

Gamer personalities

Gamers invariably choose an online role-playing personality similar to their own, which brands can use to find a match with their own brand personalities, as research from China shows

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The relationship between gamer personality, MMORPG (massively multi-player online role-playing game) archetype personality and brand personality can be conceptualised as a triad.

Our research found that 65% of the Chinese gamers surveyed chose a MMORPG archetype that reflected their own personality. Furthermore, in consumer behaviour literature, there is evidence that consumers (gamers in this case) also tend to buy brands that match their personality. So there is mileage for brands to match their brand personality with the personality of MMORPG archetypes, so that the three-way connections can be bridged. In this way, the gamers will be experiencing the brand when they play the role of the MMORPG archetype.

Brand personality can be understood as a set of human characteristics associated with a brand. In the same way that personality is a summation of what a person is all about, brand personality is a catch-all that sums up the essence of a brand. Consumers readily attribute a diversity of

personality traits, such as 'trustworthy', 'competent', 'agreeable' and 'rebellious', to brands.

These brand personalities are not just determined by the physical characteristics of the product, but are created via inferences or attributions based largely on observations of behaviour. All marketing mix activities can be seen as

'behaviours' enacted by the brand that trigger attitudinal, cognitive and/or behavioural responses on the part of consumers. A brand's personalities are created over time by the entire marketing mix (including the product, brand name, advertising, word-of-mouth, CEO image and brand user image). These personality traits, once built, are relatively distinct and enduring. In a market that is full of commoditised products, brand personality and its nuances can be a powerful differentiator for brands.

We tapped into the China data set of BrandZ, a WPP global brand equity study conducted by Millward Brown, which has data on how Chinese respondents described the personality of 367 brands using a set of 24 personality traits.

The personality scale asks: 'If the brand was a real person with his/her own [characteristics], what are the personalities you would use to describe him/her?' For example, the personality of beer brand Tsingtao is seen as trustworthy, desirable and wise; Heineken is sexy, idealistic and fun; and Budweiser is adventurous, brave and rebellious.

IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE

Computer games are important platforms for brand experience because they are interactive



FIGURE 1: How brand personalities match up with MMORPG archetype personalities

Close Combatant		Agile Fighter		Magician		Healer	
Pepsi	Metro	Ponds	BMW	Clear	Panasonic	Zhonghua	An Ta
Trustworthy	Brave	Caring	Trustworthy	Adventurous	Assertive	Trustworthy	Kind
Adventurous	Idealistic	Desirable	Different	Different	Sexy	Wise	Brave
Rebellious	Assertive	Fun	Wise	Sexy	Fun	Straightforward	Friendly
Wise	Different	Wise	Idealistic	Idealistic	Creative	Friendly	Caring
Brave	Adventurous	Different	In control	Creative	Desirable	Desirable	Fun
Assertive	Generous	Straightforward	Rebellious	Desirable	Wise	Kind	Innocent

Source: BrandZ, WPP global brand equity study by MillwardBrown, 2012.

and generate lots of consumer involvement. MMORPGs involve a large number of players, who assume the identities of the game characters via avatars and interact with one another in a virtual world.

Although each MMORPG has an independent world view and setting, the archetype classifications in all games tend to follow similar patterns. Content analysis of the characters' personalities in the top 15 games on the China Games Weight Score (see <http://top.sina.com.cn>) showed that they fell into four main archetypes.

In addition to content analysis, InGameAd Interactive and East China Normal University (ECNU) conducted a joint online survey to understand the personality of MMORPG archetypes. The research adapted the personality scale for understanding brand personalities to understand the MMORPG archetype personalities (shown in brackets).

Close Combatant (adventurous, brave, assertive, straightforward)

Game characters with job titles such as 'soldier', 'swordsmen' or 'warrior' fall into this category. They are usually skilled in defence, physically strong and powerful in short-range attack. In team operations, they play a defensive role, drawing the enemy's fire and bearing the brunt of it to ensure the safety of other team members.

Agile Fighter (different, wise, fun, in control)

The Agile fighters are extremely fast in attack and good at dodging. In battles, they deploy skills such as invisibility, disguises, *blitzkriegs* and applying poisons. Agile Fighters are 'different' in that they are often pessimistic and antisocial. They are also secretive and mysterious. Characters such as 'archers' and 'assassins' fall into this category.

Magician (arrogant, creative, desirable, sexy)
Job titles such as 'witch', 'magician' and 'wizard' refer to characters with supernatural powers. Characters falling under the Magician archetype are usually depicted as nimble, swift and maverick. They use magic powers to inflict damage, producing dazzling light and sound effects. Their aggressive assault often causes substantial destruction.

Healer (caring, kind, trustworthy, friendly)

The role of a healer is to release and enhance the powers of other characters, preserve the lives of their comrades, assure the safety of the team or increase its efficiency. They have job titles such as 'priest' and 'therapist'.

In consumer behaviour, there is evidence that purchase decisions are often expressions of an individual's personality. Each individual has a perceived image (or images) of himself

as a certain kind of person, with particular traits, habits, possessions, relationships and ways of behaving. People seek to express themselves in the way they consume and their brand choices. They tend to buy products with personalities that match or enhance their self-image, and avoid those that do not.

Game characters, or avatars, are virtual personas – the medium through which gamers inject themselves into the game. When MMORPG gamers choose avatars, they are picking an identity to represent themselves inside the game. The psychology behind choosing game characters is similar to that of choosing a brand. In fact, our research found that 65% of gamers surveyed chose MMORPG game characters that reflected their own personality traits. The game characters are extensions of themselves, reflecting their needs and wants. Since it is their own personality that they are cultivating, gamers tend to strongly identify with and commit themselves to their game characters.

If a brand can match its personality traits to those of a MMORPG character, when a gamer plays he will be living and breathing the brand while playing the MMORPG. In this way, MMORPGs can be powerful platforms for enhancing brand relevancy, preference and loyalty.

LEVERAGING THE GAMER-MMORPG-BRAND PERSONALITY TRIAD

Multiple product brands

Since there is a variety of archetypes in every MMORPG, brand owners with multiple product brands in their portfolio can match multiple brands with the different game characters. For example, Unilever owns Ponds (skincare), Clear (haircare) and Zhonghua (oral care). BrandZ data shows that Ponds' brand personality is seen as 'fun', 'wise' and 'different', and can be matched with the personality of the Agile Fighter. Clear shampoo is seen as 'sexy', 'creative' and 'desirable', matching with the personality of the Magician. Zhonghua toothpaste is perceived as 'trustworthy', 'friendly' and 'kind' – qualities that fit well with the Healer. Figure 1 shows examples of how brands can be matched with MMORPG archetypes.

MMORPG archetypes

In actual purchase and use, consumers often buy Colgate toothpaste and a Colgate toothbrush while supplementing with Colgate mouthwash. Co-operation of product extensions under the same brand

in a MMORPG makes the brand and its product extensions more cohesive. Colgate toothpaste can be a Healer and a Colgate toothbrush can be a Close Combatant, while Colgate mouthwash can be a Magician. This leverages gamers' natural mentality when playing the game for strong cross-sale opportunities.

Tailor-make game characters

The ultimate way to deploy game characters for brands is to tailor-make a character that is unique to the brand. The personality of the character can be designed to directly reflect the brand's personality. Furthermore, skills and props can be made to reflect the attributes or benefits of the brand. In this way, the brand can be experienced in a three-dimensional way in the virtual world.

Deploying props

The inherent personality of each character archetype is like inherited DNA. Once a gamer has chosen a character, he has to follow the archetype's personality mantra. If a gamer wants more from the game character, he can acquire props to compensate for whatever is not originally built into the DNA of the archetype. For example, if a Close Combatant gamer wants greater assault power, marketers can step in and provide a prop that enhances the attacking abilities. Marketers can design the props to be obtained in both the online and offline worlds. The latter can generate real-life consumption of products.

Brand messages

For a gamer to assume the role of a certain character, he has to fulfil quests or complete in-game tasks. These can entail collecting an inventory of props, killing a number of monsters and so on. In the course of tackling these quests, there are many opportunities for brands to inject messages or products into the process.

Skill acquisition

Skills are the abilities that game characters use in the MMORPG to fight for victory. The skill of the Close Combatants is slashing enemies to death, while the skill of the Magician is shooting lightning bolts. Each archetype has different skills, which are usually acquired in the course of a

gamer's ascension in rank. Brands can also move the skill acquisition process offline, into consuming products or even performing actual physical tasks, providing opportunities to interact with gamers.

Offline game carnivals

Gamers play MMORPGs because they want to experience the life of the game characters. A brand can provide an offline physical environment or an event for gamers to have a real-life experience of the game and their archetypes within the game. Many major games companies host annual carnivals for their popular MMORPG titles. These can be a golden opportunity for brands to tag along and link up with relevant game characters, which will be promotion at both physical and psychological levels.

Digital identities

The game character in a MMORPG is only one of the identities a person has in the virtual world. Account names in Weibo (China's equivalent to Twitter), QQ (like MSN) and Taobao (analogous with eBay) are common digital identities that inevitably embody the users' personalities. If all, or a majority, of the recommendations suggested here can be achieved, then the MMORPG game character will have a huge meaning for the gamer. If a brand can link the MMORPG game character with other digital identities of the gamer by providing pictures, profiles and themes from the MMORPG game character, the brand becomes the means to complete a loop of identity for the consumer's social media life. This will win brand affinity and can become a competitive advantage.

Celebrity endorsement

Adding celebrities into a brand's deployment of the MMORPG is a powerful strategy. Since the personality scale can be used to measure all facets of brand communication, it can also be used to understand the personalities of celebrities. In this way, brands have a way to choose celebrities with the best fit to the brand and the MMORPG archetype.

METHODOLOGY

BrandZ is WPP's global brand equity study and is managed by Millward Brown. In 2012, BrandZ covered 3,173 brands, of which 367 were from China. The sample size per category is around 2,000.

Content analysis was carried out into the personalities of MMORPG characters in the top 15 games on the China Games Weight Score (<http://top.sina.com.cn>).

InGameAd Interactive and ECNU conducted an online survey to ask 650 Chinese gamers, aged 15 to 40 with a 60:40 male-to-female split, whether they chose game characters that reflected their own personality when they played MMORPGs. A follow-up survey asked more than 300 respondents to describe the personalities of MMORPG archetypes.

Fifty in-depth, face-to-face interviews were conducted in Shanghai to better understand why gamers chose certain MMORPG archetypes.