

DIMENSIONS OF BRAND PERSONALITY IN MEXICO

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ABSTRACT

The principal objective of this study was to develop an exploratory investigation of the dimensions of brand personality in Mexico. Furthermore, the brand personality dimensions were compared to study the differences between males and females. An estimated 400 undergraduate students participated. They were given a questionnaire to measure brand personality divided into two sessions (six brands of think products in one session and six brands of feel products in another session). However, not all the students attended class on both days, so some completed only one of the two sessions. In the end, 313 participants completed the questionnaire on the six brands of think products and 320 completed the questionnaire on the six brands of feel products. A total of seven factors were extracted from the brand personality scale: Success, Hipness/Vivacity, Sophistication, Sincerity, Domesticity/Emotionality, Ruggedness and Professionalism. The women rated the brands higher for Success and Hipness/Vivacity, while the men rated the brands higher for Domesticity/Emotionality, Ruggedness and Professionalism. The author discusses the implications of the research for marketing practice and the meaning of these brand personality dimensions in the Mexican cultural context.

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INTRODUCTION

The American Marketing Association (AMA) defines a brand as “a name, term, design, symbol or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers.” Brands provide their customers with emotional and experiential benefits. The benefits that brands provide their customers are essential to building strong brand equity. In order to build this strong brand equity in the market, it is fundamental to understand the core dimensions of brand image, which is brand personality (Lee and Oh, 2006). Brand personality is an essential component of brand imagery—a soft attribute of an image—that helps create brand equity (Batra, Lehmann, and Singh, 1993; Biel, 1993). Plummer (1985) suggested that brand image consists of three essential features: (1) physical attributes or product attributes (e.g., green in color); (2) functional characteristics or consumer benefits (e.g., cleans teeth more effectively); and (3) characterization (e.g., youthful). Plummer (1985) termed this latter characterization process “brand personality,” and he believed that it is a key element in understanding consumers’ brand choices.

Therefore, brand personality is defined as “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (Aaker, 1997, p. 347). Aaker (1996) defines the associated personality of a brand as a set of human demographic characteristics like age, gender, and race; human lifestyle characteristics like activities, interest, and opinion; and human personality traits such as extroversion, dependability, and sentimentality. The brand becomes a living person and is often attached to a metaphor. In this way, the abstract intangible assets and characteristics can be visualized in a tangible way, and customers interact with brands as if they were human beings. Similar to human personality, brand personality is distinctive and enduring (Aaker, 1996, p.141-142). In contrast to “product-related attributes,” which tend to serve a utilitarian function for consumers, brand personality tends to serve a symbolic or self-expressive function (Keller, 1993). Customers associate human personality traits with brands because they relate to brands as they would to partners or friends (Fournier, 1998), because they perceive brands as extensions of themselves (Belk, 1988), or because marketers suggest that brands have certain characteristics.

The attribution of human personality characteristics to brands is of great interest among marketing researchers and practitioners, since understanding how consumers perceive products and brands can be useful for the elaboration and implementation of marketing actions. Consumers tend to look for products and brands whose cultural significance corresponds to the person that they are or that they would like to be in order to maintain or establish a social role. This is consistent with the symbolic meaning of consumption, where consumers exploit brands to construct and maintain their identities and to experience emotional gratification (O'Donohoe, 1994). Therefore, being able to measure a brand's personality may help firms to communicate effectively with their consumers and may play a major role in advertising and promotional efforts (Aaker, 1996; Batra, Lehmann, and Singh, 1993; Plummer, 1985). A brand personality can be used as a basis of differentiation from other brands and help to differentiate the brand from competitors in a particular product category. As such, marketing practitioners have become increasingly aware of the importance of building "a clear and distinctive brand personality" (Yaverbaum, 2001, p. 20) as a central driver of consumer preference.

This study aims to develop an exploratory investigation of the dimensions of brand personality in Mexico using the theoretical basis established in Aaker's study (1997) of personality traits, since we found only one study about brand personality in Mexico.

This article is organized as follows: section two briefly analyzes the theoretical framework of brand personality. Section three exposes the methodology and instrument used in the study. Next section, section four, presents the statistical analyses made as well as the principal findings. And section five will offer the conclusions, limitations of this study and directions for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Similar to the "Big Five" model of human personality (Goldberg, 1990; McCrae and John, 1992), brand personality is measured along five dimensions that uniquely apply to consumers' characterization of brands (Aaker, 1997). It was with Aaker's research (1997) that a generalizable (reliable and valid) scale was developed to assess brand personality (Koebel and Ladwein, 1999). Jennifer Aaker (1997) developed a theoretical framework of the brand personality construct by determining the number and nature of dimensions of brand personality traits. Aaker (1997) developed a measurement scale called the Brand Personality Scale, which consisted of 42 traits. The development of the scale involved more than 1000 surveys in the United States, 37 very well known brands and 114 personality traits that were reduced through clusters to 42 traits. Even when the sample was divided by age or sex, or when subgroupings of brands were used, five personality dimensions emerged. These five brand personality dimensions and 15 facets desired by many companies for their products are Sincerity; Excitement; Competence; Sophistication; and Ruggedness. The five dimensions explained almost all (93%) of the differences observed among the brands and described the personalities of many strong brands.

The impact of this model has been so profound that since 1997 most of the academic publications about brand personality are based on Aaker's methodology (1997) (e.g., Farhangmehr and Azevedo, 2000; Musante, Milne, and McDonald, 1999). With the aim of determining the adaptability of Aaker's original model (1997) to other cultures, the model has been used in other countries, such as France (Koebel and Ladwein, 1999), Japan and Spain (Aaker, Benet-Martinez, and Garolera, 2001), Mexico (Álvarez-Ortiz and Harris, 2002), Russia (Supphellen and Grohaug 2003), Korea (Lee and Oh, 2006), and Venezuela (Barrios and Massa, 1999; Pirela, Villavicencio, and Saavedra, 2004). The studies conducted in these countries differed in three aspects: the use of Aaker's methodology (1997), the dimensions found, and the conclusions. The studies from Japan and Spain both used Aaker's methodology (1997), although the results were different. In France, Venezuela, Korea and Mexico, the researchers used Aaker's scale (1997) only to measure the brand personality. Aaker, Benet-Martinez, and Garolera (2001) found that three of the five original factors applied to Japan and Spain, but that a Peacefulness dimension replaced

Ruggedness in both Japan and Spain, and a Passion dimension emerged in Spain instead of Competence. In Korea, Lee and Oh (2006) found Excitement/Sophistication and Smoothness dimensions. The study carried out in Venezuela in 1999 (Barrios and Massa) found Sociability, Success, and Proactiveness dimensions. However, another study in Venezuela in 2004 (Pirela, Villavicencio, and Saavedra) found Passion and Passivity dimensions. In the French study, Koebel and Ladwein (1999) found only one dimension, Competence, in common with the dimensions found in Aaker's study. France and Venezuela are countries that found dimensions very different from those found by Aaker and by researchers in other countries. Additionally, Competence remained constant in all of the countries investigated except in the last studies conducted in Venezuela (Pirela, Villavicencio, and Saavedra, 2004) and in Spain (Aaker, Benet-Martinez, and Garolera, 2001). In the United States, Japan, Spain and Mexico three common dimensions appeared: Competence, Sincerity and Sophistication. In the study conducted in Mexico, Alvarez-Ortiz and Harris (2002) found a dimension called Gender, which was more representative than that of Ruggedness and contained only feminine and masculine traits. From this, it appeared that Mexican consumers perceived brands with masculine and feminine traits, a perception that represented a bipolar dimension rather than the dimension Ruggedness. Therefore, in Mexico, the model consisted of Sincerity, Enthusiasm, Competence, Sophistication and Gender.

Based on the objective of this study, I believe that using the Brand Personality Scale by Aaker represents the best way to measure brand personality and identify brand personality dimensions to explore the differences between Mexico and other countries. Given that different brand personality dimensions have been found in other countries, in the case of Mexico it was not expected to find exactly the same dimensions as Aaker (1997) did in the United States and Alvarez-Ortiz and Harris (2002) did in Mexico. For example, this study differs from the study conducted in Mexico by Alvarez-Ortiz and Harris in 2002 in the methodology, brand selection, sampling used and characteristics of participants. The brand personality measures in the Alvarez-Ortiz and Harris study (2002) were collected on a set of twenty brands. Ten global brands in Mexico were selected from the list of brands used by Aaker (1997) and ten brands originating in Mexico were also chosen in consultation with marketing research professionals in Mexico City. Alvarez-Ortiz and Harris (2002) collected the brand personality measures during face-to-face interviews with a sample of 400 adult consumers in Mexico City who were obtained using a mall-intercept method and 49.1% of the sample included respondents between 31 and 50 years of age. Therefore, it was expected to find more coincidence with the dimensions originally proposed by Aaker than with those found in other countries because of the geographic proximity of Mexico to the United States, the influence the United States has on Mexico, and the characteristics of the sample (students with an upper-middle socioeconomic level who are accustomed to buying U.S. products when they spend vacations in the United States). In addition, in Mexican culture, masculinity and femininity are still prominent characteristics and sex roles are still markedly accentuated in some sectors. As Alvarez-Ortiz and Harris (2002) found in the study of brand personality in Mexico, in this study it was expected that a dimension related to gender would also be found in this study because of the macho culture in Mexico. Thus, the following hypotheses were made: H₁: Brand personality among 12 global brands in Mexico will be identified by at least five dimensions similar to those established in other cultures. Moreover, the brand personality dimensions will be more similar to those that Aaker originally proposed, compared with those found in other countries. H₂: At least one brand personality dimension will be related to gender (masculine and feminine traits).

Brand personality includes characteristics such as gender, age, and socioeconomic class, as well as classical personality aspects such as cordiality and sentimentality. However, although in Aaker's study and other studies age was analyzed as a factor that influences how brand personality forms, neither the perception of the gender of the product as a variable that can also influence personality, nor the differences between men and women in the perception of brands, have been analyzed in depth. For this reason, another one of the specific objectives of this investigation is to analyze the differences between men and women in their perception of brands. As a function of the traditional gender stereotypes of the

Mexican culture, the following was hypothesized: H₃: Independent of the product category, men will tend to perceive brands as having traits that are markedly more masculine, such as Ruggedness and Competence, compared with women, who will tend to perceive brands with traits that are more feminine, such as Sincerity and Sophistication.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Brand Selection

In the majority of studies on brand personality conducted previously, researchers selected brands as Aaker (1997) proposed originally: brands with symbolic significance, those with utilitarian significance and those with both. In others, researchers selected a different universe of brands, where the local brands were the most important. In this study, it was considered that the brand selection would be according to the students' familiarity with and use of the brands. In addition, it was considered that the best way to represent all the product-type categories was to use the FCB Grid by Ratchford (1987) and Vaughn (1986), which allows products to be classified as feel or think and as having high or low involvement. Following the FCB Grid, four product categories were selected: (a) laptops as think products with high involvement; (b) shampoos as think products with low involvement; (c) perfumes as feel products with high involvement; and (d) soft drinks as feel products with low involvement.

A total of 150 students completed a survey in which they were asked to write the first three top-of-mind brands for these four product categories: laptops, shampoos, perfumes and soft drinks. Finally, using a combination of top of mind and top of share, the brands selected were the following: a) Laptops: Dell, HP, Apple; b) Shampoos: Pantene, Herbal Essences, Sedal; c) Perfumes: Ralph Lauren, Hugo Boss, Chanel; and d) Soft drinks: Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Sprite. Local brands did not appear in any of the categories, as they did in other studies. For this reason, only brand personality dimensions for global brands could be measured. This allowed us to compare brand dimensions between Mexico and other countries that used global brands.

Participants

The research adopted a nonprobability convenience sampling. Participants were recruited from the Instituto Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey, Campus Guadalajara, Mexico. The study was conducted with approval from the university, where participants were selected from the classes of the School of Business and Humanities. An estimated 400 undergraduate students participated from the classes that were selected as part of the study. They were given a questionnaire divided into two sessions (six brands of think products in one session and six brands of feel products in another session). However, not all the students attended class on both days, so some only completed one of the two sessions. In the end, 313 participants completed the questionnaire on the six brands of think products (48.6% women; 51.4% men; ages between 17 and 25, M= 20.44, SD= 1.76), and 320 completed the questionnaire on the six brands of feel products (47.8% women; 52.2% men; M= 20.60 years, SD = 1.83).

Measures

Even though Aaker (1997) provides a brand personality scale, and there is a Spanish (Castilian) brand personality scale (Aaker Benet-Martinez, and Garolera, 2001), these could not be assimilated into the Mexican culture and language. Therefore, a rigorous scale-adjustment process was necessary. Consequently, the original Brand Personality Index (BPI), which includes 42 items of brand personality traits developed by Aaker (1997), was translated to the Spanish language, with modifications to some items for the Mexican culture and language.

A pilot study with 85 students was conducted to validate the Spanish version of the Brand Personality Index created especially for this study. The questionnaire had 42 items of brand personality traits and respondents had to assign a value from 1 (very unlikely) to 5 (very likely) to each attribute. A principal component factor analysis with Varimax rotation procedures was used to modify or rewrite the items, as necessary, before applying the scale to the definitive sample. After the statistical analysis with the pretest study, 10 items were changed and the other 32 items remained the same. The following items were modified using another word in Spanish with the same meaning: real, sentimental, spirited, reliable, leader, upper class, smooth, western, tough and rugged.

Procedure

The scale with the 42 items of brand personality traits for the twelve brands was administered to each group by the investigator during class time, with the previous consent of the professors who taught their subjects at that time. As Aaker (1997) pointed out, choosing a large number of brands had the advantage of increasing the generalizability and robustness of the measurement scales. Its disadvantage, however, was possible subject fatigue and boredom, which potentially could result in response bias. To minimize this problem, the scale was applied at two different times with one week of rest between sessions to avoid the learning effect and lack of motivation. A counterbalancing process was carried out: In the first session, half of the sample was given the section of the personality scale for the six brands of think products, and in the second session, after the week of rest, they completed the six brands of feel products. The other half of the sample began with the six brands of feel products, followed by the week of rest and then the six brands of think products. In the sections of the six think brands and six feel brands, the order of the brands of high and low involvement in each category were counterbalanced to control for the effect of fatigue. In addition, the management of Starbucks supported the study by providing vouchers for free coffee to distribute among the participants at the beginning of the second section to motivate them to finish the questionnaire.

RESULTS

Brand Personality Dimensions

For the validation of the brand personality scale, it was designed that each participant evaluated the personality of the 12 brands in each of the 42 items that composed the questionnaire. This way the total of the sample for the validation of this scale was made up of 3,798 evaluations, which were used for the rest of the statistical analyses.

To extract the underlying brand personality dimensions, we used exploratory factor analysis (Principal component) with Varimax rotation. Without forcing the number of factors, a factorial solution of seven factors was obtained: Success, Hipness/Vivacity, Sophistication, Sincerity, Domesticity/Emotionality, Ruggedness and Professionalism. A factorial analysis was also used for five factors, obtaining optimal groupings of personality traits in the seven factors originally obtained. The amount of variance of the data explained by the five-factor solution was 55.1%.

As can be seen in Table 1, the indices for all of the dimensions were quite high, with the exception of Ruggedness and Professionalism, which had more moderate coefficients due to the fact that these dimensions consisted of only three items each. Nevertheless, the alpha coefficients that were presented in the first five dimensions demonstrate that the scale had a satisfactory internal consistency whose values oscillated between 0.75 and 0.91. The internal consistency of the seven factors, evaluated by the alpha coefficient, was 0.95. The most reliable factors were Success, Hipness/Vivacity, Sophistication, Sincerity and Domesticity/Emotionality. The amount of variance of the data explained by this solution was 60.3%

(Success = 36.7%; Hipness/Vivacity = 6.6%; Sophistication = 5.1%; Sincerity = 3.9%; Domesticity/Emotionality = 2.8%; Ruggedness = 2.7%; and Professionalism = 2.5%).

A validation of the brand personality scale was also carried out by dividing it in function of the feel vs. think products. For the feel products, without forcing the number of factors, a factorial solution of seven factors was obtained: Success, Sophistication, Hipness/Vivacity, Sincerity, Domesticity/Emotionality, Ruggedness and Professionalism. For the think products, a factorial solution of five factors was obtained: Excitement, Sincerity, Sophistication, Domesticity/Emotionality and Ruggedness/Professionalism. The internal consistency was the same for the feel and for the think products: 0.95. The amount of variance of the data explained by the seven-factor solution for the feel products was 60.3% and by the five factor solution for the think products was 57.3%.

Table 1: Results of Factor Analysis: Brand Personality

Factor Name	Items	Factor Loading	M (SD)	Eigen-value	% of variation	Cronbach's Alpha
1. Success	Leader	0.672	3.69 (1.15)	15.43	36.73	0.91
	Successful	0.654	3.97 (1.04)			
	Original	0.606	3.68 (1.15)			
	Up-to-date	0.584	3.86 (1.09)			
	Imaginative	0.578	3.66 (1.12)			
	Secure	0.513	3.69 (1.13)			
	Unique	0.494	3.50 (1.21)			
	Trendy	0.474	3.79 (1.13)			
	Real	0.44	3.73 (1.11)			
	Daring	0.437	3.51 (1.19)			
	Independent	0.43	3.56 (1.18)			
Exciting	0.422	3.36 (1.17)				
2. Hipness/Vivacity	Young	0.755	3.77 (1.16)	2.76	6.56	0.85
	Spirited	0.645	3.71 (1.10)			
	Cool	0.626	3.77 (1.13)			
	Cheerful	0.576	3.67 (1.13)			
	Charming	0.494	3.68 (1.14)			
	Confident	0.478	3.97 (1.04)			
	Contemporary	0.446	3.67 (1.10)			
3. Sophistication	Good looking	0.773	3.47 (1.27)	2.15	5.12	0.80
	Glamorous	0.747	3.40 (1.29)			
	Upper-class	0.721	3.49 (1.27)			
	Western	0.513	3.77 (1.16)			
	Feminine	0.477	3.29 (1.36)			
4. Sincerity	Honest	0.696	3.47 (1.18)	1.65	3.92	0.85
	Sincere	0.658	3.47 (1.12)			
	Reliable	0.627	3.68 (1.15)			
	Wholesome	0.596	3.35 (1.30)			
	Down-to-earth	0.548	3.48 (1.15)			
	Intelligent	0.513	3.71 (1.10)			
5. Domesticity/Emotionality	Family-oriented	0.665	3.03 (1.33)	1.20	2.86	0.75
	Smooth	0.643	3.32 (1.18)			
	Friendly	0.547	3.55 (1.14)			
	Small-town	0.536	2.50 (1.26)			
	Sentimental	0.493	3.43 (1.17)			
	Outdoorsy	0.438	3.15 (1.35)			
6. Ruggedness	Masculine	0.76	2.89 (1.37)	1.14	2.71	0.63
	Rugged	0.746	2.60 (1.28)			
	Tough	0.456	3.51 (1.18)			
7. Professionalism	Technical	0.69	3.13 (1.23)	1.03	2.46	0.55
	Corporate	0.672	3.43 (1.30)			
	Hardworking	0.561	3.35 (1.20)			

This table presents the results relative to internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) for each of the brand personality dimensions together with the means and standard deviations of the total sample, the eigenvalue and the explained variance for each factor.

Gender Differences

In order to make all of the statistical analyses that are detailed next, the seven dimensions of brand personality were transformed into a scale from 1 to 100. This way, the scores nearest one in each dimension imply that the personality dimension does not describe the brand, whereas the scores nearest 100 mean that the personality dimension describes the brand totally. Without considering either the type of product (feel or think) or the involvement level (high or low), the ratings of the men and women were compared for all of the brand personality dimensions.

As can be seen in Table 2, Student’s t-test highlighted the existence of significant differences between the sexes for Success and Hipness/Vivacity, which the women rated higher than the men did. Significant differences were also found for Domesticity/Emotionality, Ruggedness and Professionalism, which the men rated higher. That is, the women perceived the brands as more successful and hip/vivacious and the men perceived the brands as more domestic/emotional, rugged and professional than did the women. For Sophistication and Sincerity, no significant differences were found.

Comparisons of the sexes were also carried out for each of the product categories, with the following results: For the brands of laptops, significant differences were found between the sexes for Sophistication ($t_{926} = 2.094, p = .037$), Domesticity/Emotionality ($t_{909} = 3.248, p = .001$), and Ruggedness ($t_{927} = 3.414, p = .001$), with males rating HP, Apple, and Dell as more sophisticated, domestic/emotional, and rugged than did females (*Sophistication*: males: $M = 69.54, SD = 17.97$; females: $M = 66.99, SD = 18.96$; *Domesticity/Emotionality*: males: $M = 63.35, SD = 17.53$; females: $M = 59.61, SD = 17.22$; *Ruggedness*: males: $M = 66.13, SD = 18.78$; females: $M = 62.03, SD = 17.83$). No significant differences were found between the sexes for Success, Hipness/Vivacity, Sincerity or Professionalism.

Table 2: Means and Significances of Gender Differences

Dimensions	Mean (SD)		t (D.F.)
	Women	Men	
Success	73.98 (16.85)	72.71 (16.26)	-2.295 (3.598)*
Hipness/Vivacity	76.18 (16.28)	73.85 (16.20)	-4.328 (3665)***
Domesticity/Emotionality	62.74 (17.15)	63.99 (16.05)	2.265 (3647)*
Ruggedness	57.09 (19.09)	63.18 (19.42)	9.638 (3719)***
Professionalism	65.21 (20.01)	67.08 (18.60)	2.951 (3707)**

*This table allows us to verify the gender differences (Student’s t-tests) of each brand personality dimension. ***, ** and * indicate significance at the 1, 5 and 10 percent levels respectively*

For the brands of shampoos, significant differences were found between the sexes for Success ($t_{889} = -2.700, p = .007$), Hipness/Vivacity ($t_{904} = -4.442, p = .000$), Ruggedness ($t_{919} = 6.025, p = .000$), and Professionalism ($t_{916} = 3.782, p = .000$). The women scored the shampoo brands higher than did the men for Success and Hipness/Vivacity (*Success*: females: $M = 71.49, SD = 15.84$; males: $M = 68.61, SD = 15.95$; *Hipness/Vivacity*: females: $M = 77.19, SD = 15.29$; males: $M = 72.46, SD = 16.71$). On the other hand, the men rated the shampoo brands higher than did the women for Ruggedness and Professionalism (*Ruggedness*: males: $M = 54.55, SD = 19.20$; females: $M = 47.51, SD = 16.24$; *Professionalism*: males: $M = 61.04, SD = 18.40$; females: $M = 56.40, SD = 18.75$). No significant differences were found between the sexes for Sophistication, Sincerity or Domesticity/Emotionality.

For the brands of perfumes, we found significant differences between the sexes for Hipness/Vivacity ($t_{913} = -3.406, p = .001$), Sophistication ($t_{922} = -2.456, p = .014$), and Ruggedness ($t_{927} = 4.932, p = .000$). The women rated the perfume brands higher than did the men for Hipness/Vivacity and Sophistication, while

the men rated the brands higher than did the women for Ruggedness (*Hipness/Vivacity*: females: $M = 78.27$, $SD = 15.51$; males: $M = 74.78$, $SD = 15.43$; *Sophistication*: females: $M = 82.09$, $SD = 15.98$; males: $M = 79.50$, $SD = 16.06$; *Ruggedness*: males: $M = 66.52$, $SD = 19.99$; females: $M = 59.98$, $SD = 20.34$). No significant differences were found between the sexes for Success, Sincerity or Professionalism.

Finally, for the brands of soft drinks, significant differences between the sexes were found only for Ruggedness ($t_{940} = 5.786$, $p = .000$); the men rated the brands higher than the women for this dimension (males: $M = 65.44$, $SD = 17.11$; females: $M = 58.74$, $SD = 18.34$).

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The principal objective of this study was to develop an exploratory investigation of the dimensions of brand personality in Mexico. In function of these objectives, two hypotheses were made that were reviewed and corroborated with the results found in this study. Hypotheses H_1 and H_2 were partially confirmed. In hypothesis H_1 it was hypothesized that brand personality in Mexico would be identified by at least five dimensions similar to those established in other cultures, and that those would be more similar to those that Aaker (1997) originally proposed, compared with those found in other countries. Seven dimensions of brand personality were extracted in this study. Although the factor loading of the brand personality traits in this sample differed from other samples and in particular from Aaker's study (1997) due to differences in culture and language, three of the brand personality dimensions were very similar to Aaker's findings (1997): Sincerity, Sophistication, and Ruggedness. Nevertheless, other dimensions that were found in this study, such as Success, Hipness/Vivacity, Domesticity/Emotionality and Professionalism, were found to carry more specific cultural meanings.

Although the dimension Competence remained constant in all of the countries investigated except in the latest studies conducted in Venezuela (Pirela, Villavicencio, and Saavedra, 2004) and in Spain (Aaker, Benet-Martinez, and Garolera, 2001), in this study three of the personality traits (hardworking, technical, and corporate) that made up Competence in Aaker's study (1997) formed a new dimension that I called Professionalism. Additionally, the personality traits that made up the dimension Success in this study coincided with personality traits that were part of the dimensions Excitement and Competence in Aaker's study (1997). For Hipness/Vivacity, personality traits were found that coincided with four of the traits that made up the dimension Excitement in Aaker's study (1997). Thus, the dimensions Success and Hipness/Vivacity could correspond with Aaker's dimension Excitement. Finally, the dimension Domesticity/Emotionality was made up of three personality traits that correspond with Aaker's Sincerity dimension and one trait each from Aaker's Sophistication and Ruggedness dimensions. The personality dimensions found in this study also presented coincidences with the studies in Japan and Spain (Aaker, Benet-Martinez, and Garolera, 2001) with Sincerity and Sophistication and with the study in Korea (Lee and Oh, 2006) with Excitement/Sophistication, Sincerity, and Ruggedness. In addition, coincidences were also found with the study in Mexico (Alvarez-Ortiz and Harris, 2002) with Sincerity and Sophistication and with that in Venezuela (Barrios and Massa, 1999) with Sophistication and Success. Coincidences were also found with the most recent study in Venezuela (Pirela, Villavicencio, and Saavedra, 2004) with Sincerity and Ruggedness. With respect to the study of Koebel and Ladwein (1999) in France, the results of this study did not find any coincidence with the French dimensions. These results imply that a set of brand personality dimensions such as Sophistication, Sincerity and Ruggedness is common to Mexico, the United States and Korea, although the traits that make up each dimension differ with respect to the original studies. Thus the brand personality dimensions that were found in this study were more similar to those that Aaker originally proposed, compared with the dimensions found in other countries. In addition, all of these differences in the brand personality dimensions supported the Aaker, Benet-Martinez, and Garolera (2001) study, in which they suggested that the symbolic aspects associated with a brand, such as brand personality, tended to vary in different cultures.

With respect to hypothesis H₂ it was expected that at least one brand personality dimension would be related to gender (masculine and feminine traits) as was true for the study conducted in Mexico (Alvarez-Ortiz and Harris, 2002), in which they found a dimension with masculine and feminine traits, which they called Gender. However, contrary to expectations, in this study the feminine and masculine traits were not as accentuated in the personality dimensions. The results showed that the brands were not perceived only as traditionally masculine or feminine, but instead I intuit that there are different types of masculinity and femininity. Perhaps it was due to the characteristics of the sample, students of a high socioeconomic class that is distanced from Mexico's lower socioeconomic class. The consumers in this study did not perceive the brands as simply feminine, but instead perceived two different types of femininity. One type is the woman who represents elegance and glamour, and is upper class, Western and feminine. This profile can be inferred as the one that the students from this study identified with because of their high socioeconomic status. On the other hand, they perceived some brands with a different type of femininity: the woman who is affectionate, friendly, provincial, emotional, and family-oriented, or in other words, the woman who in Mexico is called a *ranchera* (small-town, country bumpkin) and who is represented by a large part of the population, perhaps the type of woman who represents a socioeconomic class that is uneducated or from past generations such as those of their mothers or grandmothers. As for masculinity, it was perceived as rugged and strong, represented by the personality dimension Ruggedness. And perhaps in this dimension we can glimpse another type of man, the man who is professional, corporate, and hardworking, and who has technical knowledge. In addition, when a factorial analysis for the category of think products was carried out, it was found that the feminine trait was included with the traits that explain the Domesticity/Emotionality factor and not with those that explain the Sophistication factor. The masculine trait was included with those that explain the Ruggedness and Professionalism dimension. Perhaps for think products, young people tended to perceive masculine brands together with other traits related to ruggedness and professionalism while perceiving feminine brands as continuing to be part of the domestic and family realm. Without a doubt, although gender will always form part of the personalities of brands, and especially in Latin American cultures, in which gender roles are still very traditional, the meaning associated with brands differs depending on the samples used, the types of products and the historical moment.

As brand personality includes characteristics such as sex, age, and socioeconomic class, another of the specific objectives of this investigation was to analyze the differences between men and women in their perception of brands. As a function of the traditional gender stereotypes of the Mexican culture, it was hypothesized in hypothesis 3 that independent of the product category, men would tend to perceive brands as having traits that are markedly more masculine, such as Ruggedness and Competence, compared with women, who would tend to perceive brands with traits that are more feminine, such as Sincerity and Sophistication. In this study, the hypothesis was confirmed partially. The results showed that the women rated the brands higher than did the men for Success and Hipness/Vivacity. However, men perceived the brands as more rugged and professional, as we expected, and more domestic/emotional than did the women. For the brands of laptops, the men rated the brands as more sophisticated, domestic/emotional and rugged. For the brands of shampoo, the women scored the shampoo brands higher than did the men for Success and Hipness/Vivacity. On the other hand, the men rated the shampoo brands higher than did the women for Ruggedness and Professionalism. For the brands of perfume, the women rated the brands higher for Hipness/Vivacity and Sophistication, while the men rated the brands higher than did the women for Ruggedness. Finally, for the brands of soft drinks, the men rated the brands higher than did the women for Ruggedness. As we can confirm, in all of the product categories in general, the men tended to perceive the brands as more rugged and professional (competent in Aaker's study); however, the women scored the brands higher than did men for Success, Hipness/Vivacity and Sophistication. Perhaps the differences between the men and the women in their perception of the brands are reflecting traditional gender roles among them that they are also projecting onto the brands.

Theoretical Contributions and Managerial Implications

Similar to the “Big Five” model of human personality (Goldberg, 1990; McCrae and John, 1992), in this study it was hypothesized that brand personality would be measured along five dimensions that, following Aaker (1997), uniquely applied to consumers’ characterization of brands. However, recent research has established the structural robustness of the “Big Seven” model of human personality across samples and targets (Benet and Waller, 1997). Although the “Big Five” model has been advocated as a basic paradigm for personality description and assessment (McCrae and John, 1992), the utility and comprehensiveness of the “Big Five” has recently been challenged (see Benet and Waller, 1995; Block, 1995). Benet and Waller (1997) demonstrated that the “Big Seven” were cross-culturally and cross-linguistically robust personality dimensions that are were subsumable by the “Big Five.” This further evidence for the “Big Seven” factor model suggests that we probably need to reinterpret the “Big Five” brand dimensions toward a “Big Seven” model. Perhaps the seven factors found in this investigation were related to the effects of time, given that this study was conducted approximately twelve years after Aaker’s (1997) original study and seven years after the study conducted in Mexico. Without a doubt, this is sufficient time for the change of the characteristics of the consumer and of the market, buying preferences and perception of brands due to new marketing strategies. Moreover, there are differences between this study and others with respect to the sample, the product categories, and the brands used, which could explain these results.

The results found with respect to the validation of the brand personality scale suggest that the appearance of different personality traits in dimensions common to Aaker’s original study (1997) correspond to each other to the degree that those traits contain a universal meaning in relation to the specifics of each culture. The five dimensions of Aaker’s (1997) original model cannot be generalized to other cultures, as Aaker, Benet-Martinez, and Garolera (2001) had already proposed, since the different brand personality dimensions reflect the meaning that is given to them through marketing strategies that may be different from the values of each culture. In the case of the Mexican consumers of the sample in this study, many have direct contact with U.S. television and with U.S. brands and products, which could explain the coincidence with many U.S. personality dimensions, as opposed to those of other countries. Mexican consumers perceive and mentally organize the meaning of brands differently in their culture; nevertheless, the influence of the geographical proximity remains latent. Even so, the model is useful to define similarities between personality dimensions in an environment of globalization and those of a specific culture (Pirela, Villavicencio, and Saavedra, 2004). The traits that are common to those found in Aaker’s model (1997) can be grouped in different dimensions for each culture, in this way explaining the dimensions particular to each cultural reality. Moreover, the scale created to measure brand personality is sufficiently reliable, valid and robust to be used to obtain consistent results for each type of target population and to select different products and brands.

The high internal consistency and reliability that was found in each of the brand personality dimensions, those with the most explained variance being Success, Hipness/Vivacity, Sophistication and Sincerity, provide evidence that the personality traits surrounding these dimensions could help explain the personality of young Mexicans. As was pointed out in this study, brand personality is an important topic in marketing research, and the measure of brand personality should be seen as a first empirical contribution in this area. The results found in this study also represent important implications in the areas of marketing and management; since they permit us to conclude that it is valid to use a more direct approximation of the original methodology of Aaker (1997) by using a scale that measures brand personality. For organizations, using a scale to measure brand personality allows them to know quickly, directly, and inexpensively the perception that consumers have about brands and allows them to monitor changes in brand personality over time in order to be able to better define positioning strategies.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has limitations; the first concerns the sample. Although the intention was to sample a diverse pool of young Mexican college students, for convenience I was able to sample students from only one university. Mexico is a country with many public and private universities, and thus future research should compare these findings with personality taxonomies from other institutions or Mexican states. Although the sample could be a limit in this study (we cannot generalize the results), the use of students for the sample was appropriate for several reasons. The fact is that students are also consumers, and so are part of the general consuming public. Moreover, because of their homogeneity, student samples are often preferred to the general population, as they tend to reduce the effects of other external factors. So it was determined that a student sample was an appropriate and valid population for the study. Moreover, the sample was appropriate because this study used the brands that the same students had selected in a previous survey. In addition, the sample represents an important sector of the segment of young Mexicans with a high socioeconomic level.

Another limitation of the study is that only 12 brands were used; it would be interesting to use other brands to make comparisons with their different competitors. In addition, since in this study an exhaustive study about the brands used was not conducted, it would be recommendable to analyze the brands that are going to be used in a future study and the vision of the company with respect to the brands, or to analyze previous studies that have carried out comparisons of brand personality dimensions between competitors' brands.

The differences found in the perception that the men and the women in this study have of the brands indicates that additional research is needed in order to investigate how gender stereotypes could affect how men and women perceive brands. Future research might consider the possibility of using the customers' personality as a variable that can be associated with brand personality, as well as studying how the dimensions of brand personality explain brand loyalty, brand satisfaction, and brand preferences. Also, it would be interesting to analyze whether the brand personality envisioned by a company relates to the brand personality formed by consumers. It would also be interesting to assess customer satisfaction with respect to products' functional attributes and how these form a brand personality. In addition, it would be interesting to use Aaker's original methodology, as well as that used in Japan and Spain, in Mexico. Moreover, future research is needed to determine whether brand personality is different in various geographical and cultural contexts. As a final point, it would be important to study the process by which a brand personality is built, the most important factors in forming a personality impression, and the factors that allow the stability over time of that personality.

In conclusion, the results of the study suggest that a Mexican taxonomy of personality trait terms should include at least seven higher-order personality dimensions, and that future research is needed to verify the stability of brand personality dimensions for different brands and with other Mexican samples. Also, the possibility of using local Mexican brands and product categories could be helpful in improving the generalizability of results.

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