

## Examining the Relationship between Consumer Brand Relationships and Brand Evangelism

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### Abstract

It is a well-known fact now that consumers falsify profound and meaningful relationships with particular brands and that such consumer brand relationships are expected to impact brand-related behavior of consumers. The study investigates the influence of three consumer-brand relational constructs - brand trust, brand affect and brand identification – and their effects on brand evangelism behavior, which was operationalized in the form of two supportive behaviors namely; purchase intentions and positive referrals. After assessing common method bias as well as reliability and validity estimates, structural equation modelling was employed with 458 sample data to test the study model fit and hypothesized relationships. The findings reveal that the consumer-brand relationship influences brand evangelism. All consumer-brand relational constructs (i.e., brand trust, brand affect and brand identification) influence brand evangelism positively in terms of purchase intention and brand referral. The study highlights the importance of brand evangelism in the marketing literature by establishing its causal relationships with the key brand attributes of brand affect, brand trust and brand evangelism. Implications of the results are deliberated with future scope for research.

**Keywords:** Brand affect; Brand trust; Brand identification; Brand evangelism; Purchase intentions; Referral behavior

### I. Introduction

Individualized marketing communication has occupied a driver seat by replacing mass communication due to increased digitization activities. The current digital arena has transformed consumers into vehicles to spread communications to their other counterparts (Becerra, 2020). By making use of smartphones and social media, marketers are nurturing strong customer-brand relationships. Consumer brand relationships epitomize a promising area to explore for marketers due to their inbuilt capabilities in affecting consumer behavior and subsequent benefits for organization (Keller, 2012).

According to Park et al. (2013), consumers act strongly in the favor of brand due to strong consumer-brand relationships. The strong consumer-brand relationships result in the form of loyal behavior which

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subsequently leads to sustainable performance (Keller, 2013). Researchers in the domain of Marketing have been showing keen interest in understanding the nature and outcomes of consumer-brand relationships.

Multiple studies are now focusing on outcomes of consumer-brand relationships in both online and offline contexts. Concepts like “brand salience,” “brand advocacy,” and “brand evangelism” are considered as behavioral outcomes of consumer-brand relationships (Keller, 2013). The study intends to enhance the understanding that how consumer-brand relationships influence brand evangelism. The easy access to internet has made life of consumers easy in order to search for information related to various brands and also share their experiences through social media networks. Further this information helps other consumers in their decision-making processes and subsequently add value to firms (Chen et al., 2012).

Accordingly, the current research contributes to the existing literature on consumer-brand relationships by delimiting the effects of three relational constructs namely; brand affect, brand trust and brand identification, on the two brand-related behaviors that characterize brand evangelism such as brand purchase intention and brand referral intention. Drawing from the literature on social identity theory (Hogg & Abrams, 1988), trust (Mayer et al., 1995), and brand-related behaviors (Iglesias et al., 2011; Power et al., 2008), this study intends to develop and investigate a framework of consumer brand relationships.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. First, we present the theoretical framework and study hypotheses. Next, we present the data collection procedure, measures used, data analysis techniques, and findings. Finally, we discuss the findings of the study, highlight study implications, outline limitations of the study, and suggest ways for future research.

## II. Literature Review

### Consumer Brand Relationship

Building strong and meaningful relationships is an essential part of identity development (Fournier, 1998). Relationships help individuals add meaning to their lives and thus they are considered as highly valuable assets (Hinde, 1995). Building and maintaining relationships with consumers is vital for brands, as strong relationships enhance consumers’ brand commitment (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Leung et al., 2014), brand love (Ahuvia, 2005; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006), brand passion (Swimberghe et al., 2014) and brand connection (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Chaplin & John, 2005; Sussan et al., 2012).

As per Fournier (1998), consumers develop relationships with highly used brands. Due to strong feelings such as affect and socio-emotive attachment (love/passion and self-connection), behavioral ties (interdependence and commitment), and being supportive (cognitive belief, intimacy and brand partner quality) the relationships remain strong and durable over the time.

Fournier (1998) has proposed brand relationship quality (BRQ), where BRQ is a six-relationship building concept partnering quality, interdependence, intimacy, commitment, self-connection and passion/love. After BRQ, brand love came into picture where passionate love, emotional attachment and self-brand connectedness were used to explain the way consumers form their relationships with brands (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Albert et al., 2008; Tsai, 2011a, 2011b; Batra et al., 2012; Albert & Merunka, 2013; Albert et al., 2013; Fetscherin, 2014; Fetscherin et al., 2014).

Also, there is a brand commitment paradigm, where relationship commitment mediates the effects of interdependence (i.e., brand satisfaction, relationship investment and quality of alternatives) or social (i.e., brand trust) dimensions of consumer-brand relationships on brand loyalty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Hess & Story, 2005; Hess et al., 2011; Li & Petrick, 2008; Breivik & Thorbjørnsen, 2008; Hess et al., 2011; Tsai, 2011a, 2011b; Albert et al., 2013). According to Mehran et al., (2020), brand trust significantly influences brand evangelism along with quality of service and brand identification.

Moreover, some past studies have proposed new dimensions for it that are different from those proposed by Fournier (1998). For instance, Aaker et al., (2004) points to commitment, satisfaction, immediacy and self-commitment as components of consumer-brand relationships. According to Esch et al., (2006), consumer-brand relationships consist of brand trust, brand attachment and brand satisfaction. In another conceptualization, two dimensions of two-way communications and emotional exchange were used to describe the strength of consumer-brand relationships (Veloutsou, 2007; Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009).

Factors beyond rational and tangible features, such as fantasies, feelings and fun (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982), were also found to play a significant role in shaping consumers’ decisions. With this perspective, individuals mostly look for stimulating, pleasurable, unique and memorable consumer experiences when they choose products and services (Mathwick et al., 2002; Brakus et al., 2009; Mishra et al., 2014).

## Brand Evangelism

Brand evangelism was first coined by Kawasaki (1991), and is an extension of the word of-mouth (WOM) concept (Doss, 2013). According to Kawasaki (1991), customer evangelism refers to customers who are intrinsically motivated to zealously spread WOM. Collins and Murphy (2009) define evangelism as use of the brand. According to Becerra and Badrinarayanan (2013), brand evangelism is conceptualized as an amalgam of brand adoption and brand advocacy behavior and it is defined as the active behavioral and vocal support of a brand including actions such as purchasing the brand, disseminating positive brand referrals, and convincing others about a focal brand by disparaging competing brands.

Doss (2013) defines the term 'brand evangelist' as a consumer that freely communicates positive information, ideas and feelings on a particular brand. A brand evangelist frequently exhibits a strong desire to influence consumption behavior. Additionally, brand evangelists voluntarily convert other consumers to using of a particular brand (Kempe et al., 2012). Brand evangelists communicate the character and features of a brand - i.e., brand messages that traditional marketing might communicate as well - but in addition they offer their families, friends, colleagues and communities a unique personal recommendation (Smilansky, 2009).

Becerra and Badrinarayanan (2013) also refer to the term brand evangelism as an intense willingness to endorse the brand and persuade others to purchase it. Doss (2014) further defines brand evangelists as 'individuals who communicate information, ideas, and feelings concerning a specific brand freely, and often times fervently, to others in a desire to influence consumption behavior'. According to Matzler et al. (2007), brand evangelism describes an active and committed way of spreading positive opinions while trying to persuade others to become engaged with the same brand, as consumers who evangelize are passionate about their brand and feel the need to share their emotions with others.

Numerous studies on marketing have examined the way brand evangelism functions. Doss (2014) proposes that the elements leading to brand evangelism include brand satisfaction, brand salience, consumer-brand identification, brand trust and opinion leadership. Becerra and Badrinarayanan (2013) delineate the varying influence of two relational constructs – brand trust and brand identification – on three brand evangelism-related behaviors: purchase intentions, positive brand referral intentions and oppositional brand referral intentions.

Doss and Carstens (2014) did a study to understand the relationships between five personality traits and the concept of brand evangelism, and they found that brand evangelism is significantly related to extraversion, openness and neuroticism. Albert et al. (2008), on the other hand, examined the dimensions of brand love in their study, revealing eleven brand love dimensions: passion, a long-duration relationship, self-congruity, dreams, memories, pleasure, attraction, uniqueness, beauty, trust (satisfaction), and a willingness to declare the love.

As per Riivits-Arkonsuo et al. (2014) brand evangelists have a strong psychological and emotional commitment to the brand. Their brand-related behavior is characterized by (1) communicating positive information, ideas and feelings concerning a specific brand both offline (WOM) and online (word-of-web), (2) co-creating the overall brand image by actively engaging in discussions about the attributes of the brands with other consumers, (3) purchasing favored brand name products, (4) influencing consumer behavior, (5) operating as an unpaid spokesperson on behalf of the brand, (6) opposing competing brands, and (7) perceiving oneness with the brand. As per McConnell and Huba (2014), brand evangelists are those customers who are passionately loyal to one particular brand, enthusiastically spreading positive brand experience to others, persuading others to purchase the same brand, and deterring others from buying competitor brands.

According to them, brand evangelism involved passion and emotion, therefore it is difficult for the competitor to attract their attention. As per Marticotte et al. (b), with brand evangelism not only will members of a brand community positively defend a brand, but they will also denigrate and attack brands that represent a threat. Therefore, the legitimacy of the disparagement of a brand (and its users) should be questioned when consumers making the comments have no experience with the brand.

## Brand Affect

According to Chi et al., (2009), affect refers to emotion or feeling, and it is a psychological reaction which comes from pleasure, anger, sorrow and joy. For these authors, brand affect is the subjective feeling after use a product, and it is also a psychological phenomenon usually accompanied by responses from emotion and mood. Moorman et al. (1992) and Morgan and Hunt (1994) define brand affect as a positive emotional response induced from a brand. As per to Chi et al. (2009), brand affect is an exciting, cheerful and satisfying feeling when a consumer uses a product from a brand.

A positive brand affect means the consumer has a good impression and feeling, and it will raise the brand evolution in the consumers' mind. However, if consumers have a negative brand affect response, they will feel unsatisfied with a specific brand, and brand evaluation will be very low. As per Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2002), brand affect is defined here as the potential of a brand to elicit a positive emotional response in the average consumer as a result of its use. Emotional responses have crucial importance in decision-making and in guiding

behavior in general (Bechara & Damasio, 2005; Naqvi et al., 2006), in addition to, specifically, brand choice (Deppe et al., 2005; Pawle & Cooper, 2006), commitment (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2002), or loyalty (Evanschitzky et al., 2006), Hence, we propose that:

H<sub>1a</sub>: Brand affect has a positive impact on brand purchase intention

H<sub>1b</sub>: Brand affect has a positive impact positive brand referral intentions

### Brand Trust

Marketers always strive to establish and maintain an intense bond between the consumer and the brand, and the essential precursor to ensuring this bond is to build brand trust (Hiscock, 2001). Trust is traditionally considered among one of the most popular measures for relationship assessment and proves to be the leading indicator for brand equity (Ambler, 2008). While some researchers have viewed trust as an intention (Gefen, 2000; Mayer et al., 1995; Moorman et al., 1992), others have viewed it as a belief (Ganesan, 1994; Gefen, 2000).

Simply put, when a party has confidence in an exchange partner's reliability and integrity, then trust occurs (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Trust, in general, is the willingness to rely on a party based on beliefs about the characteristics and behavior of that party in the face of risk (Jevons & Gabbott, 2000). Similarly, brand trust is the willingness to rely on a brand, based on beliefs about that brand, despite the risk or uncertainty associated with that brand (Becerra & Korgaonkar, 2011; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001, 2002; Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003).

Trust builds slowly over a period through a set of beliefs focusing primarily on honesty, benevolence and competence (Doney & Cannon, 1997; Ganesan, 1994; Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002). Brand trust is crucial in maintaining a long-term relationship between consumers and brands, and it helps to maintain a company's competitive advantage (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2005). Hiscock (2001) sees the ultimate goal of marketing as generating an intense bond between the consumer and the brand, and the main ingredient of this bond is trust.

Brand trust is composed of cognitive beliefs (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003) as well as affective perceptions about the brand (Elliott & Yannopoulou, 2007). Brand trust influences consumers' attitudes and brand related behaviors including purchases, attitudinal and behavioral loyalty, perceptions of brand value, brand commitment, and brand referrals (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001, 2002; Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003; Elliott & Yannopoulou, 2007). Becerra and Korgaonkar (2011) find that brand trust increases consumers' online brand purchase intentions and augments the influence of trust in the online vendor for online purchase intentions.

Likewise, Reichheld (2003) argues that, since brand referrals involve staking one's reputation, consumers are more likely to promote a brand when they trust the brand will live up to expectations. Reichheld argues that, since brand referrals involve staking one's reputation, consumers are more likely to promote a brand when they trust the brand will live up to expectations. Thus, we propose that:

H<sub>2a</sub>: Brand trust has a positive impact on brand purchase intention

H<sub>2b</sub>: Brand trust has a positive impact positive brand referral intentions

### Brand Identification

Drawing from social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner 1985), a stream of research in B2B and B2C marketing proposes that customers may identify with companies (Ahearne et al., 2005; Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Brown et al., 2005; Homburg et al., 2009; Maxham et al., 2008) and their brands (Donavan et al., 2006; Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Kuenzel & Halliday, 2008). Brand identification refers to 'consumers' psychological state of perceiving, feeling, or valuing his or her belongingness with a brand' (Lam et al., 2010, p. 129).

Extending from social identity theory, when consumers sense that a brand reflects the characteristics that are central to their identity, they develop a cognitive connection and perceived oneness with a brand, and are likely to work instinctively towards the benefit of the brand (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Prior research has found that brand identification increases the propensity of consumers to care deeply about the successes and failures of a brand and, subsequently, engage in behaviors that benefit the brand (Badrinarayanan & Laverie, 2011; Kim et al., 2001).

Consumer-brand identification is a powerful predictor of consumer behaviors such as repurchase intention, word of mouth, and symbol passing (Donavan et al., 2006; Kuenzel & Halliday, 2008). Lam et al., (2012) examined the dynamics of consumer-brand identification and its antecedents in the context of the launch of a new brand. Three focal drivers of consumer-brand identification with a new brand were examined, namely: perceived quality (the instrumental driver), self-brand congruity (the symbolic driver), and consumer innate innovativeness (a trait-based driver).

As per Becerra and Badrinarayanan (2013), purchase and consumption of brands enable consumers to construct their identities. When consumers perceive that brands possess characteristics, they consider central to

their own identities, they incorporate the brand's characteristics into their self-identity and self-definition, and communicate such self-definition to others (Underwood et al., 2001). As a result, when consumers identify with specific brands, they form a psychological relationship with the brand, demonstrate favoritism, and work instinctively to the benefit of the brand (Kuenzel & Halliday, 2008; Underwood et al., 2001).

That is, such intense attachment with brands also drives consumers to work toward the benefit of the brand by purchasing the brand (Lam et al., 2010), and engage in higher levels of volitional information sharing such as providing recommendations, suggestions, and word of mouth communication (Beatty et al., 1988). A study by Doss (2013) among 425 members of Harley Davidson, MINI, iPhone and Saab brand communities revealed that brand identification similar to brand congruity had a significant direct relationship to brand evangelism. According to Cruz and Mendelsohn (2010), members of a brand community are more engaging and more likely to buy and recommend the brand to others compared to non-members. This is supported by the study of Becerra and Badrinarayanan (2013), which found that members who demonstrate high brand identification towards their brand community would contribute to brand evangelism (positive referral or oppositional brand referral). Thus, we propose that:

H<sub>3a</sub>: Brand identification has a positive impact on brand purchase intention

H<sub>3b</sub>: Brand identification has a positive impact positive brand referral intentions

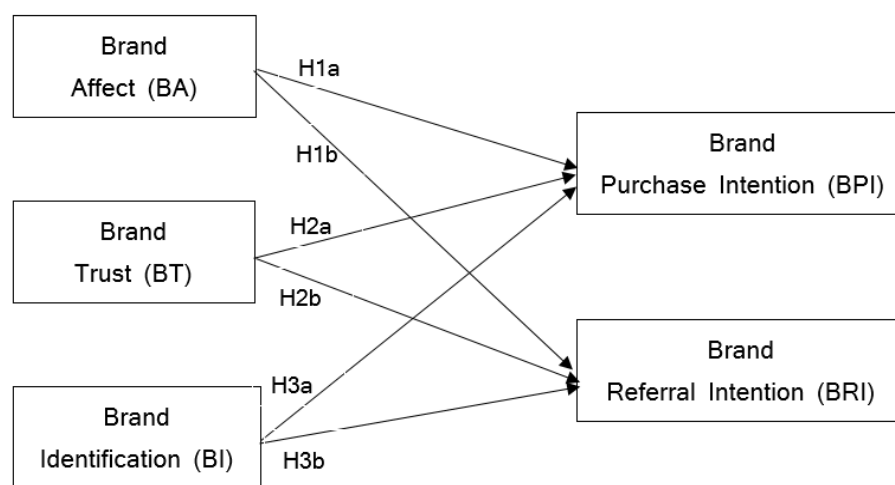


Figure 1: Study Model

### III. Research Methodology

#### Data Collection and Measures

Data were collected from a top-ranked business school in a South Asian country with students attending the institute from across the country. Pilot tests were performed to identify the type of products to be used in the study. During the pilot study, 105 postgraduate students (respondents) were shown a list of consumer electronics product categories (e.g., smartphones, laptops, memory drives, digital camera, speaker/headphones, etc.) and were asked to choose the product(s) which they were willing/planning to purchase within the next six months.

The product category (smartphones) with the highest likelihood of being purchased in the next six months was finalized for the main study. The rationale behind conducting this pilot test was to identify the product categories which are most relevant for the target respondents of the final study. Also, the pilot test helped generate a list of smartphone brands that the respondents were most likely to consider.

Next, the main study was conducted by administering a field questionnaire to postgraduate students. A total of 458 filled and complete questionnaires were received out of 850 distributed, representing a response rate of 53.9%. The responses came from 256 males (55.9%) and 202 females (44.1%). The median age of the respondents were 22 years.

The income of the respondents was spread across different levels: less than 100,000 USD (23.4%), between 100,001 USD and 150,000 USD (27.5%), and more than 250,000 USD (49.2%). Though 61.2% of the respondents have recently (less than one year) bought a new smartphone, nearly 90% of the respondents have reported that they are planning to purchase new smartphone within six months. Table 1 shows the constructs and their respective measurement items.



**Table 1:** Constructs and Measurement Items

Construct		Measurement Items
Brand (BA)	Affect	BA1: I feel good when I use this brand.
		BA2: This brand makes me happy.
		BA3: This brand gives me pleasure.
Brand (BT)	Trust	BT1: I trust the brand.
		BT2: The brand is trustworthy.
		BT3: The brand is safe.
		BT4: The brand is honest.
Brand (BI)	Identification	BI1: The brand successes are my success.
		BI2: When I talk about the brand, I usually say “we” rather than “they”.
		BI3: If a story in the media criticizes the brand, I would feel embarrassed.
		BI4: When someone criticizes the brand, it feels like a personal insult.
Brand Purchase Intention (BPI)		BPI1: In the near future, I would probably buy the brand.
		BPI2: In the near future, I would likely buy the brand.
		BPI3: In the near future, I would possibly buy the brand.
Brand Referral Intention (BRI)		BRI1: I spread positive word of mouth about the brand.
		BRI2: I recommend the brand to my friends.
		BRI3: If my friends were looking for smartphone, I would tell them to buy the brand.

Two-step structural equation modeling was used in the present study. Firstly, a measurement model ran to assess the psychometric property of the scales being used. The tests to assess psychometric properties of the dataset included common method bias assessment, reliability and validity measures. Next, a structural model was analyzed to examine the hypothesized relationships.

## Measurement Model

### Common Method Bias

Common Method Bias (CMB) has been defined as the “variance that is attributable to the measurement method rather than to the constructs of interest” (Podsakoff, Meckenzie & Podaskoff, 2003, P. 879). It is advised to assess CMB to check if data collected are not suffering from any kind of bias (Craighead et al., 2011). The following two statistical methods were employed to gauge the CMB during data collection process:

### Harman’s single factor test

In this method, a factor analysis is performed where all measurement items are constrained to a single factor, and if the total variance explained by the single factor is more than 50% then we assume that there could possible the presence of common method biasness in the dataset. In the present study, the variance explained by single-factor was only 35.895 which is less than the 50% cut-off recommended by Herman (1976).

Recently several researchers have recommended the use of confirmatory factor analysis to assess common method biasness. As expected, the difference in the model fit indices of single-factor measurement model ( $\chi^2 = 484.745$ ;  $df = 119$ ;  $\chi^2/df = 4.073$ ; CFI = 0.859; IFI = 0.860; TLI = 0.847; RMSEA = 0.084) and multi-factor measurement model ( $\chi^2 = 228.696$ ;  $df = 109$ ;  $\chi^2/df = 2.098$ ; CFI = 0.961; IFI = 0.962; TLI = 0.950; RMSEA = 0.041) is sufficiently large and significant, i.e. multi-factor model is reflecting a better model fit compared to a single-factor model ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 256.049$ ;  $\Delta df = 10$ ;  $\Delta\chi^2/\Delta df = 25.605$ ;  $\Delta CFI = 0.102$ ;  $\Delta IFI = 0.102$ ;  $\Delta TLI = 0.103$ ;  $\Delta RMSEA = 0.043$ ). Also, the other model fit indices have also crossed the index-difference cut-off limit of 0.001 (Lindell & Whitney, 2001; Byrne, 2013). Thus, it can be assumed that the dataset used in the present study has not been disturbed by the common method bias.

### Reliability and Validity

Fornell and Larcker (1981) have emphasized both the reliability of each indicator variable (measurement item) as well as each construct. Reliability of each measurement item is measured by squared multiple correlation (SMC). SMC represents the amount of variance explained by an individual indicator/construct of its respective factor; and measured by square of its (indicator’s) standardized factor loading.

Column 4 of Table 2 shows that all values of SMC are greater than the cut-off value 0.30 suggested by Bagozzi & Yi (1988). The reliability of each construct is assessed by Cronbach alpha, and as suggested by Hair et al. (2006), the values are more than the acceptable cut-off value of 0.70.

**Table 2:** Reliability and Validity Results

Item	Std. Est.	SMC	AVE	CR	A
AFF1	0.836	0.699	0.665	0.781	0.845
AFF2	0.838	0.702			
AFF3	0.771	0.594			
BI1	0.707	0.500	0.614	0.864	0.863
BI2	0.798	0.637			
BI3	0.819	0.671			
BI4	0.806	0.650			
BT1	0.818	0.669	0.591	0.852	0.854
BT2	0.764	0.584			
BT3	0.678	0.460			
BT4	0.806	0.650			
BPI1	0.802	0.643	0.581	0.806	0.805
BPI2	0.73	0.533			
BPI3	0.753	0.567			
BRI1	0.781	0.610	0.557	0.790	0.793
BRI2	0.711	0.506			
BRI3	0.745	0.555			

There are three common approaches to ensure convergent validity used by researchers: standardized factor loading (0.5 or greater), average variance explained (0.5 or higher), and composite reliability (0.7 or above) (Hair et al., 2006).

As shown in Table 2, each standardized factor loading ( $\lambda$ ) was statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) and more than 0.50, which reflect adequate convergent validity. The values of average variance explained (AVE) and construct reliability (computed as 'composite reliability') were also more than their cut-off levels of 0.5 and 0.7 respectively, and as such were acceptable. Therefore, these measures exhibited adequate convergent validity.

To ensure discriminant validity, Fornell and Larcker (1981) have recommended the comparison of correlations among constructs with the square root value of average variance explained. They have suggested that to achieve discriminant validity the diagonal value should be greater than the non-diagonal values. Table 3 presents the correlation matrix of constructs, where non-diagonal elements are correlated among constructs and diagonal elements are square root of average variance explained by that construct.

**Table 3:** Discriminant Validity

Constructs	BA	BT	BI	BPI	BRI
BA	0.815				
BT	0.753	0.784			
BI	0.521	0.461	0.769		
BPI	0.263	0.308	0.399	0.762	
BRI	0.457	0.644	0.507	0.481	0.746

#### IV. Findings and Discussion

Given the acceptable psychometric properties of the scales, to estimate the hypothesized relationships were conducted through structural model. As shown in table 4 below, the structural model reflected an adequate model fit ( $\chi^2 = 313.327$ ;  $df = 110$ ;  $\chi^2/df = 2.848$ ; CFI = 0.942; IFI = 0.943; TLI = 0.931; RMSEA = 0.050). The results of the structural model are presented in Table IV. All hypotheses have been supported.

**Table 4:** Results of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Standardized Path Estimates
H1a: BA → BPI	0.46***
H1b: BA → BRI	0.38**
H2a: BT → BPI	0.64***
H2b: BT → BRI	0.75***
H3a: BI → BPI	0.55***
H3b: BI → BRI	0.35**

\*\* 5 % level of Significance; \*\*\* 1 % level of Significance

The motive behind this study is to provide deeper understanding to the existing literature by exploring the influence of consumer-brand relationships on brand evangelism. Thus, we can say that brand evangelism in these circumstances is the extent to which consumers demonstrate support for their brand by purchasing the brand and providing positive referrals about the brand (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013). Putting it another way, brand evangelism is both communicating about and using the brand with a strong emotional connect to it.

Accordingly, the study depicts the impact of three relational constructs - brand affect, brand trust and brand identification - on two brand evangelism-related behaviors - purchase intentions and positive brand referral intentions. The results validate the proposed framework and indicate that consumers' cognitive and emotional relationships with a brand influence their brand-related behavioral intentions. Specifically, all of relational construct brand affect, brand trust and brand identification were found to influence brand-related behaviors. Brand affect was found to influence purchase intentions and positive brand referral intentions.

Brand affect, as applied to consumers (or here to current or potential employees) is defined as 'a brand's potential to elicit a positive emotional response' (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001, p. 82). Emotional responses have crucial importance in decision-making and in guiding behavior in general (Bechara & Damasio, 2005; Naqvi et al., 2006), but also specifically for brand choice (Deppe et al., 2005; Pawle & Cooper, 2006). Brand trust was also found to influence purchase intentions and positive brand referral intentions.

Similar to brand affect, brand trust is also recognized as fundamental for consumer behavior such as brand purchase behavior (Luk & Yip, 2008) and loyalty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Aleman, 2001). That is, consumers who form cognitive connections with a brand, such that they are willing to rely on the brand to perform to its stated ability, are more likely to purchase the brand and engage in providing positive referrals (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013). This finding validates the importance of brand trust in not only understanding the dynamics of the relationships between consumers and brands, but also in understanding consumers' brand-related behavior (Becerra & Korgaonkar, 2011).

Brand identification was found to influence positive brand referral intentions and was also directly related to purchase intentions. Consumers who form psychological and self-definitional attachments with a brand, such that they believe that the brand embodies characteristics that are central to their own self-identity, are more likely to engage in actions supporting or defending their brand. This finding validates the underpinnings of social identity theory in the context of consumer behavior and demonstrates that the development of brand identification is key to mobilizing vocal support from consumers via the generation of positive brand referrals.

### Implications of the Study

The global smartphone market is led by Asia both in terms of manufacturing and sales as well. World's biggest smartphone companies (e.g., Huawei Technologies Co., Ltd., Samsung Electronics, Vivo Communication Technology Co. Ltd., and Xiaomi Corporation) have their major manufacturing facilities in this region. In 2019, the smartphone market was valued at USD 714.96 billion and is expected to touch USD 1351.8 billion by 2025, at a Compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 11.2% (Mordor Intelligence, Smartphones Market - Growth, Trends, and Forecasts, 2020 - 2025). This specifies that the global smartphone brands will be riding on the pristine appetite of Asian consumers for mobile handsets. It has been observed from the past trends that in this industry, new features attract the attention of the customers and as a result they decide to purchase new launched models.

In addition, new generation Indian consumers are demanding new advanced features in smartphones. This highlights the hedonic motivation in addition to utilitarian motivation because consumers just don't want to restrict their usage to functional values of the devices but also interested in talking about their experiences across social media network sites. This is important to understand for marketers because Indian consumers are asking for feature rich devices and trustworthy after sales-service from the smartphone manufacturers. Taking cue from this demand, marketers need to make sure that whatever they promise to these consumers, they must deliver.

As discussed earlier in the study, brand evangelism cannot be developed in one day, it must be nurtured carefully. Asian consumers exhibit a typical set of characteristics, which are totally different from European consumers. Therefore, all the US and European brands must adapt to these consumers' demands and accordingly



plan their marketing communication strategy. In case of Indian consumers, value for money is considered majorly a deciding criterion in smartphone purchase. Durability, good camera, sturdiness in built quality, and voice quality are mostly considered as value indicators.

Considering these features as more important inputs while designing marketing communication strategy will ensure success for the smartphone brands. The brand manager needs to leverage a brand-centric relationship with the consumer. So, the starting point of the process of leveraging such relationships is trust. When consumers trust a brand, they are ready to take the risk of purchasing, especially with any extension of the brand. Brand managers should also develop an emotional connection with a brand and consumers, as positive emotional responses were found to influence purchase intentions and positive brand referral intentions.

As brand identification leads to both brand purchase intention and positive brand referrals, brand managers should also focus on brand identification as the development of a unique, attractive, and prestigious identity for brands can foster brand identification by satisfying consumers' self-definitional needs such as self-categorization, self-distinctiveness, and self-enhancement (Tajfel & Turner, 1985).

Apple iPhones are very popular in India because Indian consumers love to possess these devices as indicators of social status. The current research proposes that consumers value the smartphone brands due to their high-end features and high price also. Further, managers must put efforts to link product features, social status, user communities etc. so that purchase and use experiences should be enriching and it should lead to talk positive about all these brands by them.

It is further suggested that marketing practitioners should make judicious use of digital Social Network Sites (SNSs) such as; LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter, Blogs, Snapchat etc. to understand the choices and preferences of the consumers. This information can be used for personalization activities. In addition, these digital platforms may also be used to connect with all stakeholders for more value addition. These all activities with thorough planning will definitely lead to towards creation of brand evangelists.

### Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Our study has some inherent limitations. Although we carefully pre-tested product categories and brand names that were utilized in our study, we acknowledge that these restrictions limit the applicability of our findings to other products categories and brands. Therefore, to better understand brand evangelism, future researchers need to enable respondents to self-select brands and categories or provide more expansive lists. Further, although we followed the example of other studies that have utilized student samples to test their frameworks about consumer-brand relationships, we acknowledge that our choice of sample limits the generalizability of our findings.

We also acknowledge the limited nature of the framework tested in this study and recognize that the framework can be augmented by future researchers. For instance, we included only one holistic trust construct. However, drawing from other researchers who have postulated the existence of different types of trust (Shapiro, 1987) such as competence-based trust, communication-based trust, and interaction-based trust, it would be interesting to explore frameworks depicting symbiotic relationships between different types of trust and subsequent influences on brand evangelism. To further expand the proposed framework, other variables depicting consumer-brand relationships should be considered. For example, brand commitment, brand passion, brand salience, and brand relationship quality are promising candidates.

As a final note, we draw attention to the possible ramifications of causing dissonance among brand evangelists. As stated earlier, brand evangelists are primed to demonstrate support by adopting and advocating their brand. However, in the event of failures, transgressions, or perceived betrayal by the brand (Hess et al., 2011), brand evangelists are likely to experience extreme disappointment and retaliate against their brand (Rozanski et al., 1999). Therefore, organizations and brand managers would greatly benefit from further research on managing expectations and associations among brand evangelists, strategies for cultivating and deepening relationships with them, and, ultimately, leveraging the advantages of this influential group of consumers.

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