Research on the Influence of Brand Personality on Brand Forgiveness

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Abstract

As market competition becomes more and more fierce, brand building and customer retention are important ways for modern enterprises to find competitive advantages. Some brand problems arise inevitably in the development of modern enterprises. How to survive in a crisis, retain the original customers, which have been the primary businesses for enterprises to find ways to solve. The aim of the present study is to explore the mechanism between brand personalities and brand forgiveness. The explanations for this study is based on the framework of the Theory of Similarity. Combined with the theory, the study explains the influence of brand personality on brand forgiveness from the path of brand trust. And in the context of emotional brand attachment, this mechanism is more obvious.

Keywords: Brand personality, Brand trust, Brand forgiveness, Emotional brand attachment

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of era, product update cycle shortens greatly, which contributes to the intensifying competition, and the active media in the era of the existing circumstances is quite rich. The rising brand crisis spreads fast and the number of risk factors is growing, so many enterprises have to face enormous threat. While all kinds of market information is not complete, individual consumers have differences in each other, and at the same time, there are also various shortcomings in enterprises. A bad brand impression is brought to consumers, which, made the companies not "knowingly", but it does give consumers negative impression of the products and may cause the consumer to doubt, denial and anger, disappoint, and so on. These negative emotions could let consumers change the direction ,to stop buying or buying a competitor's product and so on. So, how to convenience consumer to forgive in this case, becomes the key point to scholars' research.

In this context, many scholars focus on the types and characteristics of brand crisis and propose different strategies to deal with brand crisis. Consumers secure symbol by the process of product and brand experience and experience on the interests of the enterprise by giving the brand of a certain personality characteristics to form product and brand personality characteristics. Consumers begin to form brand identification by brand experience, they get connected to the brand emotionally through the combination of individual emotional experience. When brand crisis occurs, whether or not the consumer will think about previous brand connection and forgive the brand , becomes a focus in the study of this article.

2. Overview of relevant theories

2.1 Brand Personality

In daily life or in the marketing practice, we can often hear the concept 'brand personality'. An obvious example is the celebrity endorsements in advertising, and the brand is trying to make the celebrity's personality associated with the brand characteristics of the product, so that the public can understand the personality of the products from the star's personality. Scholars of the concept of "brand personality" preliminary study began in the 80s.

By the late 1980 s, the high speed development of economy, more and more similar products appearing, it is hard to get up out of the ordinary performance to distinguish goods. So scholars started to revise theory. Among them, the most outstanding contribution, by Jennifer Aaker. Aasker use the psychology of 'big five model theory' directly researches on brand personality, and found that brand personality system includes five dimensions under the background of American culture, concluding into five dimensions of pure, simulation, ability, refinement, and strong. He defined brand personality as the collection of personification characteristics given by consumers to brands. Aaker's research on brand personality suggests that consumers choose a brand is often owing to the brand's personality which meet with his own similarity and complement, which means the consumer choose the brand suit with their own character or their complementary personality.

Most researchers tend to define brand personality from the perspective of consumers, but it cannot fully understand brand personality. Therefore, brand personality is defined in this study as: the temperament and characteristics endowed by the brand in the construction are the personalized characteristics and relatively stable psychological perception given by consumers when they perceive the brand. It is not only the personality characteristic shaped by marketers, but also the subjective attribute of consumers' psychological perception state.

Table 1. Summary of Definition of Brand Personality

Scholars	Definition
Plummer(1986)	A personified brand image
Keller(1993)	The synthesis of brand personality traits
Goodyear(1993)	A set of brand characteristics is a mapping of the brand according to consumer expectations
Batra(1993)	Customers experience a way in which brands bring personification to their use
Blackston(1995)	A group of personality traits assigned to a brand
David Aaker(1996)	Personified brand characteristics
Aaker(1997)	A set of anthropomorphic characteristics, based on brand associations
Philip Kotler (1997)	A combination of products attracted by human personality
Xianglong Xia(2002)	An expression of one's personality in a product

The table is a summary of scholars' definitions of brand trust

2.2 Brand Trust

Brand trust refers to the future expectation of brand reliability and brand behavior intention when consumers are faced with risks. This concept was first proposed by Howard and Sheth (1969). Bhattacharya et al. (1998) defined the trust as individuals to obtain the positive result of a kind of expectation on the basis of research. The expectation above is based on the other side of the trade under uncertain conditions to produce the desired action. In previous literatures, Delgado-Ballester et al. (2003) defined brand trust as customers' faith, confidence and expectation of brand reliability and propensity when risks come.

Customers' trust in the brand is actually the unification of their cognition and emotion. As early as in McAllister's study (1995), it has been pointed out that brand trust includes both cognitive trust and emotional trust. Similarly, Denghua Yuan et al. (2007) hold that brand trust consists of quality trust, goodwill trust and capability trust. There are mainly two lines of research on brand trust. One is the cognitive line focusing on judgment and choice risk and perceived quality. The other is the emotional line with the core relationship between the brand and customers. Dick and Basu (1994) believed that brand trust is the result of consumers' brand cognition. Under the condition of risk, consumers determine the trust intensity of their brand through risk perception and risk prediction. Therefore, brand trust is regarded as a cognitive development process from perceived risk to predicted risk.

To sum up, scholars at home and abroad have different perspectives on the definition of brand trust, but the essence tends to be the same. Therefore, based on previous studies, this paper holds that brand trust refers to the attitude that consumers expect to obtain positive results in line with their expectations from the brand in the uncertain market environment, and that it is a confidence and expectation that the brand can realize its functions and promises.

2.3 Brand Forgiveness

According to the definition of forgiveness given by Enright(1991) and North(1987), consumers' forgiveness is manifested as an act of harm to enterprises, and consumers' motive of evasive retaliation decreases but their motive of empathy and friendliness increases. Consumer forgiveness is essentially interpersonal forgiveness. Scholars have interpreted the connotation of consumer forgiveness according to the definition of forgiveness in psychology.

From the perspective of relationship, Finkel(2002), Tsarenbo and Gabbott define consumer forgiveness as, consumers weaken negative emotions and psychology, make allowances, tolerance and indulgence to merchants, change destructive behaviors into constructive behaviors, and form a change process of intention to repurchase relationships. Chung et al. (2006) believe that consumer forgiveness is finally manifested as the weakening of consumers' motivation to retaliate, which is manifested as the cessation of condemnation and discrimination, the understanding of offenders, and the reduction of negative emotions, brand conversion intention or complaints. Worthington(2007), on the other hand, believes that forgiveness is a kind of repairing ability, including releasing psychological pressure on offending behaviors, personal reflection and thinking about constructive behaviors. According to the definition of forgiveness by Tingting Zhu (2014) and others, consumer forgiveness is the healing process of consumers, and the transformation of body and mind into a positive direction is the most important value of consumer forgiveness.

Brand forgiveness intention is generally accompanied by product brand crisis. Brand forgiveness intention is the key for enterprises to rebuild their image and gain consumer trust after product brand crisis. Domestic and foreign scholars have carried out relevant theoretical and empirical research on brand crisis and brand forgiveness intention. In combination with the understanding of forgiveness and the scholar's research conclusion, this study defines consumer forgiveness as consumer sentiment after trust violation events, cognitive and behavioral prosocial motivation transformation process.

2.4 Brand attachment

Schltz et al.(1989) first made pioneering research on the attachment between consumers and their belongings from the perspective of social cognition and self-concept. They consider that attachment consists of three dimensions: integration, personality and time orientation. French scholars have explored brand attachment from the perspective of emotion and relationship. Critau(2001) divides brand attachment into two dimensions: friendliness and dependence. It reflects consumers' unique emotions and dependence on the brand. On the other hand, Heibrunn (2001) emphasizes that brand attachment reflects long-term and stable consumer-brand relationship, play a good role as a status symbol, and can reflect consumers' internal consumption views.

Through the summary of past scholars, scholars continue to define and develop the scale of the concept and dimension of brand attachment. Among them, Thomson et al.(2005) mainly analyzed brand attachment from the perspective of emotion and believed that brand attachment is the emotional bond formed between consumers and brands. Park et al.(2006) defined brand attachment mainly from the perspective of brand and self-connection. They pointed out that brand attachment reflects the intensity of consumers' cognition of brand and emotional bond. Whan Park et al.(2010), similar to Park et al., emphasized the degree of connection between brand and self. Specifically, it includes two dimensions: brand-self connection and Brand prominence of Brand memory.

Based on the research of scholars, this paper draws on the definition of brand attachment given by Thomson et al.(2005), that is, brand attachment is the emotional bond formed by consumers and brands, including three dimensions of emotion, passion and connection.

2.5 Theory Review

Similarity theory, from the perspective of social psychology, there is a phenomenon in interpersonal relationships known as the 'similarity effect' in sociology. That is, the similarity between people can cause the emotion or attitude of liking and attracting. This tendency of emotional preference caused by similarity can also be used to predict the attitude towards brands. In other words, the more similar the personality traits and emotional experiences are to consumers, the more they will be preferred and tolerated by consumers.

3. Relationship Between Brand Personality and Brand Forgiveness

3.1 Brand personality and brand forgiveness

Brand personality, in the process of bringing brand identity to consumers, enables consumers to match brand personality characteristics with their own personality characteristics and future expectations. Thus, from the perspective of consumers, brand personality characteristics, to some extent, are the embodiment of their own personality. Brand personality describes brand image in an anthropomorphic way. Brand personality reflects consumers' perception and emotional connection to the brand. Compared with the characteristics of commodities, brand personality provides functions of symbol and self-expression.

Consumers have the consumption motivation of pursuing uniqueness, publicizing individuality and demanding distinction, concluded as seeking uniqueness. Therefore, the uniqueness of brand personality will also affect consumers' attitudes towards brands. Biel (1993) found that the brand with strong and unique brand personality will also bring higher level of brand usage and brand preference, which coincides with the positioning concept in marketing theory for a long time.

Brand personality is closely related to symbolic consumption. When consumers want to express their true self but cannot express it directly, they prefer to express it through their own consumption behavior. Such as through the clothing, transportation, food brand to express its personality. In order to achieve the purpose of displaying themselves or distinguishing others through such symbolic consumption, consumers often buy brands with the same personality of consumers. The closer the brand personality and consumer personality, the more likely it is to get consumers to resonate with consumers to produce a kind of identity, meeting the emotional needs of the consumers. The closer the distance between brands and consumers, the formation of consumption habits slowly consumers embodied in the process of consumption of brand and brand close. When consumers form a brand reliance, a sudden crisis erupted in the product brand, is also prone to compassion, considered to be the brand of a careless loss, resulting in a subjective tendency to forgive, etc.

3.2 Mechanism of brand trust

Before purchasing products or services, consumers will more or less understand some relevant information, some of which will be used for brand information, such as brand name, popularity, brand personality and so on. Gronroos proposed customers perceived quality which is not directly from the quality of the technical quality or function, but through the adjustment of the information about the brand of the enterprise or product. That is to say, consumers for the product or service perception is affected by the information related to the brand, brand personality is the key factor affecting the quality of customer perception, from consumer brand trust of product brand personality. Consistent consumption experience means that consumers' experience in the same direction in each consumption process, which will form a more reliable and diagnostic knowledge base in consumers' memory, and this

knowledge base can be used to make decisions and judgments in relevant situations. In order to support this theory, studies have found that the consistency of people's access to information increases, so does the certainty of their attitude. Therefore, under such a circumstance, we believe that consumers will gradually form brand trust in a certain brand when consuming under a certain brand personality for a long time.

3.3 Influence of emotional brand attachment

The quality identification produced by consumers through the experience of recognized brand personality products, brand quality identification affects consumers' subjective attitude, subjective evaluation and comprehensive evaluation of product crisis. as a result, at the time of brand crisis, combining with the experience of his past consumption and consumer trust in the quality of the product identity, the higher the esteemed, consumer confidence in the brand remains enough, so is the negative effect is smaller, the brand crisis of crisis psychology to bear ability is stronger. Therefore, the higher the brand quality identification, the stronger the tendency of consumers to forgive, and the more tolerant they are to brand crisis caused by product problems or other factors. Consumers express themselves by consuming strongly attached brands or related products, so as to achieve a state of self-satisfaction. Brand attachment is also related to brand personality. Consumers form brand attachment because products can not only satisfy the functional value of consumers, but also meet the symbolic value of consumers. once brand attachment is formed, consumers will maintain and maintain such relationship for a long time. Thus, the appearance of brand crisis will also make consumers forgive and forgive for wanting to maintain such relationship.

4. Discussion

Combined with the theory, we can verify the important factor of brand personality on brand forgiveness, and brand personality could contribute to consumer brand trust, which means enterprises in the brand publicity, start from the brand personality, combined with the market positioning, choose the target group, to form a resonance with the target group of brand personality. Through the meet the needs of consumers, to some extent, enterprises establish contact with consumers, win the trust of consumers, attract loyal target groups. At the same time, the brand trust play a role as the path that can lead brand personality to brand forgiveness. The emotional attachment also create a situation that intensify the relationship between brand personality and brand forgiveness. The conclusions above have the following main reference significance for brand practice:

First of all, enterprise brand managers should build a distinctive brand personality for the brand, and use unique brand positioning and clear brand personality to stand out from the huge brand and attract the attention of consumers, which is the first step to build a consumer relationship. Brand managers should endow the brand with a unique and clear brand personality, make the brand image vivid and create a brand personality that can be perceived by consumers. Enterprises can build different brand personalities according to the brand demands of different groups, especially in some public perception personalities. By satisfying certain social psychology and social needs of consumers, they can choose to build a corresponding brand personality.

Secondly, Dig deeply into consumer personality. With the rise of Internet big data technology, it is more conducive for enterprises to collect information about consumers' personality and preferences, and design corresponding products, services and marketing strategies for various consumer groups by taking advantage of common needs and individual needs, so that consumers can feel that enterprises attach importance to customer needs.

Importantly, unique brand personality is conducive to consumers' emotional identification and brand resonance, so as to improve consumers' brand recognition and brand trust. High brand trust means that consumers will maintain a continuous relationship and dependence with the brand for a long time, which will increase the brand value of enterprise brands correspondingly. Therefore, as for brand building, enterprises should establish distinctive brand personality as the basis, strengthen brand trust as a means to win the support and tolerance of consumers.

Last but not least, individual styles of consumers vary greatly, but a brand can only have one style, which cannot meet the individual styles of all consumers. However, enterprises can start from the common experience of consumers and brands to seek the resonance of consumers and brands.by establishing a good emotional bond with consumers, the enterprise could transform such trust and support into good advertisement of product brands. At the same time, consumers' trust in brands can also be further strengthened, brand equity increased, and brand effect strengthened.

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