Aaker's Brand Personality Framework: A Critical Commentary

Prof. Dr. Muhammad Ehsan Malik[1], Basharat Naeem*[2]

[1]Dean, Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences. Director, Institute of Business Administration (IBA)/Director General, Gujranwala Campus, University of the Punjab, Lahore (Pakistan)
[2]Senior Research Officer, COMSATS Institute of Information Technology (CIIT) Lahore Campus, Pakistan

ABSTRACT

Brand personality, an integral part of brand image, is considered critical to differentiate a brand in the marketplace. It opened new horizons for brand management in relational marketing field. Researchers' interest in brand personality expanded rapidly after the seminal work of Aaker framework. But to date, heavy criticism was leveled against Aaker's multi-dimensional model to measure brand personality construct. This prompted researchers to review the literature on the effectiveness and limitations of influential framework of brand personality to inform future research. Comprehensiveness of the Aaker's framework is generalizable over multiple product categories. As regards limitations, Aaker's scale is considered as crude measure of brand personality as it transposed human personality traits rather than using brands themselves. Additionally, the framework is American culture specific as Aaker's five-dimensional structure did not always receive empirical substantiation across different cultural settings. Directions for future research are also presented.
KEYWORDS: Brand Personality, Aaker's Brand Personality Framwork, Critical Commentary

1- INTRODUCTION

1-1 Brand and Brand Personality

Brand is considered as basic factor of marketing and brand is defined as "a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of these, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors" [1]. Researchers [2, 3, 4] explained brand as value proposition that fulfills the particulars needs and wants of the customers. Creating a strong brand is played a significant role for organization to achieve competitive advantage over its competitors [5] and also considered as an important instrument in corporate marketing strategies [6]. In the light of consumers' perception, brand can add distinct value in the product and considered as more enduring asset of products [1]. A study [7] claimed that researchers have shown growing interest in brand personality concept because of its two constituents: human personality and brand characteristics.

As regards brand personality [8] defined it as "the way a consumer perceives the brand on the personality of a man to conceive". Brand personality [9] defined it as human traits linked with brands. The research of [10] is considered as first mentioned study of brand with personality and taken as foundation of this concept from projective methods. Most of the researches on brand personality derived from projective research, more specifically, from qualitative studies conducted by practitioners [11, 12, 13]. Brand personality is established based on the inspiration of those consumers "choose which brands to buy in a similar way that they choose which fellow humans to socialize with" [14]. A study of [15] argue that stronger relationship can build between brand and personality of the brand's identity match with the perception of consumers. [16] acknowledged that "the greater the self-expressive value and the distinctiveness of brand personality are, the greater will be the attractiveness of the brand personality". He also explained the concept of social identification which refers to consumers' tendency to categorize themselves as an affiliate of certain group(s).

According to [9] brand personality is multi-dimensional concept consisting of dimensions namely excitement, ruggedness, competence, sincerity and sophistication. This may be considered one of the comprehensive frameworks of brand personality which can be generalized over multiple product categories. The research conducted on brand personality is considered as very young as compared to human personality studies [17]. Some researchers [e.g., 17] also criticized the framework of [9] because it only consisted of positive attributes of the brand whereas some brands are not so wholesome. Negative factors were excluded in the development of brand personality scale [18]. Researchers [19] claimed that some items were added that were not considered as proper personality traits.

*Corresponding Author: Basharat Naeem, Senior Research Officer, COMSATS Institute of Information Technology (CIIT) Lahore Campus, Pakistan, Email: basharatnaeem@ciitlahore.edu.pk

1-2 Micro vs. Macro Approaches to Brand Personality

The terms micro and macro were introduced first in two specific approaches of social psychology in social values study [20]. He introduced the term micro by considering "the specificity of each area of investigation calls for a targeted study and that the use of overly generalized inventories is inappropriate". On the other hand, macro approach, proposed by [21], is taken as to measure social values exhaustive through multiple inventories of values [22]. They argued that "this epistemological question also arises in relation to the concept of brand personality. For consumption practices are imprinted with characteristics that are both cultural and linked to product categories, thus raising doubts as the universal nature of brand personality inventories". A recent comprehensive literature review [22] exposed that the most of the studies were undertaken in recent years in different areas. In it, researchers claimed that field of brand personality rapidly has expanded rapidly after the seminal work of [9], in multiple sectors like product, company, communication medium brand, retail channel and services industry. Consequently, retail chains, services and media develop their own brands [23] just because of identifying the importance of brand personality [24].

The measurement of brand personality is dependent upon the area of study or industry because the there are hardly comparability between the available scale of brand personality. In general, global or holistic approaches are viewable as a macroform of brand personality, for which different brand domains are grouped together, such as tangible goods, services, media and telecom operators in his scale [9]. At macro level, this approach involves into inter-category dimensions of product and cross-cultural studies whereas at micro level, the studies related to brand personality conducting at specific areas.

1-3 Implicit Theories of Personality Malleability

Researchers [25] argues that "a significant body of social psychology research has found that individuals maintain systematically different implicit theories about the world around them as evidenced by either a belief in the fixedness or immutability of personality, characterized by an entity theory orientation, or a belief in the changeability or malleability of personality, characterized by an incremental theory orientation". These theories guide information processing and social interactions and individuals rely on these theories to predict and interpret various phenomena and they judge objects, others and themselves [26]. Recent empirical studies in the domain of consumer research shown that implicit theories related to human personality are used to interpret information about marketing activities [27, 28, 29]. For example, implicit theories of consumers persuade their acceptance with brand extensions i.e., when a company launch new product under the existing brand name [27].

1-4 Consequences of Brand Personality

Brand personalities proposed significant managerial implications with respect to the relationship of consumer with brands [30, 31] and also explicated the consumer behavior [32, 33]. Hence, the brand personality concept provided new horizons for the brand management in relational marketing field [33]. Some important variables considered as consequences of brand personality is the literature includes perceived brand quality [34, 35], attitude to the brand [32, 33, 36, 37, 38], intentions of future behavior [36, 39], attachment to the brand [30, 31, 33, 40], commitment to the brand [31, 32, 33] and trust in the brand [30, 31, 41].

1-5 Limitations of Brand Personality

Brand personality was firstly introduced by [9] as "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand". This definition explained the concept but researchers criticized this term because of its "catch-all character" and overly vagueness [19]. Apart from the issues associated with the formulation of clear definition, [42] argued that "it seems necessary to question the validity of the ontological concept of brand personality". Therefore, it's important to highlight the criticism, shortcomings and limitations leveled against the brand personality concept advanced by [9].

The first critical limitation of [9] brand personality construct is items associated with this scale. [43] argued that most studies conducted on brand personality are entirely based on transposition of theories and used "crude measurement tools" that were originally developed for the measurement of human personality. This statement also supported by the study of [44] in an Italian context, which showed that human personality scale cannot transpose to brands directly. To overcome this issue numerous authors [e.g. 45] developed new scales of brand personality from qualitative studies which are based on brands themselves instead of transposing human personality traits. The second limitation is associated with the semantic problems and measurement items presented [9]. [19] claimed that the items of "Competence" dimensions should be excluded that are associated with cognitive abilities and intelligence. The third limitation in [9] model is association of the dimensions to American culture only [38, 40]. [46] revealed the dimensions of brand personality in different cultures such as Japan and Spain in comparison with USA. Another limitation is that interpretations of the dimensions of this scale. In addition, Aaker's original multi-

dimensional structure did not always received empirical substantiation. For example, [28] developed 4-dimensional scale in Korean context and [47] established a 6-dimensional scale in Canada.

2- Conclusion and Discussion

The purpose of non systematic review was to critically evaluate influential framework of brand personality proposed by Aaker. Empirical evidence confirms mounting researchers' interest in brand personality after the seminal work of [9] framework. But to date, heavy criticism was leveled against Aaker's multi-dimensional model to measure brand personality construct. Comprehensiveness of the Aaker's framework is generalizable over multiple product categories. As regards limitations, Aaker's scale is considered as crude measure of brand personality as it transposed human personality traits rather than using brands themselves. Additionally, the framework is American culture specific as Aaker's five-dimensional structure did not always receive empirical substantiation across different cultural settings.

In line with [48] suggestion, researchers are urged to develop new models related to brand personality with respect to cross-cultural aspects and extending the methodology into new areas as well. These new models should remedy the problems linked with the Brand Personality Five Factor Model (BPFFM) such as negative factors [18, 49, 50], specificity of culture [49] and exclusion of different items that are not related to human traits [18].

3- REFERENCES

1. Kotler, P., Wong, V., Saunders, J. & Armstrong, G., (2005). *Principles of marketing*. Fourth European Edition, Pearson Education Limited: Edinburgh.

2. Tsai, S. P. (2005). Utility, cultural symbolism and emotion: A comprehensive model of brand purchase value. International *Journal of Research in Marketing, 22*(3), 277−291.

3. Merz, M. A., He, Y., & Vargo, S. L. (2009). The evolving brand logic: A service dominant logic perspective. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 37*(3),328–344.

4. Vargo, S. L., & Lusch, R. F. (2004). Evolving to a new dominant logic for marketing. *Journal of Marketing, 68*(1), 1–17.

5. Delgado-Ballester, E. & Manuera-Aleman, J.L, (2005). Does brand trust matter to brand equity? *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, Vol. 14, Issue 3, p. 187-196

6. Opoku, R., (2006). *Towards a Methodological Design for Evaluating Online Brand Positioning*. Doctoral Thesis. Lulea University of Technology.

7. Milas, G., & Mlačić, B. (2007). Brand personality and human personality: Findings from ratings of familiar Croatian brands. *Journal of Business Research, 60*, 620−626.

8. Batra, R., Lehmann, D. R., & Singh, D. (1993). The brand personality component of brand goodwill: Some antecedents and consequences. In D. A. Aaker & A. Biel (Eds.), *Brand equity and advertising* (pp. 83–96). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

9. Aaker, J. L. (1997). Dimensions of brand personality. *Journal of Marketing Research, 34*, 347–356.

10. Gardner, B.B., & Levy, S.J., (1955). The product and the brand. *Harvard Business Review, 33*, 33–59.

11. King, S.H.M., (1973). *Developing New Brands*. Pitman House, UK.

12. Plummer, J.T., (1984). How personality makes a difference. *Journal of Advertising Research, 24* (6), 27–31

13. Blackston, M., 1993. Beyond brand personality: building brand relationships. In: Aaker, D.A., Biel, A.L. (Eds.), *Brand Equity and Advertising: Advertising's Role in Building Strong Brands*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Hillsdale, New Jersey, pp.113–124.

14. Melin, F. (1997), *Varumärket som strategiskt konkurrensmedel*, Lund University Press, Lund

15. Hankinson, G. & Cowking, P., (1993). *Branding in Action*, McGraw-Hill: Berkshire

16. Kim, C. K., Han, D., & Park, S. B. (2001). The effect of brand personality and brand identification on brand loyalty: Applying theory of social identification. *Japanese Psychological Research, 43*, 195−206.

17. Sweeney, J.C., & Brandon, C., (2006). Brand personality: exploring the potential to move from factor analytical to circumplex models. *Psychology and Marketing, 23* (8),639–663.

18. Bosnjak, M., Bochmann, V., & Hufschmidt, T., (2007). Dimensions of brand personality attributions: a person-centric approach in the German cultural context. *Social Behavior and Personality, 35* (3), 303–316.

19. Azoulay, A., & Kapferer, J. N. (2003). Do brand personality scales really measure brand personality? *Brand Management, 11*, 143−155.

20. Reynolds T (1998). Implications for value research: a macro vs. micro perspective. *Psychologyand Marketing, 2*(4):297–305.

21. Schwartz, S. H. (1992). Universals in the content and structure of values: Theoretical advances and empirical tests in 20 countries. Advances in Experimental Social Psychology .In M. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (pp. 1−65).

22. Valette-Florence, A., and Barnier, V.D. (2012). Towards a micro conception of brand personality: An application for print media brands in a French context. *Journal of Business Research*

23. Kapferer J-N (2007). *Les marques, Capital de l'entreprise*, Paris. 4th edition. Editions d'Organisation.

24. Venable, B. T., Rose, G. M., Bush, V. D., & Gilbert, F.W. (2005). The role of brand personality and charitable giving: An assessment and validation. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 33*, 295−312.

25. Mathur, P., Jain, S.P., and Maheswaran, D. (2012). Consumers' implicit theories about personality influence their brand personality judgments, *Journal of Consumer Psychology*

26. Elliott, E. S., & Dweck, C. S. (1988). Goals: An approach to motivation and achievement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 54, 5–12.

27. Yorkston, E. A., Nunes, J. C., & Matta, S. (2010). The malleable brand: The role of implicit theories in evaluating brand extensions. *Journal of Marketing, 74*, 80–93.

28. Park, J.K., & John,D. R. (2010).Got to get you in to my life: Do brand personalities rub off on consumers? *Journal of Consumer Research, 37*, 655–669.

29.Jain, S. P., Mathur, P., & Maheswaran, D. (2009). The influence of consumers' lay theories on approach/avoidance motivation. *Journal of Marketing Research, 46*(1), 56–65.

30. Gouteron, J. (2006), "L'impact de la personnalite´ de lamarquesur la relation marque-consommateur, applicationau marche´ du preˆt-a`-porter fe´minin", *Revue Franc¸aise du Marketing, 207*, pp. 43-59.

31. Gouteron, J. (2008), "L'impact de la personnalite´ de lamarque sur la relation a` la marque dans le domaine de late´le´phonie mobile", *La Revue des Sciences de Gestion, 233*(4), pp. 115-27.

32. Ben Sliman, S., Ferrandi, J-M., Merunka, D. and Valette-Florence, P. (2005). L'influence de lapersonnalite´ de la marquesur le comportement duconsommateur: mode´lisation et application a` de grandesenseignesd'hypermarche´s en France et en Tunisie", CDROM, Proceedings of the 3rd Colloque de l'AssociationTunisienne du Marketing, Hammamet, Tunisia, Avril.

33. Ambroise, L. (2005). La personnalite´ de la marque:contributions the´oriques, me´thodologiquesetmanage´riales. unpublished doctoral dissertation,Universite´ Pierre Mende`s-France, Grenoble.

34. Ramaseshan B, Tsao H-Y (2007). Moderating effects of the brand concept on the relationship between brand personality and perceived quality. *Journal of Brand Management;14*(6):458–66.

35. Beldona, S. and Wysong, S. (2007). Putting the brand back into store brands: an exploratory examination of store brands and brand personality. *Journal of Product & Brand Management, 16*(4), pp. 226-35.

36. Freling, T. H., & Forbes, L. P. (2005). An examination of brand personality through methodological triangulation. *Journal of Brand Management, 13*, 148–163.

37. Helgeson, J. G., & Supphellen, M. (2004). A conceptual and measurement comparison of self-congruity and brand personality. *International Journal of Market Research, 46*(2), 205−233.

38. Supphellen, M. & Gronhaug, K. (2003). Building foreign brand personalities in Russia: the moderating effect ofconsumer ethnocentrism. *International Journal of Advertising*, *22*(2), pp. 203-26.

39. Morschett, D., Jara, M., Schramm-Klein, H. & Swoboda, B. (2007). Retail brand personality as influence factor on store loyalty – an empirical test of an integrative model. *CD-ROM, Proceedings of the 36th EMAC Colloquium*, Reykjavik, Iceland, May.

40. Sung,Y., & Tinkham, S. F. (2005). Brand personality structures in the United States and Korea: Common and culture-specific factors. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 15*,334–350.

41. Hess S, Bauer H, Kuester S, Huber F (2007). In brands we trust: marketing's impact on service brand personality and trust. *European Marketing Academy 36th Conference Proceedings*: 22–25, Iceland.

42. Ambroise L, Valette-Florence P (2010). Métaphore de la personnalité de la marque et stabilitéinter-produits d'un baromètrespécifique. *Recherche et Applications en Marketing; 25*(2):3-29.

43. Wee TT (2004). Extending human personality to brands: the stability factor. *Journal of Brand Management, 11*(4):317–30.

44. Caprara, G. V., Barbaranelli, C., & Guido, G. (2001). Brand personality: How to make the metaphor fit? *Journal of Economic Psychology, 22*, 377−395.

45. Özsomer A, Lerzan A (2007). The structure of the brand personality construct and its impact on brand purchase likelihood. *EMAC Conference*; 2007.

46. Aaker JL, Benet-Martinez & V, Garolera J (2001). Consumption symbols as carriers of culture: a study of Japanese and Spanish brand personality constructs. *J Pers Soc Psychology, 81*:492–508.

47. d'Astous A, & Boujbel L (2007). Positioning countries on personality dimensions: scale development and implications for country marketing. *Journal of Business Research,60*(3):231–9.

48. Lévesque, M., & d'Astous, M., (2003). A scale for measuring store personality. *Psychology & Marketing, 20* (5), 455–469.

49. Geuens M, Weijters B, & De Wulf K (2009). A new measure of brand personality. *International Journal of Research in Marketing, 26*(2):97–107.

50. Smit, E.G., Van Den Berge, E., & Franzen, G., (2003). Brands are just like real people! In: Hansen, F., Bech, L. (Eds.), *Branding and Advertising*. Copenhagen BusinessSchool Press, Copenhagen, pp. 22–43.