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Consumer Brand Relationships

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ABSTRACT

We have investigated the dynamics of how consumer make relationship with brand (non-human entities) that is consumer brand relationships. This relationship is like the same relationship between two people in the society. Meta-analytic literature review has been conducted to explore different aspect of this relationship dynamics. The investigation reveals that brands work as a relationship partners with consumers. Relationship dimensions, which are considered as ground of relationship types, constructed by authors differs resulting different types consumer brand relationships. However, various authors measure relationship quality based on the same ground relationship strength and feelings using different theories. This research has implications for both academicians and practitioners as they can comprehensively conceptualize the consumer brand relationship, its nature, type and dimensions explored by researchers and their present state.

Keywords: Consumer Brand Relationship, Relationship Dimensions, Relationship Types

JEL Classifications: M30, M31

1. INTRODUCTION

According to American Marketing Association (1960), brand can be defined as, “brand is a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of seller and differentiate them from those of competition.” In relation, the most basic brand definition was proposed as a name, logo or trademark of product or organization (Raut and Brito, 2014). However, substantial literature identified brand is more than a source of identification and differentiation rather they add the dimensions of brand image and brand equity (Sweeney and Chew, 2002). DeChernatony and Dall’Olmo Riley (1997) elaborate brand as a link between consumer perceptions of functional and emotional elements of product and their marketing activities. Sweeney and Chew (2002) viewed this link in terms of relationship between consumers and brands. They argued that the understanding this customer brand relationship or bonding will enhance brand value. Thus, Smit et al. (2007), the connection between customer and brand can be defined as consumer-brand relationship (CBR).

The start of CBR study become a matter of debate as Fetscherin and Heinrich (2014), stated CBR has celebrated its 20 year

anniversary in 2013. They considered Blackstone (1993) book chapter titled “Brand Personality: Building Brand Relationships” as first works of CBR study. However, we find Shimp and Maden (1988) laid the foundation stone by focusing Sternberg (1986) triangular theory of love in CBR study. Following it Blackstone (1993), Fajer and Schouten (1995) shaded light on person brand relationship. Later the paper of Fournier (1998) “Consumer and their Brands: Developing Relationship Theory in Consumer Research” gave a compressive idea of CBR. Various steam of research works have been done (Fetscherin and Heinrich, 2014) on different aspect to assess the relationship between brand constructs like brand trust, brand personality, brand commitment and loyalty based on the original works of Blackstone (1993). Where Ahuvia (1993) conceptualized and Carrol and Ahuvia (2006) measure brad love based on the influential works of Shimp and Maden (1988).

Consumer brand research became popular and focused since late nineties of 20th century (Raut and Brito, 2014; Fritz et al. 2014) as increasing number of organizations are interested to know how consumer relate to brands, why one brand is preferred to other. The early researchers assessed the relationship consumer form with brands (Blackstone 1993; Aggarwal, 2004). They mainly dealt with people feelings about brands center around

personalities (Aaker, 1997), human characteristics (Levy, 1985) and brand as a relationship partner (Fournier, 1998). In order to support these notions various models and concepts (Fetshrine and Heinrich, 2014) have been introduced to better understand consumer brand relationship. For example brand commitment (Sung and Choi, 2010), brand attachment (Thomson et al. 2005), brand love (Ahuvia, 2005), brand trust (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001), brand loyalty (Jacob and Chestnut, 1978), brand attachment (Belaïd and Behi, 2011). Considering these aspects, it becomes clear that consumer brand relationship is multidimensional and multidisciplinary (Fetscherine and Heinrich, 2014). Different authors contributed different aspects of CBR, however, very little attention has been given on existing works how consumer brand relationship has evolved and shaped. Our work attempts to fill this gap by reviewing the articles on consumer brand relationship and will explore (1) evolution of consumer brand relationship in academic arena, (2) types and dimensions of CBR, (3) consequences of CBR, (4) role of brand love and brand equity in brand relationship, (5) theories applied in CBR, and (6) analysis of CBR models.

2. CONSUMER BRAND RELATIONSHIP: DEFINITION ANALYSIS, DIMENSIONS AND TYPES DISCOVERING

2.1. Definition

Shimp and Madden (1988) was the first introducing the concept consumer brand relationship in their paper focusing consumer-object relationship using Sternberg (1986) "Triangular theory of love." They defined consumer brand relationship as "Consumers form relations with consumption objects (products, brands, stores, etc.), which range from feelings of antipathy, to slight fondness, all the way up to what would, in person-person relations, amount to love" (Shimp and Madden, 1988). In the most widely accepted paper on consumer brand relationships by Fournier (1998) stated - "Brand may become an active relationship partner for the consumer and provide meanings in a psycho-socio-cultural context." Emphasizing on long-term commitment Kumar (2006) defined "Brand relationship is nothing but to know how people make long-term commitments to inanimate objects that they buy and use, as well as help make, sell, and distribute." In most recently Blackston and Lebar (2015) extended the Fournier (1998) definition of brand relationship by adding the dimension of organizational and internal culture aligned in terms of relationship principles. However, from our stand broader and comprehensive view of brand relationship is found in the shortest definitions of Keller (2001) who refers consumer brand relationship as brand resonance. According to him - "Brand resonance describe the nature of this relationship and the extent to which consumer feel that they are "in sync" with the brand."

2.2. Types and Dimension Discovering

Utmost research on CBR that portrayed the dyadic relationship was previously concerned by several authors such as Mc Call (1970) and Wish et al. (1976) in interpersonal relationship. But the most remarkable piece of work on CBR is done by (Fournier, 1998). Fournier, (1998) done the first identified the key domain of CBR

in the arena of brand relationship. Her study constituted data from 112 consumers' descriptions about brand relationships to analyze the cross-case platform of the brand relationships domain. The study specified seven theoretical CBR dimensions: (1) Voluntary versus imposed; (2) intense versus superficial; (3) positive versus negative; (4) enduring versus short-term; (5) formal versus informal; (6) public versus private; and (7) symmetric versus asymmetric. Subsequently, the research on CBR dimensions keeps on going. Based on the principles of interpersonal relationships, Degen (2000) proposed three CBR dimensions: (1) Assistance relationships; (2) pedagogical relationships; and, (3) authority relationships. For the earlier category brand seeks to help customer, and brand adjust its behavior to response to customer needs for second types of relationships. For authoritative category, brand transfers its authority or imposes its personality to the relationship with the customer. In recent study by Fritz and Lorenz (2010) formed nine dimensions based on the social psychological approaches to interpersonal relationships. Their dimensions are based on theory of social exchange by Homans (1961) and Blau (1964), investment model by Rusbult (1980), interdependency theory by Thibaut and Kelley (1959), resource theory by Foa and Foa (1974) and the equity theory by Walster et al. (1978). Based on these theories they proposed nine dimensions of consumer-brand relationships: (1) Interdependence; (2) relationship duration; (3) satisfaction; (4) brand commitment; (5) actual behavior; (6) equity; (7) brand trust; (8) passion; and, (9) intimacy. Few aspects of these dimensions seems similar to Fournier (1998), however, the main difference of Fritz and Lorenz (2010) brand relationships dimensions is underpinning theory. Fournier (1998) developed the dimensions based on the theory of animism and impression formation, where Fritz and Lorenz (2010) use several theories: Interdependency theory, social penetration theory, social exchange theory, resource theory and social penetration theory. These authors extend the brand dimensions from different perspective, however, Keller (2001) parsimoniously suggest only two CBR dimensions. First, intensity that is consumer psychological bond with the brand and second, activity that engendered by consumer loyalty.

Going beyond the arena of CBRs, Michel et al. (2015) studied salesperson-brand relationship. Their study explored three dimensions: (1) Brand trust; (2) Brand effect; and, (3) perceived customer reorganization of salesperson-brand relationship resulting positive impact on salesperson motivation to sell and organizational commitment to sale. These dimensions are the property space of CBRs from which CBR types emerged.

Based on people interpersonal relationship, Fournier (1998) in her study proposed a CBR framework basically made out fifteen different types of relationships: (1) Average marriage; (2) causal/friendship/buddies; (3) committed partnership; (4) marriage of convenience; (5) compartmentalized friendship; (6) best friendships; (7) kinships; (8) childhood friendship; (9) courtships; (10) rebound/avoidance-driven relationships; (11) flings; (12) enmities; (13) dependences; (14) enslavements; and, (15) secret affairs. Going out of only interpersonal relationship, Fetscherin and Heinrich, (2014) in their literature review paper attempted to classify different brand relationships from more-broader perspective integrating different theories and

models. Considering on Consumer-Based Brand Equity Model of Keller (2001), relationship Investment Model of Rusbult (1983), Hierarchy of Effects Model of Lavidge and Steiner (1961), social exchange and theory of interpersonal relational attraction, they categorized different brand relationship concepts based on emotional connections, functional connections or combination of the both. Emotional connections is achieved if consumers emotional needs are met, whereas, functional connections resulted from filling consumers' functional needs. On the basis of these two they developed a 2×2 matrix that produced four types of relationships as functionally invested, fully invested, un-invested, and emotionally invested. On the other hand, Fritz et al. (2014) conducted simple cluster analysis and found four broad types of CBR based of nine dimensions of interpersonal relationships. The problem of this classification is that particular type of brand relationship includes consumers from same demographic profile. A single brand, therefore, have to maintain multiple relationships. Keller (2001) on the basis of two dimensions (intensity and activity) proposed four brand relationships categories: Behavioral loyalty, attitudinal attachment, sense of community and active engagement.

3. CONSUMER BRAND RELATIONSHIP, BRAND LOVE AND BRAND EQUITY

At least some form of love has been within all human groups in all eras of human history (Hutfield and Rapson, 1993). For successful relationship, love is one of the essential components (Simpson et al., 2001). Branding researchers started believing similar relationship between consumer and brand and assigning similar characteristics of interpersonal relationship (Aaker, 1997; Fournier, 1998). Shimp and Madden (1998) showed that people have love with non-human entities like brand. They showed that brand love composed of three dimensions: Passion, intimacy and commitment. Recent studies (Batra et al. 2012; Albert et al. 2008) have also started delineating that consumers have feeling of love for their brands.

Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) defined brand love as "the degree of passionate emotional attachment a satisfied customer has for a particular trade name." One may compare it brand liking. However, brand love is different from brand liking because brand love is integrated in consumers' selves and has a long-term relationship with brand. It is more enduring and deeper than brand liking. The main outcome of brand love is positive word of mouth, brand loyalty, self-expressive and hedonistic brand.

As a very recent type of relationship, brand love has added new spectrum of possible consumer brand relationship (Pang et al. 2009). Albert and Merunka (2013) considered brand love similar to other relational constructs. They also ensured that brand love is a separate facet of consumer brand relationships. They found positive relationship between brand love and relationship as brand love plays role in maintaining the relationship with brand. Similarly in order to understand the importance and different facets of relationships brand love is being investigated by researchers (Batra et al., 2012; Albert et al., 2008; Fetschrin and Dato-on,

2012; Ahuvia, 2012; and Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006). Their studies reveal that brand love is a strong relationship construct. Brand love influences both attitudinal and behavioral loyalty since brand love affects positive word of mouth and customers' willingness to pay premium price.

Considering the critical role of relationship Blackstone (1993) studied the brand equity through brand relationships. Strong cognitive, affective and behavioral ties with a brand are reflected through consumer brand relationship in the study of Nebel and Blattberg (2000) and Blackston (1992). Whereas Swaminathan et al., (2007) explored that consumer brand relationship is formed with self-concept connection and country of origin connection that may subsequently influence brand equity. Relationship is mutually co-created. From consumer perspective, Fournier et al. (2012) stated that consumer brand equity influence and co-create brand relationships. Raut and Brito, (2014) with evidence opined Keller (2001) brand resonance is nothing but consumer relationship with brand. Researchers (Keller, 2008; Rindfleisch et al. 2006) suggest brand resonance identified the nature of relationships and bonds consumers have with brands thus brand relationship is considered as a component of brand equity (Raut and Brito, 2014). Moreover, Sreesjesh and Mohapatra (2014) showed brand equity as a relational construct since a brand drives major part of its value from the relationship of its customers and partners (Morgan and Hunt, 1994).

4. THEORIES APPLIED IN CBR STUDIES

When researchers become interested in CBRs to investigate their characteristics, nature, and consequence, they drew upon theories from interpersonal (Guess, 2011) and social psychology (Fitz et al. 2014) literature. The first theoretical contribution in CBR is taken from an isolated theory of the interpersonal relationship literature named "The Theory of Love" by Sternberg (1986) in the works of Shimp and Maden (1988). Since then research works of various authors are guided by the theories from different fields (Table 1).

5. ANALYSIS OF CBR MODELS

CBR studies, as a recent field of study, has been getting popularity among the academicians resulting to contribute in the development of concepts and models. Here, discussion is made based on seminal piece of works by Fournier (1998), and Keller (2013).

Fournier (1998) of Boston University acknowledge brand as a relationship partners and suggested to re-conceptualization of the brand personality notion the framework she had developed (Keller, 2001). Brand behaviors enacted from everyday execution of marketing mix decisions that appears to lead the engagement of the consumer and brand. The types of relationship are formed on the basis of this interaction/engagement. She identified fifteen different types of CBRs that characterized consumers' engagement of with the brands. These relationship type personalities of brands enable and manage brand personality. She also measured the brand relationship quality that specified the realization for brand enhancement and dilution of brand equity. The six faceted

Table 1: Theories applied in CBR studies

Articles	Theory	Relevance
Shimp and Madden (1988)	Sternberg (1986) "Triangular Theory of Love"	Consumer-object relationships
Kaufman and Louis (1988)	Macneil (1974, 1978) "Relational Exchange Theory"	They identified three norms 1. Reciprocity, 2. Flexibility and 3. Solidarity relevant to consumer brand relationship
Fajer and Schouterm (1995)	Inter-personal Relations	Different CBRs have different levels of brand loyalty
Aggarwal (2004)	Clark and Mills (1993) "Theory of Interpersonal Relationship"	Viewed brand relation either social factor or economic factor
Nysveen et al., (2005)	Thibaut and Kelley (1959) "Interdependency Model and Rusbult (1980) "Investment Model"	Direct and indirect relationship investment
Fritz et al. (2014)	Thibaut and Kelley (1959) "Interdependency Theory"	Frequency of interaction with the brand develop the construct "Interdependency"
	Altman and Taylor (1973) "Social Penetration Theory"	Relationship duration between consumer and brands develop the construct "relationship duration"
	Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) "Interdependency Theory" and Rusbult (1980) "Investment Model"	Comparison between expected and experience performance, develop the construct "Satisfaction"
Fritz et al. (2014)	Rusbult (1980) "Investment Model"	Desire to maintain a long-term relationship with brand and willingness to make and efforts, develop the construct "brand commitment"
	Walster, Berschied and Walster (1978) "Equity Theory"	Difference between outcome and input, develop the construct "equity"
	Homans (1961) and Blau (1964) "Social Exchange Theory"	Confidence result from customer's positive expectations and preconceptions of the brand. Develop the construct "brand trust"
	Fao and Fao (1974) "Resource Theory"	Intense longing for union with the other. Develop the construct "Passion"
	Altman and Taylor (1973) "Social Penetration Theory"	Self-disclosure and disclosing person feelings. Develop the construct "Intimacy"

CBR: Consumer-brand relationships

relationship qualities depend on the managerial actions in the marketplace.

Keller (2001) referred the brand relationships as brand resonance. He proposed four relationship types: Behavioral loyalty, attitudinal attachment, sense of community and active engagement and the measures for these key brand resonance. In order to measure behavioral loyalty he suggested asking customers direct questions what percentage of their last purchase went to the brand and what percentage of their intended future purchase will go to the brand. He stated many researchers considered brand attachment as brand love which is also measured by applying different scales of measured. However, he proposed two construct: Brand-self connection and brand prominence with two sub-dimensions of each to measure brand attachment. Keller (2001) compared sense of community as "social currency" and its dimensions are conversation, advocacy, information, affiliation, utility and identity, while, active engagement is considered customers' additional efforts beyond during purchase and consumption of the brand. It is customers' willingness to invest their personal resource such as time, energy and money.

Keller (2001) divided the four resonance types under two broad dimensions as intentions and ability (Keller, 2013). He generalized these dimensions not specifying whether these could be more applicable in consumer goods or service industry, dilution of relationships aspect is absent in Keller (2001) model which Aaker et al. (2004) specified as brand transgressions and this is influential factor in CBRs that deteriorate CBR. Here Fournier

(1998) identified five factors: Accommodation, tolerance/forgiveness, biased partner perceptions, devaluation of alternatives and attribution biases as obstacle for sustainable and durable relationships.

6. CONSEQUENCES OF CBRS

6.1. Strengthen the Consumer Brand Relationship Quality (BRQ) or Break-up

In human relationship literature, relationship quality is the most frequently studied variable which has been shown to predict the dyadic consequences (Lewis and Spanier, 1979). Relationship quality depends on the reciprocity and meaningful consumer and brand actions, and these actions can strengthen or dilute brand relationship quality (Fournier, 1998). Aiming this in mind she constructed 35 strong brand relationships from which she inducted six faceted brand relationship quality (Table 2) under attractive and socio-emotive attachment, behavioral ties, and supportive cognitive behavior.

Moreover, inspired by Storbacka et al. (1994) works on dynamics of relationship quality, Fetscherin and Heinrich, (2014) recently have attempted classified consumer brand relationship and have developed 2 × 2 matrix based on strength of relationships and customer feelings toward the brand. They identified four different types of relationship qualities: Brand satisfaction, brand love and passion, brand avoidance, and brand hate or divorce. These relationship quality factors are significant in evaluating consumer

Table 2: Fournier's (1998) six dimensions of brand relationship quality

Attractive and socio-emotive attachment	Love and passion
	Self-connection
Behavioral ties	Interdependence
	Commitment
Supportive cognitive behavior	Intimacy
	Brand partner quality

relationship with brand and total combination of these factors reflects the perceived quality of the relationship. Relationship quality is, therefore, an enduring interaction between the customer in a relationship and the actions by the brand. Changes in personal relationships and contextual changes determine the durability and stability of the relationship quality (Heding et al. 2009).

By examining 30 terminated relationships studies, Fournier (1998) identified two models of relationship deterioration: Entropy model and stress model. Due to lack of active maintenance efforts relationships are deteriorated under the first model. According to the later model (Appendix 1) relationships are deteriorated forcefully by the intrusion of personal, environmental, dyadic and brand stress factors. On the other hand, the second factor in Aaker et al. (2004) model affects the relationship strength in the commission of transgression. This means the violation of rules guiding the relationship performance (Metts, 1994). Transgressions have the ability to affect the relationship through the causes and the severity may vary. Likewise, long-term relationship is the result of inability of transgression because interdependence increases or partners interact more frequently. That's why CBR researchers are concerned about the indicators of overall relationship quality, depth and strength.

6.2. Brand as Relationship Partner

Brands have dyadic relationship with consumers (Aggarwal, 2004; Aaker and Fournier, 1995, Sweeney and Chew, 2002, Fournier and Yao, 1997). This proposition can regard brand as relationship partners (Hodge, Rom and Fionda, 2015). Basically, in developing the relationship between consumers and their brands where both parties mutually affected and define their relationship partnership interdependency must be present (Hinde, 1979). But critics may raise question "how do inanimate objects (brands) become partner with human? Solution of this debate depends on the (Sweeney and Chew, 2002) answer of three questions: "Can brands be humanized to assume the role of relationships? Can brands be active relationship partner? And do brands reach to consumers in a personal sense and vice versa?"

Since the inception of CBR concept in marketing research, the anthropomorphism of brands became a logical conclusion (Bengtsson, 2003). Anthropomorphism is the human tendency to ascribe human characteristics to nonhuman entities (Messent & Serpell, 1981). On the basis of the theories of animism, researchers try to identify ways in which brand can be humanized. For example, Nober, Becker and Brito (2010) studied brand relationships on the basis of brand personality approach. This anthropomorphism shapes consumers' perceptions regarding brand as living entities. Consumers perceive the brands as having

human like characteristics, motivations and intentions (Epley et al. 2007; Kim and McGill, 2011). Similarly, consumers are also anthropomorphizing objects where they find personality qualities to inanimate objects considering brands as human characteristics. Consumers humanize brands in their minds, assign symbolic meanings and provide cultural and social value (Loureiro, 2012)

Consumers are now accepting brands as a vital part of their relationships dyad (Aaker and Fournier, 1995; Aaker et al. 2004; Fournier, 1998). According to Jakanovic (2005), brand relationship is personal identification of consumer with brands. Substantial amount of research also suggest that CBRs are resemble as the relationships between two people (Heding et al. 2009; Lin and Sung, 2014; Fournier, 1998, 2009; Aggarwal, 2004; Aaker et al. 2004). The main reason is consumer perceive brands in the same way they perceive people (Kervyn et al. 2012). Research on brand perception identified that consumers are concerned about the relational and emotional aspect of brand perception in addition of brand's features or benefit (Aaker et al., 2004; Fournier, 2009; Ahuvia, 2005; Thomson et al., 2005). Consumers generally attached (Batra et al., 2012; Thomson et al., 2005; Albert et al., 2008) to the brands they love and they flings with the brands (Fournier and Alvarez, 2012), rivalries with adverse relationship (Paharia et al., 2011), invest in enmities (Luedicke et al. 2010; Hogg, 1998). Consumers' brand loyalty resembles marriages in their passionate commitment (Oliver, 1999; Fournier and Yao, 1997). Sustainability of a brand depends on the loyalty base relation (Hung and Lin, 2014). Clients or consumers become faithful to the brand they are connected with the relationships of connection, affiliation and coordination (Husain, 2015). These support the similarities across brand and human relational space (Fournier and Alvarez, 2012).

7. CONCLUSION

As a new concept, consumer brand relationship has been becoming popular to marketing practitioners due to its practical significance. Marketing practitioners try to influence consumers' thinking about brands (Aggarwal and McGrill, 2007; Moon, 2000) assigning human characteristics to brand. They often use anthropomorphism to position their brands that creates positive consumer reactions like increased product likability, positive emotions and favorable brand personality (Delbaere et al. 2011). These associations of brand with human qualities help consumers to form similar emotional attachment as to the relationships with other people (Kim et al. 2014). Aaker (1997) stated that marketers use these associated traits to differentiate their brands from its competitors. Consumers evaluate the traits of brand through direct and indirect contact which Sung and Choi (2010) called the basis of evaluative conception of brands. This evaluative conception of brands resulting consumers to form parallel social relationships with the brand and their interaction is guided by social relationship norms.

Here, we consider the main theoretical aspect of CBR which has still been under the developing phase. Academicians are borrowing concepts from various fields like sociology, psychology, business, marketing and others to conceptualize CBR. Important insights from Fournier (1998), Keller (2001) and (2013), Fritz et al. (2014),

Aggarwal (2004) and others are guiding principle for marketing practitioners and decision makers. Most of the studies considered as seminal piece of works are based on qualitative research. There are ample scopes for future researchers to conduct quantitative studies on these grounds. For more generalization and acceptance more research is needed using various antecedents and variable that have influence on CBR. To overcome the limitation of this paper future research must study more numbers of articles especially considering quantitative aspect of CBR studies. It will extend the area of study and to strengthen the arguments of the researchers. Future researchers should consider this to enlighten their contribution in this field.

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