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The Effect of Primary and Secondary Brand Association on Fast Food Industry

Novi Amelia*
* Departement of Branding, Universitas Prasetiya Mulya,
BSD City, Tangerang, Banten, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Consumers nowaday are now becoming more health conscious, more environment friendly, and concern about where their meals come from. This shift of consumers' preferences are threatening the big food industry and one of the way to survive is through rebranding. This study is aimed to see the the effect of primary and secondary brand association on consumer's perception toward the healthy brand image. We conducted two experimental design, each group of the study used a one group only with pre and post
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Kata Kunci:
Citra Perusahaan,
Model UTAUT
Asosiasi Merek,
Rebranding,
Gaya Hidup Sehat.

SARI PATI

Konsumen saat sekarang ini mulai sadar akan kesehatan, peduli akan lingkungan, dan ingin tahu darimana makanan yang mereka konsumsi berasal. Perubahan preferensi konsumen ini mengancam raksasa industri makanan dunia dan salah satu cara untuk bertahan adalah melalui *rebranding.* Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk melihat dampak dari *primary* dan *secondary brand association* pada konsumen terhadap *healthy brand image.* Kami melakukan dua rancangan ekseprimen di mana setiap rancangan menggunakan *one group only with pre and post-test.* Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa penggunaan *primary brand association* tidak berdampak terhadap perubahan *brand image* tetapi berdampak positif terhadap citra perusahaan. Sementara untuk *secondary brand association,* penggunaannya tidak berdampak baik kepada *brand image* maupun citra perusahaan.

Corresponding Author:
Novi Amelia
Email: novi.amelia@pmbs.ac.id

INTRODUCTION

People are experiencing a lifestyle change recently. From chips, burgers, and fried chicken to some fresh and organic foods. They are now becoming more health conscious, more environment friendly, and concern about where their meals come from. These things might happen due to the fear of high chances in getting terminal disease and the fear of living on the dying earth like the one in *Insterstellar* movie. This trend seems unended in the near time, considering the rises of digital era, which makes this lifestyle accessible to anyone. In Indonesia, the healthy lifestyle trend also arises especially among those who live in urban area. Happening sport events like running and yoga are easily found in the cities, and not to mention the development of diet catering business.

As stated above, the healthy lifestyle trend leads consumer to become more concern about the foods they consume. They want to know about the source of their meal and start to prefer the organic one which is pesticide free and environmental friendly. Based on some reports, consumers' preferences are threatening the big food industry (Fortune, 2015). As we know, artificial flavors; artificial colors; pesticide; growth hormone and others, are common things in the big food industry. And since the rises of healthy life style trend, they are reporting a global sales decline for their products. McDonald's, a giant food chain company, reported the decline of their sales this year. Others fast food companies are experiencing the same thing. From the beverage sector, Coke's products also suffered from the declining of soda consumption. Here comes the question: How does the big food industry cope with the declining trend caused by shifting consumers' preferences?

Some big food companies are trying to rebrand their image toward a healthier one. Some companies launched new products related with veggie or other healthy food (Washington post, 2015), some announced to dismiss their artificial colors, flavor, and preservatives soon (Time, 2015), and others are partnering with healthy product manufacturers to grab the potential of healthy food business. Though seems different, there is a commonality of those different approaches, i.e. they are trying to convince their consumers that their products are going healthier and that they are becoming a healthier product manufacturer.

From branding point of view, these companies are putting a healthy association on consumer's mind toward their brands, so the consumers will perceived their brand as a healthy one. Thus this study is aimed to see the effect of building a new association in rebranding big food industry toward a healthy one, will it be favorable or not?

Rebranding Strategy

The term rebrand is made up based on two words: "Re" which means "again" and "brand" as the process of differentiate a service/product from competitors which implies to a brand activity for an established brand to develop a new position in the mind of consumers (Muzellec&Lambkin, 2005). This term is usually used to describe three activities: changing the name, changing the brand, repositioning the brand (Muzellec*et al*., 2003) and also when assigning a new meaning to existing product (Oppuni *et al*., 2013).

There are some factors why rebranding is needed: the saturated target market, need for a new positioning to generate the growth, the existing target market is already ages, and the declination of the product due to the rise of technology (Aaker, 2005). Furthermore, Tevi&Utubanjo (2013) grouped the factors into two: internal factors and external factors. Internal factors is based on the firm's situation internally while external factors are based on the external situation such as competitor, economic growth, and external stakeholder that force the firm to rebranding their product/corporate. As for this study, the need to rebrand the fast food industry image is influenced by the external factor, which is the rise of consumer's healthy lifestyle nowadays.

There are two kinds of rebranding activity: Evolutionary rebranding and revolutionary rebranding. Evolutionary means a minor change and revolutionary means a major change that can be identified by the all the stakeholders (Muzellec&Lambkin, 2005). In this study, the rebranding of the big food industry toward a healthy one might be categorized as a revolutionary rebranding, because it is aimed to change consumer's perception about its previous image as unhealthy food toward a healthy one, which is a totally contrast image than before and we can assume that as a major change. Some companies have tried their rebranding strategy by launching a new product, dismissing the unhealthy ingredients, and create a new line of product (Washington post, 2015; Time, 2015). All of these were aimed to put a new association on consumer's mind toward their products.

Primary versus Secondary Brand Association

Brand image is believed as one of the important term in marketing concept, yet the exact definition has not been agreed on academic field. Even so, the concept that was proposed by Keller (1993) seems widely acceptable since it has been used in many branding image literatures. He defined brand image as "*Perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand association held in consumer memory*". It is a consumer's mental construct based on their association toward the brand (Danes *et al.,* 2010).

As mention above, in building the brand image, consumer should have an association toward the brand on their minds. It is the information related with the brand that contains a meaning for consumer. Keller (1993) distinguished these brand associations into primary brand association and secondary brand association. He stated that the primary brand association is something that related with the product it self, like changing the ingredients, the taste, etc. While for the secondary brand association, the association is linked to other information that is not related with the product. It is recognized based on consumer's memory about others that not directly related with the product, like the people, things, and places (Keller, 2003).

Actually there were not much of brand association studies mentioned the distinction between primary and secondary brand association. They were usually using the term "brand association" for both of the kinds, even though Keller (1993) has distinguished them into two categories and on 2003 he wrote about the importance of secondary brand association in building favorable brand image. Hence in this study we will differentiate the primary and secondary brand association in building a favorable brand image on big food industry.

Different Routes of Perception Change

In order to put the new association on consumer minds, the company should communicate its attributes so the consumers will change their perceptions from an unhealthy brand toward a healthy one. Based on the Petty *et al* (1983), there is two ways consumers will change their perception toward a brand: through the central route and peripheral route. Central route is a consumer change of perception as a result of their consideration toward the logical and reasonable message that was delivered about the product. In central route, everything is related with the product (Petty *et al.,* 1983; Chang, 2006; Khrisnan&Monika, 2009). As in this study, the central route is quite similar with the primary brand association, which is also related with the product. While for the peripheral route, the change of perception is resulted by the cues that associated with the product (Petty *et al.,* 1983). It is not focused on the message toward the products nor have a direct influence on them (Michael, 1997; Chang, 2006; Krishnan&Monika,

2009). It is associated with the secondary cues just like the secondary brand association.

Previous studies stated that the central route is relatively enduring or have a long-term effect. As for the peripheral, the change is relatively temporary or short-term (Petty *et al.,* 1983; Michael, 1997). Based on that finding, we can assume that the primary brand association might lead to the long-term effect on consumer's changing perception toward the big food industry, while the secondary brand association will only effect on a short-term. This might be acceptable considering the primary brand association is directly related with the product. So the consumers can see explicitly that the product changed toward a healthy one. Contrarily, the secondary brand association is using the cues that not directly associate with the healthy product. So the consumers need to associate this cue by themselves. At first they might be could change their perception that the product is now changing to the healthy one, but as the time goes by and if they do not see the product itself change explicitly, the possibility of the consumer's changing their perception again is arises. However, despite of the long-term and short-term effect in changing perception, this study will only see the short-term effect of the primary and secondary brand association due to the limitation of the study.

Thus the hypotheses of this study are:
H1: The primary brand association will have a short-term effect on creating a favorable brand image on big food industry.
H2: The secondary brand association will have a short-term effect on creating a favorable brand image on big food industry.

METHODS

In this study we examined the effect of primary and secondary brand association on consumer's perception toward the healthy brand image. Thus there were two experimental designs conducted in this study, one for primary and other for secondary. Each group of the study used a one group only with pre and post-test experimental design to examine the difference of participant perception between pre-test and post-test. There was a pre-test, a treatment, and post-test for each group. The post-test was conducted directly because this study only wanted to see the short-term effect of the brand association.

As for the product of the big food industry, we used burger and coke. Based on the gathered news that already mentioned above, both of them are the products that hit by the healthy life style due to their association with unhealthy food. Burger was used for primary brand association group. As the primary brand association is product related, the ingredients of the burger was changed. The meat was preservatives and growth hormone free, and the lettuce was organic and fresh. And for the secondary brand association, the product was coke. This coke was served with a smaller size cup than the usual one. Since the attributes of secondary brand association should be not directly related to the product, this smaller cup was a cue for the participants that this brand, which served the smaller size coke, was supporting the healthy lifestyle.

Participants

The participants in this study were 16 graduate students who were end consumers of burgers and cokes. All of them were provided by inform consent first and asked to fill out their demographic data (age, sex, income). Then they were given a number randomly, which will be used for the randomization purpose. The participants then were grouped into two; each group was consisted of seven participants. The participants who hold the even numbers were grouped on to group one (primary brand association) and the participants who hold the odd numbers were grouped on to group two (secondary brand association).

Stimuli and treatment
For the group 1 (primary brand association), this study used two burgers as the stimuli for the experiment. One burger was the usual burger that consumers easily find in the nearest fast food outlets (figure 1), while the second burger was the burger that made from low calorie bun, preservatives and hormone growth free meat, and fresh lettuce (figure 2).

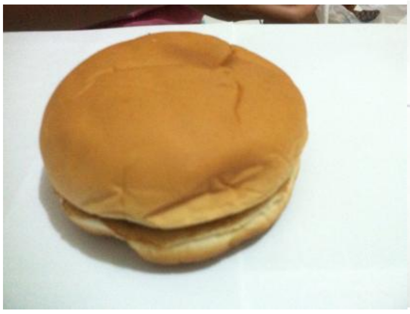
Figure 1.

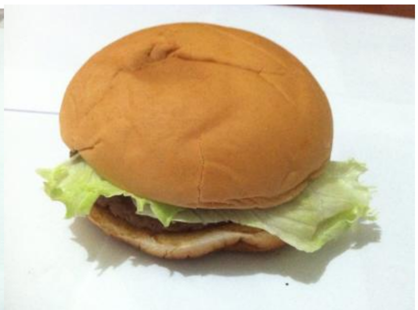
Figure 2.

As for the group 2, the respondents were presented with two size of coke's cup. One is reguler cup that can easily find in the nearest fast food outlets, the height is approximately 14 cm (figure 3). While the other one is the smaller size cup with 9.5 cm height (figure 4).

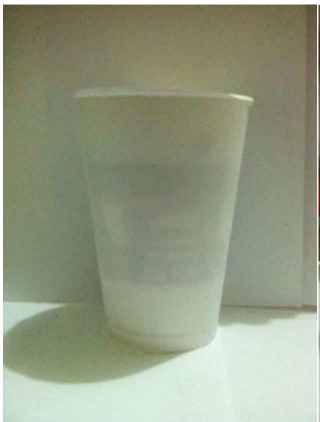
Figure 3.

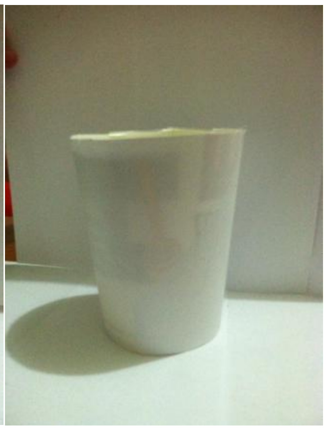
Figure 4.

Both groups were given a presentation about the products. One was mentioned as the reguler product that they usually buy, while the other is the new product that would be launched by the company.

Procedures
Group One (Primary Brand Association)
At first the participants will be asked about their perception toward the burger from big food industry, are they healthy or not. This question will be used as pre-test data. Then they will be presented the usual burger that they usually eat, following with a burger with healthy ingredients. As for the healthy burger, the participants will be informed that this burger is preservative and growth hormone free and also use the fresh organic lettuce. After the presentation, participants will be asked again about they perception toward the brand if the healthy burger is launched. Will they perceive this brand as healthy or not. This question will be used as post-test data.

Group Two (Secondary Brand Association)

Just like the group one, this group will also be started with the pre-test about their perception toward the coke, which is the product that will be used in this group. Do they perceive it as a healthy brand or not. After the pre-test, they will be presented a regular cup of coke like they usually order, following with the coke served by smaller cup than the usual size. After the presentation, the participants will be asked the same question like on the pre-test, do they perceive the brand as healthy if the brand launched a smaller cup of coke. This question will be used as the post-test data.

Data analysis technique

To see the results of each brand association, this study used descriptive statistics data using SPSS version 22 to analyse the collected data from pre-test and post-test. By analysing it descriptively, we can describe respondents perception toward the brand image before and after the treatment. So we can see whether the treatment from each association was favorable or not in changing company unhealthy brand image.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic

The demographic data of the respondents is described in table. 1. Among 16 respondents of this study, 68.8% of them were female and 31.3 were male. Age distribution was from 20 to 31 years, with 56.3% of the respondents were in the age of 20 to 25. Regarding the income, there were 37.5% of the respondents had less than 2 million rupiahs per-month, 56.3% had income between 2 million and 3.5 million rupiah, only 1 respondent (6.3%) had income more than 3.5 million rupiah. As for the frequency of buying food in fast food outlet in a month, 62.5% of respondents indicated that they purchased fast food not more than three times in a month, while 37.5% of them purchased 3 to 5 times in a month.

Table 1. Descriptive characteristics of the respondents

Category	Responses	Frequency (N=16)	Percentage (%)
Age	20 – 25	9	56.3
	26 – 31	7	43.8
Sex	Male	5	31.3
	Female	11	68.8
Income	Less than 2 million rupiah	6	37.5
	2 – 3.5 million rupiah	9	56.3
	More than 3.5 million rupiah	1	6.3
Frequency of buying fast food	Less than 3 times in a month	10	62.5
	3-5 times in a month	6	37.5

1. **Group 1 (Primary Brand Association)**

   Pre-test

   In the group of primary association, it was found that all the respondents perceived the usual burgers that they buy at fast food outlet were unhealthy. As presented in table 2, 100% of the respondents indicated that the burger was not healthy. So did the company, all the respondents also perceived that the company that served the burger did not support the healthy lifestyle.

   Post-test

   After being presented with the other version of burger (the one with new ingredients), only 37.5% of the respondents perceived that the burger was a healthy product, while the rest of them still perceived that burger as unhealthy. Yet, most of them (62.5%) perceived that the company that served the burger with new ingredients supported the healthy lifestyle.

Table 2. The results of group 1 (primary brand association)

Indicator	Responds	Pre-test		Post-test	
		F (N=8)	%	F (N=8)	%
Do you perceive the burger as a healthy product?	Yes	0	0	3	37.5
	No	8	100	5	62.5
Do you perceive the company that serve the burger support healthy lifestyle?	Yes	0	0	5	62.5
	No	8	100	3	37.5

2. **Group 2 (Secondary Association)**

Pre-test

Just like the pre-test on the group1, the respondents also perceived that the coke they usually buy is not a healthy product. As well as the company that served them. Like presented in table 3, 100% of them perceived it as the company that did not support healthy lifestyle.

Post test

The post-test result indicated that 100% of the respondents still did not perceive the coke as a healthy product even though it was served in a smaller size. As for the respondents perception toward the company, only 12.5% of respondents that perceived it as the company that supported healthy lifestyle.

Table 3. The results of group 2 (secondary brand association)

Indicator	Responds	Pre-test		Post-test	
		F (N=8)	%	F (N=8)	%
Do you perceive the coke as a healthy product?	Yes	0	0	0	0
	No	8	100	8	100
Do you perceive the company that serve the coke support healthy lifestyle?	Yes	0	0	1	12.5
	No	8	100	7	87.5

This study is aimed to see the effect of both primary and secondary brand association on consumer perception toward healthy branding in fast food industry. The results of this study indicated that the use of primary brand association was not significantly change consumer perception toward the product. As mention above, most of the respondents still perceived the product as unhealthy product. Yet the primary brand association seems had a positive effect toward the company's brand. Most of the respondents indicated that they perceived the company that using primary brand association supported the healthy lifestyle. Thus the hypothese 1 "*The primary brand association will have a short-term effect on creating a favorable brand image on big food industry"* was accepted. This finding echoes with Keller (1993) papers about the needed of primary brand association in building a brand image.

Contradictory with the findings related with primary brand association, this study found that the use of secondary brand association did not change consumer perception toward the fast food brand image, either toward the product and the company. Hence based on the study in the group 2, the second hypothese "*The secondary brand association will have a short-term effect on creating a favorable brand image on big food industry*" was rejected. Though Keller (1993) also stated that secondary brand association create a brand image, the contradictory result might be occurred because the cue that using in this study for the secondary brand association is the smaller size cup of coke. The respondents might be relating the cue as a product based association, so they thought it as a product. As the consumer is creating their consideration based on the logical and reasonable message toward a product, they did not perceive that the smaller size of coke was healthier, because it still contained the same amount of calorie. Beside, since the company did not explicitly mention their healthy efforts, the association that they create on their mind would be up to the consumer assumptions.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATION

Thus this study provide the findings that enables the managers, especially in big food industry who are trying to change their unhealthy brand image, considered which brand association will favorably effect the brand image. The need in changing the brand image as healthy company is necessary in food industry nowaday. Considering the rise of consumer healthy lifestyle recently, when the consumers are starting to concern about the foods they consume.

CONCLUSION

Though the use of primary brand association did not practically changed consumer perception on healthy product, it was favorable in changing company's image as the supporter of healthy lifestyle. Contradictory, for the secondary brand association, the use of it was not favorable for changing consumer perception toward the product nor the company in the case of trying the brand image toward a healthy one.

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