
What does Aaker's brand personality scale actually measure?

Michael Bosnjak*, Beatrice Rammstedt**, & Tracy L. Tuten***

*University of Mannheim, Dept. of Psychology II, Mannheim, Germany

**ZUMA Mannheim, Germany

***Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA, USA

Background I: Aaker's Brand Personality Scale (BPS)

- Aaker (1997) proposed a 5-dimensional instrument to assess “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (p. 347):
 - Sincerity (e.g., honest, down-to-earth, wholesome, cheerful)
 - Excitement (e.g., daring, spirited, imaginative, up-to-date)
 - Competence (e.g., reliable, intelligent, successful)
 - Sophistication (e.g., charming, upper class, feminine)
 - Ruggedness (e.g., outdoorsy, tough, Western)
 - Attribute sources: (1) personality scales from psychology, (2) personality scales used by marketers, (3) items generated by qualitative studies
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Background II: Aaker's Brand Personality Scale (BPS) ³

According to Aaker (1997, p. 348), brand personality attributions are based on:

- Person-related associations:
Perceived personality traits of people associated with a brand come to describe the brand's personality (e.g., typical user/ user imagery, testimonials, employees of company, CEO, etc.)
 - Product-related associations and inferences:
Personal or others' experiences while using the brand, product category associations and associations induced by the brand name, symbol or logo, the advertising style, the price, and the distribution channel.
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Background III: Major Concerns with the BPS

- Azoulay & Kapferer (2003):
 - Aaker's BPS is “muddling conceptually and empirically distinct brand identity facets within a single scale” (p. 146). It is an “all encompassing pot pourri” (p. 150), encompassing values, physical aspects, brand performance indicators, etc..
 - Conceptually problematic items (among others): ‘competence’ (reflects abilities, not personality), ‘feminine’ (descriptive?, value judgment?), ‘Western’ (values?)
 - Alternative definition proposed:
Brand personality = “the set of *human personality traits* that are both *applicable* and *relevant* for brands.”
 - Romaniuk & Ehrenberg (2003):
 - BPS items mainly measure classical dimensions of brand performance.
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Background III: Judgmental Processes?

Due to a recent neuroimaging study (fMRI), *brand personality and human personality are NOT processed similarly* (Yoon, Gutchess, Feinberg, & Polk, in press):

- Person-related judgments based on BPS attributes: Medial prefrontal cortex regions activated, known for person-processing.
- Object-related judgments based on BPS attributes: Left inferior prefrontal cortex activated, known for object-processing.

⇒ Fundamentally different processes at the neural level suggest different knowledge structures being used while making “personality” judgments about people or brands, respectively.

Research Question and Hypothesis

- To what extent is Aaker's BPS covering both attribute sources as consumers make judgments about a brand's personality?
 - According to the Yoon, Gutches, Feinberg, and Polk (in press), we hypothesize that: The BPS is rather mapping product(=object)-related judgmental processes, and to a lesser extent person-related ones.
 - As a consequence, BPS profiles under the standard procedure should match more closely the profile produced (on the same attributes) where the typical product is the judgmental object, and to a lesser extent to one when the typical user of the product has to be described.
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Methods: Subjects

- 309 (under)graduate students (from an initial 633 subjects)
 - Eligibility criteria for inclusion: participation in two waves (see below), brand knowledge (related to Mercedes-Benz)
 - 75% undergraduates, 60% female, $M(\text{age})=21.3$, $SD(\text{age})=5.8$
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Methods: Procedure and Materials I

Wave 1: Web-based questionnaire assessing brand-related knowledge, attitudes and evaluations, involvement, purchase probability; personality; demographics.

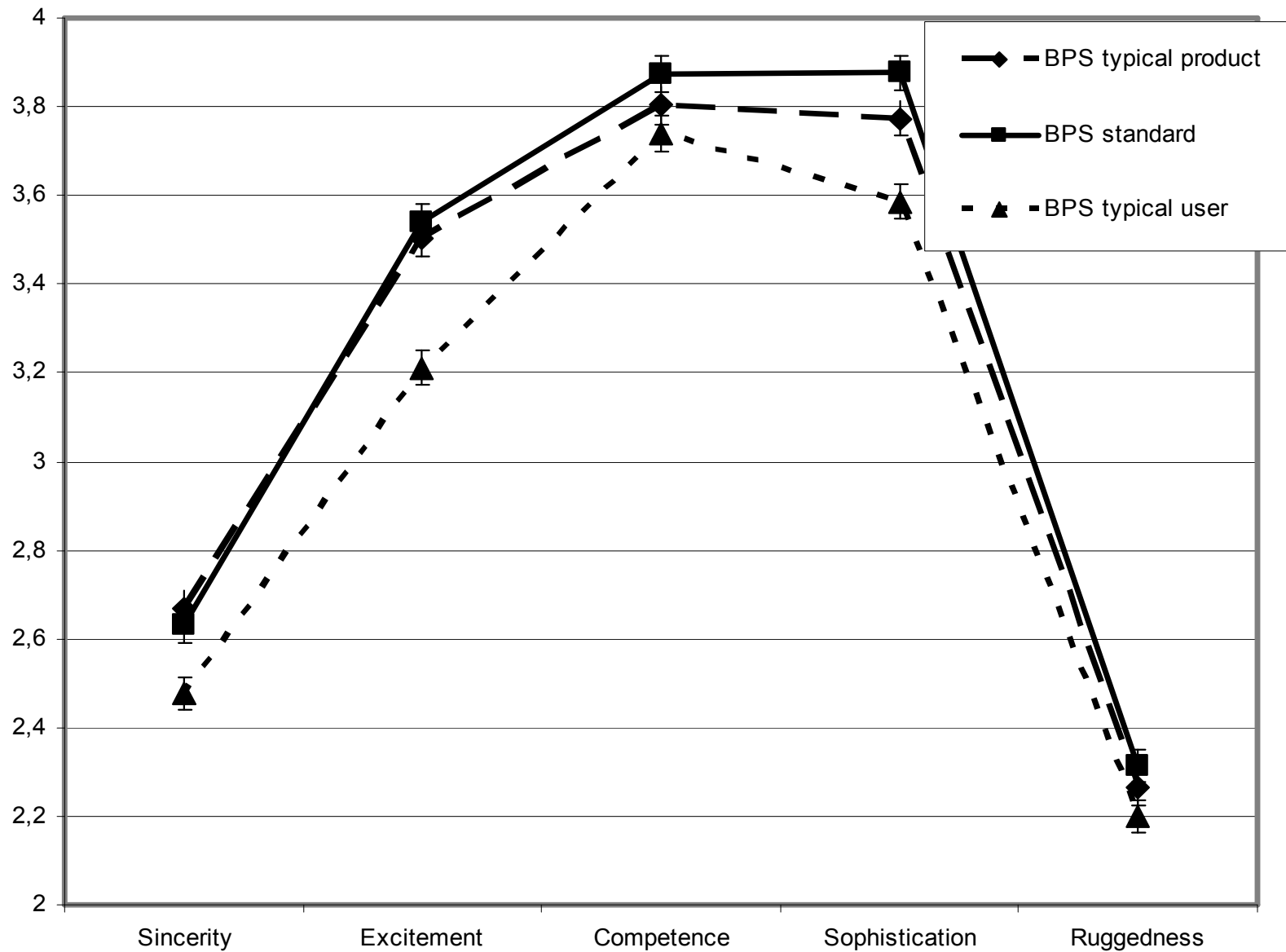
Wave 2: BPS-Scale under three different conditions (within subject experimental design with counterbalanced presentation):

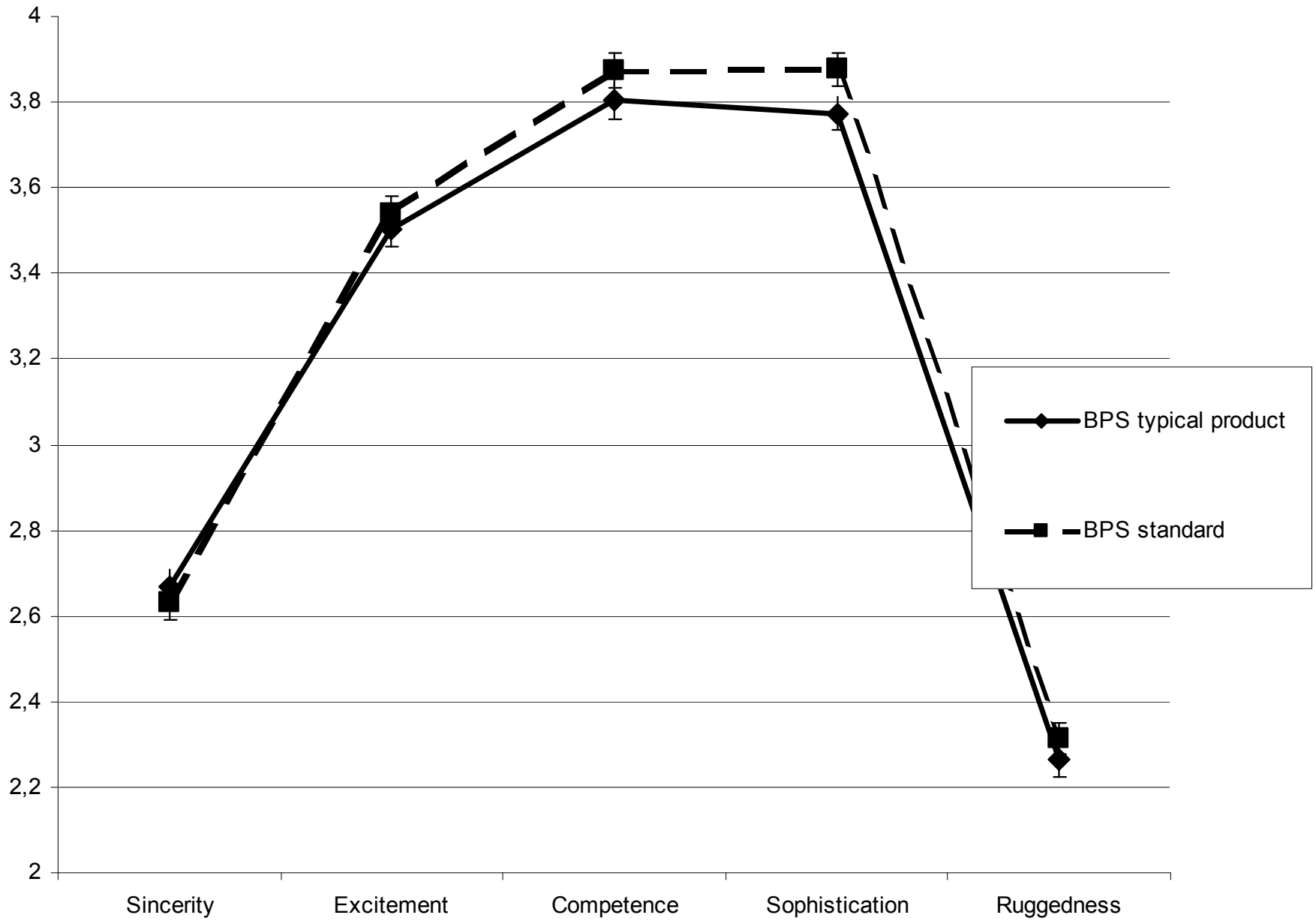
- BPS standard procedure according to Aaker (1997)
 - BPS attributes, typical user as the judgmental object
 - BPS attributes, typical product as the judgmental object
PLUS manipulation check items and items assessing difficulty of task
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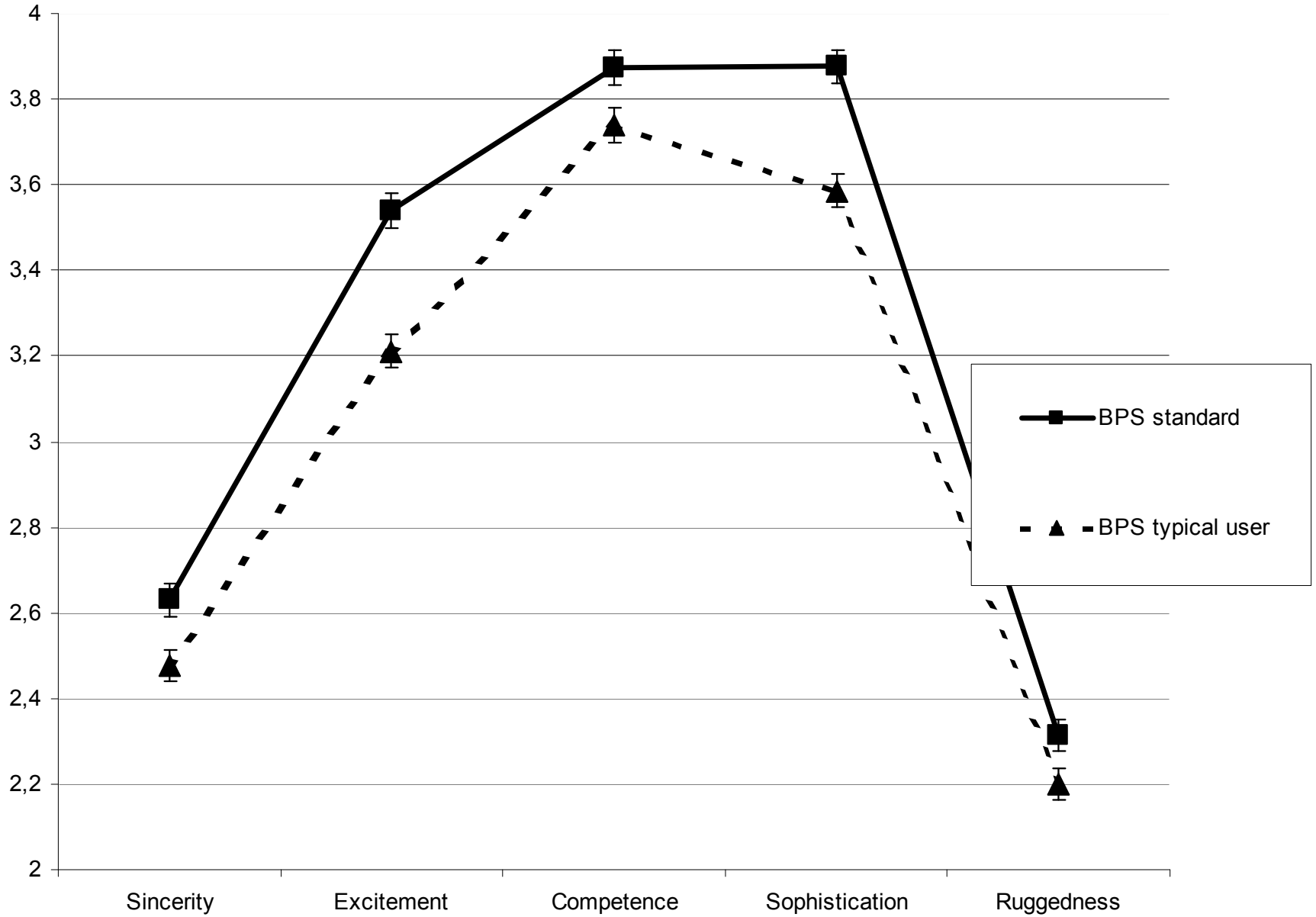
Methods: Procedure and Materials II

- Sketch of BPS standard instruction according to Aaker (1997):
“We would like you to **think of the brand as if it were a person**. This may sound unusual, but **think of the set of human characteristics associated with the brand Mercedes-Benz**. Thinking of the human characteristics you associate with the brand Mercedes-Benz, please respond to the following list of characteristics.”
 - Sketch of BPS *typical user* instruction:
“We would like you to **describe the typical driver of Mercedes-Benz cars**. ... Thinking of the **human characteristics you associate with the typical driver of Mercedes-Benz cars**, please respond to the following list of characteristics.”
 - Sketch of BPS *typical product* instruction:
“We would like you to **describe the cars made by Mercedes-Benz**. Please **think of the characteristics associated with the typical cars produced by Mercedes-Benz**. ...”
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Results: Visual BPS-Profile Comparisons







Results: Profile-Matching Metrics

		Type of Comparison	
		Standard- User	Standard - Product
Matching Metrics	T-Tests per Corrospounding Scale	All pairwise differences sign.	4 differences n.s.; only significant differences for "sophistication"
	Pearson r	.95	.95
	ICC(2/3)	.81/.82	.86/.85
	Alienation coeff.	.69	.68
	Mahalanobis Distance	.55	.13

Summary and Discussion

- Greater match between standard<->product profiles (almost identical profiles!) compared to the standard <-> typical user profiles (almost identical shape, but different elevation).
 - At least in this case, Aaker's (1997) scale tends to measure product-related associations and attributions, and to a lesser degree person-related ones. Construct validity seems questionable.
 - Inclusion of (a) conceptually questionable personality scales from marketing and the (b) qualitative elicitation task while developing the BPS might have outweighed product-related attributes.
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Open Questions and Further Research

- Explanation for elevation being the only difference between conditions?
 - Appropriateness of matching metrics?
 - Results for a broader set of brands?
 - German Brand Personality Scale (Hufschmidt & Bosnjak, 2005) is based on the clearer definition given by Azoulay & Kapferer (2003).
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