

Brand-consumer expectations; an impactful journey

Managing brand associations after owning them, a brand needs to also manage its expectations, after owning them....

By S. Ramesh Kumar

We live in a world of expectations, that is only getting more intense by the day, thanks to the fast paced, digital world. We check our mails, face book and Instagram with expectations. Brands build expectations when they launch new versions or even new brands need to whip up expectations. Do we not open a box containing a brand of mobile phone, with expectations? Do we not have expectations with respect to the relationships we build (unless we are into the world of lowering our expectations! Brands basically may also have to change the expectations to be competitive or find ways to ensure that they sustain the expectations cherished by their consumers, in a dynamic world. Blackberry brand of mobile phone had created a digital revolution by introducing the real time e mail appreciation but was unable to sustain it. Apple with its "i" offerings continues to rule the roost.

There are several useful models on consumer decision making as a journey. Brand-Consumer Expectations is a journey that pervades into several aspects of consumer decision making. Expectations trigger the basic desire for the brand, take the brand into the consideration set . MIT 's neuro specialist Moshe Bar, says that we do not think consciously to combine relevance, salience and value to us to look at an object / anything -the brain evaluates an incoming signal (read brand) within a fraction of a second and decides ,if we should look at it. Hence expectations from a brand (old or new) form the major trigger, for our decision journey. Later in all the other stages (including the regret experienced if a brand is sold out), expectations, play a part in the decision journey. When Ola launched its limited edition electric scooter, the rage for bookings (one lakh booked in the first twenty four hours) was based on expectations; the regret for not finding a booking among others who were not successful was also based on expectations. And Ola is not historically associated with scooters!

Brands and expectations

marketing context. Performance, experiential and social signaling value (status value) are the expectations associated with brands. Brands today need to be sensitive to the three kinds of expectations.

While satisfaction is the comparison between expected performance and actual performance as perceived by the consumer, expectations are important as they deal with perceived thoughts about the brand ahead of the purchase and beyond the purchase as the brand needs to have a committed following . Recent research

published using neuromarketing techniques makes the point that we may not be even fully aware of the impact the expectations make on our mind. The research points out that the maximum pleasure associated with a brand of yoghurt occurs when the consumer flips the cap of the yoghurt opened by the consumer!

Expectations and brands -a contemporary view

There are important reasons why a focus is required on expectations. Researchers, refer to attention economy , where consumers find it difficult to focus on specific brands due to the “noise” created by social media . The book “Stranger to yourself “, makes a mention of 11 million of bits of information (that we are exposed to) going down the sub conscious as we are able to only focus on a few bits of information at any given point in time. Finally, and importantly, expectations lead the consumer

into the decision journey . iPhone, with its consumer expectations on performance, signaling value and experiential aspects , is instrumental in making thousands of people queue up overnight before retail outlets ,the world over, with expectations , whenever a new offering is announced . When we consider German brand of cars like BMW, Mercedes and Audi, are there tangible major feature based differences, with respect to cars? One brand is associated with the driving experience, one with aerodynamics of design and one is associated with status (in terms of their proposition). But, all the three brands have for generations sustained the three types of expectations. Red Bull drink is all about the party experience (tracing its origin) and this includes three types of expectations, whenever a party enthusiasts plan a party.

Hasseoder, the German brand of beer had spent 30 million pounds to update (change the neck) of their 0.5 liter bottle, without altering the beer -the reason ? The angular shaped neck is the new expectation signal , that fits in with the brand proposition “men know why “ (as reported by Barden, using the work of neuroscientist Joaquin Fuster). Expectations are like hypothesis that are required to be confirmed by the brand and can be very powerful.

Expectations in the digital space

While “Going Digital” is both a prerequisite, and a trend with respect to brand campaigns, the futuristic challenge for digital campaigns is to take into consideration brand -centric technologies that create expectations. (Amazon , Starbucks, Nike + are examples of technology and consumer expectations being brought together)

Expectations are not confined just to ads; they have a greater role to play across categories, ranging from soaps, cars, retail ,banks and insurance brands and even for the likes of Alexza !

(The author is professor of marketing, IIM B Chair of Excellence 2016-19, at IIM Bangalore. Views expressed are personal.)