

ARTISAN BRANDING: AN EMERGING DIMENSION FOR SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE BRANDS

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Abstract - In this paper, based on a survey with 305 respondents, the differential levels are examined at which experiential value is derived from Indian fashion craft brands that leverage on artisan empowerment. It was found that customers derive experiential values at behavioral, affective and relational levels upon exposure to ads of such brands while the sensory and cognitive experiential value remain ineffective in this case. This effect was observed in both type of respondents-the ones who consumed such craft brand products in the past and the ones who have not. The results were confirming with the two sample profiles of student and non-student. Further it was found that craft brand experiential value (CBEV) lead to self-brand connection which was found to not having a direct impact on purchase intention.

Index terms - Strategic branding, consumer psychology, experience marketing, self-brand relationship, socially responsible consumption

I. INTRODUCTION

This new era of globally networked customers conferred more power to customers which account for brands' arduous journey of pleasing them with novel ideas constantly. Customers frequently switch to new trends which is the threshold of competition among brands. Socially responsible consumption (SRC) is a recent trend sensed among customers these days. Other than producing green products, adopting green production processing, and minimizing waste production, brands are practicing fair trade and empowering their community which involves their employees and consumer. SRC make consumers to shift from mere consumerism to consumption of products which reflects on their ideology and moral values. This led researchers and practitioners to study depth of such consumption behavior.

The overall customer experience is accounted as the core of marketing design strategy. This gave rise to experiential marketing, according to which the overall customer experience with the brand is about how customers feel and think about the brand when exposed to its brand elements.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The concept of socially responsible consumption was coined by Webster in 1975 according to whom consumers are socially conscious if they consider public consequences of their own consumption and who uses that power to bring social change. It was only in and around the year 2000, SRC received attention from many researchers. The different profiles of customers, their varied conscious consumption behavior and related social representation goals has been studied (Gonzalez et. al, 2009). Researchers have explored the key social issues such as consumer profiling based on different

motivation for SRC, environmental and ethical issues addressed by SRC (Vitell et al., 2001; D'Souza et al., 2007), and fair trade (DePelsmacker, Joergens, 2007). It was observed that when it comes to socially conscious consumption, consumers relate their personal values with the perceived experiential value derived from the consumption of a particular brand product (Shobeiri et. al., 2013; Ozcaglar-Toulouse, 2009). The overall experiential value defines his/her experiences with the brand at different levels. It was discovered erstwhile that consumers seek for pleasurable experiences at cognitive, affective and sensory levels (Brakus et al., 2009; Holbrook & Hirschman 1982; Schmitt 1999). Schmitt's introduced scale of experiential value which has five dimensions, referred to as modules namely, sensory, affective, cognitive, behavioral and relational. According to Schmitt, Affective module comprises feeling and emotions. Cognitive module addresses the intellect of the consumers and stimulate the thought process. Sensory module appeals on all five senses of consumers. Act module deals with the experiences at physical level by bringing changes in lifestyle and incorporating new roles which reflects their environmental and social values. The relational module is about the social identity of the consumer which in other words, connects self to the outer world entities or to the ideal self. Shobeiri et. al. in 2013 attempted to establish that SRC behavior is linked to consumer's orientation towards experience. To further their argument, they examined SRC behavior using Schmitt's scale of experiential value. However, results showed that SRC provide moderate levels of experiential value at all five levels of Schmitt's scale, while major trend observed was the proactivity among socially conscious consumers which was reflected by desire to act towards bringing a change for a common social benefit.

In the current study, we argue that socially responsible brands can offer higher experiential value

to consumers at many other levels such as make them feel connected to their society and environment and trigger certain emotions based on the unique value proposition of the brand product.

Often fashion brands are found to persuade consumers with several emotional and sensory appeal. Minimal exhibition of CSR activities was practiced in the earlier days. Today, very commonly brands showcase their CSR initiatives by promoting “shop for a cause” being associated with certain NGOs to help the needy. Brands also position as an entity who extend helping hand by providing jobs and livelihood opportunities to artisans from rural India. Few Indian fashion brands such as “Okhai” (based in Ahmedabad, India) leveraging on the artisan branding to the extent of empowering them with training and higher responsibilities. Blending craft with contemporary, an effort towards preserving traditional craft and making it appealing to new generation is another experiential value consumer look for. As consumers want to remain associated with their roots, at the same time want to present themselves as a fashion follower. Consumers associate with any brand for a reason more than a goal to accomplish, in other words, to feel the hedonic experience of association.

On the premise of increasing significance of experiential marketing and SRC behavior, we further our argument by examining the experiential values customers derive from the experiential marketing efforts made by some Indian fashion brands. In this study, we first try to understand at what all levels and extent, experiential value (EV) is derived upon exposure to fashion craft brand ads. These are the Indian brand ads which leverage on artisan branding. Contrast to what Shobeiri et. al proposed that experiential value to be derived, requires consumption of the product, we are proposing that experiential value can be derived upon exposure to brand elements which speaks of its experiential marketing efforts.

According to “Self-Expansion Theory (SET)” (Aron et al., 1992) over time, people go through a cognitive modification followed by self-expansion to include an outside entity (like brand) into their ‘self-conception’. This relational module can also be seen as expansion of self to let an outer entity enter and become one with the self-concept. Consumers when find alliance between self-concept related values and brand values which help him/her to represent self to others in much accurate way, a bond between self and the brand develops (Park et al., 2006). A customer to feel connection with a brand requires experience with the same. Over time, a positive experience with a brand may lead to self-brand connection (SBC). Thus, the second objective of this study is to find out whether the five experiential value results into self-brand connection.

Therefore, based on the above notion, the first hypothesis of this study can be stated as:

H1: Craft brand experiential value (CBEV) leads to self-brand connection.

The entire positive experience of consumers with a brand gives rise to connection that further assist the process of forming intentions and making purchase decisions (Ha and Perks, 2005). In other words, a consumer who enjoys engaging with a brand on every successive exposure to that brand and is emotionally connected to that brand is likely to frame purchase intentions in future. Hence, we can state the second hypothesis of this study as:

H2: Self-brand connection leads to purchase intention.

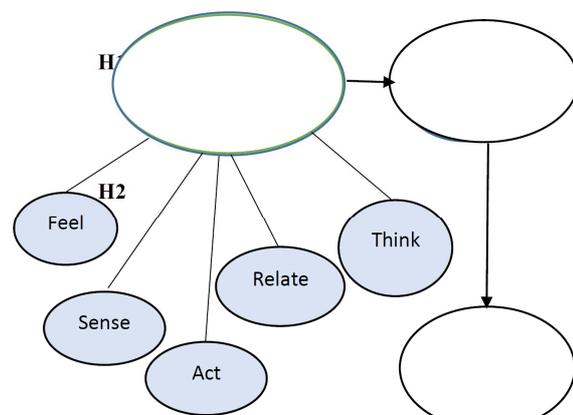


Figure 1: Integrated hypothesized model

III. METHODOLOGY

1. Sample and Data Collection:

A survey of 305 respondents from educational institutes and IT firms in 2 cities (tier 1 and tier 2) was conducted. After data cleaning aimed at detecting outliers and missing data, 300 of these were deemed valid. Digital ad images were used as stimuli which can be found on the brands' respective websites. As we proposed to study the perceived experiential value among individuals with and without past consumption of any craft brand leveraging on artisan branding, we did not differentiate respondents on consumption basis. Demographics of the respondents was as follows- 67% female and rest male; 39% belongs to age group of 22-25, 22% to 26-29, 11% to 18-21 and 28% to 30 and above. 40% were students, and remaining belong to non-student sample which comprises of service, business and others. 48 % belong to 4L-6L income group, 24% to 6L-8L income group, 10% to 2L-4L group, 8% to <2L group and 10% to >8L group.

The total of 21 items were adopted (from SBC scale by Escalas and Bettman, 2005; EV scale by Schmitt, 1999) and were modified to fit with craft brand leveraging on artisan branding. The items used are given in the table 1. A 5-point Likert scale was used to measure the responses.

Table 1: Items included in the questionnaire:

FACTOR	ITEMS
Affective/ Feel	-These ads appeal to my feelings -These ads make me respond in an emotional manner -These ads instil feeling of pride in me
Cognitive/ think	-These brand ads fascinate me -These ads make me think to contribute to society -These ads stimulate my curiosity to know their story
Relational/relate	-These ads make me relate to other people -These ads connect me to my society -These ads reflect on bonds and relationship
Sensory/sense	-These ads stimulate my senses -These ads are perpetually interesting -These ads have sensory appeal to me
Behavioural/act	-These ads remind me of socially responsible consumption -These ads reflect my lifestyle -These ads reflect my behaviour
SBC	-I feel personally connected to the brand -The brand speaks about my values -The brand reflects who I am
Purchase Intension	-I am willing to try using these brand products -I became interested in making a purchase -I can pay a little more than my budget for products of such brands

2. Results:

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted with student sample (count:120) to validate the factor structure of EV scale in the context of Indian fashion craft brand. Results showed factors were correlated and data was reliable, by yielding high KMO value (0.704), significant Bartlett’s test and Feel, Act and Relate communalities above 0.6. The factor loading of feel, act and relate are ranging between 0.7 to 0.9 while for sense and think were ≤ 0.5 . This suggests that sensory and cognitive appeal are less relevant when it comes to fashion craft brand experience

(CBEV) which leverage on artisan branding. The next EFA for the dependent variables (SBC and PI) showed higher reliability level with high KMO and significant Bartlett’s test. Factor loading were higher than 0.7 for all factors. See varimax rotated result in table 2& 3.

To confirm whether the above observed trend prevails among non-student sample (count:180), confirmatory factoranalysis(CFA) was performed using AMOS20. Table 4 & 5 demonstrates the factor items and their standardized regressionweights. Similar trend

Table 2. Exploratory factor analysis Results

Component	Feel	Act	Relate	Think	Sense
Eigen Values	2.64	3.36	2.3	1.98	1.69
Factor Loadings					
Feel					
F1			.885		
F2			.713		
F3			.846		
Act					
A1		.807			
A2		.806			
A3		.850			
Relate					
R1	.947				
R2	.925				
R3	.956				

Think					
T1				.307	
T2				.424	
T3				.453	
Sense					
S1					.489
S2					.371
S3					.329
Coefficient Alpha	0.75	0.73	0.72		

KMO: 0.704, Bartlett's Test: Chi square=1318.59, p < 0.01

was observed among the latter sample. In the next stage, to test the proposed structural model, SEM was employed and the results showed a reasonably good fit. The chi square/df value for the model was 1.54 which signified good fit. The other measures also displayed good fit of the model. Refer table 6.

Table 3. Exploratory factor analysis (dependent variables)

Component	SBC	PI
Eigen Values	2.65	2.11
Factor Loadings		
SBC		
SBC1	.793	
SBC2	.788	
SBC3	.793	
PI		
PI1		.482
PI2		.553
PI3		.539
Coefficient Alpha	0.73	0.70

KMO: 0.701, Bartlett's Test: Chi square=1261.63 p < 0.01

Table 4. Confirmatory factor analysis results

Construct/Items	Loading	P
Feel (CR=0.88, AVE=0.65, α =0.77)		
F1	.790	0.000
F2	.797	0.000
F3	.846	0.000
Act (CR=0.85, AVE=0.65, α =0.75)		
A1	.848	0.000
A2	.796	0.000
A3	.778	0.000
Relate (CR= 0.84, AVE= 0.63, α =0.71)		
R1	.772	0.000
R2	.842	0.000
R3	.775	0.000
Think (CR= 0.73, AVE=0.60, α =0.70)		
T1	.638	0.002
T2	.647	0.003
T3	.518	0.008
Sense (CR=0.70, AVE=0.62, α =0.70)		
S1	.302	0.033
S2	.577	0.010
S3	.431	0.019
Model Fit: Chisquare/df=2.20, CFI=0.91, GFI=0.97, AGFI=0.86, RMSEA=0.04, RMR=0.07		

Table 5. Confirmatory factor analysis (dependent variables)

Construct/Items	Loading	P
SBC (CR=0.89, AVE=0.67, α =0.76)		
SBC1	.649	0.003
SBC2	.862	0.000
SBC3	.746	0.000
PI (CR=0.81, AVE=0.64, α =0.71)		
PI1	.516	0.011
PI2	.466	0.021
PI3	.459	0.025
Model Fit: Chisquare/df=2.01, CFI=0.93, GFI=0.90, AGFI=0.80, RMSEA=0.05, RMR=0.06		

Table 6. Path Model Result (Goodness of Fit and Path Coefficients)

Hypothesis	Path relation	Std. Estimate	SE	P
H1	CBEV→Self Brand Connection	0.850	0.14	< 0.01
H2	Self- Brand Connection→Purchase Intention	0.341	0.21	< 0.71
Model Fit Stats: χ^2/df =1.54; GFI = 0.91; AGFI = 0.87; CFI = 0.95; RMR = 0.09; RMSEA = 0.04				

CONCLUSION

This paper makes both theoretical and practical contributions. Craft brands can utilize experiential marketing paradigm keeping in mind the levels at which consumers derive and hence desire experiential values specific to craft brands. Artisan branding being new story telling strategy adopted by few brands is explored and examined on the extent to which it reaches and affect consumers. This paper opens a new platform for researchers to explore in the directions such as explore path to make consumers move from self-brand connection towards intention to purchase, consumer involvement in empowerment initiatives, craft brand cultural aspects and consumer profiling based on fashion products consumption trends.

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