

Role of Corporate Visual Identity in Building Brand Personality: Mediating Role of Brand Communication and Moderating Role of Brand Equity

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Abstract

This paper aims to critique human personality as a theory, underpinning brand personality and to propose instead a theory from human perception, and by doing so, to identify universally relevant dimensions. The main purpose of the study is to determine the mediating role of brand communication in the relationship of corporate visual identity and brand personality. The study also focuses on the moderating role of brand equity on the relationship of brand communication and brand personality in the telecom industry of Pakistan. On the basis of available existing literature on the specified variables, six hypotheses are developed. Population of the study is the users of cellular service providers in Pakistan. The data is collected from 1536 users of cellular service providers in Pakistan, which are Mobilink, Telenor, Warid, Zong and Ufone. Cluster sampling technique is used to gather the data from the respondents. AMOS software is used for the hypothesis testing. Research findings reveal that corporate visual identity has a significant positive relationship with brand communication, and brand communication and has a significance positive relationship with brand personality. Findings of the study also reveal that brand communication significantly mediates the relationship between corporate visual identity and brand personality. Moreover, brand equity significantly moderates the relationship between brand communication and brand personality. This research study increases the body of literature and fills the academic gap. This will help the marketers and practitioners in devising their marketing strategies. Contribution of the study, research study limitations, and future research areas are also discussed in detail.

Keywords: Corporate visual identity, Brand personality, Brand equity, Brand communication

Introduction

It has become an extremely difficult task to capture the consumer's attention in today's highly saturated market where there is a continuous introduction of new products and services. To make our product unique from other available products and to create an influence on the behavior of consumer, branding plays a very crucial role and can surely act as a meaningful asset in a company (Kotler *et al.*, 2016). The companies having the

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most powerful brands have realized the power of branding. Most of these brands have unique visual identities and through these visual identities, these brands are recognized by the people around the globe (The World's Most Valuable Brands, 2017). In marketing management, the purpose of a brand is depicted as differentiating or identifying the products, whereas brand management explains the decisions related to product and product line. However, the definition of brand is even more complex, and this term can be used to define a person, product, place and corporation (Kotler & Armstrong, 2004). According to Aaker (1996), brand is defined in many ways like a symbol, organization, product or a person in brand management.

Corporate branding includes all the stakeholders and is targeted to external and internal networks, and interests and is multidisciplinary in nature (Balmer, 2002). Brand personality is what helps in differentiating a brand from other available brands and builds some identity and this is one of the core benefits of brand personality (Akin, 2017). Brands and consumers have a relationship between them, similar to a relationship between two persons. In this relationship, the two persons can serve as fun friends or close friends who are happy or comfortable enough to be in each other's company (Rajagopal, 2006). One of the strategic tools that can help understand the perceptions of the people is brand personality. It differentiates the identity of a brand and hence brand equity is developed (Aaker, 1996). Personality characteristics are assigned to the brands by the consumers which are based upon the observations of the brand (Allen & Olson, 1995). Plummer (2000) stated that consumer's experiences and perceptions of brand identity make brand personality. It is the perception or the imagination of the personality by an individual that is possessed by a particular brand. A constructive and positive brand personality acts as a foundation for differentiating a product (Aaker, 1996).

The concept of brand personality is based on the how people relate various characteristics of personality to other people in their day to day dealings. It is regarding the representation of the brand which depicts the brand's traits or characteristics. The brand is considered as a contributing and an active partner in an existing relationship between the brand and a person; a partner whose actions and manners create inferences regarding the characteristics that sums up the perception of the consumers regarding brand personality (Aaker & Fournier, 1995). These are the human traits which are related or connected with a brand (Aaker, 1997). For instance, Levi's jeans brand personality is an ordinary, hardworking, western, traditional, blue collar American (Aaker & Fournier, 1995). Brands which are there in the retail stores and those which are sold in supermarkets communicate some meaning, but the world gives meaning to these brands through misconceptions, experiences, individuals' values and perceptions, etc. Brand personality is among the three dimensions of brand image. The other two dimensions are

consumer benefits and product attributes. The personality of a brand is the outcome of communications because there isn't anything inherent in the brand which makes it sophisticated, exotic or lively (Plummer, 1985).

Due to a highly competitive and saturated market now, cellular companies are focusing to retain their customers and to switch customers towards their brand, for which, brand personality is a requirement. Managers in organizations are applying different strategies to attain their goal of brand personality enhancement, thus the study aims to assist the management in the telecom sector of Pakistan.

The study focuses on the role that corporate visual identity elements (brand name, brand logo and brand color) plays in building brand personality, with the mediating role of brand communication, to develop a theoretical framework and apply it to the Telecom service providers in Pakistan. The framework also includes the brand equity playing the moderating role between brand communication and brand personality and is also applicable on the telecom industry of Pakistan. For a brand strategy to be successful, it is critical to know how a consumer associates a personality trait to a brand and how he perceives it. Despite the fact that determining the role of corporate visual identity in building personality of a brand with a mediating role of brand communication is a difficult task, this study serves the purpose of identifying this influence. This research study serves two major objectives. The first objective is to examine the role of corporate visual identity (brand name, logo and brand color) on brand personality traits (sincerity, competence, excitement, sophistication and masculinity) with the mediating role of brand communication in the telecom sector of Pakistan. And the second objective is to examine the moderating role of brand equity on brand communication and brand personality traits in the telecom industry of Pakistan. This research study will add to the body of literature as well as it will help out the marketers in devising effective branding strategies of telecom service providing companies.

Literature Review

Brand personality endorses the consumer-brand relationship and hence contributes in creating brand equity. The relationship is based upon two things. Firstly, the brand as a person, and secondly, the brand as a type of person that the brand represents. Brand value perception can be increased if one or both are in correspondence with the perception of the consumers for their pleasing facets of the brand (Aaker, 1996). Brands can play the role of a friend or it can provide ways for the people to cope with modern world's disorders, alienation and stress (Posner, 1993). Research studies conducted in the past identified that brand name, brand logo and brand color play an essential role in building a brand because these elements provide a summary of brand information about its marketing efforts and represents the brand or corporate meaning

(Henderson & Cote, 1998; MacInnis, Shapiro, & Mani, 1999). However, scarce literature is present in which the research of the impact of logo design on brand preference and brand evaluation has been measured. Affective and cognitive reactions to brand name, brand logo and brand color is greatly influenced by how these elements are created and designed before any promotional action is taken (Henderson & Cote, 1998). In recent researches it is quite evident that the marketing managers can significantly earn a lot by considering the modifying, selecting and designing principles of corporate visual identity elements. It is crucial how people react to the corporate visual identity elements because their (Henderson *et al.*, 2003) influence can change the identity of the brand (Henderson & Cote, 1998; Schecther, 1993).

H₁: Corporate visual identity has a positive effect on brand communication.

It is through the brand communication that the brands are linked with people, brands, feelings, places, experiences, things and events. It helps in building communities and develops experiences. It helps in building brand personality by creating a brand image and a brand memory. In addition to it, shareholder value as well as the sales are also affected (Luo & Donthu, 2006).

A very crucial role is played by brand communication in building brand personality. It is essential to use increased communication efforts due to the prevailing tough communication environment. There has been a significant change in the media environment in the last few years. Traditional brand communication tools like newspapers, TV, magazines and radio are not appearing efficient in having a grip over the customers. Technology and various other elements have greatly influenced the fact that how, where and when consumers process the information. A speedy growth of internet connections, portable music and video players, audio/video recorders which are ad-skipping and the cell phones being used for multi-purposes have made the marketers reconsider their traditional brand communication practices (Kaplan, Thaler, & Koval, 2003). Such drastic changes have damaged the mass media effectiveness. An advertisement which was aired on two to three channels previously has to be aired on 100 channels. The decline in the television advertisement is the result of a number of forces (Briggs & Stuart, 2006).

H₂: Brand communication has a positive effect on brand personality

H₅: Brand communication plays a mediating role in the relationship between corporate visual identity and brand personality

Aaker (1991) provided a very comprehensive and generally accepted definition of brand equity. He defined brand equity as a set of liabilities and assets associated with a brand that subtract or add value, provided by the brand, to a customer or an organization. These assets are perceived quality, brand awareness, brand association and brand loyalty.

Previous researches show that brand communication stimuli have a significant positive effect on customers. Resultantly, a positive correlation is generated by brand communication with brand equity as long as the communication message generates customer's reaction to that particular brand as compared to a non-branded item in the similar category (Yoo *et al.*, 2000).

It can be rightly said that an accurate and thoughtful brand communication increases brand equity because it increases the probability that the brand will be integrated in the customer's mind. This will make their choice a habit and narrow down their decision-making process regarding the choice of the brand (Keller, 1993; Yoo *et al.*, 2000).

H₃: Brand communication has a positive effect on brand equity

H₄: Brand equity has a positive effect on brand personality

H₆: Brand equity plays a moderating role in the relationship between brand communication and brand personality

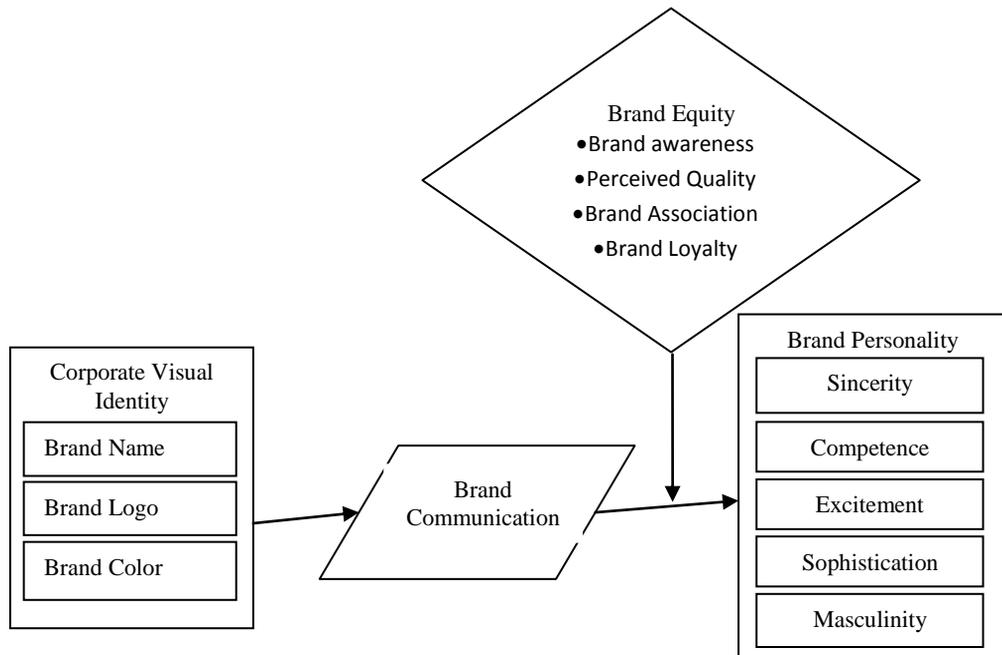


Fig 1: Theoretical framework of corporate visual identity and brand personality with brand communication as a mediator and brand equity as moderator

Methodology

Data Collection

Quantitative technique is used. For selecting the respondents among the provinces of Pakistan, cluster sampling technique is used and ten metropolitan cities are

selected according to the census data. These ten cities are Lahore, Faisalabad, Rawalpindi, Gujranwala and Multan from the Punjab, Hyderabad and Karachi from Sindh, Peshawar from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Quetta from Balochistan.

For individual level data collection, convenience sampling technique is used. The total number of respondents for the current study is selected by using the statistical formula of Krejcie and Morgan (2005) because of the highest number of citations for the purpose of calculating the sample size. 1536 respondents are selected with 2.5% margin error and 95% confidence interval. The structured questionnaires were emailed to some, and to others they were personally administered (visited and requested to fill up). They were ensured that collected data would be utilized for educational purposes only, and all the information would be kept confidential.

As the users of cellular services are in different regions of Pakistan, Berenson, Levine and Krehbiel (2009) recommended that the best sampling technique to achieve the representative sample when the targeted population is placed in various areas or regions is cluster probability sampling technique. It is so because of the fact that it is the most cost-effective technique as compared to simple random sampling. The cluster may be comprised of territories, countries, towns, etc.

Research Instrument

The variable Corporate Visual Identity was measured on the basis of three dimensions, which included the 18 items adapted from Karaosmanoglu (2006). Brand personality was measured on the basis of five brand personality traits which include masculinity, sophistication, competence, excitement and sincerity and it comprised of the items adapted from Aaker (1997). The brand personality questionnaire consisted of 36 items. Brand communication included 15 items adapted from the work of Grace and O’Cass (2005). They searched effectiveness of communication in the service industry. As the telecom organizations serve as a service industry, it is believed that it would be valid and relevant to use their measures. Brand equity was measured on the basis of five dimensions comprised of 30 items, adapted from Lee & Leh (2011).

Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis is carried out to analyze the demographic factors of the study and these demographic factors are gender, age and marital status. The male respondents’ percentage is 62.7%, as in Pakistan, usually males tend to avail more cellular services because they are away from home due to professional commitments, in comparison to females. The percentage of female respondents is less, at 37.2%.

Descriptive statistics show that of the people who responded, 62.36% persons were single, while 37.63% were married. Moreover, 31.41% were below 20 years of age,

24.86% respondents lied between the ages 21-30 years, 27.01% fell in the age group 31-40 years, 22.40% were from 41-50 years of age, and 12.30% were above 50 years.

Statistical Software (SPSS) was used to make the analysis of the collected data. Bootstrap was run to find out the effect, and correlation was made that depicted the relationship among the variables. After the analysis, the results illustrated that the research model was supported, and the hypothesized relationships were found significant at $p < .01$.

For the proposed hypothesis H_1 , it can be seen clearly that Corporate Visual Identity is positively and significantly associated with brand communication. In addition to it, beta coefficient (β_5) is .68 and it has a p value of $< .05$, illustrating that the H_1 formulated hypothesis is accepted and supported. In addition to it, χ^2/df , and the values of the model fit indices are in the range suggested by the researchers, depicting that the model is fit. Thus, H_1 is accepted.

For the proposed hypothesis H_2 , it can be clearly seen that brand communication is positively and significantly associated with brand personality. In addition to it, beta coefficient (β_5) is .51, with a p value of $< .05$, illustrating that the H_2 formulated hypothesis is accepted. In addition to it, χ^2/df , and the values of model fit indices are in the range which are suggested by the researchers and hence it depicts that the model is fit. Thus, H_2 is accepted.

For the proposed hypothesis H_3 , it can be clearly seen that brand communication is positively and significantly associated with brand equity. In addition to it, beta coefficient (β_5) is .33 and it has a p value of $< .05$, illustrating that the H_3 formulated hypothesis is accepted. In addition to it, χ^2/df , and the values of model fit indices are in the range which are suggested by the researchers, depicting that the model is fit. Thus, H_3 is accepted.

For the proposed hypothesis H_4 , it can be clearly seen that brand equity is positively and significantly associated with brand personality. In addition to it, beta coefficient (β_5) is .90 and it has a p value of $< .05$, illustrating that the H_4 formulated hypothesis is accepted. In addition to it, χ^2/df , and the values of the model fit indices are in the range suggested by the researchers, depicting that the model is fit. Thus, H_4 is accepted.

Table 1: *Summary of Hypotheses results H_1 to H_4*

Connection Between Variables	Beta value	Critical Value	P-value	Decision/Remarks
β_1 (BC←CVI)	.68	9.39	.000	Supported
β_2 (BP← BC)	.51	7.52	.000	Supported
β_3 (BE← BC)	.33	4.53	.000	Supported
β_4 (BP← BE)	.90	14.83	.000	Supported

Mediation analysis using bootstrapping

Both the direct and indirect relationship between corporate visual identity and brand personality, with and without the mediator, are given in the table below. The results of the study clearly depict that both the relationships, with and without the mediation (brand communication) are significant, leading to partial mediation. For analyzing the mediation relationship, further tests were run. Based on the proposed relationships discussed in H₅, Baron and Kenny’s (1986) approach was used for the purpose of mediation analysis. The results (see Table 2) were confirmed through bootstrapping (Preacher and Hayes, 2008) by extracting 5,000 bootstrap samples with 95 percent bias-corrected confidence intervals (Ng *et al.*, 2014). This technique is capable to test several mediations at the same time, all the while being better than other approaches. (Ng *et al.*, 2014).

First of all, H₅ was tested for brand communication as a mediator in the relationship of CVI and BP. There is a significant effect of CVI on BP ($\beta=.399, p=.001$) and when BC is used as a mediator between CVI and BP, the results are again significant, but with a marginal decline in the β value ($\beta=.105, p=.015$). It can be seen that the indirect effect is also significant which verifies that brand communication is a partial mediator between CVI and BP ($\beta=.334, p=.001$). Hence H₅ is partially supported.

Table 2: Mediator Model (for BC)

Variable	Total Effect (C) β (P)	Direct effect (C') β (P)	Indirect effect (ab) β (P)	Result	Mediation level
CVI-BC-BP	.399 (.00)	.105 (.01)	.334 (.00)	Significant	Partial

Testing Moderating Hypothesis H₆

For the hypothesis H₆, brand equity was investigated as a moderator between brand communication and brand personality. This study focused on Brand Association, Brand Loyalty, Brand Awareness, and Brand Quality. For hypotheses testing, interaction base moderation method of SEM was used to examine the moderating variable role using AMOS (Version 21). Composite score of all four dimensions of brand equity, i.e. brand association, brand loyalty, brand awareness and perceived quality were considered to test the moderating effect. Results of H₆ can be seen in Table 3 which depicts that brand equity has a significant, moderating effect on the relationship between brand communication and brand personality.

Table 3: Model Coefficients for Conditional Indirect Effects of Brand Communication on Brand Personality through Brand Equity

Antecedent	Consequent					
	M (BC)			BP (Rep. Int.)		
	Coeff.	SE	P	Coeff.	SE	P
M (BC)	–	–	–	b_1	.380	.079 < .05

V (BE)	-	-	-	b_2	.244	.033	<.001	
<i>M X V</i>				b_3	.040	.024	.011	
Constant	i_1	2.390	.024	<.001	i_2	1.221	.187	<.001

Finally, hypothesis H₆, stating that brand equity moderates between brand communication and brand personality, can also be accepted. We predicted that brand communication with brand personality was significant ($\beta=.040$, $\rho>.05$), and conditional indirect at each level of moderator is significant. Thus, hypothesis H₆ is accepted.

The interaction term of brand communication with brand equity regressed significantly with brand personality ($\beta=.141$, $\rho<.05$). This also confirms that brand equity moderates the positive relationship of brand communication with brand personality, hence, proving hypothesis H₈. Previous researches also indicate the importance of the culture for the enhancement of brand communication and organizational competitiveness (Dooley, 2001). Allameh *et al.* (2010) demonstrated that one of the very essential elements to compete in today’s environment is brand communication. It is one of the crucial factors of significant development of a brand and helps the brand achieve competitive position and a competitive edge. Double nature of brand equity is considered as the key hindrance, and controlling this factor for managing the brand communication makes this factor significant and two fold in effectively organizing the brand communication activities.

Findings and Discussion

Corporate Visual Identity (CVI) is one of the leading and essential features of brand personality. There are many researchers who have talked about developing brand personality, like (Balmer & Gray, 2000). Melewar and Bartholmé (2011), and Kapferer (2004) have talked about how the CVI elements can establish the personality of the brands. To make a successful strategy for a brand, it is important to note how the consumers recognize the brand, and the personality traits which they associate with that particular brand. However, determining the influence of CVI elements in building the personality of a brand, with a mediating role of brand communication is not an easy task. The present study has created value in the literature by adding brand communication as a mediator. Previously, the impact of CVI had been measured in building the image as well as the reputation of the brands (Silva, Rojas, & Roast, 2006). Similarly, Bosch, Jong, and Elving (2005) indicated the impact that CVI elements had in managing the reputation of the brand. CVI is less studied in Pakistan in the context of brand communication, but it does not mean that it has a diminished role in organizational setup (Jabbar, 2014). Pham (2014) recognized that CVI elements have instrumental worth in building the positive consumer’s perception of a brand. The current study has covered an important gap in the literature in specific organizational context and is the first to examine brand

communication as a mediator between CVI elements and brand personality. In addition to measuring the impact that CVI elements have on brand personality with mediating effect of brand communication, literature shows that there are fewer studies considering brand equity as a moderator between brand communication and brand personality. Schivinski *et al.* (2013) argued that a positive and significant relationship lies between brand communication and brand equity. Dolatabadi, Kazemi, and Rad (2012) concluded that brand personality has a positive impact on brand equity. Due to the fact that a relationship exists between brand personality and brand equity, very limited studies have been conducted on this relationship. The current study is a pioneer in examining brand equity as a moderator between brand personality and brand communication.

Managerial Implications and Recommendations

This research demonstrated a model which shows the impact of CVI elements on brand personality with brand communication as a mediator. The model also contains the moderating effect of brand equity in the relationship between brand communication and brand personality. It holds certain practical strategies for practitioners targeting to attain an encouraging image of their brands in the minds of the consumers. The results showed that practitioners must distinguish the fact that creation of a brand personality is a multi-layered process which is affected by various aspects involving CVI elements and brand communication. The paragraphs below contain some useful advices for the managers to translate the results of this research in the context of CVI management. A “good” name of a brand enhances the product image and is swiftly called upon by the targeted customers. The outcome of this study confirms that strategic benefits can be obtained by brand personality if proper and efficient CVI strategies are employed, and effective communication techniques are used. Thus, marketing professionals must use information of descriptive nature for their brand names to obtain encouraging outcomes. Brand logos can be used by marketing managers to disseminate identity information to the subjected customers/markets. Additionally, the type of logo will assist to define the associations that can be developed by various brand personality traits. Likewise, another important CVI element is color that impacts the creation process of brand personality. It induces emotions and moods; thus, various colors can be used by managers to affect the consumer behavior and perception, and aid the positioning of the brand in distinguishing it from the competition.

Conclusion

The study highlighted the importance of CVI elements in building brand personality. The study results also establish that brand communication plays a mediating role in the relationship between the brand name, the brand logo, and the brand color (CVI elements) and brand personality. In order to get attractive personalities of the brands, the

marketers and strategy makers of cellular service providers need to give a lot of importance to brand communication. The study also validates that brand equity plays a moderating role in the relationship between brand communication and brand personality. Empirical findings reveal that the CVI elements (brand name, brand logo and brand color) contribute significantly towards building the personality of the brands. The research findings gave a very strong empirical support for the theoretical model presented in the study. The results of the study show a statistically significant and positive relationship among all the variables of corporate visual identity, brand communication, brand personality and brand equity.

Limitations and Future direction of the Research

Cross-sectional study is the type of study design which presents only a picture of the relationship between various variables in the study at a single point in time. The present study also encompasses cross-sectional study design. Because of the non-longitudinal nature of the study, the cross-sectional can have the effect of certain conditions that are there once the data collection was done. This may lead towards reservations regarding the study results' generalization. The respondents of the study may not be fully aware of the response in terms of the experience. There is also a possibility that the respondents do not have a full understanding of the brand personality traits, brand equity dimensions, CVI elements or brand communication, as usually people do not focus on the emotional benefits of the brand, rather they focus on the fundamental benefits that a brand provides.

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