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Self-Image Enhancement through Branded Accessories among Youths: A Phenomenological Study in India

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Abstract

Fashion not only forms an important part of everyday consumption decisions, but also plays an important role in all daily events such as, the clothing we wear, how we think and also what we eat and where we eat. In realism, fashion is an outcome of a dynamic culture and common shifts in the tastes and style of individuals. The center of the debate appears to be that branded fashion accessories involvement is likely to be associated with differences in sensitivity to one's social surroundings (Auty & Elliott, 1998). The question is: "Whether involvement in fashion accessories with its strong brand image and sensory components, has similar capabilities to be seen as a significant possession creating a fulfilling life, because of the happiness, success, and central position it may occupy in the lives of some?" Branded fashion accessories are increasingly becoming popular among India's youth population. However, less attention has been given to understand the reasons behind this changing consumer behaviour in India. Thus, this study aims to understand the role of branded fashion accessories in self-image enhancement of India's youth. For this purpose, semi structured in-depth interviews were conducted using college students who wear and who do not wear branded fashion accessories. Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) of the data revealed that "social belongingness," "sense of completeness," "self-confidence," and "style and price" are the important factors that play a vital role in affecting youth's self-image. These findings may encourage retailers to focus their product and sales strategies on consumers' positive emotions and promote their products among non-consumers by explaining how these products can benefit them.

Keywords

Branded Fashion Accessories, India, Phenomenological Analysis, Self-Image Enhancement, Youth

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Self-Image Enhancement through Branded Accessories among Youths: A Phenomenological Study in India

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Fashion not only forms an important part of everyday consumption decisions, but also plays an important role in all daily events such as, the clothing we wear, how we think and also what we eat and where we eat. In realism, fashion is an outcome of a dynamic culture and common shifts in the tastes and style of individuals. The center of the debate appears to be that branded fashion accessories involvement is likely to be associated with differences in sensitivity to one's social surroundings (Auty & Elliott, 1998). The question is: "Whether involvement in fashion accessories with its strong brand image and sensory components, has similar capabilities to be seen as a significant possession creating a fulfilling life, because of the happiness, success, and central position it may occupy in the lives of some?" Branded fashion accessories are increasingly becoming popular among India's youth population. However, less attention has been given to understand the reasons behind this changing consumer behaviour in India. Thus, this study aims to understand the role of branded fashion accessories in self-image enhancement of India's youth. For this purpose, semi structured in-depth interviews were conducted using college students who wear and who do not wear branded fashion accessories. Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) of the data revealed that "social belongingness," "sense of completeness," "self-confidence," and "style and price" are the important factors that play a vital role in affecting youth's self-image. These findings may encourage retailers to focus their product and sales strategies on consumers' positive emotions and promote their products among non-consumers by explaining how these products can benefit them. Keywords: Branded Fashion Accessories, India, Phenomenological Analysis, Self-Image Enhancement, Youth

There has been a rise in demand for fashion accessories in India. It is estimated that the fashion accessories market will grow at a compounded annual growth rate of 12% and will touch six billion American Dollars by 2019 (Euromonitor International, 2014). The burgeoning fashion accessories market is expected to go through a dynamic change over the years to come and will see a chain of innovations. India is currently home to 17% of the world's population, at 1.1 billion. Fashion accessories include scarves, stoles, bags, wallets, fashion jewellery, eye wear and time wear, earrings, bangles, and sunglasses. It is one of the youngest countries in the world that are expected to have one of the largest work forces for years to come. India's 50% population is less than 25 years and 70% less than 35 years of age. Growing prosperity of middle class with around 700 million people between 20-60 years of age, India is expected to constitute 53% of the total population by 2020. The corporate salaries in India have grown at 14% per annum, which is considered to be fastest globally (Ace Global Private Limited, 2009). Since consumers have a lot of disposable income they would like to buy branded fashion accessories. How do youths experience and describe the use of branded fashion accessories which are expensive? Under such market conditions, marketers develop distinct brand images to differentiate their products and services from their competitors (Keller, 1998). These images generate specific expectations, feelings and beliefs,

in consumers when they are exposed to the brand. Researchers have given considerable attention in finding out the factors that enable marketers to create these images in the minds of the consumers without any distortion. For example, Underhill (1999) identified three components that shape consumers' beliefs and expectations including brand positioning, brand personality, and brand affiliation. In that, brand positioning refers to the process of identifying the targeted user of the brand and how the brand is distinct from other brands.

Brand personality refers to a set of human characteristics that the brand is associated with. These human traits allow consumers the ability to link their own traits with a specific brand and subsequently desire to use the brand as a means of self-expression. Brand affiliation answers the question of how a user of the brand will be perceived by others. However, all these components that shape consumer belief vary as per the target market segment. Most of the individuals are classified by a strongly held principle that to have is to be (Dittmar, 1992) and life satisfaction is assessed in terms of what possessions they have or have not been acquired (Belk, 1988; Richins, 1994). This is associated to the advantage obtained by an individual's relationship with their possessions. Thus, individuals identify themselves and others in terms of their possessions and possessions serve as key symbols for, attachments, personal qualities and interests (O'Cass & Julian, 2001).

According to self-congruity theory (Sirgy, 1986) consumer behavior is determined, in part by the congruence resulting from a psychological assessment involving the brand and the consumer's self-concept. This psychological comparison can be categorized as high or low self-congruity. Low self-congruity is experienced when the consumer perceives the brand not matching his self-image, and vice versa (Sirgy, 1986). Self-congruity affects consumer behavior through self-concept motives such as the need for self-esteem. Self-image congruence is an important area of research in consumer behavior, since it provides the marketing managers with strategic insights concerning positioning and segmenting their market. Given the theoretical and managerial importance of self-image enhancement, very few studies have been carried out to find out whether using fashion accessories by youth's enhances their self-image. It is within this perspective that this article aims to explore a phenomenological approach to understanding why youths use branded fashion accessories. However, since branded fashion accessories means different things to different people, individuals' form differing attachments to it, and an individual's attachment may be quite different from their friends or family in passion and character. Understanding individual's passion for branded fashion accessories, how they form, are maintained and are influenced is of interest to consumer researchers (academics) and practitioners (managers) alike.

The first section reviews the literature based on connection between fashion and consumer behaviour and what fashion means to youths. The second section describes the methodology used to conduct the interviews and analyse the data. The last section consists of results and discussion on the current findings, limitations of the study and direction for future research.

Review of the Literature

How do youths experience and describe the use of branded fashion accessories which are expensive? Very few studies were found that particularly address the importance of branded fashion accessories in the life of youths. The literature covered consumer behaviour, fashion and the importance of fashion in the lives of youth.

Fashion

According to Kleine et al. (1993), consumer behaviour is concerned with doing (e.g., eating, working, recreating). The act of doing requires having possessions. The activities that people do and the possessions that they need to do them are “organized around their social identities” (p. 211). Belk (1988) argued that “we regard our possessions as parts of ourselves” (p. 139). Applying these ideas to teenagers suggests teenagers may be attracted to apparel products that enable them to communicate or enact identities. Fashion is a form of imitation and so of social equalization, but, paradoxically, in changing incessantly, it differentiates one time from another and one social stratum from another. It unites those who belong to a particular social class and segregates them from others who do not belong to that class. The elite initiates fashion and, when the ordinary mass imitates it in an effort to obliterate the external distinctions of class, abandons it for a newer mode—a process that quickens with the increase of wealth (Simmel, 1957). Fashion does not exist in classless and tribal societies. It cares for externals and superficialities where there is no place for irrationality. It signals the lack of personal freedom; hence it characterizes the women and the upper middle class, whose increased social freedom is matched by intense individual subjugation (Mukti, 2011). Some forms are intrinsically more suited to the modifications of fashion than others: the internal unity of the forms called “classic” makes them immune to change.

The recent history of fashion has been largely examined from a socio cultural angle. Fashion, when viewed as a social system, is a “collective activity,” that is, the “output of the deliberation, conflict, and negotiation within a complex network of individuals and institutions” (Khaire, 2011, p. 346). Yet few studies of the world's main fashion industries have described their evolution in terms of the interactions among entrepreneurs, or as “negotiators” among institutions and individuals. Although there has been research on the role of fashion cities, there has been less scrutiny of the larger cultural context in which fashion industries arise (Finkelstein, 1998). Each national industry has a well-known, specific, and frequently asserted identity. For instance, in Paris, the fashion industry is celebrated for its elegant style and workmanship; in London, it is known for cutting edge chic combined with excellence in menswear and tailoring; in Tokyo, for avant-garde fashion; in Milan, for luxurious ready-to-wear apparel; and in New York, for sportswear-inspired fashion (Barthes, 1990). Academics have explained both the identities of these industries and their dominance over the world of fashion by invoking the social and cultural history of the cities in which they originated. Paris, for example, was the undisputed center of fashion for two hundred years, not only because the industry began there, but also because of what Valerie Steele calls a “Parisian fashion culture” (Steele, 1998, p. 348). This culture is due not only to Parisian designers' access to skilled craftswomen and artisans, but also to the Parisians' embrace of the designers' displays of prowess.

Fashion and Youth

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization define youth as persons between the ages of 15 and 24. Youth as a social category has been closely linked to the development of modernization. It is taken for granted that youth is a distinctive identity position having inherent qualities (e.g., rebelliousness, experimentation, uncaring, etc.) is a fairly recent cultural invention (Souiden, Saad, & Pons, 2011). In pre modern society, childhood was seen as a transient state of unfinished adulthood (Aries, 1965). Childhood gained a separate cultural role with the rise of modernity, and urbanization, life stage of freedom and innocence that had to be isolated from the responsibilities and various hardships of adulthood (Valentine, Skelton, & Chambers, 1998). This period of precocious

independence extended gradually over time, and the notion of youth emerged as a social category (Arie, 1965). The model of the teenager that arose in the early twentieth century gained cultural significance in the post–World War II economy of growth and affluence (Bennett, 1999), where young, middle-class consumers were freed from earning wages for the family. Due to which, the identity of teenagers became inextricably linked to leisure and hedonic consumption. Post–World War II phase, young youth were seen as a lucrative market segment and the very embodiment of the emerging mass popular culture (Morin, 1962). This cultural viewpoint led to the marketing industry becoming increasingly concentrating on youth, as exemplified by marketing books such as *The Teenage Consumer* by Mark Abrams (1959).

Abrams's report has often been referred to as the first evidence of the conspicuous consumption habits of young consumers and, as such, marks the beginning of seeing teenagers as a separate segment and hence as a distinct marketing identity, the youth or teen segment. Youth culture as an ideological phenomenon hence merges from the development of Western modernity and the growing sophistication of advertising and market-segmentation strategies and now looms quite large in the cultural landscapes of the global cultural economy (Appadurai, 1990). Identity, style, and cultural innovation are the dominant dimensions of this ideology. Coleman (1983) gives a sociological explanation to conspicuous consumption and suggests that consumers tend to use conspicuous products in order to impress others and display their wealth. Chaudhuri and Majumdar (2006) stipulate that the meaning of the word conspicuous conveys a variety of lexicographic entries including eye-catching and prominent. They add that in the context of consumption, the word acquires a significantly different connotation that indicates consumers' wasteful and lavish consumption in order to enhance their social prestige. Indian fashion industry has come at par with international standards. Fashion industry has become one of the most revenue generating and happening industry of India. The youth like to dress in style which is accepted globally (Kim & Forney, 2006).

Importance of Brands

In recent years, a shift in the values associated to luxury has occurred. Changes in consumers' interest in, and perception of, branded products have significantly changed market structure. Manufactures of certain mass marketed products are attempting to mirror the symbolic value of their brands in order to take advantage of premium pricing and positioning (Souiden, 2011). Lifestyle, which influences the choices made by consumers in their own anticipatory consumption or the purchase of lifestyle products (Brandon et al., 2003), reflects trends and fashion expression. Consumers often choose certain products, services, and activities over others because they are associated with a certain lifestyle. Fashion products can reflect self image and this is very important to an individual. Sproles (1979) suggested that when evaluating apparel attribute gains importance and this is an important characteristic in determining whether to accept or reject the product. Moreover, a lifestyle trend toward casual expression in apparel and home furnishings (Shaver, 1997) has led to extending brands from apparel to home furnishings. This increased importance is bringing much attention to brand extension in marketing research, but not in research related to fashion products. Grossman and Shapiro (1988) pointed out that consumers who buy counterfeit products from street vendors typically know the items are not authentic, and hence, not of the same quality. Indeed, they would not buy these products without the forged brand name. A brand name can, like advertising, become a potential complement in consumption that raises consumers' willingness to pay (Smith & Park, 1992).

Youths spend freely because of their economic power and lack of family responsibility. Further, an increased presence of brand names has created brand awareness

and preference among youths at an earlier age. Therefore, it is essential to know how youths form attachment to brands. The brand concept which refers to the image of a particular brand plays a crucial part in the decision making process. Brand concepts are of two types, viz. functional oriented and prestige oriented (Liu, 2002). Function-oriented brands are related with product performance whereas a prestige oriented brand concept is related with status. Brand concepts have a strong influence on how consumers evaluate the product as these concepts aid the formation of associations with brands. Taylor and Cosenza (2002) state that normative decision process starts with a stimulus which provokes need recognition. They state that this is then followed by information search, evaluating alternatives followed by a purchase decision. They state that demographic characteristics like sex, education and family income also have an impact on decision making. They state that as youths grow older, there is a decrease in information search and evaluation of product. Therefore, youths are crucial to marketers as it is important to capture this market and establish brand loyalty before they move into their late twenties. Youths are more prone to buying on impulse, ignoring information search as they seek instant satisfaction and therefore prefer branded apparel since they get an opportunity to express themselves (Taylor & Cosenza, 2002).

The aforementioned literature review suggests that a lot of work has been done fashion and youth yet, there is a paucity of research in the area of branded fashion accessories. It raises an important question: Why do India's youth buy branded fashion accessories? To answer these questions, the objective of this study is to explore and analyze those factors that encourage India's youth to buy branded fashion accessories.

Method

Given the exploratory goals of this research a qualitative approach was seen to offer the most useful insights into the experience which youths get when they wear branded fashion accessories (Calder, 1977; Sailor, 2013). Our interest in this topic was because we saw lot of retail outlets like Armani, Guess, Gucci, Louis Vuitton, etc. opening outlets in India. We were curious to find out whether individuals will really buy the products sold by these brands by spending lots of money for accessories which don't have any resale value. And secondly what motivates them to buy these products. While considering an appropriate topic for our research project, we knew that use of branded fashion accessories by youths would be an interesting topic. We decided to go for methodology which helps in capturing the experience which the youths get when they use branded fashion accessories.

Sample and Data Collection

Quantitative data cannot provide the essence of experience. Since we were looking for the structure, meaning, and essence of the lived experience we decided to go for phenomenology. Phenomenology is a qualitative study and is suitable for studying process because portraying the experience of process requires detailed description of how people engage with one another (Patton, 1990); the various experiences with direct quotes can be captured (Van Manen, 1990); and process entails obtaining the perception of the participants (Patton, 1990). Since we were studying unique and individual experiences we opted for qualitative mode of data collection and analysis. The qualitative study also allows for a small sample size (Barker, Elliott, & Pistrang, 2004). The individuals were chosen based on their interest in the research. Snow ball sampling technique was used to identify the participants. Five students were studying Bachelor of Business Administration and nine participants were pursuing Master of Business Administration in a large University in India. Ten of them were the users of branded fashion accessories while others were non users of fashion branded

accessories. Eight of them were women and six were men. They were 16 to 24 years old, belonged to diverse family income categories as described in Table 1. All the participants were well conversant with English language. All the research candidates met the subsequent criteria (a) an individual that at some time in their life have used branded fashion accessories, (b) there age was between fifteen and twenty four.

The setting in which the interviews were conducted was chosen by the participants in order to create a relaxed atmosphere that triggered an open dialogue (McCracken, 1988). Participants who were using branded fashion accessories were asked to describe their experience after using branded fashion accessories, while the non users were asked why they were not using branded fashion accessories. The interviews then continued in a conventional manner (Thompson et al., 1989). An interview guide was used to ensure that related aspects were covered (Patton, 1990). Participants were assured of confidentiality. Each interview took around 60 to 80 minutes. The researcher stopped conducting interviews when it was evident that a point of information saturation had been achieved (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Table 1 presents the demographic details of the participants. To ensure confidentiality, participants are referred to by an alias.

Table 1: Demographic details of participants

Gender	Number
Women	8
Men	6
Total	14
Age	
16-20	5
21-24	9
Total	14
Family Income per annum	
Less than 5 lakhs ¹	1
5 Lakhs to 10 Lakhs	1
10 Lakhs to 15 Lakhs	2
15 Lakhs to 20 Lakhs	4
Above 20 lakhs	6
Total	14
Education	
Graduation	5
Post Graduation	9
Total	14

The researcher asked participants open ended questions (refer to Table 2 for the list of typical questions) by starting with an introductory question (i.e., “Tell me something about your personality.”). It acted as an “ice-breaker” and established a connection with the participant. Sample preliminary questions involved was: “Who do you think influences your accessories purchases?” One of the study oriented questions was “How do brand names affect your accessories purchases?”. The interview ended with a general question in order to capture participant’s post interview feelings “would you like to add anything else to this interview?”

¹ Lakh is a unit in the Indian numbering system equal to one hundred thousand (100,000; scientific notation: 10⁵)

Table 2. Typical questions asked from participants

Set of questions typically asked from the participants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who do you think influences your accessories purchases? • Where do you shop for your accessories, i.e. the internet, in-person, catalogue, etc.? • How often do you buy? • Are your accessories purchases affected by your moods and emotions? • Who accompanies you when you buy accessories? • How do brand names affect your accessories purchases? • How do retailers affect your accessories purchases?

Note. Probing questions differed from participant to participant.

Data Analysis

The researcher tape recorded the interviews with due permission of the participant. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Smith, 2004) was used to enable an in-depth exploration of individuals' experiences (Smith & Eatough, 2006). In line with the accepted process of analysis for IPA each transcript was coded line-by-line into themes using RQDA software (R package for qualitative data analysis). Related themes from each transcript were brought together into groups and master themes were identified that exemplified the youth's perceptions of using branded fashion accessories. The intention of IPA is to elicit meaning from participants' narratives that are interpreted by the researchers (Smith, 2004). Rather than counting the number of times each theme appears, it requires the researcher to actively engage with participants to make sense of what they are saying and to clarify and confirm meanings by a dialogue between participant and researcher. Trustworthiness of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was assessed by the coding of one transcript by both the researchers. There was a high level of agreement regarding the codes and so researchers continued with the coding and theming process. At the end of the coding process the researchers met to discuss and clarify emerging themes. Member checks were also carried out to ensure the trustworthiness of the research findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Appropriate critiques were considered in the alteration of the final manuscript.

Theme 1: Social Belongingness

The need for social belonging which is for seeing oneself as socially connected is one of the basic human motivation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Social belonging is important to intellectual achievement (Walton & Cohen, 2007). Just like clothing and automobiles, certain accessories are compulsory for certain occasions. Youths will get recognition if they wear them in the social gathering. Youths will do anything to belong to that group. Not belonging to a social group may lead to stigmatization which is a state of belonging uncertainty. As a consequence, actions that threaten one's social connectedness, although seen as negligible by some individuals, can have large effects on the motivation of those contending with a threatened social identity (Walton & Cohen, 2007). A sample representative quote for the social belongingness theme from one of the participant is as follows:

I attend lot of social parties at my home town, I have to look very different, for every party I go I keep changing my footwear and watch, because people in my group are very particular as to what we wear in the gathering if I wear the same stuff no one will come and speak to me. (Man aged 23; Participant: 11)

No one will respect me if I don't wear branded accessories. I ensure that I am updated with the latest news in fashion so that we can discuss in a social gathering, otherwise they will make fun of me. (Female aged 24; Participant: 3)

The participant answer for using branded fashion accessories is to be a part of the social group. They are willing to do anything to get recognition. They want people to notice them and they also like to make new friends. Build a good social network. They like to stay connected with different social groups.

Theme 2: Self-confidence

Self-confidence means a belief that one can successfully execute a specific activity rather than a global trait that accounts for overall performance optimism (Felts, 1988). In most countries, self-confidence is generally considered as a valuable individual asset. According to James (1890), an important strand in psychology has advocated "believing in oneself" as a key to personal success. Higher self-confidence enhances the individual's motivation level and gives them with a vested significance in his performance an encouragement to build up and maintain his self-esteem (Bénabou & Tirole, 2002). High self-esteem has been reported to be one of the strongest predictors of psychological well-being (Diener, 1984). Today's youth usually seek acceptance from their peers to boast their self-confidence and to blend with their social surrounding. The statements below illustrate the self-confidence theme:

I meet people in parties I am very relaxed and can start conversation with anyone. Lot of people approach me, I don't have to go in search of friends my friends will automatically come in search of me. (Man aged 25; Participant: 8)

I don't like to wear flat shoes at all, I wore it couple of times during my formal presentations and I was not able to concentrate much. But whenever I wear heels I feel that I (Heels transforms me completely I am a different person altogether) can answer any questions during my presentation. (Female aged 23; Participant: 10)

When we asked participants: 'Why they wear branded fashion accessories?', they stated that they feel confident. They are peaceful when they meet new people. They tend to create a centre of attention and people love to accompany them.

Theme 3: Hedonism

Hedonism refers to sensory fulfilment and sensory pleasure derived from the usage of a fashion brand (Bearden & Etzel, 1982). Hedonism captures the emotional and pleasurable benefits of a product, rather than its functional properties (Woods, 1960) or for amusing and pleasure (Holbrook, 1986). Thus, hedonic products create emotional arousal (Mano & Oliver, 1993) with benefits that are evaluated primarily on aesthetics, taste, sensory, and symbolic meaning (Holbrook & Moore, 1981). Below are the representative statements of codes for the hedonism theme:

I have lots of branded bags, but my favourite is Louis Vuitton, I feel nice when I carry them, I like when my friends say wow very pretty you have a good collection. (Woman aged 20; Participant: 3)

I prefer quality and not junk stuff, and brand has.....quality. (Male aged 19; Participant: 13)

When we asked why they use branded fashion accessories, the participants answered “social symbol.” When asked about the things that motivated them to work in such profile, the participant instantly replied “money.” The above quotes reveal that youths look for symbolic value that is why they use branded fashion accessories, they like to show off in front of their friends. They like to hear praises.

Theme 4: Price

One of the most important cues which consumers look for is the price. Price cue is present in all purchase situations and this is the amount which the consumers have to sacrifice in order to engage in a purchase situation (Lichtenstein, Ridgway, & Netemeyer, 1993). Price is unquestionably one of the most important marketplace cues. In other words, price represents the amount of money that one must give up, and therefore higher prices negatively affect the probability of purchase. However, several researchers have noted that price is a complex stimulus and many consumers perceive price more generally than stringently in its negative role as an outlay of economic resources. The reason stated by the participants for not wearing fashion branded accessories is that they are very costly. The answer on the question for the price theme was as given below:

I prefer buying gold jewellery, it has some value. (Man aged 18; Participant 2)

They are very expensive; I don't understand how someone can spend so much money on artificial jewellery. For the same price I can get lots of cheap accessories. (Woman aged 19; Participant: 4)

It has to be of high price else I would not buy it. Cheap accessories are not my choice for sure simply because they are of low quality and old fashioned. What if someone asks me about its price? (Man aged 21; Participant: 1)

When we asked the participants why they are not using branded fashion accessories, they replied that it is very expensive as in the case of Participant 4. They preferred gold jewellery instead of artificial jewellery. According to the participants gold has resale value, and the price keeps appreciating, whereas branded fashion jewellery do not have resale value as reflected from Participant 2's response. They prefer to buy more junk jewellery which is available in local shops instead of branded fashion accessories. However, there is another view according to which price is an important determinant of quality and latest fashion. Response of Participant 1 shows that highly priced products are likely to attract the branded fashion accessories user. The reason could also be social fear as reflected in the sentence: “What if someone asks me about its price?”

Theme 5: Sense of Completeness

Two scholars namely, Solomon (1983) and Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1982) have contributed greatly in understanding why people feel lack of something in their personality characteristics. They call it “incompleteness.” According to Solomon (1983), people describe their personality in terms of beliefs, expectations, or images in a particular social role. People low in knowledge tend to try products that they feel makes others’ personality complete. This is also called as symbolic self-completion as theorized by Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1982). According to it, individuals lacking who feel incomplete, aspire to look for and use other compensating indicators. This sense of incompleteness may also cause lack of socialization. The statement of one participant presented below represents the ‘sense of completeness’ theme:

I feel complete when I wear accessories, I don’t go out without my belt. I have a very good collection of belts. During formal occasion I prefer to wear leather belts (Hugo Boss). When I am wearing jeans, shorts or khaki pants I wear belts made of different materials. (Man aged 20; Participant: 14)

It is apparent from the above quote that Participant 14 feels complete with branded fashion accessories. Also, it is the occasion that makes a difference in selecting a particular accessory. For some participants, an accessory has become a part of their life. Most common accessories were belt and wallets/purses. Participants felt that something is missing if they were not wearing belts or carrying wallets.

Discussion

The study was done in order to explore and analyze those factors that encourage India’s youth to buy branded fashion accessories and it was achieved by applying interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) on the data collected from youth. After the in-depth analysis of depth interviews and their interpretation, it was found that there are mainly five factors namely, social belongingness, sense of completeness, self-confidence, hedonism, and price that shape youth’s self-image.

The findings of this study support that youths are brand conscious. As such, accessories marketers need to build an emotional attachment with youths on perceptions of value and quality in order to retain them. Apart from that, emotional connections make the brand very special, and help them to differentiate their products from that of the competitors and help them to gain competitive advantage. The results may help manufacturers and retailers to develop new products targeting youths. This study also helps retailers in their initial inventory selections because the initial merchandise buying process is always difficult (Regni & Anderson, 2009). Teens differ in the extent to which they are involved in accessories consumption; teens with a high level of fashion involvement regard accessories consumption as highly relevant to their senses of self and often are considered as opinion leaders among their friends (O’Cass, 2000). Marketers should advertise their products in such a way that it seeks the attention of the leaders, once they use their products, then they will get more business, since followers will automatically start buying the same products which the leader is using. Marketers targeting the youths may wish to adopt a multifaceted, holistic approach to the design, production and promotion of accessories targeted toward youths. For example, results suggest that youths may respond positively to trendy accessories designed with attention to issues of the environment, social causes, particularly if the products are perceived as esthetically appealing and provide utilitarian value. Marketers might also

consider adopting a cause-related marketing approach to promoting accessories to appeal to the youths.

Like any other study in marketing, this study is also not free from limitations. Firstly, because of the phenomenological nature of the study and the focus being the depth analysis, the researchers could not interview parents who fund the participants under investigation. Researchers are encouraged to overcome this limitation by conducting a 360 degree analysis using all the stakeholders of the branded fashion accessories. Secondly, the study was cross-sectional in nature which restricts researchers to study how brand choices of the fashion accessories consumers change over a period of time. Future studies can focus on dynamism of this study's findings by conducting longitudinal qualitative studies.

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