

## Brand Personification: Humanizing the Brand

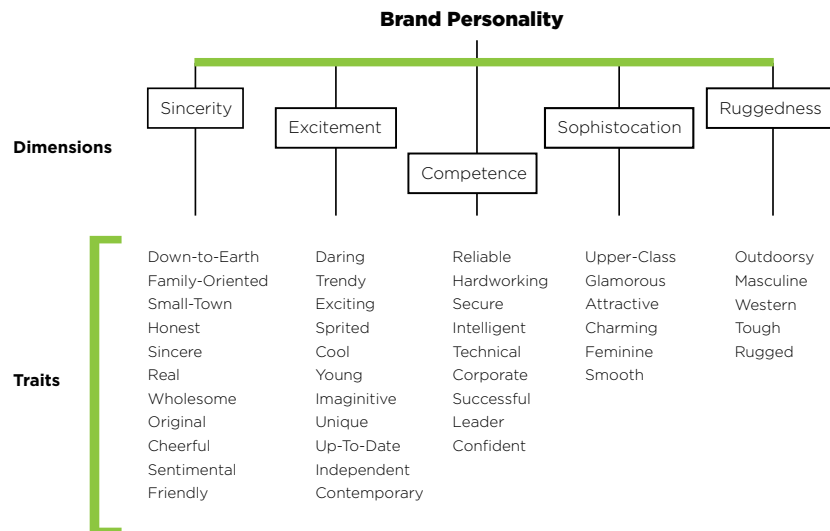
Since the start of modern advertising in the late 1800's, the method of persuasion has been at the core of all commercially communicated messages. The evolved marketing landscape and a technologically advanced society have made a significant impact on how people are persuaded by brands today. Once persuaded only by rational factors invoked by advertisers, today people are persuaded emotionally through immersive marketing that employs consumer behavior modification.

With a massive increase in brands competing for premium visibility and adoption in a variety of industry categories, connecting with their intended audience requires more than a "features and benefits" sort of approach. Moreover, people are savvier and more socially connected than they ever were before. They are able to easily tap into their peer influencer network of friends or various online resources to gain valuable and real-time insights and data on a brand. Successful brands understand this quite well and are willing to invest in developing relationships with their audience through two-way brand conversations. The result is brand adoption, advocacy, loyalty and evangelism.

In sales, it is often stated that people do business with people they know, like and trust. With marketing being the gateway to sales, it makes sense that the same truism would apply. Today, people connect with brands they know, like and trust. According to Business2Community, 80 percent of social media users prefer to connect with brands through Facebook, and 77 percent of business-to-consumer companies acquired customers from Facebook. However, to accomplish this, a brand must develop new and personally relevant ways to be known, liked and trusted by their audience.

This more personal and emotive method of marketing requires a foundation of deep research using demographics, psychographics, ethnographics, technographics, SWOT and PEST analyses in order to deeply understand the audience. Qualitative and quantitative research is an important starting point, but many marketing and social marketing

experts also subscribe to the theory that brands must harness their human characteristics in order to connect with their human audience. This is accomplished by breaking down the brand DNA to several sections, which together form its personality. Stanford’s Professor of Marketing, Jennifer L. Aaker, suggests that brands have five dimensions of personality – sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness, each one with their specific traits.



Once a brand is clearly personified and a foundation of research established, the process of connecting it with its intended audience is much akin to matchmaking. Modern marketing dictates that successful brands deliver on the needs of society as opposed to convincing people they need a product or service they don't. Brands should also make the audience feel something beyond what it communicates in literal form. Using brand to consumer matchmaking techniques, brands first define their human characteristics then create a strategy, which ultimately allows them to target and emotionally connect with their audience through a creative vehicle.

Here are some basic steps in establishing brand personification:

- Take your brand's mission and values into consideration. How do they shape the framework of this humanized brand?
- Is your brand tough or gentle, male or female?
- If your brand were a celebrity or well-known figure, who would it be?
- If your brand could speak, what would it say and how would it say it?
- Use key research data and insights to determine the personality of the brand's target audience.
- Determine multiple levels of compatibility and incompatibility.
- Make any necessary adjustments to the brand personality.
- Build a targeted strategy, which first identifies the brand's compatible counterparts and makes a match.
- The second part of the strategy is to communicate the brand personality creatively and effectively so as to elicit and positive emotional response.

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