(Photo credit = Chrysler Co.)

It seems that this neon above is talking to the consumer in this ad. (Don't you almost want to say "Hi" back?) By giving a brand a way to communicate with the consumer, and some human-like features, sometimes the brand is said to have "personality"- an idea once reserved for living beings. Brand personality refers to the set of human characteristics associated with a brand (Aaker 1997). This concept has been accepted as a viable force in practice (see Plummer's piece on brand personality at Young & Rubicam), and in academics (e.g., Durgee 1988, Aaker and Fournier 1995, Aaker 1997, Fournier 1998, Phau and Lau 2001). For industry and in terms of understanding "the brand", it is crucial to understand: a) brand personality, b) measurement of brand personality, c) the cultural implications of brand personality, and d) the relational aspects of brand personality. Here, each of these considerations is discussed in terms of understanding the overall construct of brand personality from a marketing perspective.

UNDERSTANDING BRAND PERSONALITY

In the academic literature, Durgee (1988) contributed a commentary on how to understand brand personality, primarily from an advertising perspective. He suggested a qualitative "story-telling" approach to issues such as understanding brand personality. Researchers should look at basic wants, setting, characters, opposition, symbols, mood, and story line to comprehensively research via qualitative methods. Brand personality is a strategic tool for the creative—however, this construct was not fully understood in measurement, from a cultural perspective, or in theory, until subsequent work was conducted—from quantitative studies to the "story-telling" approach suggested by Durgee.

MEASURING BRAND PERSONALITY

Jennifer Aaker's paper, "Dimensions of Brand Personality" (1997), contributes a way to measure the much talked- about and interesting notion of brand personality. The objective of her study is to identify brand personality dimensions as perceived in the consumers' mind. Her study of 631 subjects rated 37 brands on 114 personality traits. She presents a valid and reliable framework, which measures brand personality from. The construct exists via five core dimensions, each divided into a set of facets.

Dimensions and Facets

To begin the brand personality construct, both personality-trait generation and stimuli selection methods were used, in order to establish content validity. In the study, participants were asked to rate the extent that the provided (114) personality traits

describe the respective brand. With factor and principle component analyses, each brand

was scored on each personality trait averaged across subjects. A five-factor solution

provided the best result (i.e., each have eigenvalues >1, are meaningful, rich, and

interpretable, and explain a high level of variance in brand personality). After analyses,

the five core dimensions and their facets include:

• Sincerity (down-to-earth, honest, wholesome, cheerful)
• Excitement (daring, spirited, imaginative, up-to-date)
• Competence (reliable, intelligent, successful)
• Sophistication (upper class, charming)
• Ruggedness (outdoorsy, tough)

Each facet is then measured with a set of traits, described next.

Trait Measures

The trait measures use a five-point likert scale (1= not at all descriptive,

5=extremely descriptive) rating the extent to which each trait describes the specific brand

of interest. She chose a likert scale, in lieu of a semantic differential scale, as the brand

personality has a positive valence. This means that generally, the traits in branding are

attractive and desirable traits. Thus, the traits used for each of the facets include:

• Cheerful (cheerful, sentimental, friendly)
• Daring (daring, trendy, exciting)
• Spirited (spirited, cool, young)
• Down-to-earth (down-to-earth, family-oriented, small-town)
• Honest (honest, sincere, real)
• Wholesome (wholesome, original)
• Imaginative (imaginative, unique)
• Up-to-date (up-to-date, independent, contemporary)
• Reliable (reliable, hard working, secure)
• Intelligent (intelligent, technical, corporate)
• Successful (successful, leader, confident)
• Upper class (upper class, glamorous, good looking)
• Charming (charming, feminine, smooth)
• Outdoorsy (outdoorsy, masculine, Western)
• Tough (tough, rugged)

These findings were replicated with an additional (similar) set of brands. The GFI is reported at .91 and the CFI is reported at .98, in support of the findings. With these findings as a way to empirically measure an otherwise latent construct, there are implications in theory and in practice for brand personality scales- namely in the areas of self-congruity, copy-writing, and cultural dimensions of brand personality.

CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF BRAND PERSONALITY

Aaker concluded with a call for further research on this topic in the cultural sphere. Cultural aspects of brand personality are important to consider. For instance, in collectivist cultures, it may be more applicable that brands are used to "fit in", or to assimilate. However in individualistic cultures, such as the U.S., brands may be used more as a way of differentiating, or self-expression. Such is an important consideration for those in the U.S., because the U.S. has the highest index of individualism of any culture (Hoffstead ctd. in Keegan and Green 2003). Phau and Lau (2001) recognize the importance of this cultural difference, among others, in respect to brand personality. Phau and Lau, with survey work, present numerous hypotheses about Tiger beer—a market leader in Singapore. This beer commands 65% consumer loyalty, and a 60% market share, according to the authors. After a series of regressions, Phau and Lau find that when a brand does command a high preference, that the preferred personality of customers does have an influence over its *perceived* brand personality.

While, it is true, that a brand may have a personality, this personality is not always consistent across cultures. (Perhaps brands can have multi or split personalities in this sense). Global brands strive to keep their brand images and positioning consistent

across borders; however this "lure of global branding" is often difficult to achieve according to David Aaker (1999). In essence, a global brand must first be a global product with a global demand, and such products are difficult to come by.

A RELATIONAL PERSPECTIVE OF BRAND PERSONALITY

Ultimately, no matter what the culture, it is important to include the relational perspective of brand personality. Consumers have relationships with their brands (Fournier 1998). This notion may sound silly, and in fact, some consumers do not readily like to admit that they are "in relationships" with their favorite (and least favorite) brands. Recently, I asked a class of otherwise opinionated seniors in a marketing management course to share their brand relationships. There was an initial awkward silence. Some turned red. Some whispering and giggling started, until one woman shared that she, "only eats Oscar Myer" hotdogs- the other ones don't have "real meat". Her sharing opened the discussion floor (with laughs of irony), and some shared their loyal relationships (e.g., "Noxzema is the *only* cleanser I will ever put on my face!" and of course their avoidance relationships ("I *never* buy clothes from Old Navy because they fall apart as soon as you wash them"). While some may have been embarrassed discussing their favorite brands as a relational metaphor, most did agree that such relationships do largely exist.

Fournier's work on brand relationships took such an approach to understanding where consumers stand with brands on a much deeper level, in terms of theory building. She conducted case studies with three women, in order to provide a framework for characterizing and better understanding the types of relationships that consumers form with brands from an inductive approach. Via the stories of Jean (a 59 year-old Bostonite),

Karen (a 39 year-old single mom), and Vickie (a 23 year-old master's student), Fournier shows that truly, relationships with brands do exist at many levels. A model (below) is presented to show the level of brand relationship quality and the effects on relationship stability. In her work, the personalities of brands emerge with the words of the informants (e.g., "the Ivory girl is me!"; "true Italian sauce"), and brand personality is a key consideration of understanding the consumer-brand relationship. As seen in the theoretical model, relationship stability/durability is a final consideration. As loyal consumers are profitable consumers, linking brand relationships to the personality they possess as Fournier has done, is a rich area of further research.