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Effects of Brand Love, Personality and Image on Word of Mouth; the Case of Local Fashion Brands among Young Consumers.

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Abstract

As the competition of local fashion industry gets fiercer, better strategies for local fashion companies are needed to achieve higher performance in the market. Due to the competitiveness of Indonesian fashion industry, local brands have to be able to be more competitive by establishing strong brand love of the customers as well as brand personality and brand image. The study aims to replicate the study conducted by Ismail and Spinelli (2012) in Indonesian context. Quantitative research was utilised in the study. Questionnaires were distributed to the respondents with knowledge of two local brands; Cotton Ink and Nikiccio.

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Keywords: brand love; brand personality; fashion; local brands,;Indonesia

1. Introduction

Brand are acknowledged to provide emotional benefits to customers (Pawle and Cooper, 2006 in Morgan-Thomas and Veloutsou, 2013). In particular, brands of fashion products are known to possess symbolic meanings compared to other product categories (Escalas & Bettman, 2005) due to their ability to convey the identity of the wearers (Campbell, 1986; Hebdige, 1987). Consumption behaviors represent the desire to possess certain brands as a means to achieve status and self-fulfilment (O'Cass and Siahtiri, 2013). In particular, fashion brands are known to be influenced customers' lifestyle (McColl & Moore, 2011). Besides that, consumers have become more fashion-conscious and are eager to keep themselves updated with the recent trends (D'Aveni, 2010 in Casidy, 2012).

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2. Literature Review

2.1. Brand Love

Brand love is defined as an attitude that consumers held toward a particular brand which include their ability to think, feel, and behave with regards to the particular brand (Rubin, 1973). Brand love was found to influence other brand-related concepts such as brand loyalty and word-of-mouth. The ability of an individual to recognize and yearn of some brand is one of the variables of decision, so that consumer has a sense of willingness to purchase the same product or brand continuously over time. It has also been acknowledged that the relationship that leads to brand love is deep and enduring, thus rendering the brand love to be irreplaceable (Albert and Merunka, 2013).

Fournier (1998 in Albert, Merunka, and Valette-Florence, 2008) suggests how the customrs form and maintain strong relationships with brands. He notes that in total there are six major categories of relationships that customers can have with a brand, including brand love. Brand love is said to be more meaningful and long-lasting than a mere preference that the customers have toward the brand. Brand love can act as a motivator in forming and maintaining close relationships with the companies (Reimann, Castaño, Zaichkowsky and Bechara, 2012). Love is linked to positive emotions (Fehr and Russel, 1991 in Albert et al, 2008; including pleasure which could influence the duration of relationship that a customer can have with a brand (Albert et al, 2008).

Brand love can build consumer willingness to involve integration of a brand become consumer's identity (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Consumers who love a brand will become invested in the brand, similar to how they would be with the loved ones (McEwen, 2004). When a consumer loves a brand, the brand will shape a consumer's identity to be similar to what the brand is perceived as. Brands that are lovable are likely to have stronger brand loyalty and competitive advantage (Yang, 2010). Brand love was also proven to increase re-patronage intentions (Vlachos and Vrechopoulos, 2012).

2.2. Brand Personality

Brand performance is closely linked to brand personality, a concept which allows a brand to form a relationship with the consumer (Hankinson, 2004). Brand personality has been intensively studied in marketing domain, especially in the recent years (Lin, 2010) Brand personality is a result of human characteristics endowment to a brand (Aaaker, 1997). This brand personality can lead the customers to have relationship with a brand similar to a person (Aaker, Fornier and Brakel, 2004). Sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness are the five generic dimensions of brand personality scale (Aaker, 1997).

The perception that a consumer has towards the personality of the brand can be shaped through both direct and indirect experience dealing with the brand. (Aaker, 2010 in Seimiene and Kamarauskaite, 2014) This perception can influence how consumers evaluate and consume the brand (Swaminathan, Page and Gurhan-Canli, 2007). Brand personalities can create memorable and favourable associations which lead to higher brand equity (Keller, 1993). These suggest the importance of brand personality in relation to how the customers choose a brand and make purchasing decision (Biel, 1993).

Besides that, brand personality is crucial in forming the relationship between company and the customers (Fennis and Pruyn, 2007). Brand personality can be built through various marketing communication strategies (Ang and Lim, 2006; Batm and Homer, 2004; Orth and Malkewitz, 2008 in Park and John, 2012). It can help the customers to express self-concept and their symbolic benefits (Ouwersloot and Tudorica, 2001 in Bouhlel, Mzoughi, Hadiji and Slimane, 2011).

It is believed that in many instances, consumers who possess particular personality traits will exhibit consistent behaviors associated with those traits in almost every circumstances (Randhawa, Calantone and Voorhees, 2015). Consumer personality and brand personality should be tighlty intertwinned as the latter will act as a means for the customers to express themselves via purchase and consumption (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982 in Orth, Limon and Rose, 2010).

Many scholars suggested that excitement and sincerity are considered as two major dimensions that capture the variance in personality rating for brands (Aaker, et al, 2004). For that matter, only excitement dimension is utilized in this study.

2.3. Brand Image

There are many ways to conceptualize brand image in marketing literature (Broadbent, Bridson, Ferkins, and Rentschler, 2010) Brand image is an essential of the brand that can enable customers to differentiate brand from their competitors (Aaker, 1996). According to Koubaa (2008). brand image consists of brand associations, which are derived from the consumers' perception and memory There are many factors that can influence to the development of brand image including the product attributes, the company, the marketing mix, the individual perceptions of the brand, personal values, experience, type of brand users and context variables (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990). Basically, brand image is all about the thought and feeling of consumer toward the brand (Roy & Banerjee, 2007).

According to Faircloth (2005) consumer may comparing the uniqueness of brand if the consumer is already have a mental image of the brand it self. Consumer could easily associate with the brand because brand image acts as a personal symbol, which consists of all the descriptive and evaluative information of brand (Iversen & Hem, 2008). Brand image is an important factor in studying buyer's behavior because when consumer has got their favorite brand, the brand message is have a stronger influence to consumer to compare to its competitor (Hsieh & Li, 2008)

2.4. Word-of-Mouth

Word of mouth is defined as the process that allows consumer to share information and opinions about the product, brand or service (Hawkins, Best, & Coney, 2004). The primary idea of word-of-mouth is that information about the product, service, stores that companies can spread from one consumer to another (Ismail & Spinelli, 2012). Furthermore as defined by (Walker, 2001) WOM is an informal communication regarding a product, brand and services that is not commercial in nature. It is possible for consumers to promote the brand that they feel compatible with. Those kinds of customers may promote products and brand by giving away the product, doing some kind of voluntary activities related to the brand as well as spreading positive word of mouth (Arnett, German & Hunt, 2003).

The extant literature on WOM has recognized WOM as a key influencer in consumer decision-making (Nguyen and Romaniuk, 2014). In addition to that, it has been demonstrated how word-of-mouth can have stronger impact to individuals compared to advertising Hartnett and Romaniuk, 2008 in Nguyen and Romaniuk, 2014). Word-of-mouth is usually spreaded because the message senders wish to share their positive and negative experiences to help facilitating others' decision making processes or to decrease his or her own doubts regarding their own behaviors (de Valck, van Bruggen, and Wierenga, 2009).

Consumer keeps on repeated purchasing certain brand for specific reasons. In their research, Carrol and Ahuvia (2006) proposed the antecedents and consequences of brand love. Their research suggests that brand love is asssociated with hedonic products. Furthermore, when a brand is considered to be able to allow the customers to express themselves, the brand will have higher brand loyalty as well as more positive word-of-mouth. Another study also suggests that passion that customers have toward a brand will lead to willful brand choice, satisfaction and will eventually lead to positive word-of-mouth (Swimberghe, Astakhova and Woolridge, 2014).

This is also supported by Sarkar (2014) who argued that loved brands mostly belong to high hedonic and less utilitarian product categories. Talking about brands that someone loves plays an important part in that individual's construction of identity, thus spreading positive word of mouth can be associated with brand love (Batra, Ahuvia and Bagozzi, 2012).

Therefore, it can be hypothesized that:
H1: Excitement dimension of brand personality will have positive impact on brand love
H2: Excitement dimension of brand personality will have positive impact on brand image
H3: Brand love will have positive impact on word-of-mouth
H4: Brand image will have positive impact on word-of-mouth
H5: Brand Image will have positive impact on brand love
H6: Excitement dimension of brand personality will have positive impact on word-of-mouth

3. Research Methodology

In the beginning of the study, an exploratory research in the form of survey was conducted to narrow down the local fashion brands to be used in the study.The result of the exploratory research shows that the two most popular local brands are COTTON INK and Nikicio.

In order to obtain the data for the main analysis of this research, the author utilised survey method in the form of close-ended questionnaires. The questionnaires were then distributed to young generation who are aware about the existence of these two brands.. Young consumers were chosen as the respondents of this study as they have a very unique attitide towards brands. In addition, young consumers utilise brands as an extension of themselves unlike other generations and this has implication for how they should be marketed to (Nowak, Thach, & Olsen, 2006).

The items used in the questionnaire were adopted from previous studies. There are two sections for the questionnaire including general demographic questions and other questions related to the variables in the study. A pre-test was conducted to assess the reliability and validity of the questionnaire. Questions were rephrased accordingly before the actual questionnaires were being distributed.

In total, there were 150 respondents, consisting of 85% females and 15% males. Majority of the respondents were undergraduate students. The data was further analysed using regression analyses by SPSS software.

4.Findings and Discussions

4.1. Regression Analysis

The first multiple regression analysis was performed to test whether there is a relation between the variables of Brand Image and Excitement toward the variable of Brand Love. The value of R-square was shown to be the value of 0.241 which suggests that 24.1% of the variation in Brand Love can be explained by the variation in Brand Image and Excitement. Hence, H1, H2 and H5 are supported.

The second multiple regression was conducted with the brand love, excitement and brand image as independent variables and word-of-mouth as the dependent variable. The regression analysis yielded adjusted R-Square value of 0.263 with significant level of 0.00; indicating a significant positive relationship. Hence, H3, H4 and H6 are supported.

4.2. Discussion

The findings of this research show that excitement (one dimension of brand personality) has direct relationship toward an online fashion brand image. This statement is in line with Levy's (1959) findings which suggest that what the customer purchase is usually aligned with his or her social identity since it has personal meaning. Belk (1988) and Sirgy (1982) also stated that brands are generally signals which indicate the congruence between the brand and the user's own self-image, thus influencing their choice as a customer. The finding is aligned with the past studies indicating that an individual would evaluate the degree to which the brand image matches with his/her self-image, thus leading to self-brand integration.

The findings of this research show that brand image has direct relationship toward a customer's word of mouth. This statement is in line with Hsieh & Li (2008) findings that brand image is an important buyer's behavior because when consumer has got their favorite brand, the brand message is have a stronger influence to consumer to compare to its competitor and lead consumer to generate WOM (De Angelis et al., 2012). Moreover, the finding is also aligned with the finding of Unal and Aydin (2013), which suggests that brand image positively influences brand love.

With regards to brand love, it is evident from the findings that brand love can induce positive word-of-mouth. This finding provides support to the finding of Albert and Merunka (2013) who found that brand love leads to positive word-of-mouth from the customers.

The implications of these findings are twofold. First, managers should be able to create a product that trigger customer's excitement by creating a good or unique fashion items that shown by its design or other tangible aspects. Companies should be able to create a products and activities that represent the image of the brand in order to trigger

consumers to spread the word of mouth. By being able to make customers love the brand, it would be easier to encourage them to spread positive word-of-mouth.

Brand personality should be able to create attachement and enhance the positive feelings that the customers have towards the brand (Orth, Limon and Rose, 2010). Therefore, it should be noted by the local brand retailers that the personality that they wish to convey with the brands have to also be aligned with the personality of the customers.

It is also advisable that the local brand companies conduct marketing activities or customer loyalty programs that are suitable for the perceived personality of the brand may enhance the consumer–brand relationship and thus increases the positive word-of-mouth of the brands. Specific brand personality would attract the customers if it is designed to fit the customer's preferences (Lin, 2010).

It is acknowledged that there is still room for improvement for this research. Future research can incorporate the personality traits of gen Y consumers as it has been observed how gen Y tends to be more fashion conscious (Casidy, 2012). Comparison can also be done between generations (such as generation X and Y) to enrich the research findings. As customer personality can also influence their perception of brand personality (Dikcius, Seimene and Zaliene. 2010 in Seimiene and Kamarauskaite, 2014), it is possible to compare different customer personalities and how those may impact their perception of the brand personality.

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