

Developing criteria for Egyptian sportswear brand personality

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Abstract:

While so many organizations seeking to promote all kinds of products, and consumers increasingly searching for new fashion and getting to know the new trends every day, the competition increases in the apparel market one day after another as a result. Today, apparel retailers are forced to use all available methods in order to differentiate themselves and their products from others, that is why the focus of apparel organizations is recently shifting to differentiate themselves by establishing and developing branded products instead of promoting products and enumerating their characteristics and advantages for comparison with competing products. Companies resort for distinguishing themselves and their products by offering these products under the umbrella of a brand. In addition, building brands helps to form a close relationship between the consumer and the apparel brands he/she prefers, without the presence of the brand, competition between the various apparel organizations turns into a commodity competition based on price and product specifications only, which is detrimental to all these organizations and reduces their profits.

This research aims to study the personality of brands from the Egyptian consumer perspective, in order to identify the extent of the deviation of these brand personalities from the Egyptian consumer purchasing trends, through the application of the Geuens et al., (2009) brand personality scale. The importance of the research is due to rarity of brand personality scale's application in the Egyptian apparel market. Results of this research are expected to help in setting criteria for brand personality development, and improving the relationship between apparel brand personality and the personality of the targeted Egyptian consumers, in order to develop potent Egyptian's apparel brands. Because previous studies have shown that these criteria are related to the context of the society in which it was applied.

Keywords:

apparel brand personality, brand personality scale, apparel brands.

Introduction

Branding in fashion and apparel sector have drawn the attention of researchers for decades. Apparel brands create a clear and distinct identity for a product, service, or organization (Posner, 2015). Brands maximize the usage of organizations' assets in order to generate additional value from the already made investment, it helps improving communication between marketers and consumers as well. In addition, gaining market share as well (Su and Tong, 2015). Thus, Brand management became a necessity for all fashion and apparel industry (Merlo and Perugini, 2015).

Historically, branding in the fashion industry dates back to the second half of the nineteenth century (Merlo and Perugini, 2015). Specifically, when Charles Frédéric Worth (1825-1895) began marking his products to protect them from imitation (Merlo and Perugini, 2015). This

phenomenon is increasing recently as well (Ismail and Spinelli, 2012). Organizations today focus more on marketing symbolic functions rather than commercializing the properties associated with the pure utilitarian functions of product, they shifted their marketing efforts to align with consumers. It was found that consumers do not buy apparel products only because of their utilization properties, but they express their personalities through these products too, this is critical in the apparel industry compared to many other industries because apparel products is closely related to the personality of the wearer. Roy et al. (2016) found that managing consumer relationship with the brand is an important research area for both marketers and academics. Marketers are interested in understanding this relation because of its impact on corporate profits (Ismail and Spinelli, 2012).

Brand personality (BP) is an important subject in marketing research (Mohtar et al., 2019). In apparel marketing, where apparel is one of the most related products to the personality of the consumer and as an expression of his/her personality, compared to many other industries, the importance of brand personality in apparel industry is of huge importance. Apparel products are closely linked to the user, their impact on the user personality is obvious. That is why many apparel companies are currently exploring strategies that allow them to establish emotional relationships with their customers. Brand personality theories assume that brands can have personal characteristics like humans (Posner, 2015). Thus, a brand can have a personality that allows it to establish relationships with consumers. Many researchers found that consumers make relationships with brands like those that they do with their peers (Liu and Chang, 2017). This makes brand personality a strong source for customer-brand relationship (Ahmed et al., 2019). In addition, establishing strong brands in a competitive market too. This caused previous research stresses the importance of studying brand personality (Mohtar et al., 2019).

According to Angelina et al., (2012 and 2014), brand personality is an important brand component. Brand personality is the "set of human attributes that are associated with the trademark" (Aaker, 1997). In the marketing, brand personalities vary from one organization to another. For example, Levi's and Victoria's Secret companies rely on excitement, modernity and youth in presenting their brand (Ismail and Spinelli, 2012). Brands such as Westwood, Chalayan and McQueen are building strong relationships with consumers through the personality of their brands (Jelinek, 2018), while Tommy brand focuses on the freedom and independence of the American consumer. Focusing on personality traits enable the brand to demonstrate these traits continuously and consistently (Malär et al., 2012).

Marketers have started incorporating personality traits into their product brands to make them acceptable to consumers (Banerjee, 2016). Previous researchers (Govers and Schoormans, 2005; Khandai et al., 2015) have found that a significant correlation exists between brand personality and consumer personality traits (Banerjee, 2016). In addition, brand personality dimensions have a significant influence on brand choice, regardless of product type (Toldos-Romero and Orozco-Gómez, 2015). The compatibility between the brand and consumer personality is important, that is why it is not only important to understand how this relationship is formed, but also to study the factors that affect it (Ismail and Spinelli, 2012).

Brand personality indicates consumer's perceptions of personality traits of brands and further helps create and build meaningful consumer-brand relationships (Su and Tong, 2015). In the same context, Egyptian organizations working in the sportswear market, which need to develop distinctive, desirable and constant brands, needs to identify key differentiation points of their

own brands in order to able to distinguish themselves in the sportswear market. This requires studying the personality of brands and the preferences of Egyptian consumers to these personalities in a manner that helps in developing these brands and achieve consumer satisfaction.

In order to measure brand personalities in various industries, Aaker has developed brand personality scale (BPS) in 1997, which consisted of five generic dimensions: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness. The impact of this model has been so profound that since 1997 most academic publications about brand personality are based on Aaker's methodology (Toldos-Romero and Orozco-Gómez, 2015). It has been used in various parts of the world (Ahmed et al., 2019). Several researches have tested Aaker's brand personality scale in countries besides the USA including France, Spain, Japan, Germany, Korea and Turkey (Hieronimus, 2003; Sung and Tinkham, 2005). This model have been applied in various industries as well, including fashion and apparel.

However, Aaker acknowledged some limitations regarding this scale, mainly because it was developed and focused on United States, some researchers anticipated that the outcomes may differ if this model was applied in other cultures (Ahmed et al., 2019). For example, countries like Korea, Japan and Spain revealed unique brand personality dimensions representing their own cultures (Aaker et al., 2001). Recent studies emphasizes the importance of cultural context (Mohtar et al., 2019). The study conducted by Milas and Mlačić (2007) revealed that culture play a pivotal role in brand personality concept. According to Mohtar et al., (2019) the literal application of the Aaker BPS will lead to inaccurate results if applied in societies whose culture differs from the American society where the scale was developed. This made some researchers call for another BPSs other than Aaker's to avoid its limitations, especially with regard to its dimensions and the general characteristics of its trait universality (Geuens et al., 2009)

Few models were developed after Aaker's, to list a few, Aaker, et al. (2001) which was applied in Japan, Caprara et al. (2001) applied in Italy, Bosnjak et al. (2007) applied in Germany and Geuens et al. (2009) applied in USA and Europe. This research adopted the Geuens et al. (2009) model for two reasons, first, because of the previously mentioned limitations on the model developed by (Aaker, 1997), second, it has been applied in USA and Europe which represent a wider territories and population. Geuens et al. (2009) model consisted of five groups of brand personality dimensions named Responsibility, Activity, Aggressiveness, Simplicity, and Emotionality, with 12 sub traits. Using the Geuens et al. (2009) BPS, this research is aimed to identify the sportswear brand personality traits suit Egyptian shoppers.

Methodology

This study investigates generation Z (gen-z), a generation born in 1990s onward (McCrindle, 2014; Iorgulescu, 2016; Seemiller & Grace, 2017). Gen-Z is the next generation after the Millennials, it is also known as iGeneration, Post-Millennials, Gen Wii or NextGen (Turner, 2015). Gen-z was chosen for the context of this research for various reasons, first, gen-z consumers differ from those of earlier generations, while technological revolution affected all generations, gen-z interest in technology is the greatest, it is interest in brands and loyalty to them is out of question. Therefore researching the consumption characteristics of gen-z is essential (Puiu, 2016; Desai and Lele, 2017).

Second, according to the population scan results published by the Egyptian Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (2019), gen-z represent over 18 percent of the Egyptian population now. The Egyptian citizens aged between 20-24 years are 9.32 million represents 9.5% of the total Egyptian population, which is estimated to be 98.10 million, while citizens aged between 25-29 years, are 8.52 million represents 8.7% of the total Egyptian population as shown in table (1).

Table (1): gen-z segments

age	male	female	total	%
20-24	4.84	4.48	9.32	9.5
25-29	4.38	4.14	8.52	8.7
total	9.22	8.62	17.84	18.2%

Gen-z females in the Giza governorate were chosen as population for this study, according to the population scan results published by the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (2019), females in this governorate are estimated to be 4.3 million, representing 48% of the 8.92 million citizen in the governorate as shown in table (2). This market segmentation is estimated to be 1.6 million female aged between 20 and 29 years living in the Giza governorate, which is a huge market segmentation.

Table (2): Giza governorate population divided by sex

Males in Giza	Female in Giza	total	population in 2019
4.63 million	4.29 million	8.92 million	98.10
52%	48%		

In order to identify requirements of this market segmentation in their sportswear's brand personality, an electronic questionnaire in Arabic language (to ensure respondents' accurate understanding and responding) was developed, and tested through a pilot research, results were then translated to English, some phrases were reworded, and others were modified according to the pilot study requirements. The questionnaire introduction informed participants' of the questionnaire's purpose, which is studying the brand personality requirements from the Egyptian sportswear shoppers' point of view, in order to develop criteria for its application. A number of 836 have participated in this research, however only 793 responds only were valid, the other 43 responds were excluded from this study for various invalidity reasons.

Final questionnaire consisted of 21 questions in three parts. First part of the questionnaire contained five questions about the demographic characteristic of the participants as shown in table (3), including questions about their age, education, employment status, marital status and monthly income in Egyptian pounds. Age have been split into two groups, participants aged 19-24 years old (born 1990-1995) and 25-29 years old (born 1996-2000), education varies between high school, university-graduate, post graduate and others, The results show that 34.30 percent of respondents have bachelor's degree, 12.99percent have postgraduate education (master and PhD) certificates, which indicate good educational qualifications. most of participants are students and the marital status is single too which is obvious regarding the participants' age.

Table (3): Demographic characteristics of the respondents

	Variable	No.	%
Age*	19-23 (born1990-1995)	403	50.82
	24-28 (born1996-2000)	390	49.18
Education	high school	294	37.07
	university-graduate	272	34.30
	post-graduate	103	12.99
	other	124	15.64
	student	313	39.47
Employment status	employed	219	27.62
	self-employed	67	8.45
	unemployed	194	24.46
Marital status	single	537	67.72
	married	232	29.26
	divorced	24	3.03
Monthly income (EGP) of the working 421 participants	>5,000	228	28.75
	5,000:10,000	176	22.19
	>10,000	17	2.14

n=793, * questionnaire applied September 2019

The second part of questionnaire contained twelve questions about the importance of each of BPS traits presented by Geuens et al (2009) as shown in table (3). The participants were asked to respond to each of the questionnaire's question on a scale from one to five according to the Likert scale quintile (Wikipedia, 2017). Table (3) shows the mean and the standard deviation of the participants' responds.

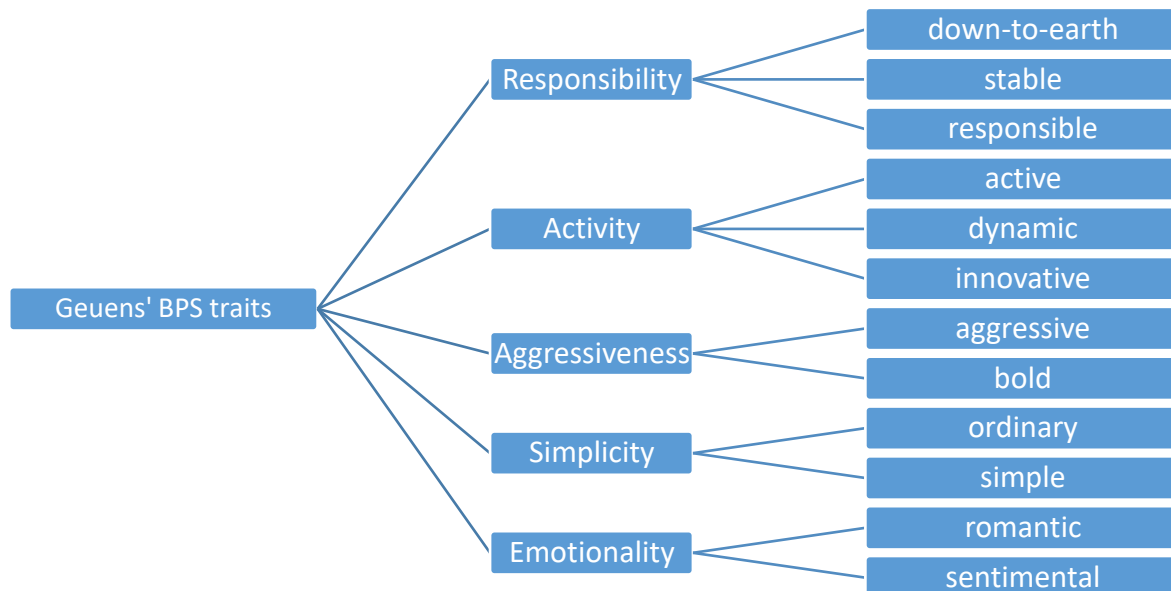


Figure (1); Geuens et al., 2009 brand personality traits, (Geuens et al., 2009)

Table (4) shows the results of the questionnaire's second part, the questions were divided into 5 groups according to BPS designed by Geuens et al. (2009), in addition to the sub-traits and its

total 12. The Cronbach Alpha was calculated for each group of these traits, values ranged between 0.68 and 0.84, each of these values are acceptable according to Field (2009).

Table (4): Business characteristic.

Brand personality dimensions		Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha	
<i>Responsibility</i>	down-to-earth	4.532	0.620346	0.82	
	stable	4.298	0.586622		
	responsible	3.596	0.613599		
<i>Activity</i>	active	4.255	0.736268		
	dynamic	4.213	0.623321		0.80
	innovative	3.213	0.657273		
<i>Aggressiveness</i>	aggressive	2.106	0.633625		0.83
	bold	3.00	0.625543		
<i>Simplicity</i>	ordinary	1.702	0.688884		0.80
	simple	3.213	0.749961		
<i>Emotionality</i>	romantic	3.894	0.890384		0.85
	sentimental	2.766	0.81328		

Standard deviation and mean were calculated for each trait of the brand personality scale individually, the highest mean was for the trait *down-to-earth*, with a value of 4.53 and standard deviation 0.62, which indicates the desire of the research community that the signs of sportswear be realistic despite the presence of some variation in their opinions. Followed by *stable* with a value of 4.298 and standard deviation 0.59, which indicates the desire of the research community that the signs of sportswear be stable despite the presence of some variation in their opinions, as well as the results of each of the two components *active* and *dynamic* on high values too through the responds. On the other hand, the *ordinary* trait got the lowest mean with value 1.702, and *sentimental* and *aggressive* the lowest means.

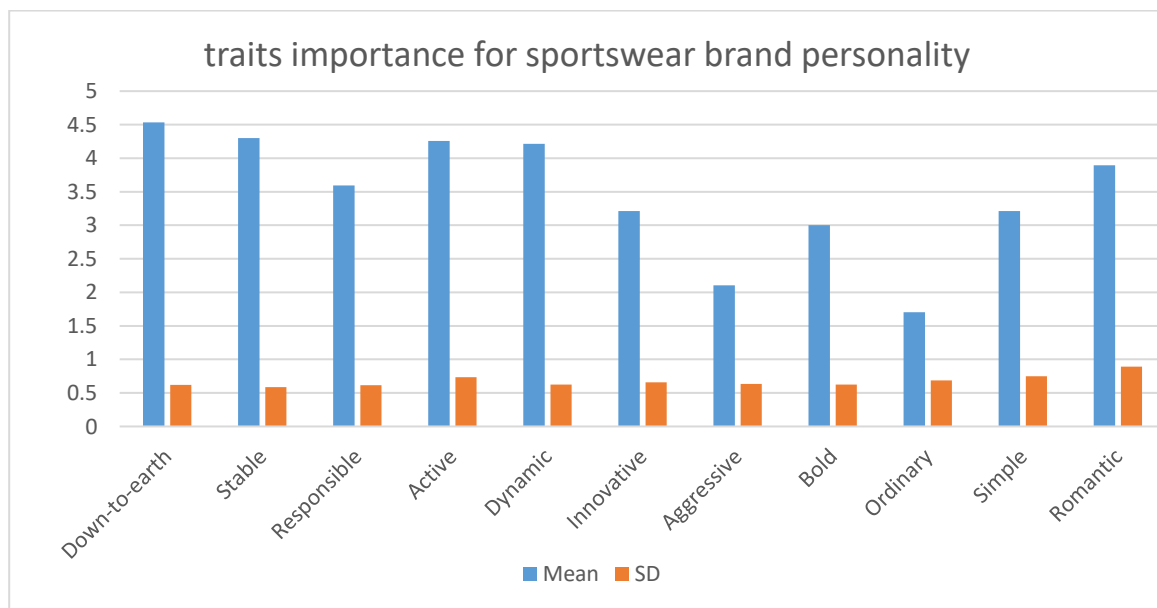


Figure (2): traits importance for sportswear brand personality.

The results of the questionnaire show the participants' valuation for the sportswear brands personality traits importance, the participants have valued four basic traits the most important, which are down-to-earth, stable, active and dynamic. These traits seems related to the function of sportswear itself, down-to-earth is an essential attribute for sportswear, also stable attribute is highly important for sportswear, also for the active and dynamic traits, they are compatible with the nature of sportswear and the nature of youth population participated in the study.

Questionnaire results are interesting; the traits *simple*, *ordinary romantic* and *sentimental* all have low to medium mean and high standard deviation, which indicates a consensus among the respondents on the low to medium importance of these traits in the personality of their sportswear brands.

Table (5): sportswear's decision-making criteria.

Brand personality dimensions	Mean	SD
Importance of distinctive brand personality	4.75	0.76
Prefer brand personality similar to theirs	4.68	0.73
Importance of buying branded sportswear	4.255	0.62
Importance of price when making a purchase	2.106	0.78

The third part of questionnaire contained four questions about shoppers purchase decision-making criteria as shown in table (555), participants valued importance of distinctive brand personality as very important with mean 4.75 and standard deviation 0.76, which indicates agreement between respondents, on the importance of distinctive brand personality. While most of them prefer brand personality similar to theirs and agree on the Importance of buying branded sportswear, on the other hand Importance of sportswear's price when making a purchase was valued lowest with a mean equal 2.106 with a great agreement between the respondents, as the standard deviation was 0.78.

Discussion

Analysis of the questionnaire's results shows that the study participants' choices of the of the sportswear's brand personality traits that they prefer, the top four traits according to their responds are down-to-earth, stable, active and dynamic, while some traits were valued low according to respondents, namely ordinary, aggressive, sentimental and bold. This indicates the importance of the brand traits of sportswear being compatible with both the nature of the apparel themselves, in this case sportswear, as sportswear require that they be active and dynamic in the first place and these are the most important characteristics that distinguish them. In addition, the target market, which is the females of gen-z living in the Giza governorate. Thus, an apparel brand personality should correspond to these two main criteria. First, the nature of the apparel provided by the brand, and the consumer segment.

Respondents has valued the Importance of distinctive brand personality very high with mean 4.75 and high standard deviation 0.76 which indicate a highly agreement between them, having distinctive brand personality allow the brand to differentiate itself and its products, further it becomes easier for a brand to target market segmentation and address them accurately. In addition, study participants prefer brand personality similar to theirs, this indicates the importance of the personality of the apparel brands to conform to the nature of the target market segment and trying to develop a personality that fits with them. Thus, a brand will have the

ability to manage and develop relationships with them, for example through websites and social media.

In their response to Importance of buying branded sportswear, the participants reported a high mean and standard deviation, which indicates the appreciation of this market segment for the value of brands and the importance of buying sportswear from well-known brands. Importance of price when making a purchase decision got the least mean according to the viewpoint of the study participants, and this indicates that shoppers' confidence in the brand compensates them for checking the price and buying unknown sportswear products.

Conclusion

The literature review show that brand personality is one of the most important topics of apparel marketing, as the consumer no longer makes the purchase decision based on the characteristics of the product and its price only, but based on the image of the brand that was formed in his mind. Brand personality is an emotional concept rather than a logical one, as it expresses the mutual feelings between the brands and their shoppers, consumers do not find a problem in attributing human attributes to brands, further they can build relationships with brands too. Because formation of the brand personality happens through any direct or indirect communication between the consumer and this brand (Aaker, 1997). The brand personality is affected by everything related to it, such as brand creators, advertising characters, and store design, fashion brands do present their personalities in two ways; *directly* through the products themselves, and *indirectly* through marketing communications.

The results of the study showed the participants' desire for the brand character to be similar to their own personalities, this results align with (Aaker, 1999) that consumer personality has huge impact on his/her brand preferences. Thus, apparel brands are supposed to create their personalities so that they are similar to that of the targeted market segment, this can be achieved by identifying the most important traits of this personalities and emphasizing them through the market communications' tools. Previous studies suggest focusing on few traits while developing brand personality, further (Malär et al., 2012) suggested focusing on one dimension rather than using all dimensions of the brand's personality. Thus, a choosing a few personality traits for the apparel brand and focusing on them would be enough, as the sustainability of the brand personality gives it a competitive advantage and increases loyalty among the consumer audience.

Finally, this study showed that the personality traits of the brand are affected by four main factors, namely:

- Objectives and nature of the brand.
- Personality of the targeted shoppers.
- Characters of competing brands.
- Market competition strategy.

Apparel brand should create and develop its personality based on the objectives and nature of the brand itself, which is supposed to be a result of market research and market segmentation in the first place. Personality of the target market segment is the second criteria for brand personality development, a personality similar to the targeted consumers' would satisfy them on one hand, and allow the brand to develop relations with these shoppers on the other hand, making it easier for the brand to increase its market share.

The aim of developing a unique brand personality is to differentiate this brand from competitive, studying competitive' brand personality traits and creating one that is distinctive, would make it easier for the brand to compete easily, rather than being similar to already existing brands. However, it is up to the market competition strategy adopted by the brand, some brands choose aggressive completion strategies, while it is better for others to avoid completion as possible, especially new apparel brands.

The study is significant as to the knowledge of the researcher as it is the first study to apply the Geuens et al. (2009) BPS in the Egyptian sportswear market, further investigation of brand personality development and its effect on marketing communications and competition is suggested.

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