

# Self concept and perceived brand personality



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## INTRODUCTION

Marketers and advertisers have recognized that products as well as services have symbolic images. These images are often more important than even the actual physical attributes and characteristics, to a product's success (Aaker, 1991; Triplett, 1994). Marketers have thus tried creating images for their brands so that they are positioned to fit a distinct market segment occupied by no other brand. They aim at creating a brand image that is in congruence with the self-image of the target consumers (Aaker and Biehl, 1993; Kapferer, 1992)

This research has been done to test the relationship between consumers' self-concepts and relevant aspects of their consumer behaviour with the perception of brand personality that they have with respect to three brands of sportswear. The congruence between these two aspects has been studied.

It is a well known fact that consumer products have significance that goes beyond their utilitarian, functional and commercial value (Cziki-szentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Levy, 1959; Mick, 1986). Bhat and Reddy (1998) have said that brands have both functional as well as symbolic meaning for customers.

Onkvisit and Shaw (1987) suggested that self-concept is significant and relevant to the study of consumer behaviour as many purchases made by consumers are directly influenced by the image individuals have of themselves. This view has been reinforced by a number of other researchers (for example Feinberg et al., 1992; Schwer and Daneshvary, 1995; Sirgy and Ericksen, 1992).

## **RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES**

Self concept may be defined as “ the totality of one’s thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object.” (Sirgy, 1982; Wily, 1961). The self concept is a cognitive structure which in turn is associated with many emotions and feelings. It is also postulated that self concept is the knowledge of oneself which includes the driving thrust of other behaviours. (Zinkham and Hong, 1991). Grubb and Grathwohl (1967), building upon the theory of individual self enhancement (Rogers, 1951) , proposed that self concept is formed in an interaction process between an individual and the people around him, and the individual shall strive to enhance the self concept in due course of the process.

Traditionally, it was assumed that a person has a stable set of personality traits and therefore he or she should behave in a similar fashion across various contexts (Aaker, 1999; Sirgy, 1982). The above assumption has been challenged at various points of time in the last couple of years. Individuals can have multiple selves (Markus and Kunda, 1986; Markus and Nurius, 1986) where in they act varyingly with different customers and under various situations. The basic idea behind this is that different personality traits can be accessed differently in different situations (Aaker, 1999; Markus and Kunda, 1986).

Consumer behavior identifies Self Concept as a multidimensional concept consisting of the following five components: the ideal self, the apparent self, the social self, the perceived self and the actual self (Burns, 1979; Markins, 1979; Rosenberg, 1979 and Sirgy 1981, 1982, 1986 ). The various concepts are described by Markins (1979) at length. Each of them is described as “ the

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perceived self is how one sees oneself; the social self is how a person thinks others perceive them; the ideal self is the model person one aspires to be; and the apparent self being how the people actually see the person. The actual self, hence, is the composite of all the aforementioned self concepts.”

The multidimensional self concept, as explained above, could be used to explain an individual’s behavior with reference to reference groups, salespersons and competing brands. This, in turn, could be utilized by marketers to design and subsequently tweak their marketing campaigns to cater to the target segments classified as per their self concepts.

The aforementioned point was substantiated by a number of studies conducted over the years. Schiffman and Kanuk (2000) proposed that the one’s self perceptions are closely related to one’s personality in the sense that the individual tends to buy brands whose personalities closely correspond to individual’s own self images. Consumers tend to purchase brands whose personalities are perceived to be congruent with one’s own personality (Aaker, 1999; Kassarian, 1971; Sirgy, 1982).

## **Brand Personality**

Aaker (1997) defines Brand Personality as the set of human characteristics that consumers associate with a brand. Brand personality, by means of the traits associated with it, provides the consumer additional reasons to connect with a brand (Keller, 1998). Brand Personality provides an identity for consumers that conveys symbolic meaning for themselves and to others (Holman, 1981; Solomon, 1983). Aaker used the “ Big Five” Personality Model to come up with a framework that consisted of five brand personality

dimensions. These dimensions were: sincerity (wholesome, honest, down to earth) , excitement (exciting, adventurous, daring) , competence (intelligent, confident), sophistication (charming, glamorous, smooth), and ruggedness ( strong, masculine).

The NK Malhotra Scale (1981) also supports the measurement of the brand personality by means of measuring the product concepts.

To the extent that different brands can develop different personalities, they can be differentiated in the minds of the consumer and subsequently, the choice preferences of the customer can be altered (Freling and Forbes, 2005; Crask and Laskey, 1990). It was McCracken (1986) who went on to suggest that consumers might search for brands whose personalities match their own self concept.

Brand Personality in sport has become a hot topic in the last few years ( Gladden and Funk, 2002; Gladden and Milne, 1999; Parent and Seguin, 2008). In addition to concentrating primarily on the athlete's personality, many studies have focused on the development of Brand Personality for a lot of sports brands or equipments (Gladden and Funk, 2002; Gladden and Milne, 1999; Parent and Seguin, 2008).

Brand Personality in Sport is affected by a variety of factors including : packaging, distribution, communication strategies (Gwin & Gwin, 2003), consumer interaction with the brand (2005) etc.

All the aforementioned strategies have to be taken into mind before designing a marketing campaign for sports goods or sportswear.

## **Self – Image Congruity**

Self congruity indicates the degree of similarity between a consumer's self image or self concept and that of a brand. It is the degree of consistency between the self image and the brand image (Sirgy, 1992).

The significance of self-concept lies in the fact that in a lot of cases what a consumer buys is largely influenced by the image or concept that the consumer has of himself or herself (Zinkham and Hong, 1991). The consumers, in effect, use products to display their self concepts to themselves (Sirgy, 1982; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1988).

Since purchase and consumption are good enough media of self-expression, therefore consumers put in an effort to purchase and consume products whose image matches those of theirs which results in Self image Product image congruity , better known as “ Self-image congruity”.

Congruency impacts are desirable as they affect a consumer's self image in a positive manner. On the other hand, inconsistencies and incongruities are likely to result in the feeling of inadequacy and dissatisfaction with the choices made (Johar and Sirgy, 1991; and Sirgy and Su, 1992). The above study has been followed by various studies that substantiate the aforementioned postulates. Previously conducted researches indicate that self - image congruity can influence consumer's purchase intentions and their final purchase decisions (Ericksen, 1996; Mehta, 1999). Ericksen (1996), in a study conducted for a European automobile manufacturer, figured out that a relationship did exist between Self image Congruity and the final product purchased.

Products that are conspicuous in nature and require a strong brand image / personality might lend heavily to the self concept (Mehta, 1999; Zinkham and Hong, 1991). However, the above assumption made is not a given across all product categories. The self image congruity theory has been tested across various product categories. Some of these product categories include : shoes, car, clothing, beer etc.

### Measurement of Self Concept

Traditionally, the self concept could be measured by using the semantic differential scale or Likert type scale. (Malhotra, 1981; Sirgy et. al 1997; Wylie 1981). The self concept of the individual using the given Likert scale is obtained. Similarly, the individual's perception of the Brand Personality is obtained by asking him to rate the Brand on certain parameters. By comparing the two scores, the gaps or matches between the person's self concept and his or her perception of the brand personality.

The NK Malhotra scale was developed in 1981 to measure self concepts, product concepts and person concepts. The scale was developed on certain sound theoretical considerations which were obtained directly from the work of Osgood, Suci and Tannenbaum (1957). The author selected a semantic differential scale on the reference made in a study which read " the semantic differential scale has enjoyed a popularity in market research that is unmatched by any other psychological scaling process"( Green and Tull 1978, p. 191). An initial pool of 70 items was developed to measure the self concept which was shortened down to 27 items after independent evaluations by 4 judges. After conducting surveys with two samples of 167

students and 187 students each regarding self concepts and automobiles and self concepts and actors respectively, a factor analysis was conducted on the 27 items. This was followed by a cluster analysis and subsequently a regression analysis to fit these 27 items into a reduced multi-dimensional scale. At the end of it, a scale of 15 items was obtained which came to be known as the NK Malhotra scale.

However, Sirgy et al. 1997 was critical of the traditional methods to compute the self concept and brand personality. The critiques included:

The usage of discrepancy scores

The possible use of irrelevant images

The probable use of compensatory decision rule

Sirgy et . al, 1997 therefore subsequently proposed an alternative method to evaluate the individual's self concept. The alternate method computed the self-image congruence directly rather than indirectly measuring it through the use of product user images and self images. The predictive validity of the new method conducted under six different surveys provided significant support for the relatively higher predictiveness of the new method over the older one.

## **HYPOTHESES**

H1: There is correlation between Self Image and Brand Personality

H2: The congruity between Self Image and Brand Personality influences buying behaviour



## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In conducting this research, it was necessary to find physically equivalent products with different brand names. This situation was found to pertain in the sportswear brands which were more or less identical in design and usage but were offered to the customers under different brand names. The three brands used were Nike, Reebok and Adidas.

### **Sample**

The population used for the research consisted of post graduate students who had purchased one of these brands at least once in the past six months.

The questionnaire was floated on the web. After filling up the self concept scale, the respondents were shown the advertisements of the brands before they filled up the Brand personality scales for the respective brands.

A total of 168 useful responses were received. All responses were used for the purposes of data analysis.

The research instrument included 15 traits for each of the four parameters being measured, viz. self-concept and the brand personality for the three brands taken for the study. All of these were scored on scales of one to seven.

In the initial phase, respondents were asked to rate themselves on the scale. Then, they were shown the advertisements of each of the three brands which were part of the study, and the respondents were asked to rate each brand on the scale, considering the brands as persons.

After a time gap, respondents were questioned about their choice among the three brands if they would be making a purchase decision, and their responses were recorded.

The analysis on the collected data was done in four stages:

Factor Analysis was conducted on the 15 items of the scale for all the four parameters under measurement, namely Self-Concept and Brand Personality for the three brands to find out the factors

Canonical Correlation was performed between the self-concept factors and the brand personality factors to identify which self-concept factors are related to which of the brand personality factors

The responses were tested for Congruence with respect to each brand with the respondent's self concept

Finally, Logistic Regression was performed to gauge the impact of self-brand congruity on purchase decisions

## **ANALYSIS**

### **Factor Analysis**

The scale designed by Naresh K. Malhotra, which is used for measuring self-concept and brand personality, is a 15-point scale. The 15 points constituting the scale are as below:

Congruence studies have been performed earlier in the west, but this study gives an insight of the impact of congruity on purchase decisions in an Indian

context. From the marketers' perspective, the results of this study have multiple ramifications.

It will help marketers segment the market and target their promotions effectively. It also reveals which traits play a more important role in influencing purchase decisions in case of each brand. Thus, it identifies the "differentiating attributes" in terms of creating consumer perception for each brand. Similarly, which parameters do not create an impact strong enough to influence purchase decisions can also be identified.

Hence, the study can also serve to gauge the impact of promotional campaigns.

Finally, this study helps in understanding the behavioural aspect of consumers of sports equipments.

## **LIMITATIONS**

The main limitation of this study was that it relied on a convenience sample of university students, not necessarily representative of all university students or the general population. The sample was also skewed with more men than women. Results of this study should not be generalized beyond the group of students in the sample.

The use of students may have introduced a bias of greater homogeneity of perceptions of self than might exist for a broader based population. The three branded products selected for the test limited the general applicability of the results.

The scale used is the N. K. Malhotra scale developed in 1981. Its relevance in the present day is an issue of contention.