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## How Chinese College Students Perceive Fast Fashion Brands: A Brand Personality Approach

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Keywords: Brand personality, Chinese consumers, fast fashion

### Research Background

Fast fashion has experienced a decade of explosive expansion (Caro & Martínez-de-Albéniz, 2015). Fast fashion provides “hot” products that capture the latest consumer trends with affordable prices. Due to the fact that fast fashion has become a key feature of the global fashion industry over the last decade (Choi, 2014), there is phenomenal growth in the availability of fast fashion brands in international markets. Fast fashion brands can be easily and affordably possessed by young consumers worldwide. With the aggressive international expansion of fast fashion retailers, young consumers in China are attracted to popular fast fashion brands, featuring updated looks, greater variety, and limited editions. This study aims to empirically investigate young consumer’s perceptions towards fast fashion using brand personality approach from an international perspective. The concept of brand personality offered in the literature recognizes the use of human descriptors to portray brand identity or brand image. More formally, the most widely cited definition of brand personality is “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (Aaker, 1997). Inspired by brand personality research, this study contributes to literature by examining Chinese college students’ perceptions of fast fashion brands and identifying the personalities that are specifically associated with fast fashion brands.

### Research Method

Guided by Aaker's (1997) study, our selection and identification of fast fashion brand personality attributes follows the following process. In the first step, we conducted interviews with 46 college students to describe their experiences with fast fashion and elicit the attributes and traits consumers associate with their preferred fast fashion brands. In this free-association task, participants were asked to write down the personality attributes that first came to mind when thinking about fast fashion brands. A total of 215 unique traits were generated in this process. In the second step, we incorporated the 42 original personality traits proposed by Aaker (1997) into our inventory. In the third step, from the set of personality attributes gathered in the previous two steps, attributes that are redundant, ambiguous, or irrelevant to the construct were eliminated, resulting in a final set of 58 traits to be included in the survey for examining the brand personality of fast fashion.

A translation and a back-translation of the questionnaire were performed by two Chinese scholars who are fluent in both English and Chinese languages. Furthermore, to minimize the limitation of linguistic difference, we administered the questionnaire with both Chinese and English trait labels. As college students are one of the key target market segments for fast fashion, this study used a sample of college students from a large Chinese university in

Shanghai. Participants were asked to rate the extent to which the final set of personality traits described their most familiar fast fashion brands along a Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all descriptive) to 5 (extremely descriptive). A total of 519 responses were collected and 427 responses are valid. 58.3% of the participants were 18-20 years old; and 32.8% were 21-23. Seventy-three percent of the sample were female.

Data Analysis and Results

Principal component analysis with varimax rotation was carried out to determine what underlying brand personality structure exists for the data. The exploratory factor analysis solution was determined by using the following criteria: eigenvalue (>1), variance explained by each component, scree plot, loading score for each factor ( $\geq 0.50$ ), and meaningfulness of each dimension. As a result, four factors were extracted, which explained approximately 59.01% of the total variance observed in the data. Moreover, the analysis of reliability of each component was satisfactory. For each component, traits with the highest item-to-total correlations were also identified. Figure 1 below represents the Chinese college students' perception towards fast fashion brands using brand personality approach. Table 1 shows the means of each brand personality dimension for HM, Zara, Forever21, and Uniqlo which were reported as the respondents' most familiar brands in the survey. ANOVA analysis revealed that only for *Attractive* dimension there was a significant difference among these four different fast fashion brands ( $F=24.80, p<0.000$ ). No significant differences among the brands were found for the other three dimensions. Furthermore, post-hoc multiple comparison Tukey HSD test indicated that for the *Attractive* dimension there was a significant difference between Zara and HM, and there was a significant difference between Uniqlo and the other three brands. Zara was perceived the most attractive by Chinese college students. The results from this study can serve as the foundation for future research to examine other aspects of Chinese consumer behaviors towards fast fashion.

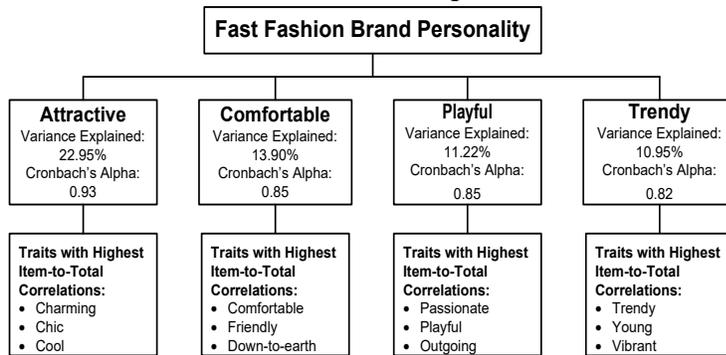


Figure 1 Fast Fashion Brand Personality Dimensions

Brands	Attractive		Comfortable		Playful		Trendy	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
H & M	3.39	0.61	3.64	0.58	3.54	0.69	3.63	0.63
Zara	3.71	0.63	3.58	0.64	3.55	0.76	3.80	0.62
Forever 21	3.55	0.58	3.50	0.61	3.56	0.64	3.78	0.56
Uniqlo	3.04	0.57	3.74	0.68	3.66	0.61	3.61	0.64

Table 1 Personality Dimension Means

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