

Humanlike brands and metaphor: applications and consequences

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Abstract

Brand personality and brand relationships have both become important concepts in the branding literature, but there are some fundamental problems with the theory and research that supports the concepts. As such, the question that the thesis seeks to answer is whether the brand personality and brand relationship concepts have utility, or are cognitively successful theory, for understanding consumer perceptions. As a primarily conceptual thesis, this work examines the brand personality and relationship concepts, and finds several problems in the literature; a grey area regarding whether the concepts are metaphoric or descriptive of a perceptual reality for consumers (they actually think of brands as humanlike), ambiguous conceptualisation, the blurring of the concepts with other concepts, as well as limited empirical support.

For the latter point, research is used to examine whether consumers perceive brands as humanlike, and the validity of the foundational scale for most brand personality research is examined. As a result of the reviews and research, the thesis concludes that the concepts of brand personality and brand relationships present a poor direction for the development of brand research and theory. The paper concludes with two directions that may better serve to understand the perceptions of consumers; user imagery, and the concept of the firm. As such the thesis contributes to brand theory through clarification of important brand concepts, and uses the clarification as a basis for proposing new directions for research and theory.

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I would like to thank both of my supervisors, Associate Professor Rob Aitken and Dr. Shelagh Ferguson, for standing by me in the journey towards a Master's and PhD. In particular, the work I have undertaken is controversial, and they have been supportive of me holding to a difficult course. I would particularly like to thank Rob for his contribution to making some controversial views less incendiary, as this undoubtedly helped with publication of my work. I would also like to thank my research collaborator, Sarah Forbes for her positive contribution to my work. In addition, I would also like to thank Sarah, as well as Gunn Kro, for moral support throughout the whole PhD. Finally, I would like to thank Rani Rajasekeran for her patience and support in the last months before submission of this PhD.

Declaration

Several of the papers included in this thesis, including papers submitted, under review and accepted for publication include more than one author on the paper. In all but one case, the other authors were my PhD thesis supervisors, and their contributions to the papers were those that would be expected from thesis supervisors, such as advice and proofreading, and help with research limited to administration roles (e.g. helping manage participants during the research process).

The one exception is the paper 'Rock Personality: Validity of a Brand Personality Scale', which is currently under review at the journal Marketing Theory. In this case, some of the work was undertaken by Sarah Forbes, a fellow PhD student at University of Otago. The paper in question includes a section detailing the research undertaken for the paper, and Sarah undertook the quantitative analysis of the research results, and compiled the results into tables. In addition, Sarah helped in the administration of the research itself, for example assisting in recruitment of participants. As a named author on the paper, Sarah also assisted by giving advice and proofreading the work.

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List of Abbreviations

BPFM: Brand Personality Five Factor Model

BP: Brand Personality

Chapter 1: Introduction

The concepts of brand personality and brand relationships are important. For example, if using citation counts as a proxy for importance (see table 5), there can be little doubt that the concepts are viewed as key brand concepts by many brand theorists, and they may also be seen as important in relation to the overall field of academic marketing. In light of the importance of the concepts, it is vital that they are built upon sound theoretical and empirical foundations and, building and extending upon my Master of Commerce thesis (Avis, 2008) this thesis presents a critical examination of these foundations.

This was not the original intention for this PhD. Having completed the Master of Commerce, the intention was to publish two or three papers based upon the Master's thesis, whilst moving on to an examination of the potential for evolutionary psychology to inform the marketing discipline for my PhD (Saad & Gill, 2000). However, publishing papers from the Master's thesis proved to be problematic. For example, the first paper submission from my Masters received a desk rejection which included a perplexing comment that Fournier's (1998) paper on brand relationships was based upon metaphor, which was not my understanding of the paper. In other papers I submitted, I found reviewers were asking for me to cover subject material 'x' or 'y' in addition to the materials already included in the paper. Discussion of brand relationships was a recurring theme in reviews. As such, the return to the subject of brand personality, and the inclusion of brand relationships in the thesis, were motivated by a sense that the work I had begun in the Master of Commerce thesis was still incomplete.

Another problem apparent in seeking to publish from the Masters was the difficulty of converting the Masters into papers, and this was also highlighted in reviews. Whilst the whole of the Masters offered a coherent position, it was difficult to take the parts and convert them into stand-alone

papers that would survive the review process. To overcome these problems, this thesis was written as papers for publication from the outset, but also with a view that the papers should create a coherent whole of a thesis submission. The thesis presented here has achieved this aim, with the caveat that comments and requirements from reviewers, and the time taken to review articles, has meant some repetition of material, albeit with subtle differences in the framing of the material to meet the objectives of individual papers.

A key element of this thesis as a whole is its philosophical foundation of critical scientific realism (Niiniluoto, 1999). It is a philosophy which, as its name suggests, includes the perspective that all research and theory should be examined critically and the verisimilitude of theory should not be taken for granted. Hunt (2003) offers a good summary of key positions of critical scientific realism as follows:

1. 'A Fundamental tenet of modern-day, scientific realism is the classical realist view that the world exists independently of its being perceived.' (p286)
2. 'A fundamental tenet of scientific realism is that it is *critical*. That is, all knowledge claims must be critically evaluated and tested to determine the extent to which they do, or do not, truly correspond to the world.' (p292)

However, following this approach has meant that, when submitted to journals, the reviews of the papers for this thesis have been 'bumpy'. For this reason, I have included all of the reviews for one paper in Appendix C to give a sense of the way this work has been received by reviewers. The reviews are typical of those received for my work. Although some reviewers are strongly supportive of my work, others take a far less positive outlook. In short, the position that I have taken can be seen as controversial.

1.2 The Papers

When taken together, the central thesis causing controversy is that I argue that the concepts and theory of brand personality and brand relationships are not cognitively successful, in other words that they are not true representations of reality (Niiniluoto, 1999). Whilst I do not explicitly frame all the papers in these terms, this is the underlying theme that runs through all of the work. I approach the question of the cognitive success of the brand personality and brand relationship concepts primarily through conceptual review, although research is also sometimes included to support these conceptual reviews. The approach to examining the brand personality and brand relationship concepts throughout the thesis can be summarised as:

1. Examination of the research methods and empirical evidence given as support for the concepts.
2. Clarifying the real issue of debate; that the validity of the concepts fundamentally hinges upon whether consumers see brands as humanlike entities.
3. The questionable understanding of the brand with regard to humanlike brand theory.

Chapter 1 commences with a paper which examines the contradictory foundations of brand personality and brand relationship theory (Avis, Aitken, & Ferguson, 2012), asking whether the theory is founded in metaphor or in a perceptual reality of consumers viewing brands as ‘humanlike’. Having identified that the theoretical foundations are mutually contradictory, the paper presents a framework for examination of brand personality and brand relationship theory, and the papers in Chapters 2 & 3 draw upon this framework. Chapter 2 is specifically an in-depth examination of animism and anthropomorphism theory in relation to the brand relationship, brand personality and brand concepts, but the examination does not find any plausible theoretical foundation for the ‘humanlike brand’. Chapter 4 examines whether there is empirical support for

ordinary consumers *ordinarily* perceiving brands as humanlike, concluding that the empirical evidence is unconvincing.

Chapter 5 (Avis, 2012) is a conceptual paper which continues to examine the coherence of theory but also scrutinises the validity and utility of factor models used to research brand personality. The paper achieves multiple aims; raising doubts about the validity of a large body of empirical evidence that supports brand personality, identifying the ambiguities in the conceptualisation of brand personality, and providing further argument raising questions about the notion that consumers perceive brands as humanlike. Chapter 6 is closely related to Chapter 5, in that the intention of the research of the paper was to examine the validity of factor research methods applied to brand personality. In this case, the research involves applying Aaker's (1997) brand personality scale methodology to photographs of rocks, and demonstrating that the methodology can create brand personality for a non-brand entity. It is research which raises questions about the empirical evidence provided in support of the brand personality concept; the majority of brand personality research uses the scale.

The final chapter reports on research investigating the proposition that brand personification, one of the foundations of brand personality and brand relationship theory, generates user imagery. However, on commencing the research, it became apparent that participants appeared to be primarily describing category associations rather than brand associations, reflecting one of the critiques of brand personality factor models presented in Chapter 4. This final chapter notes the emphasis placed upon brand associations in the consumer behaviour literature, and proposes that category associations have been wrongly side-lined as an influence on consumer behaviour. Again, it is a paper that presents some problems with current theory and, in this case, the relative emphasis on the importance of the brand versus category associations.

A further two papers are included in the appendices, and these play a supporting role for the papers in the main chapters. Appendix A is a conference paper which examines the problems associated with variable definitions of the brand (Avis, 2009), and highlights that the variability of definition creates problems in the development of research and theory. Although this thesis is focused on the brand personality and brand relationship concepts, the problems surrounding the definition and conceptualisation of the brand are ‘lurking’ as a background to the problems in the focal concepts and questions of brand definition are a recurring theme in the thesis as a whole. Appendix B plays a different kind of supporting role. Although some of the papers in the thesis have not been finally accepted for publication, many of the arguments made in these papers have already been peer reviewed in a conference paper (Avis, 2011). In addition, the conference paper is also cited in later work to introduce some key points (e.g. see Chapter 4), and is therefore used as direct support for later work.

1.3 Contribution

The overall conclusion is that brand personality and brand relationship concepts and theory are not cognitively successful. That is, they are not coherent and do not describe the reality of consumer perceptions. Nevertheless, it is apparent that; (1) there is on-going development of research and theory in support of these concepts and, (2) theories relating to the concepts are included in text books on brands/branding (e.g. de Chernatony, McDonald, & Wallace, 2010) and are therefore taught as a part of studies of brands/branding, while (3) as a result, the theory of the concepts is undoubtedly percolating into marketing practice. If the conclusions of this thesis are accepted, the continuing interest in the brand personality and brand relationship concepts is misdirected and marketing academics, students and practitioners should redirect their interest to theory and concepts with greater utility and verisimilitude (Niiniluoto, 1999). The review of the brand personality and brand relationship concepts finds that it is apparent that there are concepts which might better

represent the reality of consumer perceptions; the firm and user-imagery. It is proposed that the firm and user-imagery concepts have potential for greater cognitive success, and the redirection of attention to these concepts is the first contribution of this thesis.

The second contribution of the thesis is to commence the examination of the brand concept; Avis and Aitken (2012) provides two contributions; (1) the paper highlights a problem in brand research as well as providing a potential solution. Secondly, the paper contributes to consumer behaviour theory, by redirecting research and theory towards examination of the role of category perceptions in consumer behaviour. Also, in highlighting the role of the brand in the questions surrounding brand personality and brand relationship theory, the work of this thesis exposes the ambiguity of a concept that appears to be beyond any agreed definition (Brodie & de Chernatony, 2009). Avis (2009) is a brief and limited examination of the brand concept and several chapters of this thesis also consider the nature of the brand concept. In its totality, the thesis raises more questions than answers about the nature and use of the brand concept. However, identification of questions represents an important starting point for enquiry, and interesting or challenging questions therefore represent a contribution in their own right. As such, the concluding part of this thesis will briefly summarise some of the questions which might precipitate a critical examination of the brand concept.

The final contribution is best explained by an anecdote. I recently gave a seminar on the work that is included in this thesis and, following the presentation, had a worrying conversation. Our discussion was about the controversial nature of the thesis and the publication of work from the thesis. The individual talking with me was an experienced marketing academic from the United States, and discussed how, in the United States, I would never have been allowed to proceed with such a controversial and critical thesis and expressed surprise that I had managed to publish any work. Apparently, such a critical approach was for 'established' academics, rather than new

researchers.

The viewpoint that critical work should only come from ‘established’ researchers can be seen as a variant of the logical fallacy of *argumentum ad verecundiam* (Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1987). According to this fallacy it is not the nature of the argument, evidence and theory that determines validity, but the status of the person presenting the work. It is a worrying point of view and, if it is at all representative of the views of many, suggests that perfectly valid critical approaches are not being pursued, or are perhaps even being blocked. As such, the second contribution of this thesis is that it can serve as a template and an encouragement for new researchers to present robust critiques. Critical scientific realism provides the template, and it is hoped that this thesis provides the encouragement. In particular, it is possible to develop a thesis that critiques established theory and, although challenging, it is possible to publish critical work.

1.4 Status of Papers

Despite the controversy over this work, some of the papers included in the thesis are now published, or accepted for publication. Other papers are still going through review, with some at revisions stage. Although these latter papers still need work, they have been accepted as being worthy of publication in principle and, as discussed earlier, a peer reviewed conference paper supports many of the key points. The current status of all the papers is given in table 1.

It may be noted that several of the papers have multiple authors, and their roles are indicated in the declaration at the start of the thesis. There is one area of thesis where the work is clearly not my own, which is in the paper ‘Rock Personality: Validity of a Brand Personality Scale’. The data analysis is undertaken by Sarah Forbes, a fellow PhD student. However, the remainder of the work is my own work.

In structuring the PhD as papers, there is a potential problem in the formatting of the PhD, which is the question of how to identify tables, figures and appendices, as well as the numbering of sections. For tables and figures, these can be renumbered for the thesis without any problems of structure. For paper appendices, it makes more sense that they remain ‘attached’ to the paper rather than being moved to the general PhD appendix, as this would be inconvenient for reviewing. Where appendices are included in the main body of the PhD they are identified as ‘Paper Appendix [x]’ to delineate them from the general appendices.

Furthermore, all of the papers also include a ‘preamble’ which is intended to introduce each paper, and to link the papers to the overall themes of the thesis. However, as the PhD progresses, it is hoped that the central themes will in any case be evident.

Table 1: Status of Papers at time of submission

| Status | Journal | Title |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| Accepted | ANZMAC conference | The problems with brand definition (Avis, 2009), included as appendix A |
| Published | Australasian Marketing Journal | Brand Personality Factor Based Models: A Critical Review (Avis, 2012) |
| Accepted | ACR Asia Pacific | Anthropomorphism and Animism Theory in Branding (Avis, 2011), included as appendix B |
| Accepted | ACR Asia Pacific | Category Theory and Confusion (Avis & Aitken, 2012) |
| Published | Marketing Theory | Brand relationship and personality theory: metaphor or consumer perceptual reality? (Avis, et al., 2012) |
| 3 rd Revision | Journal of Marketing Management | Brand Personality, Brand Relationships and Humanlike Brand Perceptions |
| 1 st Revision | Marketing Theory | Rock personality: Validity of a brand personality scale |
| Submitted | Psychology and Marketing | Animism and Anthropomorphism and Humanlike Brands |

Chapter 2: Brand relationship and personality theory: metaphor or consumer perceptual reality? (Avis et al., 2012)

2.1 Preamble

This paper is given as the first of the papers as, in some respects, it is similar to a literature review that leads many traditional PhDs, and it also frames some of the questions that are answered by later papers. The paper was a direct response to an editor's comment that brand personality and brand relationships were just metaphors. This paper examines this view, and finds that there is considerable confusion in the literature between what exactly brand personality and brand relationships are founded upon. The central question in the paper is whether brands are seen as quasi-humanlike entities by consumers or whether the brand personality and brand relationship concepts are metaphors for researchers.

One of the reviewers was reluctant to accept that these might be entirely different theoretical foundations, and the paper ended up far more complex than intended as a response to this reviewer. As a result, section 2.4 includes considerable discussion of why the difference in perspectives matter, including having to detail my philosophical position as part of the discourse. This might be seen as unusual, and again reflects the problems encountered in publishing critical work. It also led to inclusion of less material on the substantive issues of the paper (e.g. further discussions of illustrative examples), which was disappointing. However, in terms of the thesis as a whole, it outlines my philosophical position, and the application of the philosophy is also apparent in later work.

2.2 Introduction

Brand personality and brand relationship theory are important elements of branding theory, and an extensive body of literature has been devoted to the examination of the concepts (see Paper Appendix A). Despite the many considerations and advances in the study of these concepts, this paper identifies an underlying disagreement as to the foundations of brand personality and brand relationship theory. The contention of the paper is that there are three different and mutually incompatible theoretical foundations for brand personality and brand relationship theory, and that there is a lack of discussion and debate regarding the validity of each of the foundations.

Founded in the critical realism of Niiniluoto (1999), the paper begins by identifying that both brand personality and brand relationships are proposed as influences upon consumer behaviour, and that the theoretical foundation offer different explanations for the behaviour. The nature of the disagreement between theorists on the foundations of their theory will then be discussed, as well as some fundamental confusion over the application of the theory. In light of the incompatibility between the foundational theories, and the lack of discussion and debate on the relative merits of the foundations, this paper provides a framework to better understand the issues and to constructively resolve the disagreements.

2.3 Background

The first mention of brands having personalities dates back to the 1950s (Gardner & Levy, 1955; also see Martineau, 1958 for store personality), as a novel metaphor for intangible brand attributes. Humanlike brand theory first appears in practitioner work (e.g. Blackston, 1993; S. H. M. King, 1973), but Aaker (1997) and Fournier (1998) were the first to explicitly introduce animism and anthropomorphism theory as an explanation for the humanlike brand. In addition, Aaker and

Fournier also imported theory and methodology from human psychology, with the implication that the animism and anthropomorphism of brands explained the relevance of the importation. Both articles are the most influential in their respective fields of brand personality and brand relationships, and their impact cannot be understated (see Paper Appendix C).

Aaker (1997) describes brand personality as ‘the human characteristics associated with a brand’ (p.347), and developed a scale to measure brand personality. The scale has been used widely in research on brands (Freling, Crosno, & Henard, 2010), and the method and theory has also been a foundation for the development of new measures of brand personality (e.g. Bosnjak, Bochmann, & Hufschmidt, 2007; Edith G. Smit, Emilie Van Den Berge, & Giep Franzen, 2003). Fournier’s case study research investigated the relationships that consumers had with brands, and proposed that relationships with brands were ‘valid at the level of lived experience [of consumers]’ (p.344). Fournier’s paper has served as an inspiration for a considerable body of research that has sought to extend (Payne, Storbacka, Frow, & Knox, 2009), refine (Hayes, Alford, Silver, & York, 2006) or add new perspectives to brand relationship theory (Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009).

Although Aaker (1997) and Fournier (1998) imported animism and anthropomorphism theory, neither author explicitly identifies the logical conclusion of the theories: that brands are normally perceived as animate humanlike entities. Guthrie (1993) defines animism as humans ‘attributing life to the nonliving’ and anthropomorphism as ‘attributing human characteristics to the nonhuman’ (p.52). If consumers see brands as animistic and anthropomorphic, the logical implication is that consumers *at least* perceive brands as something approximating living and/or humanlike entities (hereafter the *humanlike brand*). However, the nature and explanation of the humanlike entities that have been introduced into branding theory are at best general and at worst vague and ambiguous.

There are some exceptions, with Puzakova *et al* (2009) explicitly stating that the ‘fact that

consumers form strong relationships with brands suggests that individuals perceive these brands as complete humans' (p.413). Whether the humanlike brand is implicitly or explicitly defined, it is clear from the literature that the introduction of animism and anthropomorphism implies that brands are routinely being perceived as some kind of animate humanlike entities by consumers. Despite the introduction of theories of brands as humanlike entities, there also appears to be a contradictory perspective which sees the foundations of the theory rooted in metaphor/analogy. A review of the literature identified three different key foundations (discussed later):

1. The brand is purported to be perceived by consumers as a humanlike entity (hereafter the 'humanlike brand' perspective).
2. The concepts of brand personality and brand relationships are metaphors used by researchers to explain brand perceptions (hereafter the 'researcher metaphor' perspective).
3. Consumers use figurative language to describe brands, and this figurative language is captured in the brand relationship and brand personality concepts (hereafter the 'consumer metaphor' perspective).

The argument proposed in this paper is that the foundations are mutually incompatible, and that theorists have not engaged in discussion about the relative merits and validity of the different foundations. It is even possible to find examples of theorists including both foundation (1) and (2) in the same article (e.g. Fournier, 1998) despite their mutual incompatibility. The next section will present the philosophical foundation for the remainder of the article and identify the reasons for the incompatibility of the three foundations.

2.4 Philosophical foundations and incompatibility

The paper is founded in the critical realism of Niiniluoto (1999), whose concept of verisimilitude is that theory needs to be a description of reality, and that observations, measurements and experience must interact with that reality (see Figure 1). He argues that a critical scientific realist sees theories as:

[...] attempts to reveal the true nature of reality even beyond the limits of empirical observation. A theory should be *cognitively successful* in the sense that the theoretical entities it postulates really exist and the lawlike descriptions of these entities are true. *Thus the basic aim of science for a realist is true information about reality.* (p.167)

In the case of both brand personality and brand relationship literature, the theories underpinning the concepts address brand perceptions. Niiniluoto (1999) recognises that people have their own understanding of the world and that this phenomenology may be the subject of scientific enquiry, provided ‘it is accepted that there is actually a mind independent reality’ (p.209).

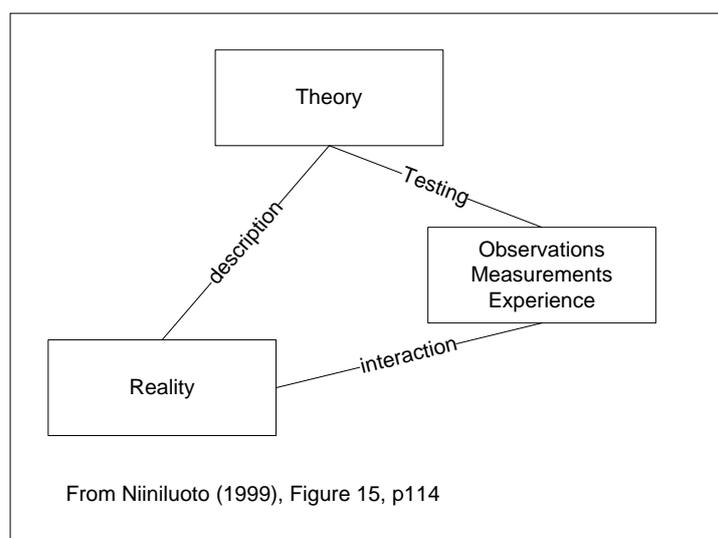


Figure 1: The interaction of reality, theory and empirical evidence

Dennet (1993) approaches phenomenology from a pragmatic perspective, saying that ‘if mental events are not among the data of science, this does not mean that we cannot study them scientifically’ (p.71). He compares understanding the perceptions of people with understanding a work of fiction; in both cases they may not be ‘real’ worlds, but we can still study both worlds and amass objective facts about the perceptions. In summary, consumer perceptions are mental events that can be examined scientifically, and entities that are posited in the mind of consumers must be real. Theory must describe the reality of these consumer perceptions, and should be supported with empirical evidence.

For both brand relationship and brand personality concepts, the supporting theory proposes that the perceptions of brand personality/relationships are an influence on actual consumer behaviour. For example, Aaker (1997) suggest that her brand personality scale can be used by marketing practitioners to examine and benchmark the personality of their brands in order to understand consumer preferences. Fournier (1998) likewise proposes that her brand relationship framework has managerial significance, and suggests that consumer brand relationship quality is a determinant of whether consumers will purchase a particular brand. In another example, Keller (1998) links brand personality and brand relationships, saying that the ‘right personality can result in a consumer feeling that the brand is relevant’ and that they ‘may be more willing to invest in a relationship or even develop a “friendship” with a brand.’ (p.97)

It is apparent that, when reading the brand personality and brand relationship literature, there is a perception of brands by consumers *that influence their actual* behaviour (e.g. see Wee, 2004). The question that arises from this is to ask *exactly* what might be influencing their behaviour. As such, theoretical explanations must explain how it is that the concepts are relevant in providing explanations of why consumer *a* might choose brand *x*, and consumer *b* choose brand *y*. If they

cannot help to explain this consumer behaviour, then it is not clear what their purpose might be. In the following sub-sections, each of the foundations will be examined, and the incompatibilities in the three foundations identified.

2.4.1 Humanlike brand

In line with Dennet (1993), if consumers actually do perceive brands as humanlike entities, then this means that the humanlike brand can be described as the labelling of the *actual* perceptions of consumers with descriptive titles. In other words, consumers ordinarily go about their daily lives thinking of brands as humanlike entities that have personalities like humans, and that they might have relationships with these perceived entities as they do with humans. These perceptions of brands as humanlike entities are *realities* in the mind of consumers.

2.4.2 Researcher metaphor

The principle of the researcher metaphor is explained by Fillis and Rentschler (2008), who describe the use of metaphor in science having a purpose to ‘stimulate creative thinking and practice by connecting two or more spheres which may previously have never been linked either directly or indirectly’ (p.498). From this perspective it is *not* that consumers have *real* perceptions of brands as humanlike entities but that theorists are using metaphors of personalities and relationships to help *them* (the researchers) understand the way that consumers perceive the world.

The premise of the researcher metaphor perspective is that the concepts of human personality and human relationships might be analogous to the perceptions of brand characteristics, or analogous to human relationships, and this is clearly the perspective taken by Fournier (Fournier & Yao, 1997) in an early article on brand relationships. Indeed, an analysis of the brand personality metaphor by

Capelli and Jolibert (2009) is premised upon the principle that brand personality is a researcher metaphor.

2.4.3 Consumer metaphor

Although there appears to be little explicit discussion of this foundation, Yoon *et al* (2006) summarise the principles, suggesting that the use of human descriptors for brands may be a pragmatic convenience to express themselves. Likewise, Tsoukas (1991) identifies, in 'lay discourse, metaphors constitute an economical way of relaying primarily experiential information in a vivid manner' (p.567). Although anthropomorphic language is commonplace (Regier, 2006), this is not to suggest that consumers are actually thinking of brands as they do humans, but rather that necessity forces them to utilise language from a familiar domain to better express themselves (D. C. Dennett, 2007, pp.254-5).

2.4.4 The incompatibilities

The argument of this paper is that the metaphor foundations and humanlike brand foundation are mutually incompatible, presenting a one or the other choice for theorists. Although there *could* be arguments about the prevalence of humanlike brand perceptions, whether researchers are proposing that consumers ordinarily think of brands as humanlike entities is a simple 'yes' or 'no' answer. If the answer is 'yes' then their perspective must be the humanlike brand theory, and if the answer is 'no' then their perspective must be a metaphor perspective.

As was discussed in the introduction, some theorists manage to combine the humanlike brand theory with discussions of the concepts in terms of metaphor and analogy. It could be claimed that the humanlike brand perspective might be compatible with the researcher metaphor perspective, as

the perceptions of the humanlike brand are not *exactly* the same as perceptions of real people. As such, it could be argued that the brand personality and brand relationship theories are therefore still metaphors or analogies. However, in the case of Fournier (1998), this does not seem to be the intended meaning, when Fournier says that ‘Ultimately, metaphors [referring to brand relationship theory] must be judged by the depth and breadth of the thoughts they spark’ (p.368).

In comparison, Pinder and Bourgeois (1982) give the example of the use of a ‘garbage can’ metaphor used in administrative science, which is used to describe organisational decision making processes (e.g. filing and dumping decisions). As Pinder and Bourgeois note, organisations are not garbage cans, and there is no suggestion in any discourse that somehow managers have *real* perceptions of a garbage can as part of their decision making process. Using the language of Fournier (1998), it is a metaphor to spark thoughts: it is not positing a *real* entity in the minds of managers. Likewise, if consumers are using human metaphor as a convenient way of expressing their brand perceptions, this is different from their actually thinking of brands as humanlike entities. For example, Gibbs (1984) illustrates the point with a description of ‘*cigarettes are time bombs*’ and points out that this does not literally mean that the person thinks that cigarettes are actually time bombs.

The incompatibility between the foundations can be illustrated by the way in which each foundation might be evaluated and validated. In the case of the humanlike brand, it is necessary that researchers and theorists provide empirical evidence that they are proposing a *real* entity as perceived in the minds of consumers. If brands are indeed perceived as humanlike, then the researcher metaphor perspective can no longer be justified, as the theory needs to explain *actual* consumer perceptions of humanlike brands. Likewise, for the consumer metaphor perspective, actual perceptions of humanlike brands would mean that consumers (from their own point of view) are being literal, not figurative/metaphoric if they describe brands as if they were humanlike.

The evaluation of the researcher metaphor perspective requires that the metaphor is providing useful heuristic insights into our understanding of brands and that there is significant correspondence (or isomorphism) between the domains of humans and brands, and that the points of similarity and difference are identified (J. Cornelissen, 2003). The consumer metaphor perspective would require an explanation of why the humanlike figurative metaphors used by consumers might influence their behaviour, rather than being convenient expressions of their thoughts. Researchers would need to identify the consumer's use of metaphorical discourse (e.g. see Group, 2007), and then undertake analysis of the discourse (e.g. see Cameron et al., 2009).

However, if brands are actually perceived as humanlike, there is no need for metaphor to 'spark thoughts', or metaphoric discourse analysis, but instead a need for observation and theory development to explain the actual perceptions. Returning to the commencement of the argument, the fundamental question is whether consumers actually perceive brands as humanlike, and this is a yes/no answer. If the answer is 'yes', then metaphor perspectives become irrelevant, as theory must explain 'literally true' humanlike brand entities in the minds of consumers (for a parallel of the three foundations, see D. C. Dennett, 2007, p252, for discussion of 'literally true', 'metaphorically true', 'true-under-an-imposed-interpretation').

2.5 Literature review: brand personality and brand relationships

Following an informal literature review, a formal literature review was undertaken and was directed at finding a sample of papers that explicitly took a position on the humanlike brand or researcher metaphor perspective (the consumer metaphor perspective emerged from reviews of the articles). The formal review utilised ISI Web of Science (ISI), Scopus and Google Scholar (GS) for citation reviews and text searches, with Meho and Yang (2007) finding that Scopus has a greater breadth of

titles indexed, but less overall numbers of articles than ISI, and that GS has the greatest breadth (albeit with lower quality of materials).

In line with the findings of the informal review, keywords such as ‘metaphor’ and ‘animism’ (see Paper Appendix B for details of the searches) were used to identify articles that explicitly discussed either metaphor/analogy or the humanlike brand in relation to brand personality and brand relationships. The articles returned from the searches were 8 for ISI, 130 for Scopus, and 986 from GS. From a pragmatic point of view, the Scopus search returned a reasonable number of articles for a formal analysis, but it was notable that some key articles found in informal reviews were not included in the Scopus results.

As such, the paper presents an analysis and classification of the literature from the Scopus search as a convenience sample to illustrate the variation in the views on theory foundation, but also uses a broader range of literature to illustrate the differing views on the theoretical foundations of brand personality and brand relationships.

2.5.1 Scopus results:

Although the search was targeted at finding discussions related to the researcher metaphor and humanlike brand foundations, the search found many articles which either were not applicable (e.g. no relevant content, minimal discourse on brand personality and brand relationships, or unobtainable) or offered no firm position on the underlying theory. For example, a number of results returned were due to key words being found in the references section of articles (e.g. Caprara, Barbaranelli, & Guido, 2001 produced 'false positives').

From a total of 130 articles that were examined, analysis found 10 explicitly humanlike brand

interpretations, 35 that used the researcher metaphor and 9 papers that combine both perspectives. A further 32 articles were classified as ‘unclear’ as they gave no obvious indication of perspective, though some of these might have implied the consumer metaphor. The remainder of the articles were rejected as not applicable. The classifications of articles as ‘unclear’ were based on the lack of an explicit perspective on metaphor or animism / anthropomorphism. An example of discourse from an article that *may* be the consumer metaphor perspective is given below (also see Musante, Bojanic, & Zhang, 2008; Yongjun Sung, Kim, & Jung, 2010):

‘Evidence suggests that brands do indeed possess personalities – that is, research respondents have been able to ascribe personality characteristics to brands (Aaker, 1997; Venable et al., 2005). Critically, to the extent that brands develop unique personalities, they can be differentiated in the consumers’ minds and accordingly choice preferences can be affected [...].’ (Arora & Stoner, 2009, p.273)

One particularly troubling article to classify was that of Capelli and Jolibert (2009) who perform an analysis of whether brand personality is a valid metaphor, but nevertheless includes some confusions, as in the following quote; ‘Thus, brand anthropomorphization is the basis of the metaphor of brand personality’ (p.1085). In this case, the overall ‘spirit’ of the paper saw the paper classified under researcher metaphor, which highlights the element of subjectivity in the classifications.

However, overall, it was apparent that there is a divide between humanlike brand perspectives and metaphor perspectives, as well as a relatively large number that appear to combine them. None of the papers reviewed discussed the relative merits of the metaphor or the humanlike brand theories, indicating that there is currently no consideration of the problems in the incompatibility of the foundations. In the next sections, examples from the literature will be used to highlight instances of

the different foundations.

2.6 Aaker (1997) and Fournier (1998)

As has been discussed, both Aaker (1997) and Fournier (1998) have had a significant impact on their respective areas of theory development, as well as having explicitly introduced animism and anthropomorphism into branding. As such, their perspectives on animism and anthropomorphism are used to facilitate understanding of how the theories have been incorporated into branding theory.

An interesting starting point is provided by examining their early writing on brand personality and brand relationship theory in a jointly authored article (J. Aaker & Fournier, 1995). It is notable in this paper that neither of the authors introduces or considers theories of animism and anthropomorphism, and it appears that the two authors have slightly different perspectives on the humanlike brand. For example, Fournier says that:

‘Specifically, the brand is treated as *an active, contributing partner in the dyadic relationship that exists between the person and the brand.*’ (p.393, Fournier’s emphasis)

Whilst not explicitly proposing that brand perceptions are subject to animism and anthropomorphism, this might be interpreted as the idea that (somehow) consumers are treating brands as if they are animate humanlike entities capable of engaging in a relationship. By contrast, in a footnote, Aaker is very explicit that brand personality is a metaphor:

‘[...] a brand, by its nature of being an inanimate object, has a personality that is determined by different factors (e.g. attributes, benefits, price, user imagery). The term, brand personality, is not being used here in a strict or literal sense, but as a metaphor.’ (p.394)

Despite Aaker's assertion, and Fournier's equivocal statement, both authors were to later introduce the theories of animism and anthropomorphism in subsequent papers (J. Aaker, 1997; Fournier, 1998). In the case of Aaker's (1997) article, this is rather puzzling in light of the 1995 description of the brand as an inanimate object. As a support for brand personality theory, Aaker cites animism theory and also presents examples of brand anthropomorphism, such as the use of the Jolly Green Giant trade character. Whilst Aaker's discussion of the subjects is not extensive, it is sufficient to make a clear argument for consumer perceptions of humanlike brand entities. Despite such discussions, Aaker does not explain the introduction of such theory nor consider its logical conclusion; that consumers perceive brands as animate humanlike entities, and that the theory is, therefore, based upon brands as humanlike.

In contrast, Fournier (1998) offers an extensive discussion of animism and anthropomorphism, but presents an ambiguous consideration of whether the article is founded on the humanlike brand or the brand as a researcher metaphor. Fournier cites several theorists of animism from anthropology (e.g. Tylor, 1874), as well as citing branding research and theory in support of the idea of animate and anthropomorphised brands. Of particular interest, is Fournier's suggestion that:

'One way to legitimize the brand-as-partner is to highlight ways in which brands are animated, humanized, or somehow personalized.' (p.344)

[and]

'For the brand to serve as a legitimate relationship partner, it must surpass the personification qualification and actually behave as an active, contributing member of the dyad.' (p.345)

However, despite such assertions, and having presented an extensive discussion of brands as animate and anthropomorphic, Fournier appears to retreat from the position of brands as humanlike entities, and presents the following statements in Table 2 (emphasis added):

Table 2: Fournier’s (1998) metaphor quotations

| Excerpt | Page |
|---|------|
| ‘A brand may enjoy selected animistic properties, but it is not a vital entity . [...] The brand cannot act or think or feel – except through the actions of the manager that administers it.’ | 345 |
| ‘These works lend credibility to the idea of extending the partnership analogue into the brand domain as well.’ | 345 |
| ‘Ultimately, metaphors [referring to brand relationship theory] must be judged by the depth and breadth of the thoughts they spark.’ | 368 |

As such, Fournier appears to propose that brands are perceived as humanlike entities, but also that the article is discussing a metaphor or ‘analogue’. Consequently, it is unclear whether the foundation for relationship theory is the humanlike brand or a metaphor. As has been discussed, the two foundations have entirely different implications. This ambiguity *may* be partly responsible for the varying perspectives and ambiguities in subsequent theory development.

One point of interest is that, whilst there have been a number of critiques of Fournier’s work, these critiques focus on the role of brand relationships as metaphor. The work of O’Malley (O’Malley & Prothero, 2004; O’Malley & Tynan, 1999, 2000), for example, is of particular note given its underlying assumption that Fournier is indeed discussing a researcher metaphor rather than a perceptual ‘reality’. In each of these papers, the subject of animism and anthropomorphism of

brands is not discussed. In contrast, Cooke and Harris (2007) review the animism and anthropomorphism of brands, but still consider that the subject at issue is the validity of the relationship metaphor.

In the case of O'Malley's analyses, it is surprising that the issue of animism and anthropomorphism is not addressed, and, in the case of Cooke and Harris, it is interesting that there is no explicit discussion of the idea that the foundation of the theory *cannot* be both the humanlike brand *and* the researcher metaphor. In both cases, the contradictory foundations of brand relationship theory remain unresolved.

A further aspect of Fournier's ambiguity appears in a later discussion (Fournier, 2009), in which the author appears to retreat from humanlike brand theory:

'Much has also been written about the facility offered through brand anthropomorphization. This factor has proven itself to be a red herring, or a moot point in the simplest case. We do not need to qualify the 'human' quality of the brand character as a means of identifying the brand's relationship potential: all brands – anthropomorphized or not – 'act' through the device of marketing mix decisions, which allow relationship inferences to form.' (p.7)

At the end of this passage, Fournier cites Aaker, Fournier and Brasel (2004) and Aggarwal (2004) to support her assertion. However, it seems that this passage is a repudiation of the theory which Fournier introduced and while it is not clear whether Fournier entirely rejects humanlike brand theory, the passage is certainly not an endorsement of the theory. Having introduced the humanlike brand as a central foundation for brand relationship theory, such ambiguity is surprising and the position deserves more detailed explanation in the peer reviewed literature.

2.7 Practitioner views

Throughout much of the literature on brand personality and brand relationships, there are a number of practitioner citations offered as support for the concept of brand personality. For example, Freling and Forbes place considerable emphasis on practitioner views citing Carr (1996), Ogilvy (1985), Duboff (1986), Durgee (1988), and Plummer (1985). When reviewing the work of these practitioners, it is clear that there is a reliance on brand personality as a metaphor for understanding brands. In the highly cited work of Plummer (1985), for example, the conceptualisation of brand personality includes the output of projective methods such as description of brands as animals or countries, which appears to diverge from the humanlike brand into brand personality as a broader metaphor for intangible brand attributes. A good example of the use of personality as a metaphor comes from Ogilvy (1985), who says:

‘Image means personality. Products, like people, have personalities, and they can make or break them in the market place. The personality of a product is an amalgam of many things – its name, its packaging, its price, the style of its advertising, and, above all, the nature of the product itself.’ (p.14)

Other practitioners demonstrate similar metaphorical uses, such as Durgee (1988) who includes product attributes as part of the ‘essence’ or personality of a brand. Likewise, Duboff (1986) offers the definition of brand personality as the ‘client’s brand, product, or service [...] if it were a person’ (p.8). In a study of advertising creativity, Nov and Jones (2003) report how an advertising brief sees the provision of ‘guidelines as to issues such as style and tone, stating the “personality” of the brand to be communicated (e.g. groundbreaking, unconventional)’ (p.4). Once again, within the context of the paper, the idea of personality appears to be a metaphor rather than a perception of a humanlike brand.

Not all practitioners see brand personality and relationships as being metaphorical, with Blackston (1993) and King (1973) offering descriptions of brands that are clearly anthropomorphic and animistic. In another example of perceptions of the brand as humanlike, Carr (1996) offers the following description:

‘Any brand, just like any person, has a personality. [...] The customer and the brand have a relationship, an affinity without a rationale; an emotional rather than an intellectual response.’ (p.4)

Cary (2000) is even more explicit, saying that ‘Our tendency is to develop emotional relationships with brands, acting as though they are living entities’ (p1.06). Such practitioner perspectives are not without some element of criticism, with a notable example coming from Earls (2002), who warns of the dangers of using metaphor, and questions whether branding metaphors such as the relationship with a brand are actually ‘out there’ (p.13). A passage of particular note is:

‘But the real problem I have with the way people use the idea [a brand] is that it gets us into dodgy thinking without realizing it: for instance, when we start to use the anthropomorphic extensions of brand-speak like brand ‘personality’ and brand ‘loyalty’. I know what we are trying to say but I begin to feel on dangerous territory when we take these extensions too literally.’ (p.10)

In reviewing some of the practitioner views on branding, it is apparent that there are some disagreements on the question of the nature of the humanlike brand and metaphor, and particularly open views on what brand personality might mean when used as a metaphor. Despite this, brand theorists cite practitioners in support of their theory, even when the practitioner has a different

foundation for their perspective. For example, Plummer (1985) is cited in support of a discussion of brand animism/anthropomorphism (e.g. J. Aaker, 1997, p348; Fournier, 1998, p344), despite the fact that Plummer's perspective on brand personality is implicitly metaphorical. Whilst the context might be appropriate for such citations, it is still curious to see a metaphorical perspective used in a discussion of brand anthropomorphism and animism.

In summary, what is evident is that there is a basic disagreement on the question of whether consumers actually see a brand as humanlike. For example, whilst Earls makes clear that his own perspective is founded on the brand as a person metaphor he also highlights the fundamental incompatibility of humanlike brand theory and metaphor perspectives. Essentially, Earl's discussion is that the two perspectives cannot be used together, and that conflating the perspectives is an element of 'dodgy thinking' (Earls, 2002, p.10).

2.8 Brand personality

As has been identified, Aaker (1997) has been influential in the development of brand personality theory and research and it is therefore reasonable to consider that most brand personality theorists will have knowledge of the humanlike brand, including those taking the perspective of the brand as a person metaphor (of 35 articles classified as metaphor, only two did not cite Aaker or Fournier, and these were focused on corporate personality). However, there are two contrasting views that might be highlighted from the literature. The first is represented by Puzakova *et al* (2009) who suggest that consumers do indeed perceive brands as humanlike entities (see introduction).

The second view is illustrated by Bosnjak *et al* (2007), who suggest that; 'Contrary to people, brands are inanimate objects and obviously do not in themselves "behave" in a consistent manner.' (p.304) This view appears to be an implicit rejection of the concept of brands as being perceived by

consumers as humanlike entities. Such an assertion would suggest that they intend the personality of a brand to be a researcher metaphor but, despite this, they cite Azoulay and Kapferer's (2003) critique that Aaker's (1997) scale included traits that are not properly human personality traits. However, if brand personality is a metaphor, it is not clear why brand personality should be restricted to properly human traits, as a metaphor might allow for a more open interpretation of the word 'personality' as is the case with some practitioners. Traits that are not strictly human personality traits (e.g. see McCrae & Costa, 2003) such as 'modern' (J. Aaker, 1997) might be included, as there would be no reason for any particular constraint on the range of terms used.

Having considered these (apparently) differing views on whether brand personality is founded on the brand as humanlike or the brand as a person metaphor, an article by Wee (2004) appears to be more ambiguous. In the introduction to the article, it appears that Wee accepts that there is a fundamental question as to whether his article is discussing the humanlike brand or a metaphor perspective:

'It seems prudent, therefore, to explore whether brand personality shares the same key characteristics as human personality. If it does, it would support the application of the human personality approach to the study of brands.' (p.317)

Having posed the question, Wee later appears to move to the perspective of the humanlike brand, citing several considerations of animism from anthropology and antecedents to brand animism and anthropomorphism. Throughout the discussion, however, there is no explicit discussion of the logical conclusion of such an assertion; that consumers literally perceive brands as animate humanlike entities. It is also notable that Wee cites Fournier (1998) but makes no reference to researcher metaphor and presumably assumes that Fournier's theory was based upon the humanlike brand.

In another example, Grohmann (2009) considers brand personality gender, and reviews the literature without any reference to anthropomorphism or animism theory, although the paper does cite articles that include this theory. Overall, the paper is ambiguous in relation to the nature of what brand personality actually is, with the following an example of the way in which the theory is discussed:

‘Similar to human personality, brand personality is multidimensional and comprises masculinity and femininity.’ (p.116)

However, in the review of brand personality, Grohmann notes that brand personality has not been validated against human personality models, and that it was necessary, therefore, to develop a scale specifically for the measurement of brand personality gender, arguing that human personality measures might present problems of validity when applied to brands. The implication is that brand personality is not founded on the humanlike brand but rather the brand as a researcher metaphor (and perhaps even consumer metaphor). In contrast to the ambiguity of Wee (2004) and Grohmann (2009), Caprara, Barbaranelli and Guido (2001) clearly state their position in a paper entitled, ‘Brand personality: how to make the metaphor fit?’, and say:

‘A number of studies have provided empirical support for the hypothesis that personality may be a viable metaphor for understanding consumers’ perceptions of brand images.’
(p.378)

They make this assertion despite, for example, citing Fournier (1998) and Aaker (1997) in their review of brand personality theory. Bearing in mind that both Aaker and Fournier both use humanlike brand theory, it is curious that they nevertheless default to the idea that brand personality

is a researcher metaphor. It is quite possible that, in the case of Fournier, they were confused by the ambiguous nature of the article, but Aaker offers no such ambiguity. As such, it is possible to conclude that they are implicitly rejecting the ideas of animism and anthropomorphism of brands. However, if this understanding is correct, it is somewhat surprising that they do not refer to this conclusion in their review.

A more forthright assertion of brand personality as a researcher metaphor comes from Feldwick (first published 1991; reproduced in 2002) in an original article that predates the explicit introduction of animism and anthropomorphism in branding. Feldwick has the following to say:

‘The metaphor of [brand] personality has been helpful, and I shall use it myself later. But it may be worthwhile at the start of this book to remind ourselves that it *is* only a metaphor. A brand may have ‘personality’, but it is not a person, still less a god on a cloud.’ (Feldwick, 2002, p.4)

Overall, although some authors are explicit in whether they are founding theory on the humanlike brand or brand as a person metaphor, many articles leave the foundations for their theory ambiguous. For the researchers and theorists who cite animism and anthropomorphism, there is a reluctance to explicitly state the logical conclusion of the introduction of the theories: that consumers actually perceive brands as animate humanlike entities. Where animism and anthropomorphism theory are not introduced, there is ambiguity over whether the theory is founded on the humanlike brand, or the brand as a person metaphor. Most surprising, is the absence of an explicit discussion of the merits of the two mutually exclusive foundations for theory despite different perspectives being taken by different authors.

2.9 Brand relationships

As has been discussed, Fournier's (1998) paper is ambiguous as to whether the theoretical foundation is based on the humanlike brand or on the brand as a person metaphor. As the most frequently cited paper on brand relationships this might be seen as problematic, particularly as many later theorists cite Fournier's (1998) paper in support of their theoretical position. As with brand personality, a few examples will be provided for illustrative purposes.

An interesting example of brand relationships being considered as a metaphor is provided by Breivik and Thorbjørnsen (2008), who cite both Blackston (1993) and Fournier (1998) directly before discussing brand relationships as a metaphor, including an extended discussion of the use of metaphor in marketing and science. However, the question of brand anthropomorphism and animism is not addressed despite Fournier's introduction of animism and anthropomorphism into brand relationship theory. Whilst clear on their own perspective, having cited theorists who discuss humanlike brands, it might be reasonable to expect the question of brand animism and anthropomorphism to have featured in discussion.

In another paper, Hess and Story (2005) commence their review by offering an unambiguous statement that their theoretical foundation is the researcher metaphor:

'Personal relationships were introduced in the marketing literature as a metaphor for the association between customers and brands (Fournier, 1998).' (p.313)

In this statement, it appears that they have chosen Fournier's metaphorical perspective on brand relationships but the authors later cite Fournier's discussion of brand anthropomorphism and animism. In doing so they are positing a combination of mutually incompatible foundations.

Similarly, Aggarwal (2004) appears to base his article on the humanlike brand, saying that ‘some consumers may think of the brand as a living being’ (p.88). However, after stating that brands are perceived as humanlike, the author offers the following:

‘Whatever view one takes, it is reasonable to suggest that even though people’s relationships with brands do not necessarily share the same richness and depth as their relationships with human partners, they sometimes do behave as if they have a relationship with them.’ (p.88)

The opening statement ‘whatever view one takes’ neatly avoids confronting the difficulties inherent in the respective theories. In the conclusion to the paper, Aggarwal discusses the ‘relationship metaphor’ (p100), but is not explicit about whether the article is founded on the humanlike brand or on the brand as a person metaphor. Similar confusion is also evident in a later paper (Aggarwal & Law, 2005), in which readers are informed that ‘this research uses the relationship metaphor’ (p.453), before going on to discuss the animism of brands.

Overall, it appears that the literature on brand relationships reflects continuing confusion and ambiguity. As with the brand personality literature, it is possible to find a range of views on the humanlike brand and brand as a person metaphor, but no clear debate on which is the underlying foundation for brand relationship theory.

2.10 Discussion

An interesting perspective on the question of brand personality and brand relationships can be found in two articles; the first is a paper by Puzakova *et al* (2009), devoted to providing a theoretical framework for the humanlike brand, and the second by Davies and Chun (2003) who provide a scholarly review of the role of metaphor in brand theory. The two papers take different

perspectives on the question of theory being founded in the humanlike brand and the brand as a person metaphor, and indirectly highlight the confusions in brand literature. In the case of Puzakova *et al* (2009), the following passage is of particular interest:

‘Furthermore, a considerable number of psychological theories have been employed in order to better understand consumer-brand relationships (e.g. theories of love (Shimp and Madden 1988) or trust (Hess 1995)) without exploring the phenomenon of brand anthropomorphization [...].’ (p.413)

Puzakova *et al* offer an accurate description of Shimp and Madden’s article, as Shimp and Madden do not ‘explore’ anthropomorphism in the article. However, what is not explained is the reason for the absence of discussion of brand anthropomorphism; Shimp and Madden make it very clear that they are discussing love as a metaphor and, as such, any discussion of animism and/or anthropomorphism would be superfluous.

In contrast, Davies and Chun (2003), explicitly state that brand personality and brand relationships are metaphors. However, in their discussion of the ‘brand as a person’ metaphor, there is ambiguity about whether they are discussing the actual perception of consumers, or whether they are discussing a metaphor. No single example can fully illustrate the nature of this ambiguity, but the following is illustrative:

‘The idea that we can have a relationship with a brand is an extension of the brand is a person metaphor, as the implication is the brand requires a human dimension before we can have a relationship with it.’ (p.51)

This reference appears to support the idea that consumers do need to perceive brands as humanlike.

The logic of the statement is that the validity of brand relationships is predicated on the fact that consumers must perceive a 'human dimension' in brands, but at the same time this is described as 'the brand is a person *metaphor*'. The interesting element of this example is that it appears in a discussion of the role of metaphor in branding, and therefore illustrates the potential for confusion; that consumers actually perceive brands in humanlike ways. Notably, Davies and Chun are critical of the lack of explicit discussion of metaphor in branding and in their own research on corporate personality they make it clear that they are using the researcher metaphor (e.g. Gary Davies & Chun, 2003).

These two examples illustrate the potential for confusion in the literature, but this is perhaps unavoidable when the foundations for theory in brand personality and brand relationship literature are uncertain. Since the publication of Aaker's (1997) and Fournier's (1998) papers, the interest in these areas of theory has grown, along with their relative importance in broader brand theory.

However, the absence of discussion on the incompatibility of the theories is problematic for both academics and practitioners. For example, when applying the theory, should practitioners use it as a heuristic (researcher metaphor), or should it be used as a template to build actual humanlike relationships (humanlike brand)? In the case of academics, the foundation that is accepted should redirect the nature and course of research and theory development. This is not to imply that there cannot be contested theoretical foundations, but they must be contested in such a way that academics and practitioners can decide which foundation offers a valid explanation of brand relationships and brand personality.

2.11 Framework for a theoretical debate

Perhaps the most important element of a theoretical debate revolves around the evidence for the humanlike brand. For those who use the humanlike brand theory, it is necessary to demonstrate that

humanlike brand entities really exist in the minds of consumers. However, there are arguments that there is little supporting evidence that *ordinary* consumers *ordinarily* have humanlike brand perceptions (Avis, 2011, proceedings forthcoming), and the validity of the humanlike brand theory primarily turns upon empirical evidence (Niiniluoto, 1999). This is the question of whether consumers ordinarily think of brands as humanlike entities, or in terms of human metaphors. For example, how many consumers think of a bleach brand as a humanlike entity or use unprompted human metaphors to describe the brand in this way? What are the meanings of the humanlike descriptors when applied to brands?

These are questions that might be resolved through naturalistic enquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), but other methods might also be used. For the humanlike brand, or thinking of brands in terms of human metaphors, the evidence would need to determine the prevalence and scope of this kind of perception, and these are questions that might be resolved through further research.

Alongside empirical investigation, there also needs to be an examination of the theoretical framework for the humanlike brand. Whilst some theorists have engaged with recent animism/anthropomorphism theory (e.g. S. Brown, 2010; Puzakova, et al., 2009), there needs to be a more comprehensive review that includes recent theory and research (e.g. Boyer, 1996b; Epley & Waytz, 2010; Epley, Waytz, Akalis, & Cacioppo, 2008; Guthrie, 1993) in addition to the historical sources cited respectively by Aaker (1997) and Fournier (1998). Similarly, while generic examples such as animal anthropomorphism and object animism are sometimes given in support of the humanlike brand (e.g. Freling & Forbes, 2005b), examples and theory are also needed which directly address and support humanlike brand theory.

An essential element in the application of animism and anthropomorphism theory is to first identify the subject of humanlike brand perceptions, which means defining a brand. There are a multitude of

brand definitions and conceptualisations (see Stern, 2006; Wood, 2000 for reviews), and the variability and diversity of definitions appears to be on-going with little prospect of agreement (de Chernatony, 2009). This would seem an important first step as *something* has the personality, and consumers have a relationship with *something*, and theorists need to identify the *something* before they can find comparable examples and theory in the animism and anthropomorphism literature to support humanlike brand theory.

Fournier (1998) appears to be one of the few humanlike brand theorists to provide a brand definition, saying that a brand is ‘simply a collection of perceptions held in the mind of the consumer’ (p.345). Fournier’s definition illustrates the importance of brand definition as, using Guthrie’s (1993) extensive review of animism and anthropomorphism, no comparable examples or theory were found that might support the humanlike brand based upon Fournier’s brand definition. However, different interpretations of the meaning of a brand might produce different findings.

Fournier’s definition also presents problems when evaluating the researcher metaphor foundation. Using Cornelissen’s (2003) proposals for metaphor evaluation, how might the ‘collection of perceptions’ be evaluated for isomorphism? The definition does not offer enough detail to provide a sound basis for evaluation of the isomorphism, and without the isomorphism the heuristic value of the metaphor is difficult to assess. Whilst Cornelissen sought to evaluate the relationship metaphor, it was in relation to marketing relationships in general, not brand relationships in particular. In light of the critiques of the brand relationship metaphor (e.g. O'Malley & Tynan, 1999), a more focussed evaluation of the relationship metaphor is overdue, and this requires a clear and comprehensive definition of a brand.

Finally, there is the question of whether brand personality and brand relationship theorists are actually implicitly adopting the consumer metaphor foundation for theory. If this is the foundation

for theory, it is necessary for theorists to be explicit in this regard. Furthermore, if consumers are simply using humanlike metaphors to better express themselves, theorists need to provide an explanation why expressing themselves with these metaphors might influence their purchasing behaviour (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980 could provide a useful framework).

At present, it is apparent that there is a considerable grey area surrounding the foundations of brand personality and brand relationship theory. The argument presented in this paper offers a starting point for debate and an invitation for theorists to contribute to resolving the confusion and incompatibilities that surround brand personality and brand relationship theory.

2.12 Conclusion

The intention of this paper is to point out a number of confusions that exist in the literature relating to brand personality and brand relationship theory. In particular, it identifies an incompatible distinction between seeing a brand as a humanlike entity and understanding the brand relationship and brand personality concepts as metaphors/metaphoric. The authors believe that in both cases the underlying assumptions need to be re-examined and that to move forward we need to be clear about the theoretical foundations upon which new understandings, changing relationships and co-creational brand experiences may be based. We hope that this paper, and the questions that it raises, will contribute to this process of clarification.

Paper Appendix A: Scopus Search, ISI Web of Knowledge and Google Scholar (GS); 23 November 2010

Table 3: Literature on brand personality and brand relationships

| Search Term | Search in | Scopus | GS |
|--|-----------------------------------|--------|------|
| “brand personality” | Article Title | 75 | 510 |
| | Article Title, Keywords, Abstract | 146 | N/A |
| | All Fields | 662 | 5350 |
| “brand relationship” OR “brand relationships” | Article Title | 38 | 305 |
| | Article Title, Keywords, Abstract | 104 | N/A |
| | All Fields | 506 | 3920 |
| ISI Web of Knowledge | | | |
| “brand personality” | Article Title OR Topic | 148 | |
| “brand relationship” | | 70 | |

Paper Appendix B: Search Results summary; 17 November 2010

Note: Scopus was an all fields search, ISI was Article Title and Topic, and GS was all fields. Later reviews of the literature suggested other keywords might be added if conducting the search again.

Table 4: Sample search results summary and search strings

| Database | Search | Results |
|----------|---|---------|
| ISI | ("brand personality" OR "Brand Relationship") AND (metaphor OR metaphoric OR metaphorical OR analogy OR animism OR anthropomorphism OR anthropomorphic OR anthropomorphise OR anthropomorphize) | 8 |
| Scopus | ALL(("brand relationship" OR "brand personality") AND (metaphor OR metaphoric OR metaphorical OR analogy OR animism OR anthropomorphism OR anthropomorphic OR anthropomorphise OR anthropomorphize)) | 130* |
| GS | ("brand personality" OR "Brand Relationship") AND (metaphor OR metaphoric OR metaphorical OR analogy OR animism OR anthropomorphism OR anthropomorphic OR anthropomorphise OR anthropomorphize) | 986^ |

*154 articles were found, and these were limited to articles classified as ‘business, management and accounting’ which reduced the number to 130.

^1410 articles were found on a general search, but a search limited to ‘Business, Administration, Finance, and Economics’ reducing results to 986.

Paper Appendix C: Citation counts Aaker 1997 and Fournier 1998

Abbreviations: GS = Google Scholar, SC = Scopus, ISI = ISI Web of Knowledge, DB = database

Search Terms Used:

ISI – BR: Topic=("brand relationship") OR Title=("brand relationship")

ISI – BP: Topic=("brand personality") OR Title=("brand personality")

SC BP: ALL("brand relationship")

SC BP: ALL("brand personality")

GS BR: "brand relationships"

GS BP: "brand personality"

Table 5: Citations of key papers

| Paper | Citations | | |
|-----------------|-----------|-----|-----|
| | GS | SC | ISI |
| Aaker (1997) | 1546 | 338 | 275 |
| Fournier (1998) | 1552 | 554 | 483 |

Table 6: Ranking of papers according to citation count (the count follows reference date).

| Search Term | DB | 1 st ranked | 2 nd ranked | 3 rd ranked |
|-------------|-----|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| BR | GS | Fournier and Yao (1997)-217 | Blackston (1993)-110 | Thorbjørnsen et al. (2002)-88 |
| | SC | Fournier (1998) -554 | Aaker (1997)-338 | Muniz & O’Guinn (2001)-353 |
| | ISI | Fournier (1998)-483 | Brunel et al. (2004)-48 | Aggarwal (2004)-46 |
| BP | GS | Aaker (1997)-1546 | Aaker, et al. (2001)-222 | Batra et al. (1993)-151 |
| | SC | Fournier (1998)-554 | Aaker (1997)-338 | Sen & Bhattacharya -239 |
| | ISI | Fournier (1998)-483 | Aaker (1997)-275 | Aaker et al. (2004)-88 |

Chapter 3: Animism, Anthropomorphism and Humanlike Brands

3.1 Preamble

This paper is one which directly addresses the call (see chapter 1) for a more thorough grounding of humanlike brand theory in the theory of animism and anthropomorphism. It is a somewhat unusual paper in that it provides long reviews of theory, only to end by saying that the theory is inapplicable. One of the common and recurring themes of the papers is that of brand definition, and it appears that the ambiguities and variable usage of the term brand (Stern, 2006) have encouraged the idea that brands might be anthropomorphic. It is theme that appears in a later paper, where it is apparent that the brand appears to stand for the firm (Avis, 2011).

3.2 Introduction

Aaker (1997) and Fournier (1998) introduced animism and anthropomorphism theory into branding literature to explain the concepts of brand personality and brand relationships respectively. Since the publication of these articles, further research has discussed animism and the anthropomorphism of brands (e.g. Azevedo & Farhangmehr, 2005; Caruana, Pitt, Berthon, & Page, 2009; Chandler & Schwarz, 2010), with (Puzakova, Kwak, & Andras, 2010) suggesting that consumers see brands as complete humans.

Although many studies have provided empirical evidence in support of perceptions of brand personality and brand relationships without referencing animism/anthropomorphism theory (e.g. Lau & Phau, 2007; Yongjun Sung & Kim, 2010; J. Sweeney & Bao, 2006) the purpose of this paper is to examine the theories of brand animism and anthropomorphism in relation to relevant literature.

In particular, Avis (2011) describes animism and anthropomorphism of brands as ‘humanlike brand theory’, and questions whether a concept such as a brand might be seen as humanlike.

The paper will commence, therefore with a brief examination of some of the key discourses on humanlike brand theory, identifying that there is a lack of clarity in understanding what exactly the subject of the humanlike perceptions is. As a context for animism and anthropomorphism theory, domain specific processing and ontology will be discussed, and it will be noted that a variety of perceptual experiences seem to be contrary to an intuitive ontology (Boyer, 1996a). For the purposes of this paper, these will be termed as cross domain perceptual realities (see D. C. Dennett, 2007 for a discussion of heterophenomonology), which are instances of people perceiving entity x in terms of entity y (hereafter, CDPRs). The paper then considers the brand concept in relation to CDPRs, and will suggest that humanlike brand theory is problematic. The paper contributes to brand literature by examining humanlike brand theory in the context of brand definition, and considers an alternative to humanlike brand theory. The paper ends by noting some potential problems in the conceptualization of the brand.

3.3 CDPR definitions

There is some variability in the use and understanding of the terms animism and anthropomorphism (R. Epstein, 1998), with some theorists, for example, conflating the two as a singular psychological phenomenon (e.g. Epley, Waytz, & Cacioppo, 2007). As such, whilst this paper uses the stipulative definitions given below, it might be noted that use of the terms by some theorists is not always clear. Definitions for the key CDPRs discussed in the paper are as follows:

- Animism: ‘attributing life to the nonliving’ (Guthrie, 1993, p62)
- Anthropomorphism: ‘attributing human characteristics to the nonhuman’ (Guthrie, 1993, p.

62; see also Virginia S. Y. Kwan, Johnson, Neel, & Cohen, 2010)

- Zoomorphism; ‘the attribution of animal traits to what is not animal’ (Guthrie, 1993, p. 202)
- Mechanomorphizm; ‘the attribution of the characteristics of machines to humans’ (Caporael, 1986, p. 216)

Guthrie (2007a, p.37) describes animism and anthropomorphism as ‘categories of perceptual and conceptual mistakes’, and this might equally be applied to zoomorphism and mechanomorphizm. Finally, the last CDPR that will be considered is metaphor (synaesthesia might be included, but is beyond the scope of this paper e.g. see Simner, 2010), which Lakoff and Johnson (1980) describe as ‘understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another’ (p.5), and which might also be related to Guthrie’s description of CDPRs as ‘mistakes’.

3.4 Humanlike brand theory

Avis (2011) identified three key papers (Fournier, 1998; Freling & Forbes, 2005a; Puzakova, et al., 2009, hereafter referred to without dates) that discuss humanlike brand theory in depth, and recognizes Aaker’s (1997) seminal paper as the first to introduce humanlike brand theory. Figures 2-4¹ provide a summary of the theories posited in each of the papers. It should be noted that, with the exception of Puzakova et al., the diagrams are interpretations of the theory presented in each of the papers.

¹ Fournier’s diagram links to the broader brand relationship theory through process 3.

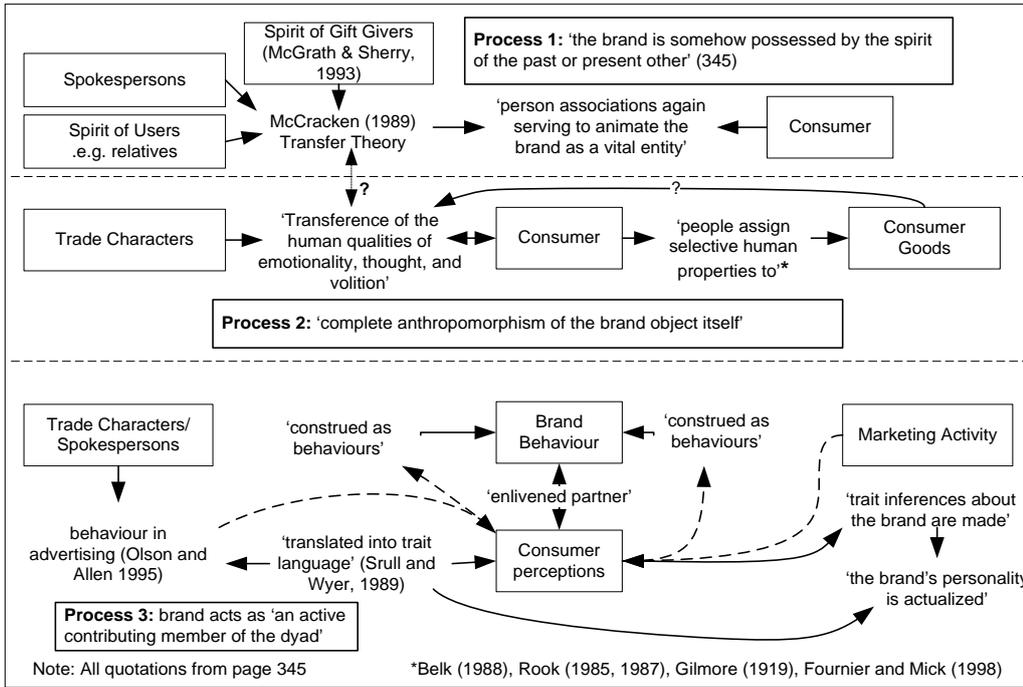


Figure 2: Fournier's Humanlike Brand theory

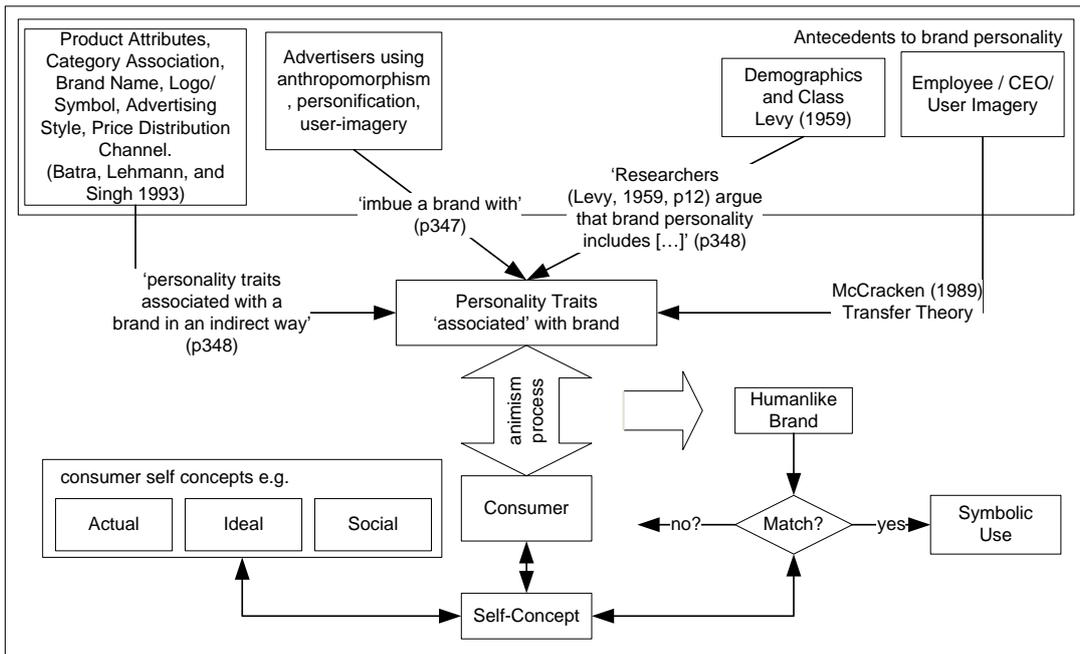


Figure 3: Aaker's Brand Personality Theory

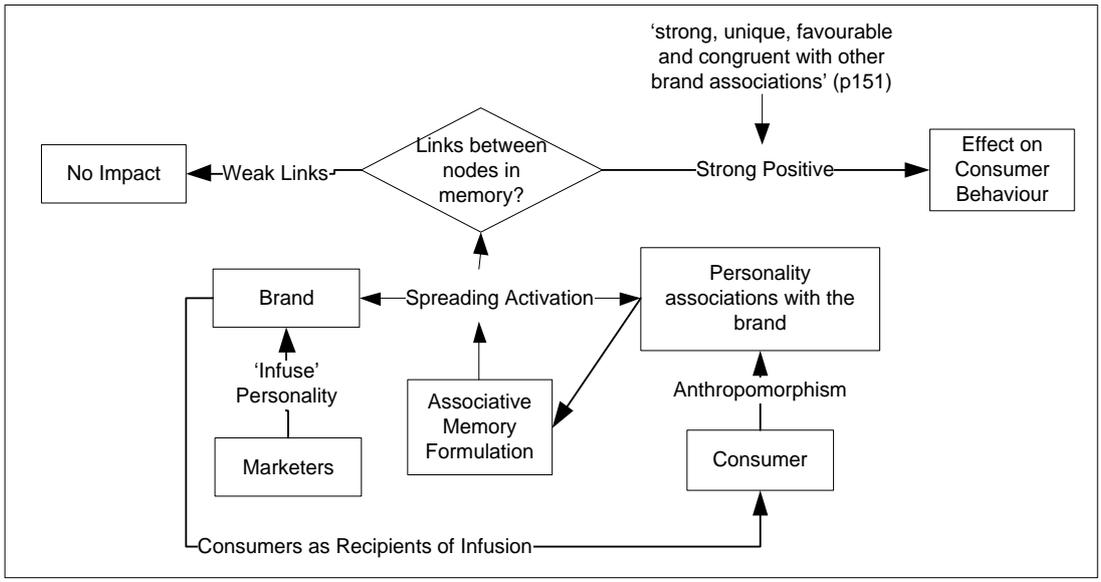


Figure 4: Freling and Forbes brand personality theory

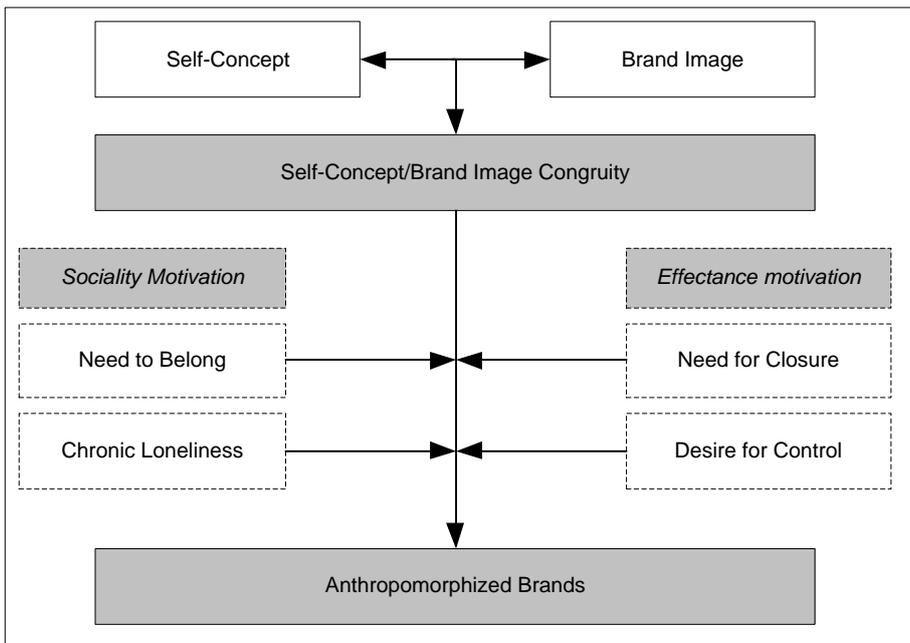


Figure 5: Puzakova *et al.* Humanlike Brand Theory, from figure 1, p.144

It is notable that in each case animism and anthropomorphism play a central role in the theory being presented, and that Fournier's extensive discussion of humanlike brand theory sits in contrast to the discussion of brand relationships in terms of metaphor. (Avis, et al., 2012). In each of the articles, there are references to theories of animism and anthropomorphism, with Fournier, for example, citing the seminal anthropological work of Tylor (1874), Freling and Forbes citing the comprehensive review of Guthrie (1993), and Puzakova et al. founding their theoretical position on Epley et al (2007).

In each case, there is commonality in the arguments of the humanlike brand theorists: that animism and anthropomorphism are commonplace phenomena, and each theorist provides exemplars of anthropomorphic/animistic perceptions in support of the theory. However, although animism and anthropomorphism are commonplace, this does not necessarily mean that brands are perceived in this way. In particular, the concept of a brand has multiple interpretations (e.g. see Wood, 2000) and, as will be discussed, CDPRs may be common but are not invariant. As such, whilst each of the theorists considered here present interesting theoretical positions, the evaluation of their theory must be considered in relation to CDPR theory *and* brand definition. In the next section, therefore, the paper will present a context for understanding CDPRs, before consideration of CDPR theory.

3.5 Intuitive ontology

To understand the nature of CDPRS, it is necessary to understand something of the way in which humans categorize (or conceptualise, Machery, 2009) the world. Before the 1980s, it was broadly believed that human ontology was a product of culture and learning, in what has been described as the standard social science model (SSSM, Tooby & Cosmides, 1992). In contrast to the SSSM 'blank slate' model of the mind (Pinker, 2003), evolutionary psychologists proposed a modular mind, in which the mind was adapted to process input from specific domains. Thus the brain, as for

human anatomy more broadly, has evolved on the basis of functional specialization (H. C. Barrett & Kurzban, 2006), with modules for domains including hypotheses and inference procedures that are relevant to the processing of inputs for specific domains. In line with this, categorization of entities in the environment is a necessary step in the determination of which domain/s need to be utilized to process inputs (Duchaine, Cosmides, & Tooby, 2001, p.226).

There is a growing body of literature that has revised early understandings of the development of categorization in infants and children (see Wellman & Gelman, 1992 for a review), as for example, in the early development of the capacity for infants to distinguish between substances and bounded objects (Huntley-Fenner, Carey, & Solimando, 2002; Li, Dunham, & Carey, 2009). As Carey (2009) summarizes, '[...] the cognition of humans, like that of all animals, begins with highly structured innate mechanisms designed to build representations with specific content.' (p.67)

There is also considerable evidence in support of the distinction between agentive and non-agentive entities, and between animals and objects, and that infants can detect agency through the presence of face and eyes *or* from behavior (see Carey, 2009 for an extensive review), and can understand biological motion as being related to animacy (Schlottmann & Ray, 2010). There is a broad consensus that infants have a preferential interest in faces versus any other category, and strong support for the idea that there is an innate face processing mechanism (see Pascalis & Kelly, 2009 for a review), and an ability to distinguish human motion from that of other entities (Bertenthal, Proffitt, & Kramer, 1987). In another example, preschoolers were shown to have a sense that the 'insides' of animals, artifacts and technical devices are different, and this difference determines perceptions of agency (Gelman & Gottfried, 1995; also see Gelman & Wellman, 1991).

The overall conclusion of this research is that humans have domain specific intuitive ontology (Wellman & Gelman, 1992), and Boyer (1998) summarizes the position as follows:

‘Intuitive ontology is not just a catalogue of types of objects in the world, but also a set of quasi-theoretical assumptions about their underlying properties and definite expectations about their observable features. Intuitive ontology comprises “naïve theories” of broad domains such as PERSON, ANIMAL, PLANT, or ARTIFACT.’ (p.878)

There is some debate around the theory of intuitive ontology, (Medin, Lynch, & Solomon, 2000; see Sloman, Lombrozo, & Malt, 2007 for a summary of different positions), and also questions about which particular assumptions derive from which domain (Keil, 2008). However, the findings from studies of infants is supportive of intuitive ontology (see Carey, 2009 for an overview), and examples such as Atran’s (1998) research on ‘folk biology’ is also supportive of the theory (also see S. Atran & Norenzayan, 2004), with other commonly discussed modules being ‘folk’ physics, psychology and biology (see Keil, 2010 for a dissenting view).

However, although there is convincing evidence for some form of domain specific intuitive ontology, it is also the case that CDPRs appear to overturn this ontology (Boyer, 1996b). For example, Piaget noted the proclivity for animism in children (see Looft & Bartz, 1969 for a summary), and their tendency to ‘promiscuously’ apply teleological and animistic thinking to domains such as plants, artifacts and the natural world (Csibra & Gergely, 1998; Gergely & Csibra, 1997, 2003; Gergely, Nádasdy, Csibra, & Bíró, 1995; Kelemen, 1999a, 1999b). Overall, there is a plethora of research where infants attribute agency, intentionality and goals to objects that would normally be understood as inanimate objects (see Carey, 2009, ch.5). The ‘promiscuity’ disappears to some degree as children grow older, apparently the result of scientific education ameliorating the tendency (Kelemen, 2004; Lombrozo, Kelemen, & Zaitchik, 2007). Nevertheless, CDPRs continue into adulthood, for example with Guthrie’s (1993) extensive review giving numerous examples and Brown (1991) suggesting that anthropomorphism is a human universal.

Accordingly, any explanation of CDPRs must also account for why an innate intuitive ontology, which has evolved to assist humans in navigating the world, might be contested (Boyer, 1996a). However, before proceeding to theories of CDPRs, it is necessary to clarify the nature of the types of CDPRs that are under discussion.

3.6 Metaphor and CDPRs

Mithen (1996b) presents a theoretical perspective that sees metaphor and other CDPRs explained from a common position. However, the relationship between CDPRs and metaphor is, in some cases, blurred. For example, personification of non-human entities abound (Kövecses, 2002; Lakoff & Turner, 1989), and can be found in scientific writing on evolution (G. Low, 2005). Interestingly, Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 33) discuss personification as a metaphor which ‘allows us to comprehend a wide variety of experiences with non-human entities in terms of human motivations, characteristics and activities’ reflecting the definitions and theory of other CDPRs. In contrast, Lakoff and Turner (1989) give many examples of the ‘poetic’ use of personification metaphors, such as the grim reaper.

It should also be noted that there are inverse metaphors (Deane, 1993) where plants, animals, objects or machines are applied to people (Lakoff & Turner, 1989), sometimes with no implication that people are actually perceived literally as these entities (e.g. see Searle, 1979 and the example of Sally as a block of ice). Gibbs (1984) illustrates the point with the metaphor of cigarettes as time-bombs, arguing that they are not literally perceived as time-bombs, but the metaphor will likely influence perceptions of the effects of cigarettes. The key point is that there is a fine line between the ‘poetic’ use of ‘as if x ’ and perceiving an entity ‘as an x ’. For example, humans *are sometimes actually* perceived as mechanomorphic or zoomorphic, with metaphor playing an important role in

understanding the development and expression of these perceptions (Stride, 2006).

Agentive metaphors further illustrate this complexity (e.g. see Caruso, Waytz, & Epley, 2010; Epley, et al., 2007). For example, where stock market prices are described with metaphors of agency, this has been found to develop expectations of continuance of trends, but the metaphor of a rollercoaster is also applied to stock markets (Morris, Sheldon, Ames, & Young, 2007). Just as people would presumably deny that the stock market is literally a rollercoaster, they would also presumably deny that it is an *actual living* agent. Nevertheless, agentive metaphors capture some of the complexity of the relationship between metaphor and CDPRs, seeming to combine both ‘as an *x*’ and ‘as if an *x*’, in the sense that people treat the concepts as if they were agents, and act as if they are agents (see Caruso, et al., 2010), but would presumably deny they are actual living agents.

A further problem arises in the interpretation of language. Black (1984) examines the metaphor of corn as people in the Hopi culture, and argues that ‘understanding is to be gained by attending to metaphor [...], and much may be lost by taking a strictly literal approach.’ (p.288) Also, Keesing (1985), in reference to animism, suggests that anthropologists may be over-interpreting metaphorical language, arguing that when ‘primitive’ people talk, anthropologists apply metaphysical or cosmological salience to their analysis (see Roger M. Keesing et al., 1989; Sandor, 1986 for further discussion). In summary, there are some ‘fuzzy’ lines between metaphor and other CDPRs, with problems of interpretation of language and difficulties drawing clear boundaries between thinking ‘as an *x*’ and ‘as if an *x*’.

3.7 Anthropomorphism, zoomorphism, and dehumanization

Another area in which boundaries might be seen as fuzzy is the possibility that use of the term anthropomorphism may, in many cases, be describing something more akin to zoomorphism.

However, in order to understand the fuzziness between the boundaries of anthropomorphism and zoomorphism, it is necessary to consider that, even where zoomorphism takes place, it might also include anthropomorphism, as anthropomorphism of animals is commonplace (Kennedy, 1992). Lakoff and Turner (1989) illustrate the point with the metaphor that ‘Achilles is a lion’. The implication of the metaphor is that Achilles is brave like a lion, but bravery applied to a lion is anthropomorphic. However, in describing Achilles this way, the attribute of bravery is quintessentially that of a lion, and says more, therefore, about Achilles than simply saying he is brave; from the lion metaphor, we know that the ‘essence’ of Achilles is bravery (see H. Clark Barrett, 2001 for a review of essentialism).

The problem of delineation between humans and animals, and humans and machines is evident in the literature on dehumanization. Dehumanization is a widespread phenomenon with different levels of humanity being applied according to race (e.g. see Goff, Eberhardt, Williams, & Jackson, 2008), situation (Haslam, 2006), or even occupation (Loughnan & Haslam, 2007). Linked with essentialism (Belk & Coon, 1993), humans place other humans into ‘in-groups’ and ‘out-groups’ (L. Harris & Fiske, 2006; Leyens et al., 2000), attributing lesser humanity to out-groups, creating a status of infra or sub-human to out-group members and a potential stage towards complete dehumanization (Demoulin, Saroglou, & Van Pachterbeke, 2008). Dehumanization might be animalistic or mechanistic; for the former, humans attribute characteristics such as amorality, and, for the latter, characteristics such as coldness (Haslam, 2006; Haslam, Kashima, Loughnan, Shi, & Suitner, 2008).

Whilst certain primary emotions (e.g. anger, Demoulin, et al., 2008) can be attributed to both humans and animals by people, certain secondary emotions (e.g. admiration, Leyens, et al., 2000) are seen as uniquely human, and secondary emotions are applied more to in-groups than out-groups (Demoulin et al., 2005). Interestingly, gods are given more secondary emotions and are seen as

supra-humans who provide a hierarchy in which humans can locate their humanity between gods and animals (Ciarrocchi, Piedmont, & Williams, 2002; Demoulin, et al., 2008).

From the various strands of research on dehumanization, there are several points that might be noted. The first is that attribution of humanity sits on a continuum between supra-human and animal/machines (see figure 6), and the second is that the proclivity to dehumanize other humans suggests that viewing a non-human entity as a complete human is unlikely. Also, putting to one side that full attribution of humanity is unlikely, Sharkey and Sharkey (2006) argue persuasively that many uses of the term anthropomorphism are in fact referring to zoomorphism (e.g. when we ‘abuse’ devices, we do so as if they were animals). As a practical example, studies have described the ‘anthropomorphism’ of car faces (the grill and headlights etc. Aggarwal & McGill, 2007) but another study reports that the faces were perceived both as anthropomorphic and zoomorphic (Windhager et al., 2008).

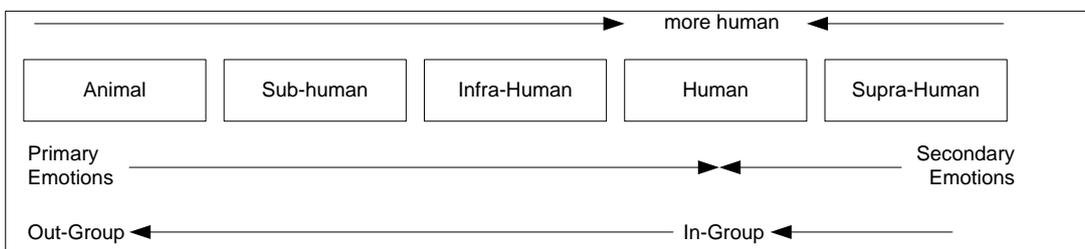


Figure 6: Simplified continuum of attribution of humanity

In summary, it seems that anthropomorphism may be less common, and less clearly ‘human’ than much of the literature implies. The exception appears to be in relation to gods, who seem to be given strong secondary human emotions, and score strongly on personality traits such as conscientiousness (Ciarrocchi, et al., 2002). It is also interesting to note that traits like conscientious appear in brand personality scales, as well as secondary emotions such as ‘interpersonal warmth’ being reflected in the scales with descriptors such as ‘loving’ or ‘friendly’ (e.g. J. Aaker, 1997; Bosnjak, et al., 2007; Geuens, Weijters, & De Wulf, 2009).

3.8 Animism

The term animism is closely linked with Tylor (1874), whose seminal anthropological work still stirs controversy today. He noted that ‘primitive people’ saw non-animate elements of the world imbued with life, perceived as people or spirits, and used animism as a term to describe these ‘mistaken’ beliefs. Developing his ideas from séances taking place in London (Stocking, 1971) and ethnographic accounts of the time, he ties animism to religiosity, and sees animistic beliefs as arising from a lack of education (Stringer, 1999).

As an example of the ongoing controversial nature of Tylor’s work, Bird-David (1999) suggests that elements of Tylor’s understanding of animism have persisted in the work of Durkheim (1915), Levi-Strauss (1962) and, more recently, Guthrie’s (1993) evolutionary account of animism (see Guthrie, 2000 for a reply). In each case, Bird-David argues that animism is not understood in its own terms, but seen through a ‘modernist’ Western lens that seeks to explain animism from a dualistic body/spirit dichotomy, as a mistaken belief or something to be explained away. Instead, Bird-David, drawing on ethnographic accounts, frames animism as a series of nested relationships within the surrounding environment, with animism seen as a sense of ‘we-ness’ and kinship.

Whilst Tylor's work has been the subject of critiques, Stringer (1999) suggests that the work has been misunderstood by both Bird-David (1999) and Guthrie (1993), arguing that they are not engaging with the actual work of Tylor, but the work of Tylor's critics (see Guthrie, 2001 for a reply). Although Tylor was constrained by the thinking of his time, Stringer argues that his work relates to all human beliefs, such as souls and various forms of God, and might, for example, be applied to New Age thinking.

Ingold (2006) also critiques Guthrie (1993), and argues that his evolutionary explanation of animism is 'nonsense' (p.11). Describing the traditional understanding of animism as 'a system of beliefs that imputes life or spirit to things that are truly inert' (p.10), he argues that animism 'is not the result of an infusion of spirit into substance, or of agency into materiality, but is rather ontologically prior to their differentiation.' Ingold suggests that animism raises questions about modern science, and that science needs to engage with animism, a view shared by Haber (2009) who argues for a move 'from research *on* animism to research *from* animism' (p.419, also see Alberti & Marshall, 2009; Zedeno, 2009).

Harvey (2005, 2006) also sees animism as a cultural phenomenon, arguing that the extension of personhood to non-humans requires cultural transmission, with different cultures defining personhood in different ways. However, even though the anthropological literature is replete with examples of animistic perceptions of non-human entities, for the majority of the time even animistic cultures act upon the world according to 'normal' intuitive ontology. For example, de Castro (1998) discusses Amerindian cosmology in terms of an egalitarian ontology in which 'humanness' is extended into the natural world, but Sulkin (2005) provides a very different account:

[...] Muinane people have a relatively hierarchical and fundamentalist or substantivist take on human and animal perspectives, and that this differs importantly from the more

egalitarian, more radically perspectivist ontologies the literature claim for other people.’

(p.24)

Barrett (2005), using the example of Koyukon hunter gathers, argues that whilst their assertions of social relationships with their environment are sincere, they also act day-to-day in ways that would be consistent with scientific accounts. Whilst there can be little doubt that some people do work within animist belief systems, Barrett suggests they may be limited in the contexts to which they are applied, and Atran (2002) argues that use of animistic ontology in day-to-day activity would limit survival prospects. As such, it seems likely that the animism of traditional people is context bound, and not so different from CDPRs experienced by Western, educated, industrialized, rich democratic societies (WEIRD people, Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010). As such, CDPRs would be best explained from the perspective of human evolution, albeit that other accounts also offer insights that help in understanding CDPRs.

3.9 Animism and anthropomorphism theory

Animism and anthropomorphism are not, as Kwan and Fiske (2008) suggest, ‘an anomaly found in scientists, lunatics and children’ (p.126) but are human universals (Scott Atran, 2002; D. E. Brown, 1991). As Epley et al. (2007) note, even within modern scientific discourse, particles have been described by physicists as ‘charming’ or ‘shy.’

Guthrie (1993) offers a comprehensive review of and an evolutionary perspective on the many manifestations of these CDPRs, and argues persuasively against classical theories of animism and anthropomorphism (e.g. Durkheim, 1915). Whilst Guthrie differentiates between animism and anthropomorphism, he also considers that they both share the same explanation:

‘Both phenomena stem from the search for organization and significance, and both consist of overestimating them. Scanning the world for what most concerns us – living things and especially humans – we find many apparent cases. Some of these prove illusory.’ (p.62)

Guthrie’s review provides the basis for an evolutionary explanation of animism and anthropomorphism, proposing that they are a survival mechanism based on an innate facility to recognize patterns that correspond to people/agents in the environment, even where they are ambiguous. At its most prosaic, the theory suggests that it is better to mistake a rock for a bear than a bear for a rock and while described as perceptual ‘mistakes’, they are mistakes that enhance survival prospects (also see Guthrie, 2007a).

Barrett (2007) has formalized Guthrie’s thesis of over-detection of agency into a mental module (note, Currie & Jureidini, 2004 question the modularity due to the ‘promiscuity’ of domains to which it applies) that he describes as a Hypersensitive Agency Detection Device (HADD, J. L. Barrett, 2000, ‘hyperactive’ in an earlier discussion), and presents a theory that religious thought is therefore an evolutionary ‘spandrel’ (an evolutionary by-product - see Gould & Lewontin, 1979). Pyysiäinen (2009) extends HADD and proposes a ‘hyperactive understanding of intentionality (HUI): the tendency to postulate mentality and to see events as intentionally caused even in the absence of a visible agent’ and ‘hyperactive teleofunctional reasoning (HTR): the tendency to perceive objects as existing for a purpose’ (p.13). The HADD, HUI and HTR all point in the same direction: the idea that humans have a strong proclivity to see the world as being populated by agentive and purposeful entities.

As Atran (2002) notes, there is a considerable body of research that is broadly supportive of HADD theory. Much of the research is extending the classic work of Heider and Simmel (1944) and Michotte’s (1963) work on perceptions of causality, in which animated (and mostly) geometric

shapes were shown to research participants, who would readily attribute agency to the shapes (e.g. see Adolphs, 2009; Frith, 2008). For example, in the Heider and Simmel study (see figure 7), participants created a narrative of a shape defending territory against an intruder. Although there is a confusion of terminology, a stream of research has sought to investigate what are essentially animistic and anthropomorphic perceptions of animated geometric shapes, or the movement of stimuli such as dots.

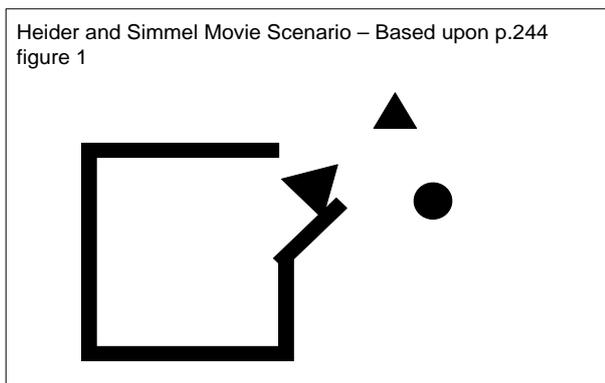


Figure 7: Animated Geometric Shapes

Examples of animacy research include mental state attribution (e.g. Abell, Happé, & Frith, 2000), anthropomorphism (e.g. L. T. Harris & Fiske, 2008), goal directedness (e.g. Opfer, 2002), and teleological thinking (Gelman & Gottfried, 1995). Research has included perceptions of sudden direction and speed changes (Tremoulet & Feldman, 2000), synchronized motions (Bassili, 1976; Dasser, Ulbaek, & Premack, 1989), interactions with spatial contexts (Tremoulet & Feldman, 2006), interactions with other objects (Dittrich & Lea, 1994; Santos, David, Bente, & Vogeley, 2008), apparent violation of Newtonian mechanics (Gelman & Gottfried, 1995), complex narratives applied to objects (Castelli, Frith, Happe, & Frith, 2002), and even fictive gadgets (Waytz et al., 2009). Regardless of the label for the research, the findings provide support for HADD, HUI and HTR theory.

Stephen Mithen presents an interesting and challenging theoretical explanation of animism and anthropomorphism (Mithen, 1996a, 1996b, 2000, 2007, 2010). Mithen proposes that people interact with the world and nature as if it were a social agent, and locates his theory in modular mind theory (e.g. Barkow, Cosmides, & Tooby, 1992; Cosmides & Tooby, 1994; Tooby & Cosmides, 1992). Mithen offers a view in which the key evolutionary development that separates modern humans from our ancestors is the integration of the modules of the mind. This is perhaps best illustrated with diagrams of how Mithen portrays the mind of homo erectus in comparison with the modern human mind (adapted from Mithen, 1996b, p165 & 173).

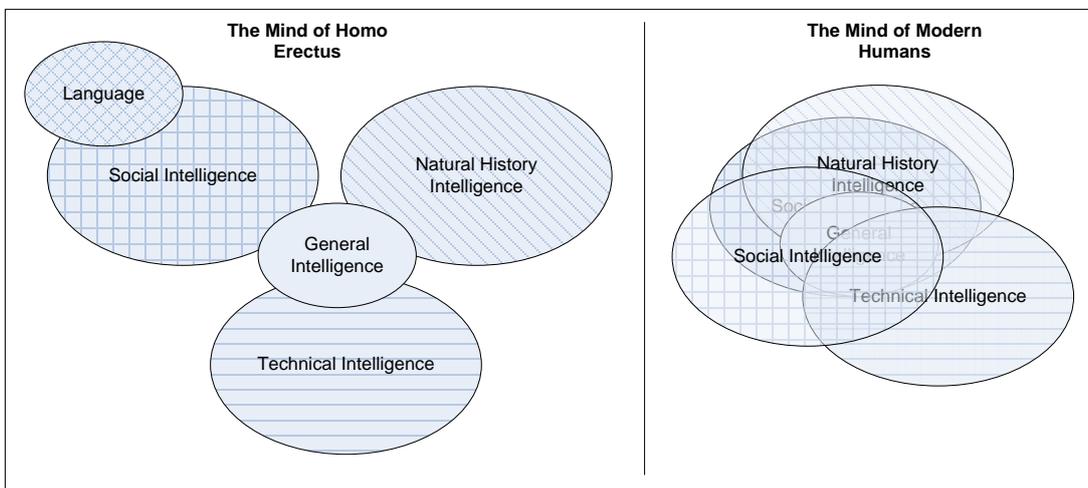


Figure 8: Cognitive Fluidity

Figure 8 captures the essence of the Mithen’s argument; that modern human minds are the result of the specialized modules no longer working in isolation. The result of the change is what Mithen describes as ‘cognitive fluidity’, in which the ‘ways of thinking and knowledge flow freely between domains’ (p.175). Mithen argues that cognitive fluidity was an adaptive advantage and suggests that the anthropomorphism of animals allows humans to predict their possible behaviors, thereby providing advantages in hunting, such as the preparation of ambushes (also see H. C. Barrett, 2005). Mithen’s theory not only explains animism and anthropomorphism, but also serves to explain metaphorical thinking and conceptual blending (Fauconnier & Turner, 2003; Fiddick, Cosmides, &

Tooby, 2000).

Whilst the previous explanations are rooted in the theory of the modular mind and evolutionary theory, a contrasting approach comes from the work of Epley, Waytz and colleagues (e.g. Caruso, et al., 2010; Epley, Akalis, Waytz, & Cacioppo, 2008; Epley, Converse, Delbosc, Monteleone, & Cacioppo, 2009; Epley & Waytz, 2010; A. Waytz, J. Cacioppo, & N. Epley, 2010; A. Waytz, J. T. Cacioppo, & N. Epley, 2010; Waytz, Epley, & Cacioppo, 2010; Waytz, et al., 2009) who approach anthropomorphism from a social psychological perspective. Epley et al. (2007) propose a three factor theory of the determinants of the likelihood of anthropomorphism; **Sociality Motivation**, **Effectance Motivation** and **Elicited Agent Knowledge (SEEK)** and present a summary of the key psychological determinants presented in Table 7:

Table 7: Epley et al's (2007) determinants of anthropomorphism

| Categories of Independent Variables | Key Psychological Determinants | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| | Elicited Agent Knowledge | Effectance Motivation | Sociality Motivation |
| Dispositional | Need for cognition | Need for closure, desire for control | Chronic loneliness |
| Situational | Perceived similarity | Anticipated interaction, apparent predictability | Social disconnection |
| Developmental | Acquisition of alternate theories | Attaining competence | Attachment |
| Cultural | Experience, norms, ideology | Uncertainty avoidance | Individualism and collectivism |

The elicited agent knowledge element focuses on the importance of the development of mind theory, and how this inferential capability might be utilized in thinking of nonhuman agents. The development of agentive thoughts is in turn stimulated by similarity in morphology or motion to humans. However, as humans develop from infancy, the proclivity to anthropomorphize decreases as alternative theories of the world are introduced and learnt.

With regards to effectance motivation theorists argue that anthropomorphism, by using a human template, has a utilitarian function of explaining a complex world, and factors such as desire for control might influence an individual's proclivity towards anthropomorphism. Furthermore, if a perceived agent violates expectations (e.g. a malfunctioning computer) humans are more likely to have a greater perception of the agent as anthropomorphic (i.e. when the item behaves in unpredictable ways). Finally, as humans are intensely social and seek emotional relationships, factors such as loneliness might act as catalysts towards anthropomorphism.

One of the most interesting aspects of the work of Epley et al (2007) is their contention that anthropomorphism varies along a continuum. Although their discussion of the continuum is not extensive (also see Epley, Waytz, et al., 2008), it is quite clear that any consideration of animism and anthropomorphism must account for where the variant in question sits on the continuum. Notably, Avis (2011) argues that the humanlike brand is a strong variant of anthropomorphism, as the brand is posited to have human characteristics, and also it is perceived as a social actor with whom consumers might have a humanlike relationship.

Also, Boyer (1996a) argues that animism and anthropomorphism are not invariant, and posits a 'hierarchy of psychological salience' (p.87) for the phenomena (see table 8 for a summary).

Table 8: Boyer's hierarchy

| Name | Description |
|-------------------------|---|
| Anatomical Structure | 'Features of the landscape described in terms of their resemblance with parts or aspects of the human body' |
| Physiological Processes | A mountain seen by the Aymara of Bolivia as a living organism, and gods and spirits that enact human behaviors. |
| Personal Identity | Religious systems in which gods have distinct personalities and histories. |
| Social Organization | 'In many cultural environments, spirits and animals are said to live in villages, have social hierarchies and other features of human social life.' |
| Intentional Psychology | 'This is the most common projection. Intentionality is routinely projected onto all sorts of ontological categories, not just categories of quasi-humans' e.g. trees overhearing conversations. |

Boyer suggests that these are not definitive lists, but are indicative of the 'cognitive diversity of projections' (p.90) and that there is no singular phenomenon, but rather variants and different 'degrees' of animism and anthropomorphism. Similarly, Fisher (1991) makes a distinction between variants of imaginative anthropomorphism (e.g. animal characters in books) and situational anthropomorphism (interpreting animal behavior as human).

It is worthwhile, therefore, to consider some of the variants of animism and anthropomorphism. From the literature on 'traditional' hunter gatherers, the natural world is often perceived as agentic, (Norenzayan, Hansen, & Cady, 2008), where spirits have been considered to inhabit trees and rocks (Zarcone, 2005), plants or streams (Halton, 2005). Curiously, in medieval Europe a glacier was excommunicated by the Catholic church (Hyde, 1915). However, in WEIRD cultures we still find the example of people seeing a face on the surface of mars (Lahelma, 2008), indicating the universality of such perceptions (also see Kiesler & Kiesler, 2005 for an examination of 'pet rocks'). However, this example illustrates another point: that most WEIRD people can perceive the face but will not perceive animism. Their perception is anthropomorphic without animating the subject of

anthropomorphism, as they are unlikely to extend personhood (Harvey, 2005), and their scientific education will ameliorate animistic perceptions (Lombrozo, et al., 2007).

However, although WEIRD people might be able to ‘correct’ perceptions, nevertheless they also commonly experience technical devices as animistic, and this has generated a substantial body of literature. Barrett (2001; 2005), for example, argues that technical devices might satisfy the domain input conditions of living kinds, and Persson et al. (2000) argue that the process involves layers such as primitive categorization (perceptions of movement), primitive psychology, folk-psychology, traits, social roles and emotions. A wide range of technical devices might be the subject of animistic perceptions, with research showing that PCs are the most talked to devices amongst another 90 that were mentioned (e.g. cars and washing machines, Luczak, Roetting, & Schmidt, 2003).

Although commonplace, there is general agreement that specific contexts are needed before devices are perceived as animistic. Barrett and Johnston (2003) comment that computers are not verbally abused when in their boxes, but ‘it is when objects’ action violates our own sense of causal efficacy, we attribute agency to them’ (p.215). The notion that anthropomorphism/animism is linked to frustration and loss of control is relatively commonplace (e.g. Jackson, 2002; Owens, 2007), with Luczak et al (2003) reporting that 79% of communications with technical devices were scolding, and 54% seeking to ‘motivate’ the device. A summary of the argument suggests that anthropomorphism is a default for ‘whenever the going gets tough’ (Caporael & Heyes, 1997, p. 64).

Also, Luczak et al (2003) found that the most common way of characterizing a computer was as a ‘tool’, with only a very small number using terms such as a ‘friend’. This is again suggestive that animistic perceptions of technical devices are activated in particular contexts, perhaps including the influences posited by (Epley, et al., 2007). Interestingly, however, are those instances where the

importance of context seems to be limited as with the example of car naming. In one study, 47% and 26% of participants attributed gender and names to cars respectively, and found that imagining a personality for their car was not an outlandish question (Benfield, Szlemko, & Bell, 2007; also see Luczak, et al., 2003). However, for the latter point, it might be noted that having people think of brands as animals is also not considered outlandish, but without implying that people ordinarily think of brands this way (Avis, 2011).

Further, both cars and computers are often designed to be anthropomorphic or zoomorphic, and this undoubtedly encourages animistic perceptions, and may also explain the naming of cars. As Sharkey and Sharkey (2006) note, designing the illusion of anthropomorphic or zoomorphic devices can be traced back to ancient history, and it is notable that cars (J Welsh, 2006; J. Welsh, 2006), computers (e.g. an early study on use of 'agents' W. J. King & Ohya, 1996; see Murano & O'Brian, 2007 for an overview; Turkle, 1995) and other devices associated with animistic perceptions are designed to encourage such responses. In particular, the literature on robotics (unsurprisingly) is replete with studies of the impact of anthropomorphic design on human interactions with robots (e.g. Arkin, Fujita, Takagi, & Hasegawa, 2003; Fong, Nourbakhsh, & Dautenhahn, 2003; D. Vidal, 2007).

However, anthropomorphic/zoomorphic design is not restricted to technical devices, but is applied to both objects and images. Creating and designing anthropomorphic objects stretches into ancient human history (Nanoglou, 2008), and has continued into modernity, including a pervasive presence in advertising (Guthrie, 2007b). The idea that objects are 'responsible' agents is a commonplace in many cultures, and throughout history (Hyde, 1915; Owens, 2007). DiSalvo and Gemperle (2003) suggest that anthropomorphic design serves to explain unknown products (e.g. technical), structures our interaction with products, projects human values (e.g. a kneeling bus), and provides continuity with product class.

One of the most widely discussed forms of CDPRS is animal anthropomorphism, but some would argue that it is not anthropomorphism at all (Chartrand, Fitzsimons, & Fitzsimons, 2008). In ethology, anthropomorphism has been criticized as unscientific (Lulka, 2008), with Wynne (2004) arguing that it is fraught with risk. Kennedy's (1992) strong critique of the re-emergence of anthropomorphism in ethology is of particular note (see Klopfer, 2005 for a counter-argument), with others arguing that resisting the proclivity to anthropomorphize animals is 'probably futile' (J. M. Vidal, Vancassel, & Quris, 1995).

Mitchell (2005) summarizes the common points of definition and understanding of anthropomorphism in ethology using three key points: that it is a category mistake, an overestimation of the similarity between humans and non-humans, and that it is necessary or unavoidable as there is no neutral language to describe animal behavior. Mitchell goes on to suggest that these are erroneous, in that animals are not input-output machines and that we are mistaking anthropomorphism for anthropocentrism.

The final variant of CDPRS is one that is quite distinct but crosses the boundaries of traditional understanding of animism. This is the belief in entities such as deities and spirits, which Guthrie (1993) links to the human proclivity to animate and anthropomorphize. Barrett (2007) offers a review of the origin of such beliefs, commencing with a consideration of reflective and non-reflective beliefs. He notes that some beliefs may be shared between these belief types, and that neither variant necessarily imply a truth value. However, a key difference is that non-reflective beliefs may be unverifiable and, where there is 'weight' of non-reflective beliefs, these can act to form a reflective belief, such as belief in deities. Belief in religious agents requires a fine balance of factors (Boyer, 2001), which Barrett (2008) summarizes as: '(1) Counterintuitive, (2) an intentional agent, (3) possessing strategic information, (4) able to act in the human world in detectable ways

and (5) capable of motivating behaviors that reinforce belief.’ (p.150)

In summary, Mithen’s (1996b) account serves to explain the underlying reason for the many variants of CDPRs, but other accounts also offer insights into the complexity, variations, and differences in degree and circumstances in which CDPRs are ‘activated’. Although CDPRs are a commonplace and part of universal human experience, for a theory of consumers having humanlike brand perceptions to be viable it is necessary to relate the theory to the variants and complexity of CDPR theory. While this may seem a logical and reasonable suggestion, there are a number of difficulties presented by the increasingly complex explanations of what a brand actually is for such a relationship to be established.

3.10 Brand definition and the humanlike brand

Reviews of brand definitions by Wood (2000) and Stern (2006) find that there are multiple perspectives on what a brand might be, for example with differences in definition arising from brand owner versus consumer centric perspectives, or process versus entity perspectives. As Kapferer (2004) observes, there are a multitude of definitions and nuances of the definitions. However, regardless of the variance in definition, few would suggest that the brand is the product and while it might be argued that the product (or service) is an element of a brand some theorists do not even include the product as a component of a brand (e.g. de Chernatony & Dall’Olmo Riley, 1998a). As Brodie and de Chernatony (2009) suggest, ‘there never will be a unifying definition of ‘brand’ but a constantly evolving series of contexts of lenses through which the phenomenon is viewed.’ (p.97) However, Fournier discusses the brand as follows:

‘Undoubtedly, there exists a lack of parallelism in applying the reciprocity criterion to an inanimate brand object. A brand may enjoy selected animistic properties, but it is not a vital

entity. In fact, the brand has no objective existence at all: it is simply a collection of perceptions held in the mind of the consumer. The brand cannot act except through the activities of the manager that administers it.' (p.345)

While Fournier describes the brand as not being a vital entity, it is uncertain whether this means that some people know it is not, but others believe that it is, or that it is simply not a vital entity in any persons' perceptions. Also, if a brand is simply a collection of perceptions in the mind of a consumer, this does not provide a referent for the perceptions, which leaves the problem of what is the subject of the humanlike brand perceptions. For example, Brown (2010) discusses the use of anthropomorphic trade characters in advertising, and Aggarwal and McGill (2007) and Kim and McGill (2011) examine anthropomorphism of cars and slot machines respectively; but are these examples of brand anthropomorphism/animism?

The problem is that, in common with many marketing concepts (G. Zaltman, LeMasters, & Heffring, 1982), the concept of the brand is metaphoric (Gary Davies & Chun, 2003). For example, Hanby (1999) details the transition of the brand concept from the classical AMA definition of brand in terms of logo and product, to 'product plus' intangible attributes, and then the emergent divide of brand metaphors into the brand as a 'living entity' and as a 'manipulable artefact'. The key point made by these authors is that the brand is not an entity 'out in the world' but is a metaphor for explaining theories of consumer behavior and/or consumer perceptions of agglomerations of intangible associations (and *possibly* including tangible elements such as product/logo).

The question that this raises is whether these metaphoric agglomerations of perceptions and/or theory might be understood in terms of the theory of CDPRs. Although, Aaker, Fournier and Freling and Forbes discuss their theories in terms of animism/anthropomorphism, only Puzakova et al. take this logical conclusion, saying:

‘However, for a brand to become an actual partner in the relationship, it must be perceived as a complete, literal human.’ (p.413, also see Puzakova, et al., 2010)

If thinking of the variants and degrees of anthropomorphism, this appears as a particularly strong variant of CDPR. It might be that this was not the intention of the other key theorists, but their use of animism and anthropomorphism theory also implies a strong variant, and humanlike brand theory is central to their theory. The problem, as Epley et al. (2007) point out, is:

‘Like any set of beliefs [...] the strength of anthropomorphic beliefs can vary along a continuum, from those held very strongly to those held more weakly. Religious believers, for instance, frequently speak of God’s will, intentions, or desires—beliefs about the mental states of religious agents that are held by many with the deepest and most sincere conviction. [...] But weaker forms of anthropomorphism may emerge as well that appear to be metaphorical ways of thinking rather than firmly held beliefs that an agent has humanlike traits.’ (p.867)

It is apparent that humanlike brand theory closely accords with perceptions of religious agents, and is far removed from the weak metaphor variant. Although Epley et al. cite Aaker’s article in a discussion of anthropomorphism the detail of the theory implies a strong variant akin to perceptions of deities. Although technical devices, artifacts, animals and the natural world might all be the subject of CDPRs, the brand concept does not correspond to any of these variants.

For example, while people name their cars, the product is not the brand. While advertising uses anthropomorphic objects or trade characters this does not imply that the metaphor of a brand is perceived as humanlike. Similarly, animals are actual agents in the world, often with traits and

behavior that we can perceive as being similar to humans and anthropological understandings of animism see animism applied to actual entities such as plants and trees in the natural world.

However, it is difficult to see how these examples of CDPRs might apply to brands.

As suggested by Avis (2011), the only exemplars of CDPRs that might correspond to the strong variant of CDPRs represented by humanlike brand theory are religious agents. However, religious agents are not metaphors. They are perceived as real entities that act in the world and belief in religious agents requires particular sets of circumstances. If taking the requirement for counter-intuitiveness (Boyer, 2001) for example, it is difficult to see what consumers might see as counter-intuitive. Consumers are undoubtedly aware that firms exist, and that they provide goods and services. As such, there is a perfectly intuitive explanation of the world that appears as more plausible than brands being seen as living humanlike entities: the firm as the social actor. This is an understanding in which a non-human entity is given the role of an actor, but nevertheless is founded in collective human action (see Lickel et al., 2000 for a discussion of group 'entitivity').

Overall, when reviewing the theory of CDPRs, it is difficult to find exemplars that might explain humanlike brand theory. Instead, it may well be that brand theorists have interpreted metaphoric language as literal explanations of genuine beliefs. Psychologists have linked anthropomorphic language with underlying anthropomorphic thought, but nevertheless to call a patch of sand 'treacherous' would be to represent the sand as a person while fully recognizing the incongruity of the description (J. L. Barrett & Keil, 1996). Caporael (1986; also see Caporael & Heyes, 1997) cautions against people's use of anthropomorphic language being taken literally, arguing that the use of human descriptors might simply be a linguistic device to better communicate ideas, a view shared by Yoon et al (2006) in relation to brand personality.

Another explanation is that the first mention of personality in relation to brands is used as a novel

metaphor (Gardner & Levy, 1955; also see S. J. Levy, 1959, who cites the work as discussing brand image). MacCormac (1985, pp.27-28), provides a warning that a metaphor might become 'true' through repetition and 'entice' scientists into believing that the metaphor is literal. Similarly, Anderson (2008) argues that, in organizational studies, the organizational metaphor came to be misunderstood as a literal description, rather than metaphor.

Most pertinently, Capelli and Jolibert (2009) examine the validity of metaphor usage in marketing, and interestingly propose that 'brand anthropomorphization is the basis of the metaphor of brand personality' (p.1085). They are assuming that it is the humanlike brand theorists developing an anthropomorphic metaphor, rather than consumers actually perceiving brands as humanlike. It is therefore interesting to see that their introduction warns that the 'inherent ambiguity of metaphor may distort our view of reality' (p.1079). It seems quite possible that the positing of humanlike brand theorists have indeed been 'enticed' to take a metaphor as literal.

Furthermore, the method of brand personification may have supported the move from metaphor to literal, despite the method not representing ordinary ways of thinking about brands (Avis, 2011; O'Guinn & Muniz, 2009; Gerald Zaltman & Zaltman, 2008, p.37). Interestingly, this projective method does indeed develop humanlike brand perceptions, uniquely generating user imagery, (Hofstede, van Hoof, Walenberg, & de Jong, 2007; a stereotypical brand user, J.M. Sirgy et al., 1997). However, user imagery does not correspond to humanlike brand theory, as it would be difficult to have a humanlike relationship with user imagery.

3.11 Conclusion

The idea of humanlike brands may be appealing, but it does not appear to be founded in the extant literature on CDPRs. A key element of this review has been to examine some of the key theory with

regards to CDPRs, but the review was undertaken with the ongoing problem of how this might be related to such an abstract concept as a 'brand'. In some respects, despite the efforts involved in reviewing such a large body of literature, the problem of the definition of the brand might be seen to render the efforts as moot. However, the review is necessary, if for no other reason than to highlight that the underlying problem with humanlike brand theory relates to the underlying problem with the definition of the brand. In particular, humanlike brand theory highlights the shift in conceptualizing the brand from lifeless artifact to living entity (Hanby, 1999) to collections of perceptions (Fournier 1998).

This shift has seen the brand come to be regarded as an agent in the world, but can a metaphor be an actual actor in the world? It is a persuasive idea, as we all share the proclivity for seeing the world in agentic terms, but what really matters is whether the underlying subject of study, consumer perceptions, also see brands as agentic entities. While describing brands as humanlike agents is a colorful, imaginative and, perhaps, natural way for people to represent their responses to such an inanimate and amorphous concept, actually believing them to be humanlike seems improbable.

The use of animism and anthropomorphism theory to describe the essential characteristics of something as impalpable as a brand seems to obfuscate as much as it does to clarify. In particular, it seems that consumers are likely to be fully aware that there is a firm that is an agent in the world. Understanding, and, accepting, the theory of the brand as a living entity seems to be a bridge too far. It is suggested, therefore, that a review of the brand concept itself is undertaken to provide some common ground for clarification and clear directions for a way forward.

Chapter 4: Brand Personality, Brand Relationships and Humanlike Brand Perceptions

4.1 Preamble:

This paper is again building on the paper in chapter 2, but uses both research and critical reviews to examine the empirical evidence for brand personality and relationships. As such, chapter 3 addresses one of the elements of the framework for debate, and this paper answers the other element; an examination of the empirical evidence. The first part of the research for the paper is based upon Avis (Avis, 2008), but reinterprets the data to consider the question of whether consumers think of brands in terms of relationships. In addition, an initially unrelated project seeking to understand the definition of brand was later added to further support the first research project.

The reviews that precede the research are as important as the research itself in the overall argument. Indeed, the purpose of the paper may have, in some respects, been better served by just presenting a critical review. However, it is easier to have a paper published that includes research, and the research does add to the argument. With regards to the review, the most interesting point is that there seems to be confusion between the firm and the brand, and the paper highlights this confusion. In some respects it is unsurprising, as the firm and brand appear to be merged in some accounts of the brand, where a brand comes to stand for everything a firm does (Ind, 2004). The problem with this expansive understanding of the brand is that it risks becoming a redundant concept (Singh, 1991), as the brand and firm might be viewed as the same entity, and this seems to be the case for the brand relationship concept.

4.2 Introduction

Do consumers ordinarily think of brands as living humanlike entities? Described by Avis (2011) as ‘humanlike brand’ theory, highly influential articles by Aaker (1997) and Fournier (1998) introduced theories of animism and anthropomorphism into brand theory, implying that consumers do indeed perceive brands as humanlike. Given the considerable influence of these two authors on subsequent research into brand personality and brand relationships, it is important to establish whether humanlike brand theory is a valid explanation of consumer perceptions of brands.

It should be noted that Fournier’s (1998) article presents a long discourse on humanlike brand theory, but also posits that brand relationships are founded in metaphor or analogy. In reviewing the underlying theory for brand personality and brand relationships, however, Avis et al (2012) present a case that these are mutually incompatible theoretical foundations. In particular, humanlike brand theory suggests that consumers actually perceive brands as humanlike, which would mean that brand relationships are actually humanlike relationships, and that metaphorical explanations would therefore be redundant. Furthermore, they note that Fournier would not have included an extensive discussion in support of humanlike brand theory if brand relationships were metaphoric.

Despite Fournier’s (1998) early emphasis on humanlike brand theory, more recent comments describe the theory as a ‘red herring’ (2009). In the same volume as this revision, O’Guinn and Muniz (2009) suggest that consumers’ humanlike brand perceptions can often be more prompted than real. It is also notable that Freling, who offered a long discourse on humanlike brand theory (Freling & Forbes, 2005b), later makes no further discussion of the theory (Freling, et al., 2010), possibly suggesting a concern that the theory was a red herring. In light of the apparent/possible revision of the positions of two key humanlike brand theorists, it is an appropriate time to revisit the

theoretical foundations of brand personality and relationships.

Avis et al's (2012) review of brand personality and brand relationship literature suggests a degree of ambiguity and confusion in relation to the foundations of the theory for the two concepts. While some articles combine metaphorical and humanlike brand theory, others, although seemingly founded on humanlike brand theory, provide little theoretical grounding. Further, there has been a limited review of the empirical evidence presented to support humanlike brand theory. The present paper seeks to address this by reviewing evidence based on naturalistic enquiry.

The paper then presents case study research that examines whether *ordinary* consumers *ordinarily* think of brands as humanlike, and interviews that examine what ordinary consumers think a brand actually is. By this we mean that consumers who are not actively prompted to think of brands as humanlike (O'Guinn & Muniz, 2009), and we specifically exclude marketing students from being ordinary as they might give answers that are informed by branding theory. As a result of the review and research, some concerns are raised about the empirical foundations for humanlike brand theory. For example, are there more plausible explanations for consumer perceptions than humanlike brand theory such as user-imagery perceptions and perceptions of the 'firm' as a social actor.

4.3 Considering the Empirical Evidence for the Humanlike Brand

In a recent review of brand personality and brand relationship literature, Avis (2011) identifies three papers that present the most extensive discourse on humanlike brand theory: Fournier (1998), Puzakova *et al* (2009) and Freling and Forbes (2005b). In reviewing the empirical evidence for and the literature in support of, humanlike brand theory presented in these papers, the following is noted:

1. In each of the papers, there are frequent references to research founded on projective methods (e.g. brand personification in which a consumer is asked to think about a brand as if it were a person). According to Zaltman & Zaltman, (2008, p37) such evidence does not represent ordinary brand perceptions;
2. Outside of citations of projective research, the only evidence found for the humanlike brand seems to come from brand personality and brand relationship research but not noticed by other brand research; and,
3. In addition, Avis also notes that there is empirical evidence that suggests that brands are not perceived as humanlike, including fMRI based research (Yoon, et al., 2006), the failure to validate human personality inventories (e.g. Caprara, et al., 2001), and that a free choice survey method found little evidence of brand personality perceptions (Romaniuk & Ehrenberg, 2003).

Of these points, point (2) is perhaps the most surprising in its suggestion that there seems to be an absence of complimentary confirmation of this phenomenon. Further, Avis (2011) also raises doubts about the use of animism and anthropomorphism theory in the brand personality and brand relationship literature. He argues that the only examples in the animism and anthropomorphism literature that might explain humanlike brand perceptions would be if consumers perceived brands in a way similar to the way that deities and spirits are perceived. As such, in conjunction with a seeming paucity of empirical support for humanlike brand theory, Avis suggests that humanlike brand theory is implausible both intuitively and empirically.

4.4 Framework for Analysis

Avis (2011) places considerable emphasis on brand definition as a starting point for the examination of humanlike brand theory; stating, in particular, that the relationship must be with *something*, and

something must have the personality. However, with the concept of brand being subject to multiple interpretations and definitions (Stern, 2006), it is not possible to provide a definition that might not be contested. As such, this paper takes a different approach, which is to ask ordinary consumers what they think a brand actually is. After all, it is ordinary consumers who are assumed to have the perceptions of brands as humanlike such that, if they do indeed view brands as humanlike, this should become apparent in their discussions.

The paper will extend the review of humanlike brand literature made by Avis (2011), including reviewing evidence given in support of humanlike brand theory by Freling and Forbes (2005b) and Fournier (1998). In addition, as an interesting contrast, the qualitative brand personality research of Arora and Stoner (2009) will be examined, as their paper does not appear to be founded in humanlike brand theory. Also, the paper will use Avis et al's (2012) sample of papers founded in humanlike brand theory to extend Avis's (2011) review of supporting empirical evidence for humanlike brands. Following Avis, the examination will seek confirmatory evidence that is not founded in personification, or in research specifically examining brand personality or brand relationships.

The philosophical position of this paper is based on the work of Niiniluoto (1999), who proposes that theory must be supported with empirical evidence, and that theory must be a 'true' description of reality. Avis et al (2012) point out that brand personality and brand relationship theory both suggest that personality and relationships influence consumer behaviour. In the literature reviewed for this paper, brand personality and brand relationship literature does not present caveats such as 'some consumers' or 'some of the time'. Therefore, in the case of humanlike brand theory, a reasonable test of the validity of theory is that most *ordinary* consumers will *ordinarily* think of brands as living humanlike entities. If brands are indeed perceived as humanlike, this should be reflected in consumer descriptions of brands, and the case study research for this paper uses brands

which have been found to have brand personality, and been used as examples in brand relationship articles. As such, it is assumed that they *should* have brand personality, and consumers *should* perceive a humanlike relationship with them.

4.5 Case Study Research: Empirical Evidence for the Humanlike Brand?

4.5.1 The firm as the social actor

Fournier (1998), Freling and Forbes (2005b) and Arora and Stoner (2009) appear to offer compelling empirical support for humanlike brand theory. However, whilst each of the papers appears to offer convincing evidence, such evidence is ambiguous. If brands are perceived as humanlike by consumers, and their relationship is with the brand, consumers should see the brand as a social actor (Avis, 2011). However, it is apparent that there are many examples in the three papers which instead see *the firm* as the social actor. Some examples are provided in the Table 9:

Table 9: Participant Quotes from Research

| Article | Participant quote |
|-----------------------------|--|
| (Arora and Stoner, 2009) | [discussing Nike] They are the most original sports gear company I can think of. They are always using the new technology air-absorb, etc.’ (p.277) |
| (Freling and Forbes, 2005b) | ‘I also regard FedEx as uncomplicated and courteous, because they don't make you stand in line for a long time and fill out a lot of unnecessary paperwork just to mail a package [emphasis added].’ (p154) [and] ‘I have not eaten there since then, and I find it very offensive that they put out those commercials with Jack the clown that are supposed to be humorous.’ (p.155) |
| (Fournier, 1998) | [in reference to Mary Kay] ‘And, I, uh, just as I have aged, like, I depend on it more and need it more.’ [and] ‘The worst is if they pull one of your favorite colors from the line. They did that to me with the lipstick.’ (p.355) |

It is apparent from these few examples that consumers are thinking of the firm as a social actor (‘they’) and, notably, products are also seen as objects that are provided by the firm (‘it’). The

4.5.2 Over-interpretation of consumer discourse and language

Having identified discourse in which the firm is the social actor, there are also examples of apparently humanlike brand perceptions, such as this from Fournier (1998) :

Vicki: Is loyalty the same as a deep love for something? I don't want to bring the "L" word into things but I guess I really do love a lot of the brands that I use. Opium, Intimate Musk. I can't imagine not having them. I love them, I do.

Karen: Oh, I just love Mary Kay! It is the perfect brand of makeup for me. It really is. When I think of not having it anymore, well, it just makes me nervous.' (p.364)

Vicki, a post-graduate student (marketing?), appears to have a strong humanlike feeling about the brand, and Karen likewise expresses 'love'? Other theorists have also posited that consumers might 'love' brands (e.g. Albert, Merunka, & Valette-Florence, 2007; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006) but it is notable that, in an earlier consideration of brand love, Shimp and Madden (1988) are very clear that the concept was entirely metaphorical, including identifying the points where isomorphism between feelings for a brand versus a person were not apparent (e.g. see J. Cornelissen, 2003). It seems that Shimp and Madden recognised the figurative nature of consumer discourse, and other theorists have likewise noted that consumers use figurative language.

It is easy to see how theorists might interpret participant discourse as indicative of humanlike brand perceptions. For example, in a participant's discussion of trust in Arora and Stoner's article: 'I'd say **they** are both **trustworthy**. Mainly with respect to **their** products, you know what you are going to get.' (p.277, emphasis added). The trust is again directed to the firm, but it also illustrates the potential for misinterpretation. Even without the firm as the target, although trust may be associated with humans, it is also possible, for example to 'trust' in a bridge (it is designed to prevent you

falling in the river) without the implication that it is viewed as humanlike.

Janlert and Stolterman (1997) illustrate this point in their consideration of the ways that people use character to describe everyday objects, such as calling a machine 'clever'. However, they are clear that 'they probably do not think that the machine really is clever, but they still find it convenient to ascribe cleverness to it' (p.298). Also, Tsoukas (1991) points out that 'In lay discourse, metaphors constitute an economical way of relaying primarily experiential information in a vivid manner.' (p.567) It is also notable that, in linguistics, the meaning of terms is seen to adjust according to the domain and the context within which the word is used, for example with the word 'good' having different potential meaning when applied to a man and to food (Evans, 2006). The problem of the use of figurative language can be illustrated in the following two sentences:

1. I love ice cream
2. I love Häagen-Dazs

In the first case, it is unlikely that anyone would suggest humanlike emotions for and/or humanlike relationships with ice cream, but in the second sentence, this might be the interpretation of brand researchers. The argument of this paper in relation to brand personality and brand relationship research is the importance of recognising the difference between figurative and literal use of language (see Coulson & Oakley, 2005 for a full discussion), and the prevalence of anthropomorphism in language (Regier, 2006). This is not to say that, in some circumstances, it is not possible for individuals to have strong feelings for firms' products or services, or strong feelings about a firm, but care should be taken with taking figurative responses as literal meanings.

In addition to the examples that support humanlike brand theory, Fournier (1998) also presents case studies to illustrate the nature of consumer relationships with brands. For example, Fournier

describes the case study of a participant as:

“Jean exhibits *especially strong relationships* with all of the brands that enable her ‘trademark’ [spaghetti sauce]. Loyalties to Pastene tomatoes, Hunt’s sauce, Bertolli Olive Oil, Contadina Tomato paste.” (p.350, emphasis added)

A reasonable way to interpret the meaning of these ‘especially strong relationships’ is to use Fournier’s (1998) own theoretical framework of human relationship theory and humanlike brand theory. In this context, the especially strong relationship implies something that is similar to a relationship with a close friend or family member. However, the evidence as presented provides little support for such an assertion and seems to rely as much on interpretation as it does on illustration.

4.5.3 Summary

When reviewing these three research studies, it is apparent that they appear to support humanlike brand theory. However, there are a number of consumer responses which are suggestive of an explanation of brand perception that is more intuitively plausible than the idea that consumers perceive brands as humanlike entities: the firm as a social actor, an entity of real people/processes/activities that provide products and services for consumers.

It might be noted that there is nothing in this summary that might preclude consumers having emotional responses to the activities of firms, or having strong feelings about a firm’s product/s or service/s. Also, there is nothing in this review to say that the actual products of a firm might be subject to animism and anthropomorphism (e.g. see Aggarwal & McGill, 2007 for cars), or that anthropomorphism/animism may not be used in advertising (S. Brown, 2010). Also, we do not

debate that animism and anthropomorphism are commonplace phenomena (see Guthrie, 1993 for a review), but we are interested in animism and anthropomorphism of brands in particular.

Finally, personification will produce animistic and anthropomorphic perceptions of brand. However, personification particularly generates user imagery (Hofstede, et al., 2007), and ‘almost always coincide[s] with subjects’ perceptions of brand users’ (Day, 1989, p.8; also see K. L. Keller, 1998, p.326). If personification does generate user-imagery, and this is the foundation of the notion of humanlike perceptions, this raises problems for brand relationship theory. As Davies and Chun (2003) propose:

‘The idea that we can have a relationship with a brand is an extension of the brand is person metaphor, as the implication is the brand requires a human dimension before we can have a relationship with it.’ (p.51)

User-imagery is indeed a humanlike association with a brand, but could not be the subject of a relationship as presented in humanlike brand theory, as it seems improbable that a stereotype might be perceived as a social actor. In any event, there is no suggestion in the brand relationship literature that the relationship is with the user-imagery.

4.6 Supporting Empirical Evidence for Humanlike Brand Theory

From the above review it is possible to see how brand personality and brand relationship theory may have been over-emphasised and under-tested. It is notable that Aaker’s (1997) methodology included the use of personification but, as discussed, this does not represent ordinary perceptions of brands (O’Guinn & Muniz, 2009; Gerald Zaltman & Zaltman, 2008). Also, Avis (2012) notes that the majority of brand personality research relies on factor based research and presents a case that

the methods used in factor research are unreliable, founded as they are on opaque conceptualisations of brand personality, and also argues that findings from factor research imply that brands are not perceived as humanlike.

Also, when reviewing a sample of humanlike brand literature (see Paper Appendix 1), it was apparent that the empirical evidence reflects the points made by Avis (2011). The discussion of humanlike brand theory was of variable depth, but some of the articles offered extensive reviews (e.g. Sargeant, West, & Hudson, 2008), including discussions of object anthropomorphism (e.g. Aggarwal & McGill, 2007), and/or general examples of animism and anthropomorphism (e.g. Cary, 2000), or general animism and anthropomorphism theory (e.g. Hirschman, 2010). However, in each case, the support for brand anthropomorphism refers to brand personality and brand relationship literature, or is based on projective research. Common citations in support of the humanlike brand referred to the work of Aaker and Fournier (e.g. J. Aaker, 1997; J. Aaker, et al., 2004; Fournier, 1998), as well as practitioner articles based upon projective research (e.g. Blackston, 1993; J. Plummer, 1985). Of the 19 papers reviewed, it is difficult to find evidence of *ordinary* consumers *ordinarily* thinking of brands as humanlike.

The reliance placed on projective methods to elicit ‘ordinary’ examples of brand personality is problematic. While clearly providing empirical evidence, the technique relies heavily on suggestion and framing to the extent that consumer responses, while interesting, are not the ‘ordinary’ responses of ‘ordinary’ consumers.

4.7 Review Discussion

In order for a theory to be valid, it is necessary that there is empirical evidence that supports the theory (Niiniluoto, 1999). However, in the review conducted for this paper, the conclusion is similar

to that suggested by Avis (2011): that empirical support for humanlike brand theory is difficult to establish.

Furthermore, within the reviews there is evidence which might suggest a more plausible alternative to humanlike brand theory: consumers perceive firms as social actors (or agents) with the firms identified through their use of brand names. Consumers then might enter into relationships of variable strength with these firms, perceiving them as collective entities. There is also theoretical and empirical support for the idea of ‘group entitativity’, whereby the mental representations of groups (e.g. military units) are processed as if they were individuals (Lickel, et al., 2000), and this *might* apply to firms (e.g. see G. Davies, Chun, da Silva, & Roper, 2001).

In the case of brand personality theory, it may be that researchers have relied too heavily on projective methods, and assumed that the data from personifications is the way in which consumers ordinarily think about brands. It may also be that brand personality theorists have created a theoretically confused re-conceptualisation of user-imagery.

For example, Aaker’s (1997) survey methodology used personification as part of the research process and this process commonly generates user-imagery. However, Azoulay and Kapferer (2003) argue that Aaker’s scale includes a ‘pot-pourri’ of descriptors that encompass many elements of brand identity, including user-imagery, but also including other brand identity concepts. As such, the personification presumably generates user-imagery, but the scale then includes the use of non-user imagery descriptors to measure the user-imagery. Perhaps a more useful approach would be to return to the study of user-imagery, which appears to be a clearer concept, and one which is an intuitively more plausible explanation of consumer perceptions (Avis, 2011).

Overall, the review presented here presents an alternative understanding of consumer perceptions of

the humanlike nature of brands. The following section presents a case study which attempts to address the question of whether *ordinary* consumers *ordinarily* think of brands as humanlike. As Gummesson (2001, p35) observes, case study research might be used to ‘confront existing theories with reality’ (p.35). Also, a further research project examines the question of what ordinary consumers think a brand actually is.

4.8 Research

Two research projects are reported here; the first, using diaries and interviews, is a case study designed to investigate whether ordinary consumers ordinarily think of brands as if they are people and the second reports an element of a larger project investigating brand definitions. For the latter, one element of the project was to examine what ordinary consumers actually think a brand is, and only this element of the project is reported here. Both projects utilised qualitative methods, and Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) provide an overview of the literature on the validity of qualitative research, with both projects drawing on their recommendations. For both projects, an audit trail has been generated, and the coding for the research was checked by a second experienced coder to ensure that it reasonably reflected the original material. Also, some examples from participants that might be perceived as ‘contrary’ are reported in full to give a balanced picture.

In project 1, the participants transcribed their own interviews to ensure accurate representation of their answers (this was not possible for project 2). The analysis method for the diary and brand definitions is drawn from Kassirjian (1977), with the aim of the analysis to identify and quantify any humanlike perceptions and other emergent themes. Using a continual process of iteration as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006) we identified what we believed were representative data categories upon which we based our discussion. In each case the raw data was revisited several times to identify the themes, with the final coding representing the coders best understanding and

representation of the data. As will be discussed, the interview stage of project 1 was adapted due to confounding results from the diaries, and relevant sections of interviews are reported.

4.8.1 Project 1

The research used diaries and interviews to investigate consumer perceptions of four fast food brands (KFC, McDonalds, Subway and Burger King), with research on fast food brands having previously found brand personality and strong brand relationships (e.g. J. Aaker, 1997; Fournier & Yao, 1997; Siguaw, Mattila, & Austin, 1999; van Rekom, Jacobs, Verlegh, & Podnar, 2006; Wee, 2004). This is an important point, as it would be reasonable to expect that humanlike brand perceptions should naturally emerge in the research, if *ordinary* consumers do indeed *ordinarily* think of brands as humanlike.

Diaries were used to generate event contingent humanlike brand perceptions (Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003), with the aim of later investigating these perceptions in interviews. However, with very few humanlike brand perceptions generated (see later), the interview was adapted as an examination of the role of researchers in generating humanlike brand perceptions. As such, human primes were progressively introduced into the interviews to examine the ease with which humanlike brand perceptions might be encouraged. The principle of priming is that primes can induce an analogy between two domains (Schunn & Dunbar, 1996), and human primes presented the potential for cognitively accessible information to change the perceptions of brands (Stapel & Koomen, 2005). For example, an early stage of the interview encouraged the participants to discuss the brands in the terms of emotions, as emotions towards brands might induce analogy between humans and brands.

The interview commenced with a discussion of the participant's understanding of brands (no human

primes) and ended with a projection based on furniture to examine the ease with which a projection might generate apparently meaningful data. Ten *non-marketing* students were recruited as a pragmatic convenience sample (Bock & Sergeant, 2002), with each individual treated as a single case. Nine participants completed the study. Each participant regularly used at least one of the fast food brands and each was offered a shopping voucher as a gift at the end of the study.

4.8.1.1 Diary Stage

As has been discussed, the diary stage was intended as a method to gather participant perceptions/language related to humanlike brand descriptors and relationship language. However, despite 128 diary entries, the results from the diaries confounded this intention, as can be seen in the analysis of the diaries in Figure 10:

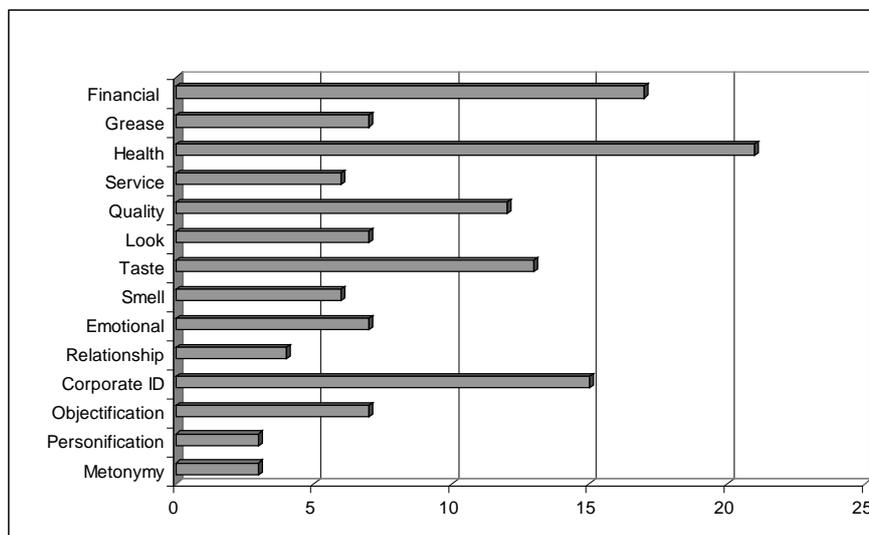


Figure 10: Summary of key diary themes

The most common theme that emerged was health, with discussion of grease common enough to merit a separate classification. The three personification references were not considered as evidence of brand personality, as these were not directly associated with the brand (e.g. ‘what a *clever*

marketing campaign it was’), and the same can be said for metonymic language (e.g. ‘what a messy takeaway’). In common with previous qualitative research on brand personality and brand relationships, there were frequent references to brands as corporate entities/the firm (Corporate ID – e.g. ‘How do **they** make **their** fries the way they do?’), and as objects, and this was in line with the examples found in previous studies cited earlier in the paper.

One interesting finding was that there were occasions when two research participants used language akin to human relationship language (e.g. ‘I told her I agreed that it was stingy but secretly I *love* KFC and don’t really mind’). In addition to the use of relationship language, there were also a few occasions when words were used that might be interpreted as demonstrating emotional involvement with a humanlike brand (e.g. ‘I *love* BK grilled chicken salad’). These few examples would be further investigated at the interview stage.

4.8.1.2 Interview Stage

The first phase of the interview was to investigate how the participants viewed brands, and the responses are discussed briefly in Project 2. The first prime in the interviews encouraged the development of humanlike brand associations through linking the brands to emotions. Despite this, it is clear that the interviewees were reluctant to think of brands in humanlike terms, with the following an illustrative example (Q=question, A=answer):

Q: How do you actually feel about, or what are your emotions for McDonalds?

A: Depending on my mood, somewhere between disgusted and ‘yay, let’s do it’

Q: When you say disgusted what are you thinking of?

A: So much fat. But yeah when you're hungry it's good.

Overall, there were *no* examples in which the participants demonstrated any indication of thinking of brands as humanlike entities. Following the first prime, where applicable, the participants were asked for clarifications of diary entries in which they used descriptors that might be indicative of humanlike/relationship perceptions. The results of this stage showed that there no examples of brands being perceived as humanlike entities. An example of a clarification is given below:

A: [regarding a diary entry in which he says he 'secretly loves' KFC] I think that even though KFC is my least favourite, I would, but if someone put it in front of me I'd still love it

Q: When you say love it...what do you mean by that?

A: I'd still eat it, I think, saying I love it is a bit of an exaggeration. Just, just because, it was, you know, it, I think it's an in-joke to, an in-joke to myself, sitting on the outside, myself saying it's so horrible and stingy but then actually being prepared to eat it, fast food.

In another example, the interviewee had expressed in a diary entry that he 'forgave' KFC for giving him an overflowing drink, suggesting a possible relationship with the brand. When asked who he was forgiving, his answer was that it was the person who served the drink. The next prime was stronger, where the participants were asked whether they thought of brands in the way they think of people. All but one interviewee denied that they thought of brands as people, such that the only positive response was quite startling as follows:

Q: When you think about the brands which we have been talking about have you been thinking about them in the same way as you think about people or as something different?

A: The same way as I view people.

Q: When you say that you view them in the same way as you view people how are you thinking of them?

A: Well I suppose I add a personality to each restaurant based on what the service is like, and what the food is like really.

Q: So you're mentioning the idea of adding a personality to... How would you compare that personality with the people in the world around you?

A: Well I suppose you relate some friends to going to McDonalds way more than they should, and I add those sort of friends personalities to McDonalds, and I suppose they're are all fairly large bubble people [meaning overweight].

There are at least two possible interpretations of this answer. In the initial answer, the interviewee is assigning personality to the restaurant and product and, therefore, more broadly the brand.

However, the question asking for clarification of the personality elicits the user imagery of friends who eat at McDonald's. It appears, therefore, that the second answer is the result of reflection on where the personality 'comes from' and the follow on answers for Burger King and Subway also indicated that user-imagery was the source of the 'personality'. For example, regarding Subway, the interviewee said:

The people that go there fit that personality, care about their weight and like to eat good food.

The last prime in the interviews was to explain animism and anthropomorphism, and the participants were then asked whether they thought of brands as animistic, or like people. The interviewee who 'added personality' gave a response which is of particular interest:

No, but I suppose that is kinda weird to say that considering I give them a personality, I don't think that they are living things at all. I think that if there was fire and a couple of people were killed it would be a tragedy, whereas if there was a fire and it burnt down an empty KFC it wouldn't really matter.

The other responses to questions were mixed with some positive answers and some negative. Several responses were just 'no' but an example of a fuller negative response is provided by one research participant:

No, to me, brands don't change. They're always going to be there and always going to be the same. I think of them as objects. Sometimes they might have qualities of a person, in that they make you feel better after you've eaten them, but that's all.

Another participant offered a positive response, for example characterising KFC as being happy, but the following was a response to the source of the characterisation:

I think it is from my own experiences, like being there with friends. It's always a place where people talk and are happy, and you sit down and there are families having meals and all that.

Where the responses were positive, it became apparent that the descriptions were user imagery, and that the more the brand was used by the participant, the more detailed the user imagery. The most interesting aspect of this part of the process was the mixture of responses. The interviewees were briefed that there was no right answer before being asked the questions and the variable results perhaps reflect this. In other words, they were primed, but not encouraged to personify. This finding both suggests that generating humanlike brand perceptions is not difficult, but is also not an ordinary process. Despite the personification, and despite all of the participants using at least one of the brands, *there were no indications at any point of perceptions of humanlike relationships with the brands.*

4.8.1.3 Projective Phase: Brands as Furniture

The final stage of the interview was to ask the participants to use a furniture projection, as a method for encouraging participants to think of brands in terms of other entities i.e. if consumers can think of brands as animals, cars, and even furniture, it is indicative of the imaginative capacity of consumers, rather than evidence of ordinary perceptions of brands. Whilst fast food restaurants have furniture, the projections were more than simply reports of furniture in the restaurants, as in this example for McDonald's from Nathan:

A couch, brown with tweed fabric, with curves, two seater, wooden legs, smooth, clean

The ease with which participants could think of brands in terms of furniture was evident in all cases, and only required some minimal prompting.

4.8.2 Project 2

As discussed, the research presented here is a small element of a larger research project investigating brand definitions. In this element of the research, a research assistant was asked to conduct street intercepts in the centre of a small city. Whilst the aim was not to recruit a representative sample of participants, the research assistant was asked to avoid too many students in the sample (the location is a 'student city'), and to try to find an approximate balance between genders, as well as including a broad range of ages and occupational backgrounds. Ages of participants ranged from 18-66 years old, and backgrounds included unemployed, managerial, business owners, scientists, manual workers, service staff and retirees. Aside from asking about occupation and age, the interview comprised a single question, with no follow-up questions, and was as follows:

A common word that is used in day-to-day conversation is the word brand. I would like to know what you think a brand actually is. Take a brief moment before answering the question to think about your answer and then please answer when you are ready.

Encouragement of answers was allowed. Participant answers were recorded for later transcription by the research assistant, and were then content analysed for themes, and these were then quantified.

4.8.2.1 Results:

A total of 61 definitions were collected, but one definition was excluded due to an inability to code or make sense of the meaning of the definition. The themes and numbers of mentions of each theme are summarised in tables 10, 11, and 12:

Table 10: Traditional interpretations of brand

| | (i) Label | (ii) Name | (iii) Logo etc. * | (iv) Slogan | Generic |
|-----------------------|-----------|-----------|-------------------|-------------|---------|
| A: Product/service | 5 | 4 | 5 | 1 | |
| B: Group/type product | | 6 | 1 | | |
| C: Firm | 1 | 6 | 4 | 1 | |
| D: Franchise | | | | | 1 |
| E: Generic | 5 | 3 | 7 | | |
| Totals | 11 | 19 | 17 | 2 | 1 |

*Symbol/logo/trademark/ nametag/visual image

Table 11: Brands represent or are associated with

| | Firm | Product | Name/logo | Generic |
|---------------------|------|---------|-----------|---------|
| Identifier / origin | 1 | 2 | | 1 |
| Awareness | | 1 | | |
| Reputation | 1 | | 1 | |
| Recognition | 1 | | 1 | 2 |
| Quality standards | 1 | | | 1 |
| Image | | 1 | | |
| Idea | | | 1 | |
| Lifestyle | | | 1 | |
| Something | | | | 1 |
| Style | | 1 | | |
| User-Imagery | 1 | | | 1 |
| Price Expectation | 2 | | | |
| Consistency | | | | 1 |

Table 12: General

| Tool for Marketers to Sell | Tool to Aid Consumers to Buy |
|---|---|
| 7 | 2 |
| Something that can be bought/ sold | Is a product |
| 2 | 4 |
| Something you own | Something Marketed/Advertised |
| 1 | 2 |
| Is something expensive/luxurious | A part of your life |
| 1 | 1 |
| Is a firm that sells things | Is a marketed image |
| 2 | 1 |
| Something that defines something | A mental association with an image (visual) |
| 1 | 1 |
| Something that can identify personality/characteristics of the purchaser -1 | |

As with all interview data, there were examples of ambiguous answers, or answers that might have several interpretations. For example, the following was a little unclear as to the intended meaning (emphasis added):

[...] it's just a collection of things that belong *to one person* or one company.

The one-person phrase was not coded and, in retrospect, might have benefited from a follow on question. The next example is one in which a fairly complex description, with an element of ambiguity, is coded very simply as a 'name for a group of products':

A brand is something where it replaces the actual product, or it sort of combines products into groups of things, so when you talk about a brand instead of the actual product name.

There is also some conservatism in the coding. For example, the following is a complete definition; '*It's how you identify products or the name of an organization*' and is coded as the two statements '*Identifies products, Identifies firm.*' However, the intended meaning is probably that the brand is the name/logo that identifies these. Also, where statements are unclear as to what they refer, they are coded as generic, as in the example 'A brand is the name of something', which is counted in E/ii.

4.8.2.2 Analysis

The most notable point in the count of the themes was the frequency of traditional ideas of a brand, which is that it is a name/logo/label for something. The responses to the street intercepts also reflected definitions of brands given in the interviews stage of project 1. For example, John answered 'I think it means some kind of imagery or symbol connected to a product' and Erin,

Maggie and Jo similarly proposed logos, with Erin proposing a brand as ‘something that is labelled’. Returning to this project, this is particularly apparent when looking at the raw data, with many of the more ‘academic’ brand definition themes coming from a limited number of long discourses. Of particular note is a shop manager who volunteered that she had studied a business degree and gave one of the more ‘academic’ accounts as follows:

I think brand is like an image or an idea of something, you know, a product, could be anything but it’s just like a marketing tool. People think of a brand and immediately in their head they’ve got like an image of something, like Nike for example, it’s a tick and it represents an idea or lifestyle. It’s more intangible, you can’t touch it.

With hindsight, it would have been better to have screened out those who might have had formal marketing education, or at least have accounted for their education. Also of note for the unique nature of the discourse was the following:

A brand is, it’s an identity of a person, a brand could identify personality and it means, for example, someone wearing a rich brand like Louis Vuitton or Gucci, you could tell they are rich people, if someone is wearing Adidas for example, you can tell they are a bit sporty.

However, the most notable feature of every single definition was the absence of perceptions of brand relationships or brand personality. Instead, the majority of participants just saw brands as identifiers of the goods/services of a particular firm, or as a tool for marketing these. The nearest equivalents were definitions which reported user-imagery, as in the answer given above.

4.8.3 Research Discussion

It is notable that in both the first and second projects that the understanding of brands is generally mundane. In project 1, in both the diaries and the un-primed stages of the interviews, the focus of most of the participants was towards mundane product attributes, such as the taste, quality and price of the food, along with considerable interest in the health implications of the food. It might be argued that this is the result of the nature of the way the research was conducted, or due to the particular category. However, other research can offer similar findings with, for example, Batra and Homer (2004, p321) finding comparable associations with snack foods brands.

With regards to the brand definition project (and this was replicated in the answers to brand definition questions in project 1), if looking at a broad overview of the participant responses, it appears that they might be represented as similar to the American Marketing Association definition of the 1960s:

‘A name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of the competitors’ (Cited in Wood, 2000, p.664).

As such, it seems that there is a gulf between modern academic representations of brands (e.g. see Stern, 2006; Wood, 2000) and those of participants. For the former, brands are far more than logos that stand for firms, and for the latter, they are largely seen as names/logos of corporate entities that sell products and services.

In project 1, in relation to how the participants characterised the brands in the un-primed stages, and to a lesser extent in the primed stages, it was apparent that many had a sense of a corporate entity, of

an organisation of people, being 'behind the brands'. The most relevant finding with regards to the humanlike brand was revealed in the staged approach of the research process. The diaries and early prime interview stage produced no humanlike associations. The progressive introduction of greater levels of priming corresponded to increases in humanlike associations, confirming the point that humanlike perceptions need prompting (O'Guinn & Muniz, 2009; Gerald Zaltman & Zaltman, 2008).

One participant response was exceptional in that the participant 'added personality' in correspondence with a strong person prime, but it should be re-emphasised that the participant had previously shown no indications of humanlike brand perceptions, and clarified that the personality added was user-imagery. This raises the question of the relationship between user-imagery and brand personality, and suggests that brand personality findings may indeed have been confused with user-imagery.

Another point of interest is that the cases of guilt and love for brands were both clarified with no suggestions of humanlike perceptions, and the expression of 'love' was entirely figurative. Throughout the interviews, even when highly primed, there were no cases of any participant expressing anything like a humanlike relationship with a brand. This suggests that perceptions of humanlike relationships with brands are not commonplace. The research findings, therefore, suggest that consumers *do not* ordinarily perceive brands as humanlike, and that priming perceptions allows individuals to readily associate brands with user-imagery. It must be reiterated that fast food brands have been 'found' to have brand personality, and that research has interpreted consumers as having relationships with fast food brands.

With regards to the brand definition project, it might be argued that the simple question that is asked generated superficial answers. It might be argued that the answers miss the subconscious elements

of the brand. However, this would be to posit the existence of subconscious feelings that cannot be empirically examined, and are therefore beyond confirmation or refutation. Furthermore, even when using the prime of emotion in project 1, the perceptions of the fast food brands remained determinedly mundane. However, it is not possible to say with absolute certainty that techniques such as personification are not capturing the *real* perceptions about brands held by consumers. Instead, an alternative point of view is presented.

It is therefore left to readers to decide on which account of consumer perceptions they believe to be more plausible. In one account, consumers are asked to think of brands as if they are people, but the same method also uses animals, and in the case of this research, furniture. We consider that direct questions and the answers they elicit better represent the way consumers think than methods which are inherently asking consumers to fantasise. The position in this paper is clear; it takes the former perspective, but others may wish to disagree.

4.8.4 Limitations

For project 1, whilst there were advantages in the use of one category for the research, it meant the following were not included; high involvement brands (Zaichkowsky, 1985), ‘Lovemark’ brands (Saatchi & Saatchi, 2008), brands around which communities have formed (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995), or celebrity brands (Towle, 2003) where there are strong connections to a real person. Both projects used a New Zealand sample, but there is no obvious reason why New Zealand people might be particularly unique or special with relation to their perceptions of brands. For example, brand personality perceptions have been ‘found’ across many different cultures (e.g. J. Aaker, et al., 2001; Y. Sung & Tinkham, 2005; Supphellen & Gronhaug, 2003), and there are no obvious reasons why New Zealand might be exceptional. However, other researchers are encouraged to replicate the research presented here in other environments.

4.9 Overall Conclusions

The paper commenced with a review of the empirical evidence provided in support of humanlike brand theory and investigated whether *ordinary* consumers might *ordinarily* have humanlike brand perceptions. It appears that consumers only have humanlike brand perceptions when prompted to do so. In relation to the research conducted here it seems reasonable to conclude that *most* ordinary consumers do not ordinarily perceive *most* brands in *most* circumstances as humanlike entities. The word ‘most’ is added to reflect the limitations of the research, and to acknowledge the possibility of finding ‘outliers’ who might indeed perceive brands as humanlike.

Having discussed what (in most cases) are not ordinary consumer perceptions, this paper suggests an alternative explanation of what ordinary perceptions are. It seems that consumers have a sense of a firm as being a social actor in the world that provides goods and services to consumers, and this is the perceived relationship (e.g. see Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995). Whether the firm is itself processed in the mind of consumers as if it were an individual rather than an entity comprising individuals remains a question, although some theorists have conducted research which suggest that this is possible (e.g. Chun & Davies, 2006). Similarly, the first research project found strong perceptions of user-imagery associations with a brand, and provides support for the idea that theorists may be confusing brand personality and user-imagery. In light of the review and findings of the limited research, investigation of consumer-firm relationships and user-imagery suggest more fruitful avenues for exploration by both brand theorists and practitioners.

4.10 Future Research

Further and more extensive/exhaustive qualitative research needs to be undertaken in other brand

categories to identify whether these ordinarily generate humanlike perceptions. Of particular interest would be celebrity brands, as here the brand is strongly associated with an actual person. The research for this paper found strong perceptions of user imagery, and it would be interesting to compare the effectiveness of projective methods (indirect methods) with more direct methods. For example, how does personification compare with simply asking a consumer to describe a stereotypical brand user (e.g. see Aitken et al., 1985, Aitken et al., 1987)?

Paper Appendix 1: Literature Reviewed

Table 13: Literature identified by Avis et al (Avis, et al., 2012) as including humanlike brand theory, or a combination of the humanlike brand and metaphor theory.

| |
|---|
| Articles classified as humanlike brand |
| (J. Aaker, 1997), (Aggarwal & McGill, 2007), (Azevedo & Farhangmehr, 2005), (Caruana, et al., 2009), (Cary, 2000), (Chandler & Schwarz, 2010), (Hyung-Seok & Chang-Hoan, 2009), (McGill, 2000), (R. C. Mulyanegara & Tsarenko, 2009), (Voeth & Herbst, 2008). |
| Articles which combine metaphor perspectives and humanlike brand theory |
| (Aggarwal, 2004), (Aggarwal & Law, 2005), (J. Brown, Broderick, & Lee, 2007), (Fournier, 1998), (Hirschman, 2010), (Louis & Lombart, 2010), (Rajagopal, 2010), (Sargeant, et al., 2008), (J. C. Sweeney & Brandon, 2006). |

Chapter 5: Brand Personality Factor Based Models; A Critical Review

5.1 Preamble

Although the majority of the work in the paper has been focused on questions of metaphor and the humanlike brand, this paper takes a different approach, and critically examines the factor research on which the vast majority of brand personality research is based. However, it nevertheless ties the problems of factor models to the question of humanlike brand theory, and finds evidence from research using factor models leads to further questions about the theory of humanlike brand perceptions. Just as importantly, it commences the process of questioning the validity of research derived from factor models of brand personality, as well as questioning the underlying conceptual foundations of brand personality. This latter point is important, as it highlights a fundamental problem with the brand personality concept; without humanlike brand theory, the concept has no clear foundations.

5.2 Introduction

Brand personality (BP) is defined in Aaker's influential (1997) paper as the 'set of human characteristics associated with a brand' (p347). The first mention of brands in relation to personality was as a novel metaphor for non-functional brand attributes, with foundations for the concept rooted in research from projective methods (Gardner & Levy, 1955). Much of the early literature on BP continued to be derived from projective research, in particular from qualitative projective personification research by practitioners (e.g. Blackston, 1993; S. H. M. King, 1973; J. Plummer, 1985). The link between human and brand personality was made in two early research studies (Alt

& Griggs, 1988; Batra, et al., 1993), but the factor approach to the measurement of brand personality became prominent with Aaker's (1997) seminal article.

Since Aaker's (1997) article, BP research has been dominated by Aaker's methodology (Freling, et al., 2010), with all but one measurement scale (J. C. Sweeney & Brandon, 2006) using factor methods, and new scale development broadly following methods based on those used by Aaker (e.g. Ambroise et al., 2003). In reviewing the BP literature, only two qualitative research projects have been found (Arora & Stoner, 2009; Freling & Forbes, 2005b), and BP research after 1997 almost exclusively uses factor research methods. It would therefore be reasonable to suggest that factor research methods are of fundamental importance in BP theory and research.

To date, Aaker's (1997) brand personality five factor model has been the subject of several critiques, which have included criticism of the exclusion of negative factors in the scale development (Bosnjak, et al., 2007), the inclusion of items that are not properly personality traits (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003), as well as questions about whether the scale might be used as a general scale (Austin, Siguaw, & Mattila, 2003; also see Milas & Mlacic, 2007). Whilst many of these concerns have been addressed in later factor models, this paper will identify potential problems that extend across all factor BP measures.

The purpose of this paper is to therefore to elaborate on some of the existing critiques, and raises some fundamental concerns about the *input* into factor models, which in turn prompt questions about what *exactly* the models are measuring. In particular, the paper identifies problems of descriptor selection, the alteration of word meanings when scales are applied in different domains, and the potential for 'category personality' to be confused with BP. However, having identified the potential problems, it is apparent that the problems are contingent upon whether consumers think of brands as humanlike entities (e.g. see Freling & Forbes, 2005b; Puzakova, et al., 2009). The

discussion section of the paper considers some possible solutions to the problems identified, but also finds that these present new problems related to the conceptualisation and relevance of BP. The paper concludes by suggesting that further research and clarification of BP theory and conceptualisation are needed.

5.3 The five factor model (FFM) of human personality

BP factor research has drawn heavily on the research methods utilized in the human Five Factor Model (FFM) of personality, and a brief overview of the literature will therefore be useful in the consideration of BP factor research methods. A summary of the theory underlying the FFM is humans traits are rooted in the biology of the individual (Plomin, Owen, & McGuffin, 1994) creating basic tendencies (McCrae et al., 2000), and these tendencies interact with environmental influences create a disposition to behavior (Bouchard & McGue, 2003).

Researchers believe that personality traits are encoded in human language (McCrae & Costa, 2003, p25), and this has led personality researchers to adopt the lexical approach, in which dictionaries have been used to isolate the underlying factors of human personality. The lexical method has seen the development of clear criteria for descriptors that might be excluded, for example the exclusion of evaluative terms such as 'Nice' or 'Capable' (John, Angleitner, & Ostendorf, 1988). Likewise, criteria for inclusion have been narrowed with De Raad (1995), for example, emphasizing traits need to be interpersonal, capturing the transactions between one person and another.

Since publication the FFM has been widely validated, such as through comparisons of self and observer reports (e.g. Costa & McCrae, 1988), validation through cross sectional and longitudinal studies (e.g. McCrae & Costa, 2003), age stability (e.g. Terracciano, Costa, & McCrae, 2006), and been examined cross-culturally (e.g. McCrae et al., 2002).

Whilst some elements of the model are still subject to debate, such as the number of factors (e.g. Ashton et al., 2004 propose six factors), the five factors were found within other earlier models of personality, thereby offering further support for the underlying structure (Digman & Takemoto-Chock, 1981). Notwithstanding debate about the relative roles of situation and personality in behaviour (e.g. see Digman, 1990), the model is now widely accepted as a valid description of human personality traits.

There are two key points to take forward from the FFM review; one is that the FFM and the traits included are bounded in biology, and the second is that the lexical approach involves a refinement of personality descriptors based upon careful screening of terms developed over millennia. As such, there is a theoretical and methodological justification for why the FFM might be a valid measure of personality, as well as considerable empirical support.

5.4 The brand personality five factor model (BPFFM)

Aaker's (1997) paper has become central to development of BP theory and research methods, illustrated by the high number of citations for the paper (at the time of writing, over 1500 citations according to Google Scholar and 554 according to Scopus). Unlike the lexical approach of the FFM, Aaker utilized a range of sources for generation of descriptors, such as the human FFM, focus groups, individual consumers, other brand measurement scales, and practitioner views. Having generated a considerable number of descriptors, in a careful and well considered process, the items generated were then reduced to a more manageable number by having consumers rate the items on how descriptive they were of brands.

The items were then used in the measurement of a range of US brands from different categories,

with Aaker then using the methods used for the FFM to factor analyse the results, thereby creating the BPFM, as seen in figure 11 (the format for all factor models follows a format of the upper box as the factor, bold text for facets, and items in plain text):

| Sincerity | Excitement | Competence | Sophistication | Ruggedness |
|---|--|--|---|---|
| <p>Down-to-Earth: down to earth, family oriented, small town</p> <p>Honesty: honest, sincere, real</p> <p>Wholesomeness: wholesome, original</p> <p>Cheerfulness: cheerful, sentimental, friendly</p> | <p>Daring: daring, trendy, exciting</p> <p>Spiritedness: spirited, cool, young</p> <p>Imagination: imaginative, unique</p> <p>Contemporary: up-to-date independent, contemporary</p> | <p>Reliability: reliable, hard working, secure</p> <p>Intelligence: intelligent, technical, corporate</p> <p>Success: successful, leader, confident</p> | <p>Class: upper class, good-looking, glamorous</p> <p>Charm: charming, feminine, smooth</p> | <p>Masculinity: outdoorsy, masculine, western</p> <p>Toughness: tough, rugged</p> |

Figure 11 American Brand Personality (based upon figure 1, Aaker et al., 2001)

Since the original BPFM was published, the BPFM has been examined in different cultures, with the result that different factors have been found (e.g. Successful and Contemporary, Supphellen & Gronhaug, 2003) as well as new facets and items (e.g. see Rojas-Mendez, Erenchun-Podlech, & Silva-Olave, 2004). Of particular interest is the work by Sung and Tinkham (2005), who compared BP in relation to perceptions of brands in the US and Korea, finding differences at the item and facet level, for both their Korean *and* US study, as well as different factors for Korea.

5.5 Other brand personality factor models

In addition to cross cultural studies, other researchers have sought to develop new factor models of BP, as well as extending the methodology to new areas such as store personality (e.g. Lévesque & d'Astous, 2003). The new BP models sought to remedy perceived problems with the BPFM, such as the lack of negative factors (Bosnjak, et al., 2007; Geuens, et al., 2009; Edith G. Smit, et al., 2003), concerns about cultural specificity (Ambroise, et al., 2003; Geuens, et al., 2009), and

excluding items that were not properly human traits (Bosnjak, et al., 2007; Geuens, et al., 2009).

Examples of the different models can be found in figures 14 and 15, and it is notable that there are significant differences between these models, and also between the models and the BPFM. The variability extends over all of the models that have been reviewed, with substantial differences found in each case. Whilst some of the variability can be explained by the rectification of problems in the BPFM, it is nevertheless surprising to see the degree of variability amongst the models, when each model was developed with similar methods.

| | | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Drive | Conscientiousness | Emotion | Superficiality |
| Exciting, adventurous, boring | Competent, orderly, reliable | Loving, cordial, sentimental | Selfish, arrogant, hypocritical |

Figure 14 Bosnjak *et al* scales (based upon table 2, Bosnjak et al., 2007)

| | | | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Responsibility | Activity | Agressiveness | Simplicity | Emotionality |
| Down to Earth, Stable, Responsible | Active, Dynamic, Innovative | Aggressive, Bold | Ordinary, Simple | Romantic, Sentimental |

Figure 15 Geuens *et al* Scales (based upon figure 1, Geuens et al., 2009)

It is also notable that, despite the later BP models being developed in response to critiques of the BPFM, the BPFM has continued to be used in research on BP (e.g. Freling, et al., 2010; Lin, 2010). This is puzzling as the view of this paper is that the later models have rectified some of the faults in the BPFM, and might be explicable by what Azoulay and Kapferer (2003) refer to as a ‘bandwagon effect’ (p144). However, the argument of this paper is that these later models are also beset by problems, and the following section will suggest that there are question marks over what, *exactly*, the models are measuring.

5.6 Problems with factor based measures of brand personality

Despite the ongoing evolution of BP factor models there remain three key problems in the current research; the category confusion problem, the domain adjustment problem, and the descriptor selection problem. Whilst some of these problems have been considered in previous literature, the critique that follows will consolidate and elaborate on these concerns, as well as tie together the relationships between each of the problems. It might be noted that this is not a critique of factor analysis, but a critique of the *input* into the analysis.

However, before discussing the problems, it should be noted that some of the problems outlined are contingent upon whether brands are perceived as humanlike. Animism and anthropomorphism theory were introduced into the branding literature by Aaker (1997) and Fournier (1998) in support of BP and brand relationship theory respectively. Guthrie (1993) defines animism as humans “attributing life to the nonliving” and anthropomorphism as “attributing human characteristics to the nonhuman” (p52). Therefore, the implication of the introduction of animism and anthropomorphism into branding is that brands are perceived by consumers as something that at least approximate to living quasi-humanlike entities (hereafter referred to as the *humanlike brand*). However, some theorists have questioned whether brands are perceived as humanlike (e.g. O’Guinn & Muniz, 2009), and the review proceeds on the basis that humanlike brand theory is at least questionable.

5.6.1 The category confusion problem

One of the key concerns about factor based BP measures is the question of whether they are measuring category or brand perceptions, or whether consumer perceptions of both are being measured. For example, Austin *et al* (2003), as part of a broad critique of the BFFFM, question whether the BPFM could be used for measurement between brands rather than categories. As a

practical illustration of the problem Levy (1999) identifies whisky as being associated with ‘upper-class’ and ‘sophistication’, both of which are used as descriptors in the BPFM. Therefore, if considering researching whisky using the BPFM, it would not be clear how much of the measure of ‘sophistication’ or ‘upper-class’ would be for a particular brand, and how much for the category.

This potential problem was also recognized in early BP literature, with both Batra *et al* (1993) and Aaker (1997) noting the possibility of category influences. Batra later investigated the nature of the problem, and found that the category does indeed have a significant impact on consumer brand perceptions (Batra, Lenk, & Wedel, 2010). There is further evidence for the category confusion effect within BP research itself. For example Sigauw *et al* (1999) utilized the BPFM for a study of the BP of restaurants and comment that, ‘although we identified statistically significant differences among the brands, most of those differences are not particularly large’ (p55).

Whilst the category confusion effect does not appear to apply to all categories (for example, E. G. Smit, E. Van Den Berge, & G. Franzen, 2003 seemed to find that mail carriers had significant differences within category), for many categories there are significant category influences.

However, despite researchers identifying the potential problems of category confusion, it is notable that no controls for this effect are built into any of the BP research measures.

This necessity for a control is particularly applicable to the development of the factor models, as these are typically developed across many different categories. Without such a control, scales may include items that might be validated as brand personality, but are actually category associations. In other words, in order to isolate a brand personality item, it is first necessary to exclude category ‘personality’. More broadly, without enacting such a control, the validity/significance of the results of much of the research on BP might be questioned, as it is not apparent whether the research is measuring perceptions of the brand (the intended measure) or the category in which the brand

resides.

5.6.2 The domain adjustment problem

The domain adjustment problem might be seen as one of the more challenging problems facing brand personality factor researchers. Essentially the problem is that meanings of words, as understood and used by consumers, may be subject to change according to the domain that they refer to. This problem was identified early in the development of self-congruence research, with Landon (1974) offering a clear explanation of the nature of the problem (also see Capelli & Jolibert, 2009 for a brief mention of the problem):

A different set of adjectives may be relevant for measuring each concept may have a very different meaning when measuring self-image than when measuring product-image.

[Provides an example] These adjectives are likely to have entirely different meanings in the two contexts. (p44)

Although context and word meaning are seen as challenging problems in linguistics (Akman & Bazzanella, 2003), increasing attention is being devoted to theoretical explanations of the influence of context in relation to meaning (e.g. Barsalou, 2003). Of particular interest is the theory of frame semantics proposed by Fillmore (1976), which proposes that word meaning is interpreted from context, and that words are best understood by referencing conceptual structures from which meaning is derived. For example, Fillmore and Atkins (1992) point out that the meaning of the days of the week require a background understanding of the concept of a calendar cycle of seven days. Langacker (1986) offers a similar perspective in his theory of cognitive grammar, in which he discusses how 'semantic structures' are characterised relative to cognitive domains. As Langacker eloquently describes, "try explaining what an elbow is without referring in any way to an arm!" (p4)

Clausener and Croft (1999) examine the emerging theories of context and meaning, and note that, whilst using different terminology, there is an agreement that a semantic unit is a concept and that the concept meaning is derived from the domain in which it is embedded. In a similar vein, Evans (2006) examines the extant theory of context and meaning and develops a theory of lexical concept integration. The work of Evan's is highlighted as, within the theory development, Evans provides an account of the importance of 'adjustment' on meaning:

“[...] the interpretation of *good* is adjusted depending on the composite lexical-conceptual structure it is involved in. For instance, a good man might possess attributes such as physical beauty, honour, providing for his family, and so on, depending on context. The sorts of qualities associated with a good meal, however, are more likely to include the size of the portions, how tasty food is, that it consists of wholesome ingredients, and so on.” (p525)

Evans' account of 'adjustment' on meaning sees the concept meaning as embedded in the domain to which the adjustment is applied. This is precisely the problem that was intuitively identified by Landon, and which will be described hereafter as the '*domain adjustment problem*'.

Within the BP literature it is possible to find examples in which the domain adjustment problem is identified indirectly. For example, Austin *et al* (2003) found that the meanings of trait terms for brands shifted across different categories, whilst Caprara *et al* (2001) found evidence of concept-scale interaction with the same adjectives locating against different factors both between brands and human personality, and also within descriptions of different brands. Caprara *et al* go on to suggest that adjectives '[to describe brands] convey different meanings as they move from one dimension to another according to the brand they are describing' (p392), and later say that 'whilst two factors are replicated in brand perceptions the adjective will shift factors according to the brand stimulus type.'

(p393)

As an illustrative example of domain meaning adjustment, Brengman and Willems (2009) examined the determinants of fashion store personality and sought to understand how consumers interpreted the descriptors used in the d'Astous and Lévesque (2003) store personality scale (an adaptation of the BPFM). On reviewing the consumer meanings, it is apparent that many are very specific to the domain, such as the finding that the most frequently mentioned cue for the descriptor 'congenial' was the store having 'wearable clothing' (p350). Whilst not all meanings are so closely tied to the domain (e.g. 'upscale' having the most frequent cue of 'expensive'), it is apparent that the domain creates very particular meanings for many descriptors.

The nature of the domain adjustment problem within BP research can be further illustrated in the development of Aaker's scale. For example, within Aaker's (1997) 'brand group one', the brand categories included brands of soup, automobiles and jeans. When considering Aaker's use of the trait 'wholesome' for a soup brand and jeans brand, it is very unlikely that consumers would interpret the words in the same way for the different categories. Similarly, Bosnjak et al's (2007) scale includes the trait 'loving', and it is not clear what consumers will understand the word to mean in the contexts of different categories. For example, what might 'loving' mean when applied to their 'group one' of categories, which includes insurance, jeans and beer?

The Bosnjak *et al* example illustrates a further problem in the using a 'generalized' scale, which is whether a consumer might ordinarily think of a brand of beer as 'loving'. It is a point that is made indirectly by Sirgy (1982) in relation to self-congruence research, with Sirgy proposing that researchers should measure 'those images which are most related to the products being tested' (p296). Low and Lamb (2000) likewise observe that (in relation to brand image) that something like a pocket calculator and shampoo would require a different scale. When a consumer is presented

with a word which does not appear to be salient to the category in question, it is not clear how they might interpret the word.

A further complication in the consideration of the domain adjustment problem is the question of what a consumer may be thinking of when presented with the items in the various BP measures. In particular, the factor measures might be seen as providing a prime of personality (e.g. see Bargh & Chartrand, 2000 for a discussion of priming), in particular where personification is used (e.g. see J. Aaker, 1997), and this may encourage consumers to think of user-imagery (van Hoof, Walenberg, & de Jong, 2007).

The perception of user-imagery is a stereotypical user of the brand (J.M. Sirgy, et al., 1997), and is therefore an application of the descriptor to the domain of humans, albeit applied to an 'imaginary' person. User-imagery allows for a human to human (albeit fictive) human comparison, but user-imagery and brand personality are viewed as different concepts (e.g. see Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003; Helgeson & Supphellen, 2004; Parker, 2009), and BP must in any case be delineated from user-imagery or risk concept redundancy (Helgeson & Supphellen, 2004; Singh, 1991).

Another problem arises in the way that BP factor measures have been used, with researchers using the BPFM for measuring aspects of congruity between consumers and brands (e.g. J. Aaker, 1999; Kressmann et al., 2006). This comparison is exactly the problem outlined by Landon (1974), albeit that he is referring to comparisons of people with product image. For example, returning to Aaker's (1997) example of 'wholesome' applied to a soup brand, the meaning will be very different when applied to humans. This closely mirrors the example in the quote from Evans (2006), and the use of the same scale for humans and brands is, at the very least, questionable.

Throughout the BP literature, as yet, no theorists have addressed the problem of domain

adjustments. Although there have been suggestions to embed behaviour descriptors in sentences to improve clarity (Milas & Mlacic, 2007), this does not ameliorate the problem of the shift in meaning. For example, if 'wholesome' were embedded in a sentence, it is not clear how this would address the problem that wholesome would have a different meaning when applied to soup brands versus a jeans brand or a person.

One particular concern is that it *appears* that Geuens *et al* (2009) were at least partly aware of the problem, saying '[because] the object of evaluation changes (from human to brand personality), traditional measures and items may not be fully appropriate' (p100). This statement appears to be an indirect acknowledgement of the domain adjustment problem, but no further consideration of the problem is forthcoming. The purpose of factor measures is to provide 'generalized' measures for brands across different categories. However, as the meanings of words change in relation to categories, it is not clear that it is possible to develop a generalized scale, as the items in the scale would not be comparable when applied to each brand category.

In summary, the domain adjustment problem has three key elements. The first problem is the question of whether consumers are thinking of user-imagery when presented with BP descriptors. If they are thinking of user-imagery, then the measures are not actually measuring BP, but are instead measuring a different (but related) concept. The second problem is that, if they are not thinking of user-imagery, then the meaning of the descriptors will shift meaning according to the category in which the brand is located. If there is a meaning shift, it is not clear what exactly the purpose of the measures might be, or how they might be interpreted. Finally, there is the question of the salience of the descriptors in different categories, with non-salient trait *x* having questionable meanings when applied to category *y*. Overall, these problems represent a significant question over *exactly* what is being measured in the BP factor based measures.

5.6.3 The descriptor selection problem

It is apparent that, in the many factor models, there are many variations on the factors, facets and items included in the different scales, despite each scale appearing to use similar underlying methodologies. As has been mentioned, there are some differences that might explain some of the variation in the scales, such as the addition of negative measures, and the later restriction of the measures to human personality descriptors. Also, cultural difference may be a further explanation in some of the variation, with for example Goodyear (1996) suggesting that understanding of brand changes with both culture and stage of development of each market.

Whilst these circumstances might explain some of the variation, it seems unlikely that they can explain the extent of variation across the scales or why, for example, the results of Sung and Tinkham (2005) US study diverged from the original BPFFM, despite replicating the methodology of the BPFFM development. The most likely explanation for the differences can be found in the category confusion problem, with different categories selected in each study creating the variability in the descriptors. In other words, each scale is not a generalized BP scale, but a scale that is skewed to the associations with the categories that are the subject of the scale development.

However, over and above the problem of category influence, there is a more fundamental problem in the item generation, which is the lack of a theoretical foundation that might provide boundaries of what can be included as brand personality. As has been discussed in section two, the FFM has a theoretical basis for why human personality might be bounded within a limited number of descriptors, but there is no underlying theory that might offer a boundary to the scope of brand personality.

Without a solid theoretical foundation for brand personality providing a method of bounding the

concept, there is no way to argue against the inclusions of factors such as social responsibility (Madrigal & Boush, 2008), or facets added based upon focus groups (J. Ferrandi, Falcy, Kreziack, & Valette-Florence, 1999). Without a theoretical grounding such as that found in human personality research, there are no criteria upon which to found any scales, or restrict the inclusion of any descriptor that might be salient to a brand. A summary of the problem is illustrated by Ambroise *et al* (2003), who critique the BPFM, saying that the BPFM ‘includes facets having no equivalent in terms of human personality’ (p2). However, they include a factor of ‘Natural’, which includes the facet of ‘environmentally friendly’. It is not apparent why such measures might be excluded from BP.

The problem that arises with brand personality is that, unlike human personality (which is bounded by biology), there are no obvious boundaries to brand personality. If considering the antecedents of brand personality, there are a multitude of elements that contribute to BP. For example, Aaker cites the work of Batra *et al* (1993), and identifies antecedents to BP of symbol/logo, product attributes, brand name, product category, advertising style, distribution channel, price, as well as adding celebrity transfer (citing McCracken, 1989) and animism and anthropomorphism. If taking the example of advertising, advertisers might seek to associate any number of descriptors with their brands. It is not entirely clear on what basis one such descriptor might be identified as applicable to brand personality, whilst another might not be applied.

It might be argued that later research that restricted brands personality descriptors to human personality terms might resolve the problem, with researchers such as Bosnjak *et al* (2007) actually limiting their models as such. However, as brands have no underlying biology, it is not clear why human personality descriptors might have any greater salience than any other descriptor in application to a brand, or how the word meaning might be interpreted in relations to brands and between different brand categories.

However, as has been discussed, researchers have introduced anthropomorphism and animism theory (e.g. Freling & Forbes, 2005b; Puzakova, et al., 2009), which *might* overcome the domain adjustment problem. The difficulty with such explanations is that the application of a full human FFM measure to brands could not be validated (Caprara, et al., 2001; also see Shank & Langmeyer, 1994 for examination of another human measure for brands), and some FFM items were not validated in the development of the BPFM. If brands are indeed perceived as humanlike, the inability to validate human scales for brands still requires explanation.

As a further complication, Bosnjak *et al* (2007, p304) *appear* to reject the explanation humanlike brand explanation, describing brands as “inanimate objects which obviously do not in themselves ‘behave’ in a consistent manner.” Such a point of view again raises the question of why human descriptors might have any particular relevance or salience and also returns to the domain adjustment problem. If consumers think of brands as ‘objects’, then the meaning of descriptors will change, unless they do indeed think of brands as humanlike entities.

The essence of the problem is that brands are social constructs, rather than being rooted in biology. Selection of descriptors salient to a particular category is more likely to be of utility in developing an understanding of consumer perceptions, rather than picking human traits without any particular salience or underlying justification. The problem that is confronted in the development of the measures of BP is that there is no basis for why, for example, ‘natural’ might be included or excluded, as any method of item generation has no real theoretical justification. Unlike human personality, it is difficult to see that there might be any justifiable boundaries around the brand personality concept, at least in relation to descriptor selection in BP factor research.

5.7 Discussion

As was discussed, some of the problems that have been identified in the previous section are contingent upon whether perceive brands as humanlike entities. For example, the category confusion problem disappears if brands are perceived as humanlike, as presumably consumers would not confuse a humanlike brand with a category. However, the finding of category personality might be seen as a reason to cast doubt on the idea of humanlike brand perceptions. The findings of category personality mirror those of BP presenting the question of whether a category can be perceived as a quasi-humanlike entity. It is also notable that other ‘personalities’ have been found in research that mirrors BP, including website personality (e.g. Opoku, Abratt, & Pitt, 2006) and even housing estate personality (Ibrahim & Ong, 2004). Are all of these entities perceived as animistic and anthropomorphic?

The domain alteration problem also disappears if humanlike brands are a valid account of consumer perceptions of brands. For example, in the case of self-congruence research, use of the descriptors for brands and humans is unlikely to present problems, as the comparison is between human and human (albeit the brand is possibly quasi-humanlike). Also, regardless of the brand category to which descriptors are applied, if consumers are perceiving brands as humanlike, they are applying the descriptors to the same kind of entity, and therefore there should be no adjustment to descriptor meaning. However, there is a problem with the humanlike brand presenting a solution to the domain adjustment problem. As was discussed, BP research has identified that meanings of descriptors do indeed change over categories, and this implies that consumer *do not* see brands as humanlike (or there would be no reason why the descriptor meanings would change between categories).

Humanlike brand theory also presents some interesting question in relation to the descriptor selection problem. If brands are seen as humanlike, then it might be that any descriptor that might

be applied to humans might also be applied to brands. BP might be conceptualised as human characteristics associated with brands (J. Aaker, 1997), or human traits applicable to brands (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003), as either might be a valid conceptualisation. However, for example for the latter, the question that needs an answer is why a human personality trait such as ‘loving’ might be more salient in brand choice than a characteristic such as ‘upper class’. Furthermore, as discussed earlier, the problem that human trait x has been validated and trait y cannot be validated requires an explanation.

Overall, it appears that humanlike brands might ameliorate some of the problems that were identified in the previous section, but humanlike brand theory presents new problems, including research findings that themselves present question marks about the validity of the humanlike brand. If the humanlike brand is not accepted there are further problems, and these might be seen as even more challenging. For example, one approach that might ameliorate the domain adjustment problem is to develop BP models for specific categories, rather than general models. As an exemplar, Low and Lamb (2000) have developed a protocol for building category specific brand image scales, and the protocol might be adapted for BP scales. Category specific scales would also have the additional benefit that researchers and practitioners could use qualitative methods, such as participant interviews, to understand how consumers interpret the meaning of the BP traits when used in relation to the category under study.

Furthermore, the development of category specific BP scales would allow for controls for category ‘personality’. For example, researchers might commence their research with examination of category personality, and examine whether there are significant differences between ratings for the category personality item for brands within the category. If there are no significant differences, the item might be excluded, as it ceases to be a point of differentiation. If there are significant differences, this might be an interesting avenue of further study as, for example, it is possible that a

high rating on such a salient item for the category may be a predictor of brand preference.

Whilst the recommendations given may work around some of the problems identified in the paper, there are still significant problems to overcome. For example, if different scales are used for different categories, the conceptualisation of BP becomes rather murky. It is notable that Aaker describes the section on the development of the BPFFM as ‘What is Brand Personality?’ Although Aaker provides a definition of BP, the implication is that BP is what is measured. The problem with this explanation is that other models have found very different BP (e.g. Edith G. Smit, et al., 2003), and the proposed solution given here would create further models which would be specific to different categories. So many different models would only serve to raise the question of what exactly the BP concept actually is.

A parallel to the problem of conceptualising BP as ‘what is measured’ can be found in the human personality literature. Epstein (1994) and Bandura (1999) proposed that the FFM was a measure in search of a theory, and that the factors that are found are determined by the measures. In the case of the FFM, the response to the critique was to present a clear theoretical explanation and justification for the model (discussed earlier). In the case of BP, if rejecting humanlike brand theory, theorists are confronted with the task of providing an explanatory theory for BP. Regardless of whether the scales have a broad range of descriptors or are restricted to human traits applied to brands, there needs to be a theoretical explanation of the relevance/salience of the descriptors. If not, BP simply becomes a measure in search of a theory.

Another problem with category specific scales is that they would preclude the development of ‘generalizable’ scales. Aaker (1997) was explicit in stating this as an aim of the BPFFM, and a ‘generalized’ scale was undoubtedly one of the drivers of interest in the BP concept. As the situation stands, there are already question marks over whether BP scales can be generalized (Austin, et al.,

2003), and debate over whether categories such as store brands can be measured with BP scales (e.g. see Avis, 2009 for an overview). However, if category specific scales were developed, the concept of BP as a general brand attribute disappears, along with a probable driver for the interest in the concept.

Finally, there is the problem of using BP scales in self-congruence research. The domain adjustment problem suggests that this is an extremely doubtful research method, and a method that could only be justified if BP is actually user-imagery. However, it is interesting to note that at least Aaker (1997) included personification of brands in the methodology for the development of the BPFFM (there is no explicit mention of personification in the development of other scales), and van Hoof *et al* (2007) suggest that personification uniquely generates user-imagery. Although theorists have sought to delineate BP from user-imagery, the use of personification *might* suggest that BP and user imagery might indeed be the same concept, thereby rendering BP as a redundant concept (Singh, 1991).

Overall, if humanlike brand theory is rejected, it is apparent that there are significant problems in trying to resolve the problems that are identified in factor measures of BP. The problem is that, without humanlike brand theory, the conceptualisation of BP becomes diffuse and unclear, and appears to be confusingly similar to concepts such as brand image, or uses descriptors restricted to human traits with no explanation for the salience of the traits, or how consumers might interpret the traits in different categories. As a result, it appears that BP hinges upon humanlike brand theory, and without this theory, it is difficult to see how general measures of BP might be justified.

In examining factor measures of BP therefore, a central question is whether consumers do indeed perceive brands as humanlike entities, and some theorists are very doubtful about this idea (also the view underpinning this paper). It might be noted that consumers should *ordinarily* think of brands

as humanlike, and projective methods such as personification are not ordinary modes of consumer thought (O'Guinn & Muniz, 2009; Gerald Zaltman & Zaltman, 2008, p37). Also, personification again presents the problem that BP could indeed be user-imagery. As such, one recommendation of this paper is that BP theorists need to examine whether consumers do indeed *ordinarily* view brands as humanlike, which is a question that might be resolved through further research.

However, if consumers do not ordinarily think of brands as humanlike, the problem is how to untangle BP from concepts such as brand image or user-imagery. Aaker and Fournier (1995) asked the pertinent question “How (or when) is it [brand personality] different from brand and/or user imagery?” (p391) Aaker (1997) and Fournier (1998) later appeared to resolve by introducing theories of brand animism and anthropomorphism as explanations of BP and brand relationships, albeit that Fournier (2009) appears to later retreat from this explanation. The question of how BP might be delineated from other brand concepts such as identity/image/user-imagery is a recurring theme in the BP literature (e.g. Freling & Forbes, 2005a; Hosany, Ekinci, & Uysal, 2006; Patterson, 1999; J. T. Plummer, 2000; Edith G. Smit, et al., 2003). However, even when theorists propose that they will answer the question, it is surprising to find that they do not actually do so.

As such, the final recommendation of this paper is that, where theorists reject humanlike brand theory, there is a necessity to revisit the conceptualisation of BP, and present theory and conceptualisation of BP that delineates BP from other brand concepts. Furthermore, there needs to be an explanation of what the BP traits actually mean to consumers when applied over different categories, and why the traits might be salient for consumers in each category. At present, where humanlike brand theory is not accepted, there is a lack of clarity about exactly what BP actually is. Without this clarity, it is not apparent why BP should be seen as important or distinct concept that is relevant to practitioners or as a subject of further research.

5.8 Conclusions

The argument of this paper overall is that there are several significant problems with the factor models used to measure BP; the category confusion problem, the domain adjustment problem, and the descriptor selection problem. When examining each of these problems, it is apparent that the root of the problems can be found in the supporting theory for BP and the conceptualisation of BP. In particular, the question of humanlike brand perceptions seems to be of particular importance. Although recommendations are given to ameliorate some of the problems identified in the paper, these solutions themselves raise questions relating to problems in theory and conceptualisation of BP.

However, in identifying the problems, and the related problems in the theory and conceptualisation of BP, the paper presents some questions that should lead to clarification of the BP concept, including some new directions/avenues of research and theory development. Research and theory development commences with questions, and it is hoped that BP researchers and theorists will find the questions discussed in this paper to be an interesting foundation for further development of the understanding of the BP concept.

Chapter 6: Rock personality; Validity of a brand personality scale

6.1 Preamble

This paper is a more specific examination of factor models, and focuses on the BPFM. The reason for the focus is that, despite other scales being developed, the majority of research for brand personality uses the BPFM. As such, if the validity of the BPFM is doubtful, so is much of the research that is founded on the scale. In particular, it is apparent in the brand personality literature that considerable credence is given to work using the BPFM, and discussions of brand personality in the branding literature almost universally cite the work Aaker (1997) as support for the concept. In chapter 5 I noted that Aaker titled the scale development method for the BPFM as ‘What is Brand Personality’ and brand personality has come to be seen as the factors, facets and items of Aaker’s scale.

As such, if the foundations of the scale are as poor as this paper will suggest, it then renders the conceptualisation of brand personality as invalid. The BPFM is so central to the brand personality concept that, without the BPFM and the research using the BPFM, there is almost nothing left of brand personality. When embarking on this research project, the intention was that, if the hypotheses were indeed correct (see later) this paper would be used as a basis for a far broader critique of the brand personality concept. Although this argument is made in this paper to some degree, it is moderated somewhat to make it more palatable for reviewers. As it stands, the paper has been particularly controversial in the review process. It is perhaps the wider implications for the brand personality concept in general that has made this the case.

6.2 Introduction

The concept of brand personality dates from the 1950s (Gardner & Levy, 1955; Martineau, 1958), but it was not until Aaker's (1997) paper that brand personality developed into a significant branch of academic research. Formally defining brand personality as "the set of human characteristics associated with the brand" (p347), Aaker (1997) adapted the human five factor model of personality (e.g. see McCrae & Costa, 2003) to develop a brand personality five factor model (BPFFM). Since the publication of the BPFFM, there has been the development of new brand personality scales using methodologies based on the human five factor model (e.g. Edith G. Smit, et al., 2003), but the BPFFM has remained the most widely used survey instrument for the measurement of brand personality (Freling, et al., 2010).

In the literature reviewed for this paper, outside of new brand personality factor model development (e.g. Ambroise, 2006), model testing (e.g. Caprara, et al., 2001; J.-M. Ferrandi, Merunka, Valette-Florence, & de Barnier, 2003; Riza C. Mulyanegara, Tsarenko, & Anderson, 2007), a circumplex model (J. C. Sweeney & Brandon, 2006), and a small number of qualitative research projects (e.g. Arora & Stoner, 2009; Freling & Forbes, 2005b), all post-1997 brand personality studies reviewed for this paper used the BPFFM methodology. In consideration of the influence of the BPFFM in brand personality research, it is particularly important to ascertain whether the BPFFM methodology is valid for use in measuring and understanding brand personality. Specifically, it is essential that any brand attribute measure actually measures what it purports to measure.

It is therefore notable that elements of the BPFFM have been criticised (e.g. Austin, et al., 2003; Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003; Bosnjak, et al., 2007; J. C. Sweeney & Brandon, 2006), and this paper builds upon and extends these critiques by identifying several other potential problems in the BPFFM methodology. This paper considers the possibility that, rather than measure pre-existing

brand personality perceptions, the BPFM methodology ‘creates’ the perceptions of personality. To examine this possibility, the BPFM methodology is applied to three pictures of rocks, on the basis that rocks would not ordinarily be perceived as ‘having’ personality. The findings of the research raises questions about the validity of the BPFM, as well as questions about the current conceptualisation of brand personality, and will highlight the importance of careful evaluation and use of brand attribute scales.

6.3 The BPFM

Aaker (1997) proposed that the purpose of the development of the BPFM methodology was to create a ‘reliable, valid and generalizeable scale’ to measure brand personality (p347). The BPFM development used a range of different sources in the generation of traits; the human five factor model, the human Inter-Circumplex Model (e.g. see Wiggins & Pincus, 1992), earlier brand personality scales, and traits generated by consumers in a free association task. These traits were then reduced in number by asking consumers to rate how descriptive each trait was for a brand, and selecting only traits deemed as very descriptive. Once traits for the scale were selected, a sample reflecting the US population were asked to complete a survey in which they rated, on a five-point Likert scale, the traits for a wide range of carefully chosen symbolic and utilitarian brands.

Most importantly, as a key element of the development process, participants were asked to personify the brands before rating the brands against the traits:

[...] We would like you to think of each brand as if it were a person. This may sound unusual, but think of the set of human characteristics associated with each brand.

[Examples of characteristics for brands] We're interested in finding out which personality traits or human characteristics come to mind when you think of a

particular brand. (Aaker 1997, p350)

The human five factor methodology was adapted to validate the items and generate a factor model of brand personality (see Figure 14). As a final stage, the brand personality dimensions were confirmed through a replication that used a new set of brands, and new set of research subjects (based on a comparable demographic sample to the original study).

| Sincerity | Excitement | Competence | Sophistication | Ruggedness |
|---|--|--|---|--|
| <p>Down-to-Earth: down to earth, family oriented, small town</p> <p>Honesty: honest, sincere, real</p> <p>Wholesomeness: wholesome, original</p> <p>Cheerfulness: cheerful, sentimental, friendly</p> | <p>Daring: daring, trendy, exciting</p> <p>Spiritedness: spirited, cool, young</p> <p>Imagination: imaginative, unique</p> <p>Contemporary: up-to-date independent, contemporary</p> | <p>Reliability: reliable, hard working, secure</p> <p>Intelligence: intelligent, technical, corporate</p> <p>Success: successful, leader, confident</p> | <p>Class: upper class, good-looking, glamorous</p> <p>Charm: charming, feminine, smooth</p> | <p>Masculinity: outdoorsy, masculine, western</p> <p>Toughness: tough, rugged</p> |

Figure 14. The BPFM, based upon figure 1, Aaker *et al.* (2001), factors are in grey, facets in bold, and items in plain text

With the exception Sweeney and Brandon’s (2006) circumplex model, all subsequent brand personality scales have followed a similar underlying approach and methodology to the development of the BPFM (e.g. see Ambroise, et al., 2003; Bosnjak, et al., 2007; Geuens, et al., 2009; Edith G. Smit, et al., 2003). The purpose of these adaptations was to rectify perceived problems in the BPFM, and have resulted in different factors, facets and items. As such, they appear very dissimilar to the BPFM with, for example, the Bosnjak *et al.* (2007) model produced factors of drive, conscientiousness, emotion, and superficiality.

The BPFM methodology has been used for brand personality assessment in a variety of brand categories such as restaurants (Wee, 2004), toys (Lin, 2010), and the BPFM has been used in

relation to consumer perceptions such as self-congruence (e.g. Kressmann, et al., 2006), quality (e.g. Ramaseshan & Tsao, 2007) and the role of employees in brand impression formation (Wentzel, 2009). Notably, some researchers have found significant differences between the brand personality factors, facets and items for different brands (e.g. Beldona & Wysong, 2007; Siguaw, et al., 1999), with significant differences between brand factors justifying a brand as having a distinct personality from another brand. It is also notable that the BPFM has been adapted into specialist areas such as retail personality (e.g. Merrilees & Miller, 2001), charity personality (e.g. Venable, Rose, Bush, & Gilbert, 2005), and product personality (e.g. Mugge, Govers, & Schoormans, 2009), again highlighting the importance of the BPFM methodology.

6.4 Critiques of the BPFM

As has been discussed, the BPFM has not been without criticism. Siguaw, Mattila and Austin (1999) have questioned whether the BPFM is ‘generalizeable’, and question the utility of the scale when measuring brands within a category or for individual brands. Azoulay and Kapferer (2003) question the selection of traits, which they believe do not represent personality, but rather ‘an all encompassing pot pourri’ that has moved too far from the concept of personality (p150). Avis (2012) presents a broad critique on factor models in which he argues that; (1) factor model descriptor items alter meaning according to the category to which they are applied, (2) that category perceptions are confused with brand perceptions, (3) there is a lack clarity in the brand personality concept that might be used to bound what descriptor types might be included in scales.

Finally, there have been criticisms that the BPFM has no negative traits despite consumers having both positive and negative perceptions of brands (Bosnjak, et al., 2007; J. C. Sweeney & Brandon, 2006). Despite the criticism and the development of scales that addressed some of the critiques (e.g. Bosnjak, et al., 2007), the use of the BPFM methodology in research is ongoing (Caruana, et

al., 2009; Hyung-Seok & Chang-Hoan, 2009; Matthiesen & Phau, 2010).

6.5 Additional concerns about the BPFM

Building upon the extant critiques, the principal concern of this paper is the possibility that researchers are not gaining an understanding of pre-existing perceptions of brands, but are instead ‘creating’ the brand personality with the use of the BPFM methodology. Such an assertion, if it is correct, would have a profound impact upon how brand personality is perceived, and presents major concerns for both the validity and utility of much of the literature on brand personality because, at present, the BPFM is the dominant tool in brand personality research.

6.5.1 Personification

One particularly unusual aspect in the development of the BPFM methodology was the use of the projective method of brand personification as a precursor to participants rating of brands (see section 2). If looking at the origins of the brand personality concept, theorists have tied the concept of brand personality to the use of projective measures (e.g. Gardner & Levy, 1955), and in particular personification (see Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003 for a review of brand personality origins; also see Blackston, 1993; S. H. M. King, 1973 who link brand personality to personification). Whilst brand personality is closely linked to personification and projective methods, this does not of itself justify the use of the personification in conjunction with quantitative measures in the BPFM methodology.

Projective methods have a long history in marketing (e.g. see Zober, 1956), and Day (1989) describes the advantages of projective methods as ‘allowing the researcher to “get under the surface”’ and ‘to overcome barriers to communication’ (p7), with a goal of uncovering unframed

attitudes to brands. Rook's (2006) overview of the output generated by projective methods sees the data described using terms such as fanciful, metaphoric, symbolic and aesthetic (p146). In the case of personification projections, one method is to ask consumers to imagine a person who wrote a shopping list (Fram & Cibotti, 1991), and a second is to imagine the brand as if it were a person (e.g. see K. L. Keller, 1998, p326), including the brand coming to life in fantasy situations (Mariampolski, 2001).

Hofstede *et al.* (Avis, 2011; 2007; also see K. L. Keller, 1998) suggest that personification uniquely generates user-imagery (a stereotypical brand user, Joseph M. Sirgy, 1982), but it should be noted that user-imagery is a different conceptualisation to brand personality (Helgeson & Supphellen, 2004; Parker, 2009). Also, the process of personification is exactly that; a process implemented by researchers, with Heylen *et al.* (1995) viewing brand personality as being resultant from projective methods.

It is also notable that consumers can think of brands as other projections such as animals (e.g. Day, 1989; Hussey & Duncombe, 1999) without suggesting they ordinarily think this way, and consumers also do not ordinarily think of brands as people (Avis, 2011; O'Guinn & Muniz, 2009; Gerald Zaltman & Zaltman, 2008, p37). Whilst it might be argued that personification is widespread in human thought (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff & Turner, 1989), this does not, of itself, mean that brands are ordinarily personified. It does suggest, however, that it would be relatively easy to encourage the personification of a brand.

Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to examine the controversy in detail, it is important to understand that projective methods have been the subject of criticism (e.g. see Lilienfeld, Wood, & Garb, 2000 for psychology; Yoell, 1974 for marketing). Many critiques argue that the interpretation of data is inconsistent (e.g. Lilienfeld, Wood, & Garb, 2000) and, perhaps in response to these

critiques, there is widespread agreement that projective data requires considerable interpretation by researchers who are experienced in the use of projective methods (Boddy, 2005; Helkkula & Pihlström, 2010; Steinman, 2009), and the data should be interpreted within a broad context (Hussey & Duncombe, 1999).

However, the BPFM methodology aggregates data which is taken ‘as is’ (literal) and free from context and interpretation of individual data, and this is not the intended use of projective methods (Hussey & Duncombe, 1999). Bearing in mind Rook’s (2006) discussion of the data generated by projective methods, and the necessity for interpretation within a context, the BPFM methodology is most unusual. The methodology adapts projective methods that inherently require interpretation of individual consumer responses but no explanation is given for why or how the aggregated data might be meaningful in the absence of such an interpretation. Although there has been some quantification of data in projective research in relation to content analysis (e.g. Boddy, 2005), such as the numbers of mentions of themes in projective interviews, there are no examples that correspond to, or justify, the BPFM methodology (i.e. quantification of projections).

6.5.2 Priming

One of the likely effects of personification projection is that researchers are priming a category in the minds of the participants (Bargh & Chartrand, 2000). Murphy and Zajonc (1993) explain priming as a situation in which a ‘presentation of one stimulus, or prime, alters subjects’ perceptions of a second target stimulus’ (p273). The principle underlying the effect of priming is that cognitively accessible information will affect the way in which the target is perceived (Stapel & Koomen, 2005), with research showing that a prime can induce an analogy between two separate domains (Schunn & Dunbar, 1996) thereby creating assimilation effects across the domains (Aarts & Dijksterhuis, 2002).

In the context of the BPFFM, it is possible to see that priming the concept of people will encourage consumers to think of brands in humanlike terms (see Herr, Sherman, & Fazio, 1983 for the influence of priming in relation to human trait research), even if this is not an ordinary mode of thought. Furthermore, while participants progress through the BPFFM survey, the priming will be reinforced through the on-going necessity to think of brands in humanlike terms, strengthening the network of association between brands and people (e.g. see Freling & Forbes, 2005b). This suggests a strong ordering effect, and it is notable that the BPFFM methodology included rotation of the surveys to presumably avoid ordering effects.

6.5.3 Leading Questions and forced choice/rating

Leading questions have been found to have a significant effect on what individuals perceive (Loftus, 1975, 2005; Loftus, Miller, & Burns, 1978). For example, when a question about a scene in a film includes a reference to a non-existent object, the respondent will actually believe that they saw the object in the scene. The questions in the BPFFM present what might be considered *de facto* leading questions. Having personified the brand, the subjects are then presented with a series of descriptors and rating scales. Although it may well be the case that a particular subject has never considered brand *x* in terms of trait *y*, nevertheless they will think of brand *x* in relation to description *y* for the survey. The leading question may create the perception, instead of identifying an existing perception.

As a further confounding factor, the survey method forces the subject to rate an item, and even if the participant is having trouble equating trait *x* with brand *y*, they must nevertheless present a rating. Barnard and Ehrenberg (1990) note that research has shown that forced choice questions might provide additional associations when compared to free choice questions. Romaniuk and

Ehrenberg's (2003) research appears to confirm this. Using the Young and Rubicam Brand Asset Valuator (including 13 BPFM traits), a free choice method was used, in which consumers only placed a tick against a descriptor that was applicable to a brand. Brand users, for example, only ticked 9% of traits (non-users just 5%), and the low response rate was not replicated for non-trait items. Furthermore, it was apparent that brands in the same category tended to have the same personality trait attribution, which suggests finding category rather than brand personality (e.g. see Avis, 2012; Batra, et al., 2010 for category 'personality').

The potential problems associated with leading questions and forced choice/rating surveys begs the question of exactly how much of the data collected actually reflects the ordinary perceptions of the subjects; has any consumer ever *ordinarily* thought of a bleach brand as 'outdoorsy' or 'intelligent'? Romaniuk and Ehrenberg's (2003) research suggests that this is unlikely.

6.5.4 Acquiescence responding (AR)

Krosnik (1999) provides an overview of the (sometimes contradictory) research findings on acquiescence responding (AR), in which respondents defer to researchers and acquiesce to researcher views. Of particular relevance is that AR can occur where a guess is required as an answer, or where the question is difficult, both of which may be the case if subjects do not ordinarily think of brands in terms of personality. Zuckerman *et al.* (1995) consider the problem of AR in conjunction with researchers using a positive test strategy to confirm their hypothesis, suggesting 'it is possible, under some conditions, *to obtain respondents' support for any assertion that is the focus of the question*' (p59, emphasis added). They propose that the problem arises (as in the case of the BPFM) where 'investigators have used a question-selection paradigm requiring participants to choose from among questions constructed a priori' (p57).

6.5.5 Summary

This paper has identified that the BPFFM methodology should raise a considerable number of questions regarding whether it is a representation of consumers' *ordinary* perceptions of brands. Although some of the potential problems identified might apply to some extent in other survey methodologies, the possibility of a combined influence of these potential problems in the BPFFM may cause one to question what is actually being measured when using the methodology (hereafter referred to as 'potentially problematic research methods').

6.6 Hypotheses

The overarching research aim is to examine whether the potentially problematic methods associated with the BPFFM methodology might actually create consumer perceptions of brand personality, rather than measure their *ordinary* perceptions of brands, and to establish whether a very widely used methodology is a valid method for measurement of the brand personality concept.

Aaker (1997) proposes that brand personality perceptions are resultant from a range of direct and indirect antecedents and, in order to achieve the research aims, it was necessary to identify an entity that shares few of the antecedents to the formation of brand personality. The specific antecedents to brand personality discussed by Aaker, with supporting references where provided, were user imagery (unreferenced), transfer from CEO/employees or endorsers such as celebrities (McCracken, 1989), gender/age/class (S. J. Levy, 1959), product related attributes/product category associations/brand name/symbol/logo/advertising style/price and distribution channel (Batra, et al., 1993).

Aaker (1997) also discusses animism and anthropomorphism of brands but in the best interpretation

of Aaker's discussion, these result from the antecedents given above. As a brand is a metaphor (Gary Davies & Chun, 2003), an entity located within human intuitive ontology as an artefact (e.g. see De Cruz & De Smedt, 2007) would provide an interesting contrast, and stimuli within a single category would also avoid category influences (Batra, et al., 2010). In applying the BPFFM methodology to non-brand stimuli, we sought to test the following hypotheses:

H1: Using the BPFFM scale and survey methodology, the within-subject design of rating the non-brand stimuli will be significantly different for traits (H1a), facets (H1b) and factors (H1c).

H2: Using the BPFFM scale and survey methodology, each non-brand stimuli will be found to have a distinct personality.

6.7 Methodology

6.7.1 Study overview

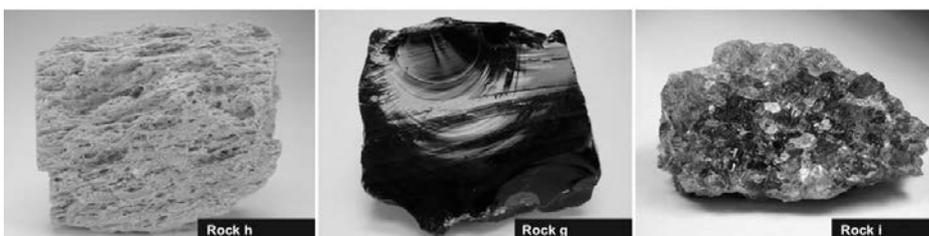
We used a within-subjects design, with participants rating three different stimuli using the BPFFM scale and methodology. The methodology used for the study included a personification prime (see Appendix A), forced rating using a Likert scale, *de facto* leading questions in the 42 BPFFM trait items (rate 'x' with 'y' implies the traits are applicable), and potential for acquiescence responding due to the presence of 'authoritative' researchers. The aim of the study was to therefore examine whether using the BPFFM methodology might create personality for the non-brand stimuli.

6.7.2 Stimuli selection

Following the criteria for stimuli selection (discussed earlier), pictures of three rocks were selected as the non-brand stimuli. Rocks are a natural category, are inanimate, and have no obvious antecedents of perceptions comparable to the formation of brand personality. It might be noted that, in some cultures, rocks are seen as animate/living (e.g. see Reynolds, 2009), but there is no reason to believe that this is the case in the culture where the study took place, and routine personification would require cultural extension of notions of personhood (Harvey, 2005, 2006).

It might also be noted that the antecedents to brand personality includes visual stimuli such as symbols and logos, and pictures of rocks are also a visual stimuli. However, the rock images do not have any obvious similarities with brand symbols or logos and it seems very unlikely that brand personality theorists would suggest that the rock images might be comparable to the antecedents to brand personality formation. However, we deliberately chose rocks with a distinctly different appearance to assist participants in differentiating personalities. Whilst this might be seen as ‘loading the dice’, we saw no reason why a rock might ordinarily be perceived to have a personality in the first place. The pictures of the rocks can be seen in figure 15.

Figure 15: Images of Rocks (originals in colour)



6.7.3 Participants

A convenience sample of students was recruited from a New Zealand university (marketing students were excluded from participation), with chocolate offered as an incentive for participation. The sample differed from the BPFM development, which used a representative sample of US consumers, as the purpose of this study was testing the scale methodology rather than development of a generalised scale. In total, 225 participants gave consent and completed the online survey to assess the personality of the three rocks. Excluded from the 225 were four participants who withdrew from the study, as they were unable to personify the rocks. We also included a quality control measure for survey inputs which required participants to spend at least four minutes to complete the survey. One survey was withdrawn as a result of this control. The final participant demographics were 40% male ($n = 90$) and 60% female ($n = 135$), with a mean age of 24.33 (± 9.11) years.

6.7.4 Procedure

On giving consent to participate in the study, we invited the participants into a dedicated research room, allowing monitoring of the participants during the online survey (e.g. ensuring no discussion). Each participant received a briefing (same researcher for all briefings) informing them that they would see a series of three images and descriptors, and they would then need to rate the images against the descriptors. Once sitting in front of the computer a scripted prime (see appendix A) was read to the participants, and they were briefed on the five point Likert scale used in the survey to rate each of the BPFM traits (1 = not at all descriptive, 5 = extremely descriptive). They were then asked to commence the survey. On the very rare occasions participants asked for help with the survey, the researchers politely declined to help. The survey was designed such that the

rocks being rated were always visible throughout the survey.

An important difference between this study and the BPFM development is that this study adapted the BPFM prime; the latter mentioned brands and gave examples of personified brands, whilst the former mentioned rocks but gave no examples of personified rocks. As such, the prime used in this study might be seen as a weaker prime than that used for the BPFM. Also, as it was possible that the participants' ratings of rocks would become progressively easier as the survey progressed (Siguaw, et al., 1999), the order of the rock presentation was rotated. Each third of the sample was exposed to a different sequence of rocks compared to the remaining two thirds. No ordering changes were made within the scale.

6.7.5 Analysis

Overall, the BPFM survey consists of 42 traits, 15 facets and five factors. For the purpose of analyses in the current study, the same traits, facets and factors were used for comparison amongst the three rocks. To analyse the differences between trait, facet and factor means across the three rocks, we used SPSS; version 18. We determined the reliability of the factor measures by the coefficient alpha, all of which were higher than 0.7 (ranging from .77 to .89), as specified by Cortina (1993) to be the level of internal consistency necessary for the scale to be acceptable.

We used repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine whether means between Rocks G, H and I were significantly different for the traits, facets and factors of the BPFM. In order for us to use this statistical tool, we assessed the data to determine whether it met the tools' assumptions. In cases where assumptions of statistical tests were violated, these are indicated in the results (if the Mauchly's sphericity test was violated, we used the Greenhouse-Geisser correction to make the F ratio more conservative, Greenhouse & Geisser, 1959). We also used repeated contrasts

to give pairwise comparisons of how rocks varied for BPFM traits, facets and factors. Due to the multiple comparisons experimental design used, we used a Mixed Model ANOVA between subjects analysis to ensure reduction of any potential type one errors. A between-subjects variable representing the ordering of the survey was used to separate each third of the sample. Factors, facets or traits found with an ordering effect had a Bonferroni correction ($p < .0167$) applied.

For hypothesis 2, a problem arises when trying to determine how many traits, facets and factors would be required to show significant differences, and in what combination, to allow an evaluation of distinct personality. An obvious solution might be to use existing evaluation methods, but there appears to be no clear framework within the brand personality literature. For example, Ramaseshan and Tsao (2007) characterize several brands in their discourse but make no reference to a method for evaluating whether the brands might be distinct. Similarly, in a study of restaurant brand personality, Siguaw *et al.* (1999) compared the personality between restaurants, in a format of restaurant x has higher y than restaurant z .

Overall, there appears to be no objective method or framework to evaluate hypothesis 2 that might not (quite reasonably) be challenged as arbitrary and subjective. In light of these problems, we will take a heuristic approach to the data evaluation. As this is an unusual approach, in addition to providing relevant data in this paper, we can provide the raw data for those who wish to examine it more closely [location and format of data will be provided according to the advice of the journal editors].

6.8 Results

6.8.1 Traits analysis for brand personality

Within brand personality research, traits are used to provide detail for the understanding of how brands may differ in brand personality from one another. The means of each trait for each rock using the BPFPM methodology can be seen in Table 14. Repeated contrasts found significant differences between one or all three pairings of rocks for 41 out of 42 traits. In total, repeated measures ANOVA found 41 out of the 42 brand personality traits were significantly different across the three rocks rated by participants. The one trait that was not significantly different across the three rocks rated by participants was 'Secure' (Rock H mean = 3.19, Rock G mean = 3.21, Rock I mean = 3.01; $F(2, 448) = 1.687, p = .186$). Therefore, hypothesis 1(a) has been supported.

Table 14: Means and significant differences (where applicable) for brand personality traits for the three rocks

| Traits | Rock H | Rock G | Rock I | H≠G≠I | H≠G | G≠I | I≠H |
|--------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Down to Earth [^] | 3.62 | 2.46 | 2.54 | p<.001 | p<.001 | | p<.001 |
| Family Orientated [^] | 3.19 | 2.08 | 2.51 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 |
| Small Town [^] | 3.23 | 1.92 | 2.18 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.05 | p<.001 |
| Honest | 3.48 | 2.45 | 2.99 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 |
| Sincere | 3.37 | 2.46 | 2.89 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 |
| Real | 3.76 | 2.94 | 3.30 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.01 | p<.001 |
| Wholesome [^] | 3.70 | 2.28 | 2.77 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 |
| Original [^] | 3.28 | 3.46 | 3.60 | p<.01 | | | p<.01 |
| Cheerful | 2.93 | 2.22 | 3.08 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 | |
| Sentimental | 3.15 | 2.34 | 2.99 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 | |
| Friendly | 3.28 | 2.28 | 3.05 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 | |
| Daring | 2.47 | 3.74 | 3.16 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 |
| Trendy | 2.16 | 3.86 | 3.34 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 |
| Exciting | 2.43 | 3.58 | 3.52 | p<.001 | p<.001 | | p<.001 |
| Spirited | 2.81 | 3.28 | 3.55 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.01 | p<.001 |
| Cool | 2.40 | 3.76 | 3.32 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 |
| Young | 2.45 | 3.18 | 2.97 | p<.001 | p<.001 | | p<.001 |
| Imaginative | 2.74 | 3.16 | 3.33 | p<.001 | p<.001 | | p<.001 |
| Unique [^] | 3.25 | 3.79 | 3.88 | p<.001 | p<.001 | | p<.001 |
| Up to Date | 2.26 | 3.49 | 3.14 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.01 | p<.001 |
| Independent [^] | 3.18 | 4.07 | 3.48 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.01 |
| Contemporary | 2.58 | 3.85 | 3.23 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 |
| Reliable | 3.49 | 2.86 | 3.04 | p<.001 | p<.001 | | p<.001 |
| Hardworking | 3.64 | 3.17 | 3.04 | p<.001 | p<.001 | | p<.001 |
| Secure | 3.19 | 3.21 | 3.01 | | | | |
| Intelligent | 3.00 | 3.71 | 3.37 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 |
| Technical* | 2.59 | 3.34 | 2.82 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 | |
| Corporate [^] | 2.00 | 3.35 | 2.55 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 |
| Successful | 2.74 | 3.82 | 3.33 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 |
| Leader | 2.57 | 3.70 | 3.04 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 |
| Confident | 3.04 | 4.10 | 3.71 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 |
| Upper Class [^] | 2.02 | 3.75 | 3.33 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 |
| Good Looking | 2.45 | 4.01 | 3.54 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 |
| Glamorous* | 1.80 | 3.72 | 3.44 | p<.001 | p<.001 | | p<.001 |
| Charming | 2.64 | 3.56 | 3.40 | p<.001 | p<.001 | | p<.001 |
| Feminine | 2.21 | 2.52 | 3.15 | p<.001 | p<.05 | p<.001 | p<.001 |
| Smooth* | 2.08 | 3.98 | 2.35 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 | |
| Outdoorsy [^] | 3.74 | 2.39 | 2.84 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 |
| Masculine | 3.26 | 3.29 | 2.61 | p<.001 | | p<.001 | p<.001 |
| Western [^] | 3.28 | 2.61 | 2.53 | p<.001 | p<.001 | | p<.001 |
| Tough | 3.22 | 3.38 | 2.96 | p<.01 | | p<.001 | |
| Rugged | 3.40 | 2.50 | 2.76 | p<.001 | p<.001 | | p<.001 |

[^]Greenhouse-Geisser correction was used.

*Bonferroni correction (p < .0167) applied to make finding non-significant.

6.8.2 Facet analysis for brand personality

Aaker (1997) described BP factors as a broad representation of BP, so facets were used to provide more detail on BP perceptions. All 15 facets were found to be significantly different across the three rocks which supports hypothesis 1(b).

6.8.3 Factors analysis for brand personality

Identifying differences in factors between the stimuli that were rated by the same participants has previously been used to assist in identifying ways a consumer may be influenced in their preference toward a particular brand (Aaker 1997). The overall means of the BP factors for each of the three rocks found when using the BPFM methodology can be seen in Table 15. The highest mean was for Rock H for ‘Ruggedness’ (mean = 3.38), and the lowest mean was found for Rock H for ‘Sophistication’ (mean = 2.20). Repeated contrast statements found significant differences for all five factors between two or all three pairings of rocks using. All five factors were also found to be significantly different across the three rocks for all five factors using repeated measures ANOVA. We therefore believe that hypothesis 1(c) is supported, as each rock was sufficiently different to represent BP factors.

Table 15: Means and significant differences for BP factors for the three rocks

| Factor | Rock H | Rock G | Rock I | H≠G≠I | H≠G | G≠I | I≠H |
|-------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Sincerity | 3.36 | 2.44 | 2.90 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 |
| Excitement | 2.61 | 3.61 | 3.36 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 |
| Competence | 2.92 | 3.47 | 3.10 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.01 |
| Sophistication | 2.20 | 3.59 | 3.20 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 | p<.001 |
| Ruggedness [^] | 3.38 | 2.83 | 2.74 | p<.001 | p<.001 | | p<.001 |

[^]Greenhouse-Geisser correction was used.

6.9 Discussion

The current study applied the BPFM methodology to examine the personality perceptions of rocks and demonstrates that, using the methodology, distinct rock personalities were found. Having followed the BPFM methodology, our evaluation is that hypothesis one and hypothesis two have been demonstrated empirically in the analysis of the survey data. Arguably, as the BPFM has no purpose outside of the measurement of brand personality, the participants created ‘brand personality’ for the rocks. However viewed, the findings highlight that the BPFM methodology is at least able to ‘create’ personality in stimuli which share no obvious antecedents to the formation of brand personality. This is evident in the significant differences between the rocks at the trait, facet and factor level. The BPFM was described as a valid and ‘generalizeable’ measure of brand personality, and this study saw it ‘generalized’ to pictures of rocks.

Although there are extant critiques of the BPFM (e.g. Austin, et al., 2003), this was the first study to highlight the possible influence of the additional potentially problematic research methods; priming, personification, leading questions, forced rating and quantification of a projection. We found the three rocks assessed within this study are significantly different for 41 out of the 42 traits used within the BPFM. With the application of the BPFM scale and methodology, traits such as ‘Sincere’ and ‘Leader’ saw variation in the rocks’ ratings, despite the fact that they are pictures of inanimate rocks. A further point of note was that only ‘Secure’ resulted in no significant differences across the three rocks. This may be due to the physical attributes of the rocks or the term may have been difficult for the participants to interpret clearly. We believe that the finding of no significant differences for only a single trait (out of the 42 brand personality traits) supports H1 and H2.

In light of the research findings, the argument of this paper is straightforward. Brand personality perceptions, according to Aaker (1997), are developed as a result of antecedents such as advertising

and user imagery (see earlier discussion). The BPFM is then used to measure the brand personality perceptions that are perceived by consumers as a result of the antecedents. Although brands have visual elements and this research used visual stimuli, rocks are inanimate objects from a different ontological category and, by any reasonable interpretation, rocks and brands have nothing in common that might explain the research findings. The ratings of the traits should have been entirely random, or the majority of traits rated as not at all descriptive. The fact that the participants were able to assign distinct personalities to each rock therefore can only be reasonably explained as an artefact of the research methodology. Rocks were found to have a personality simply because participants were asked to perceive one, and the only explanation of this finding is that the BPFM therefore ‘creates’ the personality.

Despite no obvious reason why participants should *ordinarily* view rocks in terms of confidence at all the sample were able to rate rock G significantly more confident (mean = 4.10) in comparison to rock H (mean = 3.04) and rock I (mean = 3.71). Zuckerman *et al.* (1995) suggested that AR might see participants providing answers confirming the assertions of researchers, and this may be a characterization of the results obtained in this study. In this case, with a chocolate incentive, and apparently authoritative researchers, nearly all participants were willing to complete such an apparently odd study without question. From 230 participants, only four participants withdrew from the study. One individual who withdrew was a geology student (unable to think of rocks as people), one due to disability (problems managing the input of the data), one for unknown reasons, and only one participant reported withdrawal due to the odd nature of the study.

In addition to the possible influence of AR, it is also quite possible that other elements of the BPFM methodology might have been influential. The results may also, in part, be due to the affect of being forced to rate against an item regardless of whether they had ever thought about a rock in these terms (e.g. forced rating), or possibly be resultant from the person prime (Murphy & Zajonc,

1993), or leading questions (Loftus, 2005). This study is unable to identify the degree of influence each of the potentially problematic research methods might have had on the outcome. However, it is highly improbable that participants had ever previously thought of rocks in terms of the traits that are included in the BPFM. As such, where there is uncertainty over whether participants might ordinarily think of subject x in terms of y , we suggest using a free choice method, with the advantage of this approach being illustrated in Romaniuk and Ehrenberg's (2003) research.

Another concern expressed in the review was the quantification of projections. In this survey, the aggregated data was converted by the analysis into means. However, in examining individual participant data, it was not possible to explain, for example, if participant x rated item y as 4, why they did so, and why another participant might rate the same item differently. We simply do not know, and this is why context is required for projections (Hussey & Duncombe, 1999). For example, what does it mean when an individual participant rates 'extremely descriptive' against the trait 'intelligent' for a rock? Is the data between participant x and y comparable, when we have no idea of what they were thinking about? Were participants genuinely personifying the rocks? The sample data and participant data offer no clues. As such, we recommend that novel and unusual methodologies, such as the quantification of projections, should be considered and justified before implementation.

6.10 Limitations and future research

Due to the use of rock photographs and a modified prime, the methodology utilized here is not an exact replication of the BPFM methodology. We also diverged from the BPFM methodology by using a convenience sample based upon the premise that rocks should not be found to have personality, regardless of participant backgrounds. Finally, in using a New Zealand sample of students, there may have been some different interpretations of trait meanings, but we do not view

this as problematic. Overall, we believe that these differences do not undermine the implications of the findings.

It is also possible, though we believe unlikely, that other objects or a format other than a photograph might have produced different results and research conclusions. Finally, the way in which the research was conducted offers no firm conclusions on which of the potentially problematic research methods might have played a role in the generation of the rock personality, or the degree of influence. It might also be the case that other aspects of the methodology played a role in generating the results, and these were not identified.

In light of the uncertainties over the degree of influence of each of the potentially problematic research methods, an interesting extension of this research might be a replication in which a potentially problematic variable such as the personification is excluded. For example, if personification is excluded, will the other problematic research methods generate distinct personalities for the rocks? Another interesting avenue would be to replicate the research, but also include participant interviews to try to identify how it was possible for the rocks to have personality and cross check the interview data against the survey data

6.11 Conclusions

Rock images share no obviously comparable antecedents to brand personality formation, but nevertheless we found rock pictures had distinct personalities when using the BPFM methodology. The BPFM has been the dominant tool in brand personality research, and the use of the BPFM methodology is ongoing (e.g. Freling, et al., 2010). Previous articles, such as Azoulay and Kapferer (2003), have raised legitimate concerns about the BPFM, but these have not prevented the ongoing use of the scale. The research findings presented here extend these concerns; if the BPFM

methodology can find personality for rocks, then it is apparent that the methodology can create personality. There is a large body of literature and theory which rests upon the validity of the BPFFM methodology, and with the methodology in doubt, the validity of research findings and theory founded in the use of the BPFFM is likewise doubtful.

However, there is a wider concern. Aaker (1997) defines brand personality as ‘the set of human characteristics associated with a brand’ (p347), and titled the section on the development of the BPFFM as ‘What is Brand Personality?’ The implication of the title is that brand personality is what is measured with the BPFFM, but this research suggests that this is not brand personality, but is instead a research artefact. This potentially leaves a gap in the conceptualisation of brand personality, raising questions about what *exactly* brand personality is? Whilst other researchers have presented alternative models that address *some of* the identified problems with the BPFFM, these have not been adopted by other researchers suggesting an implicit rejection of the models.

Another concern is with the salience of the descriptors used in the models, which is illustrated by the research of Romaniuk and Ehrenberg (2003). In the research for this paper, participants were able to rate a rock’s intelligence and confidence, and how hard working a rock is. Even if using one of the scales that addresses some of the problems of the BPFFM, do consumers ever ordinarily think of, for example, a brand of bleach as ‘confident’ or ‘loving’ (see Bosnjak, et al., 2007). As such, we recommend the approach of Romaniuk and Ehrenberg (2003), which may *help* to restrict the traits identified to those which are pre-existing and salient. After all, how can ‘intelligent’ be a salient descriptor for a rock, and what is the probability that ‘loving’ is a salient descriptor for a brand of bleach? Sirgy (1982) makes this point indirectly in relation to self-congruence theory, recommending that researchers use only ‘those images which are most related to the products being tested’ (p296).

We also strongly recommend that researchers forgo the use of personification, unless theorists are able to provide a theoretical justification for how the data that is generated might be meaningful when removed from the context of individual participant perceptions. Overall, we consider that surveys are valid and very useful research instruments, but draw the conclusion that, as with any research approach, they should be used with careful consideration. In particular, the research from this paper is illustrative of the absolute necessity for theorists to justify and consider any novel usage of survey instruments.

Paper Appendix A

The instructions used as a script for rock BP:

We would like you to think of each rock as if it were a person. This may sound unusual, but think of the set of human characteristics associated with each rock. If you see a descriptor and you have no sense of how it applies to the rock, look at the rock picture again and think of it as if it were a person.

Chapter 7: Category Theory and Confusion

7.1 Preamble

The final paper reports on research which investigates how user-image and brand personification compare by asking participants to either personify a brand or describe a stereotypical user. The inspiration for this work is directly related to the question of how user-image relates to personification and develops the ideas presented in Chapter 4 and Appendix B. However, this chapter presents some interesting findings that relate directly to the category confusion problem and therefore provides support for theoretical arguments give in Chapter 5.

It also represents the commencement of research on user imagery which is proposed as an alternative to the concept of brand personality. Although not reported fully in the paper, investigation of the user image concept proved to be very difficult, in particular in eliciting comparable levels of detail from different participants. The problem was fundamentally about how to achieve this without leading, or creating, the impressions that were being elicited. It remains as a significant challenge in following the path that is suggested in the conclusion to the paper. In particular, there is often no actual user as a point of reference, which means that the data that is being gathered is actually data about a fictive person. In consideration of brand personality research and theory, the potential problems with such data suggest a need to proceed with great caution.

7.2 Introduction

Described by Avis (2012) as the ‘category confusion problem’, the idea that category perceptions might be conflated with brand perceptions has been identified in the brand personality literature. Avis drew heavily on the work of Batra and colleagues (Batra, Lenk, & Wedel, 2005; Batra, et al., 2010; Lenk, Batra, & Wedel, 2003, hereafter referenced as Batra and colleagues), whose research found that brand personality perceptions were being conflated with perceptions of category personality. However, this paper will review some literature that suggests that the category confusion problem is likely to extend beyond brand personality research (e.g. Keaveney & Hunt, 1992), and the interview research presented in this paper is also indicative of a wider problem.

Also, Avis (2012) presents category confusion as a problem, but this paper will argue that an understanding of category perceptions also represents an opportunity to better understand consumer behaviour. The paper commences with a review of some key literature that discusses categories in relation to consumer behaviour, before presenting the research for this paper. Although the paper includes research, it is primarily conceptual and seeks to contribute to the literature by (1) extending the literature on category confusion, (2) presenting a method of ameliorating the category confusion problem in qualitative research, (3) and also identifying an opportunity to revisit a promising area of research and theory.

7.3 Brand Personality and Category Confusion

The term ‘category confusion problem’ is first used by Avis (2012), but early work on brand personality made passing mention of the potential for category influences in brand personality research (J. Aaker, 1997; Batra, et al., 1993). However, the key work for the category confusion problem is the research of Batra and colleagues. In particular they provide the empirical support that

brand personality measures did indeed include perceptions of category 'personality'. Using the categories of jeans, magazines and cars, Batra and colleagues investigated a method for isolating category personality perceptions within brand personality measures. Utilising Aaker's (1997) brand personality model for their investigation (see Lenk, et al., 2003 for circumplex models), they found that each category had 'distinct baseline category personality characteristics' (Batra, et al., 2005, p.29).

The work of Batra and colleagues has found further empirical support from Maehle, Otnes, and Supphellen (2011). Their research used interviews to investigate which brands consumers perceived as being typical or atypical of Aaker's (1997) brand personality dimensions. Emergent from their research findings were examples of strong category associations, such as the beverage category being associated with 'Sincerity' and fast food brands being associated with lack of 'Sincerity'. They also note other literature which finds category associations, for example citing Batra and Homer's (2004) research findings that potato chips were perceived as fun and expensive cookies were associated with sophistication.

Avis (2012) builds on the work of Batra and colleagues and argues that whilst brand personality models are intended to measure brand personality, as a result of the category confusion problem, they are conflating brand and category perceptions. To illustrate the point, he notes that Levy found whisky category associations that also appear in Aaker's (1997) scale. If researching whisky brands, he argues, it would not be possible to know whether the results would be from category or brand perceptions. Avis also suggests that the category confusion problem may also be skewing scale development according to the product categories used in development. He notes that, for example, Sung and Tinkham (2005) replicated Aaker's methodology, but still produced different personality descriptors, suggesting the results may be a function of different categories being used.

The findings of Batra and colleagues, in conjunction with Maehle et al. (2011), present a strong case that brand personality and category personality are being fused together in research results.

Although limited to brand personality research their findings are nevertheless indicative of a wider problem in brand research. There has been ongoing concern about how brand personality might be delineated from, other brand concepts such as brand image and identity (e.g. Avis, 2011; Freling & Forbes, 2005a; Patterson, 1999). Azoulay and Kapferer's (2003) critique of Aaker's (1997) scale is of particular interest for this paper. They describe Aaker's definition of brand personality as an 'all-encompassing pot pourri' (p.150), arguing that it led to the inclusion in Aaker's brand personality scale of 'all different facets of brand identity' and 'classical dimensions of product performance' (p.153). This suggests that the research of Batra and colleagues not only found conflation between category and brand personality, but also conflation between other brand and category associations.

In some respects, it is unsurprising that categories might include associations that mirror other brand concepts. For example, Levy (1999) is cited by Batra and colleagues, Maehle et al (2011) and Avis (2012) as a result of his findings of category 'meanings' and user-imagery. However, Levy is not alone in having examined categories in relation to consumer behaviour, and the next section will detail literature discussing some key foundations for the remainder of the paper.

7.4 Category Theory and Associations

The notion that categories have particular and distinct associations is not new, and there were a flurry of papers in the late 80s early 90s. For example, Sujan & Dekleva (1987) investigated the role of categories in relation to advertising. They argued that different category levels would generate more attributes or inferences, proposing that individual brands only have *some* increase in attributes when compared to their product category (p.373). As a part of their research, they examined the distinctiveness of seven product categories, as well as brands within the categories, and concluded

that the category associations were ‘rich, evaluative, and quite distinctive’ (p.374).

From the same period, one particularly influential article was Cohen & Basu’s (1987) scholarly review of theoretical developments in the understanding of categories, and applies these to consumer behaviour. With reference to the argument of this paper, it is interesting to note their contention that research is too focused on individual objects in relation to the category processing context, and they argue that the idea that brands are centre stage in consumer minds is ‘wishful-thinking’, suggesting that consumers organise their thoughts around category-relevant factors.

Meyers-Levy and Tybout (1989) conducted research that included examination of category schema, finding for example strong product and location of purchase associations for soft drinks, and these might be seen as complimentary to Levy’s (1999) more intangible associations (e.g. espresso coffee is associated with ‘busyness’ and ‘mature adults’). Interestingly, more recently, Pettigrew and Charters (2006) examined the perceptions of the beer and wine categories, commenting that the differences in some perceptions were ‘relatively rigid’ (p.177).

Building upon the empirical findings of Zimmer and Golden’s (1988) study of store image and category theory, Keaveney and Hunt (1992) examine the role of category prototypes in the development of store image. They propose that, on entering a new store, consumers activate a store category prototype, arguing that this might even allow for consumers to recall store features that are non-present in the store, but present in the prototype. In addition to the strong emphasis of the importance of category processing in consumer perceptions, Keaveney and Hunt also implicitly acknowledge the problem of category confusion. They propose methods, such as comparison between stores, to ensure that category prototype perceptions are delineated from individual store perceptions (also see Hartman & Spiro, 2005 for similar recommendations).

Returning to the work of Cohen and Basu (1987), their article is widely cited in some key brand

literature. For example, Keller's (1993) discussion of consumer brand equity, describes that 'attributes or benefits may be considered "prototypical" and essential to all brands in the category' (p.6). Aaker and Keller (1990) also discuss the importance of category fit for brand extensions, a theme that was to continue through the brand extension literature (see Volckner & Sattler, 2006 for a review). In both of the examples given, the inclusion of discussion of category associations might be described in terms of making a 'guest appearance', but with brands playing the role of the 'star performer'.

Although there are some exceptions (e.g. Schmitt & Zhang, 1998; Tapachai & Waryszak, 2000), the interest in category associations as a subject in its own right appears to have diminished. This is surprising, as both Cohen and Basu (1987) and Keaveney and Hunt (1992) present convincing arguments for the importance of this area of study. In the next section, the findings of a research study will provide support for this view.

7.5 Research

The original aim of the research for this paper was to use interviews to identify whether brand personification (Hofstede, et al., 2007) generates user imagery (a stereotypical brand user, J.M. Sirgy, et al., 1997), by comparing personification results with descriptions of stereotypical purchasers. However, serendipitous findings proved to be as interesting as the original purpose of the research (see Alba, 2011). In particular, in one of the early rounds of interviews, a participant suggested that they were not using the brand stimuli (Heineken) to create the user imagery, and explained that the user imagery was as much for a 'middle range' beer as for the stimuli brand. As the target of the research was to investigate brand perceptions, not category perceptions, the participants' comments caused concern.

As a result, controls for category influences were introduced; in addition to interviews examining the main brand stimulus brand, other participants were also asked to provide a description of a stereotypical purchaser of the category or a second brand stimulus. As personifying a category might be perceived as an odd request, the category control was limited to stereotype methods so that personification results are therefore excluded from the results in this paper (as they are not strictly comparable). As a result of this (and some other methodological problems in the early interviews) a subset of only 25 out of 44 interviews are included in the results for this paper. The research is therefore presented as exploratory and the results tentative.

Reflecting the original research aim, the participants were chosen for relative homogeneity, and were all New Zealand students between the ages of 18-25. An offer of chocolate and entry into a prize draw were incentives to participate. The brand stimuli used were Porsche (PS), Ferrari (FS) and the category stimulus was 'luxury sports cars' (CS). As the latter two stimuli were added as 'controls' the interviews are uneven in number (PS=13, CS=6 and FS=6), and this should be kept in mind when examining the results. In each case, a script was read to participants explaining the purpose of the research, after which they were asked to describe a stereotypical purchaser of the car stimuli. Further questions were the source of the stereotype, if they knew an owner of the stimuli example, an open question on their views of the research process overall. The interviews were recorded for later transcription and analysis.

For the analysis, one researcher coded the transcripts into meaning units, before clustering the units into themes until a good 'fit' was achieved. Whilst some meaning units were very distinct, others were combined into a single meaning unit (e.g. 'big company' was coded as 'corporate'). A final step for some themes was to try to arrange meaning units in rank orders. Whilst this is an aid to help visualise the data, it should be noted that this is a very subjective approximation of the intended meaning of the participants. Finally, the sources of the user imagery were quantified according to

the number of mentions. With regards to the validity of qualitative research, Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) provide an overview of the literature, and this research draws on their recommendations. An audit trail has been generated, and the coding for the research was checked by a second experienced coder to ensure that it reasonably reflected the original interviews.

Figure 16 provides an overview of the results from all of the interviews. Each stimuli symbol (see key) in the diagram represents one incidence of use of the meaning unit to which it is attached. One of the items not included in the figure is user imagery gender. There were only four female associations (PS=2, CS=2, FS=0), and it is notable that these generated other differences in the user imagery (e.g. younger). When examining the large picture, it appears that there is considerable commonality in the results, and that this is suggestive of a category effect. The category user imagery appears to be male, middle aged and is a smartly dressed and well heeled businessman. He is city living and has purchased the car to show-off/ as part of a showy lifestyle, and is not a stereotypical New Zealander.

The one theme which is striking in the findings is the direct association of Porsche with 'Narcissism'. This theme was not apparent in the initial analysis, and only became apparent as a result of removing Porsche personification descriptors for this paper, and then re-clustering meaning units to better explain the remaining data. There are also the associations with Porsche and a car 'enthusiast' but two of the descriptors were generated from known owners who fitted this description. The sources of user imagery were of particular interest for this paper, and the number of mentions of sources is provided in table 1.

Of note in table 16 is the 'status of person' as a source, which indicates the use of a generic stereotype, rather than a stereotype derived from an individual brand. For example, one PS interviewee stated that the stereotype was 'a sort of person that could afford a Porsche in the first

place', and another PS interviewee suggests that 'because [...] to afford one, expensive cars, it comes with the territory.' In an FS interview, one interviewee suggests that the source is 'like the stereotypical mid-life crisis, you buy a sports car', and another suggested that the source of the stereotype were media images of wealthy people. In all of these cases, it was apparent that, at the very least, the interviewees were partially drawing upon sources that were only vaguely related (if at all) to a particular brand. These comments and the overview of the research results are indicative of strong category effects in the research findings, and that in *some cases* the brand may not have been a significant contributor to the results.

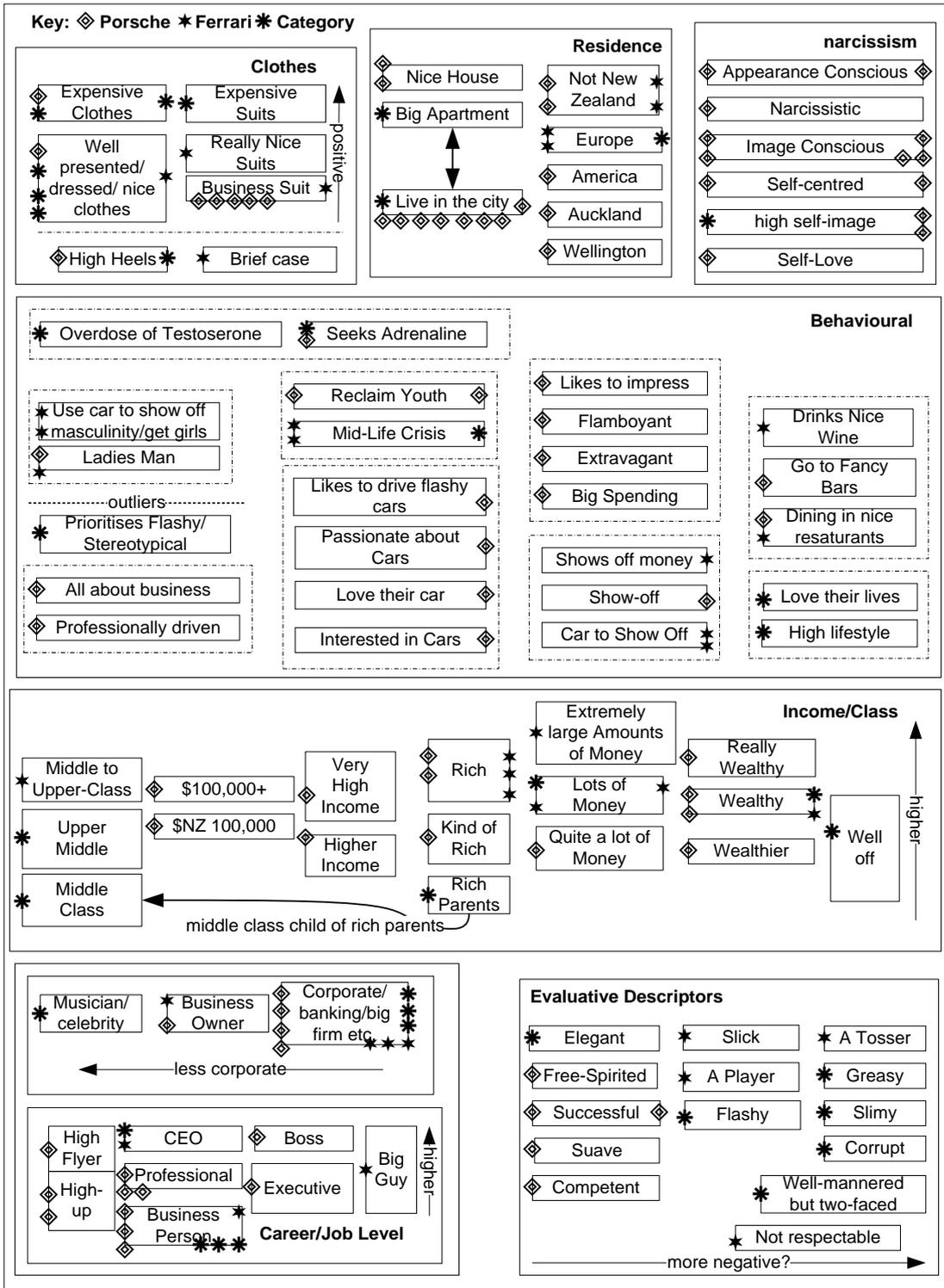


Figure 16: Overview of Research Findings

Table 16: Sources of User Imagery

| Source | PS | FS | CS | Source | PS | FS | CS |
|---|----|----|----|--------------|----|----|----|
| Actual User | 7 | | 2 | Known Owner | 3 | | 1 |
| Movies | 5 | 6 | 3 | Car Features | 1 | | |
| Magazines | 2 | 1 | | Advertising | 2 | | 2 |
| Television | 4 | | 3 | Media | 5 | | |
| Radio | 1 | | | Car Brand | 1 | | |
| Books | | 1 | 1 | Society | | 1 | |
| Musicians | | 1 | | Culture | | | 1 |
| Person known who wants the car | | | | | 1 | | |
| Sort/status of person who could afford to buy the car | | | | | 3 | 2 | |

7.6: Discussion

It is entirely unsurprising that, for example, a luxury sports car might be associated with wealthy people. Whilst this is common sense, the generic category of wealthy people (in some cases) drove the description rather than the individual brand. Less obvious was the category association of ‘mid-life crisis’ / ‘regain lost youth’ found in CS, PS and FS. Although not reported in feedback, it is likely that this stereotype was also driving some of the descriptions, rather than individual brand associations. If returning to Keaveney and Hunt’s (1992) it seems a sports car owner schema / generic wealthy person is being activated in addition to, or in place of, a brand schema.

In conjunction with the literature, the findings of this research have implication for brand research. One relatively clear finding is that measurement of a single brand within a category would be problematic. For example, if a researcher were to have researched the Porsche brand in isolation, there is potential for misdiagnosis of the results; taking the example of ‘mid-life crisis/regaining youth,’ this might be interpreted as a negative association for the Porsche brand in particular, rather than a generic negative category association.

More positively, the research findings also allowed the identification of a user imagery attribute that

appears to be a specific to Porsche (narcissism). This can be seen as an indicator that the methodology of examining category associations, and inclusion of more than one brand, might allow for the separation of category and brand specific associations. However, as the purpose of the research was not to examine category effects, the method was an *ad hoc* inclusion that was precautionary and therefore needs more comprehensive examination. Notwithstanding the limitations of the research, it appears to be a promising method of identifying individual brand perceptions, and complimentary to the quantitative methodology of Batra and colleagues.

Although there may be methods to ameliorate category confusion in some respects, these methods do not address the problems of category confusion in scale development. Avis (2012) argues that the categories used in development may see category influences determining items in a scale, and argues that this limits the ability for scales to be generalizable. It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine the many brand scales that have been developed, but it seems plausible that category associations may bias scale development. For example, Delgado-Ballester (2004, 2005) has developed a brand trust scale, using beer and deodorant categories for scale development, and links Aaker's dimension of 'Sincerity' to his trust concept of brand intent. However, Maehle et al. (2011) identify that 'Sincerity' is closely associated with some categories, and it is therefore reasonable to surmise that the categories of beer and deodorant will be associated with a perceptions of trustworthiness (or 'Sincerity') and that these could impact upon the scale development.

One possible solution to the problems of category confusion in scale development is Low and Lamb's (2000) methodology for brand association scale development. Rather than trying to develop generalised scales, they propose a methodology for developing scales for particular categories. The first step in their methodology is to ascertain which descriptors are salient for the category (category associations) to be examined, which are then used as a basis for the scale. Provided that the resultant scale is used across a range of brands within the category (i.e. not a single brand), the

relative position of each brand against each category association will be apparent.

However, even where category specific scales are developed, they may still be conflating category perceptions with individual brand perceptions. As such, the methodology of Batra and colleagues for isolating brand from category perceptions might be adapted into other areas of brand research. Alternatively, another possible avenue would be to measure the category perceptions using the scale in addition to individual brands, and then deflate each item by the mean for the category². However, these are just two approaches, and there is potential for the development of other methodologies to control for or ameliorate category confusion.

As discussed in the introduction, category confusion should not necessarily just be seen as a research problem, but should also be seen as an opportunity. In consideration of Levy's (1999) beverage category associations, it is apparent that category associations might have an equal, or greater, influence on consumer behaviour than individual brands (see Nedungadi, Chattopadhyay, & Muthukrishnan, 2001, for a discussion of category salience). For example, the strong associations between certain beverage categories and particular user imagery are likely to be influential in consumer behaviour. As just one example, the earlier discussion of wine and beer by Pettigrew and Chartres (2006) describes the association of sophistication with the wine category, which might be used symbolically by consumers.

Following the publication of Cohen & Basu's (1987) paper, there was a flurry of interest in the role of categories and consumer behaviour. Whilst there has been some attention devoted to the role of categories in consumer behaviour, attention has focused on the role of individual brands as the pre-eminent determinant of consumer behaviour. However, as discussed earlier, there are convincing arguments that category perceptions and cognitive processing are an important determinant of

² This idea comes from an anonymous reviewer for a paper on a related subject.

consumer behaviour. Also, the idea that certain categories are strongly related to consumer preference is intuitively plausible; for example, very few teenagers would be likely to want a bone china tea set (for them) in preference to a new mobile phone.

Feldwick (1991) long ago warned against the tendency to treat brands as if they were 'gods on clouds' and this is reflected in Cohen & Basu's (1987) contention that it is 'wishful thinking' that brands are centre stage in the minds of consumers. Although brand associations can undoubtedly be important determinants of consumer behaviour, there is also a risk that they are being over-represented as a central determinant of consumer behaviour. By contrast, it may be the case that the role of categories, and the importance of category effects, may be under-represented in the consumer behaviour literature.

7.9: Conclusions

The category confusion problem was initially identified as a problem related to the study of brand personality, but it is a problem that appears to extend into broader areas of brand literature and research. When reviewing the literature for this paper, it was surprising to find the clear explanation of Keaveney and Hunt (1992) mirrors some of the concerns later expressed by Avis (2012). Also, although there was a period of strong interest in the role of categories, it is also surprising to see that this interest has diminished. The review of category theory by Cohen & Basu (1987) presents a convincing case for the importance of category processing in consumer behaviour.

Following from Cohen and Basu (1987), it may therefore be time for a new and updated review of category theory in relation to consumer behaviour. There are rapid advances in the study and understanding of categories. For example, researchers are progressively identifying the areas of the brain associated with processing of different category types (e.g. Seger & Miller, 2010) and

identifying category organisation through semantic deficits (e.g. Mahon & Caramazza, 2009), and integrating theories into a comprehensive picture of which category function is activated according to task/stimuli type (e.g. Ashby & Maddox, 2010). Bearing in mind the significant advances being made in understanding categories, there is considerable promise for application of the developing theory in the field of consumer behaviour.

With regards to the problematic side of category confusion, in which brand perceptions might be conflated with category perceptions, there are promising avenues that may ameliorate the problems; Batra and colleagues offer a solution for quantitative research, and the research for this paper indicates the direction of a solution for qualitative research. However, further research needs to be undertaken to confirm the conceptual argument of this paper, in particular an examination of the extent of category confusion problems in brand research. Although this paper argues that the effect is likely to be widespread, such arguments still need empirical investigation.

To conclude, Avis (2012) proposed *category confusion* as a problem, but this paper emphasises that *category associations* represent an opportunity. As such, the paper ends by proposing a revival of interest and research in the relatively neglected influence of category learning and processing in the context of consumer behaviour.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

This thesis comprises a series of papers, and the whole of the material raises some fundamental questions about the cognitive success (Niiniluoto, 1999) of the concepts of brand personality and brand relationships. Much of the work is focused on the question of the validity of humanlike brand theory; if consumers do not perceive brands as humanlike, then the relevance, validity and meaning of brand personality and brand relationship theory are questionable. The problem is that while there appears to be little compelling evidence or theory that might support consumers viewing brands as humanlike, and there is strong evidence that consumers *do not* think of brands as humanlike, including some of the research presented in this thesis.

In order to come to such a strong conclusion, it has been necessary to examine research methodologies in some depth, both in terms of their conceptual coherence and the empirical evidence that they provide. This examination suggests that the concepts of brand personality and brand relationships sit on shaky conceptual and empirical foundations. However, there is one point that seems to be more compelling than those identified by the reviews of research presented above, and it is a remarkably simple point. It is a point made most strongly in a conference paper (Avis, 2011). Perceptions of brands as humanlike *should* be apparent in the wider body of research on brands, but there is a remarkable absence of findings of humanlike brand perceptions outside of the brand personality and brand relationship literature.

It is interesting that this absence has not raised concerns. It seems highly improbable that researchers would not have noticed something as distinctly odd as consumers talking about brands as if they are people. However, an explanation for this can be found in Chapter 1, where the foundations of brand personality and brand relationship theory are found to be ‘blurry’ due to ambiguities between metaphor and humanlike brand theory. It may be that this ‘comfortable’ grey

area encouraged theorists to avoid the real implications of humanlike brand theory. An anecdote makes the point. In the presentation of a paper at ACR Beijing (Avis, 2011), the opening slide had a picture of a can of tomatoes. I opened the presentation by informing the attendees that Fournier's (1998) research was proposing that a consumer was having a close relationship with the brand of canned tomatoes. The audience seemed genuinely taken aback, and this is perhaps indicative of the problem of the murkiness in the literature. They were taken aback because they had not thought of the theory in these concrete terms, but this *is* the implication of brand relationship literature.

Both the brand personality and brand relationship concepts were founded on humanlike brand theory, and the work that follows, whether claiming a metaphorical or humanlike perspective, nevertheless sits on foundations of humanlike brand theory. This is the central justification for both Aaker (1997) and Fournier (1998), and the importance of these papers cannot be emphasised enough. It is a very simple point that follows from this. If humanlike brand theory cannot be supported, then its foundational position must be questioned. In particular, if it is accepted that humanlike brand theory is as problematic as this thesis suggests, then the concepts of brand personality and brand relationships have no valid starting point. With no valid starting point, it becomes unclear why interest in developing research and theory to examine the concepts might continue.

It is for this reason that so much of the focus of the thesis is directed towards humanlike brand theory. If humanlike brand theory cannot be supported, then what is left of the concepts of brand personality and brand relationships? In the case of brand personality, we are left with a weak metaphor that cannot be separated from brand image, and it just becomes a 'pot-pourri' of measures seeking a theoretical justification. In the case of brand relationships we are left with a metaphor which inaccurately locates a relationship with a firm, and a metaphor with poor isomorphism with its target (O'Malley & Tynan, 1999). As such, neither appear to be cognitively successful concepts,

and both offer little prospect for advancing understanding of consumer decision making.

Although Chapter 1 goes some way to explaining why the brand personality and brand relationship concepts have evaded more critical attention, a puzzle remains. I commenced this project with a simple view; I had never thought of brands in the terms given by humanlike brand theorists, and saw no reason why I might be exceptional. It may be that readers of this thesis might also wish to ask themselves whether they have perceived something like a brand of tomatoes as a quasi-humanlike entity. Doppelt (2005) discusses the idea of intuitive plausibility in the consideration of theory, and this is why I end this part of the discussion for a request for self-reflection from the readers of the thesis. Is humanlike brand theory intuitively plausible?

If, as a result of self-reflection, the answer were to be 'no', it is odd that so much work and research has been conducted, when the foundations of the work are intuitively implausible. This is not to say that the intuitively implausible is always wrong, but rather that when something is intuitively implausible it would be sensible to give close consideration to what is being proposed. Although elements of the theories of brand personality and brand relationships have been subjected to critical examination (e.g. Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003), this thesis is the first work that has delved so deeply into the foundations of, and empirical support for, brand personality and brand relationship theory. In doing so, the paper shines a new light on these concepts, and the light clears away the murkiness of their conceptual and theoretical foundations. Although this can be seen as a stand-alone contribution, the thesis also presents more plausible concepts as the subjects of research and theory; user-imagery and the firm. Whilst the latter has been the subject of on-going interest, this thesis suggests a revival of interest in the former is overdue.

Another contribution of this thesis relates to the brand concept itself. Throughout the thesis, the uncertainty surrounding brand definition has been lurking as the background of many of the

problems in the conceptualisation of brand personality and brand relationships. Indeed, it is not possible to separate any examination of any brand concept, whether research or theory, without addressing the questions surrounding the nature of the brand concept itself. Although overall this thesis does not focus on the brand concept itself, it does serve to raise some troubling questions about the brand concept, and these present some questions that can be considered as starting points for examination of the brand. For example, how important is an individual brand in relation to the category, or sub-category in which it resides?

Also, a particular concern of this thesis is that the brand and the concept of the firm appear to be merging, and this is problematic, and suggests that the brand is becoming a redundant conceptualisation of the firm (Singh, 1991). The blurring of the firm and brand has recently been noted in the literature, Cornelissen, Christensen and Kinuthia (2012) critique the overlap between the concepts of corporate branding and corporate/organizational identity. A similar problem arises with the separation of the product and the brand. Abela (2003), in relation to brand equity, questions how this separation is possible, noting that brand equity is supposed to be something additive to the product and therefore not including the product. To illustrate the problem of separation, Abela (2003) gives the example of Starbucks, and notes that the company does not advertise, such that impressions of the 'brand' can only be derived from the firm's product.

Abela is right to question the lines between product and brand. For example, there is a body of literature which discusses 'brand choice' (e.g. Jacoby, Speller, & Kohn, 1974; Winer, 1986), but the research is an examination of the choice of *branded products*. The point is that even though theorists propose the brand as not-the-product (e.g. see Kim, 1990), studies of brand choice conflate the product and the brand. These examples represent the tip of an iceberg of literature that is unclear on how the firm, product and brand might be delineated. This is most apparent in considerations of the brand as an asset. Questions about separating firm, product and brand for brand valuation

purposes were raised in the early days of the growing interest in brand valuation and brand equity (Barwise, 1993; Barwise, Higson, Likierman, & Marsh, 1990). The questions raised have never been clearly answered.

As just one example, Bahadir, Bharadwaj, & Srivastava (2008), consider the value of brands in mergers and acquisitions but their consideration is actually applied to the merger of *firms* with branded products. Furthermore, they also conflate the product and the brand and do so explicitly acknowledging the problem of separation, saying that they ‘resort to a holistic definition of brand value that includes the product and the brand’ (p54). How a brand might be defined in relation to the brand as an asset is a knotty question (Avis, 2009). As an illustration, Salinas (2009), an expert on brand valuation³, twice stresses the importance of defining a brand before it can be valued, but without offering any clarity on which definition might be used. This is despite presenting the brand as having definitions that range from ‘visual identity’ to ‘business as whole’ (see figure 9). These examples serve to raise the question of what, *exactly*, is the relationship between product, firm and brand?

Finally, reflecting the seminal work of Kotler and Levy (1969) the brand concept has been extended and applied to non-commercial entities and this raises a difficult question. What links together the entities as diverse and different as New Zealand (a country 'brand' - Morgan, Pritchard, & Piggott, 2002), ‘Greenpeace’ (a charity 'brand' - Ritchie, Weinberg, & Swami, 1999), Persil (a product brand), and humans (Close, et al., 2011)? In order for all of these entities to be considered as brands, they must share some essential characteristics, but it is not clear what these might be. Luck (1969) questioned the extension of the marketing concept on similar lines (see Bagozzi, 1975; Kotler, 1972 for counter-argument), and the extension of the brand concept makes his concerns appear prescient. For example, Manning (2010), an anthropologist, captures the problems when he critically

³ Salinas is a member of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO/PC 231), International Committee for the Standardisation in the Field of Brand Valuation.

considers the semiotics of the brand, and notes brand theory which purports that everything is a brand. From a non-marketing perspective, Manning captures the evangelism of brand theory, with an obvious implication being that, if everything is a brand, the brand becomes nothing.

The examples given are illustrative of the questions that arise when critically examining the brand concept. However, these illustrations just touch on the multitude of problems that leap from the pages when reading the brand literature critically. The extent of these problems is beyond the brief discussion in this conclusion, even though some concerns and problems has already been identified (Avis, 2009). In particular, the volume of brand literature is growing ever larger with an ever more complex view of the brand developing. For example, even in the late 1990s, Patterson (1999) could list over sixty brand concepts, and it seems to be widely accepted that the brand concept is becoming more complex (Jevons, 2005; Veloutsou, 2008). The result is that, when looking at the large volume of literature on the brand, it becomes increasingly difficult to identify what exactly the entity called a 'brand' might be (Brodie & de Chernatony, 2009).

Even whilst the brand concept grows in complexity, and the prospects of achieving clarity of definition recedes in the face of such complexity, there is a large body of marketing literature that argues persuasively for the importance of clarity of definitions as an essential element in developing theory and research (Alexander, 1937; Bartels, 1951; Hollander, 1956; Jacoby, 1978; Kollat, Engel, & Blackwell, 1970; Rossiter, 2001; Summers, 2001; Varadarajan, 1996). The calls for clarity of definitions in marketing is on-going (Harmancioglu, Droge, & Calantone, 2009; Voss, 2013, forthcoming) and many more citations might be added to those given.

Despite the wide agreement on the importance of clear definitions, it seems that a *status quo* has developed in which it is accepted that there will be multiple and conflicting definitions of the brand. By any reasonable interpretation the brand concept can be seen as one of the foundational pillars of

marketing thought and it is therefore baffling that such a *status quo* might have developed. On the one hand there are volumes of literature on the importance of good definition, but on the other hand a key marketing concept is mired in a confusion of definitions and contesting understandings (Avis, 2009; Stern, 2006; Wood, 2000). If marketing knowledge and theory of consumer behaviour is to progress, it is necessary to address this fundamental problem in the body of marketing literature.

The final contribution of this thesis was discussed in the introduction as ‘encouragement’ and ‘a template’ for the development of critical approaches by new researchers. For the latter, even if a new researcher does not accept the overall philosophical position of Niiniluoto (1999), they might still follow the principle that all theory should be the subject of critical evaluation, including critical examination of the research methods and empirical evidence used in support of theory. Although wrapped in a philosophical position, critical scientific realism offers a pragmatic framework for critical approaches to theory, and this does not require the endorsement of the overall philosophy. Furthermore, this thesis provides a practical example of how the critical scientific realism template can be laid over a subject area, and be used to structure examination of a particular theory.

With regards to ‘encouragement’, in the introduction to the thesis, I discussed an anecdotal conversation in which I was informed that, in the United States, I would not have been allowed to pursue a critical PhD thesis. As another anecdote, a marketing academic recently suggested that marketing was unimportant, saying something along the lines of ‘it is not as if we are trying to cure cancer.’ However, if looking at the world around us, it is possible to see the profound influence of marketing on our day-to-day lives. In crude terms, every time we exchange money, our purchases are shaped by the results of marketing, and marketing has shaped the structure of the industry that provides the choices of what we may purchase. It seems beholden upon those who are engaged in developing marketing theory, therefore, to develop theory that is a consistent representation of reality (Niiniluoto, 1999).

It is for this reason that I would encourage new researchers to pursue critical approaches, as critical evaluation of theory and research contribute to ensuring that theory represents reality. Furthermore, when clearing away the foundations of poor theory, a new space opens up for the building of sounder foundations, and that is the commencement of creative new avenues. As such, whilst critical approaches are often perceived as negative, they are one of the foundations of creative and positive new directions. In the next section, I present some examples of the positive new directions that might be pursued from this PhD.

Future Research

The most interesting future direction for research that develops from this PhD is a critical review of the brand concept. This thesis has frequently cited two reviews of brand definition (Stern, 2006; Wood, 2000), both of which highlight the variability of brand definitions. Despite these reviews highlighting that the brand has multiple definitions and understandings, the *status quo* of variable definitions continues. The first task is largely conceptual, which is to critically review the history, theory and evolution of the brand concept, and to identify how and why the brand concept developed into an ever more complex and problematic entity (Avis, 2009).

The critical review of the brand would benefit from support from research. For example, a review of the image concept by Stern et al. (2001) notes that definitional inconsistency can lead to a situation in which ‘no two researchers are necessarily talking about the same phenomenon’ (p.202). It is a point that provides a research question; what brand definition do marketing academics and practitioners have in mind when reading/writing about, or discussing the brand? The question can be examined using Rossiter’s (2001) proposal that a ‘known’ definition is an adequate definition that can be spontaneously recalled. After all, when reading/writing an article, or simply discussing

brand theory, it seems that individuals must have in mind some idea of what the subject of the discussion actually is, and this is the definition that can be recalled.

Both the critical review and research on brand definition should be purposeful. As was identified in the previous section, there is a gap in the marketing literature, and this needs to be filled. As the situation stands, the review needs to either result in a clear and bounded definition of the brand, and a definition which presents opportunity for the advancement of marketing research and theory, or provide a plausible alternative to the brand concept. As such, the outcome of the review and research will be to shake the current *status quo* and will therefore be controversial. Whilst this presents a challenge, it is also an opportunity to create a firmer foundation for the development of marketing knowledge and theory.

The second new direction of research on the brand is to establish the relative importance of brand associations versus category associations (Avis & Aitken, 2012). In light of the first research direction, this faces the problem of defining the brand in order to establish the subject of comparison. For the purpose of this discussion only, a working definition of the brand is a name/logo that may stimulate consumer associations. One interesting avenue of research would be to identify the associations with carefully selected product categories/sub-categories, and then do the same for well-known brands within the selected categories. This would provide two points of comparison; how similar/different are the associations between brands in the same category, and how similar/different are the category and individual brand associations. Although not giving a definitive answer, the research will start the process of answering the relative importance of brand and category by examining the degree to which category associations might be conflated with brand associations in research, as well as the degree to which brand associations within a category are differentiated from one another and the overall category associations.

Another avenue for research is to investigate the domain adjustment problem (Avis, 2012). Notably, after publication of the Avis (2012) paper, I was advised that the domain adjustment problem was identified in the seminal work on 'The Measurement of Meaning' by Osgood et al. (1957). This work was based upon extensive research, and might be seen as providing strong empirical foundations for the problem of the domain meaning adjustment problem. However, it seems that the marketing discipline needs a reminder of the problem, and a new investigation of the problem applied to the more contemporary case of Aaker's (1997) scale items would serve this purpose. In particular, the research might present a sample of individuals with the scale items (e.g. 'wholesome' and 'exciting') applied to brands in different categories (e.g. soup and sports car), and simply ask the research participants think the items mean when applied to the context of brand 'x'. This might also serve a broader purpose of establishing that, when developing scale items, it is vital to understand how the items will be interpreted by those who are rating the items (Rossiter, 2011).

Also, in the thesis, two positive directions are given as alternatives to brand relationship and brand personality; user-image and relationships with the firm. For the former, a first step is completing the research project detailed in Avis and Aitken (2012), which is to identify whether brand personification generates user-imagery, and whether the method is more productive than simply asking consumers to describe a stereotypical user. This research needs to include the controls for category associations, and also to ensure that the research does not 'create' perceptions through the research methods.

However, there is also a larger project that might be undertaken; identification of the degree of influence of user-imagery on consumer behaviour over different categories. For example, the user-imagery of sports car purchasers was negative in many respects (e.g. 'mid-life crisis') but the sports cars also were associated with wealthy individuals. How does this impact on the purchase behaviour of potential sports car purchasers? How important is user-imagery in actually determining purchases

of sports cars relative to other influences? Again, how important are the brand associations of the sports car in the final decision? In summary, there is not a single research question, but a stream of research that might be developed.

Similarly, for consumer relationships with firms, there is a potential for a stream of research to answer questions about the types and ‘meaningfulness’ of the relationships from the consumer point of view. For example, Mitsubishi is currently advertising in New Zealand, proposing a ten year relationship between consumers and their firm (car servicing etc.), presumably mediated through their dealer network. This contrasts with a consumer buying a can of soup in a supermarket, which appears more transactional. However, a person might purchase a nappy (diaper) from a supermarket, and also play an active role on a baby centred support website provided by the firm that manufactures the nappy. In each case, there is some kind of a relationship, but the ‘meaningfulness’ of the relationship is an open question, as is the question of the circumstances under which a consumer might even desire anything more than a transactional relationship. After all, there are countless products and services in any market, and consumers only have so much attention/time.

Overall, the examples given above are just starting points. Also, as the work in this thesis enters the body of marketing literature, it may be that others researchers and theorists might also find new avenues to explore as a result of some of the findings and critical reviews presented in the papers. As has been discussed earlier; critical approaches may clear the way for the development of new avenues of research and theory.

Appendices

Appendix A: The Problems of Brand Definition (Avis, 2009)

A.1 Preamble

The origins of some of the work in the final chapters on brand definition can be found in this paper, and some of the principles and literature from the review are evident throughout the thesis. It is a first piece of work that examines the definition of the brand, but captures some of the ambiguity surrounding the concept.

A.2 Introduction

Alexander (1937) emphasised the importance of clear definition in marketing, and his call for clarity has been mirrored by other theorists (e.g. Zinkhan & Hirschheim, 1992). Among the concerns expressed by theorists have been the potential for misleading and imprecise language (Schutte, 1969), and the possibility for the same constructs to be subject to varying definitions (Jacoby, 1978; Kollat, et al., 1970). Within these critiques it is possible to discern a concern that the lack of definitions within marketing are causing confusion and holding back the advancement of theory and research.

Whilst the problem of defining brand has been discussed (e.g. de Chernatony, 2009; Stern, 2006; Wood, 2000), there has not as yet been a consideration of the problem in relation to outcomes in research. However, it is evident that the lack of clarity of brand definition does indeed cause confusions; in particular this can be seen in the examples of measures of brand personality and brand equity.

A.3 Origins of Brand and the Problem of Definition

The concept of brand personality offers a different perspective on the problems of brand definition, and highlights the lack of concept boundaries (see Morse, Mitcham, Hupcey, & Cerdas Tason, 1996 for a discussion of the importance of concept boundaries). The majority of recent brand personality research and theory is rooted in Aaker's (1997) seminal paper 'Dimensions of Brand Personality'. Aaker's research involved building a brand personality five factor model (BPFM) based upon the research on human personality (e.g. see McCrae & Costa, 2003). A key point to note is that Aaker selected a range of categories to achieve a balance between utilitarian and symbolic brands, with the aim of creating a *generalised* scale applicable to the measurement of all brands.

Since the BPFM was published, the concept of 'personality' research has been extended into several other areas. Examples of the extensions are store/retail personality (e.g. Lévesque & d'Astous, 2003), corporate personality (e.g. van Rekom, et al., 2006), destination personality, (e.g. Ekinici & Hosany, 2006; 2006), country personality (e.g. Pitt, Opoku, Hultman, Abratt, & Spyropoulou, 2007), charity personality (e.g. Sargeant, et al., 2008), product personality (e.g. Govers & Mugge, 2004) and even a formula one racing team personality (Donahay & Rosenberger, 2007). Within these many personality conceptualisations is the problem of what might be encompassed in the definition of brand.

For example, despite some theorists proposing that charities and destinations are brands (e.g. Laidler-Kylander, Quelch, & Simonin, 2007; Morgan, et al., 2002; Ritchie, et al., 1999; Van Ham, 2001), Aaker did not include these in the formulation of the BPFM. By contrast, Aaker did include entities that have been delineated as different 'personality' conceptualisations from brand personality; the corporate brands of Mercedes and McDonald's (corporate personality), Kmart

(store/retail/corporate personality), and Cheerios (product personality). It might be argued that, within the inclusions and exclusions of categories, Aaker is implicitly identifying her understanding of the boundaries of brand, and that these differ from other 'personality' researchers. As such, researchers of other variants of 'personality' have sought to justify why their concepts are different from brand personality.

For example, Keller and Richey (2006) propose that corporate brand personality is distinct from a product brand personality, suggesting that it "can encompass a much wider range of associations" (p75). The problems that arise in such distinctions are illustrated by an example provided by Keller and Richey to justify their differentiation. They use the example of P&G and their Pringles product brand, suggesting that the two brands are separate entities. However, they were presumably unaware that in Asian markets, P&G pursues an endorser strategy (Berens, Riel, & Bruggen, 2005), in which P&G offers a 'parental seal of approval' to their brands (Temporal, 1999, p112). In this situation, it is difficult to see how the associations between the parent and the product brand might be separated, suggesting that any delineation of brand and corporate brand personality becomes dependent upon considerations such as the brand portfolio strategy (D. Aaker, 2004).

In another case, Rekom *et al's* (2006) research seeks to identify the corporate personality of McDonald's, arguably a monolithic brand (Berens, et al., 2005). Their methodology involved measuring consumer perceptions of McDonald's, a method with the same underlying purpose as the BPFPM. The obvious problem presented by this research is that McDonald's might be considered to be a brand and was also utilised as a 'brand' in the formulation of the BPFPM, indicating that Aaker viewed McDonald's as a brand. As such, the only reasonable explanation for the development of 'corporate personality' scale for the research must be that Rekom *et al* have an underlying disagreement with Aaker about what a brand might be.

In a similar argument to corporate personality, Govers and Schoormans (2005) try to delineate 'product variant' personality from brand personality, suggesting they are different conceptualisations. However, returning to the McDonald's example, it would be difficult to argue that a 'Big Mac' served in McDonald's packaging in a McDonald's restaurant might see any meaningful separation between product variant and brand personality, or even between product and corporate personality. The 'Big Mac' and 'McDonald's' are effectively fused together. The example of McDonald's illustrates the difficulty in the idea that a product variant might be seen as separate from the brand, and it is not clear where any delineation might start and end between a McDonald's product, brand and corporate personality.

The degree of the underlying problem is highlighted even more clearly in the study of store/retail personality. Lévesque and d'Astous (2003) consider the relationship between store personality and brand personality and suggest that, whilst there are similarities, there are also differences between the two constructs. As such, whilst utilising the BPFM as a foundation they developed scales specifically adapted to measurement of store personality. By contrast, Zentes *et al* (2008), used the original BPFM to measure store personality, arguing that development of a specific scale for retail would suggest that the same consideration might be needed for other brand categories, such as cars. Implicit in this disagreement on how to measure store 'personality' is the issue of the contentious nature of the relationship between brands and retail, in which some theorists seek to delineate the two concepts (e.g. see Dennis, Murphy, Marsland, Cockett, & Patel, 2002).

In all of these examples it is apparent that there are different understandings of the boundaries of brand to those implied by Aaker, and this difference in understanding of what a brand might be has determined research agendas. It could be argued that each of the personality measures is simply looking at a narrow aspect of brand, were it not for the inclusion of corporate brands, product variant brands, and store brands in the BPFM. Furthermore, despite the extension of the marketing

concept to encompass non-commercial organisations (Kotler & Levy, 1969), there are still question marks over whether organisations such as charities are equivalent or related directly to commercial brands. After all, if they are equivalent, why would there be a need to adapt Aaker's *generalised* measure, or introduce new measures?

A.4 Brand Equity

Brand equity provides a case study of how these variable and nuanced definitions are enacted in research. For example, Yoo and Donthu (2001) review a long list of 'definitions and forms' of brand equity that includes examples such as attitudinal dispositions, added value, brand awareness and brand assets. In such a list it is possible to perceive that it reflects different implicit understandings of brand, for example a consumer centric view against a firm centric view, all of which reflect in different brand equity measures.

An illustration of the problem can be found in Wood's (2000) discussion of brand definition in relation to brand equity. Having reviewed many of the perspectives on brand definition, Wood comes to an 'integrated' definition of brand as "a mechanism for achieving competitive advantage for firms, through differentiation." (p677) However, before finally settling on this definition, Wood considers a wide range of definitions and perspectives, including identifying a divide between consumer and firm oriented definitions. Having discussed such a divide, it is interesting that her own 'integrated' definition still resolves towards the latter orientation, perhaps as a reflection of the fact that her main interest is definition of brand in relation to brand equity.

Feldwick (2002), appears to have grasped the underlying problem. Having detailed a scholarly brand definition, he identifies three perspectives on brand equity in theory and research; the total value of a brand as a separable asset, the strength of consumer attachment to the brand, and a

description of the association and beliefs about a brand held by consumers (p37). He quite reasonably identifies that these are three different concepts, and later proposes that ‘we might find the whole area [brand equity research] easier to understand if people stopped using those words [brand equity] altogether’ (p57).

The interesting point in Feldwick’s argument is that it is possible to discern that, in his rejection of brand equity as a singular concept, he is actually identifying the problem of brand definition. Of particular note is that he earlier described a brand as “simply a collection of perceptions in the mind of the consumer” (p4) and that consumers have “hijacked brands for their own purposes”. In describing brands in this way, it appears that he is implying that the brand asset resides with the consumer rather than the firm. The implication of this perspective is that it is not clear how a brand might be a separable asset, as the asset is ‘held’ by the consumer. Such a perspective on brand quite reasonably points towards a perspective in which the utility of the term ‘brand equity’ might be questioned.

Likewise, the consideration of brand definition by Ind (2004) presents similar challenges for the concept of brand equity. Ind proposes that a brand is a unique mental construct in the mind of the stakeholders, in which they form their own understanding of the brand based upon their own individual perspective, experiences and culture in relation to their individual position (relative to the brand). For the antecedents of this perspective, Ind’s sees the brand as being the sum of the activity of all aspects of an organisation, and also of competitors. With the brand individually constructed and presumably ‘held’ in the mind of each stakeholder, the definition of brand becomes a moving target, for example determined by the culture of the individual (note: Goodyear, 1996 also sees brand meaning as culturally derived). If Ind’s perspective on brand is accepted, then valuation of the brand as a separable asset becomes very questionable, as it is not clear how such an individually held and constructed brand might be meaningfully measured.

The problem of a brand as a separable asset is made even more explicit by Stagliano and O'Malley (2002). They question whether it would be possible to sell a brand, such as McDonald's, without selling the entire company (including transfer of people and processes). In their view the brand and the organisation that enacts the brand become inseparable. Their perspective is supported by Deighton's (2002) review of the sale of the Snapple brand to Quaker, which saw a brand purchased for \$1.7 billion sold a few years later for just \$300 million. Deighton identifies the cause for the loss of value as arising from the Quaker enactment of the brand, which saw the abandonment of the quirky and risky approach taken by the original brand owners. In essence, the enactment of the brand by the original owners was the brand, and the brand could not therefore be transferred as a stand-alone separable asset; the brand could not be sold without the Snapple management, process and ethos.

Returning to Yoo and Donthu's list of 'definitions and forms', it is apparent that their list is a proxy argument about what a brand might be. Even when examining a limited number of perspectives on brand definition in relation to brand equity, it seems that there are incompatible views of what brand equity might be, and whether brand equity might even be a valid concept. From a managerial perspective, it appears to be necessary to define a brand as something that might have a separable value in order to justify investment in branding. However, such a perspective bumps into the problem that, according to some definitions of brand, such a separation becomes impossible. The fundamental problem is the question of what exactly a brand might be. Can a brand be an asset that can be managed, owned and isolated within a firm, is it the enactment of the entire firm, or is it 'owned' as a construct in the mind of all stakeholders?

Whilst these questions are presented as broad brush characterisations, they nevertheless express the underlying assumptions that shape brand equity research, and even whether brand equity might be a valid concept. Under these circumstances, it is unsurprising that Feldwick rejected the term 'brand

equity’, as the term cannot encompass the differing underlying definitions of a brand.

A.5 Brand Personality

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concept to encompass non-commercial organisations (Kotler and Levy, 1969), there are still question marks over whether organisations such as charities are equivalent or related directly to commercial brands. After all, if they are equivalent, why would there be a need to adapt Aaker's *generalised* measure, or introduce new measures?

A.6 Conclusion

Within the review it is possible to discern that the many and various measures of 'personality' and brand equity are actually a proxy for an argument over brand definition, as well as the scope of applicability of the brand concept. In the case of brand equity, variable brand definitions make it possible to question whether brand equity might exist, with arguments about what might be an appropriate measure also determined by the underlying definition of a brand. Likewise, in the case of brand personality, the boundaries of what might be a brand appear to be the subject of contention, and the implicit disagreements have led to a confusing array of 'personality' measures.

The underlying problem of brand definition is illustrated in the famous fable in which wise blind men are asked to describe an elephant by touch (Gabriel, 2004). As they are unaware that they are touching an elephant, they describe the trunk and tail as snakes. In other words it is necessary to agree on what is being measured before the attributes can be identified and measured. It is apparent that considerable efforts are being expended in justification of ever more brand measures, when the underlying justification is not the validity of the individual measures, but the definition of brand itself. In this brief review it is apparent that the definition of brand is problematic, and this is reflected in the views of academics and practitioners (e.g. Earls, 2002; Meyers, 2003). Schultz and Schultz (2004) summarise the problem of brand definition as follows:

It's like Humpty Dumpty: "It means just what I choose it to mean, neither more nor less."

It's this lack of agreement that causes much of the confusion, lost motion, wasted efforts, and misplaced investments in brands and branding today. (p10)

In an ideal situation, the definition of brand would be clarified, including setting of boundaries around the concept. However, with the prospects for a unified brand definition a distant possibility (Brodie & de Chernatony, 2009), researchers might follow the lead of Wood (2000) and offer a stipulative brand definition. By doing so, implicit arguments about brand definition might be made more explicit, and this may encourage brand researchers and theorists to address the broader issue of what *exactly* is the subject of their studies.

Appendix B: Anthropomorphism and Animism theory in Branding (Avis, 2011)

B1: Preamble

This paper is important in relation to some of the work on brand personality and relationships that has not yet finally been accepted for publication. In particular, it is an overview of the critiques of brand personality and brand relationship concepts, and includes many elements of the critiques found in other chapters. As such, many of the critiques have been accepted in principal under peer review.

B2: Introduction

Animism and anthropomorphism theory were first explicitly introduced into branding theory by Aaker (1997) and Fournier (1998), though earlier literature seemed to imply that brands were the subject of animism and anthropomorphism by consumers (Blackston, 1993; S. H. M. King, 1973). Guthrie (1993), in an extensive and comprehensive discussion of animism and anthropomorphism, defines animism as humans “attributing life to the nonliving” and anthropomorphism as “attributing human characteristics to the nonhuman” (p52). As such, if brands are perceived as animistic/anthropomorphic, they are perceived by consumers as living humanlike entities (hereafter the humanlike brand). Indeed, Puzakova, Kwak, and Rocereto (2009) explicitly express this view, saying that the “fact that consumers form strong relationships with brands suggests that individuals perceive these brands as complete humans” (p413).

As a foundation for this paper, in addition to informal literature reviews, Scopus and Google Scholar database searches were undertaken to identify branding literature relevant to humanlike brand theory (see Paper Appendix). The aim of the reviews and searches was to identify papers that

offer a significant discourse on the theory and/or evidence for the humanlike brand, and three articles were thus identified; Fournier (1998), Puzakova *et al* (2009) and Freling and Forbes (2005b). The purpose of this paper is to present a critical review (see Niiniluoto, 1999 for a discussion of critical approaches to theory) of the theory and evidence for the humanlike brand that is presented in the three articles (hereafter referred to without dates).

A key focus of the paper is to evaluate humanlike brand theory in relation to brand definition and conceptualisation. In particular, the validity of the importation of animism and anthropomorphism theory is examined in this context and found to be questionable. In addition to this theoretical examination, the empirical evidence for humanlike brand presented in the three selected papers is examined, and is found to be questionable. Furthermore, there is literature and research that, directly and indirectly, suggests that consumers do not ordinarily think of brands as humanlike. This paper therefore finds that there are problems in both the theory and the empirical evidence presented in the three papers selected for the review. As such, bearing in mind the limited nature of the review, the paper tentatively concludes by questioning the validity of humanlike brand theory, and calling for a more comprehensive evaluation of the humanlike brand theory.

B3: What is the subject of the animism and anthropomorphism?

The review for this paper commences with a fundamental question; when discussing that brands are perceived as humanlike, a problem arises as to what exactly a brand might be and this is the question of brand definition and conceptualisation. It is not a trivial question, as the three articles are importing and adapting a body of theory and research from the animism and anthropomorphism literature, and applying this to a brand entity. It is therefore essential that the theorists explain to what entity this theory might apply, as it is only possible to know whether the imported theory is being applied appropriately if the entity that is the subject of animism and anthropomorphism is

explained.

The problem for theorists is that brand definition and conceptualisation is variable and proves to be inconsistent. For example, Brodie and de Chernatony (2009) recently observed that “there never will be a unifying definition of ‘brand’ but a constantly evolving series of contexts of lenses through which the phenomenon is viewed.” (p97) Likewise, the reviews of brand definitions by Wood (2000) and Stern (2006) identify multiple definitions and conceptualisations of brands, and other brand theorists such as Kapferer (2001, p3; 2004, p9) and Ind (2004, p16) have also noted that brand definition and conceptualisation are problematic.

It is therefore notable that Puzakova *et al* and Freling and Forbes offer no definition or conceptualisation of the brand. In doing so, they leave the brand concept open to interpretation so that it is unclear what *exactly* they are suggesting is the subject of the animism and anthropomorphism. By contrast, Fournier does define the brand but, as will be seen later, the definition proves problematic in relation to the importation of animism and anthropomorphism theory. Overall, it will be apparent that brand definitions and conceptualisations present significant challenges in relation to humanlike brand theory. In particular, when importing theory from the animism and anthropomorphism literature, examples and theory derived from the study of non-brand entities are used to explain brand animism and anthropomorphism.

For example, Freling and Forbes point out that anthropomorphism is a widespread phenomenon, citing examples taken from Guthrie (1993), such as the human tendency to speak to plants, cars and computers. They propose that a “logical extension of this thinking is to view brand personality as an instance of anthropomorphism.” (p152) In the discussion that follows, there are citations from theorists who consider the ongoing debate about animal anthropomorphism in ethology, such as Kennedy (1992) and Moynihan (1997). Furthermore, there is reference to teleology, which is a

more general position that humans assign purposefulness to the world around them (Broadus, 2006), as well as discussion of the anthropic principle, which is the tendency to explain the world in terms of their own (human) experiences.

A fundamental problem with the discussion of Freling and Forbes is that they claim that the examples of anthropomorphism that they provide can be ‘logically’ extended to the application of the humanlike brand. As Freling and Forbes correctly identify, animism and anthropomorphism are commonplace and there are indeed many variants of animism and anthropomorphism cited in literature. For example, in an extensive review, Guthrie (1993) identifies varied examples, such as a hat blowing in the wind being perceived as evading capture (p47), seeing a human form in a cliff (p84), attribution of human qualities in plants (p60) and animals (p93), anthropomorphism of objects in advertising (p85), and the anthropomorphism and animism of entities associated with religious thought.

Other theorists and researchers likewise identify similar examples, such as a Berliner key being perceived as a social actor that alters behaviour (Owens, 2007), animated geometric shapes perceived as humanlike (Castelli, Happé, Frith, & Frith, 2000), or the way in which technical devices come ‘alive’ when malfunctioning (Caporael, 1986; Epley, Waytz, et al., 2008). In addition, the literature surrounding animal anthropomorphism (Chin, Sims, Clark, & Lopez, 2004; Kennedy, 1992; R. W. Mitchell, Thompson, & Miles, 1997) and anthropomorphism in relation to religion (e.g. J. L. Barrett, Richert, & Driesenga, 2001; Boyer, 1996a; Harvey, 2005; McDougall, 1915) is extensive. There can be little doubt that animism and anthropomorphism are phenomena that are apparent over many domains, but none of these examples demonstrate that brands might be the subject of animism and anthropomorphism.

A similar problem arises with Puzakova et al, who place considerable reliance on the work of Epley

et al (2008; 2007). Epley *et al* (2007) consider a wide variety of anthropomorphic nonhuman agents and suggest that these agents might include “anything that acts with apparent independence, including nonhuman animals, natural forces, religious deities, and mechanical or electronic devices.” A similar set of examples appear in the Epley *et al* (2008), where they broadly categorise nonhuman agents as mechanical devices, nonhuman animals, and deities and spirits. As for Freling and Forbes, the problems in these examples are how they might relate to brand anthropomorphism and animism, and this raises the question of brand definition and conceptualisation.

Neither Puzakova *et al*, nor Freling and Forbes have defined what they mean by the term brand. However, in the reviews of brand definitions and conceptualisations by Wood (2000) and Stern (2006) it is apparent that all of the widely accepted views of brands propose that a brand is an immaterial entity, albeit with some physical instantiations such as logos and products. Stern (2006) observes that the definitions and conceptualisation of brand are rooted in metaphor, and Davies and Chun (2003) come to the same conclusion. As brands are fundamentally immaterial/metaphoric comparisons of brands with the animism and anthropomorphism of entities such as animals, plants, and inanimate objects do not justify or explain the humanlike brand. They may indicate a general human proclivity towards animism and anthropomorphism, but nothing more.

In consideration of the conceptualisation of brand as being metaphoric, Epley *et al* (2007) suggest that metaphor can be anthropomorphic, giving the example of inflation perceived as an adversary. However, they also categorise this as a ‘weak’ variant of anthropomorphism, suggesting that the metaphor is lacking the human traits that they see as constituting ‘strong’ variants (e.g. deities). The problem for this as an exemplar for the humanlike brand is that the humanlike brand is a strong variant of anthropomorphism, as humanlike brand theory proposes that brands have personality, and are sufficiently humanlike that consumers might have a relationship with them.

In order for humanlike brand theorists to justify the humanlike brand, it is necessary to find examples in the literature that can be related to Epley *et al's* (2007) strong variant of anthropomorphism i.e. a variant that is primarily immaterial/metaphoric but also includes a similar degree of humanlike attribution to the humanlike brand. Guthrie (1993) undoubtedly offers the most comprehensive review of literature on animism and anthropomorphism, but the only examples in his work that might be comparable with the humanlike brand are entities such as the spirits and deities. Further reviews of more recent animism and anthropomorphism literature presented the same conclusion, which is that the only example equivalent to the humanlike brand are those associated with religious thought (e.g. J. L. Barrett & Keil, 1996; Boyer, 1996a; Boyer, 1996b; Caporael & Heyes, 1997; Epley, Akalis, et al., 2008; Epley, Waytz, et al., 2008; Epley, et al., 2007; Gonnerman, 2008).

It may be a matter of concern to researchers and theorists who propose humanlike brand explanations that the only comparable examples are entities such as spirits and deities. Whilst it may be possible for consumers to think of brands in ways that are comparable to thought about these entities, it also seems intuitively implausible (e.g. see Doppelt, 2005 for a discussion of intuitive plausibility). Furthermore, if this is the explanation of the humanlike brand it would need very robust support from the body of theory examining religious thought (e.g. J. Barrett, 2007; Boyer, 2001). In the absence of presentation of this theoretical justification, the importation of animism and anthropomorphism theory into branding fails to explain or justify the humanlike brand.

The importance of brand definition in relation to the humanlike brand is further illustrated by Fournier. The article is unusual in that it gives a clear conceptualisation of the brand as “simply a collection of perceptions held in the mind of a consumer” (p344). In thus conceptualising the brand, the inevitable question is how it might be possible for a consumer to experience animism and

anthropomorphism of a collection of their own perceptions. In particular, the perceptions must have a referent somewhere outside of the consumer, or brands would just be an elaborate self-induced fantasy. It seems fair to suggest that Fournier is unlikely to have intended this interpretation (see later). As such, de Chernatony and Dall’Olmo Riley’s (1998b, see p426) contemporaneous discussion of the components of brands presents some potential sources of referents for consumer perceptions, and is summarised in figure 17.

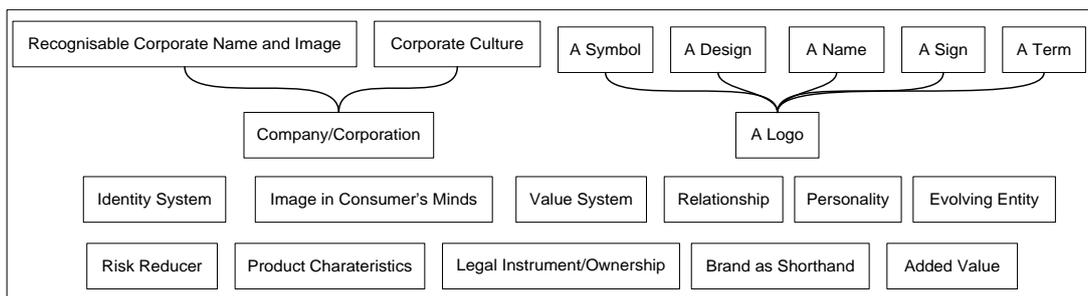


Figure 17: Summary of Brand Components

The first point to note in figure 17 is that both relationship and personality appear as components, raising the problem of relationship with what, and the question of what ‘has’ the personality. Aside from this fundamental problem, if looking for a target for the perceptions that might reasonably be the subject of animism and anthropomorphism, it is difficult to see any component that might be appropriate. Whilst the logo might be anthropomorphic (e.g. the Michelin Man), this does not imply or demonstrate brand animism. The only component that seems suggestive of being a source for humanlike perceptions, and with which a consumer might have a relationship is the company/corporation. It is therefore interesting to note that Fournier (1998) says the following:

“A logical extension of this thinking [that consumers perceive a relationship through marketing activities] is to view all marketing actions as a set of behavioral incidents from which trait inferences about the brand are made and through which the brand’s personality is

actualized.” (p345)

In light of the fact that Fournier is proposing that the relationship is with the brand, this appears to be a contradictory position, with the relationship apparently with the firm. In this case, the brand simply becomes a label for the inferences derived from the activity of the firm. A firm’s actions are the collective activity of the individuals within the firm, and it is interesting to see that O’Guinn and Muniz (2009) have sought to reconceptualise brand relationships into ‘collective brand relationships’ and highlight the role of the firm. However, as firms are a collection of real humans, there is no need for animism and anthropomorphism theory, as consumers are making their inferences from the activity of *real people*. Furthermore, a more intuitively plausible concept of ‘consumer firm relationships’ presents itself, and this reflects conceptualisations of consumer commercial relationships presented by other theorists (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995).

The interesting point in the examination of Fournier’s theory is that, in later work, Fournier (2009) has seemingly retreated from the humanlike brand theory, which is described as a ‘red herring’. When considering the problematic nature of Fournier’s brand definition, and the implications of the definition, this is unsurprising. Furthermore, when examining the case studies in Fournier’s original work, it is apparent that there is surprisingly little evidence of humanlike brand perceptions, and that the ‘relationships’ are mostly derived from Fournier’s interpretation of mundane descriptions. Although there is mention of ‘love’ in two cases, the possibility that the use of the term ‘love’ might be figurative is not considered or investigated, despite the unusual nature of this discourse in relation to the overall discourse.

In the case of Puzakova *et al* and Freling and Forbes, who present no brand definition, it is nevertheless apparent that the commonality of brand definitions and conceptualisation as

metaphoric/immaterial also present problems for the validity of humanlike brand theory. It is therefore interesting to note that, in a recent paper (Freling, et al., 2010), there is no mention of humanlike brand theory, and no explanation for the disappearance.

B4: The Empirical Evidence for the Humanlike Brand

Although there are problems apparent in the importation of theory and examples from the animism and anthropomorphism literature, Fournier, Freling and Forbes, and Puzakova *et al* all reference evidence from the branding literature to support humanlike brand theory. However, as will be seen, these references are problematic, and there is also both direct and indirect examples in the branding literature that suggest that consumers *ordinarily* thinking of brands as humanlike is, at the very least, unlikely.

The emphasis on consumers *ordinarily* thinking of brands as humanlike relates to a particular source of evidence for the humanlike brands, which is research that is founded in the use of projective methods. All three articles cite work founded in projective methods, with the following cited in one or more of the articles as evidence of the humanlike brand; Blackston (1993, 1995), Plummer (1985), Rook (1985, 1987), Lannon (1993), Sherry, McGrath and Levy (1993) and Levy (1985).

As an illustration, Blackston, Lannon and Plummer, are all practitioners who utilised projective methods in their brand research, and all of their work includes research derived from the projective method of brand personification. This is an associative projective method (see Helkkula & Pihlström, 2010 for classification of projective methods) in which the researchers ask consumers to think of a brand as if it were a person, and then ask the consumer to describe the ‘person’, and sometime consumers are even asked to think of the imagined ‘person’ in a fantasy situation

(Blackston, 1993). Another associative method is used by Plummer (1985), which is to imagine the brand as an animal, and other examples of associative methods includes cars (S. Levy, 1985). As such, in all of these examples of practitioner literature, there are indeed cases of brand animism and anthropomorphism. However, the use of this work as evidence in support of the humanlike brand is problematic.

The problem with research based upon projective methods is that this does not represent how consumers *ordinarily* think of brands. Zaltman and Zaltman (2008, p37) make the point clearly in relations to associative projections, and O’Guinn and Muniz (2009) describe the use of ‘neo-Freudian’ projective research as ‘odd’, and are dismissive of the idea that consumers might perceive a humanlike brand when they say that:

“We know of no compelling evidence that humans, without being coaxed or demanded to do so, think of brands as humans or humanlike.” (p174).

It is notable that Fournier’s (2009) ‘retreat’ from humanlike brand theory appears in the same volume as the O’Guinn and Muniz critique humanlike brand theory, possibly suggesting that Fournier retreated from humanlike brand theory as a result of the critique. The point is that, the research founded on projective methods is not in any way representative of the way that consumers *ordinarily* think of brands. For example, whilst it is relatively easy to ‘coax’ consumers to think of brands as if they were people, it is also possible to coax them to think of brands as animals. This in no way indicates that consumers think of brands as if they are animals. In other projective research, it is quite possible that human characteristics might be associated with brands, but associations such as user-imagery (the data generated from personification, van Hoof, et al., 2007) are very different from the humanlike brand, which purports that the brand itself is humanlike and animate.

When looking at the three articles, the real concern is that, outside of the results of projective methods, no other empirical evidence is presented for the humanlike brand excepting other brand personality or brand relationship articles. For example, Freling and Forbes cite Aaker (1999), Fournier (1998) and their own research on brand personality (Freling & Forbes, 2005a). The lack of citations of evidence of the humanlike brand from outside of the brand personality and brand relationship literature, and outside of projective research, raises a significant concern. This is best expressed by Freling and Forbes, who say the following:

“[...] there is a limited body of work that indirectly documents the practice of anthropomorphic thinking in a branding context, demonstrating that consumers attribute human properties to their possessions, goods, products and services [...]” (p152)

The first problem is that they discuss a ‘limited body’ of evidence, and the second problem is that this is not even for brands. As Freling and Forbes are brand personality theorists who are detailing humanlike brand theory, it would be reasonable to expect that they could present a large body of evidence to support humanlike *brand* theory. After decades of intense scrutiny of brand perceptions, there should be a voluminous body of literature to support the humanlike brand. After all, consumers perceiving brands as humanlike entities is not an immediately intuitively plausible notion, and would thus surely have garnered significant comment and notice. Of course, it is possible that the many researchers studying brands simply missed these perceptions, but this is improbable. Furthermore, there is both direct and indirect evidence which suggests that consumers do not think of brands as humanlike.

One study which strongly suggests that brands are not perceived as humanlike is rather oddly cited by Puzakova *et al* as evidence in support of the humanlike brand. This is the research of Yoon *et al* (2006), who utilised fMRI scans as method of assessing whether people use the same judgement

mechanism for brands as for people. Utilising adjectives taken from brand personality scales, they combined these on flash cards with the names of people, brands or a designation of 'self' (e.g. Sprite + cheerful, Billy Joel + sincere, self + annoying). Their purpose was to identify whether the medial prefrontal cortex, associated with judgements about people, or the left inferior prefrontal cortex, associated with judgements about objects, would be activated. The conclusions of the study were quite clear:

“Overall results of the present fMRI investigation support the contention that consumers do not process descriptive judgements of products in the same manner as those for humans.”
(p36)

Aside from their use of the word 'products' (when they presumably mean brands), their research conclusion serves to raise questions about the humanlike brand. Furthermore, there has been the application of full human personality inventories to brands, including the Five Factor Model (Caprara, et al., 2001) and the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (Shank & Langmeyer, 1994). In both cases, the models could not be validated for brands, and this is suggestive that consumers do not think of brands as humanlike.

However, it is the extension of brand personality research into other areas that indirectly raise serious problems for the humanlike brand theory. For example, Batra *et al* (2010) have developed the concept of category personality, in which categories are found to have humanlike associations. There have likewise been studies of destination personality (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006; 2006), website personality (Chen & Rodgers, 2006), and even housing estate personality (Ibrahim & Ong, 2004). Are all of these entities with 'personalities' likewise perceived as humanlike entities? Again, this seems very improbable, in particular in the case of categories.

Finally, a study of Romaniuk and Ehrenberg (2003) presented consumers with a free choice survey method to assign brand personality traits to consumers, in which they ticked the box if it was applicable to the brand. This contrasts with the widely used Aaker (1997) brand personality scale in which respondents must present a rating of the brand against each trait. It is also worth noting that Aaker (1997) used brand personification as part of the process of developing the brand personality scale, which returns to the problems of projective methods. As such, whilst the Aaker scale appears to 'find' brand personality, Romaniuk and Ehrenberg found very few of the traits were seen as applicable to individual brands and, where traits were seen as applicable, in many cases they were applied equally to different brands in the same category. This finding seems to suggest that 'category personality' was a major influence.

Overall, the empirical evidence for the humanlike brand appears to be very weak. Above all else, the greatest problem is that, outside of brand personality and brand relationship research and projective research, there is no evidence of consumers thinking of brands as humanlike. Indeed, since the introduction of the humanlike brand, research on consumer perceptions of brands is ongoing. Despite this, it is interesting to see that in a recent article, Freling (Freling, et al., 2010) still offers no citations of literature showing consumers ordinarily think of brands as humanlike. It is also interesting to note that humanlike brand theory is not included in the recent article, and that the disappearance of this theory is not commented upon.

B5: Conclusions

Before concluding, the limited scope of the review must be emphasised. As a brief conference paper, it is not possible to offer a full and comprehensive review of the literature and the conclusions are therefore tentative. However, notwithstanding this limitation, the review presented here might serve to raise concern and doubts about the theory of the humanlike brand. In particular,

there are question marks over the empirical foundation for the humanlike brand, and theories of animism and anthropomorphism only support the humanlike brand theory if brands are perceived by consumers as akin to a deity or spirit. This latter point seems intuitively implausible.

Furthermore, if brands are not perceived as humanlike, this raises broader questions about what *exactly* brand personality and brand relationships might be. Aaker (1997) and Fournier (1998) provided the foundations respectively for brand personality and brand relationship theory, but both papers were founded in humanlike brand theory. Without humanlike brand theory, what might explain the relevance of these concepts?

One indirect conclusion of the review is that clear brand definition and conceptualisation has potential to highlight inconsistencies in theory. Had Fournier considered humanlike brand theory in relation to the brand definition given in the paper, the inconsistency in the theory may have been identified. Likewise, in the case of Freling and Forbes and Puzakova *et al*, had they provided a conceptualisation of the brand, this would have potentially provided an opportunity to note the lack of plausible exemplars in the animism and anthropomorphism literature. This serves to further highlight the importance of clarity of brand definition and conceptualisation in relation to branding theory and research (Avis, 2009).

Although the conclusions of this paper are tentative, the paper presents a springboard for a more comprehensive review of humanlike brand theory and evidence, as well as a more detailed and comprehensive review of animism and anthropomorphism theory in relation to branding. The paper might also serve to spur some debate and consideration of humanlike brand theory within the brand personality and brand relationship literature. For example, it may be possible to address or refute the points in this paper, or theorists may conclude that there are more fruitful theoretical justifications for brand personality and brand relationship theory. In either case, the paper contributes to branding literature by highlighting some problems in the theory and evidence for the

humanlike brand.

Appendix B: Paper Appendix

Table 17: Database Searches for Brand Personality and Brand Relationship Literature

| Database | Search parameters | Results |
|----------------|---|---------|
| Scopus | ALL(("brand relationship" OR "brand personality") AND (animism OR anthropomorphism OR anthropomorphic OR anthropomorphise OR anthropomorphize)) | 17 |
| Google Scholar | animism OR anthropomorphism OR anthropomorphic OR anthropomorphise OR anthropomorphize "brand personality" | 108 |
| Google Scholar | animism OR anthropomorphism OR anthropomorphic OR anthropomorphise OR anthropomorphize "brand relationship" | 58 |

Appendix C: Reviews of ‘Rock Personality: A Critical Review’

C1: Preamble

This paper has been particularly controversial, and has been reviewed and rejected from the European Journal of Marketing, and reviewed with a request for major revision in Marketing Theory. In the first review process, two reviewers were positive about the paper and one was negatively disposed on the first version of the paper. One of the positively disposed reviewers gave some detailed proposals for revision. These were followed, and the paper resubmitted. However, the reviewer whose advice we followed dropped out of the review process, and we then found that with the additional new reviewers, the reviews came out as two against publication, and one for publication, and the paper was rejected. In the last days before thesis submission, reviews were returned from Marketing Theory and these were to revise and resubmit. If looking at each of the reviews, it seems that each reviewer gives their own particular view on the paper, and to satisfy every reviewer, even those who are positive would be an impossible task. Publishing critical work, it seems, is not easy.

European Journal of Marketing Review for First Submission

Reviewer 1:

I have difficulty in accepting the foundations on which this study is based.

The authors evaluate methodology developed by Aaker (1997) for measuring the dimensions of Brand Personality (BP). They present that there are concerns that such models may be flawed involving a complex combination of validity factors such as: leading questions, projective methods, priming, acquiescence. However the authors acknowledge (p14) that 'many of these problems apply

in varying degrees to all survey methods, but the cumulative effect of all these potential problems in one research methodology may cause one to question what is being measured.'

I am not convinced that they have established this 'cumulative effect'. Further I think the arguments in favour and against survey based approaches are well covered in the literature. The limitations of such approaches are well documented.

The present study aims to test whether BP scales in effect create the BP. For this photo images of rocks are selected and described as 'an entity that does not share the antecedents to the formation of BP'. I am not sure that this has been established. If rocks (and indeed brands) are perceived by customers (with none of the elements of priming) as having BP characteristics then this premise may be flawed. It is perfectly conceivable that rocks may well have personality characteristics in the minds of some consumers (who may well associate them with household products, artwork, destinations, emotional feelings etc.).

If this is the case then I feel the methodological approach is fundamentally flawed.

It may be that in this instance an interpretive / inductive / qualitative approach to establish if BP naturally arises in unprompted scenarios may be more appropriate.

The review of literature provides an interesting critical evaluation of BP scales and highlights concerns over using such survey based methods (which I suspect are generally known by your readers).

I think the basic question this paper seeks to address (are BP scales valid) is very important.

However I am not sure that the methodological approach taken is sound. I do not therefore feel the

conclusions can be relied upon.

The paper reads well and is easy to follow.

Reviewer 2:

The front end of the papers draws a number of useful aspects of BP measurement together in a very coherent way. This has not been done in this way previously.

A very nice review of the relevant literature and shows a good understanding of the BP space.

An appropriate approach to look at the issue - although students may be more likely to personify things like rocks than "real people" and it would have been nice to have data from such respondents to support your arguments.

The data are analysed in a reasonable way, but there is much too much information and some very dense and unnecessary tables - the results section should be much shorter as it would be easy to make the point in many fewer pages. I felt the results section got in the way of the main arguments the authors were trying to make.

Some very good points and suggestions for changing the way we measure BP (e.g. using pick any type approaches). The discussion is well crafted and makes some very useful points.

There are some presentation issues, but they are easily fixed. The bigger issue is the repetitive nature of the results section and the overuse of what are really unnecessary tables. A rewrite of this section is essential.

Reviewer 3:

Intent of the paper

The authors' intent was to test the "brand personality" of rocks using the Aaker (1997) brand personality scale and methodology. The intent of the research was to empirically test whether the dominant brand personality scale creates brand personality rather than measure it.

The scale appears to measure the consumer's perception of rock personality (not brand personality of a rock) as tested in the present study

What was actually tested?

This paper relates the dominant Brand Personality Scale used in brand personality research to the personality of rocks. Specifically, the subject brand personality scale appears to generalize to common rocks when tested with a rock (versus brand) personification primer.

The authors' empirical findings could support that rather than specifically measuring the consumers pre-existing perception of the brand's personality, the Aaker scale and method "assigns" a "personality" using a given set of traits that the consumer is told to associate with a particular object; be the object a branded product (as in prior research) or a rock (as in the current study).

However, brand personality work assumes an antecedent. The authors argue that no such antecedent is associated with rocks. I argue later that the personification primer used in this study can be considered an antecedent.

This present study measures the personality of rocks. Aaker measures the personality of brands.

Therefore the authors do not show that the rock had “brand” personality. Rather, they show that the rock has “rock” personality. The authors actually supported that the BP scale and method can be generalized to personify innate objects by replacing the term “brand” and the particular symbol of the brand (i.e. name, logo, ads) with the term “rock” (and offering pictures representing the image of the rocks).

Overall potential contribution

This paper’s potential overall contribution is insight into the consequences of testing measurement validity of the brand personality scale. The implications of the findings in this study are far-reaching as it also has implications for other measurement scales and methodologies.

However, the authors’ conclusion that the scale creates “brand personality” rather than measure it is not empirically supported (again rocks are not brands and the word “brand” was not used in the personification primer so brand personality was not measured). The recommendation would be to remove the word “brand” and conclude that the scale and method assigns a personality versus measuring a preconceived notion about the rock (brand).

What is empirically supported is that the Aaker scale and method can be used to develop (or assign) a personality for rocks. Three distinct pictures of rocks show three distinct “personalities” that reflect the consumers perceptions based on the same traits presented in the Aaker (1997) scale. That is, like in the case of brands, the association of a consumer’s perception of the traits offered to them concerning a brand (rock) is transferred directly to the brand (rock).

Positive aspects of the paper

1. Interesting overall concept of testing the brand personality scale on an innate object such as a rock.
2. Clear and easy to read as for reviewing and understanding the main points. However extensive editing is needed to improve the quality of the paper for the general academic, non-reviewer mode reader.
3. The work suggests merit and should be of general interest to the field of marketing.
4. Potential for important contribution.

Constructive criticism for improvement

Overall recommendations:

1. Motivation: Be careful. Articulate your research motivation to be more about your theory and a little less “hard hitting” concerning Aaker’s prior work. There is an opportunity for the authors to better position their criticisms within a carefully worded framework that includes others who have criticized the scale and the methodology.
2. Title: While the reviewer believes that short titles should be a goal, in this case the title needs to lend more help towards inspiring interest and readership.

On the one hand, some readers may overlook the paper because of a lack of interest in “rocks.” Furthermore, they may not see the “straight-faced” irony of rocks with a personality!

On the other hand, research that questions a well-accepted methodology for testing brand personality (by using a scale that can “measure” a “personality” for unbranded rocks) and considers the implications of context in methodology is important. It could generate interest among so many more scholars than the current title might suggest.

Additionally, in the long run, changing the title to reflect the content might also help the work to be

readily noticed in a title search for methodology or scale measurement.

There is also this reviewer's argument that the present study does not measure brand personality (because a rock is a rock and not a brand) – it measures rock personality using the brand personality scale items and a rock personality personification primer (not a brand personality personification primer).

Title suggestions (made only to make a point -- not to be taken as literal recommendations):

- a. Measuring or Creating Brand Personality? The “Brand” Personality of Rocks
- b. The Personality of Rocks: Testing the Measurement Validity of a Dominate Brand Personality Scale
- c. The Personality of Rocks: A Question of Measurement Validity of the Brand Personality Scale
- d. The “Brand” Personality of Rocks

The flip side of this argument is that the “dead-pan” title as presented by the authors: The Brand Personality of Rocks could already be the best title to generate interest among brand personality scholars versus scholars that would be more interested in the methodology. If so, then quotations are needed for ‘brand’ as in “d” above since a BP primer was not used in the study (for obvious reasons).

3. Abstract: From the Purpose section of the abstract, remove the second sentence (“Several potential problems in the methodology are noted, suggesting that the scale might create the brand personality, rather than measuring pre-existing consumer perceptions”) and put a reworded version

in the Originality/value section of the abstract. Replace the sentence removed from the purpose section with the second sentence in the Methodology section of the abstract (“The principle of the study is that entities sharing no commonalities with brands should not be found to have brand personality.”)

Rewrite the Methodology section of the abstract to say more about the method(s) used in the study. That is to say, do not assume that everyone knows “Aaker’s scale and methodology”

Make the one long sentence in the Findings section of the abstract two separate sentences. Remove the words “none of the antecedents of brand personality.” Indeed, use of pictures of rocks could meet the standard of an indirect influence as referenced in Aaker (1997, p. 348): “In contrast, perceptions of brand personality traits can be formed and influenced by any direct or indirect contact that the consumer has with the brand (Plummer 1985).” (*italics and underline were added*)

Think harder about the articulation of Originality/Value. What actually is the point made in the first sentence? The reviewer agrees that a general statement should be the lead sentence but believes that the current lead sentence lacks clarity (e.g. could say: This work highlights the importance of continuously questioning the measurement validity of popular constructs in the field of marketing. Specifically, this study demonstrates that what researchers say a construct measures in theory may not be all that it measures in practice. Etc., etc.)

While this reviewer agrees with the authors’ opinions concerning free choice measures as they may relate to a more meaningful way of measuring brand personality, the current study does not meaningfully address or attempt to support the effects of the “free choice survey measures.” Therefore, this opinion/recommendation should be removed from the originality/value section of the abstract. It appears to be covered in the final discussion section of the paper.

The originality/value of this work is that when the very popular (dominant) Aaker Brand Personality scale and method were employed, the personification primer caused mundane, unbranded generic “rocks” to be assigned a “brand” personality!

This finding, that non-descript rocks are “assigned” a personality, at first blush poses a concern for the measurement validity of the scale. The authors’ conclusion about the findings suggests that the Aaker scale could create brand personality rather than measure it. The implication of this finding cautions that the utility of the scale as a measurement tool and the method should be more critically assessed.

4. The front end and Introduction of the paper needs to be rewritten to more clearly articulate the motivation and lead the reader to a comfort level that this is not an attack on Aaker as a researcher.

Establish the importance of ensuring brand attributes scales measure what they purport to measure and not something else (one or two sentences).

Then, focus on the concept of brand personality as on page two. Show references at the top of page three as to the “critics” mentioned to establish that this is not the first paper criticizing the prior brand personality theory (do not start this sentence, which starts at the bottom of page two and ends on page three with “Although” -- reword the sentence to make it a separate sentence about the purpose of the present study.

Next, follow as on page three with the brand personality scale by Aaker (try using the scholar’s name less – take it out of the subtitle #2).

After this, talk about the research that questions Aaker's work (like on page six). Make a separate sub heading number three. Again, position the questioning of brand personality as nothing new by referencing the list of others that have questioned brand personality (as mentioned on page 6) in a string at the top of page three.

Mentioning the names up to front in the introduction gives more credibility to the idea of questioning the brand personality scale and methods.

Follow up with how the present study is addressing a different concern.

This is only one suggestion and may not be the best means of informing the reader that the purpose is not motivated by a desire to question the credibility of a renowned scholar but rather to ensure "best practices" in research as we try to better understand the implications and limitations of the popular scale for practical use.

The purpose is to build upon knowledge by continuously improving and addressing the practical utility of the scale. Therefore, the papers tonality needs to change.

5. Methodology:

In general, the methodology section needs substantial work. One that is challenging a well-used model needs to be very transparent in the methodology section of the paper. The reader would be interested in knowing how the two studies differed if at all.

Study Overview: Need more detail. From the first paragraph, on page 17, the parenthetic reference in the second sentence (i.e. priming, projections, personification, forced choice, leading questions)

gives the impression that this study used all of these techniques. Is that the intended impression? If so explain how each technique was employed. If not why is this information included?

Participants: The authors should not mention the name of school, which was removed for the review process, even after the work is accepted. Rather, give a country location such as Midwestern US or Northern Europe.

The participants in the Aaker (1997) study, which is being criticized, were a non-student sample comprised of five different demographics. While this should not be an issue for testing the scale versus scale development (as the case of the Aaker study), it is important to note.

Procedure: The procedure section needs more detail. Describe the survey. As presented, the reader has too much to wonder about. For example, was a Likert scale used? How was it anchored?

The scripted personification prime (Appendix A) is very different from the Aaker (1997) study. However, upon comparison, the present prime (Appendix A) is less leading. The most important difference shapes what was measured and dampens the authors' current argument that a rock can be made to have brand personality. That is to say, the use of "rocks" (versus brands) in the personification primer means that the authors captured rock personality not brand personality.

After the prime, what were the participants told to do? What traits etc. where they rating? This is a section of the methodology where more information is needed.

Analysis: Second line page 18. The authors spell out the number of traits, facets and factors in the Aaker study. They need to be cleaner that the same information was obtained in the present study for comparison in that paragraph. The information is in the text but it should be clearer to the reader

that traits, facets and factors were the same. Furthermore, listed and discussing the five factors could be helpful.

Comparisons and transparency about similarities and differences will help credibility.

Discussion: The discussion needs to be totally reworked if the authors agree that they did not measure the brand personality of rocks but instead measured the personality of unbranded rocks or simply the personality of rocks.

Again, be careful with claiming that the rocks used in this study “share none of the antecedents to the formation of BP” as the pictures used can be considered antecedents. This argument, that the rocks used in study share “none” of the antecedents is used over and over without acknowledging the use of pictures. If the consumers were asked to “picture a rock in their mind’s eye” then a claim that no antecedent was used could be supportable. In this case, an image was used to stimulate association of traits, thus an antecedent is used. The point should be qualified.

The study certainly supports that the scale can be generalized to rocks!

The authors use too many opinions to support arguments. On page 27 in the second paragraph the authors imply that Rock I could be considered rugged but not Rock H. However, I would have ranked the Rocks just as they were ranked in the findings as I consider Rock H more rugged. The personal judgment is not needed.

The work would be better received if the findings were allowed to do the speaking and personal opinions left to a minimum.

Using page 28 as an example, there is too much speculation about how a consumer should not be viewing a rock (confident, sincere, etc). After asking them to personify the rock, why question participants' judgments about the outcome of which rock looks more confident, more rugged, more like a leader, etc.?

The point on page 28 about incentives is not well-taken. It is seemingly using the present findings make fun of the idea of personification research and survey research. The present study gave an incentive of chocolate and makes a point that Aaker (1997) gave an incentive too without saying what the incentive was (which was "a gift of their choosing and a chance to win three first prizes of \$250 and five second prizes of \$50" page 350).

The point here appears to be to show that participants were influenced to participate in an "odd study" with a mere candy bar (they will do anything they are told to do no matter how "odd" the study is).

The discussion goes beyond the implications of findings and elaborates on issues not tested.

- Other comments

6. Use of acronyms appears to be overdone. Consider limiting the use of BP, FFM, and BPFM.

7. On page 7 under subtitle number 3, the first paragraph explains the potential contribution of the present paper. This should be moved up to the front of the introduction.

8. Suggestion. Reposition the Summary on page 14 to be about what was presented in the paper up to that point. There is no inherent value in taking on "all survey" methods. Furthermore, this is not the intent of the work and such a statement cannot be supported by the research

conducted.

9. “The Present Study” as a subtitle seems unnecessary and much of the material presented in the first three paragraphs should be in the introduction on page 2.

Paragraph four and five should be in the methodology section.

A subheading for the hypotheses perhaps should replace the above subtitle.

The hypothesis should be more general and not mention rocks. Rocks as the object should be introduced in the methodology. Removing rocks from the hypotheses make the hypotheses more general and amendable to testing other objects.

H2: 1) may want to say has a distinct “brand personality” (versus simply “personality”) as in the title. 2) H2 goes too far. “, thereby demonstrating that the potentially problematic research methods can create BP” should be eliminated as it interprets the authors belief (i.e. “potentially problematic research methods” about the outcome of future results

10. Discussion: Use of “heuristic” in the same sentence (sentence 2) with “demonstrated empirically” is confusing. Why can’t you simply say that the hypotheses were empirically supported?

The results need to be better presented and the story needs to be better told. Overall the research is interesting and could add insight. However, an extensive revision is recommended. It would be difficult for readers to easily see the merit of this work without a complete rewrite and a completely different interpretation about rocks being assigned a personality (not a “brand” personality as this was not tested), which is suggested by the findings. This interpretation is a odds with what is being

positioned in the present manuscript. Good luck.

European Journal of Marketing Review for Revised Submission

Reviewer #1

1. Originality: Does the paper contain new and significant information adequate to justify publication?

The paper challenges the validity of Aaker's (1997) brand personality scale, suggesting that the scale itself creates the personality. The paper makes some interesting points about methodology and validity which readers will find interesting and should stimulate debate.

However I still feel that the methodology adapted in this paper fails to convince. The authors assumption that 'rocks and brands have nothing in common that might explain the research findings' for me has not been established. The conclusion therefore that the BPFPM scale creates the personality cannot be stated with such confidence.

2. Relationship to Literature: Does the paper demonstrate an adequate understanding of the relevant literature in the field and cite an appropriate range of literature sources? Is any significant work ignored?

Good discussion and review of relevant literature.

3. Methodology: Is the paper's argument built on an appropriate base of theory, concepts or other ideas? Has the research or equivalent intellectual work on which the paper is based been well

designed? Are the methods employed appropriate?

As indicated in point 1 I find the methodology unconvincing and based on assumptions which have not been proven.

4. Results: Are results presented clearly and analysed appropriately? Do the conclusions adequately tie together the other elements of the paper?

Revisions to the paper make the analysis easier to follow.

5. Practicality and/or Research implications: Does the paper identify clearly any implications for practice and/or further research? Are these implications consistent with the findings and conclusions of the paper?

The findings could open up a significant debate about the use of BPFM scales, and certainly the questions raised by the paper are very interesting and worthy of reflection and debate.

However I think the findings cannot be viewed as conclusive based just upon this work. In their responses to the first review the authors suggest that further work of a qualitative nature might help to validate some of the underlying assumptions on which this paper is based. I wonder whether some reference to this work should be included, to acknowledge the limitations.

6. Quality of Communication: Does the paper clearly express its case, measured against the technical language of the fields and the expected knowledge of the journal's readership? Has attention been paid to the clarity of expression and readability, such as sentence structure, jargon use, acronyms, etc.

Yes the paper is well written and easy to follow.

Reviewer #2

1. Originality: Does the paper contain new and significant information adequate to justify publication?

See my earlier comments - I'm not convinced the rewrite adds anything more than was in the original paper

2. Relationship to Literature: Does the paper demonstrate an adequate understanding of the relevant literature in the field and cite an appropriate range of literature sources? Is any significant work ignored?

See earlier comments

3. Methodology: Is the paper's argument built on an appropriate base of theory, concepts or other ideas? Has the research or equivalent intellectual work on which the paper is based been well designed? Are the methods employed appropriate?

See earlier comments

4. Results: Are results presented clearly and analysed appropriately? Do the conclusions adequately tie together the other elements of the paper?

Much better presentation

5. Practicality and/or Research implications: Does the paper identify clearly any implications for practice and/or further research? Are these implications consistent with the findings and conclusions of the paper?

See earlier comments

6. Quality of Communication: Does the paper clearly express its case, measured against the technical language of the fields and the expected knowledge of the journal's readership? Has attention been paid to the clarity of expression and readability, such as sentence structure, jargon use, acronyms, etc.

I still think this is much too long a paper for its contribution

Comments to the Authors:

Some useful changes to the paper, especially in the presentation of the results, but I am still not convinced that rocks cannot have a "personality" - after all, rocks were once kept as pets [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pet_Rock] and I did feel there were differences between the rocks that could have been real to respondents. I am also still concerned that students in laboratory conditions may well try to find such differences - asking people in real world contexts would have answered this concern, as this is the real test, but you chose not to do this.

Reviewer #3

1. Originality: Does the paper contain new and significant information adequate to justify publication? No

2. Relationship to Literature: Does the paper demonstrate an adequate understanding of the relevant literature in the field and cite an appropriate range of literature sources? Is any significant work ignored? Yes

3. Methodology: Is the paper's argument built on an appropriate base of theory, concepts or other ideas? Has the research or equivalent intellectual work on which the paper is based been well designed? Are the methods employed appropriate? No

4. Results: Are results presented clearly and analysed appropriately? Do the conclusions adequately tie together the other elements of the paper? No

5. Practicality and/or Research implications: Does the paper identify clearly any implications for practice and/or further research? Are these implications consistent with the findings and conclusions of the paper? Yes

6. Quality of Communication: Does the paper clearly express its case, measured against the technical language of the fields and the expected knowledge of the journal's readership? Has attention been paid to the clarity of expression and readability, such as sentence structure, jargon use, acronyms, etc. yes

Comments to the Authors:

The manuscript reports one experimental study to argue the validity of a well-established

methodological approach to measure brand personality. Although I agree with the authors that this is an important issue and have major implications. I believe that the current manuscript and the provided empirical evidence fails short in making a compelling argument or developing a convincing evidence to support the claims made in the paper. The authors need to do a better job in positioning the issue and provide stronger empirical evidence to support their arguments while providing a better alternative to existing measures. The reported experiment leaves many unanswered questions as I explain below. In what follows, I will summarize the major issues and concerns I have with the manuscript and the reported experiment while offering the authors some suggestions to improve their work.

I disagree with the author's assumption that their stimuli "the rocks" would not be seen as having personality and their conclusion that since rocks are not perceived as having personalities that Aaker's (1997) survey methodology creates the personality. People have the tendency to humanize and project personalities even on inanimate objects like rocks. Rocks may well have personality characteristics in the mind of some consumers, as such, I think this is a major issue sense the central point of the paper is flawed.

The study results doesn't empirically provide evidence that Aaker (1997) scale and methodology creates brand personalities for rocks. This study only shows that three different pictures of rocks show three different personalities reflecting subjects perceptions based on the same traits used in Aaker (1997) scale.

Furthermore, the empirical study reported in this paper provide initial evidence and doesn't stand alone on its self as a convincing evidence to support the arguments made in the paper. In addition, the current reported experiment suffers from major weakness that limits its potential contribution and the validity of the reported results. The experiment reported in this paper raises more issues and

questions that cannot be addressed probably with the current reported empirical work.

The authors argue that priming, leading questions, forced/rating, acquiescence responding might all be issues with the way brand personality is measured using Aaker's approach. However, their reported experiments fail to isolate or even account for any of the reported issues in the paper. This is a major issue with the current reported experiment and without careful studies to isolate and examine these issues none of the claims made in the paper can be substantiated.

For example, I agree with the authors that projective data requires considerable interpretation by researchers and that data should be interpreted within a broad context (page 10). However, they failed to follow any of their suggestions and exercise a lot of subjective interpretation of their projective methodology experiment without further exploration of subjects answers through open-end process measures. The paper does not explain the process by which subjects evaluated the stimuli, this experiment/future experiments should include open end process type of measures to assess and support any arguments made in this paper. Without having such measures, it is hard to really assess any of the claims made in this paper.

In addition, the authors can also conduct another experiment(s) in which 1) personification is manipulated (personification prime, no personification prime) to understand the effects of the personification prime on subjects evaluations, 2) a free choice rating type of question is applied. Without compiling such body of empirical evidence all the arguments and discussion of findings offered in this paper is weak at best and only reflects researcher's subjective views. I suggest the authors to look at their limitations and future research section of the paper and address all issues raised.

I hope the authors find these comments useful in taking this research forward.

Marketing Theory Review of First Submission

Manuscript ID MT-12-0013 entitled "Rock personality: Validity of a brand personality scale" which you submitted to Marketing Theory, has been reviewed. The comments of the reviewer(s) are included at the bottom of this letter.

Although the reviewers are supportive of the overall critique of the paper, they are also agreed that more work is required. I am therefore offering you the opportunity to undertake a major revision to address their various concerns. In particular, though, Reviewer 2 asked me to forward his email as I believe he may already have been in touch with you. This is a bit unusual but as he is generally supportive I thought I would do this. Here are the contents of his email:

"A tricky situation has arisen with regard to manuscript MT-12-0013, "Rock personality: Validity of a brand personality scale," that you sent to me to review. I have just read a paper in our major Australian and Kiwi marketing journal, the Australasian Marketing Journal, which is undoubtedly written by the same author; as evidence of this assertion, the Figure 1's in both papers are identical. I have just written to the author, Mark Avis at Otago University, commending his work in the AMJ article and suggesting some further improvements for a follow-on article on the same topic, a thorough criticism of the "brand personality" concept and the associated research method.

It will become obvious to him who the reviewer is if I send you the review in the normal manner. I don't like his new paper submitted to Marketing Theory, for two reasons that I mentioned in my personal letter (email) to him. Briefly, the first problem is that you can of course apply any adjectival descriptor to any object, even a stone or a rock, so this undermines the rationale for the

paper. The paper is also misleadingly titled - I thought, as most incidental readers would, that "Rock personality..." was going to be about the personality of rock stars as brands! The second major problem is that this paper, like his earlier paper, fails to criticize factor analysis as the badly misleading technique underlying brand personality research. I suggested in my letter that he consider preparing a more comprehensive critique of brand personality research for a journal with much more influence in the U.S., where most of the travesties have been perpetrated. Frankly, I believe that the valuable criticisms of brand personality research would miss reaching the main offenders if published in Marketing Theory. I've had this experience with all my articles in our journal, each of which I consider to be among my best work! The unfortunate lack of influence is confirmed by the disappointingly low citation counts for all my MT articles.

May I suggest that in this case you go outside the normal review process and forward this email to Mark. I fear that a "normal" review would result in Mark missing the boat, so to speak, and his "boat" could be right up there with the Queen Mary - just as brand personality research should meet the fate of the Titanic."

So his main reservations seem to be that you may miss your audience for this paper. This of course is your decision! I will leave you to think about the various reviews and think about whether you wish to resubmit or follow the advice of Reviewer 2.

[details of submission technicalities]

Reviewer(s)' Comments to Author:

Reviewer: 1

Comments to the Author

General comments

Overall I found the paper clearly and thoughtfully written. The argument was well constructed and the testing novel and interesting.

My key overall criticism relates to the critique of brand personality scales and the degree they are related to:

- (a) Brand personality as a concept
- (b) The use of a forced choice 5 point scale
- (c) The analysis approach of using the mean

Each of these leads to different points to be raised, and many of the criticisms under (b) and (c) can be extended to any branding construct measured in the same way. As this paper is about brand personality, I think it is important that the criticisms that specifically relate to this construct are isolated. Otherwise the fault might be seen to lie in the measure rather than the construct.

One thing neglected by both Aaker (1997) and this paper is the absolute scores – as these tell us that respondents do not really see brands or rocks as having personalities (actually if you compare the actual means in both studies, rocks have more personality traits than brands!)

The scale is a one to five scale, with one being ‘not at all descriptive’ and five being ‘extremely descriptive’. It is unclear what the midpoint is, but it would be 3 out of 5. If you look at Aaker (1997)’s mean personality trait scores for brands they are mostly between 2 or 3, or below the midpoint. Similarly with this paper, a number of the mean scores are around 2 or 3. Using a forced choice scale exacerbates this issue as those who are unsure will default to the midpoint.

This point is raised in:

Romaniuk, Jenni. Comparing Methods Of Measuring Brand Personality Traits. Journal of Marketing Theory & Practice, Spring2008, Vol. 16 Issue 2, p153-161

This point should be more clearly discussed, as it is something that can lead to misinterpretation of results. It is one thing to focus on differences, but the mean scores in themselves provide insights as well.

Other points:

There is actually a long history of the Pet Rock (see link below for a discussion), and so while I don't think it is a fatal flaw in the study, we should never underestimate human's capability to anthropomorphize.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pet_Rock

Pg 6, line 10 – perhaps the addition of 'perceived' before importance might be appropriate. It is also perhaps relevant to comment that Aaker herself gives no evidence as to the importance of brand personality to consumers (she 'assumes' it is important) and over 20 years on there is no evidence to link brand personality as she defined it to any brand performance outcomes. I think it is valuable to remind people of this that lots of papers on measurement do not an important construct make.....

Pg 10 – Priming

I am not sure about the point of this section and found the argument weaker than other parts. This is

a criticism that can be leveled at all attribute research, not just personality. And given the artificiality of the research situation, some need to ask people questions that they might not normally think about (or think more or less than others) is likely.

The issue is when the respondent is forced to answer, and not given an easy 'I don't know/care' response. So I am unconvinced about this as a separate area of criticism. Either strengthen or delete (I don't really see it as necessary).

Pg 12 – Acquiescence responding

This again is an area that has been examined in the general brand image literature. I would suggest the author also refer to that body of literature as it is relevant here – particularly in the context of the use of scales versus free choice pick any approach advocated by Romaniuk and Ehrenberg (2003).

Pg 14 – I found H1 hard to read, can this be simplified – perhaps separated out to make clearer?

However, aren't the three areas linked? I am struggling to see how it is possible for traits to be similar but facets to be different. If they were all linked then one, simpler hypothesis would suffice. If they can differ (eg H1 be supported for Traits but not for Facets, then a worked example would be useful.

Pg 16 line 22 – word Figure is missing

Reviewer: 3

Comments to the Author

This is an interesting paper, well written too, scholarly but also highly entertaining in places (which

is no bad thing).

It's a serious issue for marketing that we may be too quick to theorise from metaphor, borrowing and twisting theory that has no place in marketing - I'd like you to discuss this more, as well as the direct issue you examine which is that our instruments may be manufacturing results.

Your literature review raises very serious concerns about the BPFFM. This is the strength of the paper. It's a well researched argument.

However, the key empirical result that will be mainly cited is less convincing. A single experiment, using a convenience sample, and with far from 'everyday' rocks. I'm puzzled why you took this approach. While some results seem convincing (e.g. why should respondents have thought some rocks more confident than others?!) overall it would be a much stronger article if you presented more thorough empirical evidence.

Given the availability and low cost of online surveys today I would encourage you to do the experiment again. Use different, more 'everyday' rocks. Do the experiment in the US and an emerging economy in Asia. I really feel you need more than a single experiment.

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