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Article

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Consumer Intentions to Perform Difficult Behaviors: Role of Brand-Self Connection, Prominence and Relationship Length

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Abstract

Creation of connections and memory nodes between the brand and self can encourage consumers to engage in relationship sustaining behaviors with the brand. Literature documents the phenomena of interest for rather simple behaviors i.e. purchase (actual or intentions); however, there is lack of systematic study on gauging consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors (CIPDB) through brand-self connection and brand prominence independently. This paper investigates direct impact of brand-self connection and brand prominence on CIPDB. It also investigates the moderation of relationship length in these two direct relationships and moderation of brand prominence in the self-connection- CIPDB relationship. The study uses two different product types, identity and instrumental product. The survey includes 297 users of the two product types. The study opens up the new horizon of product-type contingency in studying consumer behavior. Moreover, the findings are helpful for managers to understand how and what level of self-connection and prominence is required for creating necessary consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors in the favour of the brand, keeping in view the type of product they are dealing in.

Keywords: brand-self connection, brand prominence, relationship length, consumer intentions, self-congruency, difficult behaviors.

1. Introduction

Creating and sustaining long term relationships with customers is the most challenging task in today's world. In this era, marketers grow their businesses by engaging consumers in multiple types of difficult behaviors in favour of the brand rather than simple purchase related behaviors. These multiple behaviors include; waiting to buy the brand rather than alternative options (Johnson and Rusbult, 1989), defending the brand when others speak poor of it, referring the brand to others, paying premium for the brand (Thomson et al., 2005; Van Lange et al., 1997), forming brand communities etc. Many studies have been conducted on measuring the behavioral intentions (Cronin et al., 2000; McKnight, 2002; Thomson et al., 2005; Zeithaml et al., 1996). There have been rare studies that focus on these *consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors* (CIPDB), the most recent

systematic study on these consumer intentions is by Park et al., (2010). They empirically study a hierarchy of behaviors developed on the basis of perceived difficulty with which each of the behavior is performed.

Consumers perceive that the brands possess certain personality traits which are congruent to their own personality (Chaplin and John, 2005; Park et al., 2006, 2010). This concept of *brand-self connection* is derived from 'Self-Expansion Theory' which states that consumers have an inbuilt desire for expansion of their self and that's why they form close relationships (Aron et al., 1997). Therefore, they use brands to explain their concept of self to others, ultimately forming brand-self connections (Belk, 1988; Kleine et al., 1995; Sirgy, 1982; Solomon, 1983; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1988). The more the consumer is connected with the brand or the more the brand is likely to trigger self-enhancement, the more he is willing to go for behaviors (Seo and Scammon, 2014) in terms of sharing his resources with the brand. Same might be true for the CIPDB. This might be an oversimplified analysis of a complex situation. Because now we believe that all of the brands cannot be sold on emotional basis as a mean of reflecting consumer self; many brands are sold because they help consumers to fulfill their functional goals or tasks (Mittal, 2006).

Products are classified into two broad categories; *identity product*, which has element of psychological satisfaction and 'representation' meaning for consumers to show their self-concept to others (Park et al., 2006; Swann, 1990) and *instrumental product*, which consumers acquire for achieving a certain goal and the product use enables them to enhance their efficiency, capability and performance (Bandura, 1997; Smith and Walker, 1999).

Consumers in the present time are bombarded with many options; hence marketers are striving to achieve *brand prominence* in consumer thoughts; to be shown-up in required time. Not all the brands are present in consumer brain with equal prominence. Thoughts and feelings towards brands vary in terms of frequency and ease of retrieval (Park et al., 2010; Romaniuk and Sharp, 2004). These brand memories are liable for variation in brand retrieval when consumer undergoes decision making process. More prominence calls for increased chances of brand showing up in relevant situation (Park et al., 2010; Romaniuk and Sharp, 2003, 2004) and more tendency of the consumer to perform difficult behaviors.

We have learnt that strong connection between self and the brand and prominent thoughts about the brand can lead to enactment of difficult behaviors in favour of the brand. Park et al. (2010) find that brand attachment (taking brand-self connection and brand prominence as two dimensions) can influence the consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors. In the next step, this might be interesting to know that whether or not; individually brand-self connection and brand prominence can drive consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors. Literature at hand illustrates that if a consumer is emotionally attached to a brand and thoughts and feelings about the brand reside in his active memory, then this prominence of thoughts can lead to a disproportionately more influence on consumer decision (Alba and Marmorstein, 1987). However, there is no empirical evidence on the moderation role of brand prominence in relationship of brand-self connection with consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors. Existing literature shows that *relationship length* can count for deeper self-brand connection and more chances of retrieval. However, there has been inadequate work in investigating the

contingent effect of relationship length upon the relationship between brand-self connection/prominence and consumer intentions.

Previous work has not incorporated different product types for gauging consumer intentions to perform difficult behavior through brand-self connection and brand prominence. Work done by Park et al. (2010) on measuring combined effect of brand-self connection and brand prominence on consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors assumes that brand prominence may be less important when brands are identity based, whereas results may differ for an instrumental product. Understanding of phenomenon is incomplete for variables of interest, for different product types.

Based on the above elaborations, the current study aims at empirically investigating the hypothesized relationships for two different product types i.e. reflecting the identity product and instrumental product. The study attempts to find (a) the impact of brand-self connection and brand prominence on consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors (b) the moderation role of brand prominence in relationship of brand-self connection and consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors (c) the moderation role of relationship length in relations between brand-self connection and brand prominence with consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors. The study contributes in consumer behavior literature and opens the new horizon of product-type contingency for researchers. In the following sections, the paper exhibit theoretical background of the study, then methodology is presented and further findings, conclusions and implications are revealed.

2. Main Concepts and Literature

2.1 Consumer Intentions to Perform Difficult Behaviors

Consumers have relationships with the brands, due to which they make their resources readily available for the brand (Cronin et al., 2000; Lin, 2007; McKnight, 2002; Park et al., 2006; Shah et al., 2012). Behavioral intentions are conceptualized along a hierarchy depicting levels of difficulty (Thomson et al., 2005); lowest level involves simple behaviors such as mere search for the brand, rather higher level involves brand preference, further higher level involves behaviors such as waiting for the brand and disregarding alternatives, ignoring brand calamities (McCullough et al., 1998), maintaining bond with the brand (Drigotas and Rusbult, 1992) and at highest point, consumer is ready to pay price premiums, lend his financial resources in brand's parent company, involvement in brand communities etc which display noteworthy differences in consumer behavior, attitudes and values (Flurry et al., 2014).

2.2 Brand-Self Connection

Every human being has a concept of 'self' which refers to how he thinks about himself. Consumers utilize those products and brands which help in communicating their concept of self; therefore, a brand-self connection is formed (Belk, 1988; Klein et al., 1995; Sirgy, 1982; Solomon, 1983; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1988). Consumers use brands for showing their individuality (Ball and Tasaki, 1992; Kleine et al., 1993; Richin, 1994), releasing their anxiety, highlighting, strengthening and securing their self (Ball and Tasaki, 1992; Belk, 1988; Fournier, 1998; Proksch et al., 2013; Richin, 1994). They have feelings of 'brand love'; a parasocial relationship for which they show positive word of mouth and purchase intentions and they understand (consciously or unconsciously) that a particular brand is coupled to their self (Belk, 1988; Goffman, 1959). When brand is cued, some immediate beliefs and views about the brand are induced which consumer

matches for congruency with his self-image (Birlwell, 1968; Dolich, 1969; Gardner and Levy, 1955) and experiences with the brand form schematic representations of personal relevance to the brand in consumer brain (Berman and Sperling, 1994). Research in psychology demonstrates that people form emotional bonding with others (Weiss, 1988) and same is for the brands, having an in-built hot effect (Mikulincer and Shaver, 2007; Park et al., 2010; Thomson et al., 2005). This fulfills their self-needs (Escalas and Bettman, 2003; Gawronski et al., 2007) such as self-verification i.e. exhibiting individual's 'I'; who they are (Dolfsma, 2004; Eckhardt and Houston, 1998) and self-enhancement i.e. expressing core identity (McAdams, 1996; Murray, 2002; Park et al., 2006) and/or trait-centered self-image (Baumgartner, 2002; Morgan, 1993; Sirgy, 1982).

2.3 Brand Prominence

Brand prominence; originated from concept of 'attitude' (Krech and Crutchfield, 1948), refers to the positive thoughts and feelings about the brand residing in 'top of mind' of the consumer's brain. All of an individual's belief do not stand out with equal prominence in his subconscious brain and vary in two ways 1) the ease and 2) the frequency with which they come to mind (Park et al., 2010; Romaniuk and Sharp, 2004). Prominence indicates the likelihood that the brand will come to the forefront of consumer's mind at some point in time (Sutherland, 1993), rather at right time (Ajzan and Fishbein, 1980; Alba and Chattopadhy, 1986; Fazio, 1990). This prominence is in the form of memory structures in human brain (Keller and Davey, 2001), developed in terms of quality and quantity of structures (Romaniuk and Sharp, 2004) and is evident in the form of short-term and long-term memory. Consumers process and track the record of brand exposures (Hasher and Zacks, 1984; Romaniuk and Sharp, 2004), similarly they form memories when they undergo brand experiences (Park et al., 2007). As brain has limited processing ability (Lynch and Srull, 1982; Miller, 1956) so more brand exposure means disproportionately more influence on consumer decision (Alba and Marmorstein, 1987) and more memories, which are stronger than mere thoughts (Carlson and Smith, 1996). These episodic memories help in accessibility from long-term memory (Guido, 1998).

2.4 Product Classification

Consumers buy various brands or products not only to satisfy their basic needs, rather they have deep hidden motives. Therefore brands/products are divided into two types of categories; identity and instrumental products. *Identity products* fulfill the esteem needs (Greenwald et al., 1988); provide intrinsic value to the consumers to represent their desired image (Lo'Real, Omega etc.) or depict their association with a certain group (Alumni, Red Cross, Body shop etc.). This gives consumers internal satisfaction (Baumeister et al., 1989) and strengthens positive self-identity (Rubinstein and Parmelee, 1992). *Instrumental products* are those which provide extrinsic value to customers, a mean for functional assistance in achieving certain goal, efficiency, capability, self-confidence and better performance (Bandura, 1997; Park et al., 2010; Smith and Walker, 1999; Solomon, 2007). Congruency with Instrumental products has impact on consumer perceptions (Paasovaara et al., 2011) and they vary in grades of instrumentality which starts from fulfilling general tasks to a possible end-in-itself along the chain, reaching to the one's sense of self (Park et al., 2006).

2.5 Self-Expansion Theory and Behaviors

Psychologists say that individuals have an inbuilt desire for self-expansion and that's why they form close relationships (Aron et al., 1997). Self-expansion is not necessarily a conscious act, it starts anytime and forces individuals to expand and grow throughout their life span in order to stay satisfied with their lives (Aron et al., 1998). People include elements of others in their concept of self (Aron et al., 2004); hidden motives could be intrinsic or extrinsic. These motives affect willingness to purchase (Hansen et al., 2012). Brands also have personality same like human beings so consumers include them in their self-concept as well. This is consistent with self-congruity theory (Sirgy, 1982) which states that consumers tend to form relationships with brand which are in congruence to their self-concept. Park et al. (2010) expanded the theory by stating that as a result of self-brand congruency, consumers share resources with brands. These include social resources; such as defending the brand when others speak poor of it, preferring the brand and considering it ideal (Branaghan and Hildebrand, 2011) while ignoring alternatives (Johnson and Rusbult, 1989), financial resources; such as willingness to pay premium price for the brand (Thomson et al., 2005) or invest more in that product category as compared to other categories and time resources; such as willingness to involve in brand communities and brand promotion using social media (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995) and engage in revitalizing behaviors for continuing strong relationship with the brand (Aron et al., 1992; Mikulincer, 1998).

3. Hypotheses

Consumer intentions reflect his state of mind regarding his decision making approach (Sproles and Kendall, 1986). We have learnt that this approach is influenced by the connection/congruency a consumer has with the brand which enable him to reflect his self-concept (Park et al., 2006) or enhance his functional efficacy (Vijayasarathy, 2003). Consumers who feel more connection/overlapping between their self-concept and brand concept feel high level of love for the brand and are likely to perform more difficult behaviors along the hierarchy as compared to consumers with less brand-self connection. Intentions are not compelled by just feelings for a particular brand; rather they are also influenced by consumer's feelings for other brands in the consideration set (Porter, 1974). Less significant work is done on finding the prediction role of brand-self connection for consumer behavioral intentions which leads to the first hypothesis:

- **H₁:** Brand self-connection is positively associated with consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors.

Brand prominence enables the brand to be at the top of consumer's mind whenever behaviors are enacted. A prominent brand in consumer's brain can harbour purchase intention or future use in a more clear and relentless way than a brand which is less prominent (Barnard and Scriven, 1997). Brand prominence is an element of brand equity which indicates the positive differential effect a brand has on consumer responses (Ailawadi et al., 2003). Brand prominence has many effects in terms of consumer responses such as noticing the brand promotions, retrieving it when others talk about related product category, speaking in favour of the brand etc. There is less significant work on determining the prediction role of brand prominence for consumer intentions which creates a need for investigating the second hypothesis:

- **H₂:** Brand prominence is positively associated with consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors.

Consumers include brands in their self and hence form a strong bonding with brands. However if thoughts and feelings about the brand become in the top of mind awareness then this could possibly have disproportionately more influence on consumer decision making (Akcura et al., 2004; Alba and Morstein, 1987). Study by Park et al. (2010) on a brand attachment (taking brand-self connection and brand prominence as two dimensions) give rise to the assumption that when brand is identity based, brand related thoughts play a little role in influencing consumers to perform difficult behaviors; this is because emotionally complex feelings are involved in bonding with identity product, so prominence of thoughts is already high as self-activation and brand activation occurs at the same time. It may be assumed that for instrumental products, consumers are likely to perform difficult behaviors more consistently when relationship includes functional based self-connection as well as there is prominence of brand related thoughts and feelings, as compared to the brands with less prominence. There is no empirical evidence for the moderation role of brand prominence in variables of interest which gives rise to the third hypothesis:

- **H₃:** Brand prominence moderates the relationship between brand self-connection and consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors such that the relationship is stronger for more brand prominence than for less brand prominence.

Study demonstrates that there is a difference between the outcomes of long term versus short term relationship (Grayson and Ambler, 1999). Positive association exists between age of relationship and level of commitment, trust, and relationship performance (Anderson and Weitz, 1989; Brown et al., 1995; Doney and Cannon, 1997; Ganesan, 1994; Kumar et al., 1995a; Verhoef et al., 2002). With the passage of time, as other people become part of self, individuals deepen their knowledge and familiarity about them (Dirks and Ferrin, 2002). Relationship length determines one's level of confidence/certainty in evaluating his partner (Swann and Gill, 1997). Increased certainty affects consumer satisfaction and thus his purchase intentions positively (Tudoran et al., 2012) and encourages him to perform other difficult behaviors for a brand. This may be less for identity products as highly emotional involvement may lead to blind trust; however it is assumed that for instrumental products, confidence of evaluations matter more which is developed over time. On the contrary, study by Levin et al. (2006) states that length of relationship does not matter directly in determining a person's trust in another party; rather the association involves curvilinear complex drives. Inadequate work is at hand in determining the moderation role of relationship length in brand-self connection and consumer intentions' relationship, therefore the fourth hypothesis states that:

- **H₄:** Relationship length moderates the relationship between brand self-connection and consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors such that the relationship is stronger for longer relationship length than for shorter relationship length.

Previous literature states that when a consumer experiences the brand, an episode is created in his mind and then multiple episodes are created as the experience with the brand increases (Sia et al., 1999), and hence makes up level of prominence for a brand. This bunch of traces (associative schematics) develops over time and hence brands vary

in terms of their thought frequency and retrieval ability. Consumers evaluate brand on the basis of overall brand information (Raggio et al., 2014); more is the coherent episodic memories; more is the brand's ability to be retrieved in a given situation to affect consumer decision making. Prominence leading to retrieval from long term memory is of more interest for marketers (Guido, 1998). It may be less workable for identity product as sensitivity of relationship with brands opted for reflecting self-concept might enable the brand to reside strongly in long term memory whereas for instrumentality products, brand retrieval capability from long term memory is may be, directly associated with the age of relationship consumer has with the brand which makes it prominent in consumer's brain so that retrieval is done in a given situation for performing difficult behaviors. There is lack of considerable work on determining the moderating role of relationship length in determining the relationship between brand prominence and consumer intentions. Hence we expect the fifth hypothesis states:

- **H₅:** Relationship length moderates the relationship between brand prominence and consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors such that the relationship is stronger for longer relationship length than for shorter relationship length.

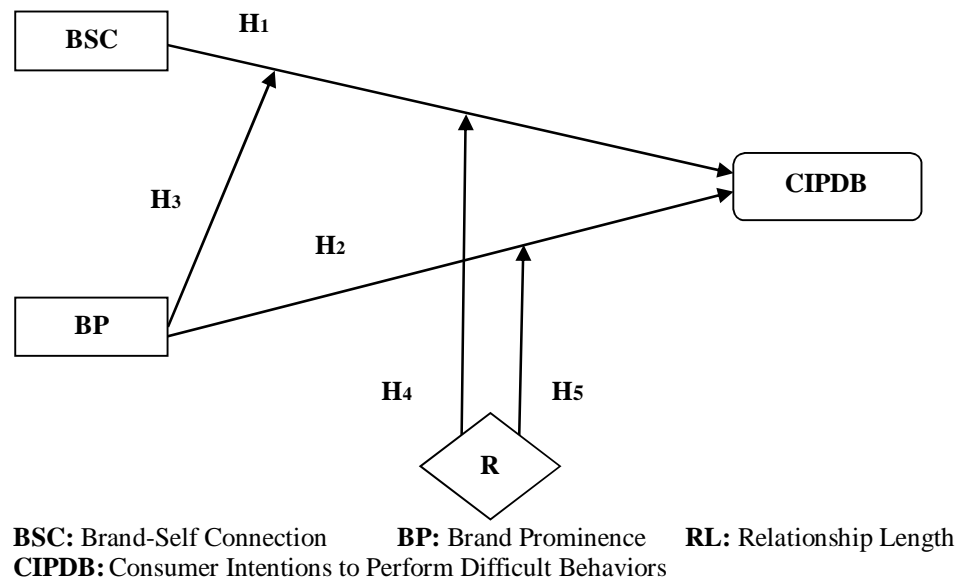


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

4. Methodology

4.1 The Sample

After developing the questionnaire, a pretesting in the pilot study is done and finds no item ambiguity. The hypotheses are tested for two products entirely different in nature i.e. iPhone (an identity product) and Head and Shoulders (an instrumental products). With regard to the sample size we relied on prevailing judgment practices. There are 3 independent variables (parameters=P) to explain a single dependent variable. According to one formula, often referred, the sample size for fitting a regression line should be

greater than $50+8P$, (i.e. $50 + 8 \times 3 = 84$). According to a more conservative approach, minimum sample for regression line should be $104 + P$ (i.e. $104 + 3 = 107$). The expected participants are students with homogenous age grouping and keeping in view the similar studies in consumer behavior, we concluded that a sample of 140 to 150 consumers for each of the selected product may sufficiently serve our purpose.

Researchers believe that students can be effectively utilized to obtain and collect information pertaining to basic psychological processes. They are able to give appropriate, useful and valuable information pertaining to consumer research and there is no reason to believe that the results obtained by collecting data from students will be any different from the results obtained by collecting data from “real people” (Kardes, 1996). Moreover information will be collected from students, about the brands they are currently consuming or had been consuming in the past.

4.2 Data Collection

The students of business administration in various universities of Lahore who are using or have used the two products are the target populations. No sampling frame is available for both the populations. There are 28 degree awarding institutions and most of these have business administration departments. We randomly selected two business administration departments expecting to recruit the desired number of participants. At first, the author visited all classes to identify all users of the two selected products (91 for iPhone and 86 for Head and Shoulders shampoo). In order to improve the sample size, the selectees falling in this criterion are requested to become volunteers for identification of further consumers to generate more *snowball* participants. This fetch us a total of 325 responses. Out of these, 297 responses are useable (148 for the iPhone and 149 for the Head and Shoulders). We compared the consumers identified directly by the author and those identified by the participants in terms of all the study variables and they are found significantly same and thus we combined all the responses to test our hypothesis.

Using survey research technique, a two page printed questionnaire is used for collecting objective response of consumers. The item questions used for both product types are same, except the change in question relating to the purpose(s)/frequency for using the particular product. Most respondents of the identity product are females (about 71%), with 86% below 25 years of age and maximum are college students. They are mostly the current users of product (about 73%). Similarly for the instrumental product also, most users i.e. 85% are females, about 79% below 25 years and college students mostly with majority being previous users of the product.

4.3 Measurements

Intentions to Perform Difficult Behaviors are measured by following the items used by Park et al., (2010) for difficult behaviors along the behavioral hierarchy (difficult to easy). Respondents indicate their intentions to the 10 items for performing future behaviors on five points scale with 1 being ‘Not at all’ and 5 being ‘Yes’, definitely. The sample items include ‘I will wait to buy the [Brand Name] versus other brands’ and ‘I will defend the [Brand Name] when others speak poorly of it’ etc.

Brand-self connection is measured by two questions that tap connection of the self with the brand. These items represent both the identity and instrumentality basis of brand-self connection. The instrument contains 2 items (Park et al., 2010) for this variable e.g. ‘To what extent is the [Brand Name] part of you and who you are? These items are measured

on five points scale with 1= Not at all, 2 = No, 3 = Don't know, 4 = May be and 5 = Completely.

Brand prominence is measured by using 2 items (Park et al., 2010) which reflect the brand relevant thoughts and feelings coming to mind without any own control; also these questions have an in-built basis of ease of retrieving and the frequency of thoughts about the brand and therefore, fulfills the characteristics of brand prominence. The sample item is 'To what extent are your thoughts and feelings towards [Brand Name] often automatic, coming to mind seemingly on their own?' These items are measured on five points scale with 1 = Not at all, 2 = No, 3=Don't know, 4 = May be and 5 = Completely.

Relationship length is measured by a single item, 'How long have you used/ been using the [Brand Name]?' This is measured on a categorical scale with all distinctive categories starting from 1 month to above 2 years and respondents select one of the five options for indicating their relationship length.

All the variables are being measured through well established and validated constructs; therefore there is no problem with *face and content validity* of the scales. Regarding other types of validity see the following section.

5. Results

5.1 Descriptive Statistics and Measurement Quality

Descriptive statistics of the study variables are presented in Table 1. The comparison of the means of the two types of product (i.e. identity and instrumental) in terms of the three study variables show that the two groups are statistically significantly from each other. Therefore, it would be more logical to study the variables of interest separately for the identity and the instrumental product in all aspects.

Table: 1 Descriptive Statistics, Reliability and Bi-Variate Correlations

Variables	Product	Alpha	Mean	SD	P-value	1	2
1.Brand Self-Connection	ID Product	0.833	3.446	1.079	**	1	
	INS Product	0.835	2.748	1.074			
2.Brand Prominence	ID Product	0.821	3.459	1.062	**	0.608**	1
	INS Product	0.793	2.782	1.170		0.538**	
3.CIPDB	ID Product	0.766	3.538	0.759	**	0.610**	0.644**
	INS Product	0.791	3.113	0.751		0.611**	0.589**

** P < 0.01; ID = Identity; INS = Instrumental

Cronbach's Alpha is calculated for the three variables of interest under study to estimate the internal consistency i.e. reliability of the scales. All Alpha values are above 0.70 and thus *reliability is acceptable for all variables* (Table 1). There is significant correlation between brand-self connection and consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors (identity product, coefficient = 0.610, $p < 0.01$ and instrumental product, coefficient = 0.611, $p < 0.01$), which establish *initial support for H₁*. Moreover, significant correlation is observed between brand prominence and consumer intentions to perform difficult

behaviors for both product types (ID product, coefficient = 0.644, $p < 0.01$ and INS product, coefficient = 0.589, $p < 0.01$), which provides *initial support for H₂*.

This may also be noted that brand self-connections and brand prominence are the positive attitudes towards brands a positive score about one is makes is likeable to be positive in other too. Here we can observe that the two brand attitudes are highly correlated with each other indicating the presence of *convergent validity*. On the other hand too high correlation is also not acceptable if above cut off correlation (i.e. 0.75 or more conservatively 0.70). However, we can see that these correlations are *well less than unity* (0.538 & 0.608) and therefore, the two brand attitudes are not linearly dependent; this simple measure rules out the chances of multicollinearity (Montgomery et al., 2009). Thus the two independent variables exhibit *discriminant validity*. Over all we can claim that our measurements are reliable and valid for moving on to hypotheses testing.

5.2 The Analysis Technique

Hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) is used for testing hypotheses. We have *three independent variables*, one of which is also a *moderator* for the two paths, and second is a moderator for one path. The comparative effect of all the independent variables may be better explained if we enter variables and interaction terms in stepwise fashion *in a sequence of blocks*. In other words we are *controlling for* or taking into account the impact of different sets of independent variables on the dependent variable. The *grouping hierarchy* has three levels – students, classes and business administration departments. Our aim is to *generalize our results* for consumers of the two products in the business administration departments. On the basis of this generalization about the *single dependent variable* i.e. CIPDB, we can enhance our knowledge in this regard. A continued empiricism perspective for diversified sample would be needed in future anyway. We have *randomly selected* two business administration departments to reach groups of potential respondents. For all these reasons we used HLM.

We also checked some well know assumption of HLM. The items for the variables are rated on five point numeric scales and averaged to transform ultimately into a single *metric number* that suites regression. The ratings for relationship quality captured through a single item on a five point scale when multiplied with the metric of the two independent variables, also becomes a metric number and secondly the ratings for relationship quality is transformed into a dichotomous scale for the purpose of constructing simple slopes. All scores range from 1 to 5 (standard deviations: 0.75 - 1.12); we *ignored the issue of outliers* as it is usual in most of these types of studies. The *ratio of valid cases* in all models (144 to 149) to the number of 3 independent variables is at least *48 to 1*, which is greater than the minimum ratio i.e. 15 to 1. Next we examined *independence of errors* by calculating Durbin-Watson statistic. These values are calculated for all the models separately. The range of this statistic for the models is 1.73 to 2.04 (means=1.87, n=16; 2 of the 18 models are same) is clearly within the acceptable range i.e. 1.50 to 2.50. Finally, for *multicollinearity* we measured collinearity statistics we observed that the all tolerance values for the independent variables are larger than 0.10. Thus, we relied on HLM for testing the study hypotheses.

Table: 2 Hierarchical Regression Analyses: CIPDB

	ID Product			INS Product		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
<i>Constant</i>	2.058	1.626	0.747	1.939	1.664	1.513
<i>Independent Variable</i>						
Brand Self-Connection (BSC)	0.610**	0.347**	0.776**	0.611**	0.414**	0.505**
<i>Moderator</i>						
Brand Prominence (BP)		0.433**	0.855**		0.366**	0.448**
<i>Two Way Interaction</i>						
BSC X BP			-0.781**			-0.156
R ²	0.373	0.491	0.519	0.373	0.468	0.469
ΔR ²		0.118	0.028		0.095	0.001

** p < 0.01

5.3 Hypotheses Results

For measuring the effects of independent variables on dependent variable, step-wise linear regression analysis is conducted for the two types of products. In the first step, brand-self connection is regressed over consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors (Table 2) which gives a significant positive value of regression for both the identity (0.610, $p < 0.01$) and the instrumental product (0.611, $p < 0.01$), and hence there is a *strong support for H₁*. It is thus noted that the *nature of product has no effect* on the relationship between brand self-connection and consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors.

In Step 2, it can be seen - controlling for brand self-connection - brand prominence is significant in predicting consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors with positive regression value (Table 2) for both the identity (0.433, $p < 0.01$) and the instrumental product (0.366, $p < 0.01$) and *supports H₂ for both product types*, thus the nature of product has no effect on the relationship between brand prominence and consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors. Next, Moderation of brand prominence in relationship of brand-self connection and consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors (Table 2) is calculated. The interaction term (BSC X BP) is significant ($p < 0.01$) for the identity product, however for the instrumental product, the interaction term of brand-self connection and brand prominence on consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors is not significant. Therefore, *H₃ is accepted for the identity product but rejected for the instrumental product*. This may be noted here that unlike H₁ and H₂ that are supported by our data, H₃ finds support only for the identity product.

Table: 3 Hierarchical Regression Analyses: CIPDB

	ID Product			INS Product		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
<i>Constant</i>	2.058	1.878	0.999	1.939	1.856	1.693
<i>Independent Variable</i>						
Brand Self-Connection (BSC)	0.610**	0.563**	0.934**	0.611**	0.553**	0.644**
<i>Moderator</i>						
Relationship Length (RL)		0.191**	0.812**		0.144*	0.263
<i>Two Way Interaction</i>						
BSC X RL			-0.821**			-0.183
R ²	0.373	0.407	0.443	0.373	0.390	0.392
ΔR ²		0.034	0.036		0.017	0.002

The moderation effect of relationship length in relationship of brand-self connection and consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors (Table 3) is significant ($p < 0.01$) for the identity product, thereby, there is a support for H₄, however, for the instrumental product, the interaction term of brand-self connection and relationship length for predicting consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors, is not significant and hence there is no support for H₄ when the product is of instrumental nature. This may again be noted here that unlike H₁ and H₂ that are supported by our data, H₄ finds support only for identity product.

Table: 4 Hierarchical Regression Analysis: CIPDB

	ID Product			INS Product		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
<i>Constant</i>	1.945	1.792	1.496	2.062	1.851	1.881
<i>Independent Variable</i>						
Brand Prominence (BP)	0.64**	0.59**	0.720**	0.589**	0.53**	0.513**
<i>Moderator</i>						
Relationship Length (RL)		0.17**	0.394		0.23**	0.211
<i>Two Way Interaction</i>						
BP X RL			-0.288			0.032
R ²	0.415	0.442	0.447	0.346	0.397	0.397
ΔR ²		0.027	0.005		0.051	0.000

** $p < 0.01$

The moderation effect of relationship length in the relationship between brand prominence and consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors (Table 4) shows that the interaction term is insignificant for both the identity and the instrumental product, thus *there is no support for H₅*. This may be noted here that the results of this hypothesis for the two types of products are not supporting the hypothesis at all.

6. Discussion

There are seven main results of this study. The first result is the empirical evidence and confirmation of the positive relationship between brand-self connection and consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors for both identity and instrumental products. Findings are consistent with existing literature which states that consumer form relationship with brands if they are congruent to their self-concept (Chaplin and John, 2005; Park et al., 2006, 2010) or if the brands help in fulfilling their functional goals and tasks (Park et al., 2010). This relationship encourages them to perform difficult behaviors in the favour of the brand e.g. purchasing the brand, speaking positive about the brand, waiting to buy the brand, referring the brand to others etc. (Cronin et al., 2000; Lin, 2007; McKnight, 2002; Park et al., 2006; Shah et al., 2012).

The second result confirms that brand prominence is positively related to consumer intentions to perform a hierarchy of behaviors. This relationship also exists for both identity and instrumental products. Previously this relationship is not tested with different product types, although the current study takes this contingency; however, the impact of brand prominence is same for both product types. The findings are similar to that of Romaniuk and Sharp (2004). They find that consumers form memory structures in brain which vary in their retrieval ability and reflect the likelihood that the brand will show up in consumer brain at some point in time/consumption specific situations (Keller and Davey, 2001; Sutherland, 1993).

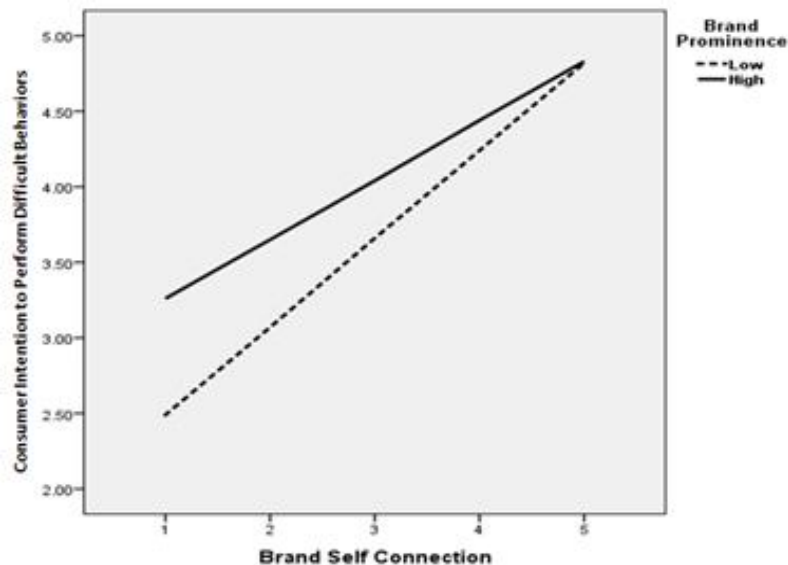


Figure 2: Moderation of BP in BSC-CIPDB (ID Product)

The third result provides support and empirical substantiation for the moderation of brand prominence in the relationship between brand-self connection and consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors for the identity product. The moderating effect of brand prominence is much greater when brand self-connection is low with an identity brand. For consumers having high brand-self connection, brand prominence's moderating role is nonexistent. This is graphically presented in Figure 2.

There has been no attempt in the previous literature to empirically test moderation of brand prominence in relationship of brand-self connection and consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors. Findings of Alba and Morstein (1987) states that if thoughts and feelings about the brand are in consumer's top of mind awareness then this can have disproportionately greater impact on his decision making. Park et al. (2010) studies brand attachment (taking brand-self connection and brand prominence as two dimensions) and finds that prominence perhaps is an unnecessary factor when the brand is identity based, because brand-self connection is an emotional bonding so prominence of thoughts is already high in the minds of customers as the decision making process begins. The current study finds empirical proof confirming moderation of brand prominence in study variables by including specifically an identity product.

The fourth result of the study demonstrates empirically that there is no moderation of brand prominence in the relationship between brand-self connection and consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors when the product is of instrumental type. This result is different from expectations drawn from assumptions of the study by Park et al. (2010) which states that for enabling consumers to perform difficult behaviors, prominence perhaps matter for the instrumental product but their assumption has not find empirical support in this study. The fifth result of the study is the empirical proof of the moderation of relationship length in the relationship between brand-self connection and consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors, for the identity product. This is graphically presented in Figure 3.

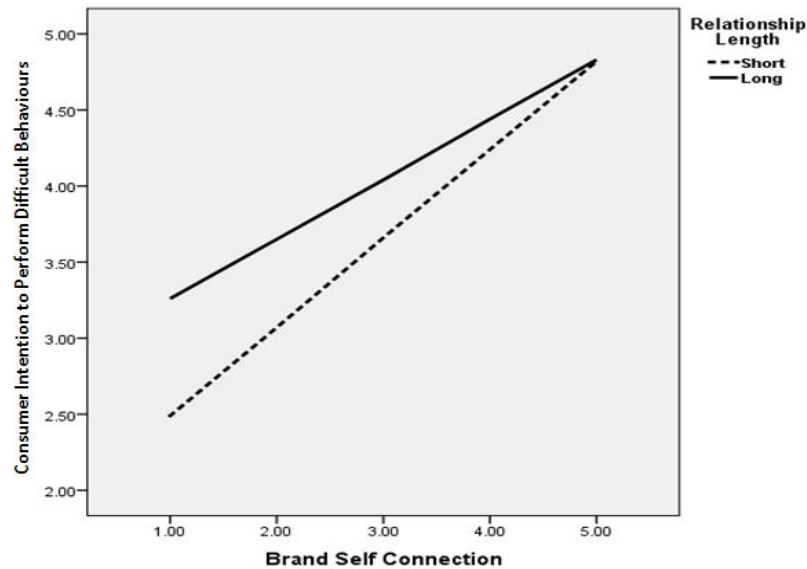


Figure 3: Moderation of RL in BSC-CIPDB (ID Product)

It may be noticed that when consumers have weak brand-self connection, their ability to perform difficult behaviors is influenced by the length of time from which they are connected to the brand. However, relationship length is of less importance in driving consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors for consumers with strong brand-self connection. At the highest point of brand-self connection with an identity product, neither long-term nor short-term relationship matters for driving consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors. Previous literature has mixed results for the issue at hand. Relationships with more age show more commitment, trust and relationship performance (Anderson and Weitz, 1989; Brown et al., 1995; Doney and Cannon, 1997; Ganesan, 1994; Kumar et al., 1995a; Verhoef et al., 2002). On the contrary, Levin et al. (2006) finds that length of relationship does not matter directly in determining a person's trust in another party. The current study clarifies the issue by gauging product-type contingency and finds that relationship length moderates the impact of brand-self connection on consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors for an identity product.

The sixth result of the study finds that the relationship length does not moderate the relationship of brand-self connection and consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors for the instrumental product. This is inconsistent to the expectations drawn from previous work. Swan and Gill (1997) find that relationship length determines the confidence in evaluating others. This gave rise to assumption that as self-connection with instrumental brands is developed on rational grounds therefore length of relationship matter more in confident evaluations of a product when consumer undergoes decision making process. However the current study contradicts and finds no support for this assumption.

The seventh result of the current investigation finds no empirical support for the moderation of relationship length in the relationship of brand prominence and consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors for both product types namely; identity and instrumental. Previous literature states that multiple experiences with a brand create brand memories (Sia et al., 1999) or blend of traces (Park et al., 2007). Longer relationship means more memories and traces which help in brand retrieval in certain situation. However the current result is inconsistent with the existing literature. The nature of the specific products used for testing hypothesis may be a reason for this result. Further investigation is needed for reconfirmation.

The current study contributes in many ways; firstly, the study contributes in measuring the individual impact of brand-self connection and brand prominence on consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors along a hierarchy. This is carried out by gauging two different types of products; identity and instrumental product, both of these fulfill different types of consumer needs. Therefore, the study has updated the academia with product-type contingency for studying consumer behavioral intentions to perform difficult behaviors. Product-type contingency is ignored in previous researches. According to the current study, the association of variables for different product type is different; however, ignoring this aspect loses the individual effect of product type for association of variables. Secondly, the study contributes by investigating the synergetic/interaction effect of brand-self connection and brand prominence on consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors. This is again studied for two different types of product and reveals noteworthy insights for the study variables. Thirdly, as the previous literature has mixed findings on the moderating role of relationship length, the current

study contributes by measuring the moderation of relationship length between brand-self connection/prominence and consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors for products of different types in order to obtain clear results.

6.1 Implications

The current study has important implications for theory. First one is the opening of new horizon of product-type contingency in studying consumer behaviors. Second is the conceptual contribution stating an associative relationship of brand-self connection and brand prominence individually, with consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors for two different product types. Third is the empirical demonstration of moderation of brand prominence and relationship length in association of study variables; an issue untapped in previous studies. The study has important managerial implications. Firstly it would help managers to understand the importance of self-connection and prominence required for creating necessary consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors in favour of the brand. As the study is conducted by gauging two different types of products i.e. identity and instrumental product, so managers can use findings for determining the level of self-connection and prominence required for different types of products they are dealing in. It can help managers in designing appropriate marketing strategies for the products with different nature. Such knowledge would be helpful for businesses in measuring the effectiveness of branding and marketing activities that link with customer relationship development and retention. It would also help managers to understand ways through which they can enhance consumer-brand relationship. Current findings would also enable managers to understand the probability of consumers who are most likely to switch the brand in near future.

6.2 Limitations and Research Directions

Like other researches, the current study also has some limitations. The majority respondents in the study are female with maximum being college / university student. They are more users of internet and social media so they may have different psychology towards brands, hence generalization of results is difficult. Only one brand under each product type is studied, and also the brands used could not be studied in terms of what type of identity they reflect or what level of instrumentality they belong to. Lastly, the measurement of probability of intentions converting to actual behaviors is another limitation of the study.

The findings of current study are although challenging, however they raise further research issues. First, as all businesses are interested in what consumers are doing in real, in the current study impact of brand-self connection and brand prominence is measured on consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors. Further research may be conducted on measuring the impact of both on actual consumer behaviors and also on measuring the fact that which of these (brand-self connection and brand prominence) contribute more in converting intentions to actual behaviors. Second, literature states that brands have grades of instrumentality starting from fulfilling general task to higher levels which includes chain of events in brand-consumption process possibly ending in reflecting some concept of consumer self (Park et al., 2006). Further research must be conducted by incorporating brands of different instrumental levels / grades. Third, previous studies suggest that consumer form semantic abstractions about the brand in terms of beliefs, values, category characteristics, abstract effects or different memories collected from experiences with the

brand (Sia et al., 1999). Semantic representations are unrealistic elements which a consumer relates with the brand in order to aid the comprehensive thought structures of brand. Study must be advanced to know whether semantic abstractions or realistic evaluations drive consumer behavioral intentions for higher grade instrumental products. Fourth, identity products also reflect different types of self-concept a consumer want to show to others; personal self and collective self. Advance work should be done on understanding the impact of study variables on identity products reflecting different kinds of identity resulting in different outcomes.

6.3 Conclusion

Businesses in current era are not focusing on measuring simple consumer purchase intentions and behaviors, rather marketers desire to see their efforts resulting in a number of consumer behaviors performed in the favour of the brand. Therefore, more and more research is being conducted on the underlying variables responsible for building and enhancing relationship between consumers and the brands. The current study is conducted in the same reference by engaging two different types of products and reveals the positive association of brand-self connection with consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors and this association works for both types of products; identity and instrumental; the positive association of brand prominence with consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors for both product types; moderation of brand prominence in self-connection-consumer intentions relationship, however the relationship is significant for only identity product; moderation of relationship length in relationship of brand-self connection and consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors, supported for identity product and not for the instrumental product. Finally, the study measures the moderation of relationship length in relationship of brand prominence and consumer intentions to perform difficult behaviors; there is no support for the relationship for any of the product type.

Overall, the study opens new perspective of product-type contingency among variables of interest and draws several insights and implications for creating and sustaining such relationships with consumers which encourages them to perform difficult behaviors in favour of the brand.

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