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Exploring the Influence of Selfie Phenomenon on Brand Personality

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Abstract:
Purpose–This study explores whether selfie campaigns extends brand personality among young consumers aged between 18 years to 29 years. This study tries to answer the question whether selfie campaigns are viewed as part of integrated marketing communication and whether they enhance brand personality. These answers will help the organizations to develop effective selfie campaigns.
Design/methodology/approach–This study is exploratory in nature. Experts were used to select two selfie campaigns each representing Aaker's five brand personality dimensions. Using these campaigns primary study was conducted using a structure questionnaire. A total of 158 respondents who were familiar with the shortlisted brands completed the survey.
Findings–Young consumers consider selfie campaigns part of brand engagement. The respondents felt that majority of the selfie campaigns were anchoring on activity dimension of the brand personality irrespective of long term personality dimension of the brand. Whether this dimension of brand personality will translate in influencing decision making is not clear.
Originality/value–To the best of our knowledge this is one of the few studies which attempts to investigate the influence of selfie campaigns from marketing communication perspective. Majority of the extant literature deals with self-portrayal of selfie by the individuals.

Keywords: Selfie phenomenon, Brand personality, Decision making in young consumers

1. Introduction

Usage of online social media like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, etc., is entrenching as a psychological and social phenomenon (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012; Blachnio, Przepiorka& Rudnicka, 2013). Over 55 per cent of 'Millennials' have taken a selfie and shared it on social media and over 93 million selfies are taken each day leading to selfie obsession. As a result, social media has quickly become a major marketing force (e.g., Gensler, Volckner, Liu-Thompkins& Wiertz, 2013). Companies like Reebok, Phillips, Indigo, etc., have also started using selfie as part of integrated marketing communication. Whether the selfie campaigns are useful in achievement of short term or in long term objectives is not answered yet. In this paper, we are exploring whether selfie campaigns are perceived as enhancing personality of the brand advertised.

Marketing scholars have long been interested in the concept of the self (Sirgy, 1982; Belk, 1988) as well as its manifestations in consumer identity projects (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). The proliferation of the Internet as well as digital and mobile technologies has enabled consumers to express their selves in digital environments (Belk 2013; Schroeder, 2013). A very recent development in this area is the selfie - "a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and shared via social media" (OxfordDictionaries.com). Parallelly social media has quickly become a major marketing force (Gensler et al., 2013). However, there is conflicting evidence about the impact of social media. Selfie is considered to be central part of online self-presentation that is effective for relationship (Hancock & Toma, 2009). Another view is that though more and more companies and organizations include social media in their advertising budget, but recent research indicates that these advertisements do not influence consumer's decision making (Gallup, 2014). It is in this context that we are specifically exploring the influence of organizational selfie campaigns in enhancing brand personality.

2. Literature Review

Extant literature on selfie as a phenomenon and its implications as a part of integrated marketing communication is limited. Majority of the studies have investigated selfie from individual perspective.
The term selfie was discussed for the first time in 2005 by photographer Jim Krause. By 2009 Selfie or the concept of self-photograph started gaining popularity amongst the Flickr users. With the advancement of smartphones and social media, selfies became a trend amongst the social media network users. By the end of 2012, Time Magazine considered 'Selfie' among the top 10 buzzwords of the year.

Selfies featuring presidents, celebrities as well as ordinary consumers have become not only the topic of cultural commentary, but also a resource for brand management campaigns as epitomized during the 2014 Academy Awards when host Ellen DeGeneres' seemingly spontaneous group selfie was later revealed to be a planned promotion for Samsung smartphones.

Millennials use social networking platforms as a way to maintain and build social relationships. Social network has changed how society interacts and perceives others. Extant literature on selfie phenomenon can be broadly categorized into three. One, consumers are using social media to project their personality, seek attention and concerned with what image they project (Sorokowski, Sorokowska, Oleszkiewicz, Frackowiak, Huk, & Pisanki, 2015). Early studies on selfie as a phenomenon investigated individual's motive for indulging in selfie campaigns (for e.g., Chua & Chang, 2016; Cheng, White, & Chaplin, 2012; Lin & Lu, 2011; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The findings show that individuals indulge in selfie for self-presentation, image management, and peer comparison among others. Two, another set of studies investigated dimensions of personality traits of individuals indulging in selfies (for e.g., Qiu, Lu, Yang, Qu, & Zhu, 2015; Ross, Orr, Sisic, Arseneault, Simmering, & Orr, 2009; Carpenter, 2012; Lee, Ahn, & Kim, 2014; Fox &Rooney, 2015; Sorokowski et al., 2015). Individuals who indulge in selfie tend to be exhibitionistic, insecure, attention seeking, jealous, and are concerned with physical appearance.Alloway, Runac, Qureshi, and Kemp, (2014) found that for both male and female posting, tagging, and commenting on photos were associated with higher "narcissism scores".

Third set of studies have investigated on genuineness of self-presentation by individuals on the social networks. Few of them believe that an online profile is a 'true depiction of a person' (Wickel, 2015). Buffardi and Campbell (2008), documented that users of Facebook and other social networking sites believe that others are interested in what they're doing, and they want others to know what they are doing". Research by Gabriel (2014) concludes that those who wish to portray social identity by social media tend to develop their online profiles. In this process, they present a persona that they believe is appealing to the general public by exaggerating certain character traits (Alloway et al., 2014). This unrealistic self-presentation is possible through different social networking platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, because each individual has complete and total control of their profile content.

However, there is limited research on the impact of selfie as a tool of marketing communication. Although organizations realize the potency of electronic word of mouth in the social media world, still "there are no clear theoretical guidelines for social media marketing communication" (du Plessis, 2010). And Social media has quickly become a major marketing force (e.g., Gensleret al., 2013). At the same time, according to Zhu and Chen (2015), for social media marketing to be effective, communication efforts need to be congruent and aligned with the different needs of social media users. In this regard organizations are trying to use selfie campaigns to communicate brand associations. This is built on the notion by social psychologists and advertisers that inanimate objects like brands can be associated with a set of human characteristics (Prentice, 1987; Snyder & Gangestad, 1986; Biel, 1993; Ogilvy, 1983). Cheng et al., (2012) showed the linkage between the brand and consumers' self-image as an important driver of emotional experience with the brand. Hollenbeck and Kaikati (2012) proposed brands are used by consumers to express different aspects of their self. This is the relationship that we are exploring in this study. Specifically, whether the selfie campaigns of companies enhance brand personalities for which the brand stands.

2.1. Brand Personality
Aaker (1997, pp. 347) defined brand personality as "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand". Aaker started from Big five personalities i.e. Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability and Openness and mixes up sender and receiver aspects and embraces a mix of the different identity concepts. For example, 'the brand as a person' from Aaker and Joachimsthaler's (2000) model is mixed up with 'the brand as a product' and the 'brand as a symbol'. The scale defines 5 personality traits of which 3 are related to Big Five dimensions. These are Agreeableness, Conscientiousness and Extraversion. Geuens, Weijters, and De Wulf, (2009) on the other hand developed a scale that is based on personality traits only and excludes other details. According to Geuens et al., (2009), there are 5 dimensions of personality as shown below:
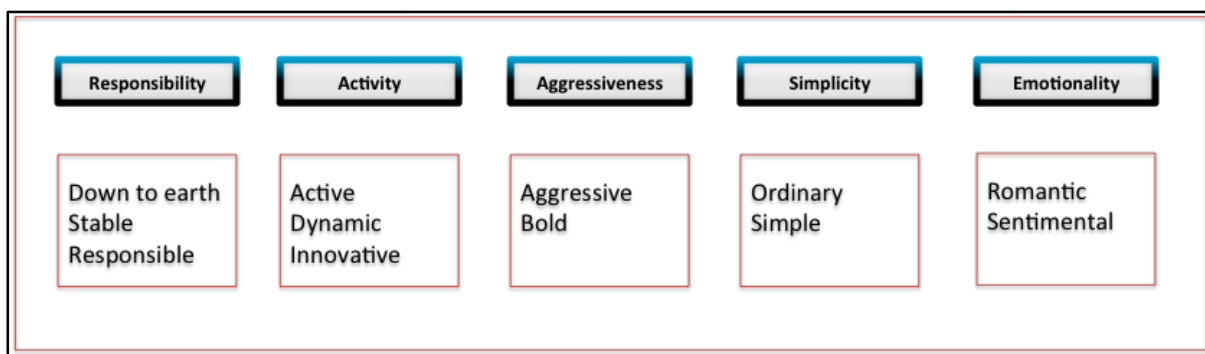

Responsibility	Activity	Aggressiveness	Simplicity	Emotionality
Down to earth Stable Responsible	Active Dynamic Innovative	Aggressive Bold	Ordinary Simple	Romantic Sentimental

Figure 1: Dimensions of Brand Personality
Source: Geuens, Maggie, Bert Weijters, and Kristof De Wulf. "A new measure of brand personality."
International Journal of Research in Marketing 26.2 (2009): 97-107

In this study, we selected selfie campaigns of leading organizations in India and investigated whether consumer can relate the campaign with the dimensions of brand personalities. We followed an exploratory methodology to test the relationship which is explained in the next section.

3. Methodology

On the basis of the literature reviewed about selfie campaigns and brand personalities and its role in branding and marketing communication, a research model was developed to explore the synergy between brand personalities and their selfie campaigns.
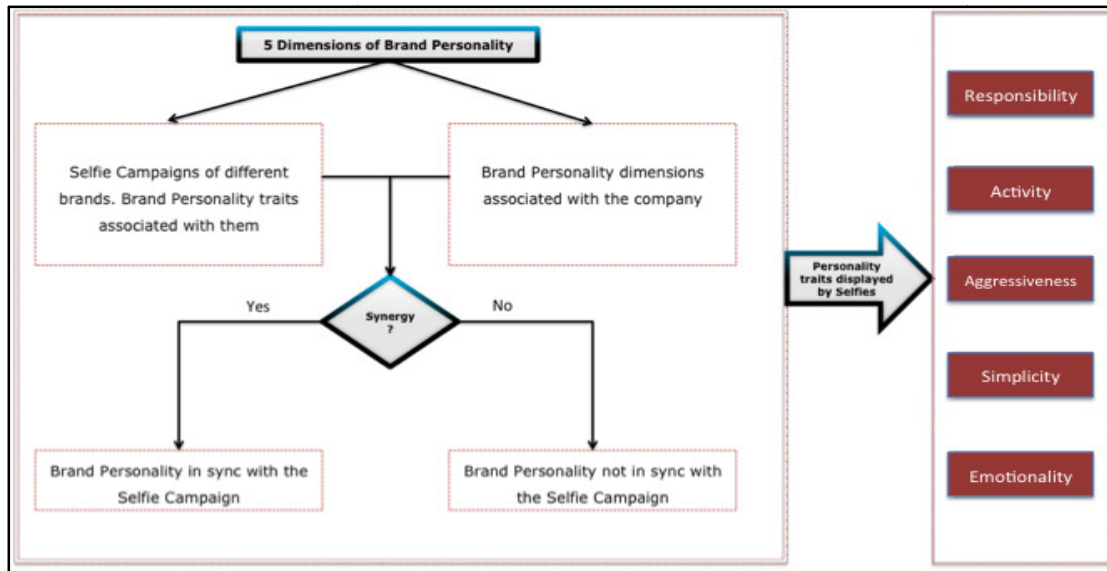

Figure 2: Research Model

3.1. Materials

A secondary research was conducted to identify selfie campaigns for the study. Ten selfie campaigns were selected by the researcher. Care was taken to select selfie campaigns of famous as well as less known but familiar brands and variety of campaigns (Appendix 1). Two selfie campaigns for each brand personality traits were selected.

The selfie campaigns were identified based on therecency of campaign and to represent five dimensions of the brand personality. Familiar brands were chosen to ensure accurate rating by respondents. Readings about the brand and the past promotional campaigns were used to identify the brand personality and the traits associated with it. This was done by two independent respondents who were not aware of objective of the study. However, they were knowledgeable in brand personality and the traits associated. We took care of this by providing write-up about brand personality and the associated traits in advance and asked them to carefully read and understand before coding the campaigns and the associated traits. Table provides detail of the campaigns identified and the associated traits.

Personality type	Brand 1	Trait	Brand 2	Trait
Responsibility	Indigo	Responsible	Dettol	Responsible
Activity	Oreo	Fun, Innovative	Skybag	Active
Aggressiveness	Reebok	Aggressive	Narendra Modi	Aggressive
Simplicity	Pond's	Confidence, Beauty	CenturyPly	Simple, Emotional
Emotionality	Magnum	Pleasure	Philips	Caring

Table 1: Selfie Campaigns and the Associated Traits

The above-mentioned campaigns (Appendix 1 provides details of the selfie campaign) were then studied via primary research to analyse if the selfie campaigns were associated with the dimensions of brand personality according to the respondents.

3.2. Participants

We floated the study to 200 respondents and received 158 valid responses (99 male and 59 female respondents) aged between 18 and 29 years. The participants were students from leading educational institutions in India. The participants were not incentivized to respond for the study.

3.3. Measures

New measure of 12 item brand personality 7-point Likert scale (1 = not characteristic for the brand at all, 7 = very characteristic for the brand) was used (Geuens et al., 2009). Only participants who indicated knowledge of the brand were asked to complete the study. We tested for reliability and found Cronbach's alpha higher than accepted level of 0.7.

3.4. Procedure
Three sets of questionnaires with four, three and three campaigns in each were developed and administered. Care was taken to randomize the order of the campaigns listed in the questionnaire. All participants completed the online questionnaire. Screening questions were there to ensure that participants were familiar with the brands used in selfie campaigns.

4. Results
We analysed each selfie campaign separately against dimensions of brand personality. The mean value of each dimension for all the campaigns was calculated. Through our exploratory study, we had identified brand personality dimensions the selected brands were to project through selfie campaign. We compared that dimensions with data obtained from respondents of primary study. According to our logic, the respondents should have identified relevant dimensions of brand personality the company desires to anchor the brand with. The results are summarized in table 2.

	Ponds		Century Ply		Magnum	
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Responsibility	4.212	1.350	3.654	1.555	3.767	1.314
Activity	5.147	0.932	4.581	1.307	4.792	1.322
Aggressiveness	4.452	1.139	3.830	1.358	4.475	1.382
Simplicity	3.856	1.104	3.524	1.365	3.288	1.489
Emotionality	4.904	1.284	3.366	1.432	3.963	1.579

	Philips		Indigo		Dettol	
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Responsibility	4.028	1.504	4.202	1.360	5.141	1.142
Activity	4.838	1.321	5.147	0.932	5.141	1.075
Aggressiveness	4.041	1.304	4.452	1.139	4.087	1.298
Simplicity	3.405	1.322	3.856	1.104	4.000	1.260
Emotionality	4.622	1.769	4.904	1.284	3.202	1.143

	Skybag		Oreo		Reebok	
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Responsibility	3.739	1.092	4.039	1.152	4.016	1.372
Activity	5.013	1.023	5.059	0.979	5.258	1.076
Aggressiveness	3.961	1.178	3.784	1.498	4.398	1.523
Simplicity	3.588	1.256	3.892	1.301	4.000	1.377
Emotionality	2.392	1.324	3.029	1.678	2.500	1.514

	Narendra Modi	
	Mean	Std. Dev.
Responsibility	4.142	1.414
Activity	5.276	1.211
Aggressiveness	4.585	1.557
Simplicity	3.732	1.589
Emotionality	3.171	1.603

Table 2: Mean Values of Brand Personality Dimensions

The two brands, Ponds and Century Ply were supposed to anchor on simplicity brand personality dimension. However, the results showed that respondents related to activity dimension of the brand personality. For brands Magnum and Philips emotionality was supposed to be the anchoring brand personality, but the results showed that respondents identified activity as personality dimension articulated through selfie campaigns. For Philips emotionality, also was identified by the respondents. Brands Indigo and Dettol were supposed to build responsibility dimension of the brand personality, however the results for Indigo showed activity as the dimensions identified by respondents and for Dettol as anticipated responsibility was identified by the respondents. Respondents identified expected activity brand personality dimension for brands Skybag and Oreo. Finally, for aggressive brands Reebok and Narendra Modi, activity dimension was inferred by the respondents.
Overall, the respondents consider selfie campaigns as part of reflecting activity dimension – fun, innovative – of brand personality.

5. Discussion
We explored through primary study whether selfie campaigns are perceived as enhancing personality of the brands advertised. The results show that respondents consider selfie campaigns as reflecting how active the brands are. For most of the brands respondents were unable to relate to personality dimension of the brand from the selfie campaigns except for few brands like Philips, Dettol, Skybag and Oreo.

Digital space has become an important market-space and almost all the organizations are trying to influence online consumer behavior through advertising among other activities. But recent research suggests that these advertisements like selfie phenomenon are treated as standalone and are not influencing consumer decision making (Gallup, 2014). Our findings extend this argument and shows that selfie campaigns are perceived more as brand activities and not as enhancing long term impact of building brand personality. Possibly, companies are interested in increasing consumer engagement as a means to establish relationship (De Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012), self-brand connection and brand usage intent (Hollebeek, Glynn, &Brodie, 2014). Though consumer use selfies for self-expression and image building whether the selfie campaigns by companies will be successful in creating linkage between brand and consumers' self-image is questionable. This linkage is an important motive for emotional experience with the brand (Cheng et al., 2012). There by we extend their work.

Majority of the extant literature on understanding of selfie phenomenon is from individual self-portrayal, we have made an attempt to investigate the influence of selfie campaigns as part of integrated marketing communication. As the usage of online social media like Facebook, Twitter is gaining as a social and psychological phenomenon among young consumers (Nadkarni & Hoffman, 2012; Blachnio et al., 2013) it is important to understand how to leverage this activity of youth to build relationship with brands. Our study though exploratory in nature makes an attempt to fill this gap in literature. As recommended by Zhu and Chan (2015) more confirmatory work is required in this area to understand how social media activities like selfies can be made congruent and aligned with other marketing communication activities of the firm.

The study being explorative has limitations which need to be addressed in future studies using more rigorous methodology. The identification of brand personality and its linkage with emotional response needs to be corroborated to substantiate the benefit of selfie as a campaign and more so for digital communications. Also, the short term and long term impact of selfie campaigns not only among youths but also among other segments of the consumer need to be investigated. A longitudinal investigation of influence of selfie on brand personality will be an appropriate methodology as development of brand personality takes investment in time and effort. Capturing this phenomenon in cross-sectional studies have limitations, hence the results of this study needs to be investigated further.

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Appendix 1: Selfie Campaigns

1. Philips + MTV (couple #StyleTurf)
About the brand: Caring brand that puts people and their needs first; innovation is the lifeblood of the company; and making meaningful impact on people's lives. Hence, this brand reflects better on the type *Sincerity*.
About the campaign: This campaign encourages couples to style each other and upload a self-shot with the hash tag #stylesurf on social networking sites or the MTV India micro site.

Figure 1

2. Dettol: Dettol's #Handfies
About the campaign: For Global Handwashing Day, soap brand Dettol introduced 'handfies' – a picture of your clean hands. For every handfie shared, the brand pledged to teach a child healthy handwashing habits. As part of the campaign, Dettol India ran #Handfie as a promoted hashtag on Twitter along with bringing in celebrities to share their handfies

Figure 2

3. Oreo
About the campaign: Oreo has launched a global campaign, play with Oreo that inspires a world of playful imagination like doodle, ppo, dip. Oreo came up with the #ClickIt campaign where Oreo lovers took innovative pictures with Oreo over their eyes and posted it on the social media. The campaign was started in October 2015. The excitement led to multiple uploads by Oreo fans.

4. Indigo

About the campaign: For an airline brand the easiest thing to do is to run a contest and give away free tickets or excess discount. Indigo did just that but with a lot of simplicity. The competition required participants to use an extremely simple hashtag completely unrelated to the brand and share a selfie which couples anyway do on 14th Feb. Although, the risk that it ran by using this hashtag was that it was a very generic one and could have been hijacked by any other brand to cash in on the contest's popularity. However, a little search of this hashtag on twitter gave the proof that it worked well. Who would not follow a twitter account and post a selfie for return tickets to Goa.

Figure 3

5. Narendra Modi

About the campaign: The political classes have started doing it too. While the Prime Minister is known for taking selfies on various occasions, BJP started with the Selfie with Modi campaign prior to the Delhi Elections to appeal to the youth. Around 2500 'Selfie with Modi booths were set up in the city leading to a huge success of the campaign. Modi recently launched the #selfieiwithdaughter campaign that had gone viral too.

Figure 4

6. Pond's Selfie Ready Campaign

About the campaign: 30 best selfies won a chance to feature on a Pond's billboard across 6 cities, while others won product hampers in the six-week campaign. Whether it influenced the change in attitude.

Figure 5

7. Magnum

About the campaign: Magnum, the premium ice cream brand from HUL got its brand ambassador Kareena Kapoor Khan to urge consumers to get #LostinPleasure through a selfie campaign. The month-long contest asked people to send in their selfies with a Magnum ice cream stick in hand, and a creative reason to why Magnum gets them lost in pleasure. The top 5 most creative and good looking selfies won a chance to meet Kareena and take a selfie with her. These winning selfies with Kareena were featured in the Times city editions too.

Figure 6

8. Reebok

About the campaign: As part of the 'Live with Fire' India campaign by Reebok, the fitness brand invited fans to share their workout selfies, calling it the 'moment of fire' selfies. One had to capture their moment of fire with a selfie and post it on their Facebook profile or Twitter page using #LiveWithFire, the brand's global marketing mantra. Participants could win Reebok tees and have their workout selfies featured on the brand's social media properties.

Figure 7

9. Skybag

About the campaign: Luggage brand Skybags did a twist to the selfie by introducing the concept of a reverse selfie. In a campaign to promote the brand's latest backpack collection for the youth, it designed a new communication mantra – Back is the new front', and launched the reverse selfie contest. Here one had to show off their unique style with their backs facing the camera either with the help of a mirror or getting it clicked by someone. The reverse selfies helped emphasize the new brand mantra of #BackisTheNewFront.

Figure 8

10. Centuryply

About the campaign: Centuryply went on a complete rebranding from durable furnitures to the furnitures in the house one connects with (Khushiyo ka Rangmanch). The consumers were asked to upload selfies with their favourite furniture on the microsite. The campaign was launch in September this year and was open till 8th October.

Figure 9