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The Beauty of "Green Branding": Way to the Future

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Keywords : *new technologies of information and communication, business services, marketing services.*

GJMBR-E Classification : *JEL Code: O13, Q57*



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The Beauty of "Green Branding": Way to the Future

Vincent Wee Eng Kim [α] & Thinavan Periyayya [σ]

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Design/methodology/approach – This study employyed both quantitative and qualitative approach. A total of 30 respondents made up the focus groups and 200 respondents who had the experience of purchasing environmentally friendly products.were selected for the survey.

Findings – The results of the study demonstrated that green brand awareness, brand image, brand credibility, brand community and brand engagement are positively related to branding of a business entity for beauty related product. Therefore, investing on resources to increase green brand awareness, brand image, brand credibility, brand community and brand engagement are helpful to enhance companies.

Research limitations/implications – While the results are clear and have strong salience towards environmental beauty products industry in Malaysia, applications of the findings beyond Malaysia should take into account other factors such as the nature of industry, the perception, behavior and demographics of these customers.

Practical implications – The study provides a set of findings relating to green branding initiatives that could be readily incorporated into a business plan.

Originality/value – The study will be significant towards managers, researchers, and governments agencies, and provide useful contribution to relevant studies and future researches as reference.

Keywords : green branding, beauty products, perception, brand image, malaysia.

I. Introduction

Green branding becomes an active part of the value proposition. A growing number of companies are thinking "beyond the green corporation" to a situation where eco-friendly and socially responsible practices drives business performance. Many business corporations participation in society makes corporate social responsibility (CSR) perspectives integral to the organizational strategy. This is usually implemented especially when searching for marketing competitive advantages. The study by (Bakker et al., 2005; Westley and Vredenburg, 1996) shows that CSR creates competitive advantage, especially in the manufacturing industries. However, till today there is still limited understanding as to why a business adopts environmental management practices (Klassen, 2001). Based on previous research on business organizations suggests that stakeholder pressures are the key critical drivers of corporate environmental response (Berry and Rondinelli, 1998; Hoffman and Ventresca, 2002).

There is a growing number of fashion designers who are presenting ecological collection that utilize recycled materials or organic textiles free of synthetic and chemical components. Surprisingly, this trend is complemented by the growing number of so-called "organic or natural cosmetics, produced using friendly processes.

a) Limitation of the Study

Some of the limitations of this study include the respondents' self-report approach used in the survey. Self-report may result in the respondents providing socially acceptable responses rather than their actual attitudes. Besides this, the research was confined to five leading institution of higher learning in the Klang Valley district only due to convenience of accessibility for data collection to the exclusion of other institutions in other districts. Greater geographical coverage would allow richer data, and generalization on findings can be done more accurately.

b) Literature Review

The study by Iyer and Banerjee (1993) responded to developments of green marketing by pronouncing that "green is in, no question about it". Others writers continued to aver that the "green market appears to be real and growing" (Menon and Menon, 1997), and "expanding at a remarkable rate" (Schlegelmilch et al., 1996).

Several high ranking research agendas of going green include (Greenfield 2004; Maignan and Ralston 2002; McWilliams et al. 2006; Pearce and Doh 2005) appears to be reflected in theoretical and managerial discussions that argue 'not only is doing good the right thing to do, but it also leads to doing better' (Bhattacharya and Sen 2004, p. 9; see also Dunphy et al. 2003; Kotler and Lee 2005). As a result, going green

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has moved from ideology to reality, and many consider it necessary for organizations to define their roles in society and apply social and ethical standards to their businesses (Lichtenstein et al. 2004). Although companies increasingly adhere and demonstrate their commitment to going green (Pinkston and Carroll 1994), many struggle with this effort (Lindgreen et al. 2009).

Generally, consumers become more willing to purchase products which are more environmental friendly (Krause, 1993). Today, there are more consumers with responsible and environmental attitudes who generally prefer purchasing products which generate a minimum detrimental impact on the environment. The society becomes more concerned with the environment and, in turn, companies are forced to change their behaviors with regard to compliance with the society's environmental concern (Ottman, 1992; Peattie, 1992, 1995; Vandermerwe and Oliff, 1990). Companies can utilize the idea of green marketing to generate and to facilitate any exchange intended to satisfy customers' environmental needs or wants (Polonsky, 1994).

As there are growing importance of green marketing in the future, this study proposes a research framework to explore its positive relationships with five main brand components: green brand awareness, green brand image, green brand credibility, green brand community and green engagement.

c) Research Hypothesis

This study proposed the following hypothesis:

i. Hypothesis 1 (H1): green brand awareness has a strong influence towards green branding.
ii. Hypothesis 2 (H2): green brand image has a strong influence towards green branding.
iii. Hypothesis 3 (H3): green brand credibility has a strong influence towards green branding.
iv. Hypothesis 4 (H4): green brand community has a strong influence towards green branding.
v. Hypothesis 5 (H5): green brand engagement has a strong influence towards green branding.

d) Purpose of the Study

The objectives of the research study are:

i. To examine the factors influencing green branding for beauty products.
ii. To verify the positive relationships between brand components namely brand awareness, brand image, brand credibility, brand community and brand engagement towards green branding.

e) Significance of Project

This research study will hopefully benefit managers, researchers and governments, and provide useful contribution to relevant studies and future researches as reference. Managers, researchers and advertisers would benefit from this study through gaining information that might help them make their decisions towards going green for their organization. Business organizations and government agencies could have a competitive advantage if they could understand the importance of green branding and the impact towards brand attitude.

II. Methodology

The dimensions of the green branding strategies of beauty products for several green brands were obtained by conducting in-depth interviews with the customers. The research is conducted to determine product attributes considered important by consumers while buying green brand products in the category of beauty products. A total of five focus groups discussion were conducted. Each group had six members consisting of three females and three males. All respondents were students from five institution of higher learning in Malaysia. Table 1 shows the total number of respondents and the institutions of higher learning.

Table 1 : Institute of higher learning and Number of Respondents

Institute of higher learning	Total respondents (Focus Group)	Total respondents (Questionnaire)
Sunway University	6	40
Taylors University	6	40
LimKokwing University	6	40
University Selangor	6	40
KDU University College	6	40

The study on attitude of consumers towards the green brand and the level of brand loyalty exhibited is based on a survey. The survey data was collected by administering questionnaires to a sample of 200 respondents. The respondents included 120 females and 80 males.

a) Opportunities for Green Brand

Today, every business corporations needs to drastically reduce its impact on the environment during manufacturing, distribution, raw materials, energy use and others. Early academic research on green marketing spoke of the rapid increase in green consumerism as heralding a dramatic and inevitable shift in consumption towards greener products (Prothero, 1990; Vandermerwe and Oliff, 1990). However, if business corporations do not, they will be left behind by regulation and hardening customer demands. Due to the world-wide push towards pro-environmental friendly activities, Malaysians are also getting more serious today. The heightened environmental awareness has lead to a growing consumer interest in green products, and a pronounced willingness to pay for green features (Roper Organization, 1990; Mintel, 1991; Worcester, 1993).

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It is becoming necessary to promote environmental consciousness. In addition to this, the rapid economic growth in Malaysia without prevention or control of potentially environmental problems, will eventually lead to more severe environmental disasters. Thus there are strong internal societal pressures in Malaysia determined to solve the present environmental problems. This will eventually provide higher demand for environmentally-friendly products and business strategies.

b) Green Brand Perception

Despite this optimistic picture, many business organizations allocate low priority to green brand. At present, there are too many severe environmental problems which need to be solved. The benefits of green brand may not be significantly perceived by the customers. The companies place more emphasis on the purchase of environmentally friendly technologies and equipment. Mintel's (1995) follow-up report on the environment recorded only a very slight increase in green consumers and identified a significant gap between concern and actual purchasing – a picture replicated in subsequent management research (Wong et al., 1996; Peattie, 1999; Crane 2000). Green products looked to have achieved only limited success (Wong et al., 1996).

III. Data Collection and Analyses

The first draft of the questionnaire was pre-tested for comprehension among twenty under graduate marketing students who purchased or used environmental friendly products. The reliability of measurements was assessed using Cronbach's alphas. A pilot survey based on 20 usable questionnaires was then conducted. Validity and reliability tests were performed to further refine measurements. Any insignificant indicators were removed and some modifications were made to increase the clarity of the questionnaire in the final study.

a) Focus Group and Survey Findings

i. *Attributes Considered*

Based on the five focus group discussions, the study discovered that respondents while buying green brands products give due attention to 11 main attributes that include nine basic and two green attributes. The basic attributes are regardless of whether the respondents are buying green or chemical-based brand products.

As shown in Table 2, the research indicated that female respondents prefer sweet fragrance and light colors. In addition to this, they are concerned about the product safety. Since the majority of respondents belong to the educated middle class, they expect the green brands to deliver benefits and value for money. Respondents also show high interest for attractive packaging. Besides that, respondents consider outlet energy efficient store atmosphere to be important. This is because many customers spend a considerable time browsing through the merchandise on display and furthermore like to pre-test. Respondents also expect to appreciate a comfortable surrounding and most importantly friendly and knowledgeable sales staff in the outlets. This is because the respondents expect the sales staff to know and could recommend suitable products. Overall, the study shows that respondents are generally very brand conscious. They consider brand image important. Brand image acts as a surrogate for the credentials of the business corporation.

The key components of green branding attributes for beauty and electronic products considered important by respondents are washable, reusable, organic, "ingredients" and "not tested on animals". At the time of buying green brand, respondents look at the product ingredients very carefully and ask questions if they are not familiar with the natural ingredients. Similarly the reusable, recyclable, washable, organic in nature and not harmful to nature and animals are attributes admired and highly appreciated by customers.

Table 2 : The key attributes influencing purchase decisions

Basic product attributes	Green branding attributes
Ingredients	Recyclable/Reusable
Product fragrance	Organics/ natural ingredients
Product safety	Not harmful to nature and animals
Product color	Reduce Packaging
Product performance	Energy efficient stores atmosphere
Value for money	
Opportunity to pre-test/trial	
Comfortable	
Product quality	

In this study, the measurement of the questionnaire items used ''five-point Likert scale from 1 to 5" rating from ''strongly disagree'' to ''strongly agree.'' The study proposes five novel components – green brand awareness, green brand image, green brand credibility, green brand community and green brand engagement. This is to develop the definitions and measurements of the five components. This study asked every respondent to point out a green brand of beauty products which is the most significant for them. Then, every consumer was requested to regard this

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brand as the focal brand to fill in the questionnaire. The study of green brand awareness is based on Keller (2008) that includes brand exposure that leads to brand recognition. This study of green brand image referred to Padgett and Allen (1997), and Cretu and Brodie (2007), and defined ''green brand image'' as ''a set of perceptions of a brand in a consumer's mind that is linked to environmental commitments and environmental concerns.'' The measurement of the green brand image includes positive image of brand users to which they aspire in terms of being kind, generous and doing good things; personality and values. By establishing green credibility include a sense of being likeable for "doing the right things." This is referring to Blau (1964), Schurr and Ozanne (1985), and Ganesan (1994), this study defined ''green brand credibility'' as ''a willingness to depend on a product, service, or brand based on the belief or expectation resulting from its credibility, benevolence, and ability about its environmental performance.''

Besides that, by creating a sense of green brand community include serving brand users and means for them to connect to or share experiences with other consumers. Finally the eliciting of green brand engagement include in participating in the cause related activities. This study referred to Oliver (1996) and defined ''green brand engagement'' as ''a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfillment to satisfy a customer's environmental desires, sustainable expectations, and green needs.

b) Empirical Results

This study utilized Structural Equation Model (SEM) to verify the research framework and hypotheses, and applied SPSS 17.0 to obtain the empirical results. SEM of this study examined the two levels of analysis namely the measurement model and the structure model, and their results are shown here below.

c) Measurement Model Results

A convenience sampling technique was selected due to its cost and time efficiency. The final questionnaire was administered by two trained research assistants.

The exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used to conduct a preliminary examination of the structure of the data as well as to achieve data reduction (Hair et al., 2010). The primary objective of EFA is to "define the underlying structure among the variables" (Hair et al., 2010, p. 94). The researcher wished to have a strong measurement model for the confirmatory factor analysis.

The high Cronbach's alphas of indicators belonging to each dimension ($\alpha = 0.738$ to $\alpha = 0.868$) indicate high internal consistency and scale reliability (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). Therefore, the measurement of this study is acceptable in content validity. The dimensions extracted from each latent construct are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlation matrix. The results in Table 3 can be observed that, there are positive correlations among green brand awareness, green brand image, green brand credibility, green brand community and green brand engagement. Additionally, there are two measurements to confirm the reliability of the components. The measure of the reliability is to examine the loadings of each components' individual items. According to the quality of the measurement model for the sample, the loadings (λ) of all items of the five components listed in Table 4 are significant. The other measurement namely Cronbach's α is the other measure of the reliability. Table 4 indicates the lists in Cronbach's α for its components. Generally, the minimum requirement of Cronbach's a coefficient is 0.7 (Hair et al., 1998). Table 4 shows that the Cronbach's α coefficient of ''green brand awareness'' is 0.751; that of ''green brand image'' is 0.738; that of ''green credibility'' is 0.779; that of ''green brand community'' is 0.868; and that of ''green brand engagement'' is 0.858.

Table 3 : Means, standard deviations and correlations of the Components for Green Branding for Beauty products

	Components of Green branding towards Beauty products	Mean	Standard deviations	A	B	C	D	E
1	Brand awareness	3.935	0.601					
2	Brand image	4.359	0.471	0.369**				
3	Brand credibility	3.836	0.584	0.394**	0.423**			
4	Brand community	4.054	0.640	0.398**	0.423**	0.423**		
5	Brand engagement	4.054	0.640	0.418**	0.423**	0.423**	0.423**	

** $p < 0.01$.

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Table 4 : The items' loadings (λ) and the components' Cronbach's α coefficients and Average Variance Extracts (AVEs) towards Green branding for Beauty products

	Components of Green Band towards Beauty product	Numbers of items	λ	Cronbach's α	AVE	Square Root of AVE
1	Brand awareness	BA1	0.771	0.751	0.652	0.807
		BA2	0.790**			
		BA3	0.786**			
		BA4	0.804**			
2	Brand image	BI 1	0.835	0.738	0.764	0.874
		BI 2	0.902**			
		BI 3	0.911**			
		BI 4	0.907**			
3	Brand credibility	BC 1	0.817	0.779	0.738	0.859
		BC 2	0.824**			
		BC 3	0.835**			
		BC 4	0.840**			
4	Brand community	BCY 1	0.803	0.868	0.712	0.844
		BCY 2	0.834**			
		BCY 3	0.822**			
		BCY 4	0.839**			
5	Brand engagement	BE 1	0.803	0.858	0.697	0.835
		BE 2	0.834**			
		BE 3	0.822**			
		BE 4	0.839**			

**p < 0.01.

In fact the Cronbach's α coefficients of all four components are more than 0.7. This clearly shows that the measurement of this study is acceptable in reliability. Furthermore, it is also important to verify the validity of the measurement. In this study there are two measurements to confirm the validity of the components. This study applied Fornell and Larcker's measure of average variance extracted (AVE) to access the discriminative validity of the measurement (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The AVE measures is used because it is able to observe the amount of variance captured by the construct through its items relative to the amount of variance due to the measurement error. However, in order to satisfy the requirement of the discriminative validity, it is necessary to perform the square root of a construct's AVE. The square root of the construct's AVE must be greater than the correlations between the construct and other constructs in the model.

Table 4 clearly shows the square roots of the AVEs for the components, green brand awareness is 0.807, green brand image is 0.874, green brand credibility is 0.859, green brand community is 0.844 and green brand engagement is 0.835. All the value shown are more than the correlation between them, 0.398, in Table I. Based on this results it shows that there was adequate discriminative validity between the two components.

The square roots of all constructs' AVEs in Table 4 of this study are all greater than the correlations among all constructs in Table I. It can be concluded that the discriminative validity of the measurement in this study is acceptable. In addition to this the AVE of all constructs are greater than 0.5. This clearly demonstrated that there is convergent validity for the components.

As shown in Table 4, the AVEs of the four components are 0.652, 0.764, 0.738, 0.712 and 0.697, respectively. All the value presented are greater than 0.5. It demonstrates that there is convergent validity in this study. Thus, it can be concluded that the measurement of this study is acceptable in discriminative validity and convergent validity. Several tests of reliability and validity were conducted and it clearly demonstrates that there are adequate reliability and validity in this study.

Based on structural model results indicated in Table 5, the overall fit measures of the SEM in this study shows that the fit of the model is very good (GFI = 0.896, RMSEA = 0.056, NFI = 0.921, CFI = 0.908). In fact, all of the paths estimated are significant, and all hypotheses are supported in this study. (RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation, CFI=Comparative fit index, Normed fit index (NFI) , GFI = Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI).

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Table 5 : Structural Model Results

Hypothesis	Proposed effect	Path coefficient	Results
H_1	+	0.266*	H_1 is significant
H_2	+	0.297**	H_2 is significant
H_3	+	0.294*	H_3 is significant
H_4	+	0.238*	H_4 is significant
H_5	+	0.258*	H_5 is significant

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01.

The data collected during the consumer survey were used to calculate the consumers' overall attitudes using Fishbein's model for measurement of attitude[1]. The importance of attributes, the belief scores for each attribute and the attitude scores towards the green brand are shown in Tables 6.

Table 6 : Customers attitude score towards green branding for beauty product

Green branding towards beauty product attributes	Importance of attribute	Belief score
Ingredients	4.67	4.77
Product fragrance	4.32	4.35
Product safety	4.81	4.85
Product color	4.69	4.72
Product performance	4.55	4.66
Reduce Packaging	4.67	4.59
Value for money	4.58	4.56
Energy efficient store atmosphere	4.68	4.66
Opportunity to pre-test/trial	3.15	3.17
Comfortable	4.35	4.38
Product quality	4.12	4.14
Recyclable/Reusable	4.38	4.45
Organics/ natural ingredients	4.68	4.69
Not harmful to nature and animals	3.12	3.05
Attitude score 171.68		

IV. Results and Discussion

According to P. Rajan Varadarajan and Anil Meno (1988), going green is the process of formulating and implementing marketing activities that are characterized by an offer from the firm to contribute a specific amount to a designated cause when customer engaged in revenue providing exchanges that satisfy organizational and individual objectives. This business imperative is vital due to the fact that environment issues have become mainstream and consumer environmentalism has created a market for environmentally friendly products. In fact, green marketing is one of the inevitable strategies for companies to stay competitive, and this approach has been widely accepted and applied in recent years. Therefore, green marketing often allows the business corporation the access to potential and new markets, to increase their profitability, and more importantly to obtain competitive advantages. For business corporations who have solid brand equity it can provide a competitive advantage. This is because it gives the brand the power to capture a larger market share and to sell at higher prices with higher profit margins (Jung and Sung, 2008). Therefore, it is essential to incorporate the idea of marketing into the framework of green brand.

From the focus group discussions and consumer survey the study also show that green branding in Malaysia is characterized by many opportunities and threats. The sensitization of Malaysians about environmental problems is beginning to drive the market for environmentally-friendly products. Many business corporations especially foreign and local, have adopted programs to deploy technologies and market products that minimize the extent of environmental damage. On the other hand, from the threat perspective, communication and lack of co-ordination amongst various constituents of the society are responsible for a less than enthusiastic response towards environmental issues. The recycling infrastructure in Malaysia is till today inadequate and costly.

The study revealed that green branding for beauty products need to adapt its products to local conditions in terms of reduce packaging, ingredients, color and fragrance. Respondents also feel that green brand command prices that are relatively higher, and are not fully able to comprehend the corporate support activities business corporations have launched to save the environment on a global basis.

The study indicated that Malaysian customers base their purchase decisions for green brand on many basic attributes such as "good value for money", "product performance", "product safety". This is because they may be committed to buy green brands. However, they are not willing to compromise on critical aspects such as price and safety. The key attributes they regard important are "ingredients" to engage with the brand.

This study summarizes the branding literature on green marketing and branding management into a new managerial framework. The empirical results summarised that green brand awareness, green brand image, green brand credibility, green brand community and green brand engagement are positively related to green branding. In fact all the hypotheses proposed in this study are significant. Therefore, this study suggests that business corporation should invest more resources in green brand awareness initiatives, green brand image, green brand credibility, green brand community and green brand engagement. This is because all these components are positively associated with green branding.

It is observed that business corporations have tried to exploit popular concerns about environmental issues to position their brands to obtain new

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differentiation advantages in new changing markets. Hence, the idea of green branding can become an innovative way of positioning their brand. Till today not many Malaysian owned business corporations are willing to carry out their green marketing campaign. This is because they potentially face huge challenges to incorporate their environmental vision into their corporate strategies. They need a substantial amount of resources to implement this strategy. Thus, in order for the business corporation to enhance their green branding, they should incorporate the ideas of green brand awareness, green brand image, green brand credibility, green brand community and green brand engagement into their long-term environmental strategies in their business strategy plan.

This study focused on beauty products in Malaysia, it is recommended that further studies can focus on the purchase experience of other products in Malaysia and other countries. This study verified the hypotheses with a questionnaire survey and focus group, and only providing cross sectional data. Thus it may not observe the dynamic change of green brand awareness, green brand image, green brand credibility, green brand community and green brand engagement in the different stages of the evolution of consumer green demands and environmental regulations in different countries. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies be based on a longitudinal study to evaluate the changes in the five brand components over a designated period of time.

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