

Model: Brand Image Transfer

Type of model: Brand model (process model)

Author(s): Rik Riezebos

Domain: Brand stretching

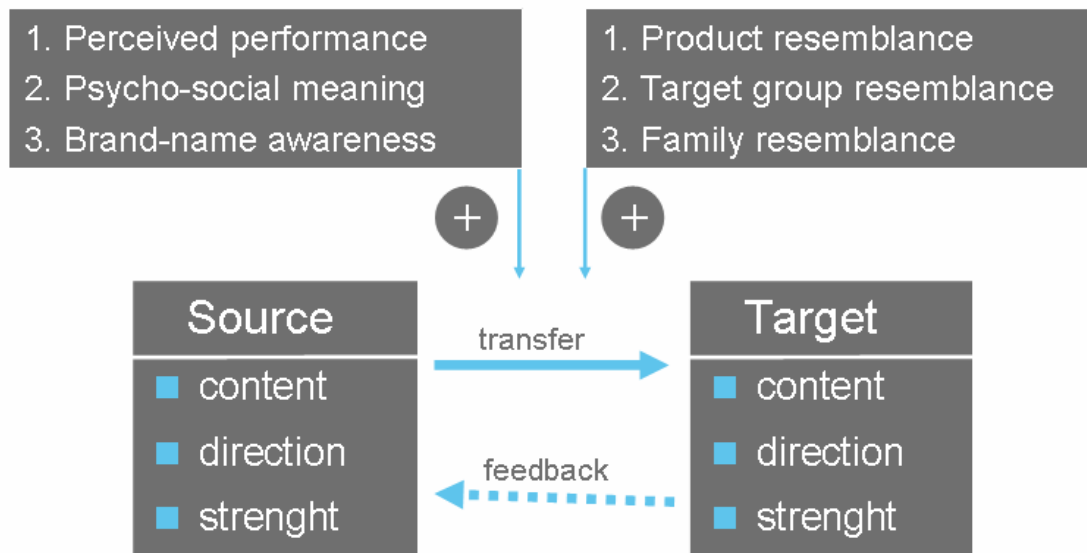


Figure 1: The process of image transfer according to Riezebos.

Image transfer involves the transfer of associations that are valuable to consumers from one brand to another, or, in the case of extensions, from one product to another. The transfer of associations requires at least two entities: a source and a target. In order to be able to transfer anything, the source already has to conjure up certain associations in consumers. Associations can be described using three characteristics: their contents, whether they have a positive or a negative charge, and the extent to which they are linked to a brand (strength). In terms of content, the Alfa Romeo brand will probably be associated with design, sporty, fast and rust-prone. The latter association has a clear negative charge (direction) and is probably not very strongly linked with the brand (anymore) (strength).

Brand image transfer is a process that comes into play in four brand strategies (see table 1): *ingredient branding*, *extension*, *co-branding* and *endorsement*.

Ingredient branding constitutes the practice of a manufacturer marketing a branded component that consumers can only consume and purchase as part of another brand product (such as an Intel processor in a Dell computer). The source is here the ingredient brand, and the target the host brand.

Table 1: Four brand stretching strategies based on image transfer

| Strategy | Source | Target |
|---------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Ingredient branding | Ingredient brand | Host brand |
| Extension | Flagship product | Extended product |
| Co-branding | Modifier brand | Header brand |
| Endorsement | Endorser | Endorsed brand |

An *extension* is the situation where a brand owner launches a new product (the so-called ‘extended product’) under an existing brand name (for example: Nivea hairspray as an extension of Nivea skin cream). The initial product is then the parent product, or - in case this product is no longer carried – the ‘flagship product’ of the brand in question (i.e. the product that is most stereotypical of the brand).

Co-branding is the joint venture of two brands marketing a new product under a common name. A classic example is the Philips – Alessi product line. In such cases, we have a ‘header brand’ and a ‘modifier brand’. In order to define which is the header brand, we will have to depart from the product class of the co-branded product. In the Philips – Alessi case, the products in question fall into the category of domestic (electric) appliances; seeing as this is the product class that the Philips brand is active in (and the Alessi brand is not), Philips is the header brand, and Alessi the modifier brand (a brand that is literally used to *modify* the image of the header brand).

Endorsement comprises a brand owner using a ‘corporate brand’ to prop up a product brand. Examples are Robeco’s Younique and ABN AMRO’s MoneYou, where Robeco and ABN AMRO are ‘endorsers’ of the product brands Younique and MoneYou, which we therefore refer to as ‘endorsed brands’.

In his so-called ‘Brand Image Transfer’ model, Rik Riezebos identifies six critical determining factors for the success of the transfer of associations from one brand (source) to another brand (target). The factors are divided into two groups: three components driving a brand’s added value for consumers, and three factors that can facilitate the image transfer process.

The three drivers of added value for consumers are: (1) *perceived performance*, (2) *psycho-social meaning* and (3) *brand awareness*¹. The level of the brand's added value should generally be quite high to ensure the image transfer process be successful. If the level of added value of the source is not high, or even low, an image transfer process is doomed to fail and cannot be started. In practical terms: if a brand is not strong enough, it does not provide a fertile breeding ground for extensions or endorsement. A weak ingredient brand will also not add a great deal of value to a potential host brand. And in the case of co-branding, the modifier brand always needs to have the required added value; the header brand can be weaker, because it is, after all, trying to boost its value through the modifier brand.

The three factors that can facilitate the image transfer process are: (1) *product resemblance*; (2) *target group resemblance* and (3) *family resemblance*. *Product resemblance* can be split up into three aspects: the extent to which consumers consider the product classes of the source brand and the target brand to resemble each other, the positioning approach of the brand, and the current product scope of the brand. Where perceived product class differences are concerned, an image transfer is more likely to succeed when consumers consider source and target product quite similar. It is, for example, far more likely for a margarine brand to boost an evaporated milk brand than a toothpaste brand. Most consumers will, after all, see more similarities between margarine and evaporated milk (both dairy products) than between margarine and toothpaste. Apart from perceived differences between product classes, a brand's positioning approach also influences the success of image transfer. This factor tells us that when positioning stresses intrinsic attributes of the brand item (a functional approach), the brand name will be harder to slap on other products than when the approach is not product-related and more expressive. The brand's current 'brand scope' is a third aspect of product resemblance. This makes reference to the number of products exploited under a brand name. An example of a broad brand is Nivea (skin cream, sun cream, shower gel, aftershave, hairspray, etc.). An example of a narrow brand is Vaseline. What matters here is the distinction between typical and atypical extensions. An atypical extension is an extended product that, in the eyes of the consumers, shows little similarity with the source brand, and will therefore probably be a so-called 'concept extension'. An atypical extension is more likely to succeed when launched by a broad brand than by a narrow brand. A typical extension (mostly

¹: For further explanation of these components, refer to the description of Rik Riezebos' 'Brand-Added Value / Brand Equity model'.

a line extension), on the other hand, will probably yield better results with a narrow brand.

Target group resemblance refers to the extent of resemblance between the target group of the source brand and that of the target brand. If the target brand (extended product) guns for the same target group as the source brand, chances are the target brand will succeed. After all, the initial purchases of a target brand will mainly be made by users of the source brand. But if the target brand tailors to another target group than the source brand, initial sales will not significantly differ from those of a new brand launch.

Family resemblance means that the look and feel of the source brand and the target brand have to be largely the same. If the style of two products leads consumers to deduce they are of the same brand, we are dealing with a high degree of family resemblance. Seeing as consumers are led by symbols and colours in their assessment, a similar style can help consumers transfer the associations they have with the source brand to the target brand.

Based on the previous on image transfer, we can conclude that a brand with a high level of added value can relatively easily contribute to the image of another brand product. If the source brand offers a medium level of brand-added value, it is advisable to invest in the source brand before applying a brand stretching strategy. If the three factors that can facilitate the brand image transfer process are not at optimum level, an image transfer process can only succeed if the process is supported by marketing communication. In case of low product resemblance, target group resemblance and/or limited family resemblance, image transfer may still prove successful, providing it is propped up by an intensive advertising campaign.

Reference(s)

Riezebos, R. (2002), *Merkenmanagement (theorie en toepassing van het ontwikkelen, beheren en beschermen van merken en merkenportfolio's)* [Brand management (theory and application of the development, management and protection of brands and brand portfolios)]. Wolters-Noordhoff, Groningen. *

* : available in the EURIB library.