The Relationship of Brand Marketing Communication and Brand Authenticity

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Abstract - **This study aims to determine the relationship between brand marketing communication towards brand authenticity among the users of a local brand company. Brand marketing communication is related to enhancing the brand itself by shaping the brand authenticity perceptions directly and clarifying its positioning. The survey was conducted among the local coffee brand consumers at a local coffee shop conducting its business in a shopping mall. A sample size of 385 respondents were selected from different ages, races, backgrounds, and statuses in this study by convenience sampling. Four distinct forms of elements in the brand marketing communication were thus reviewed, namely: advertising, social media, sponsorship, and corporate social responsibility. In this research, all the elements showed their respective relationship with brand authenticity, whereby the difference was the extent of the relationships' strength in the results. The results shown were gathered via the latest SPSS software. Further discussions on the results were shared in this paper.**

Keywords - *Advertising, Social Media, Sponsorship, Corporate Social Responsibility, Brand Authenticity*

I. Introduction

Brand authenticity has emerged as a strategic imperative and is widely known for making significant achievements for a company. It is an examination of customer perception towards marketing for a fast-moving process of customer goods. There is an increasing concern on how far companies are willing to commit when their product moves to another level in which it attains the authenticity of the brand. Products in the market are changing rapidly and the future is less specific. Therefore, this is when communications and media become the most influential tools of technology (Hoberg, Phillips, & Prabhala, 2014). Brand authenticity is prompted by brand marketing communication to promote the authenticity of products or services in order to achieve the company's mission by using advertising, social media, sponsorship, and corporate social responsibility (CSR). Social media is a form of brand marketing communication used to identify the effectiveness of brand authenticity, which constitute the most substantial online communication channel to spread the information. According to Parveen, Jaafar, and Ainin (2015), a business can be marketed using social media sites and bulk email service. Besides, Cabiddu, De Carla, and Picolli (2014) have reviewed that social media play important roles in company engagement with their customers. Meanwhile, Sadek and Tantawi (2017) have confirmed the

statement as they justify advertising's significant and direct effect on structuring the overall brand to attract people's attention.

Moreover, sponsorship is part of the marketing process to build a brand, which involves investments to gain specific benefits, such as building awareness and media exposure to the public and delivering a high return on investment. Improving the usage of brand sponsorship is vital in advancing the positive image of sponsoring bodies (Ghani et al., 2019). According to Meenaghan (2013), the investments made will generate goodwill and affect sponsors, which can, in turn, influence the attitude and behaviour of a fan towards the sponsor brand. For example, Adidas and Nike sports attire have sponsored certain Football Clubs worldwide to generate interest among their potential consumers. Besides, CSR policies or strategies have been applied and used by today's companies and organisations in solving their branding issues and improving their CSR performance through brand management (Chomvilailuk & Butcher, 2010). However, Kadirov, Varey, and Wooliscroft (2014) argued that authenticity is becoming a serious problem related to marketers and marketing. The literature on its contribution is still limited even though the topic is gaining interest and potentially powerful in the field of marketing. Therefore, this study is conducted to study the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable. The independent variables are the forms of brand marketing communications, while the dependent variable is perceived brand authenticity.

II. Literature Review

2.1 Advertising

According to O'guinn, Allen, Semenik, and Scheinbaum (2014), communication is a fundamental aspect of human existence and advertising is one of the aspects wherein people will quickly receive information. It can also be considered as an investment in promoting a brand, which involves building its "personality" or "identity" (Olins, 2017). Using the advertising method, it can strengthen the influence of trust and excitement towards people as it implements two things, namely perceived brand marketing communication and strength of the perceived brand authenticity.

The authenticity of the brand itself will make people feel confident about the advertising created and improve their awareness of the details and information disseminated by the companies (Miller, 2015). Here, a brand is seen as authentic when they deliver different side experiences precisely as promised (Eggers, 2013). Meanwhile, consumers have a narrow range of criteria in assessing a brand and its advertising method as they may doubt its intentions (Patel, Gadhavi, & Shukla, 2017). Furthermore, Hulme (2010) in previous research has reported that 58% of the respondents feel the companies are only interested in selling products and services to the customers and not necessarily the product or service that is right for them. However, Sadek, Heba, Tantawi, and Passent (2017) argued that advertising is one of the ways that can be an active direct effort for a company and obtain a positive impact from it. Therefore, there will be no issue or failure from using the brand if they want to attract people's attention as the results will be mostly positive and less negative when advertising their vetted information. It is recommended to justify the demands of the customers and have a clear vision of the customers targeted as a closer relationship implies a better future for the company. Besides, a brand tied with an advertisement can create an incredible story that grows in the consumers' minds (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017).

2.2 Social Media

Another form of brand marketing communication used in shaping the perceptions of brand authenticity is social media. Through innovations and rapid technological changes, social media has now become an essential communications base (Arifin, Basir, Roslan, & Azhari, 2018). Social media work for multiple people to interact concurrently and share information (Bingham & Conner, 2015). There are many perspectives to define social media, but Blackshaw (2006) has primarily described it as online-based application referring to the activities of posting, tagging, digging, or blogging from the consumers in order to convey consumer-generated content. Social media plays a key role in the survival of small businesses, while the use of social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, and more has enabled them to compete with larger businesses (Hibbler-Britt & Sussan, 2015). It is about how consumers use their technical senses, allowing them to post anything on the Internet. This context can be related to this research as it is the way post-modern consumers create self-authenticity of a brand and reconnect with the time, culture, and place itself. Also, Cabiddu, De Carla, and Picolli (2014) have stated that social media play important roles for company engagement with their customers; they trust the tool more than the traditional marketing strategies to engage with customers (Kumar, Bezawada, Rishika, Janakiraman, & Kannan, 2016). In contrast, Gretzel (2015) has pointed out that social media are the second wave of Web 2.0 via their technological development, which may agitate a local business.

Many companies include social media in their marketing strategies (Ananda, Hernandez-Garcia, & Lamberti, 2016). Therefore, it is proven that social media can increase awareness of authentic brands themselves via various online platforms, as well as lead to user-generated content. Moreover, the impact of social media in the context of identity based-brand management of a company indicates positive and progressive growth of hard revenue for businesses (Buhalis & Mamalakis, 2015). This point of view can be correlated with Hassan, Nadzim, and Shiratuddin (2015) explanation, even though social media are low-cost in nature, the method is a highly effective approach compared to traditional marketing and allows business pioneers to focus their assets on the activities for drawing in clients and expanding benefits. However, Herman (2015) has argued that business pioneers have been unsuccessful in implementing social media marketing (SMM) strategies promoting the longevity of their businesses.

Social media interaction may demonstrate difficulties for a company to control the message in keeping up with the brand identity. This can be clearly demonstrated in terms of brand authenticity, which is fundamental to brand image formation and yet uncontrollable due to the power in the hands of the public through direct or indirect experiences with social media. Furthermore, an overload of information and missing data points contribute to end-user confusion and rumours (Netten & van Someren, 2011). Therefore, the judgments of authenticity occur via the local brand company and the brand itself in which both interact on a regular basis, thereby telling a lot about the role of social media in brand communication and brand authenticity in the branding process (Anna, 2015).

2.3 Sponsorship

Sponsorship plays a significant role in managing high competition in business. Many competitors have looked at several strategic and practices for the business. However, the concept of sponsorship is less practiced as it incurs a high cost to the business. It is implied that all parties involved will benefit from the relationship with minimum risk. Besides, Keller (2003) has stated that the growth in sponsorship activities can reflect the brand. Herrmann (2011) belief that sponsorships will help non-famous brands to become well-known and be mentioned by people, which further aid them to build up their name due to event sponsorships. On the other hand, Fahy, Farrelly, and Quester (2004) have argued that the creation of a competitive advantage within the sponsorship market may be a necessary step for the success of a sponsor. Cornwell (2014) has mentioned that most of the results show the manner in which the high-up people perceive sponsorship, whereby there is a positive impact on brand authenticity. Becker Olsen and Hill (2006) have also noted a positive impact on sponsoring brands and deriving them to authenticity. Similarly, Visa Inc. is an American multinational financial services corporation that has seen an increasing percentage of brand perception as the overall best payment card following its Olympic sponsorship (Payne, 2005). The contentment seen with brand-sponsored activities will positively impact the brand when the customers realise it has a connection with the event they join, only by sponsoring the event. Donlan (2014) has also found that sponsorship can lead to increased levels of brand authenticity. Furthermore, past research has described that the sponsor itself believes that the investment made will generate goodwill and affect the sponsored fans. In turn, this will influence their attitude and behaviour towards the sponsor's brand authenticity (Tony Meenaghan, 2013). Besides, consumer familiarity with a brand name will significantly influence their ability to identify event sponsors correctly and consumers tend to show bias towards these brand names. It shows that consumers are attracted if the brand has sponsored an event that is connected to them and they are aware of the sponsored product.

2.4 Corporate Social Responsibility

Consumers are now increasingly aware of the importance of a company's CSR practices (Thomas & Tahir, 2019). Additionally, Bigné (2012) mentioned that consumers would react with the initiative to some CSR programmes according to their level of knowledge and congruence fit between consumer profile and company products in brand authenticity. Moreover, sending a message to the customers regarding brand authenticity can highlight the information and improve the message design based on CSR, social topic information, and specificity (Perez, 2019). Recently, many organisations follow the CSR framework that reduces pollution and wastage and minimises the use of natural resources (Anderson, 2017). Therefore, it is a right way for business firms to create authenticity towards their brands and further enhance their position in the global market. Accordingly, brand authenticity is a key business that is perhaps one highly concerned with the link between companies and environments in which they are embedded.

Besides, the way customers communicate with the brands today is different. Companies that engage and connect with the consumers as the powerful entity today need to ensure that their identity and the behaviours they engage yield good with the right kind of impacts. Despite the importance of CSR, many organisations still have minimal understanding of how the programmes will take place and the resulting effectiveness (Beckman, Colwell, & Cunningham, 2009). Meanwhile, the millennial generation is choosier and displays characteristics such as altruism and a predisposition to support the social and environmental causes that they care about.

III. Research Hypothesis

H1 There is a significant relationship between advertising and brand authenticity.
H2 There is a significant relationship between social media and brand authenticity.
H3 There is a significant relationship between sponsorship and brand authenticity.
H4 There is a significant relationship between corporate social responsibility (CSR) and
brand authenticity.

IV. Research Methodology

The study primarily used correlation to facilitate variable testing in describing the relationship between perceived brand marketing communication and brand authenticity. The respondents were required to answer all items in the instrument by using a five-point Likert scale during the data collection process. The survey instrument was believed to be speedy and reachable for the researcher in order to obtain data. The dimensions used with each of the constructs were primarily attained from previous research works. The sample size of this study was drawn using the average number of individuals visiting the local shopping mall daily, which was confirmed by the mall management. Convenience sampling was used, whereby 385 questionnaires were distributed among the target respondents and duration of collecting the data is one day. The response rate for this study was found to be 100% (n=385). The data obtained were processed in the system using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.0.

V.   Result and Findings

Table1 - Respondents' Profile

		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	181	47.0
	Female	204	53.0
Age	> 19 years	40	10.4
	20-29 years old	203	52.7
	30-39 years old	92	23.9
	40-49 years old	44	11.4
	<50 years old	6	1.6
Race of Respondent	Malay	167	43.4
	Chinese	111	28.8
	India	72	18.7
	Other	35	9.1
Frequency of visit (the local brand) at the mall	Less than once a month	165	42.9
	Once a month	92	23.9
	Once every two weeks	90	23.4
	Two or three times a week	35	9.1
	Every day	3	0.8

Table 1 shows the data from 385 respondents. Female represented 53.0% and male 47.0%. Most of them aged between 20-29 years old with 52.7% of respondents and only 14 (23%) respondents and minority above 50 years old only 1.6%. The study revealed that the majority of respondents are Malay with 43.4% followed by Chinese 28.8%. Remaining is India 18.7% and others 9.1%. The study shows that the majority of respondents visiting the brand less than once a month with 42.9% (n=165), followed by once a month with 23.9% (n=92), once every two weeks with 23.4% (n=90), two or three times a week with 9.1% (n=35) and the last one is every day, which only 0.8% (n=3).

Table 2 - Reliability Analysis

Variables	Cronbach's α	Number Item (n=5)
Advertising	.700	5
Social Media	.804	5
Sponsorship	.644	5
Corporate Social Responsibility	.621	5
Brand Authenticity	0.812	5

Based on the data that has been computed by using SPSS, the Cronbach's Alpha of the variables shows the reliability range between 0.60 – 0.89 which is the value is either "questionable" or "acceptable" or "good". Reliability can be referred as the degree of scale that generates reliable result if repetitive measurement made by computing the Cronbach's alpha score. The Cronbach's alphas for the variables are in the range of 0.700 to 0.812 which implies that the items measured were good and acceptable except for the other two results from independent variables are sponsorship and corporate social responsibility (CSR), in which the Cronbach's Alpha value for both of it is 0.644 and 0.621, so the internal consistency is questionable.

Table 3 - Correlation Analysis

Correlations		Brand Authenticity
Advertising	Pearson Correlation	.462**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	385
Social Media	Pearson Correlation	0.995**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	385
Sponsorship	Pearson Correlation	.436**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	385
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)	Pearson Correlation	.444**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	385

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Pearson's correlation was performed to assess the association between these four distinct forms. The finding indicated a moderately significant correlated relationship r = 0.462 or substantial relationship between advertising and brand authenticity. Nevertheless, social media showed a very high correlation r = 0.995 or highly dependable relationship with brand authenticity. The outcome aligns with Harrigan, Evers, Miles, and Daly (2017) opinion in which social media play a major role in convincing the consumers to trust a brand based on what they see. Next, sponsorship disclosed a moderate relationship (r=0.436) with CSR (r=0.444). This result is in line with Afzali and Ahmed (2016), whereby it has been found that charitable activities are not visibly acknowledged by the respondents.

Summary of Hypothesis Testing:

Hypothesis		Result
H1	Advertising -Brand Authenticity	Supported
H2	Social Media -Brand Authenticity	Supported
H3	Sponsorship -Brand Authenticity	Supported
H4	Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) – Brand Authenticity	Supported

VI. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study assessed the relationship between perceived brand marketing communication and brand authenticity, whereby the results indicated that social media yielded the highest correlation. Overall, the result signified a significant relationship between brand marketing communications and brand authenticity. The author concurred the suggestions of Smilansky (2017) in which people's perception of brand authenticity could be strengthened if the companies were more creative and realistic in generating ideas when publishing any advertisement. Future studies can investigate other brand categories for the robustness of the relationship between these two variables.

Meanwhile, research related to brand authenticity should be further conducted in a different industry to ensure the data and trends obtained can generate a comparison, thus adding the value of this academic study to the industrial practices. Besides, research related to age differences among respondents needs to be undertaken to comprehend the potential cause possibly linked to this parameter. Other than that, the indicated techniques can be varied, such as interview sessions for a detailed description and feedback rather than solely relying on the questionnaire method. This analysis can thus be used for future research to obtain different ways of strengthening people's perception of brand authenticity by adopting the elements of brand marketing communications.

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