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Marketing Development and Competitiveness

New York City Taxis in an Uber World Kristin Mammen, Hyoung Suk Shim	10
When Philosophers Disagree A Philosophical Analysis of Marketing Advertising Gabriel Carachilo, Bohdan Pikas	26
The Relationship between Employer Branding and Social Networks: Analysis from the Perspective of Young Graduates Valentina Pirić, Pauline Masmontet, Maja Martinović	30
Marketing: The Key to Successful Teaching and Learning Xanshunta L. Polk	49
Tourism Attraction and Tourist Satisfaction with World Heritage: A Case Study of Mount Wuyi Peihua Zhao, Liuqin Zhang, Robert Guang Tian	58
Assessing the Effects Social Media has on Online Learning Sheron Lawson, Samantha Murray	69
Critical Factors to Green Marketing Strategies Implementation of Chinese Enterprises Yunluo Shi, Yang Yang	76
Connecting with Brands: Brand Personality and Brand Outcome Valuing Persons with Special Needs (PSN) Dawn DiSefano, Pradeep Gopalakrishna	94
Contemporary Marketing Evolves R. Henry Migliore, Nancy C. Howard, Dana Moore Gray	98
Direct Application of Research Study Findings in a Practitioner Setting: The Application of the Small Retail Facilities Model for Retail Facility Assessment Omar I. Aboulola	105

Connecting with Brands: Brand Personality and Brand Outcome Valuing Persons with Special Needs (PSN)

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There are many individuals with developmental disabilities who have the capability to make independent purchases and who frequent particular brands. Studies on buying trends of individuals with physical disabilities is available, however, there is a need for academic study to explore how individuals with developmental disabilities connect to various brands via brand personality.

The proposed embryo case study will investigate how individuals with developmental disabilities associate with particular brands utilizing the Brand Personality scale (Aaker, 1997) to predict brand outcome (e.g. brand connection, purchase likelihood, and brand choice) as well as promote inclusive marketing methods for the above-mentioned population.

INTRODUCTION

Prior literature speaks to consumer welfare (a.k.a. consumer well-being) and how marketing scholars have written in various areas of public policy, macromarketing, social marketing, transformative consumer research, etc. The literature states that these areas of research are constantly growing. Consequently, these areas of study also suggest how marketing plays a role in either solving social problems or how they create social problems with the focus of sustainable business. The focus for this paper is on those living in the U.S. who have a disability 'of some sort' and speaks to the constraints of this consumer population and how it applies to this area of study (Baker, 2009).

Persons with Special Needs

Business owners and/or top management should take into account a number of considerations when marketing to those with special needs. The extended abstract identifies a number of these considerations in the following paragraphs.

Consideration should also be given to families of those who have a family member(s) with a disability living within the same household. Sometimes this population is overlooked and by marketing to family members, including said population, marketers may benefit from increased positive consumer behavior among those with PSN (Mason & Pavia, 2006).

In addition, a more robust study (which would be conducted in phases) would be to explore the responses of those who are educators of individuals with special needs as well as the vendors and/or business partners of those who service persons with special needs.

However, for the purposes for the aforementioned study, academic researchers need to focus on ways that marketers can effectively and sustainably implement viable marketing strategies toward those with PSN. They need to be cognizant of diverse consumer vulnerabilities such as powerlessness and dependence on external factors including marketers (Andreasen & Manning, 1990; Baker, Gentry, & Rittenburg, 2005). When put into diverse consumption contexts, the interaction between developmentally challenged individuals and their environmental factors (e.g. barriers that do not permit control or freedom of choice) can be compromised as this population might not have access to marketplace resources (Downey & Catterall, 2007; Mason & Pavia, 2006). Further, researchers need to be mindful of this population's lives (e.g. the overshadowing of uncertainty, perhaps immobility, and social exclusion). This type of research should enable both marketers and researchers alike to shift their mindset from standardized marketing practices to a more humanistic approach which will better cater to the diverse needs of this consumer population (Peñaloza & Venkatesh, 2006).

While this context of research is growing in recent years, difficulties remain. Recent literature illustrates how various research implications could hinder knowledge generation in this marketing domain. They can take shape substantially in the form of emotional, psychological, or physical anxiety because the research represents an array of human challenges which can ultimately influence the researcher directly as well as the research process (Lee & Renzetti, 1993; Hill, 1995). Some researchers may embrace this type of sensitive research and others avoid it which can positively or negatively impact the engagement with and understanding of research phenomena. Further it can influence the production and dissemination of knowledge (Jafari, Dunnett, Hamilton, & Downey, 2013). This study will illustrate the potential growth of this consumer population via brand personality (e.g. using existing scales) and its impact on brand outcome (e.g. brand income will be represented in the form of brand connection, purchase likelihood, and brand choice).

Furthermore, after researching several articles that focused on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (Fleischer & Zames, 2011) and learning that there are an estimated 43 million persons who have some type of disability, the hypothesis is in support of this target market being a beneficial one for both marketing practitioners and their consumer population provided there is deeper insight via brand personality on said population and how it impacts overall brand outcome.

However, future researchers need to be mindful of additional literature that speaks to this population as an expense rather than a promising market segment; further implicating impending research. The idea is that further study could prove a win-win scenario if marketers can transform their understanding of this population and market accordingly (Burnett & Paul, 1996).

More formerly, this case study will examine the relationship between brand personality in the following contexts: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness and brand outcome in the context of brand connection, purchase likelihood, and brand choice to resolve current marketing limitations; thereby, increasing this target market's appeal through humanistic and inclusive marketing efforts (Wilcox, 2005).

ACLD

Adults and Children with Learning and Developmental Disabilities (ACLD) is a Long Island not-for-profit agency that serves the needs of over 3000 individuals with developmental disabilities. Their mission includes providing opportunities for both children and adults with autism, learning and developmental disabilities to lead person-centered, fulfilled, and productive lives while promoting positive relationships within the community. To carry out its mission, ACLD employs more than 1100

people and operates 77 different program sites including group homes and apartment programs across Nassau and Suffolk counties. Service programs include Children's Early Intervention and Preschool Programs; Respite; Family Support Services; Medicaid Service Coordination; Occupational, Speech, and Physical Therapy; and Social Work Services (Anonymous, 2016).

Ongoing collaboration with senior administration of ACLD will be fundamental to fulfill the requirements that will further academic research among this beneficial population. The research will include interviews with individuals with developmental disabilities, their families/caregivers, and ACLD personnel to identify brand personalities based on Aaker's Brand Personality scale.

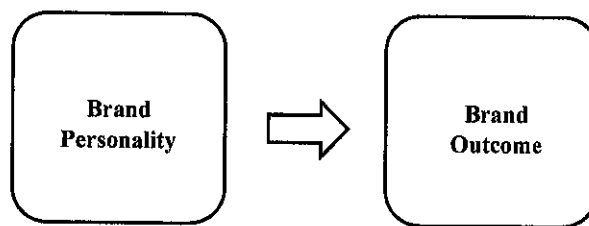
Brand Personality

Humanizing a brand can serve as a self-expressive meaning beyond the practical function of product-related attributes. Brand personality is multidimensional including: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness where some dimensions may be more relevant and expressive of particular brands than others (Aaker, 1997). This study will explore several of these dimensions to determine if they systematically influence brand outcome among the above-mentioned population. The appropriate scales are in place and further development with the aforementioned partners will continue to commence over the next several months.

Resulting Framework

The ultimate goal of this research is to illustrate that Brand Personality influences Brand Outcome. The preliminary framework is presented in FIGURE 1. In addition, the framework will be expanded upon as development endures:

FIGURE 1



GENERAL DISCUSSION

Again, a potential Phase II might be to conduct interviews among vendors who service individuals with developmental disabilities and/or who are affiliated with ACLD. Future research would incorporate the Market Orientation scale (Kohli & Kumar 1993) as a tool to further explore the relationship between the vendors (market orientation) as a moderator to the brand personality of their consumer population.

Consequently, Phase III may include interviewing or surveying the family members and/or caregivers which would further investigate the relationship of brand personality on brand outcome of this consumer population.

Lastly, Phase IV might be to conduct interviews and/or surveys among those that are professionals in the area of Education among individuals with developmental disabilities. Understanding brand personality among those that are directly in the profession of educating this population would guide future research pertaining to the brands they advocate for.

Collectively, these additional areas of exploration could make the overall case study more robust.

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