Role of Asian Cultural Authenticity on U.S. Consumers' Perceived Quality, Trust, and Patronage Intention

Sarah (Song) Southworth and Jung Ha-Brookshire, University of Missouri, USA

Keywords: Asian, authenticity, trust, patronage

Asian brands have come a long way from their main role as manufacturers to brand developers (Farhoomand, 2009). However, their stereotyped perception of inferior quality is still a lingering challenge as they attempt to become global players in today's marketplace. Literature suggests that highlighting the brand's cultural authenticity may be a viable way to improve consumer's quality as well as trust (Kumar & Steenkamp, 2013). According to Kumar and Steenkamp (2013), Asian brands may be better off in communicating their brand message of quality and trust by being authentically "Asian," rather than trying to mimic the brand offerings from their Western counterparts. However, there is no empirical research specifying how the cultural authenticity of brands can build positive quality perceptions and trust amongst consumers.

According to the classification theory in marketing context, consumers tend to draw conclusions about a brand based on the brand's attributes, such as brand logos (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2009). That is, the perception of cultural authenticity can also be created via brand logos that include certain elements of the Asian cultural heritage. We further posit that cultural authenticity influences consumers' quality perceptions, trust, and patronage intentions. Specifically, the foreign language used in brand logotype (Magnini et al., 2011; H1) as well as the cultural design of the brand logo mark (Henderson et al., 2003; H2) are found to affect the brand's cultural authenticity. Moreover, a brand's cultural authenticity is found to influence brand quality (Alexander, 2009; H3) and Brand trust (Eggers et al., 2013; H4). Both brand quality (Baker et al., 2002; H5) and brand trust (Rios & Riquelme, 2006; H6) has been supported to positively influence consumers' patronage intentions toward an authentic Asian brand.

To test the hypotheses of the study, an online experimental research was performed. Participants were exposed to one of the four randomly assigned treatment conditions (Asian-themed logo vs. Western-themed logo X English vs. mix of English and Asian language), and a set of dependent measures and demographic questions followed. Pretests were first conducted to develop reliable experimental stimuli and manipulation checks. Manipulation checks were conducted to mainly ensure that the brand logo stimuli significantly influenced the cultural authenticity. Four dependent measures, cultural authenticity, brand quality, brand trust and patronage intentions, were adopted from previous studies with adequate reliabilities (all Cronbach's alphas > .95). All used 7-point likert-type scales; demographic items were also included. A random sample of 570 responses (50% male and 50% female) were collected nationwide via Qualtrics in 2015, with a mean age of 47 (SD=16.91), ranging from 18 to 86.

In order to look at the brand logo impact on Asian brand cultural authenticity, ANOVA was first ran, where H1 was supported (F (1, 569) =13.01, p<0.001), where the Asian-themed logo was

perceived to have higher cultural authenticity (M=4.47; SD=1.33) than that of the Western inspired logo design of Asian brands (M=4.06; SD=1.39). However, H2 was not supported (p=.76). Furthermore, SEM results for H3 to H6 suggested a good fit (χ^2 (54) = 161.48, p <0.001, CFI=.99, TLI=.99, RMSEA=.06, SRMR= .03), confirming Asian brands' cultural authenticity's positive influence on brand quality and trust, as well as the positive impact of Asian brand quality and brand trust on patronage intentions.

Thus, given this difficulty and challenge of Asian brands to gain the patronage of U.S. consumers, the study findings showed that Asian brands can gain a competitive advantage over other Western brands by creating a unique brand positioning through their cultural authenticity. Particularly, the results showed that as simple an item as a brand logo could successfully communicate the brand's cultural authenticity. Therefore, by creating the perception of cultural authenticity, Asian brands may positively influence the brand quality and trust, which are crucial for them to build. Thus, instead of mimicking the brand offerings from their Western counterparts, Asian brands are recommended to create their competitive global positioning by using their cultural heritage. Further research is recommended to examine how other factors can affect cultural authenticity.

References

Alexander, N. (2009). Brand authentication: Creating and maintaining brand auras. *European Journal of Marketing, 43*(3/4), 551-562.

Baker, J., Parasuraman, A., Grewal, D. & Voss, G.B. (2002). The influence of multiple store environment cues on perceived merchandise value and patronage intentions. *Journal of Marketing, 66*(2), 120-141.

Balabanis, G. & Diamantopoulos, A. (2011). Gains and losses from the misperception of brand origin: The role of brand strength and country-of-origin image, *Journal of International Marketing*, *19*(2), 95-116.

Eggers, F., O'Dwyer, M., Kraus, S. Vallaster, C. and Güldenberg, S. (2013). The impact of brand authenticity on brand trust and SME growth: A CEO Perspective. *Journal of World Business, 48*(3), 340-348.

Farhoomand, A. (2009). *Samsung Electronics: Innovation and design strategy*. Hong Kong: Asia Case Research Centre.

Kumar, Nirmalya, & Jan-Benedict EM Steenkamp. (2013). *Brand breakout: How emerging market brands will go global*. New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan.

Henderson, P. W., Cote, J.A., Leong, S.M., & Bernd Schmitt. (2003). Building strong brands in Asia: Selecting the visual components of image to maximize brand strength. *International Journal of Research in Marketing, 20*(4), 297-313.

Magnini, V. P., Miller, T. and Kim, B.C. (2011). The psychological effects of foreign-language restaurant signs on potential diners." *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research, 35*(1), 24-44.

Rios, R.E., & Riquelme, H.E. (2008). "Brand Equity for Online Companies." *Marketing Intelligence & Planning, 26*(7), 719-742.