

## City Brand Personality: The Application of Brand Personality Concept in the City Context

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— *Review of* —  
**Integrative  
Business &  
Economics**  
— *Research* —

### ABSTRACT

The concept of brand personality proposed by Aaker (1997) consists of five dimensions: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. This concept was drawn from the development of products in general so as to describe personality of brands, and has been widely applied to research on a range of products available in the market. However, relatively few studies have utilized this concept in the context of an area, a country or a city. The present study thus aims to investigate how the brand personality concept can be applied in the city context. In so doing, this research has employed a quantitative method with a factor analysis in order to identify personality traits and dimensions of a city in relation to the brand personality concept. Results reveal that city brand personality is comprised of 37 traits in five dimensions whereas brand personality consists of 42 traits in five dimensions. Therefore, this study has exhibited a significant finding that the brand personality concept can explain a city as a product, which serves as a useful guideline for further developing a scale of city personality

Keywords: Brand Personality, Personality traits, City Brand Personality, City Brand Personality Scales

### INTRODUCTION

Brand personality is a concept which has attracted attention from such marketers as Plummer (2000) who, by conducting a study at the topic of *How personality makes a difference?*, explained that if a product has personality that a consumer wants to have or have already had, consumption will occur. In addition, consumers have feelings toward brands through brand characteristics e.g. modern, backward, or innovative. This concept sees products as human beings, which is later known as brand personality and has been utilized in further research on personality of brands. Most of these studies drew on personality scales, which were designed to measure human personality and also used for measuring product personality. Examples of these scales included those developed by McCrae, Costa, and Martin (2005) or Goldberg (1992), which consist of such personality as agreeableness, extravagant, intellectual, competence, emotional stability. However, the application of scales designed for human personality to measuring product personality cast doubts on how appropriate it is to apply such scales

to non-living things. In response to this problem, Aaker (1997), developed a brand personality scale consisting of sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness, which is of generalizability (Austin, Siguaw, & Mattila, 2003), accuracy, and high confidence, even when applied to a variety of products (Aaker, Benet-Martinez, & Garolera, 2001). This scale has thus gained high reliability and popularity in measuring brand personality. As a consequence, research on brand personality has gained interest and subsequently a number of brand personality study from several perspectives have been conducted (Ramaseshan & Tsao, 2007).

Most research on this concept tends to focus on relationships between brand personality and several other factors e.g. relationship between brand personality and brand loyalty (Farhat & Khan, 2011; Lin, 2010), and on building loyalty to brand (J. W. Kim, Lee, & Suh, 2015), relationship between brand personality and human personality (Balaji & Raghavan, 2011; J. W. Lee, 2009), and relationship between brand personality and consumer personality (Ekhlassi, Nezhad, Far, & Rahmani, 2012). Apart from these, such other topics as brand personality that links to consumer attachment to brand (Goldsmith & Goldsmith, 2012), relationship between brand personality and image of product user (Parker, 2009), relationship between brand personality and acknowledgement of product quality (Ramaseshan & Tsao, 2007), and impacts on brand extension on brand personality (Diamantopoulos, Smith, & Grime, 2005) have also been explored.

Additionally, studies on impact of brand personality on other factors have been identified. For example, impacts of brand personality on confidence, attachment, and determination (Louis & Lombart, 2010), on connection with brand (Freling & Forbes, 2005), on value of brand (C. K. Kim, Han, & Park, 2001; Valette-Florence, Guizani, & Merunka, 2011), and on consumer satisfaction. As for issues of building personality for products, there have been studies on communicating brand personality through a number of channels e.g. direct and indirect sales, personality communication through product uses, connecting personality with a variety of things, and designing brand personality through market position of products (Okazaki, 2006). Moreover, the brand personality concept has been utilized to study several other kinds of products such as brand name products (Klink & Athaide, 2012), brands of retail stores (Das, Datta, & Guin, 2012), and expansion of the brand personality concept to restaurant sector, as evidenced in research carried out by D. Kim, Magnini, & Singal (2011) which examined impacts of brand personality on customer satisfaction, loyalty to restaurants, and word-of-mouth spread by customers.

It is noteworthy that while numerous studies on brand personality have been conducted from diverse perspectives, relatively fewer of them have been found to apply brand personality to places, cities, or countries, even though brand personality of places is of vital importance for market positioning of a city in a fierce rivalry (Hosany, Ekinci, & Uysal, 2006). In the meanwhile, many cities place importance on tourism promotion through mottos, logos, and symbols. This reflects attempts to promote cities through a number of channels; thereby cities being similar to products that require marketing support. With a highly competitive environment, cities, especially those of tourist destinations need to seek new strategies for continuing promotion and the brand

personality concept is thus appropriate to perform this role. However, research on city personality has just recently gained interest so there have been relatively fewer studies and so far no research have introduced such a widely-used scale as the one developed by Aaker (1997). The current study thus aims to demonstrate that a city can have personality as a product which makes for a guideline in building a systematic scale in the future.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF BRAND PERSONALITY**

Plummer (2000) explained that such personality traits of brand as modern, backward, or innovative are called brand personality and have a role to play in sending customers a message that a brand is produced especially for them by communicating personality in many forms in order to make customers interpret, link thoughts, feelings, and brand image from anything they learn from products. Brand personality has product characteristics acknowledged by customers and provides abstract meaning that corresponds with the identity of customers (H. R. Kim, Lee, & Ulgado, 2005).

Sung and Tinkham (2005) defined brand personality as providing symbolic meaning of brands while Aaker (1997) explained brand personality as a set of human characteristics that relates to brands. For example, Absolut Vodka is a person at the age of 25 with a cool and modern personality. Such personality can be found in both human beings and products. In other words, the concept of brand personality compares a brand to human beings (Solomon, 2007). In addition, brand personality also consists of personality that businesses want people to think and feel about their brands, including customers' personality which displays behavior, thoughts and feelings. That is, brand personality contains traits as indicated by what businesses want to communicate, i.e. the designed image of brand. Also, the structure of brand personality is acknowledged by customers (Plummer, 2000). In the meantime, Azoulay and Kapferer (2003) pointed out that brand personality should have more accurate meaning than it did the past and thus defined this term as the uniqueness of human personality traits that are related to and specified in brand personality.

Based on the study conducted by Aaker (1997), brand personality consists of five dimensions: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness. These dimensions are comprehensive as they are derived from a variety of sources: psychology scale, and marketing scale from both theoretical and practical perspective. In addition, they were also derived from qualitative work. Finally, a quantitative analysis was conducted and then 42 traits remained. Besides, all five dimensions are of high reliability level at above 0.90.

## **CITY BRAND PERSONALITY**

At the early years of popularity of the brand personality concept, researchers and marketers often applied this concept to products in general. However, this concept has been later applied in other contexts as in research conducted by Smith (2009). Rutter, Hanretty, and Lettice (2015) explained that the brand personality concept can be applied to politics. Braunstein and Ross (2010) utilized the brand personality concept

to sports. Watkins and Gonzenbach (2013) employed the brand personality concept to the university context. Even though university is an education institution, it is designated as a product in response to the needs of students as consumers. In the meanwhile, the research by Austin et al. (2003), and Murphy, Benckendorff, and Moscardo (2007) confirmed that brand personality can be applied to other contexts than general products. Moreover, a place is another context found in brand personality such as the work of Guiry and Vequist (2015) which applied brand personality to tourism for medical services in Korea.

Hosany et al. (2006) and Kaplan, Yurt, Guneri, and Kurtulus (2010) stated that brand personality of places refers to a set of particular human personality traits relevant to places whereas Aaker (1997) defined brand personality as a set of particular human personality traits relevant to brands. It is noteworthy that these two definitions are very similar with the only difference in the study context of place or brand. Research by Hosany et al. (2006) revealed that brand personality of places contains three dimensions: sincerity, excitement, and conviviality, with twelve personality traits. Likewise, the work by Emirza and Seri (2013) reported fifteen personality traits of city, which is fewer than that of brand, with no division of dimensions of city personality. Sahin and Baloglu (2011), found four dimensions of city personality: competence and modernity, originality and vibrancy, down to earth, and Western, all of which are made up of 18 traits. Similarly, Ahmad, Abdullah, Tamam, and Bolong (2013), based on their study results, revealed four dimensions with different names: peacefulness, malignancy, sophistication, and uniqueness, all of which are made up of 17 traits. It is interesting to note that their research findings exhibited that city brand personality is associated with city image, which suggests that cities share some similarities with brands. Therefore, studying a city as a brand can offer an interesting point of research. (Anholt, 2010)

A review of previous research on the application of brand personality in the city context indicates differences in the number of personality dimensions: more or less than, and equal to 5 Aaker's brand personality dimensions. The research group with higher number than that of Aaker's brand personality includes the work of Kaplan et al. (2010) which examined brand personality in the context of places using such city as Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir in Turkey. Their findings revealed six dimensions of brand personality of cities: excitement, malignancy, peacefulness, competence, conservatism, and ruggedness, all of which are made up of 87 traits. Personality traits beyond those of brand personality were also found, notably conservatism – a factor commonly reported by several studies that having an impact on brand personality when focusing on general products (Austin et al., 2003; Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003; Tugulea, Bobalca, & Soponaru, 2013). A negative personality dimension, malignancy, was also identified, which may cause a number of traits to be higher than. Their results confirmed that city brand personality is more diverse than brand personality of general products. In the meantime, there are other studies which revealed over five personality dimensions as well. For example, the work of H. b. Kim and Lee (2015) which identified six dimensions of city brand personality: three of which are the same as brand personality, i.e. excitement, sincerity, and sophistication, and the other three were different, i.e. dynamic, specific, and stable.

There are also studies which presented the same number of dimensions of city brand personality as that of brand personality. For example, Vaidya, Gandhi, and Aagja (2009) reported the number of personality dimensions of their research site (city) at five, with exactly the same traits as brand personality in all dimensions. However, their studies did not employ a factor analysis. Besides, the work of H. J. Lee and Suh (2011) identified five dimensions of brand personality of the city being studied, but under different names: sincerity, excitement, technology, high-class, and femininity.

In conclusion, dimensions of brand personality of cities drawn from the literature review differ in both number and content. One possible explanation may be the fact that the research samples were from different groups and thus differently acknowledged personality dimensions of the same city (Sahin & Baloglu, 2011). Despite different results of city personality dimensions being reported in each study, such results confirmed that the brand personality concept can be used in the city context, which is not a traditional product though (Hosany et al., 2006). Therefore, the current research intends to utilize the brand personality concept to a city, even though it is not a tangible or traditional product.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The present research was quantitative using the brand personality scale developed by Aaker (1997) which has five dimensions of 42 traits to study brand personality traits of a city. The closed-end questionnaire containing questions about 42 personality traits was administered with a sample of 361. The respondents consisted of Thai people between 18 and 59 years of age, with the average of 23.56; 27.4% of them were men and 72.6% women.

Loei was the Thai city chosen for this research. It is renowned for its cultural and natural sites. Notably, an annual festival called Phi Ta Khon is particularly spectacular in this region (Editor, 2015), which enables the questionnaire respondents evaluate brand personality of this city. In addition, Aiken, Campbell, and Koch (2009) explained that customers perceive personality traits toward an area through culture and history and Loei is outstanding in its unique culture. This research thus selected this city as an example for research on city brand personality.

The respondents were asked with the following main question: if Loei is a human being, at what extent do you think these 42 personality traits describe the city? The respondents then rated five choices from number 5: the best description and number 1: the least description. The questionnaire asked the respondents to rate for each of the total 42 personality traits. Data were analyzed with principal component analysis (PCA) and Varimax rotation so that a set of personality traits with relevance were reached.

## **RESULTS**

Results reveal that among the traits of city brand personality, friendly was rated the highest at average of 4.03, followed by unique at 3.90, while family-oriented and smooth shared the same average of 3.88. For standard deviation, the value was found not over 1 to 40 out of 42, meaning that the research respondents acknowledge

personality at approximately the same. As for the other two traits: small-town and Western were rated higher than 1, i.e. 1.090 and 1.017 respectively.

Given Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO), the value was found 0.935, which was over 0.9 and near 1, displaying a value highly appropriate for factor analysis (Frie, 2015). As for testing Barlett's test of sphericity, Sig. = 0.000 meant that traits of city brand personality are relevant. The data for both statistics indicated that data was proper for factor analysis. Results of the analysis after Varimax rotation revealed that all five dimensions of city brand personality were of reliability level of 0.7, passing the acceptance criteria (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011); all of which can explain the variance at the total of 50.266%.

This study reports the values of factor loading from Varimax rotation which was over 0.4, revealing an appropriate value according to the criteria set by Nunnally (1978). Results identified 41 traits of city brand personality out of 42 traits of brand personality. The first dimension (sincerity) consists of fourteen traits: down-to-earth, family-oriented, honest, sincere, real, wholesome, original, cheerful, sentimental, friendly, imaginative, unique, independent, and smooth. The second (competence) contains nine traits: reliable, hard working, secure, intelligent, technical, corporate, successful, leader, and confident. The third dimension (excitement) contains of eight traits: daring, trendy, exciting, spirited, cool, young, up-to-date, and contemporary. The fourth dimension (ruggedness) contains five traits: outdoorsy, masculine, Western, tough, and rugged. Lastly, the fifth dimension (sophistication) contains five traits: upper class, glamorous, good looking, charming, and feminine as displayed in Table 1.

**Table 1 Detailed Dimensions of City Brand Personality**

Personality traits	Varimax Method				
	First dimension : sincerity	Second dimension: competence	Third dimension: excitement	Fourth dimension: ruggedness	Fifth dimension: sophistication
1.Down-to-earth	.570				
2.family-oriented	.580				
3.small-town					
4.honest	.701				
5.sincere	.745				
6.real	.662				
7.wholesome	.653				
8.original	.541				
9.cheerful	.553				
10.sentimental	.455				
11.friendly	.555				

12.daring			.491		
13.trendy			.717		
14.exciting			.693		
15.sprited			.467		
16.cool			.644		
17.young			.643		
18.imaginative	.404				
19.unique	.538				
20.unconventional			.572		

**Table 1 Detailed Dimensions of City Brand Personality (Continued)**

Personality traits	Varimax Method				
	First dimension : sincerity	Second dimension: competence	Third dimension: excitement	Fourth dimension: ruggedness	Fifth dimension: sophistication
21.independent	.567				
22.contemporary			.409		
23.reliable		.495			
24.hard working		.646			
25.secure		.673			
26.intelligent		.559			
27.technical		.569			
28.corporate		.578			
29.successful		.622			
30.leader		.587			
31.confident		.465			
32.upper class					.524
33.Glamorous					.553
34.Good looking					.722
35.Charming					.614
36.Feminine					.532
37.Smooth	.422				
38.Outdoorsy				.446	
39.Masculine				.503	

40. Western				.589	
41. Tough				.825	
42. Rugged				.721	
<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	0.8632	0.8797	0.8363	0.7608	0.8015

## DISCUSSION

Drawing this research has investigated brand personality in the city context, on the brand personality concept as framework. Results reveal dimensions of city brand personality that are similar to those of brand personality usually applied to products in general. That is, 37 personality traits have been found consistent; another four traits found in different dimensions; and the other trait not found in any dimension. The five dimensions of city brand personality indicated in this research have exactly the same meanings as those of brand personality: sincerity, competence, excitement, ruggedness, and sophistication. In detail, in sincerity dimension, ten traits have been found exactly matches of eleven traits of brand personality, without Western trait. In the second dimension – competence – all traits have been found exactly matches of all traits of brand personality. The next dimension – excitement – eight traits have been found exactly matches of eleven traits of brand personality, with three traits: imaginative, unique, and independent moved to the first dimension (sincerity). The fourth dimension, ruggedness – all five traits have been found exactly matches of all traits of brand personality. Finally, the fifth dimension – sophistication – five out of six traits have been found, with smooth trait moved to the sincerity dimension.

## RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

This study demonstrates that dimensions of brand personality are also found in all five dimensions of city brand personality. The traits of city brand personality, however, are different from those of traditional brand personality in some dimensions: such differences include four traits found in different dimensions while the other trait never found in any dimension. This pinpoints issues of difference between brand personality which focuses on city and the one on general products, yet such differences found in personality traits are only five in total. This suggests that brand personality can be applied to city as a product. In addition, research on brand personality was often conducted with products in the US, but the current research on city brand personality is carried out in Thailand. Culture thus could to be one of the factors that may cause differences in identification of brand personality (Aaker et al., 2001; Murase & Bojanic, 2004; Sung & Tinkham, 2005; Supphellen & Grønhaug, 2003). There are also differences in the contexts of products and cities. Although cities can be compared to products, cities and general products are different by nature, which affects personality of brand differ from that of city. (Beldona & Wysong, 2007; Hosany et al., 2006)

Interestingly, while research conducted by Davies, Chun, da Silva, and Roper (2001) reported that ruggedness dimension was low in both reliability and validity, the present research results present the opposite: the ruggedness dimension was high in both, with the reliability of 0.7608, passing the criteria specifying the lowest acceptance level of 0.7 (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). This means that the reliability ruggedness dimension is acceptable. Although ruggedness dimension of this study was still reliable, it is noticeable that the reliability of this dimension was still lower than those of the other dimensions, which had value higher than 0.8.



## MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

City brand personality is meaningful for marketing communication in many aspects. Marketing a city is not for selling the place, but to present a product the way customers expect (Zenker, 2011). A number of benefits can be gained from the use of city brand personality. Firstly, communicating city brand personality to tourists so that they can think about a particular city. As there are many cities in each country, communication of the overall country personality seems insufficient to promote tourism for a single city. City brand personality can contribute to market positioning of each city so that tourists can decide to travel (Hosany et al., 2006). It also assists marketing research in segmenting potential tourists on the same basis as brand personality (H. J. Lee & Suh, 2011). Furthermore, city brand personality can support investment and attract people to move in. Repeat travels may occur as a result of tourists being able to remember the outstanding personality of a city (H. b. Kim & Lee, 2015). All the factors suggest that city is like a product with demand for consumption.

Besides, the clear brand personality of a city is essential for agencies concerned in both public and private sectors when creating city image. If image of a city is unknown among its residents, this may affect the communication of brand personality of that city (Zenker, 2011). People who benefit from the city where they reside should take part in conveying brand personality of that city as brand personality can be acknowledged through anything relevant to a particular product, both directly and indirectly (Plummer, 2000). Additionally, city brand personality is also useful for business sector in terms of product manufacturing or business operation. A city with outstanding personality tends to support producers who rely on brand personality in creating image which corresponds with their product. When a products has a clear personality, this will enhance the competitiveness of that product (Shu, King, & Chang, 2015). That is, if the city of business operation is of good brand personality, it may have a positive impact on the product. On the contrary, negative city brand personality may adversely affect the product. Nonetheless, negative personality does not appear in the brand personality concept. In this regard, Aaker (1997) explained that sellers present solely positive brand personality while Assarut (2008) argued that negative personality also impacts buying decision. The development of city brand personality should therefore take negative personality into account.

Furthermore, if the city of business operation has brand personality, which is not a match of the personality business want to attain, that business may have problem with communicating brand personality to consumers. Besides, the concept of city brand personality is another issue of interest, apart from image of country of origin, for business. Image of country of origin presents an issue which is attended by business because their product will be reliable if produced in the right country (Arora, McIntyre, Wu, & Arora, 2015). City brand personality is a concept that can convey meaning to consumers through perceiving that if a city is a person, what kind of personality that person may have, which is a concept producers can make use. That is, if city brand concept is irrelevant to the product, producers may decide to move their business bases to another city, which is far easier than moving to another country. Hence, city brand personality is well worth considering.

In addition, city brand personality is of importance for international business. That is, previously overseas consumers when finding an imported product might know which country that product was made via a label like "Made in ..." At the same time, city personality seems crucial for buying decision. A clear example can be seen from buying wine products because they are products people pay great attention to where or which city they were made (Bernabeu, Brugarolas, Martínez-Carrasco, & Díaz, 2008). Further, country brand personality is a factor affecting investment (Y. K. Kim, Shim, & Dinnie, 2013). As in the case of Laos, most of Thai investors found difficulties in their investment. One of the reasons is that Thailand may lack reliability from the Laos perspective due to unstable politics for the past decade (Jaruensuk,

2015). Hence, if it is very difficult to change or adjust the country image, promoting positive brand personality to Thai cities, especially those bordering neighboring countries can offer an interesting alternative so as to reduce the country's negative personality. Further, it is far more difficult to change the country's personality compared to city brand personality because a city is smaller in size and thus easier to control information. City brand personality may provide positive impacts on investors who can enjoy better benefits from establishing an investment office in neighboring countries.

Apart from the mentioned benefits of brand personality in terms of tourism and business, city brand personality could be a factor that reduces the emigration of local people or relocation. If a city has positive brand personality, this may make people happy with living in that city. A city with city brand personality that relates or responds to what people in other areas desire might draw people to move in. and that will affect to expansion of the city and its local economy subsequently.

Each dimension of brand personality can be utilized for the benefits of a city. Research reported that excitement dimension of personality has a good impact on investment, employment, settlements and attractiveness (Vaidya et al., 2009), therefore, being useful for the development and expansion of a city. Moreover, sincerity and excitement dimensions are associated with image of places so these two can support tourism (Hosany et al., 2006). The work of Guiry and Vequist (2015) indicated that sincerity and competence dimensions may affect intention to travel. Further, the study by H. b. Kim and Lee (2015), based on their study on city brand personality with a sample of tourists, identified excitement, sincerity and sophistication dimensions of personality as factors affecting trips made by tourists. In other words, previous research suggests that if we want to build brand personality for a city, we should focus on sincerity or excitement dimensions of personality to convey the desired city brand personality to target groups.

## **RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.**

This study has limitations in explaining city brand personality because it chose only a single city as research site. It is thus recommended that future research should have a sufficiently diverse number of cities. In addition, this study has drawn on the brand personality scale based on 37 brands by Aaker (1997). Developing the present scale without qualitative research may cause some drawbacks: some personality traits of a city actually has may be missed; and the research respondents might acknowledge city brand personality differently from that of other general products. In other words, a city may have personality that general products lack or it may lack personality that most products have. The present research has employed traits from brand personality so this may limit the actual brand personality of a city. Hence, qualitative research should be conducted in combination with quantitative one in order to obtain a comprehensive set of personality traits.

Besides, the development of a city brand personality scale offers an issue of interest as the number of studies on city brand personality is relatively small when compared to those on general products. Developing a systematic scale for city brand personality and its wide application has not occurred yet as city brand personality is a relatively new issue. At the same time, developing a scale for city brand personality with a cultural factor included is worth considering as cities are culturally diverse. Many studies also consistently reported differences of brand personality when applying to different cultural contexts. Future research is thus recommended to include a cultural factor in developing a scale for city brand personality.

Another argument derived from the brand personality concept is a lack of negative personality traits. Our literature review shows that some of the research reports negative personality traits of city (Kaplan et al., 2010). It is possible that a city may contain both positive and negative personality traits similar to those of country personality (Polyorat & Sripongpun, 2015; Thongthip & Polyorat, 2015). Future research should therefore consider a well-rounded personality because negative factors could cause a bias when answering research questions (Aaker, 1997).

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors are thankful to the Department of Marketing, Faculty of Business Administration and Accountancy, Khon Kaen University, for the supporting of facilities.

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