



Driving factors of brand relationships in China: an exploratory study

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore key factors driving four types of brand relationships, which will explain the reasons why different relationships can form in theory and direct brand managers to build brand relationships in practice.

Design/methodology/approach – A sample of 702 data was collected through four branch scales. The empirical methods of exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were used in turn to extract the key factors driving every kind of brand relationships.

Findings – The conclusion is that the established instrument relationships are driven by three factors which are: sociogroup pressure, condition restriction and saving the existing; the established emotion relationships are driven by four factors which are company reputation, approval of geography, approval of authority and word of mouth; the acquired instrument relationships are driven by three factors which are low price, brand homogeneity and attempt on new products; and the acquired emotion relationships are driven by six factors which are brand meaning, the staffs' service, marketing promotion, product design, product value and brand element.

Research limitations/implications – There were three limitations in this research. First, the limitation of the sample structure decided this research as an exploratory one. Second, this research only adopted a static perspective although a relationship is a dynamic concept. Third, a few items were not drawn up appropriately so that the fitness of a few models was not perfect.

Originality/value – The formation mechanisms of different brand relationships have not been entirely explored in the former literatures. Based on a new sortation theory of four brand relationships in China, this research exploratorily put forward the completed key factors driving every kind of relationships.

Keywords Brands, Brand management, China

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Branding has already been a hot research direction in recent years because it ensures the building and sustaining of a company's competitive advantage. With the impact from the paradigm of relationship marketing, the relationships between consumers and a brand (abbr. brand relationships) have been an academic frontier topic in the research field of branding (Fournier, 1998; Aggarwal, 2004). Before this new concept was put forward, there were several similar concepts, such as brand personality, brand

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loyalty, brand attitude and so on. Comparatively, the former concepts are one-way whereas brand relationships are two-way. The definition of this new concept is that the interaction between consumers' attitude on a brand and a brand's attitude on consumers (Blackston, 1992). Since the research perspective was novel and special, some scholars joined to do researches around brand relationships. According to the general review on the related literatures, four questions had attracted researchers: relationship nature, relationship formation, relationship status, and relationship effect (Zhou, 2007a).

To those brand managers in practice, the most constructive research topic of brand relationships is the key factors driving the formation of brand relationships. The related theoretical findings will directly help them to build brand relationships well. However, because the types of brand relationships have not fully been in consideration before, the existing researches mainly focused on the long term and profound brand relationships such as brand affect or loyalty, thereby neglecting the existence of some temporary business relationships.

Theoretically, a relationship is defined as a conjunction status between objects which are composed of some character or influenced by reciprocity and interaction or both (Chen, 1997). It is obvious that relationships include not only the close and profound connections but also others. In reality, not all the brands shape the ideal relationships of the long-term loyalty or intimate affect with consumers. Under the conditions of information asymmetry or imperfect competition, a lot of weak-strength brands also can obtain a small piece of market share and shape the pure business exchange relationships with consumers.

From the more comprehensive perspective, we should not neglect the formation mechanism of the relationships between these small brands and consumers. All kinds of brands should be in consideration. So, the first task is to sort the whole types of brand relationships, including some pure business exchange relationships neglected by the former researches. Then, the second task is to look for the corresponding key driving factors according to the different nature of every brand relationship. It can be imagined that the driving factors may be different because every type of brand relationship has a distinct characteristic.

Therefore, this paper aims at exploring some key factors driving different kinds of brand relationships. It will be an exploratory study because no hypotheses need to be made. After reviewing the core literatures in this field, the author will choose a proper sortation approach of brand relationships and develop a scale for every relationship type. The development of the driving factors follows several main steps, including item generation, item purification, exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, factor naming, and so on. The data will be collected by a questionnaire survey. The research findings will help to explain the causes to form different brand relationships in theory and direct brand managers from companies with a different strength to design the suitable strategies to build brand relationships in practice.

2. Literature review

2.1 Sortation approaches of brand relationships

In essence, the brand relationships type comes from a basic sortation for different kinds of brand relationships, which can help to clearly understand the nature of different relationships and do more further researches. Four perspectives can be concluded from

the current sortation approaches of brand relationships: the interaction approach, the role approach, the exchange approach and the strength approach (Zhou, 2007a). The interaction approach focuses on what interaction characteristic brand relationships can display. Product category and segment group are two sub-perspectives. Several typical literatures in the sub-perspective of product category include 15 brand relationships of products (Fournier, 1998) and 16 brand relationships of services (Sweeney and Chew, 2002). Some typical literatures in the sub-perspective of segment group include several studies on women (Fournier, 1998; Olsen, 1999), children (Ji, 2002; Robinson, 2005) and gay men (Kates, 2000). The role approach focuses on which relationship roles brand relationships can be built between. Several related research findings include five brand relationships based on five dimensions of brand personality (Aaker, 1997) and different brand relationships in China based on the theories of the interpersonal relationship roles in China (He, 2006). The exchange approach focuses on what exchange basis brand relationships can be built on. A typical research finding is that brand relationships are sorted into exchange relationship and communal relationship (Aggarwal, 2004) based on the social exchange theory. The strength approach focuses on how strong brand relationships are. Several typical research findings include a brand relationships sortation based on the level of loyalty (Fajer and Schouten, 1995), seven dimensions to describe brand relationships strength in the product category (Fournier, 1998) and nine dimensions in the service category (Sweeney and Chew, 2002).

Since the focus of the exchange approach is the formation basis of brand relationships, which accords with this paper's aim of driving factors of brand relationships, it will be the theoretical perspective for classifying brand relationships types in this paper. According to the social exchange theory, relationships can be sorted into exchange relationships and communal ones. Exchange relationships describe a status in which benefits are given to others to get something back, just like commercial relationships between strange buyers and sellers. Communal relationships describe a status in which benefits are given to show concern for other's needs, just like family relationships or friendships (Aggarwal, 2004). However, this kind of sortation approach of relationships is not exactly suitable for this research's aim, because the formation process of brand relationships is not in consideration as a dimension. In fact, the formation process is very important in analysis of brand relationships, which is a dynamic construct. Without the consideration of the formation process, the sortation of brand relationships will be half-baked. An indigenous research on brand relationships type in China revealed more comprehensive types (Zhou, 2007b). In that research, based on the review of some interpersonal relationships theories in China, relationships basis and relationships process were put forward as two dimensions for sortation. The dimension of relationships basis is similar with Aggarwal's theory, on which instrument relationships and emotion ones are based. The instrument relationships are another similar name of the exchange relationships, which mean pure business relationships decided by economic value. The emotion relationships are another similar name of the communal relationships, which mean family relationships or friendships decided by real affect. The dimension of relationships process is original to the current researches, on which established relationships and acquired ones are based. The established relationships mean relationships decided by destiny, whereas the acquired relationships mean relationships decided by continuous communications. Combining these two dimensions, four brand relationships are brought forward, which are the

established instrument relationships, the acquired instrument relationships, the established emotion relationships and the acquired emotion relationships (Table I).

Thereinto, the established instrument relationships are defined as a status that consumers reluctantly purchase or use a brand they do not prefer because of the absence of choices. It seems to be a self-contradiction, but exists actually. For example, Chinese consumers usually do not prefer the brand of a taxi company. They will take the first taxi they have just met regardless of the taxi brand. Other usual examples occur in monopoly industries, such as services of railway or the community antenna television (CATV). If consumers have a better chance, they will abandon the existing brand and transfer to a new one. The acquired instrument relationships are defined as a status that consumers choose a brand not for an emotional preference but for a valuable price or other non-emotion reasons. It is a primary relationships type in China today. Facing with a lure from a sales promotion activity, consumers are likely to break up their relationships with a brand at any moment. The established emotion relationships are defined as a status that consumers choose a brand because they form some emotional bonds with some brand relatives (e.g. country of origin – COO) at first and the emotion is transferred to the brand itself. The brand can receive a favor from consumers just because it has a close connection with those grateful relatives. The acquired emotion relationships are defined as a status that consumers have a good feeling with a strange brand through long term and multiple contacts. Various brand communication tactics (e.g. advertisement) will benefit for forming this relationship type. This sortation approach shows that relationships between a brand and consumers are formed as the instrument or emotion relationships through an established or acquired process. Contrasting with Aggarwal's theory, this theory is more comprehensive and more suitable for this research.

2.2 Driving factors of the established and acquired instrument relationships

The concept of the instrument relationships is an admissible term in the research field of interpersonal relationships in China. However, it is relatively new to researchers of branding. The related literatures are very scarce at present. In nature, the instrument relationships represent a purchasing or using behavior without emotion, therefore the concept is comparatively similar to a trial use (i.e. the first purchasing behavior) or a behavioral loyalty (i.e. the long-term purchasing behavior).

As a phase in the process of innovation diffusion, a trial use indicates a course in which consumers come into being an evaluation of a new product by using it in a small way. In the process of innovation adoption, the attractiveness of a new product or the cost of a trial use is an important factor which decides consumers to attempt to use it.

A behavioral loyalty may represent another type of instrument relationships. Earlier, the researches on brand loyalty focused on consumers' repeated purchasing behavior.

		Relationships process	
		Established	Acquired
Relationships basis	Instrument	The established instrument relationships	The acquired instrument relationships
	Emotion	The established emotion relationships	The acquired emotion relationships

Table I.
Four types of brand relationships

The subsequent scholars pointed out that a behavioral loyalty may be a real loyalty or a false one. Then, the concept of preference was brought into the researches on loyalty. Based on two dimensions of preference and repeated purchase, customer loyalty can be sorted into current loyalty, potential loyalty, blunt loyalty and absence of loyalty (Griffin, 1995). Thereinto, the blunt loyalty shows low preference and high-repeated purchase, which indicates that the source of this loyalty is not customers' love of the brand. Concretely, the false loyalty can be divided into monopoly, inertia, potential, convenience, price and stimulus loyalties (Sindell, 2001).

These factors causing a trial use or false behavioral loyalties explain just the reasons why the established and acquired instrument relationships can come into being. The difference between two relationships is whether consumers have a chance to choose a brand. Respectively, monopoly or convenience results in the established instrument relationships, whereas a low price or stimulus results in the acquired instrument relationships.

2.3 Driving factors of the established emotion relationships

Various brand relatives are sources of the established emotion. Among them, COO, consumer ethnocentrism, corporate reputation, spokesman and word of mouth (WOM) are some hackneyed relatives:

- *COO*. A research in Guatemala found that a prejudice would influence domestic consumers' evaluation on products made in other countries, to which they had formed prejudice for some reasons before (Schooler, 1965). The following scholars launched a lot of empirical studies to testify the validity of this finding from different perspectives. Their research findings came to an agreement that consumers' attitude to a COO would influence their evaluation on foreign-made products, then brand attitude and purchasing behavior (Al-Sulaiti and Baker, 1998).
- *Consumer ethnocentrism*. Consumer ethnocentrism is defined as the beliefs held by consumers about the appropriateness, indeed morality, of purchasing foreign-made products. When consumers face with the choice between home-made products and foreign-made ones, those who are ethnocentric will produce prejudice to foreign-made ones. This theory has continually been testified in cross-cultural backgrounds, covering Germany, France, Japan, South Korea and People's Republic of China, and so on (Wang, 2003; Zhuang *et al.*, 2006). Moreover, the concept of hostility attitude was used to explain the hostility to Japanese products from consumers in Nanjing, People's Republic of China (Netemeyer *et al.*, 1991). These research findings prove that the emotion to nationality will affect the formation process of some consumers' relationships with particular products and brands.
- *Company reputation*. Consumers are prone to trusting and identifying with the advertising information provided by companies with good reputation, which will improve the current attitude to their brands (Goldberg and Hartwick, 1990). The association of company brand can provide a credibility for its product brands. A research finding indicated that company reputation, company credibility, company familiarity and corporate social responsibility activities would positively influence consumers' identification with company, respectively, which would significantly affect their evaluations on the product and behavioral

responses in turn (Jin, 2006). Another research found that consumers' association of company competence positively influenced the perceived quality of a product, which positively influenced brand resonances or relationships in succession. Thus, it is clear that even if consumers are not familiar with the product brand, they can produce positive evaluations on the product quality based on their identification with the company brand and good feeling to the company brand.

- *Spokesman*. In general, there are several types of spokesmen, such as celebrity, specialist, chief executive officer (CEO) and typical consumers. Spokesman played important roles in some respects: first, it can increase consumers' recall of brand information; second, it can strengthen consumers' recognition of brand name and improve their attitude to the low-involved products; third, it can increase consumers' trust on advertising and produce positive attitude to brand finally (Kamins, 1989). Therefore, a successful brand spokesman directly or indirectly influenced consumers' preference for a brand (Bower and Landreth, 2001), which promoted brand relationships.
- *WOM*. Even if consumers are not familiar with a brand, their attitude and behavior to the brand can be positively influenced by the WOM. A research pointed out that if a brand had a positive WOM in public, consumers would produce a positive attitude to the brand whether or not they were familiar with it. Moreover, a good WOM would be particularly important to the brand which consumers did not know. Conversely, a negative WOM would adversely affect consumers' attitude and purchasing behavior in a certain extent. Especially, when consumers had a relatively limited knowledge on the brand, negative effect would be more obvious than positive one (Sundaram and Webster, 1999).

2.4 Driving factors of the acquired emotion relationships

According to the conclusion of existing literatures, there are mainly four factors driving the acquired emotion relationships: self-congruity, brand personality, consumption situations and brand experience:

- (1) *Self-congruity*. The relationships between consumers and a brand are derived from the congruity between them and brand imagery, which will help them to define their self-concepts (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). Especially, the connections between different self-concepts and a brand are distinct (Escalas and Bettman, 2003).
- (2) *Brand personality*. The interaction of personalities between consumers and a brand will cause different types of brand relationships. Different brand personality dimensions will produce different effects on brand relationship strength. For example, relationships with sincere brands deepen over time in line with friendship templates, whereas relationships with exciting brands evince a trajectory characteristic of short-lived flings (Aaker *et al.*, 2004).
- (3) *Consumption situations*. Consumption situations can be sorted into five kinds: physical environment, social environment, time, task and pre-purchasing status. Several researches indicated that different physical environments in consumption situations, such as personalized web sites and customer communities (Thorbjornsen, 2002), short message services and multimedia

message services (Herbjorn *et al.*, 2005) and music in shops, engendered different impacts on brand relationships.

- (4) *Brand experience*. Brand experience is defined as the unforgettable memory consumers achieve from their participation in a brand's activity. It becomes an increasingly valuable concept because of the emergence of the experiential economy. However, the researches on brand relationships from the experiential perspective are very limited. Brand experience can be classified into two kinds: individual experience and shared one. An empirical study revealed that both experiences would affect brand association, brand personality, brand attitude and brand imagery, which were the mediating variables to brand relationships (Chang and Chieng, 2006).

Above all, the limitation of the current researches is that no one research had paid attention to driving factors of different brand relationships. Concretely, first, current researches mostly focused on only one kind of brand relationships. For example, the emotion relationships and the acquired relationships were hot research directions currently, whereas the established relationships and the instrument relationships had not received enough attention. The absence of the related theories resulted in some difficulties in explaining the real commercial world. Second, most current researches only focused on one or few factors influencing brand relationships. It caused deformity in theory and blindness in practice. For instance, when a brand manager wanted to build brand relationships, he or she mostly stood a good chance to neglect some useful tactical tools. So, based on the existing related researches, this research will explore more comprehensive factors driving every kind of brand relationships.

3. Data collection

3.1 Item development

This paper aims at exploring the driving factors of all types of brand relationships. According to the research content, the empirical method of factor analysis will be adopted, among which a scale development is a key step. Zhou (2007b) had put forward a scale to measure different types of brand relationships in China. However, the scale only considered the driving factors of every type of brand relationships as a unidimensional variable but not a multidimensional one, which neglected some important different factors. So we can only refer this scale but not use it as the same. From the meaning of the established instrument relationships, the established emotion relationships, the acquired instrument relationships and the acquired emotion relationships, we designed four questions accordingly:

- (1) What made you have to buy or use a certain brand even if you disliked it?
- (2) What made you like a certain brand a bit even if you have never used it?
- (3) What made you choose a certain brand even if you did not have any special feeling about it?
- (4) What made you like a certain brand when you touched it?

Around these four questions, we developed 40 items in all based on the above-literature review and our own experience and understanding. Then, we discussed on these items and four questions together with more than 50 undergraduates of Marketing and got six

items in addition. After that, we sent 46 items to ten undergraduates, six postgraduates and two doctors of marketing through e-mail and got 94 supplementary items at last. Choosing undergraduates, postgraduates and doctors majoring in Marketing as interviewees to develop items made us get more professional opinions and more comprehensive items. Through the deletion and merge among 140 items, 59 items in all were finally achieved. These items were sorted into four sub-scales, among which there were 12 items in the established instrument relationships scale, 15 items in the established emotion relationships scale, nine items in the acquired instrument relationships scale and 23 items in the acquired emotion relationships scale. All the items were measured through a five-point Likert-type scale.

3.2 Sample selection

With the consideration of convenience and economical efficiency in the research, the stratified convenience sampling was employed. That is to say that the sample involves full-time undergraduates, postgraduates and in-service junior college students to improve the representative of the sample structure. Thereinto, the in-service students all signed on job. In fact, in order to explore and verify a certain theoretical model under a low budget, some scholars in marketing often took undergraduates and MBA students as sample. A total of 735 questionnaires were sent to different levels and classes in a university in south of China. Finally, 719 questionnaires were returned, among which 702 is valid. Namely, the valid return ratio is 95.5 percent. These 702 data were divided into two groups for exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in turn. The first group includes 400 data and the second includes 302 ones (Table II). These 400 data are more representative to guarantee the higher data quality for EFA, because exploring the driving factors of all relationships is a key step in this research. And, if the structural relationship of factors is stable, the 302 less representative data can be used in CFA with an acceptable fitting. According to Nunnally's suggestion, it is better that the sample size is ten times larger than the items size of a scale. The 400 data in the first group can be acceptable, because they are larger than ten times of 23, the biggest item size among four sub-scales. The appropriate data will guarantee the quality of data analysis.

4. Data analysis

4.1 EFA and item purification

First, we, respectively, did exploratory factor analyses of four sub-scales through SPSS 13.0. The loadings of some items are lower and some items bestride two factors, which mean that they need to be purified. The criteria of item purification are:

- (1) The item should be deleted if its item-total correlation is less than 0.4 and after being deleted Cronbach's alpha will increase.
- (2) The item should be deleted if its rotated factor loading is less than 0.5 or two factors loadings are larger than 0.5 at the same time.

According to the above criteria, eight items were deleted from 59 initial items and the left 51 items composed of four formal sub-scales. The data after EFA in four sub-scales show that four Kaiser Meyer Olkin values are all over 0.7 (0.725, 0.754, 0.785 and 0.855, respectively) and Bartlett's sphere test significant levels are all less than 0.05, which mean that these data are fit for factor analysis. Through the analysis approach of

Demographic indicators	The characteristic description of 400 data		The characteristic description of 302 data	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
<i>Gender</i>				
Male	188	47.0	45	14.6
Female	210	52.5	257	83.1
The unfilled	2	0.5	7	2.3
<i>Age</i>				
Less than 20-years old	30	7.5	13	4.2
21-23-years old	175	43.8	179	57.9
24-26-years old	125	31.3	70	22.7
27-29-years old	49	12.3	23	7.4
More than 30-years old	19	4.8	17	5.5
The unfilled	2	0.5	7	2.3
<i>Occupation</i>				
Full-time students	237	59.3	191	61.8
In-service students	160	40.0	111	35.9
The unfilled	3	0.7	7	2.3
<i>Education</i>				
Junior college students	117	29.3	84	27.2
Undergraduates	211	52.8	188	60.8
Postgraduates	68	17.0	30	9.9
The unfilled	4	1.0	7	2.3
<i>Total</i>				
Valid sample size in all	400		302	

Table II.
The structural description of two groups of valid samples

Note: A few of demographic data are not filled completely, but their item data are filled, so they can be put into analysis

varimax, the items of the established instrument, the established emotion, the acquired instrument and the acquired emotion relationships are converged into three, four, three and six factors, respectively. From the eigenvalue of every scale and the tendency of scree plots, the numbers of these chosen factors are reasonable. Having past item purification, so the loadings of the items under the related factors are all larger than 0.5. It means that the effect of factor analysis is good (Tables III-VI). The cumulative extraction sums of squared loadings are 62.926, 61.747, 78.687 and 71.325 percent, respectively. It shows that the extracted factors can cover all the items of sub-scales to a great degree.

4.2 Confirmatory factor analysis

According to the result of the above EFA, we used CFA to testify the structure stability of every sub-scale through LISREL 8.51. In order to guarantee the quality of factor analysis, the 302 data in the second group (Table II) were used. The items are regarded as the observable variables (χ) and the factors as the latent ones (ξ). The attributive relationships between two types of variables can be seen in Tables III-VI, which can construct four path models. If a *t*-value is larger than 1.96 (namely $p < 0.01$), the path relationship will be considered as obvious. According to this criterion, the result of EFA shows that there are significant relationships between all the factors and their items (Table VII).

Code	Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
	I bought or used a brand even if I did not like it, because . . .			
χ_1	my relatives or friends with company all chose it, I had to buy it to prove my gregariousness	0.847		
χ_2	the relatives or friends around me were all using it, I had to buy it to prove my gregariousness	0.904		
χ_3	my relatives or friends with company all praised it, I had to buy them to prove my gregariousness	0.813		
χ_4	the market was monopolized by this brand		0.640	
χ_5	the hard regulation forced me to buy this brand		0.720	
χ_6	I were in dire need of this kind of products, but the brand which I loved was out of stock		0.687	
χ_7	I were in a rush, I could not spend much time to search for more appropriate brands		0.616	
χ_8	it would be a pity if I bought it whereas I did not use it			0.737
χ_9	it would be a pity if someone gave it to me whereas I did not use it			0.888
χ_{10}	it would be a pity if a shop presented it to me as a free gift whereas I did not use it			0.799

Table III.
The EFA result of the established instrument relationships

Code	Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
	I liked a certain brand a bit before I bought it, because . . .				
χ_1	other products from the company were sold well before	0.719			
χ_2	the company was very powerful	0.738			
χ_3	the company had a long history	0.749			
χ_4	the company had a good commonweal imagery	0.692			
χ_5	it came from my hometown		0.754		
χ_6	it was a domestic brand		0.763		
χ_7	it was made in the country or city which I love		0.723		
χ_8	it was recommended by the star whom I love			0.532	
χ_9	it was recommended by the authorities			0.856	
χ_{10}	the authoritative institution recommended it			0.835	
χ_{11}	it was granted some awards or titles once			0.578	
χ_{12}	my relatives and friends recommended it to me				0.836
χ_{13}	many internet friends recommended it				0.664

Table IV.
The EFA result of the established emotion relationships

The quality of these models can be evaluated by the fit indices. The criteria to judge the fitting degree of a model are:

- χ^2/df should be between 2.0 and 5.0;
- root mean squared error should be lower than 0.08; and
- comparative fit index (CFI) and non-normed fit index (NNFI) should be over 0.9.

Table V.
The EFA result of the
acquired instrument
relationships

Code	Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
	Sometimes I chose the brand which I did not like, because ...			
χ_1	it was cheap	0.804		
χ_2	its cost of use was not high	0.890		
χ_3	its cost of maintenance was not high	0.847		
χ_4	the total cost was not high	0.853		
χ_5	I wanted to change my previous taste into new brands		0.868	
χ_6	I wanted to try its new products		0.900	
χ_7	this kind of products had a low value to me, I need not spend much time to choose the brand carefully			0.879
χ_8	this kind of products had no many differences to me, I could use either brand			0.859

Table VI.
The EFA result of the
acquired emotion
relationships

Code	Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6
	I loved a certain brand when I touched it, because ...						
χ_1	it was high grade	0.761					
χ_2	it was much tasteful	0.811					
χ_3	it had a distinct personality	0.836					
χ_4	it was meaningful	0.750					
χ_5	the staff could provide high quality services		0.710				
χ_6	the staff were very professional		0.799				
χ_7	it always stood on the customers' side		0.819				
χ_8	it fulfilled the promises to customers		0.726				
χ_9	it often created new products			0.672			
χ_{10}	its advertisement was good			0.806			
χ_{11}	it often held some interesting promotion activities			0.782			
χ_{12}	its often held some meaningful commonweal activities			0.638			
χ_{13}	its product package was pretty				0.745		
χ_{14}	its product design was pretty				0.810		
χ_{15}	its product quality was good					0.756	
χ_{16}	its workmanship was exquisite					0.547	
χ_{17}	its cost performance was high					0.754	
χ_{18}	its price was fair					0.678	
χ_{19}	its brand logo was attractive						0.859
χ_{20}	its brand name was attractive						0.754

As for goodness-of-fit index (GFI) and adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI), Bagozzi and Yi said that the fitting degree of a model can be acceptable once they are bigger than 0.8. All the fit indices of four models are listed in Table VIII. Except the quality of several fit indices (including the NNFI of the established emotion relationships' scale

Path relationship	Path coefficient	t-value
<i>The sub-scale of the established instrument relationships</i>		
$\xi_1-\chi_1$	0.73	15.56
$\xi_1-\chi_2$	0.69	16.13
$\xi_1-\chi_3$	0.61	11.07
$\xi_2-\chi_4$	0.65	7.69
$\xi_2-\chi_5$	0.63	7.48
$\xi_2-\chi_6$	0.65	8.95
$\xi_2-\chi_7$	0.78	10.15
$\xi_3-\chi_8$	0.74	10.18
$\xi_3-\chi_9$	0.98	14.12
$\xi_3-\chi_{10}$	0.73	10.74
<i>The sub-scale of the established emotion relationships</i>		
$\xi_1-\chi_1$	0.31	6.97
$\xi_1-\chi_2$	0.72	13.39
$\xi_1-\chi_3$	0.76	14.92
$\xi_1-\chi_4$	0.56	11.29
$\xi_2-\chi_5$	0.72	11.68
$\xi_2-\chi_6$	0.74	13.38
$\xi_2-\chi_7$	0.61	10.22
$\xi_3-\chi_8$	0.60	9.36
$\xi_3-\chi_9$	0.89	16.58
$\xi_3-\chi_{10}$	0.85	16.19
$\xi_3-\chi_{11}$	0.54	9.97
$\xi_4-\chi_{12}$	0.47	8.18
$\xi_4-\chi_{13}$	0.63	8.53
<i>The sub-scale of the acquired instrument relationships</i>		
$\xi_1-\chi_1$	0.86	21.66
$\xi_1-\chi_2$	0.92	29.05
$\xi_1-\chi_3$	0.85	25.20
$\xi_1-\chi_4$	0.84	24.53
$\xi_2-\chi_5$	0.96	15.43
$\xi_2-\chi_6$	0.64	12.78
$\xi_3-\chi_7$	0.87	18.21
$\xi_3-\chi_8$	0.89	18.87
<i>The sub-scale of the acquired emotion relationships</i>		
$\xi_1-\chi_1$	0.64	13.55
$\xi_1-\chi_2$	0.76	17.02
$\xi_1-\chi_3$	0.71	15.36
$\xi_1-\chi_4$	0.64	14.06
$\xi_2-\chi_5$	0.74	16.46
$\xi_2-\chi_6$	0.81	18.00
$\xi_2-\chi_7$	0.60	14.45
$\xi_2-\chi_8$	0.48	10.48
$\xi_3-\chi_9$	0.54	10.93
$\xi_3-\chi_{10}$	0.78	15.27
$\xi_3-\chi_{11}$	0.79	16.43
$\xi_3-\chi_{12}$	0.57	11.03
$\xi_4-\chi_{13}$	0.78	15.19

(continued)

Table VII.
Path relationships and path coefficients

Table VII.

Path relationship	Path coefficient	t-value
$\xi_4\text{-}\chi_{14}$	0.70	14.65
$\xi_5\text{-}\chi_{15}$	0.35	10.48
$\xi_5\text{-}\chi_{16}$	0.51	12.50
$\xi_5\text{-}\chi_{17}$	0.35	6.88
$\xi_5\text{-}\chi_{18}$	0.29	6.57
$\xi_6\text{-}\chi_{19}$	0.83	15.11
$\xi_6\text{-}\chi_{20}$	0.80	14.52

Table VIII.
The fit indices of four models of brand type

Relationship type	Model description	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	CFI	NNFI
The established instrument	Three factors	70.25	32	2.195	0.063	0.96	0.92	0.95	0.93
The established emotion	Four factors	171.94	59	2.914	0.064	0.92	0.88	0.90	0.87
The acquired instrument	Three factors	37.71	17	2.218	0.033	0.97	0.94	0.98	0.96
The acquired emotion	Six factors	535.50	155	3.455	0.090	0.85	0.80	0.86	0.83

and the CFI and NNFI of the acquired emotion relationships' scale) is unfavorable (while in the scope of acceptability at least), other sub-scales' fit indices are very ideal. It shows that the sub-scales' data are fitting with the factor models, that is to say the factors are extracted from sub-scales feasibly.

4.3 Factor naming and explanation

According to the attributive relationships between the items and those factors, and the meanings of the items which are converged into one factor, these factors are named as follows.

In the established instrument relationships (Table III), the items under Factor 1 mean that customers bought the disliked brands under the sociogroup pressure, so the factor is called as "sociogroup pressure"; the items under Factor 2 mean that customers bought the disliked brands under the restrictions of objective conditions, so the factor is called as "condition restriction"; the items under Factor 3 mean that customers used the disliked brands out of saving because they had owned them, so the factor is called as "saving the existing".

In the established emotion relationships (Table IV), the items under Factor 1 mean that some elements such as company strength, company imagery and company history increased attraction to customers, so the factor is called as "company reputation"; the items under Factor 2 mean that the geographical position which was related to the company or the brand increased attraction to the customers, so the factor is called as "approval of geography"; the items under Factor 3 mean that the recommendation from the authorities or institutions increased attraction to customers, so the factor is called as "approval of authority"; the items under Factor 4 mean that the recommendation from the internet friends increased the attraction to customers, so the factor is called as "WOM".

In the acquired instrument relationships (Table V), the items under Factor 1 mean that customers might choose a disliked brand out of its low cost and price, so the factor is called as “low price”; the items under Factor 2 mean that customers might choose a disliked brand only for its new product, so the factor is called as “attempt on new products”; the items under Factor 3 mean that customers might choose a disliked brand for the tiny differences or the similar value of the product, so the factor is called as “brand homogeneity”.

In the acquired emotion relationships (Table VI), the items under Factor 1 mean that the meaning of a brand attracted customers, so the factor is called as “brand meaning”; the items under Factor 2 mean that the service quality from staffs attracted the customers, so the factor is called as “the staffs’ service”; the items under Factor 3 mean that the marketing promotion activities attracted customers, so the factor is called as “marketing promotion”; the items under Factor 4 mean that the characteristic of a product appearance attracted customers, so the factor is called as “product design”; the items under Factor 5 mean that the product’s cost performance attracted customers, so the factor is called as “product value”; the items under Factor 6 mean that the identity elements of a brand attracted customers, so the factor is called as “brand element”.

4.4 Reliability and validity test

Cronbach’s alpha should be at least larger than 0.5, and when it is bigger than 0.7, the reliability is regarded as high. Here, the reliability analysis was done by 400 sample data which had been used in EFA. From the analysis result, except the Cronbach’s alphas of several factors such as condition restriction, geographical approval and WOM are relatively low, others are larger than 0.7 whether total factor or branch factors. It shows that the data present a rather good inner consistency and have a high reliability.

During the process of drawing up sub-scales, the opinions from two doctors of Marketing and several postgraduates majoring in Business Administration were referred, which ensure the sub-scales good content validities. From the above-quantitative analysis of EFA, the factor loadings of 51 items are all larger than 0.5 (Tables III-VI), which shows that the convergent validities and discriminant validities are relatively high. According to the fit indices (Table VIII) of another 302 sample data, the fitting degree of the models is relatively high. It shows that the attributive relationships between items and factors are clear, that is to say the construct validities are high.

5. Conclusion, implications and limitations

The current researches on driving factors of brand relationships were not thought to be comprehensive and systematic. This research aimed to bridge the gap. On the basis of four types of brand relationships, we took the empirical methods of EFA and CFA to explore and check the driving factors of each relationship. The result shows: the established instrument relationships are driven by sociogroup pressure, condition restriction or saving the existing; the established emotion relationships are driven by company reputation, approval of geography, approval of authority or WOM; the acquired instrument relationships are driven by low price, brand homogeneity or attempt on new products; the acquired emotion relationships are driven by brand meaning, the staffs’ service, marketing promotion, product design, product value or brand element.

The results have some important managerial implications in the following respects:

- (1) They benefit brand managers to realize the sources of different brand relationships. These factors will help to explain the reasons why customers buy or use a certain brand. Therefore, several steps should be taken as follows. The first step is to calculate the average score of all items in every sub-scale with a certain sample; second step is to determine which type of brand relationships it is according to the level of the average score; third step is to judge the reasons which result in the relationships according to the factor score in the sub-scale of the brand relationships. Taking the established instrument relationships as an example, if its average score is highest among all relationships, we can say that customers purchase or use the brand with the absence of adequate options. This kind of relationship is relatively unstable. Once customers have a better choice, they may leave the brand at any time. According to the findings of this research, the same established instrument relationships may be caused by different reasons, including the pressure coming from their relatives or friends, the urgent needs or restrictions and saving the existing. The most proper explanation on the reason causing the relationship is decided by the level of the factor score. These specific explanations about the formation mechanism of brand relationships will help the brand managers learn the different sources of relationships and lay the foundation for the future design of marketing strategy.
- (2) They benefit brand managers to position a type of brand relationships and design a marketing strategy. Based on different resources of the company, brand managers can choose a different brand relationships pattern for positioning. For instance, when a brand's advantage is very limited, brand managers can increase the established emotion between customers and the brand through creating some relatives for the brand. For example, Yun Feng alcohol company made its new product brands named as "Xiao Hu Tu Shen", "Xiao Hu Tu Xian" and "Xiao Jiu Xian", etc. which rapidly got a positive influence from "Mao Tai", a worldwide well-known Chinese alcohol brand, because it indicated "Mao Tai Town's vintage wine for ages" on the product packages. After positioning, we need to take measures to embody it. For instance, in order to build the established instrument relationships, managers can:
 - Emphasize the important sociality significance of gregarious behavior to customers in advertising.
 - Hold up at the distribution terminals or try to be the industrial standard (e.g. the contest of the documents standard between Kingsoft and Microsoft) in order to make customers absent of enough brand options.
 - Give customers a probation to make them know products rapidly without costs. In order to build the established emotion relationships, managers can:
 - try their best to establish a company brand, such as developing a cause-related marketing activity in the name of the company;
 - enroll the brand in the place of origin of this product;
 - get many recommendations from authority institutions or people or get many industrial awards and attestations; and

- implement the WOM marketing tactics and encourage more customers to recommend the brand to their relatives or friends.

In order to build the acquired instrument relationships, managers can:

- adopt the low-cost strategy and the cost-retroversion method;
- increase the products' differences for more probability to be chosen; and
- update the brand on occasion (e.g. new logo, new product, new service, new package, new advertisement, and new concept) to bring new ideas to customers.

In order to build the acquired emotion relationships, managers can:

- enrich the connotation of the brand through the integrated marketing communication (IMC);
- improve the internal marketing to enhance the staffs' service attitude and level;
- pay attention to customers' interest and participation when designing the marketing activities;
- follow the fashion trend and increase the investment and test in the new product design;
- highlight the perceived quality of the brand while controlling its low cost; and
- design brand elements according to customers' aesthetic demands and consistently exhibit them through the IMC.

All the tactics designed above come from the driving factors of brand relationships which are all brought forward by this research.

This research had the following limitations. First, the choice of the sample was limited. As an exploratory research, all the data came from full-time undergraduates and postgraduates and the part-time students in the same university, most of whom were young girls. The concentrated structure of the sample made the results limited, which need a further test with a more extensive sample. Second, the perspective of the research was static. The relationships between customers and a brand will accordingly change with the degree of interaction. Rather than analyzing the dynamic relationships between brand relationships, the purpose of this research was just to explore the factors influencing brand relationships. As a result, the issues about dynamic relationships were not involved. Third, a few items might have a problem with the expression of the statement, which resulted in a few exceptional reasonable items purified from the initial items. Besides, the fitting quality of a few models was not perfect, so the expression needs to be adjusted in order to check again.

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