



The Impact of Brand Personality on Brand Preference: A Study on Personal Care Products

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ABSTRACT

The three factors in the marketing communication context namely, the spokesperson, message and channel is vital in affecting the purchase intention of a consumer. In the Sri Lankan context, the marketers of the personal care brands had put more effort on selecting the spokesperson the most while the consumers tend to give prominence to the message in determining their purchases. Brand personification has become one of the most salient aspect used in the marketing communication context in designing the message. Reflecting a human like character in the brand aims to attract the consumers in a unique manner with the brands. This becomes more vital in the case of brands to which the consumers are personally attached to. Hence, the personification alone wouldn't be sufficient as the means of personifying and the most suitable aspect to be personified in the brand is also vital. This research focused upon understanding the association between brand personality and brand preference, was conducted as a combination of both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The survey with a self-administered questionnaire developed by the researcher, served as the main source of data collection a convenient-judgmental sample. Findings would aid the decision makers in the chosen area of business.

Keywords: Brand Personification, Marketing Communication, Brand Preference

JEL Classification: M3

1. INTRODUCTION

Sri Lankan FMCG industry, renowned as a multi-million money sector is being dominated by Unilever Sri Lanka and Hema Holdings with the manufacture and distribution of wide range of FMCG brands. Those products which are known to leave the shelves "fast", are categorized as food and beverage, household and personal care items. Personal care products can again be categorized into five types namely, hair care, skin care, cosmetics, fragrances and oral care while Unilever Sri Lanka owns the highest number of brands while LMRB Household panel data, also indicates it as the highest monthly sales generator for the company. Hence as a result, the communication specific budgetary allocations for personal care products are highest as opposed to the other two categories (Cooray, 2016). Therefore, the companies consider the effectiveness of the marketing communication activities on the ultimate purchase decision as a prime factor.

Marketing communication, as a mean of sharing information had become a vital factor for day to day business activities. In the context, three factors are considered to be important

namely, source, message and channel. In order to deepen the understanding of the same, the mini-survey conducted by the researcher at the commencement revealed that the consumers prefer to see an image of a brand that reflects their personality in it as they consider personal care products being personally attached to them. As a result, consumers prefer to select brands whose personality has congruence with their own self-concept (Maehle and Shneo, 2010). The importance does not only lie in creating a strong brand personality, but to create a personality which matches and fits its users while appealing them. Hence, the marketers are faced with the requirement of creating a brand personality which goes in line with the personality of the target audience.

Unfortunately in the Sri Lankan context, the prominence is given to the endorser or the spokesperson of the advertisement than the content. On the other hand, consumers prioritize their preference on the personality or human based characteristics inherent in a brand. Thus, Failure in implementing a clear image will result in the loss of customers moving from a preference to a purchase decision.

Hence, the research was focused upon improving the effectiveness of the marketing communication activities, to make it appeal in a more favorable manner to the consumers through the findings. For the achievement of the same, the research was driven through the objective of understanding the relationship between personality related dimensions and brand preference for personal care products.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The contemporary marketers try to appeal to consumers in terms of the symbolic qualities associated with products as most of the today's customers purchase products for not just what they are capable of delivering, but for what they symbolize too. This symbolic meaning is also called, the brand personality, defined as "a set of human characteristics associated with the brand", by Aaker (1997). The personality is rooted in the identity which is externally focused (Schiffman, et al., 2010). In marketing, brand personalities are projected which will fit the best for a specific target market. It could be communicated to the consumer through advertising, package, social media, brand name or logo (Schiffman, et al., 2010).

Thus it is found out through numerous studies that, the brand personality can be formed through both product related, and non-product related factors. The non-product related factors include consumers past experience, user imagery, symbols, word of mouth, endorsers etc. Thus, out of the non-product related factors, which could influence the personality, marketing communication has an interrelationship with most of the factors discussed above (Jin Su, 2014).

When it comes to the context of appearance management, the prominence gained by personal care products is of utmost importance. These products are considered to be applied to enhance one's appearance and is used to communicate one's style an aesthetic preference (Craik, 1994). Further, these personal care products are applied as a complement to the clothing to gain a complete look. Craik (1994) further states that makeup or cosmetics carves the traits of personality in to the social body. It was further proved by Cash and Cash in 1982, as they found out that the women get confident by wearing cosmetics and express a more positive body and a self-image compared to the instances where they are not wearing makeup.

Brand personification is one important which is considered as important by modern marketers which put consumer perception of the product/service in to a human like character. In determining the brand personality, the consumers associate the brands with meanings, assuming it to be a person which is known as brand personification (Aaker, 1997).

The consumers are considered to be more receptive and responsive for a communication delivered via a person who has an emotional connection with, than a person who doesn't have (Santos, 2014).

Aaker (1997) defines the distinct characteristic of brand personality as follows,

- Sincerity- concerned with honesty, wholesomeness, cheerfulness, real and safe, down to earth.

- Excitement – concerned with courageous, imaginativeness and exciting nature, carefree, spirited, youthful.
- Competence – concerned with intelligence, reliability, security and success
- Sophistication – concerned with charming, glamour, upper-class and ingenuous, elegance, prestigious.
- Ruggedness – concerned with toughness, strength and masculinity.

A brand is said to be acquiring the above stated profile through advertising created associations in accordance with the users associated, or the kind of people who are endorsing them (Monger, 2012). Despite being characterized by these traits, the brand personalities also depict associated feelings. Aaker (1997) further states that the consumer attitudes and behaviors are actually a reflection of Brand personality, which ultimately gets connected with the purchase intention of the consumer through the brand preference being created.

A study by (LaPlaca, 2015) on assessing the brand personality dimensions reveals, brand personality traits aiding in the process of differentiation and also in creating a preference for brands. The findings further elaborates that if the consumer's actual perceptions about the brands does not match with the traits that the companies emphasizes, the companies should try to create strategies to shift consumer's perceptions on their brands. In this process, the human-like characteristics are needed to be used in reflecting the claims. The study further confirms the fact that Aaker's brand personality dimensions are applicable and valid in the current context as majority of the consumer's associate the traits of those dimensions with the top-of-mind brands and also states that it is required to evaluate those dimensions which could be adapted to particular sectors they address.

Based on the literature, the following framework was developed in which, the Aaker's dimensions are considered as the independent variables while the brand preference serves as the dependent variable (Figure 1).

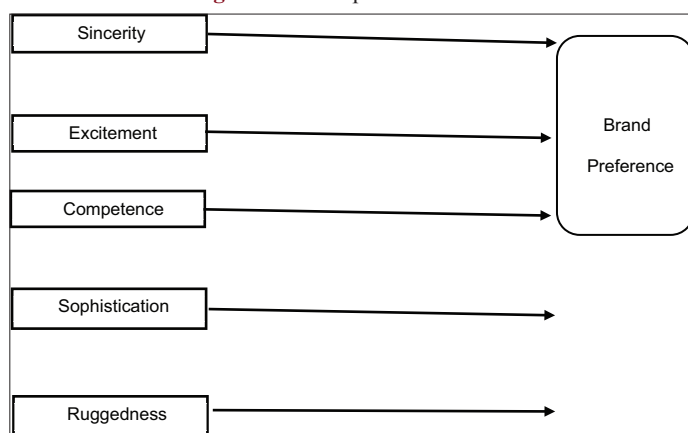
3. METHODOLOGY

This research is of mixed-method in nature since the study commenced with a qualitative approach followed by a quantitative approach to measure the various views and opinions (Sekaran, 2011). Focus Group Discussions served as the initial source of collecting data at the beginning to deepen the understanding on the context while the 200 Female personal care product consumers aged 20-35, in the Western Province, Kaduwela area, was considered for the sample to attempt the questionnaire.

For the identification of the relationship between the Aaker's Personality Dimensions and brand preference, Chi-square test of independence was used. And it was followed by Cramer's V test to assess the strength.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1 indicates the results of Chi-square test of independence with the Pearson Chi-square value and the respective P value,

Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Source: Author

Table 1: Results of the Chi-square test of independence

Product Type	Pearson Chi-square		Cramer's V value
	Value	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) – P value	
Competence	51.910 ^a	0.000	0.152
Excitement	42.463 ^a	0.000	0.138
Ruggedness	28.031 ^a	0.031	0.112
Sincerity	57.847 ^a	0.000	0.161
Sophistication	59.623 ^a	0.000	0.163

followed by Cramer's V value assessing the strength for the chosen personality dimensions and brand preference.

Out of Aaker's Personality Dimensions, Sincerity, Competence, Sophistication and sophistication has statistically a significant relationship with brand preference. It is also evident that Sophistication and sincerity has a strong relationship as opposed to the other two dimensions. On the other hand, the Ruggedness dimension does not has relationship with brand preference.

5. CONCLUSION

Personal care products are those to which the consumers are highly attached to and prefers to see a reflection of themselves in the products they consume. In the context of marketing communications related to persona care products, the marketers seem to have given prominence to the source of the message than the content whereas the consumers tend to be highly attached with the message content. Hence, the overall effectiveness of the promotional aspect is questionable with reference to it. Through the 3 Focus group interviews which was conducted, the participants, while describing the importance of the personal care products in their lives, stated that it was one of those products whereby the importance increased as they grew up. Something which wasn't that attached to them while they were schooling and something which they got so much attached to during their university life as they became independent also as the usage of others compelled them in using them. Personal care products are perceived as something that enhances the beauty though not being

a must, while getting the attraction from others. Most importantly, personal care products are considered to be so much attached with one's personality and they are used to gain self-satisfaction.

Those consumers prefer to see personalities such as the down to earth humble nature, and willingness to try out new things, the capability to do something successfully and the upper-class related mentality in them. The consumers does not prefer the masculine nature to be prevalent in any of those products they consume.

Hence it can be concluded that a promotional message with personality associated traits plays an important role in influencing to create a preference for personal care products. Thus, the preference could well differ accordingly with different personality dimensions associated with the brand.

6. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

With reference to the research findings it can be recommended in general that, personality related associations should be implicated in personal care products communications. Since the communication context is one such aspect which the consumers interact at the first place before interacting with the brand for real and also since majority of the respondents agreed with their preference to see a reflection of personality in the brands makes the need more crucial. It can also be recommended that it is important to give preference to the message of an advertisement since the consumers consider it to be as a crucial determinant in moving from a purchase intention to a purchase decision. Thus, it can also be said that the priority should be given to the message than the spokesperson since consumers give more prominence to the content.

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