Brand personality and human personality: Findings from ratings of familiar Croatian brands

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Abstract

The present article focuses on two main problems: determining the factor structure of personality ratings of familiar Croatian brands and determining how different levels of data aggregation can affect the dimensionality and the nature of extracted factors. Following Aaker's seminal study [Aaker, J. Dimensions of brand personality. Journal of Marketing Research 1997; 24: 347–356], which aims to identify the dimensions of brand personality, this study attempts to relate brand personality to personality dimensions derived from the natural language. In the first study, a sample of 55 students rate the familiarity of 111 brands represented in the categories of "a Croatian creation" and "Croatian quality". Subsequently, ten brands are selected on the basis of mean familiarity and representation in various product categories (food, beverages, medicine and cleaning products). In the second study, an exhaustive Croatian taxonomy of personality descriptors [Mlačić B, Ostendorf F. Taxonomy and Structure of Croatian Personality-descriptive Adjectives. European Journal of Personality 2005; 19: 117–152] serves as a basis for the construction of a 90-item inventory that covers the 45 facets from the AB5C model [Goldberg LR. International Personality Item Pool. A Scientific Collaboratory for the Development of Advanced Measures of Personality and Other Individual Differences. 6 June 2005. 20 April 2005. http://ipip.ori.org/ipip/]. A large sample of students (267) rate the personality of the ten selected brands using the 90-item inventory. The results of exploratory factor analyses of brand personality are discussed in respect of previous research, the lexical approach, and the possible effects of different levels of data aggregation on the dimensionality of the obtained factor structure.
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Keywords: Brand personality; Personality structure; Lexical approach; Big-Five model; Data aggregation

1. Introduction

In the last two decades, researchers interested in the concept of brand personality have witnessed a convergence of research that focuses on the two main constituents of this concept: brand characteristics and human personality. Acceptance of the lexical approach to human personality (De Raad, 2000) as an important branch of personality psychology has resulted in the emergence of the Big-Five model of personality description (Goldberg, 1993). Due to its comprehensiveness, the Big-Five is often conceived as an integrative framework in personality research (Goldberg and Rosolack, 1994). The emergence of a shared

model in human personality may also serve as a guide for the creation of a common framework in the field of brand personality. After Aaker's (1997) seminal article, which identifies the brand personality dimensions of Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication and Ruggedness, a new way of conceiving the brand personality construct, with the Big-Five human personality as a metaphor, began to emerge. The study that follows (Aaker et al., 2001) aims to replicate Aaker's (1997) American brand personality dimensions in other cultures. However, studies in Japan and Spain show varied results. Similar to research using the lexical approach to human personality (Church et al., 1998; Di Blas and Forzi, 1998), the study by Aaker et al. (2001) identifies, apart from common brand personality dimensions, additional emic (Berry, 1969) dimensions, specific to the cultures of Japan and Spain. A study by Caprara et al. (2001), which examines the brand personality of 12 mass-market brands in the Italian market and uses a

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measure developed from Roman Italian personality taxonomy (Caprara and Perugini, 1994), is of particular interest to the present study. Caprara et al. (2001) first use an emic lexical measure in the field of brand personality and show that a five-factor structure is not replicated when describing brands. The results support a two-dimensional solution that resembled Digman's (1997) α and β personality dimensions. Although Caprara et al. (2001) are skeptical about the suitability of human personality dimensions for the descriptions of brands, one of the possible reasons for the poorer five-factor replication in their study might be in the measure used. The adjectives targeted directly at the Big-Five level of abstraction are criticized as a measure too broad for specific human behavior description (Hendriks et al., 1998). Likewise, in a brand personality context, it can be hypothesized that a somewhat lower level of abstraction, such as the AB5C model (Hofstee et al., 1992) could be useful for brand personality description.

2. Theory and problems

Research on brand personality that describes either the personality of global brands or local Croatian brands does not exist in Croatia. However, because a Croatian human personality taxonomy that identifies the Croatian emic lexical factors, similar to the Big-Five factors, was developed recently (Mlačić and Ostendorf, 2005), it is now possible to investigate the personality of brands in the Croatian market using an emic lexical measure. The lexical approach in personality psychology follows a simple rationale, "The most important individual differences in human transactions will come to be encoded as single terms in some or all of the world's languages" (Goldberg, 1993, p. 26). Since Aaker's (1997) definition of brand personality has been criticized as being too wide and loose (Azoulay and Kapferer, 2003), the researchers of this study accept the definition of brand personality as "the unique set of human personality traits both applicable and relevant to brands" (Azoulay and Kapferer, 2003, p.151). In view of the previous two quotations (Goldberg, 1993; Azoulay and Kapferer, 2003), the relevance of a human personality lexical measure in the study of brand personality is clearly evident. Moreover, according to the emic/etic difference in human personality studies, it would be valuable to additionally apply an indigenous measure of personality, if researchers are interested in the brand personality of local brands. Thus, rather than using an instrument from another culture, such as in the studies that developed from the work of Aaker (1997), the researchers of this article develop a brand personality measure pertinent to the culture of Croatia and the AB5C model.

The present article also deals with some methodological ambiguities that could have had an obscuring effect on previous research findings. In her pioneering work on brand personality, Aaker (1997) correlates 114 personality traits across 37 brands, and the scores of each brand on each personality trait are averaged across subjects. However, this kind of analysis leads to possible interpretational problems for several reasons. As Austin et al. (2003) argues, by employing this procedure all within-brand variance is removed and the factor analysis results are

based exclusively on between-brand variance. Although results obtained in this way may be useful in producing a framework for evaluating brands across a broad range of product categories, their use is very limited for evaluating individual brands within specific product categories. Hence, obtaining results by using Aaker's method may have inherent serious limitations regarding the generalizability of the framework (Austin et al., 2003). Neglecting within-brand variance is also inappropriate if one wants to study individual reactions to brands and resulting behavior (Bosnjak et al., 2006). The problem of data aggregation is especially evident if individual-level data are not congruent with aggregated data (Ostroff, 1993). One may reason that the individual ratings of brands are more saturated with random error, while aggregated responses for each brand are a more accurate representation of each brand's public perception. If one assumes that means (aggregated responses) reflect true scores for each brand and individual judgments only add some error variance, then using the former in factor analysis is a preferable approach. However, if the information included in individual-level data is not essentially the same as information from the aggregated data, then the study can not recommend the factor analysis of means. For example, with regard to the case of brands, individual judgments may reflect brand personality, while aggregated results (means) may reflect the suitability of attributes for different products. Analysis of aggregated data would thus result in the absence of a personality structure found while judging a total group of brands even if it exists at the individual level. However, performing a factor analysis on correlations between ratings of a single brand could also be considered as imperfect. Ratings of a single brand produce lower variance, just as a multitude of ratings of a single person would. The consequences are lower correlations and ultimately less clear-cut factor structure. One possible solution might be to include a multitude of different brands in the same analysis, just as one does with factorizing traits across persons.

To summarize, the researchers of this study are convinced that at least some differences in results regarding the dimensionality and factor structure of brand personality, specifically different levels of data aggregation, are attributable to different methodological approaches. It seems plausible to hypothesize that excluding within-brand variance, as well as concentrating only on within-brand variance can produce results of limited generalizability. Therefore, the two specific problems pursued in this study are 1) identification of the personality structure of familiar Croatian brands, using a measure from the AB5C model, and 2) determining how different levels of data aggregation affect dimensionality of the factor structure.

3. Method

3.1. Finding familiar Croatian brands

Familiar global brands such as Coca-Cola soft drinks, Nike and Reebok athletic products, IBM computers, McDonald's restaurants, Lego toys, and various automobile brands are well established in the Croatian market. This has been the case since Croatia's economy became more accessible in the early nineties.