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ASSESSING THE EFFECTS OF PRODUCT VS COUNTRY IMAGE AND HEDONIC VS UTILITARIAN MESSAGING ON BRAND ATTITUDE

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KEYWORDS
Brand Image, Message Framing, Marketing Strategy, Sustainability Marketing.

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the most effective strategy to obtain the most favorable brand attitude when promoting a brand. It examines the effectiveness of a product or country image, as well as the hedonistic and utilitarian message towards the brand attitude of a product. This study also includes the moderating effect of brand sustainability to observe the effect of a good or bad sustainability image on the brand attitude of a product. This study uses an experimental approach using a fictitious Swiss chocolate brand with either a hedonistic or utilitarian-focused message, followed by a display of a country or product image, as well as a sustainability report using the Chocolate Scorecard as a template. The participants are then given a set of four bipolar items before and after the sustainability report to rate the brand attitude of the product. The results show a non-significant relationship between hedonistic and utilitarian messages towards brand attitude, while it shows a significant relationship between country and product image towards brand attitude. The results also show that a sustainable label shows a similar positive impact on brand attitude, while a non-sustainable label has a more adverse impact on product image compared to the country image.

INTRODUCTION

In previous studies, the strategy of advertising using a country image or product image can be effective in showing a favorable consumer response (Septianto et al., 2022). However, according to Holbrook and Hirschman, the hedonic-utilitarian perspective is also very important in classifying consumers' perceptions of a product (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Due to globalization, this topic has become very important in terms of marketing for companies (Nielsen, 2018). Not only that, but companies need to also take into account the sustainability of their brand as 81% of global consumers feel that companies should be more sustainable ("Global Consumers Seek Companies That Care about Environmental Issues," 2018). This leads the researchers to the topic of the research which is sustainable marketing. This research was also inspired by Septianto's 2022 research on "The interaction effect of country-of-origin positioning and cultural distance on international advertising effectiveness: a construal level perspective." (Amatulli et al., 2020)

In this research, the researchers have chosen chocolate as the brand topic. This is due

to the recent phenomenon of Toblerone which switched from country to product image and the fact that chocolate can be categorized as both hedonic or utilitarian products (Gross, 2023). It also happens that a survey on the sustainability of chocolate brands has gained popularity to be published even in Times Magazine in April 2023 (Baker, 2023). Hence, all these factors combined make chocolate a great research topic for this research.

Through his previous research, the researchers strive to answer four important questions. Firstly, does country image/product image positively affect brand attitude? Secondly, does hedonistic framing / utilitarian framing purpose positively affect brand attitude? The third question to answer will be, does brand sustainability affect the influence of country (vs product) image on brand attitude? Last, but not least, does brand sustainability affect the influence of hedonistic (vs utilitarian) framing on brand attitude? (Kim et al., 2017).

The questions mentioned beforehand led to the design of this research. The researchers will research the underlying theories behind the important variables from previous research, create the framework, and explain the hypotheses of the research. Then the researchers will explain the methodology of the research and finally conduct the experimental research, then comes the analysis of the data. Afterward, the researchers will summarize the meaning behind the data in the discussion section and thus conclude this research with how future researchers can further build upon the research.

METHOD RESEARCH

The research method for this research is using self-administered questionnaires where the researchers will use Populix as a method to gather participants to answer the questionnaires. Here they will do the questionnaire with no interference from the researchers and will only focus on the prompt given in the questionnaire. This research uses experimental design, in experimental design, the researcher actively manipulates the independent variables and subsequently observes the resulting impact on a dependent variable (Watson, 2015).

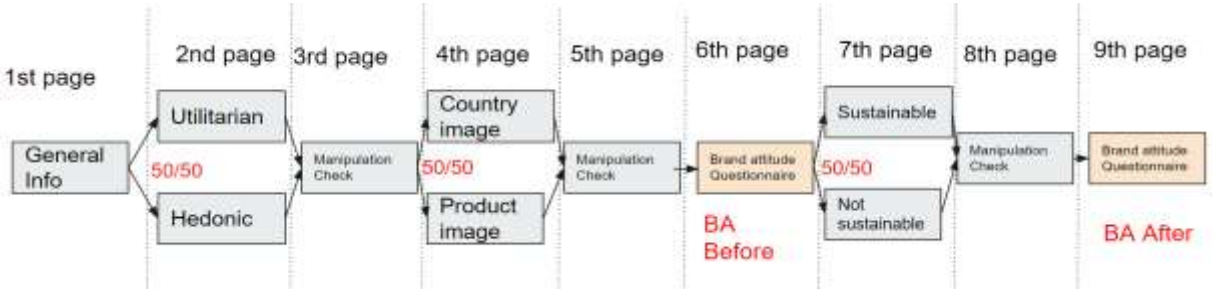

Figure 1
Survey Flowchart

From Figure 1, the order in which the questions of the questionnaire are given to the respondents can be seen. The respondents will go through two manipulation checks based on the message and image they are given and then be required to rate their attitude towards the fictitious chocolate brand. Similarly, they will go through another manipulation check in regards to the brand's sustainability and be asked about their attitude once more. The results from their attitude toward the brand (the dependent variable) will be used when performing the regression analysis (Kock et al., 2019).

In regards to the brand attitude (aka consumer responses), the researchers have used 4 bipolar items and measured them using a 7-point Likert scale. This is the method that the data processed by researchers from (Septianto et al., 2022) have used.

Data Analysis Technique

Validity and Reliability

To ensure that the data are valid and reliable, the researchers will test the validity using item-test correlation using Stata, where a higher coefficient shows a stronger correlation, thus making it more reliable (Williams et al., 2015). The researchers will test the reliability using Cronbach's Alpha to test for consistency between the data, where a value between 0.6 to 0.7 are acceptable, and 0.7 to 0.9 are satisfactory (Hair et al., 2017).

Data Processing

In this research, the researchers will use multiple linear regression to model the data obtained from the experimental study. According to (Hünermund & Louw, 2020), it is important to include control variables to prevent *backdoor paths* from the non-causal relationship between variables. The researchers will do a bivariate analysis with two sample t-tests and a chi-square test to be able to obtain the control variables. Two sample t-tests are used to analyze the differences between two sets of continuous variables, while the chi-square test is used to compare the association between two categorical variables (Waller, 2012).

The researchers will also address the 5 main assumptions in multiple linear regression which are linearity, independence, homoscedasticity, normality of residuals, and no multicollinearity between the independent variables (Tranmer & Elliot, 2008). In addition, the researchers will also do interaction testing in multiple linear regression to check for the moderating effect of brand sustainability for each of the independent variables. The results will be modeled using a margins plot in Stata to better visualize the results obtained.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Bivariate Analysis

Table 1
Bivariate Analysis Table

	Non-Sustainable	Sustainable	Total	Test
Number of Observations	118 (49.2%)	122 (50.8%)	240 (100.0%)	
Average age (xxxx)	26.432 (6.468)	24.738 (6.728)	25.571 (6.642)	0.048
1=Utilitarian, 0=Hedonic				
Hedonistic	58 (49.2%)	62 (50.8%)	120 (50.0%)	0.796
Utilitarian	60 (50.8%)	60 (49.2%)	120 (50.0%)	
1=Product, 0=Country Image				
Country Image	58 (49.2%)	61 (50.0%)	119 (49.6%)	0.896
Product Image	60 (50.8%)	61 (50.0%)	121 (50.4%)	

Consumer Response (CR) a (before sustainability exposure)				
CR1a. good	4.822 (1.477)	5.213 (1.046)	5.021 (1.289)	0.018
CR2a. positive	4.814 (1.450)	5.361 (1.121)	5.092 (1.319)	0.001
CR3a. like	4.864 (1.383)	5.361 (1.037)	5.117 (1.242)	0.002
CR4a. pleased	4.924 (1.421)	5.484 (1.152)	5.208 (1.319)	<0.001
Consumer Response (CR) b (after sustainability exposure)				
CR1b. good	3.542 (1.489)	5.664 (1.080)	4.621 (1.675)	<0.001
CR2b. positive	3.627 (1.595)	5.705 (1.018)	4.683 (1.689)	<0.001
CR3b. like	3.712 (1.548)	5.672 (1.008)	4.708 (1.628)	<0.001
CR4b. pleased	3.686 (1.668)	5.828 (1.058)	4.775 (1.755)	<0.001
CR_wo_sustainability	19.424 (5.358)	21.418 (3.891)	20.438 (4.766)	0.001
CR_w_sustainability	14.568 (6.067)	22.869 (3.820)	18.788 (6.535)	<0.001
CR_delta	**-4.856 (6.896)**	**1.451 (2.613)**	**-1.650 (6.060)**	**<0.001**

By using a t-test and chi-square test, the researchers observed that age, geographical location, socioeconomic status, and marital status are potential confounders. These confounders may affect the results of the data, therefore controlling the variables is needed. In this data, age may also correlate with marital status, therefore in this research, marital status is omitted to prevent multicollinearity. Therefore the control variables used in this research are age, geographical location, and socioeconomic status.

In addition, when looking at the data for CR_delta, we can also obtain valuable information. CR_delta represents the difference between the "total of consumer responses after being exposed to sustainability factor" and "a total of consumer responses before being exposed to sustainability factor". From this data, we can observe that consumer responses generally decrease by around 4.856 when exposed to a non-sustainable label, while consumer responses generally increase by 1.451 after being exposed to a sustainable label.

Validity and Reliability

Table 2
Validity and Reliability Table

		Item-test	**Cronbach's**
	Item	correlation	Alpha
Before Sustainability Label	CR1a.good	0.908	0.941

	CR2a.positive	0.936	
	CR3a.like	0.926	
	CR4a.pleased	0.919	
After Sustainability Label	CR1b.good	0.970	0.978
	CR2b.positive	0.972	
	CR3b.like	0.970	
	CR4b.pleased	0.970	
Delta Sustainability Label	delta_CR1	0.937	0.950
	delta_CR2	0.936	
	delta_CR3	0.925	
	delta_CR4	0.936	

The high value of item-test correlation and Cronbach alpha value being above 0.9 shows that it is above satisfactory, therefore the data is both valid and reliable.

Regression Analysis

Table 3
Regression of the model results

	Model (1)	Model (2)	
	Consumer Response	Consumer Response (delta)	
	Without Sustainability Factor	With Sustainability Factor	
1 = Utilitarian Message	-0.750	1.133	Not Significant
0 = Hedonic Message	(0.576)	(1.237)	Relationship
1 = Product Image	3.143**	-3.037*	Significant
0 = Country Image	(0.588)	(1.219)	Relationship
1 = Sustainable		5.160**	
0 = Non-Sustainable		(1.089)	
Age	-0.0441	0.0201	
	(0.0495)	(0.0469)	
Geographical Location	0	0	
	(.)	(.)	
1 = Java-Bali	0.175	-1.478*	Control

0 = Outside Java-Bali	(0.643)	(0.663)	Variables
Socioeconomic Status			
Lower 1	0	0	
	(.)	(.)	
Lower 2	-2.023	-2.425**	
	(1.529)	(0.623)	
Middle 1	1.020	-2.840**	
	(0.809)	(0.937)	
Middle 2	1.341+	-1.105	
	(0.782)	(0.884)	
Upper 1	-0.898	-0.691	
	(1.191)	(0.930)	
Upper 2	0.462	-1.813	
	(1.019)	(1.212)	
Utilitarian # Sustainable		-1.361	Not Significant
		(1.309)	Relationship
Product # Sustainable		2.568+	The interaction exists at 10%
		(1.333)	significance
Constant	19.74**	-1.804	
	(1.459)	(1.910)	
Observations	240	240	
Adjusted R-squared	0.164	0.311	
Standard errors in parentheses			
+ p<0.10	* p<0.05	** p<0.01	

From Table 3, we can observe that the utilitarian and hedonic messages from both models are not statistically significant, therefore the researchers will reject the hypothesis for H2a and H2b as they are related to utilitarian and hedonic messages (Batra & Ahtola, 1991). Model (1) represents the effect of a Utilitarian/Hedonistic message, Product/Country image, and the control variables toward Brand attitude. This model is run without the Brand sustainability moderating effect. Without the moderating effect of brand sustainability, the regression shows a more favorable consumer response for products that utilize product image by 3.143 points

compared to those that use country image. Therefore, H1 is rejected as product image will lead to a more favorable brand attitude compared to the country image.

Model (2) is similar to Model (1), however, it compares the moderating effect of brand sustainability before and after the data has been exposed to the sustainability label. Model (2) also includes the variable utilitarian#sustainable and product#sustainable, which are used to test whether the moderating effect of brand sustainability is present. Here the variable utilitarian#sustainable is not statistically significant, therefore there is no moderating effect for utilitarian and hedonistic messages by brand sustainability, therefore H4 is rejected. Product#sustainable is statistically significant at a 10% confidence level, therefore moderating effect by brand sustainability is present, and therefore H3 is accepted.

Marginsplot

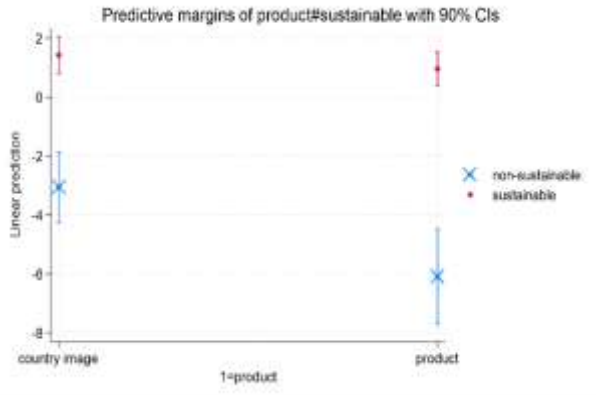

Figure 2
Marginsplot of Model (2)

Seeing from the margins plot in Figure 3, when exposed to the sustainable label, the consumer response increases by a margin of 0.38 to 1.53 points for the product image, while it increases by 0.80 to 2.05 points for the country image. There are no other notable insights gained as both country and product image increase the consumer response by a similar amount.

However, when exposed to a non-sustainable label, there is a significant difference in the amount for country image vs product image. When exposed to a non-sustainable label, the country image decreased by a margin of -4.25 to -1.85, while it decreased by -7.69 to -4.49 for the product image. There is a significant difference between the values of country image and product image when exposed to a non-sustainable label. When exposed to a non-sustainable label, product image dropped to a greater extent compared to country image.

Discussion

The result of the researchers' pilot and experimental study shows that neither hedonistic nor utilitarian message has a significant effect on brand attitude whereas product (vs country) image leads to a more favorable response in brand attitude. However, when a sustainability label is introduced for the brand, country (vs product) image leads to a more favorable response in brand attitude. These results are proven by statistical evidence in the context of a fictitious Swiss chocolate brand in Indonesia with brand attitude as the dependent variable.

This research offers various theoretical contributions. To begin with, our study enhances the field of international marketing by investigating the comparative efficacy of country image

and product image as well as hedonistic and utilitarian messages in the promotion of products within the international market.

Previous studies have shown that country and product image can lead to a more favorable response among consumers (Septianto et al., 2022). Moreover, the hedonic-utilitarian perspective has played a crucial role in categorizing a consumer's perception of a product (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). The current research is adding a greater understanding with regards to how sustainability plays a role in moderating the effects of country/product image and hedonistic/utilitarian message on brand attitude. The researchers have shown that by introducing a sustainability label on a brand, the effects of country/product image as well as hedonistic/utilitarian message are greatly affected. The most interesting part to note is that previously without a sustainability label introduced to the respondents, those who received product images responded 3.143 points higher on average than those who received country images. However, this changed when a sustainability label was introduced to these respondents. Those who received non-sustainable sustainability labels with product images responded much more negatively than those who received non-sustainable sustainability labels with country images. This is interesting as the brand attitude of those respondents who received product images changed drastically, more so than the country image. The researchers have also provided statistical evidence that proves the moderating role of brand sustainability between the independent variables country/product image towards brand attitude.

Managerial implications. There are a few implications that are of significant importance for marketers of a food and beverage brand. There is a need for marketers to know beforehand which measures to take If the government decides to make it mandatory to put sustainability labels on food and beverage products. This is especially important if their product is non-sustainable. Based on this research, the researchers recommend those brands use country images instead of product images to lessen the negative impact the non-sustainable sustainability label has on the consumer's brand attitude.

CONCLUSION

The researchers concluded from this research that both hedonistic or utilitarian message effects on brand attitude are not statistically significant, while the placement of country or product image does have a statistically significant effect on brand attitude. When brand sustainability is introduced, there is a significant change in the brand attitude of the respondents. The researchers conclude that if a non-sustainable sustainability label must be placed on a product, then it is better to use a country image rather than a product image to market the brand to get a less negative brand attitude from the consumers. Unfortunately, there are limitations to this research. The first focus of the research is a fictitious chocolate brand, a food and beverage product, similar to Septianto's research using cheese and wine, a different type of product might lead to different results. For further research, researchers could use non-food and beverage brands. The second limitation is that the researchers only used respondents from Indonesia, the researchers recommend future research to use a bigger pool of participants from different countries as it could reduce the possibility of bias from the responses.

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