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Personality Expression Through Hypermarket Brand Extension Products

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, consumers have a tremendous variety of products to choose from in hypermarkets. The majority of hypermarkets offer corporate brand extension products at an affordable price as a way to attract consumers to purchase more. This research has looked into how the consumers express self-personality through hypermarket brand extension products. The scope of this research is based on consumers as respondents in three main hypermarket outlets in Melaka, Malaysia. In order to ensure the precision of this research outcome, the focus is restricted to five main product categories: (1) beauty and health care products, (2) carbohydrate products, (3) clothes, (4) frozen foods and (5) light food and beverages. All of these products are available in almost all hypermarkets that use the retail brand name on the product label.

Key words: Brand extension, expression, hypermarket, personality, product category

INTRODUCTION

The study on personality psychology was introduced by Allport who explained personality as “a real person” that develops the characteristics of behaviour, thought and feelings of a person (Allport, 1961). Brand personality is “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand”, (Aaker, 1997). Brand personality exists when the consumer captures the dimensions of brand as a person’s personality (Batra *et al.*, 1993). Brand has a personality which is similar to that of a human being (Louis and Lombart, 2010; Smothers, 1993). Brand personality is able to influence consumer behaviour since the traits resemble human personality traits (Louis and Lombart, 2010). The brand is acknowledged to have a personality if the consumers view it as similar to human characteristics (Beldona and Wysong, 2007). Brand personality demonstrates and expresses a consumer’s personality since it is parallel with the individual and perhaps the social self-concept of the particular consumer (Kotler and Keller, 2005).

The introduction of new products by using an established brand name or core brand is known as brand extension (Chen and Chen, 2000; Glynn and Brodie, 1998; Janiszewski and van Osselaer, 2000; Keller and Aaker, 1998; Zimmer and Bhat, 2004). The extension of an existing corporate brand to a new product by using the same brand is known as corporate brand extension (Keller and Aaker, 1998). Retailers have more opportunities to sell the corporate brand extension product since the opportunity to control the consumers is higher (Beldona and Wysong, 2007) than national or manufacturing brands that have to rely on retailers or middle organizations. The key

objective to extend a brand is to utilize core brand equity in order to attract consumer acceptance towards a new product. Brand extension is a strategy for growth by utilizing the existing brand equity (Keller and Aaker, 1992).

There is a contradiction of perception concerning how brand personality could be valued. Previously, most researchers perceived brand personality as only being suitable for durable or long-term products. Nowadays, some researchers believe that there could be brand personality for both durable and non-durable products. This includes fast moving consumption products for grocery necessities (Beldona and Wysong, 2007; Hassan and Rahman, 2012a). This study has discovered the truth behind all the contradictory myths and perceptions by looking at hypermarket brand extension products, which are considered as basic necessities for almost everyone.

PERSONALITY EXPRESSION THROUGH HYPERMARKET BRAND EXTENSION

Similar to human personality, brand personality is built from a variety of personality traits and not by a single trait. As the attitude of a human being changes, the perception towards a particular brand will also change. Thus, brand personality is complex and not simple (Freling and Forbes, 2005). The perception of consumers towards a particular brand personality will not be the same since the consumers themselves have different personalities (Lin, 2010). Aaker (1997) believes that brand and humans are not exactly symmetric but most consumers will match brand with self-personality (Okazaki, 2006) through both direct and indirect contact between themselves and the brand (Aaker, 1997; Foscht *et al.*, 2008; Plummer, 2000). Direct contact comes from the individual while indirect contact comes from information concerning the product, brand, symbol, demographic, advertising and price (Parker, 2009). Consumers have a higher tendency to purchase a brand that reflects self-personality (Arora and Stoner, 2009; Kaplan *et al.*, 2010; Maehle and Shneur, 2010). Thus, it would be a good strategy to market based on consumer personality traits (Kaplan *et al.*, 2010).

Most people use brand to identify themselves (Louis and Lombart, 2010). Consumers are attracted to a brand that has a similar personality and attributes (James *et al.*, 2006). Brand personality represents a consumer's social identity and influences the reaction of other people (Batra *et al.*, 1993). Brand personality has a positive impact on the consumer to purchase or use brands that could relate to self-concept. Although, brand personality is stable from dilution it is exposed to risk (Diamantopoulos *et al.*, 2005). Thus, brand personality is able to influence company performance. Consumers will recognize and build a relationship with the brand personality through the marketing effort by the company, which will influence brand loyalty and create overall added value to the company (Lin, 2010).

A well established brand personality influences consumers to make decisions in choosing a brand (Kaplan *et al.*, 2010) and assists them to define the personal image (Freling and Forbes, 2005) through self-symbolization, self-expression (Keller, 2003) and cues from the brand personality (Freling and Forbes, 2005). Brand personality is able to make a certain product have a symbolic and emotional appeal to motivate consumers to purchase and get closer with the particular brand to represent specific characteristics. Consumers will usually project self-image through brand, which transforms the particular consumer into a loyal consumer (Arora and Stoner, 2009). Consumers with high brand personality will continuously purchase the same brand since it will represent the identity of the individual. This type of consumer will become a loyal brand user (Krishnamurthi and Raj, 1991). Consumers who are loyal to a particular store outlet will also

support the brand extension of the product (De Wulf *et al.*, 2005). Thus, it is expected that those consumers who are loyal towards a certain hypermarket will purchase the hypermarket corporate brand extension product.

Brand personality emphasizes more on actual or desired perception. Thus, it is more approachable through an emotional aspect (Ingenhoff and Fuhrer, 2010). Consumers will have a better understanding on the personality of a particular brand if there is previous experience. Without an opportunity to taste and experience a product, consumers usually believe that well-known manufacturer brands have stronger brand personality than hypermarket brand extension products. However, this rating changes after the consumer experiences the brand. Thus, consumers should be given an opportunity to experience the product by giving free samples, giveaways and promotions to build up a positive perception concerning hypermarket brand extension products (Beldona and Wysong, 2007).

Brand personality emerges from consumer associations, company efforts and the brand's attributes. Consumers are more attracted to a brand that can represent personal self-concept. There are also some scholars believe that both human and brand personality mutually reinforce each other (Lin, 2010). People build a relationship with a brand that matches the self-concept in the society (Maehle and Shneor, 2010). The type and strength of relationship between consumers and brand depends on brand personality (Louis and Lombart, 2010). A brand that matches the personality trait will create a stronger relationship (Aaker *et al.*, 2004). Brand personality is built through the manipulation of the brand name, sign, symbols, logos, imagery, music, type of endorsers, layout or use of humour and provocation (Wee, 2004). Previously, researchers believed that brand personality was more related to the expression of identities, such as through clothes and furniture brands. Consumers will look more at price, accessibility and convenience rather than brand personality when it comes to everyday basic needs (Maehle and Shneor, 2010). Nowadays, fast moving consumer products are perceived to have personality (Beldona and Wysong, 2007; Hassan and Rahman, 2012b).

HYPERMARKET BRAND EXTENSION PRODUCTS

The investment cost to introduce a new brand does not guarantee success (Pitta and Katsanis, 1995). Brand extension is one of the ways to reduce this risk (Aaker and Keller, 1990). It will reduce advertising cost (Pitta and Katsanis, 1995) and risk since the name of the core brand is strong enough (Saqib and Manchanda, 2008) to compete in the market. That is the reason why most new brands introduced on the market are based on the enhancement of an existing product (Pitta and Katsanis, 1995). Brand extension is a conservative strategy rather than an aggressive strategy (Bristol, 2002). Only five per cent of new products are developed based on new brands, while the rest is based on brand extension (6%) and line extension (89%) (Aaker, 1991). This is supported by Simms (2005) where 82% of new products were introduced through brand extension. It has also been found that 80% of firms believe that brand extension is an effective way to market new products and services (Keller, 2003). This strongly proves that brand extension is profitable for an established brand name (Thorbjornsen, 2005).

Consumers in developed countries are less concerned with food brand perhaps due to the introduction of hypermarket brand extension (Anchor and Kourilova, 2009). This finding is similar to what was found by De Wulf *et al.* (2005) based on secondary information in which the United Kingdom, Switzerland and Belgium are the three main places in Europe where hypermarket brand extensions are highly acceptable. Newer findings have proven that the highest acceptable

hypermarket brand extensions in Europe are Spanish (Gomez and Rubio, 2008). One out of three products in France and Spain are brand extensions (PLMA, 2006). In the American market, at least one out of five products available on the market is based on brand extension (Gomez and Rubio, 2008). This is highly supported by Janiszewski and van Osselaer (2000) where 95% of 16,000 new products introduced on the American market every year are based on brand extension (Hart and Murphy, 1997).

Asian consumers tend to choose well-known brands (Shannon and Mandhachitara, 2008). Recent findings have proven that the majority of Malaysian consumers still prefer to purchase products from well-known manufacturers even though the price of hypermarket brand extension products are slightly cheaper (Hassan and Rahman, 2012a). Local consumers tend to perceive overseas brands with international or foreign spokespersons as better than local brands (Wang *et al.*, 2008). However, income constraints have influenced consumers to purchase hypermarket brand extension products (Anchor and Kourilova, 2009; Burt, 2000). Further findings have also proven that most Malaysian consumers are highly price conscious and tend to be less picky for fast moving consumer products (Munusamy and Hoo, 2008).

A variety of products on the shelves provide an advantage to hypermarket retailers to build a profitable mix (Salmon *et al.*, 2000). Hypermarkets do give priority to place the corporate brand extension products on the shelves, which definitely provides competition to the manufacturer's brands. Producers who do not have a strong competitive position compared to an existing manufacturer brand tend to sell the products by using hypermarket store brands (Gomez and Rubio, 2008). Consequently, the trend of enhanced collaboration between suppliers and sellers is growing (Hassan and Rahman, 2012b). The brand should be extended based on a positive extension rather than downgrading the brand (Grime *et al.*, 2002). It should also be extended to a variety of categories by slightly changing them from the existing (Keller and Aaker, 1992).

RESEARCH DESIGN

This research focuses on hypermarket consumers in Melaka, in which 195 questionnaires were collected from hypermarket consumers as respondents. Data were collected from respondents in three main hypermarket retailers in Melaka-Giant, Mydin and Tesco. The hypermarkets are located within 20 km of each other. The respondents were asked concerning the possibility of expressing self-personality through hypermarket brand extension products. The survey was conducted based on a closed-ended questionnaire. To simplify the data collection process, only three feedback options were given to the respondents to choose from hypermarket brand extension products: (1) do express self-personality, (2) do not express self-personality and (3) neither express nor do not express self-personality. The respondents were given the opportunity to choose neutral feedback since the researcher should not force the respondent to decide if the respondent has a neutral opinion (O'Neil, 2007). In order to receive precise feedback, the respondents were only asked about five main categories of products: (1) beauty and health care products, (2) carbohydrate products, (3) clothes, (4) frozen foods and (5) light food and beverage. The five product categories were chosen since they represent the products most consumed by Malaysian consumers.

RESULTS

The percentage of respondent's feedback in all three feedback categories for all five product categories are within the range of 21.03-41.54%, in which 41 respondents (21.03%) have neutral perception on self-personality expression towards hypermarket beauty and health care products,

Table 1: Personality expression through hypermarket brand extension products

	Express self-personality		Neutral		Do not express self-personality		Total respondents
	Respondents	%	Respondents	%	Respondents	%	
Beauty and health care products:	78	40.00	41	21.03	76	38.97	195
Tissues, soap and baby wipes							
Carbohydrate products: Rice, bread, noodles and spaghetti	70	35.90	59	30.26	66	33.85	195
Clothes: Male, female and children	81	41.54	46	23.59	68	34.87	195
Frozen foods: Curry puffs, popia, paratha, doughnuts and pau	52	26.94	67	34.72	74	38.34	193 (2 missing data)
Light food and beverage: Soda, cookies and snacks	62	31.79	55	28.21	78	40.00	195

such as tissues, soap and baby wipes; and 81 respondents (41.54%) perceived hypermarket clothes for male, female and children do represent self-personality. There was no extreme feedback given by the respondents towards certain product categories. The percentage distribution of three categories feedback for all five product categories is within an almost similar range. The percentage difference between respondents who perceived hypermarket brand extension products could express self-personality and could not express self-personality was less than 10% for all five product categories. There was only two missing data in this data collection since each of the surveys was highly controlled by the researchers. The respondents in this research were able to provide more precise feedback since there was direct interaction between the respondents and the researcher. Thus, it is deemed that the overall findings of this research are reliable and valid. The findings from the data collection are summarized in Table 1.

DISCUSSION

Most research studies on brand personality missed the negative assessment elements in the personality dimensions, such as malevolence, irresponsible and selfishness (Kaplan *et al.*, 2010). There is also a lack of findings concerning the reasons for consumer integration of brand with human traits (Freling and Forbes, 2005) and how to develop consistent brand personality for users, especially on the preferred type of brand personality for diverse types of consumer (Maehle and Shneur, 2010). The current study on brand personality also focuses on the diagnosis of personality and not the impact or significance of overall brand perceptions (Freling and Forbes, 2005). Deeper insight concerning consumer perception can be gained through a combination of quantitative and qualitative investigation since some of the aspects might be isolated from each other (Arora and Stoner, 2009). It would be better to determine which category is worth investing in for hypermarket brand personality (Beldona and Wysong, 2007). However, most industrial people do not emphasize brand personality (Ingenhoff and Fuhrer, 2010).

Hypermarket brand extension products provide an opportunity for consumers who would like to gain more value for money by purchasing at a more affordable price than other well-known manufacturing products that are slightly more expensive. The introduction of a similar branding concept by the national brand of “1 Malaysia” has encouraged more consumers to try the product (Hassan and Rahman, 2012a). There are various perceptions concerning this branding concept.

However, there is still a lack of studies that have looked into this research scope. The research on hypermarket brand extension products should be continuously investigated as a path to channel the benefit to the consumers or societies who are always looking for the best value.

CONCLUSION

There is an almost equal perception distribution concerning personal expression towards hypermarket brand extension products. Some consumers perceive that purchasing hypermarket brand extension products could express self-personality. There is also a group of consumers who perceive that self-personality could not be expressed through purchasing hypermarket brand extension products. While the rest of the respondents in this research have a neutral opinion towards the relationship of self-personality with hypermarket brand extension products. In general, the distribution percentage of consumers who perceive hypermarket brand extension products: (1) do express self-personality, (2) do not express self-personality and (3) neither express nor do not express self-personality, is similar.

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