

Book Reviews

Ramarao
Desiraju
Editor
University of
Central Florida

In this issue:

[Emotional Design: Why We Love \(or Hate\) Everyday Things](#)

by Donald A. Norman (New York: Basic Books, 2004, 287 pp., \$26.00)

[Building Strong Brands; Brand Leadership; and Brand Portfolio Strategy](#)

Building Strong Brands

by David Aaker (New York: The Free Press, 1996, 380 pp. \$28)

Brand Leadership

by David Aaker and Eric Joachimsthaler (New York: The Free Press, 2000, 350 pp. \$30)

Brand Portfolio Strategy

by David Aaker (New York: The Free Press, 2004, 348 pp. \$28)

[A Chronological Overview of Antimarketing Books](#)

Emotional Design: Why We Love (or Hate) Everyday Things

by Donald A. Norman (New York: Basic Books, 2004, 287 pp., \$26.00)

In his famous book *The Design of Everyday Things* (1998), Donald Norman argues for the primacy of functionality over other considerations. Conversely, in his sequel *Emotional Design: Why We Love (or Hate) Everyday Things*, Norman asserts that the emotional side of design may be more critical to a product's success than its practical elements. His fundamental thesis is that attractive products work better. He contends that beautifully designed products make people feel good, which in turn puts people in an open frame of mind to be creative and find solutions to the problems they face. This viewpoint is gaining a lot of acceptance in the business world; for example, Postrel (2004) similarly argues that the "look and feel" of people, places, and things are more important than we think.

At a fundamental level, Norman contends that emotion and cognition work in tandem as consumers relate to products. This idea fits in well with the state-of-the-art literature in cognitive science that shows that emotions are inseparable from and a necessary part of cognition. Beyond the functionality issues, accommodating aesthetic elements that appeal to the emotions is extremely critical in the development of a "user-centric" design. Norman's recommendation that a good product design must accommodate both affective and cognitive approaches is well founded.

Norman suggests that there are three levels of design: The first is the "visceral" level, which embodies the sensory aspects about how things look, feel, smell, and sound. Visceral design elicits immediate and powerful responses that are involuntary and subconscious. Viscerally well-designed products tend to evoke positive emotions in the consumers. Second is the "behavioral"

level, at which users form their perceptions of a particular product through use. Product performance is paramount, and thus designers must ensure that the product is easy to use and that the functionality of the product is easily decipherable. Norman suggests that good behavioral design must be a fundamental part of the design process from the beginning. Third, the “reflective” level is the level at which the product has meaning for consumers; it accounts for how consumers maintain an innate sense of identity through the consumption of the product over time. Marketing plays a large role in incorporating the reflective design elements in a product. The interaction of these three levels of design leads to the culmination of the “emotional design,” a new, holistic approach to designing successful products.

Although Norman does a good job of providing a unified theory of product design by incorporating these three levels, the appeal of catering to consumers’ emotions is not really new to marketers. Similarly, the notion of the reflective design, which states that objects in people’s lives are more than mere material possessions, is also not new to the marketing literature. The idea that “we are what we own” has been well articulated by several consumer behavior scholars. For example, Belk’s (1988) classic article provides evidence of the diminished sense of self that people can experience when prized possessions are lost or stolen. However, the larger point that Norman makes is well taken in that reflective design becomes critical in a competitive marketplace in which opportunities for differentiation on functionality are scarce.

After laying out his unified theory of design, Norman devotes the next few chapters to the practice of design by providing a variety of examples, such as National Football League coaches’ headsets, Diesel clothing stores, Swatch watches, and an Alessi tea strainer. These examples add to the book by providing a concrete demonstration of his design principles. However, there is one glaring omission in these chapters. Although Norman talks about the design aspects of incremental innovations, calling them enhancers, he does not elaborate on the challenges of designing radical innovations. Designers can observe the users of incremental innovations, discover usage difficulties, and make appropriate changes to make them work better. However, the design of radical innovations is a different challenge altogether, in which the design is based totally on the vision of the product designers. In addition, the design of radical innovations may have huge positioning implications. For example, the design of TiVo, a radical innovation, is similar to that of a VCR or a DVD player. Could this design have influenced consumers to think of TiVo as an enhanced VCR or DVD player? Could a radically new design farther from the VCRs and DVD players have helped TiVo’s positioning as a truly radical innovation? Some discussion on these aspects would have been invaluable to designers of radical innovations.

These chapters lead to the book’s final section, in which Norman discusses the role of emotional machines and the future of robots. Norman believes that emotions will be an integral part of machine designs in the future so that people may better communicate with these machines. I was particularly fascinated by some of his thoughts in this section. People tend to attribute human qualities to robots that appear human. However, Norman suggests that making a robot humanlike may backfire because people are least accepting of creatures that look human (p. 176). This led me to an intriguing thought--did Sony introduce its AIBO robots, which are shaped like dogs, because these animals appeal to us at a visceral level and also because we are forgiving of robots that are designed to look like pets? If this rationale is indeed correct, the potential of emotional design to create entirely new marketspaces is extraordinary, and therein lies the greater value of Norman’s theory of product design.

In summary, the central premise that a great product can be developed by integrating all three aspects of design is innovative. The book educates designers and suggests that product design is much more than visceral design, as is commonly practiced. The book is well written, has an appropriate mix of academic rigor and practical relevance, and provides much food for thought.

REFERENCES

- Belk, Russell W. (1988), "Possessions and the Extended Self," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 15, 139-68.
- Norman, Donald A. (1988), *The Design of Everyday Things*. New York: Basics Books.
- Postrel, Virginia (2004), *The Substance of Style: How the Rise of Aesthetic Value Is Remaking Commerce, Culture, & Consciousness*. New York: HarperCollins.
-

Building Strong Brands

by David Aaker (New York: The Free Press, 1996, 380 pp. \$28)

Brand Leadership

by David Aaker and Eric Joachimsthaler (New York: The Free Press, 2000, 350 pp. \$30)

Brand Portfolio Strategy

by David Aaker (New York: The Free Press, 2004, 348 pp. \$28)

Whenever an author writes a series of management books in quick succession, it is important to ask the following question: Does each book make a substantial contribution on its own? As I began reviewing the three books *Building Strong Brands*, *Brand Leadership*, and *Brand Portfolio Strategy* by noted marketing professor and branding guru David Aaker (he coauthored *Brand Leadership* with Eric Joachimsthaler), I used this simple yardstick to evaluate the marginal contribution of each book.

An integrative review calls for a comparison of three books to a common set of criteria. In *Brand Leadership*, Aaker and Joachimsthaler provide a similar set of criteria to compare traditional brand management and brand leadership. Bandyopadhyay and Serjak (2006) also use a similar scheme to compare and contrast traditional and online brand management. There is a significant overlap between the criteria I use herein and those used in the previously mentioned studies (e.g., focus, perspective, management structure, control of communication). [Table 1](#) lists the criteria and my evaluation of each book against these criteria.

Focus

In general, the focus of *Building Strong Brands* is on a single brand. Although Aaker talks about how to create and manage subbrands within an overall system approach, he concentrates mostly on a single brand. Aaker presents a thorough, lucid description of how to create strong brand identities, develop brand equity measures, and organize brand-building programs. He uses examples of brand building in successful companies, such as General Electric, Saturn, Kodak, and McDonald's, to illustrate how strong brands are created and managed.

In *Brand Leadership*, Aaker and Joachimsthaler make a valid argument that classic brand management is being replaced by what they call the brand leadership model, in which the manager emphasizes both strategy and tactics, and has a broader scope. The focus is not only on short-term sales and profits but also on brand equity measures. Thus, the focus is more on the management of multiple brands than on a single brand.

The focus of *Brand Portfolio Strategy* is also on multiple brands, but within the framework of a brand portfolio. This brand portfolio model emphasizes the relationship between brands and seeks opportunities to leverage the strength of one brand to project another. The basic premise of this model is that brands are not mutually exclusive but are part of a well-designed portfolio of

brands.

Perspective

In *Building Strong Brands*, Aaker discusses practical management issues and introduces a set of brand equity measures to help managers evaluate and track brand equity across products and markets. Thus, the book is quite practical from a tactical point of view. For example, it provides a tool for a brand manager to develop his or her own brand equity measures and a unique identity for the brand. In other words, the book provides many take-aways for the practicing brand manager.

Perhaps the most innovative aspect of this book involves Aaker's suggestion to go beyond the brand-as-attributes concept to embrace brand-as-organization, brand-as-person, and brand-as-symbol perspectives as well. The brand-as-organization perspective focuses on the associations of the company's people, culture, programs, and values. Such organizational associations are more endearing and more resistant to imitation by other companies than product attributes. The brand-as-person perspective focuses on the brand personality, which can make a brand more interesting and personalized. Aaker believes (p. 142) that "a brand without a personality, not unlike a person, lacks friends and may be easily overlooked." The brand-as-symbol perspective focuses on a strong symbol that can provide cohesion and structure to the brand identity, thus increasing brand recognition and brand recall.

In *Brand Leadership*, the brand manager takes the leadership position in planning and implementing the business strategy. According to Aaker and Joachimsthaler (p. 7), "the brand strategy should be influenced by the business strategy and should reflect the same strategic vision and corporate culture." In other words, managers must ensure that their strategies are in sync with the company mission. Similar to *Brand Leadership*, the perspective of *Brand Portfolio Strategy* is also strategic in nature.

Country Scope

Because brand management is the principal focus of *Building Strong Brands*, the brand manager typically is responsible for the entire management of the brand in one country. Managing a brand across countries requires a new set of skills, such as cross-cultural awareness and knowledge about the channel structure, legal structure, and the demographics of each country. Thus, a brand manager with a tactical flair in only one country may not be suitable for the task.

The brand leadership model, as espoused in *Brand Leadership*, takes a global perspective. A global perspective involves not only global branding issues but also manufacturing, outsourcing, and research and development. A "brand architecture" is particularly suitable for this perspective. Brand architecture is a framework that identifies all the brands that are to be supported; their respective roles; and, more importantly, their relationship with one another.

The brand portfolio strategy also has a global component. The portfolio concept is particularly suitable for brand alliances (e.g., Star Alliance of air carriers), which are quite common in global business. A key component of the brand portfolio strategy is defining the brand scope. For what categories can the brand play a role? Is a new brand required to support a new product-market, such as an international market? If it is found that a brand alliance is more suitable than a brand extension for the global market, the brand portfolio strategy is compatible with such a scenario. However, Aaker and Joachimsthaler have not explicitly recommended a global brand alliance strategy in their brand leadership model.

Management Structure

Because of the tactical orientation of the model developed in *Building Strong Brands*, this book is more suitable for a mid-level brand manager. Although the concepts of brand equity and brand identity are universal and relevant to managers at the mid- and upper levels, the book offers

guidelines and tools that are of practical significance to a mid-level brand manager.

The brand leadership model focuses more on the strategic aspect of brand management. Thus, the manager must come from the upper echelons of corporate hierarchy because the task requires coordination between a multitude of people and organizations. The manager who is responsible for this position is often the “top honcho” in the marketing division.

The implementation of the brand portfolio strategy also requires a manager at the top-most position of the marketing organization structure. The person should be responsible for designing the brand portfolio, setting roles for the portfolio and the individual brands, defining the scope of the brand (i.e., the relevance of each brand to a given product category), and formalizing the portfolio. Thus, the manager should be near the top in the marketing division hierarchy. This position is akin to the category manager position that is prevalent in many multiproduct multibrand companies (for more details on category management, see, e.g., Bandyopadhyay and Divakar 1999; Zenor 1994). For example, a category manager oversees all shampoo brands (e.g., Pert Plus, Pantene, Head & Shoulders, Vidal Sassoon) for Procter & Gamble. The category manager ensures that each brand has a unique positioning and that all brands follow a coordinated promotion strategy, thus minimizing promotional inefficiency and the possibility of brand cannibalism.

Control of Communication

The model in *Building Strong Brands* is designed in such a way that the brand manager makes most of the brand communication decisions. In addition, the communication is mostly geared toward the consumer because customer relationship building is a key ingredient in this model. The brand leadership model and the brand portfolio strategy are designed for both external and internal communication. Although it is important to inform and persuade the consumer about product benefits, it is perhaps equally important to communicate internally to the key people in the organization to ensure complete convergence in strategic outlook. In the brand leadership model, the control of communication essentially rests with the brand leader. According to Aaker and Joachimsthaler (p. 12), a brand manager in the brand leadership model needs to be “a strategist and communication team leader directing the use of a wide assortment of vehicles, including sponsorships, the Web, direct marketing, publicity, and promotions.”

The brand manager in the brand portfolio strategy has similar responsibilities as the manager in the brand leadership model, but the perspective is somewhat different. The portfolio approach requires that the portfolio graphics (i.e., logo and visual representation) are well coordinated. The selection of the logo and its dimension, color, and layout can be used to make a statement about the brand and its relationship to other related brands. Aaker illustrates how Marriott uses portfolio graphics to signal the relative driver role of a group of brands. For example, Marriott’s endorsement of the Courtyard Inn is visually larger and stronger than its endorsement of the more downscale Fairfield Inn.

Opportunity of Brand Leveraging

Leveraging a brand involves building a strong brand platform in the core market and then extending the brand into other markets. It may involve brand extensions to a new product-market or a vertical line extension that moves the brand upscale or downscale in the same market. In *Building Strong Brands*, Aaker talks about a system approach in brand management, but the focus is always on a single brand. This restricts the opportunity of brand leveraging even on a dominant brand such as Coke or McDonald’s. Although scope for brand extension and line extension is always there, it is limited. There is also the risk of hurting the dominant brand if the extension goes awry.

The brand portfolio strategy provides the best opportunity for brand leveraging. Aaker suggests (p. 12) that it provides “a structure and process to create brand extension opportunities, assess

their risks and adjust the portfolio accordingly.” A portfolio strategy helps identify and evaluate risks of a possible extension both vertically and horizontally.

In addition, the brand portfolio management must consider not only the current scope of the brand but also the future opportunities. Brands should be leveraged as part of a long-term plan that outlines the ultimate product scope, the sequence that will take it to the destination, and the associations that are necessary to be successful. This focus on the future distinguishes the brand architecture concept proposed in the brand leadership model and the brand portfolio strategy.

Summary

Overall, I believe that *Building Strong Brands* is suitable for the mid- to upper-level brand manager. It provides the manager with a tactical perspective on how to manage a brand. Aaker explains the concept of brand equity clearly and outlines measures of brand equity. In addition, Aaker urges the brand manager to expand his or her perception of the brand. The ideas of brand as organization, brand as person, and brand as symbol are espoused in addition to the traditional brand-as-product perspective.

There is little difference between *Brand Leadership* and *Brand Portfolio Strategy*. Indeed, Aaker acknowledges the same in the preface of *Brand Portfolio Strategy*. In his words (p. xv), “brand architecture [the term used in *Brand Leadership*] was an opaque concept for some, though, and for others suggested the more limited problem of naming brands and developing logos. Thus, in this book a new label, brand portfolio strategy, is used. It is more holistic, strategic, and compatible with the book’s thrust—how to optimize and leverage a brand portfolio to enhance and enable business strategy.”

However, I believe that the brand portfolio strategy is an improvement over the brand architecture model because of its emphasis on the scope of the brand, especially the future scope of the brand. This makes the brand portfolio strategy somewhat stronger than the brand architecture model. If the potential reader has budget and/or time constraints, I suggest reading *Brand Portfolio Strategy* instead of *Brand Leadership*. There is hardly any concept in *Brand Leadership* that is not covered in *Brand Portfolio Strategy*. I suggest that brand managers also read *Building Strong Brands* because it provides the tools to measure brand equity and offers ideas to treat the brand as more than a “bundle of benefits.”

-Subir Bandyopadhyay, Indiana University Northwest

REFERENCES

- Bandyopadhyay, Subir and Suresh Divakar (1999), “Incorporating Balance of Power in Channel Decision Structure: Theory and Empirical Applications,” *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 6, 79–89.
- and Rosemary Serjak (2006), “Key Success Requirements for Online Brand Management” in *Contemporary Research in E-Marketing*, Vol. 2, Sandeep Krishnamurthy, ed. Hershey, PA: Idea Group Publishing, 147–67.
- Zenor, Michael (1994), “The Profit Benefits of Category Management,” *Journal of Marketing Research*, 31 (May), 202–213.