The Digital Era Effect on Brand Image and Brand Communication: The Coca-Cola Case Studies 🔓

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> "Your brand is what other people say about
> you when you're not in the room."
> Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon

Abstract

The present article comprehensively discusses brand image and its role in advertising. The introduction explains the definition of brand image and its importance for companies and brands. In addition, the role of social networks in building brand image in the changing and transforming digital age is explored. Then, the impact of digital advertising on brand image is discussed and the role of digital media and experiential marketing in the success of creating a positive brand image is explained by analyzing the case studies of the "Share a Coke" advertising campaign of the Coca-Cola brand and another local campaign in Turkey, "Bir Başkayız Biz". Finally, some specific effects of these campaigns on Coca-Cola's brand image are explored.

Introduction

With the increasing growth of technology and media, brand image, as one of the important factors in advertising, has become an essential issue in marketing for years. The brand image represents a company's overall image and how it appears in the audience's minds (Wagiswari, 2022: p.22). In other words, the brand image is a collection of emotions, concepts, and features formed in the audience's minds about a brand. Brand image makes the audience look at a particular brand based on their attitudes (Utama et al., 2022: p.2315). If the brand image is created and maintained correctly, it can contribute to the company's success. For example, companies like Apple, Coca-Cola, and Nike are recognized as top brands in the business world. Using the brand image, these companies have built a unique identity for

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themselves (Li et al., 2022: p.268). In this way, they have won the competition in the brand market.

The brand image faces new needs and challenges in the digital era. With the increase in online interactions and fierce competition in the market, companies are looking for ways to improve their brand image. Since many audiences are active online, the brand image must be well-known and maintained online. Also, in the digital age, with the increase in social networks and their increasing impact on brand recognition, brand image plays a vital role in social marketing (Shamsudin et al., 2022: p.148). By using dynamic and personalized ads, companies can display their brand image well on social networks and increase their sales by reaching the audience (Oppong et al., 2022: p.7).

1. Brand image

According to Kotler (2009), brand image is defined as "the perceptions and beliefs held by consumers, as reflected in the associations in the consumer's memory". Brand image has a meaning that is associated by consumers with the brand (David 1991) and is present in their minds. According to Kotler's (2021) more summarized definition, brand image is the growing consumer belief about the qualities of each brand (Huseynli & Mammadova, 2022, p. 63).

Brand image refers to elements that identify a brand by its audience and customers. These elements include the name, logo, colors, slogan, and voice, as well as the user experience they have with the brand's products and services (Mardiana & Nuryakin, 2022: p.478). Brand image is a significant value in marketing. Many companies try to attract more customers and strengthen their loyalty by optimizing the elements of their brand image. The importance of brand image is crucial for companies and brands (Li, 2022: p.31). The brand image is the best product of any company, which, if created and maintained, provides the possibility of improving the company's identity, positive thoughts about the brand, the desire of customers to buy the products and services provided, increase sales and ultimately the growth of the company (Mañosca et al., 2022: p.109).

Evidence of the importance of brand image can be seen in a study conducted by Lefebvre and Yoo (2012). They found that when customers were presented with two different brands, the one with a stronger brand image was more likely to be chosen. Furthermore, the study concluded that brand loyalty is greatly influenced by a strong brand image, as customers are more likely to remain loyal to a brand they feel strongly about.

Brand image plays a significant role as one of the most important influencing factors in the company's and industry's success. The brand image includes brand identity, characteristics, values, and user experience that customers relate to (Su, 2021: p.112). Brand image can directly impact customer satisfaction, increase sales, increase market share, improve brand recognition, and increase brand credibility (Li et al., 2022: p.269). Table 1 shows some theories and frameworks related to brand image.

Table 1. Theories and frameworks related to brand image

Theory	Description	Reference
Brand Identity	A set of visual and verbal elements that communicate a brand's personality, values, and positioning to consumers.	Aaker, D. A. (1996). Building strong brands
Brand Personality	The set of human characteristics that consumers associate with a brand can help differentiate it from competitors and create an emotional connection with consumers.	Aaker, J. L. (1997). Dimensions of brand personality
Self-congruity	The degree to which a brand's image is consistent with a consumer's self-concept can influence their attitudes and behaviors toward the brand.	Sirgy, M. J. (1982). Self-concept in consumer behavior: A critical review
Social Identity	The degree to which a brand's image is consistent with a consumer's social identity, such as membership in a particular group or community.	Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict
Brand Experience	The total of all the interactions and touchpoints a consumer has with a brand can shape their perceptions and attitudes towards the brand.	Brakus, J. J., Schmitt, B. H., & Zarantonello, L. (2009). Brand experience: What is it? How is it measured? Does it affect loyalty?

Theory	Description	Reference
Brand Equity	The value a brand adds to a product or service is based on the strength of consumer perceptions and attitudes toward the brand.	Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity
Country of Origin	The extent to which a product's country of origin influences consumer perceptions of its quality, reliability, and other attributes.	Bilkey, W. J., & Nes, E. (1982). Country-of-origin effects on product evaluations
Brand Reputation	The overall perception of a brand's trustworthiness, reliability, and quality is based on its past performance and behavior.	Fombrun, C. J. (1996). Reputation: Realizing value from the corporate image
Brand Loyalty	The degree to which a consumer is committed to purchasing and using a particular brand is often based on functional, emotional, and social factors.	Oliver, R. L. (1999). Whence consumer loyalty?
Brand Extension	The process of leveraging the equity of an existing brand to introduce a new product or service can be influenced by factors such as fit, similarity, and perceived risk.	Aaker, D. A., & Keller, K. L. (1990). Consumer evaluations of brand extensions

Considering the importance of brand image, its continuous measurement and review are one of the measures that must be taken to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the brand, promote it and increase its recognition in the market (Li et al., 2022: p.270). By measuring the brand image, the brand can see the improvement in its performance in the market and implement appropriate strategies to develop and improve its image (Ledikwe & Lombard, 2022: p.250). The growth of social media, coupled with

its high potential for measurement, has attracted marketers' attention to this attractive and rapidly growing space.

1.1. The Role of Social Media in the Formation of Brand Image

The impact of social media on brand image is one of the topics discussed in marketing and advertising. With the advancement of technology and the wide spread of social networks, the influence of these media on the brand image has increased. Using social media, brands can communicate with their audience and increase their brand sustainability (Su, 2021: p.114). However, at the same time, the existence of negative comments and opinions on social media can have a significant impact on the brand image.

Another effect of social networks on brand recognition and image formation is increasing and promoting brand awareness. Using social networks, brands can use different strategies to promote their brand (Shabbir & Xiaodong, 2021: p.21). For example, brands can increase their awareness by providing engaging and creative content, advertising on social networks, competing with peers, and reaching new markets (Saxena & Dhar, 2021: p.129).

However, in some cases, social networks can hurt the recognition and formation of the brand image. Suppose a brand cannot correctly respond to the problems of its customers on social networks or does not deal with negative reviews and criticisms from the audience correctly. In that case, this can reduce the audience's trust in the brand, ultimately damaging the brand image (Shabbir & Xiaodong, 2021: p.23).

On the other hand, brand content in social networks plays a significant role as one of the most critical factors in customer recognition and loyalty today. This content can include images, texts, videos, and interactive content shared on social networks. By providing appropriate and attractive content on social networks, brands can increase their brand awareness and attract new customers (Ledikwe & Lombard, 2022: p.251). Also, by providing creative and unique content, brands can beat their peers and connect more closely with their customers. Another effect of brand content on social networks is increasing customer loyalty to the brand (Li et al., 2022: p.271). However, in some cases, brand content in social networks can have a negative impact on customer recognition and loyalty.

For example, in 2014, after Russia annexed Crimea, Coca-Cola showed its drink in a Facebook post with an image of a new map of Russia without Crimea. This unintentional action led to severe provocation from Russia. It

forced Coca-Cola to remove its post from its Facebook page, which led to criticism of the brand and its image. This example shows that in modern society, despite the significant growth of social networks, even a large company like Coca-Cola may face criticism and reactions such as removing the post from the Facebook page due to the publication of objectionable content. For this reason, brands should be cautious in using social networks and improve recognition and trust in their brand by adequately planning and paying attention to the audience's opinions, criticisms, and suggestions (Oppong et al., 2022: p.10).

As one of the most crucial advertising methods today, digital advertising campaigns play a significant role in advertising and promoting the brand. One of the fundamental changes that will be made in brand communication using digital advertising is that brands can focus their marketing on their target audience (Mardiana & Nuryakin, 2022: p.479). Considering that digital advertising is done online, brands can use different algorithms to target their ads to their audience and attract their audience by providing appropriate content (Utama et al., 2022: p.2316).

Another change digital advertising creates in brand communication is that brands can establish a closer relationship with their audience using this advertising method. Through social networks, brands can establish a more direct relationship with their audience and attract new audiences by providing engaging and creative content (Wagiswari, 2022: p.25). For example, Glossier, a beauty brand, has built a cult-like following on Instagram. Glossier has used Instagram to create a community of loyal customers by sharing user-generated content, responding to comments and direct messages, and hosting giveaways and events.

However, despite all the advantages digital advertising has in brand communication, this method also faces challenges. Some of these challenges are (Oppong et al., 2022: p.8, Shamsudin et al., 2022: p.149, Utama et al., 2022: p.2321, Wagiswari, 2022: p.31):

- **Increasing competition**: With the increasing use of technology and digital advertising, the competition between brands is increasing. Also, new companies enter the market, which increases competition. This challenge can increase advertising costs and reduce the profitability of brands.

- **Managing large volumes of data**: With the increasing use of technology, a large volume of data and information is created, which can

be a challenge for brands. Managing and analyzing this data can be time-consuming and expensive, creating brand challenges.

- **Maintaining customer trust**: With increased transparency in digital communications, customers are always looking for more information about their brand and products. This can lead to challenges for brands needing quality and accurate content to maintain customer trust.

- **Privacy**: With the increasing use of technology, customers' privacy may also be threatened. To protect customers' privacy, brands must manage personal information carefully and comply with privacy laws.

In general, digital developments in customer and brand communication also bring challenges that brands must face and provide solutions to solve them. Among the solutions are using appropriate tools for data management, producing quality content and complying with privacy laws, and creating effective communication with customers (Narteh & Braimah., 2020: p.115).

2. Digital Advertising Campaigns

A digital advertising campaign is a marketing strategy that uses digital channels and platforms to promote a product, service, or brand (Chan et al., 2018: p.608). Digital advertising campaigns can take many forms, including display ads, social media ads, search engine ads, video ads, and email marketing campaigns. A digital advertising campaign aims to reach a specific target audience and encourage them to take a desired action, such as purchasing, signing up for a newsletter, or visiting a website. To achieve this goal, digital advertising campaigns typically use a combination of targeting, messaging, and creative elements to grab the audience's attention and persuade them to take action (Narteh & Braimah, 2020: p.117). Digital advertising campaigns are often highly measurable, allowing marketers to track and analyze metrics such as impressions, clicks, conversions, and return on investment (ROI) to optimize their campaigns and improve their results over time (Pratisthita et al., 2020: p.187). The following are a few examples of successful digital advertising campaigns:

Old Spice "The Man Your Man Could Smell Like" - Old Spice's campaign featuring actor Isaiah Mustafa went viral in 2010, with millions of views on YouTube and social media. The humorous ads helped reinvigorate the brand and connect with a younger, tech-savvy audience.

Nike "Just Do It" - Nike's iconic slogan has been a brand advertising staple for over 30 years. It has been used in countless digital campaigns. One notable recent example is the "Dream Crazy" ad featuring Colin Kaepernick, which generated a lot of buzz and controversy in 2018.

Apple "Get a Mac" - Apple's series of ads featuring John Hodgman as the "PC" and Justin Long as the "Mac" ran from 2006 to 2009 and helped establish Apple as a cool, hip brand. The ads were widely shared on social media and helped drive sales of Mac computers.

Blendtec "Will It Blend?" - Blendtec's videos featuring CEO Tom Dickson blending various items (including an iPhone and a baseball) in a Blendtec blender went viral in 2006 and helped establish the brand as a leader in the blender market. The campaign was widely shared on social media and helped drive sales of Blendtec blenders.

Coca-Cola "Share a Coke" - In 2011, Coca-Cola launched a campaign that replaced the Coke logo on its bottles and cans with common first names. The campaign encouraged people to share a Coke with someone whose name was on the bottle, generating social media buzz and user-generated content.

Several common elements contribute to the success of these advertising campaigns in the digital era (Su, 2021: p.113, Ledikwe & Lombard, 2022: p.255, Mañosca et al., 2022: p.111, Mardiana & Nuryakin, 2022: p.481, Utama et al., 2022: p.2322):

- **Creativity**: These campaigns feature a creative approach to messaging, often using humor, emotion, or storytelling to connect with their audience.

- **Viral potential**: Each of these campaigns had the potential to go viral and be shared widely on social media, which helped increase their reach and impact.

- **User-generated content**: Several of these campaigns encouraged user-generated content, such as Coca-Cola's "Share a Coke" campaign, which helped create a sense of community and engagement around the brand.

- **Brand consistency**: These campaigns stayed true to the brand's values and identity while being fresh and innovative.

- **Multi-channel approach**: These campaigns utilized multiple channels, such as social media, video, and print advertising, to reach their audience and create a cohesive message across platforms.

These successful campaigns demonstrate the importance of creativity, engagement, and a multi-channel approach in digital advertising. The following sections briefly examine the "Share a Coke" campaign and another local campaign in Turkey.

2.1. Coca-Cola's "Share a Coke" campaign

The "Share a Coke" campaign launched by Coca-Cola in 2011 is one of the most successful experiential marketing campaigns in the history of marketing. The "Share a Coke" campaign involved printing popular names on Coca-Cola bottles and cans, encouraging consumers to purchase and share the product with friends and family (The Coca-Cola Company, 2019). The campaign was highly successful, increasing sales and improving Coca-Cola's brand image (McDarby, 2018: p.65). The campaign also utilized experiential marketing techniques to engage customers and create a personalized experience (Baah & Bohaker, 2015: p.25). The campaign was implemented globally, with local variations to include popular names in each region.

Figure 1. Coca-Cola advertising image for the "Share a Coke" campaign.

The "Share a Coke" campaign resulted in a 2% increase in Coca-Cola sales in the United States during the summer of 2014 (Esterl, 2014). Additionally, the campaign resulted in Coca-Cola gaining roughly **25 million new Facebook followers** and shared over **500,000 images** using the hashtag #ShareACoke in the first year (https://smithbrothersmedia.com.

au, 2023). The use of personalized and dynamic advertising was also found to be effective in attracting customers and creating a memorable experience (Riegel & Pellerano, 2020: p.201).

The complex marketing ingenuity and sheer amount of work that was required for this campaign to succeed. Broadly, the campaign can be boiled down to two key elements:

- **Understanding the audience**
- **User Generated Content**

Young adults, who made up their target market, want a beverage that could satisfy their thirst. However, after doing weeks of research, Coca-Cola found that a deeper component impacting consumers' purchasing decisions was a **sense of belonging, self-expression, and storytelling** (https://smith-brothersmedia.com.au, 2023).

The global implementation of the campaign with local variations allowed Coca-Cola to connect with consumers on a more personal level. The campaign was seen as a success in improving the company's brand image (Crawford, 2020: p.64). The role of experiential marketing was critical in the success of this campaign. We will outline some of these roles below (Crawford, 2020: p.68, McDarby, 2018: p.67, Galizia, 2017: p.89, Langner et al., 2017: p.632):

Creating a personal connection: Although Coca-Cola is a large brand, the "Share a Coke" campaign established a personal connection with its customers. Instead of printing its name on the Coca-Cola bottles, it printed the names of customers, making them feel unique and valued.

Creating market transformation: The "Share a Coke" campaign transformed the market by changing the design of Coca-Cola bottles. This transformation caused many customers to look for their name on a Coca-Cola bottle, and this helped marketers quickly expand their product market.

Creating interaction with customers: Although the "Share a Coke" campaign was initially designed by Coca-Cola as an advertising campaign, its positive feedback turned the campaign into an interactive experience for customers. In this way, customers could interact with the Coca-Cola brand, which increased the relationship between customers and the brand.

Increasing brand awareness: Although Coca-Cola is a well-known brand, the "Share a Coke" campaign significantly increased brand aware-

ness. This campaign made the Coca-Cola brand known to customers as innovative and creative.

The "Share a Coke" campaign significantly impacted Coca-Cola's brand image, helping to position the brand as innovative, creative, and customer-focused. The following are some of the specific effects of the campaign on Coca-Cola's brand image (Austin & Gaither, 2016: p.295, Son, 2015: p.129, Vincent & Kolade, 2019: p.4, Tien et al., 2019: p.58, Weatherford, 2019: p.135):

Increased brand engagement: The "Share a Coke" campaign encouraged customers to engage with the brand more personally and meaningfully by sharing their name or the name of a loved one on a Coca-Cola bottle. This increased brand engagement helped to strengthen the emotional connection between customers and the Coca-Cola brand.

Enhanced brand perception: The customized Coca-Cola bottles with different names allowed the brand to showcase its creativity and innovation, helping to enhance customers' perception of the brand. The campaign helped position Coca-Cola as a brand willing to take risks and try new things to stay relevant and engaging.

Improved brand loyalty: By personalizing the Coca-Cola bottles with customers' names, the "Share a Coke" campaign helped to create a stronger emotional connection between the brand and its customers. This, in turn, led to increased brand loyalty and a higher likelihood of repeat purchases.

Strengthened brand reputation: The "Share a Coke" campaign was widely covered in the media and generated a lot of social media buzz, helping strengthen Coca-Cola's reputation as a leading brand in the beverage industry. The campaign was seen as a creative and innovative marketing approach that helped to set Coca-Cola apart from its competitors.

Increased brand awareness: The customized Coca-Cola bottles with customers' names on them became a topic of conversation among friends and family members, leading to increased word-of-mouth marketing and brand awareness. This helped to increase the reach and visibility of the Coca-Cola brand, particularly among younger demographics.

Overall, the "Share a Coke" campaign positively impacted Coca-Cola's brand image, helping to position the brand as innovative, creative, and customer-focused. The campaign generated a lot of buzz and excitement among customers. It helped to strengthen the emotional connection between customers and the Coca-Cola brand.

2.3. The "Bir Başkayız Biz" Campaign

The "Bir Başkayız Biz" campaign was launched by Coca-Cola in Turkey in 2019 and was aimed at promoting diversity, inclusivity, and togetherness. The campaign's slogan "Bir Başkayız Biz" translates to "We are different, together" in English and was designed to celebrate diversity and promote unity among people from different backgrounds. It features a series of television commercials and billboards that showcase individuals from different regions, ethnicities, professions, and ages coming together and enjoying Coca-Cola products. The campaign aims to reinforce Coca-Cola's position as a brand that brings people together and creates moments of happiness and joy. The "Bir Başkayız Biz" Coca-Cola ad campaign in Turkey has been making waves for its heartwarming message of togetherness and unity.

Figure 2. "Bir Başkayız Biz" Advertising Campaign Image.

One of the key features of the campaign was a TV commercial that featured people from different backgrounds and cultures coming together to share a Coke and enjoy moments of happiness. The ad highlighted the idea that despite our differences, we are all connected and can find common ground through shared experiences. In addition to the TV commercial, Coca-Cola also created a series of social media posts and other advertising materials that promoted the campaign's message of inclusivity and togetherness. The company also partnered with various organizations and influencers to help promote the campaign.

The campaign was well-received by Turkish consumers and generated significant media coverage both within Turkey and internationally. It helped

to strengthen the emotional connection between Coca-Cola and its customers in Turkey and reinforced the company's commitment to promoting diversity and inclusion.

One of the things that makes this campaign so successful is its ability to tap into universal themes of togetherness and friendship. This campaign focuses on the discovery of local values by combining the cultural features of countries and cities with design elements. By showcasing people from different parts of Turkey coming together in this way, the campaign can promote a sense of national unity and pride. The visual designs and branding elements were adjusted to reflect the unique identity and character of each city of Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Adana, Şanlıurfa, Van, Bursa, Diyarbakır, Erzurum, Samsun, Trabzon, Denizli and Antalya (Turkiyegazetesi, 2019).

According to Elif Kaypak, the marketing manager of Coca-Cola's commercial unit in Turkey, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, each city in Turkey has a different spirit, and Coca-Cola bottles and cans are a tool in this campaign to get to know the culture of cities, bring differences together, and create intimacy (Marketing Turkiye, 2019). In this campaign, users can use the "Tadını Çıkar" mobile app to scan Coca-Cola cans with their phone camera and watch the characters on the cans come to life through augmented reality technology and stunning animations, discovering different aspects of the city (Medyatava, 2019).

Another aspect of the campaign that has been particularly effective is its use of social media. Coca-Cola has been using platforms like Instagram and Twitter to share videos and photos of the campaign, which has helped to spread the message of togetherness even further. The company has also been encouraging people to share their own photos and stories of togetherness using the hashtag #BirBaşkayızBiz, creating a sense of community around the campaign. Here are some of the effects that Coca-Cola's "Bir Başkayız Biz" campaign had on the company's brand image:

- **Increased emotional connection**: The message of the campaign resonated with Turkish consumers and helped to strengthen their emotional connection with the Coca-Cola brand.

- **Positive association with diversity and inclusivity**: The campaign promoted diversity and inclusivity, which helps to create a positive association with the Coca-Cola brand in the minds of consumers.

- **Reinforced brand values**: The focus on bringing people together and creating moments of joy aligned with the Coca-Cola brand values, which helped to reinforce these values among customers.

- **Positive PR effect** : The campaign generated significant media coverage, which resulted in positive PR for the Coca-Cola brand.

- **Differentiation from competitors**: By emphasizing its commitment to diversity and inclusivity, Coca-Cola was able to differentiate itself from its competitors in the Turkish market.

- **Strengthened relationship with consumers**: Overall, the "BirBaşkayızBiz" campaign helped to strengthen the relationship between Coca-Cola and Turkish consumers by promoting shared values and celebrating diversity.

In conclusion, the "Bir Başkayız Biz" campaign by Coca-Cola in Turkey was a powerful example of how advertising can shape a brand's image and reputation. By celebrating diversity and individuality, Coca-Cola demonstrated to its audience that it is a brand that values inclusivity and understands the importance of embracing differences. The campaign helped to reinforce Coca-Cola's position as a leader in the beverage industry, while also creating a strong emotional connection with consumers. By promoting a positive message and encouraging people to share their own stories, Coca-Cola was able to build a stronger relationship with its audience and establish itself as a brand that truly cares about its customers. Overall, the "Bir Başkayız Biz" campaign was a resounding success for Coca-Cola in Turkey and a great example of how advertising can be used to create a lasting impression on consumers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the digital era has significantly impacted brand image and communication, with social media and digital advertising campaigns playing an increasingly important role in shaping consumer perceptions of brands. Coca-Cola's campaigns are prime examples of how a well-executed digital advertising campaign can generate buzz and engagement on social media and help reinforce and enhance a brand's image and identity.

Through targeted messaging, creative content, and user-generated content, these campaigns helped Coca-Cola connect with its audience on a personal level and create a sense of community around the brand. They allowed consumers to see themselves and their friends and family as part of the Coca-Cola brand, strengthening their emotional connection to the product.

Overall, the success of Coca-Cola's campaigns demonstrates the importance of creativity, engagement, and a multi-channel approach in digital advertising, as well as the power of social media in shaping the brand image

and perception. As the digital era continues to evolve, it will be necessary for brands to stay abreast of the latest trends and tools in digital marketing and to continue to innovate and experiment with new approaches to brand communication.

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