

## **Brand Personality, Consumer Satisfaction, and Loyalty: A Perspective from Denim Jeans Brands**

By: [Jin Su](#) and Xiao Tong.

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### **Abstract:**

This study employed Aaker's brand personality framework to empirically investigate the personality of denim jeans brands and to examine the impact of brand personality on consumer satisfaction and brand loyalty based on data collected from 474 college students. Results revealed that the personality of denim jeans brands can be described in six dimensions with 51 personality traits: attractiveness, practicality, ruggedness, flexibility, friendliness, and honesty. The results indicated that consumers associate particular brand personality dimensions with denim jeans brands. Also, the various dimensions of brand personality have different effects on consumer satisfaction and consumer brand loyalty.

**Keywords:** denim brands | brand personality | consumers

### **Article:**

In contemporary societies, people are constantly engaged in building their identities; thus, the symbolic qualities of products are often the primary reasons for their purchase (Maehle, Otnes, & Supphellen, 2011; Solomon, 1983). Brand personality or the “set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (Aaker, 1997, p. 347) recognizes the symbolic and emotional meaning that taps consumer appeal and affects purchase decisions (Belk, 1988; Maehle et al., 2011). Brand personality is a central driver of positive attitude toward and preference for a brand and an efficient way of creating and building a connection with consumers (Biel, 1993). For consumers, apparel products have always been the most commonly used/chosen products across different social situations due to their self-expressive or symbolic benefits (Sung & Kim, 2010).

Referred to as an American original, denim jeans are clearly a global presence. Jeans exist in every country in the world, but in many of these countries, jeans have become the single most

common form of everyday attire. At any given moment, more than half the world will be wearing this single textile (Miller, 2010; Miller & Woodward, 2007). The average woman in the United States owns 8.3 pairs of jeans and over half of the adults in the U.K. “usually” wear jeans (Miller & Woodward, 2007). The symbolic meanings of denim jeans have evolved from the initial utilitarian purposes of durable work clothes to a fashionable commodity associated with the youth culture and a means of cultural expression, further to status symbols with the emergence of designer brands (Gordon, 1991; Rahman, 2011). Denim jeans carry more implications about the American consumers than anything else we consume (Sullivan, 2006). They connect intimacy and personalization to ubiquity in a manner that is perhaps unique, even within the genre of clothing (Miller & Woodward, 2007). Therefore, consumers often use jeans to create, reinforce, and communicate their self-concepts and build meaningful consumer–brand relationships.

The purpose of this study was to identify the brand personality scale for denim jeans brands and to conceptualize and empirically investigate the impact of brand personality on key dependent variables in consumer behavior. This study will contribute to the literature in several ways. First, this research builds on and contributes to previous brand personality literature by studying brand personality within a specific area of investigation. The Brand Personality Scale (BPS) developed by Aaker (1997) explains the way American consumers perceive brands across symbolic and utilitarian product and service categories. Aaker's BPS measures brand personality on an aggregate level across multiple brands of different product categories.

However, recent research shows there is evidence of the advantages of focusing on a specific area of application in brand personality research. That would be the more exact semantics of items, facets, and dimensions, directly related to the area investigated (Valette-Florence & De Barnier, 2013). With the long history and the rich cultural background, with feelings of authenticity and Americanness, denim jeans have evolved as the most ubiquitous fashionable apparel products (Gordon, 1991; Miller & Woodward, 2011). Symbolic and self-expressive values associated with denim jeans brands are key motivations behind purchasing denim jeans products (Gordon, 1991; Wu & DeLong, 2006). Little is known about consumers' perceptions of denim jeans from brand personality perspective. Motivated by the recent studies that argued for creating an appropriate scale and specific personality traits in particular sectors (Kaplan, Yurt, Guneri, & Kurtulus, 2010; Kim, Baek, & Martin, 2010; Tong & Su, 2014; Valette-Florence & De Barnier, 2013), we seek to define brand personality measurement scale adapted to denim jeans brands. Therefore, the study is clearly in line with the recent research on brand personality.

Second, the study empirically investigates the relational consequences of brand personality. More specifically, this research conceptually links two streams of research and examines the personality structure of denim jeans brands and the impact of various dimensions of denim jeans brand personality on two dependent variables: consumer satisfaction and consumer brand loyalty. Despite the importance of the brand personality construct in marketing research, there is a dearth of research that empirically demonstrates the utility of developing a strong, positive brand personality, that is, the effect that brand personality will have on consumer-related outcomes (Su & Tong, 2015; Sung & Kim, 2010).

Limited research has empirically examined the determinant roles of various dimensions of the brand personality construct in consumers' behavior. Thus, this study proposes a theoretical model including brand personality, consumer satisfaction, and consumer brand loyalty and empirically investigates the effects of brand personality dimensions on consumer satisfaction and brand loyalty in the context of denim jeans brands. To the best of our knowledge, no study has examined the influence of various dimensions of brand personality on consumer satisfaction and brand loyalty in the textile and apparel industry.

## **Theoretical Background**

### **Brand Personality**

Previous studies have asserted that consumers find it natural to build relationships with brands (Fournier, 1998) and to imbue them with different personality characteristics, such as “active” or “confident.” Thus, the symbolic and emotional use of brands is possible (Aaker, 1997; Plummer, 2000; Tong & Su, 2014). The concept of brand personality in the literature recognizes the use of human descriptors to portray brands (Freling & Forbes, 2005; Geuens, Weijters, & De Wulf, 2009; Maehle et al., 2011; Plummer, 2000). More formally, the most widely cited definition of brand personality is the following: “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (Aaker, 1997, p. 347).

Previous literature suggests that consumers often use brands to create, reinforce, and communicate their self-concepts (Belk, 1988; Sirgy, 1982). Brand personality enables consumers to identify themselves with a brand and to express their own personality through the brand, as individuals tend to consider possessions to be part of their “self” and consumers treat the personality of the brand as a reflection and an extension of their own personalities (Belk, 1988; Maehle et al., 2011). Consumers have a higher preference for brands that they perceive to possess a personality that reflects their self-identity (Sirgy, 1982). Researchers have suggested that numerous benefits may accrue to brands with strong, positive brand personalities. A favorable brand personality is thought to increase consumer preference and usage (Sirgy, 1982), increase emotions in consumers (Biel, 1993), increase levels of trust and loyalty (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009; Fournier, 1998; Louis & Lombart, 2010; Sung & Kim, 2010), and provide a basis for product differentiation (Aaker, 1996; Arora & Stoner, 2009; Freling & Forbes, 2005).

Aaker (1997) developed a 42-item measurement scale called the BPS and identified five distinct personality dimensions (Excitement, Sincerity, Competence, Sophistication, and Ruggedness) that are associated with brands across symbolic and utilitarian product and service categories. All of the analyses by Aaker (1997) and many later brand personality studies (Aaker, Benet-Martínez, & Garolera, 2001; Bosnjak, Bochmann, & Hufschmidt, 2007; Geuens et al., 2009; Milas & Mlačić, 2007; Sung & Tinkham, 2005) measured brand personality on an aggregate level across multiple brands of a wide variety of product categories. However, studies have suggested that personality perceptions may vary by product category and different settings and that specific brand personality dimensions are associated with particular product categories or sectors (Arora & Stoner, 2009; Kim et al., 2010; Tong & Su, 2014; Valette-Florence & De Barnier, 2013). As the most ubiquitous fashionable apparel products with rich symbolic and

emotional meanings, denim jeans brands are closely and naturally connected with American consumers, thus justifying the need to define brand personality measurement scale adapted to this particular sector.

### Brand Personality, Consumer Satisfaction, and Consumer Brand Loyalty

Brand personality enables companies to create unique and favorable impressions in consumers' mind and then establish and enhance brand equity (Louis & Lombart, 2010; Su & Tong, 2015). Brand personality, especially a distinctive, powerful, favorable, and stable one, is beneficial for both marketers and consumers and can create a bond between them (Sung & Kim, 2010). Consequently, brand personality has been recognized as an effective way to determine a brand's position relative to its competitors by the marketers (Sung & Kim, 2010). From consumer perspective, brand personality presents consumers' self-expression and symbolic characteristics. Consumers may apply brands to meet their demands and establish their self-brand connections. This study proposes that the dimensions of denim jeans brand personality have a direct and significant impact on two key variables in consumer behavior: consumer satisfaction and consumer brand loyalty.

#### **Consumer satisfaction**

Consumer satisfaction has come to represent an important cornerstone for customer-oriented business practices across a multitude of companies operating in diverse industries (Roth & Bösener, 2015; Tsiotsou, 2006). Giese and Cote (2000) provided a definitional framework of consumer satisfaction which is a summary affective response of varying intensity, is with a specific time point of determination and limited duration, and is directed toward focal aspects of product acquisition and/or consumption. Previous literature theorized that customer satisfaction can be classified into two types: transaction-specific satisfaction and general overall satisfaction (Roth & Bösener, 2015). Transaction-specific customer satisfaction refers to the assessment customers make after a specific purchase experience, and overall satisfaction means the customers' rating of the brand based on their experiences. The cumulative satisfaction judgment is more stable because it has developed over time (Roth & Bösener, 2015). It is cumulative satisfaction that motivates a firm's investment in consumer satisfaction (Anderson, Fornell, & Lehmann, 1994).

Oliver (1993) suggested that consumer satisfaction requires experience dependency and involves emotions. In Oliver (1997), satisfaction is defined as pleasurable fulfillment; that is, the consumer senses that consumption fulfills some need, desire, goal, or so forth and that this fulfillment is pleasurable. According to Armstrong, Adam, Denize, and Kotler (2014), consumer satisfaction is defined as a person's emotional judgment toward a product or service which is the result of comparing product's real performance and the product performance expectations. Thus, satisfaction is the consumer's sense that consumption provides outcomes against a standard of pleasure versus displeasure (Oliver, 1999). In this study, we view consumer satisfaction as a consumer's overall emotional response to the entire brand experience.

Brand personality impacts consumers' perceptual processing of product information and may create a basis for differentiation, which impacts what customers think and feel about brands particularly with regard to perceived quality and perceived value, and further impacts customers'

attitude and behavior. Moreover, selecting a brand with a certain personality enables consumers to express themselves. Freling and Forbes (2005) demonstrated that for parity products, the presence of claims communicating a strong, positive brand personality should lead to relatively higher product evaluations in comparison with the presence of claims that merely inform consumers about the product's features and benefits. Considering the fact that consumer satisfaction can be viewed as a consumer's overall emotional response to the entire brand experience and that brand personality encourages a positive evaluation and perception and enhances the overall consumer preferences, we propose that denim jeans brand personality offers value to consumers and enhances consumer satisfaction. Thus:

H1: Brand personality dimensions affect consumer satisfaction positively.

### **Consumer brand loyalty**

Businesses understand the profit impact of having a loyal customer base. The focus of activities is no longer solely on competing for new customers, but also on securing the loyalty of existing ones. Previous studies reported that the net present value increase in profit that results from a 5% increase in customer retention varies between 25% and 95% (Oliver, 1999) and the relative costs of customer retention are substantially less than those of acquisition (Flint, Blocker, & Boutin, 2011; Fornell & Wernerfelt, 1987; Oliver, 1999).

Oliver (1999) defined brand loyalty as “a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior” (p. 34). Oliver's definition emphasizes the two different aspects of brand loyalty—behavioral and attitudinal (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Behavioral, or purchase, loyalty consists of repeated purchases of the brand, whereas attitudinal loyalty refers to the psychological commitment that a consumer makes in the purchase act, such as intentions to purchase and intentions to recommend without necessarily taking the actual repeat purchase behavior into account (Nam, Ekinici, & Whyatt, 2011). Yoo and Donthu (2001) defined brand loyalty from an attitudinal perspective as “the tendency to be loyal to a focal brand, which is demonstrated by the intention to buy the brand as a primary choice” (p. 3). Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) argued that “attitudinal brand loyalty includes a degree of dispositional commitment in terms of some unique value associated with the brand” (p. 82). In the present study, we conceptualize consumer loyalty based on an attitudinal perspective and consumer perceptions.

Consumers in our changing social world consistently wish to satisfy their need for love, intimacy, and closeness to their own image (Aaker, 1996). Companies increasingly respond to this social development by attaching a distinctive personality to themselves and their products and services to meet their customers' personal needs. Thus, companies try to infuse their products with specific attributes that create a continuous brand image. Building unique brand identity together will have a great influence in the development of favorable attitudinal and behavioral brand-related outcomes.

The brand personality construct has been proposed as an important antecedent of consumer loyalty (Sung & Kim, 2010). Brand personality can serve as a basis for meaningful and sustainable emotional differentiation. But first of all, the concept enables customers to attribute an identity to a brand and therefore supports their identification with the brand. Brand personality provides consumer self-expressive or symbolic values; thus, consumers prefer to express their personalities using brands. This in turn increases the personal meaning of the brand. Such meaningful and strong consumer–brand relationships are viewed to be most beneficial in uncertain environments (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001) as purchasing a familiar brand's products can save time and reduce uncertainty and comprehension risks.

Brand personality is created and maintained in the mind of the consumer as a reflection of the perception of the brand; therefore, it can have a meaningful and significant impact on both brand trust and brand affect (Sung & Kim, 2010). Strong and positive affective responses will be associated with high levels of brand commitment and brand loyalty should be greater under conditions of more positive emotional mood or affect (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Research has demonstrated that well-established brand personality can help consumers strengthen their brand emotional ties, enhance preference, trust, and loyalty (Brakus et al., 2009; Fournier, 1998; Louis & Lombart, 2010; Sung & Kim, 2010). Furthermore, Magin, Algesheimer, Huber, and Herrmann (2003) emphasized the fact that the creation of a clear and distinctive brand personality may help companies keep customers loyal even if they are in search of variety. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2: Brand personality dimensions affect consumer loyalty positively.

### **The influence of consumer satisfaction on consumer brand loyalty**

Consumer satisfaction and loyalty are positively related to marketer profitability and market share (Flint et al., 2011). According to Sivadas and Baker-Prewitt (2000), customer loyalty is the ultimate objective of customer satisfaction measurement and it is found to be a key determinant of a brand's long-term viability. Therefore, retaining existing customers and strengthening customer loyalty appears to be very crucial for product or service providers to gain competitive advantage (Deng, Lu, Wei, & Zhang, 2010).

The concentration on customer loyalty has come along with an increased interest in the construct of customer satisfaction. The underlying assumption is that satisfied customers are highly likely to be loyal customers in the future. Consumers who experience repeated satisfaction are motivated to continue this relationship and less likely to look elsewhere. It is widely accepted that satisfied consumers are less price sensitive, less influenced by competitors' attack, and loyal to the firm longer than dissatisfied customers (Nam et al., 2011). In addition, these satisfied customers will probably engage in “word-of-mouth” advertising among their friends and acquaintances, especially in creating virtual brand communities (Magin et al., 2003). It is widely assumed that consumer satisfaction is a good predictor of purchase behavior (repurchase, purchase intentions, brand choice, and switching behavior). Consumer satisfaction stimulates consumer loyalty and commitment, which in turn drive the long-term success of firms in a positive way (Deng et al., 2010; Roth & Bösener, 2015; Tsiotsou, 2006).

Academics in marketing are unanimous in their view that customer loyalty is first and foremost a result of a customer's satisfaction with the brand (Magin et al., 2003). Previous studies report a strong connection between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (Deng et al., 2010; Flint et al., 2011; Tsiotsou, 2006). Brakus et al. (2009) revealed the positive and strong linkage between consumer satisfaction and loyalty. When a consumer feels good about the relationship and appreciates the product or brand, a high level of commitment and loyalty results (Brakus et al., 2009). Thus:

H3: Consumer satisfaction affects consumer brand loyalty positively.

A conceptual framework was developed and is shown in Figure 1. Brand personality dimensions are considered latent-independent (exogenous) variables, while consumer satisfaction and consumer brand loyalty are considered latent-dependent (endogenous) variables.

## **Methodology**

### **Selection of Brands**

We included denim jeans brands that were dominant in the market, known to consumers, and that had a distinct image in the market. A wide variety of brands representing a spectrum of personality types was selected to enhance the scope of the scale (Aaker, 1997). Based on different sources, such as *Women's Wear Daily* (Lipke, 2010; Tucker, 2010), Cotton Inc.'s *Cotton Lifestyle Monitor* (Cotton Incorporated, 2014), and the literature (Barney & Hesterly, 2012), 26 jeans brands were chosen as examples of well-known jeans brands. Brands include Levi's, Lee, Wrangler, Seven for All Mankind, Guess, Gap jeans, Buckle, True Religion, etc. At the beginning of the questionnaire, a list of these 26 popular denim jeans brands was provided and respondents were asked to pick one jeans brand that they were most familiar with. Respondents also had the opportunity to write down their most familiar jeans brand if that was not included in our list and answer the survey based on that brand.

### **Sample and Procedure**

After receiving Institutional Review Board permission, the researchers conducted a self-administered survey with a convenience sample of American college students. A convenience sample was selected due to cost and time advantages. We used a sample of college students in this study, because young people, including college students, constitute the large and important target market for denim jeans (Vrontis & Vronti, 2004). A total of 510 copies of the questionnaire were hand-delivered to students enrolled at two universities in the United States (one from the north, and one from the south), and 474 responses were found valid and used in the data analysis. There were no statistically significant differences between the two respondent groups in terms of gender, age, or ethnic background. The participants' age ranged from 18 to 35. Sixty-five percent of respondents were females. The most prevalent ethnic group was Caucasian (79%), followed by African American (14%), and Hispanic (2%).

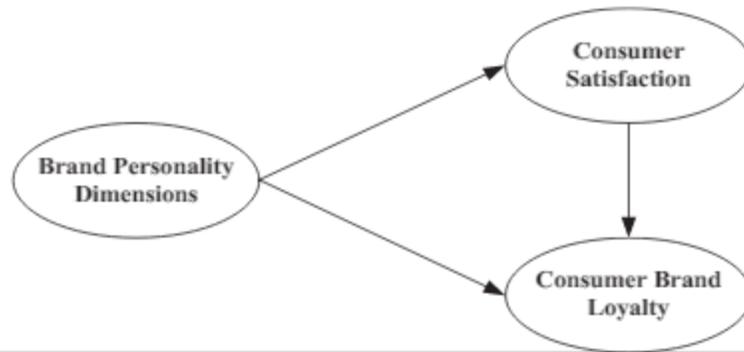


Figure 1: Conceptual framework for the study.

## Survey Instrument

In line with Valette-Florence and De Barnier's (2013) study that encourages focus on a specific area of application in brand personality research, we aimed to define denim jeans brand personality measurement scale: the more exact semantics of items, facets, and dimensions, directly related to denim jeans brand. Guided by Aaker's (1997) brand personality study, our selection and identification of denim jeans brand personality attributes followed a four-step process. In the first step, we conducted free-association task. Seventy college students were asked to describe their experiences with denim jeans brands and to write down the personality attributes that first came to mind when thinking about well-known denim jeans brands. A total of 138 traits were generated in this process. In the second step, we identified 25 additional attributes which were unique and relevant to jeans from the previous literature on brand personality scale (Aaker, 1997; Sung & Kim, 2010) and added to the list, resulting in 163 attributes.

In the third stage, we wanted to reduce the 163 attributes to a more manageable number of attributes. In this stage, 32 attributes were excluded because they conveyed similar meaning as another attribute (e.g., intelligent—smart; attractive—charming, bold—daring, youthful—young, famous—popular); 30 attributes were eliminated because they were somewhat irrelevant to the construct of interest (e.g., fierce, clean, corporate, good price, rocky star); and another 40 attributes were deleted from the list because they were either too general or ambiguous (e.g., nice, different, new, neat, basic, awesome, generic). Finally, a group of eight students from each university who had not participated in previous free-association task were asked to review the final list to make sure the traits were suitable for describing denim jeans brands. After all these four steps, a final set of 61 traits were used to examine the denim jeans brands' personality. Participants were asked to rate the extent to which the final set of 61 personality traits described their most familiar denim jeans brands along a Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all descriptive) to 5 (extremely descriptive).

We measured consumer satisfaction using five items modeled after Oliver (1980) and Brakus et al. (2009), including “I am satisfied with this brand and its performance,” “If I could do it again, I would buy a brand different from this brand” (negative item, reverse coded), “My choice to get this brand has been a wise one,” “I feel bad about my decision to get this brand” (negative item, reverse coded), and “I am not happy with what I did with this brand” (negative item, reverse coded). To measure consumer loyalty, five items from Yoo and Donthu (2001) and Brakus et al.

(2009) were used, including “In the future, I will be loyal to this brand,” “I will buy this brand again,” “This brand will be my first choice in the future,” “I will not buy other brands if this brand is available at the store,” and “I will recommend this brand to others”. We measure the items of consumer satisfaction and loyalty on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5).

## **Results**

### **Brand Personality Scale for Denim Jeans Brands**

#### **Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)**

To ensure the reliability and validity of the brand personality scale for denim jeans brands developed in this study, we followed the Aaker method (Aaker, 1997; Kim et al., 2010), randomly splitting the dataset into two equal samples: an estimation sample and a validation sample. Based on the first half of the dataset ( $n = 237, 474/2$ ), we first examined personality dimensions of denim jeans brands through EFA using principal component analysis with varimax rotation. During the EFA, 10 items that were not related to any factor were excluded from the next steps of the analysis. In the result, a total of six factors were extracted from the remaining 51 traits. The adequacy of this six-component solution was determined by the following criteria: (i) all six factors had eigenvalues larger than 1, (ii) the six-factor solution explained a high level of variance (55%), (iii) a significant dip in the Scree plot followed by the six factors, (iv) the factor loading score for each factor ( $>0.5$ ), and (v) the meaningfulness of each dimension (Aaker, 1997; Kim et al., 2010). The six factors accounted for approximately 55% of the total variance and met all the criteria we used. Table 1 shows all six factors extracted in this study, their respective eigenvalues, the variance explained by each, and the Cronbach's alphas.

To represent each brand personality dimension accurately, the analysis also included a facet identification step. Identification of facets within the six factors was carried out by means of principal components analyses with varimax rotation, performed separately for each dimension (Aaker, 1997; Aaker et al., 2001). The analysis revealed that the Attractive factor has three facets (attractive, contemporary, and energetic); Practical (practical and comfortable) and Rugged (rugged and strong) have two each; while the factors Flexible, Friendly, and Honest show a one-dimension structure.

#### **Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)**

The CFA used the second half of the dataset ( $n = 237, 474/2$ ) as the secondary holdout sample to check validity and reliability of the brand personality scale for denim jeans brands. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were used to examine the internal consistency of the items before conducting a CFA. Cronbach's alpha coefficients calculated for each of the six dimensions indicated high levels of internal reliability because all were  $>0.70$  as Nunnally (1978) proposed: Attractive = 0.95, Practical = 0.88, Rugged = 0.87, Flexible = 0.78, Friendly = 0.81, and Honest = 0.77. Fit indices of the measurement model were satisfactory overall:  $\chi^2/df$  (2.70), goodness-of-fit index (GFI) (0.94), adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI) (0.89), comparative fit index (CFI) (0.93),

and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) (0.05), suggesting that the six-component model is stable within the holdout data. All factor loadings were significant and varied from 0.60 to 0.81, satisfying the convergent validity criteria.

In addition, following the procedure described by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), discriminant validity was tested by conducting chi-square difference tests between all possible pairs of constructs. In these tests, the estimated correlation parameter between a pair of constructs was constrained to 1.0 and statistical difference between the constrained and unconstrained models was examined. The chi-square difference tests confirmed significant lower  $\chi^2$  values ( $p < .001$ ) for the unconstrained model for all comparisons that were tested, implying the achievement of discriminant validity (Bagozzi & Phillips, 1982). Thus, both convergent validity and discriminant validity were considered to have been established for the brand personality scale identified in this study.

**TABLE 1: Denim Jeans Brand Personality Dimensions**

<i>Traits</i>	<i>Attractive</i>	<i>Practical</i>	<i>Rugged</i>	<i>Flexible</i>	<i>Friendly</i>	<i>Honest</i>
Fashionable	0.76					
Sexy	0.75					
Exciting	0.75					
Glamorous	0.74					
Cool	0.73					
Creative	0.72					
Bold	0.7					
Fun	0.67					
Confident	0.65					
Attractive	0.65					
Innovative	0.63					
Lively	0.62					
Rebellious	0.61					
Energetic	0.59					
Popular	0.58					
Powerful	0.57					
Playful	0.55					
Youthful	0.54					
Cheerful	0.54					
Inviting	0.52					
Contemporary	0.50					
Casual		0.69				
Easy-going		0.66				
Down-to-earth		0.63				
Comfortable		0.61				
Classic		0.61				
Accessible		0.60				
Consistent		0.59				
Practical		0.58				
Reliable		0.51				
American		0.50				
Durable		0.50				
Real		0.49				
Rugged			0.82			
Tough			0.78			
Outdoorsy			0.75			
Masculine			0.75			
Country			0.59			
Hard-working			0.59			
Sporty			0.54			
Strong			0.51			
Soft				0.74		
Warm				0.55		
Relaxed				0.51		
Flexible				0.49		
Personable					0.60	
Outgoing					0.58	
Friendly					0.54	
Honest						0.67
Sincere						0.54
Trustworthy						0.50
Eigenvalues	17.55	7.49	3.46	1.97	1.53	1.38
% of variance	28.76	12.28	5.67	3.23	2.51	2.27
Cumulative %	28.76	41.05	46.72	49.95	52.46	54.73
Cronbach's alpha	0.94	0.88	0.86	0.75	0.80	0.76

NOTE: Factor loadings that are 0.5 or larger are shown in the table. An estimation sample is derived from a random half of the data (n=237, 474/2).

## The effect of demographic factors on consumer perception of brand personality

To investigate the effect of demographic variables (gender, age, and ethnicity) on respondents' brand personality evaluations, independent t-tests were used to test whether there was a significant mean difference in the respondent's perceptions of the six dimensions of brand personality identified for denim jeans brands. Items measuring the same personality dimension are summed and weighted together. The results of t-tests showed that there were no significant differences in mean scores across age and ethnic groups at the 0.05 level of significance. However, we did find a significant statistical difference between gender groups in their perceptions of two dimensions of brand personality for denim jeans brands.

Specifically, the results indicate that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores for males and females ( $t = -6.66^*$ ,  $p = .048$ ) on the dimension of Attractive, which implied that female respondents had a statistically higher mean score on the dimension of Attractive (88.04) than male respondents (74.40). The results also suggest that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores for males and females ( $t = 7.73^*$ ,  $p = .049$ ) on the dimension of Rugged, which implied that male respondents had a statistically higher mean score on the dimension of Rugged (32.22) than female respondents (24.69).

#### Reliability and Validity

An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was first performed on the 10 items measuring consumer satisfaction and consumer brand loyalty with a varimax rotation. Exploratory factor analysis produced two distinct factors among the items (consumer satisfaction and consumer brand loyalty). During the exploratory factor analysis, four items that were not related to any factor were excluded from the next steps of the analysis. As a result, six remaining items were retained in the study (two items for consumer satisfaction and four items for consumer brand loyalty). The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values for "consumer satisfaction" and "consumer brand loyalty" were 0.85 and 0.90, respectively, both greater than the recommended cutoff value of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978).

Next, convergent validity and discriminant validity were assessed. A CFA for the measurement model with two constructs was performed. The confirmatory factor model reflects an acceptable fit to the data,  $\chi^2/df = 2.87$ , GFI = 0.98, AGFI = 0.96, CFI = 0.99, RMR = 0.02, and RMSEA = 0.06. The results confirmed convergent validity as all items loaded significantly ( $p < .001$ ) on the underlying latent constructs (J. C. Anderson & Gerbing, 1988); Composite Reliability (CR) is  $>0.7$ ; and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is  $>0.5$ . Table 2 shows the factor loadings, composite reliability, AVE, and R-squared values. In addition, discriminant validity was tested by conducting chi-square difference tests between all possible pairs of constructs (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). The chi-square difference tests confirmed significant lower chi-square values ( $p < .001$ ) for the unconstrained model for all comparisons that were tested, implying the achievement of discriminant validity (Bagozzi & Phillips, 1982).

**TABLE 2: Confirmatory Factor Analysis for the Constructs**

<i>Latent Variables and Observed Indicators</i>	<i>Standardized Factor Loading</i>	<i>t-Value<sup>c</sup></i>
<i>Consumer Satisfaction (<math>\alpha = .85</math>, <math>CR = 0.90</math>, <math>AVE = 0.85</math>, <math>R\text{-squared} = 0.50</math>)<sup>a</sup></i>		
1. I am satisfied with this brand and its performance.	0.88	26.46
2. My choice to get this brand has been a wise one.	0.89	– <sup>b</sup>
<i>Consumer Brand Loyalty (<math>\alpha = .90</math>, <math>CR = 0.89</math>, <math>AVE = 0.77</math>, <math>R\text{-squared} = 0.62</math>)</i>		
1. In the future, I will be loyal to this brand.	0.89	–
2. I will buy this brand again.	0.88	26.46
3. This brand will be my first choice in the future.	0.80	22.47
4. I will recommend this brand to others.	0.77	20.79

NOTE: <sup>a</sup> $\alpha$  = Cronbach's alpha, CR = composite reliability, AVE = average variance extracted. <sup>b</sup>– means the path parameter was set to 1; therefore, no t-value was given. <sup>c</sup>All loadings are significant at .001 level.

### Results of the Structural Model

The structural equation model (see Figure 2) was assessed to examine the statistical significance of the relationships among the six personality dimensions of denim jeans brands, consumer satisfaction, and consumer brand loyalty using Amos 19.0 software (IBM SPSS, Armonk, New York, USA). The six personality dimensions were all taken as the exogenous variables, and consumer satisfaction and consumer brand loyalty were the endogenous variables. Here, all of the six exogenous variables were proposed to be intercorrelated.

All of the fit measures indicated an acceptable fit between the structural model and the data in the study ( $\chi^2/df = 1.35$ ; GFI = 0.99; AGFI = 0.97; CFI = 0.99; and RMSEA = 0.03). It seems thus feasible to carry out the analysis of the results of the structural model. The value of the parameters and their degree of significance, as indicated in Table 3, allow us to confirm the existence of the relationships between the exogenous and endogenous constructs (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2009).

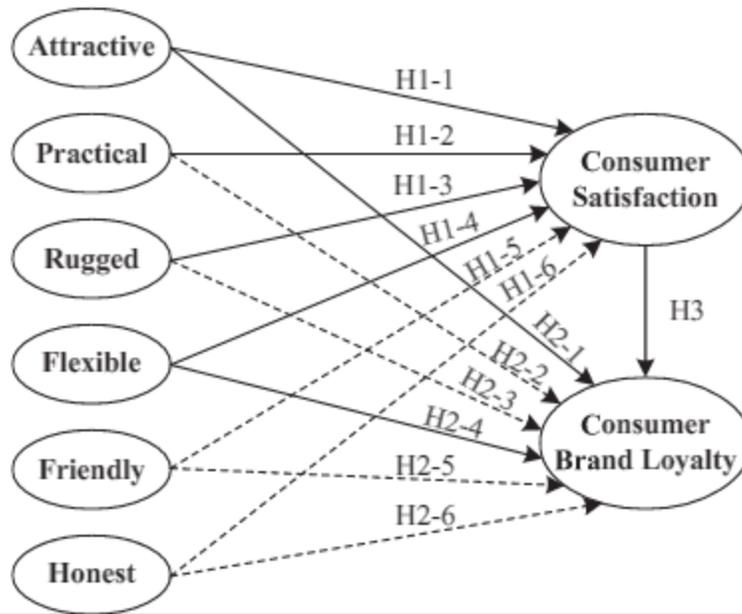


Figure 2: Structural model and hypotheses. NOTE: Dashed lines represent the paths that are not significant at  $p < .05$ .

The statistical results obtained from this study clearly indicated the existence of the significant links among the six brand personality dimensions, consumer satisfaction, and consumer brand loyalty. More specifically, the attractive ( $\beta = .43$ ,  $t = 6.99$ ,  $p < .01$ ), practical ( $\beta = .41$ ,  $t = 6.42$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and flexible ( $\beta = .12$ ,  $t = 2.07$ ,  $p < .05$ ) dimensions of brand personality had a positive and significant influence on consumer satisfaction. The attractive ( $\beta = .12$ ,  $t = 2.41$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and flexible ( $\beta = .10$ ,  $t = 2.17$ ,  $p < .05$ ) dimensions of brand personality also had a positive and significant on consumer brand loyalty. Interestingly, the rugged dimension had a significant but negative effect on consumer satisfaction ( $\beta = -.10$ ,  $t = -1.98$ ,  $p < .05$ ). In comparison, the influence of the other two dimensions, friendly and honest of brand personality on consumer satisfaction and brand loyal, was not significant. The results also show that consumer satisfaction has a significant impact on consumer brand loyalty ( $\beta = .73$ ,  $t = 12.62$ ,  $p < .01$ ) (Table 3 and Figure 2).

**TABLE 3: Summarized Results of Hypothesis Testing**

<i>Hypothesis</i>	<i>From</i>	<i>To</i>	<i>Standardized Coefficient</i>	<i>t-Value</i>	<i>p-Value</i>	<i>Hypothesis</i>
H1-1	Attractive	Consumer satisfaction	0.43	6.99	<.01	Supported
H1-2	Practical	Consumer satisfaction	0.41	6.42	<.01	Supported
H1-3	Rugged	Consumer satisfaction	-0.10	-1.98	<.05	Not Supported
H1-4	Flexible	Consumer satisfaction	0.12	2.07	<.05	Supported
H1-5	Friendly	Consumer satisfaction	-0.10	-1.49	>.05	Not supported
H1-6	Honest	Consumer satisfaction	-0.06	-1.04	>.05	Not supported
H2-1	Attractive	Consumer brand loyalty	0.12	2.41	<.05	Supported
H2-2	Practical	Consumer brand loyalty	0.01	0.17	>.05	Not supported
H2-3	Rugged	Consumer brand loyalty	-0.07	-1.68	>.05	Not supported
H2-4	Flexible	Consumer brand loyalty	0.10	2.17	<.05	Supported
H2-5	Friendly	Consumer brand loyalty	0.01	0.14	>.05	Not supported
H2-6	Honest	Consumer brand loyalty	0.03	0.63	>.05	Not supported
H3	Consumer satisfaction	Consumer brand loyalty	0.73	12.62	<.01	Supported

## Discussion and Implications

### Theoretical Implications

In summary, the current study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, this study developed a valid and reliable scale that measures personality for denim jeans brands, and it confirmed that consumers do associate particular brand personality dimensions with specific brand categories (such as denim jeans). Our results show that the personality of denim jeans brands can be described in six dimensions with 51 personality traits: Attractive, Practical, Rugged, Flexible, Friendly, and Honest. Among the six personality dimensions of denim jeans brands, four of them—Attractive, Rugged, Friendly, and Honest—are congruent with the five dimensions of brand personality developed by Aaker (1997). The strong convergence between the findings from this study and J. L. Aaker's scale is not a surprising result; because J. L. Aaker's 42-trait framework was designed and proven to be widely applicable across brands and product categories, and two denim jeans brands (Levi's jeans and Guess jeans) are included in Aaker's study.

Two new dimensions, namely Practical and Flexible, appeared in this study as dimensions of brand personality specifically for denim jeans brands, indicating that consumers consider comfort and performance as the key benefits of denim jeans (Rahman, 2011). The scale will be useful not only in academic research but also in marketing practice. As marketers engage in

projects to understand and improve the brand image in the minds of consumers, they can use the specific scale for assessment, planning, and tracking purposes.

Second, although previous research has suggested that gender influences consumers' brand perceptions, we believe this is the first study to confirm that gender identity influences consumer perceptions of brand personality. This also suggests the direction for a revision of brand personality scale to account for gender differences.

Third, this study showed that not all brand personality dimensions have the same effect on consumer satisfaction and brand loyalty, some dimensions being more effective than others. Specifically, we have identified that three dimensions among all the six personality dimensions, namely, Attractive, Practical, and Flexible, are the positive and significant contributing factors to the creation and enhancement of consumer satisfaction; and two dimensions, namely Attractive and Flexible, are the positive and significant contributing factors to consumer brand loyalty. The Friendly dimension and the Honest dimension do not have a significant impact on consumer satisfaction or brand loyalty. Fourth, this study unveiled that some brand personality dimensions could affect negatively on consumer satisfaction or brand loyalty.

In this study, the Rugged dimension had a strong negative effect on consumer satisfaction. Revelation of the potential negative impacts shows that the negative impact of brand personality also deserves careful consideration (Kaplan et al., 2010). Thus, our findings not only lend support to some existing trends in the latest brand personality research, but also pose new questions and suggest directions for deeper investigation of the brand personality concept such as the impact of gender differences in brand personality perceptions, potential negative effects of brand personality, and different effects of brand personality on consumer satisfaction and brand loyalty.

## **Practical Implications**

### **Personality of denim jeans brands**

In addition to the symbolic meanings of denim jeans which have evolved since the California Gold Rush era of the 1850s, our results indicate that consumers ascribe personality characteristics to denim jeans brands. This is a good combination of the dimensions of brand personality by Aaker (1997), characteristics associated with Practicality (e.g., comfortable, reliable, and versatile) and characteristics associated with Fashion (e.g., cool, youthful, fashionable, creative, and contemporary), suggesting that denim jeans are not only functional wardrobe staples, but also fashion statements.

The most important personality dimension is Attractive, which consists of traits such as fashionable, popular, creative, contemporary, independent, energetic, and successful. This is not a surprising finding given the link of brand personality to consumer identity (Belk, 1988; Maehle & Shneur, 2010). It reflects that people buy and wear denim jeans because they think they are particularly stylish, have a popular label, present some aspects of identity and status, or hope to fulfill their aspirations to be perceived as more attractive in the eyes of their peers. Designers have successfully brought fashion into denim jeans. The innovative and stylish characteristics of

denim jeans emphasize the importance of creative excellence in denim jeans product development.

The Practical dimension encompasses traits like comfortable, durable, casual, and accessible, which suggests the importance of quality, comfort, and easy-care of denim jeans products. Denim jeans can be worn with “absolutely anything,” they can be worn even if dirty and without ironing, and they can be worn for a long time before being thrown away (Miller, 2010). The Rugged dimension, including country, outdoorsy, hard-working, and sporty, reflects the characteristics of the Western cowboy and working class: strong, rugged, and hard-working. This result comes as no surprise because denim jeans were originally designed as work clothes for miners, farmers, and cowboys. It also suggests that consumers think denim jeans are practical for outdoor activities.

Flexible in this study depicts being soft, relaxed, and versatile. The emergence of the Flexible dimension in this study may be explained by the fact that consumers consider denim jeans to be suitable to all people and for various occasions, even at the office on casual Fridays. The Friendly dimension refers to the characteristics such as personable, outgoing, and kind. This dimension suggests that denim jeans now are a symbol of the ordinary; people put them on to feel comfortable and pleasant. Consumers appear to perceive denim jeans brands as Honest because of their high quality and positive consumer experiences. As denim jeans were originally designed as work clothes, the dimension of Honest once again reflects the characteristics that are normally associated with the working class such as truthfulness and sincerity.

This study confirms that consumers associate particular brand personality dimensions with denim jeans products. As such, brand managers may need to improve their initial strategic decisions regarding the crafting of personality characteristics for brands. The literature suggests that brand personality is shaped through brand name, symbol or logo, advertising, product attributes (Batra, Lehmann, & Singh, 1993), or spokespeople (Aaker, 1997; Keller, 2008), and advertising represents one of the most powerful tools for influencing consumer perception of brand personality associations (Biel, 1993; Maehle et al., 2011). Thus, we think advertising should be carefully developed based on the results of this research to acquire desired personality associations. For example, as the target market indicates that the major personality is attractive, the denim jeans advertising manager should develop advertising that links their brands with charm, excitement, and fashion, featuring innovative products and attractive spokespersons or celebrities.

An interesting, but not surprising, finding is that the personalities of denim jeans are perceived significantly differently by male and female consumers: female consumers perceive denim jeans brands as more attractive than males, and males perceive denim jeans brands as more rugged. The finding is consistent with previous studies which indicate that sex difference plays an important role in the way consumers perceive and relate to brands, and gender identity influences consumers' brand perceptions through creating brand meanings for consumers (Sirgy, 1982; Ye, 2008). Findings confirm that the attractiveness dimension is more associated with female clothes and the ruggedness dimension is more associated with male clothes (Maehle et al., 2011). It implies that female consumer's aesthetic needs in choices of jeans are more obviously related to

eroticism and sexual attraction, but for male consumers, they tend to use denim jeans to deploy masculine codes (Maehle et al., 2011; Miller & Woodward, 2011).

As the first type of truly unisex clothing, jeans represent a breakdown of gender roles. However, it would be misleading to say that jeans for men and women are the same just because they are made in the same way and out of the same material. Understanding gender-based differences in consumer's perceptions of a denim jeans brand could serve to improve the competitive position of the brand. Thus, marketers need to integrate gender-related differences into marketing communications (e.g., message, media) and the product itself (e.g., brand name, logo, product design) in order to help male and female consumers develop certain implicit symbolic meanings to associate the brands with their own gender perceptions (Gainer, 1993; Yorkston & De Mello, 2005).

### **The impact of brand personality on consumer satisfaction and consumer brand loyalty**

The results of this study indicate that certain dimensions of brand personality have a direct impact on consumer satisfaction and consumer brand loyalty. The study results are in line with previous studies, in which researchers have posited that brand personality has a positive impact on brand preference, attitudes, satisfaction, and loyalty toward the brand (Keller, 2008; Sirgy, 1982). This implies that effective brand management encompassing brand personality is of paramount importance in reaching a firm's overall goals of satisfaction, loyalty, and profitability in the denim jeans market. However, this study showed that not all brand personality dimensions have the same influence in increasing consumers' satisfaction and loyalty toward a denim jeans brand, with some dimensions being more efficient than others.

Specifically, we have identified that three dimensions among all the six personality dimensions, namely Attractive, Practical, and Flexible, are the positive and significant factors that contribute toward improving customer satisfaction or loyalty toward denim jeans brands. These findings imply that the more the personality/identity of a denim jeans brand is considered attractive, practical, and flexible, the higher the consumer satisfaction or loyalty toward that brand. Therefore, denim jeans marketers should capitalize on the findings by focusing on these three most important personality dimensions and incorporating them into the marketing strategies and campaigns that are heavily used in the process of personality and loyalty creation in the denim jeans industry such as advertising, celebrity endorsements, and event sponsorship. Notably, the dimension of Practical has a significant impact on consumer satisfaction but it does not have significant direct effect on consumer brand loyalty. This implies that the consumer will be satisfied when functional attributes of denim jeans are fully provided (such as comfort and quality). However, proving these attributes alone does not guarantee customer loyalty. This result confirms the mediating effect of consumer satisfaction on the relationship between practical product attributes and customer loyalty (Bei & Chiao, 2006; Caruana, 2002).

Interestingly, we found that the dimension of Rugged was negatively related to consumer satisfaction in the context of denim jeans brands for the whole sample (including both female and male respondents). We found that males perceive denim jeans brands as more rugged than females. Therefore, we conducted separate analyses for the subsamples of men and women to test whether the dimension of Rugged affects male and female consumer satisfaction and loyalty

differently. The results suggested that the dimension of Rugged does have a significant and negative impact on consumer satisfaction ( $\beta = -.17$ ,  $t = -2.81$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and consumer brand loyalty ( $\beta = -.11$ ,  $t = -2.49$ ,  $p < .05$ ) for female group but not for male group. This means that the more the personality/identity of a denim jeans brand is considered rugged by female consumers, the lower customer satisfaction and loyalty toward that brand. This was not a surprising finding, as the ruggedness dimension is normally associated with men and men's clothes (Maehle et al., 2011). Thus, we think for women's jeans, marketers should abandon the rugged outdoors position. Also for a denim jeans company offering the same brand for both men and women, they need to distinguish their lines and figure out how to set them apart on a retail basis.

Although consumers also perceived the denim jeans brands as being Friendly and Honest, these two personality dimensions are not strong enough to produce a statistically significant advantage in improving customer satisfaction or loyalty. One possible explanation for the insignificant relationships would be that although the brand personality traits such as friendly and sincere could make a denim jeans brand appear more reliable and family-friendly, they are not effective to create excitement and loyalty among young consumers (Dahlén, Lange, & Smith, 2010; Maehle et al., 2011). Therefore, based on our empirical evidence, we believe that perhaps, the denim jeans brand should avoid trying so hard to be nice and friendly, or investing so heavily for the trustworthy and sincere look.

### **The impact of consumer satisfaction on consumer brand loyalty**

Not surprisingly, we found a statistically significant positive relationship between consumer satisfaction and consumer brand loyalty in the denim jeans market. The findings from this study also confirm the mediating effect of customer satisfaction in the relationship between brand personality and brand loyalty. This means that to increase consumers' repeat purchases and brand loyalty, an understanding of consumer satisfaction is crucial. Generally, product quality leads to customer satisfaction with apparel products. Apparel product quality compatible with consumers' expectation is important in building long-term relationships with customers (Chen-Yu, Williams, & Kincade, 1999). To keep product quality compatible with consumers' expectations consistently, manufacturers should not only focus their attentions on garment design, but also pay attention to establishing a total quality system in which garment performance before and after consumption is examined, and retailers need to understand their target customers' expectations and communicate their findings to manufacturers.

### **Limitations**

First, this study was deliberately performed for denim jeans brands. Second, our findings reflect only young American consumers' personality perception of denim jeans brands. For this reason, the scale should be reassessed with consumers from different cultural backgrounds and in different age groups (Aaker et al., 2001). Third, in addition to the consequences of brand personality, we encourage future research on the potential antecedents of brand personality such as brand name, symbols, marketing communications, pricing, and distribution (Aaker, 1997).

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