

The Four Anchors of Brand Appeal: A Study into the Gaps in the Literature

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Abstract

Brand loyalty has traditionally been taken to be highly emotional, a product of bonding, on the one hand, subject to a rational appeal, on the other, and as the end result of effective branding. Only in recent decades, have sensory considerations been brought into the model of brand identity, and also only in isolated research, have intuitive criteria come to be analyzed by a few authors. However no relevant research has considered these four elements combined, that is, rationality, emotions, the senses and intuition, as the basis for a more humane view of brand appeal and brand identity. This paper threads a stream of thought in the field, and identifies a significant gap in the literature concerning the holistic approach.

Keywords: Brand identity, rational, intuitive, sensory, and emotional appeals.

Paper type: Lit review, qualitative.

Introduction

Brand loyalty has traditionally been taken to be highly emotional, a product of bonding, on the one hand, yet subject to rational appeal, on the other, coming as the end result of effective branding. Though explored by Holbrook & Hirschman as variables that would enrich the dominant buyer behavior models, only recently, have sensory considerations been brought into the model of brand identity; Lees-Maffei studied signs and symbols, their interpretation and meaning, that is semiotics; Sweldens spoke about paired stimuli; and then, only in some isolated research, have intuitive criteria come to be analyzed by a few authors like Morin & Renvoise who considered “gut feeling” as a trigger in decision making [1-4]. However no relevant research has considered these four elements combined, that is, rationality, emotions, the senses and intuition, as the basis for a holistic view of brand appeal and as anchors of brand identity, defined by Aaker as a unique set of associations that implies a promise to the consumer about the functional, emotional, or self-expressive benefits of any brand [5].

Guided by the question “have the rational, emotional, intuitive and sensory criteria for brand appeal been studied as a whole, that is, as a single model of consumer behavior, or is there indeed a gap in the literature?” what follows is a detailed review of the literature, dealing albeit separately with these rather different criteria, which reveals a significant gap that affects what should be a holistic and

more humane approach to the subject of brand identity.

Exploring the Gaps in the Literature

As ancient as Aristotle’s (384-322 BC) rhetoric, a most influential concept in management thought has been the idea of rationality [6, 7]. Block, Schultz, Breiter, Blood, Calder, Chamberlain & Fengqing said, accordingly, that consumer decision models assumed a rational process of persuasion throughout the 20th Century [8]. Problem recognition, information search, logical evaluation, and purchase decision, in a few words, had all been taken to mean a rather cold, calculating process of deduction. Bargh questioned, however, by the turn of that century, to what extent are people aware of and in control of the influences and reasons for their purchasing and consumption behavior [9].

Schmitt stated that marketing had traditionally viewed consumers as rational decision- makers, who mostly care and compare functional features and benefits [10]. He proposed that consumers be viewed as rational and emotional, concerned with achieving pleasurable experiences. Broadening the purely rational approach, so criticized by Bargh and Block, he explored sensory, affective, creative cognitive, physical, behavioral and lifestyle experiences, and social-identity, in one of the most holistic studies we have found in our quest for a more humane, rather than human, mind you, as humans are still labeled rational animals, a more humane analytical approach [8, 9, 11].

Sweldens equates brand appeal to what he calls “evaluative conditioning”, when he speaks about the consumer’s association of paired stimuli by sheer repetition, and found this process to be

largely unconscious [3]. He worked on the dual systems theory that balances intuitive and rational processes and stressed that although the decision process swings to one or the other side of a continuum between rationality and intuition, it always shows a mix of intuition and rationality.

On the other hand, Rytel says that consumers are not faithful to brands, as such, they are faithful to images and symbols, and to the sensations they generate, and thereby bringing sensory appeals into the theoretical mainstream [12]. Lees-Maffei calls that “semiotics in action”. Santos, Moutinho, L., Seixas, D. & Brandão relate brand perceptions to self-relatedness and social relevance, an interesting angle, self-versus-others, as additional emotional considerations [2, 13].

Bergqvist and Cowan state quite unequivocally that experiences are not reason-responsive, while Morin and Renvoise state that persuasion is not controlled by the rational brain, but rather, he might suggest, that it is MacLean’s primal brain which dominates [4, 13, 14].

Cleff, Chun and Nadine went wider and claimed that brand experiences consist of sensory, affective, cognitive, behavioral, and relational stimuli that provide consumers with a pleasurable and memorable experience [15]. And Bratulescu and Vasilache reported experimental results that revealed an important linkage between the five senses and purchase intentions, dealing in their research with food, which obviously involves taste.

Ferjani, Jedidi and Jagpal considered four components of brand value, biased perceptions, image associations, incremental value, and inertia value to develop a utility model of brand equity, based on different information-processing strategies without directly measuring consumer perceptions and brand image, only by observation, defining it thusly as the difference between the willingness to purchase the branded product vs. the willing to purchase the unbranded version of the same item [16].

Mullin equates branding to owning a piece of the consumer’s mind because it gives instant recall when the brain is triggered by a connection between a need and a solution. The power of a brand, the name and any associated logo (style, color, smell, sound, etc.), he says, helps the mind with pre-purchase decision-taking and conjures up a range of values of your offer. This suggests to us that a brand can and must be anchored on some kind of intuitive appeal.

Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello say that brand-related stimuli appear as part of a brand’s design and identity, its name and logo, for instance, in packaging, and marketing communications, and in the environment in which the brand is sold, or the product is consumed [16]. These brand-related stimuli constitute the major source of subjective, internal consumer responses, which tend to be multidimensional, and include hedonic dimensions, pleasure, that is, which is strictly in the consumer’s domain. Intuition seems to show its face in consumer analysis. Lastly, Pawle and Cooper found that the actual contribution of emotional factors to brand

decision making is between 63 and 86% greater than functional factors [17].

We set out to review relevant scientific works, and categorize them as inclusive, or not, of one, two, three, or all four of these appeals, the rational, the intuitive, the sensorial and the emotional anchors of brand identity, in what we view as a holistic and more humane study of brand identity, and we stress “humane” again as some might equate rationality with humanity; we tend to think of emotions and sensations in particular as linked more to our humanness than to our species, in the best style of Gobé, when he challenged marketers to “humanize” their brands [18].

Review of the Literature

As highlighted from MacLean to Schmitt, consumer decisions are not purely rational. Indeed, they may include emotional, sensory, and intuitive considerations as well [10, 14]. We may buy a car because “it is us”, or get “the house of our dreams” because “we can see ourselves growing old in it...” Do these “reasons” sound “rational”?

Bargh asked by the turn of the century to what extent are people aware of and in control of the influences and reasons for their purchasing and consumption behavior [9].

Although, in the past decade of consumer research, there has been increasing attention to the possibility that there may be automatic or non-conscious influences on choices and behavior, the field still appears dominated by purely cognitive approaches, in which decisions and actions are made deliberately.

Intuition, however, is at the heart of our most primeval thought processes. MacLean tracked the evolution of the human brain, from the reptilian, our oldest brain, which sits at the core with the cerebellum and controls our vital functions; to the limbic, which appeared along with the mammals, represented by the hippocampus, the amygdala, and the hypothalamus, and is capable of holding memories of behavior; and, ultimately, to the neo-cortex, which came with the primates, divided in two hemispheres that control language and abstract thought in humans, as well as imagination and consciousness [14]. Physiologically, it seems impossible to separate intuition and emotion from the thinking process. They are deeply imbedded in our behavior.

Nonetheless, ever since Nicosia and later Howard & Sheth, proposed the first models of consumer behavior, research assumed a rational process of decision making, the cognitive view dominated marketing as a discipline during the 20th Century; problem recognition, information search, logical evaluation, and purchase decision, in a few words, had all been taken to mean a rather cold, calculating process of deduction, where cognitive dissonance came to question if we, as consumers, had made the most rational choice; but, really, now, are consumers always all that rational? That is the question Shugan, and Steven quite literally asked! [14, 19-21].

Eser, Zeliha, Isin, Bahar & Tolon, found that unconscious mental processes are indeed major influences in peoples' deliberations. Kavalali suggested clearly that actions and decisions may have nothing to do with conscience, but with neurochemical dynamics [22, 23]. Roeser presented empirical research that supports the idea that people follow their initial intuitions and "gut feeling" in decision-making, and Denes-Raj and Epstein said they do so sometimes "against their better judgment", suggesting, with a bit of irony, perhaps, that intuition is –again– irrational [24, 25].

Bettman, Luce and Payne suggested that consumers tend to choose based on pre- established preference sets, and many times end up merely satisficing, a term coined by Simon [26]. Even West, Brockett and Golden talk about intuition in their neural networks' predictive model of consumer choice [27].

The problem is in understanding humane, not just human, behavior. Cian, Krishna and Schwartz say that emotion and rationality are fundamental elements of human life, but that, as abstract concepts, they are often difficult to define and grasp [28]. Batoni, a psychiatrist, says that the brain and the mind are different systems, indeed, the first is neurological in nature, while the latter is "a system of meanings", thus separating reasoning from sensations [29]. The brain feels, but the mind interprets those feelings, he would say. Our research into the realm of the intuitive brought us many times into the realm of religion instead. Dr. Batoni writes about religious beliefs, as Hartmann does, when he writes about "the compelling force of God", and says that 90% of Americans believe [30]. And we would ask, how much of that faith is intuitive, how much is it sensory and/or emotional, and most especially, how much of it can be deemed rational in the strictest sense of the word?

Pfaffmann established that sensations do trigger behavior. Nonetheless, Rupini and Nandagopal wrote that the senses had been largely ignored in research. The separation of sensation and interpretation was scientifically reported by Gobet and McMillan, who said that mental processes are generated by the brain, but in a broadly distributed fashion, inaccessible to direct measurement, pointing to a black box effect which could represent what Dr. Batoni calls the mind [31-34].

Danesi writes about "the meaning of meaning", and suggests there are two types, one she calls "denotative", given by initial inference, and the other "connotative", which she defines as the historical accumulations of meanings, where icons, indexes, and symbols are stored as reference [35]. But let's remember that experiences are not reason-responsive. Kavalali links this black-box-effect to decision- making, and suggests that decisions may have nothing to do with conscience [23].

Zajonc and Markus and later Chang & Tuan Pham, among others, pointed to the importance of the emotional content in the decision making processes, which had been, until then, sidelined as "irrational" [36, 37]. Scrull studied the effects of moods and memories on judgment [38]. Chanut, and Valente, extended the

considerations of Simon's theory of "bounded rationality" to consumer decision making, suggesting that we are not all that rational [39-41]. Albers-Miller & Stafford, and Fetterman & Robinson found that decisions balance emotional vs. rational criteria, and Li found that these emotional appeals are not homogeneous, nor do they generate similar responses across different consumption scenarios [42-44].

Discussion

Ballova, Hana and Kavojova stated that individual differences in decision-making have become increasingly important in consumer behavior literature, because they have consequences for our choices, and rationality [45]. Reliable assessment of these differences in cognitive styles used in decision-making is a challenge for researchers, they said, and added that within decision-making research, two broad basic preferences are distinguished: intuitive and deliberative, which is rooted in the dual process theories of Kahneman and others [46]. Understanding that black box, that maze made by the consumer's thoughts, emotions, sensations, and perceptions, for each particular consumption scenario, is vital to constructing the appropriate strategy [47]. And Haji says that for decades, brand personality has captivated research attention because it helps differentiate brands. Primarily this differentiation is achieved by the development of personal meanings expressed through emotional characteristics [48].

If Kahneman established the importance of emotion in decision making, and drove researchers to reanalyze consumer decisions, no author has considered the four criteria being proposed here, the rational appeal, the intuitive, the sensorial and the emotional appeal for constructing a holistic and more humane model of consumer behavior in what could represent a new conception of rationality [46, 6].

Nicosia's and Howard & Sheth models epitomized rationality; Denes-Raj & Epstein, West et al, Roeser, Eser et al, and Morin & Renvoise considered intuition and "gut feeling" as triggers in the decision making process in their perspective, while Kavalali suggested a black box effect, much like Gobet and McMillan ; and Betsch focused on the preference for intuition to develop a scale to measure it; Bratulescu & Vasilache, and Danesi, on the other hand, studied the effect of the senses on decision making; Zajonc & Markus, Pawle & Cooper , and Scrull concentrated on emotions; Epstein, Pacini, Denes- Raj & Heier combined two criteria, but focused on rationality and intuition only; Cian et al. on their part balanced rationality and emotions; Balueva, Kravchenko & Kartashov measured sensations and emotions; Rupini & Nandagopal centered their model on rationale and sensations; and Pawle & Cooper proposed two axes of brand identity, love and respect; widening the stream of research, Schmitt explored sensory, affective, creative cognitive, physical, behavioral and lifestyle experiences, and social-identity, in one of the most holistic studies we have found; and then Ferjani, Jedidi and Jagpal took four components of brand value to develop a utility model of brand equity, but defined them as biased perceptions, image

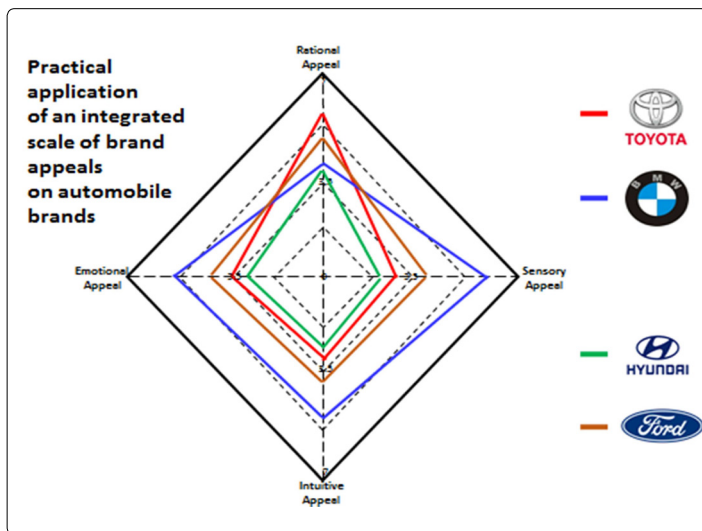
associations, incremental value, and inertia value, in what seems to be a balance between sensations and rationality [4, 14, 16, 17, 20, 22-25, 27, 28, 32-36, 38]. No author, however, has studied a balanced model including all four appeals as proposed here, the rational, the intuitive, the sensory and the emotional, as the anchors of brand identity.

Li found that emotional appeals are not homogeneous, nor do they generate similar responses across different consumption scenarios. Is that limited only to that criterion? We ask. Knowing which appeal is most effective, resilient, and resistant for a particular line of product, service, or brand, and consumption situation, is crucial to marketing success [44]. If brands are “fulfilled promises”, and these promises work with or against the customer’s feelings and beliefs, what should they promise, and what must they deliver? [48].

The Rational, Intuitive, Sensorial and Emotional Model of Brand Appeal

The graph below reflects our holistic view of brand identity. We propose that brands are indeed anchored on four elements, rational, intuitive, sensorial and emotional appeals. We view brand identity as swinging in either of two axes, the rational-intuitive and the emotional-sensorial axis, and we would suggest that any brand’s identity will fit within these, leaning toward those criteria that ultimately define its image and personality.

Our review of the literature has found no research combining these four elements of brand appeal into one single, holistic model of brand identity. Research leans toward one, two, and perhaps three of these angles. Indeed, as stated by Block et al., throughout the 20th Century, the rational view prevailed [8]. Then, as marketing paradigms broadened, researchers explored the emotional connections between consumers and brands, as well as the emotional aspects of consumer decision-making. Neuromarketers have explored the sensorial domain, but none has integrated the two axes and its four angles.



Graph 1

Conclusions

Different authors have studied separately the emotional content of consumer decisions, beyond the purely rational, that is; some have added sensory considerations, and few have considered the role of intuition in decision making, yet none, in past and current research, has explored the four elements expressed her combined, that is, the rational, the intuitive, the sensory and the emotional appeals to brand identity.

Recommendations for Future Research

If no research has studied the combined rational, intuitive, sensory and emotional anchors of brand identity, we would first recommend applying existing yet separate scales, such as Harmon-Jones and Bastian’s discrete emotions questionnaire, Glaser’s measurement methods for intuition, or Buck et al. cognitive and emotional scales, among others, through self-reporting methods, to integrate one single measurement of brand appeal and identity such as that portrayed on the graph above [49-52]. The social angle proposed by Santos et al. could be brought in as a mediating factor in the construction of a model [53].

Second, considering our proposed model, which combines the rational, the intuitive, the sensorial and the emotional appeals, as independent variables, in the definition of brand identity, we would then suggest research to test the resilience and resistance of each appeal, and to determine which factors may act as mediators and moderators. Which appeal is the strongest in any given purchase scenario?

Third, we would also recommend identifying which brands would benefit from shifting their appeal toward a different axis, if their current identity showed weaknesses in the face of competition, to then show how marketers can shift their products and services’ appeal, their brands’ identities toward more resilient and resistant angles and levels, depending on their particular purchase scenarios. The implications and applications for marketing strategy are boundless.

Purpose: To thread existing theory and research, and to identify the gaps in the literature regarding a more humane and holistic view of brand identity, based on rational, intuitive, sensory and emotional appeals.

Design/methodology/approach: Extensive literature review. Findings: Our review of the literature has found no research combining these four elements of brand appeal, that is, the rational, intuitive, sensory and the emotional, into one single, holistic model of brand identity. Research leans toward one, two, and perhaps three of these angles but not all, nor altogether.

Research limitations & implications: We would recommend applying existing albeit separate scales, such as Harmon-Jones and Bastian’s discrete emotions questionnaire, Glaser’s measurement methods for intuition, or Buck et al. cognitive and emotional scales, through self-reporting metrics, to integrate a four-pronged measurement of brand appeal and identity in one combined scale,

to then apply to iconic brands and compare the results as a new and holistic way to measure brand identity [49-52].

Practical implications: Knowing where a brand stands on an integrated scale, and which appeal is most relevant for its particular line, product or service is crucial to marketing success. If brands are “fulfilled promises”, and these promises must be aligned with the customer’s feelings and beliefs, what should they promise, and what must they deliver? [53].

Originality/value: The study presents a more humane definition of brand identity, based on four anchors and dimensions, the rational, intuitive, sensory, and the emotional appeals, and identifies a significant gap in the literature regarding this holistic view [54-65].

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