

Customer satisfaction and purchase intention



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

According to the results, those people who were told that Flora margarine was made and marketed by Unilever before they evaluated Flora's brand personality actually did not perceive any of the seven brand dimensions of Flora differently from those who were not informed of the piece of information. Therefore, telling people that Flora margarine is one of the Unilever brands does not make them consider Flora margarine as more enterprising, competent, ruthless, masculine or chicer, though the ratings of these five brand dimensions of Unilever were higher than those of Flora. Similarly, on the other hand, although the other two dimensions of Flora, agreeableness and informality, outscored those of Unilever, people who were told that Unilever made Flora did not evaluate these two brand personalities of Flora lower. Therefore, the spillover does not occur from the corporate brand onto the individual product brand. Similarly, telling people that Flora margarine is one of the Unilever brands has no impact on their judgements about Flora's brand personality attributes.

In terms of the functional aspects of Flora such as "good for heart", "lower cholesterol", "keep heart healthy", "taste nice", "easy to use", "socially responsible" and "environmentally friendly", revealing the relationship between Unilever and Flora does not encourage people to appreciate more (or less) on the functions of Flora margarine. Thus the corporate brand of Unilever brings neither benefit nor harm to Flora when informing people that Flora is manufactured by Unilever.

In respect to people's satisfaction with and purchase intention of Flora margarine, claiming that it is a Unilever brand does not have any impact as well. There was no sufficient evidence to show that one would feel more

satisfied with Flora or would be more likely to buy Flora when he/she was told that Unilever was the parent brand.

In brief, telling people that Unilever produces and markets Flora margarine does not affect their judgements about the brand personality of Flora, their evaluation of the product's functional aspects, their overall satisfaction with the product or their purchase intention of the product.

Nonetheless, according to extra analysis, people who were not just told but also aware of the fact that Flora margarine was made and marketed by Unilever rated highest on Flora's five personality dimensions (enterprise, competence, chic, ruthlessness and machismo) and its two functional attributes (socially responsible and environmentally friendly), indicating that reminding people that Flora is a Unilever brand actually can enhance people's evaluation on the five dimensions and two functional aspects of Flora. And this phenomenon could be explained by the theory of priming effect. The following part will introduce and explain this effect briefly.

5. 2 Priming Effect

Priming effect was originated from psychology and has been studied widely and deeply in many academic branches of psychology (Tipper, 1985; Bentin et al., 1985; Dehaene et al., 1998; Schacter and Buckner, 1998; Sheeder and Balogh, 2003). According to Fiske and Taylor (1984), priming effect occurs when. For instance, if one is used to classifying people into " fun" and " not fun", he/she might be more likely to adopt that dimension as the criteria to assess people in other contexts even some less appropriate ones such as perceiving whether a lecturer give a good speech (Fiske and Taylor, 1984).

Priming phenomenon is also a primary source of evidence to explain spreading activation process where presentation of one item speeds response to a related item (Ratcliff and McKoon, 1988). For example, when “bread” is activated, “butter” is more likely to be recognized faster than other less related terms (Matsumura et al., 2003). Mast and Zaltman (2005) defined a prime as

Priming has attracted marketers’ interests as well since priming can be applied in advertising or promotion to make people unconsciously focus on what marketers expect them to. A good variety of experiments and studies have been conducted to prove priming effects in the context of marketing and to demonstrate its implication for marketers.

Mandel and Johnson (1999) conducted two experiments concerning how web page background of shopping sites influenced consumer choices of products (car and sofa) and information search process as a result of priming effect. The results indicate that peripheral cues in electronic environments do impact significantly upon customer choices since those participants who were primed on quality features such as comfort (sofa) or safety (car) tended to prefer the product that outstood on quality, while subjects who were primed on price were more likely to choose the cheaper product. In addition, people would search for information relevant to the attribute that was primed earlier than irrelevant information, proving that priming can affect the order in which people look for the information of product attributes as well. Therefore, it is suggested that online shopping sites contain backgrounds, colours or other elements which are consistent with the messages that a company delivers and which emphasize product attributes

<https://assignbuster.com/customer-satisfaction-and-purchase-intention/>

that a company distinguishes itself for. Similarly, Yi (1990a) investigated the priming effect of contextual materials on the evaluation of ambiguous goods in print ads and found that the primed attributes were more accessible to customers than unprimed ones. Therefore, the contextual priming can alter how people interpret ambiguous product information in advertisements and further affect their overall assessment of products. In Yi's another research (1990b), apart from the successful identification of cognitive priming effect (i. e., attributes) on consumers' evaluation about the advertised brand and purchase intention, affective priming of advertisement context such as the affective tone of an article was found could significantly affect advertising effectiveness and purchase intention as well. Specifically, people would feel more positive about the advertisement and their purchase intention would be stronger if the advertisement context primed positive feelings compared with priming negative ones. What's more, Forehand and Deshpande (2001) argued that exposure to an ethnic prime would cause consumers of the target market to enhance ethnic self-awareness and to have more favourable evaluation of the spokespeople and advertisements, while people of the nontarget market would respond less favourably.

In addition, Herr (1989) initiated two experiments to identify the influence of priming upon automobile price judgements. According to the outcome, both assimilation effects and contrast effects were identified. Besides, the price priming only generated the difference in subjects' price judgements rather than other elements such as prestige, reliability and quality, indicating that priming effect is specific to the category primed. It was also discovered that scarce prior knowledge of the priming related dimension held by people

could result in no priming induced judgment effects. Furthermore, Pryor and Brodie (1998) replicated closely Boush's (1993) research which concerned how priming different features of existing brand in advertising slogans influenced consumers' perceptions about the brand extensions. Both pieces of research proved that a brand extension would be perceived as more similar to the existing brand products if the slogan primed features that they shared in common. And given that the fictitious brand was viewed as positive a brand extension would be more positively evaluated if the slogan primed attributes that they shared. However, Stafford (2000) proposed a third element (consumer awareness of manipulation intent in determining assimilation/contrast effects resulting from priming) apart from the other two factors (feature-matching between category exemplar and judgement target and individual cognitive resources in making category-based comparisons). He argues that even though characteristics of exemplar and target are matched contrast judgement is also likely to occur if people are aware of the manipulation intent. And he further suggests that the two-factor theory might be applicable for brand extensions of low-involvement products since advertisements which focus on the feature overlap between the extended brand and the mother brand could benefit the extensions. Nonetheless, given the great possibility of increasing customer awareness of the persuasive intent in marketing communications, advertisements are recommended to be designed being subtle rather than being blatant, otherwise, a contrast judgement might result. Therefore, the proposed three-factor priming is better to be considered as a cautionary tale when marketers apply priming in promotional tactics.

The above studies briefly provide a general picture of how priming effect can be applied in marketing and its considerable benefits. Specifically relating priming effect to the study at hand, the information stating that Flora margarine is made and marketed by Unilever can be considered as the prime which will get conceptually related things into a situation of heightened accessibility. And the finding that only people who were already aware that Flora margarine was one individual product brand of Unilever evaluated Flora's brand personality dimensions higher than the others might be explained by that scarce prior knowledge of the priming related dimension held by people could result in no priming induced judgment effects (Herr, 1989). Since people were not aware of the relationship between Unilever and Flora, they had no sufficient knowledge of the conceptually related items. Thus simply telling people the information could not generate the expected outcome, the other condition that one needs have enough prior knowledge of the relationship between Unilever and Flora should be met as well.

5. 3 Implications

Based on the findings, there are several implications for marketers in Unilever.

First, since people rate the five brand personality dimensions and the two functional attributes of Flora higher only when both of the two conditions are met: knowing Flora is an individual product brand of Unilever and being reminded of the information, it seems that Unilever's determination to implement corporate branding strategy is in the right track. In respect to the specific approaches of corporate branding, Unilever puts its blue corporate logo in the back of the packaging of all its product brands to demonstrate its

great variety of product brands. Besides, in the TV commercials of its product brands, the logo and the slogan of Unilever appear in the end as well. Additionally, in its official website, the section named “our brands” lists all of its individual brands including food brands, personal care brands and home care brands. All of these approaches are capable of assisting Unilever to achieve a wider recognition and greater awareness of its individual brands among the audience, which can help to meet the first condition that more people will have the knowledge and information of the association between Unilever and its individual product brands. Furthermore, according to the qualitative work which was conducted, evidence also indicated that the majority had heard of Unilever but seldom knew anything or any individual brands of Unilever. So Unilever had better enhance people’s recognition of its corporate brand and broaden people’s awareness of its relationship with its individual product brands as well. Therefore, the finding of the present study can support Unilever’s decision in starting building its corporate brand.

Second, regarding the five dimensions of Flora margarine (enterprise, competence, chic, ruthlessness and machismo) which were rated higher as a result of priming effect, if Unilever expect to improve customers’ evaluation of Flora margarine in any of these five personality dimensions, simply telling them Flora is a Unilever brand will not work. Instead, in order to achieve the expected outcome, reminding people via various communication channels that Unilever produces and markets Flora is required, apart from Unilever’s effective corporate branding by which people can be aware of the relationship. For instance, regarding in-store promotion, one approach can be presenting the prime stimuli “Unilever” logo at the entrance to the

supermarket or at the spot where Flora margarine are located. And other common marketing approaches such as TV commercials and newspaper advertisements also can be applied to remind people of the information.

Third, since the two functional aspects, socially responsible and environmentally friendly, have long been perceived by the public as criteria to assess the performance and reputation of organizations particularly those big corporations like Unilever, apparently relating the corporate brand Unilever to individual brands Flora is beneficial. Enhancing people's recognition and awareness of the fact that Unilever is the parent brand of Flora margarine by continuously conducting corporate branding and further reminding people of this fact will make people consider Flora margarine as more responsible to the society and friendlier to the environment. Thus people will have more positive and favourable attitudes towards the product Flora margarine. Furthermore, as a food brand, it is likely that people would consider Flora healthier as Flora is perceived as more socially responsible and environmentally friendlier. Nowadays, many brands are perceived as a poor performer in CSR and thus being criticized and boycotted severely such as Nike and Gap. It is believed that Flora will not suffer from those unwanted situation.

In addition, the finding reveals that three personality dimensions, agreeableness, enterprise and competence, positively influence people's satisfaction with Unilever while ruthlessness will generate negative influence. And agreeableness is the brand personality dimension that can most considerably contribute to consumer satisfaction of Unilever. This is also consistent with the finding in Davies et al.'s study (2003) which proves that <https://assignbuster.com/customer-satisfaction-and-purchase-intention/>

agreeableness is the most significant determinant in both customers' and employees' satisfaction with organizations. Therefore, during the process of Unilever's building its corporate brand, it is strongly recommended that Unilever associates its brand personality closely with the three personality dimensions, agreeableness, enterprise and competence, especially agreeableness. The associations can be presented in all sorts of communication channels to emphasize an agreeable, enterprising and competent Unilever, which can improve people's overall satisfaction. On the other hand, although ruthlessness is not necessarily perceived as the negative brand personality dimension in certain business sectors, for instance, construction sector (Davies et al., 2003), in this case it will have a negative impact on consumer evaluation of Unilever's image. Therefore, Unilever should be alert to the potential association with ruthlessness.

Finally, a positive forward spillover from corporate brand (Unilever) personality dimensions onto the individual brand (Flora) ones has been proved in the present study but with the condition that people should be aware of the relation between the two brands and be reminded of this piece of information, instead of simply being informed of the information.

In terms of theoretical contributions, first of all, this study shoulders a pioneer role in linking three research streams (brand personality, corporate branding and brand extensions) together to investigate how a real-world corporate brand (Unilever) influences its individual brand (Flora). Previous literature mainly explored how the perceived quality or other tangible features of corporate brand influenced individual brands, however, the present study emphasizes the intangible brand personality. Second, as <https://assignbuster.com/customer-satisfaction-and-purchase-intention/>

previous researches believe that corporate branding can benefit individual product brands and a strong corporate brand will spillover certain attributes onto individual brands, the present study proves that simply informing people of the relationship between the corporate brand and its individual brands is not enough to accomplish the expected outcome. Instead, making sure that people are already aware of the relationship and further reminding people of that are two conditions should be met in order to accomplish the expected effects. Finally, the study provides additional evidence to generalize corporate character scale (Davies et al, 2003).

5. 4 Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations in the present study need to be addressed and future research directions are stated accordingly. First, since the study focused on a real organization and one of its individual food brands, one need to be careful to generalize the findings to other contexts or situations. And future research could be conducted to explore whether the findings of this study can be generalized.

Moreover, the present research mainly concerned Flora margarine, one food brand of Unilever. However, Unilever has a wide variety of product brands including food brands, personal care products and home care products. Future research is suggested to involve its other individual product brands such as personal care products or home care brands to investigate how corporate brand influences individual brands and to see whether the same finding can be discovered. What's more, Flora margarine can be considered as a product without any gender preference, future research could also choose Unilever's individual brands that explicitly for men or women to

<https://assignbuster.com/customer-satisfaction-and-purchase-intention/>

explore the effects of corporate brand on individual brands. Furthermore, since Unilever is an international corporation and the study was only studied in the UK, future research could be conducted in another country to investigate whether culture differences would have different impacts on people's perception of Unilever and Flora, and to probe whether the same finding could be discovered in another cultural context.

In addition, the proposed study only investigated how corporate brand affects its individual brand, future research could investigate whether individual brands can generate impacts on corporate brand as well.