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## Parallel Session: Tactics to save Brands from failure

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## Tactics to Save Brands from Failure

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***Abstract:** The purpose of this study is to present the experts opinion about various tactics used to save brands from permanent failures. The sampling technique used in this survey was judgmental with a sample size of 196 marketing professionals from FMCG, health, pharmaceutical, services and manufacturing sectors based in Karachi. Using Exploratory Factor Analyses tactics are summarized into groups. This paper offers numerous expert opinions about tactics to save brands from permanent failure. Provides valuable analyses for marketing/brand professional and academics.*

***Keywords:** Brand Failure, Product Life Cycle*

### 1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to present the experts opinion about various tactics used to save brands from permanent failures. There is an abundance of literature on brand and branding areas but research on brand survival /recovery is very thin. This paper draws its analysis of tactics to save brands from failure on the opinion of marketing experts.

### 2. Literature Review

Four generalizations can be made from the existing literature. Firstly, there is not a single study that gives a concrete measure on the strategies or tactics to save brands from permanent failure. Secondly, most of the studies talk about the factors that cause brand to be successful (Quiston, 2004). As success and failure are two sides of the same coin therefore studies on brand success are considered as relevant. Major work done in this subject area focuses on how big brands are made successful and what aspects push them to achieve the excellence but the literature on how near failing brands can be recovered from failure is very thin. Thirdly, the most prolific work on brand failure has been done by Matt Haig (2004). There are seven crucial mistakes that brands could make and led to failure (Haig, 2004). But there is no account on how to save a failing brand. Fourth, various other studies have touched the subject area of brand failure (Kumar & Murthy, 1996; Kotler & Keller, 2011; Narayanan, 2012) but failed to discuss beyond brand failures. Fifth, one of replication studies has successfully replicated the Matt Haig's study with the local examples in Pakistan (Khakhan & Siddiqui, 2013). However, it was just mapping exercise of local examples on the seven reasons outlined by Matt Haig (2004). More recently a few local studies have attempted to fill the gap (Saeed & Siddiqui, 2015; Khaqan et al., 2016; Saeed & Siddiqui, 2016). As mentioned above there is no systematic study available on the tactics to save brands from failures. A brief description of various branding tactics used to detect brand failure and save it from further deterioration is given below:

#### 2.1. Market Research

“Marketing research is the function that links the consumer, customer, and public to the marketer through information--information used to identify and define marketing opportunities and problems; generate, refine, and evaluate marketing actions; monitor marketing performance; and improve understanding of marketing as a process. Marketing research specifies the information required to address these issues, designs the method for collecting information, manages and implements the data collection process, analyzes the results, and communicates the findings and their implications” (AMA, 2013).

## **2.2. Brand Audit**

It is “a detailed analysis of the brand in its current state. The purpose of a brand audit is to ascertain the health of the business by determining the effective and ineffective qualities of the brand so that brand can restructure its identity and message to produce better results” (DeMers, 2015).

## **2.3. Brand Activations**

It “rallies around activity that brings brands to life and encourages positive participation - physically or digitally. Regardless of how we deploy this activity, let's get the basics right. This will in turn deliver tangible and mutually beneficial value to clients, brands and customers alike” (Guardian, 2016). It is the art of driving consumer action through brand interaction and experiences. In simple terms, the key aim of these sorts of campaigns is to get consumers to act. It's about bringing brands to life via experiences and forming long-term emotional connections.

## **2.4. Brand Extensions**

It is “the marketing strategy wherein a new product is launched under the existing brand name. The category in which product is launched may be related or unrelated to the brand's current category. The brand that gives rise to a new product under its name is called - The Parent Brand” (BusinessJargons (a), 2016). It is needed when a company uses its leverage to launch a new product category.

## **2.5. Brand Reinforcement**

Brand reinforcement “includes regular monitoring of a product at all the levels of product life cycle (Introduction Stage, Growth Stage, Maturity Stage and Decline Stage) to keep a check on the changes in the tastes and preferences of customers” (BusinessJargons (b), 2016). It involves ensuring innovation in product design, manufacturing, and merchandising and ensuring relevance in user and usage imagery.

## **2.6. Brand Re-Positioning**

“Changing a brand's status in comparison to that of the competing brands. Re-positioning is effected usually through changing the marketing mix in response to changes in the market place, or due to a failure to reach the brand's marketing objectives” (BusinessDictionary, 2016).

## **2.7. Brand Revitalization**

It is “the marketing strategy adopted when the product reaches the maturity stage of product life cycle, and profits have fallen drastically. It is an attempt to bring the product back in the market and secure the sources of equity i.e. customers” (BusinessJargons (c), 2016). It is required in one of two cases, either that lost sources of brand equity are recaptured (“a back to basics” approach) or that new sources of brand equity are identified and established.

## **2.8. Brand Tracking**

Refers to “collecting quantitative data from consumers over a time to give consistent, baseline information about how brands and marketing programs are performing” (MarketingBinder, 2014).

## **2.9. Celebrity Endorsements**

“A form of brand or advertising campaign that involves a well-known person using their fame to help promote a product or service. Manufacturers of perfumes and clothing are some of the most common business users of classic celebrity endorsement techniques, such as television ads and launch event appearances, in the marketing of their products” (BusinessDictionary, (2016).

Brief descriptions of branding tactics used to prevent brand failure are listed below:

Table 1 Branding Tactics to save brands from permanent failure.

| <b>Branding Tactics</b> | <b>Brief Descriptions</b>  |
|-------------------------|--|
| Market research         | Organizing information about brands & customers of brand failure |
| Brand Audit             | Measuring health of brand & detecting failure early              |
| Brand Tracking          | Measuring rebranding actions & detecting failure early           |
| Brand Re-positioning    | Changing the brand's image in consumer's mind                    |
| Brand Re-vitalization   | Changing brand elements or promotion mix                         |
| Brand Reinforcement     | Reassuring current attitudes towards a brand                     |
| Brand Activations       | Engaging customers & extending the PLC                           |
| Brand Extensions        | Launching new products in different category                     |
| Celebrity endorsements  | Involving celebrities to promote the brand                       |

### 3. Methodology

As the main thrust of the study is about the tactics that can be employed to save the brand from failure in the local market therefore survey method has been selected to reach enough respondents who are experts in the field of marketing. After data collection, various statistical tests were applied including descriptive statistics, inferential statistics tests.

The population of the survey is the marketing managers belonging to FMCG, health, pharmaceutical, services and manufacturing sectors based in Karachi. The sampling technique used in this survey was judgmental and the sample size was 196 marketing professionals and it was believed to be adequate for the current study.

The primary data was collected with a help of a questionnaire, designed specifically for the present study. In the initial phase of study, few interviews were made with several senior brand managers. These interviews were substantiated with the help of two focus groups. The respondents of focus groups were marketing professionals and faculty members of the top business school of the country. Based on the discussion of interviews and the focus group a questionnaire was designed. Keeping in view of very busy professional as target population, efforts were made to keep the questionnaire short.

The respondents of this survey were 196 marketing/ brand managers who were interviewed for this survey. These professionals were employed in marketing departments of different industries/sectors and they have been grouped in four categories namely, a) Services (advertising, telecom, education, (etc), b) FMCG (Fast Moving Consumer Goods), c) Pharmaceuticals and Health, and d) Manufacturing. Most of the respondents worked in the service sector and belonged to advertising agencies, media buying houses, banks and consultancies.

The brand knowledge of respondents according to their own perception was categorized as excellent - 27%, average - 41 % and poor - 25% and rest did not answer this question. Combining excellent and average scores, it becomes 68% which was significant to generalize the findings. More than 50% of respondents have more than three years of brand management experience which signifies that selected sample is appropriate and qualified to comment on different aspects of brands and brand failures. In Brand portfolio management 18% respondents were those who had the experience of handling more than ten brands. 34% had looked after on 5-10 brands and 31% had been the custodian of 2-5 brands.

Professional Education wise the sample can be broken down as follows. 48.5 % of the sample was based upon MBAs which shows that these respondents have had the professional education which is relevant to the subject of the survey.

According to Job Status 65% of the respondents were either the Chief Executives or Brand Managers or Marketing Managers of different companies. Others might not be having the same positions as required but they all belonged to the marketing departments.

Table 2 depicts the analysis of respondents' judgments on the phase in which most brands fail and the phase at which the brand can be saved from permanent failure.

\*Table 2 Brand Failure & PLC phases

| PLC Phase    | Phase in which most brands fail |        | Phase in which brands can be saved from permanent failure |        |
|--------------|---------------------------------|--------|---|--------|
|              | N                               | %      | N   | %      |
| Introduction | 128                             | 65.31  | 62  | 31.63  |
| Growth       | 48                              | 24.49  | 79  | 40.31  |
| Maturity     | 18                              | 9.18   | 46  | 23.47  |
| Decline      | 2                               | 1.02   | 9   | 4.59   |
| Total        | 196                             | 100.00 | 196   | 100.00 |

[Source: Saeed & Siddiqui (2015). Brand Failure & Product Life Cycle: Descriptive Analyses *Science International, (Lahore), 27(5), pp: 4655-4659*]

More than 65% respondent said that it is very likely that a brand fails in the introduction stage and 24% said that brands fail in the growth stage. In short most brands tend to fail in initial stages. As far as reviving of the brand is concerned 72% marketing executives are of the view that brands can be saved in introduction and growth stage.

Failing brands can be saved by employing certain tactics. Marketing experts were asked to rate these tactics from not important to most important. The average rating of these tactics range from 3.04 to 4.01 which means that they are important. In Table 3 it can be seen that Market Research is considered to be the highest ranking in brand saviors. Market Research is conducted to know exactly what consumers do not like about the brand. Repositioning came out to be the second-best tactics to save the brand. Repositioning means that the perception of the brand should be altered. The two are followed by Revitalization i.e to recapture lost sources of brand equity and identify and establish new sources of brand equity. The least preferred brand tactics that can be used to save the failing brand are Brand Extension (launching new products in different category) and Celebrity endorsements (involving celebrities to promote the brand). It makes sense that when brands are not preferred then extensions would not attract consumers. Similarly bringing a Celebrity to save a dying brand would not work rather it would harm the fame of the celebrity.

Table 3 Branding Tactics – Descriptive Analysis

| Branding Tactics to save Brands from Permanent Failure                             | M    | SD   |
|--|------|------|
| Market research (organizing information about brands & customers) of brand failure | 4.36 | 0.83 |
| Re-positioning (changing the brand's image in consumer's mind)                     | 4.00 | 0.94 |
| Re-vitalization (changing brand elements or promotion mix)                         | 3.99 | 0.91 |
| Brand Audit (measuring health of brand & detecting failure early)                  | 3.98 | 0.90 |
| Brand Reinforcement (reassuring current attitudes towards a brand)                 | 3.76 | 0.92 |
| Brand Activations (engaging customers & extending the PLC)                         | 3.72 | 0.94 |
| Brand Tracking (measuring rebranding actions & detecting failure early)            | 3.57 | 1.20 |
| Brand Extensions (launching new products in different category)                    | 3.14 | 1.01 |
| Celebrity endorsements (involving celebrities to promote the brand)                | 3.04 | 0.95 |

[Source: Saeed & Siddiqui (2015). Brand Failure & Product Life Cycle: Descriptive Analyses *Science International, (Lahore), 27(5), pp: 4655-4659*]

Factor analysis on Tactics to save the brand was performed and nine variables were reduced to three components. Table 4 shows the value of KMO and Bartlett's Test is 0.64 and it is significant therefore it is reasonable to perform the factor analysis. The cumulative percentage of variance explained by the first three factors is 56.05%. In other words, 56.05% of the common variance shared by the 9 variables can be accounted for by the 3 factors. This is reflective of the KMO of 0.64, a "mediocre" to "middling" % of variance. This initial solution suggests that the final solution should extract not more than three factors.

Table 4 Exploratory Factor Analysis for Branding Tactics [KMO = 0.643]

| Items   | Factors                |                        |                       |
|---|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
|   | Macro Branding Tactics | Micro Branding Tactics | Core Branding Tactics |
| Eigenvalue  | 2.52                   | 1.28                   | 1.23                  |
| Cumulative Variance Explained                                       | 28.05                  | 42.32                  | 56.05                 |
| Re-positioning (changing the brand's image in consumer's mind)      | 0.75                   |                        |                       |
| Brand Audit (measuring health of brand & detecting failure early)   | 0.72                   |                        |                       |
| Re-vitalization (changing brand elements or promotion mix)          | 0.67                   |                        |                       |
| Market research (organizing information about brands & customers)   | 0.59                   |                        |                       |
| Brand Reinforcement (reassuring current attitudes towards a brand)  |                        | 0.76                   |                       |
| Brand Activations (engaging customers & extending the PLC)          |                        | 0.74                   |                       |
| Brand Tracking (measuring rebranding actions & detecting failure)   |                        | 0.55                   |                       |
| Celebrity endorsements (involving celebrities to promote the brand) |                        |                        | 0.78                  |
| Brand Extensions (launching new products in different category)     |                        |                        | 0.69                  |

Principal Component Analysis Extraction Method: with Varimax Rotation Method

[Source: Saeed & Siddiqui (2016). Brand Failure: Factor Analytic Findings, *Journal of Marketing Management and Consumer Behavior*, 1(3), pp: 1-12]

**Macro Branding:** Re-positioning (changing the brand's image in consumer's mind), Brand Audit (measuring health of brand & detecting failure early), Re-vitalization (changing brand elements or promotion mix), Market research (organizing information about brands & customers) of brand failure.

**Micro Branding:** Brand Reinforcement (reassuring current attitudes towards a brand), Brand Activations (engaging customers & extending the PLC), Brand Tracking (measuring rebranding actions and detecting failure early).

**Core Branding Practices:** Celebrity endorsements (involving celebrities to promote the brand), Brand Extensions (launching new products in different category).

#### 4. Conclusions

It can be concluded from the above study that Brands can be saved from permanent failure in various phases of PLC and with the help of different marketing tactics. At introduction stage the company cannot do much to save the brand while in growth stage strategies like Brand Activations by engaging customers, Celebrity endorsements to promote the brand can help to extend the PLC. At maturity stage sales growth slows down, no new channels are established and new competitive forces emerge. It is at this stage the companies think implementing the strategies of Market Development, Product Modification and Marketing Program Modification to save the brand from failure. By conducting periodical Brand Audits (measuring health of the brand) and Brand Tracking (measuring rebranding actions) the company can determine the positioning of the brand in the eyes of the customer and plan corrective strategies like Brand Reinforcement and Brand Revitalization (changing brand elements and promotional mix) that can also help to save the brand. At the decline stage sales decreases due to number

of reasons including technological changes, consumer preference changes and new competitive forces. Many companies have not developed policies to deal with aging products and they let the products either die their natural death or withdraw from the market. The saving of brand at this stage depends on the attractiveness/unattractiveness of the industry. The positioning and differentiation strategy of a company needs to change at different stages of the product life cycle if it wants its products to succeed. This study also summarizes tactics that can save a failing brand into three groups. These are: i) Macro branding tactics related to the image of the brand and the market forces; ii) Micro Branding related to identifying and micro segmenting customers into more focused targets; and iii) Core Branding Practices related to brand extensions and celebrity endorsement. At the time of saving a dying brand the Tactics least favored by respondents were brand extensions (launching new products in different category) and celebrity endorsements (involving celebrities to promote the brand). On a closer look this makes sense that it is not wise to extend a failing brand and bringing a celebrity to save it is not useful.

## 5. Limitations

Several limitations can be observed in this study. Firstly, every industry has some bases for brand development and management like brand naming in fertilizer branding in Pakistan (Siddiqui *et al.*, 2013); value added services or network coverage for telecom branding in Pakistan (Siddiqui *et al.*, 2015); perceptions as major bases for Islamic branding in Pakistan (Jumani & Siddiqui, 2012).; Status, Traditions, Quality and Values for women's branded clothing in Pakistan (Khaqan & Siddiqui, 2015). This research does not illustrate any industry specific bases for branding. Secondly, brand's rich history gives strength to the brand and brand legacy continued over generations can only be enhanced through intergenerational influences on brand preferences (Siddiqui *et al.*, 2013; Hussain & Siddiqui, 2016), especially among women who are actual users of most of the FMCG brands (Hussain & Siddiqui, 2015). This study lacks an illustration of brand failure due to intergenerational influences on brand preferences. A minor but relevant shortcoming of this research is the lack of visual brand elements of brands which may be significant reasons for brand failure (Ishtiaq & Siddiqui, 2016). Finally, re-positioning strategy may also be presented with the help of more local examples like re-positioning the Dawn News Channel from 'only English news channel in Pakistan' to 'mixed English /Urdu channel for mass market (Siddiqui & Fahim, 2014).; re-positioning Virtual University of Pakistan from 'merely recognized university' to 'high quality university' (Sibghatullah *et al.*, 2016); re-positioning Horlicks in Pakistan as 'an elderly drink' to 'children drink' (Latif *et al.*, 3026). All these examples set re-positioning as best available tool in local context to save a brand from permanent failure.

## 6. Managerial Implications

There are many rules of thumb for practicing marketing professionals. Firstly, brands can be saved from permanent failure with the help of different marketing tactics especially in earlier phases of Product Life Cycle (PLC). Secondly, at introduction stage the company cannot do much to save the brand. Thirdly, in growth stage few strategies are used to extend the PLC like (1) by brand activations while engaging customers, and (2) by celebrity endorsements. Fourth, at maturity stage sales growth slows down, new channels are not preferred to be established and new competitive forces emerge. It is at this stage the companies think implementing the strategies of Market Development, Product Development and Marketing Penetrations to save the brand from failure. Brand Audits (measuring health of the brand), Brand Tracking (measuring rebranding actions), Brand Reinforcement and Brand Revitalization (changing brand elements and promotional mix) can also help to save the brand. Fifth, at the decline stage sales decrease due to number of reasons including technological changes, consumer preference changes and new competitive forces. Many companies have not developed policies to deal with aging products and they let the products either die their natural death or withdraw from the market. The saving of brand at this stage depends on the attractiveness/unattractiveness of the industry. Sixth, the positioning and differentiation strategy of a company needs to change at different stages of the product life cycle, if the company wants its brands to succeed. Seventh, this study also summarizes tactics that can save a failing brand into three groups. These are: (a) Macro branding tactics related to the image of

the brand and the market forces; (b) Micro Branding related to identifying and micro segmenting customers into more focused targets; and (c) Core Branding Practices related to brand extensions and celebrity endorsement. Finally, tactics least favored by respondents were brand extensions (launching new products in different category) and celebrity endorsements (involving celebrities to promote the brand). On a closer look this makes sense that it is not wise to extend a failing brand and bringing a celebrity to save it is not useful. The findings and limitations of current research set goals for future research.

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