Brand Awareness

Brand awareness is defined as the knowledge about the brand, or the descriptive and evaluative information about the brand stored in the memory of consumers (Kotler et al., 2019). Brand awareness, in combination with brand identity (the visible elements of a brand that distinguish it from others), brand image (the view that consumers have in their mind about a brand), brand association (the mental connection between a brand and a concept) and brand loyalty (the tendency to continue buying the same brand) are considered as important components of consumer brand equity (the commercial value derived from the consumers’ perception of the brand) that significantly influence the consumer decision-making process.

Brand awareness is an important component of consumer behavioural models. Different models of consumer behaviour, including the basic and modified AIDA (awareness, interest, desire and action) models, hierarchy of effects, DAGMAR (defining advertising goals for measured advertising results), communication effects model, and so on, represent different dimensions of consumer attitudes, such as interest, evaluation, desire, trial, action, repeat buying, and so forth. However, all frameworks describe awareness as the first and most important basic stage of the consumer behaviour process.

Two major types of awareness are recall, or unaided awareness, and recognition, or aided awareness (Milman and Pizam, 1995). While brand recognition is related to the ability to identify the product by viewing its logo, package, advertising, or any other types of visual, audio or sensory cues, brand recall is the recollection of the brand name from the memory when being prompted by a product or product category. An example of brand recognition is when people automatically recognize TripAdvisor while seeing the binocular eyes of the owl. At the same time, if people think about Marriott, Hyatt, or Hilton when considering staying at the hotel, this is related to brand recall.

The term top-of-mind awareness describes the first brands that are recalled by the customer when they think about a product or service category. At the same time, brand dominance is the ability to recall only one single brand name from the category, or the superior stage of brand awareness (see figure) – for example, people recalling the destination brand Las Vegas when thinking about gambling.

Several studies suggest that brand awareness can influence purchase intentions because people tend to select well-known brands in the absence of price and quality considerations (Lin, Lin and Ryan, 2014). For this reason, brand awareness is considered one of the most important business assets that can add value to the product or service and result in competitive advantages in different fields, including tourism.

The tourism marketing literature describes relationships between tourism product awareness and marketing outcomes. Brand awareness influences other components of brand equity, including perceived quality, value, image, brand association and brand loyalty (Brahmbhatt and Shah, 2017). Brand awareness can also directly affect tourists’ behavioural intentions (Lin et al., 2014). Several factors might moderate relationships between brand awareness, brand equity and visit intentions, including socio-demographic characteristics, switching costs, the country of origin, word-of-mouth, brand performance, and so on (e.g., Liu et al., 2017). The main antecedents of tourism brand awareness include different types of advertisement, type of destination, word-of-mouth, price and distribution intensity (Kim and Lee, 2018).

Awareness of the product category traditionally precedes brand awareness. It is reasonable that customers cannot be aware of a brand and purchase it before being aware of the product itself. For example, people cannot be aware of a brand called ‘Royal Caribbean’ before being aware of a product category called ‘cruising’. This sequence is true not only for products but for services as well. Customers cannot be aware of the service brand ‘Thomas Cook’ before being aware of the service category called ‘travel agents’.
Tourism products satisfy leisure, pleasure, cultural or business needs outside of the normal customer residence in places called tourist destinations (World Tourism Association, 2020). In the case of tourism, the hierarchical order of awareness needs to include destination awareness, which could be defined as the knowledge about the destination and the ability to recall its name while thinking about travelling. By analogy with conventional products, tourists cannot be aware of the brand before being aware of the tourism product category (such as hotels, restaurants, attractions, etc.), and cannot be aware of the tourism product before being aware of the destination. For example, to be aware and purchase a brand called ‘Disney World’ tourists must be aware of the existence of a product called ‘theme parks’ and be aware of a destination called ‘Orlando’.

The traditional marketing logic does not always work in the current settings when tourism experiences significant changes due to the penetration of new information technologies, social media and mobile applications. At present, most conventional travel agents are being replaced with online travel agents and mobile technologies, which present tourist products in a different way. In some cases, tourists purchase a trip online without being aware of the destination or the product category. Two examples of the above are business travel and attending special events when people purchase an opportunity to meet with business partners or take part in an event without being aware of the tourist products they will use or the destinations they will visit.

In the case of a strong dominance of particular brands or products, it is possible that tourists will not have any information about destinations. For example, tourists purchasing extreme activities related to participation in dangerous sports such as bungee jumping or heli-skiing may be unaware of the destination, since their satisfaction is gained from the activity rather than the place where it occurs. Another example, which is becoming quite popular, is ‘surprise trips’, when people buy a trip without having any idea at the time of booking about the identity of the destination, transportation to it, lodging, or tourism activities. In this case, tourists have a high level of brand awareness and loyalty to the company selling the trip without having any awareness about the destination, its products or brands. Due to the recent changes in the marketing of tourism, it is necessary to reconsider the universality of the interrelationship between the destination, products and brands in the awareness process.

Tourists’ awareness of the brands, products and destinations is traditionally measured by self-reported retrospective scales that include questions about the ability to recall and recognize the brand name and can be influenced by self-report biases (e.g., Rossiter, 2014).
The advancement of modern information and communication technologies makes it possible to capture the complex nature of tourists’ brand awareness through measuring website traffic and analytics, social mentions, earned media, social engagement, and other awareness indicators. Understanding and objectively measuring brand awareness in tourism helps to develop and optimize brand awareness strategies, design marketing campaigns and attract new visitors.

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References