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BRAND PERSONALITY: A RESEARCH ON MALAYSIAN CONSUMERS' PERCEPTION OF STARBUCKS COFFEE OUTLET

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ABSTRACT

This study pertains to the use of the brand personality measurement framework as a means to investigate the pervasiveness of Starbucks, a foreign branded coffee outlet, in Malaysia. A survey was performed to obtain 261 consumer perceptions and opinions regarding the corporate branding of a foreign coffee outlet brand in Malaysia. Data was collected through the use of questionnaires from respondents in various cities throughout Malaysia using purposive and convenience sampling methods. Statistical analysis, including factor and reliability analysis, has been applied in order to statistically validate the findings of this research. The results of the analysis indicate that consumers identify Starbucks to be distinctive and a confident brand.

Keywords: *Brand personality, Starbucks, personality inventory*

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In recent years there has been a considerable amount of literature published pertaining to brand personality. Amidst the subsisting researchers regarding brand equity, a central fundamental is consistently attributed to the image of a brand. The work of Kapferer and Theoning (1994) stated that brand image is the determinant of mental representations; emotional and/or cognitive, of an individual attribute of a brand or an organization.

Brand Personality is one of the most indispensable constituents of brand image.

What is brand personality? Plummer (1985) identifies brand personality as the perception of consumers regarding a brand. Aaker (1991) stated that every brand has an identity and nature, i.e. a brand personality, which is a view supported by Keller (1993), who concluded that brand personality tends to serve a symbolic or self-expressive function. Upsliaw (1995) believed that brand personality is the same as brand image or brand reputation, whereby the visual aspect of a brand equates to the external personality depicted by the brand in an analogous manner to that of a person. External personality is something that is related to the characteristics of a brand and functions as a causal bond between the brand and the consumer either now or in the future. Macrcac (1996) stated that communication with consumers is variance dependant on brand personality profiles, i.e. the more riveting and engrossing a brand, the more emotional the communication with the consumer.

Some researchers define brand personality from its construction such as Batra (1999) who claimed that brand personality is the internal link of the whole brand image, which includes, but is not limited to, all relationships among the brand specialty, the brand identity, and the lifestyle and characteristics of the consumer. All such relationships contribute to the creation of brand image. Langmeyer (1994) concluded that brand personality is a consequence of a brand's characteristics and the response of consumers in the surrounding market; in a manner similar to that of a person's personality, which is result of genetic endowment and the environment in which they grow and develop. However, research has shown that the image of a product or service can be measured independently, and it is not necessarily related to the target consumers.

Aaker and Aeker (1997) considered brand personality to be like a set of human characteristics, which are associated with a brand. For example, if Absolut Vodka is described as a cool, hip, contemporary 25-year old man, the personality traits associated with this brand, in a similar manner to those associated with an individual; tend to be relatively enduring and distinct. Amongst the plethora of brand research, little has been performed on the Chinese market, and far less has been performed with a focus on the perceptions of consumers regarding their preference, attitude, loyalty and buying intent. Aaker and Aeker (1997) believed that brand personality, which might influence consumer attitudes, could be used as a heuristic

cue. Based upon this, they developed the brand personality framework and scale, which can be used to examine the perceptions of brand personality across cultures, although it may be limited in different cultural contexts.

The 42-item Brand Personality Scale (BPS) was constructed to measure the brand personality of any brand using five distinct key dimensions. The use of the key dimensions enables examination of the brand personality in relation to consumer perception. The brand personality dimensions and framework created by Aaker and Aaker (1997) have been implemented in the assessment of many product categories, including shoes, clothing, cars, fragrances, soft drinks and credit cards in many different countries. However theoretical application has only been performed by Balakrishnan *et al.* (2008) with respect to the car market in Malaysia. The results of the study indicate that when consumers perceive a brand to have a descriptive personality it influences preference, i.e. consumers become "attached" to a brand with respect to the personality on an intangible level, whereby their feelings influence brand preference and loyalty. Balakrishnan *et al.* (2008) suggested further investigations on different brands and product levels to further validate this interpretation and the degree of understanding. The presented study is significant in that it contributes to the assessment of the effectiveness of Aaker's dimensions in a Malaysian context and furthermore in a new market setting.

METHODOLOGY

In order to perform brand personality testing a well-recognised and prominent brand was required; STARBUCKS, a major foreign specialty coffee brand in Malaysia was consequently chosen. For the purposes of this study all respondents were expected to know this brand and one filter question was implemented to eliminate non-respondents: "Do you know the brand STARBUCKS?".

The population of the study considers non-student samples in Malaysia with respect to gender and age, including working respondents from both the government and private sectors. Female respondents constituted fifty percent of the sample and were aged between 20 and 50. The sample (n) comprised of two hundred and eighty representative Malaysian respondents who were working adults with purchasing power. Using an intercept survey method, respondents were approached and

delivered a questionnaire by hand and asked to complete the survey, with the assistance of the researcher, if required. Surveys were conducted throughout Malaysia including in Penang, Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur, Kuantan, Johor Bharu, Kota Kinabalu and Kuching. Seventy questionnaires were distributed at each location in order to ensure equal ratio sampling. Of the 280 questionnaires completed 261 (87%) could be used for the purposes of evaluation.

Responses to all questions were performed using a five-point Likert scale (1=extremely descriptive, 5=completely non-descriptive), for which respondents were asked to rate the extent to which 42 personality traits described the brand STARBUCKS.

RESULT ANALYSIS

The brand personality dimensions for STARBUCKS perceived by the respondents were identified based on Aaker's brand personality scale. A four-factor solution for the brand was determined with respect to principal component analysis, varimax rotation and the following criteria:

1. All four factors had Eigen values greater than one.
2. The four factors were the most meaningful, richest and most interpretable.
3. Every four-factor solution exhibited a level of variance in brand personality of 68.83%.
4. The Cronbach's Alpha values were high (Table 1).

From Table 1 Factor 1, F1, exhibits high coefficients for V31 (SB_Confident), V32 (SB_Upper class), V20 (SB_Up-to-Date), V26 (SB_Intelligent), V29 (SB_Successful), V30 (SB_Leader) and V35 (SB_charming), and was consequently labeled as the Confident and Successful factor. Factor 2, F2, is highly related to the variables V33(SB_glamorous), V8 (SB_original), V18 (SB_imaginative), V9 (SB_cheerful) and V15 (SB_spirited), and was labeled as the Glamorous and Spirited factor. Factor 3, F3, is highly related to the variables V13 (SB_trendy), V19 (SB_unique), V11 (SB_friendly), V16 (SB_Cool), and thus this factor was labeled as Cool and Trendy. The last factor labeled, as one of the original dimensions of brand personality, is Rugged and has a high coefficient for V42 (SB_rugged) and V39 (SB_Masculine).

The results indicate that Malaysian consumers perceive four major brand personalities for STARBUCKS: Confident and Successful, Glamorous and Spirited, Cool and Trendy, and Ruggedness. Consequently, it would appear that Malaysians perceive the personality of the STARBUCKS foreign specialty coffee brand as distinct and distinguishable with respect to the identified traits.

Table 1: Factors affecting the STARBUCK personality inventory.

Brand (% variance)	Factors	Variables included in the factor loading	Cronbach's Alpha
STARBUCKS (68.83%)	F1: Confident and Successful	V31 SB_confident	.909
		V32 SB_upperclass	.808
		V20 SB_up to date	.740
		V26 SB_intelligent	.717
		V29 SB_successful	.675
		V30 SB_leader	.636
		V35 SB_ charming	.612
	F2: Glamour and Spirited	V33 SB_glamorous	.853
		V08 SB_original	.814
		V18 SB_imaginative	.732
		V09 SB_cheerful	.592
		V15 SB_spirited	.575
	F3: Cool and Trendy	V13 SB_trendy	.806
		V19 SB_unique	.693
		V11 SB_friendly	.572
		V16 SB_cool	.552
	F4: Rugged	V42 SB_rugged	.842
		V39 SB_masculine	.695
	Friendly and Exciting	V55 CB_exciting	.876
		V81 CB_masculine	.644
V52 CB_friendly		.617	
			.897
			.847
			.725
			.604
			.722

Brand personality traits derived for STARBUCKS accompanied by the respective internal trait reliabilities.

CONCLUSIONS AND CONTRIBUTION

The consumer perception for any one brand will differ significantly, however from the results presented it may be concluded that the foreign specialty coffee outlet brand STARBUCKS is perceived by Malaysian consumer to be a brand that is: F1 Confident and Successful, F2 Glamorous and Spirited, F3 Cool and Trendy and F4 Rugged. In general it is fair to conclude that this is a favourable perception, but it is important that those marketing a brand such as STARBUCKS ensure that it is represented in a manner acceptable by the consumers and thereby matches their perceptions.

Globally and internationally, first impressions are crucial in establishing brand personality characteristics, hence since the first and second characteristics for STARBUCKS are Confident and Successful and Glamorous and Spirited future brand stratagems should consider these key characteristics in further developing the brand. Therefore a few important questions regarding future development should be considered; When businesses develop brand strategy; what brand personality do they wish to exude? Does the brand personality match the consumer's perception? If not, why not? Such questions provide interesting subjects for further investigation and should be considered in future investigations.

Finally, this research has successfully applied Aaker's brand personality framework for an active brand in the Malaysian market, thereby adding further gravitas for the investigation of other brands and products. Brand personality perception varies culturally therefore incorporation of cultural influences in brand personality is an effective strategy to add value to brands and their products, as well as improve brand perception. This study suggests that intangible attributes contribute to brand perception, consumer preference and loyalty, but further studies should be performed on influencing consumer behavior, particularly in the Malaysian market.

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