

Brand personality scales for media: a story in the making

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Abstract

The human characteristics of brands have proven to be a significant factor in effecting a relationship of a brand and the consumer and has impacted most success factors of businesses that own these brands. Brand personality, as the concept is termed, draws heavily, both content and sanction from the BIG FIVE dimensions of human personality. Therefore every scale that proposes to measure brand personality refers to Big Five as the starting point of its creation. This paper reviews the literature that establishes criticality of brand personality for businesses especially media industry since the emphasis laid on the products from this industry has been meagre at best and non-existent at its worst in the scales created so far. The paper also argues the effectiveness of micro vs macro approaches for measurements of brand personality. Media vehicles connect businesses to people like no other industry does, people do not connect to other products as they connect to media and therefore brand personality assumes even greater importance as a large number of brands depend upon media vehicles to create and strengthen their own brand personality. Media brands consequently have begun to focus on exploring and understanding the relationship that they enjoy with their audience and on how they are viewed by audience as a personality. This is considered as an aid to give direction to their efforts towards realizations of avowed business goals. Media industry has seen exponential growth in terms of revenues, profits, number of vehicles and application of technology in recent years. This paper reviews extant brand personality measurement scales for media products and attempts to identify gaps in the industry that are left un-catered for.

Measuring Brand Personality: Theories and Approaches

Brands make the market place colorful and exciting. Brands also enable people to express themselves, their fancy, style, personality, character etc. This duality, of a brand being communicated by the firm and that communication received and processed by the consumers in their own way, creates a relationship between the consumer and the brand. It is often seen that consumers assign human traits to the brand and therefore look at it like a person to make it easier to relate to. This process might be articulated expressly or may happen subliminally without the consumer being conscious of it. Firms have realized the importance of this process and to ensure a strong and loyal relationship, regularly try and understand the nature of relationship the brand enjoys with the consumer and accordingly sends communication in the market place. A useful and simple theoretical construct that aids this process of understanding is Brand Personality. This construct becomes even more important when the product is media. As media surrounds us and consumers or readers, viewers and listeners depend on it for information and entertainment constantly, it becomes a matter of habit too. The depth of this association is attested by the fact that readership, viewership and listenership tend to be highly sticky. This character of media business makes the concept of brand personality almost a critical success factor for the industry as it may guide efforts towards formulation of content and advertisement strategy. The research output however in this field is meager and is in incipient stages. The scales to measure media brand personality are still debating between greater effectiveness of a generic scale or a specific scale. Large swaths of media are still uncovered viz sports, music, business etc. This paper attempts to understand the research effort so far in understanding brand personality scales in media industry and explores the areas that need immediate focus to support media companies in decision making apart from paving way for further research output.

Brands have become important as they cater to a distinct need of a consumer. The maturing of markets is leading to ever finer market segmentation to cater to needs and tastes of consumers. Brands as symbols have attained great commercial value and have emerged as the top management's priority (Ailawadi and Keller, 2004). Considerable market research has focused on the symbolic meaning consumers attribute to brands (Austin et al., 2003), one such symbolic meaning is brand personality (Aaker, 1997; Zentes et al., 2008; and Geuens et al, 2009). Several studies argued that consumers associate certain anthropomorphic qualities with commercial brand (Ogilvy, 1983; Plummer, 1985; Aaker, 1997; and Sung and Tinkham, 2005). Personality is one such quality. Marketers believed that the harder aspects of brand like the functional attributes have more impact on consumer purchase behavior than its softer aspects like personality (Biel, 1993) however some studies argued that brand personality plays an important role in differentiating similar products, as it is less weighed by physical attributes (Biel, 1993; and Halliday, 1996). Research has established that while a brand's physical attributes like features, price and materials may change frequently, brand personality is an enduring quality, resisting change (Biel, 1993). Brand personality serves as a sustainable competitive advantage for the firm (Aaker, 1996) and it has great influence on brand equity (Batra et al 1993, Biel, 1993; Keller, 1993; and Aaker, 1996). Researchers found that the relationship between brands and customers could be strengthened through brand personality (Blackston, 1993; and Aaker, 1996) by creating 'feeling' or 'liking' towards the brands (Aaker, 1996). A few studies found that brand personality positively influences purchase decision of a product (Biel, 1993; Blackston, 1993; and Aaker, 1996).

Drawing on human personality models, Aaker (1997) developed a conceptual framework to examine how brand personality attributes are structured in the in the consumers' minds. Aaker (1997) proposed a brand personality scale consisting of five dimensions: (1) sincerity (down-to-earth, honest, wholesome, and cheerful); (2) excitement (daring, spirited, imaginative and up-to-date); (3) competence (reliable, intelligent, and successful); (4) sophistication (upper class and charming); and (5) ruggedness (outdoorsy and tough). Aaker defined brand personality as the set of human characteristics associated with a brand. Consumers easily can think about brands as if they were celebrities or famous historical figures (Rook 1985) and as they relate to one's own self (Fournier 1994) which may be due in part to the strategies used by advertisers to imbue a brand with personality traits such as anthropomorphization (e.g., California Raisins), personification (e.g., Jolly Green Giant) and the creation of user imagery (e.g., Charlie girl). Through such techniques, the personality traits associated with a brand, such as those associated with an individual, tend to be relatively enduring and distinct. For example, the personality traits associated with Coca-Cola are cool, all-American and real; these traits are relatively enduring (Pendergrast 1993) and differentiate Coke from its competitors (e.g., Pepsi being young, exciting, and hip; Dr Pepper being nonconforming, unique, and fun; Plummer 1985). Aaker considered a large number of brands namely four brand groups, each containing nine unique brands and one common brand Levi's Jeans, so that the generalizability of the scale improves. In Indian context, several brands have carved a unique niche for themselves, Tata Tea has a personality of the one who is awakened to social issues, Thums Up, the popular soft drink is male, macho and adventurous, Tanishq, the jewellery brand is female, elegant, sophisticated and cultured, Raymonds is a perfect man whereas Mountain Dew is a fearless man. The impact of such anthropomorphization has helped each one of these brands considerably. Tata tea closed in the gap with the market leader HUL by increasing its market share to 22.7% closer to 23%, the market share of the leader HUL, Thums Up has been the market leader in soft drink's market for last three decades, despite changing hands from Parle to Coca Cola company.

Aaker's Scale was criticized for construct validity (J N Kapferer, Azoulay Audrey 2003). They argued that Aaker's scale does not really measure brand personality, but merges a number of dimensions of brand identity, of which brand personality is one, and measures them. It also left the academicians and practitioners wondering what they have measured (Geuens et al 2009): the perceived brand personality (a sender aspect) or perceived user characteristics (receiver aspects). Aaker's definition was said to be loose and according to her, brand personality may designate any non-physical attribute associated with a brand including intellectual abilities, gender or social class which psychologists have worked over years to exclude. They therefore called for a stricter definition of brand personality and defined it as 'brand personality is the set of human personality traits that are both applicable to and relevant for brands'. They

thus called for distinctiveness in the definition of brand personality and free it from the over-generalized and blanket term that includes several dimensions other than what brand personality may not include.

In order to address these shortcomings, Geuens et al. (2009) attempted creation of another scale which purportedly drew its basis from the BIG five dimensions of human personality that provide a complete description of human 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 and Srivastava, 1999). Although the development of Big Five was not theory driven, most important personality constructs as put forward by personality theorists like Leary, Jung, Guilford and Eysnek are integrated in the Big Five structure which increased trust in the Big Five (Sanz, Gil, Garcia-Vera and Barrasa, 2008).

Geuens et al. (2009) created a brand personality scale that was derived from the study of 193 different brands across 20 different product categories of five dimensions Responsibility (down to earth, stable, and responsible), Activity (active, dynamic and innovative), Aggressiveness (aggressive and bold), Simplicity (ordinary and simple) and Emotionality (romantic and sentimental). This scale with 12 items also suffered from relatively weak predictive and nomological validity (around 12%) (Valette-Florence, Barnier 2013).

As the study of brand personality developed, two primary methods of measuring it evolved, a global or holistic scale called macro approach and a product-category specific scale termed as Micro approach. This categorization was earlier proposed by Reynolds (1988) in the study of social values in social psychology. At micro level, the study of brand personality takes place within a specific area of product category leading to generation of items of dimensions that may not necessarily be a part of macro inventory. Scales developed for areas such as websites or print media brands or culture-specific scales shall fall in the category of micro approach. In the scenario of rapidly expanding economy and businesses, every product category has become big with a large number of brands in every category, which makes every product category unique and therefore academically significant as well. This development also leads to characteristics and dynamics that are peculiar to product categories and therefore demands a specific scale to ensure high predictive power. Micro approaches have the advantages of providing product-category relevant and culturally sensitive brand personality measurement scale. The items generated shall be more relevant and specific to the product category resonating better with the customers and therefore the scale being closer to the realities of the brand personality. Generic scales may have lower validity and therefore lower utility to the managers for decision making.

Brand Personality Scales in Media Industry

Media industry, which was once only a vehicle or a medium to carry messages has now become so important that we often say, medium is the message. This industry has developed from being a group of owner-run, ideals-driven organizations to large media conglomerates influencing people and their opinion and policy-making across geographies, cultures and markets. News Corp led by Rupert Murdoch is set have a size of 46 billion USD, Walt Disney 50 billion USD, Comcast 60 billion USD and thereabout while in India, the large media houses like Bennet Coleman and Co Ltd, Zee Entertainment, Sun TV network, Hindustan Times Ltd etc hover around 0.5 to 4 billion USD. Needless to say they have become organizations that make profits and also enable other businesses to earn revenues and profits. As revenues and profits become important, distinguishing one platform from another also becomes increasingly important. These compulsions lead to creation of ever finer segments in the population and media vehicles that cater to them uniquely. No wonder today we have media vehicles dedicated for a host of interests viz news, business news, general entertainment, fashion, cinema, sports, youth, food and cookery, music, animals and pet care, history, cartoons, children, gossip and celebrities, quizzing and game shows, health, economics, decoration, lifestyle, parents, seniors etc apart from mass media vehicles that cater to them as an integrated audience.

This trend has consequently led to media vehicles attempting in-depth understanding of their readers, viewers and listeners so that it becomes easier to create relevant content and attract advertisers who may be targeting the audience that the vehicle caters to. For example, Century FM created a typical listener profile, calling it Debbie who is 33 years old, is in a relationship and has children. She loves going

out but accepts that this isn't as often as she would like to. Debbie is the reference point for all of Century's brand output. She was created after research findings showed that their listeners are people who have grown up but not grown old. Needless to say, such characterization helped in designing the communication to be aired by the station as it helped the audience to establish relationship with the brand. Similarly Choice FM characterized its listeners as "young London in love with music, money and life" that helped draw advertisers such as British Airways and Nike.

In TV medium, various brands also attempt to define their target segment and accordingly decide their brand promise, slogan and brand architecture. A study on TV brand management (Kati Forster 2011) among the TV stations of US, UK, Germany and Spain showed the following results related to segmentation of audience and resultant brand positioning of TV channels.

Brand Promise, Slogan and Brand Architecture			
Station	Brand	Slogan	Brand Architecture
	Promise		
NBC	Diversity	"More colorful"	Genre: News Format: America's Got Talent, Biggest Loser (reality shows) Personality: Jay Leno, Jimmy Fallon
CBS	Diversity	"Only CBS" / "America's Most Watched Network"	Genre: Crime series and sitcoms Format: CSI, Navy CIS, Criminal Minds, The Mentalist Personality: David Letterman
ABC	Not verbalized by ABC	"Your favorite shows live here"	Genre: Series (drama and medical drama), reality shows, Format: Dancing with the stars, The Bachelorette, Desperate Housewives, Grey's Anatomy
BBC1	Quality, creativity, variety, access for all, reliability and neutrality	"Channel for Everyone"	Genre: Entertainment, drama, information Format: Eastenders (soap), Casualty (hospital drama), Doctor Who (sci-fi), BBC News, No focus on personality brands

ITV1	Optimism	"The brighter Side"	Focus on station brand Genre: Sports and reality shows, Format: Coronation Street, Emmerdale (soaps), Personality: Sir Trevor Mc Donald, Julie Etchingham (news)
La 1	Quality, diversity, relevance, education, entertainment	-	Positioning especially via personality brands Genre: Information and telenovelas
Antena 3	Modern, young, multi-medial and innovative	-	Genre: series and movies Format: El Internado (serial)

ZDF	Democracy,	„Mit dem	Genre: Documentaries, science productions,
	accessibility,	Zweiten sieht	culture broadcasts, German movies,
	orientation,	man besser“	several strong format brands within these
	culture,		genres
	innovation,		
	entertainment,		
	knowledge,		
	future		

RTL	Diversity,	„Mein RTL“	Genre: Shows,
	innovation,		Format: DSDS
	consistency,		Personality: Günther Jauch, Dieter Bohlen
	quality and		
	relevance		
ProSieben	Passionate,	“We love to	Genre: Blockbuster, series, house brand: Made
	extraordinary,	entertain you“	by ProSieben,
	State of the		Format: Galileo, PopStars, Germany’s Next
	Art		Top Model,
			Personality: Stefan Raab, Sonya Kraus

It is evident that a media vehicle markets its readers or listeners or viewers and they give the media vehicle a character or a personality, consequent to the perception created in their minds of the communication sent by the firm. The personality so developed is mediated by organizational culture and the relationship established between the firm and the brand. Brand identity as it is called was articulated as a concept that encapsulated these ideas into a theoretical construct by Kapferer (2002).

As media business grew and became big business proposition driven by conventional market forces applicable to all other product categories, interest in studying media vehicles as a brand also grew. Researchers began exploring the idea of measuring brand personality of media vehicles as late as 2008 when Sylvia Chan-Olmsted and Cha (2008) created a brand personality scale for TV News Brands. They studied cable & broadcast news media - CNN, Fox News, MSNBC, CBS News, NBC News, ABC News and identified 3 dimensions of TV news brand personality as Competence (Intelligent, Honest, Reliable, Traditional, Analytical, Technical), Timeliness (Up to date, Contemporary, Experienced), and Dynamism (Trendy, Masculine, Energy).

The above scale measured brand personality of news media brands from the field of TV alone. Kim, Jooyoung, Baek; Tae Hyun; Martin, Hugh J (2010) expanded the scope of the study by creating a scale for measuring brand personality of news media in its entirety considering media vehicles across media outlets such as television news network, newspapers and news magazines. Through a series of exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses procedures with an initial set of 229 personality traits that were reduced to 48 items, they identified 5 dimensions of news media brand Personality as Trustworthiness (smart, professional, trustworthy, responsible informative and straight forward) Dynamism (lively, energetic, edgy, spirited and imaginative), Sincerity (family-oriented, friendly, sincere and sentimental) Sophistication (glamorous, charming, feminine, and smooth) and Toughness (tough, rugged and masculine). Sixteen news media brands were studied notably Wall Street Journal, TIME, CNN, Fox News, CBS, MSNBC etc. These dimensions were identified by juxtapositioning findings of this research to Aaker’s Dimensions. The results were generally found to be consistent with the general perception of each media organization for example The Wall Street Journal is known as business newspaper and uses fewer photographs and graphics than most other newspapers and therefore the readers may associate it with ‘Smart’ and ‘Serious’ factor and considered more Trustworthy. Similarly Fox News, which often features news anchors who aggressively question guests may indicate a higher emphasis for ‘Rugged’ and ‘Masculine’ attributes thus highlighting the ‘Toughness’ dimension. TIME, in addition to global news coverage offers extensive report on fashion, entertainment and the arts, which

may explain its high ratings on the ‘Sophistication’ dimension. The moot point of this study was to explore if news media brand personality scale can apply to media outlets across category of vehicles and the results suggested that it can.

Similar efforts were made in developing a scale for print media brands. Newspaper association of America has stressed this idea over last decade and has urged print industry to build its own brands. Wilkinson emphasized branding as the hottest topic and observed marketing executives trying to reconnect with readers through value concepts, trust and integrity. Lee in his study of brand equity of newspapers, categorized brand associations related to newspapers into three dimensions: corporate dimension, quality dimension and personality dimension. The personality dimension included ‘ability with honesty’, ‘refinement with modernity’ and ‘toughness with boldness’. He indicated that these dimensions contributed towards creation of brand equity. Valette-Florence and de Barnier, 2013, created a Brand Personality Scale for Print Media vehicles in French context. They chose newspapers and magazines on the basis of three complementary considerations: substantial circulation figures, pairs of relatively similar publications and publications belonging to the same category but different formats.

List of Mass Circulation French Print Media Publications Selected		
Media category	Media focus	Media title
National daily papers		Le Monde, Le Figaro
TV listings		TV magazine, Télérama
Women’s	Fashion	Elle, Marie-Claire
	General	Femme Actuelle, Psychologie Magazine
	Health Cooking	Top Santé Cuisine Actuelle

News	News	l’Express, Le Nouvel Observateur
	General	Paris-Match, VSD
	Economics	Capital
People		Voici, Gala
Leisure	Cinema	Ciné Live
	Travel	Géo
	Sport	L’équipe (National daily paper)
	Decoration	Art & decoration
Family	Parents	Parents
	Seniors	Notre Temps
Men’s	Fashion	Entrevue
	charm	

This scale has five dimensions of which three dimensions of order-2 Respectability (wisdom and conventional character), Charm (seduction and elegance) and Welcoming character (natural and agreeable) and two order-1 variables, misleading character and Assertive character. This scale, unlike most previous scales, follows a micro approach, and is based on qualitative study, stemming directly from brands instead of transposing human personality inventories. The initial items were all validated by experts so as to ensure relevance in the context of the study and therefore reusable for other studies in this area. In contrast other scales are derived from a macro approach and have to be consistently reduced and modified if they were to be applied to a field of investigation.

The Macro-Micro Debate

The terms “macro” and “micro” were first applied to two specific approaches to the study of social values in social psychology (Reynolds, 1988). The first, known as the “macro approach”, sets out to

measure social values through inventories of values that are as exhaustive as possible. The approach developed by Schwartz (1992) is now largely recognized within the academic community. In marketing, however, in the analysis of specific consumption practices, a more detailed approach based on the values sought in the consumption of a specific product class seems to be better (Aurifeille and Valette-Florence, 1994). This conception, termed “micro” by Reynolds (1988), considers that the specificity of each area of investigation calls for a targeted study and that the use of overly generalized inventories is inappropriate. This epistemological question also arises in relation to the concept of brand personality. For consumption practices are imprinted with characteristics that are both cultural and linked to product categories, thus raising doubts as to the universal nature of brand personality inventories. At a cultural level, for example, Aaker, Benet-Martinez and Garolera (2001) have revealed brand personality dimensions specific to countries such as Spain or Japan compared to the USA. Furthermore, the various adaptations of Aaker’s scale to France (Ladwein and Koebel, 1999) have failed to reveal the original structure found in the United States.

The debate between the micro and macro approaches was compounded by the internet revolution. All media products now being made available through websites leading to convergence has queered the pitch. Any effort in the field of measurement of brand personality scale cannot ignore the website versions of various media vehicles. Till now the question has been addressed as the scale is for comparison across media vehicles and not within a vehicle however it is a matter of academic importance to understand the brand personality scale for websites.

Internet of Things in Brand Personality

Websites have the potential to develop relationships with customers that are characterized by dialogue and customized content (McMillan 2002; Rodgers and Thorson 2000). In this sense, online marketing has much in common with interpersonal face-to-face marketing. The power of this new technology is believed to be its interactive capabilities that allow companies to engage in individualized communication on a massive scale (Chen, Griffith, and Shen 2005; McMillan 2002). Interpersonally speaking, the personality of a salesperson can affect the customer business relationship and sales effectiveness (Smith 1998). By analogy, the personality (i.e., attributes) of a website could also influence the online customer-business relationship and online sales effectiveness.

A website is also a brand carrier and an extension of the sponsoring organization’s operations (Palmer and Griffith 1998). Hence, it is important that the channel exhibits the personality characteristics of the brand. Previous research has found that brand personality largely influences a consumer’s brand preference and choice (Aaker 1997). Similarly, the personality (characteristics) of a website is (are) expected to influence the preferences and choices of online customers. Chen and Rodgers (2006) created a scale to measure brand personality of websites. The website personality scale identified 5 dimensions, Intelligent (proficient, sophisticated, effective, and systematic), Fun (engaging, exciting and vital), Organized (confusing and overwhelming), Candid and Sincere.

Gaps in Extant Research in Media Brand Personality and the Way Forward

This extensive survey of brand personality scales clearly establishes the nascent nature of research in this field. The debate is still whether scales actually measure what they propose to measure and their predictive power. The application of macro and micro approach has improved the applicability of scales for the said category however they cannot be applied across categories and therefore a unique scale would be required for every product category. Brand personality studies and measurement in the field of media is still at incipient stages. The rapid proliferation of media the world over and its emphasis on the audience that it provides reach to, to its clients makes it imperative that readers, viewers and listeners enjoy a unique relationship with the media vehicle. The scales created so far related to media sector are either to measure news media or television media or print media. Media is a vast industry and highly segmented one. It is a common practice among media houses to have separate sales and marketing teams dedicated to generate advertisement revenues from financial sector, real estate sector, retail sector, education sector, jobs sector etc. There also exists a type of media, the business media within media that seems to be ignored by most scales created for media products. In Valette-Florence (2013) has only 1 product as a part of the media vehicles considered out of 24 publications. The scales for news brands and

television brands also do not include business media. The scale for TV news media brands Kim, Jooyoung, Baek; Tae Hyun; Martin, Hugh J (2010) considers only one business media vehicle and that is Wall Street Journal.

Business media has developed as a second alternative to general entertainment media. This has happened with growth and maturing of financial markets. The increasing focus on economic growth of countries and consequently of citizens by the government and other agencies has started the process of looking at every individual not only as consumer but also as investor. As investor, one prefers to be an informed investor to maximize returns. The sheer scale of business activity and related policy developments, create voluminous content almost every day and to an interested audience, it makes for a compelling read. These developments have led to rapid proliferation of business media across platforms like newspapers, television, magazines, websites etc however the extant research completely ignores this important and significant part of media. Similarly sports media and music media are also genre by themselves and we are yet to see any brand personality scale developed for them.

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