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Preference for a career in retailing: a question of personality

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on previous findings from the field of brand personality research and employer branding, this paper aims to explore the symbolic attributes of the retail industry image in South Africa and to identify those personality traits that distinguish preferred industries from the retail industry. The research provides a contemporary overview of the current image of the retail industry in South Africa from the perspective of young university students and allows retailers to strengthen their joint communication effort accordingly. Therefore, a quantitative survey study with 1426 participants from five South African universities was conducted. Participants assessed personality characteristics of the retail industry as well as their most preferred industry. The main results suggest that retail and non-retail students hold different personality perceptions of the retail industry and that prior retail involvement accounts for this difference to some extent. Moreover, the analysis shows that retailing performs significantly worse on those personality attributes that are of major importance for future job seekers. Additionally, the study identifies those attributes that exert a strong effect on students' preferences for the retail industry. The findings provide useful communication themes for educational institutions, retail companies, and industry associations in order to foster positive personality perceptions associated with the retail industry.

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Introduction

For decades, the core topic of branding literature was marketing activities targeting at customers and consumers of products and services. In recent years, however, the branding perspective has shifted also toward other groups of stakeholders such as shareholders, suppliers and, of particular note, employers (Rampl and Kenning 2014). In increasingly competitive labor markets where the often cited 'war for talent' is present, attracting and retaining skilled employees is the focal interest of corporate branding activities (Michaels,

Handfield-Jones, and Axelrod 2001) such as employer branding (Lievens 2007) and internal branding (e.g. Vallaster 2004).

Against this background, scholars have begun to investigate whether branding concepts and strategies for acquiring and retaining customers might be applicable to the labor domain. In this vein, research on employer branding addressed different antecedents and outcomes of a favorable employer image (for a comprehensive review see Lievens and Slaughter 2016). It shows that organizational actions, recruiters, and non-organizational information determine the mental representations of an employer as held by individual constituents (Lievens and Slaughter 2016). Over and above these factors that originate from the organization and individual itself, several studies draw on the considerable influence of external factors such as the type of industry in which the company operates (Blinda 2003; Burmann, Schaefer, and Maloney 2007; Cable and Graham 2000; Dowling 2004; Erz, Henkel, and Tomczak 2008). More precisely, research shows that the industry image significantly determines the overall corporate image and the associated image attributes alike (Burmam, Schaefer, and Maloney 2007) which in turn affects interest and application intentions (Barber 1998; Rynes 1991). In this regard, an industry image is defined as 'a set of associations that is firmly anchored, condensed, and evaluated in the minds of people concerning a group of companies, which, from the point of view of an individual, supplies the same customer groups with the same technologies for the fulfillment of the same customer needs' (Burmam, Schaefer, and Maloney 2007, 159).

Moreover, there is also evidence that industries with low brand profiles (i.e. those with unknown, unclear, and unattractive value propositions) find it hard to attract a skilled and motivated workforce (Wallace, Lings, and Cameron 2012) and to even motivate university students to strive for a career in the respective industry (Oh, Weitz, and Lim 2016). In addition to other industries (such as rail and hospitality) this observation especially holds true for the retail industry (Rhoads et al. 2002). A low brand image profile of an industry can be associated with low employer brand values rather than unclear perceptions of these values. That is, if the retail companies fail to actively communicate their brand values properly, this leaves room for other drivers (such as consumer and working experiences) to shape individual perceptions. In turn, these might lead to industry profiles with low brand images.

Research on the appeal of the retailing industry predominantly focused on the functional attributes of the industry image such as working hours, development opportunities or salary (e.g. Broadbridge 2003). Thus, it only captured a small fraction of the overall image stakeholders, especially university students, establish about an industry. Symbolic attributes of an industry, i.e. the more abstract and intangible associations not related to the actual product or service (Zentes, Morschett, and Schramm-Klein 2008), have so far been of minor interest in retail literature. These symbolic attributes are also referred to as personality trait inferences or brand personality (Lievens and Slaughter 2016). In their 2004 article in the *Journal of Retailing* Ailawadi and Keller (2004) addressed the symbolic meaning individuals attribute to brands as one priority in future retail research. While some researchers addressed this call while applying the brand personality construct to retail brands (i.e. retailers as brands) there is no study that investigates the brand personality of retailing as an industry. This manuscript fills this void with a study conducted with first week university students in South Africa.

Drawing on previous findings from the field of brand personality research and employer branding, we aim to explore the symbolic attributes of the retail industry image in South

Africa and to identify those personality traits that distinguish preferred industries from the retail industry.

The findings provide a contemporary overview of the current image of the retail industry in South Africa from the perspective of young university students. The insights from our study allow retailers to strengthen their joint communication efforts with regard to the most favorable personality characteristics. Therefore, the remainder of the paper is as follows: First, the use of the personality metaphor for brands and industries is discussed, followed by an overview of empirical studies on brand personality in general and in retailing in particular. Next, we present the results of an empirical study that analyzed symbolic characteristics of the South African retail industry and compared the results to the profiles of the industries most preferred by university students. Finally, we conclude with implications for the retail industry in South Africa.

Literature review

Image of the retail industry

Prior research from the field of marketing conceptualized the image of a brand as a composition of functional and symbolic attributes (Padgett and Allen 1997). Moreover, some researchers added the experiential meaning of a brand as a third dimension to the concept (Keller 1993; Park, Jaworski, and MacInnis 1986). In their seminal work, Lievens and Highhouse (2003) adapted this so called instrumental-symbolic framework to the field of employer images. According to their framework, a job seeker's attraction to an organization builds upon instrumental and symbolic associations (Lievens 2007). While functional attributes describe an organization in terms of its objective and concrete characteristics such as job security, pay and advancement, symbolic attributes encompass subjective and intangible associations (Van Van Hoye et al. 2013; Lievens and Highhouse 2003). These symbolic associations can be best described as traits that job seekers associate with organizations (Slaughter et al. 2004). Both instrumental and symbolic image dimensions have been found to influence job seekers' attraction to a company as an employer (Lievens 2007) as well as identification and recommendation intentions (Lievens, Van Hoye, and Anseel 2007; Van Hoye 2008). Additionally, a study conducted by Burmann, Schaefer, and Maloney (2007) revealed that instrumental and symbolic industry inferences determine corporate images held by potential employees.

In recent years, there is growing interest in the symbolic meaning consumers and job seekers ascribe to brands and organizations (Das 2014). This might be due to the finding that, in terms of relative importance, symbolic attributes contribute most to organizational attraction (Lievens, Van Hoye, and Schreurs 2005). Moreover, companies find it easier to differentiate from their competitors on the basis of symbolic image dimensions rather than instrumental attributes (Lievens and Highhouse 2003). In light of these findings, it seems surprising that until now, studies on job seekers' attraction to the retail industry concentrated on functional attributes of the retail industry image without incorporating the symbolic dimension in their studies (Broadbridge 2003; Broadbridge, Maxwell, and Ogden 2007, 2009; Mokhlis 2014b; Oh, Weitz, and Lim 2016; Swinyard 1981; Swinyard, Langrehr, and Smith 1991).

In sum, each of these studies portrayed a sobering picture of the appeal of retailing careers based on data from the U.K., the U.S., and Malaysia. More precisely, in one of the first studies in this field, Swinyard (1981) found that study participants hold mainly unfavorable functional associations with a career in retailing. Whereas the most preferred career was described in terms of 'challenging', 'interesting', and 'good salary' (in order of importance), retailing was primarily characterized as 'dull', 'people-oriented', and 'poor salary'. In a follow-up study ten years later, Swinyard, Langrehr, and Smith (1991) showed that although retailers had become more sophisticated, retailing was evaluated as even less appealing as compared to the earlier study. The distorted view of the retail industry and its opportunities was termed the 'retailing myth' (Swinyard, Langrehr, and Smith 1991). Benchmarking these results, Broadbridge (2003) conducted a subsequent study more than another ten years later. Only 2.6% of the undergraduate sample nominated retailing as their first career choice due to similar associations (Broadbridge 2003). Although the industry image can be decomposed into functional and symbolic attributes, these studies omitted a measure of personality traits of the industry in their studies. Against this background, we strive to explore the symbolic associations that future job seekers hold of the retail industry in the South African context.

The personality of an industry

Symbolic attributes of organizations are also known as organization personality perceptions (Slaughter and Greguras 2009). This concept draws on Aaker's (1997) work on brand personality that is defined as 'the set of human characteristics associated with a brand' (347). While customers and prospective employees might associate different personalities with a company, research shows that these traits can be best described in terms of five higher-order factors, namely sincerity, innovativeness, competence, prestige, and ruggedness (Lievens and Highhouse 2003). Because humans possess a general tendency to anthropomorphize objects and brands (Zentes, Morschett, and Schramm-Klein 2008), researchers applied the metaphor of a brand holding personality traits to products and product groups (Aaker 1997), countries and places (Demirbag Kaplan et al. 2010), organizations (Van Hoyer et al. 2013) and industries (Burmam, Schaefer, and Maloney 2007). Brand personality traits are metaphorical in nature (Zentes, Morschett, and Schramm-Klein 2008). That is, as compared to human traits, organizations do not possess objective personalities but rather traits that individuals, external to the organization, ascribe to them (Slaughter and Greguras 2009; Zentes, Morschett, and Schramm-Klein 2008).

Trait perceptions stem from multiple sources, such as media coverage, advertisements and information from friends and family, and first and foremost, the people associated with the company (Slaughter and Greguras 2009). According to the latter, the behavior and thus the personality of the employees working for an organization as well as their clients are important drivers of organizational personality impressions (Wentzel 2009). In general, personality impressions inherit a signal effect, i.e. job seekers are attracted to those symbolic company traits that 'enable them to maintain their self-identity, to enhance their self-image, or to express themselves' (Van Hoyer et al. 2013, 544).

The current study is focused on industries as the object of investigation. Since industries are comprised of groups of companies, they can also be characterized by personality traits that stakeholders associate with them. Borrowing from Aaker's (1997) definition of brand personality, we define *industry personality* as the set of human personality characteristics perceived to be associated with an industry.

Applying the personality metaphor to the retail industry

Compared to the attention researchers have paid toward the concept of product brand personality, studies that examine personality traits of retailing remain scarce. In a call for a stronger application of personality research on the area of retailing (Ailawadi and Keller 2004), some authors addressed questions beginning with the retail brand (Hyman, Kopf, and Dongdae 2010) through to retailers as a brand (Burt and Davies 2010). A study conducted by Möller and Herm (2013) investigated the role customer experience played in forming perceptions of retail brand personalities. The authors found that bodily experiences of hardness and temperature during shopping transfer their metaphoric meaning to retail brand personality perceptions (Möller and Herm 2013; study 2). Moreover, Das (2014) empirically tested the assumption that retail brand personality impacts store loyalty. Employing a store personality scale developed for the Indian market, the results revealed that retail brand personality positively influenced store loyalty while gender moderated the relationship. In a subsequent study, the author showed that retail brand personalities varied from department stores to specialty clothing stores (Das 2015). The author also demonstrated that male study participants hold different personality associations than females. In an earlier study conducted by Zentes, Morschett, and Schramm-Klein (2008) the authors applied the personality construct to retail brands in Germany. The authors provided empirical evidence that different personality traits exert different effects on loyalty. While perceived competence regressed high on attitudinal loyalty, ruggedness seems to influence loyalty negatively. They concluded that retail brand personality 'plays an important role in store patronage and loyalty behavior' (180). These studies primarily examined the personality traits from the perspective of retailers as brands. To date, however, there is no study that investigates personality perceptions of retailing as an industry. Only Burmann, Schaefer, and Maloney (2007) empirically examined personality perceptions of industries, but without focusing on the retail industry in particular. The results of their research outline that industry images (symbolic and functional attributes) determine corporate images and that this relationship is moderated by involvement and knowledge of potential employees. In their conceptual article Erz, Henkel, and Tomczak (2008) drew upon these results and argued that negative industry images represent stereotypes that affect job seekers' perceived attractiveness of an industry and its companies. Again, empirical results for the retail industry are missing.

This gap motivates us to explore the following research questions:

RQ1: Which personality traits do young university students associate with the retail industry, and is there any difference between retail and non-retail students?

RQ2: What does the personality profile of a preferred industry look like?

RQ3: How does the personality profile of the retail industry relate to the personality profile of the most preferred industry?

RQ4: Does the perceived retail industry personality influence university students' preference for a career in retailing?

Methodology

Sample and data collection

A quantitative study, employing self-administered paper-and-pencil questionnaires, was done. Having received ethics clearance from Cape Peninsula University of Technology,

(Clearance certificate No. 2015FBREC309), the questionnaires were sent to the business departments of five participating South African universities, namely Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Durban University of Technology, Tshwane University of Technology, University of Johannesburg and Vaal University of Technology. These universities were chosen as they all offered a three-year course in retail. In each university, newly enrolled management students were accessed during class time in their first week on campus to ensure high participation. A letter of information and informed consent informed the respondents about the purpose of the study, the estimated completion time of 15 minutes, anonymity and voluntariness of participation. This collection method resulted in 1426 returned questionnaires. After eliminating 63 questionnaires due to incomplete or unlikely response patterns (for this procedure also see Mokhlis 2014a), the final non-probability sample consisted of 1363 usable questionnaires.

Measures

In order to measure the *industry personality* we adapted the scale that Burmann, Schaefer, and Maloney (2007) proposed in their seminal paper on industry image, that builds upon Aaker's (1997) 42 item brand personality measure. We relied on the shorter version consisting of 15 different personality traits that has proven applicable in the industry setting (Burmann, Schaefer, and Maloney 2007). Respondents rated how descriptive the given personality traits were of the retail industry and their most preferred industry, using a five-point scale (1 – not at all true, 5 – very true). The study relied on individual perceptions of the participants, thus no additional definition of retailing was given in the questionnaire. For brand and organizational personality scales scholars generally accept a five-dimensional structure while eliminating and re-allocating some indicators to other factors (Zentes, Morschett, and Schramm-Klein 2008). However, an explorative factor analysis could not replicate this structure from our data. Instead, the shortened and adapted scale for industry personality proved to be unidimensional with a Chronbach's Alpha of .84 (see Table 1 for correlations). In line with Burmann, Schaefer, and Maloney (2007) we refrained from calculating a composite score for the personality scale. Instead, we used each item to measure the respective personality trait. Thus, we are able to give concrete recommendations with regard to every facet of industry personality.

To gain information on participants' *preferred industry*, we asked them to specify the industry they would prefer to work in after finishing their studies from a given list of eleven industries relevant to business graduates in South Africa. These industries were retrieved from an extensive market analysis.

Finally, we also included *descriptive measures* of gender, age and the current field of study in the questionnaire. Gender and age did not show any significant differences on personality perceptions and were therefore excluded from the subsequent analysis.

Results

Descriptive statistics

The sample profile of this study was as follows. Female – 54.9%, with 97% born between 1990 and 1999. About 26.5% of all respondents were enrolled in retail business management

**Table 1.** Correlation matrix for industry personality traits.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Charming	1.00														
2. Cheerful	.537**	1.00													
3. Well-mannered	.367**	.477**	1.00												
4. Reliable	.323**	.417**	.673**	1.00											
5. Authentic	.365**	.378**	.540**	.628**	1.00										
6. Distinguished	.278**	.276**	.378**	.414**	.526**	1.00									
7. Intelligent	.281**	.329**	.463**	.488**	.455**	.495**	1.00								
8. Robust	.287**	.320**	.313**	.328**	.407**	.495**	.378**	1.00							
9. Spirited	.340**	.409**	.417**	.367**	.382**	.342**	.479**	.481**	1.00						
10. Honest	.264**	.316**	.535**	.558**	.462**	.354**	.440**	.311**	.434**	1.00					
11. Freedom-loving	.313**	.345**	.423**	.445**	.447**	.351**	.357**	.359**	.424**	.524**	1.00				
12. Enterprising	.237**	.340**	.393**	.437**	.457**	.318**	.466**	.297**	.374**	.399**	.480**	1.00			
13. Passionate	.345**	.391**	.495**	.525**	.489**	.376**	.538**	.322**	.438**	.511**	.502**	.629**	1.00		
14. Imaginative	.299**	.346**	.387**	.456**	.518**	.348**	.451**	.277**	.400**	.419**	.494**	.567**	.618**	1.00	
15. Solid	.255**	.348**	.460**	.532**	.442**	.342**	.454**	.325**	.358**	.450**	.427**	.475**	.543**	.508**	1.00

Note: $N = 866$.**Significance level: $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed).

Table 2. Demographics.

Variable	Category	Sample % ^a
Gender	Female	54.9
	Male	45.1
Subject	Retailing student	26.5
	Non-retail student	73.5
Preferred industry	Marketing/advertising agency	24.6
	Retailing	17.0
	Government/public services	13.4
	Financial services/insurance/banking	11.1
	Taxation/accounting	7.7
	Consumer goods manufacturing	4.6
	Tourism/hospitality	3.7
	Education	3.2
	Information/communication technology	2.9
	Automotive	1.8
	Consulting	1.6
Other ^b	8.3	

Note: $N = 1363$.

^aAdjusted (valid) percentages excluding missing observations.

^bOther preferred industries not mentioned in the list included such as fashion design, personal selling, and safety management.

as their major field of study. This large representation of retail students in the sample is due to the fact that we only included universities in the sample that offered retail management as a business major. This procedure ensured a sample size of retail students (as compared to non-retail students) that was big enough to allow comparisons to be made. As can be seen in Table 2, 'marketing/advertising agencies' represents the most preferred industry for later careers.

Results for research question 1

To address the first research question, study participants were asked to assess the personality traits they associate with the retail industry on a five-point Likert scale ranging from not at all true (1) to very true (5). To examine possible differences between retail and non-retail students, we conducted a MANOVA. The analysis revealed significant differences between both groups of respondents (Wilk's $\lambda = .942$, $p < .001$). Retail students significantly differed from non-retail students in their perception of the retail industry personality as being cheerful, well-mannered, reliable, intelligent, honest, enterprising, passionate, imaginative, and solid. While perceptions of charming, authentic, distinguished and freedom loving were only marginally significant, no significant differences emerged for robust and spirited (shown in italics in Table 2). Table 3 shows that retail students hold more favorable personality associations of the retail industry for all prompted traits than non-retail students, as measured by the means, provided in bold.

The students' perception especially differs when they were asked to describe the retail industry personality as being reliable, passionate, well-mannered, and intelligent. Because our sample included only first week students, prior retail course attendance does not explain these differences. Instead, however, we expect that heightened retail involvement in the study decision phase might account for this observation. In the questionnaire, we asked participants to indicate their willingness to choose retailing as their field of study before they actually started university, using a five-point scale (1 – not at all willing/5 – very willing).

Table 3. Retail and non-retail students' personality perceptions of retailing.

Personality Perceptions	Retail students		Non-retail students		Mean difference	F-value	p
	M	SD	M	SD			
Charming	3.42	1.34	3.22	1.49	0.20	2.942	<.10
Cheerful	3.90	1.14	3.59	1.42	0.31	8.339	<.05
Well-mannered	4.30	1.01	3.92	1.29	0.38	14.947	<.001
Reliable	4.32	.97	3.90	1.28	0.42	18.429	<.001
Authentic	3.93	1.02	3.75	1.29	0.18	3.255	<.10
Distinguished	3.83	1.11	3.66	1.32	0.17	2.890	<.10
Intelligent	4.30	.91	3.96	1.24	0.34	13.576	<.001
Robust	3.44	1.14	3.47	1.36	-0.03	.068	.79 (n.s.)
Spirited	3.75	1.18	3.73	1.32	0.02	.044	.83 (n.s.)
Honest	4.11	1.14	3.88	1.29	0.23	5.085	<.05
Freedom-loving	3.98	1.14	3.80	1.35	0.18	2.823	<.10
Enterprising	4.38	.83	4.12	1.14	0.26	9.481	<.01
Passionate	4.42	.83	4.04	1.23	0.38	18.041	<.001
Imaginative	4.25	.99	4.02	1.23	0.23	5.706	<.05
Solid	4.13	1.07	3.86	1.30	0.27	7.009	<.01

Notes: The higher the mean, the more participants find the trait to be applicable in retail industry, $N = 700$.

Table 4. Results of regression analyses.

Variables	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients (β)		
	b	SE	β	t	Sig.
(Constant)	3.345 (b_0)	0.094		35.769	
Retail Involvement	0.224 (b_1)	0.032	0.274	7.043	.000
Notes: Dependent variable: Reliable: $R^2 = 0.075$					
(Constant)	3.560 (b_0)	0.089		40.101	
Retail Involvement	0.179 (b_1)	0.030	0.232	5.956	.000
Notes: Dependent variable: Passionate: $R^2 = 0.054$					
(Constant)	3.366 (b_0)	0.096		35.001	
Retail Involvement	0.203 (b_1)	0.033	0.242	6.190	.000
Notes: Dependent variable: Well-mannered: $R^2 = 0.059$					
(Constant)	3.438 (b_0)	0.091		37.764	
Retail Involvement	0.180 (b_1)	0.031	0.229	5.837	.000
Notes: Dependent variable: Intelligent: $R^2 = 0.052$					

We used this item as a measure for retail involvement and ran four bivariate regression analyses. That is, we regressed those personality traits that showed the largest differences in participants' perception on retail involvement. For each of the four dependent variables the coefficient was found substantive, positive and significant (see Table 4). Variance explained (R^2) in each regression equation was between 5.2 and 7.5%. These findings show that students who can be characterized by a higher retail involvement (prior to their studies) evaluated the personality traits of the retail industry more positively in terms of reliable, passionate, well-mannered and intelligent. That is, we can conclude that prior retail involvement accounts for, at least, some variance in the observed difference between retail and non-retail students.

Results for research question 2

We also asked participants to indicate the personality characteristics of their most preferred industry, again using the same personality scale as in research question 1. According to the specified preferred industry, all respondents were classified as either 'yes – prefers to work

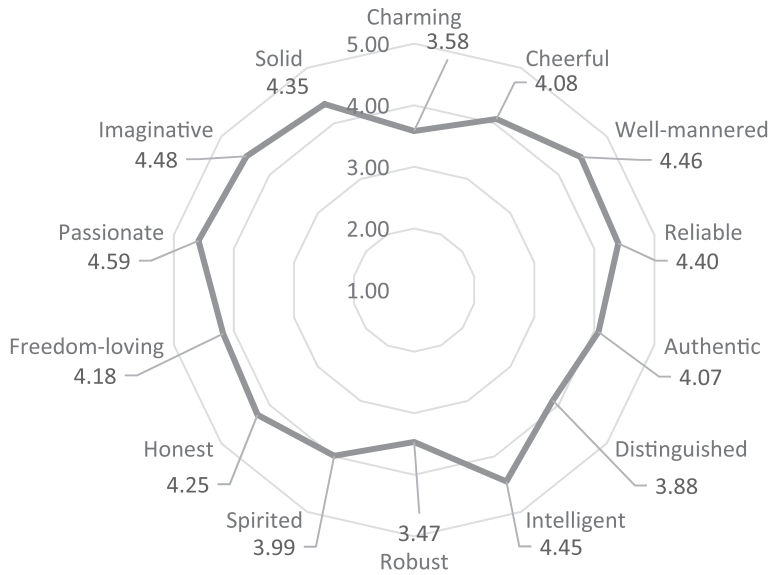


Figure 1. Personality traits of preferred industries.

Notes: The higher the mean, the more participants find the trait to be applicable in the preferred industry, $N = 977$.

in retail' or 'no – does NOT prefer to work in retail'. A MANOVA revealed a significant difference between those participants preferring a retail career compared to those striving for a career in one of the remaining industries (Wilk's $\lambda = .972$, $p < .05$). However, the subsequent univariate tests for each of the preferred personality characteristics show different results. Except for the industry personality trait of being 'enterprising' ($F = 12.782$, $p < .001$) no significant difference was obtained for both groups of respondents ($ps > .193$). That is, the personality traits that university students expect from their future industry are (nearly) the same over all industries. Because the multivariate test contradicts the univariate results (which might be due to correlations between the dependent variables), we followed up with a discriminant analysis (Field 2012). A discriminant analysis was conducted to examine if personality evaluations of the industry (independent variables) predict whether retailing is the preferred industry or not (grouping variable). The analysis revealed one discriminant function explaining 100% of the variance, canonical $R^2 = .02$, that significantly differentiated between participants preferring a career in retailing and those striving for another industry (Wilk's $\lambda = .972$, $p < .05$). Similar to the results of the univariate analysis, only the personality trait of being 'enterprising' correlated high on the discriminant function with a factor loading of $r = .674$. All remaining personality traits fall under the cut of value of $r = .30$ and are therefore not associated with the grouping variable. Accordingly, retailing as the preferred industry acts as a grouping variable only for the industry personality trait of being enterprising. To sum up, when asked to indicate the personality traits of their preferred industry, first week university students cherish similar attributes (except for enterprising) independent from the kind of industry. Therefore, we calculated mean scores for all personality traits of a preferred industry over all study participants. Figure 1 illustrates the personality profile based on these mean values.

Table 5. Personality perceptions of marketing vs. retailing.

Personality Perceptions	Marketing Industry		Retail Industry		Mean difference	t-value	p
	M	SD	M	SD			
Charming	3.60	1.482	3.27	1.486	-0.33	2.703	<.01
Cheerful	4.20	1.020	3.77	1.360	-0.43	3.774	<.001
Well-mannered	4.42	.934	3.84	1.350	-0.58	5.774	<.001
Reliable	4.33	.936	3.83	1.322	-0.50	5.027	<.001
Authentic	3.90	1.097	3.63	1.279	-0.27	2.555	<.05
Distinguished	3.78	1.215	3.55	1.339	-0.23	2.061	<.05
Intelligent	4.44	.878	3.92	1.241	-0.52	5.137	<.001
<i>Robust</i>	3.32	1.214	3.39	1.371	0.07	-.646	.52 (n.s.)
<i>Spirited</i>	3.86	1.290	3.67	1.297	-0.19	1.484	.14 (n.s.)
Honest	3.98	1.249	3.69	1.353	-0.29	2.651	<.01
Freedom-loving	4.10	1.166	3.84	1.283	-0.26	2.231	<.05
<i>Enterprising</i>	4.29	.982	4.18	1.070	-0.11	1.104	.27 (n.s.)
Passionate	4.61	.783	4.03	1.183	-0.58	5.998	<.001
Imaginative	4.62	.744	4.07	1.138	-0.55	6.180	<.001
Solid	4.24	1.028	3.97	1.206	-0.27	2.845	<.01

Notes: The higher the mean, the more participants find the trait to be applicable in the industry, $N = 180$.

It shows that the preferred industries of university students in South Africa can be best described in terms of being passionate, imaginative and well-mannered (top three attributes) and less in terms of being robust, charming and spirited.

Results for research question 3

In order to compare the personality profile of the retail industry with the profile of the most preferred industry, namely marketing, we performed paired sample t-tests. We only included participants in our analysis who chose 'marketing/advertising agency' as the industry of choice for their future career. The main question is what does the marketing industry signal to young university learners that retailing does not. Table 5 answers this question. The results reveal that, except for three personality attributes (indicated in italics), retailing is significantly inferior to marketing on all remaining personality traits, as measured by the means shown in bold.

Analyzing the differences between the personality perceptions of marketing and retailing it shows that the marketing industry is especially superior when it comes to signaling a well-mannered, passionate and imaginative personality. This result extends the finding of the analysis under the previous section.

That is, the participating students described their most preferred industry as being passionate, imaginative and well-mannered. However, in reality it is exactly these personality traits where the retail industry trails furthest behind the most preferred industry. The retail industry only meets preferred industry characteristics on two personality traits that the analysis identified as being less descriptive, namely being robust and spirited. Figure 2 illustrates this finding.

Results for research question 4

In the previous section, we investigated if the personality characteristics of the most preferred industry vary from those of the retail industry. In light of these results, it might be interesting to analyze if participants' perceptions of retail personality influence

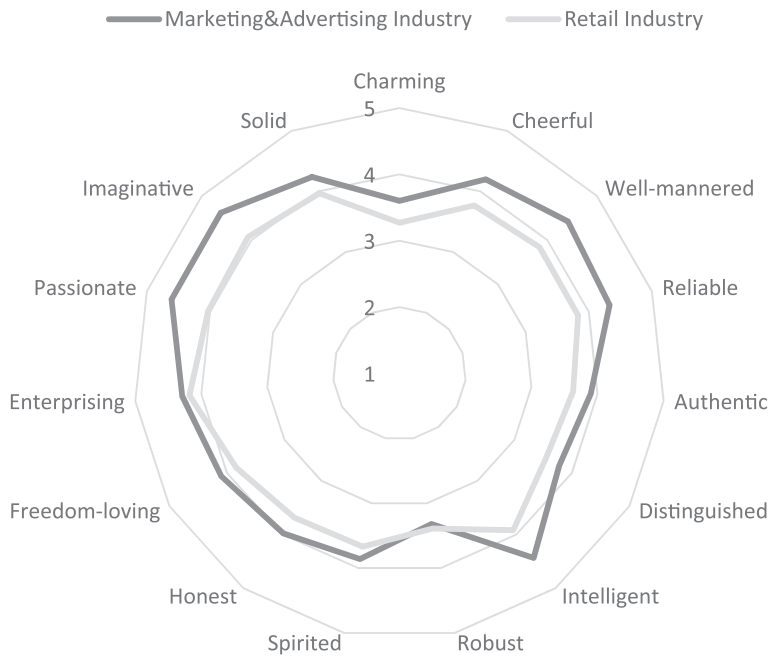


Figure 2. Personality profiles of marketing industry vs. retail industry.

Notes: The higher the mean, the more participants find the trait to be applicable in the retail industry, $N = 180$ (participants with 'marketing & advertising industry' as their preferred industry only).

preferences for their future career industry. Accordingly, we asked participants to evaluate the personality characteristics of the retail industry and analyzed the impact on the dichotomous dependent variable (industry preference: retail (0) vs. other industry (1)) using logistic regression.¹ The model chi square indicates that including the predictors (personality perceptions of retail industry) in the model improved overall fit as the -2 log likelihood from the baseline model significantly decreased by a $-2LL$ value of $\chi^2 = 87,281$, $p < .001$).

The Cox & Snell R-square and Nagelkerke R-square are both above 0.11, indicating that the variables in the model account for at least 11% of the variation in industry preference. The classification score shows that 76.4% of all cases are correctly classified. In total, the model's overall fit seems acceptable.

Therefore the statistical significance of each independent variable was estimated and displayed in Table 6. The results show that five out of the fifteen investigated personality traits exert a significant influence on industry preference. These are namely, well-mannered (Wald $\chi^2 = 7.734$, $p < .01$), intelligent (Wald $\chi^2 = 8.206$, $p < .01$), robust (Wald $\chi^2 = 6.983$, $p < .01$), spirited (Wald $\chi^2 = 4.748$, $p < .05$) and passionate (Wald $\chi^2 = 4.262$, $p < .05$). Furthermore, the results provide insights into the direction of the influence. The personality traits robust and spirited show Exp(B) values above 1. This means, that as retail personality perceptions of being 'robust' and 'spirited' increase, people tend to prefer industries other than retailing. The opposite holds true for 'well-mannered', 'intelligent', and 'passionate' since these traits show Exp(B) values below 1.

Table 6. Logistic regression results.

Dependent variable: Industry preference (Retail = 0/other industry = 1)						
Independent variables	Beta	Error	Wald	Sig.	Exp. (B)	Interpretation
Charming	0.106	0.077	1.894	0.169	1.112	<i>n.s.</i>
Cheerful	-0.161	0.097	2.750	0.097	0.851	<i>n.s.</i>
<i>Well-mannered</i>	-0.373	0.134	7.734	0.05	0.689	Increase in one unit, would increase <i>retail</i> industry preference by 31.1%
Reliable	-0.023	0.137	0.027	0.870	0.978	<i>n.s.</i>
Authentic	0.094	0.114	0.688	0.407	1.099	<i>n.s.</i>
Distinguished	0.018	0.094	0.036	0.849	1.018	<i>n.s.</i>
<i>Intelligent</i>	-0.368	0.128	8.206	0.004	0.692	Increase in one unit, would increase <i>retail</i> industry preference by 30.8%
<i>Robust</i>	0.239	0.090	6.983	0.008	1.270	Increase in one unit, would increase <i>other</i> industry preference by 27%
<i>Spirited</i>	0.212	0.098	4.748	0.029	1.237	Increase in one unit, would increase <i>other</i> industry preference by 23.7%
Honest	-0.036	0.108	0.114	0.736	0.964	<i>n.s.</i>
Freedom-loving	-0.064	0.102	0.396	0.529	0.938	<i>n.s.</i>
Enterprising	-0.181	0.157	1.337	0.248	0.834	<i>n.s.</i>
<i>Passionate</i>	-0.335	0.162	4,262	0.039	0.715	Increase in one unit, would increase <i>retail</i> industry preference by 28.5%
Imaginative	-0.115	0.128	0.812	0.367	0.891	<i>n.s.</i>
Solid	0.081	0.108	0.565	0.452	1.085	<i>n.s.</i>

Notes: Model statistics: $-2 \log$ likelihood: 665.28; Cox & Snell R^2 : 0.117; Nagelkerke R^2 : 0.178; Hosmer and Lemeshow test: $\chi^2(df) = 15.51(8), p = .05$.

Study participants are more likely to prefer the retail industry for their future career when personality perceptions of retailing as being well-mannered, intelligent and passionate increase. The corresponding odds ratio shows that one-unit change in the well-mannered perception would increase participant's probability of striving for a retail career by 31.1%.² Likewise, being positioned as robust in the minds of the students would increase participant's probability of striving for a career outside of retailing by 27%. This means that, strengthening personality perceptions of being well-mannered, intelligent, and passionate helps to attract university students to a career in retailing.

Discussion and implications

Brand personality perception is a concept that promises value when systematically assessed by companies. Considerable research interest has been devoted to developing scales to assess brand personalities of products and companies and to determine possible influences of the personality perceptions that customers and job seekers hold. The current study focuses on the industry instead of a single product or company. Thereby, our study emphasizes that industries, seen as groups of companies, can also be characterized by personality traits that stakeholders associate with them.

Prior research pointed out that industry images (including personality perceptions) influence corporate images (Burmam, Schaefer, and Maloney 2007). We merge this insight with the notion that the retail industry finds it especially hard to attract qualified and motivated job seekers, and examined whether unfavorable personality perceptions might account for this dilemma.

The findings of our study can be summarized as follows. First, we find that retail and non-retail students hold different personality perceptions of the retail industry. Since all

study participants can be classified as freshmen, prior retail course attendance is canceled out as an explanation for these differences. Instead, we find that retail involvement, measured as participant's prior consideration of retailing as a possible field of study, accounts for the main perceptual differences. Retail involvement might stem from different sources such as experiences as consumers, own work experience in a certain industry or information from personal and media sources (Heidig et al. 2017).

Second, we examined the personality traits of the most preferred industries as held by students. We find that what makes an industry a preferred industry is universal. That is, students who prefer a career in retailing and those who strive for other industries share the same personality perceptions of their favorite industry. It shows that the preferred industries of university students in South Africa can be best described in terms of being passionate, imaginative and well-mannered, and less in terms of being robust, charming, and spirited.

Third, we contrasted the personality profile of the marketing industry as the most preferred industry against the retail industry. Students who strive for a career in marketing find that retailing is inferior when it comes to signaling a well-mannered, passionate, and imaginative industry personality. Put differently, retailing performs significantly worse on those personality attributes that are of major importance for future job seekers.

Finally, we examined if retail personality perceptions influence industry preference. Moreover, we identified those attributes that exert a strong effect on students' preferences for the retail industry. A logistic regression revealed that improvements on 'well-mannered', 'intelligent', and 'passionate' positively influenced preferences toward the retail industry. In contrast, an increase on the 'robust' and 'spirited' dimension decreased retail industry preferences.

In light of these results, it is important that retail managers and educators realize the impact of the symbolic image of their industry. In order to change retail perceptions toward favorable personality traits three levels of responsibility can be distinguished in retail practice.

On the first level, *industry associations* should conceptualize communication campaigns that clearly convey a favorable brand personality of the retail industry. Other countries like Germany have launched campaigns to change job seekers' image of the retail industry. Under the headline 'Retailing – Everything for Life' [Der Handel – Alles fürs Leben] the campaign focusses on different functional and symbolic attributes that characterize the retail industry (Hebben 2011).

On the second level, we encourage each *retail company* in South Africa to provide their retail brand with a clear brand personality. Following Aaker (1997) the main question arises 'How does a brand go about developing one [brand personality]?' (354). With regard to retailing, researchers argued that store specific attributes like store atmosphere, service level or price perception (Darden and Babin 1994; Brengman and Willems 2009) as well as employee behavior (Wentzel 2009) shape personality perceptions. In cases where those personality perceptions are dissociated from the overall industry image of retailing, subtyping is likely to occur (Kunda and Oleson 1995). That is, customers and job seekers view the respective store as an exception from the retail industry (Erz, Henkel, and Tomczak 2008). This might result in a changed personality perception of the single retail store but not of the industry as a whole. However, in cases where customers and job seekers generalize those individual store perceptions, a changed industry image is likely to arise. This process can be explained through stereotyping (Crawford, Sherman, and Hamilton 2002). We argue that

this process can be fostered when retailers work together in shaping personality impressions.

On the third level, *educational institutions*, like the universities from our sample, should adapt their study programs' communication efforts according to our results. That is, campaigns should combine industry information that signal retailing to be well-mannered, intelligent and passionate.

Limitations and further research

As with other studies, we acknowledge some limitations relative to our data collection. First of all, our results are only limited to South Africa. Although our sample comprised business students from five South African universities, generalizability of the results is limited. Considering that South Africa has 26 public universities, many private universities and colleges, and more than one million students in higher education with a myriad of majors (BusinessTech 2015), our results are only applicable to those students majoring in business. For future studies it would be interesting also to include non-business students in the sample – the retail sector also holds potential for students studying disciplines such as law, engineering, food science, fashion design, etc. Such inclusions might result in even sharper differences between groups of students (Mokhlis 2014a). Moreover, our study only assessed retail specific perceptions from first year students within their first week of studies. Future research should follow up on these results or employ longitudinal research designs in order to show how the retail image evolves over time, and to assess efficiency of image-building actions.

Further research should include the validation of these findings employing samples from other cultural settings. An extension of this study would be to assess the relationship between functional and symbolic industry attributes in order to design communication strategies accordingly. In such an effort, researchers might also use qualitative research methods to delve deeply into the motivation and reasons behind personality assessments of industries.

Notes

1. We checked for multicollinearity, since all personality traits were included in the logistic regression model. Checking the collinearity statistics of the corresponding linear regression, SPSS shows that no personality trait holds a perfect linear relationship with another predictor (VIFs between 1.496 and 2.528; Tolerance all above .395; all correlation coefficients below .63). Accordingly, we expect the results of the logistic regression to be virtually unbiased.
2. Odds ratios have been calculated as $\text{Exp}(1)-1$.

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