

## **THE FORGOTTEN BRAND PERSONALITY DIMENSION**

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Building on the importance of self-expression through brands, Aaker (1997) developed the brand personality framework to understand brand-consumer relationships. This framework has become influential across many streams of brand personality research (see Aaker, Benet-Martinez and Garolera 2001; Sung and Kim 2010; Geuen, Weijters and Wulf 2009; Grohmann 2009; Smith 2009; Lee and Back (2010); Venable et al. 2005; Freling and Forbes 2005) and is based on the big five-factor human personality model.

However, Aaker's (1997) current brand personality framework only offers a positively-framed approach to brand personality; to date, there has been neither conceptual nor empirical research which has thoroughly incorporated a dimension reflective of negative brand personality despite the fact that almost all researchers are in agreement that dimensions akin to 'Extraversion' and 'Neuroticism' need to be included in a comprehensive personality scale to accommodate consumers' expressions (Cattell 1943; Allport 1961; Popkins 1998; Waller and Zavala 1993; Borgatta 1964; Conley 1985; Hakel 1974; John 1989; Lorr and Manning 1978; McCrae and Costa 1985; Noller, Law and Comrey 1987; Norman 1963; Smith 1967). The dimension 'Extraversion' has been accommodated in the brand personality framework (Aaker 1997; Aaker et al. 2001; Smith 2009; Kaplan et al. 2010; Venable et al. 2005; Batra et al. 1993; Levy 1959; Plummer 1984; Sweeney and Brandon 2006). Yet, in a branding context there may not be a dimension that is characterized as 'Neuroticism' per se.

However, it is likely negative emotions do exist in branding. For example, a recent case has been the BP oil spillage in the Gulf of Mexico, which stimulated negative emotions among consumers.

To further illustrate, Geuens et al. (2009) developed a new measure for brand personality in an attempt to provide a more reflective measure of personality characteristics.

Table 1.0 illustrates the correspondence of human personality dimension with Aaker’s (1997) and Geuens, Weijters and Wulf’s (2009) brand personality framework.

<b>Human Personality</b>	<b>Aaker’s ( 1997) Brand Personality framework</b>	<b>Geuens et al ( 2009) Brand Personality framework</b>
Extraversion	Excitement	Simplicity
Agreeableness	Sincerity	Aggressive
Conscientiousness	Competence	Responsibility
<b>Openness to Experience</b>	-	Aggressive?
<b>Neuroticism</b>	-	-
	Sophistication	Emotionality
	Ruggedness	Simplicity

**Table 1:** Reflection of how Brand Personality frameworks correspond to Human Personality framework.

The partial correspondence of brand personality to the human personality dimensions illustrates the way in which the current brand personality framework only offers a positively-framed approach to brand personality. Existing brand personality frameworks fail to capture an important dimension that reflects consumer’s anxious feelings towards brands. Although in human personality research these are characterized as ‘Openness to Experience’ and ‘Neuroticism’, the former is more prone to items that reflect intellectual curiosity and the latter is identified with characteristics that are more prone to psychological distress such as anxiety (Borgatta, 1964; John, 1989; Lorr and Manning, 1978; McCrae & Costa, 1985; Noller et al., 1987; Cattell 1943; Allport 1961; Norman, 1963; Smith, 1967). Although there

may not be an exact replica of Openness to Experience and Neuroticism factors in branding contexts, consumers are likely to classify their anxious or angry emotions with expressions that reflect their resentment of, or their insecure feelings towards, a brand (Shaver 1987; Pervin, 1989) to resolve the internal conflict and anxious feelings they may be experiencing. Other researchers have indicated the importance of this observation (see, for example, Sweeney and Brandon 2006; Geuen, Weijters and Wulf 2009). Importantly, these expressions are not indicative of the absence of positive traits, such as ‘undependable’ or ‘unsuccessful’ - they are, in fact, expressions that capture the importance of consumers’ interpretations that are susceptible to being influenced by emotions of anxiety or frustration and are more aligned with the ‘Neuroticism’ dimension of human personality. It is, therefore, important to explore the universally accepted personality dimensions within the brand personality framework to reflect characteristics of a dissonant state. To this end, negative brand personality is defined as:

*A set of characteristics ascribed to a brand by the consumer which reflect emotions associated with tension, anxiety or frustration.*

The definition acknowledges the importance of understanding brand personality from a consumer’s perspective to provide a vehicle for self-expression (Azoulay and Kapferer, 2003). It further offers the possibility of considering the analogous relationship between the brand and consumer (Fournier, 1998) by reflecting on consumers’ interpretations towards brands. Consequently, the consumer and brand have active roles in communicating messages but it is the consumer who ultimately assigns the brand personality trait based on the information received. This is unlike other research propositions that suggest brand personality is created by how marketers and advertisers intend to project a brand (Batra et al., 1993; Levy, 1959; Plummer, 1984).

Awareness and knowledge of negative brand personality traits is relevant to successful marketing because consumers that assign negative brand personality traits to brands are less likely to make rational buying decisions. The importance of negative brand personality traits to companies is based on the consequences and the economic impact that follows. For example, cognitive dissonance, dissatisfaction and negative word of mouth can negatively impact the economic incentive of the company. Moreover, providing a measure that addresses negative brand personality traits provides a more realistic and balanced view of the brand by increasing source credibility which will help retain consumer loyalty.

The purpose of this paper is to address the importance of developing a better understanding of brand personality by introducing negative brand personality traits to the literature. More precisely, four adjacent studies were conducted to first develop a measure for negative brand personality traits and, secondly, identify their antecedents as well as consequences. The proposed model will be discussed with implications for marketing management and theory.

## Method

In this present research, negative brand personality was explored through four adjacent studies. A convenience sample of male and female and differently aged consumers was drawn to represent active consumer shoppers within the context of fashion and food retail brands. Undergraduate students represented the majority of the sample within each subsequent study (Maehle and Supphellen 2011). Table 2 summarizes the procedure employed in each of the four studies to assess negative brand personality traits.

Study	Method	Objective	Data Sample	Gender	Analysis Method
Study 1.0	In-depth interview	To explore in what form negative traits	Consumers (N=42) interviewed	Fashion Retail:	Content analysis Data cleaning by

	12 Fashion retail brands 7 Food brands	exist and the antecedents behind the traits by analyzing data to provide a more integrative conceptual model of the negative brand personality traits, antecedents and behavioral consequences.	with fashion retail brands.  Consumers (N=10) interviewed with food brands.	Male: 45% Female : 55%  Food Retail: Male: 60% Female : 40%	separating positive traits from negative traits and reading in between transcripts to identify the rationale for the traits assigned.
Study 1.1	Separation of positive traits from negative traits. Assessment task to ensure the traits were not just antonyms of Aaker's(1997) traits.	Ensure negative brand personality traits are distinguished from existing measures of positive brand personality traits.	The researcher and 3 consumer independent reviewers (N=4)		Content analysis with aid of Collins Dictionary.
Study 1.2	Frequency count and eliminating traits that had similar approximate synonyms.  4 distinct negative dimensions were identified.	Capture at the broad level of abstraction, the commonalities among the most frequent negative traits consumers can identify a brand with.	Three expert judges (N=3) Face Validity.		Content analysis
Study 2	Questionnaire	To assess the refined negative traits from the interview transcripts and if they are perceived in a negative light by other consumers not involved in the initial interview study.	37 Undergraduate students (N=37)	Male: 62% Female: 38%	Mean scores were assessed for the rate of significance.

		Also, to enhance internal validity of the qualitative research			
Study 3	Free/Fixed Sorting task	To discover dimensions those are likely to result from the list of traits from a consumer's perspective without any contamination from the researcher's preconceptions.	Free Sorting Task: 9 consumers (N=9)  Fixed Sorting task: 6 consumers	Free Sorting Task  Male: 56% Female: 44%  Fixed Sorting task  Male: 33% Female: 66%	Sorting the brand personality traits into dimensions with an overall category name identified by the consumer.
Study 4	Substantive validity task	The substantive validity assessment conducted for the purpose of pretesting of items (negative brand personality traits).	30 undergraduate students (N=30)		Filled out questionnaires to assess content validity of the dimension obtained from the sorting task.

**Table 2:** A summary of four studies conducted to investigate negative brand personality.

## Exploration of Negative Brand Personality Traits

### Study 1

The initial study was contextualized to the fashion and food brand categories to provide a more holistic representation of brands that capture both symbolic and functional attributes of users' values and lifestyles (Ratchford 1987). The study consisted of a total of 52 in-depth interviews (42 of the respondents were presented with 12 fashion brands and 10 respondents were presented with 7 food brands) to ensure data validation and saturation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Each respondent was presented with a stimulus in the form of a brand to activate respondents' interpretations and meanings ascribed to brands. To eliminate subject

fatigue and boredom, a male dominated brand was presented followed by a neutral (unisex) brand and then a female dominated retail brand. Similarly, food brands were organized with a confectionary brand followed by a savoury brand.

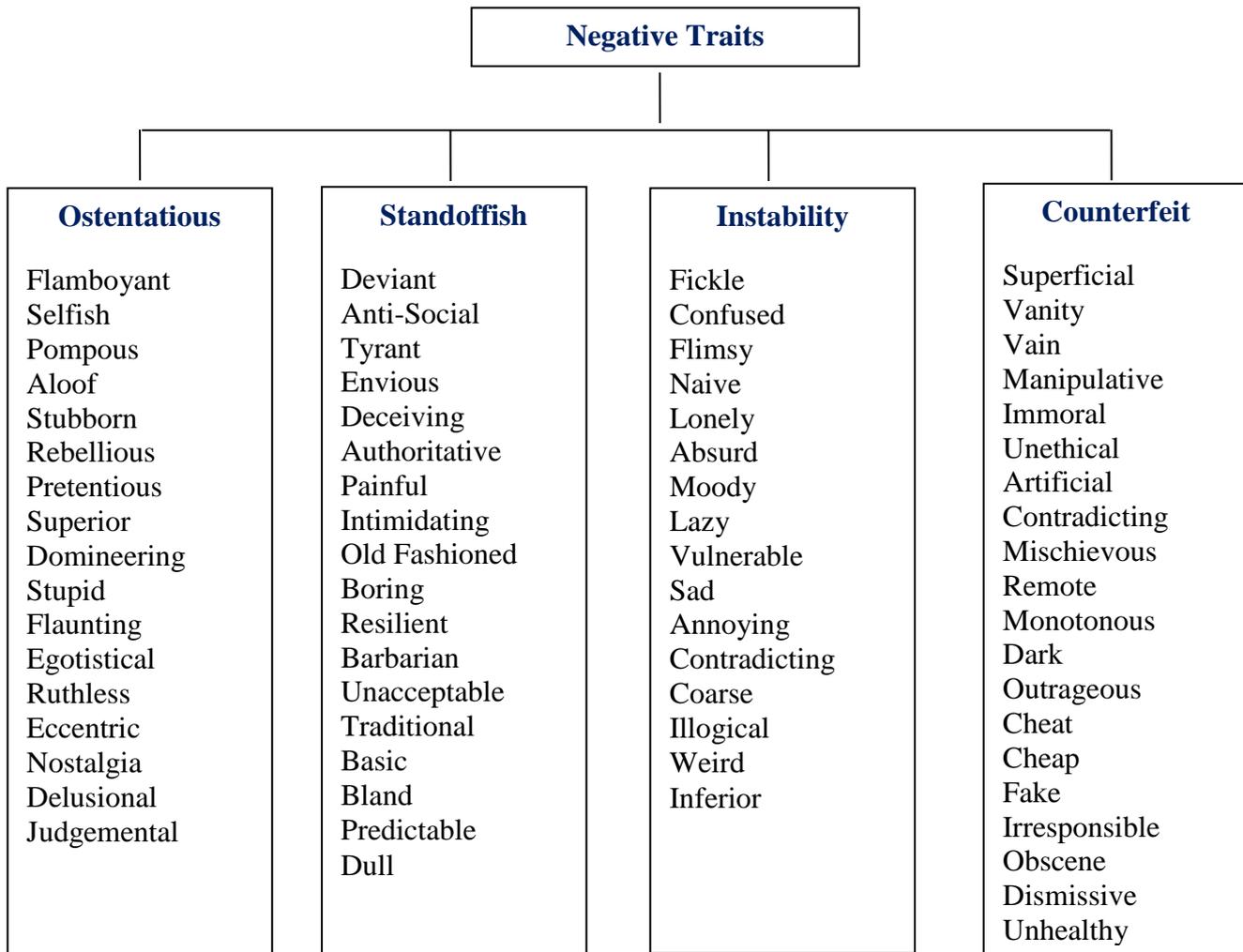
The interviews were conducted with students and non-students who were asked questions such as ‘What is your perception of this brand’, ‘What human characteristics would you assign to this brand?’, ‘Would you like to associate yourself with this brand?’, and “Do you hold any conflicting views towards the brand?” By identifying the conflicting views, respondents were given the opportunity to describe any negative traits the brand holds. This helped identify the personality traits and the rationale behind respondents’ responses.

Negative traits were not only obtained from the interview text but further analysis was undertaken by assessing the content of the interviews (Krippendorff, 2004; Mahl, 1959) by interpreting what negative characteristics are inferred from the interview transcripts through negative accounts of emotional distress. After developing the initial pool of items, 71 negative brand personality traits were obtained.

The traits were then cleaned systematically by deleting items that had a similar approximation of synonyms (Aaker, 1997; Sung & Tinkham, 2005). Following within-case and cross-case analysis, traits were grouped into emerging dimensions as an initial phase for the scale development. Such grouping was performed by the researcher to assist in item elimination (see Figure 2).

Eliminated items were validated using three expert judges (Bearden et al., 1989). The expert judges were carefully selected based on their education: they were either a PhD holder in human personality research or a PhD student in the Marketing field. Each expert judge was provided with 71 negative brand personality traits; they were then given instruction to eliminate items with similar synonym approximations to other traits within the list, and to

eliminate items that are not perceived as negative traits in light of branding. The list provided by the expert judges was then assessed against the traits eliminated by the researcher. A review was then taken to assess which items were suggested to be in need of deletion due to the approximation of traits. 21 items to be deleted were agreed upon by at least two out of the three judges.



**Figure 1:** Exploration of negative brand personality traits represented in four dimensions.

To further purify the items an assessment was undertaken to ensure the remaining 50 items were not the direct antonyms of the positive traits established in Aaker's (1997) brand personality framework. The assessment was conducted by looking up the traits mentioned in the interview transcripts and looking up the direct antonyms of the trait ( See Table 3). The list was then given to an independent expert judge to assess the face validity of the traits

presented, which provided further purification of negative brand personality items. The findings provide a diversified and meaningful measurement of brand personality through the assessment of negative traits. The negative brand personality traits that are manifested in respondents' expressions reflect their tense or anxious emotions towards brands. By identifying the negative and inferred negative brand personality traits, a frequency count of the negative traits was undertaken to summarize the negative traits mentioned within the sampled population; this also provided an indication of inferences regarding the construct (Berelson and Lazarsfeld (1948: 6).

<b>Aaker's Brand Personality Traits</b>	<b>Direct Antonyms from Collin's Dictionary and Word 2007</b>
Down to Earth	Unreasonable, foolish
Honest	Dishonest
Wholesome	Unpleasant, Distasteful
Cheerful	Sad, Depressing
Daring	Cowardly
Spirited	Pathetic, Spineless
Imaginative	Unimaginative, Dull
Up to date	Old fashioned, Out of Date
Reliable	Undependable
Intelligent	Stupid
Successful	Unsuccessful, fail, disappointment
Upper Class	Lower class, Working Class
Charming	Repulsiveness
Outdoorsy	Indoor activity
Tough	Pleasant

**Table 3:** Direct antonyms of Aaker's brand personality traits.

A frequency count was conducted to ensure emphasis is placed on the importance of using simple, straightforward language that is appropriate for the reading level of the scales' target population and for avoiding colloquial expressions (DeVellis, 2003). Some respondents inferred a trait but used another form of expression; for example, the statement 'I don't find the brand interesting' infers the trait 'Boring'. All expressions that did not explicitly mention the trait but were inferred through the syntactical analysis of the interview transcript were reviewed by an independent researcher in the marketing field to ensure consistency in

assigning the implied traits. This is to further ensure that a clarified and appropriate list is distinct from existing measures of brand personality and at the same time reflects the negative brand personality construct.

A few traits were scored relatively low in comparison to other traits such as ‘Inferior’ and ‘Stupid’. A total of 7 traits were eliminated at this stage as the items may be relevant to the study of brand personality, but lack familiarity within the sampled population. The high frequency in traits illustrates an agreement in item clarity and a common trend in traits expressed amongst the sampled population (See Table 4).

Negative Brand Personality	Frequency	Negative Brand Personality	Frequency
Absurd	10	Intimidating	8
Aloof	9	Judgmental	8
Annoying	2	Lonely	11
Antisocial	38	Manipulative	38
Arrogant	19	Mischievous	4
Barbarian	22	Monotonous	29
Boring	56	Naive	18
Brash	12	Nostalgic	30
Cheap	55	Pompous	27
Coarse	8	Predictable	24
Confused	16	Pretentious	6
Contradicting	3	Rebellious	18
Deceiving	33	Repulsive	15
Delusional	4	Resilient	2
Deviant	18	Selfish	8
Dull	44	Snobby	15
Eccentric	17	Stubborn	16
Envious	5	Stupid	1
Fake	49	Superficial	31
Fickle	11	Traditional	16
Flamboyant	38	Tyrant	20
Flaunt	14	Unstable	9
Flimsy	13	Vain	24
Immoral	39	Vanity	13
Inferior	3	Weird	25

**Table 4:** Frequency count of Negative brand personality traits obtained from interview transcripts.

## **Study 2**

Some traits mentioned by respondents from interviews were perceived in a positive light whilst other respondents perceived traits in a negative light. For example, some respondents referred to 'Flamboyant' from a positive perspective while others referred to this from a negative perspective. The perspective from which the traits were addressed was based on the syntactical rationale. Therefore, study 2 was set to confirm whether traits assigned were perceived in a positive or a negative light. Structured questions were asked, such as 'Is this trait seen in a positive or negative light?', since traits were seen by some respondents as positive and by others as negative - these are referred to as 'ambiguous traits'. In order to clean the ambiguous traits obtained from the transcripts, a separate questionnaire was conducted to ask consumers to rate all perceived negative traits as either positive or negative by ticking a box. The questionnaire conducted is part of the triangulation procedure to verify and strengthen the findings of negative brand personality traits (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Gliner (1994).

From the 43 initial pool of items, four items were predominantly perceived by more than 50% of the respondents as positively associated rather than negative. These four traits are 'Flamboyant', 'Eccentric', 'Traditional' and 'Nostalgic' and were eliminated from the study of negative brand personality traits. No expert judgment was involved at this stage as this study investigated negative brand personality from a consumer's perspective.

## **Study 3**

The objective of Study 3 was to further purify and refine negative brand personality traits. The card sorting task conducted in this study is grounded in Kelly's personal construct theory

that utilizes different types of objects or stimuli (for example, pictures, personality traits and colors) (Fincher and Tenenberg, 2005; Green and Manzi, 2002; Johnston, 1995; Rosenberg and Kim, 1975; Rosenberg, Nelson, and Vivekananthan, 1968; Rugg & McGeorge, 2005). “In a typical application of the sorting method, the respondent is asked to partition a set of inter-related objects or terms into different groups on the basis of their ‘similarity,’ ‘relatedness,’ or ‘co-occurrence’ depending on the particular application” (Rosenberg & Kim, 1975: 489). In line with the application of the free card sorting task (Giguere 2006), a stimuli in the form of traits and definitions of the traits were presented in a card format to respondents. The respondents were asked to partition the cards (which had the traits and definitions) into groups they felt the traits could be categorized into. No predefined categories or number of categories was given to respondents and instead they were encouraged to formulate as many categories as they felt were necessary (Giguere 2006). Respondents were instructed to categorize the cards by creating mutually exclusive piles comprised of conceptually similar statements. Thus, statements in the same pile were more conceptually similar to each other compared with those that made up the other piles. Participants were also encouraged to bind the cards with paper clips to ensure accurate recording of traits in each pile. Once categories were formulated, the respondents were encouraged to name the category. Traits which respondents were unable to categorize provided an indication of irrelevant negative brand personality traits.

The purpose of the free sorting method is not to uncover underlying cognitive processes, but a means to discover dimensions that are likely to result from the list of traits from a consumer’s perspective without any contamination from the researcher’s preconceptions (Rosenberg & Kim, 1975). Therefore, the free sorting task helps identify relevant categories

by investigating commonality and differences between consumers in the use of that categorization.

Five categories emerged based on what traits consumers put together under a single pile. However, the name of each pile differed from respondent to respondent. Table 4 details the category names that respondents came up with alongside the common negative brand personality traits. As a result, the traits in each category were first collated together to form a list of traits for which each of the 9 respondents had 50% or more agreement with. The name of the piles were categorized together to assess the similarity of the category group name to reflect the respondents' group labels.

Name of Categories	Traits					
<b>GROUP ONE (Egotistical)</b>						
<b>High Self Opinion</b>	Pompous	Pretentious	Vain	Snobby	Stubborn	
<b>Egotistical</b>	Pompous	Brash	Vain	Judgmental	Flaunt	Tyrant
<b>Resentment</b>	Pompous	Immoral	Unethical	Antisocial	Snobby	Tyrant
	Selfish	Pretentious	Vain	Arrogant	Flaunt	Fake
	Aloof	Coarse	Stubborn			
<b>Self-Centered</b>	Pompous	Selfish	Vain	Judgmental	Snobby	Tyrant
	Flaunt	brash	Pretentious	Superficial	Manipulative	Intimidating
	Stubborn	Arrogant				
<b>Superior</b>	Stubborn	Selfish	Vain	Arrogant	Snobby	Tyrant
			Pretentious	Judgmental	Manipulative	Intimidating
<b>Self-Important</b>	Pompous	Selfish	Vain	Arrogant	Snobby	Aloof
	Aloof	Absurd	Flaunt	Intimidating		
<b>GROUP TWO (Boring)</b>						
<b>Boring</b>	Dull	Deviant	Anti-Social	Aloof	Lonely	Cheap
<b>Boring</b>	Dull	Boring	Monotonous	Cheap		
<b>Lack of Spirit</b>	Dull	Boring	Cheap			
<b>Tedious</b>	Dull	Boring	Monotonous	Cheap		
<b>Sad</b>	Dull	Boring	Monotonous	Superficial	Mischievous	Cheap
<b>Unpredictable</b>	Dull	Boring	Monotonous	Superficial	predictable	Cheap
<b>GROUP THREE (Socially Irresponsible)</b>						
<b>Low Minded</b>	Deceiving	Unethical	Immoral	Rebellious	Snobby	Repulsive

	Selfish	Arrogant	Stubborn	Mischievous		
<b>Bad Faith</b>	Deceiving	Unethical	Immoral	Fake		
<b>Resentment</b>	Pompous	Immoral	unethical	Antisocial	Snobby	Tyrant
	Selfish	Pretentious	Vain	Arrogant	Flaunt	Fake
	Aloof	Coarse				
<b>Operating outside established code of conduct</b>	Deceiving	Unethical	Immoral			
<b>Wrong</b>		Unethical	Immoral			
<b>Without Task</b>	Deceiving	Unethical	Immoral	Coarse	Brash	Repulsive
	Deviant	Manipulative	Anti-Social	Mischievous		
<b>GROUP FOUR (Critical)</b>						
<b>Anti-Establishment</b>	Barbarian	Rebellious	Deviant	Tyrant	Antisocial	Judgmental
<b>Selfish</b>	Repulsive	Rebellious	Mischievous	Predictable	Cheap	Coarse
	Confused	Judgmental				
<b>Low minded</b>	Repulsive	Rebellious	Mischievous	Stubborn	Arrogant	Snobby
	Immoral	Selfish	Judgmental			
<b>Unclear</b>	Immoral	Rebellious	Selfish	Mischievous	Vain	Weird
	Lonely	Confused	Unstable	Naive	Aloof	Judgmental
<b>Forceful</b>	Stubborn	Rebellious	Tyrant	Judgmental		
<b>Envious</b>	Repulsive	Selfish	Superficial	Unstable	Pretentious	Predictable
	Vain	Mischievous	Weird	Judgmental		
<b>Critical</b>	Repulsive	Stubborn	Rebellious	Judgmental		
<b>GROUP FIVE (Lacking Logic)</b>						
<b>Irrational/lacking Logic</b>	Weird	Delusional	Unstable	Absurd	Naive	Superficial
<b>Unreal</b>	Fake	Delusional	Predictable	Superficial		
<b>Different</b>	Weird	Delusional	Unstable	Absurd	Deviant	
<b>Ingenious</b>	Lonely	Delusional	Naive	Superficial		
<b>Unusual</b>	Weird	Rebellious	Mischievous	Absurd	Deviant	Superficial
<b>Shallow Mindedness</b>	Weird	Delusional	Unstable	Superficial	Naive	Pretentious
	Confused	Lonely	Monotonous			
<b>Different</b>	Brash	coarse	Naive	Absurd		

**Table 5:** Details of the five main categories that emerged from the sorting task alongside the names of each of the groups identified by respondents

Although some traits are commonly categorized in each dimension, there still remains some variance in some of the dimensions. For example, in Group one, nearly all the dimensions identified by consumers placed the trait ‘Pompous’ as an important trait to be classified within the same pile as other similar traits such as ‘Vain’. However, not all consumers agreed

that 'Selfish' should be classified within the same pile as 'Pompous' and 'Vain'. As a result, a further data cleaning method was conducted by adopting a fixed sorting method (Giguere, 2006). Giguere's (2006) fixed card sorting method is similar to the free associated task, except that a restricted number of groups are generated during the card sorting task.

For the fixed card sorting task, the name for each dimension needed to be finalized. Therefore, the group labels identified by consumers were collated together to form an overall group name by summing up what consumers initially labeled each group. Three independent expert judges reviewed the overall category names in light of each category label identified by consumers. Expert judges were a PhD holder in personality research, and two PhD students, one carrying out their PhD in English Language and one in Marketing. All three expert judges agreed on the overall category dimensions as: Group one 'Egotistical'; Group two 'Boring'; Group three 'Socially Irresponsible'; Group four 'Critical'; and Group Five 'Lacking Logic'.

Six additional respondents were requested to group all 39 traits into the 5 established groups to assess consistency in traits within each group. Respondents were also given the opportunity to either create a new category or to omit traits if they felt trait(s) did not fall into the category or could not be seen in light of the branding. All other instructions were the same as the free card sorting task detailed above.

The card sorting task data was analyzed by visually assessing the frequency of traits occurring in each dimension<sup>1</sup>. Traits that achieved 80% or more in frequency by respondents were shortlisted to reflect the common traits amongst respondents. Table 5 details the overall

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<sup>1</sup> Multidimensional scaling is one statistical technique that historically has been used to analyse card sort tasks. However, the focus of this research is on identifying common negative brand personality traits and potential dimensions; therefore, a visual frequency of traits occurrence technique was applied to analyse the data.

results that show some consistency with respondents' classification of traits within each of the five groups.

Name of Dimension	Traits				
<b>Egotistical</b>	Pompous	Snobby	Brash	Vain	Arrogant
	Pretentious	Flaunt	Stubborn		
<b>Boring</b>	Boring	Monotonous	Dull	Lonely	Anti-Social
	Cheap				
<b>Socially Irresponsible</b>	Immoral	Unethical	Deceiving	Deviant	Fake
	Manipulative				
<b>Critical</b>	Confused	Mischievous	Rebellious	Selfish	Barbaric
	Judgmental				
<b>Lacking Logic</b>	Delusional	Weird	Unstable	Naive	Superficial

**Table 6:** Detail of the traits consumers assigned from the fixed card sorting task

The results indicate that consistency in negative brand personality traits emerged from both the free sorting task and the fixed sorting task with high frequency loadings assigned by consumers. Overall, the results of the free and fixed card sorting methods provided an indication of negative brand personality dimensions and traits that are likely to result from the factor analysis. Subsequent to the sorting task, a content validity assessment was undertaken to assess the content validity of the negative brand personality dimensions, which drew on the item card sorting task.

#### **Study 4**

Study 4 was a content validity assessment which follows the procedure suggested by Lawshe (1975) and Anderson and Gerbing (1991), and complements the sorting task. The substantive validity measure is defined as the extent to which a measure is judged to reflect the construct of interest (Holden & Jackson, 1979); it was applied in this study to reflect the traits and dimensions of negative brand personality. The substantive validity assessment is particularly suited for the pretesting of items due to the small-sample nature as opposed to “assessments

involving correlations, which suffer from the obfuscating effects of sampling error in small samples” (Anderson and Gerbing, 1991: 732).

Respondents were provided with a list of 40 items (negative brand personality traits) and their five dimensions obtained from the card sorting task (Egotistical, Boring, Socially Irresponsible, Critical, and Lacking Logic). The definitions of these five dimensions were provided. The respondents were instructed to read each of the items (traits) and assign it to the most closely reflected construct (dimension). The items were then calculated using the content validity ratio proposed by Anderson and Gerbing (1991).

The substantive validity assessment was first calculated by the proportion of substantive agreement ( $P_{sa}$ ) which is defined as “the proportion of respondents who assign an item to its intended construct” (Anderson & Gerbing 1991: 734). The proportion of substantive agreement is calculated as ( $P_{sa} = n_c / N$ ) in which  $n_c$  represents the number of respondents assigning an item to its posited construct and  $N$  represents the total number of respondents. The range of values for  $P_{sa}$  is between 0.0 to 1.0, where high values indicate greater substantive validity of the item.

The second index reflects the *substantive-validity coefficient*, which reflects the extent to which respondents assign an item to its posited construct more than to any other construct (Anderson and Gerbing 1991: 734). The calculation for this index is  $C_{sv} = (n_c - n_o) / N$ , where  $n_c$  and  $N$  are defined as before and  $n_o$  indicates the higher number of assignments of the item to any other construct. The values for this index range from -1.0 to 1.0, where high values indicate greater substantial validity. A recommended threshold for the  $C_{sv}$  index is 0.5 (Anderson and Gerbing 1991: 734). Once the  $P_{sa}$  and  $C_{sv}$  scores had been calculated for each item, they were then calculated for each of the negative brand personality constructs.

It should also be noted that initially there was a sixth construct termed ‘Does not fit in either of the dimensions’. This construct was not theorized by the researcher but was included to provide respondents the opportunity to not assign an item in any of the five constructs. It is worth noting that the sixth construct ‘Does not fit in either of the dimensions’ is not the focus of this research and is constructed as a means to aid item elimination at a later stage. Some respondents gave an indication that they felt items such as ‘Delusional’ and ‘Lonely’ belonged to the construct ‘Does not fit in either of the dimensions’. These items were eliminated from further analysis whereby the  $P_{sa}$  and  $C_{sv}$  results scores for the items were deleted. These results are classed as Test 1 results for the purposes of subsequent discussion.

In addition, some items were classified as ambiguous, which was indicated with a very low  $C_{sv}$  score of 0.1 or less. A  $C_{sv}$  of less than 0.1 means that there is considerable ambiguity among respondents regarding the dimension the item best describes. For an item to provide a  $C_{sv}$  value of 0.1 or less, respondents must have assigned it a similar number of times to two or more dimensions. For example, the item ‘Lonely’, which was posited to be part of the ‘Boring’ dimension of negative brand personality, was assigned nine times to ‘Boring’ and nine times to ‘Socially Irresponsible’. Another item that was dropped based on item ambiguity was ‘Mischievous’, which was posited to be ‘Socially Irresponsible’. ‘Mischievous’ was assigned ten times under the ‘Socially Irresponsible’ dimension and six times under ‘Egotistical’. The high scores in both the ‘Social Irresponsible’ and ‘Egotistical’ constructs resulted in a low  $C_{sv}$  value of 0.1 for the item ‘Mischievous’. These items were dropped from the analysis between Test 1 and Test 2.

However, items classified as ambiguous warrant further theoretical investigation and should be closely examined via, for example, exploratory factor analysis, during later data analysis. For the purposes of the substantive validity test, items with a value of  $C_{sv}$  0.1 or less were excluded from the Test 2 calculations in an attempt to increase the validity of the items under review. As a result, the Test 2 calculations were conducted using only 35 of the original 39 items. The table below illustrates the findings of Test 1 and Test 2.

	TEST ONE			TEST TWO		
	Item	$P_{sa}$	$C_{sv}$	Item	$P_{sa}$	$C_{sv}$
Lacking Logic	12	0.671	0.560	12	0.671	0.560
Critical	4	0.773	0.675	3	0.858	0.793
Socially Irresponsible	8	0.753	0.665	7	0.809	0.733
Boring	4	0.833	0.767	4	0.833	0.767
Egotistical	8	0.858	0.783	8	0.858	0.783
Does Not fit in Either of the Dimensions	2	0.516	0.323			
Total/Average	<b>38</b>	<b>0.734</b>	<b>0.629</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>0.806</b>	<b>0.727</b>

**Table 7** Illustration of the overall findings of Test one and Test two

This method of triangulation provided an insight into consumers' emotional expressions and their perceptions of brands. The systematic combination of various types of data collection/analysis for the study of negative brand personality is an important step in validating the negative brand personality traits. The preceding methods are likely to aid in the interpretation of trait elimination in the quantitative phase.

### **The Conceptual Framework**

The results from the initial study - the interviews - and associated literature identify four particular antecedent constructs to Negative Brand Personality: Corporate Social Irresponsibility, Self-Incongruence, Brand Confusion, and Price Unfairness (see Figure 1). Together, these four constructs summarize the dissonant state between corporate brand communication and consumers' interpretations.

Corporate Social Irresponsibility underpins consumers' perception of the brands' moral values (Du Bhattacharya and Sen 2007). Hollenbeck and Zinkhan (2010) illustrated the importance of this observation by acknowledging that media reports of brands using child labor may hold consumers back from purchasing a company's product. This meta-knowledge, whether accurate or not, guides consumers' perceptions of moral practices by setting examples of corporate wrongdoing (Brown & Dacin, 1997: 80), whether it is social hypocrisy or exploitation in child labor. Such findings were also demonstrated in consumers' responses that were unforgiving for the socially irresponsible behavior of a company; as a result, the respondents were evaluating the brand by assigning negative traits based on brand ethics.

Further research has shown that a non-matching advertising appeal is likely to conflict with consumers' brand schema, causing a cognitive strain on consumers' intuitive processes when trying to assimilate the information with their self-concept (Sirgy et al. 1997; Belk 1988). This suggests that the brand symbolism depends on the interrelationship between a brand's perceived image and the consumers' perceived self-image. However, the incongruence between the advertisement and the self-concept of an individual increases the dissonant state. Coupling incongruence with cognitive dissonance provides further rationalization of negative brand personality traits. To illustrate this further, if the consumer does not mirror their self-image or desired self with the brand then the relation is dissonant. As a result, respondents experience tension, guilt arousal (Ghingold, 1981), anxiety and doubt (Menasco & Hawkins, 1978; Sweeney et al., 1996), discomfort (Oliver, 1997; Bourne & Russo, 1998), and violations of a person's self-concept or image (Aronson, 1968; Collins, 1969; Epstein, 1980).

Consequently, respondents are likely to generate the feelings of frustration, helplessness and negative effect and so then assign negative brand personality traits to overcome the dissonant state. These negative feelings are then communicated through traits such as Envy, Inferiority and Superficiality. This is in line with the social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), where consumers negatively perceive gaps between their own reality and a brand with an idealistic brand personality that personifies consumers' dreams and aspirations.

Other research has found that consumers' proneness to brand confusion results from the following: perceived similarity of the product through brand imitations, information overload, and ambiguity in consumers' tolerance for processing unclear or misleading product information (Walsh, Hennig-Thurau and Mitchell 2007). Therefore, information overload arises when the information supply, due to its volume, can no longer be processed.

Consumers begin to exhibit symptoms of anxiety and frustration due to limited processing capacity and the excessive product offerings from a choice of different brands (Hafstrom et al., 1992; Mitchell & Papavassiliou, 1999; Sproles & Kendall, 1990; Halstrom, 1992). An example of this is when consumers are faced with a large number of similar advertisements from many different sources which leads to them becoming incapable of assimilating all the information before the next batch of advertisements appears (Keller, 1991; Walsh & Mitchell 2005). As a result, the consumer feels misled as a result of the overwhelming information cues, which can lead to the formation of inaccurate beliefs about the product attributes.

Confusion, therefore, not only results from similarity in product offerings but also through ambiguous or inadequate information which can be caused by overloading the consumer with too many, overly complex or conflicting marketing activities. Confused consumers are likely

to describe episodes of confusion through negative brand personality traits as a way to express their stress and cognitive strain since overload, similarity and ambiguous information results when information exceeds consumers' processing capability (Hebig & Kramer, 1994).

Furthermore, consumers' psychological reactions to price unfairness (Campbell 1999) often leads them to punish the brand by looking at alternative brands (Kahneman et al. 1986a, 1986b), or to attack the brand by assigning a discrepant self-meaning. The psychological reaction to what is perceived as a fair price (Kamen and Toman, 1970; Manroe 1973) causes skepticism about the original value of goods when heavily discounted or overpriced. Chen, Tsai and Cheung's (2010) findings show that when consumers perceive greater price unfairness, anger is the strongest negative emotional response compared to disappointment and regret. However, Chen, Tsai and Cheung's (2010) results further show that when consumers experience negative emotions, such as anger and disappointment, they tend to cope through social interaction or expressions of negative emotive language. Consequently, negative traits are likely to manifest as a response to the unfair prices. Significantly, the findings of the four antecedent constructs capture the multidimensionality of consumers' perceptions of negative brand personality.

Theoretical reasoning and empirical evidence suggest that potential moderator variables can be roughly divided into two groups, personal characteristics and organizational characteristics. Individual characteristics such as gender, human personality traits, attitude and involvement (enduring and processing) are likely to exert a moderating influence because they are often linked to consumers' ability to rationalize and process the brand stimuli. Gender differences may be related to the experience framework since women tend to have

more experiences of different brand products than men. Dimensions in human personality such as consciousness and neuroticism are likely to strengthen the link between the antecedent constructs and negative brand personality. Individuals that score high on conscientiousness are often open to new experiences and intellectual curiosity, while individuals that score high on neuroticism are more prone to psychological distress and anxiety (Barick & Mount, 1991). Although the relationship between personality and retaliation has not been studied directly, indirect evidence suggests that neuroticism is related to certain forms of negative behaviors. Individuals that score highly on Neuroticism and Conscientiousness are therefore likely to increase the susceptibility or responsiveness to the stimuli that generate negative emotions (Larsen & Katelaar, 1991) and subsequently increase the proneness to negative brand personality traits.

It is generally assumed that brand involvement (enduring and processing) is likely to be associated with differences in sensitivity to brand stimuli, in that those who are highly motivated evoke interest and drive to evaluate brand cues (Zaichkowsky 1985; Dholakia, 200; Kapferer & Laurent 1993; Richardson 1997). Therefore, a high level of processing and enduring involvement is likely to have a moderating effect on the link between the antecedent constructs and negative brand personality.

Similarly, consumers' overall attitude determines their beliefs (MacKenzie, Lutz and Belch, 1986) and feelings (Olney, Halbrook & Batra, 1991) towards brands. According to Day (1970), a consumer's low confidence level reflects uncertainty of the brand judgment or increases ambiguity to the meaning of the brand and thus increases undesirable attributes.

The overall undesirable evaluative attitude is likely to strengthen the link between the antecedent constructs and negative brand personality.

The organizational attributes consist of subjective brand knowledge, brand familiarity, brand reputation and brand experience, which are all important constructs in understanding the link between the antecedent construct and negative brand personality traits.

Subjective knowledge is self-perceived knowledge based on pre-existing knowledge primarily accumulated through readily available information from media sources (Park et al. 1994; Rudell 1979). It is likely that consumers who are less confident about their subjective knowledge are more likely to assign negative brand personality traits due to low tolerance levels for processing new information.

With low levels of brand familiarity, consumers are likely to be more prone to negative reactions (Campbell & Keller 2003). Consumers who are aware of the brand would already know something about familiar brands; advertisements for these brands are likely to reinforce or remind consumers of the brand than advertisements for novel brands that consumers do not know. Following this line of reasoning, consumers are likely to be more discriminating with their brand choices such that low brand familiarity will strengthen the link between the antecedent constructs and negative brand personality.

Brand reputation is the aggregate perceptions formulated by consumers based on the salient characteristics producers send to the market to establish the brands (Fombrun & Rindova, 2000). Therefore, a brand that fails to fulfill its stated intentions or marketing signals is likely

to develop a negative reputation (Milewicz and Herbig 1994). The negative reputation is likely to be more prone to negative brand personality due to the inconsistent perceptions established from a reputable brand. Further, consumers are likely to be less forgiving when reputable brands encounter in unethical practices. Therefore reputable brands that practice unethical activities are likely weaken the link between the antecedent conducts and the negative brand personality.

Brand experience, on the other hand, is not self-generated but induced from exposure to attributes that result from consumer interaction with brands (Arnold, Price and Zinkhan 2002; Brakus, Schmitt and Zhang 2009). Numerous studies have found that experienced consumers are likely to have prior knowledge about the attributes of various alternatives and know which attributes are most discriminating between brands (Brucks, 1985; Laroche, Kim, Zhou, 1996). Therefore, experienced consumers are likely to be more prone to discriminating hedonic evaluations grounded in their direct or indirect consumption (Holbrook & Hirschman 1982). Following this line of argument, it is likely that experienced consumers are more prone to assigning negative brand personality traits.

Although no study has investigated the outcome of negative brand personality, it is likely to be associated with low purchase intention (Laroche, Kim and Zhou 1996), low brand loyalty and negative word of mouth (Richins 1983). These are likely to relate to the immediate effect of negative brand personality.

## **Conclusion and Implications**

In light of acknowledging the existing research, it was identified that the existing brand personality framework provides a positively framed approach to the concept. This research contributes to a more advanced understanding of the negative brand personality by building on previous work that focused on a positively framed approach to brand personality. By conceptualizing the negative brand personality, providing empirical findings to the negative brand personality dimensions, theoretical rationale to the antecedents, potential moderators and outcomes of negative brand personality.

The conceptual model provides marketers guidance on how to communicate the brand to consumers by acknowledging a more balanced view of the brand. By acknowledging and reducing negative brand personality traits would increase cognitive clarity among consumers, which could be a major source of competitive advantage.

**Figure 1:** A conceptual framework summarizing the results of the four studies conducted so far.

