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REVEALING PAST IDENTITY OF UPCYCLED PRODUCTS: HOW SIMPLE NARRATIVE IMPROVE PRODUCT PERCEPTION

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Abstract

Manuscript type: *Research Article*

Research Aims: *Telling a story about the past identity of a product is believed to help improve the positive perception towards the product. Certain product has gone through transformation from its past identity to new and more valuable product, known as upcycled product. This study aimed to investigate whether a simple narrative about repurposed products can generate higher perception of product biography, product appeal, felt specialness, and purchase intention of consumers.*

Design/methodology/approach: *To test the hypotheses, a two-group between subject experiment involving 103 university students was conducted. Two upcycled products (pouch and bag) with simple narrative were used as stimulus.*

Research Findings: *The result revealed that people who are aware of the past identity of the product perceived that the product has a story and feel more special, unique, and recognized if they use the product. Contrary to the previous research, this study found no difference in perception about product appeal and purchase intention between two groups.*

Theoretical Contribution/Originality: *This research contribute in filling the gap of the impact of storytelling with simple narrative toward upcycled products especially in Indonesia.*

Practitioner/Policy Implication: *This study could provide some insights to business owners and marketers that building a story about the product or around the product can help build positive attitude toward the product and a simple or minimal narrative can function well.*

Research limitation/Implications: *This research however has some limitations such as the variety of participants which limited to university students. Furthermore, this research did not take into account the prior knowledge and awareness of participants about repurposed products.*

Keywords: narrative, past identity, product story, storytelling, upcycled product

INTRODUCTION

Almost everyone must have known how Steve Jobs started Apple Company. Most of us also have heard about symphony of romance and community from Howard

Schultz that he consistently mentioned when talking about Starbucks. In addition to that, when you are asked where did Mark Zuckerberg first built Facebook, you undoubtedly will answer, Harvard. Those are

only some of the most powerful story of brands around the world.

Stories are built around the brand for different purposes, such as to gain stakeholders' positive perception towards the brand and the company (Roper & Fill, 2012), to strengthen the brand itself (Kaufman, 2003), to give affective responses, attitudes towards the brand, up to increase the intention to use the brand (Van Laer, Ruyter, Vsconti, and Wetzels, 2014).

Story is one of the best ways to communicate with audience. Human being have tendency to like stories (Beach, 2018) because ever since we were little, our parents used to tell us bed time stories, we grew up reading comic, watching movies, and everything that have story in it.

Storytelling are proven effective for various type of products such as destination or tourism (Moin, Hosany, and O'Brien, 2020; Bassano, Barile, Picicchi, Spohrer, Iandolo, and Fisk, 2020; Lund, Cohen, and Scarles, 2018), crowdfunding (Robiady, Windasari, and Nita, 2020; Kim and Hall, 2020), games (Gomez, Jaccheri, Maraoudakis, and Sharma, 2019), architecture (Lyu, 2019), education (Attenborough and Abbott, 2020; Suki and Suki, 2017), health (Mannell, Ahmad, and Ahmad, 2018), personal reputation (Pera, Viglia, and Furlan, 2016), climate change (Benites-Lazaro, Mello-Tery, and Lahsen, 2017). Some articles specifically discuss about brand storytelling such as the brand story on narrative transportation and brand image of luxury hotels (Ryu, Lehto, Gordon, and Fu, 2018, 2019). Chiu, Hsieh, and Kuo (2012) contributed their findings of how to align brand stories with the products.

The benefits of story to a brand or product are tried to be applied generally as mentioned above, including re-purposed products. It appears that when customers are made aware

of the background story of the re-purposed products, the product appeal even demand are positively affected (Kamleitner, Thurridle, and Martin, 2019). This effect is applied to various type of products. In addition to giving benefits for the product itself, the awareness of the past identity of products can generate the the motivation for social activities such as recycling (Winterich, Nenkov, and Gonzales, 2019), hence can be used for social marketing campaign.

Repurposed products, also known as recycled or upcycled are products that are manufactured from old or waste products. Some social marketing campaign use it to motivate the society that they can use the waste to create new product with value. Together with newly manufactured products, repurposed products also need some advertising to attract the customers. By using minimal narrative, we want to see whether there is difference in perception between people who are aware of the past identity of the upcycled products and people who don't.

This type of product is growing quite rapidly in Indonesia. Waste products are transformed into variety of things including bags, pouch, wallet, clothes, etc. Fashion product is the most common choice because of its functionality, value, and exposure that the product can get. Moreover, if the consumers are aware of the upcycled fashion materials and sustainability of environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Upcycled Products

The term upcycling signifies the activity to reuse some disposed products and convert it into new products with higher quality and higher value (Cassidy and Han, 2013). It's a combination of upgrading, or adding more value, and recycling or to use again (Glaveanu, Pedersen, and Wegener, 2016).

Many fashion products are made from the upcycling process such as coat, handbag, shorts (Marques, Moreira, Cunha, and Moreira, 2019). The fashion items such as coat, shorts, handbag, and belt were creatively designed and produced by combining old textiles from plane seats and metal elements from seatbelt (Marques et al., 2019). Upcycling activity has been spread widely throughout industries as one of the effort to minimize the waste to environment (Bridgens et al., 2018). Aerospace prepreg scrap and waste were transformed into useful products such as medical devices (prosthetic foot), sporting and recreation goods (skateboard), construction, furniture, also consumer and household goods (Nilakantan and Nutt, 2015).

While in Europe or other western countries, upcycling market is gaining popularity and the products are received rather well (Kamleitner et al., 2019; Singh et al., 2019), some researchers suggest that Asian countries or Asian people themselves show some resistance toward recycling or upcycling products (Xu, Chen Burman, and Zhao, 2014). In Indonesia itself, studies found on upcycling are about the role of women in upcycling initiative (Bebasari, 2019; Rokis and Silaturrahmi, 2018), fashion items from upcycling products (Suhartini, Singke, and Danardewi, 2019) and how millennials value upcycled clothing (Parung, 2019). This study was designed to fill the gap in knowledge about storytelling especially about upcycled products in Indonesia.

The essence of stories and persuasive effects of stories

A story is an interpretation of something in the past or the expected future, whether presented orally or in writing by two or more people. Some believe that a story should contain chronological order: a beginning, a

part where the story start, the middle and of course the ending (Bennet and Royle, 2004, Bartel and Garud, 2009; Escalas, 2004). Besides chronology, a story should have causality (Delgadillo and Escalas, 2004) or known as plot, from which audience can understand the meaning of the story. Some researchers suggest element of story such as authenticity (Chiu et al., 2012; Beverland, Lindgreen, and Vink, 2008), conciseness, reversal, humor, and others (Chiu et al., 2012). A story is the essence of storytelling.

Storytelling has been widely used by marketers to help connect the brand and their customers (du Plessis, 2015). When the marketer have a message to deliver to the audience about the product, they tell story (Lien and Chen, 2013). Also known as narrative (Escalas, 2004), this strategy is used to persuade the audience to believe that certain brand or products is relevant to them (Kemp, Childers, and Williams, 2012). When narrative advertising reflects the brand personality accurately, audience are able to understand the brand (Cetinkaya, 2019).

How can a story or narrative really affect the audience? The answer came from transportation imagery model (Green and Brock, 2000; Green 2002; Laer, Ruyter, Visconti, and Wetzels, 2013). This model assumes that when people are transported into the story/narrative, it can affect their believes. Lien and Chen (2013) found that the impact of narrative advertisement product evaluation and attitude toward the product is mediated by transportation. In most researches we can find utilization of fully fledged stories to investigate the effect of narrative towards audience (Sanders and Van Krieken, 2018; Chiu, Hsieh, and Kuo, 2012). Some of the stories are built in purpose to deliver the message about the product for example to align the brand story with product type, or to design the brand story differently between

search and experience products (Chiu, Hsieh, and Kuo, 2012). Simple narrative or short narrative is believed can convey such message or story to the reader. Simple narrative means a very brief but complete sentence that has complete meaning.

Product Biography and Past Identity Salience

Kamleitner et al., (2019) suggested that product's own biographical story, without spelling out the full story can affect product perception and even demand. The mechanism works by making the product's past identity salience. Chronological order (Bennet and Royle, 2004, Bartel and Garud, 2009; Escalas, 2004) and causality (Delgadillo and Escalas, 2004) as the important element of a story or narrative can be expressed through past identity salience. Transformational story has become the important point in supporting their research. Basically in transformational story there is a transformation, either in physical or mental. This transformation can be seen as chronological order of the story. In the beginning there was A, in the middle, A had transformation, and in the end, A became A+. Meanwhile the salience of A and A+ shows the causality. Furthermore, minimal narrative has proven to be effective to induce narrative thought (Kamleitner et al., 2019) about the product and simple narrative annotation can represent a full length narrative characteristics (Rahimtoroghi, Corcoran, Swanson, Walker, Sagae, and Gordon, 2014).

Previous studies have suggested that revealing product past identity through simple narrative will create a transformational story of the product or in other word composing its product biography in consumers' mind. Hence our first hypothesis is as follows:

H1 : Awareness of past identity of upcycled products generate higher positive perceptions

Product Appeal, Felt Specialness, and Purchase Intention

In upcycling activity there is a transformation from product's original form to its new one. Hence, this upcycling products possess past identity and present identity. What once was m&m's packaging has turned into a shopping bag (Kamleitner et al., 2019). Sometimes the past identity remain unknown due to highly creative and sophisticated design, but some other time, the product past identity can be easily identified visually. Most of the time the past identity is revealed to magnify the value of the product (Marques et al., 2019), increase the products appeal and attract customers to buy the product. However some researchers found that revealing the past identity of the product could become a drawback (Hood, 2016; Trudel and Argo, 2013). When the realization of the original form or past identity of the product hits them, customer may appreciate it more or in the other way around grow to dislike it.

In this research we propose that when participants are made aware about the previous identity of the product through simple narrative or short sentence, they will see the product as more attractive.

H2 : Awareness of past identity of upcycled products generate higher product appeal

Some products can be perceived as more special than the others because of different reasons, for example the sentimental value of the product that drive less consumption (Rifkin and Berger, 2016), how the product is saved for special occasion (Pocheptsove and Dhar, 2010) or the level of scarcity of the product (Snyder, 2010). Some products are perceived special because they have story

(Newman, 2018) including the transformation from its previous form. Awareness of the past identity of a product through simple narrative has been proved to increase the demand of the product (Kamleitner et al., 2019).

H3 : Awareness of past identity if upcycled products generate higher feeling of specialness

H4 : Awareness of past identity of upcycled products generate higher purchase intention.

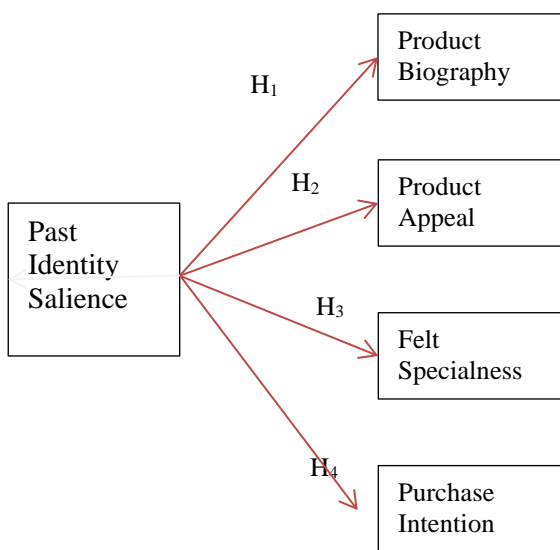


Figure 1. Hypothesis

RESEARCH METHOD

Design and Participant

The research is aimed to investigate whether a simple narrative about repurposed products can generate higher perception of product biography, product appeal, felt specialness, and purchase intention of consumers. This study used between groups experimental design. Two groups were formed to see the effect of the stimulus given. 164 participants were recruited from a public university in Semarang, Central Java. University students were chosen as participants to match the target market of the products. Participants were randomly assigned into two groups,

experiment and control. The independent variable (IV) was Past Identity Salience, and four dependent variables (DV) were product biography, product appeal, felt specialness, and purchase intention.

Stimuli

Participants in both groups were given the picture of the same products, pouch and bag. Both products were original upcycled products by Sapu Upcycle. This company focuses on producing upcycled products from variety of worn things such as worn inner tubes/tyres, abandoned oil drums, plastic drink bottles, secondhand clothing, etc. They uphold the principle of producing and distributing in ethical and socially responsible ways.

Table 1. Stimulus

Experiment Group	Control Group
<p>I WAS MADE FROM ARMY TENT AND INNER TUBE</p> 	<p>I WAS MADE FOR STORING EQUIPMENT WHEN TRAVELING</p> 
<p>I WAS MADE FROM ARMY TENT AND INNER TUBE</p> 	<p>I WAS MADE FOR STORING EQUIPMENT WHEN TRAVELING</p> 

The products used in this research were made from army tent and inner tube. The stimulus was in a form of picture of products along with the simple narrative or short but complete sentence. This was the only stimuli given because researcher wanted to focus on the past identity saliency in the form of “simple narrative”. The stimulus was shown

two times in order to make sure participants were exposed. The manipulation was as follows. In the experiment group, participants read “I was made from army tent and inner tube” while the control group participants read “I was made for storing equipment when traveling”. The narrative cue was written in Bahasa Indonesia.

Procedure

First, participants were recruited to join the experiment. Once they agreed to join, they were assigned into groups based on their students identification number. Participants received the stimuli and answer the questions afterward. In the end of the experiment, the true purpose of this research was revealed to the participants.

Measures

Product’s biography was measured using four items (Lien and Chen, 2013) as follows, “The product tells a story,” “The product’s story has a beginning, middle, and end,” “The product has evolved over time,” and “The story has a chronological order.” These four items were measured on a seven-point likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Product appeal measurement and purchase intention were adopted from Kamleitner et al., (2019). “How would you evaluate this product” (1 = very unappealing, 7 = very appealing) and “Would you buy this product?” (1 = No, definitely not, 7 = Yes, definitely) respectively. Three items (McFerran and Argo, 2014) were used to measure Felt specialness on a seven-point likert scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very); How special/unique/recognize would you feel with this product?). One item from Kamleitner et al., (2019) was added to measure the perception of participants about whether this product was homemade or factory made, since homemade products had tendency to draw positive attitude toward products (Fuchs,

Schreier, and Van Osselaer, 2015). “This product look 1 = homemade, 7 = made by company. All items were in Bahasa to facilitate the participants in understanding the questions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This paper is aimed to investigate whether a simple narrative about repurposed products can generate higher perception of product biography, product appeal, felt specialness, and purchase intention of consumers. In total there were 103 participants from salient (55 participants) and control (48 participants) groups. The demographic information of the participants can be seen in the table below.

Table 2. Demographic Data of Participants

Demographic	Total	Percentage
Gender		
Male	45	43.69%
Female	58	56.31%
Age		
< 20 y.o	61	59.22%
20-30 y.o	42	40.77%
>30 y.o	-	-
Income		
<IDR 1.250.000	68	66.02%
1.250K-2.500K	35	33.98%
>IDR 2.500.000	-	-

From the table we can see that most of participants were female university students with age range of around 20 years old. The income signifies the amount of money they gather from variety of sources such as monthly allowance from parents, part time jobs, small businesses, etc. Participants were also asked about organization or business which producing upcycled or recycled

products in Indonesia. Here are some answers from participants.

Table 3. Respond of Additional Question

Participants answer
- Kresek
- Sidalang
- Sensatia Botanicals
- PT Inocycle Technollogy Group
- Jewelery maker from bottle cap
- KDUSI (Waste recycling community in Indonesia)
- Kenyoliving (furniture)
- Local communities

Eventhough some participants gave those answers, most of the participants (87.4%) have no awareness about such organizations or businesses.

The result showed that even though the identity of the pouch and bag were made salient, participants in salient group did not perceive the products more appealing ($M_{salient} = 85.69$; $M_{control} = 79.31$; $p > 0.05$; $p = .372$). Neither did they have more intention to purchase it ($M_{salient} = 89.45$; $M_{control} = 75.55$; $p > 0.05$; $p = .054$) compared to control group.

On the other hand, past identity salience increased the perception about product biography or product story ($M_{salient} = 95.48$; $M_{control} = 69.52$; $p < 0.05$; $p = .000$). Past identity salience made participants in salient condition felt more special with the product ($M_{salient} = 90.28$; $M_{control} = 74.72$; $p < 0.05$; $p = .035$). Contrary to previous research, this study found that participants in control condition perceived the products as homemade compared to salient group

($M_{salient} = 68.44$; $M_{control} = 96.56$; $p < 0.05$; $p = .000$).

The hypotheses testing result were as follows.

Table 4. Hypothesis Result

Hypotheses	Variable	P value	Result
Hypothesis 1	Product Biography	0.000	Supported
Hypothesis 2	Product appeal	0.372	Not supported
Hypothesis 3	Felt Specialness	0.035	Supported
Hypothesis 4	Purchase Intention	0.054	Not Supported

In contrast to the previous research by Kamleitner et al. (2019), this study found that there was no difference in product appeal nor purchase intention between people who were aware and not aware about the past identity of the products (pouch and bag). This could mean that without knowing what the product are made of, participants considered the product appealing because of the design typicality and the function of the product (Lee and Pillai, 2013). Design typicality is the degree to which a product design resembles its category (Lee and Pillai, 2013) and is proven to influence attitude towards the products. According to Luchs and Swan (2011) product design consists of form and function. Lee and Pillai (2013) found that even though functionality did not influence attitude toward a product, it plays moderation role for form design and the attitude. This study used original upcycled products made of army tent and inner tube. Both pouch and sling bag had common design and function as the usual products hence it can be assumed that it influenced the attitude toward the product as well as intention to purchase. Participants who were made aware of the past identity were expected to show positive attitude under the influence of narrative about past identity salient however the control group participants are assumed to build same

positive attitude because of the form and function of the products. Previous research did not take the form and function of the product (Luchs and Swan, 2011) into account; further research are required to confirm it.

In line with Kamleitner et al. (2019), this study strengthens the evidence that minimal narrative can represent full length narrative characteristics (Rahimtoroghi, Corcoran, Swanson, Walker, Sagae, and Gordon, 2014) and induce narrative thoughts. This is confirmed by the findings that there are statistically significant difference in perceptions toward the product biography/story between two groups. The manipulation used in salient group was: "I was made from army tent and inner tube." This simple narrative along with transportation imagery model (Green and Brock, 2000; Green 2002; Van Laer, Ruyter, Visconti, and Wetzels, 2013) indicated that the manipulation made participants believe the products (pouch and bag) had a story; a beginning, middle and end part; and it had evolved over time. Meanwhile the participants in the control group did not receive such narrative that can influence their perception about the product story.

Furthermore, this study confirmed that by being aware of the product's past identity, participants felt more special with the product. To be specific, participants in salient group felt more special, unique, and recognize if they use this upcycled products, while on the other side participants in control groups showed lesser feeling of specialness, and it was assumed because they did not aware of the past identity of the product. Hence this finding supported the previous research by Kamleitner et al., (2019). Minimal narrative can induce people to think about the product as the hero or the main character of the story and the transformation it has hence resulted

in them being transported into the story and grow positive attitude toward it (Lien and Chen, 2013). The awareness of product's past identity allows participants to be transported into the story, engage with the story and enables them to feel special about the product.

The next interesting finding in this study was the perception of homemade product. The result showed that there was a statistically significant difference between salient and control group about the perception of homemade product or factory product. Higher mean-score indicated that participants in control group perceived that the products were factory made. At the same time salient group participants having been aware of the past identity, perceived the products as homemade. In the previous research, Kamleitner et al. (2019) wanted to drive out the possibility of homemade or handmade effect in their research in order to prove the minimal narrative effect, and the result were in line as their expectation. They found no difference in homemade perception between two groups. This study found otherwise. It can be assumed that making past identity salient had the participants thinking that the pouch and bags were homemade/handmade hence increase it's attractiveness (Fuchs, Schreier, and Van Osselaer, 2015). On the other hand, control group participants knowing nothing about the past identity or other information but the functionality of the product were assumed to perceive it as factory made products.

Homemade/handmade effect has scientifically proven by Fuchs et al., (2015) research that it can increase product attractiveness because homemade/handmade figuratively contain love. Looking again to the result of this study that product appeal and purchase intention did not differ between those who were aware and not about the past identity, this homemade/handmade effect

could have taken into consideration. Past identity salience may not proven to induce product appeal and purchase intention, but homemade effect may have profound effect in that (Fuchs et al., 2015). On the other hand, participants with no awareness of the past identity may still have positive attitude toward the product and intent to purchase it as a result of design typicality and function of product (Lee and Pillai, 2013). Further research is needed.

CONCLUSION

This study used minimal narrative to reveal the past identity salience of product and expect it to build people perception about the product story and feeling of specialness with the product and eventually lead to increase perception of product appeal and purchase intention. It is found that people who are

aware of the past identity of the product believe that the product has a complete story behind it, only by using simple or minimal narrative. It is also concluded that by being aware of the past identity, people feel more special, unique, and recognized with the product.

Contrary to the previous research, this study found that even though the perception of product story and felt specialness were improved by the past identity salience, the perception of product appeal and purchase intention were not differ from those who were not aware of the past identity. Design typicality and function of product were assumed to influence the positive attitude of participants hence toward the product appeal and intention to buy, without being aware of the past identity.

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