

# Understanding the Influence of Brand Personality on Consumer Behavior

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**Abstract**—Companies have recognized the relevance of brand personality in shaping consumer behavior and thus necessarily incorporate it in their brand management strategies. Previous research has suggested that brand personality increases consumer preference and usage. Given the potential utility of brand personality for marketers, this paper reviews and analyses the relevant research and thereby identifies three modes of action of brand personality on consumer behavior: (i) Brand personality as a vehicle to express functional benefits of a brand (ii) Brand personality as a reflective symbol of the self of the consumer, and (iii) Brand Personality as a medium to establish consumer-brand relationship. The results of the reviewed research indicate that consumer behavior is a function of brand-consumer personality congruence and consumers can also use brands to extend their own personality.

**Index Terms**—brand personality, self-concept, consumer behavior

## I. INTRODUCTION

In recent times, the concept of brand personality has attained enormous importance within the successful management of brands. With a view to better satisfy their customers' needs and to establish long-term consumer-brand relationships, Companies position their brands with unique personalities [1]. Brand personality is a concept within the field of relational marketing and it is defined as a set of human characteristics associated to a brand [2]. According to theories of animism, brands can also have their own personality. In fact human beings aspire to personify objects so as to help their interactions with the intangible world. The perceptions of the brand personality traits are created through all direct or indirect contacts that consumers have with a brand [3]. The concept of brand personality offers a major managerial advantage. It helps better understand the development and maintaining of relations between brands and consumers [4]. Moreover, it explains how consumer-brand relationship impacts consumer behavior [5], [6]. According to Caprara *et al.* [7], personality is an appropriate metaphor for brands based on the idea that a consumer develops attraction towards brands having personality similar to his personality [8].

A consumer can thereby identify himself in relationship to a brand based on the congruency between his own personality and the personality characteristics attributed to the brand. Personality is an important factor in the consumer's choices of brands. The brands chosen by consumers are generally in congruence with their own personalities. Therefore, brand personality proffers the functions of self-symbolization and self-expression [9]. Companies Nowadays direct all the marketing activities at making consumers believe and recognize a brand personality, and reinforcing the relationship between the brand and the consumer [10]. This in turn helps to increase the brand's loyalty and equity.

Since a long time, researchers and marketers have tried to investigate why people prefer one specific brand from a multitude of brands [11]. Thus; the impact that brand personality has on the consumer's purchase intention was and still is researched. For a number of years theorists speculated about the effects of personality on consumer choice and attempted to prove that people with differing personalities buy different sorts of products [11], [12]. The purpose of this paper is to review the relevant research showing interrelations among brand personality, consumer's self concept and consumer behavior, and to describe the implications of the findings for managers.

## II. IMPACT OF BRAND PERSONALITY ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

This paper identifies three modes of action of brand personality on consumer behavior: (i) Brand personality as a vehicle to express functional benefits of a brand (ii) Brand personality as a reflective symbol of the self of the consumer, and (iii) Brand personality as a medium to establish consumer-brand relationship.

### A. Brand Personality as a Vehicle to Express Functional Benefits of a Brand

The functional benefits of a brand can be promoted through brand personality. Therefore, brand personality serves as a vehicle for representing and indicating product-related utilitarian benefits and brand attributes. The functional benefits of a brand become much more persuasive when they are expressed by the brand's personality [13]. It is easier to create a personality which implies the functional benefits than to communicate these benefits directly. Additionally, a brand personality is not easy to copy [13]. Representing brand's functional

benefits by its personality is also called information chunking [14]. Information chunks compile information such as brand, price and quality and play a vital role in the consumer's purchase decision. Hence brand's personality serves as an information chunk for the functional benefits of the product [14]. However, the representation of functional benefits by brand's personality is indirectly associated to the consumer's behavior by strengthening the product's attributes.

#### B. *Brand Personality as a Reflective Symbol of the Self of the Consumer*

Consumers use brands as medium to express their self-identity. This identity can be either their actual identity or a preferred or ideal self which they desire. Another important way, in which people express their personality, is their consumption behavior and the selection of certain brands. Brands thereby function as a reflective symbol of the self of the consumer.

#### C. *The Meaning of Brands and Consumer Decision Making*

According to Tucker [15], consumers can be defined in terms of either the product they purchase or use or in terms of the meanings products have for them. Therefore, the meaning of brand is also an important factor of consumer decision making. McCracken [16] postulates that people are looking for brands whose cultural meanings match with the person they are or they aspire to become. Hence they are looking for products that fit to their own or ideal self-concept. indeed, the meaning that exist in brands or the consumption act itself act as a trigger or stimulus for consumers' purchase or consumption of certain brands [16], [17], [18], [19], [20]. Thus, the meaning that resides in a brand can be of a diverse nature. Park et al. [21] distinguish between three types of meanings which consumers are looking to benefit from: functional, experiential and symbolic meaning.

The functional meaning is provided to the brand through the ability to perform the basic advertised utilitarian tasks by a product or service. A product's or service's functional value is based on product-related attributes such as performance, reliability, durability or price and gratifies the consumer's need to solve consumption-related problems. Therefore, a brand must meet the basic functional needs of consumers. However, in order to differentiate one's product in the market, the experiential or symbolic meaning of a brand becomes more important [20], [22]. According to Elliott [23], consumers do not buy consumer products for their material utilities but consume the symbolic meaning of those products as portrayed in their images. Brands acquire an experiential meaning if they are linked with specific feelings or when they facilitate or perpetuate feelings [17]. Thereby, the brand's ability to satisfy the consumer's desire for sensory pleasure and cognitive stimulation generates an emotional value which in turn influences consumer behavior. Brands can also have a symbolic meaning which means that they become a

medium of social interaction and communication. Thus, the symbolic meaning attributed to a brand does not depend on product related tangible aspects but linked to its value in use, that is the non-product-related, intangible value which the product has for the individual consumer [17]. Brands become reflective symbols of the self through their figurative character. This implies that consumers use brands as a communication device to express who they are or they desire to become and to exhibit their association with or distinction from certain reference groups [20], [24]. The purchase, possession and consumption of brands disclose parts of the consumer's identity which clarifies the high importance that people ascribe to the right choice of brands. According to Levy [20], each purchase involves the assessment of the consumer if the respective product or service fits to the individual self-concept through the symbolic meaning embedded in a brand. In this manner, brands can be used to either express one's real self or to show a person's ideal self.

#### D. *The Role of Consumer's Self-Concept in Consumer Behavior*

If a consumer perceives a fit between his own self-concept and the brand's personality, that brand becomes the symbol of the consumer's personality. A person's self or self-concept refers to his/her thoughts and feelings as a whole having reference to himself as an object [25]. In the similar manner, Arnould *et al.* [17] defines the self-concept as perceptions people have about themselves. Although the general definition of the term 'self-concept' is almost the same, the operationalisations of the self-concept construct leads to disagreement within the consumer behavior literature. This disagreement is regarding whether the self concept is a one-dimensional or multidimensional construct. Even though some scientists consider self concept as consisting of only one single variable, the actual self, others identify it as having two components, the actual and the ideal self. In contrast to one-dimensionality and two-dimensionality of self concept, other scientists define the self-concept as a truly multidimensional construct. For example, Sirgy [26] identifies four dimensions of the self-concept viz. actual self-concept, ideal self-concept, social self-concept and ideal social self-concept. The actual self represents a person's real self while the ideal self reflects how a person would like to be perceived. In the similar manner, the social self stands for the image that one thinks others hold of oneself. Finally, the ideal social self expresses the image that one would like others to hold. The Table I exhibits the disagreement in operationalization of self concept among various researchers.

While the operationalization of self concept as one-dimensional or multidimensional construct becomes a point of conflict, the majority of approaches to the self-concept in consumer behavior literature postulates a three-dimensional definition and thus denies the single self of a person. For example, Malhotra [36] claims the importance of a multidimensional perspective of self concept, which particularly incorporates the real, ideal

and social self-concept. Depending on what is most relevant in a particular social setting or situation, individuals focus on different aspects of their self.

TABLE I. OPERATIONALIZATION OF SELF CONCEPT CONSTRUCT IN CONSUMER BEHAVIOR LITERATURE

Author(s)	Operationalization of self concept as	Nature of self concept
Bellenger et al. [27]; Birdwell [11]; Green et al. [28]; Grubb & Hupp [29]; Grubb & Stern [24]	Actual self	One-dimensional
Belch [30]; Belch & Landon [31]; Delozier [32]; Delozier & Tillmann [33]; Dolich [34]	The Actual and the Ideal self	Two-dimensional
Sirgy [26]; Dornoff & Tatham [35]	Actual self-concept, Ideal self-concept, Social self-concept and Ideal social self-concept	Multidimensional

Source: Author's research

Therefore, different personality traits of the individuals can be accessed in a particular social setting. The different self-concepts which an individual can activate are also called 'working selves'. The concept of a consumer's working self is also very pertinent for marketers since the currently active working self influences the processing of self-relevant information. People selectively process information and consider the information which is relevant to them. Thus, individuals look for the information that is consistent with their self-concept and are defiant to information that is contrasting to their self-representations. Moreover, self-relevant information is processed more efficiently and better remembered or recognized. In that way, currently activated working self influences consumer's information processing and the evaluation whether information is self-pertinent or not [37]. In addition to that, self-concepts change between situations and also over time. New self perceptions are formed, others are changed and even the relationship between an individual's self-concepts can differ. So the self-concepts are predominantly dynamic during certain role transitions, e.g. transition from secondary school to university, when changing jobs or after a divorce. The change between different self-concepts is then also accompanied by altered consumption patterns.

The exact role of consumers' self-concepts in consumer behavior can be understood through self-concept theories. For example, Grubb and Grathwohl [12] postulate that the consumption behavior of an individual is directed toward strengthening and enhancing the self concept through the consumption of goods as symbols. Thereby, Consumers are likely to prefer products or brands with personalities congruent to their own self-concept. The theoretical basis for this assumption exists in the social psychology literature related to the interpersonal attraction. According to that, people have a tendency to perceive others whom they like as being more similar to them than those they dislike. In the same way, individuals also tend to like people whom they

perceive to be similar to them better than they like people whom they perceive to be less similar or dissimilar. These findings from social psychology can be applied in the consumer behavior context leading to the assumption that people have a preference toward brands with personalities similar to their own [38].

#### E. Congruence of Consumer's Personality and Brand's Personality

According to Sirgy [39], consumer desire for a congruence of his personality and the brand's personality with three motives viz. the self-esteem motive, the self-consistency motive and the self-knowledge motive. Self-esteem refers to an individual's feelings and thinking about him and it is related to self-evaluation. Various factors like the interaction with others, personal experiences of success or failure or heredity influence self esteem. Self-esteem is connected to the reflected appraisal of others and can be defined as a prism through which an individual views the world [17]. Self-esteem is an important aspect of personality as it affects our goal setting, the selection of preferred environments and the stress, anxiety and depression one experiences in various situations. Moreover, self-esteem also affects people's self-efficacy which refers to people's beliefs about their ability to manage events that affect their lives. People with a higher self-esteem are likely to have a higher self-efficacy than people with a low self-esteem. In the similar manner, the *self-esteem motive* can be defined as the individual's motivational tendency to involve in information processing that may direct one to perceive oneself in a positive light [39]. This implies that in order to enhance their self-concepts or self-esteem people approach their desired images they have for themselves [25]. These desired images are expressed by the consumer's ideal self, which serves as a standard image. Therefore, self-esteem is a motivational component to recognize our ideal self concept. According to Sirgy [26], self-esteem is a conscious opinion about the relationship of one's actual self to the ideal self or social self. This relationship between real and ideal self and self-esteem as evaluative component can be elucidated by the self-discrepancy theory which states that a high discrepancy between real and ideal generates low self-esteem [40]. The need for social approval is another motive which is strongly associated with the self-esteem motive. This is linked to the individual's social or ideal social self. With a view to create a particular image in the minds of others, people thus persistently try to maintain and modify their public self in a way congruent to their ideal self image.

In relation to that, the self-consistency *motive* can be defined as the motivational tendency to involve in information processing that may direct one to perceive oneself in a way consistent with prior beliefs about oneself [39]. This implies that people seek to maintain internal consistency within the self and thus preserve their self-concept from changes. Consequently, individuals focus on experiences which support their self-

concept and try to stay away from experiences which could endanger it [41]. Since the self-concept is an individual's only assurance of security, its protection soon becomes a goal in itself. People look for the experiences that confirm and support the unified attitude and discards experiences which appear to disturb this attitude. Therefore, while the self-esteem motive is linked to one's ideal self, the self-consistency motive is associated with the actual self, implying that people are looking for congruence with the real self-concept through the purchase of respective products. The postulation that consumers prefer brands with personalities congruent with their own personality is also supported by the theory of cognitive dissonance which suggest that the behavior of people is directed towards the preservation of the own self-concept. Dissonance refers to a state of psychological discomfort which is avoided by people. Hence individuals strive for brands with personalities identical to their own personalities in order to maintain cognitive consistency.

The third motive of consumer's desire for a congruence of his personality and the brand's personality is the self-knowledge motive, which can be defined as motivational tendency to involve in information processing that may direct one to know more about oneself [39]. This motive is interconnected with the other two behavioral motives in view of the fact that the enhancement of one's self-esteem as well as the preservation of self-consistency requires a good knowledge of oneself. The self-knowledge motive thereby basically consists of two motives: first, self-knowledge/esteem motive which has the aspiration to obtain information to meet certain information standards about the self and second self-knowledge/consistency motive which has the aspiration to obtain information that is consistent with how one sees oneself.

The perceived congruity or incongruity between one's own personality and the brand's personality influences the consumer's purchase motivation [26]. The final purchase decision, however, is also affected by self-esteem and self-consistency motives which mediate the relationship between self image and brand image. In this manner, the two motivations are in some cases compatible with each other while they are contradictory in other. Referring to the case when self esteem motive and self consistency motive are compatible with each other, Positive self-congruity is generated by combining a positive self-image and a positive brand image and thereby satisfies both motives. The consumer will tend to purchase the positively valued product from the self-esteem point of view because it helps him to preserve or even enhance his positive self-image and thus helps him to approach his ideal self. In addition to that, the self-consistency motive is also fulfilled as a result of the congruence between self- image and brand-image. Consequently, the individual will be motivated to purchase the brand. Referring to the conflict between the two behavioral motives, Positive self-incongruity is characterized through a negative self-perception and a

positive product image. This inconsistency between self- and product-image does not conform to the individual's self-consistency motive; however, it helps him to enhance his self-concept and thereby satisfies the self-esteem motive. As a result of the conflict between the self- esteem motive and self -consistency motive, the decision-making process gets complicated.

In the similar manner, *negative self-congruity* results from the combination of a negative self-image and negative brand image. Therefore it satisfies consumer's need for self-consistency but the need of self-esteem is not fulfilled. Both Brand- and self-image are negative here and thereby congruent with each other; but a negative product image does not support the consumer's effort to enhance self-image. Similar to the positive self-incongruity state, the two behavioral motives are conflicting here and thus complicate a purchase decision. *Negative self-incongruity* is characterized through a positive self-image and the negative brand-image. In this case, the purchase of the product would contradict both motives and hence leads to avoidance of purchase. The product would neither preserve internal consistency between the consumer's behavior and his self-image nor would it support the enhancement of his self-concept [26], [42].

#### F. Brand Personality as a Medium to Establish Consumer-Brand Relationship

In contrast to the desire of finding a fit between their personality and brand's personality, consumers may also tend to develop a relationship with the brand. Consumers do not always strive for brands with personalities similar to their own but also seek brands with differing, sometimes opposing, identities. Concerning the relationship between the consumer and a brand, brand personality plays a vital role since it provides depth, feelings and liking to the relationship. On the other hand, a consumer-brand relationship can also be based upon purely functional benefits. Moreover; different consumers can have different kinds of relationships with one brand based on their perception of the brand.

Overall there are three kinds of relationship established between the consumer and the brand. According to Aaker [13], a brand can be considered as a friend of the consumer. A consumer-brand relationship is based on the trust, reliability and welfare in a manner similar to the relationship between people. The brand thus performs functions of a human friend. Moving one step further from Aaker [13], Blackston [43] stresses the reciprocity of relationships between consumers and brands. He postulates that a brand has his own attitude and consumer-brand relationship is affected by the brand's appearance and attitude towards the consumer, similar to a person-person relationship. Moreover, Blackston [43] claims that brands have their own 'opinion'. So as to understand the whole essence of the consumer-brand relationship it is essential to consider what the brand thinks about the consumer besides the consumer's opinion about the brand. Blackston [43] thereby emphasizes that the consumer-brand relationship thus has two active partners at each end; contrary to the

popular belief that brand is only a passive element in the consumer-brand relationship.

Following an approach similar to Blackston [43], Fournier [5] also describes the brand as an active partner. She conducted the most complex analysis of consumer-brand relationships. Thereby she found that brand actions influence the brand personality and the consumer-brand relationship. Thus strategic brand management plays a vital role since it is accountable for the brand's 'behavior' which in turn can profoundly influence the consumer-brand relationship. Moreover, Fournier [5] developed a Brand Relationship Quality (BRQ) framework to measure the quality of consumer-brand relationship. The BRQ framework consist of six dimensions viz. love and passion (intense emotional bonds between consumer and the brand), self connection (the brand and consumer share common interests, activities, and opinions), commitment (consumer is loyal to the brand), interdependence (brand plays an important role in consumer's life), intimacy (a deep understanding exists between consumer and the brand), and brand partner quality (evaluation by the consumer of the brand's attitude toward him or her). These dimensions are normally linked to strong relationships between people and which suggest how brand-customer relationships should be conceived. The higher the brand relationship quality the more brand loyal is the customer.

### III. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The results of the reviewed research point out the relevance of the concept of brand personality and thereby stress some implications for managers. Most importantly, brand managers should convey the brand's personality to consumers by using various marketing activities. Brand managers should also make the consumers of varying personality traits believe and recognize the brand's personality because brand personality has profound influence on consumer behavior. As a result, consumers may develop some kind of relationship with the brand, which will in turn influence their purchase behavior.

The findings of this study indicate that congruence of consumer's personality and brand's personality plays a very important role in shaping consumer behavior. Therefore, brand managers should imbue their brands with a distinct brand personality. The brand personality should instill the actual or ideal self-concept of target consumers. In view of that, brand managers should identify the self-concept of their target consumers and build a brand personality to match the self-concept of their consumers. Lastly, brand managers should consider brand relationship quality as an important predictor of brand loyalty. Therefore, they should strive to create positive customer-brand interactions in order to establish a strong emotional bond between the consumer and the brand which in turn contributes to brand loyalty.

### IV. CONCLUSION

Brand personalities play a crucial role in shaping purchase behavior of consumers. The influence of brand

personality on purchase intention of consumers can be understood in the following three ways

- 1) Brand personality communicates the functional benefits of a brand thereby effectively indicates product related utilitarian benefits and brand attributes.
- 2) Brand personality serve as a vehicle to express the personality of consumer thereby brand function as a reflective symbol of the self of the consumer.
- 3) Brand personality helps a consumer to extend their own personality by establishing a relationship with a brand thereby consumers can benefit from brand's characteristics even if they do not wish to become like a certain brand personality.

People buy or consume products not only for their functional value but also to enhance their self-concept through the symbolic meaning embedded in these products. Thus, consumers seek to transfer the meaning associated with the brand to them. Brands can thereby help to form a person's self. The role of self in consumer decision making is linked to consumer's perception of the fit between the brand's identity and his own identity. People seek brands with a personality identical with their own personality. As a result; the higher the congruency between both personalities, the higher is the consumer's preference and purchase intention for the respective brand. Some consumers do not aspire to have the personality of a certain brand but to have relationship with this brand. This means that they do not necessarily buy a certain brand with the intention to support their real or ideal self but to extend their own personality by characteristics which they do not possess themselves. Brand personality thus also helps in developing a strong consumer-brand relationship which in turn positively influences brand loyalty and brand equity.

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