EMOTIONAL CONNECTION OF CONSUMER PERSONALITY TRAITS WITH BRAND PERSONALITY TRAITS: THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

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Abstract

Concept of brand personality nowadays is widely discussed both in the science and business environments, however, the question of congruence between brand personality and consumer personality is still lacking clearness and in-depth analysis. Studies done in marketing field prove that consumers with specific personalities choose brands with similar brand personalities; however this is not proved for all types of personalities. Moreover, similarity or congruence concept is not discussed in detail and it remains unclear, how many traits or to what extent the personalities should be similar or different. The remaining sources of literature present ideas that consumer may choose brand with aspirational or even opposite personality, but these cases and the reasons for such choices often are not discussed. This paper aims to present detailed analysis on topic of congruence between brand personality and consumer personality. Moreover, new theoretical model based on main and complementary traits of both consumer and brand personalities is developed for examining connection between consumer and brand personalities.
Keywords: brand personality, consumer personality, consumer choice, emotional marketing.
JEL Classification: M31, M37.

Introduction

It has been confirmed that despite functional characteristics such as price, packaging, distribution the brand also has a symbolic meaning which is called brand personality (D. Aaker, 1996; J. Aaker, 1997; Kotler & Keller, 2006). Nowadays the concept of emotional marketing is spread world-wide and broadly used. Brand personality, which could be understood as an emotional connection between consumer and brand, acquires even more important role in creating, developing and maintaining strong brands (Sirgy, 1982; Malhotra, 1988; Biel, 1993; Fournier, 1998; Kim et al., 2001; Kapferer, 2008; Lin, 2010). Scientists have proved that emotions are underlying driving force of human behavior, therefore brand personality should be perceived as a main element of any successful brand.

It is argued that brand personality is an important aspect in brand choice process, however, fewer articles and scientists analyze emotional connection between brand and consumer personalities. Nevertheless, the majority of publications in marketing field argue that consumer chooses brand with personality similar to his/ her own, this conclusion is partly based on general assumptions and studies applied from psychology field (Vitz & Johnston, 1965; Byrne & Griffitt, 1969; Nias, 1979; Antill, 1983; Carli *et al.*, 1991; Shank & Langmeyer, 1994). Congruence between consumer and brand personalities is also proven by studies done in marketing and consumer behavior field (Maehle & Shneor, 2010; Lin, 2010), however, analysis of congruence concept is still not very detailed and exhaustive. It is important to notice, that some scientists and marketing specialists (Kotler & Keller, 2006; Till & Heckler, 2009) present cases or situations when consumer chooses the brand with personality different compared to his/ her personality, but these cases also lack detailed analysis.

Therefore, the object of scientific research is a connection of consumer personality with brand personality. The main objective of this paper is to present detailed analysis on topic of congruence between brand personality and consumer personality. Moreover, the author develops theoretical model based on review of scientific literature that could be used by both scientists and marketing specialists for analyzing consumer personality emotional connection with brand personality. The following research methods are used in the paper: systemic, comparative and logical analysis of scientific literature, content analysis.

Concept of brand personality

In scientific literature authors usually analyze two dimensions of brand image: rational and emotional. Rational brand image consists of such functional characteristics as price, quality, distribution channels, packaging, etc. Nowadays there are lots of brands which have similar or even the same functional characteristics, therefore for marketers it becomes almost impossible to differentiate the brand on rational level. Differentiation of brand using only functional attributes also poses threat that features could be easily

copied by competitors (Till & Heckler, 2009). By creating emotional image of the brand company could obtain a really strong differentiator. Brand personality is emotional brand image, in other words: emotional connection between consumer and brand.

Concept of product personality was first described by Martineau (1957) to define the non-material dimensions (character) of a store that make it special. J. Aaker (1997) describes brand personality as a set of human characteristics associated with the brand. Definition presented by J. Aaker is one of the most well-known descriptions of brand personality. Brand personality could be described using the same characteristics as human personality: social-demographic (sex, age, social class, etc.), lifestyle (leisure time, hobbies, interests, etc.) and specific traits of character (friendly, warm, calm, bold, careless, independent, self-assured, etc.) (Levy, 1959; D. Aaker, 1996).

The author of this paper argues that in brand personality concept definition it should also be stated how personality of a brand is created. Therefore, author describes brand personality as associations in consumer's subconscious level created by two aspects: rational brand image and perception of typical consumer. Brand personality is created through three sources: associations consumers have about the brand, image of the company that produces the brand (corporate image) and product attributes, such as distribution channels, packaging, etc. (Lin, 2010). According to Levy, image of brand users (typical consumers of the brand) and personnel of the company are also important factors that have impact on perception of brand personality (Levy, 1959).

Brand personality helps to create a stronger brand in several ways. First, brand personality that is attractive to consumer plays role of self-expression. Second, brand personality helps to build relationship between brand and consumer. Third, brand personality also communicates functional features of brand. (D. Aaker, 1996). Distinctive brand personality creates in consumer's memory a set of unique and positive characteristics thus forming and enlarging brand equity (Keller, 1993; Keller, 2008; Johnson *et al.*, 2000; Phau & Lau, 2000). Well developed and established brand personality has a positive impact on brand preference, loyalty, attitudes and satisfaction towards the brand (Sirgy, 1982; Malhotra, 1988; Biel, 1993; Fournier, 1998; Kim *et al.*, 2001; Kapferer, 2008; Lin, 2010).

J. Aaker (1997) conducted research into brand personalities and identified following five dimensions consisting of 42 traits:
1. Sincerity: down-to-earth, honest, wholesome, and cheerful.
2. Excitement: daring, spirited, imaginative, and up-to-date.
3. Competence: reliable, intelligent, and successful.
4. Sophistication: upper-class and charming.
5. Ruggedness: outdoorsy and tough.

Aaker analyzed some well-known brands and found that a number of them tended to be strong on one particular trait. However, a brand may have several different attributes, also.

Nevertheless, brand personality scale developed by J. Aaker partly or fully has been used in a lot of studies of consumer behavior (Okazaki, 2006; Supphellen & Gronhaug, 2003; Venable *et al.*, 2003); it has been criticized, too. Main criticism is received while trying to answer question, whether brand personality scales really measure brand personality. Azoulay and Kapferer (2003) argue that the concept of Aaker's brand personality is not defined properly. That is why brand personality scales in fact does not measure brand personality, but merges altogether a number of dimensions of a brand identity. Therefore, Azoulay and Kapferer say that "personality" and other concepts such as "self" are taken from psychology and adaption of these concepts in marketing is needed. They suggest that the concept of brand personality should be described as a unique set of human personality traits both applicable and relevant to brands.

Structural and semantic validity of Aaker's brand personality scale is also questioned, especially when it comes to the usage of the scale in culturally different contexts (Achouri, 2010). Because of these reason the scale was adopted to Japanese market (Lin, 2010).

Due to the criticism of Aaker's brand personality scale Geuens *et al.* (2009) developed a new scale for measuring brand personality. The new scale consists of five factors (Activity, Responsibility, Aggressiveness, Simplicity, and Emotionality) and twelve traits. Compared to other scales, this scale was proved to be reliable for comparison between brand and category, for comparison between brands within category and for between respondent comparison. Moreover, the scale also was proved to be reliable and valid in cross-cultural studies.

Concept of consumer personality or self-image

Personality is an abstract concept and due to this reason it is quite difficult to present an exact description of personality. Moreover, scientists often describe personality in the context of analyzed topic or field, that is the reason why a lot of descriptions of personality concepts exist (Pikturienė & Kurtinaitienė, 2010). According to Engel *et al.* (1969) personality could be described as traits of the individual, which have impact on his/her general behavior's peculiarities.

Freud was the first psychologist who presented a personality theory. He perceived personality as something dynamic, multiple and cumulative. Freud argued that every personality consists from 3 layers or elements: ego, superego and id. Theory of Freud is rarely applied in marketing directly, however, it is very important as he introduced the idea that people make decisions unconsciously (Mayers, 2000; Pikturienė & Kurtinaitienė, 2010).

Freud's ideas were partly developed by Adler and Jung, who argued that personality is formed not only by ego, superego and id, but also by social environment. Jung presented his theory of personality typology based on two main components: outward direction (extraversion) and in-ward direction (introversion); and main functions of psyche (senses, thinking, feelings and intuition). Eight personality types were developed: four extraverts with dominating senses/ thinking/ feeling/ intuition and four introverts with same dominating functions. Jung dimensions were further developed by Eysenck (1967), who suggested the method, how to measure exact type of personality.

Goldberg (1990) presented Big-Five theory, which is widely used in consumer behavior research. Five dimensions of the model are often labeled as O.C.E.A.N.:

1. **Openness to experience**: inventive/curious vs. consistent/cautious. Such elements as appreciation for art, emotion, adventure, unusual ideas, intellectual curiosity, imagination and variety of experience.
2. **Conscientiousness**: efficient/organized vs. easy-going/careless. Such traits as a tendency to show self-discipline, act dutifully, orderly, trustworthy, aim for achievement; planned behavior.
3. **Extraversion**: outgoing/energetic vs. solitary/reserved. Such traits as energy, positive emotions, openness to others, sociability, impulsivity.
4. **Agreeableness**: friendly/compassionate vs. cold/unkind. Such traits as kind, compassionate, modest, trust, cooperative.
5. **Neuroticism**: sensitive/nervous vs. secure/confident. Such traits as anxious, unstable, nervous, vulnerable, a tendency to express unpleasant emotions.

Nevertheless, the development of Big-Five model was not theory-driven; the model integrates personality concepts of such scientists as Jung, Eysenck, which makes it more reliable (Sanz *et al.*, 2008). Adjective-based approach is more often used compared to statements-based approach for evaluation of personality using Big-Five model (Gill & Hodgkinson, 2007).

According to the author of this paper, it is important to notice that from psychological point of view concepts of personality and self-image are different. Personality should be understood as traits that describe individuals; moreover, psychological approach is usually used for understanding personality (e.g. Myers-Briggs type indicator). Self-image should be perceived as how one views himself/ herself, what traits does he/ she attributes to his/ her self. That is why self-image is more a projection of the individual, but not his/ her exact psychological portrait. Studies in marketing or consumer behavior topics prove that it is usually enough to measure consumer self-image, but not consumer personality. Despite the stated difference between personality and self-image concepts the author uses them as synonyms in the paper.

Congruence between brand and consumer personalities

In scientific literature connection between brand and consumer personalities is perceived mainly in two ways:

1. "**Identic approach**": consumer chooses the brand consistent with his/ her personality or self-image
2. "**Differential approach**": consumer chooses the brand that is different from his/ her personality or self-image

Nowadays in marketing it is believed that consumer chooses brand with personality similar to his/ her own, however this conclusion is partly based on general assumptions and studies applied from psychology field (Vitz & Johnston, 1965; Byrne & Griffitt, 1969; Nias, 1979; Antill, 1983; Carli *et al.*, 1991; Shank &

Langmeyer, 1994). The author thinks that nevertheless marketing as an applied science, the concepts, constructs and relations taken from psychology should be analyzed in detail, verified and only then applied.

Consciously or unconsciously consumers perceive their possessions (material things) as part of themselves (Belk, 1988). People also acquire or reinforce their sense of self through the goods they buy (and what these material things symbolize both to themselves and to others with whom they communicate) (Dolich, 1969; Hamm & Cundiff, 1969; Johar & Sirgy, 1991).

According to D. Aaker people tend to choose brand with personality similar to their own, moreover the congruence between brand personality and consumer personality or self-image has impact on consumer's commitment with the brand (D. Aaker, 1996). The more congruent are brand and consumer personalities, the more committed is consumer.

Recent studies done in marketing field prove that consumers with specific personalities choose brands with similar brand personalities compared to their own, but this is not proved for all types of personalities. Maehle and Shneor (2010) in their research have identified brand preferences of consumers with different personality types. They found that consumers prefer brands with personalities that match their own. For brand personality research Maehle and Shneor were using brand personality scale developed by J. Aaker and Ekelund's Diversity Icebraker (DI) scale for consumer personality research. They found out that consumers with Blue DI type exhibit clear aversion from the excitement dimension of brand personality, whereas consumers with Red DI type exhibit clear preference for the sincerity dimension of brand personality. However, there were no clear results concerning Green DI type, type of individuals that are quite individualistic, non-conformist and innovative. Having all this in mind, author of this article thinks there is a gap in the performed studies and therefore statement *"Not all types of consumer personalities choose brands with brand personalities similar compared to their own"* should be analyzed in further research.

Moreover, the research done by Maehle and Shneor revealed a possible hierarchy of brand personality dimensions' influence. They argue that there might be potential hierarchy of dimensions influence, where certain brand dimensions may be more dominant than others in preference of consumers with different personality type. Therefore, the author of this paper proposes that "*While analyzing preference of consumers with different personality types, traits of brand personality need to be categorized into main and complementary ones*".

In her article The Malleable Self (1999) J. Aaker argues that the perception of the self could be different: real, ideal, private or public. Therefore, Aaker partly negates the view that only personality profile of target group should be taken into account while developing brand personality. According to her, the strategy of brand personality development should be chosen deciding on what positioning is the most important in each case: user, situational, usage, etc. Having in mind experiments of Aaker, the author of this paper suggests that "*Consumers might choose the brand with personality that is congruent not only to consumers' real self, but also ideal self. And the brand that is chosen might be different in these situations.*"

Lin (2010) also states for "identic approach" and her studies show that consumers prefer brands with personalities that more closely match their own self-concept. J. Aaker (1999) notified that real and ideal selves should be distinguished, but Lin does not see differences between these two concepts and this could be perceived as a weak aspect of her studies.

Representatives of "differential approach" Till and Heckler argue that traits of brand personality should not be identical to traits of consumer personality. According to them, lots of marketing specialists do a mistake trying to transfer consumer personality characteristics into brand personality (Till & Heckler, 2009). Brand personality should be attractive to consumers, but not exactly the same as consumer.

Both well-known marketing specialists Kotler and Keller agree with "identic approach", that consumer chooses the brand with personality similar to his/ her own. Kotler and Keller (2006) state that implication of Aaker brand personality scale is that brands will attract persons who are high on the same personality traits. According to Sirgy (1982), consumers often choose and use the brands that have a brand personality consistent with their own actual self-concept (how one views oneself). Nevertheless, Sirgy also thinks that in some cases the match may be based on the consumer's ideal self-concept (how one would like to view oneself) or even other's self-concept (how one thinks others see one) rather than actual self-image.

Some publications (Kotler & Keller, 2006; Till & Heckler, 2009) also present ideas that consumer may choose brand with aspirational or even opposite personality compared to consumers', however these cases and the reasons for such choice are not analyzed in detail. Moreover, the author of this paper thinks that similarity or congruence concept is not discussed in detail by most scientists and it remains unclear, how many traits or to what extent the personalities should be similar or different.

Theoretical model of emotional connection between brand and consumer personalities

In psychology personality could be described with several main traits and important values, other traits are complementary and present only in some situations (Mayers, 2000). D. Aaker (1996) uses main and complementary traits model for analyzing brand image. According to D. Aaker, the brand operating in several markets has the same main features; however, complementary traits are different. The author of this paper thinks that it would be also useful to analyze brand personality through main and complementary traits. Such analysis would provide in-depth understanding of how consumers are choosing brands in the context of brand personality.
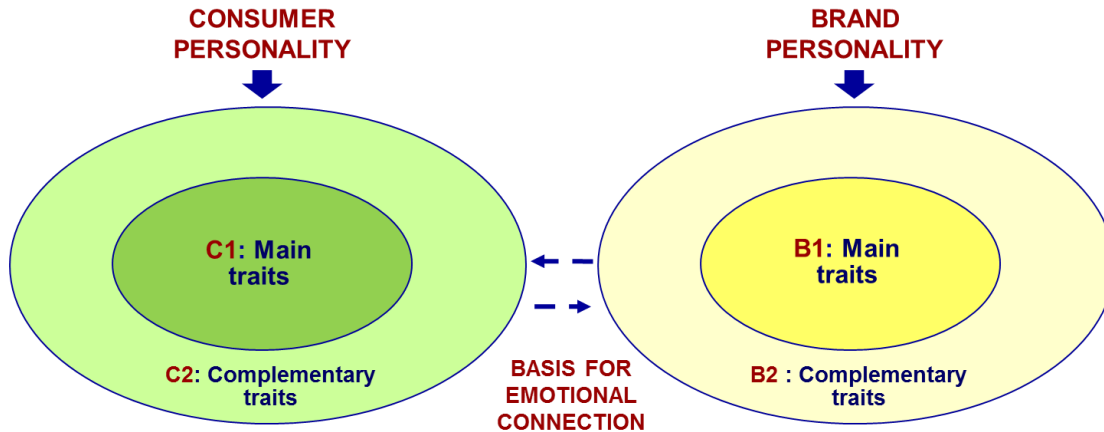

Figure 1. Theoretical model of emotional connection between brand and consumer personalities

Having all these in mind and based on scientific literature review, the author thinks there is need for a new theoretical model in order to study emotional connection between consumer personality and brand personality. The model (see Figure 1) analyzes main and complementary traits of both consumer and brand personalities and their various combinations. The author argues that comparison of C1 (main traits of consumer personality) with B1 (main traits of brand personality) shows the nature of relation between brand and consumer personalities: whether the brand is chosen or rejected. Comparison of C2 (complementary traits of consumer personality) with B2 (complementary traits of brand personality) helps to identify different forms of this connection. The author states four different situations out of theoretical model for analyzing connection between consumer and brand personalities:

1. $C1 = B1$ & $C2 = B2$: main and complementary traits of consumer personality are similar compared to main and complementary traits of brand personality; therefore *the consumer chooses the brand*.

2. $C1 = B1$ & $C2 \neq B2$: main traits of consumer and brand personalities are similar, but complementary traits are different; therefore *the consumer chooses the brand*.

3. $C1 \neq B1$ & $C2 = B2$: main traits of consumer and brand personalities are different, but complementary traits are similar; therefore, *the consumer rejects the brand*.

4. $C1 \neq B1$ & $C2 \neq B2$: main and complementary traits of consumer personality are different compared to main and complementary traits of brand personality; therefore, *the consumer rejects the brand*.

Research based on this theoretical model would answer such particular questions as for example: what happens if consumer personality main traits and brand personality main traits are completely different, but complementary traits are the same, will consumer choose the brand in this case; what happens if consumer personality traits and brand personality traits, both main and complementary are completely different, will consumer refuse the brand in this case.

Conclusions

Despite the fact that number of scientific articles analyzing connection between brand and consumer personalities have increased recently, this topic still lacks detailed and precise analysis. Major part of publications in marketing and consumer behavior field ground the idea that consumer chooses the brand with personality similar to his/ her own. However, scientific literature review revealed that:

1. Not all types of consumer personalities choose the brand with personalities similar to their own; and it remains unclear what are the preferences of these consumers and why, if so, their choice is different.
2. There is a potential hierarchy in traits of brand personality, therefore it is important to analyze traits of both brand and consumer personalities divided into main and complementary ones.
3. Consumers might choose the brand with personality that is congruent not only to consumers' real self, but also ideal self. This could be the reason why brand with different personality compared to consumer personality is chosen.

To sum up, the author presents theoretical model of emotional connection between brand and consumer personalities. The model shows nature and form of relation between brand and consumer personalities. According to authors' stated hypotheses, the consumer will choose the brand if main traits of both brand and consumer personalities are similar, and will reject the brand if main traits are different.

Limitations of this paper are due to the fact that only theoretical considerations were presented, empirical research on analyzed topic was not performed. Potential research on emotional connection between brand and consumer personalities would provide both marketing scientists and specialists with in-depth understanding of how consumers are choosing brands and how better knowledge of brand personality might be used in order to build strong and successful brand.

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