

# The Influence of Parent Brands Commitment On Consumers' Atitude Toward Co-Branding Between Those Brands

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## Abstract

*This paper examines the influence of parent brands' commitment on consumers' attitude toward co-branding. Co-branding refers to the combination of two brand names to launch a single and unique product for a short to long term cooperation. Two experiments were conducted to test the hypotheses. The 82 subjects were exposed to two sessions of experiment; evaluations on each brand with no co-branding, evaluations on co-branding. Consumers' attitude was derived through obtaining consumers' perception on brand personality and favorability. The findings showed that parent brands with high commitment received more positive attitude compared to parent brands with low commitment.*

*Keywords: co-branding, level of commitment, brand personality.*

## 1. Background

Co-branding has become a popular technique in attempting to transfer positive associations from one brand to another brand (Washburn, Till & Priluck, 2000). Co-branding occurs when there is a pairing of two or more constituent brands to form a separate and unique product — a merged brand (Helmig et al., 2008). The examples of recent marketplace are including Mercedes Benz-Louis Vitton and Sony-Ericsson. To minimize the risk of co-branding, companies need to have a deeper understanding on how the other brand may influence their brand in the co-branding process (Dickinson & Heath, 2008).

Helmig (2008) argued that any form of co-branding is essentially conducted in an attempt to transfer positive associations from original individual brands to the new co-branded offering. Ultimately, firms engage in co-branding to receive benefits such as additional marketplace exposure, shared expenses associated with a new product or promotional campaigns, gaining access to new markets or simply enhancing the reputation of their own brand by being aligned with a respected partner (Wright, Frazer, & Meriless, 2007; Helmig et al., 2008).

These benefits have been confirmed by various studies; Baumgarth (2004), Huber (2005), and Dickinson & Heath (2008). Helmig et al. (2008) mentioned that Baumgarth (2003) offers the most comprehensive study on direct effects on co-branding. He analyzed the largest sample, the greatest variety of co-branded products, and the most path relationships, which he tested simultaneously. In addition to brand and product fit, advertising relevant to the co-branded product has great importance in terms of attitudes of the co-branded product, according to his structural equation model. Huber (2005) provides evidence that product involvement and consumers' brand orientation influence the success of the co-branded product (Helmig et al. 2008).

Helmig et al. (2008) had also hinted the necessity to study the influence of level of commitment. Commitment is important for a co-branding to succeed in a long run. This factor will create a signal for consumers about the quality of co-branding. Therefore, it is important to study consumers' attitude toward co-branding in two different situations: a high commitment situation and a low commitment one. Moreover, the possibility of the spill-over effect occurrence toward the parent brands' attitude will also be investigated.

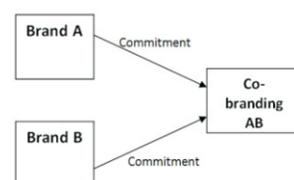


Figure 1. Illustrations of Co-branding Formation

## 2. Literature Review and Hypothesis

### Consumer Attitudes toward Co-Branding

James (2005) argued that consumer attitudes towards a brand impact on the overall associations they make with that brand. When faced with a choice of brands in a product category, consumers choose the brand towards which they hold the most favorable attitude, and which is also tied to the formation of consumer beliefs about product-related benefits such as functional performance and perceived quality (Keller, 1993). Haugtvedt et al. (1993) in James (2005) mentioned that consumer brand choice is influenced by a set of variables termed "attitude" a positive or negative feeling held about something and brand attitude by the overall evaluations that a consumer makes of a brand. Srinivasan (1979) in James (2005) stated that consumer's attitude can also be valued as the sum value of the brands attribute. Attributes could be categorized by identifying how they relate to the brands performance; products-related attributes such as the formation of ingredients key to the brands' performance and the brands' physical composition and non-product-related attributes such as external issues including the price of the product, user and usage imagery, product appearance (Keller, 1993).

Before the appearance of the co-branding in a given product category, consumers already possess established attitudes both towards the parent brands and the target co-brand product category (Leuthesser, 2003). These attitudes are composed of cognitive and affective dimensions (Garcia & Foguet, 2008). On the one hand, the cognitive component is brand/category knowledge, defined in terms of the product-related and non-product related associations linked to a brand/category in long-term consumer memory (Keller, 2009). On the other hand, the affective component refers to the feelings associated with a brand name or a product category (del Rio et al., 2001).

When the co-brand product is launched, consumers evaluate it on the basis of their attitude towards the parent brands and the co-brand category (Ashton, Scott, & Breakey, 2008). Consumers will try to link the associations they have on each of the parent brands to the co-brand. To help explain how brand associations can impact attitudes of a brand, Keller (1993) points to the associative network memory model; when memory is a function of the relationship that exists between the information present in the cues and the target memory (Aaker, 1991).

Most of the conducted research such as Baumgarth (2003), James (2005), and Dickinson & Heath (2008) employed product attributes as the associations affecting consumers' attitude toward co-branding. Researchers have noted that brand personality, as non product attribute associations, can act as a central driver of consumer preference and usage (Parker, 2009). This study, therefore, employs brand personality to represent brand associations.

### Brand Personality

Another important reason for the use of brand personality is that in the upcoming experiment, this study chooses brands from mobile telecommunication technology. In technological world, everything moves really fast, yet everything is now imitable. One technology today can be just another technology tomorrow for many will soon imitate the "new" technology. In this regard, a brand needs to have distinction from other brands. Brand personality is likely to be more difficult to imitate than tangible product attributes (Sophonsiri & Polyorat, 2009). Marketing practitioners commonly use it to achieve more sustainable advantages (Ang & Lim, 2006) such as creating product differentiation and positioning (Sophonsiri & Polyorat, 2009).

Aaker (1997) defined brand personality as the "set of human characteristics associated with a given brand". The brand personality concept is based on the premise that brands often project a certain public image that is identifiable by consumers. Aaker (1997) stated that just as the perceived personality of a person is affected by nearly everything associated with the individual – friends, activities, and so forth – so too is brand's personality. Thus, just like a person, a brand can be associated as being sophisticated, fun, active, formal, and so forth. While the drivers of a brand personality may be product-related brand elements (e.g., price, components), non-product related characteristics also play a contributing role.

In an effort to assess consumers' attitudes, this study features insight from the Brand Personality Scale (BPS) developed by J. Aaker (1997). The Aaker scale has proven to be reliable, valid, and generalizable scale to measure brand personality (Keller, 2003). Aaker's BPS is a compact set of traits designed to both measure and structure brand personality. In developing the scale to identify the meaningful brand personality dimensions, Aaker asked a total of 631 subjects to rate a subset of 37 brands on 114 personality traits.

From her analysis, Aaker was able to develop a 42-item scale to identify five personality factors that were found to explain 93% of the observed differences between brands. She titled the five personality factors: excitement (daring, spirited, imaginative, and up-to-date), sincerity (down-to-earth, honest, wholesome, and cheerful), ruggedness (outdoorsy and tough), sophistication (upper class and charming), and competence (reliable, intelligent and successful). Each of the five factors was comprised of a number of traits or facets that represented a common theme for each factor. These five dimensions are reported to be robust across the male sub-sample, female sub-sample, younger sub-sample, and older sub-sample (Keller, 2003).

Utilizing the BPS as a basis from which to test how a marketing activity may impact a brand's personality has been suggested by Aaker (1997). She advocated that through the use of BPS, brand associations can be manipulated and the impact on consumers' attitude can be measured.

**Level of Commitment**

Aaker and Keller (1990) in brand extension hypothesized that difficulty of the product making will influence consumers' evaluation toward brand extension. The study was later replicated in co-branding context by James (2005) and Dickinson & Heath (2008). While Aaker and Keller's study in brand extension supported the hypothesis, James and Dickinson & Heath's study in co-branding rejected it. It may be caused by the fact that in co-branding context, the product making process turns out to be more complex.

One of the key factors of success in brand extension context is the high parent brand involvement (Völckner & Sattler, 2006); it is the degree of parent brand's involvement in the extension product. The combination of the difficulty of product making and parent brand involvement determines the level of commitment in co-branding. Even before the product making, the two companies partnering in co-branding will have to come to an agreement what kind of co-branding they want to be engaged in. The agreement will include the time horizon, the future product of co-branding, human resources, financing, and many other important issues.

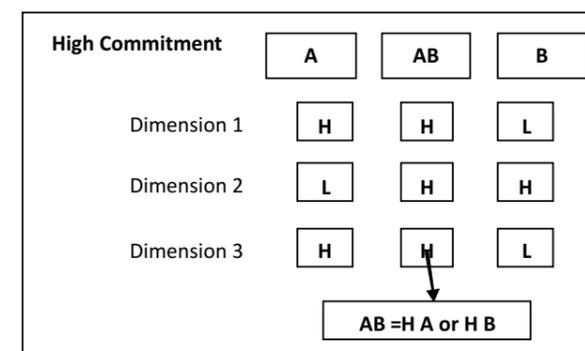
Co-branding can take any number of forms and often vary in terms of commitment of resources and goals. In Adler's view, the nature and scope of symbiotic relationships between firms can differ along a number of different dimensions such as the level and focus of the relationship marketing in terms of the length, proximity, and overall scope of relationship (Varadarajan & Rajaratnam, 1986). In the existing co-branding context, Cooke & Ryan (2000) argued that co-branding will have different continuum of collaboration, from only a brand endorsement to the collaboration on core competencies. Co-branding which only involves in brand endorsement such as product bundling will not necessarily be engaged in each other's company core competencies.

This type of co-branding does not require extensive efforts. Hereafter, this type of co-branding will be called as low commitment co-branding. Meanwhile, co-branding which requires the making of new product together will necessarily be involved in more multifaceted agreement for it needs much more extensive efforts. This type of co-branding will be called as high commitment co-branding later in this study.

The positive change in balance theory, which was mentioned previously, might be moderated by the level of commitment possessed by the co-branding which causes the degree of change to be varied. As illustrations, supposedly Brand A and Brand B are partnering in high commitment co-branding to produce a new mobile phone which involves extensive resources (finance, technology, etc.) and low commitment co-branding to market their product together in product-bundling which takes less extensive resources.

Consumers may perceive the two brands making serious efforts in the high commitment co-branding, so the additional positive associations towards the co-branding and the parent brands may be even higher compared to the additional positive associations consumers may possess toward the low commitment co-branding.

In this study, the combination of the difficulty of product making and both parent brands involvement is what determines the level of commitment in co-branding. Given the level of commitment difference across co-branding, it is important to account for the strength of the relationship in this study. Thus, this analysis differentiates between co-branding that may be perceived as possessing a high degree of partner commitment and those with lower commitment levels. It is hypothesized that co-branding's personality and favorability in high commitment will be equal or greater than the personality and favorability of the parent brand who possesses higher attitude. The following is the illustration of attitude change in high commitment co-branding.

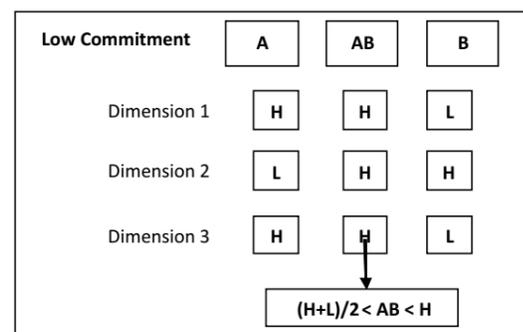


**H1A:** Co-branding's personality will be equal to or higher than the higher parent brand's personality.

**H1B:** Co-branding's favorability will be equal to or higher than the higher parent brand's personality.

**Low Commitment Situation**

If consumers recognize the low commitment co-branding performed by parent brands, the attitude formed toward co-branding is expected to be lower than the high commitment one. Low commitment co-branding is only expected to result in personality and favorability which is greater than the average personality and favorability of both the parent brands, yet lower than the personality and favorability of the higher brand. The following is the illustration of attitude change in low commitment co-branding.



**H2A:** Co-branding's personality will be higher than the average personality of both the parent brands, yet lower than the higher brand's personality.

### 3. Method

#### Experiment 1

The first experiment was conducted using undergraduate students as subjects in exchange for lunch. The brands and co-brandings used in this research are real brands and co-brandings, as suggested by Dickinson and Heath (2008). The brands were Sony, Ericsson for SonyEricsson co-branding and Telkomsel and Nexian for Telkomsel-Nexian co-branding. Out of 80 invited students, only 40 came participating. 19 were female and 21 were male.

The experiment consisted of two sessions. The first session was about subjects filling out a set of questionnaire evaluating on every brand without the co-branding existence. To avoid subjects noting the existence of co-branding, the brands were put in random so they would assume that it was just an evaluation on several brands in mobile telecommunication technology. In the second session, subjects were asked to evaluate on those two pairs of co-branding, after being given instructions on co-brandings and the level of commitment performed by the parent brands.

### 4. Results

#### High Commitment Co-Brandings Hypotheses

**H1A:** Co-branding's personality will be equal to or higher than the higher parent brand's personality.

Table 1. High Commitment Personality Results

| Personality            | Brand    | Mean     | (H+L)/2 | Co-branding Mean | Results   |
|------------------------|----------|----------|---------|------------------|-----------|
| <b>High Commitment</b> | Sony     | 5.37 (H) | 5.14    | 5.69             | Supported |
|                        | Ericsson | 4.92 (L) |         |                  |           |
|                        | BenQ     | 4.02 (H) | 3.96    | 4.04             | Supported |
|                        | Siemens  | 3.95 (L) |         |                  |           |

High commitment co-branding is expected to be:

$$\mu_{Co-branding's Personality} \geq \mu_{Higher Brand's Personality}$$

The overall personality attitudes showed that both co-brandings supported the hypothesis H1A.  $\mu$  SonyEricsson's Personality (5.69) is higher than  $\mu$  Sony's Personality (5.37), while  $\mu$  BenQSiemens's Personality (4.04) is also higher than  $\mu$  BenQ's Personality (4.02).

**H1B:** Co-branding's favorability will be equal to or higher than the higher parent brand's personality.

Table 2. High Commitment Favorability Results

| Favorability           | Brand    | Mean     | (H+L)/2 | Co-branding Mean | Results   |
|------------------------|----------|----------|---------|------------------|-----------|
| <b>High Commitment</b> | Sony     | 5.41 (H) | 5.29    | 6.15             | Supported |
|                        | Ericsson | 5.16 (L) |         |                  |           |
|                        | BenQ     | 4.31 (H) | 4.23    | 4.68             | Supported |
|                        | Siemens  | 4.14 (L) |         |                  |           |

The expectation is that:

$$\mu_{Co-branding's Favorability} \geq \mu_{Higher Brand's Favorability}$$

Both high commitment co-brandings' favorability resulted higher than the high ratings of parent brands.  $\mu$  SonyEricsson's Favorability (6.15) is higher than  $\mu$  Sony's Favorability (5.41) and  $\mu$  BenQSiemens's Favorability (4.68) is higher than  $\mu$  BenQ's Favorability (4.31). Thus, H1B is supported.

#### Low Commitment Hypotheses

**H2A:** Co-branding's personality will be higher than the average personality of both the parent brands, yet lower than the higher brand's personality.

Table 3. Low Commitment Overall Personality Results

| Personality           | Brand      | Mean     | (H+L)/2 | Co-branding Mean | Results  |
|-----------------------|------------|----------|---------|------------------|----------|
| <b>Low Commitment</b> | Telkomsel  | 5.46 (H) | 4.34    | 3.95             | Rejected |
|                       | Nexian     | 3.22 (L) |         |                  |          |
|                       | Telkomsel  | 5.46 (L) | 5.52    | 5.44             | Rejected |
|                       | BlackBerry | 5.58 (H) |         |                  |          |

Low commitment co-brandings' personality is expected to be:

$$(\mu_{A Personality} + \mu_{B Personality})/2 < \mu_{Co-branding's Personality} < \mu_{Higher Brand's Personality}$$

The overall attitude of personality showed that both low commitment co-brandings'  $\mu$  are lower than  $\mu$  parent brands/2.

$\mu$  Telkomsel A-Nexian's Personality (3.95) is lower than  $(\mu_{Telkomsel A} + \mu_{Nexian})/2$  (4.34).

$\mu$  Telkomsel B-BlackBerry's Personality (5.44) is lower than  $(\mu_{Telkomsel B} + \mu_{BlackBerry})/2$  (5.52).

Thus, H2A is not supported.

**H2B:** Co-branding's personality will be higher than the average personality of both the parent brands, yet lower than the higher brand's personality.

Table 4. Low Commitment Co-brandings Favorability

| Favorability   | Brand      | Mean     | (H+L)/2 | Co-branding Mean | Results   |
|----------------|------------|----------|---------|------------------|-----------|
| Low Commitment | Telkomsel  | 5.33 (H) | 4.28    | 4.53             | Supported |
|                | Nexian     | 3.64 (L) |         |                  |           |
|                | Telkomsel  | 5.33 (L) | 5.61    | 5.88             |           |
|                | BlackBerry | 5.91 (H) |         |                  |           |

The expectation is for low commitment co-branding's favorability to be:

$$(\mu A \text{ Favorability} + \mu B \text{ Favorability})/2 < \mu \text{ Co-branding's Favorability} < \mu \text{ Higher Brand's Favorability}$$

Co-branding seemed to have better impact on favorability in the case of low commitment co-branding. It can be seen from the results that both Telkomsel A-Nexian and Telkomsel B-BlackBerry managed to result their rating to be higher than the average of both their parent brands' favorability.

$\mu$  Telkomsel A-Nexian's Favorability (4.53) is higher than  $(\mu \text{ Telkomsel A} + \mu \text{ Nexian})/2$  (4.28), yet lower than  $\mu \text{ Telkomsel A's Favorability}$  (5.33).

$\mu$  Telkomsel B-BlackBerry's Personality (5.88) is higher than  $(\mu \text{ Telkomsel B} + \mu \text{ BlackBerry})/2$  (5.61), yet lower than  $\mu \text{ BlackBerry's Favorability}$  (5.91). Thus, H2B is supported

### Discussion

In regard with level of commitment, H1A and H2B are supported for high commitment co-brandings (SonyEricsson and BenQSiemens) were significantly increasing their ratings exceeding the parent brands which hold high personality and favorability. Meanwhile, for low commitment co-brandings, only H2B is supported, yet not H2A. Low commitment co-brandings' (Telkomsel A-Nexian and Telkomsel B-BlackBerry) ratings on personality went even lower than hypothesized, yet managed to stay in the range of hypothesis on favorability. These results also imply the level of commitment influence toward co-branding. The second experiment was conducted to reinforce the results of the previous experiment.

### Experiment 2

The second experiment was the exact replication of the first experiment. As the first experiment conducted, the second experiment also consisted of two sessions. Out of 80, 42 students came participating in the experiment in exchange for lunch; 18 were female, 24 were male. In the first sessions, subjects completed a set of questionnaire of the same seven brands as the previous experiment with no co-branding scenario presented, so they would assume that it was only an attitude of several random brands in mobile telecommunication technology. The subjects were then asked to complete an attitude of the brands paired together as co-brandings (SonyEricsson, BenQSiemens, Telkomsel-Nexian, and Telkomsel-BlackBerry) for the second session.

#### High Commitment Co-Branding Hypotheses

**H1A:** Co-branding's personality will be equal to or higher than the higher parent brand's personality.

Table 5. High Commitment Co-brandings' Overall Personality Results

| Personality     | Brand    | Mean     | (H+L)/2 | Co-branding Mean | Results   |
|-----------------|----------|----------|---------|------------------|-----------|
| High Commitment | Sony     | 5.41 (H) | 5.31    | 5.59             | Supported |
|                 | Ericsson | 5.21 (L) |         |                  |           |
|                 | BenQ     | 3.91 (-) | 3.91    | 4.40             |           |
|                 | Siemens  | 3.91 (-) |         |                  |           |

The hypothesis is that:

$$\mu \text{ Co-branding's Personality} \geq \mu \text{ Higher Brand's Personality}$$

The overall attitudes on personality showed that both of the high commitment co-brandings meet the hypothesis' requirement. SonyEricsson's personality is 5.59 which is higher than Sony's personality (5.41). Meanwhile, BenQSiemens' personality is 4.40 which is also higher than both BenQ or Siemens' personality (equally possess 3.91). Thus, H1A is supported.

**H1B:** Co-branding's favorability will be equal to or higher than the higher parent brand's favorability.

Table 6. High Commitment Co-brandings' Favorability Results

| Favorability    | Brand    | Mean     | (H+L)/2 | Co-branding Mean | Results   |
|-----------------|----------|----------|---------|------------------|-----------|
| High Commitment | Sony     | 5.80 (H) | 5.53    | 5.85             | Supported |
|                 | Ericsson | 5.26 (L) |         |                  |           |
|                 | BenQ     | 4.30 (H) | 4.20    | 4.53             |           |
|                 | Siemens  | 4.10 (L) |         |                  |           |

As in the first experiment, both high commitment co-brandings' favorability in the second experiment also showed that they managed to have higher favorability than the higher brand's favorability. SonyEricsson's favorability is 5.85 which is higher than Sony's personality (5.80). Meanwhile, BenQSiemens' personality is 4.53 which is also higher than BenQ's personality (4.30). Thus, H1B is supported.

#### Low Commitment Co-branding Hypotheses

**H2A:** Co-branding's personality will be higher than the average personality of both the parent brands, yet lower than the higher brand's personality.

Table 7. Low Commitment Co-brandings' Overall Personality Results

| Personality    | Brand       | Mean     | (H+L)/2 | Co-branding Mean | Results  |
|----------------|-------------|----------|---------|------------------|----------|
| Low Commitment | Telkomsel A | 5.57 (H) | 4.51    | 4.39             | Rejected |
|                | Nexian      | 3.46 (L) |         |                  |          |
|                | Telkomsel B | 5.57 (L) | 5.61    | 5.63             |          |
|                | BlackBerry  | 5.65 (H) |         |                  |          |

The overall attitudes on the dimensions showed that H5A is supported for Telkomsel B-BlackBerry for its co-branding's personality (5.63) is higher than both parent brands' personality (5.61), yet lower than BlackBerry's personality (5.65). However, H5A is rejected for Telkomsel A-Nexian since its co-branding's personality (4.39) is lower higher than both parent brands' personality (4.51).

**H2B:** *Co-branding's favorability will be higher than the average favorability of both the parent brands, yet lower than the higher brand's favorability.*

Table 8. Low Commitment Co-brandings' Favorability Results

| Favorability   | Brand       | Mean     | (H+L)/2 | Co-branding Mean | Results  |
|----------------|-------------|----------|---------|------------------|----------|
| Low Commitment | Telkomsel A | 5.56 (H) | 4.60    | 4.43             | Rejected |
|                | Nexian      | 3.64 (L) |         |                  |          |
|                | Telkomsel B | 5.56 (L) | 5.74    | 5.68             | Rejected |
|                | BlackBerry  | 5.92 (H) |         |                  |          |

On favorability, both of the low commitment co-brandings resulted in low ratings, even lower than  $(\mu_A \text{ Favorability} + \mu_B \text{ Favorability})/2$ . Telkomsel A-Nexian co-branding's favorability (4.43) is lower than higher than both parent brands' favorability (4.60). The same thing is experienced by Telkomsel B-BlackBerry co-branding's for its favorability (5.68) is lower than both parent brands' favorability (5.74). Thus, H2B is not supported

### Discussion

H1A is supported for the two high commitment co-brandings meet the requirement made for high commitment co-branding. The two high commitment co-brandings' results on favorability are also able to support H1B for they meet the requirement. Telkomsel A-Nexian rejected the hypothesis H2A and H2B for its ratings turned out to be lower than  $\mu_A \text{ Favorability} + \mu_B \text{ Favorability}/2$ . Telkomsel B-BlackBerry supported H2A, yet rejected H2B. As the results of the first experiment, the second experiment also showed the influence of parent brands' commitment to consumers' attitude toward co-branding. The attitude toward high commitment level is more favorable than the low one.

### General Discussion

This study proved that level of commitment performed by parent brands influenced the attitudes toward co-branding. The influence level of commitment can be seen through the attitude toward co-branding since high commitment co-brandings received more positive attitude compared to low commitment ones. No previous research has examined the influence of level of commitment toward co-brandings' attitudes. As one key factors of level of commitment, manufacturing difficulty result in more favorable attitudes based on previous study on brand extension context by Aaker and Keller (1990), supporting the finding of this study. Another support from brand extension context is the result is a study by Völckner and Sattler (2006) which stated that high parent brand involvement is associated with more favourable attitude of the consumers.

However, a study by Dickinson and Heath (2008) and James (2006) on co-branding context regarding difficulty making level did not approve that difficulty level worked as an influence for more favorable attitudes towards co-branding. This may be caused by the fact that in co-branding, the product making requires more complex process. There are steps to accomplish between two parent brands before the product is actually manufactured. Thus, it is not enough in co-branding context to just mention about the difficulty making level, but it needs something more thorough to represent the complexity of co-branding situation such as level of commitment.

### 5. Recommendations for Further Research

Clearly, the chief limitation of this study was the use of the established co-brandings. Since consumers already possess their own associations toward the co-branding, it did not seem to significantly impact their attitude toward the parent brands. For further research, the use of the fictitious co-branding between the existing brands might give better results in attitude change toward the parent brands and also the influence of level of commitment on attitude toward co-branding. Furthermore, utilizing fictitious co-branding will help to measure the influence of the level of commitment better. The same brands can be put into different level of commitments at the same time, to then be evaluated by experiment subjects. In regard with research context, individual factors of the subjects should also be taken into consideration. Demographic factors, for instance, might affect the result of the study, thus give new insights. Other individual factors such as product experience might also affect the result.

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