

Toward Conceptualizing Episodic Branding: An Empirical Study for Identifying Owned and Given Episodes

Hiroharu OCHIHARA

Oriental Land Co.,Ltd.

Katsue EDO

Prefectural University of Hiroshima, Hiroshima Business and Management School

Toshihiko MIURA

Chuo University, Department of Commerce

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Abstract:

Episodic branding is a new brand strategy that applies consumers' episodes. In this study, our objective is to discuss the concept of episodes theoretically, and clarify them through an empirical research for the development of Episodic Branding.

From the literature of episodic memory and other similar concepts, we have found out that episodes should be separated into 'Owned episodes' and 'Given episodes'. Owned episodes are episodes that are actually experienced by the consumers themselves. In contrast, Given episodes are considered as simulated episodes, which are mainly experienced by others.

An empirical research was conducted to confirm the existence and effects of Owned and Given episodes. A framework with Self-brand connection was constructed. Factor analysis and Structured Equation Modelling (SEM) were used for confirmation.

Existence of the two episodes and effects on Self-brand connection were confirmed, which gives us implication to the progress of future Episodic Branding.

Keywords: Owned episodes, Given episodes, Episodic Branding

Track: Product and Brand Management

1. Introduction

Consumers experience various kinds of episodes when they use products/services. We propose a brand strategy based on these consumers' episodes as 'Episodic Branding'. Episodic Branding is a brand strategy that engraves the brand value of a certain product/service on the consumers' episodic memory (Miura 2018). In this study, our objective is to discuss and clarify the concept of episodes through an empirical research for the development of Episodic Branding.

2.Literature of the Concepts of Episodes

2.1 Episodic memory

Our theoretical background relies on cognitive psychology, which the consumers' episodes are kept within their episodic memory (cf. Bettman 1979, Allen et al. 1992, Samuelsen & Olsen 2010, Herz & Brunk 2017). There are two types of memories. One is the semantic memory, which refers to general knowledge (facts, ideas, meaning and concepts) that we have acquired. The other is the episodic memory which is the memory of personal experiences and specific events, including location, time and emotion (Tulving 1983, 1985, 2002, Tulving & Schacter 1990). Ohta (1988) explains that once a semantic memory is related to time or place, it transfers into an episodic memory.

The concept of episodic memory has three implicative characteristics from the marketing point of view (Miura 2013,2018; cf. Tulving 1983, 2002, Ohta 1988). First, episodic memory is memorized in set with emotions of a specific experience (cf. Tulving 1983). Second, it is personal and subjective compared to semantic memory. Third, though organizations recognize and use semantic memory of brands within their brand strategies, they do not have a method to specify the episodic memory.

Episodic memory is well memorized with the emotions during the experience, and as a result it will affect the next purchase of products/services which leads us to brand management and brand strategies. In spite of this effect, marketing organizations still have not approached to understand episodic memories so that it could be applied in Episodic Branding.

2.2 Comparison with the similar concepts of episodes

Nostalgia (Holbrook 1993, Muehling & Sprott 2004, Koetz & Tankersley 2016), autobiographical memories (Sujan et al. 1993, Braun-LaTour et al. 2007, Lambert-Pandraud &

Laurent 2010), and experience (Allen et al. 1992, Schmitt 1999, Braun-LaTour et al. 2004, Samuelsen & Olsen 2010) are similar concepts to episodic memories.

Nostalgia is ‘a positive preference toward general ideas (people, place, things) of the past’ (Holbrook & Schindler 1991). It is considered as an episodic memory when a positive sentimentality is added on. Personal nostalgia is based on an individual experience, whereas collective nostalgia is a memory of a historical incident. One’s nostalgia is positioned between the series of personal and collective nostalgia (Davis 1979).

Autobiographical memories are one of the various episodic memories that people experience from the past to present ‘by themselves’ (Kusumi 2014). This means that episodic memories could be constructed by information from others with no personal experience at all. One example is the collective nostalgia, which is an episodic memory that people might read, see and listen to linguistically and do not actually experience by themselves.

Experience is also a similar concept. As we defined episodic memory before, it is the memory of personal experiences and specific events. Episodic memory is considered as ‘memorized experiences’ kept in one’s memory. Schmitt (1999) divides these experiences into five modules (sense, feel, think, act, relate).

As we have discussed, autobiographical memory, which is a part of episodic memories, is a memory self-kept as a summary of experience. It is basically constructed by the experience(episodes) from the past till present. Whereas nostalgia is constructed by the past episodes, an episodic memory could be constructed by the present episodes.

On the other hand, similar to collective nostalgia, there are episodes that are historically read, seen, or heard from others. Studies in experience explains this as an important ‘relate’ module. Therefore, it is natural to build brand strategies base upon Owned episodes, but we also should deal with Given episodes as one of the key components of episodic memory for the conceptualization of Episode Branding.

3.Owned/Given Episodes Concept and Self-brand connection

3.1 The Owned/Given episode concept

Owned episodes are episodes that comes from the personal experiences. On the other hand, Given episodes are the ones that were not experienced by themselves but by others, and in some way communicated and remembered in their memories. We also consider that these kind of unexperienced episodes are a part of the episodic memory. We call this the Owned/Given episode concept.

Especially in the recent years, in many social media such as Instagram, we are exposed to experiences of others through pictures, and we could realize that it is getting more and more important to consider these into branding strategies. In the past marketing literature, episodes and other related concepts have been studied for branding, but they have never introduced the concept and effects of Given episodes. We will examine and identify the Owned/Given episode concept using a quantitative research.

3.2 Owned/Given Episodes and Self-brand connection

Building a long-term relationship between the brand and the customer, which is known as Brand Relationship, is considered as an important goal in brand management (Fournier 1998, Aaker and Joachimsthaler 2000). Different researchers provide different definitions and concepts to Brand Relationship, and as a result, there is not a common definition to this concept. Still, the 'Self-brand connection' concept is included in Brand Relationship as a common concept in many researches (Kubota 2017). Kubota (2017) also says self-connection is a similar concept to brand relationship. We will use this Self-brand connection concept in order to confirm the effects of Owned episodes and Given episodes for implication to the development of Episodic Branding.

As we have discussed earlier, episodic memory is well memorized because it is related with the personal experiences. Horiuchi (2008) have found that episodic memory is sensitive to self-connection (Self-connection effect). Horiuchi (2008) also points out that there is a similar effect even if the episodes are from others, depending on the intimacy. From this argument, we assume that a memorizing an Owned/Given episode of a certain brand will enforce the Self-brand connection. Also from the discussion that Given episodes are not an personal experiences, it may not directly influence the level of Self-brand connection. There is an expectation of an indirect effect via the Owned episodes to the Self-brand connection. In this study, the following three hypotheses have been inducted from the discussion (Figure 1);

- H1. Owned episodes have a positive and direct effect on Self-brand connection.
- H2. Given episodes have a positive and direct effect on Self-brand connection.
- H3. Given episodes have a positive and direct effect on Owned episodes

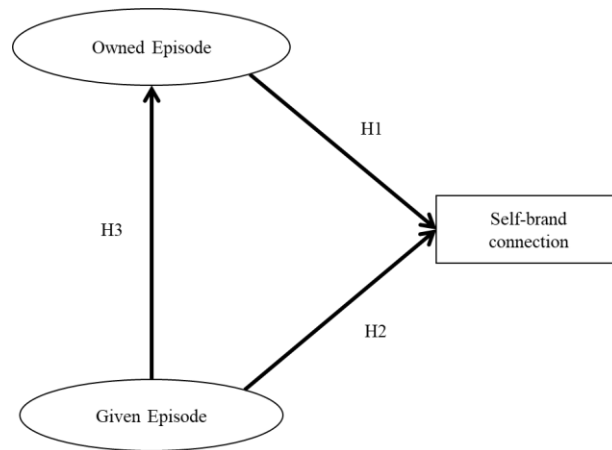


Figure 1. Hypotheses Model

4. Empirical Research

4.1 Research methodology

A consumer survey using the internet panel in Tokyo and suburbs was conducted in December 2017 (1,004 male and female each, total 2008, aged 20-34 years old). We made limitation of the respondents to avoid the bias from variance of episodes between generations and residence (1659 valid responses).

Five brands from five product/service categories were selected. Categories were selected by their tangibility. Brands were chosen by consumer's recognition. The categories are chocolate snacks (Pocky), smart phones (iPhone), casual sushi restaurant (Kura-sushi), amusement parks (Universal Studio Japan: USJ) and sightseeing destinations (Hokkaido). Responses of recognition, frequency, preference, self-brand connection, involvement, and 10 questions concerning episodes of the brands were collected. Due to the limitation of the number of questions, we have used 'Strength of self-connection with the brand' as a measurement of Self-brand connection as in Escalas & Bettman (2009).

4.2 Factor analysis of episodes: Identifying owned episodes and given episodes

Ten questions concerning episodes of each five brands were collected separately (e.g. Do you have a personal episode to the brand? Do you have an episode with familiar people?). The responses were in a six-point Likert scale.

Factor Analysis (Likelihood Method) with a Promax rotation of 10 Likert scale questions was conducted (1684 respondents). Using the scree plot, we decided to choose two factors (Chi-square= 308.428; DF = 26; CFI = .997; RMSEA = .037; AIC = 346.64). The two factors could be named as 'Owned episode factor($\alpha=.952$)' and 'Given episode factor ($\alpha=.948$)'. GFI was significant, and the reliability reach high scores (Table 1).

Items	Factor Loadings		Communality
	Given Episodes	Owned Episodes	
Sympathy to Celebrity Episodes	0.863	0.045	0.809
Sympathy to Media Episodes	0.859	0.057	0.821
Sympathy to Corporate Episodes	0.85	0.052	0.796
Episodes in trends	0.759	0.113	0.726
Sympathy to Familiar people's episodes	0.713	0.209	0.791
Strength of personal episodes	-0.039	0.951	0.847
Impact of Episodes	0.091	0.846	0.847
Episodes with familiar people	0.072	0.826	0.783
Unexpectedness of Episodes	0.253	0.654	0.757
Happiness of talking Episodes	0.302	0.633	0.799
Eigenvalues	6.838	6.744	

Fit Index		
Discrepancy=	0.039	CFI = 0.997
Chi-square=	308.43	RMSEA = 0.037
DF =	26	AIC = 346.64
p =	0	BIC = 479.34

Reliability		
	Factor1	Factor2
α	0.948	0.952
ω	0.949	0.954
Factor scores	0.953	0.955

Table 1. Factor Analysis of Given/Owned Episodes

4.3 Results and analysis

4.3.1 Effects of owned episodes and given episodes

To examine the effect of the owned/given episodes, results of factor analysis which identified the owned/given episodes were used. In addition to the two episodes, self-brand connection used in a Structured Equation Modelling (SEM). From the statistical results, the model (Figure 2) was confirmed to be reliable (Chi-square=1416.391; df=43; AGFI=.950; CFI=.985; RMSEA=.063).

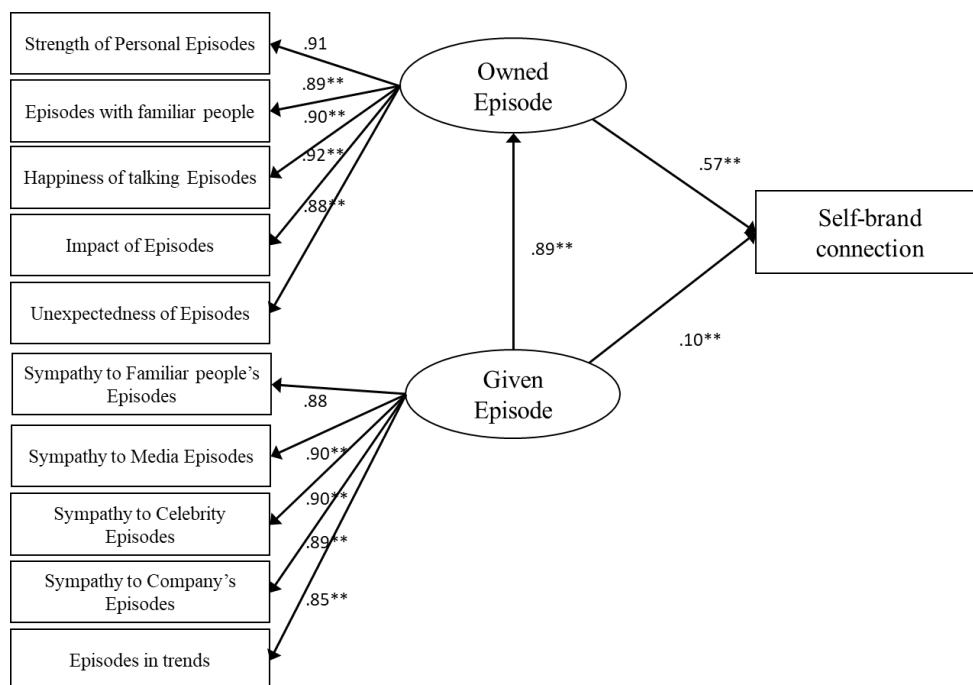


Figure 2. Owned/Given Episode Model (SEM)

The coefficients of Owned episodes (0.57) and Given episodes (0.10) with Self-brand connection were positive and significant. H1 and H2 were confirmed and we could find that there is a positive effect on Self-brand connection. The coefficient of Given episode with Owned episode (0.89) was positive and significant. H3 was also confirmed. From the results of the SEM analysis, there was a finding that Given episodes have a direct and indirect effect (via Owned episode) on Self-brand connection. We assume that the direct effect of Given episodes on the Self-brand connection is created by the increased sympathy toward the certain brand. On the other hand, the indirect effect of Given episodes on Self-brand connection could be explained as a simulated experience with the Given episodes.

4.3.2 Effect of owned and given episodes of products and services

Further research was conducted to compare if there will be a difference between product and service of the Owned/Given episodes. Multigroup structural equation modelling (SEM) was used for the product/service category comparison. The results are on Table 2.

	Pocky	i-Phone	Kura-sushi	USJ	Hokkaido
Owned Episodes → Self-brand connections	0.612 **	0.772 **	0.907 **	0.448 **	0.583 **
Given Episodes → Self-brand connections	0.008	-0.135 †	-0.208 *	0.250 **	0.092 **
Given Episodes → Owned Episodes	0.953 **	0.938 **	0.953 **	0.848 **	0.815 **

** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05, † p < 0.1

Table 2. Comparison of Product/Service Categories

In all products and services, we confirmed the relation between Owned episode and Self-brand connection. However, we could not find a significant relation between Given episode and Self-brand connection between the two brands, Pocky and iPhone. There was a significant relation with Kura-sushi (-0.208), but the relation turned out to be negative.

From the results, we analysed that there is a difference of effects between product/service categories. Services like travel destination and leisure at amusement facilities tend to be expensive, and the objective quality is difficult to evaluate. Thus, when people consume these product/service categories, they are likely to depend on the Given episodes as a substitute to confirm their purchase decision. Especially, USJ was in trend in Japan in the recent years, and we could figure out that many consumers felt sympathy with USJ.

Because Pocky (chocolate snacks), iPhone and Kura-sushi (a family type casual sushi restaurant) are commodities that could be easily purchased and its experience could be

substituted by competitive products/services, we consider that the Given episodes influenced the Owned episodes, which indirectly effect the Self-brand connection.

5. Conclusion and for Future Research

In this study, we have discussed and confirmed that there is existence of Owned episodes and Given episodes. According to results of the empirical research, there were differences between the effect on Self-brand connection and among the product/service categories, and from this implication it is necessary to argue with the concept of Owned/Given episodes. This will lead us to further research to develop Episodic Branding toward a new brand strategy.

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