I-BRANDING AS A TOOL OF INTERNET MARKETING-AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF YOUNGSTERS

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I-Branding is one of the fastest growing aspects of internet marketing. Internet marketing is still an experimental area that continues to grow, evolve and adapt. The use of internet as a branding tool is an important area of study since the literature on internet branding is currently in the formative stage. This study investigated various factors which influence the youth towards purchasing through internet. The sample size comprised of 196 respondents from various regions of Punjab. An attempt has been made to analyze the preference of internet marketing among youngsters. Finally this paper would help the academicians as well as industry experts to analyze the potential of I-Branding in near future.

INTRODUCTION

Organizations of all types are recognizing the value and importance of using their brands to improve performance and build deep relationships with their customers. The reason for this rush to branding is straightforward. With the proliferation of competitors, products and services that are easily duplicated or replaceable, brands become an important means of simplifying the decision-making process for buyers. If managed properly, brands create difference, relevance, and affinity. Branding has been one of the hottest business topics over the past few years. Traditionally, a brand is thought to evoke, in the customer’s mind, a certain personality, presence, and product or service performance (Aaker, 1991 and Doyle, 1998). In addition to providing values, a brand can represent a substitute for information i.e. a way for consumers to simplify the time-consuming process of search and comparison before deciding what to buy (Rowley, 2004 and Bergstrom, 2000). Branding is one of the most important factors influencing a product’s success or failure in the market and it can have a significant influence on the perception of the general public towards the company owning the brand.

Online branding is at an interesting point of development. Many organizations recognize the need for integrated marketing communications across offline and online channels. This makes it difficult to differentiate, both practically and theoretically, between online and offline branding. On the other hand, branding in online environment poses a sufficient range of challenges and opportunities that it is important to shine the spotlight on branding in digital environment, and to explore some of the potential impacts of online channels for branding strategy.

The views regarding online branding are of mixed nature. Some argue that in a world of information overload, brands become more important because they save the customers’ time by reducing their search costs (Ward and Lee, 2000). In an electronic shopping environment, where
physical interaction is reduced and product qualities and benefits must be distilled and captured in a way that can be communicated over the wires, online branding may be increasingly important. Others argue that with the wealth of information on the web at their fingertips, coupled with intelligent agents and search engines to help them locate the information, products and services that they need, users will no longer rely on the shorthand of brand.

Many said the internet would eliminate the need for brands. As people could examine and access any product or service from every possible provider via the internet, the brand would be irrelevant – customers would always choose the one with the lowest price. However, that logic was grossly flawed. It means that customers were primarily price-driven and that brand (and all it means) played little role in the decision-making process. In fact, we have learned that brands are even more important in cyberspace than they are in most other channels or environments. Again, the reason is simple. With more and more choices from many providers that are relatively unknown, customers tend to choose a provider they know – one that represents a set of values or attributes that are meaningful, clear, and trusted (a brand), especially if they cannot see or confirm that the provider is “real”. According to a survey reported in the Atlanta Journal Constitution, of the 1,360 customers polled, 82 percent reported that brand names play a persuasive role in their online purchase choices. For branding to be effective, it is worth acknowledging that customers relate to brands, not to products or services.

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Buttle (1996) argued that relationships with consumers are recognised to be at the heart of customer attraction and retention. Specifically, they allow customers to spend time with brands decreasing the search for information about alternatives (Newman and Staelin, 1972). Communication and consumer behavior theories suggested that, when consumers have a preference for a brand, they are more keen and willing to receive information from it and also to search for information about it. Repeated exposure potentially enhances brand attitudes by allowing the customer to process more information (Berger and Mitchell, 1989).

Kierzkowski et al. (1996) stated that to enhance their prospects of achieving successful I-Branding, companies need to understand online customers. This understanding provides the basis for going beyond developing awareness of online offerings to focus more on developing the trust and relationships. Bergstrom (2000) provided a worthwhile and interesting insight into the potential of brands in the midst of the seemingly boundless growth of the internet. Employing a highly readable style, the author introduced the importance of brands in “cyberland” and ways in which your company can build sustainable brand strength.

Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) suggested introducing the brand leadership model, which emphasizes strategy as well as tactics. Gobé (2001) believed that the emotional aspect of brands makes a key difference on consumers. He argued that people are interested in buying emotional experiences, and he called the brands that are able to create an emotional bond with their client’s emotional brands. Within this context the literature on internet branding is currently in a formative stage, with little integration evident (Merisavo and Raulas, 2004; Ibeh et al., 2005). Ibeh et al. (2005) stated that successful I-Branding is dependent upon targeting customers with unique messages, unique functionality and unique content. When customers enter an organization’s web site, they typically do so in order to find content on a given topic or to undertake a particular transaction.

To enhance their prospects of achieving successful I-Branding, companies have been urged to embrace a number of strategies. These include:

- Establishing an online brand as quickly as possible to gain first-mover advantages (Doyle, 1998);
• Undergoing a systematic process of understanding, attracting, engaging, retaining and learning about target customers (Kierzkowski et al., 1996);
• Going beyond generating awareness for their sites to a greater focus on developing trust and relationships through an improved “click-to-order” ratio and repurchase rates (Court et al., 2006; McGovern, 2000);
• Building stronger relationships through targeting customers with unique messages, unique functionality, content and personalization techniques (Ibeh et al., 2005);
• Delivering a quality product/service experience within a unique positioning concept and strong communications programme (Ibeh et al., 2005);
• Ensuring consistent delivery of the brand promise (Doyle, 1998; Court et al., 2006).

Research suggested that online traditional attributes such as product selection and price drive brand equity and e-loyalty to a lesser degree than a positive customer online experience (Kearney Report, 2000). Ibeh et al. (2005) argued that these benefits are interlocking elements that reinforce one another to create a total, high-impact customer online experience, which is a key source of added value in the internet economy.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY
The study has been carried out in order to achieve following objectives:
• To analyze the preference of internet marketing among youngsters.
• To investigate various factors which influence the youth towards purchasing through internet.

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY
H1: There is no significant difference of gender among various factors such as customer satisfaction, knowledge, attitude, accessibility and attention.
H2: There is no significant difference of age among various factors such as customer satisfaction, knowledge, attitude, accessibility and attention.
H3: There is no significant relation among the factors of I-Branding by customers.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
After studying various reviews related to I-Branding, the following objectives have been taken into consideration. The study is descriptive and analytical in nature. An attempt has been made to analyze the preference of internet marketing among youngsters. This study investigated various factors which influence the youth towards purchasing through internet. The sample size is comprised of 196 respondents from various regions of Punjab. The sample belonging to different cities of Punjab, mainly in Jalandhar and Patiala was taken. The data collected through questionnaires was coded and tabulated keeping in context with the objective of the study. Apart from descriptive statistics, tools like ‘t’ test and correlation were employed to arrive at dependable conclusions. The data was analyzed using SPSS version 16.0 for windows throughout the study.

FACTORS FOR ADVERTISEMENTS
After studying review of literature, five factors have been selected and under each factor five statements have been framed. These statements helped in understanding the perception of youth towards I-Branding and are as follows:

Customer Satisfaction:-
- I-Branding satisfies the value of offerings in product quality, service
- I-Branding satisfies the price of offerings
- I-Branding fulfill the expectation of customer
- I-Branding delight the customer expectation
- I-Branding provides the value products to the customer

Knowledge:-
- I-Branding provide relevant product information
- I-Branding provide timely information
- I-Branding are the source of upto date product information
- I-Branding supply complete product information
- I-Branding also provides the information of international brands

Attitude:-
- I-Branding provides more information
- I-Branding persuade the customer to purchase the product
- I-Branding help people change their attitude towards product/brands
- I-Branding help people change their belief
- I-Branding help people change their attitude towards the advertising company

Accessibility:-
- I-Branding are easily accessible on internet
- I-Branding are the convenient source of product information
- I-Branding provide the accurate information to Customer
- I-Branding provides the information to masses
- I-Branding is an economical source of information

Attention:-
- I-Branding is an entertaining source
- I-Branding is enjoyable
- I-Branding is exciting
- I-Branding is eye
- I-Branding is attractive

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Gender
In this study, the sample consists of 196 respondents (youth of Punjab region), out of which 125 are males and rest 71 respondents are females. Most of the male and females are working and rest are students. Table 1 indicates the contribution of both categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>63.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>36.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Age
Four categories have been identified, which are described in Table 2 and the maximum respondents (male and female) lie in the category of 20-24 years which consist of almost 69 percent of the whole sample.

**TABLE 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Categories</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>21.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>68.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 and above</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Qualification**

This is one of the most important variable as the nature of this study is totally dependent upon the educated respondents and the result shows that majority of the respondents are graduate i.e. 43 percent and 27 percent respondents are post graduate, which helps in gaining accurate picture of educated youth towards the various variables selected for this study.

**TABLE 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification Categories</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>28.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>42.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Graduate</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>27.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Sample Test (between Male and Female)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parameters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t-test for Equality of Means</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95 percent Confidence Interval of the Difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-.055</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For testing the above hypothesis, weighted average mean has been calculated and independent t-test has been applied. The Table 4 shows that there is significant difference of gender among customer satisfaction, knowledge, accessibility and attention. It can be directly inferred from the table that the mean of gender (male and female) differ significantly among customer satisfaction at the p < .05 (p = 0.957), similarly the p value of knowledge also exceeds i.e. (p = 0.395), as in the case of accessibility and attention, there is significant difference exist as the p value of both factors is more than the specified value, i.e. (p = 0.535 and p = 0.391 respectively). The independent-samples t-test indicates that only attitude (p = 0.047) is one of the factor which did not differ significantly. Otherwise it can be concluded that null hypothesis (H1) is rejected.

Now attitude could be considered as most significant factor which creates significant difference among male and female while purchasing or selecting any good through I-Branding. The value of a significant level, showing them in the face of gender has a significant impact. Marketers should do the branding on internet according to the gender, as some factor influence more male categories and some factors influence female categories.

### TABLE 5

**Independent Sample Test (between different age groups)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameters</th>
<th>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
<th>95 percent Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>1.634</td>
<td>.203</td>
<td>-1.854</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td>-2.310</td>
<td>96.096</td>
<td>.023</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Independent sample t-test in Table 5 shows that age has significant difference among all factors. Now it can be easily inferred from the table that the mean of age significantly differ among customer satisfaction at the \( p < 0.5 \) (\( p = 0.065 \)), similarly the \( p \) value of knowledge (\( p = 0.733 \)), attitude (\( p = 0.466 \)), accessibility (\( p = 0.680 \)) and attention (\( p = 0.201 \)) is greater than specified value. So finally it can be concluded that the null hypothesis \((H_2)\) is rejected. Organizations should focus on different age categories while branding on internet.

### TABLE 6
**Correlation Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Customer Satisfaction</th>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Attitude</th>
<th>Accessibility</th>
<th>Attention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Customer Satisfaction</strong></td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>( .424^{**} )</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>( .325^{**} )</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.000)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.000)</td>
<td>(.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge</strong></td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>( .411^{**} )</td>
<td>( .325^{**} )</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.000)</td>
<td>(.000)</td>
<td>(.000)</td>
<td>(.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attitude</strong></td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>( .410^{**} )</td>
<td>( .587^{**} )</td>
<td>( .489^{**} )</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.000)</td>
<td>(.000)</td>
<td>(.000)</td>
<td>(.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accessibility</strong></td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>( .325^{**} )</td>
<td>( .366^{**} )</td>
<td>( .472^{**} )</td>
<td>( .475^{**} )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.000)</td>
<td>(.000)</td>
<td>(.000)</td>
<td>(.000)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

The results of Karl Pearson’s correlation (Table 6) suggested that there is a significant correlation between customer satisfaction and knowledge \((r=.424, p=.000)\), customer satisfaction
and attitude (r=.411, p=.000), customer satisfaction and accessibility (r=.410, p=.000), customer satisfaction and attention (r=.325, p=.000), knowledge and attitude (r=.325, p=.000), Knowledge and accessibility (r=.587, p=.000), knowledge and attention (r=.366, p=.000), attitude and accessibility (r=.489, p=.000), attitude and attention (r=.472, p=.000), accessibility and attention (r=.475, p=.000). Thus H₃, that there is no significant correlation among the five factors of I-Branding by customers may be rejected in the above cases. Thus, it can be concluded that null hypothesis (H₃) is rejected.

Thus, the results indicate that every factor is correlated with each other, and for marketers every factor is equally important while identifying the customers on internet.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY

It can be concluded that customer satisfaction, knowledge, accessibility and attention could be considered as most significant factors which create significant difference between gender (male and female) while purchasing or searching any product through I-Branding and attitude has emerged as one factor which has no significant difference on gender. But in case of age, it has significant difference among all factors. And there is a significant correlation among the five factors of I-Branding by customers. Finally it can be concluded that I-Branding is creating an impact on every category of age and people and they are more satisfied with the ways that the organizations are adopting to attract the customer. Although there are various evaluation activities involved in campaigns and experiments, it is still difficult to determine the performance of current I-Branding models. More and more evaluation experience is still required to establish universally accepted and well approved measurement methodologies and techniques for I-Branding.

SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The literature of I-Branding at present is at a formative stage, with limited integration among its themes. The framework described here provides the basis for the rational formulation and implementation of branding strategies, applying internet-based tools to the tasks of marketing communication and customer relationship-building in particular. This paper has presented the I-Branding framework as an important and relevant conceptual tool for marketing practitioners and pragmatic academics. Future research could usefully explore these interactions in various business contexts, so that transferable knowledge can be built in relation to their integration into specific I-Branding strategies and campaigns. It is hoped that the findings and lessons will generate new insights into how the internet can be effectively developed as a powerful tool of branding strategy.

REFERENCES


