Turning an Intended Brand Personality into Action

Brand personality attributes human characteristic traits to the brand based on the perception of the brand by consumers (Aaker, 1997; Grohmann, 2009). Brand personality has emerged as a key brand component with high relevance for the brand’s competitive differentiation (Aaker, 1996) and for brand performance – contributing to brand equity, brand trust, and brand loyalty (Biel, 1993; Fournier, 1998). Given these positive performance implications, marketing managers carefully define an intended brand personality for their brand in order to position the brand against competitive brands. They then invest (often extensive) marketing resources into brand-related marketing activities to implement their branding strategy and to ensure that consumers perceive their brand as intended by them (Burnett and Hutton, 2007). The implementation of a brand strategy is a key challenge: “[…] strong brands do not just happen. Rather, they result from the creation of winning brand strategies and brilliant executions…” (Aaker, 1996, p. 358).

Prior research on marketing strategy implementation has paid less attention to the challenge of implementing a brand strategy (Chimhanzi and Morgan, 2005; Noble and Mokwa, 1999). However, some researchers addressed this important issue in the context of brand identity (e.g., Kapferer 2008). Harris and de Chernatony (2001) stressed the importance of managing brands through narrowing the gap between a brand’s identity (which is intended by management) and its reputation (which is perceived by consumers). Nevertheless, when focusing on brand personality, the implementation of an intended brand personality has (besides its practical relevance) been rather neglected in the relevant literature. The existing studies focus on the ‘realized’ brand personality as perceived by consumers, taking a consumer perspective of brand personality. Accordingly, there exist studies on the conceptualization and operationalization of brand personality as perceived by consumers (e.g., Aaker, 1997; Geuens, Weijters, and de Wulf, 2009; Madrigal and Boush, 2008; Venable et al., 2005), on antecedents of perceived brand personalities (e.g., Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello, 2009; Diamantopoulos, Smith, and Grime, 2005; Hayes, 1999), and on direct performance implications of perceived brand personalities (e.g., Aaker, 1999; Helgeson and Supphellen, 2004). Thus, prior research has not addressed issues related to brand personality implementation, such as how brand managers can successfully turn their intended brand personality into action, so that consumers perceive the brand’s personality as desired by brand management. While many firms have clear ideas of how their brand personalities should be perceived by consumers, they often fail in the active management of these intended brand personalities and hence in their implementation.

The goal of the current study is to address these key research deficits – especially, since marketing implementation is viewed as being so critical for marketing performance (Homburg, Krohmer, and Workman, 2004; Piercy, 1998).

**CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS AND HYPOTHESES**

We conceptually discuss and empirically examine the implementation of an intended brand personality (as defined by brand managers) into a realized brand personality (as perceived by consumers). In order to do so, we combine the perspective of brand managers with that of consumers (so called fit). Furthermore, by analyzing the antecedents and consequences of the fit between intended and realized brand personality we can examine the success factors and performance impact of brand personality implementation.
Learning more about the implication of fit (whether consumers think what management aims for) is a key to confirming the value of “defining a brand”. From both an academic and a managerial perspective, it is highly relevant to understand which specific success factors (decisions and activities of managers) drive an effective brand personality implementation. We address the following success factors by conceptualizing them as determinants of the fit between intended and realized brand personality: angularity of the brand personality profile, the competitive differentiation of the brand, and the credibility of brand-related communication activities. To show the managerial relevance of brand personality implementation, we also address its performance implications. We specifically look at brand loyalty as a direct performance outcome, which then influences the market share of the underlying brand.

**Success factors of brand personality implementation**

Our first hypotheses relate to the determinants of the fit between intended and realized brand personality. First, we analyze the design of an intended brand personality and thus the content of a specific brand personality strategy. This design may be a challenging task since there is no simple rule as to how a ‘good’ brand personality should look like: High ratings on all five personality dimensions, for example, do not necessarily imply a ‘better’ brand personality. Against this background, we introduce the concept of a brand personality profile. This profile sets the values of the individual brand personality dimensions in relation to each other. We assume that a brand personality profile can take two distinct forms: If the various brand personality dimensions have similar values, the brand personality profile can be described as balanced. In contrast, if some personality dimensions score rather high, while other dimensions score low, it can be characterized as angular. Such a profile may represent a continuum from completely balanced (all dimensions show the same value) to very angular (only one dimension has a high value, while the other dimensions score low).

We argue that the angularity of the brand personality profile affects the implementation of an intended brand personality. A brand with an angular brand personality profile is less interchangeable with other brands, so that such a brand stands out from the crowd and receives more attention from consumers. Basically, an angular brand personality profile is a stronger signal that is more likely to be detected by consumers (Ye and van Raaij, 2004). Furthermore, an angular personality profile is easier to perceive and interpret than a more complex profile (with regard to the impact of complexity on information processing see also Crawford, 1991): Here, the scope of interpretation is smaller, reducing the probability of misinterpretations of brand-related communication and advertising. With fewer important personality dimensions, consumers also have fewer possibilities for a selective perception of the various personality dimensions. Also, the reduced complexity enhances the learnability of the underlying angular brand personality among consumers. Hence, an angular personality profile is more easily understood, remembered and recalled by consumers than a balanced brand personality. We thus hypothesize:

**H1:** A high degree of angularity of a brand’s personality profile positively affects the implementation of an intended brand personality.

Second, an important decision-making area within the scope of a brand strategy relates to the overall competitive positioning of a brand which refers also to functional attributes and benefits of a brand. Competitive differentiation reflects the degree to which consumers feel the brand is generally different from competing brands (Netemeyer et al., 2004). Similar to a brand with an angular profile, a brand that is positioned as distinct from other brands, will receive more attention among consumers, especially in an environment of information overflow (Carpenter, Glazer,
and Nakamoto, 1994). Due to this increased awareness, corresponding brand-related communication activities of managers will receive more attention among consumers. Furthermore, unique information cues are easier to memorize by individuals (Park, Arndt, and Reder, 2006). Such a distinct brand will not mentally be confounded with competitive brands. We thus hypothesize:

**H2:** The competitive differentiation of a brand positively affects the implementation of an intended brand personality.

The third brand personality implementation success factor relates to brand communication activities; in particular the credibility of brand-related communication, which refers to the extent to which a consumer perceives claims about the brand made in brand-related communication to be truthful and believable (MacKenzie and Lutz, 1989). Consumers strive for an understanding of reality (Kelley, 1972), so that credible (realistic) communication messages attract greater attention among consumers. Also, cognitive response theory and empirical studies (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986) suggest that when brand communication is perceived as credible, the cognitive responses and the attitude towards the ad are more favorable – increasing consumers’ brand awareness and their willingness to objectively interpret the provided information. Consistent with this view, it has been found that the consumers’ emotional responses are more congruent with the intent of the advertiser, if the consumers perceive the ad as credible (Cotte, Coulter, and Moore, 2005). Thus, credible brand-related communication increases the probability that consumers perceive the underlying brand personality as intended by managers:

**H3:** Perceived credibility of brand-related communication positively affects the implementation of an intended brand personality.

**Brand performance impact of brand personality implementation**

We analyze this impact in order to examine the managerial relevance of successful brand personality implementation. In today’s highly competitive business environment loyal consumer-brand relationships play a key role for a brand’s sustainable competitive advantage (Srivastava, Fahey, and Christensen, 2001). Companies achieve customer loyalty by satisfying customer needs and meeting customers’ expectations (Brown et al., 2002; Deshpandé, Farley, and Webster, 1993). Thus, companies are often highly customer focused and driven by customer demands (Disney, 1999). In this context, brand managers define an intended brand personality usually based on market research in such a way, that this brand personality should meet the needs and expectations of their targeted customers. If consumers perceive the brand as intended by managers, the brand should meet the customers needs and expectations, ideally even to a larger extent than competitive brands, resulting in an increase of the consumers’ brand loyalty. Based on these considerations, we hypothesize:

**H4:** The implementation of an intended brand personality positively affects the consumers’ loyalty to the underlying brand.

An important indicator for brand performance is the brand’s market share, which reflects the percentage of a brand’s sales compared to the sales for all brands in the product category (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). It has been acknowledged that customer loyalty is a significant antecedent in predicting market share (Baldinger and Rubinson, 1996; Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978). This positive connection has been theoretically based on the theory of double jeopardy (Donthu, 1994; Fader and Schmittlein, 1993), which states that popular brands with larger market shares have more buyers and are purchased more often by these buyers. Considering these arguments, brands
with greater loyalty should exhibit also greater market shares. Accordingly, we expect a positive relationship between the consumers’ brand loyalty and the brand’s market share.

**H5: Consumers’ brand loyalty positively affects the underlying brand’s market share.**

In addition, our research framework includes the control variable competitive intensity which may have a negative impact on the brand’s market share.

**RESEARCH METHOD**

In our study, we took a dyadic approach by surveying both brand managers as well as consumers from a variety of different backgrounds (see Table 1). In a written standardized questionnaire, 140 brand managers reported on their intended brand personalities and marketing activities. In a second survey, 3093 consumers responded in an online standardized questionnaire with regard to their perceptions of the brands of the first survey (realized brand personalities). Each consumer was randomly assigned to one brand, which s/he evaluated, if s/he was familiar with it.

----------------- Insert Table 1 about here -----------------

The measurement scales used in our study were largely based on empirically validated scales from prior studies (a complete list of all items is included in the Appendix). With one exception (i.e., the brand’s market share), all items were measured with 5-point-Likert-scales anchored by strongly disagree and strongly agree. The (by management intended) angularity of a brand’s personality profile reflects the relative dispersion of the different brand personality dimensions within a brand. A commonly used statistical measure of dispersion is the coefficient of variation (CV; ratio of the standard deviation SD to the mean):

\[
VC = \frac{SD}{\bar{x}}; \quad SD = \sqrt{\frac{\sum_{i=1}^{I} (x_i - \bar{x})^2}{n-1}}
\]

where \(x_i\) stands for the specific brand personality dimension and \(\bar{x}\) for the mean across all brand personality dimensions. A greater CV value indicates a greater variability (or smaller consistency) of the brand personality dimensions. To illustrate an angular profile where only one personality dimension scores high and the other dimensions score very low (e.g., competence: 5.0; excitement: 1.0; sophistication: 1.0; sincerity: 1.0) shows a CV value of 1, a moderately angular profile where only one dimension scores low and the other dimensions score very high (e.g., competence: 1.0; excitement 5.0; sophistication 5.0; sincerity 5.0) shows a value of 0.5, whereas an extremely balanced profile (e.g., all dimensions have the same scores) would show a CV value of 0.

To operationalize the fit between intended and realized brand personality (i.e., success of brand personality implementation), we used an absolute measurement term. For each consumer, the absolute distance between the intended brand personality (intended by brand manager) and the realized brand personality (perceived by consumer) was calculated at the dimensional level:

\[
(-1) \times \sum_{i=1}^{I} |ABS(IBP_i - RBP_i)|
\]
where IBP represents the intended brand personality and RBP refers to the realized brand personality evaluated by the consumer. i (i=1,…, I) refers to the corresponding brand personality dimension (i.e., sincerity, excitement, competence and sophistication). The multiplication by (-1) ensures that high values of the new variable ‘brand personality implementation’ (i.e., fit between intended and realized brand personality) correspond to a high implementation success.

Before testing our hypotheses, we assessed measure reliability and validity by using confirmatory factor analyses. Results indicated that the shared variances (i.e., composite reliability; Fornell and Larcker, 1981) among the set of items used to measure the underlying constructs of our study all showed satisfactory values. A composite reliability of at least .6 is considered desirable (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). As shown in the Appendix, each measure met that criterion. Additionally, the coefficient alpha values exceeded the threshold value of .7 (Nunnally, 1978), suggesting a reasonable degree of internal consistency between the corresponding indicators. This conclusion is supported by the fact that all the factor loadings were significant (p < .01), which has been suggested as a criterion of convergent validity by Bagozzi, Yi, and Phillips (1991). Finally, we assessed discriminant validity on the basis of the criterion that Fornell and Larcker (1981) propose. The results indicate that there are no problems with respect to discriminant validity.

**RESULTS OF HYPOTHESES TESTING**

We estimated our causal model using AMOS 17.0, and calculated measures of global fit. All common criteria of overall fit were met in our confirmatory factor analysis basic model (χ²(112) = 1630.18, RMSEA = .066, NFI = .919, NNFI = .896 and CFI = .924), which suggests that our model acceptably fits the empirical data (e.g., Bagozzi and Yi, 1988; Bentler, 1990; Browne and Cudeck, 1993). In Figure 1, we report the resulting parameter estimates, which are used to test hypotheses H1 – H5.

Our results show a significant positive relationship between the angularity of a brand’s intended personality profile and the implementation of this brand personality (γ₁₁ = .18; p < .01), supporting H1. Our results provide also strong empirical evidence for hypotheses H2 and H3. Perceived brand differentiation (γ₁₂ = .31; p < .01) and credibility of brand-related communication activities (γ₁₃ = .42; p < .01) positively affect the implementation of an intended brand personality. The path coefficient from brand personality implementation success on brand loyalty is positive and significant (β₁₁ = .40; p < .01). Thus, hypothesis H4 is supported. Brand loyalty, in turn, positively affects the brand’s market share (β₂₁ = .14; p < .01), confirming hypothesis H5. Furthermore, market share is negatively affected by the control variable competitive intensity (γ₁₄ = -.51; p < .01).

**DISCUSSION**

Our dyadic approach (combining the firm’s and the customers’ perspective) and the corresponding empirical results provide support for the conceptual idea that brand personality is co-constructed by both consumers and brand managers. This concept of co-construction of value is a central theme in the service-dominant logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). According to this logic, marketing means collaborating with and learning from customers and being adaptive to their individual and dynamic needs (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). Also, firms with a “sense-and-respond” strategy should be more successful than firms that practice a “make-and-sell” strategy (Haeckel, 1999; Vargo and Lusch, 2004). Hence, our research may provide support for the relevance of the
service-dominant logic as an important logic for branding research. Brand personality could be viewed as an additional benefit for the customer (in addition to the core product or service; Higgins, 1987; Sirgy, 1982). Following this logic, future research on brand personality may gain relevance by following the dyadic perspective we have chosen: integrating the firm’s with the customers’ perspective on brand personality reflects the idea of co-creation of value.

Future researchers may also examine additional variables in the context of brand personality implementation. These variables may include the coordination and integration of communication efforts (Reid, 2005; Reid, Luxton, and Mavondo, 2005) or agency support of branding activities (Beverland, Farrelly, and Woodhatch, 2007). Also, the specific content of advertising may be relevant – such as the use of attractive people in ads, or the use of certain cognitive arguments.

Our approach of implementing a brand personality is seen as an adaptation to consumer expectation. We argued that brand managers define an intended brand personality usually based on market research in such a way, that this brand personality should meet the needs and expectations of their targeted customers. In this context, future research could also consider the role of the brand essence that is driven by corporate values and identity while developing an intended brand personality.

Our results provide evidence for the positive brand performance implications of brand personality implementation. Managers should hence invest considerable management resources into brand personality implementation. In order to successfully implement a desired brand personality profile, brand managers are advised to focus on the specific variables that are able to support the implementation of the underlying brand personality dimensions. Our results indicate that it will be easier for managers to implement a brand personality, which aims at an angular personality profile. A brand with an angular personality profile scores high on only a few brand personality dimensions (e.g., high on excitement) while it scores lower on the other personality dimensions. Such a brand personality profile and its corresponding brand communication activities will receive greater attention among consumers and will be more easily interpreted and memorized. This increases the chance that the brand personality will be perceived by consumers as intended by managers. Furthermore, supporting the implementation success of brand personality implementation, managers are advised to create a brand which stands out from the crowd of competitive brands, so that it is perceived as different from other brands. Finally, communication activities of managers with regard to the underlying brand should aim at credibility, which has a strong impact on the success of brand personality implementation.
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<tr>
<th>Industries of Brands</th>
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<tr>
<td>Durable consumer goods</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fast-moving consumer goods</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Retailing</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>04.2%</td>
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<tr>
<th>Position of Managers</th>
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<td>Brand Manager</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>07.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Head of Branding</td>
<td>06.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Head of Business Development</td>
<td>04.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Head of Communication</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Head of Marketing</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Head of Sales</td>
<td>02.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marketing Manager</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
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<tr>
<th>Occupation of Consumers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employee</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>00.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scholar</td>
<td>04.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>02.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>73.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker</td>
<td>00.9%</td>
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<th>Gender of Consumers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>56.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>43.8%</td>
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<tr>
<th>Age of Consumers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean (S.D.)</td>
<td>24.43 (5.74)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Min</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max</td>
<td>70</td>
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FIGURE 1
RESULTS OF THE BASIC MODEL

* $p \leq .1$; ** $p \leq .05$; *** $p \leq .01$
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APPENDIX

Scale Name, Response Cue, Items, Psychometric Properties

(M = Scale Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; CA = Coefficient Alpha; CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted)

Realized Brand Personality (Consumer Data): Aaker (1997)

Please indicate how appropriate the following characteristics are for brand X (1 = not at all descriptive, and 5 = extremely descriptive).

**Sincerity (M = 3.20; SD = .86; CA = .85; CR = n.a.; AVE = n.a.)**
- **Down-to-earth:** down-to-earth, family oriented, small-town
  (M = 3.10; SD = 1.03; CA = .76; CR = .76; AVE = .51)
- **Honest:** honest, sincere, real
  (M = 3.30; SD = .97; CA = .91; CR = .92; AVE = .79)

**Excitement (M = 2.55; SD = .90; CA = .91; CR = .92; AVE = .81)**
- **Daring:** trendy, daring, exciting
  (M = 2.31; SD = 1.00; CA = .82; CR = .82; AVE = .61)
- **Spirited:** spirited, cool, young
  (M = 2.35; SD = 1.05; CA = .83; CR = .84; AVE = .64)
- **Up-to-date:** up-to-date, independent, contemporary
  (M = 2.99; SD = .97; CA = .77; CR = .80; AVE = .58)

**Competence (M = 3.00; SD = .83; CA = .87; CR = .89; AVE = .73)**
- **Reliable:** reliable, hard working, secure
  (M = 3.18; SD = .95; CA = .80; CR = .81; AVE = .59)
- **Intelligent:** intelligent, technical, corporate
  (M = 2.65; SD = .94; CA = .74; CR = .77; AVE = .53)
- **Successful:** successful, leader
  (M = 3.11; SD = 1.03; CA = .78; CR = n.a.; AVE = n.a.)

**Sophistication (M = 2.18; SD = .86; CA = .84; CR = n.a.; AVE = n.a.)**
- **Upper class:** upper class, glamorous, good looking
  (M = 2.26; SD = 1.01; CA = .84; CR = .84; AVE = .64)
- **Charming:** charming, feminine, smooth
  (M = 2.11; SD = .98; CA = .83; CR = .83; AVE = .62)

Intended Brand Personality (Manager Data): Aaker (1997)

Please indicate how appropriate the following characteristics are for the intended brand personality of X (1 = not at all descriptive, and 5 = extremely descriptive).

**Sincerity (M = 3.56; SD = .68; CA = .73; CR = n.a.; AVE = n.a.)**
- **Down-to-earth:** down-to-earth, family oriented, small-town
  (M = 2.55; SD = .96; CA = .70; CR = .71; AVE = .46)
- **Honest**: honest, sincere, real  
  (M = 4.55; SD = .64; CA = .82; CR = .83; AVE = .63)

**Excitement (M = 3.39; SD = .87; CA = .88; CR = .89; AVE = .74)**

- **Daring**: trendy, daring, exciting  
  (M = 2.93; SD = 1.20; CA = .84; CR = .85; AVE = .66)
- **Spirited**: spirited, cool, young  
  (M = 3.06; SD = 1.03; CA = .80; CR = .81; AVE = .58)
- **Up-to-date**: up-to-date, independent, contemporary  
  (M = 3.90; SD = .81; CA = .74; CR = .76; AVE = .52)

**Competence (M = 4.03; SD = .61; CA = .76; CR = .75; AVE = .50)**

- **Reliable**: reliable, hard working, secure  
  (M = 4.16; SD = .75; CA = .65; CR = .71; AVE = .49)
- **Intelligent**: intelligent, technical, corporate  
  (M = 3.35; SD = .95; CA = .65; CR = .72; AVE = .50)
- **Successful**: successful, leader  
  (M = 4.57; SD = .63; CA = .68; CR = n.a.; AVE = n.a.)

**Sophistication (M = 2.53; SD = .94; CA = .81; CR = n.a.; AVE = n.a.)**

- **Upper class**: upper class, glamorous, good looking  
  (M = 2.65; SD = 1.16; CA = .80; CR = .81; AVE = .58)
- **Charming**: charming, feminine, smooth  
  (M = 2.40; SD = 1.07; CA = .84; CR = .84; AVE = .64)

**Perceived Differentiation of the Brand (Consumer Data): Muncy (1996); Netemeyer et al. (2004)**

Please determine to what extent you agree to the following statements (1 = strongly disagree, and 5 = strongly agree).

- X really stands out from other brands of (product category).
- I perceive X as being fundamentally different from competing brands.
- X is unique from other brands of (product category).
(Scale M = 2.67; SD = 1.00; CA = .84; CR = .84; AVE = .64)

**Credibility of Brand-Related Communication Activities (Consumer Data): MacKenzie and Lutz (1989); Putrevu and Lord (1994)**

Please determine to what extent you agree to the following statements (1 = strongly disagree, and 5 = strongly agree).

- The claims in the ads of brand X are true.
- Brand-related communication activities of X are credible.
- I think brand-related communication activities of X are honest.  
  (M = 3.18; SD = .78; CA = .89; CR = .89; AVE = .73)
**Brand Loyalty (Consumer Data): Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel (2004); Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001)**

Please determine to what extent you agree to the following statements (1 = strongly disagree, and 5 = strongly agree).

- I am so happy with X that I no longer feel the need to watch out for other alternatives.
- Even though the product is available in a number of different brands, I always tend to buy X.

(M = 1.90; SD = .95; CA = .79; CR = n.a.; AVE = n.a.)

**Market Share (Manager Data)**

Market share was assessed using one item: How high is the brand’s market share (%)?

**Competitive Intensity (Manager Data): Song and Parry (1997)**

Please determine to what extent you agree to the following statements (1 = strongly disagree, and 5 = strongly agree).

- There is high advertising pressure in the market of brand X.
- There are many competitors advertising in the market of brand X.
- There are several strong brands in the market of brand X.

(M = 3.66; SD = 1.01; CA = .80; CR = .81; AVE = .59)