RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BRAND PERSONALITY AND ATTITUDINAL BRAND LOYALTY TOWARDS LUXURY FASHION BRANDS: A CRITIQUE

Anand Thakur*, Rupinderdeep Kaur* and Lokesh Jasrai*

Abstract: Brand personality is seeing the brand as a person and defining the traits the brand has. It is important for a brand to have a unique personality. The brand personality acts as an emotional linkage between consumer and brands. Measuring attitudinal brand loyalty can recognize potential users who are susceptible in a varying scenario. The economic conditions of India are experiencing a positive change. The media has played a vital role to position luxury in the public eye. India's luxury segment market is awaited to extend $18.3 billion by 2016 from an approximated $14.7 billion in 2015. The factors that fueled luxury market are rise in disposable income, brand awareness among youngsters and purchasing power of upper and middle class people (ASSOCHAM). The present study aims to examine the critical evaluation of association between brand personality and attitudinal brand loyalty in the context of luxury fashion purchase. The comprehensive secondary data review certifies the above-mentioned relationship and advocatesfor special emphasis on dimensions of brand personality namely; trendy, sincere, family oriented, and exciting. The study suggests special focus towards: brand reputation, satisfaction, occasional gifts and feedback to win attitudinal loyalty in luxury fashion.

Keywords: Brand Personality,Attitudinal Brand Loyalty, Consumer Brand Relationships and Luxury Fashion.

1. INTRODUCTION

The American marketing association defines the brand in 1960s as: *"A name, design, term, sign, symbol or combination of them which is intended to identify the goals and services of one seller or a group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors"*

The product acts as physical entity and brand is known as perceptual entity in the consumer's mind. Now days, physical entity is not an important aspect for the company, but building perceptual entity are the focus of the companies. A successful brand is only that symbol or name or combination of both which identifies the product of a particular organization as having a sustainable differential advantage.

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* Department of Management, Lovely Professional University, Phagwara, Punjab.

1.1. Brand Management

In brand management, the management focuses on representing a promised brand to their customers. The brand acts as more just than a logo or advertisement. In every company the focus of brand management is to attain loyal customers and make them happy for longer time. The brand management follows a brand management process, which is world widely, used by every organization.

1.2. Consumer Brand Relationship

The consumer feels more loyal to what he feels connected with, attached to and loves it (Bowlby 1979). The relationship between a brand and consumers is known to produce positive outcomes for both brand and the consumers. Consumers develop relationships with number of brands, perceiving brands as partners. Brands are humanized in the minds of consumers and therefore provide symbolic meanings and social and cultural value, which is beyond the utilitarian benefits.Brands cannot act, think, or feel by themselves, but can live and evolve through their managers and exist as a partner in a strong relationship. The quality of the relationship between a brand and a consumer evolves through strong meaningful brand and consumer actions. Their actions can enhance, dilute, or even dissipate the relationship and shape the quality of such relationships.More and more firms are interested in acquiring knowledge about how consumers relate themselves to brands, why some brands are preferred to others and even loved more than others.

1.3. Brand Personality

The concept of *personality* refers to a person's unique psychological makeup and how it consistently influences the way a person responds to his or her environment. Brand personality is seeing the brand as a person and defining the traits the brand has. It is important for a brand to have a unique personality. The brand personality acts as an emotional linkage between consumer and brands. Brand personality, generally referring to the human characteristics associated with a brand (Aaker, 1997), is a branding concept that explains a facet of branding dynamics (Batra *et al.,* 1993; Kapferer, 1998; Upshaw, 1995; Keller, 2003). Brand personality serves as an effective consumer-organization communication tool. It allows an organization to identify consumers' brand perceptions (Punyatoya, 2010). Marketers can then use consumers' perceptions to make their marketing strategiesmore focused towards consumers. It also provides a useful research method for consumer studies. It helps marketers to communicate brand meaning which otherwise might not be easy to understand and/or share (among marketers). Jennifer Aaker developed a framework for measuring brand personality with five core dimensions of brand personality, each divided into a set of facets. The five core dimensions and their facets are:

- Sincerity (down-to-earth, honest, wholesome, cheerful)
- Excitement (daring, spirited, imaginative, up-to-date)
- Competence (reliable, intelligent, successful)
- Sophistication (upper class, charming)
- Ruggedness (outdoorsy, tough)

1.4. Attitudinal Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty comes when a consumer purchases a same brand over a period of time rather than consuming different brands. The consumer may purchase same brand due to its product quality, features or the brand is providing excellent after sales service. Loyalty is measured in terms of both attitude and behavior. Behavioral loyalty is the recognizable outcome of attitudinal loyalty, without knowledge and understanding of the attitude towards the act of purchasing the brand; it is difficult to project marketing programs to alter behavioral loyalty (increase brand switching to a specific brand or decrease switching from that brand). This is particularly the case in a non-stable environment with changing needs or environments. Measuring attitudinal brand loyalty can identify customers who are susceptible in a changing environment. Attitudinal loyalty can be important for marketing specialists to monitor in markets where buyers do not make a judgment between brands at each buying occasion (Bennett et al., 2001).

1.5. Luxury Fashion in India

India has traditional expertise in textiles, leather, personal care (Ayurveda) and jewelry. The luxury fashion market in India is attaining increasing visibility with each passing year. With the high growth rates of the Indian market compared to the other countries and even the settled economies, it is highly likely that interest in the Indian luxury market will increase in the days ahead. Luxury fashion brands always influence the customers due to their product quality, status and reputation (Bothra, 2013).

India is considered to be the fastest growing economies in the world. The average economic growth rate is of 7.5% during last few years. The country is expected to be the world's biggest economy till 2050.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The synchronization of the consumer's personality with that of the brand generates internal affection and trust, pushing customer value and thereby leading to higher brand satisfaction and creates customer loyalty (Vahedi *et al.*, 2014). The connection and association between brands and consumers helps in identifying strong and deeper relationships. Consumer acts as partners to their loved brands. The brands

act as a social and cultural concept for consumers. Close relationship towards a brand leads to emotional connections. Past experiences with the brands had a great impact on future purchases of the consumers. When consumers were satisfied with there past experiences they build strong relationships with the brands and can sacrifice more price for a loved brand (Loureiro, S.M.C. 2013). The brand personality characteristics of sincerity, excitement, and competence all have a strong, positive correlation with consumer commitment. Sophistication shows medium strength, positive correlation with consumer commitment and ruggedness shows weak strength, positive correlation with consumer commitment (Hren and Crosby, 2013). The four dimensions of brand personality, including sincerity, competence, excitement, and sophistication, have positive impacts on consumer satisfaction, which further increases consumers' loyalty toward brands. Consumer satisfaction is a key mediator that connects brand personality and brand loyalty in companies' micro blogs. If consumers perceive a brand with sincere, competent, exciting, and sophisticated personality characteristics, then they will be more likely to be satisfied. In addition, the dimension of sincerity is found to have the largest impact on consumer satisfaction than any other three dimensions (Zhang et al., 2013). If the company wants to increase the positive word of mouth and to sustain the positive brand image than the correct target market for them is firstly the customer having the characteristics of being well organized and hardworking. The second importance should be given to extrovert and lastly to openness (Virani 2013). There is a significant relationship between brand personality and the customers' trust and commitment to the brand. The manufacturers should be honest and loyal towards their customers in order to increase the reliability of and commitment to their own products (Fallahi and Nameghi, 2013). Brand experience positively influenced customer value, brand personality positively affected customer experiential value, and brand experience positively affected brand personality (Keng *et al.*, 2013). The classification of brands, brand identities and symbols also influences consumer brand relationships. All the factors are dependent upon consumer psychology that how they perceive about a brand that classified and represents him efficiently (Schmitt, 2012). In consumer brand relationships, there are many classification of customer loyalty, but only two classifications are commonly used i.e. attitudinal loyalty and behavioral loyalty. Department store shoppers are used to know how the influence of switching cost, customer satisfaction and corporate image differ in both classifications of customer loyalty. By testing both models, behavioral loyalty enhances better performance and no difference is observed between customer satisfaction and corporate image in attitudinal and behavioral measures of loyalty. So far, switching cost has shown greater high influence on behavioral loyalty rather than attitudinal loyalty (Cheng, 2011). For generating brand loyalty, the brand experience of the consumer is always being firstly preferred. The brand experience is further broke down into four clear dimensions i.e. sensory brand experience, affective brand experience, intectual

brand experience and behavioral brand experience. A scale is administered to measures these dimensions in consumer brand relationships. The brand experience has also a behavioral influence, which enhances brand loyalty through brand personality. The brand experience scale is further used for assessing and planning consumer behavior (Brakus *et al.,* 2009).

3. NEED AND OBJECTIVES

Referring the above-mentioned literature, there is a dire need to examine the role of brand personality and attitudinal loyalty in luxury fashion purchase. The objective of the present paper is to critically evaluate the relationship between brand personality and attitudinal brand loyalty in luxury fashion purchase and to propose useful branding insinuations. Such an attempt will enable the marketers to gain deep visions into the nature of association between brand personality and attitudinal brand loyalty, thereby creating a suitable platform for marketing strategy formulation.

4. DISCUSSION

Vahedi *et al.,* (2014) examined that the synchronization of the consumer's personality with that of the brand generates internal affection and trust, pushing customer value and thereby leading to higher brand satisfaction and creates customer loyalty but internal affection and trust can only be enhanced through personal connections with the brand and satisfaction can only gain when a person actually uses or buys that product. Loureiro, S.M.C. (2013) evaluated that consumer acts as partners to their loved brands. The brands act as a social and cultural concept for consumers. Past experiences with the brands had a great impact on future purchases of the consumers. Companies can use these experiences in future to build stronger relationship; hence consumers can more relatively relate themselves with the brands.Hren and Crosby, (2013) said that the brand personality characteristics of sincerity, excitement, and competence all have a strong, positive correlation with consumer commitment, but all the dimensions of brand personalityhas equal influence on consumer commitment and they cannot be ignored i.e. sophistication and ruggedness. Zhang *et al.,* (2013) suggested that the four dimensions of brand personality, including sincerity, competence, excitement, and sophistication, have positive impacts on consumer satisfaction, which further increases consumers' loyalty toward brands. Consumer satisfaction is a key mediator that connects brand personality and brand loyalty in companies' micro blogs. If consumers perceive a brand with sincere, competent, exciting, and sophisticated personality characteristics, then they will be more likely to be satisfied. Hence company should formulate their strategies in accordance to the personality traits of the consumers.Virani, (2013) said thatif the company wants to increase the positive word of mouth and to sustain the positive brand image than the correct

target market for them is firstly the customer having the characteristics of being well organized and hardworking. So focus of the company should be on the competence trait of brand personality and should develop more strategies on this trait. Fallahi and Nameghi, (2013) signifies that there is a significant relationship between brand personality and the customers' trust and commitment to the brand. So the manufacturers should treat their customers very honestly and with loyalty towards in order to increase the reliability and commitment to their own products. Keng *et al.*, (2013) examined thatbrand experience positively influenced customer value, brand personality positively affected customer experiential value, but brand experience can influence brand personality if the experience is good that is how customer can sustain their relationship with the brand for longer time. Schmitt, (2012) evaluated thatthe classification of brands, brand identities and symbols also influences consumer brand relationships. So the marketers should focus on consumer psychology that how can a customer relate his/her personality trait with the brand and develop their policies of attracting consumers according to that. Cheng, (2011) said that in consumer brand relationships, there are many classification of customer loyalty, but only two classifications are commonly used i.e. attitudinal loyalty and behavioral loyalty. Department store shoppers are used to know how the influence of switching cost, customer satisfaction and corporate image differ in both classifications of customer loyalty. By testing both models, behavioral loyalty enhances better performance and no difference is observed between customer satisfaction and corporate image in attitudinal and behavioral measures of loyalty. As far as behavioral loyalty is concerned it does not signifies consumer's attitude towards the brand and this is also important to study the attitude of the consumer in changing scenario. Brakus *et al.,* (2009) suggested that for generating brand loyalty, the brand experience of the consumer is always being firstly preferred. The brand experience is further broke down into four clear dimensions i.e. sensory brand experience, affective brand experience, intectual brand experience and behavioral brand experience. A scale is administered to measures these dimensions in consumer brand relationships. The brand experience has also a behavioral influence, which enhances brand loyalty through brand personality. Brand experience also has attitudinal influence; it is the attitude first which changes the consumer preferences for a particular brand.

5. CONCLUSION

A conceptual framework exhibiting relationships among brand personality and attitudinal loyalty will assist the marketers dealing with luxury fashion brands in strategic decision making pertaining to managing brands and customers. Such an effort will create opportunity for adoption of loyalty as a sustainable competitive advantage, thereby ensuring sustainable success. The present study fills the vacuum in the literature on the relationship between brand personality and attitudinal

brand loyalty in luxury fashion brands, thereby giving an opportunity to the marketers to tap this market with immense potential.

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