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Shrirampur- 413709, Dist. Ahmednagar.

BRANDING : CONSUMER RELATIONSHIP AND BEHAVIOR

Dr. S. R. Bakhale

C. D. Jain College of Commerce, Shrirampur

• ABSTRACT

The relationship between a brand and consumers is known to produce positive outcomes for both partners. Consumers develop relationships with diverse brands regarding brands as partners. Brands are humanized in the minds of consumers and therefore provide symbolic meanings and social and cultural value, which is beyond the utilitarian benefits. Following this paradigm, the purpose of this chapter is to show an overview of the research from customer relationship management to consumer-brand relationship and propose a theoretical model of consumer-brand relationship process. In this vein, the chapter begins with the conceptualization of customer relationship management. Then, the foundation, an overview of main theories, and the seminal models of consumer-brand relationship are shown. Finally, a model of consumer-brand relationship process is proposed, and insights for further research are provided.

• INTRODUCTION

Consumer-brand relationship (CBR) has attracted interest and relevance since late nineties of 20th Century. More and more organizations are interested in acquiring knowledge about how consumers relate to brands, why some brands are preferred to others and even loved. Thus, these and other issues associated to the bonds established between consumers and brands, which may be associated to goods, services, organizations, celebrities, destinations, cities, and even counties, have gained prominence amongst researchers and practitioners. Indeed, all types of organizations, profit or non-profit, are adopting customer-centric strategies, programs, tools, and technology for efficient and effective customer relationship management. Even tourism related public entities are realizing the need for in-depth and integrated tourist knowledge in order to build close cooperative and partnering relationships with their tourists. In fact, since Fournier (1998) suggested the metaphor of human relationships in their awarded article, and proposed the Brand Quality model, several other researchers and practitioners become more and more interested in understanding the mechanisms behind the relationship between a brand and consumers. The human relationship metaphor of marriage provides structure for the understanding of consumer–brand relationships phenomenon. Nevertheless, the Brand Quality model focuses on the relationship dimensions of love/passion, brand partner quality, intimacy, interdependence, commitment, self-connection, but it does not illustrate how these dimensions are related each other, in other words, it is not a causal relational model. Several studies have been analyzing how these and other relational constructs are related (e.g., Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005), as well as, antecedents and consequents of the relational constructs (e.g., Chang & Chieng, 2006;

Stokburger-Sauer, 2010; Tsai, 2011; Loureiro, Kaufmann, & Vrontis, 2012), or how to improve the measure of each construct (e.g., Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012).

CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

In the marketing literature the expression "customer relationship management lead to customer bonds. Nowadays, information technology allows the companies to focus on individual or one-to-one relationships with customers that integrate database knowledge (Peppers & Rogers, 1993). Therefore, Berry (1995, p. 25) proposed that relationship marketing can be seen as "attracting, maintaining, and – in multi-service organizations – enhancing customer relationships". This statement is according with other researcher in service marketing, such as Grönroos (1990a), Gummesson (1987). In fact, Grönroos (1990a, p. 138) states that "marketing is to establish, maintain, and enhance relationships with customers and other partners, at a profit, so that the objectives of the parties involved are met. This is achieved by a mutual exchange and fulfillment of promises". In this vein, exchange is no longer only transactional but evolved to relational and the role of marketing lies in the activities directed towards establishing, developing, and maintaining relationships with success (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Another important event in driving companies to adopt the CRM has been the Lean Production System and specially the Total Quality Manageme" (CRM) has been used) has been used to reflect a variety of themes and perspectives (Nevin, 1995). For example, CRM seeks customer retention and loyalty by using a variety of after selling tactics that nt (TQM) philosophy, which implies the relationship with suppliers and customers in implementing the program at all levels of the value chain. Just-in-time (JIT) and Materials-resource planning (MRP) have also made use of interdependent relationships between customers and suppliers. Furthermore, the process of establishing and maintaining the dyadic relationship between consumers and brands, which could evolve to multi-relationships, like in brand community, is studied in consumer-brand relationship.

MAJOR CONSTRUCTS INVOLVED IN CONSUMER-BRAND RELATIONSHIP

There is a growing interest among researchers and practitioners in consumer-brand relationship. The studies in this context involve concepts such as attitude strength (Krosnick et al., 1993), brand relationships (e.g., Fournier, 1998; Chang & Chieng, 2006), self-brand connections (e.g., Belk, 1988; Escalas & Bettman, 2003), brand loyalty (e.g., Oliver, 1980; 1999), consumers' emotional attachments to brands (Thomson, MacInnis, & Park 2005; Loureiro, Kaufmann, & Vrontis, 2012), consumer delight (e, g., Oliver, Rust, & Varki 1997; Loureiro & Kastenholz, 2011), the phenomenology of customer satisfaction (Oliver, 1980; Fournier & Mick, 1999), trust and commitment (e.g., Morgan & Hunt, 1994), brand image (Keller, 2003), brand personality (Aaker, 1997), brand community (e.g., Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander et al., 2002), brand cult (e.g., Brown et al., 2003), brand tribalism (Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009), and love in consumption contexts (e.g., Ahuvia, 2005; Albert, Merunka, & ValetteFlorence 2008; Carroll & Ahuvia 2006; Kamat & Parulekar 2007;

Keh, Pang, & Peng 2007; Shimp & Madden 1988; Whang et al. 2004; Yeung & Wyer 2005; Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012).

- **Brand loyalty, brand satisfaction, brand trust and brand personality**

    Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) examine two aspects of brand loyalty; purchase loyalty and attitudinal loyalty, as linking variables in the chain of effects from brand trust and brand affect to brand performance. However, three main streams of the research of loyalty may be distinguished: behavioral loyalty, attitudinal loyalty and composite loyalty (considering the aforementioned constructs). Consequently, in consumer research, the expression "customer loyalty" is often measured by indicators like the "intention to continue buying the same product", "intention to buy more of the same product" and "repeat purchase" (behavioral measures) or "willingness to recommend the product to others" (attitudinal indicator, reflecting product advocacy).(e.g., Rauyruen & Miller, 2007; Loureiro & Kastenholz, 2011). Caprara et al. (2001) examine mass-market brands to determine to what extent, in a consumer setting, human personality and brand personality (e. g., Aaker, 1997; Loureiro & Santana, 2010) are related. In fact, Aaker (1997, p. 347) define brand personality as "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand" and proposes five dimensions for brand personality, namely, sincerity (down-to-earth, honest, wholesome, and cheerful), excitement (daring, spirited, imaginative, up-to-date), competence (reliable, intelligent, successful), sophistication (upper class, charming), ruggedness (outdoorsy, tough).

- **Brand commitment**

    Research on relationship commitment shows two approaches: affective commitment and calculative commitment (Bendapudi & Berry, 1997; Hansen, Sandvik, & Selnes, 2003; Johnson et al., 2001; Sung & Campbell, 2009). Calculative commitment (Fullerton, 2003) captures the more rational, economic-based dependence on product benefits (Anderson & Weitz, 1992). Affective commitment is a more emotional factor related to the degree to which a customer identifies and is personally involved with a company or a brand which results in trust and commitment (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Loureiro, 2010).

- **Self connection brand**

    The expression "self connection" globally represents the associations and connections between consumers and brands, this is, the extent to which individuals have incorporated a brand into their self-concept. Escalas and Bettman (2003) focus on reference groups as a source of brand associations, which can be linked to one's mental representation of self to meet self-verification or self-enhancement goals. Later, Escalas and Bettman (2005) find that one reason for consumers to purchase brands lies in the construction of their self-concepts and form self-brand connections. Thereby, brands with images consistent with an in-group (group of reference) enhance self-brand connections

for all consumers. However, self-brand connections change as children move into adolescence (Chaplin & John, 2005).

- ## Brand community and brand tribalism

  Muniz and O'Guinn (2001, p. 412) introduce the concept of brand community as a "specialized, nongeographically bound community that is based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand". McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig (2002) analyze brand community from a customerexperiential perspective and proposed a customer-centric model of brand community that consists of four relevant relationships (community integration): customer-product relationship, customer-brand, customer company relationship, customer-customers/owners relationship. Later, Algesheimer, Dholakia, and Herrmann (2005) develop and test a conceptual model of how different aspects of customers' relationships with the brand community influence their intentions and behaviors (purchase, recommendation, membership duration, and participation).

- ## Consumer behavior and attitude

  The studies on consumer behavior and attitude are based on theories of social identity and organizational identification. Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) propose that strong consumer-company relationships often result from the consumers' identification with those companies. Aaker et al. (2004) report findings from a longitudinal field experiment examining the evolution of consumer-brand relationships. Aggarwal (2004) alludes that consumers use norms of interpersonal relationships as a guide in their brand assessments when they form relationships with the brands. Therefore, two relationship types are examined: exchange relationships (benefits are given to others to get something back) and communal relationships (benefits are given to show concern for other's needs).

- ## Brand love

  The research concerning brand love is dominated by the works from Ahuvia (2005), Carroll and Ahuvia (2006), and Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi (2012). Ahuvia (2005) investigates the possessions, activities, and objects that consumers love and reports the role and importance of loved objects and activities in structuring social relationships with brands. Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) propose the brand love construct to assess satisfied consumers' passionate emotional attachment to particular brands. Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi (2012) developed the brand love prototype and presented the brand love factor model.

- ## Brand cult and culture

  In this context it is possible to find research related to cross cultural studies and consumer-brand relationship and studies about consumer culture theory and consumer-brand relationship or cult (retro) brands. Therefore, Chang and Chieng (2006) develop a framework of consumer-brand relationships and conduct a cross-cultural comparative study of consumers at coffee chain stores. Thompson and Arsel (2004) develop the

construct of the hegemonic brandscape and study the intersection of global brands and local cultures. Then, Thomson et al. (2005) assess the cultural dimensions of the consumption cycle with their brands and provides an overview of the past twenty years of consumer research addressing the sociocultural, experiential, symbolic, and ideological aspects of consumption. In what concerns cult brands, Brown et al. (2003) show the importance of allegory (brand story), aura (brand essence), arcadia (idealized community), and antinomy (brand paradox).

- ## FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Further research should focus on: (1) improving the knowledge about the relationship among constructs; (2) typology of the strength of the relationship; (3) how the relationship evolves in line with the lifestyle cycle; (4) how technology (Internet) interferes in the relationship; (5) the moderated or casual effects of consumers' personality (trait of personality, self-esteem, age, gender), brand mythology, and lifestyle in their relationship with brands (6) the effect of the countries' social and cultural characteristics on the relationship. The more social side of brand relationship should regard social identity and brands, societal effects of brand relationships, relationships with cause brands. What about extreme and dysfunctional brand relationship, such as involving brand advocates, brand antagonists, and anti-brand movements, or addictions? Consumers' relationships with financial products, financial services, celebrities brands and entertainment brands, as well as, other sectors of activity are not yet well known. How to establish strategies based on the relationship with the consumer? That is, relationship-building strategies, relationship-based market segmentation, building relationship-sensitive corporate cultures, brand relationship metrics and dashboards.

- ## CONCLUSION

In this chapter was conducted in the field of consumer relationship, especially consume-brand relationship. The most relevant, theories, models, and the major related constructs so far were presented. Furthermore, a model showing an overview of the process behind the relationship between a brand and consumer was provided. However, the deep knowledge of the phenomenon of consumer-brand relationship and its causal relationships are not yet properly established. Therefore, more theoretical and empirical studies are needed. For the researchers this chapter provides insights about the foundations and evolution of consumer-brand relationship models and constructs, and suggests future directions in order to improve the knowledge in this field of research. The chapter also provides insights to practitioners, showing academic publications and more managerial publications and websites, where brand managers could continuously find information about how brands can evolve in building and strengthening emotional bonds between brands and consumers. Practitioners should be aware that create and maintain the emotional bonds is a continuous process. The close relationship between a brand and consumers could lead to a connection, a deep self and social identification with the brand. The mystery, the intimacy, the uniqueness, the

involvement based on past experiences, and all positive emotional connection lead to love. A consumer in love with a brand are more willing to be committed to that brand, forgiven less positive situations, advocate favorably, and willing to sacrifice for the brand beyond reason.

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