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**Perceiving Brand's Personality:
Gender Aspects**

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Perceiving Brand's Personality: Gender Aspects¹

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Abstract

The investigation was devoted to perception of brand personality by Russian young people. The investigation was based on J.Aaker's model of brand personality. In the first investigation we have carried out a comparative research of brands Nike and Adidas perception. The objective of this research was revealing gender distinctions in perception of the chosen sportswear brands. The results showed that young men gave more negative associations concerning Adidas, they personified it as the member of some subculture, and Nike as a sportsman. Girls associated brand Nike with the young and perspective girl, and also gave more attention to appearance of the personified brand. In all groups of respondents similar factors of brands perception have been revealed: attractiveness; informing; activity; calmness. The given research has shown the action of the personification mechanism at perception of brand personality. The second investigation was aimed to searching the connection between brand identity and personal identity of consumer and gender differences in this connection. The results showed that people using brand clothes have more close connection between self-images and image of brand; females are more liable to the brand impact on their personal identity. Thus, the research hypotheses have proved to be true: gender distinctions influence the perception of brand. For the consumer the brand is a prototype of the person using the given brand. The results can be used in developing brands for Russian market.

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In modern society business and consumer markets become more competitive, and customers are more demanding, that's why companies elaborate special technologies which help them to influence the customer's behavior. Brand creation is one of the most important technologies. In brand creation process the technologies of influence are actively used, but the impacts of these technologies on personality are not investigated.

The importance of the research is caused by necessity of modern communication technologies and technologies of influence investigation. Brands are not only trade marks; from the psychological point of view, they constitute a new form of marketing communication and consumers' behavior influence. This influence may cause personality changers, and one of the most crucial changes is the identity change.

By now brand influence was investigated mainly in marketing and sociological context. Psychological approach to brand perceiving investigation leads to discovering deeper personal mechanisms of brand functioning.

Theoretical background

We understand personal identity as the structure of representations about self, believes, values, the vital purposes of the person, endured subjectively as sensation of identity and a constancy of the person at perception of others recognizing this identity. In the general identity structure the personal and social components are allocated. The personal component is connected with self-identification of one's own uniqueness, differences from other people; the social component, on the contrary, is defined by identification with social groups, orientation to similarity to members of the given group (Ericson, 1968; Breakwell, 1986).

Specificity of a modern social situation in Russia is that the social reference points for social identification which were typical for the Soviet epoch have disappeared. In the first years of social changes absence of social reference points for self-identification led to identity crisis developing among many people. Now there are new reference points for social identification. Instead of identification with group and communist party the identification with brands has come. The term "brand" is now used not only in marketing, but also in psychological researches.

Psychological aspects of brands were emphasized in D. Aaker's approach. D.Aaker has developed the model of brand identity (Aaker, 2003; Aaker & Johimshtayler, 2003).

Identity of a person is the comprehension by the person of own self, the values, the purposes and believes (Marcia, 1980).

Identity of a brand is a set of brand associations which the developer of the brand aspires to create and support (Aaker, 2003).

Brand identity was studied by D.Aaker in four directions:

1. A brand as the goods (includes associations with properties of the goods);
2. A brand as the organization (includes associations with properties of the organization and in a greater degree fixes attention of the consumer to the organizations, instead of on the goods);
3. A brand as the person (Includes associations with the person, individuality of a brand). The given component of brand identity is called brand personality; the

basic mechanism of its formation is personification. The given element of brand identity allows revealing communication of brand identity and consumer identity: the consumer chooses a brand which to the greatest degree corresponds to its own self image and which identity coincides with his own identity.

4. A brand as a symbol (visual image of the brand).

The structure of brand identity includes rod and expanded identity. Rod identity is a basic, steady essence of a brand, by analogy to identity of the person. It is the self of organization or the goods. The expanded identity includes elements of brand identity, connected among them and forming various groups of properties.

It is necessary to compare brand identity with brand image. D.Aaker considers brand identity as a perception of a brand which was to be reached, in other words, it is the way a company wants to present its brand to its target groups, whereas image of a brand is the current perception and interpretation by consumers. Thus, brand identity is the ideal, desirable image existing in consciousness of brand developers. Image concerns the sphere of consumer's consciousness.

Jennifer Aaker (Aaker, 1997) has offered the concept of brand personality for the description of brand perception process. As E.B.Perelygina (Perelygina, 2002) considered, the basic mechanism of image formation is personification. This is the attribution of person's properties to inanimate object. The perception of a brand is also based on the given mechanism. According to J. Aaker, brand personality is a set of personal features, associated with a brand (Aaker, 1997). J. Aaker has assumed, that brand measurements are similar to measurements of the person, and is valid, in the research she has found out five scales of measurement of a brand which are close to scales of "The Big Five": sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, ruggedness. These measurements, however, are apparently cultural-dependent.

The J.Aaker's approach has inspired a lot of investigations of brand personality.

Some investigations were concentrated on the problem of generalizing the brand personality dimensions and creating new instruments for its measurement. Thus, Austin J. and others (Austin, Sigauw & Mattila, 2003) underlined the increasing interest to understanding the symbolic meanings which is attributed to brands by consumers, but at the same time discussed the limitations of the Aaker's model. In the investigation conducted by J.Aaker and others (Aaker, Benet-Martinez, Garolera, 2001) the cultural specificity of the brand personality structure was discerned.

The other direction of brand personality investigations is the search of brand personality perceiving factors, such as: personality features of consumers, metaphors in advertising, etc.

In the research conducted by Ang and Elison (Ang & Elison, 2006) the influence of metaphors in ads on brand personality was found. The authors showed that brands using metaphors were generally perceived to be more sophisticated and exciting, but also less sincere and competent, than brands using literal words and pictures.

Huang H. H. and others (Huang, Mitchell & Rosenbaum-Elliott, 2012) showed that consumers reflect their personalities by the brands they use. They also discovered that the relationship between brand choice and symbolic dimensions (i.e., extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, and openness to experience) is much stronger than the relationship with functional dimensions (i.e., conscientiousness). They claimed that consumers choose brands with similar personalities to theirs across

various products. This idea is very important for our investigation, because it provides the evidence of connection between consumers' personality and brand personality.

Some studies demonstrated the effects of brand personality such as emotions evoking (Biel, 1993), trust and loyalty building (Fournier, 1998), and consumer preference enhancing (Aaker, 1999).

Basing on the J.Aaker's model and the results of the observed investigations, we supposed, that there is an interaction between brand personality and personal identity of consumer choosing the brand. On the one hand, people choose the brand with the personality closer to their own identity; on the other hand, the brand personality may influence the consumer's identity and even change it. We also supposed that the gender differences may influence this interaction process.

Investigation 1

We have carried out the comparative research of brand's Nike and Adidas personalities from the gender perspective. The objective of the research was revealing of gender differences in perception of the chosen sportswear brands.

The general sample: young men and girls (19-22 years), 56 persons, all respondents were Russian students.

Hypothesis: there are genders peculiarities in brand perceiving which are caused by the different objects of identification. Girls are identified with female imagers so they would prefer brands which are personified in the female imagers; boys, on the contrary, tend to prefer male personified brands.

Methods

The following methods were used:

1. Survey: the questions were about using brands Adidas and Nike.
2. Directed associations technique: we asked to give associations to both brands.
3. Personification technique: the respondents answered the question: "«Imagine, if Adidas (Nike) was the person, whom would it be?»";
4. Semantic differentials (the scale elaborated by Lebedev-Lubimov (Lebedev-Lubimov, 2006).

Results of association and personification techniques were processed by content-analysis. The significance of differences was determined using the Mann-Whitney coefficient. Results of semantic differential were exposed to the factorial analysis. Transformation of primary statistics at the factorial analysis occurred by allocation method: the analysis of the main component, and also a rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalization.

Results

Survey has shown that the majority of the respondents, both girls and young men, use the goods of Adidas and Nike brands. All respondents have been divided into four groups on basis of a gender and on the basis of using a brand.

The associations with brands given by respondents were processed by the content-analysis procedure. We divided the following categories of content-analysis:

- A- gender (A1 – male, A2 – female); B – appearance (B1 – clothes, B2 – accessories); C – activity (C1 - sport, C2 – fitness); D – senses (D1- physical, D2 – aesthetic); E – evaluation (E1 – good, E2 – bad); F – brand features (F1 – logo, F2 –

slogan); G – persons (G1 – not sportsmen, G2 – sportsmen), H – subculture (H1 – music, H2 – culture).

For both groups of respondents (the young man and the girl) the frequency of each category occurrence was counted up. Then the percent from total number of the categories was counted up (Table 1).

Table №1. Associations with brands; results of content-analysis (Adidas).

Girls															
A		B		C		D		E		F		G			
A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2	D1	D2	E1	E2	F1	F2	G1	G2		
10%	0	13%	7%	10%	3%	24%	8%	11%	5%	5%	2%	2%	0		
10%		20%		13%		32%		16%		7%		2%			
Boys															
A		B		C		D		E		F		G		H	
A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2	D1	D2	E1	E2	F1	F2	G1	G2	H1	H2
5%	0	12%	0	17%	0	9%	5%	21%	8%	8%	1%	0	5%	0	9%
5%		12%		17%		14%		29%		9%		5%		9%	

The following results show content of associations with Nike (Table 2).

Table №2. Associations with brands; results of content-analysis (Nike).

Girls															
A		B		C		D		E		F		G			
A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2	D1	D2	E1	E2	F1	F2	G1	G2		
4%	8%	17%	6%	19%	4%	9%	11%	14%	0	0	4%	0	4%		
12%		23%		23%		20%		14%		4%		4%			
Boys															
A		B		C		D		E		F		G		H	
A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2	D1	D2	E1	E2	F1	F2	G1	G2	H1	H2
0	4%	6%	3%	19%	9%	11%	5%	10%	8%	7%	1%	0	5%	8%	4%
4%		9%		28%		16%		18%		8%		5%		12%	

The significant differences are bold (p<0,05).

We can see that girls pay more attention to the gender, appearance, and senses. Boys more frequently describe subculture and give evaluations. Both boys and girls perceive Adidas as a male, and Nike – as a female. Evaluations of Adidas, given by

girls, are more ambivalent, then of Nike. Boys, on the contrary, evaluate Nike more ambivalently.

Results of personification technique

We received the data containing answers to the question: “Imagine, if Adidas (Nike) was the person whom would it be?” which was set to 2 groups of respondents: young men and girls. Data processing was spent by means of the content-analysis method which represents calculation of frequency of certain semantic units mentioning in the investigated texts (Tables 3, 4).

The following categories were allocated: A – brand’s gender (A1 – mail, A2 – female); B – appearance (B1 – positive, B2 – negative); C – activity (C1 – professional sportsman, C2 – fans); D – personality features (D1 – positive, D2 – negative); E – age (E1 – young, E2 – adults); F – nationality (F1 – American, F2 – European); G – race (G1 – black, G2 – white); H – subculture (H1 – music culture (rap), H2 – dance (break dance)).

Table 3. Personification results for Adidas

Boys													
A		B		C		D		E		F		G	
A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2	D1	D2	E1	E2	F1	F2	G1	G2
14%	0	7%	4%	17%	0	15%	6%	10%	4%	2%	11%	10%	0
14%		11%		17%		21%		14%		13%		10%	
Girls													
A		B		C		D		E		F		G	
A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2	D1	D2	E1	E2	F1	F2	G1	G2
10%	0	40%	0	7%	0	25%	0	8%	0	0	3%	7%	0
10%		40%		7%		25%		8%		3%		7%	

Table 4. Personification results for Nike

Boys															
A		B		C		D		E		F		G		H	
A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2	D1	D2	E1	E2	F1	F2	G1	G2	H1	H2
11%	0	24%	5%	9%	2%	12%	2%	13%	0	9%	0	8%	0	3%	2%
11%		29%		11%		14%		13%		9%		8%		5%	
Girls															
A		B		C		D		E		F		G			
A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2	D1	D2	E1	E2	F1	F2	G1	G2		
0	13%	29%	0	4%	0	43%	0	3%	0	3%	0	2%	4%		
13%		29%		4%		43%		3%		3%		6%			

The significant differences are bold (p<0,05).

The results of personification procedure also showed the higher attention to appearance among girls, but only for Adidas. Personality features are more interesting for girls. Boys pay more attention to activity and subculture. Adidas was perceived by both boys and girls as a male, professional sportsman, with positive appearance and personality, young, black European. Nike was perceived as a man by boys and as a female by girls, with positive appearance and personality, young sportsman, black or white American. Boys consider Nike also as a rapper or break dancer.

Factor analysis of semantic differential method results

The results of semantic differential were processed by methods of mathematical statistics (using computer program SPSS). For the revealing of brands perception features the factorial analysis was used. Transformation of the primary statistics at the factorial analysis was processed by allocation method: by the analysis of the main components, and also by rotation method: Varimax with the Kaiser normalization.

Young men and girls have been divided on four groups according using brands Adidas and Nike.

The factorial analysis at young men results have turned out the following.

1) At the young men using brand Adidas, the factorial analysis has found out 4 factors:

1. The factor appeal includes such components as beautiful, interesting, weakened, and original.
2. The factor cognitive: clever, clear, and informative.
3. The factor activity: fast, attractive, truthful.
4. The factor calm: no aggressive, modest.

2) At the young men who doesn't use brand Adidas, the factorial analysis has found out 3 factors:

1. The factor appeal: beautiful, attractive, interesting, truthful, joyful, fast, clever, original.
2. The factor cognitive: informative, modest.
3. The factor calm: weakened, no aggressive, clear.

3) At the young men using brand Nike, the factorial analysis has found out 3 factors:

1. The factor glamour: interesting, joyful, beautiful, attractive, original, fast, informative, clear.
2. The factor cognitive: clever, modest.
3. The factor calm: no aggressive, truthful.

4) At the young men who are not using brand Nike, the factorial analysis has found out 3 factors:

1. The factor calm: weakened, no aggressive, modest, attractive, and clever.
2. The factor cognitive: informative, clear, truthful, and joyful.
3. The factor appeal: beautiful, interesting, fast.

At girls under the factorial analysis results have turned out the following.

1) At the girls using a brand Adidas, the factorial analysis has found out 3 factors:

1. The factor appeal: beautiful, attractive, original, clear, interesting, joyful, truthful, and informative.

2. The factor activity: fast, no aggressive, clever.
 3. The factor slackness: the weakened.
- 2) At the girls who are not using brand Adidas, the factorial analysis has found out 4 factors:
1. The factor activity: fast, original, interesting.
 2. The factor appeal: beautiful, attractive, joyful, clear.
 3. The factor calm: weakened, modest, no aggressive, and informative.
 4. The factor cognitive: clever, truthful.
- 3) At the girls using brand Nike, the factorial analysis has found out 4 factors:
1. The factor appeal: beautiful, attractive, joyful, interesting, fast, original.
 2. The factor cognitive: clever, clear.
 3. The factor informative: the informative.
 4. The factor calm: weakened, no aggressive, modest.
- 4) At the girls who don't use brand Nike, the factorial analysis has found out 4 factors:
1. The factor glamour: fast, clever, attractive, and truthful.
 2. The factor calm: weakened, modest, original, interesting.
 3. The factor appeal: beautiful, informative, and joyful.
 4. The factor clear: the clear.

As we can see from this results, boys and girls use some similar factors, such as attractiveness, quietly, effectively, activity, and cognitive qualities, but boys pay more attention to cognitive features, while girls to the appearance.

Investigation 2

The second investigation was devoted to the connection between personal identity of consumers and brand identity.

The **hypothesis was**: gender differences influence the connection between personal identity and brand identity.

Methods

For revealing and the analysis of brand preference features the following methods have been chosen:

1. Survey was used for defining brand loyalty and commitment, but unlike in the first survey, respondents chose themselves brands they preferred.
2. The personification technique (the procedure was the same as in the first investigation).
3. Semantic differential (variation of Lebedev-Lubimov): respondents evaluated using scales of SD their own personality and then the chosen brands.

Results of personification techniques were processed by means of the content-analysis. The significance of differences was determined using the Mann-Whitney coefficient.

The sample consisted of 56 people, 28 mails and 28 females (18-25 years old)

Results

The survey has allowed establishing the degree of loyalty to brands. The respondents chose any brand they prefer.

Among 15 girls from 28 of the sample brand is the important criterion at clothes choice. Three respondents wouldn't buy non-branded item at all, however 7 would buy it in some circumstances. Among 11 young men from 28 of the sample brand is also an important criterion at clothes choice. Four males wouldn't buy non-branded item, 6 would buy it.

Results of semantic differential.

Results of semantic differential data processing showed that there is a high correlation between self-perception and brand perception, however, some distinctions also were showed (Tables 5, 6).

Table 5. Differences in self-perception and brand-perception

Brand not loyal (p>0.05)	Brand loyal (p>0.05)
Slow-Moving Pampered- Honest - mendacious	unpretentious usual-unusual Good-Evil

The table 5 shows that people, who consider brand as important, have fewer differences in perceiving themselves and brands.

Table 6. Differences in self-perception and brand-perception (males and females)

Females (p>0.05)	Males (p>0.05)
Slow-Moving Unsociable-sociable	Practical-naive Arrogant-Unassuming Flexible-Irritable Good-Evil

The table 6 shows that females have fewer differences in evaluation of themselves and brands.

There are some differences between males and females according to the results of personification technique. Girls use the category of Personality features more frequent than boys (p<0,05).

Discussions

Qualitative features of brands perception have been revealed by girls and young men. So, young men gave more negative associations concerning a brand Adidas, personifying it as the representative of subculture, and a brand of Nike as a sportsman (the football player, the basketball player). Girls in a greater degree personify brands, in particular, girls associated brand Nike with the young and perspective girl, and also gave more attention to appearance of the personified brand.

In all groups of respondents similar factors of brands perception have been revealed:

1. The factor attractiveness into which such scales as: beautiful, interesting, original, fast, attractive enter.
2. The factor informing: clever, clear, informative, truthful,
3. The factor activity: fast, interesting (has come to light only in some groups; in the others has entered into the factor 1 or 2)

4. The factor calmness: nonaggressive, modest, and weakened.

At the analysis of factorial structure of brand personality we have noted following details.

1) At perception of brands Adidas and Nike young men and girls had been revealed some general characteristics, such as: appeal, calmness, impressiveness, activity, and also informing and clearness.

2) Proceeding from the received results, it is possible to say that in the course of perception of brands Adidas and Nike young men give more preferences to cognitive characteristics.

3) Such brand feature as attractiveness is more important for girls. Girls allocate first of all such characteristics as beauty, originality. Thus, proceeding from the results of the factorial analysis, it is possible to assert, that for girls brands Adidas and Nike are not simply a set of convenient things on different cases of a life, but it is the way to attract the people's attention, the continuation of their selves, and also a way of self-presentation. For young men attractiveness of things is also important, but to a less degree. This factor doesn't determine a choice of things for them.

The second investigation demonstrated the connection between personal identity of consumer and brand identity. As we can see from the results, those people who consider more about brand clothes have less differences between images of themselves and image of brand. It means that there is a connection between personal identity and brand identity, which depends on the consumer's experience of brands consumption; the brand identity communicates with personal identity and influences it. The more the person interacts with brands the closer his personal identity approaches to brand identity.

There are gender differences in this process; females are more likely to be liable to this impact; the differences between brand personality and personal identity are less among females than among males. There are also gender differences in brand personification process: females use more categories concerning personal features what means apparently that the personification process is more intensive among females.

Conclusions and future research

The given research has shown the action of the personification and identification mechanisms at perception of brand personality. The fact that young men and girls differently perceive the same brands shows the action of given mechanisms and their interaction with personal features of the consumer. Thus, the research hypothesis has proved to be true: gender distinctions influence the brand perception. For the consumer the brand is a prototype of the person using the given brand. Possibly, at a choice of a brand the person correlates features of brand personality to his own features, and the given correlation is one of the basic mechanisms of decision-making during a brand choice process. Obviously, the "embedding" of a brand identity into identity of the person leads to adherence formation to a brand that is profitable for manufacturer. At the same time similar manipulations in identity sphere can lead to unpredictable consequences for the person. Thus, the influence of modern marketing technologies on the person demands the further researches.

The further researches may be conducted in following directions:

1) clarifying the impact of brands on the consumer's personality;

2) investigation of brand perception features by representatives of various social groups;

3) deeper investigation of interaction process between consumer's personality and brand personality, which means, on the one hand, the investigation of the effects of brands using for people in different identity statuses, especially diffusion and moratorium, and on the other hand, researching the brands perception by people in different identity statuses (Marcia, 1980): we suppose, that for people in diffusion and moratorium identity statuses, brands can provide the basis for social categorization, which can lead to premature identity rather than developing identity;

4) the investigation of brand-addiction phenomena, which means absolute loyalty to one or several brands and can lead to personality deformations (deformations in motives structure, goals, values, self-perception and others).

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