Evaluating Salesman's Personality Attributes in B2B Branding Context: The Case of Mobile-Communication Company of Iran

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Abstract

This study aims to review B2B branding literature and investigate how to promote brand equity by salesman's personality attributes in B2B domain. By providing this knowledge, salesman's personality attributes for promoting of B2B brand equity can be evaluated for the case. In this regard three questions were designed: What is the concept of B2B branding? What personality attributes of the salesman are important in order to promote of B2B brand equity? In which attributes, MCI's salesmen should concentrate in order to improvement?

So, literature was reviewed in order to understand B2B branding concept and find a model of effective attributes of the salesman. Based on the model a quantitative study was conducted through sending a questionnaire to employees of some enterprise that are in business relationship with MCI.

Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) method shows MCI should concentrate on customer orientation and also arrangement skills of its salesmen. Although the concept of B2B brand equity and model of prerequisites for promoting it, is available in the literature, but there is no research related to evaluation a firm based on measuring desired performance in each prerequisite factor. In this study the performance of salesman's personality factor has been evaluated for the case. It should be mentioned that extract patterns and clusters from the presented data in IPA model is an innovative method by the authors.

Keywords: Business to Business (B2B), brand equity, sales force, industrial marketing, Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) method

1. Introduction

Nowadays, tendency and necessity for digitalization of business model in many industries is constantly rising. To perform this mutation, enterprises need to go through the services of telecommunications companies. So, B2B activities in telecom sector becomes more important from day to day.

MCI as incumbent mobile operator in B2C market wants to repeat this position in B2B sector as well. One of activities for powerful presence in the market can be strengthen a company's brand equity. So, an evaluating on prerequisites of brand equity is very useful. B2B activities is based on interactions between two sides of business, and salesmen role in this context is very decisive. There are some evidences show personality attributes of salesmen impacts on B2B

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brand equity. But up to now there is not any evaluation on attributes of MCI's salesmen. In order to overcome this practical gap, this study aims to evaluates prerequisites of brand equity for MCI, from salesman's personality attributes point of view. It should be mentioned, although there are some introduces attributes for B2B salesmen, but there is not any evaluation in the literature based on these factors.

2.Literature review
2.1. Brand

The concepts of brand can be considered as branding and brand equity. According to the American Marketing Association dictionary a brand is:

> *"a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers"*.

This definition is very similar to Kotler's definition of brand (Kotler, 1994). It can be said that "*brand is the final object that concentrates and materializes the other efforts of the brand management process*" (Crescitelli & Figueiredo, 2009).
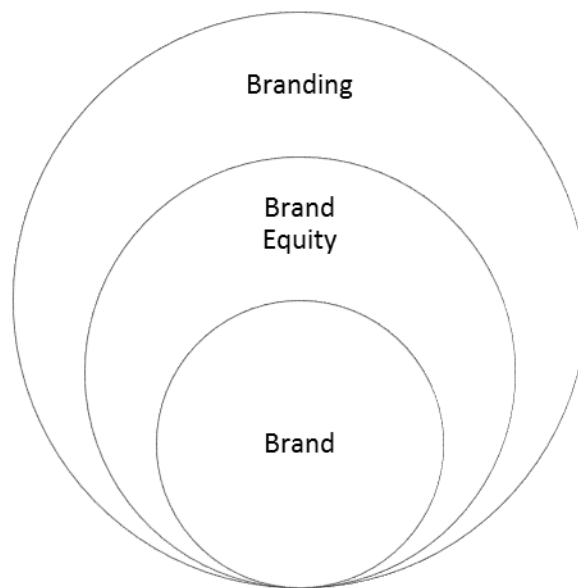

Figure 1: Relation between Brand, Brand Equity and Branding

Branding is a set of activities in order to build brand equity. It is a consumer-oriented response to the decision making issue in unclear and dense choice environments (Kapferer, 2008).

For brand equity there are different understandings in the literatures. Aaker (1995) defined brand equity as:

> *"A set of assets (and liabilities) linked to a brand's name and symbol that adds to (or subtracts from) the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customers."*

Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2009) introduced four dimensions for brand equity which is illustrated in Figure 2.
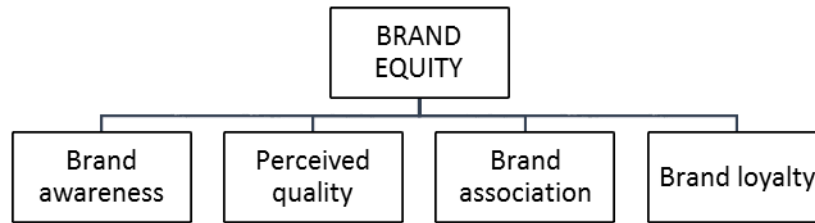

Figure 2: Brand equity dimensions

In this research, the general concept of brand equity is under study. More information about four dimensions of brand equity are in the two above-mentioned references.

2.2. B2B branding

In traditional literature of industrial marketing, no significant attention is given to B2B branding (Saunders & Watt, 1979). This approach persists for more than two decades. But after a relatively long period, the bright footprint of attention to B2B branding is recognizable (Lynch & de Chernatony, 2004, 2007). These studies not only adopt the its significance but also show influence of B2B branding on decision making processes. Kotler & Pfoertsch (2006) added something more and raised that B2B branding can cause excellent situation for premium prices. In the following, they summed up the role of brand in B2B as:

Figure 3: The role of B2B Brands (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006)

Building brands in a B2B market is different from B2C branding. It involves building trust and comfort for all partners during the process of purchasing. The role and the mechanism of an B2B brand strategy have to be more focused than B2C (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2010).

2.3. Salesman Personality Attributes

Martin, S. W. (2011), established plenty of interviews with top B2B salesman for international companies. For 1000 of them some personality tests were performed, and key personality attributes were extracted. Figure 4 summarized personality traits for B2B salesman.
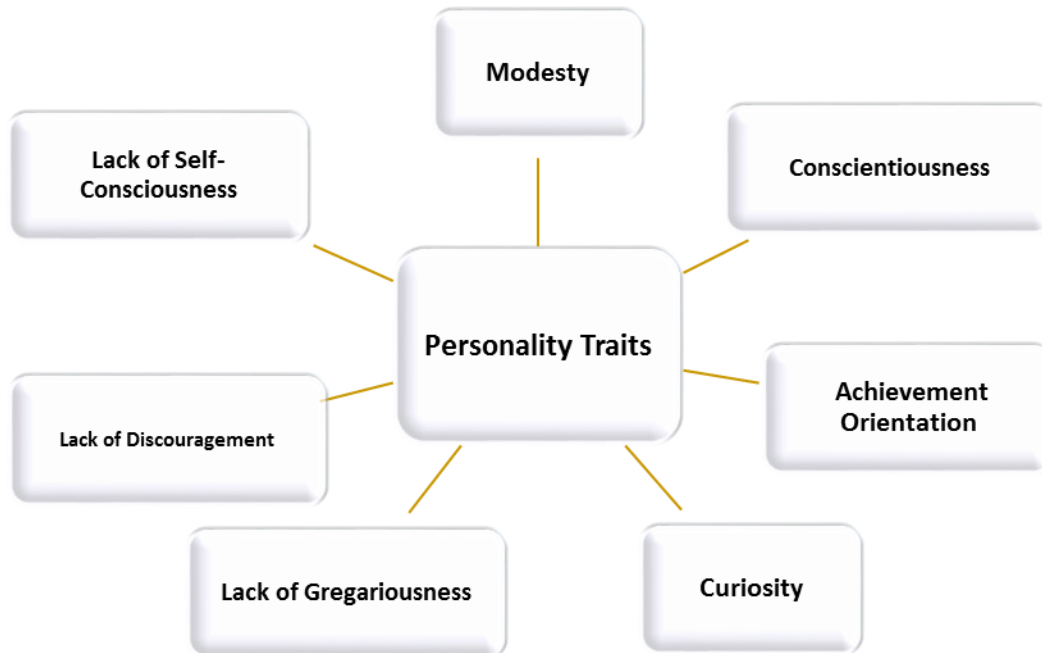

Figure 4: Personality traits for B2B salesman

Ulaga & Loveland (2014), in another study listed 13 individual variables of salesmen. Table 1 presents these variables.

3. Research model

Aforementioned personality attributes are general expected traits from salesforce. But the aim of this study is focus on those attributes impacts on brand equity in B2B context. Baumgarth & Binckebanck (2011) proposed a model for B2B brand equity that have four dimensions. One of the dimensions is salesman personality. This study has adopted the statements of salesman personality dimension in Baumgarth & Binckebanck (2011) study. The statements are presented in table 2.

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Table 1: Individual difference variables mentioned in-depth interviews (adopted from Ulaga & Loveland, 2014)

Trait	Definition	Count
Learning orientation	Inclination to learn new materials and find answers to questions on one's own; working to continuously improve	26
Customer service orientation	Striving to provide responsive, personalized, quality service to customers; putting the customer first	25
Intrinsic motivation	Motivated by the enjoyable features of the task itself, belief that skills are malleable and can be improved	23
General intelligence	Ability to reason and think abstractly; related to verbal ability, learning capacity, and breadth of interests	19
Emotional stability	Overall level of adjustment and emotional resilience; ability to work well with job pressure and stress.	16
Teamwork orientation	Propensity to work as part of a team; cooperative and participative in group projects.	11
Introversion	Tendency to be more reflective, introspective, and attentive to others.	9
Visionary thinking	Inclined toward a global, intuitive, big-picture thinking style, rather than a practical, detail-oriented, style.	8
Nurturance	Inclination to use personal warmth to help others, a need to help others and attend to their needs	3
Openness	Prone to seek out and engage in new ideas, procedures, techniques, and experiences, travel, cross-cultural activities	3
Perfectionism/rigid	Having an orientation to detail, focusing on a task until it has been completed at every level	2
Assertiveness	An inclination to seize the initiative, voice ideas and opinions that may not be well received by others, and confront problems directly.	1
Conscientiousness	Being reliable, dependable, trustworthy, and rule following; strives hard to honor all commitments.	1

Table 2: statements related to salesperson's personality (adopted from . Baumgarth & Binckebanck, 2011)

Salesperson's personality	Statement
SP1	enjoy direct customer contact
SP2	always tackle their tasks with healthy optimism
SP3	have at the ready a great deal of empathy (can put themselves in the customer's place, can take the customer's perspective etc
SP4	have a healthy sense of self-esteem (feel sure of their own competence and abilities etc
SP5	are competent in oral communication (can express themselves in a straightforward and precise manner, can pose well-directed questions etc
SP6	can listen to their customers actively
SP7	have also mastered non-verbal communication (can use body language professionally, are able to detect signals in the body language of their customers etc
SP8	are always friendly towards their customers
SP9	are flexible (adapt themselves and their selling behaviour to different customer types and situations)
SP10	are able to work in a team (can fit into team structures, enjoy team work etc)
SP11	can manage themselves well (time management, punctuality, priority setting etc)
SP12	have a great deal of product knowledge (both of their own and competitive products)
SP13	know and understand their customers very well (their needs, value chains, usage of product/service etc
SP14	have a great deal of market knowledge (the position of the supplier or trends in the market)
SP15	have a great deal of knowledge on business aspects (can assess the consequences of their decisions on costs, can conduct economic feasibility studies etc
SP16	are able to adapt to any customer on the basis of their experience

4. Method

According to above model this study concentrates on salesman personality as an effective element on B2B brand equity. So Mobile Communication Company of Iran was evaluated in terms of salesman personality attributes in context of B2B.

In order to conducting this deductive research, a questionnaire including sixteen statement was adopted from Baumgarth & Binckebanck (2011). However, to avoid ambiguity for responders, it was translated to Persian language. We sent it to some employees of 15 enterprise customers of MCI; for each enterprise from 2 to 10 employees who directly work with MCI salesman was selected. Finally, we received 69 fulfilled valid answers from 105 questionnaires were sent.

The questionnaire was organized for each statement by a Likert scale (1-5) for both of performance and importance.

After collecting data, SPSS and EXCEL software used to data analysis and MEAN and Gap scores were calculated. In addition, Cronbach's alpha coefficient calculated to consider the reliability of statements.

5. Data analysis and discussion

As mentioned above 69 valid responses were obtained from 105 people who work in 15 companies of industrial customers of MCI (Response Rate=65.7%). The average for each of Importance and Performance and gap between them were calculated for each statement (Table 3).

Table 3: Importance-Performance Result of sales person personality attributes

Statement	Performance	Importance	GAP
SP1	2.217	4.014	1.797
SP2	1.261	3.275	2.014
SP3	1.986	3.725	1.739
SP4	2.957	2.971	0.014
SP5	3.014	3.710	0.696
SP6	2.029	3.913	1.884
SP7	2.754	3.275	0.522
SP8	2.986	3.029	0.043
SP9	1.725	4.464	2.739
SP10	1.957	3.725	1.768
SP11	1.710	4.841	3.130
SP12	2.478	3.971	1.493
SP13	2.986	4.783	1.797
SP14	2.928	4.725	1.797
SP15	3.043	4.754	1.710
SP16	1.957	3.986	2.029

The reliability of these statements are verified by high correlation (0.81) based on Cronbach's Alpha.

Table1 shows biggest gap in SP11, SP9, SP16 and SP6 consequently. For better prioritization and empowering decision making criteria, instead of gap analysis, Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) method was applied. Radmanesh et al., (2017) have described IPA method in another work. According to this method, Figure 5 shows the higher priority statements in left-high quarter of the matrix. They are SP11, SP9, SP1 and Sp16. Although SP6 gap is more than SP1, but IPA method indicates SP1 has more priority (According to its higher importance from average).

From the result in Figure 5, more facts (or patterns) can be extracted. The two thick crossover lines in Figure 5, divide two-dimensional space into two areas. The first area (above the lines), is related to rational skills. The second one (below the lines) is involved emotional skills. More deep contemplation upon patterns leads to recognition of some clusters. These clusters are:

● Customer orientation
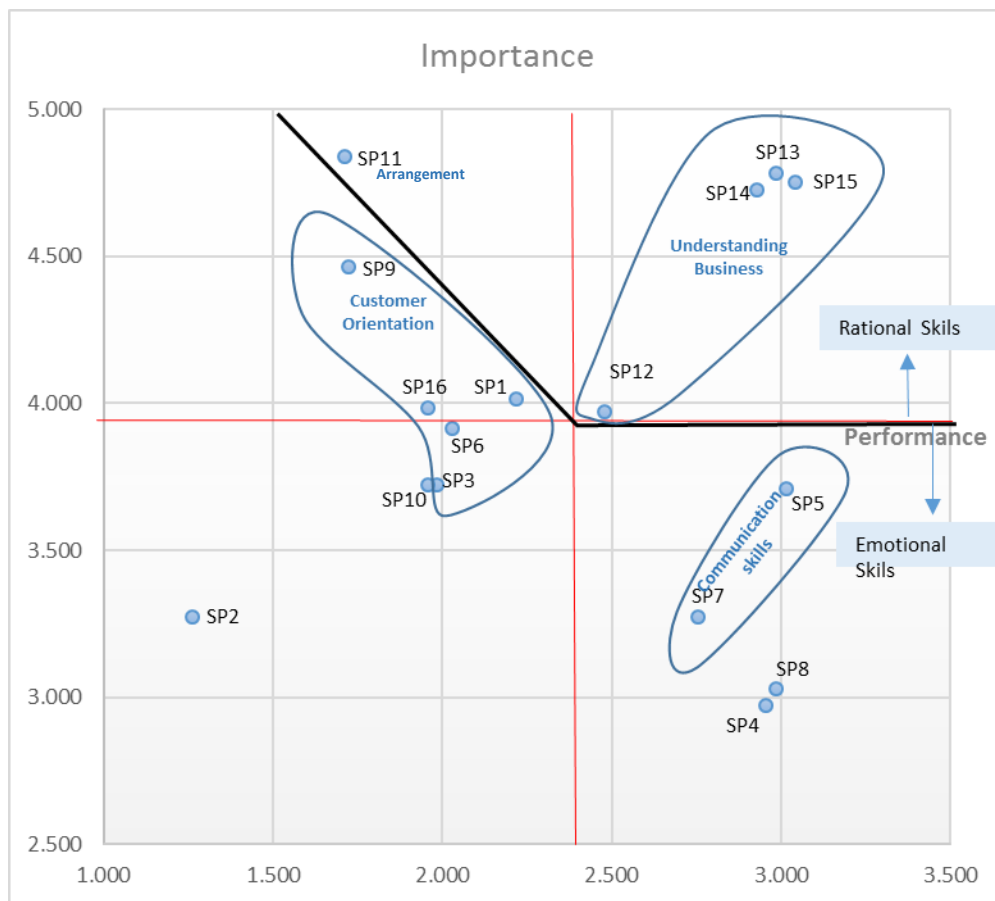● Understanding business
● Communication skills

Figure 5: IPA results for the statements

6. Conclusion

In order to evaluate MCI in one of prerequisites of B2B brand equity (salesperson personality) this has been done. In this regards, literature related to brand equity, B2B branding and salesman personality attributes was reviewed and research model (questionnaire statements) was adopted from Baumgarth & Binckebanck (2011). By using IPA, four statement have been obtained as the most important items for improvement. Three of them is related to customer orientation:

● (enjoy/ flexibility/ adaption) to customers.

Another one can be named as arrangement skills:

● manage themselves well (time management, punctuality, priority setting etc)

So, it is recommended for MCI to improve customer-oriented mentality in the culture of the organization and also concentrates on arrangement skills. For change in culture all of organization should be involved in this program (this phenomenon is not only related to B2B department). But for arrangement skills, after some interview with customers, it seems the most of complaints are from time management. So, some training programs related to importance of time and time management techniques should run.

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