

Personality-driven luxury brand management

Klaus Heine¹ · Glyn Atwal² · Sandrine Crener-Ricard³ · Michel Phan¹

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Abstract This paper combines the brand personality and brand anthropomorphization concepts and introduces the notion of personality-driven brand management especially for the context of luxury branding. A central part of this paper is a study about the major dimensions of luxury brand personality. Results suggest that there exist five distinct luxury personality dimensions including tradition, modesty, elitism, eccentricity and sensuality. They help brand managers to develop distinct brand personalities by encouraging them to decide between contrasting traits. After presenting the major strategies to bring a luxury brand personality alive, the paper discusses the benefits of personality-based brand management and concludes with some major lessons learned.

Keywords Luxury branding · Brand identity · Brand personality · Anthropomorphization

Introduction

Can Porsche be construed as a successful and dynamic man in his 1940s? Research on person–object relations shows that consumers can *anthropomorphize brands*, thinking about them as if they were human characters (Belk 1988; Plummer 2000; Puzakova et al. 2009). They show no

difficulty in assigning human characteristics to brands (Aaker 1997) as if they would describe other people (Azar 2015). Even more, they tend to maintain relationships with brands similar to the way they interact with other people (Fournier 1998). MacInnis and Folkes (2017) consider brand anthropomorphism as a contemporary phenomenon *driven by societal changes* such as the advent of digital avatars and robots that cue human knowledge schemas.

Brand managers often also encourage consumers to attribute human qualities to their brands. They implement *brand anthropomorphization techniques* using brand characters, mascots and spokespeople to create symbolic meaning and improve brand differentiation. This, in turn, helps consumers with their identity maintenance and enhancement (Wee 2004). In addition, a humanized brand can have ‘quasi social influence’ triggering effects on consumers previously seen for responses to other people (Aggarwal and McGill 2012, p. 307). Although not fully understood (Freling and Forbes 2005), brand anthropomorphization can strengthen consumer–brand relationships, which ultimately affects consumer preferences, purchase, loyalty and brand love (Rauschnabel and Ahuvia 2014).

Paradoxically, anecdotal evidence suggests that many *brand managers do not believe their brand to be a person themselves*, even though they aim at creating anthropomorphized brands in the minds of consumers (Puzakova et al. 2009). The reason lies in their approach of brand management. Since about a decade, identity-driven brand management has been getting increasingly popular. Compared with positioning-based branding, the main source of inspiration for brand-building has shifted from consumer and competitor analyses to the brand’s inner beliefs and vision (Kapferer 2012). Although brand personality is seen as a key component of brand identity, often it still does not

✉ Klaus Heine
Heine@em-lyon.com

¹ 2/F, Global Education Centre, emlyon business school, Asian Campus, East China Normal University, No. 3663 North Zhongshan Road, Shanghai 200062, China

² Burgundy School of Business, Dijon, France

³ Harvard Business School, Boston, MA, USA



consist of more than a set of traits used for brand personification in the minds of consumers.

By combining the concept of brand personality with brand anthropomorphization for brand-building, a brand may also be brought alive internally, in the minds of brand managers and all company employees. When the focal point of brand management shifts to the enlivened brand, the brand personality becomes the main source of inspiration for brand-building and influences all branding decisions. With personality-driven branding, managers may leverage the full potential of brand anthropomorphization. For instance, it can help to turn the brand into a strong character, which can spark both the employee's enthusiasm and the customer's passion for the brand (Fournier and Alvarez 2012). As a prerequisite of (internal) brand anthropomorphization, managers need to decide what kind of person they would like their brand to represent. For this purpose, they can consult a framework of brand personality dimensions for some guidance.

The two *main objectives* of this paper are (1) to introduce the notion of personality-driven brand management within the luxury and high-end cultural and creative industries and (2) to identify major dimensions of luxury brand personality as tools for building brand personality. Numerous studies already exist about brand personality dimensions, but they have been met with much criticism (Avis et al. 2014). Psychological theories about the anthropomorphization of inanimate objects were transferred in the last decades to the areas of consumer behaviour and branding (Epley et al. 2007; Puzakova et al. 2009). Despite this development, there is still *much need for further contributions to the literature* (Sweeney and Brandon 2006). The area of brand anthropomorphization still receives scant attention (Puzakova et al. 2009; Alvarez and Fournier 2016; Kervyn et al. 2012; MacInnis and Folkes 2017) with no paper focusing on brand anthropomorphization as a tool for brand-building. However, Guido and Peluso (2015) recognize that brand anthropomorphization is gaining relevance in branding research and practice. In their recent analysis, Sprott and Liu (2016) point especially to the areas of luxury branding, the application of psychological theories to brands and to brand anthropomorphization as major avenues for future research. Given this background, the paper starts by introducing identity-driven luxury brand management, then demonstrates the role of brand personality in brand-building, and, in a later stage, draws a comparison between identity-driven and personality-driven brand management.

Identity-driven luxury brand management

Brand identity is a detailed construction plan of meaning that originates from the companies' inner beliefs, is goal-driven by a vision and determines precisely how managers wish a brand to be perceived by its customers and other internal and external stakeholders. The scope of a luxury brand's identity is limited insofar as it must include a set of common characteristics that are shared among luxury brands. Research suggests that luxury brands are characterized by a relatively high rating on *six major product-related dimensions* including price, quality, aesthetics, rarity, extraordinariness and symbolic meaning (Heine and Phan 2010). Essential symbolic characteristics of luxury brands include prestige and authenticity (Heine and Petersen 2015). As one of their core tasks is to assist their consumers in improving their social status, luxury brands need to comply with the worldview and taste of the upper class (Kapferer and Bastien 2009). All luxury brands are thus *prestige brands*, whereas not all prestige brands are luxury brands, as they may not comply with some product-related criteria of luxury. As prestige originates from 'illusion' (not genuine) and can refer to something that is artificially shiny and showy, prestige brands may suffer from a perceived lack of *authenticity*. Brand authenticity is 'a subjective evaluation of genuineness ascribed to a brand by consumers' (Napoli et al. 2014, p. 1091). Because they seem to reflect opposing poles, a trade-off between prestige and authenticity may exist. Therefore, it can be difficult for brand managers to concentrate simultaneously on prestige and authenticity. As they try to add prestige to their brands, marketers may risk losing some degree of authenticity. As with the idea of Ying and Yang, prestige and authenticity require one another in the context of luxury branding. However, both are not inherent in brands, but part of their socially constructed reputation, which can be influenced through marketing techniques (Heine and Petersen 2015).

These product-related and symbolic characteristics help to distinguish non-luxury brands such as H&M and Toyota from luxury brands such as Dior and Rolls-Royce. They can be referred to as the *code of luxury* that any luxury brand has to comply with to at least some degree. These dimensions offer a basic means of differentiation for luxury brands (Heine and Phan 2010). In addition, brand prestige and authenticity can be used as *luxury brand performance measures*. Brand prestige refers to a brand's competence and related concepts such as brand expertise, culturedness and consistency, whereas brand authenticity can be perceived as a brand's good/bad intentions. Both factors can have an impact on brand desirability (Kervyn et al. 2012).

Identity-driven brand management may be particularly *suitable for lifestyle and luxury brands*. First, there is rarely



another market segment where *symbolic benefits* have a similar relevance and often exceed functional product benefits. Research suggests that consumers find luxury products useful to express their identity and ideal personality (Sung et al. 2015). Therefore, luxury brands require a sufficiently detailed framework to build unique symbolic brand benefits. Second, instead of changing themselves according to short-term consumer trends, it lays in the nature of luxury brands to be true to who they are and to create trends (Kapferer 2012). While positioning-based (mass) marketing aims at defining and constantly adapting its market positioning according to market research and consumer surveys, identity-driven (luxury) brand management means deriving its desired market positioning from inner beliefs and visions. Finally, many entrepreneurs today seek to make a positive change in the world. Identity-driven brand management could help build *passion brands*, which are driven by a higher purpose beyond money-making (Beverland et al. 2008).

Various brand identity frameworks have been developed by Aaker (2010), De Chernatony (1999), Esch (2014) and most importantly by Kapferer (2012). A comparison of the different models helps to reveal key components of brand identity including brand benefits, culture, personality, relationships and user images. *Brand personality* is a key component of brand identity as it covers the biggest part of a brand's symbolic meaning (Bhat and Reddy 1998; Vigneron and Johnson 2004). To clarify the scope of 'brand personality', the next section outlines a categorization of the major types of brand personality descriptors and a checklist of criteria to determine brand personality traits.

Brand personality

What is brand personality?

The early use of brand personality by practitioners is referred to virtually 'any non-physical attributes associated with a brand' (Azoulay and Kapferer 2003; Sung et al. 2015). Over the course of several decades, the term 'brand personality' has become widely used and accepted (Plummer 2000). Aaker (1997, p. 347) limited its scope by *defining brand personality* as 'the set of human characteristics associated with a brand'. This understanding of 'personality' in branding corresponds to the 'self-concept' in psychology (Belk 1988). Brand managers and consumers are inclined to use personality traits, but also age, gender, fashion style and various other types of characteristics to describe a brand's personality (MacInnis and Folkes 2017). Therefore, differing from its specific meaning in psychology, brand personality should not be limited to personality traits.

Accordingly, brand managers can characterize their brand's personality using a broad range of human-like characteristics. They can be classified into *major types of brand personality descriptors* including (1) personality archetypes and role models, (2) personality traits, (3) personal values, (4) needs and motives, (5) socio-demographics, (6) social identity characteristics (social roles and reference groups), (7) physical characteristics, abilities and talents, and (8) lifestyles.

Criteria to determine brand personality traits

In order to develop a clear understanding of brand personality traits, it helps to remain close to their application in psychology and to distinguish them from concepts that should theoretically and managerially be handled separately (Azoulay and Kapferer 2003). The following criteria provide a checklist to determine whether a term belongs to the category of brand personality traits:

- Brand personality traits refer only to *mental characteristics*, which excludes any physical attributes such as tall or handsome or socio-demographics such as feminine, rich or upper class (Azoulay and Kapferer 2003).
- Reflecting an individual's true nature, personality traits are *latent personal dispositions* that help explain and predict characteristic patterns of thought, feeling and behaviour (Sweeney and Brandon 2006; Plummer 2000; Wee 2004). They should not be confused with any determinants of consumer behaviour that reflect the outcome of deeper psychological mechanisms, such as values, purchasing motives or lifestyles. Accordingly, they do not include terms referring to hobbies (e.g. sporty or being a cineaste) or tastes (e.g. classical or vintage).
- Personality traits refer to relatively consistent and *stable personal dispositions* extending to affective, experiential and motivating aspects, as well as interpersonal traits (Sweeney and Brandon 2006; Plummer 2000). They include *chronic emotional patterns* such as warm or temperamental (Plutchik 1980), but not temporary emotional states such as worried or homesick (Cattell and Mead 2008). Research by Wee (2004) demonstrates that the personality patterns of many mass-market brands remain relatively stable even over decades. This is probably the case for identity-driven luxury brands.
- As latent personal dispositions within individuals, brand personality traits should *not refer to social identity characteristics* ascribed by others. This excludes descriptors of brand reputation such as



prestigious, famous, well known or well regarded (c.f. Caprara et al. 2001).

- Personality traits do *not capture direct descriptors of abilities* such as being a connoisseur, an excellent pianist, intelligent or competent (c.f. Aaker 1997). They do, however, cover related traits describing how individuals make use of their capabilities, such as being productive, well organized and (intellectually) efficient (Azoulay and Kapferer 2003).
- Aaker (1997) concentrates on personality traits that are *applicable to brands*. The meaning and relevance of an adjective is contextual and differs according to the concept it refers to. Depending on what kind of brands are evaluated, the terms energetic, creative or natural can have different meanings or may not be relevant at all (Caprara et al. 2001). This implies that the usefulness of personality traits to describe brands depends on the product category and consumer segment. In the domain of luxury, for instance, traits referring to common life problems such as relaxed versus tense may play a limited role (Cattell and Mead 2008). As luxury brands share the ‘code of luxury’ at least to some extent, they are likely to evoke some category-specific traits such as perfectionist, precise or cultured. Because of this ‘category halo effect’ (Romaniuk 2008), brand differentiation is difficult to achieve with luxury-specific personality dimensions. However, comparing different brands in the same target market can lead to relevant and distinctive personality traits and dimensions (Wee 2004).
- Brand personality traits should refer only to *non-product-related adjectives*, which exclude traits such as premium, valuable or high quality (c.f. Caprara et al. 2001). Furthermore, consumer impressions about automobiles as being safe or food deliveries as being convenient are product related and belong to the category of purchasing needs and motives.
- As managers do not wish to convey any traits clients may find unattractive, brand-building relies mainly on traits with a *positive connotation*. This criterion reflects one of the major differences between human and brand personality models (Sweeney and Brandon 2006). Traits generally seen as undesirable include dishonest, cruel, mean and pessimistic. Also excluded are terms referring to personality disorders such as hypochondriac or narcissistic (Azoulay and Kapferer 2003). The desirability of personality traits and their usefulness for brand-building are subculture specific (Caprara et al. 2001). Some luxury brands may be deliberately positioned as aloof, dominant or as pushing the edge of social norms. Some customers may perceive such traits as desirable—and possibly even more so, the more they

are rejected by groups, they aim to dissociate themselves from (Sweeney and Brandon 2006).

- There is a compelling case to make use of *bipolar brand personality constructs*, whereby every trait has an opposite trait such as ‘friendly versus unfriendly’ (Cattell and Mead 2008; Plutchik 1980). Compared with single traits, there is generally a clearer and more consensual understanding of binary oppositions among different people. Moreover, bipolar brand personality dimensions reflect the natural way how people think of brands. According to the Repertory Grid Method (Kelly 1955), people attribute meaning to a person, an event or a brand, by comparing it with concepts they already know. Therefore, they rely on a repertoire of personal evaluation criteria, which consist of dichotomies and may be adapted with every new object they evaluate. The Big Five of human personality also consists of bipolar factors (Goldberg 1990). In the context of luxury branding, both poles of the personality dimensions should have a positive connotation within the luxury segment.

Brand personality dimensions

By drawing on research on human personality and particularly the Big Five model (Goldberg 1990), Aaker (1997) developed the most established theoretical framework of brand personality (Sweeney and Brandon 2006). The scale is used to analyse brand personality as part of the brand image and as a tool for brand positioning (Sweeney and Brandon 2006; Wee 2004; Plummer 2000; Sung et al. 2015). Some researchers have criticized Aaker’s work for including items beyond personality traits, such as physical characteristics (good looking), social class characteristics (upper class), gender (masculine, feminine), age (young), lifestyles (small town, Western) and abilities (competent) (Azoulay and Kapferer 2003; Avis et al. 2014; Sung et al. 2015). While Aaker’s framework may be generally applicable to examine brand personality across diverse product categories, many other studies followed in the last two decades suggesting that brand personality dimensions need to be adapted to assess the personality of brands within specific cultures and product categories (MacInnis and Folkes 2017). Therefore, not all of Aaker’s traits and dimensions may be relevant for the luxury segment, such as ‘corporate’ or ‘ruggedness’. Sung et al. (2015) analysed personality dimensions of luxury brands, but relied on a fuzzy conceptualization of brand personality traits including physical characteristics (colourful and beautiful) and socio-demographics (wealthy).

Further research identified warmth and competence as the *Big Two evaluation criteria for brands* (Alvarez and



Fournier 2016). Psychology literature posits that humans quickly assess these two fundamental dimensions to evaluate other people and to guide their interactions with them. Kervyn et al. (2012) define warmth as the perceived intentions of a person and competence as the ability to carry out these intentions. According to Fournier and Alvarez (2012), these dimensions correspond to sincerity and competence in Aaker's Big Five. While negative traits and abilities should not be used to build brand personality, they are needed to evaluate brand performance. Therefore, instead of using them for brand-building, the Big Two may be more suitable as brand performance measures (Kervyn et al. 2012). These Big Two performance measures refer to the essential symbolic characteristics of luxury brands: brand authenticity (warmth) and prestige (competence). They may evoke some luxury-specific brand personality traits. While authenticity may be associated with traits such as polite and supportive, prestige can relate to confident, sophisticated, capable and efficient (Fournier and Alvarez 2012). However, traits that are shared by most luxury brands, including traits identified in Aaker's scale such as glamorous and sophisticated, are not very useful for brand differentiation.

Given that managers are inclined to find a lot of brand personality traits attractive, they can feel challenged to decide between them and are tempted to equip their brands with too many traits. In contrast to Aaker's framework, the use of *bipolar personality dimensions* encourages them to decide between opposing traits. This can lead to more distinctive and consistent brand personalities.

Brand anthropomorphization

Research on anthropomorphization can complement the theoretic foundation for the development of brand personality. This phenomenon generally refers to the process of prescribing human characteristics to non-human objects (Puzakova et al. 2009). Across virtually all societies, humans feel a need to anthropomorphize inanimate objects (Freling and Forbes 2005). Fournier (1998) believes this universal desire is a prerequisite to facilitate interactions between humans and brands. There is a growing interest in research on *anthropomorphization* applied not only to products but also to brands (see MacInnis and Folkes 2017). Puzakova et al. (2009) define anthropomorphism as a stronger form of animism (also 'personification') that goes beyond prescribing human qualities to non-human objects, to the level that people consider 'objects as complete humans' (Puzakova et al. 2009, p. 413).

Moreover, Puzakova et al. (2009) introduce the notion of *anthropomorphized brands*, which takes brand personification one step further, from describing a brand with

human-like features (e.g. 'Hermès is an imaginative brand') to perceiving a brand as being human-like (e.g. 'Hermès likes to play with ideas') (Alvarez and Fournier 2016). If consumers are to perceive a brand as human-like, the key antecedent is that they assume the brand to *act intentionally* (Fournier and Alvarez 2012). Brand intentionality implies that brands are imbued with a social nature, a soul, a mind and a will of their own, which allows them to form intentions and attitudes, exhibit thoughtful behaviour, embrace emotionality and evaluate others, but also be subject to moral judgments by others (Epley et al. 2007; MacInnis and Folkes 2017; Puzakova et al. 2009). As a consequence, consumer-brand relationships become similar to interpersonal interactions and therefore potentially stronger (Kervyn et al. 2012). This also implies that interpersonal models of perception and behaviour may be applied to anthropomorphized brands (Alvarez and Fournier 2016).

Personality-driven brand management

The personality-driven approach to branding can complement brand identity-driven brand management and take it one step further. It can be characterized as follows

- *Enlivening the brand internally*: Although seen as a key component of brand identity (Kapferer 2012), brand personality often only refers to a set of traits that are used for brand personification and differentiation (Freling and Forbes 2005) according to psychological theories of animism (Sweeney and Brandon 2006). Drawing on the concept of anthropomorphization, the central idea of personality-driven branding is to enliven a brand also internally, in the minds of brand managers and company employees (MacInnis and Folkes 2017).
- *Derived from the brand vision*: The brand personality's primary intention should be to achieve this brand vision. Tata Harper, for instance, defines its vision to build healthier, safer families with their 100% nontoxic and natural skincare products.
- *Based on a detailed construction plan of meaning*: Instead of describing a brand's personality with just a few terms, managers should develop a detailed brand personality handbook. Comparable to mental pictures consumers hold about real people, it should draw a metaphoric mental picture about what kind of person their brand is: What are the brand personality's goals in life? What is her lifestyle? How does she look like? How would she design a website or flyer?
- *The focal point of brand management*: While brand personality is often considered as an independent concept that affects brands only in some peripheral



and marginal way (Wee 2004), personality-driven branding acknowledges the brand personality as an intentional agent and the focal point for brand-building and brand management. This means that all branding decisions should be guided by the brand personality.

Methodology

The *existing luxury brand personality dimensions* by Heine (2012) provide a starting point for this study. They rely on several studies using the two major approaches to develop (brand) personality dimensions: (1) the lexicographic trait approach based on large-scale consumer surveys and factor analyses according to Aaker (1997) and (2) the qualitative approach with in-depth consumer interviews and content analyses according to the Repertory Grid Method (Kelly 1955).

The objective of most previous research was to develop brand personality scales that allow to measure brand image in the minds of consumers (see Aaker 1997; Sung et al. 2015). The *aim of this study* is to identify dimensions of luxury brand personality as a tool for brand-building to help managers develop their brand's identity and, more specifically, to decide what type of person they want their brand to represent. These differences in the research objectives have an impact on the methodology. For instance, in order to capture the full picture of how consumers perceive a brand's personality position, brand image analyses should include also traits with a negative connotation (Sweeney and Brandon 2006), which are not relevant for brand-building. Moreover, identity-driven brands are not defined based on consumer surveys, but rely on their inner vision and beliefs, which makes brand managers suitable survey participants for this study.

Due to its explanatory power for practical real-life organizational phenomena, this paper relies on *Grounded Theory* and more particularly on the evolved and constructivist versions proposed by Corbin and Strauss (2008) and Charmaz (2014). Instead of focusing on verifying predefined hypotheses, Grounded Theory utilizes an open-minded view and an inductive approach in an almost reverse order compared to traditional research, to explore relevant concepts and to develop new theories that are based on social reality (Corbin and Strauss 2008). The constructivist research philosophy of evolved Grounded Theory is reflected by its theoretical and context sensitivity and the use of coding processes with a degree of flexibility (Mills et al. 2006).

This approach was combined with a *multiple case study methodology* according to Fionda and Moore (2009) and He and Balmer (2013), who had employed Grounded

Theory in similar business contexts. We selected eight luxury brands covering a variety of luxury product categories (fashion, shoes, cosmetics, watches, porcelain and interior decoration). As required by Grounded Theory, the empirical database was obtained from multiple sources. We collected and analysed documentary material including company presentations, reports, brochures, website content and media coverage about company milestones, products and brand communications (see also He and Balmer 2013; Fionda and Moore 2009). We were able to gain a deep understanding of the brand's DNA, and this formed a solid foundation in order to test and adapt the brand personality dimensions.

According to the principle of purposeful sampling (Corbin and Strauss 2008) and with a stakeholder perspective (He and Balmer 2013), we conducted eight *semi-structured interviews with luxury company representatives* (marketing/brand managers and CEOs). Interviews lasted between 45 and 90 min. The interview partners were asked to provide a general evaluation of their brand's symbolic meaning (identity) and more specifically their brand's personality ('Imagine your brand as a person'). Thereafter, we used our brand personality dimensions as a guide for further discussion. Interview results were content-analysed (Corbin and Strauss 2008).

Personality dimensions can also be constructed from theory according to Plutchik and Conte (1997). In this perspective, Sweeney and Brandon (2006) suggest building brand personality dimensions on a strong theoretical background to make them clear and unambiguous. Accordingly, we used *theory as one of the multiple sources of Grounded Theory* to test and adapt the luxury brand personality dimensions by comparing and linking them with well-established personality traits and other psychological concepts. The missing theoretic foundation of the study explains why the personality scale by Sung et al. (2015) includes various terms that are by no means personality traits. Instead, the authors obtain their list of traits by employing a free-association task and asking non-luxury consumers to evaluate the personality of luxury brands. However, the personality characteristics mentioned by survey participants must be checked by the list of criteria to determine brand personality traits.

Grounded Theory relies on an *iterative process* of data collection, analysis (coding and comparisons) and theory construction, which corresponds to a perpetual alternation between acting (data collection) and reflection. This process generates insights and confirms, disconfirms or modifies them until an adequate concept is reached—in this case a set of luxury brand personality dimensions. At this point, the analysis of additional data would not contribute to any further insights, so the categorization is (temporarily) at an end (Charmaz 2014; Corbin and Strauss 2008).



Luxury brand personality dimensions

The study uncovered *five distinct luxury personality dimensions* including tradition, modesty, elitism, eccentricity and sensuality. They reflect a brand personality's perspectives on the following key topics in luxury: tradition and culture, wealth and possessions, power and the role of other people, society and reference groups, and ambition and hedonism. These dimensions are illustrated in Fig. 1 and explained in detail below.

Tradition

This dimension reflects a brand personality's perspective on changes of tradition and culture in society: Does the brand prefer preserving old-established traditions, heritage and culture, or is it rather open to progressive changes, reinventing society? Traditional traits include conservative, stable, dutiful, responsible, reliable, trustworthy, moral, virtuous and security oriented. The modern orientation is related to traits such as liberal, open, tolerant, experimental, progressive and individualistic. This dimension is related to a brand personality's temporal perspective: While a traditional personality looks much into the past as a source for inspiration, a modernist may rather refer to the present or future.

The traditional versus modern dimension relies on openness as identified in the *Big Five* model (Goldberg 1990) and one of the two main dimensions in the *value circle* developed by Schwartz (2006), i.e. conservation of tradition versus openness to change. However, within the context of luxury brand-building, the scope of these dimensions is too broad, referring also to how people make use of their abilities and their general openness to new experiences. Glisky et al. (1991) identified two independent dimensions of openness. While a traditional worldview contrasts with liberal ideas on society, it was found that it can still be combined with being open to new ideas, innovation and creativity. It can thus be argued that modernity does not resemble a general dimension of openness but is closely related to 'socio-political liberalism'.

Esteve and Hieu-Dess (2005) describe traditional versus modern as a major dimension for the positioning of luxury brands. The two poles of this dimension should not be confused with the outcome of deeper psychological mechanisms such as lifestyles, tastes or, more specifically, traditional/classic versus modern/futuristic design preferences. These terms are used for this dimension because they are well established in the luxury literature, stemming from the long-lasting discussion about the question as to whether tradition is essential to luxury brands. Proponents

of this view include Dubois et al. (2001) and Vigneron and Johnson (2004). However, while tradition is typical for many luxury brands such as Hackett, Hermès and Rolls-Royce, it is still not an essential characteristic, which is proven by the success of modern brands such as Alexander McQueen, Tom Ford or Richard Mille. Some brands such as Breguet proudly depict the year of their foundation in their logo, while other brands such as Hugo Boss do not even provide a section about their history on their website.

At first, some managers may have difficulties to decide whether their brand personalities are traditional or modern, often due to the fact that they think about their product design instead of the underlying personality traits. To facilitate this decision, it helps to prioritize what the brand personality is actually about: preserving old-established traditions or reinventing society. For instance, one of the key pillars of the brand DNA of KPM Berlin is to preserve old traditions in table culture and porcelain making, and thus, the brand personality is traditional. Consequently, the company does not change traditional production techniques or compromise on the royal quality standards. At the same time, traditional brands can appear very creative and contemporary. For instance, KPM continues to launch highly innovative products and constantly evolves its digital marketing techniques.

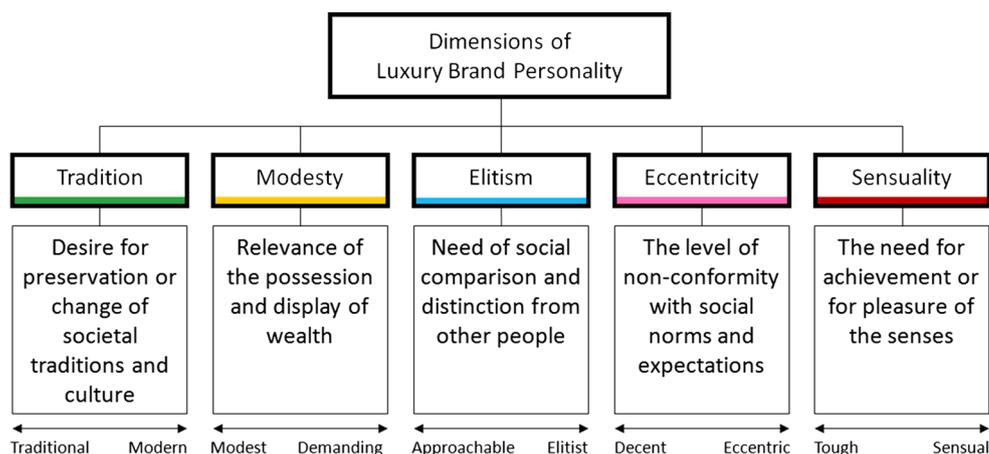
Modesty

Unsurprisingly, the desire for the accumulation and display of wealth is a major issue in the luxury segment: Does the brand represent a personality who desires being wealthy and owning or collecting beautiful and valuable objects? Or does she prefer a rather modest lifestyle? The *demanding pole* is related to traits such as discerning and extravagant and corresponds to the human personality trait of materialism (the desire to accumulate possessions) and the value category wealth (Schwartz 2006). Possessions can be accumulated to show one's wealth through conspicuous leisure or consumption (Veblen 1899) or to leave something behind (for instance, one merely looks after a Patek Philippe for the next generation; Hirschman 1990). Symbols of *conspicuousness* include ostentatious logos and valuable materials such as gold and diamonds. Louis Vuitton appears to be the embodiment of a demanding brand. Despite some more subtle forms, conspicuousness typically refers to the lavish and glamorous lifestyle of the 'rich and famous' depicted in the popular media. This is reflected by the motto of Mae West: 'Too much of a good thing can be wonderful'.

The *modest pole* is related to being humble, moderate, frugal, down to earth and grounded and also idealistic, spiritual, intellectual and philosophical. This is consistent with a rather simple or even ascetic way of life and with



Fig. 1 Dimensions of luxury brand personality



conscious instead of conspicuous consumption. With a post-materialistic mindset, people may feel a desire for personal growth and self-transcendence and passion for higher purposes in life. Typical examples for understated luxury include Bottega Veneta, Loro Piana, Aman Resorts and other forms of invisible luxury ranging from members-only institutions to the subtle aesthetics of Japanese Zen culture.

Elitism

Elitism refers to interpersonal aspects dealing with the role of other people and the need for social comparison and distinction: Is the brand generally approachable and sociable or is she rather differentiating from others, staying within her exclusive circles? With an elitist disposition, the brand personality seeks status and exclusivity and is rather unapproachable to out-group members (who are not part of the target group), which is related to being reserved, distant, formal, refined, graceful, composed, competitive and authoritative. This can be symbolized by exclusive clubs and VIP areas. The approachable pole, on the other hand, is related to heartiness, genuine joy, social responsibility, egalitarianism and also to traits such as friendly, sympathetic, cheerful, cordial, considerate, trusting, generous, unpretentious and outgoing (Kervyn et al. 2012).

Elitism is comparable with extraversion and agreeableness in the Big Five model (Goldberg 1990), with the personality traits sociability and narcissism (an extreme form of elitism). Further, it is closely related to Schwartz' (2006) value dimension self-enhancement (power) versus self-transcendence (benevolence) and to Hofstede's (2001) power distance dimension, which measures the acceptance of hierarchy and the desire for social justice.

Within the luxury marketing context, Dubois et al. (2005, p. 123) uncovered the dimension elitist versus democratic in their segmentation of international luxury consumers. While elitists believe that luxury should only

be available for the 'happy few', the proponents of democratic luxury do not see any reason why it should not be accessible to the 'happy many'. However, this dimension is not about a brand's intentions of being good or bad: KPM Berlin, for instance, can be seen as an elitist brand because of its aristocratic roots. At the same time, the brand's DNA relies on honourable intentions with exemplary CSR and sustainable manufacturing since its foundation in 1763. Brands seen as elitist include Gucci and Rolex, whereas benevolent brands include Dedon, House of Dagmar and Ermenegildo Zegna. A study by Ward and Dahl (2014) suggests that brand desirability can increase under certain conditions when an aspirational brand personality is perceived as being unapproachable. It is, however, acknowledged that a brand that is perceived as being too arrogant could cause a detrimental effect. The post-modern 'democratization of luxury' is limited insofar that luxury is by its basic definition not accessible by anyone at anytime.

Eccentricity

This dimension refers to a person's level of non-conformity with norms and expectations of society and within her reference groups: Does the brand personality prefer conforming to prevailing social standards or is she ready to break the rules? Decent personalities prefer to respect hierarchy, to be polite and well behaved in order to 'fit in' and to be liked and accepted. In contrast, non-conforming personalities prefer to 'stand out', be creative, imaginative. The decent pole is related to traits such as discreet, serious, respectful, dignified, prudent and cautious, whereas eccentricity is related to unconventional or even to being a bit wild, crazy, eccentric, provocative, rebellious and disobedient. In order to gain an impression of the eccentric personality disposition, it helps to look at a picture of Salvador Dalí with his Colombian ocelot Babou. A central idea of luxury has been the self-determined use of one's



time and freedom from duties and limitations, which extends to non-conformity with social expectations (Veblen 1899). As shown by Coco Chanel, Christian Dior and Yves Saint Laurent, who all broke the rules of their times, some ‘shocking’ and the freedom of ‘doing what you want’ is engraved in the nature of luxury brands. However, this freedom may be somewhat limited as the slogan by Audemars Piguet suggests: ‘To break the rules, you must first master them’.

The decision between fitting-in and standing-out is comparable to bandwagon versus snob purchasing motives (Leibenstein 1950), which rely on basic psychological needs for affiliation and belonging versus autonomy and independence. Eccentricity relates to the value category self-direction (Schwartz 2006) and particularity to absorption, the other dimension of openness identified by Glisky et al. (1991), capturing love for aesthetics, curiosity, fantasy and unconventional views of reality.

In their study on luxury brand positioning, Esteve and Hieu-Dess (2005) also identified an eccentricity dimension. While Hugo Boss appears to be the prototypical example for a brand that allows consumers to fit in, representative brands for the eccentric pole include Cavalli and Moschino.

Sensuality

This dimension refers to life goal-related aspects of brand personality and in particular to the level of strength to achieve ambitious goals and self-restraint from immediate gratification versus sensuality and self-indulgence: Is the brand personality tough-minded and self-disciplined with a strong will to achieve her life mission or is she seeking enjoyment of life and pleasure of the senses? The tough pole is related to traits such as purposeful, ambitious, persistent, strong-minded, courageous, vigorous, active, dynamic and energetic. On the other hand, the sensual pole is related to the pursuit of love, beauty and enjoyment and a happy and comfortable life, which is related to traits such as hedonistic, light-hearted, emotional, tender-minded, dreamy, sensuous and romantic. Archetypical representatives include creators and makers on the one hand and dandies, hedonists, gourmets and connoisseurs on the other.

The dimension has some similarities with neuroticism in the Big Five (Goldberg 1990), with hedonism (Schwartz 2006) and indulgence versus restraint (Hofstede 2001). In the branding context, sensuality is comparable to Aaker’s (1997) ruggedness and Grohmann’s (2009) masculinity/femininity dimensions. Masculine values are associated with being adventurous, aggressive, brave, competitive, daring and tough-minded, while feminine values include being emotional, sensitive, graceful, imaginative and tender-minded (Grohmann 2009). Hugo Boss is considered as

a typical tough-minded brand and Jean Paul Gaultier as a typical sensual brand. This is reflected by their advertising, for instance, with a sharp-witted businessman giving interviews at a press conference versus a mystic princess riding on a rainbow with her unicorn.

Figure 2 presents the *identity framework of luxury brands* and its functional and emotional components. Both components are closely linked: According to the functional component, luxury products are characterized by a high level of symbolic meaning, which is covered to a great extent by the essential symbolic characteristics of luxury brands and the dimensions of luxury brand personality. While the essential characteristics of luxury can be considered as the basic means of differentiation, the personality dimensions provide an extended means of differentiation.

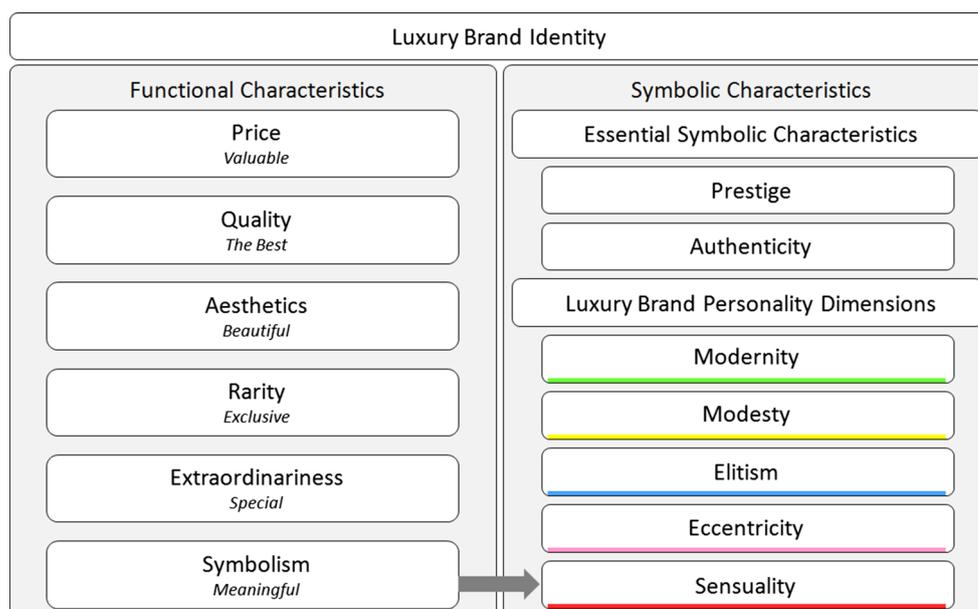
Practical application: bringing the brand personality alive

Personality-driven brand management encompasses a research, conceptualization, realization and communication phase. In the *research phase*, a brand audit should be conducted to analyse all possibly relevant information about the brand in order to decode the brand’s DNA. For instance, Karl Lagerfeld may read the biography of Coco Chanel, visit her apartment in Paris and sit in her chair imagining what kind of person she was.

In the *conceptualization phase*, marketers can make use of three major approaches of brand personality-building: First, they may decide creating a *person brand*, which is personified by a corporeal person (Fournier and Alvarez 2012). Most person brands are managed by charismatic founders, often designers or artists, who fully embody their brand in the public (see Thomson 2006 for celebrity brands). Instead of fully mirroring this person, the brand personality should represent an ideal version and desired future self of the corporeal person (Fournier and Alvarez 2012, p. 178). Another approach is to transfer the *free-floating ghost-soul* of another human being to the brand, thus enabling ‘the personal consciousness and volition of its corporeal owner to cause life and thought in the object it animates’ (Tylor 1874, p. 429, cited in Fournier and Alvarez 2012). A French e-retail start-up, for instance, takes its name and inspiration from the Dymant brothers, who were famous merchants to European royal courts in the nineteenth century and now act as the brand’s ghost-souls. Third, marketers can select one or several corporeal or *fictional characters as role models* for their inspiration, not as official brand representatives. Several role models can be morphed and evolved into the brand personality.



Fig. 2 Framework of luxury brand identity



In the *realization phase*, the brand personality will be brought to life in the minds of brand managers and used as the focal point for all branding decisions. Having in mind a clear mental picture of their brand personality, marketers may ask: How should we design the brochure or website? Can we change the returns policy? Karl Lagerfeld, for instance, does not imitate Coco Chanel's style, but tries to understand her personality, take on the perspective of her ghost-soul and interpret her style and yet adapt it to modern times. The Chanel jewelry flagship store at Place Vendôme in Paris, for instance, was designed around the question: 'In what sort of interior would Mlle. Chanel live today?' Designers used portraits of the founder, recreated her living room and some personal objects, and as a result, the aura of Coco Chanel is clearly evident throughout the store (Dion and Arnould 2011).

The *communication of brand personality* facilitates enlivening the brand as an intentional agent in the minds of other employees and consumers. To understand and judge a person's character, people translate their repeated observations of a person's behaviour into impressions of personality dispositions (Fournier and Alvarez 2012). Applied to the branding context, consumers can attribute a personality to a brand according to its perceived behaviour (Azoulay and Kapferer 2003). The marketing activities conducted at each consumer-brand touch-point can be considered as 'behaviour' enacted by the brand at the hands of its managers (Fournier 1998; Maehle and Supphellen 2011; Sweeney and Brandon 2006). This suggests that parts of a brand's personality characteristics are most likely created unintentionally (Plummer 2000). In addition, it implies that there is a wide variety of communication instruments that can help to humanize a brand. They are

generally distinguished into *direct and indirect approaches* (Plummer 2000; see Fig. 3). In a direct way, brand personality perceptions arise (directly) from the people associated with the brand. This includes, above all, the artistic director, the company founder, the CEO, company employees and particularly sales people, brand users and brand ambassadors (see McCracken 1989). Indirect approaches split into brand design, communications and behaviour. As a typical indirect approach of luxury brands, animals are used as brand characters, such as the Hermès horse or the Cartier panther (MacInnis and Folkes 2017).

Benefits of personality-driven luxury brand management

Personality-driven brand management can help improve (a) what brand managers and consumers know about a brand, (b) how they evaluate a brand, and (c) how they interact with a brand in the future (MacInnis and Folkes 2017). Research suggests that the impact of brand anthropomorphization on brand knowledge, attitudes and relationships effects brand prestige (abilities/competence) and authenticity (intentions/warmth; Kervyn et al. 2012) and, ultimately, brand attitudes, purchase, loyalty and advocacy (Aaker 1997; MacInnis and Folkes 2017; Sweeney and Brandon 2006). More specifically, there are major benefits for both brand managers and consumers.

Benefits with reference to brand managers

Developing a brand personality allows marketers to know much better what and whom their brand actually



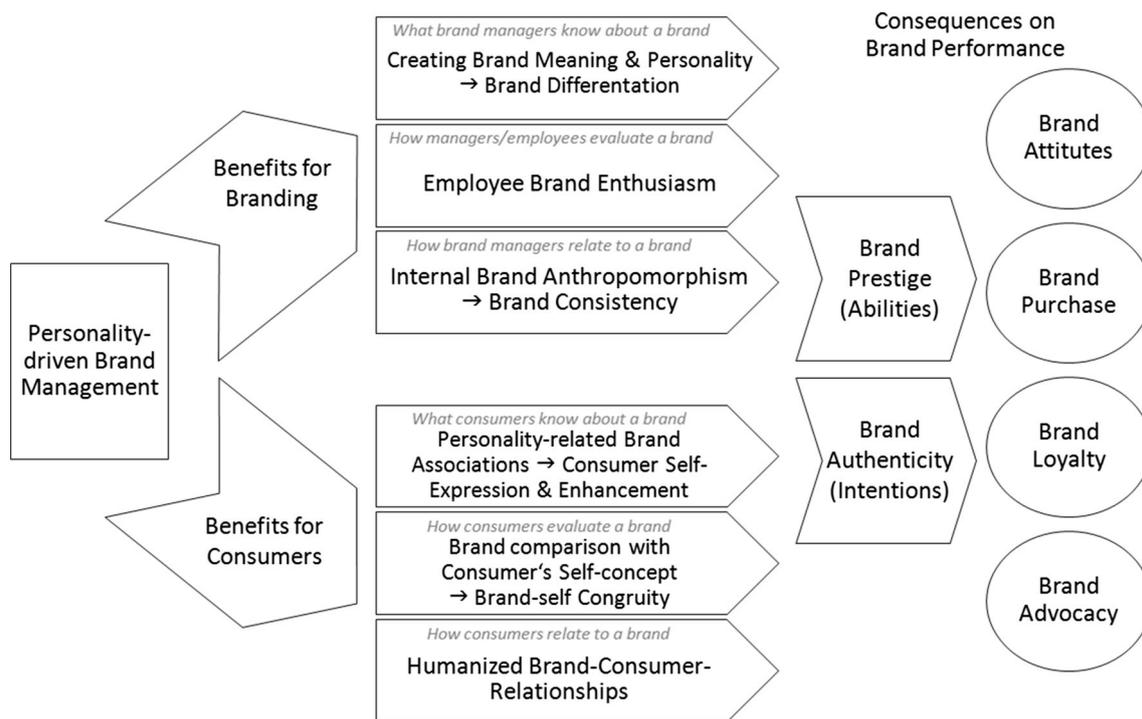


Fig. 3 Benefits of personality-driven (luxury) brand management

represents. Creating a whole universe of symbolic meaning is a basis for *brand differentiation*, which is a key success factor for achieving strong brands (Sweeney and Brandon 2006; Wee 2004). When the collective idea about the brand becomes as clear as the impression of a familiar person, internal relations are likely to improve with less misunderstandings and efforts for communication and co-ordination, also in cooperation with external agencies. Second, if managers start to imagine their brand as a person with an inspiring vision, there is a greater likelihood that they develop closer emotional ties to their own brand. Feeling a strong passion for their brands may be infectious, sparking *employee motivation* and enthusiasm both internally and externally. Finally, managers may change the way they relate to their brand, seeing it as an active relationship partner, who can be consulted for the design of advertising campaigns, stores or websites. If all employees were to align their actions with the desired brand personality, the organization would appear to act as one person, and thus, *brand consistency* would be likely to improve (Kayande et al. 2007).

Benefits with reference to consumers

As a result of brand anthropomorphism, consumers are likely to extend their brand knowledge, with particular reference to personality characteristics (Rauschnabel and Ahuvia 2014). Anthropomorphized brands provide a source

of symbolic meaning (Wee 2004), which they can use to *express themselves or improve their self-worth* (Belk 1988; McCracken 1993). Second, brand anthropomorphism can also improve brand evaluations. If consumers perceive a brand as human-like, they are likely to compare the perceived brand personality with their perceived own self-concept (Belk 1988; Plummer 2000). The more a brand's personality is congruent with the consumer's own (desired) self-concept, the more they generally like the brand (Lau and Phau 2007). However, with increasing brand-self connections, consumers are less forgiving of humanized brands that transgress against them or act in an unethical way (Puzakova et al. 2013). Third, brand anthropomorphism can strengthen brand–consumer relationships. Research suggests that consumers interact with humanized brands, perhaps subconsciously, in a similar way that they initiate and nurture relationships with other people (Chen et al. 2015; Fournier 1998; 2012). Instead of assessing a brand only in terms of its characteristics, they wonder: 'How are you treating me?' (Dall'Olmio Riley and de Chernatony 2000; Fournier 1998; Sweeney and Brandon 2006). When consumers anthropomorphize brands, they see them as more plausible relationship partners (Rauschnabel and Ahuvia 2014), tend to evaluate them more favourably (Aggarwal and McGill 2012; MacInnis and Folkes 2017; Rauschnabel and Ahuvia 2014) and are more likely to perceive such brands as similar or connected to them, which, in turn, encourages them to engage in



relationships with these brands (MacInnis and Folkes 2017).

Conclusions

This paper makes three major *contributions*: (1) It provides a checklist to determine brand personality traits, which may be helpful for future research considering that many existing brand personality concepts include items beyond personality traits (Avis et al. 2014); (2) it introduces the notion of personality-driven luxury brand management; and (3) it outlines the major dimensions of luxury brand personality as an essential tool for building brand personality. We conclude with the following lessons learned:

1. People are likely to engage in some form of brand animism (Kervyn et al. 2012). Therefore, *brands will always have a personality* to some degree, regardless if companies want to manage it or not (Azoulay and Kapferer 2003). The challenge is to strengthen brand anthropomorphization and make better use of its benefits.
2. As a starting point of creating a brand personality, managers need to *conduct an in-depth brand audit* to encode the brand's DNA. Brand personalities should be regularly audited in order to identify misguided marketing measures or adverse external situations (Wee 2004).
3. Managers should *not create a brand personality before the brand vision has being clearly defined*. The decisions about what type of person a brand should represent are derived from the brand vision.
4. As a starting point to develop a concept of brand personality, managers should *think of ghost-souls or role models* who share the same vision. Morphing and evolving them into a brand personality works better than starting from scratch.
5. Despite their relevance, *managers should not restrain themselves only to personality traits*. In the same way they describe a real person, they should consider all major types of brand personality descriptors such as age, gender or fashion style (MacInnis and Folkes 2017).
6. *Managers should create a detailed, metaphoric and life-like idea about their brand personality*, which evokes almost the same mental picture as depicting a real person.
7. A brand personality can be regarded as one of the most promising options for brand differentiation (De Chernatony 1999; Romaniuk 2008). Managers should create a *special character*. In order to achieve this, they can employ the Big Five dimensions of luxury

brand personality that make them decide between contrasting traits.

8. Managers should *acknowledge the brand personality as the focal point of brand management* and use it as a guide for all branding decisions from designing a brochure to planning an event.

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Klaus Heine works as a luxury marketing professor at Emlyon Business School in Shanghai and Lyon, where he combines applied-oriented research with teaching about luxury brand-building and practical projects. He cooperated, among others, with the Luxury Institute New York, the Meisterkreis and a wide range of leading luxury brands from France, Germany and China.

Glyn Atwal is Associate Professor of Marketing at Burgundy School of Business, France. His teaching and research interest focuses on

luxury marketing and strategy. He is co-author of *Luxury Brands in China and India* (Palgrave Macmillan). Prior to academia, Glyn worked for Saatchi & Saatchi, Young & Rubicam and Publicis.

Sandrine Crener-Ricard is a programme director and research associate at Harvard Business School where she designed a course of Luxury Marketing for the MBA curriculum and wrote a series of case studies to illustrate some of the major challenges facing the luxury industry. Prior to her current position, she has worked almost 20 years in higher education in France and Monaco and successively held positions as professor, programme director, associate dean, vice-president and dean.

Michel Phan is Professor of Luxury Marketing, Director of Lifestyles and Consumption Cluster and Director of Master of Science in Luxury Management and Marketing programme at Emlyon Business School. He is also the editor of *Luxury Research Journal* since January 2014. He has consulted for many luxury companies in France and Asia, and he is a regular guest speaker at many international conferences and top Asian universities and schools such as CEIBS, NUS and Yonsei University.

