

THE BRAND PERSONALITY OF THE SAPIENTIA HUNGARIAN UNIVERSITY OF TRANSYLVANIA

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—Abstract —

The present paper focuses on the brand personality of NGO's, more specifically that of higher education institutions. This topic was chosen mainly because it is very recent and actual – this branch of branding is just on its way of being discovered by companies, as nowadays the brand name and logo are not enough to make a difference, and this is more relevant in the case of services. This paper investigates the brand personality of several faculties within the Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania using quantitative and qualitative research methods. The research is based on the view of the university's actual students and alumni students.

My choice for universities is firstly based on a present day issue, namely that the higher education market becomes more and more competitive and it is hard to assign different characteristics and features to certain institutions in order to become more visible among all other competitors. Thus, branding and brand personality might have a crucial role in creating an image about the institutions and for a successful competition.

The present paper includes four main parts. The first part briefly presents notions and definitions with regards to the field of brand personality. The following part includes a detailed description of the research methods used for brand personality measuring. The third section presents the research results and discussion of the findings. Finally, the paper brings about the conclusions, overall findings and some suggestions regarding the issue.

Key Words: brand personality, NGO marketing, image

JEL Classification: M

1. INTRODUCTION

I believe the only way to manage brands is to find out what is their customers' opinion about them, in this case the university's present students and alumni. In order to be able to run a well-directed marketing activity it is necessary to look at the difference between the brand personalities of each faculty and to compare them. Measuring brand personality is meant to help understanding costumers' perceptions – in this case the students' opinion and attitudes towards the university. The gradually increasing competition in what regards higher education leads to the need of a conscious brand building and a constant attention to brand personality. In order to achieve this, first of all it needs to be investigated what Sapiientia as a brand means to those concerned and thus being able to know its potentials and build upon and develop these potentials so as to become more visible among other competitors.

2. IMPORTANT NOTIONS AND DEFINITIONS

2.1. The personality of the brand

Associating brands with personality obviously has its roots in the personality traits of people. In order to be able to understand the meaning of brand personality we need to define the notion of human personality traits. There are two – seemingly opposing – understandings of personality. From one point of view people's personality is biologically determined (according to gender, age, endocrine system and nerve differentiation). From the other perspective people's personality is built during the socialization period and it is sociologically determined (how does a person see his/her own role, what motivations and feelings does he/she have towards others, what are the effects of the society on him/her). The opposition between the two perspectives is only superficial as they can be easily combined. People's genetic heritage defines the types of characteristics that can develop in him/her but from these characteristics only those will actually develop which are compatible with the social and environmental effects. However, without a genetic base there is no environmental effect on its own (Mirnics,2006:12).

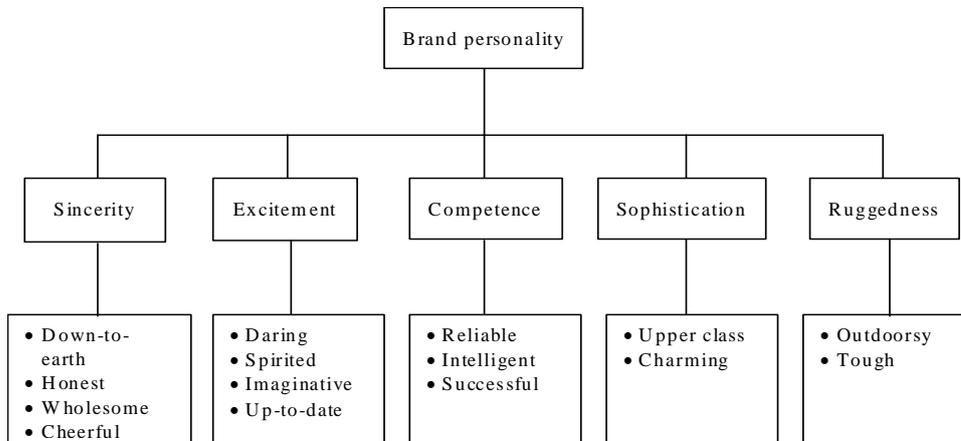
Brand personality is thus based on the philosophy of human personality. According to the definition of Aaker J. (Aaker,1997) brand personality is „a set of human characteristics associated with a brand”. Kapferer argues that brand personality is the sum of human personality traits that can be attributed to a brand

(Azoulay and Kapferer:2003:151). Thus, brand personality develops due to the direct or indirect relationship existing between consumers and the brand. Indirect relationships are actually the compounds of the marketing mix; direct relationships are the consumers' direct relation with brand users, the companies' employees or even the companies' managing personnel. It is important to know that brand personality can be interpreted from both the side of the receiver and sender. Especially in the case of this study, where the aim is to investigate the brand from both points of view – sender (university leadership) and receiver (users, students and alumni) – in order to point out any differences.

2.2. Measuring brand personality

There are several already developed to measure brand personality. The present study uses the characteristics list method. The task of the subjects is to identify on a Likert scale to what extent can a certain characteristic be attributed to a specific brand. The characteristic list is a normal list with human personality traits that are usually used to describe human beings. Aaker – who represents the starting point of most brand personality research – developed a brand personality scale including 44 items grouped around five major dimensions, which is shown in the table below.

Figure-1: The dimensions of brand personality according to J. Aaker



Source: author's own figure based on Aaker:1997:352.

Brand personality can be measured scientifically with both quantitative and qualitative methods. However, it needs to be mentioned that these methods are not fully developed, many researchers used several different methods for measuring, but there is a lack of comparative analyses and combined methods in the literature.

3. ABOUT THE SAPIENTIA HUNGARIAN UNIVERSITY OF TRANSILVANIA

The university was started its activities on three different campuses in 2001 (Cluj-Napoca, Targu Mures and Miercurea Ciuc). Nowadays the institution is also accredited by the Romanian government. The university provides education on three sites, four faculties and 27 bachelor degrees. It covers the following scientific fields: language and humanities, economics, social sciences, bio-engineering, computer science, automation and film. The university has a total amount of 1988 students, out of which 241 study in Cluj-Napoca, 733 in Miercurea Ciuc and 1014 in Targu Mures.

Education is a very specific and special service that is why I consider that it deserves an extensive analysis and research. As the services provided are intangible, many factors are involved in the materialization of the brand, e.g. the quantity and quality of available equipment, the professionalism and qualification of teachers and the active participation of the students and their future career paths.

The present study aims to present the results of the research on brand personality conducted at the Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania. The subjects of this research were the actual students and alumni of the university.

4. RESEARCH METHODS

The pilot study consisted of two parts. First focus group interviews were conducted as a qualitative method to gain insight into the different faculties of the university; I gathered information on the students' opinions and ways of thinking with regards to the university's personality.

The pilot study was followed by a quantitative online questionnaire method, using the previously presented Aaker scale, completed with some of the personality traits that came up during the focus group interviews. The subjects were randomly selected; the questionnaire was filled in by people who received it. The incomplete or irrelevant questionnaires were not analyzed as the present study focuses only on the opinion of actual and alumni students.

5. THE QUALITATIVE STUDY

The two focus group interviews were conducted in January 2013 where actual and alumni students took part. The quantitative part of the research consists of an online questionnaire. The sample includes 273 people. At the beginning of the focus group interviews the respondents were asked about their motivation to enroll this university, their thoughts about the institution, to what extent they like(d) to attend the university and to what extent is the university a high-standard institution.

Below you will find some examples of the answers given to the above mentioned questions:

“I consider Sapientia to be a good university, I could make use of the knowledge I gained here, but the truth is I studied and read a lot during the course of the university to have this knowledge.”

“I think it was worth enrolling here even though it is a young university, I learn a lot here, the teachers are nice and correct and they can teach the subjects to the students.”

Generally all members of the focus groups like the institution, they have a positive image about the university and although they pointed out some lacks and weaknesses no one resented the fact that they are learning or they learnt here. These introductory warm-up questions were followed by some questions regarding the university's personality. Firstly, I was interested in the way they judge the university, as a person's external characteristics, its look. Results show that there is no concrete, clear and unique answer to how the university looks like. Regarding the age of the Sapientia there were some really surprising responses, as the university was said to be much older than it was expected by a 12-year-old

university. In the course of the discussions most people present thought the university to be middle-aged or even older. All these answers can lead to the conclusion that while responding to this question they did not base their answers either on the university's actual age (12) or their own age but they associated more with accomplishments and achievements of the institution.

“Middle-aged, nice and sociable, that's how I can describe the university, a caring, intelligent man, who is concerned with his family, loves people and youth, laughs a lot and is very extrovert.”

“He is a stylish middle-aged man, who wears folk costumes and preserves culture, to whom keeping values and maintaining customs are the most important things, but he does not turn away from change and modernism.”

The workplace of the university as a person would be, according to the economics focus group members, at a consulting company as a senior consultant; others imagined it to be an innovation development and design engineer or even teacher. These answers lead to the conclusion that respondents combine the job of the university as a person to their own field of interest. For example if they study at the economics faculty they chose the most wanted or preferred job from this area of employment.

“It would be hard-working with numerous new ideas and it would work out everything thoroughly, though it would always take too much work on itself but there would be some good friends to help in trouble and need.”

Regarding the questions on free time, there were no common or overall answers, from football to chess, extreme sports and lazy video games all came up. There were no similar answers. This proves that the university does not have a concrete and well-built personality. What considers sports, it is common knowledge that the students don't consider it necessary, and the university does not have a clear and fully built image on sport facilities. In order to define the brand personality and to be able to develop it in the future, we need to investigate which are the basic characteristics that students like and dislike. Among the most preferred characteristics we can find: familiar, self-confident and practical. The least preferred characteristics include the following: superficial, lazy, lacks flexibility and it is not always able to accept new or modern changes. Respondents base their least preferred characteristics on the idea that there have been made many

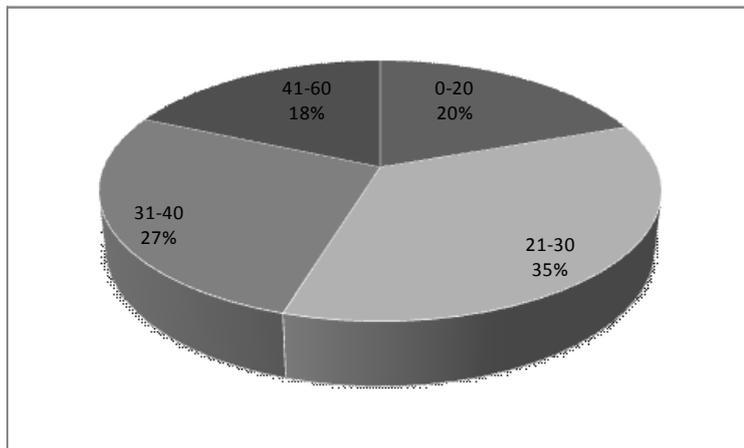
promises by the university and nothing was done in that matter. They also bring some concrete examples, such as the renovation of some campuses, building a dormitory and establishing new majors.

6. THE QUANTITATIVE STUDY

The paper aimed to measure the brand personality of Sapientia using questionnaires based on the Aaker characteristic list. These findings were completed with the experience gained from the focus groups interviews. From the total 273 received questionnaire 256 were relevant for the research, as there were 17 respondents who did not attend the university and the present study aims at investigating the created image and opinion of current students and alumni. The age of my respondents reflects the youth of the university as well. The oldest respondent was 32 years old, while the youngest 18. Women outscore men as they represent 70% of the subjects. The questionnaire was mostly filled out by alumni (53%) but their number is very close to those of the current student respondents. It needs to be pointed out that from the three campuses those attending (attended) the Sapientia in Miercurea Ciuc are in the highest number, the percentage reaches 70%.

For what concerns the gender of the person associated with the Sapientia university 64% of respondents think he would be a male. As a person, the university was attributed with the following age limitations:

Figure-2: The age of the associated person

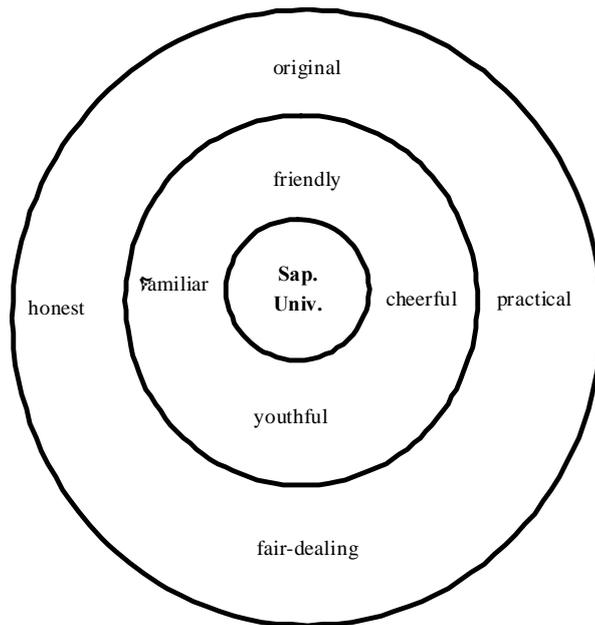


Source: author's own figure based on questionnaire database

According to the majority (62%) of the subjects Sapientia's built would be average, 35% think it would wear casual clothes and 30-30% have the opinion that it would dress elegantly or wear unique, designer clothes. Looking at the job of the brand personality the questionnaires also lead to the previously mentioned observation, that respondents base their answer on their own majors and taking into consideration that they all receive education here, the teaching job reached a high percentage (29%). The associated person would live in a small or medium-sized town, would have highly educated friends who would work in the same employment sector as the university's brand personality. It must be highlighted that many answers to different questions reflect the fact that the university is associated with a person who likes and preserves tradition. This might be rooted in the minority existence but the university's philosophy can also be seen here.

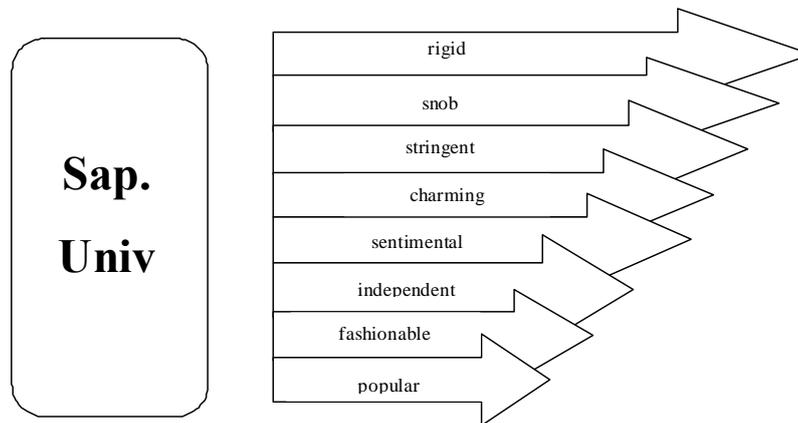
On the basis of the Aaker list, Figure 3. presents the most typical and representative features of the Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, while Figure 4. presents the least appropriate characteristics.

Figure-3: The most typical and representative features



Source: author's own figure based on questionnaire database

Figure-4: The least appropriate characteristics



Source: author's own figure based on questionnaire database

7. CONCLUSION

The focus group interviews and questionnaire responses reveal that the Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania is acknowledged among students. Even though high quality is not mentioned among the most typical features, students are satisfied with the quality of education. Based on the present study we can assert that current students and alumni do have an opinion about the institution and in most of the cases they can clearly see its strengths and weaknesses. This qualifies as an important result as the university achieved this brand personality in no more than 12 years.

Among the limitations of the study we can mention the question on what basis do students associate certain personality traits with the university. On one hand, they can bring characteristics that they themselves wish to be like or, on the other hand, they can come up with personality traits that characterize or describe the personnel who work there. Unfortunately, we cannot answer this question

unambiguously. It became clear at some points of the focus group discussions which I pointed out in the course of the present paper.

The results presented allow me to state that the perceived brand personality traits of the university fully match the desired image. Professionals in communication have been working for years on making some characteristics to be the special and specific features of the university, features that were also named by the university's "consumers", the students. These characteristics are the following: friendly, cheerful, youthful, original, trustworthy, practical and honest. Respondents avoid attributing such characteristics to the university like snobbishness or rigidity. It can be said that the created image is good; however, attention should be paid to the uncertainties regarding the quality of education. It was not clearly stated as a negative feature, although it could be felt that students are the least satisfied with it.

I believe the university should build upon and use that valuable image it has already created and under constant brand personality managing it should continue building and developing. The sharp competition existing on the higher education market and the special characteristic of the provided service proves that continuous research and development is necessary in order to achieve and maintain a successful work and survive on the market.

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