The Effects of Brand Image on Brand Perception: Steely Rolling and Melting Industry

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Abstract

This study examines the effect of brand image on brand perception taking Steely Rolling and Melting Industry Private Limited Company as a case. Data is collected from customers of Steely Rolling And Melting Industry Private Limited Company and analyzed using correlation and regression analysis; hence, explanatory research design is applied for the fact that the study is aiming at knowing the effect of brand image dimensions on the customers brand perception. Convenience sampling technique is used to select the ultimate sample elements from which data was collected. The output of the analysis shows that brand identity, brand personality, brand association, brand behavior and attitude, brand competence and benefit are positively correlated with brand perception. These variables are also proved to have positive and significant impact on brand perception. This shows that the company need to give high center of attention for such factors so that they will continue to have such positive and significant influence for long period of time.

Keywords: Brand identity, brand personality, brand association, brand behavior and attitude, brand competence and benefit, brand perception

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

A successful brand is perceived by consumers as an effective product that has a well-defined identity and added values (Doyle, 2009). The American

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Marketing Association defines a brand as a name, term, design, symbol or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from other sellers. Marketers are very eager to learn, organize, and facilitate brand communities which include a series of connections and relationships among people who admire a brand (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). The reasons behind such interest in brand communities include the advantages of learning customer perceptions of new product offerings and competitive actions; maximizing opportunities to attract and collaborate closely with highly loyal consumers of the brand (Franke& Shah, 2003); influencing members' evaluations and actions (Muniz & Schau, 2005); rapidly disseminating information (Brown *et al.*, 2003); and most importantly gaining a holy grail of loyal customers (McAlexander *et al.*, 2002).

Taking advantage of the capabilities of both brand community and social media, several companies are using social networking sites to support the creation and development of brand communities. Since these brand communities are becoming more important and prevalent, it is necessary for marketers and researchers to have more insights about them. Muniz and O' Guinn (2001) found evidence of brand communities in both face-to-face and computer-mediated environments. Their ethnographic study identified the presence of the three traditional markers of community (i.e., shared consciousness, shared rituals and traditions, and obligations to society) within brand communities. Brand image is an outcome of perceptions and association that a product leave in consumer's mind because it involves all the beliefs that create value and consumer commitment. The consumer needs and wants provide information about the desired product; and that information acts as brand perception which serves as competitive advantage. Marketing managers design their strategies based on brand perception but obtaining such precise information is a key

challenge because after every purchase consumer experience and brand association has shown variation (Lipinski *et al.*, 2011).

The basic purpose of social communities is to share information among the members, thus organizations use brand communities for collecting valuable insights about desired product/service. However, most of the studies were done in relation to branding focusing on external customers' level of commitment for a certain brand but some of the researchers tried to investigate the practice of brand image. some of the studies investigated how community play a big role in communicating the brand, its meaning and brand values to customers, Kimpakorn and Tocquer (2009), explored the relationship between the brand image dimensions and brand perception to support the brand. On the other hand Patterson *et al*. (2009) assessed the relationship between brand image and brand identification, brand commitment and brand loyalty. Even if branding is very important issue to be addressed in business organizations, only few studies have been done in Ethiopia regarding brand image Tagay (2013). Therefore, this study is aiming at contributing on this less researched area.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In today's business world customers are always in the decision making process as to which product to purchase because of the fact that there are a number related products in the market to choose from. There are different factors influencing customers' preference and their purchase decision. One of the most critical factors is their perception of the products' brand image. Brand image is summation of brand associations in the memory of consumer which leads him towards brand perception and brand association including brand attributes, brand benefits and brand attitude Keller (1993). Branding is an important concept in marketing influencing key marketing agendas like consumers'

attitude and preference towards a certain product offering. Hence, one of the reasons why customers will end up in preferring different products is because of the difference in the attitude, benefit perception and product attributes or features they have towards the product. When the customers develop positive attitude about the company and/or its product, it leads to make marketing decisions to choose and consume the product; and on the other hand if they don't have positive attitude, it is less probable for these customers to prefer it while making purchasing decisions.

Many scholars in the world in general and in Ethiopia in particular have conducted different researches about brand image and corresponding customers' brand perception (Roy & Banerjee, 2007; Suharyanti, 2011; Melewar *et al.*, 2012; Asaminew, 2014; Abera, 2015). However all of them didn't address the brand image and brand perception agenda from the perspective of manufacturing industries; therefore, this research tries to see the possible effects of brand image dimensions and brand perception of Steely Rolling and Melting Industry. The general objective of the study is to examine the effect of brand image on brand perception. More specifically, it aims to (1) examine the effects of brand identity on brand perception, (2) determine the effects of brand personality on brand perception, (3) examine the effects of brand association on brand perception, (4) determine the effects of brand behavior & attitude on brand perception, and (5) measure the effects of brand competence &benefit on brand perception.

In attempting to address the above objectives, the study developed the following hypotheses based on available literature.

1. H_1: Brand identity I expected to have positive significant effect on brand perception.

2. H_2: Brand personality is expected to have positive significant effect on brand perception.

3. H_3: Brand association is expected to have positive significant effect on brand perception.

4. H_4: Brand behavior &attitude is expected to have positive significant effect on brand perception.

5. H_5: Brand competence & benefit is expected to have positive significant effect on brand perception.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 The Concept of Brand and Branding

Scholars have viewed and defined brand and branding differently; all of which focusing on the same idea that brand is about a concept connecting companies and their products with consumers. According to Kotler (2000), brand is defined as a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and/or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors. Similar definition was given by Ind (1997), who confirmed that brand can be described as a feature of a plain idea of product or service, and it includes the definition or a view of the values that go deeper in the functional performance. A well known scholar on branding, Aaker (1991) noted that the brand signals the source of the product to consumers, and protects the customer, as well as, the producer from possible competitors who would attempt to provide products that appear to be identical. Thus, the brand is more than just a logo, name, symbol, trade mark, or the name attached to a product (Wijaya, 2013); it is a promise (Morel and Price, 2003), a relationship (McNally and Speak, 2004); kind of relationship that involves trust.

Once after brand is well defined, it will be simple to understand the process developing a brand, which is called branding. Branding is the process of creating signs, symbols or names at which the company can be easily known and positioned in the minds and hearts of consumers so that they will give to the company or its product a good meaning and feeling which affects their attitude and behavior in a way that they prefer to purchase and consumer the its products (Wijaya, 2011).

Brands in business organizations are not just names signaling to the outside world that such branded product or service has been tagged with the mark. It is a direct consequence of business organizations marketing strategy with predefined purpose of creating good image about the company or its product in the mind and/or heart of consumers; in which case it demands long term involvement investment from management's side (Schuiling & Kapferer, 2004). This shows that the dimensions of brand image are more in line with the scientific nature of branding, which is communication that is considered (in marketing) as one of many tools to encourage consumers to buy a product.

1. **Brand Image**

Brand image can be defined as consumer's thoughts and feelings about the brand (Roy & Banerjee, 2007). It could also be considered as a set of association which is significant to the consumers (Aaker, 1991). In marketing, brand management begins with an analysis on how a brand is currently perceived in the market, proceeds to planning how the brand should be perceived if it is to achieve its objectives and continues with ensuring that the brand is perceived as planned and secures its objectives. In an increasingly competitive marketplace, greater emphasis is being placed on brand image development as the basis for consumer discrimination because brand image is closely related to

the uniqueness of a particular product classification (Bearden & Etzel, 1982). According to Hsieh & Li (2008), strong brand image does create superior brand messages of a particular brand over the rivalry brand. Consequently, customer's behavior will be affected and determined by brand image because of the fact that consumers' perception of quality and value are significantly affected by brand image (Burmann *et al.*, 2008).

Marketing communication has a significant contribution in developing brand image. The promotional tools inform customers about the importance of the product with symbolic values and meanings relevant to the customer. Influenced by the marketing communication, consumers employ a product's brand image in deriving overall perceptions of the specified product; a product with higher brand image may be inferred by consumers as product of superior quality and value (Richardson *et al.,* 1994).

2.   Functions and Roles of Brand Image

Brand image develops and conveys the product's character in a unique manner different from its competitor's image. The brand image consists of various associations in consumers' mind - attributes, benefits and attributes. Brand attributes are the functional and mental connections with the brand that the customers have. Mostly customers infer the quality perception of the products from the level of brand image it has; such perception grow and influence their purchase behavior. Benefits are the rationale for the purchase decision. There are three types of benefits: Functional benefits - what do you do better (than others), emotional benefits - how do you make me feel better (than others), and rational benefits/support - why do I believe you (more than others) (Almutlaq, 2016).

Kahle & Kim (2006) also investigated that brand image has multiple functions, such as market entry, source for added value of products, value storage for the company; and can be a force in the distribution of products (channel power). Related to the function of market entry, brand image plays an important role in pioneering the advantage of the product, brand extension and brand alliance. Brand image also allows the company to develop a brand of products from one market to another market segment through brand extension (Aaker & Keller, 1990). Brand extension strategy has become increasingly attractive as a way to reduce the tremendous cost of new product introductions.

The next function of brand image is as a source of added value products. In this context, many marketers recognize that brand image does not only just encapsulate the consumer experience towards the product, but also can change the experience. Thus, it can be said that the image of the brand has a much more powerful role in adding to the value of the product by changing the experience and perception towards the product (Aaker & Stayman, 1992).

Another function of brand image is as a repository of value for the company. The brand name is a corporate storage of values as the investment result from advertising costs and the increase of accumulated product quality. Company can use the stored values as 'capital' to convert strategic marketing ideas into long-term competitive advantage. In addition, a brand name with strong image can also work in creating power in the distribution channel. This means that the brand does not only play an important role horizontally, in facing their competitors, but also vertically, in the acquisition of distribution channels, to have more control and bargaining power on the requirements made distributor (Aaker, 1991).

2.2 Dimensions of Brand Image

Image on a brand reflects the image of consumer-generated perspective from the promise made by brand. Brand image included consumer perception towards product advantages and personal characteristics that captured by consumers from that brand (Davis, 2000). Wajaya (2013) introduced five dimensions of brand image after summarizing results of various studies conducted on brand image. These five dimensions are discussed below

- **Brand Identity**: Brand identity is the visible elements of a brand, such as color, design, logo, sounds, smells, packaging, location, slogan and so on that identify and distinguish the brand in consumers' minds. It helps consumers easily identify and differentiate the product from other brands or products,

- **Brand Personality:** Brand personality is the distinctive character of a brand that makes up certain. personalities as human being, so that consumer audiences can easily distinguish with other brands in the same category, such as assertive character, stiff, dignified, noble, friendly, warm, compassionate, sociable, dynamic, creative, independent, and so on. As explained earlier, Aaker (1997) mentioned several dimensions of brand personality such as competence, sincerity, excitement, sophistication, and ruggedness.

  Personality and character of the brand helps marketers to understand deeper about the advantages and disadvantages of the brand, as well as how to position the brand properly. Brand personality also explains why consumers prefer certain brand over another brand when there is no physical or functional attribute differences between the two.

- **Brand Association:** Brand association is specific characteristic of the product or service that is associated with the brand by consumers. It usually arises from a unique offering of a product, recurring and consistent activities of the company. These are set of remembered qualities that help communicate information to the customer. These qualities should differentiate one brand from the competition, and therefore provide a reason to buy that brand over the other. These qualities shape customers to develop positive attitude and feeling.

- **Brand Behavior and Attitude:** Brand behavior and attitude are the behavior and attitude of a brand when communicating and interacting with consumers in order to offer benefits and values that it has. In other words, brand attitude and behavior are attitudes, manners and behaviors that brand and all its attributes indicates when communicating and interacting with consumers which in turn influences consumers' perceptions and judgments toward the brand (Wijaya, 2012). Brand attitude and behavior includes communication attitudes and behaviors, activities and attributes attached to the brand when dealing with consumer audiences (Keller, 1993), as well as employee and/ or brand owners' behaviors (Brexendorf & Kernstock, 2007).

- **Brand Competence and Benefit:** The last dimension of brand image is brand competence and benefit. Brand competence and benefit are the values, advantages and distinctive competencies offered by a brand in solving consumer problems. Values and benefits here can be functional (Keller, 1993), emotional, symbolic or social (Wijaya, 2012).

2.4. Conceptual Framework for the Study

One of the important issues in research process is the decision of variable selection which could fit best with the main research purpose and framing the

research framework. The purpose of this research is to know the effect of brand image dimensions on brand perception; which will be viewed from industries perspective taking Steely Rolling Melting Industry Private Limited Company as a case. Many researchers have considered different variables for their context; and in this research case, it is important to see from relatively new perspective which is applied by Wijaya (2013) after adopting from previous research outputs like Aaker, 1991; Aaker, 1997; Arnould *et al.*, 2005; Davis, 2000; Drezner, 2002; Hogan, 2005; Keller, 1993; Mowen & Minor, 2001; Plummer, 1995; Upshaw, 1995; Brexendorf & Kernstock, 2007). Diagrammatic expression of the research framework is depicted below.
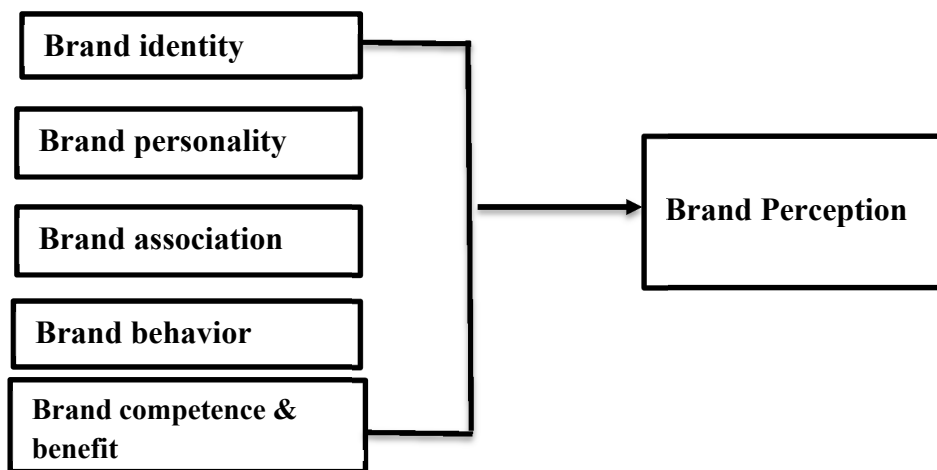
Source: Wijaya (2013)

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Approach and Design

There are three types of research approaches based on the type of data needed to answer the research questions; namely qualitative, quantitative and mixed approach. Quantitative research approach needs numerical data to answer the

research questions and/or achieve research objectives whereas qualitative research approach demands qualitative data for the same purpose. And mixed research approach requires both qualitative and quantitative data to answer the research questions and/or achieve the research objectives (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This research is aiming at determination of factors affecting brand equity; and for that matter, demands quantitative data. Therefore, it opts to use quantitative approach. Research design is to the overall research strategy used conduct research that defines a brief and rational plan to deal with research question through the collection, interpretation, analysis, and discussion of data. Based on the purpose of the research, research design can be classified in to exploratory, descriptive and explanatory (Croswell, 1998). As the main purpose of the research is to know causal relationship between the dependent and independent variables, the study applied explanatory research design.

3.2 Target Population, Sampling Technique and Sample Size

The target populations of the study are regular customers, who are loyal and listed in the customer database of Steely Rolling and Melting Industry; the total numbers of the population of the study are 8206.In conducting a study, it is not possible and sometimes expensive to gather data by considering entire population. Therefore, smaller chunks of a unit sample are chosen to represent the relevant attributes of the whole of the units (Guiltinan & Madden, 1997). Therefore, for the purpose of this study stratified random sampling is used. Parts of the population from which sample is taken include retailers, wholesalers, real estate developers and government organizations. The sample size is determined following Yemane (1967) as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)2}$$

$$n = \frac{8206}{1 + 8206(0.05)2}$$

$$n = \frac{8206}{1 + 20.515}$$
$$n = \frac{8206}{21.515}$$
$$\boldsymbol{n} = 381$$

3.3 Sources and Types of Data

The study mainly focused on primary sources, who are the abovementioned target population; from which cross-sectional data is collected regarding Rolling and Melting Industry Private Limited Company. Data is collected using self-administered questionnaire.

3.4 Method of Data Analysis

Once the data is collected and checked for completeness and accuracy, it was sorted, categorized and summarized. After coding the data entered, and analyzed using correlation analysis and regression analysis. Spearman correlation and multiple linear regressions are applied. The diagnostics tests of the multiple linear regression show that deploying multiple linear regression analysis in this research is appropriate. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) is used to conduct both the correlation and the regression; and the out puts are presented and interpreted.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research is conducted to know the effect of brand image on customers' brand preference. The research was mainly based on Wijaya (2013) who did his research based on Aaker (1991, 1997) and other researchers (Arnould *et al.*, 2005; Davis, 2000; Drezner, 2002; Hogan, 2005; Keller, 1993; Mowen& Minor, 2001; Plummer, 1995; Upshaw, 1995; Brexendorf & Kernstock, 2007) mainly to fit with the research context. As it is explained in the research methodology, the following is the correlation and regression analysis to achieve the research objectives.

4.1 Results of Correlation Analysis

The relationship between brand identity, brand personality, brand association, brand behavior and attitude, brand competence and benefit and brand perception was investigated using Spearman correlation coefficient. The results of correlation analysis shows that all the independent variables are all positively and significantly correlated with the dependent variable.

Table 1: Spearman's Correlation between Brand Image and Customer's Brand Perception

Dimensions of Brand Image	Customer's Brand Perception
Brand Identity	**0.631*****
Brand Personality	**0.532*****
Brand Association	**0.637*****
Brand Behavior and Attitude	**0.581*****
Brand Competence and Benefit	**0.510*****

***Correlation is significant at $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed)
Source: Authors' survey result (2020)

The correlation coefficient between brand identity and brand perception is 0.631 with $p < 0.05$. This shows that these two variables have significant relationship; which might probably be causal association. Similarly the correlation between brand personality and brand perception is 0.532 with p-value less than 0.05. Brand personality and brand perception, too have positive and significant relationship. This indicates that if the company work on elements of brand personality such as competence, sincerity, excitement, sophistication, and ruggedness the brand perception might probably be improved. Brand association has also a positive correlation with brand perception with 0.637 at significance level of 5%; in other words if Steely RMI works on brand association, the customer would probably develop positive

brand perception towards the company. Brand behavior and attitude is another dimension of brand image that is taken into account to explain customer's brand perception. Based on the correlation result from table 1above, brand behavior and attitude is positively and significantly correlated with customer's brand perception. The correlation coefficient between brand behavior and attitude and customers' brand perception is 0.581. This has implication that such association between these two constructs may not be random; and needs attention of the management.

The other factor that is included as dimension of brand image is brand competence and benefit; it has positive and significant relationship with brand perception having correlation coefficient of 0.510. Brand competence and benefit is one the important tools to create good perception towards the brand. Brand competence and benefit are the values, advantages and distinctive competencies offered by a brand in solving consumer problems, which enable consumers to get benefit because their needs, desires, dreams and obsessions manifested by what it has to offer. It is theoretically supported that the above discussed variables have significant association; however, to make sure whether such significant association is actually not random and it has a causal relationship among the dependent and independent variables, it is important to conduct multiple linear regression analysis.

4.2 Results of Regression Analysis

The multiple linear regression analysis was conducted following significant relationship between the dependent and independent variables to make sure if these such association between the variables imply causation or not. Multiple linear regression is an extension of simple linear regression which will be applicable when there are more than one independent variables to investigate the influence of independent variables on the dependent variable and identify

the relative significant influence of the independent variable (brand identity, brand personality, brand association, brand behavior and attitude, brand competence and benefit) to the dependent variable, brand perception.

Table 2: The Impact of Brand Image on Customer's Brand Perception

Independent Variables	Unstand. Coeff.		Stand. Coeff.	t	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta		Tolerance	VIF
Constant	.369	.061		6.0***		
Brand Identity	.174	.064	.173	2.71***	0.26	3.83
Brand Personality	.043	.061	.045	0.71***	0.26	3.83
Brand Association	.190	.063	.220	3.01***	0.20	5.02
Brand Behavior & Attitude	.346	.056	.373	6.24***	0.30	3.35
Brand Competence and Benefit	.059	.041	.069	1.44***	0.46	2.19

***Significant at $p<0.01$
Source: Authors' survey result (2020)

The above table shows the Beta Coefficients that present the contributions of each variables to the model. The results of regression analysis of each predictor show the individual effect of brand image dimensions on brand perception given the effect of other variables constant. The table shows that all of the independent variables have positive and significant effect on the dependent variable. However, the variable *Brand Behavior and Attitude* has highest contribution to predict the brand perception of customers; which implies that the company need to give highest attention; on the other hand *Brand personality* has the lease influence on brand perception but still significant and needs the

company's attention in its action to improve the customers' brand perception. The detail of the regression output will be discussed along with the discussion of hypotheses below. The hypotheses have been proposed to see if the independent variable have meaningful causal relationship with the dependent variables; and now each of the hypotheses are tested based on the regression outputs and summary of which is depicted in the following table.

H_1: Brand identity has a positive effect on brand perception.

As show in table 2, the beta coefficient of brand identity indicate that brand identity on the organization has a positive influence on brand perception having a beta value of ($\beta=0.174$) this shows that there is a positive and significant ($p<0.05$) effect on customer loyalty with 95% confidence interval.

H_2: Brand personality has a positive effect on brand perception.

Based on regression analysis result in the above table, brand personality has significant influence on brand perception with beta coefficient value of 0.043. Of course the variable is significant at 5% significance level.

H_3: Brand association has a positive effect on brand perception.

The result of multiple regression analysis in the above table indicates that brand association has a positive and significant influence on brand perception the value of beta is ($\beta=0.190$, p, 0.05) with 95% confidence level. This shows that there is a significance influence of brand association on brand perception that needs management's attention. Therefore, the above proposed hypothesis is accepted.

H_4: *Brand behavior &attitude has a positive effect on brand perception.*

The output of the regression analysis depicts that behavior and attitude has a positive and significant influence on brand perception ($\beta=0.346$, $p<0.05$) with 95% confidence interval this shows there is a significance influence of brand behavior and attitude on brand perception. Therefore, the above proposed hypothesis is accepted.

H_5: *Brand competence & benefit has a positive effect on brand perception.*

Finally the regression output in the above table shows brand competence and benefit has a significant influence on brand perception the value of beta is ($\beta=0.059$, $p<0.05$). This shows that there is a positive and significance influence of brand competence and benefit on brand perception with 95% confidence interval. Consequently, the above proposed hypothesis is accepted. Generally the output of regression analysis indicate that brand behavior and attitude was the most important factor to have positive and significant effect on brand perception followed by brand association, brand identity, brand competence and benefit and brand personality respectively.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has explored the extent to which the brand image dimensions have effects on building brand perception in Steely Rolling and Melting Industry Private Limited Company. The study found that brand identity, brand personality, brand association, brand behavior and attitude, brand competence and benefit affect brand perception. From the correlation analysis, it can be concluded that brand identity, brand personality, brand association, brand behavior and attitude, brand competence and benefit have significant and positive relationship with brand perception. Similarly, the result of multiple

linear regression analysis shows that all the independent variables (which include brand identity, brand personality, brand association, brand behavior and attitude, brand competence and benefit) have significant and positive impact on the dependent variable, brand perception. Research hypotheses were hypothesized to examine if each of the independent variables have impact on the dependent variable. They are developed to test them using the p-values and/or t-test that could be easily checked from the output of multiple linear regression. Therefore, all hypotheses are accepted showing that they have positive and significant impact on the dependent variable.

This explanatory research was aiming at knowing the factors affecting brand perception and to measuring the extent of influence of the independent variables affecting the dependent variable. As discussed in the analysis part, the independent variables have significant impact on brand perception. Therefore, the researcher extends his recommendation to Rolling and Melting Industry Private Limited Company to work on such significant factors to sustain the positive brand perception. If it doesn't work hard on such independent variables, the brand perception might go in a way that causes adverse effect.

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