

Title: Media brand architecture: an examination of network, channel, programme and talent personalities.

On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest

Abstract

Media brands have personalities, but how are these personalities managed across a brand architecture that consists of a network, channels, programmes and programme talent? This paper examines the issue of media brand management through the lens of brand personality. It argues that an effective brand management strategy needs to ensure coherence across the multiple brand personalities present within the brand architecture.

The findings from a survey of consumers, who were asked to classify human characteristics associated with personalities within a branded house architecture, indicated that whilst there was brand fit between some of the brands personality traits, there were also significant differences in the fit of these personalities. However, there is a strong argument to support proposition that these differences can add to the consideration of coherence within the brand architecture.

Key words: Brand Personality, Brand Architecture, Media Brand, Brand Fit, Brand Strategy

Introduction

The emergence of digital media technologies has transformed the media consumption experience of consumers who now have an abundance of choice in media content and delivery platforms. Media firms have responded to this transformative and fragmented market place by developing compelling brands that provide a sense of identity, trust, cultural memory and platform navigation, as well as the means to differentiate products and services and build consumer loyalty (Singh and Oliver, 2015). As a consequence, media branding has become an increasingly prominent topic of academic inquiry in recent years and can now be regarded as a distinct and quickly evolving area of brand literature (Siegert *et al*, 2015; Chan-Olmsted and Kim, 2010; Ots, 2008).

There is a significant body of literature on the concept of brand personality and how brands embody human personality characteristics, which in turn, encourages greater levels of consumer engagement and brand equity. However, what is not known is how different brand personalities *fit* within a brand architecture. Our research draws on the seminal work of Aaker (1997) and her conceptualisation of brand personality as the human characteristics associated with a brand. We argue that multiple brand personalities within a brand architecture, need to ‘fit’ coherently in order to successfully engage and reassure audiences who tend to endorse brands that are consistently positioned in a fragmented media market (Singh and Oliver, 2015; Forster, 2015). Our paper presents the findings from a large scale survey of audience members who were asked to classify human characteristics associated with personalities within a branded house architecture consisting of the BBC (Network brand), BBC2 (Channel brand), Top Gear (Programme brand) and Chris Evans (Talent brand).

Overall, our paper makes the following contributions. First, we believe that given the extent to which the media industry has embraced and developed sophisticated media brands and brand architectures (Chan-Olmsted and Kim, 2010; Chan-Olmsted and Park, 2000) an exploration of the relationship between a specific broadcast media channel’s brand personality and various levels of their brand architecture is appropriate and topical. Secondly, we believe that our research is both innovative and ground-breaking and will contribute to our theoretical understanding of how multiple brand personalities interact and fit together across branded house architecture.

Literature Review

Brand architecture

The idea of brand architecture is largely a consideration of how brands are organised within a structure and the roles and relationships between these brands (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000). Extant studies on brand architecture argue that it is critical to the success of an organisation as it helps consumers understand products and services and organise them in their minds (Keller, 2015). The concept of brand architecture is, therefore, a critical driver of brand strategy as it is a determinant of

brand extension success (Volckner and Sattler, 2006) and positive market-based performance (Berk Talay *et al*, 2015).

There is no one size fits all when comes to understanding the products and services of firm brand architectures. However, Aaker and Joachimsthaler's (2000) classification of brand architectures presented three different taxonomies, including: the 'branded house' where all products use the same corporate brand; the 'endorsed brands' approach where individual brands are linked in some way to a corporate brand; and the 'house of brands' where unique brands are developed for each product. Whilst firms have adopted different approaches in organising their brand architecture, what is not in doubt is that a coherent brand architecture is important to the performance of an organisation, particularly in an increasing number of fragmented markets (Singh and Oliver, 2015; Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000).

Keller (2015) argues that the first guideline in devising optimal brand architecture should be a strong focus through understanding what consumers want. This is, however, increasingly complex due to the emergence of market sectors that transcend national boundaries, particularly evident with the multinational nature of brands (Berk Talay *et al*, 2015). This implies an opportunity to understand and explore the 'fit' of personality as a meaningful way to engage audiences in a fragmented media environment.

Strebinger (2014) warns against what he calls "brand baggage" in designing an architecture that optimises the particular needs of the organisation rather than being over burdened by current trends or norms in a particular sector. Currently branded house architecture is prevalent in the media industry, with a particular focus on product brands within that. The question of whether this is generally the optimum architecture may therefore be considered.

Consumers tend to be literal in their assessment of brands in so far as, if the corporate level brand is the most prominent, then its associations are likely to dominate, whereas, if the individual brand is more prominent then a distinctive brand image is more easily created in the mind of the

audience (Keller, 2015). This goes some way to explain the distinct ‘products’ (particular shows such as Top Gear) that sit within media brand architectures such as that of the BBC.

Conceptualising brand personality

Much of our understanding of the concept of brand personality is derived from Aaker’s (1997) conceptualisation of understanding the human characteristics that are associated with a brand. It has been suggested that a brand that is self-congruent has greater impact and higher levels of consumer engagement (Malar *et al*, 2011) since brand personality traits provide “self-expressive or symbolic benefits for the consumer” (Aaker, 1999, p.45). It is logical, therefore, that understanding personality associations for brands will ultimately underpin better audience targeting and greater levels of engagement.

Brand identity and associated brand image plays an important role in consumers’ decision making (Keller, 2001). Branding scholars argue that brand image can be associated with personality traits that provide “self-expressive or symbolic benefits for the consumer” (Aaker, 1999, p.45). It may, therefore, be suggested that consumers choose the product they perceive as having a desirable (brand) personality (Ahuvia, 2005; Aaker, 1999; Belk, 1988) to embody and validate their identity (Berger and Heath 2007; Aaker, 1997). Therefore, a self-congruent brand reflects who the consumer actually is or would like to be (Mälar *et al*, 2011). Brands, therefore, act as important tools for self-identification as consumers reaffirm their perceptions of self-concepts by choosing compatible brand personalities (Forster, 2015). Brand image has for some time been associated with the metaphor of brand as a person (Lau and Phau, 2007), and accordingly brands are endowed with humanistic personality traits that are collectively termed ‘brand personality’ as consumers interpret the meaning behind a brand and project values onto the brand (De Chernatony *et al*, 2011).

In the media context, the rationale for a deeper understanding of the resonance of personality throughout a brand portfolio is, therefore, evident and is endorsed by Forster (2015, p.283) who argued that the audience “feels the need to reaffirm their perceptions of self-concepts by choosing compatible media brand personalities”. As such, a media brand can be conceptualised as a construct

that has the ability to engage audiences through a number of cognitive and emotional associations across a brand architecture that consists of network, channel, programme and programme talent. To understand fully and maximise the resonance of such constructs, an improved understanding of the personality traits of the brand is logically advantageous.

Positioning the research

Person-brand congruity, or the perceived fit between a person and a brand has been termed 'brand-person fit' (Emile *et al*, 2012; Matzler *et al*, 2011). Whilst there is a significant body of literature on the related ideas of brand congruence, relevancy and consistency, there are only a limited number of studies that investigate the notion of brand personality fit (Wang *et al*, 2016; Batra *et al*, 2010; Diamantopoulos *et al*, 2005) and certainly very little in the media context.

We set out to investigate two research questions. Firstly, how do individual's perceive brand personalities across the media brand architecture; and secondly, to establish whether there were any significant differences in the perceptions of brand personalities within this architecture. Our research extends our understanding of brand personality fit by examining the brand in the context of the media industry and within a branded house architecture that consists of a network, channel, programme and programme talent. The value of a brand striving for self-congruence with the target consumer's actual or ideal personality (Mälar *et al*, 2011) is logically advantageous to organisations and we believe that our research not only extends our theoretical understanding of brand personality fit, but will also enable brand managers to better understand how multiple brand personalities fit together and enable better targeting and greater audience engagement.

Methodology

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to investigate our research questions. The study adopted a quantitative approach, gathering data via an online survey that was designed to measure the brand personalities across a media brand architecture consisting of: Network (BBC); Channel (BBC2), Programme (Top Gear) and Programme Talent (Chris Evens). We used Aaker's (1997) widely adopted brand personality scale since it provided a systematic and previously validated approach to understanding brand personality in terms of the following five personality traits: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness. Indeed, there is a significant body of research that has empirically tested this scale to the point where it is now considered to be a reliable

approach to investigating brand personality (Matzler *et al*, 2011; Voeth and Herbst, 2008; Venable *et al*, 2005). Aaker (1997) has reported a Cronbach alpha of higher than 0.90 for each individual elements of the brand personality scale which makes it reliable which has been reconfirmed in recent studies around brand personality. For example Sung and Kim (2010) reported a Cronbach alpha higher than 0.83 for all constructs within Aaker's scale and Aguilar *et al*. (2014) reported an acceptable (>0.70) Cronbach alpha for the scale. We checked the normality of the scale using Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS) and Shapiro-Wilk (SW) tests. The Shapiro-Wilk test appeared to be the most powerful test for all types of distribution and sample sizes (especially for sample sizes larger than 30), in comparison with other tests such as Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Lilliefors (Razali and Wah, 2011). However, for samples larger than 200, rather than merely looking only at SW or KS tests, the kurtosis and skewness was also examined (Field, 2005, p.72). This is due to the KS test being extremely sensitive to a minor departure from normality (Sharma, 1996), furthermore, violating the assumption of normality is quite common in larger samples (Pallant, 2005). Looking at the skewness and Kurtosis values, they are well below the threshold of 1.96 (-0.352, 0.357 respectively), and as such, there are no serious concerns regarding the normality of this variable. Having said that, we recognize that previous studies have identified problems relating to a scale that has a limited number of personality traits and is problematic when considering international brands in a cross-cultural context.

Sample

We used a non-probability, purposive sample, that was informed by descriptive statistics on TV audiences provided by the Broadcasters Audience Research Board. This data indicated that the audience demographics for the Channel (BBC2) and Programme (Top Gear) consisted primarily of male, UK residents, aged 25-44 years.

The participants were drawn from the online crowd sourcing website, Amazon Mechanical Turk (Mturk). Mturk has proven to provide high quality and reliable results (Goodman *et al*, 2013), although it is recommended to avoid questions with factual answers and also take into consideration

individual differences when conducting research. Survey Monkey was used to operationalise a questionnaire that asked participants to think of each 'brand as a person' and assign, on a 5 Point Likert scale (1 – not at all descriptive; 2 - slightly descriptive; 3 - moderately descriptive; 4 – very descriptive; 5 – extremely descriptive), what human characteristics they associated with the logos of BBC, BBC2, Top Gear and a picture of Chris Evans.

A pool of participants were randomly assigned to the online survey which resulted in 250 completions, and after a data cleaning process, 226 valid answers were selected for analysis. Participants demographics data indicated that: the Gender balance was Male: 70% and Female: 30%; the age of the participants was 18-24 years (28.7%), 25-34 years (39.4%), 35-44 years (21.7%), 45-54 years (6.2%) and 55-64 years (3.5%).

Results

RQ1 To investigate an individual's perception of brand personality across the media brand architecture

The findings revealed that brands were perceived differently by individuals. The highest brand personality was assigned to BBC for Competency (mean=3.98) and the lowest brand personality was assigned to Chris Evans for Ruggedness (mean=2.3). BBC was perceived as a Competent and Sincere brand (Mean_c=3.98, Mean_s=3.28), with Competency being significantly higher than all brands tested in this study, and Sincerity being significantly higher than all brands apart from BBC2. BBC2 was perceived as a Competent and Sincere brand (Mean_c=3.76, Mean_s=3.35) which is significantly higher than Top gear and Chris Evans. Although BBC2 is perceived higher in Sincerity in comparison to BBC, the difference is not significant (p=.299) and BBC2 is perceived lower in Competency in comparison to BBC. Top Gear's dominant personalities were Excitement and Ruggedness (Mean_e=3.89, Mean_r=3.49) which is significantly higher than all other brands. Chris Evans was perceived higher on Competency and Excitement (Mean_c=3.23, Mean_e=2.986), although it was significantly lower than all other brands.

RQ2 To establish whether there are significant differences in the brand personalities within the media brand architecture

Network (BBC) and Channel (BBC2)

Analysis of Variance revealed that for BBC, there is a higher level of Sophistication and Competency (means=3.15, 3.98) in comparison to BBC2 (mean=3.11, 3.74) whereas for other elements, BBC2 was perceived higher in Sincerity, Excitement and Ruggedness (respective means as follow 3.35, 3.26, 2.71) in comparison to BBC (respective means of 3.28, 3.17, 2.52). However there was only a significant difference observed between the levels of Competency $f(1,450)=11.92$, $p<0.05$ ($p=.001$) and Ruggedness $f(1,450)=5.00$, $p<0.05$ ($p=.026$). There was no significant difference between levels of Sincerity, Excitement and Sophistication.

Network (BBC) and Programme (Top Gear)

Analysis of Variance revealed that for BBC, there is a higher level of Sincerity, Competence and Sophistication perceived by participants, having respective means as follow (Means=3.28, 3.98, 3.15) in comparison to Top Gear (Means=3.07, 3.41, 2.80) whereas for Excitement and Ruggedness participants perceived BBC to have lower means of (3.17 and 2.52 respectively) in comparison to Top Gear (3.89 and 3.49 respectively). However there was a significant difference observed between the levels of Sincerity $f(1,450)=6.82$, $p<0.05$ ($p=.009$), Excitement $f(1,450)=81.55$, $p<0.05$ ($p=.000$), Competence $f(1,450)=56.91$, $p<0.05$ ($p=.000$), Sophistication $f(1,450)=18.34$, $p<0.05$ ($p=.000$) and Ruggedness $f(1,450)=121.69$, $p<0.05$ ($p=.000$).

Network (BBC) and Programme Talent (Chris Evans)

Analysis of Variance revealed that for BBC, there is a higher level of Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication and Ruggedness perceived by participants, having respective means as follow (Means=3.28, 3.17, 3.98, 3.15, 2.52) in comparison to Chris Evans (Means=0.29, 2.98, 3.23, 2.75, 2.30). However there was a significant difference observed between the levels of Sincerity $f(1,450)=10.305$, $p<0.05$ ($p=.000$), Excitement $f(1,450)=.5.25$, $p<0.05$ ($p=.022$), Competence

$f(1,450)=96.61$, $p<0.05$ ($p=.000$), Sophistication $f(1,450)=23.62$, $p<0.05$ ($p=.000$) and Ruggedness $f(1,450)=6.405$, $p<0.05$ ($p=.012$).

Channel (BBC2) and Programme (Top Gear)

Analysis of Variance revealed that for BBC2, there is a higher level of Sincerity, Competence and Sophistication perceived by participants, having respective means as follow (Means=3.35, 3.74, 3.11) in comparison to Top Gear (Means=0.29, 2.98, 3.23, 2.75, 2.30). Whereas for Excitement and Ruggedness participants perceived BBC2 to have lower means of (3.26 and 2.71 respectively) in comparison to Top Gear (3.89 and 3.49 respectively). However there was a significant difference observed between the levels of Sincerity $f(1,450)=12.88$, $p<0.05$ ($p=.000$), Excitement $f(1,450)=59.101$ $p<0.05$ ($p=.000$), Competence $f(1,450)=20.52$, $p<0.05$ ($p=.000$), Sophistication $f(1,450)=13.744$, $p<0.05$ ($p=.000$) and Ruggedness $f(1,450)=76.532$, $p<0.05$ ($p=.000$).

Channel (BBC2) and Programme Talent (Chris Evans)

Analysis of Variance revealed that for BBC2, there is a higher level of Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication and Ruggedness perceived by participants, having respective means as follow (Means=3.35, 3.26, 3.74, 3.11, 2.71) in comparison to Chris Evans (Means=0.29, 2.98, 3.23, 2.75, 2.30). However there was a significant difference observed between the levels of Sincerity $f(1,450)=22.86$, $p<0.05$ ($p=.000$), Excitement $f(1,450)=11.28$, $p<0.05$ ($p=.001$), Competence $f(1,450)=48.11$, $p<0.05$ ($p=.000$), Sophistication $f(1,450)=18.38$, $p<0.05$ ($p=.000$) and Ruggedness $f(1,450)=21.401$, $p<0.05$ ($p=.000$).

Programme (Top Gear) and Programme Talent (Chris Evans)

Analysis of Variance revealed that for Top Gear, there is a higher level of Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication and Ruggedness perceived by participants, having respective means as follow (Means=3.07, 3.89, 3.41, 2.80, 3.49) in comparison to Chris Evans (Means=0.29, 2.98, 3.23, 2.75, 2.30). However the difference was not significant for Sincerity $f(1,450)=1.006$, $p>0.05$ ($p=0.316$), and Sophistication $f(1,450)=.295$, $p>0.05$ ($p=.587$). However there was a significant

difference observed between the level of Excitement $f(1,450)=.105.162$, $p<0.05$ ($p=.000$), Competence $f(1,450)=5.196$, $p<0.05$ ($p=.023$) and Ruggedness $f(1,450)=168.29$, $p<0.05$ ($p=.000$).

Conclusion

Whilst there is a considerable body of literature on the concept of brand personality and how brands embody human personality characteristics, there is a paucity of knowledge on how different brand personalities fit within a brand architecture. Our research sought to develop our understanding of this issue by investigating our premise that brand personalities within a branded architecture need to 'fit' coherently in order to effectively position and engage audiences in a highly fragmented media market.

Our research revealed a mixed picture in terms of the findings. For example, our results on the perception of brand personalities across the media brand architecture revealed that there was both statistically and intuitively a high degree of fit within the branded house architecture. For example, we found high levels of statistical significance in the perception of brand personality traits of the Network brand (BBC) and Channel brand (BBC2) both of which demonstrated fit in terms of Competence and Sincerity. This personality fit was also demonstrated in terms of the Talent brand (Chris Evans) who was also considered to be Competent. From a statistical point of view, we did not find significant levels of fit between the personalities of the Network brand, the Channel brand and the Programme Brand (Top Gear) with the latter being considered as Exciting and Rugged. However, intuitively this finding seems logical, since a programme about fast cars, that is targeted primarily at young to middle aged males, should be exhilarating and be presented by someone who is considered as exciting. In this sense, whilst there may not be a statistically significant degree of personality fit across the brand architecture, there is a strong argument to suggest that there is coherence across the media brand architecture that we have studied.

Our research findings have found significant differences in the brand personalities across the architecture we studied and this has led us to re-consider our original premise about brands within a

branded house architecture needing to coherently fit together in order to be effective. Our original question about ‘do the brand personalities fit?’ now needs to be framed along the lines of ‘what is brand personality fit?’ and this question is likely to provide a range of answers that are contextual to the nature of the brand architecture and the industry which is being studied.

Our research adds to the theoretical understanding of brand management by understanding how multiple brand personalities interact and fit with each other across a branded house architecture. However, future researchers working in this area may wish to embrace the idea that the brands within an architecture, may indeed, be considered to fit coherently when there are significant difference in their personalities.

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