Basic human values and brand personality preferences: a CAWI-based consumer choice study

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Abstract

Given that we live in a society characterised by pronounced consumerist habits and values, there is a growing need to understand both the patterns and the process of brand selection. The literature recognises brand personality as a phenomenon that broadly encompasses the individuality of a brand. As behaviour is also determined by the values individuals adhere to, this study examines the relationship between preferred dimensions of brand personality and basic human values. CAWI approach was utilised to collect data. A convenience sample of 190 adult residents of Montenegro (62.6% female) filled out an online form of instruments (PVQ and BPS). The predictability of BPS dimensions is found to be limited, as significant correlations were found only with two higher-order values (Self-Enhancement and Self-Transcendence). The prediction is found to be the most efficient for brand personality dimensions: Sincerity (15%), Sophistication (12%), and Ruggedness (12%). Nearly 10% of the variance in each of the remaining two dimensions (Competence and Excitement) can be predicted based on PVQ dimensions.

Keywords: brand personality, brand loyalty, brand image, basic human values

Introduction and overview of prior studies

To understand consumer habits and brand preferences, the study deals with concepts such as brand identity, brand narrative/communication, brand image, and brand personality. Such research aims to formulate an approach to tailoring the brand to meet the consumers' needs. This study relies on brand personality as a broader concept that captures brands' distinctiveness, and isn't unlike a (human) personality concept that observes individual differences through mul-

tiple dimensions. In addition to brand personality, we also examine basic human values. As a concept that has withstood the test of time (Spini, 2003; Sagiv et al., 2017), basic human values represent a universal phenomenon. One that affects virtually every aspect of human behaviour, transcends culture, and can also be connected to (human) personality (Fischer & Boer, 2015; Parks-Leduc et al., 2015; Pavlović, 2021; Sagiv & Schwartz, 2022). As such, we believe that the brand characteristics one prefers also reflect our basic human values, while some authors claim that brand anthropomorphism reveals how we attribute human traits to brands (Kim et al, 2018).

Jennifer Aaker, like Schwartz, set out to define a concept, which, in her case, is brand personality (Aaker, 1997), and her work is often dedicated to its exploration. Her efforts have brought forward a conceptualisation of a (brand personality) structure that is similar to the Big Five personality model (Goldberg, 1993). Aaker also put together a scale that measures five dimensions: Sincerity, Excitement, and Competence, which correspond to Agreeableness, Extraversion, and Conscientiousness, respectively. The remaining dimensions, Sophistication and Ruggedness, pertain specifically to brand personality and represent aspects for which consumers might want to be recognised. These can be described in the following way, and related to some concrete brands (Aaker, 1997; Chopra, 2012):

- Sincerity – describes a brand's alignment with strong moral values, values that the brand is all about (Disney, Pampers)
- Excitement – brand's recognition as dynamic and adventurous, often through various marketing activities (Red Bull, Nike)
- Competence – an impression of competence that the brand represents (Google, Microsoft)
- Sophistication – representing the level of attention and refinement that a brand puts into every detail (Rolex, Apple)
- Ruggedness – suggests that the brand holds dear the values of quality and stability (Timberland, Harley Davidson)

There are many reasons why someone finds a certain brand attractive, and the question of how one's characteristics can be expressed through brand choice is especially relevant and has been explored. At this point, it is useful to introduce the difference between *self* and *self-ideal* (Malär et al, 2011), as it poses the question of whether a brand choice represents what we are or what we would like to be. The purchase motivation is determined by a sense of moving towards or nearing self-ideal. According to the *Construal level theory* (Liberman & Trope, 1998), concepts that are closer to our self are clearer (concrete), and could allow for a more precise understanding of preferences, while those that stand at a greater psychological distance (from our self) are more abstract (Malär et al., 2011). This would mean that self has a greater and more direct influence on purchase behaviour than self-ideal, which is not to say self-ideal has no influence, but rather that its influence is second to self. Besides the importance that expressing one's self through identifying with the brand has

on brand choices (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Hasan et al., 2024), the surrounding context matters as well. Namely, both groups that one is a part of or identifies with (ingroup), and groups they do not identify with (outgroup), affect choices. Shown through an example that Escalas and Bettman gave (Escalas & Bettman, 2005: 379):

> „If I consider myself to be an intellectual and my member group of intellectuals tends to drive Volvo automobiles, I also may choose to drive a Volvo car as a symbol of how intellectual I am."
>
> „If I am not a member of a fraternity (and do not desire to be a member) and see fraternity members wearing Polo clothing, I may specifically choose not to wear Polo clothing in an attempt to distance myself from the fraternity symbolism of the Polo brand."

Values could have an influence on purchase behaviour through mediator variables. Brand personality studies are especially valuable as they explore the possibility of creating an emotional connection with consumers. The dynamic between a brand and a consumer can be comprehensively described through *Brand attachment*. This concept relates to the strength of emotional and cognitive relations that exist between consumers' self and the brand (Aaker et al, 2004; Park et al, 2010). Brand attachment reflects the willingness to invest effort into maintaining the relationship with the brand, remaining loyal, and the readiness to invest more time and money in it (Park et al, 2010). These and other studies confirm that both the brand/company and the consumers enjoy the benefits of such a connection.

Aaker and colleagues (2004) have explored the consumer-brand connection through longitudinal research. Brand Sincerity and Excitement emerged as the key determinants of this relationship. The study confirms that brand personality influences the consumer-brand bond, and it can affect how consumers respond when misunderstandings occur. Similar to how human experiences may unfold, results suggest that the Sincerity of a brand helps develop long-term and stable relationships. At the same time, Excitement leads to fun and short-term relationships. However, when it comes to the effect that brand personality has on consumers' reaction to misunderstanding, Sincerity-based relations are shaken more significantly than those based on Excitement. In the latter case, these occasions can even lead to advancement in connection, as some level of „ups and downs" can lead to greater excitement.

The study by Bairrada and colleagues (2018) confirms that brand personality is directly linked with resistance to negative information about the brand and with the readiness to share personal data. Effects of brand personality were also found when it comes to satisfaction, loyalty, praise, readiness to pay more, intensity of website exploration, and active tracking of sales (Bairrada et al, 2018; Marković et al., 2022; Hasan et al., 2024).

Research goals and hypotheses

Brands play a significant role in our everyday lives. The long presence of some brands and the high frequency of use have, sometimes subconsciously, led to the generalisation of various brands. An example is Kaladont, which became synonymous with toothpaste in the observed market, or Pampers, with baby diapers, for which replacements are scarce. Market growth, however, has made it more likely that various brands may be offering the same or similar products, taking the spotlight away from quality and placing it on branding and the analysis of consumers' psychological characteristics and preferences (Marković et al., 2022). This is why the goal of the study is to analyse the relationships between consumers' basic human values and preferred brand personality dimensions as a basis for achieving market advantage. The practical goal and application would be to drive brand change or adjustment based on the basic human values of the targeted consumer group (Hasan et al., 2024). Since basic human values are both a broad psychological concept and a very personal (individual) one, when linked with brand personality preferences, they could not only depict consumers' needs but also serve as a way to map the market and trends within it. A goal for future studies could be recognising value priorities within the characteristics of preferred brands. Results could indirectly point towards a typical consumer profile or values prioritisation within the Montenegrin society.

Based on the Schwartz model of values and the premises mentioned above, we expect values that are „closer" to each other to exhibit a stronger positive correlation than those that are more „distant." Negative correlations are expected to be found between values that are placed in opposition to one another, representing their conflicting nature (Schwartz, 1992).

Following Aaker's thoughts, not all brand personality dimensions are expected to have a connection with human personality dimensions. Instead, she confirms that a „direct" connection is expected for three dimensions: Sincerity/Agreeableness, Excitement/Extraversion, and Competence/Conscientiousness (Mulyanegara et al, 2009).

Based on the above, he following hypotheses can be formulated:

- **H1:** *The adjusted brand personality scale will show the following relations with wider dimensions of basic human values ((+) represents a positive correlation and (-) a negative one):*
- **H1a:** *Self-Transcendence: Sincerity (+)*
- **H2b:** *Conservation: Sincerity (+), Competence (+), Excitement (-)*
- **H3c:** *Self-Enhancement: Excitement (+), Sincerity (-)*
- **H4d:** *Openness to Change: Excitement (+), Competence (-)*
- **H2:** *In accordance with the previous hypothesis regarding the correlations between wider dimensions of basic human values and brand personality characteristics, it is expected that:*
- **H1a:** *The most significant predictors of Sincerity would be Self-Transcendence, Conservation, and Self-Enhancement*

- **H2b:** *The most significant predictors of Competence would be Conservation and Openness to Change*
- **H3c:** *The most significant predictors of Excitement would be Conservation and Openness to Change*

Organisation of the research process

The data gathering process relied on the CAWI approach (Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing), a method that utilises online instruments. The study used a convenience sample that received a link to the online form through which answers were collected. The data was gathered during July 2023. The sample included 190 participants, residents of Montenegro, of whom 119 were female (62.6%). All participants were adults, with an average age of 35 years.

The *Portrait Values Questionnaire* (Schwartz et al, 2001) or PVQ is an instrument originally created to make the scale more applicable and widen the population that can be included in research on basic human values. The instrument was also made applicable to younger participants by modifying the way items are formulated and the method of self-assessment. Compared to the *Schwartz Value Survey* (SVS; Schwartz, 1992, 1996), which included ranking multiple statements, the PVQ is formulated as a description of a person, and participants are asked to assess how similar this person is to themselves. Due to such a formulation of the instrument and the nature of the local language, two variants were used in the study, one for male and one for female participants.

The *Brand Personality Scale* (BPS; Aaker, 1997) comprises 42 items that assess participants' perceptions of brands using a 5-point Likert scale. The instrument is adjusted for this study to assess how important consumers find different brand characteristics in brands that they prefer or choose. Since a slight misalignment was found in the way items are translated (Jovanović et al, 2017; Starčević et al, 2017), we tested five new items/translations in this study (tehnički napredno, razdragano, unikatno, savremeno, and atraktivno).

Findings and analysis

Before showcasing the results, we will briefly present psychometrical characteristics of the instruments used. Based on the satisfactory levels of internal consistency ($\alpha = .902$), we can say that the PVQ is a reliable instrument. Table 1, which follows, shows that reliability varies among subscales and that some subscales (Power, Security, Conformity, Tradition) exhibit lower reliability.

Table 1. *Reliability of the basic human values scale*

	Uni.	Ben.	Con.	Trad.	Sec.	Pow	Ach	Hed.	Sti.	Self-d.
α	.833	.733	.666	.673	.649	.560	.808	.834	.777	.752

Uni. – Universalism; Ben. – Benevolence; Con. – Conformity; Trad. – Tradition; Sec. – Security; Pow. – Power; Ach. – Achievement; Hed. – Hedonism; Sti. – Stimulation; Self-d. – Self-direction

Factor analysis does not show dimensions as clearly separated. Based on Promax rotation, the factors reflected a pattern that indicates a quasi-circular structure. Values that are near each other in a circular structure of the model constitute the same factors. The clearest examples are: Self-direction, Universalism, and Benevolence; Power and Achievement; and Hedonism and Stimulation. Dimensions that form separate factors are Conformity, Tradition, and Security, and they, too, suggest a quasi-circular structure when secondary factor loadings are considered. An exemplary relation would be that between Conformity and Tradition. The following table (Table 2) shows correlations between wider PVQ dimensions.

Table 2. Correlation coefficients among the broader dimensions of the PVQ

	Self-Transcendence	Self-Enhancement	Openness to Change
Self-Enhancement	-.707**		
Openness to Change	-.114	.122	
Conservatism	-.028	-.407**	-.805**

** *Correlation is significant at the p < .01 level*

Below, Figure 1 shows an unexpected negative correlation found between the subdimensions Security and Power, which is inconsistent with the quasi-circular structure of basic human values. Another expected, but not found, confirmation of this structure would be a strong negative correlation between Tradition and subdimensions Hedonism and Stimulation. Although such relations were not found, it is important to note that strong and statistically significant negative correlations were observed among four broader dimensions of PVQ.

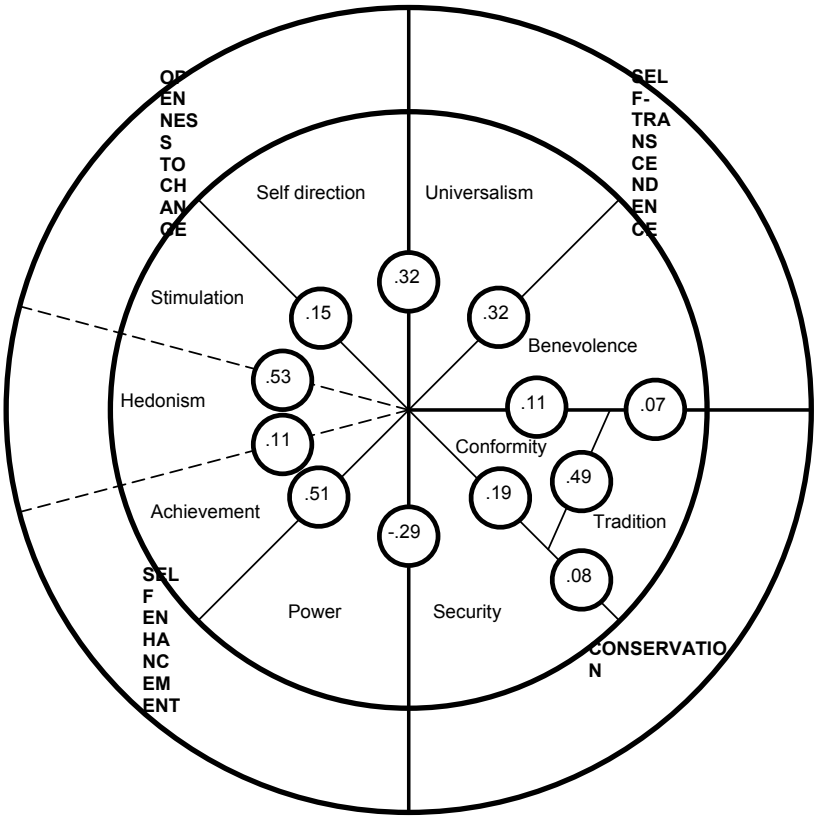

Figure 1. *Correlations of neighboring PVQ sub-dimensions.*
Note. Adapted from (Schwartz, S. H., 1992, p. 45).

Religiousness is strongly correlated with subdimensions *Tradition* and *Hedonism*. Correlation with Tradition is positive and the strongest one found ($r = .397$, $p < .01$), which was expected, and the negative correlation with Hedonism ($r = -.163$, $p < .05$) turned out to be less significant than the one with subdimension Power ($r = -.295$, $p < .01$). The relation between religiousness and other subdimensions suggests the instruments' validity – significant correlations with Conformism ($r = .172$, $p < .5$) and Stimulation ($r = -.154$, $p < .01$). Results also confirm the expected relations between PVQ and variables: Age (Conservatism, $r = .332$, $p < .01$; Openness to Change, $r = -.286$, $p < .01$; Self-Enhancement, $r = -.193$, $p < .01$), economic status (Openness to Change, $r = .337$, $p < .01$; Conservatism, $r = -.293$, $p < .01$), and level of education (Conservatism, $r = -.292$, $p < .01$; Stimulation, $r = .167$, $p < .05$; Self-direction, $r = .147$, $p < .05$).

The Brand Personality Scale demonstrates a satisfactory level of reliability ($\alpha = .948$), and internal consistency confirms the high reliability of each dimension separately, as shown in the following table (Table 3).

Table 3. *Reliability of the* BPS *scale dimensions*

	Sincerity	Excitement	Competence	Sophistication	Ruggedness
α	.857	.871	.796	.754	.713

Results from the table below (Table 4) show the relationship between BPS dimensions.

Table 4. *Intercorrelations among the BPS scale dimensions*

	Sincerity	Excitement	Competence	Sophistication
Excitement	.694**			
Competence	.824**	.743**		
Sophistication	.486**	.789**	.611**	
Ruggedness	.572**	.685**	.655**	.635**

** *Correlation is significant at the* $p < .01$ *level*

Confirmatory factor analysis identifies five factors, with Sincerity and Excitement emerging as the clearest dimensions (based on Promax rotation). Sincerity, which contains a larger number of items, has the least significant secondary factor loadings. However, Competence has significant loadings on the same factor. Excitement, which appears spread on two separate factors, also has less secondary factor loadings than is the case with the rest of the dimensions. Similarly to Excitement, Sophistication's primary loadings form a distinct factor, with significant secondary loadings appearing on the Excitement factor as well. Ruggedness has secondary loadings on factors Sincerity-Competence and Sophistication. This suggests that dimensions are interrelated and overlapping.

Table 5. *Alternative items for the BPS Scale*

English item	**Original item**	**Suggested item**	**Scale reliability**
Technical	Formalno	Tehnički napredno	.80 → .82
Up-to-date	Moderno	Savremeno	.87 → .88
Good-looking	Dobrog izgleda	Atraktivno	.75 → .78
Cheerful	Vedro	Razdragano	.86 → .85
Unique	Jedinstveno	Unikatno	.87 → .86

The five additional items, included in the study to evaluate the semantic accuracy of the BPS scale translation, have each shown expected positive correlations with the original items for which they are alternatives, as well as with the dimensions they measure (Table 7). Except for the alternative item „Tehnički napredni" (Technically advanced), all show moderate to high correlation with the original item. All suggested items show moderate to high correlation with the dimensions they measure. However, items „Atraktivno" (Sophistication) and „Razdragano" (Sincerity) show stronger correlations with dimension Excitement than with the dimensions they measure. Notable positive effects on

scale reliability are observed when each of the alternative items is introduced. Additionally, even just removing three original items, for which alternatives are „Atraktivno," „Tehnički napredno," and „Savremeno, " improves the scale reliability. This suggests that there is room for improvement in the instrument's psychometric characteristics, which could be achieved by using the suggested items instead of the original ones.

The relationship between the PVQ and BPS scales is presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6. Correlation coefficients between PVQ and BPS scales

	Self-Transcendence		Conservatism			Self-Enhancement			Openness to Change	
	Uni.	Ben.	Con.	Trad.	Sec.	Pow	Ach	Hed.	Sti.	Self-d.
Sincerity	-.124	-.097	-.028	-.129	-.058	.222**	.013	.142	.132	-.042
Excitement	.038	.125	.065	.077	.011	.024	-.192**	-.060	-.107	.029
Competence	.065	.031	-.049	-.095	-.077	.091	-.142	.090	.068	.097
Sofisticiranost	.169*	.240**	.036	-.002	-.009	-.109	-.258**	-.028	-.069	.130
Ruggedness	.093	.165	.002	-.069	-.016	.021	-.202**	.038	-.025	.089

Uni. – Universalism; Ben. – Benevolence; Con. – Conformity; Trad. – Tradition; Sec. – Security; Pow. – Power; Ach. – Achievement; Hed. – Hedonism; Sti. – Stimulation; Self-d. –

***Correlation is significant at the p < .01 level*

**Correlation is significant at the p < .05 level*

It is notable that only a few statistically significant correlations can be found between the dimensions of the two scales. Furthermore, these significant correlations appear to cluster around the dimensions of Self-Enhancement and Self-Transcendence. Namely, Self-Enhancement shows significant correlations with Sophistication ($r = -.199$, $p < .01$) and Sincerity ($r = .152$, $p < .05$), while Self-Transcendence correlates with Sophistication ($r = .250$, $p < .01$) and Ruggedness ($r = .158$, $p < .05$). In conclusion, the hypotheses based on the available body of research regarding the relationship of PVQ and BPS appear justified. Still, the absence of statistically significant markers does not allow for them to be confirmed in this study. While Competence shows no significant correlations with any of the PVQ subdimensions, Sophistication and Ruggedness, unexpectedly, show significant correlations with some of them. Moreover, correlations that appear between these two dimensions and the PVQ scale are the most significant correlations found.

Low correlations observed between the two scales limit their predictive capabilities. Still, following expectations, Self-Transcendence, Conservatism, and Self-Enhancement emerged as the best predictors of Sincerity. These can account for somewhat over 15% of the variance of Sincerity ($R2 = .154$; $p = .000$). However, since Self-Enhancement does not contribute much, a more efficient prediction model would include just the combination of Self-Transcendence and Conservatism, which covers for almost 15% of variance ($R2 = .148$; $p = .000$).

Another partially confirmed expectation relates to the predictability of Competence through PVQ dimensions, specifically Conservatism and Openness to Change. While these two help explain a tenth of the variance (R2 = .1; p = .000), the contribution of Openness to Change is not found to be statistically significant. Excluding this wider dimension from the predictive model reveals that nearly the same predictive power can be achieved based solely on Conservatism (R2 = .092; p = .000).

Instead of Conservatism, Self-Enhancement turned out to be a better predictor of Excitement. Paired with Openness to Change, Self-Enhancement can account for nearly 10% (R2 = .096; p = .000) of Excitement's variance. Self-Enhancement was also discovered to be the best predictor of Sophistication (R2 = .126; p = .000). Practically, 12% (R2 = .122; p = .000) of the variation within the remaining dimension of brand personality, Rugedness, can be explained based on Conformity and Self-Enhancement.

Conclusions and recommendations

The study's results have revealed expected consistencies and trends with PVQ, including the instrument's reliability and validity. When subdimensions are observed separately, *Power* has shown questionable reliability and unexpected (negative) correlations with the „neighbourly" dimension, *Security*. Factor analysis offers confirmation and supports the quasi-circular structure of basic human values. The *Brand Personality Scale* has demonstrated satisfactory reliability across all subscales. Slight changes, however, could add to the greater precision of the instrument. The analysis of the instrument's latent structure does not allow for an unambiguous interpretation. The expected structure of five separate factors was not confirmed, and strong correlations between its dimensions suggest disputable discriminant validity.

Between 9% and 15% of the variance in brand personality dimensions can be explained by PVQ dimensions. As expected, the most significant predictors of Sincerity are Self-Transcendence and Conservation. At the same time, this is the dimension with the highest predictability. Conservation is a predictor of Competence, and the predictors of Excitement are Openness for Change and, unexpectedly, Self-Enhancement. This dimension is also a predictor of Sophistication, but it can also add value to the prediction of brand personality dimension Ruggedness. Weak correlations exist between predictor variables (PVQ) and criterion variables (BPS), limiting the overall prediction potential. This is why we find the prediction of brand characteristic preferences based on the personal hierarchy of basic human values insufficiently precise. The present study is a pioneering effort, and future research could delve deeper into the surprising negative correlation found between subdimensions of Security and Power. However, many aspects could have affected or even produced such an unexpected result, which is why this „pattern" needs to be verified in future studies.

In this regard, considering the possibility of predicting Sophistication and Ruggedness also represents a novel insight. Sincerity is positively correlated with Self-Transcendence and Conservation, and negatively with Self-Enhancement and Openness to Change. Even though correlations between PVQ and BPS were not significant to the expected or required extent, the emerging patterns align with theoretical expectations. This is why it would be valuable to explore these questions in future studies. The limitations of the study include the convenience sampling and a greater number of female participants. A more robust and objective criterion could be used to assess religiousness and economic status than the self-assessment employed in the study. Limitations also extend to the adjustment of the BPS instrument. Namely, the abstract nature of the instrument may invite confounding, which might be mitigated by assessing concrete brands.

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