The Effect of Ethical Attributes on Brand Personality and Brand Equity

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Abstract

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With growing consumer demand for ethical products and resultant seismic shifts taking place in the industry as a response, it is imperative to better understand the effects of ethicality. Honing in on two such effects, the specific objective of this paper is to explore the question: How will ethical attributes affect the perception of *brand personality* dimensions of sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness and in turn how do these dimensions mediate the relationship between ethicality and *brand equity*? The paper makes use of past literature on the constructs of brand personality and brand equity and responds to the call to study the former as a driver of the latter. Since it has been suggested that particular personality dimensions may be more or less valuable than others (Keller and Lehmann, 2006), this research aims to explore whether particular brand personality dimensions have a greater impact on brand equity of ethical brands compared to others. Results show that ethicality has a positive direct effect on each of the brand personality dimensions and this effect is not moderated by price of the product. Ethicality also has a positive direct effect on overall brand equity. When controlling for ethical attribute relevance and brand personality, out of the five brand personality dimensions, only sophistication positively mediates the relationship between ethicality and overall brand equity.

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Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Introduction

Corporate social responsibility and sustainability have taken centre stage over the past decade. However, it is no longer only an oil spill that constitutes a sustainability disaster, but in fact, the onus is now on companies to proactively contribute to a cause rather than simply not make it worse. Resultant boycotts and backlash have the power to tarnish well established and reputable brands overnight while on the other hand, as per the Ipsos Global Reputation Monitor study conducted in 2019, companies that are seen as "responsible" are actually more trusted (Ipsos, 2020). With the power vested in ethical attributes, companies are looking to better align themselves with an "ethical" profile or personality. However, it has not been widely studied how this perception can be built and exactly what benefits it may bring to the brand in terms of equity.

Individually, the concepts of brand personality and brand equity have become familiar notions in both academic and corporate circles alike (Aaker, 1996; Aaker and Fournier, 1995). Typically, in brand building efforts, to create a competitive advantage, a key focus is on developing the emotional aspects of a brand through the meaning delivered by brand personality (Keller, 2008) as well as on value creation and differentiation through brand equity (Aaker, 1996). However, despite Aaker's (1996) suggestion to explore brand personality as a key contributor of brand equity and to determine whether a particular brand personality dimension leads to greater brand equity, the two have only rarely been studied in conjunction (Su and Tong, 2015; Valette-Florence, Guizani, and Merunka, 2011).

This research aims to examine the two concepts in conjunction, in the unique context of brands offering ethical attributes. Ethical attributes, more commonly referred to as sustainable attributes, are benefits that an increasing number of consumers are demanding (Chen, 2010;

Luchs, Naylor, Irwin, and Raghunathan, 2010). Despite the growing number of manufacturers producing products with ethical attributes (Luchs et al., 2010) as well as the increased consumer demand for products with ethical attributes (Nielson, 2018), the impact of such attributes on brand personality has been relatively unexplored. It is expected that by influencing associations and imagery surrounding the brand, the use of ethical attributes can impact perceptions regarding brand personality. Furthermore, since it has been suggested that particular personality dimensions may be more or less valuable than others (Keller and Lehmann, 2006), this research aims to fill a gap in literature by exploring whether particular brand personality dimensions have a greater relative impact on brand equity of ethical brands. Therefore, the specific question that this paper seeks to address is: How will ethical attributes affect the perception of brand personality? How does brand personality, in turn, mediate the relationship between ethical attributes and brand equity?

Literature Review

Brand personality

Just as each individual has a unique set of characteristics that contribute to one's personality, it has been found that consumers tend to think of brands as possessing human personality traits (Aaker, 1997). It is due to this anthropomorphisation and personification of brands, that the construct of brand personality has arisen. Brand personality refers to the human characteristics that are ascribed to a brand (Aaker, 1997). Aaker (1997) proposed a conceptual framework comprising five dimensions of brand personality (i.e., sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness) and developed a five-dimensional scale of brand personality.

There has recently been some debate as to whether this definition of brand personality is a true representation of the construct and does not erroneously encompass definitions distinct from personality (Azoulay and Kapferer, 2003; Geuens, Weijters, De Wulf, 2009). Most of this debate can be understood from the perspective of a researcher's orientation as this contention is mostly coming from those who believe it would be more valid to define brand personality in line with the psychological definition of personality by extending the Big Five Structure (Azoulay and Kapferer, 2003; Geuens et al., 2009). However, Aaker (1997) suggests that, although three of the brand personality dimensions relate to the Big Five (i.e., competence, sincerity, and excitement), two of them (i.e., sophistication and ruggedness) do not, which may suggest that brand personality operates differently. Therefore, although personality dimensions from the psychology literature are relevant to and can guide brand personality research, they should not define its boundaries as certain brand related dimensions are not encompassed in human personality measures (Batra, Lehmann, and Singh, 1993). In fact, research from exploratory factor analyses has shown that human personality factors are inappropriate for describing brands (Caprara, Barbaranelli, and Guido, 2001). Moreover, Aaker's (1997) conceptualisation and scale has been utilised as a brand personality measure in most studies published after this seminal paper, as it has consistently shown reliability and the factor structure has been shown to be robust (Aaker, 1999, Kim, Han, and Park, 2001). Thus, this research will build on Aaker's (1997) definition and conceptualization of brand personality.

It is important to note that even Aaker's (1997) scale still draws on the analogy between brand and human personality. However, it does not make the error of equating the two. Additionally, it should be acknowledged that cross-cultural applicability can be brought into question as brand personalities may differ across cultures. Aaker, Benet-Martinez and Garolera

(2001) found additional dimensions of peacefulness and passion when extending the model to Japan and Spain. Despite its limitations and despite the fact that, ideally, a brand personality scale should be contextualised within consumer behaviour, Aaker's (1997) scale provides a solid basis for research. Since Aaker (1997) suggests that the consequences of brand personality on key marketing related outcomes, such as brand equity, need to be explored, the current work answers this call for additional research.

Brand equity

In the marketing literature, the concept of brand equity has been operationalized in many different ways. These differential perspectives can be broadly grouped into two categories, the financial and the customer perspective (Farjam and Hongyi, 2015). While a financial perspective defines brand equity as signifying value to the firm, the consumer perspective defines brand equity as signifying value to the consumer (Chen, 2010). One of the earliest and most widely accepted definitions of brand equity comes courtesy of Farquhar (1989). According to Farquhar, brand equity is defined as the "added value" or increased strength of a product that uses the brand name (1989, p. 24). Farquhar (1989) explores several dimensions and consequences of brand equity, such as brand valuation, competitive advantages, brand leverage, and consumer perspectives. He also discusses the three elements for building a strong brand: positive brand evaluations, accessible brand attitudes, and consistent brand image. Farquhar's (1989) work conceptualizes brand equity from a customer-based perspective. Another prominent example of customer based brand equity is presented by Lassar, Mittal and Sharma (1995). The authors developed a scale to measure brand equity, which is based on five dimensions of "performance, value, social image, trustworthiness and commitment" (Lassar et al. 1995, p. 16). One of the

implications of the several dimensions is that in order to increase brand equity, companies need to manage all of these elements concurrently (Lassar et al., 1995). They authors suggest a possible halo effect, such that improvement on one dimension improves perception of the other dimensions (Lassar et al., 1995). However, this could potentially work in the opposite direction, such that if perception of one of the dimensions worsens, the other dimensions could be negatively affected as well (Lassar et al., 1995).

Alternatively, Simon and Sullivan (1993) were one of the first to present a financial approach to measure brand equity and its determinants. They defined brand equity as the additional cash flows that branded products gain over unbranded products (Simon and Sullivan, 1993). Similarly, Ailawadhi, Lehmann and Neslin (2003) developed a measure of brand equity using revenue premium, which refers to the difference in revenue generated by a product when it is branded as opposed to when it is sold under a private label brand.

Shocker, Srivastava and Ruekert (1994) combined both financial and customer perspectives of brand equity. They suggested that brand equity comprises two dimensions: brand value and brand strength. Brand value refers to the financial benefits a firm enjoys due to increased brand strength. Brand strength, on the other hand, refers to consumer responses to the communication efforts of a firm. Several authors have posited that the most appropriate measure of brand equity is based on the consumer perspective (Crimmins, 1992; Ross, Russell, and Bang, 2008), for two reasons: Firstly, they argue that the true value of the brand is in the mind of the consumers, therefore it is critical to elicit brand equity at this level (Crimmins, 1992; Ross, et al., 2008). Secondly, financial data may not always be easy to gather and accurately analyze (Crimmins, 1992; Ross, et al., 2008).

While all the previously discussed definitions and measures of brand equity have been used in past research, the two most prominent conceptualisations of brand equity come from Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993). Both take a consumer perspective and are based on consumers' brand associations. Although both authors agree that the underlying dimensions of brand equity increase the value of a brand in the minds of its consumers, they disagree on the nature of the underlying dimensions. Keller's (1993) definition focuses on brand knowledge, which itself consists of two components, namely brand awareness and brand image. According to this definition, positive brand equity manifests if a consumer responds more positively to a marketing mix element for a brand (vs. no brand). On the other hand, the most cited and more comprehensive definition of brand equity was outlined by Aaker (1991) and encompasses four dimensions, namely brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand associations. Yoo, Donthu, and Lee (2000) extend Aaker's (1991) conceptual model, incorporating the work of Keller (1993) to suggest that dimensions of brand equity such as perceived quality, brand loyalty, and brand awareness increase overall brand equity as each of them is positively related to brand equity overall. The current research adopts this conceptualization of overall brand equity (Yoo et al., 2000).

In order to understand brand equity, therefore, the underlying components need to be defined. Brand loyalty is defined as consumer's brand attachment (Aaker, 1991) and is indicated by an intention to consistently and repeatedly purchase the preferred product, resisting switching behaviour (Oliver, 1999). According to both Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993), brand awareness consists of both brand recall and recognition. Perceived quality refers to a consumer's subjective judgment of a product's superiority (Zeithaml, 1988). Lastly, brand associations are defined as "anything linked to the memory of a brand" (Aaker, 1991, p. 109). Brand associations have the

potential to contribute positively to consumer attitudes and these associations are expected to be stronger when they are based on repeat exposures (Aaker, 1991). Therefore, positive brand equity is clearly an important goal of marketing activities and has been shown to be a predictor of brand strength (Keller, 2008) and brand market performance outcomes (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). However, although brand equity research has provided a conceptualisation of the components and consequences of brand equity, there is a lack of empirical investigation on, and understanding of how the drivers of brand equity can be established (Gordon, 2010). This gap is especially notable in terms of identifying drivers of brand equity across varying product domains and consumer segments.

Ethical attributes and brand personality

A 2018 Nielsen Global Survey on Sustainability found that eighty-one percent of respondents strongly felt that companies should help improve the environment (Nielsen, 2018). It was reported that roughly forty percent of global consumers are willing to pay more for organic products (41%) or for products made with sustainable materials (38%) while thirty percent are willing to pay higher than average prices for products that deliver on socially responsible claims. In response to an increased pressure to keep up with consumer expectations of sustainability, an increasing number of manufacturers are using ethical attributes (Chang and Fong, 2010; Luchs et al., 2010). An NYU Stern study using data contributed by IRI found that fifty percent of CPG growth from 2013 to 2018 was actually attributed to sustainability marketed products (Kronthal-Sacco, Whelan, Holt, and Atz, 2020). Even in the midst of the pandemic, social and environmental responsibility has not been forgotten. A global Ipsos study conducted across 15 countries in April 2020 found that as a result of COVID-19, seven in ten respondents were very

or somewhat likely to shop closer to home and support local businesses while seventy-five percent indicated that even after the pandemic, they would continue to buy products with less packaging to reduce waste (Ipsos, 2020). However, despite the growing importance and use of ethical attributes, their effect on brand personality inferences has been largely ignored.

Brand personality has been related to brand image (Plummer, 1985), which is a set of meaningful brand associations (Keller, 1993). Therefore, because the use of ethical attributes can modify brand image and brand associations (Chen, 2010; Hartmann, Ibanez, and Sainz, 2005), then they might also have an impact on consumer perception of brand personality. According to Fournier (1998), an alteration in the marketing mix can influence brand personality. This suggests that the addition of an ethical attribute can affect brand personality. However, the relationship between ethical attributes and brand personality dimensions has not yet been examined, whereas the effect of such attributes on the related concept of brand image has been explored.

Ethical product attributes reflect moral principles (Irwin and Naylor, 2009) and can be related to protection of the environment or human, animal, and social welfare (Bodur, Tofighi, Grohmann, 2015). Ethical attributes can be inherent and product related such as organic ingredients, or separate and symbolic such as fair trade (Bodur, Gao, and Grohmann, 2014; Newman, Gorlin, and Dhar, 2014). In both cases, whether attributes are symbolic and thus influencing brand associations or inherent and thus directly influencing a marketing mix element and indirectly affecting brand associations, resultant implications for brand personality perceptions are expected.

Ethical attributes can influence a consumer's experience with a brand as well as information about the brand, which are purported to be factors that influence brand image

(Keller, 1993) and consequently, how brand personality is viewed. Therefore, it has been suggested that corporate societal marketing and corporate social responsibility can affect the imagery and associations surrounding it and thus have an effect on its perceived brand personality (Hoeffler and Keller, 2002; Kitchin, 2003; Polonsky and Jevons, 2006) though this suggestion was not further examined. Although Venable, Rose, Bush, and Gilbert (2005) explored brand personality of non-profit organizations, non-profits are a unique kind of organization with distinct attributes that cannot necessarily applied to for profit brand offering ethical attributes. However, findings on personality dimensions of non-profits (Aaker, Vohs, Mogilner, 2010) can be used to guide predictions of how ethicality can translate into perceptions of brand personality.

Brand personality and brand equity

Brand equity is considered an asset that needs to be built, measured, and managed, thus making it a goal for both practitioners to achieve through brand building activities and an issue for researchers to better understand and theorize around. If brand personality is related to brand image (Plummer, 1985) and thus brand associations (Keller, 1993), which is an indicator of brand equity (Aaker, 1991), this would imply that brand personality is also related to brand equity. In a similar line of thought, researchers have expressed that brand personalities evoke brand associations and thus influence brand equity (Biel, 1993; Pappu, Quester, and Cooksey, 2005). Yoo et al. (2000) suggested that the elements of the marketing mix can be used to create brand equity. One can infer that the mechanism explaining this link may be that changes in the marketing mix resulted in altered brand personality, which had a resultant effect on brand equity. It has in fact been advocated by Aaker (1996) that brand personality should be seen as a

determinant of brand equity. This has been again emphasised by Yoo and Donthu (2001) to explore in future research. Importantly, suggestions for future research have included identifying which dimensions of brand personality have the greatest impact on brand equity (Aaker and Fournier, 1995; Keller, 1993).

According to Freling, Crosno, and Henard (2011), "brand personality is a cornerstone of brand equity" (p. 393). By conceptualising brand personality as resulting in unique favourable brand associations and brand originality, they relate it to brand equity (Freling et al., 2011). A summary of previous research on brand personality's consequences has shown that the outcome variables include perceived brand quality, brand attitudes, brand trust, brand attachment, brand commitment, as well as intentions of future behaviour which impact brand loyalty (Louis and Lombart, 2010). Therefore, not only does brand personality affect the brand association dimension of brand equity but also the dimensions of perceived quality (Ramasehsan and Tsao, 2007), brand loyalty (Kim et al., 2001) and brand knowledge (Freling and Forbes, 2005) or brand awareness (Keller, 1993). Despite the disjointed links that have been drawn from brand personality to individual dimensions of brand equity, it is difficult to find research that has synthesised these relations to draw a model about the impact of brand personality on brand equity as a collective singular construct.

Kim, Baek and Martin (2010) explored the brand personality of news media outlets with the understanding that strong brand personalities could be leveraged to enhance brand equity through unique brand images. However, the resultant impact on brand equity was not specifically examined. Su and Tong (2015), however, empirically examined the impact of brand personality on brand equity in the context of the sportswear market and found that some brand personality

dimensions are more effective than others at enhancing brand equity, in line with the previous suggestions (Aaker and Fournier, 1995; Keller, 1993).

Specifically, since brand equity provides a competitive advantage in terms of improved brand performance (i.e., profitability and sales volume), customer value and willingness to purchase (Baldauf, Cravens, and Binder, 2003), it is imperative to explore how brand equity can be ensured in the domain of ethical attribute products, possibly through cultivating and emphasising certain dimensions of brand personality.

Hypotheses

This research links ethical attributes with brand personality dimensions, and subsequent consumer-based brand equity. The sincerity dimension of brand personality is associated with traits such as down to earth, honest, genuine, wholesome and friendliness and ethical attributes particularly are suggested to lead to increased sincerity (Aaker, 1997). Brands that are produced locally and naturally with organic ingredients may be perceived as down to earth and wholesome. At the same time, brands that produce environmentally friendly products may be associated with friendliness and brands that offer a separate ethical attribute such as free trade and promote social welfare could be associated with genuineness and honesty. It has been suggested that a brand that is ethical and is trying to promote a social or environmental enhancement is also likely to be perceived as genuine and caring, thus leading to perceived sincerity of the brand (Hoeffler and Keller, 2002).

Consumers willing to pay a higher price for ethical products have been found to highly value warm relationships with others (Laroche, Bergeron, and Forleo, 2001). Consequently, it was suggested that marketers should emphasise warm relationships to promote green

consumption (Laroche et al., 2001). It can be inferred from these findings that if consumers who seek genuine relationships with others are predisposed towards ethical consumption (Laroche et al., 2001), then it is possible that this is because they perceive ethical products to possess similar traits which are indicative of the sincerity dimension of brand personality.

In fact, it has been found that one of the most important sources for forming consumer perception of a sincere brand personality dimension is a company's moral values and inversely when choosing a sincere brand, consumers paid specific attention to a company's morals (Maehle and Supphellen, 2011). This is also why aid organizations were associated with sincerity (Maehle and Supphellen, 2011). This is to be expected as respondents answered that sincerity as a brand personality dimension is important for ethical reasons (Maehle and Supphellen, 2011). Research has also shown that non-profit organizations are deemed to be higher on traits related to warmth and integrity in line with the idea that they are seen as more trustworthy (Aaker et al., 2010; Venable et al., 2005). Since judgments of warmth include inferences about kindness, honesty, sincerity, and trustworthiness, it shows that non-profits, a unique type of ethical organization would be high on sincerity (Aaker et al., 2010).

If one considers ethical attributes from the realm of social responsibility, it is interesting to note a study by Aaker et al. (2001) found that the trait "responsible" loaded onto the sincerity dimension (0.38 loading) which lends support to the expected relationship between sincerity and ethical attributes that imply responsibility. Additionally, social responsibility and sincerity are found to be highly correlated ($r = .72$; Madrigal and Boush, 2008). This is consistent with previous research that suggests that if motives are perceived to be sincere, then corporate social responsibility efforts are also more effective (Yoon, Gurhan-Canli, and Schwarz, 2006).

H1A: Product attribute ethicality is positively associated with the sincerity dimension of brand personality.

The competence dimension of brand personality is associated with traits of being reliable, intelligent, and successful and in addition to sincerity, ethical attributes are predicted to increase perceptions of competence (Aaker, 1997). Consumers who are willing to pay a higher price for ethical products assign great importance to security, as it is in fact a guiding principle in the lives of these consumers (Laroche et al., 2001). Therefore, it was recommended that marketers should stress the notion of security for the promotion of environmentally compatible products (Laroche et al., 2001). By extension, one could argue that if socially responsible consumers use security as a guiding principle, then their choice of an ethical product could possibly reflect security which is an indicator of the competence dimension.

Aaker et al. (2001) also found that "responsible" cross-loaded on the competence dimension (0.64 factor loading). Additionally, social responsibility and competence were shown to be highly correlated ($r = .70$), and it was suggested that the competence dimension is the closest dimension to the idea of social responsibility, though in this paper, social responsibility is viewed as a unique brand personality dimension.

However, consumers frequently assume ethical products to be lower in quality because they believe that in making a product ethical, resources were diverted away from quality (Newman et al., 2014). This is due to the idea that consumers rely on a zero-sum heuristic which suggests that if a product is superior on one dimension, such as ethicality, then it must be inferior on another dimension, for example quality (Newman et al., 2014). In fact, even if the company explicitly informs consumers that the company put an emphasis on both quality and the

environment, it does not reverse the observed effects on inferences about resource allocation (Newman et al., 2014). Therefore, this paper contributes greatly by showing the possible negative consequences of ethical product enhancements. If a product is inferred to be lacking in quality, it would be logical to assume that its perceived competence which is associated with traits of reliability, will be reduced.

It has been demonstrated that products that are rated higher on ethicality are also rated to be poor in effectiveness and are not associated with the phrases "gets the job done" or "effective product" (Luchs, Naylor, Irwin, and Raghunathan, 2007; Luchs et al., 2010, p. 21). Aaker (1992) found that when the Schiltz beer brand developed a green brand image, it was associated with cheap ingredients. Lin and Chang (2012) found further support for the perceived inferiority and inefficiency of green products, a concern which was echoed in a 2010 survey on consumer concerns about environmentally friendly products (Neff, 2010). Interestingly, it was found that product usage is in line with these inferences, and consumers tend to overuse green product in an attempt to compensate for the perceived inefficiency (Lin and Chang, 2012).

In the domain of non-profits, it was found that such organizations did not signal competence, efficiency, and effectiveness (Aaker et al., 2010). Although the current research focuses on product brands rather than non-profits, previous findings indicate a negative relationship between ethicality and competence. Similarly, an exploratory study found that most fair trade products were associated with lower in quality because consumers perceived that the emphasis was on maintaining ethical standards (Bray, Johns, and Kilburn, 2011). In fact, corporate social responsibility can be disadvantageous if consumers think that corporate ability was sacrificed to achieve it (Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001).

However, the conflicting evidence between research that does and does not ascribe competence to ethical products can potentially be resolved by exploring a possible moderator. Marketing research has demonstrated that cues signalling credibility can improve perceptions of competence (Moscarini, 2007). In fact, it was found that cues signalling credibility via a money prime, were able to boost competence perceptions of non-profits (Aaker et al., 2010). For example, perceptions of inferiority declined when high price levels served as a quality indicator (Bodur et al., 2015). Private label brands benefited from ethical attributes only if they were associated with other cues such as higher price, which helped consumers form quality perceptions (Bodur et al., 2015). Cue utilization theory indeed suggests that if higher price of an ethical product signalled higher quality, then the ethical attribute would be seen as an additional benefit (Bodur et al., 2015), which in line with covariation models and would explain why both covariation and compensatory theories co-exist. It may be that when price is used as an indicator of quality, then covariation theories come into play such that improvements on one dimension imply improvements on another, whereas when there is no indicator of quality then compensatory inferences about quality are made.

> *H1B: Product attribute ethicality is positively associated with the competence dimension of brand personality but only for high price products, whereas for low price products there will be a decrease in the competence dimension of brand personality.*

The ruggedness dimension of brand personality is associated with traits of being tough, strong, outdoorsy and rugged (Aaker, 1997). When social responsibility was investigated as a brand personality dimension, it correlated weakly with ruggedness (Madrigal and Boush, 2008).

This provides some preliminary support of the idea that ethical attributes will not induce high levels of ruggedness. Additionally, Luchs et al. (2010) found that sustainable products or products with ethical attributes are perceived to be lacking in strength. On the contrary, products high on ethicality are associated with gentleness related attributes such as "safe product", "mild product", "soft product" and not with attributes related to strength such as "powerful product" "tough product" or "harsh product" (Luchs et al., 2010, p. 21). This is not to say that the decreased strength is always a liability or weakness of ethical products. On the contrary, while sustainability can be liability for products for which strength is a valuable attribute, it can also be an asset when gentleness is valued (Luchs et al., 2010). However, evidence overall points toward the prediction that ethicality reduces the ruggedness dimension of brand personality, although the relation between ethical attributes and ruggedness has not been empirically examined. This is surprising when one considers consumers' notable and relatively enduring, brand associations regarding strength of ethical products.

H1C: Product attribute ethicality is negatively associated with the ruggedness dimension of brand personality.

The sophistication dimension of brand personality is associated with traits of being upper class, glamorous, feminine, and charming while the dimension of excitement is associated with traits such as daring, trendy, up to date, young, and unique (Aaker, 1997). Jean-Ruel (2008) found that ethicality had a positive and significant effect on not only competence and sincerity but also the excitement and sophistication dimensions of brand personality.

Buying ethical products could be associated with either being seen as more responsible or sophisticated, in line with prevention versus promotion goals (Higgins, 2001). Since sustainable products have been linked to morality and aspirational values (Irwin and Baron, 2001), it can be predicted that they relate to sophistication, or even excitement, due to their hedonic aspects. A qualitative paper has made a cognitive link between greenness and femininity, which is a trait of sophistication (Brough, Wilkie, Ma, Isaac, and Gal, 2016). Additionally, another qualitative study conducted by Acharya and Gupta (2016) explored the brand personality of green products, and through semi structured interviews and focus group discussions, discovered dimensions of green brand personality which included both sophistication and excitement due to the emergence of themes such as upper class, charming, unique, trendy, freedom, and energy.

H1D: Product attribute ethicality is positively associated with the sophistication dimension of brand personality.

H1E: Product attribute ethicality is positively associated with the excitement dimension of brand personality.

It has been previously suggested that brand personality contributes to brand equity (Aaker, 1996; Kim et al., 2010; Pappu et al., 2005). Specifically, it has been posited that brand personality dimensions influence brand attitude, brand preferences, brand trust, perceived quality, and brand loyalty (Aaker, 1999; Ambroise et al., 2005; Beldona and Wysong, 2007; Gouteron, 2006; Sirgy, 1982). Development of a strong brand personality has been posited to increase the value of the brand for consumers (Arora and Stoner, 2009). Therefore, the aforementioned brand personality dimensions are expected to impact brand equity of ethical

brands. However, it is not just important to know to what extent brand personality contributes to brand equity. Instead, it is imperative to contextualise the impact of brand personality in the domain of ethical products in order to determine the relative impact of the five brand personality dimensions on brand equity, such that marketers can direct limited resources to supporting the most beneficial dimensions.

An important facet of consumer-based brand equity is that if a brand is seen as similar to an undifferentiated version of the product in the same product category, then consumers should not react differently from how they would if it was an unnamed version of the product (Keller, 1993). However, if consumers perceive the brand to possess salient unique brand associations, which are also positive, then it should result in different and more favourable consumer evaluations than an unbranded version of the product would have induced (Keller, 1993). Furthermore, brand managers and researchers have suggested that brand personality creates a competitive advantage, and distinguishes a brand from its competitors (Arora and Stoner, 2009; Sung, 2011). Therefore, when adding an ethical attribute, marketers can make use of brand personality to establish unique brand associations, which should contribute to brand equity.

Both sincerity and competence are significantly related to brand trust and brand affect (Sung and Kim, 2010). At the same time, both green trust and green satisfaction are positively associated with green brand equity (Chen, 2010). This implies that by increasing trust and satisfaction toward ethical products, the dimensions of sincerity and competence should have a significant and positive effect on brand equity. Previous research supports that a brand's traits such as sincerity, honesty, and credibility, are significant factors in enhancing brand trust, which in turn strengthens consumer brand relationships (Sung and Kim, 2010). Therefore, since honesty implies that a brand will deliver on its promises, then sincere brands with traits of

honesty and sincerity will have a strong influence on brand trust (Sung and Kim, 2010). At the same time, since competence is related to a brand's expertise, knowledge, and ability to deliver, then competent brands with traits of reliability will be also have a strong impact on brand trust (Sung and Kim, 2010).

Additionally, it was shown that a green brand image leads to greater brand trust if there is willingness to depend on a product based on inferences about its credibility and ability to deliver on environmental performance; this brand trust will result in brand equity (Chen, 2010). This suggests that competence would be a more influential driver of green brand equity than sincerity, since trust is highly dependent on inferences about the brand's credibility. In additional support of this, Chang and Fong (2010) show that green product quality is positively associated with green customer satisfaction and green customer loyalty. Since a brand that is high on competence may trigger stronger inferences of high quality, the increased perceived quality should positively relate to brand equity. At the same time, if perceived quality increases customer loyalty, the latter is in itself an indicator of brand equity.

Based on the notion that consumers have a lay theory that a firm has zero sum resources and that therefore an ethical brand has lower quality (Newman et al., 2014), it is predicted that competence has the strongest effect on brand equity. Since ethical brands are generally perceived as sincere, this likely increases brand equity. However, sincerity as a brand personality dimension does not necessarily create brand associations that are unique to particular brands but rather, the entire category of ethical attribute products may share such associations. If a particular ethical brand is additionally able to signal product quality and efficiency, and thus create a unique personality of competence, this sets the brand apart from its competition, creating an even stronger impact on brand equity. A study conducted in the services context indeed found that

customer perceived ethicality has a positive effect on consumer loyalty (i.e., a component of brand equity), which is mediated through customer perceived quality (Markovic, Iglesias, Singh, and Sierra, 2018).

H2A: There is a positive relationship between product attribute ethicality and brand equity, mediated by brand personality.

H2B: Among the brand personality dimensions, competence will have the strongest mediating effect on brand equity.

Methodology

Several pretests were conducted to aid with selection of products, ethical attributes, and price chosen for the main study. Participants in this research were recruited from Dynata's consumer panel (registered as Research Now at the time of recruitment).

Pretest 1: Product Type

Sample, procedure and measures. In the first pretest, 42 respondents (52% female; M_{age} = 50.60; SD = 14.04) were asked to rate 13 different products on perceived product functional benefits on the six-item utilitarian product benefits scale (e.g., 1 = ineffective to 7 = effective; Voss, Spangenberg, and Grohmann, 2003), and perceived product symbolic benefits on the seven-item symbolic benefit scale (e.g., "[product] reflects the kind of person I see myself to be" and [product] helps me express myself", anchored 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree; Wilcox, Kim, and Sen, 2009). Respondents also provided demographic information such as age, gender, education, and marital status. The appendix shows a detailed description of the measures.

Results. The measures used were reliable (functional benefit α = .937; symbolic benefit α = .968). A factor analysis confirmed that items loaded on their respective factors. Based on a one-way ANOVA with functional benefit and symbolic benefit as dependent variables and product as the independent variable, products from non-homogenous subsets on both perceived functional benefits and symbolic benefits were included in the main study. Detergent, printer ink cartridges, and paper towels represented functional products, while university/college t-shirts and sports jerseys were chosen as symbolic products.

Pretest 2: Ethical Attribute Type

Sample, procedure and measures. A second pretest was conducted among 30 respondents (50% female; M_{age} = 42.6; SD = 13.21) to evaluate the types of ethical attributes to be included (symbolic vs. functional). Each of the five products identified in pretest 1 were presented in combination with one of two functional ethical attributes (i.e., made with natural and locally supplied or grown material; made with recycled/renewable material) or one of two symbolic ethical attributes (i.e., made in a child labour free facility, made in cooperation with Save the Children Canada; Bodur et al., 2014). Respondents rated each product and ethical attribute combination (e.g. "paper towels made with natural and locally supplied or grown material") on functional perceptions (anchored 1 = not at all functional to 7 = very much functional), symbolic perceptions (anchored 1 = not at all symbolic to 7 = very much symbolic; Bodur et al., 2015), followed by ratings of ethicality of each individual attribute independent of the product (anchored 1 = not at all ethical to 7 = very ethical; Bodur et al., 2015). Demographic data was collected at the end of the survey.

Results. All attributes were perceived to be ethical ("made with natural and locally supplied or grown material:" M = 5.03, SD = 1.27; comparison to scale mid-point (4): t(29) = 4.45, p < .001; "made with recycled/renewable material:" M = 5.33, SD = 1.24; comparison to scale mid -point (4): t(29) = 5.89, p < .001; "made in a facility that is child labour free:" M = 5.70 SD = 1.34; comparison to scale mid-point (4): t(29) = 6.93, p < .001; and "made in cooperation with Save the Children Canada:" M = 5.13, SD = 1.22; comparison to scale mid-point (4): t(29) = 5.07, p < .001). One-way ANOVAs with ethical attribute as the independent variable and functional benefit and symbolic benefit as dependent variables showed a significant effect of attribute (functional benefits F(3, 580) = 2.71, p < .05; symbolic benefits F(3, 580) = 2.76, p < .05). Post hoc Tukey HSD multiple comparisons show that recycled material (M = 4.18, SD = 1.74, p = .05) was perceived significantly higher on functional benefit than Save the Children Canada (M = 3.67, SD = 1.70) and the two were chosen as the high and low functional ethical attributes, respectively. Out of the products, paper towels were selected as the functional and sports jerseys as the symbolic product due to their use in prior literature (Bodur et al., 2014; Park, Jaworski, and MacInnis, 1986; Voss et al., 2003), and based on pretest 1 results.

Pretest 3: Price

Sample, procedure and measures. Based on high levels of brand familiarity, Nike's Team Canada branded hockey jersey and Bounty paper towels were included as branded products. Price was manipulated by using a value that was either fifteen percent higher or lower than the average price available on retail websites, such as SportChek in the case of the Nike Team Canada hockey jersey and Walmart for Bounty paper towels. The experiment was designed as 2

(price: high vs. low) × 2 (ethical attribute: functional vs. symbolic) × 2 (product: functional vs. symbolic) with product as a between-participants factor and price and ethical attribute type as within-participants factors. Thirty-one respondents (61% male; M_{age} = 48.74; SD = 18.29) were asked to evaluate the price of both the paper towels and sports jersey on a seven-point scale (anchored 1 = very low to 7 = very high) followed by price credibility, on a two-item seven-point scale (anchored 1 = not credible/believable to 7 = credible/believable; Bodur et al. 2015).

Results. After splitting the file by product, a one-way ANOVA was run with intended price and ethical attribute as independent variables and price evaluation as the dependent variable. Only intended price had a significant effect on price evaluation for both paper towels (M_{high} = 5.89, SD = 1.13, M_{low} = 4.63, SD = 1.16; $F(1, 120)$ = 36.92, $p < .001$) and the sports jersey (M_{high} = 6.00, SD = 1.40, M_{low} = 5.29, SD = 1.40; $F(1, 120)$ = 7.89, $p < .01$) with no significant interaction effects.

Main Study

This study sought to determine how the presence of an ethical attribute impacts consumer evaluations of products in terms of brand personality, and to what extent brand personality dimensions mediate the relationship between presence of attribute ethicality and brand equity. An additional aim of the study was to explore the moderating role of price. Figure 1 shows the conceptual model tested in this study.
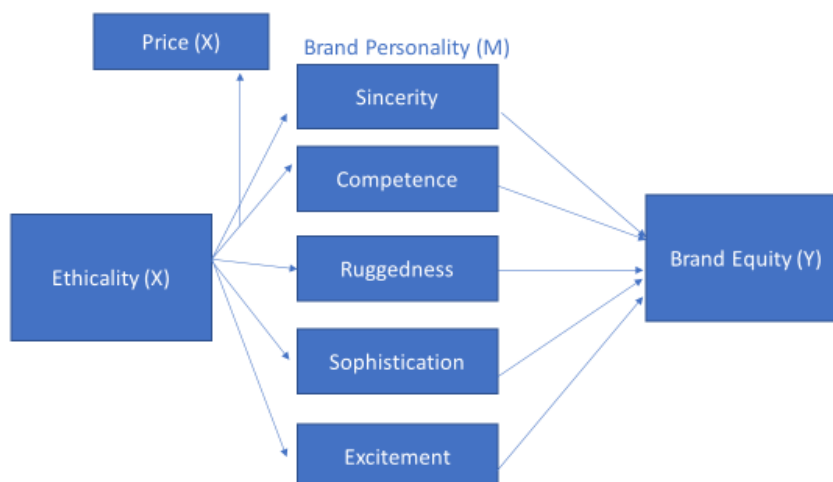
Figure 1 – Conceptual Model of Hypotheses

Sample, procedure and measures. In total, twelve stimuli were designed, with each participant randomly presented with one of the twelve stimuli. Two product categories were selected: Bounty branded paper towels as a functional product and Team Canada's Nike brand hockey jersey as a symbolic product. Ethical attributes were manipulated in terms of functional (i.e., "made with recycle/renewable material") or symbolic (i.e., "made in a child labour free facility") ethical attribute. The control condition did not include an ethical attribute description. Pretested prices were used with a low price of $9.84 and high price of $13.31 for six big rolls of Bounty paper towels, and a low price of $136 and high price of $184 for Nike's Team Canada hockey jersey.

Four hundred and sixty-seven respondents were recruited online through Research Now (50% female; $M_{age} = 46.67$; SD = 13.93) and a 2 (price: high vs low) × 2 (product type: functional vs symbolic) × 3 (ethical attribute: functional vs symbolic vs no attribute present) between group experiment was implemented. After random assignment to one condition, respondents were asked to rate the five dimensions of brand personality on a 42-item brand

personality scale (e.g. "down-to-earth", "daring", "reliable", "upper class", "outdoorsy", anchored 1 = not at all descriptive to 7 = extremely description; Aaker 1997). This was followed by ratings of perceived quality, brand loyalty, brand associations with brand awareness and overall brand equity on a 19-item scale (e.g. "it makes sense to buy Bounty paper towels instead of any other brand, even if they are the same", anchored 1=strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree; Yoo et al. 2000). A manipulation check was conducted to confirm perceived ethicality of the stimuli (anchored 1 = not at all ethical to 7 = very ethical; Bodur et al., 2015). Ethical attribute importance (anchored 1 = not important at all to 7 = very important; Bodur et al., 2015), ethical attribute relevance (anchored 1 = not at all relevant to 7 = very relevant; Bodur et al., 2015), brand familiarity (anchored 1 = low familiarity to 7 = high familiarity; Bodur et al., 2015), and being a Team Canada fan (anchored 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree; adapted from Funk, Mahony, and Ridinger, 2002), were measured as potential covariates. Additionally, a manipulation check was performed to confirm if price was being accurately perceived (anchored 1 = very low to 7 = very high) followed by price credibility on a seven-point scale (anchored 1 = not credible/believable to 7 = credible/believable; Bodur et al. 2015). *Manipulation checks.* Scale items were shown to be reliable both for brand personality dimensions (Cronbach's α: sincerity = .95, excitement = .97, competence = .95, sophistication = .93, ruggedness = .89) and components of brand equity (Cronbach's α: overall brand equity = .94, perceived quality = .91, brand loyalty = .88, brand awareness with brand associations = .87). A factor analysis confirmed that items of each scale loaded on their respective factor.

To confirm the intended effect of price, a one way ANOVA was run with price condition as the independent variable and price evaluation as the dependent variable. Price condition had a significant effect (M_{high} = 5.25, SD = 1.36, M_{low} = 5.01, SD = 1.32; $F(1, 465)$ = 3.92, $p < .05$).

Believability did not differ significantly between groups (M_{high} = 4.53, SD = 1.58, M_{low} = 4.55, SD = 1.55; $F(1, 465)$ = .009, p > .1). As the hypotheses were tested in a path model, the continuous measure of price evaluation was used in subsequent analyses.

To confirm the intended effect of ethical attributes, a one way ANOVA was run with ethical attribute as independent variable and ethicality as dependent variable. Ethical attribute presence had a significant effect ($M_{ethicalattribute}$ = 4.66, SD = 1.47, $M_{noattribute}$= 4.30, SD = 1.34; $F(1, 465)$ = 6.42, p < .05). Subsequent analyses were based on participants' continuous ratings of ethicality.

Exploratory regressions included ethicality, product type, ethicality × product type as predictors and each of the brand personality dimensions as dependent variables. Product type did not have a direct or moderating effect on any of the brand personality dimensions (*ps* > .05) and the data was therefore collapsed across products. Another set of exploratory regressions included ethicality, ethical attribute type, ethicality × ethical attribute type as predictors and each of the brand personality dimensions as criteria. Since ethical attribute type also did not have a direct or moderating effect on brand personality (*ps* > .05), the data was also collapsed across ethical attributes.

A series of regression analyses were then run with ethicality, price evaluation and ethicality × price evaluation as the predictors, and each of the brand personality dimensions as the criterion. Ethicality had a significant effect on sincerity (β = .80; SE = .14; t = 5.97; p < .001), excitement (β = .74; SE = .16; t = 4.70; p < .001), competence (β = .71; SE = .15; t = 4.72; p < .001), sophistication (β = .64; SE = .17; t = 3.80; p < .001), and ruggedness (β = .67; SE = .16; t = 4.20; p < .001), while price did not have a direct or moderating effect (p > .05) on any of the brand personality dimensions. As a second block in the regression, ethicality, price

evaluation, ethicality × price evaluation, attribute relevance, and brand familiarity were entered as predictors to explore their role in brand personality perceptions. Addition of the covariates did not change the pattern of significant effects of ethicality on brand personality dimensions. Attribute relevance was positively associated with sincerity ($\beta = .16$; SE = .04; t = 3.85; p < .001), excitement ($\beta = .28$; SE = .05; t = 6.05; p < .001), competence ($\beta = .19$; SE = .04; t = 4.25; p < .001), sophistication ($\beta = .24$; SE = .05; t = 4.70; p < .001), and ruggedness ($\beta = .21$; SE = .05; t = 4.44; p < .001). Brand familiarity related positively to sincerity ($\beta = .08$; SE = .04; t = 2.29; p < .05), excitement ($\beta = .08$; SE = .04; t = 1.98; p < .05), competence ($\beta = .18$; SE = .04; t = 4.72; p < .001), and sophistication ($\beta = .13$; SE = .04; t = 2.94; p < .01). Measures of ethical attribute importance and fan status regarding Team Canada did not consistently emerge as significant covariates and were thus not included in subsequent analyses.

Hypothesis Tests

A PROCESS model (model 7; 5,000 samples; Hayes, 2012) examined the effect of ethicality on brand personality, the moderating role of price, as well as the mediating role of brand personality in the relationship between ethical attributes and brand equity. Ethicality was entered into the model as the predictor, price as a moderator (W), brand personality dimensions as parallel mediators, and overall brand equity as the criterion. Brand familiarity and attribute relevance served as covariates.

Ethicality related significantly and positively to sincerity ($\beta = .61$; SE = .14; t = 4.46; p < .001, 95% CI [0.34; 0.88]), excitement ($\beta = .42$; SE = .16; t = 2.71; p < .01, 95% CI [0.12; 0.73]), competence ($\beta = .43$; SE = .15; t = 2.95; p < .01, 95% CI [0.14; 0.72]), sophistication ($\beta = .34$; SE = .17; t = 2.04; p < .05, 95% CI [0.01; 0.67]), and ruggedness ($\beta = .43$; SE = .16; t =

2.68; p < .01, 95% CI [0.11; 0.74]). Price did not moderate the relationship between ethicality and competence (β = -.02; SE = .02; t = -.60; p > .1, 95% CI [-0.06; 0.03]). Attribute relevance was found to have a significant positive direct effect on all brand personality dimensions (*ps* < .05), while brand familiarity was found to have a significant positive direct effect on all brand personality dimensions (*ps* < .05), except for ruggedness.

The direct effect of ethicality on overall brand equity was found to be significant (β = .14; SE = .07; t = 2.10; p < .05, 95% CI [0.01; 0.27]), as was the direct effect of sophistication on brand equity (β = .26; SE = .10; t = 2.67; p < .01, 95% CI [0.07; 0.45]), and brand familiarity on brand equity (β = .10; SE = .05; t = 2.24; p < .05, 95% CI [0.01; 0.19]).

At low levels of price evaluation ($M_{16th\ percentile}$ = 4.00), there was a significant indirect effect of ethicality on overall brand equity mediated through sophistication (β = .08, SE = .03, 95% CI [0.02; 0.15]). At moderate levels of price evaluation ($M_{50th\ percentile}$ = 5.00), there was a significant indirect effect of ethicality on overall brand equity mediated through sophistication (β = .08, SE = .03, 95% CI [0.02; 0.15]). At high level of price evaluation ($M_{84th\ percentile}$ = 7.00), there was a significant indirect effect of ethicality on overall brand equity mediated through sophistication (β = .07, SE = .03, 95% CI [0.02; 0.15]).

Once again however, the 95% bias corrected confidence interval for the indirect effect of ethicality on overall brand equity through sincerity as moderated by price was not significant (index of moderated mediation = -.03, SE = 0.01, 95% CI [-0.01; 0.01]). The indirect effect of ethicality on overall brand equity mediated through sophistication did not differ significantly at varying levels of price.
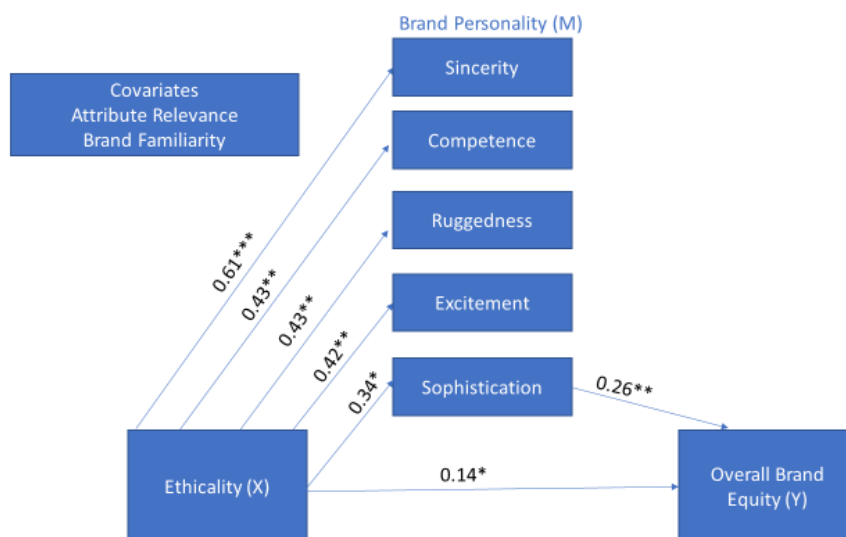
Brand Personality (M)

Sincerity

Covariates
Attribute Relevance
Brand Familiarity

Competence

Ruggedness

Excitement

Sophistication

0.26**

0.61***

0.43**

0.43**

0.42**

0.34*

Ethicality (X)

0.14*

Overall Brand
Equity (Y)

Figure 2 – Process Model 7 on Overall Brand Equity

#	Hypothesis	Supported/Not Supported
1A	Product attribute ethicality relates positively to the sincerity dimension of brand personality.	Supported
1B	Product attribute ethicality relates positively to the competence dimension of brand personality but only for high price products, whereas for low price products there will be a decrease in the competence dimension of brand personality.	Not supported
1C	Product attribute ethicality relates negatively to the ruggedness dimension of brand personality	Not supported
1D	Product attribute ethicality relates positively to the sophistication dimension of brand personality.	Supported
1E	Product attribute ethicality relates positively to the excitement dimension of brand personality.	Supported
2A	There is a positive relationship between ethicality and brand equity, mediated by brand personality.	Supported
2B	Of the brand personality dimensions, competence will have the strongest mediating effect on brand equity.	Not supported

Table 1 Summary of Results

Supplementary Analyses

Perceived Quality

The direct effect of ethicality on perceived quality was significant (β = .14; SE = .05; t = 3.04; p < .01, 95% CI [0.05; 0.24]), as was the direct effect of competence on perceived quality (β = .29; SE = .08; t = 3.54; p < .001; 95% CI [0.13; 0.45]), and brand familiarity on perceived quality (β = .21; SE = .03; t = 6.39; p < .001, 95% CI [0.15; 0.28]). Sophistication related significantly and negatively to perceived quality (β = -.19; SE = .07; t = -2.67; p < .01, 95% CI [-0.33; -0.05]).

While ethicality had a positive indirect effect on perceived quality through competence (β = .11, SE = .05, 95% CI [0.17; 0.22] at price = 4.00, also significant at price = 5.00 and price = 7.00), ethicality had a negative indirect effect on perceived quality through sophistication, with indirect effects not moderated by price (β = -.06, SE = .03, 95% CI [-0.13; -0.01] at price = 4.00, also significant at price = 5.00 and price = 7.00).
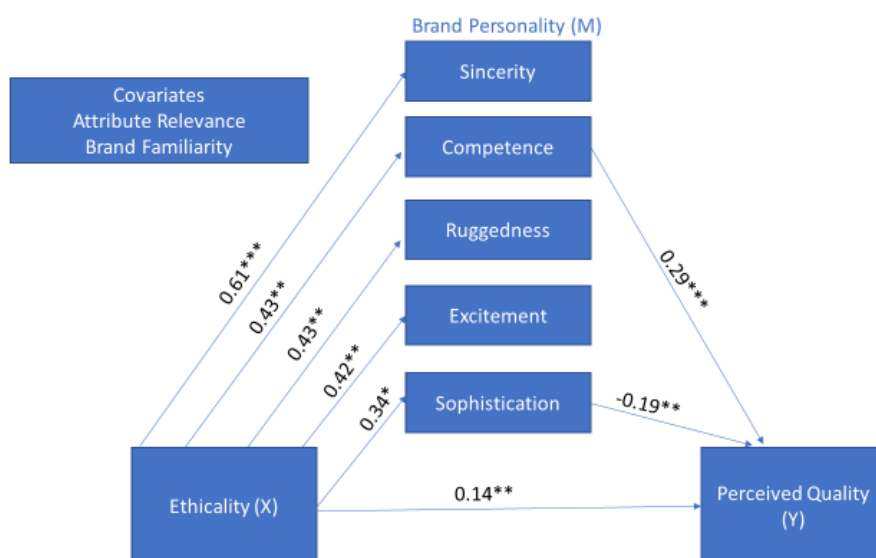

Figure 3 – Process Model 7 on Perceived Quality

Brand Loyalty

The direct effect of ethicality on brand loyalty was not significant (p > .1, 95% CI [-0.20; 0.09]). There was a significant effect of sophistication (β = .26; SE = .11; t = 2.36; p < .05, 95% CI [0.04; 0.47]), brand familiarity (β = .19; SE = .05; t = 3.66; p < .001, 95% CI [0.09; 0.29]), and attribute relevance (β = .12; SE = .06; t = 2.08; p < .05, 95% CI [0.01; 0.24]) on brand loyalty. Ethicality had a positive indirect effect on brand loyalty through sophistication, which was not moderated by price (β = .08, SE = .04, 95% CI [0.01; 0.17] at price = 4.00, also significant at price = 5.00 and price = 7.00).
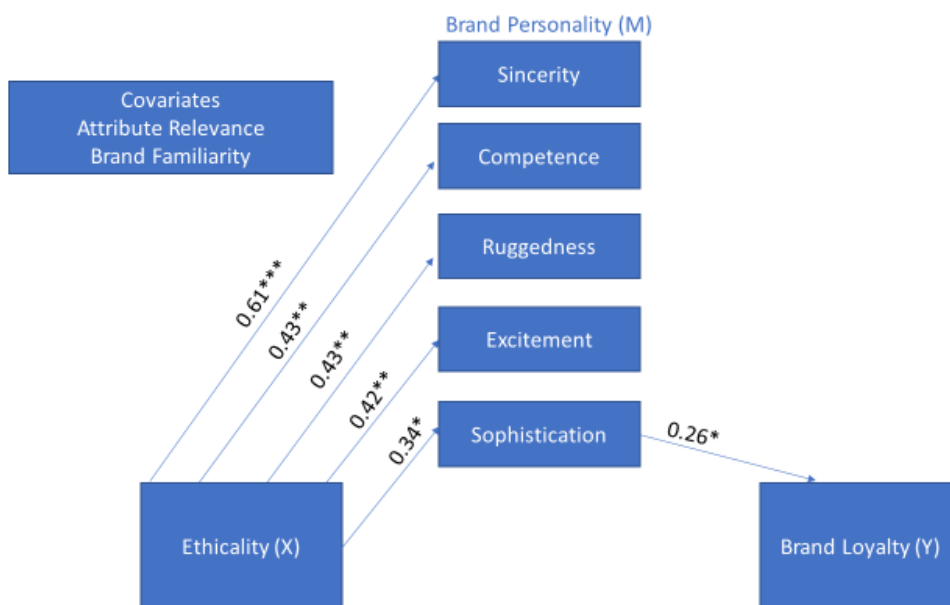

Figure 4 – Process Model 7 on Brand Loyalty

Brand Awareness

The direct effect of ethicality on brand awareness was not significant (p > .1). There was a significant effect of competence (β = .23; SE = .09; t = 2.48; p < .05, 95% CI [0.05; 0.40]), and

brand familiarity (β = .43; SE = .04; t = 11.54; p < .001, 95% CI [0.36; 0.50]) on brand

awareness. Ethicality had a positive indirect effect on brand awareness through competence,

which was not moderated by price (β = .08, SE = .05, 95% CI [0.00; 0.18] at price = 4.00, also

significant at price = 5.00 and price = 7.00).
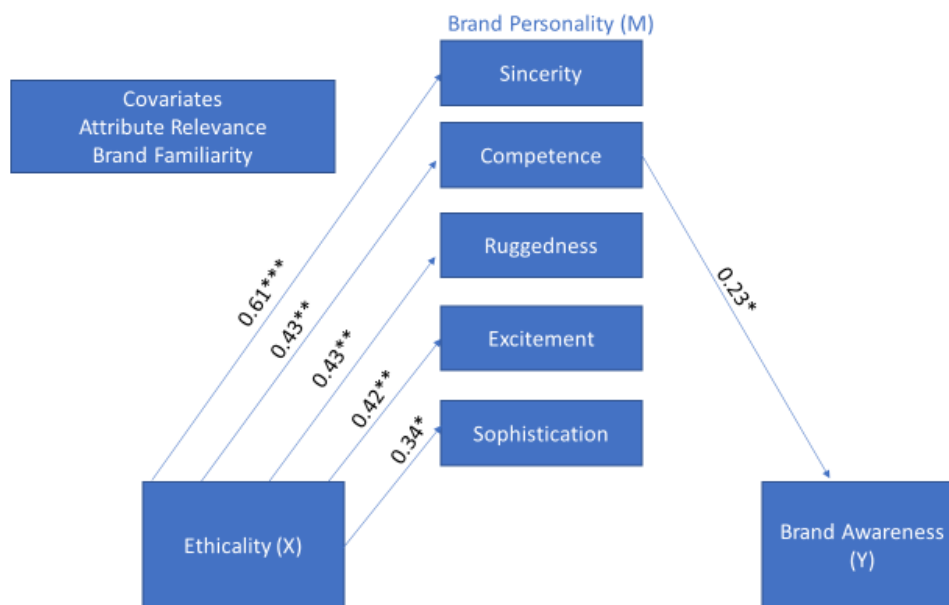
Figure 5 – Process Model 7 on Brand Awareness

General Discussion

Summary and Conclusions

This research shows that perceived ethicality positively relates to all brand personality

dimensions even when controlling for attribute relevance and brand familiarity. Hypothesis 1A,

1D, and 1E were thus supported. H1B was not fully supported. Although ethical attributes were

positively related to competence, this relationship is not moderated by price. In other words, high

price was not needed for consumers to act as a cue to signal quality or effectiveness and in fact

the ethical attribute itself was enough to increase perceptions of competence. Ethicality had the

strongest effect on perceptions of sincerity. This finding is in line with previous work that relates ethical attributes to sincerity, genuine, trust, and warmth (Aaker, 1997; Aaker et al., 2001; Hoeffler and Keller, 2002).

Although it was hypothesized that ethicality relates negatively to ruggedness, a positive relation between ethicality and ruggedness emerged in this research. This is an interesting finding because environmentally friendly and ethical attributes tend to typically be associated with feminine stereotypes, which may no longer be the case in the eyes of consumers. It is possible that the "sustainability liability" and the association of ethicality with gentleness and weakness (Luchs et al., 2010) may be a mental framework that consumers are no longer using, due to an increasing prevalence of ethical products in the market. As ethical attributes increasingly gain importance consumers perhaps no longer see ethicality and strength as a tradeoff.

Another interesting finding is that relevance of the ethical attribute to the brand positively and significantly influences all brand personality dimensions. As an attribute is seen as more relevant to the brand, perceptions of sincerity, excitement, sophistication, competence, and ruggedness increase.

While ethicality has a positive significant direct effect on brand equity, this relationship is mediated only by sophistication and not competence. While one may assume that this can be explained through price premiums charged by ethical products, in fact, this relationship was not moderated by price. Ethical products, such as those including organic or recycled material, are often seen as lacking glamour (Beard, 2008). However, with industries ranging from fashion to consumer-packaged goods picking up on the trend to go green and ethical, it is likely that an ethical product positioned as sophisticated elicits increased overall brand equity, such that

consumers would prefer to purchase that brand over an otherwise similar competitor. In this research, there was no direct effect of ethicality on brand loyalty, but an indirect effect mediated by sophistication, providing further evidence to the proposition that sophistication can establish a point of competitive advantage for an ethical brand.

Although competence did not mediate the relationship between ethicality and overall brand equity, it acted as a mediator in the relationship between ethicality and perceived quality, as well as between ethicality and brand awareness. Therefore, ethical products that create perceptions around competence benefit from unique brand associations which set them apart from other ethical brands and award them with components of brand equity such as increased awareness and perceptions of quality.

An additional finding, supporting previous literature (Campbell and Keller, 2003; Kent and Allen, 1994; Lane and Jacobson, 1995) is that brand familiarity had a significant effect on overall brand equity, as well as its perceived quality, brand loyalty, and brand awareness components.

Theoretical Contributions

This research sheds light on the relation between ethical attributes and brand personality dimensions, and demonstrates that brand personality dimensions in turn have a differential impact on brand equity. First, while brand personality has been extensively studied, it has been unexplored in the realm of sustainability or ethical products. This research demonstrates that ethical attributes can be used to modify brand personality. While prior research regarding consequences of brand personality has been informative, it has not explicated which dimensions are most beneficial in generating brand equity. While the idea of ethical attributes seems wholly

beneficial, it is important to understand the effects of ethical attributes on the specific brand personality dimensions, and their downstream effects.

Second, in studying the relative impact of brand personality dimensions arising from ethical attributes on consumer-based brand equity, this paper provided new insight. While prior research has focused on conceptualising and developing measures for brand equity, it has neglected empirical research on its antecedents (Valette-Florence et al., 2011). With the exception of Valette-Florence and colleagues (2011), the effect of brand personality on brand equity has not been studied. Instead, prior research has examined the effect of brand personality on individual components of brand equity. This, combined with the use of various operationalisations of brand personality and brand equity, has left many questions regarding the relation between brand personality and brand equity unanswered. Even Valette-Florence and colleagues' (2011) study did not investigate brand personality according to Aaker's (1997) dimensions. As a result, little is known about the relative impact of each of these dimensions on brand equity. The current research reinforces that not all brand personality dimensions contribute to brand equity in the context of green or social marketing.

Managerial Contributions

In order to help brand managers and marketers better prioritize their limited resources, this research provides novel insights into how to elicit positive consumer responses in the domain of ethical products. It is especially challenging for marketers working in the realm of ethical consumption to build unique brand associations that can set them apart from the competition, as more and more companies try to play in this field. Communication surrounding ethical products needs to be authentic (Middlemiss, 2003) in a way that resonates with consumers and does not seem artificially or externally imposed. This study provides insight into

how consumers view ethical attributes and what communications should focus on, namely sophistication and competence, in order to for a brand to benefit from investments into ethical attributes.

It should also be noted that the results of the study showed that relevance of the ethical attribute to the brand has a significant effect on brand loyalty. Therefore, the ethical attribute chosen by marketing managers should align with the overall brand, otherwise it will not have an impact on the loyalty it is able to accrue from customers. This reinforces the idea that not all ethical attributes will be equally beneficial for a brand.

Limitations and Future Research

One potential avenue of future research that should be explored is the moderating effect of congruence between type of product and type of ethical attribute in terms of whether they are both functional versus symbolic. Consumers purchase products either for affective hedonic satisfaction or for its instrumental utilitarian function (Voss et al., 2003). Therefore, while the hedonic dimension is related to the experience of using the product, the utilitarian dimension is related to the use or function of the product (Voss et al., 2003). In the same vein, ethical attributes can either be functional for example "recyclable material" or symbolic such as "Made in Cooperation with Save the Children Canada" (Bodur et al., 2015). In this research, product type did not emerge as a significant moderator. However, one reason for that may be that product type and attribute type were both determined a priori as opposed to eliciting participant ratings, which may have led to different results. When there is congruence or in other words alignment between the type of product and ethical attribute in the minds of consumers, it may lead to stronger relationships between brand personality of ethical products and brand equity.

 Another direction worth exploring would be how the prominence of an ethical attribute in terms of its communication could affect consumer perceptions of brand personality. For example, a cleaning product which is only marketed as a sustainable product made with natural ingredients may elicit a different consumer response from one marketed primarily as an efficient cleaner that just happens to made with natural ingredients as well. Furthermore, the resultant impact on brand equity of the brand personality dimensions may be weaker if the benefit is communicated as an additional feature because it will not necessarily create greater loyalty or trust in the brand. This is an important direction to pursue as it has implications for how an ethical attribute should be communicated to the public and more specifically implications for the real estate on product packaging that such messaging should occupy.

 Lastly, given that ethical attributes have a wide range and are related to social, environmental, or, even animal welfare, it is important that we explicate the resultant brand personality perceptions of these different attributes, whereas this research only tested two such ethical claims.

Appendix 1 – Measures

Measure	Source	Items
Functional Benefit of Product	Voss, Spangenberg, and Grohmann, 2003	Please rate [product] on the following: Effectiveness Helpfulness Functionality Necessity Practicality [Scale: 7 point e.g. 1=Ineffective, 7=Effective]
Symbolic Benefit of Product	Wilcox, Kim, and Sen, 2009	Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: [Products] reflect the kind of person I see myself to be. [Products] help me communicate my self-identity. [Products] help me express myself. [Products] are a symbol of social status. [Products] help me fit into important social situations. I like to be seen using [products]. I enjoy it when people know I am using [products]. [Scale: 1=Completely disagree, 7=Completely agree]
Functional Benefit of Ethical Attribute	Bodur, Tofighi, and Grohmann, 2015	To what extent is each of the following attributes **functional** (i.e. relates to functionality, quality, safety, and/or performance of the product)? [Product] made with natural and locally supplied or grown material. [Product] made with recycled/renewable material. [Product] made in a child labour free facility. [Product] made in cooperation with Save the Children Canada. [Scale: 1=Not at all functional, 7=Very much functional]
Symbolic Benefit of	Bodur, Tofighi, and Grohmann, 2015	To what extent is each of the following attributes **symbolic** (i.e., allows individuals

Ethical Attribute		to express themselves or associate with a group)? [Product] made with natural and locally supplied or grown material. [Product] made with recycled/renewable material. [Product] made in a child labour free facility. [Product] made in cooperation with Save the Children Canada. [Scale: 1=Not at all symbolic, 7=Very much symbolic]
Ethicality	Bodur, Tofighi, and Grohmann, 2015	Please rate the following attributes on ethicality. Made with natural and locally supplied or grown material. Made with recycled/renewable material. Made in a child labour free facility. Made in cooperation with Save the Children Canada. [Scale: 1=Not at all ethical, 7=Very ethical]
Price Evaluation	Created for the purpose of this research	Please evaluate the price of the product. [Scale: 1=Very low, 7=Very high]
Price Credibility	Bodur, Tofighi, and Grohmann, 2015	How credible/believable is the price of the product above? [Scale: 1=Not credible/believable, 7=Credible/believable]
Sincerity (Brand Personality)	Aaker, 1997	Please rate the extent to which each of the following traits describes the brand above. Down-to-earth Family-oriented Small-town Honest Sincere Real Wholesome Original Cheerful Sentimental Friendly [Scale: 1=Not at all descriptive, 7=Extremely descriptive]
Excitement (Brand Personality)	Aaker, 1997	Please rate the extent to which each of the following traits describes the brand above. Daring

		Trendy Exciting Spirited Cool Young Imaginative Unique Up-to-date Independent Contemporary [Scale: 1=Not at all descriptive, 7=Extremely descriptive]
Competence (Brand Personality)	Aaker, 1997	Please rate the extent to which each of the following traits describes the brand above. Reliable Hard working Secure Intelligent Technical Corporate Successful Leader Confident [Scale: 1=Not at all descriptive, 7=Extremely descriptive]
Sophistication (Brand Personality)	Aaker, 1997	Please rate the extent to which each of the following traits describes the brand above. Upper class Glamorous Good looking Charming Feminine Smooth [Scale: 1=Not at all descriptive, 7=Extremely descriptive]
Ruggedness (Brand Personality)	Aaker, 1997	Please rate the extent to which each of the following traits describes the brand above. Outdoorsy Masculine Western Tough Rugged [Scale: 1=Not at all descriptive, 7=Extremely descriptive]
Perceived Quality	Yoo, Donthu, and Lee, 2000	Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

		[Branded product] are of high quality. The likely quality of [branded product] is extremely high. The likelihood that [branded product] would be functional is very high. The likelihood that [branded product] are reliable is very high. [Branded product] must be of very good quality. [Branded product] appear to be of very poor quality. [Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 7=Strongly Agree]
Brand Loyalty	Yoo, Donthu, and Lee, 2000	Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. I consider myself to be loyal to [branded product]. [Branded product] would be my first choice. I will not buy other brands if [branded product] are available at the store. [Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 7=Strongly Agree]
Brand Awareness	Yoo, Donthu, and Lee, 2000	Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. I know what [branded product] look like. I can recognize [branded product] among other competing brands. I am aware of [branded product]. Some characteristics of [branded product] come to my mind quickly. I can quickly recall the symbol or logo of [branded product]. I have difficulty in imagining [branded product] in my mind. [Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 7=Strongly Agree]
Overall Brand Equity	Yoo, Donthu, and Lee, 2000	Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. It makes sense to buy [branded product] instead of any other brand, even if they are the same. Even if another brand has same features as [branded product], I would prefer to buy [branded product].

		If there is another brand as good as [branded product], I prefer to buy [branded product]. If another brand is not different from [branded product] in any way, it seems smarter to purchase [branded product]. [Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 7=Strongly Agree]
Attribute Relevance	Bodur, Tofighi, and Grohmann, 2015	How relevant is [ethical attribute] to the brand? [Scale: 1=Not at all relevant, 7=Very relevant]
Attribute Importance	Bodur, Tofighi, and Grohmann, 2015	How important is [ethical attribute] to your evaluation of the brand? [Scale: 1=Not important at all, 7=Very important]
Brand Familiarity	Bodur, Tofighi, and Grohmann, 2015	Please indicate your familiarity with [Brand]. [Scale: 1=Low familiarity, 7=High familiarity]

Appendix 2 – Stimuli

Bounty Select-A-Size White Paper Towels (6 Big Rolls = 8 Regular Rolls)
2X more absorbent and strong when wet
Made with recycled/renewable material
$13.31

Figure 6 – Functional Product Functional Ethical Attribute High Price

Bounty Select-A-Size White Paper Towels (6 Big Rolls = 8 Regular Rolls)
2X more absorbent and strong when wet
$13.31

Figure 7 – Functional Product No Ethical Attribute High Price

Bounty Select-A-Size White Paper Towels (6 Big Rolls = 8 Regular Rolls)
2X more absorbent and strong when wet
Made in cooperation with Save the Children Canada
$13.31

Figure 8 – Functional Product Symbolic Attribute High Price

Bounty Select-A-Size White Paper Towels (6 Big Rolls = 8 Regular Rolls)
2X more absorbent and strong when wet
Made with recycled/renewable material
$9.84

Figure 9 – Functional Product Functional Ethical Attribute Low Price

Bounty Select-A-Size White Paper Towels (6 Big Rolls = 8 Regular Rolls)
2X more absorbent and strong when wet
$9.84

Figure 10 – Functional Product No Ethical Attribute Low Price

Bounty Select-A-Size White Paper Towels (6 Big Rolls = 8 Regular Rolls)
2X more absorbent and strong when wet
Made in cooperation with Save the Children Canada
$9.84

Figure 11 – Functional Product Symbolic Ethical Attribute Low Price

Team Canada Nike Twill Hockey Jersey
Cheer on your favourite NHL Canada stars with an exact replica of the official team jersey
Made with natural and locally supplied or grown material
$184

Figure 12 – Symbolic Product Functional Ethical Attribute High Price

Team Canada Nike Twill Hockey Jersey
Cheer on your favourite NHL Canada stars with an exact replica of the official team jersey
$184

Figure 13 – Symbolic Product No Ethical Attribute High Price

Team Canada Nike Twill Hockey Jersey
Cheer on your favourite NHL Canada stars with an exact replica of the official team jersey
Made in a child labour free facility
$184

Figure 14 – Symbolic Product Symbolic Ethical Attribute High Price

Team Canada Nike Twill Hockey Jersey
Cheer on your favourite NHL Canada stars with an exact replica of the official team jersey
Made with natural and locally supplied or grown material
$136

Figure 15 – Symbolic Product Functional Ethical Product Low Price

Team Canada Nike Twill Hockey Jersey
Cheer on your favourite NHL Canada stars with an exact replica of the official team jersey
Made in a child labour free facility
$136

Figure 16 – Symbolic Product Symbolic Ethical Attribute Low Price

Team Canada Nike Twill Hockey Jersey
Cheer on your favourite NHL Canada stars with an exact replica of the official team jersey
$136

Figure 17 – Symbolic Product No Ethical Attribute Low Price

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