

Its popularity is partly explained by the conceptual basis stating that consumers will prefer a brand that conveys personality traits that reflects his/her real self, ideal self or specific aspects of self (Aaker, 1997). Most research has studied brand personality from a consumer standpoint by measuring the perception of consumers. This research stands out from others as it is interested by the supply side. How do managers perceive the brand personality of the brands they are promoting? In other words, what personality traits are highlighted by those who contribute to convey images of the brand? Which are the least popular? Why? To address these issues, advertising and public relations managers of the 150 most admired companies by Quebecers (Canada) were surveyed. This population of firms, for which consumers have a very positive attitude, comes from a representative random survey of 500 adult respondents (margin of error of 4.9%) and published in a business magazine. Eighty managers (response rate 53.3%) participated in our study. The quantitative results show that out of the 42 personality traits (Aaker, 1997), managers rely generally on those traits: honesty, hard working, successful, reliable, secure, intelligent, leadership, sincere, friendly, true, real and confident. Among the least popular, we find: cowboy, rudeness and sentimental. An interesting result is that the degree of popularity of personality traits is mostly not statistically explained either by the socio-demographic characteristics of managers, nor the origin (national or international) of the brand for which the managers work. Using the same factorial structure found by Aaker (1997), (i.e. the Big Five), the "competence", "sincerity" and "excitement" dimensions are judged the most important. This result is consistent with those found in different international contexts with consumers.

Twenty-two in-depth interviews were subsequently conducted with these managers to better understand their reasoning. The main results seem to confirm the idea that managers want to convey the traits that are most valued by their customers on the local market.

References available on request

BRAND PERSONALITY AND CONSUMER-BASED BRAND EQUITY: A STUDY AMONG POLISH CONSUMERS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the research reported here was to examine thoroughly the relationship between brand personality and brand equity as perceived by consumers. 520 persons aged between 16 and 79 took part in the study. 240 brands belonging to 48 categories were selected for the study on the basis of a survey concerning their recognition. Canonical correlation analysis indicated a connection between the dimensions of brand personality and brand equity. The core of this connection is the consumer-perceived brand quality. Product category turned out to be a moderator of the relationship between brand equity and brand personality.

INTRODUCTION

Brand personality and consumer-based brand equity are among those theoretical constructs that have attracted special interest in the last two decades. Existing research on brand personality has the serious drawback of focusing on the descriptive value of the concept while neglecting its explanatory and predictive aspects – the indispensable assets of a mature theoretical concept in applied sciences. The aim of the study reported in the present article was to verify the relationship between personality traits attributed to brands and consumer-perceived brand value.

BRAND PERSONALITY

Despite the lack of a coherent theoretical basis guiding their implementation in quality research, personification techniques have long been employed in studying symbolic brand image. This state of affairs impeded the development of quantitative

brand personality research methods until mid 1990s. The key stimulus that was instrumental in raising the interest in the concept of brand personality to a qualitatively new level was Aaker's (1997) proposal of operationalizing brand personality, drawing on the psychological trait theory. It led to a very rapid increase in the amount of research that usually aimed at verifying the universality of brand perception dimensions in different countries. In connection with their studies, some researchers (e.g. Davies, Chun, Da Silva, Roper, 2001) sought to strengthen the theoretical foundations of the concept of brand personality. Others (Azoulay, Kapferer, 2003; Austin, Sigauw, 2003), criticizing Aaker's (1997) way of operationalizing brand personality, indicated the directions for improving it.

Taking into consideration the criticism of existing research on brand personality, Gorbaniuk (2009) proposed a new conceptualization and operationalization of the concept. Previous marketing-based conceptions expanded the notion of brand personality much beyond the scope of the psychological concept of personality. In extreme views, the notion was understood as comprising all non-functional aspects of brand image (Plummer, 1984) or, at best, the personal traits associated with the brand (Aaker, 1997). According to Azoulay and Kapferer's postulate (2003), brand personality should comprise traits strictly related to human personality and at the same time applicable and essential in the perception of brands by consumers. In the study carried out (Gorbaniuk, 2009), applying and adapting the lexical approach in the psychological trait theory for the purposes of research on symbolic brand image allowed to implement this postulate fully and successfully. Brand personality was defined as the body of personality descriptors associated with the brand. Brand personality traits are linguistic categories, used in order to give meaning to observed behaviors attributed to brands in terms of constant predispositions that allow to describe, explain, and predict the performance of products marked with specified brand names and thus play a role analogical to explaining and predicting human behavior.

The personification technique allows the consumer to communicate the meaning of a brand in familiar terms, evolutionarily formed through social interactions – that is, in terms of human traits. In order to identify the natural lexicon of brand associations, 300 interviews were conducted with consumers aged 15 to 80. 300 brands from 50 product categories were considered as stimuli in the study (Gorbaniuk, 2009). The classification of over 20 000 personifying associations, based on Angleitner, Ostendorf, and John's (1990) lexical taxonomy, allowed to isolate 111 adjectival personality descriptors characterized by highest retrievability from the consumers' memory in the process of thinking about brands. Based on the quantitative study of the perception of 280 brands from 42 product categories, carried out on a sample of 1000 consumers, a four-dimensional structure of personality traits attributed to brands was isolated, the four dimensions being: Competence, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Egoism. The results of the study closely correspond to those of Bosnjak, Bochmann, and Hufschmidt's research (2007).

Numerous studies indicate that the concept of brand personality is a valuable construct for the description and differentiation of brands. The condition and the measure of the concept's theoretical maturity and practical usefulness is the capability it affords of explaining and predicting consumer behaviors based on the knowledge of the variance in personality trait profiles attributed to brands. With that in view, it was resolved to test the connections between the concept of brand personality and the components of consumer-based brand equity.

CONSUMER-BASED BRAND EQUITY

Brand equity is perceived as a platform on which it is possible to build competitive advantage on the market of goods and services (Farquar, 1989). Two basic approaches to the conceptualization and operationalization of brand equity may currently be distinguished: (1) the financial approach and (2) the consumer/customer-based approach. The financial approach compares the market performance of a given brand to that of competitive brands and aims at estimating brand value (Simon, Sullivan, 1993). The consumer/customer-based approach, by contrast, seeks to understand the nature of consumer decisions and identify the sources of brand-added value in order to increase the effectiveness of marketing activities. These approaches are complementary rather than competitive.

There is agreement that brand equity is a multidimensional construct (Aaker, 1991; Srivastawa, Shocker, 1991; Keller, 1993). Of the components of consumer-based brand equity that have stood the test of time and remain the most frequent subjects of study, four stand out, proposed by Aaker (1991, 1996): brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand image. In exploratory as well as confirmatory factor analysis, brand awareness, brand loyalty, and the brand's perceived quality constitute separate factors (Washburn, Plank, 2002). The only problem is posed by the measurement of brand image, operationalized as the retrievability of brand associations from the consumer's memory, with the reservation that the retrievability would be assessed by the respondents themselves (Washburn, Plank, 2002).

The problem of operationalizing the brand image component within the construct of consumer-based brand equity is solved by referring to the classification of brand associations proposed by Keller (1993, 1998). Keller divides brand associations into

attributes, benefits, and attitudes. It must be added that they form a hierarchical structure, organized by the degree of abstraction, with attributes constituting the most concrete level, describing the properties of a given brand related or unrelated to the product. Benefits, in their turn, are the sum total of partial utility assessments of the attributes of a product or service supplied to the consumer, whereas brand attitude is defined as overall brand evaluation, being the sum total of perceived benefits that result from the possession and consumption of products of a given brand (Zeitham, 1988). The more abstract associations (i.e. benefits or attitudes) are more evaluative in nature and, consequently, more permanent than the concrete attributes (Chattopadhyay, Alba, 1988). For this reason, brand image measurement may be narrowed down to the total of perceived functional and symbolic benefits resulting from the consumption of a given brand. Functional benefits include perceived quality and utility guarantee of products of a given brand, while symbolic benefits comprise personal and social identification with the brand as well as perceived exclusiveness (Vazquez, Rio, Iglesias, 2002; Kocak, Abimbola, Ozer, 2007). It is also worth noting that there are proposals of conceptualization and operationalization of brand equity that are limited to the measurement of perceived utility. These proposals will serve as reference point in the process of constructing measurement tools from the aspect of perceived utility.

RESEARCH PROBLEMS

Considering a potential connection between brand personality and brand equity, we may ask two fundamental research questions:

P1: Which component of brand equity is most strongly related to brand personality?

P2: Does product category moderate the relationship between brand personality and brand equity? In which categories is the relationship between brand personality and brand equity components strongest?

METHOD

Brand Selection

From the methodological point of view, the study of brand image differs from the study of human personality in the degree of differentiation of the objects studied. In self-ratings of human personality there are as many objects described as there are individuals studied, whereas the number of brands recognized by consumers is limited and varies between a few hundred and a few thousand, depending on the degree of market development. In consequence, two basic sources of variability in brand descriptions emerge. The first of these lies in objective differences between brands, manifesting themselves in the attribution of different traits to different brands by the same consumer. The other lies in the differences between the perception of the same brand by different consumers. Bearing in mind these two sources of variance in the results, care should be taken to ensure not only the representativeness of the sample but also such selection of brands and product categories that will make it legitimate to generalize research results to various other brands and products categories. Therefore, own research included 48 categories of products and services, each of them containing at least 5 brands recognized by most consumers. From each category, five brands were selected to be assessed by the respondents, adding up to a total of 240 brands.

Brand Equity Measurement

Items of the questionnaire measuring the components of consumer-based brand equity were borrowed from the scales constructed by Yoo and Donthu (2001) as well as by Vazquez, Rio, and Iglesias (2002). Based on own research, the following reliability indicators (Cronbach's alpha and mean inter-item correlation) were obtained for individual components of brand equity: brand awareness ($\alpha=.86$; $r=.69$), the strength of brand associations ($\alpha=.85$; $r=.67$), competitiveness ($\alpha=.92$; $r=.79$), brand loyalty ($\alpha=.92$; $r=.79$), perceived quality ($\alpha=.93$; $r=.81$), guarantee ($\alpha=.82$; $r=.62$), social identification ($\alpha=.79$; $r=.55$), exclusiveness ($\alpha=.84$; $r=.72$), and personal identification with the brand ($\alpha=.92$; $r=.79$).

Brand Personality Measurement

For measuring personality traits associated with brands, a 20-item scale constructed by Gorbaniuk (2009) was used. The scale measures four weakly correlated dimensions of brand personality: Competence (reliable, ambitious, thorough, hardworking, responsible; $\alpha=.84$, $r=.52$), Extraversion (entertaining, easygoing, spontaneous, sociable, cheerful; $\alpha=.84$, $r=.51$), Agreeableness (calm, subtle, gentle, modest, sensitive; $\alpha=.78$, $r=.40$), and Egoism (conceited, egoistic, haughty, greedy, mean; $\alpha=.82$, $r=.47$) (RMSEA<.05). Coefficient constancy, measured at a two-week interval, varies between .70 and .90.

Sample

The age of the respondents ranged between 16 and 79 years, with an average of 34.3 and a standard deviation of 12.8. Men constituted 50.2% of the sample and women 49.8%. 9.8% of the respondents had elementary education, 60.2% had secondary education, and 29.0% had higher education.

Procedure

The study was carried out on an individual basis. First, interviews were conducted with the respondents in order to establish their awareness of brands belonging to four random categories. The respondents were asked to indicate 7 to 10 familiar brands in each category. Next, they were given a questionnaire in which they were supposed to describe, one by one, four of the brands they recognized – one per each product category.

RESULTS

The Structure of the Relationship between Brand Equity and Brand Personality

In order to determine the structure of the relationship between brand personality and brand equity, canonical correlation analysis was carried out based on 2080 descriptions of brands belonging to 48 different categories of product and services. The results of analyses are presented in Table 1. They show that brand personality accounts for 27% of the variance in brand equity, and brand equity in turn accounts for 22% of the variance in personality traits attributed to brands. Brand personality is connected with brand equity by two latent roots, characterized by a sufficiently high percentage of common variance for their interpretation to have cognitive value. The first latent root shows strongest correlation with the Competence dimension (.99) on the side of brand personality and with perceived functional benefits – Quality (.96) and Guarantee (.80) – on the side of brand equity. Within this latent root, brand personality accounts for 25% of the variance in brand equity, and brand equity in turn accounts for 17% of the variance in brand personality. This means that the main axis connecting the two constructs is perceived quality, manifesting itself as the competence trait attributed to the brand in the process of dispositional attribution.

The second and less significant latent root shows correlation with the brand's perceived extraversion (.85), its perceived haughtiness (.57), the perceived benefits of social identification with it (.53), and perceived exclusiveness (.37). Brand equity explains 3% of the variance in brand personality dimensions.

Product Category as a Moderator of the Relationship between Brand Equity and Brand Personality

In order to answer the second research question, multiple correlation between brand personality dimensions and each component of brand equity was calculated for each product category, with brand equity components functioning as explained variables. The results of analyses indicate that the highest multiple correlation obtains between brand personality and perceived quality: the mean correlation coefficient equals $R_{\text{mean}}=.73$. For the rest of brand equity components: Brand Awareness (.43), Competitiveness (.55), Brand Loyalty (.53), Warranty (.63), Social Identification (.61), Exclusiveness (.55), Personal Identification (.52). Correlations were found to be the weakest between brand personality on the one hand and brand awareness as well as the strength of brand associations on the other.

The comparison of multiple correlation coefficients for a given component of brand equity reveals considerable differences between categories of products and services in the amount of common variance. For instance, brand awareness was found to correlate with brand personality most strongly in categories such as household appliances (.65), teas (.65), or radio stations (.62), and the correlations were lowest in categories such as watches (.12), banks (.20), or computer equipment (.23). In the case of perceived quality, highest correlations were observed for daily papers (.91), radio stations (.89), cars (.89), and household appliances (.89), and lowest correlations were found for clothes (.48), credit cards (.58), and audio/video equipment (.52) and sales networks (.59). In the case of perceived social identification benefits, highest correlations were found for the categories of teas (.81), hotels (.77), periodicals (.77), and footwear (.74), while weakest ones were revealed for beers (.29), restaurants (.40), and coffees (.45). The existence of considerable differences between categories in terms of the strength of the relationship between individual brand equity components and brand personality dimensions means that product category acts as a moderator here.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study, based on a broad array of categories and brands, showed that brand personality is a construct closely related to brand equity but not identical with it. The perceived quality of products and services of a given brand is the factor that determines the nature of this relationship. Secondary to this factor are the perceived social benefits resulting from the consumption of products of a given brand. It has also been established that, depending on product category, the relationship between brand personality and the components of brand equity is either weakened or intensified. This means that product category colors the process of brand perception with its context, which is why the relations between the dimensions of brand personality and the components of brand equity may take on a category-specific character, although the regularities that have been revealed to obtain for all categories remain fundamental.

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Table 1: Brand equity and brand personality: canonical correlation analysis

	Statistic/variables	Latent roots			
		Root 1	Root 2	Root 3	Root 4
Statistic	Canonical R	.76	.31	.21	.14
	Canonical R ²	.58	.09	.04	.02
	Chi ²	2122.84	333.21	128.59	39.90
	df	36	24	14	6
	p<	.001	.001	.001	.001
Brand equity	Awareness	.33	.13	-.50	.17
	Strength of associations	.42	.32	-.31	.38
	Competitiveness	.64	-.08	.04	.37
	Loyalty	.57	.08	.14	.66
	Quality	.96	-.05	-.01	.06
	Warranty	.80	-.22	-.20	-.10
	Social identification	.72	.53	-.28	.07
	Exclusiveness	.66	.37	.43	-.31
	Personal identification	.59	.01	.28	.37
	Extracted variance	.43	.07	.08	.11
Redundancy	.25	.01	.01	.00	
Brand personality	Competence	.99	-.10	.08	-.11
	Egoism	-.13	.57	.71	-.39
	Extroversion	.18	.85	-.17	.47
	Agreeableness	.43	-.34	.45	.70
	Extracted variance	.30	.29	.19	.22
	Redundancy	.17	.03	.01	.01

CAPTURING RETAIL/SERVICE PERSONALITY ACROSS SERVICE CONTEXTS

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ABSTRACT

Marketing and consumer researchers are long familiar with the retail personality concept (Martineau 1958). Retail personality implies that stores and retail brands take on and can be described using human like traits (Darden and Babin 1994). Just as two individual consumers may have similar physical attributes, their personalities can differ. In the U.S.A., the contrast between the Wal-Mart and Target personality illustrates the point. In France, Carrefour shopper is as different from a Leclerc shopper as Carrefour is from Leclerc. This research addresses the generalizability of the retail personality concept and proposes a way of operationalizing the construct that generalizes across service contexts, not just retail brands.

We address the research question of whether or not the personality concept can capture consumer descriptions of service contexts outside of the store brand. As numerous services cannot be offered without a personal exchange, interpersonal