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# Five dimensions of brand personality traits in sport

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### ABSTRACT

The first purpose of this study was to elaborate upon existing critiques and return to the fundamental brand personality concept by reexamining personality trait theory (i.e., lexical approach) and the sport brand personality literature. Based on a conceptualisation of sport brand personality, the second purpose was to develop an instrument for measuring brand personality in sport based on the restricted definition that excludes non-human personality traits. We adopted the lexical approach in an effort to explore the application of the HEXACO model for obtaining a set of representative personality traits ( $N = 36$ ) both applicable and relevant to sport brands. For the purpose of this study, a sport brand  $\times$  subject structure was utilised to find major sport brand personality dimensions. As a representative brand in sport, the National Football League was selected. Two data sets were collected from college students. The 36 sport brand personality traits were submitted to a principal axis factor analysis on the first data set ( $N = 196$ ). The analysis identified five factors (i.e., Agreeableness, Extraversion/Emotionality, Openness, Conscientiousness, and Honesty) that closely resemble the structure of human personality models. A Confirmatory Factor Analysis confirmed that the newly developed five-factor model has an acceptable fit to the second data set ( $N = 155$ ). This study identified that the lexical approach can provide a conceptual and methodological foundation when developing brand personality instruments.

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## 1. Introduction

With the proliferation of brands in an increasingly competitive marketplace, brand managers or practitioners have long sought to develop marketing strategies to differentiate their brands from competitors beyond utilitarian or functional characteristics (Aaker, 1997; Austin, Siguaw, & Mattila, 2003; Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003). A brand has emotional and symbolic human personality aspects that influence consumer behaviours beyond utilitarian or functional attributes (Aaker, 1997). Marketing strategies using the brand personality concept encourage consumers to think of a brand as having a human personality (Aaker, 1997). Through marketing efforts, consumers could easily attribute human personality traits to

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inanimate subjects such as brands (Arora & Stoner, 2009; Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003). For example, consumers considered the brand personality of Oil of Olay as “gentle” and “down-to-earth,” while Holiday Inn’s brand personality has been described as “friendly,” “practical,” and “reliable” (Aaker, 1997; Parker, 2009; Plummer, 2000). Moreover, “human beings have a uniform need for identity, and often search for this through the symbolisms and meanings carried by products and brands” (Wee, 2004, p. 317). Therefore, Austin et al. (2003) suggest that “choosing a brand with the right personality characteristics enables the consumer to develop a visible and a unique representation of him/herself” (p. 77). Brand personality could be an effective marketing tool for differentiating brands from competitors, and subsequently, for developing marketing strategies for sustainable competitive advantage (Buresti & Rosenberger, 2006; Keller, 2008).

Given the importance of symbolic meaning of a brand, interest in brand personality has increased in the marketing research literature (Aaker, 1997; Sweeney & Brandon, 2006). As a consequence, developing valid and reliable instruments that measure brand personality dimensions is important (Aaker, 1997; Austin et al., 2003; Geuens, Weijters, & De Wulf, 2009). In addition, in recent years, sport management researchers have become increasingly interested in measuring brand personality within the sport industry (Braunstein & Ross, 2010; Lee & Cho, 2012; Ross, 2008; Schade, Piehler, & Burmann, 2014; Tsiotsou, 2012). Within the context of spectator sport, previous research has indicated that sport brands have a variety of meaningful symbolic connections for spectators, such as community pride, socialisation with one’s family or friends when attending sport events, vicarious achievement, wholesome environment, and identifying sport players as good role models for girls and boys (Pritchard & Funk, 2010). Given the meaningful symbolic nature of sport brands, previous studies in sport management have measured brand personality in professional sport teams/clubs (Braunstein & Ross, 2010; Schade et al., 2014; Tsiotsou, 2012), intercollegiate sport teams (Ross, 2008), sport organisations (Smith, Graetz, & Westerbeek, 2006), sport sponsorship (Musante, Milne, & McDonald, 1999), and sporting events (Lee & Cho, 2012).

Aaker (1997) introduces anthropomorphism theory as an explanation for why consumers are likely to attribute human characteristics to non-human entities, such as brands. Aaker (1997) defines brand personality as “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (p. 347). Based on this conceptualisation of brand personality, Aaker (1997) developed a brand personality scale that encompasses five dimensions: Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, and Ruggedness. Aaker’s (1997) study is an important work assisting researchers and practitioners not only in understanding the symbolic meaning of brands, but also with measuring the symbolic human personality aspects of brands (Austin et al., 2003). However, to date, Aaker’s brand personality model and other brand personality studies following Aaker’s framework have been criticised regarding the inclusion of other characteristics beyond personality in the scale items, such as socio-demographics (e.g., age, gender, social class) or non-personality traits (Austin et al., 2003; Avis, 2012; Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003; Geuens et al., 2009). A second critique relates to the non-generalisability of the scale. This critique regards the issue of why the brand personality framework does not generalise to individual brands within a product or service category (Austin et al., 2003; Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003). A third criticism concerns the non-replicability of the brand personality factor structure (Geuens et al., 2009). All attempts to develop a sport brand personality measurement have replicated neither Aaker’s brand personality structure nor the human personality factors such as the Big Five dimensions or HEXACO dimensions.

While brand personality has become an increasingly important concept in the sport management literature, there is a lack of a conceptual and methodological foundation that might resolve the critiques. Therefore, the first purpose of this study is to elaborate upon existing critiques and return to the fundamental brand personality concept by reexamining personality theory and the sport brand personality literature (Avis, 2012; Geuens et al., 2009). Based on a conceptualisation of sport brand personality, the second purpose is to develop an instrument for measuring brand personality in sport based on the restricted definition that excludes non-human personality traits, focusing on understanding the symbolic meanings of a sport brand within a specific category (i.e., a professional sport league in the U.S.).

## 2. Review of literature

### 2.1. Theoretical background of brand personality

Why would sport consumers associate human personality traits with a sport brand? Animism and anthropomorphism theory can be applied to support brand personality phenomena within the context of consumers’ psychological process of imbuing human characteristics to non-human objects, such as brands (Avis, 2012; Puzakova, Kwak, & Rocereto, 2009). Animism and anthropomorphism can be defined as “attributing life to the nonliving” and “attributing human characteristics to the nonhuman” respectively (Avis, 2012; Guthrie, 1993, p. 52). Although animism and anthropomorphism have been used as interchangeable theories in the marketing literature, Puzakova et al. (2009) argued that “social psychologists explicitly differentiate between the two psychological processes” (p. 413). Epley, Waytz, and Cacioppo (2007) argued that “anthropomorphism involves more than simply attributing life to the nonliving (i.e., animism)” (p. 865). In the context of brand marketing, consumers’ psychological process of imbuing human personality traits into brands may not be synonymous with merely attributing life to the brands (Avis, 2012; Freling & Forbes, 2005; Puzakova et al., 2009). In addition, “brands are routinely being perceived as some kind of animate humanlike entities by consumers” (Avis, Aitken, & Ferguson, 2012, p. 313). Anthropomorphic theory enables sport brand personality researchers to answer the question of why sport consumers attribute human personality traits to their sport brands (Avis, 2012; Freling & Forbes, 2005; Puzakova et al., 2009).

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