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**Brand Personality in the University Context: Developing a
Multidimensional Framework**

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Multidimensional Framework**

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Abstract

Brand Personality in the University Context: Developing a Multidimensional Framework

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The concept of university branding has received considerable attention over the past decade, with numerous studies being conducted on university image, reputation and identity. However, few research studies have focused exclusively on the brand personality construct in relation to universities. This study develops a theoretical framework for the measurement and evaluation of university brand personality. Forty American universities were evaluated based on a set of personality traits by 209 college students and alumni from the United States. Five dimensions of university brand personality were observed: Sincerity, Prestige, Excitement, Distinctiveness and Ruggedness. This framework serves as a research tool to investigate brand personality characteristics, and facilitates the comparison of different institutions on a uniform scale. Numerous applications exist in the areas of brand strategy, positioning and crisis management.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Why do Universities Need “Brands”?

If we take a look at the current state of higher education in America, it is evident that there is a high level of competition among schools for the best students, faculty, staff, and donors (Whisman, 2008). Numerous factors have led to this situation, such as an increase the total number of universities, reductions in private and state funding and the proliferation of alternative learning options such as online programs. A study conducted by Lee & Clery (2004) examined changes in the higher education landscape from the 1980s to 2004. It was found that, as of 2004, there were over 4,000 colleges and universities that served over 15 million students. This signifies a growth of 3 million students and 1,000 degree-granting institutions over the past 2 decades. It was also observed that the percentage of public college and university revenues coming from student tuition increased from 13 percent to 19 percent, whereas state funding decreased from 46 percent to 36 percent of total revenues during the same years (Lee & Clery, 2004). Looking at current levels of inflation and the global economic climate, it can be assumed that these trends have escalated further; thus the creation of a unique brand identity and image has become imperative for universities to thrive.

Branding can be defined as the ability of an organization to align all actions and messages with core values, the promise that the organization keeps to its customers and the sum total of all customer experiences with the organization (LePla, Davis & Parker, 2003). In the university context, “a well established brand is an imagined world—an

idiosyncratic way of interpreting everything we link mentally to a college or university, and the people that comprise its community” (Whisman, 2008). Universities are now putting great efforts into branding in order to differentiate themselves and develop meaningful brands that communicate their strengths (Jevons, 2006). Most university websites offer guidelines on the institution’s core brand message, positioning statement, brand personality & visual identity.

Universities & Brand Personality

This report focuses on the construct of brand personality and its applications in the context of universities. Brand personality can be defined as “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (Aaker, 1997, p. 347). Most universities have implemented the concept of associating themselves with human personality traits. For instance, the brand guidelines offered on the website for the University of Wisconsin-Madison describe the following traits as being core brand attributes: intelligent, spirited, engaging, beautiful, friendly, Midwestern, comprehensive, big, challenging and progressive (“Brand and Visual Identity Guidelines,” 2010). A similar set of guidelines are seen on the website for The University of Texas at Austin, where traits such as bold, passionate, competitive, loyal, unique and innovative are said to “convey the authentic personality” of the university (“Brand Overview,” 2012).

In his book *Branded Nation*, Twitchell states that universities can be divided into three main categories based on their core brand values: brand-name campuses, mass-provider campuses and convenience institutions (Twitchell, 2004). Brand-name campuses are selective, elite schools such as the Ivy Leagues that are typically highly ranked and

well known in society. Mass providers are large, second-tier public and private institutions that enroll more students and provide a wide number of facilities. Convenience institutions are vocational schools that focus mainly on skills that can directly translate to employment opportunities for students (Twitchell, 2004). Though this classification system definitely holds some merit, I would argue that most universities have distinct brand personalities that can be further measured and evaluated.

There are a few examples that illustrate the impact of branding efforts conducted by universities. For instance, when the name of Beaver College, located near Philadelphia, PA, was changed to Arcadia University in 2002, student applications doubled by 2006. The University of Maryland "Fear the Turtle" campaign resulted in increased alumni contributions and admission applications, higher quality students and a better ranking (Randall, 2009).

The ranking of a university on various league tables and ranking systems is a key component that impacts universities. A prominent ranking system provider is the *U.S. News & World Report*, which publishes an annual ranking with the best national universities and liberal arts colleges. Research has shown that the rank position on this list can impact a university's selectiveness, admission criteria and retention rate (Monks & Ehrenberg, 1999). Specifically, movements within the top 25 and between the first two quartiles have a significant impact on admission outcomes (Meredith, 2004). It has been posited that the motivation of branding is often to enhance reputation and positively influence the university's rankings (Bunzel, 2007).

Thus being highly ranked is another motivator behind creating a successful brand identity, personality and image.

A substantial amount of past research has focused on the brand personality of commercial product brands. One of the most influential developments in the field was the creation of a brand personality framework by Aaker (1997) that allowed for the categorization and evaluation of consumer product brands based on personality characteristics. However, there is little research that focuses on segmenting universities based on their differentiating qualities and brand personalities. In the field of university branding, past research has primarily dealt with the concept of image, and tends to use a variety of variables such as reputation, loyalty, physical environment, satisfaction, brand personality and quality of education (Sung & Yang, 2008). Therefore, there have not been many studies to this point that have focused solely on the brand personality construct in the context of universities.

Therefore, the objective of this study is to develop a multidimensional brand personality framework that is specifically applicable to universities. This framework would allow for the evaluation of universities solely based on brand personality characteristics, and can be applied as a research instrument during brand audits to quantitatively assess the predominance of various traits and qualities.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Antecedents of Brand Personality

The basic concept of brand personality was found to be in use as early as 1958 by P. Martineau, who “used the word to refer to the non-material dimensions that make a store special- its character” (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003, p.145). Advertising and marketing practitioners have used the concept extensively long before academic research was conducted on the subject. King (1970) stated that “people choose their brands the same way they choose their friends; in addition to their skills and physical characteristics, they simply like them as people” (as cited in Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003, p.144). Brand personality describes the tendency of consumers to attribute facets of personality to brands. For instance, Apple computers’ personality would be considered young, unique and visionary, whereas IBM’s personality would be older, practical and uniform (Aaker, 1997).

Research has shown that people have a tendency to anthropomorphize non-living objects, hence prefer products that have a strong, positive brand personality (Freling & Forbes, 2005). Brand personality is linked with other brand associations in the consumer’s memory and is accessed through spreading activation. Many of these associations result from marketing activities initiated by the firm producing the brand (Freling & Forbes, 2005). This idea was reinforced by Fournier (1998), who put forth the theory that brands are an active, participating member in the brand-consumer relationship. Furthermore, all marketing activities directed towards consumers can be

interpreted as actions and behaviors conducted by the brand. This includes all elements of the marketing mix, such as advertising, public relations, pricing, distribution and packaging. Plummer (1985) states that brand personality for consumer products is primarily developed through communication strategies and is not intrinsic to a brand. He also mentions two separate facets of brand personality from an advertising perspective, the first being the proposed brand personality, which is the way advertisers would like consumers to think and feel about a brand based on the communication strategy put forth. The other perspective is consumer perceptions towards a brand, the way consumers actually feel about a brand based on numerous filters such as past experience, internal value systems, word of mouth and perception of marketing messages (Plummer, 1985).

Human personality theories are the foundation of the brand personality construct. The Big Five model of human personality has had a significant impact on the study of brand personality. The research of numerous psychologists such as Cattell (1946), Norman (1963), Goldberg (1983) and Costa & McCrae (1985) led to the compression of numerous personality traits into five core dimensions that were seen as the best descriptors of human personality: Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness and Neuroticism/Emotional Stability (as cited in Digman, 1990). This framework was used as the foundation for brand personality frameworks created by consumer behavior researchers, and many of the key dimensions within these frameworks have attributes similar to those found in the original Big Five model (Aaker, 1997; Ambrose, 2005).

Aaker's Brand Personality Framework

A pioneer study conducted by J. Aaker (1997) led to the development of a brand personality framework that is still widely used today. Her research focused on dividing the brand personality construct into five core dimensions, each divisible into a set of facets. The five dimensions are Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication and Ruggedness, and each dimension can be broken down into 15 facets that encompass 42 personality traits. For example, the Sincerity dimension consists of facets such as down-to-earth, honest, wholesome and cheerful, and traits subsumed within these facets include small-town, real, sentimental and friendly. Each dimension represents a unique brand personality element and serves to categorize both symbolic and utilitarian consumer product brands based on unique and differentiating characteristics. Excitement consists of facets such as daring, imaginative and up-to-date, Competence has facets such as reliable, intelligent and successful, Sophistication represents facets such as upper class and charming, and Ruggedness has outdoorsy and tough as core facets. Personality traits used in the framework were generated by analyzing a series of scales used to develop the Big Five model along with personality scales used by academics and practitioners (Aaker, 1997).

Immediately after Aaker published her measurement scale, many subsequent studies were conducted. Koebel & Ladwein (1999) applied Aaker's method to 85 French brands. Making minor adjustments for the French consumer, they found that overall, her model applied to the French populace. Though this study affirmed the measurement scale Aaker created, the researchers in turn showed that a one-size-fits-all model is not

applicable, as Ruggedness was changed to Masculine, Excitement changed to Self-Expansiveness or Extraversion, and Competence was narrowed (Koebel & Ladwein, 1999).

In 2001, Aaker, Garolera and Benet-Martinez applied Aaker's model to Japanese and Spanish populations while comparing and contrasting the results to the United States. The model was re-configured for Asian and Spanish populations. Though many congruities were found between the original U.S. model and Japan and Spain, culture-specific dimensions such as Peacefulness for Japan and Passion for Spain were added. Also, the facets of each dimension were altered from the original framework (Aaker et.al, 2001). Sung & Tinkham (2005) conducted a study that compared brand personality perceptions in the United States and Korea. Respondents from both countries evaluated a number of consumer product brands based on a set of personality traits, most of which were derived from Aaker's framework (1997). It was found that six dimensions of brand personality were common to both cultures, and whereas two additional dimensions had to be added for Korean consumers: Passive Likeableness and Ascendancy. These were found to be congruent with Korean cultural influences such as Confucianism and collectivism (Sung & Tinkham, 2005).

Applications for Non-Corporate Brands

The concept of brand personality has been applied to different contexts, such as tourism destinations and non-profit organizations. Past research has shown that destinations can be described using human traits; for example, Spain is friendly and family oriented, whereas London is open-minded and vibrant (Morgan & Pritchard,

2002). A study by Hosany, Ekinci & Uysal (2006) applied Aaker's model to tourism destinations, to understand whether tourists classified countries based on personality traits. The results of the study showed that the Aaker framework had to be adapted to fit the tourism industry; the Excitement and Sincerity dimensions remained the same, whereas Ruggedness, Competence and Sophistication were removed and replaced by a new dimension, Conviviality (Hosany et.al, 2006). Conviviality was represented by personality traits such as family oriented, friendly and charming. It was also found that destination personality had positive impact on the destination image perceived by respondents, and on their intention to recommend the destination to others.

Another study was done by Venable, Rose, Bush, & Gilbert (2005) where the Aaker framework was adapted to evaluate non-profit organizations. In this study, various nonprofit stakeholders were studied using qualitative and quantitative research techniques. Stakeholders were defined as "current and potential contributors of time, money, and in kind goods or services to nonprofit organizations" (Venable et.al, 2005, p. 296). This resulted in the creation of a four-dimensional framework to measure the brand personality of non-profits. The Sophistication and Ruggedness dimensions were retained from the original Aaker framework, whereas the Competence, Sincerity and Excitement dimensions were removed. Two dimensions, Integrity and Nurturance, were added to the framework. Integrity was represented by items such as honest, reliable, reputable and commitment to the public good, whereas Nurturance was represented by traits such as compassion, caring and loving. The results showed that there were "similarities and

differences between the brand personalities of nonprofit organizations and consumer brands” (Venable et.al, 2005, p. 308).

Consequences of Brand Personality

Brand personality has an impact on a wide number of factors, such as consumer preference and usage (Sirgy, 1982) and consumer loyalty (Fournier, 1998). It can help to differentiate brands (Crask and Laskey, 1990) and develop the emotional aspects of a brand (Landon, 1974). Key research findings regarding the consequences of brand personality are discussed below.

A study by Louis & Lombart (2010) demonstrated that brand personality does have an impact on trust, attachment and commitment to a brand. Researchers in this study examined the effect of nine personality traits on respondents’ attitudes towards the Coca Cola brand, using a brand personality scale developed by Ambriose (2005). It was found that a favorable brand personality leads to higher levels of trust, attachment and commitment.

Research by Ramaseshan & Tsao (2007) observed the relationship between brand personality and perceived quality. It was discovered that the Excitement and Sophistication dimensions of Aaker’s brand personality framework have a significant positive influence on perceived brand quality.

Freling & Forbes (2005) conducted an experimental study to investigate the relationship between brand personality and purchase intention. Half the total number of participants received information on the brand personality of a consumer product presented during the study, whereas the others did not. Subjects that received information

on brand personality had higher product evaluations and were more inclined to purchase the product.

Related Constructs

Brand personality is often considered to be a part of brand identity (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003). Other dimensions of brand identity include the inner values of the brand, the actions and behaviors of the brand, the brand-reflected consumer facet and the brand physical facet, which describes the tangible distinguishing traits of the product (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003).

Keller (2003) proposed that brand personality is a facet of a larger theoretical construct called brand knowledge, which is a cognitive representation of all descriptive and evaluative brand-related information.

Brand knowledge consists of the following factors:

- Awareness: category identification and needs satisfied by the brand
- Attributes: descriptive features that characterize the brand name product either intrinsically (e.g.. related to product performance) or extrinsically (e.g.. related to brand personality or heritage)
- Benefits: personal value and meaning that consumers attach to the brand's attributes
- Images: visual information, either concrete or abstract in nature
- Thoughts: personal cognitive responses to any brand- related information
- Feelings: personal affective responses to any brand- related information

- Attitudes: summary judgments and overall evaluations to any brand-related information
- Experiences: purchase and consumption behaviors and any other brand-related episodes

Thus brand personality is deeply connected to other theoretical constructs such as brand identity and brand knowledge.

University Branding: Image, Reputation & Identity

The branding of universities is a relatively new area of research, and though there aren't many studies that specifically deal with brand personality, numerous studies have been conducted on university image, identity and reputation. In recent times, universities function not just as institutions of higher learning but also as businesses (Bunzel, 2007). Universities have begun to heavily invest in branding efforts, and such programs typically involve multi-faceted stakeholder market research and the creation of a new visual identity (Randall, 2009). Ivy (2008) analyzed the marketing and branding strategies used by academic institutions, and business schools in particular, and developed a "7P" framework that is different from the traditional 4P model typically used to describe marketing strategies for commercial brands. The factors in this framework are as follows: Price, Promotion, People, Prominence, Prospectus, Premiums and Program. Price is defined by the cost of tuition and payment arrangements, Promotion consists of factors such as advertising and publicity, and People refers to the amount of face-to-face time with professors and networking opportunities provided. The Prominence factor refers to the reputation of the academic faculty and the university in general, Prospectus

describes direct marketing efforts related to the curriculum, Premiums includes the facilities offered and Program refers to majors and elective courses provided by the university (Ivy, 2008).

Chapleo (2010) conducted qualitative research to investigate the underlying characteristics behind UK universities considered to be successful in terms of brand management. Successful brands were defined as those that were “clear and consistent (in demonstrating a distinct competitive advantage) and congruous with needs of various customer/stakeholder groups” (Chapleo, 2010, p.172). The results indicated that support from leadership, a clear strategic vision, the use of public relations and synergy with the university location are key elements that contribute to the creation of a successful brand. Out of these factors, a clear vision, defined as “a purposeful longer term strategy and sense of identity” was found to be the most important indicator of a successful brand (Chapleo, 2010, p. 179).

Research by Sung & Yang (2008) demonstrated that the brand personality, image and reputation associated with a university have a significant influence on students’ supportive attitudes towards the university. In this context, supportive attitudes referred to students’ identification with a university and levels of trust, loyalty and attachment towards the university. Another study by Nguyen & LeBlanc (2001) proved that student loyalty has a tendency to be higher when a university has a favorable reputation and image.

A study by Alessandri, Yang & Kinsey (2006) explored the relationship between the visual identity of a university and the reputation of the institution. Within this study,

the following model proposed by Alessandri (2001) was discussed:

(a) interaction with an organizational identity can produce an organizational image, and
(b) repeated impressions of an organizational image can form a reputation of the organization over time. This study was conducted at Syracuse University, and the visual identifiers used in the study included the school logo, mascot, prominent university landmarks and well-known academic and athletic figures. The findings showed that a strong, distinct visual identity had a positive impact on university reputation (Alessandri et.al, 2006). Furthermore, the measure of university reputation was found to have three dimensions, which were quality of academic performance, quality of external performance and emotional engagement.

Research by Palacio, Meneses & Perez (2002) delved into the concept of university image, and found that overall university image is influenced by both cognitive and affective components, with the cognitive component being an antecedent of the affective component. In this study, the cognitive component was represented by factors such as university atmosphere, educational quality, reputation and networking opportunities, whereas affective components included emotional states such as boring/stimulating, pleasant/unpleasant and stressful/relaxing.

A qualitative study by Theus (1993) found that, according to university administrators, the image of a university is built due to numerous factors such as the size and location of an institution, appearance, student diversity, endowments, prestige, faculty excellence and community service. Another study by Kazoleas, Kim & Moffit (2001) found that personal experiences with a university have a greater impact on image

than media exposure, and image factors that are university-specific such as type of program, athletic appeal and facilities have a greater influence than environmental factors such as location, admission standards and expenses (as cited in Arpan, Raney & Zivnuska, 2003).

Research conducted by Arpan et.al (2003) examined the differences in perceived university image between current college students and adult non-students.

It was found that academic attributes, athletic attributes and news media coverage were three key dimensions that affected university image ratings by current students, whereas adult non-students took the evaluations of friends and family into account in addition to those three dimensions.

Research Questions

The research questions investigated in this study are as follows:

1. Can a brand personality framework be specifically developed for the evaluation of universities?
2. How would this framework differ from existing brand personality models for consumer product brands?
3. How can different universities be compared and categorized using this framework?

Chapter 3: Methodology

For this study, quantitative research was conducted by administering a survey to an online consumer panel at a large Southwestern university. The survey featured 40 four-year American universities, and respondents were required to rate each one based on 50 different personality traits. The universities were randomly selected from the annual *Top 100 National Universities* ranking released by the U.S. News & World Report in 2012, as well as the *Top Liberal Arts Colleges* list from the same year (U.S. News & World Report, 2012). Universities from these sources were selected to ensure brand awareness and recognition among respondents, in order to generate valid responses. The 40 universities were a mix of public and private universities from diverse geographical locations, and represented a variety of categories such as Ivy League institutions, liberal arts colleges, state universities, universities with religious affiliations and universities with specialized disciplines.

In order to prevent participant fatigue, the survey was randomized so that each respondent received four universities to evaluate based on the 50 personality attributes. Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which each personality trait described the respective university using a modified 5-point Likert scale (1= not at descriptive, 5= extremely descriptive). In order to prevent response bias, the traits were listed in a manner that separated qualities that could be deemed similar. After rating four universities on the 50 personality traits given, respondents provided basic demographic

information such as age, gender and level of education. An excerpt of the survey is provided at the end of this report (Appendix B).

Personality Trait Generation.

A variety of personality traits were selected from numerous models in social psychology and brand personality research. Key models included the 42-trait brand personality framework developed for consumer product brands by J. Aaker (1997), a modified version of Aaker's brand personality framework created for non-profit brands (Veneble et.al, 2005) and the Big Five model for human personality (Digman, 1990). In addition, a free-association test was conducted to capture university-related personality traits that were not included in these models (Appendix A). The test was administered online using a survey sent via email and social networking sites to 30 students and alumni of U.S. universities. Respondents were given a list of 15 randomly selected American universities, and asked to write down personality traits that first came to mind when they thought of each one.

After analyzing the frameworks mentioned above along with the free-association responses, a total list of 130 traits was created. Traits that were observed to be redundant, overlapping or non-applicable were removed based on the researchers' judgment. This process led to a comprehensive list of 50 personality traits that could potentially be applied to university brand personality.

Sample Characteristics

A total of 225 respondents took the survey, the majority of whom were recruited using an online consumer panel at the University of Texas at Austin. Social networking

sites such as Facebook were also used to generate responses, but it was ensured that the survey was exclusively taken by current students and alumni of four-year American universities. The final sample size ($N = 209$) reflects a reduction of the initial number of respondents that were eliminated due to incomplete surveys or redundant responses. Among them, 65% were female respondents and 35% were male. The mean age of all the respondents was 23, and the median age was 21. Out of the sample, 75% were undergraduates at The University of Texas at Austin, 10% were graduate students at The University of Texas at Austin, and 15% were students or alumni of other American universities. Students from The University of Texas at Austin could receive class credit as compensation for their participation in the survey.

TABLE 1 Forty American Universities

Stanford University	Baylor University
University of Michigan - Ann Arbor	University of Miami
The University of Texas at Austin	Amherst College
Columbia University	Pepperdine University
Harvard University	University of Southern California
Wellesley College	Indiana University- Bloomington
Johns Hopkins University	University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Boston University	Texas Christian University
Brown University	University of North Carolina
Massachusetts Institute of Technology	University of Chicago
University of California- Berkeley	Rice University
University of Florida	Brigham Young University
Duke University	College of William and Mary
University of Wisconsin-Madison	Georgia Institute of Technology
Carnegie Mellon University	Purdue University
Tulane University	Texas A&M University
Northwestern University	George Washington University
New York University	Emory University
Syracuse University	Georgetown University
University of Virginia	Drexel University

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

Since the objective of this research was to create a general brand personality framework for universities rather than focus on individual differences in the perceptions of a single university, each respondent's rating of a university was treated as a unique case (Aaker, 1997). This led to a total of 834 cases after removing incomplete or redundant responses.

An exploratory factor analysis was conducted using a varimax rotation, and led to the generation of a five-component solution. The analysis 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 (Sung & Park, 2011).

As shown in Table 3, five components were identified: Sincerity, Prestige, Excitement, Distinctiveness and Ruggedness. The Sincerity component included traits such as kind, helpful, down-to-earth, cheerful, honest and caring. The second component, Prestige, was defined by traits such as privileged, competitive, elite, reputable, traditional and studious. Excitement, the third component, was represented by traits such as trendy, young, cool, social and liberal. Distinctiveness was the fourth component, and included traits such as daring, unique, curious and independent. Ruggedness was the fifth component, with traits such as sporty and outdoorsy.

The five components together represented 57.41% of the total variance seen, with the first 2 components, i.e., Sincerity and Prestige accounting for 42.85% of total

variance. The eigenvalues for the five dimensions were as follows: Sincerity- 11.33, Prestige- 6.24, Excitement- 3.00, Distinctiveness- 1.64, Ruggedness- 1.38.

In order to test for reliability, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated for each of the five factors using the personality traits that fell under each dimension. Each factor had a 0.93 alpha value, with each individual trait also having an alpha value >0.90, indicating strong reliability.

In order to illustrate the similarities and differences between the five brand personality dimensions across the 40 universities used in the study, the mean scores for each university are presented in Table 3. For each dimension, the universities with the highest mean scores were as follows:

- Sincerity: The University of Texas at Austin
- Prestige: Harvard University, Columbia University
- Excitement: University of Southern California
- Distinctiveness: Massachusetts Institute of Technology
- Ruggedness: The University of Texas at Austin, University of Southern California

It is interesting to note that certain universities had high scores for more than one dimension. Thus the brand personality of a university can fall under more than one dimension within this framework.

To sum up the results, a five-dimensional framework with Sincerity, Prestige, Excitement, Distinctiveness and Ruggedness components was found to be the best representation of university brand personality. Sincerity had 10 facets, Prestige had 12

facets, Excitement had 7 facets, Distinctiveness had 4 facets and Ruggedness had 3 facets (Figure 1).

Two dimensions, Sincerity and Ruggedness, had traits similar to those used in Aaker's brand personality framework for consumer product brands. Distinctiveness and Prestige were two new dimensions specifically applicable to the university context. Excitement was defined in a slightly different manner as compared to Aaker's original framework, since it retained traits such as trendy, cool and social, but did not include traits indicating distinctiveness such as daring, unique and independent.

TABLE 2 University Brand Personality Dimensions (Varimax Rotation)

<i>Trait</i>	<i>Sincerity</i>	<i>Prestige</i>	<i>Excitement</i>	<i>Distinctiveness</i>	<i>Ruggedness</i>
Kind	.83	.02	.04	.13	-.02
Caring	.82	.07	.05	.08	.10
Friendly	.77	-.03	.15	.02	.12
Sincere	.73	.16	.09	.01	.09
Agreeable	.67	.07	.23	.17	.09
Honest	.68	.24	.03	.20	-.06
Helpful	.65	.10	.06	.24	.06
Down to earth	.58	-.08	.22	-.06	.40
Community oriented	.57	.07	.03	.02	.20
Cheerful	.53	-.06	.19	.22	.31
Outgoing	.44	.02	.36	.21	.20
Prestigious	-.00	.82	.19	.08	-.02
Studious	.10	.81	-.05	.07	-.10
Privileged	.04	.80	.07	.07	-.06
Elite	.00	.79	.13	.20	-.10
Analytical	.05	.74	.02	.19	.00
Competitive	-.02	.73	.14	.13	.22
Ambitious	.15	.73	.11	.31	-.07
Reputable	.01	.72	.11	.22	-.01
Traditional	.28	.66	-.33	-.11	.059
Confident	.20	.62	.10	.19	-.02
Worldly	.12	.60	.37	.18	-.11
Technical	.00	.52	.07	.27	.23
Arrogant	-.30	.42	.03	.36	.09
Trendy	.07	.25	.78	.14	.11
Young	.24	.03	.66	.03	.21
Cosmopolitan	-.03	.30	.65	.15	-.00
Liberal	.07	.21	.61	.13	-.04
Hipster	.13	-.12	.61	.27	.19
Cool	.26	.11	.54	.28	.21
Social	.28	-.01	.53	-.12	.40
Laid back	.37	-.29	.43	.15	.36

TABLE 2 (Continued)

<i>Trait</i>	<i>Sincerity</i>	<i>Prestige</i>	<i>Excitement</i>	<i>Distinctiveness</i>	<i>Ruggedness</i>
Daring	.17	.24	.22	.68	.17
Unique	.16	.28	.27	.66	.04
Curious	.25	.41	.10	.60	.04
Independent	.18	.38	.23	.55	.03
Creative	.23	.34	.36	.47	.01
Passionate	.35	.35	.06	.46	.10
Rugged	.18	-.11	.12	.08	.72
Outdoorsy	.23	-.00	.10	.20	.70
Sporty	.10	.09	.19	-.40	.69
Reliability (alpha)	0.93	0.93	0.93	0.93	0.93
Eigenvalue	6.24	11.33	3.00	1.65	1.34
% of Variance	15.22	27.63	7.20	4.01	3.36
Cumulative %	15.22	42.85	50.05	54.06	57.42

Note: Loadings that were |0.50| or larger are set in bold.

TABLE 3 Brand Personality Dimensions of 40 Universities

University Name	<i>Sincerity</i>		<i>Prestige</i>		<i>Excitement</i>		<i>Distinctiveness</i>		<i>Ruggedness</i>	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Stanford University	2.85	0.71	4.05	0.69	2.89	0.70	3.26	0.70	2.61	0.70
Baylor University	3.12	0.73	2.99	0.58	2.25	0.60	2.65	0.83	2.59	0.84
University of Michigan - Ann Arbor	3.04	0.58	3.27	0.68	2.93	0.72	3.26	0.70	2.61	0.69
University of Miami	2.93	0.39	2.87	0.56	3.63	0.53	3.30	0.61	3.30	0.76
The University of Texas at Austin	3.63	0.73	4.05	0.58	3.93	0.58	3.79	0.79	3.65	0.41
Amherst College	3.35	0.47	3.50	0.97	3.00	0.63	3.39	0.87	2.75	0.79
Columbia University	3.25	0.65	4.42	0.65	3.36	0.55	3.75	0.78	2.80	1.00
Pepperdine University	3.42	0.77	3.53	0.67	3.55	0.64	3.31	0.46	2.91	0.54
Harvard University	2.19	0.69	4.42	0.53	2.68	0.83	3.38	1.07	2.23	0.89
University of Southern California	3.14	0.77	3.44	0.77	4.02	0.72	3.52	0.69	3.65	0.83
Wellesley College	2.89	0.63	3.26	0.70	2.71	0.73	2.87	0.73	2.42	0.78
Indiana University- Bloomington	3.23	0.74	2.66	0.60	2.84	0.71	2.71	0.65	3.28	0.62
Johns Hopkins University	3.11	0.76	4.18	0.62	2.57	0.57	3.59	0.66	2.48	0.90
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	3.15	0.57	3.11	0.68	3.06	0.62	3.06	0.75	3.03	0.80
Boston University	3.23	0.63	3.50	0.63	3.46	0.70	3.23	0.76	2.97	0.87
Texas Christian University	3.38	0.82	2.99	0.54	2.63	0.77	2.72	0.84	2.84	0.87

TABLE 3 (continued)

	<i>Sincerity</i>	<i>Prestige</i>	<i>Excitement</i>	<i>Distinctiveness</i>	<i>Ruggedness</i>					
Brown University	3.02	0.58	3.89	0.74	2.86	0.85	3.20	0.86	2.46	0.69
University of North Carolina	3.26	0.69	3.17	0.72	3.17	0.60	3.12	0.83	3.19	0.75
Massachusetts Institute of Technology	2.94	0.68	4.04	0.96	2.89	0.70	3.88	0.89	2.21	1.01
University of Chicago	3.19	0.68	3.27	0.70	3.50	0.71	3.08	0.63	2.68	0.82
University of California- Berkeley	3.16	1.00	3.62	0.90	3.30	0.88	3.46	1.07	2.89	0.95
Rice University	2.80	0.63	3.70	0.82	2.60	0.63	3.08	1.05	2.39	0.75
University of Florida	3.08	0.80	2.89	0.57	3.21	0.70	2.94	0.97	3.35	0.81
Brigham Young University	2.95	1.01	2.66	0.70	2.12	0.74	2.68	0.93	2.48	0.76
Duke University	3.00	0.52	4.12	0.50	3.00	0.52	3.41	0.68	2.82	0.51
College of William and Mary	3.27	0.52	3.38	0.72	2.56	0.66	2.95	0.50	2.60	0.89
University of Wisconsin-Madison	3.28	0.41	2.75	0.56	3.01	0.67	2.90	0.75	3.02	0.71
Georgia Institute of Technology	2.91	0.33	3.25	0.49	2.63	0.51	3.14	0.46	2.33	0.82
Carnegie Mellon University	2.87	0.56	4.06	0.66	2.81	0.76	3.23	0.53	2.23	0.92
Purdue University	3.06	0.73	3.33	0.83	2.77	0.70	3.14	0.68	3.50	0.75
Tulane University	3.32	0.63	3.09	0.77	3.19	0.67	3.14	0.49	2.65	0.85
Texas A&M University	3.19	1.16	2.80	0.90	2.44	0.76	2.65	0.99	3.50	1.07
Northwestern University	3.21	0.45	3.48	0.68	3.06	0.50	2.92	0.70	2.60	0.71

TABLE 3 (continued)

	<i>Sincerity</i>	<i>Prestige</i>	<i>Excitement</i>	<i>Distinctiveness</i>	<i>Ruggedness</i>
George Washington University	2.92	3.67	2.84	3.10	2.64
New York University	2.79	3.66	3.88	3.47	2.44
Emory University	2.88	3.28	2.64	2.91	2.50
Syracuse University	3.08	3.22	3.02	2.82	2.84
Georgetown University	3.06	3.48	2.88	2.72	2.53
University of Virginia	3.16	3.18	2.80	2.66	2.92
Drexel University	2.80	2.66	2.57	2.72	2.36

Note: Highest mean scores are set in bold.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The EFA conducted in this research led to the emergence of a brand personality framework with 5 dimensions: Sincerity, Prestige, Excitement, Distinctiveness and Ruggedness (Figure 1). The framework had a total of 36 personality traits.

The Sincerity dimension represented traits similar to those found in Aaker's original framework (1997). Sincerity consisted of traits such as honest, caring, friendly and helpful. The universities that were highly ranked on this dimension were perceived as having a friendly, supportive, caring and community-oriented environment. Though the causality behind this perception is unclear, an analysis of the universities with the highest mean scores in this area indicated that these schools are typically state universities or mid-tier private schools (Table 3).

The Prestige dimension emerged as a new factor specifically tied to university brand personality. It has been touched upon in related research, as numerous studies have linked prestige with favorable university image & reputation (Sung & Yang, 2008). This dimension was defined by traits such as ambitious, confident, competitive, elite and studious. Not surprisingly, a large number of Ivy League institutions were highly ranked on this dimension, along with other renowned private and public institutions.

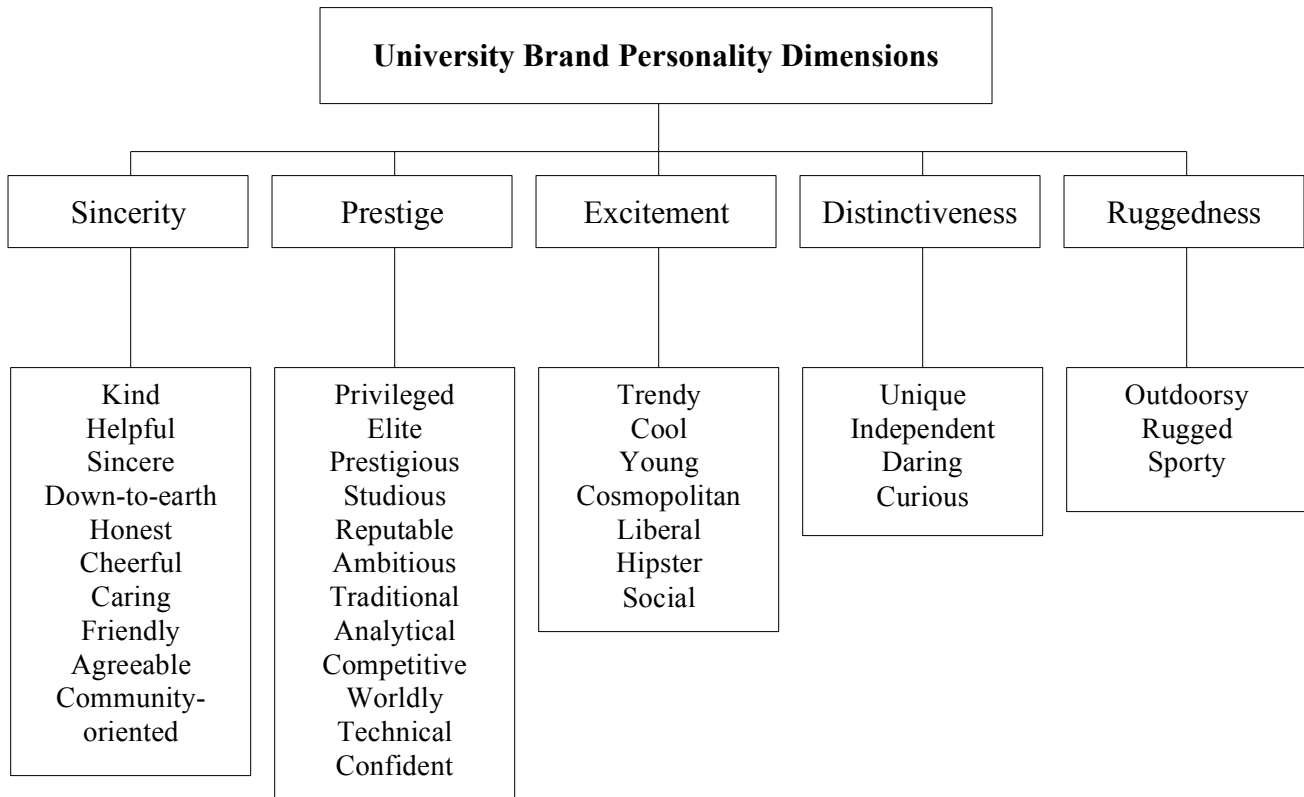
The Excitement dimension had a few traits similar to Aaker's model, such as trendy, cool, social and young. Additional university-specific traits such as liberal and hipster were also observed to fall under this dimension. Unlike Aaker's original framework, this dimension did not include qualities indicative of differentiation such as

unique and independent. Universities with high mean scores on this dimension included New York University, University of Chicago, University of California- Berkeley and the University of Miami. It is evident that geographical location plays a role in this dimension, as most of these universities are situated in cosmopolitan areas known for their financial or cultural influence.

Distinctiveness was the fourth dimension in this framework, defined by traits such as unique, daring, independent and curious. Though Distinctiveness is a new dimension in the brand personality domain, the term has been used in a model for corporate reputation proposed by Fombrun and Van Riel (2003), where it was one of five dimensions, the other four being visibility, authenticity, transparency and consistency (as cited in Alessandri et.al, 2006). Universities with specialized programs or images that vary slightly from their general category scored higher on this dimension, such as Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Johns Hopkins University and Columbia University.

The fifth and final dimension was Ruggedness, represented by traits such as outdoorsy and sporty. Ruggedness is a theoretical representation of the athletic component of universities, which has been identified as potentially being “one of the key dimensions associated with student-university emotional engagement (Alessandri et.al, 2006, p. 269). Therefore, schools with renowned athletic teams were highly ranked on this dimension, such as the University of Southern California and The University of Texas at Austin.

FIGURE 1 University Brand Personality Framework



Managerial Implications

The creation of this framework enables the evaluation of universities solely based on brand personality. The implications for universities are numerous; it is now clear that universities, like commercial product brands, have distinct personalities that serve as unique, identifying characteristics. There are certain similarities and differences in the categorization of universities versus commercial product brands. Therefore, branding strategies must be adapted to fit the requirements of university branding.

When engaging in marketing and branding efforts, it is imperative for advertising practitioners to analyze the personality of the university in order to create compelling, meaningful strategies. This framework can be used to evaluate the brand personality characteristics of a university to create a targeted positioning strategy, which is a key element in the successful branding of any university (Chapleo, 2005). The framework can also be used to evaluate changes in consumer perception after an external re-brand such as the rollout of a new advertising campaign or an internal re-brand due to cultural changes among students, faculty and employees of a university. This tool can be especially effective during crisis management, as it would help public relations professionals understand the aspects of brand personality being damaged by the situation at hand. Lastly, this framework allows for consistency in the evaluation of university brand personality. Currently, brand strategists use a host of personality evaluation techniques to understand brand personality, such as focus groups and stakeholder research (Randall, 2009). This framework can serve as a unifying tool to assess and compare universities on a standard scale.

Limitations & Future Research

There were a few limitations associated with this research study. Since the sample mainly consisted of undergraduate and graduate students from The University of Texas at Austin, the sample was not representative of the entire U.S population. This could have led to a response bias in certain cases; for instance, The University of Texas at Austin had the highest mean score for the Sincerity dimension among the 40 universities used in the survey. Respondents that evaluated this university may have felt strong ties of affiliation

and loyalty, which could have lead to higher rankings. In addition, the gender distribution was skewed towards females (65% female vs. 35% male), which is not representative of current U.S. demographics (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).

Based on the framework created in this study, future research could examine whether certain dimensions have a greater impact than others in terms of university selection and retention rates. Since the Sincerity and Prestige dimensions accounted for a large percentage of response variance, there could be a link between these dimensions and university selection.

The concept of self-brand congruity in the context of university brands can also be explored. Self-brand congruity refers to the idea that “consumers prefer brands associated with a set of personality traits congruent with their own” (Aaker, 1999, p.46). A study by Phau and Lao (2000) highlighted the self-expressive use of brands, and revealed a positive relationship between the preference levels of a brand and self-brand congruity. In a similar vein, it would be interesting to explore whether students seek out universities with characteristics that are similar to their own personalities.

This study mainly focused on American universities during the creation of a brand personality framework. Future research could examine the validity and generalizability of this framework to universities in other countries.

For consumer brands, reference groups such as friends and peers have a strong impact on self-brand congruity. The degree to which member group and aspiration group usage influences individual self-brand connections depends on the degree to which an individual belongs to a member group or wishes to belong to an aspirational group

(Escalas & Bettman, 2003). For individuals with self-enhancement goals, which are needs to maintain and enhance self-esteem, aspiration group brand use has a greater impact on self-brand connections. Therefore, if a group an individual admires or wishes to belong to uses a certain brand, it will increase the person's liking for the brand. Individuals with self-verification goals are more concerned with finding people, situations, and by extension, brands that are consistent with their current self-concept. For these individuals, brands used by member groups will be perceived more favorably (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). Future research could explore the effect of member and aspiration-based reference groups on university selection.

Another area of research would be the antecedents of brand personality when it comes to universities. Research can be conducted on the complex network of variables that influence perceived brand personality, such as branding effects, peer recommendations, media coverage, prior experiences and internal value systems.

Overall, this study illustrates the applications of the brand personality concept to universities. The research provides a quantitative measure for the assessment and evaluation of personality characteristics associated with a university. Brand personality and identity in the university context is a relatively new area of research, and has great potential for future study.

APPENDIX A

Free-association Survey

The following questions feature a variety of universities from the United States. Please think of each university as if it were a person. This may sound unusual, but think of the set of human characteristics and personality traits associated with each university. What would each university be like if he/she was a person?

Please write down a few qualities you would associate with each of the universities given below.

1. Stanford University
2. University of Michigan- Ann Arbor
3. Johns Hopkins University
4. New York University (NYU)
5. The University of Texas at Austin
6. Brown University
7. Harvard University
8. University of Southern California (USC)
9. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
10. University of California- Berkeley
11. College of William and Mary
12. Amherst College
13. Texas Christian University
14. Temple University
15. Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)

APPENDIX B

Survey Excerpt

The following questions feature a variety of universities from the United States. This may sound unusual, but think of the **set of human characteristics and personality traits associated with each university**.

What would each university be like if he/she was a person?

Please evaluate each of the following **4** universities based on 50 different personality traits.

A five-point scale is provided for each trait. (1= Not at all descriptive, 5= Extremely descriptive).

1. Stanford University

	1	2	3	4	5
Down-to-earth	0	0	0	0	0
Social	0	0	0	0	0
Prestigious	0	0	0	0	0
Rugged	0	0	0	0	0
Technical	0	0	0	0	0
Cosmopolitan	0	0	0	0	0
Trendy	0	0	0	0	0
Young	0	0	0	0	0
Sincere	0	0	0	0	0
Caring	0	0	0	0	0
Friendly	0	0	0	0	0
Confident	0	0	0	0	0
Traditional	0	0	0	0	0
Privileged	0	0	0	0	0
Sporty	0	0	0	0	0
Competitive	0	0	0	0	0
Analytical	0	0	0	0	0
Studios	0	0	0	0	0
Worldly	0	0	0	0	0
Up-to-date	0	0	0	0	0
Dynamic	0	0	0	0	0
Liberal	0	0	0	0	0
Honest	0	0	0	0	0
Kind	0	0	0	0	0
Outgoing	0	0	0	0	0

Agreeable	0	0	0	0	0
Elite	0	0	0	0	0
Ambitious	0	0	0	0	0
Masculine	0	0	0	0	0
Passionate	0	0	0	0	0
Scientific	0	0	0	0	0
Curious	0	0	0	0	0
Daring	0	0	0	0	0
Unique	0	0	0	0	0
Independent	0	0	0	0	0
Feminine	0	0	0	0	0
Community-oriented	0	0	0	0	0
Extrovert	0	0	0	0	0
Cheerful	0	0	0	0	0
Arrogant	0	0	0	0	0
Reputable	0	0	0	0	0
Outdoorsy	0	0	0	0	0
Nerdy	0	0	0	0	0
Innovative	0	0	0	0	0
Creative	0	0	0	0	0
Hipster	0	0	0	0	0
Laid back	0	0	0	0	0
Introvert	0	0	0	0	0
Helpful	0	0	0	0	0
Cool	0	0	0	0	0

2. Baylor University

	1	2	3	4	5
Down-to-earth	0	0	0	0	0
Social	0	0	0	0	0
Prestigious	0	0	0	0	0
Rugged	0	0	0	0	0
Technical	0	0	0	0	0
Cosmopolitan	0	0	0	0	0
Trendy	0	0	0	0	0
Young	0	0	0	0	0
Sincere	0	0	0	0	0
Caring	0	0	0	0	0
Friendly	0	0	0	0	0

Confident	0	0	0	0	0
Traditional	0	0	0	0	0
Privileged	0	0	0	0	0
Sporty	0	0	0	0	0
Competitive	0	0	0	0	0
Analytical	0	0	0	0	0
Studios	0	0	0	0	0
Worldly	0	0	0	0	0
Up-to-date	0	0	0	0	0
Dynamic	0	0	0	0	0
Liberal	0	0	0	0	0
Honest	0	0	0	0	0
Kind	0	0	0	0	0
Outgoing	0	0	0	0	0
Agreeable	0	0	0	0	0
Elite	0	0	0	0	0
Ambitious	0	0	0	0	0
Masculine	0	0	0	0	0
Passionate	0	0	0	0	0
Scientific	0	0	0	0	0
Curious	0	0	0	0	0
Daring	0	0	0	0	0
Unique	0	0	0	0	0
Independent	0	0	0	0	0
Feminine	0	0	0	0	0
Community-oriented	0	0	0	0	0
Extrovert	0	0	0	0	0
Cheerful	0	0	0	0	0
Arrogant	0	0	0	0	0
Reputable	0	0	0	0	0
Outdoorsy	0	0	0	0	0
Nerdy	0	0	0	0	0
Innovative	0	0	0	0	0
Creative	0	0	0	0	0
Hipster	0	0	0	0	0
Laid back	0	0	0	0	0
Introvert	0	0	0	0	0
Helpful	0	0	0	0	0
Cool	0	0	0	0	0

3. University of Michigan- Ann Arbor

	1	2	3	4	5
Down-to-earth	0	0	0	0	0
Social	0	0	0	0	0
Prestigious	0	0	0	0	0
Rugged	0	0	0	0	0
Technical	0	0	0	0	0
Cosmopolitan	0	0	0	0	0
Trendy	0	0	0	0	0
Young	0	0	0	0	0
Sincere	0	0	0	0	0
Caring	0	0	0	0	0
Friendly	0	0	0	0	0
Confident	0	0	0	0	0
Traditional	0	0	0	0	0
Privileged	0	0	0	0	0
Sporty	0	0	0	0	0
Competitive	0	0	0	0	0
Analytical	0	0	0	0	0
Studios	0	0	0	0	0
Worldly	0	0	0	0	0
Up-to-date	0	0	0	0	0
Dynamic	0	0	0	0	0
Liberal	0	0	0	0	0
Honest	0	0	0	0	0
Kind	0	0	0	0	0
Outgoing	0	0	0	0	0
Agreeable	0	0	0	0	0
Elite	0	0	0	0	0
Ambitious	0	0	0	0	0
Masculine	0	0	0	0	0
Passionate	0	0	0	0	0
Scientific	0	0	0	0	0
Curious	0	0	0	0	0
Daring	0	0	0	0	0
Unique	0	0	0	0	0
Independent	0	0	0	0	0
Feminine	0	0	0	0	0
Community-oriented	0	0	0	0	0

Extrovert	0	0	0	0	0
Cheerful	0	0	0	0	0
Arrogant	0	0	0	0	0
Reputable	0	0	0	0	0
Outdoorsy	0	0	0	0	0
Nerdy	0	0	0	0	0
Innovative	0	0	0	0	0
Creative	0	0	0	0	0
Hipster	0	0	0	0	0
Laid back	0	0	0	0	0
Introvert	0	0	0	0	0
Helpful	0	0	0	0	0
Cool	0	0	0	0	0

4. University of Miami

	1	2	3	4	5
Down-to-earth	0	0	0	0	0
Social	0	0	0	0	0
Prestigious	0	0	0	0	0
Rugged	0	0	0	0	0
Technical	0	0	0	0	0
Cosmopolitan	0	0	0	0	0
Trendy	0	0	0	0	0
Young	0	0	0	0	0
Sincere	0	0	0	0	0
Caring	0	0	0	0	0
Friendly	0	0	0	0	0
Confident	0	0	0	0	0
Traditional	0	0	0	0	0
Privileged	0	0	0	0	0
Sporty	0	0	0	0	0
Competitive	0	0	0	0	0
Analytical	0	0	0	0	0
Studios	0	0	0	0	0
Worldly	0	0	0	0	0
Up-to-date	0	0	0	0	0
Dynamic	0	0	0	0	0
Liberal	0	0	0	0	0
Honest	0	0	0	0	0

Kind	0	0	0	0	0
Outgoing	0	0	0	0	0
Agreeable	0	0	0	0	0
Elite	0	0	0	0	0
Ambitious	0	0	0	0	0
Masculine	0	0	0	0	0
Passionate	0	0	0	0	0
Scientific	0	0	0	0	0
Curious	0	0	0	0	0
Daring	0	0	0	0	0
Unique	0	0	0	0	0
Independent	0	0	0	0	0
Feminine	0	0	0	0	0
Community-oriented	0	0	0	0	0
Extrovert	0	0	0	0	0
Cheerful	0	0	0	0	0
Arrogant	0	0	0	0	0
Reputable	0	0	0	0	0
Outdoorsy	0	0	0	0	0
Nerdy	0	0	0	0	0
Innovative	0	0	0	0	0
Creative	0	0	0	0	0
Hipster	0	0	0	0	0
Laid back	0	0	0	0	0
Introvert	0	0	0	0	0
Helpful	0	0	0	0	0
Cool	0	0	0	0	0

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