

Brand personality

Consumer behaviour toward a brand is affected by the brand personality, but the personality of the consumer is also a significant factor that brands must take into account says **James Rohde**

Personality is a brand equity factor that is thrown around pretty easily; and while maybe not misused, it is used so often that it has lost a bit of its inherent meaning. With that in mind, I want to clarify what we're talking about since there are limits to what brand personality covers.

To start with, personality with regard to people is thought of as the consistent patterns of behaviour and social interactions that are initiated by the individual. Basically we're looking at the kind of behaviour that can be expected from a person and how they interact with people around them.

Keeping the standard idea of personality in mind, we can think of brand personality the same way – the kind of behaviour consumers

expect from the brand and how they believe the brand will interact with them. As I said, there are limits to what is covered by the brand personality factor though it impacts and is impacted by all the factors of brand equity.

For example, the quality of product produced by a brand is clearly NOT part of the personality factor, though how the brand presents and communicates that quality is squarely part of brand personality.

While brand personality is a contributing factor used to determine the value and power of brand equity, it is very soft even for a soft asset. It exists and it has power but it is one of the most difficult things to control, mostly because so many things can have an impact on its ability to function for you.

IS BRAND PERSONALITY AN ASSET?

Your brand has a personality; the only question is whether it was developed as an asset or is a side-effect of customer experience. It exists for every brand, even the ones that have never spent a dollar working on the definition. As stated, the core of the personality of a brand is defined by what consumers expect from the brand and how they believe the brand will interact with them. This means that brand personality is defined by perception – what consumers think is true.

This means that the value of this asset is impacted by a lot more than just the changes in how customers perceive the brand. Consumers who are non-customers also contribute to brand personality. Non-customers define a brand's personality by their perceptions of the customers who use the brand. For example, it's fair to say that Chik-fil-A now has a different brand personality than before July 2012, when it was beset with controversy following its chief operating officer, Dan Cathy's comments opposing same-sex marriage. Those on either side of the LGBT rights debate either boycotted its restaurants or supported them. All of a sudden a brand that sells chicken sandwiches has a depth that goes beyond fast food. Regardless of how you feel about the brand, the fact is that you very likely felt something. Granted this is extreme; but only in that brand personality became easily recognisable to so many so fast. The basic principle that consumer behaviour is influenced by brand personality was demonstrated and is certainly more the rule than exception.



Chick-fil-A: perceptions of its brand personality changed after controversial comments were made by its chief operating officer

So, if this is so true and brand personality has a consistent impact on consumers, shouldn't we be able to see it reflected in the marketplace? We can.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR BRANDS

To examine how brand personalities relate to the personalities of customers, a study of 2,200 respondents was conducted. In it, every respondent was given a personality assessment to complement their consumer behaviour data. These personality assessments placed respondents into five segments:

- **Adopters** (originality, open-mindedness)
- **Dependables** (orderly, responsible, dependable)
- **Vocalists** (talkative, assertive, energetic)
- **Followers** (good-natured, co-operative, trustful)
- **Perfectionists** (easily upset, nervousness)

Just as different people relate better to different personalities, they are similarly impacted by different marketing; specifically different calls to action.

A favourite question in survey work is 'How likely are you to recommend...'. It's a great question since the benefits are clear: all brands want their customers walking around as advocates. So what are our expectations when we see a strong likelihood to recommend figure? Figure 1 is from the same study referenced earlier. The circles indicate statistical significance at 95%.

There is a solid indication by most people, especially Dependables and Followers that they will be recommending their grocery stores. Seem too good to be true? It is.

Notice that the people who were most likely to recommend their store are also the least likely to have ever have done so in the past. Also, note that while the Dependables and Followers figures decrease, the Adopters, Vocalists, and Perfectionists who said they would recommend in the future have also done so in the past.

In the study, this question was not brand-specific and simply asked respondents about the grocery store that they considered to be their primary shopping destination, whatever store that may be. This was done to ensure that any format changes would not impact our ability to use past behaviour as an indicator for the future.

FIGURE 1

How likely are you to recommend your current grocery store to a family member, friend or colleague?

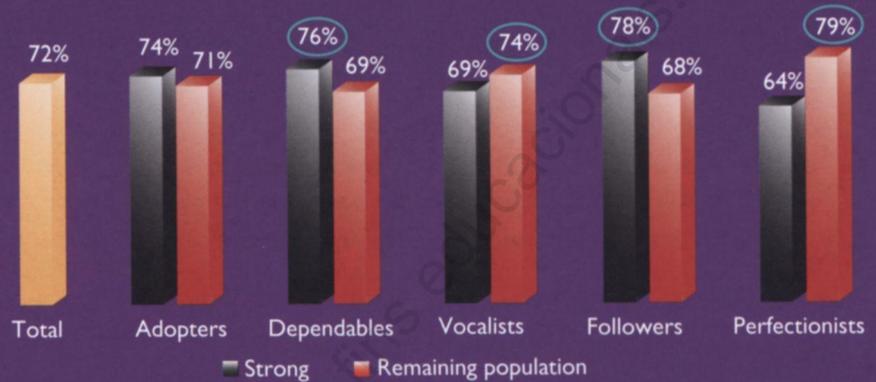
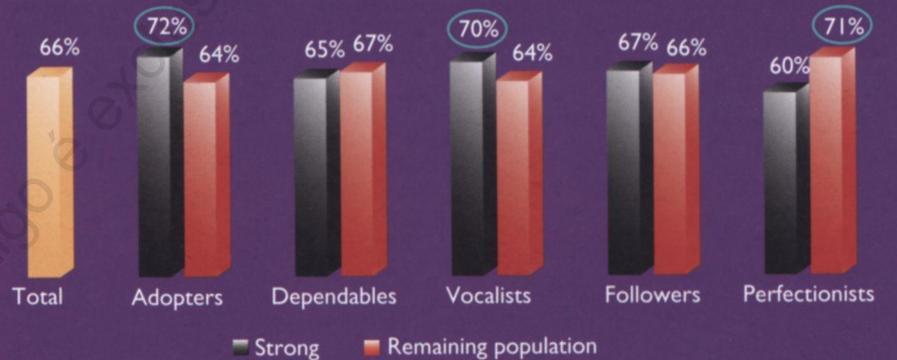


FIGURE 2

Have you ever recommended a grocery store to a family member, friend or colleague?



What this illustrates for your brand is that the personality of your customers has an impact on your brand; specifically which marketing efforts are going to be most efficient and effective. If your brand consists of mostly Dependables, efforts to expand business through word-of-mouth are going to get a much different result than if your customers are mostly Vocalists.

However, that is the big question. While we see that the personalities of consumers impacts how they interact with a brand, what impact does their personality have on if they interact with the brand?

DIFFERENT PEOPLE RELATE TO DIFFERENT BRANDS

Just as advertising a sale should bring in more customers and a loyalty programme should bring in more frequent customers, brand personality should be attracting personalities that are attracted to the image you are portraying. This means going beyond targeting demographics.

What types of people are attracted to your brand personality?

Are you a Mac or a PC, iPhone or Android; are you Apple or are you something

FIGURE 3

What brand of smartphone do you currently own for personal use?

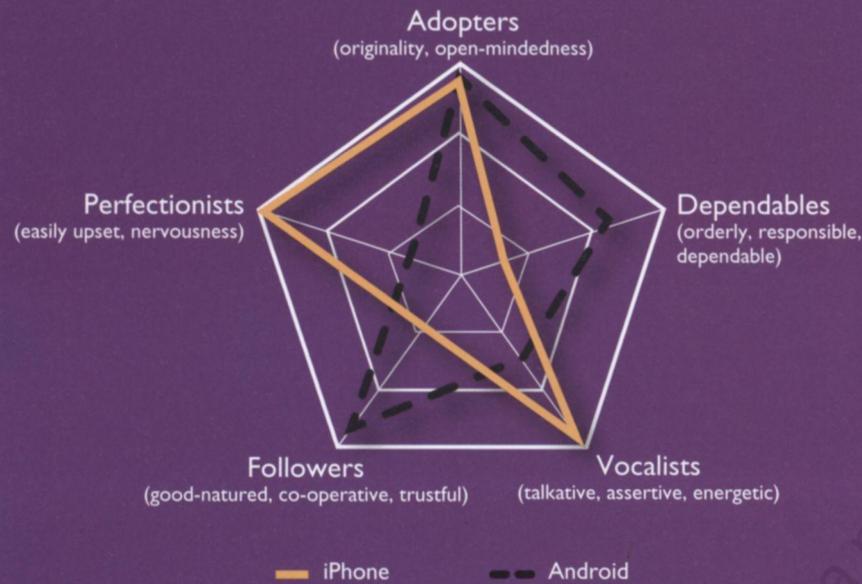
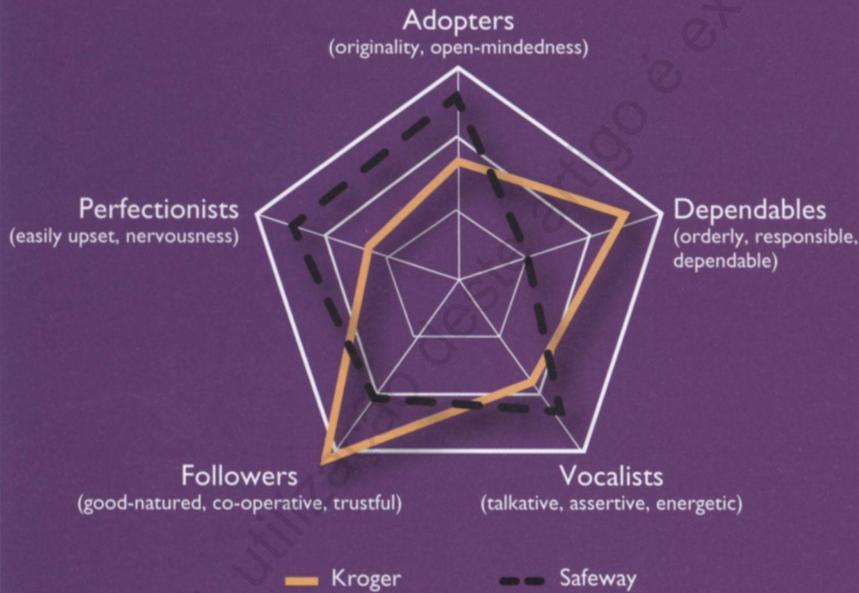


FIGURE 4

Which of the following do you consider to be your primary grocery store?



else? We look at Apple these days and very easily point to the brand as a benchmark in successful branding, in no small part to the

defined personality it has created. The fact is consumers (customers and non-customers) have an expectation from Apple that differs

from how they believe they will be treated by other brands. As a result different types of people are attracted to the brand.

Among smartphone owners: What brand of smartphone do you currently own for personal use?

Just as we make judgments on the people around us based on their actions, consumers make judgments on their brands. This is true for more than just the brands with big ticket items like Apple. Figure 4 is the breakdown from our grocery store example.

The type of industry and the level of brand marketing are irrelevant; a brand with customers has a perceived personality that is used by consumers to decide if they are willing to interact with you. In our study we see similar separation between brands in hardware stores, car insurance, and restaurants.

CONSUMERS ARE PEOPLE

There are an exhausting number of personality tests and models that try to define and capture a comprehensive list of personality traits. For our purposes we relied on attributes used in the Big Five which have been determined to capture the primary source traits of all personality attributes as described by Jerry Burger in his book *Personality*.

All questions were self-assessments, so everybody was asked to reflect on their own behaviours and self-perceptions. All responses were standardised to account for different interpretations of the semantics in the scale.

We analysed and categorised respondents using a central trait approach to personality; meaning that we determined which aspect of their personality respondents believed to be stronger than the rest.

These personality factors do not exist in a bubble and while we're looking at primary factors for the time being, personality layers are used when developing an actual strategy. That is to say that the combination of these personality factors will become more important when getting specific about your particular branding strategy.

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