Simply Speaking Shorts #6: The “—er positioning” - Logic loses to Magic

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→Your brand possesses only comparative value, rather than having its own inherent value, writes Shubhranshu Singh. (Image Source: Unsplash)

When your products, service or reason to be are just like another brand ’s except cheap-er , small-er, bigg-er, thinn-er, sharp-er, light-er, fast-er, or even bett-er.'

Denise Lee Yohn called it the “-er position” and it is an inferior place to be.

Not only does it relegate your brand to subordinate status, you are bound to use another brand as your reference point.

Your brand possesses only comparative value, rather than having its own inherent value.

Your value proposition becomes “just as good as Brand X, but ___-er.”

Joel Raphaelson (who died 92 years of age in 2021) was a young copywriter, in 1950 in Chicago, who told David Ogilvy something most insightful.

He said: “I don’t think a consumer chooses brand B over brand A because they think brand B is better. I think they choose brand B because they are more certain it’s pretty good.”

Great brands don't operate in a reactive mode, waiting to jump on the next bandwagon.

They are bold and confident.

They create a consumer mindset.

They create cultural reference points.

They identify powerful ideas on the horizon and discover ways to advance them.

They lead and create industries instead of a reactive approach chasing transitory trends.

Lead rather than one more in a crowded field of —— er brands.

The fact is that the “-er” product or service doesn’t win unless the perceived value is ‘- er’ too.

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Branding, and associations create predispositions. Why do people drink Tequila shots and not say, whiskey shots? Why has this become ritualised? Because it’s somewhat of a party high point perception.

Luxury watches like Rolex don’t sell better timekeeping—they sell status and identity. The social signaling is more relevant than the underlying product.

It’s a fallacy that only big, expensive changes drive growth. More often the small, psychological tweaks can have outsized effects. In this world Rs 1499/-is not a rupee less than 1500/- but in a different mental orbit.

Think not logic but magic, creativity, and unpredictability. Techy in marketing can be a tool,catalyst, accelerator or platform. But human beings will ALWAYS be emotional, irrational, unpredictable.

That's why marketing can never be reduced to a Newtonian science.

People use an ATM machine in exactly the same way in Tokyo, Oslo or Mumbai, but the relationship, the Japanese, Norwegians or Indians have with money is very different.

In many developed, affluent markets, offering people a small , unexpected gift (rather than just a discount) can be a more effective incentive, even if it’s worth less monetarily.

The texture, tone and quality of human interaction matters. That’s why Apple stores offer a premium physical shopping experience, even though people could buy online.

I have seen this in my work at Diageo, Lakme and Royal Enfield. The ‘where and how' of retail interaction makes all the difference.

Luxury is a refuge. Those who can afford it actually want the “reassuringly expensive” — higher prices can increase demand.

People buy emotionally and then look for data, logic, and efficiency, to justify their choices.

Successful marketing isn’t about optimizing efficiency but about understanding human perception, emotion, and irrationality.

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