

Exploring the Brand Personalities of Facebook, YouTube, and LinkedIn

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Abstract

For decades, marketers have applied brand personality to brands and organisations in order to facilitate relationships with consumers. This phenomenon has been studied across different product categories and industries however; it has not been reported for social media brands. Aaker's Brand Personality Scale (BPS), rooted in the Big Five Personality Theory, has been the preferred measurement for most studies on brand personality. This research assessed the structure of the BPS across different samples on three social media platforms - Facebook, YouTube, and LinkedIn. The findings indicate that social media brand personalities do not follow the original structure of the BPS.

Key words: brand personality, consumers, marketing, online, personality theory, social media, social network sites, Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn.

1. Introduction

Brand personality, originally defined by Aaker (1997, p. 347) as ‘the set of human characteristics associated with a brand’, has been widely applied by marketing practitioners over the decades. The practice sees marketers imbuing brands with personality traits associated with people. One of the motivations for creating brand personalities is that attractive brand personalities could potentially lead to long-term relationships between the brand and its consumers (Carlson and Donavan, 2013). Commonly, human personality traits are transferred to brands via advertising (Klabi and Debabi, 2011). Sung and Kim (2010) state that direct contact with a brand may also be instrumental in creating brand personality, as it forms in the mind of the consumer due to how the consumer perceives the brand.

Aaker (1997), later supported by Xuehua et al. (2009), asserted that similar to product brands, organisations may also represent human traits – thus brand personalities. Therefore, it seems probable that social media organisations could also manifest perceived brand personalities. This is especially likely as social media users have direct (and usually frequent) contact with the social media brand.

Brand personality has been measured widely across various product categories, and the majority of studies make use of Aaker’s (1997) Brand Personality Scale (BPS), which has its roots in the Big Five Personality Theory. Despite a plethora of research on brand personality in various industries, across product categories and cultures (Heding et al., 2009), as well as the widespread use of Aaker’s brand personality scale (BPS) (Bishnoi and Kumar, 2014) in measuring it, the applicability of Aaker’s BPS has not been investigated in reference to social media as brands.

Social media are indeed widely applied and studied. This paper uses the definition offered by Carr and Hayes (2015, p. 50): social media are ‘internet-based channels that allow users to opportunistically interact and selectively self-represent either in real-time or asynchronously with both broad and narrow audiences who derive value from user-generated content and the perception of interaction with others’.

This paper evaluates the structure of Aaker’s BPS across three studies on three different social media platforms. The primary objective of this study was to examine whether the structure of Aaker’s popular BPS differs from its theoretical origins when applied to social media brands - in particular - Facebook, YouTube, and LinkedIn.

The results show that across the three social media platforms, the structure of brand personality differs from the original BPS. The brand personalities of Facebook and YouTube are very similar, and LinkedIn presents a slightly different personality from the aforementioned platforms.

This research contributes to the field of marketing in two ways: first, it examines the suitability of the structure of the widely used BPS for three different social media brands, namely Facebook, YouTube, and LinkedIn. Second, it illustrates the brand personality traits perceived to be best associated with the three social media platforms.

The paper is structured as follows: a literature review on brand personality and social media is presented, followed by the research methodology. The results are presented, then discussion, implications and recommendations, followed by limitations. Concluding remarks are provided.

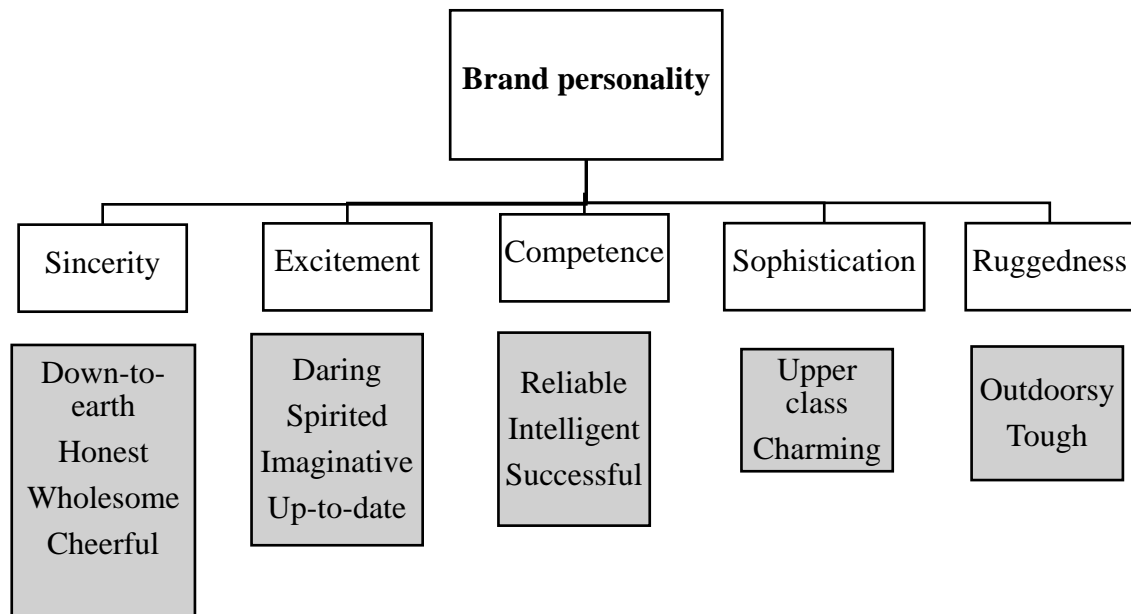
2. Literature review

2.1 Brand personality

Azoulay and Kapferer (2003, p. 151) define brand personality as ‘the set of human personality traits that are both applicable to and relevant for brands’. Brand personality was first suggested by Aaker (1997). It has its roots in the Big Five personality theory (Bishnoi and Kumar, 2014). According to Heding et al. (2009), the Big Five personality inventory consists of five dimensions, namely extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness. Extroversion designates how sociable a person is; agreeableness refers to the friendliness or sympathy that characterises an individual; conscientiousness indicates the degree of dependability (Wehrli, 2008). Neuroticism refers to the level of sensitivity and emotional instability; whereas openness refers to how innovative a person is (Clark and Çalli, 2014).

In order to measure the personalities of brands, Aaker developed the Brand Personality Scale (BPS), which she asserted was an attempt to create a ‘systematically reliable, valid and generalizable scale to measure brand personality’ (Aaker, 1997, p. 347). Aaker’s research used scales from psychology (those that led to the Big Five) as well as personality scales used by academics and practitioners, to develop the BPS (Aaker, 1997). Figure 1 depicts Aaker’s brand personality framework.

Figure 1 The brand personality framework



Source: Adopted from Aaker, 1997.

Figure 1 shows that three personality dimensions of Aaker's framework can be considered to be similar to the Big Five model, namely sincerity (similar to agreeableness), excitement (like extroversion, it denotes sociability) and competence (similar to conscientiousness). Asadollahi et al. (2015) supports this by stating that sincerity can include aspects from agreeableness and conscientiousness, and excitement relates to extraversion in that energy and communicativeness also represent an exciting personality.

Two new dimensions arose from Aaker's research: sophistication and ruggedness. The two new - and unique to brands - traits that arose propose that the personalities of brands and

humans are different constructs. Aaker (1997) suggested that these two dimensions link to personality elements that may be desirable, but are not typical for many people.

According to Heding et al. (2009) Aaker's BPS has seen widespread use across industries, various product categories and cultures, and Bishnoi and Kumar (2014) state that it is the most widely utilised and cited research in the realm of brand personality research. Ahmed and Jan (2015) further indicate that the BPS has been applied mainly in three areas: the applicability of the BPS for country brands, predictive capabilities of brand personality, and the examination of antecedents of brand personality.

Although there has been criticism against the use of the BPS (see Ahmad and Thyagaraj, 2014; Austin et al., 2003) – mainly based on the generalisability and validity of its framework – it has been successfully applied in numerous studies. Attempts have been made to 'improve' on Aaker's framework by, among others, Sweeney and Brandon (2006) who suggested a circumplex rather than a factor analytical model. Some researchers developed new scales to measure brand personality in non-US cultures, such as India (Ahmad and Thyagaraj, 2017). These authors argued that Aaker's scale dimensions have not been shown to be stable across different cultures. Other bases for examining the personification of brands include, for example, the Ten Item Personality Inventory (Gosling et al., 2003), the Spanish brand personality scale (Aaker et al., 2001), as well as new brand personality measures such as those developed by Geuens et al. (2009) and Asadollahi et al. (2015).

Aaker's original BPS contained 42 traits, representing the 15 facets within the five dimensions. Due to this complexity, some scholars argue that using shorter versions allow testing across a range of brands or with other constructs (Fohl and Elser, 2015). Additionally, Koebel and Ladwein (1999) point out the length of a 42-item scale as contributing to respondent fatigue. In order to achieve a more concise and thus user-friendly brand personality measure, Hieronimus (2003) used the facets of brand personality as indicators instead of the traits. This scale was also used by Kuenzel and Phairor (2009) as a shorter measure and to examine the structure of brand personality for one brand (a car brand), as opposed to a pool of brands. The latter is generally the case in research on brand personality. Their results indicated that for a sole brand, two dimensions emerged (security and passion).

According to Rutter et al. (2015), Aaker's scale remains the most notable and updated brand personality framework, and was therefore selected for use in the research on the brand personalities of Facebook, YouTube, and LinkedIn. The decision was made to focus on the facets rather than the traits as a shortened version, to minimise respondent fatigue (the survey instrument also contained various other constructs, which fall outside the focus of this paper) and for other practical reasons.

2.2 *Social media*

For users, social media has many advantages including interaction with friends, family and other peers, gaining social approval and the ability to share ideas and advice. From a marketing point of view, they provide the opportunity to offer information to consumers through an

avenue that allows a level of customisation. This enables a greater capacity for processing marketing information, which would not otherwise be possible (Wolter et al., 2016).

According to Dao (2015), Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), and Schlagwein and Prasarnphanich (2014), social media encompass a variety of types and forms. These include social network sites (SNS) (for example Facebook), content communities (for instance YouTube), collaborative projects (such as Wikipedia), blogs and microblogs (such as Twitter), virtual game worlds (such as World of Warcraft), and virtual social worlds (such as Second Life).

According to Socialbakers (Socialbakers, 2018), Facebook is the leading social media globally, featuring 1280 million active users daily. This SNS was created by Harvard student Mark Zuckerberg and friends in 2004 (McCallig, 2013). The platform has grown exponentially and its popularity has attracted the attention of researchers across a variety of disciplines. Ryan et al. (2014) state that empirical research on Facebook is more common than for any other platform. Despite the plethora of studies on Facebook and its users, an extensive search could not find any studies focusing on the brand personality of Facebook – nor any other SNS – as is the case for YouTube.

YouTube, which is considered a video (content) sharing community, was created by Chad Herley, Steve Chan and Jawed Karim in 2005, and was bought by Google in 2006 (Liikkanen and Salovaara, 2015). It is the most popular video-sharing web community and features 1000 million daily active users (YouTube, 2018). Videos posted on this platform can quickly go viral (spread widely across the social media platform) – as attested by the ‘Grumpy Cat’ video,

which has been watched on YouTube around 12 million times (Wolter et al., 2016). Empirical research on YouTube has focused most frequently on its influence in politics, quality of information, user characteristics and behaviour, its technical attributes, and its influence on teaching and learning (Snelson, 2011).

LinkedIn (2018) indicates that the SNS was founded by Reid Hoffman and co-founders in 2003, and it was acquired by Microsoft at the end of 2016. It differs from Facebook in that it is aimed at professionals. With members exceeding 500 million, it is currently the largest professional social network globally (LinkedIn, 2018). Studies on LinkedIn are much less abundant than for Facebook, and covers topics such as its teaching capabilities, self-expression of users and its utility as a professional networking tool (Ewing 2016; McCorkle and McCorkle 2012; Van Dijck 2013). As is the case for Facebook and YouTube, a literature review found no studies on brand personality for LinkedIn.

3. Methodology

A baseline online survey questionnaire was developed to measure the constructs for the research, and the questionnaire was then amended to represent each SNS platform. The use of an online questionnaire is suitable as the focal SNSs operate online, and respondents for the sample requirements could be recruited easily from an online panel. The questionnaire commenced with screening questions to ensure qualified respondents, followed by questions on usage behaviour (years of use, frequency of use), the BPS (customised to each platform), and other constructs that are not the focus of this paper. Demographics (age, gender and

educational level) were also included. The research instrument was pretested and refined before final data collection took place to ensure it is comprehensible.

The research received ethical clearance from the University of Pretoria, South Africa prior to data collection. South African respondents were recruited from the Qualtrics online panel and they provided informed consent of their anonymous and voluntary participation in the surveys (unique respondents for each platform). Structured, self-completion questionnaires were distributed online to samples of panel members in November 2016. No incentives were provided.

3.1 Measurement of perceived brand personality

The survey included Aaker's BPS (Aaker, 1997); measured on facet level due to practical considerations of respondent fatigue for long questionnaires (the questionnaire also measured several other constructs that are not the focus of this paper). The 15-item scale features personality facets derived from the Big Five personality inventory. These facets represent five dimensions: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness. For each platform, the respondents were requested to imagine the platform as a human being with human traits. The perceived brand personality (PBP) of each platform was measured on a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1=Strongly disagree, to 5=Strongly agree. High mean values would therefore signify the recognition of a facet as highly representing the platform. The scale reported high reliability across all five dimensions in the original study (Cronbach's alpha values ranging from .9 to .95).

Aaker's five brand personality dimensions are operationalised by the following facets:

- Sincerity: down-to-earth; honest; original; cheerful.
- Excitement: daring; spirited; imaginative; up-to-date.
- Competence: reliable; intelligent; successful.
- Sophistication: upper-class; charming.
- Ruggedness: outdoorsy; tough.

Due to a transcription error in the setting up of the online survey, “outdoorsy” was mistyped as “outgoing” in the survey. The ruggedness dimension was subsequently left out of analyses.

3.2 *Data collection and sampling*

Respondents were screened to ensure that they were active users of each of the platforms (Facebook, YouTube, and LinkedIn). A total sample of 1068 (consisting of 355 for Facebook, 338 for YouTube, and 375 for LinkedIn) was achieved. The samples' demographic distributions are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Demographic distribution

	Facebook	YouTube	LinkedIn
Age	18-20 (Gen Z) 8.7%	18-20 (Gen Z) 8.0%	18-20 (Gen Z) 10.4%
	21-39 (Millennials)	21-39 (Millennials)	21-39 (Millennials)
	57.5%	62.7%	57.9%

	40-51 (Gen X) 18.3%	40-51 (Gen X) 18.3%	40-51 (Gen X) 16.5%
	52+ (Baby Boomers)	52+ (Baby Boomers)	52+ (Baby Boomers)
	15.5%	10.9%	15.2%
Gender	Male 58.3%; Female 41.7%	Male 57.1%; Female 42.9%	Male 58.9%; Female 41.1%
Education	No education 0%	No education 0.3%	No education 0.3%
	Some primary schooling 0%	Some primary schooling 0.6%	Some primary schooling 0.8%
	Completed primary schooling 0.6%	Completed primary schooling 0.9%	Completed primary schooling 0.5%
	Some secondary schooling 4.2%	Some secondary schooling 3.0%	Some secondary schooling 4.0%
	Complete secondary schooling 32.4%	Complete secondary schooling 33.1%	Complete secondary schooling 29.6%
	Undergraduate 14.4%	Undergraduate 15.4%	Undergraduate 14.9%
	Graduate (degree/diploma): 36.3%	Graduate (degree/diploma): 37.3%	Graduate (degree/diploma): 37.9%
	Honours graduate 3.9%	Honours graduate 4.1%	Honours graduate 5.6%
	Masters graduate 6.2%	Masters graduate 3.8%	Masters graduate 4.8%
	Doctors graduate 0.6%	Doctors graduate 0.6%	Doctors graduate 0.8%

	Unclassified 1.4%	Unclassified 0.9%	Unclassified 0.8%
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Table 1 shows that the majority of the respondents can be considered Millennials as they are in their mid-thirties across all three platforms (Facebook $M=35.5$, $SD=12.881$; YouTube $M=34.1$, $SD=12.031$; LinkedIn $M=35.1$, $SD=12.996$). All three samples are slightly more inclined towards males, although the gender distribution is not drastically skewed. Across all three platforms, the majority of respondents indicated graduate-level education.

The three social media reflect similar demographics globally. According to Facebook (2018), the majority of its active users are between the ages of 25-34 (Facebook reports on individuals 18 years and older, who report their age). The reported gender distribution is male 56% and females 44%. The majority (68%) of Facebook users globally report to be educated up to university level.

For YouTube, the major user age group is the 25-34 year old group. The majority (54%) of users are male, whereas 46% are female, and 45% of users are reported to have some form of higher education (Hootsuite, 2017). Hootsuite (2017) reports that the majority (31%) of LinkedIn members are between the ages of 30-49, and that the gender distribution is 56% male and 44% female. Half of LinkedIn users have higher education. The samples for this research thus share demographic similarities with global figures across the three social media platforms.

4. Results

4.1 Usage behaviour

Usage behaviour in terms of length of use and frequency of use of the platforms is reported in Table 2.

Table 2 Usage behaviour

	Facebook	YouTube	LinkedIn
Length of use	7 or more years: 49.6% 4 to 6 years: 33.0% 1 to 3 years: 13.0% Less than 1 year: 4.5%	7 or more years: 36.4% 4 to 6 years: 33.1% 1 to 3 years: 23.7% Less than 1 year: 6.8%	7 or more years: 10.4% 4 to 6 years: 23.7% 1 to 3 years: 33.9% Less than 1 year: 32.0%
Frequency of use	Daily: 69.6% Weekly: 22.0% Monthly: 8.5%	Daily: 53.3% Weekly: 34.9% Monthly: 11.8%	Daily: 18.1% Weekly: 32.3% Monthly: 49.6%

The results indicate that both the Facebook and YouTube samples consisted of very experienced and regular users of the particular platform. The majority of the Facebook and YouTube respondents have used the platform for more than seven years, and most use it daily. Contrarily, the results for LinkedIn suggest that the users are moderately experienced users, and that the platform is not used very regularly. Most of the LinkedIn sample have used it between one to three years, followed by those who only use it on a monthly basis.

4.2 *Exploratory factor analyses*

As the BPS was not originally designed for use in an online and especially social media context, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was run to assess the structure of the scale on the three samples. Prior to factor analysis the data was assessed for factorability by using the Bartlett's test of sphericity and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy, as recommended by Pallant (2013). Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant for all three platforms (all .0000), and the KMO values exceeded .6 (Facebook .920; YouTube .926 and LinkedIn .928). These values indicated that the data were suitable for factor analysis.

Principal Axis Factoring (PAF) with Promax rotation (items were assumed to be correlated) was utilised for the EFA. Eigenvalues above 1 were included, with factor loadings above .3. Items reflecting communalities exceeding .3 were considered acceptable for inclusion. Subsequently the resulting subscales were assessed for reliability using Cronbach's alpha, with scores exceeding .7 deemed acceptable (DeVellis in Pallant, 2013).

According to Hair et al. (2010), items reflecting high factor loadings may be considered as more important. They advise that the items for each factor should be examined and greater emphasis must be placed on items that have higher loadings. Subsequently, a name, which accurately describes the items that loaded on that factor, is to be assigned to the factor. The name (or label) should be logically appropriate for the factor. Leonard and Katsanis (2013) further assert that the label of a particular factor can be chosen based on the degree to which the items are representative of the name.

Additionally, due to the objective of exploring the factor structure of brand personality (based on the BPs) in the online social media contexts, the resultant factor labels were also considered based on similarity to the original dimensions of the BPS. The results for the EFAs (and the reliabilities) follow in Table 3.

Table 3 Results of EFAs for three platforms

Platform ...	Facebook factors		YouTube Factors		LinkedIn Factors	
	1	2	1	2	1	2
	Excitement	Sincerity	Excitement	Sincerity	Competence	Excitement
... is down-to-earth		.555		.573	.370	
... is honest		1.053		.805	.663	
... is original	.461		.423		.573	
... is cheerful	.568		.604			.764
... is daring	.706		.843			.827
... is spirited	.663		.823			.860
... is imaginative	.812		.878			.494
... is up-to-date	.676		.674		.842	
... is reliable		.536		.657	.837	
... is intelligent	.588			.490	.739	
... is successful	.680		.687		.799	
... is upper-class		.415		.608	.577	
... is charming	.484			.593		.664

Cronbach's alpha	.892	.788	.904	.825	.897	.872
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Contrary to Aaker's original scale, the EFA for all three platforms' brand personality resulted in two-factor solutions, which were then labelled according to the representativeness of each item for the label, also bearing in mind the BPS facets.

4.2.1 Facebook

The two-factor solution of the EFA for Facebook brand personality explained 50.7% of the variance. Nine items loaded on Factor 1, and four on Factor 2. Two items, 'Facebook is upper-class' and 'Facebook is charming', double loaded on both factors and the decision was subsequently made to retain them on the highest-loading factor, and also as they logically fit better with the other items representing the factor.

From Table 3 it can be seen that factor loadings ranged between .415 and 1.053. It should be noted that retaining an item with a factor loading that exceeds 1 is still acceptable when using factor analysis with oblique rotation (Joreskog, 1999), as in such a case the loadings are regression coefficients. Also, refer to Deegan (1978).

As mentioned previously, in order to choose a label that would accurately represent the factors, the original dimensions of the BPS were also taken into consideration. After careful consideration, the two factors were labelled 'Excitement' and 'Sincerity', due to sharing items representative of these dimensions from the original BPS, and also as the rest of the items

representing the factors could conceivably fit into these two personality characteristics. Excitement, for example, still features all the items from the original BPS, and includes items such as ‘cheerful’, which logically could be used to describe an exciting personality. These results concur with those of Ahmad and Thyagaraj (2017), who also found factor structures that differed from the original BPS. In their study, they defined excitement by items that included, among others, cheerful.

Descriptively, the excitement factor’s mean was 3.8 ($SD=.69$), whereas sincerity had a lower score ($M=3.2$, $SD=.86$). These results suggest that Facebook is seen as primarily exciting, and to a lesser degree sincere.

4.2.2 YouTube

The YouTube data also resulted in a two-factor solution, which explained 53.04% of the variance. Seven items loaded on Factor 1 and the remaining six on factor 2. Two items double-loaded, namely ‘YouTube is original’ and ‘YouTube is intelligent’. Consistent with the procedure that was followed for Facebook, the items were retained where they loaded higher and where they logically fit better.

From Table 3, it is clear that factor loadings ranged between .423 and .878. The two factors were labelled ‘Excitement’ and ‘Sincerity’, as each retained traits from the original BPS and the other items in the factor logically fit the representative personality type. For example, the trait ‘reliable’, which falls under ‘Sincerity’ in this analysis, can be considered consistent with a sincere personality. The YouTube brand personality descriptive analysis indicate that it is

considered a very exciting brand ($M=4.1$, $SD=.69$). It is also regarded as quite sincere ($M=3.6$, $SD=.74$).

4.2.3 LinkedIn

Similarly, the factor solution for LinkedIn also resulted in two factors, explaining 55.8% of the variance. Eight items loaded on Factor 1, and five on factor 2. One item had a double loading (LinkedIn is down-to-earth), and the decision was made to retain it on the higher-loading factor (Factor 1) that also logically was more fitting. Table 3 indicates that factor loadings ranged between .370 and .860.

After careful consideration of the items that represented each factor, and the original BPS traits, the two factors for LinkedIn were named ‘Competence’ and ‘Excitement’. To illustrate: all the traits for competence from the original BPS were retained, and the factor also include traits like ‘honest’ and up to date’, which can be considered appropriate traits representing a competent personality. Descriptively, LinkedIn’s personality was shown to be mainly competent ($M=3.8$, $SD=.69$) and slightly exciting ($M=3.4$, $SD=.74$).

5. Discussion, implications, and recommendations

The results indicate that contrary to Aaker’s (1997) BPS, social media brand personalities seem to be less ‘complicated’ than those of other types of brands are. For all three of the platforms, the brand personality scale resulted in two-factor solutions, thus indicating a simpler structure than for most other brand types. All three social media featured excitement as a personality

characteristic, and Facebook as well as YouTube share the sincerity characteristic. LinkedIn differs from the two more ‘informal’ platforms by also being considered as competent.

Interestingly, the results for the SNSs are consistent with the three dimensions of brand personality that correspond with the Big Five personality theory for humans. Aaker’s work suggested that brand personalities are different from human personalities, and that was supported by the new dimensions of her framework that differed from the human traits present in the Big Five. However, this research indicates that SNS brands may have more in common with human personality traits than brand-related characteristics.

It is possible that the social nature of SNSs cause users to associate them more strongly with the human personality traits present in the BPS than those that were developed specifically for brands. The seemingly stronger humanisation of social media brands suggests that users of social media perceive the platforms to be more similar to people than to abstract brands. This allows the possibility of potentially stronger personal relationships between social media brands and their consumers.

5.1 Facebook

Facebook’s mission is to ‘Give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together (Facebook, 2018). Facebook’s results suggest a perceived brand personality (PBP) of sincerity and excitement, with excitement being more prominent. These personality characteristics are consistent with the SNS’s mission, as empowering people via an ‘open’ and ‘connected’ platform would conceivably require a level of sincerity to enable trust in the

platform to achieve these goals. It may be deemed a contained or protected platform within which to share due to its nature as a friend network – one typically shares with the people in one's friend's list as opposed to everyone (of course depending on one's privacy settings).

Excitement is consistent with a personality that dares to be innovative and brings the thrill of exploring new options – in the form of new friends, or reconnecting and therefore catching up, with old ones. From a user perspective, this could make the platform more attractive, especially in the sense of sharing and connecting to a higher degree, with the added advantage of a sense of trust due to it being perceived as also sincere.

As a brand, Facebook can leverage on these desirable traits to attract new users, and to encourage higher use levels of current members. Its current leading user figures already make it a favoured marketing platform for a plethora of brands; linking with these characteristics of this medium could strengthen the efforts of individual brands active on the platform. Facebook's sincerity could be used to relate trust in the platform to trust in the brand communicating on the platform.

5.2 YouTube

According to YouTube (YouTube, 2018), its mission is to 'give everyone a voice and show them the world'. This suggests an open, sharing and globally adventurous nature. From the results of the PBP analysis, YouTube's personality can be characterised as very exciting and reasonably sincere. The excitement of exploring new options and a wide worldview gained via

using the platform is evident from its mission and its wide array of functionalities aimed at enabling voicing and sharing on a worldwide scale.

Its less prominent characteristic, sincerity, suggests a view that YouTube also succeeds in creating a 'safe' platform for its users to express themselves and to then share their communication freely with a global audience. It seems to have a less 'restricted' nature than Facebook, yet within that, the sincerity aspect of YouTube's personality could ensure a degree of trust even when the communication is seen as less 'bounded'.

These traits make for a very attractive platform from a user perspective, especially users seeking excitement. Brands who utilise YouTube for marketing purposes can leverage the excitement aspect to bring an exciting edge to their communications. This is especially important in advertisements on the platform, as there is a limited period within which to grab the attention of the user (a few seconds of advertising time is compulsory when viewing a chosen video). Linking with the exciting nature of YouTube by providing stimulating, eye-catching advertisements (especially in the first few seconds) could hold the viewer's attention for longer than the mandatory period and thus enable better reach of communication through the platform.

5.3 LinkedIn

LinkedIn, in this research, can be characterised as competent and exciting. This platform aims to connect 'the world's professionals to make them more productive and successful' (LinkedIn, 2018). This aim, along with the fact that it is the largest professional SNS globally, is particularly consistent with its more dominant personality characteristic of competence.

From a user perspective, engaging with a professional network for the purpose of expanding one's professional network and possibly gaining new employment opportunities requires interaction with a platform that inspires confidence, and a brand personality representing competence is therefore advantageous. This could attract new members as well as organisations who wish to use the platform for marketing purposes. A favourable association with LinkedIn as a competent brand should thus present the opportunity for both individuals and brands on the platform to capitalise on this desirable trait.

6. Limitations

This research (as do all research) has some limitations. Firstly, as non-probability sampling was used, the results cannot be generalised. A transcription error led to the removal of one two-item dimension from the original BPS, which may have influenced the results. Future researchers may examine this along with the others to determine if the results can be replicated. It is recommended that other measures of brand personality be tested in the context of social media brands to investigate the structures that result from those. Bold researchers could even attempt to start qualitatively to develop a new brand personality framework specifically for social media brands.

7. Concluding remarks

The results of the research indicate that social networks as brand personalities do not conform to the original BPS as developed by Aaker (1997). In all three samples, the personality structures reflected two dimensions comparable to the original. All three featured excitement,

and Facebook and YouTube also shared the sincerity characteristic. Facebook's primary personality characteristic was excitement, and YouTube, too, was seen as highly exciting. LinkedIn was unique among the social media in this research in that it prominently featured the competence characteristic. These characteristics are shared with human personality, possibly indicating that social media platforms are seen as more 'human' in nature than traditional brands and product categories.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire

Section 1:

Please indicate your current age in years: _____

Section 2:

Q1 How long have you been using the platform?

Less than a year	¹
1 to 3 years	²
4 to 6 years	³
7 to more years	⁴

Q2 Please describe your average usage pattern on the platform:

Daily	¹	<i>Go to Q3.1</i>
Weekly	²	<i>Go to Q3.2</i>
Monthly	³	<i>Go to Q3.3</i>

Q3.1 Approximately how many times do you access the platform per day?

Q3.2 Approximately how many times do you access the platform per week?

Q3.3 Approximately how many times do you access the platform per month?

Q4 When you access the platform, approximately how much time do you spend on average per session?

Hours		and minutes	
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Section 3:

Q5 Imagine the platform as if it were a person with human characteristics.

Please rate the extent to which you associate the following characteristics with the platform. Options include 1=Strongly disagree; 2= Disagree; 3=Neutral; 4=Agree or 5=Strongly agree.

	1	2	3	4	5
The platform is down-to-earth					
The platform is honest					
The platform is original					
The platform is cheerful					
The platform is daring					
The platform is spirited					
The platform is imaginative					
The platform is up-to-date					
The platform is reliable					
The platform is intelligent					
The platform is successful					
The platform is upper-class					
The platform is charming					
The platform is outdoorsy ¹					
The platform is tough					

¹ Note: in transcribing to online survey format, “outdoorsy” was erroneously transcribed as “outgoing” as described in the article.

Q6 Please read each of the following statements about your use of the platform carefully and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. Options include 1=Strongly disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Neutral; 4=Agree or 5=Strongly agree.

	1	2	3	4	5
I use the platform to relax					
<i>I plan to use the platform in future</i>					
I use the platform to do research					
I use the platform to learn new things					
The platform lets me acquire cheap information					
Using the platform helps me pass time					
I use the platform to interact with people					
<i>I intend to recommend my friends to use the platform in the future</i>					
Using the platform lets me combat boredom					
I share news and ideas using the platform					
I enjoy the cool character of the platform					
<i>I am not likely to use the platform in future*</i>					
The platform lets me connect to the virtual community					
The platform allows me to gain status					
I use the platform for seeking relationships					
Using the platform helps me to appear modern					
The platform helps me feel important					
<i>I expect to continue using the platform in future</i>					
I use the platform to help me establish my identity					

Note: *items in italics are behavioural intent items.* * Item to be reverse scored

Q7 Listed below are pairs of descriptive words that could be used to describe your attitude towards the platform. For each pair of descriptive words, please choose the position on the scale that in your view best describes your attitude towards the platform.

For me, the platform is...

	1	2	3	4	5	
Unappealing						Appealing
Bad						Good
Unpleasant						Pleasant
Unfavourable						Favourable
Unlikable						Likable

Section 4: Demographics

Q8 Please indicate your gender:

Male	1
Female	2

Q9 Please indicate your highest level of education

No education	1
Some primary schooling	2
Complete primary schooling	3
Some secondary schooling	4
Complete secondary schooling	5
Undergraduate (currently busy with after school graduate studies)	6
Graduate (Degree/Diploma)	7
Honours graduate	8
Masters graduate	9
Doctors graduate	10
Unclassified	11