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Determining Fashion Store Personality Dimensions: An Exploratory Study Based on Repertory Grid Data and Grounded Theory

While '*store image*' typically involves the functional properties of a store (merchandise, price/quality, service, ...), '*store personality*' essentially refers to the more psychographic or humanlike personality characteristics of a retail outlet (such as enthusiasm, sophistication, etc...). Since human nor brand personality are directly transferable to the context of retail stores, d'Astous and Lévesque (2003) developed a scale specifically for measuring store personality.

In a preliminary study, we assessed the applicability of this general scale in the context of fashion chains by means of 70 in-depth semi-structured interviews with a convenience sample of Belgian adults. We systematically investigated the connotations of the 34 back-translated personality descriptors put forward by d'Astous and Lévesque (2003). Our findings reveal that only 12 out of the 34 items are deemed useful to describe store personality in a fashion retail environment. Both the '*solidity*' and the '*genuineness*' dimensions scored particularly low what their utility in a fashion store context is concerned and '*unpleasantness*' appeared to be a rather miscellaneous dimension, lacking much consistency apart from the negative valence. On the other hand, the dimensions '*enthusiasm*' and '*sophistication*' proved to be well suited for describing fashion chains.

In a subsequent study, we adopted an 'interpretive' grounded theory approach to induce a fashion store personality conceptualization. In order to be able to identify salient fashion store personality descriptors, we performed a repertory grid analysis, gathering data by means of triadic sorting. To this end, personal in-depth interviews were conducted, during which respondents successively were presented about 8 different triples of randomly selected fashion stores, and were questioned in each case about the personality characteristics simultaneously categorizing and discriminating between them. Satiation was attained with about 50 interviews, resulting in 416 repertory grid triads. This way, 163 non-idiosyncratic fashion store personality descriptors were elicited, which could be assigned to a '*construct pool*' (bases of resemblance) or an '*implicit pool*' (bases of difference). These descriptors were then content-analyzed and sorted by means of open and axial coding, using the technique of constant comparisons. This way 11 bipolar facets emerged, within 5 main dimensions: '*Openness to change*' (Progressiveness, Commonness) '*Activity*' (Dynamism, Nervousness), '*Sophistication*' (Attractiveness, Status, Vanity), '*Agreeableness*' (Warmth, Approachableness) and '*Competence*' (Solidity, Disorderliness). Comparing these extracted dimensions and the underlying items with the extant literature shows that traditional measures may not capture the full richness of fashion store personality.