Brand Personality Profiles: a Pick-A-Winner Study of Two Methods

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A considerable amount of attention has been given to the construct of brand personality in consumer behavior research (Aaker, 1997; Sung and Tinkam, 2005). These studies took the traditional survey method and corresponding data analysis approaches (i.e., the R-Method, according to Brown 1999). Cui et al. (2007) demonstrated that the Q methodology is uniquely suited to measuring the personality of a single brand because it allows the measurement of a subjective construct in a holistic way. The literature of brand personality suggests both methods can be used to profile the brand personality of a single brand. The goal of this study is to identify which method generates a more accurate and appropriate brand personality profile. The present study contributes to the literature as the first attempt to compare the two methods and demonstrate the pros and cons of each method based on the results from two studies.

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products from those countries, another major contribution of this research is to examine the impact of various levels of consumer animosity on purchase intentions.

We tested two hypotheses in study 1: 1) Chinese consumers have a higher level of animosity toward Japan than toward the U.S., and prefer American products over Japanese products; 2) even when consumer animosity is low, as long as it is present, it has a negative impact on purchase intentions. We adopted Klein, Ettensohn and Morris’s (1998) multi-item animosity scale and asked 175 Chinese participants to indicate their evaluations of products from the U.S. and Japan, their animosity toward the two countries, consumer ethnocentrism, and willingness to buy products from these two countries. We found that Chinese participants had a higher level of animosity toward Japan than toward the U.S. (Animosity\textsubscript{Japan}=5.32, Animosity\textsubscript{U.S.}=4.27, t=11.35 p=0.01, on scales of 1-7, 1 indicates low level of animosity and 7 indicates high level of animosity). Furthermore, though participants evaluated the American products and the Japanese products as equal in quality, they were more willing to purchase American products rather than Japanese products. Regression analysis revealed that even when consumer animosity was relatively low (in the case of the U.S.), as long as it was present, it had a negative impact on consumer’s purchase intentions (U.S. coefficient=-0.17, p=0.01). Our hypotheses were confirmed by this initial investigation.

In our next studies, we will examine American consumers’ animosity toward China and Japan, and Japanese consumers’ animosity toward China and the U.S., as well as their perceptions of products from these countries. We hypothesize that although consumer animosity tends to be reciprocal (the sources of animosity such as war, culture, and politics should have impact on both sides), consumers from two countries may have different levels of animosity toward each other due to different perceptions of these animosity sources.

This research moves beyond the current animosity literature to investigate the reciprocal nature of the construct in a cross-country setting, different levels of consumer animosity and its impact on purchase intentions among Chinese, American and Japanese consumers. Preliminary findings in one of the three countries supported our hypotheses. We intend to conduct further studies in all three countries to achieve a better understanding of the construct of consumer animosity and its impact on consumers’ willingness to purchase foreign products.

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Brand personality, a multi-dimensional construct, provides a holistic view of a brand that goes beyond merely describing brand attributes (Keller 2003). A brand’s personality is an aggregate representation of the benefits, usage, user and relative marketplace imagery associated with a particular brand. Examining what human personality characteristics consumers often endow a brand with will lead to a better understanding of the consumers’ perception of the brand.

Aaker (1997, p. 347) defined brand personality as the “set of human characteristics associated with a brand.” The purpose of Aaker’s (1997) research was to assess and describe the aggregate structure of brand personality across brands and product categories. Aaker (1997) selected 37 brands from the EquiTrend study (1992) that were rated high on salience and represented different profiles of brand personality. Using a lexical approach similar to the Big Five model of human personality in psychology, the author developed a 42-item measurement scale from the original set of 114 traits and identified five dimensions of brand personality: excitement, sincerity, competence, sophistication and ruggedness.

Aaker’s (1997) work inspired a stream of brand personality measurement studies. Some researchers attempted to measure brand personality using the five-factor model assuming each brand should have the same five-dimensional personality (e.g. Kim 2000; Best 2005). Rojas-Mendez, Erenchun-Podlech, and Silva-Olave (2004) applied Aaker’s scale to the study of one specific brand, Ford. Kim (2000) and Best (2005) suggested that a brand’s personality can be measured by the 15 facets of the five dimensions, instead of the full set of the 42-item scale.

Another group of researchers (Cui, Albanese, Jewell and Hu, 2007) adopted Q methodology to assess the brand personality of a single brand. They believe that Q methodology is uniquely suited for measuring the personality of a single brand because it allows researchers to measure a subjective construct in a holistic way without reducing the construct to factors (Cui, Albanese, Jewell and Hu, 2007). The instrumental basis of Q methodology is the Q-sort technique (Brown, 1996), a comparative ranking task in which participants rank order a set of statements (i.e., 42 brand personality traits), under certain instructions. Subjects are instructed to express their perceptions of a certain subject matter by rank ordering the provided statements into a continuum of categories, ranging from extremely characteristic to extremely uncharacteristic. Each category has a fixed number of statements. The number of statements required in the two extreme categories is the smallest, and the number gradually increases toward the middle of the categories; the distribution of the number of statements across categories resembles a normal distribution. Participants have to make comparisons among the statements before putting them into each category; therefore, the decision of assigning each statement to a particular category is made relative to the placement of the other statements. The subjective perspective of the brand’s personality is constantly referred to by the sorter during the sorting process. The data then will be analyzed using Q-factor analysis to uncover groups of opinion about the subject matter.

The intention of the present study is to compare and contrast the two methodologies and to examine, based on consumers’ evaluations, which method generates a more accurate and appropriate brand personality profile for consumer products. This research has two studies. In the first study, the authors will generate two separate personality profiles of the same brand using Q-methodology and the traditional survey method (e.g., Aaker 1997). A group of consumers will be presented with the two profiles (in words) and be asked to indicate which profile more accurately describes the brand’s personality in their mind. This is followed by open-ended questions asking them to explain how they make their decisions and why they think a specific profile accurately depicts the brand’s personality. Both the qualitative and quantitative data will be incorporated in the data analysis to draw the conclusion. Study 2 differs from study 1 in how the brand personality