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Chapter 12

Building a Strong Brand: Future Strategies and Insights

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ABSTRACT

Developing a strong brand is critical for long-term success in today's competitive business market. This research investigates the key features and strategies involved in developing a successful brand, and how to maintain it to stay ahead. The study underlines the significance of defining brand identity, comprehending the target audience, and developing a consistent brand message. The importance of providing excellent customer experiences, harnessing social media and digital marketing, and cultivating brand advocacy are highlighted as critical in supporting brands. Looking ahead, the study recommends embracing technology and innovation, prioritising data-driven decision-making, and emphasising sustainability and social responsibility. It emphasises the importance of cultivating an innovative and agile culture, fostering strategic partnerships and collaborations.

1. BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

Branding has risen to be a key determinant of product differentiation, competitive advantage, and profitability in modern day businesses. In line with the evolving marketing principles which mainly rely on how brands clearly identify themselves and express their uniqueness, branding has become the backbone of many organisations. It has also emerged as a customers' value creator greatly improving psychological and aesthetic experiences. Lately, branding has gained commendable space in business operations. Previously, production, finance, and procurement relegated marketing, particularly branding

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Building a Strong Brand

to the sidelines. However, the performance of organisations that have embraced branding has elevated the marketing function in many organisations in the 21st century.

As opined by Sammut-Bonnici (2015), a brand is arguably one of any organisation's most valuable assets. Brands give businesses identity, memorability, patronisation, employee sense of identity, and pride by supporting an organisation's marketing, promotional, and advertising efforts (Ilyas et al., 2020). While other business processes are key, branding is pivotal in building trust, increasing market share, and driving up sales. Emerging branding issues have led to its inclusion in all functional areas such as recruitment, procurement, production, finance, and product design. It has been incorporated in the value addition line to reshape how shareholders, employees, customers, and investors think about organisations.

Branding has outgrown its area of influence beyond products and services. It now represents an important stake in individuals, organisations, and even nations. At the core of its responsibilities is its strategic role of creating a distinguished and compelling image that differentiates an organisation from its competitors. Organisations that chose to ignore branding do that at their own peril. In an effort to unravel the importance of branding in the modern business world the chapter unravels branding dynamics by examining its evolution, its importance to modern brands, and its role in business success. The in-depth literature analysis delves further into elements that make up strong brands. The study proffers solutions for modern branding through an extensive discussion on brand development strategy, brand management and protection. The study also discusses future trends in branding to assist practitioners, organisations and customer on how modern branding is going to impact every component of the business ecosystem.

2. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study can be summarised as follows:

- 2.1. The book chapter aimed at assisting practitioners to understand the concept of branding and its evolution.
- 2.2. To evaluate the elements that can be used to assess the strength of brands.
- 2.3. Lastly the chapter infers into the future branding developments in line with and the strategies that marketers may use to promote their brands.

3. METHODOLOGY

The aim of the classical literature review would be to provide a foundation for branding and its futuristic views as an important function of marketing. The chapter identified key themes and gaps in current knowledge and looked at the future of branding from a literature perspective. The first step in the literature study was identifying questions for search queries. These were derived from the chapter objectives. The next step was the identification of literature that was in line with our objectives using Google Scholar as the main search engine supported by others like ResearchGate, LinkedIn among others. Through perusal of abstracts, authors picked on literature they thought was best in line with the study objectives. The literature was then evaluated to check its quality. The literature was then synthesised leading to the identification of themes followed by conclusions. The review of the literature was a rigorous process that provided the foundation for the chapter.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1. Branding Unpacked

Maurya and Mishra (2012) describes branding as the process of coming up with a collection of both tangible and intangible features of a product or service or organisation that distinguishes it from other products or services or organisations. This reflects that branding aims to create a unique product or service that can be different from others. Barros-Arrieta and García-Cali (2021) argue that branding targets both external and internal stakeholders of the organisation. This assertion drives at sense of identity and ownership among the internal stakeholders like management and employees. Any internalised brand is easier to promote externally. This argument identifies the internal stakeholders as brand ambassadors or representatives that should project the correct brand image.

It is Hao, Andy et al., (2021)'s argument that branding is a process of establishing personality for a product or a service or an organisation. This is in line with the proclamation by Troiville et al. (2019) who highlights that branding is fundamentally a development of a reputation to something or someone. This entails giving a face to an organisation with characteristics synonymous with what the organisation or product or service represent. The face given to a product should also be aligned to the expectations, needs and wants of the customers thereby contributing to the greater uptake of a product in the market place. Kotler and Keller (2016) argue that branding is a seller's promise to deliver a specific set of features, benefits, and services consistent with buyer needs and expectations. The above argument indicates that branding has two ends to it, that is, the consumer perspective and the producer perspective. These two perspectives should converge to ensure customer acceptance and loyalty.

Branding is entailing the development and maintenance of sets of product values and attributes which are appealing to customers, coherent, distinctive, appropriate and protectable. A corporation or an organisation will possess the rights to the brand name and employ it as a means of distinguishing their product or service from others. The way it is executed is the branding process, whereby the values of a brand are attached. It is also important for practitioners to know that brand is not about creating an identifier or label. Maintaining a brand can initially be viewed as a seed, it must be designed, positioned, and driven to grow. Establishing a brand means creating a clear manifestation of a product's values, attributes, benefits and self-image. Practitioners should also match the image they create about a product and its performance for sustainability.

4.2. How Has Branding Evolved?

The history of branding can be traced back to the 1500s when the initial concepts of branding were born. The original branding ideas have been pivotal in preceding brands being branding benchmarks. Experimentation and innovation on these brands have led to new brands being continuously produced throughout generations to the current brands. To predict the future of branding, knowing the origin of branding is key for it gives the direction the concept is taking. The birth of the current brands has rich history that is pivotal in further developing future brands. It is also interesting that throughout the centuries, the main objective of the brands was to capture customers and converting them into brand loyalists. The next section discusses the historical progression of branding as shown in the table 1.

Building a Strong Brand*Table 1. Branding historical progression*

Era	Branding
1500s	The beginnings of branding
1750s – 1870s	The Industrial revolution
1870s – 1920s	The era of invention
1920s – 1950s	Brands on the air
1950s – 1960s	The birth of modern branding
1960s – 1990s	Growth of branding
2000s – current	Beyond basic branding

Source: Cantor (2020)

4.2.1. 1500s - The Advent of Branding

The history of branding includes the use of marking techniques by farmers in the 1500s to differentiate their cattle. Cantor (2020) highlights that farmers introduced different marks on their cattle so that they could be easily identified as they used communal grazing and treatment facilities. Initially, farmers used a piece of burning wood to engrave their identity on their cattle. Moore and Reid (2008) allude that the word brand originates from Scandinavian word “brandr” means “to burn”. The engraving through burning was the branding on the cattle. Innovation later came with the substitution of wood with hot iron referred to as a torch that was used to engrave marks through burning the cattle skin. Bastos and Levy (2012) also indicate that during the same period craftsmen also became branding experts through imprinting symbols onto their goods to signify their origins. According to Holland (2017) pottery makers from China, India, Greece, Rome, and Mesopotamia (now Iraq) used different engravings to identify the person who made ceramic goods, what types of materials were used and where the goods were produced. Over time, purchasers realised that the brand provided information about origin as well as about ownership, and could serve as a guide to quality. It is also very interesting to note that from its inception, branding was meant to show identity and ownership and it was distinct, simple, and identifiable. Distinctiveness, simplicity, and identifiability were the three key pillars of branding and are still applicable in modern business.

4.2.2. 1750s – 1870s: The Industrial Revolution Branding Era

The period 1750s to 1870 was a highlight period in manufacturing processes with Europe and the United States of America leading the industrial processes agenda. The period 1750 to 1870 was characterised by the mass production of goods through enhanced technology and efficiency in manufacturing systems (Cantor, Aviva, 2020). With increasing players in the production industry companies were supposed to differentiate their products. Branding presented a unique way of distinguishing products and tracing their origin. This period saw the rise of trademarks as a major tool to identify products, protecting identity and ensuring that other companies could not copy other organisations products. Bellido (2015) indicates that trademarks consist of words, phrases, symbols, designs, and colours that are legally registered or established to represent a company or a product. Katrandjiev (2023) argues that registered trademarks began in the 1870s and the United States of America passed its first trade mark act in 1881 and this

Building a Strong Brand

marked the first time when branding was used as a trademark. The promulgation of the act meant that companies could claim brand ownership and stop competitors from copying their products. This was branding milestone period as legality of brands became a reality. Organisations now had a right to their brands and the law did not protect the brands. In line with differentiation. This also made it possible for organisations to innovate and produce different products with unique characteristics and features. Unique and differentiated products were also good in ensuring that different customer tastes were met.

4.2.3. 1870s to 1920s: The Invention Era

New technology was an epitome of the 20th century with many inventions and strong brands making entry to the different economies around the world (Cantor, 2020). Iconic brands such as Coca cola, Colgate, and Ford Motor Company came into existence and these brands became pace setters. Holland (2017) has it that the brands became iconic because they were pioneers and first of their kind and this enabled them to be powerful brands in the history of branding. Holland (2017) further highlights that during the invention era consumers were used to buying local products, however generic products did not have a similar appeal. Factories copied winemakers marketing concepts of branding transportation barrels and came up with logos and branded packaging and transportation wagons. During this period the print media in the form of newspapers and magazines were very key in propping up the brands. In this era the media made use of words, colours, logos and illustrations that differentiated brands. Advertisements in the print media were informational in nature offering descriptions on product usage and benefits.

4.2.4. 1920s – 1950s: Brands in the Air

The brands in the air period represented an era of massive marketing coupled with the creation of radio stations. In line with production, manufacturers were now more efficient and with a high level of appreciation on branding. In the 1920s radios took product marketing by storm and became an ultimate form of profiling and marketing brands (Taylor, 2012). The advertising remained informational with jingles, catch phrases and targeted messaging at the centre stage of radio advertisements. Cantor (2020) also indicates that during this period television was also launched as another platform for brands to showcase their brands. The introduction of television was very beneficial as advertisers could now use visuals, sound, words, and music to sell their brands (Wallace, 2019). The aspect of visualisation was pivotal in conveying the emotional side of brands which brought the brands closer to the people. Due to the hype created by the modernisation of the air waves, it was very prestigious to be associated with brands that were on air and this resulted in the elevation of these brands. The brand value of the brands that were advertising on television and radio tremendously went up. The brands in the air era represent an era of high brand publicity with the brands being able to connect with many customers. Due to the hype every company was advertising on the air, branding became essential of differentiation and ownership, showing brand supremacy. While in this era, the brands continued to be supported by print media as a reinforcement and as alternative way to reach those who were in areas where television and radio could not be transmitted.

Building a Strong Brand**4.2.5. 1950s – 1960s: The Birth of Modern Branding**

The modern branding era was a post-world war 2 transformative period that was characterised by the increase of the middle class and urbanisation. According to Wallace (2019), the growth of the middle class and urbanisation meant more exposure to consumers through television and radio. Moir et al. (2017) notes that other forms of display advertisement to complement the existing marketing mediums. Billboards, subway signs, loud architecture, product packaging, more television commercials became prominent (Åström Rudberg & Kuorelahti, 2021). This age was also enhanced by the creation of the colour television. This enhanced the quality of advertisements and visual aspects of the advertisements, and the advertisements became more real. During this time, many products that came into existence which were very similar. The coming in of generic products meant products were supposed to differentiate themselves to outcompete each other. In an effort to come up with differentiated products, brand managers had to research more about their target audience. Knowing target enabled the marketers to create appropriate advertisements that created emotional connection between the customer and the products.

4.2.6. 1960s – 1990s: Branding Grows Up

Due to abundant information on different brands, the consumers became spoilt of choice living the challenge in the hands of brands to differentiate themselves. De Veirman et al. (2019) indicated that the branding growth period encountered dynamic and ever-changing consumers and brands had to keep pace by staying relevant and continuously change to cater for changing tastes and an ever-growing field (Bastos & Levy, 2012). Another aspect that increased competition between brands was the production of more generic products and substitutes. The production capacity and the quality of the products improved with many products offering same features. The importance of branding became the major source of competition among industry players. Branding transformed to include employees as internal stakeholders. Branded corporate wear, stationery and consumables complemented other forms of branding to enable the brands to stamp their authority. According to Belanche et al. (2021) influencer marketing and affiliate marketing also saw celebrities, designers, artists using their influence to attract consumers towards brands. Higher quality, better-branded products created a more enticing retail experience, and by demanding better branding, retailers boosted their own brand reputation while pushing companies to create and innovate.

4.2.7. 2000s – Current: Beyond Basic Branding

In effort to continue showing their premier positions organisations have increased their innovativeness and the speed at which they are adapting to the changing needs of customers. In the current scenario television, radio, print and display media have remained pillars of product branding. While the traditional mediums have remained as anchors, social media has revolutionised branding with its power of achieving high reach (Ortiz-Ospina, 2020). Social media is also highly targeted and customizable to specific targets. Supporting this social media is the coming in of smart phones and the increased availability of internet. Steenkamp, (2020) posits that the internet has made it possible for brands to reach the whole world and this has forced brands to redefine themselves and make themselves relevant in the different parts of the globe. Branding has also been used to identify ownership and source of the brands as this has a bearing on how the brands are perceived in the target markets. The internet Zhuravskaya et al. (2020)

Building a Strong Brand

allude that digital marketing coupled data analytics has enabled data driven decisions that have greatly improved branding and customer targeting processes. Branding is now based on a person-to-person basis and the use of digital data collection instrument has enabled companies to design specific data that they use in segmenting their markets, At the core of branding is social media marketing, email marketing, display marketing, analytics, search engine optimisation, search engine marketing and content marketing. Brands surviving have come up with innovative ways of accessing customers for example food outlets have introduced drive thrus and food delivery service as a way of being super brands with unique offerings. Innovative brands have introduced customer engagement through mobile apps, loyalty programs, well-crafted retail experience, corporate colours and identifiable logos and emblems.

4.3. What Makes Strong Brands?

The agenda to establish what makes brand has been researched by many scholars like (Xi et al., 2022; Chaves, 2017; Tran & Nguyen, 2022; Lindeberg et al., 2012). The studies indicated that the strength of a brand is determined by its experience, identity, image, equity, and positioning. The next section goes further elucidate on the strength determinants.

4.3.1. Brand Experience

Brand experience is the resultant feeling that occurs to a customer when they consume products or services or when the consumer comes into contact with an organisation (Tran & Nguyen, 2022). The experience can be negative or positive and the action that consumer takes is dependent on the experience. In line with branding organisation always thrive for a positive experience to drive customer satisfaction and loyalty. J.J. Brakus et al., 2009 and Schmitt, 1999 in Lemon & Verhoef (2016) view experience as a set of sensations, feelings, responses, cognitive, and behavioural reactions from consumers in response to any interactions with a brand. Gómez-Suárez & Veloso (2020) indicate that the stimulus comes in the form of the brand identity, packaging, and communication and/or the environment in which the brand is marketed. It then follows that organisations are always trying to reduce the negative experience hence they should make sure the image portrayed meets the expected experience. Brand experience has the capacity to build or destroy brands. Organisations should target a memorable and exquisite experience to outdo their competitors. Enterprises should embrace customer journey mapping and identify touch points and interactions with customers and craft strategies that will enable them to have an emotional connection with the customers. It is paramount to note that brand experience can be a source of competitive advantage for products services and enterprises. Organisations should take advantage of brand experience to increase loyalty, satisfaction, and patronage.

4.3.2. Brand Identity

Chaves (2017) argues that brand identity is critical in differentiating any products or service from its competitors, Identity builds awareness, value and strength for any organisation and has a direct relationship with awareness, recognition and loyalty. A strong brand should have a clear and valuable identity that commands following from customers, and this will positively impact on the profitability of the enterprise. Brand identity is a long term psychological connection between the customer and the brand that reflects how the brand should be perceived by the customers (Xi et al., 2022). The assertion indicates

Building a Strong Brand

that brand identity results in long term affinity to the brand and organisations should always establish supreme and distinct brands. Mao et al. (2020) posit that brand identity is a collection of observable elements of a brand, such as colour, design, and logo that identify and distinguish the brand in consumers' minds. On the contrary Iglesias et al. (2020) argue that identity is also created from non-visible aspects like brand personality and values. Consistent marketing and messaging lead to consistent brand identity and, therefore, consistent sales (Ianenko et al., 2020). Organisation should have clear identity they want to be in the minds of their customer. This will enable the customers to have the mindshare and heart share thereby enhancing loyalty to brands.

4.3.3. Brand Image

Brand image is one of the most important brand reflections that the customer gets when he interacts with the brand (Chaves, 2017). This implies that whenever an individual interacts with a brand the image of the brand is what comes into the mind of the customer. The brand image accounts for the greater part of the mindshare in the customer. Mao et al. (2020) acknowledges that consumer attitudes towards a brand are highly influenced by the brand image. It is against this assertion that brands should always aim to create an image that identifies with the customers. According to Ahmed & Alawad (2018) brand image is the customer's opinion of your brand based on their interactions and it can evolve over time and doesn't necessarily involve a customer making a purchase or using your product or service. Kotler & Keller, (2012) indicate that brand image can be functional, emotional, social, user or symbolic image. These different forms of image aim to project a good image for the respective brands. A good brand image ensures credibility of the product or organisations. Quality, consistency and honesty are some of the sources of a credibility for brands. Brand managers should know their audience, their needs to promote the appropriate brand features and values consistently.

4.3.4. Brand Equity

Brand equity refers to 'the sum of all distinguishing qualities of a brand, drawn from all relevant stakeholders that results in professional commitment to and demand for the brand; these differentiating thoughts and feelings make the brand valued and valuable (Tasci, 2021). This entails that a brand equity is set of brand distinct attributes that are unique to the brand that can differentiate its perceived market value. In tandem with this definition, Wang & Jiang, (2019) define brand equity as the value added to products and services which could be reflected in how customers think, feel and act with respect to brand, prices, market share as well as profitability that the brand earns for the firm. Raza et al. (2018) further argues that brand equity "should be defined in terms of marketing effects uniquely attributable to a brand. Brand equity is an intangible asset that has psychological and financial value to the firm. Mulyawati et al. (2020) point out that positive brand equity can repel entry by prospective competitors. What this entails is that certain outcomes positive or negative, of a marketing activity can specifically be attributable to the performance of specific brands on the market and this output represents the brand's equity. Brand equity is a set of assets that are linked to the brand's name and symbol, which add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to the firm and firm's customers. Organisations should accumulate both tangible and intangible assets that contributes to the brand value. These assets can either be financial or their value could be in their ability to leverage brand equity.

Building a Strong Brand**4.3.5. Brand Positioning**

Laneneko et al. (2020) defines Brand positioning as the unique value that a brand presents to its customer. It is a marketing strategy that brands use to establish their brand identity while conveying their value proposition, which is the reason why a customer would prefer their brand over others. Situmorang et al. (2021) reinforces that Brand positioning enables the creation of a distinctive and positive opinion of a brand in order to differentiate it from others in the market. Effective brand positioning helps strategists determine what the brand stands for, its unique selling points, how it overlaps with competing brands, and the value derived from the usage of the brand (Sammut-Bonnici, 2015). Effective brand positioning helps shape consumer perceptions, influences purchasing decisions, and builds long-term brand loyalty. To achieve a good brand position organisations should identify their target audience and promote a unique selling proposition that is informed by competitor analysis. Brands should be consistent and stick to the brand promise and positioning statement to maintain their positioning among competing brands. It is in line with the spirit of maintaining and improving the brand positioning that brands should be dynamic and respond to changing customer needs. Brands should continuously innovate and develop to stay relevant and competitive.

The strength of a brand is contributed to by the highlighted aspects in the literature discussion and these include experience, identity, image, equity, and positioning. It is paramount for brands to realise that they need to carefully study their products and target market so that they can come up with factor contributes the most in their brand strength. This will enable to come with a well-balanced cocktail of strategies in terms of branding. The current consumers are now sophisticated that the one size fits all perspective won't work. In this regard the marketing practitioners should tailor make product branding for specific customers. Some brands have even advanced to personalised levels where they are customising brand promotions. Knowing what makes the brands strong is very important in assisting us determine the future issues to grapple with in terms of branding. The next section looks at issues that marketers should expect as they navigate the changing world of business.

4.4. What is the Future of Branding?

The future of branding is a challenging scenario for the branding specialists as they are faced with challenges ranging from volatile economies, high competition among brands and the ever-changing customer needs. Branding is likely to be shaped by several key trends and shifts in consumer behaviour calling for practitioners to be vigilant and adaptive and introduce innovative strategies. Businesspeople need to understand the modern customer to be able to come up with proper strategies for these customers.

4.4.1. What Makes a Future Customer?

The modern customer has peculiar characteristics that the branding practitioners need to know, and these will assist in the development of strategies to promote various brands. According to Keller (2019) the modern customer is tech-savvy, empowered, values convenience, personalisation, trust, engagement and a seamless experience across all channels. Wanglin et al. (2020) posits that the introduction of the internet has resulted in customers who are highly informed because information is readily available. Technological advancements have been unstoppable, and the consumers have also improved in the use of technology. The consumers are now using digital device online resources to find information about

Building a Strong Brand

products and purchasing them. Adriyanto and Prasetyo (2023) argue that consumers can also go through product reviews by other customers, and this means every customer has a possibility of destroying or building a brand.

The use of technology has also led to customers who now value convenience and efficiency. Using technology, the customers can order or transact from anywhere. Modern customers are always expecting flawless processes from the time they are looking for the product through to the purchasing and finally to the delivery. This means that companies that can offer friendly user interfaces, high performing web-site processes, good demonstrations, procuring and delivery services will be competitive. During these seamless processes the brands should be highly engaging in the pre purchase, purchase and post purchase phases to ensure that the customers are always reminded of the brands and their benefits.

Modern customers are also basing their brand evaluation on the relationship the brands are building with the customers. The relationships brands create will result in trust and personalisation (Wongsan-sukcharoen, 2022). Personalisation has captured attention of consumers through tailored offerings, communication and provision of relevant content that aligns with customer interest. Promotion of sustainable business has also led to customers patronise brands that are transparent, ethical and committed to social and environmental sustainability. Practitioners need to embrace these characteristics of the modern customers for them to be able to connect them with their brands.

4.4.2. What are the Future Branding Strategies?

The dynamic nature of customer, emerging technologies and social change undoubtedly major determinants for branding strategies for the future.

4.4.2.1. Purpose-Driven Branding

The future will be favourable for brands that response to the needs and wants of its respective customers. For brands to remain profitable they need to communicate their purpose and value. The purpose of the brand highlights what it will achieve to satisfy customers. Rey et al., (2019) highlight that all organisation systems including human resource, processes and systems should support each other for a unified purpose of supporting the brand. This is also supported by Rey et al. (2019) argues that purpose needs to be translated into a set of values and goals that guide communications, operations, and people and product development. To bring purpose and brand activities more generally to life, brand strategists, creative directors, data scientists, designers, and agencies increasingly come together to work in more coordinated and agile ways. Zu and Carlyle (2019) says once customers realise that the brand promise aligns with their need and want, they will be attracted to that brand. Due to environmental sustainability issues brands should incorporate the purpose inline with customer sustainability expectations (Ishtiaq & Di Maria, 2020). Brands will continue to emphasize their purpose and values beyond profit. They will align with social and environmental causes and actively communicate their commitment to making a positive impact. This can build stronger connections with socially conscious consumers.

Organisations intending to achieve the best out of purpose driven branding, they must conduct internal assessment to uncover their brand purpose. Organisations should align their brand purpose to their vision, mission, and core values. Future organisations will also need to align their brand promise on their brand strategy. Brand purpose also be premised on authenticity and transparency for consumers to continue being loyal to their brand. Marketing and communications systems should tell the story and

Building a Strong Brand

purpose and engage the customers continuously. In line with modern performance measurement, the brands need to constantly measure their impact and performance to continuously improve and adjust in accordance with the changing customer expectations.

4.4.2.2. Experiential Branding

Mostafa and Kasamani (2021) defines experiential branding as creating memorable and immersive experiences that's engage and connect with consumers on a deeper level. Chauhan and Sarabhai (2018) also acknowledge that customer experience comprises the cognitive, emotional, physical, sensorial, spiritual, and social elements that mark the customer's direct or indirect interaction with other market sectors. Experiential branding aims to influence feeling, perceptions and associations that reinforce the brand's values, personality and positioning (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020). It leverages on sensory elements, emotions, and interactive touch points to ensure lasting memories in the minds of consumers. Future brands should concentrate on establishing memorable experience in consumers by establishing an emotional connection. The brand personality and values should enable customers to understand and connect with the brands. In their branding, organisations should engage multi-sensory engagement tactics utilising sound, visuals, ambience and good environment to create whole some experience.

Using current technological advancement, organisations will have to use augmented reality, virtual reality and mixed reality to provide interactive and engaging brand experience. The organisation should also ensure that customer touch points like websites and stores should create memorable experience. The internet systems should be fast enough, the user interfaces, payment systems and product delivery systems must utilise state of the art technology to make these processes seamless. Technology will also have to be used gather the decision-making processes at all consumer touch points. The data collected will then be used in crafting branding strategies to target the different customers. Branding experience is going to be key in attracting, retaining, and creating brand ambassadors.

4.4.2.3. Influencer and Community Driven Branding

Campbell and Farrell (2020) posit that future consumers will continue to seek personalised experiences with customer products being at the centre stage. The brands need to start looking for influencer whose image resonates with their brand as brand association will prop up the image of their brands. According to Haenlein et al. (2020) organisations will need to establish long-term relationships with authentic and trusted influencers who have established audience through collaboration and content creation. While influencer marketing will be a recommended strategy, organisation should conduct due diligence to ensure the influencer reputation aligns with brand values (Kim & Hye-Young, 2021). Continuous monitoring to check for alignment should regularly be done. Using technology, organisations will be collecting personal information about the customers and will use the information to come up with tailor made offerings, messaging and interactions. The products and advertising material shared with customers are going to be specialised as organisations will have information about the customers at their disposal.

Closely linked to influencer marketing is community driven branding which is defined by Gilmore et al. (2020) as a branding approach in which the community participated in the development, shaping and promotion of the brand identity and values. Nordberg et al. (2020) argues that involving community in branding improves credibility, brand ownership and loyalty. When the communities own the brand, they become ambassadors and they can vouch for and defend the brand. Due to increase of digital marketing and social media these communities are going to shift from physical communities to online and social

Building a Strong Brand

media communities (Santos et al., 2022). In light of this, communities' migration organisations should come up with online community building strategies without abandoning the physical communities. Organisations should embrace collaborative initiatives and events that empower communities through education and skill building. Taking interest in sustainable development and social responsibility and celebrating community achievements are key strategies to building a brand community.

4.4.2.4. Sustainable and Eco-Friendly Branding

The future operating environment will have more discussions on issues around environmental initiatives, green practices, and sustainable development. Sustainable branding is also in line with the changing customers who are now aware of environmental issues and will appreciate green brands. Environmental issues have become topical and in the future, brands cannot ignore these issues. Green brands have space to compete and command loyalty among the modern customers. According to Kisieliuskas and Jančaitis (2022) sustainable and eco-friendly branding refers to the practice of developing and promoting a brand in ethically, environmentally, resourcefulness. Situmorang et al. (2021) calls for organisations to embrace sustainability in its totality if the environmentally aware consumers are to choose the brand among others. This implies that organisations should prioritise sustainability in all aspects of the product including design, production, packaging and marketing. Mozaffari et al. (2023) goes further advocating for the inclusion of digital marketing and social media in promoting sustainable marketing. Brands also need to get environmental compliance and sustainability endorsements from sustainability pressure groups and regulators for their sustainability authenticity and credibility (Jain & Hudnurkar, 2022). Packaging materials should also be bio readable and should have sustainability green labels or branding to show customers that they are green compliant. Another way organisation can improve sustainability branding is part of environmental sustainability projects. Internally transparent human resources systems and ethical practices will reflect the level of seriousness as sustainability. The brands also need to make a deliberate effort to market and publicise their environmental initiative to attract and retain green aware customers.

4.4.2.5. Digital Marketing Branding

The digital marketing platforms have been critical in enabling access to the customers, as such brands will need to consciously and continually take advantage of digital marketing. Desai, (2019) views digital marketing as the use of numerous digital marketing tactics to connect with customers. Digital marketing entails the use of search engines, social media, email, websites to communicate, attract, retain and transact with customers. Herhausen and Morgan (2020) predicts that digital marketing is going to be the backbone of the economies advises marketers to restructure systems to be digital marketing compliant. Kotane et al. (2019) hints that content generation is also critical in ensuring that the quality of content is aligned to the brand promise and brand values. Brands will also need to have more of user generated content to increase credibility. In line with the digital marketing paradigm, marketers will have to make sure that their content advertisements and promotional materials are suited for the internet. The Internet has global reach and there is need for organisations to make sure that content is suited for the different consumer. Geographical segmentation might be critical so that the organisation can effectively communicate with their respective customers. As consumer concerns about data privacy increase, brands will prioritize data security and transparency. Brands should implement robust data protection measures, obtain explicit consent for data usage, and provide clear and transparent privacy policies. It is critical for brands to address issue of data security to be regarded as a good brand that takes care of their customers.

Building a Strong Brand

Brands should assure customer data safety by crafting and communicating data security policies and clearly informing customers how their data will be used.

4.4.2.6. Personalised, Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, and Automation

Modern marketing trend will be highly personalised target consumers at individual levels. This is going to be aided by the artificial intelligence systems that provide predictive analytics for brands to know more about their needs and predict future needs. Huang and Rust (2021) allude that the use of artificial intelligence in marketing has been positive, due to increasing computing power, lower computing costs, the availability of big data, and the advance of machine learning algorithms and models. Verma et al. (2021) also agrees that organisations are also collecting massive data about customers using cookies and web forms, this data provides personal data that is key in marketing decisions. It is against this background that Volkmar et al. (2022) encourages current brands to invest in artificial intelligence tools for them to collect, analyse and use the information to tailor make products and promotional activities. This data is very important in optimising processes, improving service, and creating targeted marketing campaigns. Artificial intelligence has also brought in innovation in the form of simulations, Chabots and virtual assistants and this has also improved the image of major brands. The rise of voice assistants and visual search entails that brands will have optimize their online presence to cater to these emerging trends. This includes optimizing content for voice queries, leveraging voice-activated devices, and optimising visual elements for visual search platforms. Branding will highly involve artificial learning and machine learning as such brands need to appropriately brand themselves and reconfigure themselves towards the new normal.

5. CONCLUSION

The introduction provided an astute conceptualisation of branding and its justification for applicability in the business space. It elaborated on how it is critical mass to the sustainability of businesses. The main objective of the study, being to unpack the concept of branding to the relevant practitioners, was clearly expatiated. The study, being literature based, the methodology applied was the identification of the gaps in existing knowledge which was covered through the perusal of various sources of literature.

Authorities in the branding discourse alluded that branding originated in the 1500's and evolved over time to the present-day modernised branding. Its evolution did cut across the various stages from its start in the 1500's when it was being applied on cattle by the farmers and on potteries. Between 1750 and 1870, branding became relevant also to the manufacturing sector where there was a boom in activity. It is also in this era that the marketing world saw the advent of trademarks. This was followed by the innovation era in the 20th century where the world saw the origination of some of the household brands like Colgate, Coca cola and Ford Motors, being propped up by the advent of the print media.

With the manufacturing activity on the increase, there was then an increased appreciation of branding and hence more visibility of it in the 1920 to 1950s. This period was hence dubbed "brands in the air." Branding became more modernised in the 1950s -1960s with increased application of the electronic and print media. Increased customer dynamism in 1960s to 1990s was a push factor to the further growth of branding in line with the equally changing environmental dynamism. In the 2000s more complex

Building a Strong Brand

dynamism in branding was seen and being driven by the fast up and coming social media platforms. Digital marketing also invaded the environment to take part of the marketing cake.

Various aspects have been highlighted as the anchors of strong branding. These include brand experience, brand identity, brand equity and brand positioning. An inference into the future of branding and future customers was also made together with future branding strategies identified as purpose driven, experiential influencer and community, sustainable and ecofriendly digital marketing, and artificial intelligence.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

In building a strong competitive brand that is expected to perform in the future, it is recommended to follow certain processes.

- 6.1. One of the first steps in creating a powerful and long-lasting brand is to determine what your brand stands for. Your first step should be to articulate your brand's unique selling proposition (USP). Find out how you want your brand to be seen by consumers and how it differs from the competition.
- 6.2. Be familiar with your potential customers by conducting extensive market research to learn more about their wants, requirements, and habits. Develop in-depth profiles of your ideal customers in terms of their demographics, goals, and challenges. With this information in hand, you may be able to properly align, fine-tune the tone, content, and channels of your brand's communications.
- 6.3. Create a compelling brand statement that connects with your ideal customers and is in line with who you are as a company is step three in building a successful brand. To increase brand awareness and loyalty, it is important to convey this message consistently across all marketing platforms and touchpoints.
- 6.4. Brands need to make your brand's visual identity attractive by developing a consistent and eye-catching look for it. Your brand identity consists of your logo, colour scheme, typeface, picture style, and other visual elements. Make sure that your brand's visual aspects are consistent in all your promotional materials.
- 6.5. Deliver amazing customer experiences at every interaction point; this should be your top priority. Educate your staff so that they can effectively represent your brand and meet the needs of your customers. If you want to build a solid reputation for your business over time, you need actively seek out and respond to client feedback.
- 6.6. Use digital marketing and social media to boost your brand's visibility online and expand your customer base. Take part in the conversations that matter to you and your audience and contribute useful information with them. Targeted advertising is an efficient method of getting your message out to certain groups of people.
- 6.7. Promote brand advocacy by urging happy consumers to spread the word about your business. Incentivize and spread positive word of mouth by launching referral programmes, loyalty awards, or user-generated content campaigns. Connecting with prominent figures in your field can also assist spread word about your brand.

7. FUTURE STRATEGIES AND INSIGHTS

A plethora of strategies can be implemented for the future of branding. The following are some of the suggestions.

- 7.1. Take advantage of technological advances and new ideas by keeping abreast of market and technological developments. Adopt cutting-edge technologies like AI, and automation to cut costs, boost output, and provide individualised service to customers.
- 7.2. Make decisions based on evidence, not intuition. Use data analytics to learn about your clients' habits and preferences, market tendencies, and company success. Take advantage of this information to fine-tune your advertising initiatives and locate untapped development potential.
- 7.3. Organisations need to put an emphasis on sustainability and social responsibility: As customers grow more aware of environmental and social issues, businesses that incorporate these principles into their strategies will have an edge. Establish credibility by committing to eco-friendly practises, social responsibility, and open communication with your audience.
- 7.4. Promote a mind-set of constant improvement, flexibility, and originality to foster innovation and agility in your business. Encourage people to try new things, make mistakes, and come up with creative solutions. Adopt agile practises to adapt rapidly to shifting market conditions and surge ahead of rivals.
- 7.5. Encourage strategic alliances: look for chances to work with other companies that complement your own or with market leaders in your field. By working together strategically, you may expand your reach, pool resources, and complement one another's weaknesses. Think about working together in areas such as marketing, product development, and information sharing.
- 7.6. Focus on satisfying the needs of your current and future customers. If you want to know what your audience wants and be able to tailor your content to them, you need to constantly listen to what they have to say, undertake in-depth research, and have meaningful dialogues. Modify your offerings and approach to better suit their needs.
- 7.7. Invest in your employees and your company's infrastructure so that you can attract and keep the best people to represent your brand and propel your business forward. Give them chances to learn new skills and advance in their careers to help them flourish. The success of your future depends on having a team that is both motivated and competent.
- 7.8. Keep in mind that it takes time to establish a solid brand and plan. Maintaining relevance and competitiveness in a dynamic company environment requires constant self-evaluation, response to market dynamics, and strategy improvement.

Further Research

Here are several avenues of inquiry that can help one learn more about brand development, prospective strategies, and insights. Researchers need to unravel and develop new model for evaluating the impact of elements such as brand equity, brand perception, and brand performance on the overall brand profiles. Research brand tracking studies and brand valuation models, and consumer perception surveys are also key learn how to accurately assess your brand's performance. Another area for future studies is examining the role of storytelling in branding and investigate the various content marketing approaches. You can better engage and connect with your target audience if you put in the time to learn how to craft engag-

Building a Strong Brand

ing narratives, establish a consistent brand voice, and utilise various content types, including videos, blogs, podcasts, etc. Digital media have greatly affected operational modalities hence the need to analyse how digital media and new media have altered traditional methods of brand promotion. Further studies on the impact of AI on creating individualised brand experiences, as well as other related areas such as social media branding, influencer marketing, user-generated content and their future contribution to the performance of brands is another area that researchers can focus on.

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