

Brands go psycho – how to have fun with personality.

People like to ascribe human traits to inanimate objects. Anthropomorphism suggests that we form these 'human' relationships as an inherited coping mechanism, so that we can make sense of the world. I'm not sure how comforting it is to know that the hurricane that has just ripped off your roof, is called Hilda, but better the devil you know ...

I think naming things in general is the remnant of a prehistoric friend-or-foe reflex. When I used to work as a guide on the Orange River, I was driven mad by "Plis Seed, vot is se name of zat bird?" And when I told them it was the Grey Loerie, they would be visibly relieved, as if I had just removed a dangerous obstacle, instead of just having given them the wrong name. And it was the same with non-primates, like stars.

And trees!

And rocks!!

Brand Personality refers to the set of human characteristics we associate with a brand. A common way of determining this is to rely on the metaphor: "If the brand was a person, what would he/she be like?" We then list and group the traits to describe the brand as, for example: Caring, approachable and trustworthy. But there's a lot more we can do.

The Big Five Model is a popular human personality construct, where all personality traits are represented in five dimensions:

1. Openness to experience
2. Conscientiousness
3. Extraversion
4. Agreeableness
5. Neuroticism

The above has been adapted for brands by Jennifer Aaker, who proposes the following five personality dimensions into which all brand personality traits can be clustered:

1. Sincerity
2. Excitement
3. Competence
4. Sophistication
5. Ruggedness

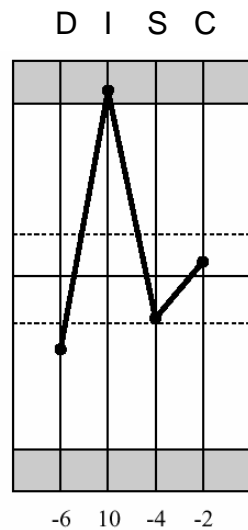
Despite the criticism of the validity of studies in brand personality, (i.e. it's not the science we want it to be – personality varies by situation and alcohol content), it remains a practical tool which strategists can use to gain insights into the relationship between the consumer and the brand. We can get a much richer

description (and perhaps discover an insight or two), when we personify the brand.

There are a wide range of psychometric tests on the net – just replace ‘you’ with ‘the brand’ and some amazing stuff comes to light. The value of these tests lies, not so much in the data generated, but in the depth of discussion it stimulates, or the postulates that emerge.

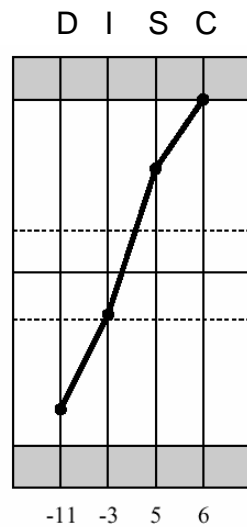
For example, let’s say I asked my girlfriend to do a DISC profile on Lux and Dove (where she imagined she was the soap). I don’t mind the extra price of Dove, but it would be interesting to see why she buys it.

Lux Profile



DISC
D – Dominance
I – Influence
S – Steadiness
C - Compliance

Dove Profile



What's interesting is that she saw Lux having a high 'I' and Dove a low 'I'. So, no matter how much advertising Lux did, she would not be swayed (she already saw Lux as very Influential). Dove has a much higher 'S' and 'C', which means that she probably sees the quality of the product as 'Steady' (unwavering) and 'Compliant' (no short cuts – high purity).

So, it could be argued that, if Lux could convince her of the added value in their (slightly) positive 'C' by, for example, including the purest glycerol found in nature, there might be a window for purchase, leaving me more money for beer.

There are many more applications of psychometry to branding – you can find gazillions (grouped for your convenience on Yahoo) [here](#). Go psycho - have fun!

About the author

Sid Peimer is the mayor of www.stratplanning.com, a small seaside consultancy. He is also the chief of police, postman, fireman, baker and refuse engineer. His psychometric profile is disturbing. However, if you ever need strategic help, there is no better man to call.