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DRIVERS OF CONSUMERS BRAND PERSONALITY PERCEPTIONS

A study of local and international brands in the Italian context

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	11
1.1 Background of the study	11
1.2 Research question and objectives.....	15
1.3 Delimitations	15
1.4 Main concepts and definitions	17
1.5 Structure of the study.....	17
2. BRAND PERSONALITY	20
2.1 Conceptualizing brand personality	20
2.2 Literature review	22
2.3 Traditional five-factors model.....	27
2.4 Cross-cultural studies.....	29
2.5 Italian brand personality scale	35
3. BRAND PERSONALITY DRIVERS	39
3.1 Classification of brand personality drivers	39
3.2 Primary drivers.....	42
3.2.1 Product attributes	42
3.2.2 Product category	43
3.2.3 Logo	44
3.2.4 User imagery	46
3.2.5 Advertising.....	46
3.2.6 Previous experiences	48
3.3 Secondary drivers	50
3.4 Integrated framework	53
4. METHODOLOGY	56
4.1 Research design	56
4.2 Semi-structured interviews.....	57

4.3 Sample	59
4.4 Selection of Brands	63
4.5 Data analysis	66
4.6 Quality of the study	67
5. EMPIRICAL RESULTS.....	70
5.1 Dimensions assessment.....	70
5.1.1 Reliability	75
5.1.2 Hedonism.....	77
5.1.3 Excitement.....	80
5.1.4 Determination	82
5.2 Primary drivers impact.....	84
5.3 Secondary drivers impact	89
5.3.1 C.O.O. and Country associations.....	92
6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	95
6.1 Limitations and future researches	100
LIST OF REFERENCES.....	102
APPENDIX 1. ITALIAN TRANSLATION OF BP TRAITS	113
APPENDIX 2. SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS.....	114
APPENDIX 3. LOGOS OF SELECTED BRANDS	116
APPENDIX 4. EXAMPLES OF BP DRIVERS FOR SELECTED BRANDS	117

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Structure of the study.....	19
Figure 2. Brand personality advantages.....	23
Figure 3. Model of brand equity value creation.....	25
Figure 4. U.S. brand personality scale.....	26
Figure 5. Italian brand personality scale.....	36
Figure 6. Relationship between Italian BP model and Aaker's U.S. scale.....	38
Figure 7. Michelin man's logo.....	45
Figure 8 Personality traits creation & transfer process through advertising.....	47
Figure 9. Framework of brand personality primary drivers.....	49
Figure 10. Country of Origin effect.....	52
Figure 11. A theoretical frameworks for brand drivers' impact on BP dimensions.....	54
Figure 12. Total Brand Value per Sector 2017.....	61
Figure 13. Pattern matching methodology.....	67
Figure 14. Brand personality associations.....	74
Figure 15. Reliability dimension.....	77
Figure 16. Hedonistic dimension.....	79
Figure 17. Excitement dimension.....	81
Figure 18. Determined dimension.....	83
Figure 19. Final framework of primary drivers.....	97
Figure 20. Drivers' impact on brand personality dimensions.....	98

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Major findings in brand personality cross cultural studies (2000-2011).....	34
Table 2. Classifications of brand personality drivers.....	41
Table 3. Secondary drivers and related theoretical sources.....	53
Table 4. Main topics of semi-structured interviews.....	59
Table 5. Sample.....	63
Table 6. Selection of Italian and foreign brands.....	64
Table 7. Respondents' identification of personality dimensions.....	71
Table 8. Secondary drivers.....	90
Table 9. C.O.O. influence.....	93

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ABSTRACT

Brands play an extremely important role in modern business and economic environment, providing to customers functional, symbolic and experiential benefits. Building strong brands became a key competitive advantage, especially for global companies, as a consequence of higher degrees of market saturation and competition. Nowadays, marketing strategies increasingly aim at creating, maintaining and enhancing strong brands. Among brand equity components, brand personality has been recognized as one of the most influential aspects, affecting customers' purchasing decisions. Firms, with solid and unique personality associations, benefit from the higher level of loyalty and trust, creating positive customers' attitudes, hardly to be replicated by competitors.

The present Master's Thesis investigates in depth the nature of brand personality dimensions, underlining the impact of brand drivers and testing the consistency of Italian brand personality scale. A sample of sixteen international and local brands is investigated among Italian customers, in order to provide new perspectives and to identify dissimilarities, in terms of personality traits formation. The different nature of personality dimension is analyzed, with the aim to enrich the understanding of how each dimension is formed and which brand drivers can be considered as primary to form specific personality associations, under customer's point of view. To collect information for this qualitative study, sixteen semi-structured face to face and Skype interviews were conducted among Italian customers.

Findings revealed a highly complex and rich nature of brand personality perceptions. Dissimilarities and discrepancies emerged even considering the country-specific context, aimed at avoiding the insurgence of cross-cultural issues. Italian brand personality scale proved to be a valuable and effective mean to analyze brand personality, even though few brands presented contrasting results and a more cross-dimensional essence. Each personality dimension revealed to be more strongly influenced by a limited set of personality drivers, reflected by peculiar and unique personality associations. Customers recognized the presented set of primary drivers, as effectively playing a fundamental role. However, C.O.O. emerged as a notably factor, despite the lacking of theoretical cues, leaving room for further studies and investigations on its value. Current results offer a new perspective on brand personality and allow practitioners to benefit from a more comprehensive and richer understanding of the construct. Accordingly, tailor made and focused brand strategies, can be adopted in order to develop distinguishing brand personality traits or to readdress current customers' attitudes.

KEYWORDS Brand, brand equity, brand personality, Italian customers, brand personality drivers

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to introduce the topic of the research. Firstly, the background of the study is presented, emphasizing research gaps. Secondly, in the central part, goals, and objectives of the Master's Thesis are cleared and presented. Finally, after a section dedicated to the overall structure of the work, main concepts are illustrated according to already existing literature.

1.1 Background of the study

Brands nowadays play an extremely important role not only in modern society but in daily life routine, they are ever-present. In recent years, different definitions have been provided about what precisely a brand is. American Marketing Association identified the brand as every "name, term, design, symbol or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or services as distinct from those of other sellers" (2010). The majority of the theoretical conceptualizations of brand stressed the same underlying meaning of the concept.

Brands provide their customers with emotional and experiential benefits (Keller, 1993), which are essential elements to develop strong brand equity. Importance of brandings strategies has been widely recognized and documented as a tool to improve profitability and performances of a company, especially in highly competitive global markets. Nowadays, almost every marketing activity seek to create, manage and exploit brand equity. Firms with strong brands and positive brand equity benefit from better product-market outcomes (Wang, 2008). Added value, solid market share, higher margins, sustainable premium prices and customers loyalty are only a few of the advantages reflecting the relevance of brand equity. However, brand equity meaning has been interpreted from various perspectives, with the result of extremely wide sources of definitions. Among these, to fully understand what brand equity really means it is important to mainly focus on two different aspects. From a financial point of view, brand

equity is the additional cash flow obtained through the association of a brand with an underlying product or service. (Biel, 1992). On the other hand, from the customers perspective, it is intended as specific attribute beliefs or more generally, global evaluative beliefs that customers commonly associate with the brand name (John and Loken, 1993).

Brand personality has been acknowledged as a fundamental aspect, among all the different elements of which brand equity is composed. It contributes significantly to build and establish a solid brand equity (Lee and Oh, 2006), playing a relevant role in creating consumers involvement. Brand personality is more hardly replicable by competitors than other product or firm attributes. Furthermore, brand personality advantage relies in the opportunity of generating customer's engagement, creating, maintaining and developing strong brands (Fournier, 1998; Kapferer, 2008; Lin 2010).

Thus, brand personality can be considered as an influential driver of consumers preferences (Biel, 1993) and as an extremely valuable mean to build unique brand associations, that directly contribute increasing perceived value. In brand management practices, a distinctive personality has increasingly become an attractive aim. Various recent marketing studies showed that customers develop positive attitudes towards brands matching their own personality (Bosnjak et al., 2007), in line with brand personality concept.

Numerous firms have built strong brand personalities, which enabled them to overcome short-term hurdles and to build long-lasting competitive advantages. Moreover, the attractiveness of brand personality has raised in the last years, partially due to growing difficulty of product differentiation based uniquely on functionality and quality (Veryzer, 1995). Thus, a heterogeneous range of organizations has addressed their attention on brand personality, as a strategy to distinguish products and services (e.g. Smith et al., 2006; D'Astous and Lévesque, 2006).

Nevertheless, this value creation process is not an easy feasible path for many firms. In order to fully exploit brand personality advantages, it's essential to understand how consumer perception are elaborated. Different strategies and tools can be employed, therefore, realizing which factors are more effective, helps firms to optimize resources.

Tailor-made strategies can establish a set of unique and solid consumer-brand relationship (Su and Tong, 2015).

In this scenario, brand personality started to attract increasing attention as an appealing argument at the end of the 80's. Aaker formulation of the so called five dimensional model, can be considered as a pioneering study, influencing the spread of literature, which flourished in recent years. Aaker's model has been adapted and applied in cross-cultural studies, to explore the consistency of the theoretical structure in different countries, such as France (Ferrandi et al., 2000), Spain and Japan (Aaker et al, 2001), Russia (Supphellen and Gronhaug, 2003) and Korea (Sung and Tinkham, 2005).

Furthermore, alternative scales have been elaborated by marketers and scholars in the attempt to improve the reliability of models through which brand personality dimensions are evaluated or measured (e.g. Bosnjak et al., 2007; Geuens et al., 2009; Austin et al. 2003). Notwithstanding, the majority of the studies have been focused on providing a definition of the concept itself (e.g. Aaker, 1997; Azoulay and Kapferer, 2003), building a measurement scale (e.g. Aaker, 1997; Aaker et al.2001; Geuens et al., 2009) or deepening the effect on branding strategies (e.g. Freling and Forbes, 2005a; Ramaseshan and Tsao, 2007).

Only few researchers (e.g. Maehle et al., 2008, Maehle et al., 2011, Seimiene and Kamarauskaite, 2014), have been focused on brand personality formation process at the dimensional level. Therefore, it can be assumed that progress in brand personality studies have been restricted by a limited qualitative grounding (Freling and Forbes, 2005). Similarly, the investigation of all the mechanisms which influence brand personality perceptions in consumers' minds, has been neglected by academics, even in more recent studies.

This particular theoretical field, that goes beyond the analysis of the construct as a whole, can be still considered as mainly unexplored, due to the lack of considerable works that examine the elements shaping brand personality (Arora and Stoner, 2009; Maehle et al., 2011), under a customer-oriented point of view. Such gap is mainly conditioned by the

nature of the majority of brand personality studies, that the implemented quantitative methodology, as Likert scale, to measure BP, hampering the possibility to investigate more in-depth customers' perceptions.

Similarly, literature volume is limited, for what concerns the characteristics of each brand personality dimension, in terms of formation process and for the different impact of brand personality drivers. Even though cross countries researches spread all over the world, and in Europe as well, literature related to Italian framework is extremely narrow and limited, not only for what regards measurement scales but for practical application of brand personality concept as well.

The present study investigates the factors that influence the creation of brand personality construct on the dimensional level, analyzing Italian consumers' perceptions. The context in which the research is conducted is among Italian customers, including both national and international brands. The current research can provide useful findings to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of brand personality, from an alternative point of view, different from traditional firm-oriented perspective. A complete understanding of how the four brands personality dimensions differ, in terms of structure and impact of brand personality drivers, could result valuable for differentiation strategies. Similarly, a deeper analysis of Italian context can act not only as a benchmark for following studies but can provide additional cues on BP model application as well.

Final insights may play a relevant role in the definition of future plans of action, for developing a more effective branding strategy. Undoubtedly, a deeper understanding of consumer point of view is needed (Maehle et al., 2011). Therefore, identifying the structural drivers of brand dimensions, that influence customers' perception of brand personality, grants the possibility for marketers to develop more efficient tailor-made strategies. Brands with strong personalities can act be considered as a reference point, to build proper marketing campaigns.

1.2 Research question and objectives

This research aims to investigate the factors that contribute to the building process of brand personality dimensions, under a customer-oriented point of view, in the Italian context, proving a more comprehensive and richer analysis of consumer's perceptions. Thus, the research question to be answered is: How different brand drivers influence Italian consumers' perceptions of local and international brands personality dimensions?

The objective of this Master's Thesis can be divided into theoretical objectives:

- Review the existing literature related to brand personality to explain its contribution to value creation, within brand equity context.
- Identify and analyse brand factors that shape consumers perception of brand personality dimensions.
- Develop a theoretical framework of brand personality to analyse Italian consumers' perceptions when evaluating Italian and international branded products.

And empirical objectives:

- Empirically analyse how different brand elements impact and influence the perception of brand personality dimension, from a new and more consumer-oriented point of view.
- Identify distinctive brand personalities of selected local and international brands, in order to have a complete understanding of how consumers' perceptions are formed and how brand personality is built.
- Analyse and discuss the managerial implications relative to empirical findings, in order to develop more effective marketing strategies.

1.3 Delimitations

Researchers and scholars have not been able to recognize a universally applicable model of personality dimensions that can be implemented across different cultures. Thus, the

choice of five dimensions model can be questionable itself (Caprara, et al., 2001), due to differences emerged in the practical application of the model in various countries (e.g. Bosnjak et al., 2007; Milas and Mlacic, 2007).

Even though alternative works could have been chosen, as reference theoretical background, Aaker's work is widely recognized as the most effective and reliable model (Maehle et al., 2011), that define five robust dimensions of personality, being also the most commonly used in brand personality research field (Azoulay and Kapferer, 2003; Parker, 2009) and supported by findings of successive researches.

However, an adequate solution to evaluate brand personality in Italian framework is Fida, Sapere, Barbaranelli, and Natali (2010) Italian Brand Personality Scale, which is an adaptation of classical Aaker's structure. The authors developed a four-dimensional model, structured on traditional U.S. scale, presenting country-specific characteristics. The validity of the model is strengthened by the following study, aimed at assessing two brand personalities (Ceres and Nokia). However, considering the limited number of researches, which implemented this model and taking into consideration the nature of the sample, results cannot be generalized without further analysis of mentioned framework.

The choice to do not focus on a specific segment is mainly driven by the characteristics of Aaker's model itself that emerged in previous empirical studies. As stated by Austin et al. (2003), researchers should be extremely cautious when using Aaker's scale in contexts where the aim is to investigate the personality of a single brand or to aggregate data within a unique product category. Nonetheless, the possibility to obtain valid results are higher when the selected framework is implemented across different product category, exactly as happens in this Master's Thesis. Thus, the current study is developed in accordance with these structural flaws. Similarly, the research is not focused only on Italian brands, to assure broader meanings of findings and to guarantee further comparisons and evaluations possibilities.

1.4 Main concepts and definitions

In this paragraph, the main concepts of the study are introduced to provide a better comprehension of the investigated, referring to most widely adopted definitions.

BRAND: A brand is a name, term, sign, symbol or design or a combination of them intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or a group of sellers and to differentiate from those of the competitor (Kotler, Armstrong, Saunders and Wong, 2005).

BRAND EQUITY: Brand equity is the differential preference and response to marketing effort that a product obtains because of its brand identification (Datta, Ailawadi and Van Heerde, 2017).

BRAND PERSONALITY: Brand personality is the set of human personality traits that are both applicable to and relevant for brands (Azoulay and Kapferer, 2003).

BRAND PERSONALITY DRIVERS: Brand related factors which directly or indirectly shape the perception of brand personality in consumers' mind (Seimiene and Kamarauskaite, 2014)

1.5 Structure of the study

The first chapter begins with an introduction of selected topic, presented with research goal, theoretical and empirical background of the study. In addition, the main purpose of the study is explained accordingly with research questions and objectives. A first preliminary draft of the overall structure and the main concepts are provided to conclude the introduction.

The second chapter is focused on the critical review of existing literature on brand personality. The construct is broaden examined, explaining more relevant thematic and cross cultural perspectives. Finally, the last part of the chapter is dedicated to the different brand personality dimensions models, introducing selected model for Italian context.

The third chapter is centred on the analysis of brand personality drivers. After a preliminary part where the different classifications are presented, primary drivers are analysed. Furthermore, secondary drivers are introduced and discussed. Finally, the last part integrated previous considerations to build a coherent framework.

The fourth chapter introduce the methodology used in this Master's Thesis. Adopted research philosophy is described and cleared. Further specification about qualitative research are provided, referring to data collection technique, data analysis and to choice of brands and consumers sample. Final section addresses the issue of data quality.

In the fifth chapter, the results of semi-structured interviews are empirically discussed, analyse and reviewed. The first part is related to brand personality dimensions associations, whereas the remaining section presents brand personality drivers findings, with a distinction among primary and secondary ones.

In the final chapter, theoretical background developed in the first part of the thesis is linked to empirical results, to critically test the consistency of the work. The chapter continues with a brief summary of the study, in order to extract and point out managerial implications. Lastly, limitation of the study are identified, coupled with suggestions and cues to expand or continue the research in this field.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Background of the study
- 1.2 Research question and objectives
- 1.3 Delimitations
- 1.4 Main concepts and definitions
- 1.5 Structure of the study

2. Brand personality

- 2.1 Conceptualizing brand personality
- 2.2 Literature review
- 2.3 Traditional five-factors model
- 2.4 Cross-cultural studies
- 2.5 Italian brand personality scale

3. Brand personality drivers

- 3.1 Classification of brand personality drivers
- 3.2 Primary drivers
 - 3.2.1 Product attributes
 - 3.2.2 Product category
 - 3.2.3 Logo
 - 3.2.4 User imagery
 - 3.2.5 Advertising
 - 3.2.6 Previous experiences
- 3.3 Secondary drivers
- 3.4 Integrated framework

4. Methodology

- 4.1 Research design
- 4.2 Semi-structured interviews
- 4.3 Sample
- 4.4 Selection of Brands
- 4.5 Data analysis
- 4.6 Quality of the study

5. Empirical results

- 5.1 Dimensions assessment
 - 5.1.1 Reliability
 - 5.1.2 Hedonism
 - 5.1.3 Excitement
 - 5.1.4 Determination
- 5.2 Primary drivers impact
- 5.3 Secondary drivers impact
 - 5.3.1 C.O.O. and Country associations

6. Summary and conclusions

- 6.1 Limitations and future researches

Figure 1. Structure of the study.

2. BRAND PERSONALITY

This chapter aims to introduce brand personality and the main topic related to it. In the first part, the construct is conceptualized, providing an extended view of influential definitions. Secondly, literature related to brand personality is critically reviewed, underlining more relevant aspects. Later, the existing cross-cultural researches on brand personality are presented and compared with the traditional model of brand personality, to identify contrasts and the common point. Critics and shortcomings of Aaker's model are underlined and analysed, in order to critically select a reliable solution for the selected scenario. Finally, Italian BP scale is illustrated in the last section of the chapter, presenting the discrepancies with other existing models and the reasons that led the author to implement this model, as a reference point for the theoretical background.

2.1 Conceptualizing brand personality

Brand personality relevance for brand equity has been widely acknowledged across theoretical and empirical studies (Aaker, 1996), being considered as a cornerstone of customer-based brand management (Freling and Forbes., 2005) and as one of the most important types of brand associations (Pappu et al., 2005).

It's challenging to recognize a universally adopted definition of brand personality. Early, in 1958, Martineau firstly introduced the terminology to define a non-material dimension that lends a special character to a store, still far from the actual idea of brand personality. Under advertisers' point of view "Brand personality displays the brand's core characteristics, embodied, described and experienced in human terms" (Restall and Gordon, 1993). Differently instead, from a customer-oriented perspective, brand personality can be described as the way how consumers perceive the brand on dimensions that are typically used to depict a human's personality (Batra, Lehman and Singh, 1993).

The most influential conceptualization of brand personality identified the concept as the set of human characteristics associated with a brand, including gender, age, socioeconomic class as well as such classic human personality traits as warmth, concern

,and sentimentality (Aaker, 1997; Keller 1998; Petromilli and Michalczyk, 1999). This definition has been implemented by Keller (2013), who integrated quasi-human traits related to a given brand. Likewise, in related literature, human descriptors have been largely identified as a valuable means to describe brands (Plummer, 2000; Freling and Forbes, 2005; Geuens et al., 2009; Maehle et al. 2011).

Notwithstanding, Azoulay and Kapferer (2003) criticized Aaker's definition of brand personality concept as excessively wide and loose, emphasizing the necessity of a stricter formulation that could avoid conceptual confusion in marketing researches. Thus, brand personality has been alternatively defined as the set of human personality traits that are both applicable to and relevant for brands (Azoulay and Kapferer, 2003). As a consequence, only human personality traits are considered, rather than a broader set of human characteristics. Similarly, a further limitation is represented by the distinction of those traits that can be applied to brand and that are relevant. Finally, Ambroise et al. (2005: 68) further narrowed the meaning of brand personality, defined as "the set of human personality traits associated with a brand". Accordingly to the theoretical model applied in this Master's Thesis, Aaker's definition will be used as reference point to describe BP, considering that a restriction of U.S. scale traits has been already operated by Fida et al.(2010).

A two-fold conceptualization of brand personality construct deeply influenced the spread of relative literature. Azoulay and Kapferer's (2003) formulation has been frequently implemented by scholars and marketers (e.g Bosnjak et al.,2007; Milas and Mlacic, 2007), even though Aaker's remains the most authoritative definition in this theoretical field. However, brand personality, intended as an emotional and soft side of brand image (Biel, 1993), has been recently defined as all personality traits employed to characterize an individual and associated with a brand (Louis and Lombart, 2010). To provide a more focused and centred definition of the concept, current research follows Azoulay and Kapferer's formulation.

A further contribution was provided by Halliday (1996) and Plummer (1985), who emphasized brand personality role, as a key mean of brand differentiation, not only for

product categories but across different countries as well. Brand personality mechanism enables customers to identify themselves with brands, which represent a vehicle to express their own personality. Accordingly, Fiske (1989) affirmed that brand personality offers consumers an alternative way of constructing and maintaining social identity. Finally, Belk (1988) and Malhotra (1988) identified and recognized brand personality effect as the result of a self-expression mechanism for consumers.

2.2 Literature review

Brand personality literature recently flourished, after Aaker's pivotal study in 1997. Nonetheless, the idea of brand personality was already widespread as a remarkable topic among the majority of advertising practitioners and marketers, before being accepted by academics.

Back at the beginning of the 20th century, Gilmore (1919) probably firstly detected consumers' trend of conferring human personality traits to brands, defining the mechanism as animism, that can be considered as the first antecedent of brand personality. Similarly, Levy (1959) identified a structural change in peoples' purchasing behaviour, more influenced by psychological factors, with a growing importance of brands symbolism. Reasons behind product choice were no longer strictly correlated to its functional characteristics, but conditioned by deeper social meanings. Thus, Levy (1959) suggested to include demographic characteristics such as class, age, and gender in brand personality construct, to build a more comprehensive theoretical background.

This consumer trend was highlighted by King (1970), who recognized individuals' habit of choosing brands exactly in the same way as these choose friends, looking at them as a human being as well. Marketers and advertising agencies redefined brands appearance, which started to be perceived as if they were representing popular figures such as celebrities (Rook, 1985) or historical characters (Fournier, 1994) through anthropomorphising or personification processes. Simultaneously, firms embraced this trend, trying to build coherent marketing strategies. As a consequence, the evolution of

brand personality led to the establishment of long-lasting association, between personality traits and brands (McCracken, 1989).

However, the majority of the researches in this period contributed to augment theoretical ground regarding the positive effect of brand personality on consumers purchasing decisions. Increases in usage, consumer preferences, loyalty and levels of trust (Sirgy, 1982; Fournier, 1994) were detected as positive consequences of brand personality impact. Belk (1988) and Malhotra (1988) highlighted, once again, brand personality importance as a vehicle to express customer own self or ideal self. Anyway, Sirgy (1982: 290) argued that “an understanding of how and when brand personality relates to a customer’s personality and thereby influences consumer preference has remained elusive”. A summary of all considered benefits, deriving from a good management of brand personality is represented by Figure 2.



Figure 2. Brand personality advantages.

Plummer (1985) and Pendergast (1993) works instead provided the first practical examples of how brand personality works and creates value in real markets. Interesting insights emerged through a deep analysis of most important brands competing in American beverage industry. Coca-Cola unique personality was related with personality traits such as cool, real and all-American, Dr Pepper was perceived as nonconforming, unique and fun while Pepsi distinctive facets were young and exciting (Plummer, 1985). Moreover, the personalities resulted to be enduring, despite the efforts to change them, proving to be stronger when traits matched consumer idealization of themselves.

A further stream of studies was mainly aimed at understanding more relevant brand personality impactful elements, which influenced customers' decisions (e.g. Grohman, 2008, Seimiene and Kamarauskaite, 2014). Advertisement, user imagery, celebrity endorsement, sponsorship, symbol and product attributes were recognized as important variables in brand personality value creation process by many scholars (e.g. Plummer, 1985; Batra et al., 1993). However, breadth of factors, dynamics, and interdependence among these elements were not in-depth investigated and remained unclear.

Undoubtedly, D. A. Aaker's (1996) work can be considered as an important turning point for brand personality research, that contributed significantly to develop a more complete understanding of the concept. Aaker underlined brand personality role, claiming that it can help brand practitioners" by enriching their understanding of people's perceptions of and attitudes toward a brand, contributing to a differentiating brand identity, guiding the communication effort and creating brand equity"(Aaker 1996: 150). Thus, brand strategist can extend their comprehension of consumers' interactions with the brand, identifying structural weaknesses and advantages. Similarly, these insights can be used to align firm's strategy or practical decisions to people's perceptions. Furthermore, Aaker (1996) identified and described three different models through which brand personality contribute to creating brand equity (Figure 3).

More commonly, segments of consumers tend to identify themselves with the brands they choose, with a *self-expression model*. Through such mechanism, brands are vehicles to express own personality traits. Alternatively, in a *relationship basis model*, brand-

customer relationship has to be considered as a metaphor to express the willingness of the individual to relate to the personality that the brand represents. Finally, in a *functional benefit representation model*, a brand personality can also be a tool for representing and cueing functional benefits and brand attributes (Aaker, 1996), through a symbol and country or region association.

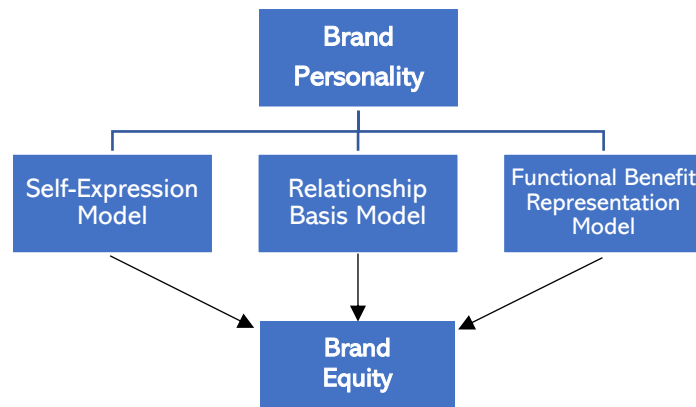


Figure 3. Model of brand equity value creation (Adapted from Aaker, 1996).

Only one year later, Aaker (1997) answered to the empirical necessity of developing a measurement scale for brand personality dimensions, as depicted by Figure 4. 37 American brands and 114 personality traits were examined and included in her work, structured accordingly to Goldberg (1990) lexical approach in psychology study. Goldberg, in his Big Five Model, grouped personality traits into 5 main factors: *Openness*, *Conscientiousness*, *Extraversion*, *Agreeableness* and *Neuroticism*. Similarly, Aaker (1997) elaborated a brand personality model made of five distinctive dimensions and fifteen facets mirroring human personality traits.

Findings of the research were mainly consistent with psychological analysis of human personality traits even though some differences emerged clearly, as recognized by the author:

“Although it could be argued that three brand personality dimensions relate to three of the Big Five human personality dimension (Agreeableness and Sincerity both capture the idea of warmth and acceptance, Extraversion and Excitement

both connote the notion of sociability, energy and activity, Conscientiousness and Competence both encapsulate responsibility, dependability and security) two dimension differ(...). This pattern suggests that brand personality dimensions might operate in different ways or influence customers for different reasons” (Aaker, 1997: 353).

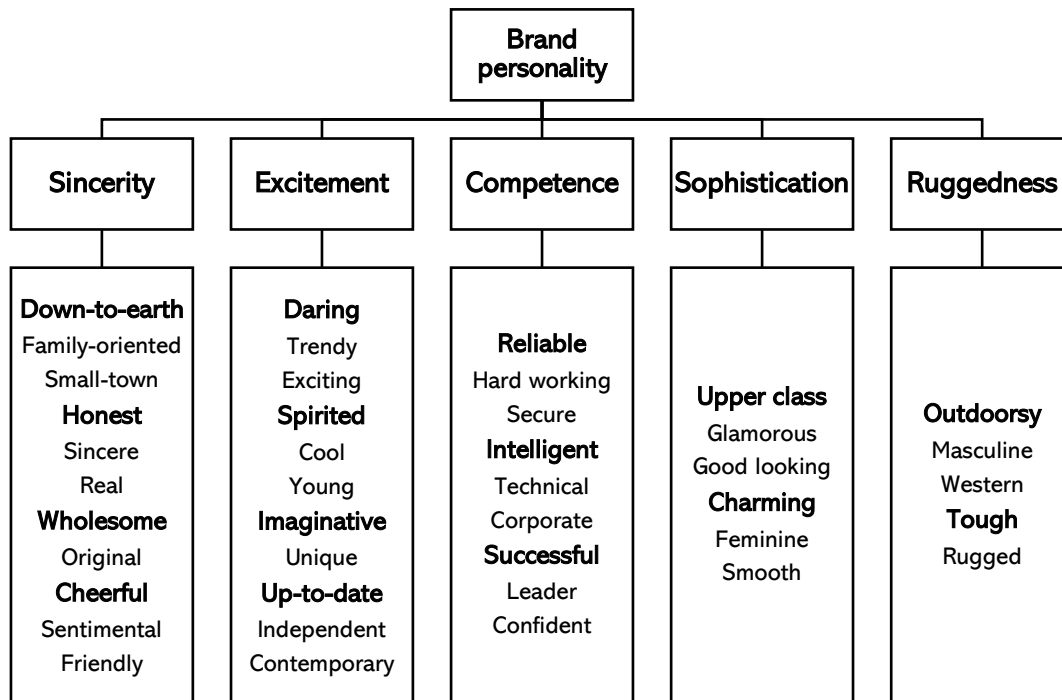


Figure 4. U.S Brand personality scale (Aaker, 1997).

Recently, literature development followed different paths. A sizable group of marketers and scholars pointed their attention on brand personality cross-cultural studies, which spread out in many countries (e.g. Aaker et al., 2001; Bosnjak, 2007; Chu, 2011; Ferrandi et al., 2000; Rojas Martinez et al., 2004; Supphellen and Gronhaug 2003; Smit et al., 2003). Aaker dimension model acted as reference point for the majority of these quantitative researches, even though results were not always consistent, in terms of cultural robustness. Remarkable differences emerged both in terms of dimensions nature and their meanings, affecting the external validity of five-factor framework.

Furthermore, a second wave of researches (e.g. Arora and Stoner, 2009; Austin, 2003; Azoulay et al., 2003; Bosnjak et al., 2007; D'Astous and Lévesque, 2003; Geuens et al., 2009) took into consideration and discussed vulnerabilities of Aaker's work, from different perspectives. Critics addressed structural shortcomings such as a loose definition of brand personality, non-replicability, and non-generalizability of the model. In the attempt to overcome existing flaws, academics elaborated alternative scales to measure brand personality in different contexts. However, none of these reached a good solidity and reliability in the international context, while the issue of a cross-cultural fitting scales remains.

Finally, the last stream of studies examined more in-depth value creation process (e.g. Maehle et al., 2011, Phau and Lau, 2000), analysing how different attributes influence consumers perception of brand personality (e.g. Brassington et al., 2000; Grohman, 2008, Keller, 2006; Seimiene, 2014). Few existing researches investigated the impact of branding factors such as product category (e.g. Maehle and Supphellen, 2008), celebrity endorsement, advertising (e.g. Kotler and Koller, 2012; Ouwersloot and Tudorica, 2001) and product design (e.g. Seimene and Kamarauskaite, 2014). However, discussion richness of this particular theoretical field is narrower, if compared to other literature aspects and can't be considered as particularly explicative, in terms of customers perceptions.

2.3 Traditional five-factors model

As the majority of pioneering works, Aaker's study has been debated and subjected to critics, from different perspectives. Especially in the last decade, academics argued about robustness, external validity and theoretical fundaments of the research.

The most severe critic of Aaker can be found in Azoulay and Kapferer's (2003) work, who strongly questioned the real effectiveness of the model, underlining some structural weaknesses. According to the authors, a fundamental weakness is embedded in the semantic formulation of brand personality construct and mirrored in facets such as competence and feminine, which includes extraneous or inapplicable concepts. Excessively loose definition caused a diffused confusion among brand researchers, that

affected the validity of many studies. Indeed, this deficiency has been enlarged by the proliferation of studies that implemented explicitly or implicitly Aaker's work. As a result, the existing scale doesn't measure brand personality properly because it merged erroneously many brand identity dimensions that should be kept separated. Nonetheless, such critic appeared to be as excessive, considering the results of the study that implemented Aaker's model.

External validity and generalizability of BP scale is the most controversial aspect of the discussions among academics. Austin et al. (2003) constructively deepened the analysis of five-dimensional model, distinguishing contexts in which the structure is more likely to have success from scenarios where the generalizability is questionable. Lack of clearance and ambiguity in the distinction between traits of generalization and differentiation is recognized as a major driver of uncertainty in the application of Aaker's model.

Researchers, especially encountered significative difficulties and hurdles when employing consumers as a facet of differentiation or, similarly, when the aim is the aggregation of data across one specific product category, as previously stated by Milas and Mlacic (2005). Likewise, the traditional scale doesn't guarantee valid results for the measurement of a single brand personality. Alternatively, positive results may emerge more likely through the aggregation of data across different product categories or even at individual brand analysis level, when the model is implemented without the purpose of remodeling the structure. Logically, these boundary conditions hamper the development of brand personality studies.

A further conceptual limitation regarding the nature of Aaker's scale was identified by Bosniak et al.(2007) in the development of a German brand personality framework. While the five-factor model of human personality includes traits with a positive and negative valence, Aaker's approach ignored negative brand personality associations. Undoubtedly, this important semantic restriction may affect seriously the analysis of consumer perceptions, under a more complete and comprehensive point of view, hampering the possibility of measuring the negative influence of brand personality.

Beside this, Caprara, et al. (2001) focused their critics on the theoretical ground on which the traditional model is built, questioning the underlying applicability of personality traits to brands, under a semantic approach. It may results complex to transfer a set of adjectives referring to human personality to properly describe various brands personality. According to the authors, traits are affected by brand-adjective interactions (Caprara et al., 2001), presenting relevant shifts in terms of meanings, when associated with different brands. As a consequence, even though it appears feasible to describe brand personalities referring to few factors, BP scale is affected by a variable degree of adequateness and consistency. In line with this hypothesis, Smith et al. (2006) noted that the nature of consumers' interactions with brands is just too complex to be fully explained by Aaker's model.

Finally, a different mixed method by Arora and Stoner (2009), involving both qualitative and quantitative approach, achieved contrasting indications. While quantitative data confirmed the five dimension structure, qualitative data portrayed a richer and more extended scenario. These results implicitly suggest that qualitative grounded research may expand brand personality comprehension, as already suggested by Freling and Forbes (2005). As a consequence, the existing lack of qualitative studies investigating brand personality is really hindering the development of uncharted perspectives and scenarios.

2.4 Cross-cultural studies

Most of the brand personality researches have been focused on the transposition of Aaker's framework across various countries, aiming at evaluating socio-cultural influences on the model and at analysing the consistency of scale as a measurement instrument, with different results. Undoubtedly, the attempt to identify a structure applicable in different context represents a problem of paramount importance for BP studies, still far from a possible solution.

Firstly, Ferrandi et al. (2000) exploratory study tested the stability of Aaker's structure among French students. The structure which came to light is not far from the traditional scale. Three dimensions, dynamism, femininity and robustness were very similar to the original ones, having the same semantic connotation of respectively excitement,

sophistication and ruggedness. However, only conviviality resulted as a distinctive dimension and country-specific, while the significance of sincerity traits changed considerably. These differences can be explained by interpretation biases from one country to another (Ferrandi et al., 2000), that as a consequence, are reflected in the structure of personality traits.

A comparative study across Japan, Spain and United States, confirmed only partially the generalizability and external validity of Aaker's five factors scale (Aaker et al., 2001). Three different dimensions, ruggedness (United State), peacefulness (Japan) and passion (Spain) proved to be country-specific, capturing cultural meaning transferred to brands, that cannot be generalized (Aaker et al., 2001). Spanish sophistication appeared to be strongly correlated not only with American sophistication but with competence dimension as well. Previous considerations suggest that brands' attempt to position themselves as sophisticated, can be easily perceived differently among American and Spanish consumers.

Reasons are attributable to differences in values perception. For instance, in Asian cultures, obedience, harmony and interdependence are primary beliefs, more rewarded rather than in other regions (Triandis, 1989). Moreover, slight discrepancies were detected in the correlations between dimensions, and facets, which were not always convergent across the examined countries, affected by shifts in the intrinsic meaning of brand personality traits.

Alvarez-Ortiz and Harris (2002) marketing research, it's the first attempt to assess brand personality scale in a developing country. Ten Mexican Brands, design appropriately for the local market and ten global brands were investigated, focusing on the perceived cultural meaning attached to them. The results underlined a moderate lack of consistency between U.S and Mexican scale. Nonetheless, only ruggedness was dropped out of the model, replaced by indigenous gender dimension. In multiple cases, incongruities were also observed among American and Mexican brand personality traits, mirrored by discrepancies in the correlation between facets such as down to earth and small town, sentimental and friendly or secure and hardworking.

Mexican consumers evidenced a strong influence of brands' cultural context, developing diverse attitudes towards brands according to this. Explanatory factors, once again, can be identified in the different set of indigenous values, as ostentatious manliness, uncertainty avoidance and collectivism which characterized Mexican social identity (Hofstede, 1980; Paz, 1985).

Smith et al. (2003) developed SWOCC model, a six-dimensional scale, in the attempt to elaborate an efficient solution for Dutch brand managers, extending the analysis to a wider range of product categories. Even if the aim was to build an alternative framework, the distance of resulting structure of SWOCC from five-factor model was not abysmal, presenting various contact points. Competence (+), excitement (+) resulted to be the only shared dimensions, ruggedness presented affinities with Aaker's dimension, while conversely sophistication emerged as a marginal and small factor. However, gentle, annoying and distinguished were identified as country-specific elements. Similarly, matching traits between the two considered models were characterized by discrepancies in their meaning and interpretation.

In accordance to previous findings, Supphellen and Gronhaug (2003) identified important differences and resemblances between Western and Russian context, relative to content and dimensionality, in their study about Ford and Levi's brand personality. While four dimensions replicated the original structure of Aaker's scale, competence was replaced by successful and contemporary factor. In Russian model, many facets didn't exactly match American ones, reflecting different significances. Moreover, brand personality traits related to financial health were reallocated from factors as excitement and sophistication to successful and contemporary dimension. A further analysis of Russian environment drew attention to the influence of Western brand personalities on brand attitudes, with positive and negative results. This effect proved to be highly correlated with the level of consumer ethnocentrism. As a consequence, only low-ethnocentric Russian consumers are influenced by foreign brand personalities, gathering more detailed attribute information about products and brands.

Rojas-Mendez et al. (2004) study on Ford brand personality in Chile provided additional insights on BPS in an emerging country. The results demonstrated that Aaker's scale

wasn't completely applicable to Chilean customers, due to the removal of ruggedness factor and additional differences in facets structure. Thus, the study strengthened the assumption that dimensions show similar meaning across different countries, even if usually these are associated with different attributes (Aaker et. al., 2001). Furthermore, three segments of Chilean customers were detected in the study, according to their different approaches toward Ford brand personality: *antagonist*, *admirers* and *cold-blooded*.

The analysis of Korean brand personality specific factors, through a comparative study (Sung and Tinkham, 2005) confirmed previous findings and considerations. Confucian values profound impact in Korean society and economic system is reflected in the relationship between customers and brands as well, influencing significantly attitude toward brands. Set of beliefs such as tradition, harmony, paternalism, and communalism (Sung and Tinkham, 2005) heavily conditioned brand personality formation process and the interrelatedness of facets, reflected by passive likeableness and ascendancy cultural distinctive dimensions.

Similarly, when Mils and Mlacic (2005) analysed consumers' perception of familiar Croatian brands, few contact points resulted from the study, both with the traditional model and alternative frameworks. Bosnjak et al. (2007) offered a different perspective on brand personality, implementing a person-centric point of view to examine German context. For the first time, in the resulting four-dimensional model, elements affected by a negative nuance emerged, such as superficiality and boredom facets, as a result of a more inclusive approach employed.

Geuens et al. (2009) developed a narrower BP scale, offering a new perspective on the topic. The research was mainly aimed at avoiding the interference of aspects that go beyond brand personality concept, typical of studies implementing Aaker's scale. The resulting model, structured into five dimensions, revealed good resemblances with Big Five human personality scale and can be considered as the best alternative to traditional Aaker's structure. The most interesting implication is represented by the good level of generalizability and validity showed by the framework. It resulted as a reliable structure, not only for researches across different product categories but for studies across different competitors within a unique product category as well (Geuens et al., 2009), even across

different European countries. However, the effectiveness of this framework has not been further analysed by following studies and there are no additional evidence which can support the goodness of Geuens et al. (2009) as an influential model.

Finally, Chu and Sung (2011) further contributed to expanding the understanding of brand personality effect in Asian countries, analysing the associations between human personality traits and brands in China. Both Global and Chinese brands were investigated. Findings were consistent with already considered empirical researches, supporting the hypothesis that culture differences partly affect brand personality dimensions, especially for Asian countries. As a matter of fact, both culturally common and country-specific dimensions stood out.

Precisely, traditionalism and joyfulness presence is justified by Chinese cultural core values and by the relevance of traditions and social rules. On the other hand, trendiness, which is similar to Sung and Tinkham (2005) Korean dimension, is mainly driven by Western cultural influence. Hence, customers' attitudes toward brands in China are conditioned by two opposite trends, Chinese traditionalism and emerging Western modernism (Chu and Sung, 2011).

A general overview of previously analysed studies reveals that, when applied to different contexts, main elements of Aaker's model were replicated with different degrees of diversity. Therefore, five factors model is a valuable methodology to evaluate brands but not a holistic measure, even though it's not possible to deduct a priori the extent to which dimensions and facets vary across countries. Findings suggest that brand personality represents and institutionalizes values and beliefs of a country (Aaker et al., 2001), while cultural differences play a major role in influencing customers' attitude toward brands.

Adjectives referred to brands often carry specific meanings which change considerably across countries. Similarly, some of the elements identified by Aaker are too strictly rooted in American culture, resulting inappropriate or misleading when applied in a different context to describe personality traits. However, cultures and set of values dissimilarities across countries are not the only explanations for emerged discrepancies. Undoubtedly, characteristics of selected samples affect the final result of these researches. Particularly, differences regarding age, cultural background and level of education of

respondents influence their perceptions of brand personality. Finally, previously considered studies investigated an extremely heterogeneous range of various typologies of brands, which as a consequence, is reflected by irregular and uneven findings. More relevant researches in brand personality field and their respective findings are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Major findings in brand personality cross cultural studies (2000-2011).

Author(s)	Country	Sample	Stimuli	BPS Scale and key findings
Ferrandi Valette-Florence Fine-Falcy (2000)	France	246 Students respondents divided in 3 groups of same size	3 Groups of four Brands in two basic consumable categories	- <i>Sincerity, dynamism, femininity, robustness, conviviality</i> - Structural and semantic biases - Aaker's scale is transportable to French context
Aaker, Benet-Martinez and Garolera (2001)	Usa Spain Japan	1.495 Japanese participants 692 Spanish respondents	25 Well-known Global Brands	- Japan: <i>excitement, competence, peacefulness, sincerity, sophistication</i> - Spain: <i>Excitement, sincerity, sophistication, peacefulness, passion</i> - Culture-specific dimensions
Alvarez-Ortiz and Harris (2002)	Mexico	400 respondents (41,4 % of participants between 18 and 30 years)	10 Global Brands popular in Mexico and 10 Local Brands	- <i>Sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, gender</i> - Inconsistency of Aaker's scale - Discrepancies among Local and Global Brands
Smit, Van Den Berge and Franzen (2003)	Netherlands	3524 Dutch respondents	93 Well-known brands in 11 product categories	- SWOCC BPS: <i>competence+, excitement +, gentle, distinguishing, ruggedness, annoying</i> - Shared and Country specific dimensions
Supphellen and Gronhaug (2003)	Russia	200 Respondents (107 students)	Ford and Levis's	- <i>Sincerity, excitement, sophistication, ruggedness, successful & contemporary</i> - Consumer ethnocentrism as a strong moderator of Western brand personalities
Rojas-Méndez, Podlech and Silva-Olave (2004)	Chile	388 Respondents (21,9% under 24 years)	Ford	- <i>Excitement, sincerity, competence, sophistication</i> - Customer segmentation in antagonists, admirers and cold blooded

Sung and Tinkham (2005)	Usa Korea	337 Korean students 320 American students	13 Global Brands	- <i>Trendiness, competence, likeableness, western, sophistication, ruggedness, traditionalism, ascendancy</i> - Confucian values impact on BP perceptions
Bosnjak Bochmann and Hufschmidt (2007)	Germany	131 Respondents (50% aged between 20-29)	15 Brands	- <i>Drive, conscientiousness, emotion and superficiality</i> - Person centric approach - Negatively connoted elements
Geuens, Weijters and De Wulf (2009)	Belgium	12.789 respondents	193 Brands representing different purchase motivations	- Responsibility, activity, aggressiveness, simplicity, emotionality - Reliability for comparisons between brand and between category comparisons - Cross cultural validity
Chu and Sung (2011)	China	698 Respondents 69% aged between 15 and 59	18 Commercial brands (6 Chinese brands and 12 Global Brands)	- <i>Competence, excitement, sophistication, traditionalism, joyfulness, trendiness</i> - Chinese traditionalism & Western modernism Influence

2.5 Italian brand personality scale

Findings of brand personality researches depict an extremely puzzling literature background, without a clear understanding of which can be considered as the best option to analyse and measure brand personality. Considering that U.S five dimensional model represents an important underlying starting point for researches, aimed at analysing symbolic meaning of brands (Austin, et al., 2003), this has been chosen as reference background for this Master's Thesis. Furthermore, when applied to different contexts, Aaker's model demonstrated psychometric rigor, while its dimensions model proved to be linguistic accessible in discussions with customers (Maehle et al., 2011), representing common personality traits that facilitate study procedures.

Nonetheless, considering all the flaws that affect the classical brand personality scale, for the purpose of this study it seems more appropriate to select a slightly different model,

that can describe Italian consumers perceptions more accurately. Italian literature offers an already structured model of brand personality, developed by Fida et al. (2010), that fits adequately the necessities of present research. The analysis was conducted focusing on Bulgari, due to its high brand saliency (Fida et al., 2010) and then validated according to the analysis of two further brands, Ceres and Nokia. Thus, the validity of the results was confirmed by the second research, guaranteeing a solid background that can be implemented for further studies.

The characteristics of this new four-dimensional model, depicted in Figure 5, confirm existing weaknesses and discrepancies of Aaker's scale when applied in different countries. Dimensions do not fully replicate the original structure, both for their contents and significance. Shifts in meaning and composition of the dimensions emerged exactly as in previous researches, as a consequence of cultural impact on consumers' perceptions.

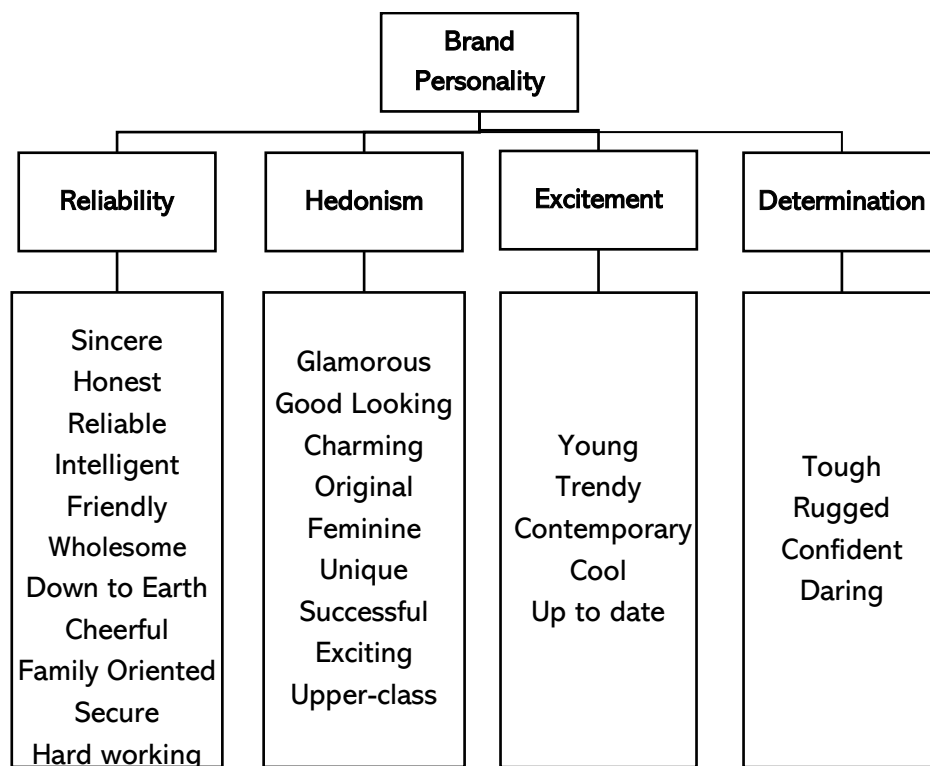


Figure 5. Italian Brand Personality Scale (Adapted from Fida, Sapere, Barbaranelli and Natali, 2010).

However, reliability and hedonism dimensions represent a contact point with previous works, considering the similarities with Ferrandi et al. (1999) sincerity and sophistication factors in the French scale model. This result underlines that, when applied in cultures not so distant between them, the model may lead to similar results, enhancing its generalizability and external validity assumptions.

Once again, U.S. scale extent resulted to be excessively broad, with the necessity to reduce the number of elements in order to build a functional and comprehensible structure. While in the Italian case, eleven adjectives were deleted from the initial array, the number is even higher in already mentioned studies

Conversely, reliability's resemblance with Aaker's sincerity is mitigated by traits belonging to competence dimension. Hedonism instead expresses exterior characteristics of being successful, distinctive and charming (Fida et al., 2010), including a set of adjectives, deriving not only from sophistication factor but from other dimensions, such as sincerity, competence and excitement as well. Excitement is the only pure dimension. Lastly, the fourth factor, determination presents similarities with ruggedness, including however also elements from competence and excitement dimensions even though is described by a narrower range of traits. Accordingly, Figure 6 shows in details the relationship between Italian scale and the original personality traits from Aaker.

Thus, the previous analysis suggests that the implementation of the traditional scale in the Italian context doesn't represent the most reliable option, considering the sizable amount of discrepancies regarding the overall structure and the meaning attached to brand personality traits. As a consequence, for the purpose of this study, to fully understand Italian consumers perceptions, it appears to be more appropriate to implement Fida et al. (2010) model, instead of the traditional one. Additionally, the goodness of the model is strengthened both by the similarities emerged with other country-specific structures and by a further study conducted by the same authors, that validated Italian BP scale.

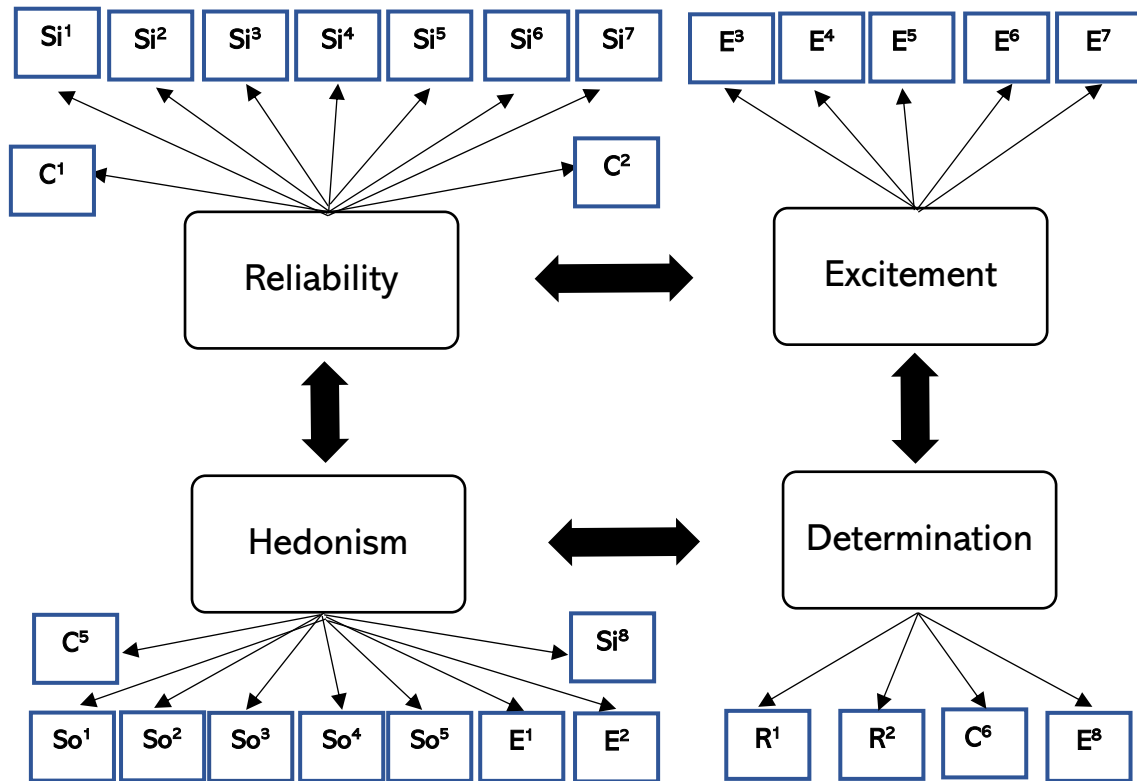


Figure 6. Relationship between Italian BP model Aaker's U.S scale (Adapted from Fida, Sapere, Barbaranelli and Natali, 2010).

Nonetheless, as emerged in previous studies, customers' differences in the evaluation of brand personality arise commonly in the majority of explored cultural context. Thus, even a narrower and better-focused model is not necessarily reflected by a homogeneous perception of brand personality. Differences related to gender, social status, geographical provenience or due to other socio-cultural elements, may emerge also in the case of one country study, as happens in this case. Discrepancies in the symbolic meaning attached to brands, lead customers to elaborate different perception of brand personality as well. Moreover, the dissimilar nature of brand personality dimensions, relative not only to semantic and symbolic meaning but to their overall structure is likely to be reflected in empirical application of the model.

3. BRAND PERSONALITY DRIVERS

This chapter aims to conceptualized and then deeply analyse all those brand elements, that can be considered as brand personality drivers. Firstly, a brief preliminary part introduces the topic, focusing on the different classifications that have been provided in recent studies. Secondly, brand personality drivers are treated in details, following a structure which starts with primary elements and ends with the discussion of secondary factors. Then, discussed themes are integrated to build the theoretical framework on which the second part of the empirical study is based upon.

3.1 Classification of brand personality drivers

Conversely to previously discussed theoretical aspects, marketers and academics have paid less attention to the sources through which brand personality perceptions are created in people's mind. Few researches investigated an integrated framework of elements responsible of influencing brand personality dimensions, trying to understand how different factors or elements impact on consumers' evaluations. However, related literature is characterised by the absence of a univocal definition, while some academics refer to such variables as brand elements, other use brand factor. For the purpose of this thesis, all the brand elements and factors capable of influencing brand personality will be referred as brand drivers, to avoid misleading interpretations and to recollect all the meanings under a unique conceptualization.

Exactly as perceived human personality is influenced by all the factors, that are associated with a given individual, similarly happens for brands. Considering that every direct and indirect contact between consumers and brands, strongly conditions the way personality traits are formed (Plummer, 1985; Aaker, 2010), firms can implement different strategies and different tools to create directly or indirectly brand personality. According to this first preliminary definition, customers' experiences with brands are pivotal for BP formation. However, brand personality drivers definition can be extrapolated from Seimiene and Kamarauskaite (2014), as all those brand related factors which directly or indirectly shape the perception of brand personality in consumers' mind. Similarly, these can be described

as the ways through which brand personality is formed, both directly, with the transfer of personality traits from the people associated with a brand and indirectly, through product-related attributes, product category, logo and advertising (Maehle and Supphellen, 2008).

The breadth of elements involved in this process underlines the complexity of the phenomenon, especially if we consider the lack of universally recognized criteria to classify brand personality drivers. A first perspective was provided by Aaker (1996) who grouped brand personality drivers in two main categories, product related characteristics and non-product related characteristics. The first group refers mainly to product elements such as package, price or attributes capable of directly influence consumer perceptions. Marketing mix elements contribute to forming brand personality traits has been recognized also by further academics, as part of a continuous process (Batra et al., 1993; Ouwersloot and Tudorica, 2001), made of repeated interactions with consumers.

Thus, price, product category, product formulation and product attributes are acknowledged as core drivers. Likewise, the second group identified by Aaker includes a broader range of various factors, including elements such as user imagery, sponsorship, logo, age of the brand, COO, company or CEO image, and celebrity endorsers.

The majority of discussed elements have been confirmed by posterior researches, even though the list has been even extended. Maehle and Supphellen (2008), enriched the set of drivers, by focusing also on company characteristics. Therefore, new variables, such as company's managing director, brand name, retail stores, company's moral values and own experience of product usage, came to light. Lin (2010), instead offered an alternative perspective and identified only a restricted number of drivers as primary, including associations about the brand in customers' mind, corporate image, and product attributes. Similarly, Wee (2004) redefine brand personality mainly as a manipulation process involving brand name and few other attributes, such as endorsers, imagery, logos and signs.

A further stream of researchers (e.g. Ouwersloot and Tudorica, 2001; Pringle and Binet, 2005; Grohamm, 2008; Seimiene and Kamarauskaite., 2014) mainly found support and enhanced previous assumptions about brand personality drivers, without taking into consideration new influential elements. However, these studies contribute stressed once

again the importance of factors as advertising, celebrity endorsement, logos, user imagery and product attributes, as can be noted from Table 2.

Table 2. Classifications of brand personality drivers.

Author(s)	Distinction	Drivers
Aaker (1996)	Product related; Non-Product related	Product category, package, price, attributes; User imagery, sponsorship, symbol, age, ad-style, country of origin, company image, CEO, celebrity endorsers;
Ouwersloot and Tudorica (2001)	Dominant role of advertising in brand personality formation	Advertising Celebrity endorsement;
Wee (2004)	BP considered as a manipulation process of a restricted range of elements	Brand name, logos, type of endorsers, imagery and signs;
Maehle and Supphellen (2008)	Wide range of different sources for each BP dimensions	Company's employees, company's managing director, endorser, typical brand user, product attributes, own experience when using the product, product category, brand name, brand logo, advertising style, price, retail stores, country of origin, company's moral values;
Grohmann (2008)	BP dimensions are influenced by different logo design characteristics	Logo;
Lin (2010)	Primary drivers	Associations about the brand in consumer's mind, image of the company and product attributes;
Maehle, Otnes and Supphellen (2011)	Each BP dimensions are correlated with specific elements	Positive service experience, company familiar nature, context in which the product is used, brand's values, brands' high quality associations, reputation, endorsers, advertising, aesthetics, product attributes, product category, brands' nature;
Seimiene and Kamarauskaite (2014)	Analysed beer BP mainly affected by one or two factors	Product design and label, colours, popularity of the brand, position of the brand in the market, advertisement, price, perceived typical user.

Company-level related drivers is the last set of factors that should be discussed for their influence on brand personality, referring expressly to company's employees and CEO. Levy (1959), firstly introduced a new relevant factor, defined as people, including among a wide range of elements, also consumers and company's employees. However, employees' role as BP source was detected only by Mahle and Supphellen (2008) and didn't find any empirical confirmations of its relevance in following researches. According to this, it can't be considered as a primary brand driver. Similarly, CEO impact, theorised by Aaker (1996; 2010), lacks empirical validations.

3.2 Primary drivers

Recent studies on brand personality, conducted both by academics and practitioners, described a quite complex and rich scenario. However, existing works didn't draw a specific and punctual delimitation for what elements can be considered as primary or secondary, coupled with a lack of a globally recognized definition of the concept. Hence, for the aim of this Master's Thesis, primary drivers are extrapolated from previous findings, due to their recurring presence in empirical studies and for their proved and tested influential effect on customer perceptions. Accordingly, these are more deeply analysed in the following subchapters, to underline dynamics and bonds with personality traits, drawing a coherent theoretical framework.

3.2.1 Product attributes

Product attributes can clearly be considered as the starting point when analysing customers' perceptions relative to brand personality traits. Personality creation is a process that evolves over time, indeed influenced by the whole marketing mix of the brand, and obviously by factors as product formulation, design, and package (Batra, Lehmann and Singh, 1993). Thus, differences can be detected as well for what concerns the different type of product attributes and their connections with personality dimensions. Once again, reasons lies in the divergent meanings attached to products and brands, such as experiential and functional benefits or symbolic ones. Product quality is more incisive in consumer formulation of personality especially for functional products (Maehle and

Supphellen, 2008). Hence, brands perceived as sincere and reliable are characterised by a higher level of quality that confirms customers' expectations (Maehle et al., 2011). Following a different path instead, features as colour, packaging or aesthetics are more influential for exciting and sophisticated brands, when these are capable of expressing elegance and excitement. Similarly, it emerged that rugged and determined dimension of brands such as Harley Davidson or Jeep is partly conditioned by their unique attributes (Maehle and Supphellen, 2008). Price is an important indicator of brands perceived as more sophisticated and unique (Maehle et al., 2011). Brands operating in luxury or targeting upper-class segments are immediately associated with similar personality traits, independently from their distinctive characteristics. Therefore, product attributes have to be considered as one of the most effective communication mean to express brand personality.

3.2.2 Product category

Undoubtedly, attributes of the singular product offered by a company are important factors for the evaluation of brand personality, due to the direct contact with consumers. However, independently from the associations related to a given brand, product categories commonly led to a stereotypical idealization of brand characteristics (Seimiene and Kamarauskaite, 2014). Grouping common products highlights the different approaches, which consumers hold toward product categories. Some specific segments are characterized by a higher involvement of the customers, while for certain categories people follow a routinized behaviour, strengthening their usual habits.

An additional divergence can be detected if we analyse the criteria that lead customers to the selection of given items or brands. For some products, the decision is driven by rational criteria while in other occasions it is more based on an affective one. This divergence led the academics to distinguish categories, for including feel or think products (Ratchford, 1987). This distinct underlying approach is mirrored on BP perception as well. Thus, we can affirm that product categories possess brand personality as well (Batra et al.1993). Accordingly, when analysed in empirical studies, specific categories resulted to be effectively correlated with distinguishing personality traits and characteristics.

Common products which become part of our daily routine are more likely perceived as reliable, hard-working and honest (Maehle et al., 2011). On the other hand, firms operating in sectors such as bank or insurance, are usually associated with dimensions as competent, serious and upper-class (Aaker, 1996). Similarly, technical appliances and car are instead considered as competent (Maehle et al., 2011), cigarette, motorcycle and men's companies are perceived as rugged or masculine while sincere brands are those related to family activities, operating in food and beverage industry (Maehle et al., 2011). However, product category can be an object of a deeper segmentation, as a consequence of the different meanings attached to a particular class of items. Accordingly to this considerations, Levy (1986) fractioned beverage sector, identifying distinguished further sub-categories, carrying specific brand personality meanings, which go beyond the category itself. Furthermore, it has been detected that specific personality dimensions present a different degree of correlation with product categories, which nature is perceived as more juvenile, masculine and feminine (Seimiene and Kamarauskaite, 2014).

3.2.3 Logo

A logo is represented by the graphic design and typeface elements that an organization employ to identify and distinguish itself or its services/products (Henderson and Cote, 1998), being a crucial element of brands' visual essence. Thus, a logo is the official visual identity of an organization (Herskovitz and Crystal, 2010), capable of sending a huge amount of information to the audience. Among non-product related factors, logos stand out as for the capacity to create very strong and powerful brand associations (Aaker, 2010), thanks to a continuous and repeated exposure that enhance lifespan. As differentiation instruments, logos are simpler to be managed and conversely to other elements, symbols grant the possibility to overcome linguistic and cultural hurdles more easily, helping to build an international consistent image. A well-designed logo become immediately emblematic of brand characteristics and brand personality traits. Michelin man's logo (Figure 7) is a successful example of how an enthusiastic logo can transmit strength and energy brand personality traits (Aaker, 2010).



Figure 7. Michelin man's logo (Aaker, 2010).

Nonetheless, the effectiveness of logo impact is strictly conditioned by the match between consumers' perception and firm's image goal (Henderson and Cote, 1998). A symbol that is not incisive in representing brand characteristics, can easily mislead customers, jeopardizing brand image and personality construction itself. In particular, when brand personality strongly reflects a functional benefit of the product or a unique attribute, it may appear ineffective if there is a lack of a well-consolidated visual representation, which can stimulate spontaneous consumer perceptions. Symbols are considered as universally attractive elements, not only when the aim is to create brand personality, but to augment or modify typical personality traits as well. Companies indeed often recur to slight changes and transformation of logos to re-route consumer perceptions of the brand.

Specific logo design attributes resulted to influence remarkably customers' perceptions of brand personality traits, underlining different patterns of connections. Round and elaborate design impacts in a diametrically opposite way on people's perceptions of sincerity and ruggedness dimensions of brands personality. While this specific symbol layout commonly evokes sincere brand, at the same time, it reduces the perception of ruggedness dimension (Grohmann, 2008). Conversely, brands considered as exciting are commonly represented by highly elaborated logos. Several symbols characteristics, resulted indeed to be important drivers for customers evaluation of brand personality, especially for sophisticated, rugged and exciting brands (Maehle and Supphellen, 2008), confirming the interrelationship with personality dimensions.

3.2.4 User imagery

Likewise, user imagery influence represents a powerful non-product related driver. It directly associates human traits to brand as a consequence of consumer's perceptions of typical or stereotyped and idealized user of the brand. Following a definition that traces brand personality conceptualization, user imagery can be described as the set of human characteristics that are directly associated with the typical user (Aaker 1996: 170). Often, among scholars and practitioners brand personality and user imagery are considered equal, for carrying identical meanings. Nonetheless, this appears to be true only in few cases, while, more commonly, there is a significant gap between brand personality and user imagery. These discrepancies, among apparently incongruent attributes, can potentially guarantee further opportunities for a given brand, to address unexpected market segments.

Unlike many other factors, user imagery is more incisive, because it reduces conceptualization effort of the consumer, considering that user or depicted user is already a person. User imagery is usually employed as a keystone for value proposition, centred on a specific reference group. Therefore, brands become as badges for the acceptance within certain social groups (Aaker, 2010). However, typical users are not controllable by the firms that can only attempt to de-emphasize undesirable users, promoting and stressing a different profile, through communication efforts. For above-mentioned reasons, user imagery impact on brand personality is correlated with another factor, celebrity endorsement, capable of readdressing consumers' perception.

User imagery effect on brand personality perception proved to be not uniform when evaluating different personality traits. The impact of such driver is more effective especially for exciting, rugged and sophisticated brands when the match between users and product nature appears as coherent and harmonious. Mercedes upscale personality, or Calvin Klein sophisticated sensed traits are practical examples of how user imagery can successfully sway perceived personality (Aaker, 1996).

3.2.5 Advertising

In the development of personality associations, advertising is strongly employed, representing the most visible communication mean (Ouwensloot and Tudorica, 2001) and

the most effective method to express brand personality (Kotler and Keller, 2012; Seimiene and Kamarauskaite, 2014). To fully understand advertising impact on brand personality is necessary to consider the concept under a semiotic approach. Thus, advertising should be considered as “a sign, representing the actual product image (or personality), which meaning depends on the interpretation of the recipient, which in turn is based on the context where advertisement occurs” (Dingena 1994: 36).

Through advertising, brands are capable of building a long-term relationship, where consumers play an active role over time. However, communicated brand personality has to be firstly understood by the consumers and then transferred to the product. Different strategies can be implemented by marketers to shape and adapt advertising messages across cultures, such as colours, celebrity endorsers or direct messages. Advertising impact on brand personality works through two different mechanisms, illustrated in Figure 8. It operates directly through the transfer of the personality of a subject involved in the promotion or indirectly, evoking and deriving personality traits from the product itself. Thus, advertising both creates and transfers brand personality.

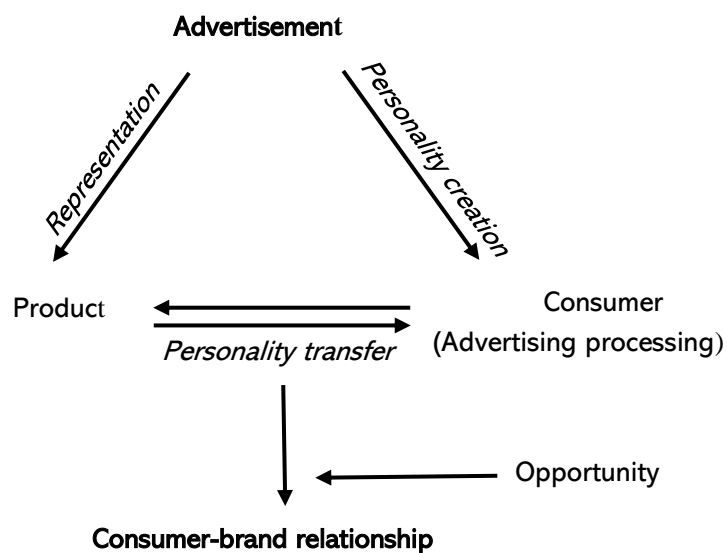


Figure 8. Personality traits creation & transfer process through advertising (Adapted from Ouwersloot and Tudorica, 2001).

However, the process through which BP is created is more articulated if compared to other drivers' effect. Its complexity derives from different factors, affecting the consumers involved in this two-way mechanism. The extent of advertising impact is indeed influenced by consumers' exposure, involvement and comprehension, processing and re-elaboration of the message (Ouwensloot and Tudorica, 2001).

From Maehle et al. (2011) study, it emerged clearly that the relationship between advertising role and exciting brand is stricter than for other brand personality dimensions. Similarly, the impact is generally even stronger when communication strategy involves celebrity endorsements and sponsorship. Celebrity appearances are more common for specific categories of product such as foods, drinks, and alcohol (Seimiene and Kamarauskaite, 2014) and for representing sophisticated and ruggedness traits in advertisements (Maehle and Supphellen, 2008). Sponsorship of events such as sports manifestations may contribute to emphasize a distinguishing personality, as has happened in Red Bull case. The Austrian company built its image of an exciting and outdoorsy brand thanks to a unique advertising campaign, based on repeated sponsorships of extreme and adrenaline sports events.

3.2.6 Previous experiences

Considering the full range of BP drivers, undoubtedly previous experiences with a specific brand are influential elements, for the development of brand-customers relationships. For the purpose of this thesis, customer experience has to be intended under a more qualitative point of view and can be defined as the qualitative aspect of every interaction that a subject has with a given brand, its services or products at every point in time (Watkinson, 2013). Thus, the construct includes all the repeated interactions between customer and a given brand, which contribute to define the relationship between them.

Under brand personality point of view, customers' experience relevance proved to be higher for specific categories of brands. Firstly, it directly impacts products with functional and experiential benefits, while the effect on brands and items with symbolic

meaning is mitigated by other factors (Maehle et al., 2011). Therefore, brand personalities of daily and habitual products, relative to segments such as food and beverage are more strictly dependent on these previous customers' experiences. As a consequence, customers are inclined to perceive brands as sincere and competent especially when these fulfill their everyday expectations. Similarly, Seimiene and Kamarauskaite's (2014) study identifies a strong connection between exciting brands and the circumstances in which these are used. More easily than for other dimensions, the context perceptions are transferred to brand personality traits.

Conversely, flaws, scandals, and negative experiences potentially may undermine positive brand correlations, if brand personality is not enough solid in consumers' mind. However, the extent to which experiences with a brand are capable of significantly modify or support already established BP perceptions hasn't been cleared out by existing literature, and still remained unexplored. Thus, mentioned theoretical works revealed that only a set of few personality drivers can be considered primary, as shown in Figure 9.

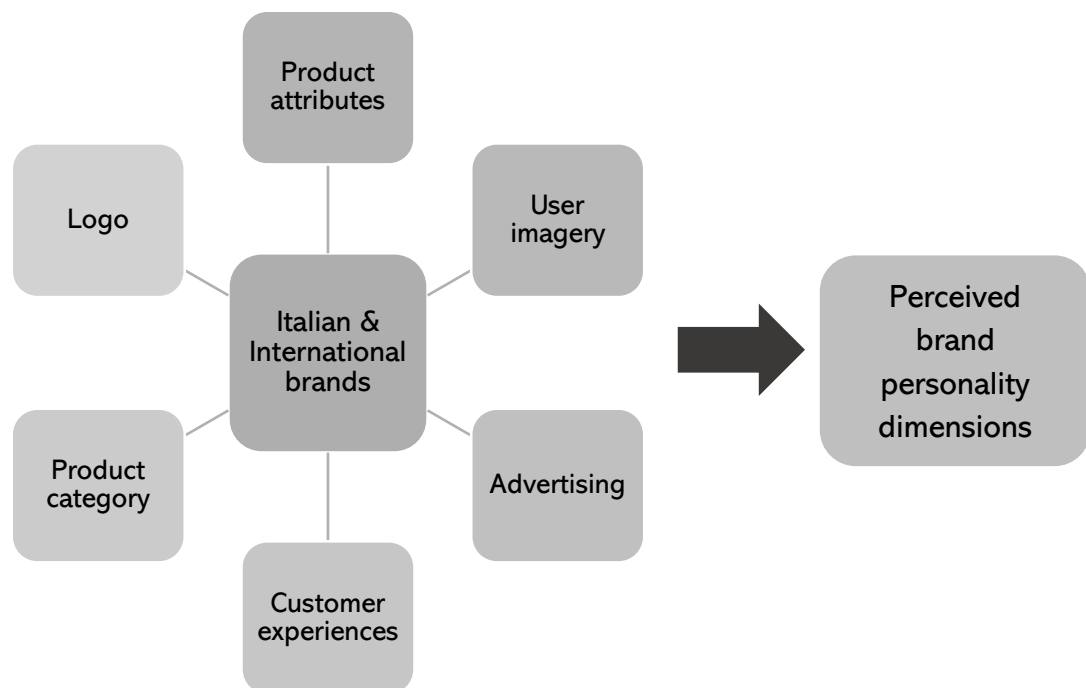


Figure 9. Framework of brand personality primary drivers.

3.3 Secondary drivers

Even though we can draw a coherent theoretical framework of primary brand drivers, based on previous empirical and theoretical studies, others secondary factors cannot be excluded from a comprehensive analysis that considers the diverse origins of brand personality. It occasionally emerged that elements, external from previously depicted scenario may condition consumers approaches towards brands (Maehle et al., 2011). The main characteristic, that affects these factors as secondary drivers, is not a more limited strength of their impact, but their sporadic nature. Thus, the influence of these elements, in very limited cases can be intended at the same level of primary ones. Furthermore, considering the scarcity of insights regarding Italian context, these drivers are then considered as well as potentially relevant, with the extent to eventually build a more extended and complete framework to describe Italian consumers' perceptions.

Company's employees and similarly CEO, represent a direct way through which brand personality can be formed (Maehle and Supphellen, 2008). Through a similar process to the one described for user imagery, personality traits are directly transferred from an individual or a group of individuals to the brand. The influence of these sources of BP didn't find any further confirmations in posteriors studies that could justify a relevant role as primary drivers, due to a narrow impact, especially limited on services companies (Harris and Fleming, 2005). However, Maehle and Supphellen (2008) suggested that company-level related brand personality drivers are more effective in influencing customers' perceptions of brand considered as competent and sincere.

CEO's personality represents a clear example of how a secondary driver may cover a remarkable role when considering specific scenarios. For few brands, such as Microsoft and Apple, given the popularity among customers of their CEOs, the personality traits that characterised these individuals are immediately transmitted to the brand itself, through an identification process that strongly influence collective imagery. Nonetheless, the impact of such driver is strongly hindered by the real possibility that company's CEO establishes himself as a distinctive and popular figure, capable of really creating consumer's engagement and matching brand characteristics.

A further company level element that can be regarded as a secondary source of brand personality, is the age of the brand itself. Aaker (1996) firstly theorized that personality traits might be influenced by how long a company has been present on the market. Major brands, with a long history and a well-established status, are more easily perceived not only as competent but, on the other side as old-fashioned and dull. Conversely, newcomers companies, as Apple, tend to be characterized by a more exciting, cooler and younger perceived nature (Aaker, 2010).

Country of origin, expressed by “Made in” label reference to the country of manufacturing (Parkvithee and Miranda, 2012), influences perceived quality of products. C.O.O. recently has been conceptualized in a more comprehensive way, according to different constructs included in its definition, as country of design or country of manufacturing (Rashid et al., 2016). While its role in BP formation process is not clear, C.O.O. resulted to act as a moderator in consumers’ purchasing behaviour (Wang and Yang, 2008), contributing to form positive attitudes in consumers’ mind toward brands.

Country of origin associations instead, may act as important differentiation factors to build a well distinct brand personality. C.O.O. provide qualitative hints about products, enhancing the credibility of the company (Aaker, 2010) as a unique and genuine brand. Extrinsic elements, as brand names or intrinsic elements, as product functional features contribute to form mental schemas in the analysis of branded products, with different country of origin (Bertoli and Resciniti, 2012). The influence of C.O.O. on customers’ perceptions is mainly driven by the transfer of typical country characteristics or cultural stereotype, directly on brands.

C.O.O. effect is not uniform and appeared to be particularly connected with specific product categories. Accordingly, as an example, consumers are disposed to develop positive approaches towards Italian fashion brands or German car brands, because those are capable of capturing typically perceived characteristic of Italian and German people. In particular, the relevance of made in Italy or of Italy made-in is clear and acknowledged, not only among Italian customers but also in foreign countries (Bertoli and Resciniti, 2012).

Throughout C.O.O. literature, is possible to distinguish three elements that could likely impact on Italian customers' perception, causing different evaluation of selected brands, as illustrated in Figure 10. Individuals' opinions of countries image and features, such as economic, cultural or technological conditions, are reflected in their related attitudes towards brands C.O.O. The perceived country image is the basis, on which customers often evaluate a product, especially when the brand is unknown or non-familiar (Matarazzo, 2012). Thus, specific perceptions, based on country knowledge, may be formed in terms of brand image and brand personality as well. Due to a similar associative process, countries may appear in consumers' mind as more strictly connected with a particular category of products (Bursi et al., 2012), originating unique and distinctive brand associations.

Likewise, as already noted by Supphellen and Gronhaug (2003), consumer ethnocentrism may cover an active role in the formation process of brand personality. Consumer ethnocentrism is a consequence of cultural ethnocentrism, defined as the tendency of individuals to refuse people from cultures, different from their own (Bursi et al., 2012). Ethnocentrism originates further evaluation biases and lack of objectivity. In countries with higher level of ethnocentrism, consumers more often prefer local brands, overestimating their quality due to morality and loyalty to home country (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2011). On the other hand, it appears as unpatriotic and wrong to prefer foreign companies over the national ones. Consequently, high level of ethnocentrism leads to a bigger impact of C.O.O over consumers' purchasing decisions.

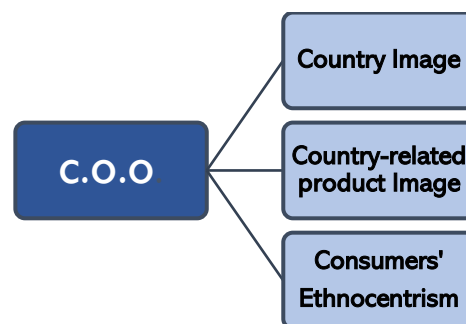


Figure 10. Country of origin effect (Adapted from Bursi et al., 2012).

As elaborated by Phou and Prendergast (2000), national products and brands are often preferred by consumers, in countries where cultural elements such sense of patriotism and national pride are more rooted in the society. This individuals' tendency, strongly correlated with customers nationalism, has been defined by Balabanis and Diamantopoulos (2004) as domestic country bias. However, modern business environments are characterised by an higher level of internationalisation and reallocation of firm activities abroad. More broadly, globalisation weakens C.O.O. effects, acting as a moderator and contributing to make more difficult the evaluation of C.O.O. for customers (Tse and Gorn, 1993).

Finally, according to previously mentioned criteria, Table 3 briefly resumes secondary sources of brand personality, that are integrated in the theoretical framework and investigated in the current study.

Table 3. Secondary drivers and related theoretical sources.

Secondary Drivers	Sources
Age of the company	Aaker (2010)
Country of Origin	Aaker (2010)
CEO	Aaker (2010)
Company's employees	Maehle and Supphellen(2008)

3.4 Integrated framework

The review of existing literature suggests that a wide framework of drivers operates in the process, that lead to brand personality formation. Even when the scope of research has been restricted to a singular market segment, the results remained extremely heterogeneous. Nonetheless, a narrower number of sources recur in considered researches, as relevant and influential drivers for consumers' perception formation process. For the purpose of this Master's Thesis, these elements have been grouped as paramount primary drivers. Otherwise, as emerged from an extended review of literature, additional elements can occasionally influence brand personality. To guarantee a broad and complete analysis of the phenomenon, these desultory secondary elements are not

excluded a priori from the investigation among Italian customers, in order to highlight specific correlations with BP dimensions. Figure 11 summarizes the selected framework, that will be analysed in the theoretical part.

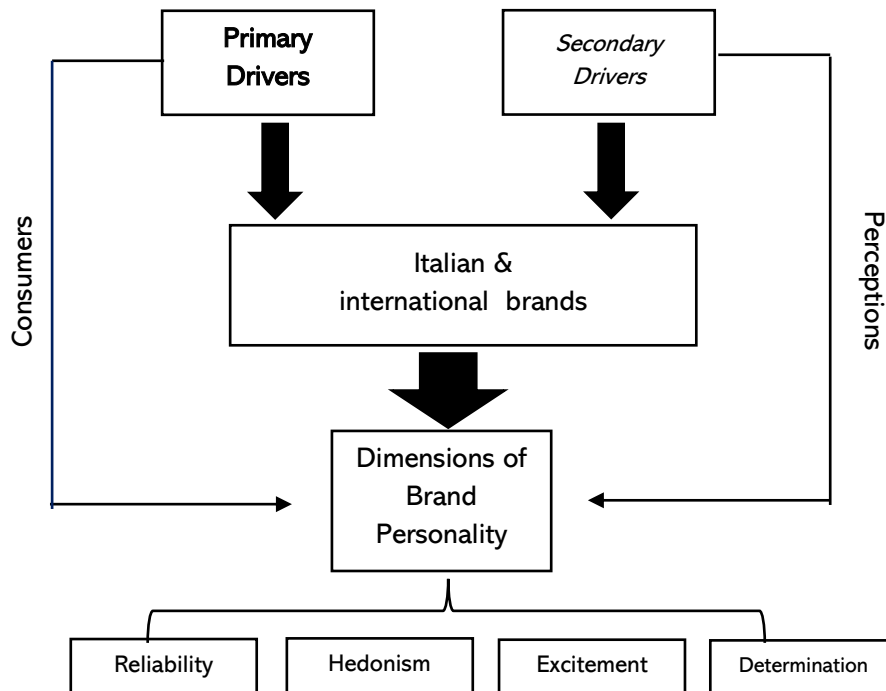


Figure 11. A theoretical frameworks for brand drivers' impact on BP dimensions.

A further common result, that characterizes existing researches, is the difference between Aaker's dimensions for their nature and sources. Hence, while sophistication and excitement dimensions are more influenced by non-product-related characteristics as symbols, endorsers, and advertising, competence and sincerity are mainly driven by product attributes and consumer's experiences. These findings underline that, even when the analysis is narrowed to a singular or few product categories, the empirical process that shapes brand personality remains extremely heterogeneous and influenced by a sizable number of variables. Similarly, relationships among drivers and different brand personality dimensions haven't been deeply cleared out, remaining a complex issue to be fully described.

The aim of the this Master's Thesis is to test the consistency of previously defined framework of primary and secondary brand drivers and to investigate the role of peculiar

factors in influencing consumers perception of specific categories of brand personality. Thus, eventual stricter bonds between brand personalities and respective brand factors may come to light as precious marketing instruments to define tailor-made and incisive communication strategies. Similarly, marketers can acknowledge a deeper understanding of Italian consumers' perception of both Italian and foreign brands, under a more focused customer-oriented perspective.

4. METHODOLOGY

This chapter aims at illustrating the methodology applied on this study. In the following sections, all the different aspects that contributed to shaping the design of the Master's Thesis are introduced. Research design, data collection techniques, sample characteristics and brand selection procedures are respectively described to clarify the most important topics.

4.1 Research design

This Master's Thesis is designed to provide further perspectives for a topic that hasn't been deeply analysed and to develop a better understanding of how brand personality can be employed as a competitive advantage. The purpose of the study is two-fold. Firstly, it is focused on the analysis of how Italian customers elaborate their perception of brand personalities for few selected brands, accordingly to theoretical Italian BP scale. Additionally, the core part of the work is aimed at understanding how brand personality is built, under a customer-oriented point of views.

Research philosophy is defined as a set of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge (Saunders et al., 2007), identifying under which approach a research is conducted. In management and business studies, five major philosophies are more often implemented: positivism, critical realism, interpretivism, postmodernism, pragmatism. Considering that there is no agreement among academics on which can be considered as the best one, the appropriateness of research philosophy is strongly related to the research design. Similarly, the same study can be conducted, adopting alternative perspectives. This Master's Thesis adopts an interpretative approach, taking into consideration complexity and richness of the environment and the social construction of reality, through culture and languages (Saunders et al., 2016).

Accordingly, this study can be classified as an explanatory research. The explanatory methodology is particularly appropriate for the aim of the work to have access to new and innovative insights of a marketing phenomenon (Malhotra and Birs, 2007). It helps to enrich the knowledge of a research problem that hasn't been analysed in depth, increasing

the understanding of the subject. This type of research is mainly aimed at clarifying existing bias and ambiguities, underlying the connections between analysed variables in order to clarify and explain why a specific phenomenon happens (Saunders et al., 2016).

The research follows a deductive perspective, due to the possibility of gaining an understanding of the meanings human attach to events (Saunders et al., 2007). Similarly, deductive research allows a more flexible structure that permits changes of research emphasis as the research progresses (Saunders et al., 2007). A theoretical background regarding Italian brand personality dimensions and brand personality drivers is first presented and then tested in the empirical part. However, this research aims at eventually reshape and redefine considered theoretical framework, accordingly to the findings of the empirical part.

4.2 Semi-structured interviews

Since only qualitative data will be gathered in this study, to investigate research problem, it can be considered as a qualitative mono-method research (Saunders et al., 2007). Furthermore, due to time constraints, the thesis follows a cross-sectional design, analysing a specific marketing phenomenon at a precise moment in time.

Both primary and secondary data were collected. Primary data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with Italian customers, both through face-to-face and Skype. This choice reflects the necessity to stimulate respondents, with explanatory figures and examples, in order to have access to more detailed and punctual insights. Semi-structured interviews grant important advantages, such the possibility to obtain a broader and more detailed range of information (Saunders et al., 2007). Similarly, these allow the interviewer to benefit from a higher level of flexibility, in terms of questions asked and themes coverage (Saunders et al., 2016). Accordingly, semi-structured interviews may reveal specific associations and connections between brand elements and brand personality dimension, through a consumer-based approach.

Thus, such data collection technique is widely widespread among academics, for marketing researches aimed at understanding consumer behaviours. Respondents' answers can be expressed at different levels of details, allowing the interviewer to proceed

with new questions or to go more in-depth with follow-through queries. Multiple source type of secondary data, such as annual reports and market surveys, were used for the choice of the brands to be proposed to respondents, accordingly with existing literature and researches (e.g. Aaker, 1997; Caprara et al., 2001; Siri, 2005).

The majority of the interviews were conducted using web conferencing services, precisely Skype. It represents an extremely valuable mean that allows geographically distant users to communicate effectively from familiar locations (Saunders et al., 2016). Synchronous electronic interviews conducted in real time avoid time gaps and loss of interest by the respondents, typical instead of asynchronous interviews (Saunders, 2016). Moreover, web services as Skype, not only share the usual advantages deriving from phone interviews, but guarantees further benefits (Hanna, 2012), providing the possibility to interact through the video, showing documents and images and to build a more solid relationship with the interviewees.

Two preliminary pilot test interviews were conducted to verify the appropriateness of the structure and the suitability of designed questions. Afterward, few questions were reformulated to have access to more precise insights while others were removed, due to redundancy issues. Open questions, probing question and closed questions were integrated to adapt to the necessity of obtaining a heterogeneous range of responses. Furthermore, it emerged the necessity to provide to the respondents an appendix with some examples of brand personality drivers, to improve the effectiveness of the second part of the interviews.

Respondents were previously asked preliminary questions regarding the knowledge of selected brands, to guarantee a sample strictly composed of well-known and suitable brands, fitting the purpose of the research. Table 4 depicts the characteristic of designed semi-structured interviews. After an introduction of the main topics discussed and few general information about the respondents, the core structure of the interviews is divided in four parts. While initially the focus is addressed on the assessment of BP dimensions, later the observer investigates the role of primary and secondary drivers. Finally, some ending question are asked to reach a comprehensive view of the respondent and to point out most relevant aspects.

Table 4. Main topics of semi-structured interviews.

Topic	Information	Theoretical sources
Introduction of main concepts	Understanding of interview's topic and contents	Aaker (1996); Aaker (1997); Azoulay and Kapferer, (2003); Ambroise et al. (2005); Fida et al. (2010);
General information	Age, occupation, educational background, place of residence	-
Dimensions assessment	Definition of brand personality dimension and traits	Fida et al. (2010); Aaker, (1997);
Primary brand drivers	Identification of primary brand drivers role	Aaker (1996); Ouwersloot and Tudorica (2001); Maehle and Supphellen (2008) Grohmann (2008); Lin (2010) Aaker (2010); Maehle, Otnes and Supphellen (2011), Seimiene and Kamarauskaite (2014);
Secondary brand drivers	Assessment of secondary brand drivers relevance	Aaker, (1996); Aaker (2010), Davies and Chun, (2012); Seimiene and Kamarauskaite, (2014)
Final comments	Final questions and conclusions	-

4.3 Sample

In contemporary Western markets, affected by globalization and characterized by high levels of saturation, humanization of brands resulted to be an important and viable path for strategic marketing differentiation (Fida et al., 2010). Similarly, increased competition from less developed countries, as China and India (Bertoli and Resciniti, 2012), determined a growing level of internationalisation and further business challenges. In more developed markets as the Italian one, in the later stages of socio-economic development, products increasingly tend to become similar physically.

Customers' attention is redirected towards subjective benefits, such as symbolic ones. Furthermore, the growth of materialist cultures of consumptions in advanced countries lead the customers to discover new potential advantages of good and services (Supphellen and Gronhaug, 2003). Thus, social and self-developmental needs arose among consumers. Similarly, a more structured social consciousness pushes the individuals to attach stronger symbolic benefits to brands, often consider as inclusive means for aspired social status or classes. As it happens in Western Countries, all those factors play an important role in influencing the perception of Italian customers, relative to brands personalities.

Italian business environment is characterised by a large incidence of industrial production over country GDP, especially if compared with other European countries. Competitive advantages of the country are limited to few sectors, including, fashion clothing and food farming (Bertoli and Resciniti, 2012). However, the better level of performance and comparative advantages relies mainly on style and visual elements, which established Italy as a style setter in many fields (Bertoli and Resciniti, 2012).

Several Italian brands benefit from high level of saliency and popularity across the world, capable of being considered as relevant global players for their iconic image. The impact of Italian brands is even higher when the focus is restricted on few business fields. Taking into consideration fashion and luxury sector, Italy can be considered as a top performer, leading not only in terms of brands presence, with more than twenty-six firms among the top 100 most valuable brands, but also considering growth pace and profitability rate (Deloitte, 2017).

Other Italian brands stand out in terms of relevance and brand value in segments as automobile, logistics, food or utilities (Brand Finance, 2017). Considering the total value of Italian brands in 2017, depicted by Figure 12, it emerges clearly how, even though luxury apparel represent the leading segment for total value, the impact of the different business sectors is well balanced, showing similar performances.

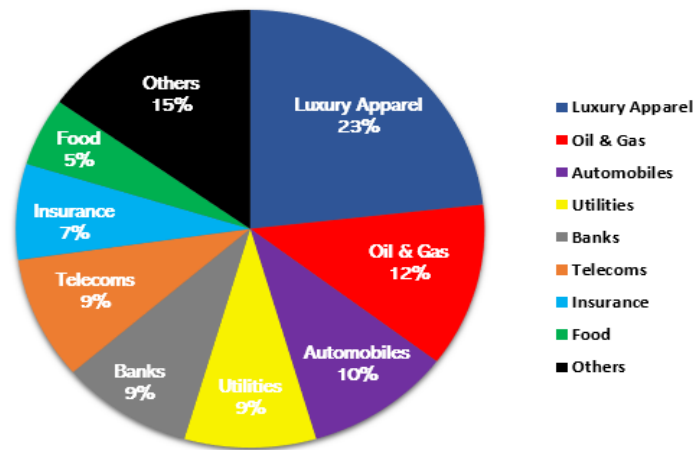


Figure 12. Total Brand Value per Sector 2017 (From Italy 50 2017, Brand Finance).

After a long and deep recession, the Italian economy is finally beginning to improve its economic conditions (OECD, 2017). An increasing rate of employment is influencing positively the overall growth of the country and boosting private consumptions. Despite enduring economic imbalances, structural reforms adopted in last years started to pay off. The country is slowly recovering from the recent economic and financial crisis, with a slight increase of the productivity and investment growth (OECD, 2017). Global cyclical economic upturn (European Commission, 2018), associated with a stronger national demand fostered Italian slight recovery, coherently with European general growth. Financial and economic forecasts for 2018 are moderately positive, with GDP expected to remain stable around 1,5 (€ billion) (European Commission, 2018). Expected up-rise relies mainly on the implementation of already approved growth-supporting regulation and cautious fiscal measures coupled with an increase in consumptions per capita and consumers' confidence.

The majority of the respondents come from Lombardy, and especially Milan Metropolitan area. This territory is characterized by a great cultural and social diversity and can be really considered as a melting pot, among major Italian cities, populated by a miscellany of inhabitants, from different Italian regions and foreign countries. The high level of internationalisation is reflected by the percentage of foreign residents in Lombardy, 11,4 % (Città Metropolitana di Milano 2017: 13). Similarly, the percentage rises to 13,9 % (Città Metropolitana di Milano 2017: 13) if we consider only Milan Metropolitan Area,

well over the national average of 8,3% (Città Metropolitana di Milano 2017: 13). However, Lombardy has been an attractive destination not exclusively for external immigrants but also as for what concerns internal migrations flows, factors that contributed to creating social heterogeneity.

Moreover, Lombardy Regional Competitive Index, including a wide range of socio-economic factors, is by far the highest one among all Italian regions. The economic prosperity of the area is underlined by a great GDP ratio of 131 PPS (European Commission; 2017), ranked 37th among all the 263 regions considered in the European context (European Commission; 2017). Therefore, the selected geographical area can be considered as an extremely dynamic and economically active environment.

The sample is composed of respondents that have been chosen according to mixed criteria, based on a convenience and self-selection methodology. For what concern students, the possibility to participate was promoted on Universities' students' networks, while emails were used to contact interviewees among few business companies in Milan Metropolitan area. On the other hand, part of respondents was contacted to have greater heterogeneity.

The sample, as frequently happens for brand personality researches, is characterized by a stronger presence of young respondents and in particular by a considerable number of students. The final sample of sixteen respondents is small and cannot be considered as representative for Italian customers. However, the aim was to collect data through a heterogeneous sample of respondents, in terms of age, gender, occupation and educational background, as displayed in Table 5.

Thus, the current study is more focused on obtaining a qualitative richer set of data, than to provide cues for generalisation. Accordingly, sampling collection stopped when no more useful and alternative insights were provided by respondents, due to a considerable degree of saturation of qualitative data (Saunders et al., 2007).

Interviews were conducted in Italian, recorded and registered referring to respondents in an anonymous way, from " n. 1 to 16". The average duration was around 30 minutes. Immediately after each interview was held, this was transcribed and carefully translated into English. Finally, information gathering produced 70 pages of text.

Table 5. Sample.

N	Age	Gender	Educational background	Occupation	Residence
1	25	M	Electrotechnics	Electrotechnical workman	Milan-Lombardy
2	26	M	Management & services design	HR Manager	Milan-Lombardy
3	35	F	Business & accounting	Accountant	Reggio Calabria-Calabria
4	45	M	Biology	Biologist	Palermo-Sicily
5	25	F	Medical science	Student	Pavia-Lombardy
6	27	M	Economics	IT Innovation Intern	Bergamo-Lombardy
7	26	M	Finance	Student	Milan-Lombardy
8	28	F	International Marketing	Marketing management	Milan-Lombardy
9	21	M	Political science & International Affairs	Student	Florence-Tuscany
10	51	M	Technical Institute for tourism	Farmer	Milan-Lombardy
11	26	M	Foreign languages and literature	Insurance company employee	Monza-Lombardy
12	24	M	Civil Engineering	Unemployed	Milan-Lombardy
13	23	F	International Communication	Student	Milan- Lombardy
14	26	M	International Business	Consultant	Novi Ligure-Piedmont
15	25	F	Communication Science	Account manager	Milan- Lombardy
16	31	M	Law	Lawyer	Rome- Lazio

4.4 Selection of Brands

Brands investigated are selected according to different criteria, in order to strengthen validity and transferability of the study. The principal aim is to select a sufficiently broad range of brands, capable of ensuring comparisons among different brand personality

dimensions both for Italian and foreign firms. Firstly, only well-known brands with a high saliency and belonging to leader companies in their respective business fields, are included in the research. The choice is supported by few studies and market reports about most popular brands in Italy, such as “Ipsos Italia: The Most Influential Brands 2016”, and “RepTrak2017” by Reputation Institute.

Twelve of the selected brands are mentioned in these ranking as influential brands in Italy, considering factors as customer engagement, trust, and presence, extremely helpful with the purpose of this Master’s Thesis. Likewise, Rolex and Estée Lauder are recognised by Reputation Institute as leader companies, in luxury segment, in terms of popularity and trustworthiness among Italian customers.

Considering that products can be classified, according to consumers’ involvement during purchasing decision, while some categories, as clothes or cars, are characterized by more complex rational thinking mechanisms, others are mainly driven by routinized decisions. This segmentation may produce repercussion and consequences on BP perceptions as well, especially concerning the meanings that customer attaches to brands. Thus, selected brands belong to twelve different product categories, as displayed in Table 6, following Ratchford’s grid classification (1987).

Table 6. Selection of Italian and foreign brands.

Italian Brands	Product category	Foreign Brands	Product category
Mulino Bianco	<i>Food</i>	Microsoft	<i>Technology</i>
Ferrero	<i>Food</i>	Volkswagen	<i>Automotive</i>
Gucci	<i>Clothing</i>	Rolex	<i>Watch manufacturing</i>
Martini	<i>Alcoholic drink</i>	Estée Lauder	<i>Cosmetics</i>
Radio DeeJay	<i>Radio</i>	H&M	<i>Clothing</i>
Aperol	<i>Alcoholic drink</i>	Starbucks	<i>Coffee</i>
Diesel	<i>Clothing</i>	Nike	<i>Sports equipment</i>
Ducati	<i>Motorcycle</i>	Gillette	<i>Razors</i>

The aim is in to include brands with utilitarian, symbolic and mixed functions reflecting both low involvement and high involvement items. Ratchford's grid is acknowledged as a reliable methodology to classify products, being used even in more recent brand personality researches. Likewise, the selection of brands, belonging to a wide range of categories is fundamental to do not jeopardize the analysis of product category as one of the primary BP drivers.

Additionally, few brands, precisely Radio DeeJay, Aperol, Diesel, and Ducati have been chosen on a convenience basis to ensure representativeness of each dimension of brand personality and to provide comparisons among Italian and Foreign brands. Therefore, brands with presumably high scores on one of the four personality dimension have been integrated into the model, following a methodology procedure already implemented in other BP studies (e.g. Maehle and Supphellen, 2008). Radio DeeJay is one of the most popular Italian radio brands, with a strong orientation toward younger segments of the population and a unique marketing campaign, involving copious sponsorships of sports events. Similarly, Aperol has a distinctive image as an alcoholic brand, capable of transmitting exciting, younger and cool traits.

Finally, Ducati and Diesel have been chosen as two different example of brands, characterised by more determined and rough features. While in Ducati case, these associations are mainly influenced by the product itself and by the relationship with sports competitions, Diesel has emphasised its rugged nature not only through its logo but through a distinctive and daring advertisement style.

Between selected brands, Starbucks is the only one that is not actually operating in Italy, even though the first shop is going to open this year in September in Milan. Anyway, it has been included for its outstanding feature and for being an extremely popular brand, especially among younger segment of Italian consumers. Therefore, its peculiar nature is particularly appropriate for the purpose of the study, to investigate brands with different natures, especially considering that even without being present in Italy, Starbucks is ranked as the 74th most popular brand (Ipsos Most Influential Brands, Ipsos Institute 2016).

4.5 Data analysis

Qualitative data reflect meanings expressed through images and words, being characterized by a more complex and ambiguous nature than quantitative. One of the major challenges of qualitative researches is the analysis and the classification of a sizable amount of non-standardised data. Thus, the quality of the study is strictly dependent from the interaction among data analysis and collected data, in order to fully explain the considered scenario. The lack of a proper analysis methodology hampers the possibility of developing a meaningful line of reasoning, with the consequence to only depict partially or superficially the reality. Building research topics logically integrated and linked with the theoretical background is essential to assure a high level of quality (Saunders et al., 2016).

Accordingly, the data gathered in the present study were firstly summarized and grouped, with the help of explicative figures to establish a logical connection with the most important topics related to brand personality, providing an understandable and meaningful picture of the phenomenon. Emblematic and explicative answers from the respondents were quoted, to provide stronger argumentations and to enhance the linkage with the theoretical framework.

The choice between deductive and inductive approach is reflected also on some important differences on qualitative analysis ground. In the case of a deductive study, Yin (2014) suggests that the same theories used to elaborate objectives and purposes or to draw the theoretical background should be used also as a guide for data analysis process.

Considering the deductive perspective and the scope of this Master's Thesis, pattern matching represent the ideal analytical technique. According to Yin (2014), pattern matching refers to the prediction of expected outcome patterns, based on theoretical assumptions, as displayed by Figure 13. Thus, the elaborated theoretical background should provides explanations for the expected outcomes of the analytical part of the study (Saunders et al., 2016).

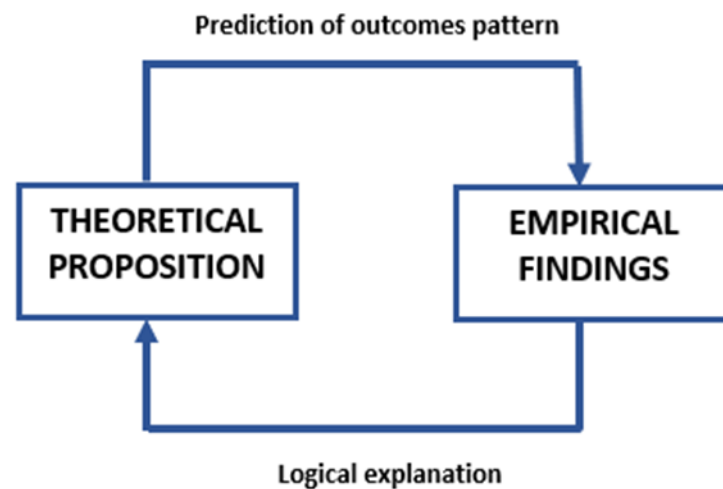


Figure 13. Pattern matching methodology (Adapted from Saunders et al., 2016).

A correct application of this deductive analysis approach produces a coherent matching between empirical patterns and theoretical framework. However, it is possible to identify two different variations of the procedure: one case is related to a set of outcomes (dependent variables) deriving from an independent variable, while in the second scenario, the variation is associated to variables, all independent from each other.

In the first scenario, the study may produce unexpected outcomes, which need the identification of an alternative explanation of the new pattern (Yin, 2014). On the other hand, when the variables are independent, different explanations for the same phenomenon may come to light. The author, then, has to identify the most logically adequate explanation, rejecting the remaining ones (Yin, 2014).

4.6 Quality of the study

While for quantitative studies, it's important to implement proper measures to guarantee the reliability and validity of the data, qualitative studies are more affected by data quality issues. In this chapter, quality of the study is discussed in terms of dependability, transferability, and credibility, considering all the potential biases that can undermine the value of the research.

Dependability can be considered as a parallel criterion of reliability (Saunders et al., 2016), referring to the possibility of further replication of the research. An important

underlying aspect has to be taken into consideration when analysing the dependability of qualitative researches conducted through interviews. This methodology produces findings that are more hardly replicable than quantitative ones, being the result of the analysis of evolving and complicated scenarios, strongly related with the specific time in which those were gathered (Saunders et al., 2016) and with selected environment and participants. Due to this stricter bond with the context, it would be unrealistic to assume that considered typology of research can be easily replicated (Saunders et al., 2016) with the same scope. However, for what regards this work, it could be replicated considering alternative business field, different population segments or investigating a different sample of brands.

Transferability refers to the possibility for other academics to apply a similar research design in a different context, according to the information provided about research question, context and methodological aspects or to scale the findings of the study in a more extended framework (Saunders et al, 2016). In the case of this Master's Thesis, the results are transferable when the focus of the research is not restricted to a singular brand or to a unique market segment. However, the current qualitative study provides limited statistically generalization possibilities, not only due to the peculiar characteristics of the sample but for its small and non-representative nature as well. Similarly, findings cannot be generalized to describe consumers' perception of different countries than Italy.

Credibility is a criterion to measure to which extent the research effectively investigated the intended framework and to ensure that there is congruency between findings and reality (Merriam, 1998). To assure credibility to this study, semi-structured interviews are strictly based on the theoretical framework, while the connection between theory and empirical part was analysed in the first two pilot-test interviews.

Furthermore, in the current research, a similar cultural provenience avoided any manifestation of cultural concerns, which may easily arise as a consequence of cross-national contexts (Gobo, 2011).

Overall validity and quality of the study are mainly supported by the procedure according to which, interviews were carefully prepared and designed. Considering that interviews are intrusive methods (Saunders et al., 2016), respondent may decide to do not share fully

their point of view or reflections, being sensitive to particular topics. As a consequence of this response bias (Saunders et al., 2016) the answer can depict only partially the real situation, perceived by the interviewees. The extended length of the interviews may reduce the willingness of the respondents to participate actively or reduce the quality level of the answers, because of the loss of interest and attention, representing a further participation bias.

Thus, different measures have been implemented to overcome these structural flaws. Respondents were informed and reassured about privacy and anonymity of their data and personal answers, to avoid eventual repercussions on provided responses and to build trust with the interviewer. Furthermore, interviews have been conducted with the help of explicative figures and images with the aim to get the respondents more involved in this brand personality study, while the duration has been settled around 30 minutes, preventing fatigue and drops of attention.

The overall structure of questions was carefully designed, following a planned scheme to help the observer during the interview. Finally, semi-structured interviews presented are characterized by a mix of various types of questions, to achieve a broad range of needed responses, through different approaches. While open questions were formulated to allow the interviewees to describe more freely a situation (Saunders, 2016), close questions were presented as well, to obtain more punctual information (Saunders, 2016). Lastly, few probing questions were included, to seek for respondents' explanation for a specific answer and to encourage further reasoning and exploration of a particular topic (Saunders, 2016).

5. EMPIRICAL RESULTS

This chapter illustrates and analyses the empirical results of the present study. In order to answer to the selected research question, the examination is conducted accordingly to research methodology presented in the previous chapter. Customers' perceptions, about selected brands personality dimensions' assessment are firstly presented, with the aim to observe the consistency of the selected model. Then the most important findings, relative to emerged connections between BP drivers and personality dimensions are described. Finally, results are compared with the proposed theoretical framework.

5.1 Dimensions assessment

One of the primary objectives of this Master's Thesis was to test the solidity of Italian BP model elaborated by Fida et al. (2010), among Italian customers, through the evaluation of a sample, composed by sixteen brands, characterised by a diverse origin. The results are in line with previous brand personality researches. Brand personality revealed to be a deeply rooted construct in consumers' mind, considering that only for very few cases, respondents were unable to identify distinguished personalities of the brand. Brands were recognized, by respondents as mean to express their personality traits (Aaker, 2010). The choice to narrow the potential variance of the responses, preferring a more specific model than the broader one didn't avoid discrepancies and remarkable differences among Italian customers (Table 7), not only in the way these elaborate their perceptions about brands personality but also for what concerns the semantic meanings attached to personality traits.

Various markers can be shifted from one dimension to another, in accordance with the description of a specific brand. Similarly, the adequateness of an adjective resulted to vary in relation to different concepts, while, due to a brand-adjective interaction (Caprara et al., 2001), personality traits covers different semantic meanings when used as descriptors of different brands. Likewise, a further factor, that contributed to forming diverse brand personality connections, can be found in the linguistic and cultural

complexity of the context, even though it is framed within country boundaries (Fida et al., 2010), to avoid intercultural issues.

Table 7. Respondents' identification of personality dimensions.

N	Reliability	Hedonism	Excitement	Determination
1	Ducati, Ferrero, Gillette, Gucci , Mulino Bianco	Diesel , Estée Lauder, Gucci, Nike , Rolex	Aperol, Martini, Radio DeeJay, Starbucks	Ducati, Gillette, Volkswagen
2	Ferrero, Mulino Bianco, Microsoft, Volkswagen	Estée Lauder, Gucci, Rolex, Martini	H&M, Ferrero, Nike, Radio DeeJay, Starbucks	Ducati, Gillette, Microsoft , Volkswagen ,
3	Aperol , Ferrero, Gillette, Mulino Bianco, Rolex	Estée Lauder, Gucci, Martini	Aperol, Diesel, H&M, Radio DeeJay, Starbucks	Diesel, Ducati, Gillette, Martini , Nike, Rolex
4	Ferrero, Microsoft, Mulino Bianco, Volkswagen	Estée Lauder, Gucci, Martini, Rolex	Aperol, H&M, Radio DeeJay, Starbucks	Diesel, Ducati, Gillette, Nike
5	Ferrero, Gillette , Nike , Volkswagen	Estée Lauder, Gucci, H&M	Aperol, , Martini, Mulino Bianco, Radio DeeJay	Diesel, Ducati, Gillette, Microsoft , Nike, Rolex
6	Ferrero, Microsoft, Mulino Bianco, Volkswagen	Ducati , Estée Lauder, Gucci, Rolex	Aperol, Gillette, H&M, Radio DeeJay Starbucks	Diesel, Martini , Nike
7	Ferrero, Gillette , Mulino Bianco, Volkswagen	Estée Lauder, Gucci, Martini, Rolex	Aperol, H&M, Martini, Radio DeeJay, Starbucks	Diesel, Ducati, Nike
8	Ferrero, Microsoft, Mulino Bianco, Nike	Estée Lauder, Gucci, Martini, Rolex	Aperol, H&M, Radio DeeJay, Starbucks	Diesel, Ducati, Gillette, Nike, Volkswagen
9	Ferrero, Microsoft, Mulino Bianco, Volkswagen	Estée Lauder, Gucci, Martini	Aperol, Ducati, H&M, Radio DeeJay, Starbucks	Diesel, Gillette, Nike, Rolex
10	Ferrero, Gillette , Microsoft, Mulino Bianco, Nike , Volkswagen	Estée Lauder, Gucci, Rolex	Aperol, Diesel, H&M, Radio DeeJay, Starbuck	Ducati, Martini
11	Microsoft, Mulino Bianco, Volkswagen	Estée Lauder, Gucci, Martini	Aperol, Ferrero, H&M, Radio DeeJay, Starbucks	Diesel, Ducati, Gillette, Nike, Rolex
12	Ferrero, Microsoft, Mulino Bianco, Starbucks , Volkswagen	Estée Lauder, Gucci, Martini, Rolex	Aperol, Ducati, H&M, Radio DeeJay	Diesel, Gillette, Nike, Rolex
13	Ferrero, Microsoft, Mulino Bianco, Volkswagen	Estée Lauder, Gucci, Martini, Rolex	Aperol, H&M, Radio DeeJay, Starbucks	Diesel, Ducati, Gillette, Nike
14	Ferrero, Microsoft, Mulino Bianco, Rolex , Volkswagen	Aperol , Estée Lauder, Gucci, Martini	H&M, Radio DeeJay, Starbucks	Diesel, Ducati, Gillette, Nike
15	Estée Lauder , Ferrero, Gillette , Mulino Bianco	Diesel , Gucci, H&M, Martini	Aperol, Microsoft, Nike, Radio DeeJay, Starbucks	Ducati, Rolex
16	Ferrero, Mulino Bianco	Diesel , Estée Lauder, Gucci, Martini, Rolex	Aperol, H&M, Nike , Starbuck , Radio DeeJay	Ducati, Gillette, Volkswagen

As a consequence brands personalities associations to dimensions vary from consumer to consumer, while in certain cases brands appear to be correlated to a wider range of personality traits. Similarly, respondents showed to relate few brands with markers belonging to different factors, underlining the existence of a more complex cross-dimensional nature. Gillette can be cited as an explicative case of how customers attached dissimilar personality traits to the same brand. The majority of the respondents associated Gillette to determined dimension, as illustrated by interviewee n.4 response:

"Gillette well represents personality traits as rough, daring and determined (...) Gillette is instead part of my routine as a man, so I perceived it as rugged".

However, according to different respondents' opinions, the same brand is capable of transmitting reliable and secure traits.

"I consider Gillette as a reliable, hardworking and secure brand (...) especially when I think about razors I immediately think about Gillette" (Interviewee n. 5).

"I consider Gillette as reliable because not only I have always used it but because shaving is something really thorny, thus I need a reliable brand to count on" (Interviewee n. 7).

Divergently, Gillette has been also defined as an exciting and contemporary brand.

"Gillette offers a wide range of products, always updated and very cool, targeting especially younger people" (Interviewee n.6).

The multidimensional character that brands, as Gillette may cover for customers, is well depicted by interviewee n. 12 opinion that associates the brand with two different factors of brand personality scale:

"Gillette, for example, is reliable and self-confident, because their products are better than the majority of other razors, as the ones you commonly can find in the supermarkets".

Thus, for Gillette, boundaries within personality dimensions appears to be narrower and more subtle. Similarly, diversity of customers perceptions emerged, even in the cases of

brands which resulted to be strongly associated with one particular personality dimension or to develop more solid and distinguished personalities, as depicted by Table 7.

“Considering, for example, Mulino Bianco, I have always been a regular consumer, and the excitement comes from all the positive experiences that I have with the brand. So, when a new product is proposed on the market, I’m very willing and enthusiastic to try it” (Interviewee n.5).

“Even if Gucci and Estée Lauder are hedonistic brands, those, conversely to other luxury brands are very dynamic, contemporary and up-to-date” (Interviewee n. 9).

“Aperol (...) is also reliable because it is a strong brand, a point of reference among alcoholic brands” (Interviewee n. 10).

Nonetheless, while the answers of respondents revealed a certain level of internal heterogeneity, any external trait was found as a recurring element, capable of being integrated to already developed model. The selected scale appears to be broad enough to describe customers’ perceptions, even considering that a remarkable number of traits have been deleted from original Aaker’s U.S. model (Fida et al., 2010). Interviewees’ opinions didn’t reveal the necessity to implement selected model, adding further BP factors or enlarging the present set of personality traits.

Furthermore, brands showed an underlying good consistency in terms of personality associations, even though the degree of uniformity of dimensions is not homogeneous. Accordingly, as showed by Table 7, hedonism and excitement dimension resulted to be more strictly correlated with a specific set of brands. In these two cases, the variations of consumers’ responses are more limited. On the other hand, the remaining dimensions, reliability, and determination present more marked differences, in terms of brands associations.

Such results are interpretable from two different perspectives. Excitement is characterised by a more solid and robust semantic nature, being the only pure factor in the Italian scale, that was originally identified by Aaker. Thus, this dimension does not merge various brand personality traits, correlated to different meanings. Excitement describes specific aspects of the consumer-brand relationship that cannot be addressed by other factors (Fida et al., 2010). As a consequence of this peculiar characteristic, personality traits included

in the excitement dimension describe more unambiguously and precisely brand personalities, preventing multi-dimensional associations.

Conversely, even though hedonism factor merges several aspects of Aaker's dimensions, it appears to be the only factor, that can be considered as external from the understanding of personality as a metaphor (Caprara et al., 2001), not attributable to any human personality dimensions. Considering the opinions of respondents, it was possible to identify and draft a scheme depicting which personality dimensions fit more adequately the brands included in the sample, illustrated by Figure 14.

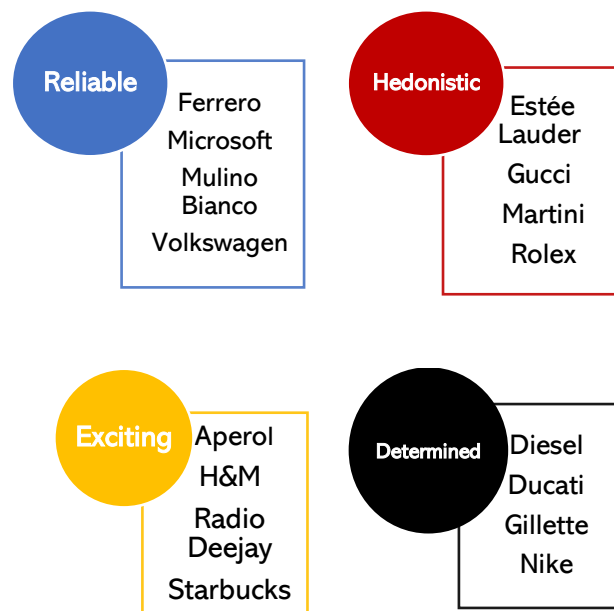


Figure 14. Brand personality associations.

Accordingly, it has to be said that selected model demonstrated a good level of solidity and effectiveness, in the analysis of brands personality among Italian customers. Nonetheless, despite the adoption of an emic strategy to define brand personality markers, it results complex to generalise results and factorial structure from brands to brands (Caprara et al., 2001; Fida et al., 2010). Finally, the presented framework of brand personality drivers has been divided and split, to describe more in details the nature of each brand personality dimension

5.1.1 Reliability

Through a depth analysis of customer responses for brands perceived as reliable, few common patterns emerged as unique for this specific brand personality dimension. Mainly four brands proved to be sensed as reliable, and precisely those are Ferrero, Microsoft, Mulino Bianco and Volkswagen. Reasons behind these BP characterisations are heterogeneous and related to different brand elements. However, brands associations with reliable traits resulted to be more strictly influenced especially by two drivers, product category, and context or circumstances in which the products are used. Being food brands, coupled with a specific family-related environment, influences a stricter bond with personality traits as honest, sincere, wholesome and family oriented.

“Ferrero instead is an Italian family owned firm, who produced products that are part of my every-day and family life. Mulino Bianco similarly depicts the typical stereotype of happy families and can be considered as an emblem of those. Thus, these can be considered as typical family-oriented brands”. (Interviewee n.1).

“Mulino Bianco and Ferrero are two Italian brands that I consider as sincere, honest and reliable mostly because of the type of product they sell, that I use daily” (Interviewee n.3)

“I perceive Mulino Bianco and Ferrero as wholesome, family oriented and reliable especially because of who usually use their product, families” (Interviewee n.8).

Furthermore, previous experiences resulted to be extremely important in the evaluation of a brand as sincere and honest, confirming Maehle et al. (2011) findings, independently from the product category.

“Microsoft represents reliability and hardworking, because I have always used its products, even every day and I know I can count on Microsoft when I have to work with computers” (Interviewee n.7).

“Volkswagen car that I had was extremely positive in term of hardworking and reliability and confirmed the idea I had about the brand” (Interviewee n.4).

Those results are in line with the study of Maehle et al. (2011), which identified a strong link between sincerity dimensions and brands providing family-related products and with

competence and previous positive experiences. An additional element, that impacted remarkably on customers' perceptions of reliable brands, is C.O.O. Many respondents perceived brands as more reliable, especially because of their national dimension, clear expression of ethnocentrism influence. Similarly, country related product image associations are not secondary in forming personality associations, as illustrated by interviewee's answers:

"Volkswagen is the first brand I think of when I have to consider secure and reliable brands, because of advertisement, users and partially because of its country origin (...) for Ferrero and Mulino Bianco, the fact that these are Italian brands makes me more convinced about honesty and sincerity of the brands" (Interviewee n. 2).

"It is more sincere, honest and reliable an Italian food brand rather than a foreign one" (Interviewee n.4).

"The fact that Rolex is a Swiss company that produces watches strongly influence the personality of the brand itself, because for me Swiss people are very precise and reliable, and those traits are transmitted to the brand. German car brands instead appear to me as more reliable, because of their C.O.O." (Interviewee n. 10).

Lastly, among product attributes, price seems to be a superficial indicator of reliability. Customers' responses expressed a certain degree of interdependence among price and reliable traits, even though in a more superficial way. Higher prices influence is not fully persuasive to characterise a brand as reliable. To be completely established, such brand personality has to be strengthened by further drivers.

"Price (...) is not always a synonym of reliability, because in this case, personal experience is fundamental" (Interviewee n.12).

"Higher prices, above the average, are capable of makes me perceived a brand as more reliable" (Interviewee n.14).

More generally, reliable dimension seems to be shaped and formed mainly through product-related brand personality drivers, as showed by Figure 15, confirming Maehle et al. (2011) hypothesis of a major impact of tangible elements for brands perceived as competent and sincere.

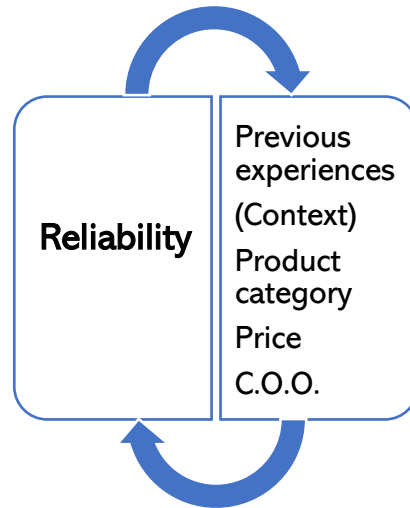


Figure 15. Reliability dimension.

5.1.2 Hedonism

Italian customers' perceptions were more homogeneous in terms of identification of hedonistic brands, compared to other brand personality dimensions. Exactly as happened for reliable dimension, to understand how these associations were formed, it is essential to move from the broader framework of BP drivers to a more focused perspective.

Aesthetic features, sensed through advertising, product category, logo or packaging emerged as a crucial element that distinguishes hedonistic brands when mentioned drivers are really capable to transmit sophisticated and successful traits. Product category impact proved to be meaningful for brands perceived as hedonistic, underlining a stricter connection between some categories as clothes and cosmetics, as already detected by Maehle et al. (2011). Cues of this specific influence can be found in customers reflections:

"I believe that product attributes and product category are the two most important factors that influence me when I perceive brands as hedonistic" (Interviewee n.3).

"Estée Lauder is mainly feminine and charming because mainly of the type of products addressed to women world" (Interviewee n.11).

Likewise, visual elements as logo and packaging are particularly effective in communicating personality traits, gathered under hedonistic factor. Especially when logo

fits the perceived image of the brand, as pointed out by Grohmann (2008), or when those tangible elements reflect elegance, class and, uniqueness, customers commonly identified brands as hedonistic.

“Given that Estée Lauder is an elegant brand, if their products would be presented in a plastic box, these would be disappointing. Usually, instead packages are really well-finished, using materials as glass and classy colours” (Interviewee n.9).

“Logo is crucial for hedonistic brands as Rolex and Gucci. Those logos are clean, simple and with an elegant font capable of transmitting the nature of the brands” (Interviewee n.6).

“Rolex logo is very famous, classy and immediately capable of communicating charming, glamorous and upper class, exactly as for Gucci and Estée Lauder “(Interviewee n.5).

“Rolex, Estée Lauder and Gucci packages immediately transmit the idea of brand personality as unique, charming and good-looking” (Interviewee n. 3).

While for reliable dimension, price impact was more superficially, in the case of hedonistic brands, consumers tend to identify this particular dimension with high priced brands, through the association to personality traits as successful, unique or authentic.

“Easily, higher prices make me think about more hedonistic and successful brands” (Interviewee n.4).

“Higher prices means a higher degree of elegance and sophistication” (Interviewee n.10).

“Price undoubtedly is very important, the reason why I do not perceive H&M as hedonistic but more as a younger brand, it’s because of low prices, if compared to Gucci or Estée Lauder” (Interviewee n.8).

As happens for reliability factor, C.O.O. cannot be excluded from the set of drivers, influencing a hedonistic perception of brands. Respondents seem to be influenced by country image and country related product image (Bursi et al., 2012):

“France and Italian brands are more easily associated to hedonistic features” (Interviewee n.11).

“For some fashion or clothing brands, Italy is a synonym of elegance and glamour, thus it impacts mainly on hedonistic brands” (Interviewee n.7).

Lastly, other brand drivers that influence significantly Italian customers’ perceptions of hedonistic brands are advertising, especially when celebrity endorsers are involved and user imagery, being capable of transmitting the higher symbolic value carried by hedonistic brands. Structural associations of hedonism revealed by the interviewees is summarised by Figure 16.

“Martini is a charming and successful alcoholic brand, in particular as a consequence of a specific style of advertising” (Interviewee n.2).

“I am influenced by both typical and stereotyped users, not for the characteristics of the product but for the messages and the values that users transmit. For luxury and hedonistic brands ad Gucci, stereotyped image of the users is important” (Interviewee n. 7).

“Rolex testimonials are always quite similar, having similar characteristics: grown men, successful, confident and elegant. These celebrity endorsers really give the idea of the personality of the brand” (Interviewee n.9).

“I believe that typical users are very important especially when I consider unique, successful brands as Gucci or Rolex. I immediately transfer the personality of typical users to the brand itself, for this category of brands”(Interviewee n. 3).

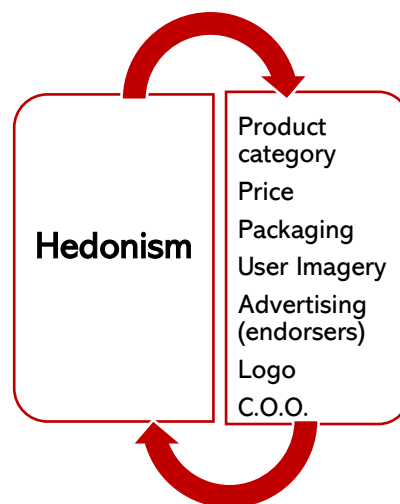


Figure 16. Hedonism dimension.

5.1.3 Excitement

When considering the third brand personality dimension, the most recurrent factor cited by the respondents as capable of generating exciting traits is the context or the circumstances where the products of the brands were consumed. In particular, customers responses confirmed that exciting brands are more strictly conditioned by special and exciting moments, where these are used (Maehle and Supphellen, 2008; Seimiene and Kamarauskaite, 2014). Thus, the characteristics of a specific context, in this case, are translated and transmitted to the brand itself.

“Aperol is a very involving brand. I use this brand usually in joyful and pleasant occasions and when I do I it makes me feel as an integrated member of a group. Additionally, it similarly happens with Radio DeeJay, even if I’m not a frequent user, the presence of this brand in many sports events help to strengthen its personality and to help me to be constantly updated on their programs and to create interest towards it” (Interviewee n.1).

“Starbucks is associated to relaxed and joyful moment, it’s more important the experience than the product” (Interviewee n.3).

Brands associated with excitement dimension often carry strong symbolic meanings, which are more easily and effectively communicated through drivers as sponsorships and user imagery, confirming the role theorised by Aaker (2010). Advertising, involving celebrities, proved to be more incisive and meaningful for exciting brands, while as stated by Maehle et al. (2011), exciting brands are those used by people considered as exciting themselves.

“Even if probably there are better brands than Gucci and H&M for example, these are trendy and cool brands and I am more attracted to them because of typical user advertised. I think that it’s a way to be included in a certain social category, a way to identify myself” (Interviewee n.1).

“Radio DeeJay sponsorships of concerts I was interested in, made me perceived the brands as more oriented toward young people and as a consequence contemporary and up to date” (Interviewee n.7).

“Aperol advertisements instead are always cheerful and funny, so I associate the brand with an exciting figure” (Interviewee n.15).

As already emerged for hedonistic dimension, visual elements play an important role in defining the personality of a brand, sensed as exciting. Colourful and innovative designs or packaging are effective reminders to a more cool, exciting and younger nature of the brand. Similarly, when these elements are identified in logos or symbols, the association to excitement dimension is more immediate. The nature of excitement dimension connections with brand personality drivers is depicted in Figure 17.

“For exciting brands as H&M and Starbucks I believe that product attributes are more effective in influencing brand personality. These items are cool, young and capable of generating excitement especially among younger generations” (Interviewee n.3).

“Starbucks products are cult and iconic and people are very often willing to show that they have been to Starbucks coffee shops, posting photos of mugs or similar items” (Interviewee n.8).

“Starbucks and Aperol logos are lively, communicate excitement and something related to young people” (Interviewee n.11).

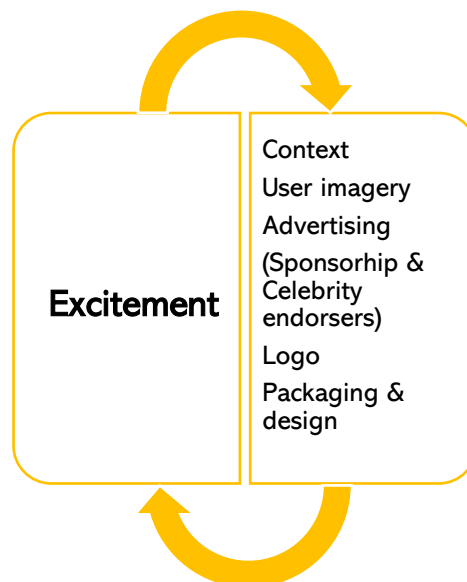


Figure 17. Excitement dimension.

5.1.4 Determination

In the Italian brand personality scale, the fourth dimension, determination is the one composed by the narrower set of personality traits. However, such restricted definition is formed by elements deriving from three different dimensions of original BP scale (Fida et al., 2010). Respondents' answers, for brand identified as determined, reflected this higher heterogeneity of the factor. A first element, of paramount importance in defining determined brands, is product category. As already emerged in Maehle et al. (2011), motorcycle and men's cosmetics are more frequently sensed as rugged or determined. Among the brands included in the sample, Gillette and Ducati are emblematic of how certain product categories are commonly associated to a more masculine and rugged dimension, with remarkable consequences on the brand personality perception as well. Following respondents answers highlight the role of product category:

"Ducati is reliable, daring, rugged and masculine because mainly of the characteristics of its products category. (...) Brands like Ducati or Gillette instead are relative to categories which emphasise masculine aspects" (Interviewee n.1).

"Ducati is daring and sportive brand which represents the stereotype of a rough and confident personality, Gillette is rough and rugged especially for the usage of provided products" (Interviewee n.2).

"Rugged brands as Ducati and Gillette are deeply influenced by product category" (Interviewee n.4).

On the other hand, non-product related elements as user imagery and advertising are similarly impactful when considering determined brands, not only in terms of celebrity endorsers but also for what concerns the style and the approach of the message.

"I perceived Diesel as determined, starting from the name itself, what it reminds to me, something strong, but also for the advertisement style" (Interviewee n.12).

"Nike products, for example, are objects of desires not for the characteristics of the products but because these are widespread across young people and because of the sponsorship of important figures that I admire" (Interviewee n.2).

“Gillette rough and determined nature is correlated mostly with the advertisements, involving young, successful and physical fit celebrities” (Interviewee n. 9).

Moreover, visual elements such as packaging and logo contribute to form a determined brand personality, as illustrated by Figure 18:

“Diesel and Nike are clear examples of how a logo or slogan can transmit determination and daring characteristics. (...) Dark colours and particular raw materials immediately communicated determined personality traits” (Interviewee n. 2).

“For rugged brands as Nike or Diesel, logo is very meaningful to me” (Interviewee n.4).

“Diesel is emblematic, is not really capable of remain impressed in my mind but when I see it, the association to determination and rough traits is strong” (Interviewee n.12).

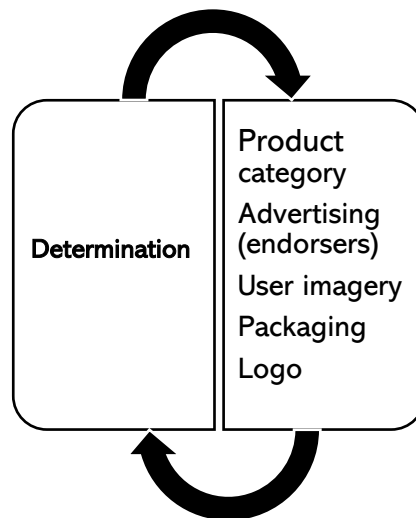


Figure 18. Determination dimension.

5.2 Primary drivers impact

Previous analysis of brand personality dimensions underlined a complex scenario, where several variables impact differently, influencing Italian consumers' perception in terms of brand personality. Each dimension presented its peculiar characteristics and distinctive elements, during BP formation process. However, according to a broader investigation of respondents answer, it is possible to draw general assumptions regarding the impact of considered brand personality drivers.

Advertising was recognized by customers as one the most important elements, capable of driving their perceptions of brand personality. These findings are in line with Ouwersloot and Tudorica (2010) study, which recognized advertising as the most effective mean in communication, while every advertisement contributes to creating brand personality. The primary role of advertising can be deducted from the following assumptions, elaborated by consumers:

"I believe that advertising is essential because it is a powerful instrument that can push people toward given brands, especially through celebrity endorsement and sponsorships, independently from the channels" (Interviewee n.1).

"I think that advertising is very important, to communicate a specific kind of personality, especially because it addresses me as a consumer with repeated streams. Additionally, I believe that it's more effective than other tools to really transmit personality traits" (Interviewee n.4).

"In my case, advertising is very important to direct my perception, because it's very impressive and effective in capturing my attention or interest toward a brand" (Interviewee n.8).

However, when considering advertising, a deeper analysis of this factor, is necessary to clarify the extent of its impact. While celebrity endorsers (Pringles and Binet, 2005) and sponsorships were found to be more influential especially for brands with a higher symbolic value, customers cleared that, across all the dimensions, the ability to communicate a message, coherently with their idea of the brand, is extremely important, as stated by interviewee n.15:

"I think that the message transmitted but also how an advertising is structured are equally important, so graphical and creative elements have to be strongly coherent not only with the communicated message but with the image of the brand" (Interviewee n.15).

Among considered drivers, product attributes divergently operate in forming brand personality. Two elements stood out in this study, packaging and price. As already identified by Maehle and Supphellen (2008), customers tend to consider price as an indicator of sincerity, while brands allocated in the highest end of the market are more easily perceived as sophisticated (Maehle et al., 2011), or as resulted in this study, hedonistic. Nonetheless, price connection with reliability traits proved to be less consistent, due to a higher influence of previous experiences for such dimension. Likewise, packaging and design element as colours or shapes are particularly meaningful in communicating hedonistic (Gucci), exciting (Aperol) and determined (Rolex) traits.

"Gucci new products characteristics, with graffiti and colourful texture makes me perceive the brand as very cool, young and contemporary even if I consider Gucci more as an exclusive brand" (Interviewee n.9).

"Packaging is important to transmit certain values at a first impact" (Interviewee n. 3).

"Packaging is important for all dimensions of personality I believe. For Rolex, the typical packaging design creates a high level of expectation in terms of quality and hedonism" (Interviewee n. 11).

"Aperol bottle and package design, due to colours and other aesthetic features gives the idea of something cool and younger" (Interviewee n.8).

Logo presented similar brand personality associations of packaging, accordingly to their similar nature as visual elements. However, as stated by various academics (Henderson and Cote, 1998; Grohmann, 2008), logo consistency with the perceived image of the company, is essential to express brand personality.

"Logo is very important to identify immediately the brand identity and indeed the personality. Especially for hedonistic, and determined brands. Once I became familiar with a brand logo that transmits given personality traits as Rolex, Gucci and Nike I immediately develop brand associations difficult to be modified in time, also with typical users. It has to be strongly coherent with brand personality" (Interviewee n. 3).

"H&M logo is simple and essential, just as the brand itself. Rolex gold crown is quite indicative of the brand characteristics. Gucci logo is emblematic, probably even more than the products of the brand, it is immediately recognisable. Starbucks and Aperol logos are lively, communicate excitement and something related to young people" (Interviewee n.11).

"Gucci and Rolex austere logos, with a polished design give the impression of something more refined" (Interviewee n.16).

"Logo is important for a strong, first impact with the brand. It has to be clear enough, the image and the characteristics of a brand have to be understandable, as it happens for Diesel, Mulino Bianco, Rolex and Nike" (Interviewee n.1).

"Nike swoosh is dynamic and oriented toward something active and athletic" (Interviewee n.14).

Thus, in the current study was proved that logo's shapes and different usage of colours direct customers perceptions toward specific personality traits (Aaker et al., 2001, Grohman 2008). Moreover, even if the impact of logo is more effective for hedonistic, exciting and determined dimensions, few respondents identified its role as meaningful also for reliable brands.

"Volkswagen, starting from its squarish logo, shows its German personality, reliable, rational hardworking and capable of setting everything right" (Interviewee n.12).

"Microsoft and Volkswagen symbol transmit me the idea of something reliable" (Interviewee n.10).

"Mulino Bianco logo with this windmill reminds me of something familiar also for the usage of light colours" (Interviewee n.16).

Brand personality associations relative to product category, were detected especially for what concerns reliable, hedonistic and determined factors. In line with Maehle et al(2011) and Maehle and Shneor (2010), respondents attempt to be perceived as a member of a reference group is one of the main reasons why brands personality traits are more rooted in a particular product category. The match between brand personalities and consumer identity, indeed result as really conditioning. On the other hand, product categories as cosmetics or motorcycle reflect specific personality meanings.

"Brands that I consider as determined are Ducati because bikes are typical men products (...)" (Interviewee n.1).

"I associate Rolex to a certain elite class and also to a masculine world, even if they produce also watches for women I think I have neither thought about a female Rolex watch" (Interviewee n. 15).

"Estée Lauder is mainly feminine and charming because mainly of the type of products addressed to women world" (Interviewee n.11).

Finally, product categories are not always univocal in determining brand personality, sub-categories can be identified in the same segment, as expressed by respondents when considering clothing and alcoholic drink companies:

"I have bought many H&M products which were not made by high-quality materials but this didn't influence my idea of H&M as a trendy and cool brand that I can afford, just when I want something more authentic and fascinating I choose different brands ad Gucci" (Interviewee n.1).

"Martini is a classy alcoholic brand that also transmits rugged traits (...) Aperol characteristics are both related to a glamorous and exciting side and to a trendy and young aspect" (Interviewee n.3).

User imagery, as personality drivers, resulted to be meaningful not only to strengthen perceived personality of a brand, but also to directly forms brand personality associations. Typical users and stereotyped users of a brand play a major role for three dimensions, while reliability seems not to be affected by such drivers, being more influenced by product-related characteristics. Commonly, respondents directly transfer the characteristics represented by user to the brand itself, confirming how this particular driver lead more easily and quickly to from personality traits, as recognised by Aaker (2010). Both typical users of every-day life and stereotyped users are capable of influence consumers. Previous considerations found their justification in respondents' answers, as illustrated by following statements:

"In few cases Ideal and typical users are important to categorize a brand personality, even if a certain brand starts to produce products for different segments of customers, the perception of the typical user is difficult to be changed (...) some type of figures are capable of transmitting their own characteristics to the brand itself, stimulating me as consumer to emulate or try to resemble some personality traits" (Interviewee n. 3).

“Nike is a brand that heavily pushes with advertisement such characteristics as self-confidence, daring and tough. Similarly, it is matched by the people that use the brand, usually a sports personality implies to use Nike products” (Interviewee n.6).

“Rolex determined nature is related to its commercial stereotype the user as a successful, daring and confident famous characters, that I admire” (Interviewee n. 7).

“Thinking about Starbucks, the first image is a young person drinking his coffee in front of his personal computer” (Interview n.8).

Even though interviewee n.5 identification of a connection between user imagery and reliability, can be considered as an exception, its statement highlights an important aspect. User imagery answers to respondents’ aspiration to express clearly their personality traits using a brand, through a so-called self-expression model (Aaker, 2010). User imagery, exactly as celebrity endorsements are particularly effective for brands expressing higher symbolic benefits, because customers develop more easily positive social associations when choosing such brands (Supphellen and Gronhaug, 2003). Similarly, interviewee 16 recognised the same above mentioned representation role of brands:

“I think that for hedonistic brands, user influence is higher, also because according to me these brands aim create segments among customers, for example in successful or wealthy classes, so when you use their product you feel as included in such categories” (Interviewee n. 16).

“I am more attracted by the brands that reflect my own personality as Mulino Bianco and Ferrero, rather than by other brands, even when those use popular personalities or figures that I admire” (Interviewee n.5).

Finally, the customers’ experiences with the brand is the last drivers to be discussed. In this case, respondents’ answers pointed out a primary role especially for brands perceived as reliable and exciting. For the first dimension, previous experience emerged as probably the most influential element in shaping perception. Conversely, for exciting brand, previous experiences importance is more correlated to the circumstances and the context where the brands were used. Therefore, special events or particular social context link theorised by Maehle et al. (2011) was consistent. Nonetheless, familiar environments and every-day usage of products were mentioned as indicators of reliability personality traits.

“For exciting brands I usually relate the experience itself to the brand, to describe this as exciting” (Interviewee n.4).

“For reliable brands as Mulino Bianco and Ferrero, it’s very important. As well when I think about computer or car brands, I believe that these have to provide guarantees, and Microsoft and Volkswagen are examples of how my experiences influenced the view of the personality. It’s not something related to a specific segment” (Interviewee n.6).

“Previous experiences are remarkable factors, especially because I’m an extremely rational person (...) I believe that this is particularly important for reliable and exciting brands, because in a certain way when I can count daily on a brand it appears more exciting to me. (...) Exactly because “I perceive brand such Ferrero or Mulino Bianco as sincere and honest, these characteristics have to be confirmed in the every-day experience of their products” (Interviewee n. 3).

The resented framework of primary drivers resulted as comprehensive, effective and empirically solid in forming consumer assumptions, even though dimension specific connections required a further segmentation of the structure, as illustrated by the pictures in the previous chapter about personality dimensions. All drivers proved to be primary elements in conditioning customers, considering that there are no cues, among respondents opinion, that could justify a removal of one element.

5.3 Secondary drivers impact

While others secondary drivers, introduced in the theoretical part confirmed their more sporadic nature, when considering Italian customers perceptions of both international and local brands, C.O.O. instead covers an important role. Respondents evaluation of secondary drivers influence, summarised by Table 8, illustrate the role of secondary drivers.

Table 8. Secondary drivers.

Respondents	Secondary drivers
1	C.O.O., Company ownership
2	C.O.O.
3	C.O.O., Company Image
4	C.O.O.
5	Company Image (Microsoft)
6	C.O.O., Retail Shop
7	C.O.O.
8	-
9	C.O.O., CEO, Company Image (Microsoft), Company Age & History
10	C.O.O., Company Image (Microsoft)
11	C.O.O., Company History
12	C.O.O.
13	C.O.O.
14	C.O.O.
15	C.O.O.
16	C.O.O.

Only a few interviewees identified company related factor, as really relevant in shaping their perception of personality traits. Age of the company was recognized as a conditioning factor, only by respondent n.9, while the history of the company was cited by respondent n. 11 and respondent n.10:

“Microsoft instead is something rational, secure and reliable because it is a leader company in the production of personal computers, with a great tradition and a solid image. (...)Martini hedonistic features derive from the fact the brand was a symbol of Milano nightlife in the 80’s” (Interviewee n.9).

“The only element that can influence me probably is the history of the brand” (Interviewee n.11).

“Microsoft was the first computer brand to be accessible for every person” (Interviewee n.10).

Similarly, company’s employees are not a remarkable variable for respondents. As expressed by interviewee n.13, when asked about employees’ role, it appears that this element, as also retail shops, may cover a marginal role only for certain category of brands and only for strengthening a certain idea of the personality.

"Selling personal is not so influential, even though for brands like Gucci it's more important that all the aspects are coherent with the image of luxury brands".

Even though various respondents identified company's image as an important element, their assumption are strictly related to only one brand, Microsoft, while in other cases there were no clues of such bond.

"Microsoft is a confident and reliable brand, recognized as world leader in its own business field, with a very strong and solid company image" (Interviewee n.3).

"Microsoft instead is something rational, secure and reliable because it is a leader company in the production of personal computers, with a great tradition and a strong image" (Interviewee n.9).

"Microsoft has always been a solid company, secure, competent and hardworking" (Interviewee n.10).

Furthermore, when respondents were asked about scandals or potential threats to company image, the majority of them identified such elements as merely temporary or not relevant. Only interviewee n.3 expressed conflicting indications.

"Volkswagen scandal of a few years ago didn't have any effect on my opinion about the brand, indeed I bought a Volkswagen just a few months later" (Interviewee n.10).

"When I discover some information about the company itself as for example poor labour practices or pollution scandals, these deeply influence the perception of a specific brand personality, as it happened for Nike child labour scandals. I believe that this is particularly important for reliable and exciting brands, because in a certain way when I can count daily on a brand it appears more exciting to me. Ferrero usage in production of palm oil didn't influence me, especially for the coherence of the brand that admitted the presence of this ingredient. Differently, Volkswagen scandal changed the way I perceive its personality" (Interviewee n.3).

"The perception of those brands that I have is pretty solid and it's difficult that something can change it. Similarly, scandals that affected few of these brands didn't influence me" (Interviewee n. 7).

Explanations can be found in already established brand personality, capable of creating and maintaining strong brand associations (Fournier, 1998; Kapferer, 2008; Lin 2010). Lastly, CEO was cited only by respondent n.9 and once again, in relation to Microsoft personality traits quoted in the previous paragraph.

“The image of Bill Gates as one of the richest man in the world and as a very successful person contributes to enhancing these (brands) characteristics”.

These weak linkages can be explained adopting Aaker’s (2010) point of view, according to which only in very limited cases CEO reach an extremely high level of popularity capable of being reflected on the company. Such perspective is confirmed by few respondents’ comments:

“The problem is that I know the CEO in few cases, I am not familiar with them usually” (Interviewee n.9)

“Among considered brands, CEO’s are not famous, I just know Volkswagen CEO that has been replaced after recent scandal” (Interviewee n.16).

5.3.1 C.O.O. and Country associations

One of the aims of the current study was to analyse both international and local brands, underlining related eventual discrepancies among Italian consumers perception in the way brand personality associations are formed. Conversely to a limited theoretical ground, that prevented the author from defining C.O.O. as a primary element, interviewees’ responses showed a different picture, when asked about its influence. While for the first segment, an Italian C.O.O. is commonly a synonymous of a higher level of trustworthiness, due to ethnocentrism, in the second case, cultural stereotypes about elegance and refinement are directly transferred to the brands with a Made in Italy label. Table 9 briefly summarises customers responses, when asked about C.O.O. impact on their evaluation of brand personality.

Table 9. C.O.O. influence.

Interviewee	Recognizes C.O.O. influence
1	Yes, for reliable brands
2	No
3	Yes, for food brands
4	Yes, for food brands
5	No, not in terms of brand personality
6	Yes, for reliable and hedonistic brands
7	Yes, for food and fashion brands
8	No
9	Yes, partially for reliable and hedonistic brands
10	Yes, for reliable and hedonistic brands
11	Yes, for reliable, hedonistic and determined brands
12	Yes, for reliable, hedonistic and exciting brands
13	Yes
14	Yes
15	Yes
16	Yes

Similar connections between countries' perceived image and brands, emerged also in the case of Volkswagen, Nike, Estée Lauder and Rolex. Respondents' answers showed further example of how often brands capture typical personality traits or stereotypes of their C.O.O. as can be found in Aaker (2010) work.

"The fact that Rolex is a Swiss company that produces watches strongly influence the personality of the brand itself, because for me Swiss people are very precise and reliable, and those traits are transmitted to the brand. German car brands instead appear to me as more reliable, because of their COO" (Interviewee n.10).

"Yes, (C.O.O it's important) like for example when I think to Volkswagen, I think about German quality" (Interviewee n.12).

"Yes, (it influences) undoubtedly (...) Nike reminds to American daring and sport nature" (Interviewee n.16).

Interviewee n. 15 answers is particularly meaningful for understanding how sometimes C.O.O. operates, even unconsciously:

"I think it is something that operates more unconsciously, if I think rationally about Italian origin I would say that it doesn't really influence me, but on the other hand I believe that Italian C.O.O. enhance the personality of a brand, independently from the kind of traits. For example, food brands, if are from Italy are more reliable".

The same respondent provided a different perspective of C.O.O., mentioning a relevant difference among Western Countries and less developed regions.

"Yes, but in a broader way, it is more about Western countries and other countries. Only if a product comes from less development countries, as the Asian ones, it's perceived as less reliable" (Interviewee n.15).

However, in some interviews, C.O.O. was not described as a primary element. Globalisation, from respondents answer, can be identified as a possible moderator of C.O.O., as found in Tse and Gorn (1993).

"For other brands, I trust the company itself, I do not really care about C.O.O., it's more about the final quality of the product itself, that has to match expected standard for the brand. Especially now, due to globalization, I believe that C.O.O. is not as relevant as in the past" (Interviewee n.3).

"I believe that now globalization deeply impact on the production, so when I have to think about brands, it's more about to trust the company itself, without considering C.O.O. I think that nowadays C.O.O. is quite complex to be analysed because usually product are assembled in many countries" (Interviewee n.4).

Finally, accordingly to its significant role among respondents, C.O.O. can be considered as a primary element, capable of strongly influence Italian customers perceptions, notwithstanding of globalization effect.

6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The current research sought to provide a deeper understanding of how Italian customers elaborate their perception of local and international brands, testing the reliability of Italian BP scale. Through its application, the study aimed at developing a more precise comprehension of the different nature of personality dimension and a more accurate understanding of the factors that contribute to form brand personality, addressing the need for a richer investigation of the concept (Ferrandi et al., 2000). Precisely, the research question intended to be answered was: How different brand drivers influence Italian consumers' perceptions of local and international brands personality dimensions?

The framework resulting from the analysis of empirical data, collected in this qualitative study, presented some dissimilarities with the structure introduced in the theoretical chapter. Firstly, Italian BP scale, elaborated by Fida et al., (2010), produced consistent findings in terms of analysis of brand personality traits among Italian customers, suggesting precise patterns of connections among brands and personality dimensions. Precisely, a set of four brands resulted to have a stronger link with each personality dimension. Furthermore, the reduced scale of traits included in the model helped the interviewee to address more specifically their perceptions and to avoid the inclusion of misleading or inappropriate traits, as emerged in other studies (Azoulay and Kapferer's, 2003). No additional markers were cited by the respondents as missing, underlining the absence of the need to implement the Italian scale.

The choice of a country-limited context was conditioned by the willingness to avoid cross-cultural issues, emerged in previous brand personality study (e.g. Alvarez-Ortiz and Harris, 2002; Bosnjak et al., 2007), as a result of culturally specific meanings associated to brands (Aaker et al., 2001). In line with previous personality researches, (Sirgy, 1982; Fournier, 1994, Alvarez-Ortiz and Harris, 2002, Smit et al., 2003; Aaker, 2010) brand personality revealed to be a well-established construct among consumers, capable of building important competitive advantages, as higher level of trust and loyalty, increased level of usage and unique brand attitudes.

Nonetheless, the application of a model elaborated in the same country environment of the one in which this present study was conducted, didn't fully avoided a certain degree of heterogeneity in terms of brand personality traits identifications, as for Gillette. As theorised by Smith et al. (2006) the complexity and richness of customers' perceptions nature represent a challenging barrier, for the development of brand personality studies, even in the current study, not affected by cross-cultural challenges.

Thus, variations from main patterns in this study can be addressed to the influence of socio-cultural differences over respondents. Similarly, a further factor that contributed to increasing the variance of the responses, is represented by the semantic nature of personality dimensions. Reliable and hedonistic dimensions produced more coherent results, due to their restricted essence (Caprara et al., 2001; Fida et al., 2010). Determined and exciting dimensions instead merge markers, carrying a diverse set of meaning (Fida et al., 2010), reflected by major differences in consumers responses. As a consequence, for a group of respondents, few brands represented traits relative to diverse personality dimension, also accordingly to the semantic essence of personality.

Similarly, as detected by Caprara et al. (2001) for Aaker US scale, results underlined the existence of brand-adjective interactions reflecting a shift in the associations of the meaning of personality traits, when applied to several brands. Accordingly, the same marker assumed different meaning when respondents applied it to describe the nature of a brand, as happened for Mulino Bianco and Rolex, while in few cases boundaries between personality dimensions resulted to be narrower. Considered assumptions suggest that there is no need to modify the scale introduced in the theoretical section.

Secondly, a further aim of the study, beyond testing the consistency of Italian BP scale, was to describe the nature of personality associations to brands. As stated by Arora and Stoner (2009), the lack of qualitative study hampered additional advancements in brand personality fields. The qualitative nature of the research played a significant role to have access to a broader set of information, capable of enriching current understanding and of depicting an articulated and complex scenario.

The presented theoretical framework of primary brand personality drivers needed to be implemented, after the discussion of C.O.O. remarkable impact on Italian customers on

both local and international brands. The primary importance of C.O.O. can be explained accordingly to three different underlying factors: country image (Matarazzo, 2012), country related product image (Bursi et al., 2012) and consumers ethnocentrism (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2011; Bursi et al., 2012). While in brand personality studies there were no meaningful cues about country image and country related product image, ethnocentrism was already identified as a moderator for Western brands among Russian consumers by Supphellen and Gronhaug (2003).

Conversely, respondents answers didn't reveal further pre-eminent drivers really capable of altering their evaluations. Thus, other company's related factors as CEO, company's employees or company's image confirmed their sporadic nature. Above mentioned assumptions led to the final framework, illustrated by Figure 19.

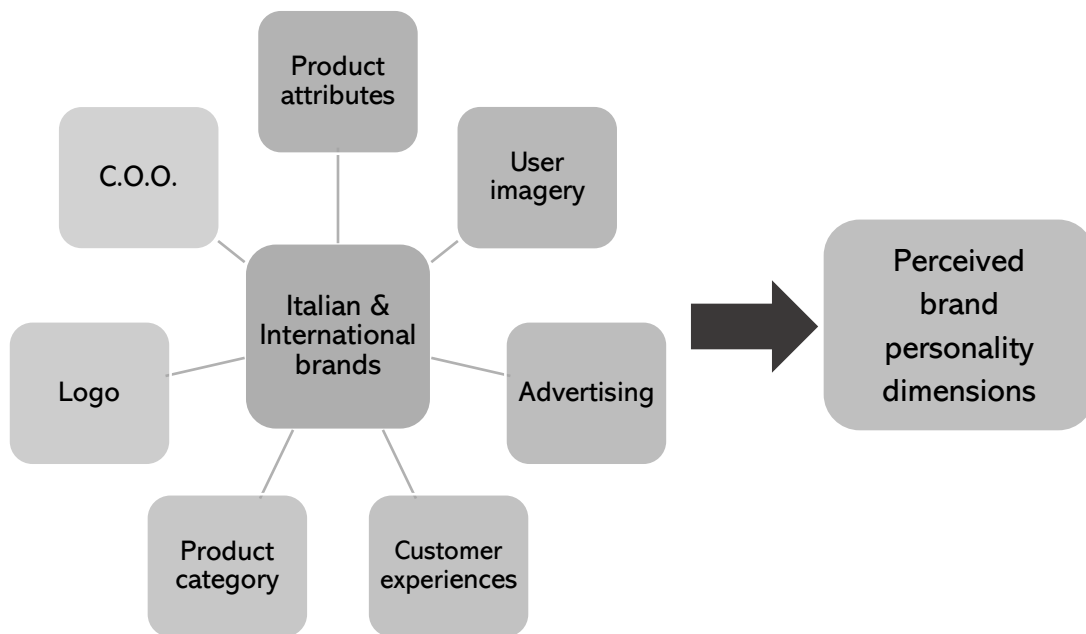


Figure 19. Final framework of primary drivers.

However, interviews unveiled a more detailed pattern or connections among drivers and personality dimensions, which required a further partition (Figure 20), to fully describe the essence of consumers' perceptions. Advertising was found as a common element of essential importance across all four dimensions, even though for reliability the influence is lower. This findings confirm Ouwersloot and Tudorica (2001) identification of advertising not only as not only the most effective communication tools, but also as a

precious factor to communicate and form brand personality. However, explanations rely in the involvement of celebrities and the sponsorship of popular events, coupled with the possibility to continuously address customers with repeated streams (Ouwersloot and Tudorica 2001, Maehele et al. 2011).

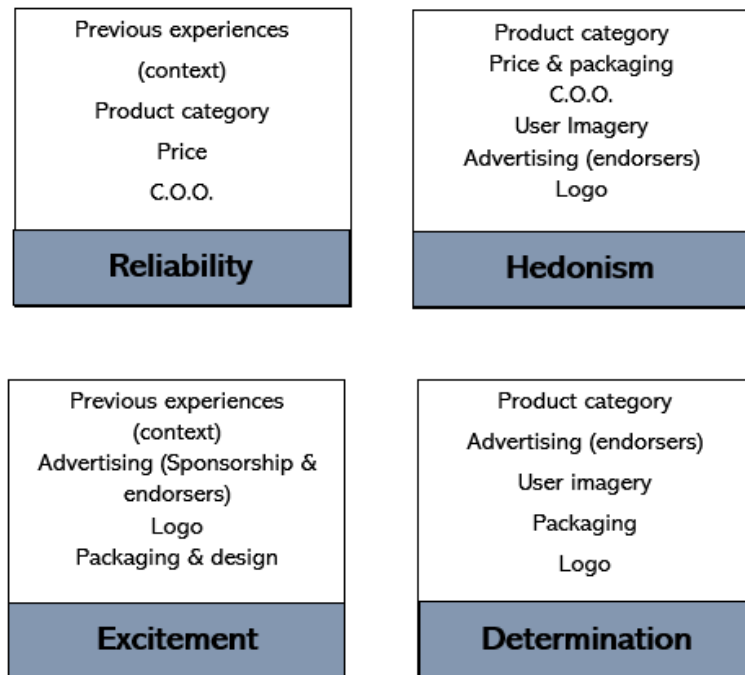


Figure 20. Drivers' impact on brand personality dimension.

For what concerns the first dimension, reliability, previous experiences are of paramount importance, from two perspectives. Consumers develop positive attitude in terms of reliability and honesty traits, especially towards brands, that are part of their everyday routine life, as already proved by Maehle et al. (2011). Furthermore, the context surrounding the experience of products usage, deeply connotes such brands, especially when involving family-related activities. For similar reasons, specific product category, are associated with more secure and honest personality traits. While, Maehle and Supphellen. (2008) revealed that price plays a role for sincere brands, respondent showed that such influence is mostly superficial. Finally, Italian customers perceived food brands as Ferrero and Mulino Bianco, as more reliable because of country image associations and ethnocentrism (Bursi et al., 2012; Matarazzo, 2012).

Hedonism presented instead a great connection with intangible elements, precisely celebrity endorsers advertising and user imagery. As identified by Aaker (2010), these elements reduce conceptualization effort of individuals, enabling self-expression and representation processes. Accordingly to Seimiene and Kamarauskaite (2014) and Maehle et al.(2011) findings, specific product categories proved to be, for their nature, perceived as hedonistic, as clothing and cosmetics, far from a more masculine and determined personality. Visual elements as logo and packaging are likewise meaningful in reinforcing elegance and charming traits. Price effect instead is deeper than for hedonistic brands, showing how consumer associate highest priced brands to this dimension. Lastly, respondents revealed significant C.O.O. associations with hedonistic brands (Gucci, Estée Lauder), transferring typical traits of countries, such Italy and France to the brands, as a consequence of country image (Matarazzo, 2012) boundaries.

Exciting brands presented common patterns, in terms of relationship with visual elements, user imagery, and celebrity endorsers. Usage of exciting graphics features, as colourful logos (Grohman, 2008) or creative design were found to be extremely important to transmit such traits to brands, while celebrities (Pringle and Binet, 2005) and stereotyped user (Aaker, 2010) impact on perceived personality traits is much higher than for other dimensions. As for Mulino Bianco and Ferrero reliable brands, the context was considered influential when associated with exciting experiences (Maehle et al. 2011) of product usage or to joyful circumstances, especially for Aperol and Starbucks.

Lastly, determined dimensions unveiled a more various framework of brand personality links, as a consequence of its heterogeneous nature (Fida et al.,2010). Both visual elements, like logo and packaging and intangible factors, as user imagery or celebrity endorsements were found as equally important for developing determined personality traits. Specifically, the same logo element can impact on an opposite way in forming, respectively sophisticated and determined traits (Grohman, 2008). As for hedonistic brands, interviewees attached symbolic meanings to product category, brands with a more determined nature are partially influenced by more masculine and rugged segments of products.

For personality dimensions as hedonism, excitement, and determination, brands' role as vehicles to express customers' own personality traits, as theorised by Aaker (1996, 2010) is stronger than for reliable brands. Similarly, considered brands are means for aspired inclusion, in social classes perceived as attractive.

The extremely complex formation process of brand personality was confirmed by the results of this study, supporting previous findings (Maehle and Supphellen, 2008; Maehle et al., 2011), underlining the need for additional investigation of the construct (Seimiene and Kamarauskaite, 2014).

6.1 Limitations and future researches

Lastly, the present study is affected by some empirical limitations, that should be contemplated. The research was not designed in order to provide broad generalisation cues for further works. Especially, considering the nature of brand personality, lack of generalizability still represents a challenge for academics (Alvarez-Ortiz and Harris, 2002) and practitioners. Current literature revealed that the attempt to elaborate a cross-cultural framework for measuring brand personality, is still far from succeed (Fida et al., 2010). Country-specific elements, such as socio-cultural values, embedded in individuals, hamper the possibility to develop a globally valid scale, capable of measuring brand personality in many diverse contexts. Furthermore, as stated by Milas and Mlacic (2007), even data aggregation level impacts on the final structure. Nonetheless, present work offers a further comparative instrument among brand personality studies in Western Countries, provide tools to identify the most challenging topics related to such construct.

The small sample analysed in this Master's Thesis affects generalisation capacity of the results, to describe more generally Italian customers. Likewise, the set of brands resulted to be conditioning in brand personality researches, for developing specific associations that are not always generalisable. Personality traits often presented shifts in their semantic meaning, when referred to diverse brands. Accordingly, academics should be cautious when transferring present results for describing different brands personality. Posterior applications of Italian BP scale may reveal different results, due to the nature of brands considered. The decision to focus the analysis on a narrower range of brands, was dictated

by the willingness to adopt a qualitative methodology, obtaining richer and more punctual results, instead of assuming a more general perspective.

However, considering that brand personality research field is affected by a general lack of qualitative studies (Arora and Stoner, 2009), this Master's Thesis attempted to address such gap, providing a new perspective, closer to customer's point of view. The isolation of brand personality dimension (Maehle et al., 2011) allowed the observer to identify the role of specific factors. Emerged findings can be used both by local and international firms in the development of marketing campaigns. Understandings of the elements that more influence specific personality traits, are valuable tools to re-address communication strategy or to strengthen brands perceived image.

Final frameworks of connections between drivers and personality markers offers the possibility to brand managers to adopt specific measures to emphasize characteristics as reliability of determination. Therefore, product repositioning solutions may be adopted while more emphasis could be stressed on visual elements to enhance exciting or hedonistic traits. Similarly, a lack of coherence between the intended image of the brand and the one perceived by customers, could be reduced through the manipulation of logo or the involvements of celebrity endorsers. On the other hand, C.O.O. novelty, as a relevant factor, revealed a new possible path for brand personality studies.

As a consequence, the main features of brands sensed as strongly correlated with a personality dimension can be considered as reference point and guidelines for marketing managers, when drafting marketing plans. With regards to future studies, brand personality construct, offers great opportunities for extending the knowledge about consumers perceptions and formation process. While the adoption of quantitative methodology produced discording perspectives, qualitative sphere grants the possibility to expand and considerably enrich the knowledge of such topic.

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APPENDIX 1. ITALIAN TRANSLATION OF BP TRAITS

Italian term	English translation
<i>Sincero</i> ^A	Sincere
<i>Onesto</i> ^A	Honest
<i>Affidabile</i> ^A	Reliable
<i>Intelligente</i> ^A	Intelligent
<i>Amichevole</i> ^A	Friendly
<i>Sano</i> ^A	Wholesome
<i>Razionale</i> ^A	Down to earth
<i>Allegro</i> ^A	Cheerful
<i>Orientato alla famiglia</i> ^A	Family oriented
<i>Sicuro</i> ^A	Secure
<i>Laborioso</i> ^A	Hard working
<i>Raffinato</i> ^{Ed}	Glamorous
<i>Di bell'aspetto</i> ^{Ed}	Good looking
<i>Affascinante</i> ^{Ed}	Charming
<i>Autentico</i> ^{Ed}	Original
<i>Femminile</i> ^{Ed}	Feminine
<i>Unico</i> ^{Ed}	Unique
<i>Di successo</i> ^{Ed}	Successful
<i>Emozionante</i> ^{Ed}	Exciting
<i>Aristocratico</i> ^{Ed}	Upper class
<i>Giovanile</i> ^{En}	Young
<i>Trendy</i> ^{En}	Trendy
<i>Contemporaneo</i> ^{En}	Contemporary
<i>Cool</i> ^{En}	Cool
<i>Aggiornato</i> ^{En}	Up to date
<i>Forte</i> ^D	Tough
<i>Ruvido</i> ^D	Rugged
<i>Sicuro di sé</i> ^D	Confident
<i>Audace</i> ^D	Daring

A= Affidabilità, ED=Edonismo, EN=Entusiasmo, D=Determinazione

APPENDIX 2. SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Before starting, the interviewer will explain the concept of brand personality, providing examples. Moreover, papers with the four dimensional structure and with examples of brand drivers will be given to the respondents to help them during the interviews

Age

Gender

Occupation

Place of residence

- 1) Consider to evaluate brand personality exactly as well as human personality. Among presented brands which ones do you consider as representative and strongly associated with sincere/hedonistic/exciting/determined dimension? Why?
- 2) Describe and explain in details your perceptions relative to this particular brand personality. Which particular personality traits are best represented by this brand according to you? Why?
- 3) Are the traits that you would use to describe this brand personality all included in the selected dimensions or external? If external, to which dimensions they belong?
- 4) What are your previous experiences with this brand's products? Did they influence significantly your perceptions of brand personality? If yes, in which ways?
- 5) Which particular aspects (related to previous experiences), such as selling personal or retail shops, conditioned your opinion about the brand?
- 6) Do you believe that the circumstances when you used this brand, such as daily habits or special events, conditioned your perception of this brand personality? How?
- 7) Do you believe that further positive/negative experience can potentially reshape your considerations? If yes, to which extend?
- 8) When you evaluate this brand, are you influenced by user imagery that depicts a particular stereotype of personality? If yes, in which cases?
- 9) Are you more conditioned by typical users of the brand or by idealized user?

- 10) Do you think that the product category of considered brand carries specific meanings that condition brand personality? In which cases? How?
- 11) Does advertising influence your perception of brand personality traits? If yes, explain why.
- 12) Which particular characteristics or transmitted messages influenced your approach toward considered brand?
- 13) Do you believe that sponsorships and celebrity endorsements are more effective instruments to influence your perceptions? Is this generalizable or only specific for some brands? Can you name few examples?
- 14) When evaluating brand personality, which product attributes do you recognize as relevant and influential? Provide practical examples, underlining the different nature of product attributes.
- 15) Do you believe that logo impact is important when evaluating brand personality? Why and for which products? Is it capable of transmitting a well distinguished image according to you? How?
- 16) Do you consider the nationality of a brand, when evaluating its personality? In which cases? Is it more important for some categories of brands?
- 17) Is your approach different, when you consider Italian brand personality? According to which criteria are your perceptions different?
- 18) Are there additional important elements that in your opinion, influenced your perceptions? Which ones? How?
- 19) Considering above mentioned thoughts, which factors do you identify as primary for shaping brand personality?

APPENDIX 3. LOGOS OF SELECTED BRANDS



APPENDIX 4. EXAMPLES OF BP DRIVERS FOR SELECTED BRANDS





APPENDIX 5. METHODOLOGY OF BRAND PERSONALITY STUDIES

Author (s)	Methodology
Ferrandi, J.M., Valette-Florence, P. and Fine-Falcy, S. (2000)	Quantitative
Aaker, J.L., Garolera, J. and Benet-Martinez, V. (2001)	Quantitative
Caprara, G.V., Barbaranelli, G. and Guido, G. (2001)	Quantitative
Ouwersloot, H. and Tudorica, A. (2001)	Qualitative
Alvarez-Ortiz, C.M. and Harris, J. (2002)	Quantitative
Austin, J.R., Siguaw, J.A. and Mattila, A.S. (2003)	Quantitative
Azoulay, A. and Kapferer (2003)	Qualitative
D'Astous, A. and Lévesque, M. (2003)	Quantitative
Smit, E.G., Van Den Berge, E. and Franzen, G. (2003)	Quantitative
Supphellen, M. and Grønhaug K. (2003)	Quantitative
Rojas-Méndez, J.I., Erenchun - Podlech, I. and Silva-Olave, E. (2004)	Quantitative
Freling, T.H and Forbes, L.P. (2005)	Qualitative
Sung, Y. and Tinkham, S.F. (2005)	Quantitative
Bosnjak, M., Bochmann, V. and Hufschmidt, T. (2007)	Quantitative
Grohmann, B. (2008)	Quantitative
Maehle, N. and Supphellen, M. (2008)	Quantitative
Arora, R. and Stoner, C. (2009)	Quantitative & Qualitative
Geuens, M., Weijters and De Wulf, K. (2009)	Quantitative
Lin, L.-Y. (2010)	Quantitative
Chu, S.C. and Sung, Y. (2011)	Quantitative
Maehle, N., Otnes, C. and Supphellen, M. (2011)	Qualitative
Seimiene, E. and Kamarauskaite, E. (2014)	Qualitative