An Assessment of the Impact of Perceived Brand Age on Brand Attitudes

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Brand age related factors have been suggested to impact consumers' attitudes and behaviors. Such relationships might have significant implications for marketing, branding, advertising researchers and practitioners. This study focuses on the impact of perceived brand age and consumers' attitudes towards new products brought to the market by established and well-known brand names. To test and validate whether and how perceived brand age influences brand attitudes among the consumers, the investigation surveyed 1,000 subjects nation-wide. The study adopted a 2x2x2 experimental design. One-way ANOVA was used to determine if there were significant differences between consumers' attitudes towards products, expected to be brought to the market by brands perceived as "newer" and "older." The results from this research suggest that the older brands stand an equal chance of success as the newer, younger ones, assuming all else is held constant. Indeed, in some cases, the older brands may actually have an advantage.

JEL Codes: M3 Marketing and Advertising

1. Introduction

Product and brand extensions are widely adopted marketing strategies. For example, "Arm & Hammer", a baking soda brand, introduced in 1846, and "Mr. Clean", a cleaning solution, introduced in 1958, have become broad lines of personal care and household goods (Pousner 2008; Church and Dwight 2009). Although some may perceive these two as "old" consumer brands, they are still around enjoying significant shelf space. On the other hand, myriad similarly "old" consumer good brands, such as Lifeboy and Lux bar soaps, have humbly faded away or suddenly disappeared from the market.

While a brand may be chronologically aged, does the consumer feel or perceive it to be old? And if so, what impact does this perception really have on their attitudes? Although some advertisers and marketers may argue that a brand's success stems from efforts to keep it "fresh," the evidence to date is largely implied or anecdotal. It is critical for brand managers and marketers to recognize not only how chronologically old a brand is, but also how the perceived age impacts consumers' attitudes.

Despite its theoretical importance and practical implications for marketing, branding and advertising, the impact of perceived brand age on consumers' attitudes towards new products brought to the market by established and well-known brand names has been

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limitedly investigated. Understanding this relationship could prove helpful with consumer targeting and brand positioning. It could improve the allocation of marketing dollars, lead to a better return on investment (R.O.I.) and accelerate the acceptance for new products.

2. Literature Review

Brand Age

A brand is not only a name. It is the organization behind it, the relationships it establishes, and the symbolism it represents (Aaker 1996). A brand's character evolves over time and is the result of communicated intentional or unintentional signals (Chevron 1998). Brand associations form "the promise of the bundles of attributes that someone buys and that provide satisfaction. The attributes that make up a brand may be real or illusory, rational or emotional, tangible or invisible" (Ambler and Styles 1997).

Keller (1999) defines consumers' knowledge of the brand as a combination of brand awareness, familiarity, and brand image dimensions (or "attributions"). Furthermore, a brand can be described by a set of human characteristics, known as 'brand personality' (Aaker 1997). One of the dimensions of Jennifer Aaker's brand personality scale, "Excitement," comprises 4 "facets:" Daring, Spirited, Imaginative, and Up-to-date. Furthermore, these facets contain various elements that refer to age perceptions, such as young, trendy, up-to-date, and contemporary.

Perceptions of youth and age are common associations, or attributions, made by the consumer with the brand (Aaker and Keller 1990). Brands may, one day, grow old and die, if proper care is not taken by management (Lehu 2003). Old, referred to a brand, however, may not mean aged or ancient (Bontour and Lehu 2002). There is a difference between a brand's perceived age and its actual age (Lehu 2004). A brand can be very aged but still young in the minds of consumers. But, a brand is old once consumers begin to neglect it, or when it looks old compared to new ones.

Over the years, several authors (e.g., Rosenberg 1979; Sirgy 1982; Deaux and Lewis 1983, 1984; Costa and MacCrae 1988, Batra and Singh 1993; Aaker 1997; Lehu 2004) attempted to understand and measure brand age. Lehu (2004) categorized the reasons for brand aging problems in three classes: the offer, the target, and the brand communications.

Darpy and Levesque (2005) noted that, despite the ongoing debate about the effect of "aging" on brands, there was no uniform way to measure perceptions of brand age. They rightly argued that "young–old" as a sole descriptor is too broad to properly measure perceived brand age. In addition, Darpy and Levesque (2005) observed that this simplified approach has never been validated as a legitimate construct of brand age. Therefore, they undertook the challenge of measuring perceived brand age as a multidimensional construct and treated it as a completely separate construct.

Through a combination of qualitative research and quantitative validation, Darpy and Levesque quantified two measurement factors of brand age: (1) *physical appearance*, as measured by three scales (disgraceful to graceful, ugly to beautiful, and unaesthetic to aesthetic); and (2) *role in the market*, as measured by three scales (insignificant to visible, traditional to innovative, and in withdrawal to present). The authors not only established a measurement scale for perceived brand age, but evaluated its impact on brand attitudes.

Brand Attitudes

According to Wilkie (1986), brand attitudes are consumers' overall evaluations of a brand that form the basis for brand choice. Brand attitudes can be related to beliefs about non-product related attributes, symbolic benefits, and a way for consumers to express self-concept (Rossiter and Percy 1987).

A prevalent method of measuring brand attitudes is by means of a 41-item semantic differential set of scales for describing a brand or product that consists of bipolar adjectives. No one set or subset of these items, however, has been deemed optimal (Bruner, Hensel, and James 2005). In practice, a wide range of adjectives and descriptors appear to have been used in various situations, with custom variations, over many years.

Shamdasani, Stanaland, and Tan (2001) developed a 7-item, 7-point scale by referring to prior studies (LeClerc, Schmitt, and Dube 1994; Pan and Schmitt 1996) that also tapped into the 41-item list of bipolar adjectives. This scale may be used to assess both products and brands. The authors reported a reliability indicator of α = .95. Their scale consists of opposing phrases rather than mere adjectives:

- 1. This is a bad product (brand)/this is a good product (brand)
- 2. I dislike the product /I like the product
- 3. I feel negative toward the product/I feel positive toward the product
- 4. The product is awful/the product is nice
- 5. The product is unpleasant /the product is pleasant
- 6. The product is unattractive/the product is attractive
- 7. I approve of the product/I disapprove of the product

The phrases on this scale are somewhat less specific than many of the single adjectives used in the 41-item semantic differential scale. Despite this, they should serve to give a general measure of attitude without using overly rigid language that could limit the scope of interpretation (such as "fast/slow," "wise/foolish," "healthy/unhealthy," "value for money/no value for money," etc.).

3. The Methodology and Model

The investigation was designed to assess the nature of the relationship between perceived brand age and brand attitudes. The exploratory framework is presented in Figure 1:

Figure 1: Exploratory Framework



The hypothesis tested was:

H1: Perceived Brand Age is negatively related (correlated) to brand attitude for a new product offered by an existing consumer brand.

If this hypothesis holds true, Brand Attitude scores for "newer" brands should exceed those for "older" brands.

Measurements

There were two measures related to "Brand Age," which served as the independent variable in this research.

The first measure of interest was Darpy and Levesque's Brand Age assessment. This construct covered two primary facets of Brand Age, physical appearance and market role. *Physical appearance* was measured by three scales, disgraceful to graceful, ugly to beautiful, and unaesthetic (unappealing) to aesthetic (appealing). *Role in the market* was also measured by three scales, insignificant to visible, traditional to innovative, and in withdrawal to present. This has been recreated in the semantic differential format with a 7-point scale.

The second independent measure related to age perceptions was the *Brand Personality Scale (BPS)*. The 11-item attribute factor identified by Aaker (1997) as a measure of "Excitement" has been deployed here as a way to assess Brand Age as a dimension of brand personality. It encompasses:

- Daring (daring, trendy, exciting)
- Spirited (spirited, cool, young)
- Imaginative (imaginative, unique)
- Up-to-date (up-to-date, independent, contemporary)

Additionally, the associative approach recommended by Romaniuk (2008) was used to enhance the efficiency of administration to survey participants. The BPS as deployed in this research was a multi-item binary scale (yes/no), with no participant assessment of strength or degree of association.

Brand Attitude served as the dependent variable or outcome variables in this research.

Brand Attitude was measured using the 7-point scale derived by Shamdasani et al. (2001). Of the seven items, three were most appropriate for measuring feelings about the brand (bad vs. good brand; dislike vs. like the brand; feel negative vs. feel positive toward the brand), while four were more suited to measuring reactions to the product concept itself (product is awful vs. product is nice; product in unpleasant vs. product is pleasant; product is unattractive vs. product is attractive; disapprove vs. approve of the product). Results for this battery were reported individually as well as in the aggregate, using summated scores for the seven items.

Research Design and Sample

This study was based on a two-phase online survey (Pilot and Main Phases) with USbased adults 18 years of age or older. The I-Say Consumer Household Panel sponsored by Ipsos-North America served as the sample frame for this research. Then, the I-Say Consumer Panel consisted of approximately 440,000 consumers across the US. Ipsos NA achieved survey quotas by age, gender, and region and monitored survey progress to ensure proper completion of both phases of the research.

The Pilot Phase survey was conducted online among 102 consumers across the nation from June 28th to July 4th 2009. The objective was to understand participants' perceptions of "old" and "new" brands within five product categories: chocolate, air fresheners, household cleaners, toothpaste, and shampoo. In each category, approximately 25 brands were shown to each survey respondent. Five questions were asked to help establish the baseline perceptions of "age" of the brands in each category.

The pretest yielded two brands within each consumer product category—one that was relatively "newer" in its age perceptions and the other relatively "older" in its age perceptions. The pretest results yielded two well-suited product categories for the Main Phase: Air Fresheners and Household Cleaners. These categories were selected based primarily upon consumers' ability to demonstrate awareness of the brands in each category and to perceive relative differences in the "ages" of these brands. Both categories had several brands that could reasonably be categorized as "older" or "newer." Within Air Fresheners, Glade and Febreze were chosen as the relatively "older" and "newer" brands, respectively. Similarly, within Household Cleaners, Pledge and Orange Glo were chosen as the "older" and "newer" brands.

There were a total of 8 cells, utilizing a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ experimental design. The perceived "age" of the brand, the revelation of the brand name, and the product categories defined

the cells. Each respondent was asked to review two product concepts (i.e., the test cells)—one from Air Fresheners and one from Household Cleaners. Upon reviewing each concept, a series of questions related to the dependent variable 'Brand Attitudes were administered.

Four product concepts referred to the Household Cleaners. Another four product concepts (E–H) was developed for Glade and Febreze in the Air Fresheners category. In the unbranded test cells (B and D, F and H), the "older" vs. "newer" context of age was cued via the introductory sentence. In the branded test cells (A and C, E and G), perceived age was implicit to the brands selected from the Pilot Phase, as they were found to be age divergent in that preliminary round of research.

Sample

The intended sample plan for the Main Phase of research was 250 responses per cell (A through H), which required 1,000 consumers to evaluate 2 concepts per person. Each respondent was randomly assigned two concepts to evaluate—A and E, B and F, C and G, and D and H, which retained the age and naming parameters, but varied the product category shown. The final numbers of responses per cell were obtained and are displayed in Table 1.

Consumer Goods Category #1 – Household Cleaners				
CELL (Age x Branding)				
Age of Brand	Brand Name Revealed (n)	Brand Name NOT Revealed (n)		
Pledge = "OLD"	257 (Cell A)	246 (Cell B)		
Orange Glo = "NEW"	245 (Cell C)	252 (Cell D)		
Consumer Goods Category #2 – Air Fresheners				
CELL (Age x Branding)				
Age of Brand	Brand Name Revealed (n)	Brand Name NOT Revealed (n)		
Glade = "OLD"	257 (Cell E)	246 (Cell F))		
Febreze = "NEW"	245 (Cell G)	252 (Cell H)		

 Table 1: Number of Participants in Each Cell

4. The Findings

Perceived Brand Age

Within the "Household Cleaners" category, consistent with the Pilot Phase results, Pledge (Mean= 4.3891) was deemed older than Orange Glo (Mean= 3.902), at the 95% confidence level. In the two unbranded cells, a similar result was observed. "Don't Know" responses were under 5% for both Pledge and Orange Glo and above 15% for the unbranded cells.

Within the "Air Fresheners" category, the desired distinction between the age perceptions of Glade and Febreze was not as pronounced as was the case of "Household Cleaners." The difference in the mean scores for Glade (Mean= 4.4125) and Febreze (Mean= 4.151) *is not* statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. However, the difference between them *is* significant at the 90% confidence level. Therefore, the expected difference in the age perceptions of the brand is not at the most stringent of testing levels. Examination of the *unbranded* cells in this product category reveals that statistically significant differences in the mean scores are in fact present at the 95% confidence level. Finally, "Don't Know" responses for Glade and Febreze remained under 10% and for the matching unbranded cells and with their Household Cleaner counterparts—they were above 15%.

Darpy and Levesque Brand Age Assessment

Brand Age was also assessed via the six Darpy and Levesque metrics, using a 7-point scale. The Chronbach's Alpha was .942 for Household Cleaners and .938 for Air Fresheners for the aggregate "D&L Brand Age Score" (hereafter D&L score). The D&L measurement method implies that newer (or "younger") brands will yield higher Brand Age scores, on average, while older (or more "aged") ones will tend to have lower scores.

Within Household Cleaners, Pledge (Mean= 31.93) and Orange Glo (Mean= 30.151) were essentially at parity with regard to the Darpy and Levesque score at the 95% confidence level. In addition, the unbranded "old" cleaner did not generate any statistically significant difference in terms of response versus the unbranded "newer" cleaner at this confidence level. Only, when the significance level is relaxed to 90% does Pledge's D&L score exceed that of Orange Glo. Of the brands in the four test cells, Pledge actually received the highest D&L score. This result indicates that Pledge is not quite as "old" as expected when it is assessed via the Darpy and Levesque scale.

Within Air Fresheners, there were no significant differences between the D&L scores of Glade (Mean= 32.1907) and Febreze (Mean= 33.8571) at the 95% confidence level. Only when the confidence level is relaxed to 90% did Febreze exhibit an advantage over Glade. The Brand Age results for Household Cleaners using the Darpy and Levesque scale were the exact opposite of those generated by the direct method of inquiry. When measured according to the Darpy and Levesque scale, Pledge (Mean= 31.93) outscored Orange Glo (Mean= 30.151) and was viewed as the newer brand. One can only conclude that the Darpy and Levesque scale is measuring something different. Noticeably, the two methods of brand age assessment are clearly not interchangeable.

The contrasting result between the two product categories raises the question of what the Darpy and Levesque metrics evaluate. Perhaps it is something other than merely "oldness" or "newness" and the degree of brand establishment.

Brand Attitudes

The Main Phase survey measured Brand Attitude using a 7-item battery of opposing statements regarding feelings about the brand and the product. In addition, an overall measure of Brand Attitude (BA) was created by summing the scores of the 7 items; this created an overall measure that could range from a minimum score of 7 to a maximum of 49. In order to ensure reliability of this measure, Chronbach's Alpha was calculated, yielding .963 for Household Cleaners and .962 for Air Fresheners.

Tables 1 and 2 show the mean scores for each of the seven items for each test cell, as well as the mean of the summated individual scores (which is equivalent to the sum of the individual means shown).

Within the Household Cleaners category, there is no difference between the summated Brand Attitude Scores of Pledge and Orange Glo at the 95% confidence level. However, if the confidence level is relaxed to 90%, the Brand Attitude score for Pledge exceeds that for Orange Glo (by a very slim margin). In this instance, the "older" brand—Pledge—displays better BA scores than the "newer" brand, Orange Glo, which runs *contrary* to the proposed hypothesis.

When the branded cells were compared to the unbranded cells, a meaningful difference did emerge. The Pledge test cell has a mean score of 38.7588 while the unbranded "old" Household Cleaner test cell has a mean of 35.2927, which is significantly greater at the 95% level of confidence. Pledge also outdoes the unbranded "newer" cleaner, with a significantly better Brand Attitude of 38.7588 versus 34.5754 (at the 95% confidence level). Orange Glo, however, does not perform as well versus its unbranded counterpart; only when the statistical significance is reduced to 90% is there an observable difference between the branded and unbranded "newer" cells.

Within the Air Fresheners category, the results were somewhat similar. At the 95% confidence level, no differences were observed between Glade and Febreze in terms of Brand Attitude mean scores. In addition, there were no differences between their unbranded "old" and "newer" unbranded counterparts. Only when Glade is compared to the unbranded "newer" air freshener did a significant difference in the Brand Attitude scores emerge, with Glade enjoying a clear advantage at the 95% confidence level. However, at the more relaxed level of 90% confidence, both Glade and Febreze beat their unbranded counterparts, yet Glade had no distinct advantage over Febreze (or vice versa).

Mean Score by Item	Pledge	Unbranded Cleaner "Old"	OrangeGlo	Unbranded Cleaner "Newer"
Percent Base	257	246	245	252
Bad/Good	5.7315	5.0407	5.3184	4.9325
Dislike/Like	5.6381	4.9553	5.2449	4.8333
Negative/Positive	5.6031	4.9959	5.2367	4.9325
Awful/Nice	5.4630	5.0203	5.3224	4.9960
Unpleasant/Pleasant	5.4864	5.0976	5.2327	4.9762
Unattractive/Attractive	5.2685	5.0244	5.0327	4.8532
Disapprove/Approve	5.5681	5.1585	5.3633	5.0516
<i>Mean of 7 Summed Items</i>	38.7588	35.2927	36.7510	34.5754
Standard Deviation	8.7592	9.3296	10.2641	9.2335
Standard Error	0.5464	0.5948	0.6557	0.5817
Mean, Upper Limit 95%	39.8363	36.4656	38.0440	35.7225
Mean, Lower Limit 95%	37.6813	34.1198	35.4580	33.4283

Table 1: Summary of Brand Attitude for Household Cleaners

Table 2: Summary of Brand Attitude for Air Fresheners

37.8556 34.3095

39.6620

36.2759

37.8349

35.6671

35.5370

33.6138

Mean, Upper Limit 90%

Mean, Lower Limit 90%

Mean Score by Item	Glade	Unbranded Air Freshener "Old"	Febreze	Unbranded Air Freshener "New"
Percent Base	257	246	245	252
Bad/Good	5.6926	5.252	5.898	4.9246
Dislike/Like	5.751	5.248	5.9143	4.877
Negative/Positive	5.642	5.2602	5.8735	4.9603
Awful/Nice	5.6109	5.2642	5.7837	5.0833
Unpleasant/Pleasant	5.5019	5.3293	5.8082	5.1508
Unattractive/Attractive	5.3346	5.1301	5.551	4.9167
Disapprove/Approve	5.5875	5.3293	5.8122	5.0952
Mean of 7 Summed Items	39.1206	36.8130	40.6408	35.0079
Standard Deviation	9.1274	9.4919	9.0573	9.1847
Standard Error	0.5694	0.6052	0.5786	0.5786
Mean, Upper Limit 95%	40.2435	38.0065	41.7818	36.1489
Mean, Lower Limit 95%	37.9977	35.6195	39.4998	33.8669
Mean, Upper Limit 90%	40.0618	37.8134	41.5972	35.9643
Mean, Lower Limit 90%	38.1794	35.8126	39.6844	34.0515

These results lead to two conclusions:

- First, H1 cannot be supported based on these results. In the case of Household Cleaners, the BA of the "older" brand is actually better than that of the "newer" one.
- Second, the branded cells tended to beat those that were unbranded. They
 appear to be conveying qualities (or thoughts) that lead to higher BA ratings.
 In this situation, the "older" branded products (Pledge and Glade) actually
 appear to have distinct advantages, which suggest that brand equity has built
 up over time.

Another means of investigating the relationship between Brand Attitude and Perceived Brand Age is by executing a one-way ANOVA analysis for each of the product categories, Household Cleaners and Air Fresheners. In each case, the dependent variable is the summated Brand Attitude score and the test cell serves as the independent or "factor" variable. Tables 3 and 4 display the results of the two ANOVA analyses.

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Significance		
2.389	3	996	.067		
ANOVA	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Significance
Between Groups	2599.051	3	866.350	9.798	.000
Within Groups	88071.349	996	88.425		
Total	90670.400	999			

 Table 3: ANOVA Results – Brand Attitude – Household Cleaners

Table 4: ANOVA Results – Brand Attitude – Air Fresheners

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Significance		
.740	3	996	.528		
ANOVA	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Significance
Between Groups	4621.644	3	1540.548	18.139	.000
Within Groups	84591.035	996	84.931		
Total	89212.679	999			

In both cases, the results pointed to statistically significant differences, since the Brand Attitude scores did in fact vary by test cell. This finding is not surprising, since it had already been established that statistically significant differences in Brand Attitude scores existed between the branded versus unbranded test cells. Thus, this result reinforces

the earlier finding, but does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that differences in perceived Brand Age played any role in the ANOVA findings.

Additionally, the relationship between Brand Attitudes and Perceived Brand Age correlation coefficients were calculated. Using Perceived Brand Age as assessed by main survey respondents ("stated"), instead of the test cell assignment, provided an additional point of investigation into the hypothesis tested. However, the correlations between Perceived Brand Age (Stated) and Brand Attitude scores provided no additional support for H1. Small, significant positive correlations of r =.140 and r =.113 were found for Household Cleaners and Air Fresheners respectively (p <.05, n = 1000). These results run contrary to the negative correlations hypothesized.

Additional support for this finding was revealed via the correlation analyses. The BA scores were highly correlated with the D&L scores, at .799 and .805 respectively. Once again, the Darpy and Levesque method produced a result that varies from what was found using the experimental design method, which focused upon the D&L score and what it is actually measuring.

Summary and Implications

The hypothesis tested in this investigation was:

H1: Perceived Brand Age is negatively related (correlated) to brand attitude for a new product offered by an existing consumer brand.

Confidence intervals at the 95% level were established to determine if statistically significant differences in the mean BA scores existed between any of the "older" versus "newer" cells. In comparing the means within the Household Cleaner cells as well as the Air Freshener cells, no statistically significant differences were found between the directly opposing "older" versus "newer" (or "younger") test cells. However, other identified differences included:

- Pledge scored higher than its unbranded "older" counterpart as well as the unbranded "newer" air freshener
- Glade scored higher than the unbranded "newer" air freshener

None of these results support the tested hypothesis. In fact, they tend to refute it, as Pledge and Glade achieve BA scores that surpass unbranded "newer" challengers. Lastly, ANOVA analyses were also conducted and a significant *F*-value was achieved, simply because significant differences in the BA scores do exist; but, none of them are in support of this investigation's hypothesis.

Implications

Based on this investigation's results, one cannot conclude that "agedness" of a brand has a negative influence upon Brand Attitudes when that brand is offering a new

product to the market. Actually, an "older," "well-established" brand can actually be very well-regarded in its category and a new product offer from the brand has the potential for success.

The findings highlight the difficulty and complexity in defining "Brand Age," a contention of Lehu's (2004). For Brand Attitudes, the Darpy and Levesque (2005) metric yielded a very different result from the testing structure present in the experimental design of this research.

Furthermore, this result appears to align with Darpy and Levesque's (2005) contention that agedness of a brand can have negative consequences on consumer attitudes towards it. Despite this, it is not quite clear what the D&L scale is actually measuring; its applicability to "age" may be debatable. Based on the research conducted here, the D&L scale seems to correspond most closely to the BPS "Excitement" factor as identified by Aaker. In comparing the attributes used by both scales, perhaps both the BPS and the D&L metrics are akin to measures of "brand health" or "brand vigor" than actual measures of "age." Further investigation into the D&L metrics is certainly warranted based on these findings.

The current research merely represents a preliminary step in the investigation of a very complex issue; undoubtedly, both marketers and academicians alike would welcome further exploration into this area of brand management and marketing.

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