Chapter 6
A Retailer Perspective of E-commerce Brand Management

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Abstract E-commerce offers opportunities in the form of a complex set of directions that many traditional, 'bricks and mortar' retailers are unsure of. Bombarded by a myriad of new words and techno jargon, it can be an intimidating experience. In this context, the retailers who embrace the challenge and who are able to cultivate an e-commerce platform are able to flourish. However, this is not straightforward—and business owners and managers are often left scratching their heads at exactly what they should be focusing on. The path to a successful eBusiness can be fraught with barriers, often causing avoidance and aversion—but those businesses that exploit the opportunities of eBusiness bear the fruit of their efforts. This can particularly be seen in the likes of eBay, Google and Microsoft as well as countless others.

Chaffey (2007) likens California's history to the struggle many retailers are faced with today. In 1849, a group of settlers travelled west towards California and entered an unnamed valley. The valley presented a harsh environment and many barriers. Sound familiar? Many were lost along the way and after eventually finding a route through to the Promised Land, California, one woman turned and said 'Goodbye, Death Valley'—which then became its name.

Whilst new online ventures seem to be thriving, where does this leave more traditional 'bricks and mortar' retailers? Research indicates that the Internet influences approximately 42 % of total retail sales in the US. This includes the percentage of sales made purely online, but also transactions made offline which began via online research (Kotler et al. 2008). Further, those that do use the internet are highly likely to research potential products prior to purchase. Thus,

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retailers must be fully aware of Internet-based threats to their business, even if they do not intend to adopt eBusiness.

Internet buyers differ from traditional offline consumers both in their approaches to buying and their responses to marketing. Traditional marketing targets a somewhat passive audience, whilst online marketing targets people who actively select which websites they will visit, as well as what marketing information they will receive about which products and under what conditions—the customer initiates and controls the contract. Thus, online marketing requires new approaches.

E-commerce Management

Electronic commerce, also known as e-commerce to a large proportion of consumers, means shopping online using the internet and web pages. However, electronic commerce covers a much broader span, incorporating all of the processes related to a company which may include buying, selling, hiring, and planning. IBM take this further and define e-commerce as "the transformation of key business processes through the use of Internet technologies" (Chaffey 2011, p. 11), whilst e-commerce presents the "greatest opportunity and/or threat to existing business models since the industrial revolution" (Holsapple 2003, p. 666).

6.1 Business Strategy

Businesses operate within a commercial reality and e-commerce must deliver distinct benefits and competitive advantages in order to maximise customer value (Barnes and Hunt 2013). Organisations, therefore, must be able to strategise, plan, develop and implement e-commerce solutions—a process which is crucial to success. de Chernatony (2012) identifies common themes between strategic gurus including Thomas Peters and Sir Michael Parry (ex-chairman of Unilever) and the seminal work by Kotler et al. (2008), which define the core components of business strategy as: understanding of needs and segmentation, differentiation and position, and planning and integrated marketing strategies. Through this process, a customer-driven marketing strategy attempts to satisfy and create superior value to consumers, enabling the business to then capture this value as both profit and future customer equity (Fig. 6.1).

Business strategy and objectives provide a basis for brand differentiation and subsequent positioning. The e-commerce platform is an integral part of an integrated marketing strategy and therefore must reflect a brand's position. e-commerce strategy, therefore, must be linked back to the business strategy in order to adequately cover the strategic role, intended scope and resources available to the e-commerce project. Kotler et al. (2008) identify high level business strategies for delivering growth that may include: market penetration (existing products or services to existing markets), product development (new products or services to existing markets), market development (existing products of services to new markets) or diversification (new products or services to new segments).

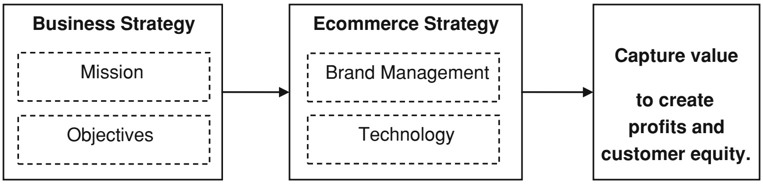

Fig. 6.1 From business strategy to e-commerce strategy

6.2 Online Business Models

We have identified that e-commerce strategy must be linked to the business strategy and mission, hence the importance of online business model selection. Timmers (1998) identifies eleven potential online business models which include: e-shop, e-procurement, e-auction, e-market, third party marketplaces, virtual communities, value chain service providers, value chain integrators, collaboration platforms and information brokers. This chapter will concentrate predominantly on electronic commerce in the form of retailers, and this section will highlight the relationship between:

- E-shops as promotion, cost-reduction, additional outlets and a means of seeking demand;
- Virtual communities as the added-value of communication between members;
- Value chain service providers to support the value chain, e.g. logistics or payments;
- Value chain integrators as added-value through integrating multiple steps of the value chain.

Thus showing how e-commerce provides an opportunity for retailers to increase profits and reduce costs.

Retailers that were previously geographically isolated are now empowered to reach small groups of customers that are spread geographically (Mohapatra 2012). Specific opportunities are presented in the way of virtual communities (Lodish et al. 2002), which allow consumers with similar interests to socialise virtually and which can be mediated by retailers. These groups of consumers have similar needs and behave in similar ways, known as market segments, which can then be targeted by marketers with distinct value propositions.

Further, organisations are able to reduce the cost of their sales handling inquiries by providing prices and availability through their IT infrastructure as well as pre and after-sales support and payment processing (Epstein 2004). Online sales also give much greater choice to customers, as well as increasing the number of customers through its 24/7 availability. As well as being able to shop at their leisure, buyers can compare and contrast value propositions from a plethora of retailers—many comparison websites have been developed to facilitate this need.

As a consequence of this, consumers are empowered to negotiate between companies in terms of price and delivery, to ensure that they receive the most competitive price. McAdams (2014) suggests this as a 'game changer' that can negatively affect profit margins. As Ariely (2009) notes, consumers prefer not to compare products that are hard to compare, thus unique value propositions (Godin 2003) which cannot be easily compared can lead to a competitive advantage.

Whereas previously exchanges could have taken place by mail order, e-commerce platforms and their customisability have almost entirely negated physical product brochures by providing customers with immensely powerful tools of customisation though filtering and sorting in order to reduce a choice of products down to their chosen purchase. Once a decision has been made, digital goods (such as software or music) can then be delivered instantly (Kotler et al. 2008).

This section has identified four main online business models as e-shops, virtual communities, value chain service providers and value chain integrators. The Sect. 6.3 will concentrate on digital brand management, an area of a retailers' online strategy that is often overlooked—but is pivotal to success in the execution of any online business model.

6.3 Digital Brand Management

An organisation's brand can be crucial to success within the online context, just as it is within offline channels. Brands have been present for as long as it has been possible to trace artefacts of human existence, and as with the offline context, the online brand definition varies and is best understood from a historical and evolutionary perspective.

Records and artefacts dating back to Egyptian times show that producers of bricks marked their products with symbols in order for them to be easily identifiable, as materials from certain areas were of better quality. Similarly, in medieval Europe, trade guilds required "trademarks" to be placed upon goods as a confirmation to a purchaser of consistent quality, while also offering a simplistic form of legal brand ownership (Farquhar 1989). The term "branding" was extended from "brand", originally the process of stamping wrongdoers, harlots (Henning 2000) or animals with embers or hot irons in order to be easily identifiable (Arnold and Hale 1940).

Today, a proliferation of brand definitions have emerged: on one hand the American Marketing Association defines a brand as a "Name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers", whilst on the other hand de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley (1998) has extensively argued that branding definitions should include an emotional aspect. "A brand is a cluster of functional and emotional values that enables organizations to make a promise about a unique and welcomed experience." (de Chernatony 2012). Further to this he suggests that the AMA's definition does not encapsulate the process of branding as a company culture, and views branding purely as inputs—neglecting the consumers' output.

Whilst a company can have a brand, the brand is not the company. A fine distinction can be drawn between how the company does business overall and how it is perceived by its customers. For instance the company Pixar may be an extraordinarily tough negotiator with its suppliers, who regard it as a tough experience; consumers however, may view it as fun, family orientated or even friendly.

In 2010, online marketing spend within the UK surpassed that spent on television advertising (Heinze and Fletcher 2011). However, critics of online branding argue that due to the nature of the online environment and the quantity of information available through it (as well as the increasing use of sophisticated search engines), consumers are now able to locate information, products and services that they require without relying on the traditional shorthand provided by a brand. Through utilisation of information consumers can make informed product choices, regardless of the brand (Rowley 2004a). Counterarguments claim that in the digital age, online branding is extremely important. Empirical studies have found that while using the internet for purchasing decisions, consumers with low proficiency became overloaded with information causing them to revert back to the brands they know (Ward and Lee 2000). In a similar vein, whilst social media can facilitate consumer knowledge, falsified endorsements—for instance reviews posted by a hotel about themselves or competitors—contribute to consumer confusion and overload.

Research by Marshak (2000) has shown that through an effective online presence, organisations can cut contact service costs by up to 70 %. According to the same research, 86 % of all consumer enquiries can be answered online. Meekings et al. (2003) explain how organisations can capture the economic benefits of their online presence, with key findings including the fact that 28 % of consumers wishing to buy online are prevented from doing so. By improving user experience, an average retailer could potentially increase sales by between 33–54 and 44 % of UK consumers said that negative online experiences would likely deter future purchases by them from the high street store associated with the brand.

Increasingly, more sophisticated online shoppers will insist upon doing business solely with online brands which they trust (Ha 2004). Ha (2004) researched the effect of consumer trust based on multiple dimensions: financial safety, confidentiality, brand name, word-of-mouth, good experience and value of information. The conclusion was that constructing an online brand is ambiguous, and that there is no consistent model of best fit to aid in the transference from offline to online branding. Ha (2004) also suggests that by investigating the aforementioned variables, marketers may be able to increase brand loyalty (Shankar et al. 2003) and gain a formidable competitive edge.

To efficiently nurture relationships with consumers, brand managers must understand how best to communicate their brand online. However, research shows that organisations are often making fundamental mistakes with their online branding. One example is the launch of the new B&Q e-commerce website. A new brand was used for the domain name (www.diy.co.uk), and the new brand image for website visitors was not consistent with their prior brand image, creating initial confusion for consumers (Muller 2008). This is reflected through research which suggests that online brands should complement offline branding (Sääksjärvi and Samiee 2011), as well as a study conducted by Young (1999), in which an overwhelming majority of participants (82 %) specified that an organisation's offline brand is important in their choice to buy online.

Evidence suggests that many organisations, especially their web developers, often become preoccupied with the functionality a website offers. This results in little thought being given to the brand or corporate identity. Studies conducted using samples of library websites concluded that a high majority focused on the features and services of the website, instead of communicating images of the library service itself (Rowley 2003).

However, research has shown that simply replicating an organisation's offline brand strategy through an online presence provides low performance and is inadequate (Meyers and Gerstman 2001). This highlights the importance of research into effective transference of brands from one medium to another. Unfortunately, most research in the area of online brands is currently orientated around assessing and measuring the performance of online brands, rather than upon examining how the transference process occurs.

Offline brands are discovering that constant improvements are required when transferring to an online presence, and that different design considerations must be explored in comparison to their previous offline strategies (de Chernatony and Christodoulides 2004). de Chernatony and Christodoulides (2004, p. 238) argue that "a brand is a brand regardless of its environment; what is different is the way the brand's promise is executed". In simple terms, the basic principles of branding still remain. They are, however, evolving. In the online environment, they are required to become increasingly customer-centric, particularly through the provision of tailored information. For instance, an organisation's online presence might initially include information which communicates the brand detail, treating the user as a passive recipient. Having taken on board the unique requirements of online branding, the website becomes a dynamic 'experience', in which consumers can tailor it to fit their own requirements. This can be seen through examples such as the online banking service provided by major banking organisations. The online brand is a system of functional and emotional values, matching an anticipated brand promise through experience.

The difficulty in transferring an offline brand to an online context is compounded by the ways in which the online brand experience differs from the offline experience. For instance, within a retail store, the environment (smells, location, etc.) and staff have a notable impact upon consumer perception of the organisation as a brand (Baker et al. 1992). This is simply not possible within the online context, although multiple influences remain which affect consumer experience. Particular interest should be paid to the website's appearance, which encompasses "image" and "consistency" and is discussed further in Sect. 6.4.

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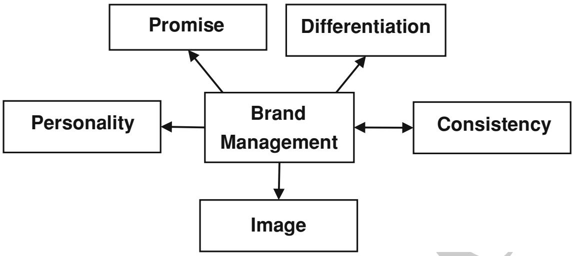

Fig. 6.2 The relationship between brand management and consumer experiences—adapted from de Chernatony and Christodoulides (2004)

Since companies cannot rely on their existing (offline) brand strategies when transferring to an online presence, they must come up with new approaches. To this end, de Chernatony and Christodoulides (2004) identify five core elements, shown in Fig. 6.2, that should be considered when taking a brand and its promise online:

1. **Promise**: The promise is the sum of all of the elements being successfully executed. Kapferer (2012) expresses this as "regular and dependable quality" and fulfilment.
2. **Differentiation**: The differential reward of one brand over another. Typically a brand will seek to compare and contrast its points of difference and parity (Kotler and Keller 2012). The key to competitive advantage is consumers finding something unique and meaningful in one brand over another (Williams 2010).
3. **Image**: The power of a brand is its ability to influence consumer behaviour in purchase situations (Kapferer 2012). These influences are as of a consequence of associations with a brand and its perceived image. These can include perceptions of competence, quality, qualities, benefits (differentiation and positioning), other imagery and a brand's personality.
4. **Personality**: Anthropomorphisation, or brand personality, provides a vital emotional connection between a brand and its consumers. A brand can develop a personality through its communications and imagery to attract and connect with specific market segments. Churchill insurance have a very anthropomorphic brand in the form of a talking dog (Hammond 2011), whilst in contrast Apple have a very clear brand personality (young, active, trendy) without using a specific non-human creature as representation.
5. **Consistency**: Brand consistency is both multi-channel and longitudinal. A brand's promise, differentiation, image and personality should be consistent with consumers' past experiences as well as between offline and online communication medium. Research has shown that brands represent crucial aspects of success in mature markets (Tilley 1999), and that consistency can be a key driver in creating strong brands (Kay 2006).

These five core elements that make up digital brand management will now be expanded upon in detail.

6.3.1 Brand Promise

The power of a brand resides in its ability to fulfil its uniquely positioned promise better than any competitor. Digital brand management execution, therefore, is about fulfilling the brand's promise within digital channels (Rubinstein and Griffiths 2001). The fulfilment of a brand promise both offline and online is crucial to building brand trust and loyalty; a consequence of perceived value and actual satisfaction. At its most basic level, an accurate description is crucial to fulfilment of a promise and satisfaction. For example, if a hotel's online booking system states that Wi-FI will be available throughout, however upon arrival it is only available in the reception area, the brand has failed to fulfil its promise; the information was either old or incorrect.

Delivering the brand promise has become increasingly pressurised within online channels. Competitors that compete via the internet often find that providing the cheapest price can be an opposing force to delivering consistent reliability and high quality service. Pressure from a globalised competition can drive prices down so far that it can be very difficult to compete whilst also providing reliability and customer fulfilment (Kapferer 2012). However, studies suggest that up to 70 % of customers check multiple media channels prior to purchase; increasingly through social media, as a sort of digital word of mouth that is commonly referred to as word of mouse (Stringam and Gerdes 2010). This mimics previous trends seen in traditional word of mouth, but now travelling much faster.

Design concerns have also morphed for online branding, with everyone being provided the same display window via the use of brand-specific websites. Companies that cannot afford to buy the best positioned property on a London high street now find themselves on a much more level playing field (de Chernatony 2012), whilst established brands are increasingly having to compete and thwart off younger competition that would previously not have proven quite so challenging. This gives much more opportunity for new companies to enter the market and fulfil customer satisfaction better than the competition, providing a better quality experience for their customers.

Websites provide an opportunity to be creative and become remarkable (Godin 2003), which can influence word of mouth, word of mouse and increasingly word of smartphone—thus affecting both online and offline branding and consumer experience. For example, LingsCars.com have made a name for themselves by being "amateurish" but are considered remarkable as they are uniquely different and positioned. The owner Ling Valentine (2014) created her company's website after recognising a "big opportunity to use an emotional bond to sell cars"—this was after observing that "other car dealers and leasing companies are quite hated, they are very impersonal". Established in 2000 with zero capital, the company now leases an average of £3.5 million worth of cars and vans each month. She attributes her success to her "**customer-focused approach, some unusual publicity stunts and a wonderfully wacky website that has gone viral**".

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Now that we have highlighted the importance of a brand's promise online and successful fulfilment, **the** Sect. 6.3.2 **will examine how brands can differentiate and thus position their brand's promise to be unique**.

6.3.2 Brand Differentiation

A brand's differentiation within an online channel is its unique set of attributes which represent its value proposition. Therefore, a brand's differentiation within an offline context must be effectively and consistently transferred to the online context. Increasingly, however, brands are starting out within online channels and then transferring to an offline context.

As brands differentiate themselves online to occupy unique positioning within consumers' minds, brand strategies can face a constant battle from competitors that seek to match and negate a brand's competitive difference, or compete fiercely in order to beat a company's difference (Keller et al. 2011). For instance a war currently wages online between Walmart and Amazon (Berman 2014), which some commentators have dubbed "Goliath versus Goliath".

Whilst the most obvious means of differentiation are within a product or service itself. Kotler and Keller (2012) identify the main distinct types of organisational brand differentiation as employee, service and image differentiation:

- **Employee differentiation** involves training employees to be better than those of competitors—and employee interaction, even through digital channels, can be pivotal to a company's success online. Zapos in particular have focused on training their employees to provide individual and unique customer experiences. It goes as far as trying to bribe half-hearted trainees with $2,000 if they leave (McFarland 2013); arguing that if they take the money, they match the company's values and culture.
- **Service differentiation** refers to the delivery system a company employs in order to make a product or service better match the needs of consumers, for example an easier purchase process. This involves utilising different consumer-centric communication and distribution channels—for instance making purchasing easier, more enjoyable or more rewarding. Copacino (1997) identifies the three types of service differentiation as reliability, resilience and innovativeness. Some companies attempt to facilitate transactions with a minimum amount of consumer effort, rather than offering an abundance of choice. HMV offer a physical store experience, whilst iTunes provide a convenient and simplistic download service, which is highly profitable. Amazon provide a "1-Click" purchase process, while Argos UK provide a "Click-n-Collect" service (Wilson-Jeanselme and Reynolds 2005), something Amazon cannot offer for logistical reasons.

- **Image differentiation** provides brands with a tool to cultivate powerful and compelling points of differentiation, designed to appeal to consumers' social and psychological needs. Brand image represents a set of brand associations and emphasises the importance of image commercially. Associations include brand beliefs, brand performance, brand meaning and brand personality.

Whilst a tangible difference can offer a distinct advantage to consumers (e.g. a cheaper price), intangible differences such as service quality, brand image and anthropomorphisation can provide competitive advantages that are potentially harder to negate. Think of Coca-Cola versus Pepsi: in blind taste tests Pepsi usually performs better, however the same study conducted in which participants could see the cans resulted in Coca-Cola being rated as the best tasting (Godin 2005). Within the context of e-commerce, tangible differences often come down to price, particularly where a brand is negated in favour of a price comparison website. Image differentiation can therefore provide a competitive advantage which can be particularly effective. An example of a unique way of image differentiation would be TOMS Shoes, which in association with various charitable organisations pledges to donate a pair of shoes or eyewear/sight-restoring surgery and treatment to those in developing countries for every purchase of their corresponding products.

6.3.3 Brand Image

Brand image represents a set of brand associations (Lassar et al. 1995) that are formally defined as "consumer perceptions of and preferences for a brand, as reflected by the various types of brand associations held in consumers' memories" (Keller 2009, p. 143). This measure emphasises the importance of image commercially, arguing that stakeholders react to what they perceive as being reality (Godin 2005), rather than actual reality (Kapferer 2008).

Brand image as created through consumer brand associations includes brand beliefs, brand performance, brand meaning and brand personality:

- **Brand beliefs** are views that stakeholders have formed regarding product or service qualities associated with a brand. Beliefs are usually measured through qualitative research that asks consumers about their opinions of brands.
- **Brand performance** is defined by Keller (2008, p. 64) as "the way in which the product or service attempts to meet customers more functional needs". This is further expanded upon through attribute types—supplementary features, reliability, durability and serviceability, quality, style and design, and price structure.
- **Brand meaning** encompasses the extrinsic properties of a product, endeavouring to meet the stakeholder's psychological as well as psychosocial needs. This goes

beyond simple functional benefits, for instance: user profiles, purchase and usage situations, heritage and experience.

- **Brand experiences**, defined as "encompassing the feelings, sensations, behavioural response and cognitions which are induced by stimuli related to the brand" (Brakus et al. 2009), represent combinations of multiple brand communications—including the environment, surroundings and packaging—which create the consumer's experience and perceptions.
- **Brand personality** is that which represents the character of the brand as if it were a person. For example, research highlights that McDonald's is seen as being more competent and exciting than Burger King (Keller and Lehmann 2004). Studies in this area commonly ask respondents to rate brands on Aaker's (1997) framework of 42 traits.

Increasingly, a brand's image is experienced through technology as brands attempt to become integral to consumer daily experience—for instance 'on the go' applications for mobile phones, social applications on websites and widgets used on computers—all of which are designed to increase brand interactivity (Broady et al. 2007) and attachment. These online channels and digital mediums provide an important form of marketing communication for brands, both in terms of encouraging growth and of providing opportunities for increased customer loyalty (Flores and Chandon 2008). Brands are designing their online presence to build customer equity and provide feedback and compliment their other channels (Kotler et al. 2008) and a brand's image and metaphors such as experience and personality are communicated via their website's experience (Rowley 2004b).

6.4 Website Brand Elements

Literature suggests that brands develop their online presence in phases, usually starting with a preliminary website which simply "secures" their brand. At this point, a larger scale development begins in order to interact with consumers through a more meaningful online relationship. Keller and Lewi (2008) put much emphasis on this initial stage, as consistency between the domain name chosen and the brand name results in increased likelihood that the brand can be located quickly (Hanson 2000; Winer and Ilfeld 2002). Due to the underdeveloped nature of online branding, case study approaches have had to be adapted to provide fresh perspectives. Along these lines a study was conducted upon the McDonalds online brand (Rowley 2004b), in order to dissect the brand elements and identify how they communicated the brand values of McDonalds (Fig. 6.3).

Rowley (2004b) provided an overview of website brand elements which include the logo, graphics, copy and typography, colour, shapes, layout and combination of images:

- The **logo** is extremely important for brand recognition and identification of an online presence. It provides a powerful method of recall and the subsequent

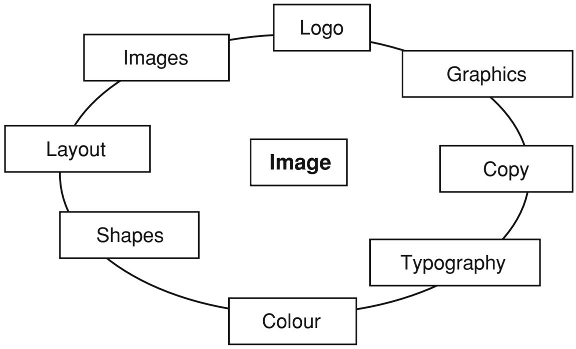

Fig. 6.3 The website brand elements (Rowley 2004b)

emotional attachments related to a brand (Rettie and Brewer 2000); other studies have highlighted that children as young as the age of 3 are able to identify and recognise a company's logo (Fischer et al. 1991).

- **Graphics** serve as a visual aid to organisational brand values, since they are a key indicator of the content and function of the page. Graphics encompasses logos, pictures and any images used. Images are an indispensable form of marketing communication, and can convey a complex story in a fraction of the time it would take to explain through prose. To use the traditional phrase, "a picture is worth a thousand words" (Burke and Dollinger 2005, p. 28).
- **Copy and Typography**: The content of the copy should be relevant to the information provided, and to the audience. This ensures effective engagement and perceived value. The text content itself positions the brand's personality, and requires a tone of voice consistent with other brand encounters. The typography and specifically the typeface refers to the choice of fonts (sizes, designs and styles) which can also be used to position personality and adjust the feeling of the page (Kipphan 2001, p. 15). The typography can also project a certain image (smart or casual) and may be utilised to increase the power of a perceived message (Willen and Strals 2009).
- **Colour** is a vital component of brand identity as it can evoke inferential associations and help to form an initial opinion on the part of a visitor. It is used to attract attention, and therefore potentially increases participation. It also serves as a part of the recognition process and can increase awareness of the brand. Colours can stimulate inferential processing, which can benefit brand claim substantiation (Meyers-Levy and Peracchio 1995). For example, a brand advertised with a red background was perceived as being more sophisticated and more exciting than a brand advertised with a blue background (Gonzalez 2005). However, specificity is also important. Even shades of equivalent colours, for instance light orange, fruit orange and dark orange, may communicate diverse and varying messages. Further studies show that higher levels of chroma

(less white dilution) elicit greater feelings of excitement and have been shown to increase likeability (Bellizzi and Hite 1992; Gorn et al. 1997).

- **Shapes**: Within art, a shape is a flat and usually enclosed area of artwork created through lines, colour, and textures. In some cases, however, it may be the inverse, and can be represented by an area enclosed by other shapes (Stewart 2006). Shapes are presented and used in many ways within websites, including shapes of images, buttons, and menus, to list only a few. The use of shapes may also include the rounded edges of text boxes, which can communicate a different styling of the brand. Synergy between other elements is crucial here, with the font used in the text or logos needing to be reflected elsewhere to ensure unity of communication. This has been dubbed the "all or none" character (Veryzer and Hutchinson 1998).
- **Layout and combination of images**: The layout of a website can be used to communicate metaphorically. For example, the McDonalds website uses the metaphor of a game, with knobs and controls for the user to "play" with (Rowley 2004b), whilst the CNN website is arranged in a column to communicate the feeling of a newspaper. It is important to note, however, that metaphors are subjective and simply a point-of-view (Leary and Hayward 1990). Other common problems involving layout include the use of too many banner advertisements, which may look disorganised and lead to many non-related marketing messages. Ambiguity in layout can also cause non-intuitive navigation of the website.

However, website branding is not without its dangers: whilst the internet provides a platform for brands to be creative and to communicate themselves, it also offers less creative brands a very easy means to copy brand elements and replicate them within their own online presence. This spectrum of 'copycatting' can range from something as illicit as downloading or 'ripping' entire websites, to designing logos and website layouts which appear very similar to competitors'. Brands must therefore remain in a constant state of vigilance, assisted with online tools such as CopyScape, which search the internet and seek out stolen elements.

Website brand elements provide an opportunity for brands to communicate their brand coherently and consistently, but equally they present the threat that a website can deviate from a core brand message. For example, this could be in the form of deviating from corporate colours, or failing to adhere to consistent use of the same logo. This has led to brands developing core guidelines which must be followed to facilitate a brand's website elements, thus matching the overall brand and communicating their core message consistently (Wheeler 2012).

'Nomophobia'—a term coined by mental health professionals—is the fear of being without your smartphone (King et al. 2010). As mobile devices such as smartphones and tablet computers become an ever-increasing part of how consumers shop and transact, brands face a new opportunity to create a brand experience which is harmonious with the computer based experience—but equally face opportunities to create frustration (Rondeau 2005). This frustration is usually shared by brand managers when it comes to asking how website brand elements can be incorporated into mobile technologies. Specifically, managers face the issue of how to reduce brand elements into a form that is both coherent with the brand and communicates the brand effectively, but is easy to use on a 'postage stamp' sized screen.

Within online channels, brands are provided with an opportunity to control the content on each medium and channel a brand is viewed over, providing the brand with the power to manage consumer experience and to individualise to each customer through a website's customisations. Whilst this normally includes tangible elements, such as product size and colours, it can also be used with less lucid concepts—for instance tailoring a website's brand elements to personality, in recognition of the fact that each consumer is unique.

6.4.1 Brand Personality

A brand personality represents the character of the brand as if it were a person (Phau and Lau 2001; Cappara et al. 2001; Aaker 1997; Grohmann 2009). Brand communication has been described by practitioners as "getting your face out there", referring to the personality of the brand (Hopper 2012). Literature suggests that a brand is communicated both in order to connect an organisation to a target consumer, and in order to create "harmonious" perceptions and sensory experiences (Brakus et al. 2011). This in turn influences thoughts and actions by connecting the two and forming a strong and prosperous relationship. Research suggests that controlled communications are pivotal in establishing consumer expectations, as well as influencing satisfaction and attitude (Grace and O'Cass 2005).

The brand as a 'personality' is an anthropomorphisation, derived from the Latin 'anthrōpos'. It involves attributing human characteristics to a non-human creature or physical object. It is a way to sustain individuality through emphasising psychological values, beyond a brand or product's functional utility. As early as 1958, academics began to reference those 'metaphysical' dimensions which can make a store special (Martineau 1958). This includes its disposition (Pierre 1958), with King (1970, p. 14) stating that "people choose their brands the same way they choose their friends. In addition to the skills and physical characteristics, they simply like them as people".

The phenomena of a 'brand personality' has traditionally been of "intuitive appeal", especially in terms of the synergy created between a brand and its customers (Plummer 1984). As brand personality has evolved today, it represents the character of the brand as if it were a person, hence anthropomorphisation (Patterson and Hodgson 2013). It creates uniqueness by reinforcing those human psychological values to which consumers relate, beyond mere performance and functionality.

Companies wishing to develop a brand personality should adopt one that best fits their business and ensure that it is communicated consistently through all communication channels (Aaker 1996b; Kapferer 2012). If the business has a physical location and higher costs this should be a more sophisticated brand, to ensure that they are able to sell at price premium—bearing in mind that they may not be able to compete solely on price as costs (for instance purchase prices) may be higher than larger organisations (that can buy in bulk).

For many decades, companies from across the business spectrum have been aware of the importance of proper branding. Many of the most successful enterprises of the early 21st century do not even require consumers to recognise their name, as their logo or advertising jingle is sufficient to awaken a whole host of positive associations. Despite this, however, the importance of powerful and consistent online design to a business' brand image has not been taken seriously until recent times. Too often, online design has been left to technology consultants or low-ranking brand managers who fixate on functionality, whilst the core brand message and personality take a sideline (Rowley 2003).

Those companies who do take online design seriously, however, experience significantly positive results (Muller 2008). In order to understand why it is necessary to grasp the concept of 'brand as personality'. Simply put, consumers want to put things in human terms. If at all possible, they will anthropomorphise business brands, associating companies with more easily recognisable human characteristics. This can have both positive and negative effects, with some companies being seen as innovative and modern (Apple, for example) and others struggling with an image of bullying and secretive behaviour (Exxon-Mobil, Halliburton, and others). The good news is that companies can actively influence their brand personality, and those that do so tend to forge stronger and longer-lasting relationships with consumers. As repeat custom is often the Holy Grail of business life, it is clear that an appealing brand personality can be almost priceless. At which time Meekings et al. (2003) explain how organisations can capture the economic benefits of their online presence.

There are a number of ways in which organisations can actively influence the personality of their brand, but perhaps the most important is through the bespoke design of every channel by which consumers receive information from the business. It is now common knowledge that, in public speaking, only a small proportion of an audience's reaction is conditioned by what is being said. Far more important is the way in which it is being said, and the unconscious judgments being made by audience members about the speaker (Knapp et al. 2013). The same is true when it comes to considering design of communications which are intended to convey a certain brand personality. Whilst the words and content are important, the choice of layout, colour, theme and overall design are equally vital. A professional and organised look can boost an organisation well above its competition in both the conscious and unconscious judgments being made by consumers.

There are few channels of communication in which good design is more important than in the online world. Increasingly, consumers are getting their information about products and organisations from the web, email and social

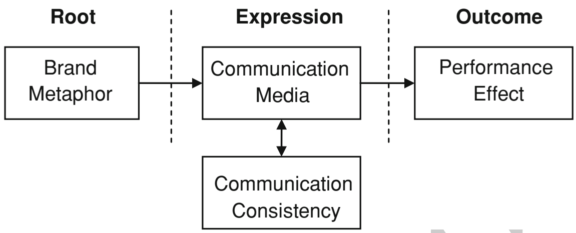

Fig. 6.4 Brand personality communication process and outcome

media—but many businesses have yet to catch up with an eye-catching and thoughtfully designed online presence. Too many websites are indistinguishable from each other, either having been plucked from generic themes available from hosting companies, or having been copied wholesale from existing successful websites. A small investment in making one's brand stand out in such an environment can yield significant benefits. For instance increased brand loyalty (Shankar et al. 2003) to gain a formidable competitive edge.

That said, brands which invest large amounts in design can still come unstuck by ignoring the vital importance of consistency in brand personality. Just as a consumer would become confused and unsettled if their local shopkeeper was radically different in appearance and demeanour each day, so can they be thrown by a constantly changing design and message from the same brand (Aaker 1996c). Too many organisations feel that in order to keep up with a fast changing online environment, they must introduce new features and new designs almost every month. In contrast, the most successful businesses understand that it can take years for a brand personality to sink into the mind of consumers, and that very careful thought needs to be put into any alterations. This is because academic research has found that consistency in the way in which a brand personality is communicated across all channels can positively affect organisational performance (Rutter et al. 2013). The flipside of this, of course, is that inconsistencies can lead to confused consumers and a drop in the bottom line.

The lessons from successful organisations couldn't be clearer when it comes to the relationship between brand image, web design and increased performance, shown in Fig. 6.4: a small investment in an eye-catching design which reflects the brand personality of the organisation can have very positive effects for any institution. This is only the case, however, if that design is consistent with all of the other communications being undertaken by the organisation, both online and offline (Rutter 2013). Ultimately, a business should be looking to examine everything it communicates through the prism of the brand's personality to ensure consistency and quality. Doing so will create and maintain a brand which resonates with consumers, and with which they will want to do business.

6.4.2 Brand Consistency

Brand consistency is the process of ensuring that a brand is continually (over time) consistent (across marketing communication), bringing many benefits such as increased efficiency of brand communications. These, in turn, can be linked to organisational performance.

This section discusses the literature which assesses why organisations should be consistent when communicating their brand, including when communicating the brand over multiple marketing media. Secondly, it examines how brands are communicated consistently to their stakeholders and lastly, conducts an analysis of the ways in which previous literature has measured brand consistency.

Brand consistency is one of the three basic rules that every global brand adheres to when communicating brand qualities, the others being clarity and constancy (Arruda 2009). The literature broadly agrees that consistent brand image leads consumers to better understand what the brand stands for and better predict its behaviour (Erdem and Swait 1998; Keller 1999; Lange and Dahlén 2003). Navarro-Bailon (2011) concluded that strategic brand consistency campaigns are more effective than their non-consistent counterparts. Arruda (2009) states that brand communications should be consistent regardless of the form of media chosen, and that this consistency provides higher levels of consumer-based brand equity (Pike 2010, p. 13) over time as part of the long-term strategy (Matthiesen and Phau 2005; de Chernatony and Mcdonald 2003; Argenti and Druckenmiller 2004; Knox and Bickerton 2003). Kapferer (2008, p. 43) extends this, arguing that brands can only develop through “consistently being consistent” over a period of time, whilst Aaker (1996a) extends this argument still further, defining consistency over time in terms of identity and position, including symbols, imagery and metaphors such as brand personality.

In order for the brand to be communicated consistently, the branding strategy also requires a consistent level of support over time, known as brand strategy consistency (Berthon et al. 2008, p. 14). The initial brand strategy relies upon understanding the needs and perceptions of customers, and is required in order to create relevant brands which satisfy consumer needs. Once these have been identified, and in order to build strong brands, the associations communicated should also be consistent over a period of time (Thorson and Moore 1996, p. 128).

The literature and research suggests that consistent brands are stronger, and also suggests that stronger brands are more likely to be communicated consistently. They also provide benefits such as increased consumer attention towards the brand (Freling and Forbes 2005, p. 406), creating stronger and more favourable brand associations. Regardless of which comes first, strong brand management requires a long term perspective of branding activities, with brand equity being enforced by marketing activities which communicate consistent brand meaning to consumers (Keller 2008).

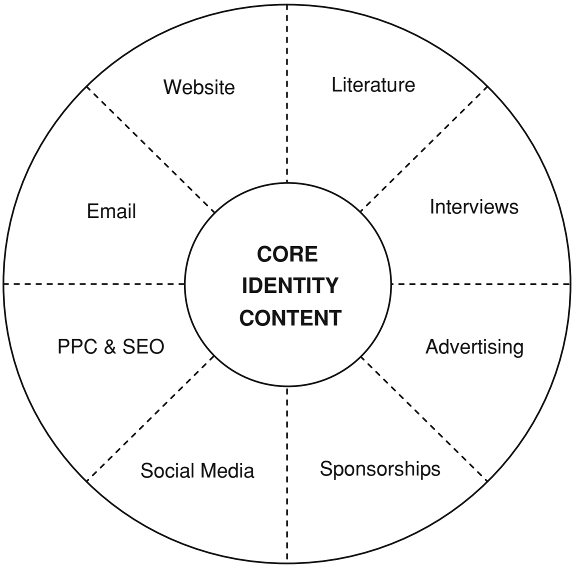

Fig. 6.5 Example of a brand communication wheel adapted from (Arruda 2009)

6.5 Brand Communication Consistency

Arruda (2009) explained that in order for a brand to be communicated consistently, planning and management are of paramount importance. In order to aid this planning process, the “Brand Communication Wheel” has been devised. The wheel encompasses all possible mediums of communication through which the brand will communicate, and posits that each marketing channel (the transmission lines of the brand) should pivot centrally around a core which represents the content theme (brand) which is to be communicated. Each segment of the wheel is required to be consistent, clear and constant when communicating the core brand content. This does not mean that communications should be repeated in an artificial manner; simply that they should be consistent in their overall meaning (Kapferer 2008, p. 211). Consistent styles of verbal expressions can exert influence upon how brand identity is processed into brand image (Franzen and Moriarty 2008, p. 120) by stakeholders. See Fig. 6.5 for an example of Arruda’s (2009) brand communication wheel, encompassing multiple brand communication channels.

Once the brand communication strategy has been devised, the process of communicating the brand begins with internal (employee) brand management (de Chernatony 2002). Well executed internal brand management leads to external (consumer) brand satisfaction and vice versa. The strong links between internal brand messages and consumer experience has been noted by scholars (Finney 2008) as well as practitioners (Jones 2001), and is receiving increased attention.

It is recognised by many brands that employee alignment of behaviour with the brand plays a crucial role in building success (Vallaster and de Chernatony 2006), especially within the context of service brands, which are often employee facing (Brodie et al. 2009).

Ambler (2003, p. 177) has even gone so far as to say that "a firm's customers are its own employees". He submits that there is a strong link between employee and customer satisfaction (Schneider et al. 1998; Heskett et al. 1997), and indicates that if an organisation's main priority are its employees, external customers will be taken care of as a result (Farrell and Oczkowski 2012; Salamon and Robinson 2008; Harter et al. 2002).

Brand consistency applies to multiple facets of the brand, both in terms of definition and the media over which it is communicated. Previous studies which have sought to measure multiple channel brand communication consistency have been sparse. Research by Graham (2013) examined the communication of visual images, tone and language as achieved on the websites and prospectuses of HEIs, as well as factors such as levels of tuition fees, in order to measure consistency of brand positioning. Research by Okazaki (2006) attempted to measure a brand's online personality across multi-national companies, in order to ascertain whether these brands were communicating consistency across global markets. However, this study mainly sought to examine inconsistencies in terms of cultural online brand personality differences, indicating that whilst consistencies between cultures may differ, consistency within cultures is important.

In summary, brand identity and position should be continually (over time) consistent. Whilst this is widely accepted within the literature, there seems to be confusion as to how brands should be managed in order to achieve this consistency in communication. Key literature suggests that being continually consistent should be part of the initial planning of communication management, with consistent execution of the management plan and employee buy-in both being vital to ensure that all transmissions are communicated consistently. Previous studies that have measured consistency over multiple marketing channels are sparse. The small number which have been attempted predominantly focus on the message which is transmitted in the form of words, in order to measure brand image and brand personality (Rutter et al. 2013). Empirical research, given the plethora of anecdotal evidence advocating consistency and pointing towards its links to performance, is certainly needed.

6.5.1 Conclusion

Overall, then, it can be seen that effective brand management within the context of retail focused e-commerce is vital to business success. To return to the analogy drawn at the beginning of this chapter, a sound understanding of online brand management can make the difference between a company finding itself in Death Valley or in the Californian promised land. As can be seen in the table below, successful brand management brings with it a host of opportunities, whilst poor performance in this area can be a serious threat to any business.

As in any section of a business, it is vital that an organisational approach to e-commerce management fits in seamlessly with an overall business strategy. In order to be effective, any such e-commerce management must take into account the vital importance of branding in modern business, and has to understand the similarities and differences that have become clear through analysis of offline and online branding. Whilst an organisation with an established offline brand should ensure that its online offering is consistent with existing communications, it is crucial that online branding should be tailored to the specific medium through which it is being communicated.

Specifically, it is important that retailers seeking to engage with e-commerce should ensure that their brand promise is fulfilled at all times, even if certain online media can introduce added pressures through price competition. As in the offline world, brand differentiation is also crucial, although there is always the threat of online media making it easier for competitors to steal or at least copy differentiated brands. On the other hand, the online world also introduces a host of opportunities for exciting new approaches to brand image, and can even refresh and revitalise an existing offline brand. Whatever image is chosen, however, the most important factors in e-commerce remain as brand personality and brand consistency. Without an effectively anthropomorphised brand which enables consumers to relate to it personally, and which is communicated consistently amongst all different media channels, branding efforts are inevitably diluted and weakened.

Ultimately, there are both significant rewards and potential pitfalls awaiting those businesses which seek to establish an online brand, whether transferring an existing brand or building one from scratch. The world of e-commerce, whilst sharing some characteristics in common with more traditional business sectors, cannot be treated as entirely synonymous with them. Those companies which take the time to study, analyse and plan their e-commerce and online branding offerings will end up ahead of their competition, and well prepared for the decades to come.

6.6 Opportunities and Threats

See Table 6.1.

Table 6.1 The opportunities and threats of e-commerce and digital brand management

Type	Opportunities	Threats
E-commerce management	• To create a customer-driven marketing strategy which attempts to satisfy and create superior value to consumers	• Lack of an organisational strategic plan to develop and implement e-commerce solutions—a process which is crucial to success
	• The geographically isolated are now empowered to reach small groups of customers who are spread geographically	• Consumers are empowered to negotiate between companies in terms of price and delivery, to ensure that they receive the most competitive price—which can negatively affect profit margins
	• The use of virtual communities allows consumers with similar interests to socialise virtually which can be mediated by retailers	
	• Reducing the cost of sales handling inquiries by providing prices and availability through IT infrastructure	
Brand promise	• Successful fulfilment of the brand's promise within digital channels. At its most basic level, an accurate description is crucial to fulfilment of a promise and satisfaction	• Delivering the brand promise has become increasingly pressurised. Competitors that compete via the internet often find that providing the cheapest price can be an opposing force to delivering consistent reliability and high quality service
	• Design concerns have morphed for online branding, with everyone being provided the same display window via the use of brand-specific websites. Companies that cannot afford to buy the best positioned property on a London high street now find themselves on a much more level playing field	• Established brands are increasingly having to compete and thwart off younger competition
	• Opportunity for new companies to enter the market and fulfil customer satisfaction better than the competition	

(continued)

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Table 6.1 (continued)

Type	Opportunities	Threats
Brand differentiation	• Brands are starting out within online channels and then transferring to an offline context • Brands can utilise different consumer-centric communication and distribution channels—for instance making purchasing easier, more enjoyable or more rewarding • Image differentiation provides brands with a tool to cultivate powerful and compelling points of differentiation, designed to appeal to consumers' social and psychological needs. Whilst a tangible difference can offer a distinct advantage to consumers (e.g. a cheaper price), intangible differences such as service quality, brand image and anthropomorphisation can provide competitive advantages that are potentially harder to negate • Within the context of e-commerce, tangible differences often come down to price, particularly where a brand is negated in favour of a price comparison website. Image differentiation can therefore provide a competitive advantage which can be particularly effective	• Effectively and consistently transferring a brand's differentiation to the online context • Brand strategies can face a constant battle from competitors that seek to match and negate a brand's competitive difference
Brand image	• Create brand image through consumer brand associations including brand beliefs, brand performance, brand meaning and brand personality • Secures a brand's online presence via website brand elements which include the logo, graphics, copy and typography, colour, shapes, layout and combination of images	• Danger of people copying or imitating it, or copycat companies copying website brand elements • The opportunity to do it correctly and wrongly—provided by your guidelines • How can the website brand elements be incorporated into mobile technologies to communicate the brand effectively? There is the opportunity to do it well and badly • If you can control the medium and the channel the brand is viewed over, it gives power to the brand to control the experience and individualisation

(continued)

Table 6.1 (continued)

Type	Opportunities	Threats
Brand personality	• Create uniqueness by reinforcing human psychological values to which consumers relate beyond mere performance and functionality • Companies can actively influence their brand personality, and those that do so tend to forge stronger and longer-lasting relationships with consumers. This is often achieved through the bespoke design of every channel by which consumers receive information from the business	• Brands must chose and cultivate a personality that fits their strategy or risk failure. For example if a brand has a physical location and higher costs, this should be a more sophisticated brand, to ensure that they are able to sell at price premium - bearing in mind that they may not be able to compete solely on price as costs (for instance purchase prices) may be higher than those of larger organisations (who can buy in bulk)
Brand consistency	• To provide increased consumer attention towards the brand, creating stronger and more favourable brand associations	• This does not mean that communications should be repeated in an artificial manner; simply that they should be consistent in their overall meaning

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