



# Role of affect and cognition in consumer brand relationship: exploring gender differences

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to explore gender differences in consumer brand relationships with respect to affect and cognition, also to examine the difference between genders with respect to the impact of variables such as age and influence of peers and family on consumer brand relationships

**Design/methodology/approach** – For this study, a field experiment approach was used, combined with depth interviews. The experiment was a three-step process where respondents were first taken through a Resonant Field Imaging (RFI™) in order to identify the types and function of all bio-energies present in the specific regions of the human brain. In the second step, this was followed by a conversation of about 30 minutes about the respondent's most preferred brand. As the final step, a brain scan was again taken to access the bio-energies in the brain of the respondent subsequent to the conversation about the most preferred brand.

**Findings** – The authors find that while both men and women form relationships with brands, these relationships are more affect based for women and more cognition based for men; this finding holds for respondents at a younger age. As time passes, this difference between men and women narrows. By the age of 35, women's brand relationships tend to become relatively less affect based and more functional. The authors provide insights into the effect of family and peers on brand relationships.

**Research limitations/implications** – This study is conducted in the age group of 18 to 35 years across SEC A and B as they have greater exposure to brands in order to form relationships. Hence, it would be difficult to generalize this study across all the socio-economic classes.

**Practical implications** – The study would help managers devise strategies for both the genders and across different age groups, in order to establish relationships with their brands.

**Social implications** – The study provides insights into the psychological behavior of men and women with respect to their interactions with brands. It throws light on the change in behavior with increasing age and how the basis for relationships formation varies.

**Originality/value** – The paper combines gender differences and the role of affect and cognition in the marketing context.

**Keywords** India, Consumer behaviour, Brands, Brand relationship, Gender difference, Peer and family influence, Affect, Cognition

**Paper type** Research paper



## Introduction

There has been a significant amount of work done in the field of consumer brand relationships in the past decade and it is still an emerging area of study for researchers (Fournier, 1998; Albert *et al.*, 2008; Sahay and Sharma, 2010). Brand relationships are based

on affect and emotions (Whang *et al.*, 2004; Thomson *et al.*, 2005; Pawle and Cooper, 2006). Consumers form relationships with a self congruent brand which is a result of emotions such as love and joy which increases with the emotional dependence and separation anxiety (Kim *et al.*, 2005). Choudhari (2001) has categorized emotions as a type of a knowledge that consumers gain based on their prior experience. Hansen (2005) found that there exists a positive relationship between the purchase involvement and perceived quality with emotions. While in some situations, emotions do not have a role to play with buying intentions being based on cognitive evaluations; research suggests that consumers base their judgment on spontaneously evoked affective criteria rather than cognition in many cases (Shiv and Fedorikhin, 1999).

Consumers make use of both affect and cognition while making judgment but the degree of usage of affect vs cognition might differ; some evidence shows affect is important in judging satisfaction when customer has little knowledge or experience with the product while, cognition gains importance once the consumer is familiar with the product (Homburg *et al.*, 2006). The impact of automatic preferences (for instance, indulging in impulse purchase) is stronger when people focus on affect whereas cognition has greater impact when people focus on reason for choice (Scarabis *et al.*, 2006). In particular, there has been some work done in the above mentioned area in terms of exploring gender differences (Tanaka *et al.*, 1988; Lammers, 1990; Parsons *et al.*, 2005). However, these fall short on the dimension of the relative use of affect vs cognition between genders in the context of development of consumer brand relationships. This is an important lacuna given increasing use of brands that are targeted exclusively at males (e.g. Fair and Handsome) or females (e.g. Women's Horlicks). In this paper we explore gender differences in consumer brand relationships with respect to affect and cognition. We further examine the difference between genders with respect to the impact of variables like age and influence of peers and family on consumer brand relationships.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. First, we briefly review the literature on gender, age and peer and family related influences on the manner in which customers develop and experience brand relationships. The primary dimension that we explore here is level of affect vs cognition used in brand relationships by male and female customers. We use the literature on affect, cognition and brand relationships to develop hypothesis on the age, gender and family and peer influence effects on strength of brand relationships. Then, we explain the Resonant Field Imaging (RFI™) approach that we use to collect data from a small sample of respondents; indications from the RFI™ data and depth interviews are then combined with the findings from the literature to generate propositions on the impact of gender, age and peer and family influence on the level and mix of affect and cognition in brand relationships. The paper finds, based on the above, that for SEC A and B customers in the age range of 18-35 that females' relationships with brands tend to be more affect based and males' relationships with brands tend to be more cognition based and that these vary with age and the nature of family and peer influence.

## Literature review

Studies have shown that consumers make use of affect and cognition in their buying decisions (Mittal, 1994). When consumers are faced with a complex situation, the immediate reaction could be automatically based on the holistic perspective and affect (Scarabis *et al.*, 2006). Pham (2004) in his study showed that affect can be interpreted differently in different situations depending upon what people are trying

to answer at the time of judgment. Affect plays an important role in attitude formation (Kim *et al.*, 1998) this is also shown in a study in context of emotional advertisements and attitude formation (Moore and Harris, 1996).

So far as gender is concerned, gender differences have been explored and it is seen that children start learning and understanding gender differences from the age of three and this is evident in their social behavior (Campbell *et al.*, 2004). From an affect viewpoint, a US-based study showed that women express more negative emotions than men (Simon and Nath, 2004). From a buying behavior perspective, Ji (2008) in her study proposed that girls indulge in greater purchase behavior than boys.

Intimacy (a dimension on which consumers form brand relationships) represents strong beliefs about the superior performance of the product and knowledge structures relating to the product and brand (Fournier, 1998). It includes the brand relationship memory of personal associations and experiences within which the brand plays an important role. Men are, in general, selective information processors and focus on visual and tangible cues while shopping (Meyers-Levy, 1988), whereas, women are more comprehensive and detailed processors helping them to have a finer distinction between the products (Laroche *et al.*, 2003). In addition, females generally engage in a greater degree of elaborative processing of personal, real-life emotional experiences than males do (Davis, 1999). Thus, women have in-depth knowledge structures about the products they use. In a study conducted across three cultures, the memories revealed by women contained more information as compared to men when asked to reveal the latest personal information, events and dates (MacDonald *et al.*, 2000; Laroche *et al.*, 2003). In addition, the memories that women have comprise of greater emotional feelings and experiences which is very unlikely to be the case with men (Kring and Gordon, 1998). Females directly recall actual experience when faced with an evaluation task, in addition to drawing upon subjective knowledge (Laroche *et al.*, 2003, p. 256).

The way men and women behave socially is also different. Women tend to attach to the groups they feel close to whereas; men look for the relational as well as collective attachments for the group identity (Seeley *et al.*, 2003). In their study Foels and Tomcho (2005), showed that women use relational aspects more than men. Reed II (2002) has drawn a connection between the society and self-connection that consumers build towards the products. People see themselves with the eyes of others and form self concept based on that. Women are more concerned about their social appearance and acceptance (Brizendine, 2007); they are more self-focused. The literature, therefore, appears to suggest that males and females will display differing levels of affect and cognition in their brand relationships; however, there appears to be no research that substantiates this difference between genders in the relative use of affect and cognition in the context of brand relationships.

## Hypothesis

### *Brand relationships*

Findings in the area of brand relationships indicate that these relationships are developed based on a two-way interaction with brands (Veloutsou, 2007). Consumers expect adherence to relationship norms from their brands; in case, these are violated, it influences the attitudes and behavior of the consumers towards the brand (Aggarwal, 2004). One study found that men and women differ in the ways they view their relationship with the brands; while men see it more as being one-way; women tend to view them as dual relationship. Women not only consider their actions toward the brand

but also expect the brand to behave and reciprocate; whereas, the latter does not hold true for men (Monga, 2002). A study exploring men's brand relationships stated in the findings that the relationships men form are more towards achieving certain goals; men do form relationships but are very functional in extracting benefits from a brand (Zayer and Neier, 2011).

Females recall more autobiographical memories of emotional events and are generally faster in doing so strongly suggesting that they engage in a greater degree of elaborative processing of personal, real-life emotional experiences than males do (Davis, 1999). In contrast, a study in the context of complex advertisements suggests that, men prefer technical complexities in processing their thought (Putrevu *et al.*, 2004). In his comments Ford (2005, p. 114) has mentioned that with the advent of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) type technology, studies around the globe are proving that the female brain is wired very differently to that of a man. There are four times as many connections between the left and right hemispheres of the female brain, meaning that women apply emotional memory and feelings to experiences (including pain and negativity) in ways that a man simply cannot. It has been revealed in past research that women are more intimate than men in a relationship (McAdams *et al.*, 1988):

*H1a.* As compared to men, women will develop relationships with brands based more on affect rather than cognition.

In a related vein, research has explored differences in the expressiveness of the emotions across genders (Barrett *et al.*, 1998). There might be no difference across genders in experiencing emotions but women tend to be more external in expressing their emotions as compared to men (Gallois, 1994; Brody, 1997). In another study, women reported greater impulse intensity and greater positive and negative expressivity whereas men reported masking their emotions more than did women (Kring and Gordon, 1998). A study on autobiographical memories reveals that women across three cultures report greater childhood memories in comparison to men (MacDonald *et al.*, 2000). Males are more subjective and institutive in their decision making process where as women recall actual experiences to support subjective knowledge they have, adding social or psychological perspective to the product (Laroche *et al.*, 2003). Thus, the memories help in adding to the expressiveness amongst females. Also, a US-based study states that females are more expressive than males in general (Simon and Nath, 2004):

*H1b.* Both men and women use experiences to express their brand relationship; women use greater affect whereas, men use more cognition.

### Age

Consumers develop relationships with brands from their childhood (Ji, 2002) and this process continues even in the latter half of their lives (Olsen, 1999). Roedder (1981) finds that adolescents who are 12 years and above are strategic processors as they use a variety of strategies for studying and retrieving information such as verbal labeling, rehearsal and use of retrieval cues to guide memory search. Moreover, it is seen that older adolescents acquire complex consumer skills like price accuracy to a greater degree than young adolescents (Moore and Stephens, 1975). As adolescents grow older they look for greater number of information sources for making rational decisions (Moschis and Moore, 1979).

It is seen that the cognitive patterns established in the early years remain stable through time for males; whereas, the established patterns for females are altered with age (Parsons *et al.*, 2005). A study showed that intelligent boys have greater problem-solving skills than girls; however, there is no difference when it comes to adult men and women with respect to these skills (Ratty and Snellmen, 1992) suggesting that boys are more likely to be “cognition” based compared to girls but that this difference narrows with increasing age. In her paper, Ji (2008) has proposed, based on the literature, that girls generally show greater motivation to develop intimate relationship with brands than do boys. It is also noted in a study that emotional reaction to a situation decreases with the age and this is highly visible in women (Hong *et al.*, 2001).

Research suggests that with the increase in number of experiences over time the influence of cognitive factors increases and the influence of affective factors decreases (Homburg *et al.*, 2006). A study by Rosa-Diaz (2004) suggests that women, middle-aged consumers and married people possess a better knowledge of prices; thus, making them a more informed and decisive buyer.

Based on the above literature, it can be said that:

*H2a.* The gender effect on brand relationship narrows with age, i.e. lesser the age, the more will females form brand relationships based on affect compared to men whose relationships will be more cognition based.

*H2b.* The greater the age, the more similar will be the basis of brand relationship between genders. Cognition, rather than affect, will drive brand relationships for both genders at an older age.

#### *Peer and family influence*

Peer influence is known to influence brand choices and decisions. In situations of uncertainty regarding brand choice, the probability of peer influence impacting the decision whether to continue with or to change the brand would increase (Feltham, 1998). Peers influence the boundaries of information search and acquisition and, on many occasions, the use of a brand (Daddis, 2008). If interactions with peers increase brand consumption, the influence of peers on brand evaluation will also increase (Moschis and Moore, 1979); this is prevalent amongst adolescent boys, as they tend to have a social status unlike girls. They spend more time in peer group activities; they have more freedom and autonomy to do as they please; and fewer household responsibilities (Condon and Stern, 1993). They are under a competitive pressure imposed by their peers and they tend to follow their peers more.

Seeley *et al.* (2003) find that both men and women tend to become members of the groups but that women seek group membership more on relational aspects (defining in terms of important relationship) whereas, men seek collective membership (defining in terms of group membership). Females as compared to males are less likely to confirm to peer pressure as they are more self-reliant and sure about themselves (Stienberg and Monahan, 2007); thus, despite being in a group, females are more individualistic as compared to males.

However, other studies suggest that males are more likely to stress their independence in relationships, are less attached to their peers and are less satisfied in schools (Crosnoe and Elder, 2004; Cross and Madson, 1997). Claudia and Huebner (2008) studied that young adolescent females relate more to peer attachments

as compared to males. Females tend to listen more to their peers as they are more emotionally attached to them. Through the interviews it was seen that female respondents have a greater say in influencing their peers choice as they tend to talk more about their brands. Males are forced to abide by the group norms and they alter their behavior as per peer pressure. In their study Fisher and Dube (2005) found that the emotional responses evoked by advertisements for males were affected in the presence of another male in order to maintain more agentic image.

From the earlier discussions it can be said that females have a more affect based relationship with brands, while males have a more cognition based relationship. This difference on the part of females and the lower susceptibility to peer pressure and greater individuality (Steinberg and Monahan, 2007) suggests that:

*H3a.* As compared to men, women play greater influencing roles amongst peers in developing brand relationships.

In general whether adolescents and young adults are at home or away from the home, the family always provides suggestions regarding brands, the volume of these suggestions may decline but do not disappear (Rafael *et al.*, 2007). Emotions play an important role in developing consumer brand relationship (Pawle and Cooper, 2006). In the context of telecom operators the negative emotional expressiveness made consumers switch to other operators (Roos and Friman, 2008). Although family plays an important role in influencing the emotional expressiveness of both males and females (Kring and Gordon, 1998), female adolescents related themselves with their families more than males because if the parents reject a female adolescent there is a greater decline in her self-esteem whereas, this is not likely with a male adolescent (Berenson *et al.*, 2005). In young men using fashion brands, the relationships do exist but there is no strong evidence stating affect or emotions coming from intergenerational influence (Zayer and Neier, 2011).

While both men and women relate their views on the origin of commitment to their experiences as children in their family, females would learn and remember different lessons as compared to males (it takes effort to work on the relationships) (Weigel *et al.*, 2003). Feldman *et al.* (1998) found that family control impacts the way a woman (generally high on interpersonal communion and connection) seeks happiness in the intimate relationships as compared to men (generally inclined towards autonomy and separateness). Parents who considered themselves as more competent had boys who were well accepted by their play groups whereas, parents who considered their families as more cohesive had girls who were well accepted in their peer group (Bullock, 2004). A study on gender socialization found that females are given greater responsibilities and household chores as compared to males who are more involved in outdoor activities (Condon and Stern, 1993). We infer, therefore, that girls are likely more influenced by their families relative to boys. Moore *et al.* (2002) show the presence of intergenerational influence in mother and daughter dyads for building brand equity. So it can be said based on the above literature that:

*H3b.* Families influence women more strongly as compared to men in the formation of brand relationships.

### Research approach and data acquisition

In this study, we used a field experiment approach combined with depth interviews. Because this is a preliminary study and the approach requires respondents to undergo



a type of brain scan, we have a small sample of three female and three male respondents for hypotheses testing. The experiment was a three-step process where respondents were first taken through a RFI™ in order to obtain electroencephalic feedback which will note the base state of the respondents' brains. RFI™ identifies the type and function of all bio-energies[1] present in specific regions of the human brain. In the second step, this was followed by a conversation of about 30 minutes about the respondent's most preferred brand. After the conversation about the respondents' most preferred brand, in the third step, a final image scan was taken to assess the bio-energies in the brain of the respondent subsequent to the conversation about the most preferred brand.

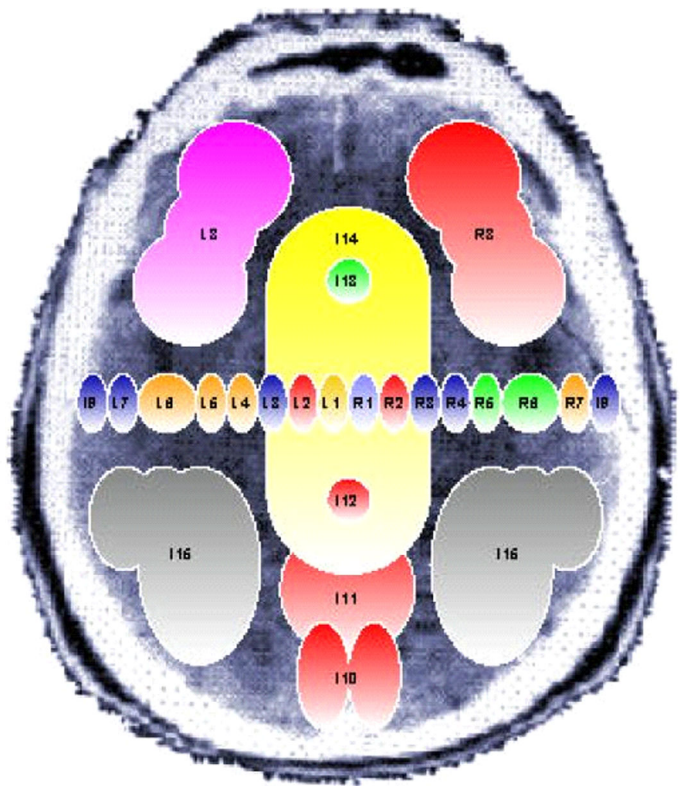
RFI™ is an experimental process which constitutes an external MRI process, intended to analyze a person's mental, emotional and psychological state. It is seen in the literature that the living organism is both a transmitter and receiver of information from the environment in form of auras or electromagnetic (EM) waves transmitted from the brain. The left side of the body is the receiver, while the right side of the body is the transmitter. Energies flow in through the left side, are processed through the metaphysical energy systems of the body and then are projected from the right side of the body. Extensive research by Innovation Technology and Energy Medicine (ITEM)[2] has revealed that this theoretical model has scientific validity. Doctors and researchers from all over the world have been using RFI™ for their practices (<http://altered-states.net/barry/newsletter394/testimonials.htm>). It has been established that the Psychological Level on the left side of the body serves as an "interface" or "boundary layer" between the person (or any other organism that is capable of thought and emotion) and the environment and that the psychological level on the right side of the body (especially at the hands) can transmit or project EM waves with great intensity. This finding also fits nicely into the neurological model of brain hemisphere lateralization, where the left side of the brain is predominantly active and projects energy (and the left brain controls the right side of the body) and the right side of the brain is predominantly receptive (the right brain controls the left side of the body).

The left hemisphere of the brain serves as a primary transmitter of EM waves. When a thought or environmental stimulus is perceived, the brain will transmit electric current through the right side parasympathetic nervous system (meridian system), which is then projected outward into the environment from the entire right side of the body (although usually more intensely at the right hand). The brain biochemically uses power to transmit the current and the amount of power is a function of the intensity of the response to the sensory perception or stimulus. When a person experiences a very strong emotion or projects a thought with great desire, the intensity and strength of the EM field on the right side of the body will increase, as will its frequency in most cases. This experimental design has been put into practice in medical science studies (Sweeney and Globe, 2006; Rahman *et al.*, 2008).

Respondent data were collected on a frequency counter with the display giving a reading of 0.000 ensuring that there are no other signals entering the experiment area. Images were acquired in the frontal lobe and the limbic brain regions (noting the reading with the help of an antenna placed at the apex). These frequencies when placed in the RFI™ software gave colour codes to the brain. The colour interpretation chart is generated by a biofeedback device or piece of medical imaging equipment, like a CAT scan (Appendix 1).

The brain image given in Figure 1 shows the parts we looked into while making the interpretations. The logic circuit of the brain comprises of the left frontal cortex, limbic region and the visual cortex. This part when activated together shows high level of logical and analytical processing in the brain. The intuitive affective circuit of the brain

Role of affect and cognition



BRAIN REGION IDENTIFICATION CHART

Brain Analysis	Region Label	Brain Region
Left Brain	L8	Left Prefrontal Cortex
	R8	Right Prefrontal Cortex
Right Brain	I9	Cerebral Cortex (Left and Right)
	I10	Visual Cortex
	I12	Pineal Body
	I13	Pituitary Gland
Integrated Brain	I14	Limbic System
	I15	Parietal Lobe

Figure 1.



comprises of right frontal cortex, limbic region and visual cortex. Activity in this part of the brain signifies high degree of emotions being used.

### Data collection

Our data collection was a three-step process. In step one, we did an RFI™ scan of the respondents to obtain the base state of the brain of the respondents; the state where the respondent was not thinking about the brand he/she prefers the most. In step two, we conducted an interview with the respondents on brands and their preferred brand for 30 minutes. We conducted six semi-structured conversation with respondents in the SEC A and B groups about their most preferred brand. This was conducted in the age groups of 18-35 years. The brand relationship literature suggests that brand relationships are likely to be stronger when there is more discretionary income (Fournier, 1998; Aaker *et al.*, 2004). Therefore, data were collected from SEC A and SEC B, which are the top two socio-economic classes as per the classification within the region where data were collected:

SEC A and SEC B are more familiar with and use branded products more than other socio-economic classes – SEC A and SEC B are more likely to have greater discretionary income by definition since they are at the top end of the income scale.

All respondents were located in Ahmedabad, a city in Western India. The first two were students. The others were either working or had taken a break to do an MBA. The data collection was spread over a period of one month. The conversation was based on the literature and questions were guided accordingly. The purpose of this step was to “prime” the respondents’ brain with its typical neuronal state and elicit the brain waves when engaged with his/her most preferred brand.

This was followed, immediately, by step three of the process, where we did a second RFI™ of the respondent to assess the change in the brain waves when the respondent was “engaging” with his/her preferred brand. The difference in the RFI measurements between steps one and three provides us the data to infer the nature of the brand relationship of the respondent with his preferred brand.

Depth interviews are proven to be methodical in such contexts where the consumer’s experiences with the brand have to be shared (Fournier, 1998; Olsen, 1999; Ji, 2002). Interviews with respondents have also been used in other contexts to develop propositions (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990). It is essential to spend more face time with the respondent in order to let them share their life experiences with the brand (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). The conversations were made with six respondents, two in age group of 18-25 years and four in the age group of 25-35 years. The first two respondents are still pursuing education and are at a transition of being called as young adults. The latter group holds work experience and is at a later stage of life. These interviews revealed:

- the brand usage history of the respondent; and
- the respondent’s context and environment where the brand is being used.

Respondent selection was done to maximize the insights on the brand relationship phenomenon. The talk was recorded in the formal set-up and on one on one basis. It was a loosely structured talk beginning with, “what do you understand by the word brand?” which sometimes directly led the respondent to mention his or her most preferred brand

and if not then further probed. The interviewer screened the respondents to ensure that the preferred brand had been used for at least a year. This was followed by asking the respondent about their thoughts about their preferred brand relative to other brands. In order to know the involvement with the brand and category, the respondents were encouraged to follow their own stream of thoughts. Interviewer probing was intended to guide the respondent within the purpose of the interview. Respondents were asked to describe when and how they were exposed to the brand in detail, memories associated with the brand, etc. The talk was then directed more towards understanding the depth of the engagement of the respondent with the brand on six brand relationship dimensions (Appendix 2) conceptualized by Fournier (1998) and based on related literature Albert *et al.*, 2008; Kim *et al.*, 2005; Ji, 2002; Olsen, 1999; Aaker *et al.*, 2004). The latter part of the conversation was to get familiarized with the kind of lifestyle respondents lead, in order to understand the impact of social groups (family or peers) in their lives and on their brand relationships.

Appendix 3 gives a list of questions used to guide the conversation and the six brand relationship dimensions. The transcripts were prepared for the interviews and data were organized and segmented in order to understand the meaning of the statements, phrases and experiences shared by the respondents. The narrations were then later used in testing the hypotheses[3].

## Findings

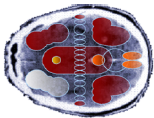
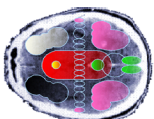
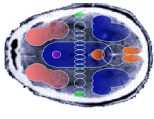
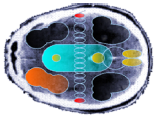
### *Brand relationships*

The RFI™ scans taken also show that women make greater use of affect as compared to men when they were being asked to talk about their most preferred brand. For females the scan taken before the conversation showed a balanced perspective whereas, greater affect manifested itself in the second scan after talking about their favorite brands.

Consider F18 and 31 before and after scans given in Figure 2. For F18 – the scan before the interview showed an active intuitive circuit having an intense mental chatter as the brain was more limbic driven. The later scan, after the conversation about her favorite brand for the same respondent, revealed a slight shift from emotional to intellectual recall but the dominance of strong emotional recall and emotional release prevailed. The interpretation for the scan for F31 before the conversation showed a balanced a mind with both the lobes working in synchronously and a high level of intellectual thinking; however, after the conversation, the brain activities turn towards greater recall of emotion based experiences; it is interesting to note that despite the brain imaging suggesting dominance of emotion, the conversation was balanced with respect to emotion and logic.

Amongst the male respondents, M21 and 35 Figure 2, the before and after scans revealed the following: for M21 the before the conversation scan showed intuitive circuit that is active and driven by emotional limbic brain activity. There was a dominance of limbic brain region in synchronization with left brain signifying a more logical inclination. After the interview the scan for M21 showed that the emotional side of the brain becomes inactive and the respondent was driven more by reasoning and factual memory. In case of M35 the before scan revealed fully active logical circuit and recalling of deep logical events. The after the conversation scan showed a reduced connect from emotion as compared to the previous scan; the respondent brain was driven more by decisional and analytical activity.

Figure 2.

Scan F18		Scan F31	
<p><b>Before</b></p>  <p>Research Funded by the NIH</p>	<p><b>After</b></p>  <p>Research Funded by the NIH</p>	<p><b>Before</b></p>  <p>Research Funded by the NIH</p>	<p><b>After</b></p>  <p>Research Funded by the NIH</p>
<p><b>Interpretation F18</b></p> <p><b>Before</b></p> <p>Here her intuitive circuit is more active. She might be having intense mental chatter. This mental chatter maybe more limbic driven signifying mental activity related to survival issues, money, material objects and the immediate physical environment, related to instincts, basic human needs and desires.</p> <p><b>After</b></p> <p>Here it shows reduced activity in the right frontal lobe and relatively more activity in the left frontal lobe. Suggests some strong emotional memory recall and emotional release, she seems to be shifting from emotional to intellectual recall, though emotion is predominant. Her intuitive activity has been stalled signifying more factual recall</p>		<p><b>Interpretation F31</b></p> <p><b>Before</b></p> <p>Both her frontal lobes are functioning synchronously signifying some higher human level intellectual activity with no connects between thinking and motor activity. The motor sensory lobes are in synchrony with the limbic brain showing some unconscious motor activity</p> <p><b>After</b></p> <p>Here her intuitive circuit has become active and her limbic brain and left frontal lobe have also become more active signifying more emotional and experiential responding. She is saying from what she has experienced (like the feel of the walk in the shoes of the given brand). Her limbic and cortical activities are not synchronous. All that the above means is that she is responding by scanning the logic/analysis, the intuition/imagination and the basic emotions separately rather than in a coherent fashion, but, therefore, what she says may be more comprehensive in all respects (logic, emotion, imagination)</p>	

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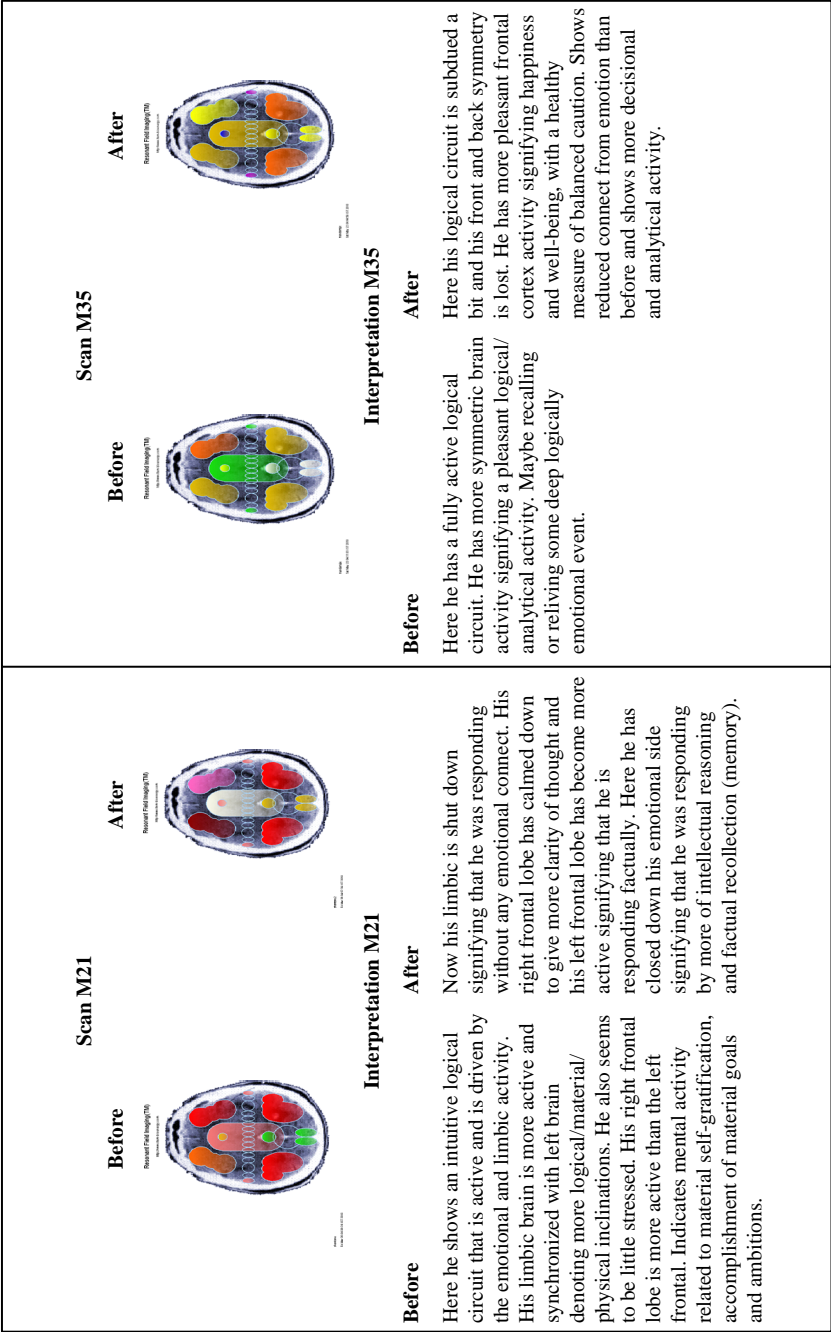


Figure 2.

In support to our hypothesis above the scans in Figure 2 state that the conversation about their most preferred brand activated higher affect based brain processing for females. In contrast, the scans for men show more decisive and analytical processing after the conversation about their most preferred brand. Thus, we can say that women will develop relationships with brands based more on affect rather than cognition, as compared to men, as given in *H1a*.

The scans (Figure 2) in the study reveals that women use greater emotional experiences while talking about their most preferred brand whereas, men used greater factual experiences. It is also seen in a study that with the increase in consistent performance experience with the product, the level of cognition increases and affect decreases (Homburg *et al.*, 2006). Hence, *H1b* is supported; from the above it is clear that both men and women use experiences to express their brand relationship; women use greater affect whereas, men use more cognition.

### Age

The conversation with the respondents in our study provides support to our hypothesis. The young female respondent under 20 years primarily has affect as the base for her relationship with the brand quite unlike the young male respondent who gave functionality as the major driver for his brand relationship. Consider the following from their interviews (emphasis ours):

For a clothing brand Jack and Jones, a female respondent aged 18 years felt, "I think it's really good. I don't know if it enhances my personality but it just makes you *feel good*. You know, like you normally buy clothes in which you look good. So if you look good in clothes – *it feels good* when you carry it out. And they keep getting you accessories and all that go totally with the clothes that you wear. So I think it's really good."

Whereas, a 21 years old male responded in the following way about Nike, "I have used brands other than Nike as well, I have used Addidas, Reebok – but it's always Nike that *has satisfied me*. Like I play basket ball and whenever I used to play, infact, the first shoes I got was Nike, the school sponsored shoes and those shoes turned out to be really well and *have better grip* than Reebok or Addidas. After that I have always preferred buying Nike shoes. Rest of it, *I just like the brand* as such so I used to buy Nike."

We found in the study that adult women (31 years) states comfort and performance as the major criterion for staying with a brand for so long. Likewise, the males in the latter age group stated that they have a measurement yardstick for the brand which is purely rational and functional as a basis for their relationship. Consider the following excerpts from the interviews:

For Nike brand a female respondent, 31 years of age mentions, "I did try other brands, a local brand not Reebok or Addidas, but I wasn't happy with the comfort – especially shoes, so, I would buy the right size, everything being the same, even I would pay good enough, I mean not like very cheap. But at the end of it I wouldn't feel very happy about it, *I wouldn't feel that comfort*. And I am a kind of an outgoing person – I would go for hiking, trekking and all those things so I need good shoes. That's one thing I have found in Nike the best. Reebok would come close to it – I have never tried that but maybe it's in my head that I always go for Nike. My measurement metrics or parameter is that if I have been using it very frequently almost every trek/hiking, every week almost and after two years also it's in the same condition *and gives me the same comfort* so I am happy with it."

A male respondent of 35 years of age states, "I would say, as 27 or probably even younger there is more fascination about the brand, you know, you just want to have Nike – you don't want to have anything else[. . .] either be it a statement or whatever and now other parameters creep in – like cost you know how much is it going to cost me, how many times am I actually going to go and play. So that number of times I play might remain the same even at 27, I might just play once a week or whatever but it didn't matter[. . .] it could just be lying around but that's fine but now it's not like that definitely cost and other things come."

Thus, the *H2a* is supported from the above excerpts where it was said that the gender effect on brand relationship narrows with age, i.e. lesser the age, the more will females form brand relationships based on affect compared to men whose relationships will be more cognition based.

The scans taken show the difference in the processing of the three women. For younger females the scans show greater use of affect whereas, for the older female, cognition is more prevalent.

Consider F18, 31 and 35 before and after scans given in Figure 3. For F18 and 31 the dominance of emotions is strong. In contrast, for F35 the scan before the interview showed higher cognition followed by the latter scan again showing the response based on logic with some inputs from emotions. Thus, the scan show a change in the mode of processing of brand relationships for the three women, revealing higher use of cognition with the growing age. These scans provide support for *H2b* – the greater the age, the more similar will be the basis of brand relationship between genders. Cognition, rather than affect, will drive brand relationships for both genders at an older age.

### *Peer and family influence*

A male respondent of 21 years stated:

There are some friends who like Nike – but most of my friends, my best friend – wears puma. These shoes I am wearing right now were gifted by him. They prefer Puma and Reebok. When wearing new shoes you can expect reactions from friends about it – I always buy white coloured shoes, so people do comment about it – there can be mixed reactions. There can be nice types and what the hell are you wearing types.

[...] male respondent 35 years of age said, when probed about communication of brand information within a peer group: We do not talk much about shoes [...] shoes it's such a thing [...] you would observe [...] not talk about it [...] that hey he is buying a addidas [...] he has a nike [...] or whatever [...] and if the colour or something stands out [...], for eg [...] all my nike shoes were black [...] and I remember you know [...] and I remember people commenting on it [...] like [...] all black..with that white nike thing [...] that's cool [...] or something [...] but not if [...] they are [...] standard looking nike shoes [...] so observe but not may be talk much about it.

Male respondent of 31 years mentioned, "When I first bought Nike after Reebok (which was cost driven at that time), by that time I had used a branded shoe and I was looking for something which normally people talk about and Nike is something which always rated everywhere better than anything else that was one thing. I think the first time was more related to what my peers were wearing rather than the design part of it."

A female of 18 years said which talking about the clothes brand she prefers the most, we keep discussing – if there is something really cool – then you might feel that this will look good on your best friend or something – okay please go buy that, it will look good on you and all.





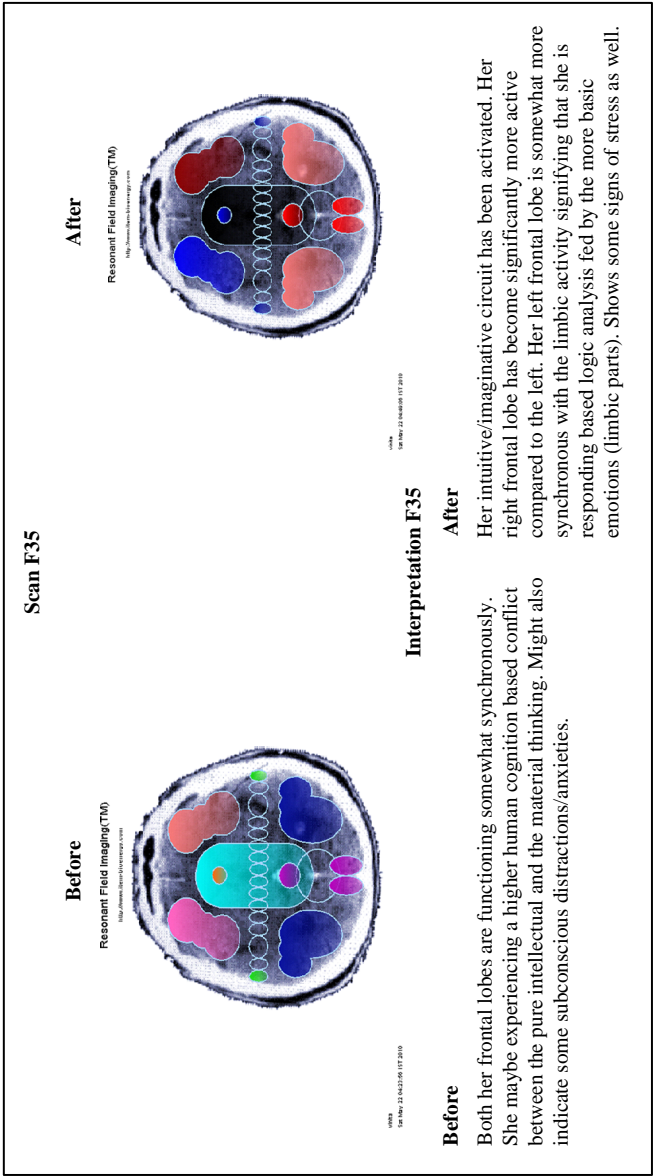


Figure 3.

[...] female of 31 years described her first purchase occasion – I first bought Nike in 2004, I got exposed to the brand as one of my good friends suggested me to buy Nike and by that time I probably had enough money to spend on shoes and we do talk about [...] like I bought this new shoes [...] but you should also go and buy this because it is too good [...] I don't think I have ever done that.

A female of 35 years age said her friends have bought the food processor brand she uses – O[...] Yes [...] I have recommended people to buy Braun and they have actually bought the stick grinder instead of buying a cheaper brand.

From the above it is seen that women play greater influencing roles amongst peers in developing brand relationships as compared to men. Thus, supporting *H3a*.

In the interviews conducted the first purchase occasion or exposure to the brand was also relating to the family experience for females:

A female, 18 years of age stated, “my mom had gone so she had got me stuff from Delhi, so she bought sweat shirt and all. So that time she bought this huge bulky Jack & Jones sweat shirt and I kind of liked it. I used to stay in Bombay so over there in Phoenix – it's a mall, recently open so then I just went there and I tried on their clothes and I really liked the stuff – like the clothes they make and all and then I started on with it.”

[...] female, 35 years of age stated, “my grandfather used Braun to grind. In the south they have roasted coffee beans, they don't have powdered coffee, they used to have beans and you roast them at home [...] and the smell used to go through the whole house, then you grind them and use freshly ground coffee, that was the idea and the Braun thing was very powerful and very easy to clean.”

The male respondents, on the other hand, do not contain references to family. Hence, based on the literature and the respondents' answers towards the brand exposure between the RFI scans, we can say *H3b* is supported stating that families influence women more strongly as compared to men in the formation of brand relationships.

## Discussion

The formation of relationships with brands is said to be affect based (Fournier, 1998) but there might be a difference in the degree when it comes to gender, age and family influence. As suggested by this preliminary study, females were found to develop brand relationships more on affect than cognition, especially at a younger age. Although, men did recall affect based experiences and incidences with the brand in the interviews, this recall is reflected in the scans, their affect levels were lower with women having higher affect based brain activity. The incidences that men have recalled are more fact based. In comparison, a female respondent recalled using the food processor brand by recalling the incidences where her grandfather used to brew the coffee with the same and how its aroma used to spread across the home.

Interestingly the basis of brand relationships will differ with age. With age, both male and female respondents start looking at the brand relationships from a similar view point; the affect levels decrease for women – they become relatively more cognition oriented in their brand relationships compared to when they were younger. The level of affect used by the females in the relationship formation will reduce. This has important implications for marketers as we discuss next.

### Potential implications of study

This study will help in understanding the degree of difference in the nature of brand relationship that is exhibited by men and women. The difference across the gender in the age group of 18-35 years provides a preliminary explanation of how consumer brand relationships transform over a period of time. The behavior shown by the teenagers as compared to the young adults is dissimilar. It will help marketers to understand how men and women behave with their most preferred brand under the influence of social variables like peers and family.

Thus, marketers need to be able to have a nuanced approach that recognizes the similarity between men and women consumers and yet is able to develop the different marketing approaches required for the two genders based on the differences. For marketers, therefore, it is important to manage their communications and product development and use based on these gender differences in brand relationships. For younger women, brand relationships and, therefore, marketing, should be more affect based; for young men, it should be more cognition based. We already see brands that are being targeted at specific genders such as Fair and Handsome cream and Horlicks for women. Since building brand relationships is important and there are gender differences in the way consumers make decisions, marketers would need to evolve gender specific messaging and relationship building activities.

### Limitations and future research

While the concept of gender differences in brand relationships may be universally applicable, the study is conducted in a single country. In addition, the RFI scans and the interview data were collected from respondents who were all SEC A or SEC B between the age range of 18-35. Arguably, one may extend the applicability of the suggested propositions to all SEC A and B consumers above the age of 18, though it may be difficult to suggest at this stage that the applicability also extends to consumers in categories other than SEC A and B at this stage of development of the research. Future research may empirically validate the suggested propositions within and across nations and may extend the scope of applicability to a larger section of the population.

### Notes

1. Bio-energies are the subtle energies that emanates from all living things can be quantified as EM field energy that resonates with different frequencies of light.
2. ITEM was originally established in 1994 as the US corporation "Institute of Technical Energy Medicine, Inc.", for the purpose of developing proprietary, "cutting edge" technologies in the fields of energy medicine and bioenergy science.
3. We would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for helping us better articulate the key ideas in this section of the paper.

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## Appendix 1

### How to read the scans

Please see the colours in the brain parts before and after and see what that colour signifies from Table AI.

Colour (depending on the monitor colour setting there might be some variance)	Brain state	CPS	Remarks
Burgundy	High beta	30-22	Agitated – not very creative – your usual self w/o workshop effect – good for creativity if seen anywhere, especially in frontal cortex, if it was not present in the first scan – as this denotes activation of this area. It also denotes efforts to come out of inhibitions
Red	Low beta	22-14	Active wakeful state – not very effective for creativity – good for creativity if seen anywhere, especially in frontal cortex, if it was not present in the first scan – as this denotes activation of this area. It also denotes efforts to come out of inhibitions
Rose	Level 1 alpha	14-13	Pink sleep state – beginning state for creativity
Orange	Level 2 alpha	13-12	Deeper relaxation – intermediate for creativity
Gold	All states can switch consciously to any state	30-1	Whole part synchronization – very good state for self directed creativity – you can choose and direct the creativity level to whatever level, whenever and wherever
Yellow	Level 3 alpha	12-11	Intermediate state relaxation and opening of the subconscious mind – good for creativity
Green	Level 4 alpha	11-10	More deeper relaxation – more opening of the subconscious mind – good for creativity

(continued)

Table AI.

Colour (depending on the monitor colour setting there might be some variance)	Brain state	CPS	Remarks
Cyan	Level 4/5 alpha	11-9	Semi relaxed state – an interstitial stage of confusion, distraction and relaxation – maybe not so opened up – unless more synchronous (right/left, front/back), fears, possessiveness and body consciousness issues may be there – good if found in the limbic area – central part of the brain
Black	Theta state	7-4	Highly relaxed-alert state – very highly conducive for creativity and paranormal activity
Blue	Level 5 alpha	10-9	Opening to open up – not very creative
Navy	Level 5 alpha	10-9	Beginning to open up – initial creativity
Purple	Level 6 alpha	9-8	Higher cognitive, intellectual, analytical and creative ability
Orchid	Level 7 alpha	8-7	High pineal body activation – heightened creativity and creative ability
Silver	High delta	4-3	Advanced creativity
White	Low delta	3-1	Advanced creativity – very highly relaxed, very high paranormal ability, also creativity if under conscious state

Table AI.

**Appendix 2**

Six brand relationship dimensions are:

- (1) Brand partner quality: brand is taken as a reliable and a trustworthy partner, the sense of being respected and looked up to in the presence of the brand.
- (2) Love and passion: are the affect based feelings related to brand indicating the warmth, affection and passion, possessiveness towards the brand, the feeling of uniqueness and a biased positive feeling towards the brand.
- (3) Self-connection: is the extent to which the brand becomes the focus of the consumer's life. The past, present and the future (expected) selves ranging across the time horizon. It also comprises of the encouragement of the tolerance in face of the adverse circumstances.
- (4) Interdependence: is the day-to-day routine interaction with the brands and making consumption as an important ceremony to be celebrated.
- (5) Commitment: shows the longevity of the brand relationship and stability to be maintained by a consumer.
- (6) Intimacy: represents strong beliefs about the superior performance of the product. It includes the brand relationship memory of personal associations and experiences within which the brand plays an important role.

**Appendix 3**

Nature of interview information requirements that directed questioning:

Introduction – what do you understand by the word brand?

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## *Brands*

## Role of affect and cognition

Which is your most preferred and used brand?

How long have you been using this brand?

Why do you think you like it above all others?

Could you describe in as much detail as possible situations in which you bought or used this brand?

Are there any memories that you have associated with the brand?

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Understanding the depth of brand relationship:

Defining the dimension of the brand relationship.

Brand partner quality:

- (1) Reliability of the brand; does it perform up to expectations.
- (2) Does the brand enhance my personality and get me more respect.
- (3) In a peer group does the brand make me more confident, expressive, more social and does it enable me to stand out of the crowd.

Commitment:

- (1) Level of loyalty to brand; whether respondent uses alternate brands or is looking for alternatives.
- (2) Will the respondent use the brand even if it lets him down once or twice; will she use in the future?

Interdependence:

- (1) Frequency of usage, whether brand is a part of daily life and level of involvement.
- (2) If I have some spare time, I use this brand.
- (3) At times, during the day I like to fiddle with this brand.
- (4) Involvement: when I am using this brand, I forget everything else.
- (5) Using this brand is like a performing a ritual for me.

Intimacy:

- (1) Does she have a nickname for the brand? Can he describe it to others easily?
- (2) Level of knowledge about brand and associated memories.
- (3) As compared to others my brand has better:
  - features;
  - quality;
  - service; and
  - status

Self connection:

- (1) The brand understands the respondent; represents the respondent; makes the respondent feel complete and fits well with his life.
- (2) The respondent would feel depressed if the brand suddenly stopped being present in the market.
- (3) This brand makes a statement about what is important to the respondent in life.

Love and passion:

- (1) Without the brand something is missing; it is irreplaceable; very few people if any can borrow it.
- (2) Not having the brand anymore makes the respondent nervous.

Lifestyle:

- (1) What do you do over the weekends?
  - out with family or friends;
  - movies; and
  - just relaxing.
- (2) What do your friends / family think about this brand?
- (3) Do you talk or advice your friends about the usage of this brand?
- (4) Do you recommend this brand to your friends or family?
- (5) Do you think any other brand can fulfill the promises that your brand delivers?

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