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**A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS UPON INFLUENCE
OF BRAND PERSONALITY ON BRAND
ATTITUDE, COMMITMENT, LOYALTY AND
EQUITY**

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A Comparative Analysis upon Influence of Brand Personality on Brand Attitude, Commitment, Loyalty and Equity

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Abstract – The research proposes to test the impact of brand personality on brand attitude and brand commitment in two product categories. For both categories, brand personality has a direct and large impact on attitude towards the brand. It has a moderate impact on brand commitment for one product category, which is probably the most suited for self-expression purposes. A test of the research model via SEM shows that attitude towards the brand is a mediator between brand personality and brand commitment. Consumer involvement towards the product category moderates relationships between brand personality and brand commitment.

Our findings show that the four dimensions of brand personality, including sincerity, competence, excitement, and sophistication, have positive impacts on consumer satisfaction, which further increases consumers' loyalty toward brands.

We provide new insight on how consumers' brand loyalty develops from the perspective of brand personality. This research assesses the relative impact of brand personality dimensions and perceived marketing actions on brand equity formation. The relative impact of these two elements may vary by consumer segment, so the authors apply a finite mixture–partial least squares procedure to analyse the data.

INTRODUCTION

Recent research has been directed at better understanding both the nature of brand-consumer relationships and the influence these relationships could have on consumer behavior. The concept of brand personality revived by Aaker in 1997 is appealing in that it might influence the strength of brand-consumer relationships and explain consumer buying behavior. Research on brand personality is recent and additional work is yet needed in terms of concept definition and measurement, particularly within different settings or cultures. However, one of the most interesting field of investigation is certainly the assessment and better understanding of the impact of brand personality on key concepts such as attitude towards the brand, brand commitment, brand preference, brand choice or brand loyalty. If brand personality does influence, say, brand loyalty, the concept becomes then very important in terms of brand management and brand performance. From a scientific standpoint, we would need to better understand and model the mechanism through which

brand personality might influence brand loyalty. This article is a contribution to that field of research. We apply a brand personality scale to two product categories and to four well-known international brands and study the impact of brand personality on two key consumer behavior constructs, namely attitude and commitment towards the brand.

Brand personality is basically a metaphor stemming from the concept of human personality and early introduced in marketing by practitioners from the advertising field. Generally, human personality traits are defined as "tendencies to show consistent patterns of thoughts, feelings and actions" (Costa and McCrae, 1998) and are understood as psychological cues that determine human action and experiences. Can brands be described in terms of a set of traits or in terms of a limited and stable set of generic terms such as extraversion or openness to new experiences as it is done for human beings? Animism theory considers that humans need to anthropomorphize objects in order to facilitate their interaction with the world. Also, marketing activities of brands such as communications can create

brand/consumer relationships, where brands are perceived, analyzed and considered by consumers as developing behaviors. Thus, consumers may assign personalities to brands and may think of brands as possessing human personality traits (Caprara et al., 2001). Plummer (1984) for example, proposes that a brand might be described on three main dimensions: physical attributes, functional characteristics or benefits associated to consumption and personality traits associated to the brand. The concept of brand personality is considered important as it might help differentiating brands and increase the personal meaning of the brand for the consumer. The existence of brand personality traits should help consumers express their self-concept (Ferrandi and Valette-Florence, 2002) and to experiment symbolic benefits from their possession or consumption. Theories on self-reinforcement (and on congruence between self-image and brand image) postulate that consumer behavior is determined by the interaction between the personality of the consumer and the perceptions of the products which he or she prefers, purchases or rejects. It is also along these lines that the concept of brand personality has emerged. Individuals tend to behave in accordance with the image they have from themselves or wish to convey to others. Brands can be thought as a means to communicate these images. Contrary to product attributes which are mainly functional, brand personality tends to have a symbolic function and one of self-expression (Keller, 1993; Phau and Lau, 2001). This connection between brands and personal identity has been conceptualized as a brand-consumer relationship.

In the marketing literature, research has shown that consumers currently purchase products not only for their functions, but also for their symbolizations (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Consumers may prefer some brands or products that match with their own personality. Many marketing activities are thus employed to attract consumers through establishing certain brand personality. In addition, brand personality is also found to strengthen consumers' communication with brands and further improve brand loyalty and brand equality (Govers & Schoormans, 2005). The significance of brand personality has been grabbing many researchers' attention in the marketing literature (Grohmann, 2009; Wentzel, 2009). In the context of microblogging sites, companies have greater opportunities to attract and communication with consumers than ever before. It will be highly possible for companies to leverage the microblogging platform and demonstrate their personalities to consumers.

In this study, we believe that brand personality may be an important factor in understanding how consumers develop their brand loyalty when they follow brand microblogs. Brand personality has been shown to play an important role in the process of a brand's success. It helps consumers to establish a strong connection with the brand. Brand personality should be consistent and can last for a long time. Besides, it should also

differ from other brands and make consumers satisfied (Kumar, Luthra, & Datta, 2006).

BRAND PERSONALITY

Brand personality has been a popular research topic in many conceptual and empirical studies. It is a significant brand component and plays an important role in brand management. Three areas of research can be identified in prior research on brand personality. First, research focuses on the identification and empirical validation of various dimensions of brand personality. Second, some researchers examine brand personality's antecedents, which include brand experience, employee behavior (Wentzel, 2009), and the spokesperson (Grohmann, 2009). Finally, some studies focus on the impacts of brand personality. For instance, research showed that brand personality may positively affect brand identification, brand relationship quality, brand affect, brand trust (Sung & Kim, 2010), satisfaction, and brand loyalty. Brand personality is also found to increase consumers' self-meaning and provide emotional aspects of brands.

Brand personality enables companies to create unique and favorable impressions in consumers' mind and then establish and enhance brand equity. Brand personality may be an important concern for both marketers and consumers. In the viewpoint of marketers, the personality of a brand is an essential component of the image and equity of the brand and in consumers' minds, and is relevant to brand value. If brand personality is constant, robust, distinctive, and desirable, it is more likely to establish close relationships between companies and consumers. Thus, marketers may consider brand personality as an effective way of distinguishing from their competitors and enhance the effectiveness of marketing (Sung & Kim, 2010). From consumers' perspective, brand personality presents consumers' self-expression and symbolic characteristics. Consumers prefer to express their personalities using brands. Escalas and Bettman (2003) pointed out that consumers may apply brands to meet their demands and establish their self-brand connections. The connections become a key role in building brand equity and keeping long-term relationships between consumers and brands. They also suggested that consumers attach importance to their association with brands as they can define and create their self-concept, as well as showing themselves to others in social occasions. Well-established brand personality can help consumers strengthen their brand emotional ties, enhance preference, trust, and loyalty.

EFFECTS OF BRAND PERSONALITY

Brand personality, the set of human characteristics associated with a brand, has become a central concept within the marketing literature. Especially since 1997, when Jennifer Aaker published her

Brand Personality article, the literature about the topic has been growing. Aaker (1997) has been the standard reference in this stream of research. A quick search on papers citing Aakers (1997) work or on the key word 'brand personality' in standard literature databases as The Institute for Scientific Information (ISI), reveals a large amount of hits. However, Brand Personality is an old construct. Marketing practitioners has used the construct for several decades. For instance, former U.S. president Ronald Reagan was a celebrity endorser for different products and brands during his acting days. The rationale behind this strategy is that a famous person can draw attention to a brand and shape the perceptions of the brand based on the knowledge consumers have about the famous person.

Brand Personality is an important antecedent in formation of brand attitude; see. But the effect of brand personality on other variables as brand loyalty, new product evaluation, relationship strength indicators, evaluation of brand extensions and brand preference (Grimm 2005) has also been investigated. The results indicate that brand personality often has strong effects on brand attitude, brand preference, brand loyalty, and brand relationship strength.

BRAND PERSONALITY AND BRAND EQUITY

Global brand equity is integral to the value added by a brand name to a product; to measure it, prior research uses various methods such as price premiums, conjoint analyses of brand names, collections of consumer-based perceptions, and purchase behaviours. Yoo and Donhu (2001) instead use a multidimensional consumer brand equity scale and successfully identify three significant dimensions: loyalty, perceived quality, and brand association/attention. Their proposed method has received confirmation from Washburn and Plank (2002). However, Guizani, Triguero instead propose a scale with four distinct dimensions: brand loyalty, brand knowledge, social value, and perceived quality. This scale takes into account the brand's social value, which refers to the brand's ability to gather a group of consumers around it as a sort of "community".

Consumer perceptions of marketing actions reflect traditional marketing tools, which implies it might be interesting to consider the novel effect of brand personality dimensions on the consumer and his or her resulting perceptions of brand equity. Prior literature provides some examples of brand personality dimensions that can be integrated into the brand judgment process, with subsequent effects on consumer behaviour and attitudes toward a given brand. Brand personality dimensions therefore should be relevant determinants of a brand's added value and influence brand preferences, consumer-brand relationships, brand attachment, and brand trust.

Thus, our literature review supports the notion that to measure and manage brand equity effectively, brand managers and researchers must consider the relative importance of brand personality versus traditional marketing mix tools.

ATTITUDE TOWARD THE BRAND

Before brand attitude is discussed, the general definition of an attitude is important. Petty (2007) defines an attitude as "a global evaluation of a person, object, or issue indicating the extent to which it is liked or disliked". Petty (2007) describes in his article that attitudes and behavior can change through a peripheral route or a central route. According to the elaboration likelihood model, consumers of whom the motivation or ability to think is low will use the peripheral route. Consumers who are highly motivated, or are able to process the whole message, follow the central route. For instance, consumers watching commercials on television are often not 100% motivated to actively process information of commercials. Therefore, commercials often use the peripheral route to affect the attitude and behavior of consumers. Thus, the elaboration likelihood model shows that an attitude can be affected through two routes. However, the elaboration likelihood model explains that attitude change through the peripheral route is temporary (not enduring) and not a predictor of behavior whereas the central route can create an enduring change in attitude and can predict behavior.

The elaboration likelihood model shows through which ways an attitude could be changed. However, the theory does not make a distinction in different strengths of attitudes.

Pomerantz, Chaiken and Tordesillas (1995) summarize in their article that the amount of knowledge a person holds, the importance of the issue and the extremity of an attitude influences the way an attitude could be changed and could result in resistance against social influence. Kokkinaki and Lunt (1999) show with their findings that "high involvement with an advertising message enhances the accessibility of the resulting brand attitudes".

Pomerantz et al. (1995) define in their article strong attitudes as "those that lead to selective cognitive processing and that are resistant to change, persistent over time, and predictive of behavior". In short, attitudes in general are not stable and can be changed through conscious and unconscious conditions. However, the strength of an attitude plays a role in attitude change and could result into resistance against the change.

CONSUMER SATISFACTION AND BRAND LOYALTY

Consumer satisfaction has been regarded as an important marketing concept to meet consumers' requirements and desires. Howard and Sheth defined consumer satisfaction as "the buyer's cognitive state of being adequately or inadequately rewarded for the sacrifices he has undergone". It concentrated on the result of sacrifices in consumers' consumption experience. Oliver referred to satisfaction as "the summary psychological state resulting when the emotion surrounding disconfirmed expectations is coupled with the customer's prior feelings about the consumption experience". When consumers purchase a product or service, they will become satisfied if they verify what they purchased is in accordance with or exceeds their pre-purchase expectations. Research has shown that satisfied consumers are likely to perform post-purchase behavior. Online consumer relationships are easier to establish if consumers can develop a high level of satisfaction. Consumer satisfaction plays a significant role at the economy-wide level (Yeung, Ramasamy, Chen, & Paliwoda, 2013). It also has a positive impact on a firm's profitability and value in the hospitality and tourism industry. In the existing literature, there are two ways to measure consumer satisfaction. One is using a single item, and the other is using multiple items. Compared with a single item scale, the multiple-item scales can enable us to obtain a deep understanding of consumer satisfaction in consumers' viewpoint. Multiple items can also induce empirically stable reliability of the scales.

To understand brand loyalty, many existing studies have shed light on its definitions and measures, as well as how it connects with enduring relationships of sellers and consumers. In Jacoby and Chestnut's (1978) research, they defined brand loyalty on the basis of consumers' intention, attitude, and belief. Kotler, Armstrong, and Frank (1989) referred to brand loyalty as consumers' feeling or emotional attachment toward certain brands. Loyal consumers are more likely to purchase products of the brand in the future. In Davidow and Uttal's (1989) study, they posited that sellers can receive three aspects of benefits from loyal consumers. First, the marketing costs of maintaining existing consumers are much lower than attracting new ones. Second, this cost reduction can further decrease costs in transaction and communication. Third, compared to non-loyal or moderately loyal consumers, highly loyal consumers tend to purchase much more. Loyalty has been identified as an important factor for companies' success in relationship marketing.

CONCLUSION

This research uses a brand personality measurement scale. A direction for future research is to test existing brand personality scales in different environments and to verify whether the personality facets and traits

would apply to any brands, product categories, consumer types, usage occasions and cultures. Universality of brand personality scales is certainly a key issue and we strongly recommend further work in this direction. The effects of brand personality are an important area for further research. We have tested here the impact of brand personality measurements on brand attitude and brand commitment.

This paper explores the relationships among brand personality, satisfaction, and brand loyalty in companies' brand microblogs. To explicate the effect of brand personality. Our findings show that all four dimensions of brand personality (i.e., sincerity, competence, excitement, and sophistication) have positive impacts on consumer satisfaction. It suggests that if consumers perceive a brand with sincere, competent, exciting, and sophisticated personality characteristics, then they will be more likely to be satisfied. In addition, the dimension of sincerity is found to have the largest impact on consumer satisfaction than any other three dimensions.

Our research objective has been to test for and compare the effects of brand personality and marketing elements on brand equity. At the aggregate level, we find that brand personality dimensions, especially those with a positive valence, influence brand equity more than do traditional marketing communication elements. This previously unexplored conceptualization of brand equity becomes clearer when we split the consumer groups into different segments.

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