Naveen Shodh Sansar (An International Refereed / Peer Review Multidisciplinary Research Journal)
RNI No.- MPHIN/2013/60638, ISSN 2320-8767, E- ISSN 2394-3793, Scientific Journal Impact Factor (SJIF)- 8.054,
July to September 2026, E-Journal, Vol. I, Issue LV (55), ISO 9001:2015 - E2024049304 (QMS)

Brand Affinity among Generation Z Consumers : A Pilot Study

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Abstract: Generation Z represents an increasingly important consumer segment for experience-oriented service industries. Understanding their relationships with brands requires measurement approaches that capture favourable attitudes, emotional responses and preference-related outcomes. The present pilot study assesses the preliminary reliability of a multidimensional instrument developed to examine brand affinity among Generation Z consumers across Recreation, Entertainment, Sport and Tourism (REST) consumption contexts. A quantitative pilot study was conducted among 104 respondents selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and a seven-point Likert scale. The instrument measured four dimensions of brand affinity-positive disposition, emotional connection, favourable brand associations, and likelihood of choosing the brand over competitors-along with brand experience, brand communication and choice overload. Descriptive statistics and Cronbach's alpha were employed to assess the preliminary characteristics and internal consistency of the instrument. The overall instrument demonstrated high internal consistency, while construct-level Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.797 to 0.966. Item–rest correlations were $\geq$0.50, and no items were removed based on the reliability analysis. The findings provide preliminary support for the internal consistency of the instrument and its use in the subsequent main study.
Keywords: Brand Affinity, Generation Z, REST Industry.

Introduction - Experience-oriented industries have become important contexts for consumer-brand interaction, as consumers encounter brands through multiple sensory, affective, cognitive and behavioural touchpoints, including brand communications and consumption environments (Brakus, et. al., 2009). In recreation, entertainment, sport and tourism, such interactions are closely associated with consumers' experiences of services, environments and other brand-related encounters. Research in sport, for example, highlights the importance of service, social and communication encounters in shaping consumer experience and behaviour (Karg, et. al., 2017).

Brand affinity is relevant in this context because consumer-brand relationships can involve favourable attitudes, emotional connections, associations and behavioural preferences. Research on consumer-brand relationships demonstrates that brands can acquire emotional and personally meaningful significance for consumers, extending beyond purely functional evaluations (Batra, et. al., 2012; Bagozzi, et. al., 2021).

Generation Z is particularly relevant to this area of inquiry because its consumption takes place within an increasingly digital and interconnected environment in which consumers encounter numerous brands and communication channels. This makes the examination of how younger consumers develop relationships with brands particularly relevant to contemporary consumer research.The Recreation, Entertainment, Sport and Tourism (REST) industry provides a diverse setting for examining such relationships. Although these segments differ in their specific offerings, they involve substantial consumer interaction with services, experiences and brand-related stimuli.

Against this background, the present study reports a pilot assessment of a structured instrument developed to measure brand affinity and related constructs among Generation Z consumers. The pilot focuses on the preliminary reliability and suitability of the instrument before its application in the main study.

Review of Literature

1. Brand Affinity: Brand affinity reflects a favourable orientation towards a brand and the development of a positive consumer-brand relationship. It incorporates affective and preference-related responses that may distinguish a preferred brand from competing alternatives. Keller (2003) emphasised the importance of strong, favourable and unique brand associations in developing customer-based brand equity.

In the present study, brand affinity is operationalised through four dimensions: positive disposition, emotional connection, favourable brand associations, and likelihood of choosing the brand over competitors(Keller, K. L., 2003). This multidimensional approach captures different aspects of consumers' relationships with brands.

2. Brand Experience: Brand experience refers to consumers' responses arising from interactions with brand-related stimuli. Brakus, et. al. (2009) conceptualised brand experience through sensory, affective, behavioural and intellectual dimensions and demonstrated its relevance as a distinct consumer-brand construct.

Experience is particularly significant in service industries, where service delivery, ambience, interaction and the overall consumption environment form an important part of the offering. Accordingly, brand experience is included among the constructs assessed by the present instrument.

3. Brand Communication: Brand communication encompasses the ways through which brands communicate with consumers, including advertising, social media, promotional communication and brand messaging. The expansion of digital platforms has increased both the frequency and diversity of consumer encounters with brands.

Voorveld (2019) highlights the importance of social-media environments in contemporary brand communication. Such communication can shape consumer perceptions and reinforce brand-related meanings. The present instrument therefore incorporates items relating to brand communication.

4. Choice Overload: Consumers increasingly encounter numerous alternatives within service categories. While variety may provide greater freedom of choice, an extensive set of alternatives can also increase decision-making difficulty.

Iyengar, et. al. (2000) demonstrated that larger choice sets can, under certain circumstances, reduce consumers' motivation to make a choice. Chernev, et. al. (2015) subsequently noted that the effects of choice overload depend on contextual and individual factors.

The availability of numerous competing offerings across REST contexts makes choice overload a relevant construct for inclusion in the broader research instrument.

Research Objective: The present pilot study aims to assess the preliminary reliability and suitability of the structured instrument developed to measure brand affinity and related constructs among Generation Z consumers in REST consumption contexts.

Research Methodology

1. Research Design: The broader research adopts a mixed-methods approach involving exploratory qualitative research through literature review and focus group discussions, followed by a descriptive quantitative phase using a structured questionnaire.

The present paper focuses exclusively on the pilot conducted as part of the quantitative phase.

2. Population and Sampling: The study population comprises Generation Z consumers who use services in the REST industry. The sampling unit is an individual Gen Z consumer with experience of brands in the relevant consumption contexts.

A total of 104 respondents participated in the pilot study. Purposive sampling was employed to select respondents meeting the study requirements.

3. Data Collection: Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire. Measurement statements were assessed on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree. The questionnaire consisted of demographic questions, segment identification, and measurement items.

4. Structure of the Questionnaire: The principal constructs and number of measurement items were as shown in table 1 below:

Construct	Number of Items
Positive Disposition	4
Emotional Connection	5
Favourable Brand Associations	5
Likelihood of Choosing the Brand over Competitors	4
Brand Experience	6
Brand Communication	6
Choice Overload	4

Table 1: List of principal constructs and number of measurement items

The four dimensions of brand affinity were measured through a total of 18 items. Brand experience, brand communication and choice overload were measured through 6, 6 and 4 items respectively.

5. Data Analysis: The pilot data were analysed using frequency distributions, descriptive statistics and Cronbach's alpha. Frequency distributions were used to describe respondent characteristics, descriptive statistics were used to examine item-level response patterns, and Cronbach's alpha was calculated to assess internal consistency of the measurement scales.

The pilot study was primarily undertaken for preliminary instrument assessment. Accordingly, the present paper does not report hypothesis testing or inferential conclusions regarding the relationships among the broader research constructs.

Results and Findings

1. Profile of Respondents: The pilot study included 104 Generation Z respondents. The sample represented all four REST contexts as shown in table 2, allowing the instrument to be examined across different consumption settings.

REST Segment	Frequency
Recreation	36
Entertainment	24
Sport	24
Tourism	20
Total	**104**

Table 2: Frequency distribution of pilot study respondents across the REST segments

Recreation represented the largest segment with 36 respondents, followed by entertainment and sport with 24 respondents each and tourism with 20 respondents.

The gender distribution was relatively balanced, comprising 53 female respondents and 51 male respondents. With respect to education, 89 respondents were graduates, 10 had completed 12th/HSC and 5 were postgraduates.The occupation profile consisted predominantly of students, with 102 respondents being students and 2 being working professionals. Regarding marital status, 99 respondents were single, 3 were married and 2 preferred not to say.

Monthly household income was distributed across all categories included in the questionnaire. The largest category was Rs. 25,001–Rs. 50,000, with 30 respondents, followed by Rs. 1,00,001–Rs. 2,00,000 with 19 respondents and above Rs. 3,00,000 with 18 respondents.

2. Descriptive Statistics: The descriptive analysis indicated that the mean scores for most measurement items were above the midpoint of 4 on the seven-point Likert scale, indicating generally positive responses.

The Favourable Brand Associations item FBA2 recorded a mean of 5.29, representing one of the relatively higher item-level means. In comparison, the lowest reported mean values occurred within the Emotional Connection construct, at approximately 4.49.

The standard deviations across the measurement items ranged approximately from 1.3 to 2.0, indicating moderate variability in respondent responses.

These findings indicate that the instrument generated generally favourable responses while retaining variability across respondents.

3. Reliability Analysis: Cronbach's alpha was calculated for the overall instrument and each construct. The results are presented below in table 3.

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha
Overall Instrument	0.968
Positive Disposition	0.797
Emotional Connection	0.869
Favourable Brand Associations	0.925
Likelihood of Choosing the Brand over Competitors	0.887
Brand Experience	0.910
Brand Communication	0.966
Choice Overload	0.911

Table 3: Cronbach's alpha value for the overall instrument and each construct

All constructs achieved Cronbach's alpha values above 0.70, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. The lowest coefficient was observed for Positive Disposition ($\alpha = 0.797$), while Brand Communication recorded the highest construct-level coefficient ($\alpha = 0.966$). The overall instrument demonstrated high internal consistency($\alpha = 0.968$).

The reported item–rest correlations were all ≥ 0.50, providing additional evidence of internal consistency. No items were removed based on the Cronbach's alpha analysis.

Discussion: The pilot findings provide preliminary support for the internal consistency of the proposed instrument. All constructs exceeded the commonly applied threshold of 0.70, while the overall scale demonstrated a high alpha coefficient of 0.968.

The four dimensions used to operationalise brand affinity also demonstrated satisfactory reliability, with coefficients ranging from 0.797 to 0.925. This supports their continued assessment as distinct dimensions of the broader construct in the main study.

The descriptive results showed generally favourable responses, although the variation in item scores indicates that respondents did not respond uniformly across all dimensions. The comparatively higher score for favourable brand associations and lower values within emotional connection suggest that different aspects of the consumer-brand relationship may be experienced at different levels. The findings are consistent with the broader emphasis on multidimensional measurement of consumer-brand constructs. Brakus et al. (2009), for instance, demonstrated the value of multidimensional measurement in examining brand experience.

Importantly, the pilot establishes internal consistency. The results therefore support taking the instrument forward for further validation and analysis using the larger main-study sample.

Implications: The pilot provides a preliminary methodological basis for using the instrument in the main study. The satisfactory reliability coefficients and item–rest correlations indicate that the measurement items demonstrate sufficient internal consistency for further investigation.

From a research perspective, the findings support the multidimensional operationalisation of brand affinity and the inclusion of the related constructs in the broader research framework. Further statistical analysis using the main-study sample will be necessary to examine relationships among the variables.

For practitioners in experience-oriented industries, the multidimensional approach highlights that consumer-brand relationships may encompass favourable perceptions, emotional responses, associations and choice preferences. However, these implications remain preliminary given the pilot nature of the study.

Limitations of the Pilot Study: The findings of the present pilot study should be interpreted in light of its exploratory purpose and methodological limitations.First, the pilot study was based on 104 respondents selected through purposive sampling. Consequently, the findings cannot be generalised to the entire Generation Z population.Second, the respondent profile was heavily concentrated among students, with 102 of the 104 respondents being students.

This limits the extent to which the findings can represent the broader occupational characteristics of Generation Z.Third, the respondents were distributed unevenly across the four REST segments, with recreation accounting for 36 respondents and tourism for 20 respondents. The larger study can provide broader and more balanced representation.Finally, the present analysis is limited to descriptive statistics and internal consistency. Further analyses are required to assess relationships among the study variables.

Conclusion: The present pilot study assessed the preliminary reliability of an instrument designed to measure brand affinity and related constructs among Generation Z consumers across REST consumption contexts. Based on data from 104 purposively selected respondents, the instrument demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency, with construct-level Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.797 to 0.966 and an overall alpha of 0.968. Item–rest correlations were e"0.50, and no items were removed during the reliability assessment.

The findings provide sufficient preliminary support for taking the instrument forward to the main study. However, the pilot's sample characteristics and limited analytical scope mean that the results should be regarded as preliminary. The main study will provide further evidence through a larger sample and more extensive statistical analysis. The pilot study consequently represents an important methodological stage in establishing the suitability of the research instrument for investigating brand affinity among Generation Z consumers.

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