CHAPTER-2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 REVIEW:

Since 19th century researchers initiated the process to examine ways in which people used goods and possessions not only to satisfy functional needs but also provide meaning and organisation to their lives. It is the latter half of the nineteenth century, during which the modern branding concepts were first used and consumers became aware of the brands accessible in the market. Since then, the brands have become essential building blocks in our society, thereby, developing more brand conscious consumers than ever before. However, today in the light of globalization, characterized by swift exhaustive competition and economic alliances being undertaken by the corporates, the brands have become more considerable in many aspects. They are regarded as not only physical products, but also the elite belongings of a specific owner and have been developed over time so as to embrace a set of values and attributes, which significantly and suitably differentiate the products, which are otherwise very similar. Thus, a brand represents product of a particular supplier differentiated by its name and presentation and is regarded as one of the most valuable possession that companies have thereby playing a vital role in the process of customer choice of products; as today’s customers are increasingly brand conscious.

It clearly suggests that brands are considered a main link between the producer and the customer, and offer the customer a number of purposes that meet his or her desires through the buying process. They help consumers to construct and manage their identities (Kleine, Kleine, & Allen, 1995); thus, becoming a social communication tool through which consumers communicate their personality, class, wealth and status by simply selecting a particular one (Piacentini & Mailer, 2004). It is so due to the fact that a customer thinks about a brand in the selection of a product when one has an intention to purchase it. This points towards the fact that brand is essential because it helps the or-
ganization to catch the attention of customers so as to enable them to purchase the product, influences their behaviour and encourages them to repeat the purchase process.

As a result, the companies have been strategising their efforts to create strong brand connections with their customers especially the adolescents, as they constitute an important market segment and are more persistent on the brands rather than its attributes. It is more so because brand is one of the important elements in the strategy of manufacturers, which exhibits a pillar of strong representation in the market and in the minds of customers, as brand in the eyes of consumers is his own elucidation and emotional reaction towards it.

In the light of above, it can be pointed out that brands play a key role primarily during adolescence, as they instigate to relate more with the environment and form their identities and connecting with brands makes them feel vital and empowered. They help in determining adolescents’ perception of products as well as being a main point for connotations and values that products have for different individuals. As individuals enter adolescence, not only do they understand themselves better, but they also start to understand the concept of the brand (Chaplin & John, 2005) and as a result their awareness and interest in brands increases (Ross & Harradine, 2004).

The brands assume symbolic meaning representing who one is or wants to be and thus linking the self to a brand. Such brands reflect one’s aspirations, hopes and desires to one’s self. Some of the consumers relate such brands with status, success, and achievement. However, others pave the way for self-enrichment through different brand meanings. A person derives meaning from close associations and other life goals that reflect his or her core attitude values, and role identities (Lydon, Burton & Menzies-Toman, 2005; Shavitt & Nelson, 2000). Thus, providing a connection to consumers’ self by the representation of their values and beliefs. In addition the brands enrich one’s current self by connecting the individual to other consumers who share their values and beliefs (Kozinets, 2001). They actively use brands in their identity projects to signal status and prestige, as well as affiliation to desired identities and groups (Chan, Berger, & Van Boven, 2012).
The discussion above points towards the importance that resides within a brand, which is a crucial factor influencing the consumers’ purchase decisions. Further, it is also imminent that people use brands as a tool to express themselves and reveal parts of their personality. A brand is therefore suited to be a symbol of the consumer’s personality, if he perceives a fit between his own self-concept and the brand’s personality or image. This fact has also been stated by Lindstrom and Seybold (2003), when they have expressed that today’s youth use brand name purchases as a pillar of their self-image and social status. Going further, in the words of Escalas and Bettman (2005), consumer form “self-brand connection” based on the congruence between the individual’s “self image” and the “brand icon.” This suggests that the consumers make use of brands to correspond who they are and how they want others to believe them. More recently, Schembri, Merrilees, and Kristiansen (2010) have propounded that consumers use specific brands as a narrative text to communicate who they are. Therefore, it suggests that brand has been considered as a strong communication tool, which plays a significant role in defining and communicating self-concept.

2.2 SELF-CONCEPT

“No topic is more interesting to people than people. For most people, moreover, the most interesting person is the self”. (Baumeister, 1999)

The above statement underlines the fact that self-concept, has immense marketing implications. This concept is considerable and suitable to study consumer behaviour because most of the purchases made by consumers are directly influenced by their self image as an individual. It is referred to as the totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object (Rosenberg, 1979). The consumer behaviour literature supports the proposition that individuals' self image dictates specific purchase behaviour patterns (Onkvisit & Shaw, 1987). It is so because consumers buy products and brands, which they believe to possess symbolic images similar and or complementary to their self-image, that is, to achieve image congruence (Heath & Scott, 1998). Thus, following the strong evidences, it has been proved that self-image congruence explains and predicts different aspects of consumer behaviour (He & Mukherjee, 2007).
Dwelling further on the “Self-concept” it is mainly concerned with how one thinks about self: who one once was, who he is, and who he may become. It is the response to basic question, “who am I?” (Markus & Cross, 1990). This understanding of self-concept helps the marketers to recognize the way consumers make choices regarding the brands they have an intention to purchase and furthermore symbolically relate to (Onkvisit & Shaw, 1987).

In this context, Levy (1959) had concluded that people buy products not only for what they can do, but also for what they indicate. Consumers choose those brands which are perceptually consistent with their own self-concept (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967; Sirgy, 1982). Therefore, purchasing and using products allows the consumers to express, maintain and enhance their self-concept (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967; Grubb & Hupp, 1968; Grubb & Stern, 1971; Hamm & Cundiff, 1969). Further deliberating the concept, Arnould and Thompson (2005) have proposed that the self-concept is a structured construction of perceptions, people have about themselves. While there seems to be an agreement about the general definition of the term ‘self-concept’, the operationalisation of the self-concept construct leads to discrepancies within the consumer behaviour literature (Sirgy, 1982).

In earlier studies, self-concept was a single dimensional construct but further researchers in the domain suggested it as consisting of multiple constructs. In this direction, some authors (Bellenger, Stanton, & Steinberg, 1976; Birdwell, 1968; Grubb & Hupp, 1968; Grubb & Stern, 1971; Hughes & Guerrero, 1971) have suggested ‘self-concept’ as a single construct referred to as the actual self, real self, basic self, or extant self (Sirgy, 1982) whereas recent conceptualizations interpret self-concept as a multi-dimensional construct (Sirgy, Grewal, & Mangleburg, 2000; Todd, 2001). Over a period of time, the marketing literature has identified four dimensions of self-concept to explain and predict behaviour i.e. actual self-concept, ideal-self-concept, social self-concept, and ideal social self-concept (Belch & Landon, 1977; Dolich, 1969; Hughes & Guerrero, 1971). In recent times, Sirgy et al. (1997, 2000) have also distinguished four different self-concepts:

1. Actual self (“defined as how people see themselves”).
(2) Ideal self (“defined as how people would like to see themselves”).

(3) Actual-social self (“defined as how people believe they are seen by significant others”).

(4) Ideal-social self (“defined as how people would like to be seen by significant others”).

However, few authors have conceived the self-concept to be representing a multidimensional concept, wherein the consumer plays different roles in different situations (Blackwell, Miniard, & Engel, 2001). It is due to the fact that brands are vital to perform various roles with different people and situations and are an extension to ourselves. In such a scenario, the brand’s personality enhances or improves the self-concept of the individual, thereby, implying that brand personality is not a concept or theory, but is developed based upon consumers of the brand (Upshaw, 1995). Thus, self-image congruence plays a considerable role in influencing consumer behaviours (Kressmann et al., 2006; Sirgy & Samli, 1985; Sirgy & Johar, 1991). The basic idea being outlined is that different personality traits can be accessed differently in different social situations (Aaker, 1999; Markus & Kunda, 1986). In a research, conducted by Freling and Forbes (2005), it has been discussed that the relevance of strong brand attributes influence the purchase decisions leading to positive perceptions about the brand.

The research on the effects of the individual’s self-concept on consumer behaviour has thus become multifaceted and transparent. Some other features that have been included in self-concept are “role identities, personal attributes, relationships, fantasies, belongings, and other symbols that individuals use for the purpose of self creation and self-understanding” (Schouten, 1991). The perceptions about self are closely related with the personality so much so that individuals are inclined to buy brands whose personalities match with their own self-images (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2000). However, the Individuals are expected to have multiple selves (Markus & Kunda, 1986; Markus & Nurius, 1986) with which they act differently in different situations and with different people.

In a progressively flooded market, the stimulus that is underlying the purchase decision has changed. Consumers do not primarily purchase products to satisfy their basic physio-
logical and safety needs anymore but to reach higher-order goals of social needs, self-esteem needs and the need for self-actualisation, which have come to the fore and play an important role in the purchase of products. Thus, brands are progressively being positioned within the emotional and experiential realms.

The brands obtain an experiential meaning, if they are associated with specific feelings or when they facilitate or spread the feelings. The resulting emotional value linked to the particular product or service thereby lies in the brand’s ability to satisfy the consumer’s desire for sensory pleasure and cognitive stimulation. Finally, brands can also have a symbolic meaning, which means that they become a standard of social interaction and communication. Thus, the symbolic meaning attributed to a specific product or brand is rather independent from product-related, tangible aspects like single features or the price but linked to its value in use, that is the non-product-related, intangible value which the product offers to the individual consumers (Arnould et al., 2005). Therefore it can be pointed out that the brands through their historical character reflect symbols of the self, thus signifying that consumers make use of brands as a communication device to articulate who they are or would like to be and also illustrate their association with or difference from certain reference groups (Levy, 1959; Grubb & Stern, 1971).

Most studies on self-concept have explored its role in explaining product choice, purchase intention towards a brand with regard to its congruence to individual’s self-concept. The origins of self-concept theory can be traced from the theory of Cooley (1902) where he has defined self-concept as to how individuals see themselves. It is important for marketers to understand the impact self-concept and social self-concept have on the purchase decisions. In most of the researches done on self-concept; the underlying premise has been based on the fact that brand associations are developed and nurtured based on individual’s self-concept (Escalas & Bettman, 2003).

Thus in line with the discussion above, it is inerfered that brand personality symbolically has been considered as an instrument that facilitates consumers self-expression (Aaker, 1997; Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Johar, Sengupta & Aaker, 2005). The human traits bestowed on the brands, empower them to play a pivotal role in the life of the consumer and extend their relationship with the brand (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988). It is so
due to the fact that brands facilitate the consumer in re-defining his image and personality so as to enable him to perceive the extent to which the brand image fits with the consumer’s self-concept (Aaker, 1999; Swaminathan, Page, & Gurhan-Canli, 2007).

While referring to the self-concept, Burris and Rempel (2004) in their self theory have stated that possessions can become part of the social image the consumer wishes to portray in society. Self-image refers to the insight one has about himself/herself (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967; Graeff, 1996) and provides with self-esteem and how the individuals feel about themselves. Moreso, it is the view people hold about themselves (Runyan, 1988). Research now recognizes that consumers in different situations exhibit different self-images, this relates not only to the ‘actual self’ but what the consumer aspires to be, which is classified as ‘ideal self’ (Aaker, 1999; Gould, 1991; Graeff, 1996; Sirgy, 1982, 1986; Sutherland, Marshall & Parker, 2004; Parker, 2009). In the similar manner, there is classification of self-image based upon the ‘social self’ and the ‘ideal social self’.

Thus, more recent researches have built upon this concept exhibiting the fact that consumers often form relationships (Aaker, Fournier & Brasel, 2004; Aggarwal, 2004; Fournier, 1998) or make a self-connection (Escalas, 2004; Escalas & Bettman, 2003) with specific brands. They incorporate brands into their self-concepts and use them to define and communicate their sense of self as well as judging others (Achenreiner & John, 2003; Chaplin & John, 2005, 2007). Hirschman (2010) in his research has suggested that the very reason for the power and success of brands is that they provide a medium through which humans can focus their evolutionary need to belong and form communal groups. Conversely, by avoiding specific brands (negative symbolic consumption), individuals can dissociate themselves from less desirable peer groups (Yalkin & Elliott, 2006). In this context Ji (2002) argues, that brands have become equipment through which children develop, gain proficiency, follow the delight of life, fulfill their dreams, and become connected with others. The strength of the consumer-brand relationship is reflected in the fact that it is now being investigated within the framework of interpersonal relationships (Sung & Choi, 2010). Furthermore, Fitzsimons,
Chartrand, and Fitzsimons (2008) have concluded that brand exposure can influence behaviour.

Therefore it can be stated that consumers use brands to construct their self-concepts and their identities (Sirgy, 1982) and one way consumers do this is by incorporating brands into their self-concept i.e. forming self-brand connections and by using the brands as signals of who they are or want to be (Escalas & Bettman, 2009).

**Figure 2.2a: Consumer Self Image**

![Consumer Self Image Diagram](source)

*Source: Sirgy, Rahtz and Dias (2014)*
2.3 SELF - BRAND CONNECTION:

![Self-concept and Brand](Figure 2.3a: Self-concept and Brand)

Source: Sirgy, Rahtz & Portolese (2014)

It has been rightly said that if consumers’ self and brand concepts are connected, then brand performance reflects on the consumer’s self-concept. Levy (1959) had introduced the concept that brands are symbols of identity. As a result, the consumers have formed “self-brand connection” based on the congruence between the individual’s “self-image” and the “brand-image” (Escalas & Bettman, 2005)

Over the past few decades, self image has become an increasingly important part of the qualities required by the consumer to understand the business world. Who you are and what you look like applies to both the physical and psychological aspect of the image issues, which closely relate to the projection of brands. The concept of self refers to all the awareness that the individual intentionally elaborates about himself/herself in
reference to the physical appearance, capabilities, associations with others and feelings in specific situations. The self, therefore, does not depend only on oneself but others also play a very important role in the construct. In fact, interpersonal relationships and the reference cultural system, where the individual acts, significantly contribute to the definition of the idea of self (Diana, Bottoni, & Ferrari, 2014). Consumer researchers define self-image in terms of the relationship between consumers and products. For example, if they own a swatch watch, certain consumers may see themselves as gorgeous and wealthy and other may view them as trendy and stylish.

Thus consumers sometimes become committed to brands that help them create or represent their desired self-concepts (Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Escalas, 2004; Cooper, Schembri, & Miller, 2010). It is through a process of matching, consumers usually select products and brands that are congruent with their self-images (Dolich, 1969; Chaplin & John, 2005; Hankinson, 2004). This process is fostered by the wide accessibility of brands and the series of images that those brands represent (Chaplin & John, 2005). As a result, the brands have become essential to consumer identities and are used to build up and articulate the self (Baudrillard, 1998; Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). Therefore it is appropriate to say that in recent years, the brands have proliferated and seem to have replaced the product (Salzer-Morling & Strannegard, 2004).

Chaplin and John (2005) have propounded that as individuals enter adolescence not only do they understand themselves better, but also start to understand the concept of the brand leading to increased brand awareness (Ross & Harradine, 2004), thereby positioning brands as well thought-out equipments from beginning to end through which children nurture, gain competence, pursue the happiness of life, accomplish their dreams, and become associated with others (Ji, 2002).

Adolescents start to associate brand images with social status, group affiliations, and personality traits and also use them as a means of expressing the transition to adulthood (Piacentini & Mailer, 2004). Through brands, adolescents “can project a self-image which is often idealized to others” (Chang, 2005). It is in this context, Dittmar and Pepper (1994) have pointed out that adolescents are, overall, a money-orientated segment of society, possibly the result of high levels of self-doubt and anomie during the “identity
“crisis” years (Chang & Arkin, 2002). Moreover, this increased uncertainty and an inclination toward materialism in them are exploited and possibly perpetuated by marketers as they “raise the bar” for social comparison by showing highly idealized images of “normal life”.

The strength of the cognitive and emotional bonds connecting the brand to the self engenders two effects. First, brand associated feelings and belief become extremely accessible and are automatically retrieved from memory whenever the self is implicated (Collins & Read, 1994; Holmes, 2000; Mikulincer et al., 2001) and secondly, given its self-linkages, the brand become self-relevant, impacting one’s readiness to allocate processing resources to the brand (Holmes, 2000; Berman & Sperling, 1994; Reis & Patrick, 1996). High accessibility and greater willingness to allocate processing resources for a high attachment brand, makes brand-associated information automatically retrieved when implicit or explicit brand-relevant cues are present.

In addition, the cultural discourses attached to brands (McCracken, 1993) have allowed consumers to communicate their personality, age, class, wealth, and status by simply selecting a particular brand (Piacentini & Mailerthe, 2004), which has become a social communication tool. A recent study by Schembri, Merrilees, and Kristiansen (2010) exhibits as to how “consumers use specific brands as a narrative text to communicate who they are”. The strength of the consumer-brand relationship is reflected in the fact that it is now being investigated within the structure of interpersonal relationships (Sung & Choi, 2010).

Thus to a large extent the brand associations are instrumental in helping consumers to communicate and even construct their self-concepts, as a result the self-brand connections are formed (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). Landon long before in 1974 had suggested that consumers sometimes express their ideal self-image (who they want to be) rather than their actual self-image when they buy products, particularly highly visible products. Thereby, establishing a connectivity of their self with the brand.

Going by the analogy, consumers use brand relations not only to develop, organize, and reprocess information in memory (Aaker, 1991; Low & Lamb, 2000), but also help
consumers to construct, cultivate and express their identities. Ultimately, strong and positive brand associations may lead consumers to develop connections with the brands that best enable them to convey their self-concepts. When consumers include a brand into their identity, the brand is considered as part of the self, such that brand associations are related to mental representations of the self, and consumers develop a sense of oneness with the brand (Chaplin & John, 2005; Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Park et al., 2010). Thus, self-brand connection is diverse from the solely touching bonds that are conceptualized as emotional brand attachments (Malär, Krohmer, Hoyer, & Nyffenegger, 2011) and brand love (Batra, Ahuvia & Bagozzi, 2012; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Therefore Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar, and Sen (2012) have concluded it to be based on a felt identity match between the consumer and the brand.

Going by the analogy, children of different ages relate to brand names in diverse ways. They gain knowledge of different brand names at an early age, recognizing brand names in stores, developing preferences for some brands over others, and requesting branded items by name. However, brand names function as simple perceptual cues for these children, identifying a familiar object with particular features (Achenreiner & John, 2003). Research conducted by Chaplin and John (2005) has also concluded that in the childhood, children form associations with brands and when they grow being an adolescent (12-13 years) the relationship between the brands improves because the brands are considered as self-concepts.

Adolescents start to associate brand images with social status, group affiliations, and personality traits and use them as a means of expressing the transition to adulthood (Piacentini & Mailer, 2004). It has also been recognised that through brands, adolescents “can project a self-image which is often idealized to others” (Chang, 2005). Thus, adolescents’ need for brands is clear; as they are not only needed to associate and dissociate from peer groups but it suggest that brands are integral to the formation of a established concept of self. Piacentini and Mailer (2004) have found that even when a brand was not visible to others, adolescents enjoyed trying it as a means of reinforcing their self-identity.
While referring to the concept of self-brand connection, it reflects the extent to which a brand is linked to the self, given its essentiality in pleasing consumer needs. It is in this context that individuals develop attachments to brands that can be counted on to fulfil their needs. Not all consumption objects can satisfy these self-relevant needs. Attachments develop only when a brand establishes a strong connection with the self - the strongest form of which involves the brand as an extension of the self. It gets stronger over time, and develops from authentic or misleading personal experiences that create memories, customized meanings, and faith. The more the brand can generate these connections the more it is regarded as an expansion of the self (Belk, 1988; Klein & Baker 2004). Thus, creating an agony and unhappiness over losing the brand.

Self-brand congruity (Sirgy, 1982) and Self-brand connection (Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Fournier, 1998; Park et al., 2010) are both related to the felt “me-ness” of the brand and the degree to which the consumer instrumentally uses the brand associations to construct and signal identity. In this process, consumers incorporate the brand into the self such that the mental representation of the brand and the self overlap. Thus, self-brand congruity and self-brand connection are conceptualized as how well the associations linked to a particular brand match the consumers’ self-concepts and, also, the brand’s efficacy in signalling consumer identities. Importantly, feeling strongly connected to a brand is not equivalent to a consumer-brand relationship (Fournier, 1998), as it does not imply that brands are active relationship partners. Rather, brands serve as vessels of symbolic meaning consumers use instrumentally to achieve goals motivated by the self (Escalas & Bettman, 2005).

As consumers discover fit between their self-image and brand image, they are able to make self-brand connections. Self-brand connections are created when brands create strong and favourable brand associations from the consumer’s perspective (Escalas & Bettman, 2003) and can be used to satisfy psychological needs, reinforce identity and allow an individual to connect to others (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988; Escalas, 2004). Thus, researchers propose that self-brand connections are formed with consumer product.
Research on human relationships (Cross, Bacon & Morris 2000) suggests that individual differences exist concerning how consumer-brand connections may develop. The personal meaning associated with a brand can be derived from the image or “personality” of the brand that develops over time (Keller, 2008), and the individual's personal experiences with the brand (Escalas, 2004). The primary basis of the Self-brand connection is that when brand associations are used to create one's self or to communicate one's self to others, a strong connection is created between the brand and the consumer's self identity (Escalas, 2004).

The creation of a strong and meaningful self-brand connection is more likely to occur when the consumer's personal experience with the brand is closely tied to its image, and when the brand itself satisfies an identified psychological need. Self-brand connections captures the strength of the “connection” between perceived brand meaning and the consumer's self-concept.

Hence, it refers to individuals’ use of brand relations to generate and construct their self-identities; thereby forming connections to brands (Escalas, 2004). Moreover, the Self-brand connection is dependent on an entire collection of brand associations, which can be used to establish consumers’ self-identities (Wright, Claiborne & Sirgy, 1992) and to identify themselves with the members in the group to which they belong (Hines & Quinn, 2005). In order to develop such self-brand connection, one important aspect is the consumers’ ability to determine and interpret brand cues and access brand associations.

The conceptualization of self-brand connection (Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Fournier, 1998; Park et al., 2010) has been mainly of a general connection between the self and the brand. However, it is well established in self-theories that people can see themselves from different perspectives and with multiple selves (Markus & Kunda, 1986). Thus, self-concept is understood to consist of several distinct facets (e.g., the actual self, the desired self, the ought self, and more). This highlights the importance of distinguishing between and tapping into motives and consequences of brand connections linked to different parts of the self, i.e., ideal self-brand connections, and actual self-brand connections. Ideal self-brand connections are based on perceived congruence between brand image and the ideal self, while actual self-brand connections are based on
perceived congruence between the actual self and the brand image (Malär et al., 2011). If the consumer perceives a brand to be part of his/her self-concept, the interactions with the brand are subject to the influences of self motives. In fact, research on self-brand connections has demonstrated that consumers incorporate brands into their self-concept due to self-motivations such as self-verification and self-enhancement (Escalas & Bettman, 2009).

Self-brand connections are formed through usage experiences, advertising, and the relevance of the brand to desired reference groups (Escalas & Bettman 2003, 2005). They are likely to be particularly strong in brand communities, whose members may define themselves in terms of their status as brand users (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Piacentini and Mailer (2004) have commented that even when a brand was not visible to others, adolescents enjoyed it as a means of reinforcing their self-identity thereby exhibiting positive disposition towards them. Thus, attitude toward the brand, perceived brand quality and perceived brand uniqueness are the associations that are predicted to be antecedents of self-brand connection among various categories of adolescents.

While referring to attitude towards brands, Mitchell (1986) proved that different attitudes toward a brand may exist even though peoples' product attribute beliefs are the same. Individuals are intrinsically motivated to achieve positive distinctiveness and typically like to be identified with positive objects and ideas (Tajfel, 1974). As a result, they relate themselves with the brand with which they develop favourable attitude and thus, it increases the chances of developing strong self-brand connection with the brand. In one of the initial researches on attitude, Allport (1935) had described it as a rational and neural state of willingness, exalted through experience, exerting a direct and dynamic impact upon the individual responses to all objects and situations with which it is incorporated. A decade later, Krech and Cruchfield (1948) further commented an attitude to be a long-term association of motivational, touching, perceptual, and cognitive processes with high opinion to some characteristic of the individual's world, thereby outlining a permanent nature of attitudes and their close relationships to individuals' behaviour.
2.4 ATTITUDE AND ATTITUDE STRENGTH

Attitude is a broad concept that is used in many diverse contexts and can be defined as; “…a lasting general evaluation of people, objects, advertisements or issues” (Solomon, 2009). Banytė, Joksaite, & Virvilaitė (2007) stated attitude as; “an achievable, relatively permanent and at the same time purposeful, gradual, more or less intensive and motivated consumer’s intention to react to a particular object”. Thus, an attitude can be considered to be a relative, enduring, context-specific overall evaluation of some aspects of a consumer’s environment, be it a product, service or brand (Hoyer, MacInnis, & Pieters, 2013; Petruzzellis, 2010; Solomon et al., 2013). Therefore, brand attitude is described as being a consumer’s overall evaluation of the ability of the brand to satisfy needs (Liu, Li, Mizerski & Soh, 2012), predicting their purchase intention and behaviour (Bagozzi et al., 1979; Tung, Shih, Wei, & Chen, 2012) which, in turn, affect brand loyalty. A brand attitude can both be negative and positive (Currás-Pérez, Bigné & Alvarado, 2009; Park et al., 2010), lasting over a long time however it is also to add that attitude can change if people get a new experience or reflection about the brand (Solomon, 2009). A brand can create trust (Garretson & Niedrich, 2004), strong bonds (Rafi et al., 2011) and interest in a firm (Priester et al., 2004) provided they develop a strong attitude towards it. Thus, the attitude depends on the customer and their so called “brand self connection” (Park et al., 2010). Marketers and researchers have, several times, studied and analyzed data about customers’ attitude and how a brand is perceived (Ghosh et al., 1995, Batra et al., 2012) clearly suggesting its relevance in the strategic decision making.

Attitude usually performs different functions and Solomon (2009) has effectively used them to describe how people have diverse attitudes towards objects such as brands. In this context, the first function is called Utilitarian function, which explains how the consumers perceives a product depending on what impression they get from it, positive or negative. The second is value-expressive function which outlines the consumers’ attitude as to how the product presents them to the environment and what they say about them. The third is the Ego defensive function, which describes the internal feelings and the final one is the Knowledge function describing the individual aspiration and their desire to understand the environment and the attitudes help them to do this (Katz, 1960).
Further elucidating the concept of attitude, it can be explained with the help of three main components i.e. affect, behaviour and cognition. The affect are feelings and emotions to a brand (Solomon, 2009; VonRiesen, Herndon, & VonRiesen, 2001) and behaviour is what action a person does with the attitude (Solomon, 2009) and cognition explains what a person thinks is true about the attitude object (Solomon, 2009; VonRiesen et al., 2001). Therefore, Close, Krishen and Latour, (2009) have commented that these three parts are important to use with regard to brands and increase their effectiveness of how the consumers perceive them.

Besides these components a brand attitude has internal and external perspectives (VonRiesen et al., 2001) also. Among the two, internal perspectives describes customers believes and feelings about a brand. These impressions are based on the perception of previous experiences and information about a brand. The external dimension however describes believes and feelings that a customer probably gives more attention to. These may perhaps be customers’ assessment, opinions and behaviours (VonRiesen et al., 2001). As a result, Banytė et al. (2007) have concluded that depending on how much the customers involve and engage in a brand, the more likely it is for them to shape an attitude to a brand and their feelings and previous experience become an emotional impact on what their attitude will become. Therefore, brands with which a customer interacts, tend to create a stronger attitude, either negative or positive.

In the earlier researches by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) and Thurstone(1931) it has been suggested that attitude is the amount of affect for or against some object. Importantly, this evaluative reaction is independent of the nature and strength of the cognitive or emotional reactions associated with the evaluative response. Brand attitudes, or a consumer’s overall evaluations of a brand, can form the basis for purchase intentions as well as actual behaviour. Consumers’ attitudes toward brands can capture an aspect of the meaning they attach to brands (Low& Lamb, 2000). This leads to an understanding that the attitudes can be related to beliefs about product-related attributes and functional and experiential benefits of the brand (Zeithaml, 1988; Rossiter & Percy, 1987). Such attitudes can serve a value expressive function by allowing individuals to express their self-concepts (Keller, 1993).
Consumers who are emotionally attached to a brand are also likely to have a favourable attitude toward it. However, although favourable brand attitudes are often reflected in strong attachments, the constructs differ in several critical ways. First, strong attachments develop over time and are often based on interactions between an individual and an attachment object (Baldwin, Keelan, Fehr, Enns, & Koh-Rangarajoo, 1996). These interactions encourage the development of meaning and invoke strong emotions in reference to the attachment object. Attitudes reflect one’s evaluative reactions to an object and these reactions can develop without any direct contact with it i.e. a consumer may develop a positive attitude toward an object without having any experience with it. Consumers have a potential to develop favourable attitudes toward any number of consumption objects and the ones that have little centrality or importance. Therefore, brand attitudes, or a consumer’s overall evaluations of a brand, can form the basis for purchase intentions as well as actual behaviours.

In contrast, attitudes are also related to beliefs about non product-related attributes and symbolic benefits (Rossiter & Percy, 1987). Such attitudes serve a value expressive function by allowing individuals to express their self-concepts (Keller, 1993), as individuals are intrinsically motivated to achieve positive distinctiveness and typically like to be identified with positive objects and ideas (Tajfel, 1974). Consequently, when consumers have favourable attitude towards a brand, they are more likely to align themselves with it.

Another research by Loudon and Della Bitta (1993) has noted that attitude is “how for or against, positively or negatively, favourable or unfavourable, a person regards a particular object”; this definition aims to reveal the idea that attitude contains consumer feelings and evaluations, related with a particular object. Schiffman and Kanuk (2004) have also described attitude within the context of consumer behaviour as a constant tendency to behave accordingly in a concrete situation, regarding a certain object or a group of objects. Social psychologists (Secord & Backman, 1969) have also popularized a detailed version of attitude interpretation, claiming that attitude is a particular system of motivation, emotions, perception and cognitional processes, responding to certain environmental aspects, surrounding an individual. This means that attitude is composed
of three components: Perception or knowledge, Feelings or emotions and will or behavioural tendencies.

The studies of attitude formation have revealed that attitudes are related with persons, objects or behaviour that constitutes a part of an individual’s perceived world. Summarizing opinions of various authors and indicating the most essential features of attitude, it is possible to state that the most precise definition of attitude determines it as a permanent and perceived intention to respond favourably or unfavourably to a certain object or a group of objects whereas, attitude strength refers to the degree to which an attitude is resistant to change and influences the cognition to behaviour.

Strong attitudes tend to be persistent over time, resistant to change and likely to have a strong impact on consumer information processing and behaviour (Krosnick, 1988; Krosnick & Petty, 1995). For example, attitudes to which people attach more personal importance are better predictors of behaviour (Budd, 1986; Parker, Perry & Gillespie, 1974; Rokeach & Kliejunas, 1972), more resistant to change (Fine, 1957; Gorn, 1975; Zuwerink & Devine, 1996), and capable of creating a strong influence on others’ liking (Byrne; Clore & Baldridge, 1968; Granberg & Holmberg, 1986; Krosnick, 1988b; McGraw, Lodge & Stroh, 1990), interpreting the personality traits (Judd & Johnson, 1981), and other cognitive processes as well. These strength-related attitude attributes include attitude importance, knowledge, elaboration, certainty, ambivalence, accessibility, intensity, extremity, structural consistency, etc. Thus, it can be fairly concluding that Attitude strength is a latent psychological construct, which is most probably represented in memory by various attributes of the attitude (Krosnick & Petty, 1995).

The discussion above points towards the fact that Attitude strength can be measured with the help of different attributes such as:

- Importance - the amount of psychological importance a person ascribes to an attitude (Boninger, Krosnick, Berent, & Fabrigar, 1995).

- Knowledge - the information about an attitude object that is stored in memory, ranging in volume from very large to none at all (Wood, 1982; Wood, Rhodes, &
Biek, 1995). Thus, it is often measured by asking people to rate their subjective sense of the amount of knowledge they have about an object.

- **Accessibility** - how easily it can be retrieved from memory (Fazio, 1995).
- **Certainty** - the level of confidence a person attaches to an attitude. Frequently, it been calculated by asking people how sure or how influenced they are about their attitudes and about its validity, accuracy, or correctness (Gross, Holtz, & Miller, 1995).
- **Ambivalence** - the degree to which a person has both positive and adverse reactions to an object.
- **Structural Consistency** - involving a person’s overall evaluation of an object, the evaluative implications of his or her beliefs about the object’s qualities, and the evaluative valence of his or her emotional reactions to the object.
- **Elaboration** - Some attitudes are formed as a result of in-depth, highly elaborative thought processes, whereas others are formed through more superficial, cue-driven processes that require relatively little thought (Petty, Haugtvedt, & Smith, 1995). The extent of prior elaboration about an attitude object has been gauged by asking people how much they have thought about the object previously.
- **Intensity** - the strength of the emotional reaction provoked by the attitude object in an individual. It has typically been measured using self-reports of the intensity of feelings a person says he or she has about the object (Cantril, 1944, 1946; Stouffer et al., 1950).

These strength attributes have been operationalized and tested in multiple ways to make them clearly distinct from one another so that they cannot be viewed as one factor; however; it is also clear that they all correlate with the effect indicators of attitude strength (Krosnick & Petty, 1995).

Previously researchers have used a range of indicators to measure attitude strength, including the intensity of feelings toward object, the stability of holding an attitude, or the
importance attributable to it. It is pertinent to mention that unfortunately, these diverse measures are weakly associated to one another (Krosnick & Abelson, 1992) and attitude strength has been context specific (Haddock, Rothman, Reber & Schwarz, 1999).

Despite these shortcomings, attitude strength has proved to be important in other domains of research. The strength with which a person holds an attitude has a number of important implications for predicting both the stability of an attitude and the likelihood that an individual will choose to act on an attitude (Petty & Krosnick, 1995). It is further to mention that, strong attitudes have been found to be more constant over time and less likely to transform in response to persuasive messages. Further strong attitudes are superior predictors of behaviour as compared to weak attitudes (Krosnick & Abelson, 1992; Bohner & Schwarz, 1992).

Several studies in the attitude strength literature indicate that greater is the amount of one’s knowledge or information relevant to a behaviour, the more a person is likely to engage in careful and effortful consideration about performing the behaviour (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Therefore, attitude strength helps in creating a strong attitude toward performing the behaviour that is constant over time, opposed to the counter influence, and projection of the behaviour. Fazio’s (1986) work on the effect of direct personal experience versus indirect experience (e.g., information from other sources) when performing a behaviour shows that the attitude formed by direct experience is more predictive of corresponding behaviour than the one shaped by indirect experience.

In addition, the above discussion suggests that repeat experience and exposure to the target behaviour provides a user with greater opportunity to consider various aspects of performing the behaviour in a relatively objective manner (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). These arguments indicate that when more careful and effortful thoughts about a behaviour are constructed, the person compares various attributes of the target behaviour with the information previously stored in memory. This ultimately creates a stronger schema about the behaviour.

The formation of a strong attitude can be affected by a variety of individual and contextual variables (Petty et al., 1997). Attitude strength exists when an individual
obtains and possesses, frequent and direct experience, an abundance of relevant information about performing behaviour. This, in turn, engenders a strong attitude by affecting the attitude attributes related to attitude strength. In addition, accumulated research findings demonstrate another key point that the attitude strength moderates the relationship between attitude and corresponding behaviours (Petty & Krosnick, 1995) whether one likes or dislikes a brand, but is uninformative concerning the underlying nature of that reaction. In contrast, attitude’s relationship to behaviour depends on other attitude properties such as attitude strength, attitude knowledge, and/or attitude accessibility (Krosnick & Petty, 1995).

Mitchell and Olson (1981) while elaborating on the attitude towards brand have suggested it to be an individual’s internal assessment. Though, Eagly and Chaiken (1973) have described attitude as a continuing state that endures for at least a short period of time and most likely energizes and directs behaviour. Therefore, attitude has been considered as an internal state of mind. Further Machleit, Allen, and Madden (1993), have conceived it to be uni-dimensional construct. It is also pertinent to mention that brand attitude can be both negative and positive (Currás-Pérez et al., 2009; Park et al., 2010). Therefore, attitude toward behaviour refers to an individual’s positive or negative evaluation of performing the behaviour. It involves an individual’s judgment that performing a behaviour is good or bad and also a general evaluation that an individual is inclined or disinclined to perform the behaviour (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). Due to such reasons, it has been considered essential for predicting consumer behaviour over a long time and can be changed if people get a new experience or reflection about the brand (Solomon, 2009). Thus, it is to conclude that the attitude depends on the customers and their so called “brand self connection” (Park et al., 2010).

Escalas (2004) reports that self-brand connections have a positive affiliation with attitudes toward the brand as well as behavioural intentions. Similarly, the self - brand connections influence attitudes toward an organization to which respondents are attached or “connected. The attitude guides the individual’s behaviour by filtering information and by shaping his or her perception of the world (Fazio, 1986). Research on attitude has also accumulated a huge deal of confirmation showing that some attitudes are weakly
predictive of corresponding behaviours, whereas others are strongly predictive (Krosnick & Petty, 1995). One of the arguments supporting relevance of the self-brand connections construct is the fact that consumers with highly developed self-brand connections exhibit stronger and more confident brand attitudes than those with less developed brand connections.

Therefore, attitude toward a particular product by those consumers who have a high product involvement is likely to be quite different from that of those consumers with lower involvement. More importantly, it is widely believed that the consumer’s attitude formation and decision making process are different among high-involvement and low-involvement consumers. The possible results of involvement are perceived differences in product attributes, preference of a particular brand, purchase intention and type of decisions used in making a choice.

2.5 INVOLVEMENT:

Involvement today is being regarded as a well-known subject in consumer behaviour research and contributes to our holistic understanding of the way consumers choose between diverse product alternatives (Bloch, 1981; Zaichkowsky, 1985; Grunert, 1988; Laurent; Kapferer, 1985; Jain & Srinivasan, 1990). Involvement is considered something personal which is connected to the individuals’ needs, values and self-concept. It further reflects the individuals’ thoughts and emotions towards an object. Thus, brand involvement has been described as the individuals’ relation to the object, or how an individual responds to it (Zaichkowsky, 1985). Involvement also has been used as a descriptive variable with regard to consumer behaviour (Dholakia, 1997; 1998). Thus, it has received extensive consideration in the marketing field over the recent years. As a result, it has turned out to be a well thought-out central framework, vital to understand consumer decision-making behaviour and associated communications (Chakravarti & Janiszewski, 2003; Fill, 1999). Consumer Involvement has been a subject of study since the late 1950s (Bayton, 1958), however, marketing researchers identified it not until the late 1970s as one of the vital moderators of the complexity of consumer decision processes (Bloch, 1981). In India, few studies have been conducted on consumer

Involvement has been regarded as a motivational state that can be used to understand consumers’ attitude towards products or brands (Guthrie & Kim, 2009). It is often referred to as degree or intensity of interest that a buyer shows for a certain product or brand (Park & Young, 1983) and has been found to control a number of behavioural outcomes, including exploring and dealing out information (Bloch, Sherrell, & Ridgway, 1986; Celsi & Olson, 1988; Mantel & Kardes, 1999). The level of involvement that customers exhibit towards a product, brand, or purchase decision is a vital determinant of their behaviour (Peter & Olsen, 1987).

Different researchers have defined involvement in diverse ways, as per Havitz and Dimanche (1997) and Rothschild (1984) involvement is ‘an unobservable state of motivation, arousal, or interest toward an entertaining activity’. In the context of purchase decision-making, it is commonly defined as a consumer’s enduring perceptions of the importance of the product category based on his or her inherent needs, values, and interests (De Wulf, Odekerken- Schröder & Lacobucci, 2001; Mittal, 1995; Zaichkowsky, 1985). Bowen and Chaffee (1974) and Bloch (1981) have referred to it as a relation between consumer and product. The area of influence of the involvement construct has been specified as the “long-term interest in a product which is based on the centrality of the product to important values, needs, or the self-concept” (Bloch 1981). Thus, product involvement determines relevance of the products and services to consumer needs, values and interests in different markets (Zaichkowsky & Sood, 1989).

The effect of involvement interacts with product information and product knowledge, that is why the researchers analysing consumer behaviour have given a great deal of importance to the product involvement variable. According to Antonides and Van Raaij (1998), it is determined as the level of a consumer’s personal relationship with a product or service including perceived importance, value, and risk. Mittal and Lee (1989) have summarized some of the most useful involvement definitions and concluded that it is the degree of individuals’ substance of the decision in terms of their basic standards, goals and self-concept (Engel & Blackwell, 1982). Therefore, it refers to the power or extent of
the cognitive relation between the self and stimulus object, which has been indicated by expressions stressing the extent of an object’s relatedness, connections, or engagement to an individual’s self-concept, needs, and values.

Therefore, involvement can be used as an analytical tool to measure the level of brand interest as well as the brand’s significance to the consumer (Guthrie & Kim, 2009). It involves an ongoing commitment on the part of consumer with regard to thoughts, feelings, and behavioural response to a product category (Miller & Marks, 1996; Gordon, McKeage & Fox, 1998). Broadly, involvement is a result of three factors: individual characteristics including a person’s needs, interests, values, and goals; situational factors comprising of the purchase occasion or the perceived risk associated with the purchase decision; and object or stimulus attributes like the type of communication media or variations within the product class (Andrews et al., 1990; Laurent & Kapferer, 1985; Zaichkowsky, 1986). Thus, individuals, situations and characteristics of an object play an important role in understanding the consumer involvement process.

Srivastava and Kamdar (2009) have stated that the understanding of the cognitive structures that underlie consumers’ feelings of involvement are particularly important. As consumers learn about brands and acquire new knowledge, they combine it with existing knowledge in their memory and form new cognitive structures in their minds. These structures represent the interpreted meanings of a product, service or a brand. Therefore, in consumer literature it is referred to as involvement. Further, it has been described as an internal stimulation comprising of three major properties including intensity (level of involvement and motivation), direction (purpose or concern towards the motivation), and persistence (level of the involvement intensity) Andrews, Durvasula, & Akhter, (1990); Mitchell, (1981).

As a result, involvement towards products, purchase situations, and marketing communications exhibits dynamism from reasonably short to comprehensive periods of time. Moreover, it is created by the personal significance that the individual ascribes to the features of the object i.e. message, situation and product. As involvement is a matter of interpretation, rather than the stimulus itself, it is expected that the involvement level of different people will vary in relation to the same object, due to differences in
personality, previous experience, consumer’s socio-demographic status, etc. (Antil, 1984).

Researchers who believe involvement to be a cognitive state are concerned with the measurement of ego involvement, risk perception and importance of the purchase. Kapferer and Laurent (1985a, 1985b, and 1993) have stressed that since there are so many kinds of consumer involvement, efforts should be undertaken to measure an involvement profile rather than a single involvement index. They have suggested five important facets to measure involvement profile of an individual. These aspects are interest in the product, perceived pleasure, risk associated with the purchase, probability of making a poor choice and sign or symbolic value associated with the product.

Thus in line with the discussion above, Solomon (2004), propounded, that product involvement is related to a consumer’s motivation to attain the goal influencing their desire to expend the effort necessary to attain the products or services believed to be instrumental in satisfying the objective. Once the brand is accepted based on its symbolic attributes, the consumer becomes highly involved with the product (O’Cass, 2000; Zaichkowsky, 1985). In addition, the self-congruity heightens consumers’ involvement with the product motivating them to process the functional characteristics of the brand. In this context, the biasing effect of self-congruity on functional congruity is likely to be more evident under high product involvement conditions.

This in turn led to a belief that involvement scenario as compared to product involvement is independent of situational influences (Rodgers & Schneider, 1993; Miller & Marks, 1996). Further Richins and Bloch (1986) commented that consumers with high product involvement would find the products interesting and this would occupy the consumers’ thoughts without the stimulus of an immediate purchase. However it is also to add to the fact that such interest in the product category may arise from the consumers’ perception that the product class meets important values and goals. Thus, in the present study involvement has been referred to as the degree of psychological affective and emotional ties the consumer has with a product category or specific brand. It has been established that the strength of these ties or the level of involvement determines the depth, complexity and extensiveness of cognitive and behavioural processes during the
consumer choice process (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985; Houston & Rothschild, 1978). Therefore, product involvement is a central framework, vital to understanding consumer decision-making process, interest in advertising, brand commitment, and frequency of product usage (Celsi & Olson, 1988; Park & Young, 1986). Product involvement that is recognized as relatively stable and enduring is derived from past experience, reflecting the perceived relevance of a product category to an individual. Thus, to the extent that product characteristics are associated with personal goals and values, the consumer experiences strong feelings of involvement with the product.

Zaichkowsky (1985) had proposed that different people perceive the same product differently and have inherently different levels of involvement with the same product. On the same lines, Andrews et al. (1990) suggested that involvement was influenced by personal needs, goals, characteristics, and situational and decision factors then directed to search behaviour, information processing and persuasion. As a result of the research conducted by him, Zaichkowsky developed a scale (PII) to measure the extent of consumer involvement relevant for varied stimuli. Though the instrument suffers slight shortcomings (Mittal & Lee, 1989) yet, it is one of the generally used measure across cultures including India (Sharma, 2000).

Consumers can be classified according to their degree of involvement into either low involvement or high-involvement consumers (Srivastava & Kamdar, 2009). Low involvement purchases are less important; as they have little relevance to the consumer. Therefore they perceive little risk associated with such purchases and are characterized by lesser motivation to expend effort and time on processing associated information. As a result low involvement products are bought frequently and with a minimum of thought and effort because they are not of vital concern nor have any great impact on the consumer's lifestyle (Rajasekhar & Makesh, 2013). According to Park and Mittal (1985) when a person’s involvement is low, the attention focus lacks direction and level of processing is superficial, revealing different patterns in using images from memory and information organization from those at a high level of involvement. High-involvement conditions, on the other hand, generate a high level of motivation, arousal, or interest that causes greater searching, information processing, and decision making by individuals.
(Sengupta, Goodstein & Boninger, 1997). High involvement products are those products for which the buyer is willing to spend considerable time and effort in searching for his brand.

Therefore, it is postulated that since there are high and low involvement buyers; there are high and low involvement purchase situations as well. High involvement purchases are those that are very important to the consumers in terms of perceived risk and urge consumers to engage in extensive problem solving. When consumers have no established criteria for evaluating a product category or specific brands in that category, their decision efforts can be termed as extensive problem solving. At this level, the buyer needs a great deal of information to establish a set of criteria on which the competing brands are evaluated. Outcomes associated with high involvement comprise of extra time and effort spent in search-related activities (Bloch et al., 1986), more extensive decision making, better perceived differences in product attributes, and higher possibility of establishing brand preferences (Zaichkowsky, 1985, 1986).

Despite the diversity of concepts related to involvement, it is easy to notice that all of them are related to the individual, and not the product. Therefore, it seems reasonable to say that the involvement concept does not concern the product itself, but rather the consumers’ emotional, attitudinal and behavioural responses towards the product category. It is now commonly accepted that involvement is a motivational and goal directed emotional state that determines the personal relevance of a purchase decision to a buyer (Rothschild, 1984).

Kapferer and Laurent (1985, 1986 & 1993) have suggested that interest in the product class is an antecedent to involvement in the purchase decision. Interest in the product class has some similarities to the importance of the purchase decision as proposed by Mittal and Lee (1989). However, Bloch (1981) argues that consumers have a greater propensity to be involved in the purchase decision if they have a prior interest in the product class. Consequently, interest in the object may be antecedent to a perception of the object’s importance to the consumer’s well being.
Hence recently, Laaksonen (2010) has stated that the concept of involvement can be used to explain differences in the nature of consumer behaviour. Kassarjian (1981) has stated that without doubt there are differences between individuals which, regardless of the product or situation, make some people more engrossed, or involved in the consumer decision process.

Consumers with similar involvement levels usually have similar motivational behaviours towards the product. For example, they should equally seek out information, perceive differences among brands and have favourite brands (Zaichkowsky, 1985). Srivastava and Kamdar (2009) have also hypothesized that consumer involvement with brands and products affects the extent of their information search, the size of the evoked set, and the nature of brand loyalty. In addition they also introduce the idea that involvement can affect the entire nature of decision processing undertaken in product or service selection.

Thus, taking a cue from the discussion above, it can be said that product involvement reflects appreciation that a particular product category may be more or less central to people’s lives, their sense of individuality and their association with the rest of the world (Traylor, 1981). Researchers have done a lot of studies on product involvement among adults but very few have been undertaken on product involvement among young consumers that to among adolescents, who are considered as the future of the consumer market. It is evident from the above discussion that the measurement of involvement varies greatly. A study propounded by Muratore (2003), indicates the importance of product involvement variable among children in terms of cognizance of product cost. Teeni-Harari, Lampert and Lehman-Witzing (2009) has suggested that the product involvement variable is important and significant in understanding the processes that young people undergo when they are exposed to marketing and advertising stimuli. Dussart (1983) has recommended involvement as an essential tool in a study of adolescents, which is also in line with the study conducted by Sridhar (2007), which states that demographic variables have an impact on consumer involvement in product choice.

Among the previous circumstances of consumer involvement, person associated experience is related to the desires, standards, characteristics and personality of the
consumer. The person linked experience demographics have significant influence on the consumer involvement. There are various studies that have investigated the relationship between age and the level of product involvement and have shown considerable variations in levels of product-involvement between different age groups. (Slama & Tashchina, 1985; Quester & Smart, 1996). Further, Fairhurst et al., (1989) and Auty and Elliott (1998) examined age differences, they however still focused on single involvement type age which carries with it culturally distinct behavioural and attitudinal norms (Alreck, 2000) and produces an effect on consumers self concept and life styles (Henry, 2000). Despite the fact that age forms a part of one's stage of family life cycle, yet it is in itself a significant factor for various products. According to Valkenburg and Cantor (2001), the ages of two, eight and twelve are important landmarks in young people’s development as consumers. In light of these studies, one can conclude that age, indeed, has an impact on the product-involvement of young people, as well as adolescents. Chaplin and Roedder (2005) have also referred to age as the key variable and commented that there is a difference across age groups in terms of level of involvement and attachment with the brands.

Furthermore, Zaichkowsky (1986) in his work has suggested that product involvement is influenced by personal factors; while the author does not indicate age specifically as a factor; age can definitely be considered one of the consumers’ personal characteristics in addition to other facets cited in the research (e.g. needs, importance, interest, values). Alternatively, it is assumed that these characteristics are age-dependent and, hence, the product involvement is influenced by age. Studies carried out among young people have also indicated that age is a central factor in processing.

Review of Literature on other demographic variables has identified gender also as another key variable. In this context Brown and Kaldenberg (1997) have examined gender differences for product involvement. In addition, Slama and Tashchian (1985) have also identified that gender differences exist across involvement they did so only in relation to purchasing involvement. Men and women enjoy exceptional personality traits, varied interests, diverse knowledge, judgment capabilities, and social status clearly suggesting the fact that both sexes evaluate products in a different way (Eagly & Carli,
1981; Fischer & Arnold, 1994; Everhart et al, 2001; Putrevu, 2001). Moreover, differences have also been reported in the involvement levels for various products between men and women (Slama & Tashchian, 1985; Jain & Sharma, 2002).

Income also is a variable, which influences the level of involvement among various products (Slama & Tashchian, 1985; Jain & Sharma, 2002). Earnings of the family combined with accumulated wealth help in determining the purchasing power (Hawkins et al., 2003). However, income enables purchases but does not generally cause or explain them. It is likely that the occupation and education have a high influence on preferences for products, though income provides the way to attain them (Mulhern et al., 1998). Further Jain and Sharma (2002) and Slama and Taschian (1985) have acknowledged that income also has an influence on the involvement levels. Thus, the above discussion concludes that level of product involvement differs among different categories of consumers. Research by Tali Te’eni –Harari and Hornik (2010), has also stated that higher level of product involvement is found among younger children than among older.

In addition to studies examining the product experience variable among adults, it has been exhibited that young people, as well attribute great importance to the product experience during their decision-making process. There are differences in customer expectations depending on the level of involvement (Varki & Wong, 2003). Customers that are more involved have more criteria and stronger demands, in comparison to those who are not that involved in the company. Therefore, having a long-term relationship with a company affects one’s expectations on economical benefits, but in particular social and confidence benefits (Varki & Wong, 2003). The concept of product involvement is a key element in helping to identify an individual’s shopping habit (Tiger et al., 1976; Fairhurst et al., 1989).

Goodman, Fichman, Lerch, and Snyde, (1995) have also exhibited similar thoughts regarding involvement. They have stated that people that are dissatisfied with something, concerning a brand, and have a bigger interest are more willing to express it in comparison to those that are less involved. When a customer has a positive attitude towards a product or a brand, they feel a stronger commitment (VonReisen & Herndon, 2011) and get involved in a product. The concept of product involvement has for long
been recognized as a central aspect of consumer behaviour, where both researchers and managers attribute a great importance to the involvement variable (Te’eni-Harari & Hornik, 2010). The majority of the studies on consumer involvement have been conducted in developed economies and more particularly in US (O’Cass, 1998). In view of the fact that in developing countries like India the construct is yet to receive wider acknowledgement and generalisability, therefore, there is a requirement for studies on consumer involvement across over diverse cultures (Shridhar, 2007).

2.6 RESEARCH GAP:

The following research gap for the present study has been identified after going through intensive literature review:

- Adolescents have been defined by WHO as individuals who are aged between 10-19 years (WHO, 2014). They are in a transitional phase, even though they appear like adults, but their psychological and physical capabilities are not entirely developed, as a result, they are considered as a vague category, who are no longer referred to as kids and at the same time have not yet reached adulthood and as a result are considered to be an interesting group to study by the marketers. While referring to the statistics, the total adolescent population of India is 253 million approximately, thereby suggesting, adolescent marketing to be exceptionally critical due to the sheer demographics and the buying power this incredible group has. Furthermore it has a capability to exercise a strong influence on the family leading to its emergence as a segment to be studied significantly.

- The above literature review has laid emphasis on the fact that individuals make use of brands to create and communicate their self-concepts, thereby creating self-brand connections. Although this phenomenon is well recognized in the adult consumers and many researchers have written about it but a very few studies have been conducted on adolescents and that too in India. Despite previous research attempts, we have limited knowledge that how adolescents connect their self-concept with brands. As a critical segment they have been neglected in branding literature also. Also that, no prior work has been done in India in the context of establishing Self
brand connections among adolescents. Hence, it has been recognized that there has been almost no study which has empirically investigated the role of self-brand connections among adolescents.

- The literature suggests that the Indian consumer today is completely different from the Indian consumer two decades back. Now they have become more materialistic and realistic. The consumer profile has also undergone an absolute makeover, with rising disposable incomes of the family, more exposure to the global world and increase in young population. No doubt, India occupies a significant place in the marketing world and further the adolescents have been identified as the major budding market segment by the marketers. However, many multinationals marketers have failed to analyze this key segment and explore their potential. Therefore, there is need to analyze and recognize this influential consumer segment.

- As Lind storm (2003), rightly said that adolescents are a marketers dream. Gaining them at this stage is very vital to the company, as once they learn to trust a brand as adolescents; they will trust the brand for a life time by creating a self-brand connection. However, the above literature review suggests that almost no study has been conducted in India, which has established a link between self-brand connection, attitude and product involvement with regard to adolescents. For these reasons, it becomes important for the researcher to identify how the Indian adolescents can be targeted by the marketers in times where India has the largest population of adolescents in the world. In an ideal world, companies want consumers to connect with their brands on an individual level so that they conceptualize the branded products as an extension of themselves. Any brand an individual deeply associates with establishes an attitude towards it and gets involved in purchasing, it would then becomes a means of self-definition, as well as a way to outwardly express oneself to others. This is commonly known as Self- Brand Connection, describing the ultimate ideation of brand-loyalty. Thus understanding these constructs in the context of adolescents is critically important to fill the gap in the existing literature.

- Many researchers, academicians and marketers have numerous times, studied and analyzed customers’ attitude and how a brand is perceived (Ghosh et al., 1995, Batra
et al., 2012) but no such study has been done in relation to self-brand connection and attitude and that on adolescents who is considered as a huge and powerful market segment.

- Researchers have done a lot of research work on product involvement among adults but very few studies have been done on product involvement among young consumers especially the adolescents who are considered as the future of the consumer market.

Hence, this study is an attempt to fill the gaps identified above and focuses upon adolescent consumers and their relation with self brand connection, attitude and involvement with the brands.

**CONCLUSION:**

This chapter presents detailed review of different constructs to build a theoretical framework of the study. It discusses the importance of brands and how they have become a crucial factor in influencing the consumers’ purchase process. It further highlights how brand has been used as a communicating tool in defining self-concept and how individuals’ use brand relations to form connectivity with them thereby creating self brand connection and develops a favourable attitude. Therefore, brand attitude is predicted to be antecedent of self-brand connection. It further discusses the impact of attitude and product involvement variable. Therefore, an elaborative review has been done on all the constructs i.e. self-brand connection, attitude, attitude strength and product involvement to identify the research gap.
REFERENCES:


Berman (Eds.), *Clinical and Development Perspectives* (pp 3-28). New York: Guilford Press.


Collins, N. L., & Read, S. J. (1994). Cognitive representation of adult attachment: The structure and function of working models, in advances in personal relationships:


