

## The Traits of City Personality: A Qualitative Study

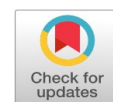
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**Abstract:** City personality means a set of human characteristics associated with the city brand. Several studies have adopted city personality measurement scale to assess their own country personality. In Thailand, there have been studies on the city brand based on quantitative methods, which are unable to identify some emerging personality traits. In addition, there seems to be no research using qualitative methods to study personality traits in the Thai context. Hence, this research is aimed at identifying city personality traits by interviews so as to specifically assess such traits in the Thai city context. Purposive sampling with the students of Khon Kaen University was conducted as the students were able to give detailed information and had relatively long time for interviews. Moreover, Khon Kaen is a city outstanding in both functionality and value, which enables those studying in this city to provide city personality traits categorized into different groups. In so doing, 31 students who were well-informed with this conceptual framework and willing to participate in this study were chosen. The interviews began with categorizing cities into three groups: functional, valuable, and functional and valuable cities so that the research participants could identify which city they know based on these categories. The researchers then put the cities nominated by the participants in order within each category by asking them to choose two cities they thought would best represent each category. Through this process, the cities chosen totaled six, which would answer the questions of city personality traits. Each participant must provide at least five words related to one city, which generated for at least 30 words from each participant. Results reveal that the top three functional cities include Bangkok, Chon Buri, and Rayong. The top three valuable cities are Ayutthaya, Sukhothai, and Chiang Mai. The best functional and valuable cities contain Chiang Mai, Khon Kaen, and Nakhon Ratchasima. Meanwhile, 281 personality traits are found in the Thai city context. Among them, 61 are similar to those identified by previous research on other cities around the world while 220 are discovered in Thai cities only. These results are therefore useful for developing a city personality scale by drawing on the identified city personality traits. It is also interesting to note that both positive and negative city personality traits emerging from this study have never appeared in the brand personality. This means that cities may have different personality traits from those of brands and thus it is necessary to develop a city personality separately from the brand personality scale. As for relevant tourism agencies, this information helps promote positive personality traits for countries and cities. At the same time, it tends to prevent and reduce negative city personality traits. Future studies may further assess these city personality traits by exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, thereby making it possible to develop a city personality scale for Thailand, which can position the right personality for Thai cities.

**Key Words:** City personality, Human characteristics, Traits

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### INTRODUCTION

Brand personality is a concept using a metaphor to characterize a brand as a human in which a brand personality refers to the set of human characteristics with a brand (Aaker, 1997; Saputra & Dewi, 2016). The concept has gained popularity especially in marketing to differentiate and strengthen a brand position (Demirbag, Yurt, Guneri, & Kurtulus, 2010; Krisnawati, Perangin-Angin, Zainal, & Suardi, 2016). Consumers intend to project themselves through consumption of a brand representing their required personalities (Kohli, Suri, & Kapoor, 2015; Lee, 2009; Oetomo & Budiyanto, 2017). The concept of brand personality can be measured following the findings of Aaker (1997) that the brand personality comprises five dimensions i.e., sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness.

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After the introduction of brand personality measurement, the measurement framework has been widely used to assess a variety of such brand as jeans, eyeglasses, shoes and beer (Muller, 2014), and regardless of manufactured products, it has been used in the context of universities, countries, tourist places and cities (D'Astous & Boujbel, 2007; Demirbag et al., 2010; Guiry & Vequist, 2015; Tuglea & Bobalca, 2014; Watkins & Gonzenbach, 2013). Despite some studies focusing on city personality, i.e., Lee and Suh (2011), Usakli and Baloglu (2011) and Vaidya, Gandhi, and Aagja (2009), the brand personality framework of Aaker (1997) fails to inadequately explain city personality (Ahmad, Abdullah, Tamam, & Bolong, 2013; Demirbag et al., 2010; Sahin & Baloglu, 2011).

Few investigations, i.e., Demirbag et al. (2010), Lee and Suh (2011), Vaidya et al. (2009) were conducted to adopt city-oriented measurement frameworks different from the brand personality framework developed by Aaker (1997). These studies were intended to identify brand personality in city context so as to establish a specific measurement scale, but the preliminary data of those studies, such as Ahmad et al. (2013), Sahin and Baloglu (2011), Usakli and Baloglu (2011) were derived merely on a city. Therefore, the generalizability of those studies on developing measurement scales seems problematic.

To our knowledge, there has been research into city personality in India, the United State, Malaysia, Turkey, Brazil, Poland, Romania, Korea and Thailand (Ahmad et al., 2013; Amatyakul & Polyorat, 2016a; Amatyakul & Polyorat, 2017; Demirbag et al., 2010; Glinska & Kilon, 2014; Kim & Lee, 2015; Lee & Suh, 2011; Petroski, de Paula Baptista, & Maffezzolli, 2013; Sahin & Baloglu, 2011; Tuglea & Bobalca, 2014; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011; Vaidya et al., 2009). However, the studies were largely based on the qualitative methodology except those of Amatyakul and Polyorat (2016a), Amatyakul and Polyorat (2017), which relied on the quantitative method and on attempt to analyze which Aaker (1997) brand personality framework lies in Thailand's context. The findings suggest that the Aaker framework fails to be specific to Thailand's context.

Thailand, a case study, is composed of cities with different identities; to illustrate, cities with cultural distinction e.g., Sukhothai and Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya, cities with economic, educational and industrial distinction e.g., Rayong, Maha Sarakham, and Chon Buri or cities with custom, economic, educational and industrial distinction e.g., Chiang Mai and Phuket (Tourism Thailand, 2017). Therefore, Thailand seems appropriate to conduct a study on city personality as it comprises both functional cities, valuable cities and functional and valuable cities. The objective of this study aims to discover traits of city personality using the qualitative methodology.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **City personality**

The brand personality concept has been the case after the statement of Plummer (1985) that a human has personality, so does a brand, e.g., up-to-date, out-of-date, trendy and other characteristics. Customers tend to appreciate a product able to reflect their personality. In other words, the meaning of brand personality is defined by customers to reflect their sense of self and feelings (King, 2016; Plummer, 1985). Therefore, brand personality is of socio-economic significance as customers are convinced of consumption beyond their physical need. To illustrate, some are willing to purchase expensive food merely to experience inner sense of wealth; other may buy a brand-named cell phone solely to show sophistication rather than use for communication. The brand personality is thus considered useful to create value to a variety of products.

The brand personality concept was extensively utilized after Aaker (1997) provided the definition of brand personality that the set of human characteristics associated with a brand. His study suggests that the brand personality could be measured and illustrated by five dimensions, i.e., sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness, all of which could be exhibited into 42 traits (Aaker, 1997). The traits found on the brand personality of the same dimensions are considered to share relation and convey similar meaning (see Table 1).

Table 1: Measurement scale for brand personality Aaker (1997)

Brand Personality	Particular Traits of Brand Personality
Sincerity	Down-to-earth, family-oriented, small-town, honest, sincere, real, wholesome, original, cheerful, sentimental, friendly
Excitement	Daring, trendy, exciting, spirited, cool, young, imaginative, unique, up-to-date, independent, contemporary
Competence	Reliable, hardworking, secure, intelligent, technical, corporate, successful, leader, confident
Sophistication	Upper class, glamorous, good looking, charming, feminine, smooth
Ruggedness	Outdoorsy, masculine, western, tough, rugged

The first serious discussions about the brand personality emerged after the introduction of Aaker (1997)s brand personality measurement scale and the concept has been widely applied for a variety of products (Amatyakul & Polyorat, 2016b). This concept is also applied to not only general goods but also physical areas, e.g., countries, tourist places, and cities (Emirza & Seri, 2013; Hosany, Ekinci, & Uysal, 2006; Sripongpun, Polyorat, & Khanthuan, 2014). In recent years, there has been an increasing amount of literature on city personality; however, several studies argue that those measurement scales suffer from the limitation of generalizability.

The generalizability of Aakers measurement scale seems problematic since it was designated to measure goods in the commercial context, such as jeans, computer and other consumption goods. Nevertheless, when the scale is applied to products different from those studied by Aaker (1997), it is likely to yield inaccurate results. Moreover, Aakers study was conducted in the United States context and the outcomes may not be universally applicable. It is noted that Aakers city personality framework is generally acceptable but not particular area.

A considerable amount of literature has been published on city personality in its own country. Several studies employed the qualitative methodology to discover city personality by collecting data in one area and performing data analysis for quantitative information (Ahmad et al., 2013; Kim & Lee, 2015; Sahin & Baloglu, 2011). Although the results from those studies could perhaps be generalized in other countries, the data collection was conducted merely in a specific city rather all types of city, thus casting doubt on generalizability of the city personality scale if used in a different context of other countries.

In Thailand, Amatyakul and Polyorat (2016a), Amatyakul and Polyorat (2017) conducted two studies on the city personality. These studies applied Aaker (1997) framework to collect data in a city and expressed as the quantitative data. The findings reported certain brand personality found on the Aakers framework; however, the personality belonged to the general brand personality rather the specific traits of Thailand's case city. In country brand personality level, these studied differ from other investigations in the respect of the research methodology used, where both qualitative and quantitative methods were used. Table 2 illustrates city personality in the country context.

The findings show that the personality of the cities are more or less similar and/or different from Aakers (1997) brand personality; moreover, the personality of individual city in each country show certain variations, which may reflect the fact that a single country could be constructed by distinct contexts of a variety of culture (Aaker, Benet-Martinez, & Garolera, 2001; Polyorat, Khantuan, Jaratmetakul, & Boonnon, 2008). Furthermore, some traits in the city were not reported in the study of Aaker (1997), e.g., clean, safe, pleasant, popular, and attractive (Kim & Lee, 2015; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011).

Table 2: City personality in country context

City Personality	Country	Study
Excitement, sincerity, sophistication, competence, ruggedness	India	Vaidya et al. (2009)
Excitement, malignancy, peacefulness, competence, conservatism, ruggedness	Turkey	Demirbag et al. (2010)
Competence and modernity, originality and vibrancy, conviviality, sincerity, cool and trendy	Turkey	Sahin and Baloglu (2011)
Vibrancy, sophistication, competence, contemporary, sincerity	America	Usaki and Baloglu (2011)
Peacefulness, malignancy, sophistication, uniqueness	Malaysia	Ahmad et al. (2013)
Empathy, balance, functionality, charm	Brazil	Petroski et al. (2013)
Peace, neatness, conservatism, other	Poland	Glinska and Kilon (2014)
Features generated by work, physical features, artistic features, financial	Romania	Tugulea and Bobalca (2014)
Excitement, sincerity, sophistication, dynamic, specific, stable	South Korea	Kim and Lee (2015)
Sincerity, excitement, technology, high-class, femininity	South Korea	Lee and Suh (2011)
Sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, ruggedness	Thailand	Amatyakul and Polyorat (2016a)
Kindness, reliability, dream man, excitement, ruggedness, country girl	Thailand	Amatyakul and Polyorat (2017)

In addition to discrepancy of the results, the meaning and explanation given to the city personality by individual investigation are also observed difference. Indeed, providing a definition deems crucial in establishing a measurement scale as information of the purposes and coverage of the scale are considered vital (Prasith-Rathsint, 2013). For instance, Lee and Suh (2011) studied a city personality by using a research question how the informants would describe Paris as a human. Demirbag et al. (2010) defines a set of human characteristics associated with the city brand. However, several studies suggest that Aaker (1997)s measurement scale fails to adequately explain certain particular aspects of city personality due to different contexts of individual brand, city and country. Therefore, the objective of this study is to investigate particular city personality in order to adopt a city personality measurement scale.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is based on the qualitative study. The data were collected by group interview. The informants included 31 Thai students studying marketing in the faculty of business administration and accounting, Khon Kean University Thailand. The subjects were enrolled in brand personality and, thus ensuring that they possess adequate understanding of this concept and provide critical information concerning city personality in the Thai context.

In this study, according to Aaker (1997), to study brand personality, he categorized products into three groups. Therefore, in this study, cities were categorized into three groups, i.e., functional cities, valuable cities and functional and valuable cities. A group interview was conducted during the class so that they were willing and available to provide the data. The subjects the subjects were asked a question what city in each group they know most. Thus, nine cities were obtained from each of the subjects. The researcher explained the subjects the meaning of each city group. The term functional city refers a city with the following distinction i.e., economy, education, and industry; the term valuable city means

a city with cultural and traditional treasure; and the term functional and valuable cities means a city with the both characteristics, respectively.

After the interview, the data were analyzed for frequency to determine which city in each group the informants know. The cities with the first three greatest frequencies were selected. The selected answers were shown to the informants who were then asked to pick merely two answers from each group. Afterward, the researcher asked the informants a question what personality those cities should have and asked them to describe it by using at least five adjectives. The method used was based on Aaker (1997) and Demirbag et al. (2010). When the terms describing personality of each city were obtained, they were categorized, but the repeated words were omitted. The rest were translated into English and approved by the marketing and English experts. Eventually, the terms describing the city personality in Thai context were obtained.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings comprise two parts: three cities the informants know best and particular aspects of citys personality in Thai context. The first three functional cities included Bangkok metropolis, Chon Buri and Rayong; the first three valuable cities included Phra Nakorn Si Ayutthaya, Sukhothai and Chiang Mai; and the first three functional and valuable cities included Chiang Mai, Khon Kaen and Nakhon Ratchasima (see Figure 1, 2 and 3).

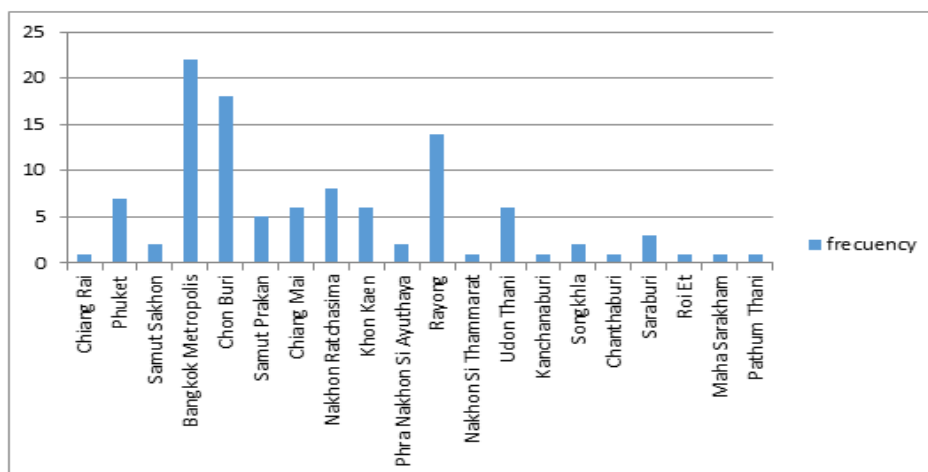


Figure 1. Functional cities

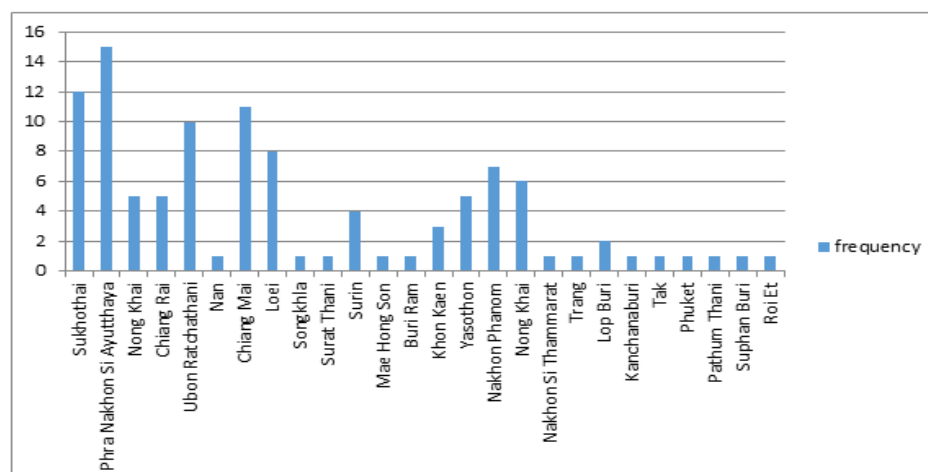


Figure 2. Valuable cities

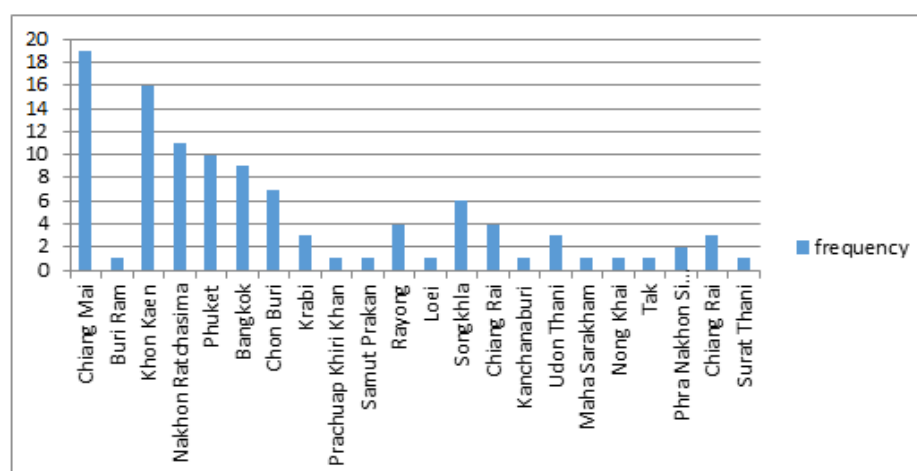


Figure 3. Functional and valuable cities

When the first three cities from the three groups were obtained, the informants were shown the list and asked to pick two cities to describe their personality. The findings revealed 281 traits, 61 of which are similar to those found by Aaker (1997), Ahmad et al. (2013), Demirbag et al. (2010), Glinska and Kilon (2014), Kim and Lee (2015), Lee and Suh (2011), Petroski et al. (2013), Sahin and Baloglu (2011), Tugulea and Bobalca (2014), Usaki and Baloglu (2011), Vaidya et al. (2009), 220 traits are found in Thai context (see Table 3).

Table 3: City personality in Thai context

Particular Aspects of City Personality Similar to Those of Previous Studies	City Personality Found in Thai Context
Aggressive, ambitious, arrogant, attractive, beautiful, benevolent, calm, charming, cheerful, clean, clever, communication, confident, cool, creative, daring, down-to-earth, enthusiastic, excited, extravagant, fast, fighter, friendly, generous, gentle, good, good looking, greedy, handsome, honest, independent, innovative, joyful, lazy, leader, modern, neat, nice, original, patent, polite, provocative, punctual, quiet, relax, respectable, rugged, save, selfish, sexy, showy, shy, simple, stable, stingy, strong, tactless, trendy, unique, upper class, western	Cross-culture understanding, active, adventurous, ancient, arbitrarily, aristocrat, caring, powerful, active, glutton, delicate, beaming, big, big eater and drinker, blather, blunt, boring, brave, fresh, buoyant, definitive, challenging, chaotic, charitable, chic, complex, composed, confined, consideration, cosmopolitan, crafty, cumbersome, cute, dangerous, dark, dependable, well-groomed, diligent, dirty, disgusting, do not take care of themselves, humble, drinker, easily bored, easy, edgy, empty, epicurean chill out, unsophisticated, classy, cold, comfort-loving, comic, committed, competence, onscious, conservative, crowded, cruel, deferential, erudite, experienced, expertise, expensive, exquisite, extra time, famous, fascinating, fine, fluent, tourist, formidable, frank, frankly, frantic, friendship, fussy, gangster, good mannered,

Table 3: Continue...

Particular Aspects of City Personality Similar to Those of Previous Studies	City Personality Found in Thai Context
	good mood, graceful, grow, half-breed, happy, happy life, hard-boiled, hasten, haughty, high abilities, high self-confidence, hilarious, hot, identity, ignore others, savage, impolite, inactive, interesting, inviting, joke, laborious, laconic, lagging, slow, leadership, fast-learning, leisurely, literature-loving, lonely, loud, family oriented, friend oriented, nature oriented, travel-loving, luxurious, hypocritical, hot-tempered, martial, mellow, methodical, moral, generous, mysterious, natural, needs attention, nightlife, no discipline, noisy, not nesting, not haughty, uninteresting, not like chaos, outdated, stressless, cherishable, old, old money, outstanding, unoverthinking, party, considerate, perfect, plain, unambitious, playful, purposeful, quick walk, ragged, raw, reasonable, reputable, flexible, rich, competitive, cunning, thrifty, save environment, scary, self-centered, serious, service-minded, shrewish, silent, skeptic, good skinned, undisciplined, sober, sociable, melodious, still, strain, strange, stressed, strict, flashy, elegant, sufficient Susceptible, swagger, sweet looking, sympathetic, taciturn, talkative, tasteful, temperamental, temptations, testy, overthinking, tired, tired of the chaos, tolerant, temperamental, tough decision, try to look rich, cute, ugly, unattractive, uncharming, uncolorful, awkward, ill-mannered, unexciting, unlovely, unobtrusive, unpunctual, unremarkable, untidy, untrustworthy, upheld the original, uphold traditions, valiant, soft-hearted, warm, weak, well-mannered, wish well, unkind, curt, husky

According to the Tables, the results reveal 281 traits, 61 of which are common to other countries but 220 of which are found merely in Thai context. This suggests that Thailand's city personality significantly differs from other countries. In addition, categorizing cities into three groups helps the informants to carefully differentiate distinct aspects of the city personality. Allowed to select two choices, the subjects could identify a variety of the particular traits of city personality rather than limit the information specific to the case cities. Thus, the findings suggest that this study is likely to sufficiently cover the city personality in Thai context. Of 220 traits found in the city personality in Thai context, they convey both positive and negative meaning. For example, such the negative meaning is given as aggressive, not attractive and not hospitalized, which may be because the subjects have a negative attitude towards the city personality. This finding corroborates the findings of Ahmad et al. (2013), who found the arriviste, arrogant, barefaced, callous, coward and greedy personality and those of Vaidya et al. (2009), who reported corruption and pollution personality.

The findings of the negative traits of city personality suggest contradictions to Aaker (1997) explanation that city personality should be merely positive traits. This may be due to differences of brand personality and city personality. The customers may perceive a product from the brand personalities through the given image, distribution channel and commercials (Wee, 2004); meanwhile, indeed a city is not a virtual product which may be negatively perceived through various ways.

The negative aspects imply that the responsibilities of establishing the city personality should not be limited to such related authorities as Thailand Tourism Authority, province as certain negative conditions are unlikely to be controlled by the government sectors. Indeed, residents and tourists may develop negative perceptions through such criminal news as and exaggerate its extent, thus leading to the negative city personality.

## CONCLUSION

The brand personality concept (Aaker, 1997) has been widely used to various extents. However, most of the studies were conducted in a single city to establish the measurement scale. The objective of this study was thus to investigate particular traits of the city personality in Thai context. This study has shown that the cities in Thailand possess the personality both similar and different from other countries. There are totally 281 traits, 61 of which are common to other countries, and interestingly 220 of which are characteristic of Thai context. It is noted that both positive and negative personalities are reported.

## CONTRIBUTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The result from the present study reveals three important implications. First, the findings may serve as a base to develop a measurement scale for city personality. The generalizability of this study may cover other countries whose cities have similar personality like in Thai context. Second, based on the negative traits found on this study, it is likely that a city may develop a negative personality caused by current difficult and problematic situations. Third, according to the study, as many as 220 traits are characteristic of Thai context. The related authorities may utilize them to promote their city regarding tourism or investment; meanwhile, the negative ones should be addressed.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE WORK

The important limitation in this study lies in the fact that the qualitative methodology was used and the information was based on individuals; thus, it would be more convincing for further study to also apply the quantitative study for factor analysis to develop a reliable measurement scale for city personality.

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