Brand Personality Differentiation in the Australian Action-Sports Clothing Market

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This research explores the application of Aaker's (1997) brand-personality (BP) construct in the Australian action-sports (A/S) youth branded clothing market. It investigates the potential for detecting differences in the BP profiles of three A/S clothing brands (Hooker Technologies, Volcom, SMP) as well as a mainstream clothing brand (JAG). Based on the results from 300 Australian respondents actively involved in the A/S subculture, Aaker's (1997) BP construct was effective in profiling the three A/S brands consistent with the nature of the A/S subculture and its image. Further, Aaker's BP construct was able to determine significant BP profile differences amongst the three A/S clothing brands, as well as identifying BP profile differences between A/S-branded clothing and mainstream branded clothing.

Keywords: brand personality, action sports, clothing, apparel, youth market, Australia, subculture

Introduction

Brand personality is a strategically important construct that can help firms achieve enduring differentiation and sustainable competitive advantage (Plummer 1985, Biel 1993, Diamantopoulos, Smith & Grime 2005, Freling & Forbes 2005a, Venable, Rose, Bush & Gilbert 2005). Thus, the development of a clearly defined brand personality is an important objective of brand management (Siguaw, Mattilia & Austin 1999, Keller 2003, Kressman, Sirgy, Herrman, Huber, Huber & Lee 2006).

This research explores the application of Aaker's (1997) brand personality (BP) construct in the Australian action-sports, youth branded-clothing market. The action-sports (A/S) youth subculture market typically refers to persons aged 18-25 years of age who actively participate in 'extreme' sports, such as skateboarding, snowboarding, wakeboarding and freestyle motocross. Empirical marketing research into clothing brands in general has been largely based on major consumer brands (e.g. Levi's and Calvin Klein) and lacking a specific focus (O'Cass 2001), or has been one of a number variables investigated in a broader fashion-clothing context (e.g. O'Cass & Lim 2001) or profiling a single brand in general (e.g. Matthiesen & Phau 2005). Whilst there has been research into youth-culture in general (Janssen, Dechesne & Knippenberg 1999) and how youth utilise clothing brands (and their symbolic meaning) as vehicles for self-expression (Hogg, Bruce & Hill 1998), the youth A/S branded-clothing market has lacked attention in the marketing literature.

The broader A/S industry has witnessed increased sports participation over the past decade in the US (DesMarteau 2004, Janoff 2005), and is estimated to be worth US$9 - US$12 billion, with the skate/surf shoe category alone growing by 20% in 2006 (Higgins 2006, Muir 2006, Palmeri 2006, Powel 2006). More specific to this research, the Australian youth A/S branded clothing market was worth an estimated A$400 million (and A$1.5 billion including the surf market) in 1999 and was growing at the rate of 10-15% per annum (De Clercq 2000). Marketing to this significant segment of the youth market is a challenge, as it has grown

correspondingly larger, more influential, more affluent (richer) and more jaded than ever before (Burbury 2001, Harty 2001). This calls for research that can provide new insights into the way in which youth in specific sub-cultures perceive brands (Wolburg & Pokrywczynski 2001).

Despite the value of the A/S market, little research has been directed toward either determining A/S brand personalities or examining the extent to which A/S brands are differentiated on personality dimensions. Therefore, building on BP profiling research in the US and Japanese fast-food restaurant and non-profit sectors (Siguaw, Mattilia & Austin 1999, Murase & Bojanic 2004, Venable, Rose, Bush & Gilbert 2005), the purpose of this paper is to investigate the potential for the BP construct to detect differences in the BP profiles of A/S clothing brands as well as in comparison to mainstream clothing brands. This will provide empirical evidence of the extent to which A/S brands have established clear and distinct brand personalities in an Australian context.

The paper first reviews the theoretical underpinnings of the study, including clothing, self expression, youth and the action-sport youth subculture and brand personality. Next, the methodology is described, followed by presentation of the BP profiling results. The paper finishes with conclusions, limitations and avenues for future research.

Clothing, self expression and youth subculture

All voluntary consumption carries symbolic meaning, therefore, consumers will consume products that hold particular symbolic meaning (Elliot & Wattanasuwan 1998, Aaker, Benet-Martinez & Garolera 2001). Clothing often represents an important symbolic consumption area for consumers (Goldsmith, Moore & Beaudoin 1999, Mullarkey 2001, O'Cass 2001). Clothing brands have been demonstrated to possess important symbolic meaning that goes far beyond the basic functionality of the brand (Auty & Elliot 1998, de Chernatony & Riley 1998), whereby consumers use clothing brands for self-expressive purposes. A clothing brand's image may be a primary means of symbolically constructing and communicating their personal and social identity (Noesjirwan & Crawford 1982, Davies 1985, Evans 1989, Lurie 1992, Polhemus 1994, Elliot & Wattanasuwan 1998, Mullarkey 2001). This self-image congruence can explain and predict different facets of consumer behaviour, including ad effectiveness, product/brand use, purchase intent, brand attitude, brand relationship quality and brand loyalty (Sirgy, Grewal, Mangleburg, Park, Chon, Claiborne, Johar & Berkman 1997, Aaker 1999, Mehta 1999, O'Cass & Lim 2001, Escalas & Bettman 2003, Kressman *et al* 2006).

Youth-culture in general is focused on a preoccupation with self rebellion and nonconformity (Manstead & Hewstone 1995), characterised as a crisis of identity involving actively seeking a social identity through the association with symbolic tools (Erikson 1968). Youth-culture is relatively self contained and based on the peer group, with its own distinctive values, lifestyles, patterns of consumption and leisure activities, and independent of, if not in active conflict with, mainstream (adult) culture (Manstead & Hewstone 1995). However, within this broad youth-culture, there exist distinctive subculture groups.

A subculture indicates which symbolic group one belongs to and demarcates that group from the mainstream (Brake 1985). Subcultures help distinctive subgroups of consumers create and preserve unique identities through various forms of consumption practices, resulting in an identifiable social structure with a shared set of beliefs, values, relationships and modes of

symbolic expression (Schouten & McAlexander 1995, Thorton 1995, Muggleton 2000, Kates 2002, Butcher & Thomas 2003a, Leigh, Peters & Shelton 2006).

The general function of a youth subculture is to compensate for the failure of the parent culture to provide a feeling of acceptance and symbolic-satisfactions (style) unique to this group. These functions suggest that feelings and symbolism rate highly for youth subculture members. One of the important psychological functions is the symbolic use of clothing style (i.e. brand) by its members for self-expression and to identify with the symbolic values unique only to this specific subculture (Sebald 1968, Brake 1985, Janssen, Dechesne & Knippenberg 1999, Butcher & Thomas 2003a). Youth subcultures are heavily focused on display, on being seen and being heard (Butcher & Thomas 2003b). Thus, clothing is highly valued as a means of distinguishing them not only from the dominant adult culture, but from the parent youth-culture in society as well, thus forming a part of their self-concept (Sebald 1968). Therefore, clothing can become a symbol for some youth subculture segments that encapsulates the values of this particular subculture and links their self-concept with the symbolic meaning inherent in these brands. Within this context, the clothing brands chosen by youth to act as a 'social glue' can denote membership, conformity and 'fitting in' with other members of their youth-culture group (Fernie, Moore, Lawrie & Hallsworth 1997, Miles, Cliff & Burr 1998, White & Wyn 2004), as is the case for the A/S youth market.

The Action-Sports youth subculture market

The A/S youth subculture market typically refers to persons aged 18-25 years of age who actively participate in alternative, youth-oriented 'extreme' sports (action-sports), for example, skateboarding, snowboarding, wakeboarding, freestyle motocross, surfing, freestyle jet skiing and all other similar freestyle or action sports. These sports are highly reflective of specific youth subculture segments that have grown into specific youth lifestyles (for example, skaters, snowboarders), each with their own unique set of symbolic meaning and consumption patterns (Polhemus 1994, Lopiano-Misdom & De Luca 1997, Kapferer 1997, Anonymous 2001). A/S subculture goes beyond just sport, featuring a vital cultural context. It has a counter-culture music and lifestyle element surrounding it that is somewhat of an anti-establishment, non-conformist attitude, in that these are people who want to be different, who wish to break away from traditional mainstream activities and sports, with values such as passion, excitement, intensity, self-expression, creativity and freedom (Polhemus 1994, Beal 1996, Anonymous 2001, Meacham 2001, Fetto 2002, Edwards 2006).

This subculture group of consumers use action sports and the associated branded clothing to self-express their identity to their peer group and symbolise how they are different from other members of the general youth market (Polhemus 1994, Kapferer 1997, Burbury 2001). The Australian A/S youth branded-clothing market is about authenticity, image, symbolism and credibility as opposed to purely utilitarian attributes (Cosic 1993, De Clercq 2000, Burbury 2001, Harty 2001).

Authenticity plays a key role in subcultures and reflects being a true or natural community member and practising the culture as a way of life, thus defining what (and who) is and is not part of the community, thus influencing the lifestyles, behaviours and consumption patterns of marker goods that define the subculture's symbolic boundaries (Polhemus 1994, Schouten & McAlexander 1995, Muggleton 2000, Kates 2002, Thorton 2005, Leigh, Peters & Shelton 2006). Authentic A/S brands are culturally connected with the A/S subculture in such a way that members of this group find them relevant to their everyday life (Keeley 2001).

Furthermore, this group of consumers has strong views on marketing and clothing brands, as they want branded clothing that conveys images of integrity and authenticity, thereby separating their identities from the mainstream consumer (De Clercq 2000). Giving a clothing brand credibility and longevity for this group is increasingly challenging for both brand owners and retailers alike (Burbury 2001, Robertson 2004, Griffin 2005, Higgins 2006). This is reflected in the view of Burton Snowboards: "Brands want to associate with Burton because it is a way of life, a lifestyle. We trade in credibility and relevance which, even if you are a $20 billion company, you can't buy" (Edwards 2006). This suggests that the A/S youth branded-clothing market is driven to a large extent by symbolism and brand image, and that branded clothing in this particular market is significantly differentiated by these symbolic meanings from mainstream branded clothing in other markets.

The A/S subculture core is represented by action-sports athletes and fans who define their world by its antiestablishment bent, and for whom A/S sports have always been an exclusive culture of "We know and you don't, and you guys are clueless" (Higgins 2006). This core considers themselves to be authentic members of the A/S subculture, and they similarly value and choose brands that have an A/S authenticity about them (Polhemus 1994, Griffin 2003, Griffin 2005). For example, the snowboard market has been described as being composed of consumers who place strict rules on branding and look for and worship their own cult brands. When mainstream ski brand, Rossignol, attempted an extension into the snowboard market, its failure to adequately understand how this market interprets brands and what brands mean to them led to the extension's rejection (Kapferer 1997). Similarly, Nike initially failed twice in trying to market skateboard shoes before successfully adopting a more low-keyed, niche approach tailored to the specific product and symbolic needs and image perceptions of the skate segment (Robertson 2004, Higgins 2006).

The image of a brand's typical user as perceived by the target group also influences the overall brand image, brand personality, brand attitude and product preference (Biel 1993, Sirgy *et al* 1997, O'Cass & Lim 2001, Escalas & Bettman 2003, Govers & Schoormans 2005, Keller and Richey 2006). A perceived blatant focus of a brand on a broader, non-core (i.e. mainstream) market can dilute the symbolic value of the brand to the core, authentic users (Keeley 2001). Thus, the challenge for A/S brands is to grow without 'selling out' and avoid being seen to abandon their core values that made them distinctive (and non-mainstream) in the first place. Staying focused on the needs of the core authentic users and upholding core brand values, along with ensuring brand credibility and authenticity, therefore, are the keys to maintaining the ongoing loyalty of this core set of A/S practitioners (De Clercq 2000, Herek 2002, Griffin 2003, Griffin 2005). For example, "The thing that makes skateboarding unique is that it's a subculture", said the founder of skateboard brand, Zero. "You're inside the group. Until you cross the line, you'll stay inside the group. Crossing the line is selling, and you'll go down on the brand-credibility barometer" (Higgins 2006, p. A1).

Arguably, then, the core A/S segment possesses a degree of counter conformity motivation and a desire to identify as being different from the mainstream (Polhemus 1994, Tian, Bearden & Hunter 2001). In this situation, perceptions of an A/S brand 'selling out to the mainstream' are seen as a transgression violating the emotional trust and bond with the brand, thus weakening the bases of self-connection and identification (Aaker, Fournier & Brasel 2004). This departure from the original image and positioning of the brand can weaken self-image congruity (Sirgy *et al* 1997) and lead to authentic, core A/S customers abandoning the 'sell-out' brand (Herek 2002, Griffin 2003, Griffin 2005). In addition to damaging the brand's short-term sales prospects, this abandonment can also further erode the wayward

brand's long-term position in the broader market due to this group's tastemaker, opinion-leader (i.e. fashion-innovator) role in the A/S clothing segment and the influence their seeking out a new A/S brand will have (Polhemus 1994, Schouten & McAlexander 1995, Goldsmith, Moore & Beaudoin 1999, Griffin 2005). Therefore, understanding the essence of an A/S brand and how it is perceived to be different from a mainstream brand is important, and one way of doing this is to understand the brand personality of the A/S brand.

Brand Personality (BP)

Researchers have consistently argued that brands, like people, take on personality traits (e.g. Biel 1993, Aaker 1997, Kapferer 1997, Keller 2003, Freling & Forbes 2005a). By communicating, brands gradually build up their own individual human-type character or personality traits. For example, a brand may be characterized as being 'modern', 'old fashioned' or 'exotic'. These human-type personality traits provide self-expressive or symbolic functions for the consumer (Aaker 1999), who uses the personality as a cue and exploits the positive aspects to present a given image to the world (Freling & Forbes 2005a). A brand with the right personality can result in the consumer feeling that the brand is relevant and that they should remain loyal to it (Aaker 1996, Keller 2003). In addition, in product/brand categories where symbolism is important to consumer decisions, brand personality and symbolism are more likely to be related (e.g. fashion clothing and cars). Thus, consumers often choose brands that have a personality that is consistent with their own self-concept (Aaker 1999, Keller 2003, Kressman *et al* 2006), and it is in understanding this association that marketers can determine the symbolic use of brands by consumers.

Brand personality can be defined as "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (Aaker 1997, p. 347). Drawing on the 'big five' dimensions of human personality, Aaker (1997) conceptualised BP as possessing five dimensions: Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication and Ruggedness. Sincerity represents warmth and acceptance; Excitement represents sociability, energy and activity; Competence represents responsibility, dependability and security; Sophistication represents class and charm; and Ruggedness represents masculinity and strength.

Aaker's work has inspired a stream of subsequent BP studies across contexts and countries. These studies have highlighted the ability of the BP construct to be used as a strategic marketing tool for profiling and differentiating brands and creating a competitive advantage through symbolism in consumer markets in a variety of contexts, such as fashion clothing, FMCGs, cars, retailers and charitable organisations. BP influences product and brand perceptions, can have a positive influence on product evaluations and can represent the principal basis on which differentiation is determined when there is little or no distinction other than the brand (Aaker 1997, Freling & Forbes 2005a). A strong, favourable BP provides emotional fulfilment and may lead to image enhancement, an increased willingness to continue using a given brand, to try a new brand or brand extension and to pay premium prices for a brand (Freling & Forbes 2005b, Venable *et al* 2005, Chang & Chieng 2006, Kressman *et al* 2006).

Using BP to differentiate brands

The development of a clearly defined BP differentiated from competitors is an important objective of brand management (Siguaw, Mattilia & Austin 1999, Keller 2003, Kressman *et al* 2006). BP can be used to strategically understand consumers' perceptions of any single

brand across any product category (Aaker 1997). Measuring the personality of any one brand is likely to provide marketers and researchers key insights into what aspects of a brand's personality influences consumption and ultimately increases brand equity. A clearer understanding of a brand's BP dimensions offers a firm the potential to capitalise on these nuances by developing and implementing branding strategies across key stakeholder groups (Venable *et al* 2005).

In the context of differentiating brands, BP is a profile construct, whereby there is no single configuration of BP scores that is 'optimal' for all brands. Thus, the 'ideal' personality of a brand will depend on the brand's market and its positioning within that market (Diamantopoulos, Smith & Grime 2005). Aaker's (1997) BP construct has been previously used to profile brands in the US and Japanese fast-food restaurant and non-profit sectors (Siguaw, Mattilia & Austin 1999, Murase & Bojanic 2004, Venable *et al*. 2005). However, Aaker's BP construct has not been used to examine the existence of distinct brand personalities for branded clothing in the Australian A/S youth subculture market.

Method

This study focused on the BP perceptions of authentic A/S subculture members in a major eastern Australian metropolitan region. Based on a focus group with authentic A/S subculture members and discussions with A/S practitioners (brand managers and retailers), three A/S brands (Hooker Technologies, Volcom and SMP) and one mainstream clothing brand (JAG) readily available in Australia were selected as the focus of the study. This phase also indicated that the target market for the focal A/S brands consisted predominantly of males, ranging from 18-32 years of age, which guided the recruitment of survey respondents.

After pre-testing, three treatment versions of a self-administered survey that took eight minutes to complete were prepared, with each version featuring one A/S brand and JAG. Respondents were randomly allocated to one of the three treatments. Brand personality was measured using Aaker's (1997) 42-item, 5-point scale (1 = *not descriptive at all* and 5 = *extremely descriptive*), with summated (mean) scales created for each A/S and JAG BP dimension. To illustrate how to complete the brand-personality part of the survey, an example was provided utilising a well-known car brand (Mercedes-Benz). In order to provide respondents an additional point of reference, the relevant A/S and JAG brand logos were placed at the introduction to each BP assessment section. Table 1 reports the reliabilities for the BP total and individual BP dimensions for the combined A/S brands and JAG.

Table 1. Brand Personality reliabilities

	A/S	JAG
BP Total	.80	.66
Sincerity	.76	.51
Excitement	.64	.68
Competence	.82	.68
Sophistication	.68	.50
Ruggedness	.66	.45

Note: Cronbach's alpha reported.
    A/S = Combined action-sports brands

Due to the 'rare' nature of the youth A/S subculture market, a multi-site mall-intercept judgmental approach was used following Sudman & Blair's (1999) recommendations. The first site was a prominent skate park, due to the nature of the typical user of the facility being actively involved in the A/S market, as well as also being a consumer of the focal A/S clothing brands. Skateboarders wearing 'true' A/S branded clothing or who were exhibiting behaviour consistent with authentic members of the youth A/S subculture were recruited by the first (male) author.[1] The behaviours included, firstly, being a skilled skateboarder and, secondly, being a key point of interaction with the other skateboarders (i.e. a group and/or opinion leader). Next, as Australian A/S youth-branded products are typically available from specialty snowboard and skateboarding stores, customers visiting two such retailers were targeted. Store customers waiting for their snowboards and skateboards to be serviced or who were seen to be purchasing A/S branded clothing consistent with the image of the focal brands were recruited by the first author. At all three locations, respondents completed the survey and immediately returned it to the researcher.

Three hundred useable surveys were collected over a four-week period split equally amongst the three locations (see Table 2). Respondents were 21.5 years old on average, were almost exclusively male (99%) and resided in a variety of suburbs. Almost all respondents reported owning multiple items from each of the three target brands: Hooker Technologies (86%), Volcom (96%) and SMP (96%), with an average of 10 A/S brand items owned overall. Respondents reported being very familiar with both the A/S brands rated and the mainstream brand (JAG). Respondents also reported that A/S brands were very important to them and strongly identified with the A/S brands evaluated. Respondents had participated in an average of 3.4 action-sports over the past twelve months and used 7.8 different information sources on average to stay informed about action-sports. A check with A/S practitioners confirmed that the sample profile was a satisfactory representation of the target market for the focal A/S brands. Thus, the sample was deemed suitable for the purposes of the research.

Table 2. Sample size by location

	Hooker	**Volcom**	**SMP**	**Total**
Skatepark	32	36	36	99
Shop 1	32	34	33	97
Shop 2	36	30	31	104
Total	100	100	100	300

Note: Each respondent also rated JAG, resulting in 300 assessments of JAG's BP.

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[1] The first author is a core, authentic A/S subculture member. He is an active snowboarder and experienced motocross racer, as well as participating in other A/S activities, such as wakeboarding. He also has previous A/S clothing-brand industry experience, as a marketing manager for a small A/S brand distributed in Australia and the U.S.A. The first author's manner, attire and appearance were consistent with being a core A/S subculture member, which facilitated the approach and recruitment of survey respondents at all three locations.

Results

Initial analysis of the BP profiles suggested that Aaker's BP scale was able to distinguish unique BP profiles both amongst the three A/S brands (Hooker Technologies, Volcom and SMP) and between the A/S brands and the mainstream brand (JAG) (reported in Table 3). Consistent with the nature of the A/S subculture and its image, the A/S brands were rated by respondents as being more exciting and rugged, reflecting a more active, energetic, strong and masculine personality than JAG's more sophisticated and competent rating, which reflected a more responsible, dependable, classy and conservative (mainstream) personality. The remainder of this section further analyses profile differences amongst the A/S brands and in comparison to the mainstream brand.

Differentiating A/S BP profiles

A one-way MANOVA was conducted to determine the A/S brand effect on the set of five dependent variables (i.e. the five BP dimensions). Significant differences were found amongst the three A/S brands on the brand-personality dimensions (Wilks' Λ = .632, F (10, 586) = 15.089, $p < .0005$; Pillai's Trace = .382, F (10, 588) = 13.903, $p < .0005$). The reasonably strong multivariate η^2 indicated that 20.5% of the multivariate variance of the BP dimensions is associated with the A/S brand grouping factor. Table 3 reports the mean results for the BP total and individual BP dimensions for each A/S brand and JAG.

Table 3. Brand Personality results

	Hooker	Volcom	SMP	JAG	A/S Avg
BP (Total)	2.89	2.94	2.64	2.63	2.83
Sincerity	2.35	2.49	2.30	2.28	2.38
Excitement	4.51	4.52	4.34	2.23	4.45
Competence	3.04	3.14	2.65	3.45	2.94
Sophistication	1.35	1.35	1.22	4.02	1.30
Ruggedness	3.22	3.22	2.71	1.16	3.05

Note: Means reported.
A/S Avg = average for the three action-sports brands (Hooker Technologies, Volcom and SMP)

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted on each dependent variable (BP dimension) as a follow-up test to the MANOVA. Due to five ANOVAs being conducted, a Bonferroni method was used to control for Type I error (Green & Salkind 2003), where each ANOVA was tested at the 0.01 level (.05/5 = .01). The ANOVAs for Sincerity, Excitement, Competence and Ruggedness were significant at the .01 level (F (2, 297) $\geq$ 6.466, $p \leq .002$), whilst Sophistication just bordered into non-significance at the .01 level (F (2, 297) = 4.578, $p = .011$).

Post hoc univariate ANOVA analyses found seven significant pair-wise differences at or below the .003 level (.01/3 = .003) across four of the BP dimensions: Sincerity, Excitement, Competence and Ruggedness. Four of the significant pair-wise comparisons were between Volcom and SMP, whilst the other three significant pair-wise comparisons were between

Hooker Technologies and SMP. Sophistication's lowest significance (.02) failed to exceed the required .003 level.

Differentiating mainstream and A/S BP profiles

Whilst respondents were randomly assigned one of the A/S brands to evaluate, all respondents evaluated the mainstream brand (JAG). To test for differences in a respondent's assessment of each BP dimension for JAG, a one-way, repeated-measures (within-subjects) ANOVA was conducted. The results suggest that a significant difference exists across the JAG BP dimensions for the individual respondent (Wilks' Λ = .054, F (4, 296) = 1287.045, $p < .0005$, multivariate η^2 = .946).

Next, the collective scores for the A/S brands were compared to the JAG scores as assessed by each respondent (reported in Table 4). Repeated-measures t-tests were used to assess if a significant difference existed in the mean evaluation for each pair for both the overall BP (Total) for Action-Sports versus JAG and for each separate BP dimension. The results indicated that the A/S BP (Total) mean (2.83) was significantly greater ($p < .0005$) than the mean JAG BP (Total) mean (2.63). The results for all five pair-wise comparisons (Table 4) were significant at the .01 level ($p < .0005$).[2] The mean differences ranged from a low of .099 (2%) for Sincerity to a high 2.71 (54.2%) for Sophistication (in absolute terms) on the 5-point scales. The stronger (higher) BP dimensions for the A/S brands included Sincerity, Excitement and Ruggedness. For JAG, Competence and Sophistication were identified as the stronger (higher) dimensions against the A/S brands. These differences are presented graphically in the box plots in Figure 1.

Table 4. Repeated-measures t-tests for A/S vs JAG Brand Personality

	A/S Mean (*sd*)		JAG Mean (*sd*)		Mean Difference	*t* (299)	sig. (*p*)
BP Total	**2.83**	(.33)	2.63	(.25)	.1908	7.92	< .0005
Sincerity	**2.38**	(.40)	2.28	(.34)	.099	3.58	< .0005
Excitement	**4.45**	(.26)	2.27	(.40)	**2.19**	97.641	< .0005
Competence	2.94	(.59)	**3.45**	(.46)	-.51	-12.640	< .0005
Sophistication	1.30	(.37)	**4.02**	(.45)	**-2.71**	-76.002	< .0005
Ruggedness	**3.05**	(.53)	1.16	(.21)	**1.89**	53.976	< .0005

Note: A/S = Action-sport average, *sd* = standard deviation, sig. = significance (*p*-value).
5-point scales used, where higher numbers are more descriptive of the BP dimension

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[2] This reflects the five pair-wise comparisons conducted being tested at the Bonferroni-based .01 level (.05/5 = .01).

Figure 1. BP dimensions A/S vs JAG
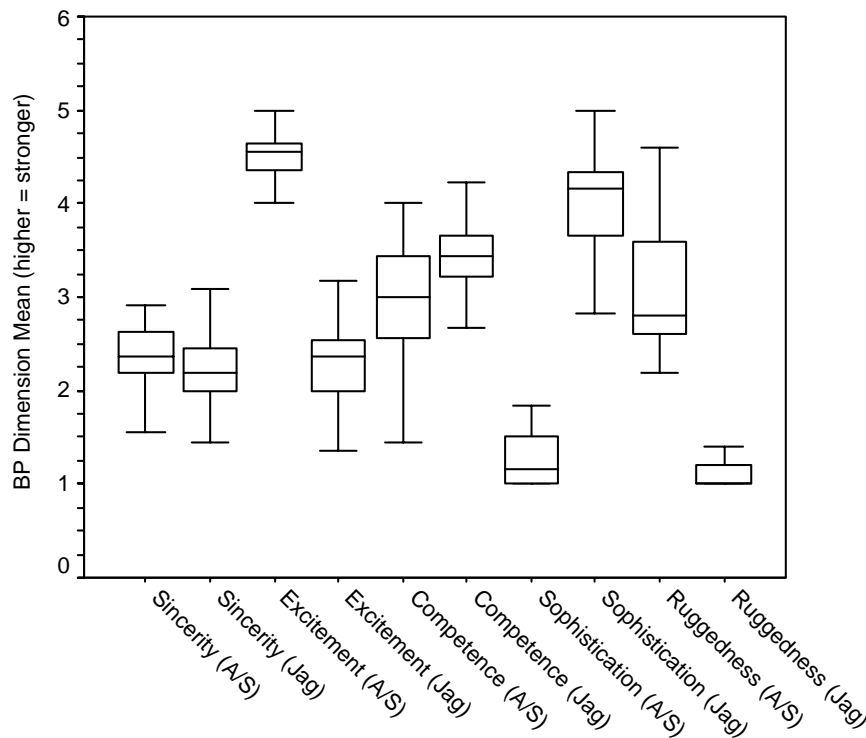
Conclusions, limitations and future research

This study provides additional empirical support for Aaker's (1997) brand-personality construct in the context of the Australian A/S youth branded clothing market based on results from 300 respondents actively involved in the A/S subculture. Aaker's construct was found to be effective in profiling the A/S brands consistent with the nature of the A/S subculture and its image. Further, Aaker's BP construct was able to determine significant BP profile differences amongst the three A/S clothing brands in this study (Hooker Technologies, Volcom and SMP), as well as identifying BP profile differences between A/S-branded clothing and mainstream branded clothing (JAG).

In the A/S context, the BP dimensions for Hooker Technologies and Volcom were similar, with Excitement, Competence and Ruggedness rating the strongest (highest) of the five brand personality dimensions for these brands. SMP had similar Excitement and Sincerity ratings to Hooker Technologies and Volcom, however, Competence and Ruggedness did not rate as highly for SMP. This indicates that the Australian youth A/S market views Hooker Technologies and Volcom as branded clothing with similar BP profile dimensions (Excitement, Competence and Ruggedness), whereas SMP is similar (with Excitement) but weaker on the Competence and Ruggedness dimensions.

Furthermore, this study confirmed that the BP construct is able to determine a difference between A/S branded clothing's overall brand personalities and the BP of a mainstream clothing brand (JAG). Significant differences were identified between the overall BP dimensions for action-sports brands and JAG's BP. Specifically, the stronger BP dimensions

for the A/S brands were Sincerity, Excitement and Ruggedness, whilst Competence and Sophistication were stronger for JAG. These BP profile differences were consistent with the nature of the A/S subculture and its image, particularly with respect to mainstream demarcations.

Therefore, these results illustrate the practical benefits for practitioners associated with the BP construct in identifying how a target market perceives differences in the personality dimensions of branded clothing. In this study, these results suggest that members of the Australian A/S youth market identify the BP dimensions of Excitement and Ruggedness as being the more descriptive of the constitution of A/S branded clothing. This highlights the relevance of the BP construct for measuring the differences in (brand) personality dimensions across product categories. This will provide the marketing practitioner with useful information regarding the brand strategies needed to incorporate and build on these dimensions in the personality of an A/S youth clothing brand in order to differentiate their brand from A/S competitors and the mainstream branded clothing market.

By entrenching themselves over the long term within communities of people with shared values, A/S youth clothing brands have earned the emotional currency to speak honestly with their target market. However, as the A/S category has accelerated from niche to mass status, and a host of new, well-financed brands have entered the category (Yanovsky & Simmons 2006), the potential has increased for a brand to be perceived as 'selling out' and going mainstream by the core, authentic users. It is important for A/S marketers to understand what constitutes the core essence of their brand and ensure that they remain true to the brand's roots and core values, as discerning, and often very well-informed, consumers could otherwise abandon an A/S brand (Herek 2002, Griffin 2003). Redemption of abandoned A/S brands is possible, but this requires returning to the brand's roots, values and core essence, understanding how they were transgressed—such as ill-conceived ads, distribution through inappropriate channels or neglecting relationships at the grassroots level—and rectifying these transgressions so as to redeem their credibility with the tastemakers of their core audience (Robertson 2004, Anonymous 2005, Griffin 2005). Therefore, understanding and monitoring the brand personality of their A/S brand can assist the A/S brand manager understand the essence of their brand and how it is perceived to be different from other A/S and mainstream brands.

Limitations of this research involve its specific focus on the Australian A/S youth branded-clothing market as assessed by the authentic (and predominantly male) A/S subculture members that came from one regional metropolitan market. It is conceivable that this A/S subculture focus could have had a bearing on the lower reliabilities reported for the JAG BP dimensions, for though familiar with JAG, the survey respondents were not representative of the typical JAG customer. Thus, it is possible that the A/S BP profiles would have been different had a broader cross-section of people been sampled. Similarly, only three A/S brands and one mainstream brand were profiled, though many more are in the market. Therefore, caution should be used in extrapolating these findings to the broader A/S youth branded-clothing segment in general and to other branded-clothing segments and countries.

Therefore, future research could broaden the use of Aaker's (1997) BP construct to include other A/S brands, including those which feature mixed gender and primarily female consumers. Future research could also investigate the usefulness of Aaker's construct in understanding consumer perceptions of brands in other branded-clothing markets and the extent to which the construct can usefully differentiate the brands in Australia and elsewhere.

Future research could also investigate the relationship between self-image congruence and brand outcomes using Aaker's BP construct.

In conclusion, brand-personality research can help A/S brand managers to maintain a closer relationship with consumers in the youth A/S subculture market. BP research can provide significant insights into the personalities of the brands so that a match between the personalities of the brand and the target consumer can be facilitated.

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