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Understanding the influence of Brand Reputation and Trust on Loyalty: A Mediated Role of Relationship

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I. ABSTRACT

Recent studies have highlighted the significance of brand relationship among consumers and using it as an enabler for brand loyalty. Through this paper, the study explores the importance of brand reputation, brand trust, brand relationship as factors aiding the formation of strong brand loyalty. A cross-sectional survey was conducted in the growing organic personal care market among females to test the model. The organic cosmetic industry was selected due to its gaining importance and priority among the young health-conscious consumer. Organic and natural beauty care products also recorded the fastest growth in the beauty and personal care industry. The study focused on the brand reputation's significance over brand loyalty. Our research also incorporated a mediating variable - brand relationship into the brand reputation and brand loyalty analysis. It also hypothesized the effect of brand trust on brand loyalty. We reported the results where the importance of brand reputation in building brand loyalty was stressed. The role of brand relationship in strengthening the association between brand reputation and brand loyalty was also noted.

II. INTRODUCTION

Brand gained its significance in the 20th century and it has become a hallmark of a successful product. Though branding has been around since the beginning of 2700Bc, it gained importance in the 1960s. It is an inevitable phenomenon that sets a company above the rest of the competition. Brand increases

recognition among customers and potential customers. It also provides ways for a company to raise its financial value by creating goodwill and increasing brand value. A strong brand is known to create a financial advantage for companies.

Though branding has not lost its importance in the digital era, consumers started to see through the brand strategies thus blunting its impact. Consumers have become brand savvy as well as value-oriented. This brought the end to the days of brands were ruling the rooster. It prompted the brands to cater to all the needs of the consumer while designing, developing, and maintaining brand value. Kevin Robert (2005) suggested that the emotional relationship should be the foundation for any marketing strategies developed. Developing a sustainable brand relationship came to the rescue of the companies which were taken to a ride in the ever-changing market dynamics.

Brand loyalty was considered one of the most important factors in the marketing arena. It is regarded as the most essential branding strategy (Sui and Baloglu, 2003). It was used to give considerable advantage and play a critical role in building brand equity (Aaker, 1999). Companies strive to achieve loyalty as the end goal of any marketing plan. (Popp and Woratschek, 2017). Brand reputation has been considered as the flag bearer of positive or negative attributes of a product but not related to the functional composition of it. Even though companies try to influence the reputation of a brand, it is the consumer perception that creates the flow of information about the brand among other consumers (Herbig and Milewicz, 1993).

Brand trust is the customer's belief that the company will deliver on the promise made (Lassar et al., 1995). Brand trust aids the process of committing to a brand and developing brand loyalty. Brand relationship creates an emotional bond between the brand and the consumer which in turn paves way for other factors such as brand loyalty, brand trust, and so on (Schultz and Schultz, 2004). Brand relationship works to strengthen the customer base of a company (Rowley and Haynes, 2005).

Organic cosmetics are gaining prominence over the last decade and now have started dominating the Indian market. There is no established definition for organic cosmetics. But it is generally accepted that the cosmetics manufactured without using any ingredients which contain or grown using synthetic fertilizer, chemicals and Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) are organic. Organic cosmetics have become must-haves for people who are into a natural skincare routine. There is an increasing amount of awareness and consciousness among the Indian public that is pushing the cosmetic manufacturers to provide an organic and natural substitutes for the products with chemical content. According to a survey in India, 71% of respondents said that they would prefer "natural" skincare products. The labels such as "Natural, Organic, Botanical, Herbal" also said to have influenced the respondents while making a buying decision (Bhushan and Maheswari, The Economic Times, 2016). India's natural and organic beauty and personal care market is projected

to grow at 17.27% by 2022. The increasing spending power of the Indian population helps the industry to flourish. The organic and natural product sector shows the fastest growth in the personal care industry. The organic market value is also set to hit \$15.9 billion by 2020. (Orbis Research report, Dec, 2017).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This paper intends to study the influence of brand reputation, brand relationship, and brand trust on brand loyalty in the context of organic cosmetics. The study also tests the mediating effect of brand relationship. The study is relevant in the current scenario where companies are increasing their focus on different brand entities to gain an upper hand in the very fluid market. In the game of perform or perish companies are looking for any and every advantage, they could own. With access to the consumer perspective on brand trust, brand reputation, brand relationship, and brand loyalty will provide companies, better understanding to cater to the ever-changing needs of consumers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Trust has been ascertained as an inevitable factor in creating a satisfactory and happy relationship. Trust aides companies to pile up their market share through their goodwill (Moorman et al., 1993). It was considered that trust is important for marketers to have a hold on consumer preference and prevent them from making any alternative choices even if it is temporary (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Brand trust stems from the experience from prior use, interaction, and experience (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999).

Like any other human relationship with trust, the consumer brand relationship also is expected to put the interest of the consumer before its own i.e. the brand is expected to satisfy the expectation of the consumer. Brand trust has been defined as the consumer's ability to trust the brand to perform the promised function to the satisfaction of an average consumer (Moorman et al., 1992). It is considered as a "notion on reliance" which is very crucial to build trust (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). They ascertained that brand trust creates a cohesive environment for a business to business transaction. Trust is an integral component of a satisfying relationship (Berry, 1995). Brand trust has been empirically proven to lead commitment to brand commitment and brand loyalty (Moorman et al., 1992).

It was noted that as the product reaches the consumer through retailer the relationship between the company and the consumer is indirect. It is through the concept of brand, the company tries to build trust and develops a relationship with the consumer (Lau and Lee, 1999). This serves as an advantage for companies to sustain over the competition. Brand loyalty has grabbed all the marketing attention it can get and rightfully so. Brand loyalty has been considered as the most important factor to be achieved by any company. The marketing division of companies toils day and night to attain

brand loyalty. Repeat purchase of a particular brand at a fixed frequent time interval of the same quantity again and again was described as brand loyalty (Oliver, 1999). The concept first came in to picture when Copeland (1923) termed it as “brand insistence” where consumers insist upon a particular brand frequently and persistently.

Brand loyalty was described as buying the same brand at two different times. It is not just selecting a product but also not selecting another brand (Jacob and Kyner, 1973). The concept of brand loyalty was divided into attitudinal and behavioural loyalty. Behavioural loyalty is the habit of purchasing a particular brand again and again that it becomes a habit/behaviour (Ehrenberg, 2000). It is a result of habitual buying. This buying behaviour leads to a low involvement purchase behaviour as it is bought out of habit as the consumer explore the available brand and decide upon a brand initially. Attitudinal loyalty is complex than the behavioural loyalty. Attitudinal loyalty is the cognitive ability of a customer to compare and contrast the available options of brand. Then the consumer makes a rational choice with the information they had about the brand. Attitudinal loyalty is fluid and it changes from a person to person depending upon the personality traits (Jacoby and Chestnut, 1973)

Brands must ensure the availability of their product on the shelf to restrict consumers from considering any other option available (Felix, 2014). Brand loyalty forms the core of the brand equity dimensions. Multi-brand loyalty is where a consumer is loyal to more than one brand of different product categories. It is a rule rather than an exception in today’s market scenario (Dawes, 2008). Loyal consumers are known to be committed and give out positive word-of-mouth. The store brand concept is also gaining significant popularity among the consumers (Allaway et al., 2011).

The common agreement was that brand reputation is an important attribute of a brand. The positive brand reputation also helps a brand to be successful financially too. Brand reputation is part of brand building along with brand identity and brand image (De Chernatony, 1999). A good reputation also helps the company to perform better than the competition. Brand reputation was defined as “a collective representation of a brand’s past actions and results that describes the brand’s ability to deliver valued outcomes to multiple stakeholders.” (Fombrun and Rindova, 1996).

Brand reputation is considered as perception of the consumer about the brand which was more stable. Brand reputation was used to counter the more fluctuating brand indicator – brand image which frequently changes over a short period of time (Fombrun and Van Riel, 1997). Brand reputation is created and developed by the companies through various marketing signals and characters; they gave for their brands which were picked up by the consumers (Herbig and Milewicz, 1994).

Reputation is considered as an important asset that gives an advantage in creating a sustainable position in the market (Hall, 1992). When a brand loses its reputation then it would damage the positive purchase intention the

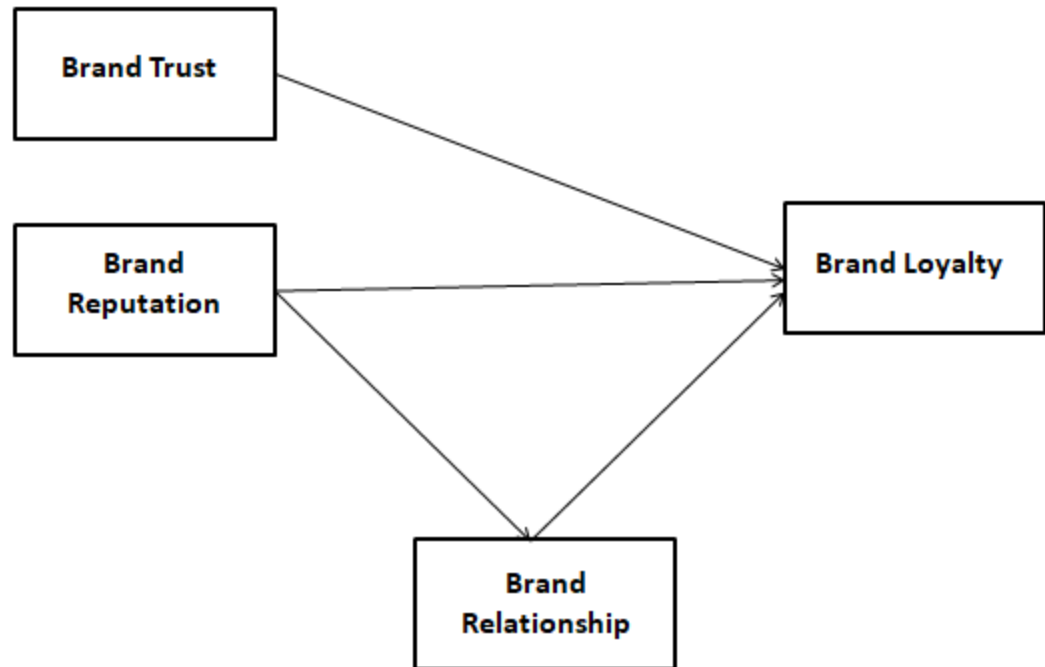
company meticulously built from its inception. The brand reputation will also turn negative. It is the companies with a positive reputation of the brand which is likely to attract more consumers into their fold (Herbig and Milewicz, 1995).

Companies emphasized on the brand relationship concepts while developing their marketing positioning strategies (Palmer, 1996). The study of consumer brand relationship is not without its fair share of controversies where relationship researchers contradicted the view that relationship literature applies to brand relationship also (Fiske and Taylor, 1991). The judgment or perception formed about a product is different from the impression or even social judgment made about a particular person. The reason being the characteristics of a product or brand is almost fixed whereas the characteristics of a person and the judgment about are bound to be flexible over a period of time. Some researchers tried to negate the argument with the observation that consumers view and interact with the brand as they do with a person. Some consumers do perceive their brand as a living being with the concept of Anthropomorphism gaining much traction (McGill, 1998, Moon 2000).

The companies through their marketing strategies and communication have created a two-way communication in the consumer-brand relationship. Marketers also employed tools such as projective techniques to enforce and re-enforce the characteristics of a brand personality (Aaker, 1991 and Keller et al., 1998).

Previously much attention wasn't paid to the brand relationship as it was treated as a facilitator than creating a connection (Coviello et al, 2002). Bond is formed when a customer chooses to buy a brand willingly. This bond paves for a relationship that can be emotional, physical, and even financial. This bond has the ability to ensure future purchases are secure (Schultz and Schultz, 2004). The customer circle is enlarged and retained by creating a relevant brand relationship with consumers (Rowly and Haynes, 2005). Brand was considered as "an active contributing partner in a dyadic relationship that exists between a person and the brand" (Fournier, 1995). A positive experience with a brand is a very important component as it serves as a way to reach a successful brand relationship. Brand personality was found to have an influence over the consumer relationship with the brand (O'Loughlin et al, 2004). Consumers are also known to develop a relationship with a brand which they perceive to have a positive brand attitude (Kates, 2000).

Figure 1- Conceptual Model



HYPOTHESES

Trust has been long considered as the antecedent of loyalty which is build based on consumer commitment and trust (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Trust is used as a key indicator to predict brand loyalty whereas earlier researches concentrated on satisfaction as a predictor (Kim et al., 2008). Trust becomes the central ingredient for creating and developing loyalty in the long run (Hess and Story, 1995). Trust is built through a personal relationship with the brand and the consumer (Hes and Story, 1995) Customer commitment built upon trust which in turn influences brand loyalty (Gremler and Brown, 1999). In the high service and high consumer involvement market, brand trust influences loyalty over time (Chiou and Droge, 2006). Keeping the above focus on the mind with the help of literature the following hypothesis is proposed

H₁: Brand trust has an impact on brand loyalty

Brand reputation is one of the important selling points for a brand. By developing and maintain brand reputation, brand loyalty is created (Tepeci, 1999). With a good brand reputation, companies can attract consumers who in turn offer word-of-mouth which is a result of brand loyalty (Rogerson, 1983). Brands that fail to maintain its reputation or falls into a negative reputation will lose consumers as the loyalty component decreases to the point of nonexistence (Herbig and Milewicz, 1995)

H2: Brand reputation has an impact on brand loyalty

Consumer who connects with the brand either on a personal level or at the least on a functional level would be inclined to be loyal to the brand (Algesheimer et al., 2005). The strength of a brand relationship acts as a good indicator of loyalty towards the brand (Gaus et al., 2006). The degree of effort put by the company and the consumer in the relationship will lead to commitment and loyalty (Laroche et al., 2001). Brand relationship combined with brand image and self congruity influence brand loyalty in a consumer (Yi and La, 2002)

H3: Brand relationship has an impact on brand loyalty

Brand relationship was proposed as a mediating variable during the formation of brand loyalty (Valta, 2013). Few previous pieces of literature have proven the mediating role of brand relationship on brand loyalty (Iglesias et al., 2011). Brand relationship has been used as a criterion in proving brand loyalty (Aurier and Lanauze, 2012)

H4: Brand relationship mediates the effect of brand reputation on brand loyalty.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is descriptive. A survey-based methodology using a self-administrated structured questionnaire was used. The data was collected from respondents who use organic products. An online survey questionnaire was created to collect data. An email request for participating in the survey was sent across out of which 247 respondents willingly participated. Out of 247 data collected where 39 responses were disregarded due to missing data. And finally, 208 responses were used for the analysis. The responses were collected in purely voluntary in nature thus overcoming response bias. The survey has a response rate of 84.2% (208). All the scaled items used in the measurement are five-point Likert scale (ranging from 5- strongly disagree to 1 – strongly agree). All the scaled items are adapted and no reverse coded items were used in the questionnaire. The questionnaire was ordered from independent variables to the dependent variable.

DATA ANALYSIS

Model fit and Common method bias were tested using Amos 22 version and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to run the model using Smart-PLS 2.0 to test the model proposed. Bootstrapping technique (5000 Iteration) was used to obtain the t-statistics path value to test the proposed hypotheses.

Table 1 Demographic Profile

Demography Profile		Percentage
Age	18-21	12.5

	22-25	40.9
	26-29	42.3
	>30	4.3
Educational Qualification	Under Graduation	66.3
	Post Graduation	31.7
	Others	2
Profession	Government Employee	8.7
	Private Employee	8.9
	IT Employee	32.7
	Student	49
	Others	0.7
Income/Per Month	<20,000	58.7
	20,000-30,000	15.9
	30,000-40,000	9.1
	40,000-50,000	6.7
	50,000-60,000	3.8
	>60,000	5.8
Duration of Usage	Less than a month	43.3
	2-6 Months	37
	One Year	14.4
	Two Year	2.4
	More than Year	2.9
Superiority to cosmetics	Yes	72.6
	No	4.8
	May Be	22.6
Recommend to friends and family	Yes	77.4
	No	1
	May Be	21.6
Brand of Organic Cosmetics used	Pure Earth	10.6
	Soul Tree	8.7
	Kama Ayurveda	14.8
	Forest Essential	8.4
	Just Herbs	45.2
	Lakshmi Krishna	
	Naturals	10.6
	Others	1.7

The demographic profile of the respondents was analyzed. All the respondents were female using organic products. About 80% of the respondents were between the ages of 22-29, 66.3% of respondents finished under graduation and 31.7% completed their post-graduation. 80 % of respondents were students and IT employees (Table 1).

Common Method Bias

The study was tested for common method bias. Using Harman's one-factor test an exploratory analysis was used without any rotation. The factor analysis result revealed that the variance observed was less than the accepted threshold of 50 %. A common method variable was created in Amos to load all the items into the common method variable as well as the respective constructs (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Confirmatory factor analysis ran with common method variable and a model without the common method variable. The CFA revealed that the common method model is fit with the given data, the CMIN/DF = 1.517, p-value = .000 CFI = .905, RMSEA = .050. The model without the common method variable was also found to be fit with CMIN/DF = 1.604, p-value = .000, CFI = .883, RMSEA value = 0.054. Both the statistical tests and the procedures reveal that the study is without any common method bias.

Table 2: Measurement Model

Constructs	CR	AVE	Loyalty	Trust	Reputation	Relationship
Loyalty	0.952	0.712	0.844			
Trust	0.934	0.642	0.576	0.801		
Reputation	0.953	0.558	0.328	0.227	0.747	
Relationship	0.953	0.612	0.552	0.554	0.366	0.782

The Cronbach's alpha values for the constructs were tested. The values were reported between 0.8 and 0.946 which were above .70 threshold limit for adapted measurement (Nunnally, 1978). Composite reliability values were also reported above 0.7 which is the acceptable limit for a construct, ranging around 0.9 (Hair et al., 2009). The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) must be above 0.5 according to Hair et al (2013) and Henseler et al., (2009) to be deemed to have convergent validity. The AVE values for the constructs were reported above 0.5 (refer table 2). Fornell and Larcker (1981) suggested that "square rooting Average Variance Extracted values that should be greater than variance shared between and another latent construct in the model" in order to achieve discriminant validity. The square rooted AVE values of the constructs were 0.844, 0.801, 0.747, and 0.782 (refer table 2) which are higher than their respective AVE values thus satisfying the condition.

Hypothesis Testing

The relationship between brand trust and brand reputation on brand loyalty was tested. The relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty was reported

statistically significant (the standardized $\beta = 0.202$, t statics value = 3.306). The r square value was reported at 0.632 on brand loyalty.

H₁: Brand trust has an impact on brand loyalty. Hence H₁ is accepted

The relationship between brand loyalty and brand reputation was found to be positively significant (the standardized $\beta = 0.774$, t statics value = 7.509).

H₂: Brand reputation has an impact on brand loyalty. Hence H₂ is accepted

A mediation analysis was used to test the relationship between brand reputation and brand loyalty with brand relationship as the mediating variable. The value between brand relationship and brand loyalty was found to be positive (standardized $\beta = 0.303$, t statics value = 3.107).

H₃: Brand relationship has an impact on brand loyalty. Hence H₃ is accepted

Table 3: Path Analysis Results

Constructs	β	t-Value	R ²	Hypotheses Result
Trust --> Loyalty	0.202	0.202	0.632	H1 Accepted
Reputation --> Loyalty	0.774	7.509		H2 Accepted
Mediation Results				
Reputation --> Relationship	0.553	3.852	0.688	H4 Accepted
Reputation --> Loyalty	0.607	6.425		
Relationship --> Loyalty	0.303	3.107		

The path value between brand reputation and brand loyalty was significant and positive (the standardized $\beta = 0.607$, t statics value = 6.425) The r square value was reported at 0.688 on brand loyalty. The relationship between brand reputation and brand relationship was reported positive (the standardized $\beta = 0.553$, t statics value = 3.852). The direct relationship value between brand reputation and brand loyalty decreases while mediating variable is introduced. From the analysis was found that brand relationship partially mediates brand reputation and brand loyalty.

H4: Brand relationship mediates the effect of brand reputation on brand loyalty. Hence H4 is accepted

DISCUSSION

The important goal of this paper is to study the relationship between brand trust, brand reputation on brand loyalty for organic cosmetics. Organic cosmetics are bought through brand reputation which in turn leads to brand loyalty. Brand reputation influences the consumer to make them choose a particular brand over the rest of the competition (Esch et al, 2006). Brand reputation can formulate the perception about a brand which strengthens the relationship between the consumer and the brand (Stuart-Menteth et al., 2006).

Consumers will develop a positive attitude over the brand from its positive brand reputation which will help them to be more loyal to the particular brand (Gounaris and Stathakopoulos, 2004). It is indeed a key priority for cosmetic companies to create an organic reputation for the brand which acts as an antecedent for strong brand relationship and brand loyalty. Brand relationship result shows that it can positively impact the relationship between brand reputation and brand loyalty. The relationship is strengthened through the incorporating brand relationship into it (Ramaseshan and Stein, 2014).

Brand trust has a significant effect on brand loyalty as it creates positive commitment with the consumer (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman, 2001). Trust is created through the belief of consumers that the brand fulfills its expectation (Lau and Lee, 1999). When the given promise is fulfilled by the company it creates value brand value and credibility which reinforces the loyalty for the brand thus repurchase intention (Agustin and Singh, 2005).

THEORETICAL AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATION

The model proposed takes into consideration the importance of image and commitment through brand reputation and brand trust. The consumer cognition on brand loyalty and the mediated analysis brings out a different dimension of the brand and consumer relationship. The effect of brand trust is lower than that of brand reputation. It is understood that brand reputation plays a primary role in the cosmetic industry. The importance of having a positive brand reputation can't be stressed enough. The image of the brand helps the consumer formulate the purchase decision. Hence brand reputation plays a major role in the consumer decision-making process. Brand reputation emerged as the influential variable on brand loyalty while buying organic cosmetics; as the brand with a positive reputation has leeway to experiment and even fight out bad publicity through its reputation. It must be noted that brand reputation leads to an effective brand relationship which in turn paves way for strong brand loyalty.

It is paramount for the cosmetic companies to maintain the reputation of being organic and natural as it is the selling point and make up their image. The clean image of being organic helps to increase sales of any cosmetic companies.

Companies must focus and be very cautious in maintaining the organic tag which if ruined will lead to a brand failure as it is the core of relationship and loyalty between the brand and the consumer.

Building brand trust over a period of time leads to habitual loyalty. Consumer will make a rational decision of buying a product after taking the pros and cons of organic quality into the mind. They form trust after using it and then become loyal which over a while become a habit. The consumers are more likely to pick out the cosmetic brands which they have ascertained to be organic in a flash due to brand trust. When a brand delivers organic cosmetics as promised it is expected to deliver the same quality and nothing less than that is acceptable. Strong brand trust helps fight with controversies but if the cosmetic brand is found to be infusing chemicals into their product it will corrode the trust and reputation, therefore, brand loyalty.

Companies must take steps to enhance their brand reputation by maintaining the promised quality, create an emotional connection with the consumer and step up their social media game to develop and maintain reputation. Companies must make undertake loyalty programs and other marketing activities to bring customers into their loyalty fold. Organic cosmetics are catering to all the general audience but especially to the health-conscious young millennial women (Choraria, Vogue, July 2018). Brands must advertise their product being natural and chemical-free. In addition to the labels, companies must list all their ingredients in the package as the millennial women are much more informed and it will help the company to earn the trust of their target customers. The brands which do list their ingredients and walk the talk of being natural earn an incredible reputation among the consumer. These brands have an incredibly loyal customer base which gives out good word-of-mouth and helps shore in new customers. Bring new customers is a costly affair, by maintaining a brand relationship along with reputation and trust companies would not only retain the existing customer but also gain new customers through them. It must be noted that loyal customers allow leeway for the brand's experiment and even fail but maintain the market share. This study helps in understanding the consumer's perception and the importance of brand elements in the organic personal care industry.

LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study though met its intended objectives is not without its fair share of limitations. The study is cross-sectional thus failing to fulfill the temporal precedence which a longitudinal study would have satisfied. The study didn't differentiate the attitudinal and behavioural loyalty which would have provided a better understanding of the loyalty component. Our study is limited to the organic personal care industry whereas future studies could test the same in different product categories which might yield different results. Further studies could look into self-congruity and e-WOM as factors that would help understand the brand relationship much better. Brand community and brand tribalism will also add new insight into the existing literature. Researchers

could look into a comparative study between both the genders to understand the difference in the consumption pattern. Using different consumer profiles would help generalize this result and help marketers to understand the importance of different attributes in brand variables.

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