

Loyalty to a Low Quality Brand
Kristen Meyer
Spring Hill College

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Dr. Sharee Broussard
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ABSTRACT

This pilot study was conducted to examine if respondents will report continuous brand loyalty despite low quality or low differentiation toward a brand. The study explored branding from the perspective of alcohol beverage purchasing habits and alcohol beverage advertisements. A working method from Saatchi & Saatchi called *Lovemarks* was used to determine how emotional branding might promote customer loyalty and long-term preference.

Spring Hill College students, and some faculty, completed a survey which consisted of 15 questions regarding habits of alcohol beverage consumption. The data was collected and processed into SPSS Software. After running four tests, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient did not support the relationships between all the questions on the survey. However, the crosstabs that were performed did show some relationship between the questions the researcher chose to test. Overall, the data found regarding emotional branding and long-term loyalty showed a positive correlation.

INTRODUCTION

One technique heavily relied upon by the alcohol-beverage advertising industry is emotional branding, according to the SAGE Encyclopedia of Alcohol. Emotional branding is a term used to refer to advertising and marketing practices that position the brand in a way that appeals to the consumer's emotions, desires, and emotional needs rather than to practical considerations, such as a discounted price or health choice. Emotional branding explains the attachment a drinker can have to a specific beer or beverage, such as a popular brand like Budweiser, despite its low rating by any accepted standard of beer quality. One's attachment to a mass-produced bourbon brand that is made in such quantities that it is impossible to guarantee a stable flavor profile also lends itself to the emotional branding strategies of the alcohol beverage company. Within the alcohol industry, emotional branding was pioneered by Champagne houses or négociants-manipulants, who conjured the idea Champagne is a celebratory and romantic drink (Martin, 2015). Countless alcohol-beverage companies have focused on this emotional technique in beer and liquor advertising and branding campaigns.

This type of affection toward a brand has adopted the term 'lovemark'. Lovemarks is a brand theory that was first explored by Kevin Roberts, CEO of Saatchi & Saatchi. Saatchi & Saatchi is an American global communications and advertising agency. Over the past decade, the Lovemarks concept has sparked research on the topic of emotional branding and marketing. This concept is based on a simple idea: inspiring consumers to be loyal beyond reason.

Historically, emotional branding has been especially useful in two areas: creating lifelong consumers of the brand rather than focusing on short-term gains and differentiating a brand from others that are making very similar products with very similar virtues. In actuality, there is little

difference between any two choices of low-grade alcohol-beverages. The production techniques used for the mass production of beer or liquor at the average price, and the process of creating massive amounts of such beverages, inevitably result in products that taste substantially similar (Martin, 2015). Emotional branding, then, becomes the solution to create a brand identity such that the consumer will choose the option of alcohol beverage that best suits his or her self-image or emotional aspirations.

Creating a bond between the consumer and the product, while provoking the consumer's emotions feeds the human need to feel fulfilled and satisfied. The building of brands that appeal directly to a consumer's ego, emotional state and aspirations allows companies to ultimately feed human needs such as love, power, emotional security and ego-gratification. These needs were originally proposed by Abraham Maslow in his 1943 psychology paper, "A Theory of Human Motivation." In time and with repetition, brands then can establish this lasting connection in the minds, and even hearts, of consumers. A consumer who feels he or she can identify on a personal level with a particular brand, perhaps with the brand's specific values and symbols, will in turn become attached and continue a life-long loyalty to the brand (Barakat, 2014).

The purpose of this pilot study is to explore emotional branding and customer loyalty strategies from the perspective of alcohol beverage companies and it will be examined through the lens of the Lovemarks normative theory to determine answers to this research question: In what ways does the use of emotional branding in alcohol-beverage advertisements promote customer loyalty and long-term preference?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Emotion is a term frequently used synonymously with feelings. In psychology it signifies a reaction involving certain physiological changes, such as an accelerated or reduced pulse rate, diminished or increased activities of certain glands, or change in body, to further activity. The three primary reactions of this type are anger, love, and fear, are an immediate response to external stimuli or, as the result of an indirect subjective process. (Pandey, p. 10, 2014)

Emotional branding refers to the practice of building brands that appeal directly to a consumer's ego, emotional state, needs and aspirations. The purpose of emotional branding is to create a strong bond between the consumer and the product by provoking the consumer's emotion, according to Barakat. Human needs are subconsciously emotion-based and serve as the foundation for emotional branding. Marketers create a self-fulfilling prophesy when it comes to consumer needs, while promoting the need to fulfill them in a perpetual cycle (Barakat, 2014).

Emotional appeals are those that are not preceded by careful analysis by the consumer when making a buying decision. Rather, emotions are those mental agitations or excited states of feeling which prompt a consumer to make an impulsive purchase. The role of emotions in developing a brand strategy has marked a simple but revolutionary shift in thinking that places the consumers, no longer the product, at the forefront of a brand's strategy. When consumers choose a brand, the reasons are specifically distinguished as functional, rational and emotional. While functional and rational reasons would be clear to most people, the emotional reasons are often referred to as substantiates and provide support for the delivery of both the functional as well as rational benefits of a brand. This relationship between the consumer and the brand becomes a vital goal for the company and the branding strategies. Portraying a particular personality with

specific values and symbols attached to it is the most beneficial way to win consumers over (Pandey, 2014). These feelings and emotions create a powerful drive for potential and existing consumers. Simply having or creating a decent product is just not enough; a carefully developed brand strategy will enable the company to transform the products and services into powerful brands, create new brands for the target markets and position the brands in the competitive market place.

Considering the importance of emotions in branding has opened the pathway to an entirely new kind of thinking, which explores *how* brands can connect with consumers on a sensitive, intimate and humanistic way. Emotional branding allows companies to masterfully make the consumer fall in ‘love’ with the brand. Notable examples of this increasingly popular advertising strategy include attachments of the specific emotion of “nostalgia” to the Kodak brand of film, “bonding” to the Jim Beam bourbon brand, and “love” to the McDonald’s brand. (Rossiter, J. & Bellman, S., 2000) When it comes to positioning a brand, beer commercials and alcohol advertisements are huge supporters of this strategy.

Alcohol advertising aims to evoke feelings and emotions in the consumer, which are usually not associated with beer and alcohol brands. The goal is for the consumer to feel he or she identifies with the values of the brand on some level. Alcohol advertisements and beer commercials resonate with emotional branding because of the very saturated market. The difference between any two brands of beer or liquor is really very little. Therefore, digging deep into what the customer aims to feel about himself or herself is vital in creating loyal costumers. Tapping into the feelings and emotions of the consumer, rather than what the product offers, allows for this relationship between brand and consumer to strengthen.

LOVEMARKS

“For more years than I can remember I have used the same shampoo: Head & Shoulders. Ridiculous, isn't it? I've no hair, let alone dandruff! Still, I love Head & Shoulders. I won't buy or use anything else. It's a Lovemark of mine,” says Kevin Roberts. Robert, CEO Worldwide of Saatchi & Saatchi. Roberts explains that there is only one way to thrive as marketers in the Attention Economy and that is to stop racing after every new fad and focus on making consistent, emotional connections with consumers. The journey from products to trademarks and from trademarks to brands is over. Trademarks and brands are useful in the quest for differentiation and vital to survival, but they're not winning game-breakers. Roberts says that today, the stakes have reached a new high. The social fabric is spread more thinly than ever. People are looking for new, emotional connections. They are looking for what they can love and they need an emotional pull to help them make decisions. Finally, they want more ways to connect with everything in their lives- including brands. This revelation is the groundwork for the development of Lovemarks as the future brand, by Saatchi & Saatchi. The best brands were Trustmarks, Roberts says, but the great ones were Lovemarks.

Emotion has become a legitimate subject for serious research. Maurice Levy, Chairman of Publicis Groupe, owners of Saatchi & Saatchi, elaborates:

Consumers who make decisions based purely on facts represent a very small minority of the world's population. The vast majority of the population, however, consumes *and* shops with their minds and their heart, their emotions. They look for a rational reason: what the product does and why it is a superior choice. And they take an emotional decision: I like it, I prefer it, I feel good about it. People making decisions are tense,

under pressure, and rationality is reassuring. But emotions are more rewarding, both in the short and long-term (Roberts, p. 42-43).

According to Saatchi & Saatchi, Lovemarks are built on respect and love. Without respect, there is no foundation for any long-term relationship. However, without love, brands are unable to move beyond transactional relationships into emotional relationships with consumers. The three key elements that go into making Lovemarks are mystery, sensuality and intimacy. Mystery draws together the stories, metaphors, dreams, and symbols that give a relationship its texture. Mystery is a way to connect past, present and future. Sensuality serves as a portal to the emotions. This is how consumers experience the world: with vision, smelling, hearing, touch and taste. Intimacy is the fine art of being close to partners, customers and consumers, without overbearing. The intimate connections the brand will create is what will ultimately win undying loyalty. The hypothesis is as follows: If it is with these three key elements: sensuality, mystery and intimacy, in which a brand becomes a Lovemark, alcohol-beverage advertisements can promote customer loyalty and long-term preference by connecting consumers to the brand which he or she will love and fiercely protect.

Respondents will report affinity toward one low quality and low differentiation brand that includes sensuality, mystery and intimacy in promotions.

METHODOLOGY

The survey was provided to current students and some faculty of Spring Hill College in order to gain knowledge on the research question regarding emotional branding in alcohol beverage advertisements and customer loyalty. The survey was distributed on paper throughout cam-

pus to only students and faculty 21 years of age or above, as the research questions focused on alcohol brand consumption.

The sample consisted of nominal, ordinal and scale questions. The breakdown of the questions included three related to the respondent's loyalty to a low quality or low differentiation alcohol brand (Q1, Q2, Q3), three related to price of alcohol beverages (Q4, Q6, Q8), and the respondents likelihood of consuming a particular brand because he or she finds it relates to his or her self image (Q7, Q10, Q11). All questions contained in the survey were formulated with the intention of discovering results that would support the hypothesis inquiring if consumers purchased specific alcohol brands because of an emotional connection, rather than high quality.

The last section of the survey were questions regarding the respondents, individually. The respondents were asked to provide basic demographic information, including highest level of education completed, age range and gender. The researcher felt it necessary to find these specifics about the respondents in order to characterize and make soft assumptions once gathering all data.

The majority of the questions were asked in a scale format. Such scale questions included Q1-12, and were ranked as follows: strongly agree (5), agree (4), neutral (3), disagree (2) and strongly disagree (1). Nominal questions included Q14, gender classification. The ordinal questions were Q13 and Q15, which asked the respondent to provide his or her age and education level.

Once the data was completed, four tests were run to analyze the results of the surveys. The test included frequencies, descriptives, cross tabs and Cronbach's Alpha testing. Frequencies are tested as a count for each variable. The researcher must run frequencies to determine how

many respondents answered each question, in which ways and also allows the researcher to find where cells are missing data. Descriptive statistics were run next to determine if the responses contain any dispersion or if they show a bell curve, a normal distribution. The smaller the standard deviation number, the less variability in the response. If the minimum is lower than one and the maximum is higher than five, the researcher must fix these errors. Standard deviation calculates the variety of responses to each question. Crosstabs are used to ensure the researcher understands how two different questions relate to or affect one another. These determine age, gender and education, among various other possible characteristic questions. Lastly, Cronbach's Alphas are run to determine similarities between questions and those that should be grouped together. A relationship between questions is found using Cronbach's Alphas.

DATA ANALYSIS

Due to the convenience sampling, the data collected cannot be applied to an entire population. This data is merely a sampling. The students and faculty surveyed were 21 years and older, and many were juniors and seniors at Spring Hill College. A total of 71% of those respondents were between 21 and 22 years old, 24% were aged between 23 and 24 and a total of 5% were 25 years or older. The gender selection of this survey's respondents consisted of 56% female and 44% male. Lastly, the respondents provided the following information as his or her education level: of 1% answered 'some college', 95% answered 'current college student' and 4% answered 'college graduate'.

According to the frequency statistics, some questions were skipped by a respondent. Q4 and Q5 were left blank by one respondent. Q6, Q7 and Q10 were missed by three respondents and Q9 was skipped by two respondents. The researcher believes that due to these particular

questions asking for information regarding emotional connections, perhaps these individuals did not feel comfortable giving such information regarding an alcohol beverage. This was interesting and unexpected.

Overall, the respondents' answers ranged according to the frequency testings. An astonishingly high response to Q1 reports that 68% agreed that he or she continues to purchase the same brand when purchasing alcohol beverages. While on the other hand, only 12% disagreed with this statement. Fifty-three percent of those surveyed reported that they continue to buy the same brand of alcohol because he or she claims to hold loyal to this brand. Eighteen percent disagreed with loyalty to an alcohol brand. Though many respondents reported to repeatedly purchase a particular brand of alcohol, 43% of respondents disagreed that it is because of high quality that causes him or her to continue to purchase this brand. The working theory, Lovemarks, can perhaps be attributed to this finding. It is interesting that although the individual remains loyal to a brand, he or she cannot report that it is because of quality. Almost half, 48% of respondents agree that he or she holds an emotional connection to this brand. The correlation of brand loyalty and long-term preference is evident.

The descriptive statistics showed that the researcher's variables contained a minimum response of one (strongly disagree) and a maximum response of five (strongly agree), so no errors were detected in this field. Only one of the twelve questions had a minimum response of two, which was a question inquiring if a similar brand was cheaper, would the respondent switch from a brand he or she loves. The average for the majority of the questions, eleven out of twelve, were answered with mostly ones and fives. This means that the average respondent either strongly agreed or strongly disagreed with each question. The standard deviation for all twelve of the

questions ranged between .958 and 1.219. It is clear that because of the small range of standard deviation, the variability in responses was hardly visible in these results.

Two crosstabs were run using the emotional connection to this brand and whether or not the respondent is a longterm consumer of this particular brand. The second crosstab that the researcher ran was that of high quality causing the customer to continue to purchase a particular brand, and if the price was raised, the customer would continue to be a customer of this brand anyway. When the crosstab was run on the emotional connection to an alcoholic beverage brand and the question regarding whether or not the respondent is a longterm consumer, Chi-Square tests produced a positive mathematical connection to one another. These two questions are, in fact, related because the Chi Square test produced .001. This means these two variables have a significant relationship to one another. The second crosstab regarding the relationship between high quality and potentially switching to another brand because of a lower price, also showed a positive mathematical connection. These two questions resulted in a .013 Pearson Chi-Square. It is evident, with these results, that the two selected questions have a significant relationship as they hold a mathematical connection.

Lastly, Cronbach's Alphas were run to show the relationship between the questions. After running this test on all twelve scale questions (Q1-Q12), the results showed a .357 coefficient. This means that the scales within the survey instrument do not exhibit internal consistency reliability. Though the instrument is not valid, according to the alpha coefficient, this pilot study was created with the intent to test the instrument and report what this particular group of respondents answered.

RESULTS

After the sampling, testing and analyzing the data, results were found that the data supports the original hypothesis: Respondents will report loyalty to at least one low quality and/or low differentiation brand that includes sensuality, mystery and intimacy in promotions or advertisements. Data analysis showed that many respondents report to continuously purchasing the same brand of alcohol, because of an emotional or self-image connection. Respondents also reported that they are loyal to at least one low quality brand of alcohol, and he or she would not switch to another simply because of a lower price. This was interesting as most of the respondents were college students, many of whom are assumed to be on a smaller budget. The hypothesis, however, focused on emotional branding and attempted to link this brand loyalty to an undermining emotional connection to the brand. Many respondents stated they became loyal to this brand due to sensuality, mystery and/or intimacy in promotions. The results support the Love-marks working theory and the researcher's hypothesis.

The alpha coefficients did not support the survey questions' relevance to one another, which perhaps could mean the hypothesis was weak and ineffective to this particular group of respondents. However, the crosstabs which the researcher chose to run, did reveal positive correlations and relationships. This means that the hypothesis was supported somewhat through the data collected.

CONCLUSION

After gathering data analysis and results of this pilot study, it is evident that the hypothesis was supported according to the given data. Many responses on the survey pointed to an obvi-

ous loyalty to a low quality alcohol beverage brand because of an emotional connection to the brand. The data collected supported the cited information documented through research, overall.

If the researcher was to test this hypothesis again, perhaps more questions regarding emotional branding would be useful. Also, using a different product, rather than alcohol beverages, would be more effective in varying the respondents' age. Also, a larger audience would be useful.

The work and research done by Saatchi & Saatchi regarding Lovemarks, which again, shows the emotional relationship individuals have with mediocre products, can be supported through a survey study. Emotion has become a legitimate subject for serious research. By touching emotion, the most devoted customers will emerge, according to Kevin Roberts. Overall, the pilot study showed a positive correlation of emotional branding and brand loyalty to alcohol beverages.

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