

Do we need Alexa or Alex? Leveraging generative artificial intelligence for establishing brand identity for designing name-brand voice assistants

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Suggested Citation:

Yadav, J.K. & Gupta, A.K. (2024). Do we need Alexa or Alex? Leveraging generative artificial intelligence for establishing brand identity for designing name-brand voice assistants. *International Journal of Current Innovations in Interdisciplinary Scientific Studies*. 8(1), 9-14. <https://doi.org/10.18844/ijciss.v8i1.9351>

Received from January 19, 2024; revised from May 2, 2024; accepted from June 13, 2024;

Selection and peer review under the responsibility of Assist. Prof. Dr. Ezgi Pelin YILDIZ, Kars Kafkas University, Turkey.
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Abstract

Emerging trends such as personalization, artificial intelligence, and experiential marketing present new opportunities and challenges for understanding and leveraging brand personality in contemporary marketing contexts. This paper explores the literature around the effect of voice on brand personality and if name-brand voice assistants posit an opportunity for the brands to create a unique brand identifier for easy recall and thus a long-term competitive advantage against the firms that choose to adopt the generic voice-based assistants like Alexa or Siri. This study is a qualitative study which uses the literature review method. The study makes use of existing literature and draws resources from credible sources. The study concludes that there are a few things that can be leveraged from the previous literature and there is a need to do further research to explore the unanswered questions.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence; branding; brand personality; name-brand voice assistants (NBVA); Voice Assistants (VA).

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1. Introduction

There has been an increased focus on adopting name-brand voice assistants (NBVAs) by businesses (Pal & Arpnikanondt, 2021; Kim et al., 2021). However, there are several questions to be explored to predict their success. It is a familiar concept with the common examples of their applications e.g., Amazon Alexa, Google Assistant, or Apple HomeKit for smart home automation, productivity assistants helping you with scheduling work appointments, emails, text messages, or managing to-do lists, finding you your favorite shows, music, and podcast on various streaming services. Shopping, navigating your way through traffic, education, social media interactions, and many more we are surrounded by voice-based assistants, and the share of voice searches is increasing every day.

In this adoption of Voice-based Assistants (VAs), there are two types of companies; one who has just adopted the popular VAs without any focus on using it for brand identity e.g., LG, SONY, and JBL relying on third-party Google Assistant integration; Sonos Speaker and other smart home devices and there are others who want to leverage upon this opportunity to create a unique voice that. Samsung Bixby for example is Samsung's own VA. It's not a case of brand identity but an attempt to break from Alexa and Siri's dominance. Mercedes Benz's MBUX is a different approach although that focuses on creating a brand identity and looks at MBUX as an opportunity for anthropomorphism of the brand itself (Vernuccio et al., 2021; Vernuccio et al., 2023), with recent news of them teaming up with OpenAI Chat GPT they are in a process to upgrade their user experience.

Anthropomorphism is nothing new to human beings, we all grow up listening to stories, watching cartoons and rhymes on kidsTV, and human babies laugh and giggle at animated voices that are used to anthropomorphize various characters. The existent literature focuses on 'human body lineaments', and 'human facial physiognomy' (Guido & Peluso 2015) but has not considered the role of voice and tonality that has always been important for theatre artists to create a persona or personality. The researchers suggest that the brand personality literature has to understand the role of brand voice in brand personality.

1.1. Purpose of study

This paper explores the literature around the effect of voice on brand personality and if name-brand voice assistants posit an opportunity for the brands to create a unique brand identifier for easy recall and thus a long-term competitive advantage against the firms that choose to adopt the generic voice-based assistants like Alexa or Siri.

2. Method and materials

This study is a qualitative study which uses the literature review method. The study makes use of existing literature and draws resources from credible sources. All materials used were acknowledged, cited, and referenced. Credibility, applicability, and academic merit were assessed for each source of literature that was used in this review. Prioritization was given to publications from credible academic publishers, peer-reviewed journals, and acknowledged authorities on the subject. Any works that might be contentious or controversial were made explicit, and their inclusion was justified by their addition to the conversation about the topic.

3. Results

3.1. Brand personality

Brand personality is defined as a set of human characteristics associated with a brand (Aaker, 1997). Brand personality provides a framework for understanding and communicating a brand's unique identity, values, and attributes, enabling consumers to form emotional connections and perceptions. Anthropomorphic brands can convey their value propositions and brand messages in story form which are easy to connect with.

3.1.1. Dimensions of brand personality

Aaker (1997) identified five core dimensions or facets that contribute to brand personality: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. These dimensions serve as building blocks for

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defining and differentiating brands in competitive markets, guiding brand strategy, positioning, and communication efforts.

3.1.2. Consumer perception and brand personality

Research has demonstrated the impact of brand personality on consumer perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors (Keller, 1993). Consumers often associate human traits with brands, influencing their preferences, loyalty, and purchasing decisions. Brand personality serves as a symbolic representation, facilitating emotional engagement and brand attachment.

3.1.3. Brand personality and brand equity

The relationship between brand personality and brand equity has been explored in various studies (Aaker, 2009; Yoo & Donthu, 2001). Brand personality contributes to brand equity by enhancing brand awareness, differentiation, and emotional connection. A strong brand personality reinforces brand identity, values, and positioning, driving customer loyalty and competitive advantage.

3.1.4. Cultural and global perspectives

Research has examined cultural variations in brand personality perceptions and preferences across different markets and consumer segments (De Mooij, 2010). Cultural values, norms, and social influences shape consumer perceptions of brand personality, necessitating adaptation and localization strategies for global brands.

3.1.5. Brand personality and consumer engagement

The role of brand personality in fostering consumer engagement, brand loyalty, and advocacy has been investigated in the context of social media and digital marketing (Fournier, 1998; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Authenticity, consistency, and relevance are critical factors in leveraging brand personality to enhance consumer engagement and brand performance in digital environments.

3.2. The relationship between the human voice and personality

There is a multifaceted relationship between voice and human personality. The literature on human voice and personality suggests that voice is related to emotional expression, authenticity, intelligence, confidence, gender stereotypes, and cultural influence. We suggest that understanding these aspects is important to understanding brand-customer relationships, social interaction, and creating effective brand communication.

3.2.1. Emotional expression in voice

Scherer (1986) studied the role of voice in emotional communication. This study suggests that the phonatory and articulatory of voice correlates with the physiological responses characterizing different emotional states expressed as narrow/wide, lax/tense, and full/thin. Further changes in acoustic parameters resulting from changing voice types are related to vocal cues in emotional expression. We know so far that the voice's tone, pitch, and intensity can effectively convey emotions such as happiness, sadness, anger, or fear (Juslin & Laukka, 2003). In the case of name-brand voice assistants, we need to understand further if these relationships are going to remain the same and how this knowledge about phonatory and acoustics can be leveraged to define the bot's voice. To find a better connection with the customer and experience.

3.2.2. Voice and authenticity

The concept of authenticity in voice has been extensively explored in studies focusing on vocal cues to deception (Vrij et al., 2006). Vrij et al., (2010) studied the voice in the context of a lie-detection context and he suggests that a genuine voice is often associated with sincerity, trustworthiness, and emotional depth. Vocal authenticity thus plays a vital role in building trust and credibility in interpersonal relationships and professional settings (Matosas-López, 2024). With an increased fear of digital fraud and disbelief not just in

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Spain or Europe (Kemp et al., 2020) but almost everywhere sounding brands perhaps can win over the customer's trust (Morgan Freeman's voice perhaps can change the fortunes of a firm). Though Mukhopadhyay et. al., (2015) studied voice impersonation possibility and fraud we suggest that there is still room to understand the legal framework to prevent such cases of fraud in case NBVAs get adopted rapidly.

3.2.3. Voice, confidence, and authority

The vocal characteristics such as pitch, volume, and articulation can influence perceptions of confidence and authority (Bavelas et al., 1990), individuals who speak with clarity, conviction, and assertiveness are often perceived as more competent, confident, and influential. We suggest that in the case of name-brand voice assistants, an authoritative and confident voice can provide a brand with competence and authority.

3.2.4. Cultural and social influences on voice

The influence of cultural and social factors on vocal expression has been explored in cross-cultural communication studies (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003). Variations in accent, dialect, intonation, and language choice reflect cultural norms, social identities, and regional influences, shaping perceptions of identity, heritage, and belonging (Pycha & Zellou, 2024). We are not sure of the strategies a brand should follow if they have operations in various countries and regions of the world. Having the NBVAs customized for each country or region can have its challenges e.g., confusing the native users if they are exposed to ads from other regions or if they are traveling to other regions or countries. Is it possible to retain the pitch, tone, and intensity of the chosen voice can provide the same effect as would have a local voice e.g., Morgan Freeman's voice used in the Middle East interacting in Arabic which is the native language (Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Borrie, 2012).

4. Conclusion

Studies have investigated gender differences in vocal characteristics and their implications for gender stereotypes and social perceptions). Societal norms and expectations influence vocal patterns, pitch range, and speech patterns, contributing to gendered perceptions of authority, competence, and leadership. This opens an opportunity for the brands to adorn a particular gender as well as a challenge to have a voice that may connect well with various gender types that contribute to the actual user base of the company.

Emerging trends such as personalization, artificial intelligence, and experiential marketing present new opportunities and challenges for understanding and leveraging brand personality in contemporary marketing contexts. Future research may explore innovative approaches to defining, measuring, and managing brand personality in an evolving marketplace for name-brand voice assistants (NBVAs).

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