

ABSTRACT

TEACHING BRANDING MANAGEMENT THROUGH RESEARCH WORKSHOP

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During the 1970s American firms allocated substantial funds for application of scientific methods to the selection of effective brand names and logos, and success stories have been increasing. Nonetheless, the 1982 Consumer Survey reported that a majority of Americans could not recall any brand name for some commonly purchased products.

A survey of teaching methods conducted by the author in 182 universities and colleges throughout the United States and Canada (1977-82) revealed that marketing instructors spent an average of 20 minutes on branding in marketing management courses of graduate and undergraduate levels. Some of the shortcomings of conventional approaches are cited in Anderson's Survey of MBA Marketing Research course content (1982) where a significant difference between faculty and practitioners' priorities for design of experiments were reported.

The Research-Workshop approach to teaching Branding Management was developed by the author at Western Washington University in 1974, and since then 24 successful experiments have been conducted, the findings of each contributed to further improvement of the brand selection model.

A newly established company with international operations (here referred to as ABC) was considering a new name and logo for its enterprise. The author was involved in development of brand name and design for this company. Relevant information about ABC was furnished to a number of artists as the basis for logo design. Altogether twenty logos were designed for management consideration. These designs were then tested in samples of ABC target markets in various parts of the world. The same research format was used to teach branding management to marketing students.

Each design was given a number, and several color slides were produced for testing and instruction. Equipment consisted of two slide projectors, two screens, a tape recorder, a raw tape, and a pointer. A set of workshop forms was produced in two parts, each in a different color, and distributed among the participants. Workshop forms were designed and arranged to measure the effectiveness of each design with respect to various aspects of learning process, i.e., cognition, retention, recall, etc.

Students (workshop participants) were told to assume their role as members of the ABC target market who were randomly selected and paid to help the company select an effective brand name and logo. The difference between this mock session and an actual session was mostly in its format, i.e., in order to maximize academic productivity within constraints of class hours only a selected number of designs were presented in each test. The testing process was also interrupted at various intervals to discuss the purpose of that test and its contribution to branding management.

Various tests were conducted to demonstrate the effectiveness of each design with respect to objectives and mission of the firm. In the Association Test a number of designs were projected on the screen and the participants were asked to associate each design with four characteristics of the firm, i.e., its activities, areas of operation, size of the company, and its personality. The instant feedback ranked the effective logos by closeness of their perceived characteristics to the minds of the target market (here represented by the workshop participants). The instructor then cited the work of other scholars in support of these findings. Experiments by Bowen and Chaffee (1974) and Traylor (1981) found a positive relationship between ego involvement in a product class and commitment to a brand in a low-involvement product. Stevens (1981) suggests that associating product (or company) characteristics with events of public interest or areas of public concern enhances brand promotion. He coins the term "Brandstanding" for this strategy. The next step is to measure the uniqueness of the logo, i.e., the degree to which a particular design would make the brand identifiable among competitive brands (Uniqueness Test). Although previous designs could be projected for this test, new logos were presented to reduce monotony. Participants marked any established companies or brands which logos brought to their minds. Usually those logos which were not reminiscent of other companies or brands were preferred, unless the firm was deliberately seeking association with competition. Statman (1981) points out that a distinguishable logo contributes to brand loyalty. Kleinberg (1980) warns that if a brand is distinguished too clearly from competition but is heavily associated with a product it may lose its identity and be considered generic by FTC.

Other tests include the Preference Test, which measures attractiveness of each design; the Suitability Test, which matches the overall feature of designs with companies' objectives and mission in light of adequate information; the Modification Test, which recommends perfection touches on preferred logos; and the Typeset Test, which measures suitability of various typesets for printing companies' names.

The innovative approach increased academic productivity both on quantitative and qualitative levels. Final exams in all 27 courses produced most complete and correct answers about questions of Branding Management. Student evaluation of the instructor and the course gave the highest rating to the workshop. Alumni who had taken the course five years ago referred to the branding workshop as their most valuable experience in marketing class. In subsequent experiments the instructor raised the workshop size from 30 to 100 participants and noticed the same quality of performance in midterms and finals.

(The references are included in the complete paper, a copy of which can be obtained from the author.)