

Impact of brand personality on three major relational consequences (trust, attachment, and commitment to the brand)

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this research is to offer a model that incorporates both direct and indirect effects of brand's perceived personality on three major relational consequences of this construct: trust, attachment, and commitment to the brand. In addition to the links between brand personality and its relational consequences, the interdependence links amongst these consequences are also considered.

Design/methodology/approach – The model proposed in this research was tested by means of structural equations modelling. The data were collected from a convenience sample of 348 young French consumers (aged from 19-23) questioned about the brand Coca-Cola, which enjoys strong awareness with that target.

Findings – All the nine personality traits of the Coca-Cola brand studied in this research impact directly on at least one of the three relational consequences under study: trust, attachment, and commitment to the brand. In addition they have an indirect influence (except for the Charming and Ascendant personality traits) on commitment via trust and attachment to the brand.

Research limitations/implications – The model proposed in the research shows the impact of brand personality on three major relational consequences of this construct: trust, attachment, and commitment to the brand. Future research should study the influence of brand personality on other consequences such as satisfaction, loyalty and preference.

Practical implications – The research demonstrates that brand personality affects the type and strength of the relationship that consumers maintain with brands. It is a useful tool for managers to direct or reinforce the lasting relationship they want to develop or maintain between their brands and the consumers they target. Relational paths from brand personality to the variables trust, attachment, and commitment are suggested in this research.

Originality/value – The model proposed in this research refines the overall understanding that researchers and managers have of the direct or indirect impact of each brand personality trait on consumers' relationship with a brand, measured by trust, attachment, and commitment.

Keywords Brand identity, Trust, Brand loyalty, Consumers

Paper type Research paper

An executive summary for managers and executive readers can be found at the end of this article.

1. Introduction

How to increase consumer loyalty? This question is currently a major challenge for professionals and constitutes an endless research issue for researchers. It also raises the double complexity of the conceptualisation and operationalisation of the concept of loyalty. There are various approaches: behavioural, attitudinal, and mixed. The behavioural approach alone does not allow to distinguish true loyalty from other forms of repeated purchases. For a consumer to be considered truly loyal to a brand he should not only buy that brand in a repeated manner, he should also have developed

positive attitudes towards it (Jacoby and Kyner, 1973; Trinquocoste, 1996; Bozzo *et al.*, 2003).

One of the ways to raise client loyalty for a company is to set up relational marketing operations, which Morgan and Hunt (1994) define as the set of activities whose purpose is to establish, develop, and maintain successful relational exchanges. The company then attempts to develop and maintain a relationship over time with its customers. To do so, it can rely on its brands, which become the supports of this relation.

Brands were the subject of a great deal of research, including the concepts of brand identity (Kapferer, 1998), brand equity, brand image (Keller, 1993), and lastly brand personality (Aaker, 1997).

Brand identity involves all elements forming the existence of the brand. The concept allows companies, through the six emission facets of the brand identity prism – physical facet, personality, culture, relationship, reflected consumer and consumer mentalisation – to specify the meaning, the project, the designing of their brands. Conversely, brand image is a reception concept. It is the result of the consumers' interpretation of all the signs emitted by the brand (brand name, visual symbols, communications, etc) and/or external sources. As a result, brand identity comes before brand image (Kapferer, 1998).

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The concept of brand equity is the added value that a brand brings to a product. It is an additional effect in a consumer's response to a brand that stretches beyond the product itself and its attributes (Keller, 1993). The literature agrees to consider that brand equity is influenced by brand image (Keller, 1993; Park and Srinivasan, 1994), which is the collection of associations with a brand as found in a consumer's memory (Keller, 1993). Such associations can be both functional and abstract. Abstract associations feed the personality assigned by a consumer to a brand (Fournier, 1994; Aaker, 1997), which is one of the components of brand image.

Brand personality, defined as all personality traits used to characterise a person and associated with a brand, is a concept within the field of relational marketing. It helps better understand the development and maintaining of relations between brands and consumers. In addition it explains how those relationships impact consumers' behaviour (Fournier, 1998; Ambroise, 2006; Gouteron, 2006, 2008).

Previous studies involving brand personality can be divided into three major fields of research: the conceptualisation and development of a measurement scale of the construct; the understanding of the influence of the congruence, between the personalities of a brand and a consumer, on product selection; the impact of brand personality on consumers' behaviour (Azoulay, 2005).

The purpose of this research is to offer a model that incorporates both direct and indirect effects of brand's perceived personality on three major relational consequences of this construct, trust, attachment and commitment to the brand. This study is therefore clearly in line with the third field of research mentioned above. In addition to the links between brand personality and trust, attachment and commitment, the links of interdependence amongst those relational consequences will also be studied. While previous research focused on the study of specific links such as, for instance, brand personality-attachment or trust-commitment, this research considers all those links simultaneously and thus proposes an integrated model of the relational consequences of brand personality.

In this research, the concept of brand personality is defined. The research hypotheses and conceptual framework are then described. Lastly, the methodology used, the results of the research and its main managerial implications, limits and future lines of research are provided.

2. The concept of brand personality and its main consequences

Brand personality: definitions

Human personality is the starting point of the research on brand personality. The currently prevailing school of thought in the area of psychology is the personality trait structure. Traits can be defined as inclinations to adapt consistent modes of cognition, affect, and behaviour (Costa and McCrae, 1998). Overall, personality traits should be considered as stable psychological features giving meaning to human actions and experiences.

According to theories of animism, brands too can have their own personality. Indeed human beings feel the need to personify objects in order to help their interactions with the intangible world. All contacts, whether direct or indirect, that consumers have with a brand generate and impact the

perceptions of the brand personality traits (Plummer, 1984). According to Caprara *et al.* (2001), personality is a valid metaphor for brands whose latent idea is that a consumer grows affinities towards brands based on his personality (Koebel and Ladwein, 1999). A consumer can thus identify himself in relationship to a brand based on the adequacy between his own personality and that ascribed to the brand.

There are many definitions of brand personality, yet none so far has been commonly adopted. In 1997, Aaker defined, for the first time, brand personality as "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand". However, this founding definition has been criticised.

According to Azoulay and Kapferer (2003), Aaker defines brand personality not solely as a facet of brand identity, but as a broader construct. There is then the risk of combining several facets of brand identity into that overall construct, referred to by Aaker (1997) as brand personality. As a result, these authors recommend that marketing researchers adopt a stricter definition of brand personality in order to later get a more accurate measure of that concept.

Ambroise *et al.* (2004) also blame this first founding definition for being too general. It can lead, when measuring brand personality traits, to include *ad hoc* terms that exist in no human personality measurement tool. The scale proposed by Aaker (1997) encompasses traits that have no equivalent in terms of human personality (for instance, sophistication or ruggedness) and personality traits that correspond more to social appreciations (for instance, outdoorsy, up-to-date or upper class).

As a result, new definitions of brand personality have been put forward. Azoulay and Kapferer (2003) define this construct as "the set of human personality traits that are both applicable and relevant to brands". Likewise, Ferrandi and Valette-Florence (2002) conceptualise brand personality as "all personality traits used to characterise the individual and associated with a brand".

The latter definition will be used in this research as it offers the major advantage of defining brand personality only based on human personality traits. Therefore it offers the possibility of considering meaning transfer between the perception that an individual has of his personality and that of the brand he buys and therefore consumes or rejects.

Brand personality: its main consequences

The concept of brand personality offers a major managerial advantage in that it can impact the relation that a consumer has with a brand (Gouteron, 2006, 2008) and explain that consumer's behaviour (Ambroise *et al.*, 2005; Ben Sliman *et al.*, 2005). Thus that concept clearly offers a new prospect for brand management and performance in the field of relational marketing (Ambroise, 2006; Ambroise *et al.*, 2005).

Various variables have been considered by the literature in the study of the consequences of brand personality: perceived brand quality, attitude towards the brand; intentions of future behaviour; trust in the brand; attachment to the brand and commitment to the brand. A summary of these studies is provided in Table I, even if the comparison between them is difficult since the contexts, brands and measurement scales used are different.

Table I Summary of research relating to the consequences of brand personality

Dependent variables	Authors	Results
Perceived brand quality	Ramaseshan and Tsao (2007)	Whatever the brand considered, the excitement and sophistication traits of brand personality have a significant positive influence on the perceived brand quality While excitement has a significant positive influence on perceived quality of symbolic brands, sophistication has a significant positive influence on perceived quality of experiential brands
	Beldona and Wysong (2007)	Of the 15 traits of brand personality that were studied, 12 are correlated with perceived quality, for all national and store brands. Such correlations are positive, except for one trait, Tough
Attitude to the brand	Supphellen and Gronhaug (2003)	The Ruggedness and Sophistication personality traits have a significant positive impact on attitude towards the Ford brand The Sophistication personality trait has a significant positive impact on the attitude towards the Levi's brand while the Sincerity personality trait has a significant negative impact
	Helgeson and Supphellen (2004)	The Modern and Classic personality traits have a significant positive influence on attitude towards the brand. In addition, Social Desirability has a moderating role. Indeed, the relationship is stronger when Social Desirability is medium or strong. The relationship is weaker – or even not significant – when Social Desirability is low
	Freling and Forbes (2005)	Using an experiment, these authors showed that consumers exposed to a product (bottle of water) with a vignette presenting information about the brand personality of that product have a more favourable attitude towards that brand than consumers exposed to the same product, without brand personality information
	Ambroise <i>et al.</i> (2005)	These authors highlighted the influence of brand personality on consumer attitude towards the brand for the two product categories considered in their research: cola and sportswear
	Ben Sliman <i>et al.</i> (2005)	The Charming personality trait has a significant positive influence on consumer attitude towards the retailer
Intentions of future behaviour	Freling and Forbes (2005)	Using an experiment, these authors showed that consumers exposed to a product (bottle of water) with a vignette presenting information about the brand personality of that product have stronger brand purchase intentions than consumers exposed to the same product, without brand personality information
	Ambroise (2006)	The studies conducted by this author show that the five dimensions of the developed brand personality barometer explain on average 27.4 per cent of the intent to purchase a brand
	Morschett <i>et al.</i> (2007)	The Competence, Sincerity, and Excitement personality traits have a significant positive impact on store loyalty measured by the intent to recommend that retail outlet. The Sincerity trait has the strongest influence The Ruggedness personality trait has a significant negative impact on store loyalty
	Özsoymer and Lerzan (2007)	Lastly, there is no significant impact of the Sophistication personality trait on store loyalty The Excitement and Traditionalism personality traits have a significant positive influence on the intent to purchase a brand, whereas Rebelliousness has a significant negative influence on this variable. Lastly, the interaction between the Competence personality trait and perceived brand quality has a significant positive influence on the intent to purchase a brand
Trust in the brand	Gouteron (2006)	In terms of his overall sample, this author showed that the Independence and Sincerity personality traits have a positive and significant impact both on Credibility and Integrity (two dimensions of trust in the brand) Whether consumers are little or strongly involved in the product category and little or strongly brand-sensitive, Independence has a significant positive impact on Credibility and Sincerity has a significant positive influence both on Credibility and Integrity. However, Independence has a significant positive influence on Integrity for consumers strongly involved and sensitive, but not for consumers that are little involved and sensitive
	Gouteron (2008)	Not all brand personality traits have the same impact on trust in the brand. Whereas the Youthfulness, Sincerity, and Gentleness personality traits have a significant positive influence on the three dimensions of trust (credibility, integrity, benevolence), the Sensuality trait has a significant positive influence on credibility and benevolence and the Ruggedness and Confidence traits have a significant positive influence only on the credibility dimension
	Hess <i>et al.</i> (2007)	The Reliability and Temperament personality traits have a significant positive impact on trust in the brand. The Reliability trait has the strongest influence The Instinctiveness personality trait has an indirect impact on trust in the brand via the Temperament personality trait

(continued)

Table I

Dependent variables	Authors	Results
<i>Attachment to the brand</i>	Sung <i>et al.</i> (2005) Ambroise (2005, 2006)	Brand personality has a significant positive influence on attachment to the brand The studies conducted by this author show that the five dimensions of the developed brand personality barometer explain on average 32.4 per cent of attachment to the brand
	Goueron (2006)	In terms of his overall sample, this author showed that the Independence, Excitement and Sincerity personality traits have a significant positive impact on attachment to the brand. This is also true whether the consumers are little or strongly brand-sensitive However, for consumers strongly involved in the product category, the Excitement, Independence and Youthfulness personality traits have a significant positive impact on attachment to the brand For consumers that are little involved, only the Sincerity personality trait has a significant positive influence on attachment to the brand
	Goueron (2008)	All dimensions of brand personality have a significant positive influence on attachment to the brand
	Ambroise <i>et al.</i> (2005)	At first, these authors showed the impact of brand personality on consumer commitment to the brand for sportswear brands, but not for cola brands Then they showed that this impact is indirect via the attitude towards the brand Lastly, those authors took into account a moderating variable: involvement in the product category. When involvement is high, personality has a significant positive impact on commitment and attitude is a partial mediator of the relation between brand personality and commitment. When the involvement is low, the brand personality has a significant negative impact on commitment and the attitude is not a mediator of the relation
<i>Commitment to the brand</i>	Ben Sliman <i>et al.</i> (2005)	The Reassuring Personality trait has a significant positive influence on commitment to the retailer
	Goueron (2008)	Whereas all personality traits have a significant positive influence on the will to continue a relationship with the brand (1st dimension of the construct commitment to the brand), only the Sincerity, Confidence, Sensuality and Gentleness traits have a significant positive influence on the will to resist changing brands (2nd dimension)

3. Conceptual framework and research hypotheses

At first, three research hypotheses relating to the links between brand personality and the three major relational consequences of this construct, i.e. trust, attachment, and commitment, will be proposed. Second, the interdependence links amongst those relational consequences will be examined. Lastly, the conceptual framework integrating the set of those various research hypotheses will be presented.

Influence of brand personality on three key relational concepts

Amongst the various relational concepts mentioned in the literature, three main constructs will be considered in this research: trust, attachment and commitment to the brand. They help characterise the links that exist between a company and its clients and better understand their loyalty behaviours (Darpy and Volle, 2007).

The influence of brand personality on consumer trust in the brand
Trust is a key concept in the field of relational marketing as without trust there is no stable and lasting relationship (Guibert, 1999; Gurviez and Korchia, 2002). Nonetheless, the nature of trust is debated in the literature. It can be seen as a belief (Sirieix and Dubois, 1999; Frisou, 2000), a will (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001) or a presumption (Gurviez, 1999; Aurier *et al.* 2001; Gurviez and Korchia, 2002). Gurviez and Korchia (2002) thus indicate that the authors

mobilise cognitive, affective or conative dimensions to define trust in the brand. There is also the issue of the number of dimensions to be used: is it a unidimensional or multidimensional construct?

In this research, the definition of trust proposed by Gurviez and Korchia (2002) will be used as it considers trust, as do most marketing studies, as a multidimensional construct and more specifically, three-dimensional: “trust in the brand, from the consumer’s point of view, is a psychological variable that reflects a set of aggregated presumptions relating to the credibility, integrity and benevolence that the consumer ascribes to the brand”. According to this definition, the brand will be credible if it can meet the performance expected by the consumer. The brand will be of integrity if it keeps its promises regarding the terms of the exchange and if its discourse, in a broad meaning, is perceived as being honest. Lastly, the brand will be benevolent if it is lastingly perceived as taking into account consumer’s interests. Gurviez and Korchia (2002) indicate that it is the combination of those three dimensions that determines consumer’s level of trust.

Considering the studies conducted by Goueron (2006, 2008) and Hess *et al.* (2007), who showed a positive and significant influence of brand personality traits on trust in the brand, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1a. There is a causal link between brand personality and consumer trust in this brand.

The influence of brand personality on consumer attachment to the brand

Attachment to the brand corresponds to the emotional link between a consumer and a brand (Bozzo *et al.*, 2003). Various definitions and measures of that construct have been suggested (for instance, in French literature, Lacoëuilhe, 1997, 2000; Cristau, 2001; Heilbrunn, 2001; Lacoëuilhe and Belaïd, 2007). The definition of attachment put forward by Lacoëuilhe (2000), which is generally considered in the studies conducted in this area, will be used in this research: “attachment to the brand is a psychological variable that reveals a lasting and inalterable affective relationship (separation is painful) to the brand and expresses a relation of psychological closeness to it”.

Based on the studies conducted by Sung *et al.* (2005), Ambroise (2005, 2006) and Gouteron (2006, 2008), who showed the explanatory power of brand personality on attachment to the brand, we suggest the following hypothesis:

H1b. There is a causal link between brand personality and consumer attachment to this brand.

The influence of brand personality on consumer commitment to the brand

In the field of marketing, the concept of commitment has been considered in many areas, including consumer behaviour (Bodet, 2005), which resulted in many definitions, yet none so far has been commonly accepted. According to Morgan and Hunt (1994), there is relational commitment when an exchange partner believes that a current relationship with another is important enough to deserve as much effort as possible to maintain it. Thus, the committed party believes that it is worthwhile to work on the relationship to ensure it goes on forever. Bozzo *et al.* (2003) indicate that the committed consumer will be prepared to make short-term sacrifices to protect the durability of his long-term consumption.

In order to complete the previous studies relating to the link between brand personality and commitment (Ambroise *et al.*, 2005; Ben Sliman *et al.*, 2005; Gouteron, 2008), this research distinguished two types of commitment: affective commitment and continuance commitment, also called cognitive or calculated commitment (Harrison-Walker, 2001; Gilliland and Bello, 2002; Fullerton, 2003). The normative commitment, derived from organisational psychology research, is indeed less relevant when studying the existing relationship between a brand and a consumer (Fullerton, 2005).

Affective commitment is based on shared values, identification and attachment (Gruen *et al.*, 2000; Fullerton, 2003, 2005; Bansal *et al.*, 2004). Intuitively, affective commitment will be the core of the relationship between a consumer and a brand as consumers relate with, and are involved in, most of the brands they consume on a regular basis (Fournier, 1998). Affective commitment explains the process whereby a consumer is loyal. He has a favourable attitude to and is a frequent buyer of the brand (Fullerton, 2005).

Continuance commitment originates in the lack of alternate options offered to the consumer and in the costs of changing. When consumers are committed in a calculated manner, they are linked to their partner because it is difficult for them to exit the relation or because they see few alternate options outside the existing relation. The potential loss of something

that is valuable to the consumer is a key feature of continuance commitment (Fullerton, 2003, 2005). Lastly, Darcy and Volle (2007) stress that if the cognitive dimension (continuance commitment) is linked to opportunistic behaviour and to search for more valuable options, affective commitment translates a real identification between the partners and attachment comparable to friendly relationships.

Recently, several authors highlighted the significant positive influence of brand personality, in terms of overall personality or at the more specific level of personality traits, on brand commitment, without differentiating affective commitment from continuance commitment. Ben Sliman *et al.* (2005) showed that the Reassuring brand personality trait has a significant positive influence on commitment. Ambroise *et al.* (2005), in terms of overall personality, indicated that it has an influence on commitment even if it is not true for all product categories and if the sign of the relation depends on consumers' level of involvement in the category of products. Based on the above studies, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1c. There is a causal link between brand personality and consumer commitment to this brand.

The links between consumer trust, attachment, and commitment to the brand

The hypothesis of a link between trust and attachment to the brand was suggested both by Gouteron (2006, 2008) and Lacoëuilhe and Belaïd (2007). In attempting to discriminate trust and attachment, Lacoëuilhe and Belaïd (2007) noticed that integrity and benevolence – two dimensions of trust – are close to attachment and even likely to influence this variable. In addition this hypothesised link between trust and attachment corresponds to the end of the relational chain put forward by Aurier *et al.* (2001), which assumes the existence of positive relations between the following variables, respectively perceived quality, perceived value, satisfaction, trust, and attachment. As a result, we suggest the following hypothesis:

H2. There is a causal link between consumer trust in a brand and his attachment to this brand.

According to Lacoëuilhe (2000), the existence of a link between attachment and commitment is important to the extent that attachment to a brand helps understand how a consumer can be loyal to a brand whereas it is difficult to differentiate it from its competitors, when only the usefulness or functional characteristics of the brand are taken into account. Lacoëuilhe and Belaïd (2007) indicated the causal direction of this link and stressed that attachment is likely to feed the attitudinal facet of brand loyalty, i.e. commitment. While the hypothesis of the influence of attachment on brand commitment was suggested by Lacoëuilhe (1997), it was empirically demonstrated by Lacoëuilhe (2000), Lacoëuilhe and Belaïd (2007), and Gouteron (2008). As a result, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3. There is a causal link between consumer attachment to a brand and his commitment to this brand.

Lastly, trust is often mentioned as a determinant of commitment (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Gilliland and Bello, 2002). Indeed, commitment comprises potential vulnerability, uncertainty,

and consumers will be less committed when trust is not well established. If the consumer believes he can trust the brand, he solves the issue of uncertainty by engaging in a relationship with it. Thus consumer's commitment to a brand would be the consequence of his trust in it (Gurviez and Korchia, 2002; Lacey, 2007). The hypothesis of the influence of trust on commitment to the brand was suggested both by Gurviez (1998) and Lacoëuilhe and Belaïd (2007). A positive significant link between trust and commitment for mass consumption goods was showed by Frisou (2000), Kennedy *et al.* (2000), Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001), Gurviez and Korchia (2002), and Gouteron (2008). As a result, we propose this last hypothesis:

H4. There is a causal link between consumer trust in a brand and his commitment to this brand.

The conceptual framework shown in Figure 1 represents our corpus of four research hypotheses. Each arrow bears the number of the hypothesis associated with it.

4. Research methodology

This section successively describes the data collection carried out in this study to test the postulated research hypotheses, and the scales selected to measure brand personality as well as the three relational consequences considered in this study, trust, attachment, and commitment.

Data collection procedure

The data were collected from a convenience sample of 348 French consumers aged 19–23. It is composed of 53.7 per cent of women and 46.3 per cent of men. All those consumers had to answer a self-administered questionnaire about the Coca-Cola brand. The choice of the Coca-Cola brand is justified by its strong awareness with the studied population: young consumers of the brand.

Description of the measurement scales used

Brand personality

In order to measure the personality of the brand studied, Coca-Cola, the scale recently developed by Ambroise (2005), in a French context, was used. This measurement scale includes nine traits comprising 23 items. The nine traits are respectively:

- 1 friendly;
- 2 creative;
- 3 charming;
- 4 ascendant;

- 5 misleading;
- 6 original;
- 7 elegant;
- 8 conscientious; and
- 9 introvert.

Ambroise showed the stability of the structure of this scale through the assessment of 32 brands belonging to 12 different product categories as well as its reliability (internal consistency type) and its trait validity (convergent and discriminant validities). The author also demonstrated the predictive power of this scale measuring brand personality on attachment to the brand and brand purchase intention. Lastly, Ambroise (2006) indicated that the structure and semantic contents of the traits of her brand personality measurement scale are consistent with the general theories of human personality and the previous research carried out on the transposition of the concept of personality to the area of brands.

Trust in the brand

Trust in the brand was measured using the scale developed by Gurviez and Korchia (2002), composed of three dimensions: credibility, integrity, and benevolence, comprising eight items. The three dimensions have good internal consistency reliabilities. The convergent and discriminant validities have also been shown. Gurviez and Korchia indeed demonstrated that the three dimensions of trust are empirically distinct and that they also differ from commitment. Lastly, these authors showed that trust influences significantly commitment to the brand. The predictive validity of this measurement scale has thus been tested.

Attachment to the brand

The four items used to measure attachment to the brand are derived from the research of Lacoëuilhe (2000). The reliability (internal consistency type) of the unidimensional measurement scale developed by this author is satisfactory (Lacoëuilhe, 2000; Lacoëuilhe and Belaïd, 2007). The trait (convergent and discriminant validities) and predictive validities (through the study of the attachment-commitment link) of that measurement tool have also been established (Lacoëuilhe, 2000; Lacoëuilhe and Belaïd, 2007).

Commitment to the brand

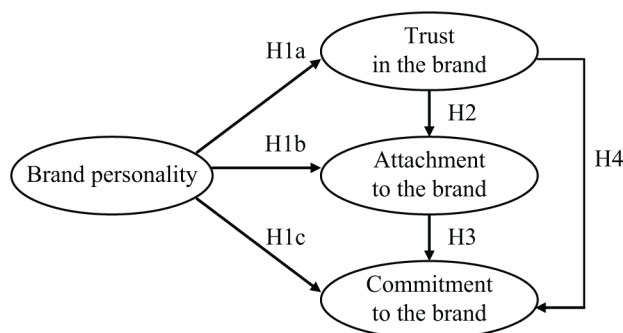
To measure the affective commitment and continuance commitment, the two measurement scales proposed by Fullerton (2005) were used. These two unidimensional scales, each comprising three items, have satisfactory internal consistency reliabilities. The convergent and discriminant validities of those two measurement tools have also been established.

The 348 young consumers surveyed in this research had to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with the items of those four constructs (trust, attachment, affective commitment, and continuance commitment), using a five-point Likert scale.

5. Results of the research

The theoretical model proposed in this research (see Figure 1) suggests the use of structural equations modelling. Adopting the two-stage procedure recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), the test of the measurement models will be described first and then the test of the structural model.

Figure 1 Conceptual framework



Stage 1: test of the measurement models

The main objective of this first stage is to assess the dimensionality and reliability (internal consistency type) of the various constructs used in this research.

First, exploratory factor analyses (principal component analyses) helped to find the original factor structures of the various measurement tools selected, except for brand personality – the confirmatory factor analysis conducted for this construct will be discussed later – and trust in the brand. For this latter construct, two factors were found, the first one comprising the credibility (three items) and integrity (two items) dimensions of this construct, the second one being composed of the two items of the benevolence dimension. An item of the integrity dimension was suppressed[1] as it had a poor loading, i.e. below 0.4. The Kaiser's eigenvalue rule, the most commonly used for determining the number of factors to extract – only factors with eigenvalues greater than one are significant – was considered.

The Cronbach's (1951) alpha coefficient then helped to assess the reliability of the different constructs considered in this research or of the factors of those constructs (see Table II). The coefficients calculated for the first factor of trust in the brand found during the exploratory factor analysis (credibility and integrity dimensions), attachment to the brand and affective commitment are satisfactory since they exceed 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978; Peterson, 1994). It should be noted that the values of the alpha coefficients for continuance commitment (0.68) and for the second factor of trust in the brand, benevolence (0.59), are lower than 0.7. This factor has only two items.

Second, confirmatory factor analyses were conducted (using Lisrel 8.30 software and a systematic 300-iteration bootstrap procedure) in order to corroborate the unidimensional factor structures found for the attachment to the brand, affective commitment and continuance commitment constructs. For the trust in the brand construct, the confirmatory factor analyses conducted showed that a three-dimensional model, true to the conceptualisation and operationalisation of this construct according to Gurviez and Korchia (2002), is more satisfactory in terms of fit indices, than a unidimensional model, tested on the basis of the exploratory factor analysis. The various fit indices obtained, except for the affective commitment and continuance commitment constructs, which have each three items[2], are satisfactory in relation to generally accepted standards (Hu and Bentler, 1999). Table III shows the communalities and the loadings of each of the items constituting the relational consequences of brand personality considered in this research. All the loadings

exceed 0.50 and are significant at the 0.01 level. Likewise, the communalities exceed 0.50, except for two items[3].

Jöreskog's (1971) rho internal consistency coefficients were then computed (see Table II). All exceed 0.70 except for the benevolence dimension of the trust in the brand construct (0.47). This result is not surprising as we had already got a lower Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this dimension during the exploratory factor analysis. Lastly, the convergent and discriminant validities between the three relational consequences considered, trust, attachment and commitment, were established using the method recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981)[4]. The latent variables each share more than 50 per cent of their variance with their measurements. Further, the values of the Student's *t* test, for all items of each of the studied constructs, are all significant at the 0.01 level (see Table III). Discriminant validities were also established. The latent variables each share more variance with their items than with other latent variables (see Table IV).

For brand personality, a crucial concept to this research, a nine-factor solution was requested (see Table V) for confirmatory factor analysis (with a 300-iteration bootstrap procedure) in order to converge with the original multidimensional structure of the scale proposed by Ambroise (2005). The fit indices obtained are satisfactory in relation to generally accepted standards (Hu and Bentler, 1999). The items with poor loadings, i.e. below 0.40 were suppressed. More specifically, the "smart" and "organised" items, belonging respectively to the Creative and Conscientious traits, were eliminated. The loadings of the items retained, for each of the brand personality traits, all exceed 0.50 and are significant at the 0.01 level, except for the "manipulative" and "sophisticated" items belonging respectively to the Ascendant and Elegant traits.

The reliabilities of the nine brand personality traits considered are satisfactory since the computed Jöreskog's rho coefficients all exceed 0.60. Only the original, elegant, and conscientious traits have lower Jöreskog's rho coefficients. As this reliability coefficient integrates explicitly the measurement errors, it seemed more appropriate than Cronbach's alpha for the structural equations used at this point of the research. The convergent and discriminant validities between the nine brand personality traits studied were then established using the method recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981)[5] (see Table VI).

Based on those various analyses, the perceived personality of the Coca-Cola brand can be described[6] (see Table VII and Figure 2). Overall, the personality traits of the Coca-Cola brand are perceived positively by the consumers surveyed. Indeed, six out of nine personality traits get a score above the average of three[7]. Coca-Cola is perceived as a creative (this personality trait gets the highest score), original, friendly and rather charming, elegant and conscientious brand. Two personality traits get a score under this average score, but they are negative traits (ascendant and misleading). Lastly, Coca-Cola is not perceived as an introvert brand. This personality trait gets the lowest score. It is noteworthy however that Introvert would be a negative trait, as suggested by Ferrandi and Valette-Florence (2002). Both authors stressed in their research that Lee Cooper was perceived by consumers as having rather negative personality traits such as Introvert.

Table II Relational consequences of brand personality: Cronbach's alpha and Jöreskog's rho coefficients

	Cronbach's alpha	Jöreskog's rho
<i>Credibility</i> (trust in the brand)	0.77 (1st dimension)	0.74
<i>Integrity</i> (trust in the brand)		0.89
<i>Benevolence</i> (trust in the brand)	0.59 (2nd dimension)	0.47
<i>Attachment to the brand</i>	0.90	0.92
<i>Affective commitment</i>	0.79	0.86
<i>Continuance commitment</i>	0.68	0.79

Table III Relational consequences of brand personality: main results of the exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses

	Exploratory		Confirmatory	
	Communalities	Loadings	Loadings	t
<i>Trust in the brand</i>				
The products of this brand bring me safety (<i>credibility dimension</i>)	0.37	0.59	0.55	9.88*
I trust the quality of the products of this brand (<i>credibility dimension</i>)	0.57	0.77	0.80	15.45*
Purchasing products of this brand is a guarantee (<i>credibility dimension</i>)	0.52	0.65	0.74	14.15*
This brand is sincere towards its consumers (<i>integrity dimension</i>)	0.66	0.83	0.87	17.80*
This brand is honest towards its clients (<i>integrity dimension</i>)	0.64	0.81	0.92	19.02*
I find that this brand renews its products to take into account research progress (<i>benevolence dimension</i>)	0.69	0.83	0.53	6.59*
I believe that this brand tries to improve its response to consumer needs on an ongoing basis (<i>benevolence dimension</i>)	0.71	0.84	0.58	6.81*
<i>Attachment to the brand</i>				
I have a lot of affection for this brand	0.83	0.91	0.93	22.53*
I am attached to this brand	0.74	0.86	0.83	18.75*
I am attracted to this brand	0.77	0.88	0.88	20.36*
Thinking about this brand brings me a lot of joy, pleasure	0.73	0.85	0.81	18.01*
<i>Affective commitment</i>				
I like this brand	0.65	0.81	0.75	15.27*
This brand has a lot of meaning to me	0.79	0.89	0.91	19.65*
I am strongly related to this brand	0.67	0.82	0.78	15.98*
<i>Continuance commitment</i>				
Even if I wanted, it would be hard for me to change brands	0.68	0.82	0.78	16.57*
My life would be disturbed if I had to change brands	0.75	0.87	0.92	22.41*
It would be too costly for me to change brands	0.43	0.66	0.52	9.89*

Note: * $p < 0.01$

Table IV Relational consequences of brand personality: tests of convergent and discriminant validities

	Credibility		Integrity		Benevolence		Attachment		Affective commitment		Continuance commitment	
	n	R_{ij}^2 ^a	n	R_{ij}^2 ^a	n	R_{ij}^2 ^a	n	R_{ij}^2 ^a	n	R_{ij}^2 ^a	n	R_{ij}^2 ^a
Credibility	0.50											
Integrity	0.67**	0.45	0.80									
Benevolence	0.42**	0.18	0.29**	0.08	0.31							
Attachment	0.64**	0.41	0.42**	0.18	0.33**	0.11	0.75					
Affective commitment	0.59**	0.35	0.44**	0.19	0.30**	0.09	0.68**	0.46	0.67			
Continuance commitment	0.19**	0.04	0.21**	0.04	0.17*	0.03	0.45**	0.20	0.56**	0.31	0.58	

Notes: The italics show convergent validities or the average variances extracted (ρ_{vc}); ^a The squared correlations between two constructs (R_{ij}^2); * The correlation is significant at the 0.05 level; ** The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Stage 2: test of the structural model

The structural model presented previously in Figure 1 was tested using Lisrel 8.30 software and a 300-iteration bootstrap procedure. The results of the goodness-of-fit tests of the overall structural model are rather satisfactory (RMSEA: 0.077; CFI: 0.81; Normed Chi-Square: 3.058 (0.000)) in relations to generally accepted standards (Hu and Bentler, 1999). It seems thus feasible to carry out the analysis of the results of the structural relations model.

The value of the parameters and of their degree of significance, indicated in Tables VIII-IX, allows us to confirm the existence of relations between the variables of the proposed conceptual model.

H1a postulated a link between brand personality and trust in the brand. Table VIII clearly indicates the existence of significant links between the three dimensions of trust in the brand proposed by Gurviez and Korchia (2002), credibility, integrity and benevolence, and several traits of brand personality. H1a is therefore partially supported by the data collected. More specifically, the conscientious ($\gamma = 0.41$, $p < 0.01$) and original ($\gamma = 0.27$, $p < 0.01$) brand personality traits have a significant positive influence on the credibility dimension of trust in the brand. Likewise, four brand personality traits have a significant positive influence on the integrity dimension of trust in the brand: conscientious ($\gamma = 0.48$, $p < 0.01$), friendly ($\gamma = 0.28$, $p < 0.05$), original

Table V Brand personality: main results of the confirmatory factor analysis and Jöreskog's rho coefficients

Traits	Loadings	t
<i>Friendly</i>		
Warm	0.71	14.21 *
Pleasant	0.80	16.38 *
Nice	0.68	13.39 *
Jöreskog's rho	0.775	
<i>Creative</i>		
Inventive	0.92	22.41 *
Imaginative	0.77	16.31 *
Jöreskog's rho	0.836	
<i>Charming</i>		
Attractive	0.58	10.12 *
Seductive	0.78	13.00 *
Jöreskog's rho	0.637	
<i>Ascendant</i>		
Manipulative	0.48	8.88 *
Arrogant	0.79	16.08 *
Pretentious	0.82	16.67 *
Jöreskog's rho	0.748	
<i>Introvert</i>		
Withdrawn	0.52	7.33 *
Shy	0.78	8.86 *
Jöreskog's rho	0.601	
<i>Misleading</i>		
Hypocrite	0.62	12.32 *
Lying	0.85	18.49 *
Deceitful	0.87	18.99 *
	0.828	
<i>Original</i>		
Trendy	0.70	12.57 *
Modern	0.54	9.86 *
	0.558	
<i>Elegant</i>		
Sophisticated	0.42	7.58 *
Has style	0.70	11.75 *
Jöreskog's rho	0.485	
<i>Conscientious</i>		
Strict	0.60	5.99 *
Serious	0.62	6.05 *
Jöreskog's rho	0.542	

Note: * $p < 0.01$

($\gamma = 0.26, p < 0.05$) and elegant ($\gamma = 0.21, p < 0.05$). The creative ($\gamma = 0.48, p < 0.01$) and conscientious ($\gamma = 0.43, p < 0.01$) brand personality traits have a significant positive influence on the last dimension of trust in the brand: benevolence. Lastly, should be noted the strong significant negative influence of the misleading trait of the brand on the integrity ($\gamma = -0.82, p < 0.01$) and credibility ($\gamma = -0.47, p < 0.01$) dimensions of trust in the brand and the negative significant impact of its introvert personality trait ($\gamma = -0.25, p < 0.01$) on the benevolence dimension.

Those various results show that seven brand personality traits have a significant influence on at least one of the three dimensions of trust in the brand. Only the charming and ascendant traits of the brand have no significant influence on trust. The conscientious trait of the brand is the only personality trait with a strong significant positive influence on the three dimensions of trust in the brand. Lastly, it should be noted that, for the credibility and integrity dimensions of trust, the influence of the misleading trait of the brand is the strongest, then followed by its conscientious personality trait.

A link has also been postulated between brand personality and consumer attachment to the brand. The results included in Table VIII indicate the existence of positive and significant relations between the friendly ($\gamma = 0.49, p < 0.01$), original ($\gamma = 0.25, p < 0.01$) and elegant ($\gamma = 0.27, p < 0.05$) brand personality traits on the dependant variable attachment to the brand. *H1b* is therefore partially validated.

Lastly, this research highlighted the significant positive influence of the original ($\gamma = 0.42, p < 0.01$) and friendly ($\gamma = 0.32, p < 0.01$) brand personality traits on affective commitment. Only the misleading trait of the brand has a significant negative influence ($\gamma = -0.35, p < 0.01$) on this dependant variable. Likewise, this personality trait ($\gamma = -0.63, p < 0.01$), as well as the ascendant trait of the brand ($\gamma = -0.33, p < 0.01$), have a significant negative influence on continuance commitment. This construct is also influenced positively by the original ($\gamma = -0.38, p < 0.01$) and charming ($\gamma = 0.18, p < 0.05$) brand personality traits.

Only the misleading and original brand personality traits have a significant influence, respectively negative and positive, on the two types of commitment considered in this research: affective commitment and continuance commitment. *H1c* is therefore partially supported by the data collected.

Regarding the hypothesised links of interdependence amongst the three relational consequences of brand personality studied (trust, attachment, and commitment) *H2* postulated a link between trust in the brand and attachment to the brand. The results included in Table IX highlight the positive influence of one of the dimensions of trust in the brand proposed by Gurviez and Korchia (2002), credibility, on attachment to the brand ($\beta = 0.35, p < 0.01$). The influence of the other two dimensions highlighted by those authors, integrity and benevolence, is not significant. *H2* is therefore partially validated.

However, those three dimensions of trust in the brand can be considered as explanatory variables of affective commitment to the brand. Indeed, the links between the credibility ($\beta = 0.17, p < 0.01$), integrity ($\beta = 0.34, p < 0.01$), and benevolence ($\beta = 0.14, p < 0.01$) dimensions of trust in the brand and affective commitment are positive and significant. Trust in the brand is also an antecedent of continuance commitment to the brand, except for its credibility dimension. The influence of the latter on continuance commitment is not significant. Conversely, the links between the integrity ($\beta = 0.50, p < 0.01$) and benevolence ($\beta = 0.16, p < 0.05$) dimensions of trust in the brand and continuance commitment are significant and positive, but at the level of 0.05 only for the benevolence dimension. *H4*, which postulated a link between the trust and commitment variables, is therefore partially supported by the data collected.

Attachment to the brand is a determinant of affective commitment ($\beta = 0.95, p < 0.01$) and of continuance

Table VI Brand personality: tests of convergent and discriminant validities

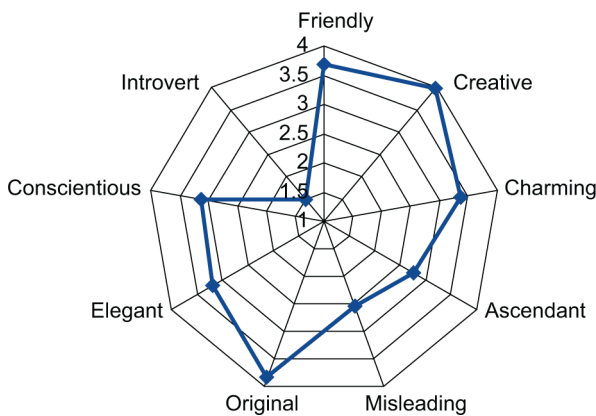
	Friendly	Creative	Charming	Ascendant	Misleading	Original	Elegant	Conscientious	Introvert
	R_{ij}^2 ^a	R_{ij}^2 ^a	R_{ij}^2 ^a	R_{ij}^2 ^a	R_{ij}^2 ^a	R_{ij}^2 ^a	R_{ij}^2 ^a	R_{ij}^2 ^a	R_{ij}^2 ^a
	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>
Friendly	0.54								
Creative	0.43***	0.19							
Charming	0.60***	0.36	0.47***						
Ascendant	-0.40***	0.16	n.s.	n.s.					
Misleading	-0.46***	0.21	-0.20***	0.03	0.51				
Original	0.57***	0.33	0.44***	0.19	0.67***	0.45			
Elegant	0.61***	0.37	0.59***	0.35	n.s.	n.s.	0.39		
Conscientious	0.34***	0.12	0.14*	0.02	-0.35***	0.12	0.62***	0.38	
Introvert	-0.27***	0.07	-0.33***	0.05	-0.16**	0.03	0.26***	0.07	0.37
					0.20	0.04	-0.45***	0.20	-0.20**
									0.44

Notes: The diagonal shows convergent validities or the average variances extracted (μ_{vc}); ^a The squared correlations between two constructs (R_{ij}^2); * The correlation is significant at the 0.10 level; n.s. = not significant; ** The correlation is significant at the 0.05 level; *** The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Table VII Scores received by the Coca-Cola brand on its various personality traits

Perceived personality traits of the Coca-Cola brand	Scores
Creative	3.96
Original	3.84
Friendly	3.69
Charming	3.37
Elegant	3.20
Conscientious	3.13
Ascendant	2.76
Misleading	2.55
Introvert	1.49

Figure 2 Personality of the Coca-Cola brand



commitment ($\beta = 0.94, p < 0.01$). *H3* is therefore validated. The analysis of the values of the structural model parameters leads to consider attachment to the brand as the most explanatory variable of affective commitment and of continuance commitment. Then come the dimensions of trust in the brand: integrity, credibility (for affective commitment only), and lastly benevolence.

Table VIII Gamma parameters (γ) and *t*-values of the structural model

Independent variables	Dependant variables											
	Trust in the brand						Attachment to the brand		Affective commitment to the brand		Continuance commitment to the brand	
	Credibility		Integrity		Benevolence		<i>t</i> -value	γ	<i>t</i> -value	γ	<i>t</i> -value	γ
Friendly	n.s.	n.s.	0.28	2.31 *	n.s.	n.s.	0.49	4.77 **	0.32	3.78 **	n.s.	n.s.
Creative	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	0.48	5.95 **	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Misleading	-0.47	-5.97 **	-0.82	6.97 **	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	-0.35	4.73 **	-0.63	-4.45 **
Original	0.27	3.85 **	0.26	2.56 *	n.s.	n.s.	0.25	2.86 **	0.42	5.54 **	0.38	4.15 **
Elegant	n.s.	n.s.	0.21	2.12 *	n.s.	n.s.	0.27	2.42 *	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Conscientious	0.41	4.35 **	0.48	5.16 **	0.43	4.17 **	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Charming	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	0.18	2.15 *
Ascendant	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	-0.33	-3.15 **
Introvert	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	-0.25	-3.13 **	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; n.s. = not significant

The percentages of explained variance (R^2) for each of the dependant variables considered in this research, credibility, integrity, benevolence (the three dimensions of trust in the brand), attachment to the brand, affective and continuance commitment to the brand, are indicated in Table X.

Table XI summarises the main findings of this research and indicates the direct and indirect existing links between the various variables studied: brand personality (including nine traits) and three major relational consequences of this construct, trust (encompassing three dimensions: credibility, integrity, and benevolence), attachment and commitment (affective and continuance). Thus it highlights, for managers, relational paths, from brand personality to the trust, attachment, and commitment variables.

6. Discussion

The purpose of this research was to offer a model that incorporates both direct and indirect effects of brand's perceived personality on three major relational consequences of this construct, trust, attachment, and commitment to the brand. Previous research that considered those variables had mainly studied specific links such as, for instance, brand personality-trust or attachment-commitment. The overall vision of the links, direct and indirect, between the brand personality, trust, attachment, and commitment variables, constitute the major conceptual contribution of this research, which thus proposes an integrated model of the relational consequences of brand personality.

In addition, three methodological contributions deserve to be pointed out:

- 1 The brand personality measurement tool, proposed by Ambroise (2005), and used in this study, includes nine traits comprising three negative ones: ascendant, misleading, and introvert. This research showed significant negative influence of those three traits on all the studied relational consequences, except for attachment. This result thus refines the understanding, by managers and researchers, of the impact of brand personality traits, both positive and negative, on the three major relational consequences of this construct: trust, attachment, and commitment.

Table IX Beta parameters (β) and t -values of the structural model

Independent variables	Dependant variables					
	Attachment to the brand		Affective commitment to the brand		Continuance commitment to the brand	
	t -value	β	t -value	β	t -value	β
<i>Trust in the brand</i>						
Credibility	0.35	5.36**	0.17	3.30**	n.s.	n.s.
Integrity	n.s.	n.s.	0.34	4.93**	0.50	4.60**
Benevolence	n.s.	n.s.	0.14	3.08**	0.16	2.11*
<i>Attachment to the brand</i>	/	/	0.95	17.21*	0.94	12.43**

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; n.s. = not significant

Table X Coefficients of determination (R^2)

<i>Trust in the brand</i>	
Credibility	0.53
Integrity	0.69
Benevolence	0.59
Attachment to the brand	0.61
Affective commitment to the brand	0.71
Continuance commitment to the brand	0.73

2 Regarding the concept of trust in the brand, three dimensions have been considered in this research: credibility, integrity, and benevolence. This conceptualisation and measure of trust, derived from the research of Gurviez and Korchia (2002), offer a better understanding, firstly of the influence of brand personality on trust as a multidimensional construct and secondly, of the influence of the three dimensions of trust on attachment and commitment.

Table XI Summary of the principal findings

Brand personality traits	Significant direct links (polarity of the relation)	Significant indirect links (polarity of the relation)
<i>Friendly</i>	Integrity (positive) Attachment (positive) Affective commitment (positive)	<i>Affective commitment</i> : via integrity (positive) and attachment (positive) <i>Continuance commitment</i> : via integrity (positive) and attachment (positive)
<i>Creative</i>	Benevolence (positive)	<i>Affective commitment</i> : via benevolence (positive) <i>Continuance commitment</i> : via benevolence (positive)
<i>Misleading</i>	Credibility (negative) Integrity (negative) Affective commitment (negative) Continuance commitment (negative)	<i>Attachment</i> : via credibility (the link between credibility and attachment is positive) <i>Affective commitment</i> : via credibility, integrity and attachment (the links between, on the one hand, the credibility, integrity and attachment and, on the other hand, affective commitment are positive) <i>Continuance commitment</i> : via integrity and attachment (the links between, on one hand, integrity and attachment and, on the other hand, affective commitment are positive)
<i>Original</i>	Credibility (positive) Integrity (positive) Attachment (positive) Affective commitment (positive) Continuance commitment (positive)	<i>Attachment</i> : via credibility (positive) <i>Affective commitment</i> : via credibility, integrity and attachment (all the links are positive) <i>Continuance commitment</i> : via integrity and attachment (all the links are positive)
<i>Elegant</i>	Integrity (positive) Attachment (positive)	<i>Affective commitment</i> : via integrity and attachment (all the links are positive) <i>Continuance commitment</i> : via integrity and attachment (all the links are positive)
<i>Conscientious</i>	Credibility (positive) Integrity (positive) Benevolence (positive)	<i>Attachment</i> : via credibility (positive) <i>Affective commitment</i> : via credibility, integrity, benevolence and attachment (all the links are positive) <i>Continuance commitment</i> : via integrity, benevolence and attachment (all the links are positive)
<i>Charming Ascendant Introvert</i>	Continuance commitment (positive) Continuance commitment (negative) Benevolence (negative)	None None <i>Affective commitment</i> : via benevolence <i>Continuance commitment</i> : via benevolence (the links between the benevolence and, on the one hand, affective commitment and, on the other hand, continuance commitment, are positive)

- 3 Two types of commitment have been distinguished in this study: affective and continuance commitment. This conceptualisation and measure of commitment complete the previous research relating to the impact of brand personality on commitment (Ambroise *et al.*, 2005; Ben Sliman *et al.*, 2005; Gouteron, 2008).

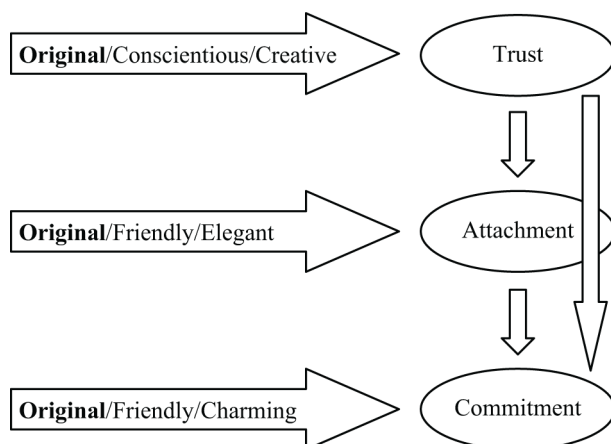
Thus this research highlights several interesting results. All the nine brand personality traits studied influence directly, positively or negatively, at least one of the three relational consequences considered: trust, attachment, and commitment (affective and continuance). In addition they have an indirect influence (except for the charming and ascendant personality traits) on affective and continuance commitment via trust and attachment to the brand. It has indeed been shown, in terms of the links of interdependence amongst the studied three relational consequences of brand personality, that trust influences directly attachment as well as affective and continuance commitment to the brand. More specifically, only the credibility dimension of trust in the brand has an influence on attachment. It also has an influence on affective commitment. The integrity and benevolence dimensions have an influence both on affective commitment and continuance commitment. Lastly, attachment strongly influences affective and continuance commitment to the brand.

Managerial implications

The results obtained in this research point out the relevance, for managers, of the concept of brand personality in predicting three constructs belonging to the field of relational marketing: trust, attachment, and commitment. More specifically, this study showed that not all brand personality traits have the same influence in the establishment or management of a lasting relationship between a consumer and a brand and that some traits are more efficient than others, based on the considered relational consequence. It is therefore important that managers act not on the “global” personality of a brand, but on personality traits.

As shown in Figure 3 for Coca-Cola, brand personality can be considered as a tool that helps, in the prospect of a long-term relational process, the transition from one stage of the relationship to another (trust – attachment – commitment)

Figure 3 Main personality traits to be considered depending on the stage of the relational process – in the case of the Coca-Cola brand



and contributes gradually to establishing a strong link between consumers and the brand based on the personality traits that are used. As all the nine personality traits of the Coca-Cola brand influence directly or indirectly at least one of the three relational consequences studied, none should be dismissed in order to develop or strengthen the relationship to the brand. Those personality traits can be used simultaneously or separately, depending on the relational stage preferred by managers. This research thus offers them various relational paths, from brand personality to the trust, attachment, and commitment to the brand variables.

The brand personality traits that would produce the sought relationship to the brand could be integrated in the positioning of the brand and communicated to targeted consumers. This research has also identified the existing links between trust, attachment, and affective and continuance commitment to the brand. It thus shows that taking into account the links of interdependence amongst the three studied relational consequences increases the understanding of how managers can reach their objectives in terms of consumer commitment to their brand.

Figure 3 shows that for the Coca-Cola brand, the original trait is particularly important since it has an influence on all the studied relational consequences of brand personality, except for the benevolence dimension of trust in the brand. The Coca-Cola brand should therefore appear as trendy and modern, which is already the case with the studied population.

Regarding trust in the brand, it seems difficult for companies to tell consumers that their brands are benevolent (Gurviez and Korchia, 2002). This research does contribute an element of response on this point for the Coca-Cola brand. It could indeed develop or increase some personality traits such as creative or conscientious, or yet not be perceived as being introvert (the introvert personality trait having a significant negative influence on benevolence).

Coca-Cola brand managers should keep an eye on consumers' perception of the Misleading and Ascendant traits of the brand, as well as of the Introvert personality trait. Certainly those three traits achieve the lowest scores of the nine personality traits of the brand. However, those scores assigned by consumers should be maintained or even reduced as they can damage the brand's capacity to establish a lasting relationship with them. Unsurprisingly, the Coca-Cola brand should not appear as being a brand that tries to mislead its clients since this personality trait has a direct and negative influence on all the relational consequences considered in this research – except for benevolence and attachment. But it should not appear either as being withdrawn or shy if it tries to appear benevolent, or manipulative, arrogant, and pretentious, if it tries to establish a continuance commitment with consumers.

Limits and future lines of research

This research has a number of limits, which constitute areas for future research. First of all, the study was carried out on a convenience sample. Even if the young consumers surveyed, aged 19-23, are part of the target of the Coca-Cola brand, it would seem interesting to replicate this survey on a much more diversified sample of consumers. Then, only one brand was studied, Coca-Cola, preventing both the generalisation of the results and the demonstration of the differentiating nature of brand personality. Others brands, either in the same

category of products, or in other categories of products, should be taken into account in future studies. Lastly, the influence of brand personality on other consequences should be studied (satisfaction, loyalty and preference, for instance). The influence of brand personality could also vary depending on various consumers' characteristics (involvement and brand sensitivity, for instance), this would let a company to act more specifically depending on the target.

More generally, future research in this area of brand personality should attempt to identify the antecedents of this concept in order to develop or increase some relevant personality traits. Communication has often been mentioned amongst these (Plummer, 1984; Ben Sliman *et al.*, 2005; Ambroise, 2006; Gouteron, 2006), but other variables of the marketing mix could also be taken into account (Batra *et al.*, 1993). Pantin-Sohier and Brée (2004) have recently shown the influence of product shape and colour on the perception of brand personality traits. Aaker (1997) also suggested the persons associated with the brand such as users, company employees, brand ambassadors. With regard to this, Ambroise *et al.* (2007) showed that there was a transfer of personality perceived by consumers from celebrity to brand on some traits of the personality barometer. The study of the consumers' perception of the personality of the artists-ambassadors of the Coca-Cola brand, for instance, and of its influence on the brand's perceived personality could constitute an interesting line of future research.

Notes

- 1 "This brand shows interest for its clients".
- 2 It is impossible to get goodness-of-fit indices for scales of less than four items.
- 3 "The products of this brand bring me safety" belonging to the credibility dimension of the trust in the brand construct and "It would be too costly for me to change brands" belonging to the continuance commitment construct.
- 4 Except for the benevolence dimension of the trust in the brand construct in terms of convergent validity.
- 5 Except for the original, elegant and conscientious brand personality traits in terms of convergent validity and for the Elegant personality trait in terms of discriminant validity.
- 6 To realise the profile of the Coca-Cola brand, the means of the scores of the items forming the trait was first computed. Then the means of each trait for all consumers was established.
- 7 The lowest score is 1 and the highest score is 5.

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Executive summary and implications for managers and executives

This summary has been provided to allow managers and executives a rapid appreciation of the content of the article. Those with a particular interest in the topic covered may then read the article in toto to take advantage of the more comprehensive description of the research undertaken and its results to get the full benefit of the material present.

Brand personality is widely acknowledged as having the potential to significantly influence consumer behaviour. The concept takes its cue from human personality and the notion is that brands can also have character traits. A key premise of the argument is that people ascribe inanimate objects with human attributes in order to explain and understand them better. It is also proposed that every direct or indirect contact a consumer has with a brand serves to create and reinforce these perceptions. Assigning traits in this way can also improve affinity towards a brand, more especially when consumers perceive a close match between the brand’s personality and their own.

Different models have been developed and utilized for studies into brand personality but certain flaws remain evident. Some analysts argue that definitions are not specific enough and others point to the inclusion of traits that have no relevance to human personality. This had led to the emergence of new definitions confined to characteristics that are mutually relevant to both humans and brands.

Key issues to consider

Evidence suggests that brand personality can influence consumer-brand relations and provide marketers with crucial insight into consumer behaviour. Previous research into brand personality has examined a range of different variables among which are perceived brand quality, attitude towards the brand and future purchase intention.

How brand personality impacts on consumer trust, attachment and commitment to the brand has also received attention. Louis and Lombart revisit earlier studies by exploring links between brand personality and these three variables, while they additionally consider how the variables interrelate.

Relational marketing considers trust a vital concept. Various definitions of trust persist but for the purpose of this study it is perceived as a multidimensional construct that incorporates credibility, integrity and benevolence. Consumers will regard a brand as credible if it meets performance expectations and a reputation for integrity is earned by keeping promises. Perceptions of benevolence will emerge when a brand consistently takes the interest of consumers into account.

Consumer attachment describes the emotional link between consumer and brand. It has also been defined as a strong psychological bond that is “lasting and unalterable”. With regard to commitment, this variable has received considerable attention from marketing scholars in relation to consumer behaviour and many other areas. Among the various definitions of commitment is one that differentiates between affective commitment and continuance commitment. Analysts have proposed that affective commitment reflects the closeness between consumer and brand and functions as the core of the relationship. It is also supposed that loyal

customers score highly on this commitment type. In contrast, continuance commitment is seen as a cognitive process that can signal a more “calculated” or “opportunistic” form of commitment that may prevail due to a lack of alternative options. Previous investigations have noted the considerable impact of brand personality on commitment without actually distinguishing one type from the other.

Plenty of evidence exists to support beliefs of links between the trust, attachment and commitment variables. For instance, different scholars have noted the closeness between the integrity and benevolence components of trust and attachment. The relationship between attachment and commitment may also be significant. A key suggestion here is that attachment explains why consumers commit to brands that are similar to competitors in terms of usefulness or functional attributes. Many researchers have pointed out the impact of trust on commitment. Effectively, trust serves as an antecedent of commitment because the latter will not occur unless trust is “well established”.

Survey and results

For the present study, French consumers aged between 19 and 23 were asked to answer a self-administered questionnaire about the Coca-Cola brand chosen because of its relevance to the sample. Of the 348 respondents, 53.7 per cent were female.

Nine traits were used to measure brand personality and analysis showed that respondents perceive Coca Cola to be a creative, original, friendly, charming, elegant and conscientious brand. Coca Cola scored low on ascendant, misleading and introvert, which are or could be negative traits.

Findings also revealed that:

- each trait has a direct positive or negative impact on at least one of the three trust components;
- all apart from the charming and ascendant traits indirectly influence both affective and continuance commitment through trust and attachment;
- trust directly affects both types of commitment to the brand;
- the credibility dimension of trust influences attachment and affective commitment;
- integrity and benevolence trust dimensions influence both commitment types; and
- attachment strongly influences both commitment types.

Marketing suggestions and further study

The Coca-Cola example reveals that some personality types are more influential than others when it comes to the creation and management of relationships between consumer and brand. Louis and Lombart therefore urge marketers to focus on individual personality traits rather than the brand’s overall personality.

Utilizing the appropriate personality traits can enable strong relations to be gradually formed. With Coca Cola, managers should consider their chosen relational path when deciding how to use the personality traits. The authors point to their direct or indirect impact on at least one of the three relational consequences to assert that marketers should separately or simultaneously focus on all nine traits to help improve or fortify consumer relations with the brand.

Another recommendation is to emphasize the traits needed to achieve the desired outcome within communications directed to relevant customer segments. Recognizing the interdependence of trust, attachment and commitment can also influence consumer behaviour towards the brand.

Brand managers of Coca Cola are also advised to remain alert to the negative traits of the brand. A key aim here is to maintain or reduce the scores to prevent these traits from harming the brand’s long term relationship with its customers. For instance, the brand should display no intention to mislead as this trait indicated a direct and negative influence on most relational consequences included in the study. The introvert trait could likewise prove damaging for any attempts to appear benevolent.

Louis and Lombart recognize that the convenience sample and single brand may limit the study findings. Further research that uses a more diversified consumer population and different products from the same or other categories is therefore encouraged. Studies may also reveal the impact of brand personality on other factors that could include satisfaction, preference and loyalty. The authors suggest that consumer characteristics such as involvement might moderate brand personality’s effect. Identifying the antecedents of brand personality may likewise be valuable as it could determine which traits need to be developed or strengthened.

(A précis of the article “Impact of brand personality on three major relational consequences (trust, attachment and commitment to the brand)”. Supplied by Marketing Consultants for Emerald.)