

Brand Personality Perception: the Case of Thai Consumers of Japanese Brands

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Abstract-- Brand personality is a key factor to build brand equity and create a strong brand. Consumers seek brands with congruent personalities and use brands' personality to define their sense of self. However, previous researchers found that brand personality from difference nations are difference in terms of consumer perceptions. Most of previous literatures studied the difference of brand personality dimension by conducting the research using the stimuli of national brands and subjects from difference regions and high variation of cultures (e.g. Spanish brands and Japanese Brands, or American Brands and Spanish Brands). This study examines brand personality dimensions of Japanese Brands among Thai consumers with consumers. The stimulus brands are 10 different Japanese commercial brands. The research surveys are distributed to 400 experienced Japanese brands consumers. The findings show that descriptive results and how Thai consumers perceive the Japanese brands. This shows perceptions of brand personality are country specific. Implications and contribution of these findings are discussed.

Keywords-- Brand Personality, Brand Attitude, Branding Strategy, National Brands, Consumer Behavior

I. Introduction

Marketing researchers have focused on brand personality since it is a marketing tool to differentiate one brand to others and also build brand identity. Previous researches have pointed out that brand personality lead consumers to aware the brand by creating an associate memory according to the ways consumer perceive the brand through its marketing activities [1] – [6]. National branding is referred to how consumers perceive a brand original country maker or founder. The country that the brand was first established seems to be an importance key for consumer to measure and remember the brand. Both National branding effects depend largely on country reputation on its culture, technology, political, people and so on. However, these national branding effects might be source of creating brand personality on a product or service.

The study places a main research question that does national brand have brand personality and do consumers perceive national branding and place it in their mind as brand personality. Consumer might translate the country that the product or service was found and perceive those national culture, way of life, value of the nation or so on, and place them as brand personality. The connection between national branding and brand personality can be closed and cannot take them apart. Therefore, this study aims to examine how consumers perceive brand personalities from a particular country across product categories.

The interaction of national branding and brand personality is an important conceptual and managerial issue. When buying branded products or services, consumers' purchase intention may not be influenced by only brand reputations and perceptions, but the consumers' purchase intention might be also directly influenced by national branding image of the products or services and this national branding image might also indirectly manipulate brand personality.

Japanese brand was selected as our focal national brand because the amount of trade value between Thailand and Japan is as much as 700 billion baht or 26 billion US dollars approximately. The trade value between Thai and Japan has been growing dramatically since 1995, from 200 billion baht to 700 billion baht in 2015 (Bank of Thailand, 2015). The number of Thai tourist to Japan has also been increasing rapidly. In 2014, the number of Thai tourist to Japan is 12 millions, the highest record of all time as reported by Immigration Bureau, Royal Thai Police. This pointed out that Thai consumer is interested in Japanese. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the Japanese brand personality that Thai consumers perceive through the Japanese brands.



II. Conceptual Background

Brand Personality

The attribution of human personality traits (seriousness, warmth, imagination, etc.) is to a brand as a way to achieve differentiation. Usually, it is done through long-term above-the-line advertising and appropriate packaging and graphics. These traits inform brand behavior through both prepared communication/packaging, etc., and through the people who represent the brand - its employees.

Importance of Brand Personality

There are three very compelling reasons for a brand to have an identifiable personality beyond any specific advertising or public relations for that brand.

First, because more and more parity products are arriving on the scene to duke it out with one another, the brand's personality may be the one and only factor that separates it from its competitors.

Second, when a purchase decision involves (or perhaps even depends on) an emotional response, a likeable personality may well provide that necessary emotional link.

Third, a consistent brand personality can help not only the brand, but that brand's advertising stand out and be recognized.

Brand personality refers to the human characteristics associated with a specific brand [1]. Reference [7] indicated that brand personality is considered to possess symbolic values rather than utilitarian functions. Brand personality is a branding concept that explains a facet of branding dynamics [1], [8]. Brand personality serves as an effective consumer-organization communication tool [9]. Kapferer, J. N. (1998) reported that the consumers easily perceived brands if they have a personality.

Therefore, brand personality fulfills the link between consumers' memory and awareness [10] - [11]. Marketers can then use consumers' perceptions to make their marketing strategies become more focused on consumers. It also provides a useful research method for consumer studies. On the other hand, brand personality serves as an organization-wide guide for brand meaning communication. It helps marketers communicate brand meaning which otherwise might not be easy to understand and/or share (among marketers). By adding robust, descriptive, and realistic explanations for core yet abstract brand identity, brand personality makes the brand meaning understandable and contemporary [12].

Brand identity can be built by examining the brand personality and developing unique brand personality. Brand image can also be created when consumers perceive and aware of brand personality. Therefore, brand personality theoretically and conceptually a brand-oriented strategy and become the most critical in post-modern branding concept.

The brand can be viewed as a product, a personality, a set of values, and a position it occupies in people's minds.

Research on brand personality has been in the main streams of brand and branding literatures. The stream research on brand personality can be subdivided into three streams. First stream investigated on various on brand personality dimensions across country and areas [13] – [16]. Second stream focuses on the antecedents and factors which affect brand personality or its fit [17] – [18] and the last stream examine the consequences and the effect of brand personality or it fits [9], [19]. This study is aimed and categorized under the first stream.

Reference [1] developed a framework for measuring brand personality with five core dimensions of brand personality, each divided into a set of facets. The five core dimensions and their facets are Sincerity (down-to-earth, honest, wholesome, cheerful), Excitement (daring, spirited, imaginative, up-to-date), Competence (reliable, intelligent, successful), Sophistication (upper class, charming), and Ruggedness (outdoorsy, tough). This measurement scale are widely accepted and applied in across products and market [2], [20] – [21].

The Brand Personality Dimensions of Jennifer Aaker is a framework to describe and measure the 'personality' of a brand in five core dimensions, each divided into a set of facets.

It is an easy to understand model to describe the profile of a brand using an analogy with a human being.

The five core dimensions and their facets are:

- *Sincerity* (down-to-earth, honest, wholesome, cheerful)
- *Excitement* (daring, spirited, imaginative, up-to-date)
- *Competence* (reliable, intelligent, successful)
- *Sophistication* (upper class, charming)
- *Ruggedness* (outdoorsy, tough)

Each facet is in turn measured by a set of traits. The trait measures are taken using a five-point scale (1= not at all descriptive, 5=extremely descriptive) rating the extent to which each trait describes the specific brand of interest.

The traits used for each of the facets are as in Figure 1

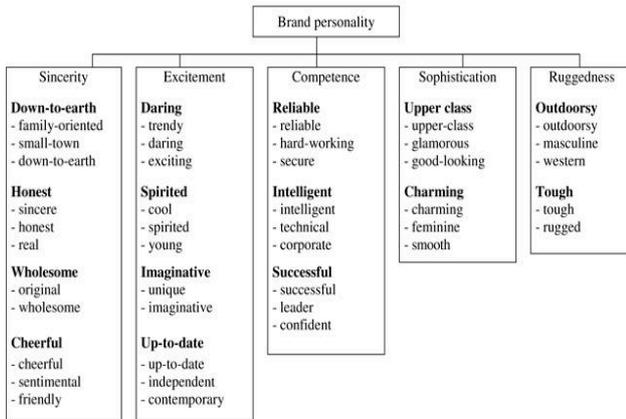


Fig. 1 Dimensions of Brand personality and traits [1]

Based on the Aaker's model and the results of the observed investigations, this study hypothesized that there is brand personality of a nation brand. On the one hand, consumers perceive the characteristics of a nation and apply them toward the brand.

III. Research Methodology

The questionnaire was constructed based on the theoretical and conceptual framework of this study. The questionnaire was divided into three sections; first section was consisted of questions about personal information, second was consisted of questions about the brand perceptions the customers, and the last section was consisted of questions regarding to the dimension of brand personality. The brand personality items in the questionnaire survey were adapted from dimension of brand personality in [1]. The rating scale was applied by using 7-point Likert scale method. The questionnaires were in Thai and were checked by two marketing researchers. The samples were mostly a university student. Two-hundred and fifty questionnaires were collected and usable.

IV. Research Results and Discussions

The respondents demographic are as in Table 1. Ninety-nine percent of the respondents were single and most of them were low income and under 30 years old. From the demographic point of view, they were generation Y consumers.

TABLE 1
Respondent Demographic

Sex		
Male	79	32%
Female	171	68%
Status		
Single	248	99%
Married	2	1%
Education		
High school or less than	4	2%
Bachelor Degree	246	98%
Income		
less than 10,000 baht/month	181	72%
10,000-19,999 baht/month	59	24%
20,000-49,999 baht/month	9	4%
50,000-69,999 baht/month	1	0.02%
Age		
less than 21 years	92	37%
21-30 years	155	62%
31-40 years	3	1%
Total	250	100%

The results pointed out, the most awareness Japanese brand is TOYOTA, HONDA, UNIQLO, GLICO, and SHISEIDO, respectively. This is indicated no matter how long Japanese brands have been introduced in Thailand, it is not related to brand awareness in the mind of consumers. GLICO has been marketed in Thailand since 1971, but it cannot be ranked higher than UNIQLO which was marketed in Thailand four years ago (2011). For Japanese product and service category, the results indicated that food and dessert were the first product category that they aware when they think about Japanese brands. Comics and animation were the second category that they aware. The results of Japanese brand and product category ranks can be seen in Table 2.

TABLE 2
JAPANESE BRAND and PRODUCT CATEGORY
RANKS

No.	Brand	Product Category
1	TOYOTA	Food and Dessert
2	HONDA	Comics and Animation
3	UNIQLO	Car/Motorcycle
4	GLICO	Cosmetic
5	SHISEIDO	Clothes/bag
6	SONY	Game Console
7	DAISO	Electric Appliances
8	MUJI	Singer and Actor/Actress
9	MITSUBISHI	Camera
10	HADA LABO	Movie/TV series

The highest score for brand personality trait is “reliable” (5.85) and the lowest score is “western” (4.42). There is no trait which has score lower than the middle score (median = 4.00). The result of brand personality traits is as in the Table 3. It can be concluded that the five major traits for Japanese brand in the mind of Thai consumers were “reliable”, “sincere”, “secure”, “honest”, and “technical”. Reliable is the highest score for brand personality facet. Daring and spirited are the two lowest score for brand personality facets.

For brand personality’s dimensions, the score of competence dimension is highest at 5.53 and the lowest score is sophistication at 5.01 and ruggedness at 5.02, as be shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3
THE SUMMARY of BRAND PERSONALITY’S
DIMENSIONS

	Mean	STDEV	
Sincerity (\bar{x} = 5.25)	Down-to-earth (\bar{x} = 5.19)		
	Down-to-earth	4.90	1.365
	Family-oriented	5.42	1.234
	Small Town	5.26	1.295
	Honest (\bar{x} = 5.64)		
	Honest	5.68*	1.158
	Sincere	5.72*	1.249
	Real	5.52	1.223
	Wholesome (\bar{x} = 4.96)		

Excitement (\bar{x} = 5.16)	Wholesome	5.16	1.369
	Original	4.76	1.453
	Cheerful (\bar{x} = 5.12)		
	Cheerful	4.95	1.345
	Sentimental	4.98	1.347
	Friendly	5.44	1.307
	Daring (\bar{x} = 4.89)		
	Darling	5.02	1.317
	Trendy	4.46	1.633
	Exciting	5.20	1.332
Spirited (\bar{x} = 4.89)			
Spirited	5.45	1.192	
Cool	4.71	1.447	
Young	4.50	1.451	
Imaginative (\bar{x} = 5.50)			
Imaginative	5.59	1.284	
Unique	5.40	1.445	
Up-to-Date (\bar{x} = 5.46)			
Up-to-Date	5.41	1.432	
Independent	5.56	1.338	
Contemporary	5.42	1.315	
Competence (\bar{x} = 5.53)	Reliable (\bar{x} = 5.71)		
	Reliable	5.85*	1.226
	Hard Working	5.59	1.315
	Secure	5.70*	1.39
	Intelligent (\bar{x} = 5.39)		
	Intelligent	5.34	1.497
	Technical	5.60*	1.335
	Corporate	5.22	1.302
	Successful (\bar{x} = 5.49)		
	Successful	5.49	1.306
Leader	5.46	1.302	
Confident	5.51	1.312	
Sophistication (\bar{x} = 5.01)	Upper Class (\bar{x} = 4.99)		
	Upper Class	4.76	1.497
	Glamorous	5.05	1.376
	Good Looking	5.15	1.367
	Charming (\bar{x} = 5.03)		
	Charming	5.22	1.312
	Feminine	4.71	1.41
	Smooth	5.17	1.493

Ruggedness (\bar{x} = 5.02)	Outdoorsy (\bar{x}= 5.02)		
	Outdoorsy	5.26	1.428
	Masculine	5.39	1.373
	Western	4.42	1.561
	Tough (\bar{x}= 5.03)		
	Tough	5.36	1.304
	Rugged	4.69	1.625

The result pointed out that Thai consumer perceived Japanese brands as it was reliable and honest. This means that Japanese brands are revealed to be a brand that consumes trust. Japanese brands have been building relationship with Thai consumers through trustworthy dialogue; unbiased information, and consistent product quality. In addition, Japanese brands can deliver what they promise to consumers. Therefore, what consumers expected from a Japanese brand, they would receive it after they purchased. This makes Japanese brand is trustworthy in the mind of the consumers and it is how Thai consumers look at a Japanese brand.

The results also indicated that Japanese brands had high level of competence in the mind of Thai consumers. These competence dimensions were reflected by technology and innovation of Japanese product quality. This also showed that Japanese social value and working culture (disciplined, hardworking, focusing, and task-oriented) have been sent toward the brand which found to be a Japanese brand [3].

Another point that the results indicated was that Japanese was not quite a brand which very fashionable. The low scores of “young” and “trendy” traits showed that Japanese brands were not a brand for consumers who love to go shopping fashionable and trendy products.

Finally, the results can be summarized as Japanese brands have a particular personality in the eyes and mind of Thai consumers. It is competence and trustworthy. For brand management point of view, brand personality is that aspect of comprehensive brand which generates it is emotional character and associations in consumers’ mind. Brand personality develops brand equity [22], [12]. It sets the brand attitude. It is a key input into the look and feel of any communication or marketing activity by the brand. It helps in gaining thorough knowledge of customers feelings about the brand. Brand personality also creates brand identity which contributes to brand image associations in the consumers’ memory [7], [23] – [24]. It is obvious that, in this study, Japanese attributes were associated to the brand which originated from Japan, named in Japanese, manufactured by Japanese

companies. Therefore, country of origin cannot be ignoring in order to build a strong brand for brand management practice.

The only limitation of this study was that the data was mainly collected from university students. Therefore, for the future research, the expanding of demographic data collection is recommended, to other age range and income.

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