Managing Brand Personality: Antecedents and Consequences

Brand personality attributes human characteristic traits to the brand based on the perception of the brand by consumers (Aaker, 1997; Geuens, Weijters, and de Wulf, 2009; 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).

Although it is important to understand how consumers form their perceptions of brand personality, rather little attention has been paid on empirically examining antecedents of brand personalities (e.g., Batra, Lehmann, and Singh, 1993; Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello, 2009; Diamantopoulos, Smith, and Grime, 2005; Grohmann, 2009). In a similar vein, little attention has been paid on addressing the value of different personality dimensions (see Keller and Lehmann 2006). We address these research opportunities by exploratory investigating how different antecedents impact various brand personality dimensions and how these brand personality dimensions differ in their branding outcomes.

In academic research, a considerable amount of basic research work on brand personality exists. The primary focus of those studies lies in the conceptualization and operationalization of brand personality (e.g., Aaker, 1997) and the effects on consumer’s brand evaluation (e.g., on brand loyalty and purchase intention; Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel, 2004).

We know that various brand personality dimensions differ in their nature and are perceived by consumers from different causes (e.g., Grohmann, 2009). Thus, knowing which antecedents effectively influence a brand personality is necessary in order to manage a brand’s personality. Research shows that many of the consumers’ brand personality associations result from marketing activities initiated by the brand’s management (Freling and Forbes, 2005). There are three main categories of brand personality antecedents, which are mostly conceptually discussed in literature: Company-related antecedents (e.g., behavior and characters of employees and country-of-origin; Aaker, 1996), marketing-mix-related antecedents (e.g., advertising and price; Aaker, 1997; Ouwersloot and Tudorica, 2001; Plummer, 2000) and user-related antecedents (e.g., image of the typical user; Aaker, 1996, 1997).

Furthermore, since these dimensions differ in their nature, one can also expect that they differ in their consequential branding outcomes. In literature, there is a considerable amount of conceptual support for the key role of brand personality. However, important issues are still left open. Prior studies have focused on traditional indicators of brand performance such as brand attitude or loyalty. However, they did not distinguish between emotional and cognitive branding outcomes. The cognitive branding outcomes result from an evaluative judgment based on cognitive beliefs and evaluations of the brand and its performance. Emotional branding outcomes, on the other hand, are reflected in the emotional feelings towards the brand and the personal connection to the brand. The differentiation between emotion and cognition is rooted in the classical distinction between feeling and knowing as two facets of human experience (Hilgard, 1980) and has been applied in different academic fields. The distinction between those two may also be relevant for research on brand personality since designing a brand’s personality is a challenging task. Many brand managers face the fact that there is no simple rule as to how a ‘good’ brand personality should look like. Knowing which dimensions especially impact different branding outcomes might be of important value to them.
FRAMEWORK AND PROPOSITIONS

Figure 1 presents the framework for our study. Our main focus is on the two brand personality dimensions sincerity and excitement as suggested by Aaker (1997). These two dimensions are fundamental (Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel, 2004) since they capture the majority of variance in personality ratings for brands (Aaker, 1997; Caprara, Barbaranelli, and Guido, 2001). This finding is robust across individuals, product categories, and cultural contexts (Aaker, Benet-Martinez, and Garolera, 2001).

We argue that these two brand personality dimensions vary in their formation. Drawing on prior conceptual research on antecedents of brand personality (e.g., Batra, Lehmann, and Singh, 1993), we argue that the price and the quality of the underlying brand, advertising for the underlying brand, and the image of the brand’s typical users influence the consumers’ perceptions of these two brand personality dimensions.

Furthermore, we suggest that sincerity and excitement both affect cognitive and emotional branding outcomes, however, in different ways. By using this framework, we can exploratory investigate the different roles of various antecedents of brand personality as well as the different roles of sincerity and excitement for their branding outcomes.

Antecedents

Researchers have examined price and quality in numerous ways. Extensive behavioral research exists on how cues such as price affect consumers’ perceptions (signaling theory, see also Rao and Monroe, 1989 for a review). However, little research, if any, has explored how price and quality affect a brand’s personality dimensions. For example, do higher prices signal specific brand personality traits (e.g., exciting)? Also, do high quality products signal specific traits (e.g., sincere)? Conversely, are low-priced brands perceived with different personality traits?

In the context of advertising, we assume that the credibility of brand-related communication activities, perceived advertising intensity and the advertising style (informative, erotic, and entertaining) might impact a brand’s personality dimensions in different ways. For example, do intensively advertised brands foster specific perceptions of brand personality dimensions (e.g., excitement)? Or does an informative advertising style signal a sincere brand personality dimension? Moreover, does the perceived credibility of brand communication – reflecting the extent to which a consumer perceives claims about the brand made in brand-related communication activities to be truthful and believable (MacKenzie and Lutz, 1989) – affect certain brand personality dimensions?

In terms of the brand’s typical user images, we suggest that these images have an effect on the consumers’ perceptions of the two brand personality dimensions. The basic rationale of this link is that according to attribution theory (e.g., Folkes, 1988; Kelley, 1972; Kelley and Michela, 1980), consumers develop images of typical brand users and then infer these images on the brand’s personality. These different typical users might affect a consumer’s perception of brand personality dimensions in different ways.

Since sincerity refers to characteristics such as for example being honest, down-to-earth, cheerful and wholesome, our first proposition is that this brand personality dimension should be positively affected by the credibility of brand-related communication activities, socially accepted
typical users (who are characterized by high social status, social acceptance and political interest), an informative advertising style, and a high quality of the underlying product.

Within our **second proposition** we assume that consumers’ perception of the dimension sincerity (which refers to honest, family-oriented, friendly and original nature of the brand) is negatively shaped by a high price of the underlying brand, intense advertising campaigns, trendsetting typical users (who are characterized by fashion consciousness, trendsetting activities and striving for a world of beauty), and an erotic advertising style.

Excitement is a brand personality dimension that is built around qualities of energy and youthfulness (Aaker, 1997) and consists of highly emotional traits such as cool, young, imaginative or daring. This dimension is transmitted to consumers if the corresponding advertising approach uses an emotional appeal (Escalas and Stern, 2003; Poels and Dewitte, 2006). Thus, our **third proposition** is that this brand personality dimension should be positively affected by intense advertising campaigns, trendsetting typical users, and an erotic and entertaining advertising style.

On the other hand, since the nature of an exciting brand also refers to unique and independent characteristics, we assume in our **fourth proposition** that excitement is negatively affected by socially accepted typical users.

**Outcomes**

Our **fifth and sixth propositions** relate to the outcomes of sincere and exciting brand personality dimensions.

Traits of nurturance, warmth, family-orientation and traditionalism, which have been positively related to relationship strength (Buss, 1991; Robins, Caspi, and Moffitt, 2000), are characteristics of sincere personalities (Aaker, 1997). Sincerity can boost inferences of trustworthiness and dependability (Aaker, 1999). Thus, we propose that sincerity has a stronger effect on cognitive branding outcomes than excitement.

Conversely, exciting brands which consist of highly emotional characteristics such as being cool, young, imaginative or daring, emphasize fun. Keller (2001) indicates that when a consumer gains feelings of fun and excitement from a brand, he or she may be more likely to become attached to it. These feelings seem to mirror the needs for pleasure-stimulation (Sheldon et al. 2001). Hence, excitement should have a stronger impact on emotional branding outcomes than does the sincere brand personality dimension.

**RESEARCH METHOD AND RESULTS**

To test our propositions empirically, we conducted a large-scale online study of 2916 female and male consumers aged between 14 years – 74 years from a variety of different backgrounds. The unit of analysis was the individual brand relationship between a consumer and a specific familiar brand. Overall, 167 different brands were studied, covering a range of 23 different industries.

All items used for our measurement scales were based on empirically validated scales from prior studies, and were measured with 5-point-Likert-scales anchored by strongly disagree and strongly agree (see the appendix for all scales and individual items). The respondents were only allowed to continue the questionnaire with the corresponding brand if they were familiar with this brand.

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 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.

We estimated our propositions using AMOS 17.0, and calculated measures of global fit. Most of the common criteria of overall fit were acceptably met in our confirmatory factor analysis basic model ($\chi^2$(764) = 12013.89, RMSEA = .071, NFI = .84, NNFI = .82 and CFI = .84), which suggests that our model acceptably fits the empirical data (e.g., Bagozzi and Yi, 1988; Bentler, 1990; Browne and Cudeck, 1993). In Table 1, we report the resulting parameter estimates, which are used to test our propositions.

The path coefficients show a significant positive relationship between the brand personality dimension sincerity and the credibility of brand-related communication activities (.43; p < .01), informative advertising content (.04; p < .05), and high quality of the underlying product (.29; p < .01). Also, our results show a significant negative relationship between the brand personality dimension sincerity and a high price (-.12; p < .01), intense advertising activities (-.14; p < .01), trendsetting typical brand users (-.09; p < .01), and an erotic advertising style (-.04; p < .01).

Moreover, our results show a significant positive relationship between the exciting nature of a brand and intense advertising activities (.08; p < .01), trendsetting typical brand users (.52; p < .01), as well as an erotic (.14; p < .01) and entertaining (.17; p < .01) advertising content. On the other hand, socially accepted typical brand users (-.08; p < .01) show a significant negative effect on excitement.

The path coefficients of the two brand personality dimensions on emotional and cognitive branding outcomes are significant and positive: sincerity has a positive effect on emotional branding outcomes (.32; p < .01) as well as on cognitive branding outcomes (.52; p < .01). Excitement has a positive effect on emotional branding outcomes (.49; p < .01) as well as on cognitive branding outcomes (.24; p < .01).

We use a chi-square difference test to test our propositions, which suggest that sincerity has a stronger effect on cognitive branding outcomes than excitement, as well as that excitement has a stronger effect on emotional branding outcomes than does sincerity. The corresponding path coefficients for the emotional branding outcomes are .32 for sincerity and .49 for excitement, which corresponds to a difference of .17. This difference is significant at the .01-level, which results from equalizing the path coefficients of excitement and sincerity ($\Delta \chi^2 = 7.1$, $\Delta df = 1$; p < .01). Further, the corresponding path coefficients for the cognitive branding outcomes are .52 for sincerity and .24 for excitement, which corresponds to a difference of .28. This difference is also significant ($\Delta \chi^2 = 133.8$, $\Delta df = 1$; p < .01).

We also calculated the explained variances for the endogenous variables. 46% of the brand personality dimension excitement and 46% of the brand personality sincerity are explained by our
DISCUSSION

In this empirical study with a large number of brands, we examined antecedents and branding outcomes of two brand personality dimensions, namely sincerity and excitement. We could show that these two brand personality dimensions tend to come from different sources and tend to have different branding outcomes.

These findings should make the brand personality phenomenon more ‘tangible’ for managers, so that they can use the results for the positioning of their brands.

Those managers who try to emotionally connect their customers with their brand should especially focus on the brand personality dimension excitement. Our results suggest that excitement stems especially from its typical users’ image. Thus, those brand managers who would like to manage a change in the perception of their brand’s exciting personality should try to target trendsetting consumers, instead of socially accepted consumers (who negatively impact consumers’ perception of excitement). Also, an erotic and entertaining advertising style seems to strengthen consumers’ perception of the exciting nature of a brand.

Brand managers who would like to more cognitively connect their customers with their brand should focus on the sincere nature of their brand. Sincerity seems to come especially from credible brand-related communication activities and a high quality of the underlying brand. Thus, managers who would like to put more emphasis on the sincere nature of their brand should focus on those two factors. Regarding the advertising style, brand managers could emphasize an informative advertising style, rather than an erotic and entertaining style. Also, a high price, trendsetting typical brand users, and intense advertising activities negatively impact the consumers’ perception of sincerity. Thus, when brand managers intend to position their brand as a sincere brand, they are advised to avoid those factors.

The strong impact of brand personality on branding outcomes should encourage further research on the antecedents of brand personality dimensions. Future research may empirically examine other potential antecedents of brand personality dimensions such as brand name, brand symbols, distribution, employee behavior, or the usage of testimonials in advertising. Also, it might be worth addressing the question of which processes and mechanism underlie the attribution of different factors on a brand’s personality in future research.

Finally, while we focused on the two dimensions of sincerity and excitement, future research could examine other brand personality dimensions such as the gender dimensions of masculinity or femininity (Grohmann, 2009).
FIGURE 1

FRAMEWORK
### Table 1

**Results of the Antecedents of Brand Personality Dimensions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANTECEDENTS</th>
<th>Sincerity</th>
<th>Excitement</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Standardized Estimates</td>
<td>t-value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived relative price</td>
<td>-.12 (-6.291, p &lt; .01)</td>
<td>-0.2 (-1.048, n.s.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived relative quality</td>
<td>.29 (11.685, p &lt; .01)</td>
<td>.08 (3.613, p &lt; .01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility of brand-related communication activities</td>
<td>.43 (16.078, p &lt; .01)</td>
<td>.09 (3.849, p &lt; .01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived advertising intensity</td>
<td>-.14 (-7.882, p &lt; .01)</td>
<td>.08 (4.234, p &lt; .01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informative advertising style</td>
<td>.04 (2.247, p &lt; .05)</td>
<td>.00 (n.s.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erotic advertising style</td>
<td>-.04 (-2.563, p &lt; .1)</td>
<td>.14 (7.798, p &lt; .01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertaining advertising style</td>
<td>.03 (1.527, n.s.)</td>
<td>.17 (9.395, p &lt; .01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trendsetting typical brand users</td>
<td>-.09 (-3.650, p &lt; .01)</td>
<td>.52 (18.454, p &lt; .01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socially accepted typical brand users</td>
<td>.11 (4.201, p &lt; .01)</td>
<td>-.08 (-2.956, p &lt; .01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BRANDING OUTCOMES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Standardized Estimates</td>
<td>t-value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>.32 (15.138, p &lt; .01)</td>
<td>.49 (21.193, p &lt; .01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>.52 (20.921, p &lt; .01)</td>
<td>.24 (13.227, p &lt; .01)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES


APPENDIX

Scale Name, Response Cue, Items, Psychometric Properties

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

Perceived Relative Price: Yoo, Donthu, and Lee (2000)
Please determine to what extent you agree to the following statements (1 = strongly disagree, and 5 = strongly agree).
- X is expensive relative to its competitive brands.
- The price of X is high.
(Scale M = 3.07; SD = .93; CA = .86; CR = n.a.; AVE = n.a.)

Perceived Relative Brand Quality: Yoo, Donthu, and Lee (2000)
Please determine to what extent you agree to the following statements (1 = strongly disagree, and 5 = strongly agree).
- X is of very high quality.
- The likelihood that X is reliable is very high.
(Scale M = 3.56; SD = .80; CA = .84; CR = n.a.; AVE = n.a.)

Perceived Advertising Intensity: No prior operationalization found
Please determine to what extent you agree to the following statements (1 = strongly disagree, and 5 = strongly agree).
- X is intensively advertised.
- The ad campaigns for X seem very expensive, compared to campaigns for competing brands.
- The ad campaigns for X are seen frequently.
(Scale M = 2.7; SD = .97; CA = .80; CR = .85; AVE = .66)

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 = .79; CA = .89; CR = .89; AVE = .73)

Advertising Style: Burton and Lichtenstein (1988); LaTour, Pitts, and Snook-Luther (1990)
Please determine to what extent you agree to the following statements (1 = strongly disagree, and 5 = strongly agree).
- Advertising campaigns for X are entertaining (M = 2.67; SD = 1.1).
- Advertising campaigns for X are erotic (M = 1.75; SD = 1.01).
- Advertising campaigns for X are informative (M = 2.95; SD = 1.04).

Typical User Image: Hayes (1999); Rokeach (1973)
Please determine to what extent you agree to the following statements (1 = strongly disagree, and 5 = strongly agree).
Trendsetting typical brand users
- The typical users of X are fashion conscious.
- The typical users of X are trendsetters.
- The typical users of X strive for a world of beauty.
(M = 2.75; SD = .96; CA = .82; CR = .89; AVE = .73)

Socially recognized typical brand users
- The typical users of X have a high social status.
- The typical users of X are socially recognized.
(M = 2.85; SD = .85; CA = .78; CR = n.a; AVE = n.a.)

Realized Brand Personality: 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)

Cognitive Branding Outcomes: Chattopadhyay and Basu (1990); Putrevu and Lord (1994)
Please determine to what extent you agree to the following statements (1 = strongly disagree, and 5 = strongly agree).
- Buying X is a good decision.
- I have a favourable opinion of X.
- I think X has a lot of beneficial characteristics.
(M = 3.38; SD = .84; CA = .85; CR = .91; AVE = .73)

Emotional Branding Outcomes: Sirgy et al. (1997); Thomson, MacInnis, and Park (2005)
Please determine to what extent you agree to the following statements (1 = strongly disagree, and 5 = strongly agree).
- My feeling towards X can be best described as affectionate.
- My feeling towards X can be best described as loved.
- My feeling towards X can be best described as connected.
- My feeling towards X can be best described as passionate.
- My feeling towards X can be best described as captivated.
- I identify with X.
(M = 1.88; SD = .85; CA = .88; CR = .94; AVE = .71)