

THE IMPACT OF MASCOTS ON LEBANESE MARKET BRANDING STRATEGIES

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by

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IMPACT OF MASCOTS

Abstract

In markets that are saturated with competition and rivals, a lot of thought has been brought into introducing the concept of a mascot, which is a cartoon character that reflects a brand or a characteristic of a certain brand. Many mascots have proven to be a powerful marketing tool and have grown brands into becoming more popular. In the Lebanese market, mascots' presence alongside brands is growing too slowly incorporate most major local and international brands. This comes to question the impact of the use of such marketing tools in affecting the Lebanese market branding strategies. This study attempts to answer the question through the in-depth examination of the relation between the usage of the mascot and its effects in terms of consumer behavior towards the brand: buying likeability, brand recognition, and consumer buying processes to name but a few ideas discussed. The study includes both a theoretical and subjective frameworks that set the tone for the entire research: it is based on readings and previous research portraying the work of mascots in marketing and a study conducted on Lebanese customers taken into smaller clusters of both demographic and economic appeals. When segmenting the results, the descriptive view of the results shows that people share a positive attitude when it comes to associating brand advertisements with mascots and consequently the ability to use mascots to create positive attitudes towards brands and products. The study also elaborates on the trend the Lebanese market follows in terms of using a mascot in promoting products; not all mascot associated brands are linked to a mascot in Lebanon. The study hence calls for a new framework that incorporates mascots in more integrated marketing segments such as those in supermarkets and on the streets.

Keywords: Mascot, Advertising, Experiment, Lebanon

The Impact of Mascots on Lebanese Market Branding Strategies

Introduction

Until 1995, the brand was living independently of the product (Ruffin, 2005). The product was a sole entity of its own which then moved into the big picture of branding and brands to identify it. Today, products continue to serve the needs of consumers but their branding is becoming ever more important, and mascots have played the powerful part in the branding process. The American Marketing Association (2000) defines the brand as “any sign, symbol or any appearance that allows a product or a service to be distinguished from those of the competition.” Brand awareness is related to the functions of brand identities in consumers’ memory, and their effectiveness can be measured by how well the consumers can identify the brand under various conditions. Brand awareness includes brand recognition and brand recall performance. Brand recognition refers to the ability of the consumers to correctly differentiate the brand they were previously exposed to (Kapferer, 1986). This does not necessarily require that the consumers identify the brand name. Instead, it often means that consumers can respond to a certain brand after viewing its visual packaging/images. Brand recall is the ability of the consumers to correctly generate and retrieve the brand in their memory after being exposed to certain aspects of the brand.

Brand mascots start out as being the personification of a brand’s value, but they then make the brand’s personality more explicit through their characters, traits, and histories, as the advertisements associated with them create a story which makes them familiar and identifiable to consumers.

The brand's role is to tell a story. It tries to recount myths and to invent mythical characters to give more credibility to the product story. The brand creates a link in the

customer's mind. The idea is to build brand recognition signs (logo, colors, slogan ...) and to characterize them as if they were a person. Like a sponge, the brand absorbs characteristics and becomes part of the consumer's lifestyle and part of their social awareness (Amboise, 2006). The brand is an exceptional and unique entity. "As a person, the brand has an identity. This is what the brand really represents. It is the result in the minds of consumers of all its characteristics. However, it has the power to revive and be immortal" (Michelin, 2010).

With the increase in supply, the proliferation of multiple products and the brand extension strategy, it is becoming very difficult for a consumer to make a choice between a wide variety of similar or complimentary products. How can a brand operate to influence, persuade and guide a client to find and select its products? By developing a communication strategy for a brand, the company enables the product to interact better with audiences, to be innovative, to stand out from its competitors and to solidify the company's image in the minds of consumers. This is not a new idea. Since the industrial revolution, which expanded the types and number of available products, and the increased use of advertising to sell these products, the creation of identifiable characters associated with specific products, the mascots, has continued to grow (Heilbrunn, 2013) and its development serves a distinct purpose one that is connected to the representation of the brand identity.

Brand identity is a concept that reflects both a coupling between the brand and the product; the creation of brand identity may be done through introducing catchy music, witty catch phrases, coherence of colors, and of course mascots. This helps in building over time a sustainable set of signs that signal a brand's value and its memory in the minds of consumer. The mascot is another element forming the identity of the brand; it is the visual representation of how the brand would like to be presented and what traits it is to be associated with. A mascot is

defined by Merriam-Webster's dictionary as "a person, animal, or object adopted by a group as a symbolic figure especially to bring them good luck." They have been "commonly been used as advertising and marketing tools to create brands or event identities" (Brown & Ponsonby-McCabe, 2017, p. 1). These brand mascots "operate as organizational totems, helping concretize and reproduce an organization's identity (Cayla, 2013, p. 1).

From Buster Brown to Tony the Tiger, these images have become part of pop culture around the world, wherever the product is sold (Hémar-Nicolas, 2011). Moreover, representation by an animated character is a very basic way to fascinate people and make them understand the product. The mascot creates brand awareness and can become a famous icon (Hémar-Nicolas, 2011).

Choosing a brand character or mascot is an added value for the product and the brand. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of brand mascots, first one must determine how many are common in Lebanese marketing. It would also be helpful to look at whether these are "imported" mascots (i.e. from the West); whether they are local mascots, and how much market life they have. In other words, truly effective mascots become part of the culture. They are not just temporary marketing tools.

Mascots are used not only for brand recall or brand recognition, but to educate niche segments about the brand. In addition, the very familiarity of mascots, their bright colors, appealing images, and non-threatening approach, make them ideal in creating the impression that the product is also bright, appealing, and harmless. The stars of the brand story, mascots help consumers interact with brands and even develop affectionate relationships with them. The brand mascot provokes positive emotional reactions, and serves as a magnet for consumers. A compelling back-story makes a brand memorable and effectively passes on key messages to

consumers (Campelo, 2014). This is exposure, one of the most important elements of successful branding using a mascot. Without regular and long-term exposure to a mascot, one would have to assume that the character would not have the desired impact. If a mascot is not effective, it does not last (Campelo, 2014). Therefore, in a good ad campaign, the mascot leads to more exposure for the product, and the product in turn helps establish the mascot in the minds and hearts of consumers. It is an effective feedback cycle (Campelo, 2014).

Brands appeal to us at both tangible and intangible levels, and mascots are a key element in developing that appeal (Keller, 2003). “As a tangible manifestation of the company, the mascot provides the brand with a symbol as a visual reference to the brand. To this visual reference, personality traits are then added, which enhances the brand identity and adds an intangible layer where meaning is transferred onto the brand by consumers” (Campelo, 2014). Meaning that sometimes has very little to do with the product itself. A perfect example is Kellogg’s Frosted Flakes: which has a tiger as their mascot. Tigers do not eat frosted flakes; Yet Tony the Tiger is recognized around the world as the ambassador, so to speak, for sugar-frosted corn flakes. Have Frosted Flakes been so successful because they are truly superior in quality to other corn flakes, or has the company’s reputation, combined with the appealing character of Tony the Tiger, enabled Frosted Flaked to survive for more than a half century and to be successfully introduced in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East? Does quality drive liking or does liking a product give it a higher perceived quality?

Television ads are one common place that people expect to see mascots selling products. Since a TV ad is usually shown over and over again, both kids and adults will begin to identify the mascot with the product or service that’s being sold. Of course, television isn’t the only place to find a mascot; ad spots in magazines, newspapers, brochures, internet, cinema, promotional

gifts and even radio are all excellent vehicles that can be used to promote the mascot and its brand (Baglolle, 2002). The Smokey bear campaign was created by ad council in 1944 to serve as the face of the forest fire prevention in the United States. Over the years it became the longest running public service campaign. Smokey was depicted in cartoons, animation, posters, radios books and much more. The Smokey message was “Only you can prevent forest fires.”

Changes in communication technology and instant access to information through tools such as the Internet explain one of the reasons why integrated marketing communications have become so important. Now companies have to find and reach consumers wherever they are, and this means a wide variety of media must be used. Delivering consistent information about a brand or an organization helps establish the brand in the minds of consumers and potential customers (Schmitz, 2012).

Many consumers and business professionals seek information and connect with other people and businesses from their computers and phones. The work and social environments are changing, with more people having virtual offices and texting on their cell phones or communicating through social media such as Facebook. Text messaging, the Internet, cell phones, blogs—the way we communicate continues to change the way companies are doing business and reaching their customers. As a result, organizations have realized the need to change their promotional strategies as well to reach specific audiences (Schmitz, 2012, Creative Commons).

Social media have given brand mascots a voice. The characters are even more relatable because the public can now “interact” with them on sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Fans and followers feel as though they know these mascots personally, but underneath it all, they are more connected to the business behind the character than they realize. Through the mascot’s social

media page, the brand is able to advertise deals, specials, promotions and new products. This is just one example of how companies' advertising departments are able to integrate the use of a mascot along time, keeping it relevant even as it moves from newspapers to television to the Internet—and beyond. For instance, Mr. Peanut of the famous peanut butter can has now moved towards a personal Facebook page called “Mr. P,” that has animated the mascot into a realistic character with daily updates and statuses (Brown, 2017).

Despite the mascots ongoing remodeling and change, the statement of the problem is as follows: Minimal research has been executed concerning the impact of mascots on Lebanese customers. Specifically, it would be helpful for more research to be done in order to determine the impact of a brand's mascot on consumers and their buying decisions. Some of the few existing studies based their results on observing and analyzing multiple brands and their activities, while others have investigated the issue by experimenting with mascots. As noted, a mascot is a major part of the brand and the product. While brands themselves are intangible concepts, mascots created and adopted by them act as protagonists of brands' stories and endeavors.

This study through branding framework investigates the Lebanese consumer's attitudes and perspectives of incorporating mascots in advertising to understand the use such incorporation may have in the Lebanese market. In addition, this study explores whether mascots promote brand recognition and top-of-mind awareness more than advertisements or communication tools without a mascot. Through a quantitative experiment, this study will be able to examine the variance between the different conditions (mascot vs. non-mascots) on the outcomes aforementioned. The significance of this study lies in the understanding the usage of a mascot and the understanding of consumer engagement with this mascot. This in turn will, will offer

suggestions on how Lebanese businesses could incorporate mascots and/or encourage them to use such symbolism. The in-depth investigation of these factors might produce implications for brand loyalty and increase in sales. The mascot culture does not exist in Lebanon as it does in other countries, such as the United States, however it is worth investigating due to its potential and direct effects for advertising and marketing and consumer behavior.

These animated advertising characters have allowed businesses to directly interact with their customers; thus it is important to test this concept with a Lebanese demographic. Communicating directly to the client allows brands to meet their goals, including selling a product, keeping customers coming back, and gaining new ones.

Literature Review

Mascots can create brand awareness. Being rich in images and color, they catch the consumer's attention (Keller, 1998). Mascots may help communicate key attributes of the product/organization. If the consumers have strong feelings about a mascot, they will probably create favorable perceptions of the products associated to that mascot (Aaker, 2000). Brée and Cegarra (1994) differentiate two types of mascots, the advertising mascots and the brand mascots. The first type promotes the product's value through the association with the mascot they use, or they can promote the creation of the product concept, when the mascot is used to represent the brand.

Advertising Mascot

The advertising mascot is mainly used to communicate with adolescents and adults (Bree & Cegarra, 1994). The use of an advertising character has some disadvantages. It can first be a phenomenon of saturation for consumers, as the consumers would only be pleased by seeing only this product only. Also, another point is when the character surpasses the brand; thus this type of character can immobilize the brand and keep it from evolving (Michel, 2004).

The solution advocated by Michel (2004) is to avoid characters that are too realistic, by using for example animal symbols, which have the advantage of articulating the values of the brand without harming it. These mascots are mainly used in the teenager/adult segments, where the symbolic function of the brand is very present.

As Brown (2014) observes, the most successful mascots are usually animals or fictional characters of some kind. Successful ad campaigns have used animal fixations. Some of the guidelines include:

- A. The entire animal kingdom is fair game

- B. Some animal orders are more popular with marketers than others
- C. Specific species wax and wane in popularity throughout time
- D. While it is called an animal inventory, it includes humans, super-humans, extra-terrestrials, dinosaurs, monsters, cyborgs, androids, and all sorts of inanimate objects such as rocks, ropes, rolling pins, and root vegetables...
- E. Some critters take on a life of their own, transcend the brand that bore them, and become part and parcel of popular culture (p. 82).

This, of course, is the marketer's dream, a character so popular that it cannot only sell the product but in many cases can sell spin-off products related to the mascot - t-shirts, caps, toys, and more. For instance, while Camel Cigarettes eventually had to retire Joe Camel due to accusations that he was selling cigarettes to teens; Camel sold an enormous amount of Joe Camel merchandise before they terminated use.

Brand Mascots

Brand mascots can have several functions: to be the main visual expression of the brand (through a representation more or less anthropomorphic); to represent an iconic complement of the brand; and in both cases to establish connection to the brand (Corte-Real & Lencastre, 2009). Usually, brands rely on these types of characters to attract for instance, children's attention. The personality of these characters facilitates the brand recall, teaches children about the product and makes them dream about it. Children, thus become better informed about the product - since the mascots' shows the product better than it is (Roedder, 2001) - and thus can better understand the value of the product. Children have a strong visual memory; they tend to remember what the character is and then imitate it or identify with it.

A study was conducted with children eight, 12, and 16 years of age. Participants were asked to evaluate an advertised product (e.g., athletic shoes) with a familiar brand name that was either popular (e.g., Nike®) or less popular (e.g., Kmart®). The advertised product was physically identical in both cases, allowing one to explore whether the brand name had meaning for children apart from its name familiarity or perceptual features (Arencheiner, & John, 2003). The data analysis revealed a level of knowledge and understanding of the concept of brands that is very impressive for children in this age. Thus, consistently with academic research in this field, not only were they able spontaneously to name a large number of brands but, more importantly, to identify their constituent signs (logos, characters, color codes, etc.) and define their functions (Arencheiner, & John, 2003).

Having a brand character for a product allows the brand to gain more visibility and build an emotional relationship with the consumer (Ruffin, 2005).

Cayla's (2013) findings revealed that brand mascots are more than advertising glitter used to entice consumers into buying products; they can also become powerful organizational totems – a symbolic proxy for a firm's identity, solidifying organizational loyalties and guiding strategy.

Function of a Mascot: Young to the Older Consumer and Vice-versa

The strength of the mascot is its ability to establish a relationship with the consumer at an early age. The mascot, in some cases, directly targets children. It weaves a relationship with the child and drives her/him to act by creating curiosity or simulating his/her imagination. The child will be submitted to the appeal of the mascot, which will give him/her great pleasure.

As children, adults are also influenced by the mascots. The latter also applies to them since they are the subject of socialization of their children. The children want the product, but

most of them do not have the money to make a purchase, so they must influence the adults in their lives. Hence the fundamental role of parents is in the purchase process. Thus, the mascot targets also parents because they are the ones that allow children to buy, and consume the product. Consequently, brands must take into consideration equally parents and children (Ruffin, 2005).

Half of the brands used in childhood are adopted by the consumers when they become adults (Middelmen & Melzer, 1984). As evidence, one can look at the case of Mr. Malabar, a mascot that was “retired” and replaced by the Mabulle cat. When this happened, adults posted their comments on Facebook to demand their old mascot back. They insisted on the company retaining the character they knew and loved when they were children. The company didn’t take any action since a Portuguese brand from the same group was using Mabulle cat they wanted to standardize communication across borders. Children will also be influenced by the childhood of their parents. Parents unconsciously transmit a brand message through their fondness for a childhood mascot, gifting it, so to speak, to the next generation (Siegler 2010).

Today, parents buy many more products for their children. Similarly, the guilt of parents related to the fact that they spend less time with their children can play an important role in their purchase decision. As a result, these mascots have changed adult consumption habits. So adults purchase the product, either because they had used it being very young, or because they were influenced by their children (Khogeer 2013).

When dealing with commercial mascots, it is important to understand how to appeal to both adults and children. Obviously, adults have the greater buying power, since they earn the income. However, no marketer ever ignores the power of children to influence their parents

when it comes to choosing a product. The brand mascot should be loved first by kids and teens. Then the product itself needs to be approved by adults.

Usually mascots in Lebanon are linked to sports. There used to be a mascot in Lebanon for Jolly Time Popcorn and Boom Boom Malaysia, which would appear in favorite sports games watched by Lebanese citizen. Boom Boom deodorant used to be located under the basketball net and also between timeouts and breaks; it also used to be seen in the middle of court. They used to create a positive atmosphere by cheerleading to both teams and by taking photos with players and children after the game. While Jolly Time Popcorn used to have advertisement on the broadcasting station that cover the basketball game showing how one can enjoy his/her time by eating popcorn and encouraging one's favorite team.

Another mascot was created when Lebanon launched the Asian Athletic Championship in 2007. The championship Mascot identified as “natout” the grasshopper as well as the logo of event. "The grasshopper was chosen for his surprisingly high jumping abilities, dynamic pace of movement, small size, but great potential and abundant presence in Lebanon" (Khiami, 2007).

Lipos was designed to communicate the "wide array of services and products available at the national postal operator's post offices" (El Zein, 2004).

The latest superhero might not be able to save the lives of ailing citizens, but the "swift, friendly and trustworthy character" will be seen in streets, post offices, and schools, as well as on television, on radio and in print advertising responding to everyday needs - all in order to reinforce the message that "no matter what service is required, whether mailing a letter overseas, renewing military service documents or requesting pension certificates, Lipos will be there to make life easier" (El Zein, 2014).

One can find differences between internationally known mascots and Lebanese mascots. In Lebanon the mascot lifetime will not last more than 10-15 years, while all successful international mascots developed from the early nineteen hundred and are still present till now. They have been developed with time to have a perfect image.

Examples of Successful Brand Mascots

As noted earlier, in order to understand the brand/mascot relationship, it is necessary to search and seek out the most successful mascots. It is then important to judge their exposure in the marketplace, understand the perceptions of the consumers in relation to these mascots, evaluate the consumers' liking for the mascots and how that affects sales, and appraise both the objective and subjective influences and effects of these mascots. Are they just cute characters, or do they truly drive sales? The best mascots, obviously, do both.

Thus Brown (2010) reveals that the most popular brand characters are somewhat real and portrayed human beings - the Michelin Man, the Burger King, Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben, Ronald McDonald, Pillsbury doughboy and so on.

Much more than little guys designed to entertain children and increase sales, mascots have become true emblems to the brand they represent. These characters acquiring human characteristics allow better identification, brand differentiation and even an iconic addition to the brand name. One of the best examples of this is Ronald McDonald, the clown that identifies McDonald's fast food restaurants and has done so for decades, becoming a popular and indeed beloved mascot that is recognized around the world. Ronald is American, yet that does not matter. His appeal is universal. At the same time, however, too close an identification with a mascot can backfire if the consumers decide they want a different product. While Ronald McDonald was successful for decades as the children's friend, recent concerns over childhood

obesity have made McDonald's into a scapegoat of sorts. As a result, the company's marketing group has had to re-tool Ronald, making him less of an enabler when it comes to cheeseburgers and more a friend who encourages children to exercise and eat the apple slices in the Happy Meal before they drink a milkshake (Ives, 2005).

An example of a successful mascot in the Lebanese market is the one of Jolly Time Popcorn. The brand released, for a limited time, a mascot for the purpose of up selling the brand's microwave popcorn. The two popcorn bags (yellow and red), represented the brand, and appeared in almost all major supermarkets and events (sports, concerts etc.). The theory of using brand tools such as mascots serve the purpose of increasing the brand's "stamina" in the market so that consumers are more prone to buying. And how did Jolly Time Popcorn manage to do that? To start off with, jolly time popcorn is a solution to achieve "cinema" made popcorn at home; this alone helped the brand in getting the attraction needed, however, the market was still saturated with traditional methods. The mascot played a vital role; the mascot in this case leads to curiosity about the brand and eventual inquiry; this was usually met with salespeople at supermarket. However, this alone does not increase sales. The appearance of such mascots in major events like basketball league, which used to be and still considered the favorite sports that Lebanese consumer watch especially during final game matches where there is a large number of people who can be triggered by such brands. After all, the mascot serves its only purpose of promoting a brand, which can be identified that such mascots have disappeared after a while. Such notion is discussed later on.

How a Mascot Serves its Purpose

In marketing, mascots serve the purpose of driving up customer positivity towards a brand and hence their willingness to buy a certain product or service of the brand. A mascot can take

several forms - an animal such as that of Frosty's or a completely fictional character like Ronald McDonald or even a lion that represents the lion brand. Brands have mainly relied on more realistic creatures as they are highly more identified by people. It is called the "mascot mania" as Stephan Brown (2017) states in the book *Brand Mascots and Other Branding Animals. Going Apes*, Brown explains about Britain's top tea Pg tips as he comments on the chimps that speak and portray the brands overall image. However, these chimps went off the screen in 2002, remaining Britain's classic. Brown explains that these mascots have served their roles, and have been identified by the consumer, but for how long? The mascot served its purpose and the idea of recycling its objective over and over can overdue a brand. In a sketch cartoon book cover, *Ad Boy* is a book published by Warren Dutz and Masud Husein which describes over 450 characters used in ads over the past few decades; but where have these characters gone? The *Ad Boy* explains how characters evolved with time. Some characters still exist and entertain today like they used to do in the past and many other characters have disappeared with time. These *Ad Boy* or marketing tools (mascots), have been incorporated in the everyday lives of people in the past 50-60 years as the use TV, radio and internet popularized. However, the abundance of such tools, leads to the same effect of the PG Tips tea brand in London, eventually calling off these mascots.

Theoretical Framework

A brand is a concept that happens in a customer's mind. It is a perception. In other words, a company doesn't create a brand; it merely creates the tools, actions and processes that enable the formulation of a brand, sending messages about the brand, product, and/or company. It is important to understand the concept of branding. Branding refers to the set of tools used to create an image for a good or a service at hand, and it is the integration of colors, sounds and characters that bring the brands to life. However, branding is far from objective as it is more subjective, since what a brand imposes might not attract the same person of the same age, of the same background. Like Maslow's pyramid, branding as well follows a branding model or pyramid (Conlon, 2018). Conlon (2018) have developed this pyramid to explain the relation between Maslow pyramid and soulful pyramid which was created by him. Conlon (2018) has extended Maslow philosophy to healthy brands and companies in order to create more humanistic theories for brand and company growth

The lowest part is considered to be the most basic and simple positioning, that of the product. Product positioning places an object or service with its features as the lowest need in a brand, as it's what the customer expects the least. As the pyramid goes up, the need is shifted to a more "soulful" area; the branding position. It tackles the brand's social and emotional rewards, values and the personas and characters exemplified in this brand. This pyramid, following Maslow's model, evolves from the lowest of needs (physiological) to the highest of them (self-actualization). Nike's "Just Do It" branding took Maslow's model to look inward to understand their own evolution of the brand and what "need" it satisfies (Conlon 2018). Nike in such a case concentrated mainly on Maslow's theory of self actualization. They did so by integrating several marketing communications to motivate their customers to try to reach this self- realization. Nike

has clearly demonstrated the Maslow's theory of self-actualization. The company has deployed numerous marketing communications to motivate their customers to achieve self-realization. One of the examples includes the slogan of Nike 'Just Do It' which serves as a powerful statement to encourage the users of Nike products to achieve results by going through the physical pain activities. Besides that, Nike has also used a song called 'Ali in the Jungle' in which the main lines of repetition are: "It's, not how you start, it's how you finish. And it's, not where you're from, it's where you're going now. Everybody gets knocked down, How quick are you gonna get up?" (Youtube, 2008). The song encourages their audiences to achieve self-actualization through inspiration. Nike has been successful in advertising due to their astounding method of connecting with their customers (Xuan, 2018). Being a sports brand, the company strives to provide this through physical effort and endurance done by the customer to achieve results of a healthier body and lifestyle. The phrase is simple "Just Do It", which encourages the customer to cut any limitations and go for the extreme, while having their reliable source of sporting goods from Nike.

The usage of Maslow's pyramid also reflects the brand's personality. A brand personality is achieved when a set of human characteristics are linked directly to brand's name. (Keles, 2015) Take Nike again where the brand thrives to deliver the message that you can have the best sporting products in any form of sport you choose, you are free to do whatever you want. Nike also has linked its brand to several sports figures such as LeBron James and Micheal Jordan to name but a few. Being linked to such figures, Nike customers get a sense of pride and satisfaction that are also being branded with successful names. Nike also impressively have not linked their products to any age group, making their motto "Just Do It", without any limitations to anyone using it.

According to Schroeder and Salzer-Mörling (2006) “Brand culture refers to the cultural influences and implications of brands” (p. 1). It provides the necessary cultural, historical and political grounding to understand brands in their context, and to explore the complex underpinnings of the branding process. We live in a branded world, and as much as culture infuses brands with meaning, brands too infuse culture with meaning. Therefore, brand management exerts a profound influence on contemporary society. The principle of brand management implies the use of the brand as a managerial tool and not just the construction of a distinctive trademark (Arvidsson, 2006). It is the management of the particular context of action that the brand conveys. As previously expressed, people not only purchase products for their functionality, but also for their symbolic meaning. When a product is meaningful to an individual, it becomes prosthesis, or an extension of the self – i.e. for the individual, the brand becomes a representation of who they are, or who they aspire to be (Lury, 1999). Brands become a bold statement to others and a valuable expression of the inner true self.

It can be clearly stated that “Your Culture is Your Brand.” This directly implies that whatever the brand wants to achieve externally in the market, has to mirror what its culture is like on the inside; how much effort it puts into creating a culture for the brand, than actually selling the brand. Customers usually concentrate on what the brand makes them feel, rather than what the brand’s logo looks like (Hsieh, 2010). In the airline industry, this is most present. Airlines are no longer driven by competitive pricing rather than getting a better experience for a different dollar value. In simpler terms, if an airline ticket of an airline X costs less than airline Y, but the service from check in to boarding to leaving the aircraft is better in airline Y, people will go for airline Y. Airline branding works as a one shot transaction, when the process starts, you’re hooked till the end of the process. Airlines tend to create an overall culture that strives to

give more than a seat to travel. On Thai Airways for example, the airline promotes its travel itineraries with a full immersion into the nuance of Thai culture to better understand the place and its people. In other terms, if you're traveling to Thailand or not, Thai Airways will provide you with the Thai experience regardless (Thai Airways, Interbrands)

Advertising/Branding Tactics and Mascots

Some of the common advertising appeals are humorous, emotional, frightening (fear), rational (informative), and environmentally conscious. Many brands use mascots because they are typically entertaining and memorable (Phillips, 1996 p.143–158). Some commercials are very entertaining, but consumers cannot remember the brand or product. In addition, using humor in a wrong context and/or products can have an inverse affect, for example joking about life insurance or medication is usually a bad idea. An example of this would be an ad portraying that penicillin is made out of molds where you can find at home.

Firms also decide whether to use strategies such as an open-ended or closed-ended message; whether to use slogans, characters, or jingles. An open-ended message allows the consumer to draw his or her own conclusion, such as a commercial for perfume or cologne. A closed-ended message draws a logical conclusion.

The beginning and the end of the message should be strong and include the brand name. That way, if consumers hear or read only part of the message, they will at least remember the brand name. An example of this which uses a mascot is Green Giant. The Jolly Green Giant helped kids remember the Green Giant jingle and contributed to reminding them to eat their vegetables (Copes, 2010).

Some companies use characters or mascots and/or jingles or slogans. Although media is changing, many of the characters and jingles have stayed the same for decades. Each brand needs

to have a unique selling proposition (USP) for customers to remember and want their product. Depending on their objectives and their USP, marketers must develop a message strategy. Some companies prefer humor or rational appeals, while others may use a fear appeal.

Package with Mascots

Of course, packaging is a key benchmark and an essential element of the attractiveness of the product. “This proves a good media vector brand character both in the home and in the point of sale” (Hilderbrandt, 2009, p.34). The presence of the brand character on the packaging is intended to facilitate the identification of the brand on the shelf and also create top-mind awareness and brand recognition. A mascot can simulate the desire to want the product. Beyond its technical function, moreover, the packaging has an important advertising function. The aim of packaging is to create more visibility. This allows the brand to educate customers about the product itself, such as its quality and benefits. It is a silent salesman. The packaging consists of several elements: form, color, logo, brand name, graphics, and text and brand character. This is the value of the mascot comes into play, as it is the best remembered detail, quickly and directly identifiable and retained. The brand character enriches the packaging, makes it more fun and seduces the customer. The mascot on the packaging is static; it is reproduced so as to remain the same in every detail in order to have a particular and unique when dealing with the competition and to convey a particular message to the consumer, one that hopefully will remain with the customer for the life of the product (Smithson, 2015). Tony the Tiger, for instance, has survived for many decades. If a mascot does need to be updated, the marketing department thinks long and hard about the design and will probably come up with several designs - not necessarily changing their mascot, but usually do some certain amendments just to keep the basic figure of their trade character. Betty Crocker, has had several makeovers in the last 100 years, but those

who guard her image are very careful not to disturb the essence of her value to the brand and identity. Even with new makeovers, Betty Crocker will probably never have a pierced eyebrow, for example.

Attitude and Mascots

Attitude appears in several studies as a central variable of various models of consumer behavior (Kraus, 1995). However, defining and evaluating attitudes implies an approach with several perspectives (Cohen & Areni, 1991).

Consumer behavior can be defined as, “The study of individuals, groups, or organizations and the processes they use to select, secure and dispose of products, services, experiences, or ideas to satisfy needs and the impacts that these processes have on the consumer and society” (Elxir, 2013, p. 77). The psychology of how consumers think, feel, reason, and select between different alternatives (e.g., brands, products, and retailers); the behavior of consumers while shopping or making other marketing decisions can and is affected by many factors, including brand and advertising mascots.

Some brands insist on having an imaginary character to make them stand out from the competition (Keller, 2003). They may subsequently determine the positioning of the brand from the mascot. This may trigger the desired attitude and behavior from consumers. The idea is that the character will effectively identify the brand (Keller, 2003).

In general, the choice and use of the character is a key to its success. The goal is to choose a relevant and contemporary character. These characters must attract consumers and deliver a message. People subject to find this new mascot will be selected based on age, target, gender, the product and its function. The mascot will be either a symbol of the main attributes of

the product such as Mr. Clean or an emotional connection with the target such as Ronald McDonalds (Choi, 2014).

Purchasing Purpose of Mascots

Philip Kotler (1991) defines marketing as the science of art and exploring to deliver value in a product that satisfies the needs of a target market. As brands evolved from Kotler's (1991) previously stated definition, they became more than simply fun images. The focus of branding, to put it simply, is to get people to buy products whether or not they need them, and the mascot is a tool designed to make this happen. By associating an emotion with the brand, consumer loyalty could be encouraged (Barber, 2007). Consumer loyalty is about building long-term relationships equivalent to those with family and friends. In other words, to encourage consumer loyalty, brands must become part of the family. Thus, branding takes on a whole new role in the context of a relationship very different from that of making sales:

A transaction is like a one-night stand, and it is never going to be as satisfying or rewarding as falling in love. A transaction makes the cash register ring once. A relationship makes it ring again and again. And selling takes on a new dimension when you put it in the context of a relationship (Travis, 2000, p. 54).

In order for a long-term relationship to be synthesized with a brand, and in order for this brand to become part of the consumer's family, it must be personified by being instilled with human characteristics and traits (Csaba & Bengtsson, 2006). Personality is the unique, authentic, and identifiable soul of a brand that people get passionate about. The "branding theory" will be used to further understand the mascot phenomenon.

Branding and Customer's Buying Process

In discussing mascots and branding techniques, it is significant to also understand how purchasing a product plays a key role in learning more about branding and using mascots in strategies. Purchasing a product provides the sender with feedback, which often tells the seller that the buyer saw information and wanted to try the product. If the consumer uses any coupons or promotions when buying a product, the advertiser knows which vehicle was used to get the information. Branding thus offers feedback and hence, branding happens three times in the customer buying process (Hinz, 2015):

- During the information search: through the communications model. This is where information search happens and where perceptions of brands are formulated. In our case study, the mascot is the major communication tool. The companies send out messages via mascots propositions. The customer tries to decode the message and initial perception.
- Evaluation of alternatives: this where the second impression on branding happens. This is where the personality of the company product or service is important. Through different means of communication, the company must convince the consumer that their offering fits them. Since consumers buy products that reflect their personalities, it is important for companies at this point to not just show their value, designs, utility but to create an emotional attachment to the customer. At this point, the customer will be able to make a purchase decision based on what they perceived.
- Post-purchase: After the purchase the customer starts evaluating if they are satisfied or not with what the company was offering. They start thinking of whether the product or service actually reflects their self or ideal self-concept. If the customer is satisfied after his/her purchase, they will form another brand impression. They might even develop

brand loyalty. If the customer is not satisfied he/she will complain or interact with employee and won't buy the product again; this will cause another impression.

However at this time, it will change the brand perception in a negative way.

To sum up, branding is a concept in the customer's mind. Branding happens three times: the first two are influenced by the communication model and the last one is formed by the experience. Marketers must determine how to get consumers' attention and avoid as much interference and noise from other products as possible. Perceptual processes include how a person decides what to pay attention to and how to interpret and remember different things.

Every element of a business, from interactions with consumers to the packaging of products, is an element of brand personality. Personality is the unique, authentic, and talk-able soul of a brand that people get passionate about (Bhargava 2008). The most straightforward method of displaying brand personality is to hinge on real life individuals, company directors, employees, users or famous personalities such as actors, musicians, presenters, and sports personnel. for celebrity endorsement. Another popular method of displaying brand personality amongst practitioners is the development of spokes-characters/mascots or the utilization of famous fictional characters. Ronald McDonald, Charlie Tuna and Mr. Whipple provide such examples of past mascot successes (Khogeer 2013). What makes brand more unique other than mascot? Mascots play important role in building brand personality in consumer's mind. Brands with mascots are trying to show their organizational values and goals in order to attract new consumer who share the same vision.

Persuasive communication can be an effective way to change the minds and behaviors of those who disagree with a message. Persuasion is a type of communication in which someone

attempts to influence or change a person's beliefs or opinions about something, often by making a convincing argument (Raffel,2006).

Assuming that a person disagreed with them, there are basically three choices: accept their opinion and move on, or could challenge them by offering evidence in favor of a different answer. In doing this, one attempts to persuade them to change their opinion. Creating a brand character or mascot is a great way to build a corporate identity and generate attention from the public, as well as (in many cases) persuading someone to change their mind about a product.

Brand Recognition and Mascots

A mascot can offer limitless opportunities to drive consumer interest and brand recognition (Kristopher, 2012). A mascot helps consumers to connect with the brand by being confident enough. It helps them to see it in a new way. The mascot is a key component of a brand. It gives visual cues to the brand's consumers. Mascots are figures that can build an identity and help to create and express a brand's personality. They also help target markets and groups of consumers to identify, remember, and understand the brand. Exposure is the key element when it comes to mascots. If the mascot is out there and is visible, there's a better chance that the public will connect with it and identify the product with it. If the mascot is effective, that will be reflected in the sales figures.

A brand with a mascot presents a friendly image. They are fun to watch and immediately capture a place in consumer's mind which can make a positive connection with customers (Mohanty, 2004). Brand mascots can also help to illustrate the benefits of the brand in brand marketing communication messages. Brand mascots portray these aspects, while communicating valuable information regarding a service provided by the brand. Developing a corporate mascot is a great way to develop a positive brand image which will drive positive brand connotations

with consumers and must still incorporate all possible endeavors in creating a strong brand. Mascots are illustrated in many different shapes, sizes and colors and are typically used to promote a specific brand. Some mascots are cute and furry while others are fierce or menacing; depending on the brand/product category and objective. In these perspectives, using a mascot typically has a handful of different purposes: Mascots help consumers connect with the brand; they help trigger a desire to buy the product; create loyalty for customer retention over the long term; and mascots can help make your brand visible (Maxine 2018).

Exposure is the key element when it comes to mascots. If a mascot is out there and is visible, there's a better chance that the public will connect with it.

Top of Mind Awareness

Some brands insist on having an imaginary character in order to create a different position from the competition and stand out from the pack creating top-of-mind awareness. This leads to defining certain aspect of brand positioning through the mascot. This may or may not trigger the desired attitude and behavior in profitable conditions. Mascots serve an important role in positioning. As commonly known, positioning lasts in time and it is difficult to change. Similarly, the mascot is an essential element of the brand; changing or eliminating a mascot could disturb consumer perception, and brand positioning.

Including a character in the communication of a product is an effective way to reach people by linking the product to their needs. Therefore, in some cases, individuals are tempted to compare themselves to this character and to judge the degree of similarity between them. Yet people may not necessarily identify with the mascot, but they see characteristics that are friendly, approachable, and agreeable (e.g., Pillsbury Doughboy), and that encourages them to buy the product (e.g., chocolate chip cookies). In sum,

a brand is a complex symbol. It is the intangible sum of a product's attributes, its name, packaging and price, its history, reputation, and the way it's advertised. A brand is also defined by consumer's impression of people who use it, as well as their own experience (Ogilvy, 1985).

That is, brands are understood in terms of their constituent elements – name, logo, advertisements etc. More recently, brands have been perceived as complete entities that play a major role in the lives of consumers. Mascots are part of the brand and play potential role in having a strong brand. Including a character in the communication of a product, is an effective way to reach people and influence them..

Research Questions and Hypotheses

To be able to study the Lebanese market's engagement with brand mascots and to explore how they impact consumers the most, the following research questions and hypotheses were addressed:

RQ1: Does a mascot have a purpose in the Lebanese market?

RQ2: Does the mascot promote a positive attitude towards the brand?

RQ3: Does the mascot promote brand recognition, top of mind, awareness, and purchase intentions?

H1: A product with a mascot will a) have more favorable attitudes towards the product and b) are more likely to purchase the product.

H2: Participants exposed to the mascot condition will be more likely to a) recognize the brand and b) have top-of-mind awareness as opposed to the no-mascot condition.

Methodology

To examine the impact of the attitude of consumers in relation to using a mascot as a marketing strategy to create a large buying force, a quantitative experiment design was used. This would allow for a direct measure of cause and effect. To assess the theories addressed in the research, a sample of n=91 entries were accounted for in an experiment with a post-questionnaire tackling the attitude, purchase intentions, brand recognition and the brand's mascot recognition. The mascot chosen for this study is the Pillsbury Dough Boy. The reason for this particular mascot's use as opposed to a local brand is in order to not have preconceived notions about the brand and/or the portrayed illustrations. The Pillsbury Dough Boy mascot had not been , to the date of this study, advertised in Lebanon or seen in most supermarket shelves. Thus, this will ensure that any confounding variables (e.g., fondness, familiarity, likeness) which can contaminate and yield invalid and unreliable results have been accounted for.

Sample

Due to the central limit theorem in an experimental design as long as 30 participants are chosen at random per conditions specified then the sample should represent a normal distribution.

The study was performed covering several demographic aspects and their different relationships when cross examining their impact on each other. Such demographic labels were general labels such as gender, age, marital status, employment status, and residence location. Other demographic entries were more specific such as position in the household, financial provider of the house hold, household purchasing decision maker, personal wage and wage of the highest household member, respective occupation (general categories) of each and the income of the household per month.

Thus, for this experiment 54.9% of 91 participants were exposed to the mascot condition and 45.1% were exposed to the non-mascot condition. 20.9% were male, and 75.8% female, and 3.3% did not respond. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 67 years old ($M = 32.19$, $SD = 8.209$). 34.1% of the participants said they were single, 58.2% were married, 1.1% widowed, 3.3% divorced, and 3.3% did not answer. 63.7% of participants claimed that they were independent (head of household), 26.4% were dependents (living with parents), and 6.6% claimed they are another member of the household, 3.3% missing. Likewise, when asked about who the decision maker in the household was when it came to the buying of products, 65.9% of the participants cited themselves, 30.8% said either their father, mother, spouse or other household member, 3.3% missing responses. However, the 73.6% claimed that they were not the person with the highest income in the household, while only 22.0% stated to be so; 4.4% missing answers. The majority of respondents live in urban (e.g., Baabda, Beirut, Dbayeh, Kerwan, in Meten region) as opposed to rural areas (e.g., Beqqa, south of Lebanon, Chouf). 50.5% of the participants are employees, 24.2% are self-employed, 5.5% are students, 14.3% are unemployed, 2.2% are retired, and 3.3% did not respond. 45.1% earn approximately between \$2001 to \$5000 per month, 16.5% earn between \$5001 and \$9000 per month, 15.4% earn between \$1001 to \$2000 per month, 8.8% between \$501-\$1000 a month, 7.7% earn more than \$9000 per month, and 1.1% earns \$500 or less per month.

Chi-square assessment indicated that there was a variance in each of the groups, ensuring random assignment (Gender: $\chi^2 = 20.022$, $p < .05$; Marital Status: $\chi^2 = 12.583$, $p < .05$; Position: $\chi^2 = 7.210$, $p < .05$; Occupation: $\chi^2 = 13.696$, $p < .05$; Income: $\chi^2 = 22.582$, $p < .05$). (See Appendix A for advertisement design).

Procedure

Participants were exposed to one of two conditions, mascot versus no mascot, of the same advertisement. Then they were asked to fill out a post-questionnaire via Qualtrics. The questionnaire was posted in December 2017 for a period of two months. The topic at hand discusses different aspects related to using a mascot as a branding scheme. Respondents voluntarily participated and they remained anonymous throughout the study. Once completed the questionnaire, they were thanked for their time and participation.

Variables

There were several variables used such as attitude about the advertisement, purchasing intentions, brand recognition, and top of mind awareness (see Appendix B for questionnaire).

Attitude about the advertisement: This variable aimed at understanding people's attitudes and perceptions about the advertisement they were exposed to. A Likert-type scale from 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree was used to measure this variable and included five items, such as "I like the Pillsbury advertisement that I just saw" and "The cookies look like they are good" ($\alpha = .889$, $M = 3.712$, $SD = .820$).

Purchasing intentions: Purchasing intentions refers to whether participants would be willing to buy the product. This variable was measured using four statements such as "the Pillsbury advertisement influenced me to buy the product" and "Next time I want cookies, I would buy chocolate chip cookies" ($\alpha = .874$, $M = 3.522$, $SD = .858$). This variable was measured with a Likert-type scale from 1 = Extremely unlikely to 5 = Extremely likely.

Brand recognition: Brand recognition refers to whether they can identify various elements of the brand. A Likert-type scale was used to measure this variable from 1 = extremely unlikely to extremely likely. Five items were used to measure brand recognition, including "I

know the brand name of this product" and "I am likely to identify the logo" ($\alpha = .835$, $M = 3.286$, $SD = .968$); after which they were asked to specify the name of the product and its characteristics. Also immediate recall of the brand was measured to see how many people were able to recall certain features of the ad.

Top-of-mind awareness: This variable indicated if participants would think of the advertisement in relation to the brand category first. Top-of-mind awareness was measured with 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree for three items that included "Pillsbury comes to mind when thinking about cookies" and "I associate Pillsbury (as a brand) with cookies (as a product)" ($\alpha = .905$, $M = 3.348$, $SD = .936$).

Data Analysis

Research questions were assessed through descriptive statistics. The hypotheses were measured by using Welshsmire Independent T-Test to examine the variance between the two conditions (mascot versus no mascot) and purchase intentions, value propositions, and brand recognition.

Results

This section will detail the results from the data compiled as a means of comparison between the experimental group (those exposed to a mascot) and the control group (no-mascot advertisement).

Recall from the Ad

Participants were asked to describe what they remember or recognize from the brand the most, after exposure to their assigned condition. Some indicated "100% real chocolate" others "chocolate chips" others the "calorie count" and many indicated the "blue color and the mascot" or the "bunny." 44.0% of participants recognize Pillsbury among other competing brands of cookies, 28.6% disagree and 27.5% neutral. In relation to what would they purchase if their favorite cookie brand wasn't available in the store they go to, 63.8% said that they would go to the nearest shop to find them or that they would buy them next time; 36.3% said that they would buy the cookies of another brand. Likewise, when asked if they were interested in other types of products from the brand portrayed, 60.5% said yes, 13.2% said no and 26.4% were indecisive.

H1: A product with a mascot will a) have more favorable attitudes towards the product and b) are more likely to purchase the product.

Hypothesis 1 was not supported. The groups can be viewed as equal. Descriptive analysis is used to demonstrate participants' attitudes and purchasing intentions.

Attitude

The selected population was divided into two sets of groups one exposed the participants to the Pillsbury Cookie Mix product cover and the other exposed them to the exact cover, however without the mascot. The group exposed to the mascot was said to be the experimental one since it was tested to see if the mascot had a higher influence than the other group.

An independent-sample *t*-test was performed in order to examine whether the experimental group and the control group differed significantly in their attitude towards using mascots as a significant sign of branding. Results indicated that there wasn't a statistical difference between the two groups (Mascots: ((M= 3.656, SD 0.786); no-Mascot: (M= 3.536, SD= 0.835)) on participants' attitudes (Welch's $t(91) = 1.873, p > 0.05$) where an equal value was not assumed. The mean, even though indicating a significant difference (as stated in results), does not prove the effect of the exposure. The standard deviation also showed that the sample group atypical, showing negligible effect to mascots in terms of attitude. Thus, the proposed research question regarding the attitude had no positive or negative results regarding the Lebanese consumer's attitude.

When participants were asked, after seeing the advertisement, whether they liked the Pillsbury advertisement that they just saw, 66% liked it, 8.8% did not like it and 25.3% were neutral. Also, 68.1% agreed that the cookie ad was believable, 8.8% said it was not and 23.1% were neutral. Regarding the taste of the cookies, 73.6% agreed that the cookies would taste good, while 11 disagreed and 15.4% were neutral. In addition to that, 64.9% agreed that the product compared to its advertisement was reliable, in contrast to the 9.9% that disagreed and the 25.3 % that were neutral. Finally, the purchasing attitude was reflected positively by 60.5%, while negatively by 17.6% and neutrally by 22%. Other numbers showed similar attitudes such

as those of brand resemblance color by 37% and 35% of negative and positive. Such results expanded in different domains, which proves that the attitude in premiering a mascot and not has no effect.

Although the majority of the participants had positive attitudes towards the ad, there wasn't a significant difference between those exposed to the mascot condition and those who were in the no-mascot condition. This result indicates that participants, regardless of the conditions have similar attitudes about the product advertisement.

Purchasing Intentions

Another independent-samples *t*-test was performed in order to examine the purchase intentions of both the control and experimental group. Again, the groups purchase intentions did not yield a significant statistical difference, thus intentions are similar in either condition. Descriptive statistics showed there was variance between the mascot ($M= 3.45$, $SD 0.908$) and the no mascot ($M= 3.603$, $SD= 0.796$). This showed that there existed no difference in purchasing powers when dealing with brands that have an available mascot present due to the lacking difference in means value between the experimental and control group with Welch's($t(88.580) = -0.831$, $p>0.05$).

After seeing the advertisement 59.4% of the participants stated that the ad influenced them to buy the product, while 20.9% would not be influenced and 19.8% are neutral. 47.3% would recommend this product to others, while 17.6% would not and 35.2% were neutral. When asked if next time they wanted to buy cookies in the near future, would they buy chocolate chip cookies (as the type of cookie advertised in the ad) 75.8% said they would, 7.7% were not likely to buy this type, and 16.5% were neutral. When asked if Pillsbury would be their first choice when purchasing cookies, 52.8% said that they would, 15.4% said they wouldn't and

31.9% were neutral. These findings are significant and can draw out that both advertisements work. This might indicate how important the design is to the advertisement as a whole. In addition, 59.4% said that the use of a mascot will make them more likely to purchase the product/service, 15.4% are unlikely, and 25.3% are neutral. Although there wasn't a significant difference between the two groups, exposure to the ads whether with a mascot or not had a favorable attitude towards purchasing intentions. This suggests that incorporating the mascot did not lower the amount of influence; participants were influenced by the no-mascot advertisement just the same. The results showed that even in regular conditions the influence driven by the mascot was more or less equal to those exposed to a mascot in irregular conditions.

H2: Participants exposed to the mascot condition will be more likely to a) recognize the brand and b) have top-of-mind awareness as opposed to the no-mascot condition.

Hypothesis 2 was not statistically supported, again indicating that the studied groups were similar in their perceptions in relation to the advertisement.

Brand Recognition

The third independent-samples *t*-test reflected the brand recognition among the control and experimental group. Descriptive statistics showed a difference in the mean scores of both groups: mascot group (M= 3.36, SD 0.802) and the non-mascot group (M= 3.184, SD= 1.142). The *t*-test indicated that there was no significant statistical difference, thus H2 was not supported (Welch's $t(69.50) = 0.780, p > 0.05$). 53.9% of participants were likely to know the brand name of the product (after exposure to the advertisement), 30.8% would not recognize the brand name and 15.4% neither likely nor unlikely to know the brand name of the products. The results thus were inconclusive for just slightly above 50% of the participants recognized the brand after being exposed to it.

Top of Mind Awareness

A fourth independent-samples *t*-test reflected the brand top of mind awareness regarding consumers when dealing with the brands that have mascots among the control and experimental group. The descriptive analysis showed a difference gap between the no-mascot ($M= 3.20$, $SD= 1.02575$) and the mascot ($M= 3.5285$, $SD= 0.78872$) groups. No statistical significance was indicated, hypothesis 3 was not supported (Welch's $t(91) = -0.1682$, $p > 0.05$).

68.2% of participants said that chocolate chip cookies came first to mind when thinking of cookies, while 14.4% were not likely, and 16.5% were neutral. 46.2% were unlikely to think about Pillsbury when thinking about cookies, while 29.7 were likely to and the 24.2% remaining were neither. This shows that the results here as well were inconclusive, for the positive feedback represented around 50% of the population at hand.

73.6% of people ranked 1 to 3 (1 being the most memorable and 7 being the least memorable feature of having a mascot). 56.0% ranked 1 to 3 as an input, which was slightly equal to have the population (1 being the most positive and 7 being the least positive feature of having a mascot). 37.4% ranked 1 to 3 as an input which was less than 50% of the population (1 being the most creative and 7 being the least creative feature of having a mascot). 13.2% ranked high positions for the mascot being powerful. Only 27.5% ranked the mascot as a overshadowing the brand name. 73.6% have positive feedback regarding the buying behavior of brands with mascots

91.2% agreed that income had an influential power when it came to buying a product. 80.9 % of the applicants went with the familiarity of the brands at hand.

Discussion

After the deliberate process of collecting and sorting the data, the results collected lead to an understanding of the areas tackled in this research. The data allows us to draw general yet targeted findings regarding the Lebanese population. This section will answer if a mascot is meaningful in the Lebanese market, if the presence of a mascot promotes a positive attitude towards a brand, and whether the implications from the Lebanese consumer's purchase intentions, brand recognition and top-of-mind awareness. The findings are thoroughly discussed below.

Overall, the results indicated that there wasn't any difference between the two portrayed conditions. Although there weren't any differences between the two conditions on the outcomes measured, it does not mean that mascots do not have a purpose in advertisements or in relation to brand development and representation. The general purpose of this study is to argue on the fact whether mascots have any effect on attitude towards the consumer when viewing the brand. Hence, the results showed that people had positive attitudes and perceptions about the advertisement with the mascot, consequently the ability to use mascots in promoting positive attitudes towards the brand and product.

Attitude about the Advertisement

Analysis of the results showed no significant difference in attitudes regarding the premiering of the brand with its mascot or without it. The similarities in some aspects such as brand resemblance showed that the Lebanese consumer was affected by previous images of brands available in the market.

An explanation of this could be because of the Lebanese market that presents alternating brands that have the same colors and aspects of branding; for example the presence of chocolate brands that are an imitation of the original brands (an example is the KitKat brand that has mimic brands that go with the same colors and a similar name- kitkot katkot). This can be seen in a large line of food and beverage products, as well as cleaning and sanitary items. This strategy is well known as brand copying, in which a certain brand mimics the aspects of an original brand to attract more customers. Although these brands might resemble closely in fabrication and production, the original brand ensures a premium product while the later doesn't. It is described as duplicating someone's success factor (Waldman, 2012). This is widely common in food and beverage, as well as detergents. However, this does not apply to high end brands that are uniquely identified if fraudulent, this shall be discussed shortly.

According to a case study posted on Emerald Insight titled "Driving Forces of the Lebanese Market" by Jaafet Adhari (2012), the Lebanese market is driven by result more than it is driven by the looks of the brand. This applies to a wide range of products such as cleaning supplies and cooking essentials (salt, milk, bread etc.). The whole purpose of the product lays in its end function. Most brands tend to copy one another with similar colors and mascots, however, the Lebanese consumer focuses on the brand's overall effect. This aspect is not present when dealing with high end products, as the consumer pays a sum of money to be handed a high quality of material, and no other substitute would do. This puts into play the consequence of dealing with copy of high end brands; it may have a larger magnitude than mid and low market brands. This is because most counterfeit products are inferior versions of genuine products (Penz & Stottinger, 2008), so any fault or wrongly produced parts are anticipated especially in clothing. However, since these faults cannot be replaced in the original sites of production; they are sent to

more inferior correction places making the product more venerable. In consumer marketing behavior, customers are more midmarket products that portray original products, mainly because these items are almost the same when it comes to quality and product appearance (Rutkowske, 2015).

If one looks at Lebanon in specific, this applies due to two factors, the lack of proper restriction on counterfeit goods and the financial crisis that makes every transaction worth accounting for. For one thing, this action was due to a financial crisis that has been lingering in Lebanon for over the past 12 years counterfeit brands usually provide a lesser price for a value that is similar to original brands. In some products, the counterfeit is the next best thing if the original isn't present. According to Credit Libanais Financial Report on the Dissecting the Lebanese Public Debt (Lawati, 2018), the financial and economic crisis in Lebanon have triggered a public debt that has crippled middle class families and has thrown most of the people into high low class families. With limited income, the next available cheaper and best brand can be the substitute. Everyday buyers and consumers care about financial prosperity and having products of similar branding and partially close outcomes to act as a solace to them. Another idea is that there is no restriction on the production of counterfeit products in Lebanon as much as there is in other regions of the world. Brands in Lebanon are created with the same brand identity as other international brand, and share the same aspects of design and product implementation. The presence of a mascot in security and physical needs have a minor effect in Lebanese society. Everyday buyers are searching for product functionality and reasonable price. The reason behind this is due to bad economic situation that is causing people to buy their basic needs without thinking of Mascot as part of this brand.

Purchasing Intentions

The presence or absence of a mascot had also developed a very negligible significance in terms of purchasing power. The Lebanese consumers will buy what seems best in terms of end results, and that is fairly linked to their attitude. As mentioned before, the attitude is driven by several aspects one of which is financial power of the consumer. Even though some of the results were favorable to this claim, the purchasing power was not significant in the appearance of the mascot or in its absence. Another reason the results went in such direction might be because the Lebanese population was influenced by societies and communities behavior (Lebanon The Market, SGBL Reference). For instance, if a relative of the family were using a product, the person would most probably initiate a purchasing behavior of that sort. People in Lebanon often times, rely on small mini-markets next to their houses to keep up with daily demand. These mini markets provide limited options that lower the buying intentions of the customers, so that when they are faced with a bigger selection, their prejudice will be the same. Mini markets provide necessities at most times, those required by the population surrounding it (neighborhood). These mini markets tend to refrain from carrying in products that are not used in daily life. However, it cannot be concluded that mini-markets do not reflect attitudes that can be transferred to the supermarket. The main point reflected here is the fact that mini-markets might not be interested in brands or items that is of less frequent use. Mini Markets which do so on the other hand, do introduce the people surrounding this market to new brands and would affect the buying attitude. It can be concluded here that purchasing intention is interlinked with attitude as well, since the majority of the Lebanese market, in this study, is subject to variable effects on their purchasing power and their purchasing need. A research titled “The Economic Impact of Marketing Campaigns on Lebanese Consumer” published by the American University of Science and

Technology (2013) looked at the purchasing power in terms of pharmaceutical drugs. Lebanese consumers were more affected by what they need more than what they want. The relationship with consumable products is the same. As health and self-awareness rises, the Lebanese consumer becomes more prone to providing themselves with needs and less of wants.

Brand Recognition

Brand recognition showed results similar to the above two findings. However, the only difference is that brand recognition has to do with brand knowledge. The results above showed that the Lebanese market had an indecisive stance regarding brand recognition. The situation depends on how much the consumer is well involved with the brand: social media, ads and so on. The market is becoming more involved online and open to new lifestyles and most importantly brands. Social media play a huge role in portraying these brands to people and then this portrayal becomes embedded in their subconscious and reappears when faced with a brand. However, if the person does show an interest in the brand, the images of the brand will simply be shallow images. The head of Global Consumer Unit Ooredoo in the Middle East, Mr. Mohammad Dergham states that Lebanese consumers are fast becoming active participants in the networked life (Mohanty, 2014). Their interests are focused in one place, so are their favorite books, music, shows and brands. The brands that appear on social media are quickly passed on from user to user, Dergham explains.

Top of Mind Awareness

Top of mind awareness is a combination of all three mentioned aspects. Attitude drives purchasing power which is affected by brand recognition. In economics, purchasing power is affected by the overall awareness of the consumer, while in marketing it is driven by attitude and brand recognition (Lee, 2016). Both economic and marketing understanding create what is called

a top of mind awareness. Top of mind awareness is an algorithm that combines all three aspects, each aspect affecting the end result. If a brand doesn't meet recognition, price, and advertisement concerns of the consumer, the brand simply fails to establish a "bond" with the consumer. If one succeeds it follows second to last, and so on until the top brand reaches the top of the list satisfying all three. The problem in Lebanon seemingly is that there is not one market segment that is satisfied with all three. High end buyers have limitations on the brands available and affect their purchasing intentions. Low end consumers have problems with acquiring brands and with intentional reduced purchasing power (Lautianen, 2015). The top of mind awareness compares the brands physical attributes (mascots included) and the overall satisfaction of the Lebanese consumer.

Conlon (2018) transformed Maslow Branding theory to a brand development model.

The basic four layer of the pyramids contains deficiency needs after fulfilling the following needs one can then reach self actualization. The first two items of the brand development model are production and positioning. In this case the client will look at the product features and functional benefits and the mascot's role would be to highlight for the customers the product's benefit in order for the client to feel the need to purchase the product. The second two items of the brand development model deal with communicating with clients. Through mascots brands are able to communicate with their potential customer and get their thoughts and needs and try to adapt the product to fulfill customer's needs. The last part is self-actualization where brands should be creative, generating new ideas and executing them. Also the brand creators should be interested in solving problems and the brand should be made available and/or resourceful. In this case mascots should help the brand deliver their new product launching in a smooth way. Nike has clearly demonstrated the Maslow's theory of self-actualization. The company has deployed

numerous marketing communications to motivate their customers to achieve self-realization. One of the examples includes the slogan of Nike 'Just Do It.' Appealing to a strong brand personality, helps the audience differentiate the company from the competitor and can positively influence their purchasing decisions. Understanding of culture may allow the companies to further define their particular target market.

Pillsbury cookies package with the mascot should be able create positive attitudes when clients are searching to buy cookies since it has a nice package with a smiley mascot. Children and parents usually love packages that have vivid images and will have the curiosity to check the ingredients of Pillsbury cookies. After information research, the client will be interested in buying between different alternatives; Mascot like Pillsbury dough boy should play an important role to encourage the client to try their product over other competitors. If the client chooses Pillsbury cookies and was satisfied from the taste of the cookies then he/she will create a positive brand impression and with time he/she will become loyal to the brand.

Limitations and Further Suggestions

Although the study was not in favor of the presence of a mascot presented, a number of important implications could be drawn from it. It drew out four of the biggest aspects tackling the availability of mascots on brands and their absence. However, this research like many others has its limitations. The study has shown that there is a ground to base more research on the topic. Similar research to various other fields such as those of labor and medicine, have created a bench mark to start establishing concrete findings. The population selected and the group at hand corresponds to a random distribution in all elements and aspects, thus the results hold. However, economic and social criteria have not been fully regarded. Future research might want to take these aspects into consideration when dealing with the groups at hand. Also, future research must focus on more Lebanese used products and appliances that might have a bigger effect on the results provided. However, , the brand with mascot showed similar results to brand without a mascot this means that the mascot can work similar to an ad without a mascot; it can have similar effects. This also shows that if one works on promoting a mascot that Lebanese clients might like then different results could be achieved. Future research might want to pick up from this point onwards, and hypothesize on the results above and move into a more concrete understanding. The research should be done a wider basis with more qualitative input, a deeper look into the consumers post purchase bag at home and what the consumer wanted to buy in the first place.

Conclusion

The intention of this research was to address the power and impact of mascots on the brands and their prosperity in the market. This was done by the addressing three main concepts: the use of mascot in affecting the purchasing power, brand recognition, and the top of mind awareness of the Lebanese user in the market. The ground research was based on the Pillsbury Cookie brand as a reference to test the above theories mentioned; as it is a product that the Lebanese consumer is not familiar with thus minimizing the rival explanation to the results which can impact validity and the cause-effect relationship tested. The consumers were subject to several conditions and experiments that revolved with and without being subject to the mascot on the packaging. This strategy was done to reflect on both the negative and positive deliberation of whether the mascot has any effect in the first place. The purchasing power of brand with mascot didn't have any significant effect but however in several part of experiment a high percentage of participant recognized the ads with mascot. This however, does not invalidate the purpose of the research as branding and mascot use is much more than purchasing power. Also, the mascot did reap positive results, and thus cannot be fully dismissed from future investigations or even incorporating it as part of a brand.

Brands are a collection of culture and principles companies wish to hold. The limitations set in this research have affected the results. Conducted in the Lebanese market, the results thus have been set as two far points, but they do draw out the different level of brand interpretation in the use of the Lebanese consumer. The models addressed worldwide target countries which have several classes of economies, have a different economic stance as well as a different face to its profit. Lebanon indeed is a service country more than it is a product country, this means that brands that sell services are more likely to gain buying attraction in the end of the day than those

of products. Production in Lebanon is looked upon as another local product that deserves local support, which drives most people to buy it. However, these products are mostly mimics of high selling products that weaken their stance in the market.

The research does open doors to new observations of how delicate the Lebanese market is ; brand use and recognition varies over time. The Lebanese market follows a certain trend that is affected by the economic situation, the availability of certain brands and their positioning in the market. As of February, a product called “Today” emerged in the market is copying the Maltesers’ brand. Priced fairly and with more taste variations, this product is emerging on shelves everywhere. If I can buy the Today product for 500 less than Maltesers , I can definitely save money on the long run. This is a typical mid-class purchasing conversation.

The research also draws out that adults do not seek pleasure in the products like children. However, one recognizes brands do not present the mascot in a spectacular way all the time. A company must therefore be vigilant about this and find a balance that will satisfy both adults and children as part of the marketing. A child is most likely to recognize more features from a product, rather than its name.

A lot can be deliberated from the research above, however, in Lebanon there is more to expand on that cannot be narrowed down and generalized. Each aspect in the research is broken down into finer pieces that when put together give a general understanding of the Lebanese market. This market however is versatile, changes as the economy shifts back and forth.

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Appendix A: Media Stimulus

Advertisement with Mascot



Advertisement without a Mascot



Appendix B: Post-Questionnaire**Mascots**

Start of Block: Default Question Block

Q1 Thank you for taking the time to participate. Your time will be very valuable. The responses will be completely confidential and you throughout will remain anonymous. By continuing you agree that you are voluntarily participating.

Page _____

Break

Q2 Pillsbury is a brand known for the ready to cook recipes such as biscuits, crescents, pizza crusts, and cookies.

You are about to view an advertisement for Pillsbury chocolate cookies. Please spend time looking at the advertisement. Once you click next you won't be able to see the advertisement again.

Page _____

Break



Q3 After seeing this advertisement please rate your attitude towards the following statement as best as you can from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

	Strongly disagree	disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	agree	Strongly agree
I like the Pillsbury advertisement that I just saw.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The cookie ad is believable.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
the cookies look like they will be good.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
this product looks reliable as advertised.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The cookie advertisement will get me wanting to buy the cookies.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Q4 After seeing this advertisement please rate your attitude towards the following statement as best as you can from 1 = extremely unlikely to 5 = extremely likely.

	Extre mely unlikely	Unlik ely	Neithe r likely nor unlikely	likely	Extre mely likely
I know the brand name of this product. If so please specify below the name	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am likely to identify the logo.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am likely to identify the mascot.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I think of cookies Pillsbury comes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

to mind first.

When
you think of
cookies,
chocolate chip
comes to mind
first.



Q5Please describe what you remember or recognize from the brand the most.

Q6 I recognize Pillsbury among other competing brands of cookies.

- Strongly agree
 - agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - disagree
 - Strongly disagree
-

Q7 After seeing this advertisement please rate your attitude towards the following statement as best as you can from 1 = extremely unlikely to 5 = extremely likely.

	Extremely unlikely	Unlikely	Neither likely nor unlikely	Likely	Extremely likely
Pillsbury advertisement influenced me to buy the product.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would recommend this product to others.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Next
time I want
cookies, I
would buy
chocolate
chip cookies

I
would
consider
Pillsbury as
my first
choice when I
want to buy
cookies.

Q8 After seeing this advertisement please rate your attitude towards the following statement as best as you can from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

	Strongly disagree	disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	agree	Strongly agree
Pillsbury comes to my mind when thinking about cookies.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I associate Pillsbury (as a brand) with cookies (as a product).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
After seeing the ad, Pillsbury comes first to	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

mind when
thinking
about
cookies.



Page

Break






Q9 What would you do if you want to purchase your favorite cookie brand and there isn't any in the store you usually go to?

- buy cookies from another brand
 - go to the nearest shop to find them
 - buy next time
-

Q10 Are you interested in other types of products from this brand?

- Definitely yes
- Probably yes
- Might or might not
- Probably not
- Definitely not

Q11 Which of the following brands of chocolate cookies are you familiar with? Specify how familiar you are with the brands by sliding the bar to indicate familiarity with 1 = least familiar to 5 = most familiar.

Cadbury	
Grandma's	
Oreo	
Pillsbury	
Bonne Maman	

Q12 What comes first to your mind when thinking about cookies?

Rank the following statements from 1-5, where 1 = number one choice.

_____ The quality of the cookie

_____ taste

_____ price

_____ brand

_____ design/style/packaging

Page _____

Break

Q13 From the following what makes the brand valuable? rank the following from 1 = least valuable to 6 = most valuable.

_____ the mascot

_____ the logo

_____ the name

_____ the slogan

_____ the design

Q14 Select the number of stars to indicate from a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being most positive, rate the following statements

how
would you
describe the
relationship
between the
mascot (the little
white backer
portrayed in the
advertisement
viewed) and the
service?

Does this
mascot have a
direct impact on
the
product/service it
endorses?

Q15 How likely do you purchase a product with a mascot rather than another product of the same category?

Extremely likely

likely

Neither likely nor unlikely

unlikely

Extremely unlikely

Q16 As a customer how likely does a mascot make you more likely to purchase this product/service?

Extremely likely

likely

Neither likely nor unlikely

unlikely

Extremely unlikely



Page _____

Break

Q17 Which of the following characteristics are the best to describe a mascot? Rank in order from 1 the best characteristic to 7 least needed characteristic.

_____ successful

_____ memorable

_____ positive/fun

_____ creative

_____ bigger than the logo

_____ keeps up the brand image

_____ powerful



Q18 As a customer does your attention to the product/service get overshadowed by the popularity of a mascot on that product?

yes

sometimes

no



Q19 Do brand mascot affects your buying behavior?

- definitely
- sometimes
- no influence



Page _____

Break

Q20 For the following statements select the degree of influence of each factor on your purchase/use of a product.

	Really not influential	Not influential	Neutral	Influential	Really influential
The well-known brand name of the product.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The quality of the product.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your satisfaction of a previous product from a certain brand.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Design/packaging	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Available income	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Q21 When buying a product, I look for the following features:

	Strongly agree	agree	Neither agree nor disagree	disagree	Strongly disagree
economic value	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
personal satisfaction	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
innovation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
practicality	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
popularity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
familiarity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
flavor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

taste

Q22 If your preferred brand is not available for repeat purchases then what will you do?

- postpone your purchase
 - switch over to another brand
 - go to the other shop to search for your preferred brand
-

Q23 If another brand of the same product appears in the market, would you prefer to stop buying this brand and buy the new brand?

- no, not at all
- I may consider it
- yes, for sure
- I don't know

Q24 If you don't like to change to a new brand, then what are the reasons for continuing to purchase the old brand?

Page

Break

Q25 How old are you?

Q26 Please specify your gender.

Male

Female

Q27 What is your marital status?

single

married

widowed

divorced

Q28 Where do you live?

- Aley and Chouf
- Baabda
- Beirut East
- Beirut West
- Beqaa
- Dahieh
- Keserwan
- Jbeil
- Metn
- North Lebanon
- South Lebanon
- other, specify _____

Q29 What is your position in the household?

- I am the head of household (married couple, parents, independent)
- I am one of the children (living with my parents)
- I am another member of the household

Q30 Who is the main decision maker in the household to buy products?

- Myself
- My father
- My mother
- My spouse
- My child/children
- My sibilings
- Another household member. Please specify

- The maid
- Other, specify _____

Q31 Are you the person with the highest income in the household?

- yes
 - no
-

Q32 What is your occupation?

- Employee
- self-employed
- student
- unemployed
- retired

Q33 What is the occupation of the chief wage earner?

- employee
- self-employed
- student
- unemployed
- retired

Q3 Approximately how much is the household income per month?

- \$500 and less
- \$501-\$705
- \$751-\$1000
- \$1001-1500

- \$1501-\$2000
 - \$2001-\$2500
 - \$2501-\$3000
 - \$3001-\$5000
 - \$5001-7000
 - \$7001-\$9000
 - more than \$9000
-

Page _____

Break

Q35 Thank you for your time and valuable answer! Your participation is highly appreciated. Please click the next button to end the survey.

End of Block: Default Question Block