Issues of Authenticity in Brand Licensing and The Use of Mental Visual Imagery in Authenticity Judgment

ภาพลักษณ์ความเป็นของแท้ในการให้สัมปทานการผลิตสินค้ามีตรายี่ห้อและการใช้จินตนาการในการตัดสินความเป็นของแท้

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Abstract

Licensed brand refers broadly to any brands that are manufactured and marketed by someone other than the brand owner. The goal of this research is to study the link between a person's assessment of the authenticity of a licensed and his or her attitude towards the brand by exploring the various dimensions of authenticity. In addition, In order for the licensed brand to be perceived as authentic, the cues for assessing and the methods for communicating authenticity are crucial between marketers and consumers over what is (or is not) authentic. This paper suggests that the use of mental visual image can result in better understanding of cues of authenticity. In a qualitative study and two field studies, this research examines different types of visual mental image, attributes and assessment of authenticity and consumers' attitude formation associated with licensed brand.

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บทคัดย่อ

  แบรนด์ได้รับอนุญาตหมายถึง แบรนด์ใดๆ ก็ตามที่เจ้าของแบรนด์อนุญาต
ให้ผู้อื่นทำการผลิตและทำการตลาดแทน งานวิจัยนี้มีจุดมุ่งหมายเพื่อศึกษาความ
สัมพันธ์ระหว่างการประเมินความแท้จริงของใบอนุญาตของบุคคลใดบุคคลหนึ่งกับ
ทัศนคติต่อแบรนด์ของบุคคลนั้นๆ โดยมองว่าเป็นของแท้จากหลายมิติมุมมอง นอก
จากนี้การมองว่าแบรนด์และแนวทางในการประเมินแบรนด์และวิธีการสื่อสารความ
จริงของแบรนด์ ระหว่างนักการตลาดกับผู้บริโภคมากกว่าแบรนด์อะไรแท้จริง
หรือไม่แท้จริง บทความนี้แนะนำการใช้ภาพลักษณ์ทางสมอง โดยการศึกษาเชิง
คุณภาพและการศึกษาภาคสนาม 2 ครั้ง งานวิจัยนี้ศึกษาการใช้ภาพลักษณ์ทางสมอง
หลายแบบ คุณลักษณะและการประเมินความแท้จริง การก่อตัวของทัศนคติของผู้
บริโภคที่เกี่ยวแบรนด์ได้รับอนุญาต

Keyword : Brand Licensing , Mental Visual Imagery,
      Authenticity Judgment

As the world markets become increasingly globalized, brand licensing has been used by firms to further exploit their brand equity in foreign markets. In brand licensing, a licensee instead of the brand owner is in charge of the manufacturing, marketing and channel development in a marketing territory specified by the licensing agreement (Tang & Yu 1990; Griffin & Pustay 1996). However, despite the increasing activities in brand licensing by multinational companies, to date very little research has been carried out to investigate the implications of brand licensing and little is known about why some licensed brands are more successful than some others in the marketplace, and some even surpass the performance of the original brand. For example, Haier, China's largest home electrical appliance manufacturer began its ascent by licensing refrigerator technology and the brand from German Liebherr Corp. in 1985 (Peoples' Daily 2002) with the original brand name of "Liebherr-herr". From 1985 to 1997 Haier started to introduce its licensed brand and product lines in China, and despite its licensee image, Liebherr-herr generated strong domestic sales. In 1998, the company became so successful that it decided to drop the

original brand owner's name in the brand (i.e. Liebherr-herr) and re-branded it to the current brand name "Haier". This is a critical gap for marketers as it raises an important question as to whether or not a licensed brand is still capable of performing similar functions as the original brand now that it is no longer 'original'. Therefore the first objective of this paper is to examine the effect of perceived authenticity of a licensed brand on consumers' attitude towards the brand.

The issues of authenticity have been studied in various contexts such as tourism and reproduction of art (e.g.). Most researchers agree that authenticity is not an attribute inherent in an object and is better understood and assessed by a particular evaluator in its particular context (e.g. Grayson and Martinec 2004; Peñaloza 2001; Stern 1994). This is particularly relevant in brand licensing, as the cues negotiate the meaning of authenticity for a licensed brand, and these cues may or may not be related to the attributes of the original brands. Drawing from these studies, we propose that in the absence of originality in the context of brand licensing, consumers instead rely on their perception of authenticity to form their attitude

towards licensed brands and there exist multiple dimensions of authenticity in brand licensing. In other words, we argue that perceived authenticity rather than factual "originality" is the key to understand consumers' attitude towards brand licensing.

Next, we are interested in investigating methods which may assist consumers making sense of the cues for authenticity. Consumers use different methods to make sense of cues for decision making such as cognitive elaboration (Petty and Cacioppo 1986) or apply imagery account (Green and Brock 2000). Research has suggested that the encouragement of applying visual mental imagery yield more favorable brand judgments (Schlosser 2003). Mental visual imagery is *the quasi-perceptual experience* which resembles perceptual experience as one of the mental processes that consumers use to make sense of cues (Richardson, 1999). Therefore the second objective of this paper is to investigate whether the use of mental visual imagery will result in better authenticity judgment.

The link between authenticity and consumer attitude

Grayson and Martinec (2004) identified two dimensions of authenticity based on the semiotic model developed by Peirce (1998): *the indexical authenticity and iconic authenticity.* Indexical authenticity refers to the physical or psychological link which distinguishes the "real thing" from its copies (Grayson and Shulman 2000). Iconic authenticity refers to the preexisting knowledge or expectations which a person perceives something being similar to something else. In order for the licensed brand to be perceived as authentic, the cues for communicating authenticity are crucial, and this process of understanding and specifying these cues is called the negotiation of meaning (Grayson and Martinec, 2004).

Attitude towards a brand can be defined as consumer's overall brand evaluation (Aaker and Keller 1990). Zeithaml (1988) indicates that attitude toward the brand stems from beliefs or knowledge about attributes of the brand and its product. Attitudes are enduring patterns of belief which are predictive of behaviour (Ajzen 2002). Consumers

who express positive attitudes towards a certain type of behavior are more likely to engage in that behavior. Perceived authenticity is a type of cognitive association that consumers develop in relation to licensed brands. Cognition is part of the belief formation and the salience of beliefs in tern form attitude (Ajzen, 2002). Therefore:

H 1 : Perceived iconic authenticity is positively correlated with consumers' attitude formation toward licensed brands.

H 2 : Perceived indexical authenticity is positively correlated with consumers' attitude formation toward licensed brands.

H 3 : Perceived authenticity is positively correlated with consumers' attitude formation toward licensed brands.

The link between Authenticity and Mental Visual Imagery

Past research (e.g. Adeyemo, 1990; Dahl and Chattopadhyay, 1999; MacInnis and Price, 1987) has shown that mental visual imagery is one of the mental processes which one uses to make sense of cues. Mental imagery is a form of internal representation in which information about the appearance of physical objects, events and scenes can be depicted and manipulated (Richardson 1999, P. 3). Research in marketing has distinguished different types of visual mental imagery: the image based on *memory* and *imagination* (Dahl and Chattopadhyay, 1999; MacInnis and Price 1987). These authors define memory image as the event or occasion that a person has personally experienced or observed whereas imagination imagery is a new, never–before–experienced event.

Assessment of authenticity involves a complex perceptual process (Belk and Costa 1998; Peñaloza 2001). A person may construe the cues via the formation of mental visual image before further deriving his/her perception about the authenticity of a licensed brand. Iconic authenticity may be achieved when cues are congruent with their memory. To view something as iconically authentic, a perceiver will need to have some preexisting knowledge or perceived similarities of a licensed brand

with something he or she is familiar with, memory imagery can be interpreted as the cue which links consumers preexisting knowledge with the perceived iconic authenticity about the licensed brand. Therefore:

H 4 : The use of memory imagery is positively correlated with perceived iconic authenticity.

Imagination imagery involves the creation of previously unseen image and the capacity of imagination imagery determines one's ability to negotiate meaning out of novel information (Adeyemo 1990). To view something as an index, a perceiver must believe it actually has the "factual" and "spatio-temporal link" that is claimed (Grayson and Shulman 2000). Imagination imagery can be an effective aid to strengthen the acceptance of marketing communications from the licensee toward the perception of indexical authenticity by consumers. Therefore:

H 5 : The use of imagination imagery is positively correlated with perceived indexical authenticity.

H 6 : The use of mental visual imagery is positively correlated with perceived authenticity of licensed brand.

Methods and Measures

There are two stages of data collection in this research: exploratory focus group studies and controlled experiments.

Exploratory Focus Group Studies

The focus group studies were completed. The purpose of the focus group studies is twofold. Firstly, we hoped to gain deeper understanding about how consumers perceive the connections among our three focal concepts and to develop a set of hypotheses. Secondly, it would help with the development of relevant measures to be used in the controlled experiments.

Three focus group interviews were designed and conducted based on the guideline from Krueger (1994) and Yin (1984). Twenty-six informants (20 to 35 years of age) were recruited from both undergraduate and postgraduate students in a west midland university in

the United Kingdom. Each focus group lasted around 60 minutes. The informants, 51% of which are female, have Chinese origin. These informants were recruited for the consistency with second stage of data collection in China. The focus group results were content analyzed according to the guideline of Yin (1984). The results shown that, firstly, there exist different antecedents for the two dimensions of authenticity (see Table 1 for detail). Secondly, the distinction between the use of memory and imagination imagery is important aids to assess authenticity of licensed brands.

Study One

To examine the effect of perceived authenticity on consumers' attitude formation (H1, H2, and H3), a set of questionnaire will be administrated on-line. Real brands instead of fictitious brands will be employed as subject of study. Real brands are used to enable mental visual imagery usage. The original brands will be selected based on Aaker and Keller's (1990) criteria for parent brand selection. Brands will be selected of being relevant to the subjects, generally perceived as high quality, able to elicit relatively specific associations. Specifically, the chosen brands should

have not been largely licensed yet, so that it can avoid the impact of over-licensed situations (i.e. noise generated by multiple licensees). The selection of prestige (concept) and functional (concrete, usage) brands implies a distinction between the brands in the minds of the respondent, as revealed by previous research (Park et al., 1989, 1991; Roux, 1995). Thus brands should be pilot tested to ensure they are categorized correctly by respondents and brands not eliciting clear category responses will be eliminated from the study. A total of four brands from the same product category (to control for the effect of product heterogeneity on the results) will be selected and each of the two brands maintaining distinct indexical or iconic elements.

The questionnaire will contain measures of perceived authenticity developed in study 1. To measure attitude toward licensed brand, we adopt the scale recommended by Kind and Smith (2001). All measurement items in this research will be using a 7-point semantic differential scale.

To study the effect of different indicators on two types of authenticity (i.e. H1 and H2 an ANOVA will be used to analyze the significance of the

relationships. To examine whether consumer will form positive attitude towards licensed brand when it is perceived more authentic (i.e. H3), an ANOVA will be used to study the correlation.

Study Two
Method

To examine the use of different imagery types upon the perceptions of authenticity (H4 and H5), the two experimental factors (memory and imagination imagery) will be manipulated in a between subjects design. One hundred and fifty students participated in the study are to be Chinese –origin from an UK university. Chinese students are to be recruited for two major reasons: the consistency with focus group results and the consistency with where most brand licensing activities taken place. Similar studies in consumer research have used student samples. Brand and product chosen for this research will be fictitious. Fictitiousness will be used to ensure low levels of familiarity of these brands among the participants and to reduce potential noise generated with their previous experience.

Design

In this study, the independent Variables will be the visual mental imagery types which will be manipulated by instructing participants to rely on images based on either memory or imagination during the experiments. Experimental design will consist of a 2 (imagery type) x 2 (authenticity type) +1 control mixed model. Imagery types are between–subjects variables, with subjects exposed to a set of either memory or imagination stimuli. In the memory imagery condition, participants will be given a booklet containing a brief description of memory imagery and information regarding the fictitious brand. Participants will be asked to "dig" into their memory and visualize similar brand and product in their daily life when filing out questionnaire on the perception of authenticity. In the imagination imagery condition, participants will be given a booklet containing a brief description of imagination imagery and the same information as in the memory condition regarding the fictitious brand. Participants will be asked to visualize the fictitious brand based on the information provided in the booklet

when filing out questionnaire on the perception of authenticity.

Manipulation and Measures

First part of the questionnaire will contain questions regarding perceived authenticity. Construct measures generate from the interviews and literature will be pre-tested for convergent and discriminate validity. Relevant measurement items were adopted from Laroche et al. (1996) and Lane and Jacobson's (1995) to measure iconicity with familiarity of the brand. Relevant items from Guʔrhan-Canli and Maheswaran (2005) and Parameswaran and Yaprak's (1987) scale were adopted for measuring iconicity with country of origin. Relevant items were adopted from Melewar and Saunders's (1999) scale to measure iconicity with trademark. To measure idexicality with perceived manufacturing expertise, relevant items were adopted from Keller and Aaker (1992) and Dahl and Chattopadhyay's (1999) scale. The items focus on perceived quality and newness of the licensed product. Relevant items were adapted from Keller and Aaker's (1992) scale and focus on fit and logic to license. Relevant items from Peck and Childers (2003) and Spangenberg et. al. (1996) scale was

adopted to measure the perceived credibility of the retail outlets.

Second part of the questionnaire will contain questions that sought to determine the nature and form of their imagery. It will be adopted from Dahl and Chattopadhyay's (1999) 7-point scale which ask how "hard" participants were using imagery when filling out the questionnaire. The questionnaire for the experiments will finish with an open-ended measure that ask participants to describe any mental picture they have. These response will be used to asses the success of the incorporation of manipulation. The types of imagery used to assess perceived authenticity will be examined with scale measures of memory and imagination usage. A two-way ANOVA with imagery types as two independent factors will be examined. The open-ended responses will be coded to identify the number of distinctly different images involving in the evaluating process of perceived authenticity.

Discussion and Conclusions

Little is known about why some licensed brands are more successful than some others in the marketplace, and some even surpass the performance of

the original brand. Our preliminary findings suggest that all licensed brands posses both indexically and iconically authentic properties and consumers may rely on their perception of authenticity to form their attitude towards licensed brands. To examine what marketers should do to communicate these two dimensions of authenticity more effectively, we have conceptualized that the process of authenticity assessment can be intervened by the use of mental visual imagery.

Base on the discussion above, this research intend to make two related contributions. First, we have developed latent measurements for authenticity in the context of brand licensing. Secondly, we are to empirically test whether the use of mental visual imagery influence consumers' perception of authenticity. Results of this research will add a new dimension to the brand study in consumer research, providing a critical level of detail which differentiates types of visual mental image, cues and assessment of authenticity and consumers' attitude toward licensed brands.

Table 1. Examples of Informant Description of Indexical and Iconic Authenticity

Dimensions of Authenticity	Indicators	Description	Example of responses from Informants
Indexicality	Familiarity	Constructed based on the awareness of the original brand.	If any company is trying to license a brand, they should have at least licensed it from some brand I have heard of. If not, I wonder what difference it would make (F, 21, Hong Kong).
	Country of origin	Constructed based on assessment of country of origin of the original brand.	I only like Japanese made walkman, although there are not too many around now. the "Japanese made" give me a feeling of owning the real thing (M, 24, China).
	Trademark	Constructed based on trademark of the original brand.	I am very brand oriented. Logo is something tells me if it is authentic. I have seen a "lacoste" shirt which its crocodile look the other way. What a trick to fool consumer. (M, 20, China).
Iconicity	Expertise	The perceived manufacturing expertise of the licensed brand	I have seen a Ferrari computer. I think that is the beautiful piece of design I have ever seen. I really like to buy one… just feel good to even think about it (M, 20, China).
	Fit between licensed and original brands	Licensee is believed to have perceived fit with the original brand.	Do you know that Burberry Japan have had about 10 designers moving from UK to Japan….I see no difference in buying this brand in England or in Japan (F, 26, Taiwan).
	Distribution	Licensor is believed to have spatio-temporal link (via credibility of the retail outlet) with the original brand.	Last summer I went to this Ferrari store in Hongzhou. They even have the actual car in display. It is very nice and I paid 150 RMB just for a keychain (M, 24, China).

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