

Brand relationship quality and its value for personal contact [☆]

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Abstract

Although the consumer–brand relationship idea is widely discussed, some argue that certain brands are more suitable for relationships than other brands. The present study shows that brands indeed differ in terms of perceived relationship quality. Especially brands with a unique and exciting personality qualify more likely for the role of partner. Moreover, the results suggest that it is worth the effort to invest in such relationships because better relationships reduce the fear of inadequate privacy protection.

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1. Introduction

The idea that consumers and brands can relate to each other is referred to as ‘brand relationship’ or ‘consumer–brand relationship’ (e.g. Fournier, 1998; McAlexander et al., 2002; Parvatiyar and Sheth, 2001; Webster, 1992). The consumer–brand relationship concept is an important research topic, because of advantages such as: reduced marketing costs, ease of access, acquiring new customers, customer retention, brand equity and more profit (Blackston, 2000; Dowling, 2002; Reichheld, 1996; Winer, 2001). For a long time, advertisers invested more money in acquiring new customers than in reinforcing relationships with existing consumers. This philosophy, however, has changed completely. Strengthening relationships with consumers is now the focus of marketing activities (Peelen, 2003).

The brand relationship metaphor originates in person-to-person relationships as studied in personality research and social psychology. Three fundamentals (De Wulf et al., 2001;

Hendrick and Hendrick, 2000; Hinde, 1997; Olivier, 1999) characterize Interpersonal relationships: interdependence, temporality and perceived commitment. Interdependence means that relationships involve a reciprocal exchange between active and interdependent relationship partners. Moreover, relationships change over a series of interactions and in response to fluctuations in the contextual environment. This temporality characteristic implies that relations do not exist as an isolated action, but consist of a series of repeated actions. In general, relationships involve different stages, such as initiation, growth, maintenance, deterioration, and dissolution. In each stage relationships can change in type, e.g. the evolution from friends to lovers (or vice versa). The third fundamental characteristic is that relationships involve the provision of meanings to the persons who engage them. Relationships range across several dimensions and take many forms, but they all provide possible benefits for their participants and therefore willing to continue a relationship.

The third characteristic of interpersonal relationships corresponds to brand loyalty concepts as described by several authors (e.g. Fournier, 1994, 1998; Garbarino and Johnson, 1999; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Dorsch et al., 1998; Olivier, 1999). In this respect, an integrated multi-faceted construct, Brand Relationship Quality (BRQ), is proposed by Fournier (1994, 1998). BRQ is best thought of as a customer-based indicator of the strength and depth of the person–brand

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relationship. The construct consists of seven facets which are based on 112 brand stories (Fournier, 1994, 1998) and measured with 39 items in two surveys for 12 brands (Fournier, 1994), shown in Fig. 1. The intimacy facet (1) refers to the psychological closeness between the relationship partners and the knowledge about the brand. Personal commitment (facet 2) means loyalty to the brand in terms of faithfulness and willingness to make small sacrifices. Passionate attachment (3) refers to the integration of the brand in its user's daily life. This facet represents attachment and the feeling that something is missing if the brand is not used. Love (4) relates to possible feelings for the brand. Self-concept connection (5) reflects the extent to which the brand is part of the self, part of the self image, and refers to the question whether the consumer and his or her brand have lots in common. In the nostalgic connection facet (6) brands are part of the consumer's history and related to particular memories. The final facet partner quality (7), refers to the qualities of the partner in the relationship, and whether the brand takes good care of the consumer, shows interest and is reliable. Besides these seven facets, a second order dimension is noteworthy, namely the more emotional dimension of BRQ (left) and the more behavioral or informational dimension (right from the vertical midline in Fig. 1).

Some authors, however, question the suitability of the relationship metaphor. O'Malley and Tynan (2001), for instance, raise the important question: 'under which circumstances does a consumer–brand relationship exist?' They suggest that close relationships are unlikely to exist between all consumers and all brands, because close relationships are special and therefore rather rare. Also some brands are naturally more suited for a relationship than others, for instance because of the importance of the brand to the consumer (Dowling, 2002) or because of the personalities of the consumer and the brand (Aaker et al., 2004; Plummer, 2000).

The aim of the present research is to provide insight in the previously stated question about differences in consumer–brand relationships. To guide the study, the researchers formulate the following research questions: 1) To what extent are brand relationships different for various types of brands? and 2) To what extent are consumers willing to share personal information with their relationship partners, i.e. the organizations behind the brand? Before going into the details of the study, the researchers first focus on these two questions from the literature.

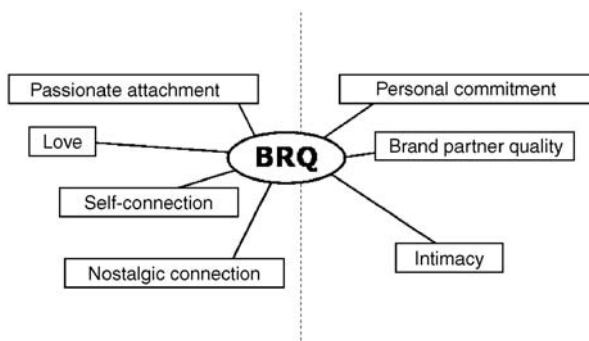


Fig. 1. Fournier's BRQ model (Source: Fournier 1994, 1998).

2. Different relationships with different personalities

With respect to product differences there are two issues at stake. First, from a business perspective one could argue that consumer behavior is very different for products that require more financial or social risk. In this respect, other studies propose different two-dimensional product typologies (Vaughn, 1980, 1986; Weinberger et al., 1995; Rossiter et al., 1991; Rossiter and Bellman, 2005). The type of purchase motivation (first dimension) can be either informational (negatively originated) or transformational (positive ending). The type of decision (second dimension) can be classified as low involvement if only a small economic or psychological loss is at stake, or high involvement in opposite cases. In the Rossiter Percy grid, each of the four types relates to different marketing communication strategies. Although empirical support for the success of these matching strategies is not consistent (Loef, 2002), the idea that different types of products are treated differently in marketing terms is plausible.

However, from a consumer–brand relationship point of view, consumers can be very loyal to all kinds of products, ranging from chocolate and photo cameras to detergents. In a range of different studies, Fournier argues that meaningful firm relationships exist between consumers and all kinds of daily used products (Fournier, 1994, 1998; Fournier and Mick, 1999; Fournier and Yao, 1997). Differences are found in those studies, but are caused by differences in satisfaction levels, perceptions of brand quality or the brand's personality (Aaker et al., 2004). Results of a longitudinal field experiment examining the evolution of consumer–brand relationships show that relationships with brands with a sincere personality deepen over time, while the relationships with brands with an exciting personality stop. However, in a period of transgression, relationships with sincere brands suffer, while relationships with exciting brands show signs of reinvigoration. These two brand personalities (sincere versus exciting) are part of the multi dimensional brand personality construct proposed by Aaker (1996, 1997). Aaker bases her brand personality measurement on the famous "Big Five" in personality research and applies this to different products and in several cultures (Aaker, 1996, 1997, 1999a,b; Aaker et al., 2001). Smit et al. (2004) apply the Aaker scale to Dutch brands and show that brands – and their product categories – have significantly different personalities.

In sum, the researchers in the present study expect that consumers relate more easily to brands with outspoken personalities, i.e. exciting brand personality. Moreover, they expect to find stronger relationships with products where emotions are at stake (transformational purchase motivation) and where consumers are more involved in the brand or product choice, irrespective of perceived brand personalities.

3. Getting to know each other

Brands succeed by getting, keeping and growing customers. Customers, however, are difficult to find and even harder to keep (Peppers and Rogers, 2005). In other words, organizations should invest in developing the lifetime value of existing customers

(Bolton et al., 2004; Verhoef, 2006). Direct marketing strategies represent one approach organizations may use to develop the lifetime value of its customers. In doing so, they may rely upon direct mail, telemarketing, email marketing, and a host of other direct response options. However, the most effective direct response options are based on the “opt-in” model, which requires that customers give permission to receive offers. This model is also known as permission marketing (Bolton et al., 2004; Narayandas and Bowman, 2001). A better relationship with a customer possibly reduces the fear of inadequate privacy protection. As Peppers and Rogers (2005, p.201) state: “If your customers can trust you with their personal information, then you will be free to tune your whole organization and management structure to the customer frequency. You can manage your relationship with each individual customer for your mutual benefit”. Not only from a manager perspective, but also from an interpersonal psychology perspective, relationships are formed and continued if both partners interact and are willing to share personal information (Hinde, 1997).

The study therefore expects that strong relationships lead to a positive attitude of the customer to give up some privacy protection and a willingness to share personal information with the organization behind the brand.

4. Method

The study utilizes interviews with users ($n=938$) of one of the following brands: the car brands Ford ($n=83$) and Volvo ($n=81$); the computer brands Compaq ($n=122$) and IBM ($n=101$); the beer brands Grolsch ($n=154$) and Heineken ($n=149$); and the shampoo brands Andrélon ($n=126$) and Dove ($n=122$). The selection of products is based on the previously described Rossiter–Percy product typology.

4.1. Data collection

Computer assisted self interviewing is used as the data collection method and carried out by the market research agency TNS NIPO. Respondents are selected from its access panel, which consisted of 150,000 potential respondents. The participants in this access panel are screened using a variety of research instruments (following Bronner et al., 2003). The researchers make extra efforts to ensure adequate data from consumers without computer access. Participants are selected for studies on a rotating basis, minimizing participant fatigue. In addition, participants are rewarded for their participation. Respondents are able to answer the questions at a time that is convenient to them. The database information on brand use makes it possible to draw samples of users of specific products, services and brands.

In the present study eight independent samples are drawn out of the access panel. Each of the samples is representative of the users of the selected brand. Response rates are high, ranging from 80–90% for the samples drawn.

4.2. BRQ measurement

In a previous study, the 39-item BRQ scale of Fournier (1994) is translated, combined with the four-item trust scale of Chaudhuri

Table 1
BRQ measurement

Facets	Items (rotated)	Alpha	Factor 1*	Factor 2
Passionate attachment	It is a feeling of loss when I have not driven my X for a while	.74	.69	.32
	Something would definitely miss in my life when X would not exist anymore		.74	.31
Intimacy	I have the feeling that I really understand X	.74	.69	.48
	It feels like I know X for a long time		.63	.41
Self-connection	X and I have lots in common	.82	.71	.44
	X reminds me of who I am		.79	.28
Nostalgic connection	X reminds me of things I have done or places I have been	.81	.79	.17
	X will always reminds me of a certain period in my life		.77	.17
Love	I have feelings for X that I do not have for a lot of other brands	.79	.60	.59
	If it is about a cars, X is my most favorite brand		.35	.67
Partner Quality	X has always been good to me	.76	.34	.69
	X treats me as an important and valuable customer		.47	.61
Personal commitment	X can always count on me	.70	.56	.60
	I will continue driving X in the near future		.16	.72
Trust	I trust X	.82	.21	.81
	X is an honest brand		.19	.80

Note. *Factor loadings based on PCA Factor Analysis with Varimax rotation; F1: EV=5.26, Adjusted $R^2=32.86$; Cronbach's alpha=.91 (8 items, $M=3.56$, $SD=1.51$); F2: EV=4.96, Adjusted $R^2=31.03$; Cronbach's alpha=.91 (8 items, $M=4.71$, $SD=1.35$); bold factor loading means item selected for first or second factor.

and Holbrook (2001), and used in an online study with ten different brands and a total of 1972 users of one of the brands (Tolboom, 2004; Smit et al., 2004). Not only does this study offer insights into differences between the brands, it also reduces the BRQ instrument to a reliable and more practical instrument of 16 items (7-point scale). The researchers apply this reduced BRQ scale in the present study. Reliability analyses show that the items can be combined to the expected facets (see Table 1) as well as to one BRQ index with a Cronbach's alpha of .95 ($M=4.13$, $SD=1.36$). However, as is the case in the previous studies, factor analysis (Varimax rotation) shows that BRQ is a two dimensional construct. The first dimension ($R^2=32\%$) consists of Fournier's connection facets as well as passionate attachment and intimacy (8 item scale 'Connection', alpha=.91), while the second dimension ($R^2=31\%$) refers to Fournier's brand partner quality combined with trust, personal commitment and love (reduced to 8 item scale 'Partner Quality', alpha=.91).

4.3. Independent variables

The researchers postulate that the car and beer brands would better represent the transformational-motivated product categories, while the computer and shampoo brands would represent the informational-motivated product categories (first dimension in the RP grid). The product categories also vary on the effort taken in the brand choice (second dimension). The study

Table 2
Product typology check*

First dimension:	Informational		Transformational	
Second dimension:	High	Low	High	Low
	Computer (<i>n</i> =223)	Shampoo (<i>n</i> =248)	Car (<i>n</i> =164)	Beer (<i>n</i> =303)
Evaluation (1)	7.00 (c)	7.50 (b)	7.76 (a)	8.01 (a)
Involvement (2)	.20 (b)	.29 (b)	.41 (a)	.52 (a)

Note. *Mean scores on (1) 10-point scale (school mark: 1 = very bad, 10 = excellent); (2) 0 = automatically chosen, 1 = not automatically chosen; (a, b, c) = different letter means a significant different average score in the same row ($p < .05$) based on ANOVA with post hoc tests (Tukey), evaluation: $F(3,934) = 32.01$, $p < .001$, involvement: $F(3, 879) = 20.84$, $p < .001$.

expects the consumers to be more involved in the brand choice for computers and cars than in their choice for shampoo and beer brands, which are purchased on a more regular basis. In order to check the selection of brands in the product typology, the researchers ask respondents to grade the brand (1 = very bad, 10 = excellent). They also ask whether they habitually purchase the brand or not (brand choice involvement).

Analyses of variance shows that brands significantly differ in terms of evaluation ($F(7,930) = 15.72$, $p < .001$) and choice ($F(7,875) = 9.49$, $p < .001$). Additional post hoc analyses (Tukey) shows that no significant differences are found between the two brands within one product type. The mean scores on the product level in Table 2 shows that the beer and car brands are indeed more positively evaluated than the computer and shampoo brands. However, differences in brand choice involvement are not as expected. Respondents are not only more involved in their choice of car brands, but also in their choice of beer brands, as compared to shampoo and computer brands. These differences are also found when controlled for sex, age and degree of brand use.

The study expects brand relationships not only to differ across product categories, but also in terms of their personalities. The measurement of brand personality is based on a previous study in which the researchers developed and tested the Dutch version of the Aaker scale with 38 items and six brand personality dimensions (Smit et al., 2003). Some of these dimensions appear to be in accordance with Aaker's American dimensions and some appear to be more culture specific. The researchers develop a reduced version of this scale with 17 items (5-point scale), which they apply to the present study. Factor and scale analyses show three brand personality dimensions and the exclusion of three items. Table 3 shows the remaining items and its dimensions.

4.4. Dependent variables

In order to measure the strength of brand relationship quality, the researchers ask the respondents whether they would consider the brand in the future (1 = yes, 0 = no). They also asked them whether they would switch to another brand if and when complaints are not sufficiently resolved (4-point scale; 1 = not likely, 4 = definitely).

The attitude towards brand contact (i.e. openness to brand contact) is measured with three statements on a 4-point scale (1 = totally disagree, 4 = totally agree): 'I like to be in contact with X'; 'I appreciate that X keeps me posted regularly'; 'I appreciate it when I get attention of X'. These items are combined in one index (Cronbach's $\alpha = .77$; $M = 2.77$, $SD = .85$). Finally, the study measures the willingness to share personal information by asking the respondents whether they would release information on ten different aspects (5-point scale: 1 = no problem, 5 = definitely not): age ($M = 2.25$, $SD = 1.42$), profession ($M = 2.26$, $SD = 1.44$), family composition ($M = 2.28$, $SD = 1.43$), education ($M = 2.35$, $SD = 1.44$), hobby's ($M = 2.36$, $SD = 1.42$), email ($M = 2.77$, $SD = 1.51$), address ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.48$), telephone number ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.45$), income ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 1.16$), bank account number ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 1.02$). The study recodes and combines these ten items in one index ($\alpha = .91$) ranging from 0 to 50, where 50 means no problem with all ten items and 0 means problems with releasing information on all these ten aspects.

4.5. Control variables

Because the samples are representative for the users of the brand and therefore not identical in terms of demographics, the study analyzes whether possible differences between the samples might disturb the relationships between brand differences and BRQ. The researchers use demographics (sex, age, education, and social class) and degree of brand use as control variables. Degree of brand use is measured differently per product and recoded later as heavy use or not. Heavy car and computer use is coded as "daily use", while heavy shampoo and beer use is coded as "almost daily use".

Table 3
Brand personality measurement

Items (rotated):	Unique and excited	Competence	Gentle
Daring	.79	.10	.29
Rugged	.75	.06	-.12
Masculine	.64	.39	-.28
Firm	.63	.48	-.04
Unique	.62	.29	.27
Creative	.58	.18	.43
Spirited	.48	.39	.32
Active	.42	.40	.44
Steady	.09	.84	.03
Sympathetic	.28	.61	.30
Precisely	.38	.60	.17
Confident	.48	.57	.15
Feminine	.01	-.07	.80
Soft-hearted	.02	.42	.66
Gentle	.11	.44	.49
EV	3.59	2.98	2.22
Adjusted R^2	23.95	19.85	14.80
Cronbach's alpha	.85	.77	.64
Number of items	8	4	3
Mean	3.37	3.87	3.27
SD	.75	.75	.84

Note. *Factor loadings based on PCA Factor Analysis with Varimax rotation; bold factor loading means item selected for first, second or third dimension.

Table 4
Differences in brand relationship quality*

	Computer (n=223)	Shampoo (n=248)	Car (n=164)	Beer (n=303)
BRQ	3.82 (b)	3.92 (b)	4.32 (a)	4.46 (a)
Connection (Factor 1)	3.27 (a,b)	3.07 (b)	3.59 (a)	3.61 (a)
Partner quality (Factor 2)	4.24 (c)	4.56 (b)	4.85 (a)	5.10 (a)

Note. *Mean scores on 7-point scale (1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree); (a, b, c) = different letter means a significant different average score in the same row ($p < .05$) based on ANOVA with post hoc tests (Tukey), BRQ: $F(3,928) = 13.09$, $p < .001$, connection: $F(3, 922) = 6.95$, $p < .001$, partner quality: $F(3, 928) = 19.51$, $p < .001$.

Results show that the car and beer samples consist of higher educated respondents ($\chi^2(df=18) = 108.43$, $p < .001$), more men ($\chi^2(df=4) = 31.14$, $p < .001$) and more respondents of a higher social class ($\chi^2(df=12) = 39.95$, $p < .001$). The computer brands are more frequently used, as are the shampoo brands ($F(3,934) = 40.73$, $p < .001$). The samples do not differ in age. Despite these differences, no significant differences in BRQ scores are found for men and women, for people with different education levels, and for people with different social classes. Age also does not make a difference. These relations are still not significant when controlled for product type. Degree of brand use, however, appears to be significantly related to BRQ. Heavy users evaluate their relationship with the brand slightly more positively ($r = .13$, $p < .001$). Analyses of variance with BRQ as dependent variable, product type as factor and brand use as covariate show a significant relation for product type ($F(3,931) = 22.55$, $p < .001$) as well as for the covariate ($F(1,931) = 43.97$, $p < .001$). The study therefore includes degree of brand use in further analyses.

5. Results

In this section, the researchers first present the results with respect to differences in Brand Relationship Quality based on product differences and differences in brand personalities, and then relate BRQ to the willingness to share personal information with the organization behind the brand.

5.1. Brand relationship quality: differences between products and personalities

The beer brands as well as the car brands score significantly higher on the BRQ index than the other brands (see Table 4). The study finds no differences between the two brands within

Table 5
Brand personality differences*

	Computer (n=223)	Shampoo (n=248)	Car (n=164)	Beer (n=303)
Unique and Excited	3.31 (b)	3.09 (c)	3.42 (b)	3.61 (a)
Competent	3.84 (b,c)	3.69 (c)	4.05 (a)	3.94 (a,b)
Gentle	2.98 (c)	3.71 (a)	3.12 (b,c)	3.19 (b)

Note. *Mean scores on 5-point scale (1 = totally disagree, 5 = totally agree); (a, b, c) = different letter means a significant different average score in the same row ($p < .05$) based on ANOVA with post hoc tests (Tukey), unique and excited: $F(3,879) = 23.70$, $p < .001$; competent: $F(3,888) = 9.06$, $p < .001$; gentle: $F(3,869) = 34.75$, $p < .001$.

Table 6
Explaining BRQ by personality differences

Dependent variables: Predictors:	BRQ	Connection	Partner quality
BP unique, excited, rugged	.39**	.43**	.29**
BP competent	.25**	.16**	.31**
BP gentle	.08*	.07*	.10*
Heavy users ⁽¹⁾	.16**	.12**	.18**
Product type ⁽¹⁾⁽²⁾	.10*	.06*	.13**
Adjusted R ²	.44	.37	.43
ANOVA	$F(5,859) = 138.89**$	$F(5,856) = 102.38**$	$F(5,859) = 132.74**$

Note. Regression analysis, method Enter, standardized Beta coefficients are reported, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$; BP = Brand Personality; ⁽¹⁾ = included as dummy variable; ⁽²⁾ cars and beer versus the rest.

one product category, the only exception is the car brands. Volvo scores significantly higher on BRQ and Partner Quality than Ford (4.60 vs. 4.04, $t(161) = -2.73$, $p < .001$; 5.13 vs. 4.59, $t(161) = -2.74$, $p < .001$, respectively). The researchers also find the product type differences for the two underlying BRQ dimensions, especially Partner Quality (mean scores above 4). Partner Quality reflects the way the customer has been treated by the company behind the brand and all the years they have known each other. Again, the average scores are significantly higher for the more “emotional” products.

The measured brands not only differ in terms of the previously described relationship quality, but also in terms of perceived personality (see Table 5). The customer perceives car brands as competent. He perceives beer brands as having a rugged personality as well as being unique (combined in one dimension). Shampoo brands are perceived as gentle.

The study uses regression analysis to test the relation between brand personality and BRQ. The researchers include product difference in this analysis as a dummy variable (transformational or not, which is found to be the distinguishing dimension). They also include brand use because previous analyses shows that this control variable is significantly related to the product samples as well as the dependent variable (see Method section). Table 6 shows that brand personality is strongly related to BRQ. This relationship still holds when controlled for product type and heavy brand use. The brand personality dimension that combines the excited, rugged and unique personality aspects relates to BRQ ($\beta = .39$). More interesting are the different findings for the two underlying dimensions of BRQ. While connection is more strongly related to unique, excited and rugged ($\beta = .43$), partner quality has more to do with a competent brand personality ($\beta = .31$).

Table 7
Possible consequences of BRQ

	BRQ	Connection	Partner quality
Future use	.42	.34	.47
Switch likelihood	-.31	-.29	-.28
Openness to brand contact	.47	.46	.43
Willingness to share	.33	.29	.33

Note. Pearson correlation coefficients (all significant at .001 level).

Table 8
Predictors of willingness to provide information

Predictors:	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Future use	.06	.01	.01
Switch likelihood	-.13**	-.10**	-.11**
Openness to brand contact	.35**	.29**	.29**
BRQ connection		.01	.01
BRQ partner quality		.19**	.19**
Product type ⁽¹⁾			.02
Adjusted R ²	.16	.18	.18
ANOVA	F(3,748)= 48.99**	F(5,746)= 33.60**	F(6,745)= 28.06**
R ² change		.02	.00
F change		8.94**	.49

Note. Hierarchical regression analysis (three models, method Enter), standardized Beta coefficients are reported, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$; ⁽¹⁾ = included as dummy variable (cars and beer versus the rest).

5.2. Willingness to share

Results show that BRQ is positively related to the intention to use the brand in the future, more reluctance to brand switching after dealing with complaints, a more favorable attitude on brand contact, and a willingness to share more personal information with the organization behind the brand (see Table 7). These correlations are also found for the two underlying dimensions of BRQ.

Finally the study analyzes which variable would best predict the willingness to share personal information with the organization behind the brand. For this the researchers use a hierarchical regression analysis predicting willingness to share in three steps. The results in Table 8 show that adding product differences in the third model does not significantly add to a change nor a significant contribution of the predictor itself. Adding BRQ in the second model however did. This second model clearly shows that both, partner quality and a favorable attitude towards brand contact increase the willingness to provide the organization with more personal information.

6. Discussion

First of all, the results suggest that some love exists between consumers and brands. Consumers perceive an emotional bond with their brands. They especially see partner quality as an important aspect of the perceived relationship between a brand and its user. Some brands, however, stand out in terms of relationship quality. The transformational beer and car brands are more qualified as partners, as are brands with certain personality characteristics. Brands with a 'unique' or 'exciting' personality qualify more likely as partners. However, when taking the different dimensions of BRQ into account, partner quality more strongly relates to brands with a competent brand personality.

The researchers' expectation that consumers would relate more easily to brands with outspoken personalities is indeed confirmed. Also stronger relationships are formed with products with a transformational purchase motivation, irrespective of

perceived brand personalities. However, the expectation that this especially would be the case for high involvement products is not confirmed at all. Respondents value their relationship with their beer brand as much as their car or computer brands. The study's second set of expectations about brand contact is confirmed. Stronger relationships lead to a more positive attitude to sacrifice some privacy protection by sharing personal information with the organization behind the brand.

The study's findings imply that it may be useful for organizations to adjust marketing strategies to fit perceived brand personalities. As with people, some brands possess certain traits that make relationships with them – as friends or as lovers – easier. Another implication of the findings is that it is worth the effort for organizations to invest in consumers who are heavy brand users. Loyal consumers should be rewarded, not only in words but also in action (such as special discount programs). Good relationships can result in active consumers who love to be in contact with their brands, and who are willing to invest in the relationship.

One of the limitations of the study is the selection of only two brands per product category and only four product types (cars, computers, shampoo and beer). Further research is needed to add more different brands to the database, and also to vary more on different personalities of the brands within one product category.

Another interesting topic for further research is the translation of brand relation aspects in advertising and other marketing tools. We expect that advertising aimed at building a brand's personality is probably an important tool for brand relationship management. The researchers' next study will investigate the relationship between advertising, brand personality and brand relationship quality. They hypothesize that advertising aimed at building brands with strong personalities will have a direct positive influence on brand personality and so an indirect positive influence on brand relationship quality.

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