

Full Length Research Paper

Function of projective techniques in improving brand personality

Makarand Upadhyaya

College of Business Management, Jazan University, Jazan, Saudi Arabia. Email.makarandjaipur@rediffmail.com.

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The purpose of this paper is to examine four finest perfume brands. Two metaphor based personification methods-mood-boards and job-sorting are employed to study the association that the participants have with the brands. Both methods use open ended assignments to decipher how participants think or feel about the research object in question. The study analyses the congruent validity of the two methods and differences in their ability to personify the chosen brands of deo. Both methods yielded almost similar outcomes, thereby reiterating that the two methods possess congruent validity. The latter part of the paper analyses the brand personality characteristics that were connected to the celebrities and jobs, as identified in the mood-boards and job-sorting exercise respectively. SWOCC Brand Personality Scale, which is a further elaboration of Aaker's brand personality research, was used to provide a list of the personality characteristics.

Key words: Brand personality enhancement, sources of brand personality, brand personality dimensions, SWOCC scale.

INTRODUCTION

Brands exercise an overwhelming influence on consumers. Consumers use a mix of both rational and emotional considerations in eventually deciding on the brand to purchase. A lot of consumer choices are governed by the right side of the brain, that has little to do with reasons and logic but much to do with feelings and emotions. We all purchase products from time to time based on how they make us feel from a strictly functional or utilitarian standpoint. Effective branding should thus appeal to both the right and left sides of the brain. This emotional consideration is what the marketers need to identify, explore and develop. This necessitates a rigorous investigation on the emotional aspects of a brand-brand image and brand personality.

Qualitative research is the most appropriate technique for uncovering the feelings, attitudes, emotions and motivations associated with the purchase of brands. Quantitative research, using pre-structured questionnaires fails to capture the entire gamut of reasons and intentions-to-buy. A still more complicating fact is the inability of respondents to express their views on image or personality of a certain brand using a standard vocabulary on a structured scale. Projective techniques

help to overcome this problem inherent with the use of quantitative research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Morrison et al. (2002) define projective research as "the use of stimuli that allow participants to project their subjective or deep-seated beliefs onto other people or objects". Projective techniques "provide verbal or visual stimuli which, through their indirection and concealed intent, encourage respondents to reveal their unconscious feelings and attitudes without being aware that they are doing so" (Will et al., 1996). Projective techniques are usually sub-divided into five categories of methods-association, completion, construction, choice ordering and expressive (Gordon and Longmaid, 1988; Will et al., 1996; Donoghue, 2000; Morrison et al., 2002; Boddy, 2007). In each of these methods, the respondents are provided with an incomplete stimulus which they need to complete by associating, completing, constructing, choosing and expressing. The categorization is based on the tasks given to participants. Association

tasks require respondents to respond to a stimulus by the first image or thought elicited by the presentation of stimulus (Donoghue, 2000; Will et al., 1996). Completion tasks require participants to complete an incomplete stimulus which may be a story, sentence, argument or conversation. Third person questioning and bubble drawings are typical construction techniques that help in exploring feelings and attitudes without being defensive and having personal accountability for the responses. Expressive tasks require participants to draw, enact, role play a specific concept or situation (Donoghue, 2000; Gordon and Langmaid, 1988; Will et al., 1996). Projective techniques are often labeled as disguised and unstructured because the respondents are unaware of the purpose of research and the researcher does not determine or limit the response alternatives (Klopper and Taulbee, 1976).

Metaphors are a method that is truly projective in nature. Participants are asked to connect the research object to a phenomenon from an entirely different domain. This involves a combination of association and expressive methods. Literature abounds in examples of use of metaphors for research purposes. Oswick and Montgomery (1999) asked managers to compare their organizations to animals and car parts. Grady et al. (1996) developed a metaphor based questionnaire called images of schools through metaphors (ISM) to determine the image of a school. Grady's question-naire stems from the work of Steinhoff and Owens (1989) and Owens and Steinhoff (1989) and was developed by assembling a set of metaphors in the form of simple questionnaires through workshops consisting of teachers and students.

A special class of metaphor based research techniques is personification method. Personification methods require respondents to compare the research objects with people rather than with cars, trees, animals etc. Photo-sort is the most commonly employed personification method, where participant is shown a large number of photographs of a wide range of people in varied settings and they are required to connect the photographs to the objects of research which may be brands or organizations (Van Riel et al., 1998).

Projective techniques in practice

Haire's shopping list study is the first published study on projective technique in consumer literature (Haire, 1950). The prime focus of the study was consumers' image of Nescafe instant coffee, then an innovative product in households which traditionally used drip coffee. Marketers speculated that the product would not receive unequivocal acceptance with consumers. The reason for apprehension was that the ease of making the coffee (instant coffee) had all likelihood of challenging the image of the women as a caring, nurturing, committed, and competent and a doting housewife. The objective of

Haire's study was thus to explore the consumers' attitudes towards the innovative yet controversial product. Thus, he tried using the indirect approach of questioning with projective technique.

For the conduct of his study, he prepared two shopping lists (A and B) which were identical in all respects except that one contained the innovative product Nescafe instant coffee while the other list had its traditional alternative that is the Maxwell Coffee House (Maxwell drip ground). The lists were administered to alternate subjects, and individuals had no awareness that another list existed. Total participants for the study were 100 women from Boston area, 50 of them were subjected to list A and 50 were administered list B. The participants were required to read the shopping list and try to draw a profile of the women shopping for the items on the list.

The findings suggested that the Maxwell Coffee House shopper was described in a positive manner whereas the Nescafe shopper was described in a rather negative mode. The Nescafe shopper was rather viewed as being indolent, callous, inefficient and a poor planner, scheduler and organizer. As against this Maxwell Coffee House shopper was viewed as being loving, affectionate, committed and as having concern for the family. Haire (1950) conducted two more studies to understand the findings from the initial Nescafe instant coffee experiment. Haire's shopping list study has been replicated several times since its publication in marketing research literature (Anderson, 1978; Arndt, 1973; Fram and Cibotti, 1991; Hill, 1960, 1968; Lane and Watson, 1975; Robertson and Joselyn, 1974; Webster and Penchmann, 1970; Westfall et al., 1957). These replications have given useful insights on the methodology, validity, reliability and utility of projective techniques in consumer behavior and marketing research. A few more published studies on projective techniques have examined the meaning in gift giving (McGrath et al., 1993). Some studies have emphasized the need for marketers to connect with consumers and evaluated the measurement capabilities of lifestyle typologies (Lastovicka et al., 1990).

Projective techniques enable the researcher to explore unreachable beliefs: attitudes, values, motivations, personality, cognitions and behaviors (Donoghue, 2000; Fram and Cibotti, 1991; Will et al., 1996). Being disguised interventions, they prevent respondents' bias from distorting the results.

Another advantage of projective techniques lies in their ability to explore the situation and generate, supplement and verify hypotheses in consumer behavior studies. The hypotheses thus generated can later be tested through methodologies like panel studies, surveys and causal research.

The third advantage arises from the fact that the technique places very nominal cognitive demands on the respondents. Reading, comprehending and responding to instructions is not needed and hence data are not limited

by cognitive abilities of the respondents and permit the researchers to measure beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, feelings and motivations of the respondents better than direct questioning used in quantitative research.

On the disadvantages side, lies the complexity of interpretation of largely unstructured data. The researcher should be adept at decoding the data culled from the projective stimuli. The researcher needs to be specially trained in conduct of projective technique and the analysis of the emerging data (Donoghue, 2000). Respondents' comfort levels also affect the effectiveness of the technique. Some respondents might not find themselves comfortable with role playing and other expressive techniques. Another disadvantage of projective techniques is the reliability of the instruments (Donoghue, 2000; Kline, 1983). Reliability refers to the general consistency of the instrument (Churchill and Iacobucci, 2002). Test-retest reliability refers to the stability with which a technique yields information over time. In certain situations, subjects' responses should remain similar and highly correlated from when they are first tested to when they are later re-tested. However, in other instances, the researcher might expect responses to be affected by situational factors (Churchill and Iacobucci, 2002; Donoghue, 2000). Test-retest reliability is contingent upon the goals of the projective research and is a consideration when using projective techniques. There is much debate about whether repeated administrations of projective techniques should correlate or differ (Donoghue, 2000). A second form of reliability is coder or interrater reliability. Interrater reliability refers to the extent to which two (or more) interpreters code the data in the same manner. If equally competent researchers interpret the data in a different manner, then interrater reliability is under suspect. Interpreting subjects' responses to the projective stimuli requires a high level of subjectivity on the part of the researchers, and they may disagree about the underlying meanings of responses. Thus, interrater reliability is one of the major issues of using projective techniques and is often the target of criticism (Churchill, 1991).

This paper describes the development and comparison of two personification based projective techniques for brand image research-the mood-board approach and job sorting task. The brands chosen for investigation were four brands of deu. The intent of the study was to distinguish the brands under study. Functional characteristics are inappropriate differentiators for ego sensitive products like deu where the purchase behavior is substantially connected with image.

The study employed two methods for investigation-mood-board approach and job-sorting task. The study analyses the differences between the two methods and on their ability to personify the chosen brands of deu. The analysis involved two stages-an intermediate analysis for gathering an impression of the four deu brands. For this, we compared the types and number of celebrities (mood-boards) and jobs (job-sorting task) associated with each

brand. The second was an analysis of brand personality characteristics that were connected to the celebrities and jobs thus connected with each brand chosen for study. SWOCC Brand Personality Scale (Van den Berge, 2002), which is a further elaboration of Aaker's (1997) brand personality research was used to provide a list of the personality characteristics (Table 1). The scale has 73 different personality items, divided into 6 dimensions, some of which are further divided into facets.

METHOD

Mood-boards

Mood-boards are posters, collages or any design that may consist of images, text, clippings of objects in a composition of the choice of the mood-board creator. It is an open ended assignment used to decipher how participants think or feel about the research object in question. The participants are free to clip whatever seems appropriate to them. There is essentially a non verbal rationale behind the method. For the purpose of the current study, we tried to structure the responses by asking the participants to identify the celebrities that in their view were typical of the four deu brands.

Each participant was provided with 10 magazines, 2 each of 5 different genre-lifestyle, sports, entertainment, politics and films. Also provided to them were four large sheets of paper bearing the name and logo of one of the four deu brands under observation. The participants were required to go through each magazine and identify an appropriate celebrity or person that they could identify the deu brand with and then paste it on the sheet of paper of that particular brand. The collage had to be adequately filled. This phase of the research resulted in four collages per participant, one for each brand of deu.

In the second stage of the session, the participants were required to assign each celebrity thus appearing on the mood-board to a dominant personality characteristic. They were to assign an item from the earlier mentioned SWOCC Personality Scale for each celebrity they identified each deu brand with.

The above exercise was conducted with 16 participants belonging to the age group of 20-35, who are all potential buyers of finest deu brands. The male female ratio within the group of participants was 1:1, keeping in sync with the consumer population.

Job-sorting assignment

8 jobs were selected based on a 3D grid (physical effort, intellectual effort and salary drawn), one for each combination of extremes on the three axes. Cards were used to represent various jobs:

1. gardener
2. window cleaner
3. artist
4. gym teacher
5. professor/researcher
6. stockbroker
7. minister
8. lieutenant-colonel

Corresponding to each job, a laminated card bearing the picture and name of the profession was made. A well-known cartoon character (Mickey Mouse) was used to portray the doer of the job on the cards, so that the participants judge exclusively on the characteristics of the job and not on the looks, gender or expression of the person depicting the job. Four more cards were made

Table 1. SWOCC personality scale.

Dimension	Facets
Competence	Confidence
	Sympathy
	Preciseness
Excitement	Solidity
	Cheerfulness
	Activity
	Creativity
Gentleness	Gentleness
Ruggedness	Ruggedness
Annoyance	Unfriendliness
	Childishness
Distinctiveness	Distinctiveness

Source: Van den Berge (2002).

bearing the logo and name of the deu brands.

As with the mood-board session, the participants were offered the alphabetical list of 73 personality characteristics and were asked to assign each job to a dominant personality characteristic. The participants were then required to select three personality items for each job that is presented in a random order. They were free to use the personality items in both positive and negative ways. In the second part of the session, they were given the four deu brand logo cards, and were asked to match every brand with one of the job cards.

The number of participants for this job sorting session was 100 potential buyers of finest deu brands with the male female ratio of 1:1.

FINDINGS

mood-board study

The mood- boards study resulted in 64 collages. The number and types of celebrities selected by the participants and a general impression of their associative activities was made. The following are the observations made from the mood-board study.

1. It was not quite difficult for participants to connect celebrities quite emphatically and exclusively with one brand compared to the other three brands. Thereby implying that the four deu brands enjoyed distinct associations and images.
2. The mood-boards for brand B were inadequately filled. 2 participants had left the entire mood-board empty. This indicates that brand B has quite a weak and meaningless image and participants cannot associate meaning with the brand.
3. There were astounding differences between the types of celebrities associated with the given three brands. Mood-board for brand A typically had local celebrities. This confirms the plain, simple, ordinary, local and accessible associations with Brand A. The mood-boards for

brand B were not filled enough to connote any meaningful association. Brand C included stars, singers both rock and pop, artists and a few icons from diverse walks of life. This refers to a quite exclusive, creative, artistic, aesthetic, independent and an achiever's association with the brand. Brand D had versatile associations both in terms of age and types. It had athletes, members of the royal family and popular singers. This indicates that brand D is a broadly accepted brand enjoying patronage across all ages and lifestyles. Brand D is thus an established, prominent and broadly accepted brand.

Job sorting study

The job sorting study yielded a frequency score of the different jobs connected to the four deu brands. The job scores per brand ranged from 0-100. In a hypothetical situation, where all participants connect the same job to the same deu brand, a maximum score of 100 is reached.

1. One of the jobs that was hardly associated with deu at all was that of a researcher/professor. The professor/researcher scored abysmally low on all the four brands.
2. Brand A was quite often associated with a gardener (25 times), window –cleaner (23 times) and a gym instructor (15 times) and never ever with other job categories. This refers to the simple, ordinary, unhyped and accessible associations with Brand A, same as that detected in mood-board study. Brand B had no high or low scoring jobs in particular, which indicates the existence of weak and meaningless association with the brand, as found even in the mood-boards study. Brand C had especially high scores on artist (30 times) and very low scores on the minister (5 times) and emphasizes on its artistic and exclusive image. Eventually, brand D was often associated with stockbrokers (30 times) and rarely with artists (3 times), which highlights the brand's established and prominent position.

The two methods have given an appreciable insight on the image of the four deu brands. They have been able to highlight the differences between the four brands and the results of both the methods are in sync with each other, that is, point in the same direction. This indicates the methods' congruent validity.

Personality characteristics

Both the studies employed a 73 item personality scale. The scale had six underlying dimensions-competence, excitement, gentleness, ruggedness, annoyingness and distinctiveness. In the mood-boards study, the participants were asked to assign one personality item to each celebrity that they identified the brand with, in their collages. In our analysis, we totaled the number of personality items per dimension for each deu brand. For

Table 2. Brand personality scores (percentages) based on mood-boards.

Dimension	Brand A	Brand B	Brand C	Brand D
Excitement	47	41	40	39
Distinctiveness	15	29	28	32
Annoyance	14	13	10	13
Ruggedness	8	-2	10	5
Gentleness	5	8	3	3
Competence	4	6	2	0

Table 3. Brand personality scores (percentages) based on job-sorting.

Dimension	Brand A	Brand B	Brand C	Brand D
Excitement	54	49	46	49
Distinctiveness	27	29	32	26
Ruggedness	5	3	5	9
Gentleness	4	5	6	4
Competence	5	8	5	5
Annoyance	1	1	2	1

making the comparison easy, percentage scores of the six dimensions were computed by dividing them by the total number of personality items mentioned and multiplying the outcome with 100 percent.

Similarly, with the job-sorting study, the participants had to assign three personality items to each job. Each deus brand was connected to one of the eight jobs and a total of 300 personality items were attached to each beer brand. A percentage score per dimension was calculated for each brand.

Tables 2 and 3 represent the six personality dimensions for the four deus brands chosen for the current study. The degree of overlap between the two studies is established by computing the correlation scores, comparing the mood-boards and the job-sorting distribution for each deus brand. In all the four cases, the correlation was very high, varying from 0.84 (brand D, $p < 0.05$) to 0.91 (Brand C, $p < 0.005$). This is an indication that the two methods possess congruent validity, that is, despite the use of different personification methods and procedures, the results are quite comparable.

The only consistent difference between the two methods lies on the annoyance dimension: in the mood-boards results, annoyance invariably ended up on the third place of the often-mentioned personality dimension; in the job-sorting results, annoyance was always last.

Looking at the personality scores, it becomes evident that the similarities between the brands are more sharply defined than the differences between them. For all the four brands under observation, both the methods indicate that excitement and distinctiveness are the most important personality dimensions of deus brands. The remaining four dimensions were relatively less significant. Differences between the brands were intermittent and not

always consistent between the two methods. For example, in the mood-boards results, brand A scores relatively low on excitement as compared to the other three brands. Both methods reveal low scores for brand B on ruggedness, to the extent of being negative in the mood-boards study. Thus we can say that the translation of results of the two methods on the personality dimensions dilutes the discriminating value of the holistic results. The personality scores, though present an overall image of the deus brands, appear to be less effective for highlighting the differences between the brands.

Conclusion

The paper attempts to use two different personification methods—mood-boards and job-sorting to investigate and compare the image of four deus brands. Also intended was to analyze the similarities and differences in the results of the two personification techniques used in the context of brand image research.

The results were evaluated using two criteria:

1. the similarity or convergence between the two methods; and
2. the discriminating value of the two methods

The results were analyzed on two levels. On the level of holistic analysis, the two methods yielded largely similar outcomes, which clearly pronounced the differences in image between the four brands. The differences have some face validity too, as they very well reflect the differences in the advertising strategies of the four chosen brands. Referring to the next level of analysis at

the personality dimensions level, the results of the two methods are quite approximate but less sensitive to the differences between the four brands. Despite this limitation, the paper highlights the practical implication of projective research techniques, especially personification, for brand image research. The participants for both the studies provided meaningful and sharp insights which could not have been generated with ease using traditionally accepted methodologies that involve questionnaires or interviews.

The research proposes a serious limitation of projective techniques by highlighting a serious difference between the two methods on the annoyance dimension. A plausible explanation for this appears to be the specific stimulus domain used for the study. This needs to be explored further as it can pose a serious threat to the validity of projective techniques. The second concern is about the holistic interpretation of results. It is not at all difficult to analyze the types of celebrities associated with the brand or count how frequently certain jobs are associated with the brand, but translating these holistic interpretations into judgments on the brand image appear to be a big leap. The third concern is the failure of the translation from the projective results into personality scores dimensions. This raises a serious question if it is at all possible to validly translate overall projective data into analytical scores; and if it is so then what would be the ideal procedure to do this?

These concerns call for a systematic research attention for projective research techniques. It needs to be explored as to what extent these techniques and other possible measurement techniques produce comparable results. And are there aspects of brand image that can only or better be deciphered using projective techniques. It is indeed a highly creative research approach but more has to be learnt about its inherent strengths, weaknesses and limitations.

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