

A Study on Selected Antecedents of Brand Preference

A R Mishra

Professor-Marketing, Jagan Institute of Management Studies (JIMS) Rohini, Delhi

E-mail: mishra_a_r@yahoo.com

Abstract

The main objective of the paper is to examine the relationship of consumer personality, values and consumer susceptibility to the interpersonal influences with private label brand preferences in the food category. This study uses constructs which are taken from existing branding scales. The primary data was collected by administering the questionnaire on the respondents involving 550 consumers of private label brands as the study participants. Structural equation modeling technique is used for data analysis. The paper provides empirical insights about how personality, values and consumer susceptibility to the interpersonal influences affect the brand preferences. The research has been confronted with several limitations, since the self-report method was used for personality assessment, there may be bias in terms of the nature of respondents' personality as expressed in the questionnaire. The paper poses interesting insights and empirical evidence with regard to the predictive power of personality, values and consumer on brand preferences within private label contexts suggesting interesting implications for the development of a strong private label brand preference.

Keywords : *Brand Preference, Big Five Model, Consumer Values, SUSCEP, Private Label Brands*

Introduction

Every individual is different in terms of his/her preferences and tastes. These preferences are results of many factors like background, upbringing, values, attitudes, cultures, etc. Depending upon these factors individuals indulge in diverse set of activities. Personality research as it relates to marketing is both an enigma and a thorny area of research for marketing scholars. A perusal of any basic text in psychology shows that personality research has been a cornerstone of psychology since the early 20th century. One of the most widely used approaches to the study of personality traits is The Big Five model. The model's capacity in helping to explain human behaviour has attracted the interest of researchers from other disciplines, including sociology, management and marketing. Management scholars have attempted to link employee

personality to job satisfaction and leadership. Researchers in marketing have explored the impact of consumer personality on perception, preferences and behaviour. The results of studies have, however, been mixed. Although attempts to demonstrate the link between consumer personality and behaviour have not yielded many meaningful results, other methods founded on personal values and demographics have been more efficacious.

Although consumer personality research has received marketing scholars' interest since 1960's (Westfall, 1962), there has always been problem in finding the significance of personality to consumer behaviour (Shank and Langemeyer, 1994). It seems that marketers found it difficult to trust personality as a reliable construct to predict behaviour due to the complex nature of human personality (Blackwell, 2001) and the existence of

more powerful tools to predict behaviour such as price, values, product usage, and perception (Shank and Langemeyer, 1994). This resulted in the substantial research gap in marketing discipline, particularly in examining the relationship between consumer personality and brand preferences. In order to succeed in today's competitive environment, the private label marketers must be able to formulate effective marketing strategies for their target markets. The success of a private label brand depends upon how precise it is in understanding its target customers and their needs, so as to create wants. Research into brand preferences has gained the interest of marketing scholars since the early 1970s when researchers began to examine the antecedents of brand preferences over a different range of product categories. One of the most widely used concepts in the study of brand preferences is the self-congruity theory. The theory proposes that consumer behaviour is partly determined by an individual's comparison of their self-image with the image they associate with a brand, as reflected in the stereotype of a typical user of the brand (Birdwell, 1968; Dolich, 1969; Grubb and Hupp, 1968). The concept of self-congruity plays an important role in marketing as it is argued that consumers are highly influenced by their self-concept when it comes to purchase decisions based on brand preference (Piacentini and Mailer, 2004). Values are also considered as an important domain of research within marketing literature, as studies in the past have used constructs such as Rokeach Value Survey (RVS) and Kahle's List of Values (LOV) to examine the relationship between values and brand choice (Prakash, 1986; Goldsmith et al., 1993; Kim, 2005;). However, similar to findings in consumer personality research, previous studies examining the impact of personal values on brand preferences has also generated mixed results. Consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influences on brand preference has widely attracted the attention of marketing researchers.

(Bearden et.al, 1989) have developed scale which is widely used by marketing scholars in this context.

Accordingly, the purposes of this study are as follows: (1) to investigate the relationship between personality and private label brand preferences, (2) to investigate the relationship between values and private label brand preferences, and (3) To investigate the relationship between consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influences and brand preferences.

Literature Review

Brand Personality and Consumer's Self Congruity

Self-congruity represents the degree of similarity between consumer's self-image or self-concept and that of brand. The degree of consistency between the self-image and brand image is self-congruity (Sirgy, 1982). The four aspects of self-concept compose the global self-image, which is hypothesised to influence consumer choices of products/brands through self-image with brand image congruity (Johar and Sirgy, 1991; Sirgy and Su, 2000). Congruity impacts are desirable because they influence positively consumer's self-image, but inconsistencies or incongruity is likely to result in feelings of inadequacy, and dissatisfied with their choices (Johar and Sirgy, 1991; Sirgy and Su, 2000). According to Pervin and John (2001), self-concept is often viewed as a component of personality. Identifying congruity relationships between brand image and consumer's self-image would enable marketers to position and promote products more effectively with the appropriate target markets. Identifying more clearly symbolic brand personality meanings, consumer personality characteristics and the interrelationships between consumer self-image and brand image, would provide an integrated homothetic approach to understanding the

symbolic with the actual consumer needs. Understanding the relationships between brand and consumer personality would prove most invaluable, as personality constructs, are considered stable over a long time and universally generalisable for all individuals and transcend cultural differences (Jung, 1921, 1971; McCrae and Costa, 1997).

Brand Personality

Contrary to product-related attributes, which refer to be performance-oriented for customers, brand personality seems to be representative/self-expressive oriented (Keller, 1993). Brand personality refers to “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (Aaker, 1997, p. 347). Moreover, researchers found that brand personality facilitates a consumer to articulate his/her self (Belk, 1988), an ideal self (Malhotra, 1988), or exact aspects of the self (Kleine, Kleine, and Kerman, 1993) via the use of a brand. Additionally, this concept was the essential determinant of consumer preference and usage (Biel, 1993). Brand personality can be shaped and influenced by any direct/indirect contact that the consumer has with the brand (Plummer, 1985). The direct influences included the brand's user imagery, which is defined as “the set of human characteristics associated with the typical user of a brand” (Aaker, 1997, p. 348); the firm's workers and/or boss; and the brand's endorsers. On the other hand, the indirect influences contained product-related features, product category relationships, brand name, mark or emblem, and other marketing mix elements (Batra, Lehmann, and Singh, 1993). Moreover, according to Levy (1959, p. 12), brand personality consisted of demographic characteristics such as gender (“Usually it is hard to evade thinking of inanimate things as male or female”), age (“Just as most, people usually recognize whether something is addressed to them as a man or a woman, so are they sensitive to

symbols of age”), and class (“The possession of mink is hardly a matter of winter warmth alone”). Some examples are provided as follows. First, in the tobacco industry, “Virginia Slims tends to be thought of feminine, whereas Marlboro tends to be perceived as masculine” (Aaker, 1997, p. 348). Second, in the PC business, “Apple is considered to be young, and IBM is considered to be older” (Aaker, 1997, p. 348). Third, based on the various pricing policies in relation to different department stores, “Saks Fifth Avenue is perceived as upper class, whereas K-mart is perceived as blue collar” (Aaker, 1997, p. 348).

Brand Preference

“Customers buying products are buying utility, function, and performance as much as image and status” (Terpstra and Sarathy, 1997, p. 375). Actually, customer merchandise has implications more than their utilitarian, functional, and commercial significance (Cziki-szentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Ericksen, 1996; Leigh and Gabel, 1992; Levy, 1959; Mick, 1986). Consumers do not “consume products for their material utilities but consume the symbolic meaning of those products as portrayed in their images” (Elliot, 1997, p. 286). Therefore, the acquired goods are not only “bundles of attributes that yield particular benefits” (Holt, 1995, p. 1) but also indications of symbolic meanings to the public. Consumers are more likely to use brands to express how they are either similar to or different from people of their in-group (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). Bhat and Reddy (1998) also reported that brands have practical and emblematic importance for consumers. The emblematic importance, which is attached to brands, is often broadcasted via the use and consumption of brands (Gottdeiner, 1985; McCracken, 1986). Consequently, there seems to be a noteworthy relationship between brand images, consistent with the emblematic importance of brands, and

consumers' self images (Zinkham and Hong, 1991). Individuals are more likely to buy brands whose personalities intimately match their own self images (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2000). Similarly, consumers express themselves by selecting brands whose personalities are recognized to be consistent with their own personalities (Aaker, 1999; Kassarian, 1971; Sirgy, 1982). In many circumstances, consumers' self image influences his/her purchase decisions (Zinkham and Hong, 1991). In other words, consumers use products to illustrate, maintain, and reinforce their self concepts to themselves (Sirgy, 1982; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1988; Zinkham and Hong, 1991). Therefore, "purchase and consumption are good vehicles for self-expression" (Jamal and Goode, 2001, p. 483).

Previous research indicated that self image/self expression affect consumers' product preferences and their purchase intentions (Ericksen, 1996; Mehta, 1999). For example, Ericksen (1996) found a significant relationship between self image and intention to buy an American automobile (Ford Escort). Based on this finding, it might be inferred that "individuals prefer brands that have images compatible with their perceptions of self" (Jamal and Goode, 2001, p. 483; Belk, et. al., 1982; Ericksen, 1996; Solomon, 1983; Zinkham and Hong, 1991). Moreover, this self image consistency strengthens positive attitude toward products and brands (Ericksen, 1996; Sirgy, 1982, 1985, 1991; Sirgy, et. al., 1997). Specifically, "the more similar a consumer's self-image is to the brand's image, the more favourable their evaluations of that brand should be" (Graeff, 1996, p. 5).

Consumer Values

Many researchers have studied the impact of cultural factors and they tried to measure the values of the individual. The literature review reveals

following values measurement tools:

1. The Rokeach value System (RVS) (Rokeach, 1973);
2. The Values and Lifestyles System (VALS) (Mitchell, 1983);
3. The List Of Values (LOV) (Kahle, 1983); and
4. The Schwartz's human values (1992).

Among these measures the List of Values (LOV) is commonly used in research on values because of its ease of management and high reliability. It is considered to be well-organized, assessable sets of variables, and more closely associated to stimulus than demographic and psychographics measures. The LOV has also proven its effectiveness in cross-cultural applications (Beatty, Kahle, & Homer, 1991; Goldsmith, Freiden, & Kilsheimer, 1993). Commonly used method of value measurement was developed by researchers at the University of Michigan (Veroff et al, 1981; Kahle, 1983).

A significant number of researchers recommended that values influence a variety of characteristics of consumption and behaviors (Vinson et al., 1977; Becker and Connor, 1981; Prakash and Munson, 1985; Valencia, 1989; Donthu and Cherian, 1994; Wedel et al., 1998, Shim and Eastlick, 1998; Kamakura & Novak, 1992; Kim et al, 2002; Chrysohidis & Krystallis, 2005). Whereas Kahle (1980) argued that values have an indirect effect on consumer behavior through less abstract mediating factors such as domain specific attitudes and needs. Therefore all the individuals have some stated goals and ends towards which they strive and the selection and maintenance of these goals and ends is the responsibility of the values as well as regulating the processes in which in struggle has been take place (Vinson, Scott, & Lamont, 1977; Kims et al, 2002). Therefore values, explicit or implicit, function as grounds for behavioural

decisions in general and consumption behaviours in particular (e.g., Carman, 1977; Williams, 1979; Allen, 2001). The Values help people adjust the situation for the achievements of their goals by directing both their effort and resources. Other researchers have also attempted to understand consumer behaviour through needs (cf. Tse et al., 1989; Homer and Kahle, 1988; Kim et al, 2002; Hollywood et al., 2007).

Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influences

SUSCEP has been recognized as a general trait that varies among individuals (Bearden et al., 1989).

This trait has been shown not to be stable in individuals as it varies with the level of assimilation among first generation immigration. SUSCEP is defined as the need to identify or enhance one's image with significant others through the acquisition of products and brands, the willingness to conform to the expectations of others regarding purchase decisions, and the tendency to learn about products and services by observing others and/or seeking information from others (Bearden et al., 1989). Researchers generally agree that interpersonal influence occurs in three distinct forms: utilitarian, value-expressive, and informational, with value-expressive influence and utilitarian influence forming the broader category of normative influence.

Utilitarian-influence operates when an individual complies with the expectations of others in an effort to avoid punishment or receive rewards (Bearden, Netemeyer, and Teel 1989). With utilitarian-influence, individuals adopt group norms, values and behaviours, not out of genuine conviction of their worth, rather, because they are viewed as instrumental in producing a desired social outcome. In Individuals yielding to this type

of influence do so because these behaviours are prescribed for them. For example, an individual consumes an expensive brand of table wine to impress his dinner companion, but drinks a cheap brand of wine when drinking at home alone.

Value-expressive influence refers to an individual's desire to enhance his/her self-image by reference group association (Bearden, Netemeyer and Teel 1989). Value-expressive influence operates through the process of identification. This occurs when an individual adopts another person's behaviours because such actions are associated with a satisfying, self-defining relationship with another person or group (Kelman 1958). In the case of identification, individuals engage in certain behaviours because these behaviours allow them to act as if they were agent with whom the individual identifies. For example, a man consumes a pricey table wine because his gourmet friends value fine wine and he considers himself to be a gourmet.

Informational influence refers to the tendency for individuals to accept information from others as credible evidence about a product's true nature (Bearden, Netemeyer and Teel 1989). Informational influence may occur in two ways: (1) Individuals may actively solicit information from others perceived to be knowledgeable about the product in question, or (2) they may acquire it passively through the observation of such persons. With informational influence, the individual believes the information he/she receives reflects reality. For example, with informational influence, an individual drinks the same expensive brand of table wine his friends drink, because he believes his friends are a good judge of wine quality.

Bearden et al (1989) developed a scale to measure SUSCEP. The original scale had 12 items, four items for each of the three dimensions (utilitarian, value-expressive, and informational). However,

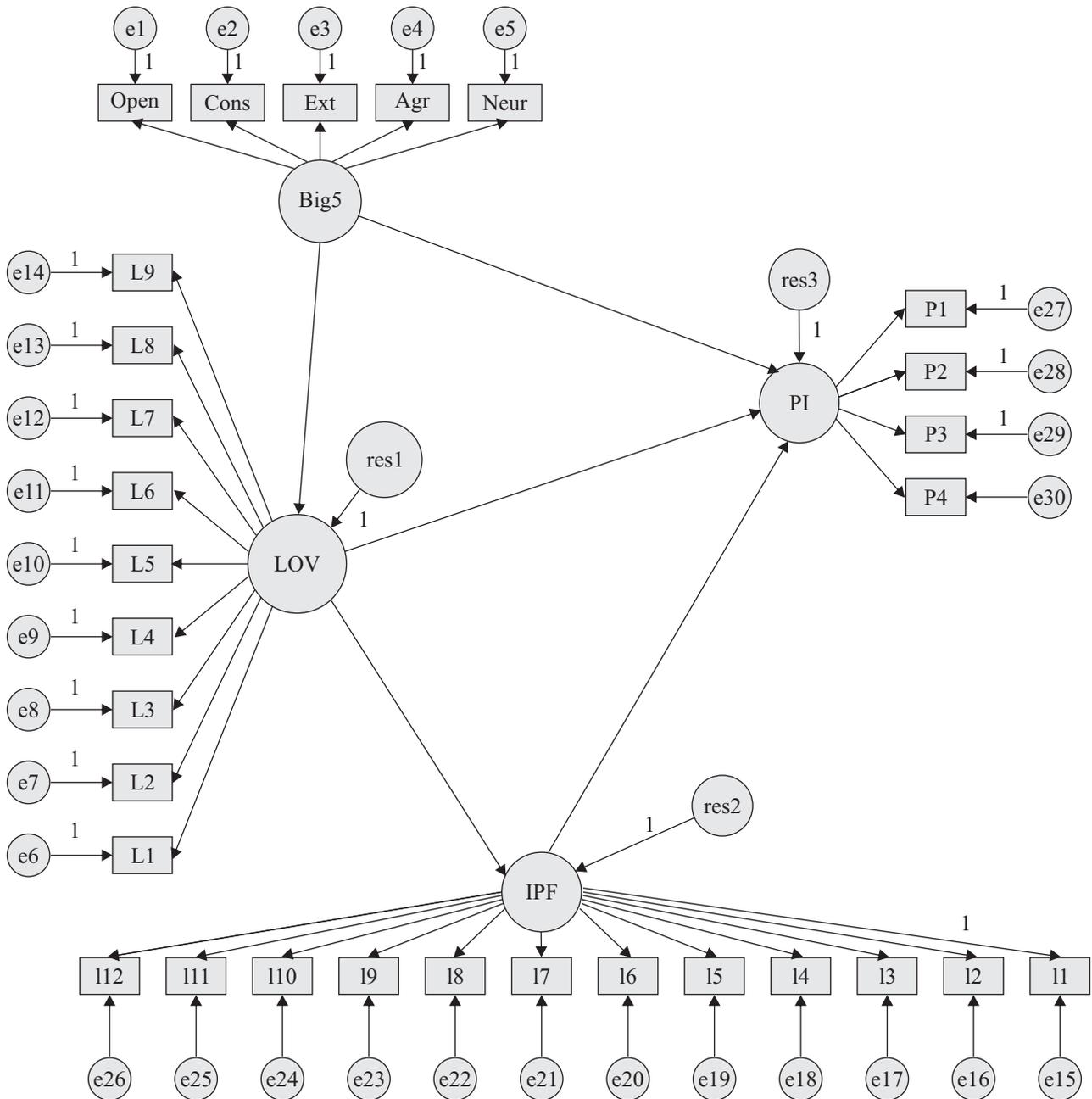
their analyses indicated that the measures failed to discriminate between the utilitarian and value-

expressive dimensions. This leads to a two-dimensional scale, with eight normative items and four informational items.

The Research Context: Indian Private Label Market

Following is the postulated model to be tested using Structural Equation Modeling

Figure 1: The Postulated Model of this Study



The summary of hypothesis is present in the table below:

H1	There is a positive relationship between personality and private label brand preferences
H2	There is a positive relationship between values and private label brand preferences.
H3	There is a positive relationship between consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influences and brand preferences

Research Methodology

Measures of Construct

The questionnaire was divided into several sections that contained questions related to psychological characteristics – Big Five, Values, Consumer Susceptibility to the Interpersonal Influences and Purchase Intention – as well as brand preferences and demographic information.

Personality – Big Five

The Big Five personality scale was adapted from the “Big Five Trait Factors and Illustrative Scales” (McCrae and Costa, 1990). These different dimensions were used to gain theoretical and practical insight into the antecedents and consequences of brand personality and to estimate the congruence between the consumer and private label brands. Respondents were asked to rank themselves on a 7 point semantic-differential scale which contained the adjectives which related to each of the Big Five dimensions.

This scale measures 5 dimensions of personality referred as OCEAN (Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extroversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism). In the questionnaire, respondents were asked to rate their preferences for each characteristic element of the brand personality constructs. It was expected that respondents who were dominant on a particular dimension of the Big Five would prefer a brand personality which reflects that dimension or is close to it.

Values

A list of values (LOV) (Kahle and Kennedy, 1989) (9 items) was adopted to represent the values construct. They are excitement, self respect, security, warm relationship with others, sense of accomplishment, self fulfilment, being well respected, sense of belonging, fun and enjoyment in life.

Purchase Intention

Behavioural intentions were measured by four positive actions suggested by Vezina and Paul (1997); to search information about the brand, to visit a store of the brand, to buy the brand and to recommend the brand.

Sample & Data Collection

For the purpose of this study a sample of 150 respondents were chosen. The sample consisted the purchasers of private label brands of Big Bazaar, Reliance Fresh, More, Easy Day and Spencer's in the NCR market of India. The primary data was required to collect the information needed to arrive at the purpose of this research. The primary data was collected by administering the questionnaires on the respondents. Since the research required respondents to disclose information about psychological aspects of the self, anonymity was viewed as an important element in the methodology. Thus an anonymous self-administered questionnaire was used for data collection.

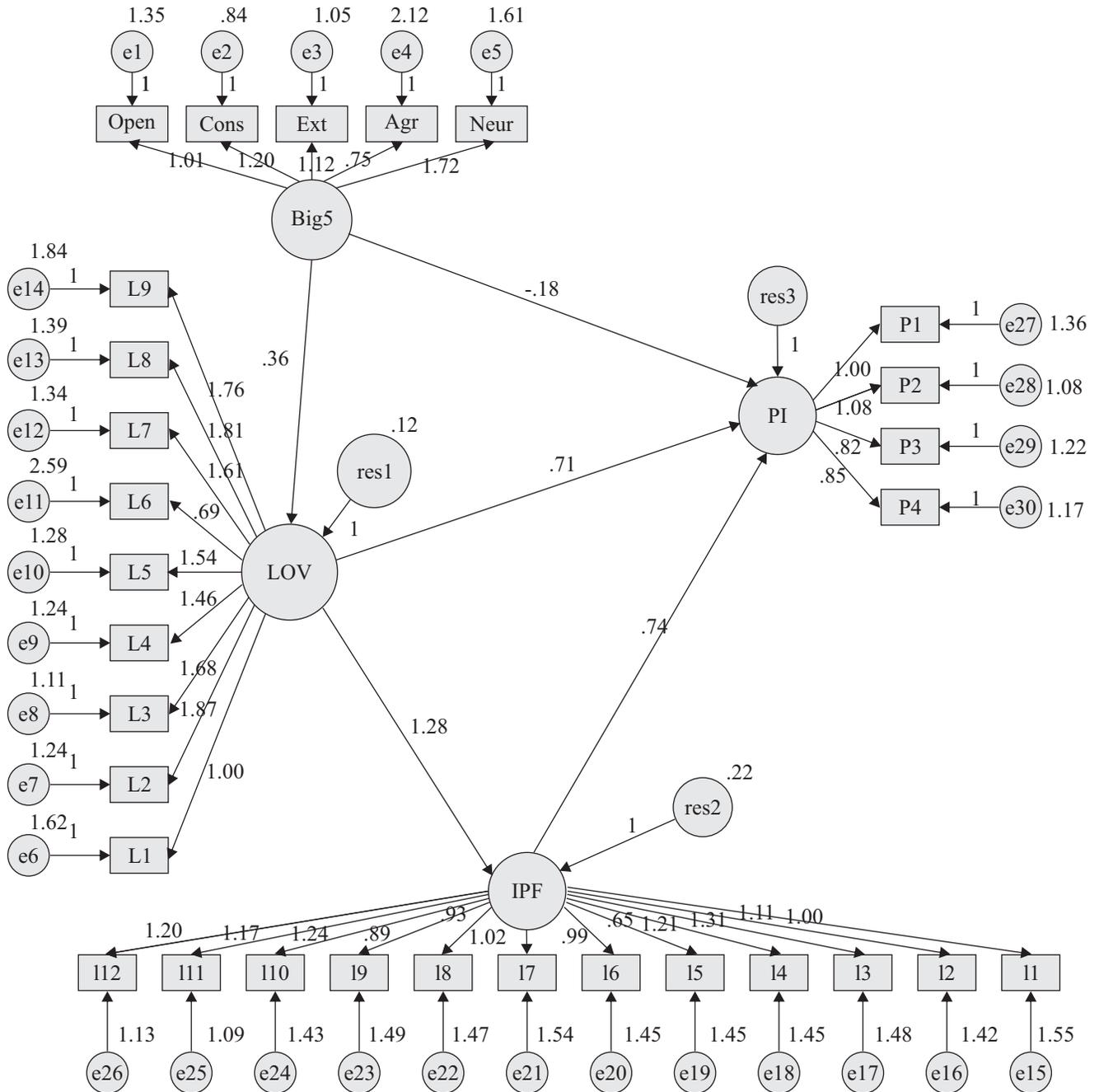
Analysis and Interpretation

Reliability and Validity of Measures

The value of Internal Consistency Analysis (Cronbach's alpha) is greater than 0.7 for all the constructs that implies that the data is highly

reliable. CFA and SEM was used to test validity and it was found that there is a discriminant validity as all the items specified get loaded on to the relevant factors. There was no multicollinearity.

The Conceptual Model Path Diagram with associated output



Based on the hypothesised model, and path diagram, Confirmatory Factor analysis was conducted and

following is the statistics obtained for interpretation.

Default Model Output

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
LOV	←	Big5	.358	.057	6.314	***
IPF	←	LOV	1.276	.198	6.434	***
PI	←	IPF	.738	.130	5.677	***
PI	←	LOV	.714	.252	2.827	.005
PI	←	Big5	-.178	.082	-2.167	.049
Open	←	Big5	1.000			
Cons	←	Big5	1.205	.102	11.820	***
Ext	←	Big5	1.122	.098	11.395	***
Agr	←	Big5	.383	.085	4.497	***
Neur	←	Big5	.716	.087	8.279	***
L1	←	LOV	1.000			
L2	←	LOV	1.874	.267	7.021	***
L3	←	LOV	1.680	.242	6.954	***
L4	←	LOV	1.455	.219	6.651	***
L5	←	LOV	1.544	.230	6.720	***
L6	←	LOV	.693	.185	3.747	***
L7	←	LOV	1.605	.238	6.747	***
L8	←	LOV	1.811	.262	6.900	***
L9	←	LOV	1.756	.265	6.634	***
I1	←	IPF	1.000			
I2	←	IPF	1.105	.111	9.981	***
I3	←	IPF	1.128	.113	9.977	***
I4	←	IPF	1.206	.117	10.303	***
I5	←	IPF	.850	.097	8.731	***
I6	←	IPF	.994	.105	9.481	***
I7	←	IPF	1.016	.108	9.436	***
I8	←	IPF	.853	.098	8.720	***
I9	←	IPF	.993	.106	9.405	***
I10	←	IPF	1.236	.119	10.416	***
I11	←	IPF	1.171	.109	10.724	***
I12	←	IPF	1.204	.112	10.753	***
P1	←	PI	1.000			
P2	←	PI	1.076	.086	12.477	***
P3	←	PI	.822	.075	10.915	***
P4	←	PI	.853	.076	11.240	***

Model Fit Summary**CMIN**

Model	NPAR	CMIN	DF	P	CMIN/DF
Default model	65	1970.850	400	.000	4.927
Saturated model	465	.000	0		
Independence model	30	5753.122	435	.000	13.226

RMR, GFI

Model	RMR	GFI	AGFI	PGFI
Default model	.146	.803	.771	.690
Saturated model	.000	1.000		
Independence model	.499	.349	.305	.327

Baseline Comparisons

Model	NFI	RFI	IFI	TLI	CFI
	Delta1	rho1	Delta2	rho2	
Default model	.657	.627	.707	.679	.705
Saturated model	1.000		1.000		1.000
Independence model	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

Parsimony-Adjusted Measures

Model	PRATIO	PNFI	PCFI
Default model	.920	.605	.648
Saturated model	.000	.000	.000
Independence model	1.000	.000	.000

NCP

Model	NCP	LO 90	HI 90
Default model	1570.850	1436.110	1713.070
Saturated model	.000	.000	.000
Independence model	5318.122	5076.597	5566.093

FMIN

Model	FMIN	F0	LO 90	HI 90
Default model	3.590	2.861	2.616	3.120
Saturated model	.000	.000	.000	.000
Independence model	10.479	9.687	9.247	10.139

RMSEA

Model	RMSEA	LO 90	HI 90	PCLOSE
Default model	.085	.081	.088	.000
Independence model	.149	.146	.153	.000

AIC

Model	AIC	BCC	BIC	CAIC
Default model	2100.850	2108.630	2380.995	2445.995
Saturated model	930.000	985.656	2934.112	3399.112
Independence model	5813.122	5816.713	5942.420	5972.420

ECVI

Model	ECVI	LO 90	HI 90	MECVI
Default model	3.827	3.581	4.086	3.841
Saturated model	1.694	1.694	1.694	1.795
Independence model	10.589	10.149	11.040	10.595

HOELTER

	HOELTER	HOELTER
Model	.05	.01
Default model	125	131
Independence model	47	49

Interpretation

Our model examined both direct and indirect effects between constructs. The overall examination of fit indexes suggests a good fit with the data. The model suggests that there is less significant relationship between Big five and brand preferences because the critical ratio value is insignificant, thus H1 was not supported for private label brands. However, values are in significant relationship with brand preference, hence lending support to the second hypothesis H2. In addition, the model reveals a significant relationship between Big five and customer values. This result indicates that personality strongly affects consumers' values. Hence accepting second

hypothesis H2.

The finding indicates that susceptibility to interpersonal influences also plays a significant role in brand preference, hence accepting third hypothesis H3. It was also found out that there is a significant relationship between values and susceptibility to interpersonal influences and the latter is acting as a mediator between values and brand preferences.

Research Conclusions

In the previous researches very less amount of emphasis is given to the implications of predictive power of personality, values and interpersonal

influences in the Indian private label market. Although many researchers have argued that consumers use brands as a channel to express their personality and embedded values but there is a lack of empirical evidence to support the proposition. This study contributes to this research gap by examining the significant relationship between personality, values, interpersonal influences and brand preferences in a segment of the Indian private label market.

Theoretical and Managerial Implications

This study has contributed to an important area of consumer research by evaluating the strength of predictive power of prestige sensitivity and values. Earlier it was assumed that consumer personality is the most crucial predictor of brand preferences, but here it was found that values and interpersonal influences are indeed better predictors of brand preferences. Private label brand managers should account for consumer values and interpersonal influences when forming strategies to create a particular brand image in order to better reflect the values of the target consumers.

This study has also opened the scope of personality research in marketing by using The Big Five taxonomy to examine the relationship between consumer personality and private label brand preferences. The findings in this research signify that personality variables are not strong enough to be reliable predictors of brand preferences. However, significant findings on the relationship between personality and values can help managers to design promotional strategies that are relevant to the personality and values of the target segment.

Limitations and Future Research

The findings presented in this paper are met by a number of limitations. One limitation is the use of a self-report instrument to measure respondents' personality. (Pervin and John, 1997) argue that self-report assessments in personality measurement have weaknesses since respondents tend to report positively about themselves. Although the survey was anonymous, respondents may have scored themselves

high in positive dimensions.

The second limitation of this study is the development, validation and application of the scales in other product contexts, which is another avenue for future research.

Future research projects can be done by conducting a similar research on a larger sample across a wider population. This study has examined the association of Personality, Values, Interpersonal Influences and Brand Preference. Future studies could also be done on other factors such as marketing variables, emotional appeal, buyer motives, and cultural influences as the mediating or moderating variables in predicting brand preferences.

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