Theoretical Construct of Brand and Consumer’s Personality Congruence: A Study

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Abstract:

Brand personality, which is defined as the personality traits associated with the brands, is one of the central drivers of buyer’s motivation to purchase a particular brand. According to several studies, Brand Personality is one of the important components of the symbolic benefits offered by a brand. Through the use of the personality attributes of a brand, consumers try to express their personality. On the other hand, marketers also try to create a specific and desired personality for their brands, so that it can match with the personality of the consumers and thereby enhance the chance to trigger-off the purchase decision. For designing the desired brand personality, marketers are required to know the specific personality traits applicable for the brands. Moreover, knowledge related to the brand personality constructing components and their relative importance in creating the personality of the specific brand is also essential. Several studies are directed towards the measurement of brand personality, its dimensions and also towards the measurement of personality congruence. But none of the studies are directed to design the complete theoretical base of brand and consumer’s personality congruence. The following study aims to design a model of theoretical construct of brand and consumer’s personality congruence, which would be one of the corner stone of the studies in this field.

Key Words:

Brand Personality; Consumer’s Personality; Personality Congruence; Modeling Personality Congruence;

Introduction:

“Brand Personality”, which is defined as the personality traits associated with brand (Sentis and Markus, 1986), helps marketers create a differential positioning of a brand in a mature and highly populated market. The personality attributes associated with a brand stimulate consumers’ decision related to brand selection. Consumers often try to express their personality, or certain attributes of their personality through the use of brands. Thus selection of a brand often depends on consumer’s perception about the personality of the brand and consumer’s desire to express that personality attribute/s. The harmony of this perception and desire creates the personality congruence between brand and its consumers. From the marketing point of view, personality congruence is of huge importance and marketers are always striving to design and communicate such personality attributes which matches the personality of the target consumers. Research works in the field of brand personality have identified the constructs of brand personality, and also structured the inventory of brand personality under certain dimensions. For constructing the appropriate brand personality attributes, knowledge related to the constructing components of brand personality is also necessary. A deep understanding related to the consumers’ personality is also an important requirement of the marketers, without which the design of marketing communication will be futile. Moreover, a clear theoretical model of brand and consumer’s personality congruence is also an important aspect of study. But unfortunately, this avenue remains untouched and no such theoretical model is designed so far. The following study is aimed to bridge this research gap. Adhering to the theoretical studies related to the construction of brand and consumer’s personality, the following work designs a theoretical model of brand and consumer’s personality congruence model. This model is designed to demonstrate how
both brand and consumer’s personality is created, and also illustrates the process of the personality congruence.

Literature Review:

The term “Brand Personality” was coined by advertisers and practitioners. It was described as a metaphor and its origin was marked in the human personality (Plummer, 1985). The importance of the term became enriched gradually for its ability to explain the interrelationships between the symbolic content of a brand and the personality of the users. Proponents of self concept theory claim that individuals perceive products in terms of symbolic meaning to themselves and to others (Hall and Gardner, 1957). Thus the purchase and consumption of a product serves as a symbolic device to manifest one’s own self. Although Lloyd Warner (1959) defined symbols as “things which stands for or express something else”, Levy (1959) claims that consumers are able to gauge and translate the symbolic meaning of products and brands. Besides the functional attributes, products have their personal and social meaning. Once the consumer is satisfied with the symbolic content of the product, purchase decision takes place (Levy, 1959). To serve as a device of symbolic communication, a product primarily requires achieving social recognition. Moreover, the symbolic meaning associated with the product must be clearly established and understood by the social segment (Grubb and Grathwohl, 1967). As the symbolic attributes of brands help consumers to manifest their personalities in a symbolic way, its marketing implication becomes significant. It acts as a prolific agent for brand positioning as brands are associated with communication imagery (Charnatony, 2001).

The self-consistency perspective predicts consumers’ consistency towards the motivation to purchase a product which is congruent with their self image belief. Besides the theoretical and conceptual framework, a large number of research work also concentrated to select and measure the brand personality attributes. To measure the product image, some researchers used semantic differential type of methodology, (Birdwell, 1968; Munson and Spivey 1981; Ross 1971; Samli and Sirgy 1981; Sirgy and Danes 1982). Researchers tried to conceptualize and measure the extent to which a product is related to the consumers’ self-concepts (actual self-concept, ideal self-concept and so on) by using a product anchored Q-methodology (Blech and Landon 1977; Greeno, Sommers, and Kernan 1973; Landon 1974; Martin 1973; Sommers 1964). Some other studies (Golden, Allison and Clee, 1979 and Allison, Golden, Muller. and Coogan, 1980) tried to measure masculinity, femininity, and psychological androgyny in product perceptions. They found that respondents can perceive and segregate masculine and feminine product images as two separate constructs. Several empirical researches were also directed towards measuring the brand personality and also to measure the congruence between consumer and brand personality. Although Evans (1959) unsuccessfully tried to classify Ford and Chevrolet owners by difference in personality variables, Tucker and Painter (1961) showed some correlation of personality variables with product usage. Significant relationships between the self concept and several automobile makes were obtained by Birdwell (1968). Congruence between self concept and brand of beer was found by Grubb (1965). The process of developing a scale for measuring self, person and product constructs by using semantic differential scale, was designed by Malhotra (1981). Researchers readily used human personality traits’ inventory to explain the personality attributes of the brands. But the methodology of selecting the personality traits was not explained. Categorization of the huge number of personality traits was also required. Aaker (1997) made a remarkable contribution in this field. As the Big Five personality traits categorize the human personality traits, Aaker also constructed the brand personality dimensions. Her empirical study brought forth forty two brand personality traits and five brand personality dimensions: Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, and Ruggedness.
Aaker’s work gained the popularity in the field marketing and academic studies. Researchers used Aaker’s framework as an instrument to study its validity across product categories (Siguaw, Mattila, and Austin 1999; Wysong 2000; Villegas and Burns 2000; Kim 2000) and across different countries and cultures (Ferrandi, 2000, Aaker 2001, Hieronimus 2003, Supphellen & Gronhaug 2003, Rojas-Me’ndez 2004, Sung & Tinkham 2005, Chu & Sung 2011, Rojas-Me’ndez 2013). Most of the studies found relevant results that supports Aaker’s Brand Personality framework with some variation. Maggie Geuens, Bert Weijters, Kristof De Wulf (2009) developed a new brand personality measure. The new scale consists of twelve items and five factors (Activity, Responsibility, Aggressiveness, Simplicity, and Emotionality). By means of five studies, they proved that the dimensions are valid and reliable. The scale, they prepared, is claimed to be useful for studies on individual brand level, within a specific product category, across multiple brands, across different competitors, and also for cross cultural studies.

Perception of brand personality traits are said to be formed and influenced by direct and indirect contacts between the brand and the consumer (Plummer, 1985). Advocate of the theory of direct association, McCracken (1989) claimed that personality traits of the people associated with the brand (such as brand’s user, company employees, celebrity endorsers and so on) get directly transferred to the brands, to form the brand personality. Moreover Levy (1959) claimed that demographic characteristics such as gender, age, class are also transferred directly to form the personality attributes of a brand. Proponents of indirect association (Batra, Lehmann, and Singh, 1993) postulates that Indirect association between brand and personality traits takes place by means of product related attributes, product-category association, brand name, symbol or logo, advertising style, price and distribution channel and so on.

Theories related to the formation of consumer personality traits owe their genesis to the psychology literature. Marketers identified several factors which have impact on the making consumers’ personality. Researchers have found the relationship between satisfaction and customer behavior (repurchase intention and retention) is moderated by demographic characteristics (Mittal and Kamakura, 2001). According to Zeithaml, (1985) income is another important characteristics and it is assumed to have a strong impact on choice decisions. Recent study of Awad (2011) about the impact of age, income, and education of consumers, has found these variables helpful in defining the consumer characteristics. According to Park (1986), perceptions of human personality traits are inferred on the basis of an individual's behaviour, physical characteristics, attitudes and beliefs, and demographic characteristics. Thus it is evident from the studies that demographic and psychographic traits have significant impact on creating the consumers’ personality.

Theoretical studies in the field of brand personality have highlighted the importance of brand and consumers’ personality congruence. Attempts have been made to find out, which self acts as a pivotal role in a particular purchase decision. In this context Schenk and Holman (1980) specified that an individual’s choice of expressing a particular self is driven by the characteristic of a specific social situation. The choice of a brand is also dependent on the congruence between the personality attributes of the brand and the consumers. In this context the work of Sirgy (1981a, 1982a, 1982b) related to the self-image, product image congruence is worth mentioning. He treated product image as stimuli to activate the “self-schema involving the self-images”. The four congruity theories of his proposition were the result of the interaction between the self-image belief and product-image perception. Using the self-esteem and the self-consistency perspective, Sirgy tried to explain the purchasing behavior of the consumers. Self-esteem perspective explains consumers’ motivation towards buying a product to maintain their positive self-image.
Although much is discussed about the construction of brand personality, empirical validation of the constructing components were not done until Ghosh (2016) modeled brand personality with the help of direct and indirect association attributes theory. His work related to modeling brand personality of apparel brands of India, has made the empirical justification of the earlier theories given by different researchers. But the theoretical construct in relation to the making of brand and consumer’s personality and their congruence is still a grey area. The following study aims to attain the following research objectives:

**Research Objectives:**

- To create a model of Brand and Consumer’s personality
- To provide the theoretical construct of Brand and Consumer’s personality Congruence

**Theoretical Construct of Brand Personality**

The proposed theoretical construct delineates the framework of the study in the field of brand and consumer’s personality congruence. The model primarily illustrates the formation of brand and consumer’s personality and shows the personality congruence between brand and its consumers.

As discussed by McCracken, (1989), the components of direct association are:

- a. Brand’s user image
- b. Image of the Company employees, and

These images are said to be directly transferred to the personality of the brands. They form the market related relevant attributes which in turn creates brand personality.

On the other hand, On the other hand, Batra, Lehmann, and Singh, (1993) proposed the Indirect Association theory of brand personality formation. According to this theory, the personality traits associated with the brand, get indirectly transferred to the brand from different sources. They have identified three sources of indirect association, and the sources are:

- a. Product related attributes
- b. Product-category association
- c. Brand name, symbol or logo, advertising style, price and distribution channel and so on.

While Product related attributes addresses the functional benefits offered by the basic product, Product category association deals with the relative position of the brand among the other competing brands and the impact of brand name, symbol or logo, advertising style, price and distribution channel and so on is related to the attractiveness and communication of the brand. According to Batra, Lehmann and Singh (1993), the basic product category of a brand, the relative position of a brand and the impact of attractiveness and communication, indirectly create the personality of a brand.
The Model of Brand Personality:

- Brand’s user image
- Image of the Company employees
- Image of Celebrity endorsers

Product related attributes
- Product-category association
- Brand Name, Symbol or Logo

Direct Association

Indirect Association

MARKET RELATED RELEVANT ATTRIBUTE

BRAND PERSONALITY

Figure 1: Graphical Model of Formation of Brand Personality

Theoretical Construct of Consumer’s Personality:

On the other hand the four factors, (demographic, psychographic, geographic and behavioural) create the socio-psycho-behavioural factors, which is liable in creating the consumer’s personality.

Demographic Factors

Socio-Psycho-Economic Factors

Other Factors

Consumers’ Personality

Figure 2: Graphical Model of Formation of Consumer’s Personality

Theoretical Construct of Brand and Consumer’s Personality Congruence:

According to the theoretical studies, brand and consumer’s personality congruence is a function of their interaction. When consumers believe that the brand successfully manifests her/his personality, the personality congruence takes place. The model also shows the diagrammatic presentation of personality congruence between brands and its consumers. The intensity of this interrelationship between these two determines the amount of congruence present between the brand and the consumer. Following this theoretical construct, a model of brand and consumer’s personality congruence is prepared:
Conclusion and Further Research Avenues:

The following work is an attempt to model the brand personality, consumer’s personality, and also the personality congruence under the light of the previous theoretical studies. The work is a pioneer work to model both brand and consumer personality and the congruence between them. The model designed in this work, will clear the theoretical concept in the mind of both the researchers and marketing practitioners and will be useful for creating more theoretical and empirical research avenues. Future researches may be conducted in illustration of the model of congruence and factors could be added as building blocks for the construction of brand and consumer’s personality. Moreover, further attempts could also be directed to justify this model empirically and by measuring the congruence between brand and its consumer’s personality congruence.
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