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ADOPTING DISSONANCE-SOLVING APPROACH TO INVESTIGATE LUXURY SOCIAL MEDIA DVERTISING: ROLE OF GAPS IN SELF, PROJECTIVE SELF, INFLUENCER AND BRAND IMAGE

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

1. INTRODUCTION

The massive usage of social media and soaring power of online influencers have created huge challenge to marketing, psychology, and other technological disciplines to adopt a synthetic framework to understand why consumers are (or aren't) engaged with online communication and subsequent behaviours. The luxury fashion marketing, in particular, needs to address this challenge as the mismatch of the luxury brand, brand ambassador and consumer self-construal has led to fatal negligence. Though it is documented that consumer cognitive processes have impacted their luxury brand buying, the underlying mechanisms of how the discrepancies of brand, endorser, and their self-identity collectively determine the consequent engagement and actions remain unclear before being put into practice. This research adopts a map-mapping approach which is derived from the self-construal theory, to highlight six critical "gaps" with relevant to strategic marketing, brand management, communication, self-construal, demonstration, virtual agent pilgrimage, and social recognition.

In explaining the created luxury fashion's mind picture, this paper extended the self-construal concept into self- and enhanced self- concept and linked with the brand and online influencer characteristics to explain how the social media posts create expected engagement outcomes and buying opportunity. After being primed with self-construal after the perceived brand image via a 28-item semantic differential scale, this paper adopted three types of online influencer (i.e., forum expert opinion leader, celebrity and cewebrity) as fashion brand endorser, and mapped the self-construal of influencer and projective self via the same set of items among 160 Chinese social media users. The findings showed, firstly, the 28 items can be scaled down to seven major dimensions to outline the major meanings of observatory subjects; Secondly, the existence of self, projective self, brand and online influencer images can map six gaps respectively addressing some important marketing issues of interest and suggest a diagnostic implication of fashion brand positioning; Thirdly, interacted with the cognitive importance of dissonance of each gap, the priming gaps of dissonance were tested of their impacts on consumer buying intention via a hierarchical regression. The results advanced the self-construal theory and its's application in fashion marketing and casted a deeper light on brand identity and digital marketing communication theories.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This paper assembled 160 samples from Chinese social media platforms via a convenient sampling approach. An online experiment was applied with a random assignment of one of four fashion product category (cosmetics, apparel, handbag, and digital accessories) with one of three online influencers (expert-typed, fan-endorsed, and status recognised) as brand

endorser in the allocated scenario. To measure the perceived characteristics of personal, brand, and influencer identity, 28 semantic differential scale items raised and verified are used (Table 1). To collect bias-free scores, participants are given a diagnostic pre-test of their self-identity via the scale before being showed the brand information. After a disguised session, the fashion product information with brand image is presented following by the measure of perceived brand characteristics and projective self-image on the brand via the same scale. Following another inserted disguised session, the assigned online influencer's information with a social media post picture of the brand was introduced to study in prior to measuring respondents' evaluation of brand endorser.

3. FINDINGS AND DISUCSSIONS

3.1 Extraction of Dimensions of Self, Brand, Influencer Characteristics

Through exploratory studies in prior the experiment, interviewees contributed 28 different meanings they expected be understood via a fashion product. Authors adopted the semantic differential scale to measure through these items (shown in Table 1) consumer's self-identity (62.343% variance explained), projective identity on the brand (66.714% variance explained), brand identity (68.645% variance explained) and influencer identity (63.070% variance explained). The factor analysis generates seven dimensions of meaning for all the measuring subjects, respectively as cognition, affection, heterogeneity, reference, aesthetics, complexity, and generalisability.

Table 1 Factor Analysis of Characteristic Depiction of Brand, Self, and Influencer

Dimension			Factor Loading						
			D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6	D7
Semantic Differential Scale			Cognition	Affection	Heterogeneity	Reference	Aesthetics	Complexity	Generalisability
Score	Low	High							
Cognition	Unrestrained	Reality-bound	0.648						
	Absorbing	Radiating	0.547						
	Accommodative	Captious	0.833						
	Conservative	Liberal	0.689						
	Submissive	Rebellious	0.824						
	Blunt	Acute	0.864						
	Soothing	Agitated	0.848						
	Simple	Sophisticated	0.665						
	Harmonious	Contradictive	0.816						
	Nonsensical	Serious	0.573						
Affection	Rigid	Indefinite		0.702					
	Angry	Joyful		0.734					
	Criticizing	Praising		0.440					
	Boring	Interesting		0.688					
	Sad	Rejoiceful		0.651					
Heterogeneity	Intimate	Alienated			0.656				
	Familiar	Unacquainted			0.825				
	Fit Majority	Fit minority			0.720				
	Unrefined	Exquisite			0.559				
	Close	Distal			0.609				

Reference	Dependent	Independent				0.669			
	Austere	Luxury				0.680			
	Mundane	Noble				0.795			
Aesthetics	Rigorous	Artistic					0.792		
	Nostalgic	Trendy					0.585		
Complexity	Concise	Complicate						0.794	
	Low profiled	Publicized						0.550	
Generalisability	Special	Universal							0.799

After being tested by both cross-dimension discriminant validity test and intra-dimension convergent validity test to be well-constructed, the scale generated a bunch of measures to map a 3D surface chart (Figure 1). Provided with the treatment, respondents reported their scores in the actual self, brand image, projective self, and influencer image, and these scores are scaled down to the seven dimensions of distinct meaning.

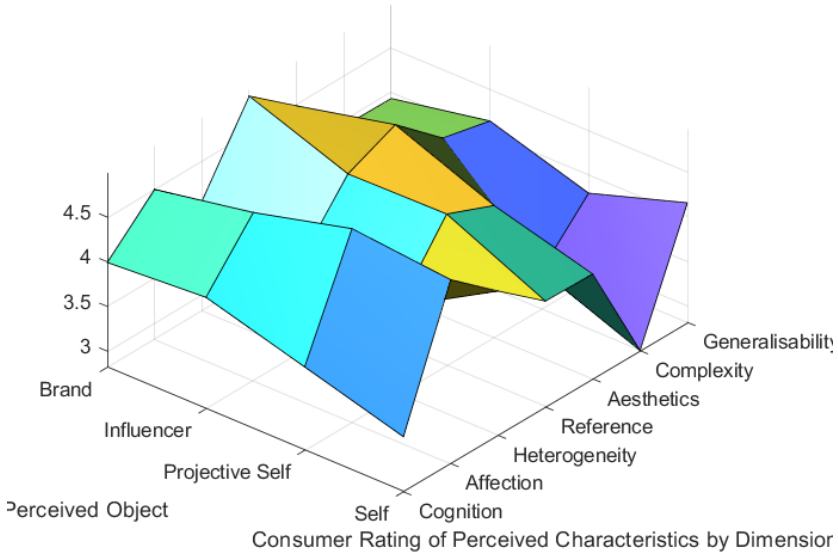


Figure 1 3D Surface Chart

Furthermore, based on the above components, this paper adopts a dissonance -solving approach to develop the theory (Figure 1 Pyramid Model) and interpret the outcomes. To select the outcome, among various consequences research have casted light on, the R.E.A.N. framework of social media engagement (i.e., content reach → engagement → action → nurture) and preferable marketing outcome (customer buying intention) are synthesized in an integrated framework for testing.

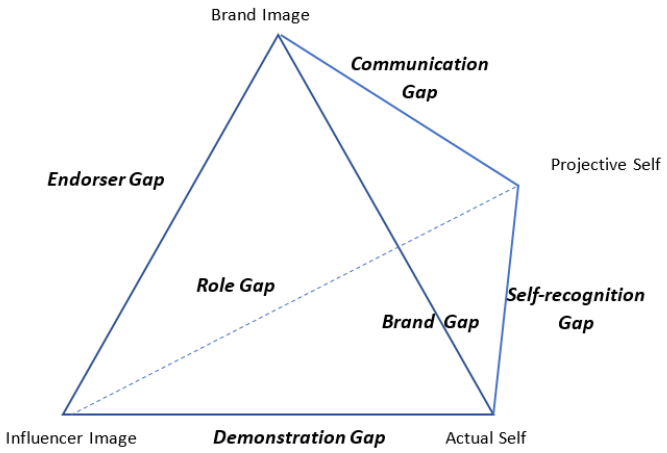
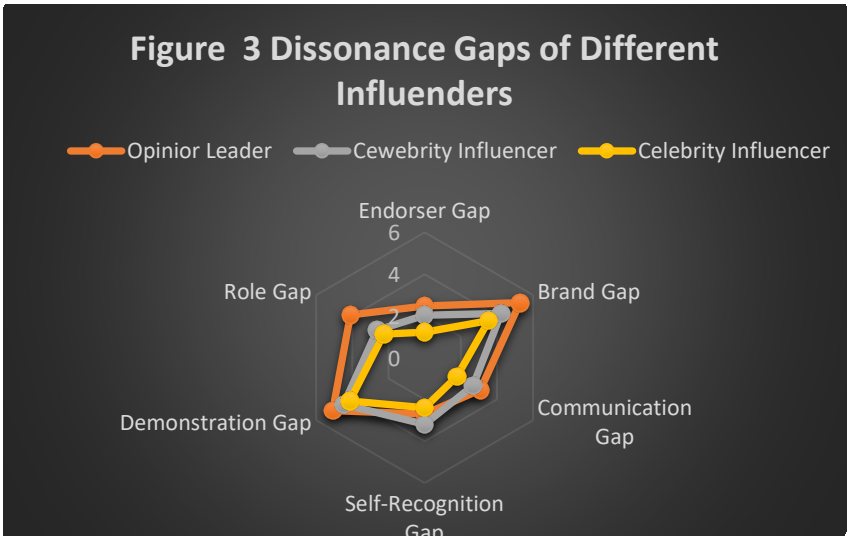


Figure 2 Pyramid Model

3.2 Type of Influencer and its Impact

The overall dissonance gaps of all influencer types are mapped with averages in Figure 3. It shows that generally the celebrity has the smallest dissonance level in all the six areas in contrast with opinion leader (the biggest) and cewebrity (the medium).



It's also found that influencer type has a significant impact on the formation of consumer brand gap (F=2.940, sig. 0.045) while the opinion leader as endorser has a smallest brand-consumer dissonance, celebrity medium, and cewebrity the biggest. With regard to the buying intention, the celebrity endorser has the higher persuasion than opinion leader and cewebrity (F=2.864. sig. 0.050). However, if taking the content engagement for an analysis, opinion leader has a strongest trigger of the online action (F=3.339, sig. 0.038) and maintenance of buyer-seller relationship (F=3.198, sig. 0.044).

3.3 Role of gaps and R.E.A.N. on Buying Intention

This paper develops a hierarchical regression model to regress the dissonance gaps with the cognitive relevance and their impacts on consumer buying intention. It suggested the following relations. The ***cognition*** component has a positive impact via self-recognition gap (B=.614, sig .046) and a negative impact via demonstration gap (B=-.714, sig .050) on buying intention. To shorten the ***affection*** component between the brand and the composed ad image in consumer mind (communication gap) gap (B=-.422, sig .047) can boost buying chance. From the other end reduce the ***heterogeneity*** component of image in ads communication (B=-.389, sig .047) may reach the same outcome.

Consistent with the current knowledge, brand marketing needs to find out the most suitable spokesperson to endorse the brand. This is evidenced by a negative coefficient (B=-.472, sig .031) of the ***reference*** component in endorser- influencer gap with consumer purchase intention.

The ***aesthetic*** expectation conflictions of brand -influencer (B=-.340, sig .042), brand-consumer self (B=-.454, sig .028) won't benefit the marketing outcome. However, the aesthetic difference of influencer image and projective self image may impose a push in sales (B=-305, sig .053).

The ***complexity*** dimension is tested to intensify the dissonance caused by the influencer and consumer cognitive discrepancy and therefore decrease sales (B=.309, sig .036). Last, the ***generalizability*** component in endorser gap (B= -.378, sig .024), demonstration gap (B= -.447, sig .002), role gap (B= .512, sig .003), are proved to alter the marketing consequence.

The interaction test also reveals a fruitful collection of results showing that consumers bearing high, medium, low levels of tolerance of dissonance, demonstrated different patterns of online content buying interest. Figure 4-7 below display some of the interactive relations of our interest.

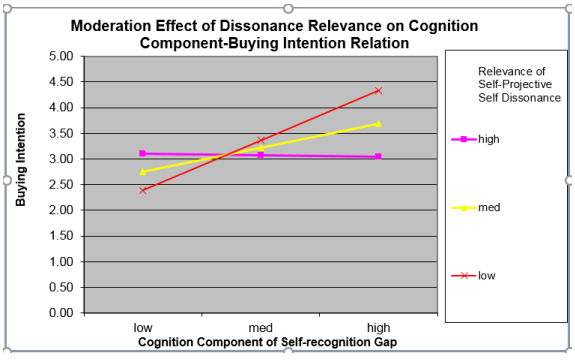


Figure 4

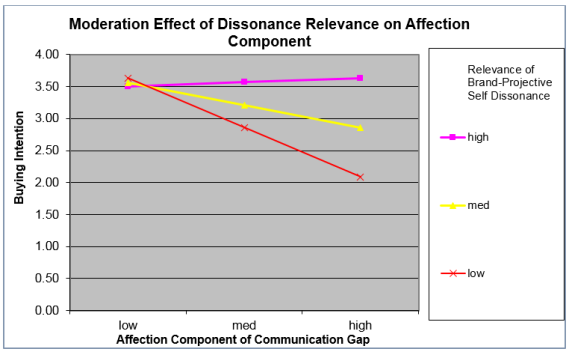


Figure 5

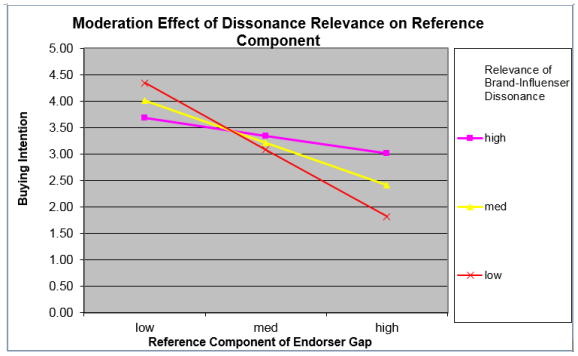


Figure 6

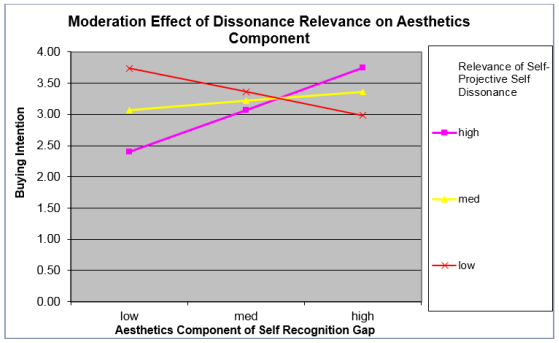


Figure 7

4. LIMITATION

This research bears its limitations. First, the findings gained from our semantic differential scale are subject to the items of scale which are non-exhaustive and therefore serve more diagnostic than conclusive insights of understand fashion brands. Second, some findings of how controlled factors (for example the innate preference and familiarity towards the brand and influencers) adjusted the consumer responses haven't been included in this paper.