

A scale for measuring store personality¹

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September 2001

¹ This research was partially funded by a research grant from the Omer DeSerres Chair of retailing at HEC-Montreal. The authors would like to thank Marc Tomiuk for his very helpful suggestions.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Consumers' mental representations of brands, stores, and other commercial objects have been an important research topic in marketing for several years. Recently, marketing researchers have proposed that these mental representations may be defined around characteristics that are typically associated with human beings. For instance, brands may be perceived as having a personality just like a person (e.g., *Nike* is creative and performance-oriented) or they can be seen as relationship partners (e.g., friendship with an *Ericsson* mobile phone). In this study, we extended this line of research to the case of an important commercial object for all consumers: the store. More precisely, our objective was to develop a scale for measuring store personality and to assess its psychometric properties.

Store personality is defined as the mental representation of a store on dimensions that typically capture an individual's personality. It must therefore be contrasted with the concept of store image that encompasses all dimensions associated with a store, including those dimensions that do not correspond to human traits (e.g., product selection). Store personality must also be differentiated from brand personality because the information sources that are used to infer the personality of a store are likely to be different. For instance, sales personnel is an important factor in forming a mental representation of a store but it plays little or no role in inferring a brand personality. In addition, because advertising is a central source of inference for forming an impression of a brand, the personality traits that are attributed to a brand are generally positive. However, the many negative aspects often associated with shopping environments (e.g., crowding, cleanliness, high-pressure selling) are likely to impact on the favorableness of the trait inferences made by consumers.

The study comprised three steps. First, we generated a list of personality items from previous studies and on the basis of individual qualitative interviews with shoppers. Second, a pilot study with 26 adult consumers allowed us to eliminate inappropriate items and to uncover five basic store personality dimensions. Finally, a survey with 226 adult consumers confirmed the stability of the personality dimensions and the reliability of the scale with respects to each personality dimensions.

The 34-item store personality scale comprises five dimensions which were named *sophistication* (chic, elegant, high class, selective, snobbish, stylish, upscale), *solidity* (hardy, imposing, leader, reputable, solid, thriving, well-organized), *genuineness* (conscientious, genuine, honest, reliable, sincere, true, trustworthy), *enthusiasm* (congenial, daring, dynamic, enthusiastic, friendly, lively, friendly, welcoming), and *unpleasantness* (annoying, conservative, irritating, loud, outmoded, superficial). For application purposes, we showed that it was possible to reduce the number of items to 20 without compromising the psychometric qualities of the scale.

The proposed store personality scale should prove useful to marketing practitioners who wish to understand how consumers perceive their store and that of their competitors on psychological dimensions. The scale could also be used to monitor changes in store personality over time. We see the store personality scale as a complement to conventional store image measures instead of a substitute. An important feature of the store personality scale is the fact that its underlying psychological dimensions are as pertinent for consumers as they are for a store which makes possible the conduct of analyses aimed at studying the match between target consumers' perception of their personality and that of the store.

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this research study was to develop a scale for measuring store personality and to assess its psychometric properties. A preliminary study showed that store personality comprised five dimensions which were termed *sophistication*, *solidity*, *genuineness*, *enthusiasm*, and *unpleasantness*. A follow-up survey with 226 adult consumers confirmed the stability of the factorial structure of the 34-item store personality scale as well as the reliability of each composite dimension. Some empirical evidence was gathered with respect to the scale's construct validity since the proposed store personality scale was shown to behave in a manner consistent with self-image congruence theory. Additional analyses revealed that a reduced scale including 20 items exhibited factorial stability and resulted in reliable measures of the five store personality dimensions. Finally, some empirical support was obtained in favor of using the proposed scale across different retail settings.

