

Symbolic and

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Their efforts seem to have paid off, as evidenced by the enduring well-defined, and strong images of some of the world's popular brands (e. G. Marlboro, Ivory, Pepsi). In line with this evidence, theorists and practitioners (CB. Gardner and Levy, 1955; Park et al. , 1986; Rise and Trout, 1 986) have recommended that developing, communicating, and maintaining a brand's image is crucial to its long-term success. 32 Brand image important The importance of a brand's image in its long-term success necessitates having a framework for strategically managing the image over the long term Park et al. , 1986).

Brand managers have had very little direction for setting up such a conceptual framework. One notable exception is brand concept management (BCC) proposed by Park et al. (1986). BCC proposes that every brand image should be based on a brand concept or a brand-specific abstract meaning. In its general form, a brand concept can be either symbolic or functional, and thus comprises one aspect of a brand's image. Functional brands satisfy immediate and practical needs. Symbolic brands satisfy symbolic needs such as those for self-expression and prestige, and their racial usage is only incidental.

For example, in the category Of wrist watches, the brand Cassia would be considered a functional brand since its usefulness lies primarily in its ability to tell the time correctly. The brand Moved, on the other hand, would be considered a symbolic brand since it is used primarily for its status appeal, and its ability to tell the time is only an incidental reason for its usage. Once a concept is selected for a brand, park et al. (1986) advise that it should be

maintained over the brand's life for sake of consistency. Symbolic or functional

While the notion of brand concept management is intuitively appealing, the proposition that brands can be either symbolic or functional in their appeal to consumers raises a number of interesting issues. The first issue is whether symbolism and functionality are two distinct concepts or are two ends of one brand concept continuum. In addition to the uniqueness of these two concepts, Park et al. (1986) assume that each of these concepts is unidirectional. Whether that is really so has not been examined in empirical research to date.

Also, to our knowledge, no measures or scales have been developed that would assess whether a particular brand is symbolic or functional. Thus, empirical research has not directly examined these related issues. An understanding of such issues would also be very useful to marketing managers in planning positioning strategies for their brands. In this exploratory study, a set of scales are developed to assess a brand's symbolic and/or functional value to consumers. In the process, we

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examine the issue of distinctiveness and dimensionality of the two brand concepts. Two schools of thought

Brand concept Background There is a long tradition of research into human needs and motivations. While there are a large number of theories and models that explain the nature of human motivation for consumption behavior, a simple typology would suggest two distinct schools

of thought. The rational school or the "economic man" model suggests that consumers are rational and try to maximize total utility.

They do so by buying products based on objective criteria like price per ounce or gallons per mile (Coffman and Kane, 1994). In arriving at this excision, consumers generally go through a variety of cognitive operations that include deciding the importance of each attribute in a product category, gathering information about competing brands' attributes, judging the levels of each attribute in competing brands, and finally using a judgment rule to decide on the optimal brand (for an exhaustive review of the information processing literature, please see Bateman, 1979).

A number of researchers, however, contend that the rational model is appropriate only for goods which consumers value for their tangible and utilitarian benefits, and does not adequately capture their motivation for consuming products that satisfy their emotional wants (CB. Levy, 1959; Ditcher, 1960; Holbrook, 1980). For example, Hiroshima and Holbrook (1982) note that the rational model does not capture the multistory imagery, fantasy, fun, and emotions associated with the consumption of some products.

They refer to this type of consumption, based on individual tastes and intangible product benefits, as hedonistic consumption. Thus, in contrast to the rational or information processing approach, the emotional or hedonistic school holds that consumers' motives are motional in nature. In this perspective, individuals use personal or subjective criteria such as taste, pride, desire for adventure, and desire for expressing themselves, in their

consumption decisions (Coffman and Kane, 1994). Consumer behaviorists have long recognized the importance of both types of motivations (CB. Katz, 1960; Metal, 1983). Empirically, several researchers have noted the existence of these two different types of motivations and the different product attribute categories that tap into these motivations (CB. Metal, 1988; Metal et al. , 1990; Sahara and Siring, 1991). Thus, both theory and research support the idea that consumers' needs are driven by functional/ utilitarian as well as by symbolic/expressive motivations. In keeping with this tradition, Park, Gasworks, and Manacling (1986) noted that consumers' needs could be classified as being either functional or symbolic.

They assert that functional needs are related to specific and practical consumption problems whereas symbolic needs are related to Selfridges and social identification. To tap into these two different types of needs, Park, Gasworks, and Manacling (1986) proposed that all brands should have a "brand concept", which is an overall abstract meaning that identifies a brand. They suggested that a brand concept be either symbolic or functional, thus tapping into consumers' symbolic and functional needs respectively. Park et al. S (1986) brand concept management framework advises managers to select a specific concept for a brand at the time of its introduction and then use the marketing mix to support and reinforce it over the brand's life. This helps consumers understand with clarity what a brand can do for them.

JOURNAL OF CONSUMER MARKETING, VOLT. 15 NO. 1 1998 33 Functional or utilitarian needs The existence of different types of motivations among individuals suggests that within most product categories, consumers' needs

could be either functional or symbolic in nature, and brands could be positioned to satisfy either of these two types of needs.

Thus, functional or utilitarian needs of consumers could be exploited with a "functional" brand, i. e. One positioned with a functional brand concept or meaning. Similarly, a brand could be positioned as a "symbolic" brand to tap the needs of those who wish to enhance their self-image or their social image. Park et al. Rather argued that brands should be positioned to appeal to either one of these types of needs, but not both, for a number of reasons. A brand concept that is both functional and symbolic poses problems for consumers because they cannot clearly relate the brand to either their functional or their symbolic needs.

In addition, it increases the number of competing brands and makes brand image management difficult. This argument, however theoretically compelling, has not been tested in empirical research. In one related research, park et al. (1991) Were able to show that nonusers' reaction to functional extensions of functional brands was more favorable than their reaction to prestige extensions of functional brands. In the same study, consumers also displayed a more positive reaction to prestige extensions of prestige brands than to functional extensions of prestige brands.

Please note that, in this study, the authors assumed that brand concepts could be either functional or prestigious (not symbolic). Unanswered questions Several questions, though, remain unanswered. Are functional and symbolic brand concepts adequately distinguished in consumers' minds? If so, what are mom characteristics that help in distinguishing these brand

concepts? Is the prestige of a brand an adequate representation of a brand's symbolism to its customers? Are functionality and symbolism merely the two ends of a continuum?

In any event, is there a mechanism to assess the functionality or symbolism of brands? The paucity of research to illuminate these issues resulted in this study. This study was set up to answer the preceding questions: to investigate the phenomenon of the functionality or the symbolism of brand image and to develop scales that would help classify a brand as functional or symbolic. Apart from the theoretical contributions, the issues raised in this study have a number of managerial implications for brand positioning.

Method In line with this study main objective of exploring the issue of brand image functionality or symbolism, scales containing items thought to measure a brand's functional or symbolic value to consumers was developed. The scale was validated by testing the scale's ability to discriminate between brands a priori identified as functional or symbolic. Correlations among the items in the scale and exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses of the data were used to investigate the dimensionality of brand functionality and symbolism.

Stimuli Pairs of brands were identified in a few commonly used product categories, such that one brand in each pair was, a priori, thought to be functional and the other symbolic. In other words, the first brand was thought to primarily satisfy functional needs whereas the second brand was thought to mainly satisfy the symbolic needs of consumers of the product category. The pairs of brands which were selected are shown in Table I. 34

Product category Symbolic brand Functional brand Watches Role Timex 2
 Sports shoes Nike Converse 3 Cosmetics Lancôme Amiability 4 Hair cream
 Paul Mitchell Suave 5 Ice cream Hagen Dads Scafiest Table I.

Item generation Adjectives or phrases thought to indicate a brand's symbolism or functionality were first generated by the authors and a focus group of graduate students at a university. The focus group noted the difficulty of coming up with adjectives describing functional or utilitarian appeal. Based on these processes, three adjectives and phrases were identified as relating to functionality and 17 as relating to symbolism. Three sets of questionnaire items Three sets of questionnaire items were developed for the 20 adjectives and phrases.

The first set of questions sought respondents' agreement with various statements about individuals' use of a brand to express themselves. The second set of items sought respondent < ratings on the characteristics of the brand, whereas the third set of items sought evaluations of the user of the brand. Responses were measured with seven-point scales in all cases. With respect to the items representing brand functionality, respondents recorded their agreement with the statement that " (brand) was for people who are down-to-earth" and evaluated the practicality Of: (1) the brand itself; and (2) the user of the brand.

Brand symbolism The 17 adjectives and phrases representing brand symbolism were assessed with three sets of items. In the first set of items, respondents were to agree with these statements: (1) " people use (brand) as a way of expressing theirpersonality"; (2) " (brand) is for people who want

the best things in life"; (3) " a (brand) user stands out in a crowd"; and (4) " using (brand) says something about the kind of person you are". The second set of items sought to evaluate these brand characteristics: (1) hemolytic; (2) prestigious; (3) exciting; (4) status symbol; and (5) distinctive v. Invitational. The third set Of items evaluated these characteristics Of the brand's user: (1) sophisticated v. Simple; (2) not at all v. Very romantic; (3) not at all v. Very successful; 35 (4) unique v. Ordinary; (5) stylish v. Plain; (6) expressive v. Subdued; (7) glamorous v. Sedate; and (8) not at all v. Very elegant. Survey design and administration Two separate questionnaires were prepared with questions on five of the ten stimulus brands such that each questionnaire contained questions about one f the brands within a product category.

Thus, a subject would answer the above questions with respect to either a symbolic brand or a functional brand within a product category but not both. This procedure was used to eliminate any comparative biases in responses. The survey was administered to 62 graduate students at a major south-eastern university. Rest Its Analysis of correlations TO obtain a preliminary idea of the pattern Of relationships among these items, the correlations among the items were first examined.