

Impact of Brand Personality on Brand Equity : The Role of Brand Trust, Brand Attachment, and Brand Commitment

* *Anees Ahmad*
** *K. S. Thyagaraj*

Abstract

Research suggests a close interrelationship between brand personality and brand equity. Companies have recognized the importance of brand personality in the development of brand equity. Therefore, a brand management strategy based on interrelationship between brand personality and brand equity is the need of the hour. The purpose of this study was to understand the influence of brand personality on brand equity through relational variables: brand trust, brand attachment, and brand commitment and to offer a model depicting the relationship among these variables. The data were collected from a survey of 220 respondents. Structural equation modeling was used to test the proposed model. The results of the study confirm the indirect influence of brand personality on brand equity via brand trust, brand attachment, and brand commitment. The findings yield implications for brand managers, which will help them in devising branding strategies.

Keywords: brands, brand personality, brand equity, trust, attachment, commitment, consumer-brand relationship

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In today's society, brands are ubiquitous and surround us in our everyday life (Kapferer, 2008). One of the key aspects in a company's marketing strategy is management of brands. Companies direct their efforts towards building brands, which can increase loyalty and win the trust of consumers (Mukherjee, Panda, & Swar, 2014). An important percentage of a firm's overall marketing budget is spent on brand building and management activities (Domadenik, Prasnikar, & Svejnar, 2001; Mohan & Sequeira, 2013).

Brand management is a systematic process which is directed towards creating, maintaining, and nurturing brands so as to gain competitive advantage and to increase the market value of the company (Keller, 2013). Securing competitive advantage is highly challenging, particularly in times of financial crisis, cut throat competition, and extremely fragmented markets (Shocker, Srivastava, & Ruekert, 1994). Consequently, the concepts and mechanisms having the potential to increase the value of a company's brand portfolio attract both researchers and brand managers. In this regard, the brand personality concept has received increasing attention among researchers (Aaker & Fournier, 1995; Aaker, 1997; Ang & Lim, 2006 ; Freling & Forbes, 2005). Brands have emotional value for the consumer, which is reflected by their personality (Vincent, 2006). Brand personality can be used as a strategic tool for enabling the establishment of strong brands (Aaker, 1996; Keller & Lehmann, 2003; Lombardi, 2007).

Research suggests that brand personality increases consumers' preference and loyalty to a brand (Fournier, 1998), facilitates brand differentiation in a product category (Plummer, 2000), and creates brand equity (Keller, 1993). Brands can be made more desirable to consumers through a differentiated brand identity obtained by brand personality (Sekar & Thomas, 2008). Moreover, brand personality has an impact on some of its major relational

* *Research Scholar*, Department of Management Studies, Indian School of Mines, Dhanbad - 826 004, Jharkhand.
E-mail : anees.candytuft@gmail.com

** *Assistant Professor*, Department of Management Studies, Indian School of Mines, Dhanbad - 826 004, Jharkhand.
E-mail : ksthyagaraj@gmail.com

consequences such as brand attachment (Sung, Park, & Han, 2005), brand trust (Hess, Bauer, Kuester, & Huber, 2007), and brand commitment (Louis & Lombart, 2010; Bouhlel, Mzoughi, Hadji, & Slimane, 2011). A well defined brand personality influences consumer preference and patronage (Malhotra, 1988; Sirgy, 1982) and creates strong emotional bonds (Biel, 1993), trust, and attachment with the brand (Fournier, 1998). This results into the formation of a robust consumer- brand relationship. A strong consumer- brand relationship inhibits the switching of a customer to a competitor brand. Therefore, consumer- brand relationships are positively linked to brand equity (Blackston, 2000).

Most of the studies centered at developing measurement tools of brand equity (e.g., Keller, 2003 ; Park & Srinivasan, 1994; Yoo & Donthu, 2001), and few empirical research studies tried to explore the formation of brand equity through an examination of antecedents (Barwise, 1993). Therefore, this study tries to understand the influence of brand personality on brand equity through its relational variables namely, brand trust, brand attachment, and brand commitment.

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

↳ **The Impact of Brand Personality on Brand Trust :** Aaker (1997) defined brand personality as “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (p. 347). Her view was also supported by Keller and Richey (2006) and Milas and Mlačić (2007). The concept of brand personality is derived from the 'Theory of Animism,' which suggests that people have the need to personify objects with a view to simplify the interactions with them; hence, consumers visualize brands as human beings (Gilmore, 1919). Brand personality has a positive influence on the consumer-brand relationship and thus provides a major managerial advantage (Gouteron, 2008). Brand personality enhances consumers' preference and loyalty to a brand (Fournier, 1998), and creates brand equity (Keller, 1993).

In the field of relational marketing, trust is the key concept necessary for a stable and enduring relationship (Guibert, 1999 ; Gurviez & Korchia, 2002). Gurviez and Korchia (2002) defined brand trust as “a psychological variable that reflects a set of aggregated presumptions relating to the credibility, integrity, and benevolence that the consumer ascribes to the brand” (p. 47). Based on this definition, a brand is termed as credible if it performs according to the expectations of the customers, a brand has integrity if it maintains its promises pertaining to the terms of exchange, and finally, the brand is termed as benevolent if it takes care of the consumer's interests. According to Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001), brand trust is the “willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function” (p. 82). The trust plays a pivotal role in the consumer - brand relationship (Bowen & Shoemaker, 1998; Fournier, Dobscha, & Mick, 1998). It helps in the reduction of perceived risk, which in turn increases the confidence in relationship of a consumer and brand. Trust is used as a tool to develop a strong bond between the consumer and the brand, which is the ultimate objective of marketing (McKnight, Choudhury, & Kacmar, 2002). Trust leads to customer loyalty and commitment (Anderson & Narus, 1990; Yoon, 2002). Marketing research suggests that consumers trust the brands that possess a well-defined personality as well as a positive brand image (Ferrandi & Valette-Florence, 2002; Hiscock, 2001). Brand personality evokes emotions in consumers (Biel, 1993), and positively affects trust and loyalty (Fournier, 1998). Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

➔ **H1:** Brand personality has a direct positive effect on brand trust.

↳ **The Impact of Brand Personality on Brand Attachment :** The attachment represents an emotional bond between a consumer and a brand (Bozzo, Merunka, & Moulins, 2003). According to Lacœuilhe (2000), “attachment to the brand is a psychological variable that reveals a lasting and inalterable affective relationship (separation is painful) to the brand and expresses a relation of psychological closeness to it” (p. 66). The attachment of a consumer to a brand is not dependent on the context of purchase (Onkvisit & Shaw, 1987) as well as on the instrumental value of the brand (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995). The attachment towards the persons can be

transferred by consumers to the brands having personalities similar to their own personality (Beatty, Homer, & Kahle, 1988 ; Ganesan, 1994 ; Thomson, MacInnis, & Whan Park, 2005). Various researchers such as Sung and Tinkham (2005), Ambroise (2006), and Gouteron (2008) suggested that brand personality is an important factor in increasing brand attachment. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

→ **H2:** Brand personality has a direct positive effect on brand attachment.

↳ **The Impact of Brand Trust on Brand Attachment :** According to Lacœuilhe and Belaïd (2007), integrity and benevolence dimensions of brand trust influence brand attachment. The link between brand trust and brand attachment was also suggested by Gouteron (2008). Moreover, certain number of behaviors like trust, commitment, and loyalty can be predicted through attachment (Traylor, 1981). Aurier, Benavent, and N'Goala (2001) put forward a relational chain of perceived quality, perceived value, satisfaction, trust, and attachment; thereby, they suggested a positive relation among these variables. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

→ **H3 :** Brand trust has a direct positive effect on brand attachment.

↳ **The Impact of Brand Trust on Brand Commitment :** Commitment is a desire to maintain a long-term relationship (Bettencourt, 1997). Fournier et al. (1998) defined commitment as an enduring desire to continue a valued relationship. A committed consumer is always ready to make short term sacrifices with a view to maintain his/her long term consumption (Bozzo et al., 2003). Brand commitment refers to how much a brand is accepted by consumers as the only choice within its product class. Companies can strengthen their relationship with committed customers so as to avoid the threat of customers switching to other brands.

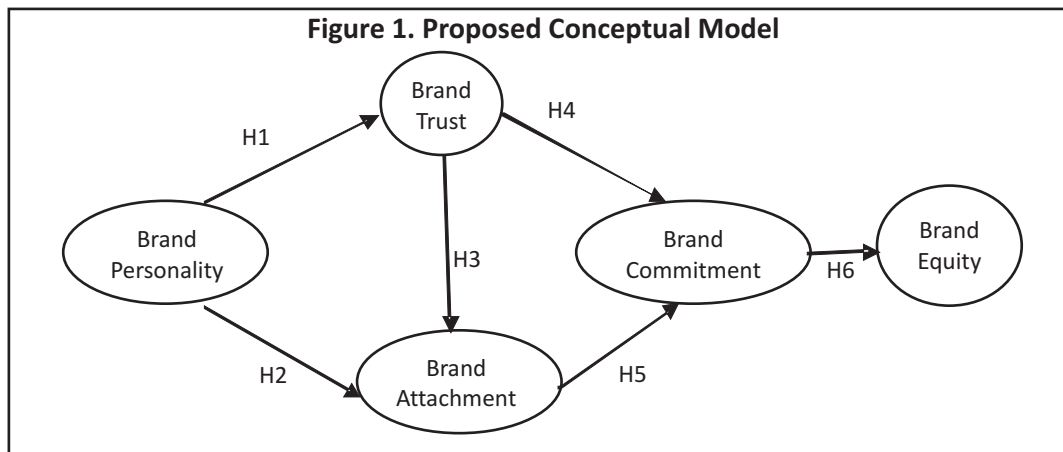
Trust is repeatedly considered as a determinant of commitment (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Gilliland & Bello, 2002 ; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Hiscock (2001) suggested that there is a positive relationship between trust and commitment. The consumer's desire to maintain a long-term relationship with a brand is strengthened if the consumer has firm trust on the brand. Trust has a central value in the relationship between a consumer and a brand, making it a valued relationship, and generating consumers' commitment to the brand (Hosmer, 1995). Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

→ **H4:** Brand trust has a direct positive effect on brand commitment.

↳ **The Impact of Brand Attachment on Brand Commitment :** The desire to make financial sacrifices and commitment towards a brand is an outcome of consumers' emotional attachment to a brand (Thomson et al., 2005). The attachment proves to be a determinant of brand commitment (Fullerton, 2003 ; Onkvisit & Shaw, 1987; Wetzels, de Ruyter, & van Birgelen, 1998; Zainuddin, Russell-Bennett, & Hartel, 2007). According to Lacoœuilhe (2000), Lacoœuilhe and Belaïd (2007), and Gouteron (2008), brand attachment influences brand commitment. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

→ **H5 :** Brand attachment has a direct positive effect on brand commitment.

↳ **The Impact of Brand Commitment on Brand Equity :** Brand equity is a complex concept which results into diversified conceptualizations in literature. Different studies have described different aspects of this intangible asset. It is because of the lack of an agreed definition of brand equity, various methods have been used to measure this construct. Despite the absence of a universally accepted definition of brand equity, there is at least some agreeableness in that "brand equity represents the added value endowed by the brand to the product" (Farquhar 1989, p. RC7). This value can work as a bridge link connecting what happened to the brand in the past and what should happen to the brand in the future (Keller, 2003). Hence, Ambler (2003) characterized brand equity as a



repository of future benefits or cash flows that accrue from past marketing investment. Brand equity has both psychological and financial value for a firm (Shashikala & Suresh, 2013). According to literature, a firm is not the only recipient of brand value, in fact, the two main recipients of brand value are either firms or customers, and this view is explicitly mentioned in Aaker's (1996) definition of brand equity as "a set of assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name, and symbol, that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or that firm's customers" (p. 15). Till now, the brand equity construct has been viewed from two major perspectives in literature. Some researchers emphasized on the financial perspective of brand equity (Farquhar, Han, Ijiri, 1991; Simon & Sullivan, 1993) and others on the consumer-based perspective (Aaker, 1991; Christodoulides, de Chernatony, Furrer, Shiu, & Temi, 2006 ; Keller, 1993; Pappu, Quester, & Cooksey, 2005 ; Vázquez, del Rio, & Iglesias, 2002 ; Yoo & Donthu, 2001).

The level of commitment in the consumer-brand relationship creates favorable strong and unique associations in the minds of the consumers (Keller, 1993); hence, commitment has an impact on brand equity. According to Winters (1991), commitment has been used as a parameter of brand equity by marketing research firms regularly. The empirical studies conducted by Fournier (1998) and Rego, Billett, and Morgan (2009) also suggested a positive relationship between commitment and brand equity. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

➔ **H6** : Brand commitment has a direct positive effect on brand equity.

The Figure 1 shows the conceptual model which represents our corpus of six research hypotheses.

Research Methodology

This section presents the details of data collection and selection of scales to measure brand personality, the three constructs of consumer-brand relationship namely, brand trust, brand attachment, and brand commitment, and finally, brand equity.

📁 **Data Collection** : This study uses the questionnaire survey to verify the hypotheses and conceptual framework from March 1, 2014 to May 15, 2014. Primary data was collected from a convenience sample of 220 students (42 % women respondents and 58% men respondents aged between 19-26 years) who were pursuing their graduation or post graduation in a major university in Jharkhand, India. All the respondents were using a mobile phone. The respondents were asked about the brand of mobile phone which they were using. The responses for the survey questions were collected for the brand of mobile phone mentioned individually by each respondent.

Table 1. Model Constructs, Survey Measures, and Scale Source

Construct	Survey measures	Scale adopted from
Brand Personality	Bp01: Down to earth BP02: Stable BP03: Responsible BP04:Active BP05:Dynamic BP06:Innovative BP07:Aggressive BP08:Bold BP09:Ordinary BP10:Simple BP11:Romantic BP12:Sentimental	Geuens et al. (2009)
Brand Trust	BT01:The products of my mobile phone brand are safe to use. BT02:I trust the quality of the products of my mobile phone brand. BT03:Purchasing products of this mobile phone brand is a guarantee to me. BT04:Mobile phone brand that I use is sincere towards its consumers. BT05:Mobile phone brand that I use is honest towards its customers. BT06:This mobile phone brand shows interest in its customers. BT07: I find my mobile phone brand renews its products which shows research progress. BT08: I think my mobile phone brand tries to improve its response to consumer needs on a regular basis.	Gurviez and Korchia (2002)
Brand Attachment	BA01:I have a lot of affection for my brand of mobile phone. BA02:I am attached to my brand of mobile phone. BA03:I am attracted to my brand of mobile phone. BA04:Thinking about my brand of mobile phone brings me a lot of joy, pleasure.	Lacoeuilhe (2000)
Brand Commitment	BC01:I am strongly bonded with my brand of mobile phone. BC02:I stick with my usual brand of mobile phone because I know it is best for me. BC03: I am committed to my mobile phone brand.	Coulter, Price, & Feick (2003)
Brand Equity	BE01: It makes sense to buy my brand of mobile phone instead of any other brand, even if they are the same. BE02: Even if another brand has the same features as my brand, I would prefer to buy my brand of mobile phone. BE03: If there is another brand as good as my brand, I prefer to buy my brand of mobile phone. BE04: If another brand is not different from my brand of mobile phone in any way, it seems smarter to purchase my brand.	Yoo and Donthu (2001)

✎ **Measurements** : The respondents evaluated brand personality on the 5 - point Likert scale (1= *not at all descriptive*, 5 = *extremely descriptive*). Other four constructs - brand trust, brand attachment, brand commitment, and brand equity were also evaluated on a 5 - point Likert scale (1= *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*).

✎ **Brand Personality** : Aaker (1997) developed a brand's personality scale consisting of five brand personality dimensions, that is, 'Sincerity,' 'Excitement,' 'Competence,' 'Sophistication,' and 'Ruggedness'. Although Aaker's brand personality scale has been widely approved and used in many brand personality-related studies, yet the generalizability of her framework across cultures and product categories has been questioned by some researchers (Austin, Siguaw, & Mattila, 2003 ; Ferrandi & Valette- Florence, 2002 ; Sung & Tinkham, 2005). In this context, Geuens, Weijters, and De Wulf (2009) developed a new brand personality scale, which has been validated in the United States and nine European countries. This study uses the brand personality scale of Geuens et al. (2009) with brand personality dimensions namely, Responsibility, Activity, Emotionality, Simplicity, and Aggressiveness,

Table 2. Results of Confirmatory factor Analysis and Reliability Test

Constructs	Items	Standardized Factor Loading	Squared Multiple Correlation (SMC)	Cronbach's α
Brand Personality	BP01	0.56	0.31	0.744
	BP02	0.64	0.41	
	BP03	0.61	0.37	
	BP04	0.52	0.37	
	BP05	0.66	0.43	
	BP06	0.70	0.49	
	BP07	0.63	0.4	
	BP08	0.64	0.41	
	BP10	0.62	0.40	
	BP11	0.54	0.33	
Brand Trust	BT01	0.56	0.32	0.778
	BT02	0.57	0.32	
	BT03	0.61	0.38	
	BT04	0.60	0.36	
	BT05	0.66	0.44	
	BT07	0.71	0.50	
	BT08	0.61	0.36	
Brand Attachment	BA01	0.53	0.38	0.714
	BA02	0.70	0.49	
	BA03	0.56	0.32	
	BA04	0.60	0.36	
Brand Commitment	BC01	0.72	0.52	0.722
	BC02	0.62	0.38	
	BC03	0.58	0.34	
Brand Equity	BE01	0.54	0.31	0.74
	BE02	0.62	0.38	
	BE03	0.72	0.52	
	BE04	0.71	0.50	

*Note- Two items BP09 and BP12 from brand personality and one item BT06 from brand trust were removed subject to low factor loading.

comprising of 12 items. The Table 1 summarizes the survey measures and scale sources of all the constructs used in the proposed model.

Analysis and Results

➤ **Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Reliability :** A total of 31 items were used in the study. With a view to assess the reliability and validity of the measurement model, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and Cronbach's α were used.

The reliability and validity of the constructs were tested subject to the suggestions given by Fornel and Lacker (1981). All the constructs showed a standardized factor loading above 0.5 (ranging from 0.52 to 0.72) ; thus, indicating adequate convergent validity among all the latent variables. Cronbach's α was used to measure the

Table 3. Chi-Square Results and Goodness of Fit Indices of the Proposed Model

Fit Indices	Obtained Value	Norm*
χ^2	275.413	N/A
Scaled χ^2/df	1.539	>1 & <5
Goodness of Fit index (GFI)	0.883	>0.90 (Ideal fit), 0.8-0.9 (Acceptable)
Normative Fit Index (NFI)	0.827	>0.90 (Ideal fit), 0.8-0.9 (Acceptable)
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	0.918	>0.90
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.930	>0.90
Incremental Fit Index (IFI)	0.932	>0.90
Root Mean Square Approximation Method (RMSEA)	0.052	<0.08

Norm Sources: Bowersox et al., 1995; Xu & Wang, 2012

Table 4. Path Analysis of Structural Model

Path	Standardized Estimates	t- statistics	p - value	Relationship
BP → BT	0.61	4.626	0.000	Significant
BP → BA	0.40	2.986	0.003	Significant
BT → BA	0.25	1.970	0.049	Significant
BA → BC	0.90	5.824	0.000	Significant
BT → BC	0.11	1.192	0.233	Not Significant
BC → BE	0.68	6.019	0.000	Significant

Note : BP : Brand Personality ; BT : Brand Trust ; BA : Brand Attachment ; BC : Brand Commitment

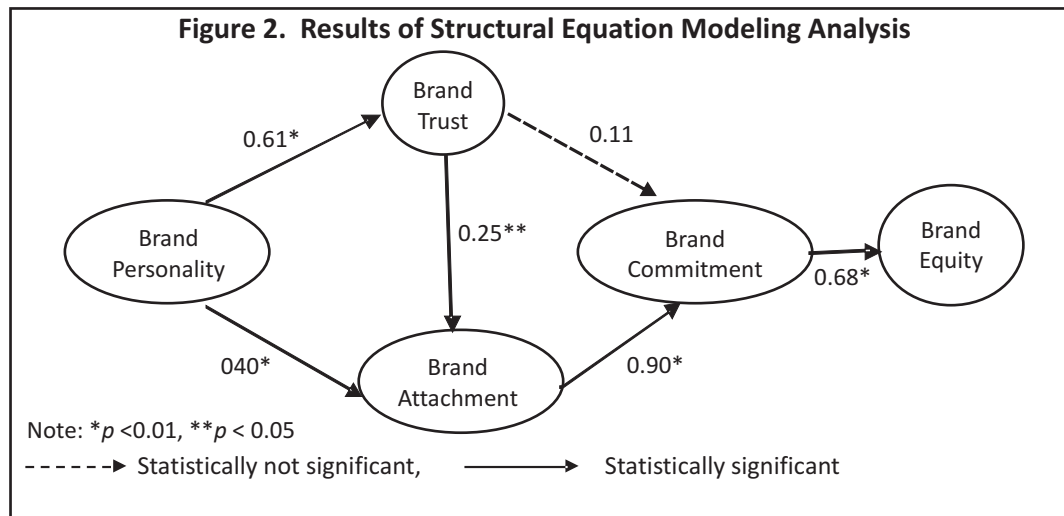
internal consistency among items, which ranged from 0.714 to 0.778, indicating a good consistency (Nunnally, 1978). Moreover, square multiple correlation (SMC) was also used to ensure discriminant validity of each item. SMC value of each item was found to be less than its standardized factor loading (Fornell & Lacker, 1981) and the value was also above the minimum criteria of 0.3 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). The Table 2 lists all of these values.

➤ **Analysis of Structural Model & Hypothesis Testing :** The goodness of fit statistics of the measurement model was tested using measures of the model fit namely: goodness of fit index (*GFI*), normative fit index (*NFI*), Tucker-Lewis index (*TLI*), comparative fit index (*CFI*), incremental fit index (*IFI*), and root mean square approximation method (*RMSEA*). The Table 3 shows the summary of the statistical results.

On the basis of these measurements, the results of the study show that our proposed model reasonably fits the data ($\chi^2 = 275.413$ ($p = .000$), $\chi^2/df = 1.539$, $GFI = 0.883$, $NFI = 0.827$, $TLI = 0.918$, $CFI = 0.930$, $IFI = 0.932$, $RMSEA = 0.052$). The finding shows that brand personality significantly influences brand trust ($\beta = .61$, $p = .000$) as well as brand attachment ($\beta = .40$, $p = .003$), which supports the hypotheses H1 and H2. Further, brand trust is found to have a significant influence on brand attachment ($\beta = .25$, $p = .049$), and brand attachment significantly influences brand commitment ($\beta = .90$, $p = .000$), which supports the hypotheses H3 and H5. The hypothesis H4 was not supported, as brand trust ($\beta = 0.11$, $p = .233$) is not found to have a significant influence on brand commitment. Lastly, brand commitment is found to have a significant positive influence on brand equity. Hence, H6 is supported (refer to Table 4 and Figure 2).

Conclusion

The objective of this research was to understand the influence of brand personality on brand equity, through relational variables: brand trust, brand attachment, and brand commitment and to offer a model depicting the



relationship among these variables. This research showed significant positive influence of brand personality on brand trust and brand attachment, which is similar to the findings of Fournier (1998) and Ambroise (2006). While brand trust also positively influences brand attachment, it is found to have no significant influence on brand commitment, which contradicts the study of Hiscock (2001). Brand attachment, however, positively influences brand commitment, which further positively influences brand equity. The results of the study indicate that attaching personalities to brands can make them more desirable to the consumer. Brand personality influences the trust and the attachment as well as the commitment. In other words, brand personality helps in developing a consumer-brand relationship, which in turn helps in increasing brand equity. Consumers' trust in the brand forms their strong attachments to the brand, which results in their commitment to the brand, and their willingness to make sacrifices in order to maintain the relationship. This study showed a significant indirect effect of brand personality on brand equity through its consequent variables namely, brand trust, brand attachment, and brand commitment. This implies that the effect of brand personality on brand equity is mediated through the consumer-brand relationship.

Managerial Implications

The findings of the study have some direct implications for brand managers. The results suggest that brand personality can generate consumer perceptions of trust and attachment towards the brand, which in turn facilitates relationship commitment with the brand. This posits the role of brand personality in building relationship with consumers. Thus, the brand managers should focus on the development of a unique brand personality that can positively influence the establishment of a long lasting consumer-brand relationship. They should use brand personality as a strategic tool to facilitate transitions (trust-attachment-commitment) of consumer-brand relationship. Additionally, the brand managers should take into consideration the interdependence amongst brand trust, brand attachment, and brand commitment, which will help them to achieve their goals in terms of consumer commitment to their brand. The more the consumers trust a brand, the more they are attached with it, which in turn generates their commitment to the brand. Therefore, companies must follow a promise centric approach in which conscious efforts should be taken to deliver whatever has been promised by the brand. Lastly, the brand managers should plan some activities to increase the level of consumer trust such as commitment for sustainable development, concern for consumers' interests, and ethical issues related to the brands. These innovative measures will serve as a foundation for the development of brand equity.

Limitations of the Study and Scope for Future Research

While the present study has added to the existing body of knowledge ; still, the study has some limitations. First of all, only one product was studied by the researchers, so the scope of generalizability is limited to the product selected. Future research could consider other brands in different categories of products. The study used a convenience sample of university students; future research studies can replicate this study using a diversified sample of consumers. Future research could also examine the applicability of findings in other countries. Lastly, the indirect effect of brand personality on brand equity through variables other than trust, attachment, and commitment (satisfaction, credibility, and loyalty intentions, for instance) could be studied and a new generalizable model could be constructed.

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