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**How different creators of wine brands affect dimensions of brand personality: An empirical study in the German wine industry**

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**Abstract**

*Purpose: Brands are one of the most important assets owned by many producer companies. This is even more important in the wine industry which is characterized by almost unlimited different brands leading to the fact that wine is seen as an extraordinary “difficult” product by the average consumer with a lot of information that cannot be processed in advance of their purchases. However, how brands emerge is not fully understood, yet. Recent research suggests different brand creators besides the producer (for example consumers as brand creators). Nevertheless, empirical research on this issue is scarce, even more in the wine industry.*

*Methodology: Against this background we analyzed how the perception of a brand in the wine industry and corresponding dimensions of brand-personality will be changed using different brand creators in an experimental setting with n=957 participants.*

*Findings: We found significant differences in the evaluation of brand-personality-dimensions. Therefore, we suggest that knowledge about the role of different groups in the brand creating process will have important implications for communication strategies within contemporary brand management and successful positioning in the wine industry.*

**Keywords:** wine industry, brand creators, brand personality, relationship model, brand management

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The field of brand research is concerned with examining the important influence of brand information on decision-making (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004). Today, brands are one of the most important and valuable assets owned by many producer companies, especially in the consumer goods sector (Keller, 2008). Consequently, branding and brand management has clearly become an important management priority for all types of organizations (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). Academic research has covered a number of different topics and conducted a number of different studies that have collectively advanced our understanding of brands, ranging from company actions (e.g., Naik & Raman, 2003) to what consumers think and feel about a brand (e.g., Fournier, 1998), to what consumers do about a brand (e.g., Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001) and finally to the financial market impact of a brand (e.g., Kapferer, 2005).

A prominent concept within the framework of brand research is “brand personality” (Aaker, 1997). Advertising often applies this construct by using product descriptions that correspond to humanlike traits (e.g., Henkel: “a brand like a friend”). Therefore, an emotional and symbolic benefit of a brand can be an important factor to discriminate oneself against competitors in saturated markets (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). That is why marketers are increasingly embracing alternative forms of *brand-creating activities*, as they recently have come to appreciate that they do not have the total control over the way their brands are built (Fueller & von Hippel, 2008). Moreover, although it would be rather intuitive to think of the original producer as brand creator or brand owner, new forms of brand creators emerge to date (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Pennington & Ball, 2009).

From a theoretical perspective the occurrence of new forms of brand creators can be explained by the relationship model (Fournier, 1998). This model regards a brand as an active element, an active partner of consumers that they can enter a relationship with – just like human partnerships (Fournier, 1998). Aaker (1996) underscores the relevance of those relationships between brands and consumers in an increasingly stressful, complex and uncertain world. In this environment brands can act as an enduring anchor, thereby adopting the function of a good friend (Aaker, 1996). This conceptualization of a brand includes that *groups different from the original producer* of a good or service *can be involved in the creating process of brands* as well. In that function these other groups have to be taken into consideration as direct determinants of brand personality. Direct determinants represent a direct transfer of meaning of the associated humans to the brands (McCracken, 1989). That is why we hypothesize that different *brand creators* lead to different perceptions of brand personalities by consumers.

Against this background, the aim of our exploratory study is to use an experimental design to reveal the influence of two different brand creators on the concept of brand personality (Aaker, 1997). We argue that brand creators act as additional direct drivers of brand personality. Brand creators are involved in or even absorb the entire process of creating a unique name and image for a product, good or service (e.g. Fueller & von Hippel, 2008). They should be considered as a significant and differentiated presence in the creating process of a brand with the aim to attract and retain loyal customers. So far – and to the best knowledge of the authors – the role of brand creators has not been at the center of academic scrutiny. Accordingly, we aim at closing the research gap between the history of brand origins (i.e. who built the brand?) and the perception of brand personality. We suggest that knowledge about the role of different groups of participants in the brand creating process will have important implications for communication strategies within contemporary brand management and successful positioning in dynamic markets.

## 2. EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

We used the online survey platform oFb (<http://www.soscisurvey.de>) to recruit a convenience sample of  $N = 957$  participants in the main study (male = 502; female = 455). While sitting in front of a computer, participants had to run through an online questionnaire that lasted about 12 minutes. A pretest with 11 participants confirmed comprehensibility, graphical depiction and functionality of the questionnaire in the online environment as well as the functioning of the manipulation (see below).

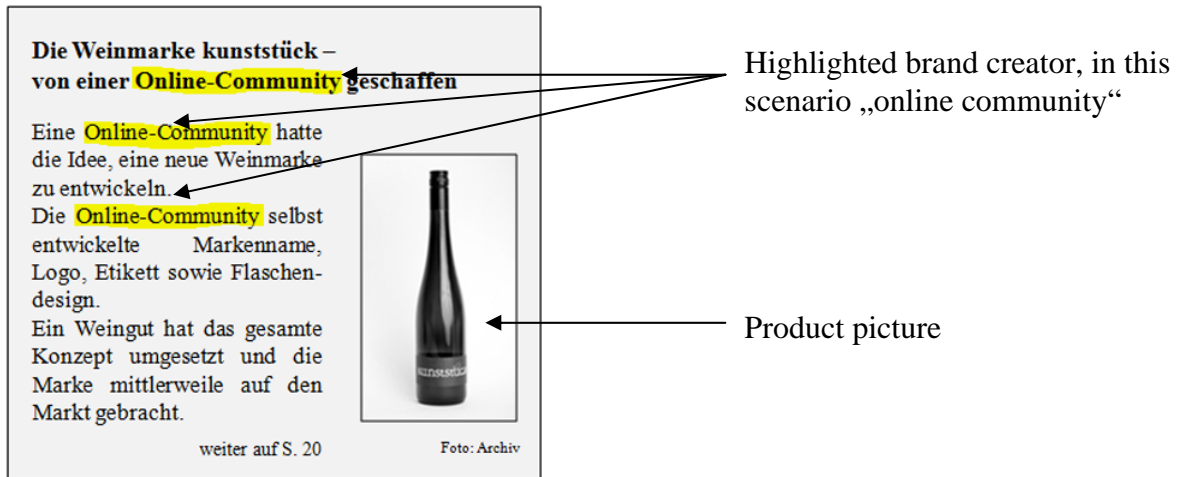
Stimulus material consisted of a new (and thus widely unknown) German wine brand. This brand was introduced in the market briefly before the start of the study. Several advantages occur from this stimulus material: Consumers of the brand could not be well-known or familiar with it, resulting in a credible manipulation of the original brand creators. Additionally, a real and already introduced brand has the advantage of a credible setup that has not been generated for study purposes only. The product category “wine” was chosen because it represents the most popular alcoholic beverage in the German market (GfK Group, 2009: No. 1). The wine market in Germany is characterized by almost unlimited different brands and wine is seen by the consumer as extraordinary “difficult” product with a lot of information that they cannot process in advance of their purchase (Lockshin, Jarvis, d’Hauteville, & Perrouy, 2006). This leads to a simplified purchase decision based on only little information (Lockshin, Jarvis, d’Hauteville, & Perrouy, 2006). Therefore, the purchase of wine in Germany can be described as highly brand-oriented. For example, 53.5 % of the Germans decide to buy wine because of the brand, whereas this percentage rapidly drops for other product categories (e.g., 37.7% for clothing and shoes; GfK group, 2009). As a reaction, there has been a tendency of wine producers and retailers to use their brand as differentiating attribute to attract consumers, whereas other regulated-by-law attributes like grape variety and growing area take a back seat (Hoffmann, 2010). In general, wine is a product where symbolic attributes come to the fore (Boudreaux & Palmer, 2007).

We manipulated the brand building history of the wine brand in the experimental conditions using a message framing approach (e.g., Blanton, Stuart, and VandenEijnden, 2001). The brand was presented within a short fictitious newspaper article (41 words) that highlighted the specific original brand creator. The different brand creators were selected according to the practical experience in the German wine market (Frick, 2004) as well as innovative approaches out of marketing research and practice (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001; Pennington & Ball, 2009).

Therefore, we integrated five groups of brand creators as well as a control group and randomly assigned participants to one of the scenarios: In the first scenario the whole brand was built by the winegrower himself (1), in the second scenario the brand was built by an Artist (2), then regular customers (3), an Online-Community (4), a professional marketing agency (5), and (6) is the control group (no brand creation stimulus). The five scenarios were presented credible, informative and short. First, homogeneity and consistence of the fictitious newspaper articles was assured through exactly the same presentation of stimulus design over all participants. Second, we manipulated only the construct of interest, the brand creators. Third, attention of participants was drawn on the brand creators by highlighting the specific wording. As can be seen in figure 1, participants did not receive any further product information (e.g., price or origin), so that their response behavior can be traced back to the manipulated variable brand creators, as everything else (brand name and product picture) was held constant (a similar procedure can be found in Orth and Malkewitz, 2006). The information on the scenario card emphasized the respective brand creator three times, stated

that the respective brand creator designed the brand name, the logo, the label and bottle on his own and that the brand creator introduced the whole concept into the market.

Figure 1: Example of a scenario with highlighted and manipulated brand creator.



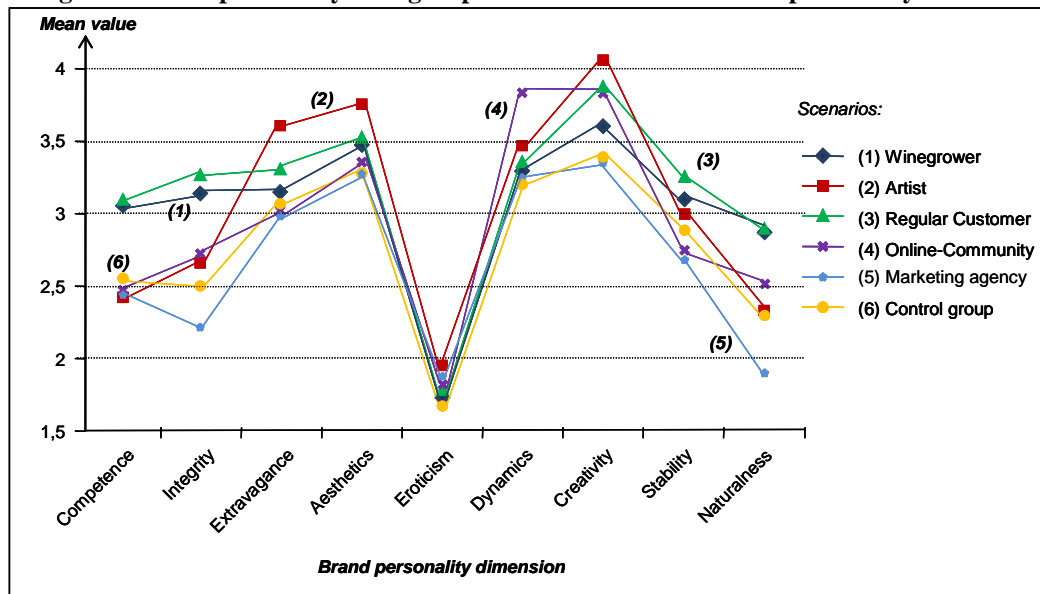
Brand personality was measured using the brand personality dimensions introduced by Mäder (2005). He developed a brand personality inventory for the German language and cultural area following the procedure of Aaker (1997). The nine brand personality dimensions of Mäder (2005) include competence, integrity, extravagance, aesthetics, eroticism, dynamics, creativity, stability and naturalness. These are measured on 6-point Likert scales (“This wine brand can be characterized as ...competent...dynamic...etc.”; Poles: (1) Strongly disagree – (6) strongly agree). We chose the brand personality dimensions of Mäder (2005) because of the fact that brands are seen as carrier of cultural specificity (McCracken, 1993).

### 3. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Statistical analyses were conducted with PASW Statistics 18. The study sample consisted of 957 participants, who were randomly assigned to the different groups. No significant age differences between the groups could be observed. For the analysis of our data we used ANOVA and post-hoc-testing as well as “Levene`s Test” to explore equality of means and variances between our study groups (Levene, 1960). All tests were non-significant ( $p > .05$ ) for the study groups, leading to the acceptance of equality of variance assumptions.

The descriptive analysis of our data shows that brand personality dimensions are perceived in a comparable way for the same product category indicated by the same trend for the lines of the different groups (Figure 2). With mean values ranging from 2.24 to 4.02 the brand personality dimensions of competence, integrity, extravagance, aesthetics, dynamics, creativity, stability and naturalness seem to fit to the perception of wine by our study participants. Only the dimension eroticism with mean values from 1.74 to 1.94 seems to be a brand personality dimension that does not fit to a wine brand. Overall, we can confirm the assumption that brand attributes come to the fore when dealing with wine (Boudreaux & Palmer, 2007).

Figure 2: Descriptive analysis of group mean values for the brand personality dimensions



Although indicating the same trend in the perception of brand personality dimensions by the different groups, a closer look reveals significant differences (Table 1). No significant differences between the experimental groups were observed for aesthetics and eroticism, though it is notable that the artist group on average scored higher on these dimensions than the other groups.

Table 1: Results of ANOVA and Post-hoc-Tests

Brand personality dimension	(1) Winegrower		(2) Artist		(3) Regular customers		(4) Online-Community		(5) Marketing agency		(6) Control group		Sig.
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Overall <i>n</i> =957	<i>n</i> = 156		<i>n</i> = 173		<i>n</i> = 153		<i>n</i> = 151		<i>n</i> = 172		<i>n</i> = 152		
Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Post-hoc
Competence	<b>3.04</b>	1.43	2.42	1.32	<b>3.05</b>	1.30	2.48	1.19	2.45	1.52	2.53	1.13	3,1 > 6,4,5,2
Integrity	<b>3.10</b>	1.45	2.65	1.32	<b>3.33</b>	1.42	<b>2.68</b>	1.26	2.24	1.17	2.50	1.13	3 > 4,2,6,5 3,1 > 2,6,5 1,4 > 5
Extravagance	3.14	1.47	<b>3.58</b>	1.51	3.31	1.42	3.04	1.46	3.01	1.51	3.07	1.42	2 > 6,4,5
Aesthetics	3.47	1.39	3.67	1.51	3.52	1.44	3.39	1.41	3.32	1.56	3.32	1.43	-
Eroticism	1.74	0.98	1.94	1.25	1.78	1.06	1.80	0.98	1.83	1.12	1.75	1.07	-
Dynamics	3.34	1.40	3.47	1.40	3.45	1.38	<b>3.79</b>	1.42	3.28	1.46	3.22	1.37	4 > 5,6
Creativity	3.57	1.46	<b>4.02</b>	1.45	<b>3.87</b>	1.44	<b>3.87</b>	1.49	3.39	1.61	3.43	1.41	2 > 6,5 2,3,4 > 5
Stability	3.09	1.37	2.99	1.47	<b>3.26</b>	1.33	2.75	1.37	2.70	1.39	2.91	1.29	3 > 4,5
Naturalness	<b>2.87</b>	1.48	<b>2.38</b>	1.28	<b>2.88</b>	1.42	<b>2.52</b>	1.24	1.93	1.13	<b>2.36</b>	1.29	3,1 > 2,6,5 3,1,4,2,6 > 5

Note: Rating scale for brand personality items "This wine brand can be characterized as ...competent...dynamic...etc."; Poles: (1) Strongly disagree – (6) strongly agree; *n* = number of participants; *M* = Mean; *SD* = Standard deviation; Sig. = Significance. Significant *p*-values with at least *p* < .05 are **bold**.

#### 4. DISCUSSION AND GENERAL CONCLUSION

We hypothesized that different brand creators lead to different perceptions of brand personalities by consumers. The results of our exploratory experimental study show that (1) most of the dimensions of brand personality fit to the product category “wine” as well as (2) that there are significant differences between both brand creators and the perception of brand personality dimensions. Here, a producer-driven brand creation approach (e.g. brand created by the producer, in our case the winegrower) is associated with higher levels of competence, integrity, stability or naturalness whereas a user-driven brand creation approach (e.g. brand created by the users of an online community) is associated with higher levels of dynamics and creativity. Furthermore regular customers as brand creators are associated with higher levels of competence, integrity, stability and naturalness (as in the winegrower scenario) but additionally a higher level of creativity is found (as in the winegrower scenario) whereas artists as brand creators score highest on the brand personality dimensions of extravagance and creativity.

Because we concentrated within our study on one product category namely wine, future research could (1) analyze the influence of different brand creators i.e. the corresponding producers and/or different consumer profiles with regard to other product categories, (2) could validate how different brand creators and the communication of different brand creating histories seems to influence the perception of the brand personality within a specific product category and between specific product categories, which i.e. could be defined by various attitudes toward brand and/or product categories, and (3) could analyze which influence those dimensions of brand personality have on different outcome variable -i.e. purchase intention, perceived quality or brand trust – moderated by different brand creators.

Nevertheless, our exploratory study leads to the general conclusion that telling the consumer about how the brand was developed could be an important yet not well understood source of differentiation of brands, especially for marketing theory (Aaker, 1996, Fournier, 1998) and practice (Fueller & von Hippel, 2008) which could be of rather high importance in the wine industry due to the complexity of this product category and the importance of storytelling for differentiation purposes. E.g. if a company (in this case a winegrower) has the need to create a brand or change the perception of a brand with an emphasis on being ‘dynamic’ from our data it seems to be promising strategy in that case to outsource brand creating activities to online communities. Thus a company should be aware of the fact that the communication of a specific brand creating history has an influence on the perception of the brand and that putting emphasis on the communication of brand history could be an interesting positioning or re-positioning tool.

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