

Growing Importance of Mascot & their Impact on Brand Awareness – A Study of Young Adults in Bhubaneswar City

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Abstract

The paper explores theoretically and empirically the brand and the mascot concept and their contribution towards brand.

Purpose: the purpose of this research is to examine the impact of brand mascot on brand awareness and also the persuasive power of these characters in enhancing brand preference.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper reports the results of a survey. A research methodology has been structured so as to carry out the research in an effective manner. This is achieved by adopting the qualitative research method of in-depth interviews and through questionnaires with the young adults (students of undergraduate technical college) in the city of Bhubaneswar who have explained the way brand mascot have been interpreted by them for different brands and used in different marketing communication program.

Findings: This study has disclosed impressive insights into the topic which examines the influence of these fictional characters on various aspects of consumer brand relations.

KEY WORDS: Brand Mascot, Brand recognition, Brand recall

1. INTRODUCTION:

We are living in a marketing world, any where we go, any corner we pass, in any traffic we stand or wait for & finally any discussion we have, brand is more or less definitely be a part of it. A brand is nothing but simply can be defined as an entity (product, service, place, person, technology, organization) that is offered by a marketer. Brand as an important asset of an organization deserves care, attention & thought of marketers. Generally, companies build a brand through their products, packaging, logos, and advertisements. A strong brand communicates to consumers an image that, hopefully, builds trust and loyalty. There are four essential steps in developing a strong, unique brand: 1) dare to be different, 2) determine your own fame, 3) make an emotional connection, and 4) internalize the brand (Berry, 2000). Developing an emotional connection with consumers is, essentially, developing a relationship with them. In the present scenario of cut throat competition marketers try to go beyond pure rationality and ignite a feeling of closeness, affection and trust by establishing a different brand image all together. Developing a corporate mascot is a great way to develop a positive brand image, which will drive positive brand connotations and emotional attachment with consumers. The mascot must still incorporate all four steps in creating a strong brand.

2. ABOUT MASCOT: Creating a brand character or mascot is a great way to build a corporate identity and to generate attention

from the public. A mascot can give limitless opportunities to drive consumer interest and recognition (Kristopher, 2012). The design and implementation of the mascot is imperative to its success. “To be visually effective, the vehicles or mascots must be properly designed and satisfying both the viewer’s preferences and perceptions” (Lin, Lin & Ko, 1999). A mascot is a fictional celebrity (person, animal or cartoon) which is believed to bring luck. In branding mascots are not used for luck but for their associations. A mascot can be an illustration of either a real or an imaginary figure, it represent the brand and adds life of it. It is something between the brand’s logo and a celebrity brand endorser (Manjusa, Segar, 2013). Like brand logos, design, punch line, brand mascot is a key component of brand. It gives visual cues to the brand’s consumers. They are characteristic figures which can build an identity and help to create and express brand’s personality. They also help target market to identify, remember and understand the brand.

2.1. RATIONALE BEHIND SELECTING MASCOT AS A MARKETING ICON:

It is an apparent question that, why brand mascots when brand names and logos can suffice? Brand mascots give visual cues to brand’s consumers. They are characteristic figures which can build an identity and help to create and express brand’s personality. They also help the target market to identify, remember and understand the brand. “Brand characters are created to promote a brand by establishing brand identity and favourable brand association...they also help brands come alive with human qualities of emotion, thought and personality” (Weszka, 2011). Brand mascots present a friendly image. They are fun to watch and immediately capture a place in consumer’s mind which can make a positive connection with your customers. They connect outstandingly with different age group by understanding their brand related psychology & expectations. Particularly children are fascinated towards these animated but life-like creatures, which influence their brand & product acceptance. Brand mascots can also help to illustrate the benefits of the brand in brand marketing communication messages. To demonstrate the value added services Vodafone created a special world of Zoo Zoos, where all the product stories get told. The world of Zoo zoos is real yet different, strange yet simple, warm and lovable. All the specific product stories and services get told in this world of Zoo zoos, making the messages more charming & reflecting the brand to be more qualitative. (Rajiv Rao, creative executive director, O&M).

3. BRAND AWARENESS:

Brand awareness refers to the strength of a brand’s presence in the consumer’s mind (Aaker, 1996). Brand awareness is related

to the strength of the brand node or trace in memory, as reflected by consumer's ability to identify the brand under different condition. (Keller, 2006). Brand awareness is the first and most important step in creating brand equity, though not always a sufficient condition in building brand equity. So marketers always start their brand strategy by creating brand awareness through different communication tools like advertisement, personal selling, publicity, direct marketing etc. Brand awareness can provides a host of competitive advantages for the marketer. These include the following (Aaker, 1996):

1. Brand awareness render the brand with a sense of familiarity
2. Name awareness can be a sign of presence, commitment and substance
3. The salience of a brand will decide if it is recalled at a time in the purchasing process.
4. Brand awareness is an asset that can be inordinately durable and thus sustainable. It may be extremely difficult to dislodge a brand that had achieved a dominant awareness level (Aaker, 1996).

3.1. KELLER MODEL OF BRAND AWARENESS:

Brand awareness consists of brand recognition & brand recall performance:

Brand recognition relates to consumer's ability to confirm prior exposure to the brand when given the brand as a cue (Keller,2006). In other words it requires that consumers can correctly discriminate the brand as having previously seen or heard.

Brand recall relates to consumer's ability to retrieve the brand from memory when given the product category, the needs fulfilled by the category, or a purchase or usage situation as a cue. In other words it requires that consumers correctly generate the brand from memory given a relevant cue.

4. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

With the rise of industrialisation, and the increasing distance – both geographic and psychological – between marketers and consumers, brand mascots reflect a deeply rooted human tendency to understand the marketing & advertising world. Mascots also played a critical role in the humanisation of modern corporations & developing an emotional bonding between the brand & people.

According to Lebell & Cooke, 2008, to create relationships between customer & brand, marketers never rely on mere assertion of their products' benefits; rather, they use elaborate tactics intended to engage consumers' emotions. One such tactic, used for more than a century now, has been the creation and integration in marketing strategies of branded spokes characters that are designed to instil trust and enliven a brand's personality and claims. **Beirão Lencastre, et.al.** explores theoretically and empirically the brand and the mascot concept and its impact on children. As brand mascots represent a special type of signals, particularly important in the children segment, as they allow children to establish an emotional bond with the brand, and simultaneously, they enhance its memorisation. **Kristopher Caufield (2012)** proposes that to develop a strong brand it is necessary for companies to challenge the norm and expand their horizons. The goal should be to present a differentiated customer experience by differentiating the brand. By daring to be different,

companies are looking to give consumers an experience that cannot be duplicated by their competitors. Developing a corporate mascot is a great way to develop a positive brand image, which will drive positive brand connotations with consumers and must still incorporate all possible endeavour in creating a strong brand.

Manjusha & Segar (2013), explained that fictional celebrities popularly known as the company mascots can be an illustration of either a real or an imaginary figure, it represent the brand and adds life of it. It is something between the brand's logo and a celebrity brand endorser. Mascots are "the gift that keeps on giving." They never get in trouble with the law. They don't up their fees. You can use them for a long, long time." (Carol Phillips)

5. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM:

The study is conducted because it is necessary for the marketer to understand the relevance of brand mascot in creating brand awareness & influencing consumer purchase decision. It is a daunting task for advertisers, to develop an imaginary character that can create an emotional link with the consumer and are also an "ideal fit" for the products. Analysing many factors and largely on the type of product to be endorsed, marketers choose the mascot.

6. Purpose of the study:

1. To understand and analyse the popularity of mascot as an advertising & marketing talent in selected sample
2. To understand the importance of mascot in recollecting and recognising a brand
3. To analyse the contribution of mascot in consumer purchase decision

METHODOLOGY

In this study a structured questionnaire is designed and administered to elicit responses hence; the proposed study is both analytical and descriptive in nature. The primary data is collected through the structured questionnaire. The secondary data is collected from published manuals, magazines, journals of repute, published reports, research papers, and related web sites. An independent sample t-test is used to determine the significance of mascot in creating brand awareness & developing brand preference.

The following two hypotheses are formulated for testing purposes for the study of the influence of mascot in creating brand awareness & reinforcing brand preference

- H1: Brand mascot has a significant direct influence on brand awareness.
- H2: Brand Mascot has a significant direct influence on brand preference

SAMPLING SIZE

Out of the total population, 150 samples are drawn, out of which 120 samples are found to be useful and the rest of the samples are not complete, hence they are not considered for the study and analysis.

QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

The primary data are collected through questionnaire. The first part of the questionnaire comprises of demographic factors with

optional questions, the second part includes statements relating to the importance of mascot in crafting brand recall & recognition. The third part is related to the impact of brand mascot in consumer brand preference and also the relative importance of mascot in comparison to celebrity and other brand elements.

RESULT ANALYSIS:

A total of 120 respondents were participated in the study. They were selected on the basis of convenience of their response and their availability to the researcher in an undergraduate technical college in the city of Bhubaneswar. The average age is 19.25. Participation in the survey was open to all students regardless of their interest and familiarity with the mascot. Characteristics of the participant's are given in the table – 1. Keeping the objective of this paper in mind the aim was to check the impact of mascot on creating brand awareness and developing brand preference for different brands using variety of fictional character (mascot) for their promotion. Result of testing the objectives through the above mentioned hypothesis (H1 & H2) suggest that the influence of mascot on brand awareness and brand preference are not statistically significant .As shown in table -2 the t-test suggest that there is no significant impact of mascot on brand Analysis at 5% level of significance. Analysis of testing H1 suggest that majority of mascots (taken in this study) didn't demonstrate any impact either on brand recall or on brand recognition. Similarly result analysis of testing H2 also reveals that mascot did not show any impact on brand preference. However the present study does suggest that mascot has a very insignificant role in creating brand awareness as well as brand preference

personifying a brand and also develop a good image for the brand to change the customer perception in the long run.

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CHARACTERISTICS	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	%
GENDER		
Male	76	63.33%
Female	44	36.66%
FAMILIARITY WITH MASCOT		
Strong	35	29.16%
Moderate	62	51.66%
Low	23	19.16%

Table-1 characteristics of the study participants

HYPOTHESIS	CONSTRUCT	t
H1: Brand mascot has a significant direct influence on brand awareness.	Brand recall	6.492
	Brand recognition	5.461
H2: Brand Mascot has a significant direct influence on brand preference	Brand exposure	6.219
	Brand preference	6.894

Table-2, Summary assessment of research hypothesis

CONCLUSION:

From the survey results and data analysis and interpretation, it is clear that mascot doesn't influence consumer's level of awareness and preference for a brand. As a promotional technique it is found to be quite useful. Developing a mascot or brand character can be an effective tool in building good advertisement and rapport with consumers. Mascots find their place in shorthand of popular culture and very useful in