

Consumer's Sport Preference as a Predictor for His/Her Response to Brand Personality



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1 Introduction

The increasing competition in saturated markets drives companies to adopt highly sophisticated communication mix strategies. This is the case especially for categories of products that possess similar physical attributes, e.g., sport shoes. For these products, the brand attribute constitutes a key driver affecting consumers' final purchase decision. However, what affects consumers' choice of a specific branded product? Wright [11] has claimed that consumers often tend to choose a product that arouses the most positive brand affect rather than taking certain product attributes into account. Hence, recent literature has focused on central drivers for (positive) brand affects, i.e., constructs that arouse positive brand emotions such as joy or happiness. In this context, brand personality has been identified as a central driver for affective brand loyalty, which encompasses the abovementioned brand-related emotions. Brand personality could be described according to a person's personality and therefore refers to personality characteristics, e.g., trustworthiness and activity, that are associated with the brand. Recent studies have revealed that consumers prefer brands that are aligned with their own personality traits (e.g., Mulyanegara et al. [7]). Because brand personality is created by a company's communication mix, companies may explore the personality traits of their target market segments and attach the corresponding personality traits to their brand. However, focusing on consumers' personality traits for market segmentation (i.e., market evaluation) is challenging since personality traits are not directly observable.

In the context of unobservable segmentation variables/bases, Wedel and Kamakura [10] stated that three of six criteria for successful market segmentation variables, i.e.,

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stability, accessibility and responsiveness, are not clearly supported in the relevant literature (p. 14), while identifiability, substantiality and actionability are supported. However, linking the unobservable variables underlying personality traits to observable variables may solve these drawbacks. In particular, the criterion accessibility, which refers to the degree to which the target market segment is reachable through a company's communication efforts, is a key variable identified in the research of drivers of affective brand loyalty. The existence of an easily observable variable, which could be linked with consumers' personality traits and may serve as a predictor of consumer response to brand personality, may therefore simplify and reduce a company's communication efforts.

In this contribution, we search for such an easily observable variable. We explore whether a consumer's preference for/choice of a specific sport and, correspondingly, his/her membership in a specific sport cluster, may serve as an appropriate observable variable in this context and, hence, as a predictor of the consumer's response to brand personality, i.e., affective brand loyalty.

In the next section, we review the theoretical bases of consumer and brand personality and discuss relations between these two constructs. In the third section, we use empirical data to explore the personality traits of several sport clusters. Furthermore, we give recommendations on how these results may be used within communication mix strategies. Finally, we conclude our results by explicitly pointing out the appropriateness of a consumer's sport preference as a predictor of the consumer's response to brand personality, i.e., affective brand loyalty.

2 Consumer Personality and Brand Personality

Since the 1980s, there has been a consensus about five (independent) personality traits that determine a person's personality. This Big Five model constitutes of the following five factors: agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, neuroticism and openness to experience (cp. McCrae and John [6]). While agreeableness is linked to facets such as altruism and modesty, conscientiousness is connected with traits such as efficiency and dutifulness. Neuroticism summarizes facets such as vulnerability and impulsiveness, and extraversion is described by traits such as warmth and talkativeness. Openness could be described by fantasy and wide interests. To measure the degree of each of these five factors in a person, several rating-based tests have been developed. The most popular test constitutes the NEO-PI-R test of Costa and McCrae [2], which lays the ground for most subsequent tests. Almost all tests rely on Likert scales, where respondents rate their self-application to different personality statements. For example, "I am efficient" is a facet of conscientiousness. These facet results are subsequently pooled to yield an overall result for the focal Big Five factor.

In accordance with consumer personality, brand personality could be defined as the "set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (Aaker [1], p. 347). Aaker [1] worked out five factors that determine a brand's personality, i.e., sincerity, excitement,

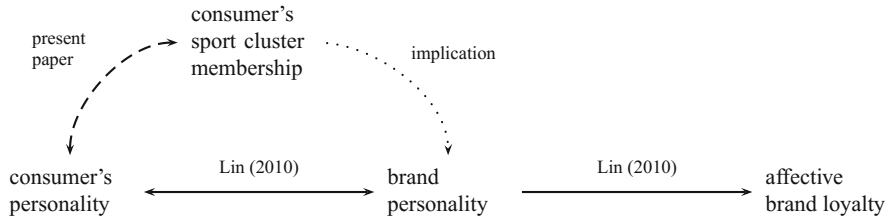


Fig. 1 Relations between consumer personality, sport cluster membership, brand personality and affective brand loyalty

competence, sophistication and ruggedness. These factors could be described by different facets, e.g., sincerity refers to cheerfulness, excitement to imaginativeness, sophistication to glamor and ruggedness to toughness (p. 351). Brand personality is created by company's communication mix, e.g., an advertisement that aligns the brand with certain personality traits. For example, Thomas and Sekar [9] found that the sport brand Nike is associated with ruggedness.

Aaker [1] has found parallels between three of the Big Five factors and brand personality factors: agreeableness and sincerity, extraversion and excitement, and consciousness and competence. Several studies identified relations between consumer and brand personality: Lin [5] found positive relationships between the Big Five factors agreeableness and extraversion and the brand personality trait excitement as well as a positive relation between the Big Five factor agreeableness and the brand personality traits of sincerity and competence. Geuens et al. [3] found positive correlations between consciousness resp. extraversion and competence as well as between agreeableness resp. consciousness and sincerity.

Brand personality has been identified as a central driver for affective brand loyalty. Affective brand loyalty constitutes one part of brand loyalty as it refers to a consumer's preference for a specific brand. Affective brand loyalty could be seen as a predictor of action loyalty, which constitutes another part of brand loyalty and could be measured by actual purchases (Lin [5]). Since consumers prefer brands that are aligned with their own personality traits, a consumer's personality may be used as a predictor for his/her affective brand loyalty (Lin [5]). The bottom part of Fig. 1 illustrates these relations. However, a consumer's personality traits are rarely directly observable. Hence, the search for a more easily observable variable (here: consumer's sport cluster membership), which may finally serve as a predictor for affective brand loyalty, is appropriated to reduce a company's communication efforts. In this contribution, we therefore check whether customers in different sport clusters differ in their personality traits. In this case, a consumer's membership in a specific sport cluster would mirror his/her personality traits (cp. dashed double arrow in Fig. 1), which would subsequently predict his/her affective brand loyalty as a result of brand personality (cp. dotted arrow in Fig. 1).

3 Empirical Study

To answer our research question, we conducted an empirical study at a German university. A total of 153 students of different study courses participated. Most of the respondents were male (67%), and the mean age was 26 years. The respondents were asked to answer two questionnaires. The first questionnaire was related to the respondents' sports activities. The respondents were asked about their favored sports. The second questionnaire encompassed a Big Five self-test adopted from Saum-Aldehoff [8], pp. 190–198. Respondents' self-reports on different facets of the Big Five factors were collected by using rating-scales. The score for each factor ranges from -20 to 20 , where a high/low score reflects a high/low level of the focal Big Five factor. To handle the high number of reported sports activities, we followed the advice of Hartmann et al. [4], p. 43, and built seven sport clusters, i.e., sport games (39 members); fitness sports (36 members); endurance-trained athletes such as swimmers, long-distant runners and triathletes (21 members); adventure/nature sports (17 members); sport fighting (14 members); dancing/gymnastics (13 members); and others, such as riders (10 members). Furthermore, a special cluster was built for students who refused to state their preferred sports (three members). To check for personality differences between those clusters, we pooled respondents' individual scores of the Big Five factors for each sport cluster and conducted one-way ANOVAs. Extraversion ($p = 0.077$) and openness to experience ($p = 0.033$) turned out to differ significantly across clusters. While conscientiousness ($p = 0.121$) was on the threshold at a 90% significance, neuroticism ($p = 0.751$) and agreeableness ($p = 0.532$) showed no significant cluster-specific differences.

To gain further insight, we subsequently conducted pairwise t-tests between sport clusters for the Big Five factors that turned out to differ at least weakly significantly. Fig. 2 depicts bar charts, which plot the means and standard deviations for extraversion, conscientiousness and openness to experience in each sport cluster.

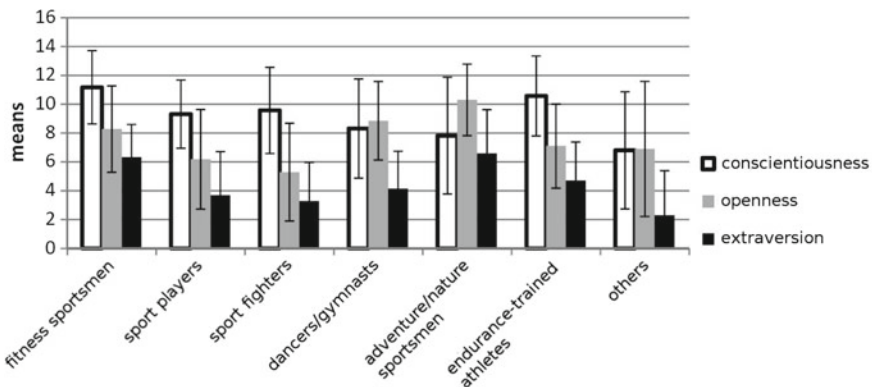


Fig. 2 Means of conscientiousness, openness and extraversion in sport clusters

On average, sport players (3.692), sport fighters (3.286) and others (2.333) rate themselves as weakly extraverted. These sport clusters are (at least by trend) less extraverted than fitness sportsmen (6.333, $p < 0.05$) and adventure/nature sportsmen (6.588, $p \leq 0.122$). Fitness sportsmen are the most conscientious (11.167). Their results differ (at least by trend) from the means of sport players (9.307, $p = 0.105$), dancers/gymnasts (8.307, $p = 0.121$) and significantly from adventure/nature sportsmen (7.824, $p = 0.073$) and others (6.800, $p = 0.042$). Adventure/nature sportsmen exhibit the highest mean (10.294) of openness to experience. They score significantly higher than sport players (6.180, $p = 0.031$), sport fighters (5.286, $p = 0.024$) and endurance-trained athletes (7.095, $p = 0.081$). Obviously, differences in personality traits across sport clusters exist. In accordance with Fig. 1, a consumer's membership in a specific sport cluster mirrors the consumer's personality traits. Hence, the consumer's sport cluster membership predicts affective brand loyalty resulting from brand personality. From a practical point of view, companies may use this result to simplify their communication strategies for creating brand personality. To harmonize brand personality and the personality of the target market and thereby achieve affective brand loyalty of consumers, companies may infer a consumer's personality from his or her sport cluster membership. For example, if a company wants to sell hiking boots, it could use information on highly extraverted and open adventure/nature sportsmen and attach the corresponding personality trait to its brand. Hence, rather than exploring the personality traits of their target market by cost-intensive market surveys, companies may simply focus on the (easily inferable/observable) product-corresponding sport cluster to draw conclusions for a harmonious brand personality. This approach saves communication costs and therefore contributes to the company's profit.

4 Conclusions

This study aimed to explore whether a consumer's preference for a specific sport - measured by the consumer's membership in a specific sport cluster - predicts the consumer's affective brand loyalty as a result of brand personality. To answer this research question, we used empirical data on personality traits - measured by the popular Big Five approach - and sport cluster memberships of respondents. Using one-way ANOVA and pairwise t-tests, we found evidence that different sport clusters differ significantly with respect to certain personality traits. Since the recent literature has identified a consumer's personality traits as predictors for his/her response to brand personality, our results imply that a consumer's sport cluster membership is a key predictor for his/her affective brand loyalty. From a practical point of view, consumers' sport cluster membership - compared to their personality traits - is easily observable. Hence, companies may use our results to simplify and reduce the communication efforts associated with creating brand personality.

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