

Gravity-defying brands show how to sustain growth through market turbulence

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Gravity-defying brands, defined as those which maintain or obtain strength over a period of time, have several factors that differentiate them from gravity-succumbing brands, according to new research from the brand tracking firm Tracksuit.

- The study, which reviewed eight food brands, found that one major differentiator for gravity-defying brands was a stronger connection to the customer base.
- Gravity-defying brands also had well-defined product experiences that drove higher usage (93%, vs 70% for gravity-succumbing brands).
- Brands that stand the test of time are also perceived to be more relatable, the study found.

Why it matters

With the passing of time, it's inevitable that brands experience both cultural shifts – such as 24/7 connected consumers and greater social responsibility – and technological innovations, such as e-commerce and social media, that can alter their trajectory of success. Understanding the essential components for building a brand for the long term amid changes can make a brand a leader in its category, not simply a passive follower.

Takeaways

- In addition to gravity-defying brands having strong customer bases, well-defined product experiences and being relatable, they also demonstrate authenticity, as these brands are more likely to stay closer to their roots.
- Gravity-defying brands have greater exposure – the study found they are more likely to be seen across channels such as television, internet advertising, billboards and social media.

- Despite research that emphasizes the power of cultural relevance, the study found that it doesn't necessarily carry weight for gravity-defying brands; rather, maintaining community and connection with consumers is more important.

Gravity-defying brands – those which maintain or gain strength over a period of time – have a stronger connection to their consumer base than those that don't, according to a new study by brand tracking firm Tracksuit.

In addition to having a solid relationship with consumers, gravity-defying brands had the following characteristics that gravity-succumbing brands did not:

- A superior product experience defined by higher consumer usage, distinctiveness and relatability;
- A more active marketing strategy, as gravity-defying brands are more likely to be seen across a variety of channels that include television, billboards, internet ads and social media. (This dovetails with research from WARC's "**The Multiplier Effect**" that shows that it pays to continually leverage the power of equity-led advertising because it benefits both immediate and future sales.)

Adored by consumers

The study looked at eight unidentified food brands, encompassing the categories of savory snacks, sweet snacks, cookies/biscuits and condiments/sauces, divided equally between those that were gravity-defying and those that were gravity-succumbing. The first takeaway was that gravity-defying brands are able to successfully develop a noticeable consumer connection.

"I thought that a brand that doesn't keep with the times – it's outdated – it's probably going to be the thing that succumbs to gravity. Or what about high awareness? Actually, if you've got really good awareness, you'll defy gravity," said Leanne Tomasevic, UK and US head of insights at Tracksuit, as she presented findings during the Advertising Research Foundation's July online Cognition Council event, "Defying Gravity: How Brands Stand The Test of Time."

She continued, "Actually, it was none of these things. When we looked at the gap between the brands that defy gravity and stand the test of time – versus those that don't – these were not significant differences. These were not the critical factors."

Indeed, it was being well-liked that proved the key to success.

"If you want to drive a brand to defy gravity, what do you focus on?" Tomasevic asked. It's about being well-liked. It's about being famous, iconic."

The power of being a well-liked brand was seen in consumer responses from Tracksuit's study:

- "I've always eaten [brand] all my life, even as a child."
- We only use [brand]. Family won't eat anything else."
- [Brand] is my favorite, even the grandkids buy them for me."

"It's really calling out these factors that relate to social proof – that understanding of the role a brand plays in your community, that it's part of your friends and family, part of the world that you live in," said Tomasevic. "It actually starts to help you develop loyalty and admiration for a brand."

“ ... So again, I think it's this ability to become embedded that becomes really important, embedded in the world that we live in and the people that we connect with.”

Gravity-defying brands are also more likely to be recommended to others: These brands scored a 29% Net Promoter Score (NPS), while gravity-succumbing brands had only a one percent NPS.

“What was really interesting was when we asked people about the reasons for their score, there was the sense among the gravity-defying brands that the brand was very much irreplaceable,” she said.

“It was more of a transactional relationship when you become a gravity-succumbing brand. I think this kind of connects into becoming iconic, developing those deep emotional bonds where you have that sense of loyalty and feel proud of a brand.”

Ensuring a strong product experience

Delving into the second learning from the Tracksuit study, Tomasevic said that a well-built product experience can pay dividends. To illustrate, brands that withstand gravity are viewed as 12% stronger than their competitors.

“Again, I think this comes back to differentiation. It has to feel differentiated versus its immediate competitive set,” she said.

Moreover, a well-built product experience can lead to higher usage: 93% of consumers used gravity-defying brands, while 70% used gravity-succumbing brands.

The final element of a favorable product experience, as mentioned in the study, was more relatability (12%) and embracing authenticity and brand roots (10%).

“It's not necessarily about being worthy, it's about being consistent, knowing who you are and not deviating too far away from that,” said Tomasevic.

Greater visibility pays off

The final finding from the study was that a more robust advertising strategy can withstand a gravitational pull.

“We saw here with gravity-succumbing brands, they were just perceived as being less seen. They were less likely to be seen across lots of different channels – TV, advertising on the internet, billboards, social media – across the board,” Tomasevic said.

“Actually, it was the gravity-defying brands that were seen much more significantly across all these channels.”

Further, 83% of consumers said they were likely to buy gravity-defying brands in the future, while 58% said they were likely to buy gravity-succumbing brands in the same time frame.

Three brand best practices for defying gravity

Considering these results altogether, Tomasevic reiterated that the following best practices can help brands withstand headwinds such as technological innovation and cultural shifts that are unavoidable as time goes on:

1. **Taking social proof into account:** “Your brand needs to be talked about and shared with others. How do you make sure that your brand is in those conversations?”
2. **Having a distinctive product experience:** “The whole experience of the brand and the product has to come together and to be differentiated in some way, and then consistently showing up across multiple touch points is also really important.”
3. **Creating a relatable brand:** “The one watch out here, because I think this is something that was a surprise to me, is that to be up-to-date isn't really that important. Cultural relevance is not about necessarily being cool or modern or contemporary - it's about being involved in the community, showing up in multiple places, and developing a meaningful connection with others.”

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