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Managing and shaping brand associations to ensure positive alignment with "Brand Image": Narrative synthesis

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Abstract
This narrative synthesis aims to provide an overview of the strategies and tactics used by marketers and brand managers to manage and shape brand associations to ensure positive alignment with brand identity. The study is based on a review of 25 relevant studies published between 2006 and 2021. The most effective strategies identified in the studies included brand positioning, brand personality, brand storytelling, and brand community. The findings suggest that effective brand positioning can be achieved by highlighting product benefits, emphasizing emotional connections, or targeting specific consumer segments. The studies also suggest that brands with strong and consistent personalities are more likely to be perceived positively and generate greater emotional attachment and loyalty among consumers. Effective brand storytelling involves creating a narrative that reflects the brand's history, values, and mission, which engages consumers on an emotional level and fosters a sense of connection and loyalty to the brand. Building a brand community through social media, events, and other channels can also be an effective way of managing and shaping brand associations, as it fosters a sense of belonging and identity among consumers, and generates positive word-of-mouth and advocacy. The study emphasizes the importance of ensuring alignment between brand associations and brand identity, which involves identifying and communicating the core values, personality traits, and attributes that define a brand and differentiate it from competitors. Overall, the study provides valuable insights for marketers and brand managers on how to manage and shape brand associations to ensure positive alignment with brand identity and emphasizes the importance of consistency and authenticity in brand messaging and communication.

Keywords: Brand associations, brand identity, brand management, brand personality, brand community, consumer behaviour

Introduction
In today's highly competitive business environment, building a strong brand has become more important than ever. A brand's equity, or the value that it represents to its customers, can be a key driver of business success. Central to building brand equity is managing and shaping brand associations to ensure that they are positive and aligned with the brand's identity. Brand associations are the perceptions, emotions, and beliefs that consumers have about a brand, and they are shaped by a variety of factors, including advertising, product quality, and customer experiences. Managing and shaping brand associations to ensure positive alignment with brand identity is a critical aspect of building and maintaining strong brand equity. According to Keller (2016) [16], brand associations are the "thoughts, feelings, images, perceptions, experiences, beliefs, attitudes, and so on that become linked to the brand" (p. 2). These associations are shaped by various factors, including a brand's products or services, advertising, packaging, and customer experiences (Keller, 2016) [16]. To manage and shape brand associations effectively, companies must first understand the key associations that consumers make with their brands. This requires research and analysis to identify the most important attributes and values that are associated with the brand. For example, a study by Aaker and Biel (2013) found that the most important attributes for building brand equity are quality, reliability, innovation, and trustworthiness. Once companies have identified the key

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associations that they want to cultivate, they can take steps to shape these associations over time. This can involve a range of strategies, including advertising, sponsorships, packaging, and customer service.

For example, a company might sponsor an event that aligns with its brand values, or create an advertising campaign that emphasizes the quality and reliability of its products. To ensure that brand associations are aligned with a brand's identity, companies must also be consistent in their messaging and branding. This means using consistent visual elements, such as logos and color schemes, across all marketing materials, as well as ensuring that all messaging and communications reflect the brand's values and personality. Overall, managing and shaping brand associations is a complex and ongoing process that requires careful planning and execution. By understanding the key associations that consumers make with their brand, and taking steps to shape these associations over time, companies can build strong brand equity and differentiate themselves from their competitors. In this narrative synthesis, we explore the importance of managing and shaping brand associations to ensure positive alignment with brand identity and examine some of the strategies that companies can use to achieve this goal. We also discussed the role of consistency in brand messaging and branding, and highlight the key research and insights that can inform effective brand management.

Search strategy
To conduct research on the topic of managing and shaping brand associations to ensure positive alignment with brand identity, the following search strategy was used:

A general search was conducted using keywords related to brand equity, brand management, and brand associations, such as "brand equity", "brand management", "brand associations", "brand identity" and "brand perception". The search was refined by adding specific terms related to the topic, such as "managing brand associations", "shaping brand associations", "positive brand associations" and "aligning brand associations". Academic articles and books were searched for using databases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, and ProQuest. The search was limited to articles and books published in the past 15 years to ensure relevance and currency. Relevant case studies, industry reports, and white papers were searched for on the websites of branding and marketing firms, such as Interbrand, Landor and Ogilvy. The reference lists of relevant articles and books were reviewed to identify additional sources and references that may be useful for the research. The search was also expanded to include sources from other fields, such as psychology, consumer behavior and marketing, to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that shape brand associations. The search strategy was refined as new information and sources were discovered, and the process was iterated until a comprehensive set of relevant sources was obtained.

1. **Brainstorming and Identifying Keywords:** The first step in the search strategy was to brainstorm and identify relevant keywords and terms that are commonly associated with the topic of brand associations, brand identity and brand equity. Some of the keywords used include "brand equity", "brand identity", "brand perception", "brand associations" and "brand management".
2. **Refining the Search:** After identifying the primary keywords, the next step was to refine the search by adding more specific terms related to the topic, such as

"managing brand associations", "shaping brand associations", "positive brand associations" and "aligning brand associations".
3. **Identifying Relevant Databases:** The third step was to identify relevant databases and search engines that would provide access to academic articles, books, and other credible sources on the topic. Some of the databases used in this search include JSTOR, Google Scholar and ProQuest.
4. **Restricting the Search to Relevant Time Periods:** To ensure the results were current, the search was restricted to articles and books published within the past 10 years.
5. **Searching for Case Studies and Industry Reports:** In addition to academic articles and books, relevant case studies, industry reports, and white papers were searched for on the websites of branding and marketing firms, such as Interbrand, Landor and Ogilvy.
6. Reviewing Reference Lists to identify additional sources and references that may be useful for the research, the reference lists of relevant articles and books were reviewed.
7. **Expanding the Search:** To gain a deeper understanding of the factors that shape brand associations, the search was expanded to include sources from other fields, such as psychology, consumer behaviour and marketing.
8. **Iterating the Search:** The search strategy was refined as new information and sources were discovered, and the process was iterated until a comprehensive set of relevant sources was obtained.

Developing and Coding Framework for Managing and Shaping Brand Associations to Ensure Positive Alignment with Brand Identity:

1. Identify the Key Brand Associations (Code A)
The first step is to identify the key associations that consumers make with the brand. This could involve conducting consumer research and analyzing brand perception surveys to understand the top attributes that consumers associate with the brand. Some potential codes under this category could include Top attributes associated with the brand, Consumer perceptions of the brand and Consumer attitudes toward the brand.

2. Evaluate the Current Brand Identity (Code B)
Next, evaluate the current brand identity to ensure it aligns with the key brand associations. This could involve analysing the brand's mission statement, visual identity, and messaging to ensure they are consistent with the desired brand associations. Some potential codes under this category could include Analysis of the brand's mission statement, an Evaluation of the brand's visual identity, and Analysis of the brand's messaging and communication strategies.

3. Identify the Desired Brand Associations (Code C)
Develop a clear understanding of the desired brand associations and determine if there are any gaps between the current and desired brand identity. Some potential codes under this category could include: Desired brand attributes, Goals for the brand's identity, Areas for improvement in the brand's identity.

4. Develop Strategies to Align Brand Identity with Desired Associations (Code D)
Develop strategies to align the brand identity with the desired

brand associations. This could include revising the visual identity, messaging and marketing campaigns to reinforce the desired brand attributes. Some potential codes under this category could include the Development of marketing campaigns, Revisions to the visual identity and Development of messaging strategies.

5. Implement the Strategies (Code E)
Implement the strategies and evaluate their effectiveness over time. This could involve conducting follow-up consumer research to assess whether the desired brand associations are being reinforced and identify any improvement areas. Some potential codes under this category could include the Implementation of marketing campaigns, Evaluation of consumer feedback, and Assessment of brand perception over time.

6. Monitor Brand Perception and Adjust Strategies as Needed (Code F)
Monitor brand perception and adjust strategies as needed to ensure the brand remains aligned with the desired brand associations. This could involve ongoing consumer research, brand tracking studies, and regular evaluations of the brand identity and marketing campaigns. Some potential codes under this category could include Regular evaluation of brand perception, Assessment of consumer feedback, and Adjustment of marketing strategies as needed.

7. Measure the Impact on Brand Equity (Code G)
Measure the impact of the strategies on brand equity to determine if they are contributing to the overall success of the brand. This could involve analyzing sales data, brand awareness metrics, and consumer sentiment. Some potential codes under this category could include: Sales data analysis, Evaluation of brand awareness metrics, Assessment of consumer sentiment over time Overall, this coding framework can help organizations effectively manage and shape their brand associations to ensure positive alignment with their brand identity.

Table 1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Study design	Studies that do not focus on managing and shaping brand associations.
Population	Studies that do not measure the impact of managing and shaping brand associations on consumer behaviour and attitudes.
Outcome measures	Studies that focus on brand associations in B2B contexts or on the branding of specific products rather than on managing and shaping brand associations.
Publication date	Studies that are not published in English.
Population	Studies that do not focus on managing and shaping brand associations.

Screened Studies
The screening process is a critical step in any systematic review as it helps to ensure that only relevant studies are included in the final analysis. In this particular review, the screening process involved reviewing the titles and abstracts of all identified studies to determine if they met the inclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria, in this case, were studies that focused on the management and shaping of brand associations to ensure positive alignment with brand identity. Initially, 100 studies were identified through the search strategy. However, after the first round of screening, 75 studies were excluded as they did not meet the inclusion criteria. The reasons for exclusion were primarily due to the studies' focus on general brand management strategies without specific emphasis on brand associations, brand equity measurement rather than management and shaping, brand associations in a specific industry or product category, or not being empirical research, such as conceptual or review articles. The remaining 25 studies were selected for full-text review to determine if they met the inclusion criteria. The full-text review involved a careful analysis of each study to ensure that it met the inclusion criteria and provided relevant insights into the management and shaping of brand associations to ensure positive alignment with brand identity. Overall, the screening process helped to narrow down the list of potential studies to those that were most relevant to the review's focus. By excluding studies that did not meet the inclusion criteria, the review's quality and relevance were enhanced, ensuring that only the most useful and informative studies were included in the final analysis.

Data Extraction
Extracting data from the included studies in the narrative synthesis on managing and shaping brand associations to ensure positive alignment with brand identity involved identifying key information related to study design, sample size, and key findings. The review included a total of 25 studies that met the inclusion criteria, and data were extracted from each study to identify the strategies used to manage and shape brand associations, their effectiveness, and their impact on consumer attitudes and behavior.

Data Extraction Criteria

Table 2: Show table Criteria of Data Extraction

Criteria of Data Extraction	
Study design:	The study design used in each included study was evaluated to assess the quality and reliability of the findings. The review included studies that used a range of research designs, including case studies, surveys, experiments and content analysis. For instance, some studies used qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews and focus groups, to understand consumer perceptions and attitudes toward brand associations. Other studies used quantitative research methods, such as surveys, to collect large-scale data on consumer behavior and decision-making. This diverse range of study designs allowed us to gain a comprehensive understanding of the strategies used to manage and shape brand associations.
Sample size:	The number of participants or cases involved in the study was another crucial factor in evaluating the generalizability and statistical power of the findings. The review included studies with sample sizes ranging from a few dozen to several thousand participants. The larger the sample size, the more representative the findings are likely to be of the overall population. Thus, analyzing the sample size helped us assess the validity and reliability of the findings of the included studies.

Key findings:	The main results and conclusions of the studies related to managing and shaping brand associations were extracted to identify the most effective strategies and their impact on consumer attitudes and behavior. Key findings included the importance of brand positioning, brand personality, brand storytelling, and brand community in managing and shaping brand associations. Studies also found that effective management and shaping of brand associations can increase brand awareness, preference, loyalty, engagement, and emotional attachment among consumers.
Brand identity:	The core values, personality traits, and attributes that define a brand and differentiate it from competitors were important factors in the review. Extracting data on how brand identity was managed and shaped in relation to brand associations provided insights into how companies can ensure positive alignment with their brand identity.
Brand associations:	The mental connections that consumers make between a brand and various attributes, such as product features, benefits, emotions, and values, were also important in the review. Extracting data on how brand associations were formed, managed, and measured provided insights into how to ensure positive alignment with brand identity.
Consumer attitudes and behaviour:	The attitudes, perceptions, and actions of consumers in relation to a brand were crucial in evaluating the effectiveness of different strategies. Extracting data on how managing and shaping brand associations affected consumer attitudes and behavior provided insights into the impact of these strategies on consumer behavior and decision-making.

Data Synthesis

The synthesis of the extracted data from the 25 studies on managing and shaping brand associations to ensure positive alignment with brand identity revealed several key themes, patterns, and relationships.

Brand positioning emerged as a key theme in the studies, with many emphasizing the importance of identifying and communicating a clear and distinct brand position that aligns with the brand's identity. This involves developing a unique value proposition that sets the brand apart from its competitors and communicates its core values and personality traits to consumers. Brand personality was another important theme, with studies showing that consumers often form emotional connections with brands that have a strong and consistent personality. Developing a brand personality that aligns with the brand's identity can help create a sense of familiarity, trust, and loyalty among consumers. Brand storytelling was also identified as a key strategy for managing and shaping brand associations. This involves using narrative techniques to communicate the brand's identity and values in a way that resonates with consumers on an emotional level. By telling compelling stories that highlight the brand's unique features and benefits, companies can create a sense of differentiation and build stronger connections with consumers. Brand community was another important theme, with studies showing that creating a sense of community around a brand can increase consumer engagement and loyalty. This involves fostering a sense of shared identity and belonging among consumers through social media, events, and other marketing initiatives. The data synthesis also revealed several patterns and relationships among the different strategies for managing and shaping brand associations. For example, studies showed that a clear and consistent brand position is often a prerequisite for developing a strong brand personality and effective brand storytelling. Similarly, building a brand community can be an effective way to reinforce the brand's position, personality, and story.

Overall, the synthesis of the extracted data from the included studies highlights the importance of a holistic approach to managing and shaping brand associations that takes into account the brand's identity, positioning, personality, storytelling and community-building strategies.

Synthesis of the Data Included in the Study

The synthesized data from the included studies on managing and shaping brand associations to ensure positive alignment with brand identity revealed several key themes and patterns.

Firstly, the study design was an important factor in assessing the quality and reliability of the findings. The review included studies that used a range of research designs, including case studies, surveys, experiments, and content analysis. The diversity of research designs provided a rich and nuanced understanding of the strategies used to manage and shape brand associations. Secondly, the importance of brand positioning, brand personality, brand storytelling, and brand community in managing and shaping brand associations emerged as a key theme. Studies consistently found that these strategies were effective in increasing brand awareness, preference, loyalty, engagement, and emotional attachment among consumers. Effective management and shaping of brand associations can thus be a valuable tool for companies seeking to enhance their brand equity. Thirdly, the core values, personality traits, and attributes that define a brand and differentiate it from competitors were crucial in ensuring positive alignment with brand identity. Companies that effectively managed and shaped their brand associations in relation to their brand identity were more likely to create a strong and coherent brand image that resonated with consumers. Fourthly, the mental connections that consumers make between a brand and various attributes, such as product features, benefits, emotions, and values, were important in the review. Studies demonstrated that effective management and shaping of brand associations can influence consumer attitudes and behavior, leading to increased brand loyalty, positive word-of-mouth, and higher purchase intentions.

In conclusion, the synthesized data suggests that effective management and shaping of brand associations can enhance a brand's equity and create a strong and coherent brand image. Companies that utilize strategies such as brand positioning, personality, storytelling, and community building in a way that aligns with their brand identity can positively impact consumer attitudes and behavior. The findings of this narrative synthesis have important implications for marketers seeking to enhance their brand's performance and competitiveness.

Results

This was a narrative synthesis, so the statistical analysis was not applicable in this case. The analysis involved a qualitative assessment of the data extracted from the studies, which was then synthesized into key themes, findings, and conclusions. However, some studies included in the synthesis may have conducted statistical analyses to support their findings. In such cases, the narrative synthesis would have reported these statistical findings as relevant to the overall conclusions drawn from the studies.

In this narrative synthesis, we reviewed 25 studies on managing and shaping brand associations to ensure positive alignment with brand identity. The studies used a range of research designs, including case studies, surveys, experiments, and content analysis, and had sample sizes ranging from a few dozen to several thousand participants.

Key Themes
Brand positioning: Several studies found that effective brand positioning, which involves creating a unique and compelling position for a brand in the minds of consumers, is a key strategy for managing and shaping brand associations. This can be achieved through various means, such as highlighting product benefits, emphasizing emotional connections, or targeting specific consumer segments.

Brand personality: A brand's personality traits, such as sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness, were found to be important in managing and shaping brand associations. Studies showed that brands with a strong and consistent personalities were more likely to be perceived positively and generate greater emotional attachment and loyalty among consumers.

Brand storytelling: Telling a compelling and authentic brand story was identified as another effective strategy for managing and shaping brand associations. This can involve creating a narrative that reflects the brand's history, values, and mission, as well as engaging consumers through interactive and multimedia experiences.

Brand community: Building a brand community through social media, events, and other channels was found to be an effective way of managing and shaping brand associations. Studies showed that brand communities can foster a sense of belonging and identity among consumers, and generate positive word-of-mouth and advocacy.

Key Findings: Overall, the data synthesis revealed that managing and shaping brand associations is a complex and multifaceted process that involves various strategies and tactics. The most effective strategies included brand positioning, brand personality, brand storytelling, and brand community, which can increase brand awareness, preference, loyalty, engagement, and emotional attachment among consumers. The studies also highlighted the importance of ensuring alignment between brand associations and brand identity, which involves identifying and communicating the core values, personality traits, and attributes that define a brand and differentiate it from competitors.

Conclusion: The results of this narrative synthesis provide valuable insights for marketers and brand managers on how to manage and shape brand associations to ensure positive alignment with brand identity. By adopting effective strategies such as brand positioning, brand personality, brand storytelling, and brand community, and ensuring consistency and authenticity in brand messaging and communication, companies can build strong and enduring relationships with consumers and generate long-term competitive advantage.

Conclusion and Discussion
The results of this narrative synthesis suggest that managing and shaping brand associations is a complex process that involves various strategies and tactics. The most effective strategies identified in the studies included brand positioning, brand personality, brand storytelling, and brand community, which can increase brand awareness, preference, loyalty, engagement, and emotional attachment among consumers. The findings on brand positioning align with previous research that emphasizes the importance of creating a unique and compelling position for a brand in the minds of consumers. The studies suggest that effective brand positioning can be achieved through highlighting product benefits, emphasizing emotional connections, or targeting specific consumer segments. This highlights the importance of understanding the target audience and tailoring the brand messaging and communication to meet their needs and desires. The findings on brand personality also align with previous research that emphasizes the importance of consistent and authentic brand messaging. The studies suggest that brands with a strong and consistent personality are more likely to be perceived positively and generate greater emotional attachment and loyalty among consumers. This emphasizes the importance of defining and communicating a clear brand personality that aligns with the brand identity and values. The findings on brand storytelling highlight the importance of creating a narrative that reflects the brand's history, values, and mission. This emphasizes the importance of developing a brand story that engages consumers on an emotional level and fosters a sense of connection and loyalty to the brand. The studies suggest that interactive and multimedia experiences can be effective in creating a compelling brand story. The findings on brand community suggest that building a brand community through social media, events, and other channels can be an effective way of managing and shaping brand associations. The studies suggest that brand communities can foster a sense of belonging and identity among consumers, and generate positive word-of-mouth and advocacy. This emphasizes the importance of engaging with consumers and fostering a sense of community around the brand. Overall, the studies highlighted the importance of ensuring alignment between brand associations and brand identity, which involves identifying and communicating the core values, personality traits, and attributes that define a brand and differentiate it from competitors. This emphasizes the importance of consistency and authenticity in brand messaging and communication, and the need to continually monitor and manage brand associations to ensure alignment with the brand identity. In conclusion, the findings of this narrative synthesis provide valuable insights for marketers and brand managers on how to manage and shape brand associations to ensure positive alignment with brand identity. By adopting effective strategies such as brand positioning, brand personality, brand storytelling, and brand community, and ensuring consistency and authenticity in brand messaging and communication, companies can build strong and enduring relationships with consumers, and generate long-term competitive advantage. However, it is important to note that the effectiveness of these strategies may vary depending on the industry, target audience, and competitive landscape and that ongoing research and evaluation are necessary to continually refine and optimize brand management strategies.
Furthermore, the findings of this narrative synthesis contribute to the broader body of research on branding and marketing. The studies provide empirical evidence that supports the theoretical frameworks and concepts that have been developed in the field, such as brand personality, brand storytelling, and brand community. The studies also provide new insights and nuances to these concepts, such as the importance of aligning brand associations with brand identity and the effectiveness of various strategies for managing and shaping brand associations. The implications of the findings extend beyond marketing and branding. Effective brand

management can have significant implications for a company's financial performance and competitiveness. For example, strong brand associations can lead to increased customer loyalty, repeat purchases, and positive word-of-mouth, which can ultimately lead to increased sales and revenue. Additionally, a strong brand can act as a barrier to entry for new competitors, as it can be difficult for them to replicate the emotional connections and relationships that consumers have with established brands.

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