A STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF MASSTIGE STRATEGIES ON BRAND COOLNESS AND BRAND HAPPINESS

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ABSTRACT

RESEARCH AIM

Luxury was once exclusive and limited to a small group of wealthy individuals, but as purchasing power increased, traditional luxury brands began to lose their exclusivity. Brands realized they needed to expand their target audience to sustain their growth, leading to the birth of the masstige phenomenon, where premium but attainable products are marketed to the masses. While the masstige strategy has been proven effective, it has been largely ignored and underestimated in the literature. Moreover, the concept of brand coolness and its impact on customers is still in its nascent stage and will also be examined, particularly in the context of mobile brands, which have become a high priority for individuals in their everyday lives. So, this paper aims to contribute to the branding literature by examining the relationship between brand coolness and masstige, investigating how customers relate to their mobile brands in terms of different branding components and constructs, such as masstige, brand coolness, and brand happiness.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The luxury market has evolved to embrace the concept of democratic luxury, where luxury items that were once considered extraordinary by the masses are now perceived as ordinary by a growing number of people (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009). The term masstige was introduced by Silverstein & Fiske (2003) to describe a modern marketing and branding strategy that delivers prestige to the masses by launching new product lines, new brands, and product extensions to target the middle class. Masstige marketing aims to generate brand knowledge, love, likability, and attachment based on perceived prestige (Bilro et al., 2022). Masstige is not just about price reduction, but also about product innovation, careful promotional strategies, and keeping prices relatively high (Kumar et al., 2021).

While the definition of cool remains elusive, it is generally considered a subjective and dynamic positive trait attributed to cultural objects. Consumers associate cool brands with desirable characteristics, including aesthetics, originality, authenticity, rebelliousness, high status,

subculturalist, iconicity, and popularity (Warren et al., 2019). Coolness is dynamic in nature and changes during the process from niche to mass cool and eventually uncool brands (Loureiro et al., 2020). Before becoming cool for a mass, brands are typically considered cool for a niche within a small in-group or a particular outsider subculture. Mass cool brands are perceived to be more familiar, command a higher price premium, and produce more word of mouth (Warren & Campbell, 2014). However, mass brands need to maintain characteristics that made them cool in the first place to avoid becoming mainstream and less differentiated from competitors.

Building brand happiness is a highly advantageous strategy for companies, but it requires the creation of appropriate conditions to achieve it (Loureiro et al., 2022). These conditions include establishing a strong relationship between consumers and the brand, designing brands that align with consumer goals and self-concept, and creating fair, unique, and enjoyable brand touchpoints (Batra et al., 2012). It is crucial for companies to carefully consider these requirements in order to successfully influence brand happiness and reap the benefits of a loyal and satisfied customer base.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a primary research method using a quantitative approach in the form of an online survey to test the conceptual model. The measurement of the constructs was based on previous research. The survey was conducted on Qualtrics platform and imported into PLS SEM for data treatment. To obtain a representative sample, the survey was distributed via social media platforms, targeting individuals of different ages, genders, and diversities residing in Germany. The data were cleaned by excluding respondents with half or empty answers and those residing outside of Germany, resulting in 327 valid comprised 58.5% females and 41.5% males, with two participants not disclosing their gender. The gender balance was acceptable since almost everyone in Germany owns a smartphone, and the female and male participants were almost equally represented.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This paper contributes to the existing literature on masstige and brand coolness, as well as on its relationship with brand happiness. First, the findings are consistent with Warren et al. (2019) research on the role of self-brand connection and cool brands in consumer behaviour. Second, the study shows that German consumers who integrate their mobile brand into their self-concept tend to find their brand cooler. This is because the brand is perceived as good-looking, aesthetically appealing, popular, or widely accepted. Moreover, German customers who feel connected to other brand consumers on a social level tend to identify more strongly with their individual identity, which

fosters their connection to the brand. Third, the study supports the research of Batra et al. (2012), which shows that happiness can be transferred to products by simply using them. When German customers are happy about their smartphone brand, they have a feeling of comfort towards the specific brand. Experiencing supplemental joy, they are motivated to buy more from this brand, which leads to consumer passion-driven behaviours.

The study provides managerial implications for mobile brands to focus on brand coolness, as it positively impacts brand happiness, and ultimately determining the success of a brand. Marketers should assess whether their brand is niche, mass or uncool, and work on the consequences, especially if they are represented worldwide, where coolness can vary across different cultures and countries. To make a brand cooler, marketers can focus on characteristics such as being extraordinary, aesthetically appealing, energetic, original, authentic, rebellious, high status, subcultural, iconic, and popular. This can positively influence the status and prestige of a brand, generating more word-of-mouth and offering the possibility to expect a higher price for the mobile brand product. Marketers can use typical brand happiness strategies, such as experience marketing, storytelling, gifts, cheerful and vibrant colours, fair, particular, and enjoyable brand touchpoints, to achieve brand happiness.

Keywords: Brand Coolness; Masstige; Brand Happiness; Branding.

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