CHAPTER 4: CONCEPTUAL MODEL DEVELOPMENT

As the primary objective of the study is to explore the attitudinal and behavioral dimensions and to build a conceptual model of consumer-brand relationships, Chapter 4 structured in three main sections. First, the Chapter follows a qualitative research approach to explore the same and develops a conceptual model of consumer-brand relationships. Second, followed by the conceptual model, we define the phenomenon of consumer-brand relationships. Third, the Chapter develops the hypotheses, which further support the model and provide directions for further testing and validation.

4.1. Conceptual Model Development

4.1.1. Use of Research Approach

Considering the nature of the first two research objectives of the study, the qualitative research approach used for conceptual model development is “Grounded Theory” (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Loke (2001) stated that grounded theory is best suited in those situations, wherein the researcher want to: (a) capture complexity, (b) linking with practice, (c) facilitating theoretical work in substantive areas that have not been well researched by other researchers, and (d) putting life into established fields to provide alternative conceptualization for the existing work.

The use of grounded theory approach here in this study could provide the basis for an alternative view of well-established field of consumer-brand relationships through its open-ended approach to data collection followed by a systematic approach to theory development. To conduct grounded theory phase of this study, the multi-stage process was designed following the suggestion given by Glaser and Strauss (1967), Strauss (1987), Strauss and
Corbin (1994), and Glaser (1992). The detailed procedure followed by the grounded theory approach is shown in Figure 4.1.

4.1.2. Process and Domain

The process of interest in this study was the process of brand relationship development by the consumers. Thus, the cases of interest were those consumers who have a strong and deep rooted relationship with brands. The relationships were not stipulated a-priori and each respondent was allowed to discuss the relationships that he/she wanted to bring up. However, in some situations, different relationships of interest (based on data gathered so far and theoretical considerations) was prompted by the researcher.

During the research, the researcher remained conscious that both major and minor consumer-brand relationship process had to be explored. The following Table 4.1 shows the typical major and a minor consumer-brand relationships processes explored. The domain was delimited to include only those brands which have been already established in the market place. Specifically, in those product categories of durables and non-durables and having high familiarity in the market place.

Table 4.1. Major and Minor Brand Relationship Processes Investigated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Relationship Processes</th>
<th>Minor Relationship Processes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Relationship augmentation.</td>
<td>2. Emotional connection with the brands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Relationship maintenance.</td>
<td>3. Purchase intention with the brands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Relationship outcomes.</td>
<td>4. Confidence and trust with the brands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Attitudinal relationships.</td>
<td>5. Purchase evaluation with the brand.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.1.3. Informant Selection and Recruitment

Study participants were recruited purposefully from five different shopping malls which were located in a metropolitan city (Hyderabad, India) by the researcher themselves. Of the 55 approached research participants, 40 become the research participants, who informed their willingness to participate in this study and to represent the broad criteria listed in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2. Purposive Criteria in Informant Selection.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Years of relationship with brands</td>
<td>Those consumers who have relationships with brands since the last one year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Income</td>
<td>Annual income between Rs.100000-1000000.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographic Status</td>
<td>Consumers from different parts of the country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Consumers belong to the age group of 20-50 years of old.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.3.1. Informant Identification

In addition to the above mentioned purposive considerations, the selected 40 participants were further screened and identified in stages as listed in Table 4.3. Several other considerations specific than the purposive criteria listed in Table 4.2. above was used to screen these study participants.
### Table 4.3. Stages of Recruitment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identification</td>
<td>Identification through convenience, and suitability based on the key purposeful critieria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of accessibility</td>
<td>Assessment of likelihood of providing rich data, the possibility of interaction in various settings, and likelihood of achieving intimate familiarity. Assessed through communication about the project. Recruitment process terminated at this stage for non-suitable prospects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Screening</td>
<td>Administering of screening questionnaire to verify recruitment criteria and other demographic information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>First, an interview conducted through face to face interaction with the participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-up</td>
<td>Additional interviews were conducted after an appointment with the participants through direct interaction or over telephone.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.1.3.2. Assessment of Accessibility

When prospective research participants called up and informed about their willingness to participate in this study, they were screened for their suitability to participate in an interpretive study. The criteria used to screen the respondents are presented in Table 4.4. Then the researcher explained the purpose and scope of the study, and also made a pre-recruitment communication with each participant to assess these considerations. The cues derived during this communication were used to assess the suitability of the respondents for the study. Participants who did not qualify for these considerations were terminated at this stage.

Table 4.4. Assessment of Accessibility (Suitability for Interpretive Research).

| Likelihood that the information would be rich | 1. Does the respondent show good inclination to describe the events in detail.  
2. Is the respondent put efforts to recall the events.  
3. Does the respondent show no signs of reservation about the responses for the study. |
|------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The possibility of achieving familiarity       | 1. Does the respondent provide personal information.  
2. Does the respondent show high level of interest in the study.                                                                 |
| Likelihood of face-to-face interactions in multiple settings. | 1. Is the respondent ready to meet in person.  
2. Is the respondent willing to meet more than once (directly or indirectly).  
3. How flexible does the respondent appear to be about scheduling meetings. |
4.1.3.3. Screening

Once the researcher felt confident that the respondent satisfies the above mentioned considerations (Table 4.2., 4.3., and Table 4.4.), they were formally recruited into the study after an administration into the screening sheet. All these processes generated a suitable respondents list of 20. Among the 20 participants 11 of them were males and the rest of them were females. All the selected participants were the consumers of major brands, with an age ranging from 20 to 50, who had been buying this brand since the last one year. The selected participants belong to different regions of the country, which mainly aimed to avoid cultural bias in consumers’ brand purchase and their relationships. The participants’ educational level ranged from completion of the graduation equivalent degree to having a Ph.D. The selected respondents’ purchase frequency with the brand varied from regular purchaser (more than four times in a month) to once in a month. All those consumers who were involved in this study having an experience with the brand ranging from 1 year to more than 10 years. The profile of the study participants are presented in Table 4.5.
Table 4.5. Profile of Respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ex. with brand*</th>
<th>Brand</th>
<th>Study Stages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rajeesh</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Samsung</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divya.</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1.2 years</td>
<td>Tommy</td>
<td>1 and 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mittal Parik</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Tupperware</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swati Sharma</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1.2 years</td>
<td>BagIt</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sourabh Bhattacherjee</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>Goldflake</td>
<td>1 and 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kartikeya Vats</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>Nike</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shubhangi Bose</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Revlon</td>
<td>1 and 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gurveen Kaur</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1.8 years</td>
<td>Allen Solly</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shipra</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>Bausch and Lomb</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charu Atiri</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Subway</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jayraj</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1.1 years</td>
<td>US Polo</td>
<td>1 and 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Budweiser</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naveen</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3.2 years</td>
<td>Arrow</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sidharth Negi</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>Casio</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noel D’Souza</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1.1 years</td>
<td>Apple</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akshay Babbar</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2.5 years</td>
<td>Kenneth Cole</td>
<td>1 and 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eureka Singh</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1.2 years</td>
<td>Zara</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoaib Ahmed Khan</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1.5 years</td>
<td>HP</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiran</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1.8 years</td>
<td>Puma</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meghna</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2.5 years</td>
<td>Esprit</td>
<td>1 and 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* shows experience with the brands in years, study stages show the stages at which the respondents were interviewed.
4.1.3.4. Interviews and Follow-ups

At the beginning of the interview the participants were informed that their participation was completely voluntary. This was mainly carried out to avoid discomfort from the side of respondents. During the interview, the interviewer assured that none of these participants faced any kind of distress or discomfort, before, during, or after the process. For follow-up interviews, the participants were contacted before the interview, and asked to select their interview place and time.

4.1.4. Sampling Procedure: Theoretical Sampling

As the primary objective of this study is to direct all data gathering efforts towards gathering information about the attitudes and behavioral dimensions of consumer-brand relationships that will best support development of the theoretical framework. Therefore, the study followed a theoretical sampling procedure. In this research the researcher during the qualitative data collection(sampling) enters with the supposition that it will be an open ended and flexible process that will likely be modified over the course of the study as the study progresses. In this type of sampling, the need for data collection is decided by the emerging theory, whereby the researcher jointly collects information, code, analyze the information and then progressively determine which sample and information to collect next in order to develop a theory as it emerges. The process stopped at a stage where it is clear that additional interviews would yield theoretical saturation. In this research, the data collection began by interviewing a respondent from a shopping mall who had made the relationship with a mobile brand during the last 1.1 years. This initial interview helped the researcher to understand the starting point of relationship building. The researcher then interviewed another respondent to understand his attitudinal characteristics during the relationship
establishment. In this fashion, the researcher gradually interviewed 20 different individuals. Some of them repeatedly interviewed to understand the real process of brand relationships. The sampling process stopped when the researcher convinced by the fact that there was no additional information from the next respondent (called as theoretical saturation). This sampling process helped the researcher to explore and integrate the attitudinal and behavioral dimensions of consumer-brand relationships and to establish the theoretical framework.

4.1.5. Data Gathering

Data was primarily gathered through a series of in-depth interviews. The duration of these interviews were ranging from 60 to 90 minutes. These semi-structured in-depth interviews aimed at the exploration and understanding about the attitudinal and behavioral dimensions of consumer brand relationships, as well as the integration of these dimensions and thereby form a conceptual model of consumer-brand relationships. The tentative initial in-depth interview protocol was composed of several sections. Specifically, the questionnaire protocol composed of questions related to the starting point of relationship building, evaluative aspect before and after relationship identification, affective aspect, intentional aspect and outcome of consumer-brand relationships. In addition, the researcher collected the information about the type of respondent’s relationship with brands, the reason behind this relationships, and the peculiarity of the relationship partner (brand) etc. The in-depth interviews start with some informal questions (warm up questions). As the study followed theoretical sampling, data collection and analysis carried out simultaneously. This simultaneous data collection and analysis helped the researcher to generate questions instantaneously and the modification of the protocol. This process of protocol modification helped the researcher to get more insights on the problem. The analysis process involves
utilizing particular coding procedures such as open, axial and selective coding. This coding process normally begins with open coding. During data collection, the respondents were asked to talk about their experience with the brand. These questions were intended to uncover attitude formation, attempting to explore how and what would be the starting point of relationship establishment. Respondents were also probed about the kind of evaluation they had about the brand during their starting point of relationship formation. Participants were also probed to talk about their affective and emotional feeling with the particular brand and also the respective thoughts and feeling about the specified brand. During the interview once the interviewer found support for some of the dimensions of cognitive, affective and behavioral components, then the questions were directed towards these dimensions to understand more about these dimensions. Questions were also asked aiming to identify their intentional aspect of the relationship. During the interview, attempts were also made to provide the respondents with a distinct voice, which mainly enables him/her to explain feelings and affections in detail about the brand. All the interviews were conducted in a naturalistic setting and this approach helped the researcher to understand the process of relationship building in a context specific (brand) settings. To illustrate the views in good clarity, the respondents were motivated to draw on their personal experiences and those of friends. In all the interviews, the information was recorded and later transcribed for further analysis. The data collection processes for in-depth interviews were lasted around 5 months. The detailed questionnaire protocol for semi structured in-depth interviews is provided in Appendix 4.1.
4.1.6. Role of Researcher in Grounded Theory

Distinct from other qualitative research approaches, the role of researcher in grounded theory studies are different. Grounded theory studies require the researcher to be deeply engaged in the process and extract meaning from the research (Creswell, 1998). In this study, in all phases of the research process the researcher was actively involved, such as in-depth interviews, questionnaire protocol preparation and its modification, interviewing, and analysis of interview information etc. The researcher also played an active role in all the other related activities, such as confirmation of interviewee participation, audio taping, transcribing, preparation of the field notes and the report. The preliminary questionnaire protocol developed by the researcher was a mere starting point of generating information. Through engaging the participant during the interview process, the researcher developed more questions and modified the initial version. This process of gradual modification helped the researcher to understand diversified approaches to consumer-brand relationships. As a result, the current study designed in such a way that the participants work as co-researchers to explore the central research questions. This made the research process as a circular process, that is interactive and conversational. It is also essential for the grounded theorists to work as an active by a neutral listener to the given information during the interview process. Graham (2006) believed that it is essential for the researcher to play the role of an “An active by neutral listener, who listens deeply and carefully to the perspectives offered by the participants... and look for themes as they emerge”(page. 74). The researcher in this study played the role of an active by neutral listener through writing down the field notes, participants’ emotional and non-emotional changes during their
interview and probed only during it requires desperately. This helped the researcher to be free from researcher bias and get free and true interview participation.

4.1.7. Assessment of Trustworthiness

The study followed the criteria proposed by Flint et al. (2002) for the assessment of trustworthiness of qualitative phase. Table 4.6. presented below gives a detailed description about the assessment of trustworthiness of grounded theory approach.

Table 4.6. Trustworthiness of Grounded theory.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trustworthiness Criteria Dimensions</th>
<th>The Mode of Trustworthiness Confirmation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Credibility:</strong> The rate at which the results generated seems to be a better representation of data.</td>
<td>5 months for conducting in-depth interviews. Detailed summary of initial interpretation was given to participants for feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transferability:</strong> Extent to which findings would be applied in other contexts.</td>
<td>Use of theoretical sampling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependability:</strong> The extent to which findings are stable and consistent.</td>
<td>Found stability in participants opinion about the phenomenon regardless of changes occurred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Confirmability:</strong> The extent to which the interpretations generated from the phenomenon are from participants and free from researcher biases.</td>
<td>Two persons were actively involved as auditors.¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fit:</strong> Extent to which finding matches with the study under investigation.</td>
<td>Satisfied through credibility, dependability, confirmability and concepts were more deeply described.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Understanding:</strong> The rate at which the respondents believe the results generated are their real world representations.</td>
<td>Results generated were submitted to the participants and confirmed that it would reflect their opinions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Generality:</strong> Extent to which findings capture multiple aspect of a phenomenon.</td>
<td>Interviews were lengthy to capture multiple aspects of the phenomenon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Integrity:</strong> Extent to which interpretations are influenced by participants unwillingness and misinformation</td>
<td>All the interviews were conducted in professional and non-threatening way.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ See Appendix 4.2. for Auditor Checklist
Figure 4.1. Grounded Theory Procedure.

**Input**
Understand the actual experience of consumers with brands and build a theoretical model of consumer-brand relationships.

**Grounded Theory: Problem under study involves to provide the basis for an alternative view of well-established fields (consumer-brand relationships) (Bryman & Bell, 2011)**

Semi-structured in-depth interviews

**Stages**

1. Research Gap/Objectives
2. Selection of Qualitative Method
3. Selection of Data Collection Method
4. Selection of Samples
5. Data Collection
6. Identification of Concepts
7. Asking Questions/Constant Comparison
8. Saturate Categories
9. Explore Relationship between Categories and Sub-categories
10. Sampling (Theoretical)
11. Data Collection
12. Development of Core Categories
13. Model Development and Testing of Hypothesis

**Results**

- Generation of 68 concepts and seven major categories of consumer-brand relationships
- Relating sub-categories to a category
- Verification of the hypothesis
- Search for properties of categories and sub categories and dimensional location
- Exploration of variation in phenomenon
- Development of theoretical model and substantive theory
4.1.7. Analysis of the Data

After the completion of each interview, the collected information was transcribed and analyzed in line with the procedures suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967), Strauss (1987), Strauss and Corbin (1990), and Glaser (1992). First, the information in the transcripts broke down into different concepts of incidents, ideas, events and acts and then assigned a label/name/code into it. The concepts that related to each other were combined in order to form dense, more abstracted and well developed categories. Second, the data were coded for relevance to a specific phenomenon or incidents within a specific category for conditions, intervening conditions, strategies and tactics, and consequences (Strauss 1987; Strauss and Corbin 1990). Third, the categories were refined, modified and integrated to from new or core level categories. These procedures are integrated with the constant comparative method proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). During the constant comparison, the concepts and categories were constantly compared with similar concepts and categories with the eventual goal of integrating concepts and categories across incidents. This overarching framework helped the study as the governing principle in data collection and analysis. These stages are explained in detail in the following sections.

4.1.7.1. Stage 1: Discovering Concepts and Categories (Open Coding)

During the first phase, 14 semi-structured interviews were undertaken using 14 consumers of the study sample. All these collected information was open coded. The aim of this open coding was to assign a conceptual label (Representational/ in vivo) to each concept-or statements-found within the data. As data gathering and analysis were simultaneous, open coding was conducted and revised after each interview. During this process, 68 unique concepts were generated. Then, those 68 concepts were grouped through constant
comparison of concepts, like with like, to reduce the number of concepts. This led to the formation of sub-categories. Then, these sub-categories were grouped together and assigned names that were more abstract than those of the concepts grouped under them. The names selected in these categories typically surfaced by borrowing from the extant literature reviewed at this stage, as this procedure is consistent with the recommendations of Strauss (1987) and Strauss and Corbin (1990). The complete list of concepts, categories, and sub-categories identified by the study are shown in Table 4.7.

During this stage, the generated concepts were constantly compared in order to generate questions for subsequent interviews. In addition, the consumers’ statements were compared and contrasted with each other to group similar concepts. This procedure was helpful to create further questions and to reduce and integrate the similar concepts. During this stage, the researcher also reviewed upon extant literature related to the concepts which was helpful to describe and delimit sub-categories and categories. During this stage, the researcher also involved in writing the theoretical memos- “the theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding” (Glaser 1978, p. 83). Memo writing was essential to keep track of emerging categories, stimulate further coding, and aid inquiry audit.
Table 4.7. List of concepts and Categories.²

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Category</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Concepts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Establishment</td>
<td>Attitude Strength</td>
<td>brand knowledgable, confidence about the performance in the future, comfortable and easily available, importance of the brand, positive quality evaluation, started accidently and was appealing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brand Satisfaction</td>
<td>the brand offers more than the expectation, happiness, purchase satisfaction, immense satisfaction, satisfaction with quality and price, satisfaction with the usage of the brand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Augmentation</td>
<td>Brand Attachment</td>
<td>associating with brand, best friend, best companion, brand is a kind of identity, brand is a part of the family, correlate with the brand and person, emotional attachment, feel close to the brand, feeling possessiveness, love towards the brand, make sense to buy it again, matching personality, memories about the brand, passionate about the brand, personal connection with brand, positive feelings, serious and intimate, something special, something that suit, reflection of personality, remembrance, emotional quotient, like a mate, brand shows personality, something special, want to hug it, bonding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brand Trust</td>
<td>confidence about the brand, high faith, nothing gone bad till date, reliable and global, brand credibility, secure, trustworthiness, consistency in performance, keeping the promises.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Maintenance</td>
<td>Brand Commitment</td>
<td>brand as a future option, intention to purchase different varieties of the brand, intention to buy, decides to stick with the brand, like to stick to the brand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Outcome</td>
<td>Brand Loyalty</td>
<td>brand recommendation, long-lasting relationship, everlasting, loyal and consistent, purchase of every product variety of the brand, repeated buying.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brand Equity</td>
<td>a differential effect which others can't provide, always prefer brand irrespective of competitor brand is the first preferred one, brand matters most, gives a punch which other brands don't, knowledge of everything about the brand, substitutes can't compensate the brand, brand is a synonym for the product, brand is more important.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

² The generated sub-categories are presented in the theoretical framework
4.1.7.2. Stage 2: Relating Subcategories and Categories (Axial Coding)

The purpose of this stage of coding was to identify the relationship among various subcategories and categories. Strauss and Corbin (1990) recommended to use a paradigm model to organize these categories. First, the open coded categories were revised to examine whether they were consistant with the new data, and in many cases they were futher subcategorized. Then, the analysis was centered on each category, one at a time the relationship patterns in the data were identified and integrated. During this stage four analytical steps were applied simultaneously as follows: (a) relating sub-categories to a category using statements which denote the relationships between themselves and the phenomenon, (b) the verification of these hypotheses against actual data, (c) identification of properties of categories and its subcategories, and (d) linking categories at the dimensional level. During the analysis, it found that at dimensional level there were four major categories.

The ongoing and simultaneous data collection and analysis (stage 1 and stage 2), allowed categories and sub-categories to emerge out of data and facilitated the establishment of a number of provisional hypotheses. It has been stated that the development of these kinds of provisional hypotheses is the main output of a grounded theory study (Seaman and Basili, 1997). During this stage, the study also looked at the extant literature to develop more precise and abstract hypotheses. These hypotheses are detailed at the last section of this Chapter.

During the axial coding process, the study proposed the relationship between concepts and categories and between categories and categories. It stated that the relationships identified during axial coding is considered to be loose and tangled (Strauss and Corbin, 1994). Therefore, this was tackled and sorted out during the last stage of the data analysis.
process, called as selective coding stage. This stage of selective coding phase involved six semi-structured in-depth interviews with six consumers. During this stage the interview questions were primarily developed from the previous stage (stage 2) and based on provisional hypotheses proposed during the axial coding stage. In this selective coding stage, the relationships identified during the axial coding were verified and tested. This process helped the researchers to understand the conditions leading to the formation of CBR. This phase also helped to test the provisional hypotheses and develop a preliminary model of consumer brand relationships. The core category, categories, sub-categories and their various relationships were then combined to form a theoretical framework shown in Figure 4.2.
Figure 4.2. Theoretical Model of Consumer-Brand Relationships.
4.1.7.3. Stage 3: Generation of Action Diagram

In the selective coding phase, the concepts identified in Stage 1 and 2 were combined to create the phenomenon of consumer-brand relationships as a set of four stages. These were: (1) the relationship establishment stage (cognitive context); (2) the relationship augmentation stage (affective context); (3) the relationship maintenance stage (conative context) and (4) the relationship outcomes stage (behavioral/action context).

This coding phase supported that during the relationship establishment stage, cognitive aspect of consumer-brand relationships would play a major role. Consumers’ brand relationships during this stage were derived from current or previous knowledge, interaction with the brand and information about the brand from other sources. The responses stated that their relationship during this stage (establishment stage) would develop through their evaluation and comparison between their preferred brands with its alternatives based on their earlier interaction or reference. It was also evident that consumer-brand relationships during the cognitive context consist of: (a) attitude strength (composed of the valence and strength of the attitude towards the brand), and (b) satisfaction with the brand, in which consumer assesses the performance of the brand in terms of their expectations.

The second core dimension of consumer brand relationships was the relationship augmentation stage. This is a deeper sense of consumer-brand relationships forming an affective orientation. This aspect of consumer-brand relationships related to the trustworthiness, self-connection with the brand and brand prominence in their (consumers) thought process. In this regard, the selective coding showed that the second phase of relationship augmentation involved brand trust and brand attachment.
Nonetheless, consumer-brand relationships were not sufficiently stable in the affective stage. It could be influenced by various deteriorations, mainly due to the attractiveness of competitive offerings.

Thus, consumer-brand relationships maintenance would happen in conative context, in which consumers showed their intention or commitment to achieve a goal related orientation toward the brand. It was also found that during this stage consumers build a deeper level of relationships with brands compared to the former stages.

To complete the consumer-brand relationships sequence, the analysis went beyond the assessment of these three contexts, namely cognitive, affective and conative. The results support the fact that the outcome phase of relationship happens only in action context. In detail, the consumers first develop cognitive brand-relationships with brand attitude strength and brand satisfaction, then affective relationships through a brand trust and brand attachment, then conative brand relationships with deeply held commitment and intention to buy, and finally action part of relationships overcoming obstacles to achieve the action through their intense brand equity and loyalty. The following subsections will present these stages of consumer-brand relationships with relevant consumer brand relationship stories.

4.1.8. Consumer-Brand Relationship Stories

4.1.8.1. Relationship Establishment Stage

During this stage, two types of relationships emerged from the data: (1) attitudinal relationship and (2) satisfied relationship. Attitudinal relationships could be further subdivided into two parts. First was a positive evaluation towards the brand. The following quotes were representative of the customer comments associated with their attitudinal and satisfied relationships.
“initially when I bought this brand I didn't know about its performance, because it was still in the testing period. I came to know about the performance of the brand from my friends. The first watch that I got from this company (brand) is still with me, and I have got it repaired just once in 10 years. So the quality aspect is very good and the company provides the pick up service as no other brand could provide. Design, ease of carry, and other add-on features it can give are the differentiating aspects of this brand. Even a Rs.500 watch can give you time, or satisfy your needs, but if the company can surprise you with a brand which you can never imagine with a watch, it would act as a major hold on to me”.

During the relationship establishment stage, respondents also reported the strength dimensions along with strong evaluation, such as certainty, knowledge and importance toward the brands. For example,

“my friend suggested this brand, it helped me to develop a positive attitude and confidence that since I am travelling and live in a hostel, it's a quick snack and better than brands like McDonalds because its oil free, good for health, and known for customization”.

The role of strength dimension was also clear in their knowledgeability with brands. The amount of information about the brand that accompanies one's attitude towards it was always recalled and assessed by knowledge parameters. It was also evident from the conversation that the importance consumers personally attached to a brand also play a crucial role in relationship establishment. This strength related aspects of attitude are the major antecedents to brand satisfaction and brand trust:

The participants’ opinions showed that their relationship to be satisfied when the interviewer asked to describe the stage and the type of relationship during relationship establishment. However, detailed probing on the same brought out the exact nature of the
relationship. Participants stated that satisfaction comes when performance of the brand meets their expectations, and this satisfaction is a motivating factor behind brand attachment.

“my relationship with (brand) is a satisfied one. Satisfaction comes when you do what you really want to do. This is because everything is just so simple from making calls to surfing the net. Even if any message comes, you don't have to unlock your phone, the message just gets flashed on your screen. It's simple, easy and its operations are too smooth hence I am attached using iPhone or iPod”.

From the responses it was clear that the relationship establishment constructs, namely brand attitude strength and satisfaction work as a pre-condition for relationship augmentation and maintenance.

4.1.8.2. Relationship Augmentation Stage

Respondents stated that trustworthiness and attachment towards brands was very important in augmenting consumer-brand relationships. From respondents words, trustworthiness indicates the confidence that the brand (product) works according to the his/her expectations, or it is reliable. The following quotes were representative of the customer comments associated with their trustworthiness and attached relationships.

“It(brand) has been trustworthy and as the length of a cigarette is 69 mm, so the time it takes to burn according to my level is 5 to 6 minutes. If I am working, and feeling sleepy during my work, with a smoke I can go on to my work for an hour or more”.

“It's a relationship of trust, I feel the brand to be my partner because whenever I bought this watch I was sure enough that this is never going to be bad”.

It was also evident from the customer conversation that the brand was honest in its promises and claims, and was respectful of its customers.
“It has till date not deceived me and I am sure it will not do so in future as well...I have complete trust on it to deliver what it stands for”.

The brand trust is the outcome of strong positive attitudes, whenever the brand keeps the promises of the customers it develops into trust, that drive the customer with the brand forever.

Respondents’ brand relationship statements suggest that detailed brand relationship argumentation developed around deeply held attachment with brands, such as deeper associations, feelings and strong bonds.

“The brand is absolutely a part of me because whenever I want to have something, drink something...I go and grab it (brand)”.

It was also clear from the responses that these deeply held attachments were the outcomes of consumer trust and satisfaction with that brand.

“Since it’s like my partner and so will go on and high on emotional attachment, it’s basically coming from my trustworthiness with it and the satisfactory performance”.

4.1.8.3. Relationship Maintenance Stage

The responses revealed that a high level of commitment towards the brand or the intention to maintain relationship longevity was common across strong brand relationships. During the interviews, respondents openly expressed their relationship maintenance through showcasing their intention to stay with the brand and brand pledges.

“Yes this brand is still and will always be the option in the future, because there is a sense of loyalty associated with it”, or “If tomorrow I need to buy a phone again it has to be Apple. Till now they have always come up with better versions from 2g to 3g to 4s. Every product of this brand has outperformed others”.

It was also evident that commitment towards brand become stronger with time.
“Whenever I go to purchase a watch, it (brand) has a distinct design ready for me which is totally different from what I had owned. So my relationship is going deeper and deeper because without going to other brands I know that probably this has the watch I am looking for”.

It was also evident that a long term orientation was the basic factor that prompted the consumer to repeat purchase the brand. Commitment also fostered stability by showing a differential effect that other competitors could not provide:

“Yes it is here to stay in my life... I don't think for some time to come I will move away from this brand, this brand adds something different, that others can’t provide”.

4.1.8.4. Relationship Outcome Stage

The core outcome of strong brand relationships for relationship maintenance was a rich differentiating effect or brand equity. While consumers expressed their intentions to stay with the brand, they also showed their endowed value towards the brand.

“For me, price is not an issue when selecting my brand. Even if there are offers, I still would buy it at whatever price it is available”.

It was also evident that this brand equity is the outcome of brand trust and its associated credibility.

“I will go for Apple iPhone, because I have been using this brand from quite some time and I have trust on Apple. One will always go for something that one trusts even though others offer the same products. Until and unless I get some good and strong reason, I won't think of buying another brand”.

This differentiating value protects the relationship through a full range of relationship biases and repeated buying.
“I feel it is an aura because once you start using an Apple product you can’t really go to another product. I had Apple products before and I wanted to buy a phone, so I bought the next version, which is Apple 4s. Even though I had options to buy other phones (brands), I am still would like to stick to Apple”.

The action related behaviors or behavioral loyalty were also revealed on the outcome stage of consumer-brand relationships. Respondents also expressed behavioral loyalty. However, their stories showed the fact that their loyalty came from the brands’ trustworthiness, the differential effect (brand equity) and their feelings and emotions or affective component (attachment) that the brand provided. It was also evident that loyal consumers would be biased towards the brand and would recommend the brand to others. Illustrative quotes identifying behavioral loyalty as follows:

“Yes now I am a repeated purchaser of this brand, its basically because of the trustworthiness of the brand, emotional connection and finally the differentiated effect that the brand possesses”.

4.1.9. Interpretation of the Findings

Relationship phases emerged during the qualitative exploration were in support of extant literature. Both attitudinal and behavioral aspects were found to interplay in relationship formation between brand and consumers (Blackston, 1992; Nebel and Blattberg, 2000). The attitudinal phase of consumer-brand relationships had three key stages, namely cognitive, affective and conative (Evanschitzky and Wunderlich, 2006; Oliver, 1997, 1999). During the cognitive stage consumers form strong and positive brand attitudes. Consumers at this stage develop attitude strength through comparing the brand and its alternatives based on past experiences and or/vicarious knowledge related to the offering, brand attributes, performance of the brand or current experience based information about the brand (Back and Parks, 2003; Evanschitzky and Wunderlich, 2006; Oliver, 1997;
Such attitudes may become strong when they are based on thoughtful processing. Strong attitude development is the starting point of brand relationships (Fullerton, 2005). When the performance of the brand meets customers’ expectation, cognitive evaluations result in brand satisfaction. Brand satisfaction is the outcome of the subjective evaluation that the chosen alternative (the brand) meets or exceeds the expectations (Engel et al., 1990). Busacca and Castaldo (2003) in their conceptual framework stated that the beginning of a consumer-brand relationships is also determined in terms of brand satisfaction. The second stage of consumer-brand relationships is the affective relationship, which provides a deeper sense of relationships. Consumer-brand relationships in this stage develops from a strong favorable attitudes towards the brand and its overall evaluation (Oliver, 1997). It helps the customer to augment the relationship. This stage will occur when the brand offers resources in the service of self-expansion, which develops through brand trust or consistency in the performance of the brand. Customers may subsequently develop strong connections between the brand and the self as well as mental models of the brand and the self (Park et al., 2010). In this stage, the brand-related thoughts and feelings are easily and frequently accessed and brand attitudes develop into brand attachments. This affective relationship stage is very essential in the attitudinal consumer-brand relationships formation (Bandyopadhyay and Martell, 2007; Han et al., 2009; Oliver, 1997, 1999). During the relationship augmentation stage, consumer-brand relationships is subjected various deteriorations, particularly due to the attractiveness of competitive brands (Evanschitzky and Wunderlich, 2006). Therefore, for the relationship to continue, it is essential for the consumers to move into the conative phase of consumer-brand relationships. In this stage, the brand’s prominence and its linkage to the self may incline consumers’ to invest resources to maintain the relationship.
However, even if the consumer passes through cognitive, affective and conative stages, the consumer-brand relationships will be accomplished in its fullness at the behavioral/action phase (Oliver, 1997, 1999). To summarize, customers first form cognitive consumer-brand relationships through attitude strength and brand satisfaction. Then, affective consumer-brand relationships through trusted and attached relationships. Followed by conative consumer-brand relationships with deeply held brand commitment. All these works as as an integrative framework, which finally results in a behavioral/action relationship.

4.2. Conceptualization of Consumer-Brand Relationships

Based on the above mentioned study findings the current research defines consumer-brand relationship as “an integrated approach to establish, augment and maintain relationships between the brand and its customers and to continually strengthen these relationships through the attitudinal and behavioral components aimed to generate relationship outcomes which extended over a long period of time”. This definition composed of three parts: (a) Consumer-brand relationships is an integrated approach: The consumer-brand relationship is an integrated approach, wherein the parties involved in the relationship building process aimed to establish, augment and finally maintain it forever, (b) It is getting strengthened through the attitudinal and behavioral components: The establishment, augmentation and maintenance of consumer-brand relationship is achieved through the integration of attitudinal and behavioral components, which basically results in relationship outcomes, (c) Extended over a long period of time: Consumer-brand relationship creation is a long term process, wherein the parties involved in the relationship creation process achieve this objective of brand relationship building through their continuous and long term relationship building efforts.
4.3. Hypotheses Development

The hypotheses of the study were developed based on the qualitative study findings and with the support from extant literature. Figure 4.3. displays the conceptual model used in this study. It shows the integration of all attitudinal and behavioral dimensions of consumer-brand relationships.

The first hypothesis connected brand attitude to satisfaction. Brand satisfaction is defined as “the outcome of subjective evaluation that the chosen alternative (the brand) meets or exceeds the expectations” (Engel et al., 1990, p. 22). According to Bloomer and Kasper (1995) brand satisfaction is the result of strong subjective evaluation (attitudes). A consumer is expected to elaborate upon the evaluation of the brand. This elaboration happens when the consumer having the motivation and capacity to evaluate the brand in terms of its reference point or alternatives. The central route of elaboration will lead to permanent attitude change and peripheral route of elaboration will lead to temporary attitude change. The extent of elaboration (direct or indirect) would help the consumer to have an explicit or implicit comparison between expectation and performance. The result would be the confirmation or discormation of previous expectations. Mona and Oliver (1993) argued that the favorable utilitarian evaluation will result in the experience of pleasure that lead to develop product satisfaction. In similar lines, Bolton and Drew (1991), Suh and Youjae (2006) argued that attitude works as an antecedent of satisfaction.

Thus, the first hypothesis is stated as:

\[ H_1: \text{ Brand attitude strength will have a positive effect on brand satisfaction. } \]

The extent to which customer develops attachment to a brand depends not only on the brand’s ability to provide the resources but also the ability of the brand to do so consistently, and hence develop a sense that the brand can be trusted to act in the
consumer’s best interests (Park et al., 2006). Analogously, the consumers’ strong brand attitude would develop into an attachment when they believe that the brand can be relied upon would consistently deliver its resources for the self expansion of brand holder. The major motivation for such attachment may include the need for comfort, support, security and consistency (Patwardhan and Balasubramanian, 2011), called as brand trust.

Wieselquist et al. (1999) defined the term trust in branding as “the expectation that the brand can be relied upon to behave in benevolent manner and to be responsive to one’s needs”. Rempel et al. (1985) stated that the expectations of benevolence and responsiveness would impart a sense of confidence by the customer with the brand. This created confidence helps the customer to believe that the brand will satisfy their desired goals and motives even in the face of future relationship uncertainties. When the customer is convinced that the brand puts their interest and welfare ahead of all other interests, the customers will become more self connected and emotionally attached to it.

Park et al. (2006) stated a number of reasons behind the role of trust in attachment development: (a) Trust is a relationship variable, and evolves and develop over time from consumer interactions with the entity. Attachment could not be created without trust, because the lack of trust leaves the individual at risk about the uncertain outcome; (b) Trust creates a type of intimacy goal, in which the individual develops an individual secure base and helps to create greater intimacy by considering future risks associated with the entity will be less and (c) Trust helps to create an in-depth understanding of the entity as part of the self, in which considering the entity as “us” or “we” as opposed “me” or “I”. Thus, the next hypothesis is stated as:

$H_2$: Consumer brand trust mediates the relationship between brand attitude strength and brand attachment.
Busacca and Castaldo (2003) stated that brand satisfaction is the starting point of consumer-brand relationships. This satisfaction is the result of customers’ strong subjective evaluation of the brand (Engel et al., 1990). The resultant satisfaction having the ability to affect brand commitment and re-purchase intentions (Fullerton, 2005). Subsequently, when the consumer-brand relationships is prolonged, the brand satisfaction is replaced by brand trust (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999). The core value that a strong brand is able to provide to its customers is brand trust, this will enable the customers to know the offering and perceived risk associated with purchasing and consuming the product (Berry, 2000). A customer who has a strong trustworthiness towards the brand is intended to be with the brand, willing to pay premium price for it, intended to buy any new product under it in the existing and new category and finally, ready to share information about testes, preferences and behavior (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Busacca and Castaldo, 2003). Highly committed consumers trust and emotionally connected with the brand compared to non-committed customers (Evanschitzky et al., 2006). Brigita et al. (2010) stated the role of satisfaction for the development and maintenance of strong brand relationships. According to him “If customers believe that the brand satisfies their needs, then a bond between the brand and the customer will be formed based on trust and satisfaction”. Thus, the third hypothesis is related to the mediating role of trust between satisfaction and commitment and is stated as:

\[ H_3: \] Consumer brand trust mediates the relationship between brand satisfaction and brand commitment.

Literature on attitude supports that brand attitudes are an important starting point in building a conceptual model of consumer-brand relationships (Fullerton, 2005). Park et al. (2010) argued that relationship establishment starts with brand purchase and at this
stage the customer develops positive brand attitudes and this developed attitudes might become strong when they are based on thoughtful processing. When a brand starts offering resources in the service of self-expansion, the consumer will attach to the brand, which is shown through two ways; self connection- strong connections between the brand and the self and brand prominence- the development of mental models of the brand and the self which is shown through brand-related thoughts and feelings which easily appear in consumers’ mind (Park et al., 2010). Lacoeuilhe (2000) argued that the relationship between brand attachment and commitment is crucial to the extent that brand attachment helps in understanding how a consumer can be loyal to the brand, whereas the consideration of only functional characteristics of the brand will create problems for differentiating it from its competitors. The relationship between brand attachment and commitment is also supported by Lacoeuilhe and Belaid (2007), that brand attachment feed the attitudinal intention, i.e. commitment. These links between brand attachment and commitment was empirically shown by researchers(e.g. Lacoeuilhe, 2000; Lacoeuilhe and Belaid, 2007; Gouteron, 2008).

The present study argues that the relationship establishment starts with the development of strong positive brand attitudes This strong positive attitude helps to create brand self connection and prominence, which ultimately leads to intention to behave in a manner that supports relationship longevity. Brand commitment is derived from strong attachment towards that brand (Park et al., 2006). Thus, the fourth hypothesis is stated as:

\[ H_4: \text{Brand attachment will mediate the relationship between brand attitude strength and brand commitment.} \]

The investment model (Rusbult, 1983) of interpersonal relationship identified the role of satisfaction in building relationships. The investment model states that commitment is a
core relationship specific motive. Strong commitment makes the individual most likely to remain with the brand, and also promote a variety of relationship maintenance behaviors. Satisfaction is considered to be one of the core components of commitment development. According to Berry et al. (1988) consumers psychological attachment would be higher if a brand provides them the values (symbolic or hedonic), explains that, if a brand provides ultimate superior benefit to the consumer, which in turn helps to develop satisfaction. The developed satisfaction would lead to commitment or intention to stay with the brand. The commitment or intention with the brand is not the direct outcome, instead it develops though the feelings and thoughts which are derived from satisfaction. Tsai (2009b) studied the role of satisfaction in consumer-brand relationships with service branding context, and operationalized the construct in two dimensions, such as satisfaction of utilitarian attributes and satisfaction of affective attributes. In that study, the author found that these two satisfaction dimensions will have a positive impact on service brand commitment. In Oliver’s (1981) confirmation and disconfirmation model, it stated that satisfaction is derived from confirmation or disconfirmation of previous expectations. If any brand which consistently perform previous expectations, or satisfy the consumer, this would lead to developing a kind of commitment or intention to stay with the brand. But this intention would happen only through the creation of positive feelings and thoughts about the brand. Intent to persist and feeling of psychological attachment will have a positive impact on relationship building and maintenance (Rusbult, 1983). Thus, the fifth hypothesis is stated as:

**H₅:** Brand attachment will mediate the relationship between brand satisfaction and brand commitment.
Garbarino and Johnson (1999) stated that consumer brand trust evolved and developed from past experience and prior interaction with the brand. Most often, the development of brand trust of an individual has been portrayed through the experiential process of learning over time and reflects the consumers’ knowledge and experiences with the brand. Brand trust as an experiential attribute is influenced by the consumer’s strong evaluation of any direct (e.g. Trial, usage) and indirect contact (e.g. Advertising and word of mouth) with the brand in hand or use (Keller, 1993; Krishnan, 1996). Among all these experiences and contacts the most important attribute which direct trust is the consumption experience with the brand. Dwyer et al. (1987), Krishnan (1996) argued that consumption experience is the major driving force behind associations, thoughts and inferences that are more self-relevant and held with more certainty. Moorman et al. (1993) defined brand trust as “willingness of a person relay on another (person/brand) in which one has confidence”. This definition shows the importance of confidence in building trust towards the object or person. This certainty and confidence are the two major dimensions of attitude strength (Krosnick & Petty, 1995). In this context, it can be postulated that the attitude strength or strong positive evaluation of the brand developed from consumption or non consumption experience with the brand, generates brand trust (Ganesan, 1994; Selnes, 1998).

There are studies in marketing which considered the construct brand equity as the relational market-based construct (e.g. Falkenberg, 1996; Hooley et al., 2005; Srivastava et al., 1998, 2001). The primary reason for this consideration is that, for a brand most of its value for its equity development is derived from the brand’s relationship with external members of the value chain (e.g. the distribution system and the final users) (Delgado et al., 2005). Ambler (1997) stated that the relational market-based nature of brand equity may be best expressed as a function of brand-consumer relationship. In such a
relationship context brand trust is the major determinant of building brand equity (Delgado et. al., 2005). Trustworthiness towards the brand is the major determinant to building brand equity because people will place high value in the brands they trust. Lassar et al. (1995) supported this argument with an example; consumer’s trust towards Nordstrom had created high equity for Nordstrom. Distrust will negatively affect the brand equity of the brand (Lassar et al., 1995). The extant literature in marketing considered a very similar concept, brand credibility in relationship context and considered as the antecedent of brand equity. Erdem and Swait (1998) stated trustworthiness as the dimension of brand credibility and this credibility is the major driving force behind brand equity. Thus, the sixth hypothesis is stated as:

\[ H_6: \text{Consumer brand trust mediates the relationship between brand attitude strength and brand equity.} \]

While explaining the role of trust in relationship building Morgan and Hunt (1994) stated that trust is a major determinant of relationship. If a person possesses trust towards another party, it is more likely that he/she would develop some kind of behavioral intention towards that trusted party (Lau and Lee, 1999). Literatures in branding have shown exhaustive evidence that brand loyalty is a consequence of brand trust. But all these literatures conceptualized the concept of brand loyalty either in terms of behavioral intention or repeated purchase behavior. Based on commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing (Morgan and Hunt, 1994) and brand commitment (Grundlach et al., 1995), Chaudhuri and Halbrook (2004) stated that brand trust and brand affect impacts repurchase loyalty. According to Morgan and Hunt (1994) consumer’s trust towards brand will lead to higher levels of loyalty because the trust component creates the relationship as highly valued one. This trust component creates affection towards the
trusted object/brand or positive mood and affect, because the trusted object/brand consistently performs according to expectations. Brand loyalty should be higher when the positive mood and affect of a consumer is higher (Dick and Basu, 1994). Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) stated that those brands make consumers happier, joyful or affectionate will elicit more purchase. Thus, the next hypothesis of the study is stated as:

\[ H_7: \] Consumer brand attachment mediates the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty.

Lassar et al. (1995) studied the perceptual nature of brand equity and analyzed the impact of feeling component of commitment on it. The author distinguished commitment into two dimensions; feeling component and action components. The feeling component is just similar to attitudinal loyalty combined with attachment and action component is just similar to behavior loyalty as proposed by Oliver (1997). The commitment directed by feeling judged behavior to be the force behind brand equity rather than brand equity itself (Lassar et al., 1995). The feeling part of relationship intention comes from the development of attachment with that relationship object. For supporting this argument Lassar et al. (1995) gave an example: The severe protests against Coco-Cola for the brief removal of “old” Coco-Cola brought forth by its loyal fans exemplified by the consumers’ attachment towards that brand and that feelings power in augmenting brand equity. The consumer feels an attachment towards some brands and form relationship with them (Fournier, 1998) which result in equity of that brand (Keller, 1993). Ahluwalia et al. (2000) studied the role commitment with attachment influences consumer information processing. Emotional attachment plays a vital role in determining resistance to counter attitudinal information. Commitment combined with attachment is considered to be the crucial determinant behind the prevention of negative information. Highly
committed consumers with attachment counter argue negative information about that brand (Ahluwalia et al., 2000). This counterargument against negative information creates a differential effect for that brand and that will lead to brand equity and also this defensive mechanism of commitment with attachment will reduce the likelihood of negative brand equity towards that brand. Thus, the next hypothesis is stated as:

**H₈**: Consumer brand commitment has a positive impact on brand equity.

Oliver (1997) defined the concept of brand loyalty as “a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior”. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) stated behavioral intention as one of the most predictable behaviors and it works as a direct antecedent to behavioral loyalty. There were studies in marketing which considered brand commitment as the necessary and sufficient antecedent to the formation of behavioral loyalty (Cunningha, 1967; Knox and Walker, 2001; Back and Parks, 2003; Bandyopadhyay and Martell, 2007; Evanschitzky and Wunderlich, 2006). Kim et al. (2008) differentiated true loyalty from spurious loyalty through integrating the attitudinal and behavioral aspects loyalty. The authors empirically demonstrated that the attitudinal loyalty, such as brand commitment is the direct antecedent of behavioral loyalty. Thus, the next hypothesis is stated as:

**H₉**: Consumer brand commitment has a positive impact on behavioral loyalty.

In brand management literature the concept of brand equity has been defined “as the added value endowed to a product as a result of past investments in the marketing of the brand” (Keller, 1998). This added value in the consumer’s mind created because of the perceived performance of that brand that generated through the experience of interaction
with the brand in the past. This differential value is a major determinant of repeated purchase. Brand equity can be considered as the major determinant of brand loyalty (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993, 1998) and loyalty has been considered to be the important outcome of brand equity (Van Riel et al., 2005). Erdem and Swait (1998) used Spence’s (1974) signaling and information economics framework, stated that brand loyalty in the consequence of brand equity. According to Erdem and Swait (1998) the clarity and credibility of brands act as signals of product positions that in turn increase perceived quality, reduction in consumer perceived risk and information costs, and hence increase consumer expected utility, this expected utility motivates the consumers to repeatedly buy the same brands. Recently, the same argument has also been supported by Menictas et al. (2012) in an attempt to validate Erdem and Swait’s (1998) brand equity framework. High brand equity consumers are always loyal to that brand (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2005). Strong behavioral loyalty is the consequence of strong customer based brand equity and change in brand equity will lead to change in brand loyalty (Kaynak et al., 2008; Leone et al., 2006). Therefore, the study made a hypothesis for analyzing the relationship between brand equity and brand loyalty.

**H_{10}:** Consumer brand equity has a positive impact on brand loyalty
Figure 4.3. Hypothesized Model of Consumer-Brand Relationships

Hypotheses:

H1: Attachment
H2: Satisfaction
H3: Trust
H4: Attachment
H5: Trust
H6: Equity
H7: Commitment
H8: Loyalty
H9: Loyalty
H10: Commitment

Concepts:

- Attitude Strength
- Trust
- Equity
- Commitment
- Loyalty
4.4. Chapter Summary

Although branding literature is rich with the descriptions of specific forms or typology of consumer-brand relationships, in this Chapter the study conducted a systematic and unique examination of the process of consumer-brand relationships. A theoretical model of consumer-brand relationship employing 20 real consumers was constructed through a qualitative data analysis, which include involving consumers during the data analysis process in order ensure that the model reflected their relationships with brands. The model developed in the present study was from a multitude of experiences, examples and anecdotes. The result supported a coherent construct oriented framework for understanding the often difficult and confusing constellation of different attitudinal and behavioral patterns of consumers-brand relationships. Later on, the study proposed ten hypotheses, which integrated all the plausible relationships based on extant literature. Therefore, the Chapter made an attempt show more detailed evidence, which further support the qualitative exploration carried out during the first phase of this study.