

I Promise That You'll Never Find Another Like Me – Linking Brand Personality and Pop-up Store Visits

Lena Kamp

University of Münster

Iina Ikonen

University of Groningen

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This research examines how strategic branding (i.e., brand personality) shapes consumers' intention to visit pop-up stores. Across two preregistered experiments, we test the effects of two key personality dimensions, excitement and competence, on visit intention and explore anticipated experiential value as a mediator. Study 1 shows that both dimensions increase intention to visit, with excitement exerting the stronger effect. Study 2 demonstrates that communicating both personalities simultaneously reduces visit intention and that anticipated experiential value fully mediates the effects of each personality dimension. Together, the findings show that brand personality guides consumers' expectations of experiential value, which in turn drives their motivation to visit pop-up stores, underscoring the importance of communicating a clear, dominant brand personality.

Keywords: Brand Personality, Experiential Retailing

Track: Product and Brand Management

1. Introduction

In today's evolving retail landscape, consumers increasingly seek memorable experiences and meaningful brand interactions, which are needs that traditional retail formats often fail to meet (Henkel & Toporowski, 2022; Kim et al., 2010). Pop-up stores offer a response to this shift: they are temporary, brand-focused environments designed to create experiential consumer–brand interactions rather than generate immediate revenue (Henkel & Toporowski, 2022; D. J. Zhang et al., 2019). Their emphasis on brand-related outcomes distinguishes them from seasonal stores (Klein et al., 2016). Although many companies, such as IKEA and Coca-Cola, rely on pop-up stores as part of their marketing strategy, it remains questionable whether pop-up stores operate on a “one size fits all” basis and are suitable for every type of brand. Research suggests that pop-ups must feel authentic and align with the brand to successfully enhance consumer experiences (Kim et al., 2010; Lowe et al., 2018). Despite the importance of brand perception, especially in experiential settings (Lowe et al., 2018; Sundar & Noseworthy, 2016; Ye et al., 2023), its role in shaping pop-up store effectiveness surprisingly has not been explicitly examined. Furthermore, existing studies employ brands from diverse industries, complicating comparisons and potentially introducing uncontrolled brand effects.

A particularly relevant form of brand perception is brand personality. Unlike attitudes, it has no inherent valence, making the impact of its dimensions less predictable, and it is both highly visible to consumers and actively shaped by marketers (Aaker, 1997). Brand personality is defined as “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (Aaker, 1997, p. 347) and consists of five dimensions: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. We focus on excitement and competence, the dimensions explaining most variance in brand personality (Aaker, 1997). Excitement reflects unique and youthful qualities, whereas competence signals reliability and intelligence (Aaker et al., 2004; Bock & Thomas, 2023). Prior research shows that brand personality guides how consumers interpret brand actions and that aligning personality with marketing initiatives enhances authenticity and positive responses (Eigenraam et al., 2021; Sundar & Noseworthy, 2016).

Building on this, we propose that brand personality meaningfully shapes consumer evaluations of experiential retail formats, such as pop-up stores, which rely heavily on interactive brand encounters (D. J. Zhang et al., 2019). Accordingly, we investigate the research question: How does brand personality affect intention to visit a pop-up store?

2. Hypothesis Development

Prior research shows that brands strongly influence consumer behavior (Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995; Keller, 1993; Verhoef et al., 2009), and qualitative evidence indicates that the brand itself plays a meaningful role in consumers' decisions to visit pop-up stores (Ye et al., 2023). We therefore argue that consumers' perceptions of the brand shape their intention to visit such stores. Brand personality is a particularly relevant perception in this context: it is widely used in practice and research (Davies et al., 2018), familiar to consumers, and, because it is non-valenced, differences in personality profiles provide meaningful contrasts. In experiential settings like pop-up stores, brand personality serves as a symbolic tool through which consumers express and communicate aspects of their identity (Aaker, 1997; Kuo, 2022; Youn & Dadoo, 2021). According to self-congruity theory, alignment between a brand's personality traits and a consumer's self-concept fosters positive behavioral responses, suggesting that consumers who identify with exciting or competent traits may be especially inclined to visit the pop-up store (Choi et al., 2022; Eisend & Stokburger-Sauer, 2013). Psychological needs theory further supports this reasoning by showing that excitement and competence relate to basic human needs such as autonomy and mastery (McManus et al., 2022); thus, interacting with brands that embody these traits may help consumers fulfill or express these needs, reinforcing their motivation to visit the brand's pop-up store.

H1: Both excitement and competence as dimensions of brand personality are positively associated with consumers' intention to visit the brand's pop-up store.

Consumers form perceptions of a brand's personality through accumulated interactions, including direct experiences and brand communications (Aaker et al., 2004; Ghorbani et al., 2022). These impressions create cognitive schemas that guide evaluations and behaviour. Schema congruity theory suggests that people assess new brand actions based on how well they fit these existing schemas (Halkias & Kokkinaki, 2014; Mandler, 1982). A pop-up store is a novel stimulus that consumers judge in light of the brand's established personality. Exciting brands evoke novelty and emotional stimulation (Sundar & Noseworthy, 2016), qualities that naturally align with the hedonic, experiential nature of pop-up stores (Kim et al., 2010). Competent brands signal reliability and functional value (Eigenraam et al., 2021; Sung & Kim, 2010), which fit less well with an emotionally engaging, temporary event. Because congruent brand actions elicit more positive responses (Bock & Thomas, 2023), consumers should be more inclined to visit a pop-up store when the brand personality aligns

with this format. Thus, an exciting personality should generate higher visit intentions than a competent one.

H2: Consumers exposed to an exciting brand personality will report higher intentions to visit the brand's pop-up store than those exposed to a competent brand personality.

Like people, brands can express multiple personality traits. This may be intentional, to appeal to broader audiences, or unintentional, when a brand lacks a coherent identity (Aaker, 1997; McManus et al., 2022). However, emphasizing several strong traits can create confusion or conflicting impressions (Aaker, 1997). Research shows that brands with one dominant personality dimension achieve clearer, more consistent positioning and stronger performance (Malär et al., 2012). We argue that this also applies to experiential formats like pop-up stores. Because these stores are temporary and often require deliberate effort to visit, a clear experiential promise is essential. A singular personality helps consumers quickly understand what the pop-up offers, excitement signals entertainment, while competence suggests learning or information. When both traits are equally strong, the brand's positioning becomes ambiguous, weakening motivation to visit. Additionally, a secondary trait may add little value or even dilute the primary experiential cue, reducing clarity and emotional appeal.

H3: The positive effect of one brand personality dimension (excitement or competence) on visit intention is weakened when the other dimension is also high.

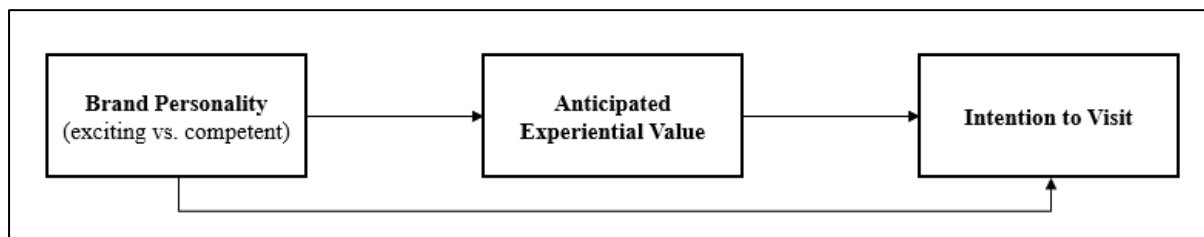
Anticipated experiential value describes the benefits consumers expect to gain from a future brand encounter (Yuan, Yi-Hua, "Erin" & Wu, Chihkang, "Kenny", 2008) and consist for four dimensions: cognitive value, hedonic value, social value, and ethical value (Varshneya & Das, 2017). Anticipated experiential value is central to experiential marketing, where consumers' willingness to participate depends on the value they believe the experience will deliver (Mathwick et al., 2001). Brand personality serves as an important basis for these expectations. Because consumers treat brand personality as a predictive cue for what it will feel like to interact with the brand, it functions as a "promise" of the experience awaiting them at a brand event. Different brand personality dimensions evoke different anticipated benefits. Exciting brands signal novelty and emotional engagement, leading consumers to expect hedonic and social value, such as entertainment, or connection with like-minded others. Competent brands communicate efficiency and reliability, prompting expectations of cognitive and ethical value, such as learning or high-quality information. In this way, brand

personality shapes consumers' anticipated experiential value by shaping what they believe the pop-up store will offer them. These expectations are crucial because anticipated experiential value is a key motivator of behavioural intention. Expectancy–value theory posits that people act when they believe the outcomes of that action will be beneficial (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Thus, when consumers anticipate that visiting the pop-up store will provide meaningful value, they become more motivated to go. This process is especially pronounced for exciting brands: anticipated positive emotions act as behavioural energizers that create approach motivation, making consumers more inclined to visit (Bagozzi et al., 1999). Together, this reasoning suggests that brand personality influences visit intentions because it shapes the experiential value consumers expect from the pop-up store.

H4: The effect of brand personality (excitement and competence) on intention to visit the pop-up store is mediated by anticipated experiential value.

The conceptual model is presented in Fig. 1.

Figure 1: Conceptual model



3. Method and Results

3.1. Study 1

Study 1 examines the basic causal effects of brand excitement and brand competence on intention to visit a pop-up store (H1–H2). In a preregistered between-subjects experiment, participants were randomly assigned to one of four fictitious brand descriptions varying in personality intensity: high vs. low excitement and high vs. low competence. After reading the description, they rated perceived excitement and competence based on a scale by Aaker (1997). Subsequently, participants were informed that the focal brand planned to open a temporary pop-up store. Intention to visit, the key dependent variable, was measured on a 7-point Likert scale by Baek et al. (2020). Control variables included age, gender, consumer-brand identification (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012), and Fear of Missing Out (Z. Zhang et al.,

2020). Study 1 was conducted with Prolific workers ($N = 313$; females = 52.1%, males = 47.6%, other/prefer not to say = 0.3%).

Manipulation Check. An ANOVA confirmed that the four experimental conditions differed significantly in perceived excitement (Welch's $F(3,168.55) = 77.95$, $p < .001$) and competence (Welch's $F(3,169.93) = 30.24$, $p < .001$), indicating successful manipulation of the brand personality dimensions.

Main Effect. To test the hypothesized relationships, we conducted a linear OLS regression with intention to visit as the dependent variable and participants' continuous ratings of brand excitement and competence as predictors. Both excitement ($b = 0.228$, $p < .001$) and competence ($b = 0.173$, $p = .032$) significantly increased intention to visit, supporting H1. To test H2, we compared the relative strength (i.e., standardized coefficients) of the main effects. Excitement ($\beta = 0.228$, $p < .001$) exerted a stronger influence on visit intention than competence ($\beta = 0.102$, $p = .032$), providing support for H2.

3.2. Study 2

Study 2, a preregistered between-subjects experiment, tested the joint effect of brand excitement and competence (H3) and the mediating role of anticipated experiential value (H4). Using the same questionnaire structure as Study 1, we implemented a 2×2 factorial design in which participants were randomly assigned to one of four brand personality profiles: (1) high excitement, high competence, (2) high excitement, low competence, (3) high competence, low excitement, and (4) low competence, low excitement. Anticipated experiential value was measured across four dimensions using a scale by Varshneya and Das (2017). The final sample consisted of 390 Prolific workers (55.9% female, 43.6% male, 0.5% other/prefer not to say).

Manipulation Check. An ANOVA confirmed that the four experimental conditions differed significantly in perceived excitement and competence, indicating successful 2×2 manipulation of the brand personality dimensions.

Moderating and mediating effects. To test H3, we conducted a regression analysis with the two brand personality dimensions and their interaction in our 2 (high vs. low excitement) $\times 2$ (high vs. low competence) factorial design. The interaction term, computed as the product of the dummy variables, was significant and negative ($b = -0.598$, $p = .007$), indicating that when both dimensions are high, the positive effect of each is attenuated, supporting H3.

For H4, we tested mediation using SPSS PROCESS Model 4 with 5,000 bootstrap samples (Hayes, 2018). Two models were tested: Model A with brand excitement as the independent variable and Model B with brand competence, each controlling for the other dimension. In Model A, excitement significantly predicted anticipated experiential value ($b = 0.312, p < .001$), which in turn predicted intention to visit ($b = 0.694, p < .001$). The indirect effect was significant ($b = 0.216, CI_{95} = [.112, .329]$), while the direct effect was non-significant ($p = .316$), indicating full mediation. In Model B, competence predicted anticipated experiential value ($b = 0.689, p < .001$), which again predicted intention to visit ($b = 0.694, p < .001$). The indirect effect was significant ($b = 0.479, CI_{95} = [.343, .626]$), with no significant direct effect ($p = .238$), also indicating full mediation.

4. Implications

The goal of this research was to analyze the effect of an exciting or competent brand personality on consumers' intention to visit a pop-up store of this focal brand. The results of the two studies along with their theoretical implications are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Study Outcome and Theoretical Implications

Hypothesis	Decision	Theoretical Implication
H1: BP $\rightarrow$ ItV	Accept	Both BPs evoke intention to visit a pop-up store
H2: Excitement > Competence	Accept	An exciting BP evokes higher intention to visit, because it feels more congruent with the experiential nature of a pop-up store.
H3: Interaction BP	Accept	Both BPs interact; communication two brand personalities negatively impacts consumers' intention to visit
H4: BP $\rightarrow$ AEV $\rightarrow$ ItV	Accept	Consumers evaluate the value of a visit based on the brand's personality

Note: BP = Brand Personality (exciting or competent), ItV = Intention to Visit, AEV = Anticipated Experiential Value.

Study 1 established a general, causal relationship between the two brand personality dimensions and the intention to visit in an experiential retailing context. The results of this experiment indicate that both exciting and competent brand personalities positively influence consumers' intention to visit a brand's pop-up store. This aligns with prior research demonstrating that brand personality can enhance consumers' willingness to engage with a brand (Eisend & Stokburger-Sauer, 2013). In comparing the standardized effects of brand personality, excitement emerged as a stronger predictor of intention to visit than competence across all participants. This result suggests that while both personality dimensions can enhance consumer engagement, their relative effectiveness is context dependent. Specifically, within the domain of experiential retailing, the emotionally stimulating and hedonic nature of an exciting brand personality appears to be more congruent with the ephemeral and immersive characteristics of pop-up stores than the functionally oriented and stable nature of

a competent brand personality. Accordingly, these findings provide empirical support for the notion that the positive effects of brand personality dimensions vary across marketing contexts, reinforcing the importance of situational fit between a brand's personality and its marketing format.

Study 2 extends our initial findings by examining the combined effects of excitement and competence when both personality dimensions are present simultaneously and by introducing anticipated experiential value as a mediator. The results demonstrate that presenting both dimensions at high levels reduces consumers' intention to visit. Communicating two strong and divergent personality cues creates ambiguity about what consumers can expect from the pop-up store. This supports Malär et al.'s (2012) argument that brands benefit from a singular, dominant personality profile. Managers should therefore aim to prioritize and consistently communicate one primary personality dimension rather than striving to appear equally exciting and competent. Additionally, our finding that anticipated experiential value fully mediates the effect of brand personality on intention to visit offers important theoretical insight. It suggests that consumers infer the type of experiential value a pop-up store will deliver based on the brand's perceived personality and that these value expectations, in turn, drive their behavioural intentions. Clear communication of a dominant brand personality therefore helps consumers form coherent value expectations, whether hedonic, social, cognitive, or ethical in nature, which ultimately increases the likelihood of visiting the pop-up store. Generally speaking, our research reveals how branding can shape consumer interactions in experiential retail environments.

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