Developing brand identity and sales strategy in the digital era: Moderating role of consumer belief in brand

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ABSTRACT

Brand identity helps customers to identify, as well as distinguish alternative competitive brands. If there is a consistent marketing strategy and consistent messaging, brand identity remains consistent, which helps in improving sales management and generating better revenue for the brand. In this digital era, there are various digital marketing tools and capabilities to improve brand identity, which help in establishing close association with customers to influence their purchasing decisions. However, we have limited understanding of the antecedents of brand identity in the digital era, and how the moderating role of consumer belief in brands could influence their purchasing decision making process. In this context, this study aims to determine the antecedents of brand identity in the digital era, and to examine if there is any moderating impact of consumer belief in brand (CBB) on consumer purchase decision (CPD). Based on the resource-based view and social identity theory, a theoretical model has been developed. Following the survey responses of representatives from 302 organizations/brands, the covariance-based structural equation modelling validates our model. Our analysis affirms that e-WOM, digital infrastructure, skilled manpower, and digital marketing capability positively impact on developing brand identity, which influences sales strategy differently in different situation to influence CPD, where CBB plays a moderating role. The study results have been derived by analyzing the inputs of the respondents based out of India which invited external validity issue and it has been considered as one of the limitations of this study.

1. Introduction

It is a common practice that "every organization needs to develop strong brands as an essential part of business strategy" (Kay, 2006, p.742). Brand identity is considered as a key factor for appropriately articulating a brand-based strategy (Urde, 1999; Zhao et al., 2017). Brand identity is considered to impact the sales efforts of the organizations and it is said to be an effective ingredient of brand development which could influence the purchase decision of the consumers (Hanna & Rowley, 2013). Brand identity is associated with the concept of brand vision, brand value, and brand positioning. Analysis of these components could help to understand insights on how brand identity relates to business performance of the organizations (Muhonen et al., 2017). With rapid progress of technologies, organizations have become interested in adopting digital marketing practices as this could help to improve the sales efforts of the organizations (Rayburn et al., 2021). Digital marketing is concerned with the use of digital channels for promoting brands that are helpful to enhance the sales efforts of the organizations (Bahcecik et al., 2019). Besides, sales management is considered an important aspect of the marketing mix which is rapidly developing in the business world in this digital era (Kim & Hyun, 2011; Krishna, & Kim, 2021; Squire, 2021; Erdmann et al., 2023). In such context, sales efforts of the organizations are considered as an impactful initiative to promote its brand in the marketplace (Allison & Flaherty, 2020). Effective brand management with controlled flexibility helps the organizations to effectively counter the competitors with better planning and strategy that can influence the consumer buying decision (Featherman et al., 2021; Gupta, 2022; Jabeen et al., 2022). Moreover, sales management efforts of the organizations influenced by the brand value have also been impacted by the emergence of digital technologies which has modified the style of interactions of the organizations with the potential consumers (Möller & Parvinen, 2015). Studies have demonstrated that

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salespeople of different organizations are involved in interactions with the consumers mainly through using different digital platforms. Such digital interactions could help the organizations to propagate their brand positioning helping the consumers to be better aware of the brand with superior knowledge about the products (Ballantyne, 2004; Allison & Flaherty, 2020; Chatzopoulou, & Navazhylava, 2022). In such perspective, brand identity plays a decisive role to make consumer aware regarding the product features and functionalities along with its positioning. Social media and digital marketing play a vital role in promoting brand identity through digital means (Syed et al., 2023). The purchase decisions of the consumers could be impacted through proper sales efforts by the salespersons along with the belief and trust of the consumers in the brand through feedback from other consumers (Riley et al., 2013; Chatterjee et al., 2022; Merle et al., 2022). In this digital era, there are numerous ways by which the organizations strive to improve their brand identity in establishing a close association with the consumers that helps to influence their purchase decision (Karimi et al., 2018; Chaudhuri et al., 2023). Thus, it is argued that organizations need to develop their existing digital competencies and resources which could impact the brand identity of the organizations, the concept being corroborated by resource-based view (RBV) (Barney, 1991). By improving brand identity, it is possible by the organizations to establish an atmosphere to supplement the sales efforts of the organizations to influence the consumer decision making process, the idea being supported by social identity theory (SIT) (Tajfel et al., 1979; Mael & Blake, 1992). However, limited studies are available which extensively investigated how organizational digital competencies could impact consumer purchase decision by improving brand identity and sales efforts of the organizations duly supported by the moderator 'consumer belief in brand'. It is essential to consider all these points simultaneously to investigate how these factors could eventually impact consumer purchase decisions. In this vein, the aim of this study is to address the following research questions (RQs).

RQ1: What are the factors of digital competency of the organizations that could impact the brand identity?

RQ2: Does brand identity influence consumer purchase decision mediated through sales efforts?

RQ3: Whether there is any moderating effect of consumers' belief in brand which could influence the relationship between sales efforts and consumer purchase decision?

The above noted three RQs have been addressed with the help of analysis of 302 usable responses from the respondents working in service-oriented and manufacturing-related organizations involved in marketing and brand building activities. A theoretical model has duly been proposed conceptually highlighting the predictors of brand identity that eventually could impact consumer purchase decision. The proposed theoretical model has been tested by covariance based structural equation modelling technique through estimation and assessment of hypothesized relationships between the exogenous and endogenous constructs. For effectively substantiating to the empirical findings, this study has taken a holistic attempt to integrate the concepts of resource-based view (Barney, 1991) and social identity theory (SIT) (Tajfel et al., 1979). Such integrative approach has been taken because neither of these two approaches could alone explicitly and justifiably explain how digital competency of the organizations comprising of digital marketing and infrastructural abilities supported by electronic word of mouth with support of skilled manpower could impact brand identity which could eventually influence the purchasing decision of the consumers under the moderating influence of consumer belief in brands. This study has contributed that digital competency of organizations comprises of organizational dissemination ability through eWOM, digital infrastructure, and digital marketing ability along with the support of skilled manpower. These factors help to improve the brand identity impacting consumer purchase decision with the help of organizational sales effort duly moderated by the belief and confidence of consumers in the brand.

The remaining parts of the paper are organized as follows. Next to the introduction section, section 2 presents background studies followed by hypotheses development in section 3. Thereafter, section 4 presents the research methodology followed by analysis of data with results in section 5. Next, section 6 presents discussions including implications along with limitations with future scope.

2. Background studies

2.1. Literature review

Studies have highlighted that personal selling and sales management have been considered as important elements of strategy for marketing and these factors are rapidly developing in this digital era (Rapp et al., 2014; Ranjan et al., 2021; Squire, 2021). Another study has demonstrated that salespeople acting as 'brand ambassadors' help the organizations to acquire knowledge about the needs and aspiration of consumers during their interaction process with the consumers in the prevailing marketing conditions (Srivastava & Thomas, 2010; Sääksjärvi & Samiee, 2011; Van Esch et al., 2023). It has been observed that interplay between personal selling, sales management, and branding is such an area that needs in-depth studies. The research in such interplay area has remained under explored by the top-level journals (Panagopoulos et al., 2011; Von Wallpach et al., 2017). Studies have demonstrated that personal selling is impacted by branding (Rouziou et al., 2018) and it also influences branding (Hughes et al., 2019). There are studies which have demonstrated that social networking site like Facebook has offered access to a huge pool of consumer information including opinions of consumers about different products and services along with their brand preference (Yang et al., 2016; Robson et al., 2019; Nadeem et al., 2021; Sheshadri et al., 2022; Wong et al., 2022). Individuals frequently use social media to interact with each other about brand preferences and exchange their views and opinions through social media platforms which could impact the purchase decision of the other consumers (Daugherty & Hoffman, 2014; Karimi et al., 2018; Balmer & Podnar, 2021) and this communication system is known as electronic word of mouth (e-WOM). The organizations must possess appropriate digital infrastructure so that they can adopt digital marketing practices using various digital means and can promote their brands to the wider audiences (Sheshadri, 2020; Rosario & Dias, 2022). Studies have demonstrated that organizations should have digital marketing competency so that they can do digital advertising. Such ability of the organizations is quite helpful to promote their brands and to reach potential consumers. Digital marketing activities help to influence the decision-making process of the consumers (Degbey & Pelto, 2021; Schiavone et al., 2021).

Studies have highlighted that digitalization of business practices can achieve better organizational performance (Chu et al., 2019; Sheshadri, 2021; Krings et al., 2021). But to use digital technologies efficiently and effectively, the organizations must have adequate skilled manpower to sail on with the digital marketing process (Krishen et al., 2021; Rizvanović et al., 2023). A study has demonstrated that for developing appropriate brand strategies, organizations need to develop their relationship building activities helpful to improve their sales efforts which could eventually influence the decision-making process of the consumers (Webster, 2000; Karimi et al., 2018; Vrontis et al., 2022). Another study has highlighted that brand advocacy and sales efforts are considered as volitional and belief-based behavioral outcomes of the salespeople who could influence the potential consumers towards their decision-making process (Bendapudi & Leonard, 1997; Karimi et al., 2018; Chatterjee, 2020; Santos & Gonçalves, 2021). Studies have demonstrated that for the development of brand positioning and brand value which are closely related to brand identity, the organizations are taking help of different means of digital communications (Schiavone et al., 2021; Ranjan et al., 2022). Thus, to efficiently use digital communications technologies, the organizations need to improve their in-house digital competencies, the idea being supplemented by resource-

based view (RBV) (Barney, 1991). Moreover, when consumers identify a specific brand, they develop a psychological relationship with the brand and become advocates for that brand (Kuenzel & Sue, 2008). This idea has received support from social identity theory (Tajfel et al., 1979). Digital competency also enables organizations to access possible customers and to grasp their brand choice, as various studies have shown (Schiavone et al., 2021; Rosario & Dias, 2022. However, there is a lack of detailed and clear research that could show how different aspects of organizational digital competency could help to enhance organizational sales efforts and could offer valuable information to the consumers about the advantages and disadvantages of different brands which ultimately could affect the buying decision of consumers (Panagopoulos et al., 2011; ; Von Wallpach et al., 2017). Therefore, the existing literature lacks such a comprehensive approach, and this study has tried to fill this gap in knowledge.

2.2. Underpinning theories

2.2.1. Resource-based view and organizational in-house digital competencies

The proponents of RBV advocate that various resources of the organizations which are collectively valuable, rare, imperfectly imitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) can effectively support the organizations to develop their in-house competencies to achieve their goals (Sikora et al., 2016; Yaseen et al., 2016). Classical view highlights that to achieve success, organizations should consider strategic investment which deters easy market entry and can raise prices of the products for profitability (Chuang et al., 2016). But according to RBV, focusing on intra-organizational resources is more important. This is because such resources can support the organizations to achieve their success and gain competitiveness through appropriately deploying organization specific in-house VRIN resources (Wójcik, 2015). The present study contends that brand identity is linked to the digital skills of the organizations, which include elements such as digital marketing, eWOM, digital infrastructure, and talent capabilities. All these abilities are also seen as the internal resources of the organization with VRIN features, and these abilities could also influence brand identity.

2.2.2. Social identity theory and brand identity

In terms of social identity theory (SIT) (Tajfel et al., 1979), self-concept is construed as an individual-specific identity that presents idiosyncratic personal nature whereas social identity encompasses specific group characteristics (Mael & Blake, 1992). SIT posits that for enhancement of self-esteem, individuals intend to be in a group which is prestigious, attractive, and distinctive helpful for enhancing the self-evaluation for the individuals. Empirical research has highlighted that identification is linked with various outcomes which include loyalty (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003), word of mouth (Kim et al., 2001), and so on. A study has demonstrated that brands are considered vital components towards identification of a person in society (Elliott & Kritsadarat, 1998). Thus, when consumers are identified with specific brands, it is seen that they develop a psychological relationship with those specific brands and advocate in favor of those brands (Kuenzel & Sue, 2008). SIT suggests that brand identity can encourage the retail salespeople to contribute towards the success of the brands. From the concept of SIT, it has been seen that psychologically, sometimes consumers feel an emotional connection with the brands and sometimes the consumers also adopt the brands as a part of their social identity (Tajfel et al., 1979). Brand identity of an organization is considered as a part of its social identity, and it is managed with the help of digital communication channels and sometimes through traditional forms of communication. Thus, in terms of SIT, brand identity helps the organizations to impact their sales efforts that could influence the decision-making process of the consumers and the brand identity of the organizations could also create trust and confidence in the minds of the potential and existing consumers. It is pertinent to mention here that social identification is

important since it influences how people see themselves and how they interact with others. It is experienced that if people possess positive views of their identity within a group, they are more likely to connect with others in the same group and feel positive emotions about themselves. In terms of SIT, whenever a consumer prefers a brand, he or she is psychologically aligned with that brand and becomes a recommending agent of that brand in the group where he or she belongs.

3. Hypotheses development

With the literature review and theories, some determinants have been identified which could impact the brand identity of the organizations. Also, such determinants could impact on the sales management process of the organizations and could also influence the decision-making process of the potential consumers. The present study has also considered the effects of consumers' belief in brands as a moderator that could influence the consumers' purchase decision. All these factors will be discussed in this section to formulate different hypotheses.

3.1. Digital competency

Studies have highlighted that digital platform usage like social media has become a critical entity towards the advancement of marketing strategies of the organizations (Muninger et al., 2019). Businesses which could embrace the technology revolution swiftly along with effective planning and marketing strategy are able to realize the benefits provided by digital competency of the organizations (Herhausen et al., 2020; Bhattacharjee et al., 2021). Digital competency of the organizations can provide various benefits to the organizations and such competency is comprised of factors such as digital infrastructure, eWOM and digital marketing capability of the organizations along with skilled in-house manpower of the organizations. All these capabilities of the organizations are valuable and cannot be imitated and as such they possess VRIN characteristics. This concept is supported by RBV (Barney, 1991). The use of different digital platforms is helpful to communicate regarding the brands of the products through word-of-mouth that could eventually help the organizations to impact on their sales-promotional activities (Degbey & Pelto, 2021). Studies have highlighted that digitalization can ensure improving the satisfaction level of the consumers which is one of the goals for the organizations. Such enhanced satisfaction of the consumers can positively impact on the competitiveness of the organizations in the marketplace (Magnusson, & Berggren, 2018; Sundararajan et al., 2022). For achieving these goals by improving the brand value, the organizations must develop their digital infrastructure by appropriately integrating digital technologies with their existing business strategies (Ardito et al., 2019; Ranjan et al., 2022). Digital evaluation has a significant impact on the brand management activities influencing the marketing strategies of the organizations. Consumers do not only look for such products which could meet their needs but could exceed their expectations and the consumers also like to share their opinions and experience on the brands (Chatterjee, 2021; Caliskan et al., 2021). The organizations need to develop their digital marketing ability by articulating proper planning and strategies to improve their existing marketing abilities. Such improved marketing ability of the organizations could improve the organizations' adaptive abilities helpful to positively impact the brand values of the organizations (Cao et al., 2019; Vrontis et al., 2023). However, for appropriately extracting best potential from digital communication technologies, the organizations must have a high-skilled workforce. These skilled workforces can efficiently use this digital communication technology for reaching out to the consumers (Senker, 1980; Sheshadri, 2015; Fernandez-Lores et al., 2022; Syed et al., 2023). All these valuable inputs help to formulate the following hypotheses.

H1a: Electronic word of mouth (EWM) can positively impact the brand identity (BRI) of the organizations.

H2a: Digital infrastructure capability (DIC) can positively impact the

brand identity (BRI) of the organizations.

H2c: Digital marketing capability (DMC) can positively impact the brand identity (BRI) of the organizations.

H2d: Skilled manpower capability (SMC) can positively impact the brand identity (BRI) of the organizations.

3.2. Brand identity

Brand identity is the visible elements of a brand. These elements include design, color, and logo through which the brand can be distinguished and identified by the consumers. Brand identity is also concerned with the visual aspect of a brand (Pecot et al., 2022). As for example, the symbol of apple for the tech giant Apple Inc. helps in identification of brand of Apple Inc. A strong brand identity helps an organization to strengthen the popularity and acceptability of the organizations and by identifying the brand, a consumer can take purchase decisions that could help the sales efforts of the salespeople of the organizations (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Rayburn et al., 2021). Brand identity matters since without the brand identity, it is difficult for the consumers to easily identify and recognize a brand in the marketplace. A strong identity may impact the endeavor of the organizations for selling their products and services (Srivastava & Thomas, 2010; Rayburn et al., 2021). Whenever retail salespeople sales a specific brand for the organizations, they are aligned with that specific brand and put their effort into increasing the sales of that specific brand (Ahearne et al., 2005; Rayburn et al., 2021; Mullins et al., 2023). Whenever a consumer identifies a specific brand, the consumer develops a psychological relationship with that brand and starts favoring and campaigning for that brand (Kuenzel & Sue, 2008; Pantano, 2021). This idea supports the concept of social identity theory (Tajfel, 1979). Accordingly, the following hypothesis is formed.

H2: Brand identity (BRI) positively influences the sales efforts (SAE) of the salespersons of the organizations.

3.3. Sales efforts and consumer purchase decision

Sales efforts of the organizations are conceptualized as the endeavors of the salespersons of the organizations to persuade consumers to purchasing their specific products and services (Wolf, 2006). Sales efforts of the organizations are concerned with the sales management related activities and processes. Such activities are also associated with effective and implementable planning, control, coordination, execution, and assessment of the sales performance of the organizations (Wang & Richard, 2002). Successful sales efforts include identification of sales goals, articulating sales planning, and strategies, and monitoring the field sales team (Hughes & Michael, 2010). To achieve better outcomes from the sales efforts of the salespeople, organizations need to hire and train them to develop appropriate customer relationship management (CRM) sales strategy, forecasting, efficient use of tools, and so on (Brown & Robert, 1994; Lackes et al., 2020; Gozuacik et al., 2023). All these efforts are perceived to have influenced the purchase decision of the consumers. Accordingly, it is hypothesized as follows.

H3: The sales efforts (SAE) of the salespeople positively influence the consumer purchase decision (CPD).

3.4. Moderating effects of consumer belief in brand

Whenever a relationship between two variables is not fixed, a third variable impacting on that relationship may facilitate that relationship, or may retard the relationship, or even in some cases it may reverse the direction of that relationship. This third variable is called the moderating variable in respect of that specific relationship. When a consumer thinks a brand to be highly reputable, trustworthy, reliable, and dependable, the consumer aligns to take a favorable purchase decision for that product (Selnes, 1998). From different studies, it is seen that the interpersonal relationship and attachment amongst the prospective

consumers are critical for trust formation which creates reliability on a brand (Boles et al., 1997; Shams, 2016a; 2016b; Shams, 2017; Bigné et al., 2023). Consumers' belief in a specific brand is seen to have impacted the decision-making process of the consumers towards purchase (Salancik, 1977; Karimi et al., 2018; Rašković et al., 2020). In terms of consumer marketing management literature, sales efforts are associated with the belief based as well as volitional behavioral outcomes of the prospective consumers (Bendapudi & Leonard, 1997). Besides, it is experienced that trust and belief on a brand is grown in the minds of a consumer when the consumer gets good review of that brand from the other consumers (Nielsen, 2012; Riley et al., 2013). Also, a study has demonstrated that eWOM can influence the belief of the consumers on a specific brand impacting their purchase decision (Baker et al., 2016). All these discussions lead to formulating the following hypothesis.

H4: There is a moderating impact of consumer belief in brand (CBB) on the relationship between sales efforts (SAE) and consumer purchase decision (CPD).

From all the above discussion, a theoretical model has been proposed which is shown in Fig. 1.

The above figure (Fig. 1) highlights how digital competency of an organization comprising of some specific factors could impact brand identity which could eventually influence the consumer purchase decision mediated through contextual factors like brand identity and sales efforts. The relationship between sales efforts and consumer purchase decisions is also impacted by the moderator 'consumer belief in brand'.

4. Research methodology

For testing the hypotheses and validating the model, a covariance-based structural equation modelling (CB-SEM) approach has been initiated. This process helps for estimating and assessing the hypothesized relationship between the constructs. The proposed model represents the linkages to highlight the relationship between the constructs with the help of data that are symmetrical about the mean. CB-SEM can analyze complex lifetime problems which other process like multiple linear regression cannot achieve because it invites some issues like autocorrelation, heteroskedasticity and endogeneity problems (Dogan, 2004). CB-SEM can analyze both confirmatory as well as exploratory model (Byrne, 2010). This approach makes it possible to estimate the path coefficients of different linkages, corresponding probability values, and the coefficients of determination of the endogenous variables.

4.1. Preparation of the instruments

A set of instruments has been prepared with the knowledge of the extant literature. The recitals of the instruments have been duly modified in terms of the context of the present study. The instruments have been pretested with the help of having the opinion of nine experts. Out of these nine experts, six experts were selected from the industry, each of whom possessed more than ten years of professional experience in the field of the present study. The remaining three experts came from academia, each having more than fifteen years of research experience in the domain of this present study. The opinion of these experts helped to modify the recitals of the instruments helpful to enhance their understandability. After the pretest stage, pilot test has been conducted by analyzing the feedback of 30 respondents selected through convenience sampling technique. The analysis of feedback helped to reconcile some of the formats and the instruments to enhance their readability, understandability, and comprehensiveness. However, these 30 respondents were not included in the main survey. In this way, 24 instruments could be finetuned. These responses were quantified by a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (SD) with marking as 1 to Strongly Agree (SA) with marking as 5. Here, a 5-point Likert scale has been used because it is simple to apply and at the same time this scale provides an opportunity for the respondents to take a neutral stand by
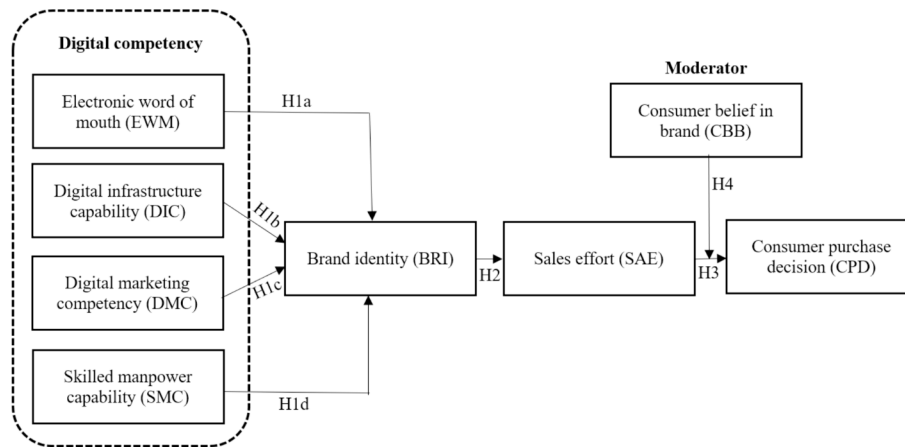
Fig. 1. Theoretical model ().
adopted from RBV and SIT

choosing 'neither disagree nor agree' option. Be it mentioned here that the instruments were prepared in the form of statements.

4.2. Data collection

To collect the data for this study, India-based organizations were purposefully considered. India was selected primarily since it is the fifth largest economy in the world as well as it is the fastest growing emerging economies among the BRICS countries. Both purposive as well as convenience sampling approaches were followed. A list of service oriented and manufacturing related organizations involved in marketing and brand building activities were obtained from the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE), India. BSE has been selected because it is considered as one of the largest exchanges in the world and a lot of organizations are listed in this stock exchange. Initially, a list of 800 organizations were selected at random. Out of these 800 organizations, it appears that 679 organizations are interested in the study. Since the unit of representation was the organizations, for each organization, one employee has been selected to represent the organization. All of them were requested to take part in the survey. It was informed to them that the aim of this study is purely academic, and the confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents will be strictly preserved. After a long persuasion, eventually 439 organizations agreed to take part in the survey. A response sheet each containing 24 instruments was provided to all the participants. The participants were asked to respond within two months (October −November 2022). With each response sheet a guideline was given describing how to fill up the response sheet. Within the scheduled time window, representatives of 318 organizations responded. After scrutiny of these 318 responses, 16 responses were found incomplete. The responses of these 16 respondents were found defective and biased since all these respondents put tick marks in the same option out of five options. Hence, these responses were not considered. Statistical analysis was done with the input of 302 responses against 24 instruments. The details of the organizations are provided in Table 1.

Here, a non-response bias test has been performed following the recommendations of Armstrong and Overton (1977). Now independent t-tests have been performed by analyzing the responses of the first and last 100 respondents. No deviation of results was detected in these two cases confirming thereby that the non-response bias could not pose a major threat in this study.

5. Data analysis with results

5.1. Measurement properties

To examine the convergent validity of the instruments, loading

Table 1
Statistical sample (N = 302).

Particulars	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Industry	Retail	48	15.9
	Information Technology	42	13.9
	Logistics	25	8.0
	Telecommunication	50	16.8
	Textile	54	17.9
	Automotive	66	21.8
	Petrochemicals	17	5.7
Organization type	Service oriented	165	54.6
	Manufacturing	137	45.4
Organization size	Large (Annual revenue: >US$ 100 million)	166	54.9
	Midsized (Annual revenue US $50–100 million)	91	30.1
	Small and Micro (Annual revenue < US$ 50 million)	45	15.0
Organizational sector	Private Sector Companies (Domestic)	187	61.9
	Public Sector Undertaking (PSUs)	42	13.9
	Multinational Organizations (MNOs)	73	24.2

factor (LF) of each instrument has been measured. To ascertain the internal consistency of the constructs, Cronbach's alpha (α) of each construct has been estimated. For verifying the validity and reliability of each of the constructs, average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) of each construct have been computed. All the estimated values of these parameters are found to be within the specified range. This is because the estimated values of all the LFs were found to be greater than the lowest threshold value of 0.7 (Chin, 2010). The estimated values of all the AVEs were found to be more than the lowest threshold value of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2017). Table 2 provides the results.

5.2. Discriminant validity test

It is essential to assess if the items associated with a construct can fully explain that construct and can explain less for the other constructs. For this, discriminant validity test needs to be conducted. For ascertaining the discriminant validity of the constructs, square roots of all the AVEs have been computed. It was found that all the square roots are greater than the corresponding bifactor correlation coefficients. This satisfies the Fornell and Larcker criteria (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 3 provides the results.

Table 2
Measurement properties.

Constructs/ Items	Mean	SD	LF	AVE	CR	α	t-values
EWM				0.76	0.81	0.84	
EWM1	3.8	1.9	0.80				22.11
EWM2	4.1	1.4	0.85				27.19
EWM3	2.7	1.1	0.95				21.01
DIC				0.81	0.84	0.87	
DIC1	2.9	1.2	0.90				24.47
DIC2	3.4	1.6	0.85				28.11
DIC3	4.3	1.4	0.95				26.33
DMC				0.79	0.83	0.88	
DMC1	3.8	1.7	0.80				25.63
DMC2	4.5	1.9	0.95				27.12
DMC3	2.7	1.3	0.92				38.13
SMC				0.84	0.87	0.89	
SMC1	2.1	1.8	0.75				24.17
SMC2	3.9	1.5	0.81				26.11
SMC3	3.6	1.1	0.92				29.44
BRI				0.78	0.82	0.86	
BRI1	2.9	1.3	0.87				26.69
BRI2	4.3	1.7	0.85				39.01
BRI3	3.8	1.2	0.94				26.22
BRI4	2.7	1.9	0.87				24.47
SAE				0.80	0.83	0.88	
SAE1	3.8	1.4	0.85				25.11
SAE2	3.4	1.6	0.89				26.07
SAE3	4.2	1.1	0.96				25.04
SAE4	3.5	1.3	0.93				26.11
CPD				0.73	0.81	0.85	
CPD1	3.7	1.7	0.89				36.31
CPD2	2.8	1.5	0.92				20.15
CPD3	2.1	1.9	0.76				26.47
CPD4	3.6	1.4	0.84				29.07

To supplement the discriminant validity test following the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criteria, Heterotrait Monotrait (HTMT) test has also been performed and the concerned values were found to be all less than the highest recommended value of 0.85 (Teo et al., 2008; Henseler et al., 2015). This confirms discriminant validity of the constructs. The results are provided in Table 3a.

5.3. Moderator analysis (multi group analysis)

To ascertain the effects of the moderator 'consumer belief in brand' (CBB) on the linkage SAE → CPD (H3), multi group analysis (MGA) has been performed. For this, bootstrapping procedure with consideration of 5000 resamples has been used. The effects of CBB have been analyzed by considering its effects into two categories, namely, Strong CBB and Weak CBB. It appears that the p-value difference between the effects of Strong CBB and Weak CBB on the linkage SAE → CPD is found to be 0.03 which is less than 0.05 (Hair et al., 2016). Hence, the effects of the moderator CBB on the linkage SAE → CPD (H3) are significant.

5.4. Common method bias

Since the results of this study principally depend on such data emerged from the survey, chance of possessing common method bias in the responses of the respondents cannot be overruled. The present study has taken a holistic approach to mitigate the risks of such bias by taking both procedural ad hoc measures as well as by undertaking some statistical approaches. As an ad-hoc procedural measure, the questionnaire used in the survey was simplified and comprehensive through the simultaneous process of pretest and pilot test so that the respondents could not feel any constraint to respond easily. Also, to obtain unbiased responses, the respondents were apprised that their confidentiality and anonymity will be preserved. Moreover, for examining the risks of common method bias, Harman's single factor test (SFT) was performed wherefrom it has been found that the first factor emerged as 21.63 % of the variance, the estimated result being far less than the highest recommended value of 50 % (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Since Harman's SFT is opined to be not a conclusive as well as robust test for verifying common method bias (Ketokivi & Schroeder, 2004), marker correlation ratio test has also been performed (Lindell & Whitney, 2001). This test also yielded negative results. Hence, both these tests did not provide any conclusive evidence of having common method bias. Therefore, common method bias could not pose a major threat in this study.

5.5. Causality effects

Causality is considered an important aspect. It needs to be addressed before hypotheses testing. For this, non-liner bivariate causality direction ratio (NLBCDR) for each linkage that needs to be computed (Kock, 2015). The NLBCDR for the linkage EWM → BRI (1.003), DIC → BRI (0.999), DMC → BRI (1.001), SMC → BRI (1.004), BRI → SAE (0.992), and SAE → CPD (1.002). All these values are greater than the lowest threshold value of 0.7 (Wamba et al., 2020). Hence, the results demonstrate strong evidence that the support towards the reversed hypothesized direction of causality is weak. It confirms that the causality is not a major issue in this study.

5.6. Hypotheses testing

For testing the hypotheses, ratio of Chi-square and degree of freedom, Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Normed Fit Index (NFI), Tucker

Table 3a
Heterotrait Monotrait (HTMT) test.

Constructs	EWM	DIC	DMC	SMC	BRI	SAE	CPD
EWM							
DIC	0.42						
DMC	0.39	0.21					
SMC	0.31	0.44	0.32				
BRI	0.44	0.56	0.54	0.36			
SAE	0.28	0.31	0.34	0.44	0.29		
CPD	0.49	0.29	0.21	0.30	0.45	0.22	

Table 3
Discriminant validity test (Fornell and Larcker criteria).

Constructs	EWM	DIC	DMC	SMC	BRI	SAE	CPD	AVE
EWM	0.87							0.76
DIC	0.26	0.90						0.81
DMC	0.32	0.26	0.89					0.79
SMC	0.24	0.24	0.19	0.92				0.84
BRI	0.28	0.32	0.37	0.24	0.88			0.78
SAE	0.31	0.34	0.25	0.27	0.29	0.89		0.80
CPD	0.27	0.30	0.28	0.29	0.17	0.37	0.85	0.73

Note: Diagonal = sqrt AVE.

Lewis Index (TLI), and Root Mean Square error (RMSE) have been estimated. The estimated values are 2.062, 0.939, 0.807, 0.962, and 0.027 respectively. All these estimated values are within the permissible range. The path coefficients, along with their corresponding probability values and the coefficients of determination (R^2 values) of the endogenous constructs have duly been estimated. Table 4 highlights the results.

With all these inputs, the model after validation is provided in Fig. 2.

6. Discussion and conclusion

This study has demonstrated that EWM, DIC, DMC, and SMC could impact BRI significantly and positively as the path coefficients are 0.17, 0.21, 0.14, and 0.31 respectively with respective levels of significance as $p < 0.001$(***) (H1a), $p < 0.01$(**) (H1b), $p < 0.05$(*) (H1c), and $p < 0.001$(***) (H1d). These hypotheses have duly been statistically validated and they also received support from other studies like Chu and Kim (2011), Conti et al. (2023), Apasrawirote et al. (2022), and Senker (1980). Besides, the study has highlighted that BRI could impact SAE significantly and positively as the concerned path coefficient is 0.41 with level of significance is $p < 0.01$(**) (H2). Also, the present study has demonstrated that SAE could impact CPD significantly and positively since the concerned path coefficient is 0.43 with level of significance as $p < 0.05$(*) (H3). Both these hypotheses (H2 and H3) have been statistically validated and they have received support from Badrinarayanan and Laverie (2011). The present study has shown that CBB acts as a significant moderator on the relationship between SAE and CPD since the concerned path coefficient is 0.11 with level of significance as $p < 0.05$(*) (H4). Such moderation impact is consistent with the findings from the research study by Cheung and To (2021) with the consideration of the moderating aspect of ethical belief. The present study also demonstrates that EWM, DIC, DMC, and SMC could predict BRI to the tune of 47 % as the R^2 value is 0.47. Also, SAE could be predicted by BRI to the tune of 53 % since the concerned R^2 value is 0.53. Again, this research work highlights that SAE could explain CPD to the extent of 71 % since the concerned R^2 value is 0.71 which is the explanatory power of the proposed theoretical model. It is pertinent to mention here that R^2 means coefficient of determination which is a number lying between 0 and 1 that could accurately estimate how well a model could predict an outcome.

Now, the effects of the moderator CBB on the linkage SAE → CPD [H4: (SAE → CPD) × CBB] will be discussed graphically by categorizing the effects of CBB into two groups as Strong CBB and Weak CBB. This has been highlighted in Fig. 3.

In Fig. 3, continuous and dotted lines represent the effects of Strong CBB and Weak CBB respectively. From the nature of the graph (Fig. 3), it appears that with the increase of SAE, the rate of increase of CPD is more for the effects of Strong CBB compared to the effects of Weak CBB as the continuous line has higher slope than the dotted line. It is to note that the slope of a straight line is defined as the angle which that straight line makes with the positive direction of the horizontal axis.

Table 4
Path coefficients, p-values, and remarks.

Linkages	Hypotheses	Path coefficients	p-values	Remarks
EWM → BRI	H1a	0.17	$p < 0.001$ (***)	Supported
DIC → BRI	H1b	0.21	$p < 0.01$(**)	Supported
DMC → BRI	H1c	0.14	$p < 0.05$(*)	Supported
SMC → BRI	H1d	0.31	$p < 0.001$ (***)	Supported
BRI → SAE	H2	0.41	$p < 0.01$(**)	Supported
SAE → CPD	H3	0.43	$p < 0.05$(*)	Supported
(SAE → CPD) × CBB	H4	0.11	$p < 0.05$(*)	Supported

6.1. Theoretical contribution

This study has several theoretical contributions. It is a fact that consumer identity has been acknowledged as a critical entity in the relationship marketing literature. But studies on brand identity appear to be sparse. In such a perspective, the present study has enriched the extant literature by analyzing the impacts of brand identity on the sales efforts of the salespersons of the organizations influencing the consumer purchase decision. Besides, barring a few studies, the marketing literature is found devoid of analyzing the effects of brand identity among the individuals across the organizational boundaries. This study has been able to fill up that theoretical gap by investigating how brand identity impacted by the digital competency of the organizations could improve the organizational sales efforts which eventually impacts the purchase decision of the consumers under the moderating influence of consumer belief in brand. Moreover, the present study has been able to import some novel ideas. Through digitalization process, it is possible by the organizations to impact brand value, brand vision, and brand positioning. These factors could eventually influence the brand identity of the organizations. This study has demonstrated that digital communication with improved digital infrastructure and using digital marketing capabilities could help to disseminate essential communication to the consumers through e-WOM by the skilled workforce of the organizations. Such capabilities of the organizations also improve the brand identity of the organizations through usage of different virtual communication approaches. This study has applied the idea of RBV (Barney, 1991) by suggesting that different digital abilities of the organizations have VRIN features that could help to create brand identity of the organizations and affect the consumer buying decision. This study has shown that when consumers choose a brand, they form a psychological connection with that brand by becoming supporters of that brand in society. This idea builds on the expanded notion of SIT (Tajfel et al., 1979). The study of Badrinarayanan and Laverie (2011) demonstrated that brand identity and brand advocacy could influence the salespeople to improve the sales efforts of the organizations which eventually impact the organizational performance. The present study has extended the findings of that study by highlighting that through digital means, it is possible to accelerate the improvement of brand identity which could eventually influence the purchase decision of the consumers moderated by consumer belief in that brand. This has added value to the extant literature. In another study of Muninger et al. (2019), it is highlighted that brand identity helps the SMEs to improve their performance. This idea has been generalized and has been extended in the present study to demonstrate that for any organization, brand identity helps to strengthen sales efforts of the organizations which in turn could also impact consumer purchase decision process. This has also enriched the extant literature.

6.2. Implication to practice

The present study has provided several practical implications, should the outcomes be more broadly generalized. The present study has provided initial evidence that the development of brand identity could be accelerated by improving digital competency of the organizations. This implies that the leadership team of the organizations need to put their efforts to improve brand identity of the organizations with the help of different digital communication means such as e-WOM, digital marketing campaigns and so on. The leadership should invest adequately to improve the digital infrastructure of the organizations commensurate with the scope to apply digital technologies to improve the brand identity. The management of the organizations need to emphasize improving assimilation process of digital marketing adoption (Gunasekaran et al., 2017). The management of the organizations should focus on improving the marketing performance of the organizations. The marketing performance of the organizations includes the use of digital technologies to ensure loyalty of consumers and building a seamless
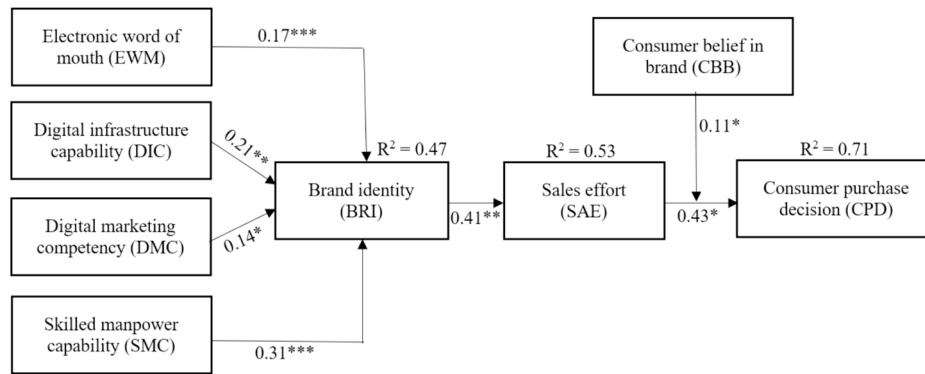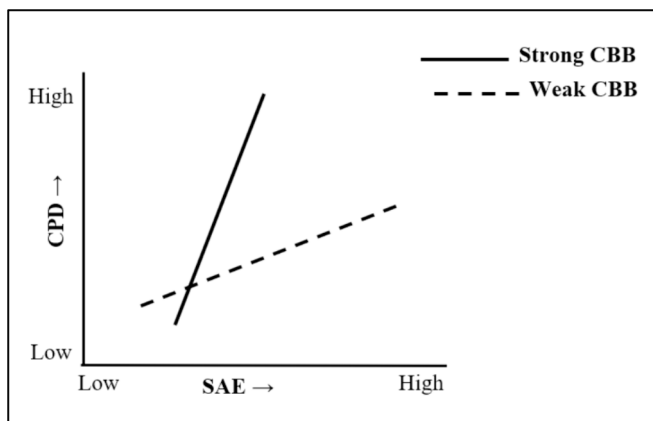
Fig. 2. Validated model.

Fig. 3. Effects of CBB on H3.

environment of improved communication system that helps to adhere to consumers' referral value through e-WOM (Liu et al., 2021).Since this study has advocated that digitalization in the communication process could bring in success and improve brand vision, brand value, and brand positioning of the organizations, it is essential to appropriately use different digital communication technologies by the employees to reach out existing and potential consumers of the organizations. To ensure this, the skillset of the workforce need to be further improved. For this, the leaders should sponsor different readiness opportunities and training sessions to the employees involved in using different digital communication tools to reach out to the consumers. Such training could enable the employees to extract the best potential by using different digital communication tools in the organizations. In addition, the leaders should create suitable plans to boost their sales management actions by building a strong connection with the possible customers to increase their satisfaction, trust, and loyalty in the organization's brand. Such strategy could consequently influence the consumers to take a favorable decision towards purchasing a specific brand of the organization.

6.3. Limitations and future scope

The present study has provided several theoretical and practical contributions. Still this study cannot be said to be free from all limitations. First, the results of this study depend on the input of the respondents based out of India. This invites external validity issues. To eliminate this defect, it is suggested that future researchers should collect data from respondents spread evenly across different regions of the world. Results arrived by analyzing such input could ensure findings with more generalizability. Second, this study has arrived at a result by analyzing the responses of 302 respondents. This does not represent the entire society. To achieve a result with more generalizability, it is

suggested that future researchers should collect more data for analysis. Third, the results of the present study depend on the cross-sectional survey data which was collected at a single point in time. Hence, the causality of relationship between the constructs cannot be claimed and cross-sectional studies are often prone to endogeneity bias. To eliminate all these defects, future researchers should conduct a longitudinal study. Fourth, the explanatory power of the proposed theoretical model is 71 %. Future researchers should consider other constructs and other boundary conditions to examine if by such consideration, the explanatory power of the model could be enhanced. Fifth, the present study did not analyze a rival model which could provide more clarity to this section. The authors did not analyze a rival model which could help the authors to have an opportunity to compare the rival model with the proposed theoretical model to ascertain if the proposed theoretical model is of superior quality compared to the rival model. This is considered as one of the important limitations of this study. It is suggested that future researchers will nurture this issue.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Riad Shams: . **Sheshadri Chatterjee:** Formal analysis. **Ranjan Chaudhuri:** Writing – original draft.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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