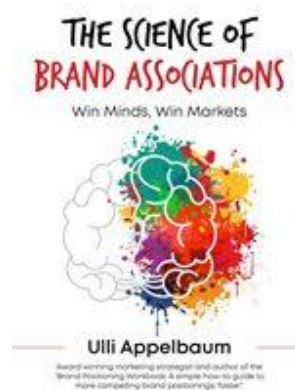


PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW ¹



Book Title: ***The Science of Brand Associations: Win Minds, Win Markets***

Author: **Ulli Appelbaum**

Publisher: Independently published

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Reviewer: **Joseph Adebajo, PMP**

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Introduction

In *The Science of Brand Associations: Win Minds, Win Markets*, Ulli Appelbaum explores how brands influence perception, decision-making, and competitive advantage through the formation of mental associations. Grounded on principles from cognitive psychology, behavioral science, and market research, the book explains why certain brands consistently command trust, preference, and loyalty even in highly competitive and uncertain environments.

While the book is positioned within the branding discipline, its relevance extends well beyond branding functions into leadership and governance. For project, program, and organizational leaders, Appelbaum's analysis provides a practical and valuable framework for understanding stakeholder perceptions, trust-building, and adoption; factors that often determine whether initiatives succeed or fail, independent of technical execution quality.

Overview of Book's Structure

The book is structured around a clear and logical progression, beginning with a foundational scientific explanation of how brand associations are formed in the human mind. Appelbaum establishes this foundation by examining the interaction between

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memory, emotion, and cognition, framing brand perception as a predictable and explainable process rather than a purely creative or intuitive one.

Building on this foundation, the book explains how associations are strengthened over time through consistency, credibility, and repeated experiences. The author argues that successful brands are not built through isolated messages or short-term campaigns, but through sustained alignment between promise, behavior, and outcomes. Durable brands are the result of repeated, coherent signals rather than sporadic efforts.

The latter portions of the book focus on application, demonstrating how organizations can intentionally shape and manage associations to influence preference, trust, and long-term market position. Through practical examples, the author illustrates how these principles translate into measurable outcomes, reinforcing the link between perception management and sustained competitive performance.

Highlights

One of the book's most significant contributions is its treatment of brand associations as cognitive shortcuts that directly influence decision-making. The author explains how individuals and organizations rely on established associations to navigate complexity, reduce uncertainty, and act quickly. For leaders, this reinforces the reality that decisions related to investment, adoption, or prioritization are often shaped by perception as much as by formal analysis.

Another key highlight is the emphasis on consistency as a prerequisite for trust. The book makes a compelling case that trust is not built through isolated successes, but through repeated, predictable alignment between intent, behavior, and outcomes. This insight closely parallels challenges faced in project governance, program delivery, and organizational change, where credibility is accumulated or lost over time.

The author outlines nine deliberate strategies for building strong brand association networks, reinforcing that brand strength results from disciplined, coordinated actions that drive distinctiveness, consistency, and relevance. These associations, once established, need continuous stewardship for long-term sustainability.

The book also offers a clear explanation of why emotional responses frequently outweigh rational evaluation in decision-making. Appelbaum shows that even well-supported data and logic may fail to influence outcomes if they conflict with existing associations. For leaders and managers, this underscores the importance of

understanding not only what is being proposed but how it is perceived and internalized by stakeholders and decision-makers.

Highlights: What I liked!

The strongest aspect of the book is its grounding in science rather than opinion, projecting scientific evidence rather than story or anecdotes. Appelbaum avoids prescriptive or superficial branding advice and instead presents a structured, research-based explanation of how and why associations influence behavior. This lends the book credibility and makes its insights more durable across industries and contexts.

I also found the book's applicability beyond traditional marketing roles particularly valuable. Although framed within a branding context, the concepts translate directly to leadership, change management, and organizational decision-making. This makes the book especially relevant for professionals responsible for influencing outcomes, aligning stakeholders, and sustaining credibility over time.

Who might benefit from the Book

This book is useful for project and program managers, PMO leaders, and executives who operate in environments where influence, credibility, and stakeholder alignment are critical to success. Leaders responsible for securing sponsorship, guiding organizational change, or driving adoption across various initiatives will find the book's focus on perception and trust particularly relevant.

The book will also benefit consultants and senior practitioners engaged in transformation or strategy execution, where initiatives often compete for attention, resources, and commitment. More broadly, anyone interested in understanding the cognitive and behavioral factors that shape decisions beyond technical plans and metrics will gain the greatest value.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *The Science of Brand Associations: Win Minds, Win Markets* offers a disciplined and well-researched examination of how mental associations shape decisions, trust, and long-term competitive advantage. While positioned within the branding domain, the book's relevance extends directly to leadership contexts where outcomes are influenced as much by perception and credibility as by execution quality.

For project and program leaders, the book reinforces an important reality: successful initiatives are not defined solely by what is delivered, but by how those outcomes are understood, remembered, and trusted by various stakeholders. This core message is best summarized by Appelbaum himself: "Brands don't live in boardrooms, marketing departments, or flashy philosophies; they are in the mind of the customers and are built one memory and one association at a time, shaped by consistent exposure, reinforced by emotion, and anchored through distinctive assets."

Overall, this book serves as a valuable resource for professionals who recognize that leadership effectiveness depends not only on technical competence but on the ability to shape understanding, confidence, and commitment over time.

For more about this book, go to: <https://www.amazon.com/Science-Brand-Associations-Minds-Markets/dp/B0FL2ZDW8Z>

About the Reviewer



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Joseph Adebajo, PMP, is a project management and ERP transformation professional with experience delivering SAP S/4HANA implementations, organizational change initiatives, and training enablement programs. He also brings doctoral-level training and education in the field of chemistry, applying rigorous analytical thinking and research-driven leadership to complex, cross-functional initiatives. He holds several SAP certifications. Joseph is also deeply committed to the professional community, actively serving as the Newsletter Director for the PMI Dallas Chapter. He can be contacted at josephadebanjo@yahoo.com

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