

Understanding the Relationship of Boys and Their Bikes: Using Brand Romance, Attitude, and Loyalty¹

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Brand romance as a concept saw its origin in 2011 in the work by Patwardhan and Balasubramanian (2011). According to Roberts (2005), branding is no longer enough to keep customers grounded to products in the sea of growing competition. People are becoming increasingly aware of the branding strategies and even becoming immune to it. He suggested that companies need to tell stories, form relationships, and create passion for their products. This concept came to be known as “lovemark model” (2005). The consumer-brand relationship is the basic root of this research. Consumer-brand relationship deals with the relationship feelings between brand and consumers (Tsotsou and Goldsmith, 2017). It is created over a period of time voluntarily for a brand by the consumer. By creation of this relationship, companies will be able to hold their fort. Before brand love, there was a need for another variable which describes the relationship. It was not mature enough to be love but still special than any ordinary brand usage and it is called brand romance. It is important for the customer to romance a

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brand and then develop the said romance into love. Brand romance also filled up the gap where brand attitude was considered short of measuring the attachment between customer and brand (Park and MacInnis, 2006).

This paper aims to understand brand romance and various constructs of brand romance, brand attitude brand loyalty and self-expressive brands. The study uses an expressive brand category-bike-and attempts to measure the level of romanticism boys have for their bikes. Using Patwardhan and Balasubramanian's (2011) model, brand romance is measured using three variables: pleasure, dominance, and arousal. The impact of brand romance and brand attitude on brand loyalty is also tested.

LITERATURE REVIEW

While developing the concept of brand romance, Patwardhan and Balasubramanian (2011) based it on work of Aron, Norman, and Aron (1998). They proposed the self – expansion model. According to the theory, humans are always open to expansion relationship and it plays a role in changing one's identity. Sometimes the changes are known and initiated owing to proximity and sometimes these changes happen involuntarily without one's knowledge. People are always in for expansion because it gives access to new perspectives and images. This affiliation provides the person with shared resources. These changes which happen owing to the new association are elaborated in the self-expansion model. Spirituality and creativity will also provide the same result as the self-expansion model. People are also known to look for opportunities to self-expand. While few try to find a new relationship to expand, some work on their existing relationship to feel the same changes.

Self-expansion model is proven to take only positive aspects of a person and use it to expand which makes sense since people will only try to adopt positive elements to grow. However, the adoption of even negative elements shows one's dire need to expand. This expansion might be more important than to have the feel-good emotions which are not always a conscious decision. As relationship is one of the common ways to expand, people feel either distant or close or even different which is called psychological overlap. It can be measured using a self-scale. The result will reveal self-other overlap which is a combination of oneself with the associated other. The relationship high in the scale means expanded perspective, resources, and identities from the associated person which may even lead to identity confusion. And people use situations to identify with others. This theory will help to understand the attraction and downfall of relationship over the course of time.

Need for Brand Romance and Brand Love

The consumer-brand relationship was defined as “the tie between a person and a brand that is voluntary or is enforced interdependently between the person and the brand”(Chang and Chieng, 2006). The relationship between brand and consumers were defined by stages including brand romance and brand love. The concept of brand romance and brand love took its birth from the new “theory of lovemarks”. The model was proposed by Roberts (2005). Roberts, CEO of Saatchi and Saatchi, observed the concept of branding was becoming less reliable in the market and did not hold the consumer’s attention that it did during the inception of the branding concepts. Roberts (2005) explained that people are so used to the concept of branding that it is no longer viable as an effective strategy.

Brand Romance

Patwardhan and Balasubramanian (2011) based the concept of brand romance on the self-expansion model. According to the authors, the next logical conclusion for the model is extending it to the relationship between consumer and brand. To them, the brand is also like a person and has its own perspective, identities, and resources. Consumers use the brand’s associations and characters and integrate them with their self, thus following the self-expansion model where brand replaces the partner of association.

People associate themselves with the brand through frequent and repeated interactions by purchasing and reusing it again and again (Osselaer and Janiszewski, 2001). As the frequency of association increases, so does the level of association which in turn leads to increased positive feeling, loyalty, and further desire to engage with the brand (Yoo, Donthu, and amp, Lee, 2000). The outcome of brand relation leads to emergence of three characters: arousal towards the brand from the consumers, pleasure from the consumption of it, and dominance of thought by the brand over the consumers. These three characters are the dimensions of brand romance to be measured.

Based on the study of Patwardhan and Balasubramanian (2011) Petzer et al. (2014) discussed brand attachment and emotional connection between consumers and the brand. They noted that the brand must be made to be felt like part of the identity of the consumer and association must be established. This will lead to the consumer identifying more with the brand as the self and becoming more loyal to the brand. This study deals in the field of brand relationship between young consumers and expressive brands. It zoomed in on the factors influenced by the brand emotional characteristics which in turn leads to commitment towards the brand. The

study used luxury products as the expressive brands. The reason for choosing a luxury product in the category of fashion is to deny any confusion because of varying level of symbolism in different types of products and brand categories (Hwang and Kandampully, 2012). Luxury products and brand categories are more expressive and communicative explicitly than another normal day to day products and brands (Bearden and Etzel, 1982).

According to, Moussa (2015) brand attachment, brand romance, and brand love are same and it is the researchers who are in the “race of concepts”. He argued that brand attachment and brand love are “two faces of same penny” and concluded that caution must be maintained in the amount of importance given in building them. It was argued that brand romance is same as brand desire which can be just attraction to the brand and not necessarily something intense or important (Shimp and Madden 1998). But the concept of brand romance proposed by Patwardhan and Balasubramanian (2011) was much wider and had depth. Brand attachment was found to be similar to brand romance and that positive emotional feeling would lead to significant increase in brand trust. It would also lead to frequent usage of the brand. It also stressed the need for community feeling creation and management (Ardyan et. al., 2016). The increase in confidence will also lead to more loyalty.

Brand romance is defined using these three dimensions. It is described as an emotional attachment which has positive feelings with arousal because of the brand and the brand nominated thoughts in consumer’s mind. But brand romance and feelings are subjective and differs from person to person. It is not necessary that the same brand will inspire the same level of romanticism from two different persons.

Pleasure

Pleasure is described as both positive and negative emotions (Bakker, et al 2014). Pleasure is linked to polarizing emotions such as happy or sad (Osgood, Suci, Taneenbaum,1957). Patwardhan and Balasubramanian (2011) used pleasure as an important part of brand romance which acts as a stimulus between the consumer and brand. There are many emotional elements which also mirror romance like desire, fun, or love but Patwardhan and Balasubramanian (2011) proposed pleasure as the foremost dimension to measure brand romance. The study found that brand love can be relevant only when customers have different levels of love for a particular brand (Bagozzi, Batra, and Ahuvia, 2017).

Arousal

Arousal is the second of three constructs for measuring brand romance. Mehrabain and Russell (1974) said that even the positive feeling towards the brand is not enough. It must be intense enough to create arousal in consumers to be taken seriously. They argued that arousal is part mental and part physical state. They also noted that arousal causes alertness about the particular arousing entity. The capacity to arouse consumers is also important for a brand.

Dominance

Mehrabian (1996) discussed about dominance which he equated with potency. It is defined as a feeling of control and overtaking of the physical and mental being. It can be described with both positive and negative feelings such as power, relaxation, and anger. It was categorized to have masculine and feminine differences in the emotion according to gender.

Difference between Brand Romance and Brand Love

Brand Romance is an emotional attachment between consumer and brand. But it is different from other variables related to brand engagement. Brand romance has similarities with brand attitude, brand involvement, brand commitment, and brand love (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006).

Commitment is entirely different as it is an outcome of attachment to emotion than an attachment itself. Brand love and romance are different as brand love is defined as an intense emotional attachment between a brand and happy consumers (Sternberg, 1986). Brand love has more effect than simple brand attachment (Sarkar, Ponnampalath, and Murthy, 2012). It does not require disconfirmation or expectancy. It is also a voluntary act of accepting and expressing the love and inclusion of identity with the resources and perspectives. Interpersonal liking is not necessarily precedent to interpersonal love and both are mutually exclusive (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). Thus, concepts of brand romance and brand love are basically two different items.

Brand Attitude

Attitude is an evaluation of thinking of people's image. It can be positive and negative. Brand attitude is liking or loathing a brand, repeat purchasing, or shunning it with contempt. It is basically the opinion consumer has towards the brand (Wu and Wang, 2011). Kotler and Keller (2008) voiced that good opinion about the brand will increase the usage of brand and negative view may result in bad word of mouth. After reviewing the literature on brand attitude, three

elements are included: First, it is a cognitive element which is the comprehensive knowledge about the brand from various sources of information and prior experience. Second, affective element which is feeling or affective emotion of the customer towards the brand is owing to experience or opinion of the customer formed about the brand. The last is conation element which talks about the behaviour or tendency of the consumer towards the brand (Wu and Wang 2011). Some studies consider brand and product attitude as same (Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum, 1957) while others do not accept all three components and few studies include all three components (Bennet and Rundle-Thiele, 2000).

Brand Loyalty

Jacob and Kyner (1973) have included six different conditions: under brand loyalty (a) It is not random and is biased in nature; (b) It is attitudinal response; (c) It is communicated over period (d) through decisions – “Decision-making unit” (e) to one or multi-brands from an available set of brands, and (f) and represents neurological choices and its process.

Jacob and Kyner (1973) conclude that “repeat purchase and brand loyalty” are fundamentally different and have different dimensions to them. They found that if a brand failed to complete all the six challenging conditions it will lead to disloyal and non-loyal acts. It is important to note that preferences become expressional rather than staying as a one-time private deed. Consumer opts for brand loyalty, as to avoid any negative experience with any other brand (Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009). Loyalty was found to be preceded by brand love which paves way for developing romantic feeling (Jiang, Potwarka, and Havitz, 2017)

Self-Expressive Brands

Chernev, Hamilton, and Gal, (2011) did a study of self-expressive brand using lifestyle brands. In that study, they stated that these expressive brands are consumed just to create and display certain status in the social circle. This social status comes with huge spending of money which is another way of indirectly showing off wealth to others. It is also noted that consumers may use more than one brand to express themselves and this multi-brand expression again depends on the consumer’s idea of self-expression. This process of using multiple brands for expressing oneself is called as “cross-cultural self-expression”.

When customers express themselves through a brand, it quenches the thirst for self-expression and customer realizes satisfaction because of the said expression. It was found that after realizing satisfaction, consumers reduce the frequency of interaction with other brands and slowly the desire for expression through other brands reduces. They tend to become less and less

aware of other brands for self-expression and they also move to updated products of the same brand (Acevedo and Aron, 2009).

Identity of a person needs to be recognized by brands (Escalas and Bettman 2005), it was also suggested that value of a brand only goes to the limit it can help people identify and stress their self-created image. “Conspicuous consumption” was used to describe people using a product to gain social status (Twitchell2012). Belk (1988) and Fournier (1998) have suggested that this may not be the case always and consumers can be influenced by society which sometimes calls the shot at defining a person’s self-identity. Finally, the consumer will opt for expressive brands as long as there is no alternative for expressing self (Chernev, Hamilton, and Gal, 2011).

Brand Romance and Bike

Men express their masculinity through their everyday consumption(Holt and Thompson 2004). Because of family, nature of work, or even surroundings men may feel threatened about their masculinity; to overcome the said fear and change the feelings, men buy compensatory products. Biking is considered as a symbol of personal freedom and even a temporary escape from reality(Schouten and McAlexander 1995). This special relationship between men and their bikes has led to this study of brand romance between them.

OBJECTIVES

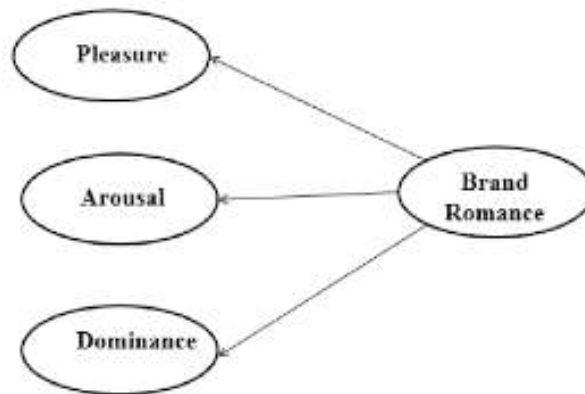
The study aims to:

- find the influential dimension of brand romance of boys towards their bikes.
- assess the affiliate relationship between brand attitude and brand romance.
- understand the impact of brand romance and brand attitude on brand loyalty, respectively.

CONCEPTUAL MODEL

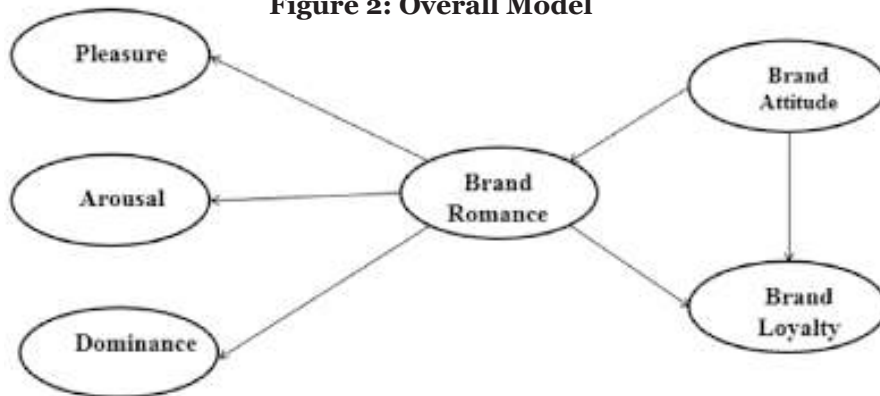
Patwardhan and Balasubramanian (2011) developed a scale for measuring brand romance and study the connection between brand romance, loyalty, and attitude. Their model included the already defined variables of brand romance: pleasure, arousal, and dominance. Brand romance between boys and bike was measured using this model.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model



The next model uses brand loyalty and brand attitude in the already existing model. The model tests the proximity between brand romance and brand loyalty and the proximity between brand attitude and brand loyalty. The relationship between brand attitude and brand loyalty was tested. The relationship between brand romance and brand loyalty was also tested

Figure 2: Overall Model



METHODOLOGY

This paper used descriptive approach to study the brand romance via pleasure, dominance and arousal and the relationship between brand romance, brand attitude, and loyalty. Data were collected from students at a private university in Vellore city in Tamil Nadu. Millennials have surpassed their previous parent generation of Y. They are also “media-saturated, brand conscious and is keeping the marketers on their toes” (Fernandez-Cruz, 2003). Millennials have also surpassed Gen Y in 2017 with a spending power of \$200 billion (Retail Leader, 2012).

Millennials being the emerging market in India and becoming an independent spending power, were the target respondents. Bikes are the largest vehicle markets in India with the producers concentrating in the premium bike markets as the disposable income of the aspirants (Philip and Thakkar, 2017).

A structured questionnaire was used for collecting data. Quota sampling method was used to acquire responses from male population of students. Students who fit the profile were invited to fill up the questionnaire and data were collected from those who volunteered. Thus the study overcame the issue of nonresponse bias. A total of 227 students recorded their response and 17 responses were eliminated owing to incomplete data. Finally, 210 responses were used for analysis. The survey has a response rate of 92.51 per cent.

To measure brand romance through pleasure, dominance, and arousal scale developed by Patwardhan and Balasubramanian (2011) was adapted. Brand attitude was measured using items of scale developed by Wu and Wang (2011). Finally, brand loyalty was measured using Keller (2001) scale items. All the scales were Likert scale of 5 = Strongly agree to 1 = Strongly Disagree.

HYPOTHESES

Brand attitude when positive and strong will lead to a better brand relationship (Kotler and Keller, 2008). The study intended to explore the relationship between brand romance and brand attitude on bikes among boys to determine if the positive opinion leads to higher romantic feelings and vice versa.

- H_1 – There is a relationship between brand attitude and brand romance

The study also tests if brand attitude and brand loyalty are correlated. Does attitude have any influence on brand loyalty and vice versa? If attitude tests positive between the consumer and bikes, it might lead to greater loyalty between the consumer and brand. The level of any impact of attitude on loyalty might give a new perspective to brand romance literature.

- H_2 – There is a relationship between brand attitude and brand loyalty

The relationship is set to be formed when trust and loyalty for the brand are strong. One of the objectives is to study the relationship between brand romance and brand loyalty. Stronger the loyalty, stronger will be the relationship between boys and their bikes.

- H_3 – There is a relationship between brand romance and brand loyalty

ANALYSIS

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics		
Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	210	100

As the study deals with bikes, the respondents were all male.

Table 1: shows descriptive statistics of the respondents. Of the 210 respondents collected, all of them are male as required by the objective of the study and purposefully students were taken as target respondents.

The research was checked for common method bias. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was used to find common method factor. The total percentage of variance extracted by a single factor was 43.37 per cent. The result is below 50 per cent at which there is common method bias.

Measurement Model

According to Nunally (1978), Cronbach's Alpha values should be above 0.7 for adapted instruments. The paper tested the reliability of each construct and Cronbach's Alpha values were reported. The Cronbach alpha value for brand attitude was 0.859, for brand Loyalty it was 0.877 both were higher than the required value of 0.7. Brand romance has three dimensions under it and all the dimensions were tested for reliability. Pleasure reported Cronbach's alpha value of 0.812, arousal's alpha value was 0.803 and dominance had an alpha value of 0.854. The composite alpha score for Brand romance was reported at 0.909. All the Cronbach's alpha values listed in Table 2 satisfied Nunally's (1978) set condition and thus the scale was deemed reliable.

Nunally and Bernstein (1994) require the composite reliability score to be 0.7 or above to be considered reliable. All the constructs tested to have composite reliability scores between 0.876 and 0.903 whereas the composite reliability score of brand romance as a variable is 0.925. Thus the constructs have good internal consistency (see Table 2.)

Table 2: Composite Reliability (CR), Cronbach's Alpha (CA), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values of the constructs

Constructs	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha
Brand Attitude	0.544	0.893	0.859
Brand Romance	0.516	0.925	0.909
Brand Loyalty	0.540	0.903	0.877
Dominance	0.696	0.902	0.854
Pleasure	0.640	0.876	0.812
Arousal	0.654	0.876	0.803

The Cronbach's alpha value reported to be more than .700, the benchmark set by Nunnally (1978). Average Variance Extracted (AVE) should be above 0.5 according to Hair et al (2013).

Convergent Validity: Average variance extracted (AVE) should be above 0.5 according to Hair et al (2013). All the constructs reported values above 0.5 and thus convergent validity is confirmed. Dominance has the highest value of 0.696 (see Table 2.)

Discriminant Validity: Fornell and Larcker (1981) report that "square rooting Average Variance Extracted values should be greater than variance shared between and other latent construct in the model". The squared AVE values for brand attitude, brand romance, and brand loyalty were 0.737, 0.719 and 0.735 which were higher than their AVE values. The square rooted values of AVE of three variables brand romance, brand attitude and brand loyalty values adhere to the Fornell and Larcker's (1981) condition (see Table 3.)

Table 3: Discriminant Validity

	Brand Attitude	Brand Romance	Loyalty
Brand Attitude	0.737		
Brand Romance	0.691	0.719	
Brand Loyalty	0.683	0.651	0.735

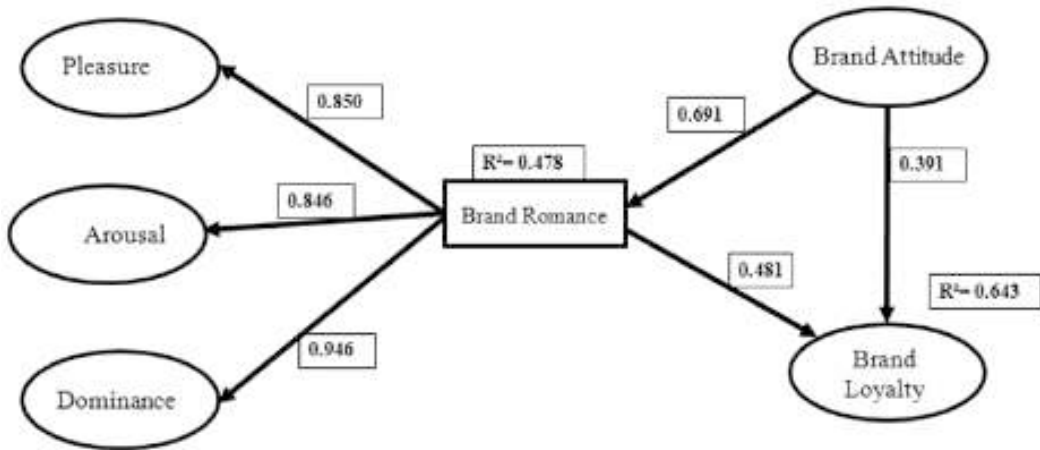
The AVE is greater than the variance shared between other latent construct in the model (Fornell and Larcker, 1981)

Structural Model

The structural equation model was drawn using smart PLS software. Boot strapping technique approach (500 samples) was used to calculate structural relationships among constructs (i.e. hypothesis testing). The t-statistics values were above 1.96 for 95 per cent level and above 2.56 for 99 per cent level of significance (Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt, 2013) recommendation. The t-Statistics value of the relationship between brand attitude and brand romance is 19.79, the relationship between brand attitude and brand loyalty is 8.020 and finally, the relationship value for brand romance and brand loyalty is 9.821.

Path coefficient (β value) of dominance for brand romance is 0.946. Pleasure as a dimension of brand romance reports 0.850 for path coefficient. Finally, arousal's path coefficient value for brand romance is 0.846 (figure 3.). Clearly, dominance is the influential dimension among the three dimensions for brand romance. Pleasure and arousal have almost similar impact while measuring brand romance.

Figure 3: Path Value of Brand Romance Dimensions



Path coefficient (β) value reveals the relationship between brand romance and brand attitude (0.691) which is influential among the all other relationships (figure 3.). This leads to the finding that the impact of brand attitude has on brand romance is stronger than the other two tested relationships.

Path coefficient value of brand attitude and brand loyalty is 0.390. The same value for brand romance and brand loyalty is 0.480. This indicates that brand romance has a greater impact on brand loyalty than brand attitude.

H1 – There is a positive relationship between brand attitude and brand romance

The t statistics of the relationship between brand attitude and brand romance is 19.769 (Table 4.). The path coefficient and t statistics values indicate a strongly positive impact of brand attitude on brand loyalty which is also the strongest relationship.

Hence H1 is accepted.

H2 – There is a positive relationship between brand attitude and brand loyalty

The t statistics value of the relationship between brand attitude and brand loyalty is 8.020 (Table 4.) which is above 2.56 at 99 per cent significance. The relationship between brand attitude and brand loyalty is determined to be strongly positive for the β and t statistics values.

Hence H2 is accepted.

H3– There is a positive relationship between brand romance and brand loyalty

The t statistics value of the relationship between brand romance and brand loyalty is 9.821 (Table 4). The path coefficient and t statistics values indicate that the relationship is strongly positive between the variables.

Hence H3 is accepted.

Table 4: Path Coefficient Values

<i>Constructs</i>	<i>Hypothesis</i>	<i>Path Coefficient (β)</i>	<i>R Square</i>	<i>T Statistics</i>
<i>Brand Attitude -> Brand Romance</i>	<i>H1</i>	<i>0.691</i>	<i>0.478</i>	<i>19.769</i>
<i>Brand Attitude ->Brand Loyalty</i>	<i>H2</i>	<i>0.390</i>	<i>0.643</i>	<i>8.020</i>
<i>Brand Romance ->Brand Loyalty</i>	<i>H3</i>	<i>0.480</i>		<i>9.821</i>

The path coefficient value was used to find the strongest relationship among the variable. t-statistics was used to find if the relationship is significant where the value should be higher than 1.96 at 95% level of significance and 2.56 at 99% level of significance.

DISCUSSION

Our research attempted to investigate the relationship between men and their bikes through brand romance. Concepts of pleasure, arousal, and dominance defining brand romance were tested. Results showed that dominance stimulated the feeling of brand romance in boys when it comes to their bikes. Men due to their lifestyle and family situation feel weak and see biking as a symbol of control of their life (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). The emergence of dominance as the influential stimulus proves their theory that men are induced by dominance to choose bike and develop a relationship with it. Mehrabian (1996) compared dominance to potency and Holt and Thompson (2004) remarked men like to flaunt their masculinity. Dominance being the influential stimulus adheres to these studies that men consider bike as an expression of masculinity and this expression increases their romantic feelings towards their bike. Pleasure and arousal almost have same impact as stimuli over boys when it comes to bike but less significant than dominance.

Brand attitude has a great impact on brand romance. This explains people who have a positive attitude towards their brand will also develop romantic feelings to the brand. Good opinion on the brand will increase the usage of that brand and our study proves that strong positive attitude will lead to greater brand romance (Kotler and Keller 2008).

The study also compared the impact of brand romance on brand loyalty and impact of brand attitude on brand loyalty. It was concluded that brand romance has greater impact on brand loyalty than brand attitude. This result is in line with the Patwardhan and Balasubramaniam (2011) study which also concluded that brand romance has a greater influence on brand loyalty.

IMPLICATIONS

When it comes to bikes, it is important for the companies to induce the feeling of dominance while promoting their bikes. This will lead to stronger romance. By inducing masculinity, companies can create a better brand relationship with boys. It must be noted that men like to flaunt their masculinity which is also evident in our study. It is important for the marketers to target the masculine side of men who tend to display that side when it comes to everyday consumption. Bike is not only just an expressive product but also a self-expressive product in therefore, it is very important to choose a brand which reflects the consumer's identity. Men would like to project their dominance through their motorbikes. If brand attitude for bike is high, it will also lead to stronger brand romance. Therefore it is important for managers to create and maintain a positive attitude for the brand. Positive attitude can be developed only

through streamlining the information that goes out about the bikes to be positive. Also the consumers start to develop an image for the product right from the moment they get exposed to it. Therefore positive awareness about bikes needs to be created. Companies creating brand romance are indirectly creating brand loyalty. In this study, as brand romance increases brand loyalty for bikes increases. These variables are correlated which means that as boys start developing relationship with their bikes they also start developing loyalty for the brand. This loyalty can also lead to longer relationship and also repeated patronizing with the brand. By creating positive feeling about the brand for consumers, brand loyalty can be increased as brand romance.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE SUGGESTION

Though the research did take a cue from previous studies and attempted to research using expressive brands of bike, it also suffers from the disadvantages of earlier studies as to whether the effects are caused by product or brand. The possible cause for the romantic feeling is not addressed by the study, as also the reason why few brands invoke romantic feelings in few people and not in others. Our study also does not differentiate passionate normal users and passionate bike lovers who will display intense feelings towards their bike. Millennials are different from early generations in characteristics which urge us to be cautious in generalizing the results. Future research should attempt to measure brand romance among working executives which may give different results than our study. Executives who are financially independent may display significantly different characteristics than students. Larger sample size which includes respondents from a different cultural background will also help in generalizing the result. Future research should compare male and female expressive products and carry out a comparative study.

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