



The supremacy of brand experience dimensions on brand equity among millennial generation smartphone users in Malaysia

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 21 March 2016

Received in revised form

17 May 2016

Accepted 18 May 2016

Keywords:

Brand experience dimensions

Brand equity

Millennial generation

ABSTRACT

This study intends to highlight the effect of brand experience dimensions on brand equity of smartphone users in Malaysia. Specifically, 85% of the population in Malaysian owns a smartphones. The Millennial generation in Malaysia consists of over 40% of the population, making them potential smartphone users. The theoretical importance of this study comes into view through discussing and conceptualizing the dimensions of brand experience, and the concept of brand equity. The practical importance of this study comes into view through identifying which brand experience dimension appeals to the millennial smartphone users. As a result marketers can gain competitive advantage through identifying and understanding how to meet customers' expectations by providing the millennial buyers with smartphone brands that fulfill their needs and satisfies their experience. Consequently, these experiences result in high brand equity among consumers who continue to purchase or upgrade their smartphone of a particular brand.

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1. Introduction

Brand experience has attracted a lot of attention in marketing practice. Marketing practitioners have come to realize that understanding how consumers experience brands is critical for developing relevant marketing strategies for goods and services (Davis, 2009). In marketing, appropriate and relevant branding can result in higher sales of not only one product, but also on other products associated with that brand. A brand refers to the personality of a company that identifies a product, service or company through name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or combination of them and how it relates to customers (Aaker, 1991; Keller and Lehmann, 2006). In marketing, proper branding can result in higher sales of not only one product, but on other products associated with that brand. Hence, a brand is the person personality that identifies a product, service or company (name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or combination of them) and how it relates to customers. Hence, under the experiential notion in marketing the psychological aspect are distinguished so for example; brand associations like thoughts, feelings, perceptions, images, experiences, beliefs, attitudes, and so on that become linked to the brand from the experiential aspect. The experiential aspect consists of the sum of all points of contact with the brand and is known as the brand experience. Hence,

brand experience is a brand's action perceived by a person (Ha and Perks, 2005).

Since, global marketplace today is all about how consumers feel, relate and act. Therefore, the human interaction is becoming a necessary component in providing the necessary encounters for generating memorable experiences (Atwal and Williams, 2009). As a result, competition is high among marketers, in which principles and actions of traditional marketing are no longer effective and appealing among consumers. Marketers wanted to find new opportunities to attract customers, and that is when the notion of experiential marketing came into view. However, Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) were the first pioneers in introducing the notion of experience in the field of consumption and marketing. Twenty years later, this notion of experience has gained solid recognition and is considered essential for what it can contribute to marketing knowledge. Therefore, the notion of experience is considered to be a pillar of the so called experience economy and experiential marketing (Grundey, 2008).

According to Brakus et al. (2009) most of the research on experiences to date has focused on utilitarian (usefulness) product attributes and category experiences, not on experiences provided by brands. When consumers search for, shop for, and consumer brands, they are exposed to utilitarian product attributes. However, consumers are also exposed to various specific brand-related stimuli, such as brand-identifying in the branding literature. The concept of brand identity and defined it as a

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unique set of brand associations that a firm can create or maintain. It may involve a value-proposition with functional, emotional or self-expressive benefits. It does not matter whether the associations are tangible emotional/symbolic or both (Alsem and Kosteljik, 2008). However, although past studies has shown the impact of brand experience, both directly and indirectly, on short-term consequences, such as satisfaction and loyalty, the question arises whether brand experiences affect customer lifetime value (Brakus et al., 2009). That is, can brand experiences build brand equity? Thus, reviewing and conceptualizing the dimensions of brand experience and linking how these dimensions can influence brand equity of smartphone users among the millennial generation is in great demand.

2. Literature review

2.1. Brand experience

According to Brakus et al. (2009) most of the research on experiences to date has focused on utilitarian (usefulness) product attributes and category experiences, not on experiences provided by brands. When consumers search or, shop for consumer brands they are exposed to utilitarian product attributes. However, consumers are also exposed to various specific brand-related stimuli, such as brand-identifying in the branding literature. In addition, Alsem and Kosteljik (2008) explained the concept of brand identity and defined it as a unique set of brand associations that a firm can create or maintain. It may involve a value-proposition with functional, emotional or self-expressive benefits. However, brand associations are either tangible or emotional/symbolic or both. For example, colors (Bellizzi and Hite, 1992; Gorn et al., 1997; Meyers-Levy et al., 1995), shape (Veryzer Jr and Hutchinson, 1998), typefaces, background design elements (Mandel and Johnson, 2002), slogans, mascots, and brand characters (Keller, 1987). The current study demonstrated that brand experience can be broken down into four dimensions (sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioral), which are differentially evoked by various brands. Hence, this study adopts Brakus et al. (2009) conceptualization of brand experience.

2.2. Dimensions of brand experience

This study intends to follow Brakus et al. (2009) brand experience scale which is generated from the four experience dimensions, which include: sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioral. Therefore, brand experience is conceptualized as the subjective, internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings, and cognitions) and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments.

2.2.1. Sensory (SENSE) brand experience dimension

Sense experiences enable customers to satisfy their need for sophistication Xu and Chan (2010). While Schmitt (1999) explained that SENSE marketing - appeals to the senses with the objective of creating sensory experiences, through sight sound, touch, taste and smell. SENSE marketing may be used to differentiate companies and products, to motivate customers and to add value to products for example (through aesthetics or excitement) (Schmitt, 1999). Therefore, Hultén (2011) claimed that firms opt to distinguish and express a good or service as a sensation, in order to be observed by customers. This is especially relevant, since the human senses continually notice every small change in the environment, either as a threat or an opportunity. In addition, firms can gain a competitive advantage to attract attention of consumers in the crowded marketplace by distinguishing a good or service in terms of sensation.

2.2.2. Affective (FEEL) brand experience, dimension of brand experience

Affective experiences (FEEL) are defined by Schmitt (1999) as marketing appeals to customers' inner feelings and emotions, with the objective of creating affective experiences that range from mildly positive moods linked to a brand to strong emotions of joy and pride. In addition, the feel experiences is referred to by Xu and Chan (2010) as the customers' perceptions of fun and pleasure. Consequently, best relationships with customers are affective or emotional in nature and when companies succeed in not only satisfying certain needs but also making the interactions pleasurable, as a result, people are more inclined to stay loyal, even when a mistake takes place (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). According to Kim (2003) emotional certainty indicates that the certainty associated with an emotion can affect information. It has also been confirmed in research that consumers look for and buy emotional experiences around what has been bought and no longer buy products and services alone (Ekström and Brembeck, 2004; Ratneshwar and Mick, 2005).

2.2.3. Behavioral (ACT) brand experience dimension of brand experience

Act experiences is defined by Xu and Chan (2010) as the reflection of consumer's personal ties with a brand and company, which helps consumer's develop individual actions and lifestyles. According to Schmitt (1999) ACT marketing enriches customers' lives by targeting their physical experiences, showing them alternative ways of doing things in business-to business and industrial markets, alternative lifestyles and interactions. In addition, Zarantonello and Schmitt (2010) argued

that behavioral dimension includes bodily experiences, lifestyles, and interactions with the brand. This dimension of brand experience explains the capacity to engage customer in physical activity, bodily experience, lifestyle and interactions with the brand.

2.2.4. Intellectual (THINK) brand experience dimension of brand experience

According to Schmitt (1999) THINK marketing appeals to the intellect with the objective of creating cognitive, problem-solving experiences that engage customers creatively. THINK appeals to target customers' convergent and divergent thinking through surprise, intrigue and provocation. THINK campaigns are common for new technology products. Think experiences is defined by Xu and Chan (2010) as satisfying the customers' desire to seek opportunities which will enable them to broaden their knowledge and learn new things. Hence, intellectual or thinking experiences are

considered as the customer's wish to seek opportunities which will permit their knowledge and acquire new things. As a result, intellectual experience of a specific brand will form from the perceived feeling, sense and the knowledge gathered from their past experience of that brand.

Table 1 shows the top 6 popular smartphones in Malaysia in terms of ranking, brand name (Chew, 2014). In addition, the distinctive features of top 6 Smartphones in Malaysia are described and tailored according to the brand experience concept which consists of four major dimensions. Firstly, the sensory dimension includes senses such as sight, sound, taste, and smell (Schmitt Bernd, 1999). Secondly, the effective dimension appeals to customer's feelings and emotions (Xu and Chan, 2010). Thirdly, the behavioral dimension reflects the consumer's actions and lifestyle (Schmitt Bernd, 1999). Fourthly, Intellectual dimension which explains the consumer's desire to gain knowledge and learn new things (Xu and Chan, 2010).

Table 1: Top 6 popular smartphone in Malaysia

Top 6 Popular Smartphones in Malaysia	Brand Name	Sensory (Sense)	Affective (Feel)	Behavioral (Act)	Intellectual (Think)
No.1	Samsung Galaxy Note 3	1) Screen is absolutely beautiful to see. 2) Large screen makes it bulky to carry	For those who like to use big gadgets	Long battery life that lasts 11 hours	Runs Google's Android operating system
No.2	Apple iPhone 5s	1) A slim aluminum design 2) small screen 3) comfortable to carry	For those who have strong admiration for the product (fans)	High quality camera	The iOS operating system Incredibly fast processor
No.3	Samsung's Galaxy S4	1) A vivid 5" HD screen 2) plastic polycarbonate shell design	For those who prefer to use a device that is very useful for a particular job (gadgets)	13-Megapixel camera	A software that places an emphasis on hand gestures
No.4	HTC One	1) Housed in a sleek aluminum unibodyfit offers a premium feel 2) a 4.7-inch display screen	For those who love music and technology (audiophile)	A decent camera	Intriguing user interface, and a fast processor
No.5	Sony Xperia Z1	1) Full HD 5-inch screen. 2) Waterproof chassis	For those who like strongly made and capable products that withstand rough handling (rugged)	High-end camera 20-megapixel camera resolution seems like gold on paper	Powerful engine
No.6	Nokia Lumia 1020	Features a decent screen.	For those who like to take Photos (photographer)	41-megapixel camera	Decent processor

2.3. Brand equity

According to Atilgan et al. (2005) one of the most popular and potentially important marketing concepts which have been extensively discussed by both academicians and practitioners over the past decade is brand equity. One of the reasons for its popularity is its strategic role and importance in gaining competitive advantage and in strategic management decisions. The competitive advantage

of firms that have brands with high equity includes the opportunity for successful extensions, resilience against competitors' promotional pressures, and creation of barriers to competitive entry Farquhar (1989) is which is considered a critical in developing marketing strategies for goods and services. Brand equity, when correctly and objectively measured, is the appropriate metric for evaluating the long-run impact of marketing decisions (Simon and Sullivan, 1993b). Positive customer-based brand equity, in

turn, can lead to greater revenue, lower costs, and higher profits; and it has direct implications for the firm's ability to command higher prices, customers' willingness to seek out new distribution channels, the effectiveness of marketing communications, and the success of brand extensions and licensing opportunity (Keller, 2003).

2.3.1. The Relationship between brand experience and brand equity

Paste studies have studied brand experience in relation to different variables such as satisfaction, and loyalty (Brakus et al., 2009). However, other researchers studied brand experience in relation to brand equity by including other variables to influence brand equity for example Berry (2000). Berry argued that customer experience with a company influenced brand equity through brand meaning which refers to the customer's dominant perceptions of the brand, and what immediately comes to the consumers mind if a certain brand is mentioned. Therefore, as customers experience the company's total products these experiences become influential because customer experience-based beliefs are powerful, because customers tend to rely on their own experiences more than relying on advertising (Berry, 2000). Furthermore Cobb-Walgren et al. (1995) studied brand equity in relation to brand preference and purchase intention, and found that brands with higher equity generated significantly greater preferences and purchase intentions.

Moreover, according to Krishnan (1996) consumers learn about products from a variety of sources. One reasonable position according to Aaker and Biel (1993) is that for various reasons, associations from sources are more important components of equity, since they lead to differences in associations' strength. One distinction in sources is between direct experience for example (trial, usage) and indirect experience with a brand (e.g., advertising, word of mouth). Compared with indirect experiences, associations based on direct brand experiences are likely to be more self-relevant Burnkrant and Unnava, (1995) and held with more certainty (Smith and Swinyard, 1983). Hence, a brand that has high proportion of associations based on direct experience should be in a relatively strong position and posse's high equity. Furthermore, Xu and Chan (2010) found that Hotel guests establish their brand knowledge through direct and indirect experiences. Hence, they conclude that a better understanding of how these experiences contribute to brand equity has important implications for brand managers. While Berry (2000) established a service-branding model that emphasized the important role of customers' service experiences in brand formation. In addition Berry (2000) discussed and explained four primary strategies that excellent service firms use to cultivate brand equity. Aaker and Biel (1993) considered creative advertising as a powerful tool for building strong brands; they also

stressed the urgency to advance marketer's commitment to the importance of brand equity.

Moreover, Burnkrant and Unnava (1995) found that increasing self-referencing (e.g. one's own personal experience) increases message elaboration and can increase message persuasion when message arguments are strong. According to (Ambler, 1997) brand equity is made up of memories of different kinds. Which are identified by Rose (1993) as procedural, or reflexive (responsive), memory that records how we do things? It includes programmed behavior patterns (habits) and is largely unconscious leading to the alarms, which proved unfounded, about the possibility of subliminal advertising declarative memory takes two forms: semantic, which records meanings and associations, and episodic, which records facts and events. Declarative memory can be cognitive (thinking-related) and affective (feeling-related). Awareness is cognitive, as is our knowledge of a brand's functional performance characteristics and price. Attitudes towards the brand are primarily affective, in another words the concept of evaluation in emotion links emotion to 'attitude' in that attitude measures reflect an evaluation"(O'Shaughnessy, 1992).

In addition, Smith and Swinyard (1983) studied the role of direct versus indirect experience on attitude-behavior consistency, their results show that when attitudes are based on direct experiences purchase behavior was predicted very well. Therefore, from the above literature obviously stated that brand experiences arise in a variety of settings, and these experiences can influence behavior which in turn can affect brand equity. However, recent studies suggest that customers are inclined to choose one brand over others for its experiential benefits, this indicates the possibility of a direct causal relationship between brand experience and its ability to generate consumer-based brand's equity (Ratneshwar and Mick, 2005; Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2010). Nonetheless, a limited attempt was made in the past to identify some of the possible consequences of brand experience such as satisfaction, loyalty and brand commitment (Brakus et al., 2009; Iglesias et al., 2011; Morrison and Crane, 2007; Zarantonello and Schmitt, 2010). Furthermore, past studies failed to incorporate the most important marketing construct such as brand equity as a potential outcome of brand experience in a single model. Therefore, this study will shed the light on the structural relationship between brand experience and brand equity. Consequently this study will provide a better understanding on how positive brand experience can affect brand equity.

2.3.2. The pivotal role of brand experience on the millennial generation

This age group grew up with the worldwide web, the latest technology, and numerous communication channels, ranging from cell phones to Facebook and Twitter, leaving Generation X and the more elderly far behind Williams and Page, (2010). However, the

Millennials have been targeted with extravagant advertising and commercials since a very young age; as a result, this generation is quite suspicious towards all marketing campaigns. Furthermore, Williams and Page (2010) suggest that many names has been given to Generation Y they are referred to as; millennial, Echo Boomers, Why Generation, Net Generation, Gen Wired, We Generation, Dot Net, Ne(x)t Generation, Nexters, First Global, iPod Generation, and iY Generation. The Millennials are born between 1982 and 2000, and are the children of the baby boomers (persons born between 1946 and 1964) (Lancaster and Stillman, 2010). This group includes several age cohorts: tweens ages 10 between 12, teens ages between 13 and 18, and young adults ages between 19 and 33, their purchasing power is \$733 billion (Kotler and Armstrong, 2012). According to Osman et al. (2012), mobile phone usage in Malaysia has increased greatly in recent years. Malaysia is a country that is riding the technological wave of telecommunication evolution: as a result, the usage of mobile phones in Malaysia has greatly increased. It has been reported that 85 percent of Malaysians own smartphones. However, the millennials are bold, bash, face booking, iPhone lovers, and Multi-taskers; Tweeting Blackberry in one hand, an ear to their iPhone and an eye on the latest download. The millennial generation, have a selective nature of valuing experience (Williams and Page, 2010). Therefore, by getting to know the millennials high-tech savvy consumer smartphone companies can learn how to meet the customers' expectations by providing positive brand experiences to the millennial smartphone buyers. Consumers will continue to purchase the same smartphone brand after they have had a positive brand experience with a certain smartphone. Positive brand experiences will enable mobile companies to successfully build strong brand experience among the millennial population which is estimated to account for 2 billion customers worldwide.

3. Conclusions and recommendations

The main importance of this paper comes into view through; first, to review the dimensions of brand experience and the concept of brand equity. Second, to shed the light on the millennial generation which make up over 40% of the population in Malaysia and 2 billion new customers worldwide. Third, to discuss the influential role of brand experience dimensions on the millennial smartphone users. The practical importance of this study comes into view through identifying which brand experience dimension (sensory, affective, behavioral, and intellectual), appeals to consumers of a particular brand. For example, the sensory dimension includes senses such as sight, sound, taste, and smell (Schmitt, 1999). Sensory features in a Smartphone are linked to the design, size of the screen, the feel of the device and whether it is sleek or bulky. The effective dimension appeals to

customer's feelings and emotions (Xu and Chan, 2010). Effective features of a Smartphone are linked to those who like big device, who love to listen to music, or like to take photos. Thirdly, the behavioral dimension reflects the consumer's actions and lifestyle (Schmitt, 1999). The behavioral features are linked to the quality of the camera, long battery life. The Intellectual dimension which explains the consumer's desire to gain knowledge and learn new things (Xu and Chan, 2010). Intellectual features are linked to the Smartphone's Software, Processor, and operating system that helps user search for information. Hence, this study will provide suggestions for future research to empirically measure the impact of brand experience dimensions on brand equity among smartphone users in Malaysia.

Acknowledgment

The author s acknowledges the Short Term Grant provided by Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, [Grant no: 304/PMGT/6313042] that has resulted in this article.

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