



An empirical comparison of two brand personality scales: Evidence from India



Anees Ahmad^{a,*}, K.S. Thyagaraj^b

^a School of Business & Commerce, Glocal University, Mirzapur Pole, Mirzapur, Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh 247122, India

^b Department of Management Studies, Indian School of Mines, Dhanbad 826004, Jharkhand, India

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ABSTRACT

Aaker's (1997) brand personality scale has been widely used to measure the personality of brands. However, studies also show that Aaker's brand personality dimensions are not stable across cultures. In pursuance of this issue, we examine the structure of brand personality dimensions in India. This research presents the results of two studies conducted to develop a brand personality scale in Indian context, and to make an empirical comparison between Indian brand personality scale and Aaker's brand personality scale. Results reveal that brand personality in India can be described in six dimensions: sophistication, excitement, popularity, competence, trendiness and integrity. The findings empirically support the reliability and validity of the scale developed. The results also reveal that Indian brand personality scale is a suitable alternative to Aaker's brand personality scale in Indian context.

1. Introduction

One of the key aspects of a company's marketing strategy is to manage brands. An important percentage of the firm's overall marketing budget is spent on brand building and management activities (Domadenik et al., 2001; Mohan and Sequeira, 2013). Brand management facilitates utilization of the organization's assets and generates additional value (Pappu et al., 2005). Brand building strengthens the communication between a company and its consumers and yields competitive advantages to increase the market value of the company. Thus, brand building, as one of the core components of marketing mix, is considered highly essential to reinforce a company's position and to utilize available resources (Wang et al., 2008).

According to Keller (2008), one of the vital elements of brand management is building brand equity. Most marketing activities are directed towards building and managing brand equity (Aaker, 1991; Yoo and Donthu, 2001). Since, strong brands help in achieving competitive advantages, the concept of brand equity has attracted attention of both practitioners and academicians (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 2008). For instance, the increase in brand equity level results in increased consumer preferences as well as an increased intention to purchase (Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995; Freling et al., 2011; Romaniuk and Nenycz-Thiel, 2013).

According to Aaker (1996), brand personality is a key element of brand equity, and it can contribute to brand equity. Brand managers

seek to exploit the benefit of the effect that brand personality has on consumer behavior and brand equity. This study focuses on the brand personality and brand equity concepts. The relationship between brand personality and brand equity has not been subjected to extensive empirical testing (Freling and Forbes, 2005). Further empirical evidence is required to examine the relationship between these two constructs.

Understanding the concepts of brand personality and brand equity and gaining further insights into the relationship between brand personality and brand equity is needed to manage the brand effectively and to maximize brand value and therewith also the company's profit (Bauer et al., 2000; Keller, 2008).

Studies show that Aaker's (1997) brand personality dimensions are not stable across cultures. Other than the USA, the five dimensions could not be replicated in studies conducted in Japan and Spain (Aaker et al., 2001), France (Ferrandi et al., 2000), Netherlands (Smit et al., 2003) and China (Chu and Sung, 2011). This suggests that brand personality represents values and beliefs of a culture. Therefore, the cultural difference among countries can result in culture specific differences in brand personality dimensions. In pursuance of this issue, we examine the structure of brand personality dimensions in India.

In summary, our contributions in the study are:

1. To examine the structure of brand personality dimensions in India.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: anees.candytuft@gmail.com (A. Ahmad), ksthyagaraj@gmail.com (K.S. Thyagaraj).

The aim is to identify the culturally common and culture specific dimensions of brand personality in Indian and American context.

2. To empirically compare the Indian brand personality scale and American brand personality scale.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Brand personality

Aaker, p 347) (1997) defined brand personality as “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand”. Brand personality helps consumers in identifying themselves with the brand and they can relate their own personality with the personality of the brand (Sirgy, 1982; Louis and Lombart, 2010). Thus, if traits of brand's personality complement or match with those of consumers, they will feel more familiar and more contented with the brand. With a view to facilitate more detailed empirical research on brand personality concept, she developed a measurement instrument ‘Brand Personality Scale’. Conducting an extensive study on US consumers, she developed a brand personality framework of five distinct dimensions, namely, sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. According to Aaker (1997), a company's marketing management positions a brand by determining its extent of sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness.

2.2. Brand equity

The consumer-based brand equity, adopted in this study, is brand equity from the customers' perspective. Consumer-based brand equity is the incremental value which a brand provides for its consumers. Aaker (1991) has conceptualized brand equity along four main dimensions: brand loyalty, perceived quality, brand awareness, and brand associations. Brand loyalty is the attachment of a customer towards a brand (Aaker, 1991). Perceived quality is the quality perceived by the consumer based on his/her subjective evaluations (Zeithaml, 1988). Brand awareness determines the extent to which a potential buyer can recall a brand as a member of a certain product category (Aaker, 1991). It refers to how strongly a brand is present in consumer's mind. Brand associations are the symbols and images associated with the brand because of consumption experience or communication exposure such as advertisements (Aaker, 1991).

2.3. Study 1: developing the brand personality scale in Indian context

Next, we develop a brand personality scale that captures the brand personality dimensions perceived by Indian consumers. In this section, first we discuss the selection of brands, selection of personality items and procedure of data collection. Then we conduct a principal component analysis to determine the dimensionality of the scale followed by a confirmatory factor analysis to establish the construct validity of the scale. Also, we examine the convergent and discriminant validity of the scale. Finally, the scale is shortened and subjected to confirmatory factor analysis to further determine the scale dimensionality.

2.4. Brand selection

A total of 18 brands were selected, representing different purchase motivations. With a view to increase the representativeness of the contemporary commercial brands in India, 12 global and 6 Indian brands were selected. The brands are well known to Indian consumers which ensured familiarity of the sample of brands. Based on Ratchford's (1987) classification, six brands were selected from highly symbolic product categories (Raymond's, Armani, Lakme, Titan, Archie's Cards, and Ray Ban), six brands were selected from utilitarian categories (Surf Excel, Dabur, Colgate, LIC, Prestige, and Sunsilk) and

six brands bridged both these categories (Toyota, Coca Cola, Dell, Adidas, Lego, and Domino's) function.

2.5. Selection of personality items

The selection process of personality items was completed in two steps. In a first step, 21 male and 15 female Indian participants were involved in a free association task. Participants were asked to think of each of the brand as a person and write attributes that first come to their mind. Participants were could skip a brand in case they were not familiar or had no experience with it. It was explained to participants that personality can be a set of human characteristics associated with a brand (Aaker, 1997). Considering only responses from participants who acknowledged familiarity with the brand, the free association process resulted in 138 personality items. The brand personality items generated in free association task were answered in English language.

In a second step, a panel comprising nine researchers from marketing area was asked to eliminate the inappropriate personality items from the list. The criteria for short listing the personality attributes were (i) words that were not personality traits, (ii) words with negative connotation, (iii) words that were synonyms for attributes already been identified, and (iv) words that were ambiguous or too general (Chu and Sung, 2011). The panel deleted items such as narcissistic, sparkling, crafted, cheap, supreme, bond, executive, fresh, savior, complex, modern, familiar, regular, eco-friendly, and rough. Based on the outcome of this two step process, a pool of 56 personality attributes was constructed.

2.6. Subjects and procedure

Participants of this study were Indian consumers recruited via Facebook using online questionnaire. The sampling frame was restricted to India. Snowball sampling method was adopted to increase the sample size. The online questionnaire was designed using Google Forms. Potential participants received the invitation in a personal message and were asked to participate in the survey. Personal messages were sent to friends (who also helped in recruiting volunteers) and members of various interest groups on Facebook, belonging to all four major regions of India namely East, West, North and South India.

Large number of brands in a questionnaire leads to participant fatigue (Aaker et al., 2001). Hence, with a view to minimize potential fatigue, the 18 brands were divided into six subgroups of three brands each (one symbolic brand, one utilitarian brand, and one symbolic/utilitarian brand) and participants were randomly assigned a brand group. This resulted in six subgroups of respondents. Each respondent in a subgroup rated three brands on a 5 point Likert scale (1= not at all descriptive, 5= extremely descriptive) and provided ratings on total of 168 items (3 brands on 56 personality items). With a view to control order bias due to primacy or recency effects, the researcher systematically rotated the order in which 56 attributes were listed for each brand in the questionnaire. A total of 636 participants completed the survey.

68.3% of the sample were 30 years old or younger representative of the Indian population which is predominantly young. Out of the total respondents, 56.3% were male. The male to female ratio of the sample also represents Indian population. 590 (92.7%) out of 636 respondents were either graduate or post graduate. Based on the qualification of the respondents it can be assumed that responses collected will provide a correct assessment of dimensions of brand personality in India. Most of the respondent belonged to the Northern states of India (32.4%) whereas respondents from Eastern (25.6%) and Western (23.5%) states were more or less equal with the least number of respondents from the Southern states of the country (18.5%). The overall sample was representative in terms of major regions in which Indian population lives.

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