

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a detailed review of the relevant literature and to introduce the literature gaps and research questions. Primarily, the literature is structured around four sections. In the first section, a thorough review of the conceptual understanding of the consumer–brand relationships is presented. Specifically, a cross-disciplinary framework of the conceptualization of the relationship construct is presented. In the second section, the examination of some recent development in the area of consumer–brand relationships, including the models of consumer–brand relationships are reviewed. In the third major section, the conceptualization and operationalization issues of the construct are discussed. It serves as the basis for conceptualizing consumer relationship’s exclusively branding, the central construct of this study, and provides the major rationale for conceptualizing consumer–brand relationships in branding paradigm. The final section of this chapter briefly reviews the research gaps and possible research questions, which guide research objectives of the study.

Conceptualization of Consumer–Brand Relationships

Over the past two and a half decades, there have been a number of studies in branding literature for the conceptualization of the construct of consumer–brand relationships. This interest in this stream of literature initiated because of the fact that the term *relationship* as such is interesting and infiltrating (Patterson and O’ Malley 2006). Patterson and O’ Malley (2006) in their critical review of the brand relationship literature stated five major reasons that contribute to the consideration of the concept of consumer–brand relationships. First, for human beings, the concept of relationship is more intuitive and appealing. Second, the concept of brand relationships emerged out of the supposed failure of brand image research to predict consumer behavior. Third, excessive importance given by the researchers to branding loyalty construct since the last 40 years and the subsequent attempt to capture the exact nature of brand loyalty. Fourth, brand managers’ overwhelming consciousness to protect their assets during the turbulent and competitive environment. Finally, the

crucial factor that contributes the emergences of consumer–brand relationships is the introduction of the brand personality concept and its subsequent anthropomorphization of brands.

In brand management literature, considerable studies have been conducted to conceptualize consumer–brand relationships through establishing the anthropomorphous characteristics of brands, such as personality (Aaker 1997; Batra et al. 1993; Durgee 1988) and Charisma (Smothers 1993). This attempt of personification of brands has now reached its new height with the introduction of strong and deep-rooted interpersonal characteristics, such as love (Batra et al. 2012), attachment (Thomson et al. 2005; Park et al. 2012), and the integration of negative and positive aspects of emotional and nonemotional interpersonal characteristics (Park et al. 2013). In short, the majority of these extant literatures in consumer branding conceptualized the concept of consumer–brand relationship as analogous as interpersonal relationships by assuming anthropomorphous characteristics, which adds brands a character and allows to see the brand as a person who can engage in a mutual and reciprocal exchange relationship.

Blackston (1992) has the credit for the original development of consumer–brand relationship concept (Aaker 1994). In his conceptual paper, the author argued that brand relationships are the logical extension of brand personality, which is more or less similar to the relationship between people (Blackston 1992). In an observational note, Blackston (1992) conceptualized brand relationships as:

The concept of a relationship with a brand is neither novel nor outrageous. It is readily understandable as an analogue between brand and consumer-of that complex of cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes which constitute a relationship between two people (p. 80).

The majority of the conceptualizations of consumer–brand relationships in branding presented with the use of relationship metaphors.¹ The use of these relationship metaphors from interpersonal domain (particularly from high-involving human relationship, e.g., marriage) to branding domain facilitated to the enhancement and reinforcement of the relationship between consumer and brands. The human relationship metaphor of marriage functioned as a source category and established the ground rule and content for understanding relationship metaphor in a brand–consumer context. The use of these relationship metaphors helped the researchers to map three common characteristics across two disciplines, these are: interdependency, temporality and perceived commitment (De Wulf et al. 2001; Hendrick and Hendrick 2000; Hinde 1997; Oliver 1999). Interdependency explains that relationship involves a reciprocal exchange between active and interdependent relationship partners. In branding, context interdependency is between two active partners such as brand and consumer. Temporality means that relationship would not happen in an isolated manner, it is generated through a series of repeated actions. In branding

¹ Metaphors refer to “a literally false, declarative assertion of existential equivalence that compares two concepts or things, where one concept called the primary concept is claimed to be another, the secondary concept” (Hunt and Menon 1995).

context, temporality explains that relationships between brand and consumer happens only through a series of repeated interactions. Perceived commitment explains that relationship ranges across several dimensions and takes many forms, but they all provide possible benefits for their participants and therefore willing to continue a relationship. In branding context, perceived commitment explains that the relationship between brand and consumer may take several forms and types and this will ultimately lead to intention to stay with the brand. This mapping of common characteristics across disciplines using metaphors helped the researchers in branding to develop specific relationship constructs such as, brand commitment (BC), brand love, passion interdependency, and brand attachment (BA). To an extent, the use of metaphoric transfer also helped the marketing community to implement the brand relationship elements in brand building. Monga (2002) stated that the use of relationship metaphors in consumer–brand context facilitated the understanding of brand loyalty, in-depth information about consumer needs and wants, and thereby assisted companies to improve better products and marketing activities.

Followed by the above-mentioned qualities of interdependency, temporality, and perceived commitment, there were a series of conceptual and empirical works on the topic of consumer–brand relationships published in different contexts. Fournier (1998) in her conceptual paper used human relationship metaphors to explain consumer–brand relationships and stated that there exist relationship qualities between consumer and brands. Fournier (1998) extended these three qualities further into four conditions to exist to satisfy consumer–brand relationships. First, consumer–brand relationships exist when there exist reciprocal exchanges between brand and consumer. Second, the interactions between brand and consumers are purposive. Third, the relationships between brand and consumers take different forms and types. Finally, the relationships between brand and consumers are a process phenomenon; these relationships change according to contexts.

Backed by the above-mentioned four conditions, Fournier (1998) defines brand relationships as:

The brand person relationship is voluntary or imposed interdependence between a person and a brand, characterized by a unique history of interactions and an anticipation of future occurrences, that is intended to facilitate socio-emotional and instrumental goals of the participants, and that involves some types consolidating bond.

While extending the conceptualization, Nebel and Blattberg (2000) defined consumer-brand relationships as:

An integrated approach to establish, maintain, and enhance relationships between a brand and its customers, and to continually strengthen these relationships through interactive, individualized and value added contacts, and a mutual exchange and fulfillment of promises over a long period of time(p. 3).

Aggarwal (2004) stated that:

People sometimes form a very intimate bond with brands and, in some extreme cases, a passion that is often associated only with a close circle of friends and family(p. 87).

This advancement in understanding of the consumer–brand relationship, which is mainly from interpersonal literature, provides the researchers to conceptualize and investigate the ties between consumers and brands (Breivik and Thorbjørnsen 2008).

Operationalization of Consumer-Brand Relationships

The studies in consumer–brand relationship literature used different approaches for the operationalization of the construct. Aaker et al. (2004), Kaltcheva and Weitz (1999), Monga (2002), and Park and Kim (2001) followed a completely quantitative approach. At the same time, Fournier (1998), Ji (2002), Kates (2000), and Olson (1999) used in-depth interviews and text analysis as their data collection and analysis method. The focus of these studies varies from operationalizing the previous conceptualization through further exploration, scale development, identifying specific relationship constructs, examination of the identified relationship constructs in different contexts, and assessment of gender differences in consumer–brand relationship formation.

The first attempt to extend the work of Fournier (1998)² was from Goh (2002). In a follow-up study, Goh (2002) made an attempt to verify Fournier's (1998) brand relationship typology through following the mix of both qualitative and quantitative techniques and proposed an extended typology of consumer–brand relationships (named as “referents”). According to the author, the typology referents imply the relationship that is precipitated because of the reference groups influence or it emerged out of an actual or imaginary individual, conceived of having significant importance upon an individual's or behavior.

Studies were carried out to operationalize the construct through the development of scales to measure the construct. Kim et al. (2005) conducted a study, which aimed to develop a scale to measure brand relationship quality (BRQ), followed by Churchill's (1979) procedure. Followed by Fournier's (1998) conceptual framework, the authors used a series of in-depth interviews to confirm the dimensions of BRQ model. Items for measuring these dimensions were generated through past studies and later refined through a pilot study. A convenient sample of 361 respondents was used for final measurements. Using exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, the study confirmed the reliability and validity of the measures. The results of the study confirmed five dimensions of BRQ. The identified dimensions are: self-connective attachment, satisfaction, commitment, trust, and emotional intimacy.

In consumer–brand relationship, literature studies were conducted to identify and examine the alternative constructs to describe the strength of consumer–brand relationships. Kaltcheva and Weitz (1999) examined the role played by the dimensions

² Although Fournier's (1998) work is considered to be the base study for operationalization of consumer–brand relationship, the details of the study are not mentioned in this section of operationalization; instead it has been presented in models of consumer–brand relationships.

of consumer–brand relationships, such as mediation and reciprocity on the attributions for intention and selfishness that the consumers make during pleasant and unpleasant experiences with the brand. The authors defined mediation as the extent to which the relationship partner derives the benefit from the relationship itself rather than the product/brand. Reciprocity means the norm of reciprocity, which explains the extent to which relationship partner feel that the norm of reciprocity (equity or equality) is being present in their relationship. The authors followed a simulation study using 225 undergraduate students. The result of the study demonstrated that these two dimensions of relationship have an impact on the attributions for intention and selfishness.

Thomson and Johnson (2002) studied the role of a relationship orientation variable called attachment and examined the predictive and explanatory power BA on the satisfaction in consumers' brand relationships. The authors used two dimensions of attachment such as avoidance and anxiety from psychological literature and modeled it as predictors of satisfaction. The results of regression analysis supported that anxiety and avoidance were good and significant predictors of satisfaction.

Hess and Story (2005) came up with another relationship variable, called relationship commitment and proposed a model called trust-based relationship commitment model, in which relationship commitment was the major construct defined by personal and functional connections, which are in turn caused by trust and satisfaction. In their study, the authors modeled satisfaction as an antecedent to trust. The data were collected through an online survey using 4,000 customers. A structural equation modeling was used to validate the model. In this study, the authors found that satisfaction was a major antecedent to trust, but primarily contributes to functional connections. The results also supported that consumers' personal connection with the brand stems from brand trust.

Continuing with the same line of thinking, Swaminathan et al. (2007) synthesized two brand-related concepts such as self-concept connection and country-of-origin connection and stated that the consumer–brand relationship can be formed on the basis of individual (self-concept connection) or group-level connections (country-of-origin connection); it influences brand equity. When the consumer is high with self-concept connection, he/she will counterargue negative information, but this situation is greater when there is a presence of independent self-construal conditions. The country-of-origin will promote tolerance in the face of negative information under conditions of interdependent self-construal conditions.

Veloutsou and Moutinho (2009) examined the role of brand reputation and tribalism on the strength of consumer–brand relationships. Data were collected through a self-administered survey using 912 consumers. A regression analysis was applied to test the proposed model. The results supported that the brand tribalism is the most influencing predictor compared to brand reputation for building strong and deep-rooted consumer–brand relationships.

While studying the alternative constructs of relationships, there were attempts to see how the negative aspects of brand-related factors would influence the relationships with consumers. Huber et al. (2010) studied the role of brand misconduct on consumer–brand relationships. The authors defined brand misconduct as the behavior

of the brand that disappoints the consumers' expectations. Backed by congruence theory, the authors developed a model of consumer–brand relationships, in which the factors such as, functional congruence, actual and ideal self-congruence, partner quality, and BRQ were modeled as the antecedents to consumers' purchase intention. Data were collected through self-administered surveys using 219 respondents in Germany. The authors used a partial least square (PLS) technique to analyze the data. The results of the study support the fact that the brand misconduct is not an influencing factor in BRQ and purchase intention.

Since brand is considered to be an identification factor, Papista and Dimitriadis (2012) made an attempt to examine the concept of relationship quality and examined the link between relationship quality and consumer-brand identification through following a qualitative study. The results of the study showed support for the concepts such as satisfaction, trust, commitment, intimacy, and love in describing consumer BRQ. Consumer–brand relationship identification emerges as a distinct construct of cognitive nature.

There were studies in consumer–brand relationships, which examined the connection between the brand personality and brand relationships. The underlying postulation behind these studies were based on the assumption that if brand possesses the personality characteristics, which is more or less similar to human personality characteristics, then there exist consumer–brand relationships, which are more or less similar to interpersonal relationships. Smit et al. (2006) studied the role of brand personality in consumer–brand relationships and stated that there exist relationships between brands and its consumers. The study used a computer-assisted self-interviewing technique as the suitable method for data collection. The results of the study supported that in relationship building partner quality plays a crucial role and in some bands it is the relationship quality that keeps the relationship in the long run. Brands with exciting and unique personality qualify more likely for the relationship partner (Smit et al. 2006).

Hayes et al. (2006) added a new conceptualization in between brand personality and brand relationships. According to Hayes et al. (2006), “the brand personality-partner quality connection depends to a degree on the brand's perceived attractiveness. Furthermore, the specific role attractiveness plays in the relationship appear to vary across individual personality dimensions.” The authors modeled attractiveness as a moderator between the brand personality dimension and evaluations of the brand as a relationship partner. The study collected responses from the survey of 142 graduate and undergraduate students. The regression analysis revealed that brand personality dimension has a positive and significant impact on partner quality perceptions. It also found that the attractiveness of the brand varies across different personality dimensions. The relationship between personality and partner quality perceptions is influenced by brand attractiveness.

There were studies in consumer-brand relationship literature, which showed the importance of other interpersonal relationship constructs, such as BA and relationship norms for consumer–brand relationship formation. Zhou et al. (2012) in their study examined the intermediate mechanism that translates brand communities into the formation of consumer–brand relationships in the Chinese context. The study

collected responses through an online survey from 437 respondents. Using PLS, the results were analyzed. The results of the study support the fact that BA works as a full mediating variable between brand community commitment and BC and partial mediation between brand identification and BC.

Valta (2013) examined the role of relationship norms or “principles of right action binding upon the members of a group and serving to guide, control, or regulate proper and acceptable behavior” (Macneil 1980) on BRQ. The author considered only limited relationship norms with relevant consumer branding literature such as solidarity, reciprocity, flexibility, and information exchange. The authors used 510 university students as the study sample and applied a structural equation modeling technique to test the model. The results supported that the relationship norms do affect consumer-brand relationships.

The application consumer-brand relationship construct not only limited to consumer/product branding, but it extended to other areas, such as services branding. Sweeney and Chew (2002) studied the role of relationship metaphors in consumer services. Through following a detailed literature review and text-based analysis of case study data, the study supported the applicability of Fournier’s (1998) brand relationship model in service branding context. The study also found support for two additional dimensions in the consumer-brand relationships, such as dominance versus subordination and friendly versus hostile. The authors also proposed the typology of consumer-brand relationships based on the identified dimensions.

Carlson et al. (2009) studied the role of consumer-brand relationships in sports branding context. The study examined the role of personality dimensions such as, wholesome, charming, successful, imaginative, and tough, on a relationship variable called cognitive identification. The study also examined the mediating roles of prestige and distinctiveness. They conducted a survey using 162 university students. The data were analyzed using structural equation modeling technique. The results of the study supported that the personality dimensions would influence cognitive identification, but mediated through prestige and distinctiveness.

Nyadzayo et al. (2011) examined how the brand relationship can be used to leverage brand citizenship behavior and to improve brand equity in franchising. Apparently, the authors developed a new concept called franchise-based brand equity. The authors followed a qualitative research design, followed by a series of semistructured interviews. Data analysis was carried out qualitatively, which generated theoretical categories. The analysis helped the authors to show the significance of brand relationship management in franchising context and also show the relationship between brand relationship management to build franchise-based brand equity.

Recently, Xie and Heug (2012) examined the role of Fournier’s (1998) BRQ framework and its impact on hotel consumer’s behavioral intentions. The results showed that BRQ is applicable in the hotel industry and is also an influencing factor for consumer’s behavioral intention. These are all studies in branding, which supported the fact that the concept of consumer-brand relationship is also applicable in services branding.

There were context-specific studies in consumer-brand relationship literature aimed at the applicability of consumer-brand relationships, in which particular

country or different culture is the study context. J and Lu (2009), using interpersonal literature and relationship metaphors, developed a theoretical model of consumer–brand relationships in the Chinese context. The authors proposed a framework for consumer–brand relationships that consist of four basic types of relationships, namely “family member,” “good friend,” “cooperation partner,” and “acquaintance.” The study supported the role of relationship metaphors in consumer–brand relationship model building and using the same confirmed the validity of the consumer–brand relationship types.

Yet another attempt has been from Chang and Chang (2006), who made an attempt to build a framework of consumer–brand relationships by integrating an experiential view through conducting a cross-cultural comparative study in both China and Taiwan. Different from other studies, the study integrated not only emotional experience constructs but also the sense, think, act, and relate experiences. The study contributes to the consumer–brand relationship literature in three ways. First, the study contributes to the literature by specifying brand-associative network variables through the consideration of individual and shared experiences. Second, the study modeled four relevant variables, such as brand association, brand personality, brand attitude, and brand image, as mediating variables between brand experience and consumer–brand relationships. Third, different from previous studies, which focuses more on the effect, this study gave more emphasis to the establishment of consumer–brand relationships. The results supported the fact that all the moderating variables modeled in the study help to shape the establishment of consumer–brand relationships.

Saunders and Rod (2012) made an attempt to augment traditional investigations of consumer–brand relationships and suggested an alternative way to consider the same. The authors considered associative networks for uncovering consumer–brand relationship dimensions in New Zealand and supported the use of associative networks in brand relationships.

In consumer–brand relationship literature, there were attempts to identify the perspectives of how some particular individuals or groups develop relationships with brands. For example, Olson (1999) using a qualitative exploration identified the brand relationships of five women in the American context. The results supported by Fournier’s (1998) work identified the distinction in terms of consumer–brand relationships among married and unmarried women. Keats (2000) using a series of in-depth interviews examined the dynamics related to the brand relationships of 44 self-identified gay men within the North American social context. Ji (2002) using relationship metaphors in a qualitative data analysis setting, examined relationship forms and how relationships developed between the children and brands in the family setting. The detailed probing and analysis of stories about children’s relationships with brand showed that their (children) relationships with brands embedded in the social environments where children live and grow. Jevons et al. (2005) came up with a new way to understand relationship dimensions. The authors studied consumer–brand relationships in managers’ perspective and suggested different management strategies for different types of brand relationships. Zayer and Neier (2011) using a series of in-depth interviews examined the applicability of

consumer–brand relationship typology proposed by Fournier (1998) to a segment of heterosexual male shoppers of fashion and grooming products. The results of the study confirmed the majority of the consumer–brand relationship typology and supported the role of contexts in defining consumer–brand relationships. Hwang and Kandampully (2012) in their study examined the role of three relationship building factors, such as self-concept connection, BA, and brand love in context of younger consumer-luxury brand relationships, and supported the role of these three constructs in building younger consumer-luxury brand relationships. Recently, Sahay et al. (2012) examined the gender difference in consumer-brand relationships with respect to affect and cognition. The authors used a field experiment approach; the results supported the fact that both men and women form relationship with brands and men's relationships with brands are more oriented toward the cognitive approach and at the same time women are more affected-based.

There were studies in consumer–brand relationship literature to integrate the relevant consumer–brand relationship paradigms. Tsai (2011) integrated three relationship paradigms, such as BRQ, BA, and BC. Consequently, he developed a new model called Relationship Building for Strategic-Brand Management Model (RB-SBM). As part of validating the model, the authors administered a survey of 519 consumers of three international product brands. A structural equation modeling was carried out to validate the model. The results supported that the data fit well to the model and also the model having good predictive validity.

Models in Consumer–Brand Relationships

BRQ Model

Fournier (1998), based on a qualitative research using several interpersonal theories, introduced a model in consumer–brand relationship setting, called BRQ model. This BRQ model aimed to measure the strength and depth of consumer relationship with brands. Figure 2.1 shows the structure of the BRQ model.

For identifying the underlying dimensions of consumer–brand relationships, the author used a series of in-depth interviews with three women participants. The data analysis was carried out through detailed textual analysis of the transcripts and its coding. The results of detailed text analysis helped the authors to come up with the six dimensions of consumer–brand relationships. These six dimensions or facets are: partner quality, intimacy, behavioral interdependence, personal commitment, self-concept connection, and love/passion. These dimensions identified by the author explain the forms of relationships that exist between consumers and brands. During the analysis, the theoretical origin of behavioral interdependence traced back to Kelley and Thibaut's (1978) interdependence theory, and the self-concept construct originated from self-expansion model. Love/passion and personal commitments originated from the theories of attraction and RI Model (Rusbult 1980). It is considered

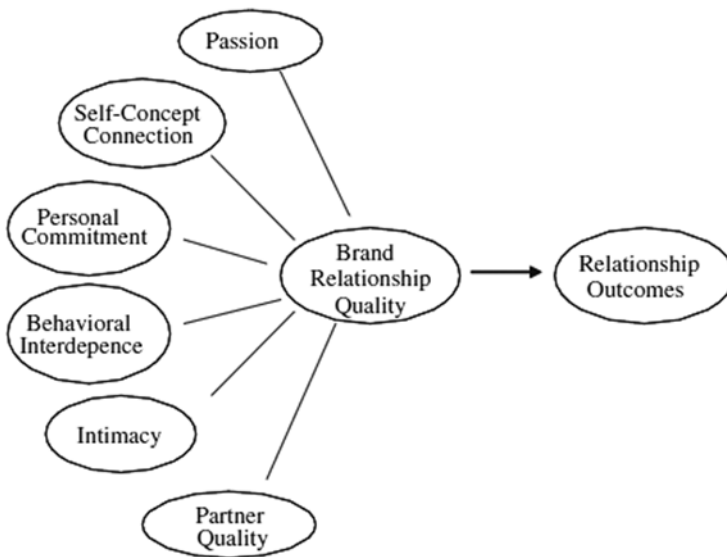


Fig. 2.1 BRQ Model. (Source: Fournier 1998)

that BRQ is theoretically richer and more informative, because it integrated several interpersonal theories (e.g., Breivik and Thorbjørnsen 2008). The brand relationship dimensions introduced by Fournier (1998) are given below in detail:

Love and passion This dimension is considered to be the core of all relationships; it is based on affective grounding supported brand relationship endurance. The presence of this dimensionality was evident from respondent statements that “something was missing,” when they (consumers) were not interacted with the brand for a while.

Self-Connection This dimension explains the extent to which brand delivers on important identity concerns, tasks, or themes, thereby expressing an important aspect of self.

Interdependence This dimension emerged out of three ways: (a) frequent brand interactions, (b) increased scope and diversity of brand-related activities, and (c) heightened intensity of individual interaction events.

Commitment Commitment has been defined as the intention of the consumer to behave in a manner that supports relationship longevity.

Intimacy When consumers bonded toward a brand, he/she develops strong elaborate knowledge structures around it supported by richer layers meaning that reflects intimacy.

Mixed Method Research Design

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