

# 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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\*Oana Tugulea is lecturer at the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Al. I. Cuza University of Iasi, Romania, e-mail: ciobanu.oana@uaic.ro.

† Claudia Bobalca is lecturer at the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Al. I. Cuza University of Iasi, Romania, e-mail: iuliana.bobalca@uaic.ro.

‡ Camelia Soponaru is lecturer at the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, Al. I. Cuza University of Iasi, Romania, e-mail: camelia.soponaru@psih.uaic.ro.

**Figure 1 - Aaker's Brand Personality Dimensions and Traits**

Sincerity	Excitement	Competence	Sophistication	Ruggedness
Down-to-earth	Daring	Reliable	Upper-class	Outdoorsy
Family-oriented	Trendy	Hardworking	Glamorous	Masculine
Small-town	Exciting	Secure	Charming	Western
Honest	Spirited	Intelligent	Feminine	Tough
Sincere	Cool	Technical	Smooth	Rugged
Real	Young	Corporate		
Wholesome	Imaginative	Successful		
Original	Unique	Leader		
Cheerful	Up-to-date	Confident		
Sentimental	Independent			
Friendly	Contemporary			

Source: Ahmad, Muhamad Fazil, Abdullah, Zulhamri Bin, Tamam, Ezhar Bin, Bolong, Jusang Bin (2013)

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 area 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.

Theme	Respondents' answers	Key words - possible items
If the city you selected was a person, how old would that person be?	30 years – ideal age 50 years – old 50 years – the person is wise, smart, not old, calm 20 years – youth 20 years – no worries 20 years – no money 20 years – fun 20 years – holiday 30 years - in 70 years old outfit 35 – 40 years – mature 35 – 40 years – classical and spiritual doctor 35 – 40 years – calculated person 27 – 30 years – ascending person 27 -30 years – mature 27 – 30 years – conservator 27 – 30 years – professional 27 – 30 years – young 27 – 30 years – with clear future vision 27 – 30 years – is not making things by happen 35 years – this person seems stable, calming, familiar 18 years – jovial, seducing 25 years – charming person 25 years – ingenious, innocent person 55 years – her children help her to combine culture and innovation 20 years – dreaming person 67 years – boring person 80 years – monotonous person 100 years	Item – age of the city: b) < 20 years c) 20 - 25 years d) 26 – 30 years e) 31 – 35 years f) 36 – 40 years g) 41 – 45 years h) 46 – 50 years i) 51 – 60 years 60 years Item city portrait: ideal age old smart young relaxed/ no worries poor/ no money for fun for holiday for young people doctor priest ascending Item city personality: wise calm mature bohemian (no money) calculated conservator professional visionary (with clear future vision)

		<p>organised/structured/ is not making things by happen stable calming familiar jovial seducing charming ingenious innocent inventive dreaming boring monotonous</p>
<p>If the city you selected was a person, would that person be a woman or a man?</p>	<p>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</p>	<p>Item sex of the city: woman man</p> <p>Item city portrait: handsome/beautiful coquette elegant knight tall blond svelte</p> <p>Item city personality: fulfilled charming mysterious adventurer sober rational human hospitable calculated sociable meticulous bacchanal conservator confident simple protector changeable extravagant polyvalent melancholic</p>

		passionate ordinary
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  Item city personality: changeable pedagogical friendly practical perfectionist caring
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

	<p>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, solidary 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</p>	<p>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</p>
<p>If the city you selected was a person, what human qualities would define that person?</p>	<p>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</p>	<p>Item city personality:  hospitable  encouraging  like a parent  altruist  understanding  courageous</p>

	<p>sociable, responsible  Generous, good-natured  Persevering, respectful, educated, sincere  She is an active person  She is modest  He is always informed, convincing  She is punctual, tolerant  She is pleasant  She involves in different activities  He is alert, great heartedness  He is faithful and forgiving  He is patriot</p>	<p>altruist  responsible  with common sense  to be trusted  generous  good-natured  persevering  respectful  active  modest  informed  convincing  punctual  tolerant  pleasant  involved  alert  great heartedness  faithful  forgiving  patriot</p>
<p>If the city you selected was a person, what weaknesses would define that person?</p>	<p>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  Naive, 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</p>	<p>Item city personality:  backbiter  confident  vain/proud  vulnerable  vulgar  conservator  liar  moody  individualist  convincing  naive  patient  unpredictable  spender  quitter  jealous  emotional  shy  influenced  quarrelsome  whimsical  lazy  envious  flattering  ironic</p>
<p>If the city you selected was a</p>	<p>Yes, because the person is provocative  Yes, because she is charming and backbiter</p>	<p>Item city portrait:  realized</p>

<p>person, would you like to be his/her friend?</p>	<p>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</p>	<p>Item city personality:          charming          confident          to be trusted          special          provocative          gentle          experienced          tutor          loyal</p>
<p>If you had to describe that person using only one word, what word would that be?</p>	<p>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</p>	<p>Item city personality:          magical          resistant          quality person          nostalgic          gay          helpful          charming          regenerating          sportive          wise</p>
<p>How does the door in front of you look like, if it had the name of the selected city written on it?</p>	<p>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 difficultly, you have to push it          High door, old, well kept, double, old architecture, dark brown, renovated          Powerful door          Grandiose door          Simple, fragile, opened door</p>	<p>Item city portrait:          modern          classical          artistic          tall          tidy</p> <p>Item city personality:          pure          simple          correct          powerful          grandiose          fragile</p>

<p>Is the person sincere? (Dimensions of Brand personality – sincerity)</p>	<p>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</p>	<p>Item city personality:          sincere          evasive          charming          constant          to be trusted          natural</p>
<p>Is the person exciting? (Dimensions of Brand personality – excitement)</p>	<p>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</p>	<p>Item city personality:          serene          funny          jolly          surprising          relaxing          joker</p>
<p>Is the person competent? (Dimensions of Brand personality – competence)</p>	<p>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</p>	<p>Item city personality:          positive          ambitious          confident          skilled          experienced</p>
<p>Is the person sophisticated? (Dimensions of Brand personality – sophistication)</p>	<p>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),</p>	<p>Item city personality:          stylish          selective          refined          accessible</p>

	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
- antiquarian
- professor
- receptionist
- pianist
- singer
- cafe patron
- specialist doctor
- spiritual doctor
- events' organiser
- housewife
- 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
- other job  
.....  
(mention which)

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

Trait	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
artistic							
modern							
elegant							
tidy							
handsome/beautiful							
involved							
smart							
wise							
ascending							
tall							
literate							
realised							
relaxed (no worries)							
poor (no money)							
young							
svelte							

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

Trait	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
great heartedness							
agitated							
accessible							
altruist							
amiable							
ambitious							
attractive							
backbit							
generous							
jealous							
calm							
charismatic							
conservator							
honest (correct)							
changeable							

communicative							
curious							
creative							
balanced							
discreet							
educated							
emotional							
courageous							
opened							
diplomat							
dynamic							
enigmatic							
enthusiastic							
evasive							
experimented							
familiar							
charming							
faithful							
flexible							
funny							
caring							
gracious							
determined							
hardworking							
forgiving							
independent							
envious							
informed							
ironic							
understanding							
confident							
encouraging							
peaceful							
shy							
entrepreneur							
jovial							
relaxing							
fighter							
proud							
flattering							
meticulous							
monotonous							
modest							
patriot							
perfectionist							
innocent							
nostalgic							

hospitable							
passionate							
perceptive							
profound							
punctual							
optimist							
pragmatic							
regenerative							
helpful							
sensitive							
sociable							
solidary							
powerful							
protector							
polyvalent							
provocative							
patient							
stylish							
responsible							
resistant							
romantic							
seducing							
sincere							
tolerant							

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.

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