

An Exploration into the Brand Personality Traits of Social Media Sites

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Abstract

The brand personality framework has emerged as a strong predictor of consumers' feelings toward a brand. Despite its widespread use in other product categories, to date no research has examined the brand personality characteristics of major social media platforms. Major social networking sites (SNSs) are powerful brands and, like other brands, they are at the mercy of consumer perception. With the role SNSs play in marketing communication continuing to grow, an understanding of consumer perception of these platforms may suggest certain platforms have more desirable associations than others. This analysis examines the five brand personality traits of sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness for

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six prominent social media platforms. Results of this analysis suggest that the social media platform with the most defined personality is Pinterest, which scored highest for sophistication and sincerity while being the least rugged. Using hierarchical regression analysis, we also determined how the Big Five human personality characteristics, combined with brand personality characteristics, influence the use of specific social media platforms.

The use of social media sites has reached a critical mass of adult Internet users, with 71% of U.S. adults using at least one social networking site and 52% using multiple social networking sites (Duggan et al., 2015). Social media sites allow users to connect online to pre-existing networks, or to create new networks for such purposes as maintaining relationships, entertainment, self-expression, and passing the time (Hunt, Atkin, & Kirshnan, 2012; Papacharissi & Mendelsen, 2011; Sheldon, 2008). The most widely used SNS platforms are Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest (Duggan et al., 2015). With each of these platforms having different functions and audiences, it is common for users to join multiple platforms.

As is the case with other consumption decisions, with many social media platforms available, consumers have choices regarding which platforms they will use, and which they will not. Batra, Lehmann, and Singh (1993) noted that consumers develop brand associations using product attributes, associations, symbols, and names, among other factors. Just as the character traits of people make them more or less compatible, people often base

their consumption decisions for brands on perceived compatibility.

While the basis of social network sites is human interaction, marketers are drawn to any large aggregation of consumers, and have been drawn to social media platforms. Mangold and Faulds (2009) noted “social media is a hybrid element of the promotion mix because in a traditional sense it enables companies to talk to their customers, while in a non-traditional sense it enables customers to talk directly to one another” (p. 357). Heinonen (2011) added that social media users are increasingly discussing and creating content about brands, which further prompts brands to involve themselves in social media conversations. An important consideration for marketers is how consumers view a given platform, as Mady (2011) noted that individuals’ perceptions of where the information is received influences their perception of, and motivation to consume, the content.

The evolution of categorization of personality traits has been well documented in the scholarly literature. The most prominent personality traits that have developed from these research paradigms are the Big Five (Costa & McCrae, 1990) or the Big Three (Eysenck, 1990) models. These personality models have been applied to a vast array of contexts to understand human behavior, and more recently, behaviors surrounding new media technology. The most widely adopted model of brand personality was put forth by Aaker (1997) positing that, like humans, brands develop personality characteristics in the eyes of consumers over time.

Working off studies of human traits, researchers began examining consumers' use of brand descriptors.

McCracken (1993) noted that brands espouse social status, nationality, ethnicity, gender, or other attributes. Factor analysis allowed Aaker (1997) to hone in on the constructs that tend to be “enduring and distinct” (Aaker, 1997, p. 347) when determining consumers’ preferences for a particular brand. Focusing on brand characteristics, Aaker (1997) developed a scale that measures a brand’s perception in terms of sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness.

The purpose of this study is to determine how popular social networking sites are viewed in terms of their brand personality traits. Social networking sites (SNSs) are brands, and have brand associations attached to them. Both consumers and organizations are interested in fostering a better understanding of social media consumption patterns. This study will explore the brand characteristics that consumers associate with each platform, and whether the combined influence of human personality characteristics and brand personality characteristics may influence social network use.

Human Personality Traits

Human personality traits, such as the Big Five, have been applied in many contexts to understand media behavior. The most commonly identified personality characteristics (Costa & McCrae, 1990; John & Srivastava, 1999) are extraversion, neuroticism, openness to experience, conscientiousness, and agreeableness. Individuals who are social and energetic are often characterized as extraverts, while tendencies toward anxiousness or self-consciousness suggest high levels of neuroticism. A person rating high for openness to experience enjoys variety and

new experiences in their lives, while conscientiousness is associated with a high level of organization and self-discipline. The final trait in the Big Five model, agreeableness, describes individuals who are accepting of and sympathetic toward others.

Extraverts are more likely to join Facebook groups (Ross et al., 2009; Correa, Hinsley, & Gil de Zuniga, 2010), engage in photo sharing (Hunt & Langstedt, 2014), and less likely to guard their self-disclosure or privacy on Twitter (Jin, 2013). Individuals high in neuroticism are more likely to control their online presence via social media platforms (Ross et al., 2009; Jin, 2013). Conscientiousness leads to active photo sharing as a means of maintaining relationships (Hunt & Langstedt, 2014). Trait agreeableness increases empathetic concern among online consumers, which then increases their overall satisfaction (Anaza, 2014). People who are open to experiences prefer variety and novel media forms (e.g., Finn, 1997).

Brand Personality

Working off the scholarly community's efforts in understanding human personality characteristics, Aaker (1997) developed the construct of "brand personality." Defined as "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand," (Aaker, 1997, p. 347) the Aaker model has five dimensions. A brand's sincerity considers consumer perception of their honesty, wholesomeness, cheerfulness, and how down-to-Earth the brand is. Excitement explores the brand's level of spirit, imaginativeness, and how up-to-date they are. A high score for competence suggests a brand is considered reliable, intelligent and successful. While sophistication explores a brand's level of association with the

upper class, and how charming it is perceived, ruggedness measures the level to which a brand is seen as outdoorsy and tough.

Sung and Kim (2010) examined how the five aforementioned brand characteristics each impact brand trust and brand affect, and ultimately brand loyalty. Their findings have several implications for this body of research. Brand sincerity is, not surprisingly, a strong predictor of brand trust. This research also found that exciting and sophisticated products influence brand affect more than brand trust. Sung and Kim (2010) also outline the important role of marketing and advertising in determining brand personality characteristics.

People are typically drawn to brands whose attributes espouse something for which they wish to be associated (McCracken, 1993). The brand personality literature is full of examples of brands and the characteristics associated with them. For example, the clothing line Gucci is considered sophisticated while Old Navy is considered sincere (e.g., Kim & Sung, 2013). Brands that exemplified each of the five traits presented by Aaker (1997) were as follows: Ruggedness – Nike, Competence – *The Wall Street Journal*, Sophistication – Guess jeans, Sincerity – Hallmark cards, and Excitement – MTV.

Congruence between consumers and the brands they use has been well established in the literature (see Nienstedt, Huber, & Seelmann, 2012). Park and John (2010) predicted that consumer perceptions regarding of their personality might be influenced by the brands they consume. Their research concluded that this occurred in some, but not all cases. Research by Nienstedt et al. (2012) demonstrated that congruence increased loyalty and brand

relationships for magazines, therefore extending this body of research to media brands.

To tie the Big Five personality characteristics to brand characteristics, researchers examined a more direct relationship between the five psychological traits and brands (Mulyanegara, Tsarenko, & Anderson, 2009). The researchers hypothesized a strong relationship between human personality traits and perceived brand characteristics for fashion products. Although they reported weak predictive associations, they found some interesting results, which included that conscientious consumers prefer “trusted” brands while extroverted consumers prefer “sociable brands.” Other scholars working in this research area also found that consumers prefer to use brands congruent with their personalities (Huang, Mitchell, & Rosenbaum-Elliott, 2012).

Research has extended the study of brand characteristics to corporate brands. Keller and Richey (2006) explained that corporate brand characteristics represent the employees of a corporation as a whole; focusing on the heart, mind, and body dimensions of a brand. In their work, they explain that the “heart” includes the passionate and compassionate characteristics associated with the corporation. The “body” represents the agile and collaborative traits while the “mind” represents the creative and disciplined traits. Recently, Vernuccio (2014) assessed how corporations are representing their brands via social media platforms. She identified the three “principal” ways to build a corporation’s brand via social media: use social media in public relations initiatives, listen to consumers via social media, and interact online. Her findings indicate that corporations tend to err on the side of caution on so-

cial networking sites, when they should be actively engaging in conversation with their audience.

Social Networking Sites

The scholarly literature examining the role of social networking sites has increased exponentially in recent years. Early definitions of social networking sites (SNSs) used a broad definition of social networking. In early work in this area, boyd & Ellison defined social networking sites as “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (2008, p. 211). This general framework for social networking sites is inclusive of various platforms with unique purposes, such as using LinkedIn for professional relationship building and using MySpace to connect with music and musicians. New types of social platforms are being introduced to both the consumer and professional market regularly. However, there are some platforms that have much higher levels of adoption – most notably Facebook.

The most widely adopted social networking platform is Facebook (Duggan et al., 2015). Facebook research has yielded findings in a number of areas including online privacy (Butler, McCann, & Thomas, 2011), motives (Hunt et al., 2012; Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011), youth-related issues (boyd, 2014), and politics (Johnson & Perlmutter, 2010). Research in this area has also looked at enterprise social networking – focusing on organizations’ internal communication (Leonardi, Huysman, & Steinfield, 2013), advertising (see Khang, Ke, & Lee, 2012), and prod-

uct branding (Gensler, Volckner, Liu-Thompkins, & Wiertz, 2013). These newer applications of Facebook research are more relevant to the brand literature but do not inform our understanding of the brand characteristics of the social networking sites in and of themselves. The research community has not examined the brand characteristics associated with social media platforms.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

Here we present the dominant brand characteristics we predict to be associated with the most frequently used social networking sites.

LinkedIn markets itself as “the world’s largest professional network” and targets working professionals (LinkedIn, 2015, para 1; Li & Bernoff, 2011). As a social networking site, the platform has often adapted since its inception in 2003 to keep with popular trends in SNSs, such as adding a “news feed” feature (van Dijck, 2013). The platform focuses on highlighting strong professional skills as opposed to conveying emotional forms of expression (van Dijck, 2013). Because of the utilitarian- rather than hedonic- nature of the platform, we hypothesize that:

H1: LinkedIn will score the lowest for brand personality trait Excitement.

Photo sharing platforms and mobile applications have grown steadily with the diffusion of smartphones and the improvement in camera phone quality. Photo sharing is a relational form of communication and is often influenced by one’s peer network (Hunt, Lin, & Atkin, 2014a). In addition, photo sharing can be used as a means of presenting oneself to the online world and as a form of self-

expression (Hunt, Lin, & Atkin, 2014b). About one-quarter of online adults use Instagram and adoption has increased in every demographic (Duggan et al., 2015). As a social media platform created for mobile devices, as well as focusing on images, Instagram is an imaginative, modern platform. When considering its creative and social uses along with the platform's dynamic growth, we hypothesize that:

H2: Instagram will score highest for the brand personality trait Excitement.

The mobile application Snapchat is widely used among teens and young adults. The platform has seen increased growth in recent years and is a novel approach to multi-media messaging with 41% of teens using the application (Lenhart, 2015). Users capture an image or video and send it to their desired recipients, but it disappears after a short amount of time (Snapchat, 2015). While other platforms are public and promote linking, Snapchat focuses on keeping users within the platform (Benton, 2015). Because information on Snapchat is made to quickly disappear, some users have adopted the platform to send images and messages of a crude or sexual nature. This being a common belief about medium, we hypothesize that:

H3: Snapchat will score lowest for Sophistication.

Ruggedness is often associated with outdoorsy and being tough (e.g., Aaker, 1997). The social media platform, Pinterest, is designed for users to collect images on the web and pin them to their virtual board. Pinterest is growing with 28% of online adults using the site and females predominately using the platform (Duggan et al.,

2015; McDermott, 2014). Based on the demographic data and the purpose of the platform we predict:

H4: Pinterest will score lowest for Ruggedness.

Predictions for the remaining brand traits are less clear. We do not have grounds to hypothesize which social media brand will be identified as the most or least sincere or competent. Additionally, we do not have information that allows us to hypothesize which social media brand will score highest for sophistication or competence. With this in mind, we propose the following two research questions:

RQ1: Which social media brand will score highest for (a) Sophistication, (b) Sincerity, (c) Competence, (d) Ruggedness?

RQ2: Which social media brand will score lowest for (a) Sincerity and (b) Competence?

Consumers will often select brands for use based on perceptions of the character of the brand. To our knowledge, no research has been conducted exploring whether consumers select which social media platform to use based on their perception of the social media brand's personality. With this in mind, we propose the following research question:

RQ3: Will perceived brand personality traits predict the use of social media platforms?

Methods

Sample and Procedure

Data was collected using an online survey, from which 170 usable responses were obtained. The sample

included 103 females and 53 males. Fourteen additional respondents did not state their sex. The sample was composed of college students who were offered credit or had a chance of winning gift cards for completing a survey. Students were recruited via electronic mail and their online course management systems. Students read the informed consent page online and if they agreed to participate, proceeded to the online survey. The third-party company, Survey Monkey, hosted the survey online.

Measures

Brand Personality. The perceived personality traits of Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Snapchat, Instagram, and LinkedIn were measured using Aaker's (1997) brand personality traits. These scales measure the brand's sincerity, competence, sophistication, excitement, and ruggedness. For each item, respondents indicated their level of agreement on a 7-point scale from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree. *Sincerity* assesses the how the brand was rated on beliefs that the site is honest, wholesome, cheerful, and down-to-Earth. *Excitement* assesses the how the brand was rated on beliefs that the site is daring, spirited, imaginative, and up-to-date. *Competence* assesses the how the brand was rated on beliefs that the site is reliable, intelligent, and successful. *Sophistication* assesses the how the brand was rated on beliefs that the site is charming and upper class. *Ruggedness* assesses the how the brand was rated for masculinity, strength, and toughness. Several scales of differing lengths have been created to measure these brand personality traits.

Nunnally (1978) suggested 0.7 as the lower bound of alpha reliability needed for scales. In total, this analy-

Table 1*Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Scores for Brand Personality Traits*

	Excite- ment	Sophisti- cation	Sincerity	Compe- tence	Rugged- ness
Facebook	$\alpha \geq .865$	$\alpha \geq .783$	$\alpha \geq .852$	$\alpha \geq .765$	$\alpha \geq .615$
Twitter	$\alpha \geq .872$	$\alpha \geq .732$	$\alpha \geq .816$	$\alpha \geq .803$	$\alpha \geq .789$
Pinterest	$\alpha \geq .930$	$\alpha \geq .824$	$\alpha \geq .904$	$\alpha \geq .846$	$\alpha \geq .730$
Instagram	$\alpha \geq .851$	$\alpha \geq .777$	$\alpha \geq .778$	$\alpha \geq .803$	$\alpha \geq .789$
LinkedIn	$\alpha \geq .894$	$\alpha \geq .542$	$\alpha \geq .839$	$\alpha \geq .920$	$\alpha \geq .655$
Snapchat	$\alpha \geq .895$	$\alpha \geq .815$	$\alpha \geq .838$	$\alpha \geq .852$	$\alpha \geq .707$

Table 2*Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Scores for Big Five Model*

Neuroticism	$\alpha \geq .810$
Conscientiousness	$\alpha \geq .803$
Extraversion	$\alpha \geq .778$
Agreeableness	$\alpha \geq .469$
Openness to Experience	$\alpha \geq .761$

sis utilized 35 scales, measuring the NEO personality traits of respondents and five brand personality scales for each of the six social media platforms examined. While 31 scales met the .7 threshold, four did not, and were not included in the regression analysis. The four which were removed from the analysis were: Agreeableness, Facebook Ruggedness, LinkedIn Sophistication, and LinkedIn Ruggedness. Alpha reliability scores for all the scales have been included as tables 1 and 2.

Personality Characteristics. The Big Five personality traits were assessed using an adapted form of the NEO-PI-R scale (Goldberg, 1992). This scale included measures of extraversion, neuroticism, openness to experience, con-

scientiousness, and agreeableness.

Results

The first hypothesis predicted that LinkedIn would score the lowest for the brand personality trait excitement. When looking at the average scores for each of the six social media platforms, LinkedIn scored the lowest for the brand personality trait excitement ($M = 3.89$). The other average scores ranged from 3.95 to 5.05, thus H1 was supported by this analysis. The second hypothesis predicted that Instagram would score the highest for the brand personality excitement. The excitement scores for both Instagram and Pinterest were ($M = 5.05$), partially supporting the second hypothesis. It was predicted that Snapchat would score the lowest for the brand personality trait sophistication (H3). This hypothesis was supported by the analysis, with Snapchat scoring the lowest in sophistication ($M = 2.72$). The fourth hypothesis predicted that Pinterest would be rated the lowest on ruggedness. This hypothesis was also supported ($M = 3.02$). Table 3 shows the highest and lowest brand characteristic scores for each platform.

Research question one posed the question of which social media platform would score the highest for sophistication (RQ1a), sincerity (RQ1b), competence (RQ1c), and ruggedness (RQ1d). Pinterest scored the highest for sophistication ($M = 4.27$) and sincerity ($M = 4.81$), while LinkedIn scored the highest for competence ($M = 4.81$), and ruggedness ($M = 4.13$). The second research question assessed which social media brand would score the lowest for sincerity (RQ2a) and competence (RQ2b). Snapchat scored the lowest for sincerity ($M = 3.37$), as well as com-

Table 3*Average Score for Brand Personality Traits*

	Average Scores for Brand Personality Traits				
	Excite- ment	Sophisti- cation	Sinceri- ty	Compe- tence	Rugged- ness
Facebook	3.95	2.73*	3.66	4.04	3.64
Twitter	4.74	2.96	3.52	3.82	3.72
Pinterest	5.05**	4.27**	4.81**	4.37	3.02*
Instagram	5.05**	3.76	4.19	4.04	3.58
LinkedIn	3.89*	3.52	4.03	4.81**	4.13**
Snapchat	4.76	2.72*	3.37*	3.12*	3.48

*denotes lowest value(s) for brand personality trait

**denotes highest value(s) for brand personality trait

petence ($M = 3.12$). In two instances, when determining the platforms that scored the highest and lowest on a personality trait, the results were statistical tied. In one such occurrence, Facebook ($M = 2.73$) was in a statistical tie with Snapchat ($M = 2.72$) for having the least sophisticated brand personality, and did not score highest or lowest in any other category. Twitter did not score highest or lowest for any brand personality trait, while Instagram statistically tied with Pinterest as scoring highest for excitement ($M = 5.05$). The analysis found LinkedIn to be perceived as the most rugged ($M = 4.13$) while Pinterest was rated the least rugged ($M = 3.02$). LinkedIn received the most mixed ratings, scoring highest for competence ($M = 4.81$) while also being perceived as the least exciting brand ($M = 3.89$). In addition to rating the highest in excitement, in a tie with Instagram, Pinterest also rated highest for sophistication ($M = 4.27$) and sincerity ($M = 4.81$). In contrast, Snapchat rated lowest as a brand for sophistication ($M = 2.72$), sincerity ($M = 3.37$), and compe-

tence ($M = 3.12$).

The second analysis (RQ3) explored whether brand personality characteristics might predict consumers' time spent on social media platforms. A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted for each platform: Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat. Because prior studies have found sex and the Big Five traits to predict media use, these predictors were put in the first block, with the brand personality traits (Excitement, Sincerity, Ruggedness, Competence, Sophistication) added in the second block.

For the social media site Facebook, the initial regression found female sex ($\beta = .245, p < .01$) to be the only predictor of time spent on Facebook, explaining 5.3% of the variance. When including the brand personality predictors in a hierarchical analysis, female sex ($\beta = .291, p < .001$), and the brand personality characteristic of perceived competence ($\beta = .320, p < .001$), predicted Facebook time use, increasing the variance explained to 14.3%.

For the social media site Twitter, the initial regression found neither the respondents' sex nor the Big Five personality traits to predict time spent on Twitter. When including the brand personality predictors, the brand personality characteristic perceived sincerity ($\beta = .384, p < .001$) predicted Twitter time use, and explained 14.2% of the variance.

For the social media site Pinterest, the initial regression found female sex ($\beta = .454, p < .001$) to be the only predictor of time spent on Pinterest, explaining 19.9% of the variance. When including the brand personality predictors in a hierarchical analysis, female sex ($\beta = .378, p < .001$), and the brand personality characteristics of per-

ceived sincerity ($\beta = .264, p < .001$), predicted Pinterest time use, increasing the variance explained to 25.8%.

For the social media site Snapchat, the initial regression found the respondent's level of extraversion ($\beta = .189, p < .05$), and conscientiousness ($\beta = -.189, p < .05$) to predict time spent on Snapchat, explaining 5.3% of the variance. When including the brand personality predictors in a hierarchical analysis, the respondents level of extraversion ($\beta = .174, p < .05$), conscientiousness ($\beta = -.219, p < .01$), and the brand personality characteristics of perceived sincerity ($\beta = -.311, p < .05$) and perceived competence ($\beta = .474, p < .01$), predicted Snapchat time use, increasing the variance explained to 11.5%. It is worth noting that both conscientiousness and sincerity were statistically significant negative predictors of Snapchat use.

For the social media site Instagram, the initial regression found the respondent's female sex ($\beta = .225, p < .01$) to predict time spent on Instagram, explaining 4.4% of the variance. When including the brand personality predictors in a hierarchical analysis, female sex ($\beta = .158, p < .056$) approached significance, while the brand personality characteristics of perceived sincerity ($\beta = -.209, p < .05$) and perceived excitement ($\beta = .195, p < .05$), predicted Instagram time use, increasing the variance explained to 15.2%.

For the social media site LinkedIn, the initial regression found neither the respondents' sex nor the Big Five personality traits to predict time spent on LinkedIn. When examining brand personality predictors, perceived competence ($\beta = .394, p < .001$) predicted LinkedIn time use, explaining 14.9% of the variance.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the brand personality characteristics associated with the most widely adopted Social Networking platforms. Research in brand personality suggests that exemplifying a favorable personality characteristic is a sign that your brand stands out in the perceptions of consumers. Organizations are trying to find strategic ways to utilize social media platforms to leverage their business and organizational goals. These findings will help illuminate the perception of these social media platforms in the eyes of consumers. This analysis determined that human and brand personality characteristics together explain the use of most popular social networking sites more thoroughly than human personality characteristics do on their own. More surprisingly, the variance explained by the platforms' brand personalities proved a stronger predictor of media use than the users' personality traits.

Consumers gravitate toward brands whose personalities they find favorable. By extension, if perceptions about platforms may influence perceptions of the brands on these platforms, brands may wish to consider whether to interact with their consumers on certain media platforms.

With no previous research conducted in this area, this analysis first explored perceptions of the six social media platforms by assessing their brand personality traits. Results of this analysis suggest that the social media platform with the most identifiable personality is Pinterest, which scored highest as the most sophisticated, the most sincere, and the least rugged, and also tied with Instagram as the most exciting platform. The most unfavorable

brand personality ratings were given to Snapchat, which scored lowest for sincerity and competence, and statistically tied with Facebook for the lowest rating for sophistication. The novelty of these “newer” platforms may explain why their scores were more extreme than the more established platforms of Facebook and Twitter. Within organizational contexts, novel technology use can influence the perception of the user as a specialist (e.g., Treem, 2013). This is also in line with an innovator’s ability to influence others through technology use, as outlined in diffusion theory (e.g., Rogers, 2003).

Focusing on each of the brand personality traits, some interesting findings can be extrapolated by looking beyond the platform with just the highest and lowest rating. Exciting brands usually represent energetic and youthful attributes and often target younger demographics (Aaker, Fournier, & Brasel, 2004). The most exciting platforms were Pinterest and Instagram, followed by Snapchat. All three platforms embrace visual images, still and moving, for communication within the platform. This finding supports the notion that users are developing preferences for visual and multimedia applications for social interaction (e.g., Hunt, Atkin, & Lin, 2014a). The platforms that rated the lowest in the excitement trait were Facebook and LinkedIn. Founded in 2002 and 2004 respectively, LinkedIn and Facebook have been around the longest of the six SNSs examined; therefore their novelty can wear on consumers over time. Past research has demonstrated that initial motivations for using SNSs can evolve over time (e.g., Hunt et al., 2012).

Exploring sophistication and sincerity, there are several possible conclusions to be drawn based on Pinter-

est rating highest on both of these attributes. Sophisticated brands are considered upper-class and charming while sincere brands are representative of nurturance and warmth (Aaker, 1997). The sophistication associated with Pinterest may come from its smaller user base. Because it is not widely adopted, this in turn may give the platform an aura of having more discerning user base. The sincerity attribute might be also related to the strength of the ties among Pinterest users. The strength of ties in a relationship can influence the use of mediated technologies and is related to relationship intimacy, kinship, duration, and contact frequency (Haythornthwaite, 2002).

All of the SNSs examined in this analysis were rated relatively high in competence. LinkedIn scored the highest in this attribute while Snapchat rated the lowest. Competence tends to be characterized by brands that are considered reliable and successful. It is not surprising that LinkedIn rated the highest given its professional focus and connections to career objectives. In addition, the site's focus on limiting "emotional" expressions and focusing on professional attributes (e.g., van Dijck, 2013) may, in part, explain these results. On the other side of the spectrum, Snapchat is meant for short, multimedia messages and is sometimes used for crude unprofessional messages. It is no surprise that it rated lower on the sophistication attribute. Also, because its user base is younger, Snapchat may benefit by being viewed as a less sophisticated platform. Snapchat is the third most used SNS by teens, after Facebook and Instagram (Lenhart, 2015).

Ruggedness should not be considered in terms of favorability or un-favorability, but rather measures a brand based on perceptions of toughness. LinkedIn rated

highest in this attribute, which might have been influenced by the college student sample. The fact that LinkedIn rated highest in both competence and ruggedness may also be tied to its demographic base. As noted by Duggan et al. (2015), "it is the only platform where those ages 30-64 are more likely to be users than those ages 18-29" (p. 9). Pinterest rated lowest on the rugged attribute, possibly because of the high female user base. Why LinkedIn scored highest for ruggedness is less clear. One possible explanation is that the comparative absence of creative elements on LinkedIn stands in stark contrast to Pinterest. Consumers associate gender characteristics with their own self-concept and marketers also embrace the practice of reinforcing gender characteristics in branding strategies (see Grohmann, 2009). If one associates creative elements with femininity, they may, in turn, infer that their absence is masculine.

This study also attempted to further our understanding on why people elect to use platforms by assessing the combined influence of human personality types and brand personality traits on SNS use. Several studies have used the biological sex respondents and the Big Five personality traits to predict media use. Using a hierarchical regression analysis, we included these demographic and psychographic variables while also factoring in the respondents brand personality ratings. Because the biological sex and the Big Five were the established predictors, they were incorporated in the hierarchical regression first, with the brand personality traits being included in the second level.

Results of this analysis found that for each of the six platforms, brand personality traits increased the vari-

ance explained. In each case, the variance explained by the brand personality traits exceeded that explained by the respondents' sex and the NEO-PI-R model, suggesting perceptions of social media platforms influence whether or not a user chooses to participate.

The brand characteristics influencing time spent on the social media platforms the most were competence and sincerity. Competence increased the variance explained for time spent on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Snapchat. In the case of Snapchat, extraversion and conscientiousness were also predictors of time spent on the platform. For Facebook, biological sex and ruggedness also influence the variance explained. Sincerity influenced the time people spent on Pinterest, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat. For Twitter, agreeableness also influences the time one spends on the platform. Female sex as well as sincerity predicted the use of Pinterest, while female sex, sincerity, and excitement were all predictors of time spent on Instagram. Taken as a whole, these findings highlight the combined role of personality traits and brand traits in influencing the time one spends using a social media platform.

With social media playing an increasing role in brand marketing communication, brand managers should consider consumer perceptions of social media platforms. Just as advertising in a certain magazine or on a certain television channel may influence consumers' perception of your brand, so too might your presence on a specific social media platform. To understand how consumers perceive a particular SMS may guide brands to platforms that have associations congruent with their own brand's personality.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study, exploratory in nature, revealed several interesting findings, but the study is not without limitations. First, the sample of respondents was predominately college-aged and might view social networking platforms differently than a more varied demographic sample. The cross-sectional survey design does not show changes in the new media environment that a longitudinal study could provide. Regarding the content of this research study, we have only scratched the surface in understanding the role of brand perceptions in social media use. We also did not look at every predictive relationship between human and brand personalities.

Future research in this area should continue to build upon the foundation outlined in this manuscript. One fruitful avenue of continued research would be to track how brand personality characteristics change over time. Another would be to survey corporate employees of their perceptions of the brand characteristics associated with each of these platforms. It is possible that corporate marketers using Facebook might perceive it as a novel platform in terms of business objectives. Additionally, new studies could parcel out the unique and combined influence of personality characteristics on SNS use.

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