

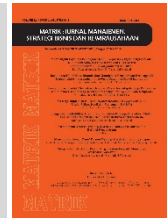


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Brand Anticipation in an Era of Uncertainty: Understanding Consumer Behaviour towards Companies' Future Anticipation Efforts

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ABSTRACT

Modern companies invest heavily in understanding future customer needs, but these efforts are sometimes unappreciated, leading to poor results. This research aims to understand future anticipation by linking it to companies' predictions of technological, cultural, and competitive changes and how consumers perceive these changes. Using qualitative methods, data was collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGD) with eight participants each. The findings show that customers highly value visionary company initiatives, forming positive memories that strengthen brand relationships. These memories, particularly in the precordium area of the brain, impact loyalty and shopping behavior, emphasizing the importance of introspection and personal experience. The research also introduces the concept of "massclusivity" and its relationship with elite consumers, like tablet owners. The novelty of this study lies in applying futurology in marketing and utilizing autobiographical memory.

Keywords: consumer behaviour; corporate anticipation; era of uncertainty; future; technology products

INTRODUCTION

Brands have a significant role for companies and consumers, where consumers shape their identity through their products. In contrast, companies benefit financially and have good consumer relationships, leading to increased profits (Puente-Díaz & Cavazos-Arroyo, 2021). Brand building is also vital in motivating internal stakeholders, especially employees who feel honoured to be part of the best brands (Goisaufer et al., 2020). Furthermore, brand development contributes to the development of society, with brand innovations improving people's quality of life (A. Huang et al., 2022). However, achieving these benefits for consumers, companies, and society is difficult. Therefore, brands and companies must invest to continue to compete in the future. This means that future-focused brand strategies must be formulated and implemented to create stronger brands and achieve success that integrates companies, consumers, and society (Bibri, 2021; Riyadi et al., 2023).

The needs of the company's stakeholders are the main key to business success. Therefore, brands become strategic assets that must be transformed into effective resources for stakeholders, especially when an organisation excels over its competitors (Jain & Ranjan, 2020; Murliasari et al., 2023). Developments in the service sector and increased investment in trade and manufacturing have created an intensely competitive environment, often referred to as the 'red ocean', where companies must constantly learn and adapt their competitive strategies (Dabić et al., 2023). This is a proactive approach to brand building for the future. Despite this understanding, many managers are still fixated on short-term tactics and lack a strategic vision, which often leads to brand failure (Bamel et al., 2022). Understanding and anticipating the future is strategic in an organisation, where companies must balance expected outcomes (such as profits and reputation) and the costs required to achieve those goals (Anton & Nucu, 2020).

Many companies claim to be able to forecast consumer needs and wants and have greater insight into the right time to launch new products and services. However, many new products and services still fail. The main cause of this failure is often the company's inability to accurately predict future consumer behaviour, an error that stems from reliance on experience (Amanatin & Wijaya, 2023; Tiberius et al., 2021). Understanding how to learn the brand knowledge integrated into consumers' lives over the years is key for brand managers. It is an important factor for the success of a brand, yet often overlooked by researchers in this field (Aschemann-Witzel & Janssen, 2022). The autobiographical memory approach has been applied in children's market research (Ligaraba et al., 2023; Marchini et al., 2021). However, how this approach can be widely adopted and applied across organisations requires some thought. Through understanding consumer memories, companies can gain benefits, such as building stronger relationships between the company and its consumers.

On the other hand, the relationship between brands and consumers has been widely researched. Understanding brand building through consumers' autobiographical memory is a useful yet rarely applied approach in brand studies. This is important because brand memories, including recognition of colours, images and symbols, can be researched more deeply through autobiographical profiles (Rangaswamy et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2021). Other research has also been conducted on consumer attitudes towards European, Asian and African brand extension strategies (Attor et al., 2022; Haq et al., 2021; MacNiven et al., 2023), but how futuristic brands are perceived by consumers based on their memories has not been widely researched. The emphasis on future prediction in brand strategy, specifically related to the perceived value of such endeavours through autobiographical memory generation, has not been widely researched. While there are many studies in marketing exploring consumer memory (C. Huang et al., 2022; Rangaswamy et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2021), research exploring customer memories as a foundation for future predictions is minimal. As such, we consider this an opportunity to advance theoretical understanding in marketing and introduce a new paradigm in research on this topic.

It is recognised that there is no single dominant method for developing knowledge in the marketing field - new approaches and paradigm shifts in enriching marketing theory are always appreciated (Haq et al., 2021; Paetz, 2021). To broaden marketing insights by introducing new paradigms, this study adopts DeRoo's philosophical perspective on the future (Verster et al., 2019). It applies the psychological theory by Steinberg et al. (Paetz, 2021) to explore and explain how companies anticipate the future from the perspective of

their key stakeholders, namely consumers. This study is also rooted in Mello and colleagues' theory of time perspective (Dressler & Paunovic, 2021), which examines attitudes and thought processes regarding the past, present and future. To better understand behaviours associated with anticipation for the future, we draw on the sociological theory of futurology, which focuses on Huber and Bell's generalisations about predictive ability (García-Salirrosas & Gordillo, 2021). By combining these two theoretical frameworks, we evaluate a conceptual framework designed to predict the impact of future anticipatory actions by firms and their relation to the formation of brand loyalty.

In this context, Indonesia has experienced significant economic growth, with an average growth of 5.35% from 2000 to 2016. This has made Indonesia one of the emerging economic powers in Asia, alongside countries such as China, India and Singapore. Indonesia once accounted for 53% of Samsung's global sales, with 3.5 million smartphone users (Ferine et al., 2023; Sestino & Amatulli, 2024). Moreover, with stable economic growth and its status as a G-20 member, Indonesia is a potential market for high-tech products, especially those that are future-orientated. With a population of approximately 118 million people of productive age, Indonesia offers a vast market for various digital products (Prasetyo & Saefudin, 2023; Ferine et al., 2024).

The ability to forecast future trends emphasises the importance of conducting more research on predictive trends, which are currently under-researched. This study examines the link between brand associations and future predictions and their impact on consumer brand loyalty. The importance of companies looking to the future and anticipating it is crucial, yet there is little research in this area. The focus has been on the relationship between future anticipation and marketing outcomes such as consumer loyalty (Gerlich, 2023; Giza & Wilk, 2021; Kita et al., 2021). This research aims to develop an understanding of future anticipation by linking it to companies' predictions of technological, cultural and competitive changes and how consumers perceive these changes. From a marketing perspective, it is important that consumers appreciate the company's efforts and that the gap between management's orientation and consumers' expectations of a brand is minimised, which indicates strategic success. Through this research, we hope to help managers understand better consumers' perceptions of their futuristic strategies so that they can design more effective strategies while introducing new products and services.

METHODS

Given the limited literature available to explore the relationship between futurology and branding in the context of consumer autobiography from an internal company perspective, we decided to use qualitative methods in this study. A case study approach in qualitative research is often recommended when a deep and detailed understanding is required (Yin, 2016). To strengthen our methodology, we adopted a triangulation strategy consistent with the practice in contemporary qualitative research, using multiple methods in data collection (Miles et al., 2014). According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), the simultaneous use of data and theory triangulation provides a more complete and in-depth picture of the phenomenon under study, and increases confidence in the research results. Data were collected through several means, including semi-structured interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs).

In the inception phase, we conducted semi-structured interviews to gain an understanding of future anticipation and its relation to autobiographical memory, brand identity and brand interaction. The main objective of these interviews was to gain a broader understanding of how participants perceive the future and the autobiographical memories associated with them. The interviews were also effective in uncovering their autobiographical memory. The collected data from eight participants, considered technology product experts due to their experience and expertise in computer and gadget sales and repair in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Respondent's selected for their in-depth knowledge of technology products and understanding of customer needs regarding future products. Through these interviews, we managed to capture participants' personal experiences, which provided valuable insights for our study. These interviews were designed to deepen our understanding of future anticipation initiatives. In particular, the interviews were geared towards confirming whether Product X is a good example of a perceived future anticipation measure by further scrutinising respondents' reactions and views towards Product X.

In this study, in addition to applying semi-structured interviews, we also conducted Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to deepen the understanding of participants' perceptions of the anticipatory actions taken by the company. The FGDs were selected based on the results of the interviews and the projective method to further explore the group's opinions on anticipatory actions and their relation to autobiographical memory and brand identity (Julmi, 2020; Lapan et al., 2012). This research integrates various important concepts to navigate the complexities of predicting the future. We apply future anticipation theory from the field of futurology, as outlined by Mische and Mello, to provide a deeper understanding of future concepts. This approach is used to gather perspectives from technology experts and individuals who are familiar with technology products.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Perceptions of Anticipatory Future Actions

As an initial step in our research, we chose semi-structured interviews to explore perceptions of anticipatory future actions, brand relationships and autobiographical memory. Through these interviews, we identified common understandings of anticipating the future, including the anticipatory steps taken by Company X to make Product X an innovator and pioneer, ahead of competitors, and appear authentic, original, sophisticated and futuristic. We found that most people who use Product X as a status symbol perceive anticipatory actions as 'good function' and following trends. In contrast, those who don't have it often see Product X as 'expensive', 'exclusive' and 'original'.

These findings provide marketers and service providers with insights into the importance of anticipating the future to capture the attention of a number of consumers and play a vital role in improving market performance. Our results are in line with research conducted by Rangaswamy et al. (2022), who found that when companies anticipate customer needs, they are well received by consumers and have a positive impact on market performance. Research by Zhang et al. (2021) also confirms that consumers appreciate and are grateful for the additional effort companies make to fulfil their needs. Therefore, while

anticipation of the future can be a key differentiation factor to support market-focused companies, relying solely on claims or anticipation alone is not enough to ensure success.

In our interviews, a frequent answer given by participants when asked about the usefulness of Product X for their future needs, such as the question "How is this product useful to you in the future?" was that the majority of participants felt that Product X would still fulfil their needs (such as for entertainment, internet access, and running applications for work or study) for at least the next five years. This shows that most participants had a positive view of the usefulness and effectiveness of Product X in solving their problems. However, some participants also highlighted the shortcomings of Product X. They mentioned that Product X requires additional supporting devices (such as a PC and iTunes app), has limitations in accessing free apps, and only supports a limited number of apps.

From these findings, we can conclude that future anticipation by provider companies offers a competitive advantage. However, companies must realise that their anticipatory actions increase customer expectations. Attor et al. (2022) suggest that identifying future trends helps to better prepare for the present. Our findings support the results of previous studies (Haq et al., 2021; MacNiven et al., 2023), which suggest that thinking about the future can help increase awareness and wisdom in dealing with the present.

Next, in the FGDs, we asked subjects to express their understanding of future anticipation in the context of tablet PCs, specifically Product X. Similar to the responses in the semi-structured interviews, we asked subjects to express their understanding of future anticipation in the context of tablet PCs. Like the responses in the semi-structured interviews, most subjects praised Product X for its simple yet futuristic design, portability, speed, and various accessories supporting their needs. They also highlighted the hardware quality of Product X, such as the more responsive touchpad and sensitive screen, and the attractive software, such as gaming applications. Some respondents even stated that Product X outperformed other brands regarding graphics and processors.

In addition, these positive perceptions align with the responses from the semi-structured interviews, where respondents stated that Company X's anticipatory steps towards the future increased customer expectations. This aligns with the view of Attor et al. (2022), who state that identifying future trends helps prepare for challenges. This positive response also emerged when discussing the differences between the first and second generation of Product X, where respondents noted significant changes in Product X-2, such as the addition of a camera, improved graphics quality, and better camera pixels, although other features remained the same.

Perception of Brand Relationship and Autobiographical Memory

Overall, users of Product X have a positive view of this brand relationship. They perceive Product X as a solution to various problems, including work, study and entertainment. They also value after-sales services such as product warranty and company responsiveness. Some respondents even shared their positive experiences, such as satisfaction when claiming a warranty for problems with the Product X screen or asking for help downloading apps and getting information about the product. Respondents also believe that Company X recruits competent employees.

An individual's association with a particular brand often creates a set of experiences that can be considered part of their autobiographical narrative. For example, some users feel that using Product X is much more convenient than using a laptop when playing games or

surfing the internet, especially when they feel lonely with nothing else to occupy their time. They felt that Product X provided a more intuitive and satisfying experience in this regard.

Another respondent also expressed his experience with Product X, describing how it provided practical solutions in his daily life. He noted that through Product X, he could easily download class tutorial materials when he forgot to bring his printed materials. He also appreciated the great durability of Product X, as even though the product was dropped once, it still maintained its quality well. This shows how an individual's relationship with a brand can form an important part of their life narrative, with every positive experience associated with the brand becoming part of their autobiographical story.

In FGDs involving users of Product X, participants generally expressed a positive view of the relationship they had built with the brand maintained by Company X. They pointed out that Product X had provided significant support in their work, enhanced their learning experience, and reduced stress levels by providing a variety of satisfying entertainment features. They pointed out that Product X has provided significant support in their work, enhanced their learning experience, and reduced stress levels by providing a variety of satisfying entertainment features. Not only that, they also convey a favourable impression of the quality of Product X itself and have confidence that the company is committed to improving the weak aspects of the product. This reflects their positive perceptions of the brand and products produced by Company X, as well as their confidence in the company's ability to continuously evolve and improve their user experience.

Perception of Brand Loyalty

In our semi-structured interviews focusing on brand loyalty, when asked whether they would buy again from the same brand for other products, such as tablet PCs, or whether they would recommend this brand or Product X to others who need tablet PCs, the common answers from subjects were a strong desire to buy the brand again and a definite recommendation to others. Some respondents even strongly recommended Product X, arguing that Product X is superior to other brands and offers many advantages. Some expressed a desire to continue buying products from Company X, mainly because they were already emotionally attached to the product, which they thought had a more attractive design and brighter colours. Based on this explanation, especially regarding autobiographical memory and brand loyalty, we can conclude that positive autobiographical memory plays a significant role in influencing customer loyalty to a brand or product.

In focused group discussions (FGD), positive responses regarding loyalty, particularly towards brand attachment, are reflected in the form of autobiographical memory. This phenomenon has the potential to influence the level of customer loyalty towards a specific brand or product. It is evident from the participants' earnestness in expressing their intention to recommend Product X to others based on their appreciation of its superior design, aesthetics, and diverse benefits compared to other brands. The concepts related to autobiographical memory and brand loyalty further bolster the findings derived from semi-structured interviews on brand loyalty. Positive autobiographical memories, encompassing verbal narratives, mental imagery, and emotional experiences undergone by Product X users (as outlined by Marchini et al., 2021), play a significant role in shaping and maintaining the level of customer loyalty towards a brand or product. To understand the results of the study, Figure 1 is shown below:

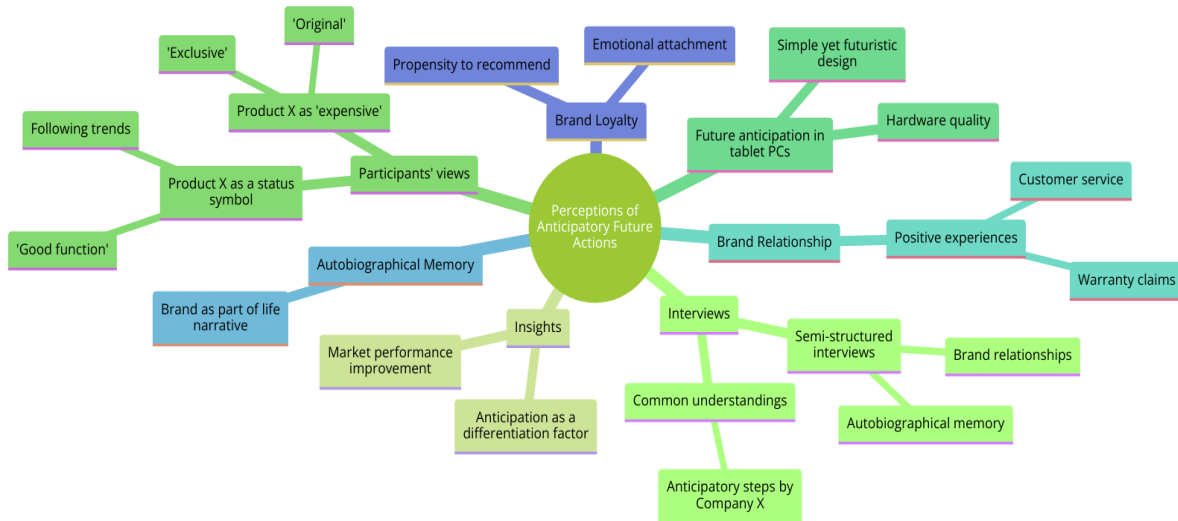


Figure 1. The Perceptions of Anticipatory Future Actions

The results of this phenomenological study are closely related to previous research on technology adoption and market performance, as presented by previous research results (Anton & Nucu, 2020; Bamel et al., 2022; Jain & Ranjan, 2020; Tiberius et al., 2021). Participants gave significant responses regarding the importance of companies in anticipating the future, especially in technological intelligence. Their comments covered a wide range of aspects, from futuristic benefits to the convenience and usability offered by technology. This suggests that companies can achieve competitive advantage through these anticipatory measures, as revealed by previous studies (Aschemann-Witzel & Janssen, 2022; Kita et al., 2021; Ligaraba et al., 2023). In addition, these anticipatory efforts also contribute to increased consumer expectations, in accordance with previous findings (Gerlich, 2023; Giza & Wilk, 2021; C. Huang et al., 2022; Marchini et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2021).

These findings specifically highlight the importance of the relationship between brand loyalty and the role of autobiographical memory in consumer dynamics, which is seen as a reflection of the competence of the human resources involved in the process. The strength of brand loyalty is reflected in customers' propensity to recommend the brand to others and in the emotional experience they have of the brand (Rangaswamy et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2021). Customers form a "mental chain" that connects the brand image with autobiographical memory, product attributes, and the language used by consumers in semiotic and semantic contexts. This significantly strengthens their propensity to identify and select leading brands, as advocated by previous research (Attor et al., 2022; Haq et al., 2021; MacNiven et al., 2023). The word association technique approach in this study helps in illustrating the strong relationship between product attributes and innovation. The analysis of product attributes revealed five dominant aspects or conditions, which include technological advancement, usefulness and relevance, futuristic characteristics, and brand identity. In addition, research conducted by Zhang et al. (2021) concluded that brand personality reinforces key attributes such as "contemporary", high social status, and "metro-sexual" aspects. However, more importantly, brand personality is also closely related to anthropomorphic characteristics, which describe it as having human-like traits.

Our findings indicate that companies' efforts in predicting the future are highly appreciated by most consumers, which contributes to the formation of favourable autobiographical memories and may act as a foundation for brand loyalty. As such, it is important for companies to openly communicate and consistently scale up their future prediction efforts to consumers. Without effective communication of these initiatives, consumers may not understand the investments and may be wasted. Furthermore, companies should regularly conduct market analyses to identify future trends. This includes the challenge of understanding future consumer needs and wants and taking advantage of market, cultural and technological trends to forecast future trends. In order to anticipate the future, it is recommended for companies to establish innovation labs aimed at key areas such as marketing, finance, human resources, and production to detect and capitalise on upcoming trends.

The managerial findings of this study show that while consumers have a great affinity with key product categories and brands, they tend to be less enthusiastic about claims of continuous product feature updates. Such claims are often not perceived as meaningful improvements by consumers but rather seen as a reaction to competitive pressures and market cycle dynamics. Today's consumers are more discerning and experienced and value simplicity in marketing and management, seeking solutions that deliver tangible improvements in personal productivity. They value companies that demonstrate innovation and market leadership as a core part of their identity. Therefore, companies should focus on authentically anticipating the future by adopting proactive rather than reactive strategies to the market. This will enable them to lead, foresee, and even shape societal changes, resulting in increased collaboration with consumers, capitalisation of customer ideas, and utilisation of crowdsourcing.

CONCLUSIONS

Anticipatory efforts and developing brand relationships, such as after-sales service and superior features, enhance competitiveness and build customer loyalty, even in product weaknesses. These actions create autobiographical memories that influence consumer perceptions and purchase decisions. Brand personality plays a role in product differentiation and appeal, raising customer expectations. Anticipating future needs proved attractive to many consumers, demonstrating the importance of proactivity in maintaining a competitive advantage. Findings suggest that anticipation of the future, including strategic vision and understanding of market developments, plays a key role in improving market performance and is valued by consumers for the value it brings. Visionary leadership and a commitment to transparency and honesty fulfil consumer needs in a relevant way, strengthening brand relationships and consumer experiences. Autobiographical memory, particularly in the precuneus of the brain, impacts consumer loyalty and behaviour, demonstrating the importance of self-reflection and personal experience. The study also highlights the trend of "massclusivity" and product relationships with "premium" consumers, such as tablet computer ownership. However, limitations of this study include the small sample and methodology, limiting the generalisability of the results and suggesting the need for further research that is more extensive and in-depth.

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