

## THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BRAND PERSONALITY COIN

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### ABSTRACT

Every research is not perfect. There are plenty of possible threats for the internal validity, construct validity and external validity. The logic underlying the study may also be flawed. Thus, every piece of theory should be given a thorough analysis in order to find the possible sources of mistakes. There exists a conceptual confusion in the brand personality area. To avoid the present state of conceptual confusion in branding, an extensive research is the need of the hour, which can allow brand personality concept to be a richer one and most helpful concept to understand and manage brands. This article is an attempt to inquire the theoretical concepts of brand personality and brand personality scale and to have a look at the negative side of the same.

**KEYWORDS:** Brand Personality, Human Characteristics, Brand Personality Scale, Validity.

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### 1 INTRODUCTION

The world interprets the brand through many different filters; through experience, through perceptions, misconceptions, the value systems of the individuals out there in the world, and all the noise in the system.” - Joseph Plummer

The research process is to be regarded not as a set of problems to be “solved”, but rather as a set of dilemmas to be “lived with” (McGrath 1982). Every research is not perfect. There are plenty of possible threats for the internal validity, construct validity and external validity. The logic underlying the study may also be flawed. Thus, every piece of theory should be given a thorough analysis in order to find the possible sources of mistakes.

Since 1997, literature and research on the concept of brand personality is flourishing, and specific scales have gone widespread use in academic circles. As is frequently the case with pioneer studies, they lead to a bandwagon effect: a first wave of research consists of replication studies, in the country of the first study. Then a second wave assesses the external validity of the scale in foreign countries in order to evaluate the robustness of the scale, its ability to support translations and intercultural uses. Meanwhile its use becomes widespread and goes unchallenged (A. Azoulay and J.N. Kapferer, 2003).

However there exist a widespread confusion and chaos as the validity was unchallenged. Brand personality is certainly a key facet of a brand identity. No one can deny that. But the issues relating to brand personality concepts and scales need to be addressed. This article is an attempt to inquire the theoretical concepts of brand personality and brand personality scale and to have a look at the negative side of the same.

## **2 OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this article is to have a look at the negatives of the brand personality with respect to its concepts and scales that were developed by the noble laureates. This article is Descriptive in nature; therefore the informations have been obtained from different reliable sources such as news papers, Journals, Magazines etc. This article is structured as follows: Introduction, objectives and methodology, brand personality meaning, negative facet of brand personality concepts and scales and finally conclusion.

### **BRAND PERSONALITY – MEANING**

Brand personality refers to human personality traits associated with a brand (Aaker 1997). It is one of the major components of brand image in addition to the product's physical attributes (e.g., quality of food and drink) and the product's benefits (e.g., enhancing one's health and well-being). Since brand personality is likely to be more difficult to imitate than tangible product attributes, marketing practitioners commonly use it to achieve more sustainable advantages (Ang and Lim 2006), such as, creating product differentiation and positioning. McDonald, for example, endeavors to create its brand personality to differentiate itself from the competitors by positioning its restaurants as "a kid-friendly place" through several marketing strategies (Knutson 2000, p.73). These strategies include the "I'm lovin it" campaign (Mohammad, Barker and Kandampully 2005), the provision of McDonald's happy meals, the partnership with kids' movie, the use of Ronald McDonald character, and the Ronald McDonald House Charities (RMHC) that provides support for ill children and their families (Knutson 2000).

Through a series of studies conducted with American consumers, Aaker (1997) uncovers five dimensions of brand personality: sincerity (down-to-earth, honest, wholesome and cheerful), excitement (daring, spirited, imaginative and up-to-date), competence (reliable, intelligent and successful), sophistication (upper class and charming) and ruggedness (outdoorsy and tough). These five dimensions are reported to be robust across the male sub-sample, female sub-sample, younger sub-sample and older sub-sample. Moreover, these five dimensions emerge from different sets of brands and product categories; and, hence, suggesting the scale's generalizability. Despite some criticisms, most of the brand personality studies conducted after 1997 are based on Aaker's (1997) framework (Azoulay and Kapferer 2003). In line with most of the brand personality studies, Aaker's (1997) scale has also been used to examine the brand personality of fast-food restaurants by various researchers (e.g., Murase and Bojanic 2004; Siguaw, Mattilla and Austin 1999).

### 3 OTHER SIDE OF BRAND PERSONALITY COIN

#### 3.1 CAN PERSONALITY BE APPLIED TO BRANDS LIKE HUMANS?

This section of the article raises the question whether the personality applied to human beings can be applied to brands also.

The methodology that led to the Five Factors Model has been directly borrowed, and sometimes somehow adapted, by some marketing researchers (Caprara, Barbaranelli & Eysenck Guido, Ferrandi & Valette-Florence). Thus, if we consider that brands, just as individuals, can be described with adjectives, the approach used in psychology can be very interesting and relevant to account for a brand personality as perceived by consumers. Indeed, we perceive an individual's personality through his/her behavior, and in exactly the same way, consumers can attribute a personality to a brand according to its perceived communication and "behaviors". The question is whether the terms that encode personality in our language can be applied to brands. The existing literature about the relationship between an individual and a brand (Plummer; Fournier), about brand attachment or even about the view of a brand as a partner (Aaker & Fournier), enables us to think that, brands being personified, human personality descriptors can be used to describe them. But maybe not all of them, brands being attributed only some of the human characteristics. In fact, the adjectives used to describe human personality may not be all relevant to brands. This is where an adaptation is required. Some psychological aspects of human beings such as neurotic fatigue for example, may not be applicable to brands.

#### 3.2 DO WE HAVE A UNIQUE DEFINITION FOR BRAND PERSONALITY?

There is no consensus in defining the term Brand Personality. Aaker's work has been criticized for being based on a loose definition of personality (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003) and for including characteristics such as 'upper class' which confuse 'brand personality' with 'user profiles' (Geuens et al., 2009). This confusion causes a construct validity problem (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003).

They (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003) consider that a stricter definition of brand personality is needed. Aaker (1997) defines brand personality as "the set of human characteristics associated to a brand". However, according to Azoulay and Kapferer (2003), inner values, physical traits and pictures of the typical user are also "human characteristics" that can be associated with a brand. Thus, they suggest to define brand personality as "the set of human personality traits that are both applicable to and relevant for brands" (Azoulay and Kapferer 2003).

Hence there exists a conceptual confusion. To avoid the present state of conceptual confusion in branding, a extensive research is the need of the hour, which can allow brand personality concept to be a richer one and most helpful concept to understand and manage brands.

#### 3.3 DO WE HAVE AN ACCURATE SCALE THAT MEASURES BRAND PERSONALITY?

Aaker's scale (1997) also has got some critics. Azoulay and Kapferer (2003) argue that Aaker's scale does not in fact measure brand personality, but merge a number of dimensions of brand

identity – personality being only one of them. Brand identity has more facets than the personality facet alone.

Azoulay and Kapferer (2003) consider that Aaker's scale (1997) encompasses dimensions conceptually distinct from the pure concept of personality. The main problematic items on the scale are "competence", "feminine" and the items related to social class and age. These items are applicable to brands, but not in the framework of brand personality.

A second criticism of Aaker's scale regards the weak discriminatory power of its factor structure for within category analysis at the respondent-level as well as at the brand-level (Austin, Siguaw, & Mattila, 2003; Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003; Bosnjak, Bochmann, & Hufschmidt, 2007), since the scale was developed from data aggregated across respondents for between-brand comparisons only. In contrast, Geuens et al.'s (2009) five-factor, twelve-item measure of brand personality was designed to include only personality items and, as compared to Aaker's measure, showed higher affinity to the 'Big Five' personality model. Geuens et al. demonstrated the appropriateness and reliability of their own scale for between brand and between-respondent within-category comparisons. Therefore they suggested its construct validity, as well as its practical advantage over Aaker's scale, since within-category comparisons of this kind are common in the marketing research practice (Austin et al., 2003)

### **3.4 DO WE HAVE AN EXTENSIVE THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF THE SUBJECT MATTER?**

There is lack of the research on how brand personality is formed. More research should be done in this area so that adequate number of theories can be formed. Nevertheless, more theories like personality theory, source effects theory are formed; the subject matter will lead to wrong path. For further theoretical support, a lot of research should be done in this area.

### **3.5 DO WE HAVE THE THEORY ABOUT THE NATURE OF BRAND PERSONALITY DIMENSIONS?**

There is lack of the research about the nature of brand personality dimensions. We assumed that dimensions differed in their nature and were typically formed by different sources. However, the more extensive support from the literature could be desirable. It is still necessary to explore the literature on the nature of personality in general (not only brand personality) in order to find more support to the assumption. It is one of the directions for further theoretical development of the current research.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Developing brand personality is the crucial factor for brand success as it helps to differentiate brands, develop the emotional aspects of a brand and augment the personal meaning of a brand to the consumer. There have been a number of studies devoted to brand personality (e.g. Okazaki 2006; Supphellen & Gronhaug 2003; Venable & Rose 2003). However, the primary focus of these studies has been either on the effects of brand personality or on measurement issues. There is still lack of research on how brand personalities are formed and how they can be enhanced.

To conclude, we think that the existing measures for the construct of brand personality do not measure that construct and introduce conceptual confusion. Rather, they somehow measure all the human characteristics applicable to brands merging under one blanket word a number of key distinct facets of brand identity. It is time to restrict the use of the concept of brand personality to the meaning it should never have lost: the unique set of human personality traits both applicable and relevant to brands (A. Azoulay and J-N. Kapferer, 2004).

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