

Brand Activation: A Theoretical Perspective

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Abstract

The objective of this review paper is to determine what brand activation is and how it becomes a marketing communication tool for leading brands during the last few years. This paper includes the principles and benefits of brand activation; the difference between brand activation and advertising; the theory and process of brand activation; and marketing brand via brand activation. Brand activation is a very precious tool for marketers to active the brand in customers' mind through experience and interaction with the brand.

1. Introduction:

The focus of brand activation is on two-way interaction between consumer and brand in real time which result in a deeper bond between consumer and brand. These live experiences are usually in the form of live events which allow consumers to have a feel of the brand via interactive activities. Brand activation is a natural step for the advancement of brand. Brand activation is the marketing interaction between consumer and brand in which consumer come to know about the brand and accept the brand as a part of their lives. Activation provides focus to the actual marketing because with the help of activation, consumers understand brand more easily and effectively as compared to the traditional marketing. In brand activation, people are motivated emotionally to adopt the product which in turn enhances the image and equity of the company. Brand activation is normally the interaction between company and consumer which helps to activate the brand. Its purpose is to create the link between the company and the customer. Brand activation enhances effectiveness in the communication of brand to consumers as it is more focused on a particular or targeted market.

Brand activation revolves around a big idea which is reinforced with positive stimuli in a way that consumers start appreciating the brand. Consumers must ensure that the brand activation process is properly developed so that brand may be connected to the consumers at emotional level. The strength of this emotional connection is predictor of well-off of the brand. This emotional connection with the brand may be created through various live activities where consumers have a sense of attachment and trust.

The aim of the brand activation is to motivate the consumer and to make a good image in the mind of consumers in a way that consumers think that the brand is a part of their lives. Brand activation is not a theory rather it has practical and logical form demonstrated in some sort of experiences through which a company or the brand can understand needs and wants of consumers. Activation can be done by using sources like TV, internet, newspaper, mobile etc. and through these sources company can convey its message and activate its brand. Activation is the creative theme for any company because it provides many ideas and a platform for enhancing the image of a brand. For bringing a brand to life, it is important that consumer must be communicated about brand features. It must be kept into the mind that only few main features of the brand should be communicated instead of entire information which may create ambiguity. For successful activation of a brand it is essential to connect the brand emotionally with the consumer at the right time, in the right way and at the right place. The right mean for brand activation may event marketing, niche promotion, retail marketing, social programming, and sales promotion

2. Brand Activation:

Brand activation is defined as a marketing relation created between brand and consumers in a way that consumers understand the brand in a better way and consider it as a part of their lives. Brand activation is the process of activating the customers by joining the all available sources of the communication in a creative manner. Brand activation in its simplest form is a road show where company's personnel take a brand to the people so that they can experience the brand. It is known as experiential marketing and is a popular method for

creating experiences with the brand for the consumers. It works brilliantly for FMCGs (Mujuru, 2011). Brand activation focuses on the core of marketing and initiates purchasing process. An effective brand activation result in brand awareness, brand knowledge, liking and ultimately purchase and repurchase of brand. The brand activation is the simplest form of communication which brings instant results. The means of communications are changing day by day and emerging ways of communications like official websites, email, sponsoring, incentive system and outdoor advertising etc. are being introduced. These various new ways of communications are also applied during the process of activation of the brand. Here the meaning of activation is to create the interest, trial and loyalty. The first driver of activation is the interest created by the marketing by focusing on hot prospects and cold prospects. Prospects are actually the future customers of the business and cold customers may or may not be the real customers but the chances are there. The hot prospects are the persons who may become customers in near future. The second driver of brand activation is trial. After creating interest among consumers, the focus of marketer is on getting trial of product by hot and cold consumers. And the last driver of brand activation is to create loyalty among consumers and this is the ultimate goal of brand activation. This loyalty ensures repeat purchases of the product and a sense of attachment is created among consumers for the brand. Thus by applying these three drivers on hot and cold prospects, the brand is activated.

According to McKinney, less commercial and more rigid marketers create an opportunity for those who are not in a way that the later can adopt brand activation to capture more and more market share. Since 80% marketing plans are failed and this suggests to the brand activators to shift their line of attention to the buying process of the customers rather than focusing on selling process. There are products which are not always on demand and sometimes there is a dip in demand. Brand activation is a tactic which can be used to gain sales over a limited period of time. The objective of brand activation may be to inform and educate members of the public about key attributes of the product and demonstrate its usage. The main benefit of brand activation is its immediate response. The marketers tell the general public about the uses and attributes of the brand to inspire them. This marketing campaign brings immediate response and it can be a launch or post launch event. This is the brilliant concept to keep the product in the minds of consumers because a product in itself is not as important as the perception of the customers regarding that product. This activity is not just a fun but brings the wonderful results, increases sales volume and creates the opportunity for the brand to come into life by developing place in the mind of consumers.

Marketers use advertising as a main weapon to build a brand but advertising has lost its credibility due to excessive and unrealistic usage. Internet has made consumers savvier. Brand activation is therefore a new method of communication and brand building that produces instant and remarkable results. Therefore marketers use this idea to capture new customers and to retain the old one.

3. Brand Activation Vs. Advertisement:

Branding is much more than advertising. Today's world is a word of brands and the battle of brand is played in "D-Zone" (decision zone) and the company that makes accurate decision related to brand will win the battle. Advertisement is just about making promises while activation is to 'deliver' these promises. Most of the time the purpose of advertising is to inform the customers while brand activation builds trust between customer and the company. Brand activation is more accountable than advertisement. The marketing advertisement can only solve the difficulties of the market regarding the product but it cannot generate growth for the product and there is an opportunity for the marketers to compete in the market by adopting more flexible and charming idea of brand activation. Since the customer is considered as king he has the power to compare the product with the competitor within the minute detail, so for companies it becomes necessary to adopt the new ways of communication to attract the customers. Advertisement can only defend the market position but can't generate the demand and can't expand the market so this is a great opportunity for the marketers to move to brand activation rather than advertisement. The brand activation generates and initiates the core issues of marketing by starting buying process which is different strategy from the traditional marketing. Because people have no time to focus on bundle of information they just focus on the filtered information and the advertising campaigns waste the precious time of customers. There is an argument that mostly information in advertising is irrelevant which just waste the time of the customers. So brand activation is a good alternative as it involves consumer and product related information is communicated to them through experiences.

4. Why Brand Activation?

In today's competitive environment it is not sufficient to convince consumers by offering product features at functional or emotional level. Brand activation seems to be more convincing as the basic idea to active brands is to execute the brand in other ways than traditional marketing. The real value lies in the opportunities it created by the brand activation. Brand activation creates trust among consumer, society and the brand which as an outcome creates loyalty for the brand. In return, this loyalty creates re-purchase behavior and motivates consumer to spread positive word of mouth about the brand. This customer loyalty can be used to expand

business and in the due process the main challenge is to retain existing relation of trust between customer and brand. Activation shifts the focus of core marketing and the major part of the advertising is related to brand activation. There are various reasons behind this shift. Some of the reasons are given below:

Information Selection: People filter the information and get only that part which is of their interest. Too much information annoyed the customers.

Relevancy: The relevancy of the message has become much more important. Due to the irrelevancy of many advertisements many people claim that they are more annoyed about advertising.

Experience: Use of experience is very convincing. So in advertising people do not experience the brand. But in case of brand activation a positive experience with the brand is the most powerful instrument to activate people.

5. Advantages of Brand activation:

Brand activation can be used for creating positioning of brand in the mind of the consumer. This supports the claims which are made in the advertising of that product in the context of positioning. The mental distortion is less in case of brand activation as compared to advertising. The other feature of the brand activation can be the salience creation regarding the brand. The perfect example of the brand activation can be the Horlicks fuddy-buddy by changing it into wiz-kid. The brand activation gives the facility of the revitalization of the brand and it does elicit the thoughts of the people regarding product. Brand activation strengthens the ties between brand and consumer which in turn increases the amount of repurchase of the brand by customers. It increases the ability of the brand to communicate in the market effectively. It is an effective is an effective way of marketing a brand which meets customers demand and challenges. It is also a rational and impactful way to the process and design of advertising campaign.

6. Principles of brand activation:

The principles of brand activation tell about how and in which manners brand activation is used by marketers. Some principles of brand activation are:

- It captures the customer attention by adopting big idea approach.
- It brings the spirit of brand to life in a typical way.
- To activate brand demand, brand activation ignites the passion of the consumer with the power of a big idea.
- It delivers ideas that motivate the customers.
- It emotionally connects the brand with the consumer at the right time, in the right place and in the right way.
- By turning insight into action, the brand's reason to believe becomes more acceptable and understanding, and the opportunity to purchase becomes more promising.
- It motivates the consumer to increase commitment toward the company.

7. Brand activation Process:

Brand activation is the process to create experience with the brand. These experiences get people to think, feel, sense, act and relate to a brand (Hussain, 2013). The consumer experience is the ultimate measure of any campaign or idea. Brand activation process involves the following steps:

Discovery: Basically the marketers need to understand their brand and then the needs and wants of their customers to build a better and most effective brand activation process.

Strategic Development: Then a strategy is developed by choosing an appropriate mode of communication. Strategic review tells that what makes a brand more active.

Creative Development: In this stage the focus is on the execution and creative side of the brand activation. In this stage the various plans are developed and creative ways are decided to execute the strategy.

Delivery: In this stage the strategy is implemented according to the pre decided execution plans and creative ways.

Evaluation: At the end there is an evaluation stage that determines either the brand activation effort was effective or not and whether the company's expectations were met.

8. Measurement of brand activation:

It is very complex for the marketers to estimate the results of their brand activation strategies. To measure the activation of any brand is much difficult due to its subjective nature. The DSA brand activation model explains the measurement of the results of brand activation through a simple formula. This formula measures the results brand activation in quantitative form. It is measured by multiplying the number of product trial exposure or contacts by the number of acceptance level of exposed population.

Formula is given below:

Loyal customers/Association level of brand = Association level with the brand*3(No. of trials)

$$E = (BE_1 + BE_2 + BE_3 + \dots) * 3T$$

Where,

E= association level of brand,

BE= association level with brand (in %age) = Recall value

&

T= Productivity/ Trial generation= $P_{(n_1+n_2+n_3+\dots)} * A$

P_n : Number of exposure through the awareness, advertisement & information etc.

A: Acceptance level of exposed population (in %age)

For explanation we take illustration that a company makes a campaign by which it makes about $P_{(n_1+n_2+n_3+\dots)} = 12000$ contacts and the acceptance level was 30%.

Hence

$$T = P_{(n_1+n_2+n_3)} * A$$

$$T = P_{(4000+3000+5000)} * 0.3 = 3600$$

Assume that company wishes to create the brand loyalty and for this it conducts two activation programs. First program gave 0.5% recall value and second program gave 0.25% recall value. Thus

$$E = (BE_1 + BE_2) * 3T$$

$$E = 3240 = (0.05 + 0.25) * 3(3600) = 3240 \text{ (loyal customers)}$$

By these loyal customers the company can easily understand its activation success.

9. Elements of a successful activation plan:

A successful activation plan includes the following steps:

Situation analysis: Marketers need to identify key issues, need of shareholder, customers and the opportunities in the market before establishing an activation plan.

Identification of resources: Marketers need staff, time, budget, etc. But before this they have to focus these things and establish a team to achieve brand activation objectives.

Competitive analysis: Identify any competition, such as another major event that will also be of interest to the target audience and the key factor to success the brand.

Goals: Identify attendance and awareness level goals. Because without identifying goals real objective can't be meet in brand activation.

Identification of target markets: Identify groups of individuals to whom the activity could be successfully promoted. It will decrease the expenses of brand activation.

Development of plans for reaching each target market: Develop a strategic plan for promoting the activity to each identified target audience. This is necessary in brand activation because at first whole market plan is develop and then separate plans are set for each market.

Development of evaluation tools: Measurement of the success of activation program during and after the activity is very important. Therefore many short-term and long-term measurable outcomes are included.

10. Limitations of Brand activation:

The more initiatives cannot be given to the manager on activating the brand. The measurement of brand activation can be a problematic because the metrics or indices do not measure the brand activation correctly. This is just the tool to build brands via interaction with the target audience while other promotional activities are mostly the sales oriented.

Conclusion

Brand activation is replacing traditional marketing because of its targeted, emotional and practical approach. It is basically experiential marketing and is the simplest tool available for activating brand by the collaboration of

various tools available for communication. Brand activation is more accountable than advertisement as its focus is on delivering rather than focusing as is in the case of advertisement. Brand activation is not measured in term of sales rather it is measure in terms of awareness and visibility. Brand activation creates loyalty for the brands as its focus is on getting trust of customers. Brand activation can be used for creating positioning and salience of the brand. Brand activation is a tool that is providing benefits to both the company and the brand simultaneously by giving exposure and experience to the customers.

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