

What is next for brand personality? A systematic review and research agenda proposition

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Resumo

This article reports a systematic review performed to understand the scientific production on brand personality, a marketing construct whose relevance lies on its potential to create positive associations on customers' minds, guiding their preference in a context of high and global competition. We have analyzed 289 peer reviewed journal articles published between 2015 and 2019, a productive period that reveals a mature body of knowledge with growth perspective. Studies in brand personality are comprised in three major clusters: brand personality in tourism and hospitality industry, consumer-related outcomes and brand-related outcomes, confirming the adherence of brand personality concepts to customer preference and persuasion strategies. As the main trends, we foresee the study of brand personality in service context, public sector and digital world, especially regarding social media and its effects on brand personality perception. Additionally, we point out the need of theoretical essays to enhance conceptual understanding of the construct, its antecedents and consequences. We also expect the adoption of multi-method studies, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques, including methodological triangulation, in order to achieve a deeper comprehension of brand personality related phenomena



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Abstract

This article reports a systematic review performed to understand the scientific production on brand personality, a marketing construct whose relevance lies on its potential to create positive associations on customers' minds, guiding their preference in a context of high and global competition. We have analyzed 289 peer reviewed journal articles published between 2015 and 2019, a productive period that reveals a mature body of knowledge with growth perspective. Studies in brand personality are comprised in three major clusters: brand personality in tourism and hospitality industry, consumer-related outcomes and brand-related outcomes, confirming the adherence of brand personality concepts to customer preference and persuasion strategies. As the main trends, we foresee the study of brand personality in service context, public sector and digital world, especially regarding social media and its effects on brand personality perception. Additionally, we point out the need of theoretical essays to enhance conceptual understanding of the construct, its antecedents and consequences. We also expect the adoption of multi-method studies, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques, including methodological triangulation, in order to achieve a deeper comprehension of brand personality related phenomena.

Keywords: Brand Personality; Brand; Systematic Review; Cluster Analysis; Marketing.

Introduction

Marketing practice has been facing a great challenge: there is too much of everything in the market. Consumers have many options of every kind of product and service nowadays, especially with the internet and the possibilities it has brought to global business. In this context, how can a brand stand out in competition? What makes a consumer chose a certain brand and not the others?

It is known that brands increase marketing activities productivity, being an important asset in strategy formulation since they help customers to develop their attitudes, their perceptions about the company and the brand itself, playing an active role in customer decision-making (Keller, 2009). In this context, brand personality arises as a central element of a brand, constructing a more interesting brand image, obtaining customers' attention through the associations they make about the brand as a person (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). According to Kapferer (2003), customers perceive brand personality as soon as they communicate with a brand, in any point of interaction, moment in which they imagine what kind of person the brand would be.

The concept of brand personality has its roots in psychology studies. In the 1950', marketing literature recognized the power of personality traits in describing companies, products and brands, assuming these traits would create a better brand image (Garner & Levy, 1955; Martineau, 1958). In the 1980's, brand personality gained consistency as a research stream, when scholars suggested the use of human personality concepts and its measurement instruments in brand personality studies (Berry, 1988; Durgee, 1988; Plummer, 1985). However, it was with the seminal work of Jennifer Aaker (1997) that brand personality was conceptualized and operationalized: brand personality is the "set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (p. 347).

There are several benefits in using the brand personality perspective in marketing strategies: customer benefit of it by using the brands as a way for self-expression (Belk, 1988) and companies enhance their visibility and increase their brand equity (Keller, 2007). Besides, brand personality has a great impact in customer loyalty (Das, 2014; Demo, Silva, Watanabe, & Scussel, 2018) and it works as an important element in customer-relationship building, known as a great source of sustainable competitive advantage (Fournier, 1998; Delmondez, Demo, & Scussel, 2017; Scussel & Demo, 2019). Additionally, brand personality can represent beliefs and values of a culture

(Aaker, Benet-Martínez, & Garolera, 2001; Rojas-Méndez, Murphy, & Papadopoulos, 2013) and it has been point out as a paramount construct in destination branding, since it helps tourism and hospitality industry actors to develop and enhance hotels, services, cities and even countries' images (Kaplan, Yurt, Guneri, & Kurtulus, 2010).

Despite the relevance of brand personality, there are discussions about its conceptualization, the application of measurement instruments and the empirical validation of this construct (Freling, Crosno, & Henard, 2011; Geuens, Weijters, & Wulf, 2009; Malär, Nyffenegegr, Krohmer, & Hoyer, 2011).

Based on this, we believe brand personality is a topic of growing interest, however, little is known about its body of knowledge as a whole, which could be an important step to identify research gaps and set directions for future investigations. In this sense, we wonder: what do we know about the characteristics of brand personality scientific production? Is there a scientific network that connects authors interested in brand personality? What are the main recent developments? What are the trends for brand personality studies? What can we say about the future of the research on brand personality? Together, these questions form the main purpose of this article: to perform a systematic review in order to draw an overview of brand personality state of the art and propose a research agenda.

Theoretical Framework

The idea of brand personality regards customers perceiving a brand in the same way they would typically describe someone's personality. Since the concept proposed by Aaker (1997, p. 347), brand personality as "the set of human characteristics associated to a brand", literature recognizes that once brands are objects of preferences, expectations and attributes, it is plausible to use with brands the same heuristic used to form an impression about a person (Caprara, Barbaranelli, & Guido, 2001). This is valid in market context due to the fact consumers attribute human personality traits to brands in order to identify and differentiate them (Aaker, 1997). Hence, the objective of brand personality is to describe the perceptual reality from the customer perception, reflecting his feelings about the brand and not only expressing what the brands would like consumers to feel about them (Plummer, 1985).

Brand personality research covers three major topics: (i) the comprehension of the conformity between brand personality and customer personality; (ii) the effects of brand personality on consumer behavior; and (iii) the development of brand personality scales (Azoulay, 2005). In the first group, we have identified studies focused on understanding the congruency between customer and brand personalities and the impact of this relation in brand preference (Branaghan & Hildebrand, 2011; Huang, Mitchell, & Rosenaum-Elliot, 2012; Lee, Back, & Kim, 2009; Parker, 2009).

The second research stream has shown positive relations between brand personality and brand strategy formulation (Valette-Florence, Guizani, & Merunka, 2011; Malar et al., 2012; Naresh, 2012); brand positioning (Kim & Sung, 2013); advisement persuasion strategy (Park & John, 2012) and brand experience (Moller & Herm, 2013). We have also found investigations connecting brand personality to future behaviors (Akin, 2011) and a strong relationship between brand personality and loyalty (Kim, Magnini, & Singal, 2011; Demo et al., 2018) and customer relationship perception (Scussel & Demo, 2019).

The last research group concerns brand personality measurement scales. Shank and Langmeyer (1994) were the ones to call attention to the need of scientific metrics to understand the construct. Until the 1990's, there were no scale attending the reliability, validity and generalization criteria to measure brand personality – according to Aaker (1997), this construct used to be studied

using check-lists, photo-sorts and symbolic analogies. In this scenario, human personality measurements had a great contribution to the development of brand personality research, and several studies were conducted with the objective of testing empirically human personality scales to measure brand personality (Caprara, Barbaranelli, & Guido, 2001; Ferrandi et al., 2002). However, these scholars recognized the limitation of these metrics in describing brand personality.

Aaker (1997) has explained that this limitation is attributed to the antecedents of human personality and brand personality. Even though these constructs share similarities, they differ in the way they are formed: human personality traits arise from the person's behavior, the physical characteristics, attitudes and beliefs; meanwhile, the brand personality traits emerge from any direct or indirect contact a consumer has with a brand. In this sense, there was no way of properly measuring brand personality resorting to human personality scales. Aaker (1997) developed a scale to measure brand personality, revealing five dimensions, namely, sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness.

As proposed by Aaker (1997) in her article, the culture plays an important role in shaping brand personality perception, and the application of the scale should respect cultural values, demanding the validation of the instrument in different contexts. The scale was empirically validated in different countries (Aaker et al., 2001; Supphellen & Gronhaug, 2003; Bosnjak, Bochmann, & Hufschmidt, 2007; Muniz & Marchetti, 2012). After extensive validation and acceptance of the original scale, scholars start validating the scale for specific sectors, in an attempt of achieving a more accurate measure of brand personality (Kaplan et al., 2010; Kim, Baek, & Martin, 2010; Sung et al., 2015).

From this theoretical framework, it is plausible to say that brand personality is a relevant construct in marketing literature due to its potential of generating positive associations in consumers' minds and, scientifically speaking, given its influence in other marketing constructs. Our perception about its relevance also lies on the fact the interest on brand personality is global, reaching different countries and cultures, at the same time it enables local and specific knowledge when directed to specific industries and sectors.

Method

The objective of this paper was to analyze the academic production on brand personality in order to comprehend this construct's conceptualization, characteristics and research gaps. To do so, we resorted to a systematic review, a method that helps scholars to understand, organize and summarize data from a specific subject, enabling them to elaborate conclusions on a certain phenomenon, as Kitchenham (2004) explains.

Data collection concerned the identification of brand personality related articles published in the last five years in two important databases for marketing and business scientific research: Web of Science and Scopus. We selected only journal articles peer-reviewed, published between January 2015 and April 2019 (when data collection was ended) using the keyword "brand personality". In this stage, we identified 181 papers from Web of Science and 230 papers from Scopus, totalizing 441 documents. From this sample, we deleted the duplicate articles, obtaining the final sample of 289 works. Regarding data analysis, we performed descriptive statistics and content analysis, following the systematic review protocol proposed by Crossan and Apaydin (2010).

We used the software VOSviewer 1.6.11 to generate the descriptive analysis of the analyzed period, covering: the number of published articles; the main sources of brand personality knowledge, regarding the journals that have published the most; the origin of the papers, in relation to the country of publication; the most cited articles and the scientific network of brand personality

researchers. We have also developed a word cloud, based on the orientation of Van Eck and Waltman (2010; 2017), resorting to the website Wordle.net for word counting and the software wordcounter360 to create the word cloud.

Results

This section displays a synthesis of the results obtained from the data extracted in our systematic review. From these findings, we have developed an analysis of the academic production on brand personality, which has raised a few reflection about its evolution and possible research trends, allowing us to draw a research agenda.

The first result regards **the productiveness of the analyzed period**. It was a productive period, with 289 articles published. As Figure 1 illustrates, 2018 was the year with more publications, although we can observe a constant effort in developing brand personality research, since there is no high variation from one year to the other – note that 2019 is in red in the figure because we analyzed articles published up to April 2019. Therefore, it is plausible to say there is a stable interest in brand personality research, which could be an indicator of a mature topic in marketing literature. This evidence reinforces our idea of understanding the scientific production behavior on this topic, so we can identify what is next and offer direction for future studies.

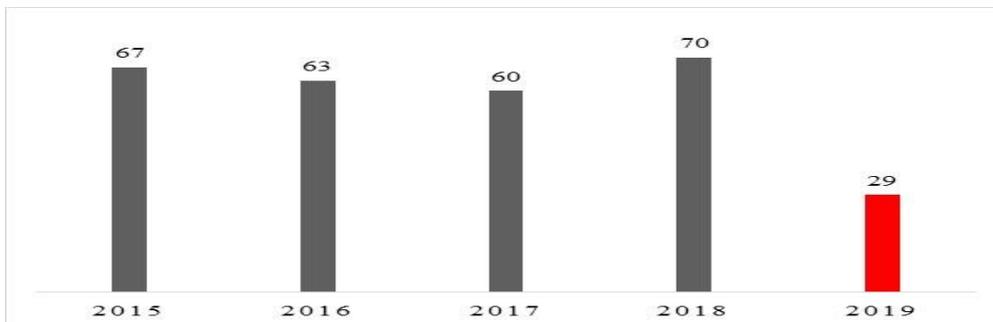


Figure 1. Brand personality studies by year

This reflection led us to draw a trend line, as illustrated by Figure 2. Note that we have excluded 2019 of this graphic since we analyzed studies published up to April, and considering this year's scientific production could generate a strong bias in our interpretation. Hence, the growth tendency shown in Figure 2 signalizes that although there is stability on brand personality developments, the knowledge in this construct can expand its domain.

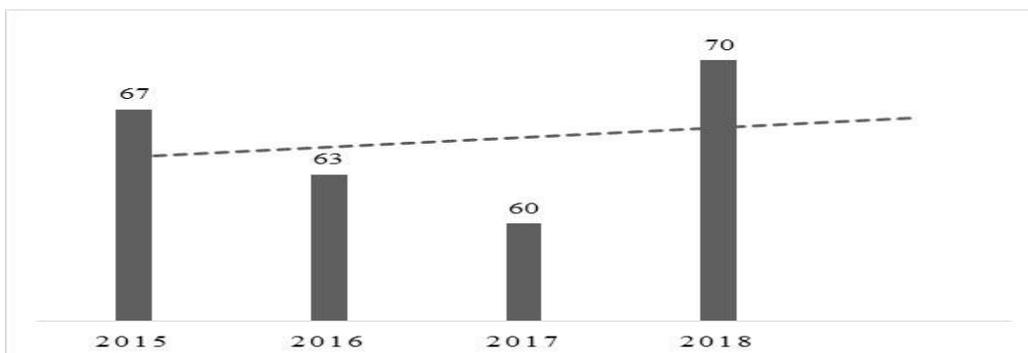


Figure 2. Brand personality studies' growth trend

In the following, we reviewed the articles by journal, in order to identify **the main sources of brand personality knowledge**. Results indicated that 77 journals hold brand personality studies and a tie between articles in the first three positions, as Table 1 presents. The analysis of the scope of such sources shows that brand personality is a concept of global interest, since it is investigated by journals focused in not only marketing, but also applied business, economy and sports science. We must highlight the amount of journals concentrating attention in tourism and hospitality management, which suggest brand personality has a relevant impact in this industry.

Table 1
The main sources of brand personality knowledge

Position	Journal
1st (five articles each)	Indian Journal of Marketing
	International Journal of Applied Business and Economic Research
	Place Branding and Public Diplomacy
2nd (four articles each)	Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics
	International Journal of Economic Research
3rd (three articles each)	Annals of Applied Sport Science
	European Journal of Marketing
	Global Business Review
	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management
	International Journal of Tourism Research
	Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing
	International Journal of Wine Business Research
	Journal of Business Research
	Journal of Marketing Communications
Journal of Political Marketing	

We have also analyzed between the 77 journals the ones that were cited the most, according to Table 2.

Table 2
The most cited sources of brand personality knowledge

Position	Journal	Number of Citation
1st	Journal of Marketing Communications	24
2nd	Services Marketing Quarterly	23
3rd	Journal of Service Research	19
4th	Journal of Political Marketing	15
5th	International Journal of Wine Business Research	14

Among them, the *Journal of Marketing Communication* has the highest impact on the advance of brand personality knowledge, with 24 citations in the analyzed period. Besides, this journal is in the list of the most productive journals (Table 1). This journal is focused on marketing and corporate communication, and the behavioral foundations of marketing communications and

promotion management. In this journal, brand personality is studied as an important asset in brand communication and advertisements creation.

The *International Journal of Wine and Business Research* also appears in Tables 1 and 2. Articles from this journal cover wine brand personality, wineries' personalities and the impact of these brand personalities perception is purchase intention, customer preference, satisfaction and consumption experience. This analysis corroborates the impact of brand personality on developing competitive advantage, especially in the tourism and experience field. This happens with the *Journal of Political Marketing* as well, a journal focused on connecting marketing methods and politics. In this regard, brand personality is used as a tool to develop voter perceptions, candidates positioning and influencing decision-making processes of voters. In our point of view, the domain of brand personality is expanding, as it reaches contexts that go beyond brands and products.

Afterwards, we tracked **the country of origin of the articles**, finding 241 research institutions distributed in 50 countries. Our objective with this analysis is to identify the nations with the highest impact in brand personality scientific production. In this perspective, Table 3 presents the countries that have published the most about brand personality.

Table 3
Ranking of the countries that have published the most about brand personality

Position	Country	Number of published articles
1st	United States	35
2nd	India	22
3rd	Malaysia	13
4th	Iran and United Kingdom	9
5th	Canada, China and France	7

The North American journals hold the greatest part of brand personality publications, being responsible for 12% of this period production, followed by Indian, Malaysian, Iranian, British, Canadian, Chinese and French journals that together produce 38% of brand personality studies. Considering we have identified 50 countries in total, it is reasonable to affirm that the knowledge on brand personality is concentrated in the countries of Table 3. Nevertheless, we must deepen this analysis and understand the impact of each country, which was done through the exam of the number of citations of each country, as Table 4 demonstrates.

Table 4
Ranking of the most cited countries, considering the origin of the articles

Position	Country	Number of citation
1st	United States	127
2nd	India	55
3rd	United Kingdom	37
4th	South Korea	31
5th	Switzerland	29

United States and India lead both the list of publications and citations, considered the protagonists in brand personality research. It is important to notice the United States had a production 59% superior to India, highlighting the North American scientific production as a

reference for other developments. Although South Korea and Switzerland do not appear in the list of the countries that published the most, they demonstrate a considerable impact in brand personality investigations, as pointed out by Table 4. The results from Table 3 and 4 also put light on the role of brand personality concept in contributing to the scientific research in emerging countries, conforming a source of competitive advantage to the companies and brands located in such regions as well.

Our next step was to analyze **the top five articles** from the analyzed period, which was possible by identifying the most cited articles.

Table 5
Top five articles about brand personality

Position	Article	Reference	Citations
1st	Satisfaction and Loyalty From Shopping Mall Experience and Brand Personality	Kim, Lee and Suh (2015)	19
	Service Brand Relationship Quality: Hot or Cold?	Nyffenegger, Krohmer, Hoyer and Malaer (2015)	19
2nd	Celebrity endorsement: How celebrity–brand–user personality congruence affects brand attitude and purchase intention	Pradhan, Duraipandian and Sethi (2016)	17
3rd	Relationships between brand experiences, personality traits, prestige, relationship quality, and loyalty: An empirical analysis of coffeehouse brands	Choi, Ok and Hyun (2017)	10
	The impact of brand gender on brand equity: Findings from a large-scale cross-cultural study in ten countries	Lieven and Hildebrand (2016)	10

When we broaden the isolated analysis of these articles and explore them as a set of brand personality knowledge, it is possible to identify a few connections can, which enables reflections about the future directions for brand personality studies.

The first connection regards the role of brand personality in customer experience. Kim et al. (2015) explore this relationship in the context of shopping malls; meanwhile Choi et al. (2017) address the impact of brand personality in the experiences customers have with coffee brands. Consumption experience is a matter of major interest in marketing literature (Scussel, 2018). By examining the results from Kim et al. (2015) and Choi et al. (2017), it is possible to consider brand personality an antecedent of customer experience, following the consumption experience process proposed in Scussel and Petroll (2018). According to them, the factors generating consumer experience indirectly affect consumer behavioral intentions, brand-related outcomes, managerial outcomes and relational outcomes. Based on this, brand personality has a strong connection with customer preference and firm performance.

The work of Choi et al. (2017) also finds resonance in the article from Nyffenegger et al. (2015), since both are dedicated to explore brand personality in the service industry. In their investigation, Nyffenegger et al. (2015) show brand personality as an important factor used by companies to create associations in consumers' minds, establishing connections that lead to long-term relationships. In this sense, brand personality plays the role of a conductor of sustainable competitive advantage. Similarly, we also see a connection between brand personality and service quality, as demonstrated by Choi et al. (2017).

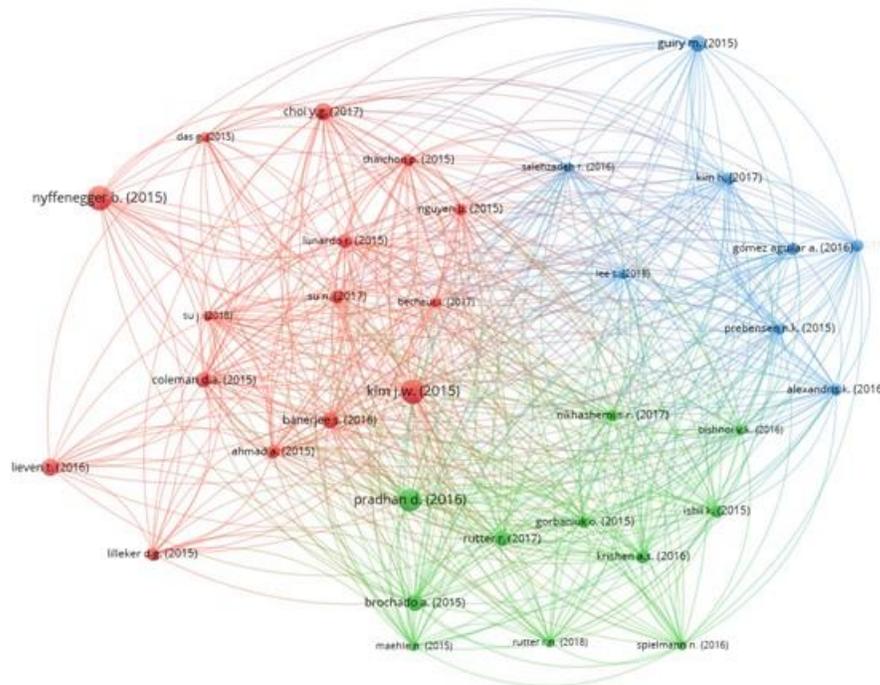


Figure 4. Brand personality knowledge network

The findings reveal three scientific production networks, enabling us to identify the common characteristics of the article in each network, which we will denominate cluster. We have analyzed the most cited articles in each cluster.

The **red cluster** is the most representative network, covering studies about the impact of brand personality in consumer-related outcomes – customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, customer preference, customer purchase intention, customer experience, customer personality and customer self-image.

Kim et al. (2015) explore the link between brand personality and customer experiences – sensorial, emotional, perceptive and behavioral. According to them, the set of these of experiences are influenced by brand personality and, together, these concepts promote customer satisfaction and loyalty. As proposed by Su and Reynolds (2017), brand personality has a leading role in customer decision, especially concerning functional attributes, when credibility dimensions arises as the most relevant factor in brand choice.

The work of Lunardo, Gergaud and Livat (2015) resort to endorsement celebrities, exploring their personalities to emphasize brand personality and, consequently, attract audience attention and guide customer preference. Their results prove that all brand personality dimensions have a positive effect of advertisement appeal. For its turn, Banerjee (2016) connects brand personality and corporate personality, defending this combination is a powerful factor influencing customer preference.

The **blue cluster** deserves our attention since it not only represents a group of interest: it aggregates the studies in a specific economic sector, the tourism and hospitality industry. In this context, Kim and Stepchenkova (2017) and Guiry and Vequist (2015) studied destination brand personality through tourists' narratives with the purpose if developing strategies to attract tourists and increase return chances. Similarly, Gómez-Aguilar, Yagüe-Guillén and Villaseñor-Roman (2016) concluded that brand personality is a useful variable to understand customer perceptions about identity and image, and the perceived personality traits is the basis of customer positive

evaluation of a tourist destination. Lastly, the paper written by Lee and Kim (2018) investigated the role of brand personality in customer engagement, evaluating as well the differences between genders in brand personality perception. As a result, men and women show different levels of perception, and women tend to present a higher engagement hotel brands when perceiving their personality traits.

Finally, the **green cluster** addresses the works about brand personality perception, most of them related to brand image and brand identity. In other words, this cluster comprises articles emphasizing brand-related outcomes. Under this perspective, we found studies on global brands, advertisement outcomes, relational outcomes and political marketing. Ishii and Watanabe (2015) investigated the association between national brand personality and national products evaluation in seven countries and different product categories. As for the main results, competence is a dimension that affects positively all product categories, revealing itself as a global personality trait affecting customer preference.

Maehle and Supphellen (2015) studied advertisement agencies' efforts in strengthening positive traits and minimizing negative traits of a brand and the impact of such action in advertisement effectiveness. Brand personality was also identified as an important customer relationship perception antecedent, which means a predisposition of engaging in long term relationships with brands when they are perceived as having personality traits (Delmondez et al., 2017; Demo et al., 2018; Scussel & Demo, 2019).

Brand personality has been used as an important element in political marketing. According to Rutter, Hanretty and Lettice (2018), voter perceive political parties as brands, owners of personality traits, perception with high influence in voters' decisions. As observed by Gorbaniuk, Kusak, Kogut and Kustos (2015), brand personality is an element in politics' image, with resonance in the image the population has on political parties. For their turn, Gorbaniuk et al. (2015) evaluated the connection between brand personality traits, politics image and voters' political preferences, confirming a positive relation. These studies are evidence of the potential of brand personality in shaping brand image and brand identity.

Discussion and Research Agenda Proposition

The review of the 289 articles analyzed in this article and the data extracted from them have enables us to draw and overview of the latest developments in brand personality research, which allows us to reflect about the future trends on this content for the near future.

In general, the analysis of the clusters reveal three major discussions in brand personality literature: brand personality in tourism and hospitality industry; brand personality and consumer-related outcomes; and brand personality and brand-related outcomes. These three perspectives converge in a unique purpose: creating associations in consumers' minds in order to guide preference, close negotiations and develop lucrative relationships with them, which will increase the competitive advantage of brands, companies and destinations.

Since brand personality construct should be evaluated in a cultural context, we recommend researchers to adapt and validate the brand personality scales to specific situations, such as tourism and hospitality industries (brand personality of cities, countries, destinations, hotels and different kinds of accommodation, for example) and political parties and candidates. We have also identified a research gap concerning brand personality in the public sector. As the green cluster includes works about political parties and national personality, we believe this could be a starting point to develop brand personality knowledge in public sector.

Additionally, the perspective of brand personality in service context must be addressed: do services have personality? Can customers perceive services as having personality traits? Does it

influence service preference? Moreover, how do we measure service brand personality? We strongly advise scholars to engage in this perspective, not only creating measurement instruments, but also developing theoretical and exploratory works that provide conceptual and deeper understanding of the phenomena.

Regarding methodological issues, we have observed a prevalence of quantitative methods. In this sense, the use of exploratory and qualitative methods are useful to broaden the knowledge on brand personality. Likewise, we suggest the adoption of new methods, especially netnography, to investigate the formation of brand personality in the online context: do brands profiles in social media contribute to customer perception of its personality? Do brand and customer communication in social media enhance the perception of brand personality traits? In addition, multi-method studies, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques, including methodological triangulation, are welcome since they provide a greater comprehension of the phenomenon.

As limitations of this article, our sample was restricted to only two databases and the last five years of academic production, which means the theme production has not been exhausted. Moreover, we have not included works from conferences, dissertations and thesis. Although our data allowed us to achieve the objective of this paper, we recommend periodic updates of this systematic review in order to track the theoretical and empirical advances in brand personality literature.

Conclusion

The intention of this article was to perform a systematic review in order to draw an overview of brand personality state of the art and propose a research agenda. To do so, we have analyzed 289 articles published from 2015 to 2019, a productive year that reveals a mature body of knowledge with a growth perspective. Studies in brand personality are comprised in three major blocks: brand personality in tourism and hospitality industry; brand personality and consumer-related outcomes; and brand personality and brand-related outcomes, confirming the adherence of brand personality concepts to customer preference and organizational results.

Regarding our contributions, we present a review of the latest topics and future trend for brand personality construct, shedding light on what has been done, what is new and the next best thing. This summary works as a guide for scholars, professors, conference chairs and research groups to develop their works based on literature gaps. Besides, the information from this article can be used by marketing practioners, brand managers and advertisers to understand the concept of brand personality, its application and possibilities.

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