
Examining the Correspondence between Intentions and Perceptions of Brand Personality and Brand Communication Style

The Case of an International Chocolate Beverage Brand

Witty & Mischievous or Cosy & Reliable?

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Abstract

The main objective of this research is to examine whether the perceptions of the customer concerning the brand personality and brand communication style are in line with the intentions of the brand owner, by examining the brand XXX via a case study. The intentions were assessed through nine in-depth interviews, whereas the perceptions were examined via a survey among 441 consumers. The findings reveal that the perceptions and intentions with respect to the brand personality and brand communication style are partially corresponding, indicating that the implementation of the brand personality has been successful to a certain degree. Intentions and perceptions concerning characteristics and styles that relate to the category “friendly, welcoming, open” are fully aligned, however the customer does not perceive the intended “playful, mischievous” characteristics and styles yet. Furthermore, this thesis demonstrates that the degree of involvement of customers has an effect on brand personality and brand communication style perceptions. A second objective of this study is to examine whether the brand communication style can be seen as an expression of the brand personality of XXX. The findings reveal that the brand personality and communication style indeed correspond to each other.

Keywords

brand personality, brand communication style, intentions, perceptions, involvement

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1. Introduction

Brand personality can be defined as “the set of human characteristics or traits associated with a brand” (Aaker J. , 1997, p. 347) A well-established and well-communicated brand personality accommodates the differentiation of brands, strengthens the personal meaning of the brand to the customer (Levy, 1959) and increases levels of customer loyalty (Fournier, 1998). Furthermore, it determines product evaluations (Freling & Forbes, 2005) and may enhance firm performance (e.g. Keller, 1993; Geuens et al., 2009). However, these positive effects might be in vain when the brand personality is not properly conveyed.

Brand personality has two different components, which are also referred to as “the two different faces of brand personality” (Plummer, 1985, p. 28). The first component is the perceived brand personality, which is the actual perception of the customer regarding the brand personality. The other component concerns the intended brand personality, which is the way the brand owners would like consumers to perceive the brand in terms of personality. The distinction between those two faces is important, because if the perceived brand personality is not in line with the intended, this can have negative consequences for the brand as “marketing implementation is critical for performance” (Mäler et al., 2012, p. 729). However, despite of the fact that numerous organisations have clear viewpoints on how the brand should be perceived in terms of its brand personality, in many cases the brand personality perceptions differ from the intentions (Mäler et al., 2012).

One way of transferring an intended brand personality is by sending (advertising) messages to the consumer (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003; Kim & Lehto, 2013). In creating a well-established brand personality, a communication style can be helpful, since each message can have a unique communication style that strengthens the intended brand personality. Brand communication style – which is “the way one verbally or paraverbally interacts to signal how literal meaning should be taken, interpreted, filtered, or understood” (Norton, 1978, p. 99) - has two faces as well. On the one hand the communication style as intended by the brand owners, and on the other hand the communication style as perceived by the customer. Also separating the two faces of brand communication style is important, because inconsistency between them might have negative consequences for the implementation of brand personality, in a way that the brand personality might not be perceived as intended. Because a communication style can be seen as an expression of a personality (De Vries et al., 2011;

Leung & Bond, 2001), I believe that those two concepts need to be connected in order to facilitate successful implementation of brand personality.

In this thesis, both faces of brand personality and brand communication style will be examined. I conduct a case study that allows me to measure whether the brand personality of a Dutch market-leading chocolate beverage, called XXX, has been implemented successfully. Furthermore, I examine whether the perceived brand communication style corresponds to the intended. I will do this by comparing intentions with perceptions for both the brand personality and the communication style. Implementation is considered to be successful if consumers perceive the brand personality in a similar manner as the brand owner intended it. Lastly, this research tries to analyse whether the communication style and the brand personality are in line with one another, and hence whether the communication style might be an expression of the brand personality of XXX. Three research questions have been formulated that will further guide my research:

Research question 1 - *To what extent is the implementation of the brand personality of XXX successful? Specifically, to what extent does the perceived brand personality correspond to the intended brand personality concerning the XXX brand?*

Research question 2 - *To what extent does the perceived brand communication style correspond to the intended brand communication style concerning the XXX brand?*

Research question 3 - *To what extent can the brand communication style be seen as an expression of the brand personality of XXX?*

In the academic field most studies examined brand personality as perceived by the consumer (Aaker, 1997; Geuens et al., 2009) whereas the intended brand personality as well as the successful implementation of brand personality received little attention. Unfortunately, as it happens, is it not always the case that the perceived brand personality is in line with the intended. Although the literature indicates that the alignment of perceptions and intentions has various positive effects, there is only limited research in this area. Therefore, I believe that a more thorough investigation into the perceived and intended brand personality could add value to the academic community by deepening our understanding of this scarcely studied area. Obtaining more knowledge about this area could also contribute to the business, as brand managers could potentially use this knowledge to improve their implementation of brand personality or adapt their communication with the consumer.

Brand communication style, as a second part of this research, is also an area where only little research has been done. Moreover, prior research has neglected a managerial perspective on brand communication style and only few studies have focused on the consumer's perception.

Therefore, investigating this infrequently examined topic will extend our understanding of this area. Lastly, this research is one of the few that makes the link between brand communication style and brand personality and tests this link in practice.

The following chapter provides a review of the literature. The purpose of this part is to explain the concepts of brand personality and brand communication style in more detail as well as to describe the possible interface between those concepts. In the second part of this thesis I will outline the methodology I used to conduct the case study. Hereafter, I present and discuss the results and I will derive both theoretical and managerial implications.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Brand Personality

The purpose of brand personality research is to describe which character traits customers associate with a brand (Aaker 1997; Phau & Lau, 2001). However, it is also interesting to look at the brand personality by means of how marketers intend to project it. The concept of brand personality is examined by several research streams. One of those research streams focussed on the conceptualisation of brand personality while investigating the brand personality as perceived by customers. (e.g. Aaker, 1997; Geuens et al., 2009). This stream contributed to the theory by providing empirical measurement scales consisting of different brand personality dimensions. Another research stream examined the effect of brand personality on organisational performance, as customer loyalty and satisfaction (Fournier, 1998; Brakus et al., 2009). However, most studies have not examined the intentions of the brand owners regarding brand personality and neither do they focus on the implementation of brand personality, which can be done by comparing intentions with perceptions.

Brand personality can be analysed from two different perspectives, on the one hand the intended perspective and on the other hand the perceived brand personality perspective. The implementation of an intended brand personality is generally a challenging process, since “strong brands do not just happen” (Aaker, 1996, p. 358). Although plentiful firms and brand managers design a complete picture of the character traits they want to assign to their brand, in many cases they fail to effectively implement this brand personality in the sense that the perception of the customer is not in line with the intention of the brand owner. Causes can for instance be that the intended brand personality does not match the type of product (Mäler et al., 2012), it is not managed well by the company, or the communication strategy is insufficient. Either way, implementing a brand personality requires active behaviour on behalf of the brand and must be managed effectively, otherwise “it will lead a life of its own” (Triplett, 1994, p. 9). The negative consequences of the perceived brand personality not being in line with the intended brand personality have not been investigated yet to my knowledge and they may vary from case to case. However, previous research did show that successful implementation of an intended brand personality has positive effects on customer loyalty, market share and consequently firm performance (Bonoma, 1984; Mäler et al., 2012).

2.2 Brand Communication Style

To create a strong brand with a well-established personality, an appropriate communication style can be helpful. The concept of brand communication style is relatively new.

Nevertheless, research did show that using a certain style of communication is not only relevant in relationships between people, but also invaluable in customer brand relationships (De Vries et al. 2011; Gretry et al., 2014). Now that social media has become increasingly important in communicating with customers, the style of communication is crucial in influencing customer evaluations due to the limited options for the design of the brand profile on social media (Brakus et al., 2009). Research of Gretry et al. (2014) examined for instance the effects of an informal- and conversational communication style on brand trust in brand-based online communities. They found that the use of an informal and conversational communication style reduces consumers' trust towards brands (Gretry et al., 2014, p. 22). This signifies the importance for a brand to use the appropriate communication style in its communication with its customers (Norton, 1982).

2.2.1 Translating Brand Personality into Brand Communication Style

Just as brand personality, brand communication style can be analysed from two different perspectives. On one hand, one can analyse the communication style as intended by the brand owners. On the other hand, one can evaluate the communication style how it is perceived by its customers. In my opinion is separating those two perspectives important, because to successfully implement the intended brand personality it is crucial that the communication style is perceived as intended, since a personality can be expressed by a certain communication style.

The literature provides some evidence that the concepts of personality and communication style are related to each other (e.g. Leung & Bond, 2001; Heisel et al., 2003; De Vries et al., 2011). De Vries et al. (2011) found that personality and communication style are closely aligned, since a communication style helps a person to express who he or she is. A communication style can therefore be considered as "an expression of one's personality" (De Vries et al., 2011, p. 509). Although these studies relate to interpersonal personality and communication style, it is very likely that a brand's personality can be expressed as well by a certain communication style. A brand can seek to convey an intended brand personality via advertising messages that each have their own communication style corresponding to the intended brand personality. In designing those advertising messages, the intended brand personality is translated into a particular brand communication style.

However, despite the fact that the above mentioned studies provided some evidence for connectedness on the interpersonal level, evidence is still scarce. Research into this link on brand level is to my knowledge not present and therefore I will attempt to investigate this link

in practice by comparing the intended brand personality with the intended brand communication style.

2.3 The Formation of Perceptions

The main objective of this thesis is to examine whether the customers' perceptions of brand personality and brand communication style correspond to the intentions of the brand owners. Although the purpose of this study is neither to investigate the causes of a possible discrepancy, nor to investigate the formation of perceptions, I will outline these topics briefly. The very basis of any work on brand personality originates from the concept of personality in psychology. Although human personality traits and brand personality traits may share a congruent construct (Epstein, 1977), they differ in the way they are formed (Aaker 1997, p. 348). Perceptions of human personality traits are formed by demographic- and physical characteristics, behaviour, attitudes, and beliefs (Park, 1986). Brand personality perceptions however are established in a different manner, and may be formed in various ways.

On the one hand, previous research suggests that consumers derive brand personality perceptions from observing the behaviour and communication of the brand (e.g. Allen & Olson, 1995; Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003). Those perceptions can be modified through marketing communications (Teichert & Schontag, 2010). When a brand communicates about its products or services, it continuously builds up character and might leave a customer with the impression that he or she is communicating with an actual person with specific character traits. This can be accomplished for example by using a certain communication style, a specific design, or applying certain colours (Kapferer, 2004; Kapferer, 2008).

On the other hand, the literature indicates that perceptions of brand personality can be formed and altered by direct and indirect contact between the brand and the customer (e.g. Plummer, 1985; Aaker, 1997; Ouwensloot & Tudorica, 2001). The direct manner in which brand personality perceptions can be formed is through the people associated with a brand, such as the perceptions of employees working at the brand or the stereotypical user. In addition, brand personality perceptions can be established over time in an indirect manner through the entire marketing mix (Batra et al., 1993). "Product-related attributes, product category associations, symbols, logos, price, distribution channel, and using a certain advertising style" all lead to the formation of perceptions concerning the characteristics of a brand (Aaker J. , 1997, p. 348).

Lastly, while above mentioned research concerning the formation of perceptions mainly focussed on activities from brand owners to customer, recent research of Mäler et al. (2012) showed five additional antecedents having an important influence on brand personality

perceptions. Customers' perceptions and subsequently successful implementation of the intended brand personality also depend on "the singularity of the brand personality profile, competitive differentiation of the brand, credibility of brand related communication activities, product involvement, and prior brand attitude" (Mäler et al., 2012, p. 737). For instance, when referring to product involvement, Mäler et al. (2012) have provided evidence that customers with a low state of involvement will also care less about brand-related communication initiatives. This in turn has an impact on the brand personality perceptions.

The formation of brand personality perceptions and brand communication style perceptions may differ, since a communication style is more directly observable whereas brand personality perceptions are dependent on more factors (including a certain communication style). However, independent of how brand personality and communication style perceptions are formed, fact is that if a brand wants to convey a certain intended personality, it needs to actively communicate this to the customer by using an appropriate brand communication style befitting the brand personality.

2.4 From Intentions to Perceptions

Brand owners can seek to convey an intended brand personality via (advertising) messages that each have their own communication style corresponding to the intended brand personality. Implementing a brand personality requires active behaviour of the brand, and needs to be actively managed (Triplett, 1994).

The transfer of a certain intended brand personality via communication is about encoding and sending messages to the consumer, who in turn receives those messages and interprets them (Kapferer, 2004). In designing those messages, the intended brand personality is translated into a brand communication style. This stream of communication that flows from sender (brand) to receiver (customer) can be explained by traditional communication models (e.g. Shannon, 1948). These models include a sender who designs a specific message and encodes this message. The sender transmits this message to the receiver through a certain channel. Subsequently the receiver decodes and interprets the received message. The message, sent by the brand manager, may have a particular style that corresponds to the brand personality the brand manager would like to transmit. The process of communicating and transmitting those messages (in the form of advertisements, TV commercials, social media messages) results in a certain perception of the customer concerning the brand personality and brand communication style.

In this study I examine whether the customers' perceptions of brand personality and brand communication style are in line with the intentions of the brand owners. Furthermore, I will

investigate whether the communication style can be seen as an expression of the brand personality. As shown in figure 1, the central construct in my thesis is the translation of an intended brand personality into an intended brand communication style, which are both perceived by the customer in a certain way. I conceptualize the concepts of brand personality and brand communication style by using the conceptualization developed by Aaker (1997) and Norton (1978; 1982), which will be outlined briefly in the next paragraph.

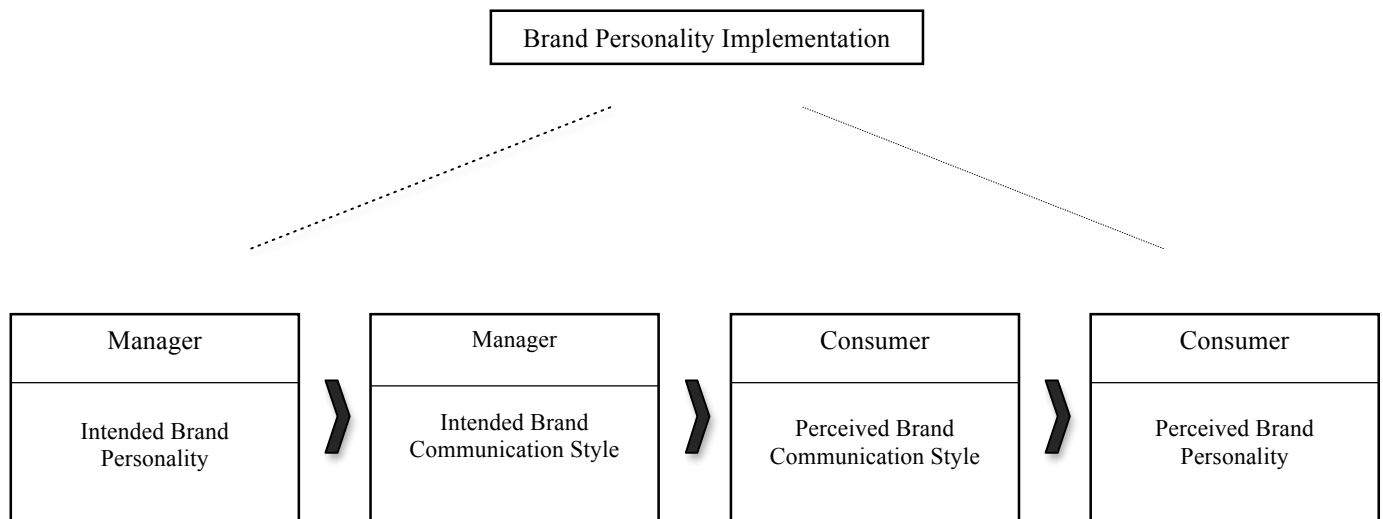


Figure 1. Conceptual framework: from Intentions to Perceptions

2.5 Conceptualisation of the Concepts of Brand Personality and Brand Communication Style

2.5.1 Measuring Brand Personality

A major researcher in the field of brand personality is Aaker, who defined brand personality as “the set of human characteristics or traits associated with a brand” (1997, p. 347). Aaker states that brand personality also includes socio-demographic characteristics such as age, gender or class. In contrast to psychologists and several other researchers, she defined personality in terms of characteristics instead of traits. Aaker introduced the first brand personality measurement scale, which was based on the “Big Five” human personality dimensions in 1997. The measurement scale, in which she defined five dimensions of brand personality (figure 2), is widely used in brand personality research.

However, authors have also criticized Aaker’s scale on several grounds. A first restriction of Aaker’s scale is that it cannot be easily replicated in cross-cultural situations. Several studies have shown that the dimensions are not always stable, and therefore it cannot be assumed that

they can be applied universally. Instead, they are partially culture- and situation specific. A further criticism concerns the non-generalizability of the scale for a specific brand or within a specific product category (Austin et al., 2003). Additionally, some researchers consider Aaker's definition of brand personality as too broad, as it includes characteristics such as physical- and demographic characteristics besides personality characteristics (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003; Geuens et al., 2009). It has been argued that the definition might embrace concepts beyond brand personality, which might cause conceptual confusion. As a consequence, a new, stricter definition of brand personality has been developed by amongst others Azoulay & Kapferer (2003), who define brand personality as "the set of human personality traits that are both applicable to and relevant for brands" (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003, p. 151). Furthermore Geuens et al. (2009) developed a new significant measure for brand personality. As the measurement scale of Geuens et al. (2009) is so recent, critical academic reviews do not yet exist.

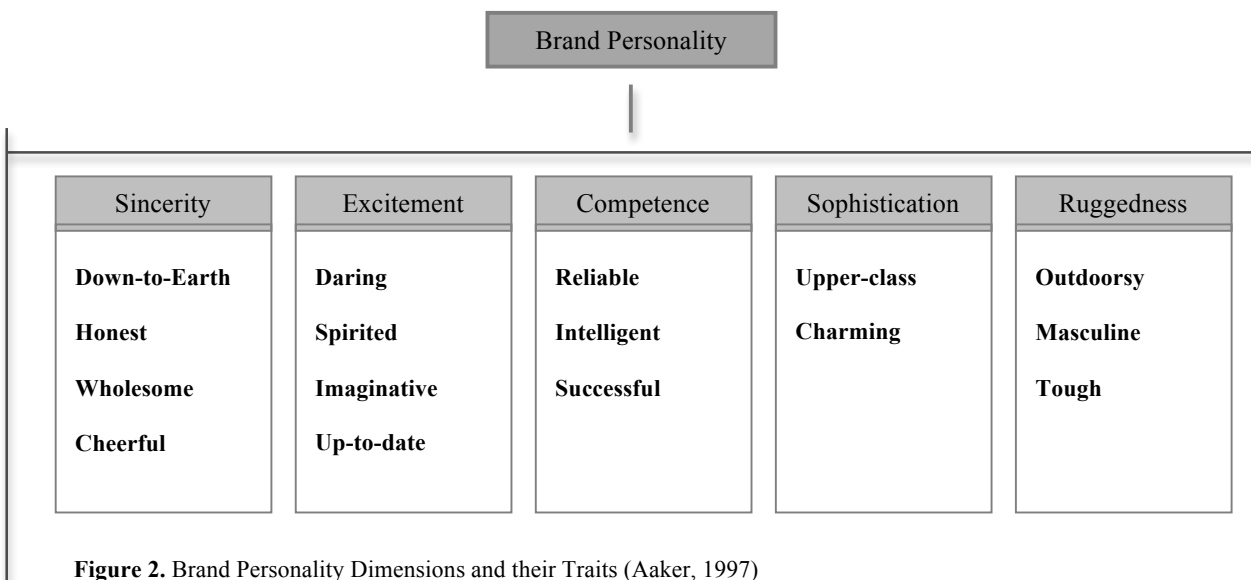
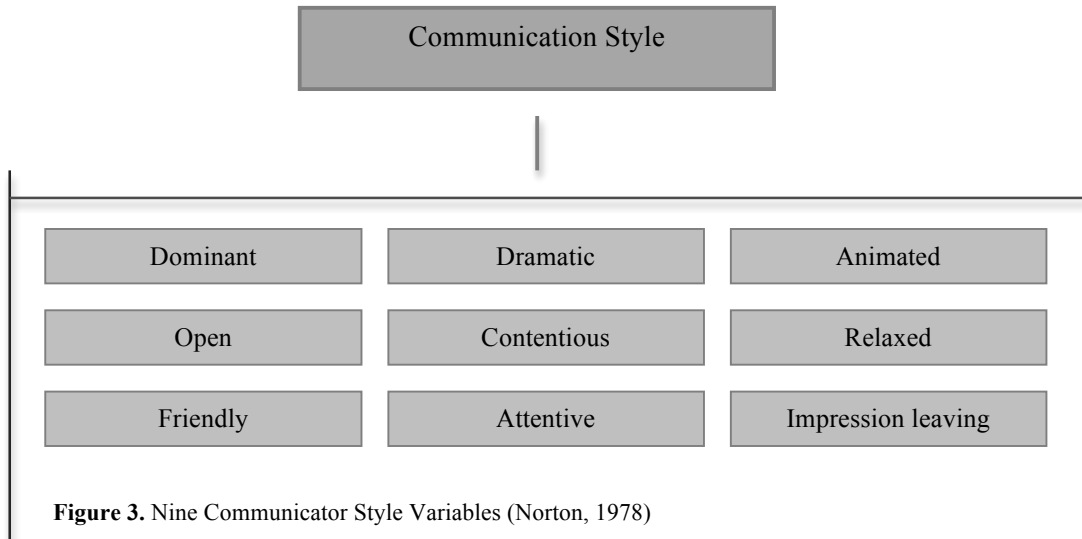


Figure 2. Brand Personality Dimensions and their Traits (Aaker, 1997)

2.5.2 Measuring Brand Communication Style

In the past, several measurement models have been developed in order to measure and outline the concept of communication style. Important measures are amongst others the Communicator Style Measure (hereafter referred to as: CSM) of Norton (1978; 1982), the Relational Communication Scale of Burgoon & Hale (1987) and the Communicator Style Inventory of De Vries et al. (2011). Norton was the first researcher who developed a measurement model to measure interpersonal communication style. Norton defines communication style as "the way one verbally or paraverbally interacts to signal how literal meaning should be taken, interpreted, filtered, or understood" (Norton, 1978, p. 99). In his

CSM, communicator style consists of nine style variables: dominant, dramatic, animated, open, contentious, relaxed, friendly, attentive, and impression leaving (1978, p. 99). These nine variables are predictors of the communicator image (figure 3).



The definition and the CSM of Norton (1978; 1982) are still most commonly used in the field. However, there are researchers who criticized Norton’s work. Talley and Richmond (1980) questioned the quality of Norton’s CSM. They argued that additional clarification of the model is needed since the variables are highly correlated with each other, causing a moderate reliability of the model. De Vries et al. (2009) criticized Norton’s definition of communication style (1978), arguing that it is not broad enough as it only focuses on the interpretation of a message. They define communication style as “the characteristic way a person sends verbal, paraverbal, and nonverbal signals in social interactions denoting (a) who he or she is or wants to (appear to) be, (b) how he or she tends to relate to people with whom he or she interacts, and (c) in what way his or her messages should usually be interpreted” (De Vries et al., 2009, p. 179). This definition can be considered as being broader than the definition of Norton, since it also includes the identity and personality as key components of which of a certain communication style is derived from, as well as the interactional aspects of communicative behaviour (De Vries et al., 2011).

3. Methodology

In this section, the methodology used for this thesis will be outlined. This study aims to examine the intended and perceived brand personality and brand communication style and the linkage between them for the brand XXX. In assessing this linkage a case study will be conducted. I choose to conduct a case study since it contributes to a more holistic view of the phenomenon under study (Meyer, 2001) and it provides profound insights. Disadvantages of a case study consist of the fact that the study is hard to generalize and there exists the risk of researcher bias. The latter may threaten validity if the researcher is biased or looks at certain patterns in a subjective manner. I tried to ensure objectivity in this study as much as possible by making use of transcripts and documents without subjective interpretation. However, I am aware that a certain degree of subjectivity will always remain.

This chapter will be divided in three sections. Firstly, I will outline the operationalization of the key concepts of thesis. Secondly, I outline the qualitative part of the case study, which consists of nine in-depth interviews and a document analysis to examine the intentions of the brand owners. Thirdly, I discuss the quantitative study, in which I examine the perception of the consumers by conducting a survey amongst 441 Dutch customers.

3.1 Measuring the concepts Brand Personality and Brand Communication Style

In both the survey as well as in the interviews, a combination of open-ended questions and closed-ended questions were asked. Open-ended questions were asked prior to the closed-ended, since this enabled me to first measure the spontaneous terms participants attached to the personality and communication styles of XXX, before being exposed to pre-existing terms and thus being biased.

3.1.1 Measuring the concept Brand Personality

Open-ended questions

In the interviews as well as in the survey, participants were first provided with the definition of brand personality and an example.

Interview - The interviews were aimed at measuring the intentions of the brand owners. In the first phase of every interview, I started asking questions such as: *“If XXX would come alive as a person, what kind of person is XXX intended to be? Which characteristics would this person have? How would this person behave if you went to a party together?”* I believe this is a decent method, since theories of animism suggest that there is “a felt need to

anthropomorphize objects in order to facilitate interactions with the nonmaterial world” (Fournier, 1998, p. 344). It is convenient for the consumer to think of a brand as if it would be a famous person (Rook, 1985) or to think of a brand as if it relates to a person’s self (Fournier, 1998). Moreover, several other researchers used this method as well (e.g. Aaker, 1997; Geuens et al., 2009).

Survey - With respect to the survey, to allow for more free-flowing reactions concerning the perceived brand personality, respondents were given an opportunity to write down two characteristics of XXX. These unstructured evaluations provided more specific and unique perceived characteristics that would have not been captured by the structured measurement scale alone. Respondents received the following instruction:

The following questions are about the brand personality of XXX. Brand personality can be defined as “the set of human personality traits that are both applicable to and relevant for brands”. If you imagine the brand Absolut Vodka as a person, that person can be described as cool, hip and challenging: a modern 25- year old.

Now imagine that XXX is a person, a friend. If XXX would be a person, what characteristics would this person have?

Closed-ended questions

After conducting the open-ended questions, the participants were provided with a list of personality items.

Interview - Concerning the interviews, I assessed brand personality by using the widely used scale of Aaker (1997). I asked the participants whether they could make a top three of the items relevant for XXX.

Survey - With respect to the survey, I included two extensive lists of personality items. The first list consists of 19 personality traits, and was composed by characteristics that came up several times during the interviews plus some additional character traits. This enabled me to measure whether the consumer recognized the personality traits referred to and intended by the brand owner. The second list consists of brand personality dimensions of Aaker (1997), since Aaker’s scale is still the most widely used measurement scale to measure brand personality. Moreover, it enables researchers to ‘capture the symbolic meaning of brands as if they were people’ (Pitt et al., 2007, p. 838). Using a seven-point Likert scale (1= Completely Disagree, 7= Completely Agree), the respondents could determine the items that best represented the brand personality of XXX.

3.1.2 Measuring the concept of Brand Communication Style

Open-ended questions

I selected the same approach to measure the intended and perceived brand communication style. Similarly, the concept was first explained by providing a definition and an example.

Interviews - In the interview, open questions were asked such as: *“Imagine XXX as a person, how would he or she talk? What would be the style he or she would use to communicate?”* Furthermore, I asked the participants directly about the intended tone of voice of XXX.

Survey - Concerning the survey, subjects received the following instruction in order to gain free-flowing responses to the perception of the communication style:

A communication style can be described as “the typical way a brand communicates with his customer”. For example the style the brand uses in a commercial or the style of the messages on the brand’s Facebook page.

Imagine again that XXX would be a person. Suppose that you are sending texts via Whatsapp or that you are speaking with him/her via Facebook, what kind of messages would this XXX person send? What style of communication would this person have?

Closed-ended questions

Closed-ended questions to measure the perceived brand communication style consisted of a multiple-choice question and a list of communication styles. The multiple-choice question refers to the distinction between formal versus informal brand communication styles. I believe this question was relevant to include, since the use of informal styles is increasing due to the increasing importance of the social web (Gretry et al., 2014). The list of communication styles that I included in the interviews as well as in the survey was based on the style variables of Norton. Despite criticism on the CSM construct of Norton, his description of communicator styles had a lot of impact in the research field. I asked the participants of the interviews to make a top three of the intended communication styles for XXX. With respect to the survey, a seven-point Likert scale was used to measure the style variables that best represented the perceived communication style of XXX.

3.2 Qualitative Research Method

3.2.1 The XXX Case

Company X - XXX is a chocolate drink brand, which is owned by Royal Company X (hereafter referred to as: Company X). Company X is a large, multinational dairy company that manufactures natural, nutritious and high-quality dairy products. The XXX, with an annual revenue in 2015 of 11,3 billion euro, has been established in 2008 through the merger between XXX and XXX. However, the roots of the cooperation go back to XXX. The cooperation is nowadays the world's largest dairy cooperative and one of the top five dairy companies in the world. It operates internationally in 32 countries, with 22.000 employees worldwide.

The XXX brand - The brand XXX, which was introduced in 1932 and is widely available in the Netherlands, Germany, and Belgium (under the name Cécémel), has a market share in the Netherlands of 81% in the retail market and 75% in the foodservice market. The brand is so well known in the Netherlands that the word "XXX" is often used in everyday parlance for chocolate milk in general. Nearly every Dutchman takes the nostalgic slogan for granted: <SLOGAN>.

International Rollout Difficulties - At the moment the XXX team is working on a rollout in the foodservice market in Denmark. Within the retail market, possibilities are being investigated to enter the market in the Middle East. According to the brand leader, an international rollout can be difficult, since in the Middle East the company does not have the history and the brand awareness it has in the Netherlands. What brand strategy should the company formulate? Which personality does Company X want to convey internationally? Cultural values must also be adhered to, since these countries have different cultural values and score differently on for example the cultural dimensions of Hofstede (1980; 2001). Because cross-country differences are present in the proposition and marketingstrategy of the XXX brand, I only focus on the XXX brand in the Netherlands in this thesis.

3.2.2 Insider access

Due to my marketing internship at Company X, I already had access to the organization. This gave me the advantage of being familiar with the organisational culture and politics. Before conducting the interviews, I had been working for the company for two months. It was therefore very easy for me to approach the participants and furthermore they were very willing to participate, because the study could be beneficial to the brand as well. Additionally, being an insider provided me with the possibility to interview the entire team of employees

working on the XXX brand, and it gave me easy access to the relevant documents. A major hazard of being an insider is the risk of being affected or biased as a researcher by my role in the organization. With regard to the latter, it is important to point out that I was primarily working on other brands than XXX, such as XXX and XXX. Moreover, the research topic does not exhibit similarities with my activities within Company X.

3.2.3 Research design

In order to get a profound understanding of the intended brand personality and brand communication style of XXX, a qualitative research was conducted. Qualitative research is in this case most suitable, since it provides deep insight into the intentions of the brand owners. Furthermore it is suitable because the intended brand personality and brand communication style concern an underdeveloped research area. The in-depth interview is an effective method, since it allowed me to gather detailed information and insights about the participants' intention. I have chosen semi-structured interviews in order to be able to adapt to topics the participants brought up. Furthermore semi-structured interviews were logical to use, since on the one hand it provides a framework of topics to be explored, but on the other hand it allowed the participants the freedom to express the intended personality and communication style in own words and terms. This gave me the possibility to explore new and relevant 'traits' and 'style variables' in addition to the already existing items and variables of the concepts of brand personality and brand communication style.

3.2.4 Data Collection

The study covers a time period of four months, from April 2015 to July 2015. During this period, documents were analysed and nine in-depth interviews were conducted. With respect to the document analysis, I searched for documents regarding the brand personality and brand communication style by scanning the hard disk of the marketing- and sales department and by reaching out to my colleagues.

The interviews lasted around 45 minutes to one hour. Participants were contacted in person or by e-mail. Interviewees were selectively chosen based on close affiliation with the XXX brand. Seven participants work at Company X. Additionally two participants work at a global media agency called MEC and manage the communication on social media for XXX. Below an overview is provided of the subjects who participated in the research.

Number	Function	Sex	Age category	Department	Organisation
<hr/>					

1	Brand Leader XXX	Female	35-40	Retail	Company X
2	Brand Manager XXX	Female	25-30	Retail	Company X
3	Category Developer Ambient Flavoured Dairy drinks	Female	25-30	Foodservice	Company X
4	Channel Marketer	Female	30-35	Foodservice	Company X
5	Intern XXX	Female	20-25	Foodservice	Company X
6	Intern XXX	Female	20-25	Retail	Company X
7	Previous: Brand Manager XXX Future: Brand Leader XXX	Male	30-35	Retail	Company X
8	Social Media Manager XXX	Female	30-35	-	MEC Amsterdam
9	Social Conceptor XXX	Male	25-30	-	MEC Amsterdam

To improve the fluency of speech, I decided to conduct the interviews in Dutch. Prior to the interviews the purpose of the research was explained and I stressed that anonymity and confidentiality would be respected in the study. In line with ethical standards, I pointed out that the interview would be recorded and I asked if they agreed with that. By stressing those issues, an environment was created in which everyone dares to speak freely. Lastly, I emphasized that the participant could withdraw from the study at any time during the investigation.

3.2.5 Data analysis

To examine the case from different viewpoints, I used different data sources. The document analysis was done by comparing documents and exploring whether the message was consistent. After permission of the participants, all interviews were recorded and transcribed to guarantee the quality and ensure no data would go missing (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). The respective transcripts can be found in appendix 1.1. I started the coding process by assigning open codes to relevant statements. In the next stage, codes were reduced to a more convenient number of categories. In a final stage, relevant codes were selected and combined into high order codes. An overview of the assigned codes can be found in appendix 1.2.

3.2.6 Reliability

Reliability is an important quality requirement of a research, because it shows whether a research is free of random errors. Reliability can be improved by standardizing the data collection methods, however since this concerns a qualitative research including semi-structured interviews, standardization is difficult to achieve. Nevertheless, in-depth interviews do make it possible to provide the participant with an explanation of a question or concept, which limits misunderstanding. Additionally, consistency of the analysis is important to ensure reliability (Boeije, 2005). Therefore all nine interviews have been recorded,

transcribed, and coded in the same way to reduce certain mistakes. Lastly, providing interviewees the opportunity to check their transcript has enhanced reliability. A risk in doing this is that the text is sometimes adapted. However, no interviewee requested to adapt the transcript.

3.2.7 Validity

A study can be considered internally valid if it is free of systematic measurement errors (Golafshani, 2003). Since the process of coding and analysing qualitative data involves judgements on the part of the researcher, internal validity is hard to demonstrate (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). To achieve a higher internal validity of the conclusions, I combined document analysis with interviews (Hall & Rist, 1999). Assuring anonymity and stressing that the interviews and results would only be used for research purposes reduced the threat of socially desirable answers. The qualitative character of the study increases the internal validity as well, since the flexibility of semi-structured interviews enabled me to thoroughly measure the intentions of the participants. Additionally, existing measurement scales were used to measure the concepts of brand personality and brand communication style to ensure that the research is firmly grounded in existing literature.

The external validity of a research concerns the generalizability of the study. Since I conducted a case study for one firm, generalisation of the results is difficult.

3.3 Quantitative Research Method

3.3.1 Data collection method

Similar to methods used in previous studies, a survey was used to examine the perceived brand personality and brand communication style. I conducted a survey since it can be easily spread, which ensures accessibility to a large audience and provides participants with the liberty to complete the survey whenever it suits them best. In order to stimulate a high return rate, the questionnaire was sent via email to 2202 respondents of Company X's customer panel. Approximately 20% of the respondents returned the questionnaires (n = 441). About 17.9% of the respondents were male and 82.1% of the respondents were female. About 31.7% of the respondents belong to the target group (18-35 years old). The fieldwork ran from August the 5th to August the 17th 2015.

The customer panel consists of a large group of customers who subscribed to participate in Internet research on a regular basis. The surveys are sent out two to three times a year and concern all Company X brands. Using the customer panel provided me with the advantage of quick and easy data collection. Without the company's cooperation and resources, I would have not been able to undertake such a large-scale survey. Another advantage of using the

customer panel as data collection method in my thesis was that the customers tend to be more involved and hence might be more inclined to answer, especially regarding the open-ended questions.

However, a risk is that self-selection bias can occur since respondents of the customer panel voluntarily subscribed to be part of the Company X's customer panel. They therefore might be more aware of the Company X brands and might have more affinity with them. This could bias the sample, as it might not fully reflect the population. Although this risk cannot be completely eliminated, I attempted to mitigate and account for this hazard by including questions in the survey to distinguish between high-involvement customers, called 'fans' or 'fanbase' and low-involvement customers, called 'non-fans'.

The fact that the fieldwork ran in the summer may have had an influence on the data collection. On the one hand it could have the consequence that the customers were mainly thinking about the cold variant of XXX when responding to the questions, because the warm variant of XXX is usually consumed in the winter. On the other hand, the beverage might not be top-of-mind, since XXX at the first glance does not seem to be a beverage suitable for summer. Regarding the latter, fact is that the sales of the cold variant (which is sold throughout the year) is much higher than the sales of the hot variant, which could indicate that the cold variant is top-of-mind during the whole year, hence also in the summer. However, since this research is specifically aimed at examining the intentions and perceptions of XXX as one brand, I asked implicitly about the brand, and not about a variant. Furthermore, I included a question in the survey to test whether the customer answered the questions by thinking about the brand as a whole or by thinking about a specific variant. The majority of respondents (62%) indicated that they answered the questions thinking about the brand XXX and not thinking about the hot (6%) or the cold (32%) version. Lastly, the summer period did not have a major effect on the response rate of the survey, since the rate is generally around the 20%. Therefore I believe that the period of the fieldwork has a negligible impact on the data collection.

3.3.2 Survey design

The survey focuses on the perception of the consumer regarding the brand personality and brand communication style of XXX. The survey, which is included in appendix 2.1, includes three elements: open-ended questions, multiple-choice questions, and three questions using a seven-point Likert scale (1= Completely Disagree, 7= Completely Agree, and 99= no answer (i.e. missing value)). I selected a Likert scale because this method is universally known, making it easy for respondents to understand. It furthermore enabled me to quantify and code the data more easily.

An inherent risk to using surveys is that participants might wrongly interpret certain questions. Hence, to prevent biasing results it tried to explain the concepts by providing the respondents with clear definitions and an example to further clarify the questions.

Because the survey also included questions concerning the brand XXX, I had to limit the scope of the questions, in order to prevent the respondents from stopping at an early stage because of an excessively long survey. With regard to the Likert scale questions, I was therefore not able to measure the concepts of brand personality and brand communication style by asking sub-questions for each item. Instead, I asked directly about the score on a particular characteristic or communication style variable. This constitutes a limitation of the study and may affect the reliability and validity of the research. I tried to restrict this limitation by testing the survey on a number of consumers before sending it out to the entire consumer panel. The objective was to check whether the characteristics and styles were interpreted the same way, which was mainly the case. In addition, I decided to provide a definition to the items that were not interpreted in a same way or were not generally known. Finally, I have tried to overcome the problem by asking open-ended questions. The two open-ended questions were asked prior to the Likert scale questions and were used to find out which terms regarding the perceived personality and communication style were mentioned spontaneously and frequently by the respondents and thus could be considered as important. A list was generated of all the unique words that emerged from the free-flowing responses (table 4 and 5, appendix 4.1).

The last questions of the survey consisted of demographic questions concerning the age of the respondents, gender, and the most recent education. The operationalization of the concepts was already discussed in the first section of this chapter.

3.3.3 Data analysis

With regard to the statistical analysis, several factor analyses have been conducted and t-tests have been used to determine differences between distinct groups and establish significance. Furthermore I analysed the open-ended responses and the descriptive statistics. The results will be presented in the next chapter. Before performing statistical tests, the variables were prepared. For instance, a dummy variable was created of the variable ‘age’, in order to distinguish between target group (18-35 years old) and rest group.

Descriptive statistics - Firstly, I analyse the descriptive statistics, looking at the means scores and standard deviations of all items.

Factor analysis - Secondly, I will run two common factor analyses because I am interested in searching structure among the set of character traits and communication styles. Principal axis factoring is used to identify underlying dimensions that reflect what the variables have in

common (Hair et al., 2013). I used Oblique rotation (Direct Oblimin) as a method for rotation, since this method allows for factors correlations. The sample size is considered to be sufficient (n=441), since there are 42 variables included in the questionnaire and the rule of thumb is at least five respondents per variable. The dataset that has been analysed contains items of both brand personality and brand communication style. Firstly, I have conducted a factor analysis using all brand personality items of Aaker, resulting in two factors. Secondly, I run a factor analysis using all communicator style variables of Norton, which resulted in two factors as well. The determination of the number of factors is based on Eigenvalues exceeding 1.

T-tests - Finally, several T-tests were conducted to examine the difference between various groups. The t-statistics were evaluated at a significance level of .05.

3.3.4 Robustness checks

To test and ensure validity and reliability, different robustness tests have been conducted.

Factor analyses – To assess the internal reliability of the variables that are assigned to the different factors, Cronbach's Alpha is used. A Cronbach's alpha above the critical value of .700 indicates reliability of the constructs. All factor analysis reported values higher than .700, indicating that the scale is reliable. Additionally, I checked whether the score on the Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin technique is above the critical value of .500 and furthermore whether Bartlett's test of Sphericity is significant. Both factor analysis reported KMO values above .500 and had a significant score on the Bartlett's test of Sphericity. Lastly, I checked whether the communalities were above .300, which was the case.

T-test - To conduct an ANOVA or t-test, the variables should be normally distributed. Normality was evaluated by testing the skewness and kurtosis, which must be between -3 and 3 (Hair et al., 2013). This proved to hold true. Lastly, I successfully tested the assumption of equal variance across groups, by conducting a Levene's Test.

4. Results

4.1 The Intended Brand Personality and Brand Communication Style

4.1.1 Documents

The first important document that has been analysed is the “Communication House”. The four pillars ‘magnetic attraction’, ‘wittiness’, ‘iconic elements’, and ‘product experience’ are the main elements of all brand communications of XXX. If those elements are included in all communications, this should lead to an irresistible brand. The communication pillars are built upon the personality of XXX, which is defined in this document as ‘positive’, ‘aspirational’ and ‘witty’. The foundation where everything is based upon is its ‘heritage’.

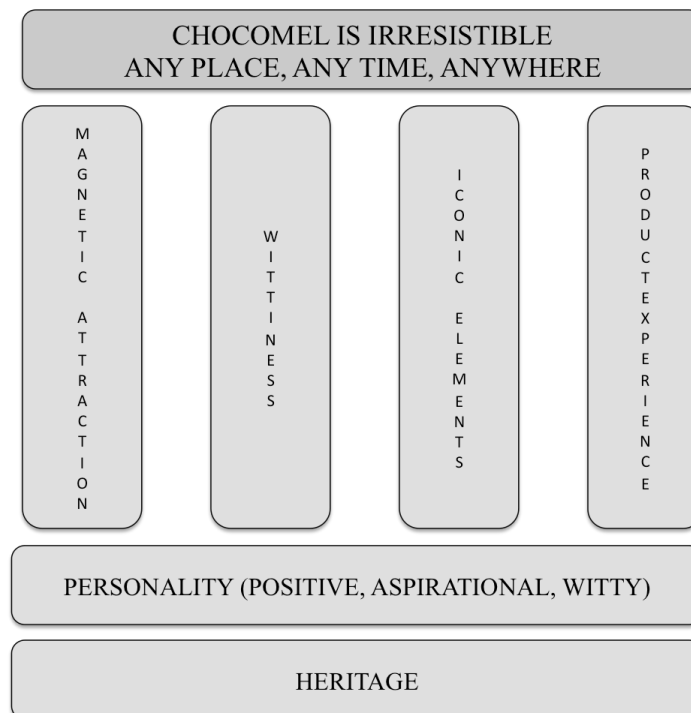


Figure 4. Communication House

Another document that has been analysed is the brand manual, in which XXX outlines guidance regarding the communication of the brand. In this document the style of communication has not been described, however it provides insights into the unique (patented) colours of the brand logo and other important brand elements. Additionally, this document shortly describes the target group. Finally, documents were analysed that describe the target group of XXX in more detail. From the documents it can be inferred that XXX has

changed target group very recently. The new target group is described as both males and females of the age of 18 to 35, who have a busy life and are often active on social media.

4.1.2 Interviews

In the following part of the thesis, the intended brand personality and communication style will be outlined. For clarity purposes I included a list in appendix 3.2 consisting of the explanations and translations of the most important intended characteristics and styles.

Intended Brand Personality

Open description - In examining the intended brand personality, interviewees were first asked to imagine and describe XXX as a person. The brand owners typified the intended brand personality of XXX as humoristic and witty, lively, mischievous, cosy, and positive.

The interviews indicate that a major intended characteristic of XXX is to have a humoristic and witty personality. In all nine interviews the adjective ‘humoristic’, or a synonym of humoristic was used to describe the intended personality. Adjectives related to humoristic that were mentioned were ‘witty’, ‘joke maker’, ‘animated’, and ‘with a wink’ (in Dutch: “met een knipoog”). Quotes of how interviewees described this characteristic: *“In everything the person XXX does, he or she does it with a witty wink”* (intern, interview 6), *“He likes a joke and he likes to joke”* (brand leader, interview 1). The terms witty and humoristic are slightly different from each other. However since every participant mentioned that the character of XXX was intended to be humoristic in a clever, witty manner, I merged these adjectives into one major intended characteristic.

With the exception of one interview, every participant mentioned the characteristic lively. Terms that were frequently used to refer to this characteristic were ‘active’, ‘energetic’, and ‘lively’.

A third important intended characteristic appeared to be mischievous. In eight out of the nine interviews the adjective ‘mischievous’ or a synonym was used such as ‘rebellious’, ‘tough’, and ‘cheeky’. *“XXX is just a cosy, mischievous, and a bit of a tough guy. But always cheerful”* (brand leader, interview 1). *“That mischievous and sturdy character can mostly be observed in our desire to be edgy, witty, and playful, while at the same time always being cheerful and positive”* (category developer, interview 3).

Six out of the nine brand owners furthermore typified XXX as cosy. *“XXX is intended to be a cosy and warm person”* (intern, interview 5). *“The personality we want to convey is cosy and open”* (category developer, interview 3).

Lastly, the characteristic positive was mentioned in several interviews.

“XXX is a sturdy, cool person. Retro cool actually. My top three of the Aaker dimensions are cheerful, spirited or energetic, and tough. Oh! Reliable certainly applies as well!” (Brand leader about the Aaker dimensions, interview 1)

Aaker dimensions - When asking the participants to make a top three of the applicable Aaker items, the characteristics cheerful, spirited, tough, and reliable appeared to be important. Other traits that were referred to, but less frequently so, were charming and honest. This indicates that four of the five brand personality dimensions appear to be applicable to the intended brand personality of XXX: sincerity, competence, ruggedness, and sophistication. An overview is presented in table 2 (appendix 3.3).

The characteristic cheerful was mentioned in every top three. In providing an explanation, participants mentioned the adjectives ‘humoristic’, ‘open’, and ‘positive’. These words also spontaneously came up when describing the intended brand personality of XXX in the open-ended questions. *“XXX certainly has a very cheerful character. Always positive and frequently attempts to make jokes”* (channel marketer, interview 4).

Spirited appeared to be another important personality trait, since six participants mentioned it. This trait was explained to the participants as being lively and energetic. Lively was also mentioned frequently in the spontaneous description of the intended brand personality.

Tough is a third item that was mentioned several times. *“XXX is a little mischievous and tough, but certainly not too much”* (category developer, interview 3). The adjectives ‘tough’ and ‘mischievous’ were also mentioned frequently when spontaneously describing the intended characteristics before being exposed to the Aaker dimensions. The interviews indicate however, that the personality of XXX was not always intended to be mischievous (interview 3, interview 5, interview 8). All nine participants mentioned that XXX has changed target group two years ago. While previously the target group was children, they now focus on young adults of the age of 18 to 35. To reach this target group, they repositioned the brand and they are trying to create a more witty, mischievous brand personality. *“In trying to reach an older target group, our brand personality is also allowed to be a bit more sturdy, mischievous. We try to be funny and witty, with a sharp edge, but always within the lines!”* (category developer, interview 3). *“Well, I think we all understand that XXX wants to create a more rebellious personality”* (social media manager, interview 8).

Reliable was also mentioned a few times, though it was never mentioned first. *“Oh! And reliable certainly applies as well!”* (brand leader, interview 1). When spontaneously describing the intended personality, reliable was only mentioned by one participant (interview

7). This might indicate that being reliable is important for XXX, but it is not one of the major personality characteristics the brand owners want to convey actively.

Other mentioned dimensions were charming and honest. According to the channel marketer, “*XXX should always be interpreted with a wink, and is maybe even a little flirtatious. So in that sense a little charming*” (interview 4).

Intended Brand Communication Style

Open description - Respondents typified the communication style of XXX as informal, positive, humoristic, conversational, and mischievous. Attentive was mentioned as an important reactive communication style.

Firstly, all nine participants indicated that the communication style was desired to be informal, rather than to be formal. “*We tend to communicate in a informal manner, because we always try be friendly and to stay close to consumers and we always communicate with a wink*” (brand leader, interview 1). “*We try always to be positive, open, and friendly*” (future brand leader, interview 7).

Furthermore it appeared from the interviews that major intended communication styles are positive, humoristic and witty. “*We do not communicate like a joker, but with a wink. Witty*” (brand leader, interview 1). An example of this positive and humoristic style is the slogan “*I love beastly weather! It is always time for a XXX*” (brand manager, interview 2). In explaining the desired clever (witty) humoristic communication style, several participants referred to the Communication House, in which the term ‘witty’ is positioned as the main communication style and main personality of the brand.

In addition, an interactive or conversational style appeared to be important. XXX tries to engage in conversations with its customers on for example social media “*by sending likable, funny questions as response*” (brand leader, interview 1).

Lastly, it appeared that the style of communication is intended to be mischievous. “*Company X gave us the instruction to communicate in a positive, witty, a bit rebellious, and funny way*” (social media manager, interview 8). “*Our messages are a little mischievous and edgy. It should not be too goody-goody*” (social conceper, interview 9).

Norton style variables - Interviewees were asked to make a top three out of the nine style variables of Norton’s communicator style construct. The styles impression leaving, open, and animated were mentioned the most. Furthermore the variables friendly, dramatic, and attentive were mentioned several times.

The style variable open was mentioned first in everyone's top three. Remarkably, the word open was not used when spontaneously describing the intended brand communication style. However, the terms informal, positive, conversational, and attentive were mentioned frequently. These terms are all related to each other.

With respect to the communication style impression leaving, the brand owners argued that they intend to communicate in a very impactful manner. *"You always know whether you have seen a XXX message or not. The colour, the style. You can not ignore it"* (brand leader, interview 1).

Furthermore animated was mentioned in several top threes. The brand owners argued that they try to communicate in an energetic and humoristic way (interview 2, interview 8). *"Look to our newest TV commercial where a sort of 'The Devil Wears Prada' setting is created. Animating and with a wink"* (brand manager, interview 2).

Lastly, the dimensions dramatic and friendly appeared to apply as well, as they were mentioned several times. It appeared that with respect to the dramatic style, participants meant 'to exaggerate in a funny way'. *"A dramatic style is also shown on social media. For instance, the ad we displayed, in which someone used a Ferrari to drive to the supermarket as fast as possible to buy a XXX, is dramatic and not functional at all"* (future brand leader, interview 7).

With respect to the reactive style of communicating, it appears that XXX intends to communicate positively and furthermore attentively by listening very well to the customers (interview 1, interview 3, interview 8, interview 9). *"When it comes to responding to a complaint, we try to respond positive. We will not respond defensively or in a technical, formal way"* (brand leader, interview 1).

Additional Interesting Findings

Repositioning - The interviews indicate that XXX is trying to reposition itself as a more adult brand. In striving for this repositioning, the brand attempts to achieve a more witty and little mischievous brand personality by adapting its communication style, its communication- and marketing strategy, and by focusing on a new target group. *"The communication style must be a little self-willed, positive, and witty. These styles are briefed to us to ensure a rebellious personality"* (social media manager, interview 8).

"When people tag the brand in a photo of a little child, we do not re-tweet this. However when a group of youngsters is in the photo, we of course re-tweet it" (intern retail, interview 6).

The XXX team tries to reach the new target group by catchy ads on Facebook and introducing new recipes to mix the beverage with alcohol. Moreover they try to introduce new ways and

moments to drink the beverage by introducing the ‘ice cold cup’ and by linking the beverage with festivals and parties such as ‘Solar Festival’ or ‘Zwarte Cross’. Additionally, the communication strategy of XXX appears to include indirect channels such as food- and fashion blogs and magazines. Lastly, it appeared that customers can nowadays add XXX on their mobile application ‘Whatsapp’ to receive mischievous challenges in order to win festival tickets.

However, the repositioning process is argued to be a familiarization process. *“Especially our fans have to slowly get used to XXX becoming more and more an adult brand”* (brand manager, interview 2). Brand owners mention that they expect that customers, and in particular the fans, still associate XXX with a kids drink and do not see the intended ‘mischievous’ character yet.

Communication via social media - It appears that the use of Facebook is of very high importance for the brand. The Facebook fan page is managed by the global media agency MEC Amsterdam. MEC has been extensively briefed about the brand, its personality, the desired tone of voice and the desired target group of the brand. The XXX Facebook page, which is called the ‘fanbase’, has more than 91.000 likes. Facebook is used for two purposes. On the one hand, it is used for all communication activities to the fanbase itself. These activities consist of responding to questions and comments of customers: *“If it is a very tricky question, then MEC contacts the consumer service and in turn translates the answer to the tone of voice of XXX”* (brand leader, interview 1). Furthermore the fanbase is used for posting relevant advertisements or messages. On the other hand, the second purpose of Facebook is to reach the target group via sponsored posts.

The interviews indicate that when communicating via social media, there is a small difference in the style of the message, depending on whether the audience is part of the fan group or target group (interview 2, interview 8, interview 9). It appears that still a somewhat more goody-goody style is used when communicating to the fans. According to the brand manager, showing XXX products with a catchy slogan is enough for the fans: it does not necessarily have to be very witty. *“We still have posts that are only aimed at the fanbase. These are somewhat different than the posts that are intended for the target group, because then we can actually use a little more challenging style, and be a little more rebellious”* (social media manager, interview 8). However, interviewees argued that the style of the messages on the fanbase will gradually become wittier as well.

Aligning the Brand Personality and Brand Communication Style - Within Company X, two different teams are working on the brand XXX: a retail team and a foodservice team. It appears that these teams meet on a regularly basis to align their activities. The brand leader

and category developer meet on weekly basis. It appears that also the global media agency MEC is totally up-to-date regarding the brand personality, objectives, target group, and tone of voice of XXX. The brand leader states: *“MEC is well aware of the tone of voice and brand personality”* (interview 1).

Relevant documents concerning the intended brand personality and communication style were mentioned several times during the interviews, indicating that the brand owners are familiar with those documents. Especially the Communication House and the Brand Manual were mentioned frequently. This is noteworthy, since I concluded from the document analysis as well that those were relevant documents. Both the document analysis and the interviews indicate that the tone of voice is anchored in the Communication House. The participants also explained that the Communication House (figure 4) consists of four pillars that have to be included in every message. *“One of the communication pillars is wittiness, which is part of the personality and a very important tone of voice that we want to emphasize”* (brand leader, interview 1). The pillars are based on the personality, which is intended to be positive, aspirational, and witty.

4.1.3 Intermediate summary

Alignment

It appears that all nine participants have a shared understanding of the brand personality and the brand communication style of XXX, since similar and consistent words and terms were used in each interview. This indicates that the brand personality and the brand communication style have been clearly defined within the organization and that they have been actively brought to life, for and by the employees. Furthermore, it appears that the brand personality and brand communication style as outlined in the documents match well with the statements made in the interviews. Interviewees referred frequently to especially the Communication House and described how they utilize it.

Interestingly, when asking participants about their feelings about XXX as a person and its intended personality and the corresponding communication style, each respondent needed a few seconds to reflect on this. Eventually, all participants did provide a description and I can conclude that all words and terms were in line with each other. The fact that everyone did not immediately respond to the question, but after a moment of reflection provided quite similar answers, indicates that the intended brand personality and brand communication style indeed exist in the minds of the brand owners, even though they have not been indiscriminately memorized from a given document. This renders evidence that both concepts are top of mind.

Intentions

Table 1 (appendix 3.3) provides a list of the major intended characteristics and communication styles of XXX. Analysis of the documents and interviews indicate that the major intended brand personality characteristics can be divided into two categories. An overview of this dichotomy is provided below in table 3. The entire table is also included in appendix 3.4. The first category consists of characteristics that could be summarized as “*friendly, welcoming, and open*”. Intended characteristics within this category are cosy, positive, cheerful, reliable and honest. The second category consists of characteristics that are more playful, in a mischievous kind of way. I will name this category “*playful, mischievous*” and it exists of the characteristics witty, humoristic, mischievous, tough, lively, and charming. These characteristics appear very important for XXX, especially in reaching the new target group (interview 3, interview 8).

The same categories can be distinguished regarding the intended communication style. The “*friendly, welcoming, open*” category includes the intended styles informal, positive, conversational, open, friendly, and attentive. Further major intended communication styles appear to be witty, humoristic, mischievous, impression leaving, and dramatic. These styles belong to the category “*playful, mischievous*”. At first glance dramatic seems to be the odd man out. However, the dramatic style is meant in a playful, funny kind of way. Therefore it also fits to this category.

Analysis of the interviews indicates that the set of characteristics and styles of the category “*playful, mischievous*” matches the repositioning of XXX as a more adult brand. It appears that the brand owners want to convey the intended mischievous personality by communicating in a humoristic, witty, and mischievous kind of way.

Linkage between Brand Personality and Brand Communication Style

When evaluating the intended brand personality and brand communication style, these appear to be in sync with each other. XXX intends to be “*friendly, welcoming, and open*” and also “*mischievous and playful*”. In order to convey this personality, all messages are intended to have a *humoristic, informal, positive, and little rebellious* style. Additionally, inter alia the brand manager pointed out that these concepts are strongly intertwined. “*The tone of voice and the brand personality are definitely corresponding. We do not want to be a schizophrenic brand*” (brand manager, interview 2). Lastly, the interconnectedness of the concepts becomes apparent from the Communication House document as well, where the communication style and personality both include ‘witty’ and the communication pillars are built on the brand personality, which functions as ‘cement’. These findings indicate that the communication style can be seen as an expression of the personality of XXX.

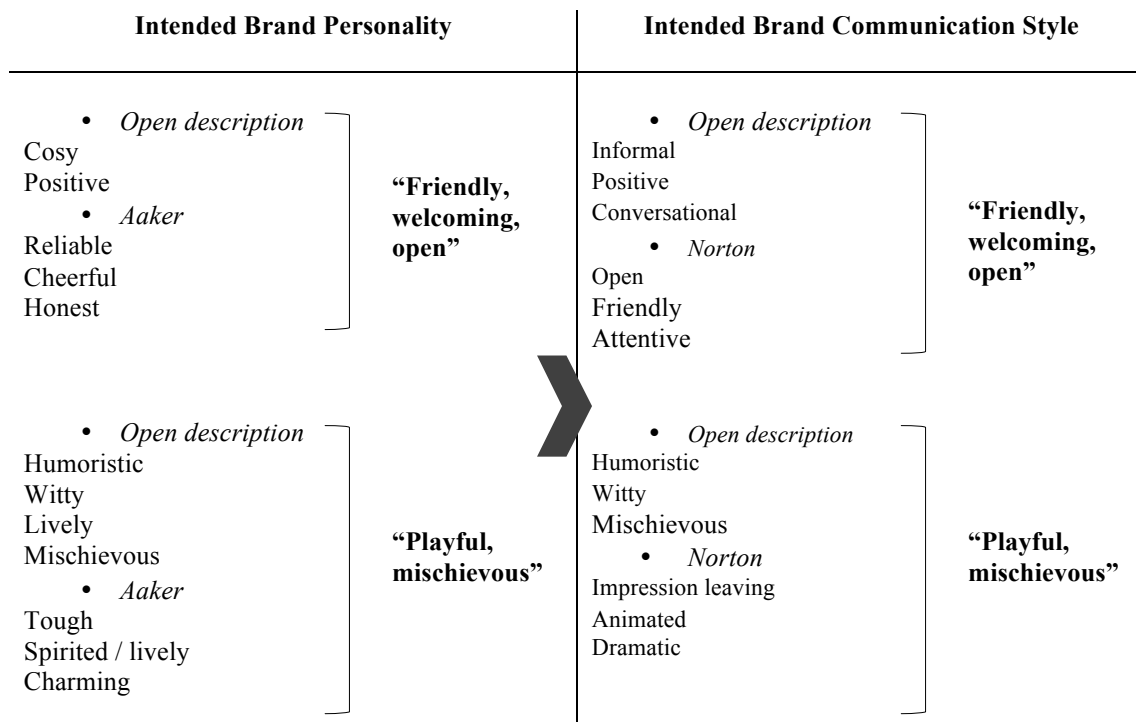


Table 3. Schematic overview of the major Intended Personality Characteristics and Intended Communication Styles and their related categories

4.2 The Perceived Brand Personality and Brand Communication Style

4.2.1 Open-ended Questions

Before posing the Likert-scale questions, I asked respondents to spontaneously write down two characteristics of XXX. The unstructured question regarding the perceived brand personality resulted in 327 valid answers. There were 114 missing values: 21 respondents did not provide an answer, and 93 responses did not relate to personality characteristics. Cosy was the most frequently cited characteristic, which was mentioned spontaneously 81 times, as table 4 below shows. Furthermore reliable, friendly, and cheerful were written down very frequently. The entire table is included in appendix 4.1.

Personality characteristic	Frequency
Cosy	81
Reliable	43
Friendly	36
Cheerful	26

Table 4. Perceived Brand Characteristics: unstructured responses

In the second open-ended survey question, I asked participants to write down at least two communication styles that are applicable to XXX. The unstructured question resulted in 278 valid answers. As depicted in table 5, friendly was the most mentioned communication style (41 times). Humoristic, open, and informal were written down frequently as well. The entire table is included in Appendix 4.1. The frequencies seem few at first glance, however they are spontaneous associations without the respondent being exposed to previous examples of communication styles. Therefore they can be considered as important perceptions of the communication style of XXX.

Communication style	Frequency
Friendly	41
Humoristic	33
Open	32
Informal	28

Table 5. Perceived Brand Communication Styles: unstructured responses

Overall, analysis of the unstructured responses indicates that the majority of the characteristics and styles that were written down all relate to the previously mentioned category “*friendly, welcoming, and open*”. This is noteworthy, because analysis of brand owners’ intentions indicated that this is also one of the major categories concerning the intended brand personality and communication style.

Characteristics such as witty, humoristic, and mischievous were almost not mentioned, although these appear to be major intended characteristics and communication styles of XXX belonging to its repositioning. Nevertheless, as can be observed in table 5, humoristic did appear to be a major perceived communication style. This is somewhat unexpected as the term humoristic was barely mentioned with respect to the brand personality.

4.2.2 Descriptive Statistics

Characteristics compiled from interviews - Table 6.1 and 6.2 show the descriptive statistics for the five lowest and highest scores on the characteristics compiled from the interviews. The entire tables are included as table 6 in appendix 4.2. As can be observed in table 6.1, the lowest scoring traits are arrogant, sexy, old-fashioned, witty and mischievous. The characteristics arrogant, sexy, and old-fashioned were however also not mentioned by the brand owners as being important.

The highest scoring characteristic is cosy, followed by reliable, positive, friendly, and cheerful (table 6.2). These high scoring characteristics - relating to the category “*friendly, welcoming, open*” - were also mentioned most frequently in the open-ended survey question, which strengthens the outcomes from both the descriptive statistics and open-ended questions.

Lastly, the descriptive statistics indicate that important intended characteristics such as witty, mischievous, and humoristic have a relatively low score compared to the highest scoring characteristics (table 6.1). In the open-ended survey question, these characteristics were also not mentioned frequently. This indicates that the customer might recognize these characteristics, however they are not spontaneously associated with XXX and they are not perceived as main characteristics of the brand.

	Arrogant	Sexy	Old- fashioned	Mischievous	Witty	Humoristic
Mean	2.29	3.33	3.66	4.01	4.26	4.56
Std. Deviation	1.619	1.836	2.031	1.813	1.592	1.642
N	441	441	441	441	441	441

Table 6.1. Descriptive statistics Brand Characteristics compiled from interviews – 5 lowest scores Brand Personality Perceptions + the score on ‘humoristic’

	Cosy	Reliable	Positive	Friendly	Cheerful
Mean	5.63	5.59	5.57	5.40	5.39
Std. Deviation	1.447	1.467	1.398	1.446	1.516
N	441	441	441	441	441

Table 6.2. Descriptive statistics Brand Characteristics compiled from the interviews – 5 highest scores Brand Personality Perceptions

Aaker personality items - Concerning the means of the brand personality traits of Aaker, the descriptive statistics indicate that the items reliable, honest, and cheerful score highest (table 7.1). These highest scoring items belong to two of the five Aaker dimensions: ‘competence’ and ‘sincerity’ (see table 9, appendix 4.3 for an overview).

It is noteworthy that the highest scoring Aaker items largely correspond to the characteristics that also appeared to be important based on the open-ended survey question and the descriptive statistics scores discussed above. On the basis of these results, there appears to be an unambiguous category of brand personality perceptions related to “*friendly, welcoming, open*”.

The items upper-class and daring scored the lowest. Keep in mind, these two characteristics were also not mentioned by the brand owners as being applicable to XXX. The dimensions charming, tough and spirited did appear to be important intended characteristics, related to the category “*playful, mischievous*”. However, as depicted in table 7.2, the customer does not necessarily perceive these as major characteristics. The entire table 7 is included in appendix 4.2.

	Reliable	Honest	Cheerful	Daring	Upper-class
Mean	5.49	5.35	5.33	4.46	3.70
Std. Deviation	1.511	1.468	1.478	1.672	1.796
N	441	441	441	441	441

Table 7.1 Descriptive statistics Brand Personality Items Aaker - 3 highest and 2 lowest scoring items

	Charming	Tough	Spirited/lively
Mean	4.55	4.63	5.00
Std. Deviation	1.596	1.652	1.559
N	441	441	441

Table 7.2. Descriptive statistics Brand Personality Items Aaker

Norton style variables - The table below shows the descriptive statistics for the score on the style variables of Norton. The brand communication styles friendly, relaxed, and open score highest. These scores strengthen the findings from the open-ended survey question, since these styles were written down most frequently (table 5, appendix 4.1). These major perceived style variables of Norton are in line with the important intended style variables.

Furthermore, the communication styles attentive, impression leaving, animated, and dramatic appear to be important intended style variables as well. As can be observed from the table below however, particularly the style variables impression leaving and dramatic are not perceived as major communication styles of XXX.

	Friendly	Relaxed	Open			
Mean	5.60	5.38	5.26			
Std. Deviation	1.374	1.444	1.489			
N	441	441	441			

	Impression					
	Animated	Attentive	leaving	Contentious	Dramatic	Dominant
Mean	5.06	4.89	4.63	3.64	3.49	2.94
Std. Deviation	1.587	1.587	1.614	1.804	1.658	1.637
N	441	441	441	441	441	441

Table 8. Descriptive statistics Norton Style Variables – Communication Style Perceptions

Multiple-choice question – Lastly, regarding the informal style, the results of the multiple-choice question indicate that most respondents (79,5%) perceive the communication style of XXX as informal (friendly, open, personal) rather than formal. This strengthens the outcome of the open-ended question regarding the perceived communication style, as informal was also one of the styles that was written down most frequently there.

4.2.3 Intermediate Summary

Table 10 below (also included in appendix 4.3) provides a schematic overview of the major perceived characteristics and communication styles of XXX. Overall, analysis of the unstructured responses in combination with the descriptive statistics indicates that the major perceived characteristics and communication styles relate to the category “*friendly, welcoming, open*”.

The main perceived characteristics - which all relate to this category - are cosy, reliable, friendly, cheerful, honest, and positive. Major perceived communication styles relating to this category are friendly, open, informal, and relaxed. Furthermore the customer appears to perceive a humoristic communication style. This style is part of the intended category “*playful, mischievous*”. However, the customer does not perceive the intended witty and

mischievous communication styles belonging to this category. Therefore I named the second perceived communication style category “*playful, humoristic*”.

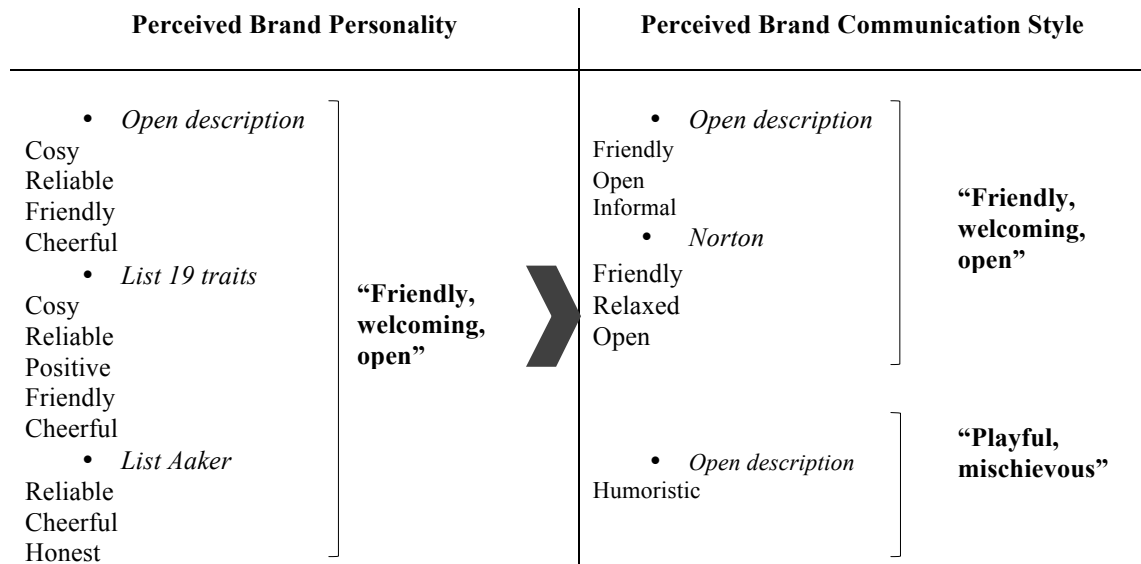


Table 10. Schematic overview of major Perceived Brand Personality Characteristics and Communication Styles and their related categories

4.2.4 Factor analyses

Tables 11 and 12 contain the results from the factor analyses; variables with coefficients below .30 were suppressed to increase the clarity of the table.

Aaker dimensions - The first factor analysis, concerning the brand personality dimensions of Aaker, yields two factors that jointly explain 64.61% of the variance. As table 11.1 below shows, factor 1 has high loadings on the variables daring, spirited, imaginative, up-to-date, outdoorsy, tough, and upper-class. The second factor has a high loading on the variables down-to-earth, honest, reliable, and successful. Three cross-loaders can be identified: factor 1 and 2 both have high loadings on the variables cheerful, intelligent, and charming. However, I decided not to delete them, since these are relevant brand personality characteristics according to the theory, as they are dimensions of the widely used measurement scale of Aaker. In addition, the objective of the factor analysis is data summarization and the identification of logical combinations between characteristics rather than data reduction.

Pattern Matrix

	Factor 1	Factor 2
Daring	.965	
Spirited	.709	
Imaginative	.758	
Up-to-date	.677	
Outdoorsy	.820	
Tough	.760	
Upper-class	.464	
Down-to-earth		.577
Honest		.774
Reliable		.954
Successful		.627
Cheerful	.440	.440
Intelligent	.527	.383
Charming	.491	.363
Variance explained	58.62%	58.62%
Cumulative variance	5.99%	64.61%
Cronbach's Alpha	.940	.917

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy: .947

Table 11.1. Factor Analysis Brand Personality Items Aaker

Pattern Matrix

	Factor 1	Factor 2
Animated	.657	
Impression leaving	.648	
Relaxed	.823	
Attentive	.767	
Open	.846	
Friendly	.924	
Dominant		.695
Dramatic		.652
Contentious		.700
Variance explained	46.31%	14.54%
Cumulative variance	46.31%	60.85%
Cronbach's Alpha	.906	.737

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy: .870

Table 12. Factor Analysis Brand Communication Style Variables Norton

Norton style variables - The second factor analysis (table 12) resulted in two factors as well, explaining 60.85% of the variance. Factor 1 has high loadings on the variables animated, impression leaving, relaxed, attentive, open, and friendly. Factor 2 has high loadings on dominant, dramatic, and contentious.

The factor analyses render evidence that there are two clusters of “behaviour of perception” with respect to the brand personality and communication style perceptions.

Concerning the Aaker dimensions, two latent factors emerged with high loadings on all variables indicating that the image of XXX is inconsistent with respect to the perceived brand personality. As such, it appears that there are two distinctive brand images. The first latent factor could be described as “*sensation seeker*”, as it is composed out of more daring and spirited traits. Variables belonging to this factor also correspond to the previous mentioned category “*playful, mischievous*”. The second latent factor could be characterized as a “*stability seeker*”, as the underlying dimensions are strongly related to characteristics such as reliability and honesty. This factor is also related to the previous mentioned category “*friendly, welcoming, open*”.

The dimensions cheerful, intelligent, and charming have high loadings on both factors, which might be an indication that those variables belong to both “views” regarding the perception of brand personality. It could be hypothesized that certain characteristics, such as the three mentioned above, are always encountered, as they could be for example part of the brand identity. In particular, the variable “cheerful” could be subject to this conjecture, since it has a high average and was also often spontaneously mentioned in the open-ended survey question.

With regard to the Norton dimensions, I also identified two factors that describe the relationship between the communication style variables. Again, the variables can be combined in two distinctive groups: on the one hand, the first factor is composed out of dimensions such as friendly, open, and impression leaving. This factor could be described as “*welcoming*”. On the other hand, the second factor is rather described by variables such as dominant, dramatic, and contentious, and could be labelled as “*conflict seeking*”.

Overall, the above-mentioned dichotomy with regard to both the characteristics and the styles also becomes apparent from the factor analyses. Although I assigned slightly different names to the factors of both factor analyses, they are largely corresponding to the previously mentioned categories “*friendly, welcoming, open*” and “*playful, mischievous*”.

4.2.5 T-test

In the following section I will discuss several t-tests used to compare means of groups to one another. Firstly, I will run several t-tests to see whether the mean scores of the fanbase significantly differ from the non-fanbase scores. Secondly, several t-tests will be conducted to investigate whether the mean of the target group significantly differs from the mean of the non-target group. The full tables can be found in Appendix 4.5 and 4.6.

Fanbase versus Non-fanbase - The first comparison is made between fanbase and non-fanbase. The fanbase can be defined as the respondents who have liked the XXX Facebook page and follow XXX on social media on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. The non-fanbase group can be defined as the group of respondents who have not liked the XXX Facebook page and who do not (or not more than once a year) visit the XXX Facebook page.

The first t-test compares the means of the characteristics compiled on the basis of the interviews. It is remarkable that there are significant differences in mean between fans and non-fans on almost all characteristics (17 out of the 19), with the exception of goody-goody and arrogant. The fanbase group generally has higher averages, except for the characteristic old-fashioned (table 13). This indicates that the fanbase group perceives the personality of XXX less old-fashioned compared to the non-fanbase group. The below table 13 indicates that the highest significant differences in mean are encountered for the characteristics sexy, witty, humoristic, adventurous, cosy, and mischievous. Interestingly, these highest mean differences are encountered for the majority of characteristics that relate to the previous defined category “playful, mischievous”. Derived from the finding of the first t-test, it can be inferred that there are high differences in perception amongst groups that do follow XXX on social media and groups that do not.

The second t-test compares the means of the scores on the personality dimensions of Aaker. As table 14 in Appendix 4.5 shows, the means on all personality dimensions are significant higher for the fanbase group.

	Sexy	Witty	Humoristic	Adventurous	Cosy	Mischievous	Old-fashioned
Mean group Fanbase	3.94	4.79	5.09	4.97	6.11	4.49	3.29
N	141	141	141	141	141	141	141
Mean group Non-fanbase	3.05	4.01	4.31	4.22	5.40	3.79	3.85
N	300	300	300	300	300	300	300
Mean difference	.890	.788	.782	.748	.710	.699	-.549
Sign.	(.000)***	(.000)***	(.000)***	(.000)***	(.000)***	(.000)***	(.008)***

Table 13. T-test comparing Brand Personality Fanbase to Non-fanbase

The last t-test, which compares the fanbase with the non-fanbase on the communicator style variables of Norton, indicates that the fanbase has significant higher means on six of the nine style dimensions (table 15, Appendix 4.5). The characteristics with significant mean

differences are shown in table 15 below. As the variables dominant, dramatic, and contentious are not statistically significant, it appears that there are no differences on these style perceptions between fanbase group and the non-fanbase group.

	Impression					
	leaving	Animated	Attentive	Friendly	Relaxed	Open
Mean group Fanbase	5.17	5.51	5.33	5.96	5.80	5.65
N	141	141	141	141	141	141
Mean group Non-fanbase	4.38	4.38	4.69	5.43	5.18	5.07
N	300	300	300	300	300	300
Mean difference	.794	.657	.636	.531	.625	.572
Sign.	(.000)***	(.000)***	(.000)***	(.000)***	(.000)***	(.000)***

Table 15. T-test comparing Brand Communication Style Fanbase to Non-fanbase

Overall, the results of these three t-tests indicate that social media usage influences the perception of the customer regarding the personality and the communication style of a brand.

Target group versus Non-target group - The final t-tests compare the target group and the non-target group. Comparing the means of the two groups on the personality characteristics compiled from the interviews, it can be observed that the mean of the target group is only significantly lower for the dimensions old-fashioned, lively, and wise (table 16). Regarding the other dimensions, none of the means differ significantly from one another. The full table is included in Appendix 4.6.

	Old-fashioned	Active – Lively	Wise
Mean target group	3.32	4.61	4.14
N	140	140	140
Mean non-target group	3.82	4.98	4.46
N	301	301	301
Mean difference	-.502	-.376	-.319
Sign.	(.015)***	(.024)***	(.046)***

Table 16. T-test comparing Brand Personality Target group to Non-target group

The second t-test compares both groups on the brand personality dimensions of Aaker. Considering the means of each characteristic, there are no statistically significant differences among the groups (table 17, Appendix 4.6).

The third and final t-test compares the means of the groups on the communicator style dimensions of Norton (table 18, Appendix 4.6). Similar to the previous t-test, no statistically significant differences in means can be found between target group and non-target group.

Hence, interestingly this indicates that the target group and non-target group do not differ in perception regarding the brand personality and brand communication style of XXX.

5. Discussion

5.1 Discussion of results

This thesis served the purpose to examine whether and to what extent the perceived brand personality and brand communication style correspond to the intended brand personality and brand communication style. In order to answer these research questions, I compared the brand owners' intentions with the customers' perception. Furthermore I examined to what extent the brand communication style could be seen as an expression of the brand personality.

Intentions - Considering the document- and interview analyses, I concluded that the intended characteristics could be divided into two categories, on the one hand characteristics related to “friendly, welcoming, open” and on the other hand characteristics related to “playful, mischievous”. This dichotomy is also evident when analysing the applicable Aaker dimensions (table 19, appendix 5). The same categories as mentioned above can be distinguished with regard to the intended brand communication style. On the one hand the brand attempts to communicate in a “friendly, welcoming, open” manner, however at the same time all messages intend to have a “playful, mischievous” style.

Analysis of the interviews indicates that the set of characteristics and styles of the last category “playful, mischievous” corresponds to the brand repositioning of XXX.

It appears that the brand attempts to change the customers' perception from a kids brand into a more adult brand, in order to appeal to a different target group (young adults). To achieve a successful repositioning, the brand attempts to create a witty, mischievous, and rebellion brand personality by adapting its communication style and its communication- and marketing strategies.

Linkage between Brand Personality and Brand Communication Style - While the few analyses present in the literature explicitly look at the connectedness on interpersonal level between personality and communication style, my expectation was that those two concepts would be linked on brand level as well. The last research question reflects this expectation. It was interesting to observe that the brand personality and communication style indeed correspond to each other. To be more specific, the “friendly, welcoming, open” characteristics are expressed by a communication style of the same category (as can be observed in table 20, appendix 5). Furthermore, the more “playful, mischievous” characteristics are also in line with the communication style, which is especially important to the successful repositioning of the brand. This implies that the brand communication style of XXX can be considered as an

expression of its intended brand personality, which is in line with the expectations derived from the literature (e.g. De Vries et al., 2011).

Correspondence between Intentions and Perceptions - Turning to the comparison between the intentions and perceptions, I observed that the perceived brand personality and communication style are partially corresponding to the intended brand personality and communication style. A total overview of the intentions and perceptions is depicted in table 20, appendix 5. Partial correspondence was anticipated, because it appeared that the brand owners expected that the customers would not experience the new personality that matches the repositioning yet. Also in the literature it was indicated that in many cases brand owners fail to effectively implement a brand personality in a sense that the perception of the customer is not in line with the intention of the brand owner.

Considering the open-ended questions and descriptive statistics, major perceived characteristics of XXX appeared to be cosy, reliable, friendly, positive, cheerful and honest. These perceived characteristics relate to the category “friendly, welcoming, and open”. In terms of the last mentioned category, the intentions and perceptions are fully aligned. In fact, it can be concluded that the “friendly, welcoming open” characteristics are deeply embedded in the customers’ minds.

However, characteristics related to the category “playful, mischievous” are not perceived by the customer yet. This demonstrates that the intentions and perceptions concerning the brand personality partially correspond, and hence that implementation of the brand personality has been successful to a certain degree. This is in line with prior literature, demonstrating that connectedness between intentions and perceptions must not always be assumed immediately. Concerning the connectedness between the intentions and perceptions with respect to the communication style, it can also be concluded that those are partially aligned. Dutch consumers tend to view the brand communication style of XXX as friendly, open, informal, relaxed, and humoristic. Again, these styles mainly correspond to the recurring category “friendly, welcoming, open”. The majority of styles that relate to the category “playful, mischievous” are not perceived, with the exception of humoristic. It was observed that a humoristic communication style in a witty kind of way is also one of the major intended communication styles of XXX. Furthermore witty and humoristic appeared to be major intended characteristics.

It is striking that although the customers do not perceive the personality of XXX as being humoristic, they do perceive a humoristic communication style. This implies that the intentions and perceptions of the brand communication style are slightly more aligned than the intentions and perceptions of brand personality. This finding is in line with the

expectations derived from the literature. As discussed in the theoretical framework, brand personality perceptions depend on several factors, such as direct and indirect contact between customer and brand or the behaviour and communications of the brand. Brand personality perceptions are therefore established over time, as in line with Batra et al. (1993).

The recent brand repositioning could be a possible explanation for the absence of a humoristic perception of brand personality, but at the same time the already existing perception of a humoristic communication style. It can indicate the beginning of a successful repositioning process. It is conceivable that the formation and adjustment of brand personality perceptions in people's mind is a more complicated process and takes more time than the formation and adjustment of communication style perceptions, because one can observe a communication style more directly.

However, it might also be the case that customers do recognize the humoristic, mischievous, and witty characteristics already, but that they perceive other characteristics, as for instance cosy and reliable, as more important or key characteristics. Especially when considering the descriptive statistics, which showed that the "playful, mischievous" characteristics scored low compared to the major perceived characteristics, it could be argued that these characteristics might be associated less with XXX and are not perceived as the main characteristics of the brand. Nevertheless, even though they might be of lesser importance, their means were substantial enough to conclude that these aspects are recognized.

Differences in perceptions between groups – The descriptive statistics combined with the t-tests results allowed me to observe not only which characteristics and styles were perceived by the customers, but also to observe whether there was a difference in perception between groups.

Contrary to the expectations, no differences were observed in perception between target group and non-target group. This finding is not in line with the expectations derived from the interviews, since it appeared that all communication- and marketing strategies are aimed at transferring this new personality to the target group. In particular, I observed that in the communication towards the target group a more mischievous communication style was used than in communication to other groups. Therefore I expected that the target group would perceive the personality and communication style of XXX as being more witty and mischievous than the non-target group. The unexpected finding that the target group does not differ in perceptions from the non-target group can indicate that the target group might not be open to the new personality of XXX. It can also imply that the core personalities are so profound that adjustment of brand personality perceptions and hence successful repositioning takes time. Further research is however required to verify these conjectures.

An interesting observation in this thesis is the existence of high differences in perception between high involvement groups and low involvement groups. Considering the t-test results, I found that social media usage is of influence on brand personality and brand communication style perceptions of consumers. Especially the “playful, mischievous” characteristics and styles were experienced more by the fanbase group. I interpret this finding as supporting evidence by Mäler et al. (2012) that high involvement customers will be more open for brand-related communications and will be more likely to perceive the brand communication style and the brand personality as intended.

Although this finding was expected on the basis of the theory, it was not expected on the basis of the interviews. Brand owners indicated that particularly in the communication to the fanbase, still a more goody-goody and less mischievous style was used. Even though it might conflict with the interviews with the brand owners, the findings from the t-tests strengthen the theory of Mäler et al. (2012), indicating that involvement increases the motivation of customers to actively seek for information and the ability of information processing. This enhances the correspondence between the perceptions and intentions.

Internal consistency - One last interesting observation that deserves attention is the finding that the brand personality and brand communication style of XXX appear to be clearly defined within the organization and actively brought to life, for and by the employees. The importance of internal consistency and congruency is also mentioned in the literature, demonstrating that a brand personality should actively be managed by all brand owners and requires active behaviour of the brand (Triplett, 1994). Considering the similarity of words, terms and examples used to describe the intended personality and communication style, existence of internal consistency and congruency can therefore be concluded, implying that all brand owners behave in accordance with the intended brand personality. This is essential in successfully implementing an intended brand personality (Harris & de Chernatony, 2001).

5.2 Theoretical implications

This thesis provides several contributions to the literature on brand personality and brand communication style. Previous research focused mainly on brand personality and brand communication style perceptions of customers. This thesis enhances the already existing knowledge by also examining the brand personality and brand communication style as intended by the brand owners. A comparison was made between the intentions and perceptions, and this link was tested in practice.

A second contribution of this thesis is that it tests the link between brand personality and brand communication style. It was found that indeed the brand communication style is an expression of the brand personality. Research into this linkage is very limited, and to my knowledge at brand level there is no research into this linkage at all.

Lastly, this thesis demonstrates that the degree of involvement of customers has an effect on brand personality and brand communication style perceptions. This finding adds knowledge to this research area, since previous research concerning the formation of brand personality perceptions mainly focussed on activities from manager to customer.

5.3 Practical implications

For practitioners this thesis can be a positive contribution as well. The main conclusion of this thesis is that the intentions and perceptions of the brand personality and brand communication style are partially corresponding. The customer does perceive the “welcoming, friendly, open” characteristics and styles, however does not (fully) perceive the “playful, mischievous” traits and styles yet. From a managerial point of view, correspondence between the intended and perceived brand personality is important in the long run, since it has a positive effect on firm performance (Mäler et al., 2012). Understanding and identifying a potential discrepancy between the intended and perceived brand personality is therefore crucial.

Considering the XXX case, the findings indicate that the customer does not perceive the “playful, mischievous” style and characteristics. If these characteristics and styles are really important for the brand, the company must ensure that these are better conveyed. It is advisable to keep monitoring this and, where necessary, to adjust the communication- and marketing strategy.

Lastly, the results revealed that involvement on social media has an influence on customers’ perceptions regarding the brand personality and brand communication style. In my opinion, this can have two implications. On the one hand, it appears that social media is a powerful mean to convey a brand personality by using a corresponding communication style. It is therefore important that brand owners carefully design the messages sent via this medium. On the other hand, a large proportion of the target group does not follow XXX on social media. If the brand wants to convey its intended brand personality, they might need to do more than just post messages on Facebook, because the vast majority does not see these messages.

5.4 Future research

Firstly, this thesis observed interconnectedness between brand personality and brand communication style. It demonstrated that the brand communication style strengthens the

brand personality. Since this study focuses solely on the XXX brand, it would be interesting to further investigate this link and to explore implications of a possible discrepancy.

Furthermore, the outcomes of this research indicate that the brand communication style may go beyond the commonly acknowledged nine interpersonal communication style dimensions of Norton. As perceptions and intentions of communication style may differ across brands, brands might have unique communication style dimensions that possibly should be included in the measurement scale. Further research is necessary to develop a reliable and generalizable measurement scale to measure the communication style of brands.

This thesis found that the communication style intentions and perceptions are slightly more aligned than the intentions and perceptions of brand personality. Especially considering the recent repositioning of the brand, it is conceivable that the adjustment of brand personality perceptions is a more complex process that will take longer. It would be interesting to investigate whether this perception of a humoristic communication style in the long run leads to a corresponding perception of a humoristic brand personality.

5.5 Limitations

As every academic piece of research, this thesis deserves thorough criticism and needs to be considered within its own limitations.

As brought up in the chapter on methodology, using Company X's customer panel could be an important limitation of the study. Although the profile of respondents corresponds to the profile of the average Dutch customer, their image and awareness of the products of Company X might not be representative for the greater population of Dutch customers.

Another limitation of the study is that the concepts of brand personality and brand communication style were not measured by asking sub-questions per item, but the participants were asked directly about the score on a specific characteristic or style. This is something I would do differently in a future research. However, since the scores on the Aaker and Norton items were not the only data on the basis of which conclusions are drawn in this thesis, the restriction is limited.

A final limitation of this study concerns the fact that this study focuses solely on the XXX brand. Due to differences in branding strategies and customer perceptions it is difficult to generalize the results for different brands, thereby limiting the external validity of these results.

6. Conclusion

In this thesis, I set out to investigate the alignment between the intended and perceived brand personality and brand communication style. I further examined the linkage between the brand personality and brand communication style. Thereby I seek to contribute to the existing literature on those two concepts.

Firstly, I was able to provide evidence that the perceptions and intentions of both the brand personality and the communication style are partially corresponding. Therefore it can be concluded that the implementation of brand personality has been successful to a certain degree. To be more specific, intentions and perceptions concerning characteristics and styles that relate to the category “friendly, welcoming, open” are fully aligned, however the customer does not perceive the intended “playful, mischievous” characteristics and styles yet. Furthermore it appears that the brand communication style perceptions and intentions are slightly more aligned with each other than perceptions and intentions of brand personality.

Secondly, I was able to conclude that the brand communication style is an expression of the intended brand personality. Even more, it appears that the communication style is used to strengthen the brand personality.

Lastly, this thesis found that the degree of involvement of customers has an effect on brand personality and brand communication style perceptions. Findings indicate that the communication style and brand personality come across better as people are more involved with the product on social media.

As a last remark, whereas this research has contributed interesting findings to the existing body of literature, further research on the linkage between perceptions and intentions is needed to truly understand what causes potential discrepancies. Moreover, I call for more research on the relationship between brand personality and brand communication style. Although my results point towards an interrelationship between those two concepts, there is still a lack of literature.

7. References

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