Five Dimensions of Sport Brand Personality

Chanho Kang, University of North Alabama
Ye Hoon Lee, University of North Alabama
Gregg Bennett (Advisor), Texas A&M University
Jon Welty Peachey (Advisor), University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Whilst brand personality has become an increasingly important concept in the sport management literature (Braunstein & Ross, 2010; Lee & Cho, 2012; Tsiotsou, 2012), there is a lack of a conceptual and methodological foundation that might resolve the critiques. These critiques revolve around inclusion of other characteristics beyond personality in scale items, the non-generalizability of the scale, and non-replicability of the sport brand personality factor structure. Two possible conceptual and methodological reasons for this lack of consensus are identified in the present study. The current study opines that the lack of consensus between dimensions of the two constructs (i.e., human personality, brand personality) may be due to Aaker's (1997) definition. Aaker’s broad definition could cause convergent or discriminant validity problems and provide brand managers or brand personality researchers with ambiguous information on brand personality. Therefore, this study adopted the Azoulay and Kapferer's (2003) brand personality definition: “the unique set of human personality traits both applicable and relevant to brands” (p. 153). A second reason for non-resemblance between human personality dimensions and those of brand personality may result from the lack of a theoretical foundation in sport brand personality studies. Since a brand, like a person, can generally be described with human personality traits, brand personality studies might follow a lexical approach which suggests that personality differences tend to become encoded in human personality traits. Although the lexical approach has been generally accepted as providing a theoretical basis for obtaining a set of representative personality traits when developing the major personality dimensions, there is a lack of application of the lexical approach to identify a variety of personality traits for finding sport brand personality dimensions. Both the Big Five and HEXACO scales are the result of factor analysis based on the lexical approach. Previous brand personality studies were built upon the Big Five structure. Given the important role of the Big Five in brand personality, the HEXACO model needs to be critically examined. Based on the lexical approach and its application to identifying a brand personality structure in sport, this study proposes that brand personality dimensions are similar to the Big-Five or HEXACO structure. Therefore, the first purpose of this study is to elaborate upon existing critiques and return to the fundamental brand personality concept by reexamining personality theory and the sport brand personality literature. Based on a conceptualization of sport brand personality, the second purpose is to develop an instrument for measuring brand personality in sport based on the restricted definition that excludes non-human personality traits.

In the first step of generating an initial set of brand personality items, a set of 360 brand personality items including both non-personality traits and human personality traits were identified from previous sport brand personality studies. According to the lexical approach, all non-human personality traits, such as temporary states, physical states, or social evaluation terms were excluded from the initial set of brand personality items. In the second step, to reduce the initial pool of 105 human personality traits to a more manageable number (N=36), this study made use of an expert panel consisting of three sport management faculty members and one educational psychology scholar who assessed the traits. For the purpose of this study, a sport brand × subject structure was utilized to find major sport brand personality dimensions. As a representative brand in sport, the National Football League (NFL) was chosen. Although brand personality research has utilized well-known brands for scale development, if consumers do not have any close relationship with the brand or diverse brand experience, they may ambiguously describe brand personality variation in terms of the brands. Concerning the likeability, familiarity, and media exposure, the college students ranked football, the NFL, and the Super Bowl at the highest index scores for the types of sport, sport leagues, and single events respectively (Lee & Cho, 2012). In order for respondents to describe as many personality dimensions as possible in detail, the brand should be familiar, relevant, and meaningful to the subjects. The NFL fulfills these criteria.
Data were collected from sport and kinesiology major students at a large, Southwestern university in the U.S. It is appropriate to assume that those major students may possess a certain level of intimate knowledge and experience of the NFL. Students are also appropriate research subjects because they are an important market segment of the NFL. Relatively homogeneous samples are desired to minimize the variance from other factors (e.g., age, culture, and income). Using SPSS version 20.0, an EFA was performed through principal axis factor analysis with Oblimin rotation in order to generate a factor structure of sport brand personality and identified five dimensions of sport brand personality (i.e., Agreeableness, Extraversion/Emotionality, Openness, Conscientiousness, and Honesty). A CFA was performed through AMOS version 20.0. The newly developed model showed an acceptable fit to the data: (c2/df ratio = 1.857; CFI = .908; RMSEA = .075), discriminant validity, and good reliability.

The findings of this research may not only provide brand personality researchers with a conceptual and methodological foundation when developing brand personality instruments but also offer sport marketers and brand managers in the sport industry several practical implications. First, defining the brand personality construct thoroughly can be an important step in the process of developing a sport brand personality instrument (Churchill, 1979). In addition, this study is the first to explore the application of the HEXACO model for identifying brand personality dimensions in sport. This study identified the Honesty factor as a sport brand personality dimension. Even though the Honesty factor has been considered one of the most desirable characteristics in organizational contexts, few brand personality studies have assessed the dimension. The issue of not identifying the Honesty factor in previous research may be explained in terms of failing to obtain an exhaustive or representative set of brand personality traits (Ashton & Lee, 2005). Based on the lexical approach, this study showed that personalities of brands are more likely to become encoded in human personality traits both relevant and applicable to sport brands. As a result, this study identified that the newly developed sport brand personality scale is similar to dimensions of human personality scales. Based on the understanding about their brands’ personality, sport brand marketers could use the information of their brands’ personality to develop marketing strategies to effectively attract sport consumers or sponsors in order to survive in the highly competitive sport industry (Tsiotsou, 2012).

In sum, this study contributes to the literature by (a) reexamining personality trait theory (i.e., lexical approach) by returning to the fundamental brand personality concept; (b) recognizing that defining the brand personality construct thoroughly can be a fundamental step in the process of developing a sport brand personality instrument; (c) developing a reliable and valid instrument that has five dimensional factors based on the restricted brand personality definition; and (d) providing crucial information for brand managers or marketers to initiate effective positioning and advertising strategies.