



A new measure of brand personality

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ABSTRACT

In response to criticism of brand personality measures that embrace other aspects besides brand personality, we developed a new brand personality measure consisting of personality items only. Belgian respondents ($n = 12,789$) participated in a study of 193 brands. The new scale consists of five factors that show an affinity with the Big Five human personality dimensions. Unlike existing scales, this new measure proved to be reliable for between-brand between-category comparisons, for between-brand within-category comparisons, and for between-respondent comparisons. Moreover, the scale showed high test–retest reliability and cross-cultural validity (in the US and nine other European countries).

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Strong and differentiated brands significantly enhance firm performance (Colucci, Montaguti, & Lago, 2008; Madden, Fehle, & Fournier, 2006; Warlop, Ratneshwar, & van Osselaer, 2005). In this paper we focus on brand personality. 'Brand personality is the set of human personality traits that are both applicable to and relevant for brands' (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003, pp. 151). Plummer (1984, 2000) argued that brand personality might be crucial to understanding brand choice. Indeed, at a time in which consumers consider product quality as a given and competitors can easily copy product characteristics, a strong brand identity and personality are invaluable to build brand equity (van Rekom, Jacobs, & Verlegh, 2006).

The foregoing puts brand personality high on the agenda of academics and practitioners alike. As a consequence, reliable, valid and practical measurement tools are invaluable. The work of Aaker (1997) inspired the majority of the research on brand personality to date. She meticulously developed a 44-item Brand Personality Scale that encompasses five broad dimensions: Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, and Ruggedness. The scale has served as a brand personality measure in many studies, and its factor structure proved to be robust in several of them (Aaker, 1997, 1999; Aaker, Benet-Martinez, & Garolera, 2001; Kim, Han, & Park, 2001). However, Aaker's scale has recently been criticized on several grounds.

A first criticism pertains to the loose definition of brand personality, which embraces several other characteristics (such as

age, gender, etc.) besides personality (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003; Bosnjak, Bochmann, & Hufschmidt, 2007). This induces a construct validity problem and leaves researchers and practitioners uncertain of what they have actually measured: the perceived brand personality (a sender aspect) or perceived user characteristics (receiver aspects).

A second criticism concerns the non-generalizability of the factor structure for analyses at the respondent level (for a specific brand or within a specific product category) (Austin, Siguaw, & Mattila, 2003). Because Aaker (1997) conducted all analyses on data aggregated across respondents (for between-brand comparisons), she actually removed all within-brand variance, which led to factor analysis results that are exclusively based on between-brand variance. As a result, the framework does not seem to generalize to situations in which analyses are required at the individual brand level and/or situations in which consumers are an element of differentiation. Because the latter is the topic of a majority of practitioners' research, this is a serious boundary condition.

A third criticism relates to the non-replicability of the five factors cross-culturally (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003). Aaker et al. (2001), for example, found that only three of the five factors applied in Spain (namely, Sincerity, Excitement, and Sophistication). Peacefulness replaced Ruggedness and Passion replaced Competence. In Japan four of the five factors emerged, whereas Peacefulness again replaced Ruggedness. This shortcoming led several researchers to construct a country-specific brand personality scale. Bosnjak et al. (2007) developed a German scale, Milas and Mlačić (2007) a Croatian one, and Smit, van den Berge, and Franzen (2002) a Dutch one.

The first objective of this paper was to return to the basics of brand personality and develop a new scale based on a rigorous definition of brand personality that excludes all non-personality items. To have any practical value, the scale should be short and easy to

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administer since brand personality often is only one of several measures in a questionnaire. In this respect, we took to heart a recent trend to develop ultra-short scales (Burisch, 1997; Rammstedt & John, 2007).

A second objective was to assess the generalizability of the revised scale across research purposes and countries. With respect to the former, we investigated the replicability of the scale on (1) data aggregated across individuals for many brands in different product categories (to allow between-brand between-category comparisons), (2) data at the respondent level for several brands within the same product category (to allow between-respondent comparisons, but especially between-brand within-category comparisons), and (3) data at the respondent level for single brands (to allow between-respondent analyses). Concerning the latter, we assessed the validity of the revised scale in an additional ten countries.

Third, we tested the reliability and validity of the scale further (1) by examining test–retest correlations of the brand personality dimensions for 84 brands with a time interval of 1 year (in two different samples) and (2) by investigating the relation between brand attitude and the brand personality dimensions for distinct consumer groups to assess the nomological validity of the scale.

1. Theoretical background

Brand personality forms a major component of brand identity. Therefore, we first discuss brand identity frameworks, the place of brand personality therein, and the importance of measuring brand personality by means of personality items only. Next, we present an overview of human personality and summarize how personality appears in recent brand personality scales.

1.1. Brand identity, brand image and brand personality

Kapferer (2008) defines brand identity as a brand's meaning as put forward by the firm. It is the way a company wants to present its brand to its target groups. Brand image, on the other hand, is the consumers' perception and interpretation of the brand's identity (De Pelsmacker, Geuens, & Van den Bergh, 2007). Academics typically conceptualize brand identity and image as multi-dimensional constructs of which brand personality is an important component. Keller (2008), for example, defines brand image as consisting of (1) user profiles, (2) purchase and usage situations, (3) personality and values, and (4) history, heritage and experiences. Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) organize brand identity elements around four perspectives: (1) the brand as a product, (2) the brand as an organization, (3) the brand as a person, and (4) the brand as a symbol.

Building on the constructivist school of theorizing about communications, Kapferer developed a brand identity prism in which he considers a brand as a speech flowing from a sender to a receiver (Kapferer, 2008). He argues that the brand identity dimensions of physique (i.e., physical features and qualities) and personality (i.e., human personality traits) picture the sender. The identity dimensions of reflection (i.e., image of the target group) and self-image (i.e., how the brand makes consumers feel) depict the receiver. The dimensions of culture (i.e., values) and relationship (i.e., mode of conduct) form a bridge between the sender and the receiver.

Although several brand identity frameworks exist, most researchers share the opinion that brand identity (and brand personality) is best understood from the sender-side and brand image from the receiver-side perspective (Konecnik & Go, 2008). It is important to make this distinction between sender and receiver and each of the composing elements of brand identity, not only theoretically, but also in practical measurement instruments (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003). Otherwise, among other things, brand and user personality get mixed up, leading to uncertainty about how to take action in case of a gap between the desired and the perceived personality.

Indeed, user imagery often is not in agreement with brand personality (Keller, 2008). Plummer (2000, pp. 82), for example, found that consumers perceive the stereotypical user of Oil of Olay as “a pretty, down-to-earth, solid, female citizen”, whereas the brand personality of Oil of Olay is more upscale and aspirational.

In sum, a first reason to focus on personality traits only in a brand personality scale is that brand identity frameworks become useless if no appropriate measurement instruments exist for each of its components. Second, results are no longer interpretable and become meaningless if, for example, a measurement instrument mingles sender and receiver characteristics. Further, consumers use brands with a strong brand personality to build relations with (Fournier, 1998) and to show their own personality (e.g., Belk, 1988). If a brand personality scale could resemble a human personality scale, it would be easier for brand managers to translate consumer research into the most appropriate actions to create the “right” brand personality in view of their target group.

1.2. Personality in human personality scales

Psychologists define the substance of personality as ‘the systematic description of traits’ (McCrae & Costa, 1987, pp. 81), where traits are ‘relatively enduring styles of thinking, feeling, and acting’ (McCrae & Costa, 1997, pp. 509). After decades of research on a taxonomy of human personality, consensus now rests upon five dimensions that provide a complete description of personality: (1) Extraversion or Surgency (talkative, assertive, energetic), (2) Agreeableness (good-natured, cooperative, trustful), (3) Conscientiousness (orderly, responsible, dependable), (4) Emotional Stability versus Neuroticism (calm, not neurotic, easily upset), and (5) Openness or Intellect (intellectual, imaginative, independent-minded) (John & Srivastava, 1999).

The “Big Five” dimensions are a result of analyses of the natural language terms humans use to describe themselves and others (Goldberg, 1993). Although the development of the Big Five was not theory-driven, most important personality constructs as put forward by personality theorists as diverse as Jung, Leary, Guilford, and Eysenk are integrated in the Big Five structure, which increased trust in the Big Five (Sanz, Gil, Garcia-Vera, & Barrasa, 2008).

The idea to start from all personality terms that can be found in a dictionary stems from the assumption that natural language contains all relevant and salient personality traits (Allport, 1937). Starting from different sets of several hundred personality characteristics, a number of researchers found evidence of five recurrent factors (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Goldberg, 1992; Norman, 1967; etc). Although the individual items do not always load on the same factor and the factors are not always identically labeled (Neuroticism/Emotional Stability has appeared as Emotionality and Affect; Openness/Intellect has emerged as Imagination, Culture, Rebelliousness, and Unconventionality; and researchers have suggested relabeling Conscientiousness as Responsibility), the general contours of the Big Five appear in most (cross-national) studies. The evidence is least convincing for the Openness factor (John & Srivastava, 1999).

Initial scales contained as many as 240 (Costa & McCrae, 1992) and 100 (Goldberg, 1992) items. The trend away from overly long scales (Burisch, 1997) and the demand for efficient yet psychometrically sound measures resulted first in a 40-item version (Saucier, 1994), and recently in 10- (Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003; Rammstedt & John, 2007) and 5-item scales (Woods & Hampson, 2005). These ultra-short scales have proven to be a reasonable alternative to longer scales, balancing the demands of brevity versus reliability and validity.

With respect to products and brands, humans seem to feel a need to anthropomorphize objects to enhance their interactions with the nonmaterial world (Brown, 1991). Consumers also appear to experience no problems in assigning human characteristics to brands (Aaker, 1997) or in building a relationship with brands (Fournier,

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