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## **A Lexical Study of Comparisons with Typical Brand Users of Goods<sup>1</sup>**

### **Abstract:**

The article proposes a methodological framework of psycholexical studies, derived from personality theory, as a reliable base for the extraction of universal dimensions of self-image congruence. The aim of our study was to explore the psycholexical structure of a lexicon of comparisons made by Polish consumers of goods when comparing themselves to typical brand users of particular goods. The consumer lexicon was compiled as a result of 586 individual interviews with respondents aged 13 to 82 ( $M = 36,6$ ;  $SD = 16,9$ ), 51.8% of whom were females. The study involved 294 brands representing 29 categories of goods. The lexicon of 17,075 attributes of typical brand users was classified by 13 judges according to the classification system adopted from German lexical studies. Judicial decisions underwent psychometric verification in the aspect of their validity and internal reliability; they were found satisfactory. The results of judicial classifications were demonstrated in the aspect of desirable, similar, and undesirable attributes in the consumers' self-concept, and discussed with reference to the structure of a person-descriptive lexicon in the Polish language. The results showed that consumers observe both positive and negative attributes in typical brand users and over a half of all the attributes of consumers are personality descriptors. The study allowed us to extract a high-frequency list of consumer descriptors that can be applied in quantitative self-image congruence research.

### **Introduction**

Today's brands are essential signifiers of meaning for consumers (C.W. Park/B.J. Jaworski/ D.J. MacInnis 1986). By purchasing products<sup>2</sup> of certain brands,

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consumers can maintain and reinforce their self-concept (G.M. Zinkhan/ J.W. Hong 1991; T.R. Graeff 1996; S. Hosany/ D. Martin 2012), fill the gaps in their self-image, (R.A. Wicklund/ P.M. Gollwitzer 1981), and attain their desired self-image in their eyes (E.L. Grubb/ H.L. Grathwohl 1967; J.E. Escalas/ J.R. Bettman 2015) or in the eyes of others (A.C. Ahuvia 2005; M.J. Sirgy et al. 1991). By possessing products, they communicate who they are (D.A. Aaker 1996; W.J. McEwen 2005; A. Chernev/ R. Hamilton/ D. Gal 2011) and who they would like to be (C.R. Hollenbeck/ A.M. Kaikati 2012). The relationship between self-image congruence and brand-user/ consumer image has been confirmed in extant research (A. Aguirre-Rodriguez/ M. Bosnjak/ M.J. Sirgy 2012). Although numerous studies have been conducted, there are still many problems that hamper the development of self-image congruence theory (M.J. Sirgy 1982; J.S. Johar/ M.J. Sirgy 1991) and, thereby, the systematization of results of research carried out in different countries. The key issue here is the lack of a universal multidimensional model that would describe attributes in terms of which consumers compare themselves to typical brand users. Consequently, measurement of such congruence is unidimensional in the overwhelming majority of cases (e.g. N.E. Stokburger-Sauer/ S. Ratneshwar/ S. Sen 2013) and dominated by the evaluative aspect over the descriptive aspect.

The aim of this study is to propose a universal platform for establishing universal and valid dimensions of comparisons for self-image congruence offered by a lexical approach to studying person-descriptive terms (A. Angleitner/ F. Ostendorf/ O.P. John 1990; G. Saucier/ L.R. Goldberg 1996). The lexical approach meets most demands imposed on structural models and offers more chances to reach agreement on a scientific taxonomy (G. Saucier/ S. Srivastava 2015). The evidence for that is the identification of five (L.R. Goldberg 1990) and, later, six essential attributes that describe the structure of personality lexicon of all the European languages examined so far. The results of these studies have become a point of departure for building, respectively, a five-factor (R.R. McCrae/ P.X. Costa 1987) and six-factor (HEXACO) (K. Lee/ M.C. Ashton 2004) model of personality.

The starting point for psycholexical research is the assumption that the most significant individual differences are encoded in natural language (F. Galton 1884; L.R. Goldberg 1981). The more meaningful a certain trait, the more words have been coined by the users of a given language in the course of its evolution in order to name that trait (by means of synonyms and antonyms). An exploration of the structure of such a lexicon allows us to identify key dimensions that describe the most significant individual differences. A typical psycholexical study involves two essential stages: (1) qualitative research aimed at compiling a representative pool of descriptors of individual differences on the basis of a given natural language's lexicon and their taxonomization, and (2) quantitative research aimed at identifying the structure of the compiled pool of descriptors by means of multidimensional statistical analyses (e.g. principal component analysis). Because the results of the first stage determine the results of the second stage, the compilation of the representative sample and its

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout the text, the term *product* will be used interchangeably with the term *goods*, to solely refer to material products, not services.

psycholexical taxonomization are the key to the whole venture (D. Peabody/ L.R. Goldberg 1989; G. Saucier 1997).

The most influential studies that have significantly enhanced the shaping of the contemporary standards of psycholexical taxonomy are taxonomic studies within the following languages: American English (G.W. Allport/ H.S. Odbert 1936; W.T. Norman 1967; L.R. Goldberg 1982), Dutch (B. De Raad/ A.A. Hendriks/ W.K. Hofstee 1992), and German (A. Angleitner/ F. Ostendorf/ O.P. John 1990). In the first stage, the researchers select a representative, i.e. the most up-to-date and comprehensive general dictionary that contains the most essential and relevant part of a particular natural language. Next, only those person-descriptive lexemes (adjectives, participles, nouns, and verbs) are selected that are useful in the description of individual differences. Further, all the items are classified (American and German taxonomy) or their pool is reduced (Dutch taxonomy) to personality descriptors according to the applied operational definition of personality: restrictive (e.g. L.R. Goldberg 1990; O. Gorbaniuk et al. 2013) or unrestrictive (e.g. B. De Raad/ D.P. Barelds 2008). In the last step, the list of personality descriptors is reduced to a scale that can be used as a questionnaire in quantitative studies.

The application of the lexical approach for the purpose of examining self-image congruence primarily requires that a sample of consumer comparisons to typical brand users is compiled. The scientific value of research results is directly determined by the representativeness of that sample and by the adoption of a methodologically reliable taxonomization procedure of the linguistic material compiled. In turn, the representativeness of the sample of self-image lexicon depends heavily on the stimuli administered in research (a broad sample of brands representing different categories of goods) and on the sample of consumers who are the users of that lexicon, whereas the reliability of the lexical taxonomy is ensured by psychometrically verified judges' psycholexical decisions taken according to methodological standards in psycholexical research (e.g. A. Angleitner/ F. Ostendorf/ O.P. John 1990).

## 1. Research Questions

Our study into the consumer lexicon of comparisons with typical brand users has an exploratory character. It is narrowed down to a consumer lexicon of goods as the specificity of the perception of service brands has already been demonstrated in numerous studies (A. Gilmore 2006; M.D. Musante/ D.C. Bojanic/ J. Zhang 2008; J.A. Siguaw/ A. Mattila/ J.R. Austin 1999), and the structure of that lexicon may be affected by the fact that services are provided by people. The research into the consumer lexicon addresses the following key questions:

RQ1: What attributes are utilized by consumers when comparing themselves to typical brand users? What is the proportion of desirable, similar, and undesirable attributes in the images of typical brand users?

RQ2: What is the psycholexical structure of comparisons to typical brand users? Is the structure of the consumer lexicon different from the structure of the Polish language?

RQ3: Is the psycholexical structure of comparisons to typical brand users varied regarding desirable, similar, and undesirable attributes?

## 2. Method

### Sample and research procedure

The lexicon of personality descriptors utilized by purchasers when comparing themselves to typical users of product (not service) brands was compiled through 586 individual interviews with Polish respondents aged 13 to 82 ( $M = 36.6$ ;  $SD = 16.9$ ), 51.8% of whom were females. The interviewer presented the respondent with a list of 29 categories of goods<sup>3</sup> and asked to select those the respondent was interested in buying in the near or more distant future; that allowed us to narrow down the object of study to the categories the respondent was actually interested in (“product category involvement”, cf. N.E. Stokburger-Sauer/ S. Ratneshwar/ S. Sen 2013), which enhanced positive motivation for participating in the research and contribute to its psychological realism. If the respondent selected more than three categories, the interviewer selected certain categories for the next stage of the interview in a manner that resulted in each of the 29 categories having approximately similar frequency at the end of the research.

Next, the respondent was asked to identify familiar brands out of the three categories previously selected. Then, the respondent indicated which of these brands he/ she preferred most (X) and least (Y), and those constituted the objects of further study.

In the next stage, the respondent was shown previously-prepared slides with six typical products of a given brand, and was asked to imagine a situation in a point of purchase, specific to a particular product category (e.g. car showroom, supermarket, tool store), in which he/ she was looking at a person who was buying a product of that particular brand and saying that brand was his/ her favorite (so-called typical consumer). An exemplary instruction was:

*Imagine yourself in a showroom selling cars of brand X. You want to purchase a car of brand X or just look around. You meet a person who is about to buy a car of brand X and who tells you that he or she has had such a car before and that that brand suits him or her. Try to imagine that person and think what he or she is like/ what characterizes him or her/ what his or her characteristic/ specific/ distinct attributes are.<sup>4</sup>*

The respondent’s task was to list those attributes in terms of which he/ she (a) would like to be similar to the typical user of a particular brand (“What are the attributes in terms of which you would like to be similar to a user of brand X?”<sup>5</sup>), (b) is actually similar to such a user (“What are the attributes in terms of which you are similar to a user of brand X?”<sup>6</sup>), and (c) would not like to be similar to the typical user (“What are the attributes in terms of which you would not like to be similar to a user of brand

<sup>3</sup> Cameras, chocolate bars, chocolate, tea, yoghurt, coffee, ketchup, cosmetics, painkillers, motorbikes, soft drinks, tools (drills, grinders, etc.), shoes, clothing, sportswear, tires, cigarettes, toothpaste, perfumes, beer, washing powder, cars, juice, radio and television, domestic electrical appliances, computer hardware, mobile phones, vodka, watches.

<sup>4</sup> The original instruction in Polish was: *Wyobraź sobie, że jesteś w salonie samochodowym marki X celu zakupu lub obejrzenia samochodu marki X. Spotykasz tam osobę, która zamierza kupić samochód marki X i mówi, że wcześniej również taki posiadała, i ta marka do niej pasuje. Wyobraź sobie tę osobę, zastanów się, jaka ta osoba jest/ co ją charakteryzuje/ jakie są jej charakterystyczne/ specyficzne/ wyróżniające właściwości.*

<sup>5</sup> *Z uwagi na jakie właściwości chciałbyś być podobny do konsumenta marki X?*

<sup>6</sup> *Z uwagi na jakie właściwości jesteś podobny do konsumenta marki X?*

X?<sup>7</sup>). Each respondent was asked such questions for each pair of brands (X and Y) among three product categories selected by the interviewer from among the product categories the respondent had indicated interest in buying.

Based on the interviews, we compiled 17,075 personal descriptors (adjectives, predicates, nouns, and compounds) used by the respondents in the process of comparing themselves to brand users. A substantial part of the descriptions were duplicates; 6,459 of them were calculated as having occurred at least once.

### Classification of personality descriptors

In order to systematize the compiled consumers' descriptions, a classification system of personal descriptors developed by A. Angleitner and his colleagues (1990) was employed. As the German lexical taxonomy was performed later than the American or Dutch ones, it takes account of all the strong aspects of the previous taxonomies and offers the most favorable opportunities for prospective quantitative research. Although time consuming, the systematization of the whole range of personal descriptors allows, by the application of that taxonomy, a relatively flexible adjustment of the list to a specific definition of the range of personality descriptors applied by the researcher. This is why we followed the German lexical taxonomy that had been applied in taxonomies in other European languages, including Italian (L. Di Blas/ M. Forzi 1999), Croatian (B. Mlačić/ F. Ostendorf 2005), Polish (P. Szarota/ M.C. Ashton/ K. Lee 2007; O. Gorbaniuk et al. 2013) and Czech (M. Hřebíčková 2007), which offers additional opportunities for comparative analyses of research results concerning the consumer lexicon.

A judge's task was to assign each lexical description to one of 15 categories that fell into five general categories: (1) dispositions, (2) temporary conditions, (3) social aspects, (4) overt characteristics, and (5) chronic disorders. The category "dispositions" was divided into three subcategories: (1a) temperament and character and (1b) mental abilities and talents, or their absence. Although a separate category was established, (1c) non-mental abilities and talents, it, nevertheless, was excluded from the calculation of the aggregate lexical frequency within the general category because the items go beyond the range of personality traits. The category "temporary conditions" consisted of three subcategories: (2a) experiential states (emotions, moods, and cognitions), (2b) physical and bodily states, and (2c) observable activities. The category "social aspects" comprised five subcategories: (3a) roles and relationships, (3b) social effects: reactions of others, (3c) pure evaluations, (3d) attitudes and worldviews, and (3e) hobbies and interests—which we added to A. Angleitner et al.'s classification (1990). The category "overt characteristics" was divided into two subcategories: (4a) anatomy, constitution, and morphology, and (4b) appearance and looks (socio-cultural aspects of appearance). The fifth category, "chronic disorders", was, in turn, introduced instead of the imprecise category "terms of limited use". It included (5a) mental disorders and (5b) non-mental disorders.

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<sup>7</sup> *Z uwagi na jakie właściwości nie chciałby być podobny do konsumenta marki X?*

In accordance with the prototype theory (E. Rosh et al. 1976) and fuzzy-set theory (L.A. Zadeh 1965), categories have fuzzy boundaries. Bearing that in mind, the judges were allowed to assign a lexical unit to more than one subcategory.

### **Psychometric validation of judges' decisions**

The classification of 6,459 descriptions of typical brand users was performed based on the taxonomic decisions of 13 judges, taken as part of parallel psycholexical studies carried out in Polish. The procedure of training and verification of judges' taxonomic competence are briefly presented below.

The judges were psychology students in their fourth and fifth year of study, who also attended a seminar on the psychology of social perception. Their M.A. research projects directly addressed psycholexical issues and the results of their classifications of personality descriptors in Polish were supposed to be used for interpretation of their own research results. Accordingly, their motivation for reliable assessment can be regarded as very high.

Before starting the classification process, all the candidates for judges underwent a 16-hour theoretical training session during which they could study and discuss, in detail, key publications on psycholexical studies. Next, the candidates did a six-hour training session and performed their own three-stage trial classification of a few hundred personality descriptors. Each stage was followed by verification of the trial categorization in both group and individual discussions over the most common mistakes. Having reached a 50% threshold of correct classifications within each category and sub-category, the candidates took on a test task to classify 225 descriptors, which further served as a basis for the assessment of their classification decisions. The set of the descriptors had been developed on the basis of (1) extant psycholexical research (O. Gorbaniuk/ E. Czarnecka/ M. Chmurzyńska 2011) in which they were univocally assigned to the relevant categories and sub-categories, and (2) a list of markers, as well as on the basis of the results of psycholexical research in other languages. Each of 15 categories was comprised of 15 lexical units.

The validity index was calculated as a percentage of correct assignments of personality descriptors to the relevant categories and subcategories. For the category "dispositions", that index was calculated only on the basis of adjectives from sub-categories 1a and 1b (altogether 30 units), as only those referred to personality traits. According to Table 1, which shows the correctness of judicial decisions, the judges achieved a very high average classification relevance oscillating for sub-categories between 73.1% and 96.4%, and for categories between 81.5% and 95.7%.

An independent classification of 23,407 personality descriptors extracted from *Uniwersalny słownik języka polskiego* ('The Universal Dictionary of the Polish Language') edited by S. Dubisz (2008) took the judges more than ten weeks to complete. To make sure they worked systematically and independently, they were instructed to deliver the results of their classifications in the number of 1,100 lexical units in three-day intervals. After all the classifications had been completed and delivered, inter-judge reliability was calculated. For sub-categories, it oscillated between .63 and .98, whereas for categories—between .82 and .97. These indices should be regarded as satisfactory, especially in light of analogous lexical analyses conducted in other lan-

guages (e.g. A. Angleitner/ F. Ostendorf/ O.P John 1990; L. Di Blas/ M. Forzi 1999; B. Mlačić/ F. Ostendorf 2005). An ultimately distinctive feature of the taxonomic procedure applied in this study is the measurement of the validity of judicial decisions, which has so far been performed only once (A. Angleitner/ F. Ostendorf/ O.P John 1990).

As a lexical unit was assigned to a given category or sub-category only when at least seven out of 13 judges indicated that category or sub-category as the relevant one, the validity and inter-judge reliability indices ensure satisfactory reliability of classification results.

Category/ sub-category	Validity			Reliability	
	min	max	mean	$\alpha$	$r$
<b>1. Dispositions</b>	<b>76.7</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>93.6</b>	<b>.91</b>	<b>.43</b>
1a. Temperament and character	66.7	100	89.2	.91	.46
1b. Mental abilities and talents	66.7	100	82.6	.86	.35
1c. Non-mental abilities and talents	66.7	100	83.8	.84	.32
<b>2. Temporary conditions</b>	<b>91.1</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>95.7</b>	<b>.82</b>	<b>.32</b>
2a. Experiential states	80.0	100	95.4	.77	.25
2b. Physical and bodily states	80.0	100	92.3	.88	.44
2c. Observable activities	66.7	100	88.7	.65	.17
<b>3. Social aspects</b>	<b>91.4</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>94.5</b>	<b>.89</b>	<b>.41</b>
3a. Roles and relationships	53.3	100	88.2	.94	.54
3b. Social effects: Reactions of others	73.3	100	88.7	.63	.12
3c. Pure evaluations	66.7	100	83.1	.86	.38
3d. Attitudes and worldviews	53.3	100	96.4	.98	.80
3e. Hobbies and interests	50.0	100	92.3	.93	.52
<b>4. Overt characteristics</b>	<b>86.7</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>95.6</b>	<b>.95</b>	<b>.63</b>
4a. Anatomy, constitution, and morphology	26.7	100	85.1	.94	.57
4b. Appearance and looks	86.7	100	95.9	.89	.43
<b>5. Chronic disorders</b>	<b>65.0</b>	<b>95.0</b>	<b>81.5</b>	<b>.97</b>	<b>.73</b>
5a. Mental disorders	50.0	90.0	73.1	.95	.61
5b. Non-mental disorders	60.0	100	81.5	.96	.69

$\alpha$  = Cronbach's alpha coefficient,  $r$  = average correlation among judges

Table 1. Psychometric validation of judges' decisions

### 3. Results

#### Potential added value and confirmation of brands

When writing results of each interview into the database, the interviewer compared a respondent's answers with regard to the attributes that respondent (a) would like to be similar to the typical user of a particular brand, (b) is actually similar to such a user, and (c) would not like to be similar to that user. As a result of recurring answers, seven specific categories could be defined. The personal descriptors that appeared in answer to the first question (41.7% of all personal descriptors) were divided into two categories. The first category (I) comprises brand users' attributes the respondent would like to have but currently does not, because they have not been mentioned among those attributes the respondent shares with typical brand users. The second category (II; 7.9% of all descriptors) includes those desirable attributes of typical brand users the respondent already possesses and shares with them (= desirable existing similarity).

These attributes shared with typical brand users (22.9% of all consumer descriptors), which had been mentioned by the respondent in answers to the second question, were divided into three further categories (III-V). The third category (III, 7.7%) comprises those attributes which make the respondent believe he/ she is similar to typical brand users and which were also mentioned among desirable attributes in answers to the first question (= desirable existing similarity). The fourth category (IV, 14.5% of all descriptors) gathers descriptors of the attributes shared by the respondent and typical brand user, which occurred neither in the answers to the first nor to the third question. The fifth category (V, 0.7% of all descriptors) gathers person-descriptive terms that refer to attributes of the respondent's similarity to typical brand users that were marked as undesirable (= undesirable existing similarity).

The last two categories were established based on the answers to the third question ("What are the attributes in terms of which you would not like to be similar to a user of brand X?"; 35.4% of all descriptors). As a result, the sixth category (VI, 0.8% of all descriptors) contains descriptors of undesirable attributes but are, at the same time, regarded by the respondent as making him/ her similar to typical brand users (= undesirable existing similarity). In turn, the seventh category (VII, 34.5 of all descriptors) comprises descriptions of undesirable attributes the respondent does not observe in himself/ herself.

To recapitulate, the results show that 33.8% of the lexicon of comparisons to typical brand users constitutes attributes that are desirable for the respondent's self-image, but are currently not possessed by him/ her (category I). Those attributes build up a positive added value for the respondent's self-concept when purchasing a product of a certain brand. Next 31.7% of the lexicon comprises descriptors of the attributes the respondent observes in his/ her own self-image as well as in the image of typical brand users (the sum of categories II-VI). Those attributes may reflect the confirmatory value for the respondent's self-image. Finally, the remaining 34.5% of descriptors refer to the attributes the respondent does not currently possess and, furthermore, would like to avoid (category VII). The possibility of incorporating negative attributes into the consumer's self-concept may be the reason for which they avoid certain brands that may pose a threat to their self-image.

### Psycholexical structure of comparisons with typical brand users

To present the psycholexical structure of comparisons to brand users, we prepared a contingency table of descriptors classified in psycholexical categories and sub-categories together with categories of answers to three key questions asked during the interviews. Additionally, Table 2 demonstrates information on the structure of the lexicon of the Polish language as represented by the unabridged dictionary edited by S. Dubisz (2008).

Comparing the natural consumer lexicon with the Polish lexicon, it is worthwhile to draw attention to the involvement of personality-trait descriptors in consumers' descriptions, which is over twice as big as in the Polish lexicon (53.7% vs. 21.6%); e.g. such descriptors as *oszczędny* ('thrifty'), *snobistyczny* ('snobbish'), *pewny siebie* ('self-confident'), *skąpy* ('stingy'), *zarozumiały* ('conceited'), *pracowity* ('hardworking'), *leniwy* ('lazy'), *spokojny* ('calm'), or *zaczofany* ('behind the times'). In turn, a comparison of the proportion of personality descriptors with regard to three interview questions (I+II vs. III+IV+V vs. VI+VII, see Table 2) shows strong structural similarities between the two lexicons (53.7% vs. 54.5% vs. 53.2%). The involvement of personality descriptors increases when referring to desirable (62.0% and 61.8%) and undesirable (68.5% and 65.0%) attributes in terms of which the respondents perceive themselves as similar to typical brand users.

The proportion of the descriptors within the "social aspects" category is slightly lower in the consumer lexicon than in the Polish lexicon (43.7% vs. 49.2%). Nevertheless, closer scrutiny of frequencies of individual categories exhibits fewer instances of comparisons involving social roles (6.6% vs. 13.4%; e.g. *kobieta* 'woman', *student*, *farmer*, *rodzic* 'parent') and worldviews (2.9% vs. 6.3%; e.g. *tradycyjny* 'traditional', *konserwatywny* 'conservative', *patriotyczny* 'patriotic'), whereas the respondent would more often use strong evaluative lexemes (26.8% vs. 20.8%; e.g. *przeciętny* 'average', *tandetny* 'cheesy', *porządny* 'neat/ decent', *nijaki* 'nondescript') and descriptors referring to hobbies and interests (5.0% vs. 1.1%; e.g. *majsterkowicz* 'handyman', *pasjonat* 'enthusiast', *hobbysta* 'hobbyist'). A comparison of respondents' answers to the three interview questions shows a considerable increase of social evaluations when pointing to those desirable (28.5%) and undesirable (30.2%) as compared to the attributes in terms of which the respondents observed similarity (18.4%) between themselves and brand users.

Descriptors of temporary conditions occur in the consumer lexicon at a lower rate than in the Polish dictionary (12.3% vs. 24.7%). That difference mainly applies to observable activities—which are relatively less often referred to in social comparisons. In turn, the difference is not so huge as regards experiential states (8.2% vs. 7.9%; e.g. *niezdecydowany* 'undecided', *wesoły* 'cheerful', *obojętny* 'indifferent', *smutny* 'sad') and physical states (1.4% vs. 3.0; *zdrowy* 'healthy', *chorowity* 'sickly', *wyspany* 'well-rested').

In comparisons to typical brand user, there is a relatively small number of descriptors referring to appearance; they occur less often in the consumer lexicon than in the Polish dictionary (3.1% vs. 4.6%; e.g. *elegancki* 'elegant', *czysty* 'clean', *brudny* 'dirty', *umalowany* 'made-up').

Category/ sub-category	Consumer lexicon											Dictionary
	–	=	≡	≥	>	≷	Ⅶ	Ⅰ+Ⅱ	Ⅲ+Ⅳ+Ⅴ	Ⅵ+Ⅶ	Total	
<b>1. Dispositions</b>	<b>51.7</b>	<b>62.0</b>	<b>61.8</b>	<b>49.9</b>	<b>68.5</b>	<b>65.0</b>	<b>52.9</b>	<b>53.7</b>	<b>54.5</b>	<b>53.2</b>	<b>53.7</b>	<b>21.6</b>
1a. Temperament and character	42.4	52.7	52.7	43.3	65.3	62.9	46.5	44.4	47.2	46.9	45.9	15.8
1b. Mental abilities and talents	7.6	9.3	8.5	5.9	2.4	2.1	3.4	8.0	6.6	3.4	6.0	3.8
1c. Non-mental abilities and talents	2.2	1.6	1.5	0.9	0.8	0.7	0.4	2.1	1.1	0.4	1.2	0.9
<b>2. Temporary conditions</b>	<b>11.0</b>	<b>11.9</b>	<b>12.6</b>	<b>18.3</b>	<b>13.7</b>	<b>10.5</b>	<b>11.1</b>	<b>11.2</b>	<b>16.2</b>	<b>11.1</b>	<b>12.3</b>	<b>24.7</b>
2a. Experiential states	7.7	8.9	9.5	11.3	10.5	7.7	6.8	7.9	10.7	6.8	8.2	7.9
2b. Physical and bodily states	1.2	1.7	1.5	1.5	3.2	2.8	1.4	1.3	1.6	1.4	1.4	3.0
2c. Observable activities	2.6	2.7	2.8	6.4	0.8	0.7	3.6	2.6	5.0	3.5	3.5	12.2
<b>3. Social aspects</b>	<b>46.2</b>	<b>38.0</b>	<b>37.2</b>	<b>34.5</b>	<b>33.9</b>	<b>39.2</b>	<b>48.2</b>	<b>44.7</b>	<b>35.4</b>	<b>48.0</b>	<b>43.7</b>	<b>49.2</b>
3a. Roles and relationships	8.4	5.2	4.7	5.6	4.8	6.3	5.9	7.8	5.3	5.9	6.6	13.4
3b. Social effects: Reactions of others	2.5	2.4	2.3	1.5	1.6	2.8	2.1	2.5	1.8	2.1	2.2	2.6
3c. Pure evaluations	29.8	22.8	22.5	15.9	24.2	26.6	30.3	28.5	18.4	30.2	26.8	20.8
3d. Attitudes and worldviews	2.4	4.0	4.5	3.0	0.8	1.4	3.0	2.7	3.4	2.9	2.9	6.3
3e. Hobbies and interests	4.9	4.9	5.0	7.8	2.4	2.8	4.1	4.9	6.7	4.0	5.0	1.1
<b>4. Overt characteristics</b>	<b>4.8</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>2.6</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>4.6</b>
4a. Anatomy, morphology and constitution	1.0	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.9	0.8	0.5	0.9	0.8	2.4
4b. Appearance and looks	3.9	2.1	2.1	1.3	0.0	0.0	1.3	3.6	1.5	1.3	2.3	1.8
<b>5. Chronic disorders</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>3.8</b>
5a. Mental disorders	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.9	2.4	2.1	2.1	0.1	0.6	2.1	0.9	1.4
5b. Non-mental disorders	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.0	0.7	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.3	0.1	2.4
Total (frequency)	5767	1354	1321	2469	124	143	5897	7121	3914	6040	17075	23407
Total (percentage)	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

*Note:* I = desirable brand user's attributes not possessed by the respondent, II = desirable attributes also marked as being similar to typical brand users, III = attributes describing similarity with typical brand users also marked as desirable, IV = attributes describing similarity with typical brand users *not* marked as desirable or undesirable, V = attributes describing similarity with typical brand users also marked as undesirable, VI = undesirable attributes also marked as similar to typical brand users, VII = undesirable attributes not possessed by the respondent; I+II = desirable attributes, III+IV+V = attributes describing similarity with typical brand users, VI+VII = undesirable attributes.

Table 2. A summary of the consumer lexicon vs. the lexicon of the Polish language

On the basis of a frequency analysis of the descriptions of desirable and undesirable attributes in the consumer's self-image, we extracted a list 104 descriptors, reflecting approximate proportions of all the psycholexical categories established

in this study, of which 52 refer to positive attributes and 52 to negative attributes (see Appendix).

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusions

The results fully confirm the statement that brands serve a symbolic value to consumers (C.W. Park/ B.J. Jaworski/ D.J. MacInnis 1986) and, in particular, they epitomize numerous personality and non-personality attributes of their typical users (O. Gorbaniuk/ M. Dudek 2016). During the interviews, the respondents showed no difficulties in generating properties of prototype brand users even when presented with only a brand name and a picture of its products.

On the basis of the frequency of descriptors occurring during the interview that complies with the proportion of the attributes observed in social comparison processes, we can conclude that consumers, observing typical users of desirable and undesirable brands, to a similar degree, notice (1) entirely new desirable attributes they would achieve after purchasing products of a particular brand, driven by the self-enhancement motive and meeting the need to improve self-esteem (M.D. Alicke/ C. Sedikides 2009), (2) attributes that already confirm their self-concept, driven by the self-verification motive and meeting the need to maintain consistency with one's self-view (W.B. Swann/ P.J. Rentfrow/ J.S. Guinn 2003), and (3) undesirable and currently unpossessed attributes that consumers would like to incorporate into their self-concept, driven by the self-protection motive (M.D. Alicke/ C. Sedikides 2009). In particular, our results confirm earlier studies (E.N. Banister/ M.K. Hogg 2004; M. Bosnjak/ C. Brand, 2008; M.K. Hogg/ E.N. Banister 2001) that underscored the significance of undesirable brands for brand image/ brand user's image and the importance of avoiding undesired attributes in accounting for consumer behaviors as a potential threat to their self-concept (J. Angle/ M. Forehand 2011; N. Munichor/ Y. Steinhart 2016).

The study results show that 53% of all comparisons to typical brand users involve references to personality traits. This suggests that when employing questionnaires measuring personality traits to examine self-image congruence, almost a half of the inventory of meaningful attributes in social comparisons is overlooked.

In addition, worth noting is a marginal share of attributes describing appearance in comparisons to brand users.

In this study, we applied a methodological framework of psycholexical studies for establishing universal dimensions of self-image congruence. Our aim was to explore the structure of a psycholexical lexicon of consumers' comparisons to typical brand user. To do so, we addressed three questions (RQ1-RQ3).

Regarding RQ1 (about the kind of attributes used by consumers when comparing themselves to typical brand users), the results show that consumers observe both positive and negative attributes in typical brand users, and over a half of all the attributes are personality descriptors. Roughly one-third of the consumer lexicon (in which seven categories were distinguished) includes attributes that are desirable for the respondent's self-image, but are currently lacking. Another one-third embraces descriptors of the attributes observed both in the consumer's self-image and in the image of typical brand users (and these attributes may reflect the confirmatory

value for the respondent's self-image). The remaining part of descriptors refer to the attributes the respondent does not currently possess and would like to avoid (as these may pose a threat to his/ her self-image).

The answer to RQ2 (about the psycholexical structure of comparisons to typical brand users) is that personality-trait descriptors in consumers' descriptions are over twice as big as in the Polish lexicon. As for the differences, the consumer lexicon contains fewer descriptors categorized as observable activities, social roles, and worldviews (although social evaluations are more common when consumers point to desirable and undesirable attributes in comparisons to the image of typical brand users). By contrast, the Polish lexicon proved to be lower in strong evaluative adjectives and descriptors referring to hobbies and interests. The proportion of consumers' comparisons involving attributes from the categories of experiential states (cognitive or emotional states) and physical states appears to be similar.

Finally, addressing RQ3 (concerning the psycholexical structure of comparisons to typical brand users by references to desirable, shared, and undesirable attributes) revealed that the proportion of personality descriptors in respondents' answers to three interview questions is similar, although, as regards desirable and undesirable attributes, more common are purely evaluative attributes that express an attitude or affect toward typical brand users than a description of their characteristics.

Importantly, the study allowed us to extract a high-frequency list of 104 consumer descriptors (see Appendix) that can be applied in quantitative research into the factor structure of the lexicon of social comparisons conducted on the basis of (a) a list of most frequent descriptors of typical brand users, (b) examination of the meaningfulness of different attributes for brand preference, and (c) development of short scales for the measurement of self-image congruence resolving the domain adjustment problem (cf. M. Avis 2012). It is worth noting that the study presented here was restricted to brands of goods. Therefore, a valuable contribution to our results (in the area of brands of goods) would be analogous research into service brands as well as research into consumer lexicons in other countries so that cultural universality of the results of this study can be examined. Another direction of future research could be addressing a question of the extent to which consumer context affects the semantic field of the words (and relationships between them) used in descriptions of consumers, as compared to their use in descriptions of other people.

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## Appendix

### A high-frequency list of Polish descriptors of the attributes of consumers of goods (in alphabetical order)

agresywny, bez stylu/ nijaki, biedny, bogaty, ceni jakość, ceni smak, chamski, chwalipięta, cwaniacki, dba o siebie, dba o zdrowie, delikatny/ subtelny, dokładny, doświadczony, dynamiczny, dziecienny, egoistyczny, elegancki, energiczny, gadatliwy, głupi, impulsywny/ porywczy, inteligentny, kłamiwy, konsekwentny/ wytrwały, leniwy, ładny/ przystojny, ma dobry gust, ma klasę, ma pieniądze, ma poczucie humoru, ma prestiż, ma swój styl, miły, młody, modny, nadmiernie oszczędny, naiwny, nie dba o siebie, nie dba o zdrowie, nie ma gustu, nie wyróżnia się z tłumu, nie zależy mu na jakości, niechlujny, niekompetentny, niemiły, nieodpowiedzialny, niezdeterminowany, nowoczesny, nudny, obojętny, odważny, oryginalny/ kreatywny, oszczędny, otwarty na innych, pasjonat/ ma hobby, pewny siebie, pogodny, porządny/ uczciwy, pozer, pracowity, profesjonalista/ fachowiec, prostak, przeciętny/ zwyczajny, przemądrzały, rodzinny, rozrzutny, rozsądny, roztrzepany, schludny, skąpy, skoncentrowany na sobie, snobistyczny, solidny, spokojny, staromodny, staroświecki, stary, sympatyczny/ lubiany, szpanerski/ popisuje się, tandetny/ kupuje byle co, towarzyski, tradycjonalista, troskliwy, uparty,

*uzależniony/ nałogowiec, wesoły, wie czego chce, wolny/niezależny, wredny, wybredny, wyluzowany, wyniosły, wysportowany, wywyższa się, zacofany, zadbany, zadufany w sobie, zamknięty w sobie, zamożny, zaniedbany, zaradny, zarozumiały/ waśniak, zdecydowany*

**English translation (in alphabetical order)**

accurate, addicted, aggressive, athletic, average/ ordinary, backward, bigheaded, bigmouth, boorish, boring, brave, careful, cheerful, cheeseparing, childish, conceited/ cockalorum, consistent/ persistent, deceitful, decent, determined, does not care about health, does not care about himself, does not care about quality, dynamic, elegant, energetic, enjoying high prestige, enthusiast, experienced, family, fastidious, foolish, free/ independent, full of oneself, garrulous, gullible, hard-working, haughty, having a good taste, having a high regard for quality, having a high regard for taste, having class, having its own style, having money, having sense of humor, impulsive/ impetuous, incompetent, indifferent, intelligent, irresponsible, laid back, lazy, light-hearted, likeable, modern, neat, neglected, nice, nondescript, old, old-fashioned, open to others, poor, poseur, pretty/ handsome, professional/ expert, put on airs, quiet, reasonable, resolute, resourceful, rich, scatter-brained, self-concentrated, self-confident, selfish, simpleton, sloppy, smartassed, snobbish, sociable, solid, standing out above the crowd, stingy, stubborn, stuffy, swanky, tactful/subtle, take care of himself, take of health, tastelessness, thrifty, traditionalist, trashy, trendy/ fashionable, undecided, unique, unpleasant, vicious, wasteful, wealthy, well-groomed, withdrawn, young.