Using Personal and Online Repertory Grid Methods for the Development of a Luxury Brand Personality

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Abstract: Interest has been growing in the brand personality concept, because it offers a systematic approach for developing symbolic benefits, which are becoming more and more essential for brand differentiation. Although they are a distinctive feature of luxury brands and often even exceed their functional benefits, there is still no personality concept designed especially for luxury brands. The aim of this article is therefore to develop and implement an appropriate methodology for developing a luxury brand personality. In contrast to the common quantitative approach, the article proposes a qualitative methodology including the Repertory Grid Method (RGM) and explains its benefits. It was implemented with a survey of 31 German millionaires who can be described as heavy luxury consumers. The content analyses of the data uncovered five personality dimensions including, for example, Modernity, which relates to the temporal perspective of a brand. The study extends the RGM areas of application and demonstrates its applicability in developing brand personality dimensions. The validity of the results improves if they are replicated with other studies and with varying research methodologies. To this end, recent developments in Web 2.0 provide a great source of inspiration. As a result, a complementary study was conducted to exploit these opportunities for online RGM and to allow for a more in-depth understanding about the personality dimensions. The article builds upon an overview of qualitative online research, common online RGM and the idea of Web 2.0 to expand the methodological toolbox with collaborative RGM that allows respondents to build on the input of previous participants. The procedure was simplified in line with the explorative approach and implemented with a specially programmed online tool. The results support the five personality dimensions and give further insights into adequate brand personality traits. The article concludes with a discussion of the results and benefits of collaborative RGM for researchers and marketers.

Keywords: qualitative online research, Repertory Grid Method, Web 2.0, luxury brand, brand identity, brand personality

1. Introduction: decoding the "aura" of luxury brands

Because the functional benefits of many products on the market today have become increasingly equivalent and exchangeable, the focus of brand differentiation is shifting increasingly to *symbolic benefits* (Kapferer 2008, p. 173). Moreover, this trend is also stimulated by the growing emergence of *"fellow-shoppers"* who buy a product for the most part due to the congruity between their personality and the symbolic personality of the product (Trommsdorff and Heine 2008, p. 1672; Vigneron and Johnson 1999, p. 434). These trends lead to an *increased interest in the brand personality* concept, which offers a systematic approach to create symbolic benefits (c.f. Esch 2008, p. 79).

The *symbolism of luxury brands* conveys to a large extent human personality traits (c.f. Vigneron and Johnson 2004, p. 490). Although symbolic benefits are an essential feature of these brands and often even exceed their functional benefits and even though Vernier and Ghewy (2006, p. 4) attest them to have an "aura", the symbolic meaning of luxury remains largely unexplored (c.f. Dubois et al. 2001, p. 6) and there is still no integrated personality concept for luxury brands. Its development requires the investigation of luxury symbolism. But what research methodologies are there to *explore the "aura" of luxury brands?*

The *objective of this article* is to present and to implement an appropriate methodology for the development of a luxury brand personality. According to the explorative stage of the area of research, a qualitative methodology will be proposed that includes the Repertory Grid Method (RGM). The validity of results improves if they are replicated with other studies and with varying research methodologies. To this end, the recent opportunities of the Web 2.0 provide a great source of inspiration. A complementary study was therefore conducted to exploit these opportunities with a collaborative online RGM, and in order to deepen the understanding of the personality dimensions.

The article is *organised into another four parts*. The second part forms the conceptual groundwork. It explains the concept of brand personality and its common research methodology, defines luxury brands as the objects of investigation, and outlines the state-of-the-art of luxury symbolism. The third part describes the first empirical study. It introduces the RGM and its benefits for the research of

brand personality, outlines the survey procedure and demonstrates its results. The fourth pre-sents the complementary study. It gives an overview of qualitative online research methodologies, introduces the principles of Web 2.0 and outlines the collaborative online RGM and its results. The article concludes with a discussion of the results and the benefits of collaborative RGM for research-ers and marketers.

2. Conceptual groundwork

2.1 The status of brand personality in brand management

The modern understanding of a *brand* is consumer and identity oriented. Brands are regarded as images in the minds of consumers and other target groups. In dependence on the human identity, brands are also ascribed as having an identity. The *brand identity* comprises all associations that are intended by the company (Aaker 1996, p. 68). It corresponds with the intra-company self-perception of a brand, which determines precisely how the brand should appear to the external target groups. It builds the fundament for brand positioning, which relies only on the most relevant characteristics for brand differentiation. As shown in figure 1, the *brand image* constitutes the antipole of the brand ident-ity. It corresponds with the public-perception of a brand and is the result of marketing measures and other consumer experiences with a brand (Esch 2008, p. 91).
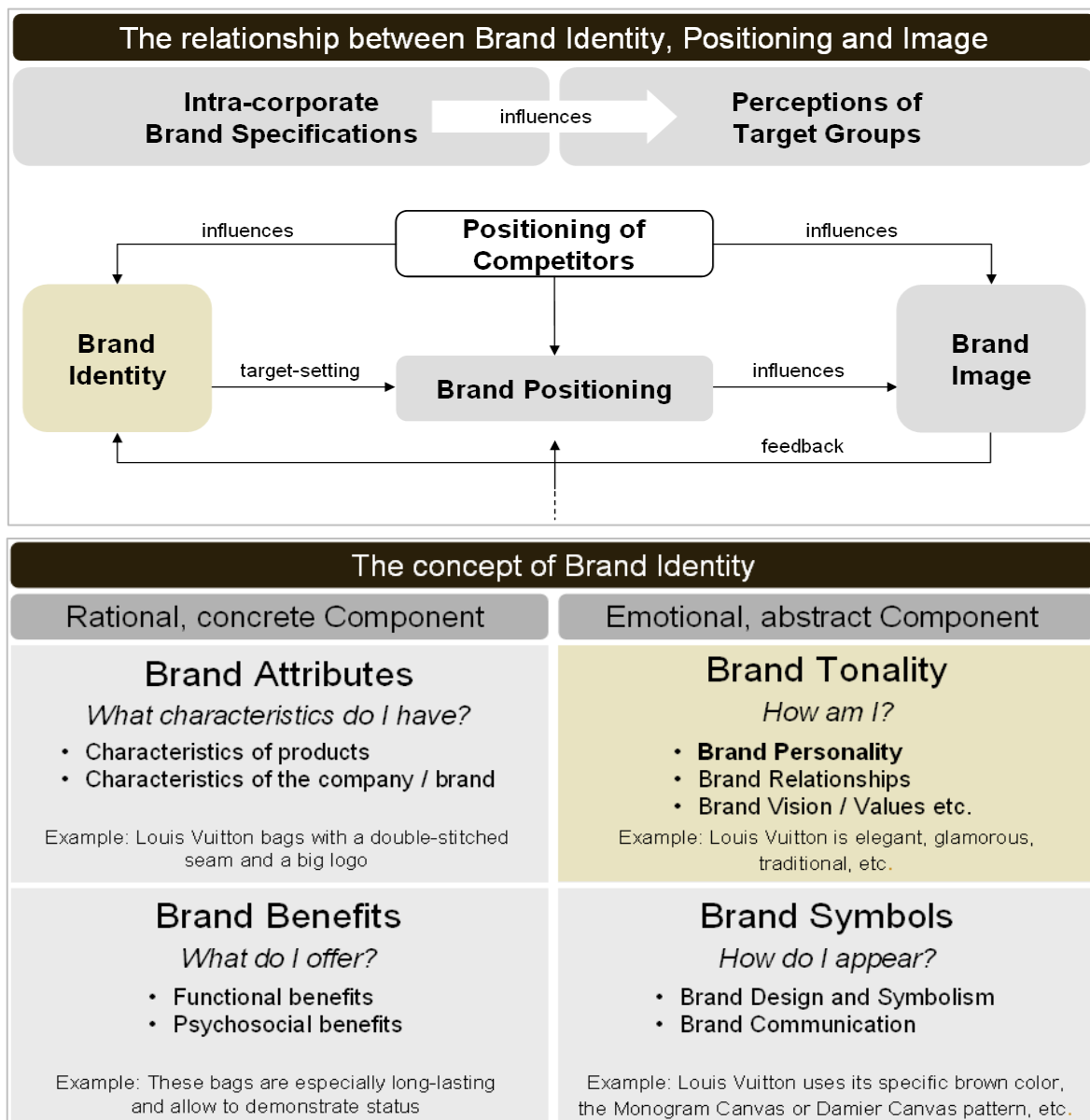

Figure 1: The status of brand personality in brand management according to Esch (2008, pp. 91 et. sqq.)

The *elements of common identity concepts* can be divided into two main components. The first component covers the physical-functional, mainly product-related associations and the other component includes the abstract, emotional associations of a brand (c.f. Kapferer 2008, p. 171 et sqq.). Esch (2008, pp. 91 et. sqq.) differentiates each of the two components again into two sub-components (see figure 1). The *rational component* consists of Brand Attributes and Brand Benefits. Brand Attributes cover the functional characteristics of a brand or its products (such as the double-stitched seam or the big logo of a Louis Vuitton bag). The Brand Attributes lead to Brand Benefits, which include functional and psychosocial benefits (such as the longevity of a Louis Vuitton bag also because of its double-stitched seam or the possibility to demonstrate status because of its prominent logo). The *emotional component* of the brand identity is divided into Brand Tonality and Brand Symbols. The Brand Tonality covers the emotional characteristics of a brand and corresponds largely with the Brand Personality (for example, the personality of Louis Vuitton might be seen as elegant, glamorous and traditional). Brand Symbols can be described as mental images of a brand, which can relate to visual, acoustic, olfactory, gustatory and haptic perceptions. They help to create the functional and emotional brand associations (for instance, Louis Vuitton uses also its Monogram Canvas pattern to convey an elegant style). As this article concentrates on the Brand Personality, this concept will be explained in detail below

2.2 The brand personality concept

According to Aaker (1997, p. 347) the brand personality refers "to the set of human characteristics associated with a brand." She developed the most established theoretical framework of brand personality dimensions and a scale to measure them by drawing on research about the Big Five human personality traits. Because of her consumer-oriented brand definition, the dimensions were derived from a large-scale consumer survey. More than 600 U.S. respondents rated on a five-point Likert scale different brands of varying categories on more than one hundred personality traits. Aaker consolidated these traits by factor analysis to five distinct dimensions. These include Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, and Ruggedness. Figure 2 illustrates her framework of brand personality including its sub-dimensions and a representative brand for each dimension (e.g. Hallmark cards typify the Sincerity dimension). While the framework claims general applicability across product categories, the dimensions might not be very descriptive for other cultures or specific categories (c.f. Austin et al. 2003, p. 81). Therefore, other studies followed in recent years, which usually *replicated the procedure* of Aaker to develop specific concepts for other cultures (e.g. for Germany by Hieronimus 2003 and Mäder 2005) and particular categories (e.g. for restaurants by Siguaw et al. 1999). This study aims to apply the brand personality concept to the luxury segment. As a precondition for that, the concept of luxury is outlined in the following.
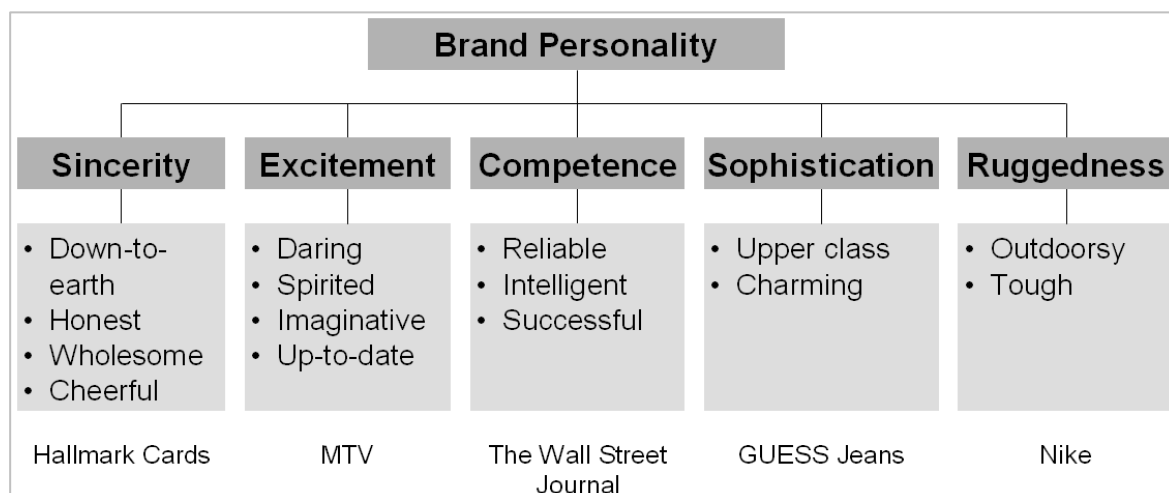
Figure 2: The concept of brand personality for mass market brands according to Aaker (1997

2.3 The concept of luxury

In management field it is accepted to distinguish luxury products from necessary and ordinary products within their category by their *essential characteristics*. These include price, quality, aesthetics, rarity, specialty and symbolism. As with the notion of luxury, all of these characteristics are relative terms. A *luxury product* is characterised by a relatively high rating on each of these dimensions com-

pared to other products of its category (Trommsdorff and Heine 2008, p. 1670). The definition of luxury products is closely related to the *definition of luxury brands*, because they are distinguished from non-luxury brands by product-related associations. Therefore, the essential characteristics of luxury products correspond largely with these of luxury brands and lead to the following definition: Luxury brands are regarded as images in the minds of consumers that comprise associations about a high level of price, quality, aesthetics, rarity and specialty (c.f. Meffert and Lasslop 2003, p. 6). Just as Dior differs from Chanel, it is essential for every luxury brand to differentiate from other peer brands. This is achieved mainly with symbolic characteristics, which are explained below.

2.4 State-of-the-art of luxury symbolism

There is only a small literature base about the symbolic meaning of luxury brands. Some authors concentrated on some particular symbolic characteristics including Dubois et al. (2005, p. 123), Esteve and Hieu-Dess (2005), Kisabaka (2001, p. 192 et sqq.) and Ourahmoune and Nyeck (2008). In most of the literature, the luxury symbolism is only mentioned circumstantially in descriptions about luxury brand characteristics (e.g. by Lipovetsky and Roux (2003, p. 51 et seq.), Mutscheller (1992, p. 65), Valtin (2004, p. 26), Vickers and Renand (2003, p. 469), Vernier and Ghewy (2006, p. 4) and Vigneron and Johnson (2004, p. 494). The research method for the development of a luxury brand personality needs to consider the special conditions of the luxury segment and will be outlined below.

3. First empirical study: using a personal Repertory Grid Method

In contrast to Aaker, the article proposes a qualitative methodology including the RGM. It introduces the RGM, describes the sampling, interviewing and analysis procedure and discusses the results and the applicability of the RGM.

3.1 The Repertory Grid Method

This method was developed by Kelly (1955) to support psychotherapy and it spread into a variety of different areas of research including marketing (c.f. Marsden and Littler 2000). One of its two *central assumptions* is that there is no direct, immediate access to objective reality, because everything that people know was filtered by individual perception and further information processing. Correspondingly, people live in their unique *subjective reality* and all their actions can only refer to that. Another important assumption is that people attribute meaning to something and understand something (also a person, event, etc.) by comparing it with other things that they already know. A repertoire of *personal constructs* helps them to group everything according to its similarity and dissimilarity in order to reconstruct reality and their position within that. Pupils, for instance, could use the construct "fair-unfair" to differentiate between teachers; a new teacher would be judged upon that construct with reference to teachers they already know. This demonstrates that personal constructs consist of binary oppositions and that every new object is assigned a position within that dichotomy (Durgee 1986, p. 34). The *objective of RGM* is to uncover the repertoire of personal constructs. The *challenge* is that they are often difficult to express in verbal distinctions, because a great deal of them are subconscious. Therefore relying on simple direct questioning is inadequate. According to its theoretic base, RGM elicits personal constructs with an *iterative process* that requires respondents to compare different triad combinations of stimuli, to express their constructs and to relate the stimuli to the construct poles. Irrespective of its specific version, RGM leads to *structured data* that facilitate elaborate analysis and interpretation (c.f. Eden and Jones 1984; Fromm 2004).

3.2 Sampling procedure

The investigation of luxury brand images with an open interviewing approach requires participants with a sound understanding about these brands. Therefore, only millionaires were selected (defined as individuals with a net worth of at least one million euros). The study of Dubois and Duquesne (1993, p. 42) indicates that wealthy people are not necessarily (heavy) luxury consumers. Therefore, the second selection criterion required that participants are actually consuming them enthusiastically. These criteria were verified in a preliminary talk before the interview. Beside that, the study requires a preferably heterogeneous mix of different personalities to ensure that it captures all relevant constructs. Therefore, the selection of participants followed a *snowball approach*: Initially, a very mixed group of students was selected for a seminar course at the Berlin Institute of Technology and consequently, they acquired very different interview partners mainly from their circle of acquaintances (c.f. Schnell et al. 1999, p. 280). The sample contains 31 participants including 14 women and 17 men,

mainly entrepreneurs, managers, experts from different industries and heirs. The age distribution is balanced between 20 and 70 years.

3.3 Interviewing procedure

The interviews were conducted in Berlin and Cologne by two interviewers at a time and took in each case about one to two hours. They started with an open discussion (free elicitation) with the participants according to Dubois et al. (2001, p. 7). At the beginning, the interview referred to fashion and later shifted also to another category that was chosen by the participants. Subsequently, brand associations were investigated according to the RGM procedure, which was complemented with the *preference differences* technique (c.f. Reynolds and Gutman 1988, p. 14). It required participants to expatiate in detail upon the differences in their preferences for luxury brands. Subsequently, participants were faced with print adverts of their selected brands to *stimulate them* further. In addition, *projective techniques* were deployed to also capture brand characteristics that are subject to social bias. Participants were asked to describe characteristics that would be important to other types of luxury consumers (c.f. Fisher and Tellis 1998, p. 566; Haire 1950, p. 651 et sqq.).

3.4 Data analysis

All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed leading to some hundred pages of verbatim. Then, a content analysis was conducted according to Mayring (2002, p. 114 et sqq.). At the beginning, the associations were roughly arranged into some main categories. It followed an iterative process of reviewing and adapting these categories until a reasonable system of categories was identified and all associations were assigned to a category (c.f. Reynolds and Gutman 1988, p. 18 et seq.). In addition, results were compared and consolidated with the results of another researcher, who conducted an independent content analysis (c.f. Dubois et al. 2001, p. 7). The results were translated into English based on intense discussions with an English native speaker.

3.5 Results: the luxury brand personality

The results suggest that consumers perceive that luxury brands have five distinct personality dimensions. They are illustrated in figure 3 and include the following:

- *Modernity*: This dimension describes the temporal perspective of a brand, which can lie either in the past or in the present or future. The traditional side is associated also with the words (in descending order according to their number of mentions) conservative, old-fashioned, countrified and natural; modern on the other hand is linked to the words trendy, young, youthful, urban and progressive. The modern pole is typified by Donna Karan New York, the traditional pole by Hermès. These results are supported by literature in psychology, marketing and luxury marketing. First of all, Modernity corresponds with one of the most prominent personality and cultural traits, especially with "Openness to Experiences" in the Big Five model (c.f. John and Srivastava 1999, p. 105), the cultural dimensions "Uncertainty Avoidance" and "Long-term Orientation" from Hofstede (2001, p. 145 et sqq.) and with one of the two main dimensions in the value circle from Schwartz (1992, p. 45) "Openness to change vs. Conservation". In the marketing context it is included in Aaker's (1997, S. 352) dimension "Excitement". In the luxury marketing literature Esteve and Hieu-Dess (2005) described tradition as an essential dimension for the positioning of luxury brands. Additionally, tradition was specified as an essential characteristic of luxury brands by Gurvierz and Besson (2000, p. 2), Mutscheller (1992, p. 65), Vickers and Renand (2003, p. 469), Vernier and Ghewy (2006, p. 4) and Vigneron and Johnson (2004, p. 494) and as an accessory characteristic by Dohrn-van Rossum (2003, p. 98), Lipovetsky and Roux (2003, p. 51 et seq.), Lombard (1989, p. 13), Valtin (2004, p. 26) and by Kisabaka (2001, p. 219 ff.) with her luxury look "Nostalgia Luxury".

- *Eccentricity*: This dimension describes the level of discrepancy from social norms and expectations, for instance in reference to loyalty to the law. Respondents described the conventional pole with the words boring, sincere, unremarkable, conservative, narrow-minded and honest, however with eccentric they associated provocative, freaky, funny, exotic, funky, naked, shrill, crazy, dubious, vulgar, overstated and bold. As a typical representative of a conventional brand they suggest Bogner, while Moschino is regarded as a typical eccentric brand. Eccentricity is comparable with the cultural dimension "Individualism" from Hofstede (2001, p. 209 et sqq.) and with the value category "Self-Direction" from Schwartz (1992, p. 45). In the marketing context it

can be found in Aaker's (1997, p. 352) dimension '"Excitement". In their investigation about luxury brand positioning Esteve and Hieu-Dess (2005) also revealed an "excentrique" dimension.

▪ *Opulence*: This dimension describes the level of conspicuousness of the symbols of wealth. These symbols cover a wide range of associations including ostentatious logos and valuable materials like gold and diamonds. The associations with the discreet pole comprise of words like frugal, understated, diffident, unobtrusive, puristic, unknown, connoisseur and minimalist. In contrast to that, the opulent pole was linked to the words conspicuous, pretentious, ostentatious, logo-oriented, kitschy, golden and famous. While Jil Sander is deemed to be the embodiment of a discreet brand, Louis Vuitton is deemed to be the embodiment of an opulent brand. This dimension is comparable to the value "Wealth" from Schwartz (1992, p. 33). In the luxury marketing context, brand awareness is described as an essential characteristic by Lombard (1989, p. 28), Mutscheller (1992, p. 65) and Phau and Prendergast (2000, p. 124). Belz (1994, p. 649) and Valtin (2004, p. 26 & 186) describe awareness and opulence as accessory characteristics and Kisabaka (2001, p. 130 & 193 et sqq.) incorporated this dimension in her luxury looks "Glamour Luxury" and "Logo Luxury" vs. "Understatement Luxury".

▪ *Elitism*: This dimension describes the level of status and exclusivity that is displayed by the brand. The post-modern, democratic perspective is limited insofar that luxury is by definition exclusive. However, the democratic pole is described by words like natural, warm, casual, authentic and friendly and the elitist pole is associated with the words neat, artificial, aloof, aristocratic, donnish, arrogant and offish. A brand especially cited as democratic is Strellson and as elitist, Gucci. This dimension is comparable with "Agreeableness" in the Big Five model (c.f. John and Srivastava 1999, p. 105), with the cultural dimension "Power Distance" from Hofstede (2001, p. 79 et sqq.) and with the second main dimension "Achievement vs. Benevolence" from Schwartz (1992, p. 45). In Aaker's brand personality concept (1997, p. 352) it corresponds with the dimension "Sophistication". In the luxury marketing context, Dubois et al. (2005, p. 123) uncovered the dimension "Elitist vs. Democratic" and Kisabaka (2001, p. 202 et sqq.) described elitism in her luxury look "Noble Luxury".

▪ *Strength*: This dimension describes the level of toughness and masculinity that is displayed by a brand. The soft pole is associated also with the words playful, feminine, kitschy, gay, youthful and decorated and the opposite pole is characterised by sporting, masculine, dynamic, successful, strong and rakish. Jean Paul Gaultier is considered as a typical soft brand and Hugo Boss is regarded as a typical strong brand. Strength is comparable with the cultural dimension "Masculinty" from Hofstede (2001, p. 279 et sqq.) and with the value "Power" from Schwartz (1992, p. 45). It is also covered by the dimension "Ruggedness" from Aaker (1997, p. 352). In the field of luxury, the dimension was analysed by Ourahmoune and Nyeck (2008). Kisabaka (2001, p. 202) explained that her luxury look "Noble Luxury" could either carry a maculine-dignified or a feminine-elegant note.
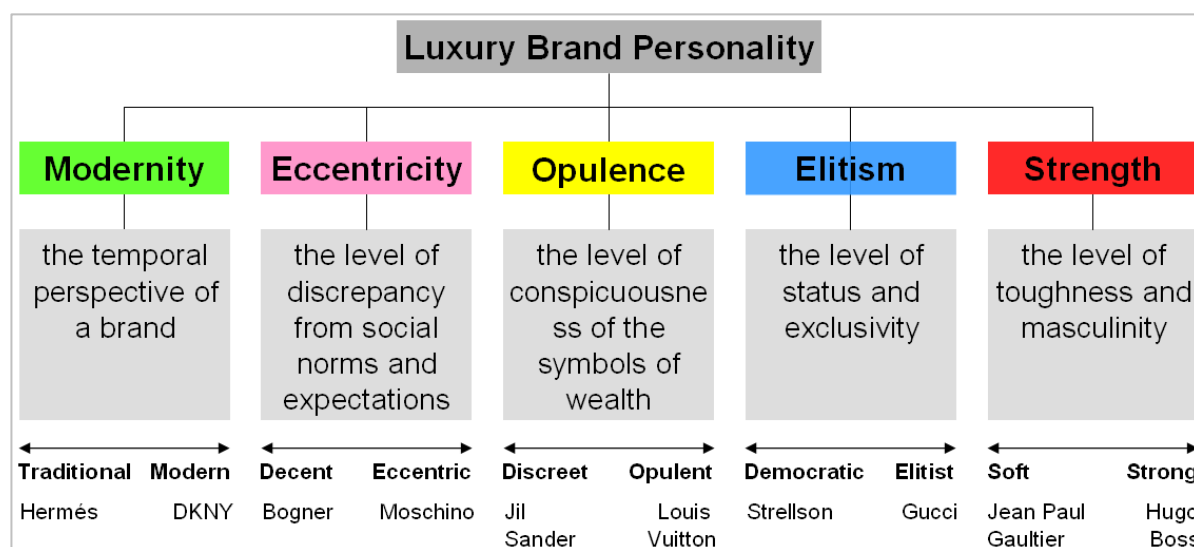

Figure 3: The concept of luxury brand personality

These dimensions are *not independent* from each other. First of all, the poles on the left hand side in figure 3 can be characterised with "quiet" and the opposite poles as rather "loud". In addition, there

are popular combinations, for instance modern-eccentric brand personalities. But then there are also modern, but rather conventional brands like Hugo Boss and traditional, but rather eccentric brands like Chanel.

3.6 The applicability of RGM for the research of brand personality dimensions

As demonstrated above, *literature supports the results* and therefore the applicability of the RGM. As the symbolism of luxury brands conveys largely human characteristics (c.f. Vigneron and Johnson 2004, p. 490), results were related also to psychological concepts including the Big Five model of personality (c.f. John and Srivastava 1999), the cultural dimensions from Hofstede (2001) and the value system from Schwartz (1992). In the field of marketing, the brand personality framework from Aaker (1997) provided another relevant basis. In addition, many similarities were found to the findings in the luxury marketing literature (c.f. Belz 1994; Dohrn-van Rossum 2003; Dubois et al. 2005; Esteve and Hieu-Dess 2005; Gurvierz and Besson 2000; Kisabaka 2001; Lipovetsky and Roux 2003; Lombard 1989; Mutscheller 1992; Ourahmoune and Nyeck 2008; Phau and Prendergast 2000; Valtin 2004; Vernier and Ghewy 2006; Vickers and Renand 2003; Vigneron and Johnson 2004).

Besides that, there are some *essential benefits* of RGM that explain its applicability. The quantitative approach is also influenced by subjective interventions of the researcher, especially by the determination of the *number of factors* in factor analysis and by the *pre-selection* of traits and stimuli. These decisions are even more difficult for the field of luxury, because researchers could only rely on its relatively small literature base. The qualitative approach of RGM allowed to explore the subject and to create a sound fundament also for subsequent quantitative studies. Respondents can select traits and brands as they desire. The set of traits certainly varies between different categories. On the one hand, there might be important constructs for a specific category, which are not included in the standard set of Aaker. On the other hand, the standard set probably contains traits that apply either to all or none of the brands in a specific category, which could lead to irrelevant *dimensions*. Moreover, most of the words describing personality are *ambiguous and contextual* (John et al. 1988, p. 174). While the quantitative approach requires deleting traits that load on multiple factors, RGM allows describing constructs with a group of words, which enables researchers to decode their varying contextual meanings for different constructs. In addition, it is difficult to differentiate constructs with the quantitative approach if there are popular, maybe even unexplored *combinations of traits* in a category. Another advantage of RGM is that it delivers relevant *binary oppositions*, which correspond to both the human information processing and the requirements for the design of a brand identity and positioning.

4. Complementary study: using an online Repertory Grid Method

The following paragraph presents the complementary study, which exploits recent opportunities of the Web 2.0 for qualitative RGM and explores further insights about the luxury brand personality. Based on an overview about qualitative online research, common online RGM and the idea of Web 2.0, a new version of collaborative RGM is explained and tested on a student sample. Subsequently, the results and benefits of RGM are discussed.

4.1 The status of RGM in qualitative online research

In contrast to quantitative online research that is already well established and increasingly displacing its offline counterpart (c.f. Skulmoski et al. 2007, p. 11), qualitative online research stands still in a relatively early stage of development. It can be categorized into *reactive and non-reactive* methods. The latter mainly include *content analyses* of any information in the web (such as websites, blogs, etc.) and participating and non-participating *observations* of user behaviour (c.f. Bensberg and Weiss 1999). Reactive methods comprise *questionnaire surveys* and synchronous and asynchronous *interviews* including *one-to-one interviews (*c.f. Fontes and O'Mahony 2008; Vioda et al. 2004) and *focus groups* (c.f. Stewart and Williams 2005). Questionnaire surveys can be classified into *collaborative* and *non-collaborative* techniques or versions. The questionnaires contain some qualitative research techniques ranging from simple open questions to advanced techniques. These include for instance Delphi (c.f. Snyder-Halpern et al. 2000), laddering (c.f. Reppel et al. 2008), but also *RGM*. The following paragraph explains the implementation of RGM into online applications.

4.2 Non-collaborative Repertory Grid Method

There are some web applications for RGM, e.g. nextpractice, sci:vesco.web and WebGrid. They provide researchers with a convenient procedure to set up a survey by entering some basic information including a set of stimuli, for instance a list of car brands. Respondents are faced with a short introduction followed by an iterative comparison process: They are required to select the stimulus of a given triad combination that they think would differ from the other two stimuli (sometimes dyad combination are used), to explain the construct poles in own words – non-collaboratively, i.e. independently of other respondents – and to evaluate all stimuli with reference to that construct. The existing tools offer analysis for single and multiple interviews and present results with data matrixes and graphic illustrations that even include interactive 3D grids. These applications are definitely state-of-the-art and exploit the (technical) opportunities of the Internet with new exiting features. However, they mainly squeezed offline applications into the web without challenging them on the modern understanding of the Internet, which is described as Web 2.0 and outlined below.

4.3 The idea of Web 2.0

The bursting of the dot-com bubble in 2001 marked a turning point for the development of the web. O'Reilly (2005) realized that the companies that had survived the crash and the new successful ventures seemed to have something in common. That's the set of principles and practices of the modern second era of the web, which can be described as Web 2.0. The *essential practices* include the following:

▪ Tags: A tag is a keyword or term that is used to characterise pieces of information like articles, pictures or videos. In contrast to the traditional approach used in books or by the standard Windows File Manager which relies on hierarchical taxonomy, Web 2.0 content is organised by tags. They provide metadata about items of information that help users to find them by browsing or searching (c.f. Hearst and Rosner 2008).

▪ Tag clouds: A tag cloud is a visual depiction of the tags that were assigned to an item of information. The tags are usually listed alphabetically and the importance of a tag is represented with its font size or color. They are usually hyperlinks that lead to respective information or that can be used to describe an item of information (c.f. Hassan-Montero and Herrero-Solana 2006).

▪ Folksonomy: Tags on Web 2.0 pages are usually chosen and managed by their users collaboratively. This practice of social tagging leads to user-generated classification systems which are known as folksonomy (from folk and taxonomy). Tags are usually not restricted to predetermined vocabulary, but chosen freely (c.f. Golder and Hubermanm 2006).

▪ User-generated Content: Beyond the social classification of content, Web 2.0 pages allow and encourage also the creation of user-generated content. This includes creating and sharing texts, pictures or videos and commenting and editing on existing content.

They come along with the *essential principles*, which require webpage creators to trust and to involve their users, but enable them to harness network effects and collective intelligence to create applications that actually get better the more people use them (c.f. Vickery and Wunsch-Vincent 2007). It's time to exploit the opportunities of the Web 2.0 also for the RGM. Therefore, the next paragraph outlines a RGM 2.0.

4.4 Collaborative Repertory Grid Method

According to the explorative nature of the study, the procedure of RGM is *simplified* and relies on the results of the *previous study*. Each of its *five rounds* corresponds with one of the five personality dimensions and consists of *seven steps*, which are illustrated in figure 4 (the original questionnaire is in German and shows bigger adverts).

At first, respondents were faced with a *triad combination* of adverts. According to the principle of simplification, the adverts were chosen to represent at the best one of the five personality dimensions and respondents were already given an advert that they had to compare with another two adverts by entering some adjectives. Subsequently, they had to describe the opposite pole. In the third step, respondents had to select their preferred position between the construct poles on a four-point Likert scale. The next step required them to think about further adjectives to describe the construct. They could either enter new ideas into the input field or select items from a tag cloud, which contained adjectives that previous respondents used to describe the respective construct. This approach allows

the collaborative development of constructs and represents the main difference to existing online RGM. In the sixth step, respondents were faced with a list for each construct pole, which contained the adjectives that they previously entered. They were asked to organize them into a ranking order starting with the adjective that they think would best suit to describe the construct. The procedure was repeated for each of the other four dimensions.

The collaborative RGM application is an explorative version, which could lead to a fully respondent-generated RGM in a later stage. It was programmed from scratch using PHP and MySQL by two students. In accordance with the open source principle, the source code is available from the author.

Figure 4: The questionnaire of collaborative RGM

4.5 Sampling and interviewing procedure

According to the explorative objective of the study, a *student sample* was chosen. After a pre-test with five students, a request for participation and a link to the questionnaire was emailed to about 150

business students at the Berlin Institute of Technology in three waves. After two days a reminder was sent to people who didn't already participate. This led to a sample of 52 students including 23 women and 29 men and a corresponding response rate of about 35 percent.

The *data collection* took seven days and ran mostly automated, beside the regular review of the user-generated vocabulary. It was necessary to correct mistakes in spelling, to modify some words (e.g. nouns into adjectives) and to delete some inappropriate words. In total, respondents entered 519 different adjectives.

4.6 Results of the complementary study

Figure 5: Final tag clouds

In figure 5 *tag clouds* are used to illustrate the results. Their main function is to create a *feeling for the data*. The font size of an adjective represents its *importance*, which depends on an underlying score. It increased every time an adjective was entered from a participant between a minimum of two points and a maximum of ten points depending on its position on the ranking order. The font colour of an adjective represents its *connotation*. It is neutral for black tags, negative for red tags (marked in italic) and positive for blue tags (underlined). Its *intensity* is represented with the brightness of font colour. The score of connotation was summed up every time the adjective was mentioned with a score between "-2" and "+2" depending on the position that the respondent had selected on the four-point Likert scale during the third step. This selection reveals the tendency of a respondent to choose more

or less favourable words to describe a construct pole. According to the principle of simplification, the same score was assigned to all adjectives that a respondent had chosen to describe a construct pole.

The tag clouds reflect pretty much the previously identified *personality dimensions*. In addition, they help to identify *meaningful and representative traits* and deliver further insights about the *impact of personal preferences* on the choice of traits. For instance, eccentric-oriented respondents described the opposite pole with conventional, conform and boring, while conventional-oriented people described it (themselves) with classic and elegant.

The *factor analysis* offers another analysis tool. Therefore, a *MySQL database query* was implemented to create a frequency table that contains the number of joint entries of any two adjectives. If two adjectives were found within the top three of a respondents ranking order, their joint entry was counted triply. This is another simplification to roughly incorporate their level of similarity and their relevance to describe a construct. The matrix was z-standardized and factor-analysed using *principal components analysis* and varimax rotation. The top ten factors of the first analysis explained only 44.6 percent of the variance. Therefore, the *matrix was cleared* from variables with cross-loadings over 0.4 or with factor loadings below 0.7 and from 21 words that are not adequate to describe a personality (e.g. black or technical).

The top ten factors of the subsequent analysis explain a variance of 72.2 percent and contain 156 variables without any cross-loadings over 0.4 (in total 16 factors with an eigenvalue above one; the 10th with 3.9 and the 11th with 1.5). Every factor includes between ten and 19 variables. Because of the simplified research design and the non-representative sample, the results don't provide any proof, at most some support of the five personality dimensions. In addition, the factor analysis identified traits that are *least ambiguous* and that are *most closely related* to a factor. Figure 6 illustrates the factors with their top ten adjectives by factor loading. Some adjectives were skipped in favour of the representative terms of a construct pole (marked in bold). It also reveals some interesting insights about *personality stereotypes*. For instance, a traditional person is perceived to be English/British, gentlemen-like and lordly.

Modern		Eccentric		Opulent		Elitist		Strong	
1 contemporary	,937	1 experimental	,914	1 pompous	,917	1 avant-garde	,895	1 dominant	,928
2 easygoing	,898	2 shrill	,911	2 sensual	,912	2 rich	,872	2 demanding	,917
3 youthful	,894	3 wild	,891	3 passionate	,911	3 proud	,871	3 powerful	,894
4 innovative	,886	4 freakish	,880	4 snobbish	,908	4 snootily	,868	4 hard	,872
5 urban	,876	5 surrealist	,864	5 flashy	,887	5 bitchy	,865	5 dynamic	,868
6 young	,875	6 funky	,857	6 baroque	,884	6 neat	,860	6 challenging	,862
8 casual	,829	7 strange	,855	7 demonstrativ	,884	7 arrogant	,846	7 *strong*	,860
9 credible	,824	8 futuristic	,841	8 ostentatious	,877	8 posed	,834	8 hot	,840
11 *modern*	,791	9 *eccentric*	,827	9 decadent	,876	9 *elitist*	,829	9 masculine	,817
12 clean	,693	10 artificial	,804	14 *opulent*	,855	10 presumptuous	,824	10 assertive	,789
Modernity		**Eccentricity**		**Opulence**		**Elitism**		**Strength**	
Traditional		Serious		Discreet		Democratic		Soft	
1 *traditional*	,913	1 stylish	,895	1 sober-minded	,877	1 nice	,919	1 childish	,882
2 countrified	,867	2 style-conscious	,871	2 puristic	,866	2 tolerant	,907	2 juvenescent	,872
3 english	,824	3 charming	,861	3 unobtrusive	,864	3 free	,897	3 niminy-piminy	,867
4 old-fashioned	,803	4 meritocratic	,853	4 minimalist	,846	4 sympathetic	,888	4 boyish	,856
5 old	,771	5 sovereign	,839	5 plain	,826	5 pleasant	,886	5 slimy	,856
6 gentleman-lik	,768	6 closed	,789	6 sallow	,813	6 relaxed	,884	6 genderless	,849
7 conservative	,740	7 aesthetic	,784	7 reserved	,809	7 accessible	,881	7 non-sexy	,846
8 british	,731	8 harmonic	,775	8 inornate	,806	8 *democratic*	,866	8 mummy's boy-lik	,841
9 lordly	,615	10 *serious*	,749	9 offish	,787	9 friendly	,855	9 innocent	,827
10 mystic	,580	13 *conventional*	,584	10 simple	,781	10 affable	,849	10 *soft*	,798

Figure 6: Results of factor analysis

4.7 Benefits of the collaborative RGM

First of all, collaborative RGM offers all the advantages and disadvantages of online research. The main *disadvantages* include the difficulties to create a *representative sample* and *validity-related disadvantages*, which can result from missing *motivation* by an interviewer and the deficit of *body lan-*

guage and context information (c.f. Curasi 2001). *Advantages* include mainly its *resource efficiency*, its *promptness*, the *accessibility* of hard-to-reach target groups (O'Connor and Madge 2003, p. 140) and *validity-related advantages* including the prevention of *interviewer bias* (Hessler et al. 2003, p. 122), the stimulation with *multimedia* and the encouragement of *self-disclosure* (Joinson 2001, p. 188).

Specific disadvantages of collaborative RGM include the regular *revision of tags* during the survey and *validity-related disadvantages* including the *bias by other respondents* and possible *bias by tag clouds* that require people to change their reading habits (c.f. Hearst and Rosner 2008, p. 2). On the other hand, it is suited for studies that aim to disclose a consensus of a target group about their constructs. This principle is especially known from the *Delphi method*, which uses a multi-level process that also enables participants to consider responses from previous participants (c.f. Ziglio 1996, p. 9 et sqq.). Collaborative RGM reduces *bias and struggle* in data documentation and analysis, because the tag clouds depict the consensus of the respondents at every stage of the survey (c.f. Snyder-Halpern et al. 2000, p. 811).

5. Conclusions

The use of RGM led to the *first concept of luxury brand personality*. The five dimensions help marketers to analyse the symbolic meaning of brands and to create a personality for their own brand. For researchers, it offers a fundament for further research about luxury brand personality and to analyse its antecedents and consequences.

The article offers two main contributions concerning the *research methodology*. Firstly, it *extends the use* of RGM to the development of category-specific brand personality concepts and demonstrates its suitability for that purpose. Furthermore, it explored the opportunities of Web 2.0 to extend the range of versions with the *collaborative RGM* and demonstrated its practicability with a complementary online survey on a specially programmed web application. Its main difference to common online RGM highlights an essential success factor for the advancement of online research: The idea of Web 2.0 isn't constrained to technical aspects; it claims trust and cooperation between webpage creators and users, which translates into a new researcher-respondent-relationship 2.0. This helps to stimulate and to empower respondents – and this corresponds to the modern customer-focus in brand management.

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