A conceptual framework on the role of Emotional Intelligence in Consumer's Creativity: The case of Environmental Innovation

Adnan Mendares [1]

Abstract

Consumers' integration in the innovation process on digital platforms has gained attention and is considered with much importance in today's business strategies. Evaluation of effective creative product ideas and criteria for the proper identification of creative consumers who participate in creative product generation are the key to success for the business. Moreover, as with the time, environmental problems are increasing around the world, business related creativity should have a consideration of that concern for innovation. In this research framework, messages in environmental context with emotional orientation (vs. non-emotional orientation) and psychological distance (proximal vs. distant social distance) have been used to motivate consumers for the generation of environment friendly innovative solution. This framework is expected to demonstrate that, inclusion of emotional and social aspects in the digital creative campaigns can stimulate consumers with more emotional intelligence ability, which will provide them openness. Openness will facilitate to think divergently and that divergent pattern of creative thinking is expected to produce effective and environment friendly novel idea of product/service (functional creativity). In the path towards creativity, consumer's trait emotional intelligence is supposed to have a moderating effect on emotional intelligence ability while processing the emotional and social aspects. In a word, this framework focuses on how to improve the emotional intelligence of consumers in the path to generate creative product/service idea. Apart from being useful for innovative business or marketing, this framework will also have an impact from environmental and societal point of view.

Keywords: Message framing, Emotional intelligence Ability, Trait emotional intelligence, Functional creativity.

[1] Ph.D. Student,Université Grenoble Alpes, CERAG, Marketing Department, France.
  E-mail: mendares.adnan@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Innovation is a vital factor in business by bringing new ideas to reality, which keeps company's product, service or operations fresh and up to date. The incorporation of consumers in the thought generation process is an important contribution to a company's item portfolio and an eminent solution for the enhancement of achievement in the marketplace. Without a doubt, in a rationale of open development, companies incorporate consumers in development processes by including them in exercises, for example, idea generation, creativity sessions and idea testing through collective entryways, like community forums, collaborative portals or even crowdsourcing platforms. However, in many cases, organizations are regularly disappointed not only by the scarcity of imaginative thoughts, which rise up out of consumers, but also with the ideas, which are not concerned about environment. With the increment in the worldwide population and the development of technology, we are confronting a few ecological difficulties on a worldwide scale: environmental change, biological ecosystem destruction, loss of biodiversity, soil degradation, diminished regular sustenance assets, scarcity of energy and water shortage etc. (Diamond, 2011). While looking at this upsetting reality, we should always keep a mindset that considers these issues during making any proposition for innovative ideas. This can possibly shape our innovative products, services or processes more environment-friendly.

The environmental friendliness regarding product or service is focused on companies now a day to handle the issue of environmental problems. Most of the research work in this area have been done from organizational point of view. For instance, reasons of green product development in companies (Danjelico *et al*, 2010) or urgency for green product development in company practices (Borchardt *et al*., 2011) are researched which are directed to how the company itself can provide environment friendly solution. However, when it is about consumers to integrate into the environment-friendly solution giving process, the research is still lagging behind.

To narrow the gaps in research, it can be investigated how emotion-oriented messages and social distance play role in motivating the consumers to generate environment-friendly solutions. Being properly combined, these two factors can help to use consumer's emotional intelligence ability for thinking and taking things more openly. It will facilitate more divergent thinking for them (which is also measured as creativity, but as a process).
Therefore the research questions of this conceptual framework are considered as follows:
(1) How to improve consumer's creativity? (2) Is Emotional Intelligence a way to improve creativity of the consumers? (3) Are message framing and social distance possible ways to improve consumer's Emotional Intelligence Ability?

2. Conceptual Framework

In the context of creativity, now, we will briefly explain the relevant concepts regarding the formation of the conceptual framework.

2.1 Functional Creativity. Creativity should take care of societal aspects. Cropley and Cropley (2011) have looked for effective novelty of a product concentrating on novel items that fulfills some valuable social need. They name this as *"functional creativity"* and it is based on four criteria (*"effectiveness", "novelty", "elegance", and "genesis"*).

2.2 Emotion. Emotions can be categorized as positive and negative emotion. Negative emotions are related to control of emotions and adaptation of emotions (White, K., 1992). Individuals are stimulated to dismiss or pull back from stimulus by negative emotions while individuals are inclining toward a stimulus by positive emotions. Positive emotion lifts up the flexibility of cognition (Isen, 1999). Focusing on motivating the consumers, it would be better to use positive emotion in emotional message framing and see the difference with non- emotional message framing.

2.3 Social Distance. "Social distance" is a psychological distance according to "Construal Level Theory". "Social distance" is the "*subjective perception or experience of distance from another person or other persons"* (Magee and Smith, 2013). People give special treatment to close people than distant ones (Magee and Smith, 2013). A study by Spence *et al.* (2012) utilizing CLT and psychological distance, showed low level psychological distance promotes behavioral intention for environmental issues and social distance was the most important of all psychological distances. Therefore, in this framework, social distance is chosen among other possible psychological distances.

2.4 Emotional Intelligence Ability. "Emotional Intelligence" is *"the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions"* (Salovey and Mayer, 1990). Emotional intelligence ought to encourage consideration regarding information of emotion (Fiori, 2009). Emotional aptitudes are essential for emotional and social adjustment (Salovey et, al. 2002). Therefore, Emotional Intelligence ability is related to emotional and social aspects. This indicates that, emotion and social distance are two factors those can help an individual to perceive regulate and utilize emotions in self and others.

2.5 Trait Emotional Intelligence. Trait emotional intelligence takes care of only affective side of an individual, which also varies person to person. High Trait EI encouraged pro social behavior in children (Petrides *et al.,* 2006). There is connection between interpersonal relationships and Trait EI (Schutte *et al.,* 2001). When an individual will go through an emotional message framing and proximal social distance approach, his emotional intelligence ability supposes to be moderated by his inward affective traits.

2.6 Openness Emotional intelligence has a significant relationship to "Openness". Ability based emotional intelligence takes into account of the self and other's emotional perceptions and regulations. Thus, it can help an individual to have openness when he/she is going to use those emotions. He will be able to empathize to other people and think according to their emotions.Though openness is usually considered as dispositional, we suppose that, a state of openness or situational openness is possible to happen.

2.7 Divergent Thinking Openness is correlated with a measure of divergent thinking (McCrae, 1987). Individuals usually utilize two diverse ways to deal with creative critical thinking: convergent thinking and divergent thinking. Openness and divergent thinking has a proved link in brain science (Xu and Potenza, 2011). We suppose that, when an individual or consumer possesses openness, he/she will have the ability to think divergently.

Compared to convergent thinking, divergent thinking has more possible links to the functional creativity. When an individual has the ability to think divergently, it is quite expected from him to take into account as many as effective solutions generation of a product/service. It is also expected from him to think of various angles for a problem. On the basis of all these relationship, we propose the conceptual framework as follows:
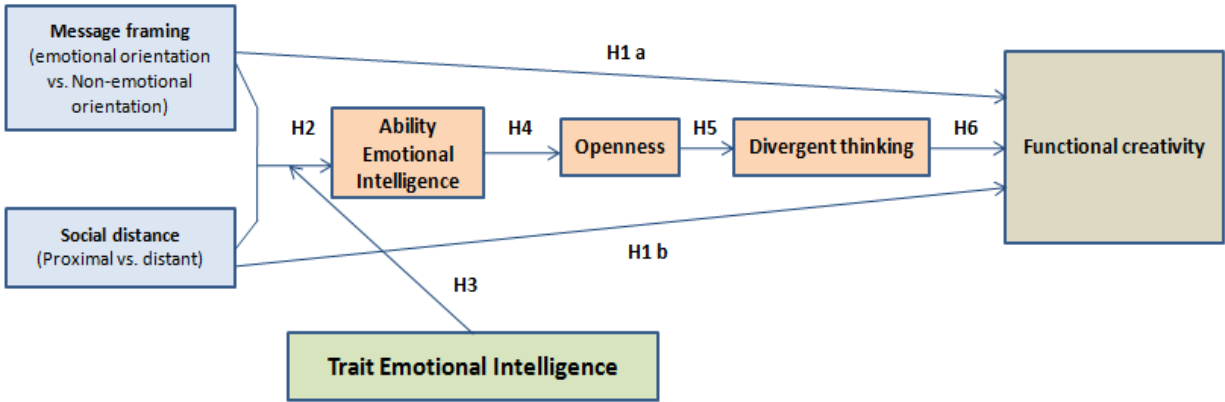
Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual framework

3. Research Methodology

The research framework is proposed as a 2(Message framing: with emotional orientation vs. non- emotional orientation) x 2(social distance: proximal vs. distant) between-subjects experimental design with control group condition. Emotional message has been formed by integrating "self" and making an interrogative statement. Message with emotional orientation is made as "Like you, the planet earth wants to live, Will you help her with green idea?" and message without emotional orientation is: "Green idea is important to save the planet earth". Social distance can be manipulated as proximal and distant. In this case, for proximal social distance "Your close friends are always concerned about environment" can be used. Distant social distance can manipulated just by changing the "Closed friends" and replaced by "People" ("People are always concerned about environment").

This framework can be implemented on digital platform or even in case of face to face brainstorming process.Participants will be requested to give some creative idea after going through the stimuli. For an example, it can be like "Imagine a unique, direct to consumer experience or service a Beverage Company could provide to consumers in 2025. Please write your valuable idea for us".

4. Potential contributions and Conclusion

A new type of message framing for environmental context has been made which can distinguish between an emotional and non-emotional message. In the ability based conceptualized framework of *"Emotional intelligence"* provided by Salovey and Mayer (1990), there is "creative thinking" considered as a mental ability of emotional intelligence for utilizing emotions. We suppose, a state of "Openness" plays a role between emotional intelligence ability and creative thinking (here, divergent thinking). This will help to understand the mechanism of the utilization of emotions in the framework.

From the consumers' perspective, it has not researched yet how trait emotional intelligence moderates relationships while thinking and delivering a new product idea to the company. This framework may give a better understanding of this question and can be considered as new addition to theoretical application.

It would be then less time consuming and less effort giving for the managers to evaluate the creative products by initially sorting out the participants on the basis of trait emotional intelligence. Managers can also recruit people with the basis of emotional intelligence, where creativity is a concern.

Finally, the experimental outcome of the framework will be helpful for companies to understand how an advertisement should be made for consumers in the digital creativity campaigns so that, participants would be able to generate an environment friendly creative idea with just a little trigger.

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