

Sources of Brand Value from Semiotics to Marketing Perspectives

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate brand value and specifically sources (antecedents) that determine this value. We wanted to explain brand value, which is a complex phenomenon, from semiotics and marketing literature. Our conclusions indicate that value depends on perceptions of the sign (brand) through a set of elements conceived by the company and transmitted as an identity of the brand to consumer who will evaluate them as an image of the brand. The differential effect between brand identity and image makes the basis of brand value.

Keywords: brand value, semiotics, marketing, brand identity, brand image.

1. Introduction

Brands are present in the landscape of each individual. Some brands have become legendary because they were able to enhance the value they hold. Indeed, Aaker (1991) suggests that the brand provides value to the consumer as well as the company. However, to succeed brand must have value in the eyes of consumer (Keller, 1993). But the problem is to identify the sources of consumer-brand value. Which are the powerful determinants of brand value in consumer's eyes? The objective of this paper is to identify the main sources of brand value to consumer from semiotics and marketing literature.

2. The semiotic approach of brand value

Semiotics is the discipline that studies how meaning is generated and transmitted among humans (Eco, 1988). Meanings depend on perception of sign. According to De Saussure (1962), a sign is represented with two facets: the signifier (or acoustic image) comes from the perceptions of the outside world and the signified (or concept image) comes from the perceptions of the inner world. Besides, the brand is a sign perceived by the consumer. For Semprini (2005), the brand is a machine to produce meanings. So that, value occurs when brand is perceived and interpreted by consumers. The brand sign has the product that represents the material world and the brand which is the immaterial world or the spirit sphere (Saint-Hilaire, 2005). Brand value contains, in one hand, functional values related to the object of product (*i.e.* physical performance, practicality, techniques) and in the other hand, symbolic values which are sources of emotions, pleasure, luxury, sensuality held by the brand. Both facets of brand value could be more explained referring to marketing literature.

3. The marketing approach of brand value

Floch (1990) exploited the semiotic works in marketing researches. Brand value could be identified with two concepts well known in marketing literature: brand identity and brand image.

3.1. Brand identity

The brand identity framework proposed by Floch (1990, p.111) explains that the brand is an entity set showed by a speech and concrete existence on markets. The identity is defined through sensory dimension (the signifier) as brand design, materials and techniques, then the dimension of contents (the signified) as values from the world vision. In other worlds, according to Kapferer (1999), brand identity could be considered as:

- a physical entity with objective features. This is the basis of the brand and its material added value;
- a personality. In fact, brand communicates thanks to speeches (advertising, design...). It is compared by Aaker (1997) to a person. Personality aims to communicate symbolic values as emotions, life, youthfulness which are human traits
- a cultural universe. It means a system of values considered as a source of inspiration to brand identity.

Brand identity is created and nourished by the company. Speeches communicated with logos, slogan, colors, styles or characters to show physical and symbolic attributes of the brand. These elements are sensitive to environment (consumption, communication, culture, market) evolution and trends. They are made by brand managers to be perceived and evaluated by consumer. Brand identity seems to be a transmitter of values to the receiver (consumer). Reception of these values becomes the brand image.

3.2. Brand image

Lai (2005, p.53) defines brand image as “*all material and immaterial representations associated to the brand and organized in individual’s mind*”. Brand image depends on consumer’s memory (knowledge and information stored in memory due to experiences lived with brand, word-of-mouth, advertisements and broadly communication strategies made by the company) but also on perceptions (subjective evaluation of the brand and product’s quality). These perceptions are a set of associations related to the brand and identified as connected nodes of information held in memory that contain meanings about the brand for the consumer (Keller, 1993). This concept is influenced by brand history and personality, product categories, benefits derived by consumer from brand consumption...so that brand associations could be divided into two categories:

- Functional associations: related to the product as physical and technique features;
- Symbolic associations: related to the brand as hedonic experiences, emotions, pleasure, and brand personality.

Brand value is a process made by brand identity which is transferred and changed into brand image made by consumer. These two concepts are dependent and considered as main sources of creating value to the consumer. More precisely, values appear from the gap or the differential effect between identity and image as showed in Figure 1. Total or part of elements transmitted by the company will be evaluated by the consumers’ perceptions. Some brand identity elements would not be accepted by consumer and rejected. This fact could consequently decrease the value of brand provided to the consumer.

4. Conclusion

Analyzing elements of the brand that add value in consumer’s eyes is complex. Brand valuation depends on physical (product) and sensitive or symbolic (brand) spheres. For managers, understanding sources of brand value is necessary to develop specific marketing strategies, creating new communication programs or changing store’s merchandising so as to make living hedonic experiences to the consumers and orient them to choose this brand and not another. Consumers would change their behavior and buy this brand. As a result, the company could increase its turnover.

5. References

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Figures

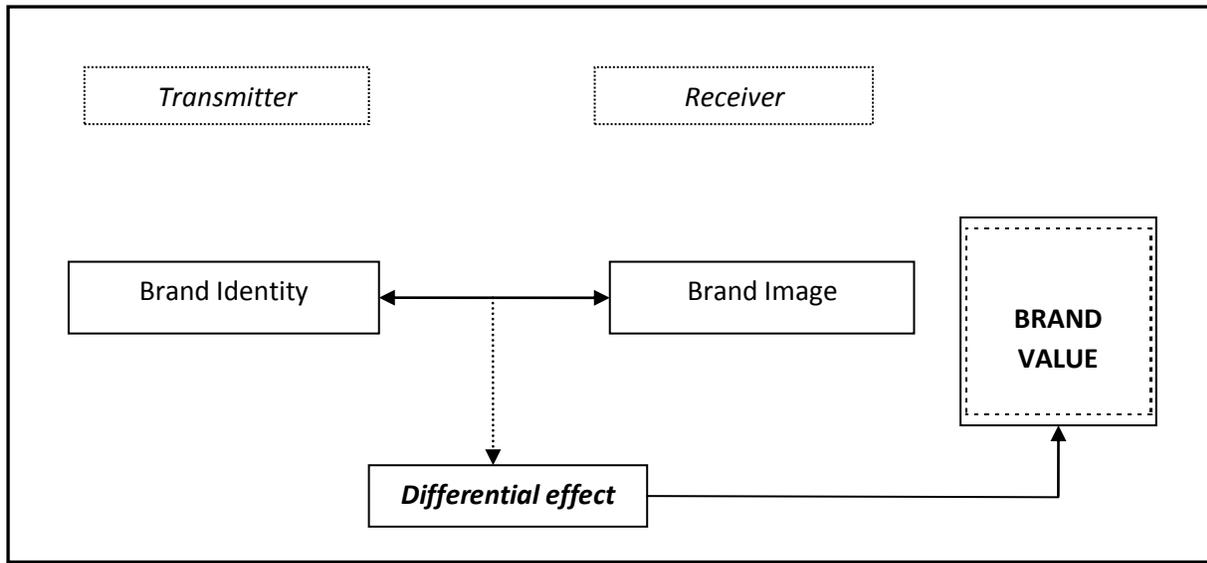


Figure 1- Sources of brand value