

California Department of Child Support Services

Consumer Brand Research Report

Submitted by Ogilvy
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BACKGROUND

Our overarching goal is to enhance the brand of DCSS from a limited understanding of “where to get child support” to a brand evocative of the full breadth of the services offered, overlaid with the emotional equities of trust, compassion, fairness and respect.

We also want to:

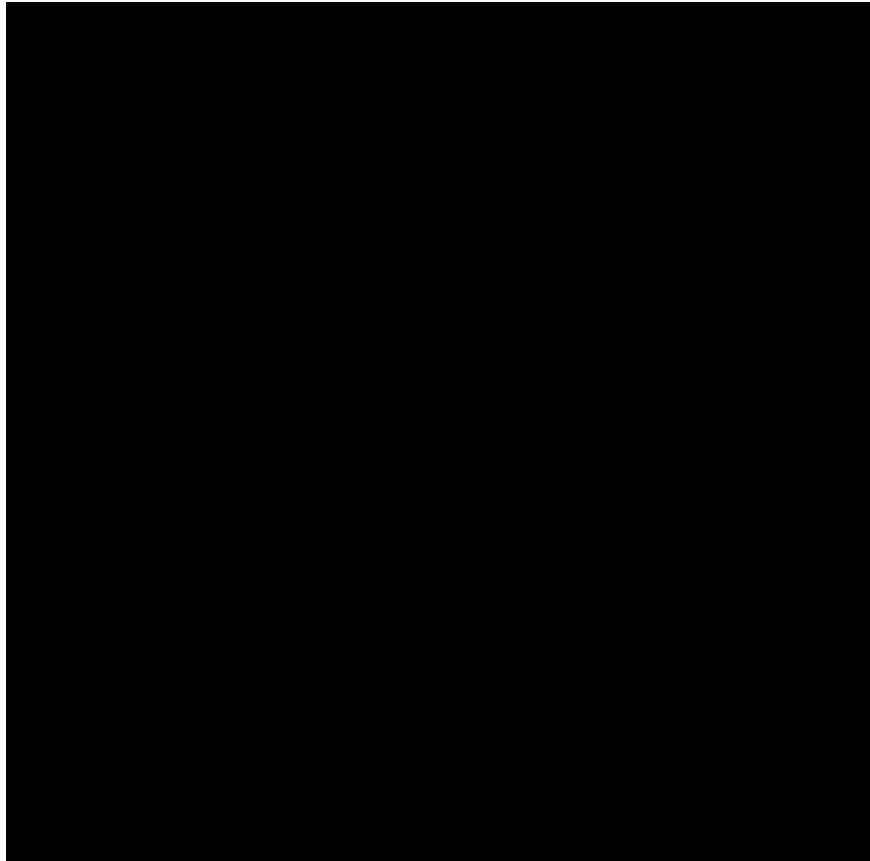
1. Change public attitudes and beliefs about child support services.
2. Reach those whom DCSS currently doesn't reach.
3. Inspire parents who want to support their children.
4. Help ensure that DCSS is viewed as a positive resource and the first place to go for help.

The objective of this research is to uncover current perceptions, attitudes and feelings about DCSS.

This research will help define the DCSS brand and develop a message platform that will serve as the foundation for organizational activities and communications to internal and external audiences.

METHODOLOGY

Ogilvy conducted 10 in-person focus groups across five locations. In each location, we hosted one group of females either receiving or paying child support and one group of males either receiving or paying child support. In total, 78 people participated in these focus groups.



In these focus groups, Ogilvy used the following projective exercises and techniques to uncover brand themes¹:






- One word top-of-mind association
- Martian exercise
- Personification
- Adjective checklist
- Collage
- World without DCSS

¹ In [REDACTED], we did half of these exercises, so we could spend time developing possible brand positioning themes.

This report reflects the common themes across all groups. Differences based on gender, region or general market vs. Latina/Latino are noted throughout.

KEY FINDINGS

The following is a high-level overview of the key findings from the 10 focus groups.

				
Category Ownership	Category Rejection & Need	Negative Brand Perceptions	Operational Adjustments	Opportunity
DCSS = child support	No one wants to be in the category, but most see its value	DCSS' brand is muddy and tainted by category baggage and bad DCSS experiences	System improvements would go a long way to build positive brand perceptions	DCSS can reinvent the child support category and build a new compelling brand

1. Children bring the greatest joy, but they also bring significant concerns².

What brings me joy in life . . .

"Seeing my kids do well in school." – Female, [REDACTED]

"The first birthday party I had for my kid." – Male, [REDACTED]

"Seeing my kids happy." – Male, [REDACTED]

"Watching my kids play football." – Male, [REDACTED]

"Seeing my kids prospering." – Female, [REDACTED]

"Spending time with my kids." – Male, [REDACTED]

"Cooking with my kids." – Male, [REDACTED]

² Men often mentioned activities (or only mentioned activities) that did not involve their kids. Almost all women focused on their kids.

What keeps me up at night . . .

“I’m really the one who is there for my son and what if something happens to me?” – Female, [REDACTED]

“Worrying about my kids hooking up with bad influences.” – Male, [REDACTED]

“I worry about money and managing my kids and how well they are doing in school.” – Female, [REDACTED]

“I worry about my son’s future education, about where he may go and being set for life.” – Male, [REDACTED]

“My kids are teenagers. I worry what my kids are up to and if they are behaving.” – Male, [REDACTED]

2. Money worries everyone³.

“Not knowing how I’m going to pay my next bill.” – Female, [REDACTED]

“I worry about not being able to provide for my family.” – Male, [REDACTED]

“I just want to be debt free.” – Male, [REDACTED]

“I worry about my kids future and what I can leave for them. Paying child support – it is difficult to get ahead and buy a house, a car or make any investment.” – Male, [REDACTED]

3. There’s an undercurrent of sadness pervading life; disappointment and regret for their kids (especially felt by women), thoughts of personal loneliness and for some, bitterness.

“I wish the father felt like being a parent the way I do.” – Female, [REDACTED]

“Dad never calls or texts my son.” – Female, [REDACTED]

“I worry about how being without a dad will affect my kids.” – Female, [REDACTED]

“What worries me is that my son is in therapy, because his father never sees him. He is very affected by that.” – Female, [REDACTED]

4. It’s not surprising then that feelings about DCSS are fraught.

³ Latinas [REDACTED] had the most low paying and unpredictable jobs and were most concerned about money.

Child support is inherently negative — It's about failure: of a relationship, a marriage, of birth control, of judgment, of one's ability to provide for one's family, etc. It's public, like a scarlet 'C': It unmask "deadbeat dads" and "baby mommas."

"If rent is not getting paid and I have to tell the landlord, it's all out there."
– Female, [REDACTED]

"You go to jail and there's no time to get on your feet before child support asks for money. It's like a set-up. You end up being a habitual offender, and it's a felony. It's real stressful." – Male, [REDACTED]

There's a lot of shame: many feel inadequate and unworthy of respect.

"I'm ashamed." – Female, [REDACTED]

"It's almost embarrassing. It messes with your dignity." – Female, [REDACTED]

"You feel dumb as a mule, because I'm in this mess because of 15 minutes of fun." – Male, [REDACTED]

"I always feel like I'm apologizing for myself. It's a little bit demeaning." – Female, [REDACTED]

DCSS becomes the focal point of blame: negative feelings towards their ex or themselves transfer to DCSS. It stirs anxiety and provokes anger.

SPECIFIC FINDINGS

In addition to the high-level overview, Ogilvy provides an in-depth look at participants' responses and include several unattributed, verbatim quotes to give more context and texture to respondents' comments.

FIRST ASSOCIATIONS EXERCISE

Ogilvy asked participants to say the first word that comes to mind when thinking about DCSS. Not one person mentioned family, parents or children. In fact, the general market groups used almost all negative words.



The words most often mentioned have to do with how and what, not why “money paperwork, bureaucracy government.” They also have to do with financial outcomes, e.g., “unfair,” “not enough,” “unpredictable” and “debt.” Only five people had a positive word come to mind: “helpful,” “financial support,” “supportive,” “smooth” or “liaison.” Latinas ██████ used the same or similar words as the general market. They are particularly disenchanting by DCSS as many are very poor and on welfare, making their DCSS checks very low.

Notably, Latinas [redacted] all Latino men had starkly different points of view, showing women's gratitude and men's alienation



THE MARTIAN EXERCISE

Ogilvy asked participants describe DCSS to someone who had never heard of it. Many acknowledged the need for DCSS, but this exercise exposed clear differences of opinion about who DCSS benefits or should benefit.

1. Some talk about finding agreement between parents.

“It’s an intermediate between two parents when there is some kind of dispute or miscommunications in relation to their children’s welfare.” - Male, [REDACTED]

“An agency that makes sure that both parties of a child contribute what they deem fair to the child financially.” – Male, [REDACTED]

“DCSS is the middleman to protect and serve people in need.” – Female, [REDACTED]

“Department of Child Support Services acts as a middleman between the mother and father of your kids.” - Male, [REDACTED]

2. Many woman and most men see DCSS as serving women.

“The Department of Child Support Services is a great middleman that takes the stress off me having to deal with the children’s father who is abusive.” – Female, [REDACTED]

“Be prepared to be under the mercy (control) of an outside agency. Be prepared to never get a fair deal.” - Male, [REDACTED]

“It’s a department that helps make the father of your children more responsible. They answer all of your questions and even investigate and help you calculate what is the right and just amount your child should receive from the father.” – Female, [REDACTED]

It’s a place where they think they are helping children. A lot of money. They are not as transparent as they think. It should be a place for dads/men as much as it is for women (but it isn’t). Use protection. Don’t get close to a woman! – Male, [REDACTED]

3. Some, especially women, focus on DCSS as helping children.

“A government agency that will track down fathers who do not live with their child and help get money from the dads to support their children.” – Female, [REDACTED]

“The department is there to make sure your kids have a better future and some medical insurance.” – Male, [REDACTED]

"Intercedes on the children's' behalf." – Female, [REDACTED]

"Child Support Services is a department that help[s] get financial aid to children from absent fathers in their life. The department is [there] to relieve problems from parents who [are] having difficulty getting help." - Female, [REDACTED]

4. Some men vilify the system, seeing DCSS as being autocratic or for itself.

"The enforcers. The government. The feds. No escape! The system." – Male, [REDACTED]

"It's a group of people who threaten loss of freedoms if you don't comp with an arbitrary set of rules set forth by the consideration of an older lawyer wearing a robe." – Male, [REDACTED]

"Overlords." – Male, [REDACTED]

"It's a way to control you from breeding too much." – Male, [REDACTED]

"A non-transparent, unaccountable, for profit business in collusion with the U.S. courts system with its main function to disempower men." – Male, [REDACTED]

PERSONIFICATION

Ogilvy asked participants to describe DCSS as a person. The following themes emerged:

1. Strong and corporate

For some women, this means: competent, professional and determined
“A professional woman.” – Female, [REDACTED]

“A man in a suit. He enforces the law...business like, to the point, professionally dressed.” – Female, [REDACTED]

For most men and other women, this means: arrogant, aggressive, calculating and dominating

“A very tall, blond woman, 38-40 years old, who is arrogant, calculating and cold and drives a Hummer.” – Male, [REDACTED]

“She is Russian or German and wearing black leather.” – Male, [REDACTED]

“Tough, strict, stern.” – Female, [REDACTED]

“Someone who has power and imposes that power...like a parent. You can't talk back. What I say goes.” – Male, [REDACTED]

2. Unapproachable and cold

Powerful and authoritative

“He drives a Jeep Wrangler. Rugged and will run someone over.” – Female, [REDACTED]

“I think of ‘Men in Black’: blank, intimidating, just stares.” – Male, [REDACTED]

“A muscle man with a briefcase.” – Female, [REDACTED]

“An aggressive male, like a military guy, older, mean and sexist.” – Female, [REDACTED]

“Cold hearted.” – Female, [REDACTED]

“A man, 50 years old, strong, strict, often angry, wearing an impeccable suit and tie.” – Female, [REDACTED]

“Not a good listener. Impersonal.” – Male, [REDACTED]

3. Detached and indifferent

No common ground, understanding and empathy

(upper class neighborhoods)

"Lives in [REDACTED]. There aren't any beat up cars in their community. Gated communities that are mid-to-upper class." -

Male, [REDACTED]

"A white man. Privileged, can't relate." - Female, [REDACTED]

"Don't mingle with us." - Female, [REDACTED]

"He lives in places that a single black mother does not live in." - Female, [REDACTED]

"He has walls no one can climb." - Female, [REDACTED]

4. A bully to men and an insufficient ally to many women

For most: DCSS is not trustworthy, compassionate, genuine, respected or respectful

For men: DCSS is mercenary and uncaring, calculating and threatening

"A man with no compassion." – Female, [REDACTED]

"Drives a black SUV with tinted windows." – Male, [REDACTED]

"Vulture." – Male, [REDACTED]

"Knows what he wants...with lots of money." – Male, [REDACTED]

"I wish they were still professional but more helpful."

"Smile more." – Female, [REDACTED]

"Drives a Mercedes with lots of dents because you think they are a respectable brand, but then you look closer and it has lots of problems." – Female, [REDACTED]

"A middle-aged woman, professional, conservative. Cheerful and welcoming, but I'm not sure if I trust her." – Female, [REDACTED]

5. Latinas [REDACTED] were the most positive, creating an image of a professional, approachable and just person

Trustworthy, Loyal

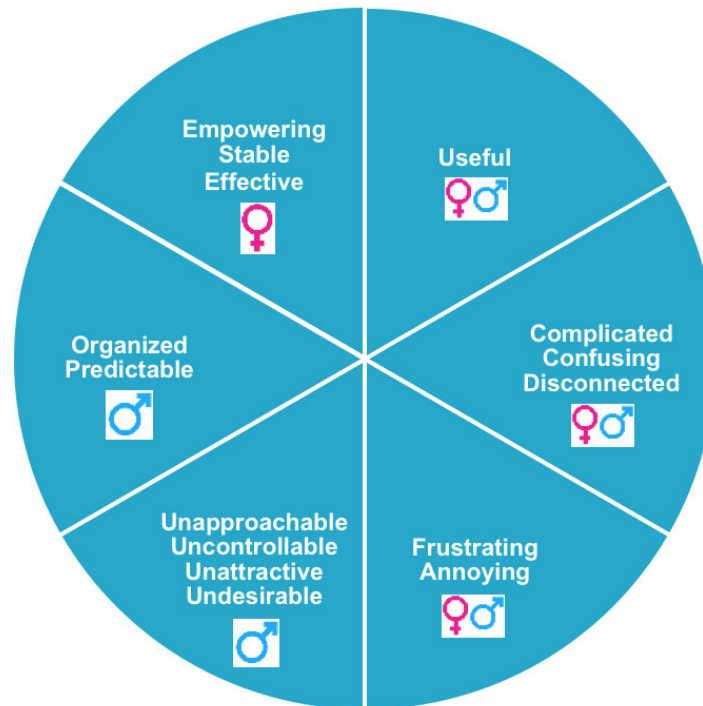
“A tall, strong woman, 40-45, who wears pants, Ferragamo shoes, a nice blouse and blazer and drives a sporty Lexus or Black BMW that is clean, new and elegant.” – Female, [REDACTED]

“She wants the best for your children.” – Female, [REDACTED]

“Her house is very organized. Its simple but clean.” – Female, [REDACTED]

ADJECTIVES: DCSS TODAY

Ogilvy asked participants to choose up to six words that best describe DCSS today from an adjective list. Almost all commonly chosen words are process-oriented and emotionally distant.



DCSS takes something so emotional and makes it so financial. – Female, ■

“With the IRS you know the rules but not with child support.” – Male, ■

“I go there with a bag full of papers and I am always missing the one they need.”
– Female, ■

“It’s like the DMV. Inflexible.” – Male, ■

“I’m just a number. They treat me like I’m on welfare.” – Female, ■

“Overbearing, intimidating.” – Male, ■

COLLAGE: TODAY

Ogilvy asked participants to choose images that reflect what DCSS is today.

1. Complex, disorganized and chaotic

"A mess." – Female, [REDACTED]

"Wild and crazy." – Male, [REDACTED]

"My head is spinning when I go there." – Female, [REDACTED]

"Carved up. Unorganized." – Male, [REDACTED]

"Chaotic." – Male, [REDACTED]

2. Corporate, bureaucratic and unhelpful

"Like a maze. You have to figure your way out." – Female, [REDACTED]

"Like a blank piece of paper. You get no answers." – Female, [REDACTED]

"They ask you for books of information." – Female, [REDACTED]

"There's so much and so many people. It's a cycle that doesn't change." – Female, [REDACTED]

"They are a waste of time." – Female, [REDACTED]

3. Women: stable, strong, effective and committed (except Latinas in [REDACTED] and most people in [REDACTED])

"They will hunt. They will find the father and get the payment." – Female, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

"They do the hard work for you." – Female, [REDACTED]

"Teamwork. [DCSS] stabilized things for me." – Female, [REDACTED]

"They advise you well." – Female, [REDACTED]

"They give you answers." – Female, [REDACTED]

4. Women: reminds them of their vulnerability

"Alone and hanging from one arm." - Female, [REDACTED]

"I feel underwater, alone." – Female, [REDACTED]

"I'm walking on eggshells." - Female, [REDACTED]

"You feel very intimidated in that office." - Female, [REDACTED]

5. Latinas in SD: gives them confidence, peace and tranquility

"They make you feel strong." – Female, [REDACTED]

"You can breathe and have time for yourself." – Female, [REDACTED]

"A happy family." – Female, [REDACTED]

"They are like medicine for a sick person." – Female, [REDACTED]

6. Men: emasculating and threatening

"I feel eaten alive." – Male, [REDACTED]

"I feel like a toy with them. They do anything they want with me." – Male, [REDACTED]

"Overbearing, intimidating." – Male, [REDACTED]

"Authority – I'm going to mess you up." – Male, [REDACTED]

"If you don't pay, the police come after you." – Male, [REDACTED]

7. Men: biased, thieving and for some, corrupt

"Thieves." – Male, [REDACTED]

"They're worse than the mob." – Male, [REDACTED]

"I've been stolen from." – Male, [REDACTED]

"It leans towards women – those gender roles, those sexist roles." – Male, [REDACTED]

"It's a business. It's about getting the money." – Male, [REDACTED]

8. Men: distant, uncommunicative and callous

“Like from another planet.” – Male, ■■■

“Dark and cold hearted.” – Male, ■■■■■■■■■■

“Arrogant and hard to communicate with.” – Male, ■■■

9. Men: makes them feel battered and hunted

“You feel beat-up but you try to smile.” – Male, ■■■

“An uphill battle.” – Male, ■■■

“Just chopping away at me.” – Male ■■■

“I keep batting and losing.” – Male, ■■■

“Like a cancer, it’s killing you and you can’t escape it.” – Male, ■■■

“Pinned and trapped.” – Male, ■■■

“You cannot plan for the future. The more you earn, the more they take away. It’s horrible.” – Male, ■■■■■■■■

COLLAGE: FUTURE

The previous exercises reflect a lot of negativity about DCSS. So, we explored the ideal DCSS; the DCSS of the future. Ogilvy asked participants to choose images that reflect what you want DCSS to be in the future.

1. Organized and clear

“A sense of balance and structure.” – Male, [REDACTED]

“Technically advanced.” – Male, [REDACTED]

“Their office is clean and organized.” – Female, [REDACTED]

2. Personal, through intimacy or advocacy

“Friendly, can relate to my experiences.” – Female, [REDACTED]

“Everyone gets along.” – Female, [REDACTED]

“More personable. There for you. Like family.” – Female, [REDACTED]

“Have my back and be my teammate.” – Female, [REDACTED]

“There is love.” – Male, [REDACTED]

3. Collaborative and flexible

“You’re working on a team together.” – Male, [REDACTED]

“With the power to reach good agreements with them.” – Female, [REDACTED]

“You can have a partnership to take care of your kids.” – Male, [REDACTED]

“Everyone winning together... a group effort.” – Female, [REDACTED]

“We’re happy now and we’re sticking it out together.” – Female, [REDACTED]

4. Reassuring and soothing

“Relaxed. Relieved.” – Female, [REDACTED]

“Peaceful.” – Male, [REDACTED]

“Comforting.” – Male, [REDACTED]

“Peace and tranquility.” – Male, [REDACTED]

“They make you feel at home with a cup of coffee.” – Female, [REDACTED]

5. Women: understanding and empowering

“Strong, beautiful, powerful.” – Female, [REDACTED]

“Like the safety of a good car.” – Female, [REDACTED]

“See me, for me.” – Female, [REDACTED]

“Like Oprah. Giving. Listens and is more compassionate and empathetic. Less sterile and more welcoming.” – Female, [REDACTED]

6. Men: kinder and gentler

“A great relationship, like milk and cookies.” – Male, [REDACTED]

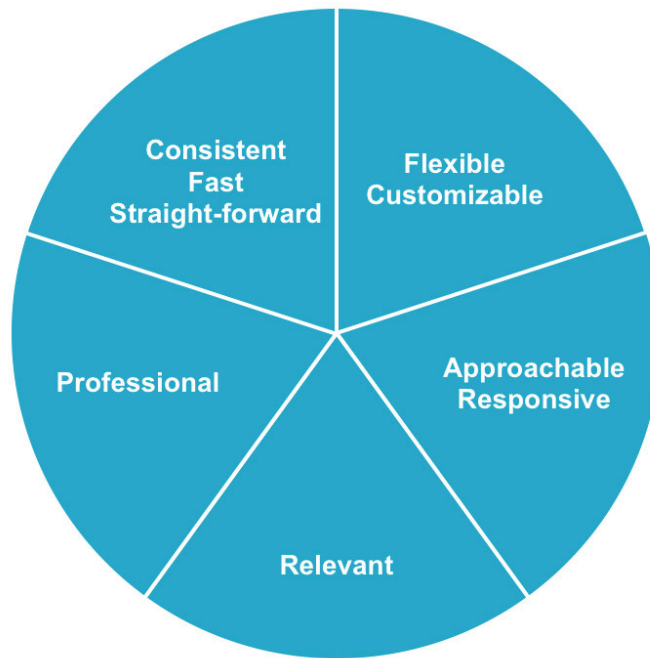
“Nice and sweet to us.” – Male, [REDACTED]

“I want to be with my family and put [DCSS] on the sidelines.” – Male, [REDACTED]

“You can finally rise out of the water.” – Male, [REDACTED]

ADJECTIVES: IDEAL DCSS

Ogilvy asked participants to choose up to three words that describe the ideal DCSS.



“It would be nice if we could sit around a table like here right now, and just have a fair discussion where I felt like they cared about my needs.” – Male, [REDACTED]

“It would be so nice to be offered a cup of coffee to deal better with all of the frustrations.” – Female, [REDACTED]

FUTURE: A WORLD WITHOUT DCSS

Ogilvy asked participants to describe what life would be like without DCSS.

1. Women react emotionally and envision abandonment, uncertainty and turmoil

“Disaster.”

“Chaos.”

“Drama.”

“No man would pay willingly.”

“No more safeguard.”

“How would I survive?”

“Without this help, I would feel unprotected and horrible.”

“Without DCSS people would feel like a sick person without access to any medication.”

2. Men react practically, either seeing an opportunity for escape or recognizing the system’s purpose despite its faults

“If I can communicate with the mother then fine, but if I can’t then [DCSS] is necessary because parents can’t talk to each other. If the parents aren’t friendly, then the system does help.” – Male, [REDACTED]

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To create a new brand for DCSS, we must start with the elements that contribute to brand power. Awareness and understanding cultivate knowledge, while differentiation and relevance create leverage, both leverage and knowledge are essential to developing and supporting brand power. We assessed these elements and concluded that understanding and relevance are the biggest challenges for DCSS to address.

Currently, DCSS has high awareness among participants, but participants maintain an incomplete and inaccurate understanding of the organization. The services that DCSS provides is distinct, but the functional relevance is tied to shame and anger. There is very limited emotional relevance. It is clear, that DCSS needs to improve understanding and address functional and emotional relevance.

Improve Understanding

We will use these consumer findings, combined with insights from our research with employees and partners, to help inform our overall recommendations on what is needed to improve understanding. For example, we may recommend:

- A new name and logo to better communicate the “head and heart” of the brand.
- A robust internal communications effort to introduce and refocus staff (at all levels) on the newly defined brand power.
- Exploring systematic changes to better align processes with the newly defined brand.
- Updating the existing (or creating a new) consumer website with new language, imagery.
- Updating materials using new language.
- New partnerships to help better serve customers in a more streamlined manner.

Gaining Relevance

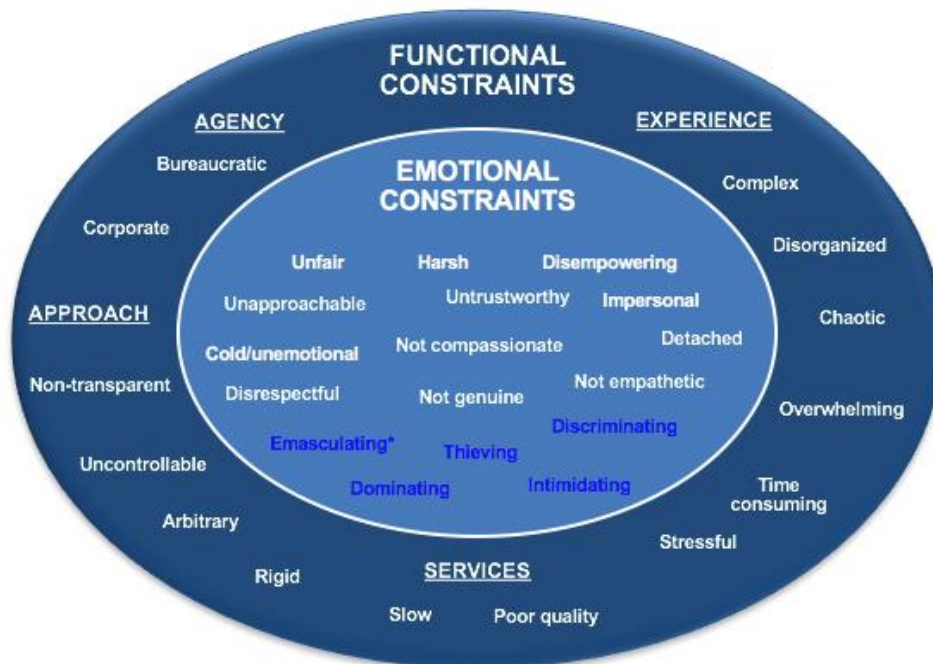
Relevance is found by identifying and providing a benefit that flows from DCSS' functional and emotional brand equities, and by understanding brand constraints to overcome.

Brand equities are deeply rooted positive associations with or expectations of the brand. Equities are describing as functional or emotional. Functional include the perception of the brand's product or service competencies leading to DCSS'

intellectual relevance. Emotional equities include the positive feelings associated with the brand, thus creating an emotional attachment to the organization.

Overcoming Constraints

To fully activate these equities, DCSS must overcome the brand's constraints with or expectations of the brand. Like equities, constraints are characterized as functional or emotional. The organization's constraints are pictured below:



*Men only

These brand constraints are largely about product and experience. A poor product and an unsatisfactory experience are overcoming a worthy purpose:

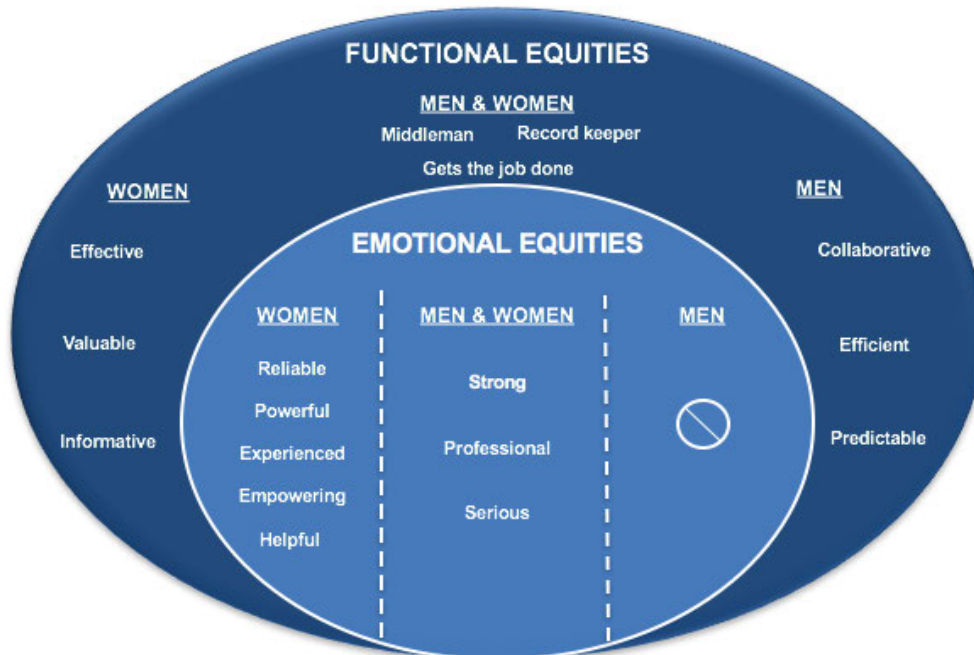
- There are clearly internal issues to address.
- Increasing understanding will help improve these brand limitations. Customers talk like DCSS is a product and experience brand, but DCSS is a promise brand.

Moving Forward

There are three key areas to focus on as we move forward with the rebranding of DCSS: product, experience and promise. Although we are not a product brand like Rolex or Tide, to effectively solve a brand issue, we need to improve the product. While we are not an experience brand like Starbucks or Amazon, we need to remember that a customer's experience deeply affects the brand. Finally,

we must fulfill the brand's promise to inspire and guide the experience. We need to connect with customers in a deeply emotional way by focusing on DCSS' promise to customers and having the product and the experience support it.

To find the right brand promise, we start with DCSS' brand equities



4

We Understand What Does Not Work

From our consumer research, we know that these paths do not help cultivate and support the brand:

- 1. Focusing on family:** DCSS' clients' families are not intact, nor do most of them want them to be intact.
- 2. Focusing on children:** This may be highly compelling, but will require further research to inform how best to communicate such a message with credibility.
- 3. Focusing on compassion and trust:** Compassion is a hard sell and trust needs to be earned.

⁴ SD Latinas also include: Committed, safe and loyal.

Focus on a Path for DCSS Customers

The Strawman Benefit Pyramid helps provide a pathway for DCSS to craft a credible brand that connects with consumers. As we move forward with developing a branding plan, we will use this path to build-out our efforts.

