

Sales promotion as strategic communication tool: a case of Syrian market

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ABSTRACT: *The strategic effect of sales promotion is continuous issue between scholars, because some researchers concluded that sales promotion is not short term incentives use to increase the sales volume only, but it has long term effect on brand elements. In this paper, an attempt has been made to analyze the effect of different sales promotion types on brand image and the moderating role of awareness level, This research uses a cross-sectional experiment to manipulate, brand awareness level, type of promotion and measure the brand image, The results obtained suggest that at all levels of brand awareness, there are not differences between the effect of promotion type on brand image. The findings offer guidance to managers who might benefit from knowing what is the best strategy to promote their products and services. Our work also extends prior related research because, to this date, the effectiveness of price discounts and premiums across promotional benefit levels and brand awareness levels is an under-researched issue.*

KEYWORDS: *Free gift, price Discounts, brand awareness level*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Syrian market witnessed a dramatic changes in the recent year , because the retailers become more powerful and the consumer became take his purchase decision inside the outlet. This changes made the sales promotion is the most importance element within the overall marketing communication.

Sales promotion, perhaps more than any area of marketing communication has witnessed both dramatic growth and change over recent years (Huff.et al, 1999). Consequently, sales promotion is increasingly gaining relevance within company communication programs. Nevertheless, Although promotions may prove to be useful for a rapid sales increase, these marketing tools have long-term effects. Several researchers have revealed that the frequent use of promotions may have a negative effect on the expected product price and the promoted brand image (Raghubir & Corfman, 1999), However, other authors have verified that these effects may differ according to the promotion tool used. Thus, price promotions –such as discounts or coupons- may have a detrimental effect on brand image, whereas non-monetary promotions –i.e. gifts or contests- do not damage brand image and may even help to create it(Mela.et al,1997).

First, the effects of promotions on brand image are reviewed. The potential moderating variables are studied and hypotheses formulated. Next, the methodology to verify hypotheses and the results are presented. Finally, the paper concludes with limitations and recommendations for future research.

II. THE EFFECTS OF PROMOTIONS ON BRAND IMAGE:

Different types of promotional tools may have different effects on sales, profitability or brand equity (Srinivasan &Anderson, 1998). In the analyses of these differences numerous studies distinguish between monetary and non-monetary promotions because each of these categories has clearly differentiated costs and benefits (Chandon.et al,2000)

Monetary promotions, or price promotions, are those actions which allow the consumer to purchase a product at a lower price than usual. Several studies stress the long-term risks and negative effects of these promotions (Diamond and Campbell, 1989) The first argument that would explain why monetary promotions have a negative effect on brand image is that these actions diminish the internal reference price (Kalwani and Yim, 1992). This lower reference price will reduce the perceived brand price, resulting in lower brand equity (Blattberg et al., 1995),also (Montaner&Pina,2008) concluded that monetary promotions reduce consumer’s expectations regarding the regular price of the product and reduce brand image assessments of the promoted product, on the other hand (Ramos and Franco, 2005) show that price deals have not any effect on brand image , also (Sinha &Smith ,2000) concluded that the price discount (50%) for one time does not reduce the reference price.

Non-monetary promotions embrace a vast variety of actions where the incentive is not directly evidenced in a lower purchase price. Unlike price promotions, both in professional and academic contexts, these types of promotions have been recommended because not only do they have a harmless effect on brand image (Mela et al,1997), but they may help to reinforce it.

The first reason why non-monetary promotions would not have negative effects on brand images is that its frequent use does not affect consumer internal reference prices. Unlike monetary promotions, the promotional incentive is not integrated in the product price so this type of action is unlikely to entail a reduction of the consumer reference price (Campbell &Diamond, 1990). Furthermore, (Mela et al. 1997) verified that these promotions made brand-loyal customers less sensitive to price.

On the other hand, non-monetary promotions may improve image in the long term, generating differentiation (Papatla &Krishnamurthi, 1996) and helping brands maintain their competitive position. These actions often contain messages about the brand which enable an increase of knowledge without information about the price. (Mela .e tal,1998) observed a positive, though not significant, relationship between the use of non-monetary promotions and brand differentiation. Besides, this type of action does not modify brand loyalty (Gedenk &Neslin, 1999), also (Montaner&pina,2008) concluded non-monetary promotions do not modify the expected regular price of the product and increase brand image assessments of the promoted brand,(palazon &Delgado,2005) show that Non-monetary promotions have more positive effects on brand knowledge than monetary promotions, this leads to H1

H1: Free gift has more positive effect on brand image than price discount.

III. THE MODERATING ROLE OF BRAND AWARENESS :

The evaluation of sales promotions tool is likely to depend on the type of brand used (e.g. whether high or low brand equity). Recognizing brand awareness is a component of brand equity, previous research has shown that promotions involving high quality brands which have high awareness have significantly different effects from the same promotions using medium or low awareness brands (Chandon .et al,2000; Montaner .et al,2011).

Blattberg and Wisniewski (1989) argued that those who buy lower quality brands are more price sensitive than the consumers of higher quality brands. Thus, promotions for lower quality brands only attract customers of similar or lower price brands. By contrast, promoting strong brands causes consumers to switch from a competing brand in greater numbers.

Chandon.et al(2000) concluded that non monetary promotions are more effective than monetary promotions at high level of brand equity, Lowe,(2010) shown that consumers prefer monetary promotions like price discount with low brand awareness product, and prefer non monetary promotion like extra free product with high brand awareness. Montaner.et al ,(2011) concluded that consumers evaluate the free gift more positive with high brand equity product, above discussion lead to the following Hypotheses:

H2: At low brand awareness level: The brand image is higher for price discount than for free gift.

H3: At High brand awareness level: The brand image is higher for premium than price free gift.

IV. METHODOLOGY:

In this study 2 promotion type(price discount, premium)X 2brand awareness (low, high) between-subjects experimental design was employed. The data for the empirical study were obtained from a controlled experiment involving undergraduate and post graduate students

4.1Pretests to the Treatments' Design:

Different pilot studies were conducted to choose the product category to be used and to select the discount levels and the premium

The first pretest involved 72 subjects, and 9 products were pretested. These products were chips, toothpaste, soap, chocolate, coffee, shampoo, soft drinks , and noodles. Subjects responded to a set of items to measure the hedonic or utilitarian nature and the interest in these products. The hedonic or utilitarian nature of the product was measured with three 7-point semantic differential scales based on Wakefield and Inman (2003) Soft drink was finally chosen as the focal product, (see Appendix I for scale items and Appendix II for further information about the pretest).

The use of a purely hedonic or utilitarian product was deliberately avoided to prevent possible congruencies between the promotion and the product that may enhance one type of promotion over another (Chandon, Wansink, & Laurent, 2000).

The second pretest involved 60 subjects and sought to guide the selection of the premium used as a nonmonetary incentive .A total of 6 different premiums were pretested. Four measures were obtained for each premium: attractiveness, value, utilitarian or hedonic nature, and perceived fit between the premium and the main product (Soft drink). These premiums were: a backpack, a t-shirt, an alarm clock, , football, Mug, sport cap. It was of interest to select a premium that was neither very Attractive nor especially unattractive to avoid the possibility that this characteristic would determine the effectiveness of one type of promotion over another.

The fit between the premium selected and the product used in the study was also controlled. The use of a purely hedonic premium was avoided because it could have enhanced the deal by making the benefits congruent (Chandon,Wansink,& Laurent, 2000) and because receiving something people could not justify buying for themselves may have enhanced the attractiveness of the premium(Nunes & Park, 2003). Based on this procedure, the Football was selected, and the monetary value assigned to it was \$2 (see Appendix II). The purpose of third pretest is chosen tow brands for soft drink. one with high awareness and another with low awareness. This pretest was carried out with 70 students. Six brands were pretest: Pepsi, Coca cola ,Canada dry , Sport cola , Original , Ugarit . The brand awareness was measured by 5 points Likret scale based on (Yoo. et al, 2000). Finally Pepsi was chosen as high brand awareness and Original as low brand awareness.

4.2 Measures:

The dependent variables (Brand image) were evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale, anchored by “Disagree Strongly” and “Agree Strongly. Brand image was measured with five items based on Montaner& pina (2008). The items were as follows :1- The products have characteristics that other brands don't, 2-The brand is nice, 3-The brand has a personality that distinguish itself from competitor s’ brands , 4- It’s a brand that doesn’t disappoint its customers, 5-It’s one of the best brands in the sector.

4.3 Sample and Procedure:

Data were collected from a 315-student sample at Higher institute of business administration (Syria).The students were distributed in eight similar size groups which were actually practice groups of a subject. The information to contrast hypotheses was obtained by means of a survey adapted to the experimental conditions of each group. At the beginning of the session each participant was given a questionnaire with two differentiated parts and they were asked to complete the first part. After this, a PowerPoint presentation which simulated the purchase conditions of the product and brand corresponding to each group was performed in the classroom. At the end of the practical session, the participants had to answer the second part of the survey.

4.3 Manipulation Check:

Manipulation check shows the adequacy of the treatments.

A- The creditability of promotional scenarios: the credibility of each promotional scenario was tested with a 7-point semantic differential scale with endpoints of “Not Believable” and “Believable.” The promotional conditions were perceived as believable(overall mean =5,20). Each of the individual promotional evaluations exceeded the neutral point, and the credibility ratings ranged from 4, 8 to 5, 6.

B- Brand awareness: An ANOVA indicated that for price discounts the perceived benefit varied across levels (T=19, 123, p=0,001), For Pepsi product the brand awareness was=3,68 and for Original Product the brand awareness was=2,35 ,P=0,003.

V. HYPOTHESES TEST:

H1a posits that Free gift has more positive effect on brand image than price discount, T test result shows that there are not significant differences between the effect of promotion type on brand image ,that lead to reject (H1) as table (3) shows.

Table (1) the effect of promotion type on brand image

Dependent variable	Price discount		Free gift		T test	
	M	SD	M	SD	T	Sig
Brand image	3,81	0,55	3,85	0,8	-0,743	0,464

To test H2 and H3, an ANOVA was conducted for dependent variable, focusing on the interaction between promotion type and brand awareness level. After that, the simple effects driving the interaction were obtained. The ANOVA

including brand image as dependent variable, and promotion type and brand awareness as independent factors indicated not significant main effects of brand awareness ($F=0.003, p=0.953$). Also the effects of promotion type is not significant ($F=5.39, p=0.463$), also the interaction between the two experimental factors was not significant ($F=0.2847, P=0.092$)

To assess whether there is empirical evidence for H2, H3, comparisons across brand awareness levels were performed. H2 posits that effect of price discount on brand image will be stronger at low level of brand awareness than free gift, and table 2 shows that the differences between them are not significant, that lead to reject H2. H3 posits At “ high brand awareness levels The Brand image for free gift is higher than price discounts, and table2 shows that the differences between them are not significant, that lead to reject H3.

Table2. The effect of interaction between sales promotion and brand awareness level

Dependent Variable	Sales promotion		brand awareness level		Sales promotion* brand awareness level	
	F	Sig	F	Sig	F	Sig
Brand image	5.39	0,4 63	0.003	0,953	0,258	0.612

Table3. Means, Standard Deviations, and Test of Significance

Dependent Variable	Sales promotion	Brand awareness level			
		Low		High	
		M	SD	M	SD
Brand image	Price discount	3,8 2	0,48	3,80	0,42
	Free gift	3,8 4	0,82	3,87	0,78
	Sig	0,99		0, 85	

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS:

Marketers spend an enormous amount of time finding out what consumers really want and what promotions will be most effective. Given the very large expenditures allocated to sales promotion tools, understanding what strategy to use for a given promotional cost/value remains important. Thus, one of the basic decisions confronting a manager, when implementing a promotion, is the type of promotion to be used and the benefit to be offered to consumers. Therefore, it is a very relevant issue for both academics and researchers to understand

what promotional tool (monetary vs. nonmonetary) works better at a given brand awareness from the perspective of consumers’ reactions. In this sense, one of the most interesting contributions of this research is that, even between two equivalent promotions, “low” and “high” benefit levels can lead subjects to infer different values for monetary and nonmonetary promotions. the results obtained show there are not significant differences between promotion type on brand image at all brand awareness level , As suggested in the literature reviewed, the effect of sales promotions on brand image differs according to the type of promotional tool used in the long term (Montaner & pina,2008), but in short term there are not differences between the effect of monetary and non monetary promotions on brand image, because the monetary promotions don’t lower the reference price of product in short term (sinha&Smith,2000),also the non monetary promotions don’t depend on price – quantity equation and haven’t effect on reference price.

VII. LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH:

The current study represents a small step toward understanding consumers’ response to sales promotions and therefore the effectiveness of different promotional tools. This research investigates just one type of monetary and nonmonetary promotion, price discount and premium. However, due to the high number of promotional tools (e.g., bonus pack, sweepstakes, and so on), it is possible that these results may not generalize to other tools. Therefore, future research is needed to identify how different promotional tools work.

Also we need to study the nature of the premium offered (e.g., hedonic or utilitarian) is of special relevance because it can influence the evaluation of a promotional offer and determine the arousal of affective and cognitive responses in the evaluation process. Also we need to extend this work to study the effect of promotion type on brand image in long term.

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APPENDIX I: Pretest1

Scale Items: Hedonic or utilitarian nature of the product category (a=0.82)

“Think of the situation in which each product is typically used”:

Practical purpose/just for fun

Purely functional/pure enjoyment

For a routine need/for pleasure

Table A the nature of product

Product categories	Hedonic/Utilitarian Nature
chips	5,56
Toothpaste	2,49
soap	3,10
noodles	4,81
Shampoo	2,68
coffee	5
Soft drink	3,93
chocolate	5,63

APPENDIX II: Pretest2

Scale Items: Perceived product-premium fit(a=0.83)

This premium is appropriate for the product.

This premium is a logical choice for the product.

There is a good association between the premium and the product.

Scale Items: Premium attractiveness (a=0.96)

This premium interests me.

This premium pleases me.

Scale Items: Hedonic or utilitarian nature of the premium

“Would you characterize the premium as primarily a functional gift or an entertainment/enjoyable gift?”

Primarily for functional use/Primarily for entertainment use

Table B the premium Features

The Premium	Product- premium fit	attractiveness	Hedonic/Utilitarian Nature	Monetary Value
backpack	3,33	2,87	4,5	4,5\$
t-shirt	3,37	2,85	4,6	3\$
an alarm clock	2,59	2,47	2,1	2,4\$
football	4,01	3,15	4,4	2\$
Sport cap	3,51	2,93	3,6	1,8\$
Mug	4,18	4,3	3,5	1,5

APPENDIX III: pretest 3

Scale Items: brand awareness(a=0.96)

1-I know what X looks like

2-I can recognize X among other competing brands

3-I am aware of X brand

4-I know X brand

Table C the level of brand awareness

Brand	mean	SD
Ugarit	3,66	0,129
Pepsi	4,61	0,068
Canada Dry	3,78	0,086
Original	2,61	0,012
Sport cola	3,32	0,089
Coca cola	4,48	0,062