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UNIVERSAL BRAND PERSONALITIES:

A Cross-Cultural Examination of adidas Brand Managers and Consumers in Italy and Germany.

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Abstract

Background

The field of brand management has long dealt with "brand equity" as a way to measure a brand's success. Brand managers will try to increase brand equity through tactical measures. The concept of brand personality, assigning human attributes to brands, is a way brand managers can influence consumers to form brand description and ultimately influence brand equity. This research focuses on brand personality and its challenges.

Problem

Brand managers attempting to apply the brand personality instrument will run into applicability and ambiguity challenges. The first is that managers and consumers will often have differing expectations and realities for the same brand. The second is that culture moderates the embedding and perception of brand personalities. This research thus explores how culture influences brand personality perception, using brand personality (Aaker J. L., 1997) as one theoretical concept, the cultural models of Hofstede (2001) and Schwartz (1992, 2004) as the cultural lenses, against the background of two angles and the apparent "manager-consumer gap" in brand management.

Method

Qualitative case study research is employed as an ideal theory-building method that also addresses the lack of qualitative research in brand personality research. Eight brand managers from Italy and Germany at the global sportswear brand adidas, and twenty adidas consumers, were interviewed. Answers were qualitatively explored using theory-infused coding techniques and a qualitative research analysis tool.

Result

The research revealed that adidas received similar brand personality profile assessments from all participants, regardless of country and angle (manager / consumer). Due to a unique constellation of Schwartz value types at adidas, and based on recent research on the subject matter, we argue that adidas has the characteristics of a "Universal Brand Personality", i.e. a brand personality that potentially works across multiple cultures. With high-impact implications for the global-local dilemma, the research closes with suggestions on how to further pursue the proposed concept

1   Introduction

"Think different", "The Power of Dreams", "Impossible is Nothing". What do these brand slogans from Apple, Honda and adidas (respectively) have in common? These brands' slogans all provide a sense of self-direction, creativity and independent thought.

Why is this important? In the field of brand management, brand managers face the great challenge to create and carefully adapt brand descriptions in order to have a positive financial impact on brand equity. One way they do this is to convey brand personalities to consumers, essentially assigning human personality attributes to brands and communicating these personalities to consumers in each direct or indirect contact they have with the brand. Research shows the brand personality instrument is essential for global brand managers to have an enduring impact on brand equity, since brand personalities help consumers identify with brands and make confident purchase decisions.

The challenge for brand managers arises particularly in global settings, since brand personalities are heavily impacted by cultural differences. For instance, Honda's brand personality would be perceived differently by US American consumers than it would by German consumers. However, current research indicates that the inclusion of *universal values* plays a significant role in branding messages and as such could have significant impact on the global-local dilemma most brand managers face. More specific, coming back to the slogans above, "self-direction", communicated by each of the brands Apple, Honda and adidas, is a value type defined by Schwartz (1992, 2004). Current research shows that the inclusion of this value (along with other values) leads to possible positive associations with brands across borders (Batra, Zhang, Aydinoglu, & Feinberg, 2017). Conversely, inclusion of other values leads to neutral or even negative associations with brands across borders.

This research, of qualitative nature, thus uses this theme, takes it a step further by including brand personality and the ideas from past research, to broadly examine:

RQ: How does culture influence brand personality perception?

1.1   Relevance

Why is such universal inclusion of values relevant in the brand management field, and how does this relate to brand personalities? For one, brand managers struggle with finding the right degree of globalization versus localization in their branding strategies. "In a world that is characterized both by

the sweeping forces of globalization (e.g. Alden, Steenkamp, & Batra (1999)) and by consumer desires for localization (e.g. Hannerz (1990)), multicountry marketers must find a way to combine local appeal with global efficiency" (Batra, Zhang, Aydinoglu, & Feinberg, 2017, p. 929). Current research shows that universal values could play a role in finding the most suitable compromise for brand managers, which is a relevant appeal for pursuing the research (Batra, Zhang, Aydinoglu, & Feinberg, 2017).

Second, the concept of brand personality is currently riddled with cultural challenges and pitfalls e.g. Ferrandi, Valette-Florence, & Fine-Falcy (2015); Aaker, Benet-Martinez, & Garolera (2001); Austin, Siguaw, & Mattila (2003); Hieronimus (2003); Smit, Van den Berge, & Franzen (2003); Supphellen & Grønhaug (2003); Rojas-Méndez, Murphy, & Papadopoulos (2013); Rojas-Méndez, Erenchun-Podlech, & Silva-Olave (2004); Sung & Tinkham (2005) & Chu & Sung (2001). Since the concept is only applied with difficulty when it comes to global brands, it is sensible to combine the developing theory on universal values with the brand personality concept to improve practitioner understanding of the instrument, so they can better influence brand equity, and simultaneously advance academic research in the field. Combining the idea of cultural models with brand personality seems like an inevitable step to take to improve overall applicability of the instrument.

Additionally, there is potential to improve the brand management research methodologically, which provides further relevance for the field and which is addressed in this research. This can be achieved (1) by employing qualitative research, a type of research often neglected to date in the brand management field and which is addressed here by employing qualitative case study research (Yin, 2013), and (2) by examining both brand manager and consumer sides of brand management. As the literature review uncovers in detail, brand managers and consumers form two angles of brand management (Zeithaml, 1988) that should be examined in conjunction to achieve depth, significance and expressiveness.

1.2   Context: adidas

The global brand adidas was chosen as an optimal context to further scope this research and provide insights from practice at a globally successful brand. adidas ag, originally named "Adi Dasser adidas Sportschuhfabrik", was founded in a small Bavarian city, Herzogenaurach, in August 1949 by Adi Dassler (adidas, 2018). In the exact same day, the soon-to-become-famous adidas 3-Stripes, which today are still the mark of the company worldwide, have been registered by the same father, beginning a long-lasting and successful story (adidas, 2018).

Throughout more than 50 years of history, today the Herzogenaurach based group is a worldwide provider of a wide range of sport and lifestyle products, manufacturing primarily athletic footwear,

apparel and accessories through its core brands: adidas and Reebok (producing 92% of the group's sales) (adidas Intranet, 2018). Both brands are then divided into sub-brands, entailing different brand strategies, products, target consumers, markets and brand images - as will be explained further.

Geographically, the group operates within the sporting goods industry and its business operations are classified into eight main regions, namely: (1) Western Europe, (2) North America, (3) Greater China, (4) Russia/CIS, (5) Latin America, (6) Japan, (7) The Middle East, (8) Asia/Pacific and Other Businesses (Marketline, 2018). According to adidas ag FY2017, Europe is adidas' main business area (27,7% of the company's total revenue), followed by North America (20,1%) and Greater China (17,9%). However, the company is planning to further expand its business outside of Europe, where until now it does not hold a leadership position.

In terms of product categories, footwear accounts for more than half of adidas' ag revenues, followed by apparel (38,8% of total net sales) and finally accessories, which includes bags, balls, equipment, scarf, etc. and counts for 8,7% of total revenue (Marketline, 2018).

According to the company's annual report (adidas, 2018), from 47 employees in 1949, today the adidas group employs more than 56.900 employees from over 100 countries and produces 900 million products every year (Marketline, 2018)In addition, it operates more than 2.500 own retail stores and 13.000 mono-branded franchise stores (Marketline, 2018), making adidas one of the biggest sporting goods company in the world.

As such, the company has achieved record sales of €21.218 billion in 2017 and its net income grew double digit compared to previous year – progressing by 32% up to €1.430 billion in less than 12 months (adidas, 2018). In addition, the brand yearly grows its market share around the globe, growing more than twice in all countries and regions the group operates in. In this regard, Russia/CIS seems to be an exception, as adidas is still struggling to gain market share in this region (adidas, 2018).

In 2018, the confident picture of adidas ag will continue as stated in the adidas annual report (2017): the company is targeting both a currency-neutral sales increase of around 10% and a net income of €1.6 billion, showing again a rapid but quality growth compared to the previous year (adidas, 2018).

Now, apart from other factors, these promising financials are the results of a successful branding strategy, which has been implemented the past years. *Adidas' brand managers as well as adidas' consumers* are examined in-depth to provide two holistic angles to answering the primary research question and sub-questions.

1.3   Scope

Besides the contextual choice for the global brand adidas, one of the main choices that affects the scope of this research is that both *brand manager and consumer angles* are included. Based on the reviewed literature, this is a rarity in brand management research and a first for brand personality research. Although the coverage of two angles is more complex, it does provide deeper insights. This scoping decision also provides a uniqueness factor to the research; i.e. never has brand personality been examined across brand managers and consumers from different cultures for the same global brand (Ahmad & Thyagaraj, 2014). To further scope the research adequately, only the cultures Italy and Germany were examined. The rationale for this is to examine cultures that have not been examined in conjunction in past brand personality research (Ahmad & Thyagaraj, 2014) that have a similar connection to the industry of the brand in question, and are European, hence familiar with the brand at hand, which is particularly important on the consumer side of the research.

1.4   Structure

The research continues with a literature review and theoretical framework, in which the two angles of brand management (scoping mechanism), the impact of cultural differences on brand management and brand personality, and the relevant cultural differences between Italy and Germany (scoping mechanism) are introduced. The structure then continues with the contextual background of adidas (scoping mechanism), which in this section revolves more around brand management-related information found through secondary sources. A formulation of research questions from the literature review and the contextual background follows, which is chronologically ordered by primary research question, sub-questions for the managerial angle and sub-questions for the consumer angle.

Next, methodological procedures are structured into a five-step process, covering the research plan (1), research design (2), fieldwork and analysis preparation (3), evidence collection and timeline (4), and analysis considerations (5).

The presentation and analysis of findings is structured in a similar format as the formulation of research questions, i.e. first the managerial sub-questions, then the consumer sub-questions are presented and discussed. The Brand Personality Profile is constructed per angle to visualize the results from the qualitative study. This is followed by an overall discussion of the primary research question and the introduction of Universal Brand Personalities as a concept for future research, infused with theoretical considerations and result triangulation.

The research closes with limitations, suggestions for future research, and concluding remarks.

2   Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1   A Review of Branding

This first section of the literature review will summarize the rich history of brand development and how its subsequent relevance came into existence. The following historical overview will allow for a contemporary presentation of the concept of "brand".

Branding at adidas

According to the recent BrandZ ranking conducted by Kantar Milward Brown (2018), the adidas brand is ranked at #100 among the most valuable brands worldwide. The brand registered a brand value of $8,296 million in 2017, while in 2018 it reached $12,456 million, becoming one of the top 20 brand risers in 2018 together with companies such as Netflix, Gucci, Tesla and Amazon.

The importance adidas places on its brand can be inferred from its financial valuation. Many top performing companies across the globe have brands that are recognizable and thus valuable, giving consumers a sense of assurance when their products and services are purchased.

This will be further examined in the following review on brands and brand management.

2.1.1   The Four Eras of Brands

To understand how brands such as adidas grew to be vital financial drivers and gain such influence over its consumers, it seems interesting to examine how the concept of 'branding' evolved.

During the end of the 19th century, though not entirely new at the time and limited to industries like tobacco and medicine, brands as we know them today were rare (Strasser, 1989). In a first era depicted to be around 1870 to 1914, brands started developing across various industries in the United States and became increasingly familiar to American consumers (Low & Fullerton, 1994). The origin of brands is attributed to business owners who realized that brands offered significant growth opportunities, and who found themselves amidst macro-environmental changes that enabled them to capitalize on brands (Low & Fullerton, 1994).

Improvements in communication and transport to coordinate cost-effective nation-wide distribution (e.g. railroad expansion, telegraph adoption, postal service improvement, telephone short-range contact), production processes to offer consistent products in high volumes, and even dramatic improvements in packaging (e.g. from bulk to individual packing, lower-cost high-speed lithograph

presses for color printing of brand labels) made branding adoptable and inciting for business owners across industries of this era (Low & Fullerton, 1994). Popular sectors included canned foodstuffs, soap, film, tobacco, process grain products, and metalworking. Additional developments, such as changes in U.S. trademark law that made it easier to protect trademarks, growth in advertising and advertising-based revenue models of magazines and newspapers that would advertise branded products, new retail institutions that would stock branded products, and increasing industrialization and urbanization, made brands both more familiar to American consumers and economically viable to American business owners (Low & Fullerton, 1994). Many well-known brands were established and driven by corporate leaders and top-level managers of this period, e.g. by H.J. Heinz, King C. Gillette, or Asa G. Chandler (Coca Cola). There was little functional, mid-level organization surrounding brand management activities in this period (Low & Fullerton, 1994).

Early on, brands could be described from a business or a consumer's perspective. From a business owner's perspective, brands, or "manufacturer branded products", became a way to communicate known and consistent-quality products to consumers through large-scale advertising (Low & Fullerton, 1994). Clearly identifiable by consumers, such brands had an edge over less-known competing products whose quality was undetermined. Conversely, from a consumer's perspective, brands had the appeal that the company took responsibility for the quality of the product, and if the consumer's expectations were unsatisfactory, they could avoid the brand in the future (Strasser, 1989).

In a second era ranging from circa 1915 to 1929, manufacturer brands were a norm in American consumer life (Low & Fullerton, 1994). Consequently, more systematic and functional mid-level management was introduced to the field of branding, reflecting functional organizational structures that had established at the time. "Brand management", in these days, was characterized by the challenging intersection of production, promotion and personal selling, which meant trained functional managers started taking on specialized roles as "Advertising Managers" or "Sales Managers" (Reed, 1929; Converse, 1930). Big brand names of this era still prevalent today, e.g. Wrigley, Ford, Campbell, Colgate, Kellogg's and Goodyear, already had a minimum 8 out of 10 familiarity rating among consumers in 1923 (Hotchkiss & Franken, 1923), showing that through marketing and sales, these firms' brands were becoming more dominant in the market due to new systematic management techniques.

A third era spanning from 1930 to 1945 was characterized heavily by the Great Depression in 1929 (Low & Fullerton, 1994). A "Battle of the Brands" took place (Borden, 1946), during which retailers promoted their own in-house brands aimed at price-sensitive consumers. This led to many manufacturer brands being removed from store shelves. Manufacturer brands were under further pressure through consumer ideals. Advertising was under critique from highly educated segments of society, and negative

connotations such as "manipulative", "tasteless", and "deceptive" were brought into connection with advertising.

Despite these downfalls, brand managers were only slowly introduced into some organizations, likely because most firms were confident that their existing functional management organization sufficed in coping with these brand-related challenges (Low & Fullerton, 1994). One of the first examples of brand management in organizations was P&G, whose president from 1930, Richard Deupree, approved the innovative plan of one of his employee's, Neil McElroy. McElroy had the vision that each P&G brand would have its own brand assistants and managers, responsible for driving the promotional activities around the brand. Other companies slowly followed suit in the years to come, e.g. Johnson and Johnson in ca. 1935, Monsanto in ca. 1940, Merck in ca. 1946, and General Electric in ca. 1950 (Low & Fullerton, 1994).

Following World War II, birth rates were up, personal income levels rose, and the middle class was growing. Many other factors, like television advertising, new products and large demand for national products, increased the importance of manufacturer branding. These factors, along with a certain "fad" for the brand manager position, led to widespread adoption of the formal "brand manager" in most other companies. This fourth era, beginning in circa 1950, continues to this day (Low & Fullerton, 1994).

This historical examination reveals that brand management has been susceptible to business and marketing changes on both firm and macro level, and that brands emerged primarily due to their benefits for *both business owners and consumers*. Most of the changes are characterized by managerial styles and organizational structures. The widespread adoption of brand managers in organizations across the globe has sparked much research in the field, which further demonstrates the importance of brand management (Low & Fullerton, 1994).

2.1.2   Contemporary Views of Brands

The "brand" construct has been thoroughly researched from different perspectives leading up to the present day. Some take a more product-oriented, others a more holistic view (e.g. Styles & Ambler (1995) & Wood (2000)). There are also various stakeholder perspectives that define the brand construct, i.e. that "a brand may be defined from the consumers' perspective and/or from the brand owner's perspective" (Wood, 2000, p. 664).

During the fourth era of brand management, the American Marketing Association (1960) defined a "brand" as: "A name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors". Many contemporary researchers have adopted this definition with minor changes, e.g. Watkins (1986);

Aaker (1991); Stanton, Etzel, & Walker (1991); Doyle (1994) and Kotler, Armstrong, Saunders, & Wong (1996).

Naturally, other variations of the brand definition exist, some highlighting intangible aspects of a brand (e.g. brand image). Dibb, Simkin, Pride, & Ferrell (1997) use a variation devised by Bennett (1988, p. 18) stating a brand is: … "a name, term, design, symbol or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers". This definition not only highlights intangible elements of brands, but also takes a more corporate rather than consumer perspective (Wood, 2000).

Consumer perspectives have also been infused into definitions of "brand". Ambler (1992) does so by defining a brand as: … "the promise of the bundles of attributes that someone buys and provide satisfaction… The attributes that make up a brand may be real or illusory, rational or emotional, tangible or invisible". This definition clearly shows how subjective the attributes of brands can be, and that "brand attributes are essentially what is created through brand description" (Wood, 2000, p. 664).

Brand definitions in the literature include many more perspectives, including emphasizing brands as images in consumers' minds (Boulding, 1956; Martineau, 1959; Keller, 1993), brands as value systems (Sheth, Newman, & Gross, 1991) and brands as added value (Levitt, 1962; de Chernatony & McDonald, 1992; Wolfe, 1993; Doyle, 1994). One of the more holistic definitions is that of Brown (1992), who states that a brand is: …" nothing more or less than the sum of all the mental connections people have around it". There are also more specific brand personality definitions (Alt & Griggs, 1988; Goodyear, 1993; Aaker, 1996) that will be emphasized in later sections of this review.

2.1.3 Contemporary Views of Brand Management

Today, brand management positions (e.g. "brand manager", or their equivalent) have been sound and adaptable to individual needs of organizations (Low & Fullerton, 1994). Because brand managers attempt to influence consumers' predispositions towards their brands and such predispositions and beliefs may impact purchase decisions, brand management caries great financial responsibility for the firm (Fischer, Völckner, & Sattler, 2010), which means brand management is both an important and relevant driver for any organization engaging in highly competitive markets (Low & Fullerton, 1994). "Managers of brands are essentially involved in the creation of brand description and therefore the degree of brand strength or brand loyalty achieved" (Wood, 2000, p. 666). Thus, brand managers have the potential to affect many quantifiable aspects of competitive advantage, be it market power, brand value, added value or profit (Wood, 2000, p. 666).

Further, "brand management should be strategic and holistic, as this is conductive to longevity" (Wood, 2000). The management philosophy that brands should be seen as long-term assets has been researched early on e.g. Dean (1966). Whereas Davis (1995) also promotes that brand management should occur in a long-term fashion, Wood (1995) and Uncles, Cocks, & Macrae (1995) add that brand management must take a higher level function in organizations than is currently represented in order to succeed: "If brands do have value then the way a company uses its portfolio of brands is a top management decision" (Uncles, Cocks, & Macrae, 1995) as cited in Wood (2000). There are also strategic implications that brand management is becoming more team-based and thus interdisciplinary (de Chernatony, 1997).

One of the greater strategic challenges of brand management are relationships between more operational levels of brand description/loyalty and measurable elements of brand value, which should ideally be explicit, monitored and measured (Wood, 2000, p. 665). However, different organizational structures and cultures may not allow for such "operationalization" of the brand management function (Wood, 2000), and in fact, brand equity has been described as non-existent in an operational context (Feldwick, 1996). For brand managers, this means that learning from current brand value and iteratively infusing these learnings into their brand descriptions to continuously improve brand position and long-term competitive advantage seems unlikely (Wood, 2000).

2.2   The Angles of Brand Management

From the previous discussion on brands and brand management, it becomes clear that two angles exist: (1) managerial and (2) consumer side. The following section will dive deeper into these two opposing sides.

Angles of Brand Management at adidas

Adidas takes a consumer-oriented approach to brand management. The adidas consumers are divided into six categories: (1) Male Athlete, (2) Female Athlete, (3) Young Creator, (4) Streetwear Hound, (5) Amplifier and (6) Value Consumer, which are not mutually exclusive (adidas, 2018). Within these consumers, the objective is to target and to win the most influential consumers, defined creators who live in the six global cities and who set trends, as explained above (adidas, 2018). Indeed, adidas seeks to build communities around its brands and products, through a specific digital strategy.

From all the fragmented and plentiful definitions of the brand construct that focus either on the corporate or consumer sides, Wood (2000) drew together many of the different approaches into one

definition that emphasizes both the corporate and consumer perspectives. That definition reads: "*A brand is a mechanism for achieving competitive advantage for firms, through differentiation (purpose). The attributes that differentiate a brand provide the customer with satisfaction and benefits for which they are willing to pay (mechanism)*" (Wood, 2000, p. 664).

A great takeaway from the literature and the final consolidated definition presented here is that a brand is meant to add to a firm's competitive advantage (in terms of revenue, profit, added value or market share). On the consumer side, the brand should provide benefits, which may be illusory or real, emotional or rational, intangible or tangible (Wood, 2000). Deducted from this definition and applied to our conceptual framework, we will examine both perspectives, i.e.:

(1) Managerial perspective (Aaker, 1991; American Marketing Association, 1960; Bennett, 1988; Dibb, Simkin, Pride, & Ferrell, 1997; Doyle, 1994; Kotler, Armstrong, Saunders, & Wong, 1996; Stanton, Etzel, & Walker, 1991; Watkins, 1986 & Wood, 2000),

and (2) *Consumer perspective* (Aaker, 1996; Alt & Griggs, 1988; Ambler, 1992; Boulding, 1956; Brown, 1992; de Chernatony & McDonald, 1992; Doyle, 1994; Goodyear, 1993; Keller, 1993; Levitt, 1962; Martineau, 1959; Sheth, Newman, & Gross, 1991; Wolfe, 1993 & Wood, 2000).

Figure 1: Definitions: The Angles of Brand Management.

Adapted from Wood (2000, p. 664).
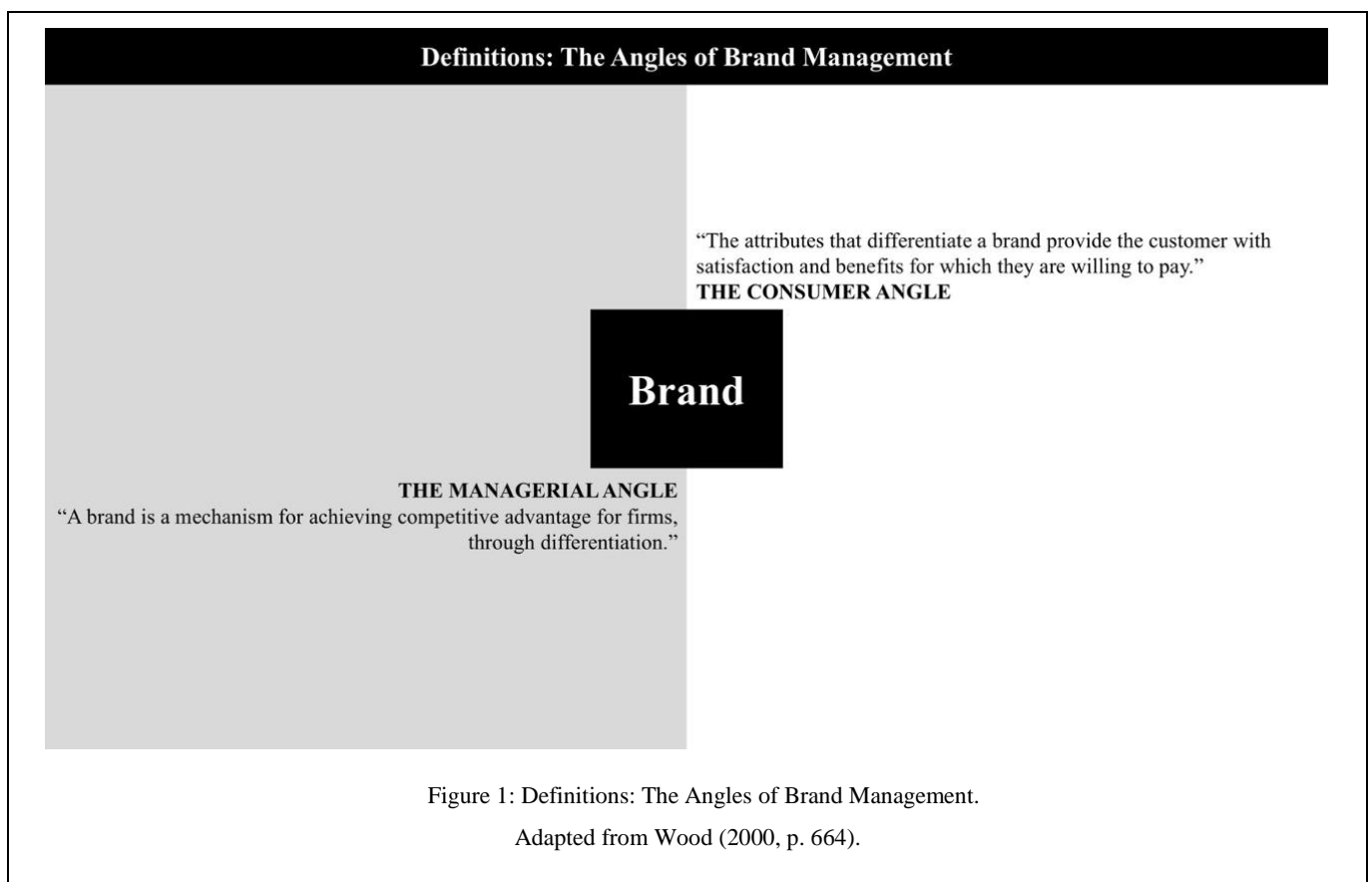
2.2.1 Managerial Angle: The Importance of Brand Personality

As stated above, brand managers carry great financial responsibility for the firm (Fischer, Völckner, & Sattler, 2010), which, regarding to brands, entails a strong focus on brand equity. To influence brand equity, managers use an array of strategies, methods and tactics. In this context, *brand personality* is introduced as a relevant influencing instrument for managers to indirectly influence brand equity.

Brand personality, describing the "assignment of human personality traits to brands" (Lieven, 2017, p. 592), stems from the theory of animism (Gilmore, 1919; Harvey, 2005). Animism describes when characteristics commonly associated with humans are attributed to objects (Lieven, 2017). Multiple definitions surround the concept of brand personality. For instance, brand personality has been defined as:

- … "set of human personality traits that are both applicable to and relevant for brands" (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003, p. 151)

and, more methodologically:

- … "personality descriptors [should] load on the same factor when used to describe human personality and brand personalities" (Caprara, Barbaranelli, & Guido, 2001, p. 381)

Aaker J. L. (1997) first incorporates brand personality in her definition, stating that brand personality can "help brand strategists by enriching their understanding of people's perceptions of and attitude toward the brand, contributing to a differentiating brand identity, guiding the communication effort and creating brand equity".

The concept of brand personality emerged in the early 1990's, when marketers and researchers alike started attributing distinct personalities to brands (Aaker & Fournier, 1995). Organizations leverage brand personality to characterize brands as partners or friends of the consumers (Fournier, 1998). Brand managers are responsible for choosing what human characteristics to infuse into their brands (Fournier, 1998). Using certain personality scales, managers can adjust these brand personalities in accordance with how they intend to position the brand in the market (Grohmann, 2009). Brand personality has shown to have predictive capabilities of brand equity (Aaker J. L., 1997; Grohmann, 2009). Brand personality is used to generate consumer engagement with brands, and helps establish and maintain strong brands (Fournier, 1998; Kapferer, 2010; Lin, 2010).

Now, linking this concept back to brand manager's financial responsibility and therefore determine the managerial relevance of the brand personality concept, its monetary and potential return on overall *brand equity* should be reviewed. There is consensus that brand personality has inherent influence on brand equity (as Aaker J. L. (1997)'s definition above indicates; also see Biel (1993), Keller (1993),

Fournier (1998), Kapferer (2010) & Lin (2010)). Although multiple definitions fragment the concept, *brand equity* can more generally be described in three ways, as:

1. the total value of a brand as a separable asset – when it is sold, or included on a balance sheet;
2. a measure of the strength of consumers' attachment to a brand;
3. a description of the associations and beliefs the consumer has about the brand (Feldwick, 1996).

The three definitions range thematically across *brand valuation* or *brand value* used in accounting (1), to *brand strength* or *brand loyalty* (2), to *brand image* or *brand description* (3) - the two latter definitions used more commonly by brand managers (Lieven, 2017, p. 662). Brand equity models resulting from general definitions as described above do not differ substantially from each other (Brady, Cronin, & Fox, 2008; Keller, 1993; Yoo, Donthu, & Lee, 2000). Naturally, the impact of brand personality on brand equity corresponds mostly to the third definition, because a brand can be "associated" with human personality traits, which may shape a certain belief or perception about the brand by the consumer. A relationship between the three above definitions of brand equity can be assumed (Wood, 2000), and if placed into a chain adapted from Wood (2000, p. 667), then brand personality may have the potential to affect the start of the chain, where a brand is tailored to the needs and wants of a target marketing using the marketing mix (Wood, 2000).
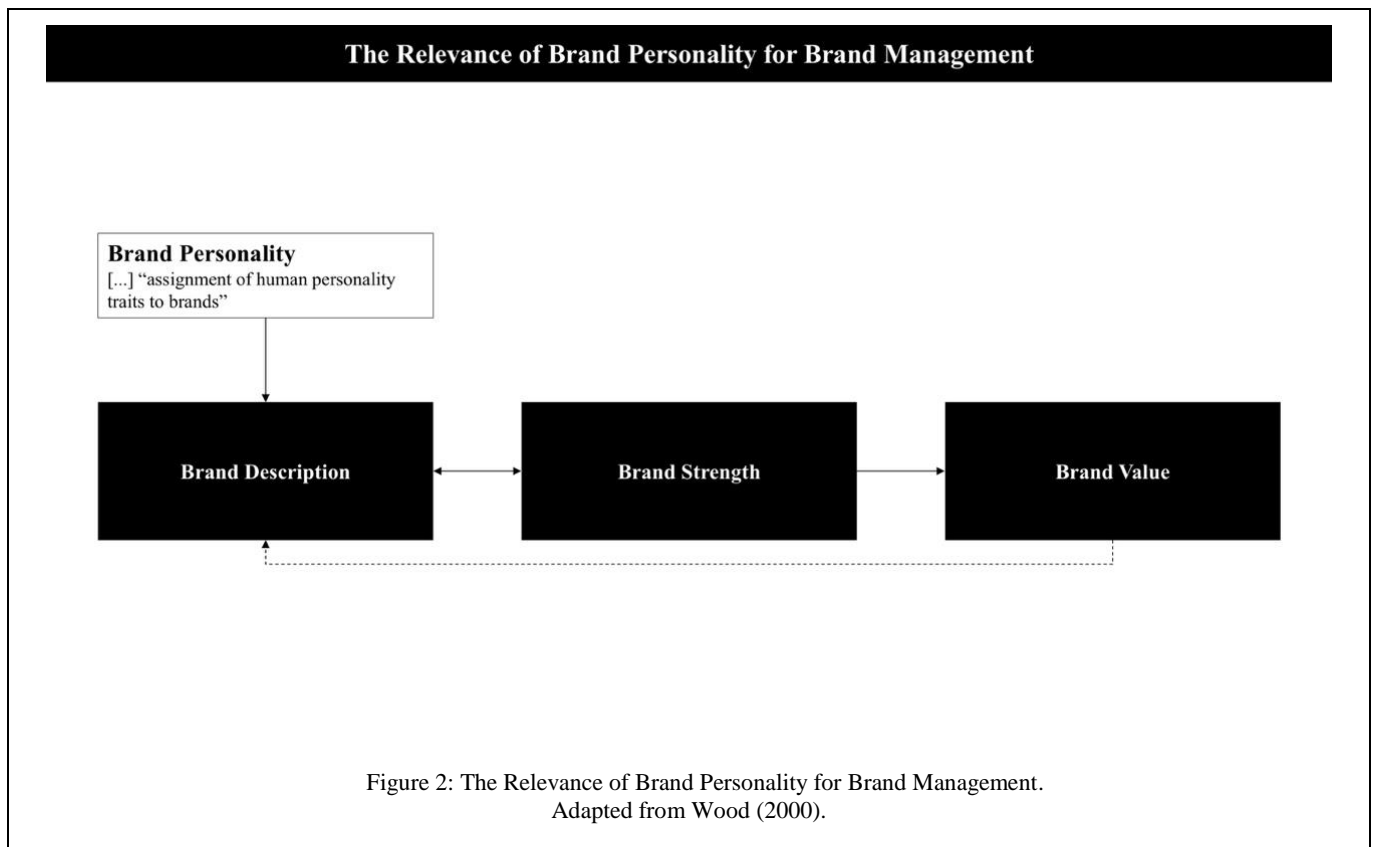
Figure 2: The Relevance of Brand Personality for Brand Management.
Adapted from Wood (2000).

Hence, arguing for an influence of brand personality on brand description, we see from the literature that brand personality may have an impact on overall brand equity, and as such, a high relevance for brand managers to account for. The chain above implies that brand managers will inherently deal with brand personality, or similar concepts, in their strategic decisions that have subsequent impact on brand equity. Brand personality "appears to be an ideal instrument to manage brands, to adjust brand personality according to consumers' perceptions, and to compare a company's own brands with competitors' brands" (Lieven, 2017, p. 592). Further, if we focus on global brands, it has been stated that successful global branding will require a system that measures brand equity in terms of brand personality (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 1999).

Challenges

However, the brand personality models and scales still lack validity, reproducibility and applicability to this day (Lieven, 2017). One of the greatest challenges affecting brand personality as a measurement instrument is achieving generalizability, and as such allowing related brand personality measurements to be equivalent and invariant, holding true across different brands, industry sectors, consumer groups, or countries and cultures (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998; Lieven, 2017). It is yet to be understood how brand managers can strategically manage the brand personality concept to their brand's economic advantage, and how to better account for moderators affecting the generalizability of the scales employed.

Measuring brand personality

To better explain the difficulties of brand personality, let us look at how the concept has been methodologically applied in research, taking one of the most prominent scales as an example. To date, many measurement scales were created to quantify brand personality e.g. Freiling, Crosno, & Henard (2011); Freiling & Forbes (2005); Geuens, Weijters, & De Wulf (2009), Kim, Han, & Park (2001) & Ouwersloot & Tudorica (2001). One of the first research contributions to the field of study has been *Aaker's brand personality model* (Aaker J. L., 1997). Similar to Goldberg (1990)'s big five model of personality traits, Aaker discovered five factors, namely *(1) sincerity, (2) excitement, (3) competence, (4) sophistication and (5) ruggedness*, that form a brand's personality. Aaker J. L. (1997) used qualitative research and past personality model literature to determine 309 attributes describing human personality. To reduce this number of attributes and apply them specifically to brands, she employed surveys to ask participants about the descriptiveness of these 309 attributes against three brands

(Wrangler, Pepto-Bismol and Dr. Pepper). Based on the responses and an exploratory factor analysis that used the highest item-to-total correlation, the attributes were further reduced to 42 traits. These 42 traits corresponded to the five factors listed above, aligning with the above definition of brand personality provided by Caprara, Barbaranelli, & Guido (2001, p. 381). Appendix B illustrates these 42 traits.

Most of the brand personality measurement scales described above employ a "psycho-lexical approach" (Ashton & Lee, 2005; Lieven, 2017), which means that the procedure starts with sets of human personality characteristics. Essentially, traits that describe humans are collected from dictionaries (Lieven, 2017). Exploratory factor analyses (EFA) are used to refine these models by eliminating attributes that do not fit (Lieven, 2017).

Challenges

Many challenges occur when reproducing these brand personality measurement scales to global brands. Beyond applicability across different brands, industry sectors or consumer groups (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998; Lieven, 2017), one of the greatest challenges is applicability across *cultures*. Brand personality has the power to "determine the success of a brand in a particular country or cultural sphere", in effect raising its organizational relevance (Foscht, Maloles, Swoboda, Morschett, & Sinha, 2008, p. 132), but cultural considerations for brand personality cause quite the conundrum.

For instance, Aaker's original model from 1997 was evaluated by Aaker, Benet-Martinez, & Garolera (2001) in Japanese and Spanish. In the Japanese model, the factor "peacefulness" replaced the original factor "ruggedness", and in the Spanish model, "passion" and "peacefulness" replaced "competence" and "ruggedness" respectively. Similarly, Ferrandi, Valette-Florence, & Fine-Falcy (2015) tested the replicability of the model in France, which led to seven factors instead of five. Nine traits needed to be removed to receive a five-factor solution. Further, Foscht, Maloles, Swoboda, Morschett, & Sinha (2008) found that across a six-nation study of Austria, Germany, Netherlands, Singapore, UK and USA, cultural differences, as measured using Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions, have significant impact on the perception of brand personalities. A study in Korea, which examined global brands like Nike, Adidas, VW and BMW, found Korean-specific brand personalities labeled "Passive Likableness" and "Ascendancy" (Sung & Tinkham, 2005).

It is therefore safe to conclude from the literature that "*consumers across cultures attribute different brand personalities to one and the same global brand*" (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010, p. 92).

We see from past research that culture has a great impact on consumer brand personality perception (i.e. the consumer angle). In their daily pursuit to drive brand equity, brand managers must understand the influence culture has on brand personality perception so that fundamental improvements can be achieved for its applicability as a strategic instrument. An essential step to achieve such understanding is to examine how the consumer perceives brands and is influenced by brand personality according to past research.

To better understand all angles that are part of this discussion, the consumer angle is reviewed next.

2.2.2   Consumer Angle: Brand Personality Perception

"Perception", from a psychological perspective, can be defined as "the neurophysiological processes, including memory, by which an organism becomes aware of and interprets external stimuli" (Oxford Living Dictionaries, 2018). "Brand perception" thus deals with how consumers become aware of and interpret external brand stimuli. Research has shown that in general, consumers perceive brands in terms of their *benefits* (van der Lars, van Everdingen, & Melynk, 2016), but that brand purchase intentions are influenced by many other factors. Brand benefits "represent the added value of the brand image to the customer" (Park & Srinivasan (1994) as cited in Krautz (2017, p. 278)). The benefits can be mostly connected to (1) quality, (2) uniqueness, and (3) leading position and popularity growth (van der Lars, van Everdingen, & Melynk, 2016). However, many other factors are at play when consumers perceive brands and brand personalities.

Culture is only one of many factors (van der Lars, van Everdingen, & Melynk, 2016), which means that focusing our research on culture will require us to acknowledge other possible influencers or "moderators" that may be at play. Inspired by research conducted by van der Lars, van Everdingen, & Melynk (2016), this is best achieved by reviewing the literature on general consumer brand perception, beginning with the three most important brand benefits that consumers tend to perceive (van der Lars, van Everdingen, & Melynk, 2016):

(1) Quality: Brand quality has often been determined one of the leading intrinsic benefits of any brand (Holt, Quelch, & Taylor, 2004). Brand quality has also been connected to high influence in consumer choice (Erdem, Keane, & Sun, 2008), because perceived risk in buying a brand of high quality can be reduced for the consumer (Erdem & Swait, 1998). Further, consumers often choose global brands due to perceptions of high quality (Levitt, 1983; Strizhakova, Coulter, & Price, 2011).

(2) Uniqueness: This intrinsic benefit relates to the way companies "attempt to set the brand apart from the general category" (van der Lars, van Everdingen, & Melynk, 2016, p. 926). Such "specialized"

products (Sujan & Bettman, 1989) reduce substitutability (van der Lars, van Everdingen, & Melynk, 2016), and often are the reason for consumer adoption of new products (Gielens & Steenkamp, 2007).

(3) Leading position and popularity growth: Relating to extrinsic benefits, a leading position occurs when brands are "widely sought after and purchased by the population at large" (van der Lars, van Everdingen, & Melynk, 2016, p. 927). Consumers rely on external sources to increase their confidence in brands, reduce their purchase risk, and minimize their information search costs (Erdem & Swait, 2004). This will lead to positive effects on brand image and market sales (Kim & Chung, 1997).

In addition, "perception of the brand personality is determined by each contact with the brand, regardless of whether contact is direct or indirect" (Foscht, Maloles, Swoboda, Morschett, & Sinha, 2008, p. 132).

Direct experiences could include when the consumer comes into contact with endorsers of a brand, the company's employees and CEO, or other users of the brand in their immediate surrounding (Pringle & Binet, 2005). Indirect experiences are linked to associations the consumer has with brand attributes like the brand name, logo, communication channels and content, colors, packaging, price, advertising style and logistics of the product (Aaker J. L., 1997). These elements that differentiate the brand from competing brands and allow it to be identified in multiple environments influence brand personality perception (Keller, 2008).

The *brand name* is one of the most dominant personality messages that the consumer perceives (de Chernatony, 2010). It is the basis for brand awareness and communication (Keller, Heckler, & Houston, 1998), and also influences the perception of brand personality (Wee, 2004). Similar in importance, the *logo* acts as the brand's visual identity (Kohli, Suri, & Thakor, 2002), allowing the brand to raise awareness and gain recognition (Henderson & Cote, 1998; Janiszewski & Meyvi, 2001). The choice of logo can be linked to brand personality traits by the consumer, as revealed in a study by Grohmann (2008). Brand personality perception is also influenced by choice of *colors*. In a study by Aaker, Benet-Martinez, & Garolera (2001), the colors blue and red were related to the dimensions of competence, while green was related to sincerity, and pink, yellow and purple were related to the excitement dimension. Similar findings were made in terms of a brand's *packaging*. Ampuero & Vila (2006) suggested that upper class products would be more effective with cold and dark colors, while lower priced products would be more effective using the opposite. Finally, *employees* of the brand's company are of course great advocates of brand personality (Levy, 1959). Though it is more relevant for service brands, employees of a brand use their human personality traits to communicate the brand's personality e.g. Harris & Fleming (2005), and this personality is perceived by the consumer and applied to the entire brand.

Therefore, as a result of direct and indirect experiences (Aaker D. A., 2010), the perception of brand personality occurs through associations the consumer has about the brand, the corporate brand image, and attributes of the branded product (mentioned above, e.g. packaging) (Lin, 2010).

Brand purchase intention levels

These experiences are often moderated by other factors that shape a consumer's brand purchase intentions. Van der Lars, van Everdingen, & Melynk (2016) defined three levels that influence brand purchase intentions. These are referred to as the (1) country-level, (2) the category-level, and (3) the consumer-level. Each of these levels has the potential to affect brand purchase intentions (van der Lars, van Everdingen, & Melynk, 2016), which makes the consumer angle quite complex to measure. For holistic purposes, only the country-level and consumer-level will be analyzed in-depth, as it is within the defined scope of brand personality.

If we start with the *country-level* (van der Lars, van Everdingen, & Melynk, 2016), we have economic factors, like GDP per capita, and demographic considerations, i.e. population density, to consider that influence consumers in their brand perception. People in wealthier countries may afford higher quality brands at higher prices (Keller, 2008). There is also research that indicates developing countries associate themselves with Western brands (Kotabe & Helsen, 2010). In a demographic sense, population density may affect the way brands are learned about from peers through word-of-mouth (Lemmens, Croux, & Dekimpe, 2007). A dense population may also increase a consumer's desire to differentiate themselves with more unique brands (Arnett, 2002). Culture is placed into this category in the research by van der Lars, van Everdingen, & Melynk (2016). Other research by de Mooij & Hofstede (2010, p. 86) has placed culture in the category of the consumer's self, not as an environmental factor since cultural values define the self and personality of consumers. The culture moderator will be reviewed in detail below, as it is a critical element of the research scope. However, it is important to note that culture is a significant influencer of brand perception on the consumer side (Foscht, Maloles, Swoboda, Morschett, & Sinha, 2008, p. 132), because culture conditions the way people see their world, meaning "culture may influence attitudes and perceptions towards marketing stimuli and [...] how people respond to the marketing mix" (Malai & Speece, 2005, p. 15).

In terms of the *consumer level* (van der Lars, van Everdingen, & Melynk, 2016), there are also demographic factors that must be accounted for, like gender and age. Some research indicates that men are more susceptible to the appeals of high status (Melnyk & van Osselaer, 2012), whereas younger consumers tend to be influenced by older age groups (Arnett, 2002), meaning such consumers may either be influenced by leading brands to "fit in" with a group, or pursue unique brands to differentiate themselves.

At the consumer level, a dominant factor is the idea of a person's ideal self-image (van der Lars, van Everdingen, & Melynk, 2016; Quester, Karunaratna, & Goh, 2000). Related to *self-congruity*, this concept "links the psychological construct of an individual's self-concept with the symbolic value of goods purchased in the marketplace" (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967, p. 22). The reason for this is that people tend to purchase a brand only when it is aligned, enhances, or achieves good fit with the conception they have of themselves (Ross, 1971, p. 38).

Because self-congruity is highly related to brand personality, this moderator will receive an in-depth review below.

Introducing Self-congruity

The concept of self-congruity consists of two components: (1) "product image" and (2) "self-image" (Quester, Karunaratna, & Goh, 2000, p. 525). A product (or brand) image, in this sense, is often described in conjunction with personality (Sirgy, 1985), which is perceived in terms of human personality attributes. Such attributes could be "friendly, modern, youthful and traditional" (Sirgy, 1985, p. 195), similar to those described by Aaker J. L. (1997). These personality attributes differ from functional attributes, like quality or price, and are determined by many factors, such as advertising, stereotyping, and other marketing and psychological associations, like packaging, and distribution channels (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967; Sirgy, 1985). A product image may also derive from direct experience, word-of-mouth or commercial information (Eriksen, 1996).

A strong connection can be drawn between self-congruity and brand personality concepts, seeing as brand personality describes the "assignment of human personality traits to brands" (Lieven, 2017, p. 592). Self-congruity, which was first researched by Landon Jr. (1974) and thereby predates research on brand personality, takes a further step in assuming that the consumer's self-concept (also referred to as "self-image") "affects the consumer's product preference and purchase intention" (Quester, Karunaratna, & Goh, 2000, p. 526). An accurate example of this would be how a female consumer may purchase a certain perfume because she believes it reflects her personality, while a male consumer may buy a car because he believes this aligns well with his personality (Quester, Karunaratna, & Goh, 2000, p. 527). The "self-congruity hypothesis" thus states that "… the consuming behavior of an individual will be directed toward furthering and enhancing of his self-concept through the consumption of goods as symbols" (Sirgy, 1980, p. 350). The hypothesis has been confirmatory in research by Grubb & Hupp (1968); Dolich (1969) and Ross (1971), and opposed in research by Green, Maheshwari, & Rao (1969). The confirmatory research suggests that self-congruity has influence on "consumer preference, purchase intention, ownership, usage and loyalty to specifics products and brands" (Quester, Karunaratna, & Goh, 2000, p. 528).

Summarizing the review of the consumer angle in short, one finds that consumers tend to perceive brand benefits (van der Lars, van Everdingen, & Melynk, 2016), which drive purchase intentions, and that brand purchase intentions are linked to many influencing factors. These "moderators" may occur on country-level, category-level and consumer-level (van der Lars, van Everdingen, & Melynk, 2016), and should be considered in research on consumer brand personality perception.

2.2.3   *Bridging the Gap*

Looking back at the two previous sections, it becomes clear that while managers try to reach consumers with their messages, consumers are supposed to perceive these messages in the intended way. This automatically creates a gap between sender and receiver, which is further discussed in the section below.

When brand managers intend certain characteristics and values for their brands, these often differ from actual consumer perception of the same brands (Zeithaml, 1988). It is well-established that there is a difference between what people perceive and what is objectively true for product attributes, like price, quality and value (Zeithaml, 1988). This holds true for branding, and it is a particularly difficult field, since brand-related terms like brand description and brand strength are difficult to quantify. It is comparable to communication theory and could be compared to "encoding" and "decoding" processes of communication models (e.g. Dean-Faustine Model), during which consumers perceive something totally different from the message that the managers responsible for the message intended due to a range of factors (Craig, 1999). "Managers' views may differ considerably from consumers' or users' views" (Zeithaml, 1988, p. 5). Such uncertainty and uncontrollability pose great challenges for brand managers and for brand management research alike. It is clear that the beliefs of consumers towards brands influences their purchase decision, carrying financial consequences for the firm (Fischer, Völckner, & Sattler, 2010). Trying to predict, understand and strategically cater to these beliefs are brand managers, or equivalent marketing professionals dealing with brand management that we will refer to as "brand managers", whose job is to ensure their brand is perceived as originally strategized to achieve a calculated differentiation that leads to guaranteed competitive advantage (Levitt, 1986).

Here, we argue that the concept of brand personality, i.e. the "association of human personality traits with brands" (Lieven, 2017, p. 592), delivers some of the greatest possible implications for the delta between intended and actual brand personality perception of the same brand, and uncovers the importance of researching this gap from both "angles" of brand personality.

Our conceptual framework depicts that the brand personality concept, like the many definitions of "brand" discussed above, should be viewed from two angles: The managerial angle (1), which deals

with intended brand personality perception by brand managers; and the consumer angle (2), which describes the actual brand perception by consumers. These two angles and the summary of the conceptual framework is covered in Figure 3 below.
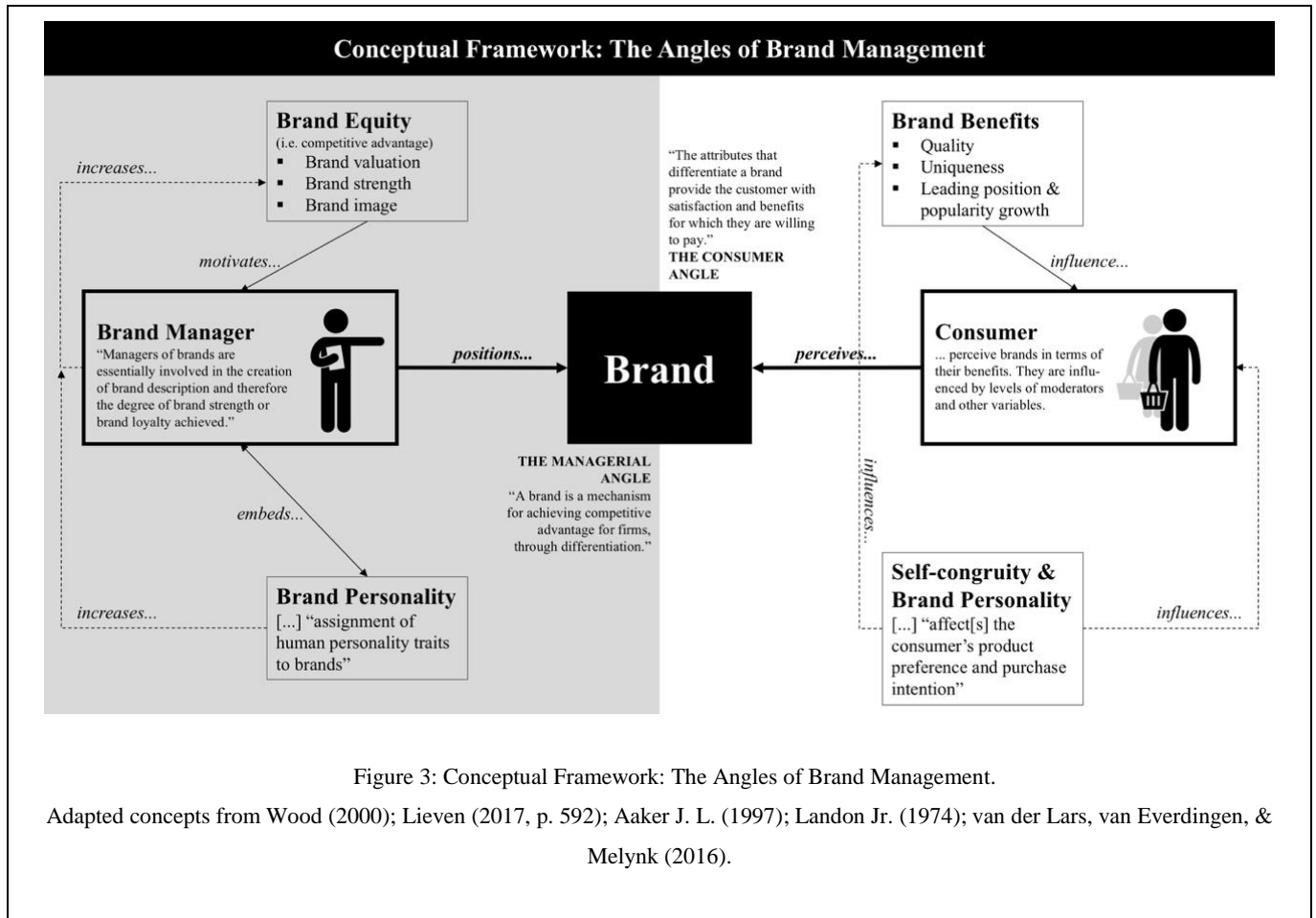
Figure 3: Conceptual Framework: The Angles of Brand Management.

Adapted concepts from Wood (2000); Lieven (2017, p. 592); Aaker J. L. (1997); Landon Jr. (1974); van der Lars, van Everdingen, & Melynk (2016).

2.3   The Impact of Cultural Differences on Brand Personality

The above review of the managerial and consumer angles already indicates the importance of including culture when examining brand personality. The conceptual framework is thus extended by including "Cultural Differences" as an influencer that spans both managerial and consumer sides (see Figure 4 below):

Conceptual Framework: The Angles of Brand Management

Brand Manager
"Managers of brands are essentially involved in the creation of brand description and therefore the degree of brand strength or brand loyalty achieved."

positions...

Brand

perceives...

Consumer
... perceive brands in terms of their benefits. They are influenced by levels of moderators and other variables.

embeds...

Brand Personality
[...] "assignment of human personality traits to brands"

Self-congruity & Brand Personality
[...] "affect[s] the consumer's product preference and purchase intention"

influences...

Cultural Differences
How does culture influence brand personality perception?

Figure 4: The Angles of Brand Management Influenced by Culture.
Adapted concepts from Wood (2000); Lieven (2017, p. 592); Aaker J. L. (1997) & Landon Jr. (1974).

Additional theoretical foundations for this inclusion of cultural differences, including culture's definition, importance, relevance and status quo in the brand management literature, will be provided below.

2.3.1   The Importance and Relevance of Cultural Studies in Brand Management

"Culture" is a term surrounded by many definitions in the literature (Foscht, Maloles, Swoboda, Morschett, & Sinha, 2008). Most of these definitions agree that culture, in some way, shapes human decision-making and behaviors (Hill, 2002). Culture is comprised of components, such as values,

standards, language and religion (Hill, 2002). Thus, along with different cultures come different parameters that influence the "structure in which people perceive and evaluate different things" (Foscht, Maloles, Swoboda, Morschett, & Sinha, 2008, p. 132) as cited in Hall (1989).

In his famous book, Culture's Consequences (Hofstede, 1980, p. 9), Geert Hofstede treats culture as the "collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another. There is a tight connection between consumption of goods and culture (van der Lars, van Everdingen, & Melynk, 2016). Applied to the field of brand management, this means that "brands may be better received by the people of a particular culture if they are congruent to the cultural perceptions of that culture" (Foscht, Maloles, Swoboda, Morschett, & Sinha, 2008, p. 132). Culture conditions the way people see their world, meaning "culture may influence attitudes and perceptions towards marketing stimuli and […] how people respond to the marketing mix" (Malai & Speece, 2005, p. 15).

"Culture" in brand management deals with strategic questions surrounding globalization and localization. There is evidence that global culture is converging and thus from managerial perspective, a homogeneous brand strategy would save time and money (de Mooij, 2003). However, there are directly opposing viewpoints, stating that because deeply embedded cultures lead to different attitudes, perceptions and behaviors, brands must cater to such differences between cultures with localization strategies, since culture creates a potential entry barrier (Usunier, 1996; Tse, Lee, Vertinsky, & Wehrung, 1988). This "global-local dilemma", whether to "standardize advertising for efficiency reasons or to adapt to local habits and consumer motives to be effective" (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010, p. 85), persists today. To localize or to standardize is seen as a trade-off in brand positioning, where standardization is only sensible if there is enough homogeneity in consumer wants relative to the standardized elements (Jain, 1989; Samiee & Roth, 1992; Zou & Cavusgil, 2002). Some research has shown that the "adaptation strategy", adapting to local habits and consumer motives, is more effective (Dow, 2005; Calantone, Kim, Schmidt, & Cavusgil, 2006; Okazaki, Taylor, & Zou, 2006; Wong & Merrilees, 2007). This would indicate that understanding culture, in the sphere of global marketing and brand management, is "increasingly important" (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010, p. 85). Even if the opposite were true and a global consumer culture were in fact arising for which more standardized strategies were suitable and effective, brand managers would still have to understand (global) cultural impacts to operate successfully in global markets (Malai & Speece, 2005).

The specific branding strategies deducted from the literature that brand managers can pursue to effectively deal with culture will be dealt with in the next section.

Empirically derived cultural domains e.g. Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner (1998) & Hofstede (1991), have been described as helpful for comparing the effects of culture on consumers (Wong &

Ahuvia, 1998). There is still research potential in the intersection between culture and brand management, seeing as there is "no systematic approach to examining how or why culture gets different results" (Malai & Speece, 2005, p. 8). A lack of a framework for cross-cultural consumer behavior research is one of the greatest research challenges to date (Luna & Gupta, 2001).

Branding Strategies with Implications for Culture

The above sections indicate that the study of culture in brand management and inclusion in research on brand personality is vital. Originating from political, economic and technological forces (Levitt, 1983; Riesenbeck & Freeling, 1991), academics have widely accepted that global consumer segments and cultures have emerged due to globalization of markets (Boddewyn, Soehl, & Picard, 1986; Jain, 1989; Levitt, 1983 & Wind, 1986). Much research has been dedicated to identifying how a brand's global, foreign or local nature influences consumer behavior (Steenkamp, Batra, & Alden, 2003). The literature identifies three general consumer culture positioning strategies that brands will adopt in a global marketplace (Halkias, Micevski, Diamantopoulos, & Milchram, 2017). These are, according to extensive research by Alden, Steenkamp, & Batra (1999):

1. Global Consumer Culture
2. Local Consumer Culture
3. Foreign Consumer Culture

Brands that are categorically part of a *Global Consumer Culture* (1) are those that emphasize globalness and are free of cultural norms (Akaka & Alden, 2010; Kjeldgaard & Askegaard, 2006). Such global brands cater to perceptions of high quality, prestige, and worldwide recognition and adoption (Dimofte, Johansson, & Bagozzi, 2010; Steenkamp, Batra, & Alden, 2003). They are also surrounded by generally accepted beliefs and consumer tendencies (Terpstra & David, 1991; Holt, Quelch, & Taylor, 2004).

Brands that belong to the category of *Local Consumer Culture* (2) are those that create a relationship with local contexts, endorse local elements like cultural values and traditions, and create a sense of belonging and strong identification among local consumers of the brand (Ger, 1999; Özosomer, 2012; Schuiling & Kapferer, 2004; Westjohn, Singh, & Magnusson, 2012).

Finally, brands that are part of the *Foreign Consumer Culture* (3) are brands that create a connection to non-domestic cultural norms (Alden, Steenkamp, & Batra, 1999). The idea here is that brands do the direct opposite of the Local Consumer Culture in that they provide a sense of uniqueness and exoticness brought into connection with foreignness (Alden, Steenkamp, & Batra, 1999; Brannen, 2004).

The literature indicates that a mix of the three positioning strategies above will lead to potential advantages (Alden, Steenkamp, & Batra, 1999; Nijssen & Douglas, 2011), but also that corporations are trying to take advantage of global consumer culture by "altering their brand portfolios in favor of global brands" (Quelch, 1999, 2003) as cited in Zhou, Teng, & Poon (2008) since global brands are often related to perceived quality, perceived prestige and contribute to consumers' purchase intentions of a brand (Alden, Steenkamp, & Batra, 1999; van der Lars, van Everdingen, & Melynk, 2016). Brands adhering to Global Consumer Culture are, for instance, Sony, Philips or Nescafe, using the same theme that is communicated across a global scale (Alden, Steenkamp, & Batra, 1999).

For the context of our research, it is important to determine, from the managerial angle, what kind of strategy the company in question is pursuing, and from the consumer angle if this strategy is in-line with actual consumer perceptions.

Branding Strategy at adidas

According to internal sources at adidas (adidas Intranet, 2018), adidas is categorically part of the Global Consumer Culture, meaning it emphasizes globalness and is mostly free of cultural norms (Akaka & Alden, 2010; Kjeldgaard & Askegaard, 2006).

The adidas strategy revolves around the global organization, which plans and creates, and markets, which input and execute (adidas Intranet, 2018). By 2020 the group wants to generate a more effective set-up between global and local organizations that will drive further integration (adidas Intranet, 2018).

2.3.2   Review of Cultural Research in the Brand Personality Field

As discussed earlier, culture also has a vital influence on brand personality. As such, a summarized overview of all prior cultural research to date within the brand personality field can be retrieved from table 1 below.

Author(s)	Description & Findings (Ahmad & Thyagaraj, 2014, p. 21)
Ferrandi, Valette-Florence, & Fine-Falcy (2015)	*Examined brand personality dimensions in a French perspective* ▪ Dimensions corresponding with Aaker's brand personality scale: Sincerity, Sophistication, Excitement, Ruggedness France Specific: Conviviality

Aaker, Benet-Martinez, & Garolera (2001)	*Examined the dimensions of brand personality across the cultures of Spain and Japan* ▪ Dimensions corresponding with Aaker's brand personality scale: Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, ▪ Japan Specific: Peacefulness ▪ Spain Specific: Peacefulness and Passion
Austin, Siguaw, & Mattila (2003)	*Measured the personality of US restaurant brands* ▪ Brand personality scale of Aaker (1997) does not generalize to individual brands within one product category
Hieronimus (2003)	*Examined the dimensions of brand personality in German context* ▪ Germany specific: Trust & Security, Temperament & Passion
Smit, Van den Berge, & Franzen (2003)	*Developed a new brand personality scale for the Netherlands* ▪ Dimensions corresponding with Aaker's brand personality scale: Competence, Excitement, Ruggedness ▪ Netherlands specific: Gentle, Annoying and Distinguishing
Supphellen & Grønhaug (2003)	*Examined the dimensions of brand personality in Russian context* ▪ Russian consumer's perceptions of brand personality possess similarities as well as differences with regard to western consumer's perception of brand personality
Rojas-Méndez, Erenchun-Podlech, & Silva-Olave (2004)	*Measured the personality of Ford brand in Chile* ▪ Identified brand personality dimensions: Excitement, Sincerity, Competence and Sophistication
Sung & Tinkham (2005)	*Examined the dimensions of brand personality across the cultures of USA and Korea* ▪ Dimensions corresponding with Aaker's (1997) Brand Personality Scale: Competence, Sophistication and Ruggedness ▪ Korea Specific: Ascendancy and Passive Likeableness ▪ USA specific: Androgyny and White Collar
Chu & Sung (2001)	*Examined the dimensions of brand personality in the context of China* ▪ Dimensions corresponding with Aaker's (1997) Brand Personality Scale: Competence, Excitement, and Sophistication ▪ China specific: Joyfulness, Traditionalism and Trendiness

Rojas-Méndez, Murphy, & Papadopoulos (2013)	*Examined perceptions of Chinese consumers about the American brand personality*
	▪ Three main dimensions of U.S. brand personality viz. Amicableness, Resourcefulness, and Self-centeredness

Table 1: Review of Cultural Research in the Brand Personality Field.
Adapted from Ahmad & Thyagaraj (2014, p. 12).

The table above indicates, that despite the fact that brand personality dimensions vary across different cultures, it is interesting to see that some dimensions are shared. Now, to what extent cultures share or conflict on certain dimensions will be further discussed in the next section below.

2.3.3   *Measuring Brand Personality through Cultural Models*

Attempts to measure culture have focused on defining patterns among groups and individuals and linking these patterns to certain consequences for those groups. Such patterns may be the conception of self, primary dilemmas of conflict and how it is managed, and relation to authority (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961; Inkeles, 1997). Identifying such patterns is central to contemporary, leading cultural research, including that of Hofstede (2001); Hofstede & Hofstede (2005); Trompenaars F. (1993); Schwartz & Bilsky (1987) & Schwartz (1992), and the GLOBE study (House, 2004). All of these studies have been widely perceived, however, though similar in their identified cultural differences (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010), the research to date varies with respect to "the level of analysis, the dimension structure, the number of dimensions, the subjects, and conceptual and methodological differences" (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010, p. 87). Whereas Hofstede researches all levels of employees in a company, Schwartz researches teachers and students, while the GLOBE study examines mid-level managers (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010). The different research designs lead to differing results when applied to global branding (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010). Further, "none of the cultural models was developed for analyzing consumer behavior" (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010, p. 88), indicating that careful, selective application of relevant dimensions is in order.

Most models, with exception to Hofstede's, have only provided limited advancements in the realm of international marketing strategy (Magnusson, Wilson, Zdravkovic, Zhou, & Westjohn, 2008). Because Hofstede's model is also the most widespread of all the above models due to the large number of countries measured, its comprehensive dimensions and application in practice (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010), the research here will further discuss cultural dimensions by Hofstede.

However, this research will not be entirely limited to Hofstede's cultural dimensions. Since Hofstede assumes cultural *differences*, and the cultures we examine in this research arguably provide only

marginal differences that may lead to insignificant basis for discussing the results, the work of Schwartz (1992, 2004) on value types will also be included as a lens to explain possible *similarities* in brand personality perception. The review of both theoretical lenses will be covered below.

2.3.4   Cultural Dimensions Relevant for Brand Personality: Hofstede (2001) and Schwartz (1992, 2004)

Reviewing these two opposing cultural models will provide deeper insights into whether to lay focus on the differences or rather the similarities in brand personality perception.

2.3.4.1 Hofstede's Dimensional Model of National Culture (2001)

In Hofstede's dimensional model of national culture, Hofstede (2001) and Hofstede & Hofstede (2005) distinguishes cultures according to five dimensions. Each dimension is ranked on a scale from 0 to 100 for all 76 countries included in the model, leading to a distinct position for each country relative to other countries (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010).

The five Hofstede dimensions are (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005):

1. Power distance
2. Individualism / collectivism
3. Masculinity / femininity
4. Uncertainty avoidance
5. Long- / short-term orientation

Culture Dimension	Definition
1. Power distance (PDI)	"This stands for the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally." (p. 98)
2. Individualism / collectivism (IDV)	"Individualism stands for a society in which the ties between individuals are loose: Everyone is expected to look after him/herself and her/his immediate family only. Collectivism stands for a society in which people from birth onward are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty." (p. 225)
3. Masculinity / femininity (MAS)	"Masculinity stands for a society in which social gender roles are clearly distinct: Men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success; women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life. Femininity stands for a society in which

	social gender roles overlap: Both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life." (p. 297)
4. Uncertainty avoidance (UAI)	"This stands for the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations." (p. 161)
5. Long-/ short-term orientation (LTO)	"Long-Term Orientation stands for the fostering of virtues oriented toward future rewards, in particular perseverance and thrift. Its opposite pole, Short-Term Orientation, stands for the fostering of virtues related to the past and present, in particular, respect for tradition, preservation of "face" and fulfilling social obligations." (p. 359)

Table 2: Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Descriptions (2001).

Adapted from Morris & Waldman (2011, p. 946).

As Hofstede himself has stated (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010), the five Hofstede dimensions have notable implications for brand management, some examples of which will be explained below.

Power distance (1) refers to the "extent to which less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally" (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010, p. 88). Applied to branding, this dimension is of great importance. Since large power distance cultures have strict social hierarchies, global brands, especially luxury articles and fashion items, would allow social statuses to be conveyed, i.e. highlighting the individual's hierarchal position within society (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010).

Individualism / collectivism (2) is defined as the "people looking after themselves and their immediate family only, versus people belonging to in-groups that look after them in exchange for loyalty" (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010, p. 89). This dimension describes that people in individualistic cultures are "I"-conscious and universalistic, assuming their values are valid for others, and are driven by self-actualization (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010). This is contrasted by people in "we"-conscious, collectivistic cultures, whose identities are based on the social system to which they belong (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010). For global brands, the implication here is that in high-context collectivistic cultures, relationships and trust must be established before any transactions take place, raising the importance for the recognition that global brands may provide (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010). In individualistic, low-context cultures, the opposite rings true, meaning parties will want to get to the point quickly (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010). Again, global brands may benefit from this, seeing as global brands usually stand for persuasive quality attributes.

Masculinity / femininity (3) can be described as follows: "The dominant values in a masculine society are achievement and success; the dominant values in a feminine society are caring for others and quality of life" (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010, p. 89). For branding, this dimension also has clear implications, in that certain brands are important to show status (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2002; de Mooij, 2010). The dimension may also cause shifts in shopping between men and women; in feminine cultures, men tend

to spend more time on household shopping activities than in masculine cultures (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010).

Uncertainty avoidance (4) deals with "the extent to which people feel threatened by uncertainty and ambiguity and try to avoid these situations" (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010, p. 89). Because cultures with strong uncertainty avoidance are less open to change than low uncertainty avoidance, this dimension will affect adoption of particularly innovative brands (Yaveroglu & Donthu, 2002; Yeniurt & Townsend, 2003; Tellis, Stremersch, & Yin, 2003).

The fifth dimension, long- / short-term orientation (5), describes "the extent to which a society exhibits a pragmatic future-orientated perspective rather than a conventional historic or short-term point of view" (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010, p. 90). Whereas long-term oriented cultures tend to pursuit peace of mind in the long-term by demonstrating perseverance, short-term oriented cultures will pursuit happiness in the short-term by focusing on personal steadiness (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010). The dimension suggests that any brand that requires a greater financial expenditure or "investment" may be impacted by it (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010).

Now, looking at possible cultural similarities rather than differences, Schwartz's Value Types are introduced below.

2.3.4.2   Schwartz's Value Types (1992, 2004)

Relatively new when tied to literature on brand personality, Schwartz's (1992) value types provide a basis to understand the values that effectively *unite cultures* in their brand perception, rather than exclusively differentiate them (Batra, Zhang, Aydinoglu, & Feinberg, 2017). Recent research by Batra, Zhang, Aydinoglu, & Feinberg (2017) has shown that in light of the global-local dilemma outlined above, not enough research has identified "the consumer needs that are similar enough to justify standardizing on them" (Batra, Zhang, Aydinoglu, & Feinberg, 2017, p. 915). Therefore, it is sensible to include this relatively new lens in the examination of our research question.

"Values" can be defined as "desirable, trans-situational goals, varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles in people's lives" (Schwartz & Bardi, 2001, p. 4). Values also play a role for brands (Batra, Homer, & Kahle, 2001). For instance, linkages have been established between types of values and types of brand personality attributes e.g. Aaker, Benet-Martinez, & Garolera (2001, p. 494-495).

Schwartz's (1992, 2004) research was developed using data from over 60 nations in the years 1988 to 1996, leading to a cross-cultural values typology. 57 individual values, like "creativity", "freedom" or "equality", were rated by importance and then clustered into ten multi-item "value types" (Schwartz, 2004).

These ten clustered value types were defined by Schwartz (2004) as: (1) Power, (2) Achievement, (3) Hedonism, (4) Stimulation, (5) Self-direction, (6) Universalism, (7) Benevolence, (8) Tradition, (9) Conformity, and (10) Security. The constellation of the values can be visualized in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5: Schwartz's Value Types (1992, 2004).
Adapted from Schwartz (1992).
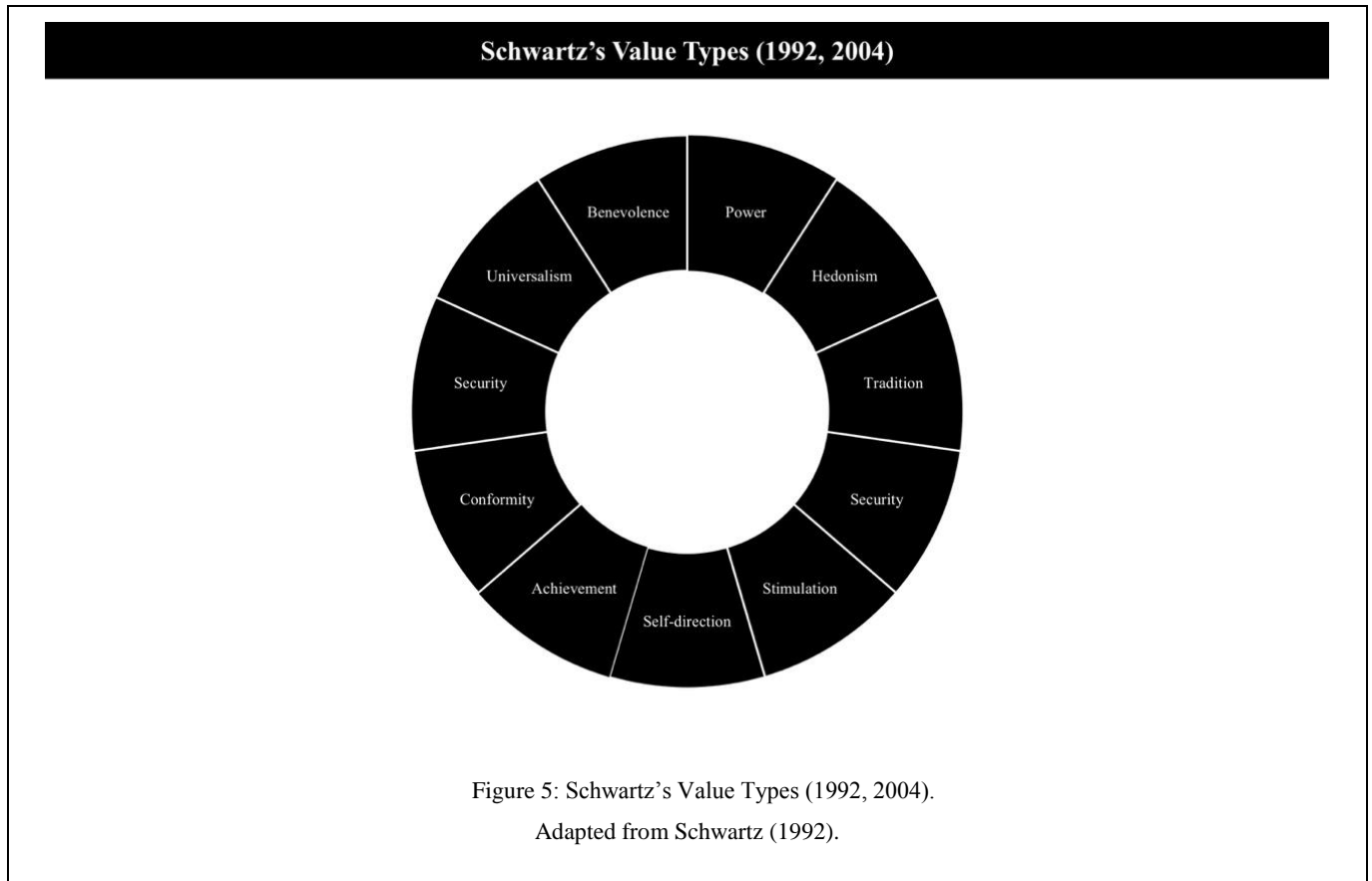
The definitions for each of values can be found in Appendix A, adapted from Batra, Zhang, Aydinoglu, & Feinberg (2017).

Recent literature (e.g. Batra, Zhang, Aydinoglu, & Feinberg (2017)) has highlighted the importance of researching the value types established by Schwartz's in brand management, seeing as they are applicable to brand dimensions studied by other researchers (Aaker, Benet-Martinez, & Garolera, 2001). Because only limited research has used such value types to draw implications for brand management (Batra, Zhang, Aydinoglu, & Feinberg, 2017, p. 916), Schwartz's value types will be used in addition to Hofstede as a basis for analysis in the discussion.

2.3.5 *Cultural Dimensions applied to Brand Personality Dimensions*

From the literature, one can reason how certain cultural dimensions are applicable or relatable to brand personality dimensions. This is a prerequisite for analyzing the findings, since the cultural differences examined here are determined using Hofstede (2001) and Schwartz (1994, 2004) cultural models, and their potential influence on brand personality dimensions is applied to the variable research outcome on brand personality.

To examine the two cultural models and how they can be interpreted for application to brand personality dimensions, Table 3 highlights each cultural model, its respective dimension, and applicability to Aaker J. L. (1997) respective brand personality dimension using a justification.

Brand Personality Framework Dimension (Aaker, 1997, p. 352)	Applicable Cultural Dimension/s (Hofstede, 2001 & Schwartz, 1994, 2004)	Conceptual Support from the Literature
Sincerity ▪ Down-to-earth ▪ Honest ▪ Wholesome ▪ Cheerful	**Hofstede Cultural Dimensions** Individualism (IDV)	**Individualism (IDV)**: Sincerity may influence / be influenced by a society that is collective, i.e. integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010).
	Schwartz Value Types Conformity, Security, Universalism, Benevolence	**Conformity**: Sincerity synonyms honest and real correspond to impulses likely to not upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms (Aaker J. L., 1997; Batra, Zhang, Aydinoglu, & Feinberg, 2017). **Security**: Sincerity synonyms honest and real correspond to impulses likely to not upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms (Aaker J. L., 1997; Batra, Zhang, Aydinoglu, & Feinberg, 2017). **Universalism**: Sincerity synonym down-to-earth correspond to understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature (Aaker J. L., 1997; Batra, Zhang, Aydinoglu, & Feinberg, 2017). **Benevolence**: Sincerity corresponds to preservation and enhancement of the welfare

		of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact (Aaker J. L., 1997; Batra, Zhang, Aydinoglu, & Feinberg, 2017).
Competence ▪ Reliable ▪ Intelligent ▪ Successful	**Hofstede Cultural Dimensions** Long-term orientation (LTO)	**Long-term orientation (LTO)**: Competence may influence / be influenced by long-term orientation, which stands for the fostering of virtues oriented toward future rewards, in particular perseverance and thrift. The LTO dimension suggests that any brand that requires a greater financial expenditure or "investment" may be impacted by it (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010).
	Schwartz Value Types Achievement	**Achievement**: Competence and its synonyms (reliable, intelligent, successful) corresponds to personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards (Aaker J. L., 1997; Batra, Zhang, Aydinoglu, & Feinberg, 2017).
Excitement ▪ Daring ▪ Spirited ▪ Imaginative ▪ Up-to-date	**Hofstede Cultural Dimensions** Uncertainty avoidance (UAI)	**Uncertainty avoidance (UAI)**: Excitement may influence / be influenced by the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations, i.e. "innovative brands" (Yaveroglu & Donthu, 2002; Yeniurt & Townsend, 2003; Tellis, Stremersch, & Yin, 2003; de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010).

	Schwartz Value Types Stimulation, Self-direction	**Stimulation**: Excitement corresponds to excitement, novelty, and challenge in life (Aaker J. L., 1997; Batra, Zhang, Aydinoglu, & Feinberg, 2017). **Self-direction**: Excitement synonyms (unique, original, imaginative) correspond to independent thought and action-choosing, creating, exploring (Aaker J. L., 1997; Batra, Zhang, Aydinoglu, & Feinberg, 2017).
Ruggedness ▪ Outdoorsy ▪ Tough	**Hofstede Cultural Dimensions** Masculinity (MAS)	**Masculinity (MAS)**: Ruggedness may influence / be influenced by a society in which social gender roles are clearly distinct: Men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success; women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010).
	Schwartz Value Types None	No connection could be drawn from literature.
Sophistication ▪ Upper class ▪ Charming	**Hofstede Cultural Dimensions** Power distance (PDI), Individualism (IDV)	**Power distance (PDI)**: Sophistication may influence / be influenced by the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally. Since large power distance cultures have strict social hierarchies, global brands, especially luxury articles and fashion items, would allow social statuses to be conveyed, i.e. highlighting the individual's hierarchal position within society (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010). **Individualism (IDV)**: Sophistication may influence / be influenced by a society in which the ties between individuals are loose: Everyone is expected to look after him/herself and her/his immediate family only (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010).

	Schwartz Value Types	Power: Sophistication and its synonyms
	Power	(upper class, glamorous, smooth) correspond to social status, prestige, control, or dominance over people and resources (Aaker J. L., 1997; Batra, Zhang, Aydinoglu, & Feinberg, 2017).

Table 3: Cultural Dimensions applied to Brand Personality Dimensions.
Own research inspired by Batra, Zhang, Aydinoglu, & Feinberg (2017) & de Mooij & Hofstede (2010).

2.4   Identifying Cultural Differences and Similarities: Italy and Germany

It is important to note that culture is extremely stable over time, and that slow culture changes have mostly occurred due to technological breakthroughs (Hofstede, 1980, p. 34). As the convergence hypothesis suggested in the 1960's, such technological breakthroughs were thought to totally converge cultures and allow for common societies. Later research on culture has shown that because cultures have different starting points and pre-existing value systems, their developments will vary and even increase differences when each culture copes with technology in different ways. In this research, we will treat each culture from a contemporary "as-is" perspective, and although it is important to note that culture changes do occur over time due to age, generation and zeitgeist factors (Hofstede, 1980), we will take a sample of cultures to date of the research and not factor in potential culture changes in the future.

2.4.1   Cultural Profile of Germany

Germany is located in Central Europe, bordering the Baltic Sea and the North Sea. The country lies between the Netherlands and Poland, southern of Denmark. Its capital is Berlin. The official language is German, and English is widely used in the corporate sector. The country is ethnically homogenous, with some minorities from Turkey, the former Yugoslavia and Greece in its larger cities. Germany has two major religions, which are Roman Catholicism primarily in the southern and western regions, and Lutheran Protestantism in the northern regions (Datamonitor Europe, 2006).

The country is the third largest economy in the world (behind the United States and Japan) and considered one of the world's leading industrialized countries. Consisting of 16 federal states, it is member of the United Nations (UN), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and founding member of the European Union (EU). Germany's population exceeds 80 million, and it is Europe's largest economy, with dominating decision-making power in the EU (Datamonitor Europe, 2006).

Germany has a power distance score of 35, an individualism score of 67, a masculinity score of 66, an uncertainty avoidance score of 65, and a long-term orientation score of 83.

Germany has comparatively low power distance (35), seeing as it is highly decentralized and supported by a strong middle class. Co-determination rights are common in management settings. Direct communication is also usual in Germany, and leadership is challenged (Hofstede Insights, 2018).

Individualism (67) is rated highly in Germany, meaning that self-actualization is considered an integral part of society. The child-parent-relationship is maintained closer than relationships with extended family, and loyalty stems from people's personal preference for people. Communication in Germany uses one of the most direct styles in the world, which means that people are honest even if it may hurt other people's feelings (Hofstede Insights, 2018).

Masculinity (66) is high in Germany. This means that performance is valued highly, which is evident in the educational system that divides young children into different school types based on their intellectual potential. People gain self-esteem from tasks at work, and status is often shown with material items, like cars and watches (Hofstede Insights, 2018).

Germany is ranked highly for uncertainty avoidance (65). This means that people are predominantly fact-driven, and that one must lead to effective actions by care and rational thought. Details and deductive reasoning are used to create certainty, and people will rely on expertise to make decisions (Hofstede Insights, 2018).

Finally, Germany is considered highly long-term oriented (83), which means that it is a pragmatic country in which people will understand that consequences stem from situation, context and time. Subsequently, traditions are more easily adapted in long-term oriented countries like Germany, and its people will show tendencies to save money and show perseverance in achieving results (Hofstede Insights, 2018).

2.4.2   *Cultural Profile of Italy and Comparison with Germany*

Italy is located in Southern Europe and is a peninsula that extends into the central Mediterranean Sea towards Tunisia. The capital of Italy is Rome, and the country's official language is Italian. German is widely spoken in the north, and other languages include French (in the Valle d'Astora region) and Slovene (in the Trieste-Gorizia region). Italy is ethnically homogenous, while some of the northern population includes German, French and Slovene Italians, and some of the southern population is home to Albanian and Greek Italians. The two main religions are Roman Catholicism (in the south and west) and Lutheran Protestantism (in the north and east). Italy is the seventh largest economy in the world and

the fourth largest economy in Europe. The country has 20 regions and is part of the G8, UN, NATO and the EU, with a population of above 60 million (Datamonitor Europe, 2007).

Italy has a power distance score of 50 (+15 from Germany), an individualism score of 76 (+9 from Germany), a masculinity score of 70 (+4 from Germany), an uncertainty avoidance score of 75 (+10 from Germany), and a long-term orientation score of 61 (-22 from Germany) (Hofstede Insights, 2018).

Power Distance (50) presents the highest positive difference that Italy has over Germany. Nevertheless, the score indicates that Italians prefer equality and a decentralization of power, similar to Germany (Hofstede Insights, 2018).

Individualism (76) in Italy is a bit higher than in Germany, thus Italy is also an individualistic culture where people place great importance on their personal outcomes. Happiness is found through personal fulfillment, and Italians will enjoy putting their own ideas and objectives forward. It is noteworthy that there are some discrepancies between Northern and Southern Italy, where Southern Italy tends to be less individualistic due to strong family networks and rituals like weddings and Sunday lunches (Hofstede Insights, 2018).

Italy is a masculine society (70). Only slightly higher than the masculinity score of Germany, Italians are highly success-driven. Children are taught at early stages that competition is important and positive. Similar to Germans, Italians will show status with material aspects, like cars, fashion, or extravagant travels (Hofstede Insights, 2018).

Uncertainty avoidance in Italy (75) is the second highest positive difference to the same dimension in Germany. So just like Germans, Italians are not comfortable with uncertain situations. This means Italians are detailed planners in the workplace and know which of the many Italian penal and civil codes are important to follow to comply with formality in society. The combination of this dimension with the former masculinity dimension means that Italians are stressed frequently, which is balanced with traditions like long meals or coffee breaks. As part of this dimension, Italians are very passionate, and emotions will inevitably be expressed regularly through use of body language (Hofstede Insights, 2018).

Long-term orientation in Italy (61) has the largest negative difference to Germany, which still shows that Italians are pragmatic people. Like Germans, Italians tend to understand their life situation is dependent on context and time (Hofstede Insights, 2018).

Similarities between Italy & Germany

As the comparison across the five German and Italian Hofstede dimensions shows, we are dealing with *marginal cultural differences* (maximum 22 difference in score) between Germany and Italy that may impact the discussion of our research. Though we are examining two different cultures, their similarity in Hofstede dimension scores warrants the use of an additional cultural model to explain possible *similarities* in brand personality perception. For this reason, Schwartz's (1992, 2004) value types will be examined complementary to Hofstede's (2001) dimensions to provide a well-rounded picture, inspired by research by Batra, Zhang, Aydinoglu, & Feinberg (2017).

Batra, Zhang, Aydinoglu, & Feinberg (2017) hypothesize that because Benevolence, Self-direction and Universalism are, in most cases, ranked *higher* than the other value types (Schwartz & Bardi, 2001), and these values can in effect be seen as "universal values" across cultures including Germany and Italy (Batra, Zhang, Aydinoglu, & Feinberg, 2017), high cross-national consistency of a brand image using attributes reflecting these values will lead to *positive* association with the brand by the consumer (Batra, Zhang, Aydinoglu, & Feinberg, 2017, p. 918). Conversely, the authors hypothesize that because Power and Hedonism are, in most cases, ranked *lower* than the other value types across cultures, high cross-national consistency of a brand image using attributes with these values will lead to *negative* association with the brand by the consumer (Batra, Zhang, Aydinoglu, & Feinberg, 2017, p. 918). The authors also make note of the other values that are ranked in the middle across cultures, i.e. Security, Conformity and Achievement.

Both hypotheses were confirmatory in the authors' research, indicating that the only way to both scale *and* adapt, thus adhering to the highly desired "mix" of global, local and foreign consumer cultures, is to "identify a promise that works across countries" (Hollis, 2008, p. 165-166). The authors conclude that global or "multi-country brands" must therefore maximize their brand appeals across universally applicable values (e.g. Self-direction) rather than brand appeals with high variance (e.g. Hedonism). The authors use the example of Apple (Batra, Zhang, Aydinoglu, & Feinberg, 2017, p. 929), whose hedonistic brand image of pleasure and enjoyment, which led to positive reactions in the United States and negative reactions in Japan, could have been positioned as Self-directive instead, adhering to appeals of creativity and independent thought, which would have potentially worked well in *both* countries through use of universal values.

Because Germany and Italy are affected by these "universally valid" values (Batra, Zhang, Aydinoglu, & Feinberg, 2017), we will incorporate an analysis of Schwartz's (1992, 2004) value types to determine potentially similar perceptions of brand personality across the two countries. Doing so provides a differentiated lens for analysis that can examine similarities that are unapparent from Hofstede's (2001) dimensions.

Figure 6 below summarizes culture's overall influence in this research.
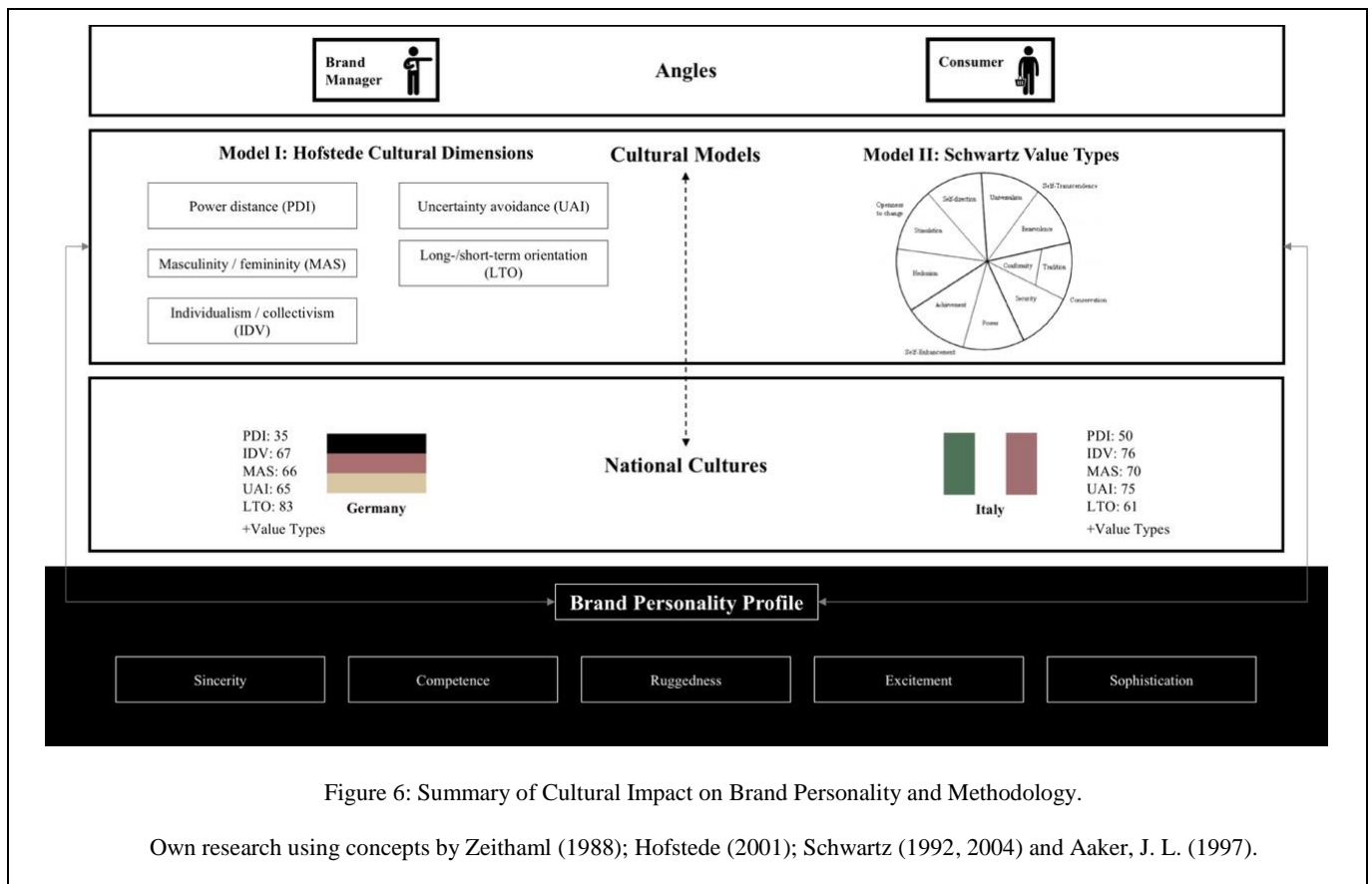
Figure 6: Summary of Cultural Impact on Brand Personality and Methodology.

Own research using concepts by Zeithaml (1988); Hofstede (2001); Schwartz (1992, 2004) and Aaker, J. L. (1997).

3 Contextual Background: Brand Management at adidas

The following section covers relevant information on adidas that has not been addressed in the introduction and literature review to further frame the context.

The rationale for choosing adidas is its global outreach, the clothing and footwear industry in which it operates, and its German heritage. In terms of globalness, adidas will be well known to both Italian and German consumers, which allows for accurate answers during interviews. Since most interview questions assume prior experience with the brand, a global brand like adidas suits the research well methodologically. Also, researching a global brand is sensible to examine the brand management angle, since adidas will have brand managers operating in both Italy and Germany that can provide valuable information.

Further, adidas operates in the clothing and footwear industry, one of the most important industries for Italian and German consumers by household consumption expenditure, placed at the top three in Europe and only surpassed by the United Kingdom. In fact, Italy and Germany have a similar household consumption expenditure on clothing and footwear, at €64,36 billion consumer spending in Italy and €70,69 billion spending in Germany in 2016 (Statista, 2018). Finally, the fact that adidas' heritage is German can be used as an advantage to provide additional cultural insights.

To further gain deeper insights into how adidas operates, its strategic business plan is discussed next.

3.1 Strategic Business Plan

In 2015, the group has set a clear business strategy leading the company to 2020, called "Creating the New" (adidas Intranet, 2018). This strategy has a vibrant operating model: "global organizations plan and create, markets input and execute" (adidas Intranet, 2018). As such, the group plans to generate a more effective set-up between global and local organizations to drive further integration by 2020 (adidas Intranet, 2018).

Three business plan pillars help to achieve this vision: (1) Speed, (2) Cities and (3) Open Source (adidas, 2018).

Firstly, (1) Speed relates to how the group wants to deliver products to consumers. Within "Creating the New", consumers ought to get the products they want, when they want them and where they want them. In fact, today consumers are exposed to social media and e-commerce, seeking for style inspiration from friends and influencers before entering the stores. Thus, it is crucial for a successful retailer

company to be faster and more agile compared to its competitors to reach the right consumers at the appropriate time.

Additionally, activities such as 'never-out-of-stock' and planning responsiveness helps creating higher demand with a shorter-lead time and consequently increasing sales and brand desirability (adidas, 2018). Now, to further develop this pillar, adidas is planning to open its second speed factory in the US, after the first one in Germany. Here, innovative production methods will produce footwear, apparel and accessories faster and more efficient than the old production plants (adidas, 2018).

Secondly, (2) Cities relates to where the group operates. In particular, a set of up and coming capitals worldwide is identified to focus on adidas' most influential consumers (adidas, 2018). Six 'Global Key Cities' are chosen: New York, Los Angeles, London, Paris, Shanghai and Tokyo (adidas internal source). Adidas believes that if the brand wins over these cities, then it will win everywhere (adidas, 2018).

Lastly, (3) Open Source, refers to how the group creates in terms of fostering the collaboration between adidas and partners from both sports and entertainment (adidas internal source). Particularly, this key element refers to already existing successful collaborations with Kanye West for instance, which generates extremely high revenues through the 'Yeezy' collection every year, as well as the sustainable initiative "Parley for the Oceans" (adidas, 2018). These partnerships turned out to be highly positive initiatives for the company, generating sales and brand heat. Now, the ambition is to implement this element even further, incrementing the brand momentum (adidas, 2018).

Consequently, these three pillars ought to enable adidas to reach its 2020 goals and ambitions.

3.2   Adidas Brand Portfolio

Adidas' brands are at the heart of the group's success and the 2020 strategy. Hence, it is important to understand how the group's brand portfolio is structured.

To begin with, the adidas brand is quite a complex organization, inhabiting four sub-brands within: (1) *adidas badge of sport,* (2) *adidas originals,* (3) *adidas core and* (4) *adidas Stella McCartney.*

Now, (1) *adidas badge of sport* is the core element of the company – celebrating the power of sports in every form. It still maintains the original 3-stripes logo and is connected to the long history of the brand. This sub-brand only caters to athletes and wants to inspire them. It produces footwear, apparel and accessories only made for sports, characterized by the best sport expertise (adidas Intranet, 2018).

Its broad sports portfolio includes global sports such as football, basketball and running and minor/regional sports such as rugby and American football.

Then, (2) *adidas originals* is the lifestyle and streetwear brand of the company, deeply-rooted in the increasingly relevant relationship between sport and street culture and targeting all the creators (adidas, 2018). Particularly, the creators' target audience is made up by both influential people wanting to actively participate in the process of unleashing creativity and changing the athletic world and also by consumers creating their own streetwear style and stay on trend (adidas, 2018). In this regard, its mission is "to become the most influential and connected sportswear brand in the street culture" (adidas, 2018).

Next, (3) *adidas core* "exists to democratize modern footwear, because we believe anyone should be able to harness the power of sport in their lives" (adidas, 2018). It covers both sports and sports inspired offers, producing footwear, accessories and apparel for everyone (adidas Intranet, 2018).

Lastly, (4) *adidas Stella McCartney* is the brand where sport meets style (adidas internal source). In fact, this partnership is a unique combination of highly technical products and fashion design (adidas Intranet, 2018). Thus, it caters to a more fashion-influenced target audience, compared to the badge of sports.

3.3   Core Belief & Mission

Now, moving from the strategic angle closer to the core of the group, reveals adidas' Core Belief and Mission below.

Firstly, adidas' Core Belief reads as follows: "Sport is central to every culture and society and is core to an individual's health and happiness. We work every day to inspire and enable people to harness the power of sport in their lives. Everything we do is rooted in sports. We believe that: "Through sport, we have the power to change lives" (adidas internal source). As such, adidas wants to inspire and enable people to understand the power sport can have in their life (adidas, 2018). Manufacturing athletic products, the brand wants to be perceived as the key sporting goods company for all - from elite professional athletes to anyone who desires to make sports a part of his life (adidas annual report, 2017). With this core belief, the brand wants to help athletes and people worldwide to make a difference – not only in sports, but also in life and in the world (adidas, 2018).

Secondly, adidas' Mission addresses the desire: "To be the best sports company in the world" (adidas internal source). Here, being the best sports company is not the same as being the biggest sports company. 'Best' means that through this mission adidas is able to produce and sell superior sports products worldwide, including the best experience and services, in a sustainable way (adidas Intranet,

2018). In fact, adidas wants to be driven by both a continuous pursuit of innovation and its history of sports expertise, developing the best sports offer for the best consumers (adidas, 2018).

To conclude, this mission is not driven by how many products adidas sells, but it depends on the image consumers, athletes, partners, shareholders and media have about the company and their products (adidas, 2018). Thus, "once people are saying that we are the best, market share, leadership and profitability will follow" (adidas, 2018).

Also related to the very core of the group are the people that live adidas' mission and core belief through their values and culture. This will be further discussed in the section below.

3.4   People, Culture and Values

With regard to people culture, adidas has a clear position: "we believe that our people are the key to the company's success" (adidas, 2018). As such, people performance, work-environment, knowledge, skills and activities have a crucial impact on the financial performance of the company (adidas annual report, 2017). Related to this, to be an adidas employee, there are some values the company claims as the most important: "at adidas, we strive to be honest, open, ethical and fair and we expect our employees to share the same values. Nothing wrong with fair competition, but fair play should always come out on top – as for athletes" (adidas, 2018).

Furthermore, four clear fundamentals with regards of people culture exist: (1) attraction and retention of the right talents, (2) role model leadership, (3) diversity and inclusion and (4) creation of a unique corporate culture (adidas, 2018). Hence, the goal is to inspire young talents and current employees, through learning opportunities, great corporate culture and role model leadership, to be the best they can be, enabling the company to reach its target. In addition, adidas wants to invest in raising awareness and support for topics such as LGBTQ, age, origin and women.

To conclude, adidas' culture is more than just people management. It engages a lot around sustainability, striking the balance between shareholders expectations and the needs and concerns of employees and consumers, the workers in supply chain and the environment (adidas, 2018). In particular, adidas believes that through sports they have the power to save lives - but sports need space to exist. Thus, the company has a clear focus on sustainability, responding to challenges that compromise the space of sports and our planet.

4 Formulation of Research Questions

The following sections introduce the research questions based on the literature review and theoretical framework.

4.1 Primary Research Question

"Various investigations show that cultural differences can influence the way in which a brand personality is perceived" (Aaker & Maheswaran, 1997) as cited in Foscht, Maloles, Swoboda, Morschett, & Sinha (2008, p. 132). Placing these cultural "global" vs. "local" viewpoints against the concept of brand personality e.g. Aaker J. L. (1997), which is abstract in its application and problematical in its replication despite its potential positive effects on brand equity, shows that there is still much research to be undertaken in the field.

Returning to the conceptual framework, it is evident that culture plays a relevant role on both the managerial and the consumer sides with regard to brand personality: On one side, brand managers, often constrained by budgetary considerations, will attempt to position their brand's personality according to either global or local needs, which are determined by culture in the targeted market. On the other side, consumers of different cultures will be influenced by these defined brand personalities when perceiving the brand (e.g. as explained by the self-congruity hypothesis), but they may perceive them differently than the brand managers intended. It seems that the brand personality instrument can only be effectively employed by brand managers if cultural implications, on both managerial and consumer sides, are understood as a bare minimum basis for effective decision-making.

Since products from global companies are introduced to markets worldwide, "it has become imperative to study whether consumer perceptions of a brand personality of a product are consistent throughout all the markets a firm is serving" (Foscht, Maloles, Swoboda, Morschett, & Sinha, 2008, p. 131). This includes the understanding of how the brand manager positions the brand's personality with regard to cultural differences (desired state) in order to influence brand equity, and how consumers from different cultures actually perceive the brand personality (actual state).

Thus, the primary research question is formulated as follows:

RQ: How does culture influence brand personality perception?

This primary research question addresses (1) *both the managerial and consumer angles* of brand management (Zeithaml, 1988), (2) the importance of advancing the research on the *brand personality* instrument as an effective influencer of brand equity and as an effective influencer of the consumer's brand perception (Aaker J. L., 1997), and (3) *cultural dimensions* that act as significant game-changers when employing the brand personality instrument e.g. Aaker, Benet-Martinez, & Garolera (2001).

Performing qualitative interviews on both managerial and consumer sides of the same global brand, we expect the answers of this research question to pave the way for further research on **(1) the gap between brand managers and consumers**, **(2) brand personality as a strategic instrument for global brand managers**, and **(3) the overall global-local dilemma**, examined through the theoretical lenses of Hofstede (2001) and (Schwartz, 1992, 2004) cultural models.

To break this primary research question down into reasonable sub-questions that adhere to the thematic and methodological scope of this research, the managerial (M) and consumer (C) angles will be split and examined individually.

4.2   Managerial Angle: Sub-questions

The research is conducted with brand managers at adidas across two cultures, therefore the sub-questions for the managerial angle are phrased as follows:

M1: How is the brand personality of adidas intended to be positioned?

M1 determines the *intended* brand personality as defined by the brand managers questioned (across two cultures). This will act as the managerial component that allows comparison to the *actual* consumer perception of the same brand's personality across two cultures. The question addresses the gap between brand managers and consumers by examining the "ideal" or "desired" state that the brand managers intend.

M2: How do cultural differences influence the embedding of brand personality at adidas?

M2 helps determine whether adidas is pursuing a global or local branding strategy at the time of research, and whether brand managers from different countries cope with cultural challenges in a unified

or differentiated manner. It also uncovers potential discrepancies between brand managers of adidas who themselves are of two different cultural backgrounds.

4.3   Consumer Angle: Sub-questions

The consumer angle will employ similar sub-questions as the managerial side to achieve a degree of comparability between both angles and to determine potential gaps. The first sub-question for the consumer angle reads as follows:

> **C1: How is the brand personality of adidas perceived by the consumer groups?**

C1 determines the *actual* brand personality as it is perceived by the consumer groups (across two cultures). This acts as the consumer component that allows comparison to the intended brand manager position of the same brand's personality (see M1 above). The question contributes to the body of research on the gap between brand managers and consumers, and, together with M1, provides insights on the contemporary adidas brand personality profile.

> **C2: How do cultural differences influence the adidas brand personality perception?**

C2 uncovers the cultural differences that may lead to different or similar brand personality perceptions of adidas across two consumer cultures. As mentioned above, the theoretical lenses of Hofstede (2001) and Schwartz (1992, 2004) will be employed as a basis for analysis and discussion to answer this question. The question helps uncover discrepancies between (potential) consumers of adidas who are of two different cultural backgrounds, and it primarily contributes to the global-local dilemma by helping the managerial side understand the effect of their brand personality positioning strategy across two cultures of, otherwise similar, consumer groups.

5   Research Methodology

Qualitative and quantitative research methods have been employed in brand management research as means to reach different goals (Arora & Stoner, 2009). While quantitative research attempts to quantify reality by measuring large respondent samples, qualitative research captures subjective realities from different participant perspectives. Qualitative research leads to richer explanations of complex situations (Creswell, 2002), while quantitative methods are often chosen for their statistically rigorous results.

In brand management, the use of qualitative methods is still limited (Arora & Stoner, 2009; Bezborodova & Bennett, 2004). In fact, the field of brand personality has been criticized for not having advanced significantly due to limited theoretical or qualitative grounding (Freiling & Forbes, 2005). As has been determined in the prior section on brand personality, the scales associated with brand personality have been criticized for their replicability, as consumer interactions with brands are too complex to be captured fully by scales of the likes of Aaker (Smith, Graetz, & Westerbeek, 2006). Wood (2000) states that because brand description, which is closely linked to brand personality, is distinct, one would not expect it to be quantified. The research indicates that qualitative research may be beneficial to future research on brand personality.

Due to lack of qualitative research in the field despite its positive applications in complex situations (Arora & Stoner, 2009; Bezborodova & Bennett, 2004), this research will employ *exploratory case study research* in the form of expert interviews conducted with adidas group brand managers, and interviews with adidas consumers. Doing so addresses the proposed research questions adequately, as they deal with "how" a contemporary phenomenon unfolds in complex behavioral dynamics beyond the control of the researcher (Yin, 2013). "Exploratory case study research" here is defined as "an exploration of a "bounded system" (bounded by time and place or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context" (Creswell, 1998, p. 61). The case here will examine both managerial and consumer sides of adidas through multiple, in-depth structured interviews. These interviews take the form of "expert interviews" on the managerial side, and "non-expert interviews" on the consumer side.

Acknowledging that this methodological decision will only lead to theory-building, as opposed to theory-confirming, results (Arora & Stoner, 2009), the research provides a stepping stone for future research that builds on its qualitative insights and provides further qualitative *and* quantitative (mixed) method approaches to advance the research on brand personality and cultural differences.

To adequately structure the methodological considerations taken for this research, a five-phase design with guidelines inspired by Yin (2013) is followed (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: Research Phases.
Own research with concepts from Yin (2013).
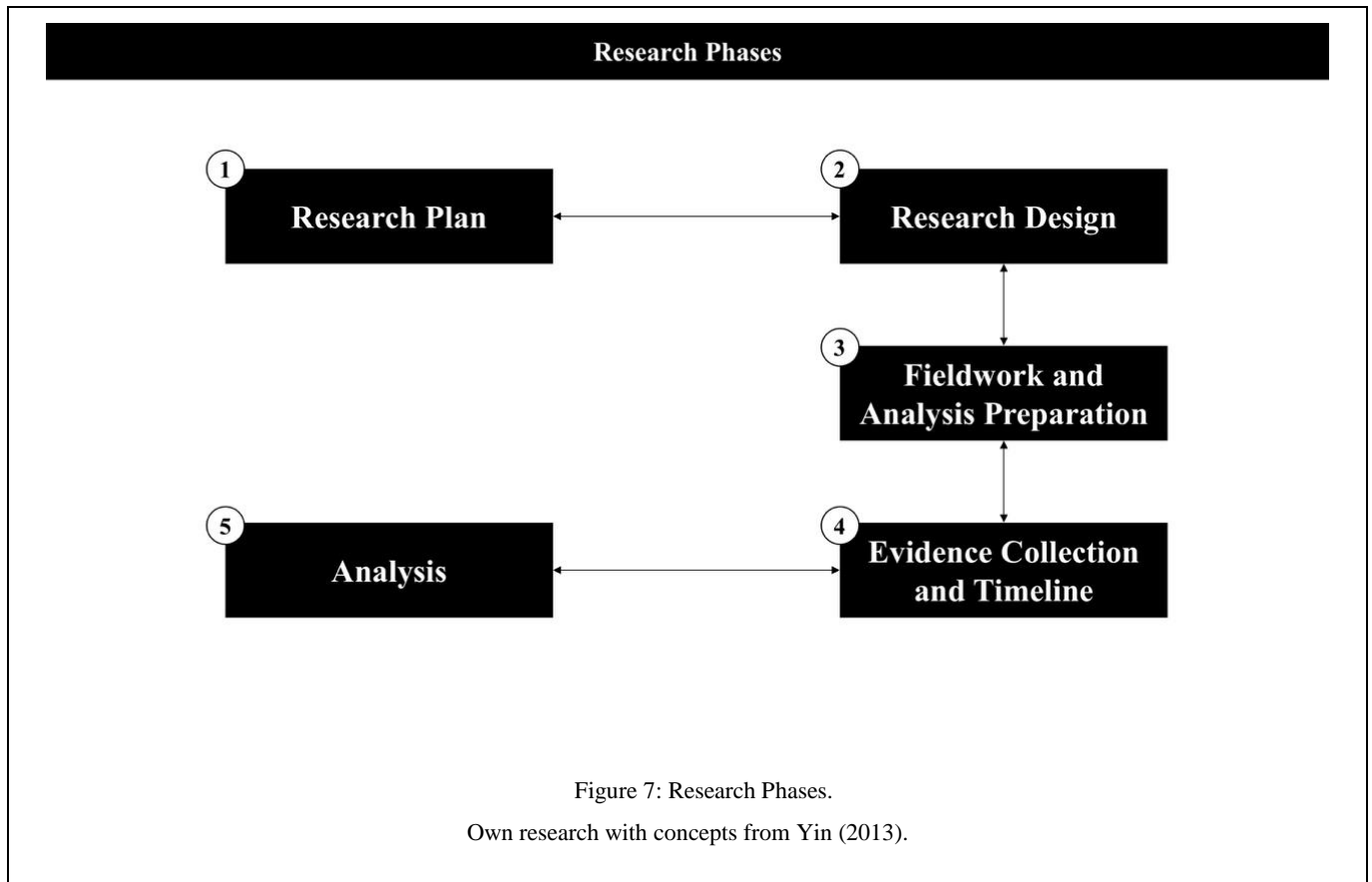
5.1 Research Plan

The research endeavor began with a research plan that was developed from 1st March onwards and completed by 16th April 2018, with some time overlap with the research design below. A single case design (Yin, 2013) was selected based on the company and the literature, which together are in accordance with the "critical", "uniqueness" and "revelatory" rationales described by Yin (2013, p. 38). The case proposed at adidas is first-of-its-kind, and even though brand personality research has been performed at adidas from consumer side (see Arora & Stoner (2009)), an examination of both managerial *and* consumer side at the company is unique, revelatory and critical for advancing foundational understanding on brand personality research (e.g. Freiling & Forbes (2005)).

The case study design can be classified as "embedded" (Yin, 2013, p. 39), as opposed to holistic, because it adheres to multiple units of analysis, namely brand managers across two nations, and consumers across two nations, of the same global brand. Due to a professional engagement at adidas, one of the researchers had close ties to brand management and related positions at adidas, and employed this connection to interview relevant brand management personnel from Germany and Italy for research

purposes. The consumer side was addressed by interviews from both the researchers in both countries, with similar demographic factors.

5.2   Research Design

The research design was initiated on 12th March and finalized on 16th April 2018. Research designs can be thought of as "blueprints" of what questions should be studied, what data is relevant, what data is collected, and how results are analyzed (Yin, 2013). The research questions have been formulated from the literature review. To answer these questions, the case study research here *bounds* the scope of the data collection and analysis by focusing particularly on organizational personnel and management at adidas that deal with brands. These were equated to be titled "brand managers", "product managers" and "merchandising managers" at the company. The scope further includes data collection and analysis of adidas consumers, whom the roles at adidas primarily cater to and address in their brand strategies.

The research design of a case study must address five components, these being (1) a study's questions, (2) its propositions, if any, (3) its unit(s) of analysis, (4) the logic linking the data to the propositions, and (5) the criteria for interpreting the findings (Yin, 2013, p. 20).

Figure 8: Research Design: Five Case Study Research Design Components.

Adapted from Yin (2013, p. 20).
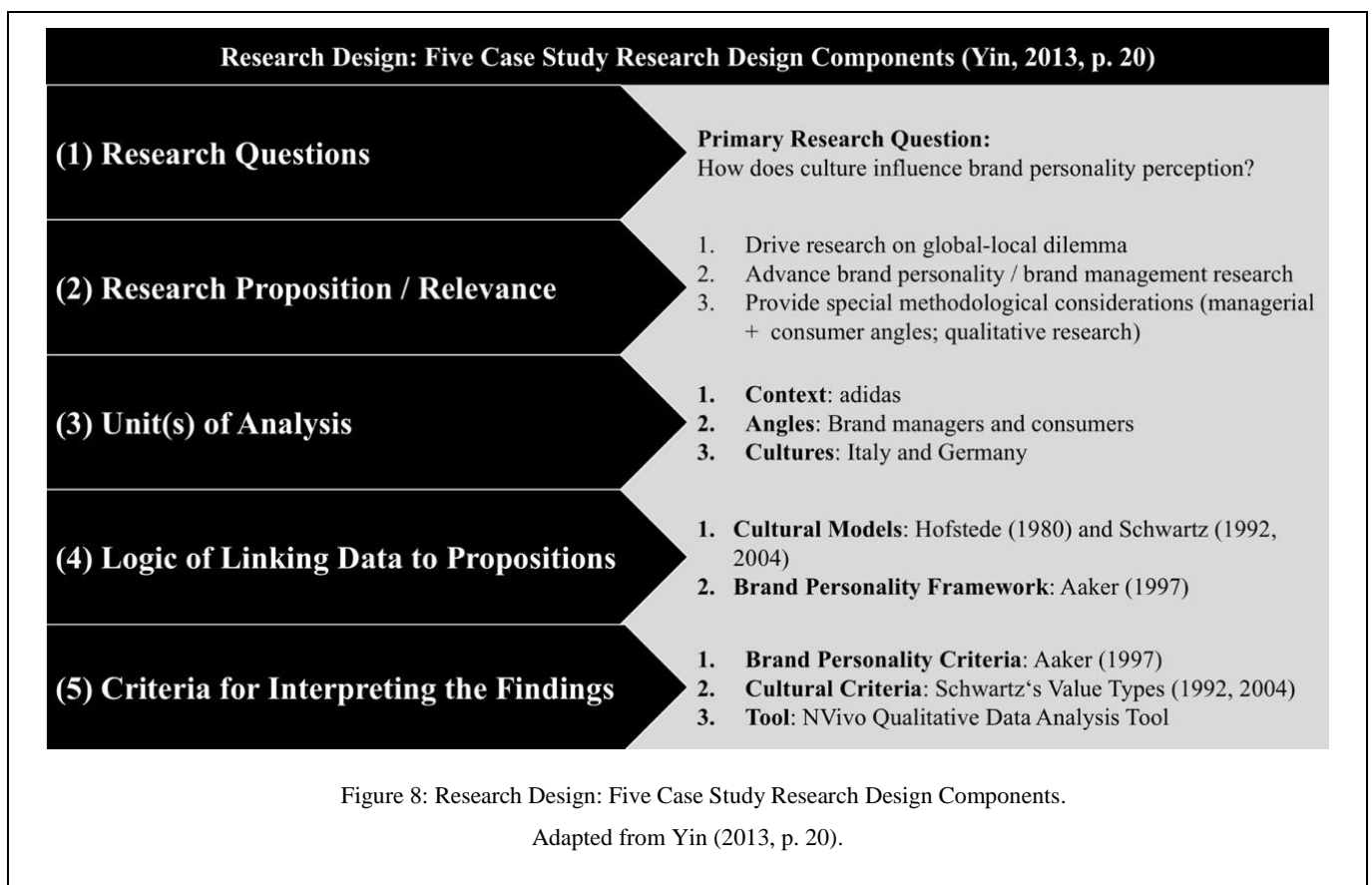
The research questions have been derived from relevant literature in the previous sections and deal primarily with "how" cultural differences influence brand personality perception. These questions warrant the use of exploratory case study research as an adequate method (Yin, 2013). No propositions have been formulated seeing as no confirmatory research is being undertaken (Arora & Stoner, 2009; Yin, 2013). A research purpose is provided instead in the introduction and literature review sections, which provides a valid, alternate justification for exploratory case study research (Yin, 2013, p. 31). The unit of analysis, multiple individuals (brand managers and consumers) across two countries in relation to a single global brand, have also been determined in the original research plan. The logic of linking the findings to the original research questions is achieved by first breaking down the research question into sub-questions belonging to either managerial or consumer angles, then generating relevant questionnaire items related to the research in one interview questionnaire per angle, conducting the interviews, and using a qualitative data analysis tool to critically interpret and compare the respective findings. In-depth information on this procedure is provided below.

Quality criteria for case study research designs include (1) construct validity, (2) internal validity, (3) external validity, and (4) reliability (Yin, 2013). To maximize the effectiveness of the research design, it follows three of these four quality criteria as determined by Yin (2013). Internal validity is not examined, because it is only relevant for causal case studies and not for exploratory cases as is relevant here (Yin, 2013).

5.2.1 *Construct validity*

Construct validity describes using correct operational measures (Yin, 2013). This can be achieved through (1) triangulation of multiple sources of data or interviews, (2) providing readers with evidence chains where relevant, and (3) allowing interviewees to give feedback to the actual research (Yin, 2013).

Construct validity is achieved in this research by employing open-ended, structured interviews on both managerial and consumer sides of the same brand. Within these two sides, 8 interviews were conducted on managerial, while 20 interviews were conducted on consumer side. On each side, the research accounts for the two cultures central to the research (Germany and Italy). Thus, the case study research conducted here achieves triangulation through multiple sources of data and interviews (Yin, 2013).

Further, the discussion section of the research includes quotes from respondents with direct ties to the theoretical foundations from the literature review. This allows the research to enhance construct validity by providing readers with a chain of evidence (Yin, 2013).

Finally, the interview questionnaire was designed to allow for respondent feedback, by both transparently communicating the aim of the research, and allowing the respondents to add any information they feel would benefit the overall case. By including interviewees directly in the case, construct validity is further enhanced (Yin, 2013).

5.2.2   External validity

External validity should allow the specific case findings to be generalized to a greater domain or research field. This requires (1) a specification of the population of interest and (2) replication logic in multiple cases (Yin, 2013). Both these factors will be addressed in the section for theoretical implications and future research.

5.2.3   Reliability

Reliability means that the research can be replicated if the case study and methodological procedures described here are pursued by other researchers. Yin (2013) describes reliability to thus require (1) a standardized interview protocol, (2) constructs that are well defined and grounded in extant literature, and (3) an audit-trail by providing access to the data.

In this research, structured, open-ended interview questionnaires and documentation are employed to ensure reliability and potential replication of the research to other settings. The interview questions are infused by theoretical constructs identified in the literature review (e.g. Aaker J. L.(1997)), and results from the interviews are analyzed and linked to the theoretical constructs. Finally, an audit-trail is provided through meticulous interview record-keeping through interview transcripts by the researchers. Replicability of the research will be further elaborated on in the theoretical implications and future research section. Overall, this leads to reliability of the case study research in accordance to Yin (2013).

5.3   Fieldwork and Analysis Preparation

The fieldwork and analysis preparation began on 9th April and extended until 31st May 2018. In-depth, structured interviews were chosen as the method of data collection for this case study research. As one of the main methods of data collection in qualitative research (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003), interviews can be described as a "conversation with a purpose" (Webb & Webb, 1932). They have a central function to social science research, including the complex dynamics of brand management (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003). "The expressive power of language provides the most important

resource for accounts. A crucial feature of language is its capacity to present descriptions, explanations, and evaluations of almost infinite variety about any aspect of the world, including itself" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 126) as cited in Legard, Keegan, & Ward (2003).

The interviews conducted here are aligned with four key features of the in-depth interview (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003), including:

- Combining structure with flexibility
- Promoting interactivity
- Employing probe techniques
- Encouraging generativity (i.e. new ideas)

Continuing the theme that this research investigates two angles, the fieldwork and analysis preparation first deals with generating questionnaire items per angle and per sub-question.

Table 4 and 5 below show each questionnaire item posed to the participants (column 1), the purpose behind the question (column 2), its theoretical grounding (column 3), and to which sub-question it ultimately contributes (column 4). Because interviews should involve a number of stages (Robson, 2002) (Rubin & Rubin, 1995), the merged rows also display the stages employed (five and four stages for managerial and consumer angles respectively). As we have established in the literature review, addressing all four sub-questions provides a lens for answering the primary research question. It is worth noting that due to different theoretical groundings in the managerial and consumer angles, the questionnaire items vary per angle.

<u>Adidas brand manager questionnaire</u>

Questionnaire Item	Purpose of Question	Theoretical Grounding	Contribution to sub-question
Stage One: Purpose of the interview, reaffirmation of confidentiality and opening questions			
Q1: "Adidas is a global brand. How do you position the Adidas brand in the global market?"	Used to open the interview without introducing prior concepts or bias of brand personality. Attempts to identify how the brand manager in question positions the adidas brand in their country.	Wood (2000); de Mooij & Hofstede (2010)	→ **M1**: How is the brand personality of adidas intended to be positioned?
Q2: "Do you think that consumers are perceiving adidas the way you are positioning	Attempts to identify potential discrepancy between managerial and consumer sides according to brand managers.	Wood (2000)	→ **M1**: How is the brand personality of adidas

Questionnaire Item	Purpose of Question	Theoretical Grounding	Contribution to sub-question
adidas / intend the brand to be perceived?"			intended to be positioned?
Q3: "Please mention the top five brand traits of how you position adidas."	Attempts to identify the top five brand traits without prior knowledge or bias of Aaker's (1997) brand personality dimensions.	Aaker J. L. (1997)	→ **M1**: How is the brand personality of adidas intended to be positioned?
Stage Two: Introduction of the "brand personality" concept in a global context			
Q4: "What are the specific brand personality traits of adidas."	Attempts to identify the top five adidas brand traits after introducing the concept of brand personality. Aaker's (1997) brand personality dimensions are not introduced at this point. Aims to probe for brand personality instruments that may / may not be in place at adidas already.	Aaker J. L. (1997)	→ **M1**: How is the brand personality of adidas intended to be positioned?
Q5: "Does your personal perception of adidas' current brand personality conflict with the way the brand is currently positioned?"	Attempts to identify discrepancy between personal views, which may be influenced by culture, and the adidas global branding strategy.	Aaker J. L. (1997); de Mooij & Hofstede (2010)	→ **M2**: How do cultural differences influence the embedding of brand personality at adidas?
Q6: "If there were any quick changes you could make to adidas' brand personality, what would you change?"	Same as Q7, attempts to identify discrepancy between personal views, which may be influenced by culture, and the adidas global branding strategy.	Aaker J. L. (1997) de Mooij & Hofstede (2010)	→ **M2**: How do cultural differences influence the embedding of brand personality at adidas?
Q7: "Do you think adidas relates to the following brand personality traits? Please explain your answer."	Introduces Aaker's (1997) brand personality dimensions. Attempts to see whether brand manager views are consistent with previous answers.	Aaker J. L. (1997) de Mooij & Hofstede (2010)	→ **M1**: How is the brand personality of adidas intended to be positioned?
Q8: "Are there any other traits you think adidas has that were not discussed above?"	Attempts to see whether brand manager views are consistent with previous answers.	Aaker J. L. (1997)	→ **M1**: How is the brand personality of adidas intended to be positioned?
Stage Three: Introduction of the "brand personality" concept in a local context			
Q9: "Is there a difference between adidas' global brand personality and local brand	Introduces the brand personality concept at a potential local level with the specific countries Germany and Italy. Attempts to	Aaker J. L. (1997) de Mooij & Hofstede (2010)	→ **M2**: How do cultural differences influence the embedding of brand personality at adidas?

Questionnaire Item	Purpose of Question	Theoretical Grounding	Contribution to sub-question
personality when it comes to countries Germany and Italy?"	find out whether there are differences in brand personality across the two nations.		
Q10 (conditional): "How do you perceive adidas' current brand personality in Germany and Italy?"	Only asked if the previous question is answered positively to identify concrete discrepancies between German and Italian brand personalities of adidas.	Aaker J. L. (1997) de Mooij & Hofstede (2010)	→ **M2**: How do cultural differences influence the embedding of brand personality at adidas?
Stage Four: Influence of culture on brand personality at adidas			
Q11: "Do you think cultural differences affect the way the adidas brand personality is perceived?"	Introduces the concept of culture and the global-local dilemma. Attempts to gain insight on the views of the brand manager on the global-local dilemma to pinpoint adidas' current strategy.	Aaker J. L. (1997) de Mooij & Hofstede (2010)	→ **M2**: How do cultural differences influence the embedding of brand personality at adidas?
Q12: "What does adidas do to try and reduce risks from cultural differences?"	Attempts to probe for specific tactics employed by the brand managers to deal with cultural differences on a general level.	Aaker J. L. (1997) de Mooij & Hofstede (2010)	→ **M2**: How do cultural differences influence the embedding of brand personality at adidas?
Q13: "Does the fact that adidas' heritage is German have any effect on the brand personality in Italy?"	Attempts to clarify the role of adidas' German heritage and how this may have an effect on the brand personality in Italy.	Aaker J. L. (1997) de Mooij & Hofstede (2010)	→ **M2**: How do cultural differences influence the embedding of brand personality at adidas?
Q14: "Does the fact that adidas' heritage is German have any effect on the brand personality in Germany?"	Attempts to clarify the role of adidas' German heritage and how this may have an effect on the brand personality in Germany.	Aaker J. L. (1997) de Mooij & Hofstede (2010)	→ **M2**: How do cultural differences influence the embedding of brand personality at adidas?
Q15: "We are conducting our research with consumers from Italy and Germany. Would you expect that there are differences between these cultural groups in their brand personality perception of adidas?"	Increases transparency on the research. Attempts to see whether actual research outcome is aligned with expected outcome.	Aaker J. L. (1997) de Mooij & Hofstede (2010)	→ **M2**: How do cultural differences influence the embedding of brand personality at adidas?
Stage Five: Confirmation of interviewee demographic data			
Q16: "What is your country of birth?"	Relevant for assignment of national culture.	Legard, Keegan, & Ward (2003)	→ **M1+M2**
Q17 "What is your country of residence?"	Relevant for assignment of national culture.	Legard, Keegan, & Ward (2003)	→ **M1+M2**

Questionnaire Item	Purpose of Question	Theoretical Grounding	Contribution to sub-question
Q18: "What country / countries are you primarily responsible for at adidas?"	Relevant for assigning to brand manager nation.	Legard, Keegan, & Ward (2003)	→ **M1**+**M2**
Q19: "Which of the following best describes your tenure in your current role?"	Relevant for assessing prior experience with the company.	Legard, Keegan, & Ward (2003)	→ **M1**+**M2**
Q20: "Which of the following departments do you work in?"	Relevant for identifying the "brand manager" expertise required for the research.	Legard, Keegan, & Ward (2003)	→ **M1**+**M2**
Q21: "Do you have any other points / comments you would like to make regarding this research?"	Increases the transparency on the research. Allows interviewee to openly discuss further viewpoints and questions not addressed.	Legard, Keegan, & Ward (2003)	→ **M1**+**M2**

Table 4: Questionnaire Item Generation: adidas Brand Managers.

Adidas consumers questionnaire

Questionnaire Item	Purpose of Question	Theoretical Grounding	Contribution to sub-question
Stage One: Purpose of the interview, reaffirmation of confidentiality and opening questions			
Q1: "How do you perceive the adidas brand?"	Used to open the interview without introducing prior concepts or bias of brand personality. Attempts to identify how the consumer in question perceives the adidas brand in their country.	Wood (2000); de Mooij & Hofstede (2010)	→ **C1**: How is the brand personality of adidas perceived by the consumer groups?
Q2: "Please mention the top five brand traits you connect with adidas."	Attempts to identify the top five brand traits without prior knowledge or bias of Aaker's (1997) brand personality dimensions.	Aaker J. L. (1997)	→ **C1**: How is the brand personality of adidas perceived by the consumer groups?
Stage Two: Introduction of the "brand personality" concept			
Q3 "Do you think adidas relates to the following brand personality traits?"	Introduces Aaker's (1997) brand personality dimensions. Attempts to see whether	Aaker J. L. (1997)	→ **C1**: How is the brand personality of adidas

Questionnaire Item	Purpose of Question	Theoretical Grounding	Contribution to sub-question
	consumer views are consistent with previous answers.		perceived by the consumer groups?
Q4: "Are there any other brand personality traits you think adidas has that were not discussed above?"	Attempts to see whether consumer views are consistent with previous answers.	Aaker J. L. (1997)	→ **C1**: How is the brand personality of adidas perceived by the consumer groups?
Q5: "Would you say that you identify yourself with the adidas brand personality?"	Attempts to identify the role of the self-congruity hypothesis and its relevance towards the research.	Aaker J. L. (1997) Self-congruity hypothesis Landon Jr. (1974)	→ **C1**: How is the brand personality of adidas perceived by the consumer groups?
Stage Three: Influence of culture on brand personality perception of adidas consumers			
Q6: "Does the fact that adidas' heritage is German have any effect on the way you perceive the brand personality in your country?"	Attempts to clarify the role of adidas' German heritage and how this may have an effect on the brand personality in either Germany or Italy.	Aaker J. L. (1997); de Mooij & Hofstede (2010)	→ **C2**: How do cultural differences influence the adidas brand personality perception?
Q7: "We are conducting our research with consumers from Italy and Germany. Would you expect that there are differences between these cultural groups in their brand personality perception of adidas?"	Increases transparency on the research. Attempts to see whether actual research outcome is aligned with expected outcome.	Aaker J. L. (1997); de Mooij & Hofstede (2010)	→ **C2**: How do cultural differences influence the adidas brand personality perception?
Stage Four: Confirmation of interviewee demographic data			
Q8: "What is your country of birth?"	Relevant for assignment of national culture.	Legard, Keegan, & Ward (2003)	→ **C1+C2**
Q9: "What is your country of residence?"	Relevant for assignment of national culture.	Legard, Keegan, & Ward (2003)	→ **C1+C2**
Q10: "What is your sex?"	Relevant to maximize generalizability of the sample.	Legard, Keegan, & Ward (2003)	→ **C1+C2**
Q11: "What is your year of birth?"	Relevant to maximize generalizability of the sample.	Legard, Keegan, & Ward (2003)	→ **C1+C2**

Questionnaire Item	Purpose of Question	Theoretical Grounding	Contribution to sub-question
Q12: "Information about income is very important to understand demographic differences. Would you please give your best guess?"	Relevant to maximize generalizability of the sample.	Legard, Keegan, & Ward (2003)	→ **C1+C2**
Q13: "Do you have any other points / comments you would like to make regarding this research?"	Increases the transparency on the research. Allows interviewee to openly discuss further viewpoints and questions not addressed.	Legard, Keegan, & Ward (2003)	→ **C1+C2**

Table 5: Questionnaire Item Generation: adidas Consumers

Now, the questionnaire items above make use of two questioning techniques, i.e. (1) content mapping and (2) content mining (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003). The content mapping questions are designed to open the research area, while the subsequent content mining questions are employed to gain in-depth insight on the relevant subject matter (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003, p. 148). These are pre-defined to ensure consistency across the research. The questionnaire items are designed to provide a range of dichotomous yes/no questions and open-ended questions, so that a balance of affirmation and description is achieved (Patton, 2002). Other measures are infused into the questionnaire item generation, including the avoidance of leading questions, ensuring concepts are explained in-depth so that questions are clear, and using topic guides for the interviewers to ensure all subjects are covered (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003).

Probing techniques (amplificatory probes, exploratory probes, explanatory probes, and clarification probes) are further used within the content mining questions to ensure a suitable depth-level is reached (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003). The interview questionnaire is designed to not reveal the full research purpose at the beginning, which ensures that the interviewees respond in the most natural manner and do not feel obliged to say what they think the interviewer wants to hear. In practice, using explanatory and clarification probes, the concepts of "brand personality" and "culture" are only revealed to the interviewees as the conversation progresses.

5.4   Evidence Collection and Timeline

The evidence collection took place from 1st June to 30th June 2018. The evidence was collected by interviewing a total of eight adidas brand managers from Germany and Italy, and twenty adidas consumers from Germany and Italy using the questionnaires and topic guides. The ratio of brand managers to consumers (2:5) is the result of difficult access to employees at adidas willing to take part in the interviews. The ratio can be justified, seeing as consumers are far less acquainted with the brand in their daily lives compared to the brand managers, so adding more consumers to gain deeper insights is adequate. Also, the consumer interviews were kept significantly shorter (see above for list of questions), meaning the total time spent with brand managers and consumers equates to around the same number of minutes.

Table 6 below shows the referencing mechanism used for the interview data – the "type" (Column 2) of interview is distinguished using the reference "Mgm" (brand manages) and "Con" (consumers) respectively, while the "country" (Column 3) is determined using the ISO-codes "DE" (Germany) and "IT" (Italy) respectively. This information is combined into a unique "reference ID" (Column 1) per interview (e.g. "Mgm-DE-01"), which is used in the analysis as in-text citation.

Reference ID per Interview	Type	Country
Brand Managers (Mgm)		
Mgm-DE-01	Brand Manager (Mgm)	Germany (DE)
Mgm-DE-02	Brand Manager (Mgm)	Germany (DE)
Mgm-DE-03	Brand Manager (Mgm)	Germany (DE)
Mgm-DE-04	Brand Manager (Mgm)	Germany (DE)
Mgm-IT-05	Brand Manager (Mgm)	Italy (IT)
Mgm-IT-06	Brand Manager (Mgm)	Italy (IT)
Mgm-IT-07	Brand Manager (Mgm)	Italy (IT)
Mgm-IT-08	Brand Manager (Mgm)	Italy (IT)
Consumers (Con)		
Con-DE-01	Consumer (Con)	Germany (DE)
Con-DE-02	Consumer (Con)	Germany (DE)
Con-DE-03	Consumer (Con)	Germany (DE)
Con-DE-04	Consumer (Con)	Germany (DE)

Reference ID per Interview	Type	Country
Con-DE-05	Consumer (Con)	Germany (DE)
Con-DE-06	Consumer (Con)	Germany (DE)
Con-DE-07	Consumer (Con)	Germany (DE)
Con-DE-08	Consumer (Con)	Germany (DE)
Con-DE-09	Consumer (Con)	Germany (DE)
Con-DE-10	Consumer (Con)	Germany (DE)
Con-IT-11	Consumer (Con)	Italy (IT)
Con-IT-12	Consumer (Con)	Italy (IT)
Con-IT-13	Consumer (Con)	Italy (IT)
Con-IT-14	Consumer (Con)	Italy (IT)
Con-IT-15	Consumer (Con)	Italy (IT)
Con-IT-16	Consumer (Con)	Italy (IT)
Con-IT-17	Consumer (Con)	Italy (IT)
Con-IT-18	Consumer (Con)	Italy (IT)
Con-IT-19	Consumer (Con)	Italy (IT)
Con-IT-20	Consumer (Con)	Italy (IT)

Table 6: Evidence Collection.

Due to the sensitivity of adidas employees revealing their identities and the agreements with the company, all interviews where transcribed from original audio recordings, which were subsequently deleted after the transcription phase into the data analysis tool. This procedure ensured full anonymity of the data. All interviews were conducted in English language in both countries to avoid translation errors. The total primary research period (five-phase design) took place from 1st March 2018 and ended on 24th August 2018, lasting approximately half a year with two researchers driving the process forward. The figure below outlines the summary of the total primary research period.

Timeline						
Phases	**2018**					
	March	**April**	**May**	**June**	**July**	**August**
Total Primary Research Period (March to August 2018)						
1. Research Plan	▬	▬				
2. Research Design	▬	▬				
3. Fieldwork and Analysis Preparation		▬	▬			
4. Evidence Collection and Timeline				▬		
5. Analysis					▬	▬
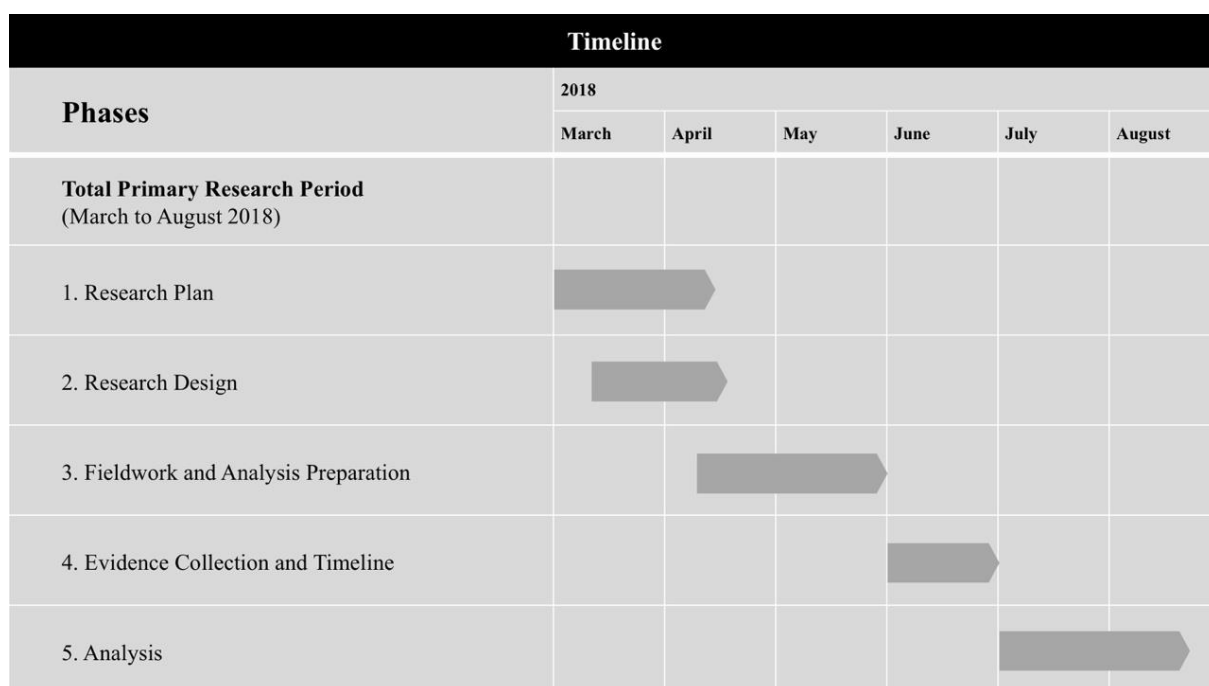
Figure 9: Timeline.

5.5 Analysis

5.5.1 *Choice of Qualitative Data Analysis Tool: NVivo*

"In order to carry out a robust analysis that allows all different levels of investigation to be achieved, it is important that researchers choose a 'tool' or 'analytic support' that will help, not distract, them during their analytic searches" (Spencer, Ritchie, & O'Conner, 2003, p. 210). This being said, the qualitative data analysis tool "NVivo" was decided to be a promising fit due to its intuitive usability and effective features.

According to GSR International (2018), NVivo's benefits in a nutshell are described as: "See the big picture fast with NVivo – the most powerful software for gaining richer insights from qualitative and mixed-methods data". More specifically, NVivo builds on three main data processing steps: (1) store and organize, (2) categorize and analyze and (3) visualize and discover. Firstly, 'store and organize' refers to storing and sorting all gathered data in one platform through the 'DATA' area. Secondly, 'categorize and analyze' implies using powerful tools to categorize and classify the data such as automatically sort sentiment, themes and attributes. The 'CODES' area helps to establish customized codes through specific nodes. Lastly, 'visualize and discover' helps to visualize the results to brainstorm

and map ideas, identify connections between project items and possible new paths of investigation. Additionally, the option of running queries such as word count or most frequent words used within selected files/nodes established a vast variety of customized analysis options.

Spencer, Ritchie, & O'Conner (2003) introduces seven 'hallmarks' to look for in any qualitative data analysis tool. Clarifying if NVivo fulfils these hallmarks serves as a way to justify the analysis tool selection and implies a certain quality of the tool.

(1) Remains grounded in the data

In general, it is important that the evolving analytic are based on the data, rather than simply superimposed. Now, to obtain this, the chosen tool needs to provide a structure that allows emergent patterns to be collected and revisited. Related to this, it is essential to have fast and easy access to the original data at any stage of the analytic process (Spencer, Ritchie, & O'Conner, 2003).

NVivo fully fulfills this criterion through its ability to 'store and organize' the original data. Every 'categorize and analyze' step is directly linked to the original data, which makes it very convenient to access the data source every step of the way.

(2) Permits captured synthesis

It is essential that at one point, the original data needs to be reduced from their raw form to be able to make sense of the evidence. However, one needs to carefully handle the original terms, thoughts and views of the study participants so nothing is lost in the process. Hence, it is crucial that the synthesis is captured to ensure that it can be checked back against the original data at any time. Additionally, this way a record of the used conceptualization or interpretation is established (Spencer, Ritchie, & O'Conner, 2003).

Again, NVivo fully fulfills this criterion through its effective coding options. The uploaded data can be coded through customized nodes, which ensures the systematic reduction of raw data into specific areas of interest. This way it is possible to look at the raw data from different relevant angles and make sense of the evidence. Furthermore, due to the constant link to the original data source (through the 'get info' or 'view reference' button) the synthesis is transparently captured.

(3) Facilitates and displays ordering

Another important point is the ordering of the evidence. The data will need to be organized and sorted into largely related blocks of subject matter (Spencer, Ritchie, & O'Conner, 2003).

As mentioned above, NVivo's coding function through customized nodes directly caters to the organizing and sorting requirement into relevant subject blocks.

(4) Permits within and between case searches

To be able to define key characteristics, clusters and associations within the data it is essential to guarantee moving through the entire data set quite easily and facilitate the searching process (Spencer, Ritchie, & O'Conner, 2003).

Again, NVivo fully fulfils this requirement through its "visualize and discover" methods, in particular the 'query' option and constant linkage to the reference data and between all uploaded files. This way, customized queries enable the user to easily search through the entire data set or compare selected files to each other. Furthermore, through various visualization options hidden relationships can be revealed.

(5) Allows systematic and comprehensive coverage of the data set

This refers to giving each unit of analysis, such as interview, observation and document etc., the same analytical treatment by systematically applying the analysis across the entire data set (Spencer, Ritchie, & O'Conner, 2003).

NVivo hat the ability to equally analyze mixed method data, however in this research only one data method (interviews) was used.

(6) Permits flexibility

With qualitative analysis new ideas can occur at any stage of the process, which calls for some flexibility in the analysis tool to add and change features as the analysis progresses (Spencer, Ritchie, & O'Conner, 2003).

Again, NVivo fully fulfills this criterion through unlimited editing options throughout the entire analysis process. At any time, the user can add, delete or change any file or node.

(7) Allows transparency to others

For the purpose of discussing the developing stages of an analysis with third parties or a follow-up study for instance, the content of qualitative analyses sometimes needs to be made accessible to people other than the main analyst (Spencer, Ritchie, & O'Conner, 2003).

For this case, NVivo contains a project sharing and combination option, as well as the function to simply export the project file.

It seems that NVivo fulfills all of the above described desirable analytical tool features. This concludes in the assumption that NVivo is a viable qualitative analysis tool, which is hence being used for the analytical process of the conducted interview data.

5.5.2   *Using NVivo to Analyze and Interpret the Findings*

To get started, after downloading the NVivo 12 Mac Software, a new NVivo project is created. Now, all gathered data can be imported. In the designated 'DATA' area all files can be added and organized into relevant folders of interest referring to different data sources. However, as this research uses interviews and therefore only a single data collection method, all data is uploaded into the overall 'Files' folder without creating subfolders.

Now, the imported files are ready to be coded. Within the 'Codes' area different 'Nodes' can be created. In this case a node refers to a collection of references about a specific theme. These references are gathered by coding the uploaded interviews. This research uses two main nodes: (1) 'Brand Managers' and (2) 'Consumers'.

Brand Managers

The 'Brand Managers' node is further divided into (1) 'Questions – Brand Managers' and (2) 'Relation to Aaker's brand traits – Brand Managers'. Within the 'Questions – Brand Managers' node all brand manager interview questions are summarized in 14 sub-nodes labeled with question numbers respectively. Now, within these question nodes, three different question types exist: Firstly, questions designed to relate to Aaker's five brand traits do not have further sub-nodes, as their file content is later coded into the relevant 'Relation to Aaker's brand traits – Brand Managers' node. The following questions fall into this category: Q1 ("*Adidas is a global brand. How do you position the Adidas brand in the global market?*"), Q3 ("*Please mention the top five brand traits of how you position Adidas.*"), Q4 ("*What are the specific brand personality traits of Adidas?*"), Q6 ("*If there were any quick changes you could make to Adidas' brand personality, what would you change?*") and Q8 ("*Are there any other traits you think Adidas has that were not discussed above?*").

Secondly, questions designed to identify certain attitudes towards a specific topic are further divided into sub-nodes relating to the displayed attitude: (1) 'Positive', (2) 'Neutral' and (3) 'Negative'. The following questions fulfill this criterion: Q2 ("*Do you think that consumers are perceiving Adidas the way you are positioning Adidas / intend the brand to be perceived?*"), Q5 ("*Does your personal perception of Adidas' current brand personality conflict with the way the brand is currently positioned?*"), Q7 ("*Do you think Adidas relates to the following brand personality traits? Please explain your answer.*"), Q9/10 ("*Is there a difference between Adidas' Global Brand Personality and Local Brand Personality when it comes to countries Germany and Italy?*"), Q11 ("*Do you think Cultural Differences affect the way the Adidas brand personality is perceived?*"), Q13 ("*Does the fact that Adidas' heritage is "German" have any effect on the brand personality in Italy?*"), Q14 ("*Does the fact*

that Adidas' heritage is "German" have any effect on the brand personality in Germany?") and Q15 *("We are conducting our research with consumers from Italy and Germany. Would you expect that there are differences between these cultural groups in their brand personality perception of Adidas?").*

Lastly, questions related to open-ended questions are analyzed individually and do not contain any sub-nodes. The following question fulfils this criterion: Q12 *("Some research indicates that localization strategies are a must to adhere to specific cultures. What does Adidas do to try and reduce risks from Cultural Differences?").*

The 'Relation to Aaker's brand traits – Brand Managers' node inhabits five sub-nodes related to Aaker's five brand traits: (1) 'Related to Competence', (2) 'Related to Exciting', (3) 'Related to Ruggedness', (4) 'Related to Sincerity' and (5) 'Related to Sophistication'. Here, all content from the above-mentioned questions related to Aaker's five brand traits is coded into the respective sub-node (Aaker, 1997).

<u>Consumers</u>

The 'Consumers' node is further divided in the same manner as the 'Brand Manager' node above: (1) 'Questions – Consumers' and (2) 'Relation to Aaker's brand traits – Consumers'. Here, the 'Questions – Consumers' node is again divided into 7 sub-nodes describing all consumer interview questions from Q1 to Q7. Again, three different types of questions with relevant sub-coding exist. Firstly, questions designed to relate to Aaker's five brand traits: Q1 *("How do you perceive the Adidas brand?"),* Q2 *("Please mention the top five brand traits that you connect with Adidas.")* and Q4 *("Are there any other brand personality traits you think Adidas has that were not discussed above?").*

Secondly, questions designed to identify certain attitudes: Q3 *("Do you think Adidas relates to the following "brand personality" traits? Please explain your answer."),* Q5 *("Would you say that you identify yourself with the Adidas brand personality? Why / why not?"),* Q6 *("Does the fact that Adidas' heritage is "German" have any effect on the way you perceive the brand personality in your country?"),* Q7 *("We are conducting our research with consumers from Italy and Germany. Would you expect that there are differences between these cultural groups in their brand personality perception of Adidas?").*

Similar to above, the 'Relation to Aaker's brand traits – Consumers' node inhabits five sub-nodes related to Aaker's five brand traits: (1) 'Related to Competence', (2) 'Related to Exciting', (3) 'Related to Ruggedness', (4) 'Related to Sincerity' and (5) 'Related to Sophistication'. Again, all content from the above-mentioned questions related to Aaker J. L.'s (1997) five brand traits is coded into the respective sub-node.

The NVivo screenshot below summarizes the discussed nodes.
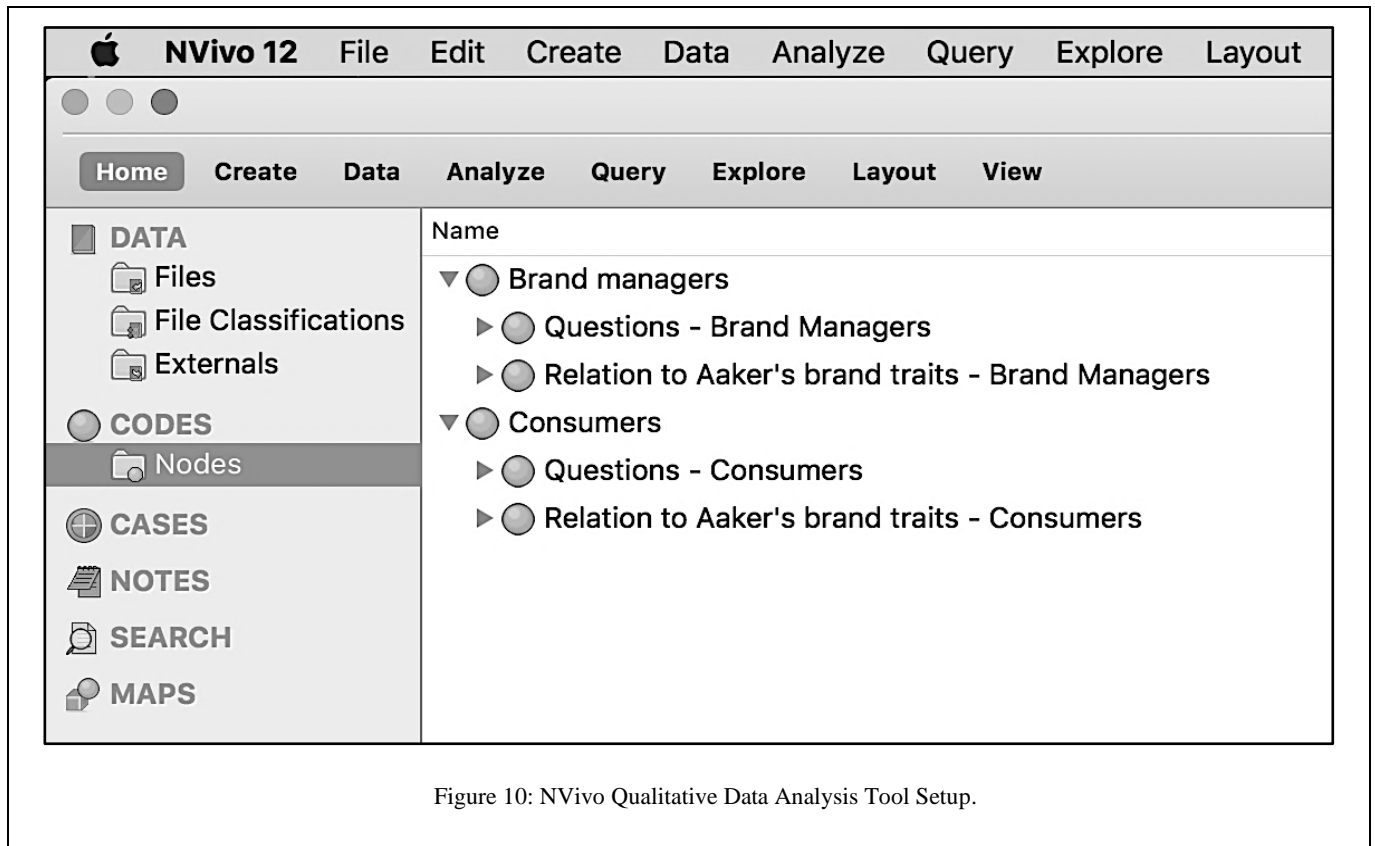
Figure 10: NVivo Qualitative Data Analysis Tool Setup.

The choice of a qualitative research tool adhering to requirements grounded in research (Spencer, Ritchie, & O'Conner, 2003), and the detailed linkage of the tool to Aaker's brand personality dimensions–fulfilling the fifth requirement outlined in an optimal case study research design (Yin, 2013, p. 20)–clearly addresses the gap for advancing qualitative research methods in the brand management domain (Arora & Stoner, 2009; Bezborodova & Bennett, 2004), and provides a solid methodological foundation for interpreting the findings in the next section.

6 Presentation and Analysis of Findings

The presentation and analysis of findings from the primary research will be chronologically discussed in order of posed sub-questions. Thus, the analysis begins by proposing possible answers to sub-questions M1 and M2 (managerial angle) and proceeds with C1 and C2 (consumer angle). Then, the primary research question is addressed by discussing both angles in conjunction.

6.1 Managerial Angle: Intended adidas Brand Personality Profile Across Italy and Germany

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M1: How is the brand personality of adidas intended to be positioned?

Eight brand managers–four German brand managers and four Italian brand managers at adidas–were interviewed. M1 is primarily addressed by constructing an intended adidas brand personality profile. This is achieved by closely analyzing and presenting the findings of questions Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q7, Q8. The profile is essentially a reflection of the brand personality managers in Italy and Germany have of the brand they are positioning, based on the pursued branding strategy and their extensive professional experience working for the brand.

To begin with, the two unbiased opening questions Q1 and Q2 are discussed below.

Just like the information presented in the contextual background section, adidas brand managers seemed generally aligned to the overarching (global) adidas mission in the interviews (Q1: "*Adidas is a global brand. How do you position the Adidas brand in the global market?*").

This suggests a *unified brand personality* on the overall brand managers' side.

"Adidas wants to be the best brand in the sport market, and it is close to this goal. Considering the numbers, adidas is not the biggest brand nowadays, being second after Nike. However, the goal of adidas is to be the best, not the biggest brand and it makes all the difference. Thus, adidas wants to be positioned and perceived as the best brand, attracting creatives and athletes from all over the world - and this is how I personally perceive it"

(Mgm-01-DE)

> *"adidas is one of the leading sports brands in the world. By focusing on key cities around the world, adidas pushes itself to be the number one brand by creating and being part of cultural moments."*
>
> *(Mgm-05-IT)*

It becomes clear, that "being the best", "leading" and "the number one" sports brand in the world seems to be one of adidas' main brand attributes. Hence, associations such as quality, competence and winning seem to be build. This gives the brand a highly competitive touch, while at the same time inherits a promise to the consumer: providing the best possible product and connecting people through sports.

Next, Q2 ("*Do you think that consumers are perceiving adidas the way you are positioning adidas / intend the brand to be perceived?*") was posed to challenge the interviewees whether their mission was actually being perceived by consumers, or if there was a discrepancy in the brand position and consumer perception. A majority of the brand managers (five out of eight) felt there is a discrepancy. As one brand manager from Germany noted:

> *"It's not always easy to make people understand what you really want to communicate to them. I would say that mostly people get what adidas is, but they do not understand how we position ourselves as a company. We want to be the best for athletes, having the best technologies and being closer to the consumers, compared to competitors. Is this message really clear to the consumers? Not always. I think it depends a lot on how much people are interested in this area of the market and how much they are exposed to our messages and digital activities."*
>
> *(Mgm-02-DE)*

A similar view was maintained by an Italian brand manager, highlighting the difficulty to persuade consumers in the sportswear market:

> *"In the brand adidas operates it is not always easy to be perceived in the way adidas wants to. This is because, when you talk to athletes, they may have their own ideas on this brand and it may be very difficult to change their mind (ex. an athlete who has always wore Nike would not change to adidas easily). At the same time, being closer to consumers is not easy in a market which is always dynamic and changing as the sportswear one."*
>
> *(Mgm-06-IT)*

The question revealed that managers were pessimistic about their messages being correctly understood by the consumers due to an array of challenges, be it the sportswear market, the communication channels or the difficulty of making sure the right messages are being heard. This corresponds to the existing body of research on the varying perceptions of managers and consumers (Zeithaml, 1988). Related to this, there seems to be a lack of a transparent communication mechanism that both managers and consumers understand equally. The concepts of brand personality might provide a tool that helps to "translate" these communication errors, as both sides are able to relate equally.

As the interviews progressed, one could deep dive into more specific trait-associations (*Q3, Q4, Q7, Q8)* that were codable to Aaker's (1997) brand personality dimensions, allowing smaller differences to become apparent between the brand managers' opinions.

6.1.1   Constructing the Intended Brand Personality Profile of Adidas

Using Aaker's (1997) brand personality dimensions as a base for analysis, the holistic, intended brand personality profile of adidas shows that brand managers (Italian and German) at adidas see the brand as primarily "sincere" (38) [8], followed by "competent" (30) [8], "exciting" (13) [7], "rugged" (14) [2], and "sophisticated" (1) [4]. As outlined in the methodology, the brand personality profile was constructed by counting the number of coding references connected to Aaker's (1997) brand personality dimensions, either in direct matches (after direct inquiry) or synonyms related to the dimensions based on (Aaker J. L., 1997, S. 354), in relevant pre-determined questions. It is important to note that both the associations and the direct enquiries are included in the figure 11 below and the overall brand personality profile construction, since we methodologically account for possible discrepancies between subconscious and conscious associations. The associations are presented in rounded brackets "( )", while the direct enquiries made later during the interviews are presented in rectangular brackets "[ ]".

It is important to note that the discrepancies between associations and direct enquiries resulted to be minimal and nearly the same order is maintained between both (a swap between ruggedness and excitement takes place). Associations were sorted into their respective nodes as often as they occurred to determine a ranking by importance, while direct enquiries only show positive agreement with the trait's alignment with adidas–hence the lower number for enquiries. The direct enquiries thus represent the real number of brand managers who agree with the trait's alignment with adidas, while associations are mere connections made to a brand personality trait prior to the direct enquiries.

Figure 11: Brand Personality Profile Across Italy and Germany.

Own research.
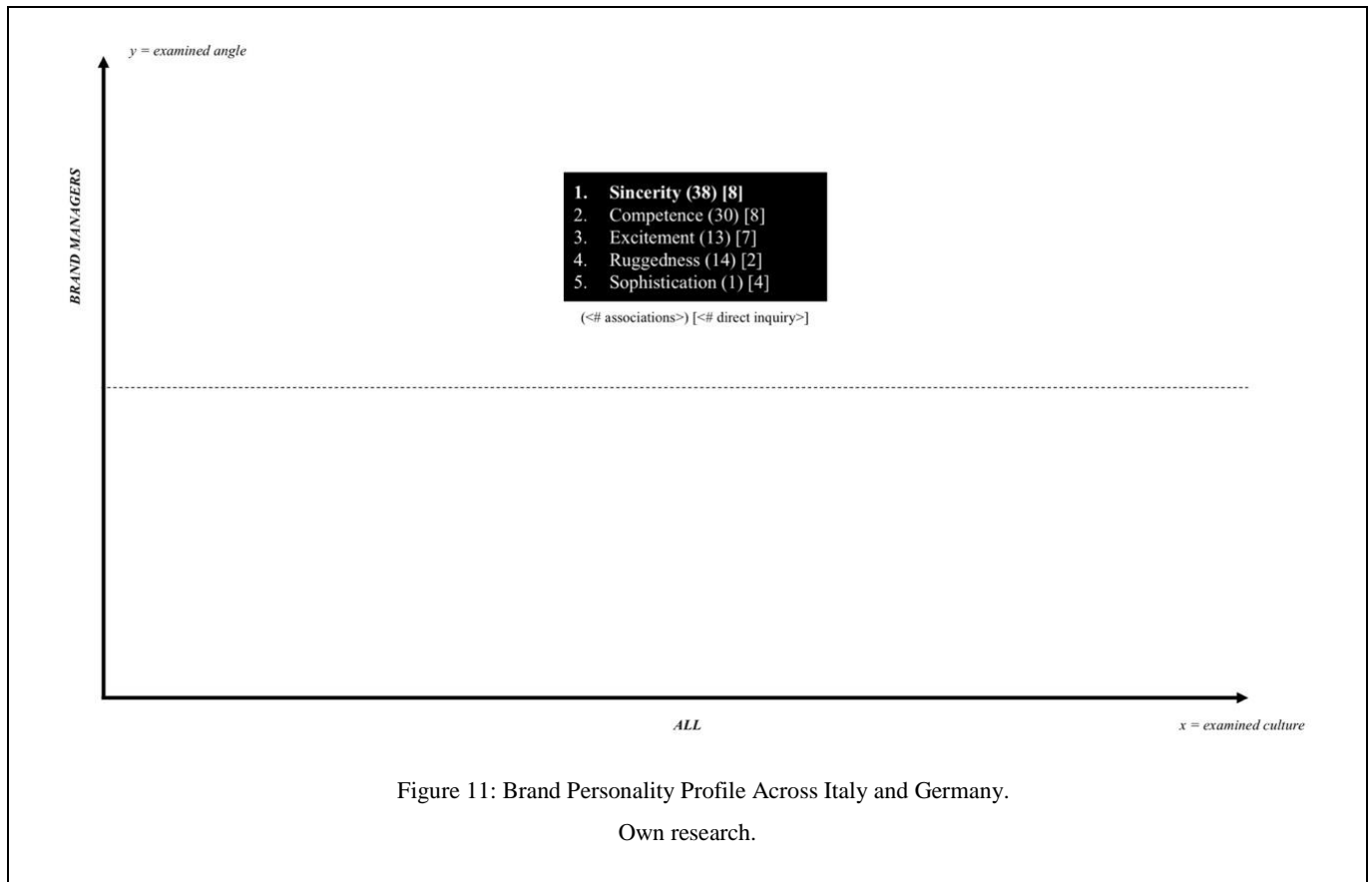
Below are reference examples that were used as codes indicating a certain Aaker (1997) brand personality trait.

<u>Sincerity</u>

In terms of sincerity (38) [8], many brand managers mentioned the factor related to adidas. Synonyms like "honest", "authentic", "caring", and "friendly" were all coded to relate to the sincerity trait (Aaker, 1997):

> *"[…] honest. I believe we are publicly accessible to consumers. We do activities that help third parties to understand our company and what we do. Another trait related to this is down-to-earth (e.g. Parley activities to help the oceans)"*
>
> *(Mgm-01-DE)*

> *"[…] authentic. Adidas stays authentic to its roots and heritage. It's what it prides itself from. When it comes to making and developing new and innovative products, it always looks at the past and uses products from our archive for inspiration."*
>
> *(Mgm-05-IT)*

> *"[…] caring. It is really relevant for adidas in general to speak and connect its caring activities to its consumers. Activities such as Parley (2018) are the best examples on how the company wants to be perceived and known by consumers. Year by year, these caring activities are starting to be intended as a key pillar of the company."*
>
> *(Mgm-04-DE)*

> *"[…] friendly. It wants to be close to the consumers. For example, many activities in-store are organized in order to get people to understand what adidas is and how it works. It is very easy to get along with the brand, participating in one of its runs around the world or to one of the parties organized by adidas originals."*
>
> *(Mgm-06-IT)*

Direct enquiries also determined a clear agreement upon the sincerity trait, as voiced by one brand manager's opinion:

> *"Yes, it [adidas] is a sincere brand and wants to always be connected to the people, showing its real message and brand identity."*
>
> *(Mgm-02-DE)*

It is clear that brand managers feel their brand is sincere. The brand has been working on improving this trait over the years to counterbalance bad press surrounding controversial labor issues. The brand's rich heritage and its accessibility to many consumers across the globe have been positive influencers for the sincerity trait for many years (adidas Intranet, 2018).

<u>Competence</u>

Moving on to the competence (30) [8] trait, many brand managers mentioned that it is strongly related to adidas. Synonyms like "powerful", "technical" (tech-oriented), and "leading" were coded to relate to the competence trait (Aaker, 1997):

> *"[…] powerful. At the end of the day, it [adidas] is one of the leading brands in its category (top 2) and due to this it has the power to lead the market and to set trends."*
>
> *(Mgm-02-DE)*

> *"[…] tech-oriented. Because adidas always try to empower technologies, analyzing the ones from the past, implementing new technologies and creating the best product."*
>
> *(Mgm-07-IT)*

> *"[…] competence. It [adidas] is a company existing for such a long time and thus it is perceived as reliable, intelligent and successful."*
>
> *(Mgm-04-DE)*

> *"adidas is one of the leading sports brands in the world. By focusing on key cities around the world, adidas pushes itself to be the number one brand by creating and being part of cultural moments. As Nike leads in the global market, adidas is investing heavily in marketing and retail spaces to gain NPS and NPD in their respective marketplaces."*
>
> *(Mgm-05-IT)*

Full agreement was established across brand managers when *directly enquired*. As one brand manager noted:

> *"Yes, it has been one of the leading brands for the last decades, so it is a competent brand."*
>
> *(Mgm-03-DE)*

The brand managers interviewed are aligned in that adidas' competence stems from its innovative technologies and its leading position in the market. It has established itself as a known name and uses its powerful brand recognition to its advantage.

Excitement

Next, the third brand personality trait "excitement" (13) [7] is examined. Synonyms like "freedom" and "cool" were identified to be associated with the trait:

> *"[freedom]. One thing that adidas is known for with their collaborators (e.g. Kanye West, Pharrell) is that adidas gives them the freedom and space to do what they want, unlike other competing brands."*
>
> *(Mgm-05-IT)*

> *"[…] In general, it [adidas] is an exciting and authentic company, being able to communicate the right message to consumers and to let them understand the brand positioning."*
>
> *(Mgm-06-IT)*

> *"[cool]. Because adidas follows both the fashion trends and proposes us newer things than competitors do."*
>
> *(Mgm-07-IT)*

Excitement showed more agreement across brand managers when *enquired directly* than when identified through associations. Seven brand managers agreed that excitement was there, but often limited to certain product lines or sub-brands:

> *"Yes, it [adidas] is really up-to-date. People would stay in line for days outside adidas stores when a pair of YEEZY drops, or when a new release comes up."*
>
> *(Mgm-04-DE)*

> *"We are creators and we need to make people excited in order to improve their lives, into sport and daily activities."*
>
> *(Mgm-08-IT)*

Excitement is more apparent when the brand managers were asked directly. The excitement trait received less associations than one would initially expect from the contextual background (adidas, 2018). Brand managers mentioned that adidas is pursuing cool initiatives, from products to collaborations, but perhaps due to its age and because brand managers deal with the brand on a daily basis, the excitement trait was not addressed often subconsciously. One brand manager from Italy even mentioned a potential explanation, blaming the German heritage and internal, dominantly German organizational culture of adidas:

> *"Being a German brand, it sometimes can be "strict" and "firm" in processes and the way we work. We need to be more flexible to change quicker. The brand is consistently growing. It needs to provide us with more resources if expectations are to be this high performing."*
>
> *(Mgm-05-IT)*

<u>Ruggedness</u>

The next brand personality trait, ruggedness (14) [2], also received references across the managerial angle. Synonyms mostly related to "athletic", but also "conqueror" were associated with ruggedness (Aaker, 1997):

"[athletic]. We are a sports brand. First brand trait that comes to my mind is surely athletic."

(Mgm-01-DE)

"[athletic]. It [adidas] is the athletic brand, the oldest one on earth, having so many athletes in its portfolio and dressing creators and sports people for many years."

(Mgm-06-IT)

"[conqueror]. I personally associate this brand with resilience, character and endurance. It is a company with a strong position and it is linked to performance, so that's what it is!"

(Mgm-02-DE)

Compared to the excitement trait, where direct enquiry uncovered stronger opinions in favor of excitement across brand managers, ruggedness achieved the polar opposite. *Direct enquiry* led to opinions against the ruggedness trait when connected to adidas.

"No, because it [ruggedness] doesn't fit to the organization."

(Mgm-07-IT)

Only two Italian brand managers voiced their opinions in favor of ruggedness through associations, while all German brand managers connected adidas with the trait through associations. Adidas' origin is sportswear, so it could be characterized an outdoorsy brand designed for tough athletes. Though its DNA and heritage were mentioned (also in connection to sincerity and competence above), it seems that the ruggedness trait in particular received less resonance with the brand managers. This can be inferred

by the overall associations made with ruggedness as compared to the two top traits, sincerity and competence.

<u>Sophistication</u>

The final trait, sophistication (1) [4], received only one association by an Italian brand manager, who mentioned the trait in the following when asked what they would do differently in terms of adidas' brand position. All other brand managers did not make associations through relevant synonyms.:

> *"I would push more on the eco-friendly and authentic traits, since I think both are very important for a brand like ours. I believe people now buy the brand just because they find the articles at the store, but they don't really know the history behind each product, which is a history of eco-friendly, sophistication and authenticity."*
>
> *(Mgm-06-IT)*

When *enquired directly*, half of the brand managers did mention sophistication for certain product lines:

> *"Yes, but I would say that it is only linked to specific sub-brands (e.g. Originals, Performance). It does not refer to adidas core, which is the "low cost" sub-brand. This one wants to be perceived as accessible to everyone."*
>
> *(Mgm-04-DE)*

> *"Not really. Again, except for some categories (YEEZY, Originals) we do not want to be a brand for a limited number of people."*
>
> *(Mgm-01-DE)*

> *"Not really. People do not perceive our brand as a sophisticated one."*
>
> *(Mgm-06-IT)*

Thus, the trait as a whole is deemed to be rather insignificant, which makes sense when examining the other answers and the contextual background (adidas, 2018). Adidas is an outdoorsy sport brand focused on changing lives through sport (adidas, 2018). It targets athletes, and although the prices could

be argued to be moderate for some sub-brands and high for other sub-brands (e.g. the exclusive YEEZY products or more expensive Originals line), the prices are in a category well-below luxury fashion items often associated with sophistication. Adidas does not segment the market to cater only to upper-class athletes, but it caters to athletes who perform exceptionally or anyone striving to do become one across a wide segment. Thus, the sophistication trait is aligned with prior research and can be seen as an expected outcome.

Adidas' intended brand personality profile in a nutshell

As has been done in the prior section, it is sensible to summarize our primary research findings in relation to the facts we uncovered through official company sources and other secondary data in the contextual background. The "sincerity" dimension ties in with the fact that adidas markets itself as original (related trait), "adidas originals" even being an own sub-brand within its portfolio. The brand is positioned as honest, which can even be connected to the high ethical standard adidas has of its employees. The "competency" dimension also fits to the brand's high-achieving mission, i.e. that it wants to be the best sports company in the world. Competency is connected to traits like "hard working" and "leader" (Aaker J. L., 1997), which are aligned with the mission that the brand sees itself on and the long line of success it comes from. "Ruggedness" relates to the "sports" factor, and traits like "tough" and "outdoorsy" related to ruggedness (Aaker J. L., 1997) match the brand's product portfolio. "Excitement", on the same level as "ruggedness", is equally fitting to the brand's mission of being associated with influencers, who are predominately "young", "trendy" and "hip", which are related traits (Aaker J. L., 1997). Finally, "sophistication", the only dimension that receives insignificant response from the brand managers, is absent from adidas' mission and major strategic directions. No information can be found that adidas is willing to go into a more "upper class" or "glamorous" (Aaker J. L., 1997) direction, indicating that the lack of this dimension in adidas' mission is aligned with the participants' interview responses.

Concluding, it seems there is general alignment between what brand managers are saying and how adidas is acting (on managerial side). Where this alignment becomes agitated is when examining the exact order of importance for each of the dimensions per cultural group. The next section deals with this in detail, while still staying on the managerial angle.

6.1.2 Brand Personality Profile Differences between Italian and German Brand Managers

> **M2: How do cultural differences influence the embedding of brand personality at adidas?**

M2 is addressed by examining the key differences in the adidas brand personality profile when splitting the brand managers into two national groups, i.e. Italy and Germany. This is achieved by closely analyzing and presenting the findings of questions Q5, Q6, Q9, Q10, Q11, Q12, Q13, Q14, Q15. Figure 12 summarizes the German and Italians adidas Brand Personality Profile separately.
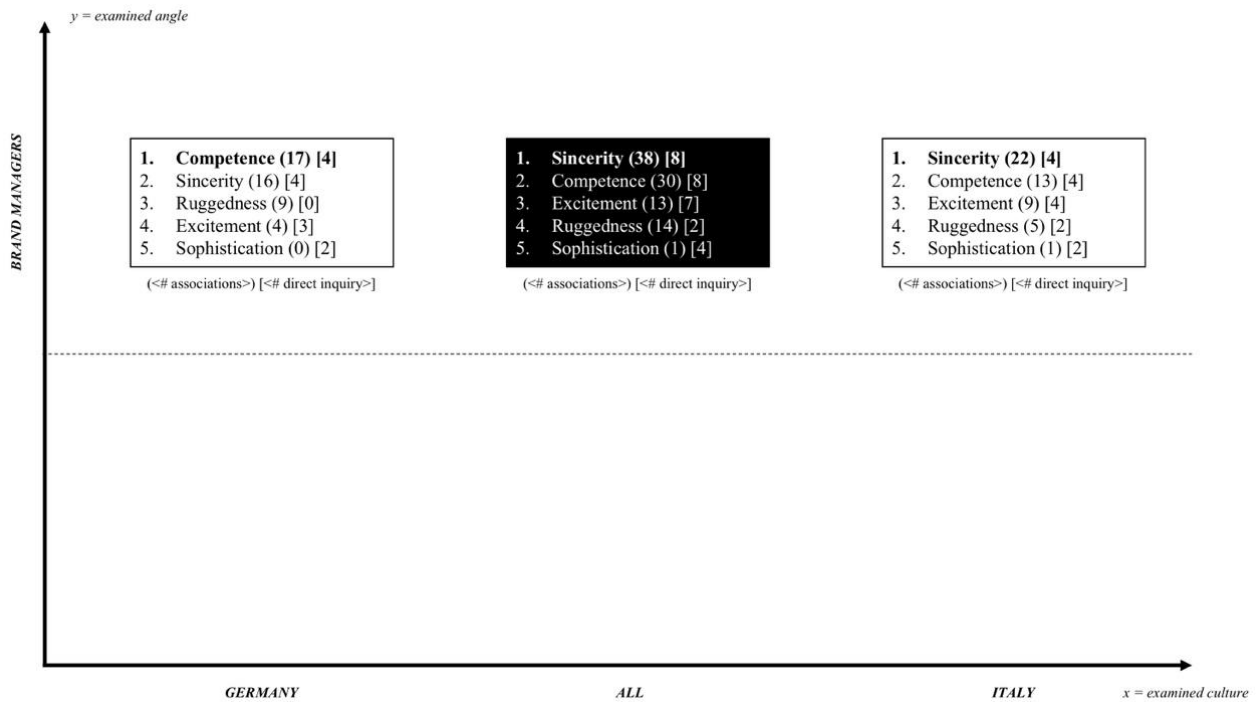
Figure 12: Brand Personality Profiles for Germany and Italy.

Own research.

6.1.2.1 German adidas Brand Personality Profile

The German brand managers see the adidas brand personality as primarily "competent" (17) [4], followed closely by "sincere" (16) [4], "rugged" (9) [10] and "exciting" (4) [3]. No associations were made to the "sophistication" (0) [2] dimension, but two brand managers agreed to the trait when directly enquired.

The outstanding trait on the German brand manager side is the trait "ruggedness", which is not as dominant in Italy, and which is associated by German brand managers through synonyms like "athletic". Visualizing the intended brand personality profile for German Brand Managers, the dimensions are ordered seen in Figure 11 above.

6.1.2.2   *Italian adidas Brand Personality Profile*

Compared to the German brand managers, most coding references for the Italian brand managers are connected to "sincerity" (22) [4], by far the leading attribute. "Competence" (13) [4] is the next dimensions most related to the adidas brand personality according to the Italian group. "Exciting" (9) [4], which appears on rank four for the Germans, is third for the Italians, essentially swapped with "rugged" (5) [2], which is on rank four for the Italians and rank three for the Germans. One Italian brand manager draws a connection to the "sophistication" (1) [2] dimension, which does not occur on the German side, and two Italian brand managers agree to the trait when directly enquired.

The excitement trait is outstanding for Italy, since it is on a higher rank than for the German brand managers.

6.1.2.3   *Comparison between adidas Brand Personality Profile Across Italy and Germany*

The comparison shows that German brand managers intend the adidas brand personality to be primarily competent, followed by sincere, while Italian brand managers intend the adidas brand personality to be primarily sincere, followed by competent. A larger degree of excitement is also apparent in Italy, which takes the place of ruggedness in Germany. Even though one brand manager did mention sophistication, the theme of this dimension was barely present across interviews.

However, it is important to conclude that only marginal differences exist between the way German and Italian brand managers intend the adidas brand personality to be. For Germany, the first (Competence) and second (Sincerity) rank are only separated by a single competence-coded association, making the first two ranks almost equally important and therefore move even closer to the ranking profile of Italy (with Sincerity ranked #1). The 3rd and 4th rank (Excitement & Ruggedness) once again switched places in Germany and Italy, however only marginal coding reference differences exist (maximum of 5 coding references difference).

Now, these marginal differences in brand personality dimensions could be explained by a number of factors.

On the one side, infusing the Hofstede (2001) cultural dimensions into these insights, one could explain these deviations in embedding of brand personality through cultural differences between Italy

and Germany. However, as discussed earlier Italy and Germany only slightly differ on Hofstede's cultural dimensions with Power Distance being the most significant difference (Italy: 50; Germany: 35). Nevertheless, Power Distance does not seem to be a driving factor in terms of intended brand personality dimension ranking. Table 3 (section Cultural Dimensions applied to Brand Personality Dimensions) showed cultural dimensions applied to brand personality dimensions. It becomes clear, that Power Distance mostly relates to the brand personality dimension of Sophistication, which was barely mentioned within the interviews and therefore is considered mostly irrelevant. Consequently, one can argue that the differences in brand personality dimensions between the two cultures are too marginal and insignificant (due to the focus on Sophistication) to further focus on cultural differences as a main driver of cultural influence.

A key takeaway from the managerial angle is that culture plays a role in the definition of brand personality itself, and cultural differences may already be embedded into the brand before it is even communicated despite an overall, global branding strategy in place. However, as these cultural differences appear to be minimal and seem to be restricted to the dimension of Sophistication, they can be considered less relevant than the cultural similarities for this research. Hence, it makes sense to *focus on cultural similarities* between German and Italian brand managers through the theory of Schwartz (1992, 2004) to better understand the cultural influences on the intended brand personality profile.

Additionally, taking this focus on cultural similarities rather than differences one step further, confirms that adidas is part of a *Global Consumer Culture*, as discussed in the literature review above (see section 2.2.1 The Importance and Relevance of Cultural Studies in Brand Management). As such, adidas emphasizes globalness and is free from cultural norms (Dimofte, Johansson, & Bagozzi, 2010; Steenkamp, Batra, & Alden, 2003).

6.1.3   *Personal Conflicts, Cultural Risks, German Heritage and Expectations of Research Outcome*

This section deals with outstanding questions that cover (1) personal conflicts brand managers have with the adidas brand personality, (2) cultural risks of managing the adidas brand, (3) adidas' German heritage and its effects on the brand, and (4) the expectations the brand managers have on the research outcome.

<u>Personal conflicts with adidas' brand personality</u>

(1) Whereas the majority of Italians did not feel their personal perception of adidas conflicted with the way the brand is currently positioned (Q5), the majority of Germans did feel that they would prefer to position the brand differently.

> *"I feel that we are not really speaking, as a company, to the real creators as we want to. Most of the time, customer do not perceive us as innovative and up-to-date as we are. Our communication is not as direct as our product and we often miscommunicate our ideas."*
>
> *(Mgm-03-DE)*

> *"I would say that consumers do not perceive adidas as creative and innovative as it is. There is no other brand that is able to target creators and come out with different new shoes every season. The consumers still feel that the most creative and innovative (leading) brand is Nike […]."*
>
> *(Mgm-04-DE)*

These apparent discrepancies between German and Italian personal views may be influenced by their cultural differences and related differences in brand personality trait ranking. The main factor seems to be that some German brand managers feel that adidas' innovative trait is not perceived as well as it should be by consumers, which directly caters to the 'competence' brand personality trait. 'Competence' is ranked 1st for German managers and 2nd for Italian managers after 'sincere'. This explains why German managers might feel that this trait is undervalued by consumers.

Now, when asked what brand managers would change to act upon these conflicts they have with the brand positioning (if any), the managers proposed different solutions ranging from large to small, or were satisfied with the way things were currently running (Q6):

> *"I would try to communicate more the friendly part of the brand. We are creators but at the end of the day we are producing shoes and clothes, we are not saving lives or doing politics. We should be friendlier and easier in the way we communicate to people."*
>
> *(Mgm-02-DE)*

> *"I wouldn't change anything in particular because sometimes we recognize ourselves in the way the brand acts. Personally, I am very close to adidas values, not only in my job, but also in daily life and way of acting. Concerning sustainability, there is always margin to improve, so that is the only aspect where I will work harder to have a greater impact for the future and next generations."*
>
> *(Mgm-08-IT)*

Again, these conflicts tend to occur in relation to certain brand personality traits. For instance, attributes like "friendly" or "authenticity" were identified by the managers as improvable areas. These conflicts show that the brand, though operating under an arguably unified brand personality profile (see prior sections), has conflicts within and its constellation and presence can be challenged. The conflicts arise from brand managers' uncertainty whether their messages are strong enough, prioritized correctly, or understood as intended by consumers (Zeithaml, 1988). These conflicts make proper assessment, alignment and usability of brand personality traits ever so difficult, seeing as there is uncertainty within the brand management function at adidas, and this could be an explanation of why the brand personality instrument is a challenging model to operationalize (Feldwick, 1996).

<u>Cultural risks of managing the adidas brand</u>

(2) Coming back to the presentation of findings for the outstanding questions, the managers identified several risks of cultural differences (Q9; Q10; Q11; Q12). For one, general cultural differences were identified as an apparent challenge:

> *"For sure Italians and Germans perceive the brand differently based on their culture and past influences."*
>
> *(Mgm-01-DE)*

> *"People are different, and the place where you live, the experiences you have faced and the communication you are exposed to, are slightly different if you are Italian or German."*
>
> *(Mgm-02-DE)*

Relating this more specifically to adidas, the brand managers gave some insight on how these differences are influencing their brand management position:

> *"When it comes to market share and NPS, adidas is perceived as a leader in Germany, while in Italy it's only the second brand, after Nike. I would say that in Germany, people recognize the history of the brand better than in Europe (e.g. everybody knows the old adidas shoe and they are mostly proud of their German brand). In Italy, this is not strongly perceived."*
>
> *(Mgm-04-DE)*

> *"People in Italy may understand the brand in a different way compared to German consumers. It is so difficult to communicate the same message across the world, especially because the brand management team is led locally and not globally. So it mainly depends on how the brand team understands the company locally. E.g. all the events have a global guideline, but then they are mainly driven by local brand teams and local agencies, who can give a different idea to the event and to the communication behind it."*
>
> *(Mgm-06-IT)*

To adequately counteract these cultural challenges, adidas pursues a mix of global and local strategic measures as confirmed by the brand managers:

> *"adidas has a global communication strategy, led by Germany. However, every cluster (e.g. for Europe we have South Europe, which entails Italy and Greece) has a brand team that is localized in the specific market. This for sure helps reducing risks from cultural differences."*
>
> *(Mgm-03-DE)*

> *"We get information and communication from our global team [located in Germany], and then it "falls down" to the local ones. Once the local team gets the information, we work on it to make it suitable for our market."*
>
> *(Mgm-07-IT)*

The way adidas' branding strategy is constructed, there is collaboration between global and local teams. The global teams, headquartered in Germany, decide on an overarching strategy, which is then localized and executed by individual markets, like Italy. This is a popular branding strategy, pursued by many brands across the globe. The choice has implications for brand personality perception. For one, brand strategies originate in Germany, which means elements of German culture are embedded in the brand through dominantly German employees. This means that if markets were to localize every element of the strategy, they would have to put in a lot of effort, depending on the acceptable gap in cultural differences identified by local brand managers. The advantage of this strategy is, however, that because many of the strategic choices are made beforehand, the brand positions itself in a *unified manner*. This has been established by the quite similar brand personality profiles above (1st and 2nd rank switched).

Adidas' German heritage

Because of these hereditary implications, the subsequent questions (Q13; Q14) deal with adidas' German heritage, and how it may play a role in how the brand personality is perceived. In terms of the heritage impact on *German consumers*, all German brand managers and half of the Italian brand managers believed it would have an impact.

> *"I think so. In Germany and Berlin alone, NPS is much higher than anywhere else in the world. Consumers see it as the number one brand. The brand personality speaks to the German consumers."*
>
> *(Mgm-05-IT)*

> *"adidas is a German brand, and it uses specific ways to communicate to people. Additionally, German customers may have some bias on the brand due to its history."*
>
> *(Mgm-03-DE)*

One German brand manager noted how this German heritage could have direct impact on brand personality perception:

> *"For sure it is. Based on culture, you understand things differently. People from Germany for example may be closer to the sincerity trait (i.e. to heritage), compared to Italians."*
>
> *(Mgm-01-DE)*

In terms of the heritage impact on *Italian consumers*, all brand managers believed the German heritage would impact the brand personality perception.

> *"Yes, for sure. People perceive the German heritage and the history behind the brand. Once I had a conversation in a shop in Milano about adidas and the consumers said to me: "Nike is such an American brand – they let you customize the product, customize the ads, and play with the brand. Adidas is so different, you are so German in the way you cannot touch the products, customize them, do collaborations and so on. You need to stick to the plan" I feel that sometimes this is true."*
>
> *(Mgm-06-IT)*

It also seemed like in Italy, the effect of the German heritage would be more subconscious, seeing as, according to multiple Italian brand managers, not many Italians knew adidas was even German:

> *"Talking from my experience, there are a lot (and I mean A LOT) of Italians who still don't know that the brand is German"*
>
> *(Mgm-07-IT)*

But just because the heritage factor was not predominantly known, this would not mean there is no implication for the brand's personality perception. As one Italian brand manager noted:

> *"To consumers, no, I don't think they even realize its German. However, to employees internally, yes, because everything we do starts from the German HQ and in some way or another it sticks and spreads across the global market."*
>
> *(Mgm-05-IT)*

The brand managers all agreed that adidas' German heritage would have some impact on the brand personality perception by consumers, regardless whether these consumers were German or Italian. The degree of impact would vary, and different brand personality traits would be "triggered" to the heritage. For Germans, the influence would be more conscious, seeing as most Germans are aware that adidas originated in Germany. This will have an impact on traits connected to sincerity and competence. On the flipside, Italians are not equally aware of the fact that adidas is German. So, if their brand personality perception is influenced, it is because the brand has an embedded German culture in the first place and the subsequent brand personality is perceived closer to traits embedded by the global team out of the German headquarters.

<u>Brand managers' expectations on the research outcome</u>

When transparently communicating the research outcome to the brand managers (Q15), both the Germans and Italians believe that consumer perception would differ between German and Italian consumers:

> *"People perceive it [adidas] differently. I am sure there are big differences, most probably German people feel closer to the brand, that's my assumption."*
>
> *(Mgm-02-DE)*

> *"Germans feel the brand differently than Italians. I expect Italians to be less detailed when talking about adidas, not relying on its history and past."*
>
> *(Mgm-04-DE)*

> *"People understand the brand differently based on where they are from […]. I would say that German consumers will be more reactive to the history of the brand, while Italians will be more linked to the present, compared to the past."*
>
> *(Mgm-06-IT)*

The brand managers have the expectation that brand personality perception will differ across Italian and German consumers. This assumption stems from preceding statements, such as adidas using local markets to execute global strategies, adidas having German heritage, or Germans simply knowing more about adidas' and its history than Italian consumers.

To align this expectation with reality, the next section deals with adidas' actual brand personality as perceived by consumers.

6.2 Consumer Angle: Actual adidas Brand Personality Profile Across Italy and Germany

C1: How is the brand personality of adidas perceived by the consumer groups?

20 consumers–ten German consumers and ten Italian consumers–were interviewed. It is worth noting that the majority of the consumers (15 out of 20) stated they self-identified with the adidas brand. Three of the consumers were neutral, while two consumers did not self-identify with the brand.

 C1 is addressed by constructing the actual adidas brand personality profile. This is achieved by closely analyzing and presenting the findings of questions Q1 – Q5. This reflects the brand personality consumers in Italy and Germany have of the brand.

6.2.1   Constructing the Actual Brand Personality Profile of Adidas

Aaker's (1997) brand personality dimensions applied to the consumer brand personality perception across both countries are in the order of "competence" (38) [17], "sincerity" (38) [16], "excitement" (28) [18], "ruggedness" (19) [13] and "sophistication" (10) [3].

Just like the intended brand personality profile on the managerial side, the actual brand personality profile on the consumer side was constructed by counting the number of coding references connected to (Aaker J. L., 1997) brand personality dimensions, either in direct matches (after direct inquiry) or synonyms, in relevant pre-determined questions. Rounded ( ) and rectangular [ ] brackets are again used to indicate these differences.

Figure 13 below depicts this profile.

y = examined angle

CONSUMERS

1. **Competence (38) [17]**
2. Sincerity (38) [16]
3. Excitement (28) [18]
4. Ruggedness (19) [13]
5. Sophistication (10) [3]

(<# associations>) [<# direct inquiry>]

ALL

x = examined culture

Figure 13: Brand Personality Profiles for Germany and Italy.

Own research.

<u>Competence</u>

The competence (38) [17] trait received most associations and agreement after direct enquiry in consumer responses. Synonyms like "high quality" and "leader" were used by multiple consumers:

> *"I perceive adidas as a major sports brand, as it has gained considerable recognition and reputation throughout the years, due to its diversity, variety and quality in products offered. Besides having a foothold in various consumer product segments, I further consider its innovative designs as the most important USP, which give adidas its leading position in a very competitive market."*
>
> *(Con-01-DE)*

> *"I perceive the brand adidas as a leading company in the sports sector competing with brands like Nike. The quality of the products is quite good, but they are very expensive compared to similar brands on the market."*
>
> *(Con-08-DE)*

> *"adidas is a global, high-quality brand rooted in sports with a leading position in lifestyle."*

> *(Con-13-IT)*
>
> *"I think adidas is one of the best brands in terms of quality and price-level. In terms of uniqueness, I think it's really similar to other sports brands, so I don't find it too singular, but it's definitely a leader in the sportswear world."*
>
> *(Con-14-IT)*

Related to this, the direct probe mostly reflected the associations with the trait competence:

> *"As a frequent user of adidas products during sport exercises, I can confirm their competence in what they do."*
>
> *(Con-10-DE)*

> *"Yes. Seeing adidas as a brand that reached global recognition and survived in the market for years, competence definitely is a trait that I'd relate with the brand. The brand's German origin also plays a role here."*
>
> *(Con-04-DE)*

> *"Yes. Being one of the leaders in its sector, it [adidas] can be considered extremely competent and reliable. Another reason for this is that it is a company that has lasted for so many years, always keeping with the trends, meaning that it is competent in what it does."*
>
> *(Con-15-IT)*

It is interesting to note, that both adidas' actual (as perceived by consumers) and intended (as positioned by brand managers) brand personality profile rank competence as the number one adidas brand personality dimension. This entails that at least in this case the gap between managers and consumers seems to be minimal and the intended message is received.

Sincerity

The 2nd rank is filled with sincerity (38) [16], where adidas received many associations by all consumers, related to synonyms like "original", "open-minded" and "friendly":

> *"The brand stands for originality, a high quality and since recent times for (at least partly) really good design. I appreciate adidas for its high-quality in the sports performance sector as well as their shoes from the originals series."*

(Con-10-DE)

"I perceive it [adidas] as a brand for open-minded people, clearly intended to satisfy everybody's needs."

(Con-11-IT)

"[…] friendly. I see the company as an easy character. Their communication is easy and friendly. I feel like, compared to other companies (e.g. in high fashion), it [adidas] appears friendlier."

(Con-12-IT)

When probed and directly enquired, the consumer respondents in majority agreed with the sincerity trait:

"Yes, I perceive the brand personality as easy and genuine."

(Con-18-IT)

"Yes, because it's uncomplicated and straightforward also thanks to the association with the people it partners with."

(Con-16-IT)

"Yes, for me. I always had adidas football shoes and I value the fact that adidas still produces simple black shoes that are simply honest to me. On top, it is really nice to wear some retro stuff in a quickly changing world."

(Con-03-DE)

"I think this trait is very appropriate. Adidas seems to take sports and their image seriously. One advertisement I remember displays focused athletes that seem to be good at what they do, and less "fun" or "joking around"."

(Con-07-DE)

However, not all respondents agreed with the suitability of the sincerity trait. One consumer raised a point concerning the trait and the size of adidas, stating:

> *"No. Sincerity to me is a trait that doesn't work with any fashion brand of that size. The picture I associate with such global fashion brands is one of mass production sites, big marketing campaigns being created for large indifferent target groups, high profit margins and fast consumption. All this doesn't go along with honesty."*
>
> *(Con-04-DE)*

Regarding the negative answer above, it seems that the consumer does not judge adidas in particular to be insincere, but more the global fashion brand market as a whole. As such, one can argue that this answer does not fully reflect on the concept of the brand personality dimension sincerity, but rather states an overall critique point to the fashion market. It becomes clear, that the consumers' understanding of the brand personality concept, be it more narrow or broad, has significant influences on their given answers.

Excitement

Now, Excitement (28) [18] being ranked 3rd, received some associations by consumers through use of synonyms like "trendsetting", "up-to-date", "trendy" and "young":

> *"Trendsetter. To be one of the market leaders, it [adidas] needs to be the first to invent the next trends."*
>
> *(Con-19-IT)*

> *"Up-to-date. In order to be one of the best companies in the world, you need to keep trends and make trends, and you need to product articles always wanted by consumers. I guess adidas is very up-to-date."*
>
> *(Con-12-IT)*

> *"Young, but at the same time old school, but in a cool way."*
>
> *(Con-09-DE)*

The direct enquiry revealed much agreement with adidas' excitement factor:

> *"Yes, due to its collaborations with various athletes and interesting designers."*
>
> *(Con-01-DE)*

> *"Exciting fits well to adidas, but more in the sense of adrenaline, countdown, and running."*
>
> *(Con-07-DE)*

> *"Yes, because of the colorful products and its online communication."*
>
> *(Con-16-IT)*

> *"Yes, because every time there is the release of a new shoe everyone wants it."*
>
> *(Con-19-IT)*

Again, the brand personality dimension excitement shares the 3rd rank both on the managerial as well as on the consumer side. This entails that the correct message is perceived by the consumers.

Ruggedness

Next, the 4th rank ruggedness (19) [13] received some brief associations and upon direct enquiry, consumers gave closer insight:

> *"Yes. With its commercials and slogan "impossible is nothing", they are able to successfully portray an image of a strong and robust sports brand."*
>
> *(Con-01-DE)*

> *"Yes. Adidas is a strong brand in its market segment and very competitive."*
>
> *(Con-18-IT)*

However, not all consumers found ruggedness to be an adequate trait they could connect to adidas. As two consumers noted:

> *"No. They [adidas] do not have an outdoor soul. It's more of an indoor-inspired brand. So I don't see the company as tough and strong in that way."*
>
> *(Con-12-IT)*

> *"I'm not so sure about this trait, it partly fits. I would always wear my adidas clothes for an outdoor adventure, like hiking or running, but I'm not sure if the products are that robust. They are not made of special materials (like hiking boots for instance)."*
>
> *(Con-07-IT)*

Again, it seems that different interpretations of certain brand personality dimensions exist. It seems that some consumers understand ruggedness in a figurative sense describing the brand being strong and competitive, whereas other consumers interpret the dimension in a literal sense describing adidas' product characteristics as not being outdoorsy and robust enough. Hence, it seems that once again the way consumers perceive a certain dimension is crucial.

Sophistication

The final trait, sophistication (10) [3], was primarily associated in conjunction with "fashion", by only few consumers:

> *"The products are fashionable because they adapt their products to the newest fashion trends, like colors or patterns."*
>
> *(Con-08-DE)*

However, the direct enquiry revealed that attitudes are strongly against the connection between adidas and the sophistication trait:

> *"No, I don't think the brand is sophisticated. I perceive a sports brand like adidas as more basic than sophisticated."*
>
> *(Con-18-IT)*

> *"No, I don't see adidas as sophisticated. Maybe high-level brands like Y3 are an exception here, but all the classic adidas brands are rather reliable and cool."*
>
> *(Con-10-DE)*

> *"No. Although I think of adidas as a brand of pricey products, I also like to think of it as mainstream. This, to me, excludes glamour."*
>
> *(Con-04-DE)*

> *"No, because I do not consider it [adidas] as being a brand that has become a status symbol for the upper class, but primarily a sports brand for everyone."*
>
> *(Con-01-DE)*

The high discrepancy between direct and indirect enquiries suggests that consumers apparently do not really have an understanding of sophistication related to sports brands. This connection might be too complex to grasp, as 'fashionable' was the only adjective connected to this dimension.

The actual brand personality profile in a nutshell

In summary, the brand personality profile constructed on consumer side is nearly aligned with the brand personality profile drawn from managerial side, which will be further addressed in the section below. Adidas is portrayed as a dominantly sincere and competent brand, that raises some excitement among consumers, is marginally rugged and only minimally sophisticated. The consumers displayed good knowledge of the brand, despite brand managers assuming knowledge could be limited. The German heritage of adidas plays a role according to consumers, and the fact that adidas is a brand accessible to many people, contributes to its honesty. Adidas' age is an indicator for its competence and how it has managed to persist in a competitive market, while the excitement factor stems from high-profile collaborations, keeping up with the latest trends and launching innovative products. Sophistication falls short for adidas, since its ties with sports create a bias that the brand cannot be glamorous, although some product lines are exempt from this view.

Overall, with Competence on the 1st rank of adidas' actual brand personality profile and most associations related to 'high quality' and 'leader', adidas is clearly perceived as being part of a Global Consumer Culture, catering to perceptions of high quality and worldwide recognition (= 'leader')

(Dimofte, Johansson, & Bagozzi, 2010) (Steenkamp, Batra, & Alden, How perceived brand globalness creates brand value, 2003). This directly relates to brand managers' placing adidas into the Global Consumer Culture, entailing that intended and actual Consumer Culture match in this case.

6.2.2 *Actual adidas Brand Personality Profile Differences between Italy and Germany*

C2: How do cultural differences influence the adidas brand personality perception?

C2 is addressed by examining the key differences in the adidas brand personality profile when splitting the consumers into two national groups, i.e. Italy and Germany. This is achieved by closely analyzing and presenting the findings of questions Q5 and Q6.

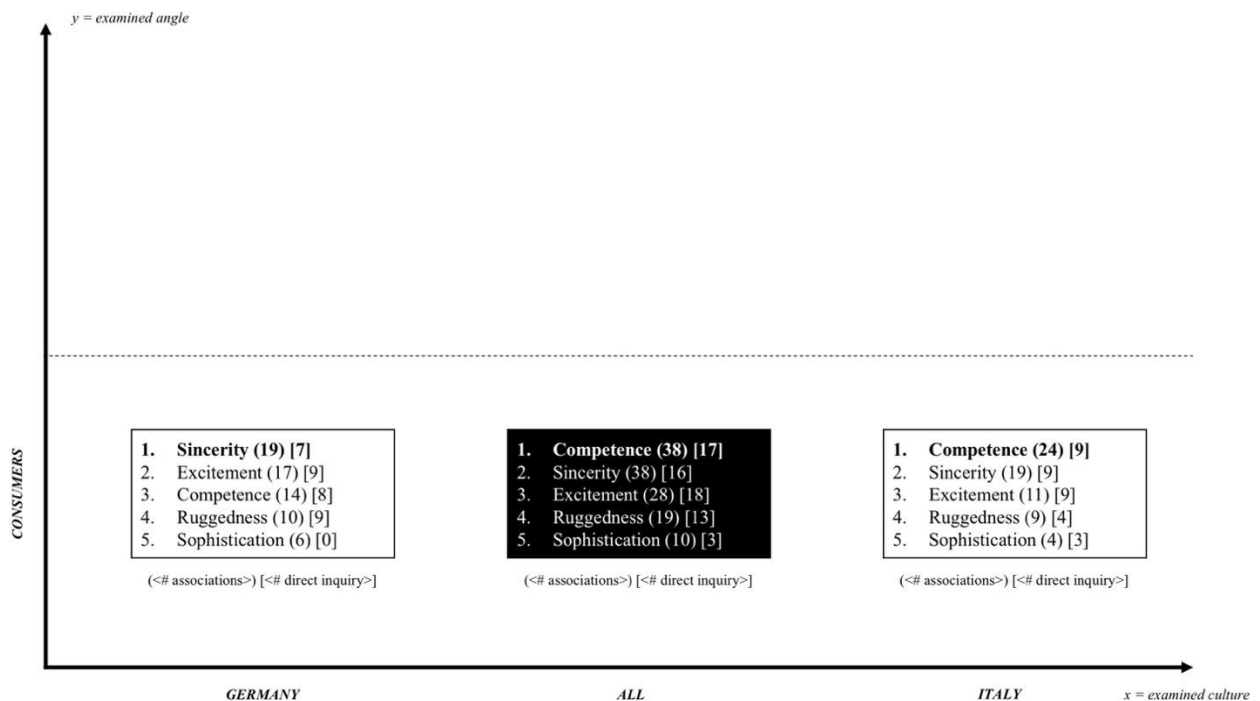Figure 14 summarizes the German and Italian consumer Brand Personality Profile.

Figure 14: Brand Personality Profiles for Germany and Italy.
Own research.

6.2.3   German adidas Brand Personality Profile

The German consumers see the adidas brand personality as primarily "sincere" (19) [7], followed closely by "exciting" (17) [9], "competent" (14) [8], "rugged" (4) [9], and "sophisticated" (6) [0].

A stand out for the German consumer brand personality profile is how excitement is on a higher rank, with more associations and confirmations through direct enquiry. Also, competence is associated and mentioned directly less often than excitement. Interview examples of both these standing out dimensions have already been discussed earlier with regard to C1.

6.2.4   Italian adidas Brand Personality Profile and Comparison

Compared to the German consumers, most coding references for the Italian brand managers are connected to "Competence" (24) [9]. "Sincerity" (19) [9] is the next dimension perceived according to the Italian group. "Excitement" (11) [9], which appears on rank two for the German consumers, is third for the Italians. "Ruggedness" (9) is on rank four, just like for the German consumers. The Italian consumers also see a degree of "sophistication" (4) [3] on rank five, similar to German consumers, where two more associations were made according to the coding reference count.

As mentioned above, competence is mentioned more often by Italian consumers than by German consumers. This has an implication on the ordering of relevance of the brand personality profile for Italian consumers. Its order can be seen in Figure 13.

It seems that for consumers more differences exist between Italian and German perception of the adidas brand personality, compared to the brand managers above. Cultural differences could indeed be an influencing factor, however similar to the brand manager side the difference in perception does not occur within the Sophistication dimension (related to Hofstede's Power Distance dimension) which is directly related to potential cultural differences between Italy and Germany. As this is not the case, one might argue that these differences in perception might also root in personal interpretations of the different brand personality dimensions and could even involve translation errors, as the interview language English is not the mother tongue of either of the two cultures.

However, one should note that these differences can still be seen as marginal, with Competence being an outlier looking at the association count (difference of 10 association counts). Nevertheless, considering the direct enquiries on Competence reveals only a difference of one, which again relativizes the ranking difference.

Another explanation for this Competence ranking difference could root from the fact that Competence directly relates to a Global Consumer Culture of adidas, which might be perceived differently by German

consumers due to the German Heritage factor. German consumers might confuse adidas' German heritage with a feeling of localization, which could explain distancing oneself from the Competence dimension and rather relate to the Sincerity dimension with associations such as 'family-oriented', 'down-to-earth' and 'original'.

The section below will further discuss this in more detail.

6.2.5   Self-identification, German Heritage and Expectations of Research Outcome

Unlike for the brand managers, this section deals more strongly with the self-identification consumers felt they had with the adidas brand (1), questions regarding German heritage (2), and expectations consumers had regarding the research outcome (3).

<u>Self-identification with the adidas brand</u>

(1) Most of the consumers we interviewed (15/20) felt like they self-identified with the adidas brand:

> *"Yes, because adidas is a brand that fits my personal character. I do a lot of sport and like to wear athletic clothes in my daily life. I have the feeling that I got to know adidas throughout my entire football career, especially since I was a little boy and that I went through tough games with my adidas shoes. I still feel secure and totally in my comfort zone when I wear adidas stuff."*
>
> *(Con-03-DE)*

> *"Yes, I would identify myself with adidas' brand personality due to the fact that I am an athletic person and really close to the environment, like adidas is […]."*
>
> *(Con-15-IT)*

The answers indicated that the adidas brand either was aligned with the consumers' various personalities, or in some way extended the consumers' personality in a positive manner.

In other either neutral or negative nodes, the consumers felt the brand did not add any value to their own personality:

> *"No, adidas appears to be a bit too conservative for me."*
>
> *(Con-04-DE)*

> *"Not entirely, a stronger drive to become a business as environmentally sustainable as possible could help me identify even more."*
>
> *(Con-17-IT)*

As suggested in the literature review the concept of *Self-Congruity* (simplified as self-identification for the consumer) directly affects the consumer's product preference and purchase intention (Quester, Karunaratna, & Goh, 2000, S. 526). It becomes clear, that consumers self-identifying with the adidas brand seem much more enthusiastic and supportive of the brand, suggesting that these consumers are more likely to purchase or interact with the brand in some way. Negative or neutral identifications with the brand seem to evoke the opposite and distance consumers from the brand.

<u>The impact of adidas' German heritage</u>

As mentioned above, (2) the impact of adidas' German heritage might have an influence on the apparent brand personality dimensions' ranking. Seven consumers found an impact of adidas' German heritage to exist (3 DE & 4 IT) while five consumers viewed it to be neutral (2 DE & 3 IT), and eight consumers (5 DE & 3 IT) believed there would be no significant impact of heritage.

As consumers from Germany noted, reasoning in favor of an impact were close, nostalgic ties to childhood and family, and a degree of national pride:

> *"Yes indeed. I feel more connected to it [adidas] than I feel I am connected to Nike. It feels like adidas is a local brand, even though it is a huge worldwide player in the sportswear business. It feels more like home and family."*
>
> *(Con-03-DE)*

> *"Yes, it makes me proud and I am glad to support a German company when it comes to purchasing sports and lifestyle apparel."*
>
> *(Con-10-DE)*

Some Italian consumers believed in an impact as well:

> *"Yes, I feel like adidas, having a German heritage, is perceived as genuine and sincere, with a defined and well-communicated history."*
>
> *(Con-17-IT)*

> *"Honestly, I discovered adidas is German only a few months ago. I thought it was American, but I guess being a multinational company, it's not easy to keep the heritage alive. Today it is more common to have a world-culture when being such a company, compared to being loyal to the country you are from. However, adidas is still keeping its heritage important, doing a lot of activities and spots specifically dedicated for Germany."*
>
> *(Con-15-IT)*

Neutral and negative reasoning included viewpoints like adidas missing knowledge by consumers, difficulties of maintaining a national reputation when acting on a global scale, and the sheer choice of competing products:

> *"It is a nice add-on and I feel a bit proud that a German brand performs so well internationally. However, this does not influence my purchase behavior. If I prefer a certain Nike, Puma or Under Armour product, I would buy it."*
>
> *(Con-07-DE)*

> *"[…] being a global company, it's not easy to keep the German heritage. I feel adidas is now a global company and has lost its soul along the way."*
>
> *(Con-12-IT)*

> *"No, because few people know it's [adidas] originally a German company."*
>
> *(Con-16-IT)*

It seems that German consumers mostly believe that adidas' German heritage does not necessarily have an impact on the way they perceive adidas' brand personality compared to Italian consumers. However, this does not entirely rule out the possibility that even though German consumers mostly disregard the influence of adidas' German heritage that it could still have a subconscious influence on their perception towards the brand's brand personality dimensions.

<u>Research outcome</u>

(3) The majority of consumers (15/20) with relatively equal division between Italian and German consumers (8 DE & 7 IT) believe in the research outcome that culture has an impact on brand personality perception. For one, heritage reasons were mentioned:

> *"For Italy, I think it is very important how the brand is perceived. If adidas sponsors for instance the Italian soccer team, I think that might have a positive influence on the Italians because soccer is a very important cultural thing. For Germany, I still think that the German background has a certain advantage."*
>
> *(Con-07-DE)*

Further, some potential differences in values towards brand personalities are addressed:

> *It depends, because some brand personalities are perceived in a similar way, while others are not.*
>
> *(Con-01-DE)*

This directly relates to the Global-Local Dilemma and Schwartz's Value Types, stating that some values will lead to positive associations with the brand by the consumer, while other values are ranked lower across cultures (Schwartz, 1992, 2004). This connection is discussed further in the sections below.

Furthermore, prejudices towards cultures also came to show:

> *"The Italians are more aware of brands and in general about fashion. But maybe this is a prejudice…"*
>
> *(Con-02-DE)*

Then, consumers expecting less of an impact reasoned with only marginal differences due to their close geographic location within Europe:

> *"I tend to think that consumer behaviors differ remarkably between countries. Since both are European, the difference however should not be too big."*
>
> *(Con-04-DE)*

> *"No, because they are both European countries with pretty much the same standard for clothing."*
>
> *(Con-08-DE)*

This again relates to adidas' Global Consumer Culture and the related disregard for cultural norms (Dimofte, Johansson, & Bagozzi, 2010; Steenkamp, Batra, & Alden, 2003).

6.3 Comparison of Brand Personality Profiles between Germany and Italy Across Angles

6.3.1 Comparison of Angles

It has become apparent that the angles employed to provide a rich and holistic exploration of adidas' brand personality have formed similar viewpoints as depicted in Table 15 below.

Figure 15: Brand Personality Profiles for Germany and Italy.
Own research.
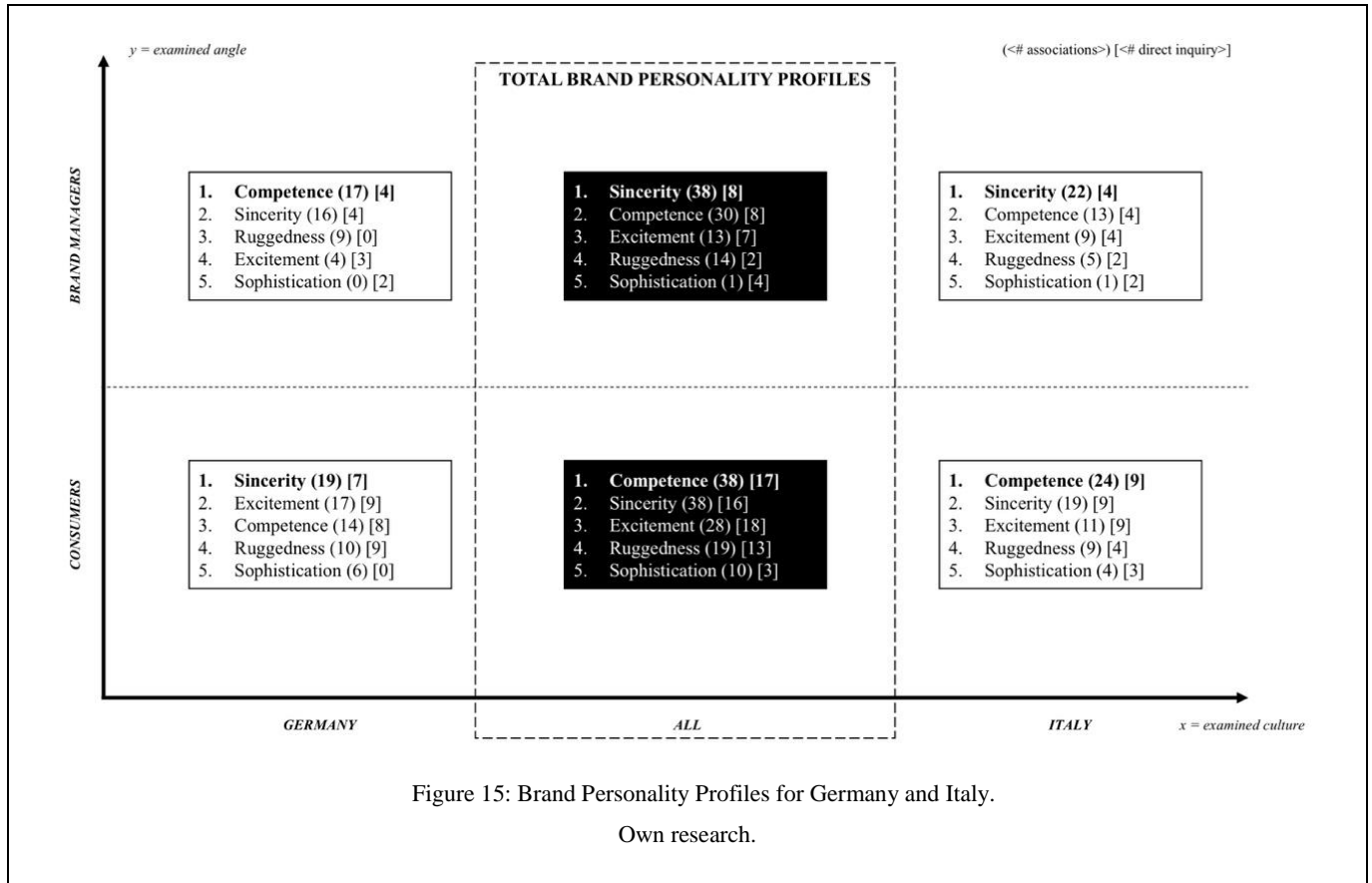
Overall, the total brand personality profiles of the consumer and brand manager angle seem to be quite similar apart from minor differences in ranking. However, these ranking differences in Competence (being ranked 1st for consumers and 2nd for brand managers) on the consumer side is rooted in only one direct enquiry count more compared to Sincerity. This left aside, with regard to association counts Competence and Sincerity share the 1st rank and are congruent with the Sincerity association count on the brand manager side. This said, one can argue that perception errors between the two angels are minimized at adidas and the gap almost completely closed in this case. However, as both brand managers and consumers raised concerns about the congruity of adidas' intended and actual brand personality, one can argue that the rationale behind this similarity in brand personality profiles might

root from the nature of the top ranked brand personality dimensions itself and the values they inherit. This is discussed further later on.

6.3.2 Comparison of Cultures

This can be used as a foundation to further explore cultural influence. Moving on, to compare the brand personalities across cultures, one can consolidate the brand personality profiles of brand managers and consumers in Germany, and the brand personality profiles of brand managers and consumers in Italy, and provide an initial, qualitative and non-representative comparison for analytical purposes as depicted in Figure 16 below.

It is worth noting that the direct enquiries, formally included, have now been removed from the figure, as they do not provide any meaningful comparison basis and were only used within their respective brand personality profiles to assess whether respondents were aligned in their unconscious associations and direct responses. As we have clarified, the responses were aligned in this case.

Figure 16: Brand Personality Profiles for Germany and Italy.

Own research.
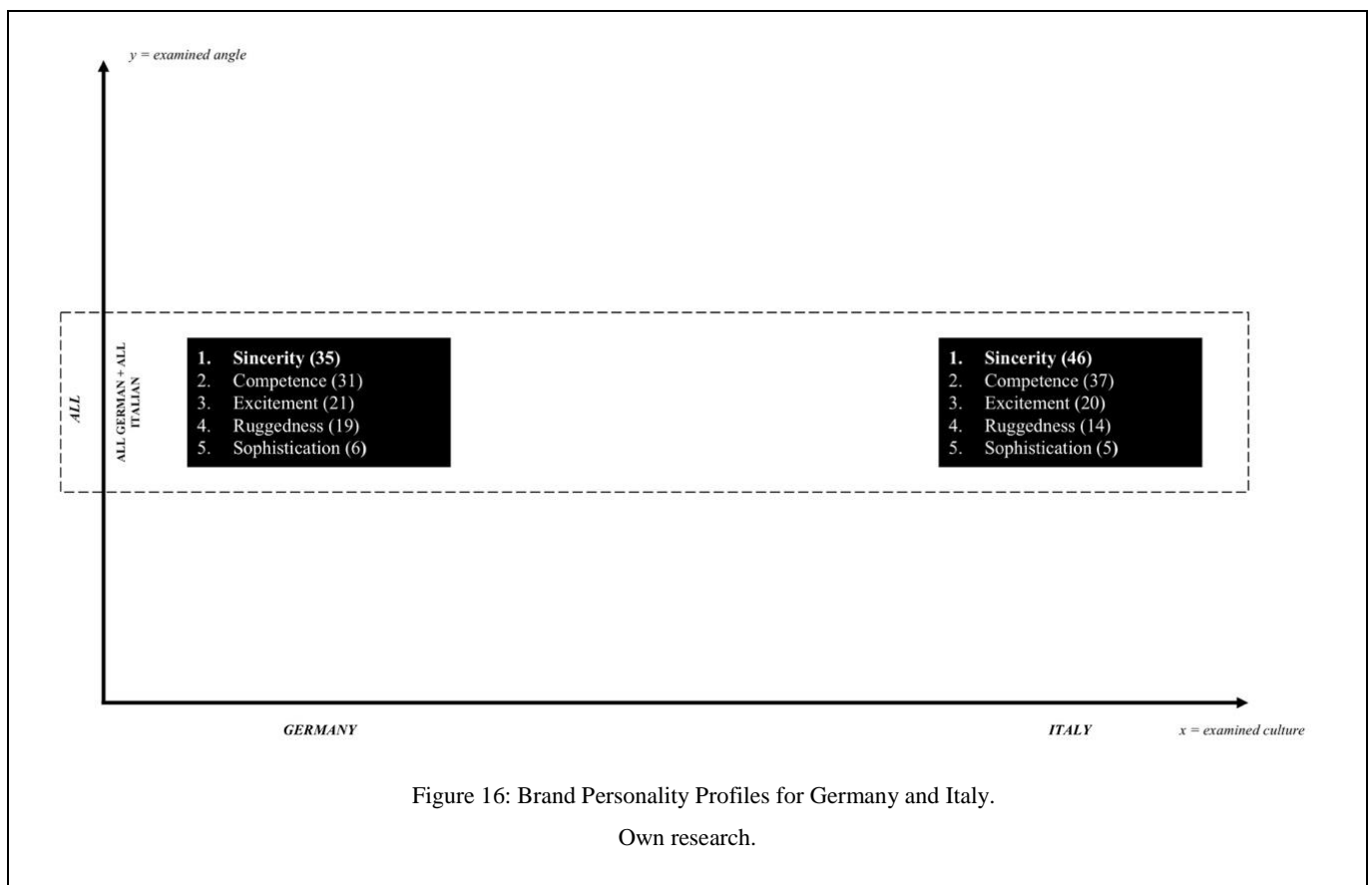
Now, while marginal differences between German and Italian Consumers and German and Italian brand managers exist as discussed in the earlier sections above, consolidating the two angles on each cultural side reveals a brand personality profile congruity, with more associations occurring on Italian side than on German side. This strongly suggests the presence of a Global Consumer Culture at adidas as well as unified values between the cultures.

The next section will further elaborate on these findings.

7 Discussion: The Concept of Universal Brand Personalities

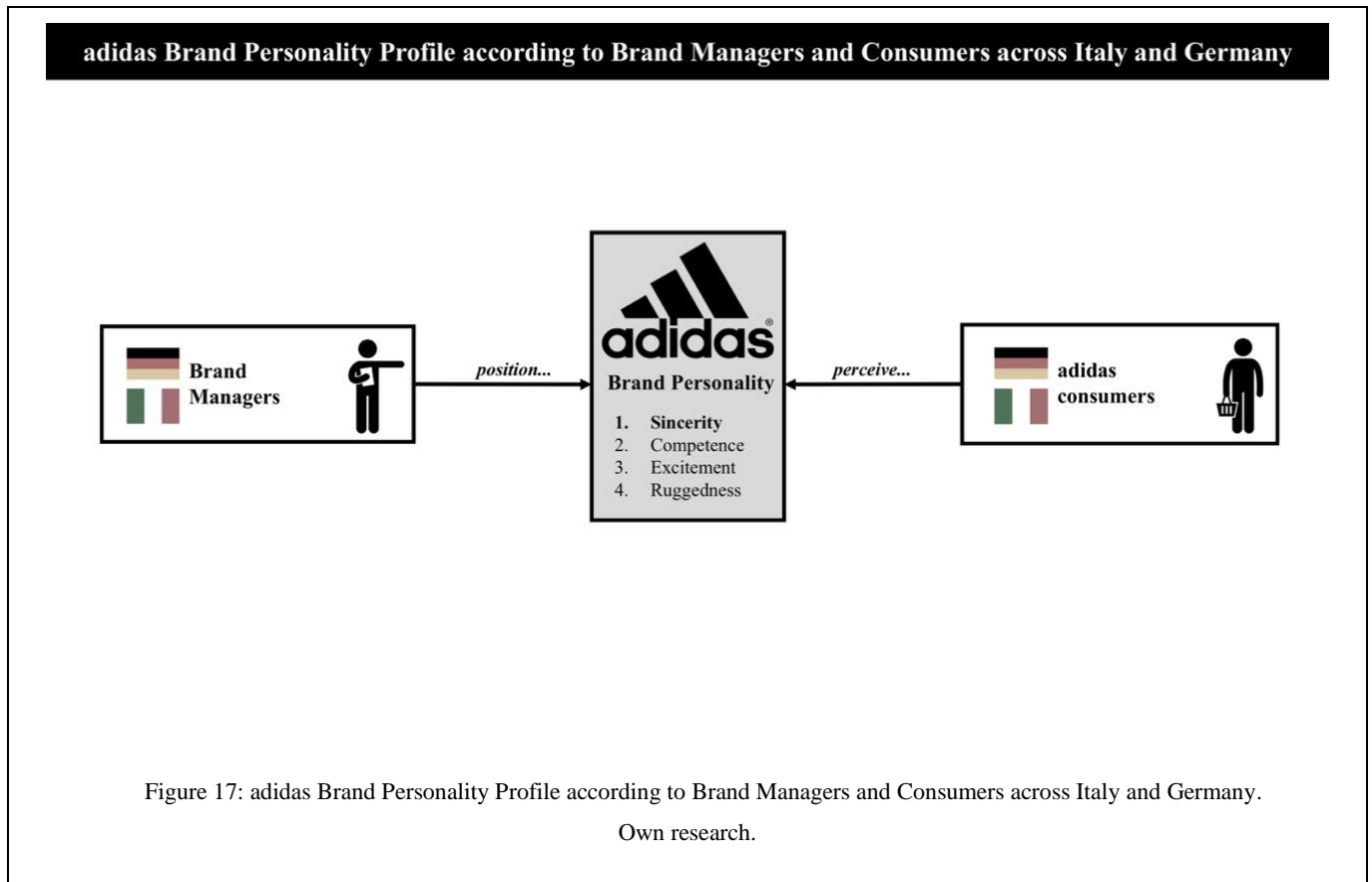**RQ: How does culture influence brand personality perception?**

Coming to the primary research question, the presentation of findings and initial analyses have led to plentiful potential views.

For one, culture's influence on brand personality perception potentially begins early-on in the business' history–spanning all the way to its national roots, the company's national heritage and the years it has been operating successfully. Brand managers will normally try to capitalize on this heritage if sensible. In the case of adidas, we did not see any indication that adidas was pushing its German heritage strategically, indicating that *globalness is being favored over national loyalty* when brand personalities are constructed. Of course, adidas' evolution has contributed indirectly to many brand personality traits, like competence, which can only be built up over time through trusted consumers. The specific role of heritage on brand personality embeddedness provides a potential future research direction.

Culture's influence on brand personality perception also begins in the managerial angle, not the consumer angle. Brand managers at adidas have their own culture and performing their jobs at the company embeds these cultural beliefs into branding-related decisions that are then potentially perceived by consumers. Before the first consumer perceived adidas, a brand manager (or similar person responsible) made choices that either directly or indirectly impacted the brand's personality. The importance of understanding these choices on managerial angle are vital for driving the research on culture's influence on brand personality forward.

In the case of adidas, many responses indicate that the company's strategic choices for its branding, one where global implementation is decided by the headquarters in Germany and local execution follows, also influence brand personality perception. Although the company operates in a way that branding-related decisions are driven out of Germany, it seems the company is positioned for maximum global outreach, much more so than respondents on all sides believed the research outcome to be. Our research indicates that the adidas brand personality, at least for Germans and Italians, was aligned despite differences in Hofstede's Dimensions. This would suggest that not only the well-researched "global consumer" plays a role, but also a "global brand manager", regardless whether they are located in the headquarter or in a local market. A global mindset that pushes adidas in the right, global direction

is required to cater to an ever-increasing global consumer base and to reduce frictions caused by inconsistent messages.

Figure 17: adidas Brand Personality Profile according to Brand Managers and Consumers across Italy and Germany.
Own research.

Based on the literature, and in light of such aligned findings, it makes sense to focus on Schwartz's (1992, 2004) Value Types over Hofstede's (2001) Dimensions as a lens for analysis. Had there been significant differences in brand personality profiles, a natural procedure would have been the potential explanation of these differences using the relationships between brand personality and cultural dimensions. This is not the case in our research, meaning Schwartz's model of value types is included for appropriate further analysis.

One can hypothesize that if Germany and Italy position and perceive adidas similarly, that adidas is focusing its communication efforts on messages that promote universal values, or at least values that Germans and Italians feel strongly about. Recent research has shown that the values benevolence, self-

direction and universalism will lead to positive associations with a brand across most cultures, whereas power and hedonism lead to negative associations with a brand.
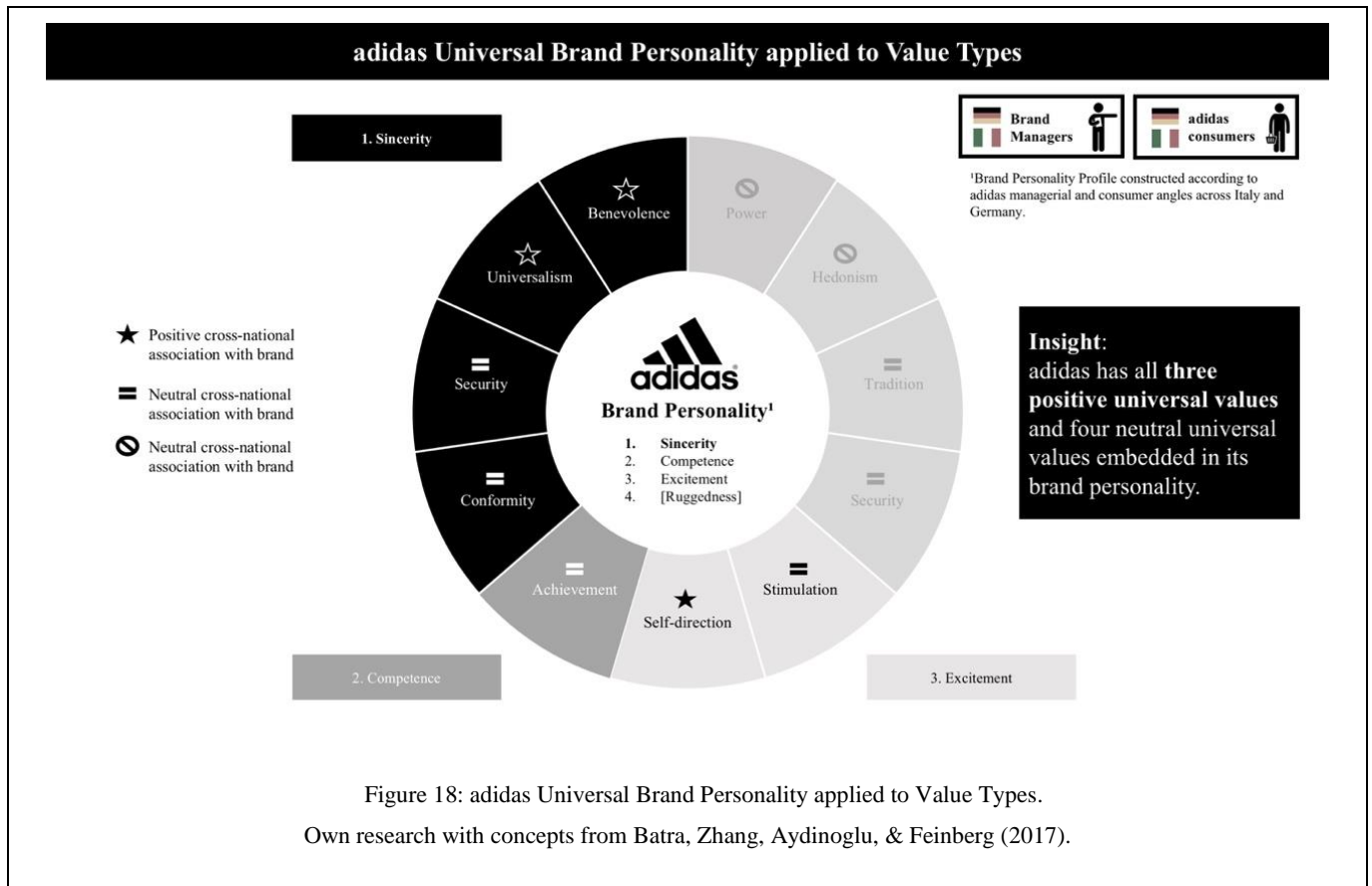
Our research has shown that adidas ranks particularly high on sincerity and competence brand personality dimensions. Cross-analyzing this using the existing theory, "sincerity" mostly corresponds to the values conformity, security, universalism and benevolence. Two out these four values are positive values, indicating that adidas has two positive universal values embedded in one of its key brand personality traits. "Competence", another highly ranked brand personality trait for adidas, corresponds to achievement, which is a neutral universal value that resonates neutrally with most countries (Batra, Zhang, Aydinoglu, & Feinberg, 2017).

Further, the next brand personality dimension that was often addressed in connection with adidas was "excitement". This corresponds to the universal values of stimulation and self-direction, self-direction leading to positive affects across cultures, while stimulation leads to neutral effects. Ruggedness could not be connected to any universal value from the literature.

Sophistication, the only brand personality dimension that lacked response from both brand managers and consumers when tied to adidas, is the only dimension that corresponds to a negative universal value, namely power.

This shows that adidas' brand personality does not contain a single universal value that could be negatively perceived by varying cultures. Conversely, the brand personality beholds exceptionally positive universal values of universalism, benevolence and self-direction, which will resonate well with many cultures, also besides Italy and Germany, according to current research.

Figure 18 below summarizes this relationship.

Figure 18: adidas Universal Brand Personality applied to Value Types.
Own research with concepts from Batra, Zhang, Aydinoglu, & Feinberg (2017).

Consequently, the application of universal values to adidas' unified brand personality profile highlights that consumers could be cross-culturally addressed consistently and strategically with positive resonance if the right, universal values are applied. This would suggest that to answer how culture influences brand personality perception, an inclusion of universal values is key to understand unified or divided brand personality perceptions. Only if the values that unite or divide cultures are understood and their connection to brand personality construction can be made, can brand managers strategically use the instrument, a type of "Universal Brand Personality", to its full potential and drive calculated choices. Such an endeavor calls for future research.

8   Limitations and Future Research

8.1   Limitations

Due to the complex methodological considerations taken for this research, a myriad of limitations has formed that should be addressed in future research.

For one, two European cultures, Italy and Germany, are examined, which present only marginal cultural differences between each other compared to other country pairs. Other country constellations, perhaps across continents that provide larger cultural differences, would be beneficial to truly understand the position and perception of adidas in a more global context. A larges distance between the brand's headquarters / origin and another country would also be sensible to get a better understanding of heritage effects on the target cultures.

Additionally, only one global brand is examined. Adidas is a positive example of a brand that communicates positive universal values, but perhaps there are opposing examples of brands that use more neutral or even negative universal values that could be cross-examined with different cultures. Doing so would likely lead to differentiated brand personality profiles and additional outcomes for the concept of Universal Brand Personalities.

Further, the analysis relies on the prior research of Batra, Zhang, Aydinoglu, & Feinberg (2017) for conceptualizing the connection between brand personality dimensions and Schwartz's (1992, 2004) value types. Though vital to the outcome of the research, it also presents a limitation, since the brand personality dimension "ruggedness" could not be matched to a value type using theory, leading to an incomplete analytical lens. Future research would have to ensure that *all* brand personality dimensions are mapped to value types using extensive theory or even quantitative research. A framework could be introduced, in which brand personality dimensions and value types are mapped to each other as a basis for future research in the field, making it easier for academics and practitioners alike to make advances to the body of research.

Further, the research dynamically employs the cultural model that most suited the outcome of the research. If other research constellations on this matter turned out to be opposing, i.e. cultures did not establish a unified brand personality profile (which would be a likely outcome if performed with e.g. countries across continents), the inclusion of Hofstede (2001) as the most popular cultural model to date would be sensible to focus on Hofstede cultural dimensions and their relationship to brand personality dimensions. Though Table 3 above provides an initial mapping of Hofstede cultural dimensions to brand personality dimensions as a preparatory measure for differing outcomes, research on this is slim and could be further addressed in the future.

Next, Aaker's brand personality dimensions play a central role in the research. The scale has been criticized for its replicability (Smith, Graetz, & Westerbeek, 2006), and past research has determined that different cultures require different adaptations of the scale e.g. Aaker, Benet-Martinez, & Garolera (2001). Though this is acknowledged in our research, the framework still provides one of the foundational and most researched bases for the brand personality theme. Using the scale allows a mapping to universal values grounded in theory (Batra, Zhang, Aydinoglu, & Feinberg, 2017), which provides an important step in the proposition for universal brand personalities. Future research, rather than focusing on the scale alone, could shift its focus to examine the values or cultural dimensions embedded in the scale's dimensions. Perhaps examining the matter from this angle provides new insights and a different, culturally-driven basis to solve the cultural limitation of a one-size-fits-all brand personality scale. Though setting up such research would require high expenditure, it would be a valuable addition to the body of research on brand personality and brand management.

Then, the fact that neither of the groups' mother tongue is English and all interviews in this research were conducted fully in English, suggests that a language barrier due to different English proficiency levels of the participants exists. Perhaps testing participants on their English proficiency beforehand and only select those with similar levels to move on with the interviews, would reduce this limitation.

Finally, the research performed here is of qualitative research. This was chosen as an adequate response to the call for more qualitative research in the brand management field (Arora & Stoner, 2009; Bezborodova & Bennett, 2004), and to provide rich results for the brand personality field. However, the choice also means that the research can only provide theory-building, rather than theory-confirming elements (Arora & Stoner, 2009). Subsequently, quantitative research is a must to confirm elements of the theory and triangulate results, either within the same context and scope or new contexts and scopes (Patton, 2002).

8.2   Future Research

The limitations above have provided numerous options for future research, including the inclusion of different cultural constellations, the addition of different global brands, an advancement of cultural dimension-brand personality dimension mapping, a use of Hofstede's cultural dimensions if alternative research outcomes were reached, and an integration of quantitative research to confirm theoretical suggestions made here.

Specifically coming back to the points raised in the formulation of research questions, future research can focus on **(1) the gap between brand managers and consumers**, **(2) brand personality as a**

strategic instrument for global brand managers, and **(3) the overall global-local dilemma**, examined through the theoretical lenses of Hofstede (2001) and Schwartz (1992, 2004) cultural models.

(1) The managerial and consumer angles applied throughout, providing a strong and holistic approach, have led to aligned results across cultures. However, one must not assume that only choosing to analyze one angle is methodologically sufficient because of this outcome. Other constellations, including different brands, cultures, and industries, may have completely opposing viewpoints on brand manager and consumer sides, as past research in the field would suggest. Thus, the approach to take both angles into consideration has been valuable as it ensured great span and depth of the results. This should be continued in future research and become a more common practice to ensure true depth, significance and expressiveness of results, especially in the brand management field (Zeithaml, 1988).

(2) Looking at the operational level of brand management, one is still challenged by how to apply brand personality as an instrument in a day-to-day context or work environment. It presents a challenge to formulate clear managerial implications for practitioners, since the concept of brand personality is only applied vaguely and no operationalization of such exists. Future research should thus focus on brand personality implementation and how managers can concretely and effectively generate brand personalities that drive brand description and brand equity.

(3) The overall global-local dilemma has been addressed by the introduction of the Universal Brand Personality concept. Instead of just focusing on global messages, our research indicates that it is important to focus on the *right* global messages, potentially using Universal Brand Personalities. These are messages or personalities that work across borders and engage positive values that most cultures will be able to relate to. Much research indicates that this is an effective way for brand managers to "leverage their advantages of scale *and* adapt their offering to ensure local relevance" (Hollis, 2008, p. 82; Batra, Zhang, Aydinoglu, & Feinberg, 2017). Thus, based on our research, future research could focus on the "global" side of the global-local dilemma, and concentrate most on the universal values that work across borders. To achieve this, as mentioned above, cultural dimensions and brand personality dimensions must first be better mapped to achieve comparability and an array of future research, using multiple cultural models as adequate analytical lenses (e.g. Hofstede and Schwartz).

(4) Finally, though not initially mentioned in the formulation of research questions, it is sensible to further advance qualitative research in the brand management field. Doing so for our research has provided deep and holistic insights that otherwise would not have been leviable, and we recommend such practices be continued in the future.

9   Conclusion

This research has dealt with the concept of brand personality and how cultural differences affect its perception. "Brand personality", the attribution of human personality traits to brands, is an important concept for brand managers since it may be employed as a strategic instrument that strengthens brand description and ultimately leads to measurable brand equity. On the consumer side, consumers perceive brand personality with each direct and indirect contact they have with the brand, ideally leading to positive brand trait associations that align with or complement the consumer's own personality, leading to purchase behaviors.

However, the applicability of this strategic instrument in managerial settings is challenging, presenting many issues in its measurability and replicability. One of the root causes of these issues is how cultural differences affect brand personality embeddedness and perception. Adidas was chosen as a global brand to provide a contextual foundation for the qualitative case study research. Acknowledging that culture has an impact on *both* managerial and consumer sides, the analysis identifies multiple points for the examined national cultures Germany and Italy.

There is concrete evidence of cultural differences between Italy and Germany, yet there are marginal to no differences apparent in the brand personality profiles that were established by counting brand personality trait associations with the adidas brand in individual cultures and angles (Germany / Italy / Brand Managers / Consumers). These marginal differences put into consolidated (cross-national) perspective lead to similar brand personality profiles when comparing the brand manager and consumer angles. Though the qualitative data can only provide observations at a foundational level, it seems that the brand personality trait prioritization adidas brand managers see for their brand, and the consumers' perception of this brand personality is aligned in a cross-border context. A type of "*Universal Brand Personality*" has surfaced as a result of the findings.

Though the research outcome provides no theory-confirming elements due to its qualitative nature, it does provide a theory-building aspect. A certain unity, at least for the responding Italians and Germans, seems existent for the adidas brand from both managerial and consumer angles, suggesting that the theory of "global consumer culture" and the global-local dilemma may have to be revisited for the concept of brand personality and other countries across all continents. If brand personalities were becoming more unified across cultures on both managerial and consumer sides, it would imply multinational organizations could standardize more than they localize in their brand management efforts. Such "Universal Brand Personalities" would have a direct effect on adidas, a company that currently has localization expenditures despite a global strategy team.

Building on the current insights from Batra, Zhang, Aydinoglu, & Feinberg (2017), our research also indicates that brand messages are best communicated globally if they adhere to the *right* universal values. Schwartz's (1992, 2004) value types, complemented by the research of Batra, Zhang, Aydinoglu, & Feinberg (2017) and the further qualitative development provided by this research, provide an initial foundation to identify these values. As the chief marketing officer of Uniliever, Simon Clift, states: "A global promise is the most important global brand asset, way more important than the same name or formulation or graphics". Stressing that a consistent brand appeal that works across borders is key for the future of brand management, we coincide with this view and believe Universal Brand Personalities could provide a stepping stone to advance the field. Instead of engaging in resource-hungry guessing games, brands must embrace positive universal values to make brand personality promises that work across national borders (Hollis, 2008, p. 165-166).

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11 Appendices

Appendix A: Schwartz's Value Types Descriptions

Value	Definition
1. Hedonism	Pleasure and sensuous gratification of oneself (pleasure, enjoying life)
2. Power	Social status, prestige, control, or dominance over people and resources (social power, authority, wealth, preserving public image)
3. Conformity	Restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms
4. Tradition	Respect, commitment to, and acceptance of customs and ideas provided by traditional culture or tradition (humble, accepting my portion in life, devout, respect for tradition, moderate)
5. Stimulation	Excitement, novelty, and challenge in life (daring, varied life, exciting life)
6. Security	Safety, harmony and stability of society, of relationships, and of self (family security, national security, social order, reciprocation of favors)
7. Achievement	Personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards (successful, capable, ambitious, influential)
8. Self-direction	Independent thought and action-choosing, creating, exploring (creativity, freedom, independent, curious, choosing own goals)
9. Universalism	Understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature (broadminded, wisdom, social justice, equality, world at peace, unity with nature, protecting the environment)
10. Benevolence	Preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact (helpful, honest, forgiving, loyal, responsible)

Appendix A: Schwartz's (1992, 2004) Value Types Descriptions.

Adapted from Batra, Zhang, Aydinoglu, & Feinberg (2017, p. 924).

Appendix B: Aaker J.L.`s (1997) Brand Personality Scale

A BRAND PERSONALITY SCALE
(Means and Standard Deviations)*

Traits	Mean	Standard Deviation	Facet	Facet Name	Factor Name	Mean	Standard Deviation
down-to-earth	2.92	1.35	(1a)	Down-to-earth	Sincerity	2.72	.99
family-oriented	3.07	1.44	(1a)				
small-town	2.26	1.31	(1a)				
honest	3.02	1.35	(1b)	Honest			
sincere	2.82	1.34	(1b)				
real	3.28	1.33	(1b)				
wholesome	2.81	1.36	(1c)	Wholesome			
original	3.19	1.36	(1c)				
cheerful	2.66	1.33	(1d)	Cheerful			
sentimental	2.23	1.26	(1d)				
friendly	2.95	1.37	(1d)				
daring	2.54	1.36	(2a)	Daring	Excitement	2.79	1.05
trendy	2.95	1.39	(2a)				
exciting	2.79	1.38	(2a)				
spirited	2.81	1.38	(2b)	Spirited			
cool	2.75	1.39	(2b)				
young	2.73	1.40	(2b)				
imaginative	2.81	1.35	(2c)	Imaginative			
unique	2.89	1.36	(2c)				
up-to-date	3.60	1.30	(2d)	Up-to-date			
independent	2.99	1.36	(2d)				
contemporary	3.00	1.32	(2d)				
reliable	3.63	1.28	(3a)	Reliable	Competence	3.17	1.02
hard working	3.17	1.43	(3a)				
secure	3.05	1.37	(3a)				
intelligent	2.96	1.39	(3b)	Intelligent			
technical	2.54	1.39	(3b)				
corporate	2.79	1.45	(3b)				
successful	3.69	1.32	(3c)	Successful			
leader	3.34	1.39	(3c)				
confident	3.33	1.36	(3c)				
upper class	2.85	1.42	(4a)	Upper class	Sophistication	2.66	1.02
glamorous	2.50	1.39	(4a)				
good looking	2.97	1.42	(4a)				
charming	2.43	1.30	(4b)	Charming			
feminine	2.43	1.43	(4b)				
smooth	2.74	1.34	(4b)				
outdoorsy	2.41	1.40	(5a)	Outdoorsy	Ruggedness	2.49	1.08
masculine	2.45	1.42	(5a)				
Western	2.05	1.33	(5a)				
tough	2.88	1.43	(5b)	Tough			
rugged	2.62	1.43	(5b)				

Appendix B: Aaker J.L.`s (1997) Brand Personality Scale.