A Study on Branding Strategies in the Food and Beverage Industry

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Abstract: The Food and Beverage (F&B) industry is one of the most dynamic and competitive sectors where branding strategies play a crucial role in influencing consumer choices and building long-term loyalty. In the present digital era, brands extend beyond names and logos to embody consumer experiences, values, and aspirations. Traditional branding methods such as television and print media have given way to digital platforms, e-commerce, and mobile applications, reshaping how businesses engage with consumers. This study investigates the branding strategies of organisations in the Food and Beverage (F&B) sector, with a focus on Coimbatore and Chennai. It examines the elements of branding, evaluates consumer awareness, and explores the role of social media in shaping perceptions. Particular attention is given to evolving practices such as ethical sourcing, health-centric product positioning, storytelling, and sustainability initiatives. The research also highlights the shift from product-focused communication to value-driven narratives that emphasise quality, transparency, and wellness. By analysing consumer responses and organisational practices, this study seeks to bridge the gap between branding strategies and consumer expectations in the Indian Food and Beverage (F&B) industry.

Keywords: Traditional Branding; Health-Centric Products; Branding Strategies; Brand Recognition; Consumer Awareness; Consumer Engagement; Sustainability Initiatives.

1. Introduction

In today's global village, researchers, as users of products and services, are swamped with numerous brands in our lives every moment, from using our favourite company's toothbrush early in the morning to tucking ourselves into a cosy mattress after a long day. Brands play a vital part in our lives [1]. The American Marketing Association defines a brand as "A name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group and to

differentiate them from those of competitors [2]. A brand is a dimension of a product or service that differentiates it from existing products in the market to fulfil a need or want. Now that researchers have learned what a brand is, let's dive deep into what branding is. Branding is the process of creating a unique name, image, or logo that is consistent and relevant to the products and services offered for sale by the organisation [3]. The basic function of branding is to intrigue customers and grasp their attention. Where are brands used? They are widespread across business, marketing, and advertising. The Features of Branding are as follows.

1.1. Targetability

As mentioned above, the process aims to ensure that customers can identify and recognise the company's products or services through its logo, name, symbols, and other branding elements. But what segment of consumers plays a vital role? The target audience must be clearly defined to ensure optimal results [4]; [5]. Research to select the target group can be undertaken across categories such as age, gender, income, and social factors, as relevant to the products/services offered in the market.

1.2. Awareness

The percentage of consumers who are aware of and can recognise a particular brand constitutes brand awareness [6]. For example, the products of Retail giants like Reliance (in India), Tata, Walmart, Target, and Costco (in various parts of the world) have high brand awareness, as consumers have adequate knowledge of these brands. This is achieved by disseminating information through advertising, social media, promotions, and other channels. Logos are crucial for brand awareness.

1.3. Loyalty

The organisations competing in the market strive for one common action from consumers – Brand Loyalty [7]; [8]. This refers to the phenomenon in which customers consistently choose a particular brand over others for the products/services offered in the market [12]; [14]. The customer who depicts this behaviour is called a Brand loyalist. This phenomenon can be ingrained in users' minds by improving communication with customers through reviews and feedback [15].

1.4. Consistency

One of the key elements of advertising is the information it passes on to consumers. This can either discuss the uses and benefits of the product/service or explain what the product aims to achieve through commercials. Either way, this information should be relevant and consistent with the brand. Consumers lean on such information, and when the product doesn't meet the expectations as promised, it is bound to fail in the market. The Elements of Branding about the Food and beverage industry include:

- Logo
- Colour palette
- Taste
- Location of the outlet
- Tone of voice and vocabulary
- Interactions
- Positioning

In this fast-moving world, with meals delivered at the click of a button, there is intense competition among food manufacturers, processing units, and retailers to develop new strategies to set themselves apart. From an executive point of view, the world of branding is an ocean. But with the right bait and techniques, they can find opportunities to promote the product/service to the right customers at the right time and place, thereby improving sales and, in turn, the organisation's profitability [10].

2. Review of Literature

Cheong et al. [18] in their study have discussed how AI tools help companies formulate and strategise branding techniques for optimal results. Shandy et al. [17] state that the traditional marketing mix of 4Ps has now taken a new form: 4Es. The product mix is now being replaced by experience. Reddy et al. [9] offer a thorough analysis of the transforming big data environment in branding. It examines significant advancements, challenges, and trends, emphasising the crucial role of personalisation and predictive analytics. Meléndez-Illanes et al. [11] discuss how the group selected for the research recognised and recalled the products of a particular brand when an unsatisfied need arose. The research also discusses the ability to influence communication in social networks. Bragg et al. [13] conducted a descriptive study in which they developed a quantitative

codebook to record the marketing themes used by international food and beverage companies. Martinho [16] provides insights into how consumers associate conative and semiotic meanings with visual design features, such as colours and shapes, on product packaging.

3. Statement of Problem

The modern era is defined by brands and how customers perceive them. As consumers of myriad products and services, researchers are surrounded by promotions and advertisements wherever they set foot. Food is one of the essentials for survival. But this essential has turned out to be one of the most profitable businesses in the market. While branding recognition in the food and beverage industry is widespread, there is a notable gap in implementing these strategies, understanding their impact on consumer behaviour, and making the necessary adaptations to suit the organisation's needs. The traditional method of branding a product is a thing of the past. Advertisements on television, in magazines, on the radio, etc., are not as prevalent as they were a decade ago. The world is moving towards technological upgradation, and so is the Food and Beverage industry. Understanding the roles of technology, data-driven markets, e-commerce, and mobile applications is crucial for businesses to gain a competitive edge. The primary task of any executive involved in marketing and retail is to capture consumers' attention and build brand recognition.

In the past, branding in this segment focused heavily on highlighting product benefits, taste, cultural segmentation, and secretive production processes. But today, this has taken a 180-degree shift. Branding in this era is focused on providing consumers with quality, healthy products with no compromises on taste. It also focuses on the holistic wellness of its consumers through the ethical sourcing of high-quality raw materials, showing the behind the screens process through which customer loyalty is built, leveraging the social media presence to touch the minds of youth, developing "green" practices, telling a story to the customers that stretch beyond the product and talks about the mission and vision of the organization and much more. In this study, an attempt by the researcher has been made to understand how various organisations undertake branding, analyse the elements involved in the process of branding, dig deep into the relationship between the process and the consumers of the products, and recognise the degree of influence that social media has on the consumers via the branding of the products. The study is prepared about consumers in Coimbatore and Chennai.

3.1. Need for the Study

The study helps in understanding the various branding strategies utilised in the food and beverage industry across the selected region. Furthermore, this aims to discover the role of social media platforms in branding and the extent of their impact in the business world. To conclude this segment, the study also considers the role of branding strategies in brand recognition and awareness in this industry.

4. Objectives of the Study

- To understand the branding strategies utilised in the organisation (selected locations).
- To analyse the use of elements in branding in accordance with the strategies identified.
- To evaluate Brand awareness among the consumers for the previously identified and selected brands.
- To comprehend the importance of social media and branding in the food and beverage industry.

4.1. Hypothesis for the Study

4.1.1. Hypothesis 1

- **H0:** There is no significant relationship between the branding of food and beverage and social media.
- **Ha:** There is a significant relationship between the branding of food and beverage and social media.

4.1.2. Hypothesis 2

- **H0:** There is no significance between the social media platform used to make the online presence and branding of food and beverage.
- **Ha:** There is significance between the social media platform used to make the online presence and branding of food and beverage.

4.1.3. Hypothesis 3

- **H0:** There is no significant relationship between positive memory associates and loyalty towards a particular brand.
- **Ha:** There is a significant relationship between positive memory associations and loyalty towards a particular brand.

4.2. Data Collection

Data Collection is a systematic process of gathering observations or measurements while conducting research for business, governmental, or academic purposes, using standard, validated techniques. Data collection is the initial and essential step that allows the researcher to gain knowledge and original insights into research. Effective data collection provides the information needed to answer questions, analyse business performance and outcomes, and predict future trends, actions, etc. The approach to data collection differs across fields of study, depending on the required information. When data is processed, organised, structured, or presented in a given context to make it useful, it is called information. Information for research activities is obtained in different forms.

4.3. Sources of Data

This research employs a descriptive approach. It is based on surveys of students who have attended online classes during the pandemic and offline classes post-pandemic, collected using structured questionnaires, to examine knowledge retention in online and offline classes. Both primary and Secondary data are used for the study.

4.4. Primary Data

Primary data were collected from consumers across the regions of Coimbatore and Chennai. This was done using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire covers respondents' age, occupation, daily time spent on social media, their preference for sharing food and beverage content on their socials, and the factors they consider when choosing food or beverage.

4.5. Secondary Data

The secondary data have been collected from different sources: books, journals, magazines, experts' opinions published in various print media, books written by the authors on Branding and food and beverage, influence of branding in the food and beverage industry, and the advancements to look out for in this industry, which were available on the internet.

4.6. Sampling Design

Sampling means selecting the group from which you will collect data in your research. It is a procedure for concluding a significant group of respondents. The sample is a section of the population selected to represent the population as a whole. Ideally, the sample should be representative so that the researchers can accurately estimate the thoughts and behaviours of the larger population:

- **Sample Size:** The sample size of this study is 155.

4.6.1. Sampling Method

Convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling technique, entails selecting individuals or items based on their convenient availability to the researcher rather than through a random or structured process. This method is often chosen due to its practicality and cost-effectiveness, particularly when time, resources, or access to the target population are limited.

4.6.2. Tools Used for Analysis

Data analysis is an important domain that helps convert the data into meaningful value or insights. It primarily consists of quantitative and qualitative data analysis. The tools used for this study are Percentage Analysis and ANOVA.

4.6.3. Percentage Analysis

The percentage is important in both mathematics and data analysis. It is represented by the symbol % and a fraction with 100 as the denominator. To calculate the percentage of any number, divide the number by the whole and multiply by 100. It is used in data analysis to find information on discrete categories and to collate statistical data. It is used to determine "how much" and "how many" and hence helps calculate the exact figure or amount. One of the basic uses of percentages is to calculate and compare two quantities. It helps compare and review results and progress. It helps draw a comparative analysis of various subjects or issues. Here is the percentage formula:

Percentage = (Actual number / Total number) x 100%

4.6.4. ANOVA

ANOVA stands for Analysis of Variance. It is a statistical test used to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between two or more categorical groups by comparing means using variance. The formula for Analysis of Variance is:

ANOVA coefficient, F = (Mean sum of squares between the groups (MSB) / Mean squares of errors (MSE))

Therefore, F = MSB / MSE

4.6.5. Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis is a statistical method used to evaluate the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two quantitative variables. The correlation coefficient is often denoted 'r' and represents it. The correlation coefficient ranges from -1 to +1. A value of +1 indicates a perfect positive correlation, -1 indicates a perfect negative correlation, and 0 indicates no correlation at all. The formula for the correlation coefficient is:

Correlation coefficient, $r = \Sigma[(X - \bar{X})(Y - \bar{Y})] / \sqrt{(\Sigma(X - \bar{X})^2 * \Sigma(Y - \bar{Y})^2)}$

Where:

- X and Y are the variables being compared.
- $\bar{X}$ and $\bar{Y}$ are the means of X and Y, respectively.
- Σ is the summation symbol, indicating that you sum over all data points.

4.7. Period and Area of Study

- **Period of Study:** 3 months.
- **Area of Study:** The sample area chosen for conducting the study is Coimbatore and Chennai City.

4.8. Findings

- **The Age Distribution, along with the Percentage, is as follows: 18-20** years (14.8%), 21-24 years (41.9%), 25-29years (14.2%), 30-34years (5.2%), 35 years and above (23.9%). The majority of respondents fall into the 21-24 years' age group.
- **The Social Media Applications Used are:** WhatsApp:121 respondents (78.1%), Instagram: 114 respondents (73.5%), YouTube: 94 respondents (60.6%), Facebook: 67 respondents (43.2%), Twitter:50 respondents (32.3%), Other respondents (7.6%). The majority of users' lean towards WhatsApp and Instagram.
- **The Time Spent on Social Media is as Follows:** 2-3 hours: The largest group with 54 respondents (34.8%). 1-2 hours: The second-largest group with 42 respondents (27.1%), 3-4 hours: The third-largest group with 31 respondents (20%). More than 4 hours: Smaller group with 16 respondents. Less than 1 hour: The smallest group, with 12 respondents.
- **The Importance of Branding is as Follows:** Very Important: 49 respondents (31.6%), Somewhat Important: 55 respondents (35.5%), Neutral: 32 respondents (20.6%), Not Very Important: 16 respondents (10.3%), Not Important at All: 3 respondents (1.9%). The majority of respondents consider branding to be somewhat important in their decision-making process.
- **The Likelihood of Purchasing a Product from a Familiar Brand is as follows:** Category 1: 5 respondents (3.2%), Category 2: 9 respondents (5.8%), Category 3: 49 respondents (31.6%), Category 4: 62 respondents (40%), Category 5: 30 respondents (19.4%). The most selected option was 4, indicating a likelihood of trying a new product from a familiar brand based on a positive experience.
- **The Findings on How Information Provided about Packing Influences the Purchase Decision are as Follows:** Yes: 74.8%; No: 25.2%. This indicates that the majority of respondents feel that the information on the packaging influences their decision to try the product.
- **The Most Influential Elements of Branding for Purchase Decisions are:** Logo and Packaging (56.8%), Product Name (42.6%), Brand Reputation (73.5%), Advertising (36.8%), Price (50.3%), and others (5.4%). The majority of respondents identify brand reputation as the most influential factor in purchase decisions.

- **The Findings Regarding the Role of Price in Purchasing Decisions are:** Option 1: 1.9%; Option 2: 1.9%; Option 3: 13.5%; Option 4: 18.1%; Option 5: 37.4%; Option 6: 19.4%; Option 7: 7.7%. The most selected option was 5, indicating that price is a significant factor in the decision-making process for purchasing food or beverage products.
- **The Impact of Advertising on Perceptions of Food and Beverage Products is:** Option 7: 38 votes, Option 5: 25 votes, Option 8: 23 votes, Option 4: 19 votes, Option 9: 13 votes, Option 6 and 3: Tied for sixth place with 11 votes each, Option 1: 9 votes, Option 10: 4 votes, Option 2: Least influential with two votes. These results indicate that advertisements significantly influence consumers' perceptions of food and beverage products.
- **The Factors That Constitute Brand Loyalty are:** Consistent quality (92 respondents, 59.4% of total), Positive brand experience (45 respondents, 29% of total), Social responsibility (17 respondents, 11% of total), Loyalty programs (respondents, 0.6% of total). Consistent quality is the leading factor contributing to respondents' brand loyalty.
- **The Frequency of Recommending Food and Beverage Products is:** Yes, rarely (31.6%), Yes, often (60%), No (8.4%). The majority of respondents often recommend food and beverage products after a positive consumption experience.
- **The Findings on Whether Online Reviews and Ratings Influence Consumers' Purchase Decisions are as Follows:** Very much: 23.9%; Somewhat: 48.4%; Neutral: 20.6%; Not much: 7.1%. The option "Somewhat" was chosen by the majority, indicating that online reviews and ratings have a moderate influence on consumers' purchase decisions for new food or beverage products.
- **Correlation:** There is a significant relationship between food and beverage branding and social media.
- **Correlation:** There is a significant relationship between the social media platform used to build the online presence and the branding of food and beverage.
- **ANOVA:** There is a significant relationship between positive memory associations and loyalty towards a particular brand.

5. Discussion

Based on the analysis and interpretation of the data, the following recommendations have been made for the future of branding in the food and beverage industry. The 21-24 age group is the largest segment of respondents, indicating that this demographic is highly engaged with food and beverage brands. Marketing strategies should be tailored to this age group's interests, behaviours, and preferences, using platforms and messaging that resonate with young adults. With a nearly equal distribution of male and female respondents, brands should adopt a gender-inclusive approach in their branding and marketing efforts. This includes using language, imagery, and themes that appeal to a diverse audience, avoiding stereotypes, and ensuring that products and campaigns are designed to cater to all genders. Students form the largest occupational category among the respondents. Brands should consider student-friendly initiatives such as discounts, campus events, and partnerships with educational institutions to engage this demographic.

Additionally, messaging should reflect the values and aspirations of the student community. Instagram is the most popular social media platform among the respondents. Brands should focus their digital marketing efforts on these platforms, creating engaging content and interactive campaigns that encourage sharing and participation. The data shows that the majority of respondents spend 2-3 hours on social media daily. Brands should schedule their posts and advertisements to coincide with these peak usage times to maximise visibility and engagement. Branding is considered important by the majority of respondents. Brands should clearly communicate their unique value proposition, focusing on what sets them apart from competitors, and highlight the benefits and features that align with consumer needs and preferences.

The findings suggest that consumers are likely to try new products from familiar brands. Brands should capitalise on this loyalty by introducing new products under the same brand umbrella, ensuring that the quality and experience associated with the brand are consistent. While catchy slogans or taglines may catch attention, they do not significantly influence the majority's decision to try new products. Brands should focus on the overall product quality, customer experience, and value to drive trial and adoption. A significant number of respondents are likely to share content related to food and beverage brands on social media. Brands should create shareable content, such as engaging visuals, user-generated campaigns, and interactive challenges, to encourage this behaviour. The majority of respondents indicate that packaging information influences their purchase decisions. Brands should ensure that packaging is informative, transparent, and clearly communicates the product's benefits, ingredients, and any unique selling points.

Brand reputation is the most influential factor for purchase decisions. Brands should focus on building and maintaining a positive reputation by consistently delivering quality, providing excellent customer service, and engaging in corporate social responsibility initiatives. Price is a significant factor in purchasing decisions. Brands should consider pricing strategies that offer value for money, including competitive pricing, promotions, and discounts, to attract cost-conscious consumers.

Advertisements play a significant role in shaping consumer perceptions. Brands should create impactful, memorable advertising campaigns that effectively convey their message and resonate with the target audience. Consistent quality is the leading factor contributing to brand loyalty. Brands should ensure their products consistently meet high-quality standards, as this is a key driver of repeat purchases and customer loyalty.

The majority of respondents often recommend food and beverage products after a positive consumption experience. Brands should encourage this word-of-mouth marketing by providing exceptional experiences and creating referral programs that reward customers for recommendations. With neutral opinions on AR/VR, brands should explore the potential of these technologies to create immersive, interactive branding experiences. Pilot projects could help gauge consumer interest and assess the effectiveness of enhancing brand engagement. Given that many respondents do not follow brands on social media, brands should diversify their marketing channels to reach a wider audience. This could include traditional media, influencer partnerships, and community events. Brands should focus on creating content about new product launches, as this is the most preferred content type among respondents. This content should be informative and engaging, highlighting the unique aspects of new offerings. Understanding the importance of the chosen social media platform in enhancing brand presence, brands should optimise their profiles, engage with followers, and create platform-specific content that aligns with their branding objectives.

6. Conclusion

In the dynamic and competitive landscape of the food and beverage industry, branding strategies play a pivotal role in shaping consumer perceptions and driving business success. A comprehensive analysis of various branding approaches reveals that the key to creating a brand experience lies in understanding and aligning with consumer preferences, leveraging current trends, and establishing a unique brand identity.

Understanding the Target Audience: The foundation of any effective branding Strategy is a deep understanding of the target audience. Demographic profiling, which includes age, gender, income level, lifestyle, and location, allows businesses to tailor their branding efforts to resonate with their ideal customers. Furthermore, staying attuned to consumer preferences and dietary trends enables brands to align their offerings with their audience's tastes and values, ensuring relevance and appeal.

Leveraging Online and Offline Branding Strategies: In today's digital age, online branding strategies, including social media engagement and digital advertising, are crucial for reaching a wider audience. However, offline strategies, such as in-store experiences and community involvement, remain important for creating a tangible connection with consumers.

Building Brand: Creating brand advocates through exceptional customer experiences and engagement can drive organic promotion and build a loyal customer base. Encouraging customers to share their positive experiences on social media and review platforms can amplify a brand's reach and credibility.

Adapting to Market Changes: The food and beverage industry is subject to rapid changes in consumer behaviour and market trends. Brands must remain agile and adaptable, continuously innovating their products and marketing strategies to meet evolving consumer demands. In conclusion, successful branding in the food and beverage industry requires a multifaceted approach that encompasses a clear understanding of the target audience, a strong brand identity, effective online and offline strategies, and the ability to adapt to market changes.

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