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Role of Involvement and Feelings towards Consumer-brand Personality Congruence and Brand Relationship Quality

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Abstract: *Objective :* The study investigates the perceptions of consumer regarding the way they see themselves (consumer-personality), the way they see their most frequently used brands (brand-personality) as well as they visualize their relationship with the brands (brand relationship). The research using the self-identity theories as its foundation discerns whether the congruence between the consumer- brand personality influences brand relationship or not, as it is controlled by involvement and feeling associated with product purchase.

Methodology: The study employed an experimental design to measure causal relationship and the enumeration was conducted in the city of Lucknow. More precisely, a quasi-experimental research design with a field testing (2*2 factorial design of high * low involvement and high * low feelings) was used. The study employed a questionnaire survey for procuring the responses and for finding the results the quantitative methods and statistical analysis were applied.

Findings: The findings suggest that the individuals or consumers share a better relationship with the similar personality brand partners, which is in conformity to the previously postulated interpersonal relationship theories (Aron, 2003; Aron *et al.*, 2001). Further, the impact of brand-consumer personality on perceived brand relationship quality is more pronounced in the product categories that depict greater involvement and low feelings.

Managerial Implications: The findings drawn from the study are useful for the marketers who can use the knowledge regarding the extent of the involvement and feelings consumers associate with the different product categories in discerning the appropriate marketing/ branding strategies.

Keywords: Involvement, Feelings, Consumer Brand Personality Congruence, Brand Relationship Quality

INTRODUCTION

The social reality investigated in the current research study is based upon the perceptions of consumer regarding the way they see themselves (consumer personality), the way they see their most frequently used brands (brand personality) as well as they visualize their relationship with their brands (brand relationship). The research using the self-identity theories as its foundation discerns whether the congruence between the consumer and brand personality influences brand relationship or not specifically as it is controlled by involvement and feeling associated with product purchase. The Sirgy's self-image congruence model or the consumer-brand congruence model is used for capturing the gap between consumer personality and brand personality (Sirgy, 1982, p.289); which is reflective of the resemblance the consumers share with their favourite brands. Further, the linkage between the consumer-brand congruence with brand relationship was probed that depicted that there exists a positive relationship between the two. The findings suggest that the individuals or consumers share a better relationship with the similar relationship partners, which is in conformity to the previously postulated interpersonal relationship theories (Aron, 2003; Aron et. al., 2001).

OBJECTIVE

The present study investigates the effects of involvement and feelings on customer buying behavior/ decision making. More specifically, the present study aims to determine the linkage between the congruence of consumer and brand personality with the brand relationship quality and explore the moderating effect of involvement and feelings in explaining this relationship.

HYPOTHESIS

The main objective in the study is to ascertain that whether the linkage between brand relationship quality with consumer brand congruence is dependent on the levels of feeling and involvement or not.

For the purpose, the following hypotheses was tested in the study

H₀: The linkage between brand relationship quality with consumer brand congruence is not dependent on the levels of feeling and involvement.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The study of the relationship between Consumer behavior and Personality has an impressive history dating back to the writings of Chinese and Egyptians, Hippocrates to the European Philosophers. Last five years have seen some exciting times in the field of consumer behaviour. New theories, models, relationships and data has been searched and developed. Decision-making, self concept and personality are integral concepts of consumer behaviour. Consumer decision making process has always been regarded as a psychological process. It is a course of action that involves selecting a product from amongst a number of alternatives available in the market. Consumers are constantly making purchasing decisions regarding the choice of products, purchase of products and services and their usages. These purchase decisions are not only important for consumers but also for marketers and policymakers. Due to technological advancements and immense competition in the markets, consumers get a wide range of alternative choices to choose from.

Involvement

'Involvement' refers to the usage of stored information, information search from different sources while making purchase decisions; higher the involvement with the product, the more extensive is the search for information. It is an important mediator of Consumer behaviour as the previous studies has shown that the consumer's decision making process situation is affected by product-involvement (Laurent and Kapferer, 1985). Product-involvement is also considered as an important contingency variable for the success of various marketing strategies and activities (MacInnis and Park 1991; Petty and Cacioppo 1986). A consumer usually invests more time and effort in the purchase of high-involvement products as compared to the low-involvement products (Richins and Bloch, 1986). The effect of involvement also depends on the amount of personal experience a consumer has with a product class and his demographic variables. It can be camouflaged in pre-purchase research activities, information processing, attribute evaluation and perception of brand differences (Calder, 1979; Greenwald & Leavitt, 1984; Kallick, Nearby & Shaffer, 1974; Ray et al., 1973; Rothschild, 1975).

High involvement is the outcome of psychological, social, financial and physical risks perceived with the purchase of an unsatisfactory product. The high price of the product also results in high search costs. Mitchell defined involvement as "an internal state variable that measures the amount of arousal or interest in a stimulus object or situation" (1979, p. 195). It is referred to as a person's motivational state of mind with respect to an object or activity (B. Mittal & Lee, 1989), or a mobilization of behavioural resources for the achievement of relevant goals (Poiesz & de Bont, 1995).

Sherif and Cantril (1947) conceptualized involvement in terms of the relationship between an individual's values and an issue or object. The greater is the integration between the individual's value and the object, the higher is the level of involvement.

When a consumer comes across products high on personal relevance or importance, a state of motivation is created in the memory that energizes or drives consumers' cognitive behavior (attention, comprehension, information search; Celsi and Olson 1988) or affective responses (e.g. emotions; Park and Young 1986). Therefore, product involvement is not a characteristic attribute of a product but is rather perceived by the consumers. Involvement resides within the consumer but it is certainly influenced by the product.

The brand is more personally relevant when the consumer's level of involvement is high. The consumer develops a connection between the brand and his/ her actual self. A consumer's actual self is verified with the congruency in comparison with the brand and the consumer exhibits a stronger connection with the brand resulting in a stronger emotional brand attachment. However, when involvement is low, consumers are less willing to engage in self-verification through the brand because the underlying product is not important enough. However, they seem to be willing to emotionally connect with self-enhancing (i.e., ideally self-congruent) brands.

Involvement is identified as being central in consumer-brand relationship. It is the most predictive relational variable of purchase behaviour (Martin, 1998; Evrard & Aurier, 1996). A consumer's involvement can be related with a product, a product-class, or a specific product-category, with its consumption and purchase decision and also with the communication of the product (Homburg & Giering, 2001). An understanding of all these different types of involvements is required while studying consumer buying behaviour. Apart from being viewed as a personality trait, it is also referred as an individual's state of motivation/ interest, a process, a mediator and a moderator (O'Cass, 2000).

Consumers are involved in a product purchase or stimulus when according to them the product holds importance and a central position and also has the potential to satisfy their higher order psychological needs. Literature suggests that consumers may be heavily involved in a product but not loyal or committed to a brand (Warrington & Shim, 2000). There is a possibility of loyalty to originate without product involvement (Coulter *et al.*, 2003).

Involvement can be used as a motivator and a basis for understanding consumer/ brand relationship in marketing. It can be used for personal growth and satisfaction. Increase in involvement may result into an increase in the effectiveness of the market and its efficiency.

Feelings

Literature confirms that anticipated emotions influence purchase decisions. They also mediate the effect of outcome valence on purchase decisions and act as a mediating factor in purchase process. The impact of emotions on product evaluation and final purchase decision has always been important in psychology and in the study of consumer behaviour.

In literature, the term feeling has been used interchangeably with “emotion”, “affection” and “mood” (Zambardino and Goodfellow 2007, pg. 28). However (Oliver, 1991) has defined each of these concepts to have an understanding of the differences that exists among them. “Emotion is addressed as evocative stimuli, internal reactions, observable manifestations that include motivational states and behavioral characteristics such as facial expressions.” Emotions are also said to elicit during product usage or consumption process (Westbrook and Oliver 1991). These experienced emotions tend to leave traces in memory which the consumers accesses and integrates in his assessment related to satisfaction. Emotions are more effective in influencing the level of satisfaction. The positive and negative emotions experienced during purchase or consumption process increase the explanatory power of cognitive satisfaction (Westbrook 1987). In general, literature supports the existence of a positive relationship between emotions and satisfaction (Szymanski 2001; Mattila 2000; Krampf 2003).

The affect has been referred to as a “sentimental consciousness” and is opposite to the thought processes that lie in the cognitive domain. Cohen and Areni (1991) defined affect as “a valenced feeling state (p. 190). Mood is a subcategory of feeling states perceived by individuals (Gardner 1985, p. 282) It changes with the changes in the surrounding environment. Feelings do not describe ‘state’ but it can yield emotions or change mood.

Conclusions drawn from the study of (Westbrook, 1987 and White 2005) show that emotion, which arise during consumption have an impact on behavioural intentions, which also includes an informal interpersonal communication and loyalty. Emotions such as anger, regret, pleasure, happiness, sorrow, empathy have been studied across disciplines like consumer behaviour; compulsive buying (O’ Guinn & Faber 1989), self-gift giving (Mc Keage, 1992) and customer satisfaction (West brook & Olives, 1991). Research also throws light on Self Conscious emotions which are regarded as being motivational. The process of self evaluation assumes a comparison between actual self and behaviour and the ideal self (Tracy & Robins, 2004) or an evaluation based on the inference drawn from the other’s opinion about one-self and also how should be or act (Leary, 2004).

Literature also discusses the influence of emotions on product evaluation; the general agreement being that emotions (happiness, sadness as well as mixed emotions) have an impact on attitude, intentions and actual purchases (Williams & Aaker, 2000).

Some purchase decisions are based on reasoning considering objects specifications and functionalities, facts, cost, features and efficiency and others on feelings (provoking, excitement, satisfaction, contentment, attraction or fear). Specifically people give more weightage to reason rather than feelings. (Amir and Arieli 2007; Hsee *et al.* 2009; Hsee *et al.* 2003; Kramer, Maimaran, and Simonson 2012; Okada 2005). People who engage in impulsive buying use feelings to guide their decisions.

Studies also indicate that the environment within the store and the emotional state of the consumers both are important determinants in purchase behaviour. A study by Swinyard (1993) indicates that mood interacts with involvement and shopping experiences.

Personality

Another concept in Consumer Behavior and a part of our study is that of Personality. Purchasing behaviour of an individual, social influence, the choice of the products, attitude change is linked to personality. According to Leon G. Schiffman and Leslie Lazar Kanuk, personality can be defined as “those inner psychological characteristics that both determine and reflect how a person responds to his or her environment.” Since Individuals tend to be consistent with their environment, their different ways of coping with the world can be called their Personality traits.

Personality characteristics affect the way consumer’s respond to the promotional efforts and the way they purchase, consumer and evaluate the products and services. A number of researchers have attempted to relate purchases of product types or purchase of specific brands to personality traits of the purchasers. Therefore, the current study focuses on the individual’s perception of their personality that may help consumers explain their behaviour regarding their self-identities. Since Leary and Tangney (2003), argue that the meaning of the self can be captured through personality and that personality is a representation of the self (Tesser 2002), therefore personality can be used to examine the self.

Self-theory

Self theory refers to how an individual perceives himself. “The self is what one is aware of, one’s attitudes, feelings, perceptions and evaluation of oneself as an object”. Previous studies have examined the link between an individual’s possessions and his sense of self. It has been proved that ‘we are what we have’ is the fact of consumer behaviour (Belk 1988). Various definitions of ‘self’ have been given by eminent researchers. According to James (1890), self is characterised by ‘I’, ‘me’ and ‘my’. Dittmar (1992) argued ‘I shop, therefore I am’. People use consumption as a tool for self enhancement. When an individual buy’s a product, he chooses a particular brand because it conveys some symbolic meaning to him and is a physical extension of his personality. Brand personality refers to a set of human characteristics associated with a brand. It is a description of a brand in terms of human traits. The concept of Brand Personality also helps to build Brand equity. This is the additional advantage that a brand gains apart from its functional benefits. It is the extent to which a consumer holds strong, favourable and unique association with a brand in memory. According to the self-identity theories by Belk (1988), James (1890), consumers consume or use

brands to construct, maintain and enhance their self-identities. People's consumption pattern is a reflection of their identity. This study examines the relationship between self-identity and consumption. According to Kotler (2011); Kotler & Armstrong (2010); Kotler and Keller (2009), the consumer behaviour in the acquisition of the product varies from complex, when the product is expensive, infrequently purchased, technically advanced, and is an expression of consumer's self identity to simple, when buying routinely used products. Lake (2009) discussed, that consumer's purchase products that reinforces their self-image, enhances their lifestyle, expresses and enhances their identity culturally as a group and helps them to gain recognition in their own group. He also reported that consumer's try to rationalize their emotions.

The study attempts to have an understanding of how brand personality relates to a consumer's personality, thereby influencing consumer preference. Consumers select brands that are compatible with their needs and personality types and that the characteristics of the brands selected are congruent with consumer's self concept and Personality traits. Researchers have suggested that greater the congruity between the human characteristics that consistently and distinctively describe an individual's actual or ideal self and those that describe a brand, the greater the preference for the brand (Malhotra, 1988; Sirgy, 1982).

RESEARCH DESIGN

In this study the quasi-experimental research design with a field testing (2*2 factorial design of high * low involvement and high * low feelings) is used where in the level of control of the experiments is not as stringent as in the case of a true experimental design. Here the assignment of the study subjects to the control groups is not random but the pre-existing groups are considered for the study. Questions related to consumers level of feelings and involvement were asked.

In the present study the changes in the linkage between brand personality and brand relationship are examined for the different product categories that exhibit disparities in the extent of consumers' involvement and feeling associated with them. The pre-selection of the product categories with product pre-testing procedure ensures that the different levels of involvement and feeling are incorporated in a quasi-experimental manner rather than manipulating it directly using an experimental setting. In addition to this, the subjects were allowed to choose their favourite brands in the respective product categories as they yielded their responses. This facilitates the stimulation of the subjects' imaginations of their most-frequently used brands.

SAMPLE

The sample comprises of 400 respondents representing a cross-section of people from different demographic profiles that captures disparities in income, gender and profession inherent in the consumer group. Respondents particularly belonging to the upper middle class and upper class income group from the city of Lucknow (India) and neighbouring areas were taken. This sample has been selected using convenience sample which is appropriate to be used in inductive effects application research setting as it represents the relevant universe under consideration.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a structured questionnaire that was administered on personal basis and the answers were recorded. The questionnaire comprised of four sections. The first part was used to investigate the

level of Involvement and Feelings associated with the product purchase decisions for different product categories. The second part of the questionnaire comprised of General Personality Questions, The third section examined the Brand personality and the fourth Brand relationship quality. Questions related to the demographic information of the respondents were also asked.

Eight products (Air- Conditioner, Insurance, Mobile phones, Apparel, Soap, Incense Sticks, Cosmetics, Eatables (Biscuits) were taken for the study. These eight products were selected as a result of an informal communication with the target audience. Seven questions measured the level of involvement and six questions measured the level of feelings associated with the product purchase. The mean value of all the items on involvement was taken to indicate the specific involvement score of the product category as well as the mean value of all the items on feelings was taken to indicate the specific feeling score. All the products were rated on an 11 point semantic differential scale and plotted on the graph. The enumeration was conducted for three months between September 2016 and November 2016.

The coded and tabulated data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Mean, standard deviation, range have been calculated to draw a profile of the respondents and their responses. The scales used in the questionnaire were assumed to be interval scales and hence, parametric tests are used (Zikmund, 2010). The data set was analyzed with the help of SPSS 20.0. Regression analysis has been used to assess the proposed relationships.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The findings from the preliminary investigation regarding the selection of the four products that exhibit significant disparities across the extent of involvement and feeling depict that Incense sticks happen to be a low feeling and low involvement product with mean values being (-0.4079, 0.4264) respectively. Then another product is Insurance, which happens to be a low feeling and high involvement product with means (0.85538, 3.8038) and Apparel is high on feeling as well as high on involvement with respective means being the right corner (2.4, 2.9774). The fourth product chosen is Eatables which depict means (1.1491, 2.0639) such that it is high on feeling and low in involvement.

With respect to the hypothesis (i.e. H_0 : The linkage between brand relationship quality with consumer brand congruence is not dependent on the levels of feeling and involvement) it is shown that the involvements as well as the feeling associated with the product purchase have a moderating effect in influencing the relationship between the brand relationship quality and the consumer-brand congruence as shown in the following tables. It is shown here that if the two separate regression equations are drawn for the products that exhibit difference in the extent of involvement (high or low) then the regression coefficients exhibit the different values as well. Also it is evident that both these regression models are statistically significant separately. However, in case of high level of involvement the model yields a better fit as depicted by greater value of R-square (See Table 1, 2 and 3). In case of the two regression models drawn for the products that exhibit difference in the extent of feeling associated with the purchase (high or low) it is seen that the two regression coefficients for each of these models, exhibit the different values as well. Also it is evident that both these regression models are statistically significant separately. However, in case of low level of feeling, the model yields a better fit as depicted by greater value of R-square (See Table 4, 5 and 6).

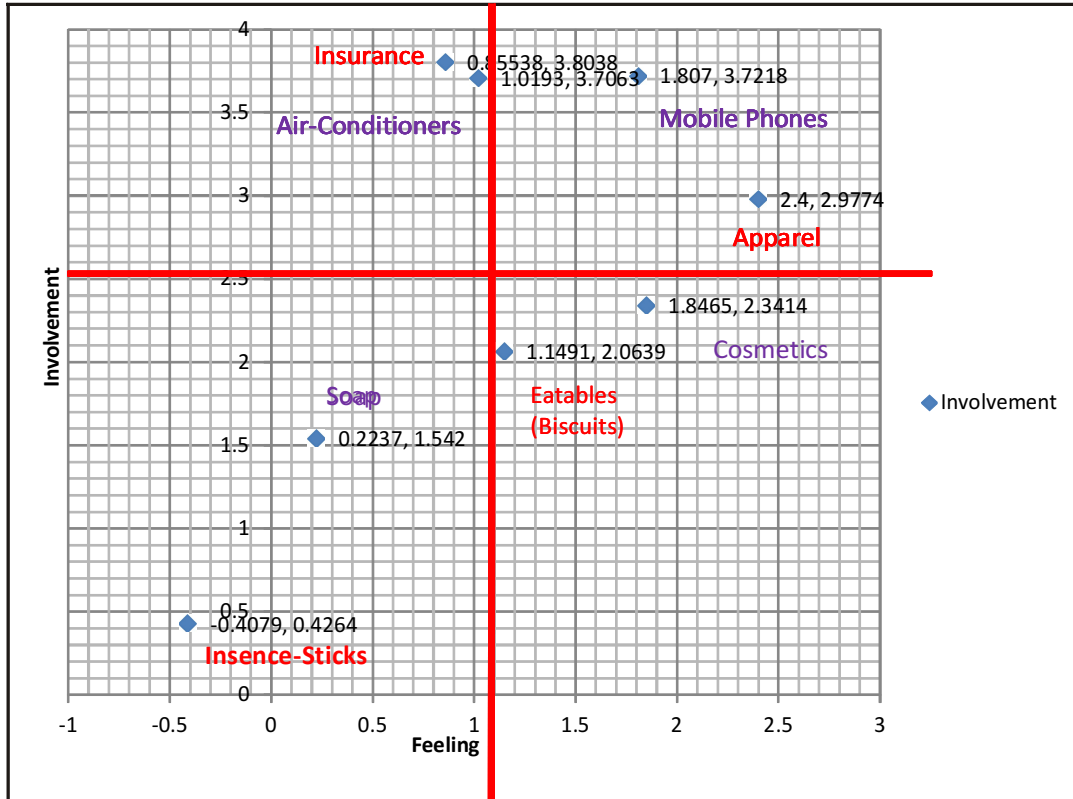


Figure 1: Two dimensional diagram with ‘Extent of Involvement’ on Y axis and ‘Extent of Feeling’ on X-axis

Table 1
Model Summary

Extent of involvement	Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
Low	1	.197 ^b	.039	.036	.23212
High	1	.204 ^b	.042	.032	.24726

b. Predictors: (Constant), consumer brand congruence

Table 2
ANOVA^{a,b}

Extent of involvement	Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Low	1	Regression	.659	1	.659	12.227	.001 ^c
		Residual	16.326	303	.054		
		Total	16.984	304			
High	1	Regression	.248	1	.248	4.059	.047 ^c
		Residual	5.686	93	.061		
		Total	5.934	94			

a. There are no valid cases in one or more split files. Statistics cannot be computed.

b. Dependent Variable: brand relationship quality

c. Predictors: (Constant), consumer brand congruence

Table 3
Coefficients^{a,b}

<i>Extent of involvement</i>	<i>Model</i>		<i>Unstandardized Coefficients</i>		<i>Standardized Coefficients</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
			<i>B</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>Beta</i>		
Low	1	(Constant)	3.797	.058		65.128	.000
		Consumer brand congruence	-.298	.085	-.197	-3.497	.001
High	1	(Constant)	3.828	.108		35.581	.000
		Consumer brand congruence	-.321	.159	-.204	-2.015	.047

a. There are no valid cases in one or more split files. Statistics cannot be computed.

b. Dependent Variable: brand relationship quality

Table 4
Model Summary^a

<i>Extent of feeling</i>	<i>Model</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R Square</i>	<i>Adjusted R Square</i>	<i>Std. Error of the Estimate</i>
Low	1	.263 ^a	.069	.063	.23561
High	1	.164 ^a	.027	.023	.23530

a. Predictors: (Constant), consumer brand congruence

Table 5
ANOVA^{a,b}

<i>Extent of feeling</i>	<i>Model</i>		<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Low	1	Regression	.590	1	.590	10.621	.001 ^c
		Residual	7.938	143	.056		
		Total	8.528	144			
High	1	Regression	.388	1	.388	7.011	.009 ^c
		Residual	14.008	253	.055		
		Total	14.396	254			

a. There are no valid cases in one or more split files. Statistics cannot be computed.

b. Dependent Variable: brand relationship quality

c. Predictors: (Constant), consumer brand congruence

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The present study substantiates the relationship existing across self-identity and consumption by utilizing the concepts of the brand personality, consumer personality as well as brand relationship. The study determines the inter-linkages between the aforesaid constructs with the help of the self-identity theory and the theories of interpersonal relationship, which comprises its main theoretical contribution. Further, the study examines the pertinent role of involvement and feeling that serve as the critical ingredients in the construction, maintenance and enhancement of the self-identities of the consumers across different buying

Table 6
Coefficients^{a,b}

<i>Extent of feeling</i>	<i>Model</i>		<i>Unstandardized Coefficients</i>		<i>Standardized Coefficients</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
			<i>B</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>Beta</i>		
Low	1	(Constant)	3.887	0.087		44.903	0
		Consumer brand congruence	0.413	0.127	0.263	3.259	0.001
High	1	(Constant)	3.761	0.063		59.24	0
		Consumer brand congruence	0.246	0.093	0.164	2.648	0.009

a. There are no valid cases in one or more split files. Statistics cannot be computed.

b. Dependent Variable: brand relationship quality

situations. There is plethora of qualitative evidence that exhibits the relationship between self-identity and consumption such as Thompson and Haytko (1997), Holt (1995) and Thompson and Hirschman (1995). Yet, when it comes to quantitative research evidence the major barriers are realized first in terms of enumeration of the self-identity concept for an individual and then regarding the appropriate mechanism to link it with brand image. The present study uses the psychological construct of ‘personality’ for capturing the individual’s self-identity (Leary & Tangney 2003). Then analogous to the construct of consumer’s personality the study re-examines the brand-personality construct as well using the same concept of personality.

Regression model as applied to the consumers and the brands is used to ascertain the relationship between self-identity and consumption which is also verified using the consumer-brand congruence model. The first model based on regression analysis examines the role of consumer personality as a predictor for the brand personalities, in the context of the brands they used most-frequently. On the basis of the empirical evidence it is exhibited that the consumer-personality shares a positive relationship with the brand-personality. The result implies that the use of brands by the consumers is for the construction, maintenance and enhancement of their self-identities; this positive relationship is in conformity with the self-identity theory.

Then the regression analysis is used to assess the predictive ability of the brand-consumer personality congruence in influencing the perception of brand relationship quality.

The last but not the least, the study depicts that significant role of involvement and feeling moderating the relationship between self-identity and consumption by acknowledging the inherent differences among the products. The study utilizes the concepts of involvement and feeling that are closely entwined with self-identity in the context of brand choice.

The study via these efforts facilitates the deep comprehension of the concept of self-identity and the inter-relationships across consumer personality, brand personality as well as the brand relationship.

The major methodological contribution made by the study is towards reconciling the enumeration of consumers’ self-identities and brand personality. The present study simulates brand personality as human

personality and uses the psychological theories to enumerate it. This has made it possible for the researcher to determine the consumer-brand congruence and relate it with the brand choice.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The significant managerial implications arise due to the enumeration of brand personality using the same items used for the measurement of consumer personality.

Manifestation of brand in terms of brand personality is an indicator to signal a strong brand and hence it can be used for segmentation across brands. The study strengthens the understanding of brand personality using the self-identity theories and yields significant insights regarding the mechanism to locate a 'favourable' brand personality as suggested by Ang & Lim (2006). It is discerned that the 'consumer-brand congruence' or the identification of the consumers with the brands is itself an indicator for the favorable brand personality and it is reflected in terms of their consistent relationship with their brands. Thus the understanding of the identity relationships is useful for the marketing practitioners who can use this knowledge for the development of appropriate marketing communications and activities to cultivate their brands in that direction.

The second implication is related to the development and assessment of global marketing activities. The Big Five personality structure as employed in this study has been successfully validated in several cross-cultural contexts and hence the understanding of brand personality using this model allows the investigators to replicate this structure and conduct cross-cultural studies in this direction. As well as it enables the global marketers to design their global brand strategies based on this understanding.

LIMITATIONS

Like any other research, the present study also contains certain limitations.

- While selecting the products for the study, not much attention is paid to the branding activities which may raise possible differences.
- The questionnaire was exhaustive and required self-monitoring.
- Literature proves that involvement and feelings is related to individuals, rather than products. Therefore people belonging to similar backgrounds and demographic characteristics may show similar involvement.
- There was lack of control over the environment in which the respondents filled the questionnaire.
- The study is based on the perception of the consumers. The consumer's perception of the brand personality is based on their imagination which is enhanced through various branding activities and usage experience which is not included in the product selection. Though the products were given to the consumers they were free to select their own brands.
- The study is confined to the city of Lucknow only.
- Constrains of time and finance.

CONCLUSION

The findings drawn from the above study are useful for the marketers who need to be aware regarding the extent of the involvement and feelings consumers associate with the different product categories; this knowledge can be instrumental in discerning the appropriate marketing strategies. As exhibited in the above study it is more profitable for the marketers if they direct their branding efforts in the product categories that depict greater involvement and low feelings.

FUTURE SCOPE

The future research in the above direction can probe the role of other variables such as the self-esteem in influencing the linkage between the brand-consumer personality congruence and brand relationship quality.

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