

Corporate Branding: Utilising Colour and language on the Internet

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Abstract:

In this 21st century, the concept of corporate branding holds much significance to organisations engaged in business-to-business marketing. As organisations face multiple challenges and increasing expectations from their stakeholders, there is a growing realisation that a strong corporate brand requires contributions from both the organisation and its stakeholders for it to be sustainable. This paper facilitates a comprehensive review and understanding of the implications of corporate branding for brand management in a competitive market. Moreover, the paper integrates the abilities of both colour and language to develop a unique branding concept that adopts a three-step process model (AER) – attraction, engagement, retention that serves as a guide to organisations on how to strategically communicate their brand in a way that stakeholders are willing to identify with.

Keywords:

Brand management, Brand strategy

Introduction

There has been much discussion over the significance of corporate branding for organisations engaged in business-to-business marketing. An interconnected and integrated world brings multiple challenges and

complexities to organisations seeking a competitive advantage. As such, organisations recognise the need to build a sustainable corporate brand in order to meet these challenges.

Today the concept of an organisation is such that it is no longer a static entity but rather a dynamic social co-construction negotiated by all its stakeholders.¹⁻² Jones³ argues that organisations' need to establish their corporate brand to meet the increasing expectations of their stakeholders in order to maintain corporate legitimacy. As such, Taylor and Van Emery⁴ therefore argue that the corporate brand should not be considered a construct separate to communication but rather a result of communicative processes between all stakeholders.

The Corporate brand

Argenti and Druckenmiller⁵ argue that an organisation engages in corporate branding when it markets the organisation as a brand. However, while the original concept of the 'brand' can be traced back to the marketing approach adopted when selling a product, the corporate brand aims to differentiate the organisation from its competitors and has an added dimension of interacting with multiple stakeholders.⁶

In addition, unlike product branding which is focused solely on marketing the product, corporate branding is a

process that involves building stakeholders' emotional affinity with the brand,⁷ and in this way the organisation is able to create value for both its stakeholders and other businesses. Moreover, the corporate brand has the potential for greater strategic impact than product brands for it is based on a more credible brand identity, namely, the identity of who the organisation really is and what it is really about.⁸

The corporate brand has several implications for brand management at the organisational level.⁹ For example, a corporate brand shapes the image its stakeholders and other businesses have of the organisation and helps stakeholders identify with the brand. In other words, the corporate brand allows the organisation to relate to all its multiple stakeholders through inculcating a relationship between stakeholder and brand.¹⁰

The corporate brand and its stakeholders

Stakeholders are “groups without whose support the organisation would cease to exist”.¹¹ Stakeholders need to be considered when organisations make strategic decisions. In addition, as stakeholders experience and relate to the corporate brand, they evaluate and draw informed conclusions about the corporate brand.¹² In essence, the profitability of the organisation is dependent upon the organisation's willingness and ability to recognise all its stakeholders as important contributors to the corporate brand.¹³

In this paper, consumers are not included as stakeholders. This is because this paper focuses on corporate branding for organisations engaged in business-to-business

marketing. Moreover this paper finds that product branding and its target audience is a construct separate to corporate branding. Therefore, stakeholders are defined as other businesses, as well as the organisation's internal employees, who interact with the organisation.

Stakeholders are presented the corporate brand through their interaction with the organisation's internal employees.¹⁴ As such, Harris and de Chernatony¹⁵ argue that the organisation's employees are central to the process of building a brand. They explain that employee behaviour can either reinforce the values that are communicated by the organisation or undermine the credibility of the brand. The organisation's core values influence the consistency and credibility in the building of the corporate brand.¹⁶

Gylling and Lindberg-Repo¹⁷ explain that because corporate brand communication has shifted from ‘what the brand has to offer’ to ‘the brand is who you are’, the organisation should ensure that its employees’ live the organisation's core values and thus its brand. Stuart¹⁸ argues that it is essential for all employees of the organisation to speak the same language of the corporate brand in order to live the organisation's brand. In other words, the employees must present the “corporate story” especially through the way they interact with stakeholders and other businesses.¹⁹

As the organisation's internal employees interact with stakeholders, the more consistent the stakeholders' brand experience is with the stated brand promise, the higher the competitive advantage the organisation has.²⁰ Therefore as part of any

organisation's branding strategy, while the corporate brand should be representative of the organisation's values and culture, more importantly, organisations' should engage in internal branding as part of their branding strategy.

Significance of the corporate brand in the 21st century

The corporate brand reflects the organisation's strategy^{21,12} and how the brand is communicated shapes the organisation's reputation. Brands, according to Keller and Lehmann²² are one of the most valuable assets that organisations have. A brand "creates value and influence".²³ Furthermore, the organisation's brand has the ability to "motivate members by imparting value"²⁴ if the organisation is able to establish a sustainable corporate brand.

The concept of integrating sustainability in branding has taken on increased importance especially in today's context. Porter and Kramer²⁵ argue that sustainability is "an inescapable priority for business leaders in every country." In addition, a report published by World Business Council for Sustainable Development²⁶ explained that a brand can increase its value by integrating sustainability into its current organisational practices.

In an increasingly competitive commercial environment, the corporate brand becomes a valuable resource in helping organisations differentiate themselves from their competitors.²⁷ Moreover, as stakeholders seek an emotional affinity with the brand, they often look to brand differentiation that is meaningful based on its sustainable practices.²⁸

This paper aims to show why developing an effective branding strategy on the Internet is crucial to establishing a sustainable corporate brand. This paper proposes that organisations adopt a three-step process model (AER) of developing their brand communication strategies through the dimensions of attraction, engagement and retention. Moreover, relatively little research has focused on exploring how colour and language together, impact organisational branding strategy on the Internet. This paper develops a branding concept utilising both colour and language that serves as a guide to organisations on how to strategically design and communicate their brand values in a way that stakeholders are able and willing to identify with.

Corporate branding on the Internet

The Internet has effectively integrated all forms of communication technologies. Ross et al.²⁹ argues that similar to the function of both the telephone and television, the Internet provides an avenue for individuals to conduct intimate conversations with friends and family, and has the ability to efficiently convey information to large groups of audiences, respectively. As such, the Internet has resulted in a fundamental shift as to how people communicate.

Today organisations recognise the capability of the Internet as a platform to communicate, how their brand operates as a collective entity as well as their values. More often than not, stakeholders are seeking a brand that shares the same values as them. Bartels et al.³⁰ explains that a setting that allows for open communication such as the Internet will lead to greater willingness to identify with the brand.

Therefore, it is beneficial for organisations to develop a branding strategy on the Internet.

According to the Global Internet User Survey³¹, more than 98% of Internet users indicated that they view the Internet as essential when accessing knowledge and education and “nearly 75% of users strongly agreed that access to the Internet allows them to seek any information that interests them”. Therefore, developing an effective branding strategy on the Internet is crucial to establishing an organisation’s brand.

Insert Table 1 – Internet User Statistics, here

The Internet today has more than 3 billion consumers³² (see Table 1). Over the last ten years 2005-2015, there has been an increase of about 2150 million consumers. This works out to be a more than 200% increase in consumers’ online presence since 2005, making it rather imperative for organisations to target this demographic.

Attraction

When developing a branding strategy, organisations need to consider how the individual mentally represents the world, whether he or she thinks ‘in pictures’ or ‘in words’³³. This is because it is important to consider how the brand is communicated, for the brand message can be positioned to either be visual or more informative in nature to meet the needs of the organisation’s stakeholders.

This paper proposes that organisations utilise colour as a strategy when building a brand that is attractive and sustainable. Colour affects individuals

because of certain innate unlearned associations. This is because as we grow up, we learn to associate various colours with our environment. Colours attract our attention, especially those that are vibrant and distinct. Colours suggest different values, remind us of the things we see and identify us with our culture. At times, we use colour as a heuristic when making decisions³⁴. In other words through colour, a brand can establish an effective visual presence that stakeholders are attracted to and can identify with.

The seven-second-colour theory as explained by Chang and Lin³⁵ states that as individuals, we have the ability to recognise and memorise the colour and shape of any brand within seven seconds. In addition, Gatewood, Gowan and Lautenschlager³⁶ found that with stimuli that was initially viewed as neutral or positive, repeated exposure to an object resulted in an increased in the positive evaluation of the object. This effect occurred even when subjects were not instructed to evaluate the objects to which they were exposed.

A major point of interest is that these findings indicate that mere exposure to information is central to an individual’s perception of image.³⁷ In essence, these two studies showed the importance of utilising colour effectively to establish favourable stakeholder perception towards the brand during the crucial first seven seconds or when the individual first encounters the brand.

Engagement

Brand communication campaigns should utilise stakeholder involvement. Stakeholders are more likely to be engaged with the brand when they

perceive a connection between the brand message and their self-concept.³⁸ Moreover, stakeholders are more likely to remember the brand that engaged them the most.³⁹ Volkswagen, through their advertisement helped individuals identify their values with the corporate brand. Volkswagen depicted a black sheep amongst other sheep in a flock to portray how an owner of a VW Golf should be an independent and self assured person just like the personified characteristics of the car. The personality of a black sheep in Italy is the symbol of independence and willingness to go one's own way⁴⁰. Therefore when developing a branding strategy, organisations should inspire stakeholder identification with the values espoused by the brand.

Another way to engage stakeholders is through the establishment of brand communities. Brand communities perform important functions on behalf of the brand such as the sharing of brand values and perpetuating the culture of the corporate brand.⁴¹ In addition, the low cost of interaction with stakeholders and other businesses in cyberspace⁴² allows organisations to establish their brand presence through the setting up of niche brand communities (eg. Muniz and O'Guinn⁴³). These niche brand communities in turn create opportunities for the organisation's stakeholders to share their brand related feelings and experiences with others.⁴⁴ Therefore, it is imperative that organisation provides the necessary support to sustain these communities.

Chang and Lin⁴⁵ in their study selected several international brand logos among the top 100 brands from 'Interbrand' that included Coca-Cola (Red in colour), Starbucks (Green in colour), IBM (Blue in colour) and

Burberry (Black in colour). Participants were then asked, "What messages do brand colours convey from the corporate perspective?" Interestingly participants were able to identify the brand's identity and personality through its colour traits³⁴.

Participants in Chang and Lin⁴⁶ research considered the red of Coca-Cola to represent excitement and passion, while blue conveyed stability and reliability of IBM's products. Also, Fraser and Banks⁴⁷ found that the colour blue connotes intelligence, communication and trust. Connelly et al.⁴⁸ noted that brands that used the colour green were perceived to be more ethical in their organisational practices. Some participants even noted that that red curve of the letter C of Coca-Cola represented energy. Perhaps it is also worth considering how a purely black and white brand design can be useful as a differentiation tool from other brands, especially in such a competitive market.

Language too, matters in branding. For example, Nike's advertisement slogan "Just Do It" comes across as compelling us to do something, perhaps to buy their latest designer sports shoes or celebrity endorsed exercise attire. Why slogans such as this are important for corporate branding is because besides evoking emotions and creating a positive association with us, Nike, through their slogan attempts to create a meaning that resonates with the values of their stakeholders. Furthermore in the process of doing so, Nike gets their stakeholders involved in communicating their slogan and therefore their brand.

Eastman⁴⁹ explained that he chose the name Kodak for his brand because the “K” had an “incisive sound” and as a result it could not be easily confused with other words or brand names. Therefore it is important for organisations to choose words that are unique to communicate the brand. Moreover, it is important to ensure that the words chosen are part of everyday lexicon so that the corporate brand is understandable and relatable.

Language can sometimes be utilised as a directive in brand communication campaigns. Alka-Seltzer in the early 1960s, marketed their discomfort and pain relief tablet with the slogan “Plop, plop, fizz, fizz. Oh, what a relief it is”. What makes this slogan effective for corporate branding is that contained within its slogan is model behaviour to follow. Upon further analysis, we see how the individual is encouraged to use twice as much of the product. To their stakeholders, Alka-Seltzer presents itself as a corporate brand that is approachable and one they can seek out for assistance.

Language conveys brand attributes and has the ability to shape stakeholder perceptions and attitudes towards the brand. Using an example closer to home, SpeedPost is a courier service in Singapore. In addition, their services include international deliveries. “SpeedPost” conveys the impression that you will be engaging an efficient courier service.

Therefore as we have seen, language matters in branding. Every word used in crafting the brand communication campaign plays a role in shaping stakeholders impression of the corporate brand. This is because language used in such communication campaigns tends to be associated with

the image of the brand. Therefore when developing a branding strategy, organisations should invest the effort to create experiences that engages their stakeholders and shapes their attitudes towards the corporate brand.

Retention

Organisations should use metaphors when developing a strategic corporate brand. Sackmann⁵⁰ defined metaphors as mental pictures that are able to substitute a thousand words. Moreover O’Malley and Tynan⁵¹ argue that the language of branding is becoming more metaphoric in nature. In corporate branding, metaphors can be utilised as a personification metaphor where the “brand is person”⁵², whereby human characteristics are ascribed to a brand⁵³.

Lakoff and Johnson⁵⁴ suggested some examples of metaphors included “She’s weighed down by responsibilities”, “Tomorrow is a big day” and “I see what you mean”. Lakoff and Johnson⁵⁵ suggest a technique for structuring metaphors is to use a TARGET IS SOURCE format. Gibbs⁵⁶ in explaining the mapping of the metaphor “Love is a Journey”, showed how this metaphor is created. The knowledge about journeys is mapped onto knowledge about love and, this correspondence allows us to reason about love using the knowledge we use to reason about journeys⁵⁷.

Applying this metaphor-mapping concept to corporate branding, Microsoft, in their brand communication campaign included the question “Where do you want to go today?” This conveys a sense of potential achievement for both stakeholder and Microsoft when they embark on a metaphorical journey

together. In other words through this metaphorical association of going somewhere, Microsoft conveys their corporate brand as relevant and accomplished. The New York Times described this global branding campaign as a “humanistic approach to demystifying technology”⁵⁸.

Allstate Insurance serves as a good example of utilising both metaphors and colour to convey brand attributes. Allstate with their slogan “You’re in good hands” conveys a sense of support and concern towards stakeholders, which accentuates the positive aspect of the corporate brand. Moreover Allstate has successfully utilised the colour blue in the design of their logo that has the additional positive effect of portraying themselves as competent and efficient⁵⁹.

Therefore as we have seen, metaphors are relatable and relatively easy to interpret. In addition metaphors help stakeholders and other businesses to elaborate on the distinctive features of the organisation’s corporate logo that aids in their processing of brand attributes. Moreover metaphors help stakeholders to draw inferences that they might not have made should the mappings have been explicit⁶⁰. Therefore when developing a sustainable corporate brand, organisations should consider utilising both colour and language to differentiate themselves from their competitors.

Conclusion and management implications for corporate branding

This paper has brought to light the importance of utilising both colour and language as a branding strategy to establish a sustainable corporate brand.

In addition, this paper has showed why developing an effective branding strategy on the Internet is crucial to establishing a sustainable corporate brand. Moreover, this paper presents a unique branding concept that adopts a three-step process model (AER) that serves as a guide to organisations on how to strategically communicate their brand in a way that stakeholders can identify with.

Insert Table 2 – Application of Colour to branding, here

Insert Table 3 – Application of Language to branding, here

Insert Figure 1 – Proposed process model (AER), here

In this 21st century, the concept of corporate branding is of much significance to organisations engaged in business-to-business marketing. The role of the corporate brand has changed. As organisations seek a sustainable competitive advantage, the corporate brand can no longer “just stand there, they must stand for something”⁶¹. The corporate brand must reflect the value system espoused by the organisation. In today’s context, the organisation’s employees are representatives of the corporate brand to the organisation’s stakeholders and other businesses.

This necessitates going beyond employing a short-term strategy simply in pursuit of increased profitability for the organisation. Building a sustainable corporate brand necessitates a long-term commitment from the organisation and its employees, to their stakeholders. The organisation must align its core values with its human resource practices such that their employees will reflect the values and

culture of the organisation that invites stakeholder identification. Moreover for a corporate branding strategy involving colour and language to be effective, the organisation's employees must believe in the brand message being communicated and most importantly, they must live the brand. Therefore it is the hope of this paper that organisations will see the value of making the long-term investment into establishing a strong corporate brand.

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Tables/Figures to Insert:

Table 1 – Internet User Statistics

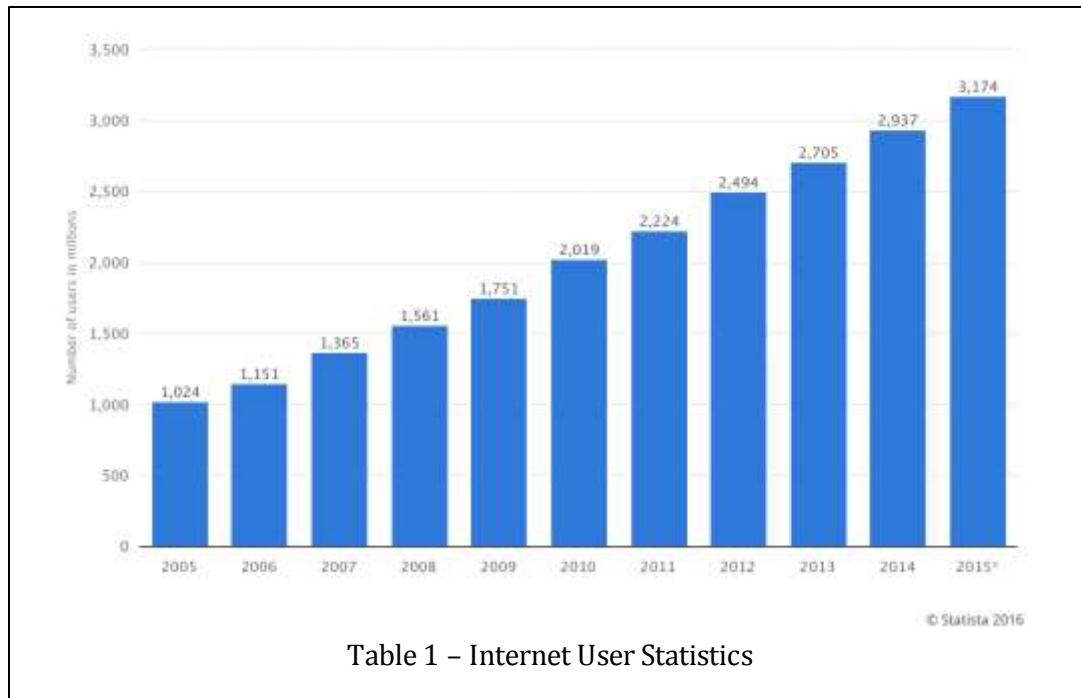


Table 1 – Internet User Statistics

Table 2 – Application of Colour to branding

- To convey your brand as competent and exciting: Try using a darker shade of blue as a base with a dash of red!
 - To highlight your brand as dignified and elegant: Try using a rich purple color as a base with a sliver of silver!
 - To convey your brand as rustic and rugged: Try using earthy brown with shades of green!
 - To convey your brand as sleek and refined: Try using black with gray for understated elegance.
 - To convey your brand as fun loving and passionate: Try using warm orange as a base with a medium blue. Get people thinking and buzzing!
- Table 2 – Application of Colour to branding**

Table 3 – Application of Language to branding

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Use language that compels behavior eg. Nike <i>Just Do It</i> □ Choose words that are incisive and yet contained within everyday lexicon eg. The K-sound of <i>Kodak</i> □ Use language as a directive in brand communication campaigns eg. “Plop plop fizz fizz” □ Use language that conveys brand attributes eg. <i>Speedpost</i> □ Use language to shape perception and attitudes towards the brand □ Use metaphors to shape mental pictures of positive brand attributes <p style="text-align: center;">Table 3 – Application of Language to branding</p>

Figure 1 – Proposed process model (AER)

