Identifying Component Themes of Consumer Products' Brand Personality in Contemporary Iranian Market (A Qualitative Approach)

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Abstract. Nowadays, marketing professionals are increasingly aware of the importance of brands in the success of organizations, as it can be an asset with utmost importance for a lasting competitive advantage. Indeed, what is called a brand is something far more than a name. The brand and its affiliates pave the way for human communication. Brand personification is done in this respect. Although BP can be defined separately from human personality, it is not entirely independent of it. Therefore, in this study, the indicators of the component themes of consumer BP present in Iran's market are clearly demonstrated. The present study, which falls into the category of developmental research in terms of

objective, is carried out qualitatively. As a developmental research, this study uses a sample of 29 students of management whom were selected by non-probability sampling (purposive and judgemental). The main research tool was an open-ended questionnaire, completed and collected by semi-structured interviews.The findings consist of 74 indicators that were extracted and compiled from the literature review, theoretical foundations, research background (such as Aaker, 1997 and Geuns et al. 2008) and semi-structured interviews using NVivo software, which could be divided into eight positive and negative dimensions. Furthermore, some of the 74 indicators or personality traits identified for Iranian consumer brands include beautiful, personable, hardworking, always friendly, strong and capable, skilled, attractive, creative, efficient, competent, competitive, friendly to little ones, old friend, funny, dysfunctional, uncommitted, insincere, unfriendly (unkind), bully, tyrant, naughty, narcissistic that actually constitutes the personality themes of consumer brands in Iran's commodity market.

1. Introduction

The concept of brand personality (BP), either in Iran or around the world, has been the subject of numerous studies which have emphasized the significance and impact of this construct on important marketing variables, including customer loyalty (e.g. Rezaei Dolatabadi et al., 2013), brand preference (Daneshian et al., 2014), and brand trust (Mzoughi, et. al, 2011). On the other hand, everything consumer behaviorists have ever done about BP has been to imitate human personality studies, regardless of its farthest background, i.e., the typology of human personality. This way, consumer behaviorists have so far viewed the BP only as a set of personality traits, rather than a typological attitude towards the construct.Within Iran, researchers still ignore Iranian traits. The proposed dimensions of Aaker (1997) and Geuens (2009) are still the main conceptual frameworks, which are used in research. Nonetheless not only are they outdated but also have been developed only regarding the market coordinates of the origin countries.

Hence there are doubts about sufficiency of them for Iran's market. Thus, what challenges the scholar's mind is how to get a deeper and more complete understanding of personality among Iranian brands. To arrive at such a perspective, first, it is necessary to eliminate the deficiency in recognition of the BP dimensions in indigenous conditions of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Then, we can use the findings to develop a suitable scale and questionnaire for measuring consumer goods BP in our national market. In this regard, one should answer the following question: "What are the constituent variables of Iranian consumer BP?" Therefore, the main purpose of the present study is to identify the indicators of the component themes of consumer products` BP in Iran's market. In this respect, personality constituent variables, including dimensions, components, or indicators of Iranian consumer goods BP have been identified and presented.

2. Literature review

The concept of a brand, brand in English, or Marque that came from France, is a word, a mark, or anything else that can distinguish a product in consumers` minds. This distinction may be the result of the product`s performance or some understanding of human-like characteristics in the Brand (Aaker, 1997). Personality is a dynamic interpersonal organization made up of psychophysical systems that determine characteristic patterns of behavior, thinking, and human emotions(Allport, 1961). Allport`s definition was supplemented by Child (1968) who emphasized sustainability, saying that personality is more or less composed of human stable internal factors that contribute to her or his behavioral stability, such that these behaviors, in comparable conditions, vary from person to person. Nowadays there are plenty of measurement methods available for this construct, best of which may be, is based on a five-dimentional approach called The Big 5. Though there is a variation of this concept, the amazing point in common is indeed, an agreement among the number of dimensions that constitute personality measures within the majority of these scales. The relative domination that was a prologue that fell into line with a newly developing Spin-off from branding era.Thus, BP has generally been the most important focal point of brand advertising since the 1970s (Kapferer, 2008: 217). The use

of BP as a symbol or symbolic source for self-construction (by the customer) can only be based on BP or the ideal/actual personality of brand users. Therefore, the personality approach to brand puts BP and its stereotypical consumer personality at the center of brand management attention (Heding, Knudtzed, and Bjerre, 2009). Therefore, BP can be defined as the human characteristics related to a brand (Jenifer Aaker, 1997: 347-348). Aaker (1997: 348) describes two types of personality scales that have been explored by former researchers on how to build a relationship between brand and human personality guide consumer preferences. The first scale was produced on an ad hoc basis (including behaviors ranging from 20 to 300 traits). The second type consisted of BP scales based on human personality scales. Aaker questioned the validity of the first scales since they were of ad hoc origin because they were more likely to miss some of the traits. However, the second category of scales was questioned because they were of human origin and lacked the necessary validation support for brands. Amongst all scales, the most cited BP scale was developed by J. Aaker (1997) (Figure 1). inspired by the five-factor model of human personality, she extracted the BP dimensions from personality traits previously used for human personality. Aaker evaluated a set of 37 brands with a sample of 631. They were selected based on gender, age, income, race, and geographic location. Its main structure includes consists of five factors, namely sincerity, emotion, competence, sophistication, and roughness. Though Aaker claimed that her scale had good generalization capabilities, some cross-cultural studies like Ambroise, Ferrandi, and Merunka Scale (2004), Heere Scale (2010), and Geuens, Weijters, and Wulf Scale (2009) etc, were conducted to adjust the scale to other populations, afterwards; but none had the advantage of extracting traits from middle-eastern socio-cultural circumstances.
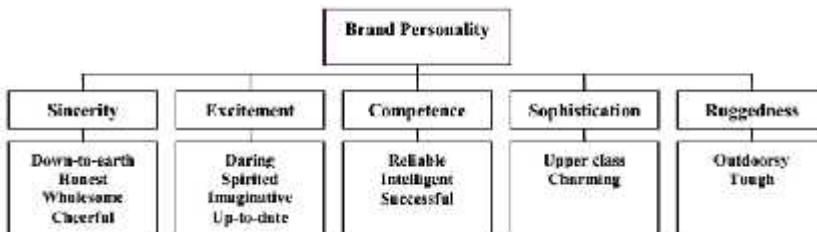
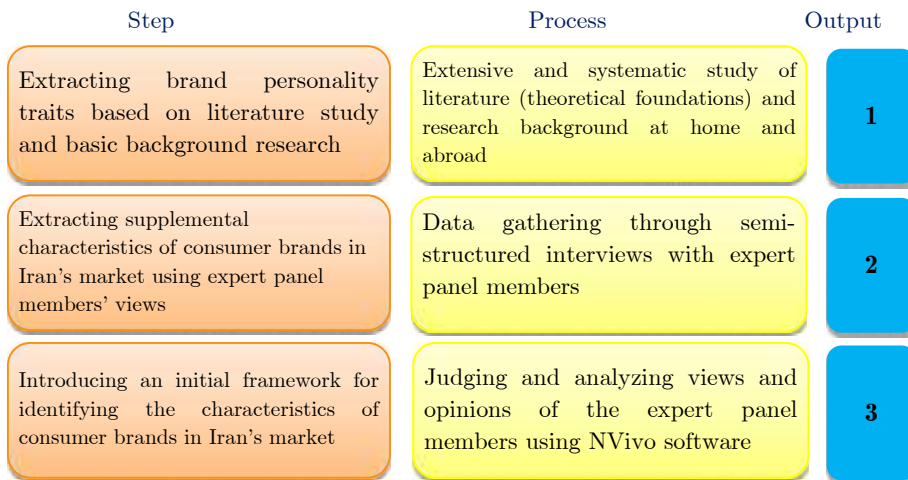**Figure 1.** Dimensions of brand personality (Aaker, 1997)

3. Method

This research is developmental in terms of objective. To develop a research conceptual framework to identify the dimensions and constituent components of consumer goods BP in the domestic market, based on literature review (articles, books, and research), an open-ended questionnaire was designed and given to the expert panel members, whose opinions and views on these dimensions and components were received as semi-structured interviews, and were then analyzed by NVivo Software (one of the best quality data analytics software that has attracted the attention of numerous users worldwide due to its diverse capabilities). Finally, based on the analyses done with NVivo software, the themes and personality traits of Iranian consumer, good brands are identified and explained in terms of dimensions and components. However, before entering into the results and findings section, it is first necessary to define a statistical population framework and to identify the individuals selected from it (the sample studied). In this regard, the statistical population of this study, according to its type and methodology (qualitative research), includes all experts and specialists in the field of management and marketing who have the necessary knowledge and expertise in the field of research. The selected individuals from this community are known as the panel of experts. Non-probability sampling and a combination of purposive and judgmental methods were used to select the expert panel members. In this regard, the researcher selected 30 experts and specialists who had the necessary qualifications to form a panel of experts or interviewees of this research. However, one of these individuals withdrew during the interviews, and finally, 29 were interviewed, who participated in various stages of the qualitative section of the study and were members of the panel of experts in this study.

4. Findings

In the present study, the researcher identified the dimensions and components affecting the BP of consumer goods based on previous studies; then, he encoded and entered them into the NVivo software for analysis by conducting semi-structured interviews and transforming them into text files (such as Word). Following this step, the identified codes are sorted and combined based on conceptual similarity, and

finally displayed in tree representations in the main themes. Finally, they are represented in the form of main and secondary themes in the form of tree representations. In effect, to identify the personality traits or themes of consumer brands in Iran's market, three main steps or stages were implemented, which are described below and are also illustrated in Figure 2. In the first step, an extensive study was done on different backgrounds, brand models, and personality dimensions. The result of this section, which is summarized in the second section of this article, was to examine the models of human personality and BP as well as different personality traits. In the second step of the qualitative section, considering the purpose and novelty of the research topic, especially in Iran, qualitative research method and semi-structured interviews with expert panel members with an emphasis on exploratory approach to identify other personality traits were used to analyze the information. Before distributing the questionnaire, however, a summary of previous findings including Aaker (1997), Geuens et al. (2009), and Asadollahi et al. (2015) scales was explained to the panel of experts for recall. In the third step of this section, the results of each interview were transcribed into NVivo software, and the responses and opinions of the experts are identified as main and secondary themes, along with an example of quotation and frequency of codes are organized in tables and analyzed (Table 1).

Step	Process	Output
Extracting brand personality traits based on literature study and basic background research	Extensive and systematic study of literature (theoretical foundations) and research background at home and abroad	1
Extracting supplemental characteristics of consumer brands in Iran's market using expert panel members' views	Data gathering through semi-structured interviews with expert panel members	2
Introducing an initial framework for identifying the characteristics of consumer brands in Iran's market	Judging and analyzing views and opinions of the expert panel members using NVivo software	3

Figure 2. Executive steps of designing the personality pattern

Finally, out of the responses given and the following monitoring and analyzing the results of the software, 74 personality traits were extracted as the final variables of the personality pattern of Iran's market consumer brands. These variables were finally categorized into ten general themes by experts. The themes obtained include strong or powerful (beautiful, personable, stylish, gentle, lifelong friend, charming, powerful, skilled, creative, hard-working, loyal, expert, kind, problem-solver, intimate, relaxing, generous, self-confident), market (inefficient, insincere, uncommitted, worthless, unkind, deceitful, traitor), efficient (frugal, competitive, worthy and deserving, fair, healthy, stable), friendly (sweet, friendly to little ones, funny, old friend), pleasurable (variety seeker, exciting, happy, and smiling), professional (reputable, up-to-date, valuable, noble and honest, famous, imposing, energetic, hearty, clean and tidy, safe), self-satisfied (acquisitive, tyrant, naughty, narcissist, bully, spoiled, ordinary, imitator), hopeful (hopeful, omnipresent, lively, experienced), high-quality (high-quality, special, memorable, confident), untrustworthy (liar, untrustworthy, causing accidents) and finally consistent (durable and robust, consistent, prestigious, and dignified) are presented in Table 1 the personality themes derived from the findings and analyses of this study.

Table 1. The main and secondary themes

Main theme	Secondary theme	Brand
Personality dimension	A personality trait or indicator	
1 Powerful	Beautiful	Oriflame/Roland/Akhavan /Farsh-e Farehi
	Personable	LG / Samsung
	Stylish	Roland / Hacoupian
	Gentle	Golbaft / Khoshkhab / Roland
	Life-long friend	LG / Coca - Cola
	Charming	San Ich
	Powerful	Cheetoz / Busch / Samsung
	Skilled	Boof / Farmand
	Creative	Pars Khazar / Kalleh
	Hard-working	Busch
	Loyal	Apple
	Expert	Snowa and Sinjer stove / Digikala

Main theme	Secondary theme	Brand
Personality dimension	A personality trait or indicator	
	Kind	Biscuit Madar
	Problem-solver (catalyst)	San Ich / Ave Samsung / Sony
	Intimate	Biscuit Madar/Alis Beverage / Chuckles and Cheetoz / Molfix
	Comforting	Khoshkhab
	Generous	Bank Mellat
	Self - confident	Notebook / Snowa
2 Market	Inefficient	Snowa
	Insincere	Gooshtiran and Andre
	Uncommitted	My baby
	Worthless	Arden / Golrang
	Unkind	Iran Khodro / Saipa
	Deceitful	Charm-e Mashhad
	Traitor	Sosis O Kalbas Pofakha O Snakha
3 Efficient	Frugal	Busch
	Competitive	Dariush Hotel
	Worthy and deserving	Adidas
	Fair	San Ich
	Healthy	Boof / Aladdin / Ladan/ Doogh-e Abali / Non-palm oil
	Stable	Pars Khazar
4 Friendly	Sweet	Aydin
	Friendly to little ones	Golrang
	Funny (Cute)	Yek O Yek / Tohfeh / Farmand
	Old friend	Cheetoz/Farsh-e Mashhad/Biscuit Madar
5 Pleasurable	Variety seeker	San Ich / Ave Samsung / Sony
	Exciting	Samsung / LG
	Happy and smiling	Cheetoz Snack and Pofak
5 Professional	Reputable	Rang-e Alvan / Takdaneh
	Up-to-date	Apple
	Valuable	Bhutan
	Noble and sincere	My Cream / Sony Samsung

Main theme	Secondary theme	Brand
Personality dimension	A personality trait or indicator	
	Famous	Pars Khazar / Minoo
	Imposing	Azad University
	Energetic	San Ich
	Hearty	San Ich
	Clean	Pril / Firouz / Pril
	Safe (security)	Volvo
6 Self-satisfied	Acquisitive	Payam Noor
	Tyrant	Iran Khodro
	Naughty	Cheetoz
	Narcissistic	Snowa
	Bully	Azad University
Self-satisfied	Spoiled	Snowa
	Ordinary	Akhavan
	Imitator	Samsung
7 Hopeful	Hopeful	Bank Ayandeh
	Ubiquitous	Cheetoz
	Lively	San Ich
	Experienced	Akhavan / Pars Khazar Nescafe
8 High- quality	High-quality	San Ich / Busch / Apple Akhavan / Samsung Snowa / Hacoupian / Zara / Sony / Canon
	Specificity	Apple / Zara / Charm-e Mashhad
	Memorable	m&m
	Trustworthy (reliable)	Nicala / Samsung / Hacoupian / Busch / Irancell / Akhavan
9 Untrustworthy	Liar	Snowa / Arden / Snowa Zamzam / Saipa
	Untrustworthy	Iran Khodro and Saipa
	Causing accidents	Saipa
10 Consistent	Sincere (honest)	Apple / Mai
	Patient	Zara
	Convenient	Mashhad leather
	Advanced	Samsung

Main theme	Secondary theme	Brand
Personality dimension	A personality trait or indicator	
	Tough and durable	Nicala / Bhutan / Snowa / My baby / Apple / Canon / Charm-e Mashhad / Steel-e Alborz / Asus / Casio
	Consistent (accommodating)	ChinChin / Pars Khazar
	prestigious and dignified	Busch

5. Conclusion

Although the present study was designed to modify the stereotypes common in the academic environment of the country in the field of BP research, its findings are not restricted to this, so it proposes the following items. The personality traits of brands are not necessarily limited to positive traits. Therefore, studies in this field require that all aspects be viewed without prejudice. The findings of this research also suggest that in addition to positive traits, the behaviors of the owners of some brands may lead to negative personality traits in the minds of consumers. The personality traits found in this study not only are fully extracted from the Iranian mind and Iranian business environment but are not limited to specific product classes. Thus, as a relatively rich but tempered treasury of the personality traits of Iranian brands, its cautious use is recommended for different product brands. Future researchers are advised to investigate the factors that cause and exacerbate the negative personality traits of brands in the minds of consumers in different product areas and classes. Respected researchers can also study the impact of personality traits of different brands on different marketing variables, including loyalty, purchase intention, subjective image, brand experience, and so on. Brand owners and managers, as well as marketing and brand consultants, are advised to watch out for negative traits in the personality of their brands.

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