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The influence of cultural dimensions on consumer brand personality perception in Finland, Serbia and Vietnam

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ABSTRACT:

The 21st century is the age of globalisation and deepened integration of nations. International trade is facilitated by easier transfer of money, goods, and ideas. This in turn encourages companies to expand internationally and to offer their products or services abroad. Growing competition brings challenges concerning the ability to stand out from the wide selection of competing products. Distinctive brands that consumers perceive as relevant is an effective method of differentiation. Subsequently there is a need to have an understanding of the target culture's values and traditions.

Consumer perception of brand personalities, otherwise known as human personality traits that can be applied to brands, helps to understand the attitudes of consumers towards brands. This information is crucial for creating relevant brands and marketing. This study examines the connection between cultural dimensions, and brand personality preference of consumers. In addition, it examines the connection of product category and consumer brand perception.

The theories used are Hofstede's cultural dimension theory and brand personality scale by Geuens et al. (2009). There are three case countries: Finland, Vietnam, and Serbia. The study adopts a deductive and explanatory research approach. Data collection was done through self-administered online questionnaires and the final number of responses is 228. Data analysis was conducted through SPSS 28. The results show that for the most part connection between culture and consumer brand personality perception exists. Also, the product category of brands triggers brand personality associations most typical for the category. Non typical personalities are rejected.

The study contributes by adding research data concerning Finland and Serbia, as well as data involving the impact of all six Hofstede's cultural dimensions on consumer brand personality perception.

Contents

Figures

Tables

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

The 21st century has seen the increase of globalisation, or the deepened integration of nations and markets which allows businesses, people, and information reach foreign destinations easier and more rapidly than ever before. The introduction of new technologies, transportation methods and digitalisation has made faster transfer of products, money, information and ideas possible, which in turn encourages and facilitates international trade. Companies seek new markets for their products especially if their products are in the mature stage in their home market, and there is growth potential abroad. (Griffin & Pustay, 2013, 38-39.) Some other factors affecting internationalisation process are access to resources, production costs, and availability of skilled workers. Luostarinen (1994) explains that home country, host country, and company factors all have an impact on the internationalisation decision, as they can either act as a pull or push abroad (Luostarinen, 1994, 16-17). This internationalisation process in turn pushes companies from individualised marketing to marketing on a worldwide scale (Albaum, Duerr & Josiassen, 2016, 684).

The competitive international market conditions of today make it more challenging for companies to stand out from the wide selection of competing or substituting goods. One way to differentiate from competition is to create and maintain a strong, distinctive brand. Such a brand can also help to attract the desired target segment. However, to achieve that in the international context, it is important to have an understanding of the local culture, values, and beliefs. This helps companies to minimise the chances of upsetting the consumers and to maximise the relevance and attractiveness of their brand. There is a need to study brand perception of consumers in an international context, as this could help marketing professionals to improve and manipulate brands to their advantage. Similarly, it would help to check if the brand is perceived in a way that is intended. Successful brand and brand personality management have been found to have

an impact on things such as brand loyalty, trust, and preference (Kressmann et al. 2006; Kim, 2000). Similarly, brand equity is positively affected (Ahmad & Thyagaraj, 2014, 19).

The application of theories, especially those related to psychology and consumer behaviour is an area that needs more testing also in a non-western context. This is because they are usually created from the western point of view. (Taylor, 2012, 229.) Despite the trend of globalisation, which is viewed by some as "Americanisation" of the world, there are still differences in values and worldviews. Interestingly, culture is found to be somewhat resistant to the outside influence especially because globalisation process itself creates resistance from people (de Mooij, 2010, 6-7). Consumer perception of brand personalities, or human personality traits that can be applied to brands, as well as how it is affected by various cultural dimensions would thus be a relevant field of study. Studying consumer perception could help to determine the attitudes of consumers from different cultural backgrounds, which is beneficial information for companies considering expansion of their business activities, or for those that already operate in various cultures.

The topic of how cultural dimensions influence consumer brand personality perception is important because of several reasons. First of all, brands are crucial to companies, as they help consumers to differentiate between different products and even make people pay premium price for a product they could purchase for less. Many companies today compete with brands and not the products themselves. Well-managed brands have the power to make consumers perceive some brands as more unique and desirable. The ability to create brands that are perceived as relevant is increasingly important because of their growing number. (de Mooij, 2010, 23-24.) Consumers are more likely to relate to marketing communication that they see as relevant and attractive, and a global brand with a consistent image makes the brand stronger. In order to make brands more relevant for consumers in the international context, cultural aspects must be taken into account.

Brand personality has been studied a lot in several contexts, such as products (Aaker, 1997; Geuens, Weijters & De Wulf, 2009), places (Hosany, Ekinci & Uysal, 2006; Kaplan, Yurt, Guneri & Kurtulus, 2010), B2B marketing (Herbst & Merz, 2011), corporation branding (Keller & Richey, 2006), and online bands (Okazaki, 2006) for example. Interest in the subject grew after Aaker's (1997) influential work which created a scale for brand personalities. Also brand personalities specific to certain countries have been studied (Aaker, Garolera & Benet-Martinez, 2001; Sung & Tinkham, 2005; Chu & Sung, 2011), and it was found that there are brand personalities that are specific to some cultures but not others. This finding makes brand personalities an interesting and relevant area of study.

Even though brand personalities have been studied with the aim to identify the applicability of the existing personality scales in some cultures, there is a need to examine the connection between cultural dimensions, and brand personality preference of consumers in more detail. It is suggested that consumers may reflect their culture on brands by attributing their own cultural preferences to them: mostly people from low power distance and high uncertainty avoidance cultures rate global brands as having a Friendly personality. People from high power distance cultures on the other hand are more likely to rate global brands as Prestigious. In high uncertainty avoidance cultures strong brands are perceived as Trustworthy, while in low uncertainty avoidance and low power distance cultures they are seen as Innovative. (Hofstede & de Mooij, 2010, 92.) The amount of information, however, is insufficient. More information is needed to determine how other cultural dimensions, and not only power distance and uncertainty avoidance, impact brand personality perception. Therefore, there is a need for more research examining the possible connection between brand personality perception and cultural dimensions. In addition, the existing brand personality research has studied only a limited number of cultures. This study contributes to the research gap by adding research data concerning Finnish and Serbian cultures, as well as examining the impact of all cultural dimensions on brand personality perception.

1.2. Research question and objectives of the study

The main purpose of the study is to examine the possible connection between consumer brand personality perception and cultural dimensions. Aim of the study is to find out whether or not consumers attach their own personality preferences to brands as suspected by de Mooij & Hofstede (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010, 92). The goal is to deepen the understanding of the role of culture and to examine it further. Cultural dimensions offer a tool to measure and compare culture (de Mooij, 2010, 67). By using the dimensions, the phenomenon can become clearer and easier to understand.

Thus, the research question is: *"Is consumer brand personality perception influenced by cultural dimensions?"*

According to Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2009) research objectives show the direction and purpose of the study (Saunders et al., 2009, 34). The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. *To study the connection between cultural dimensions and consumer brand personality attribution.*

2. *To create a theoretical framework based on a review of relevant literature and to test the resulting hypotheses.*

3. *To test brand personality theory in a western context in Finland and Serbia, and also in non-western context in Vietnam.*

1.3. Delimitations of the study

The scope of the study is quite limited, as it can only focus on a limited number of theories and concepts. Branding in an international context is a vast subject, and this study focuses on one aspect, that being the brand personality and its perception. Ideally, cultural studies should involve at least five different nations (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010,100). This study, however, has three. Nevertheless, this should be a sufficient number to give enough data for the purpose of a master's thesis.

The selection of the three case cultures is made based on their availability, as well as author's interests. The aim is to have at least one Asian culture in the study to test the brand personality theory, outside of the western context. Because there are only three cultures, there is no possibility to involve even more versatile respondents representing all continents, so the study's context has a narrow focus. Similarly, the number of responses collected is limited but acceptable for a study of this level. The aim is to study the perception of regular consumers, and they mostly have experience of consumer brands only. For this reason other points of view, such as business-to-business, will not be considered.

1.4. Structure of the study

The research paper is divided into several chapters. The first chapter is the introduction, which introduces the topic and its background to the reader, as well as the research questions and objectives. The delimitations of the study are discussed as well. The second and third chapters include the literature review which is used for the creation of the theoretical framework. The second chapter focuses on brand personalities and brand perception. Also, the applicability of the brand personality theory to different cultures and to other categories than products is discussed. The third chapter introduces the cultural aspect of the study. It defines culture and gives some background about the cultural dimensions. Also, it presents the cultural dimensions of the three case cultures by applying the chosen cultural dimensions theory. Chapter four introduces the theoretical framework used in the study as well as the methodology approach adopted, and covers topics such as data collection method and data sample. The fifth chapter discusses the results of the questionnaire, and the findings of the study. The theoretical contribution, managerial implications and possible suggestions for future research are also discussed.

2. BRAND PERSONALITY THEORY

A brand is "an identifiable product, service, person or place, augmented in such a way that the buyer or user perceives relevant, unique added values which match their needs most closely" (Chernatony & McDonald, 1998, 20). Brands are used for the purpose of producers conveying the image and feelings that are attractive to their target market segment, and to differentiate from the offering of competitors that produce similar products or services. Brands are developed by getting to know the consumers' needs and developing an image that can be perceived as satisfying those needs. (Ghauri & Cateora, 2010, 286-288.)

Brands can be seen as combination of both emotional and functional values. Brand personality, or a set of human characteristics that can be applied to brands, is formulated either based on the actual real-life users of the products, or the ideal users depicted in marketing campaigns (Phau & Lau, 2000, 54-55). In order to manage brands well, it is necessary to build them in the long-term to make them consumer relevant. Once consumers trust a brand, they can buy it without much thinking. (de Chernatony & Riley, 1997, 99-100.) People tend to purchase products because of their perceived symbolic benefits (Solomon, 1983; Maehle, Otnes & Supphellen, 2011, 290). Indeed, brands are used for communicating status and identity of the owner. This is made possible by people attaching brand personalities to objects. (Lannon & Cooper, 1983; Maehle et al., 2011, 291.) Consequently, there is growing interest towards understanding the symbolic attributes consumers see in brands (Austin, Siguaw, & Mattila, 2010, 77).

The first attempt to create a comprehensive framework for brand personality was made by Aaker (1997). The research is a response to not having a consistent and reliable way to measure brand personality, as until then researchers used ad hoc or personality psychology methods for measurement purposes. This was not satisfactory because of the inability to generalise the results and their overall low reliability: the personality traits

were often selected in a random fashion and applicable to the specific study only. (Aaker, 1997, 347-348.) Aaker (1997) defines brand personality as "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand." This is linked to attaching human characteristics to inanimate objects, otherwise known as anthropomorphism. (Kumar, 2018, 205.) The five main human personality dimensions identified by psychologists are known as the Big Five. These dimensions "reflect an individual's stable and recurrent traits" (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003, 148). Brand personality is usually studied by asking consumers to think of a brand as a person, and what kind of personality traits he could have. Consumers have been found to perceive brand personality traits, as they usually answer such questions effortlessly (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003,143).

Participants of Aaker's (1997) study rated the brand personality of 37 well-known brands in order to identify the personalities they perceive. The brand personalities identified were determined through combining available personality traits from psychology, previous research, and marketers, and gradually narrowed down to only five major ones (Aaker, 1997, 349). In the end, the study identified 15 facets and five brand personalities perceived by consumers: Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, and Ruggedness. There are 42 personality traits all together. (Aaker, 1997, 351.) This model is known as the brand personality scale, or BPS.
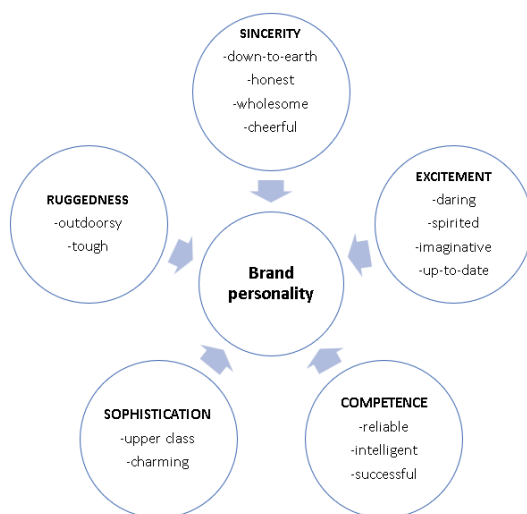

Figure 1. Brand personality framework by Aaker (Source: Adapted from Aaker, 1997)

Aaker's work is considered to be the most influential as it inspired the most research on brand personality. To this day it remains the most used and cited theoretical model in the field (Kumar, 2018, 204). Consequently, it has also attracted a lot of criticism. There is a view that the term brand personality is incorrectly defined, as it includes characteristics such as age, gender and class, which according to psychologists are not personality traits. In practice, the results mix brand personality and brand user characteristics. Also the removal of within-brand variance through aggregating data across respondents is seen as problematic by some scholars, as it disables analysis at the individual brand level. (Geuens et al., 2009, 97.) There is some disagreement about this though, as Kumar (2018) states that even though results at aggregate level may differentiate from those at individual brand level, such a sample is more generalisable than analysing an individual brand (Kumar 2018: 219).

Azoulay & Kapferer (2003) claim that Aaker's (1997) widely accepted and used brand personality scale "merges a number of dimensions of a brand identity", and as such does not necessarily measure brand personality (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003, 144). Terms used to describe human personality traits are not always suitable for describing brands, because not all psychological aspects of humans are applicable for brands (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003, 149). It is argued that Aaker's (1997) framework is better suited to measure product performance. Therefore, the definition of brand personality should be re-examined to avoid grouping all human characteristics in the same brand personality category. (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003, 153.)

Aaker's brand personality theory is also criticised for not being quite as generalisable as she intended it to be. According to Austin et al. (2010) it is not entirely clear in which context Aaker's framework is generalisable (Austin et al., 2010, 78). Aaker's original study suggests that the scale can be used for measuring and analysing brand personality at individual brand level among other uses. However, she does not clearly state which of the variables, brands, or consumers, are generalised and which are objects of measurement. These two facets are otherwise known as facet of generalisation and

facet of differentiation. (Austin et al., 2010, 79.) It is argued that the way Aaker's (1997) study was conducted appears to suggest that brands are considered as the facet of differentiation. The brands used were selected from diverse product categories, and no within-brand variance was left as the points for each brand were averaged on each personality trait across subjects. The results are based on between-brand variance. "Consequently, the factor structure that emerged represents key dimensions on which brands differ (or vary) across a broad spectrum of product categories."(Austin et al., 2010, 80.) Austin et al. (2010) argue that Aaker's (1997) framework is not that descriptive when it comes to individual brands within specific product categories. Aaker's procedures and findings appear to suggest the framework will likely generalise to research settings involving aggregated levels of analyses, particularly when the aggregation is across a wide variety of product categories. In their opinion, the brand personality framework is less well suited for cases where consumers are the facet of differentiation instead of product categories, or when brand personality is measured at the level of an individual brand. (Austin et al., 2010, 88.)

In response to Aaker's (1997) brand personality scale, Geuens et al. (2009) developed an alternative brand personality framework to address some of the issues of BPS. The definition of brand personality for this theory was narrowed down to "human personality traits that are both applicable to and relevant for brands" (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003, 151). Between-brand between-category, between-respondent, and between-brand within-category comparison is possible because of not removing within-brand variance (Geuens et al., 2009, 97). The resulting new brand personality framework consists of five factors and 12 items. Unlike Aaker's (1997) framework, it can be applied across several cultures. The cross-cultural generalisability was tested, although using one brand only, in nine European countries, and using 20 brands in the US. The framework can be used in versatile situations "across multiple brands of different product categories, for studies across different competitors within a specific product category, for studies on an individual brand level." (Geuens et al. 2009, 106.) It has been suggested however, that the variation of brand dimension results compared to Aaker (1997) may also be partly

connected to factors such as changing societies, lifestyles, and demographics, and that it is a sign of Aaker's (1997) framework's progression to maturity stage (Kumar, 2018, 214).
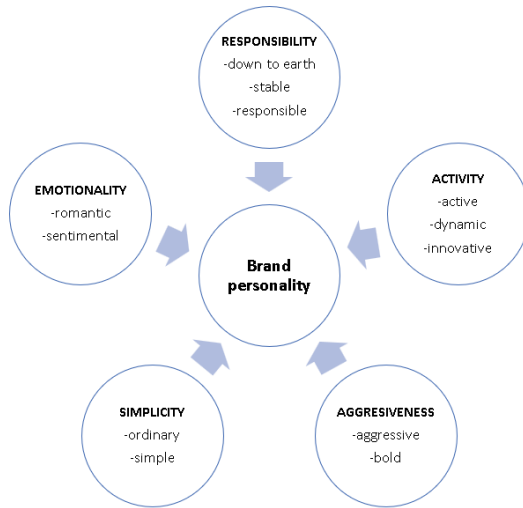
Figure 2. Brand personality framework by Geuens et al. (Source: Adapted from Geuens et al., 2009)

2.1. Applicability of brand personality concept beyond consumer products

In addition to consumer goods, brand personality theory has been used in various contexts, such as business-to-business brands, corporations, online brands, brand personalities across cultures and even places. Growing competition in the industrial sector has made good branding practices more important, and branding is increasingly seen as a way to differentiate from competing companies (Herbst & Merz, 2011, 1072). Herbst & Merz (2011) found that Aaker's (1997) brand personality framework is ill-suited for industrial marketers, as it does not provide comprehensive personalities relevant in industrial context. In the context of online branding, Okazaki (2006) examined the online communication of 64 US based multinational corporations (MNCs) to identify what kind of stimuli they use to transfer the intended brand personality image to their foreign customers. Okazaki (2006) argues that there is a connection between the intended brand personalities and website online content, which points to the fact that MNCs attempt to create a consistent brand personality across countries also online. Out of five identified

brand personality dimensions it was found that three of Aaker's (1997) dimensions were present in online brands. This subsequently confirms that the online brand personalities are at least partly similar to product brand personalities. (Okazaki, 2006, 279.)

As with products, corporate brands help people differentiate between various brands and attach associations to them. However, they are slightly different from product brands in the sense that similarly to place brands, they evoke more associations than products. As put by Keller & Richey (2006), corporate brand is about who the company is and what it does, like values, benefits, and credibility, as well as the products or services they produce. (Keller & Richey, 2006, 75.) Consequently, corporate brand personalities go beyond Aaker's (1997) five product brand personality dimensions, and can be divided into three categories – mind, body, and heart. (Keller & Richey, 2006, 76.)

Several authors have also examined the role of brand personalities in the context of places. Hosany et al. (2006) applied BPS theory to tourist destinations in order to test its applicability. It was discovered that Aaker's brand personality framework is suitable to be applied to places, as well as that brand image and brand personality are closely related, which in turn justifies the terms being used interchangeably in the literature (Hosany et al. 2006, 641). Kaplan et al. (2010) on the other hand took the research further by applying the brand personality framework not only to touristic places, but to cities in general. Cities can be defined by these brand personalities and thus it can also be a way to differentiate them (Kaplan et al., 2010,1296). A new brand personality scale of six personalities was created, which includes also a negative personality type. In fact, Aaker's (1997) BPS theory was criticised for leaving out negative personalities, because unlike Aaker's original study suggests, the Neuroticism dimension of the Big Five human psychology personality traits is not necessarily irrelevant in the branding context (Kaplan et al., 2010, 1298). This shows that the brand personality framework for places is broader than that of products, as "places evoke a greater number and variety of associations" (Kaplan et al., 2010, 1298).

2.2. Applicability of brand personality concept across cultures

Brand personality dimensions are shown to reflect some differences across cultures. Dimensions have been studied around the world in places such as South Korea, Spain, Japan, and China for example. The universal nature of brand personalities was examined by Sung & Tinkham (2005), who investigated whether brand personality dimensions vary between nations. It was hypothesised that brand personalities reflect values of cultures, and that consumers tend to find the factors that reflect their cultural values more important. The research compared South Korean and American brand personality structure, as well as what kind of meaning the brand dimensions have in both cultures. It was found that the majority of the brand personality dimensions do indeed have the same meaning, but also that both cultures have two culture-specific factors. (Sung & Tinkham, 2005, 347.) Thus, the validity of a single brand personality structure across cultures can be questionable (Sung & Tinkham, 2005, 349). Chu & Sung (2011) came to similar conclusions when studying the brand associations of contemporary Chinese people. Brand personalities can reflect cultural differences in marketing context (Chu & Sung, 2011, 169). Similarly to Sung & Tinkham's (2005) findings, the research found that brand personalities attributed to consumer brands by Chinese consumers have both local and international elements. The theoretical framework for Chinese brand personalities identified six personalities, three of which were culture-specific, and the remaining three more universal. (Chu & Sung, 2011, 175.)

Culture can have an impact on consumer perception of brands also through marketing. Consumers' value preferences are taken into account when planning what traits of brands are promoted, how they are communicated, and on what attributes consumer attention should be focused on (Belk & Pollay, 1985; Aaker et al., 2001, 495). For example, in Spain many marketing messages are formed with Passion at the centre (Aaker et al., 2001, 505).

Aaker, Garolera and Benet-Martinez (2001) argue that brands act as carriers of culture, as they can represent cultural beliefs (Aaker et al., 2001, 492). Unsurprisingly, culture and people cannot be separated (Shweder & Sullivan, 1990; Aaker et al., 2001, 493). Therefore, consumers from different cultures may not perceive brand attributes in the same way, causing variance. The meaning of utilitarian attributes usually does not vary that much, but symbolic attributes may be seen through a different cultural lens. (Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998; Aaker et al., 2001, 493) For this reason, cultural lens must be remembered when interpreting the meaning of brands (Aaker et al., 2001, 506).

A study examining to what extent brand personality scale has universal meaning and structure in the US, Japan, and Spain, found that the majority of the personality dimensions identified by Aaker (1997) are common to all three cultures. For Japan, four out of five brand personality dimensions - Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, and Sophistication are similar. However, the fifth dimension Ruggedness is more culture -specific to the US culture, while in Japan there is a dimension called Peacefulness. (Aaker et al., 2001, 501.) In the Spanish context, three out of five brand personality dimensions - Sincerity, Excitement, and Sophistication share a similar meaning as in the US. Dimensions Competence and Ruggedness are more applicable to the US, and there is a culture specific Spanish dimension known as Passion. Similarly to Japan, Peacefulness dimension is also present in Spain. These differences are due to the fact that harmony is more valued in Japanese and Spanish cultures than in the US (Aaker et al., 2001,503.) In other words, "the meaning embedded in commercial brands has both culturally specific and culturally common elements" (Aaker et al., 2001, 507).

2.3. Consumer perception of brand personality dimensions

Maehle et al. (2011) studied what factors can influence consumers' brand personality perception. The study gathered data about what made consumers perceive specific personality traits and attach them to brands. People were interviewed about what brands

they believe describe Aaker's (1997) brand personality traits the best, and which ones do not. As a result, common characteristics of brands that make consumers perceive brand personalities the way they do, were identified. As previously mentioned, brand personality scale developed by Aaker (1997) has five personalities: Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication and Ruggedness. Brands are perceived as sincere if they are honest about their products, product performance, the service is positive, and they are often connected with family activities (Maehle et al., 2011, 292-293). Exciting brands are the ones that evoke special feelings, are used on special occasions, or have a trendy design (Maehle et al., 2011, 296). In order to be perceived as competent, brands are usually producers of high quality goods and are market leaders. Repeated positive experiences with brands are required for them to be perceived as competent. (Maehle et al., 2011, 295.) As for sophistication, the respondents indicated that such brands have good design, are in some way unique and are not used every day. They are also often feminine in nature. Finally, brands perceived as having rugged personality are masculine. (Maehle et al., 2011, 298.)

Maehle et al. (2011) suspect that the concept of brand personality is applicable not only to brands, but also to product categories. The product category a brand belongs to can have an impact on consumer perception by triggering associations. (Maehle et al., 2011, 299.) In addition, the study shows that consumers' perception of brand personality is impacted by their functional and experiential benefits, and not only symbolic ones as previously believed (Maehle et al., 2011, 302).

3. CULTURAL DIMENSIONS THEORY

3.1. Hofstede and GLOBE dimensions

Culture can be defined in many ways. Anthropological view is that culture is a learned and transmitted survival mechanism with patterns (Gamst & Norbeck, 1976, 6). Culture is also seen as a glue that keeps societies together. This glue-like nature can be explained by the fact that people who grew up with similar life experiences and in the same soci-ocultural environment tend to share norms, values, and attitudes. In a way, people can be considered to be products of their culture - it is something that is acquired in the first ten years of life from the environment and surrounding people (Minkov & Hofstede, 2011, 14). Even though the most frequent cultural values are used to define a specific culture, there are always individuals who behave differently. This is because cultural characteristics follow the normal distribution model. (de Mooij, 2004, 26-27.) In market-ing context, culture can be used to explain different marketing related consumer behav-iour and attitudes, such as brand and product success, or what kind of marketing works and does not work (de Mooij, 2017, 444).

Culture is a popular research field in international business. According to de Mooij and Hofstede (2010), the amount of cross-cultural consumer behaviour studies has increased steadily over time (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010, 104). Similarly, Pinto, Serra & Ferreira (2009) found that culture is the most used environmental dimension when it comes to research in international business (Pinto et al., 2014, 342). This view points to the high importance of the topic.

The best known and widely accepted framework for cultural study is Hofstede's dimen-sions of culture. This study was conducted as an attitude survey for IBM employees around the world during late 1960s and early 1970s. At the time, this multinational cor-poration was one of the biggest ones in the world, and consequently Hofstede was able to collect data from 72 countries and 116,000 questionnaires. (Hofstede, 2001, 41.) The definition for culture in this study is "collective programming of the mind that

distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another" (Hofstede, 2001, 9).

According to Hofstede, many of the cultural differences in values and norms can be connected to dimensions of culture (Minkov & Hofstede, 2011, 11). The resulting framework is made up from dimensions Power distance, Uncertainty avoidance, Individualism / Collectivism, Masculinity / Femininity, Indulgence / Restraint, and Long-term / Short-term orientation. Power distance refers to attitude and expectations towards authority and unequal distribution of power. Uncertainty avoidance describes the extent of feeling comfortable with unknown or new situations. Individualism and Collectivism are about the relationship between groups and individuals, while Masculinity and Femininity measure prevailing values in a society. The Indulgence and Restraint dimension describe importance of leisure and the degree of happiness experienced, or working hard and careful spending (de Mooij, 2017, 452). Finally, Long-term and Short-term orientation dimension describes the extent to which people focus on either the future or the present and past. Cultural dimensions are correlated across cultures instead of individuals, and therefore should not be used for measuring individual differences.
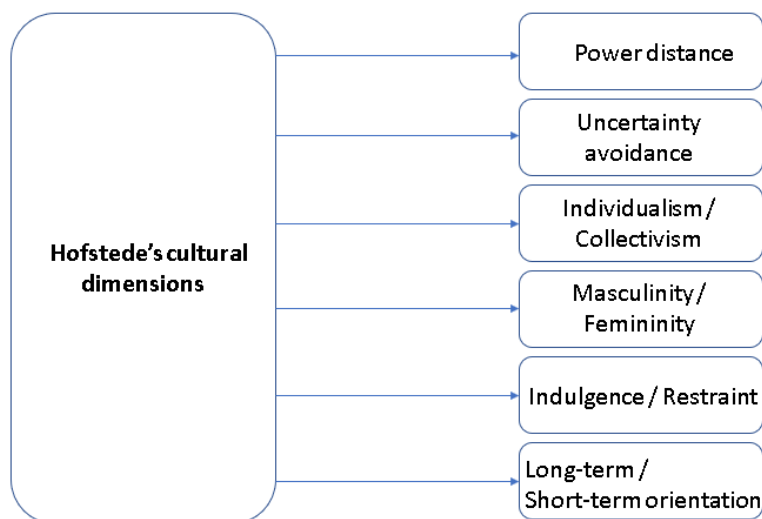
Figure 3. Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Source: Adapted from Hofstede, 2001)

Despite its popularity, there is desire among some scholars to move cultural research beyond Hofstede's seminal study and look further. It is argued that Hofstede's study was made at a time when the world was more stable and less interconnected. Today the world is more affected by globalisation and nations are less homogeneous. Consequently, people around the world are more aware of global product offering and trends through increased cross-cultural interaction. (Nakata, 2009, 5.) In addition, the respondents of the original IBM study were all working at the same company, and could be considered as being educated people. For this reason the generalisability of the results can be questioned. Even though the data was collected some decades ago, Hofstede argues that despite possible changes, cultures "tend to move together in more or less one and the same cultural direction" and that relevant differences between them are still measured (Minkov & Hofstede, 2011, 12-13.)

Another well-known cross-cultural study is the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness Research Program, otherwise known as GLOBE. This study gathered data from 17,300 managers in 62 cultures back in the 1990s in order to determine what attributes make managers either successful or not in a cross-cultural context. In the GLOBE study, culture is seen as "shared motives, values, beliefs, identities, and interpretations or meanings of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives that are transmitted across generations" (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman & Gupta, 2004, 15). Cultural differences are an important area of study, as increasingly interconnected business world means that managers and workers are likely to experience cross-cultural situations. Being aware about cultural differences helps managers to be understanding of them. (House et al., 2004, 5.)

The GLOBE study produced a framework of nine cultural dimensions: Uncertainty avoidance, Power distance, Institutional / In- Group collectivism, Gender egalitarianism, Assertiveness, Future orientation, Performance orientation, and Humane orientation. The dimensions are measured at organisational and societal level (de Mooij, 2017, 446). The conclusion of the study is that the universally positive leadership is connected to

attributes such as trustworthiness, encouragement, planning ahead, and team building. The attributes that were seen as negative for leaders are connected to inability to co-operate, being asocial and irritable. (House et al., 2004, 677-678.) In addition, the importance of culture in forming human perception was established: "cultural differences strongly influence important ways in which people think about leaders, as well as the societal norms concerning the status, influence, and privileges granted to leaders" (House et al., 2004, 698).

Measuring cultures is not simple, as culture is a complex concept. Frameworks for measuring culture have been criticised for not defining clearly enough what exactly they measure, and they can be ambiguous: "if we are not sure whether we are actually measuring the cultural dimensions we intended, it will not be clear whether the observed effects really reflect the influence of these cultural dimensions on consumer behavior" (Sun, D'Alessandro, Johnson & Winzar, 2014, 340).

When comparing the two frameworks, de Mooij (2017) found that despite having similar names for some of the dimensions like Uncertainty avoidance and Power distance, Hofstede's and GLOBE dimensions do not measure the same thing and have their own nuances. (de Mooij, 2017, 453) GLOBE has been criticised for mixing results of both socially desirable behaviour and respondents' personal values, and the results can be very different (Minkov & Hofstede, 2011, 15). As with Hofstede's cultural dimensions, "GLOBE scales are also found to be unreliable and invalid at the individual level analysis within countries" (Venaik & Brewer, 2013, 471). It is argued that both Hofstede's and GLOBE cultural frameworks should be tested more to ensure their reliability and clarity before "uncritically "applying them to individuals as is done by some scholars. (Venaik & Brewer, 2013, 478).

3.2. Culture's role in brand perception

Foscht et al. (2008) examined whether or not culture can have an impact on brand perception, and found that people from various cultural backgrounds can view the same brand differently. The study compared Austrian, German, Dutch, British, American and Singaporean consumers' perception of the Red Bull brand, which is positioned identically across the cultures (Foscht et al., 2008, 137). Red Bull, which is supposed to be seen as exciting and competent, was found to be perceived in the intended manner only in the UK (de Mooij, 2017, 446). In addition, perception is also affected by the amount of product consumed by the respondents (Foscht et al., 2008, 134-136). However, as there was only a limited number of countries involved in the study, more research into the matter is required to get generalisable results (Foscht et al., 2008, 137).

Cultural dimensions Individualism and Collectivism can impact the perception of brand personality through self-expression. It has been found that consumers from collectivist cultures tend to use brand personalities to express similarity with their groups, while individualistic consumers want to express their differences. (Aaker & Schmitt, 2001; Phau & Lau, 2000, 60) In addition, people from collectivist cultures emphasise brand personalities that are related to interdependence, such as harmonious and peaceful (Phau & Lau, 2000, 61). It is thought that brands resonate the best with the cultures which are similar to that of the marketing manager's culture, as cultural background affects thinking and worldview (Foscht et al., 2008, 132).

3.3. Cultural dimensions of the case countries

Hofstede's cultural theory defines culture as "collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another" (Hofstede, 2001, 9). It ranks cultures according to the rating of their dimensions. Rating them from 1 to 100 allows the measurement and comparison of otherwise intangible cultural differences. The case countries for this cross-cultural study are Finland, Vietnam, and Serbia.

Culture	Power distance	Individual-ism	Masculin-ity	Uncertainty avoidance	Long-term orientation	Indulgence
Vietnam	70	20	40	30	57	35
Finland	33	63	26	59	38	57
Serbia	86	25	43	92	52	28

Table 1. Hofstede's cultural dimensions ratings for the case countries (Source: Adapted from Geert Hofstede, 2015)

Power distance is the extent to which the more powerful person can determine the behaviour of the less powerful, and the other way round. It is accepted by both those who have power, and those who have less of it as it is supported by the sociocultural environment. (Hofstede, 2001, 83.) In other words, it is expected. In addition to distribution of power, power distance can manifest in things such as wealth and prestige (Hofstede, 2001, 79). According to the data collected by Hofstede, Serbia has the highest power distance score of the three case cultures. Serbia's score 86 is higher than that of Vietnam's 70, with Finland having the smallest score of 33. (Geert Hofstede, 2015.)

Individualism refers to the relationship between the individual and communities, and the extent to which identity is individualist or collective. Highly individualistic cultures place interest of individuals above interest of groups. For example traditional family units in a culture can reflect individualism by being either nuclear or extended. (Hofstede, 2001, 210-211.) The data shows that Finland has the highest level of individualism with a score of 63, and that both Serbia and Vietnam are societies with collectivist values with scores 25 and 20 (Geert Hofstede, 2015).

Masculine values are typically associated with achievements, competition, assertiveness, and other tough characteristics. More tender values are called feminine, as they are traditionally more often displayed by women than by men. Such values can be nurturance, importance of relationships and co-operation for example. (Hofstede, 2001, 280-281.)

Cultural dimensions data shows that the Serbian culture is a feminine one with a score of 43. Vietnam is close with a slightly lower score of 40, while Finland is the most feminine society with a masculinity rating of 26. (Geert Hofstede, 2015.)

Uncertainty avoidance is connected to how comfortable people are with feelings of uncertainty and ambiguity. If a culture scores high in uncertainty avoidance, implementation of control mechanisms, such as writing reports or consulting experts can be used to reduce the feeling of uncertainty and make things more predictable. In addition, clear structure in organisations is desirable. However, uncertainty avoidance does not equal risk avoidance. For this reason, taking risks is acceptable if it is perceived to reduce uncertainty. In this case, Serbian culture has the highest score, which is 92. Finland is in the middle with a score of 59, and finally Vietnam is rather comfortable with feelings of uncertainty with a score of 30. (Geert Hofstede, 2015.)

Long-term orientation is related to the Confucian way of thinking, which is prevalent especially in some Asian countries, such as China for example (Hofstede, 2001, 351). It is the way societies prefer preparing for the future and try to be pragmatic, or show respect for tradition and do not have a habit of for perseverance. Cultures with a high score are persistent and thrift. On the other hand, cultures with lower scores for this dimension prefer getting results quickly and tend to save less. (Hofstede Insights, 2020.) Vietnamese culture is long-term oriented, as is shown by score of 57. Serbian culture is in the middle with a score of 52, and Finnish culture has the lowest score of 38. (Geert Hofstede, 2015.)

Indulgence dimension refers to how restrained people are when it comes to desires. Low indulgence means careful spending and hard work, while high indulgence level societies put more emphasis on leisure time and feelings of happiness (de Mooij, 2017, 452). Finland has the highest indulgence level score 57, while Vietnam and Serbia are both more restrained cultures with scores 35 and 28 (Geert Hofstede, 2015).

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

As mentioned previously, the purpose of this study is to investigate possible connection between consumer brand personality perception, and the cultural dimensions of consumers' cultures. This is done by studying whether consumers attach brand personality preferences to brands based on their own cultural dimensions. In order to do this, brand personality theory is complimented by cultural dimensions theory.

The theories chosen for the study are brand personality framework by Geuens et al. (2009) and Hofstede's (2001) dimensions of culture. Brand personality framework of Geuens et al. (2009) is used because it addresses some of the shortcomings of Aaker's (1997) framework. The chosen framework narrows the definition of brand personality to leave out non-personality traits. Also, the framework of Geuens et al. (2009) could benefit from more testing in various cultures to further investigate the validity, as proposed by the authors (Geuens et al., 2009, 106.) Hofstede's culture theory is used by 68% of the culture papers with explicit theories, and his seminal work "Culture's consequences" (2001) is one of the most cited researches in the field of social sciences (Nakata, 2009,70). This research paper concentrates on Hofstede's cultural dimensions because of the influence and acceptance of his work, but also because of its ease of use and the availability of data for various countries.

Based on the literature review, culture may have an impact on consumer perception of brand personality. In this study, culture is measured and explained by using Hofstede's (2001) dimensions. In addition, impact on perception may be made by the product category the brand belongs to, as suggested by Maehle et al. (2011). The chosen brands for this study are three internationally well-known brands Coca-Cola, Adidas, and Samsung.

This study has several hypotheses that are tested in order to either confirm or reject them. Based on the review of the theory, it can be concluded that culture and therefore cultural dimensions of consumers can have an impact on the way they perceive brand

personality. As determined by Aaker et al. (2001) brands carry culture and represent cultural values. Culture cannot be separated from an individual, and it affects consumer thinking and behaviour. Majority of people from the same culture tend to share norms and beliefs which in turn shape their way of thinking. As discussed, consumers were found to reflect their culture on brands by attributing their cultural preferences to them, such as rating global brands as Prestigious in high power distance cultures, or Trustworthy in high uncertainty avoidance cultures. (Hofstede & de Mooij, 2010, 92). The theory mentions only power distance and uncertainty avoidance. For this reason, the impact of other cultural dimensions is hypothesised through applying the same logic to remaining dimensions, and combining it with cultural theory by Hofstede (2001).

 As suggested by Hofstede and de Mooij (2010), culture acts as a lens through which brands are viewed. This in turn may cause respondents to attribute their cultural preference to the case brands based on their own nation's cultural dimensions. Thus, the hypothesis is:

Respondents attribute their cultural preference to the case brands based on their own cultural dimensions.

Uncertainty avoidance is about how comfortable people are with feelings of uncertainty and ambiguity. Control mechanisms and clear instructions are some of the ways to control uncertainty. Desire to avoid or minimise uncertainty can lead to people perceiving brands as stable.

H1a. *Uncertainty avoidance has a positive influence on Stable brand personality.*

Power distance describes the distribution of power, and can manifest in things such as wealth and prestige. This cultural dimension affects the relationship between those who have power and those who have less power. Power distance may increase the importance of status symbols which signal the position of the owner. Consequently, less Simple or Ordinary brand personalities might be preferred, as they do not signal prestige.

H1b. *Power distance has a negative influence on Simple brand personality.*

H1c. *Power distance has a negative influence on Ordinary brand personality.*

Indulgent culture is less restrained when it comes to desires. Such societies put more emphasis on leisure and less on work. Indulgence dimension can make people look for feelings of happiness. Thus, Ordinary brand personality might be less preferable.

H1d. *Indulgence has a negative influence on Ordinary brand personality.*

Individualism focuses on individuality and interest of individuals as opposed to groups. Individualistic people tend to highlight their individuality, and like to stand out. Therefore, more Bold or Dynamic brand personality might be preferred.

H1e. *Individualism has a positive influence on Bold brand personality.*

H1f. *Individualism has a positive influence on Dynamic brand personality.*

Long-term orientation makes people more persistent and willing to wait for results. Spending money is careful and not wasteful, and preparing for the future is considered important. Consequently, Responsible brand personality might be more preferable.

H1g. *Long-term orientation has a positive influence on Responsible brand personality.*

Masculinity values competition, assertiveness, and achievement. Success is imperative. Thus, Bold brand personality might be preferable.

H1h. *Masculinity has a positive influence on Bold brand personality.*

Product category can have an impact on perception as well. Maehle et al. (2011) identified the characteristics of brands that shape consumer perception using Aaker's (1997) brand personality scale. For instance, brands are perceived as Exciting if they are trendy and create special non-everyday feelings. Good design and uniqueness contribute to brands being seen as Sophisticated. Brands that evoke special feelings or are used on special occasions are seen as Exciting. (Maehle et al., 2011, 296.) Product categories brands belong to can impact brand personality perception by triggering associations – some product categories are more likely to create certain associations and not others. For example, cleaning products are unlikely to be seen as Exciting, and products such as cars could fit that description better. Consequently, the next hypothesis is:

Product category of the brand has an impact on consumer brand personality perception by triggering personality associations most typical for the category.

Based on theory of Maehle at al. (2011), the most probable personality groups were selected from the brand personality scale by Geuens et al. (2009). The study by Maehle et al. (2011) used Aaker's (1997) brand personality scale, so it is not possible to use the same personalities. However, similar logic can be applied to the personality scale used in this study.

Samsung is a brand which has to move quickly to keep up with technological development and to stand out from fierce competition. The brand has been in existence for over five decades. Thus, the most suiable personalities could belong to the Activity or Responsibility group.

H2a. *The technology brand is likely to have the strongest association with Activity or Responsibility personality group.*

Sportswear brand Adidas is mosly used by physically active people. The style is unofficial and down-to-earth. Therefore, the brand personalities that could describe it the best most likely belong to the Activity or Responsibility group.

H2b. *The sportswear brand is likely to have the strongest association with Activity or Responsibility personality group.*

As a soft drink brand Coca-Cola has an easily approachable image. Such drinks are usually affordably priced and can be a regular part of life for people who consume soft drinks. Therefore, the the brand personalities that could describe it the best most likely belong to the Simplicity or Responsibility group.

H2c. *The beverage brand to is likely to have the strongest association with Simplicity or Responsibility personality group.*

The following figure illustrates the proposed relationships and hypotheses of the study.

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                        ┌─────────────┐
                        │   PRODUCT   │
                        │  CATEGORY   │
                        └─────────────┘
                               │
                               │  H2a-H2c
                               ▼
┌──────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│           CONSUMER PERCEPTION OF BRAND PERSONALITY                 │
│  ┌────────┐ ┌─────────┐ ┌──────────┐ ┌───────────┐ ┌──────┐ ┌──────────┐ │
│  │ Active │ │ Dynamic │ │Innovative│ │Aggressive │ │ Bold │ │ Ordinary │ │
│  └────────┘ └─────────┘ └──────────┘ └───────────┘ └──────┘ └──────────┘ │
│  ┌────────┐ ┌─────────┐ ┌──────────┐ ┌───────────┐ ┌──────┐ ┌──────────┐ │
│  │ Simple │ │ Romantic│ │Sentimental│ │Down to earth│ │Stable│ │Responsible│ │
│  └────────┘ └─────────┘ └──────────┘ └───────────┘ └──────┘ └──────────┘ │
└──────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                               ▲
                               │  H1a-H1h
┌──────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│                        CULTURAL DIMENSIONS                         │
│ ┌───────────┐ ┌──────────────┐ ┌──────────┐ ┌─────────────┐ ┌──────────┐ ┌───────────┐ │
│ │Uncertainty│ │Power distance│ │Indulgence│ │Individualism│ │Long-term │ │Masculinity│ │
│ │ avoidance │ │              │ │          │ │             │ │orientation│ │           │ │
│ └───────────┘ └──────────────┘ └──────────┘ └─────────────┘ └──────────┘ └───────────┘ │
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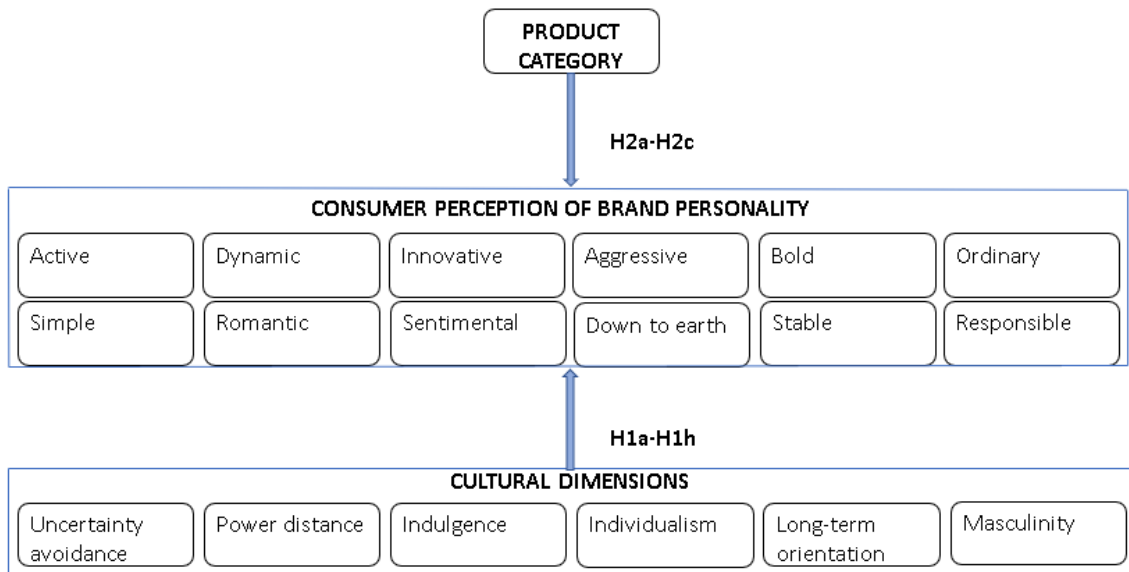
Figure 4. Theoretical framework (Source: Adapted from Hofstede, 2001; Maehle et al., 2011)

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Saunders et al. (2009) define methodology as the set of theoretical and philosophical assumptions that underpin the research (Saunders et al., 2009, 595). This study is based on the philosophical approach of positivism. This is because the aim is to create generalisations about the research topic - *The influence of cultural dimensions on consumer brand personality perception,* after developing and testing of hypotheses. These hypotheses are then either confirmed or rejected. (Saunders et al., 2009, 113.) The study adopts a deductive research approach, as it is be based on testing a theory instead of creating it after examining the empirical data. This approach is suitable because the plan is to first create a theoretical framework based on the literature, and then to test the hypotheses. Also, the sample size will not be too small in order to allow generalisation. (Saunders et al., 2009, 124-125.)

As the aim of the study is to examine and explain the relationship between two variables, cultural dimensions and brand personality perception, the study is explanatory in nature. In other words, the causal relationship is at the centre of the study (Saunders et al,. 2009, 140). This is well suited with the first and the most important research objective, which is "*To study the connection between cultural dimensions and consumer brand personality attribution*".

The research strategy uses the survey method. It is fairly easy to collect a lot of data this way. After establishing the connection between the two variables – Hofstede's cultural dimensions and brand personality perception, the second question of the study is *"do consumers attribute their own brand personality preferences to brands based on their cultural dimensions?"* Using the survey strategy allows to "suggest possible reasons for particular relationships between variables." Also, if used in conjunction with a

questionnaire as in this particular case, the data is easy to compare as it is standardised. (Saunders et al., 2009, 144.)

The general population of the study is the consumers of the three case countries that are familiar with the case brand. When it is not possible to collect responses from the whole population, a sample of it must be used. For the purpose of this study, a convenience sample is used. This means that cases are selected based on their availability and not because of pre-determined characteristics, other than nationality and familiarity with the chosen brand. The reasoning is that there are no existing contacts which would allow a sample to be selected with higher precision. In addition, the questionnaire is internet mediated and shared through social media, so it is not possible to filter exactly what type of people fill in the questionnaire. The disadvantage of this method is that it involves influences beyond control (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007, 234). The sample includes respondents from three different cultural backgrounds. The number of cultures was chosen because it is big enough to be considered international research, while not being too big for the scope of the study. For the purpose of the study, which aims to test brand personality theory also outside the western context, one of the cultures is Asian.

The study uses mostly primary data collected by the questionnaire. Secondary data of Hofstede's (Geert Hofstede, 2015) cultural dimensions scores is also used to give the reader an understanding of the case cultures by using the official numbers available. Primary data, or data that is collected for the purpose of the study includes a quantitative questionnaire, which is self-administered by the participants. It collects data about cultural dimensions of the respondent as well as their perception of brand personality. Questionnaire was chosen as the data collection method because of several reasons. First of all, it makes collecting responses from more than a few people practical. Also, it allows to collect the data by asking the same questions in the same way from each participant, which reduces possible bias caused by the researcher. Questionnaires can also

be self-administered which makes them practical to distribute. Also, data collected through surveys can be used to make conclusions about relationships between variables (Saunders et al., 2007, 138).

The research questions are answered by determining the attitude of consumers from three different cultures towards the same three internationally well-known brands: Coca-Cola, Adidas, and Samsung. These particular brands were chosen because they exist in all the case cultures, and because they represent different product categories. The collected data is analysed with SPSS 28 statistical analysis software.

5.1. Data collection and analysis

Saunders et al. (2007) argue that adopting existing and tested research questions is convenient, as data can be collected without developing new questions (Saunders et al., 2007, 368). For analysing the perception of consumers, the respondents are asked to rate the chosen brand by using a five point Likert scale and a list of available brand personalities identified by Geuens et al. (2009). Similar approach was adopted by Badgaiyan, Dixit & Verma (2017), who asked people to rate brands by using the 12 adjectives that together form the five brand personality types. Personality types Responsibility and Activity have three adjectives or items, while Aggressiveness, Simplicity, and Emotionality have two. (Badgaiyan et al. 2017, 628.) This brand personality scale was found to be of "acceptable reliability and validity" (Badgaiyan et al. 2017, 622). In this study, culture is the independent variable and consumer perception is the dependent one, as it is tested whether or not perception changes with culture (Saunders et al. 2009, 593).

The cultural part of the questionnaire adopts Hofstede's dimensions of culture as the theoretical framework. As mentioned previously, this theory was chosen because of its wide acceptance, ease of use and availability of data for all three case countries. More specifically, the questionnaire uses the Values Survey Model 2013 (VSM). According to Hofstede & Minkov (2013) the answers to the VSM questions have been proved to show

systematic differences between cultures. (Hofstede & Minkov, 2013, 2.) This survey measures all six cultural dimensions. Each dimension has four questions, making the total number of questions 24. There are also a few questions for gathering demographic data about the respondents, such as age and education level.

The VSM 2013 survey was chosen for this study because of several reasons. The fact that the survey was developed by the creator of the Hofstede's cultural dimensions makes it easy to use, as the compatibility is guaranteed. Also, the survey has been tested in real research. The VSM survey has been developed over time, as it has grown with the number of cultural dimensions identified. The first public VSM was VSM 82, which measured only four dimensions, and the next version VSM 94 measured five. The version used in this study is the latest one available. (Hofstede & Minkov, 2013, 2-3.)

Questionnaire layout should not be too long in order not to reduce the number of responses. This is especially important with internet mediated questionnaires as response levels tend to be low (Saunders et al., 2007, 391). The maximum length is around four to eight pages. The questionnaire should preferably start with questions regarding attributes and behaviour, followed by questions determining opinions. (Saunders et al., 2007, 380-381.) With this in mind, the length of the questionnaire is seven pages. The questionnaire in English language is in the appendix section of the research paper.

The first version of the questionnaire was in English. Later the questionnaire was translated to Vietnamese and Serbian by native speakers. The translation was done because it was estimated that it would be easier for the respondents to complete the questionnaire in their language. Translation to Finnish was done by the author. The questionnaire was pilot tested by a small group of people to get feedback on the questions and check for potential technical problems. The translation of the Serbian questionnaire was ready first, and it was released through Webropol. When creating the Vietnamese version in

Webropol, it was discovered that the questionnaire looked confusing in the mobile view. The main question was repeating over and over before moving on to the next sub question. It was estimated that the majority of the Vietnamese respondents would fill in the questionnaire on a mobile device and not a computer. For this reason the questionnaire had to be moved to another platform. Another reason for looking for an alternative platform was uncertainty about finding enough respondents. All of the questionnaire links were distributed via social media through local contacts. The Finnish link was also shared via email with the students of University of Vaasa. After one month of data collection the number of Vietnamese and Finnish responses was still lower than 40, so it was decided that there is a need to contact a consumer panel. As a result, Vietnamese and Finnish questionnaires were distributed to a paid consumer panel through Pollfish. The final result for the data collection was 40 responses for the Serbian questionnaire, 99 responses for the Vietnamese questionnaire and 94 responses for the Finnish questionnaire. From these responses 5 bad responses were removed, making the final number of responses 91 Finnish, 40 Serbian and 97 Vietnamese.

5.2. Data analysis and results

Participants of the study are 63,2% male and 36,8% female. Most of the participants are in their thirties, and have approx. 16 years of education behind them. Job related background is mostly vocational or general training. Demographic data is visible in full in the next table.

Demographic data		Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	144	63.2%
	Female	84	36.8%
Age	Under 20	14	6.1%
	20-24	40	17.5%
	25-29	42	18.4%
	30-34	44	19.3%
	35-39	47	20.6%
	40-49	28	12.3%

	50-59	8	3.5%
	60 or over	5	2.2%
Education	10 years or less	28	12.3%
	11 years	10	4.4%
	12 years	31	13.6%
	13 years	11	4.8%
	14 years	18	7.9%
	15 years	32	14.0%
	16 years	43	18.9%
	17 years	0	11.4%
	18 years or over	29	12.7%
Job	No paid job (includes students)	30	13.2%
	Unskilled or semi-skilled manual worker	23	10.1%
	Generally trained office worker or secretary	43	18.9%
	Vocationally trained craftsperson or equivalent	57	25.0%
	Academically trained professional	39	17.1%
	Manager of one or more subordinates (non-managers)	28	12.3%
	Manager of one or more managers	8	3.5%

Table 2. Demographic data

In a research context, reliability has an impact on quality of the research findings (Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad, 2010, 85). According to Saunders et al. (2007) reliability of questionnaires has to do with whether the questionnaire can produce similar results at a different time and with a different sample. One of the ways to test reliability is to check the internal consistency of the questionnaire by measuring consistency of the responses. (Saunders et al., 2007, 367.) Cronbach's alpha is used to measure consistency in this research. The following table illustrates Cronbach's alpha values for variables of the study.

Construct	Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Power distance	4* (1 left out)	0.563
Individualism	4	0.531
Masculinity	4	0.693
Uncertainty avoidance	4* (2 left out)	0.248
Longterm orientation	4	0.492
Indulgence	4 *(2 left out)	0.493
Responsibility	3	0.845
Activity	3	0.746
Aggressiveness	2	0.631
Simplicity	2	0.738
Emotionality	2	0.791

Table 3. Realibility of variables

*The following items are left out: Power3:" How often, in your experience, are subordinates afraid to contradict their boss (or students their teacher?)". Uncertainty1: " All in all, how would you describe your state of health these days?" and Uncertainty4: " A company's or organization's rules should not be broken - not even when the employee thinks breaking the rule would be in the organization's best interest". Indulgence3: " Do other people or circumstances ever prevent you from doing what you really want to?" and Indulgence4:" Are you a happy person?".

The Cronbach's alpha values for Hoftede's cultural dimensions are mostly low. None met the 0.7 value which is traditionally considered as the treshold for reliability. Construct measuring Masculinity has the closest value to the treshold. One item is left out from Power distance, and two items from Uncertainty avoidance and Indulgence dimensions because of the low values. However, according to Cho & Kim (2015) the acceptable levels of Cronbach's alpha are the result of personal intuition and not empirical research. " For example, there is no evidence that .7 is a better standard than .69 or .71." (Cho & Kim, 2015, 217). For this reason, the author felt it is acceptable to use cultural dimensions with lower values for the purpose of a master's thesis. Contrary to the cultural dimensions, Cronbach's alpha values for brand personality types are good. Only Aggressiveness is slightly under 0.7.

Hypotheses of the study were tested with SPSS 28. Hypotheses H1a-H1h concerning attribution of cultural preferences to brands were tested by conducting a regression analysis in order to check for statistically significant relationships. The findings show that four

out of eight hypotheses are supported. There is no significant relationship (p=.154) between uncertainty avoidance and Stable brand personality and subsequently H1a is rejected. Similarly, power distance and Ordinary brand personality have no significant relationship (p=.089) and H1c is rejected. Power distance has a significant positive influence (p=.040) on Simple brand personality, but hypothesis H1b is rejected as the relationship is not negative as initially hypothesised. Also H1d is rejected for the same reason – Indulgence has a significant positive influence (p=.040) on Ordinary personality. However, Individualism and Bold have an extremely significant (p=.001) relationship. The same (p=.012) applies to individualism and Dynamic brand personality. Thus, hypotheses H1e and H1f are supported. Long-term orientation has an extremely strong (p=<.001) influence on Responsible brand personality and subsequently H1g is supported. Finally, masculinity has an extremely significant (p=<.001) influence on Bold brand personality. Thus also hypothesis H1h is supported. Participant gender, education, and job background were used as control variables of the study. However, the relationship between these variables and brand personalities was mostly completely statistically insignificant. There was impact only on Dynamic personality by gender (p=.012), Ordinary personality by age (p=.024), and Stable personality by job (p=.021). The relationship between job background and Stable brand personality is negative. Therefore, it seems that impact of factors other than cultural dimensions is either statistically irrelevant or minimal.
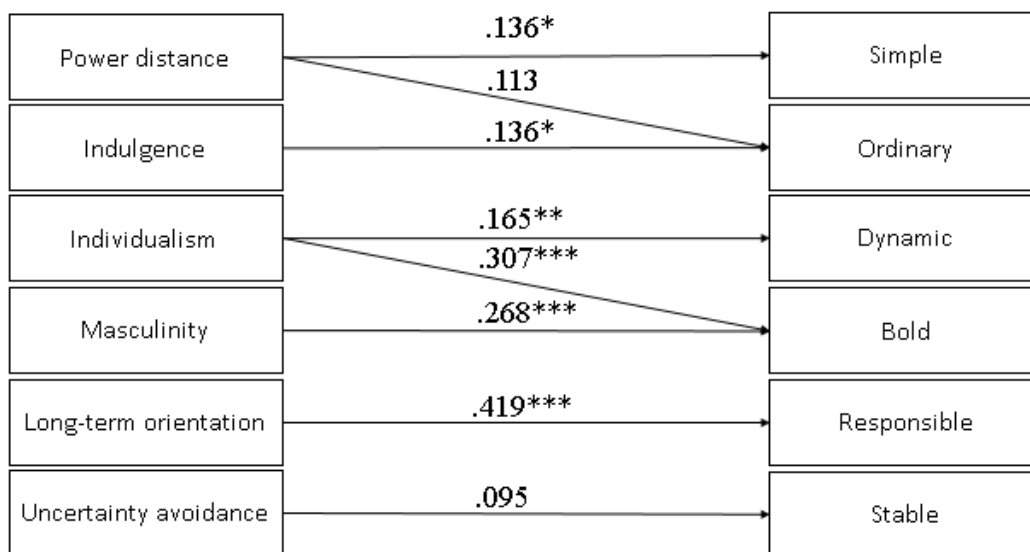

Figure 5. Standardised coefficients (* = < .050, ** = <.010, * = <.001)**

Hypotheses from H2a to H2c were tested by calculating the mean of the scores given to each brand's personalities. These hypotheses are about product category of brands having an impact on brand personality perception by triggering associations most typical for the category. The study uses a five point Likert scale where 1 means strongly agree and 5 strongly disagree. Lower mean represents respondents' strong level of agreement with a brand having a specific personality type. The data shows that technology related brand Samsung is perceived as having mostly Innovative, Stable and Active personality. Innovative and Active brand personalities belong to the Activity personality group. Stable belongs to Responsibility personality group. Sportswear brand Adidas is perceived as having mostly Stable, Active and Dynamic personality. Active and Dynamic personalities belong to Activity group, while Stable to the Responsibility group. Finally, bewerage brand Coca-Cola is perceived as mostly having Stable, Active and Dynamic personality. Therefore, they also belong to Responsibility and Activity group.

The initially hypothesised personality types for both Samsung and Adidas were Activity or Responsibility, and for Coca-Cola Simplicity or Responsibility. These personality types were selected based on the product category the brands represent. The results show that all three hypotheses are supported. Only Coca-Cola has one additional perceived brand personality group, Activity, that was not hypothesised. Interestingly, the personality types with the lowest level of respondent agreement for all three brands include personalities such as Romantic, Sentimental and Aggressive. These seem to be the type of adjectives that are not the first to come to mind when thinking about technology, sportswear, or soft drinks. This in turn would seem to suggest that the product category of a brand can have an impact on brand personality perception by triggering personality associations most typical for the category. Therefore, hypotheses H2a, H2b and H2c are supported.

The table below shows which hypotheses were accepted or rejected as well as their significance level.

Hypo-thesis		Sig-nifi-cance	Result
H1a	Uncertainty avoidance has a positive influence on Stable brand personality	.154	re-jected
H1b	Power distance has a negative influence on Simple brand personality	.040	re-jected
H1c	Power distance has a negative influence on Ordinary brand personality	.089	re-jected
H1d	Indulgence has a negative influence on Ordinary brand personality	.040	re-jected
H1e	Individualism has a positive influence on Bold brand personality	.001	sup-ported
H1f	Individualism has a positive influence on Dynamic brand personality	.012	sup-ported
H1g	Long-term orientation has a positive influence on Responsible brand personality	<.001	sup-ported
H1h	Masculinity has a positive influence on Bold brand personality	<.001	sup-ported
H2a	The technology brand is likely to have the strongest association with Activity or Responsibility personality traits	N/A	sup-ported
H2b	The sportswear brand is likely to have the strongest association with Activity or Responsibility personality traits	N/A	sup-ported
H2c	The beverage brand to is likely to have the strongest association with Simplicity or Responsibility personality traits	N/A	sup-ported

Table 4. Hypothesis results

The study also collected data concerning Hofstede's cultural dimensions. The table below shows the calculated mean score for each cultural dimension. As with the questions measuring brand personality perception, there is a five point Likert scale where 1 means strong agreement and 5 strong disagreement. The table with the official Hofstede's cultural dimensions for the case countries can be found in chapter 3. Finnish respondents seem to have a stronger level of power distance, as well as masculinity and long-term orientation than in original Hofstede data. This means that respondents are more

focused on wealth and prestige, as well as achievement. They also tend to prepare for the future. Vietnamese respondents have stronger level of individualism, masculinity, long-term orientation, and indulgence compared to official cultural dimension scores. Thus, the respondents care more about the interest of individuals instead of groups, and similarly to Finns focus on achievement and prestige. Serbian respondents in turn have a stronger level of individualism, masculinity, long-term orientation, and indulgence. Therefore, they also are focused on the interests of an individual, are competitive and appreciate leisure time. They are also persistent. Interestingly, majority of the differences compared to the original scores are linked to stronger power distance, masculinity, individualism, and indulgence. These cultural dimensions are connected to ambitions, achievement, prestige and having fun. Therefore, respondents are more competitive and oriented towards values that could be seen as more materialistic. This study was conducted much later than the IBM research which was done in 1960s and 1970s, and therefore represents the current situation. Time is one of the factors that can have an impact on results. (Hofstede & Minkov, 2013, 5). In addition, according to Hofstede (2013), scores received through VSM questionnaire cannot be directly compared to the official cultural dimension scores. This is because "…comparisons should be based on matched samples of respondents: people similar on all criteria other than nationality that could systematically affect the answers" (Hofstede & Minkov, 2013, 5). In order to be fully comparable, the respondents should be matched to the original population taking part in the IBM study.

Culture	Power distance	Individualism	Masculinity	Uncertainty avoidance	Long-term orientation	Indulgence
Vietnam	2.20	1.99	1.97	2.29	1.84	2.64
Finland	2.40	2.05	2.17	2.52	2.13	2.48
Serbia	2.40	2.06	1.99	2.67	2.22	2.42

Table 5. Mean scores of cultural dimensions

5.3. Summary of the study and final conclusions

This study examines the impact of cultural dimensions on brand personality perception by consumers. The topic is a relevant one because of the importance of well managed brands in increasingly competitive environment. Distinctive brands are more likely to stand out from the competition, and taking cultural aspects in account can improve brand performance.

The theory used in the study includes Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions and brand personality scale by Geuens et al. (2009). Hofstede's (2001) work was chosen because it is well-known, widely used, and easy to understand, while the scale of Geuens et al. (2009) addresses some of the downsides of Aaker's (1997) work. In addition, the author wanted to test the applicability of a lesser known personality scale. The data collection was done through self-administered online based questionnaires. Such method allowed to remove possible researcher bias and made the collection of big number of answers, as well as their comparison easier. Convenience sample was used, which means that the population was not matched in any particular way. After removing the low variance responses, 228 responses were left and included in the study.

All in all, out of eight hypotheses concerning impact of cultural dimensions on brand personality perception, only two were not statistically significant. Therefore, it can be stated that for the most part there is certainly a connection between culture and consumer brand personality perception. Therefore, findings support Hofstede and de Mooij's (2010) suspicion that consumers may attribute their cultural preferences to brands. However, the study also showed that the connection between culture and brand personality perception may not necessarily be always straightforward. Two of the hypotheses were rejected because the nature of the relationship was not as anticipated, as it was positive instead of negative. This needs more research to determine whether the relationship between culture and brand personality perception can be negative at all, or if it tends to be only positive.

Another finding of the study is that the product category of a brand triggers personality associations that can be considered to be most typical for the category. This is further supported by the fact that the weakest association respondents had were the ones that did not seem appropriate for the product category. This confirms the theory of Maehle et al. (2011). The finding is even more interesting because of the fact that Maehle et al. (2011) used Aaker's (1997) brand personality scale. Therefore, this study contributed additional theory by testing the applicability of brand personality scale by Geuens et al. (2009). Product category has a clear impact on brand personality attribution regardless of the brand personality scale used.

The cultural dimensions data shows that the scores for several dimensions differ compared to the official scores for each culture. One of the reasons may be that the respondents represent mostly the young generation, people in their twenties or thirties. Younger people are more likely to fall under the influence of globalisation, and it in turn may affect their values or views to some extent. Also, the study uses a convenience sample, which produced a population where respondents were not matched to each other. The official research conducted by Hofstede carefully matched the population of each culture (Hofstede & Minkov, 2013, 5). In addition, the Cronbach's alpha score for cultural dimensions data was mostly below .70. This was deemed acceptable for the purpose of a master thesis, but should be noted. For this reason, the author feels that the cultural dimension scores should not be generalised to apply to the case cultures in general, but only to this particular study.

The are several contributions of this study. First of all, it added research data involving Finland and Serbia. Previous studies related to the topic of brand personalities involved mostly big countries such as United States, Spain, Japan, and China among others. Also, the research goal of involving at least one Asian culture was met by involving Vietnam. This was set as a goal because of the need to test western made brand personality theory also in Asian context. Another contribution is producing research involving all six Hofstede's cultural dimensions while before it focused on two dimensions, power distance

and uncertainty avoidance. As mentioned previously, the study contributed also by using the brand personality scale by Geuens et al. (2009).

5.4. Managerial implications

The most important thing the study has confirmed is that the importance of culture in marketing context is crucial. Results suggest that consumers attach their own personality preferences to brands. When developing a brand, marketers should avoid marketing or brand personality which is foreign to the target group. Preferably a brand should resonate with the consumers and should be understandable and acceptable to them. Marketers need to keep culture of their target customers in mind when designing a brand or marketing communications for their product. Cultural factors of target group must be known, that way preferences may be identified more accurately. This could be especially important in the case of considering international expansion to a new location. It should be kept in mind that in some countries there may be more than one cultural group, as there are big differences inside the country. Based on study results and on subject literature, there is no doubt that taking cultural aspects in account can make brands more relevant to consumers. Increased relevance can transfer to increased interest, and subsequently business. Many consumers select which products to purchase based on their perceived symbolic benefits (Solomon, 1983; Maehle, Otnes & Supphellen, 2011, 290). Therefore, marketers cannot afford to ignore the importance of cultural preferences of their target group.

When it comes to the impact of product category on brand personality attribution, the marketers should be aware that it may be more challenging to make consumers attribute personalities which could be considered unusual for the category. It could require more effort, and possibly focusing on experiential factors of the brand more than functional.

5.5. Suggestions for further study

Future research would benefit from reasoning behind the decision making process of the respondents. Therefore a qualitative research method, and an interview would be an interesting option. It would allow the respondents to explain in their own words why exactly they perceive a brand having a specific type of personality. Equally important would be to hear why respondents do not perceive some brand personality. This could help to explore the subject of brand personality perception using personality scale by Geuens et al. (2009) in more detail.

Impact of product category on brand personality attribution could be researched further by studying several brands that all represent the same product category. This would allow to compare the personality attribution between the brands, and see whether there are statistically significant differences.

In addition, it would be interesting to study the subject from a different point of view, and study brand personality perception of something other than physical products. For example Hosany, Ekinci & Uysal (2006) as well as Kaplan, Yurt, Guneri & Kurtulus (2010) studied brand personalities in context of places. Studying the impact of culture on such brand personalities would provide deeper understanding about the subject, and help marketing professionals by providing information about whether or not brand personality attribution theory applies only to physical products. Similarly research from a B2B point of view is needed, because it tends to differ from consumer marketing.

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Appendix 1. Questionnaire form

Please think of an ideal job, disregarding your present job, if you have one. When choosing an ideal job, how important would it be to you to ... :

1 = of utmost importance
2 = very important
3 = of moderate importance
4 = of little importance
5 = of very little or no importance

01. have sufficient time for your

personal or home life   1   2   3   4   5

02. have a boss (direct superior)

you can respect   1   2   3   4   5

03. get recognition for good performance   1   2   3   4   5

04. have security of employment   1   2   3   4   5

05. have pleasant people to work with   1   2   3   4   5

06. do work that is interesting   1   2   3   4   5

07. be consulted by your boss

in decisions involving your work   1   2   3   4   5

08. live in a desirable area   1   2   3   4   5

09. have a job respected by your

family and friends   1   2   3   4   5

10. have chances for promotion   1   2   3   4   5

In your private life, how important is each of the following to you:

11. keeping time free for fun   1   2   3   4   5

12. moderation: having few desires   1   2   3   4   5

13. doing a service to a friend   1   2   3   4   5

14. thrift (not spending more than needed)   1   2   3   4   5

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?:

1 = strongly agree
2 = agree
3 = undecided
4 = disagree
5 = strongly disagree

15. One can be a good manager
without having a precise answer to
every question that a subordinate
may raise about his work   1   2   3   4   5

16. Persistent efforts are the
surest way to results   1   2   3   4   5

17. An organization structure in
which certain subordinates have two
bosses should be avoided at all cost   1   2   3   4   5

18. A company's or organization's
rules should not be broken -
not even when the employee
thinks breaking the rule would be
in the organization's best interest   1   2   3   4   5

19. How often do you feel nervous or tense?
1. always
2. usually
3. sometimes
4. seldom
5. never

20. Are you a happy person?
1. always
2. usually
3. sometimes
4. seldom
5. never

21. Do other people or circumstances ever prevent you from doing what you really want to?
1. yes, always
2. yes, usually
3. sometimes
4. no, seldom
5. no, never

22. All in all, how would you describe your state of health these days?
1. very good
2. good
3. fair
4. poor
5. very poor

23. How proud are you to be a citizen of your country?
1. very proud
2. fairly proud
3. somewhat proud
4. not very proud
5. not proud at all

24. How often, in your experience, are subordinates afraid to contradict their boss (or students their teacher?)
1. never
2. seldom
3. sometimes
4. usually
5. always

25.Imagine Coca-Cola brand as a person. What kind of personality traits would this person have? Please rate your level of agreement with each statement.

1 = strongly agree
2 = agree
3 = undecided
4 = disagree
5 = strongly disagree

	1	2	3	4	5
The brand is down to earth	1	2	3	4	5
The brand is stable	1	2	3	4	5
The brand is responsible	1	2	3	4	5
The brand is active	1	2	3	4	5
The brand is dynamic	1	2	3	4	5
The brand is innovative	1	2	3	4	5
The brand is aggressive	1	2	3	4	5
The brand is bold	1	2	3	4	5
The brand is ordinary	1	2	3	4	5
The brand is simple	1	2	3	4	5
The brand is romantic	1	2	3	4	5
The brand is sentimental	1	2	3	4	5

26. Imagine Samsung brand as a person. What kind of personality traits would this person have? Please rate your level of agreement with each statement.

1 = strongly agree
2 = agree
3 = undecided
4 = disagree
5 = strongly disagree

The brand is down to earth	1	2	3	4	5
The brand is stable	1	2	3	4	5
The brand is responsible	1	2	3	4	5
The brand is active	1	2	3	4	5
The brand is dynamic	1	2	3	4	5
The brand is innovative	1	2	3	4	5
The brand is aggressive	1	2	3	4	5
The brand is bold	1	2	3	4	5
The brand is ordinary	1	2	3	4	5
The brand is simple	1	2	3	4	5
The brand is romantic	1	2	3	4	5
The brand is sentimental	1	2	3	4	5

27. Imagine Adidas brand as a person. What kind of personality traits would this person have? Please rate your level of agreement with each statement.

1 = strongly agree
2 = agree
3 = undecided
4 = disagree
5 = strongly disagree

The brand is down to earth	1	2	3	4	5
The brand is stable	1	2	3	4	5
The brand is responsible	1	2	3	4	5
The brand is active	1	2	3	4	5
The brand is dynamic	1	2	3	4	5
The brand is innovative	1	2	3	4	5
The brand is aggressive	1	2	3	4	5
The brand is bold	1	2	3	4	5
The brand is ordinary	1	2	3	4	5
The brand is simple	1	2	3	4	5
The brand is romantic	1	2	3	4	5
The brand is sentimental	1	2	3	4	5

Some information about yourself:

28. Are you:
1. male
2. female

29. How old are you?
1. Under 20
2. 20-24
3. 25-29
4. 30-34
5. 35-39
6. 40-49
7. 50-59
8. 60 or over

30. How many years of formal school education (or their equivalent) did you complete (starting with primary school)?
1. 10 years or less
2. 11 years
3. 12 years
4. 13 years
5. 14 years
6. 15 years
7. 16 years
8. 17 years
9. 18 years or over

31. If you have or have had a paid job, what kind of job is it / was it?
1. No paid job (includes full-time students)
2. Unskilled or semi-skilled manual worker
3. Generally trained office worker or secretary
4. Vocationally trained craftsperson, technician, IT-specialist, nurse, artist or equivalent
5. Academically trained professional or equivalent (but not a manager of people)
6. Manager of one or more subordinates (non-managers)
7. Manager of one or more managers

32. What is your nationality?

Appendix 2. Mean scores of brand personality perception

Brand	Brand personality	Personality group	Mean
Samsung	Innovative	Activity	1.79
	Stable	Responsibility	1.80
	Active	Activity	2.00
	Down to earth	Responsibility	2.09
	Responsible	Responsibility	2.16
	Bold	Aggressiveness	2.42
	Simple	Simplicity	2.67
	Dynamic	Activity	2.70
	Sentimental	Emotionality	2.71
	Ordinary	Simplicity	2.89
	Romantic	Emotionality	3.06
	Aggressive	Aggressiveness	3.35
Adidas	Stable	Responsibility	1.75
	Active	Activity	1.95
	Dynamic	Activity	1.98
	Down to earth	Responsibility	2.00
	Innovative	Activity	2.05
	Responsible	Responsibility	2.23
	Bold	Aggressiveness	2.34
	Ordinary	Simplicity	2.79
	Romantic	Emotionality	2.84
	Simple	Simplicity	2.95
	Sentimental	Emotionality	3.12
	Aggressive	Aggressiveness	3.37
Coca-Cola	Stable	Responsibility	1.84
	Active	Activity	1.94
	Dynamic	Activity	2.05
	Innovative	Activity	2.22
	Down to earth	Responsibility	2.25
	Responsible	Responsibility	2.32
	Bold	Aggressiveness	2.42
	Simple	Simplicity	2.54
	Sentimental	Emotionality	2.59
	Ordinary	Simplicity	2.81
	Romantic	Emotionality	2.89
	Aggressive	Aggressiveness	3.29