



From Cool Experiences to Brand Advocacy: The Mediating Role of Brand Identification in Pop-Up Store Contexts

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Abstract. With the increasing integration of the experience economy and social media, more and more people are posting photos of pop-up stores on social media. This indicates a subtle shift in the primary function of pop-up stores: from promoting inventory to building consumer brand identification. However, previous research has focused more on product sales, with little exploration of the underlying psychological processes. To address this gap, this study primarily examines whether brand identity plays a mediating role between brand coolness and consumer advocacy behavior in the context of pop-up stores. Data were collected through questionnaires and analyzed. The consumers' brand identification does play a mediating role in brand appeal and consumers' supportive behaviors. Based on these results, the following suggestions are proposed for the practical application of the brand: Firstly, the function of pop-up stores is transformed. The temporary stores are changed into platforms for establishing the brand image rather than merely as sales tools. Secondly, focus on the brand development from short-term exposure to long-term brand recognition.

Keywords: Marketing, Brand Coolness, Brand Identification, Consumer Advocacy Behavior

1 Introduction

Currently, the experience economy and digital social media are deeply integrated, and the global retail is undergoing profound changes. Among them, pop-up stores, as a retail model that is experience-oriented, non-traditional and temporary spaces for a short period of time (ranging from one day to one year, are gradually moving to the center stage [1]. Pop-up stores can often be seen in various shopping malls. Although pop-up stores were initially regarded as marketing tools for clearing inventory or short-term promotions, in the context where Generation Z is gradually becoming the main consumer group, pop-up store functions has changed. Kim 2010 pointed out that the scarcity and novelty provided by pop-up stores can particularly attract consumers who show a higher interests towards innovation and shopping enjoyment [2]. Pop-up stores have a certain reputation, they are cool, unique and stylish which appeals to the younger

generation. The past studies are mainly concerned with the influence of pop-up stores on sales promotion, or the tendency towards impulse buying in the short-term. Such an orientation which aims at the quality of product sale does not reflect the immense worth of pop-up stores as vessels of brand culture in the age of social media. Since the idea of visual hunger and impression management has become the standard of the Z generation, even the pop-up stores no longer serve as spots to buy products. It has become an avenue where the brands and consumers create brand identity together.

Hence, a critical question has arisen; how can this pop-up store experience coupled between a short time to experience contact into a long-term relationship between the consumers and the brand, therefore, instigating consumer motivation towards supporting the brand and also promoting the brand?

According to previous research, the perception of coolness by a brand on the part of the consumer can prove to be key in influencing internalization of the brand meaning. Brand coolness is a sign of how unique, innovative a brand is perceived to be [3]. According to self-concept theory, cognition is bound to promote brand identification, the degree of brand inclusion to the self-concept of a consumer. Given that possessions by consumers are symbolic, Belk suggested that they are regarded as part of the extended self [4]. A brand that is viewed as cool carries more likelihood of inclusion in identity of the consumer since it provides symbolic resources in identity construction and self-expression.

Importantly, when a brand becomes part of a consumer's self-definition, individuals may not only be motivated to purchase but also to engage in advocacy behavior, such as recommending the brand to others [5]. Unlike a purchasing behavior, consumers further promote brand dissemination through active recommendations, word-of-mouth communication and participation activities [6].

Accordingly, this study moves beyond a sales-oriented perspective to a process-oriented approach by examining brand identification as a psychological mechanism linking perceived brand coolness to consumer advocacy behavior in pop-up store contexts.

H1: Brand coolness will positively predict consumer advocacy behavior.

H2: Brand identification plays mediating role between brand coolness and consumer advocacy behavior.

2 Method

2.1 Research Design

Based on the above variables and hypotheses, a questionnaire survey was conducted. A five-likert scale survey was designed based on three dimensions: independent variable brand coolness, mediating variable brand identification, and dependent variable consumer advocacy behavior. The survey asked respondents to recall a specific brand they encountered in a pop-up store and report their opinions and evaluations of that brand.

All variables were measured using previously validated scales, which were adapted for the pop-up store environment. All indicators range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Brand Coolness. The measurement of brand coolness adopted items borrowed from the research of Warren et al., covering consumers' perceptions of a brand's aesthetic appeal, innovativeness, and uniqueness [3]. In the context of a pop-up store, the final measurement included two items, measuring brand innovativeness and uniqueness (e.g., "This brand is innovative"). The scale showed extremely high internal consistency in this study (Cronbach's alpha = 0.978).

Brand Identification. Brand identity was assessed using a scale that drew upon previous research on consumer and brand identity, reflecting the extent to which consumers integrate brands into their self-concept [7]. The final scale contained 3 items (e.g., "This brand helps me present myself to others") and showed high reliability in this study (Cronbach's coefficient $\alpha = 0.955$).

Consumer Advocacy Behavior. Consumer advocacy behavior was measured using items adapted from existing research on brand advocacy and recommendation behavior [8]. The final scale contained 3 items to assess respondents' willingness to recommend the brand and give it a positive evaluation (e.g., "I would recommend this brand to others"). The scale had strong internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.929). Participant age was included as a control variable in all regression analyses.

Meanwhile, considering that the majority of the participants were Chinese, for this situation, the questionnaire was translated with semantic equivalence. The accuracy of the questionnaire content has been ensured.

Data was collected online using random sampling. All procedures complied with the British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Ethics for Human Research. After data cleaning—ensuring participants had visited or interacted with a brand's pop-up store before submitting the questionnaire—66 valid responses were analyzed using SPSS.

Before analysis, calculate mean of every variable. Descriptive statistics and reliability analyses were first performed for all study variables. Pearson correlations were examined to assess initial associations among the constructs.

To test the proposed mediation model, a mediation analysis was conducted using PROCESS macro for SPSS (Model 4), with brand coolness as the independent variable, brand identification as the mediator, and consumer advocacy behavior as the dependent variable. Age was included as a control variable. Bootstrap confidence intervals were estimated using 5,000 resamples.

2.2 Scale Purification and Validity Assessment

To assess the construct validity of the measurement scales, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using principal axis factoring with Promax rotation was conducted on all scale items. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure was 0.895, indicating excellent

sampling adequacy. Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 994.052$, $df = 55$, $p < .001$), supporting the suitability of the data for factor analysis.

Consistent with the theoretical structure of the model, a three-factor solution was specified. Items with low factor loadings or substantial cross-loadings were removed to improve construct clarity. The final factor structure demonstrated clear separation among brand coolness, brand identification, and consumer advocacy behavior, with all retained items loading strongly on their intended factors.

Following item refinement, all constructs exhibited excellent internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding .90.

3 Result

Base on descriptive statistic for there variable are showed in Table 1, Brand coolness (BC) had a mean score of 3.93 (SD = 0.92), consumer advocacy behavior (CAB) had a mean score of 3.88 (SD = 0.93), and brand identification (BI) had a mean score of 3.76 (SD = 1.05), a regression analysis was conducted controlling for age.

Table 1. Result Data.

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std.deviation
BC_mean	66	1.00	5.00	3.9318	.91939
CAB_mean	66	1.67	5.00	3.8788	.92936
BI_mean	66	1.00	5.00	3.7626	1.05371
Valid N(listwise)	66				

3.1 Main Effect (H1)

Brand coolness may have a significant direct effect on advocacy behavior of consumers even after brand identification is included in the regression model. ($B = 0.56$, $SE = 0.09$, $t = 6.59$, $p < .001$). This finding confirms H1 and indicates that brand coolness may have a direct effect on consumer advocacy indirectly through brand identification. This holds that brand coolness can stimulate consumers directly into consumer advocacy behavior, not taking into account factors of brand identity. The consumers will endorse the brand or make good reviews. Besides, the findings of the research show that the perceived coolness of a brand is positively related with the advocacy behavior of the consumers. The brands that seem to be unique, new, and oriented towards the culture are more apt to encourage the proactive advice or defensive behavior of consumers. This has been in agreement with the past. Indeed, in their study, which takes a quantitative method to study 402 tourists, Butt and Muhammad discover that when tourists believe that a destination is cool, they are more inclined to be proactive in promoting the destination to others and guard against negative reviews [9].

3.2 Mediating Effect (H2)

The indirect effect of the brand coolness on consumer advocacy behavior was tested using bootstrap and involved brand identification. The outcomes showed that there was

a large indirect effect (effect = 0.33, BootSE = 0.09), whose 95 percent bootstrap confidence interval neither indeterminate nor zero [0.17, 0.53]. This result supports H 2 and proves that brand identification has a mediating role in the relationship between brand coolness and consumer advocacy behavior. In particular, brand coolness has the role of allowing brand identification to be incorporated into the self of a consumer. It can be used to make people have an emotional attachment to the brand by stating the personal connection between the consumer and the brand, which will support the motivation of their brand advocacy behavior. The mechanism captures the psychological position which the consumers are in at the time of consumption hence helping to find out more about how the experiential retail setting can generate brand value in the face of time pressure.

In addition, Age was also put as a control variable in all regression models. The findings reveal no great impact of the age on the brand identification and consumer advocacy behavior. It means that identity-based advocacy younger consumers cannot be bound to, and can possibly be extended to more age demographics.

These findings provide a number of applications of how it can fully leverage the use of pop-up stores in generation of long-term value. The long-term impacts will not be probably based solely on the sales performance, particularly in the short term pop-up stores. The value of pop-up stores can be obtained to the maximum and the short-term promotions should be converted into long-term interactions with customers. As an illustration, pop-up stores will create an internal relationship between brand and consumers. It compels them to be devoted customers of the brand. Consequently, as well as buying the goods, consumers are proliferating the meaning of the brand into a longer period than the pop-up store experience and disseminating it to others. Just like the concept of Arnould 1993 and Sun 2026 (For those consumption experiences that bear meanings that have to do with one identity but not necessarily directly possess transactional value, they are likely to have a prolonging impact.), it enables brands to extend the impact of short experiences of consumption past time and space [10,11]. In the meantime, Bagozzi and Batra to present the empirical evidence that brand coolness structural elements were significant predictors of brand word-of-mouth (WOM) behavior ($R^2 = 0.83$) [12].

4 Discussion

4.1 Pop-up Stores as Identity-Building Platforms rather than Sales Tools

According to the current research, the pop-up stores could be referred to as the possibility of promoting the deeper psychological attachment between the consumer and the brand. The close relationship between the brand coolness and the consumer advocacy behavior implies that, within a pop-up store, the brand is considered innovative and special than other brands, the consumers tend to internalise brand meaning. This observation concurs with the recent works that point out experiential retail spaces as symbolic spaces where people demonstrate their self-identity [13]. Consumers start being interested in symbolic cues in temporary consumption settings such as pop-up stores. It may help them make sense on the meaning that a brand can

portray and its appropriateness to their self-concept. This brand identification value is so much more than short term sales. Thus, pop-up store must be designed in a way that the brands pay attention to product display or promotional award and attempt to employ elements of brand identity to express the meaning of the brand when designing it. Particularly, interactive installations can be used by the brands within pop-up stores. An example would be the brand stories that are brand value oriented and focuses on helping the consumer consider the brand as an identity of who they are or what kind of a person they would like to be. Such strategies may increase brand awareness and build a long term consumer buying behavior.

4.2 From Short-Term Exposure to Long-Term Advocacy: The Role of Brand Identification

A mediation analysis is among the main contributions of this paper. The study established that the brand recognition presence has something to do with the conversion of brand coolness into brand-recommend and positive review behaviors by people. This finding again reaffirms the former research studies. In a situation where a brand has become a part of a particular person, workers will publicly display this association in terms of communication behavior [14]. Consumer advocacy facilitates the creation of enduring brand value in short-term experiences conditioned by the condition of experiential consumption. The reason behind this is that the brand will be marketed by consumers even after the disappearance of the pop-up store. This is very useful in building brands and selling the brands. Since advocacy actions constitute a more profound and long-term customer interaction as opposed to instant buying performance [15].

Thus, in pop-up store designing or analyzing the effectiveness, the readiness of consumers to suggest a particular store to others, the degree of social sharing, and the positive word-of-mouth is all a worthy indicator. In order to promote these actions, pop-up store must incorporate elements whereby consumers can show their association with the brand, i.e. by engaging in co-creation experience, shareable symbolic items, or reminders which makes consumers feel like expressing the significance of the brand to the consumers.

5 Conclusion

The proposed research is based on the short-term and experience-based setting of pop-up stores and how brands can trigger more psychological and behavioural reactions under the condition of having a limited experience. A mediation equation based on the elements of brand coolness, brand identification and consumer advocacy behavior was built. Questionnaires and SPSS data analysis were used as tests of the hypotheses in the model. The findings confirmed the primary effect, which is that brand coolness perception positively relates to brand advocacy behavior, and the mediating effect, which is that brand identification has a substantial mediating role between brand coolness and consumer advocacy behavior. The paper concludes that in terms of the brand, the benefits of the use of pop-up stores are not only the ability to sell goods or make the stores look visually appealing, but also in terms of assisting the brands

establish a psychological bond between the brand and the consumer. It is this relationship that preconditions the willingness of the consumer to be active in recommending and backing brands. The research also offers substantial suggestions on how it can be improved in the future in the design of pop-up stores.

Although the research results are in line with the suggested model of mediation, this research used a cross-sectional design. It is aware of the raw mechanics behind how short-term experience sales formats such as pop-up stores propagate longer-term psychological brand recognition among consumers, but it does not enable one to identify the dynamic reasons behind the emergence of the mechanism. In future the study may use longitudinal or experimental research design to investigate how the relation between self and brand and advocacy behavior varies with the course of time following experience of a temporary store.

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