

Pilot analysis for the development and validation of a Brand Reputation measurement model.

Authors: Giuseppina Gifuni^{1,2}, Vincenzo Russo^{1,2}

1. Dipartimento di Business, Law, Economics e Consumer Behaviour “Carlo A. Ricciardi”, Università IULM, Milan, Italy

2. Behavior and Brain Lab IULM – Neuromarketing Research Center, Università IULM, Milan, Italy.

Abstract

Brand reputation is an intangible asset of growing managerial importance, and monitoring it is crucial for companies. According to the resource-based view, brand reputation can be measured through financial evaluations, surveys, interviews, and analysis of direct customer experiences. The present study is part of a theoretical strand that integrates cognitive and emotional elements in conceptualizing reputation according to a perception-based approach. The exploratory analysis aims to define a theoretical framework of the brand reputation construct, using a structured questionnaire to measure the relationships identified in the literature between authenticity, trust, and reputation. Furthermore, the direct impact on the brand's reputation of the authenticity outcomes identified in the literature, such as the quality of the relationship with the brand and the intention to recommend it, and the potential mediating role of the same, was examined. Finally, from a relational perspective, the impact of consumer personality traits on brand reputation was investigated. The final objective of the presented project is the measurement of the brand reputation with neuroscientific techniques. Preliminary results confirm the critical relationships of the model, justifying its future validation through neurometric analysis. The study introduces a new integrated approach to monitoring brand reputation, providing companies with actionable insights for reputation building in competitive contexts.

Keywords: brand reputation, brand authenticity, brand trust, consumer neuroscience

Introduction

Brand reputation is central to marketing and business management studies. This multidimensional construct has been defined in the literature according to different perspectives (resource-based view, signaling theory, institutional theory). Numerous intangible elements, such as trustworthiness, transparency, and brand integrity (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001), have been identified as components of brand reputation that can influence consumers' loyalty and purchasing decisions (Fombrun & van Riel, 1997). According to a literature review conducted by Berens and Van Riel (2004), brand reputation is a product of the social expectations that all stakeholders, including employees (Cravens & Oliver, 2006; Malewar, 2013), have of the brand, its personality and the trust induced by it. According to Morhart et al. (2015), brand authenticity, as the perceived consistency between what the brand promises and what it delivers (Napoli et al., 2014), is a construct that affects overall reputation. This construct positively influences the quality of the relationship between the consumer and the brand: when

consumers perceive a brand as authentic, it develops a more profound and lasting bond, which results in a greater intension to recommend it, further enhancing its reputation (Eggers et al., 2013). A construct related to brand reputation identified in the literature is brand trust, i.e., consumers' belief that a brand keeps its promises and acts reliably and benevolently (Delgado-Ballester, 2004). This construct helps to mitigate the negative impact of adverse events on reputation as consumers are more likely to give *the benefit of the doubt* to trustworthy brands (Geyskens et al., 1998), fuelling a virtuous cycle that strengthens their reputation in the long term (Sritharan et al., 2013). In delineating the construct of brand reputation, it is now crucial to also consider the relational perspective that allows to understand how social and interpersonal dynamics contribute to the construction and maintenance of reputation in the long term. According to this approach, components related to consumer personality, such as skepticism, have a mitigating effect on the ability of the content expressed by the brand to influence consumer perceptions (Morhart et al., 2015; Arli et al., 2019).

The research hypotheses

This exploratory analysis seeks to test the impact of each component identified thanks to the literature analysis conducted on the brand reputation, hypothesizing a positive impact of the constructs of brand authenticity (H1a), brand trust (H1b), brand recommendation intention (H1c) and brand relationship quality (H1d) on brand reputation. In addition, the following hypotheses were tested: (H2) at least one consumer personality trait impacts brand reputation through brand trust; the impact of brand authenticity on brand reputation is mediated by brand recommendation intention (H3a) and brand relationship quality (H3b).

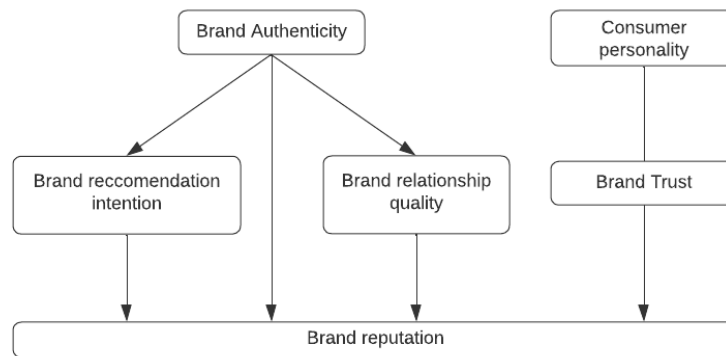


Fig.1: Theoretical model developed by the Author.

Methodology

A traditional questionnaire, based on five scales validated in the literature, was developed to measure the constructs of brand reputation (Lau et al., 1999), brand

authenticity (Akbar & Wymer, 2017), and brand trust (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001), as well as intention to recommend the brand (Markey & Reichheld, 2011) and the quality of the relationship with it (Algesheimer et al., 2005). The scale items were subjected to a translation and back-translation process. Consumer personality was studied through the Big Five Personality Trait Short Questionnaire (Morizot, 2014), which analyses five main personality traits (open-mindedness, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and emotional stability). The brands selected for the analysis follow a branded house strategy, meaning they operate under a single umbrella brand for all their products or services, ensuring alignment between corporate and brand reputation (Rust et al., 2021). The selection process involved marketing experts and industry professionals, and brand familiarity data was gathered to determine which brands were the most suitable for this analysis. The brands selected through this process were then included in the final questionnaire submitted to a sample of 40 consumers for each brand (M: 35.60, min: 21, max: 57, SD: 10.56). Participants were preliminarily asked whether they were users of the good or service under analysis and, if so, invited to participate. The questionnaire was administered via LymeSurvey.org to ensure the randomization of the blocks of questions grouped by sectors.

Results

The results show a positive impact on brand reputation of the constructs of brand authenticity (H1a: $\beta = 0.699$, $SE = 0.058$, $t = 6.029$, $p < 0.001$), brand trust (H1b: $\beta = 0.802$, $SE = 0.050$, $t = 8.278$, $p < 0.001$), brand recommendation intention (H1c: $\beta = 0.552$, $SE = 0.037$, $t = 4.076$, $p < 0.001$), brand relationship quality (H1d: $\beta = 0.476$, $SE = 0.048$, $t = 3.338$, $p = 0.002$). These results confirm the relationships identified in the literature. Despite the positive relationship between authenticity and brand recommendation intention ($\beta = 0.495$, $SE = 0.077$, $t = 3.507$, $p < 0.001$) and brand relationship quality ($\beta = 0.859$, $SE = 0.055$, $t = 10.363$, $p < 0.001$), these do not act as mediators. This result led to an analysis of the direct relationships between the constructs, further highlighting the positive impact of brand authenticity on the brand trust construct ($\beta = 0.741$, $SE = 0.106$, $t = 6.808$, $p < 0.001$). Among the personality traits, agreeableness appears to have a significant and positive effect on brand reputation, and in this relationship, trust has a significant mediating effect (H2: estimate = 1.168, $SE = 0.396$, $z = 2.951$, $p = 0.003$).

Discussion

The findings suggest that fostering authenticity through strategic brand communications - aimed at reducing the gap between projected identity and perceived image - can amplify the effects of trust on overall reputation and strengthen high-quality relationships. The absence of a mediating effect of recommendation intention and relationship quality between authenticity and reputation was an unexpected outcome, calling for further investigation. Finally, the results show that the agreeableness trait induces greater trust, improving brand reputation perception. Previous research has shown that agreeableness - and its key features such as altruism, trustworthiness, and empathy - directly contribute to fostering positive relationships (John & Srivastava, 1999). Applied to a consumer-brand dynamic, it suggests that consumers with higher

agreeableness may form more robust and positive connections with brands that reflect similar values and traits (Aaker, 1997). Given this, segmenting the audience based on consumer personality traits can be a valuable strategy for brands to cultivate deeper trust over time, enhancing brand reputation. Customizing communication efforts to align with these traits could be a powerful tool for sustaining a brand's positive image in the long run, allowing brands to build more personalized and lasting relationships with their consumers.

Limitations and future research

The main limitation of the present study is the small sample size, which will be expanded in later stages to statistically validate the model. As the aim of the project is to measure the construct through neuroscientific techniques, future research will employ indirect measurement tools, such as the Single Category Implicit Association Test (SC-IAT), to test the impact of perceived similarity between consumer personality and brand personality, and electroencephalography to detect brain reactions in response to brand-related stimuli using event-related potentials (ERPs), providing a non-invasive measure of implicit brand associations (Nedelko et al., 2017).

Conclusions

This research provides valuable insights demonstrating the critical importance of brand authenticity and the potential of audience segmentation based on personality traits. The identified model can provide managers with strategic levers to improve communication strategies, emphasizing the alignment between brand identity and consumer perceptions. Finally, the research offers a new methodological perspective using neuroscientific techniques to fine-tune reputation management in an increasingly complex marketplace.

Bibliography

- Akbar, M., & Wymer, W. (2017). Refining the conceptualization of Brand Authenticity. *Journal of Brand Management*, 24, 14-32.
- Algesheimer, R., Dholakia, U. M., & Herrmann, A. (2005). The Social Influence of Brand Community: Evidence from European Car Clubs. *Journal of Marketing*, 69(3), 19-34.
- Arli, D., Esch, P., Northey, G., Lee, M., & Dimitriu, R. (2019). Hypocrisy, skepticism, and reputation: the mediating role of corporate social responsibility. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*.
- Berens, G., Van Riel, C. B. M. (2004). Corporate associations in the academic literature: Three main streams of thought in the reputation measurement literature. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 7(2), 161-178.
- Camarrone, F., Van Hulle, M. M. (2019). Measuring brand association strength with EEG: A single-trial N400 ERP study. *PloS one*, 14(6), e0217125.
- Chaudhuri, A., & Holbrook, M. B. (2001). The Chain of Effects from Brand Trust and Brand Affect to Brand Performance: The Role of Brand Loyalty. *Journal of Marketing*, 65(2), 81-93.

- Cravens, K. S., Oliver, E. G. (2006). Employees: The key link to corporate reputation management. *Business Horizons*, 49(4), 293–302.
- Delgado-Ballester, E. (2004). Applicability of a brand trust scale across product categories: A multigroup invariance analysis. *European Journal of Marketing*, 38(5/6), 573-592.
- Eggers, F., O'Dwyer, M., Kraus, S., Vallaster, C., Goldenberg, S. (2013). The impact of brand authenticity on brand trust and SME growth: A CEO perspective. *Journal of World Business*, 48(3), 340–348.
- Fici, A. (2023). Consumer Neuroscience and Brand Relationship: measuring the implicit association between consumer self and brand.
- Fombrun, C. J., Van Riel, C. B. M. (1997). The reputational landscape. *Corporate Reputation Review*.
- Geyskens, I., Steenkamp, J. B. E., Kumar, N. (1998). Generalizations about trust in marketing channel relationships using meta-analysis. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 15(3), 223-248.
- Gotsi, M., Wilson, A. M. (2001). Corporate reputation: Seeking a definition. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 6(1), 24–30.
- Lau, G.T., Lee, S.H. (1999). Consumers' Trust in a Brand and the Link to Brand Loyalty. *Journal of Market-Focused Management* 4, 341-370.
- Malewar, S. (2013). Effective Leadership-Employee Retention-Work Life Balance: A Cyclical Continuum.
- Markey, R., & Reichheld, F. (2011). *The Ultimate Question 2.0: How Net Promoter Companies Thrive in a Customer-Driven World*. Harvard Business Review Press.
- Matzler, Kurt & Bidmon, Sonja & Grabner-Kräuter, Sonja. (2006). Individual determinants of brand affect: The role of the personality traits of extraversion and openness to experience. *Journal of Product and Brand Management*. 15. 427-494.
- Morhart, F. M., Malär, L., Guevremont, A., Girardin, F., Grohmann, B. (2015). Brand authenticity: An integrative framework and measurement scale. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 25(2), 200-218.
- Morizot, J. (2014). Big Five Personality Trait Short Questionnaire (BFPTSQ) [Database record]. APA PsycTests.
- Napoli, J., Dickinson, S. J., Beverland, M. B., Farrelly, F. J. (2014). Measuring consumer-based brand authenticity. *Journal of Business Research*, 67(6), 1090–1098.
- Nedelko, A., Lupova, O., Gorin, A., Kuznetsova, A., Klucharev, V., Shestakova, A. (2017). An Analysis of Brand Association Perception Using N400 Evoked Potential. *Higher School of Economics Research Paper No. 77/PSY/2017*.
- Rust, R. T., Rand, W., Huang, M. H., Stephen, A. T., Brooks, G., & Chabuk, T. (2021). Real-Time Brand Reputation Tracking Using Social Media. *Journal of Marketing*, 85(4), 21–43.
- Sritharan, V., Zhang, J., Sivarajah, R. (2013). Brand affect, brand trust, and perceived value: their impact on brand loyalty. *Excel international journal of multidisciplinary management studies*. Vol.3. 1-11.