# An Exploratory Study on Brand Personality: The Case of A Traditional Casual Brand in Korea<sup>+</sup>

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# **Abstract**

In order to build strong brand equity in the current market circumstances, it is essential to understand the core dimensions of brand image, which is brand personality. The objectives of this study were to identify the brand personality dimensions of a casual brand, "BeanPole," and to investigate the effects of the brand personality on BeanPole buyers' brand preference, satisfaction and loyalty. The data were collected via a web survey. The sample consists of 500 people between the ages of 18–45 who are familiar with Bean Pole casual clothing brand (male– 40%; female–60%). Sixty-six percent of the sample indicated that they had purchased the Bean Pole clothing during the last three years.

A total of five factors were extracted from the brand personality index scale: They were excitement/sophistication, competence, sincerity, ruggedness, and smoothness. Compared to the B/P non-buyers, B/P buyers tended to rate excitement/sophistication, competence, sincerity, and the smoothness brand personality dimensions higher. Multiple regression analysis revealed that excitement/sophistication, competence, sincerity and ruggedness brand personality were significant predictors of respondents' casual clothing brand preference, satisfaction, and brand loyalty. Among these significant predictors, competence was the best predictor of casual clothing brand preference, satisfaction and brand loyalty. Based on these findings, strategic implications are discussed.

Key Words: brand personality, casual brand, brand preference

# I. Introduction

In the current market circumstances, differentiation based on emotional and experiential benefits that brands provide to their customers is essential in order to build strong brand equity. In this context, brand image, such as brand personality,

is an attractive and appealing concept in marketing today. Brand personality is defined as 'the set of human characteristics associated with a brand'<sup>1)</sup>. Biel<sup>2)</sup> maintains that brand personality is an important component of brand imagery-

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-a soft attribute of an image--widely used in the marketing research area. The brand personality that people associate with a brand, is transferred directly to their perceptions of the brand. For instance, Chanel is considered to be chic and glamorous, while Levi's is described as rugged. Similar to these examples, consumers tend to imbed human characteristics into brands. Brand personality is created by all of the experiences of customers with a brand and is key for success in brand adoption and purchase decision-making processes. Examining the role of brand personality is vital to understanding a customer-based relationship with a brand. Previous research indicates that brand personality is important in differentiating and developing long-term brand equity. 2)3)

Since customers use clothing as a tool for self-expression (and the personality of the brand they purchase and wear encourages more active communication with others about themselves), examining the role of brand personality in the clothing industry is vital to understanding customer-based relationships with a clothing brand. In particular, Korean consumers, tend to use brand name as the most important factor in evaluating it's apparel products<sup>4)</sup>. Although there has been little research on fashion brand equity, 5),6),7) the effect of brand personality on fashion brand equity<sup>8)</sup> has been studied. However, the importance of brand personality and its effect on brand preference and lovalty in the Korean fashion industry have not been widely acknowledged.

The objectives this study were to identify the brand personality dimensions of BeanPole (B/P), one of the leading casual fashion brands in Korea, and to investigate the effects of brand personality on brand preference, satisfaction and loyalty among B/P buyers.

### II. Review of Literature

### 1. The Concept of Brand Personality

Several definitions of brand equity have been proposed. The Marketing Science Institute (MSI) defines brand equity as "a set of associations and behavior of a brand's consumers, of channels of distribution and the company of the brand, which allows the branded product to achieve volume and profit margins more important that without he brand's name, and which gives them a sustained, strong and differentiated advantage regarding competitors."

One of the component of brand equity involves the perceptions about a brand, as reflected by the brand associations held in consumers' memory.3 Keller suggests that the quality of a brand's image depends on the favorable or unfavorable nature of that brand's associations, uniqueness, strength, and level of abstraction. These associations consist of the consumer's mind regarding the value of the brand. Aaker<sup>9)</sup> defines ten dimensions of brand image, which are the following: product attributes, intangible features, benefits, relative attributes, places, moments and forms of utilization, buyers and consumers, stars and characters attached to the brand, brand personality, and product category/competitors. Plummer<sup>10)</sup> argues that brand image is composed of product attributes, consumer benefits, and brand personality. He believes that brand personality is a key element in understanding consumers' brand choices.

Brand personality is one component of the brand image, as mentioned earlier. 10) Brand personality is defined as a set of human-like attributes associated with a particular brand, in much the same way as people relate and bond themselves to other people<sup>11)</sup>. By endowing a brand with a unique personality, brands with similar product attributes can be differentiated. By using these brands, consumers show their characteristics to others, obtain social recognition and develop identities. 12) Brand personality is important in differentiating and developing long-term brand equity.<sup>2),3)</sup>

### 2. Related Research on Brand Personality

Aaker suggests that brand personality should be defined as "the set of human characteristics associated with a given brand." The personality of a brand is one major component of the definition of brand image. Aaker<sup>11)</sup> developed a brand personality scale on the basis of personality scales from psychology, personality scales used by marketers, and the original qualitative research of a numbers of brands' personality traits in an American context with a scale frequently used in research. The final scale contained 42 personality traits. A series of factor analyses resulted in five personality dimensions and 15 facets. These dimensions include: sincerity, represented by attributes such as down-to-earth, honest, wholesome, cheerful; excitement, represented by attributes such as daring, spirited, imaginative, and up-to-date; competence, represented by attributes such as reliable, intelligent, secure, and confident, successful; sophistication, represented by attributes such as glamorous, upper class, good-looking, charming; and ruggedness, represented by attributes such as outdoorsy, tough, masculine, and western.

Aaker, Benet, Martinez, &Garolera 13) conducted additional studies to examine how the symbolic and expressive attributes associated with commercial brands are structured, and how this structure varies across three cultures: the United States, Japan, and Spain. The study revealed that a set of brand personality dimensions share similar meanings in Japan and the United States (e.g., sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication). The study also revealed that some brand personality dimensions are culture-specific, such as in Japan (e.g., peacefulness) and the United States (e.g., ruggedness). In a study of Korean consumers by Yi and La, 14) five dimensions of brand personality similar to Aaker's were revealed.

Since brand personality is developed by consumers' experiences and is a important factor in understanding consumers' brand choices and their purchasing behavior, understanding brand personality is essential to understanding the relationship between a brand and its consumer. Besearchers have further explored how these dimensions of brand personality could increase consumers' brand preferences and usage. Aaker's brand personality concept and five brand personality dimensions have been frequently used in research.

Yi and La<sup>19)</sup> applied Aaker's<sup>11)</sup> personality scale to the context of a Korean discount store in order to investigate the structural relationships among brand personality, identification, and equity. They found that the

sincerity and excitement dimensions influenced identification. and that identification had a direct impact on brand loyalty. Lim, Ahn, and Joo 16) found that brand personality factors have a significant influence on brand choice, regardless of product type. However, the relative influence of brand personality factors compared to product attributes is different based on the product type. While the relative influence of brand personality is stronger than that of product attributes for low-involvement products, product attributes had a much stronger influence on consumers' brand choices for high-involvement products.

However, studies on Korean fashion brand personality and its relationship between consumers' brand preferences and loyalty are limited. Therefore, In this study, the brand personality index scale<sup>11)</sup> was applied to Bean Pole(B/P), one of the major traditional casual brands in Korea. After identifying five dimensions of brand personality by factor analysis, we examined the relationship between brand personality dimensions and brand preference, satisfaction and loyalty.

# III. Methods

The "Bean Pole" casual brand was chosen as the target product for this study, due to its high sales volume in the apparel industry and consumers' high level of brand satisfaction<sup>20)</sup>. From a pilot study with 50 college students selecting the brand for this study, Bean Pole was the most well known and most preferred fashion brand.

### 1. Research Questions

- 1) To identify the brand personality dimensions of a traditional casual brand (BeanPole: B/P);
- 2) To compare the brand personality dimensions of B/P between buyers and non-buyers of B/P; and
- 3) To investigate the effects of brand personality on brand preferences, satisfaction and loyalty among B/P buyers.

### 2. Measurement

A Brand Personality Index (BPI) including 42 items of brand personality traits (developed by Aaker) was used in this research. For these 42 items, respondents were asked to assign a value from 1 (very unlikely) to 5 (very likely) to each attribute.

Brand preference, satisfaction, and loyalty measures were developed, based on previous research. 14),21) Consumers' brand preferences were measured with questions, such as, "Do you prefer the B/P brand?" (1=not at all prefer; 7=extremely prefer); and, "Do you like the B/P brand?" (1=not at all like; 7=extremely like). Consumer brand satisfaction was measured with questions, such as, "I am satisfied with visiting the B/P brand store"; "I am satisfied with buying B/P brand apparel items"; and, "I am satisfied with having B/P brand apparel items"; the respondents were asked to assign a value from 1(very unlikely) to 7 (very likely). Consumer brand loyalty was measured with question, such as, "I will likely buy the B/P brand again in the future"; and. "I will likely recommend buying B/P brand apparel items" (1=very unlikely; 7=(very likely).

### 3. Data Analysis

For the data analysis, frequencies, factor

analyses, t-tests and regression analyses were used. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics were used to determine the characteristics of the sample. Exploratory factor analysis (Principal component) with Varimax rotation using the minimum eigenvalue of one as the criteria (to control the number of factors extracted) was used as the method to extract the underlying dimensions of Internet store attributes. Those items loading above .50 on a single factor and loading .25 on all other factors were retained. Items that did not contribute to any of the scales were dealt with separately.

Secondly, a reliability test was performed on each scale to examine whether or not the items included in the scale were reliable measures. A Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated for each scale. Lastly, a rotated factor matrix was created and was examined as to whether the interpretation of each scale appeared to be possible and/or meaningful.

# 4. Sample Characteristics

The data were collected via a web survey, using an online panel provided by a commercial online research company located in Seoul.

<Table 1> Sample Characteristics

Characteristics		Buyers (n=368)		Non-buyers (n=132)	
		N	%	N	%
Sex	Male	149	40.5	51	38.6
Sex	Female	219	59.5	81	61.4
	20-25	84	22.8	43	32.6
	26-30	95	25.8	32	24.2
Age	31-35	90	24.5	25	18.9
	36-40	66	17.9	26	19.7
	41-45	33	9.0	6	4.5
Marital status	Single	275	55.0	75	56.8
Mantai Status	Married	225	45.0	57	43.2
	Student	67	18.2	29	22.0
	Professional	132	35.9	29	22.0
Job	Housewife	65	17.7	9	6.8
	Service	31	8.4	12	9.1
	Other	73	19.9	53	40.2
Household Income (10,000won)	100 or less	26	7.1	16	12.1
	more than 100-200	68	18.5	28	21.2
	more than 200-300	115	31.2	37	28.0
	more than 300-400	79	21.5	19	14.4
	more than 400-500	41	11.2	14	10.6
	more than 500	39	10.6	8	6.1

Korea. The sample consists of 500 people between the ages of 18-45 who are familiar with the Bean Pole casual clothing brand (male- 40%; female-60%).

Three-hundred-sixty-eight respondents indicated that they had purchased B/P clothing within the last three years (73.6%); these respondents were categorized as "B/P buyers" in this study. The majority of the B/P buyers indicated that they had purchased 1-3 B/P items within the last three years (mean=3.82; median=2). The department store (51.9%) was the most frequently used retail store, followed by street (consignment) stores (22.0%), outlet stores (20.7%), and online stores (5.4%). The t-test on household income and clothing expenditures were also performed. Compared to B/P non-buyers, B/P buyers tend to have higher household incomes, higher household clothing expenditures and higher personal clothing expenditures. Detailed demographic information about the sample in this research is shown in Table 1.

# IV. Results

### 1. Brand Personality Dimensions

An exploratory factor analysis using principal components analysis was done on the 42 items of brand personality with a Varimax rotation. For this analysis, the total sample of 500 people's responses were included. During the factor analysis, 12 items not related to any of the factors were excluded, and a total of five factors were extracted from remaining 30 items, which were the following: excitement/sophistication, competence, sincerity, ruggedness, and smoothness. The

Cronbach's alpha for these five factors ranged from .67 to .93, indicating that the measures were generally reliable (See Table 2). The scores of all items in each factor were added up for further analysis.

# Comparison of Brand Personality Dimensions between Buyers and Non-buyers of B/P

As indicated earlier, three-hundred-sixtyeight respondents indicated that they had purchased B/P clothing within the last three years, and these respondents were categorized as B/P buyers. Those who indicated that they had not purchased B/P clothing within the last three years were categorized as B/P non -buyers. T-tests were performed in order to compare B/P buyers' and non-buyers' ratings of each brand personality dimension. Buyers and non-buyers of B/P both rated competence as the highest, followed by sincerity, smoothness, and excitement/sophistication. The results indicated that both buyers and non-buyers did not perceive the brand to have a tough or rugged image. Compared to the B/P nonbuyers, B/P buyers tended to rate the excitement/sophistication, competence, sincerity, and smoothness brand personality dimensions higher (See Table 3).

# 3. Brand Personality and Brand Preference

A regression analysis was used to examine whether the brand personality dimensions were predictors of the B/P casual clothing buyers' brand preference. For this analysis, only B/P buyers' (n=368) responses were included. A mean score of the consumers' responses of two questions on brand preference

<Table 2> Results of factor analysis: Brand personality

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<u>Factor</u>	Factor	Eigen Value	% of Variation	Cronbach's	
Statement	Loadings	Ligeri value	76 OI VAIIALIOII	alpha	
Excitement/Sophistication					
Spirited	.809				
Trendy	.774				
Unique	.764				
Up-to-date	.761				
Exciting	.753				
Imaginative	.748	11.23	37.43	.93	
Young	.684				
Daring	.637				
Cheerful	.621				
Cool	.610				
Contemporary	.607				
Independent	.537				
Competence					
Successful	.813				
Leader	.798				
Confident	.796	3.01	10.02	.90	
Technical	.751				
Upper class	.745				
Corporate	.695				
Sincerity					
Family-oriented	.744				
Honest	.725				
Small-town	.712				
Wholesome	.707	2.63	8.77	.87	
Sincere	.705				
Down-to-earth	.666				
Real	.619				
Original	.596				
Ruggedness					
Tough	.855	5.14	5.14	.81	
Rugged	.712				
Smoothness					
Feminine	.781	4.03	4.04	.67	
Smooth	.748				

<Table 3> Comparison of brand personality between buyers and non-buyers of B/P

Variable		Mean	+	
		Buyer	Non-buyer	ί
	Excitement/Sophistication	4.30 (.98)	4.00 (.97)	3.04**
Brand Personality	Competence	4.82 (.97)	4.54 (.86)	2.94**
	Sincerity	4.54 (.82)	4.16 (.85)	4.62***
	Ruggedness	3.44 (1.27)	3.24 (1.18)	1.57
	Smoothness	4.40 (1.02)	4.05 (1.02)	3.38***

\*\*p<.01; \*\*\* p<.001

were used as a dependent variable. Multiple regression analysis revealed that excitement/sophistication, competence, sincerity and ruggedness brand personality dimensions were significant predictors of the respondents' preference to the casual clothing brand. Among these, the competence (t=.399, p<.001) dimension was the most significant predictor, followed by the excitement/sophistication (t=.261, p<.001) dimension (See Table 4).

### 4. Brand Personality and Brand Satisfaction

A regression analysis was used to examine whether the brand personality dimensions were

predictors of B/P casual clothing buyers' satisfaction of owning B/P brand clothing. For this analysis, only B/P buyers' (n=368) responses were included. A mean score of the consumers' responses of three questions on brand satisfaction were used as a dependent variable. Multiple regression analysis revealed that excitement/sophistication, competence, sincerity and ruggedness brand personality dimensions were significant predictors of satisfaction in owning B/P brand clothing. Among these, the competence (t=.377, p<.001) dimension was the most significant predictor, followed by the sophistication dimension (t=.245, p<.001). (See Table 5).

<Table 4> Results of multiple regression analysis of the B/P casual brand preference

Independent veriable	Coefficient				
Independent variable	В	Std. Error	Beta	t	
Excitement/Sophistication	.180	.042	.261	4.300***	
Competence	.278	.039	.399	7.144***	
Sincerity	.104	.040	.127	2.622***	
Ruggedness	099	.025	187	-3.935***	
Smoothness	013	.031	020	425	

# Model Summary

R=.606  $R^2=.367$  Adjusted  $R^2=.358$  Standard error of the estimate=.539

<Table 5> Results of multiple regression analysis of brand satisfaction

Independent variable	Coefficient				
independent variable	В	Std. Error	Beta	t	
Excitement/Sophistication	267	.064	.245	4.194***	
Competence	.414	.059	.377	6.996***	
Sincerity	.249	.060	.192	4.21***	
Ruggedness	123	.038	147	-3.210***	
Smoothness	.028	.047	.027	.598	

### Model Summary

R=.643  $R^2=.414$  Adjusted  $R^2=.405$  Standard error of the estimate=.820

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> p<.001

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> p<.001

### 5. Brand Personality and Brand Loyalty

Regression analysis was used to examine whether the brand personality dimensions were predictors of B/P casual clothing brand consumers' repurchase intentions. For this analysis, only B/P buyers' (n=368) responses were included. A mean score of the consumers' responses of two questions on brand loyalty were used as a dependent variable. Multiple regression analysis revealed that excitement/sophistication, competence, sincerity and ruggedness brand personality dimensions were significant predictors of B/P casual clothing brand consumers' repurchase Among these, the competence dimension (t=.390, p<.001) was the most significant predictor. followed the excitement/sophistication dimension (t=.248, p<.05), and sincerity (t=.200, p<.001). (See Table 6).

# V. Conclusion

# 1. Discussion and Implications

This study was undertaken to identify the

brand personality dimensions of one of the leading casual fashion brands in Korea, and to investigate the effects of brand personality on B/P buyers' brand preference, satisfaction and loyalty. Five dimensions of brand personality were extracted, which were similar to Aaker's five dimensions of brand personality. Similar to the findings of previous research 13),14), these results imply that a set of brand personality dimensions (e.g., sincerity, excitement/sophistication, competence) common to both Korea and the United However, other dimensions (e.g., smoothness in this study), were found to carry more specific cultural meanings. These differences in the basic structure of B/P's al.'s<sup>13)</sup> case supports Aaker et comparing the brand personality dimensions of United States, Japan, and Spain. Aaker et suggests that although utilitarian attributes of brands tend to show limited similar meanings across different nations or cultures, the symbolic aspects associated with a brand, such as brand personality, tend to vary in different cultures. Although the results of this study cannot be generalized because this study investigated only one Korean casual fashion brand, the results may suggest the

<Table 6> Results of multiple regression analysis of brand loyalty

Independent variable	Coefficient				
independent variable	В	Std. Error	Beta	t	
Excitement/Sophistication	.286	.066	.248	4.318*	
Competence	.453	.062	.390	7.367***	
Sincerity	.274	.063	.200	4.365***	
Ruggedness	093	.040	104	-2.316*	
Smoothness	005	.049	004	094	

### Model Summary

R=.658  $R^2=.432$  Adjusted  $R^2=.425$  Standard error of the estimate=.854

<sup>\*</sup>p<.05; \*\*\* p<.001

possibility that the meanings embedded in commercial fashion brands have culturally specific, as well as culturally common aspects.

The t-test results revealed that B/P buyers tended to rate the excitement/sophistication, competence, sincerity, and smoothness brand personality dimensions higher than non-buyers did. The results of multiple regression analysis showed that brand personality dimensions were significant in explaining the respondents' brand preference, satisfaction, and loyalty. Among the five personality dimensions, excitement/sophistication, competence, and sincerity had a significant positive effect on buyers' brand preference, satisfaction and loyalty. Since the B/P brand is a traditional casual brand that attempts to convey the concept of a sincere and conservative look, these brand personality dimensions were significant predictors of buyers' behavior. On the other hand, the ruggedness brand personality dimension had a negative effect on casual fashion brand preference, satisfaction, and loyalty. These results of the regression analysis support the results of previous research<sup>2),3)</sup> that brand personality is vital to understanding customer -based relationships with a brand.

In today's highly competitive Korean fashion industry, it is important to position a brand in terms of its brand image. It is also necessary for fashion marketers to effectively develop and deliver an attractive and differentiated brand personality through various marketing strategies, including product design, merchandise assortment, visual merchandising, and promotional activities in order to increase brand satisfaction, as well as brand loyalty. By developing a strong brand personality in

advertising and product design, fashion marketers can powerfully differentiate themselves from their competitors and can increase brand loyalty.

In the case of B/P casual brands, providing competent, sincere, and sophisticated brand personalities were found to be a positive B/P effect on the brand preference, satisfaction, and loyalty. As a result, many current B/P marketing strategies are designed to deliver those brand personalities. instance, B/P's current "no-sale" pricing strategy and Its advertising strategy of using a famous international actress is an effective tool to deliver those brand personality dimensions. These strategies provide the consumers with a successful, upper-class, and sophisticated brand image. Therefore, current strategies need continued. However, since many competitors in the Korean traditional casual market are following B/P's brand concept and marketing strategies. B/P marketers need to long-term goals so as to create its unique brand image, as well as to set up proactive B/P strategies differentiating from competitors.

# 2. Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. The findings of this study relied on only one brand. Also, a convenience sample was used for this research. Research with various fashion brands and product categories could be helpful in improving the generalizability of the results.

For future research, since the brand personality index scale used in this study was developed in the US, this scale may not be

appropriate for measuring brand personality dimensions in a different cultural context. Additional research is needed in order to develop scales measuring Korean fashion brand personality dimensions, and in order to identify personality frameworks that capture the key personality dimensions useful for differentiating competitive brands within fashion product categories.

There is a possibility that the meanings of individual brand personality traits interpreted differently for different brands, due to differences in various characteristics of each brand. Therefore, future research is needed to verify the stability of brand personality in association with different fashion product types (e.g., high-fashion designer brands), and with other fashion Furthermore, future research is needed to investigate global fashion brands' (e.g., Polo) brand personality dimensions and to determine whether brand personality is different in various geographical and cultural contexts.

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