

Comparing consumer personality and brand personality: do fashion styles speak of who you are?

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SUMMARY

Teenagers, especially African American teens, are an important target market for fashion retailers. Identifying what type of customer is interested in which brands is a principal concern. This study investigated how fashion brand personalities are similar to people's personalities and whether people may prefer a particular clothing brand based on their own personal traits. We hypothesized that individuals prefer brands that share similar personality traits to their own. In particular, we expected that there would be significant correlations between people's Big Five Personality Trait scores and how much they desire a specific brand personality. All together, we found that the Big Five Personality Factors are generally not related to participants' preferred brand personalities. Out of the 25 hypothesized relationships, only four were significant. Extraversion was positively related to emotive and sociable brands, and agreeableness was negatively related to sincere or trusted brands. Therefore, if a brand is marketed as outgoing or sociable, then investing in attracting extraverted customers could be useful, and the brand should target people who are high in extraversion. Otherwise, brands should consider different factors besides the Big Five Personality Factors for identifying potential customers.

INTRODUCTION

One important fashion market is teens; teenagers spend an average of 36% of their money on fashion clothing, representing a huge opportunity for businesses. In particular, African American teens spend about \$1.2 trillion annually (1). Brands cannot maximize profit if they do not target the right consumers. Furthermore, African Americans' consumer choices create a "halo effect" that can affect the purchases of other social groups, making a study of their brand preferences important (2).

One common way to determine a person's personality is the Big Five personality factors. The Big Five personality group consists of five primary factors of personalities that represent nearly all of the basic personality traits (3). The Big Five is also known by the acronym OCEAN to abbreviate the five personality factors. The Big Five personality factors are:

openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism.

Openness to experience is described as an individual's creativity and how they are disposed to open up and try new things. Individuals who are high in openness to experience are more likely to enjoy stepping outside the box and meeting new people. Individuals who are low in openness to experience are more likely to stick to what they already know and their regular routines. Some traits that are commonly related to openness to experience are creativity, curiosity, and having a variety of interests.

The second personality factor is conscientiousness. It is described as an individual's behavior and how they act in sociable ways. People who are high in conscientiousness are more likely to be successful, well-organized, and like to play by the rules. People who are low in conscientiousness are more likely to procrastinate and do things on their own. Traits that describe conscientiousness are hard-working, planner, ambitious, and reliable.

Extraversion is described as how individuals present their energy and how they connect with others. Individuals who are high in extraversion are more likely to interact with others and be very outgoing. Individuals who are low in extraversion are more likely to be shy and keep to him or herself. Traits that are linked to extraversion are socialness, outgoingness, and high energy.

Agreeableness is described as how people get along and interact with others. People who are high in agreeableness are more likely to be caring, be well-liked, and respected. People who are low in agreeableness are more likely to be rude, blunt, and sarcastic. The traits that are connected to agreeableness are trust, loyalty, politeness, and sensitiveness.

Lastly, neuroticism is described as individuals who have negative traits that deal with their lack of emotional stability. Individuals who are high in neuroticism are more likely to have low self-esteem, to be emotional, and be easily angered. Individuals who are low in neuroticism are more likely to be very confident and courageous. The traits that are linked to neuroticism are insecurity, anxiety, moodiness, and lack of confidence.

Brand personality is a group of human characteristics that are attributed to a brand by consumers (4,5). There are five common brand personalities: emotive, trusted, sociable, exciting, and sincere (4). Common traits of these personalities are listed in **Table 1**. Other researchers have proposed other

Brand Personality	Common Traits of Each Brand Personality Type	Brands used in Current Study
Emotive	Emotional, idealistic	Gucci, Pink, Champion
Trusted	truthful, reliable, preserving	North Face, Levi, Old Navy
Sociable	friendly, creative, outgoing	Hollister, Vans, Forever 21
Exciting	active, adventurous, cool	Nike, Jordan, Adidas
Sincere	simple, caring, helpful	Polo, Columbia, H&M

Table 1. Common traits and representative brands for different brand personalities. Previous research suggests these are common personalities traits of the different brand personalities (4).

brand personalities, although these do not relate directly to human personality traits (6). A recent meta-analysis on brand personality found that consumers see their personalities as matching brand personalities they like, and when that happens, positive outcomes occur for businesses (5).

Casidy *et al.* investigated the relationship between consumer personalities and brand personalities among college-aged Australian students (4). They found that there was a significant relationship between some of the Big Five Personality Factors and their corresponding brand personalities. People with more neuroticism and conscientiousness personalities prefer trusted brands. People high in extraversion and openness to experience preferred the sociable brand personality. Exciting, sincere, and emotive brand personalities showed no relationship to any of the Big Five. Their findings suggest that there is a weak relationship between personality and brand personality.

Another study by Ayman and Kaya investigated gender differences in behavior based on branded fashion in a Turkish cohort (6). The authors found that individuals of a certain type of personality tend to like similar brands that shared the same personalities. Also, their study found that individuals associate with brands with which they share personalities. This is important to our study because their study concluded that personality and brand personality have strong relationships, although they did not use the Big Five personality traits or standard named brand personalities. Our study will use different personalities factors and brand personalities, while also using African American teens to see if personality and brand personality also have a stronger relationship.

Personality, mood, and self-concept play a role in individual's clothing choices and clothing preferences. Individuals tend to make their clothing choices based on the way they are feeling. Barquet and Balam researched the effect of clothing preferences on undergraduate students' clothing decisions based on factors such as mood, personal style, desire to feel comfortable, and self-esteem (7). They found that mood, personal style, a desire to feel comfortable, a presentation during class, and weather influenced clothing choices. This is important to our current study because if mood and personality play a role in an individual's clothing preferences, people should prefer brands that reflect their personality.

An additional study found there was a strong relationship between mood and three out of the five Big Five Personality

Factors and clothing preferences (8). However, she also found that personality and clothing choice had a very weak relationship. Although personality and clothing choices do not have a strong relationship, the relationship between mood and three out of the five personality factors was strong, which supports our current study.

Burroughs studied the relationship between clothing and social identity (9). In his first study, the kind of person the participant is could be determined based only on clothing, but only for certain personality traits. In his second study, he found that brands by themselves do not seem to reflect a person's personality (9). Dolich studied the congruent relationship between self-images and product brands. The author found that people preferred brands that were more similar to their ideal self-image rather than their real self-image (10). This study is similar to our current study because we are looking to see if people connect with brands that are similar to their personality. The study shows that people's ideal-self connects with brands that are similar to their personalities.

Another study by Piacentini and Mailer investigated symbolic consumption, the importance of goods and consumables in teenagers' clothing choices (11). They found that clothing choices made by young people are closely bound to their self-concept and used as a means of self-expression, a way of judging people and situations they have faced. They also found that teens use symbolic consumption to maximize their ability to belong to a group. This study is helpful because it discussed how people's self-concept plays a role in clothing choices and how they try to fit in to a group.

We investigated how fashion brand personalities are similar to people's personalities and how people may prefer a particular brand based on their own personal traits. Overall, research suggests that there are some relationships between how people see themselves and their clothing preferences. However, there is limited research on how the Big Five and brand personalities are related, especially with African American consumers. Our experiment consisted of African American students from a private college-preparatory high school called The Neighborhood Academy. We will have a group of the upperclassmen list a variety of brands that they prefer or like and categorize them into brand personalities. Next, we will have the other students take the Big Five Inventory (BFI) and connect their personalities with The Big Five personality factors. Then, we will take the list of the brands and ask students do they or will they prefer or desire that brand. We hypothesized that individuals prefer brands that share similar personality traits to their own and that there would be significant correlations between people's Big Five scores and how much they desire a specific brand personality. This agrees with previous research on personality and self-concept (4, 5, 7, 10, 11), which found significant but not strong relationships between people's personalities and brand personalities. We are not predicting specific relationships between the Big Five and individual brand personalities because many of the brand traits could align with multiple of

Subject personality factor (max = 10)	Openness	Conscientiousness	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Neuroticism
Mean	7.0	6.3	5.9	6.1	5.3
SD	0.78	0.14	0.14	1.13	0.71
Preference for brand personality (max = 5)	Trusted	Sincere	Sociable	Excited	Emotive
Mean	3.8	3.3	3.5	3.3	3.1
SD	0.71	0.99	0.71	0.77	0.64

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations for Big Five Personality Traits and Brand Personalities.

the Big Five factors. Our intent is to explore all the possible relationships between the two.

RESULTS

We sought to investigate how fashion brand personalities are like people’s personalities and how people may prefer a brand based on their own personal traits. A focus group of 14 African American teens generated a list of 15 brands, three for each brand personality. Then, fifty-five African American teenage participants completed the Big Five Inventory as well as a survey to measure their preference towards each of the brands from the focus group. The brand questionnaire consisted of 15 clothing brands, three for each brand personality. The participants were to rate each brand on a scale of one through five with five being very likely to desire or prefer that specific brand. Each person’s preference score for each brand personality was found by averaging the preference score for each brand of the three brands (Table 2). We calculated correlations between subject’s preference

Personality Factor / Brand Personality	Openness to Experience	Conscientiousness	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Neuroticism
Trusted	0.173	0.022	-0.202	-0.254*	0.109
Sincere	-0.091	-0.145	0.119	-0.347*	0.050
Sociable	0.049	0.065	0.34*	0.033	0.022
Exciting	0.089	-0.101	0.071	-0.015	0.014
Emotive	0.195	0.17	0.27*	-0.166	0.202

Table 3. Pearson correlation coefficient matrix between personality factors and brand personalities. Significant correlations marked with an asterisk ($p < 0.05, n = 55$).

for brands of different brand personalities and the Big Five personality factors (Table 3, Figure 1).

We observed a significant positive Pearson correlation coefficient between the extraversion personality factor and the sociable brand personality ($r(53) = 0.339, p = 0.006$). People who are high in extraversion tend to desire a sociable brand. There was also a significant positive correlation between a person’s extraversion and desiring of an emotive brand ($r(53) = 0.270, p = 0.02$). People who are high in extraversion tend to prefer an emotive brand. As seen, there was a significant negative correlation between agreeableness and a trusted brand ($r(53) = -0.254, p = 0.03$). People who are high in agreeableness tend to like, prefer, or desire a less trusted brand. Lastly, there was a significant negative correlation between agreeableness and a sincere brand ($r(53) = -0.346, p = 0.004$). People who are high in agreeableness tend to not like a sincere brand. All other correlations were not significant (Table 3).

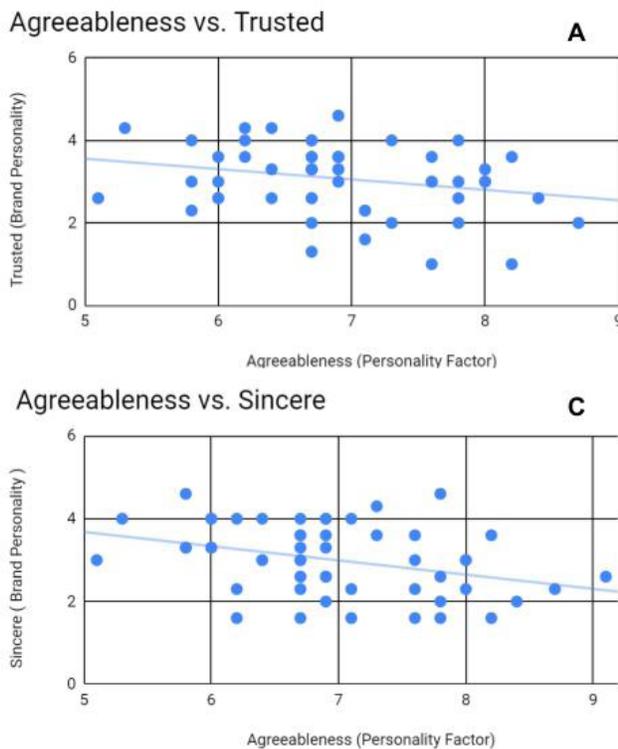


Figure 1. Significant correlations between personality factors and brand personalities. Listed above are the four significant correlations between personality factors and brand personalities ($p < 0.05, n = 55$). Agreeableness was negatively correlated with trusted brands (A) and sincere brands (C). Extraversion was positively correlated with emotive (B) and sociable brands (D).

DISCUSSION

We found that some of the Big Five Personality Factors (openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) had a relationship with five common brand personalities (trusted, sincere, sociable, exciting, and emotive). Four out of the 25 correlations had a significant relationship (Table 3). People who reported being more agreeable tended to dislike a sincere brand or a trusted brand. A person who was high in extraversion tended to prefer a sociable brand or an emotive brand (Figure 1).

Our research was partially consistent with prior research (4). Casidy *et al.* found that there was a significant relationship between some of the Big Five and their corresponding brand personalities. People with higher neuroticism and conscientiousness personality scores preferred trusted brands and the sociable brand personality was preferred by people high in extraversion and openness to experience. Exciting, sincere, and emotive brand personalities showed no relationship to any of the Big Five in their study. We found that there was also a significant relationship between some of the Big Five and brand personalities. One relationship that we found in common was that people who are high in extraversion prefer a sociable brand. Altogether, this was important because the Big Five Personality Factors are not very useful when it comes to brands. Unless a brand is outgoing or sociable, then investing in finding extra customers is useful and they should target people that are high in extraversion. Otherwise, brands should consider other factors besides the Big Five Personality Factors for market segmentation and advertising.

Our study was also partially consistent with prior research on personality and clothing preference (6). Ayman and Kaya found that individuals of a certain type of personality tend to like similar brands that shared the same personalities. We found that there was also a significant relationship between some of the Big Five Personality Factors and brand personalities. Although they did not use the Big Five Personality Factors or standard named brand personalities, their research was similar to our study. They concluded that there was a strong relationship between personality and brand personality, which we did not find.

Prior research by Eisend and Stockburger-Sauer, who did a meta-analysis review on brand personalities, was also partially consistent with our research (5). They found that consumers see their personalities as matching brand personalities. Because of that, positive things may happen, like building trust and strong brand relationships. This is like what we found because if a brand is outgoing or sociable, then investing in finding extraverted customers may be useful, and brands should target people who are high in extraversion.

One surprising result of our study was the negative correlation between agreeableness and sincere and trusted brands. Agreeableness is described as when people get along and interact with others well. People who are high in

agreeableness are more likely to be someone who cares for others, is well-liked, and respected. The brands that were categorized by the focus group as sincere were Polo, Columbia, and H&M and for trusted North Face, Levi, and Old Navy. We are uncertain why agreeableness had a negative relationship with sincere and trusted brands. We hypothesized that they would have a positive relationship because they shared similar adjectives like trusting, caring, and helpful. However, both relationships were very weak. Therefore, we would not recommend that marketers use this information when reaching customers. It is also possible our results are unique to the brands the focus group picked, and a different list of brands might have a different result.

There were two limitations to our study, which might have affected the results. First, our focus group had difficulty agreeing on some brand personalities. Our focus group consisted of 14 high school seniors. During the focus group, members often could not agree on the designation of a specific brand to a brand personality group. The group had to vote to come to a decision. Therefore, the brands in each category could be different when assigned by a different focus group. Also, some students complained the questionnaire was too long. So, it is possible that some of the students rushed through it, which could have affected our data. We saw no direct evidence of people randomly circling, but the complaints do tell us some rushing may have happened.

We recommend future research have other people take the Big Five Inventory to describe another person instead of having them take it about him or herself. We believe it would be interesting to use ratings of personality by friends instead of self-ratings because they may not be telling the truth, compared to how a friend would view them. It is possible that the personality that other people see might be more related to the brand personalities people prefer, since clothing choices often reflect the social group to which one wishes that he/she belonged (9).

In conclusion, the Big Five Personality Factors may not be useful when describing people's preferences for brand relationships. Our study, as well as others, have found few and weak relationships between the two. We recommend that marketers and brand promoters use other factors to target customers who will buy and promote their brands.

METHODS

The participants were students from 9th through 11th grade from The Neighborhood Academy, a college preparatory, private high school. There were 60 students invited to participate in total, 64% female and 36% male. Five students declined to participate in the study so we had 55 participants in our study. We also had a focus group with the senior class (14 students), in order to develop a list of brand personalities.

The materials were The Big Five Inventory and a self-created brand survey. The BFI is a personality test that measures the Big Five dimensions to determine a person's personality (3). We modified the test because students did

not understand certain words. Words such as quarrels, aloof, and assertive were replaced with similar words that students knew such as argues, not friendly, and demanding.

We also made a brand personality questionnaire, which 14 senior students, acting as a focus group, helped create. The focus group categorized the brands into different brand personalities (Table 1).

In the focus group, we had participants each write down ten clothing brands that they like, desire, or prefer. Then they placed them into the brand personalities where they best believe they connect to, and we discussed why they chose to place the brands where they did. After the discussion, the group had to agree on three brands for each of the brand personalities. When the group could not agree, the brand personality was assigned by voting. At the conclusion of the focus group session, a total of 15 clothing brands were divided into brand personality groups with three brands per group.

After the focus group helped created the brand personality questionnaire, both the BFI and the brand personality questionnaire were given to the 55 study participants over a two-week period. On the brand personality questionnaire, the participants were to rate each brand on a scale of one through five with five being very likely to desire or prefer that specific brand. Each person's preference score for each brand personality was found by averaging the preference score for each brand of the three brands. Participants completed the questionnaires during class time in small groups of 5-10 students. Students who participated were given a few pieces of candy in exchange for their participation.

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