

A Comprehensive Review of Evolving Brand Image Strategies: From Universal Appeal to Targeted Resonance in Modern Marketing

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Abstract:

In today's fierce market competition, brand image building has become the object of attention of major corporations, more and more enterprises take brand image building as the key work of marketing, such as Amazon, and Disney. Therefore being fully aware of the model and internal mechanism of brand image sharpening in enhancing brand market competitiveness, it can provide an effective reference for enterprises to improve the efficiency of brand image building. This paper is devoted to reviewing the history route of brand image building, and summarizing the typical cases, then summarize the business strategies of several different brands. Finally, we summarize the effective business strategy for brand image building, the first is high-quality products, good quality and cheap products always can attract more customers; the second is precise brand positioning, targeting customers to gain competitive advantages; the third is high-quality corporate culture, good cultural atmosphere can enrich the connotation of enterprises and the external competitiveness, to stand out from the homogenized products; the fourth is great ethical image, enterprises though attend public welfare activities and other ways to create a positive brand image, then enhance customer's loyalty.

Keywords: Brand Image Construction; Marketing Strategies; Consumer Engagement.

1. Introduction

Today's commodity market is characterized by an endless stream of new products, rapid iteration of new brands, and fierce competition in every product segment. Take China's smartphone market in 2024 as an example: Honor's market share in the first quarter was 17.1%, marking a year-on-year increase of 13.2% (Procter & Gamble, 2006). Since last August, Huawei has recovered rapidly, with its market share reaching 17% in the first quarter of this year. OPPO continues to rank among the top three in the market with a 15.7% market share. In such a competitive domestic market, carefully controlling shipments has allowed some brands to maintain significant market shares, such as 14.6% for another major player.

In conclusion, all major mobile phone brands are highly competitive. In this situation, capturing consumers' attention, stimulating their consumption, and cultivating their buying motivation become key to the survival of enterprises in the competition. Building a strong brand image always plays a crucial role in increasing buying intention. More and more enterprises regard brand image building as the key work of marketing and attach great importance to it (Aaker, 1996).

For instance, Amazon has become one of the world's largest online retailers by maintaining an efficient and

convenient image, providing customers with diversified services to satisfy different needs, and emphasizing a customer-first approach, thereby successfully creating a trustworthy brand image. Similarly, Disney is famous for its magical brand image. By building theme parks around the world, creating unique IPs, and expanding business territories, Disney has successfully created a brand image that is loved and sought after by a global audience (Clifton, 2009). It can be seen that fully understanding the mode and internal mechanism of brand image building in enhancing product market competitiveness is conducive to providing useful references for enterprises to improve the efficiency of brand image building.

Brand image establishment has always played an important role in helping enterprises build a unique image, which is necessary to increase consumers' purchase intention. In the market, there are numerous brands are offering similar services and products. A powerful and unique brand image can help a business stand out and attract more target customers. A consistent, positive brand image can enhance consumers' trust in the brand and make them loyal to the brand. Satisfied customers may become long-term customers and recommend the brand to others. Consumers often connect a strong brand image with high quality and value. Brands with a positive image can demand higher prices because consumers are willing to pay a premium for per-

ceived superior quality and reliability. Satisfied customers who have a positive impression of a brand are more likely to become followers of that brand and share their positive shopping experiences with friends. This kind of word-of-mouth marketing is undoubtedly powerful because it comes from trusted sources and can significantly influence potential customers' purchasing decisions. A strong brand is better able to stabilize consumers in times of crisis, based on long-term emotional connections and positive service experiences. Consumers who have a strong affinity for the brand are more likely to forgive occasional missteps and keep coming back (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001).

Considering the critical role of brand image building in business competition and market environment, this paper is devoted to exploring the main content, mode of action, and real effect, then providing a reference for more efficient brand image building. The content of brand image building carries the positive information that brand owners want to convey to the customers.

2. The History of Brand Image

Branding initially emerged organically through word-of-mouth, relying heavily on accumulated reputation over time rather than deliberate design. Early brands were spontaneous results of consistent quality and customer satisfaction, leading to a slow but steady build-up of trust and recognition (Moore & Reid, 2008). As brands began to form, imitators emerged, prompting brand owners to create unique symbols and designs to distinguish their products. For instance, the Liu family's kung fu needle shop used the symbol of a rabbit pounding medicine, making it one of the earliest examples of a physical trademark. This emblem served not only as a means of identification but also as a mark of ownership and quality assurance.

In the Western context, the word "brand" has multiple origins and meanings. The term "brand" from Old Norse means "to burn." Farmers would brand their livestock with unique marks using a hot iron to signify ownership during transactions. The root "brand" from Proto-Germanic means "flame" or "to burn." Over time, branding with fire became a mark of quality and status among European nobility (Holt, 2004).

In the mid-19th century, Procter & Gamble (P&G) inadvertently discovered the value of trademarks. In 1851, P&G's candles produced in Cincinnati were marked with stars and moons by barge workers to differentiate their goods from others. William Procter noticed that buyers associated these marks with quality, and if the marks were absent, merchants would refuse the goods. This realization led P&G to formally design a star-and-moon logo, which

they printed on all candle packages, securing early customer loyalty. This logo remained until it was replaced by the "P&G" wordmark in 1944 (Tedlow, 2006).

The success of Coca-Cola led to numerous imitations like Koka-Kola, Koca-Nola, Celery-Cola, and Koke. To combat this, Coca-Cola collaborated with the Root Glass Company to design a unique bottle that could be recognized by touch even in the dark, and by fragments when broken. This iconic contour bottle was patented on November 16, 1915, and registered as a trademark in 1960 (Pendergrast, 2000).

During this period, branding focused primarily on names, logos, and product packaging design, especially strong visual symbols. These elements were critical in distinguishing brands and were the most crucial components of brand identity (Olins, 2003).

In 1958, Gordon Lippincott introduced the concept of "corporate identity," developing a complete system that included Mind Identity (MI), Behavior Identity (BI), and Visual Identity (VI). MI referred to corporate philosophy and values, BI to norms and guidelines for employee behavior, and VI to the design and consistent application of logos, colors, fonts, and other visual elements across all corporate materials. Despite the importance of MI and BI, they often became mere slogans without practical impact. In contrast, VI, focusing on visual elements like logos, standard colors, and fonts, became the most fundamental part of brand identity. However, branding success required more than just a strong visual identity; it needed to be applied to product packaging, stores, and advertisements (Beverland, 2009).

Benjamin Franklin pioneered newspaper advertising in 1729 by placing ads prominently in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*. The first issue featured a soap advertisement with a large headline and ample white space, setting a precedent for artistic ad design (Schudson, 1984). In the late 19th century, advancements in transportation and communication, such as railroads and telegraphs, facilitated faster and more reliable product distribution, reducing business risks and enabling nationwide brand advertising. Procter & Gamble's national advertising campaign for Ivory soap in the 1880s, with the famous "99.44% pure" slogan, marked the beginning of modern brand marketing (Ries & Trout, 2001).

The late 19th century saw the rise of advertising agencies like N.W. Ayer & Son, which formalized commission structures for media placements. This standardization, supported by the formation of the American Association of Advertising Agencies (4A), established industry norms that lasted for decades (Pope, 1983).

The mid-20th century brought a "creative revolution" in advertising, with innovative campaigns and new branding

elements like mascots, jingles, and slogans becoming integral to brand identity. Iconic campaigns during this era demonstrated the power of creative advertising in building strong, enduring brands (Ogden & Ogden, 2014).

From its humble beginnings in word-of-mouth reputation to the sophisticated design and advertising strategies of today, branding has evolved significantly. The integration of visual identity, corporate philosophy, and behavior norms has created a comprehensive approach to brand building, ensuring that brands resonate deeply with consumers and maintain their competitive edge in the market (Kapferer, 2012).

3. The main focus of brand image building

3.1 High-Quality Features of Products

Attractiveness in price and quality is a key element for almost every consumer. Many businesses focus on emphasizing the high quality of their products in brand image building, highlighting factors such as durability, comfort, and functionality. Some scholars have found a direct relationship between perceived quality and purchase intention (Carman, 1990; Boulding et al.). Consumers tend to associate a strong brand image with high quality, which encourages them to choose this brand over others. Research indicates that customers use brand image to perceive the quality of a specific product. Clients believe that the better the brand image, the better the product quality and value (Richardson et al., 1994; Jacoby et al., 1971). In many situations, brand image serves as a quick reference or “shorthand” for quality and value (Aghekyan-Simonian et al., 2012; Romaniuk & Sharp, 2003). Studies have shown that tourists’ future behavior depends on their satisfaction and the destination’s image (Castro et al., 2007). Brand image is perceived as a reflection of product quality, which consumers use to evaluate the product. There is a positive correlation between brand image and perceived quality (Golden & Milne, 2004). Brand image is considered a part of brand equity; consumers’ perception of brand image impacts brand equity (Aaker, 1996). Brand equity increases with the improvement of perceived quality, as perceived quality is a component of brand value, leading consumers to choose a specific brand over competitors. In terms of communication, advertising plays an important role. Through the integration of visual, auditory, and textual information, brand quality can be conveyed more effectively (Kotler & Armstrong, 1996).

3.2 Precise Brand Positioning

Brand positioning is the perception or feeling that consumers have toward a brand in relation to a defined group

of competing brands (Keller, Sternthal, & Tybout, 2002). By identifying the brand’s target audience, including factors such as age, gender, hobbies, and income, and segmenting the market accordingly, brand positioning can satisfy the needs of the defined market segment. This makes marketing activities more targeted, reduces resource waste, and enhances consumer loyalty. Brand image is not just about identity markers; it also depends on brand positioning, which combines consumer preferences, strengths, and exclusivity. Therefore, conveying the brand image effectively requires positioning the brand in the desired direction and in the minds of targeted consumers, to clearly communicate the company’s goals and objectives. Brand image does not change instantly; rather, it evolves over time. Additionally, the brand’s value will gradually adjust to align with its true exclusivity or similarity with other brands.

Positioning a brand requires a suitable brand image, but without a consistent definition and interpretation of the brand image, targeted positioning is not possible. Positioning is a strategy used to define a brand’s image for potential consumers to gain a competitive edge and win customers’ hearts. The introduction, refinement, and strengthening of the brand image depend on constructing a clear definition (Lee, James, & Kim, 2014). By developing strategic messaging, the brand can be positioned to appeal to various target audiences, including potential customers, prospective staff, referral sources, and other influential potential collaborators. Although the core brand positioning must remain consistent across all audiences, each group may be interested in different aspects of the brand (Vilniaus Kolegija).

3.3 The Influence of Enterprise Culture

Enterprise culture is formed through the long-term production and management activities of enterprises; it is a comprehensive reflection of the values, codes of conduct, and business philosophy observed and pursued by all personnel within the enterprise. In practice, a famous brand is supported by excellent corporate culture because a real brand represents not just material satisfaction but also a mental feeling, psychological identification, and spiritual value that the enterprise provides to customers. A brand is a cultural phenomenon; it is not just a name or a symbol. It symbolizes the spirit of the enterprise and embodies its corporate culture and philosophy. As the carrier of corporate culture, a brand always communicates the spirit and culture of the enterprise, including its morals, ethics, and philosophical concepts. All of these elements demonstrate the brand’s image and represent the quality and strength of the enterprise.

At the same time, corporate culture extends its influence

across the entire cultural field through the brand, enhancing internal cohesion within the enterprise and increasing competitiveness externally. In this way, the dissemination of corporate culture continually enriches the brand's connotations and increases its value. Corporate culture is sometimes integrated into the concept of enterprise behavior by setting rules, acting with principles, and running programs to foster a sense of belonging among employees. An active corporate culture can improve staff loyalty and satisfaction, thereby boosting their work enthusiasm and creativity. This, in turn, helps the brand stand out in a highly competitive market by creating a distinct memory point in the minds of consumers, ultimately achieving brand differentiation. As consumers become more and more knowledgeable about products and companies, including factors such as employee work environments and community involvement, corporate brands are receiving increased attention and scrutiny (Chang et al., 2009). Corporate branding is defined as the systematic processes that an organization implements through internal and external interactions to create a strong brand image while maintaining brand reputation among stakeholders. Compared to product branding, typically handled by marketers, corporate branding involves organization-wide practices that help enterprises establish their image (Melewar et al., 2012).

3.4 Moral Image

Previous research has defined the characteristics of ethical branding as honesty, integrity, respect, responsibility, and accountability to all stakeholders (Fan, 2005). Recent research finds that customers are more concerned with companies or brands that prioritize ethical commitments (Patel et al., 2017; Singh et al., 2012; Story & Hess, 2010). As a result, enterprises must establish ethical commitments with consumers. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) refers to the responsibility that individuals or organizations assume for their social environment (both human and natural) when carrying out any activity (Marina Mattered & Baena, 2012). Many enterprises donate to charity, construct public facilities, and engage in other activities to cultivate a positive public image (Zain Noori Ismael, 2022). Research has found that corporate social responsibility measures, especially moral rules, have a significant positive effect on brand image building (Lauritsen & Perks, 2015; Popoli, 2011). According to research, more and more customers' purchasing decisions are based on the social responsibility of the brand, as harmless and high-quality products are seen as more reliable (Kim et al., 2018). In fact, ethical purchasing influences traditional businesses. In the service industry, businesses might need stronger brand loyalty and a positive brand image to main-

tain long-term customer relationships, which requires connecting business ethics with operations. Similarly, good ethical behavior by front-line employees can improve customer satisfaction, increasing customers' willingness to buy again (Vesel & Zabkar, 2009). If customers feel unfairly treated or witness immoral behavior from sales or front-line staff, they not only lose enthusiasm but also are less likely to repurchase due to the perception of unfairness and inequality (Chipulu et al., 2018). The experience of Schmalz and North shows that consumers are less willing to repurchase from such brands or companies.

4. Discussion

A successful brand image building needs to satisfy three functions: resonate with consumers, differentiate the brand from competitors, and align with what the company can and will do over time. Accordingly, enterprises should build the personality and value proposition of their products, improve them, and foster emotional engagement.

Brand building for companies has gone through three stages. The first stage is the marketing strategy of universality and mass appeal. This strategy suits a broad market environment, especially among price-sensitive consumer groups. By providing cost-effective products, companies can attract a wider range of customers.

The second stage is refined and differentiated marketing. By accurately targeting core audiences, companies can focus their resources on more specific marketing campaigns, which in turn increases their market competitiveness. This approach not only enhances consumer loyalty but also establishes a unique brand identity, helping the company avoid homogeneous competition.

The third stage emphasizes cultural resonance and the emotional experience consumers derive from products and services. By leveraging cultural resonance, a brand can establish deep emotional connections with customers and attract those seeking a personalized experience through cultural uniqueness. In the long term, this improves the brand's lasting value and strengthens consumer loyalty. Storytelling is an effective way to build and strengthen emotional connections (Herskovitz, S., & Crystal, M., 2010). Whether dealing with a product or company brand, storytelling is crucial for brand success. Storytelling touches our hearts and bonds us together through emotional connection, creating lasting relationships with a brand image that people can relate to.

As brand image building evolves from a rough approach to a more refined process, storytelling has increasingly played a vital role. According to research, storytelling fosters genuine communication and emotional connection with target customers, thereby strengthening the corpo-

rate brand. Brand marketers and advertising professionals use storytelling as a powerful tool (Rose, 2011) to break through the clutter and noise and add meaningful value to gain attention. In the digital age, when people are bombarded with information and noise is the norm, storytelling helps a brand stay in consumers' minds. Customers, through brand experience, brand engagement, and brand costs, find meaning in the brand. Additionally, brands need to clearly define their identity so they can convey the right information to target consumers. As technology advances and new media platforms evolve, we are likely to witness a revolutionary shift in how brands connect with customers through memorable stories at the intersection of science, art, and the humanities.

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