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**Article**

City Brand Personality – An International Concept with Regional Appliance in the Tourism Development Strategy

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CITY BRAND PERSONALITY – AN INTERNATIONAL CONCEPT WITH REGIONAL APPLIANCE IN THE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Oana Tugulea*  
Claudia Bobalca†  
Camelia Soponaru‡

Abstract: The personality of a city is an important concept to be created and evaluated by local administrators as this should be part of the touristic strategic approach. The aim of this paper is to create a research instrument that allows researchers to define the brand personality of a Romanian city. In order to use one instrument in a specific geographical area, the instrument has to be created using a qualitative research. Three focus groups were conducted in order to identify items to create the research instrument which is presented at the end of the paper. This research is a preliminary step for a future quantitative research that is intended to measure the city brand personality of the city of Iasi. The created instrument can be applied to any Romanian city.

Keywords: Brand personality; City Brand personality; focus group; personality traits; research instrument  
JEL classification: M39

1. INTRODUCTION

In the marketing literature, brand personality is defined as “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (Aaker, J. L., 1997, p. 347). One important aspect to consider when dealing with branding is that brands have human personality features to help them differentiate from other brands; these features are important to consumers (Goldsmith, Ronald E. and Goldsmith, Elizabeth B., 2012).

Aaker, J. L. (1997) first developed a framework and scale of brand personality dimensions that can be generalised on various product categories. According to Aaker, J. L. (1997), consumers perceive brand through five personality dimensions: Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication and Ruggedness.

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The role of brand personality is important for customer retention and company’s performance (Farhat, Reshma and Khan, Bilal Mustafa, 2011).

There are two possibilities to associate personality traits to a brand. Personality traits are defined by people that are associated with the brand in a direct manner, such as the company’s CEO, the employees or the endorsers (Aaker, J. L., 1997, McCracken, 1989). The indirect manner of associating personality traits is using certain products features, a certain logo, an advertising style, the brand name itself etc. (Aaker, J. L., 1997, Batra, Lehmann, Singh, 1993).

According to Lee Eun-Jung (2009), the concepts required for the new brand personality studies are: (1) context oriented – consumers establish the meaning of brand as their lives are projected, which is contextual; (2) consumer-oriented – the meaning of the product have to be understood from the consumers’ perspectives.

Avis (2012) revises the factor based models mostly used in the brand literature. In his critical review, he identifies three key problems: (1) the problem concerning the category confusion, (2) the problem concerning the domain adjustment and (3) the problem concerning the descriptor selection.

Naresh, Sheena, G. (2012) study in the FMCG industry underlines the fact that Aaker J. L. (1997) brand personality’s traits influence the brands in a strong manner, helping to build brand success. Her research concludes by directing marketers to focus on their brands’ significant personality traits into products strategies of positioning and communication.

Avis, Mark (2012) identifies problems of the brand personality models presented in the literature connected to perceive ness of brands as humanlike, questioning the validity of this theory.
2. BRAND PERSONALITY CONCEPT APPLIED IN VARIOUS AREAS OF RESEARCH

Brand personality concept has large implications in other areas of research as well. For example, Goldsmith, Ronald E. and Goldsmith, Elizabeth B. (2012) concluded that brand’s personality has an important part in generating consumer engagement with the brand. They conducted a survey on 132 college students that supports this statement on the case of North Face brand of clothing. As a conclusion, this study explains how consumers can become attached to a specific brand (Goldsmith, Ronald E. and Goldsmith, Elizabeth B., 2012).

The influence of brand personality on advertising response in the fashion industry was examined by Azevedo, Antonio and Farhangmehr, Minoo (2005).

Farhat, Reshma and Khan, Bilal Mustafa (2011) propose a model that presents the concept of brand loyalty through the concept of brand personality. The model uses brand personality in order to explain the process of customer loyalty.

Perepelkin, Jason and Zhang, David Di (2011) study investigates if consumers identify different brand personalities associated to different types of pharmacies and the possible effect that brand personality types on consumer trust. Dividing pharmacy types into independent and corporate chains, consumers trust slightly more the independent ones as these are perceived to have a sincere and competent brand personality. Sincerity and competence positively and significantly contribute to customers’ trust.

Lee, Hee-Jung, Suh, Yong-Gu (2011), conducted a research that provides a city personality scale applicable to the Korean tourism market. This study considered previous studies applied in different cultural contexts, considering Aaker’s Brand Personality Scale. The City Personality Scale applied in Korea has five dimensions with fifteen items; “sincerity”, “excitement”, “high-class”, “technology”, and “femininity”. The first two dimensions are similar to Aaker, J. L. (1997) model of brand personality. Competence corresponds to “technology” and “high-class”. Ruggedness and Sophistication are very sensitive to the cultural context.

Ahmad, Muhamad Fazil, Abdullah, Zulhamri Bin, Tamam, Ezhar Bin, Bolong, Jusang Bin (2013) conducted a study in order to define a city brand personality scale applicable to the Malaysian context, based on Aaker, J. L. (1997) Brand Personality Scale. The research investigates the causal relationship between determinants of dimensions of city brand and the city brand. Structural equation modelling was used in order to investigate the causal
relationship. Ahmad, Muhamad Fazil, Abdullah, Zulhamri Bin, Tamam, Ezhar Bin, Bolong, Jusang Bin (2013) found four dimensions and seventeen items of the city brand personality: “Peacefulness”, “Malignancy”, “Sophistication” and “Uniqueness”.

According to Ahmad, Muhamad Fazil, Abdullah, Zulhamri Bin, Tamam, Ezhar Bin, Bolong, Jusang Bin (2013), the Malaysian context presents a slightly different scale for city brand personality comparing to Aaker, J. L. (1997) Brand Personality Scale. In Ahmad, Muhamad Fazil, Abdullah, Zulhamri Bin, Tamam, Ezhar Bin, Bolong, Jusang Bin (2013) study, the city brand personality in the Malaysian context has 5 factors: “Peacefulness”, “Malignancy”, “Sophistication”, “Uniqueness” and “Conservatism”. As in Lee, Hee-Jung, Suh, Yong-Gu (2011) study, the dimension of ruggedness was not reliable. The dimension of Sincerity corresponds to “Peacefulness”. The dimension of Competence corresponds to “Malignancy”. The dimension of Excitement corresponds to “Uniqueness”.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted with the purposes to create a questionnaire for a further quantitative research. The purpose of the entire research (qualitative and quantitative) is to create an instrument to assess the City Brand Personality applicable for any Romanian city. As the literature review revealed, the general Brand Personality scale and the City Brand Personality scale are both sensitive to the cultural context. This leads to the necessity of creating the measurement instrument starting with the qualitative research.

This article presents the qualitative research step and the instrument – the City Brand Personality scale resulting from this exploratory and instrumental research.

3.1. Research Method

We conducted three focus groups in order to identify items to create the research instrument. This method was appropriate given the nature of the sample (students at the Al. I. Cuza University of Iasi – Romania).
3.2. Sampling

The investigated population consists of young Romanian educated tourists that visited at least one Romanian city in the past year. Given the nature of the sample and the convenience, we considered students to represent the population. In order to have a representative sample, we selected three groups of 10-12 students of different years of study (bachelors ‘degree - second and third year of study and masters’ degree first year of study) from different specializations in the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration (Public Administration, Management and Finance). The focus groups were conducted in seminar rooms of the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration.

3.3. The research instrument

The focus group guide was tested on one group of 12 Bachelors’ degree, third year of study students at the Business Administration specialization. The focus group instrument was edited according to the suggested rules in the literature.

The first two sections of the focus group guide were dedicated to open up participants to conversation (hobbies, travelling, visiting cities). These sections were not recorded from the results point of view. This part of the guide was very useful in creating the conversational environment.

The third section was composed of questions that asked participants to select one city in Romania they visited in the past year and speak about it from various points of view, as if that city was a person.

The fourth section applied to the same city participants have chosen. Participant were asked to say whether the city they selected is sincere, exciting, competent, sophisticated and rugged and to explain each answer (“Why do you say that?”, “What makes you believe that?” etc.). We followed the general Brand Personality scale in order to find eventual new personality traits that could correspond to various cities.

The questions in the third and fourth section are presented with the results.
3.4. Research results

We present below the focus group discussion results. The first column represents the question in the focus group guide. In the second column we integrated the most representative answers. The third column is composed of raw items to be gathered and analyzed, processes or modified for the quantitative stage questionnaire.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Respondents’ answers</th>
<th>Key words - possible items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If the city you selected was a person, how old would that person be?</td>
<td>30 years – ideal age</td>
<td>Item – age of the city:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50 years – old</td>
<td>b) &lt; 20 years</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50 years – the person is wise, smart, not old, calm</td>
<td>c) 20 - 25 years</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20 years – youth</td>
<td>d) 26 – 30 years</td>
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<td></td>
<td>20 years – no worries</td>
<td>e) 31 – 35 years</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20 years – no money</td>
<td>f) 36 – 40 years</td>
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<td></td>
<td>20 years – fun</td>
<td>g) 41 – 45 years</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20 years – holiday</td>
<td>h) 46 – 50 years</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30 years - in 70 years old outfit</td>
<td>i) 51 – 60 years</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35 – 40 years – mature</td>
<td>60 years</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35 – 40 years – classical and spiritual doctor</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27 – 30 years – ascending person</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27 -30 years – mature</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27 – 30 years – conservator</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27 – 30 years – professional</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27 – 30 years – young</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27 – 30 years – with clear future vision</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27 – 30 years – is not making things by happen</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>35 years – this person seems stable, calming, familiar</td>
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<td></td>
<td>18 years – jovial, seducing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>25 years – charming person</td>
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<td></td>
<td>25 years – ingenious, innocent person</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>55 years – her children help her to combine culture and innovation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>20 years – dreaming person</td>
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<td></td>
<td>67 years – boring person</td>
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<td></td>
<td>80 years – monotonous person</td>
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<td></td>
<td>100 years</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Item city portrait:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>ideal age</td>
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<td></td>
<td>old</td>
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<td></td>
<td>smart</td>
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<td></td>
<td>young</td>
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<td></td>
<td>relaxed/ no worries</td>
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<td>poor/ no money</td>
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<td>for fun</td>
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<td>for holiday</td>
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<td>for young people</td>
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<td>doctor</td>
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<td>priest</td>
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<td></td>
<td>ascending</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Item city personality:</td>
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<td>wise</td>
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<td></td>
<td>calm</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mature</td>
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<td></td>
<td>bohemian (no money)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>calculated</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>conservator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>professional</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>visionary (with clear future vision)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If the city you selected was a person, would that person be a woman or a man?</td>
<td>organised/structured/ is not making things by happen stable calming familiar jovial seducing charming ingenious inventive dreaming boring monotonous</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>---</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man – young man with a long coat on, with a top hat Beautiful woman, fulfilled, coquettish, charming, mysterious, adventurous Sober man, elegant, knight, rational, professional, human, hospitable Calculated woman, worriless, tall, blonde, with vaporous dresses on, with many friends Woman – meticulous, conservative, bacchanal Beautiful woman, confident, simple, hospitable, svelte Man, doctor that leads our thoughts to certainty, thoughtfulness, protection, mature, calculated She is a changeable nature, extravagant This person is a polyvalent man, with a big turn for culture Melancholy woman, full of passion for beauty She is out of ordinary</td>
<td>Item sex of the city: woman man Item city portrait: handsome/beautiful coquette elegant knight tall blond svelte Item city personality: fulfilled charming mysterious adventurer sober rational human hospitable calculated sociable meticulous bacchanal conservator confident simple protector changeable extravagant polyvalent melancholic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| If the city you selected was a person, what job would that person have? | Actress – easily changeable  
Antiquarian  
Teacher – teaches you to have fun and to relax  
Museum, theatre director  
Receptionist – she is friendly, hospitable, beautiful  
Pianist  
Singer  
Cafe patron  
Doctor  
Spiritual doctor  
Visual doctor – shows easy paths to targets  
Practical  
Event’s organiser  
University professor – she is attracted to academics and getting to perfection  
House wife – she takes care of her children  
Retired – enjoys his work’s results along the years  
Mountain saver – his is worried about people getting lost in the mountains  
Touristic guide  
Housekeeper – cleaning is her obsession  
Writer – she is a sensitive person  
Sky instructor for children  
Director of a high school  
Student, alpinist  
Entrepreneur  
D.J.  
Fashion creator  
Painter  
He works in sales  
Waitress  
Cooker  
Publicity agent  
Important person in government | Item city’s job:  
actor  
antiquarian  
professor  
director  
receptionist  
pianist  
singer  
cafe patron  
specialist doctor  
spiritual doctor  
events ‘organiser  
house wife  
retired  
mountain saver  
touristic guide  
housekeeper  
writer  
sports instructor  
director  
student  
alpinist  
entrepreneur  
D.J.  
fashion creator  
painter  
sales agent  
waiter  
cooker  
publicity agent  
important person in government |
| If the city you selected was a person, what personality traits would define that person? | Literate, educated  
Calm, anxiety  
Enigmatic, sincere, mysterious  
Positive, gay  
Opened, talkative, very flexible, with lots of friends (sociable) | Item city portrait:  
literate  
tidy  
Item city personality:  
educated  
enigmatic |
Warm, wise, easy accessible, mysterious, romantic, conservative, non-conformist, sociable, perceptive
Tidy, orderly, wise, refined, educated, altruist, friendly
Ambitious, confident, educated, sociable
Pragmatic, professional, passionate, attached by people, seeking for fulfilment, cultured, educated
She is a communicative, loving, funny and attractive person
She has plenty of initiative
She is a sensitive kind of person
She is an eccentric person
She is an agitated person
This woman is a caring person
Life challenges made him become a better person
He is superficial
he is smart, sociable, charismatic and mysterious
She is an active, solitary person, has plenty of initiative
She is a little impulsive
He is a good speaker
He is a creative person
She is decided, courageous, sociable
The fact that he spends a lot of time outside makes him feel free

sincere
positive
gay
opened
talkative
flexible
warm
accessible
romantic
non-conformist
perspicacious
refined
altruist
ambitious
confident
pragmatic
passionate
sociable/attached to
people
seeking for fulfilment
cultured
communicative
loving person
dynamic
funny
attractive
has plenty of initiative
sensitive
eccentric
agitated
caring
good person
superficial/profound
charismatic
solidary
entrepreneur
impulsive
orator
gracious
creative
decided
independent

If the city you selected was a person, what human qualities would define that person?
Educated, hospitable
Passionate, encouraging, like a parent
Sincere, offers what she has to offer with a lot of joy, altruist
Understanding, courageous
Altruist, responsible, emphatic, with a lot of common sense, to be trusted

Item city personality: hospitable
encouraging
like a parent
altruist
understanding
courageous
| If the city you selected was a person, what weaknesses would define that person? | Backbiter, over confident  
Proud  
Vulnerable, vulgar, lying, with moods, is not opened to newness, too conservative  
He is not easily taking risks, is not opened to newness, is individualist, imposes his own opinion, vain  
Naïve, impatient, inscrutable, Spender  
She is a quitter  
She wants to solve things very fast (doesn’t have patience)  
She is jealous sometimes  
He is not confident  
She is emotional  
She is shy  
She can be easily influenced  
She is a quarrelsome, noisy person  
He is whimsical  
She is selfish, lazy  
He is envious and would like to have it all  
He is flattering  
He is ironical | Item city personality:  
backbiter  
confident  
vain/proud  
vulnerable  
vulgar  
conservator  
liar  
moody  
individualist  
convincing  
aïve  
patient  
unpredictable  
spender  
quitter  
jealous  
emotional  
shy  
influenced  
quarrelsome  
whimsical  
lazy  
envious  
flattering  
ironic |
| Question                                                                 | Yes, because she is confident, charming | No, we are different characters | Yes, I could learn a lot from her (she is a realized person for her age) | Yes, but only for a superficial relationship because he is unpredictable | Yes, she is a person to be trusted, mature | Yes, she is special, unique, provocative | Yes, warm and pleasant character | Yes, I could learn many things from her because she has a life experience | Yes, she could be a good tutor for me | No, because of her high age, but she is a loyal person | Item city personality: | charming | confident | to be trusted | special | provocative | gentle | experienced | tutor | loyal |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| If you had to describe that person using only one word, what word would that be? | Mysterious                             | Charming                        | Magical                                                                  | Quality person                                                            | Nostalgic                                                                     | Resistant                                                                          | Gay                             | Warm summer rain                                                                | Helpful – helps and involves in saving people | Regenerating – like a pencil (always offers a new beginning to people around) | Sportive – keeps you in shape in winter and summer time | Wise                            | Item city personality: | magical | resistant | quality person | nostalgic | gay | helpful | charming | regenerating | sportive | wise | stag |
| How does the door in front of you looks like, if it had the name of the selected city written on it? | Modern (thermo pan), with classical models, oak tree imitation, with artistic patterns | Natural varnished wood with vertical ditches (straight paths) | White, metallic, flowers patterns (purity) | Double door (opening in two directions, like in a palace) | Polished door (elegance) | Very colourful | It opens with no key | Quality material | Made out of transparent glass | It opens difficulty, you have to push it | High door, old, well kept, double, old architecture, dark brown, renovated | Powerful door | Grandiose door | Simple, fragile, opened door | Item city portrait: | modern | classical | artistic | tall | tidy | Item city personality: | pure | simple | correct | powerful | grandiose | fragile |

**Item city personality:**
- charming
- confident
- to be trusted
- special
- provocative
- gentle
- experienced
- tutor
- loyal

**Item city portrait:**
- modern
- classical
- artistic
- tall
- tidy

**Item city personality:**
- pure
- simple
- correct
- powerful
- grandiose
- fragile
| Is the person sincere?  
| (Dimensions of Brand personality – sincerity) | Sincere and not sincere (evasive) – you have to investigate otherwise he hides things from you  
Infantile sincerity with mystery and charm  
Sincere (elegance, simplicity, charm, magic)  
Sincere – she is the same across the year  
Sincere with close persons, she is to be trusted  
Sincerity is gained in time, through respect  
She addresses with sincerity, she has nothing to hide, she acts naturally | Item city personality:  
sincere  
evasive  
charming  
constant  
to be trusted  
natural |
| Is the person exciting?  
| (Dimensions of Brand personality – excitement) | He is not exciting, he is calm and serene  
She is exciting, is joker, jolly, offers pleasant surprises  
He is exciting, offers a relaxing and funny mood  
He is exciting but not with everyone, he is intellectual  
He is exciting for people that love to explore new places  
She is exciting, she involves you in her activity  
She is partially exciting, at the beginning, followed by relaxation  
She is exciting just at events, she opens up in front of everyone | Item city personality:  
serene  
funny  
jolly  
surprising  
relaxing  
joker |
| Is the person competent?  
| (Dimensions of Brand personality – competence) | He is competent, you always learn something, he is positive  
He is competent, ambitious and to be trusted  
She is competent, skilled, plays her role very well  
She is competent, she has solid knowledge, she has experience, she is professional, she reaches thru her own powers, she finishes what she starts  
He is a tacit competent, he is in top  
She is competent because she is calculated, responsible  
She is competent because she wants everybody to be content | Item city personality:  
positive  
ambitious  
confident  
skilled  
experienced |
| Is the person sophisticated?  
| (Dimensions of Brand personality – sophistication) | He is sophisticated, it’s all new on old  
He is not sophisticated, he is simple, elegant  
He is not sophisticated, he is educated, mature, elegant  
He is sophisticated, handsome, a quality person, visual artistic harmony  
She is sophisticated, she has style, addresses a certain segment (selective), accessible | Item city personality:  
stylish  
selective  
refined  
accessible |
She is not sophisticated, she is simple, opened, accessible

| Is the person rugged? (Dimensions of Brand personality – ruggedness) | She is not rugged, she is sociable, friendly. She is rugged, she is warm only at events time, she is not accessible, not sociable. He is not rugged, he is diplomat, with common sense, educated. She is not rugged, she is educated and amiable. He is not rugged, he is elevate, modern, organised, calculated, hospitable, with good taste, refined, with quality. | Item city personality: friendly, warm, accessible, diplomat, with common sense, amiable, elevate, modern, with good taste, refined. |

The questionnaire was edited combining the items presented in column three and eliminating the words and expressions that have similar meanings. The questionnaire will be applied for the particular case on the city of Iasi, although it can be applied for any city in Romania. The instrument is presented below.

If Iasi was a person, this person had the age corresponding the interval:
- < 20 years
- 20 – 25 years
- 26 – 30 years
- 31 – 35 years
- 36 – 40 years
- 41 – 45 years
- 46 – 50 years
- 51 – 60 years
- > 60 years

If Iasi was a person, this person would be:
- woman
- man

If Iasi was a person, this person’s job would be:
- actor
- spiritual doctor
- sports instructor
- antiquarian
- events’ organiser
- director
- professor
- housewife
- student
- receptionist
- retired
- alpinist
- pianist
- mountain saver
- entrepreneur
- singer
- tourist guide
- D.J.
- cafe patron
- housekeeper
- fashion creator
- specialist doctor
- writer
- painter
If I had to create a portrait for the city of Iasi seen as a person, I would say this person is:

1 – the characteristic is not matching at all    7 – the characteristic is a very good match

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If the city of Iasi would be a person, this person could be characterised as:

1 – the characteristic is not matching at all    7 – the characteristic is a very good match

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Identification data:

I am a:

1. Bachelors’ degree student  
2. Masters’ degree student  
3. PhD student

Year of study:

- First year of study  
- Second year of study  
- Third year of study

Specialisation (Bachelor’s degree students):

- Marketing
- Management
- Economic computer sciences
- Accounting
- Finance
- Economics and international business
- Business administration
- Public administration
Specialisation (Masters’ degree or PhD students) ....................

Monthly income:

1. < 850 Ron
2. 851 – 1500 Ron
3. 1501 – 2000 Ron
4. 2001 – 2500 Ron
5. 2501 – 3000 Ron
6. 3001 – 4000 Ron
7. > 4000 Ron
CONCLUSIONS

This research is a preliminary step for a future quantitative research that is intended to measure the city brand personality of the city of Iasi.

The general concept of Brand personality depends on the cultural context. In order to apply this scale for a Romanian city, a new qualitative research was needed. As the qualitative research didn’t refer to a specific city in Romania, the created instrument can be applied to any Romanian city, on condition that the investigated population consists of educated young Romanian tourists. For another type of target, a new preliminary qualitative study is necessary.

This instrument is not the final questionnaire for the quantitative step. The instrument will be tested on 20-30 respondents in order to filter the personality characteristics and eliminate those features referring to the same characteristic. Also, the quantitative analysis will continue to filter these characteristics during the factor analysis procedure.

The research limits refer especially to the sample restriction (educated Romanian young tourists). This instrument has the advantage to be applicable to any Romanian city but the research can be conducted only for a certain type of population.

REFERENCES


