STUDY OF MASCOTS AS AN EFFECTIVE BRANDING TOOL

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Abstract
The purpose, message, and worth of a brand's mascot are communicated through associated products or organizations. Just because the product isn't able to speak for itself, the brand needs to find an ambassador. In the same way that the company uses celebrities as endorsers, brand mascots can serve as product advocates. According to experts, one of the best ways to advertise is through spokes characters (Stewart, 1986; Phillips, 1999). The animated characters content analysis in television advertising is presented by Callcott (1994), one of the earliest studies on animated spokes-characters. The employment of fictional superheroes and celebrities as product endorsers has been compared (Isari Pairoa, 2016). It was that the mascot's behavior was under the control of the company, but the chosen celebrity's subsequent actions were beyond its control. (Brown, 2010) suggests that personified plants, vegetables, and fruits have their own advocates, such as Tom Tomato and Mr. Peanut. To be fair, any object can be made to resemble a human by simply adding eyes, a mouth, and possibly some limbs. When a brand mascot is visible in an advertisement, consumers are expected to see more similarities between themselves and the brand than when no brand mascot is visible in the advertisement. This because the advertisement then shows human characteristics that a consumer also possesses, making it easier for a consumer to connect to it.
Keywords: *Branding, Mascots, Positioning, Spokes-Characters, Target Audience.*

Introduction

The national and international businesses have different strategic plans to promote their products and services through advertisements. Mascots have been found most important and relevant, cheap and bestway for the marketing of the product. Usually, brand value is measured by the success of the product which includes logo, and product packaging. A brand always seeks to develop the trust of the consumer through trust and loyalty. The consumer has the close connect and emotional bonding with the mascots. Mascots have different target audience which has more positive approach than the brand ambassador. A brand ambassador is always a famous celebrity or a person and brands try to encash his/her fame through promoting their product or services by the personality.

Brand awareness is a crucial component of branding as it influences consumers to choose a product over competing offerings from the market. It has been observed that brand advocates typically select efficient methods of promotion through a variety of channels, including direct marketing, personal selling, and promotional campaigns.

In any kind of branding, consistency is the key as far as projecting your products in a convincing manner when brands project their products and the message. The visual appeal factor as well as the tone of the brand should be identifiable and in line with the branding strategies which would prove effective in the longer run. Consistency is the key as far as creating a faith and adding an element of loyalty towards the brand, developing loyalty towards the brand can be achieved with the help of consistent branding because if any promotion or marketing strategy has been highlighted in a continuous manner then people would tend to get impacted by the communication or the thought process that what the brand has tried to present.

Literature Review:

McDonald's has managed to maintain a great amount of consistency in its branding strategies in the past few decades. The consistency in branding and product quality has allowed McDonald's to get associated with consumers effortlessly as although the brand is a multinational one but getting a burger for as less as Rs.35 and the easy availability of McDonald's products make the brand more consistent with respect to pricing and offering the taste. Of course, branding with respect to multiple brands need to be more consistent then be it the branding strategies, the marketing strategies for the taste of the product, the consistency will attract more and more consumers towards your brand.

When it comes to communicating the message to the target audience in an experimental way then Amul has done it in a great way or rather mastered the art of using their mascot in a variety of forms. The Amul Girl is being known for many years and the mascot is popular among all age groups. The older as well as younger audiences notice the advertisements or commercials which are based usually on current affairs or social issues, are presented in a humorous way.

The smart and witty messages along with the image of the Amul girl appeals to many of the people. Even in some instances, if the message is found to be not in a good taste but the messages presented with the help of Amul Mascot helps in delivering the message effortlessly.

The captions used for the post are presented in a satirical way which makes them to take a note of the commercials and ultimately the brand. An enduring mascot; whilst keeping him original, his appearance – along with many others – has been updated over the years in order to add a contemporary edge to it. This allowed new generations to embrace old, established characters as new (Phillips, The cow, the cook, and the Quaker: Fifty years of spokes-character advertising. , 1999).

While elaborating on the Amul branding of using the mascot is also said to be a form of Guerrilla Marketing strategy. It has been said that Amul introduced the 'Polka Girl' in an attempt to compete with the 'Polson Butter Girl' which was used by the brand 'Polson'. An image of a Girl also was featured on the products of Polson. Branding strategy is concerned with selection of some characteristics of a product as fundamental values in order to channelise the process by which customers confidently recall, recognize and acknowledge these attributes (De Chernatony, 1998).

For Instance, the popular Cheeka- The Pug of Vodafone was actually a live being which was being seen on the TV commercials and went on to become a Mascot for Vodafone. Mascot can no longer be limited to an artistic choice but has gained the importance of a compelling branding element.

The brand value is an intangible asset and using a mascot can symbolize a brand's personality through their traits and features. A unique personality of a brand can help to stand apart in a crowded market and engage consumers. For example, Bira 91's Mascot is a monkey for the craft beer brand. This personality of Bira 91 mascot projects a quality of rebellion against the traditional and gives a humour filled image.

One more mascot personality from the South Indian QSR chain is 'Vaango'. The mascot signifies 'Come in', Vaango is the traditional Tamilian way of welcoming guests. The brand's mascot wears lungi and smiles with folded hands. This mascot expresses the spirit of the brand through its gesture.

In case of Shera-the tiger, where it was used for the promotion of commonwealth games held in India was depicted in a vibrant and jovial manner which made its image and appearance quite welcoming and appealing for many. Use of Tiger also has been done nicely by Kellogg for the promotion of its product named 'Frosties'. The Tiger has been depicted as someone which represents power and energy, and Kellogg Frosties will help in making the child strong and healthy. Animals depicted in a cartoon form are likely to attract the children as the they tend to be humorous and energetic for many.

In India, Britannia has employed Tiger as a Mascot, for their glucose biscuits which again represents Power, Energy and Endurance for their glucose product. The traits of animals have been simply put into use for showcasing the qualities of the product which has been a common and popular strategy for many brands. The use of elephants as Mascots too have been seen especially in India as Bholu, Appu and Stumpy, all the mascots represented a factor of luck and fortune. Elephants being considered as someone who represents Lord Ganesh, many consider elephant as the one who brings good luck and charm. Moreover, the traits of elephant of being an Intelligent, quite, brainy, and cute looking makes it as the universally accepted animal. To have a good beginning just like we seek the blessings of lord Ganesh, the use of elephant for any auspicious beginning and a symbol of good luck and fortune, this thought has made the use of elephants widely as a part of Indian branding strategy. For (Nixon, 2013) image means personality. By imbuing Hathaway with a personality, its brand image was nationally recognised after 116 years of relative obscurity.

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The better a brand is positioned in the mind of a consumer, the more likely it is that the consumer chooses this brand above other brands. To strengthen the position of the brand in the mind of the consumer, several brand elements (e.g. the logo", name", slogan" etc.) reinforce the brand associations (Keller, 2005, p. 20). The brand mascot is one of those brand elements. Although it might appear that using a mascot in your branding is merely a visual decision, mascots have more power than meets the eye. Any company would always like to portray its image, and brand element to the people. It will also add a new dimension to the personality of the company. According to Obae & Barbu (2004), brands are 'in the minds of consumers.' Elliott & Percy (2007, p. 4) support this assertion by stating 'as brands only exist in the minds of customers, then the management of

brands is all about [the management of] perceptions'.

Adding a character to your product that blends in with the rest of your branding will make it even more identifiable. According to (Mitchell R. W., 1997) anthropomorphism is employed because it modifies our relationship with other organisms by framing them in the same way that we speak of "other" individuals.

Conclusion:

Visuals do have a higher recall value to the human mind than words. Like the brand logo, Mascots are also part of the brand identity. Once consumers see a popular brand mascot, they instantly recognize the brand. For instance, Amul Girl's image is not only restricted to a mascot, but it also acts as one of the Nation's best commentators. For more than 50 years, the mascot has been mesmerizing people with her wit and humour. No major event of note is missed by a comment from the Amul Girl. Without any doubt, the Mascot has done a great job of making even a routine dairy product like butter stand out.

If the food brand fails to deliver, then the selection of the Mascot could be one of the reasons for it. The manner to which people perceive a Mascot as responsible for its appearance and action, directly pushes them to punish this entity for its negative portrayal or behaviour.

It can be said that the strategy of brand anthropomorphism can be a dual edged sword; if developing brands with more human quality features can establish connections and engagement with the people it can also allow more liberty for judging or viewing the brand as a human being. The safest approach is for brands to project that human quality of the Mascot at its best which is more acceptable.

And if the brand is judged by customers as human beings, then they might as well expect brands to commit errors as humans do and thus could connect effectively with the brand.

Brand mascots have the ability to penetrate the public consciousness and an image could be formed in the heads of majority of the people when your brand is speaks loudly. The image brings familiarity, and association and with it comes trust.

Mascots have a great potential to generate vast amounts of income for brands today, and this is where the brands need to optimize the use of mascots in an effective way.

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