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## **Country Personality of France: A Qualitative Study**

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### **Abstract**

This qualitative research examines the application of brand personality concept in the context of country branding. From a marketing perspective, brand personality reflects the ideas of employing human personality traits associated with a brand. This concept has been extensively used to market typical brands and products. Country personality, therefore, further extend this concept by describing a country based on brand personality traits. France is selected as a focal country due to its important role in the global area. As research in country personality is relatively scant, thus, in order to fill in this gap, the present study opts for a qualitative research to gain insights in this topic as well as encouraging the possibility that new country personality dimensions and/or traits will emerge. Data collected from twelve Thai consumers reveal eight dimensions of country personality of France: sophistication (e.g., fashionable, luxurious), identity (cultured, patriotic), activeness (e.g., enthusiastic, hurry), freedom (i.e., free, democratic), strictness (e.g., punctual, orderly), friendliness (friendly, easygoing), attractiveness (e.g., attractive, well-known), and macro-environment (well-infrastructure, environmentally-concerned). The study results provide a number of research implications regarding country branding, country personality, and management of France image.

*Keywords:* Brand personality, country personality, France

### **Introduction**

#### **Background**

In brand personality literature, human personality traits can be used to describe a Brand (Aaker, 1997). Although the topic of brand personality has been extensively researched among marketing academia and practitioners, the application of this construct to non-traditional products appears relatively scant. In recently years, marketing scholars have started to apply this construct to non-product entities including, for example, temples (Polyorat & Miwichian, 2018), higher education institutes (Polyorat 2011), and cities (Amatyakul & Polyorat, 2017).

Another nontraditional product that could warrant more attention in brand personality research is the study of a country as a brand where brand personality of a country or country personality may reflect how a given country is portrayed and perceived by using brand personality trait descriptors such as gentle, attractive, and competent. When a country is considered as a brand, brand personality could thus be useful to describe a country. This marketing practice could be particularly useful for country branding. That is, major economic sectors including tourism, import-export, and foreign investment of a country could be promoted through this strategic marketing tool by the proper management of country personality where a country is managed as if it were a brand (cf., Avraham, forthcoming; Gupta et al., forthcoming).

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Given the potential role of country personality discussed thus far, the current research thus seeks to investigate personality of a country to demonstrate that a country also has personality as do traditional branded products. The study results may reveal several implications regarding the development of country marketing campaign.

The present study employs France as the focal country due to several important reasons (Favre 2008). Economically, France is the fifth-largest country. Geographically, it is situated in the central location of the largest market in the world, European Union. Technologically, its leading-edge innovation in healthcare and airspace, just for example, could not be denied. Culturally, this country harbors several world-famous museums and world heritages. Touristically, France draws a tremendous number of visitors each year as evidenced by high traffics in major tourist attractions including the Eiffel Tower, Versailles, and Louvres. As a consequence, France is an interesting country to examine the application of this marketing concept.

Due to the undeniably important role of brand personality in the marketing sphere and the global recognition of the France in several domains, the current research therefore aims to examine the country personality of the France. Next, the literatures in brand personality and country personality will be discussed. Then, the research methodology is described, followed by data analysis. Finally, this study report will end with research implications.

### **Study Objective**

The present research aims to study the country personality of the France.

### **Research Question**

What are the dimensions and traits of country personality of France?

## **Literature Review**

### **Brand Personality**

According to Aaker (1997), the construct of brand personality is defined as human personality traits associated with a brand. Because brand personality is more likely to reflect symbolic identities or value-expressiveness of a brand, as opposed to the utilitarian aspect of the product benefits (Keller 1993). For example, some consumers may be a brand-named mobile phone primarily to demonstrate their life sophistication or socio-economic status rather than for the telecommunication purpose (Amatyakul & Polyorat, 2017). In this sense, brand personality can thus be used as a strategic component in brand positioning as it is more likely to be difficult for a competitor to imitate in comparison with the concrete product attributes or benefits.

A pioneering study in the measurement of brand personality by Aaker (1997) uncovers five dimensions of brand personality: sincerity (e.g., down-to-earth, honest, wholesome and cheerful), excitement (e.g., daring, spirited, imaginative and up-to-date), competence (e.g., reliable, intelligent and successful), sophistication (e.g., upper class and charming) and finally ruggedness (e.g., outdoorsy and tough). A series of factor analysis consistently confirm the validity and reliability of these five dimensions as the structure and items of these five dimensions are practically similar across different genders, age groups, brands, and product categories. As a consequence, it is not surprising that tremendous brand personality studies conducted after 1997 employ Aaker's (1997) framework (Amatyakul & Polyorat, 2016).

### **Country Personality**

In marketing literature, a country could be viewed as a brand, and therefore a country may modify its image to be more desirable (Fan, 2010), resulting in the practice of country marketing or country branding. Country marketing is in fact related to several areas of

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marketing including country-of-origin, destination or place branding as well as tourism marketing (Fan, 2010; Sirisoontorn and Polyorat 2013).

Because many countries endeavor to be attractive, unique, and different from others, country personality could be one important marketing tool for reaching these goals. That is, the construct of brand personality could be applied to a country where brand personality traits relevant to countries could be the focal point. For instance, while Japan could be viewed as humble, the US could be perceived as aggressive (Sirisoontorn & Polyorat 2013). In this sense, various brand personality traits such as, peaceful, attractive, friendly, and aggressive may be used to describe a country and be related to the consumer perception of a particular country.

A number of studies, heavily based on a quantitative approach, reveal several dimensions of country personality. For example, d'Astous and Boujbel (2007) collected data from French-Canadian research participants and reports six dimensions of country personality including agreeableness, wickedness, snobbism, assiduousness, conformity, and unobstrusiveness. Similarly, d'Astous and Li (2009) replicated d'Astous and Boujbel's (2007) findings with Chinese research participants and revealed the six identical dimensions of country personality. More recently, Sripongpun & Polyorat (2018) conducted country personality research in Thailand and found three dimensions of country personality including dependable, charming, and unattractive.

### Methodology

The current research opts for a qualitative approach for a number of reasons. First, there have existed relatively few brand personality studies primarily adopted an unstructured or qualitative technique (Murphy, Moscardo, and Benckendorff 2007). Moreover, a quantitative approach may yield only what occurred and thus insufficiently elicit emotional experience and subjective side of consumers (Pravag 2007). In addition, of the use of qualitative approach may increase higher potential to uncover new country personality traits and dimensions previously unidentified in the literature.

Data collection were conducted with twelve samples of Thai young adult consumers. They were interviewed individually. To encourage informal ambience aiming at eliciting diverse responses from the research participants, the researchers first asked the participants one or two introductory questions. For example, "Have you ever been to France?" or "Have you ever seen or heard about France from any media such as movies, news, or social media?" Subsequently, the researchers told the research participants to imagine France and asked them "if the France were a person, what would be its characteristics?" At this moment, each participant was asked to think about at least five personality traits for France that came to their mind when thinking of France.

### Results

After the apparently redundant words were removed, thirty-three non-redundant personality traits are retained. Based on the semantic relationships among these personality traits as well as descriptions of personality dimensions identified in the brand personality and country personality literatures, eight dimensions of France's country personality are revealed as depicted in Figure 1.

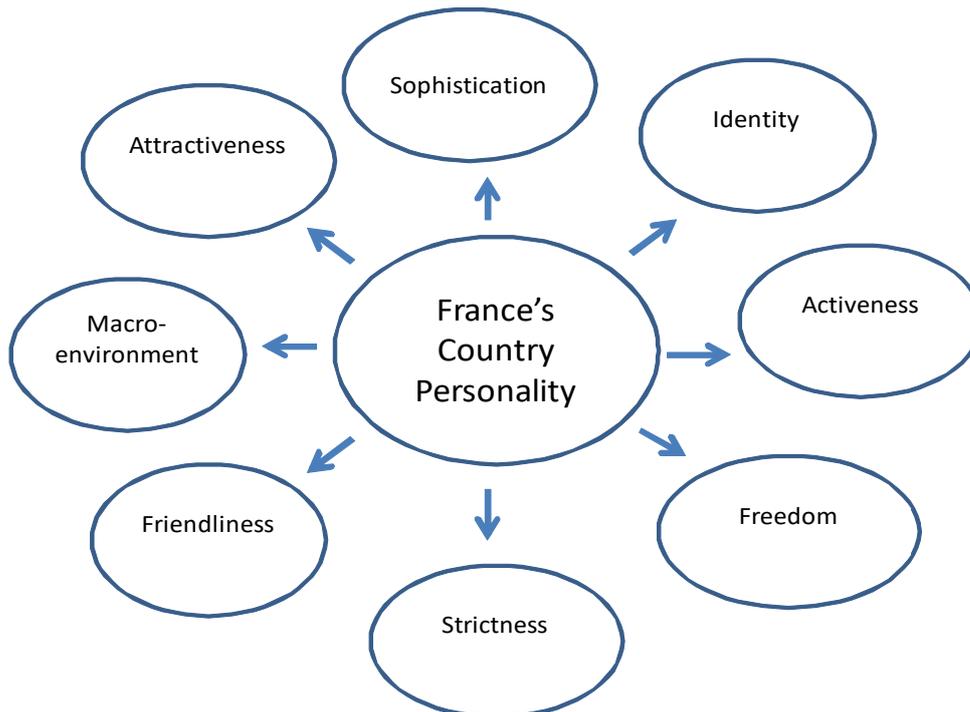


Figure 1. Dimensions of Country Personality of France.

The personality traits belonging to each dimension of France's country personality are as follows:

1. Sophistication (6 items): fashionable, luxurious, perfuming, materialistic, brand-name, and shopping
2. Identity (5 items) patriotic, cultured, unique, self-assured, and upper-class.
3. Activeness (3 items): enthusiastic, hurry, and diligent
4. Freedom (2 items): free and democratic
5. Strictness (3 items): punctual, orderly, and legally-strict
6. Friendliness (7 items): friendly, hospitable, kind, cooperative, harmonious, easy-going, and calm
7. Macro-environment (3 items): well-infrastructure, environmentally-concerned, and well-economy
8. Attractiveness (4 items): attractive, touristic, well-known, and modern.

## Discussions

### Summary

The results from this unstructured, qualitative study reveal eight dimensions of country personality of France: sophistication (e.g., fashionable, luxurious), identity (cultured, patriotic), activeness (e.g., enthusiastic, hurry), freedom (e.g., free, democratic), strictness (e.g., punctual, orderly), friendliness (friendly, easygoing), macro-environment (well-infrastructure, environmentally-concerned), and attractiveness (e.g., attractive, well-known).

### Research Implications

The results of the present research suggest a number of theoretical and managerial implications to the areas of country marketing, and country personality. First, regarding the managerial contribution, based on the specific personality traits found on this study, it is possible that each country may develop unique personalities caused by different social, cultural, economic, political, and environmental conditions. Therefore, the relevant parties

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(e.g., travel agencies and government's tourism promotion office) should consider these factors when formulated marketing messages for their country and/or destinations (cf., Mongkolamnuay and Polyorat, 2016).

Furthermore, from the theoretical perspective, as a relatively smaller number of studies focus exclusively country marketing and country personality, this study therefore contributes to the void in this literature. Next, the country personality dimensions and personality traits uncovered in the current research may serve as a base to develop a measurement scale for country personality. In addition, the results from the current study document some dimensions conceptually similar to those identified in other brand personality and country personality research. That is, the sophistication, the attractiveness, and the friendly dimensions uncovered in the present study are related to those identified in traditional branded product research (e.g. Aaker, 1997), hence suggesting the connection between brand personality and country personality in this respect.

Moreover, this research uncovers a number of new dimensions and traits of country personality. These include identity, freedom, and macro-environment dimensions. These three dimensions may be influenced from the specific characteristics of the focal country, France. That is, France is a unique country where its culture, civilization, art, and language is of tremendous concern. Therefore, it is no wonder that the sense of patriotism, culture, uniqueness, self-assurance, and high culture (e.g., art and architecture) reveal its influence on country personality of France. Next, in terms of the freedom dimension, this finding may come from the impression of French revolution as well as its national motto "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity". In fact, in this regard, future research may consider examine the relationship between politics or political marketing and country personality (Oppermann, 2011; Preechapanyakul & Polyorat, 2015) Finally, the macro-environment dimension may be derived by France's high level of development in economy, infrastructure, and environmental protection.

### Study Limitations and Directions for Future Research

A number of limitations in this study that should be aware and deserve more scrutiny in future research. First, this study employs only one type of quality approach, future research may consider other types of qualitative approach such as projective technique (Prayag 2007) to study this topic. Next, as there is a huge growth in the use social media, future study may explore how personality of a country is communicated in these media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and webboards. Finally, as the present study focuses only one country, namely France, future research may attempt to uncover personality of other countries.

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