

TOWARDS A CONCEPTUAL MODEL ON EMPATHY AND BRAND EQUITY

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Abstract - Empathy is different for different people. However, the research explores the affective empathy. In affective empathy customers feels same emotions of others even though they are not may be in the same situation or they are not members of the same group (review, rating). The research explores the impact of affective empathy on brand equity.

Keywords: Empathy, Emotions, Ratings Reviews, Brand Equity

INTRODUCTION

“The truth is that today's customers have become highly dependent on the opinions of others. In many cases, others' words have even outweighed both personal preference and marketing communications. The reason for this is none other than the connectivity itself.”(Marketing 4.0 Philip Kotler). “Empathy is different for different people. However, the research explores the affective empathy and its impact on brand equity. In affective empathy customers feel the same emotions of others even though they are not may be in the same situation or we are not members of the same group (review, rating). Feeling the same emotion towards others even though the customer is not may be in the same situation or the customer is not a member of the same group (review, rating) provides the mirror purchase experience to the customer” (Nagaraju Kolla, 2019). Hoffman's (2000) five mechanisms of empathy are the same idea of mirror purchase experience; mimicry, classical conditioning, direct association, mediated association and role taking.

Mimicry: Customers get the reviews directly from the peers (who purchased the brand recently) and imitate their expressions or situation (Or) Sometime customers directly observe the brand usage behaviour of peers and develop his own feeling for that and try to imitate that feeling. **Classical conditioning:** Customer may observe the features of peers who already owned the brand i.e. he/she gets the clues about the brand and later the customer considers those clues and imitates them.

Direct association: Some time customers observe the direct expression or situation of others and it reminds the customer's own past experience. Then the customer feels the emotion that he felt during the original experience/ imitation. **Mediated association:** Customer may observe the rating or review of others i.e. indirect observation through words and imitates them. **Role taking-**Customer may either imagine themselves in the rating /review (or) imagine how the reviewer is feeling and imitates them.

BRAND EQUITY

Brand equity has taken its roots from MSI workshop. MSI has suggested certain issues for conceptualizing the brand equity. Aaker (1991), Kevin Lane Keller (1993), and others have conceptualized the brand equity from different perspectives. Aaker (1991) conceptualized it from organisational assets perspective and Kevin Lane Keller (1993) conceptualized it from consumer perspective. However, Keller and Lehmann (2002), Aaker, Zeithaml, and Lemon (2004) treated brand equity and brand value as the same construct (Nagaraju Kolla, 2019). Bu Randle D. Raggio and Robert P. Leone award winning paper clearly separated brand equity and brand value. Brand equity is the customer knowledge about the brand. “The added value in the thoughts, words, and actions of consumers” (Michael Burger). Aaker, (1991)- Aaker defines Brand Equity as “a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name & symbol that adds or subtracts from the value provided by a product or service to a firm &/or to that firm's consumers”.

Kevin Lane Keller, (1993):- Kevin Lane Keller defined Consumer Brand Equity as “the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to marketing of the brand”. Kevin Lane Keller (1993) model of consumer based brand equity (CBBE) has changed the brand equity perspective from organization to customers’ minds and Kevin Lane Keller (1993) treated it as a cognitive construal (Heding, Tilde & Knudtzen, Charlotte & Bjerre, Mogens, 2008.) still it is treating as an epitome of equity models. However, so far model have ignored the capacity of consumer to feel emotions for others or simulation of consumers in emotions of other (Affective empathy) (Nagaraju Kolla, 2019). Empathy (Affective empathy) doesn’t require separate neural representations whatever the neural representations are present for semantic memory same neurons are responsible for episodic memory (Empathy/ Affective empathy) (Nagaraju Kolla, 2019). This claim is drawn from mirror neuron (di Pellegrion, Fadiga, Fogassi, Gallese, & Rizzolatti, 1992), perception and action model (Preston and de Waal’s 2002), and empathy theories (Wondra and Ellsworth 2015). Two memory systems are characterized by different learning and unlearning mechanisms;

“Semantic memory works through knowledge and facts, learning is slow.....episodic memory runs through events and experiences, learning is fast” (Ming Hsu p.231)”.

Customer learns faster about the brand through others emotions (ratings, reviews, word of mouth etc.) than the organization promotions. Episodic memories takes time to rewrite hence while addressing the brand promotions organisations must consider how the customer is feeling about others emotions (ratings, reviews, word of mouth etc.) (Empathy /Affective empathy).

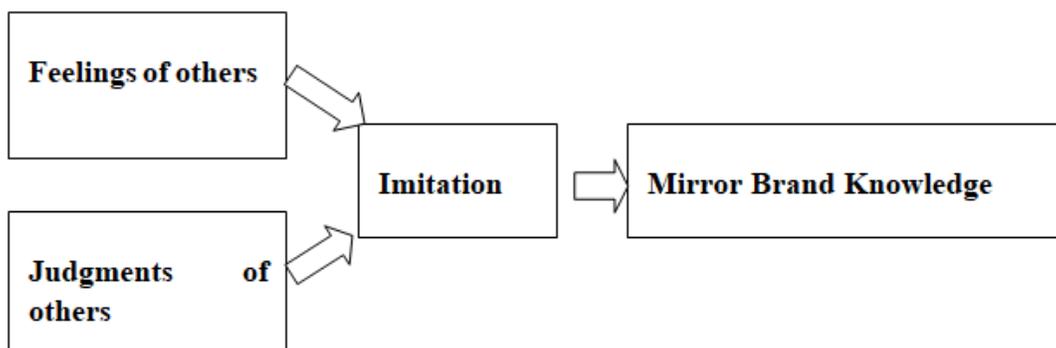
BRAND KNOWLEDGE

Brand is a combination of product and non-product attributes. Attributes translates into benefits in the consumers mind. Eventually, product and non-product attributes and benefits form the brand knowledge. Strength of product and non-product related features and benefits is vital here the promotions play a vital role. Uniqueness of product and non-product related features and benefits differentiates the brand from its competitors. Favorability of product and non-product related features and benefits indicates to what extent brands are close to consumers. Strength, uniqueness and Favorability form the brand memory in consumer mind and Keller treated it as an association of network.

EMPATHY AND BRAND KNOWLEDGE

“Consumers develop both episodic and semantic memories for the brands. Semantic memory is a factual knowledge of the brand. It develops through brand promotions. Episodic memory is autobiographical in nature. Consumers develop the episodic memory through personal experience or through simulation in others emotions” (Nagaraju Kolla, 2019). “Mirror neuron and Virtual mirror neuron made the consumer to depend on other emotions in the purchase of brands”(Nagaraju Kolla, 2019). Hence along with semantic memories and episodic memories are equally important for successful branding.

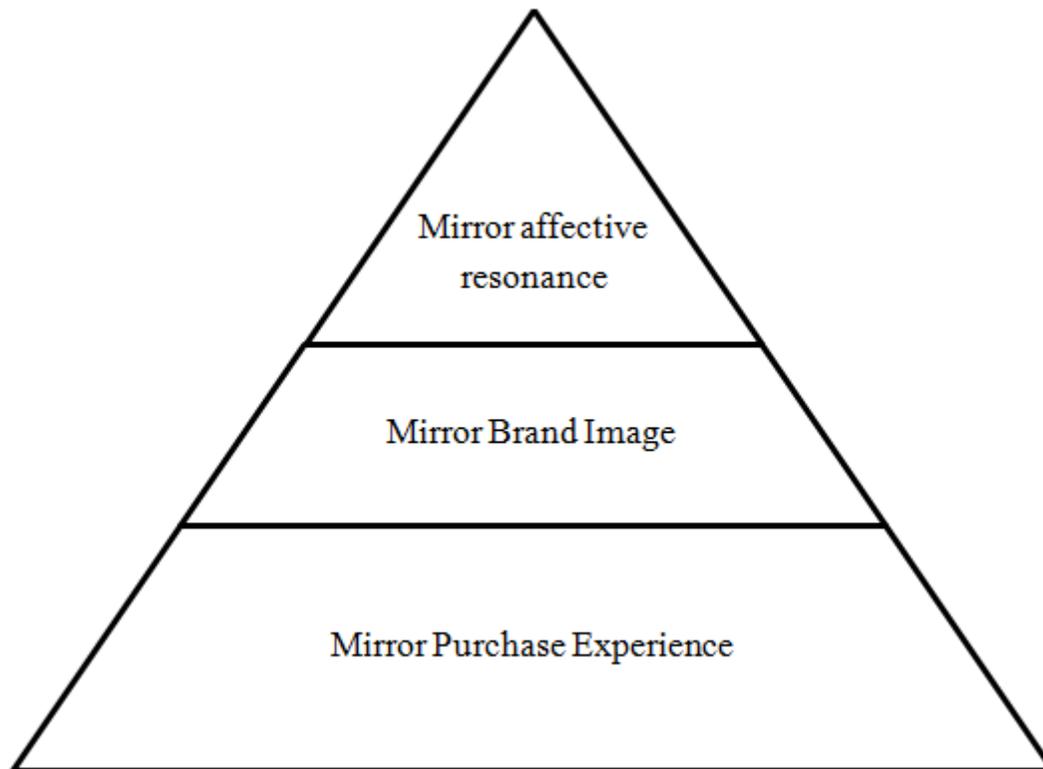
Diagram-1: Mirror Brand Knowledge



Source: Nagaraju Kolla.(2019). Mirror neurons and Branding. Hyderabad, Telangana State: Paramount Publishing House. ISBN: 978-93-8808-66-8

Imitation of others feelings and emotions (Ratings, Reviews, Word of Mouth etc.) develops the mirror brand knowledge in the consumers (Nagaraju Kolla, 2019). “It is a three step process: mirror purchase experience, mirror brand image and mirror affective resonance. Consumers have more credibility towards user generated content (ratings, reviews, word of mouth) than brand generated content. Mirror brand knowledge happens when the consumers simulates in the emotions of others (ratings, reviews word of mouth etc.), however, it is context-dependent” (Nagaraju Kolla, 2019).

Figure-2: Mirror brand Knowledge



Source: Nagaraju Kolla.(2019). Mirror neurons and Branding. Hyderabad, Telangana State: Paramount Publishing House. ISBN: 978-93-8808-66-8

CONCLUSION

Customers simulate in emotions of others (ratings, reviews, word of mouth etc) and decide the purchase of brand. The empathy (affective empathy) indicates the capacity of customer to feel emotions for others and it develops the episodic memory. Empathy (affective empathy) doesn't require separate neural representations and it forms the mirror brand knowledge in the consumers (Nagaraju Kolla, 2019).

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