

How Brand Personality affects Products with different Involvement Levels?

Plavini Punyatoya

Indian Institute of Management

Indore, Rau-Pithampur Road, Indore-453331, M.P., India

Tel: 91-9907664565 E-mail: f08plavinip@iimidr.ac.in

Abstract

Brand personality is seen as the set of human characteristics associated with a brand. It carries the symbolic meaning of the brand. Whether it is a low or high involvement product, brand personality will definitely improve the consumer brand preference and purchase intention. This article presents a brief literature review of the concept of brand personality and its relationship to consumer brand preference and purchase intention. The study also emphasised effect of brand personality on high and low involvement products preference and purchase. The paper also talks about how famous endorsers and strong brand argument can improve brand personality of low and high involvement products respectively.

Keywords: Brand personality, Product Involvement, Brand preference, Purchase Intention.

1. Introduction

The concept of brand has evolved a years ago, which is different than a product or service. Brand is more than a product, as it satisfies both tangible and intangible needs. Brands differentiate a product or service from competitor and are a critical success factor of companies. Brand has various elements attached to it, like symbols, logo, brand association, brand name, brand awareness etc. Brand also has a personality. Brand personality is defined as “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (Aaker, 1997). It has multiple dimensions which help consumers to express themselves in terms of the brand. When the attributes are product-related, they serve a utilitarian function; brand personality tends to serve a symbolic or self-expressive function for the consumer and associated in the memory (Keller, 1993).

The stronger a consumer identifies with a product or service, the more time and money he will spend on that. By developing strong brands, managers will be able to connect with consumers, resulting in long-lasting and profitable consumer-brand relationships and increased purchase (Wang & Yang, 2008; Carlson, Donovan & Cumiskey, 2009). Purchase of High and low involvement products have different level of decision strategies and level of information search behaviour (Hoyer, 1984). So brand personalities of these products affect consumers differently. This article presents a brief literature review of the concept of brand personality and its relationship to consumer brand preference and purchase intention. Then the effect of brand personality on high and low involvement products preference and purchase is discussed.

2. Concept of Brand Personality

Brand personality is conceptualized based on the way that people attribute personality characteristics to other people during everyday interaction. It is about personification of a brand or brand character, which describe the "inner" characteristics of a brand. The brand is treated as an active, contributing partner in the dyadic relationship that exists between the person and the brand, a partner whose behaviours and actions generate trait inferences that collectively summarize the consumer's perception of the brand's personality (Aaker & Fournier, 1995). This is the human characteristics associated with the brand (Aaker, 1997). For example, the brand personality of Levi's 501 jeans is American, western, ordinary, common, blue collar, hard working and traditional etc. (Aaker & Fournier, 1995). A brand sold in a supermarket or retail stores is communicating something, but the world interprets the brand through many different filters; through experience, through

perceptions, misconceptions, the value systems of the individuals etc. The two faces of brand personality are input, that is, what we want consumers to think and feel, and out-take, what consumers actually do think and feel. Brand personality is considered as one of the three components of brand image (the others being product attributes and consumer benefits). The characterizational aspects of the brand or its personality are purely the result of communications because there is rarely anything intrinsic to a brand that makes it lively, or exotic, or sophisticated (Plummer, 1985).

If a brand has only minor physical differences and has meanings added to it through various marketing activities such as advertising, it will definitely build the brand personality (Supphellen & Gronhaug, 2003). The emphasis of brand personality is also meaningful for those brands that are consumed in a social setting where the brand can make a visible statement about the consumer (Aaker, 1996). Cult brands attract a loyal base of customers by having this emotional connect. For example Harley-Davidson motorcycles have a personality, which attract a number of customers who may be in line for up to two years to buy a new one (Carr, 1996). Although considerable research in psychology has converged on a stable, robust, and reliable factorial composition of human personality, the "Big Five" (Goldberg, 1990), the frame work of brand personality was developed by Aaker (Aaker, 1997). The theoretical framework of the brand personality is constructed by determining the number and nature of dimensions of brand personality (Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, and Ruggedness). To measure the five brand personality dimensions, a reliable, valid, and generalizable measurement scale was also created. Most of the recent research papers use Aaker's scale for brand personality (Azoulay and Kapferer, 2003). In the present paper the Aaker's scale for brand personality is also followed (Figure 1).

Situational factors, individual personality and brand personality affects the consumer preference toward a brand (Aaker, 1999). Effective of global marketing communication campaigns and various psychological mechanisms also build brands and increase consumer preference for the brand in different cultures (Aaker & Maheswaran, 1997). A favourable brand personality is thought to increase consumer preference and usage (Sirgy, 1982). When subjects are exposed to stimulus material featuring information about the product's features and the product's brand personality, their product evaluations is significantly more favourable (Freling & Forbes, 2005). Product personality is the profile of human personality characteristics that people use to describe a specific product variant (like size, price and appearance) and to discriminate it from others. This is the symbolic meaning that refers to the physical product itself (Govers & Schoormans, 2005). People prefer brands with which they share personality characteristics. Moreover, congruence between brand personality and the consumer influences the relationship that develops between the consumer and the brand (Aaker et al., 2004). This is also true for product personality i.e. product-personality congruence has a positive influence on consumer preference (Govers & Schoormans, 2005). Considering Aaker's brand personality scale we can say that brand personality shifts the consumer preference toward a brand and increase usage (Aaker 1999; Sirgy 1982; Freling & Forbes 2005; Aaker & Maheswaran, 1997). This leads to,

Proposition 1: Brand Personality positively affects consumer brand preference.

In case of fashion apparel, brand association and personality affects both consumer preference and purchase intention for young Singaporean consumers. The feelings attached to a brand as well as the brand's personality were found to also have stronger relationships with purchase intention, than with brand preference (O'Cass & Lim, 2001). Both brand personality and country of origin image exert significant positive main effects on purchase intention and country of origin image is found to be a positive moderator in the relationship between brand personality and purchase intention (Wang & Yang, 2008). For store brands (store brand cookie, store brand cola), when the consumer experience them the brand personality and quality perception will improve as compared to national brands(national cookie and national cola). Consumers feel that if the brand has some sort of personality, the brand has a higher level of quality (Beldona & Wysong, 2007). The higher quality perception definitely leads to brand preference and purchase intention. Thus:

Proposition 2: Brand personality positively affects purchase intention.

Brand personality has its importance for both convenient goods (like detergent, body soaps, toilet cleaners) and shopping goods (like electronics items, furniture). International private labels project them as cosmopolitan, more inspirational, desirable, appealing, prestige brands and consuming them is associated with more sophisticated personalities than local private label products (Batra et al., 2000). Consumers perceive the brand personality of national brands as being significantly superior to international private labels, and the brand personality of international private labels as being superior to local private labels. But this will vary with the product category (Cheng et al., 2007).

Corperates also have their own brand personality. For some product brand organizations such as Unilever, Procter and Gamble and Cycleurope, the brands core identity revolve around the product, for others, such as McDonalds or General Electric, core brand identity might crystallize around corporate brand values, and the product is instead part of the extended identity (Uggla, 2006). Corporate branding involves all stakeholders, has a multidisciplinary character and is targeted to internal and external interests and networks. Corporate brands can have a small set of fundamental core values that define the brand. These values are intrinsic to the firm and part of its core ideology (Balmer, 1998). Camy ice-cream, McDonald's fast food, Elvive shampoo of Spain, when extended with different brand associations, this created dilution of brand personality and image. So there is requirement of perceived fit between extension and parent brand, so that brand image and personality will not be diluted (Martinez & Pina, 2003).

3. High and Low Involvement Products

For high involvement products, the buyer has to spend considerable time and effort in searching for information about the products and take more time to take decision for purchase. But low involvement products are bought frequently or the repeat-purchase products and they required minimum of thought and effort to buy them. They are mostly not having any great impact on the consumer's lifestyle. Consumers are not motivated to engage in a great deal of in-store decision making at the time of purchase when the product is purchased repeatedly and is relatively unimportant. As a result, consumers tend to apply very simple choice rules or tactics that provide a satisfactory choice while allowing a quick and effortless decision (Hoyer, 1984). Consumers put minimum cognitive effort and only make a satisfactory choice for low involvement product rather an optimal choice (Einhorn & Hogarth, 1981). For example consumers exerted considerably less effort in choosing detergent, butter or breads than in choosing lifestyle apparel, shoe or an automobile, which are high involvement products.

A study on a repeat purchase product i.e. laundry detergent showed that consumers engage in remarkably little in-store decision deliberation and decision making occurs in a large portion outside the immediate in-store decision context. Consumers take price-related tactics, product-related experiences—such as product usage, numerous exposures to advertisements, and influence by others in a social environment etc. to play major role in preference and purchase decision for a low involvement product (Hoyer, 1984). So the purchase of low involvement products is mostly based on tactics, heuristics, rather than symbolic meaning of the brand and emotional characteristics of it.

Whereas the high-involvement product like Clothing carry symbolic meaning, image reinforcement or psychological satisfaction and reflect the consumer's social life, aspirations, fantasies and affiliations and are brought upon this emotional aspects (Solomon, 1986; Kaiser, 1998). In high involvement products consumers are aware of their own self-concept and thus use brand personality as a criterion in evaluating products, rather than only using heuristics (Oh & Fiorito, 2002). A study on sportswear clothing brands (a high-involvement product) and coffee brands (a low-involvement product) showed that a higher brand awareness of high-involvement product brands than of low-involvement product brands. Advertising played an important role in the awareness of sportswear clothing brands, but seemed unimportant in the case of coffee. The brand name was important for coffee, while the name and the logo played a role in students' awareness of sportswear brands (Radder & Huang, 2008). So brand personality is of more importance for high involvement products than low involvement products.

By having a strong brand personality consumers will definitely prefer a low involvement brand. For examples researchers used bottled water (Freling & Forbes, 2005), chocolate chip cookies and cola soft drinks (Beldona & Wysong, 2007) etc. which are low involvement products to see the positive effect of brand personality on the product preference to purchase. In case of high-involvement product like lifestyle Clothing, shoe which carry

symbolic meaning and emotional aspects (Solomon, 1986; Kaiser, 1998; Oh & Fiorito, 2002), brand personality is of higher importance. Researchers have also conducted on screwdrivers, coffeemakers, soap-dispensers, table-wines (Govers & Schoormans, 2005) etc. So brand personality has its relevance for both low and high involvement product brands. Considering previous two propositions, the third proposition is:

Proposition 3: Brand personality increases consumer brand preference and purchase intention for both high and low involvement products.

As per elaboration likelihood model (ELM), in low involvement situation there will be low elaboration and there will be little motivation to process a message. Attitude will be formed primarily by associating the message position with an easy-to-process, peripheral cue. The cues are not associated with the long term memory and therefore the retrieval of the ad or message will decay over time. Whereas in high involvement situation there will be high elaboration, high motivation, and attitudes will be formed by central cues and consumer's retrieval of the message or ad will be stable over time (Sengupta, Goodstein & Boninger, 1997; Haugtvedt & Petty, 1992). But brand personality has importance for both low and high involvement product brands. By building strong brand personality in low involvement condition, the products will get symbolic meaning and consumers will be attached to them. In high involvement condition the brand personality will help to retrieve the brand and persistently attached to the message.

When the consumers will find that the brand personality of the product is congruent with their self-image, they will exhibit a favourable feeling toward a brand (Chang, Park, & Choi, 2001). This will increase positive attitude of consumers who have high hedonic attitude and emphasize symbolic values. The congruence between brand personality and self-image increases consumer satisfaction and consumer-brand relationship. Consumer satisfaction also is a main factor that leads to consumer-brand relationship and brand loyalty. For high involvement products the consumer-brand relationship quality mediates the effect of satisfaction on consumers' brand loyalties, but for low involvement products satisfaction directly influences brand loyalty (Park & Lee, 2005).

It is seen that high-involvement product brands have higher brand awareness than of low-involvement product brands (Radder & Huang, 2008). Consumer-brand relationship quality increases brand loyalty more in high involvement situations than low involvement situations (Park & Lee, 2005). So brand personality is of more importance for high involvement products than low involvement products. By building strong brand personality in low involvement condition, the products will get symbolic meaning and consumers will be attached to them. In high involvement condition the brand personality will help to retrieve the brand and persistently attached to the message. This leads to:

Proposition 4: The effect of brand personality is higher for high involvement products than low involvement products.

Presence of a prominent product endorser of celebrity in the advertisement will increase the impact for a low involvement product than a high one. Similarly presence of strong positive argument about the brand in the advertisement has a higher impact for high involvement product than the low one (Petty, Cacioppo & Schumann, 1983). The high involvement condition is processed by central route and low involvement condition is processed by peripheral route. For examples Cadbury chocolate ad in India has famous actor Amitabh Bachan in its advertisement. It will act as a potential determinant of attitude towards the product. Similarly ads of refrigerators, music systems, laptops have strong argument about the product, its features, product-relevant information which will motivate the consumers and require higher ability to process them. This leads to the two propositions:

Proposition 5: In case of low involvement products, brand personality can be improved by famous endorsers.

Proposition 6: In case of high involvement products, brand personality can be improved by strong positive argument about the brand.

The model showing relationship between brand personality and involvement conditions is presented in Figure 2.

4. Managerial Implication

The product markets continue to change rapidly. As market is changing, companies need to distinguish their brand from that of the competitors. Focus of positive brand personality building will improve brand preference, purchase intention and also harmonize brand strategy across all products. Effective management of brand personality in the light of changing market conditions and the firm's market expansion is, however, crucial to

maintaining its position and strengthening key strategic brands in international markets. The above propositions can be tested in any particular country and the significance can be found.

Since brand personality is the human characteristics associated with the brand (Aaker, 1997), the positive association with consumer mind will definitely help in building strong bond with a brand's consumer base. By purchasing a brand or wearing a brand or driving a brand, consumer will feel a sense of attachment to it. Brand association and personality affects both consumer preference and purchase intention. Whether the product is of high or low involvement type, the importance of brand personality is still there. Establishment of strong and distinctive brand personalities for different product lines helps to establish their separate identities. Again significance of corporate brand personality will help both high and low involvement product categories to reassure the customer. In the international market, a single corporate brand personality acts as integrative force unifying different brand identities across national boundaries. Since the effect of brand personality is higher for high involvement products than low involvement products, brand endorsement will help to build brand personality. Famous endorsers like movie stars, sportsmen, other famous celebrities can improve brand personality of a low involvement product to a large extent. The brand association created can improve both consumer preference and purchase intention for low involvement product. Whereas a strong positive argument about the brand can build a even stronger brand personality for a high involvement product. It may be stated that the brand endorsement with strong and associated name would be helpful in the market penetration for the new brands and extended brands. The presence of famous endorser or strong argument about the brand would also provide an added impact on the endorsed brands where competition is intensive.

The conceptual framework of work on the dynamics of brand personality and consumer brand preference and purchase intention, with particular attention to new business environments, an area that is becoming more significant now. Again with the increasing importance of the Internet as a medium for business and have proposed necessity for better understanding of brand personality and consumer brand evaluation. It will be of critical importance for future researchers and practitioners to understand the increasingly complex variety of factors underlying and influencing the linkages between brand personality and product involvement, so that consumers can be more attracted to the brand. Future work will concentrate on the operational implications of the model proposed here and the propositions can be tested in different countries. Manufacturing firms need to focus on building a better brand personality, which will lead their brands to a sky-high level in consumer mind.

5. Conclusion

Brand Personality positively affects not only consumer brand preference but also purchase intention. The effect remains true for both high and low involvement products. But the effect of brand personality is higher for high involvement products than low involvement products. The brand personality can be improved by famous endorsers for low involvement products and by strong positive argument about the brand in case of high involvement products. But these aspects are yet to be studied. Of course, there are other issues that need to be addressed regarding brand personality. The effect of situational factors, human personality, and other moderators can be studied. The airing of advertisement (Hill, 1988), ad vehicle, gifts, coupons, other sale promotions also affect the brand preference and purchase intention of both low and high involvement brand. At times retailer promotion also plays a major role for purchase of a product. Packaging, in-store promotion also affects the brand preference. So an integrated study can be carried out to find the relation between other factors along with involvement conditions and brand personality.

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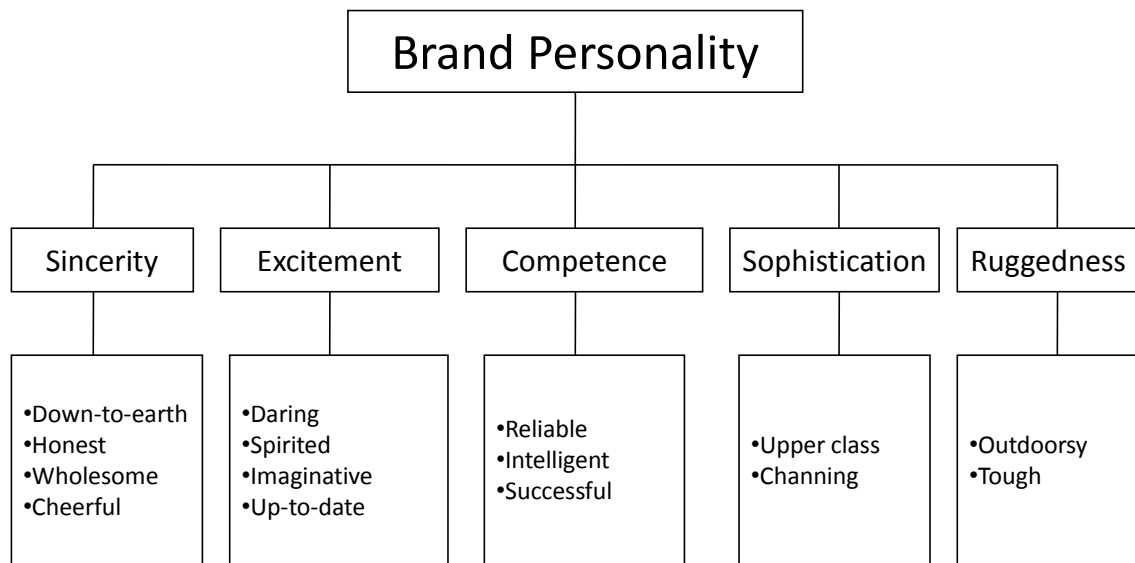
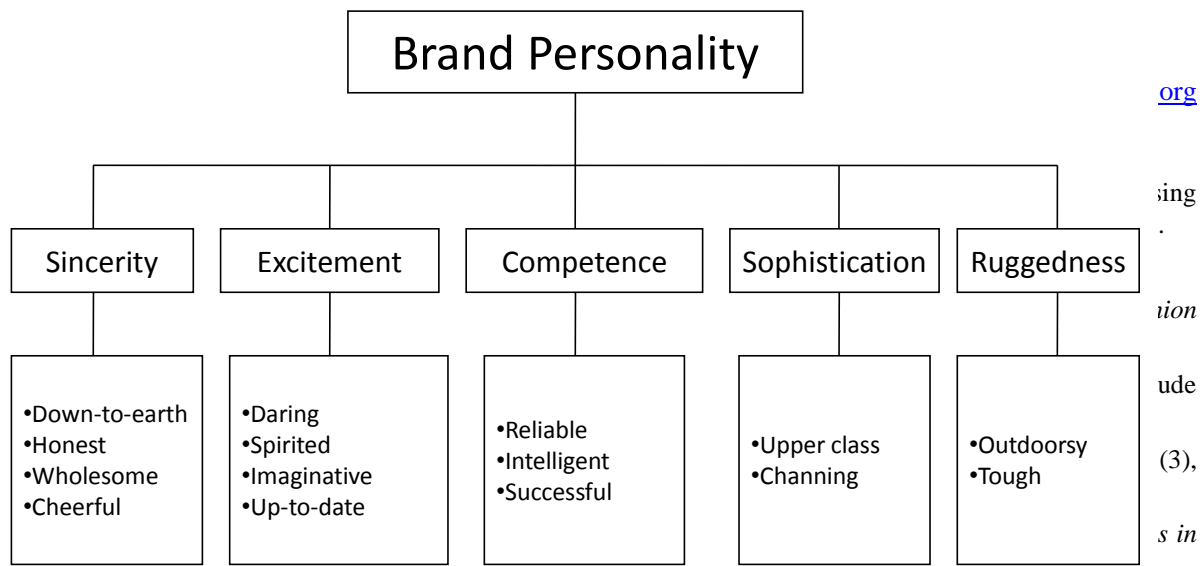


Figure 1. A brand personality framework (Aaker, 1997)

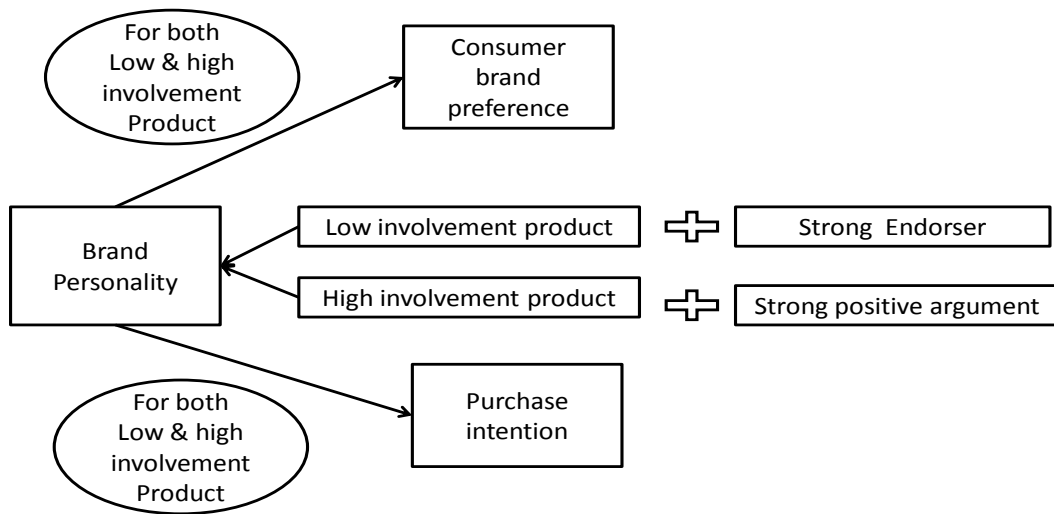


Figure 2. Model showing relationship between brand personality and involvement conditions

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