

Exploring the Personality of Southern lifestyle Brands

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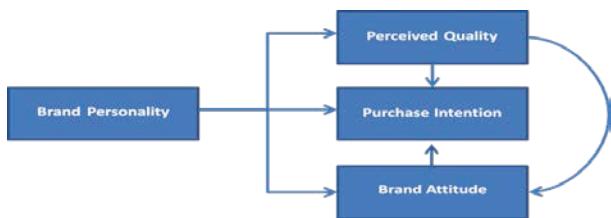
Introduction

Southern Tide, and similar brands, are referred to as southern lifestyle brands. These brands claim to market to “the classic Southerner”, and through clothing, attempt to communicate the life experiences and emotions collectively held by native southerners. Southern Tide, the most popular southern lifestyle brand, was launched in 2006 and experienced a 3,121% growth rate in three years (“How Do You Achieve”, 2012). In subsequent years, several other similar clothing lines were developed such as Southern Proper and Southern Shirt Company. Based on the fact that the growth of southern lifestyle brands occurred during the second largest economic downturn in US history, their expansion and success is intriguing. The identification of specific factors that set southern lifestyle brands apart from other clothing brands could be valuable for the field of clothing and consumer studies.

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

The functionality of a consumer product is not the only factor consumers consider when deciding to purchase a good, and symbolic qualities associated with consumer brands are frequently the principal motivator behind purchase decisions (Maehle, Otnes, & Supphellen, 2011). The construct of brand personality offers an explanation into how consumers develop and identify symbolic qualities associated with brands. The most widely cited definition of brand personality is “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (Aaker, 1997). Aaker (1997) introduced the most widely used 42-item scale brand personality framework, which reveals five distinct and robust personality dimensions. Aaker’s brand personality research is based on a set of brands across a wide variety of product categories. However, recently several scholars have suggested the advantages of focusing on a specific area of application in brand personality research (Valette-Florence & De Barnier, 2013).

In conjunction with brand personality, consumer bias toward a certain country or region also influence consumer brand preference and buying decision (Shimp, Dunn, & Klein, 2004). The southeastern US possess a unique culture primarily due to its distinctive history and southern identity (Thompson, 2007). Southern lifestyle brands represent southern culture and lifestyle, so we believe these brands should possess a unique brand personality. The purpose of the current study is to identify brand personality dimensions of southern lifestyle brands and further to empirically investigate the impact of brand personality on key dependent variables in consumer behavior. The specific objectives of this research are: 1) *Identify the brand personality construct of southern lifestyle brands;* 2) *Empirically investigate the impact of brand personality on perceived quality, brand attitude, and purchase intention;* and 3) *Investigate the relationships among perceived quality, brand attitude, and purchase intention.* This conceptual framework of this study is shown in Figure below.



Research Design and Methodology

Guided by Aaker's (1997) brand personality study, our selection and identification of southern lifestyle brand personality attributes follows the following process. The study uses a sample of college students enrolled at a state university from the south, because they represent primary consumers of southern lifestyle brands. Initially, a list of personality characteristics used to describe southern lifestyle brands was compiled from descriptions used by southern lifestyle brands, literature reviews, and consumer publications. In the second step, we conducted interviews with 50 college students. In this free-association task, participants were asked to write down the personality attributes that first came to mind when thinking about southern lifestyle brands. In the third step, we incorporated the 42 original personality traits proposed by Aaker (1997) into our inventory, because those attributes were compiled and developed from diverse sources such as the Big Five personality factors and other refined scales used by academics and practitioners. In the end, from the set of personality attributes gathered in the previous three steps, attributes that are redundant, ambiguous, or irrelevant to the construct were eliminated, resulting in *a final set of 66 traits* for examining southern lifestyle brand personality. The major personality traits identified in this study include: *active, honorable, old south, traditional, nostalgic, popular, gentlemen, classy, family-oriented, preppy, independent, classic, sophisticated, versatile, southern, leader, local, courageous, confident, brave, beachy, charming, ambitious, and cool.*

Data Collection and Analysis Plans

In the main study, we plan to recruit 300 voluntary participants from a large state university from the south. Participants will be first asked to select their most familiar southern lifestyle brand and then to rate the extent to which the final set of 66 personality traits described their most familiar brand using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all descriptive) to 5 (extremely descriptive). Scales to measure the three dependent variables (perceived quality, brand attitude, and purchase intention) are borrowed from past studies. An exploratory factor analysis will be first carried out on the 66 personality traits of southern lifestyle brands. Confirmatory factor analysis will be next used to check validity and reliability of the brand personality scale for southern lifestyle brands. Last, we will use structural equation modeling (SEM) to test the structural relationships among brand personality, perceived quality, brand attitude and purchase intention using Amos software.

Selected References

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