

Spokes characters and young consumers' context specific understanding

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Abstract: Spokes- characters have appeared in numerous promotion campaigns in creating context specific and dynamic mood in advertisement. The study investigates young consumers' perception on spokes- characters for brand identity with specific reference processed food. Spokes-characters are to be tuned to help in sustaining the brand image and to stimulate the brand image; to help making it stand out from others. Spokes –characters and their design characteristics have an impact and increase the effectiveness of non-verbal communication with young consumers which enhance more favourable brand attitudes. The study concludes that young buyers are capable of analysing the elements of brand identity and their context specific views may be a crucial decision towards creating a design strategy for brand identity and product recognition with specific reference to Indian brand with elements of Indianans perspective.

Key Words- Element identity, Character imitation, Design application

Introduction

The rapidly changing advertising environment and increasingly competitive markets have led practitioners to look for more effective marketing communication strategies to persuade consumers as well as to build their brands. Employing a spokes-character, defined as "a symbolic object that has been created for the promotion of a product, service, or idea with conveying a brand attribute or personality" (Phillips, 1996, p. 155), appears to be one effective advertising strategy to increase the impact of advertising campaigns.

In particular, many food manufacturers and fast food restaurants have been employing spokes-characters as mascots or symbols. Although created spokes-characters may have less authority and expertise than do real spokespersons or celebrities, advertisers have employed spokes-characters as temporary or permanent "safer" endorsers, in that the public persona of human endorsers can be changed as they engage in some activities that impair their personal values and that possibly have a negative impact on brand reputation (Tom et al. 1992). 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 spoke-character is a great way to develop a positive brand image, which will drive positive brand connotations and emotional attachment with consumers. Personified spokes-characters can be created and controlled in ways in which advertisers want to establish and maintain the images and personalities of the brands. Creating a brand character or mascot is a great way to build a corporate identity and to generate attention from the public. A spoke character can give limitless opportunities to drive consumer interest and recognition (Kristopher, 2012).



The design and implementation of the character 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 spoke character is a fictional celebrity (person, animal or cartoon) which is believed to bring luck. In branding spoke character are not used for luck but for their associations. A character 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 spoke-character 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. Therefore, personified spokes-characters and their design characteristics have an impact and increase the effectiveness of non-verbal communication with target consumers which enhance more favourable brand attitudes as well as they build a positive brand image. The study aims at looking into identity specific spoke characters suitable for Indian brand image.

INSPIRATION BEHIND SELECTING SPOKE CHARACTER AS A MARKETING ICON

It is an apparent question that, why brand spoke character when brand names and logos can suffice? Brand Spoke character gives 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 Spoke-character 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 Spoke character can also help to illustrate the benefits of the brand in brand marketing communication messages.

Spokes-Characters

Since the late 1800s, advertisers and marketers have employed a variety of spokes-characters to promote their brands and persuade consumers (Callcott, 1993; Garretson & Niedrich, 2004; Morgan, 1986; Thompson, 2002). For a spokes-character to be considered for any advertising campaign, it should consistently be associated with the advertised product and recognized as "character" or "persona" (Callcott & Lee, 1995). Air India's Maharaja which came into existence in the year 1946 and the Amul girl in 1967 are the spoke character which captured the hearts of one and all in India, (fig.1). This spoke-character caught the attention of the consumers as they were charming and connected well with the consumers. Indian corporate have also seen few other mascots like Fido the cool swanky doodle of 7 Up, doughboy the sweet little butler of Godrej Pillsbury, Gattu who build brand Asian Paint, Chintamani who endorsed ICICI, Sunny who is creating magic with Sunfeast. The success of

these spoke-character can be qualified by, the increase in the brand value of these brands consumer connect. The type of spokes-character and the product advertised affects the believability, suggesting a fit between spokes-characters and product images will increase persuasion (e.g., Hawkins, Best, & Coney, 1983; Kamins & Gupta, 1994; Till, 1998). As Kamins and Gupta (1994) suggested, spokespersons' appearance or expertise must be matched to brand characteristics because perceptions of credibility "may be a function of the consistency or congruence of the image or knowledge base of the spokesperson in relation to the product image" (Kamins & Gupta, 1994, p. 571).



Fig. 1.

Indian mascots use identity specific spoke characters



Fig. 2

Popular brand Spoke- Character

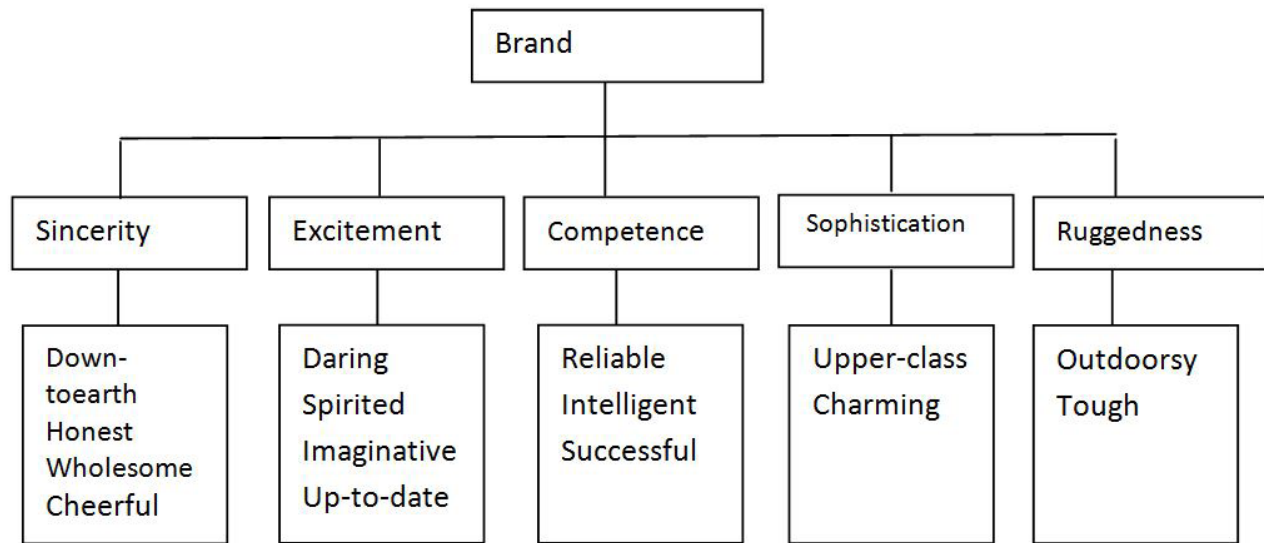
Spokes-Characters (specific identity elements) imbedded in brand image personalities

Commercial brands are cultivated in today's market. A brand can be described by such characteristics as gender, age, social class, and life style as well as such classic human personality traits as rugged, formal, up to date, and sophisticated. The concept of brand personality suggests that a brand can have predominant characters that identify its personality and that such characterization can differentiate a brand from competitors. Brand personality is defined as "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (Aaker, 1997, p. 347). Since brands can be associated with human personality traits, brand personality management can be an efficient way to create and build a bond with the consumer.

Personalities of spokes characters play a significant role in the formation and maintenance of brand personalities. Advertisers and marketers generate this type of spoke character which helps in to convey their intended personalities of the brands. For example, they can manipulate look, characteristics, movements, or communication styles of spokes-characters; as result spokes character can be related with any character qualities which communicate advertisers and brand managers message to the consumers. For example, when any brand wants to build his image as a Trustworthiness and enthusiasm traits and images on that time brand create spokes-characters with such qualities which portray the brand image and communicating with consumers. Aaker (1997) developed and identified the five dimensions and 42 traits of brand personality. The five dimensions are Sincerity (includes brand personality traits such as down-to-earth, honest, sincere, friendly), Excitement (trendy, exciting,



young, imaginative, unique, and up to date), Competence (reliable, secure, successful, and hardworking), Sophistication (upper class, glamorous, charming), and Ruggedness (rugged, tough, outdoorsy).



Source: Adapted from Aaker, 1997, p. 352.
Fig. 9. A Brand Personality Framework

Source Credibility

A celebrity endorser is “an individual who is known to the public (i.e., actor/actress, athlete, and entertainer) for his or her achievements in areas other than that of the product class endorsed” (Friedman & Friedman, 1979, p. 63). In advertisement using big celebrity endorsers in advertisement is very famous tactic in advertisement industry. Previous literature proposes that use of celebrities in advertisement help to recall message (Friedman & Friedman, 1979) and recognition of brand name (Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983). From the Previous literature review on celebrity endorsements the two prior result came out the source-credibility model and the source-attractiveness model. source-credibility. As per Hovland and his associates (1953) found that the most significant factors that lead to the perceived credibility of the communicator are expertise and trustworthiness. Expertise and trustworthiness can be defined as the extent to which a communicator is perceived to be a source of valid assertions and the degree of confidence in the communicator’s intent to communicate the assertions he or she considers most valid (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953). The source-credibility model is based on credibility theory, which posits that if a messenger is perceived to be an expert or to be trustworthy, the message conveyed by the messengers credible (Hovland & Weiss, 1951).

Brand Personality is important both in positioning a brand and in developing a brand image. Brand personalities and brand images create a feeling of familiarity with a known product. Because the brand is familiar, consumers feel comfortable or even pleased to buy it again. Branding, the process of creating a unique identity for product, is the secret behind the

phenomenal success. Branding also creates memorability, establishes preferences, habit and loyalty. It encourages a relationship between a brand and consumers. A brand identifies and represents a particular product, but it is much more than just a name. It is an image in customer's mind that reflects what they think and feel about a product- how they value it. A brand image is a mental image that reflects the way consumer perceives the brand, including all the identification elements, the product personality, and the emotions and associations evoked in the mind of the consumer Product personality- the idea that a product takes on familiar human characteristics, such as friendliness, trustworthiness is an important part of an image. A brand, then, has both physical and psychological dimensions. The physical dimension consists of the physical characteristic of the product itself and the design of the package, logo. Typography, shape, colour that the advertiser use to define the graphics of the image. In contrast, the psychological side includes the emotions, beliefs, values, and personalities that people ascribe to the product. (Wells, Burnett, Moriarty, 2002, p.163)

Conclusion

The findings suggest that spokes-characters perceived as having sincere, competent, sophisticated, and rugged personality characteristics tend to be viewed as an expert source or endorser of the brand and company. That is, consumers' perceptions about such spokes-characters' personality characteristics are important backgrounds that can influence the level of source expertise. The outcome of this study contribute to expanding our knowledge regarding the determinant role of the spokes-characters' personality in creating and maintaining the level of source expertise, source trustworthiness, and source expertise, which, in turn, increase the level of positive brand attitude. Every component of advertisement and marketing will be a contribution to the complex meaning and personality of brands. Employing spokes-characters, along with other marketing communication tools, is an undeniable force in creating food brand personality. Thus, spokes-characters coordinated to create and maintain the brand personality as well as they builds strong brand perception in young consumer mind. Specific to talk about Indian brand, thus Indiana's ethos and content description should in proper combination make the brand identity i.e. mascot to carry forward.

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