



19th International Scientific Conference; Economics and Management 2014, ICEM 2014, 23-25
April 2014, Riga, Latvia

Effect of brand elements on brand personality perception

Eleonora Seimiene^{a*}, Egle Kamarauskaite^b

^{a, b} Vilnius University, Vilnius, Lithuania

Abstract

Brand personality is an important topic in marketing studies already for several decades. It is proven that brand personality plays a significant role in ensuring brand loyalty, forming favourable attitudes towards the brand and enlarging brand equity. However, very little attention is paid to the topic, how different brand elements, attributes or factors shape in consumers' minds the perception of brand personality. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to fill the existing gap in the literature by providing a better understanding about what factors form the perception of brand personality. The qualitative study consisting of in-depth interviews was done in beer market, investigating how different attributes shape the consumers' perception of beer brands personalities. The study revealed that brand personalities were mostly impacted by design of bottle and label, design colours and advertisements. However, such factors as position of brand in the market, brand name, and perceived typical user should be also considered as important in forming consumers' perception of brand personality

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Peer-review under responsibility of the Kaunas University of Technology.

Keywords: Brand personality; brand elements; brand attributes.

1. Introduction

Brand personality already for several decades is an important and extensively analysed concept in scientific literature. Brand personality is described as human characteristics that consumers associate with the brand (Aaker, 1997). Brand personality plays an important role in generating consumers' engagement with the brand, helps to create, develop and maintain strong brands (Fournier, 1998; Kapferer, 2010; Lin, 2010). Lots of studies analyse and prove importance of brand personality on favourable attitudes towards the brand, consumers' satisfaction with brand, brand loyalty and brand recommendation, moreover, brand personality tends to enlarge brand equity (Biel, 1993;

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +37061544786

E-mail address: eleonora.seimiene@gmail.com

Keller, 1993, 2008; Fournier, 1998; Kapferer, 2010; Lin, 2010). However, only several researchers investigate the elements, attributes or factors that shape perception of brand personality or explore the nature of brand personality and the sources it is formed from (Maehle & Supphellen, 2008; Arora & Stoner, 2009; Maehle, Otnes & Supphellen, 2011; Dikcius, Seimiene & Zaliene, 2013).

Maehle, Otnes and Supphellen (2011) investigated how consumers form their perceptions of various dimensions of brand personality scale and found that concrete product categories characteristics influence brand personality understanding according brand personality scale dimensions. Furthermore, Maehle, Otnes and Supphellen (2011) also found that brands named as strong on specific personality dimensions have characteristics related not just with a product: sincere brands share family-related associations and high morals, exciting brands are related to special exciting occasions and moments, competent brands are mostly associated with quality and expertise, sophisticated brands are usually of feminine nature, and rugged brands are of masculine one.

Personality of consumer also impacts the perception of brand personality (Dikcius, Seimiene and Zaliene, 2013). Study done by Dikcius, Seimiene and Zaliene (2013) revealed variety of matches between dimensions of human personality and brand personality. However, only in one case consumers attributed their personal characteristics to the same dimension of brand personality: the consumers, who scored high on extraversion dimension, were inclined to attribute excitement characteristic to brand personality. This match was also proved by previous studies (Aaker, 1997; Caprara, Barbaranelli & Guido, 2001; Fennis, Pruyn & Maasland, 2005; Lin, 2010).

Brand personality perception in consumer's mind can be changed by any direct or indirect experience that consumers have with the brand (Aaker, 2010). Endorsers of brand, company's employees or CEO, and users of brand affect perception of brand personality directly (Pringle & Binet, 2005). The opposite indirect effect comes from associations with the brand attributes such as name, logo, way of communication, colours, package, price, advertising style, communication, logistic of the product (Aaker, 1997). All these various brand elements that help to differentiate brand from competitors and identify it in multiple environment (Keller, 2008) impact brand personality perception.

Brand name is perceived as the most seen information by consumers (De Chernatony, 2010), it the basis for brand awareness and communication (Keller, Heckler & Houston, 1998), it can help to increase brand awareness and create desired brand image for a new product. Brand personality is built by the manipulation of brand name and other features such as symbols, signs, logos, music, type of endorsers, imagery, layout or use of provocation and humour (Wee, 2004).

Logo is an important element of brand's visual identity (Kohli, Suri & Thakor, 2002). A number of studies have proven the importance of logo graphic design on brand awareness and recognition (Henderson & Cote, 1998; Janiszewski & Meyvi, 2001). Design of the logo also influences consumers' perception of brand personality (Grohmann, 2008). The study done by Grohmann (2008) revealed the relation between characteristics of logo design and brand personality dimensions. For instance, the brand is perceived as more sincere when its logo is highly natural, elaborate, round and coherent.

Colours of the brand are another factor affecting perception of brand personality and are essential for the brand and brand personality. Meaning of colours was extensively analysed over the past years (Bottomley & Doyle, 2006); studies revealed that black colour is related with expensiveness and power, blue colour with dependence and trust, high quality and love are seen in red colour, happiness – in the yellow. Lots of brands are associated with several colours, thus communicating to consumers more than one meaning (Bottomley & Doyle, 2006). The study of Aaker, Benet-Martinez and Garolera (2001) related colours with brand personality dimensions: blue and red are in the dimension of competence; green shows sincerity, warmth and honest feelings; pink, yellow, purple means energy and stands for dimension of excitement. However, sophistication and ruggedness dimensions were not so clearly related with colours.

Package of brand has much to do with colours; but it also has more elements that transfer the meaning to consumers. According to Ampuero and Vila (2006) if a product is for upper class and highly priced, colours of the package should be cold and dark; the opposite situation with price sensitive consumers – colours of the package should be light, mostly white. What is more, letters and words of the package for upper class should be bolded, large. Product packages directed to the middle class use straight and horizontal lines, curves, circles; on the contrary, straight vertical lines and squares are used for highly priced products.

People is one more factor influencing perception of brand personality (Levy, 1959) It should be noticed that “people” stands both for consumers of the brand and also for the employees of the company. Employees especially influence consumers’ perception for service brands (Harris & Fleming, 2005). As Davies and Chun (2012) state, female staff can even be asked to do makeup or to wear dress for work to present the company and the brand better. For instance, airlines employees wearing more stylish uniforms than other company’s staff, create an image of brand also being more stylish. Brand personality of the company can be understood in several ways according the age of employees Davies and Chun (2012). If company is having young employees, brand personality is perceived as young, adaptable, open – minded; the older the average age of employees the more competent the corporate brand appears but is perceived as less adaptable to changes. To sum up, it could be stated that employees influence perception of corporate brand as and bring some symbolic effects due to stereotyping done by customers.

As it was stated earlier brand communication indirectly influences perception of brand personality, however, one of the elements of marketing communication mix advertising is one of the most effective ways to communicate with consumer and express brand personality (Kotler & Keller, 2012). Brand personality is built with every advertisement. A lot of tools used in advertising (from colours and words to symbols and people) do affect the perception of brand personality (Pringle & Binet, 2005). One of the most effective ways to influence consumers with advertisement is to use celebrity endorsers in it. Compared to celebrities, anonymous people and actors can bring demographic information such as age, gender, status, but real celebrities transfer to brands lifestyle and personality meanings that unknown models cannot provide (Pringle & Binet, 2005). Celebrities are used in brands advertising to show specific characters and personal features, create needed brand personalities. Such categories as food and drink, alcohol, personal appearance are more often advertised with the help of celebrities; moreover, younger people are in general more into celebrities. Therefore, advertising these categories with celebrities for younger people attracts attention, matches consumers’ and brands’ personalities and increases sales (Pringle & Binet, 2005).

According to Lin (2010) perception of brand personality is mainly created through these sources: associations about the brand in consumers’ minds, corporate image or image of the company producing the brands, and attributes of the product: packaging, distribution channels, etc. Price of the brand also creates specific characteristics of brand personality.

To sum up, it could be stated, that so far lots of researches paid attention to specific brand attributes or elements and their effect on brand personality perception (for instance, colours and created brand personality, employees and created brand personality, etc.). However, fewer studies integrated different elements and attributes of brands and analysed it all together trying to understand how the whole particular perception of brand personality was formed. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to understand how consumers form their perception of brand personality, which brand’s elements, attributes or factors and how impact the perception.

2. Method

The main purpose of the research was to investigate consumers’ perception of brand personalities and to understand which brand elements and how influence and contribute to the perception of brand personalities.

Qualitative research method was chosen due to the need the reveal consumers’ perception of brand personalities, evaluation of specific brand elements, and associations they have about brands. Qualitative research methods are mainly used when object of the study are feelings of consumers, their understandings, motivation, way of thinking, moreover, it allows for the researcher to be flexible during the research process (McDaniel & Gates, 2004). Compared to quantitative study, qualitative research happens while asking questions, getting answers and generating insights from relatively small samples.

Research consisted of 15 in-depth interviews conducted in Vilnius, Lithuania. In-depth interviews were chosen instead of focus groups in order to reveal more honest answers and to get more detailed and deeper information from each respondent. Discussion guide prepared for the interviews mainly consisted from indirect questions and nondirective techniques to uncover deepest understandings of respondents. Projective tests such as personification exercise and word associations’ tests were extensively used. Such brand attributes and elements as packaging, logo design, colours, brand name, perceived price, advertising, producer, and typical perceived user were included into the study. Each interview lasted for 1,5-2 hours. All interviews were audio recorded and later transcripts for analysis

were made. Analysis of qualitative data is usually described as creative process requiring from the researcher some intellectual contribution (McDaniel & Gates, 2004). The analysis of qualitative data was made using the methods of convergence and divergence: searching and grouping the similarities and stating the differences.

The research was done in beer market. Beer market was chosen due to the fact, that breweries constantly invest in their brands, moreover, competition in this market is intense; thus all results in distinctive brand personalities (which compared to other markets are more easily described by consumers). Top five Lithuanian beer brands produced by three breweries were chosen for analysis: “Švyturys Ekstra” and “Utenos Utenos” (by “Švyturys-Utenos” brewery), “Volfas Engelman” (by “Volfas Engelman” brewery), “Kalnapilis Original” and “Tauras Tradicinis” (by “Kalnapilio-Tauro group” brewery). In-depth interviews were conducted with 20-27 y.o. 10 males and 5 females, average income, consuming one of earlier mentioned brands as their main one and being aware of other brands in the market. As the main task of the study was to reveal perception of brand personalities and influence of brand attributes, no strict specific criteria for respondents’ age, education or income were settled.

3. Results

The research revealed in detail the respondents’ perception of five beer brands’ personalities; moreover, during the study elements and attributes of different brands were compared and discussed with respondents. All these collected data allowed to perform analysis, which brands’ attributes and in what way formed the perception of brand personalities. Below the results of the study are presented in short, discussing only the attributes that had the most impact on brand personality perception.

“Volfas Engelman”. Mainly personality of this brand was influenced by the outstanding design of the bottle. Due to the exceptional bottle design (the bottle compared to others is bigger in volume and higher in size – pint size) brand personality is perceived as refined, sure about what he wants in his life, owing higher position at work (being manager or director), having high social status. Moreover, different label place on the bottle compared to other brands’ bottles makes consumers assign to brand personality such feature as innovative. Also, the personality of the brand that has label with black and golden colours looks choosy, expensive and leading.

“Švyturys Ekstra”. The personality of the brand was also mostly affected by exclusive bottle design and being popular in the market. Relatively new, changed and attractive bottle design and form of the bottle (with convexities and prints) makes consumers think about the brand as ambitious person being a businessman, who values work and results. The brand personality is seen similar to “Volfas Engelman”. Used golden, black and red colours on the label are perceived as refined person’s characteristics. The brand is also seen as popular and consumed by many people, this affects the perception of the brand personality as having a lot of connections and being well-known in society.

“Utenos Utenos”. Personality of this brand was influenced by simple design of the bottle and youthful advertisements. The bottle (made from transparent glass) of this brand compared to all others and especially to “Volfas Engelman” is perceived as simple, usual, not outstanding; therefore, the brand personality is assigned such features as bright, cheerful, middle social class. Moreover, the brand uses young people in advertisements and thus it is related with the young, active, energetic, easy-going, fun-loving personality.

“Kalnapilis Original”. Brand personality was mostly affected by general stable brand’s position in the market. The bottle of the brand is seen as very usual, not changing for a long time, thus the personality is ascribed such characteristics as stable, mature, respected and keeping traditions, but at the same time, old-fashioned, conservative, not very ambitious and a bit boring. Due to the fact that producing company is for a long time in the market and has stable position, the personality is perceived as stable, known, reliable. Current advertisement with the slogan “It is time to meet” forms brand personality perception as being united and friendly. Average price creates personality of being simple, not refined and middle social group.

“Tauras Tradicinis”. Mainly the brand personality perception was influenced by old-looking appearance of the bottle design in general and masculine advertising. The brand personality perception mostly is affected by the simple, old-fashioned design and form of the bottle; therefore, personality is seen as older person, who values family and traditions. But dark and dirty red colour of the label forms aggressive brand personality. Constant and not changed or renewed for some time label suggest to think that brand does not care about innovations, is closed to the world and stubborn. Price perception as being the cheapest among researched brands assigns personality with such

profession as being builder, hard-worker. Advertising of the brand where the strongest person in the world is used makes people think about the brand as strong, angry, lonely, but reliable person.

4. Discussion/Conclusions

This paper contributes to brand personality topic analysing how consumers form their perception of brand personality and what attributes or elements impact the perception. The study revealed that the perception of analysed beer brands' personalities is mostly affected by one or two factors (design of the bottle and label, used colours, advertisements, position of brand in the market, brand name, perceived typical user, etc.), which have the most impact on perception of brand personality and form the main characteristics. The element that affected the perception of all analysed beer brands the most was design and colours of bottle and label. However, this could be due to the fact that this element is most often seen and noticed by consumers and, therefore, forms particular associations stronger compared to other factors. To sum up, in general the study proved results of other studies about the importance of brand/ product design and colours (Henderson & Cote, 1998; Aaker, Benet-Martinez & Garolera, 2001; Janiszewski & Meyvi, 2001; Kohli, Suri & Thakor, 2002; Ampuero & Vila, 2006; Bottomley & Doyle, 2006; Grohmann, 2008).

The limitations of this study are due to the fact that the study was done only in one market: implementing the research in other markets (for instance, retail chains, clothes, etc.) could result in different factors influencing the perception of brand personality and different meanings ascribed to the elements and attributes of the brand. Nevertheless, qualitative studies usually operate with samples much smaller than quantitative studies; a bigger sample for qualitative study in the same beer market (for instance, different age groups, other preferred brands) could provide more insights about the effect of different factors on consumers' perception of brand personalities.

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