Brand Personalities and Consumer-brand Relationships as Elements of Successful Brand Management

von Katharina S. Güse

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1.1.1   Defining brands

Brands are omnipresent in today's society. They surround us in our everyday life (Kapferer 2007; Klein 2000). But what exactly is a brand? According to the American Marketing Association, a brand is a "name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competition" (AMA 2010). From a different angle, brands are defined as intangible assets that are able to produce benefit for both the internal and external stakeholders of the company – such as employees, customers, suppliers or civil society organizations (Srivastava, Fahey, and Christensen 2001; Crane, Matten, and Moon 2008). Again another definition argues that brands are a set of perceptions (Kapferer 2007). These definitions are only a few examples for the manifold angles from which researchers and practitioners approach the brand phenomenon. The diversity of brand definitions also suggests that different perspectives can be taken when exploring the world of brand, such as the legal, the management or the customer perspective.

From the legal perspective, the brand is the right that protects the use of a name, a logo or a combination of them. The legal term for a brand is trademark. This trademark is used to identify the product or the service of a company and to differentiate it from offerings of competing manufacturers (Keller 2008, Ramello 2006). However, even though brands legally exist from the day of their registration on, the company constantly has to build and manage the brand to defend it against a premature dissolution – there is no direct link between owning a brand and

economic outcomes (Herbig and Milewicz 1993). Thus, different brands although being protected in a similar legal manner may result in different market shares, cash flows or profit margins (Keller 2008, Kerin and Sethuraman 1998). The explanation resides in the fact that every brand has its positioning and that this positioning contributed to the emergence of brand-specific images in the minds of customer which, in turn, influence customers' purchasing decisions (e.g. De Chernatony 1999, Keller and Lehmann 2003). The more unique a brand's positioning, and the closer this positioning gets to the ideal positioning a customer or segment expects in a given product category, the better the brand's economic performance.

Therefore, from the company's perspective, branded articles are a device to create some form of "imperfect competition". A product comprises non-distinguishing and distinguishing intrinsic attributes. For instance, pens can be used to make a note. But how do the different pens differ from each other? The brand name, the logo and other extrinsic attributes such as the price or the packaging are the components which are needed to create a brand. The brand summarizes what a company's offerings stand for and what they are like. Successful brands often manage to convince customers that the offerings sold under their name and logo are unique, or at least clearly different from other offerings on the same market. As a consequence, brands are increasingly considered to constitute critical resources allowing companies to gain a competitive advantage over their competitors (Srivastava, Shervani, and Fahey 1998; Hunt 2000). They are seen as intangible assets which contribute to the financial performance of the company (Srivastava et al. 2001; Madden, Fehle, and Fournier 2006). For instance, through higher prices or quick consumer responses to marketing activities, they lead to increased and faster cash flows. Also the vulnerability of cash flows is limited through customer loyalty towards a brand. As consumers, who are (emotionally) attached to a brand, have high switching costs, the cash flows are less volatile. Furthermore, brands may attract a larger customer base and customers who are willing to buy further products from the same company (cross-selling effects, Srivastava, Shervani, and Fahey 1999). Be-

side this, brands also have psychological effects such as brand awareness, brand liking, brand trust (e.g. Ambler 1997, Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001). However, there is a clear link between psychological effects that brands have on the customer and economic outcomes on the firm. Particularly those customers who like and trust the brand will tend to repurchase the brand and in return lead to constant cash flows. So, in the end, we see that strong brands contribute to the firm's financial performance.

From the consumer perspective, brands are described as a set of perceptions (Kapferer 2007, Guthrie and Kim 2009). Different types of information – such as verbal, visual, or contextual information – are stored in the consumer's mind. Based on marketing activities by the company and personal experiences with the brand, each individual develops specific brand perceptions (Romaniuk and Nicholls 2006). These perceptions trigger mental processes in the consumer's mind. They can result in both emotional and cognitive effects (Bhat and Reddy 1998). For consumers, brands may have different functions: for instance, they guarantee a specific quality level or they provide orientation. For example, in a product category such as shampoo where the difference between products is hard to evaluate, brands simplify the evaluation of alternatives. But brands do not only facilitate the buying process of customers. They may also serve as device to communicate with social groups surrounding the individual (e.g. Muniz and O'Guinn 2001, Del Río, Vázquez, and Víctor Iglesias 2001).

1.1.2 Measuring brand value

Because for many companies brand constitute important assets, academics and practitioners alike investigate how to measure a brand's value, often referred to as brand equity (or customer-based brand equity, see Keller 1993). Brand equity has been defined as "the incremental contri-

bution […] obtained by the brand in comparison to the underlying product (or service) with no brand-building efforts" (Srinivasan, Park, and Chang 2005, p. 1433). Numerous approaches exist to measure brand equity (see Esch and Geus 2005 for an overview). We can distinguish between financial techniques (see Salinas and Ambler 2009 for an overview) and customer-based brand equity techniques (Srinivasan et al. 2005, Keller 2008). The latter concentrate on how the consumer perceives the brand and which emotional and cognitive effects (psychological effects) the brand has on the customer mind-set. In the customer-based brand equity measurement techniques, the brand value depends upon the question whether customers have changed their mind towards the brand as a result of marketing campaigns. More precisely, five dimensions have emerged from customer-based brand equity research as measures of the costumer mind-set (Keller 2008). These dimensions are seen as the sources of brand equity:

- Brand awareness
- Brand associations
- Brand attitudes
- Brand attachment
- Brand activity.

Brand awareness means the extent to which customers recall and recognize the brand. Another measure of brand equity is brand association: The stronger, the more favourable and the more unique a brand is perceived by the customer, the more customers feel that the brand satisfies their needs. In that sense, brand associations such as brand image and brand personality are key sources of brand value (see also Biel 1993; Esch, Langner, Schmitt, Geus 2006). Third, brand attitudes serve as measure of the customer mind-set. They reveal how customers evaluate a brand in terms of its quality. They also indicate which feelings the customer has towards the brand as well as his degree of brand satisfaction. Brand attachment is the fourth measure of brand value. According to Keller (2008) brand attachment means the degree of loyalty the customer feels towards the brand. A strong form of attachment causes that the customer remains loyal towards the brand. Similarly, strong brand relationships hinder the customer from switching to a competitor brand.

Thus, brand relationships are positively linked to brand equity (Blackston 1992). Finally, brand value can be measured by the extent to which customers use the brand and talk to others about the brand (brand activity).

Among these dimensions, especially the dimensions brand associations, e.g. brand image, and brand attachment, e.g. brand relationship, have received much interest over the last few decades.

1.2 Academic and managerial relevance

Overall, managing brands plays a pivotal role in the company's marketing strategy. Brand building and management frequently represent an important percentage of a firm's overall marketing expense (Domadenik, Prašnikar, Svejnar 2001). In general, brand management can be defined as a systematic process directed at creating, maintaining and nurturing brands in order to build up positions of competitive advantage in the company's target markets (Keller 2008). Gaining these competitive advantages has become a crucial challenge – especially in times of financial crisis, strong price competition and highly fragmented markets (Shocker, Srivastava and Ruekert 1994). As a consequence, marketing scholars and practitioners alike show strong interest in concepts and mechanisms that can potentially increase the value of a company's brand portfolio.

In particular, the **brand personality** concept, as one dimension of brand image (e.g. Plummer 1985), has received increasing attention among researchers (Aaker and Fournier 1995; Aaker 1997; Freling and Forbes 2005; Ang and Lim 2006). Faircloth argues that, compared to other dimensions such as brand awareness, brand personality is the most significant antecedent of brand equity (2005). Further studies show that the effect between brand personality and purchase intention is significant (for instance Ang and Lim 2006). From a managerial vantage point, the

brand personality concept represents a strategic tool allowing the establishment of strong brands (Aaker 1996; Keller, and Lehman 2003; Lombardi 2007). However, in the marketing literature, disagreement still exists regarding the conceptualization and measurement of brand personality (see for instance Azoulay and Kapferer 2003; Austin, Siguaw, and Mattila 2003).

In a similar spirit, the **brand relationship** concept has received much interest between brand managers and scholars (Fournier 1994; Fournier 1998; Aaker et al., 2004; Kressmann et al.; 2006; Hayes et al. 2006). It constitutes the result of a paradigm shift from a purely transaction to a relationship oriented marketing perspective. Blackston argues that a link exists between brand relationships and brand equity (1992). Research revealed that one brand equity measure alone, such as brand knowledge, is not sufficient for building strong brands in the long term. Rather brand relationship factors must be considered (Esch et al. 2006). However, this research stream is still in its infancy. Our knowledge concerning drivers of successful brand relationships remains limited.

The focus of this doctoral dissertation lies on the brand personality and the brand relationship concepts. According to both academics and practitioners, they represent two particularly important building blocks of brand equity. However, the two concepts still lack a comprehensive understanding. Hence, the following chapters will attempt to provide deeper insight into how to measure and manage brand personality and how to build strong consumer-brand relationships.

1.3   Research Objective

The purpose of this dissertation is twofold: The first objective is to analyze how customers perceive brand personalities. Here, the focus lies

upon two more specific research issues. The first issue concerns the coherence of perceptions different consumers develop about a given brand. In extant research about brand personalities, the underlying assumption is that there is a high level of homogeneity among customer perceptions of one brand, i.e. all customers have a fairly unique perception of one brand's personality. This research questions whether the amount of variance in customer brand personality perceptions is truly low. Empirically, this chapter examines whether all customers perceive an identical brand personality or if customers perceive the same brand personality differently. This is a crucial question because many companies strongly invest in advertising campaigns aimed at creating or reinforcing a specific brand personality (Batra, Myers and Aaker 1996). Against this background, understanding the process of translation from the brand personality a company intends to create (intended brand personality constellation) to the brand personalities customers perceive (Plummer 2000) is of high importance in order to evaluate the effectiveness of brand personality building.

The second research issue related to brand personalities concerns brand personality measurement. Reviewing the extant literature on the brand personality concept reveals that much criticism exists with respect to the brand personality scale most widely used by scholars (Aaker 1997). In order to address this issue, we introduce an alternative conceptualization of brand personality by drawing upon social psychology. The aim is to test the appropriateness of this alternative conceptualization by analyzing a model linking brand personality perceptions, emotions, brand attitude and purchase intentions based upon prior work by Fiske, Cuddy, Glick and Xu (2002) and Cuddy, Fiske and Glick (2007).

The second objective of this dissertation is to improve our understanding of how customers form relationships towards brands. In a first step (and as a third research issue in this dissertation) a thorough literature review on the extant research on consumer-brand relationships is provided. The aim here is to scrutinize past research. This literature review will portray how the concept of consumer-brand relationships has been used in the marketing literature and serve to identify precisely the variables and concepts that deserve attention. Subsequently (and as a fourth research

issue), these variables are integrated into a conceptual model of consumer-brand relationships comprising relevant antecedents and mediating variables. In a second step the model is then tested empirically.

In doing so, this doctoral thesis seeks to provide a clear picture of the current state of brand personality and consumer-brand relationship research. Moreover, it aims at fostering a better conceptual basis for future studies in these two research fields.

1.4   Epistemological position

What are the criteria that need to be fulfilled to make a theory scientific? How can we contribute to science, and how does science progress? These questions are of epistemological nature. They are important for scientific work and have been addressed by philosophers such as Auguste Comte, Thomas Kuhn and Karl Popper to mention but a few (Chalmers 1982, Popper 2006a, Popper 2006b). The main concern of epistemologists is to investigate how we acquire knowledge and how science progresses. While epistemologists have the common objective to explain the essence of science and to predict further developments, they disagree on the methods that should be used for the contribution to science (Chalmers 1982).

This thesis follows the positivistic approach which has been one of the major epistemological theories in the social science research. Its core idea is that social reality exists externally and its properties should be measured by objective methods. That is, concepts should be operationalized to enable the quantitative measurement of concepts (see e.g. Hunt 1990, Hunt 1991, Hunt 2000, Hunt 2010). In this study, all concepts are operationalized and measured based on the extant literature. Therefore, this thesis satisfies the principle of positivism.

Proponents of positivism stress the importance of validity and reliability of measurement before claiming that research outcomes can contribute to knowledge (Brannick and Coghlan 2007). Accordingly, this study pays

adequate attention regarding the validity and reliability of the developed scales for brand personality and brand relationship related measurement scales.

For the positivists, a theory should include one basic model that links concepts together (Brannick and Coghlan 2007). Following the idea of positivism, this thesis deduces a series of hypotheses, especially in chapter 3 and 5, describing the relationships between the focal constructs as well as their outcomes. Then these hypotheses are subjected to empirical testing. This approach allows to accept, reject, or to modify a hypothesized relationship, and is consistent with a positivistic logic to scientific research.

1.5 Research structure

The structure of the dissertation is as follows: Chapter 2 provides a summary of the current knowledge on brand personality as well as an overview of the caveats in this realm. Subsequently, a taxonomic analysis of brand personality perceptions follows in an empirical study.

Drawing upon social psychology, chapter 3 proposes a model which analyzes the link between brand perception, emotions and consumers' purchase intentions.

In order to address the second main purpose of this dissertation, chapter 4 provides a comprehensive literature review. This state-of-the-art review covers brand relationships towards consumer goods brands. Based on the knowledge gained in chapter 4, chapter 5 proposes a model with hypotheses about the links between antecedent and mediating variables of brand relationships as well as brand loyalty as an outcome variable.

Finally, this thesis concludes in chapter 6 with a summary of the findings, managerial and theoretical implications as well as suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2. Customers' Brand Personality Perceptions: A Taxonomic Analysis[1]

2.1 Introduction

Brands play a pivotal role in the marketing strategy of most companies. Increasingly they are considered to constitute critical resources allowing companies to gain competitive advantage over their competitors (Srivastava, Shervani, and Fahey 1998; Hunt 2000). Brand building and management frequently represent an important percentage of a firm's overall marketing expense. As a consequence, marketing scholars and practitioners alike show strong interest in concepts and mechanisms that can potentially increase the value of a company's brand portfolio. Beyond financial aspects of measuring brand equity, the mental processes triggered by brands inside the customer's mind are at the centre of academic research.

One of the key concepts in this context is brand personality. Brand personality represents a strategic tool allowing for the establishment of strong brands (Aaker 1996; Keller, and Lehmann 2003; Lombardi 2007). The marketing sub-discipline which analyzes customer brand personality perception draws upon psychological research on the personality of human beings. A key outcome of fundamental research in human psychology has been the identification of the "Big Five Personality Factors" of human personality (Goldberg 1992). Marketing research attempts to identify comparable personality structures with regard to brands. The rationale for studying brand personality is that a significant link exists between brand personality and outcome variables such as preference (Aaker 1999), usage (Sirgy 1982), emotions (Biel 1993), trust and loyalty (Fournier 1994).

Aaker (1997) identifies five dimensions by means of which brands can be described. Since the publication of her seminal article, numerous

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[1] Most of this chapter is taken from Guese and Ivens (2008).

authors have drawn upon her approach and have used the measurement scales she provides. According to Aaker (1997), a company's marketing management positions a brand by determining its extent of sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness. In this study a brand's specific personality, positioned along Aaker's brand personality dimensions, is defined as the brand's personality constellation. The brand personality constellation is an outcome of the brand positioning process. It is the one combination of personality traits defined by the managers in charge of the brand and that characterizes a specific brand.

In management practice, variance occurs among brand personality constellations. The number of brand personality constellations that can be designed along Aaker's five dimensions is vast. However, social scientists often observe that in reality a limited number of empirically observable constellations exist, even though no natural forces limit or reduce variety. These typical constellations are often referred to as "types" or "styles", for example consumer types, life styles or decision making styles. Academic research provides little insight into the extent to which variance in the design of brand personalities exists.

In addition to the variety of brand personality constellations that are empirically observable, there is a second field of variance. Strategic marketing defines brand personalities and marketing instruments express a brand's personality. Customers interpret the signals a brand sends out to them and develop individual and subjective perceptions of the brand's personality. Because each customer may perceive the same brand personality signals in different ways, a certain amount of variance among customer perceptions is expected for one and the same brand. From a brand management perspective, the challenge is to achieve a low level of variance among customers' perceptions of a brand.

The aim of this chapter is to explore the amount of variance in customer brand personality perception. For this purpose a taxonomic approach is used. A taxonomy is an empirical tool for classifying observations into groups. It makes it possible to verify, in the study-specific context, whether customer perceptions of a given brand personality are homogeneous or heterogeneous. If a brand's management succeeds in its task of

creating a clear and distinct brand personality, then the level of variance between customers' brand personality perceptions should be relatively low. If different customers attribute different personality traits to the same brand then brand management may need to reconsider the marketing mix deployed in order to transmit the brand personality.

In this chapter, cluster analysis is used for their taxonomic exploration of brand personality perceptions. Results are based on data from an empirical survey among 571 customers. Each participant described one out of seven consumer goods brands from three product categories (food, skin care, and sporting goods) on a reduced set of Aaker's (1997) scale. Four typical constellations of brand personality perceptions emerge from these analyses. Examining the distribution of respondents' brand personality perceptions across clusters allows for an analysis of the homogeneity or heterogeneity in brand personality perceptions.

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows. First, the extant literature on brand personality research and on the use of taxonomies in marketing is reviewed. Next, the presentations of the research design and the empirical findings of this study follow. Finally, theoretical and managerial implications are discussed as well as limitations of the present study which provide avenues for future research.

2.2   A taxonomic analysis of brand personality perceptions

2.2.1   Brand personality research

Scholars are increasingly studying brands as quasi-human beings (Berry 1988; Durgee 1988; Levy 1985; Lombardi 2007; Plummer 1984/85). Against this background, Aaker (1997, p. 347) defines brand personality as the "set of human characteristics associated with a brand". In order to enable more detailed empirical research on this phenomenon she develops a measurement instrument, the "Brand Personality Scale (BPS)". Based on an extensive study of consumers in the US, she derives a

framework of five distinct dimensions, comparable to the "Big Five Factors" (Norman 1963) in human personality research, to describe a brand's personality: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness. Even though some researchers critically discuss the construct, brand personality is widely investigated in different contexts.

Table 2-1 presents a summary of selected brand personality research based on Aaker's "Brand Personality Scale" (1997). This research deals with articles focusing on (1) cross-country validation, (2) cross-industry validation of the brand personality construct and (3) on those evaluating the predictive quality of brand personality.

Group 1 consists of several successive studies which apply the brand personality framework in different countries. For example, in a comparative study conducted in the United States, Japan and Spain, Aaker, Benet-Martinez and Garolera (2001) confirm their cross-cultural validity for only part of the initial five dimensions whereas certain culture-specific dimensions appeared. In a study conducted in South Korea which used domestic as well as global brands, Sung and Tinkham (2005) come to the same conclusion. In line with these findings, Supphellen and Gronhaug (2003) identify similarities and differences between a Western and a Russian context.

Group 2 comprises articles focusing on the application of the brand personality scale in different industries. For instance, Venable, Rose, Bush and Gilbert (2005) analyze the brand personality of non-profit organizations and result in four brand personality dimensions. By applying the Aaker scale to the context of sport organizations, Smith, Graetz and Westerbeek (2006) identify six dimensions of brand personality. Furthermore, Hosany, Ekinci and Uysal (2006) test the relevance of brand personality to tourism destinations. They end up with a three dimensional model comprising sincerity, excitement and conviviality. These findings are in line with Azoulay and Kapferer's (2003) thesis that Aaker's framework is not generalizable to every research situation. Another criticism of Aaker's brand personality scale focuses on the necessity to strictly define the brand personality construct from closely related constructs before the construction of a measurement (Austin,

Siguaw, and Mattila 2003). These authors perceive brand personality more as a dimension of brand identity than as a separate construct.

Group 3 comprises studies which link the brand personality construct to different outcome variables. For example, Helgeson and Supphellen (2004) detect the impact of brand personality on customers' brand attitudes. Their results are in line with Wysong, Scott, Munch and Kleiser's findings (2002) who identify a link between brand personality and consumer decision-making. However, Kim, Han and Park (2001) cannot confirm a direct relationship between brand personality attractiveness and customer brand loyalty.

Table 2 - 1: Literature Review.

Author (Date)	Sample	Stimulus	Country	Key findings
Group 1: Research on cross-country validation				
Aaker et al. (2001)	1.495 Japanese panelists, 692 Spanish panelists	commercial brands of 25 product categories	USA, Spain, Japan	- five-component solution in Japan: excitement, competence, peacefulness, sincerity, sophistication - convergent and discriminant validity regarding the culture common dimensions: excitement, sincerity, sophistication, competence - five dimensions representing the Spanish brand personality: excitement, sincerity, sophistication, peacefulness, passion - Spain: mixture of competence associations in the sophistication dimension - culture-specific dimensions (peacefulness (Japan), ruggedness (USA) and passion (Spain)) mainly capture culture-specific meaning
Supphellen and Grønhaug (2003)	200 participants (107 students and 93 consumers)	Ford, Levi's	Russia	- five-factor solution for brand personality (sincerity, excitement, sophistication, ruggedness, successful, contemporary); similarities and differences between Western and Russian brand personality - brand personality of Western brands also have an impact on brand attitudes among Russian consumers - effect of Western brand personality is heavily moderated by consumer ethnocentrism: only low-ethnocentric consumers are influenced by foreign brand personality - brand personality has an influence on the brand evaluation; this effect is moderated by consumer ethnocentrism (brand personality only had an effect for low-ethnocentric consumers)

Sung and Tink-ham (2005)	320 US students, 337 Korean students	13 global brands	USA, Korea	- US brand personality: likeableness, trendiness, competence, sophistication, traditionalism, ruggedness, white collar, androgyny - Korean brand personality: competence, trendiness, likeableness, passive likeableness, sophistication, ascendancy, ruggedness, traditionalism - six common dimensions and two culture-specific factors (Korea: passive likeableness, ascendancy, USA: white collar, androgyny) were observed whereby the latter represent the cultural values of the respective country
Group 2: Research on cross-industry validation				
Venable et al. (2005)	1029 respondents	nonprofit organizations	USA	- personality describing adjectives similar to those in Aaker's set of items; however, social importance of nonprofits being kind, caring and compassionate as well as the trustworthiness of nonprofits emerged - detection of four brand personality dimensions; 15 items of the originally 54 item scale were retained which resulted in a more parsimonious measure - CFA supported the four factor solution which identified integrity, sophistication, ruggedness and nurturance as brand personality dimensions among nonprofit organizations
Smith et al. (2006)	413 members of a sporting organization	member-ship-based sport organization	Australia	- six-dimensional brand personality: competence, sincerity, innovation, excitement, sophistication ruggedness - studied brand is strongly associated with competence, sincerity and innovation; is moderately linked with excitement and sophistication and has a low connection with ruggedness - statistically significant correlations of brand personality dimensions with the attributes of the respondents

Hosany et al. (2006)	148 British nationals	tourism destination	UK	- three-factor solution of brand personality: sincerity, excitement, conviviality - destination image and destination personality are related concepts: the emotional component of destination image captures the majority of variance on destination personality dimensions - brand personality dimensions were significant in predicting the intention to recommend
Group 3: Research on brand personality's predictive quality				
Kim et al. (2001)	130 students	high-technology product (cellular phones)	Korea	- from the set of 42 personality traits 36 items remained to form five brand personality dimensions - high self-expressive value and high distinctiveness of brand personality leads to high evaluation of the brand personality attractiveness - brand identification has a positive effect on word-of-mouth reports - brand identification does not have a significant direct effect on brand loyalty, but an indirect effect through word-of-mouth reports - attractiveness of a brand personality has a direct effect on word-of-mouth reports and indirectly affects brand loyalty
Wysong et al. (2002)	84 students	beer industry	USA	- importance of different groups of antecedents affected different brand personality - perceived beer's ruggedness positively influences consumer's attitude towards the brand

Hel-geson and Sup-phellen (2004)	424 female con-sumers	clothing industry	Sweden	- brand personality measurement resulted in a two-factor solution: the dimension "clas-sic" was similar to Aaker's sophistication dimension; the dimension "modern" resem-bled Aaker's excitement dimension - self-congruity and brand personality are empirically discriminant and have positive, independent effects on brand attitudes, moderated by socially desirable responding - socially desirable responding has a negative, moderating effect on the relationship between self-congruity and brand attitude - socially desirable responding has a positive, moderating effect on the relationship between brand personality and brand attitudes - stronger effect of ideal self-congruity on brand attitude than of actual self-congruity

This brief literature review reflects the strong interest scholars have recently shown in brand personality management and customer perception of brand personality. Despite this endeavour to better understand the construct's importance and role, several questions remain unanswered. One open question concerns the customer's perceptual space. Numerous studies report empirical results based upon perceptual data for various brands and their personalities, yet little is known about the homogeneity of these perceptions among consumers who evaluate the same brand and across different brands. Irrespective of the brand personality framework one uses, the assumption that brand personalities can be described along several dimensions opens room for variance not only in the brand personality constellations brand managers may define, but also for variance among consumer perceptions.

Each single respondent in a study can describe a brand along n dimensions and on k scale points. The larger the number of dimensions and the more scale points are available for the rating, the larger the potential for heterogeneity in brand personality perceptions. Aaker (1997), for example, suggests using five dimensions measured on five point Likert-type scales. Each dimension is measured through a set of items. Each respondent's scores on each dimension are aggregated and can take any value between 1 and 5. Thus, the number of possible brand personality perceptions is considerable. The present study refers to the individual and subjective perception one consumer develops of a given brand along the five dimensions of the Aaker scale as his brand personality pattern. The brand management, responsible for positioning a given brand, would aim at minimising the heterogeneity of consumers' brand personality patterns with respect to their specific brand as much as possible. On the other hand, in order to achieve competitive differentiation brand personality patterns between brands should be heterogeneous.

Extant research provides little insight into consumers' brand personality patterns. It remains unknown whether there is no variance in these patterns, whether variance is high but unstructured, or whether clusters of typical perceptions exist. Yet, without such insights cannot understand the process of translation from the brand personality a company intends to create (intended brand personality constellation) to the brand person-

alities customers perceive, i.e. the brand personality patterns (Plummer 2000). In fact, customer perceptions of brand personality traits can be formed and influenced by any direct or indirect contact a customer has with the brand (Aaker 1997; Ouwersloot and Tudorica 2001; Plummer 1985). In the marketing mix, brand communication, sales promotion, and advertising play a pivotal role in the transmission process between companies and customers (Batra, Lehmann, and Singh 1993; Ang and Lim 2006). The brand communication challenge is to harmonize customer perceived brand personality as much as possible with the intended brand personality as defined by the company.

Inherent in quantitative research published to date is the assumption that customers of a given brand perceive the personality of the brand in a fairly homogeneous way. Irrespective of the measurement approach used, scholars tend to interpret brand personality as a construct for which customer perceptions do not show important differences. For example, Aaker (1997), although reporting a standard deviation of around 1 for the brand personality factors and enumerating a series of directions for future research in order to further extend the knowledge of brand personalities, does not evoke the issue of inter-individual similarity of perceptions. So far, Freling and Forbes (2005, p.155) are the only authors who evoke the possible diversity of brand personality perceptions. Based on their qualitative research, they observe: "respondents expressed vastly conflicting perceptions about the same brand". This finding provides an indication that perceptual heterogeneity may play an important role when managing brand personalities. It highlights the fact that subjectivity is one of the central characteristics of perceptions, irrespective of the content of these perceptions. This chapter intends to fill the identified gap in brand personality research. This study conducts a taxonomic analysis of individual brand personality perceptions in order to analyze the level of homogeneity among consumers' brand personality patterns.

2.2.2   A taxonomic perspective on brand personality styles

The classificatory approach has a long standing tradition in marketing research. At the heart of any market segmentation, classifications also provide an approach to study and describe various other phenomena. Regardless of the specific variables which classifications draw upon, classifications may differ as to their origin. Whereas some classifications are purely based on conceptual distinctions (e.g., Krapfel, Salmond, and Spekman 1991), others are empirically derived (e.g., Cannon and Perreault 1999). The first are generally referred to as typologies, the latter are usually called taxonomies (Hunt 1991; Sanchez 1993). In brand management research, different approaches for classifying brands exist. For instance, Rossiter and Percy (1991) propose a brand typology based on involvement and a motivational dimension. They distinguish between low involvement (e.g. paper towels) and high involvement (e.g. life insurance). When referring to the motivational dimension, they distinguish between "think" (e.g. car battery) and "feel" (e.g. perfume). Another brand typology is based on brand aspects (physical, textual, meaning, experience) that can be open or closed (Pitt, Watson, Berthon, Wynn and Zinkhan 2006).

Since the aim of this chapter is to identify alternative brand personality patterns in consumer perceptions in practice, the approach of this study draws upon the taxonomic perspective. This approach is in line with the recent literature which increasingly uses empirical data either for establishing taxonomies or for empirically verifying conceptual typologies. An assumption in the extant literature is that such "holistic patterns of multiple variables" (Homburg, Workman, and Jensen 2002, p. 39) provide more insights into the differences between objects than isolated variables. They represent typical configurations of variables (here: consumers' individual brand personality patterns) which differ from other typical configurations, usually along the dimensions of a framework developed in conceptual research or in a theory (here: the dimensions of the brand personality construct as described by Aaker 1997). Hence, taxonomies are of descriptive value to researchers.

In addition to description, the typical constellations (types, styles etc.) identified through empirical studies may also serve for hypothesis formulation in further research. For example, in a comparative perspective brand personality patterns could be the independent variable in research studying dependent variables for which a researcher would expect a link with brand personality perceptions, such as attitudes or loyalty. The more a classification contributes to explaining important independent variables, the higher its value for research. On the other hand, clusters identified through taxonomic research can also serve as independent variables when researchers analyze the antecedents which may explain why a consumer has developed a specific personality perception pattern.

2.2.3 Brand personality patterns and brand evaluation

In order to establish whether the developed classification is relevant for brand management, further tests reveal whether the cluster, into which a consumer's brand personality pattern is assigned, has an impact on a set of outcome variables which show how a consumer evaluates a brand, namely attitude toward the brand, satisfaction, and brand preference. "Brand attitude" denotes a liking for a product (Suh and Yi 2006). Consumers form brand attitudes based on different cues such as past experience, advertising, and corporate image. Direct personal experience with the purchase or consumption of a brand is not required for a consumer to develop an attitude towards a brand (Oliver 1997). This aspect differentiates brand attitude from brand satisfaction (e.g., Oliver 1980). Many studies have been conducted to analyze the satisfaction construct (Anderson, Fornell, and Lehmann 1994; Fournier 1998; Magin, Algesheimer, Huber, and Herrmann 2003; Yi 1993). "Satisfaction" reflects an evaluation based on the total product purchase and consumption experience (Anderson, Fornell, and Lehmann 1994). Numerous studies underline the importance of satisfaction for customers' future purchasing decisions and related behaviors (e.g., Bloemer, de Ruyter, and Peeters 1998; Suh and Yi 2006). Brand satisfaction denotes the outcome of

the subjective evaluation that a chosen brand meets or exceeds expectations (Bloemer and Kasper 1995). From a brand management perspective, brand satisfaction, and also brand attitudes, are important because they represent presumed key antecedents of customer loyalty (Oliver 1999).

Consumers express their satisfaction with several brands in the same category at a time. Often, however, they need to build a clear preference for one brand in a given decision situation (Hellier, Geursen, Carr, and Rickard 2003). Hence, "brand preference" represents another important construct in the buying process (Bass and Talarzyk 1972). In particular, marketing managers need to understand how brand preferences vary from people to situations. Communication and positioning decisions are more likely to be effective if the relationships among customer perceptions of a brand and preferences for a given brand are known (Yang, Allenby, and Fennell 2002).

2.3   Empirical study

2.3.1   Study design

Given the research objective of examining whether distinct clusters in consumers' brand personality patterns exist, this study focuses on a set of seven both symbolic and utilitarian brands stemming from three different product categories: food (Emmi vs. Danone), sporting goods (Adidas vs. Puma vs. Nike) and skin care (Nivea vs. L'Oréal). Consumers who filled in the written questionnaire referred to one randomly assigned brand. Again, the purpose is not to develop a taxonomy which would be valid for all types of brands. This study concentrates on typical mass market FMCG brands. It aims at exploring whether consumers' perceptions of these brands show cluster-like structures, or whether no variance or unstructured variance is observed in these perceptions. In order to ensure the validity of the data collected, a filter question was used to make sure that participants knew the brand for which they ex-

pressed brand personality perceptions. Answers were included in the final data set for analysis only if the respondent confirmed that he knew the brand.

The data collection took place in the French speaking part of Switzerland. Therefore, the questionnaire was submitted to respondents in French. To ensure its comprehensibility as well as the equivalence of the original English scales a translation – back-translation approach was applied (Brislin 1970; Douglas and Craig 1983). In addition, the French version was checked by French native speakers and was pre-tested. For the main study, questionnaires were distributed in a snowball system. Students filled in one questionnaire and each student was then requested to collect 15 additional questionnaires respecting quota instructions. The study was part of a group assignment in the context of a marketing course. They obtained extra credits for handing in the correct number of questionnaires.

A total of 603 questionnaires was collected. Among the 603 respondents, 27 stated that they did not know the brand they were asked to evaluate and their questionnaires were therefore excluded from data analysis. Hence, the empirical results are based on a final sample of 571 questionnaires. As the data collection took place at a university, students constitute a large part of the sample (55.8%) and 52.9% of the informants were 24 years old or younger. Nevertheless, the sample is appropriate given the nature of the brands evaluated (see e.g., Homburg, Koschate, and Hoyer 2005). 53% of the respondents in the sample are women. The seven brands are quite equally distributed across the sample since the percentage of questionnaires received for each brand (as compared to the complete sample) ranges between 12.6% (Adidas, n=75) and 17.4% (Emmi, n=105). Regarding the frequency of use, 38.9% of the respondents answered that they use the brand they referred to at least once a week. 36.6% answered that they had used the brand since childhood. Only 16.1% of the informants stated that they did not use the brand they evaluated, but they confirmed that they knew the brand. Thus, the brand personality perceptions of the respondents in this study constitute a solid basis for these analyses. The questionnaires were all filled-in completely or almost completely. The number of missing val-

ues per variable is lower than 2% for 60 out of the 73 variables and lower than 3% for the remaining 13 variables.

2.3.2   Measures

The different facets of brand personality were measured on reflective multi-item scales. The operationalization was based on the extant literature. This study uses a shortened version instead of Aaker's (1997) original long measurement scale in order to increase the response rate. The reliability and validity of this scale was assessed in the Swiss context by Krohmer, Malär and Nyffenegger (2007). Their measurement validation resulted in a set of 21 items grouped into the four dimensions of sincerity, excitement, competence and sophistication. Aaker's ruggedness dimension did not appear. The final questionnaire for this study also contained constructs such as "satisfaction", "attitude toward the brand" (Peracchio and Meyers-Levy 1994; Peracchio and Meyers-Levy 1997) as well as "brand preference" (Sirgy, Grewal, Mangleburg, Park, Chon, Claiborne, Johar, and Berkman 1997).

All items were measured using 7-point Likert-type scales. Construct reliability was tested in two steps. First, the coefficient alpha was calculated. Results are documented in table 2-2. After eliminating 3 items all scales fulfill the generally accepted criterion of alpha > 0.7 (Peterson 1994) so that the indicators of the four latent brand personality dimensions and those of the three other variables can be seen as internally consistent.

Table 2 - 2: Coefficient alpha; basis: n = 571.

Construct	No. of items	Coefficient Alpha
Sincerity	4	0.880
Excitement	7	0.886
Competence	3	0.783
Sophistication	4	0.837
Satisfaction	3	0.940
Attitude	8	0.908
Preference	3	0.949

In addition to the alpha test, each scale was submitted to confirmatory factor analysis in order to verify its reliability and validity. Results for composite reliability are documented in table 2-3. Again, all scales exceed the required level of 0.6 (Bagozzi and Yi 1988).

Table 2 - 3: Composite reliability; basis: n = 571.

Scale	Composite reliability
Sincerity	.76
Sophistication	.76
Competence	.62
Excitement	.81
Satisfaction	.92
Attitude	.83
Preference	.94

Furthermore, to assess the convergent validity of the measures, the factor loadings must be statistically significant. As this is the case for all brand personality dimensions, this criterion, suggested by Bagozzi, Yi and Phillips (1991), is also fulfilled. Based upon the final set of scales, the next step consists in applying cluster analysis to the perceptual data collected from consumers.

2.3.3   Data analysis

Cluster analysis is a method used to examine whether a data set is characterized by certain structures. Here, the aim is to analyze whether consumers' perceptions of brand personality are homogeneous or whether there is variance in their perceptions. Based on the strategic brand management literature, it is expected that the perceptions which consumers express about the same brand fall into one and the same cluster. The rationale for this expectation is that companies aim to create an idiosyncratic brand personality constellation for each brand in their brand portfolio through brand positioning. The level of homogeneity among consumers' perceptions of a given brand can be seen as an indicator as to the success of the company's brand positioning efforts. Cluster analysis makes it possible to examine to what extent the perceptual data collected from different consumers evaluating the same brand is homogeneous. Following the recommendations from Punj and Stewart (1983), a two-stage clustering approach was pursued.

In the first stage, the whole data set was submitted to two hierarchical clustering methods, complete-linkage clustering (CLC) and the Ward method (Punj and Stewart 1983; Ward 1963). The objective of this first step is to identify the number of clusters which represents the structure in the data in an optimal way. The solutions produced by the two methods applied here may serve as indicators of the "right" number of clusters in which the observations (here: respondents' brand evaluations) fall.

CLC joins a case to a cluster if the case has a certain level of similarity with all current members of a cluster. Furthermore, this method tends to form large, clearly distinct groups (Punj and Stewart 1983). Careful inspection of its dendrogramm allows for identification of potential outliers. Regarding the four brand personality dimensions which served as clustering variables, all cases are usable to determine an appropriate cluster solution. The Ward method tends to minimize the average distance of the cases within a cluster regarding the clustering variables

(Ward 1963). The so-called elbow test hinted to potential solutions at 5 or 3 clusters for CLC and at 4 or 5 clusters for the Ward method.

Following the recommendation from Punj and Stewart (1983) and in order to the 3, 4, and 5 cluster solutions, in the second step the non-hierarchical k-means method was used. The advantage is that this method is more robust, for example with respect to outliers, than the hierarchical methods. K-means method results in reassigning cases by moving them to the cluster whose centroid is closest to that case (Punj and Stewart 1983). The k-means clustering method led to a 4 cluster solution. The solution was validated using discriminant analysis. The 4 cluster structure provided a 97.5% classification success rate.

As a result and based on the taxonomic analyses, the results reveal that consumers' brand personality perceptions show typical patterns. In the next section, the clusters into which the consumers' perceptions fall are characterized.

2.3.4   Cluster description

Table 2-4 provides the descriptive characteristics of the detected clusters and the complete sample. Figure 2-1 shows the profiles (arithmetic means) of these clusters across the four brand personality dimension variables included in the analysis.

Table 2 - 4: Cluster description.

Cluster	n	% of total sample	Mean sincerity	Mean excite-ment	Mean competence	Mean sophis-tication
1	145	25%	5.13 [c]	5.28 [a]	5.07 [d]	5.15 [b]
2	245	43%	3.69 [d]	4.45 [a]	3.99 [c]	4.08 [b]
3	87	15%	2.47 [b]	2.84 [a]	2.08 [d]	2.22 [c]
4	94	17%	4.93 [a]	3.56 [c]	3.97 [b]	2.88 [d]
Total	571	100%	4.08	4.27	3.97	3.87

[a] highest mean in this cluster, [b] second highest mean, [c] third highest mean, [d] lowest mean

To provide a more detailed description of the four clusters, each one is presented relying on the active cluster variables (i.e. the four brand personality dimensions) and two important passive cluster variables (frequency of use of the brand and the length of period during which respondents have used and built up experiences with the brand they evaluated).

Figure 2 - 1: The four brand personality clusters.
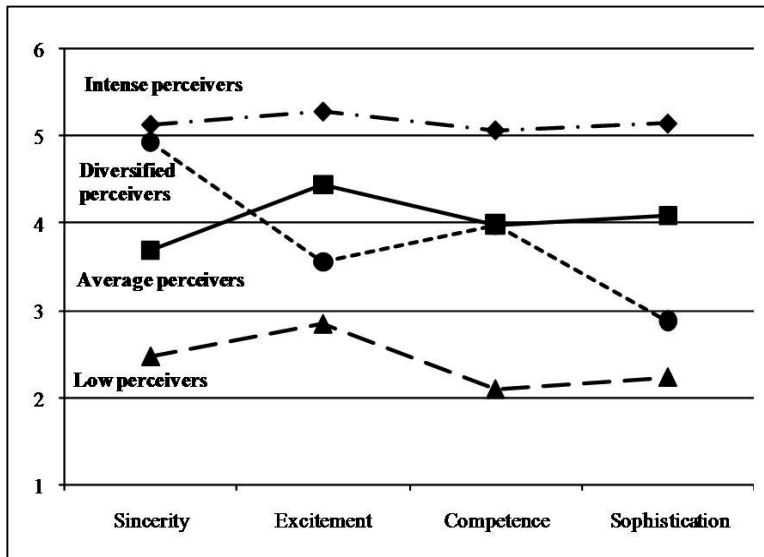
First, the results indicate that three clusters differ regarding their degree of brand personality perception. However, the proportion of the perception with respect to the different dimensions of sincerity, excitement, competence and sophistication remains the same in all three clusters.

The 43 cases in the cluster "intense brand personality perceivers", generally answered that the different adjectives can well describe the specific brand they have been questioned about. Compared to the other

groups, the different brand personality dimensions in cluster 1 had nearly the same means. Therefore, they are all perceived as useful in describing the brand. Beside this, most of the respondents in this cluster use the brand more than once a week and most of them have also used the brand since childhood.

The largest subgroup of the sample, the "average brand personality perceivers", represents 43% of respondents. Unlike the "intense perceivers", a clearer difference between sincerity and the other dimensions characterizes this group. In general, informants in this cluster indicated a medium level of brand personality perception. Furthermore, they can be characterized as quite experienced because the most of them have used the product since childhood, and 40.8% utilize the product every few months or even monthly.

The lowest means of each dimension are regrouped in the cluster named "low brand personality perceivers". This smallest cluster (15%) combines people who believed the adjectives could rarely be used to describe the brand. People in this group know the brand but most of them have never used it.

A totally different pattern appears in the brand personality perceptions for the fourth cluster (17.0% of clustered observations). Cases regrouped in this cluster perceived the brand as extremely sincere, but not as exciting and even less sophisticated. Apart from this, informants in the cluster named "diversified brand personality perceivers" are mainly characterized (33.0%) by a monthly brand usage as well as the fact that 48.4% use the brand since childhood.

In summary, the results reveal significant differences between the groups regarding the four active cluster variables (Table 2-5).

Table 2 - 5: Analysis of variance.

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Sincerity	Between Groups	492,406	3	164,135	235,121	,000
	Within Groups	395,816	567	,698		
	Total	888,222	570			
Excitement	Between Groups	381,441	3	127,147	228,070	,000
	Within Groups	316,098	567	,557		
	Total	697,539	570			
Competence	Between Groups	484,555	3	161,518	282,712	,000
	Within Groups	323,937	567	,571		
	Total	808,491	570			
Sophistication	Between Groups	575,146	3	191,715	339,712	,000
	Within Groups	319,984	567	,564		
	Total	895,130	570			

Independent variable: cluster membership

Even though t-tests indicate, that "intense perceivers" and "diversified perceivers" do not significantly differ in terms of the sincerity dimension and that "average perceivers" do not significantly differ from "diversified perceivers" as regards the competence dimension, the two respective clusters still significantly differ on the remaining three brand personality dimensions.

2.3.5   Validation of the cluster solution

To assess the external validity of the presented cluster solution, first, the correlations of the cluster assignment with potential covariates were examined. As regards the variables "age" and "profession" of the respondents, they lead to non significant results. Therefore, no systematic effects resulting from these variables influence the cluster membership of an informant. This finding provides evidence that using a student-dominated sample does not affect the quality of the results. Similarly, respondent gender did not significantly influence the clustering process.

Beside these sociodemographic variables, a respondent's level of brand familiarity may influence his personality perception. Correlation analysis revealed that indeed the individual's familiarity with the brand significantly affects the brand personality perception (Table 2-6).

Table 2 - 6: Correlation analysis.

		Cluster member-ship	age	profes-sion	gender	Brand familiarity
Cluster member-ship	Pearson Correlation	1,000	,023	-,008	,044	-,238**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,589	,842	,292	,000
	N	571,000	565	570	565	567
age	Pearson Correlation	,023	1,000	-,360**	,002	-,091*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,589		,000	,959	,030
	N	565	569,000	568	569	566
profession	Pearson Correlation	-,008	-,360**	1,000	-,087*	-,123**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,842	,000		,037	,003
	N	570	568	575,000	568	570
gender	Pearson Correlation	,044	,002	-,087*	1,000	,062
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,292	,959	,037		,142
	N	565	569	568	569,000	566
Brand familiarity	Pearson Correlation	-,238**	-,091*	-,123**	,062	1,000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,030	,003	,142	
	N	567	566	570	566	571,000

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Given the significant influence of brand familiarity, a cross-validation procedure was then pursued to analyze the stability of the presented cluster solution. For this purpose, the complete sample was divided in two subsamples along the variable "familiarity", namely in a group of respondents who are less familiar with the brand and a comparison group of highly brand familiar respondents. A median split resulted in two subsamples of equal size.

Again, cluster analysis was applied to analyze whether brand personality is equally perceived by all respondents who are less familiar with the

brand or whether one and the same brand is heterogeneously distributed across several clusters. For the same purpose, individuals who are highly brand familiar were examined. In each analysis the four brand personality dimensions served as clustering variables. In the first stage, the two subsamples were submitted to the Ward method. As for the complete sample, the elbow test for each subsample indicated the 4 or 5 clusters as potential solutions.

In the second step, the non-hierarchical k-means method was conducted resulting in a 4 cluster solution for both subsamples. A discriminant analysis validated this solution by indicating a 97,4% classification success rate for respondents who are less familiar with the brand and a 97,6% classification success rate for highly brand familiar respondents.

Moreover, table 2-7 shows that the respective clusters of the two subsamples significantly differ in terms of the active cluster variables (i.e. the four brand personality dimensions).

Table 2 - 7: Analysis of variance (after median split).

Brand Familiarity (median split)			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Low brand familiarity	Since-rity	Between Groups	291,001	3	97,000	152,833	,000
		Within Groups	171,364	270	,635		
		Total	462,365	273			
	Excite-ment	Between Groups	190,779	3	63,593	107,499	,000
		Within Groups	159,724	270	,592		
		Total	350,503	273			
	Com-pe-tence	Between Groups	226,659	3	75,553	123,247	,000
		Within Groups	165,516	270	,613		
		Total	392,174	273			
	So-phis-tica-tion	Between Groups	271,074	3	90,358	162,042	,000
		Within Groups	150,558	270	,558		
		Total	421,632	273			
High brand familiarity	Since-rity	Between Groups	167,169	3	55,723	90,096	,000
		Within Groups	178,743	289	,618		
		Total	345,913	292			
	Excite-ment	Between Groups	138,173	3	46,058	88,410	,000
		Within Groups	150,557	289	,521		
		Total	288,730	292			
	Com-pe-tence	Between Groups	189,940	3	63,313	118,470	,000
		Within Groups	154,448	289	,534		
		Total	344,388	292			
	So-phis-tica-tion	Between Groups	289,819	3	96,606	213,131	,000
		Within Groups	130,995	289	,453		
		Total	420,814	292			

Furthermore, a series of t-tests reveals that for each brand personality dimension all clusters significantly differ one from another for the group of less brand familiar respondents. Concerning the highly brand familiar informants, significant differences were found in 23 out of the 24 t-tests. Only as regards the "sincerity" dimension is there a non significant difference between the "intense perceivers" and the "diversified per-

ceivers". However, the two clusters significantly vary along the three other active cluster variables and show significantly different distribution patterns (Figure 3).

The visual inspection of the two subsamples' distribution patterns shows clear analogies (Figure 2-2 and 2-3). However, two main differences between the subsamples exist. First, both subgroups differ regarding the general degree of brand personality perception. While less brand familiar respondents perceive each brand personality dimension less distinctly, more brand familiar informants have a more explicit perception of the brand's personality. The second main difference stems from the order of the clusters per dimension. Although cluster order remains stable across the sincerity, excitement and sophistication brand personality dimensions, highly brand familiar and less brand familiar consumers vary in terms of the competence dimension. While "average perceivers" sense a higher degree of brand competence than "diversified perceivers" in the case of less brand familiar respondents, the latter perceive the brand's competence to a greater extent among the more familiar informants.

Figure 2 - 2: The four brand personality clusters (low brand familiarity).
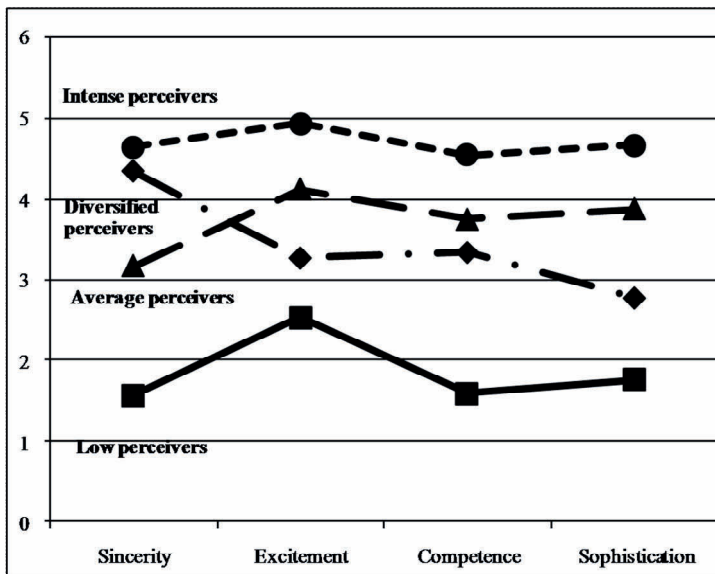
**Figure 2 - 3: The four brand personality clusters
(high brand familiarity).**
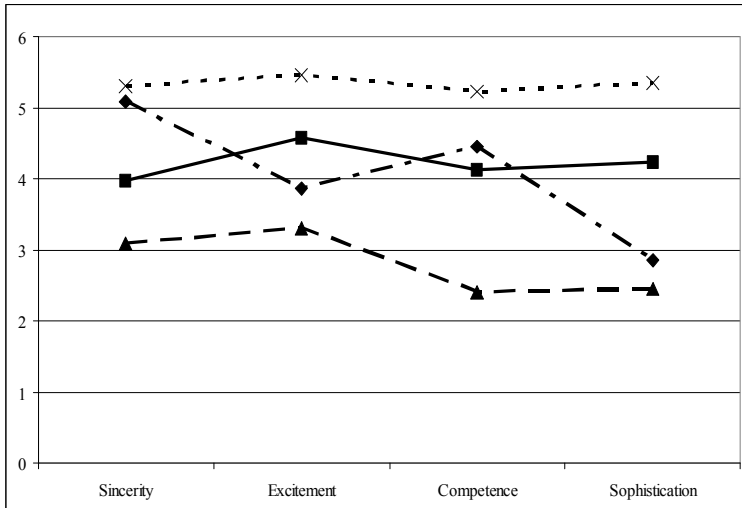
Summarizing, the validation of the cluster solution detected a significant influence of the initial cluster membership of the complete sample only on the variable "brand familiarity". However, even though the four initial clusters significantly differ in terms of the respondent's familiarity with the brand, the patterns of the cluster profiles remain mostly the same for informants who sense a low degree of brand familiarity compared to those who are highly brand familiar. Thus, no systematic effects resulting from this variable influence the cluster profiles that were originally identified. Moreover, the validation procedure revealed that socio-demographic variables did not significantly influence the cluster results.

2.3.6 Brand personality style, satisfaction, attitude, and preference

The primary purposes of any taxonomy are description and classification. The value of a taxonomy for academic and practical research increases if it contributes to the explanation of other phenomena of interest. In particular, if a classification has an impact on some dependent variable it also has explanatory value. In the present case, for example, the value of the brand personality perception taxonomy for brand management research would be higher if the cluster into which a consumer's brand personality evaluation falls allowed to predict outcome variables as consumer satisfaction with a brand, attitude toward the brand, or preference for a brand.

In order to verify whether the brand personality cluster has an impact on these three outcome variables, analyses of variance were conducted. For each case, personality perception (the four clusters) served as the factor and satisfaction, attitude and preference served as dependent variables. The results are presented in table 2-8 and figure 2-4.

Table 2 - 8: Analysis of variance.

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Attitude	Between Groups	183.690	3	61.230	100.261	.000
	Within Groups	358.483	587	.611		
	Total	542.173	590			
Prefe-rence	Between Groups	143.903	3	47.968	15.557	.000
	Within Groups	1822.284	591	3.083		
	Total	1966.187	594			
Satisfac-tion	Between Groups	195.606	3	65.202	56.501	.000
	Within Groups	675.083	585	1.154		
	Total	870.689	588			

For all three outcome variables the results reveal highly significant differences between the four brand personality style clusters. A Duncan post-hoc test demonstrates that especially the mean scores relating to satisfaction differ significantly between the four clusters. Whereas "intense perceivers" obtain the highest values across all three dependent variables, "low brand personality perceivers" consistently show the lowest scores. "Average perceivers" and "diversified perceivers" find themselves in the middle between these extremes. Their mean scores on attitude, preference and satisfaction are close to each other. Additional t-tests comparing the means of "average brand personality perceivers" and "diversified perceivers" reveal that a statistically significant difference

only seems to exist for brand satisfaction ($p < 0.01$). By comparing these results with the mean values for the active cluster variables across the four clusters the results show a correlation between the strength of the brand personality and the outcome variables. Cluster 1, named "intense brand personality perceivers", presents the highest scores for sincerity, excitement, competence and sophistication. At the same time this cluster achieves the highest values for brand attitude, brand preference and brand satisfaction. For cluster 3, the "low brand personality perceivers", precisely the opposite situation arises, that is low scores both on the brand personality dimensions and the three outcome variables. In the same vein, "average" and "diversified perceivers" have mean scores situated at intermediary levels for all cluster and outcome variables.

Figure 2 - 4: Outcome variables per cluster.
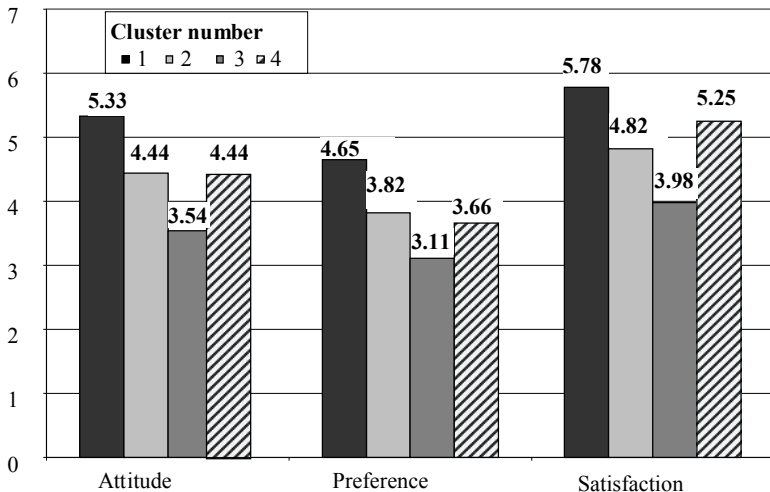
Based on a data set for seven consumer goods brands, the results show a statistically significant link between the type of brand personality perception a consumer develops concerning a brand and outcome variables

which occupy an important place in many companies' brand management objectives. This provides support for the argument that a taxonomy of brand personality perceptions may constitute a valuable framework for academic and practical research.

2.3.7 Distribution of brands across clusters

The second research question of this study concerns the distribution of brand perceptions across the four brand personality styles. The aim of brand personality management is the design and implementation of a clear, coherent and distinct brand personality for each brand in a firm's brand portfolio. As a consequence, one would expect the cases of respondents who rated the same brand to be located in the same brand personality cluster. If this result arises, this distribution would be an indicator of successful brand management since all respondents would perceive similar extents of sincerity, excitement, competence and sophistication for the brands they rated.

Table 2-9 contains the distribution of the respondents (cases) for each brand across the four clusters. The seven different brands are widely distributed across the brand personality clusters. Each brand is present in every cluster with at least one observation. The percentages of distribution for the brands range between 1% for L'Oréal in cluster 4 to 55% for L'Oréal and Puma in cluster 2. Three brands (Adidas, Nike, and Emmi) are represented at percentages above 10% in all four clusters. For six out of seven brands, the distribution of respondents across the clusters is such that one cluster exists in which respondents dominantly classify the brand (i.e. minimum 40%-value). For example, 43% respectively 46% of respondents perceive Adidas and Nike to belong to cluster 2, even if the perception of the other 57% of customers spread strongly across the remaining three clusters. For Emmi, however, even this is not the case. None of the seven brands in this sample comes close to achieving a

homogeneous brand personality style. Rather, customers perceive these brands in very different ways.

Table 2 - 9: Brand per cluster.

Brand Name	Cluster Number				Total
	1	2	3	4	
Adidas	23	32	12	8	75
%	.31	.43	.16	.11	**1.00**
Nike	17	41	16	16	90
%	.19	.46	.18	.18	**1.00**
Puma	19	48	15	6	88
%	.22	.55	.17	.07	**1.00**
Nivea	38	30	6	16	90
%	.42	.33	.07	0.18	**1.00**
L'Oréal	15	38	15	1	69
%	.22	.55	.22	.01	**1.00**
Emmi	14	21	18	33	86
%	.16	.24	.21	.38	**1.00**
Danone	19	35	5	14	73
%	.26	.48	.07	.19	**1.00**
Total	**145**	**245**	**87**	**94**	**571**
%	**.25**	**.43**	**.15**	**.16**	**1.00**

2.4 Discussion

2.4.1 Summary of the research

Applying the taxonomic perspective to the brand personality construct and analysing the homogeneity of consumers' brand personality perceptions were the main objectives of this research. For this purpose, a total of 571 subjects rated a set of seven consumer goods brands from three product categories on four brand personality dimensions. The results of the cluster analysis conducted suggest that consumer' perceptions fall into brand personality clusters. These clusters do not only reflect different intensity levels of brand personality perceptions. They show distinct configurations of brand sincerity, excitement, competence and sophistication. The results of a variance analysis indicate an impact of brand personality on attitude towards the brand, brand preference, and brand satisfaction. Finally, the distribution of the cases across the four brand personality perception clusters provides interesting insights into the heterogeneity of customers' brand personality perceptions. In summary, the results of these analyses point to weaknesses in the brand personality communication of many companies.

2.4.2 Theoretical implications

The first contribution of this work consists in being the first study to empirically classify the consumers' personality perceptions of consumer goods brands. Although taxonomies exist for a large variety of concepts and behaviors in consumer behavior (e.g. a customer relationship typology: O'Loughlin and Szmigin 2006; or a typology of online shoppers: Rohm and Swaminathan 2004) and although several brand typologies are present in the literature no taxonomy exists which takes the different personality traits of brands into account. Therefore, this taxonomy fills a gap in empirical knowledge about consumers' perceptions of brand personalities.

The emergence of four clusters as such neither questions nor confirms the usefulness of the brand personality measurement scale used. Nor does their emergence question or confirm the usefulness of the brand personality concept in general. Moreover, the precise number pertaining to the four clusters identified here may not be reproducible in every national or sectoral setting. The value of this empirical finding is to structure the broad variety of brand personalities potentially observable in "the real world". Hence, this taxonomy helps reduce the complexity of possible brand personality constellations and, thus, provides a starting point for future research. Furthermore, this taxonomy's value partially lies in the fact that, contrary to some of the extant brand taxonomies (DMB&B 1994; Young & Rubicam 1994), it builds from dimensions drawn from academic research in the form of a conceptual model (i.e., Aaker 1997).

The second contribution of this taxonomic research is to provide deeper insights into the performance aspects of brand management. On a general level, the findings are notable in view of the fact that a comparable level of performance in terms of attitude toward the brand, brand preference, and brand satisfaction can be accomplished through different approaches. This is because brand personality styles of "average" and "diversified brand personality perceivers" yield comparable results but represent different patterns of brand sincerity, excitement, competence, and sophistication. Yet, "low perceivers" perform significantly worse and "high perceivers" significantly better than the others. The finding that the weakest brand personalities are behind on all outcome dimensions represents a strong empirical demonstration that companies benefit from investing in the development of strong brand personalities.

2.4.3 Managerial implications

Managing brand portfolios is one of the most fundamental tasks in marketing management. In a brand portfolio, every single brand plays a specific role. Brand taxonomies explain brand roles and characteristics.

Hence, this research makes a contribution to practical marketing management by providing a new perspective on brands. Such a taxonomy is conducive to characterising the company's own as well as its competitors' brands. The characterisation is useful for different purposes. First, a taxonomy allows structuring the brands present on a market. In a given competitive area, brands may all be positioned very closely because they have similar brand personality constellations. This perspective may provide arguments for brand portfolio managers to either eliminate certain brands or identify space for the positioning of a new brand. Second, managers may use a taxonomy of brand personality perceptions internally in order to help clarify the role and competitive position of a brand vis-à-vis employees involved in brand management. This could facilitate brand management processes in which several individuals and departments are often involved. Particularly in service businesses, where front-stage employees need to understand the characteristics, and potentially how their brand compares to competitor brands, a classificatory view on brands may prove to be of great value. Finally, it may be interesting to conduct a similar analysis on brand personality perceptions internally among employees and contrast the results with consumers' perceptions.

The second managerial implication relates to the homogeneity of consumers' brand personality perceptions. Several scholars posit that brand personality research findings indicate that marketing managers should develop strong and favorable brand personalities (Aaker 1997; Freling and Forbes 2005). In the logic of the classical segmentation – targeting – positioning approach of strategic marketing, companies should: first, identify market segments with homogeneous characteristics; second, select those market segments they intend to serve; and third, position brands with idiosyncratic value propositions for the target segment(s). The positioning of the brand is based on customer and competitor analysis. From this vantage point, a brand should have a unique and distinct brand personality. On the contrary, for brands which do not have a unique and distinct brand personality the segmentation – targeting – positioning paradigm would predict difficulties because the target group has difficulties forming a clear image and, consequently, understanding the specific value proposition. Against this background, the result of the second analysis conducted is astounding. When analysing the cluster(s)

in which the seven studied brands fall, the results show that none of them is homogeneously perceived by the respondents. Rather, customer perceptions are distributed across all four clusters. This result is counterintuitive because the aim of a company's brand personality management is to create a clear image of what the brand stands for (Plummer 2000). Brand management spends considerable financial and other resources in order to develop and communicate this unique image. The unique image is assumed to be necessary in order to be successful in competitive differentiation. An unclear image due to an unclear perceived brand personality, on the other hand, should reduce the firms' marketing effectiveness, for example due to consumer confusion or poor brand awareness. Put differently, at comparable levels of marketing spending the firm is less efficient than its competitors. Consequently, the brand is in a position of competitive disadvantage (Hunt 2000). Analysing the distribution of brand perceptions across clusters yields interesting insights for practitioners. They may wish to benchmark their own brand with other brands for the clarity of its perceived brand personality by analysing the homogeneity of this perceived brand personality as it applies to their own brand and to that of the competition. The distribution of percentages across clusters is a good proxi for the clarity of image.

In sum, the taxonomy developed in this article further supports brand managers in their decisions about brand personality design and brand portfolio management. They can categorize their own brand, discover neglected design areas, and take strategic decisions.

2.5   Limitations and future research

Although this study provides useful insights, it has limitations. These limitations provide opportunities for future research.

First, this analysis is based on a limited sample of brands. These brands are representative for fast moving consumer goods. This is in line with much of the research conducted on brand personalities to date (Caprara,

Barbaranelli, and Gianluigi 2001; Kumar, Luthra, and Datta 2006; Sung and Tinkham 2005; van Rekom, Jacobs, and Verlegh 2006). However, in other industries different brand personality constellations may be designed by companies and, hence, lead to different brand personality patterns in consumer perceptions. For example, brands become increasingly important on industrial markets. Yet, the knowledge about the role and the types of brand personalities in business-to-business contexts is very limited. However, different brand personality constellations may even exist within the field of consumer goods, due to differences in the market environment.

Second, this study reports results from one specific national context. The brands used in the survey all have a strong position on the Swiss market. Thus, consumers were knowledgeable about them. By eliminating 27 respondents who knew nothing about the brand they were asked to rate, potential bias could also be excluded. On the other hand, research concludes that the Aaker (1997) dimensions of brand personality are not reproducible in every cultural context (Aaker et al. 2001; Sung and Tinkham 2005; Supphellen and Gronhaug 2003). For example, for the French market Koebel and Ladwein (1999) and Pantin-Sohier (2004) developed an adapted measurement instrument. In this case a measurement tool which is closer to the original framework was applied because Krohmer, Malär and Nyffenegger (2007) successfully used a reduced set of items from the Aaker framework in the Swiss context. Future research may, however, replicate this study by using the adapted French measurement tool in a French speaking context. More generally, additional replications of this study in other countries would extend the validity of the findings.

Third, the overrepresentation of students in this sample as compared to the general population may appear to constitute an important limitation in the present research. In fact, academics often criticize the use of student samples because they assume students to be less knowledgeable or not representative of the population of interest (Jones, Mothersbaugh, and Beatty 2002; Oliver 1980). This argument is obviously true for research contexts like business-to-business marketing, internal marketing and the like. In the case of consumer research, however, students are

an important part of the target group for the brands or product categories studied. In the present empirical research, seven consumer goods brands were used which target broad segments of their markets. In the sporting goods category, young customer groups even represent the largest share of the target segments. Hence, working mainly with students does not limit the value of the presented findings. Rather, given that one of the research objectives was to verify the homogeneity of brand personality perceptions and given that important variance emerged among consumers' brand personality perceptions, a more homogeneous sample provides a stronger basis for the research findings presented here. If heterogeneity is observable within a fairly homogeneous sample, then heterogeneity constitutes a substantial issue when analyzing broad target segments.

2.6   Conclusion

Although advances in practice and theory contribute to enhanced knowledge of brands and brand management, the field is far from mature. Companies continue to struggle with developing and implementing new brands and maintaining existing ones. More effective brand management helps companies stabilize and enhance the intangible assets the brand portfolio constitutes. To realize these benefits, firms must understand how to create strong brands and position them against competitor brands to effectively achieve the diverse objectives and outcomes possible from brand management. By offering insight into prototypical patterns that show how consumers perceive brands along different dimensions of brand personalities and how these perceptions differ within and across brands, this study helps advance theory and practice in the area of brand management.

Chapter 3.   An empirical comparison of the stereotype content model and the Aaker scale of brand personality in purchasing processes

3.1   Introduction

Several empirical studies have provided insights into the role of brand personality in purchasing processes. Aaker's seminal article (1997) occupies a central position in this stream of research and most research since has used Aaker's brand personality scale. Nevertheless, the approach is not without its critics (Austin, Siguaw and Mattila 2003, Azoulay and Kapferer 2003). This study approaches brand personality from another angle, focusing on warmth and competence as the two basic dimensions in social perception (Fiske et al. 2002, Cuddy et al. 2007) and examines empirically its validity for predicting purchase intentions, compared to Aaker's model. In what follows, this chapter first provides a brief overview of the brand personality construct. Then, the stereotype content model is introduced and it is argued why it may constitute a viable alternative to the Aaker's model. Next the model is developed predicting purchase intentions through perceptions of brand personality, mediated by emotions and attitudes. A present of the study design and the empirical results follows. The paper concludes with a discussion of theoretical and managerial implications of our research, directions for future research, and of the study's limitations.

3.2   The brand personality concept

3.2.1   Origins and definition

Defined as "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (Aaker, 1997, p.347), brand personality is often considered the soft and emotional side of brand image (Biel 1993). Brand personality typically

has a symbolic or self-expressive function in contrast to the utilitarian function of other brand image dimensions (Keller 1993). It allows the consumer to express his own self (Belk 1988) or his ideal self (Malhotra 1988), thus influencing consumer choice (Sirgy 1982). The underlying mechanism for brand personality resides in anthropomorphization. People have a natural tendency to 'anthropomorphize' brands, thus assign human characteristics to non-human things and events (Guthrie 1993). From this perspective, a brand can act as a partner, a character and a person (Aaker and Fournier 1995) and therefore trigger emotional reactions from the consumer (Plummer 1985; Biel 1993). Consumers may even enter into long term relationships with brands (Fournier 1998, Freling and Forbes 2005).

3.2.2 The five-factor model of brand personality

The five-factor model of personality as proposed by Aaker (1997) shows similarities with the "Big-Five" model of human personality (Goldberg 1990). In psychology, Goldberg found that a large array of personality traits can be grouped into five factors: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism. Today, the OCEAN model is one of the most widely accepted and used models in social sciences (e.g. Costa and McCrae 1992). Building upon this research, Aaker (1997) found a five-dimensional model of brand personality with the following factors: (1) *Sincerity*; (2) *Excitement,* (3) *Competence,* (4) *Sophistication, and* (5) *Ruggedness*. Three of these five dimensions can be related to the human personality dimensions: "*Agreeableness and Sincerity both capture the idea of warmth and acceptance; Extroversion and Excitement both connote the notions of sociability, energy and activity; Conscientiousness and Competence both encapsulate responsibility, dependability and security*" (Aaker, 1997, p.353). However, the Sophistication and Ruggedness dimensions are different, expressing more desirable than necessarily present traits.

3.2.3   Research based on the five-factor model

During the last years, Aaker's work led to a plethora of theoretical and empirical articles. The five-factor model of brand personality has been replicated in different cultural and linguistic contexts (e.g., Ferrandi et al. 1999, Koebel and Ladwein 1999, Aaker et al. 2001, Caprara et al. 2001, Kim et al. 2001, Lim and O'Cass 2001, Phau and Lau 2001, Supphellen and Grønhaug 2003, Ambroise et al. 2005), including Switzerland (Krohmer et al. 2007). It proved to be valid for different objects such as corporate brands (Keller and Richey 2006), tourism destination brands (Hosany et al. 2006) or non-profit organization brands (Venable et al. 2005). Other studies have explored its stability over time (Wee 2004) or compared brand personality with other concepts like self-congruity (Helgeson and Supphellen 2004).

Importantly, dimensions of brand personality can be linked to several important marketing variables. For example, specific brand personality perceptions increase consumer preferences and usage (Sirgy 1982), evoke emotions in consumers (Biel 1993) and increase the levels of trust and loyalty (Fournier 1995).

3.2.4   Difficulties related to the five-factor model and its measurement

The original five-factor model as well as its measurement scale developed by Aaker (1997) have been repeatedly been criticized. Azoulay and Kapferer (2003), for example, questioned the adaptability of this scale to the personality of a brand. Austin, Siguaw and Mattila (2003) questioned the generalizability of the measurement instrument. They underline that analyses were done on an aggregate level instead of an individual brand level. Other critics pertain to the non-replicability of the five factors across cultures (e.g. Aaker 2001, Bosnjak et al. 2007, Milas and Mlacic 2007, Smit et al. 2007, Ferrandi et al. 1999, Caprara et al. 2001).

As a consequence, researchers have often developed country-specific brand personality scales (Ferrandi et al. 1999; Koebel and Ladwein 1999, Bosnjak et al. 2007, Milas and Mlacic 2007, Supphellen and Grønhaug 2003, Aaker et al. 2001, Smit et al. 2007). Finally, the length of the initial scale (42 items) is often criticized (Romaniuk 2008, Geuens, Weijters and De Wulf 2009). therefore, Geuens, Weijters and De Wulf (2009) recently developed a new and shorter version of Aaker's brand personality scale, composed of 12 items and split into five dimensions (responsibility, activity, aggressiveness, simplicity and emotionality).

3.3 Alternative perspective on the brand personality concept: the stereotype content model

Given the problems inherent in Aaker's approach, scholars are starting to seek alternative ways of studying the brand personality concept. This study draws upon social psychology in order to develop and test a different operationalization of the brand personality concept. More specifically, this study builds on decades of research on social perception suggesting that all social perceptions have two, fundamental underlying dimensions: warmth and competence (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, and Xu 2002, Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick 2007). Extant research in this field investigates stereotypes and how (together with emotions) they influence human behavior. Recently, a first article applying the stereotype content model in the context of nonprofit organizations appeared (Aaker, Vohs, and Mogilner 2010). They found that when consumers perceive high levels of competence and warmth, their desire to buy increases. Against this background, applying the stereotype content model in the context of consumer goods brands is highly interesting for managers and academics alike.

Stereotypes are ways of looking at an object through generalizations. The stereotype perspective is potentially useful in brand personality research because it allows taking a different vantage point for interpreting the same objects, i.e. brands and their personality, than the brand personality concept. Whereas in Aaker's (1997) approach personality measurement takes places through several traits, Fiske et al. (2002) as well as Cuddy et al. (2007) study how people stereotypically perceive objects. Aaker (1997) assumes that brands dispose of certain characteristics. Hence, her approach does not primarily focus on studying subjective human perceptions of brand characteristics but rather assumes that brands have specific objective characteristics. Another key difference between both approaches is that Aaker's brand personality concept is not part of a larger nomological network. She identifies five dimensions of brand personality. However, there is no theoretical framework that would allow formulating hypotheses about how the five brand personality dimensions would influence specific outcome variables. Fiske et al. (2002) and Cuddy et al. (2007), on the other hand, base their work on the tripartite view of attitudes. According to this view attitudes comprise three dimensions: cognitive (stereotypes), affective (emotional responses), and behavioral (e.g., discrimination). It is argued that this kind of stereotype research provides a suitable approach to studying brand personalities and their relevance in consumer behavior. In this dissertation stereotypical views consumers hold about brands are interpreted as conceptually similar to brand personality perceptions.

For an operationalization of brand-related stereotypes, this study draws upon the stereotype content model (Fiske et al. 1999, Fiske et al. 2002). The stereotype content model posits that competence and warmth stereotypes stem from different sources and lead to distinct emotions. It is built on work showing that different traits are processed in very different ways (Rothbart and Park 1986) and lead to markedly different outcomes (Wojciszke 2005). It is expected that, in line with how human beings evaluate the personality of other human beings, the stereotype content model can also be used in order to study how human beings (consumers) evaluate the personality of inanimate objects (such as brands).

3.4   Model development

The purpose of our study is to compare the usefulness of the stereotype content model and the five-factor model of brand personality in explaining consumer emotions and purchasing intentions. In a first step, it is expected that brand personality perceptions (the five factors as well as warmth and competence) are related to consumer emotions. We distinguish between positive emotions and negative a consumer may develop towards a brand. Whereas based on the literature that draws upon the Aaker scale it remains impossible to formulate hypotheses about the direction of this causal relationship, the stereotype content model expects that perceptions of warmth positively impact on positive emotions and a negative impact on negative emotions. Likewise a positive relationship between competence and positive emotions and a negative relationship between competence and negative emotions is expected.

In a second step consumers' emotions towards brands are assumed to have a direct impact on brand attitudes. In both models positive emotions should have a positive impact on brand attitude and negative emotions a negative impact.

Finally, it is supposed that attitudes relate to behavioral intentions. Positive attitudes should foster positive consumer behavior intentions such as purchase intentions or word-of-mouth intentions. Thus, brand personality was expected to be indirectly related to purchasing intentions, via emotions and attitudes toward the brand.

These predictions were tested with two models that only differ with respect to the operationalization of brand personality: In model 1 brand personality is modeled as a five-dimensional trait construct whereas in model 2 it is modeled as a two-dimensional construct, referring to warmth and competence.

3.5   Empirical study

3.5.1   Study design

We selected eight brands, applying two criteria: (1) brands had to be well-known and affordable among the respondents; (2) both consumer goods and consumer service brands were included, to be able to derive more generalizable conclusions.; The final set of brands was composed of Coca Cola, Nivea, Apple, Mc Donald's, Starbucks, Easy Jet, Ikea, and Amazon. Each respondent filled out the questionnaire regarding only one brand.

Data collection took part in the French-speaking part of Switzerland. Therefore, the questionnaire was in French. To ensure its comprehensibility as well as the equivalence of the original English scales, a translation-back-translation approach was followed (Brislin 1970; Douglas and Craig 1983). In addition, the French version was checked by French native speakers and was pre-tested. For the main study, questionnaires were distributed in a snowball system as students filled in one questionnaire and each student was then requested to collect 15 additional questionnaires. The study was part of a group work students did in the context of the course. They obtained extra credits for handing in the correct number of questionnaires.

A total of 800 respondents filled out the questionnaire. It was important to base our analyses on responses from people who know the brand. Thus, an introductory question verified that all respondents knew the respective brand. Then, information regarding the participants' familiarity with the brand was gathered. Next, respondents answered a series of questions that mapped onto the independent (e.g., brand personality, stereotypes), the mediating (e.g., emotion, brand attitude) and the outcome (positive brand behavior) variables. For each of these questions,

additionally to the 7-point-Likert scale, participants had the eighth response option "is not applicable". As items relied upon the human psychology literature, respondents could express when, from their point of view, one item was not applicable to the brand context. In doing so, this study addresses the criticism on Aaker's work that some of the human-related items are not applicable to the brand context. Finally, the questionnaire concluded with socio-demographic questions.

Because of missing data, 10 questionnaires had to be excluded from further analyses. Also 79 individuals, answering "not applicable" for more than half of the items of one construct, were excluded from further studies. In sum, the basis for further analyses consists of 711 completely filled questionnaires.

49.9% of the respondents in the sample are women. The informant's age lies to 31.5% between 18 and 24 years. 46.5% of the sample are represented by people aged between 45 years and more than 65 years. The eight brands are quite equally distributed across the sample since the percentage of questionnaires received for each brand ranges between 10.0% (Starbucks, n=71) and 15.6% (Ikea, n=111). Regarding the frequency of use, 40.5% of the respondents answered that they use the brand they referred to at least once or twice a week. Regarding their familiarity with the brand, 51% answered that they had used the brand since more than five years or even since their childhood. Just 17.6% of the informants were non-users of the brand. Nevertheless, these still knew the brand. Thus, it is assumable that the respondents in this study are knowledgeable about the brands. Consequently, their brand perceptions constitute a solid basis for our analysis.

3.5.2   Measures

Both the five dimensions of brand personality (Aaker, 1997) as well as warmth and competence (Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick, 2007) were measured on reflective multi-item scales. The operationalization of the brand personality scale was based upon the original 42-item scale by Aaker (1997; sincerity: 11 items, α = .843, excitement: 11 items, α = 854; competence: 9 items, α = .845, sophistication: 6 items, α = .889; ruggedness: 5 items, α = .855). To measure warmth and competence dimension, items were also taken from existing literature (Cuddy et al., 2007; Fiske et al., 2002; warmth: 3 items, α = .817, competence: 3 items, α = .805). As regards the positive (3 items, α = .762) and negative emotion (3 items, α = .848) scales, this study referred to Cuddy et al.'s (2007) admiration and contempt scales. Furthermore, constructs such as brand attitude (Peracchio and Meyers-Levy 1994; 1997; 3 items, α = .945) as well as positive behavioral intentions (reference, 3 items, α = .799), consisting of items such as repurchase and word-of-mouth, were part of the questionnaire. All items were measured on 7-point Likert scales.

3.6   Results

In order to analyze the role of emotions and brand attitudes in the link between brand personality and behavioral intentions, this study compares the two different models, the brand personality model and the stereotype content model, using AMOS.

3.6.1   Brand personality model

First, the proposed brand personality model is tested. The overall fit indices for the model were reasonable, but not satisfactory: $X^2(1290)$ = 6117,926, GFI = .702, AGFI = .669, CFI = .782 and RMSEA = .073.

As expected, the five brand personality dimensions have an impact on consumer emotions towards the brand. However, differences between dimensions exist.

Figure 3 - 1: Brand personality model: results.
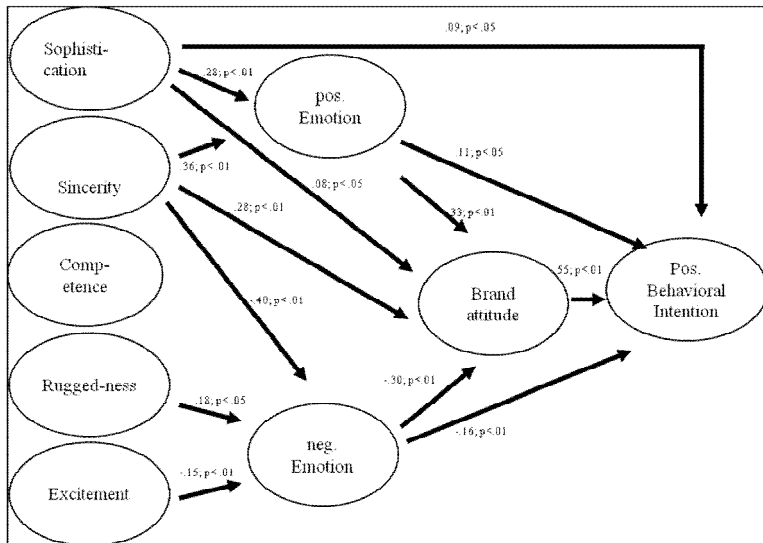
The most influential dimension is sophistication (composed of personality traits such as upper class and charming). Sophistication has a significant positive impact on positive emotion ($\gamma = .28$; $p < .01$) and on brand attitude ($.08$ $\gamma = p < .05$) as well as on consumers' behavioral intentions ($\gamma = .09$; $p < .05$). However, the predicted effect of sophistication on negative emotion was not supported although the sign was in the expected direction.

Sincerity is the only dimension that significantly affects both the positive ($\gamma = .36$; $p < .01$) and negative emotions ($\gamma = -.40$; $p < .01$). In addi-

tion, sincerity has a significant positive impact on brand attitude (γ = .28; p < .01), but not on behavioral intentions.

The competence dimension is the sole brand personality dimension that has no significant impact on any mediating or output variable. The excitement and the ruggedness dimensions do not significantly influence positive emotions of consumers towards the brand. While excitement (composed of items such as imaginative, daring and up-to-date) has a negative impact on negative emotions (γ = -.15; p < .01), ruggedness, against expectations, has a positive effect on negative emotions (γ = .18; p < .05). This finding may result from the fact that items forming the ruggedness dimension (outdoorsy, rough) have negative connotations. Regarding their effect on brand attitude, neither ruggedness nor excitement directly impact on brand attitude or behavioral intentions, but indirectly they exert an influence via negative emotions. Because, as expected, negative emotions significantly impact on brand attitude (γ = -.30; p < .01) and on the consumer's intention to repurchase or recommend the brand (γ = -.16; p < .01). Similarly, positive emotions influence brand attitude (γ = .33; p <.01) and behavioral intentions (γ = .11; p < .05). Also the link between brand attitude and behavioral intention is highly significant (γ = .55; p <.01).

3.6.2   Stereotype content model

In a second step, the role of perceived warmth and competence for purchasing intentions is tested. The overall fit indices for the model were satisfactory: X^2 (121) = 425.585, GFI = .939, AGFI = .914, CFI = .960, RMSEA = .060.

Figure 3 - 2: Stereotype content model: results.
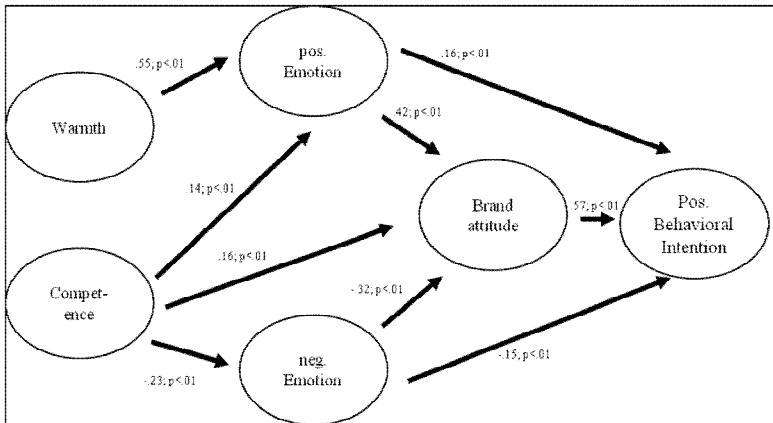
The proposed model suggests that warmth and competence perceptions are related to both positive and negative emotions. As expected, warmth significantly affects positive emotions (γ = .55; p < .01). Consumers who perceive a brand as warm, friendly or sincere develop positive emotional cues towards the brand. Even though the sign of the path from warmth to negative emotions shows in the expected direction, it is not significant. Also the direct link from warmth to brand attitude and to behavioral intentions is not significant, but still has the expected positive tendency. On the other hand, the second stereotype, namely competence, has a strong influence on the mediating variables. First, it has the expected significant effect on positive emotions (γ = .14; p < .01). Consumers are more likely to have positive emotions towards a brand they perceive as competent. Similarly, the more consumers attribute the stereotype competence to a brand, the less they develop negative emotional cues (γ = -.23; p < .01). Furthermore, competence not only has direct effects on emotions, but also on brand attitude (γ = .16; p < .01). In other words, the more consumers perceive a brand as competent, the more favorable their attitude towards this brand is and the more they are then willing to repurchase or to recommend the brand (γ = .57; p < .01). Beside direct effects, stereotypes also have indirect significant effects on

brand attitude through positive ($\gamma = .42$; $p < .01$) and negative ($\gamma = -.32$; $p < .01$) emotions so that it can be argued for a link from stereotypes via emotions and brand attitude to behavioral intentions. In addition, findings reveal that emotions directly and significantly impact on behavioral intentions (positive emotions: ($\gamma = .16$; $p<.01$; negative emotions: ($\gamma = -.15$; $p<.01$)) so that the chain of effects can also be shortened in the following way: stereotype-emotion-behavioral intentions.

3.6.3   Model comparison

Summarizing, both models explain important parts of consumer behavior. While the warmth-competence model explains 66,3% of the variance of consumers' behavioral intentions, the brand personality model explains even 68%. However, a comparison of the model fit indices reveals that the model based on Aaker's brand personality dimensions does not fit the data well (table 3-1). Furthermore, only two out of five dimensions are important drivers of emotions, brand attitude and behavioral intentions, namely sophistication and sincerity. Sophistication not only has an indirect effect on behavioral intentions, but also a direct significant effect. Contrary to this, the dimensions ruggedness and excitement exclusively affect negative emotions. Finally, the competence dimension has no influence at all on the other constructs. This finding is consistent with earlier criticism of Aaker's competence dimension (Azoulay and Kapferer, 2003).

Table 3 - 1: Model comparison

Model fit indices	Model 1 (five factor model)	Model 2 (stereotype content model)
Cmin/df	4.743	3.517
GFI	0.702	0.939
AGFI	0.669	0.914
CFI	0.782	0.960
RMSEA	0.073	0.060

Compared to the five-factor model, the warmth competence-model is more parsimonious, consisting of only six items, and yields a better fit. It explains approximately the same amount of variance of consumers' behavioral intentions as the five-factor model of brand personality. Even though warmth and competence do not directly affect the intention to repurchase or recommend a brand, results indicate that a link exists which is mediated through positive and negative emotions and brand attitude.

Overall, the results seem to be somehow contradictory. While in the five-factor model competence has no significant impact on emotions, brand attitude or consumer behaviour, in the stereotype-content-based model competence explains an important part of these constructs. A possible explanation of this discrepancy is that different items form the two competence scales. Whereas Aaker's (1997) brand personality traits comprise items such as intelligent, reliable, hard working, secure, technical, corporate, successful and leader, the competence in the stereotype content model is formed by items such as competent, capable and confident (Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick 2007; Fiske et al. 2002). Along with this

competence-related result, the proximity between Aaker's sincerity and the stereotype content model's warmth dimension is assessed. According to Aaker (1997), sincerity captures the idea of warmth and acceptance. These similarities are reflected in the items utilized to form the two dimensions. The stereotype warmth comprises items such as warm, sincere and friendly. Similarly, Aaker (1997) uses items such as sincere, honest, cheerful, friendly and others to define her sincerity scale.

3.7   Discussion

3.7.1   Theoretical implications

After the stereotype has proven of value in the context of non-profit vs. for-profit firms (Aaker et al. 2010), this study is the first to empirically investigate the applicability of the stereotype content model in the brand context. Reviewing extant research on brand personality, this chapter observed growing concern about the appropriateness of the Aaker scale. Drawing upon social psychology and the stereotype content model, it introduced an alternative conceptualization of brand personality. This provides us with a two-dimensional brand perception construct (warmth, competence). Our empirical results suggest that the stereotype content model constitutes a viable alternative conceptualization of brand personality. Moreover, this chapter argued that the Aaker operationalization (1997) is not part of a wider theoretical framework. Our stereotype-content-based model allows arguing for a personality-emotion-attitude-behavioral intention chain. The stereotype content model provides a suitable nomological framework. The findings show that the two brand perception dimensions (warmth, competence) are sufficient to explain as much of the variance in behavioral intention as the five brand personality dimensions, namely 66%.

Hence, this study contributes to current research in two main ways: First, it helps reducing complexity in brand personality measurement. Aaker's brand personality scale requires a set of 42 items reflecting five

dimensions. The alternative approach relying upon stereotypes (warmth, competence) requires fewer items. Second, even though no direct link between stereotypes and behavioral intentions was found, the findings provide evidence that brand perceptions are mediated through emotions and attitudes.

Overall, our results showed the following: While the model based on Aaker's brand personality did not fit the data well, the proposed stereotype content model structure was well able to fit the data. This finding supports the assumption that the consumer's behavioral intention results from the consumer's stereotypes towards the brand (warmth, competence), his emotions and his brand attitude.

3.7.2   Managerial implications

Understanding how consumers perceive the brand is especially important from a managerial perspective. Currently, research mainly provides the 42-item tool to measure how consumers perceive the personality of a brand. This study suggests a more parsimonious measurement tool that only consists of six items. The results of this study reveal that the six brand perception items which form the two dimensions warmth and competence are sufficient to support brand managers in two ways: First, the two brand perception dimensions simplify clear differentiation of the company's brand from competitor brands. They may be useful tools in positioning analyses. Second, the stereotype content model supports brand managers by providing insight into consumer behavior. Whereas the Aaker approach (1997) assumes that one brand is characterized by one personality, the stereotype content model acknowledges that consumers may hold very different perceptions of one and the same brand. By using stereotypes as frame for brand personality studies managers can attempt to capture the variance in consumer perspectives on their own brand as well as competitor brands.

3.7.3   Limitations and future research

Although this study provides useful insights, it has limitations. These limitations provide opportunities for future research. First, this analysis is based on a limited sample of brands. Although in response to suggestions formulated in prior research (e.g., Caprara, Barbaranelli, and Guido 2001; Kumar, Luthra, and Datta 2006) this study included both Fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) and service brands and no important differences were found in the results between FMCG and services contexts, it remains unclear whether the stereotype content model is applicable in other contexts (B2B brands, not-for-profit brands etc). For instance, brands become increasingly important on industrial markets. However, our knowledge about the role and the types of brand perceptions in business-to-business contexts is very limited.

Second, this study reports results from one specific national context. Research on brand personalities concludes that the Aaker (1997) dimensions of brand personality are not reproductible in every cultural context (Aaker, Benet-Martínez, and Garolera, 2001; Sung and Tinkham, 2005; Supphellen and Gronhaug, 2003). Also our knowledge of the reproducibility of brand perceptions is very limited. Future research may replicate this study in another cultural context in order to extend the validity of the findings.

A third limitation of the present study is that assumptions about causality are not possible. Even though current research supports arguing for a brand perception-emotion-attitude-behavioral intention chain, future research may attempt to replicate these results by using an experimental approach.

Chapter 4. Consumer-Brand Relationships: A State-of-the-Art Review and Future Research Directions

4.1 Introduction

The seminal article by Fournier (1998) led to an overwhelming attention on consumer-brand relationships. Nevertheless, researchers still disagree on the existence of such relationships. Thus, the rationale for this article is (a) to highlight the origins of this realm and (b) to provide a conceptual approach to consumer-brand relationships that lays the foundation for future research.

This article differs from an earlier review of consumer-brand relationships by Patterson and O'Malley (2006) in that it results in an innovative perspective on consumer-brand relationships. This contribution neither stretches the interpersonal relationship metaphor too far, nor does it introduce a different concept as a substitute for the term consumer-brand relationship, nor does it change the original understanding of the relationship metaphor. Moreover, the aim of this article is not only to overview the conceptual contributions, but also to provide a detailed framework of empirical studies in this realm by focusing on contributions treating brand relationships towards consumer goods. Although both approaches share the common goal to review previous works and to develop a new vantage point on consumer-brand relationships as a basis for future research, they suggest complementary rather than substitutive views. Hence, this article fills a gap in the existing literature by documenting the state of consumer-brand relationship research focusing on brand relationships towards consumer goods and by providing innovative directions for future research. Thus, the remainder of the chapter is structured as follows. The second section attempts to describe the article selection method. Section 3 overviews the existing conceptual ideology concerning consumer-brand relationships, while section 4 provides a comprehensive review of empirically drawn examinations. Section 5 discusses the findings and introduces a new conceptual approach on the topic. Finally, section 6 lays the foundation for future research.

4.2   Article selection method

The goal was to locate academic research regarding the consumer-brand relationship phenomenon focusing on brand relationships in the context of consumer goods. The article selection phase consists of three stages.

First, the relevant articles were identified both through the electronic investigation of online databases (e.g., EBSCO Business Source Premier, Science Direct Elsevier, Emerald, ABI Inform, Web of Science) by means of key words (e.g., consumer, brand, relationship, and their different combinations), author details (e.g., Fournier) and through the investigation of search engines on the Internet (e.g., Google Scholar). Additionally, an extensive search of further pertinent publications in this research field was conducted via the manual investigation of reference lists.

In the second stage, all included articles were analyzed to verify that they deal with the brand relationship of an individual consumer towards a consumer goods brand. Therefore, articles exclusively focusing on service brands were eliminated from further analyses (such as Aggarwal 2004; Nysveen et al. 2005; Chang and Chieng 2006; Aaker et al. 2004).

Six crucial works treating the consumer-brand relationship conceptual were identified, covering a period from 1988 to 2006. In particular, the search for empirical studies was dominated by the selection criterion for dealing with the consumer-brand relationship phenomenon. In the third step, contributions examining rather unidirectional constructs such as brand connection (e.g., Escalas 2004) and brand attachment (e.g., Thomson et al. 2005), those that solely rely on particular types of relationships such as brand love (e.g., Carroll and Ahuvia 2006), brand dislike (e.g., Pimentel and Reynolds 2004; Dalli et al. 2006; Pichier and Hemetsberger 2007) or consumer devotion (e.g., Pichier and Hemetsberger 2007; Pimentel and Reynolds 2004) as well as those analyzing the interaction between brand users in communities rather than the unique relationship between a consumer and a brand (e.g., McAlexander et al. 2002), were eliminated from this review. The focus therefore lied exclusively on

studies contributing to the consumer-brand relationship realm in the context of consumer goods, which in itself is understood as a research stream analyzing the two way interaction between an individual and a brand.

Due to the investigation of international online databases, the selection process, particularly for empirical articles, focused on articles published in peer-reviewed Anglo-American journals. Hence, a number of dissertations, conference publications and books on the topic are omitted – except for the dissertation by Fournier 1994, which constitutes the basis for her seminal article in 1998. However, the focus on journals is justified due to their wide availability among both academics and marketers (Nord and Nord 1995).

Thus, a total of 18 scientific empirical articles were selected, covering nine years of research published between 1998 and 2007. Among these, 10 studies were qualitative and eight further works follow a quantitative approach.

All 18 articles were exclusively published in journals covering aspects of marketing in general, consumer behavior, psychological issues and brand management:

- Advances in Consumer Research (6),

- Journal of Business Research (3),

- Psychology & Marketing (3),

- Journal of Consumer Research (2),

- Journal of Marketing (1),

- Journal of Marketing Management (1),

- Journal of Marketing THEORY AND PRACTICE (1),

- Journal of Product and Brand Management (1).

In the following section, the conceptual framework regarding consumers and their relationships with brands will be presented in a chronological order to illustrate the origins of this research stream.

4.3 Conceptual framework about consumer-brand relationships

Before scientists became more interested in consumer-brand relationships and investigated their characteristics as well as their antecedents or consequences, they drew upon existing theories from the interpersonal literature to conceptualize this phenomenon (table 4-1). In the first contribution, Shimp and Madden (1988) applied an isolated theory from the interpersonal relationship literature, namely Sternberg's theory of love (1986). They detected eight types of relations which are composed of intimacy, passion and decision/commitment. Apart from this and compared to Sternberg's context of interpersonal relationships, they state that relations between consumers and objects are unidirectional: "The consumer may feel a strong attachment and caring for a consumption object, but the object cannot love back nor initiate the relationship" (p. 163). Nevertheless, they conceded the potential of marketers to humanize objects and to initiate relationships between their offers and the consumers. However, they examine relations between consumers and objects in general. Even if they mention brands as one type of object, they do not establish the nowadays well-known notion of consumer-brand relationships. Some years later, Blackston (1992) introduced the brand relationship notion which he perceived as "a logical extension of the [until then widely accepted (e.g., Gardner and Levy 1955)] idea of a brand personality" (p. 80). His main concern was to examine how brand equity can be created by managing brand relationships. In order to define what a brand relationship is, he refers to the example of a doctor/patient relationship – an interpersonal relationship. From his point of view, a brand relationship develops in the consumer's mind: the con-

sumer has a perception of the brand's personality, develops a perception of the attitude that the brand has towards himself and consequently builds an attitude towards the brand. While Shimp and Madden stress the unidirectional character of a consumer-brand relationship, Blackston (1992) extends the idea of a consumer-brand relationship to a bidirectional perspective.

Thereafter, in 1994, Fournier conceptualizes consumer-brand relationships in line with the idea that people tend to humanize brands (Belk 1988; Gardner and Levy 1955; Levy 1985; Levy 1959). Admitting that brands per se are inanimate objects, she advances the view that through impression formation processes, consumers perceive marketer-initiated activities as brand actions which in turn demonstrate the brand as an active partner in the relationship. In order to underline the idea of the brand as a respectable partner in the dyad, she mentions that in interpersonal relationships partners may also be perceived as passive and non-reciprocating. Fournier cites among others the example of a childhood friendship which persists for years without active interaction. According to this author, a further characteristic of a consumer-brand relationship is that the brand and the consumer are not equal partners because the consumer has the final say in whether or not the relationship exists. Moreover, from her point of view and in line with the interpersonal relationship literature, a consumer-brand relationship consists of three key dimensions: 'interdependence', 'development over time' and the 'affective or instrumental nature' of the bond.

Fournier's (1994) statement that consumer-brand relationships develop over time and progress through different stages, influenced Fajer and Shouten (1995) to deal with the dissolution of brand relationships. Referring to the interpersonal relationship theory, they made use of the friendship metaphor. Since humans have different kinds of relationships towards different persons regarding their importance, substitutability and pleasure/cost ratio of the friendship, they conclude that consumer-brand relationships differ regarding the customer's loyalty to the brand which they comprehend as a function of exit barriers, commitment and investment. Correspondingly, they argue that a customer's relationship to a brand becomes more complex and disturbed as the level of loyalty

towards that same brand increases. To prevent the consumer-brand relationship from breaking down, they advise developing a true dyadic communication with loyal customers from the brand side. In case of lacking brand performance, customers may be motivated to express their concerns via two-way communication, thus avoiding a complete break down in the relationship

These findings gave rise to the first critical examination of the limitations to the relationship metaphor and interpersonal relationship theory in the context of consumers and brands. Bengtsson's (2003) main criticism is based on the lack of reciprocity and mutuality in the relationship between consumers and brands because brands are inanimate objects which cannot act or feel. Thus, the brand as a human being is just a metaphor and due to the lack of reciprocity the consumer-brand relationship is not entirely parallel and applicable to relationships between humans. Therefore, he suggests that the term relationship, which is associated with interpersonal relationships, should be redefined or modified. He also claims that terms such as love should not be utilized in the context of consumer-brand relationships because they exclusively refer to the interpersonal context. According to this author, the kind of relationships consumers might have with brands is likely to be imposed on them rather than initiated by mutual interest. Finally, he questions whether the relationship discourse among marketers and scientists encourages consumers to accept having relationships with brands, even though they may not have perceived such relations in the past. Patterson and O'Malley (2006) express a comparable line of argument. They conclude that even if brands possess meanings which go beyond their functional use and if individuals project personalities onto brands, the interpersonal relationship metaphor is sometimes overextended. From their point of view, problems can occur when transferring a concept from the interpersonal context into a commercial framework because of differing contextual variables. In addition, they mention that the parties in consumer-brand relationships are not individual agents. One of the counterparts, namely the brand, is a conceptual entity managed by a number of actors. In their opinion, the perspective of individual dyads does not provide sufficient insight because brands "are works in progress, constantly acted upon by brand's various publics" (p. 15). Therefore, they digress

from the classical dyadic perspective to a network perspective and argue for the notion of brand communities. However, this would imply an absolute abandonment of the original relationship understanding and approximate the brand community concept rather than provide a starting point to get deeper insight into the consumer-brand relationship phenomenon.

Table 4 - 1: Conceptual Articles about CBR.

Year	Author	Objective	Theory	Key findings
1988	Shimp and Madden	adapting Sternberg's (1986) triangular theory of love to the context of consumer-object relations	Theory of love	- theory of love is applicable to the domain of consumer-object relations
1992	Blackston	examining how to build brand equity by managing the brand's relationships	n.s.	- components of a successful, positive relationship: trust in the brand, customer satisfaction with the brand - concept of BP/ relationship has been applied to the development of advertising
1995	Fajer and Schouten	exploring the role of dissolution models of IR in the context of CBR	CBR, dissolution (inter-personal relations)	- different CBRs have different brand loyalty levels - at high loyalty levels, patterns of break-ups become more complex and more disruptive or disturbing to the customer - importance of dyadic relationships; two-way communication

2003	Bengtsson	examining limitations with the relationship metaphor and IR theory in the context of consumers and brands	CBR	- lack of reciprocity and mutuality in the relationship between consumers and brands → term "relationship" should be redefined or exchanged
2006	Patterson and O'Malley	reviewing the emergence of the literature on CBRs, considering problems and suggesting opportunities for future development	Social exchange theory, CBR, brand community	- brands possess meanings which go beyond their functional use - individuals project personalities onto brands - IR metaphor stretched too far - network perspective: communities as tools to construct personalized brands meanings; brand communities provide a frame in which people can interact with each other by using the brand (person-thing-person)

These empirical studies were arranged differently for the sake of systematisation: First, the characteristics of the studies were analyzed and secondly, a summary of the main empirical results follows.

4.4 Empirical Studies on consumer-brand relationships

4.4.1 Characteristics of the empirical studies

- Sample size and unit of analysis

The sample size of the qualitative studies ranges from two to 20 respondents (table 4-2). By contrast, due to the study design and to the methodology utilized, the sample sizes of the quantitative studies vary greatly between 56 and 938 respondents (table 4-3). While smaller sample sizes were sufficient for the univariate analyses of variance analyzing experiment data, larger samples were needed in the case of more complex methods such as LISREL, which were chosen for scale validation (e.g., Hayes et al. 2000) or to analyze a previously defined structural model (e.g., Park and Kim 2001). Regarding the sample selection, convenience as well as random samples occurred. However, as investigations revealed that men and women perceive consumer-brand relationships differently (Monga 2002), samples for future studies will have to be selected carefully.

Table 4 - 2: Qualitative Articles about CBR – objective, study design.

Author	Objective	Theory	Study Design	Sample	Stimulus
Fournier (1998)	establishing a framework to better understand the CBR	IR	in-depth interviews (for a total of 12 - 15 hours)	Women	lived experiences with brands
Olsen (1999)	discovering the particularities of consumption for women at mid-life	CBR	phenomenological interviews	5 women	product categories associated with mid-life transition
Kates (2000)	exploring the lived experiences and consumer behaviors of gay men, especially their brand relationships	n.s.	in-depth, semi-structured long interviews	44 gay men	special gay brands amongst others
Ji (2002)	examining children's relationships with brands	n.s.	story telling technique	three children of one family	different product categories (TV, stereo, bike, car, cereal, toothpaste, clothing, shampoo, soap etc.)

Underwood (2003)	examining the role of packaging as a product-related attribute to communicate meaning via both mediated and lived experiences; as well as its role to enhance CBRs	CBR	in-depth interviews	5 subjects differing in terms of age, gender, social class	grocery store walkthrough
Woodside (2004)	describing psychological schemas for four means-end chains	IR	4 case studies reporting lived experiences	2 subjects	beverage industry
Robinson and Kates (2005)	exploring children's socialization into CBR in order to understand young children's consumer behavior	CBR	interviews	ten 6-7 year old and ten 9-10 year old children, their 20 parents	n.s.
Beverland (2006)	examining the role of in-store music and brand image fit and its effect on CBR	CBR	in-depth interviews; projective techniques	20 consumers	in-store music
Chung and Beverland (2006)	examining the appropriateness and applicability of consumer forgiveness in the context of CBR	IR	semi-structured in-depth interviews	20 consumers	n.s.
Braun-LaTour et al. (2007)	understanding CBRs using people's earliest and defining product memories as projective tools	CBR	interviews, questionnaire	three age cohorts (60 participants)	automobile

- Stimulus

As regards the choice of stimulus, researchers created a fictitious brand in a scenario description for its use in experiments (Aggarwal and Law 2005). Existing brands were chosen particularly in the qualitative studies wherein respondents were instructed to choose any brand they use (e.g., Fournier 1998) (table 4-2). By contrast, in the quantitative studies, the brand was chosen by the researcher to gather comparable information for deriving generalizable conclusions (table 4-3). The brand selection process followed different approaches: Whereas Hayes and his colleagues (2006) chose a sunglass brand with respect to their research objective, in the Smit et al. study (2007), a set of brands was chosen on the basis of the Rossiter-Percy product typology to represent several brands differing in terms of consumer involvement and purchase motivation. To reflect a wide range of different product categories, researchers might refer in future studies to the symbolic-instrumental framework (Aaker 1997).

- Study design and methodology

Due to the research objective of qualitative studies, in-depth interviews were conducted by initiating respondents to report their experiences with a brand (table 4-2). After having made a transcription of these interviews, the content was analyzed not only across the cases, but also by an idiographic approach, meaning that the informants' statements were interpreted in terms of socio-cultural context (e.g., Fournier 1998; Ji 2002). With respect to the sample size, the information gathered in the context of the quantitative studies was derived from computer-assisted self-interviews, mail surveys, written questionnaires or face-to-face interviews (table 4-3).

The studies are identical in that they all followed a cross-sectional approach. However, no prior study has applied a longitudinal approach to investigate the evolution of consumer-brand relationships (see Aaker et al. 2004 for an example of the service brand context). Moreover no study has examined cross-cultural differences regarding consumer-brand

relationships towards consumer goods. As Chang and Chieng (2006) identified significant differences in the context of a service brand, such differences are also likely within the scope of consumer goods. As the starting point for a cross-cultural approach, researchers may rely on Hofstede's cultural dimensions (1983), what have successfully been applied to identify cultural differences regarding consumer brand perception (Foscht et al. 2008).

- Theoretical framework

A further aspect which merits attention is the theoretical understanding of consumer-brand relationships in the different studies. After the publication of Fournier's (1998) crucial article, authors transferred different theories and concepts from the interpersonal context to the brand relationship context. In particular, Clark and Mills' communal versus exchange framework (Aggarwal and Law 2005), Heider's balance theory (Woodside 2004), interpersonal attractiveness (Hayes et al. 2006) as well as interpersonal forgiveness (Chung and Beverland 2006) are concepts which were applied to provide a deeper understanding of the consumer-brand relationship. Even though drawing upon interpersonal theories enriched the knowledge about consumer-brand relationships, criticism arose arguing that the interpersonal relationship metaphor has been stretched too far (Patterson and O'Malley 2006). Therefore, an alternative framework (e.g. Relational Exchange Theory) that has successfully been applied in the marketing literature appears to be a promising area for future research. A detailed reflection upon this approach follows in the discussion section.

Table 4 - 3: Quantitative Articles about CBR – objective, study design.

Author	Objective	Theory	Study Design	Sample	Stimulus
Park and Kim (2001)	examining the role of CBR in a brand's extension	IR	face-to-face interviews, questionnaire	430 adult consumers	grocery food, bed-set brand, cellular phone, nonalcoholic drink, beer brand + 2 potential extension brands (similar/dissimilar) for each brand
Park et al. (2002)	demonstrating the importance of building and maintaining strong CBRs in the context of brand extensions	CBR	face-to-face interviews, questionnaire	550 housewives	n.s.
Monga (2002)	- examining whether consumers think of their relationships with brands by evaluating the brand's actions towards them in addition to their own actions towards the brand - examining whether men and women differ in the way they perceive relationships	CBR	2 (closeness of relationship: close, distant) x 2 (gender: male, female) design in which closeness is a within-subjects factor and gender is a between-subjects factor	71 undergraduate students	automobile beverage fashion

Aggarwal and Law (2005)	examining relationship norms (salient at the time of transaction between a consumer and a product) as a moderator of the consumer's information-processing strategy when evaluating a brand	IR	exp. 1: 2 (communal vs. exchange relationship) x 2 (type of extension: near, far) between-subjects design, scenario based exp. 2: 2 (communal vs. exchange relationship) x 2 (type of brand information: concrete/ abstract) between-subjects design, scenario based exp. 3: 2 (communal vs. exchange relationship) x 2 (level of abstraction to at which brand's features are processed) between-subjects design, scenario based	exp. 1 : 64 undergraduate students + 48 + 61 (control groups) exp. 2: 56 undergraduate students exp. 3: 114 undergraduate students	exp. 1: cola manufacturer (ice tea and coffee as extensions), a pen and a jeans manufacturer (calculator (near/ far) and fashion accessories (near/ far)) exp. 2: clothing store brand exp. 3: fictitious brand of pen
Kressmann et al. (2006)	direct and indirect effects of self-image congruence on brand loyalty	CBR	questionnaire, mail survey; computer-aided selection process; incentive: lottery of cash prices	600 car owners	automobile
Hayes et al. (2006)	analyzing attractiveness as a moderator of the relationship between the perceived BP and the evaluation of the brand as a partner	IR	questionnaire	142 graduate and undergraduate students	sunglasses (Oakley)

Smit et al. (2007)	- examining to what extent brand relationships are different for various types of brands - examining to what extent consumers are willing to share personal information with their relationship partners	CBR	computer assisted self interview	938 users of the mentioned brands	car (Ford), computer (Compaq, IBM), beer (Grolsch, Heineken), shampoo (Andrélon, Dove)
Veloutsou (2007)	exploring the concept of CBR: developing a quant. instrument to assess the strength of the relationship	RM, CBR	questionnaires	277 respondents randomly selected from marketplaces and near university	clothes, personal care products, cosmetics

- Operationalization of consumer-brand relationships

As regards the consumer-brand relationship analysis, two different approaches can be distinguished (table 4-5). While certain studies aim at analyzing to what extent varying relationship types lead to different types of behavior, other research objectives focus on the analysis of antecedents or outcomes of a specific degree of relationship strength. Aiming to measure to what extent diverse kinds of relationships result in differing consumer reactions, the Clark and Mills framework (1993) distinguishing between communal and exchange relationships was applied in the brand relationship context (Aggarwal and Law 2005). According to these authors, distinct motivations – so-called norms – to engage in a relationship exist. In exchange relationships, the motivation for giving is to get something back in return. On the other hand, in communal relationships people give benefits to others to demonstrate a concern for them and to attend to their needs. Clark and Mills (1993) developed a set of items from which a score is calculated to end up with a statement about how people perceive their relationships along a continuum ranging from an exchange to a communal relationship.

On the other hand, in order to analyze the nature of a relationship, Fournier (1994) developed the brand relationship quality scale, which she defines as "a customer-based indicator of the strength and depth of the person-brand relationship" (p. 124). She argues that high brand relationship quality implies further development of and investment in the consumer-brand relationship and stresses the dynamic character of the construct. Brand relationship quality demonstrates a multi-faceted construct composed of seven dimensions which each represent a type of relationship that she derived from results in a qualitative analysis and after empirical testing. They are: love/passion, behavioral interdependence, intimacy, personal commitment, self-concept connection, nostalgic connection and partner quality. Furthermore, she explained the additive relation of these dimensions. Even though they are interrelated, each facet is distinct from the other, but also constitutes an important piece of the whole. Regarding the extent to which a consumer perceives each of these dimensions, conclusions about its consumer-brand relationship can be drawn.

On the basis of Fournier's relationship dimensions, six quantitative studies utilized her brand relationship quality scale to measure the extent to which each dimension is perceived by the respondent. Depending on the purpose, researchers adjusted this original scale by omitting specific facets of Fournier's brand relationship quality (e.g., Hayes et al. 2006), adding new items from pretests (e.g., Park et al. 2002) or by adding items from other existing scales of constructs such as brand trust (e.g., Smit et al. 2007). Other authors did not use Fournier's scale proposition that she developed in the course of her dissertation (1994) but derived certain items from her qualitative study which was published in 1998 (e.g., Park and Kim 2001).

In four out of six studies, Fournier's facet partner quality was replicated and is therefore the dimension which aroused most interest among scientists. In two works, new brand relationship dimensions were detected. First, Park and Kim (2001) discovered the satisfaction and brand knowledge dimensions as well as Fournier's commitment and self-connection dimension. Another study replicated five facets as defined by Fournier and identified new dimensions labelled nostalgia and trust (Park et al. 2002).

Neglecting the existence of Fournier's brand relationship quality operationalization and deriving its relationship understanding from the relationship marketing literature, Veloutsou (2007) recently developed a two-dimensional measurement of consumer-brand relationships consisting of the two dimensions "Two-way Communication" and "Emotional Exchange".

In summary, much discrepancy exists in the literature regarding the operationalization of consumer-brand relationships. Particularly, a widely accepted operationalization of the brand relationship quality construct remains undefined. Nevertheless, until recently, the operationalization by Fournier has interested academics most and has been applied in several subsequent studies the empirical results of which follow in the next paragraph.

Table 4 - 4: Quantitative Articles about CBR – measures, key findings.

Author	relationship measure	relationship dimensions	independent variable	dependent variable	Key findings
Park and Kim (2001)	4 items derived from statements in qual. study by Fournier (1998)	self-connection, satisfaction, brand knowledge, commitment	- original brand quality - BRQ	- evaluation of the extension - purchase intention - perceived quality of extensions (mediator)	- brand relationships directly influenced purchase intentions of the extensions regardless of the extension's similarity to the original brand - brand relationships indirectly influenced purchase intentions via affecting the perceived quality of the extension (only when the extensions were dissimilar rather than when similar to the original brand category)
Park et al. (2002)	Fournier (1994) + pretest → 46 items (after factor analysis: 42 items)	commitment, brand partner quality, self-connection, intimacy, nostalgia, love and passion, trust	- benefit (typical/ atypical) - product category (similar/ dissimilar) - BRQ (high/ low)	- evaluation of the extension - purchase intention	- set of 42 items to measure the BRQ → 7 types detected - strong BRQ subjects accepted the proposed extensions more positively than the weak ones - BRQ tended to interact with benefit typicality and category similarity: clearly supported hypothesis in the evaluation data and partially supported in the purchase intention data → building strong CBR has strategic importance

Monga (2002)	BRQ scale Fournier (1994) + items to assess both sides of the relationship	Intimacy, interde-pendence	- closeness of relation-ship - gender	- intimacy - inter-dependence	men may not view brand relationships as a dyadic interac-tion as much as women do; they do not see the brand as an active partner as much as women do
Aggar-wal and Law (2005)	12 item questionnaire from Clark (1986) to calculate a communal net score	communal and exchange relation-ships	relationship type	- product evaluation - memory measures - feature list-ings	- norms of a communal relationship lead to brand attrib-utes being evaluated at a higher level of abstraction, compared to those of an exchange relationship - in consumers' brand interaction, the type of CBR influ-ences what information becomes salient (exchange r.: focus on details, information processing at a lower level; communal r.: information processing at a higher level)
Kress-mann et al. (2006)	BRQ: interdepend-ence, partner quality, intimacy (Hayes et al. 2000 who derived their item set by Fournier 1994) love and passion (derived from the Modified IR Scale (Garthoeffner et al. 1993))	interdependence, partner quality, intimacy, love and passion	- self-image congruence - func-tional congruity - BRQ - product involve-ment (moderator)	brand loyalty	- integration of the BRQ construct into self-congruity theory - significant effect of self-congruity on functional congru-ity - self-image congruence positively affects brand loyalty directly and indirectly through functional congruity, product involvement, and BRQ

Hayes et al. (2006)	Aaker (1996); Fournier (1998)	partner quality	- BP - attrac-tiveness (moderator)	partner quality	- respondents perceived BP influenced their desirability of the brand as a relationship partner - the BP - partner quality connection depends is moderated by the perceived attractiveness
Smit et al. (2007)	BRQ scale (Fournier 1994): 39 items + 4 items of Chaudhuri and Holbrook's (2001) trust scale → after pretest: final set of 16 items	connection, partner quality	- BP - product category - brand choice involve-ment - demo-graphics (moderator) - degree of brand use (moderator)	- future use - switching likelihood - openness to brand contact - willingness to share personal information - BRQ (con-nection, partner quality)	- brands differ in terms of perceived relationship quality - brands with unique and exciting personality qualify more likely for the role of partner - three-dimensional solution for BP: unique and excited, competence, gentle - car brands are perceived as competent; beer brands as unique and exciting and shampoo brands as gentle - BP is strongly related to BRQ, even if this effect is controlled for brand use and product type, i.e. connection is strongly related to unique and exciting brands and partner quality has more to do with a competent BP - BRQ positively related to use intention, negatively related to switching intention; BRQ leads to a more favorable attitude on brand contact and enhances the willingness to share personal information with the organi-zation behind the brand
Velout-sou (2007)	items derived from Harker's RM defini-tions (1999) and from viewing philosophers	two-way commu-nication, emo-tional exchange	-	-	- developed a measurement instrument of brand relation-ships with the dimensions: two-way communication (6 items) and emotional exchange (5 items)

4.4.2　Empirical results

- Relationship Types

The first relationship typology was detected by Fournier (1994; 1998) who identified the following 15 relationship types: (1) arranged marriages, (2) casual friends/buddies, (3) marriages of convergence, (4) committed partnerships, (5) best friendships, (6) compartmentalised friendships, (7) kinships, (8) rebounds/avoidance-driven relationships, (9) childhood friendships, (10) courtships, (11) dependencies, (12) flings, (13) enmities, (14) secret affairs and (15) enslavements. After the salient works by Fournier (1994; 1998), scholars became interested in detecting relationship types of particular cohorts in qualitative analyses (table 4-4). Ji (2002) identified 10 different ways in which children perceive a relationship towards a brand on a range from first love to enmity. A further study on children's consumer-brand relationships conducted by Robinson and Kates (2005) resulted in four relationship types (uberbrand, lifestyle, fade or phase relationship) which differed mainly in terms of duration, marketer involvement and interdependence on the brand. Other studies concentrated on women at mid-life ages (Olsen 1999) or on gay men who are assumed to have three different types of relationships, namely community membership, political alliance and political enmity (Kates 2000).

In line with Monga (2002), these results demonstrate that customers not only perceive consumer-brand relationships differently depending on gender, but that they also establish different types of relationships depending on age and affinity groups.

Table 4 - 5: Qualitative Articles about CBR – relationship types, key findings.

Author	relationship types	Key findings
Fournier (1998)		- brand is seen as a relationship partner - BRQ is a multiplex phenomena - identified 6 relationship types: love and passion, self-connection, interdependence, commitment, intimacy, brand partner quality - BRQ evolves through meaningful brand and consumer actions
Olsen (1999)	-	- differences between single women and married working mothers - nostalgic attachment overlaps with brand relationships
Kates (2000)	community membership, political alliance, political enmity	- identification of 3 relationship types which have not been mentioned by Fournier's (1998) - contrary to Fournier who focused upon individual aspects of brand relationships, he points out the communal and shared motivation of brand behavior
Ji (2002)	first love, true love, arranged marriage, secret admirer, good friend, fun buddy, old buddy, acquaintance, one-night stand, enmity	- "relationship is established if the child can name a brand from the product category" (p. 377) - children develop CBRs; CBR are imbedded in the social environment where children live - identification of 10 different relationship types

Underwood (2003)	-	product packaging was positioned as a product related attribute capable of influencing the identity of the brand and the self, while also strengthening the CBR, via lived or mediated experiences
Woodside (2004)	-	- respondents have a "causal friendship/buddy" type of relationship with a beer because there is not a long term commitment with the brand - consumers are loyal but they do buy other brands depending on their financial situation - another brand relationship, a hostile relationship has been detected; it is characterized by the respondents' desire to avoid the product due to its negative effects
Robinson and Kates (2005)	uberbrand relationship, lifestyle relationship, fad relationship, phase relationship	- detected 4 relationship types that children might have with brands - key properties of these relationships are: duration, marketer involvement, interdependence on the brand
Beverland (2006)	extent of bonding (weak or strong)	- defined as the strength of consumers emotional connections to the brand (Fournier 1998) - consumers with clearly formed expectations of the brand → fit results in brand reinforcement and positive in-store experience - for consumers without prior experiences, music is an important signal of product quality and appropriateness; fit introduces brand to the customer - misfit resulted in both positive and negative outcomes for the brand: positive repositioning, confusion, store avoidance
Chung and Beverland (2006)	-	- concept of forgiveness can be applied to the context of CBR; marketer transgressions include various breaches of expressed and implied relationship norms - subsequent to a transgression, consumers adopted coping strategies (re-evaluation of the brand relationship)

Braun-LaTour et al. (2007)	n.s.	- earliest memories and defining memories have an important influence of customer's current and future preference → they give insight into brand meaning - earliest memories experiences centered on families; defining memories showed the influence of external members of the participants social circles - CBRs are dynamic and changing, but also cyclical → certain key experiences provide insights into what the consumer will desire in the future

BP = brand personality

BRQ = brand relationship quality

CBR = consumer-brand relationship

IR = interpersonal relationship

Qual. = qualitative

Quant. = quantitative

RM = Relationship marketing

- Outcome variables of consumer-brand relationships

As researchers mainly draw upon two different approaches to measure consumer-brand relationships, the analyses of the outcomes for such relationships can further be structured into two groups. On the one hand, by conducting an experiment and measuring the relationship type in terms of Clark and Mills' operationalization, the respondent's brand-related information processing was analyzed (Aggarwal and Law 2005). The findings reveal that in a consumer-brand interaction, the type of brand relationship and its resulting norms influence which information becomes salient. According to them, brand-related information is processed at a broader overall level in a communal relationship, while in exchange relationships with the brand, the same information are processed at a more detailed level.

On the other hand, outcome variables of consumer-brand relationships were identified by relying upon the effects of brand relationship quality. Therefore, Park and colleagues (2001; 2002) investigated the role of brand relationship quality in the context of brand extensions. Using Fournier's scale, they discover the direct influence of brand relationships on purchase intention. Emphasizing the strategic importance of strong consumer-brand relationships, they argue that respondents who perceive a high brand relationship quality accept the proposed extensions more positively than those who perceived weak brand relationship quality. In line with these findings, brand relationship quality is positively related to use intention and negatively related to switching intention (Smit et al. 2007). Moreover, results indicate that brand relationship quality leads to a more favorable attitude towards brand contact and enhances the willingness to share personal information with the organization behind the brand (Smit et al. 2007). Furthermore, researchers assess the mediating role of brand relationship quality and a positive impact on loyalty towards a brand and product reuse was proven (Kressmann et al. 2006).

Altogether, these contributions agree on the fact that high brand relationship quality leads to positive brand attitude and positively influences consumer behavior. Thus, they underline the managerial importance of

consumer-brand relationships. Notwithstanding these enriching insights, defending the market share by keeping customers loyal is not the sole objective for companies. Market growth is a more costly but rather promising objective. As a company's growth rate is found to have a strong correlation with the likelihood that customers will recommend the product to friends (Reichheld 2003), empirical findings identifying a significant link between consumer-brand relationship and positive word-of-mouth behavior may underline the strategic importance of brand relationships for marketers.

- Antecedents of consumer-brand relationship

In the course of four explorations, scholars were interested in the determinants of consumer-brand relationships. The first study taking this perspective was conducted by Monga (2002) who showed that women tend to perceive an interactive brand relationship more easily than men. The determinant which arises most interest among researchers is brand personality. More precisely, this construct occurs in three out of the four studies concerning consumer-brand relationship antecedents. First, they agree on the finding that the brand relationship quality differs depending on the perceived brand personality (Hayes et al. 2006; Smit et al. 2007). Moreover, studies reveal that aspects such as brand attractiveness, brand use and product type moderate the effect of brand personality on consumer-brand relationships (Hayes et al. 2006; Smit et al. 2007). Finally, relying upon the brand personality scale, the positive effect of self-congruity on consumer-brand relationship is proven. Kressmann and colleagues (2006) find that the perceived similarity between the consumer and the brand enhances the quality of the perceived brand relationship.

In conclusion, these findings emphasize the importance for marketers to develop strong consumer-brand relationships with their customers taking into consideration the perceived brand personality, further brand-related aspects as well as the individual characteristics of the consumer.

Even though both consumer characteristics (e.g. gender) and brand characteristics (e.g. brand personality) have partly been investigated, the role of typical brand relationship characteristics, such as the consumer dependence upon the brand, remains unclear. A further starting point for future studies could potentially be Kaltcheva and Weitz's (1999) work. They find that customers who have unpleasant experiences with the service brand remain less loyal than those who perceive pleasant brand experiences. First, research may replicate this result in the consumer goods context. However, no study has yet investigated the expectations that brands need to conform to. It may be pertinent to investigate the expectations which brand managers should respect in order to prevent customers from exiting their brand relationship. Insight into such codes of conduct for brands could provide promising information both for academics and managers.

4.5 Review of critical issues

The preceding sections illustrating the way consumers deal with consumer goods brands has aroused overwhelming interest among researchers. However, after having condensed the results emanating from over one decade of consumer-brand relationship research, certain conceptual and methodological challenges still remain.

4.5.1 Conceptual issues

- Focus on interpersonal relationship literature

As regards the conceptual discussion on consumer-brand relationships, scholars neither agree on the existence of such relationships nor the appropriateness of interpersonal relationship theories for examinations.

This disagreement results from the fact that previous articles exclusively draw upon interpersonal relationship theories.

However, according to the marketing literature, the relationship metaphor stems back to the concept of relational exchange and was first mentioned by Berry (1983). It constitutes the result of a paradigm shift from a purely transaction-oriented to a relationship-oriented marketing perspective (Sheth and Parvatiyar 1995a). The relationship concept has widely been investigated in areas such as the business-to-business context (Dwyer et al. 1987; Morgan and Hunt 1994) or services marketing (Berry 1995; Grönroos 1996). Although sceptical academics criticized the appropriateness and utility of a domain extension (e.g., Barnes 1994), in the middle of the nineties, the relationship perspective was extended to consumer markets (Christy et al. 1996; Gruen 1995; Sheth and Parvatiyar 1995b), the so-called "parasocial relationships" (Gummesson 1994, p. 14), and consumer-brand relationships (Fournier 1998).

In a content analysis of 26 relationship marketing definitions, Harker (1999) detected seven conceptual categories: creation, development, maintenance of the relationship as well as its temporal and interactive nature, its emotional content and its output as expected by the counterparts. These seven dimensions of relationship marketing definitions provide a starting point to reconsider the meaning of consumer-brand relationships and their possible influences. However, the specific context variables of consumer-brand relationships, as compared to those of buyer-seller relationships, for instance, need to be considered (see Gruen 1995). Since the interorganizational context and the brand context are both dominated by monetary exchange, the reference to relationship marketing seems even more appropriate than the previous reference to the interpersonal relationship literature. Morgan and Hunt (1994, p. 22) argue that "relationship marketing refers to all marketing activities directed toward establishing, developing and maintaining successful relational exchanges". Drawing upon this definition and assessing that managers direct marketing activities towards brands, referring to the relationship marketing literature is justified and encourages critical discussions about including frameworks from this research stream to provide

deeper insight into consumers' relationships towards consumer goods brands.

- Revisiting the counterparts in the dyad

The second remaining issue is that the nature of the two counterparts in the dyad also needs clarification. On the one hand, there is an individual, the consumer, who nowadays seeks individuality, is increasingly self-confident and strives for self-actualization (Burnett and Hutton 2007). The other part of the relationship is represented by the brand. The present conceptual thought on consumer-brand relationships is derived from the literature on objects and how people deal with these tangible items. The criticism concerning the extent to which a person can build a relationship with an object, which consists of certain raw materials, is not negligible. However, relying on the neuroscience literature, brands can rather be described as a network of associations that is created in the consumer's mind (Franzen and Bouwman 2001; Gordon 2006). Franzen and Bouwman (2001) suggest that a brand evokes a totality of associations, meanings, emotions, attitudes and behavioral tendencies. In this respect and relying upon the relationship definition by Morgan and Hunt (1994), consumers build a mental relationship with a brand which can be created and maintained through marketing activities, namely through interactive communication and inclusion of the consumer in brand creation processes (Morris and Martin 2000; Bengtsson 2003; Heath et al. 2006).

4.5.2 Methodological issues

Despite the controversial conceptual debate on consumer-brand relationships, empirical testing reveals that the investigation of consumer-brand relationships contributes to a deeper understanding of consumer behavior towards brands. Important antecedents and outcome variables of consumer-brand relationships have been identified thus leading to an

assessment of the strategic importance of consumer-brand relationships for marketers. Notwithstanding these findings, certain methodological issues still remain.

- Partial perspective

First, the contributions appear to be partial, rather than holistic. Each article focuses on variables evaluated as appropriate with regards to a particular target. The overview of empirical studies revealed that antecedents and effects of consumer-brand relationships have widely been investigated. Scholars tend to concentrate on consumer characteristics (e.g. demographics) or brand-related variables (e.g. brand personality, brand attractiveness). However, no relationship-related characteristics were investigated either as antecedents or as moderators or mediators of the consumer-brand relationship. Therefore, the role of consumer brand dependence or the potential influence of individuals' expectations towards the brand remains unclear. Prior studies provide partial insights in the dyad. However, a comprehensive overview examining both the effects of consumer characteristics, brand characteristics and brand relationship characteristics as well as managerially relevant consequences of consumer-brand relationships (e.g. word-of-mouth behavior), would enrich the current knowledge in the research field.

- Relationship phase

Marketing relationships are similar to interpersonal relationships in that they evolve through various phases characterized by the way the relationship partners regard each other (Dwyer et al. 1987). Studies on consumer-brand relationships towards consumer goods brands have thus far concentrated on effects and consequences during the relationship maintenance phase. However, it would be of interest to investigate how consumers deal with brand transgressions and unpleasant experiences with the brand (see as an example from the context of service brands e.g. Kaltcheva and Weitz 1999; Aaker et al. 2004). Moreover, further ques-

tions remain unanswered: Does the actual relationship phase influence the perceived brand relationship quality? Or do expectations towards the brand differ according to the phase of the relationship?

- Counterbalanced sample

In all studies using existing brands as stimulus respondents were users or owners of the brand in question. However, arguing that brand relationships develop in the consumer's mind and through impression formation (Blackston 1992; Fournier 1994), both brand users/owners but also non-users might serve as valuable informants in evaluating their brand relationship. Counterbalancing a sample with non-users would prevent a loss of information and lead to managerially relevant knowledge for successful brand relationships.

- Brand relationship quality operationalization

The state-of-the-art review revealed that there still is no widely accepted consensus on the brand relationship quality operationalization. In particular, the empirical studies reveal a lack of comparability because the operationalization of the construct followed different approaches. Even though six works out of the eight quantitative studies used Fournier's brand relationship quality scale, they all applied the scale in a slightly different way. Furthermore, as the conceptual contributions about consumer-brand relationships, most of the empirical studies are drawn on concepts from the interpersonal relationship literature. Only in the recent publication by Veloutsou (2007) scale items stem from existing relationship marketing definitions to form a consumer-brand relationship operationalization. However, particular importance for the research field arises from the fact that a conclusive brand relationship quality operationalization independent from the interpersonal relationship analogy is still missing.

4.6   Discussion

By providing a current state-of-the-art review, this chapter serves as a valuable source of information to enhance research concerning consumers' relationships towards consumer goods brands.

Building strong consumer-brand relationships is an important objective in marketing. Strengthening the bond between consumers and brands bases upon the belief that developing relationships results in loyal customers, and that those loyal customers are more profitable than non-loyal customers (Reichheld 2003). However, the review of the literature reveals that consumer-brand relationships have not been examined to any great extent. The main purpose of this chapter was to reflect the current knowledge of marketing scholars regarding consumer-brand relationships in the context of consumer goods. The conceptual contributions pertaining to consumer-brand relationships were presented, followed by a detailed framing of the present empirical studies in this realm.

Notwithstanding the contributions of this state-of-the art review, certain limitations remain. First, the review bases on articles published in peer-reviewed Anglo-American journals. As a result, dissertations, conference publications and books on the topic are not considered. Even though the focus on journals is justified due to their wide availability, future investigations might also integrate unpublished contributions in their reflections. Beside this, even though focusing on Anglo-American journals is justified due to their wide availability, future research might also integrate findings from peer-reviewed journals edited in other languages. For instance, in 2010, Fritz and Lorenz investigated consumer-brand relationships in the German-speaking journal "Zeitschrift für betriebswirtschaftliche Forschung". They analyze different relationship types and find that the stronger the brand relationship type is perceived by the customer, the more willing the consumer is to repurchase the brand. Surprisingly, they found that brand relationships are often per-

ceived as superficial. This counterintuitive result stresses the evidence of brand relationship management for marketers. Hence, this example shows that insight in other peer-reviewed studies might advance our knowledge on brand relationships and provide ideas for future research.

A further limitation lays upon the elimination of articles treating concepts not related to the consumer-brand relationship phenomenon. Findings from closely related research areas such as brand attachment (Ball and Tasaki 1992, Lacoeuilhe 2000) or brand connection (Escalas 2004) may enhance knowledge about consumer-brand relationships.

**Chapter 5.   Do relational norms influence consumer behavior?
An analysis of mediating effects in consumer-
brand relationships[2]**

5.1   Introduction

Enhancing the understanding of consumer-brand relationships presents a challenge to both academicians and practitioners. Recent research supports the relevance of brand relationship quality as indicator of the strength and depth of consumers' relationships towards consumer goods brands (e.g., Fournier 1994; Fournier 1998; Hayes et al. 2006; Kressmann et al. 2006; Park and Kim 2001; Park et al. 2002; Smit et al. 2007). This research stream however has often been criticized because of its origins in the interpersonal relationship literature (Bengtsson 2003; Patterson and O'Malley 2006).

Only one study (Aaker et al. 2004) applies a relationship strength measure that in addition to the interpersonal relationship literature partly relies upon findings stemming from the context of business relationships. Aaker, Fournier and Brasel (2004) argue that relationship strength is composed by four indicators; namely intimacy, commitment, satisfaction and self-connection. Neglecting the existence of Fournier's brand relationship quality operationalization and deriving its relationship understanding from the relationship marketing literature, Veloutsou (2007) recently developed a two-dimensional measurement of consumer-brand relationships consisting of the two dimensions "Two-way Communication" and "Emotional Exchange". She derived scale items from existing relationship marketing definitions to form a consumer-brand relationship operationalization. However, particular importance for the research field arises from the fact that a conclusive brand relationship quality opera-

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[2] Most of this chapter is taken from Guese (2010).

tionalization independent from the interpersonal relationship analogy is still missing.

Limited research also exists that investigated consumers' relationships with consumer goods brands via mediating variables. Only one study (Kressmann et al. 2006) finds that consumer brand relationships are mediated via brand relationship quality. However, no previous work examined the mediating role of relational norms even though authors provide evidence for assuming that norms intervene in brand relationships: In a longitudinal experiment, Aaker, Fournier and Brasel (2004) argue for an influence of relationship-specific expectations towards a service brand and their influence on brand perception: "Findings corroborate the view that objective evidence, such as that revealed by a transgression, may be interpreted differently depending on prior experiences and relationships" (Aaker et al. 2004, p. 13). Beside this, Aggarwal (2004) examined whether distinct motivations – so-called norms – exist in brand relationships by applying a social relationship framework (Clark and Mills 1983). He finds support for the theory that an action which violates a relationship norm leads to a poorer evaluation by the consumer in respect of an action that conforms with the relationship norm. However, this study analyzes relationships towards service brands so that the role of norms in the context of consumer goods brands is still unclear. Moreover, one main conceptual issue arises from his work: The question whether Clark and Mills' interpersonal relationship framework is applicable to the brand context remains unanswered. An even more important conceptual problem stems from the fact that Aggarwal did not measure actual brand relationships but confronted participants in an experimental setting with hypothetical descriptions of relationships. Therefore, Johar's (2005) key question whether norms are attached to brand behavior still remains unanswered.

Attempting to address these gaps, this research first provides an operationalization of brand relationship quality and relational norms that is

derived from the context of business relationships. Without stretching the interpersonal relationship metaphor too far, nor changing the original understanding of the relationship metaphor, this contribution suggests alternative operationalizations. Second, the present framework explores the relationship between brand characteristics, consumer characteristics, and brand relationship characteristics and brand loyalty with an emphasis on understanding the mediating role played by relational norms and brand relationship quality. If this link exists, measures of relational norms and brand relationship quality provide enriching insight in consumer-brand relationships. Furthermore, marketing managers can justify expenditures on fulfilment of relational norms to improve the perceived brand relationship quality and in turn enhance brand loyalty.

Thus, the remainder is structured as follows: The first section reviews the existent literature on consumer-brand relationships and evaluates different approaches to operationalize relationship quality. Second, a summary of the current knowledge on relational norms follows. On the basis of the literature reviews, a multidimensional conceptualization of brand relationship quality and relational norms is developed and relevant antecedents and outcomes of brand relationships are identified. This is followed by a description of the empirical study and a report of the findings. The concluding section discusses implications and provides ground for future research.

5.2   Relationship Quality Research

In the marketing literature, the relationship metaphor stems back to the concept of relational exchange and was first mentioned by Berry (1983). It constitutes the result of a paradigm shift from a purely transaction-oriented to a relationship-oriented marketing perspective (Sheth and Parvatiyar 1995). Morgan and Hunt (1994, p. 22) argue that "relation-

ship marketing refers to all marketing activities directed toward establishing, developing and maintaining successful relational exchanges".

Even though analyzing key indicators of successful relationships became one widespread issue among academicians, no consensus exists in the literature on business relationships. While some researchers of business-to-business relationships argue that one or two single dimensions such as commitment, trust or satisfaction are the predominant indicators of a close relationship (Anderson and Weitz 1989; Jap and Ganesan 2000; Morgan and Hunt 1994; Reynolds and Beatty 1999), others introduced the notation of relationship quality (Crosby et al. 1990). They define relationship quality as an overall assessment of the strength and depth of a relationship that provides inside into the exchange performance (Crosby et al. 1990; Johnson 1999; Kumar et al. 1995). Relationship quality is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct conveyed by commitment, trust and satisfaction (Crosby et al. 1990; De Wulf et al. 2001; Kumar et al. 1995).

In the context of consumers goods brands, brand relationship research is inspired by the concept of animism, the increasing tendency to personify brands (e.g., Aaker 1997; Belk 1988; Levy 1985) and the theory of love applied to consumer-object relations (Shimp and Madden 1988). In 1994, Fournier (1994; 1998) introduces the notation of consumer-brand relationships and brand relationship quality. According to her, brand relationship quality is defined as "a customer-based indicator of the strength and depth of the person-brand relationship" (1994, p. 124). She argues that high brand relationship quality implies further development of and investment in the consumer-brand relationship and stresses the dynamic character of the construct. Brand relationship quality demonstrates a multi-faceted construct composed of seven dimensions which each represent a type of relationship that she derived from results in a qualitative analysis and after empirical testing. They are: love/passion, behavioral interdependence, intimacy, personal commitment, self-concept connection, nostalgic connection and partner quality. Furthermore, she explained the additive relation of these dimensions. Even

though they are interrelated, each facet is distinct from the other, but also constitutes an important piece of the whole. Regarding the extent to which a consumer perceives each of these dimensions, conclusions about the nature of his consumer-brand relationship can be drawn.

On the basis of Fournier's relationship dimensions, six quantitative studies utilized her brand relationship quality scale to measure the extent to which each dimension is perceived by the respondent. Depending on the purpose, researchers adjusted this original scale by omitting specific facets of Fournier's brand relationship quality (e.g., Hayes et al. 2006), adding new items from pretests (e.g., Park et al. 2002) or by adding items from other existing scales of constructs such as brand trust (e.g., Smit et al. 2007). Other authors did not use Fournier's scale proposition that she developed in the course of her dissertation (1994) but derived certain items from her qualitative study which was published in 1998 (see e.g., Park and Kim 2001).

In four out of six studies, Fournier's facet partner quality was replicated and is therefore the dimension which aroused most interest among scientists. In two works, new brand relationship dimensions were detected. First, Park and Kim (2001) discovered the satisfaction and brand knowledge dimensions as well as Fournier's commitment and self-connection dimension. Another study replicated five facets as defined by Fournier and identified new dimensions labelled nostalgia and trust (Park et al. 2002).

Neglecting Fournier's brand relationship quality operationalization, but also inspired by the interpersonal relationship literature, Veloutsou (2007) argues that "relationships could be described by two broad dimensions, the communication and emotional content" (p. 15). Drawing upon the relationship marketing literature, she found support for this assumption. She derived scale items from Harker's relationship marketing definitions (1999) and from views on the meaning of relationships expressed by philosophers and qualitative interviews that constitute the

two dimensions "Two-way Communication" and "Emotional Exchange".

In summary, much discrepancy exists in the literature regarding the operationalization of brand relationship quality. Even though drawing upon interpersonal theories enriched the knowledge of consumer-brand relationships, criticism arose arguing that the interpersonal relationship metaphor has been stretched too far (Bengtsson 2003; Patterson and O'Malley 2006). Particularly, a widely accepted operationalization of the brand relationship quality construct remains undefined. The literature review revealed that constructs such as trust, commitment and satisfaction were identified when researchers intended to replicate Fournier's brand relationship quality construct. As noted above, these dimensions also serve as indicators of relationship quality in the context of business relationships. Therefore, an alternative conceptualization that has successfully been applied in the context of business relationships appears to provide an enriching starting point for this research. Particularly, this approach addresses the criticism mentioned by Bengtsson (2003) to avoid terms such as love that are associated with interpersonal relationships.

Hence, brand relationship quality is conceptualized in this study as a higher-order construct that results from the dimensions relationship commitment, brand trust and relationship satisfaction. *Relationship commitment* generally signifies "an enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship" (Moorman et al. 1993) p. 316 and is regarded as indicator of successful interactions (Dwyer et al. 1987). For the purpose of this study, commitment is defined as an enduring desire to continue the brand relationship combined with the consumer's willingness to make efforts in maintaining it (e.g., Morgan and Hunt 1994). Including commitment as a dimension of brand relationship quality becomes even more evident as Fajer and Shouten (1995) identify this construct as important component to prevent dissolution of consumer-brand relation-

ships. *Trust* generally is defined as "confidence in an exchange partner's reliability and integrity" (Morgan and Hunt 1994) p. 23. Also in the brand context, researchers define brand trust as the confidence in the reliability of the brand (Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001; Delgado-Ballester et al. 2003). Finally, *relationship satisfaction* represents the customer's affective or emotional state toward a relationship (Crosby et al. 1990). In other words, it signifies the satisfaction with the past outcomes of the customer-brand interaction. This understanding of brand relationship quality also corresponds with Blackston (1992) who states that customers' trust in, and satisfaction with the brand are key components of a successful positive brand relationship (see scale items in appendix).

5.3 Relational norms research

5.3.1 Introduction to Relational Exchange Theory

The extensive body of research on norms in business relationships demonstrates the pivotal role that norms play in exchange relationships. Relational norms lie at the core of Relational Exchange Theory (Macneil 1980) that gained overwhelming interest among researchers of business-to-business relationships. According to Relational Exchange Theory by Macneil (1980), exchange acts can be classified on a continuum that ranges from discrete to relational exchanges. Whereas discrete exchange constitutes an exception, most transactions are characterized by repeated interactions that thus have relational character (Macneil 1980). For Macneil, including the content of exchange transactions and assuring their respect by writing explicit contracts is nearly impossible (Macneil 1974). Rather, there are soft governance mechanisms, so called implicit agreements or relational norms, which govern exchange relationships. These relational norms are conceived as joint expectations that have evolved over a significant amount of interaction (see e.g., Ivens and Blois 2004). Previous research has identified several norms that govern

exchange relationships(see e.g., Heide and John 1992; Ivens 2004; Kaufmann and Stern 1988; Macneil 1980).

5.3.2   Applicability of Relational Exchange Theory

Several reasons exist to argue for the applicability of the Relational Exchange Theory to the brand context. First, consumer-brand relationships are defined in the same way as business relationships as repeated exchanges between two parties known each other (Fournier 1998). Innovative relationship marketing tools such as direct mailings, customer clubs, and blogs, facilitate these repeated interactions between brands and their customers (see Müller, Flores, Agrebi, and Chandon (2008) who show that satisfied website visitors who receive newsletters have a higher repurchase intention). Brands communicate individualized offers to their customers, customers can provide feedback and brands can react to that input. Needless to say that people act in the name of the brand, and that the brand cannot act on its own. However, through impression formation customers associate these actions executed by employees directly with the brand (Fournier 1998).

Second, brands are argued to be virtual contracts. Through its existence over time on the market, they become a quasi contract that binds both parties (Kapferer 2007). The brand must keep its identity and stay loyal to itself and its values to retain its market position. Consumers automatically expect a certain degree of reliability and consistency from an established brand. For instance, through its existence over time on the market, a brand transmits a sign of quality. Even though no written contract explicates that each product must be of high quality, there are rather implicit expectations build in the consumers' mind that need to be fulfilled in order to prevent dissolution of the brand relationship. These expectations are built on past experiences with the brand, the brand's reputation or due to the fact that the brand is an important player on the market.

Finally, brand relationships are argued to have more similarity with business relationships than with interpersonal relationships: Because from the brand managers' perspective a successful relationship finally signifies to receive money in exchange for the good. In this respect, Relational Exchange Theory introduced by Macneil (1980) that is inspired by contract law, organization theory, transaction cost theory, power dependence and resource dependence theory, provides an appropriate framework to gain deeper insight in consumer-brand relationships.

5.3.3   Norms that Govern Consumer-brand Relationships

Macneil initially developed a set of nine to 10 relational norms or "principles of right action binding upon the members of a group and serving to guide, control, or regulate proper and acceptable behavior" (Macneil 1980)Macneil 1980, p. 38). Due to evidence for limited discriminant validity existing in the literature (e.g. Heide and John 1992; Ivens 2006), a limited set of four norms that are argued to have particular relevance for consumer-brand relationships is selected: solidarity, reciprocity, flexibility, information exchange.

- Solidarity

The relational norm solidarity reflects the extent to which the involved parties perceive the relationship as being important (Kaufmann and Stern 1988). It is expressed through behaviors which contribute directly to relationship maintenance (Heide and John 1992; Macneil 1980). Especially in situations in which one partner is in predicament solidarity plays a decisive role to preserve the relationship (Achrol 1996; Dant and Schul 1992; Kaufmann and Stern 1988). For instance, solidarity expressed by the customer towards the brand may occur when the desired brand is not available at the moment. In such a case, a customer's solidarity may be expressed by not buying an alternative brand or product but by searching for the brand in another shop or by waiting until it is

available again. On the other hand, the brand can express solidarity by providing special payment facilities if the customer's liquidity is limited or by assisting when problems in the course of the product usage emerge.

- Reciprocity

Reciprocity captures the belief that the realization of one's own success passes through the partners' common success (Macneil 1980). It does not demand equality in every single exchange. Rather in the long term, benefits for both partners of the dyad should be evenly distributed (Kaufmann and Stern 1988; Kaufmann and Dant 1992). Such an attitude prevents the parties from maximizing their individual relationship benefits at the expense of the exchange partner. Benefits can have monetary (e.g. higher earnings, lower costs) or immaterial character (e.g. information access, psychological benefits). In the context of consumer-brand relationships, this means for instance that a consumer is willing to pay more for the brand because in the end, he enhances self-esteem from expressing himself through the brand. Factors like mutual dependence and a highly competitive market situation reinforce the emergence of the norm reciprocity. In other words, the more the customer depends on the brand and the more competitors the brand has, the more both parties are willing to make allowances to the partner. As the consumer goods market is highly competitive, reciprocity is expected to be a salient norm in consumer-brand relationships.

- Flexibility

Environmental conditions are not static, but change over time. Therefore, adaptations of the initial agreements become necessary. The willingness to adapt initial expectations to new environmental conditions is called flexibility (Heide and John 1992; Noordewier et al. 1990). According to Relational Exchange Theory, flexibility becomes more important, the more long-term oriented the relationship is (Macneil 1981).

Particularly the consumer goods market is characterized by high volatility, unforeseen changes and uncertainty. For instance, new legal restrictions for the tobacco industry or the food industry may necessitate flexibility of both partners in the consumer-brand dyad. For brands that are interested in retaining their customers over a long period of time, flexibility is a crucial norm. Hence, flexibility is argued to play a decisive role in the context of consumer-brand relationships.

- Information Exchange

The norm information exchange signifies the "bilateral expectation that parties will proactively provide information useful to the partner" (Heide and John 1992, p. 35). It represents a safeguard to the brand in the sense that the consumer can be expected to provide unforeseen information that may affect the brand's operations. For instance, when the company usually delivers the product at home, the consumer is expected to inform the company in case of relocation. On the other hand, a flux of relevant information from the brand's side, such as for instance delivery delays or quality problems, prevents the customer's frustration and premature dissolution of the consumer-brand relationship. Since information exchange is necessary for relationship building, it is argued to be salient both in establishing and maintaining consumer-brand relationships.

- Relational Norms as Second-order Construct

Although solidarity, reciprocity, flexibility and information exchange are conceptually different norms, evidence exists in the literature for arguing that these norms are interrelated dimensions of the second-order construct relational norm (Heide and John 1992) or relationalism (Noordewier et al. 1990). Noordewier, John, and Nevin (1990) state that an underlying syndrome or a higher order construct exists because the elements tend to support each other. Also empirical results of a confirmatory analysis show that the three norms flexibility, information exchange and solidarity could be seen as a single factor due to high sec-

ond-order factor loadings (Heide and John 1992), even though they also have acceptable first order loadings. Analyzing the existence of underlying dimensions among the 10 relational norms by Macneil, Ivens (2006) detected the two underlying groups value-creating norms and value-claiming norms. As the four relational norms that are relevant for the purpose of this study belong to the group of value-creating norms, evidence exists that they constitute a higher order construct also in the brand context. Hence, the norms solidarity, reciprocity, flexibility and information exchange are conceptualized as a second-order construct called relational norm.

5.4   Model Development

Analyzing consumer-brand relationships gained much interest among researchers over the last two decades. Many contributions differently approached the topic: studies exist examining rather unidirectional constructs such as brand connection (Escalas 2004) and brand attachment (Thomson et al. 2005), those that solely rely on particular types of relationships such as brand love (Carroll and Ahuvia 2006), brand dislike (e.g., Dalli et al. 2006; Pichier and Hemetsberger 2007; Pimentel and Reynolds 2004) or consumer devotion (Pichier and Hemetsberger 2007; Pimentel and Reynolds 2004) as well as those analyzing rather the interaction between brand users in communities than the unique relationship between a consumer and a brand (McAlexander et al. 2002). However, little research focused on truly bidirectional consumer-brand relationships in the context of consumer goods brands. Reviewing the extant works in this realm reveals that they are partial, rather than holistic. Each article focuses on variables evaluated as appropriate with regards to a particular issue (such as the effects of self-image congruence, Kressmann et al. 2006; or the acceptance of brand extensions, Park et al. 2002). Empirical studies widely investigated antecedents and effects of consumer-brand relationships: Scholars tend to concentrate on consumer characteristics (e.g. demographics, Monga 2002) or brand-related variables (e.g. brand attractiveness, Hayes et al. 2006; e.g. brand personality,

Smit et al. 2007). However, no relationship-related characteristics were investigated either as antecedents or as mediators of the consumer-brand relationship. Therefore, the role of consumer brand uniqueness and the potential influence of individuals' expectations towards the brand remain unclear. Prior studies provide partial insights in the dyad. A comprehensive overview examining both the effects of consumer characteristics, brand characteristics and brand relationship characteristics would thus enrich the current knowledge in the research field.

With regard to the unveiled issues, this contribution extends the current knowledge in two ways. First, a new conceptualization of the brand relationship quality and the relational norms construct is introduced to the context of consumer-brand relationships. Second, a comprehensive framework to understand consumer-brand relationships is presented, which includes brand relationship characteristics as a source of brand relationship quality and relational norms as mediating variables in the dyad. In the following, the different elements of the model will be discussed in more detail (see figure 5-1).

Figure 5 - 1: Conceptual model.
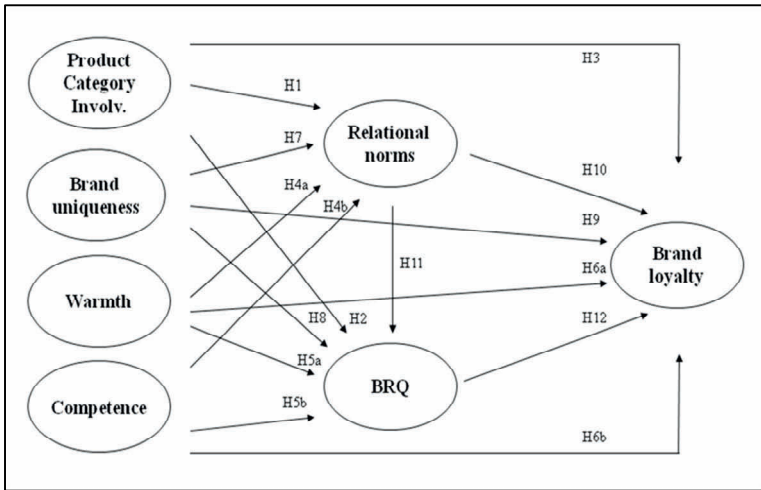
The presented model consists of consumer-brand relationship antecedents that are classified in three main groups. First, consumer characteristics, such as product category involvement, are assumed to impact the perceived brand relationship quality and further mediators of the dyad. Mittal (1995) describes product category involvement as a personality trait representing the individual's perceived importance of a product category based upon its inherent needs, values and interests. In that respect, it is argued that product category involvement has a positive effect on the expectations or relational norms that the individual has towards the brand. High involvement in the product category should hence lead to high expectations towards the brand. Assuming that these expectations are fulfilled it is argued in line with Christy et al. (1996) that a consumer's high product category involvement provides a strong basis for successful relationships. Beside this, product category involvement is argued to positively affect brand relationship quality as previous studies found evidence to assume that higher product involvement leads to higher perceived brand relationship quality (Kressmann et al. 2006).

This model not only suggests an indirect link between product category involvement and brand loyalty via the mediators, but also a direct effect. Hence, it is argued that product category involvement positively affects brand loyalty. Quester and Lim (2003) recently found support for previous findings that there is a link between product involvement and brand loyalty. Even though researchers do not agree on which construct precedes the other, this model suggests that product category involvement influences the willingness to repurchase the brand (see also Leclerc and Little 1997). Derived from these arguments, the following is hypothesized:

H1: Product category involvement has a positive influence on relational norms.

H2: Product category involvement has a positive influence on brand relationship quality.

H3: Product category involvement has a positive influence on brand loyalty.

As regards the second group of antecedent variables, brand characteristics are supposed to impact consumer-brand relationships. One potential brand characteristic is brand perception. It is argued that for instance a customer who perceives the brand as extremely warm or competent may build higher brand expectations than a customer who perceives the brand as less warm or competent. Similarly, this model suggests that brand perception has an effect on brand relationship quality. This hypothesis corresponds with findings by Hayes et al. (2006) who demonstrate that brand personality has an influence on brand relationship quality. They found that respondents' perceived brand personality influenced their desirability of the brand as a relationship partner. Besides, extant literature suggests that brand perception in terms of brand personality directly influences brand loyalty (e.g., Kumar et al. 2006). Against the background that different brand perception dimensions and another

conceptualization of the brand relationship quality construct will be presented in this study, the paramount interest relies on the examination whether the cited findings can be replicated.

Hence, it is hypothesized that:

H4: Brand perception has a positive influence on relational norms.

H5: Brand perception has a positive influence on brand relationship quality.

H6: Brand perception has a positive influence on brand loyalty.

Finally, brand relationship characteristics are assumed to have an effect on the mediators and final outcomes of the consumer-brand dyad. The variable brand uniqueness may serve as informant to specify the brand relationship. In line with the definition by Joshi and Arnold (1997), who investigated the buyer's dependence on the supplier in the business-to-business context, brand uniqueness refers to the costs for the consumer associated with terminating the brand relationship and switching to an alternative brand. In other words, brand uniqueness positively influences the consumer's willingness to persist in the relationship. This then leads to the assumption that brand uniqueness directly and indirectly impacts on brand loyalty:

H7: Brand uniqueness has a positive influence on relational norms.

H8: Brand uniqueness has a positive influence on brand relationship quality.

H9: Brand uniqueness has a positive influence on brand loyalty.

In the preceding section relational norms were introduced as customers' expectations towards the brand or principles of right action (Macneil 1980). They serve as reference points for the evaluation of different interactions with the brand. They are not stable, but develop over time and are adapted after each brand contact. In business relationships, norms are expected to lead to behavior (Lusch and Brown 1996; Macneil 1980). More precisely, Kaufmann and Stern (1988, p. 549) argue that "adherence to the norm may dampen retained hostility; betrayal of those norms may heighten it".

In the brand context, Kaltcheva and Weitz (1999) found that customers who have unpleasant experiences with the service brand remain less loyal than those who perceive pleasant brand experiences. A possible explanation for this result is that brand action did not conform to the expectations the customer developed through past experiences with the brand. This non-conformity to relational norms then leaded to dissolution of the brand relationship. In other words, the higher the customers' expectations towards the brand, the more difficult it becomes for the brand to retain their customers loyal. In that sense, this finding confirms the statement by Macneil (1980) and his supporters that relational norms govern relationships. Hence, this model first suggests that norms – as mediating variable – directly lead to behavior.

H10: Relational norms have a negative influence on brand loyalty.

Second, as relational norms serve as reference points, it is assumed that they indirectly influence behavior via the perceived brand relationship quality. More precisely, the present model suggests that conformity to norms positively impacts the consumer's perception of relationship commitment, brand trust, and brand relationship satisfaction. For instance, Kaufmann and Stern (1988, p. 539) state that in business-to-business relationships "with highly relational norms of solidarity, the

parties are likely to develop strong reputations for trustworthiness". However, no study has yet investigated whether consumer goods brands need to confirm to relational norms such as solidarity, reciprocity, information exchange and flexibility so that consumers are willing to build brand trust, commitment and relationship satisfaction. In order to fill this gap, the following is hypothesized:

H11: Relational norms have a positive influence on brand relationship quality.

Brand relationship quality plays a pivotal role in consumer-brand relationships (e.g., Kressmann et al. 2006). However, certain issues regarding its conceptualization were identified in the preceding section. Hence, brand relationship quality is conceptualized as a combination of brand commitment, brand trust and brand relationship satisfaction. Several empirical findings give rise to the assumption that the better the brand relationship quality is perceived, the more willing the customer is to stay loyal towards the brand. For instance, Morgan and Hunt (1994) found empirical support for a negative effect from commitment on the customers' propensity to leave the relationship. Scholars also detected a positive impact from the satisfaction with the relationship partner to the loyalty to this partner. Furthermore, in the brand context Lau and Lee (1999) found support for the hypothesis that brand trust leads to brand loyalty. In the present study, loyalty is understood as behavioral loyalty and thus defined as the customer's repurchase intention. The proposed model hence supposes that brand relationship quality is a mediator in the consumer-brand dyad that impacts on brand loyalty:

H12: Brand relationship quality has a positive influence on brand loyalty.

With the above hypotheses, this study suggests a comprehensive model as shown in figure 5-1. The model considers consumer characteristics, brand characteristics as well as brand relationship characteristics and describes their link with relational norms, brand relationship quality and brand loyalty. While relational norms and brand relationship quality serve as mediators of the consumer-brand dyad, brand loyalty is considered as endogenous variable.

5.5 Empirical Study

5.5.1 Study Design

Given the research objective of examining the role of norms in consumers' relationships towards consumer goods brands, this study focuses on a set of nine both symbolic and instrumental brands stemming from three different product categories: clothing (Zara, H&M, Nike), toothpaste (Colgate, Signal, Elmex) and soft drinks (Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Nestea). According to Aaker (1997), relying upon the symbolic-instrumental framework ensures representing a wide and representative range of different product categories. For the final brand selection, the brands needed to be affordable for the majority of potential respondents and well-known among Swiss people. Consumers who filled in the written questionnaire referred to one randomly assigned brand. Again, the purpose is not to develop a framework which would be valid for all types of brands. This study concentrates on typical mass market FMCG brands.

Within the scope of this study, the only selection criterion was whether the participant uses the brand he was questioned about. Introductory questions clarified the respondents' usage frequency and brand familiarity. Only if a respondent was a brand user, meaning that he developed a relationship towards the brand, his answers were included in the final data set for analysis so that the validity of the collected data was ensured.

The data collection took place in the French speaking part of Switzerland. Therefore, the questionnaire was submitted to respondents in French. To ensure its comprehensibility as well as the equivalence of the original English scales a parallel translation approach was applied (Brislin 1970; (Douglas and Craig 2007). In addition, the French version was checked by French native speakers and was pre-tested. For the main study, questionnaires were distributed in a snowball system. Students filled in one questionnaire and each student was then requested to collect 15 additional questionnaires. The study was part of a group work students did in the context of a course.

A total of 510 questionnaires were collected. As the data collection took place at a university, students constitute a large part of the sample (71.2%) and 63.7% of the informants were 24 years old or younger. Nevertheless, the sample is appropriate given the nature of the brands evaluated (see e.g. Homburg et al. 2005). 53.9% respondents in the sample are women. The nine brands are equally distributed across the sample since the percentage of questionnaires received for each brand (as compared to the complete sample) ranges between 8% (Elmex, n=41) and 14.5% (Coca-Cola, n=74). Regarding the frequency of use 28.6% of the respondents answered that they use the brand they referred to more than once a week. Across the different product categories, the majority of the respondents (58.6%) use the brand at least once or twice a month. Furthermore, most of the participants (42%) answered that they had used the brand since their childhood. Thus, the respondents in this study constitute a solid basis for the analyses. The questionnaires were all filled-in completely or almost completely. The number of missing values per variable is lower than 0.9% for all variables.

5.5.2 Measures

All constructs were measured on reflective multi-item scales. The operationalization of the relational norms basically relied upon the extant literature, but was adapted to the consumer goods context (Gassenheimer et al. 1995; Heide and John 1992; Kaufmann and Dant 1992; Lusch and Brown 1996). As regards the different facets of brand relationship quality, brand satisfaction (Lau and Lee 1999), brand relationship commitment (Garbarino and Johnson 1999) and brand trust (Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001; Delgado-Ballester et al. 2003), they were also derived from reliable and valid existing scales and modified in order to fit the brand context.

The final questionnaire for this study also contained constructs such as behavioral brand loyalty ($\alpha = .91$) (Quester and Lim 2003), product category involvement ($\alpha = .94$) (Mittal 1995), brand perception (warmth: $\alpha = .83$; competence: $\alpha = .83$) (adapted from Cuddy et al. 2007) and brand uniqueness ($\alpha = .68$). All items were measured using 7-point Likert-type scales.

5.6 Results

5.6.1 Measure Validation Procedure

As the proposed brand relationship quality scales and the operationalization of the relational norms do not exist in the consumer goods context, these scales were subjected to a detailed validation procedure.

Construct reliability was tested in two steps. First, coefficient alpha was calculated for both the brand relationship quality dimensions and the relational norms. Results are documented in table 5-1, 5-2. All scales fulfill the generally accepted criterion of alpha $> .7$ (Peterson 1994) so

that the indicators of all latent variables can be seen as internally consistent.

Table 5 - 1: Cronbachs Alpha of Brand Relationship Quality components

Construct	Cronbachs Alpha
Brand Trust	.892
Relationship Satisfaction	.885
Relationship commitment	.841

Table 5 - 2: Cronbachs Alpha of Relational Norms

Construct	Cronbachs Alpha
Solidarity	.886
Flexibility	.833
Information Exchange	.851
Reciprocity	.915

Second, results for composite reliability are documented in table 5-3, 5-4. Ranging from .77 to .89, all scales again exceed the required level of .6 (Bagozzi and Yi 1988).

Table 5 - 3: Composite Reliability of Brand Relationship Quality components

Brand relationship quality dimension	Composite Reliability
Relationship Commitment	.767[a]
Relationship Satisfaction	.849
Brand Trust	.838

Table 5 - 4: Composite Reliability of Relational Norms

Relational Norm	Composite Reliability
Information Exchange	.788[a]
Flexibility	.739
Reciprocity	.889
Solidarity	.830

Subsequently, the brand relationship quality items and the relational norm items were submitted to confirmatory factor analysis in order to verify the hypothesized factor structure. The brand relationship quality items were supposed to have a factor structure with the three factors commitment, trust and relationship satisfaction comprising the higher order construct brand relationship quality. This structure corresponds to a second-order factor model in which the observed items are hypothesized to result from a second-order factor. The proposed brand relationship quality model fitted the data well (χ^2 (32) = 95.535, RMSEA = .062, CFI = .981).

Beside this, the relational norm items were hypothesized to form the four factors reciprocity, flexibility, solidarity and information exchange.

Also these four constructs were hypothesized to originate from one second-order factor, namely relational norm. The proposed relational norm model fitted the data well (χ^2 (61) = 173.751, RMSEA = .060, CFI = .974).

Furthermore, to assess the convergent validity of the measures, the factor loadings must be statistically significant. As this is the case for all brand relationship quality items and relational norm items, this criterion, suggested by Bagozzi, Yi and Phillips (1991), is also fulfilled (table 5-5, 5-6). An average variance extracted (AVE) above .5 for all multi item constructs assesses the discriminant validity of the scales.

Table 5 - 5: Standardized regression weights of second-order construct Brand Relationship Quality

First-Order Factor	Brand Relationship Quality
Relationship Commitment	.604[a]
Relationship Satisfaction	.764
Brand Trust	.778

[a] Fixed parameter

Table 5 - 6: Standardized regression weights of second-order construct Relational Norm

First-Order Factor	Relational Norm
Information Exchange	.819[a]
Flexibility	.777
Reciprocity	.754
Solidarity	.797

[a] Fixed parameter

5.6.2   Hypotheses Testing

Structural equation modeling (AMOS 17.1) was used for testing the model and hypotheses shown in Figure 4-1. The following fit statistics assess a deemed good overall fit for the model: χ^2 (601) = 1549.619, RMSEA = .056, CFI = .931.

- Impact of consumer characteristic

As proposed in hypothesis 1, the consumer characteristic product category involvement has a significant positive effect on relational norms (γ_1 = .083, p < .05). However, no significant impact was detected from product category involvement on brand relationship quality (H2). Also hypothesis 3 for predicting the effect of product category involvement on brand loyalty was not supported although the sign was in the expected direction.

Table 5 - 7: Structural parameter estimates

Hypothesized path	Standardized path coefficient	Result
H1: product category involvement → relational norm	.083	s
H2: product category involvement → brand relationship quality	.057	n.s.
H3: product category involvement → brand loyalty	-.037	n.s.
H4a: brand perception (warmth) → relational norm	.551	s.
H4b: brand perception (competence) → relational norm	.233	s.
H5a: brand perception (warmth) → brand relationship quality	.047	n.s.
H5b: brand perception (competence) → brand relationship quality	.199	s.
H6a: brand perception (warmth) → brand loyalty	-.035	n.s.
H6b: brand perception (competence) → brand loyalty	-.141	s.
H7: brand uniqueness → relational norm	.085	n.s.
H8: brand uniqueness → brand relationship quality	.599	s.
H9: brand uniqueness → brand loyalty	.409	s.
H10: relational norm → brand loyalty	-.020	n.s.
H11: relational norm → brand relationship quality	.350	s.
H12: brand relationship quality → brand loyalty	.604	s.

s = supported; n.s. = not supported

- Impact of brand characteristic

Brand perception was reflected by the two dimensions warmth and competence (Cuddy et al. 2007). Hypotheses 4a and 4b proposed a positive influence on relational norms for both dimensions. This hypothesis is confirmed and the results indicate that relational norms mainly rely on the degree to which a brand is perceived as warm (warmth: $\gamma_{4a} = .551$, p < .01; competence: $\gamma_{4b} = .233$, p < .01). When it comes to the second mediating variable, results indicate that hypothesis 5 is only partly confirmed. While warmth has no significant impact on the mediator brand relationship quality (H5a), the brand perception dimension competence significantly affects the brand relationship quality construct (H5b) (warmth: $\gamma_{5a} = .047$, p > .05; competence: $\gamma_{5b} = .199$, p < .01). This finding corresponds to a previous result by Smit and his colleagues who found that especially the brand personality dimension competence is related to brand relationship quality (2007).

As also hypothesized, brand perception not only has an indirect influence on the final outcome of the dyad, but also directly influences brand loyalty (H6). However, this is the case only for the competence dimension (H6b). Surprisingly, this influence yet is not positive, but negative ($\gamma_6 = -.141$, p < .05). In other words, the more a brand is perceived as competent, the less the customer remains loyal to the brand. One reason for this counterintuitive finding might be that although high brand relationship quality is attributed to a brand that is perceived as highly competent, a far too competent brand might transmit suspicious and negative connotations. Competence is here reflected by the items competent, capable and efficient. Due to translation of the scales from English in French, negative connotations such as deceitfulness, manipulation or exploitation of the consumer-brand relationship might have creeped into the meaning of the French items.

- Impact of brand relationship characteristic

Against expectation, the brand relationship characteristic does not have a significant influence on relational norms (H7). However, the assumed path from brand uniqueness on brand relationship quality (H8) is in fact highly significant (γ_8 = .599, p < .01). Also a direct positive link exists from the brand relationship characteristic to the outcome variable brand loyalty (H9) (γ_9 = .409, p < .01).

Summarizing the impact of consumer-brand relationship drivers, the results indicate that consumer characteristics are especially related to relational norms and that brand relationship characteristics rather influence the degree of perceived brand relationship quality and brand loyalty. Brand characteristics on the other hand can be linked to both mediators and the outcome variable. While warmth captures more the emotional cues and promotes establishing expectations towards the brand relationship, competence not only influences relational norms but also brand relationship quality and brand loyalty.

- Impact of relational norms and brand relationship quality

Hypothesis 10, which proposed a negative relationship between relational norms and brand loyalty, was not supported. Even though this direct link was not significant, the sign of the path was in the expected direction. This result appears to indicate that the higher the consumer expectations are, the more difficult it becomes for the brand to fulfil these expectations so that the individual would repurchase the brand. As argued in hypothesis 11, relational norms had a significant influence on brand relationship quality (γ_{11} = .350, p < .01). This result shows that relational norms, beside brand relationship characteristics, are one of the most important influencing factors of perceived brand relationship quality. Likewise, hypothesis 12 for predicting a positive impact from brand relationship quality on brand loyalty was also strongly supported (γ_{12} =

.604, p < .01). These findings suggest that brand relationship quality is a better predictor for brand loyalty than relational norms. However, relational norms are a crucial driver for brand relationship quality and thus have an indirect effect on brand loyalty.

Overall, the proposed model indicates to provide relevant insight in consumer-brand relationships as it explains 75% of the variance of the consumer's intention to repurchase the brand. In addition, the variance of the relational mediators is highly explained. The drivers of the consumer-brand dyad account for 55% of the relational norm construct and 86% of brand relationship quality so that consumer, brand and brand relationship characteristics seem to be appropriate antecedent variables.

As also mentioned above, one main objective of this study is to assess the mediating role of relational norms in consumer-brand relationships. Thus, the model containing relational norm as mediator of the dyad was compared to an alternative model that ignores the role of relational norms.

Figure 5 - 2: Alternative conceptual model.
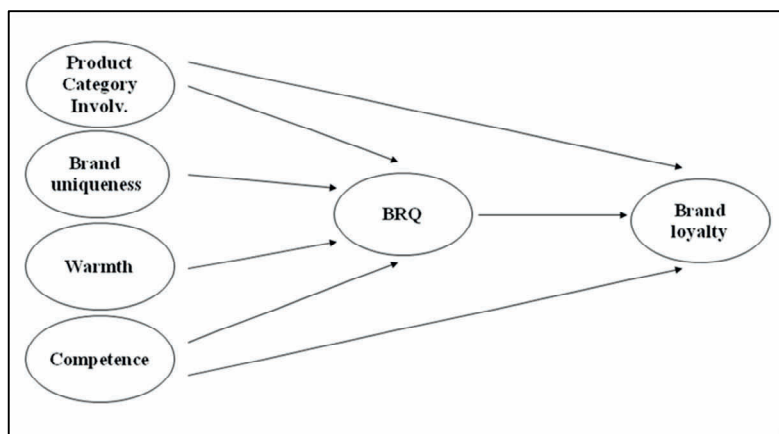
The following fit statistics demonstrate a worse model fit than the model that includes relation norms as mediating variable: χ^2 (234) = 829.499, RMSEA = .071, CFI = .932. Altogether, the reported results imply that the specified model that considers the intervening role of both brand relationship quality and relational norm serves as useful source of information to explain consumer-brand relationships.

5.7 Discussion

5.7.1 Research Contribution

Despite the interest that consumer-brand relationships arose among researchers, prior research still did not agree on a brand relationship quality operationalization that is independent from the interpersonal relationship context. Also the studies examining the role of relational norms have been scarce in the extant literature. The contributions of this study come from both the alternative conceptualization of the brand relationship quality construct and from the comprehensive model of the consumer-brand dyad.

The first contribution of this study is to propose an alternative conceptualization of the brand relationship quality construct. The most criticized failure of previous works was that they rely on the interpersonal relationship literature (Bengtsson 2003). In addition to review the extant literature of brand relationship quality in the consumer goods context, this research suggests an alternative conceptual scope of brand relationship quality by integrating current knowledge from the business-to-business context to the brand context. Thus, brand relationship quality was conveyed by the dimensions relationship commitment, trust, and relationship satisfaction. This conceptualization also confirms findings

from previous works in the brand context that partly identified these dimensions (e.g.: trust: Park et al. 2002; satisfaction and commitment: Park and Kim 2001). However, the main strength of the approach presented in this work is that the conceptualization is derived from a theoretical background that proved of value in the context of business relationships and whose conceptual scope does not arise associations to the interpersonal relationship context.

A second contribution of this study is its being the first to apply the Relational Exchange Theory by Macneil (1980) to the consumer goods brand context. Empirical studies on norms in consumer-brand relationships are scarce and several limitations were identified in these works. For instance the application of a social relationship framework or the use of experimental settings with hypothetical descriptions of the relationship (Aggarwal 2004) was criticized. First, in this study, all respondents were real brand users who had a relationship with the brand. Second, by building the bridge between a relationship marketing framework and consumer-brand relationship research, this study approaches the norm concept from a business perspective. In doing so, relational norms are conceptualized and empirically tested in a second-order model that reflects the dimensions solidarity, reciprocity, flexibility and information exchange.

Furthermore, this study advances the current knowledge on consumer-brand relationships by empirically testing a comprehensive framework of consumer-brand relationships. This framework includes not only consumer and brand characteristics, but also brand relationship characteristics as relevant drivers of the consumer-brand dyad. The findings indicate that consumer characteristics are especially related to relational norms and that brand relationship characteristics rather influence the degree of perceived brand relationship quality and brand loyalty. Brand characteristics on the other hand can be linked to both mediators and the outcome variable brand loyalty.

Finally this work's main contribution is that empirical results demonstrate the intervening role of relational norms in consumer-brand dyads. Hence, the present study approves the question by Johar (2005) whether norms are attached to brand behavior: Even though no direct link could be identified, the findings reveal that relational norm is an important driver of brand relationship quality and that they indirectly affect consumer behavior via this mediator. This finding also is in line with Bennett (1996) who argues that the relational norm reciprocity is an important factor leading to brand relationships.

5.7.2   Limitations and Future Research Directions

Notwithstanding the contributions of this study, certain limitations remain. Future research should seek to overcome these limitations.

First, this analysis is based on a limited sample of brands. These brands are representative for fast moving consumer goods. Even though they were affordable for the respondents and covered a wide range of product categories, future research might extend the brand choice given that the knowledge on the role of relational norms in exchanges of other consumer goods brands is limited. For instance, it may be pertinent to examine whether relational mediators and norms have another influence on outcomes in exchanges of luxury brands compared to exchanges of private brands. The role of relational norms may even be different between further product categories due to differences in the market environment.

Second, this study reports results from one specific national context. The brands used in the survey all have a strong position on the Swiss market.

However, intercultural differences may lead to different expectations in relationships so that the same analysis would result in different findings if for instance Asians would have responded to the questionnaire.

Third, this study concentrated exclusively on the maintenance phase. Yet, brand relationships evolve over time and through different phases. Researchers are encouraged to examine in longitudinal analyses which relational norms are salient in each phase and whether the intervening role of norms may even augment or diminish over time. Knowing which relational norms are the most salient depending on the relationship phase could provide relevant information for managers.

A further starting point for future research is the replication of this study by using different variables that represent consumer, brand and brand relationship characteristics or different outcome variables. For instance defending the market share by keeping customers loyal is not the sole objective for companies. Market growth is a more costly but rather promising objective. As a company's growth rate is found to have a strong correlation with the likelihood that customers will recommend the product to friends (Reichheld 2003), empirical findings identifying a significant link between consumer-brand relationship and positive word-of-mouth behavior may underline the strategic importance of brand relationships for marketers.

Another open issue is that further intervening variables should not be neglected. In this respect, researchers are encouraged to consider the moderating role of contextual factors (e.g. influence of parents, peer groups, colleagues in purchase decision) and situational variables (e.g., relationship quality towards personnel in store, store loyalty) in future examinations of consumer-brand relationships.

Additionally, it may be pertinent to investigate on a more detailed level the expectations which brand managers should respect in order to prevent customers from exiting their brand relationship. This study demonstrated that relational norms play a role in the consumer-brand dyad. However, examining which precise norm should be respected depending on the relationship phase or the degree of brand familiarity still remains a challenge for future research. Insight into such codes of conduct for brands could provide promising information both for academics and managers.

5.7.3   Managerial implications

Building and maintaining strong consumer-brand relationships is a key factor to successful business. Hence, this research makes a contribution to practical marketing management by providing a new perspective on the drivers of successful brand relationships. This perspective is conducive for different reasons.

First, the results of this study reveal that brand relationship quality is the strongest driver of brand loyalty. As brand relationship quality was conceptualized as a second-order construct conveyed by brand trust, relationship satisfaction and commitment, brand managers especially should focus on enhancing these dimensions in order to make their customers more loyal.

In order to provide information to managers on how they can improve the brand relationship quality this study secondly investigates the drivers of brand relationship quality. Even though also brand characteristics influence brand relationship quality, the brand relationship characteristics are key drivers of brand relationship quality followed by relational norms. Relational norms are for instance solidarity, reciprocity, flexibil-

ity and information exchange. Satisfying the customer expectations with regard to these dimensions will enhance the customer's brand relationship quality perception. Hence, marketing managers can justify expenditures on fulfilment of relational norms to improve the perceived brand relationship quality and in turn enhance brand loyalty.

As mentioned above, findings suggest relational norms as important driver of brand relationship quality. The framework developed in this work further supports brand managers in their decisions on how they can influence the customer expectations. Results reveal that relational norms mostly rely on brand characteristics. Especially the more a brand is perceived as warm, the higher the relational norms and the more important it becomes that brand managers fulfil the customer expectations.

Most important, there is evidence from this study that relational norms interact in consumer-brand relationships. This work approves Johar's question (2005) whether norms are attached to brand behavior. Findings suggest that relational norms play a decisive role in consumer-brand interactions. Relational norms or codes of conduct directly affect brand relationship quality and via this highly relevant mediator, they indirectly have a positive effect on brand loyalty. Results thus encourage brand managers to include measures of relational norms to get deeper insight in the relationships with their customers.

As this study shows that norms are attached to behavior, it finally may be interesting to conduct a similar analysis on relational norms by identifying the most salient relational norm for each customer. Managers could then segment the market in homogeneous groups based on relational norms. These findings could further support brand managers in their strategic marketing decisions: They may select those market segments they intend to target and finally they can position their brand and provide differentiated value propositions for their target segments in

order to best address the expectations of their customers. Understanding the role of norms in relationships is thus especially important for managerial reasons.

Chapter 6.   Discussion

6.1   Overview

The purpose of this doctoral thesis was twofold. First, it attempted to provide a better understanding of customer's perceptions of brand personalities. Since there is much criticism regarding the dominant brand personality scale developed by Aaker (1997), the research objective was also to introduce an alternative conceptualization of brand personality by drawing upon social psychology.

Second, the purpose of this dissertation was to develop an explanatory model of brand relationship drivers and mediators, and to test this model empirically.

This chapter first presents a summary of the main findings, evaluates how this thesis achieves the research objectives, and discusses academic and managerial implications. The preceding chapters each revealed limitations and numerous avenues for future research. Rather than merely summarizing the previously articulated research directions, this chapter aims at identifying future research issues in the field of brand management. Hence, the chapter concludes with a brief overview of general limitations of this dissertation and suggests directions for future research on the brand personality construct and consumer-brand relationships.

6.2   Summary of the results

The brand personality concept has received considerable attention. However, researchers had long ignored the question of heterogeneity in consumer brand personality perceptions. The first study (chapter 2) in this thesis attempted to fill this gap by analyzing survey data (n = 603) collected from respondents evaluating seven mass market consumer

brands. Using cluster analysis it identified four typical brand personality constellations. The study revealed variance among brand personality perceptions across brands, but more interestingly also within perceptions of each individual brand.

There has been increasing interest in the impact of customers' brand personality perceptions on customers' behavioral intentions. The second study (chapter 3) extended the extant literature in two ways. First, drawing upon social psychology it introduced an alternative conceptualization of brand personality. Second, the study analyzed how emotions mediate the link between brand personality perception, brand attitude and purchase intention. Based upon a sample of 711 respondents, who evaluated eight widely known brands, the second study tested and compared two alternative causal models. One model included Aaker's conceptualization of brand personality (1997) and the second model included the stereotype content model (Fiske et al. 2002, Cuddy et al. 2007). The results showed that irrespective of the brand personality conceptualization used, emotions are an important explanatory factor for customers' behavioral intentions. Another finding is that the stereotype content scale for measuring brand personality perceptions yielded model fit indices which were at least equivalent to the ones obtained using the Aaker scale. Because this scale contained fewer items it may offer an interesting alternative for future empirical research.

Drawing upon the consumer-brand relationship literature, the overall purpose of chapter 4 was to provide a comprehensive review of the existing works. It focused on brand relationships towards consumer goods and developed an innovative conceptual approach to consumer-brand relationships which constituted the basis for future research. The review presented a selection of published articles in marketing and revealed the current knowledge and viewpoints regarding consumer-brand relationships towards products and brands. The first part focused on conceptual research and highlighted in chronological order the origins of

the research stream. The second part brought the focus on empirical research and overviewed the following topics: sample size/unit of analysis, stimulus, study design/methodology, theoretical framework, operationalization, and empirical findings.

This state-of-the-art review provided information about each source, indicating its main viewpoint and contribution to the field. The overview revealed that numerous conceptual and methodological challenges still remain in this recent field of research. Therefore, this chapter suggested to base future research on the findings in the relationship marketing literature. Consequently, this chapter fulfilled an identified need to provide a new approach to consumer-brand relationships and offered guidance for researchers to gain further insight in these relations.

The thorough literature review showed that considerable research relies upon Fournier's brand relationship quality operationalization to enhance the understanding of consumer-brand relationships. Related research indicated an effect of relationship norms on consumer behavior. Both research directions, however, were criticized for their origins in the interpersonal relationship literature. Furthermore, little or no research explicitly linked brand, consumer and brand relationship characteristics to consumer behavior via their impact on relational norms and brand relationship quality. The study in chapter 5 attempted to fill this gap. The contribution was twofold: First, this research provided an operationalization of brand relationship quality and relational norms that was derived from the context of business relationships. Second, this research permitted comprehensive insight in consumer-brand relationships. The framework highlighted the mediating role of relational norms, their effect on brand relationship quality and their linkage between the characteristics of the dyad and consumer behavior. The empirical findings provided evidence for a second-order structure of relational norms and brand relationship quality. The results suggested that brand relationships towards consumer goods brands are significantly mediated via relational norms and brand relationship quality.

6.3 Academic implications

Academic research can follow different paths. In case of both conceptual and empirical research, multidimensional constructs are particularly interesting to scholars. The three empirical studies as well as the theoretical chapter presented in this dissertation dealt with the brand personality and brand relationship concept. The aim was to enhance knowledge on these two important measures of brand equity.

The first study (chapter 2) applied the existing brand personality scale. It developed a taxonomy which fills a gap in empirical knowledge about consumer perceptions of brand personalities. To the best of the author's knowledge this is the first study that empirically derives a taxonomy of brand personalities. Building on dimensions drawn from academic research (Aaker 1997) typical constellations of brand personality perceptions emerged. The results pointed to a four cluster solution. As such, the value of this finding lies in the fact that it helps reducing the complexity of possible brand personality constellations. Furthermore, the study provided deeper insights into the performance aspects of brand management. Overall, the results revealed that customers who perceive a strong brand personality perceive higher levels of performance in terms of brand attitude, preference and satisfaction. By offering detailed insight into how consumers typically perceive brands along different dimensions of brand personalities and how these perceptions differ within and across brands, this study helps advance theory in the area of brand management. It points out that, at least based on the Aaker approach to studying brand personalities, the assumption of a homogeneous brand personality does not hold and that our theoretical models may need to be adapted. Conceptually, a more complex brand personality constellation with different segments of customers perceiving different attributes in a brand may be required. This leads to the question why some brands may manage to obtain a more homogeneous personality perception then others, but also whether a multitude of personality perceptions is detrimental to a brand or maybe even favourable.

The second study (chapter 3) empirically investigated the applicability of the stereotype content model in the context of consumer goods brands. The initial review of extant research on brand personalities showed that there is growing concern about the appropriateness of the Aaker scale. In order to address this issue, this study drew upon social psychology and the stereotype content model. Hence, it introduced an alternative conceptualization of brand personality, namely a two-dimensional brand perception construct (warmth, competence). The empirical study suggested that the stereotype content model is a viable alternative conceptualization of the brand personality concept. To the best of the author's knowledge, this study was the first to analyze the brand perception-emotion-attitude-behavioral intention chain. The findings showed that the two brand perception dimensions (warmth, competence) are sufficient to explain as much of the variance in behavioral intention as the five brand personality dimensions, namely 66%. Thus, this study contributed to current research in two ways. First, it helped reducing complexity in brand personality measurement. While Aaker's brand personality scale requires a set of 42 items reflecting five dimensions, the alternative measurement relying upon the two stereotype dimensions warmth and competence, requires fewer items. Second, the results provided evidence that a consumer's behavioral intention results from a consumer's stereotypes towards the brand, his emotions and his brand attitude. While Aaker, Vohs, and Mogilner (2010) successfully applied the stereotype content model to organizations, at the best of the author's knowledge, this study is the first that applied stereotypes to the brand context. Concluding, this model provides a valuable alternative tool for brand personality research and potentially research on perceptual issues in marketing in general. Given the solidity of the warmth-competence classification of stimuli in social psychology research, the stereotype content model may yield stronger interest from marketing scholars in the future.

By providing a current state-of-the-art review, chapter 4 serves as a valuable source of information to enhance research concerning consumer-brand relationships. First, the overview showed that the consumer-brand relationship realm still is in its infancy. Second, it revealed that current research on consumer-brand relationships focuses on the interpersonal context. For this reason, the research stream has often been criticized. However, relationships between consumers and brands are characterized by a monetary exchange and by the impersonal nature of a brand. Thus, the appropriateness of drawing upon the interpersonal relationship literature still remains a challenge. Therefore, chapter 4 suggested referring to the relationship marketing literature and transferring concepts from the context of business relationships to the consumer-brand context to examine the relationships between individuals and consumer goods brands.

The first contribution of chapter 5 is to achieve the transfer of several constructs from the business-to-business context to the brand context. It proposed an alternative conceptualization of the brand relationship quality construct by integrating current knowledge from the relationship marketing literature. The results showed that brand relationship quality is well captured by the dimensions relationship commitment, trust, and relationship satisfaction. Second, this study is the first to apply the Relational Exchange Theory developed by Macneil (1980) to the consumer goods brand context. It introduced the norm concept from a business perspective and showed that relational norms play a mediating role in actual relationships between consumers and brands. Hence, the present study provides a positive answer to the research question raised by Johar (2005) whether norms are attached to brand behavior. Furthermore, this chapter advanced the current knowledge on consumer-brand relationships by empirically testing a comprehensive framework of consumer-brand relationships. This framework included not only consumer and brand characteristics, but also brand relationship characteristics as relevant drivers of the consumer-brand dyad. The findings indicated that consumer characteristics are especially related to relational norms and that brand relationship characteristics rather influence the degree of

perceived brand relationship quality and brand loyalty. Brand characteristics on the other hand can be linked to both mediators and the outcome variable brand loyalty.

Overall, this dissertation advanced the understanding of the two key brand equity measures brand personality and brand relationship by reducing complexity: Whereas the first study developed a taxonomy of brand constellations, the remaining two empirical studies transferred existing knowledge of the marketing discipline or related disciplines to the brand context. As such, this doctoral thesis reduced complexity and enriched research in the two fields by adding knowledge which has proven of value in related contexts.

6.4   Managerial implications

Brand personality and brand relationships are two important antecedents of brand equity. Thus, building unique brand personalities and strong consumer-brand relationships are fundamental tasks for marketing managers in order to build up positions of competitive advantage in the company's target markets. The present dissertation suggests the following practical implications.

Brand managers spend considerable financial and other resources in order to develop and communicate a unique brand image. This unique brand image is necessary to differentiate one brand from other brands in the company's brand portfolio or from competitors' brands. With five different brand personality dimensions, the variety of possible brand personality constellations is currently immense. The first study (chapter 2) of this dissertation developed a taxonomy. This taxonomy allows managers to structure the brands that are present on a market. It distinguished four different constellations of brand personality perceptions.

These constellations help managers to create a unique brand image. Given that the results revealed that customers have heterogeneous brand personality perceptions, i.e. that the same brand is perceived differently by different customers, this implication became even more important. Hence, the taxonomy developed in this chapter further supports brand managers in their decisions about brand personality design and brand portfolio management. Managers can categorize their own brand, discover neglected design areas, and take strategic decisions.

Since a proper understanding of how consumers perceive a brand is crucial from a managerial perspective, the second study (chapter 3) also focused on analyzing brand perceptions. Currently, research mainly provided a 42-item tool to measure how consumers perceive the personality of a brand. This study suggested a more parsimonious measurement tool that only consists of six items which form the two dimensions warmth and competence. First, the results of this study revealed that these six brand perception items are sufficient to support brand managers. They simplify a clear differentiation of the company's brand from competitors' brands. Second, this study provided insight into consumer behavior. The results showed that clear brand perceptions impact directly consumers' emotions and indirectly their behavioral intention. This finding emphasizes how important it is for managers to communicate a distinct brand image.

The theoretical and empirical study (chapter 4 and 5) contribute to practical marketing management by providing a new perspective on the drivers of successful brand relationships. They revealed that brand relationship quality is the strongest driver of brand loyalty. Furthermore, the results showed that relational norms are the drivers of brand relationship quality. Managers can derive precise codes of conduct from the relational norm concept in order to tighten the relationship between the brand and the customer. Satisfying the customer expectations with regard to relational norms will enhance the customer's brand relationship

quality perception and in turn may prevent the consumers from drifting to alternative brands. Thus, respecting relational norms provides a competitive advantage and results in profitable brand management.

Brands are a crucial device for managers to gain competitive advantages. The value of a brand can be measured in different ways. Two important brand value dimensions across different measurement approaches are brand associations (e.g. brand personality) and brand attachment (e.g. brand relationship). The present work helped understanding how consumers perceive brands and under which conditions they are more favourable to build long-term brand relationships. Thus, it provided important information for managers in order to justify marketing expenses.

6.5   Limitations and future research directions

Even though the present doctoral dissertation aimed at enriching the brand management literature, it can only add a piece of information to the realm. At the same time, each chapter raised new and challenging questions and avenues for future research. Some limitations and future research directions have already been mentioned at the end of each chapter. The purpose of this section is to raise more general concerns and chances for future research.

The first limitation relates to the first two chapters of this dissertation. They focused on the effects of different brand personality/brand perception dimensions. However, they did not raise the question on the antecedents of brand personality or brand perception. Which factors have an impact on how consumers perceive a brand? For instance, what happens if a company realizes a marketing campaign that promotes the com-

pany's environmental or social concerns (cause related marketing)? Is a brand then perceived as warmer or more competent? What kind of effect does it have on further outcome variables such as the purchase intention or the willingness to pay? Are people more willing to pay for a warmer brand or for a more competent brand? These questions go beyond the scope of this dissertation, but provide avenues for future research.

Beside this, the second study showed that brand perception impacts on emotions and brand attitude. However, it currently remains unknown whether for instance a positive brand attitude could also promote the perception of a brand as warm. Even though current research supports arguing for a brand perception-emotion-attitude-behavioral intention chain, future research may attempt to replicate these results by using an experimental approach.

The second limitation is related to the brand perception and the brand relationship concept. Does the customer perceive the personality of (relationship towards) the brand or of (towards) the personnel who sells and promotes the brand? For instance, in the banking industry, the relation between the customer and the personnel is important for the customer satisfaction with the bank (Bloemer et al. 1998). In order to minimize interference of the personnel's behavior, the empirical studies of this dissertation dealt with consumer goods brands. Here, the relation between the personnel and the consumer was less relevant than in the banking sector so that the effect might be negligible. Nevertheless, future research may rethink about different study designs in order to address this issue. For instance, conducting experiments with fictitious brands could remedy this limitation.

Finally, this dissertation focused mainly on brand associations (brand personality, brand perception) and brand attachment (brand relationship). According to Keller (2008), brand awareness, brand attitudes and brand activity are further sources of brand equity. He argues that there is an obvious hierarchy between them. In other words, according to Keller,

brand value is created when customers have a high level of awareness, a unique brand association, a positive brand attitude, an intense brand attachment and a high degree of brand activity (e.g. likelihood to recommend) (2008). Hence, future studies might integrate further variables in conceptual models. For instance, empirical findings identifying a significant link between consumer-brand relationship and positive word-of-mouth behavior may underline the strategic importance of brand relationships for marketers (Reichheld 2003).

Overall, this work followed the positivistic approach which has been one of the major epistemological theories in the social science research. However, critiques of this approach were articulated by philosophers such as Karl Popper. Karl Popper has been highly influential and led to the development of the *critical rationalism*. Critical rationalists aimed at explaining the growth of knowledge without justification. They argue that theories should be subjected to empirical tests which may falsify them.

In marketing research, we are used to formulate falsifiable hypotheses such as "variable X has no effect on variable Y". If the data show that we have to reject this hypothesis, we can assume that variable X has an effect on variable Y. However, since Popper accounts for an asymmetry between falsification and verification, we cannot suppose that variable X truly has an effect on variable Y. Popper advances theory by assessing that sentences are false. He begins with the fact that a theory is false if it contradicts a singular sentence describing some observation reports. Popper then says that such singular sentences are veridical, so that they may be used to produce final proofs of the falsity of some universal sentences. However, he argues that proof of universal sentences requires inductive inferences. As a consequence, no such supposed proof can be valid.

In this spirit, this dissertation is bounded by three limitations across the empirical studies – namely, the limited sample of brands, the specific national context, and the overrepresentation of students among respon-

dents. Several remedies of how to deal with these issues are presented in detail at the end of each chapter. Moreover, research in other settings could provide exciting and fruitful insights and further generalize the results of this dissertation.

Appendix: Scales

Norm – Solidarity (α = .886)

If I incur problems (e.g. with the usage of the product), I assume that
…… tries to help.

I assume that …… shares the problems that arise in the course of our
dealing.

I assume that …… is committed to improvements that may benefit our
relationship as a whole and not only itself.

Norm – Flexibility (α = .833)

I assume that …… timely responses to requests for assistance.

I assume that …… reacts to complaints related to the product's perform-
ance.

I assume that …… will make adjustments in dealing with me to cope
with changing circumstances.

Norm – Reciprocity (α = .915)

I assume that over the long run both …… as well as I will benefit from
our relationship.

I assume that …… is interested in my well-being in the same way as I
am interested in its economic well-being.

In the long run I assume that mutual benefits will even out in my rela-
tionship with …….

I assume that mutual benefits are characteristic for my dealing with
…….

Norm – Information Exchange (α = .851)

I assume that …… provides me any information that might be helpful.

I assume that …… provides me relevant information not only if it is
legally prescribed.

I assume that …… informs me about events or changes that may affect
me.

Brand relationship quality – Trust (α = .892)

I trust this brand.

…… is a brand that meets my expectations.

I feel confidence in …… brand.

…… is a brand that never disappoints me.

Brand relationship quality – Relationship Satisfaction (α = .885)

Pleased – displeased

Sad – happy

Contented – disgusted

Dissatisfied – satisfied

Brand relationship quality – Relationship Commitment (α = .841)

I feel a sense of belonging to this brand.

I care about the long-term success of this brand.

I feel loyal towards this brand.

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The focus of this dissertation lies on the brand personality (BP) and the brand relationship concept. They represent two particularly important measures of brand equity. And more importantly, both concepts still lack a comprehensive understanding. Hence, this dissertation provides deeper insight in how two manage and measure BP and how to build strong consumer-brand relationships.

The purpose of this dissertation is twofold: The first objective is to discuss the BP perception of customers. Do all customers perceive the same intended BP or do customers perceive the same intended BP differently? Do emotions mediate the link between BP perception and purchase intention? Second, this dissertation aims at illustrating how customers form relationships towards brands. After a thorough literature review, testing an empirical model identifies relevant antecedent and mediating variables of consumer-brand relationships.

Overall, this dissertation advances the understanding of the two key brand equity measures BP and brand relationship: Whereas the first study develops a taxonomy of brand constellations, the remaining two empirical studies transfer existing knowledge of the marketing discipline or related disciplines to the brand context. As such, this dissertation reduces complexity and enriches research in the two fields by adding knowledge which has proven of value in related contexts.