

Brand Personality, Consumer Congruity and Advertising: Influence on the Apparel Brands

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Abstract

Purpose- This paper aims to analyse the mechanism of brand personality on advertising response in apparel brands and the congruity affect on the purchase intention of consumers. It attempts at integrating the four concepts of BPC, attitude towards the ad, attitude towards the brand and the purchase intention and in the process present viable propositions as managerial implications for building the brand personality.

Design/methodology/approach- Based on the existing literature and as part of our analysis, the paper examines the influence of brand personality on advertising response in fashion clothing branding context. Stimuli of 7 fashion apparel brands with different expected personalities were evaluated by young students (21-26 years old) in terms of Brand Personality Scale of Aaker (1997). The implications of self-congruence are discussed.

Findings- This paper comprehensively examines the self-concept and the analysis the relationship between the three related parameters is being carried out, i.e., attitude towards the brands, attitude towards the ad and the purchase intention and to see how the brand personality congruence is affected by all three of these factors. The analysis of the study should help in understanding the antecedents and consequences of brand personality processing.

Research Implications- Caution is advised in extrapolating the results beyond the issues investigated in the study.

Practical Implications- The implications raise awareness that brand personality and consumer congruity need to be examined independently or at least both included in the planning process to determine their importance in a brand's overall identity. Central to developing and maintaining a long-term brand image strategy is an understanding of the dyadic relationships forged between consumers and brands.

Originality/value- Most of the research on the subject of personality has been designed around Aaker's five dimensions of personality. The self-concept literature in consumer behaviour can be perceived as multi-dimensional perception of one's self. The study fills the gap in the literature about the congruence between brand and human images, and demonstrates how self-image congruity dimensions impacts brand preference among consumers. The findings This paper uses qualitative research methodology, specifically a grounded theory framework, to discover the personality of products, and to compare these outcomes with Aaker's five dimensional scale.

Keywords: Brand Personality, self-congruence, advertising, purchase intention

Paper type- Research Paper

Introduction

An effective communication of what a brand stands for has become a fundamental principle of marketing. Marketing managers of today have recognized the real value of establishing an identity for their brands. Apart from the functional utility, the psychological trait of the brand gives an identity to a brand. The concept of brand personality has emerged as an effective tool for measuring the level of congruency between the brand and the self personalities. Researchers also acknowledge the value of the brand image as a contributor to brand equity (Keller, 1993).

Distinguishing brands based on physical attributes and functionality have been the traditional foci. However, attention to the concept of brand personality has expanded in recent years, in part due to the difficulty of product differentiation based on functionality and quality (Veryzer, 1995). Although the significance of branding has been broadly recognized and well-documented, the expanding role of branding serves to underscore its topical importance.

Brand personality plays a crucial role in attracting the consumer following which the consumer prefers a particular brand. Brands by emphasizing on the key attribute that consumer's deem important, can increase

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the probability of being chosen by the consumer, by inducing the level of self congruity. Moreover, in order to derive the relationship between the personality of the brand and consumer, the concept of brand personality congruity is adopted with advertising acting as a major source of communication between the two. This provides an opportunity to establish a relationship with the consumer.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the personality of apparel brands and to examine the influence of self-concept and BP congruence on student's advertising response. Also the effect of advertising in building an attitude towards a brand and the purchase intention is also assessed. The research finding indicates that other than these known and certain factors there are many independent factors at work that play a dominant and determining role in influencing the consumer's attitude towards the purchase intention and selection of a brand. This study is concluded by identifying opportunities for future research which ultimately influence the consumer buying decisions when it comes to apparel brands. From a brand builder perspective, brand personality is an important input variable, normally considered in branding strategy models (Kapferer, 1991; Keller, 1993; Aaker, 1996).

Review of literature

Brand personality

Brand personality is created by any direct or indirect contact that the consumer has with the brand. Basically, brand is a tangible object which, unlike a person, cannot think, feel or act, but the managers of today have shifted their focus from functional utility to symbolic utility. A type of anthropomorphism occurs when human traits are attributed to non-human objects, Consumers easily assign personality qualities to inanimate objects like brands in thinking about brands as if they are human characters (Blackston, 1993; Fournier, 1998; J. Aaker, 1997).

Keller (1998) states that "brand personality reflects how people feel about a brand, rather than what they think the brand is or does". The symbolic use of brands is possible because consumers often give brands human personalities (J. Aaker, 1997). Consumers perceive the brand on dimensions that typically capture a person's

personality, and extend that to the domain of brands. The dimensions of brand personality are defined by extending the dimensions of human personality to the domain of brands.

To measure the brand personality, many techniques have been used, as that of personification techniques (Lannon, 1993), the Zaltman's Metaphor Elicitation Technique – ZMET (Zaltman and Higie. 1993) or the IMPSYS model (Heylen, 1990; Heylen et al., 1995). The most recent and the most used concept of measurement is the Aaker's BPS (1997). She developed a brand personality scale in which she identified five brand personality dimensions and 15 facets: sincerity (down-to-earth, honest, wholesome and cheerful); excitement (daring, spirited, imaginative and up-to-date); competence (reliable, intelligent and successful); sophistication (upper class and charming); and ruggedness (outdoorsy and tough). Depending on these dimensions the personality of the brand and that of the self is being calculated.

Brand personality congruity

Product attachment is defined as "the emotional bond experienced with a product" (Schifferstein and Pelgrim 2003). Usually consumers own many products for its functional or symbolic benefits, but they develop a long-lasting relationship with the brand when they become emotionally attached to these products or brands. Here, the concept of brand personality congruity plays a crucial role in maintaining a long term relationship with the brand and this product attachment can thus result in a longer usage period. Product attachment exists next to the product's utilitarian benefits (Schifferstein, Mugge, and Hekkert 2003).

Self-congruity refers to the fact that consumers prefer products associated with an image that is similar to their self-concept (e.g., Belk 1988; Malhotra 1988; Sirgy 1982). Sirgy (1982) suggested in his self-congruity theory that when a consumers goes for a brand, he makes a psychological comparison between his self-concept and the image of a product. If the consumer identifies the affinity with that of the brand he will experience a high self-congruence which positively influences the purchase intention of the customer and the satisfaction level. Sirgy (1982) specifies that products can serve as means by which an individual can symbolically display his/her self-concept to oneself and to others.

Aaker (1999) proposed a theory based on the concept of self-congruity that consumers prefer self-congruent brands. She conducted various researches and found confirming evidence for a congruity effect for brands. Consumers evaluate and prefer a brand with a matching personality more positively than incongruent brands. In the context of apparel brands, clothing is a non-verbal communication form of the individual personality and self-image (Thomas et al., 1991). According to Pervin and John (2001), self-concept is often viewed as a component of personality. A number of researchers have suggested that there is a positive association between self-concept and brand image (Levy, 1959; Sirgy 1982; Sirgy and Su, 2000; Sirgy, Grewal and Mangleburg, 2000; Johar and Sirgy, 1991).

This paper contributes to the research on product attachment by investigating product-personality congruence as a determinant of product attachment in an experimental setting. Most of the research on the subject of personality has been designed around Aaker's five dimensions of personality. This paper uses qualitative research methodology, specifically a grounded theory framework, to discover the personality of products, and to compare these outcomes with Aaker's five dimensional scale.

Advertising effectiveness

Communication is a fundamental aspect of human existence. Advertisers use these decisions to communicate the product's meanings, and therefore the determined brand personality to consumers. Advertising is recognised as one of the most potent sources of valorized symbolic meaning. Consequently, the brand personality depends on the advertising process. Advertising creativity is the ability to generate fresh, unique and appropriate ideas that can be used as solutions to communications problems. Every brand has a personality. Advertising design plays a major role in maintaining this personality. Brands and advertising can be described as my two main topics. My intention is to focus on brand personality and advertising design and the connection between them.

S. MacKenzie, R.J.Lutz and G.E.Belch (1986) highlighted through their body of work that attitude towards the advertisement (Ad) has been postulated to be a casual mediating variable in the process through which

advertising influences brand attitude and purchase intentions. J.S. Johar and M.J.Sirgy (1991) discussed the implications of two kinds of advertising appeals: Value-expressive advertising appeals, which are effective when the product is value-expressive; and utilitarian appeals which are effective when the product is utilitarian. When the product is value-expressive, audience persuasion is influenced through self-congruity. Conversely, when the product is utilitarian, audience persuasion is influenced through functional congruity. The effectiveness of the value-expressive as opposed to utilitarian appeals is argued also to be a function of such product-related factors as differentiation, life cycle, scarcity, and conspicuousness, and consumer-related factors such as involvement, prior knowledge, and self-monitoring.

A strong managerial relevance to advertisers, coupled with the well-defined theoretical background of multi-attribute attitude models (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975), has generated considerable research into attitude toward the ad. Ad has been found to be related to attitude toward the brand, AB (Mitchell 1986; Gardner 1985; Homer 1990; Muehling and Laczniak 1988; Stayman and Aaker 1988), advertised deal (Burton and Lichtenstein 1988), the likelihood a brand is considered (Moore and Hutchinson 1983), ad recall (Zinkhan and Fornell 1989), purchase intention (Mitchell and Olson 1981), and attitude towards the act of buying the brand (Mitchell 1986).

J.W. Hong, and G.M. Zinkhan (1995) hypothesized in their study that advertising appeals congruent with viewers' self-concept would be superior to incongruent appeals in terms of enhancing advertising effectiveness. Advertising effectiveness was operationalized as: brand memory, brand attitude, and purchase intentions. Again, Meenaghan (1995) illustrated that advertising has a central role to play in developing brand image, whether at the corporate, retail or product level. It informs consumers of the functional capabilities of the brand while simultaneously imbuing the brand with symbolic values and meanings relevant to the consumer.

Hypotheses Development & Conceptual Model

This research aims to explore the mechanism that builds brand personality through media communication like advertising. It attempts at integrating the three concepts

of advertising variability , brand personality and consumers self congruence with each other and in the process present viable propositions as managerial implications for building the brand personality considering the variables of marketing communications. The hypotheses set within the integrated framework lead to the construct of the advertising model cohesive to the brand personality measures.

For the purpose of this research the main hypotheses are:
 H1: Consumers will favor advertisements of brands (in terms of attitude towards the ad, attitude towards the brand and purchase intentions) with a personality congruent with their (ideal) self concept.

H2: The higher the perceived degree of self image and product brand personality congruity, the more positive is the attitude towards the advertisements.

H3: The higher the perceived degree of self image and product brand personality congruity, the more positive is the attitude towards the Brand.

H4: The higher the perceived degree of self image and product brand personality congruity, the more likely is the purchase intention towards the brand.

Thus the model is established on the premise that a favorable brand - personality congruence will further lead to a more favorable attitude towards the advertisements and attitude towards the brand. The three will eventually lead to positive, ratifying and complying purchase intentions. The research objective is to testify whether the above model holds true in the practical world. It aims at exploring the extent to which the consumer’s buying behavior is influenced by the advertising and how in turn it influences his attitude towards the brand and finally his purchase intentions. It explores whether the company’s efforts in delivering advertising in a more appealing dimension have quick cognitive reflexes on customer’s mind.

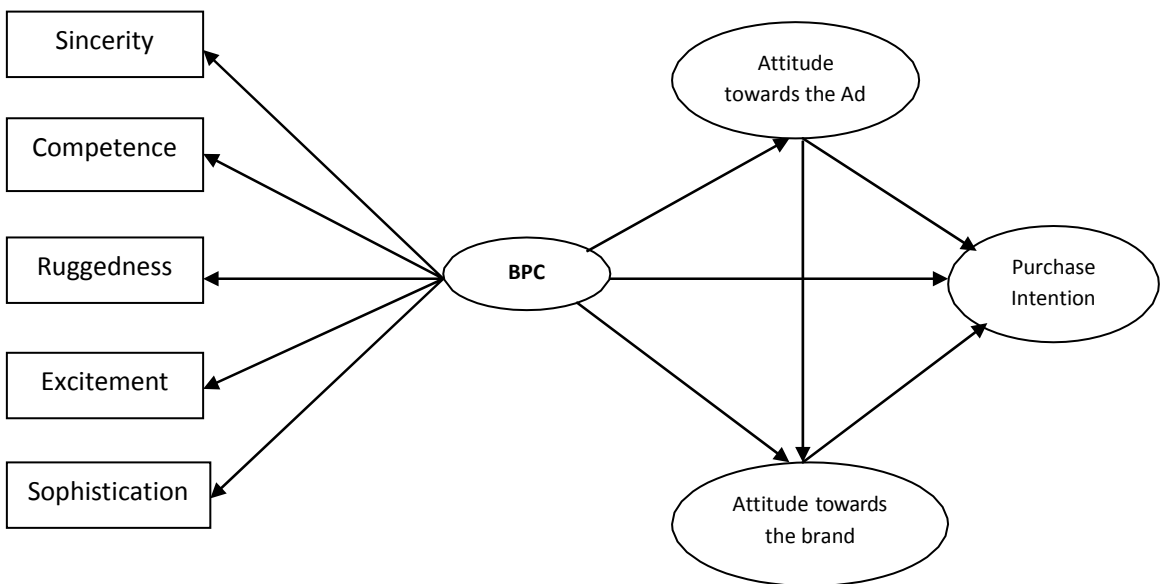


Figure 1: Conceptual Model

Research Methodology

This research employed the survey research method to explore the brand personality congruence, attitude towards the brand, attitude towards the ads and whether

the three finally culminates into an affirmative purchase intention. For this purpose an extensive questionnaire was designed that comprised of two sections and a total of 10 questions. The first section measured the aforementioned dimensions and the second section

recorded the demographic details of the respondents. On the basis of popularity, prominence and acceptance seven apparel brands were selected for undertaking the study. They were United Colors of Benetton, Tommy Hilfiger, Diesel, Levis, Wrangler, Raymond and Van Heusen. The process that produced the scale in this study involves a sequence of steps consistent with the conventional guidelines for scale development (Churchill, 1979; Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). Content validity was established by evaluating the items for conformity to the theoretical definitions and for redundancy.

A convenience sample of 80 students was undertaken. Analysis of the respondents profile revealed that most of them were in the age group of 21-26 and males outnumbered the females in terms of sheer numbers. Analysis by gender reveals that 71% of the respondents were young males while the remaining 21% were females. Most of the respondents had considerable purchasing power.

Using a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree), subjects rated the extent to which the 42 Brand Personality Scale traits described each brand presented. The self-concept and brand personality congruence was measured with an adaptation of the method suggested by Aaker, 1996.

Analysis & Interpretation

The design of the study assured independent and random responses. However the scale and items were tested according to their distributional characteristics. Exploratory data analysis was performed to weed out outliers and was examined in particular for the normality and kurtosis. None of the variables were found to have significant departure from normality or pronounced kurtosis, and therefore all variables were found suitable for use. Some questionnaires were rejected as missing data was more than 75%.

Analyses of the responses involving the elicitation of the level of involvement of the respondent with respect to the clothing revealed that most of the respondents bought fashion and lifestyle products as these represent a way to express their values and personality and also a majority overwhelmingly believes that fashion and life style products are a source of pleasure or a way to indulge themselves (hedonist). Overall fashion and lifestyle

products were found to be hugely important in the respondent's life.

This is in keeping with the fact that most of the respondents are at a stage in a life cycle where brands and products which have a self expressive benefit are patronized. Consumers view the brand as an extension of self and hence purchase products and brands in conformance with their youthful image.

Table 1: Brand Personality Congruence: Brand Personality Scale (Myself)

Traits	Facet Name	Factor Name	Mean
Down-to-earth Family Oriented Conservative	Down-to-earth	Sincerity	3.2476
Honest	Honest		
Sincere			
Real			
Wholesome	Wholesome		
Original			
Cheerful	Cheerful		
Sentimental			
Friendly			
Daring	Daring	Excitement	3.8615
Trendy			
Exciting			
Spirited	Spirited		
Cool			
Young			
Imaginative	Imaginative		
Unique	Up-to-date		
Up-to-date			
Independent			
Contemporary	Reliable	Competence	3.8267
Reliable			
Hard working			
Secure			
Intelligent			
Technical			
Corporate			
Successful	Successful		
Leader			
Confident			

Upper Class	Upper class	Sophistication	3.9893
Glamorous			
Good Looking			
Charming	Charming		
Feminine			
Smooth			
Adventorous	Outdoorsy	Ruggedness	3.3849
Masculine			
Western			
Tough	Tough		
Rugged			

As indicated by the BPS scale for myself, the research findings suggest that on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, most respondents identified themselves with the attribute sophistication which had the highest mean value of 3.98 and a low standard deviation at .41 suggested that there wasn't much variation in their responses. Excitement was another attribute that people easily identified with and it ranked second on the 5 point Likert scale with an average mean score of 3.8615. In other words the respondents considered themselves daring, trendy, excited, young, cool, up-to-date, contemporary etc. The quality that

found most takers after Excitement was Competence with a mean score of 3.8267, but a higher standard variation suggested a lot of variation in the responses. The recognition with these attributes and in this order follows naturally from the age pattern of the respondents, mostly belonging to the age group 21-26 and at the prime of their lives.

Ruggedness and sincerity were next in the order of preference with a mean score of 3.3 and 3.2 respectively. The scaling of the respondents personality on the Jennifer Aaker's Brand Personality Scale was a preliminary step for finding out the associations that consumers formulates with the brands. The result highlights the order of attributes with which most respondents finds easy recognition. To summarize the findings for the respondents personality dimensions, the aspirational qualities like good looking, upper class, smooth were considered most attractive and thus most accepted, taking sophistication peaking the popularity scale among the five dimensions. Excitement and Competence were next in row and preferred over ruggedness and sincerity.

Table 2: Summary of brand personality scores

Brands	Sincerity	Excitement	Competence	Sophistication	Ruggedness
United colours of Benetton	3.6500	3.8899	3.0675	3.0798	3.6925
Tommy Hilfiger	3.7095	3.7511	3.5053	2.9857	3.7440
Diesel	3.5571	3.7327	3.1918	3.2940	3.5079
Levis	4.2881	4.1136	3.6270	3.0440	3.5536
Wrangler	3.9548	3.6818	3.1561	2.9083	3.1905
Van Heusen	3.1929	3.6393	3.8889	3.5024	3.9226
Raymond	2.9381	3.5119	4.0807	3.8929	3.6647

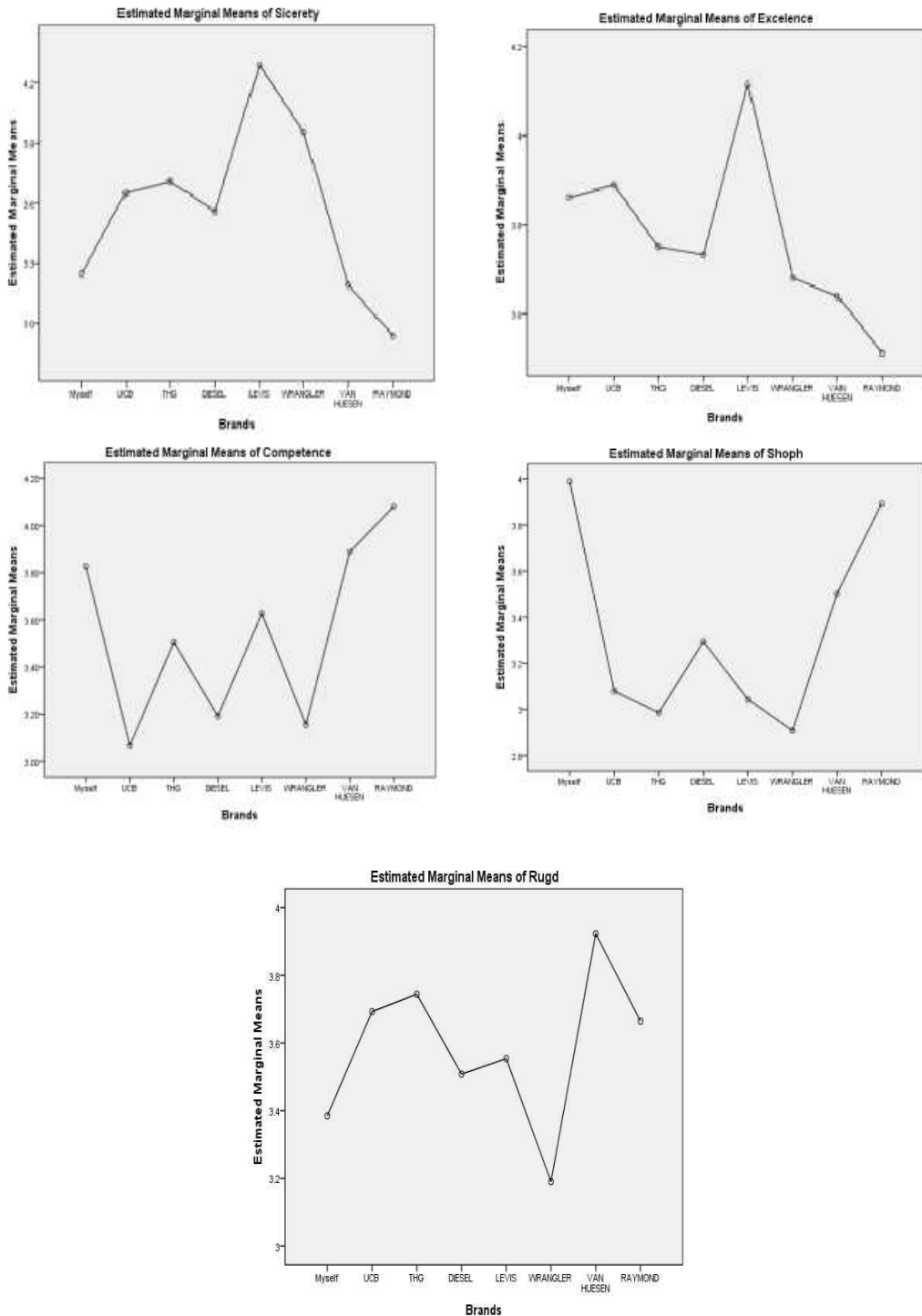


Figure 2: Graphical Representation of BPS Congruity

The above graph represented in the figure 2 depicts that on the scale of Sincerity and Excitement, Levi's is said to be the most sincere brand. Raymond is the most Competence and Sophisticated brand, whereas Van Heusen is considered to be the most Rugged brand.

Brand attitude was obtained from average ratings on a five, five point scale: superior to other brands, grown to like this brand more than the others, continue to buy this brand in the future, when feel the need to buy the clothes think of this brand, loyal to this brand. Scale items were taken from the past researches in the field (e.g., Beihal et.al., 1992, Mitchell 1986 and Gardner 1985). Analysis of the brand personality dimensions revealed some interesting facts. Levi's scored highest at 4.2881 and 4.1136 on Sincerity and Excitement respectively. Raymond scored the highest at 4.0807 and 3.8929 on Competence and Sophistication respectively. Surprisingly the respondents regarded Van Heusen as the most rugged brand of all, with a score of 3.9226 on the dimension of Ruggedness.

The underlying table demonstrates how the attitude towards the advertisements influences the Brand Personality congruence, the attitude towards the brand and the purchase intention. In case of Benetton, on the dimension of sophistication generates favorable attitude towards the ad which leads to favorable attitude towards the brand and finally culminates into favorable purchase intentions. Benetton fails to appeal the respondents on any other dimension.

In case of Tommy Hilfiger the sophistication aspect of the brand appeals to the respondent, leading to favorable attitude towards the brand and an even higher purchase intention. The dimension of competence, excitement, and ruggedness generated favorable response towards the advertisement, which did not necessarily lead to a favorable attitude towards the brand but generated very favorable purchase intentions.

For Diesel the dimension sincerity generated significant purchase intention at 0.275*.

Excitement led to favorable attitude towards the ad at .425** and positive purchase intention at .274*. Sophistication garnered most positive result leading to favorable attitude towards the ad at .393**, attitude

towards the brand at .342** and finally favorable purchase intention at .368**.

For Levi's, almost every dimension generates favorable response. Sincerity generates favorable attitude towards the ad at .283**, attitude towards the brand at .504** and finally leads to favorable purchase intentions at .418**. Similarly excitement generates favorable attitude towards the ad at .423**, attitude towards the brand at .454** and finally leads to favorable purchase intentions at .464**. Competence leads to favorable attitude towards the ad at .293** and favorable purchase intentions at .413**. Sophistication generates favorable attitude towards the ad at .407**, attitude towards the brand at .327** and finally leads to favorable purchase intentions at .490**. Finally ruggedness leads to only favorable attitude towards the brand at .215* and purchase intentions at .251*

In case of Wrangler, sincerity generates favorable attitude towards the ad. 215*, Excitement leads to favorable attitude towards the ad, brand and purchase intentions at .412**, .360** and .313** respectively. Competence leads to only favorable attitude towards the brand and purchase intention at .378** and .360** respectively. The dimension sophistication leads to favorable attitude towards the ad, brand and purchase intentions at .532**, .300** and .259* respectively.

Likewise similar interpretations could be drawn for the remaining brands from the table. What is evident from the tabular arrangement of the above statistics is that the most popular brands are Raymond, Levi's and Wrangler, which have a favorable outcome on almost every other dimension. Purchase intentions were highest for Levi's, reason being that the sampled segment frequently indulges in buying jeans and casual wears. Partly the intentions are associated with the way the brand is advertised and how it communicates the message of being unique and individualistic. The reason for the popularity of Wrangler could also be associated with the advertising techniques, the most recent being "We are animals" theme that portrays the raw and rugged appeal of the brand very convincingly.

Table 3: Attitudinal Dimensions of the Advertising Effectiveness

Brands	BPC	At AD	AtB	PI
United Colors of Benetton				
Sincerity	.8793	.077	-.063	-.021
Excitement	.8737	.243*	-.035	.060
Competence	.8989	.184	.206	.123
Sophistication	.9815	.259*	.511**	.331**
Ruggedness	.7326	.235*	.082	.138
Tommy Hilfiger				
Sincerity	.9380	.008	-.027	-.006
Excitement	.6846	.295**	.177	.220*
Competence	.7377	.325**	.155	.238*
Sophistication	.6937	.321**	.331**	.432**
Ruggedness	.6987	.316**	.155	.301**
Diesel				
Sincerity	1.008	.203	.146	.275*
Excitement	.9771	.425**	.132	.274*
Competence	.9480	.365**	.163	.226*
Sophistication	.9834	.393**	.342**	.368**
Ruggedness	.8037	.194	.037	.062
Levis				
Sincerity	.8989	.283**	.504**	.418**
Excitement	.6734	.423**	.454**	.464**
Competence	.643	.184	.293**	.413**
Sophistication	.6287	.407**	.327**	.490**
Ruggedness	.7138	.161	.215*	.251*
Wrangler				
Sincerity	.9068	.215*	.079	.171
Excitement	.8545	.412**	.360**	.313**
Competence	.8968	.378**	.360**	.212
Sophistication	.9373	.532**	.300**	.259*
Ruggedness	.7833	.334**	.291**	.323**
Van Heusen				
Sincerity	.8990	.239*	.150	-.029
Excitement	.6324	.507**	.199	.179
Competence	.6137	.338**	.405**	.205
Sophistication	.6050	.263*	.336*	.262*
Ruggedness	.8566	.499**	.362**	.231*

Raymond				
Sincerity	1.067	.283**	.314**	.196
Excitement	.6851	.305**	.255*	.263*
Competence	.6600	.285**	.376**	.317**
Sophistication	.5472	.502**	.475**	.529**
Ruggedness	.9451	.279**	.397**	.292**

Significance level: * $p < 0.050$; ** $p < 0.010$

Note: AtAD-Attitude towards the ad,
AtB-Attitude towards the brand

Discussion and Conclusions

The research model hypothesized that favorable attitude towards the favorable brand attitudes and favorable purchase intentions should result as the congruence increases between consumer self-image and a brand's image. Researchers typically operationalize self-brand congruity with indicator scores representing the measured distance between self and brand personality. The latter, brand personality, is traditionally captured in respondents' perceptions of the brand, and other social and psychological factors like, influence of the social group, individual aspiration etc. By encouraging congruity researchers examine the different brand image constructs that can enhance the usefulness of the self-brand congruity. Because the primary purpose of the self-brand congruity is to predict consumer brand attitudes and since brand image represents the cognitive structure of brand attitude, a broader conceptualization of brand personality enhances the application of self-congruity in modeling brand attitudes.

The prime objective of this study was to analyse the relationship between the three related parameters, i.e., attitude towards the brands, attitude towards the ad and the purchase intention and to see how the brand personality congruence is affected by all three of these factors. The research objective was testified on the mentioned hypothesis and it tried to probe into the consumers psyche by means of the questionnaire. The hypothesis were confirmed in certain cases, however there were many cases where the results departed from the main hypothesis. The present research indicates the predictive power of consumer personality on brand preferences and provides supporting evidence for brand personality congruence effect.

The results brings to the fore a new finding which indicates, in case of many brands that it is not necessarily that the presence of a high brand personality congruence will always influence the attitude towards the brand and ad and ultimately the purchase intention. The absence of it could also generate a correlation on these dimensions. The research finding indicates that other than these known and certain factors there are many independent factors at work that play a dominant and determining role in influencing the attitude towards the brand and purchase intentions. The finding holds true for all five dimensions of the Jennifer Aaker's Brand personality scale.

In regards to the self-brand congruity framework and the modeling of self expressive brand attitudes, BPC provides an additional brand image construct useable in the operationalization of the congruence phenomenon. Similar to the traditional user imagery based self-brand congruity, BPC tends to differ based on respondents' self image dimension; at times actual-BPC best predicts brand attitudes, while in other instances it does not.

In light of this, brand personality congruence provides a framework for studying the construct brand personality and its relationship to brand attitudes. The brand personality construct, does not remains confined to a particular theoretical domain. As per the results that were derived in the course of the research work there is a need highlighted to incorporate those independent factors that influences the attitude towards the brand, & purchase intention.

This study was exploratory in nature and presented an original comparison using the construct referred to as BPC. Several limitations of the study are identified that restrict the conclusions that can be made, though they do not preclude the value of incorporating a more encompassing conceptualization of the brand image construct in the self-congruity model. Instead, via their acknowledgement, areas for advancement in future research are recommended, enhancing the contributions of this study and maximizing the potential of incorporating a more holistic conceptualization of the brand personality construct in the self-brand congruity research.

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