

More than Words: Effective Business Management and the Role of Brand Language

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ABSTRACT

Brand language is the body of words, phrases, and terms that an organization uses to describe its purpose or in reference to its products. Brand language is used in marketing to help consumers connect specific words or ideas to specific companies or products. When developing a brand language, word choice and tone are the two fundamental components. The present paper attempts to establish the prime importance of Brand Language – both at its ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ level. Brand Language establishes sustaining and timeless corporations, right from the Founding Stones to the Image Building Facades, from the Social Responsibility acts to Survival Integrity Skills.

Key Words : Brand language, Communication, Advertisements, Branding, Business management

INTRODUCTION

“Without Language, one cannot talk to people and understand them; one cannot share their hopes and aspirations, grasp their history appreciate their poetry, or savour their songs”

—*Nelson Mandela, Long walk to Freedom*

Brand language is the body of words, phrases, and terms that an organization uses to describe its purpose or in reference to its products. Brand language is used in marketing to help consumers connect specific words or ideas to specific companies or products. When developing a brand language, word choice and tone are the two fundamental components. Word choice is the vocabulary that is used in the marketing or advertising, while tone refers to the attitude of the advertisement. Tone is not limited to language; it can also be incorporated through visual elements as well as delivery. Brand language is a part of verbal brand identity, includes naming of both corporation and the products they sell as well as taglines, voice, and tone. Another benefit of developing a brand language is the ability for a corporation or product to be

recognizable across international borders, while other advertising codes can be misinterpreted, words can be translated to ensure brand unity.

As a part of the advertising world brand language’s primary function is to identify a company or product and also differentiate that company/product from competitors. The language is used to get the attention of the consumer and then to relay information about what is being advertised. It is also used to ensure that when people communicate about the product there are fewer misunderstandings and more clarity about purpose and the role that this commodity wants to play in the lives of the consumer.

The brand language can also be associated with competing for investors, recruiting talent, or acquiring business partners.

Brand language is also often used internally within a company. For motivational and leadership situations, branding language helps to promote the brand values and is treated as a commodity alongside the actual products and/or company.

When positive words become strongly associated

with particular brands, these words can become assets—to the point that competing brands may find the words difficult to use. For example, in his book *Brand Sense* (Kogan Page, 2005) Martin Lindstrom quotes extensive word association research carried out by Millward Brown demonstrating the strong link between the words “magic” and “kingdom” and Disney. Disney appears to have made a successful investment in “owning” these words. Lindstrom’s studies found that Disney has the highest number of words that are associated with one specific brand (among brands that were surveyed). Along with “magic” and “kingdom” Disney has been shown to have branded the words: “dreams,” “creativity,” “fantasy,” “smiles” and “generation”. The study that he conducted asked people to associate those words with a brand and over 80% of people asked said that they thought of Disney. Part of the reason that Disney has been so successful is that they are able to seamlessly integrate traditional and new media markets in a way that allows them to reach large audiences with a stable continuous message.

Other campaigns that have powerful brand language recognition are Kellogg’s and Gillette. Part of the idea with branded language is to go beyond just a slogan and to imbue ordinary words with the idea or essence of a particular brand. With Kellogg’s the word that is associated with them is “crunch”. With Gillette the word that consumers see as synonymous with the brand is “masculine.” In this case the word masculine also conjures socially constructed ideologies, which helps the brand become a more stable construction in the mind of consumers.

The disadvantage of very strong brand language associations is that they may prove a hindrance if a brand wishes to position itself differently.

The other day while watching an advertisement on TV, we were amazed at how Junior Amitabh Bachchan and Shashi Kapoor enacted the Brand ‘Dance India Dance’ auditions act. It was truly relishing as the junior Amitabh exclaimed: ‘Mere Paas bank balance hai, bangla hai...aur factories bhi hain.’ Then the younger dude climactically retorted ‘to phir maa kahaan hai’.

The word ‘Maa’ has never been used or ab (used) since ‘Deewar’ to the latest ‘Dance India Dance’ – Mummy’s Auditions Advertisement.

In the same way the manner in which, some of the advertisements have become ageless, they have etched a permanent inkling in the mass psyche. Take for example

the advertisement of Bajaj Bulbs and Lights:

‘Jab main chota Bacha tha, badi shararat karta tha, tabh bhi mere ghar ke andar, roshni deta bajaj. Ab main bilkul buddha hun, goli khake jeeta hun, lekin aj bhi ghar ke andar, roshan hota bajaj.’

As the case goes, how the language, the thought and the tone go into making an advertisement plays a significant role in establishing it as an immortal Brand which consequently evolves into a time-tested and road-friendly name. ‘Maa’ has never been trending so much. Bajaj’s song is still on every one’s lips when *tete a tete* (ing) with friends over a cup of tea.

Well, it is all about establishing the Brand and what goes behind it is the Brand Language, which seems perhaps the back bone of the Grammar of the world of Marketing.

Every business set-up aspires to position itself as a trending and loved-by-all Brand. The question is how the aspiration is to be fulfilled. Perhaps the answer is Brand Language. The words that have been used, the sentences that have been framed, and the tone that influences, instils and imbibes both conception and perception. The Brand Language is hence both a re-enforcing and an undermining factor. Therefore it has to be simple, jargon-free and with a ‘spot-on’ tone. As one thinks of the Brand, one visualises, a logo, a monogram, symbols, signs, shapes, colours etc. Further, the combination of words, diction, and rhyme, musical, visual or sensual identity is what gives to the Brands that are left-alone, a popular trending mark. It makes them sought-after Brands.

Most business writers have soggy imaginations, sinfully chunky, objective, matter-of-factly ‘whey-matey’ chunks of thoughts with overloaded tones. Consequently the language of the Brands may become split, stuffy and alienated. No Business House would love to know this. The language needs to be clear, competent, concise, compelling, consistent and simply cool. The choice of Diction and Tone is truly significant for an organisation while trying to define its product and purpose. They are behind the marketing ideas that help consumers to connect, compare and consist (Lindstrom, Martin). Visual Element and delivery has been added to it by (Ellis Jessica).

Brand language has no boundaries, as far as it takes the products, the punch lines, taglines, literature, voice, tone, image, places. It is the Brand language that gives

the corporations an over-the-edge weapon of cutting across markets and sweeping away competitions. Brand Language is both an end in itself, as well as a means to an end in establishing both, the profile and personality of the company. More importantly, the thought that goes behind the Profile, which Lindstrom (2005) would call 'The Brand Sense'

Well, it would be also incorrect to consider language as the only mode or means of communication, yes by no means; it may exhaust our capacities of communication. Here it would be fruitful to bring in the views of Noam Chomsky, who says: "We communicate in all sorts of ways- by gesture, by the clothes we wear, even by our hairstyles." He has discussed some of the most interesting aspects of language in an interview in 2005. It goes thus:

'What we know is mostly by introspection, if you pay attention for, say, next few hours, you'll discover that you're constantly talking to yourself. It's almost impossible to go through a moment of time without internal dialogue taking place, and that's just an enormous part of our consciousness. And it's in language, most of it, at least the part that's accessible to our consciousness in language...The thing is, we have no real access to thought or consciousness except through language. It is wrong to think of human use of language as characteristically informative, in fact or in intention. Human language can be used to inform or mislead, to clarify one's own thoughts or to display one's cleverness, or simply for play. If I speak with no concern for modifying your behaviour or thoughts, I am not using language any less than if I say exactly the same things with such intention. If we hope to understand human language and the psychological capacities on which it rests, we must first ask, what it is, and then how and for what purpose it is used'(Noam Chomsky interviewed by David Jay Brown, 2005)

Language, then, we think remains the back bone of the industry whatsoever. Although, challenges in establishing, a sustaining brand personality have increased, with the onslaught of the new social media. Volatile and erratic markets, split consumers, unlimited choices and opportunities perhaps call for a more responsible and powerful role of Brand Language in giving the corporation a timeless identity. The power of words, the power of the impact of thought and expression make them the backbone of the organisation. The Thought, the Words lead to an everlasting commitment and promise of delivery. This makes Brand Language a founding stone and not the facade, the whole cake and not just the icing on it.

Thus Brand Language is not just a 'Top down' concept – as is popularly considered, but it is a sincere 'Bottom Up' endeavour on the part of the marketers. Brand Language establishes the 'Persona' of the company projecting its education, background, seriousness, playfulness, desire to attract, level of commitment, clarity of purpose, focus, level of engagement with the people and the product, meter of honesty with the consumers.

In an age where all organisations, governments, companies all seek reputations, Media steps in as all powerful, an omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent presence. Its influence sneaks into almost all the nooks of society from violence, sexual promiscuity to gender discriminations and bull and bears in the stock markets. Markets soar high and take steep downturns with the influence of the media. Corporate collapses, government turnarounds are often the after effects of media manifestations and muzzling (McNamara, 2005). Looking at the histrionics, would trace the roots of Brand establishing and the grammar of language at the very core of it.

Lasswell, Lerner, and Pool have the right words probably regarding the grammar of content, "Content Analysis operates on the view that verbal behaviour, that the flow of symbols is a part of the flow of events, and that the communication process is an aspect of historical process...Content Analysis is a technique which aims at describing, with optimum objectivity, precision and generality. What is said on a given subject, in a given place, at a given time?"

Apparently:

- Who says what?
- Through which mode and channel?
- To whom?
- With What effect?

Brand Language under the auspices of such an analysis can be both quantitative as well as qualitative. It could range from gathering, summarizing, identifying, making references, measuring, generalising and reaching its maximum impact. Newman (1999) calls it a technique for gathering and analysing words, meaning, pictures, symbols, ideas, themes etc. It could be any sort of communication – written, visual, or spoken. Berger (1991) would account for the tone part, when he talks about measuring the content on the basis of violence, negative portrayals of women and Weber (1985) would draw valid inferences out of them. Brand Languages along with Content Analyses are winning combinations as they bring

out desired results in the form of preference for a particular Brand, people's willingness to pay, Perception, Image and Impact. Consequently the ultimate goal of any content/language monitoring by media, advertisers or marketing professionals would be: Proper Analysis of the text, Critical Analysis of the text, Narrative Analysis, Rhetorical, Discourse, and Interpretation. Also, Studying the Tone of the Text e.g. "How Stupendous!" Further it studies metaphors and similes, active and passive sense of the action and the text, viewpoints, visual elements and photographs, contexts and meanings, by or from the given text.

E.g. Photograph of a man cuddling a baby projects Love Care and Protection. Message given by a high-profile expert will outweigh the same from a lay man.

In the long journey of establishing a Brand, in the modern arena of faceless interactions and communications reaching a level of a lifelong relationship is not a very easy task. The language content hence steps in to either positively or negatively influence the market. Be it Advertisements, PR, Marketing Communications, Public Speaking, Propositions, conferences, relations and simply just telephone calls. Brand language is at the centre of all this. Thus it could be safely placed at the top of the hierarchy of the multiple promotional tools that organisations use to establish a positive or sustaining position for their product, place and people. Organisations

have a large social responsibility towards the environmental issues, global warming, sustainable development, fair treatment of employees on a global basis, safety, quality and much more. Brand Language at both the 'bottom up' and the 'top down' level is the answer to build a socially responsible corporation at the forefront with Trust and Credibility.

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