand perceives it to. The ability to share information at the touch of a finger instantly has started playing a huge role in the perception of brands. Consumer perception and opinion is more dominant than ever in determining brand perception. If we desire to increase the overall brand perception of a brand, we first need to understand what those opinions are (Day, & Wensley, 1988).

What consumers say truly reveals what the consumer's values emotions truly are towards a brand. Emotions convey true meanings & feelings about brands. Through the formation of meaning and feelings, consumers are not only able to achieve a connection between brands and their true intentions, but also start creating and influencing other around them if those feelings and meanings are strong enough. In simple words we will see that the legitimacy of the consumer-brand engagement is based mostly (if not completely) on feelings, emotions and associations that are propagated by the brand in the minds of consumers. Brand coherence mostly depends upon the depth of the associations between the brand message and what kind of feelings and meaning are derived by the consumer from the brand message (Barnes, 2003).

With huge investments by the brand owners in its course of development and getting a trust build among the target and potential customers, it remains a constant pain point for the marketers to develop brand messages that deliver the exact values a brand holds and communicates with its customers in such a way that builds an association with the customer and the customer tends to believe that the brand which he/she opts to associate with will create improved self-esteem and lesser pain points. At the same time will provide benefits that will eventually allow the customer to consider the brand a good value for money (Barrow & Mosley, 2011).

But the problem is often seen when a diluted message is either conveyed from the brand owners end or either perceived in a different way by the customer base which includes both target and potential customers. When a brand gets its message diluted, its customers switch. Phillip Kotler says it is difficult for a marketer or a brand to re-attract the customer once it changes its path then to develop a new customer. Nowadays with advent of social media and other platforms for direct customer to customer and customer to company interactions, it is merely impossible to control the negative word of mouth buzz if a customer has a bad experience with a particular brand. Similarly a positive word of mouth will not escalate among the masses but also result in improved customer life time value. Through this study we will be trying to find out the causes, the effects and discover the remedial actions that will eventually help the brand to become a source of sustainable customer satisfaction

## 2. Literature Review

Brand Perception can easily be defined as a psychological variable which is involved in a Purchase Decision Process which will generally impact Consumer Behavior. Brand perception is owned by consumers, not brands. Regardless of your message, whatever people are thinking and saying about your brand, that is your brand. A strong brand gets the prefrontal cortex on your side. It also reinforces the importance of considering your

customer's complete experience. (Bian, & Moutinho, 2011).

Brand perceptions are hugely impacted by the overall experience of the product itself than just from marketing communication. Marketing communication has a much greater impact when trying to build brand awareness. This in no way means that communication does not change perception, or help in changing the perception of the consumer about the brand, but it cannot be a standalone means of gauging and changing perception and needs to be backed by a real change in the overall experience of the product (Grimes & Doole (1998).

Customer evaluates the brand on few embedded elements. If it's a product, Aaker says your customers evaluate on:

1. Performance 2. Features 3. Conformity with specifications 4. Reliability 5. Durability 6. Serviceability 7. Fit and finish

If it's a service, Aaker (1991) says your customers make quality decisions based on:

1. Tangibles 2. Reliability 3. Competence 4. Responsiveness 5. Empathy ("Brand Perceptions," 2014)

A brand in its name embed three different meanings including cultural meanings, community meanings and individual meanings which means that for a brand manager to compose its brand message have to take into consideration all these three elements otherwise it may create a false perception in the minds of consumer. But it may also be considered that the marketing communication mix that includes all the tools that are present on a brand managers' discretion in order to convey a strong brand message may be more effective in creating brand awareness than creating and changing brand perceptions. There are other ways to change or create brand perception including competitive strategy, business model, technical support, internal culture etc. (Keller et al., 1998).

Consumer values and consumer emotions are revealed by what consumers say. Consumer emotions convey meanings and feelings about brands. Through the creation of meaning and feelings, consumers are able to achieve consonance between brands and their intentions - if not their actions (Rupp & Spencer,2006).

### **3. Methodology**

The research is being carried out using both primary and secondary data. We will be distributing questionnaire to two different groups who will help us understand the connection and the disconnect between the brand message and the perception it carries. The study will have a two pronged approach, wherein we will ask:

1. Brand Managers will be asked question on how a brand message is created
2. How consumers develop brand perception

We will be targeting a maximum of 10 Brand Managers and Communication Managers who will help us in discerning how the Brand Message and Coherence is developed in Pakistan. A total of 25-40 students of management sciences who have a basic understanding of how to ascertain the brand message and can see where it was a hit or a miss.

#### **3.1. Data collection**

- All of the data was collected through digital questionnaires

- We analyzed the data whenever we could, given the short time between commencement of project and completion of collection of all the surveys. We then moved towards theoretical sampling.
- We were able to collect a great deal of data however; some of the data collected was incomplete and had to be removed.

### 3.2. Data analysis

- We have tried to maintain sanctity of all the data, which has made it possible for us to write this explanatory paper.
- All of the researchers involved supported analysis activities.

### 3.3. Answering our research questions

We asked consumers questions about the process of brand perception creation and worked it over into themes and categories, and in the same way, we asked brand managers a series of questions of how they market their products or services, and how they try to position themselves. Once we received all of the answers, we divided the answers and started answering each one of our research questions.

## 4. RESULTS

From the 25 respondents on the consumer side, we have found out that a large number believe that they respond more to the brand values and message rather than the brand name, since values correspond to how ethical the brand acts. Ethicality and the way brands try to disseminate their message seems to be a key focus point of our respondents. Of the 254 responses that we received, we were able to code them into 74 codes, out of which we were able to create close to 16 themes, which we further sorted into 4 main categories according to the following:

Bad Punchline	Quality
Quality	Values
Brand Values	Offerings
Brand Features	Relevancy
Brand Promise	
Consumer Trust	
Product Design	
Customer Satisfaction	
Brand Message	
Jingles	
Cultural Aspects	
Cost Benefit Trade Off	
Message Dilution	
Irrelevancy	
Consumer Values	
Brand Recall	

These are broadly defined categories which tell us that the consumers of our research (students of IoBM and IBA) believe that quality of a product is based on a few simple aspect, i.e. what the offerings of the product are, the features that the brand comes with,

the values of the brand and the quality that they provide. Values have been given specific importance as mentioned above. The brand message seems to have been lost whenever a brand tried to market itself in a way which deviated from either societal or social norms or the brand perception already created within the minds of the consumer.

On the brand side we asked 12 brand managers, 25 very open ended question which gave us very unique and different answers from one industry to the other. From the brand side we see that specific focus is put on being consumer oriented or market capitalization. Of the 281 responses that we received, we have boiled it down to 81 codes, out of which 12 themes were created which were further reduced to 4 categories according to the following:

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Emotional Appeal Benefits	Offerings
Quality Perception Internal Ambassadors Customer Oriented Approach Market Capitalization Pricing Positioning Rationality Based Consumption Satisfaction Synergy Trust	Marketing Orientation
	Marketing Mix
	Synergy

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Our study shows that even though brand managers do try to go for creating trust and synergy with the consumer in order to further their brand, they emphasize more on their market orientation, positioning and pricing. Some of the brand managers keyed satisfaction and trust of the consumer on their brand as an important element.

#### 4.1. Discussion

- There are several issues and challenges that a brand owner or a brand manager face especially while establishing a new brand or reinventing the old brand that has diluted its message and function in the eye of its customer that includes both consumer and potential customers.
- A brand right from its inception has a message embedded in it that has to be communicated to its target audience with great efficiency and care. Building a strong brand requires a great amount of zeal and rigor.
- It has to be constantly reinforcing its message of values and benefits in order to provide a solution to the customer pain point. As discussed earlier, a customer associates with a brand in order to eliminate or mitigate an emotional, functional or psychological pain point and with the brand constantly delivering its message and values with embedded benefits result in long term association with the brand and increases the customer lifetime value, a many folds.
- Not only a loyal customer adds huge monetary benefits to the brand and its owner company but also with this lifelong association the loyal customer is turned into

- apostle that creates a positive word of mouth for the brand and add enormous value to it indirectly as well by convincing other customers or by turning non customers into customers and later loyal customers.
- This chain like brand perception mechanism makes the brand flourish and fly high in this highly volatile and competitive global market.

## 5. Conclusion

With the findings of our research, we are in a position to state this firmly that in local market comprising of highly diversified brands portfolio, the spectrum of consumer preference is highly unpredictable. There are strong implications of cultural and social preferences for the consumers that make it difficult for the brand owner to deliver a consistent message across all available brand platforms and a cross wide and diversified pool of target audiences.

In order to get better and efficient results of marketing efforts that a brand owners undergo for stated intended outcomes, it is of utmost importance to clearly communicate the intended message without any ambiguities to the target audience. Brand owners have a large set of strategic tools to create a profound impact, utilizing these to the optimal level may result in intended and desired better performance of the brand.

Consumers on the other hand perceive the brand message and benefits from their own angle. The way a consumer evaluate a brand has several elements including emotional association, self-esteem needs, functional benefits, cost benefits trade-off and socio psychological inferences. Before a customer is turned into a consumer, this decision making process of purchasing is impacted by culture, influencers, peers and recommenders. The victory of a brand manager is to relate its brand promise and brand message with all the elements and needs of the consumer purchase decision. In our research it was highlighted in many responses that if a consumer perceive any tool associated with a brand to be irrelevant, it does not only prohibit the customer to buy it. But also develop an antitrust feeling and negative emotions towards a particular brand.

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