

Aix-Marseille Université
Institut d'Administration des Entreprises
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Centre d'Etudes et de Recherche en Gestion d'Aix-Marseille

**ALIGNMENT AND MISALIGNMENT OF FRONTLINE
EMPLOYEES WITH BRAND: A CUSTOMER PERSPECTIVE IN
SERVICE SECTOR**

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Par

Ali RAZA

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JURY

Directeur de Thèse :

Monsieur- Kiane GOUDARZI
Professeur, Université Jean Moulin Lyon-3

Co-Directrice de Thèse :

Madame- Sylvie LLOSA
Professeur, Aix-Marseille Université (IAE)

Rapporteurs:

Monsieur- Gilles N'GOALA
Professeur, Université de Montpellier
Monsieur- Adilson BORGES
PhD (HDR), Chief Learning Officer - Carrefour

Suffragants :

Monsieur- Barry J. BABIN
Professeur, Louisiana Tech University, USA

« L'université n'entend donner aucune approbation ni improbation aux opinions émises dans les thèses ; ces opinions doivent être considérées comme propres à leurs auteurs »

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Brand management is crucial for both academicians and practitioners because brands are an intangible assets possessed by an organization which can be very valuable (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). Brands provide both symbolic and economic benefits to consumers through their ability of product or service source identification, reduction of consumer risk, promise establishment, indicate quality and symbolic attachment provision (Keller, 1998). In traditional marketing concept, brand positioning is used to convey the key brand meanings to the customers and this process is supported by massive advertising and other promotional tools (Kevin Lane Keller & Lehmann, 2006). The concept of brand is similar in the case of products and services (Vargo & Lusch, 2004a) but branding has a specific significance in case of services (Berry, 2000).

Service experience has a crucial impact on service branding (Berry, 2000; Camelis & Llosa, 2011). The proper balance of brand promise and brand experience is the building block of strong service brands. Brand experiences are “*internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings, and cognitions) and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand’s identity (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009, p. 53)*”. Services are intangible and frontline employees are their face. Frontline employees have an important role in terms of service experience (Eiglier et al., 2010) and in building the confidence of consumers in service brands (De Chernatony & Riley, 1999). Balmer et al., (2001) ascertain that a consistent service delivery and a better interaction of consumer and employee help consumers to develop a good perception of a service brand.

Surprisingly, a lot has been discussed about the importance of service employees in delivering service quality but very less studies has been found on the role of frontline employees in service branding. The ultimate desire to achieve an unbeatable competitive edge and to build and maintain strong brand is manifested in the significant role of employees in the delivery of brand promises (W. Kim, Ok, & Lee, 2009; Pappu, Quester, & Cooksey, 2005). This means that it is the responsibility of service employees to not only provide excellent service but also held them responsible for the delivery of brand promises in organization's intended manner. Therefore, employees must understand the brand and their important role in relation to the brand. Despite the promotion of internal brand building activities in the literature, very less consideration has been given to the concept of employee based brand building efforts and its added value to the brand (King & Grace, 2009).

Branded customer service is a significant tool to convey the brand meaning to the customers. The most crucial factor in this process is employees and frontline employees in particular (Sirianni, Bitner, Brown, & Mandel, 2013). This can be done in a better way by strategically aligning frontline employee's behavior with the brand positioning (Barlow & Stewart, 2004; Sirianni et al., 2013). A significant amount of financial resources and time is invested by companies to make it possible. Many firms shape their hiring and training process to strategically align their employees with their brand positioning. Avid runners and yoga practitioners are strategically hired at lululemon athletica to promote their physically active brand image with their employees' physically fit, brand-aligned appearances (Sacks, 2009).

Hence, it seems crucial for service brands to have their frontline employees aligned with the brand, but is it always the case? Is it always the case that aligning frontline employee with the brand contributes to brand value? For example, authenticity of frontline employee's performance is also very crucial to the service brands. A performance can be aligned with the brand but may not be authentic. Customer may have lower brand evaluation due to less authentic behavior of frontline employee. Therefore, an emphasis is required on the authentic behavior of frontline employees.

I. Importance of frontline employee in service encounters & branding

Frontline employees have a crucial role during service encounters because they can influence customer perceptions of value, satisfaction and service quality (Brady and Cronin 2001). Prior literature explored the factors that can affect the attitudes and behaviors of service employees. The key factors investigated in service literature are the role of organizational features (Babakus, Yavas, Karatepe, & Avci, 2003), social setting (Sergeant & Frenkel, 2000), overall perceptions of the job (Singh & Sirdeshmukh, 2000), and personality (Hurley & Hult, 1998).

Frontline employee's behavior has a pivotal role during service encounter because it can impact customer emotions and brand evaluations which can be a source of long-term relationships (Hennig-Thurau, Groth, Paul, & Gremler, 2006; Sirdeshmukh, Singh, & Sabol, 2002). Findings demonstrate that long-term relationship with customers is reciprocated by frontline employee's good behavior (Palmatier, Jarvis, Bechkoff, & Kardes, 2009; Raggio & Folse, 2009; Wetzel, Hammerschmidt, & Zablah, 2014), intentions to purchase (Palmatier et al., 2009; Xia & Kukar-Kinney, 2013) and positive word of mouth (Soscia, 2007; Xia & Kukar-Kinney, 2013).

Service firms are putting more pressure on the service employees by elevating the expectations of service delivery which can be a foundation of survival in competitive service industry. Service managers are more focused on the service employees to make sure that they treat clients as valued customers and put on a convincing act that they really care about the customers. Today, service managers understand the significance of employees with customer orientation (Zablah, Franke, Brown, & Bartholomew, 2012), as well as those frontline employees who excellently exhibit organization's preferred attitudes and behaviors (Allen, Bryant, & Vardaman, 2010; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2006). Yet, service employees often face challenging and stressful situations like busy and crowded job conditions, where support from organization varies in terms of job security and fluctuating customer responses (Bettencourt, Brown, & MacKenzie, 2005; A. Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985).

Service employees are crucial for service quality and customer satisfaction but also for establishing a strong brand. Brand success is dependent on the consistency between the message communicated through mass media promotions and what is conveyed during service encounter by service employees. A brand experience which does not match with brand expectations developed by media campaigns may result in brand refusal and customer dissatisfaction. (Bendapudi & Bendapudi, 2005; Berry, 2000; Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Hannah & Iverson, 2004). In order to convey brand consistent values during personal interactions, organizations must focus on the high quality service delivery but also emphasize on the importance of promoting these brand values and meanings through service employee (Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, & Hill, 2006; Berry, 2000; Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; Van Scotter & Motowidlo, 1996).

As stated above, a superior brand performance can be achieved if service employees represent the brand through a distinguished and unique brand promise at each and every customer contact point. Thus, service organizations must comprehend that managing frontline employees is not only limited to instruct them to act courteous, open and friendly, but also includes the promotion of distinguished and unique brand image through their behaviors (Bendapudi & Bendapudi, 2005; Berry, 2000; Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Van Scotter & Motowidlo, 1996). However, the effective dissemination of this brand message is dependent on the fit between several procedural and structural mechanisms within the service organization such as, service employee hiring and training (Hartline, Maxham III, & McKee, 2000; Jaworski & Kohli, 1993).

The employee-customer interaction is a pivotal tool to convey brand meanings and service brand values to the customers (Christodoulides & De Chernatony, 2004). The alignment between customer's perceived brand values and a service brand's values has a positive influence on customer trust, satisfaction, loyalty and commitment (Zhang & Bloemer, 2008). Therefore, service organizations must work persistently to ensure that service brand values are effectively communicated to the customers and this can yield better results if employees internalize the brand's values. This can be ensured if service organizations attract and hire those frontline employees who share the brand values (Schneider & Bowen, 1985).

However once hired, service organizations should actively support frontline employees to share the brand values. This can be achieved through mentoring and other socialization tools such as brand orientation and role play exercises (Cable & Parsons, 2001). In fact, this socialization aspect should be designed to enable service employees for brand value internalization through organizational internal communications. Thus, the perceived alignment between brand's values

and service employee's values should be enhanced through timely and high quality internal brand communication efforts (Burmam & Zeplin, 2005; Christodoulides & De Chernatony, 2004; C. King & Grace, 2008).

The idea of frontline employee's actions influencing the customer's perception of service brand image also referred as a concept known as "employee brand-building behavior" (Miles & Mangold, 2004). However, a vague terminology is available in the prior literature on the notion of employees as brand builders, with researchers referring employees as "*brand champions*," "*brand ambassadors*" or "*brand evangelists*" and "*brand maniacs*," (VanAuken, 2003) who "*transform brand vision into brand reality*" (Berry, 2000, p. 135). However, these researchers provide a less concrete conceptualization that goes beyond employees delivering high service quality.

Morhart, Herzog, & Tomczak (2009, p. 123) define "*employee brand building behavior as employee's contribution (both on and off the job) to an organization's customer-oriented branding efforts*". Furthermore, Sirianni et al., (2013, p. 108) defines branded service encounters as "*service interactions in which employee behavior is strategically aligned with the brand positioning. This strategic alignment may be evident in various elements of the employee's presented behavior, appearance, and manner that can reinforce brand meaning during service interactions with customers*".

The concept of alignment¹ has been very much studied in advertising and consumer behavior literature and it is referred as congruence, fit, appropriateness, match-up, similarity,

¹ In the dissertation, we will prefer the use of "alignment" term to express our ideas, when authors referred to this notion with another term, we use the term they used or refer it as alignment. See chapter 3 for more details.

relatedness, suitability, etc (N. Fleck & Maille, 2010). However in services literature, (e.g. De Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003; Sirianni et al., 2013) it is more referred as alignment. The concept of alignment can also be found in the strategy literature. Strategic alignment is defined as *“context and structure must somehow fit together if the organization is to perform well”* (Drazin & Van de Ven, 1985, p. 514). The fit refers to intellectual or strategic alignment, internal or operational alignment, and social alignment. (Gerow, Grover, Thatcher, & Roth, 2014; Turel, Liu, & Bart, 2017). Thus, we will use the term alignment because it is more of a strategic and managerial issue.

II. Problem statement & research design

A holistic brand image integrates entities such as values, colors, name, symbols, words and slogans. After the establishment of a favorable brand image, it's the foremost responsibility of service organization to ensure the consistency between brand promise and service delivery (Berry et al., 1988). Thus, managing brand consistency is an issue of core importance because a monolithic branding strategy is often followed by service firms. This strategy tend to convey a certain viewpoint to customers which enables them to expect uniformity and group all the organization's portfolio together (De Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003).

“Any potential encounter with a brand - marketing initiated or not - has the opportunity to change the mental representation of the brand and the kinds of information that can appear in consumer memory” (Kevin Lane Keller, 2003, p. 597). Marketing managers has a primary responsibility to maintain a company-chosen brand image through strategic brand management (Park, Jaworski, & MacInnis, 1986). The traditional way to accomplish this goal is through advertising and brand positioning. This way companies used to convey brand meaning to establish a certain image in the minds of consumers (Kevin Lane Keller & Lehmann, 2006). However, employee-customer interactions are sometimes difficult to control directly as compare to other

tools such as advertising. Service organizations work hard to position their brand in a better way by controlling these service encounters.

Therefore, an interesting theoretical questions is: whether it is better to have frontline employee aligned or misaligned with a brand having a low brand image. For example, a “chic” air hostess for a low cost airline company, aligned or misaligned with default brand image. In this case, is alignment a good option? In a managerial perspective this question lack interest as companies won’t invest in aligning their frontline employee to negative brand attributes. In this research, we will focus on an alignment with key positive brand and attributes. Thus, the question arises:

“To what extent Aligning frontline employees with the brand contribute to a stronger brand evaluation?”

Frontline employee brand alignment can be studied from the company perspective or the customer perspective. Most of the researchers (e.g. Baker, Rapp, Meyer, & Mullins, 2014; Morhart et al., 2009) focused on the employee perspective and discuss the concept of frontline employee brand alignment mostly in terms of a alignment between the values and norms of employee and organization. Only Sirianni et al., (2013) considered the customer perspective in their research. They investigate the level of alignment between employee’s behavior and brand personality. They applied an experimental research design and manipulated employee behavior in terms of audio call recordings but not in face to face interactions. They focused on the impact of frontline employee brand alignment on the overall brand evaluation and customer-based brand equity. Hence, three main gaps can be identified.

Gap 1: Determinants of frontline employee brand alignment are not studied

Prior researchers ignored the determinants of frontline employee brand alignment from a customer perspective. Researchers have emphasized on the role of person-to-person interactions as these interactions can play a pivotal role in creating better brand image in the minds of customers (Bitner, Booms, & Mohr, 1994; Hartline et al., 2000; Herr, Kardes, & Kim, 1991; Larivière et al., 2017; Sirianni et al., 2013; Wilson, Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2012). The concept of conveying brand meaning during personal encounters is also referred as branded service encounters (Barlow & Stewart, 2004; Sirianni et al., 2013).

As most of the researchers focus on the employee or organizational perspective, studies on customer perspective of frontline employee brand alignment (e.g. Sirianni et al., 2013) also focus more on the consequences of frontline employee brand alignment and did not consider the idea that what determines the perception of alignment in the minds of customers during service encounters. Even, Sirianni et al., (2013) only mentions appearance and behavior of frontline employees as important factors for branded service encounters but their research does not empirically studied these elements. As they manipulated the behavior of frontline employee during audio call recordings.

Researchers also emphasize on employee related characteristics as an important component in shaping customers' perception of service quality (Brady & Cronin Jr, 2001). For example, Bitner (1990) argued that customers' assessment of service quality is highly dependent on the behavior of service employees. Furthermore, service employees' attitudes, behaviors, and skills influence the customers' perception of service (Grönroos, 1984). Hence, determinants of frontline employee brand alignment such as appearance, attitude, behavior and expertise remain unexplored in face to

face interaction. Therefore, this study contributes to the literature by exploring the role of these antecedents of frontline employee brand alignment.

Gap 2: An extensive measurement scale of frontline employee brand alignment is missing

Prior research on frontline employee brand alignment did not measure it but manipulated it. They did not incorporate the alignment literature in marketing that can be used to develop a comprehensive measurement of frontline employee brand alignment. alignment can be measured in two ways, direct or indirect (N. Fleck & Maille, 2010). “*Direct measurement refers to explicitly asking respondents to rate a measurement scale whether the combination of two entities goes well together. However, indirect measurement refers to the potential sources of alignment (Maille & Fleck, 2011, p. 88)*”.

Direct approach to alignment measurement is used much more frequently (Maille & Fleck, 2011). Direct method measures a broader perception of alignment (Sirgy et al., 1997). For direct method, many ad hoc measures are available in literature. These measurements are more often one dimensional and focused on relevancy of the entities. Furthermore, these measures do not follow the recommended procedure of Churchill (1979) measurement development (Maille & Fleck, 2011).

Researchers (e.g. Heckler & Childers, 1992; Y. H. Lee & Mason, 1999; Sirianni et al., 2013) have developed ad hoc one dimensional direct measure with only one item to conduct their experimental studies. Maille & Fleck (2011) mentioned that only two measures followed the comprehensive validation process. One of the measure is developed by Fleck & Quester (2007) in the context of sponsorship and other is developed by Galan (2009) and validated for advertising music context. Maille & Fleck (2011) suggest to develop comprehensive scales for alignment to be validated in different marketing contexts. They also recommend that expectancy should be

measured first and then relevancy. It is suggested because evaluation of relevancy may create biases for the expectancy measurement.

Indirect method of measuring alignment rely on predetermined dimensions and images which respondents might not consider while evaluating the concept. Thus, indirect method is more focused on objective measurement of alignment on the basis of predefined items by the researcher. An indirect method is more focused on the relevancy dimension and do not consider expectancy aspect of alignment. Indirect measurement is used in many contexts. For example, Basil & Basil (2003) studied number of associations between two entities. Sirgy (1982) investigated the similarity of perceptions between two entities. Other researchers (e.g. D. Basil & Basil, 2003; Gwinner & Eaton, 1999) explored similarity between entities and their attributes.

Yet, a comprehensive measurement of frontline employee brand alignment is needed to completely understand the dynamics of this concept. This research also contributes to the literature by following the Churchill (1979) guidelines for scale development. The items for direct measurement of alignment are developed for both expectancy and relevancy. This is a significant contribution of this research because prior researchers (e.g. Sirianni et al., 2013) considered the alignment literature superficially and focused more on one or two item measurement scale for frontline employee brand alignment.

Gap 3: A comprehensive model of frontline employee brand alignment is required

Corporate brand culture is based on a distinctive and relevant brand promise to the customers (Balmer et al., 2001; L. D. Chernatony, Cottam, & Segal-Horn, 2006). This distinctive and relevant brand promise is critical in building strong service brands. The preferred frontline employee behavior is embedded in strong corporate brand culture where core brand values are clearly defined (Baker et al., 2014). This clarity of service brand promise and alignment of frontline employee

behavior with functional and emotional brand values helps to position a brand and to develop its image and personality (Sirianni et al., 2013). By appropriate communication of service brand vision, brand promise and customer expectations, frontline employees can better recognize their role as brand builder (Baker et al., 2014).

Service branding has strong relevance to the following important issues such as: 1) the significance of the service encounter; 2) that service employees are an important medium to deliver the service vision to consumers; 3) the necessity for frontline employee responsiveness; and 4) the need of service employee empowerment mechanisms to attain such responsiveness (De Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003). For example Starbucks's founder Howard Shultz claims frontline employees as the most important component of Starbucks brand by quoting his observation, "*the people create magic*" (Howard & Jones, 1997). People create experiences (Shaun Smith & Wheeler, 2002). Other authors quote similar examples in their scholarly work such as: "*Uncommon practice*" (Milligan & Smith, 2002), "*Corporate Religion*" (Kunde & Religion, 2000), and "*Living the Brand*".

In many consumer-oriented services, service encounter is scripted and based on an operating manual. Although, this encounter is easy to predict and relatively simple but it is dealt in a functional approach. For example, it is very normal to hear the scripted phrase in telecommunication call centers that "*Is there anything else I can help you with?*", when the call center employee has not even solved your actual problem (Meyer & Schwager, 2007). This kind of service experience remains inconsistency with actual brand promise. Authenticity is very important for service brands. Due to lack of responsiveness and genuine personality, scripted or fake employee behavior backfires both emotionally and functionally. Many service organizations impose strict control over the script of service encounter and loose the brand promise

comprehension (Gapp & Merrilees, 2006; S Smith & Wheeler, 2002). In contrast, opposite approach to convey clear brand promise and encourage service employees to act naturally is opted by most successful and celebrated service brands (Mosley, 2007).

In contrast to product brands, Consumer's evaluation of a service brand is highly dependent on the interaction between consumer and service employee during service encounter. In fact, Service experience plays a key role in building consumer's perception of a service brand. (Padgett & Allen, 1997). Attitude and training of service employees and organizational culture are the main drivers of service experience due to limited presence of physical evidence in service brand (De Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003). Service employee's ability to build stronger customer relationships along with their expertise to deliver quality service become an inseparable component of a service (King & Grace, 2009). The significance of service dominant logic is further magnified through such thinking (Vargo & Lusch, 2004a).

Due to intangibility characteristic of services and heterogeneity in service encounters, there is always a dire need to develop trust in the minds of customers (De Chernatony & Riley, 1999; Goldstein, 2003). Consistency between delivered brand experience and communicated brand promise is fundamental to realize strong service brands (Baker et al., 2014; Jeong, Jeong, Jang, & Jang, 2017; Kevin Lane Keller & Lehmann, 2006; Sirianni et al., 2013).

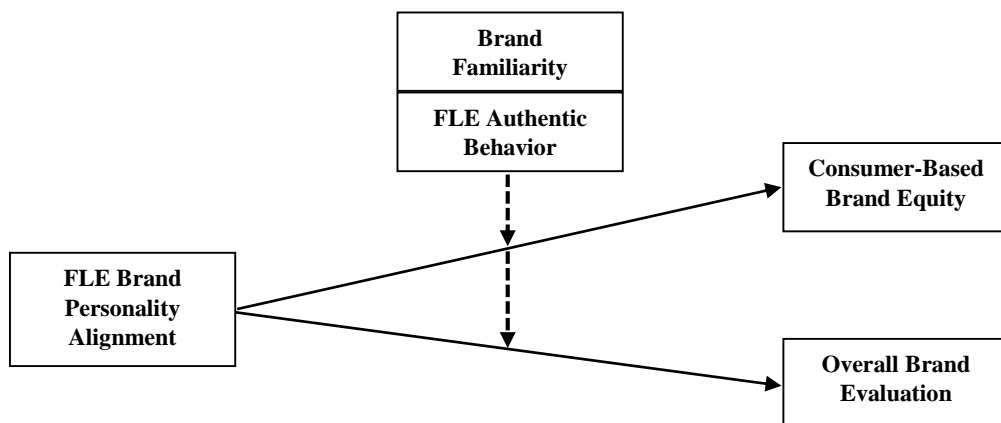
On other hand, this strategic alignment of frontline employees with brand image during service encounter will result in higher customer-based brand equity and increase in overall brand evaluation. Customer-based brand equity is a very valuable competitive advantage for the service firms yet delicate at the same time because it is dependent on the customer perceptions about the brand (Dawar & Pillutla, 2000). Higher level of brand equity is the basis of classification for successful brands (King & Grace, 2009). Brands with higher equity display characteristics such as

higher brand awareness, strong customer loyalty, stronger brand association, perceived quality, trust and credibility (Papasolomou & Vrontis, 2006). Thus, value of an organization's brand is a combination of financial measures such as market share or future earnings and customer based non-financial measures mentioned above (King & Grace, 2009).

Customer's perception of service brand is subject to the consistency between employee customer encounter and service quality expectation, which is primarily formed through external marketing communications (Baker et al., 2014; L. de Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2001; De Chernatony, Cottam, & Segal-Horn, 2006; De Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003; Jeong et al., 2017; McDonald, De Chernatony, & Harris, 2001; Morhart et al., 2009; Sirianni et al., 2013). *"Employees represent a powerful medium for building brand meaning and brand equity"* (Berry, 2000).

A consistent service experience have always been difficult to manage due to the interpersonal complexities and it received far less attention in many service organizations (King & Grace, 2009). Companies are more focused on the physical dimensions of service experience. They regularly discuss product range, lead time, the time to answer a phone call and delivery schedule. However, emotional aspect of customer experience is less understood, which is heavily dependent on employee customer encounter (Shaw, 2007). Operational consistency is an important driver of customer satisfaction from service provider's point of view. It plays a pivotal role to avoid dissatisfaction. No matter how good interpersonal encounter is, customer will be dissatisfied if core product or service fails. However, there is a need to shift the balance of attention to interpersonal and emotional aspect in order to gain competitive advantage, loyalty and customer delight (Mosley, 2007).

However, the customer perspective is missing because consumer service sector is dominated by operations focused models. These models focus more on controllable and functional dimensions and prone to suffer from flaws of not focusing on emotional, intangible and interpersonal components (King & Grace, 2009). Apart from technical expertise, interpersonal characteristics such as commitment and trust are also important attributes for service encounters in professional services (Mosley, 2007). The most important and influential components to build a strong professional service brand include day to day customer employee interactions (Young, 2008).



Source: (Sirianni et al., 2013)

Figure of conceptual framework of Sirianni (2013)

The most recent study by Sirianni et al., (2013) test with multiple experiments the consequences of frontline employee brand alignment on customer-based brand equity and Brand Evaluation and include boundary conditions (brand familiarity and employee authentic behavior) by manipulating them. The alignment is also manipulated and not measured. Thus, it is important to investigate that which level of alignment is more suitable. Their overall proposed model is not tested as boundary conditions are tested one by one.

There is a need to test this model in real situation, by measuring perceived level of alignment (not by manipulating it), evaluate if boundary conditions are linked, consider new

potential boundary conditions and also include in the model the determinants of frontline employee brand alignment which has not been done yet. In order to respond to these three gaps, our research design, presented in the next figure, includes both qualitative and quantitative studies.

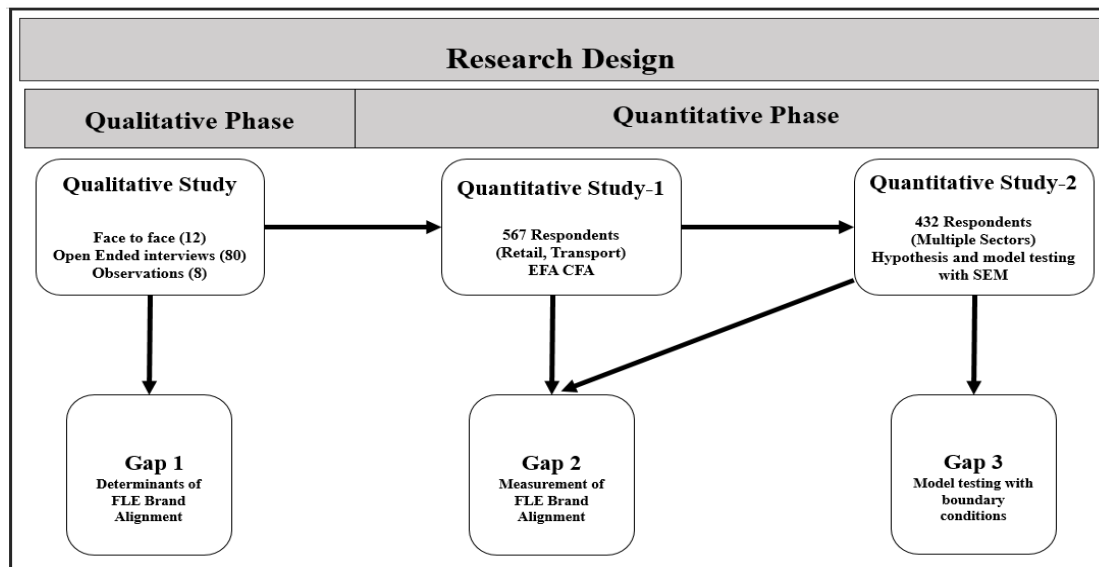


Figure of research design

A qualitative study is conducted to fill the gap 1 with the objective of exploring the determinants of frontline employee brand alignment. Quantitative study 1 and 2 were conducted to develop and validate the direct and indirect measurement scale of frontline employee brand alignment. Quantitative study 2 also fills gap 3 by investigating the antecedents and consequences of frontline employee brand alignment and the boundary conditions of its impact.

III. Structure of the dissertation

The current dissertation will be structured into two parts and seven chapters. The objective of part 1 is to develop our conceptual framework through a research model. It includes a literature review and a qualitative study. The objective of Part 2 is to test this conceptual framework. Two empirical studies are conducted and results of hypothesized relationships are presented. Our key findings are finally presented in discussion. Each chapter is briefly outlined as follows:

Part I

Chapter 1: In this chapter first we begin with the concept of service branding, its significance for services and explain how it is different for service sector. This chapter discusses the importance of service brand equity and its significance for the success for service firms. This chapter also includes Brand Equity Model (King & Grace, 2009) and Service Branding Model (Berry, 2000).

Chapter 2: This chapter first focuses on the crucial role of service experience and how frontline employees are important for this service experience. Secondly, it reflects the significance of frontline employees in the creation of brand differentiation. The criteria for service brands to influence service customers is presented after wards. This chapter also discusses the alignment in service context and also presents the frontline employee brand personality alignment model of Sirianni et al., (2013).

Chapter 3: This chapter develops a theoretical background on alignment. It provides the relevant marketing literature on alignment. A formation mechanism and evaluation framework for alignment is presented in this chapter. This chapter clarifies the meaning of alignment and also explains that how alignment is used as an interchangeable term in marketing literature. Chapter 3 also explains the dimensionality of alignment as a concept where it provides expectancy and relevancy as two dimensions of alignment.

Chapter 4: This chapter presents the qualitative study which has the objective to identify the antecedents of frontline employee brand alignment. As a finding, this study provides appearance, attitude, behavior and expertise of service employees as determinants of frontline employee brand alignment. A conceptual framework based on existing literature is presented as an outcome of this qualitative study.

Part II

Chapter 5: This chapter explains the quantitative methodology which is implemented in both empirical studies. We further explain how data is collected. A total number of 567 responses for quantitative study 1 and 432 responses for quantitative study 2 were analyzed. We then explain how we developed measurement scale and criteria followed for scale validation. This chapter also presents statistical analysis techniques used to examine hypothesized relationships.

Chapter 6: This chapter depicts the results of quantitative study 1. This study is conducted to develop the measurement scale for frontline employee brand alignment. It describes the data screening process, results from exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis and predictive validity.

Chapter 7: This chapter describes the data screening process, results from exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis for quantitative study 2. This chapter also includes the detailed result of measurement scale (direct and indirect) developed and enhanced in study 2. All the measurements scales of rest of the variables are also included in this chapter.

Discussion & conclusion: Finally, we concluded by outlining how this research enhanced existing debate surrounding the brand alignment of frontline employees and their important role in service branding. Theoretical contributions and managerial implications derived from the findings of the research, limitations and future research directions, and final thoughts of the study were given under separate section.

PART I

**CONCEPTUALIZING THE ANTECEDENTS AND
CONSEQUENCES OF FRONTLINE EMPLOYEE
BRAND ALIGNMENT**

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INTRODUCTION TO PART I

The objective of Part 1 is to develop a conceptual framework to be tested through quantitative study. It includes literature review analysis and preliminary qualitative study. Each chapter in part I will briefly have outlined as follows:

Chapter 1: This chapter first introduces the concept of service branding, its importance for services and describes how it impacts the service sector. The significance of service brand equity is also discussed in this chapter and it also sheds light on its importance for the success for service organizations. Brand Equity Model (King & Grace, 2009) and Service Branding Model (Berry, 2000) is also presented in this chapter.

Chapter 2: The primary focus of this chapter is on the vital role of service experience and how frontline employees play an important role for this service experience. Secondly, it reveals that how brand differentiation can be created through frontline employees. This chapter also includes the criteria for service brands to influence service customers. Afterwards, this chapter also presents the frontline employee brand personality alignment model of Sirianni, (2013).

Chapter 3: A theoretical background on alignment is discussed in this chapter. It includes the pertinent marketing literature on alignment. It also includes a formation mechanism and evaluation framework for alignment. This chapter clarifies the meaning of alignment and also explains that how alignment is used as an interchangeable term in marketing literature. This chapter also clarifies the dimensionality of the concept of alignment where it provides expectancy and relevancy as two dimensions of alignment.

Chapter 4: This chapter presents methodology and findings for qualitative study. This study provides appearance, attitude, behavior and expertise of service employees as determinants of frontline employee brand alignment in findings.

In conclusion of part 1, we present the conceptual framework along with the description of variables and their respective hypothesis. These hypothesis are tested in quantitative studies.

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CHAPTER 1

MANAGING SERVICE BRANDS IS DIFFERENT

CHAPTER 1

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Chapter 1

Managing service brands is different

The origin of brand concept can be traced back to indicate the ownership of cattle by ranchers and American gun makers to assure product safety to cowboys (Murphy, 1992). Thus, Klaus & Maklan, (2007) infer brand as a conceptualization of ownership designation and product quality conformance. However, brand is traditionally conceptualized by marketing scholars as bundle of features, attributes and perceptions about a firm's offerings intended to influence customer's behavior and preferences (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 2002).

Although there are various definitions and conceptualizations of brand, Aaker, (1996, p. 7) defines brand as *“a distinctive name and or symbol”*, and is a differentiating feature in a competitive market (Kevin Lane Keller & Lehmann, 2006). However, it is further suggested by Knox, (2004, p. 106) that a name or logo is not only the bases of distinction in a brand but it is also peculiar because it delivers *‘added value based on factors over and above its functional performance’*. A brand is a communication medium of a firm, product or service which symbolizes their nature, values and personality. (Jevons, 2005; McDonald et al., 2001; Peng & Hackley, 2009).

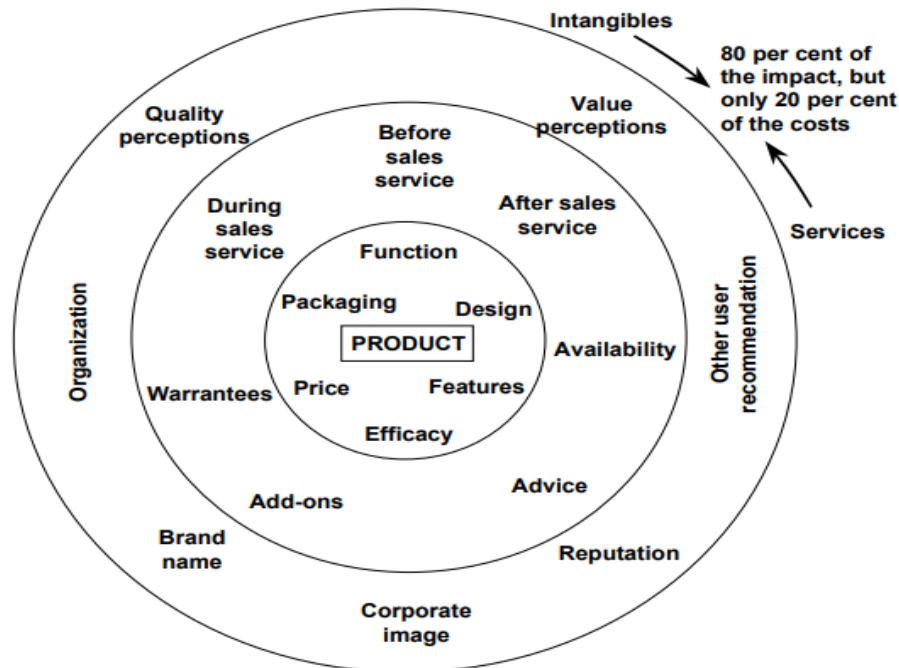
A successful brand is defined by McDonald, De Chernatony, & Harris, (2001, p. 3) as *“An identifiable product, service, person or place augmented in such a way that the buyer or user perceives relevant, unique added values which match their needs most closely. Its success results from being able to sustain these added values against competitors”*. A brands is a multidimensional constructs (Veloutsou, 2008; J. White & Chernatony, 2002), a social object (Muniz & O’guinn, 2001) and a cluster of values (McDonald et al., 2001) which is embraced by the consumers and personally owned (Pich, Dean, & Punjaisri, 2016). Hence brands create

emotional attachment and more importantly, loyalty through powerful symbolic value (D. A. Aaker, 1996; Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005; Atkin, 2004; Burnett & Hutton, 2007; Cova & Cova, 2002; Fournier, 1998; Kevin Lane Keller & Lehmann, 2006; Lavine & Gschwend, 2007; Lindstrom, 2005; Lury, 2009; Muniz & O'guinn, 2001; Pich et al., 2016; Roper & Parker, 2006; Tan & Ming, 2003). Due to the complex nature of brands, they should be conveyed through a simplified value-based message (Needham, 2005), which needs a coherent marketing strategy and consistent internal and external communication (J. White & Chernatony, 2002).

For example, included Sunlight Ivory (soap makers), Ford Cadillac (car builders) and IBM, Xerox (technology providers) are considered as pioneers of successful branding. However, customers became more sophisticated along with competitive market place, marketers felt that simple quality conformance and ownership designation were insufficient. It was need of the hour to augment the product-centered brand concept through emotional attachment, value addition, distribution, additional services, trust and relationship building (Berry & Bendapudi, 2003; Levitt, 1981; Webster, 2000). Despite of these valuable improvements, differentiation of the core product offer remains the fundamental issue of the augmented brand concept (Klaus & Maklan, 2007).

Traditionally, product-centric approach to branding has been considered successful by marketers in a product-dominant economy which is categorized by the exchange of goods and services. However, the idea of service-dominant economy is increasingly accepted by the marketers and scholars (Lusch, Vargo, & O'Brien, 2007; McConnel, Mosser, & Quiros, 1999). Currently, the rapidly growing sectors of the economy are travel, entertainment, financial services, telecom services and other services. The market investments are directed towards these sectors instead of products-dominant businesses. Thus, the question arises that whether product-centered

branding is reaching to its limits where markets are focused more and more on service propositions (Brodie, Glynn, & Little, 2006; Maklan & Knox, 1997).



(Christopher & McDonald, 1995)

Figure 1.1 Service Dominant Relationship Marketing

Certainly, there are product brands which generate high and sustainable profits through strong brand image, superior product quality and loyal customers (e.g. Louis Vuitton, Porsche). However, success of such product brands is also increasingly dependent on associated services. For example, Apple iPod has created fortunes for the company but iTunes service played an integral part in its establishment (Reppel, Szmigin, & Gruber, 2006). Even, consumers are displaying more loyalty towards retailers than the owners of product brands (Burt, 2000).

The “servitisation” trend is increasingly effecting the traditional product brands. (Vandermerwe & Rada, 1988). For example, large companies are outsourcing information technology services to service providers, which is resulting in low profit margins for computer

hardware manufacturers. Whereas recent research indicates that the differentiation of product brands is also done through service augmentation (Klaus & Maklan, 2007). Thus, relationship-based, interactive and experiential approach towards brand building is essential in service-dominated markets (Berry, Carbone, & Haeckel, 2002).

The emergence of service-dominant economy contests the traditional brand concept which is product-centric in nature. Services are different from products because they are 1) intangible, 2) heterogeneous (unique), 3) inseparable (co-produced with the customer) and 4) perishable (cannot be stored) (E. W. Anderson, Fornell, & Rust, 1997; L. de Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2001; C. Lovelock & Gummesson, 2004; Lusch et al., 2007).

The level of complexity involved in service sector can be a main reason of delayed adoption of comprehensive approach to brand management (De Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003). While there can be exceptions, product brand experiences are likely to be a lot simpler than those of service experiences, and hence are much easier to manage. This complexity of service brands can be classified into two dimensions from a service provider's perspective 1) operational complexity and 2) interpersonal complexity. The operational complexity is related to the components brought together for service transaction, typical steps to be taken during service delivery, complexity of service related products and different services offered under a single brand name. The second dimension is related to the level of complexity involved during personal encounters between consumers and service providers. This complexity includes the depth of knowledge required to deliver the service, different people involved in the service encounter and quality of relationship essential to effective service delivery (Mosley, 2007).

For example, customer perspective of this complexity can be illustrated through customer experience of a telecom operator which most likely includes an encounter with frontline employee

recommending you on which tariff suits your needs, core cellular service, additional features offered by service provider and interaction with call center employees in case of a problem or query. Thus, apparently simple personal encounter creates a challenging situation for service provider due to the involvement of various components and steps throughout the service delivery process. (Mosley, 2007).

1.1. Significance of branding in service organizations

Brand marketers initially responded to service-dominant economy by the recreation of product brand concept. It has been an effort to productize the service though in a service-dominant environment. The basis for this type of marketing is to divide service delivery into a sequence of distinct events and moreover deconstruct every event into minor, measurable occasions that can be managed as quality process similar to manufacturing. For example, excessive scripting of frontline employees. This approach follows the similar method as six-sigma in product manufacturing to control and manage variability in service encounters (Woodall, 2001).

The executional strategy is the fundamental reason of distinction between product branding and service branding rather than definitions or different interpretations of brand concept (De Chernatony & Riley, 1999). Considering brand as a promise is most appropriate interpretation of brand concept in services context which relates to the heterogeneity and intangibility characteristics of services (Ambler & Styles, 1996; Ward, Light, & Goldstine, 1999). Ambler & Styles, (1996, p. 10) define a brand as: *“the promise of the bundle of attributes that someone buys, the attributes that make up a brand may be real or illusory, rational or emotional, tangible or invisible.”*

Although services brands are regarded as clusters of emotional and functional values, however, it is also important to communicate their values through associated clues of physical

evidence due to the intangible nature of services (De Chernatony et al., 2006; De Chernatony, Drury, & Segal-Horn, 2004; Onkvisit & Shaw, 1989; Valarie A Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996). While interpreting services as promises, marketers tend to raise consumer expectations through advertising by focusing on classical models of product branding. However, due to high dependence on service employee attitude and significance of service encounter, companies face difficulties to meet such high expectations and ensure consistent standards. The gaps and shortfalls of expected and delivered service quality may frequently occur (Bitner et al., 1994; De Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003; C. King & Grace, 2008; Sirianni et al., 2013; Valerie A Zeithaml & Bitner, 1996).

Consumers are active participants in service value delivery system. By contrast, an unseen value delivery system of an internal quality control process is assumed in classical product branding (De Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003). Service firms must learn to convert this problem into an opportunity because consumer's service quality perceptions comprise of technical outcome (what they get) and service process (how they get it) (Gronroos, 1990). For example, technical outcomes are basis of branding activity in financial services and retail sector focuses on the service process. Service brand perceptions can be influenced by recruiting frontline employees who are devoted to behave according to the brand promise (Sirianni et al., 2013) and whose values are congruent with the preferred organizational values and culture (Baker et al., 2014). For example, the body shop (retailer of personal care products) recruits those frontline employees who can represent their brand values. Strong service brands can be built by encouraging customer focused culture and emphasizing on the improvement of service delivery process during service encounters (De Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003).

1.1.1. Prior research on service branding

In contrast to the idea of service process industrialization and incorporation of technology by replacing human activities (Levitt, 1981), many authors (e.g. Free, 1996; Heskett & Schlesinger, 1994) believe that frontline employees can be a source of competitive advantage. An emphasis on technical outcomes can result in demotivation of good employees and staff may be unable to respond to customer requests effectively (Baker et al., 2014). Service firms must focus on service processes which also includes communication of organizational values to the service employees (J. Kotler, 1992). Understanding these values can help service employees to recognize their important role in organization which also results in reduced employee stress and increased employee commitment to deliver the brand promise (Baker et al., 2014; J. Heskett, Sasser, & Schlesinger, 1997; Jeong et al., 2017).

Indeed, a coherent internal and external communication strategy is necessary for service brands due to the multiple contact points between service brand and its consumers. These multiple touch points also differentiate service brands from product brands (De Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003). During service encounter, failure of service employees to communicate a consistent message about service brand can consequently result in failure of service brand itself. Greater employee commitment to represent service brand values (Baker et al., 2014) and image and personality (Sirianni et al., 2013) can be achieved by proper induction and well-designed training programs (Farnfield, 1999). A good internal communication program results in successful service brands (Cleaver, 1999) and it also supports delivery of a consistent message and high quality service experience whenever customers come in contact with the organization (Camp, 1999).

In today's competitive environment, firms continuously struggle to achieve competitive advantage. This struggle has ensued in exceptional service quality regardless of whether

company's actual product is a service or physical good (Henkoff & Sample, 1994). Thus, a shift towards a new dominant logic of marketing is seen, where service provision is the fundamental of economic exchanges as opposed to the product-centric marketing. Therefore, the replication of something that involves service employees as human capital comes with an inherent difficulty and creates new challenges for marketers (Sundaram & Webster, 2000).

Table 1.1 Prior literature on service branding

No.	Reference	Employee Branding	Study Description	Key Findings
1	Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, (1985)	"Executives consistently mentioned the pivotal role of contact personnel. -COURTESY involves politeness, respect, consideration, and friendliness of contact personnel (including receptionists, telephone operators, etc.). It Includes: consideration for the consumer's property (e.g., no muddy shoes on the carpet); clean and neat appearance of public contact personnel."	-Exploratory Study -Focus Group Interviews	"-Service Quality Model -10 Categories for service Quality Determinants."
2	Solomon, Surprenant, Czepiel, & Gutman, (1985)	Facilities may be spotless and the service delivered on time as ordered—but if the customer leaves with a negative impression from the attitude of an employee, other efforts may be overlooked.	-Role Theory -When customers and service providers read from a common script (high inter-role congruence), the encounter is more satisfying.	-The setting the organization provides, together with the implicit and explicit cues it gives service employees, helps to determine the content of the employee role which, in turn, has an impact on and is affected by the customer role. -Service encounters can be characterized as role performances.
3	Bitner, (1990)	"-Employee responses in service failure can significantly influence important consumer responses."	-Service Encounter Evaluation Model -Service Failure	"-Decisions about employees and the design of physical evidence are not made by marketing managers."
4	Berry & Parasuraman, (1993)	"-Service company executives needed fresh ideas on issues such as differentiating their companies' services, creating an image of value, improving service quality, retaining customers, and turning contact employees into marketers."	-Expert Interviews	"-Services Marketing Model - The analysis reveals that services marketing developed academically because it filled a need in marketing practice."
5	Berry, (1995)	"-Customer contact employees are "part time marketers" in service organizations."	-Conceptual Paper	"-Service firms should: 1) Attract new customers. 2) Do more business with existing customers. 3) Reduce the loss of customers."
6	Hartline & Ferrell, (1996)	"-Contact employees span the boundary between the firm and its customers."	-Sample: Hotels -Employee Customer Interface -Employee Role Interface -Manager Employee Interface	"-Job Satisfaction and role ambiguity has a significant impact on customer perception of service quality."
7	Berry, (2000)	"-Service performers are a powerful medium for building brand meaning and equity. -their actions with customers transform brand meaning to brand reality. -Service providers make or break the brand."	-Service Branding Model	"-Positive Brand equity is a marketing advantage that accrues to a company to a synergy of brand awareness and brand meaning."

8	Hartline, Mayham III, & McKee, (2000)	<p>“-Shared values among a firm's employees can facilitate greatly the implementation of marketing strategy and enhance a firm's performance.</p> <p>-When contact employees share the firm's customer-oriented values, the firm's customer-oriented strategy is more likely to be implemented effectively.”</p>	<p>-Empirical Study</p> <p>-Sample Frame: Hotels</p>	<p>“-Results indicate that the alignment of customer oriented strategy with behavior-based evaluation has a positive effect on employee commitment.”</p>
9	Bettencourt & Brown, (2003)	<p>“-External Representation: Frontline service employees play an important role in representing the organization to the customers and enhancing its image.”</p>	<p>-Empirical Study</p> <p>-Sample Frame: Retail Banking, Financial Services</p>	<p>“-Results revealed that both role conflict and role ambiguity has stronger negative relationships through job satisfaction and organizational commitment with external representation.”</p>
10	Miles & Mangold, (2004)	<p>“-Employee brand-building behaviors may include courtesy, responsiveness, reliability, helpfulness, and empathy.</p> <p>- service experiences aligned with brand image can only be delivered by the employees who represent the organization, the task of getting employees to reflect the organization's brand image and deliver on its promises is a challenge for businesses.”</p>	<p>-Model Development</p> <p>-Conceptual Model for Employee Branding process.</p>	<p>“- The messages employees take in and process influence (1) the extent to which they perceive their psychological contracts with the organization to be fulfilled and (2) the degree to which they understand and are motivated to deliver the desired level of customer service. In so doing, they drive the formation of the employee brand.”</p>
11	Kevin Lane Keller & Lehmann, (2006)	<p>“-Brand positioning is heavily influenced by employees.”</p>	<p>-Conceptual Paper</p> <p>-System Model of Brand Antecedents and consequences.</p>	<p>“-Do brands positively impact employee effort and hence customer satisfaction or welfare?”</p>
12	Henkel, Tomczak, Heitmann, & Herrmann, (2007)	<p>“-it can be reasoned that only those companies, which are able to create, communicate and keep a unique and differentiating brand promise via behavioral branding, have the possibility to reach an undisputed positioning in the customer's relevant set.”</p>	<p>-Empirical Study</p> <p>-Sample: Marketing Managers and CEO's</p>	<p>“-Results of study imply that the management of customer contact employees involves more than training employees to act "socially conform" but also to promote those complex employee behaviors that may generate a highly distinguishing brand performance.”</p>
13	King & Grace, (2009)	<p>“-Organizations are increasingly encouraging employees to embrace their role as brand ambassadors, given that they are considered key to the brand building process.”</p>	<p>-Conceptual Paper</p> <p>-Dimensions of employee based Brand equity.</p>	<p>“-Consumer's perception of the service brand, while initially formed by the marketing department in the form of external communication, ultimately depends on employee-consumer interaction.”</p>
14	Morhart, Herzog, & Tomczak, (2009)	<p>“-"employee brand building behavior" as employees' contribution (both on and off the job) to an organization's customer oriented branding efforts.”</p>	<p>-Empirical Study</p> <p>-Telecom Sector</p> <p>-Sample: Frontline Employees</p>	<p>“-Results indicate that brand-specific Transformational Leadership is more effective in enhancing brand-building behaviors among followers than brand-specific Transactional Leadership.”</p>
15	Sirianni, Bitner, Brown, & Mandel, (2013)	<p>“-branded service encounters as service interactions in which employee behavior is strategically aligned with the brand positioning.</p> <p>-When employee behavior is aligned with the brand personality, the inherent context congruity will enable customers to experience the brand as a more consistent, unified whole.”</p>	<p>-Experimental Design</p> <p>-Critical Incident Protocol</p>	<p>“-Findings of the study not only establish the vital role of employees in firms' brand positioning strategies but also uncover when and why employee behavior is most influential in reinforcing brand meaning and shaping affective brand evaluations and customer-based brand equity.”</p>
16	Baker, Rapp, Meyer, & Mullins, (2014)	<p>“-Brand value congruence as the extent to which there is congruency between employees' personal values and those communicated by the brand.”</p>	<p>-Empirical Study</p>	<p>“-Internal branding can encourage brand building behaviors when internal branding activities (e.g., brand knowledge dissemination) enhance employee brand value congruence and perceptions of brand authenticity.”</p>

17	Berry & Berry, (2016)	"-Employees are "volunteers" in that an almost inherent gap exists between the levels of energy they can bring to the service role and the level required to avoid being penalized. Service effort above this minimum standard is voluntary; it is an extra effort."	Viewpoint	"-Service organizations that market intangible products need to find ways to differentiate themselves from competitors. Generosity differentiates by creating an emotional connection between the organization and its stakeholders."
18	Yakimova, Mavondo, Freeman, & Stuart, (2017)	"Brand champions are responsible for encouraging employee commitment to the corporate brand strategy. They strongly believe in and identify with the brand concept—the company's selected brand meaning, which underpins corporate brand strategy implementation."	-Empirical Study	"Findings show that articulating a compelling brand vision, taking responsibility, and getting the right people involved are the most widely used strategies by brand champions. Study uncovers how rhetorical strategies within brand champion behavior generate employee commitment to a new corporate brand strategy. The dimension of brand champion behavior that is effective depends on the type of brand evolution, involving shifts in the brand concept."

1.1.2. Moving from service quality to service branding

Once measurable, service quality can be improved continuously by standardization of customer service elements across employee–customer interactions. Just as product reliability, functionality and quality is continuously improved. Supported by this approach, both academics and managers believe that customer satisfaction is outcome of superior service quality, (Oliver, Rust, & Varki, 1997; A. Parasuraman et al., 1985) which in turn generates desired customer behaviors such as retention and loyalty (J. L. Heskett & Schlesinger, 1994; Reichheld & Sasser, 1990; Rust, Lemon, & Zeithaml, 2004; Rust, Zahorik, & Keiningham, 1995; Seiders, Voss, Grewal, & Godfrey, 2005).

The key components to manage service brands in a product brand way are measurements and metrics. To determine in an objective way, a service quality measurement was required in order to assess the impact of marketing activities on service brands. Based on the notion that consumers increasingly differentiate competitors in retail industry on the basis of service quality, SERVQUAL, a multi-item scale was introduced by Anantharathan Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, (1988) to measure and assess consumer's expectations and perceptions in an objective way. SERVQUAL addresses consumer based assessment of service quality and comprised of a 22-item measurement instrument. SERVQUAL is further distributed into five sub-dimensions: (1)

reliability, (2) tangibles, (3) assurance, (4) responsiveness and (5) empathy. SERVQUAL helps companies to categorize consumers into further segments on the basis of their perception of service quality. The other potential application includes tracking different levels of service in individual stores in a chain to better understand the company's service performance and gap in expected and perceived service quality (Valarie A. Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1988).

SERVQUAL is the most popular and widely applied tool to measure service quality. However, it does not measure all facets of a service brand because of its emphasis on the functional aspects of service quality (Buttle, 1996). In addition to the functional aspects of service (the process, the 'how'), the technical (the outcome, the what) and emotional aspects (behavior, values) of the service encounter should be measured to assess the complete picture of service encounters. (H.-C. Chiu, 2002; Liljander & Strandvik, 1997; Seiders et al., 2005). Thus, customer experience is measured to assess the holistic view of service which is a broader concept that extends beyond the scope of SERVQUAL (Mascarenhas, Kesavan, & Bernacchi, 2006; Schembri, 2006; Schembri & Sandberg, 2002).

While traditionally employees are managed by human resources department, they have been considered as essential organizational asset and their role is acknowledged in the realization of organizational objectives and goals (King & Grace, 2009). The essential role of service employees in realizing marketing strategies should be acknowledged by marketers (Gronroos, 1990). Therefore, it is wise for marketers to harness power of employees in order to move forward in their quest for the holy grail of competitive advantage (King & Grace, 2009).

Consistent with the delivery of excellent service quality, an edge over competitors is manifested in the provision of investment in the firm's brand which can be used as a strategic weapon (Hong-bumm Kim, Gon Kim, & An, 2003; Pappu et al., 2005). Organizations actively

invest in their brands to define and differentiate themselves with respect to their competitors. In doing so, organizations promote implied promises to the consumers to deliver a bundle of benefits. Thus, it is not the only responsibility of the service employee to deliver the exceptional service but employee is also expected to ensure the delivery of intended brand promise. This means that employees should be clear in terms of their expected roles and responsibilities and develop a better understanding of the organization's brand meaning. Therefore, it gives increase prominence to the pivotal and essential role of service employees in service brand delivery (King & Grace, 2009).

1.2. Service brand equity

Both managers and academicians have given significant importance to the concept of brand management because of the increased understanding that brands are intangible assets of a company which can be most valuable for business performance (Kevin Lane Keller & Lehmann, 2006). Brands can deliver multiple advantages to customers which can be both economic and symbolic in nature. Brands have an ability to assign responsibility of quality product to its producer, identification of product source, establishment of organization's promise, reduction in customer risks (i.e. search and cost) and also present symbolic attachment (Kevin L Keller, 1998). In turn, brands can generate value in terms of financial benefits for the organizations. A consistent delivery of brand promises is a prerequisite to gain such benefits (King & Grace, 2009). In order to achieve competitive advantage, organizations must effort to build and maintain strong brands (Hongbumm Kim et al., 2003; Pappu et al., 2005). Therefore, brand equity has been a point of interest for both managers and academicians to measure such brand building efforts (King & Grace, 2009).

Fundamentally, brands work as a marker for a firm's offering. Along with their other valuable functions for customers, brands can help customer to reduce risk by assuring a certain quality level, simplify their product choice, and stimulate trust. A comprehensive marketing strategy, product or service consumption by consumers and product or service itself can help in

building strong brands. Thus, brands are the reflection of complete customer experience with the product or service. The effectiveness of marketing activities such as channel placement and advertising can be determined through the customer response towards the brands. Thus, *“brands are an asset in the financial sense. Thus, brands manifest their impact at three primary levels—customer market, product market, and financial market. The value accrued by these various benefits is often called brand equity”* (Kevin Lane Keller & Lehmann, 2006, p. 740).

Higher level of brand equity is the basis of classification for successful brands (King & Grace, 2009). Brands with higher equity display characteristics such as higher brand awareness, strong customer loyalty, stronger brand association, perceived quality, trust and credibility (Papazolomou & Vrontis, 2006). Thus, value of an organization’s brand is a combination of financial measures Such as market share or future earnings and customer based non-financial measures mentioned above (King & Grace, 2009).

In order to improve brand management activities and increased promotion in literature for better understanding of brand building efforts, such non-financial measures of brand equity are crucial for future brand management practices (Atilgan, Aksoy, & Akinci, 2005; Pappu et al., 2005). Furthermore, with an increasing emphasis on better marketing measures (Srinivasan, Park, & Chang, 2005), a balanced approach towards brand equity is necessary which encompasses both internal and external perspective (King & Grace, 2009).

Despite the shift to a balanced approach towards brand management and marketing activities, surprisingly less has been discussed in terms of service brand equity. A small number of authors have discussed about service-profit relationship (e.g. J. L. Heskett, 2002; J. L. Heskett & Schlesinger, 1994; Valarie A Zeithaml et al., 1996). In order to explain this important relationships between employees, customers and profitability, J. L. Heskett & Schlesinger, (1994)

developed a service-profit chain. J. L. Heskett & Schlesinger, (1994) illustrates a chain reaction that initiates by organizational support services and policies and moves through the employee and customer loyalty and satisfaction consequently resulting in organizational growth and increased profits (J. L. Heskett & Schlesinger, 1994). Thus, service-profit chain proves that satisfied and loyal employees are pivotal for organization's profit maximization. Therefore, a financial edge can be created through employee satisfaction and loyalty (King & Grace, 2009).

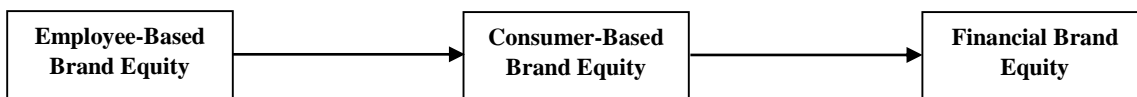
With an increasing interest of academicians and managers to measure the impact of marketing and brand management activities displayed through brand equity (De Chernatony & Cottam, 2006) many authors (e.g. Pappu et al., 2005; Srinivasan, Park, & Chang, 2005) suggest to utilize a combination of financial and non-financial measurement tools to gauge success of a brand instead of using one comprehensive evaluation methodology. This strategy of multiple perspective measurement is believed to be more beneficial because it reflects the perspective of all the stakeholders in an organization. However, service employee is a central pillar in management of service brands. Service employees have a key role is building a service brand, hence they are encouraged by the organizations to perform their responsibility as brand ambassadors (De Chernatony et al., 2006).

In contrast to product brands, Consumer's evaluation of a service brand is highly dependent on the interaction between consumer and service employee during service encounter. In fact, Service experience plays a key role in building consumer's perception of a service brand. (Padgett & Allen, 1997). Attitude and training of service employees and organizational culture are the main drivers of service experience due to limited presence of physical evidence in service brand (De Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003). Service employee's ability to build stronger customer relationships along with their expertise to deliver quality service become an inseparable

component of a service (King & Grace, 2009). The significance of service dominant logic is further magnified through such thinking (Vargo & Lusch, 2004a).

1.2.1. Brand equity model (King & Grace, 2009)

Vargo & Lusch, (2004a) argue that customers buy offerings which create value for them by rendering services. Thus, customer buy services instead of tangible products. For example, customers buy core entertainment services instead of television which is merely a hardware to seek the service. Therefore, it is time to shift to a more service dominant customer centric view where interaction, intangibility and customer relationship are important. Whereas, tangibility, transaction and output are the main focus of product dominant view (Vargo & Lusch, 2004a). This amplifies the role of employee as a gatekeeper for skill exchange and service delivery process to create value for the customers (King & Grace, 2009).



Source: (King & Grace, 2009)

Figure 1.2 Brand Equity Model

Although use of technology or self-service is promoted in service literature as a substitution of service employees by authors (e.g. Meuter, Bitner, Ostrom, & Brown, 2005) to improve satisfaction with service encounter, the significant role of service employee is not negated to deliver service quality. Despite the fact that service quality can be enhanced through technology implementation which may result in financial benefit for the firm, such technology developments can also be less profitable. For example, an organization realized the loss of \$16 million, whereas \$40 million profit was projected by implementation of online billing and services (Meuter et al., 2005). Thus, customer do not always require replacement of interpersonal service encounters with

technology (Jo Bitner, 2001). While there can be no negation for the notion that technology deployment can improve service quality through introduction of new ways of service delivery, potential down side must also be considered such as reduced interpersonal contact. Therefore, many organizations focus on interpersonal form of service delivery (Jo Bitner, 2001).

Irrespective of whether interpersonal form of service delivery is opted or a service is premised and facilitated by application of technology, it remains a challenge for service brands to meet customer expectations during a service encounter (King & Grace, 2009). Consumers always struggle in the articulation of their expectations from a service encounter which results in increased perceived risk. This can be attributed to customer's complication to form pre-purchase expectations and judgment of service performance (Valerie A Zeithaml & Bitner, 1996). In a fragmented and competitive marketplace, service encounters are based on clearly defined short term goals, while society still lacks the clear definition of roles of involved participants (Solomon et al., 1985). Underpinned with role theory, whereby evaluation of the participant's behavior as appropriate or not is dependent on the reaction of other participants involved in an exchange. Thus, a common script for customers and employees has a paramount importance in a service exchange (Solomon et al., 1985). Organizations build strong brands to simplify the process of role comprehension and these brands help employee and customers to better understand their respective roles during a service encounter (King & Grace, 2009).

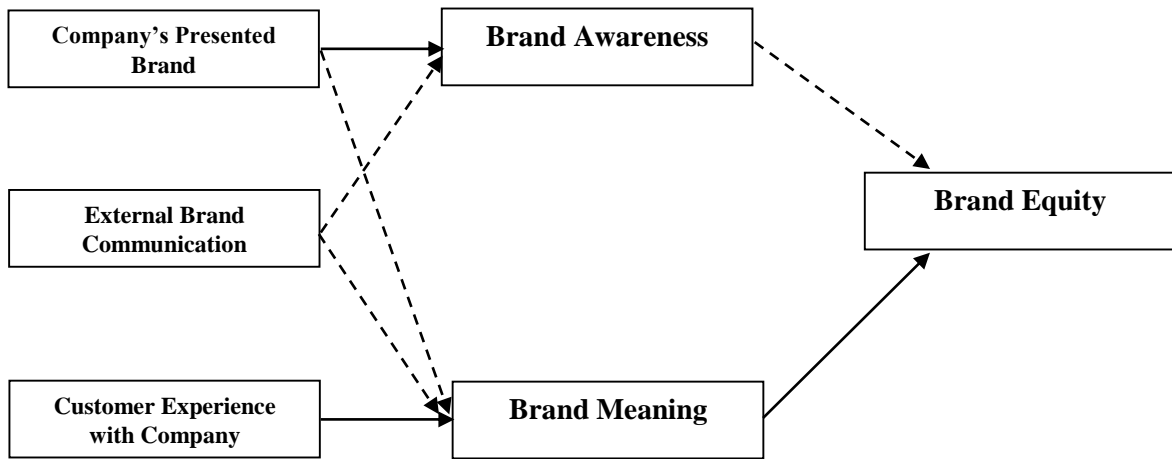
By adopting internal brand management practices, organizations can align their networks, systems and culture to meet the customer expectations that are formed through brands (Vallaster, 2004). Service employees comprehend their desired role during a service encounter from the cues and settings provided by the organization and these cues can be implicit and/or explicit in nature (Solomon et al., 1985). In order to determine the appropriate behaviors during a service encounter,

a brand can be considered as a common script. However ideally, a business continuously acquires new customers. Therefore, organizations cannot expect that all the customer are familiar with their role during service encounter (J. Bateson, 2002). Thus, organizations must help their employees to align their values and performance in accordance to the brand and subsequently customer expectations through increased brand knowledge and internal brand management practices (Baker et al., 2014; C. King & Grace, 2008; Morhart et al., 2009). Hence, brand is a representation of the relationship between organization, its employees and customers (Jacobs, 2003).

While concept of a brand is similar for products and services (Vargo & Lusch, 2004b), branding has a significant importance in the services context (Berry, 2000). Due to intangibility characteristic of services and heterogeneity in service encounters, there is always a dire need to develop trust in the minds of customers (De Chernatony & Riley, 1999; Goldstein, 2003). Consistency between delivered brand experience and communicated brand promise is fundamental to realize strong service brands (Baker et al., 2014; Jeong et al., 2017; Kevin Lane Keller & Lehmann, 2006; Sirianni et al., 2013).

1.2.2. Service branding model (Berry, 2000)

Customer's perception of service brand is subject to the consistency between employee customer encounter and service quality expectation, which is primarily formed through external marketing communications (Baker et al., 2014; L. de Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2001; De Chernatony et al., 2006; De Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003; Jeong et al., 2017; McDonald et al., 2001; Morhart et al., 2009; Sirianni et al., 2013). As shown in the model below, "*Employees represent a powerful medium for building brand meaning and brand equity*" (Berry, 2000). Thus, brand management strategy can achieve desired outcomes by incorporation of better internal brand management practices. For example, many brands (e.g. Starbucks, Google and Southwest Airlines) are making it an integral part of overall brand management strategy (King & Grace, 2009).



Source: (Berry, 2000)

Figure 1.3 Service Branding Model

Conclusion of chapter 1

Service employees can fulfil the inherent implicit and explicit brand promises through brand internalization (Miles & Mangold, 2004). A clear direction to realize organizational goals is necessary and desired brand values and behaviors should be clarified and defined for the service employees (Tosti & Stotz, 2001). The ability of service employees to deliver desired brand experience is highly unlikely without such brand internalization. In situations such as this, any external brand-building activities are likely to be unsuccessful in such situations (Jacobs, 2003). Employees are source of brand power (Berry, 2000). Thus, committed and informed employees have the inherent ability to deliver brand promise (Aurand, Gorchels, & Bishop, 2005). Hence, informed service employees have the ability to transform brand vision to reality (Berry, 2000; Miles & Mangold, 2004). Berry, (2000) illustrates employee as a source of brand power by citing the following statement of Starbucks founder Howard Shultz.

"Our competitive advantage over the big coffee brands turned out to be our people. Supermarket sales are nonverbal and impersonal, with no personal interaction. But in Starbucks store, you encounter real people who are informed, excited about the coffee and enthusiastic about the brand. Starbucks success proves that a multimillion-dollar advertising program isn't a prerequisite for building a national brand- nor are the deep pockets of a big corporation you can do it one customer at a time, one store at a time, one market at a time" (Howard & Jones, 1997, p. 247).

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CHAPTER 2

**MANAGING SERVICE EXPERIENCE, FLES, AND
THEIR BRAND ALIGNMENT ARE CRUCIAL FOR
SERVICE BRANDS**

CHAPTER 2

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Chapter 2

Managing service experience, FLEs, and their brand alignment are crucial for service brands

Customer experience has a central role in service brands and “A brand is a cluster of functional and emotional values that promises a unique and welcome emotional experience for its stakeholders” (L. D. Chernatony et al., 2006). Customer experience research (Berry et al., 2002; Pine & Gilmore, 2000), and its importance in service brand concept is of significant importance (Carbone & Haeckel, 1994). It has a formative impact on consumer behavior. As such, customer experience is a more comprehensive and robust predictor of customer satisfaction and buying behavior than SERVQUAL (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Schembri & Sandberg, 2002). Because of its difficult comprehension and context specific meanings, companies can achieve competitive advantage by successful customer experience management (King & Grace, 2009).

2.1. Service experience is crucial

Every service encounter and consumption communicates customer experience which creates perception of brand in the minds of customers. Thus, companies are deprived of the luxury to decide that whether or not to involve in experience management (Homburg, Koschate, & Hoyer, 2005). To build a strong service brand, it is crucial for companies to comprehend all the facets of customer experience and manage it in accordance to customer expectations (Mascarenhas et al., 2006). As Klaus & Maklan, (2007) explain it by old proverb, “*brand or be branded*”.

Although there is an increased realization of the crucial importance of customer experience for successful service brands, companies still struggle to assess the quality of their customer

experience with respect to the perception of their customers. The result of a 2005 Bain & Co. survey reveals that there is a huge difference in companies' assessment of their customer experience and perception of the customers. While 80 percent of brands believe that they deliver a superior customer experience, only 8 percent of their customers concur with their belief (Klaus & Maklan, 2007).

Both product and service brands work effortlessly to manage customer experience. Proctor & Gamble introduced a systematic approach towards brand management in 1930s which dominated in fast moving consumer goods sector. When 4Ps were introduced by Philip Kotler as a platform for management of marketing activities and it was clearly for product brands not services (P. Kotler, Wong, Saunders, & Armstrong, 2005). Even though the significance of differentiation and consistency has always been valued in service sector, application of rigorous and systematic approach towards service brand management dates back to last 20 years (McDonald et al., 2001) and many service brands are still struggling in effective management of this approach (King & Grace, 2009). Service sector has been an important component of developed economies and advanced brand management activities (e.g. advertising, brand identity and sales promotion) were adopted by major companies (Mosley, 2007).

The context is the environment in which service interaction occurs includes relational and physical context of the service setting where service is consumed (Gupta & Vajic, 2000). The physical context encompasses the clues generated by the smells, textures, sounds and sights of the environment; the relational context is comprised of the behaviors of the people involved in service encounter (Carbone & Haeckel, 1994). Customer's emotional brand experience can be effectively managed by the creation of an environment in which these physical and relational clues meet or exceed customer expectations (Berry et al., 2002).

Experience management is critical in order to convey the appropriate impression of the service brand (King & Grace, 2009). A model of service experience design proposed by (Pullman & Gross, 2004) further divides the relational context into two forms of interaction: 1) between service employee and customer, 2) between customer and other fellow customers. They propose that this interaction plays a significant role in fostering customer brand identification. They argue that if customer identifies him/herself with the service brand then it is highly likely that customer will take more interests in the brand. Based on this, customer loyalty can be generated by effective management of service interaction and by fostering shared identity and emotional attachment during service experience (Morrison & Crane, 2007).

As for the physical context plays much smaller role in fostering emotional attachment than relational context (Pullman & Gross, 2004), powerful and more stronger positive customer emotions can be generated through the relational context. These positive emotions are primarily an outcome of personalized and extended direct customer interaction with service employees. A perfectly designed service scape is important, but service encounter cannot be transformed into an emotional connection and memorable service experience without appropriate employee training to perform desired customer service (Morrison & Crane, 2007).

Service designers and managers must understand how to create emotional attachment and positive service experience for the customers. Thus, relational context has an utmost importance to determine emotional response of customers towards a service brand (King & Grace, 2009). Emotional service experience should be managed throughout all the stages of the service interaction (pre, core and post experience) from a strategic point of view (Morrison & Crane, 2007). Conventional relationship management strategy has been less effective to generate customer satisfaction and loyalty in service context (Yanker, Arnold, Tonby, & Placier, 2004) and

the emphasis is needed on a more collective approach towards customer experience management (Chu & Pike, 2002). Likewise, Meyer & Schwager, (2007) suggest for a shift from traditional relationship management approach to a more holistic view of customer experience management.

The attempt to deliver a consistent total customer experience is always affected by the complexity of service interaction. Both interpersonal and operational dimensions of a service remain a point of concern for service brands. However, service organizations are more focused and feel confident about the management of operational dimensions. Training, automation and service quality measurement make it more conducive for service brands to manage repetitive operational complexities. Thus, consistency in functional areas of a service brand is found (Slater, 1997).

A consistent service experience have always been difficult to manage due to the interpersonal complexities and it received far less attention in many service organizations (King & Grace, 2009). Companies are more focused on the physical dimensions of service experience. They regularly discuss product range, lead time, the time to answer a phone call and delivery schedule. However, emotional aspect of customer experience is less understood, which is heavily dependent on employee customer encounter (Shaw, 2007).

Operational consistency is an important driver of customer satisfaction from service provider's point of view. It plays a pivotal role to avoid dissatisfaction. No matter how good interpersonal encounter is, customer will be dissatisfied if core product or service fails. However, there is a need to shift the balance of attention to interpersonal and emotional aspect in order to gain competitive advantage, loyalty and customer delight (Mosley, 2007).

Brand management has always been focused on delivering a distinctive and consistent brand experience. Before even the term brand experience was invented, in the mid-1880s, the

brand pioneer William Lever created a unique image for sunlight soap through packaging, advertising and delivering a consistent experience (Mosley, 2007). In the early 1900s, retail pioneer Gordon Selfridge was also focused on the delivery of distinctive and consistent brand experience. The source of the phrase “*the customer is always right*” (Ratcliffe, 2011) also described his vision for Selfridge departmental stores as “*delighting them with an unrivalled shopping experience*” by training employees in the “*Selfridges Way*” to ensure the delivery of consistently distinctive service experience (Selfridge, 1918).

Based on the customer surveys conducted by in hotel industry and banking sector, interpersonal interactions came up as the most important factor for customer satisfaction (Mosley, 2007). However, senior managers of those businesses responded by listing functional and operational factors such as furniture quality and room size. Many research surveys confirm this relative hierarchy. Their tendency to list these functional aspects clearly shows the approach by which service businesses are run (Mosley, 2007).

Employee behavior was identified as single most crucial factor in driving loyalty and satisfaction in a comprehensive survey conducted in major service industries (G. Martin, Beaumont, Doig, & Pate, 2005). IBM conducted surveys among ten major US retailers and came up with similar results where interpersonal experience was identified as most important factor in driving customer satisfaction (Chu & Pike, 2002). In other studies, service encounter and employee behavior is identified as important factor for customer satisfaction, even in the product based retail services such as mobile phone sector (Mosley, 2007). J. L. Heskett & Schlesinger, (1994) argues that there is a strong relationship between employees satisfaction, customers satisfaction and organizational performance, referred as service profit chain (J. L. Heskett & Schlesinger, 1994). The evidence that service experience is significantly affected by behavior of frontline employees

has been notified in many studies (Baker et al., 2014; Bitner, Booms, & Tetreault, 1990; Bitner et al., 1990; Brady & Cronin Jr, 2001; Brodie et al., 2006; De Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003; J. L. Heskett & Schlesinger, 1994; Jeong et al., 2017; Kraak & Holmqvist, 2017; Larivière et al., 2017; Mohr & Bitner, 1995; Sirianni et al., 2013; Zablah et al., 2012)

2.2. Role of frontline employees and brand differentiation

Prior research on frontline employees prove that satisfied employees deliver a positive and consistent service experience. However, this may create brand differentiation if poor service delivery is an industry norm. Thus, role of service employee to create brand differentiation does not limit to positive service attitude. Along with consistent positive service attitude, a particular distinctive service style generated through strong emotional values is fundamental to differentiated and sustainable service brands (King & Grace, 2009). It is easy for competitors to copy operational and functional components. However, it is far more difficult to imitate intangible characteristics of a service experience (De Chernatony & Harris, 2000).

Although functional components of a service experience are an important source of competitive advantage, but competitors can easily copy those functional characteristics. Even a new operating model is developed, the lead time before you are being copied is becoming increasingly narrow. For example, Easyjet became successful by developing a low cost operating model, it is only a matter of time that competitors like Ryan Air beat you at your own game (King & Grace, 2009). Evidently, the point of similarity in all successful service brands is the focus on service employee to deliver a distinctive service experience. Joseph Michelli concluded in his study of *“Starbucks Experience”* that *“While seemingly endless details go into producing the emotional bond that loyal Starbucks customers feel, often the most important aspect of this bond is the personal investment of Starbucks partners [employees] (Michelli, 2006).”*

Service encounter is *“the moment of interaction between the customer and the firm”* (C. H. Lovelock, 1981), also referred as *“the moment of truth”* (Normann, 2001) remains a critical issue in service brand management (King & Grace, 2009). Bitner, (1990, p. 71) *ascertains* that *“the service encounter frequently is the service firm from the customer’s point of view”*. Yet often service employees are neither receive appropriate training to comprehend customers and lack the discretion to warrant desired responses (King & Grace, 2009). Moreover, frontline employees may lack motivation and sense of responsibility due to relatively poor salary (Bowen & Lawler, 1995) which may result in a disastrous situation for service brands.

Competitors can easily copy products but it is difficult to imitate service. Although, it is difficult to develop strong, successful and sustainable service, however once developed, competitors face difficulty to copy them because of their dependence on employee training, strong organizational culture and service employee attitude and behavior (Albrecht & Zemke, 1985; Doyle, 1990). *“service is perhaps the most sustainable differential advantage in building successful brands”* (Doyle, 1990, p. 87). J. L. Heskett, (2002) referred it as a self-reinforcing process where service organizations have an ability to convey brand vision to its consumers and also to focus on service employees as responsible to deliver that vision. He ascertained that these practices are necessary for successful service brand management.

Service organization must focus on employee commitment which is core to such self-reinforcing processes. In order to obtain service employee commitment, service organizations should first develop synergy in all organizational processes and practices to help service employees in performing their roles and responsibilities during service encounter (Quinn & Paquette, 1990). For this reason, the organizational pyramid should be turned upside down in service organizations (Grönroos, 2008) because service brands are heavily dependent on customer service as compared

to product brands (Gilmore & Carson, 1996; Pine & Gilmore, 2000). Based on the argument for a *“production-line approach”* to increase technical intensity and productivity in service organizations (Levitt, 1972, 1976), other authors (e.g. Bitner, 1990; Bowen & Lawler, 1995; J. L. Heskett & Schlesinger, 1994) recognize the importance of operational efficiency in services. They suggest to shift the focus on service employee effectiveness by matching processes and practices in order to help them while performing their role. Thus, the focus on service employee empowerment can be more effective in service brand management than a production-line approach because of its focus on both operational processes and service employee’s mindset (Bowen & Lawler, 1995). This employee empowerment must include fair rewards, sufficient information and autonomy to perform discretionary actions on the behalf of customers (De Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003).

In summary, service branding has strong relevance to the following important issues such as: 1) the significance of the service encounter; 2) that service employees are an important medium to deliver the service vision to consumers; 3) the necessity for frontline employee responsiveness; and 4) the need of service employee empowerment mechanisms to attain such responsiveness (De Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003). For example Starbucks’ founder Howard Shultz claims frontline employees as the most important component of Starbucks brand by quoting his observation, *“the people create magic”* (Howard & Jones, 1997). People create experiences (Shaun Smith & Wheeler, 2002). Other authors quote similar examples in their scholarly work such as: *“Uncommon practice”* (Milligan & Smith, 2002), *“Corporate Religion”* (Kunde & Religion, 2000), and *“Living the Brand”* (Ind, 2007).

Indeed, frontline employees play key role in delivering service experience in consumer oriented service brands as well as in professional service businesses like IT services, medical

services, financial services, law and accountancy. Interpersonal complexity exists as standard in such businesses. Service employee knowledge, expertise and ability to connect with customers is central to value creation process (Barber & Strack, 2005; Drucker, 2002). Most professional service organizations gain competitive advantage with respect to expertise and specialist knowledge of their employees. Top law firms follow a very simple and successful operating model by hiring top lawyers which gives them competitive advantage and ability to charge higher fees.

However, the customer perspective is missing because consumer service sector is dominated by operations focused models. These models focus more on controllable and functional dimensions and prone to suffer from flaws of not focusing on emotional, intangible and interpersonal components (King & Grace, 2009). Apart from technical expertise, interpersonal characteristics such as commitment and trust are also important attributes for service encounters in professional services (Mosley, 2007). The most important and influential components to build a strong professional service brand include day to day customer employee interactions (Young, 2008).

In many consumer-oriented services, service encounter is scripted and based on an operating manual. Although, this encounter is easy to predict and relatively simple but it is dealt in a functional approach. For example, it is very normal to hear the scripted phrase in telecommunication call centers that *“Is there anything else I can help you with?”*, when the call center employee has not even solved your actual problem (Meyer & Schwager, 2007). This kind of service experience remains inconsistency with actual brand promise. Authenticity is very important for service brands. Due to lack of responsiveness and genuine personality, scripted or fake employee behavior backfires both emotionally and functionally. Many service organizations impose strict control over the script of service encounter and loose the brand promise

comprehension (Gapp & Merrilees, 2006; S Smith & Wheeler, 2002). In contrast, opposite approach to convey clear brand promise and encourage service employees to act naturally is opted by most successful and celebrated service brands (Mosley, 2007).

Andrew Rolfe, CEO of Pret a Manager stated that the most important guidelines they give to their service employees are: greet the customers upon arrival, make eye contact when you return change, say something while they are leaving but most importantly, “*be yourself*” (S Smith & Wheeler, 2002). Successful service brands put more focus on building strong culture instead of focusing on specifics of service during service encounter. Culture is defined as a “*collective programming of the mind that reinforces patterned ways of thinking, feeling and reacting*” (Hofstede, 2011). Strong service brands continuously work on the evolution of marketing techniques to program “*the way people within the organization think, feel and react towards brand and customers*” (King & Grace, 2009).

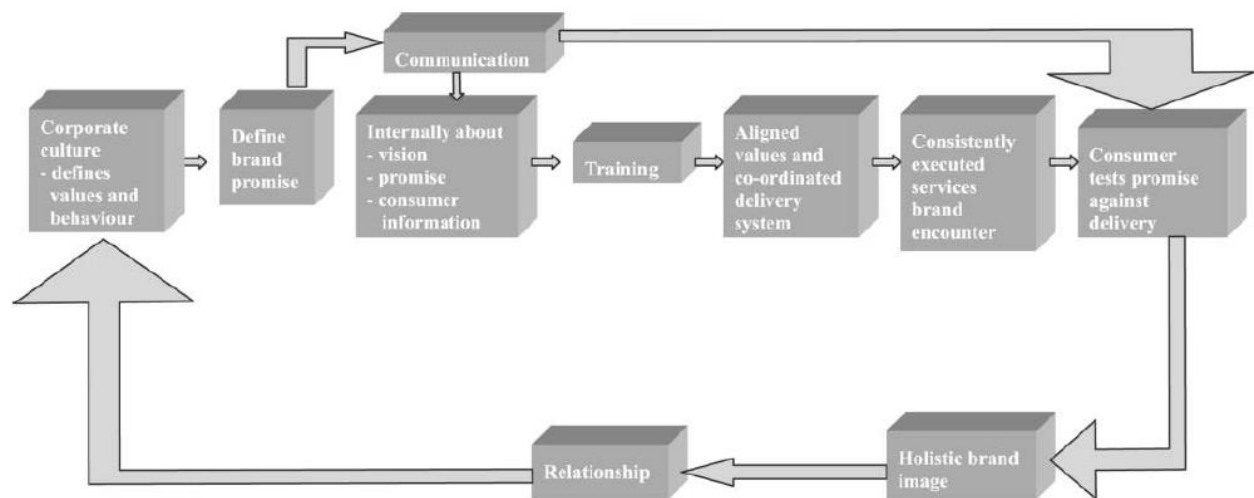
Service marketing literature shows a significant interest to enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty through service encounter management. Many authors posit that consistent service experience is focal to maintain positive customer perceptions about the brand (Gobe, 2001; Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Pullman & Gross, 2004). Customer experience is referred as engaging customers in a series of memorable experiences by creating personal connection (Pine & Gilmore, 1999).

Extraordinary experience occurs when customers experience higher emotional intensity over a period of time (Arnould & Price, 1993). Successful experiences are memorable and unique which customers wants to repeat and generate positive word of mouth. These memorable and unique experiences create emotional connection between customers and brand (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) and this is highly dependent on service employees (King & Grace, 2009). Through this emotional connection, customers feels satisfied and repeatedly buys with the same service brand

(Morrison & Crane, 2007). An engaging and consistent service context is important component for developing strong emotional connection during service encounter (Pine & Gilmore, 1998).

2.3. The criteria influencing the success of service brands

With an increase economic potential and growth of services sector, service-based branding models should be developed to increase the number of valuable service brands (De Chernatony & Harris, 2000). Due to heterogeneity of service quality and intangible nature of services which relies on brand consistent acting of service employees, execution of service brand strategy has paramount importance. This execution should be consistent at all the customer interfaces (L. D. Chernatony et al., 2006). In contrast to product branding, where communications through marketing department work as crucial factor in determining brand personality and image, service brand perceptions are heavily dependent on frontline employees (Jo Bitner, 2001). Thus, a bottom-up approach of frontline employee brand alignment may be implemented to integrate them in service branding process (De Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003).



(De Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003)

Figure 2.1 The criteria influencing the success of service brands

“A brand is a cluster of functional and emotional values which promise a particular experience” (Kevin Lane Keller & Lehmann, 2006). Few principles of product-based branding may be useful in developing successful service brands (L. D. Chernatony et al., 2006). However, production, distribution and communications can be tightly controlled (Wilson et al., 2012). On the contrary, service branding is very much dependent on corporate brand culture and its appropriate representation through frontline employee behavior (De Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003; Jo Bitner, 2001).

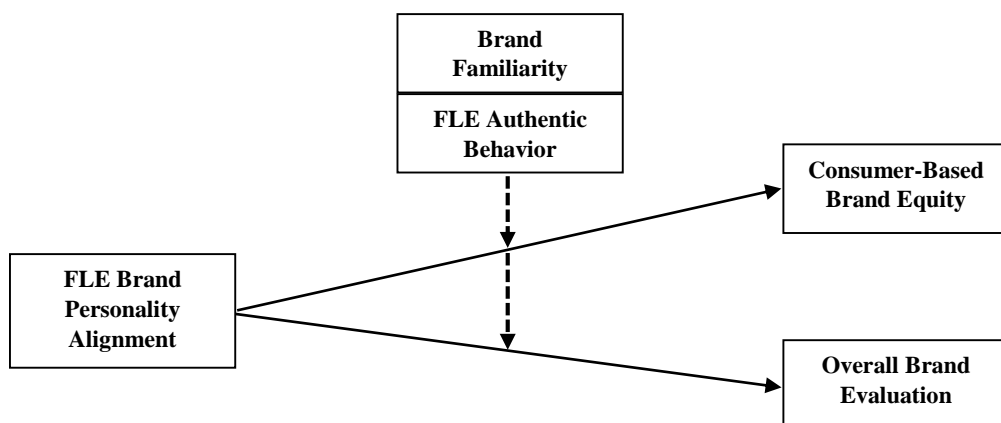
2.4. Alignment in the service brand context: Sirianni (2013) model

Given the significance of the concept of alignment in social psychology and organizational contexts, it is justified that alignment may also play a pivotal role in relationship marketing context and its key components such as commitment, trust, satisfaction, and loyalty (Zhang & Bloemer, 2008). Yet, a very few authors empirically studied alignment in terms of relationships between supplier and firm (MacMillan, Money, Money, & Downing, 2005; Morgan & Hunt, 1994), manager and salesperson (Brashear, Boles, Bellenger, & Brooks, 2003), or seller and buyer (Nicholson, Compeau, & Sethi, 2001). There has been very few studies which explored the customer perspective on alignment in service sector (e.g. Sirianni et al., 2013).

In addition to the aforesaid role of alignment in marketing literature, several other reasons show that alignment also has significant implications for services sector (Zhang & Bloemer, 2008). First of all, consumer behavior literature posits that not only functional characteristics but also emotional characteristics of a product are also important for consumer purchase behavior (Johar & Sirgy, 1991; Sirgy, Grewal, & Mangleburg, 2000; Sirgy et al., 1997). Therefore, in a services context, frontline employees fill the gap of less tangible emotional attributes (Berry, 1995; Bitner, 1990; Haytko, 2004).

Secondly, heterogeneity characteristic of services which results from human interaction between customers and service employees (Wilson et al., 2012). Embedded in organizational behavior studies, it is argued that similar expectations and common interpretation of events may result when service employees and customers hold the same values (Kalliath, Bluedorn, & Strube, 1999). Consequently, this common interpretation can improve interpersonal relationships between service employees and customers which ultimately results in reduced uncertainty (Cable & Judge, 1997; Zhang & Bloemer, 2008).

Third, De Chernatony et al., (2004) identified service employees as critical success factor for a service brand and suggested to align their values and of the brand. They identified focused position and consistency as the most important factors through in-depth exploratory interviews. Furthermore, Baker et al., (2014) emphasized on the importance brand value congruence of service employees to enhance their performance. A most recent study by (Sirianni et al., 2013) suggested that service brands can enhance their customer-based brand equity and brand evaluation by aligning their frontline employees with the brand personality. Figure 2.2 presents Sirianni et al., (2013) model of FLE brand personality alignment.



(Sirianni et al., 2013)

Figure 2.2 Framework of Sirianni's research

Conclusion of chapter 2

Corporate brand culture is based on a distinctive and relevant brand promise to the customers (Balmer et al., 2001; L. D. Chernatony et al., 2006). This distinctive and relevant brand promise is critical in building strong service brands. The preferred frontline employee behavior is embedded in strong corporate brand culture where core brand values are clearly defined (Baker et al., 2014). This clarity of service brand promise and alignment of frontline employee behavior with functional and emotional brand values helps to position a brand and to develop its image and personality (Sirianni et al., 2013). By appropriate communication of service brand vision, brand promise and customer expectations, frontline employees can better recognize their role as brand builder (Baker et al., 2014).

The likelihood of brand consistent service encounter can be enhanced through coordinated service delivery and strong corporate culture that encourages shared values in service employees (L. D. Chernatony et al., 2006). A higher customer satisfaction, positive customer perceptions and a holistic brand image is reinforced through alignment of actual and perceived brand promise (Jeong et al., 2017). This brand alignment of frontline employee develops a long-term trust worthy relationship between customers and service brands, which also results in higher customer based brand equity (Sirianni et al., 2013).

This chapter help us to understand the critical importance of frontline employees during service encounter. Where, it provides the information on the role of frontline employees to deliver a brand promise in company intended way which ultimately helps service organizations to gain competitive advantage. This next chapter explains that what is alignment and how it is measured. It also provides information on the dimensionality of alignment and its relative importance in marketing literature.

CHAPTER 3
ALIGNMENT: WHAT IT IS?
HOW IT IS MEASURED?

CHAPTER 3

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Chapter 3

Alignment: what it is? how it is measured?

The term “*alignment*” has variety of meanings with respect to its use in different contexts. In marketing literature, various authors define it according to their concerned area of research (Maille & Fleck, 2011). Generally, it refers to the idea of “conformity, agreement, proportion, relation”. In everyday language, it refers to the fact, for two objects, of matching, agreeing, being appropriate to and being consistent with each other” (Maille & Fleck, 2011, p. 79). It is expressed through different words in marketing literature such as congruence, fit, appropriateness, match-up, similarity, relatedness, suitability, etc (N. Fleck & Maille, 2010).

The concept of alignment can be traced back to the research on cognition (Hastie & Kumar, 1979), then it appeared in marketing literature after wards (Maille & Fleck, 2011). Thus, it explains structural correspondence (Mandler, 1982) or going well together of two or more than two entities. It is also expressed through various interchangeable terms such as similarity, fit, appropriateness, match-up, relatedness and suitability (Maille & Fleck, 2011). In social psychology research, similarity remained the point of interest to investigate the relationship quality and its outcomes (i.e. relationship commitment, stability, marital satisfaction, relationship maintaining behaviors and partner liking) (Aron, Steele, Kashdan, & Perez, 2006; Arthur Jr, Bell, Villado, & Doverspike, 2006; D. Byrne, 1997; Gaunt, 2006).

Hence, alignment, similarity, fit, congruence, overlap, and match are often considered as interchangeable terms (Zhang & Bloemer, 2008). The support for this concept can be traced back to the work of researchers (D. E. Byrne, 1971; Newcomb, 1956) to explore similarity-attraction theory through experiments and field study (Aron et al., 2006). This work establishes a consensus over the similarity effect and proves that the idea of “*opposite attracts*” is rather unsuccessful (Aron et al., 2006; D. Byrne, 1997; Zhang & Bloemer, 2008). In order to balance self-identity and enhance self-esteem, people are more attracted to and prefer relationships with other people having high similarity (J. B. Smith, 1998). Increase behavior predictability, improved communication and reduced cognitive dissonance are main source of similarity attraction in a social interaction (Cable & Judge, 1997).

People have better interpersonal relationships where similar values are shared. Reduced uncertainty is achieved through common interpretation and cognitive processing of experiences. (Cable & Edwards, 2004; Kalliath et al., 1999). Moreover, it is further desirable for people to interact with others who possess same psychological characteristics to reinforce and verify their behaviors and beliefs during interaction (Arthur Jr et al., 2006; Zhang & Bloemer, 2008). Thus, higher level of similarity during social interaction results in favorable attitudes towards similar others (Zhang & Bloemer, 2008).

3.1. Alignment in advertising and consumer behavior

Marketing literature is interested in investigation of alignment in various areas of application. For example, co-branding research addresses alignment between brands, while alignment between an event and brand is the main concern of sponsorship literature. Thus, alignment can be seen between various marketing entities such as: retailers, brands, media, stores, advertisement, events and products. Marketers investigate alignment between aforementioned entities and also customer entities such as needs, emotions self-conception and schemas (Maille & Fleck, 2011).

Organizations make choices and customers evaluate those choices as less or more aligned with respect to the organizations (N. Fleck & Maille, 2010). Customers may assess alignment or misalignment between product or brand extension, brand and its advertising campaign, merger and acquisition (Maille & Fleck, 2011) and a brand and its frontline employee (Baker et al., 2014; Jeong et al., 2017; Morhart et al., 2009; Sirianni et al., 2013). For example, the assessment of level of alignment between messages conveyed through advertising campaign and its context. Customer's assessment of alignment between brand and its extension of product category may differ. Thus, customer's perception of brand image may dilute due to this misalignment (Maille & Fleck, 2011). Service employees can achieve higher level of performance through brand value congruence (Baker et al., 2014) and brands can also gain higher customer-based brand equity and greater brand evaluation by aligning their frontline employees with brand personality (Sirianni et al., 2013).

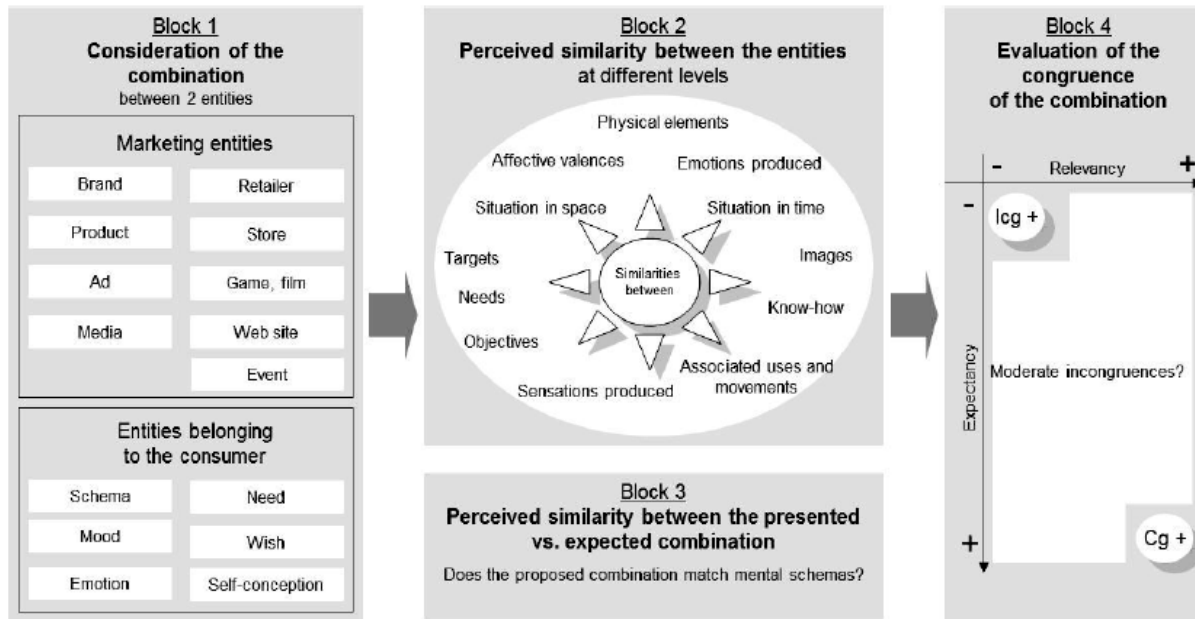
Similarly, merger between congruent companies might be perceived as credible. On the contrary, seeking out diverse capabilities may enrich company's image in the minds of customers. Although, the concept of perceived alignment is manifested in the work of past three decades, a major work has been seen recently in this area (Maille & Fleck, 2011). The research shows contradictory findings and no concrete recommendation can be given in terms of level of alignment to be achieved. Hence, different authors have different recommendations. One school of thought recommends higher level of alignment and to others moderate level of incongruence can also be beneficial. Thus, literature on alignment remains divided in terms of their recommendations that which level of alignment companies should aim for (N. Fleck & Maille, 2010).

Table 3.1 Prior studies on alignment in marketing

Context	Major Studies
Celebrity Endorsement	(Kamins, 1989), (Kirmami & Shiv, 1998), (Bower & Landreth, 2001), (Till, Stanley, & Priluck, 2008)
Characteristics of Ads and Web Sites	(Dahlén & Lange, 2004), (Priester, Godek, Nayakankuppum, & Park, 2004), (Alpert, Alpert, & Maltz, 2005), (Phillips & McQuarrie, 2009), (Galan, 2009)
Media	(Lambert, 1980), (Alden, Mukherjee, & Hoyer, 2000), (Russell, 2002), (Dahlén, Rosengren, Törn, & Ohman, 2008)
Sponsorship	(d' Astous & Bitz, 1995), (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999), (D. Z. Basil & Herr, 2006), (N. D. Fleck & Quester, 2007), (Wakefield, Becker-Olsen, & Cornwell, 2007)
Brand Extension	(D. A. Aaker & Keller, 1990), (Ahluwalia & Gürhan-Canli, 2000), (Desai & Keller, 2002), (d' Astous, Colbert, & Fournier, 2007), (Hakkyun Kim & John, 2008)
Product Extension	(Sirgy, 1982), (Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1989), (Sirgy et al., 1997), (Mattila & Wirtz, 2001), (Gill, 2008), (Gill & Lei, 2009)
FLE Brand Alignment	(Morhart et al., 2009), (Sirianni et al., 2013), (Baker et al., 2014), (Jeong et al., 2017)

3.2. Formation mechanisms of alignment evaluation

Various definitions in literature and different measurements of alignment can be possible reasons for this disagreement. One researcher may view something as aligned and other describes the same as misaligned (N. D. Fleck & Quester, 2007; M. Lee & Faber, 2007). For example, one may view creative advertisements as incongruent with the brand (R. E. Smith, Chen, & Yang, 2008). Indeed, neither companies nor researchers have an agreement on the definition and measurement of alignment. Moreover, it is difficult for companies and researchers to ascertain that assessment of their choices will be perceived aligned or misaligned by the customers. One major reason for this uncertainty is the absence of knowledge that through which mechanism of alignment is formed (Maille & Fleck, 2011). Recent researchers show the impact of perceived alignment and the mechanisms of this impact (N. Fleck & Maille, 2010). Other research of (Maille & Fleck, 2011) explains the mechanisms by which alignment is assessed. Figure 3.1 explains this assessment mechanism in detail.



Source: (Maille & Fleck, 2011)

Figure 3.1 Formation mechanisms of alignment evaluation

3.3. Clarifying the meaning of alignment

In marketing literature, the term “*alignment*” is used as a vague concept (N. Fleck & Maille, 2010). It has been expressed through many terms. For example, authors from brand extension and sponsorship research used the term such as “*fit*” while referring to alignment (D. A. Aaker & Keller, 1990; Broniarczyk & Alba, 1994; Lane, 2000; Park, Milberg, & Lawson, 1991; Sheinin & Schmitt, 1994; Tauber, 1988). The term “*fit*” can also be found in co-branding literature (Park, Jun, & Shocker, 1996; Simonin & Ruth, 1998). Many authors (e.g. Boush & Loken, 1991; Broniarczyk & Alba, 1994) preferred “*similarity*” or “*typicality*” (Boush & Loken, 1991; Ladwein, 1994). While others authors have actually used the term “*congruence*” (Baker et al., 2014; N. Fleck & Maille, 2010; Heckler & Childers, 1992; Jagre, Watson, & Watson, 2001; Lane, 2000; Maille & Fleck, 2011; Meyers-Levy, Louie, & Curren, 1994; Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1989; Sirianni et al., 2013; Speed & Thompson, 2000).

Definitions of alignment can also be found in the brand extension literature. Where it is argued that new product should have similarity with old products of the same brand (Boush & Loken, 1991). Typicality is also used in brand extension literature with reference to the similarity between new products and already existing products (Boush & Loken, 1991). Typicality is also used as a conceptualization of a product to represent its brand (Gürhan-Canli & Maheswaran, 1998; Ladwein, 1994). Alignment as fit is used when a new product is considered as expected or logical from a certain a brand by customers (Tauber, 1988, 1993). Perceived fit is referred as a process by which customers ascertain the suitability of a new product from a given brand (Park et al., 1991).

Hence, fit and similarity are used interchangeably in the brand literature, Aaker & Keller, (1990) describe these terms as the “*consistency*” of new product to the brand, whereas other authors (e.g. Broniarczyk & Alba, 1994) mention the term “*relevance*” to represent the brand extension in a category. Fit is further divided in to two types by some researchers 1) fit between product category and brand 2) new product attributes and brand (Sheinin & Schmitt, 1994). Fit is also referred as similarity and defined as degree to which parent brand and brand extension is perceived similar (Ahluwalia & Gürhan-Canli, 2000). By contrast, usage similarity, brand and features are also identified as sources of similarity and referred the term alignment as the description of compatibility (I. M. Martin & Stewart, 2001).

Meyers-Levy & Tybout (1989) were first to use the term alignment in brand extension literature. They defined alignment as the “match between attributes of an object and the relevant schema”. This definition provided an opportunity to understand the broader meaning of the concept beyond the context of brand extension and it is further examined in the context of product category (Meyers-Levy et al., 1994). On the contrary, other authors (e.g. Lane, 2000) studied misalignment by using the term fit and defined it as the degree to which a brand extension is perceived as unexpected or surprising.

Park et al., (1996) explained fit between a brand and two brands constitutive of a composite brand in co-branding context. Product fit is referred as the compatibility between two product categories and consistency between brands is referred as brand fit as perceived by the customers (Simonin & Ruth, 1998). In the context of co-branding, perceptual fit is defined in relation to “whether consumers can see a logical link between the two brands” and typicality is defined in relation to “how representative each brand is in its own product category” (Cegarra & Michel, 2001).

Alignment is also widely discussed in advertising and celebrity endorsement literature (N. Fleck & Maille, 2010). Alignment occurs when attributes of a brand are consistent with the characteristics of endorser (Misra & Beatty, 1990). The term consistency is also used by other authors (M. Walker, Langmeyer, & Langmeyer, 1992). Kamins & Gupta (1994) use alignment, match and fit as interchangeable terms. Lynch & Schuler, (1994) referred alignment as the term “*match-up*”. Bower & Landreth (2001) also referred alignment as match-up and define it as convergence between endorser’s image and product. The notion of alignment is also used in product placement literature. Where it is described as the degree to which brand or product is connected or integrated with the storyline of the placement program (Russell, 2002).

3.4. Alignment is a multi-dimensional concept

Alignment literature has a lot of authors who use the term but do not define it or further explain its measurement (N. Fleck & Maille, 2010). For example, authors (e.g. Lynch & Schuler, 1994) discuss alignment between endorser and product in the context of advertising but do not define or measure it. Kirmani & Shiv (1998) use a broad measurement of high/low alignment but do not define it. Alignment may be distinguished in three ways of conception to understand its explicit definition (N. Fleck & Maille, 2010).

Primarily, alignment is conceived as relevancy. Authors (e.g. Aaker & Keller, 1990; Park et al., 1991) explicitly considered relevancy to define alignment and referred it as consistency

between a parent brand and brand extension. Other authors in brand extension context took the same position. For instance, alignment is defined as a logical relationship between sponsored entity and its sponsor (Weeks, Cornwell, & Drennan, 2008). Although, Kamins & Gupta (1994) do not explicitly define the concept but they share the similar conception in their measurement. This explanation of alignment is similar to the adjective incongruent referred as illogical character in the dictionary (Cassidy & Le Page, 2002a).

Secondly, alignment is conceived as the notion of matching expectations. This notion was first conceived in product evaluation context (Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1989; Ozanne, Brucks, & Grewal, 1992; Stayman, Alden, & Smith, 1992). Later, it is expressed as ad-schema congruity in advertising context. It is defined as the correspondence of expectations between advertisement and its target audience (Dimofte, Forehand, & Deshpande, 2003). Thus, this definition corresponds to the concept of alignment namely referred as surprising (Cassidy & Le Page, 2002a).

Third conception of alignment defines it in relation to both expectancy and relevancy (Maille & Fleck, 2011). This bi-dimensional conception can be traced back to psychology (Goodman, 1980) and then marketing (Maille & Fleck, 2011). Thus, Heckler & Childers (1992) define relevancy as *“the extent to which the information contained in the stimulus contributes to or detracts from the clear identification of the theme or primary message being communicated.”* Hence, mutual meaning and semantic link among entities is the base of this conception of relevancy (Maille & Fleck, 2011). For example, Kenzo (famous for floral fabric) launches a perfume “Flower by Kenzo” and sponsors a botanical exhibition, could be viewed as relevant. the Dior Rose Bagatelle jewelry collection and Dior Joaillerie sponsoring the Bagatelle international competition for new roses is another example of relevancy (Maille & Fleck, 2011).

Expectancy is defined by Heckler & Childers (1992) as “*the degree to which an item or piece of information falls into a predetermined pattern or structure evoked by this theme.*” Thus, understanding of alignment is gained through a learning process which is dependent on prior experiences with the entity (Maille & Fleck, 2011). Therefore, Dior sponsorship to a rose competition and Kenzo sponsoring a botany exhibition may seem relevant but rather unexpected. Thus, many authors (Dahlén et al., 2008; N. D. Fleck & Quester, 2007; Galan, 2009; Y. H. Lee, 2000; Y. H. Lee & Mason, 1999; Lichtlé, 2002; Maille & Fleck, 2011) followed the notion of alignment as bi-dimensional concept given by Heckler & Childers (1992).

Although, some authors do not directly discuss the concept of dimensionality but use variables which are related to relevancy and expectancy. For example, Tauber, (1993) discussed fit between brand extension and parent brand, whereby new product is accepted by the customer as an expected and logical brand extension. Lane, (2000) refers it as an unexpected and surprising aspect of brand extension, whereas consistency between parent brand and its extension is referred as fit.

Conclusion of chapter 3

In marketing literature, dimensions of alignment (relevancy and expectancy) are mostly analyzed or measured separately. However, the combination of both dimensions can be distinguished into four types of aligned/misaligned relationships. 1) When association is expected and relevant 2) when association is unexpected and not relevant 3) When association is moderately expected and relevant and 4) When association is moderately unexpected and not relevant. Two intermediate types vary in levels because expectancy and relevancy of all characters lie on a continuum (Maille & Fleck, 2011).

Thus, the disagreement is not only in the definition of alignment but also on the level of alignment/misalignment. Therefore, Dior sponsoring rose competition may be considered as congruent as per relevancy but incongruent on the basis of expectancy. However, this link may be viewed as moderately incongruent as per bi-dimensional definition of alignment. Therefore, authors must come to a consensus over assessed level of alignment (Maille & Fleck, 2011). Hence, considering the strategic and managerial nature of alignment, we further use the term alignment and develop its measurement. The next chapter provides the methodology and findings of qualitative study.

CHAPTER 4

**QUALITATIVE STUDY: EXPLORING THE
ANTECEDENTS OF FLE BRAND ALIGNMENT**

CHAPTER 4

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Chapter 4

Qualitative study: exploring the antecedents of FLE brand alignment

Service encounter are defined as "*a period of time during which a consumer directly interacts with a service*" (Shostack, 1985, p. 243). Other authors (e.g. Bitner et al., 1990; Ellis, Lee, & Beatty, 1993) characterized these encounters as distinct, separate, and discrete behaviours and events. However, commonly these encounters are considered as interpersonal exchanges between customers and service employees (C. H. Lovelock & Yip, 1996; Solomon et al., 1985; Surprenant & Solomon, 1987) and satisfaction of service customers is strongly influenced by these interpersonal exchanges. Hence, services marketing research has shown a keen focus on these service encounters (Bitner et al., 1990; Solomon et al., 1985; Surprenant & Solomon, 1987). hence, strategic brand alignment of service employees with brand is very important (Sirianni et al., 2013). Therefore, the objective of this qualitative study was to identify the determinants of frontline employee brand alignment during service encounter.

4.1. Research design and methods

In order to explore and investigate the determinants of Brand aligned behavior in service sector, the qualitative study handled in this research aims at exploring the concept itself, its antecedents and consequences, and the service sectors where it is crucial. The exploratory qualitative study is based on 92 customer interviews and 8 observations were conducted. Out of 92 customer interviews, 12 were face-to-face interviews and remaining 80 were open ended customer surveys. These interviews were conducted by using Critical incident protocol technique. Semi-structured

interviews were conducted to collect respondents' and experts' point of view. All the material was recorded, transcribed and analysed through content analysis.

Table 4.1 Summary of methodology

Method	Data Collection	Analysis	Major Contributions
Interviews: Critical Incident Protocol, Customer Interviews, Open Ended Customer Surveys	Customer Face-to-Face Interviews: 12 Open Ended Customer Surveys: 80	Content Analysis: Identification of themes and count of number of occurrences of sectors.	Important sectors and factors of alignment in FLE-Customer interaction. Identification of alignment factors.
Observations: To explore the factors of FLE brand alignment.	Observers: 2 Duration: 30-35 Min Brands: 8 (Apple, GAP, Sephora, H&M, MAC, FNAC, ZARA, Laposte)	Observed the behaviour and physical appearance of FLE to identify that whether it is aligned with the brand or not.	Evaluation of FLE behaviour and appearance obtained.

In the interviews, respondent were asked to select and describe a service experience where they consider that employees in contact represent (vs not represent) the brand. They were also asked to explain the reasons why they considered employees were aligned (vs not aligned) and in which type of organization they consider it is really important that frontline employee represent the brand. The interviewees were asked to give (1) their general opinion of the alignment of employees with the brand, (2) some personal examples of alignment and misalignment, (3) their idea of antecedents and consequences of the alignment and finally (4) in which type of service setting they consider it is really important that frontline employee is aligned with the brand. Annexure A-2 presents complete interview guide for qualitative interviews.

4.1.1. Critical incident technique

Flanagan (1954, p. 347) defines critical incident technique as “*a set of procedures for collecting direct observations of human behavior in such a way as to facilitate their potential usefulness in solving practical problems and developing broad psychological principles*”. The critical incident technique helps researchers to understand critical behaviors in complex situations particularly in

management and organizational studies (Breunig & Christoffersen, 2016). This technique helps to solve problems by discovering and analyzing behavior of people through narratives (Andrews, Hull, & Donahue, 2009; Breunig & Christoffersen, 2016; Burns, Williams, & “Trey” Maxham III, 2000; Helkkula & Pihlström, 2010; Westbrook, Coiera, Gosling, & Braithwaite, 2007).

The procedures involved in critical incident technique are collection of narratives, content analysis and classification of human behaviors based on these observations (Flanagan, 1954). “A critical incident is one that makes a significant contribution, either positively or negatively, to an activity or phenomenon. Once collected, information concerning incidents is carefully scrutinized to identify data categories that summarize and describe the incidents” (Grove & Fisk, 1997, p. 67). Data related to these critical incidents can be collected through interviews. These interviews emphasize on the detailing of occurrences which can affect the evaluation of a certain phenomenon. The categorized data further interpreted to gain insights related to patterns and frequencies of crucial factors affecting a certain phenomenon (S. Walker & Truly, 1992).

The subjective nature of the phenomenon of service encounter and experience requires a methodology which can capture all the aspects of its evaluation (J. E. Bateson, 1985; Edvardsson, 1992; Grove & Fisk, 1997). This methodology should allow researchers to understand the critical factors during a service exchange. The critical incident technique meets all these criteria and has been used widely by researchers in variety of contexts (Bitner et al., 1990; D. Gremler & Bitner, 1992; D. D. Gremler, 2004; Hoffman, Kelley, & Rotalsky, 1995; Sirianni et al., 2013). Hence, both validity and reliability of critical incident technique is unquestionable (Andersson & Nilsson, 1964; D. Gremler & Bitner, 1992; D. D. Gremler, 2004; Grove & Fisk, 1997; F. M. White & Locke, 1981).

4.1.2. Observations

Observational method in service research refers to “*data gathering techniques that focus on services experiences as they unfold*” (Grove & Fisk, 1992, p. 218). For example, this data may include the observation of service employee’s speed to process a service exchange. Observational methods can propose multiple benefits in service research. (1) it can be used as complementary method of traditional data collection methods (Berry, 1990; Condon & Crano, 1988; Kidder & Judd, 1986); (2) it can help in hypothesis testing and discovery of a phenomenon (Friedrichs & Lüdtke, 1975; Grove & Fisk, 1992; Jorgensen, 1989) and (3) provide up-close information about a phenomenon in a natural context (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Friedrichs & Lüdtke, 1975; Grove & Fisk, 1992; Jorgensen, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Hence, this method can be used as a comprehensive investigative alternative in service research (Grove & Fisk, 1992).

The observation can be done mechanically (e.g. video recording) or by human observation. The human form of observation can involve researcher as participant observer (service employee and service customer) and independent or covert observer. For example, Marriot sent its employees to other competitors as customers to stay in their hotels to observe their offerings during the development of Fairfield Inn. However, human based approach is more preferable because of complex nature of service encounter (Grove & Fisk, 1992).

This study used both participant observation method (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994), where researcher communicated with the service employee as customers and also as covert observer (Reed, Wang, Shillington, Clapp, & Lange, 2007), while keenly observing the other customers and service employees during service encounters. The later method helps to reduce the risk of behavioral reactive modifications during the participant observation method (Reed et al., 2007). Two researchers studied eight brands (e.g. Apple, GAP, Sephora, H&M, MAC, FNAC, ZARA, Laposte) as observers for this qualitative study.

4.2. Findings

Our results help to identify the determinants of frontline employee brand alignment and to conceptualize the dynamics of frontline employee brand alignment.

4.2.1. Determinants of frontline employee brand alignment

For our respondents, frontline employee alignment is perceived through the physical appearance of frontline employee and their attitude, behaviour and expertise. These four categories (attitude, behaviour, expertise and physical appearance) are determinants of the alignment. These categories and quotes from qualitative interviews are presented in appendix A-4.

A variety of sectors has been mentioned by our respondents. These include high class services (restaurant, hotels), cloth and beauty stores (H&M, Abercrombie, Sephora), very specialized services and stores (nutritionist, Forestier, Naturalia), brands with a very strong identity (Apple, Nespresso). Other sectors have been mentioned such as airlines, health, dry cleaner, teaching, bank and insurance.

4.2.2. Conceptualization of the dynamics of frontline employee brand alignment

Based on the results, we conducted an extensive literature review to determine the support for determinants of frontline employee brand alignment. Importantly, the literature supports these characteristics as key elements of interaction quality (e.g., attitude, behavior and expertise). Prior researches also emphasize on employee related characteristics as an important component in shaping customers' perception of service quality (Brady & Cronin Jr, 2001). For example, (Bitner, 1990) argued that customers' assessment of service quality is highly dependent on the behavior of service employees. Furthermore, service employees' attitudes, behaviors, and skills influence the customers' perception of service (Grönroos, 1984).

Thus, adopting the Hierarchical Approach of service quality model, this study adds to the literature and propose that employee attitude, behavior and expertise are very much important to define interaction quality but there is a fourth and very important factor which is considered in this model is employee appearance which consist of their 1) attractiveness, 2) Dress and make-up and 3) Brand related things, which is evident from findings of our study. Therefore, this study focuses on interaction quality instead of other two elements of service quality because customers' perception of service quality is more affected by interpersonal interactions during service delivery process. The key component of a service exchange are these service encounters which are classified as employee–customer interface (Brady & Cronin Jr, 2001).

Frontline employee brand alignment can be of many types. 1) Frontline employee alignment with brand personality is defined as “level of congruence between the employee's behavior and the brand personality” (Sirianni et al., 2013). 2) “Branded service encounters are service interactions in which employee behavior is strategically aligned with the brand positioning. This strategic alignment may be evident in various elements of the employee's presented behavior, appearance, and manner that can reinforce brand meaning during service interactions with customers” (Sirianni et al., 2013). Furthermore, 3) Muchinsky & Monahan, (1987) defined employee firm fit as the degree of customers' perception of how effectively employees convey the firm's image. They argued that employee firm fit exists when employee and firm possess similar characteristics. Therefore, this definition of employee firm fit suggests that firm characteristics (e.g. culture, norms and values) enhance employee characteristics (e.g. attitudes, personality and values), and vice versa (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). Thus, Evident from the literature, frontline employee brand alignment can be differentiated into three types. 1) Frontline

employee alignment with brand personality, 2) frontline employee alignment with brand image and 3) frontline employee alignment with brand positioning.

The consequences of frontline employee alignment has not really been understood by our respondents. The experts were more able to qualify the consequences for the customers than the antecedents. They mentioned variables linked to the brand and classical variable in service marketing. Frontline employee brand alignment consequences include brand love, brand trust, brand positioning clarity and strength, brand equity, customer satisfaction, loyalty and repeat purchase and positive word of mouth. Thus, given the diversified nature and number of the consequences mentioned by the respondents, this study follows the path of Sirianni et al., (2013) examine the consequences such as 1) overall brand evaluation, 2) customer-based brand equity and moderators such as 1) frontline employee authentic behaviour, 2) brand familiarity. Based on previous literature and current study results, following conceptualization of interaction quality is proposed.

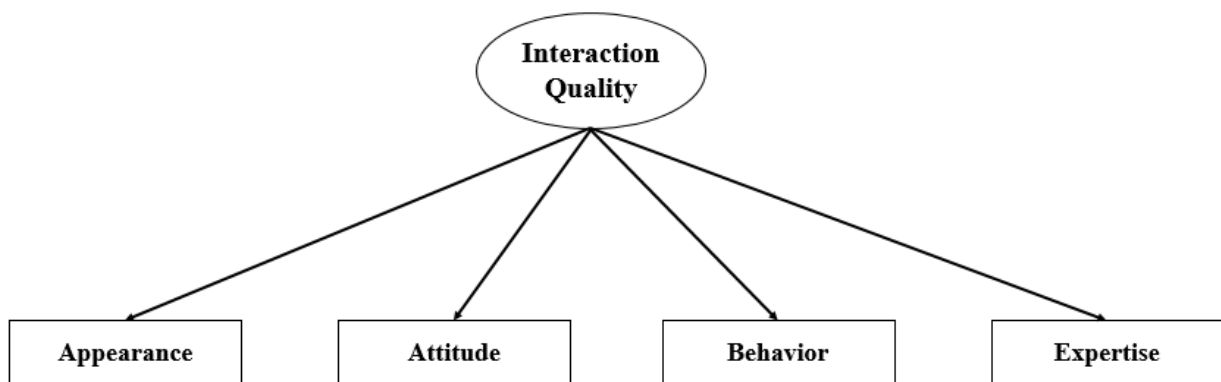


Figure 4.1 Conceptualization of interaction quality

Conclusion of chapter 4

Frontline employee brand alignment appears to be an important concept in service branding. Most respondents were able to give personal examples of alignment (vs misalignment). The determinants of alignment includes the physical appearance, attitude, behavior and expertise of frontline employee. Most quotations were focused on the physical appearance and behavior. The positive or negative consequences of the alignment include the brand evaluation and classical service marketing variables such as satisfaction and loyalty.

Frontline employee alignment is crucial in a huge diversity of services sectors but high class services and cloth and beauty stores were the most quoted. As shown in table 1, Prior literature discusses the concept of frontline employee brand alignment mostly in terms of a alignment between the values and norms of employee and organization. Most recent work to explore the customer perspective of frontline employee brand alignment has been done by (Sirianni et al., 2013), where they investigate the level of alignment between employees' behaviour and brands' personality. Hence, employee appearance (attractiveness, dress and make-up and brand related things) remain unexplored.

From a managerial point of view the research tends to show that service branding is impacted by frontline employee brand alignment, especially the way they appear and behave. Based on evidence from observation, employee expertise can reinforce the brands' image. For example, people consider apple and fnac as an advance technological brand and frontline employees can enhance the brands' image by presenting their expertise with advance product and technological knowledge.

Conclusion of part I: Modeling FLE Brand Alignment, its antecedents and consequences

Muchinsky & Monahan, (1987) defined employee firm fit as the degree of customers' perception of how effectively employees convey the firm's image. They argued that employee firm fit exists when employee and firm possess similar characteristics. Therefore, this definition of employee firm fit suggests that firm characteristics (e.g. culture, norms and values) enhance employee characteristics (e.g. attitudes, personality and values), and vice versa (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Thus, higher level of alignment between the firm's image and image of the employees results in higher level of employee firm fit. (S. Anderson & Smith, 2017).

Employee brand building behavior is defined as “employees' contribution (both on and off the job) to an organization's customer-oriented branding efforts” (Morhart et al., 2009). The real challenge for service organizations is to get their employees to build the desired brand image. Furthermore, companies enhance the frontline employee brand alignment by hiring such individuals who can reflect firm's norms and values by adhering prescribed organizational practices (Chatman, 1989). High frontline employee brand alignment is evident when employees' behavior is congruent with the norms and values of the organization, which results in employee performing extra-role behaviors (Morse, 1975). Consequently, high frontline employee brand alignment will also have a significant impact on customer's perception of the service experience (S. Anderson & Smith, 2017).

The employees can be equipped to fulfill the implicit and explicit brand promises by internalizing the brand (Miles & Mangold, 2004). Through this, clarity about behaviors and brand values can be disseminated to the employees (Tosti & Stotz, 2001). (Aurand et al., 2005) ascertain the need of such workforce which has the ability as well as commitment to deliver the brand promises. (Morhart et al., 2009) concluded that clearly defined behavioral script and rewarding

appropriate conduct can enhance the customer contact employee's performance. These codices of behavior can also help them in a better representation of brand. They also suggested that a strategic shift of managers from transactional leadership style to transformational leadership style is required to build a strong relationship with subordinates and developing a workforce which can be called as brand champions.

Table 4.2 Prior research on frontline employee brand alignment

Citation	Concept	Definition
(Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987)	Employee firm fit	<i>"The degree of customers' perception of how effectively employees convey the firm's image. They argued that employee firm fit exists when employee and firm possess similar characteristics. Therefore, this definition of employee firm fit suggests that firm characteristics (e.g. culture, norms and values) enhance employee characteristics (e.g. attitudes, personality and values)".</i>
(E. G. Harris & Fleming, 2007)	Employee-Service Personality Congruence	<i>"The degree of perceived congruence between the employee's personality and the service personality".</i>
(Morhart et al., 2009)	Employee brand building behavior	<i>"Employees' contribution (both on and off the job) to an organization's customer-oriented branding efforts"</i>
(Sirianni et al., 2013)	Branded service encounters	<i>"Branded service encounters are service interactions in which employee behavior is strategically aligned with the brand positioning. This strategic alignment may be evident in various elements of the employee's presented behavior, appearance, and manner that can reinforce brand meaning during service interactions with customers".</i>
(Sirianni et al., 2013)	Frontline employee brand alignment	<i>"Level of congruence between the employee's behavior and the brand personality".</i>
(Baker et al., 2014)	Brand value congruence	<i>"The extent to which there is congruency between frontline employees' personal values and those communicated by the brand".</i>

I. Interaction quality as antecedent of frontline employee brand alignment

A comprehensive model of service quality was proposed by (Brady & Cronin Jr, 2001). They integrated various perspectives and proposed a new comprehensive measure for service quality. Their hierarchal model of service quality has three primary dimensions: interaction quality,

physical environment quality, and outcome quality. Furthermore, they divided these three primary dimensions into several sub-dimensions. Thus, their hierarchical model of service quality can be considered as most comprehensive service quality model because it is a synthesis of all prior conceptualizations (Leisen Pollack, 2009).

Interaction quality is considered as an important component of service quality which was proposed by the Nordic School scholars (Brady & Cronin Jr, 2001). They found that the concept of interaction quality is similar across different service sectors. Furthermore, (Brady & Cronin Jr, 2001) through their extensive literature review identified three distinctive characteristics that shape the customers' perception of interaction quality: (1) service employee behaviors (e.g., helpfulness); (2) service employee attitudes (e.g., willingness to serve); and (3) service employee expertise. (C. H. Lovelock, 1983) argues that customers are involved to a greater extent in service delivery process in people based services. This, consequently, highlights interaction quality as a key component for such services (Leisen Pollack, 2009).

Attractive individuals are perceived as more successful, happier and sociable than those who are less attractive (R. K. Chiu & Babcock, 2002). Attractiveness of an individual has a key role in his/her level of persuasiveness during social (Chaiken, 1979) which can have a significant impact on marketing and sales initiatives (Magnini, Baker, & Karande, 2013). Mulford et al., (1998) suggests that people tend to cooperate more with the attractive individuals during social interactions and physical attractiveness also increases the evaluation of social skills (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972). Sirianni et al., (2013) also recommended to investigate the impact of employee appearance on perceived authenticity of frontline employee brand alignment.

Based on evidence from hospitality industry, May, (1980) suggests that a physically attractive server has a greater impact on tip size than the delivered service quality. Barnes et al.,

(2016) also emphasize on the importance of appearance and attractiveness of service employees. Sirianni et al., (2013) suggests that frontline employee brand alignment can reinforce brand meanings during service encounters and this alignment can be achieved by various elements, such as, appearance, behavior and manner. For example, Club Med staff are called "GOs", or Gentils Organisateurs (Gracious/Nice Organizers). Clients are "GMs", or Gentils Membres (Gracious/Nice Guests/Members). There are 15,000 GOs of 96 different nationalities working in the villages around the world. The resort is known as a *village*. The resort manager is called the *Chef de Village* (Village Chief). Resort managers are also responsible for announcing the evening program and leading a few 'crazy signs' (communal dances). The special feature of Club Med is that the GOs and GMs play, dine, drink, and dance together every day and night. A particular institution is the communal dance or *crazy signs* led by the GOs at varying intervals during the day and evening. The dance steps for each song are standard across the organization with some new ones introduced each year. The evening shows, often requiring detailed choreography, are also standardized and include both new and established routines. All GOs, regardless of their area of specialty (a sport or administrative function), are expected to regularly participate in both the show and "crazy signs".

The concept of matching frontline employee appearance with brand is also referred as aesthetic labor (Warhurst & Nickson, 2003). *"Aesthetic labor practices involve strategically controlling human aesthetics in an effort create a predefined physical appearance profile that becomes part of the value proposition"* (Pounders, Babin, & Close, 2015, p. 670). These aesthetic labor practices are implemented in various industries predominantly in cosmetic or fashion industry, to convey a clear brand image. However, this practice can also be found in other sectors such as airlines and restaurants (Pounders et al., 2015).

H1: Frontline employee brand alignment is considered to be greater when interaction quality is higher.

II. Consequences frontline employee brand alignment

Overall brand evaluation

Frontline employee brand alignment can consequently enhance the overall brand evaluations, which is a measure of customers' affective responses towards a brand, such as, trust, desirability and liking (Sirianni et al., 2013). Thus, overall brand evaluation is defined as “customers' general affective assessment of a brand”. This general affective assessment of a brand can be turned into higher level of overall brand evaluation by frontline employee brand alignment. Thus, trust, desirability and liking of the brand can be enhanced by the congruent message delivered by frontline employee and other brand related communications. Sirianni et al., (2013) ascertain that higher frontline employee brand alignment can consequently result in higher level of overall brand evaluations.

H2a: Frontline employee brand alignment is positively related to brand evaluation.

H2b: Frontline employee brand alignment mediates the relationship between interaction quality and brand evaluation.

Customer-based brand equity

Customer-based brand equity can be classified as a direct measure of customer response towards a brand (Kevin Lane Keller, 1993; Sirianni et al., 2013). Thus, (Kevin Lane Keller, 1993) defines customer-based brand equity as “the differential impact of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand”. Keller, (1993) considers customer-based brand equity as a process of consumers' high brand familiarity where brand associations are strong, unique and favorable. These associations can be termed as primary associations which include attitude towards perceived brand benefit and brand beliefs. These attitudes and beliefs can be functional, symbolic or

experiential in nature (Netemeyer et al., 2004). Thus, the focus of customer-based brand equity is more on directly measuring the managerial implications, such as, increased brand uniqueness, increased brand quality versus competitors, brand building, willingness to pay a price premium and perceived value (Netemeyer et al., 2004; Sirianni et al., 2013). Consequently, aligning employee behavior with the brand positioning leads to higher customer-based brand equity evaluations (Sirianni et al., 2013).

H3a: Frontline employee brand alignment is positively related to customer-based brand equity.

H3b: Frontline employee brand alignment mediates the relationship between interaction quality and customer-based brand equity.

III. Boundary conditions of frontline employee brand alignment

Authentic employee behavior

Service organizations control and direct how frontline employees present themselves to consumers (Hochschild, 2012). However, all brand aligned frontline employee behavior may not result in the same level of brand evaluations. An unfelt brand aligned behavior may generate low level of brand evaluation than an authentic brand aligned behavior (Sirianni et al., 2013). These authentic and inauthentic behaviors can be studied through the concept of “emotional labor” which is described as a display of organizationally desired emotions while managing one’s feelings during service encounter (Hochschild, 2012). Sirianni et al., (2013) defines “employee authenticity as the degree to which customers have confidence in the sincerity of an employee's brand-aligned behavior”. This authentic behavior occurs when employees express their true nature while acting in accordance to their espoused values (Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Wood, Linley, Maltby, Baliousis, & Joseph, 2008). Sirianni et al., (2013) examined that how the overall brand evaluations is affected by the authenticity of employees' brand-aligned behavior. Their study suggests that it is very

important for frontline employees to internalize the brand positioning elements while altering their behavior for their service role play. This study also emphasizes on the significance of training the employees for their brand aligned performances. Their study suggests that employee authentic behavior in service encounter can influence the customer's perception about the brand image.

H4a: Employee authentic behavior moderates the impact of frontline employee brand alignment on brand evaluation, such that the impact s of frontline employee brand alignment is more positive at high levels of employee authentic behavior than for low levels of employee authentic behavior.

H4b: Employee authentic behavior moderates the impact of frontline employee brand alignment on customer-based brand equity, such that the impacts of frontline employee brand alignment is more positive at high levels of employee authentic behavior than for low levels of employee authentic behavior.

Brand familiarity

Brand familiarity is a reflection of the level of direct and indirect experiences of a consumers with a brand or product (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987; Kent & Allen, 1994). It is also defined as the degree to which consumers are knowledgeable and aware of a specific brand or product (Kent & Allen, 1994). Prior research has found that consumers response towards a familiar brand is more favorable than unfamiliar brands which consequently result in higher level of brand equity and preference (Aaker David, 1991). Thus, unfamiliar brands remain disadvantageous because consumers' lack of knowledge makes it difficult for these unfamiliar brands to be preferred (Campbell & Keller, 2003). However, recent research by (Sirianni et al., 2013) found that frontline employee brand alignment can be more beneficial for unfamiliar brands.

H4c: Brand familiarity moderates the impact of frontline employee brand alignment on brand evaluation, such that the impacts of frontline employee brand alignment is more positive at high levels of brand familiarity than for low levels of brand familiarity.

H4d: Brand familiarity moderates the impact of frontline employee brand alignment on customer-based brand equity, such that the impacts of frontline employee brand alignment is more positive at high levels of brand familiarity than for low levels of brand familiarity.

Interaction duration

Interaction duration is referred as “the total time taken during the service encounter”. Longer duration can increase the chances of employee burnout and leaking of emotions during service encounter. Service consumers can use these symptoms of leak of emotions as a tool of evaluation and appraisal of that service encounter (Price, Arnould, & Tierney, 1995). This evaluation and appraisal can influence the overall brand evaluation of the consumer. These leak of emotions can result in reduced satisfaction and decrease in overall brand evaluation (Hartline & Jones, 1996). However, interaction duration is a factor which can vary from service to service. Hence, it could be examined as a boundary condition for the overall brand evaluation (Söderlund, 2017). For example, customer have a different interaction duration at a hotel front desk and it can be longer while meeting a lawyer or having a make-up in a beauty parlor. Where longer duration of service encounter can influence a service consumer, at the same time it can result in the emotional leak of service employee which eventually impact s the overall brand negatively.

H5a: Interaction duration will moderate the impact of frontline employee brand alignment on brand evaluation, such that the impacts of frontline employee brand alignment will be more positive at high levels of interaction duration than for low levels of interaction duration.

H5b: Interaction duration will moderate the impact of frontline employee brand alignment on customer-based brand equity, such that the impacts of frontline employee brand alignment will be more positive at high levels of interaction duration than for low levels of interaction duration.

Employee-brand personality delta

Frontline employee brand alignment is an important concept. However, it is also important to understand that which level of alignment is most suitable. Can frontline employee be too much aligned? To investigate the appropriate level of alignment, Aaker, (1997) brand personality dimensions (1. Sincere, 2. Excitement, 3. Competent, 4. Sophisticated and 5. Rugged) are taken as the basis of brand personality delta.

H6a: The impact of frontline employee brand alignment on customer-based brand equity and brand evaluation is higher when frontline employee is aligned with the brand personality. (*Confirmed*)

H6b: The impact of frontline employee brand alignment on customer-based brand equity and brand evaluation is higher when frontline employee is aligned rather than too much aligned with the brand personality. (*Not Confirmed*)

IV. Control variables

Apart from main variables tested in hypothesized relationships, this research includes a number of control variables. Prior research included employee-customer similarity as a moderator for relationships in service profit chain, where employee-customer similarity was considered on the basis of age and gender similarity (Homburg, Wieseke, & Hoyer, 2009). In this research, we included age and gender of customer and age and gender of service employee as control variables. For path analyses, both employee and customer gender was categorized “1” for male “2” for female, whereas age was coded by distributing in different age groups e.g. “1” for age interval 0-18 years, “2” for 18-25 years, “3” for 26-32 years, “4” for 33-40 years, “5” was coded for 41-50 years, “6” was coded for 50-60 years and “7” was coded for 60 years and above.

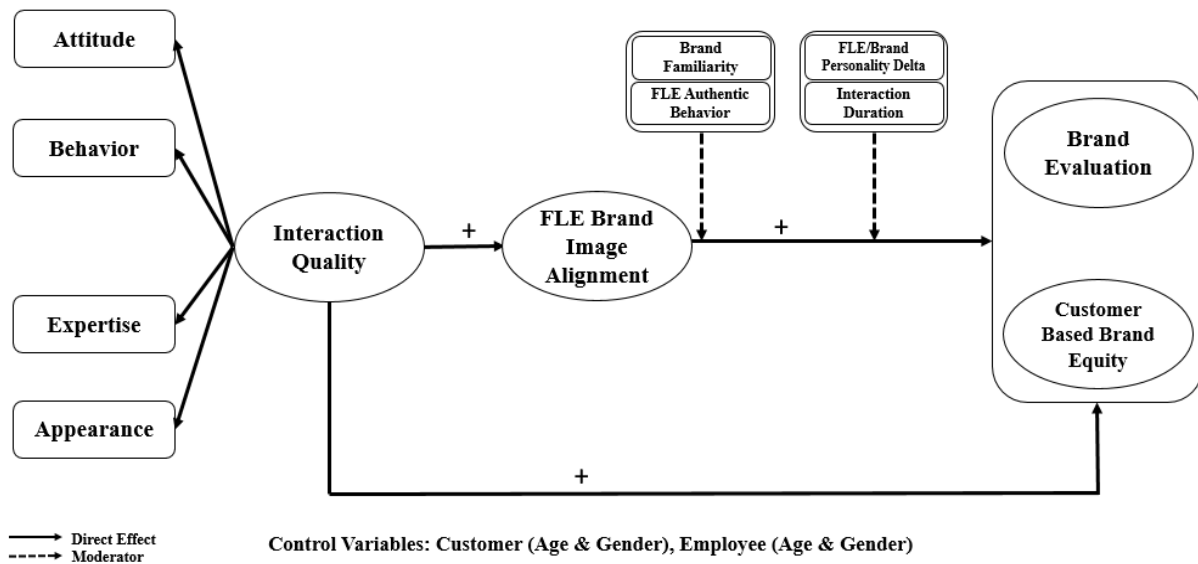


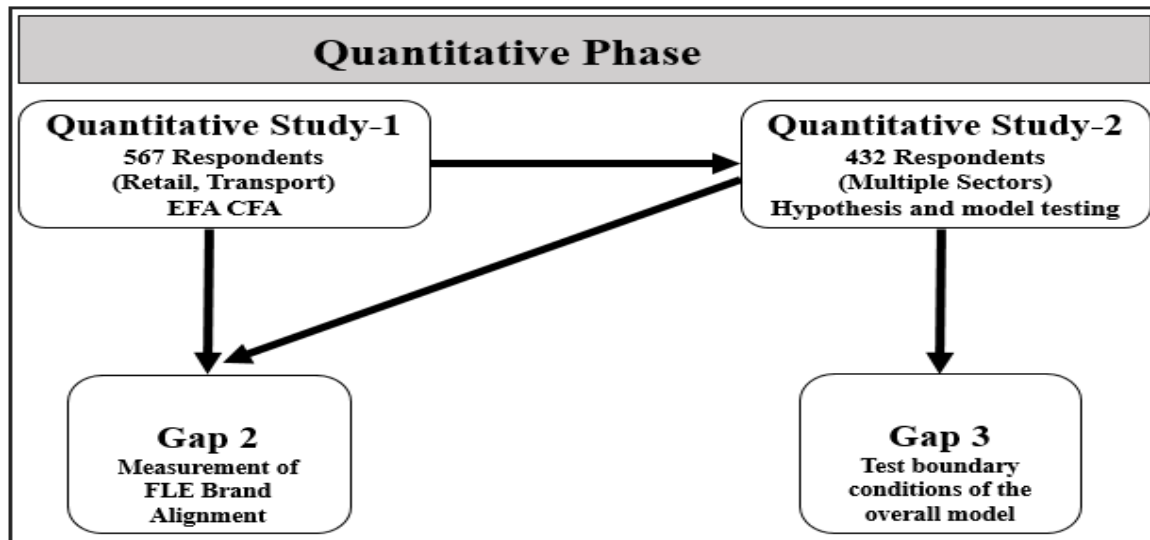
Figure 4.2 Conceptual framework

PART II
QUANTITATIVE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

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INTRODUCTION TO PART II

The main objective of Part 2 is to develop the measurement of frontline employee brand alignment and test the hypothesized relationships. It presents the two empirical studies and results of hypothesized relationships which is followed by discussion and conclusion. Each chapter in part 2 will briefly have outlined as follows:



Chapter 5: This chapter includes the methodology for both quantitative studies. In quantitative study 1, data is collected in IKEA, Décathlon and SNCF brands. Subsequently, data for quantitative study 2 is collected from multiple sectors such as, retail, restaurants, hotels and transport. A total number of 567 responses for quantitative study 1 and 432 responses for quantitative study 2 were analyzed. All the measurements scales of rest of the variables are also included in this chapter.

Chapter 6: This chapter presents the results of quantitative study 1 which was conducted to develop the measurement scale for frontline employee brand alignment. It explains the data screening process and also presents results from exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis. The predictive validity model for the two dimensional measurement scale of frontline employee brand alignment is also presented for quantitative study 1.

Chapter 7: This chapter presents the results of exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis for quantitative study 2. This chapter also contains the result of direct and indirect measurement scale developed in quantitative study 2. The hypothesized relationships (direct, indirect, mediating and moderating impacts of frontline employee brand alignment) are discussed in this chapter.

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CHAPTER 5

STUDY 1 AND STUDY 2 METHODOLOGY

CHAPTER 5

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Chapter 5

Study 1 and study 2 methodology

5.1. Data collection

The objectives of quantitative studies are to develop measurement of frontline employee brand alignment and to investigate the conditions in which this alignment has the most impact on brand evaluation and customer-based brand equity, such as employee authentic behavior, interaction duration. Study-1 is mainly conducted to develop the measurement of frontline employee brand alignment and check its predictive validity. Study 2 is conducted to test the conceptual framework.

5.1.1. Study 1

In study-1, the data collection was focused mainly on retail and transport sector. The reason for selecting these sectors comes from the result of qualitative study, where retail and transport emerged as major sectors in terms of customer perspective of frontline employee brand alignment. Data was collected from brands such as, Décathlon, IKEA and SNCF was selected from transport sector. A convenient sampling method is used for study-1 and Student from graduate level marketing classes were asked to collect data from customers for these service brands. The students self-allocated the brands to respondents to minimize the hallow effect. After purification of the sample, 567 responses were analyzed.

Décathlon is world's largest sports brand with operations in 40 countries with 1229 outlets worldwide and a total workforce of 85000 from which 5000 works in France. It has also been nominated for the best place to work for two consecutive years 2017, 2018. The ambition of “Décathlon Échanges” is to be the world reference in terms of managerial innovation, training and instruction. The Individual Training Plan (“PIF” in French) is the plan that the company itself offers. It is usually offered per “job” and divided into 4 parts: 1) The integration: trainings

necessary to master the basics of the job, to acquire the fundamental knowledge 2) The apprenticeship: trainings allowing for skill improvement in the job, making it possible to know how to anticipate activities, to become efficient in one's job 3) The improvement: trainings enabling one to enhance his level of expertise of his job and 4) The additional: to attend, independently from the job or to develop know-how useful for a future job. Décathlon prefers the frontline employees who are athletic and expert in their area of sports. Their frontlines employees have great knowledge about the sports and they tend to represent a sports brand. Their recruitment website emphasizes that they are looking for people who can create coherence between brand communications and actions.

IKEA is one of the largest furniture retailer in the world with its operations in 29 countries with 149,000 employees including 10,064 in France. Since, IKEA is a brand with a strong culture, so they especially focus on employee socialization and brand alignment. Their main focus is simplicity and that's what they look for in an employee. IKEA boasts an annual, "Learning & Development" program guide for each of their workers which includes over 45 training opportunities from in-store training, national training and specialized workshops which are intended to help develop and encourage the career goals and leadership abilities of their staff. IKEA also offers significant tuition reimbursement for any courses that employees might take that relates to their career endeavors at IKEA.

SNCF is the largest train transport service in France. The frontline employees must have the qualities such as, dynamic, confident, independent and most importantly happy to serve the customers. SNCF is considering a strategic shift by moving from a transport company to a service company. This is the challenge set by Mireille Faugère, Deputy Managing Director of Voyageurs France Europe, a member of the Executive Committee of SNCF. In 2006, SNCF had the idea of a

"university of service" intended to welcome 30,000 people in contact with the clientele since then, this structure has given more than 3 million hours of training to its employees.

“The marketing competence of the SNCF is not questioned, however all its customer relationship is questionable. The reputation of the company and the brand is played with each contact. We must go from a brain culture to a culture of emotion” says the graduate of HEC who has made a career in the company. Moreover, to lead this structure, SNCF chose to be passionate about transformation. In their training, they emphasize on role plays in situations explains the director of the university. They have tried to create situations that are a bit out of sync between the trainer and the trained to create more customer-oriented posture changes.

All these brands have large number of employees with a focus on customer service. Therefore, it provides a strong justification to collect data from these brands to understand the customer perspective of frontline employee brand alignment. A cross sectional approach to data collection was used to collect data. Respondents were asked to rate the questions on a likert scale. Table 5.1 shows the descriptive statistics of the data collected from these brands in terms of number of respondents and their percentage in the study 1.

Table 5.1 Descriptive statistics of sectors and brands study 1

Sector	Brand	No. of Respondents	% Age
Retail	Décathlon	360	63.5
	IKEA	94	16.6
Transport	SNCF	113	19.9
	Total	567	100

5.1.2. Study 2

Study-2 is conducted to further improve the measurement and test the hypothesized relationships. Study-2 comprised of 432 respondents from various sectors, such as Restaurants, banking, Transport, Hotels and Retail, which increases the generalizability of research. Respondents were

asked to rate the questions on a likert scale. A convenient sampling method was used to collect data and online link was sent to the respondent to access the questionnaire. A critical incident technique (CIT) was used to collect data, as respondents were asked to recall a memorable interaction with a frontline employee and then rate the questionnaire. Prior researches in service literature show that critical incident technique can be used both in qualitative and quantitative studies (D. D. Gremler, 2004). A comprehensive explanation of critical incident technique utility in qualitative research can be found in qualitative research methodology in chapter-4.

The CIT was developed to “collect direct observations of human behavior in such a way as to facilitate their potential usefulness to solve practical problems” (Flanagan, 1954). Respondents were asked to recall a memorable experience with a service employee. Bitner et al., (1990, p. 74) defined these memorable experiences as “specific interactions between customer and service employees which very satisfying or dissatisfying”. By analyzing such incidents, these experiences can be categorized as highly positive or highly negative from a customer perspective (De Ruyter, Wetzels, & Van Birgelen, 1999).

In quantitative studies, critical incident technique can help to understand the nature and type of incidents linked to other variables. It can also help to provide and asses comprehensive understanding of relationships among different variables (Chell & Pittaway, 1998). *“Given the different ways critical incident technique generated data are used, it can be classified as three general types: (a) studies in which data generated from the CIT method are not directly analyzed but rather are combined with another method (e.g., a survey or an experiment), (b) studies analyzing the CIT data primarily in an interpretive fashion, and (c) CIT studies employing content analytic methods (D. D. Gremler, 2004, p. 70).”*

Critical incident technique is used to collect data that can be employed with other empirical methods (D. D. Gremler, 2004). For example, Marshall, (1996) and Miller, Craighead, & Karwan, (2000) used this technique to develop survey instrument. Other authors (e.g. Folkes, 1984; Hausknecht, 1988; Singh & Wilkes, 1996) used this technique to create a frame of reference for the respondents. R. Harris, Harris, & Baron, (2003) used it to develop a dramatic script and Swanson & Kelley, (2001) utilized critical incident technique for the creation of realistic scenarios for their experimental studies. In these studies, respondents were probed to think of a specific incident/event and to tell the story by writing down the specifics of that event. These studies also conducted the analysis of further quantitative data (D. D. Gremler, 2004).

Several researchers have used CIT as quantitative data collection techniques. For example, D. Gremler & Bitner, (1992) conducted a study to investigate the robustness of satisfactory/dissatisfactory service encounters across various contexts and to extend the generalizability of their prior study of 1990 through critical incident technique. De Ruyter, Wetzels, & Van Birgelen, (1999) conducted an empirical study by collecting data through critical incident technique from six different service sectors (i.e. Retail, Restaurants, Transportation, Government Agencies, Health Care and banking). Sirianni et al., (2013) also collected data for the empirical analysis through critical incident technique which involved variety of service sectors, such as Financial services (investment, insurance and banking), Health Care, Telecommunication Services, Transportation, Hotels, Restaurants, Salons and Retail.

In his meta-analysis of studies using critical incident technique in service research, Gremler, (2004) mentioned variety of contexts where critical incident technique was used as primary data collection method. Examples of such contexts include Restaurants, Airlines, hotels, Amusement Parks, retailing, education banking and transportation. He further mentioned that 13

% of the studies included in meta-analysis reported using critical incident method between two to four service sectors and 31 % of the studies used this technique to collect data from five or more sectors. 83 % of these studies were conducted on business to consumer settings. Overall, critical incident technique is used in wide range of service contexts which suggests the strong applicability of this technique to study service research issues (D. D. Gremler, 2004). Table 5.2 shows the descriptive statistics of the data collected from these brands in terms of number of respondents and their percentage in the study 1.

Table 5.2 Descriptive statistics of sectors and brands (Study 2)

Sector	No. of Respondents	% Age
Retail	87	20.1
Restaurant	100	23.1
Banking	84	19.4
Hotel	65	15
Transport	37	8.6
Telecom	26	6
Others	33	7.6
Total	432	100

5.2. Data Screening

Data must undergo a rigorous cleaning and purification process before the statistical analysis.

The quality of data ensures the authenticity of results derived from the data. Therefore, we focused on the purification of the data by purifying it by identifying missing values, unengaged responses and outliers. We also checked the data for normal distribution and multicollinearity diagnostic to ensure its quality. The next section presents the detail of the techniques used for data screening.

5.2.1. Missing values

The most important step to ensure the quality of data is the identification of missing values. These missing values not only reduce the quality of data but also restrict researchers to perform certain analysis. Therefore, careful screening of missing values and its treatment is necessary for further data analysis. Cross sectional data is collected from customers through survey questionnaires, thus there is a great risk of missing values. Therefore, detection of missing values is essential to ensure the quality of data for further analysis (J. Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010; J. F. Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 1998).

There are multiple methods to deal with the issue of missing data. Researchers have addressed this problem through imputation of missing values such as, “*last observation carried forward*” (Molnar, Hutton, & Fergusson, 2008) or mean substitution method which involves replacement of missing value with the mean of all other observations of the same variable, by which benefit of same sample mean can be gained (Graham, 2009). However, Hair et al., (2010) suggests to remove the missing value responses to ensure the further quality of results.

5.2.2. Outliers

There can be many type of outliers in a data set such as, unengaged responses, univariate outliers and multivariate outliers. If a respondent fills a survey questionnaires with same figures i.e. 3,3,3,3,3 or 7,7,7,7,7,7, this respondent is considered as unengaged (Gaskin, 2012). Researcher must focus on these type of responses and eliminate them to ensure the quality of results. Therefore, we ensured by carefully examining the data set to detect these responses. Hence, there were no such responses found in our data.

After the treatment of missing values and detection of unengaged responses, further identification of extreme responses was done through box plot in SPSS 20. These type of outliers are called univariate outliers. These extreme responses can create distortion in results (Tabachnick

& Fidell, 2001). These univariate outliers can be a result of data entry and coding errors. These responses with univariate outliers can be deleted in a large data set but it is not possible if the data set is small. (Hair et al., 1998).

5.2.3. Normality of data

It is important to check if the data is in normal distribution or not. There are many ways to determine the normality of the data such as, statistical method of skewness & kurtosis or histograms, which is a graphical representation of data normality. Higher level of skewness and kurtosis can influence the regression results. Hence, data must fall under the acceptable range of skewness and kurtosis (George & Mallery, 2010). There is a debate on the acceptable range of skewness and kurtosis.

To further ensure the normal distribution of data, a visual representation through histogram is generated in SPSS. It is a visual confirmation of normal distribution of data. This confirmation is done by inspecting the graphs to seek a normal curve in the distribution of data. This normal curve is an indication that data is in acceptable shape for further analysis.

5.2.4. Assumption of multicollinearity

The assumption of multicollinearity should be satisfied before the regression analysis. This assumption is violated when independent variables have high correlation with each other, which means that these independent variables are overlapping and part of same construct (J. F. Hair et al., 1998). If the independent variables show correlation greater than 0.80, then there is a potential issue of multicollinearity (Kline & Santor, 1999). However, variance inflation factor (VIF) is suggested as more sophisticated test of multicollinearity (O'brien, 2007). Table 5.3 shows the threshold of VIF and its description.

Table 5.3 Threshold for variance inflation factor

No.	Threshold level	Description
1.	VIF < 3	No collinearity issue
2.	VIF > 3	Potential Issue
3.	VIF > 5	Very likely Issue
4.	VIF > 10	Definitely Issue

5.3. Measurement development

This section explains how measurement scale was developed and what criteria were followed to validate the measurement scale and check its robustness. These criteria include cronbach's alpha coefficient for reliability, discriminant and convergent validity. This section also explains fits for exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis. Furthermore, it contains the initial scale which was developed to measure frontline employee brand alignment.

5.3.1. *Direct and indirect measurement of frontline employee brand alignment*

This research developed a direct and indirect measurement scale for frontline employee brand alignment. Two empirical studies are conducting for the purpose of developing direct measurement.

5.3.1.1. *Direct measurement of frontline employee brand alignment*

Many measurements of alignment can be found in literature. However, these measurements contain one or two items. In total, we developed 27 items for the alignment measurement based on the previous literature in order to incorporate all the potential terms referred as fit, appropriateness, similarity etc. Appendix A-3 presents all 27 items. These items were further presented to senior marketing professors for validation. Based on their review, nine items were selected for quantitative study 1. Items used in quantitative study 1 are presented in table 5.4. After the analysis, it yielded seven items on the basis of two dimensions of alignment (expectancy and relevancy).

However, there were only two items remaining for the expectancy dimensions. Thus, a subsequent quantitative study was conducted to enhance the measurement scale items.

Table 5.4 Measurement items for frontline employee brand alignment (study-1)

S #	Frontline employee brand alignment	Strongly Disagree ← - - - → Strongly Agree						
1	Knowing XX, you were expecting that FLE were as they were.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2	Going at XX, you were expecting to interact with the FLE that served you.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3	Knowing XX and its specificities, you think FLE is appropriate.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4	FLE of XX goes well with XX stores and its specificities.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5	FLE of XX is well adapted to XX stores.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6	FLE of XX convey what characterize XX.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7	FLE of XX corresponds to XX and its specificities.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	FLE of XX is typical of XX.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9	Knowing XX and its specificities, you were expecting to interact with the FLE that served you.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Study 2 included fourteen items for frontline employee brand alignment. The items used for expectancy dimension in study 2 are presented in table 5.5. The items presented in table 5.6 are used for relevancy.

Table 5.5 Measurement items for expectancy (study-2)

S #	Expectancy	Strongly Disagree ← - - - → Strongly Agree						
1	Knowing XX and its specificities, you were expecting to interact with the FLE that served you.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2	Knowing XX, you were expecting that FLE were as they were.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3	Going at XX, you were expecting to interact with the FLE that served you.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4	I am not surprised that this brand has this FLE.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5	One would expect this brand to have this FLE.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6	It was predictable that this brand would have this FLE.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7	I could have predicted the association between this brand and this FLE.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Table 5.6 Measurement items for relevancy (study-2)

S #	Relevancy	Strongly Disagree ← - - - → Strongly Agree						
1	1. Knowing XX and its specificities, you think FLE is appropriate.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2	2. FLE of XX goes well with XX stores and its specificities.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3	3. FLE of XX is well adapted to XX stores.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4	4. FLE of XX convey what characterize XX.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5	5. FLE of XX corresponds to XX and its specificities.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6	6. FLE of XX is typical of XX.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7	7. The employee fit with this company's brand image.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

5.3.1.2. Indirect measurement of frontline employee brand alignment

For indirect method, Aaker, (1997) brand personality dimensions (1. Sincere, 2. Excitement, 3. Competent, 4. Sophisticated and 5. Rugged) are taken as reference point for alignment. Respondent rated the employee on brand personality scale then respondent rated the brand personality on the same scale. To calculate Frontline employee brand personality Alignment, the absolute difference scores between each customer's perceptions of employee personality and their perception of the corresponding brand personality score. Authors (e.g. Johar & Sirgy, 1991; Kressmann et al., 2006; S. Gammoh, L. Mallin, & Bolman Pullins, 2014; Sirgy, 1982) have used similar method to measure alignment indirectly. Table 5.7 presents the scale for indirect measurement.

Table 5.7 Scale for indirect measurement of frontline employee brand alignment (study-2)

I would describe this brand personality as							I would describe fle personality as						
<i>Sincere (Brand)</i>							<i>Sincere (Employee)</i>						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>Exciting (Brand)</i>							<i>Exciting (Employee)</i>						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>Competent (Brand)</i>							<i>Competent (Employee)</i>						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>Sophisticated (Brand)</i>							<i>Sophisticated (Employee)</i>						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>Rugged/Casual (Brand)</i>							<i>Rugged/Casual (Employee)</i>						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

5.3.2. Other measurements

5.3.2.1. Interaction quality

Interaction quality was measured through four sub dimensions, 1) Attitude, 2) Behavior, 3) Expertise and 4) Appearance. Measures developed by Brady & Cronin Jr, (2001) were used to assess attitude, behavior and expertise. Measurement Items are presented in the table below.

Table 5.8 Measurement items for attitude, behavior & expertise

S #	Interaction quality	Strongly Disagree ← - - - → Strongly Agree						
Frontline employee attitude								
1	You can count on the employees at this brand for being friendly.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2	The attitude of this brand's employees demonstrates their willingness to help me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3	The attitude of this brand's employees shows me that they understand my needs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Frontline employee behavior								
1	I can count on this brand's employees for taking actions to address my needs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2	This brand's employees respond quickly to my needs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3	The behavior of this brand's employees indicates to me that they understand my needs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Frontline employee expertise								
1	You can count on this brand's employees for knowing their jobs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2	This brand’s employees are able to answer my questions quickly.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3	The employees of this brand understand that I rely on their knowledge to meet my needs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

We used Keh, Ren, Hill, & Li, (2013) scale to measure frontline employee appearance. We also included two additional items. Items for appearance are presented in the following table. Respondents rated the items on seven point likert scale of 1-*strongly disagree* to 7-*strongly agree*.

Table 5.9 Measurement items for frontline employee appearance

S #	Frontline employee appearance	Strongly Disagree ← - - - → Strongly Agree						
1	The employee I met is very good looking.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2	The employee I met has an attractive appearance.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3	The employee I met would generally be thought of as beautiful/handsome.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4	The employee I met was wearing proper uniform/dress.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5	The employee I met was wearing other brand related things. (i.e. Cap, Bracelet, Badge)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

5.3.2.2. *Brand evaluation*

Brand evaluation includes the measurement items related to brand liking, quality, trust, purchase intention and desirability (D. A. Aaker, 1991; Dawar & Pillutla, 2000). Sirianni et al., (2013) developed a scale for overall brand evaluation by aggregating these dimensions which is used in this study. Respondents rated the items on seven point differential scale to rate the brand in terms of measures mentioned below. Table 5.10 presents the items used to measure brand evaluation.

Table 5.10 Measurement items for brand evaluation

S #	Brand evaluation	Scale						
		Dislike ← - - - → Like						
1	Overall, how do you feel about the brand?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
		Not at all trustworthy ← - → Very trustworthy						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
		Very low quality ← - → Very high quality						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
		Not at all desirable ← - → Very desirable						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2	How likely are you to shop with the brand?	Not at all likely ← - → Very likely						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Respondents rated the items on seven point differential scale to rate brand in terms of above mentioned measures.

5.3.2.3. *Customer-based brand equity*

Netemeyer et al., (2004) developed a comprehensive scale of customer-based brand equity based on the four dimensions (quality versus competitors, willingness to pay a premium for the brand, brand uniqueness, and value for the cost). These four dimensions were aggregated by Sirianni et al., (2013) for the development of customer-based brand equity index. We used this index to measure customer-based brand equity. Table 5.11 presents the measurement items for customer-based brand equity.

Table 5.11 Measurement items for customer-based brand equity

S #	Customer-based brand equity	Strongly Disagree ← - - - → Strongly Agree						
1	The brand is the best brand in its product class.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2	The brand really stands out from other brands.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3	I am willing to pay more for the brand than other comparable brands.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4	Compared with other brands, the brand is a good value for the money.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5	The brand is the best brand in its product class.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

5.3.2.4. *Frontline employee authentic behavior*

We measured frontline employee's authenticity of behavior through the measurement scale proposed by Grandey et al., (2005). Respondents rated the items on seven point likert scale of 1-*strongly disagree* to 7-*strongly agree*. Items used to measure frontline employee authentic behavior are presented in table 5.12.

Table 5.12 Measurement items for frontline employee authentic behavior

S #	Frontline employee authentic behavior	Strongly Disagree ← - - - → Strongly Agree						
1	The employee was faking how she or he felt in this interaction.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2	The employee was pretending/putting on an act in this interaction.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

5.3.2.5. *Brand familiarity*

We used Kent & Allen, (1994) scale to measure brand familiarity. It includes items related to familiarity, knowledge and experience of brand. Respondents rated the items on seven point differential scale to rate these facets of familiarity. Table 5.13 presents the measurement items for brand familiarity.

Table 5.13 Measurement items for brand familiarity

S #	Brand familiarly	Scale						
1	Please rate the following on the basis of your familiarity, experience and knowledge about the brand.	Unfamiliar ← - - - → Familiar						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
		Inexperienced ← - → Experienced						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
		Not knowledgeable ← - → Knowledgeable						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7

5.3.2.6. *Frontline employee-brand personality delta*

Respondents were asked to rate the personality of frontline employee and personality of brand on the basis of Aaker, (1997) brand personality dimensions (1. Sincere, 2. Excitement, 3. Competent, 4. Sophisticated and 5. Rugged). Difference was calculated between consumer's perception of frontline employee brand personality alignment scores and consumer's perception of brand personality on the basis of Aaker, (1997) brand personality dimensions. Groups were formed on the basis of negative (negative fle-brand personality delta) and positive (positive fle-brand personality delta) value of difference. Two types of groups were formed on the basis of difference. One Multigroup analysis was performed where two groups (Aligned Vs Misaligned) were formed where difference value of zero was included in aligned group. Further two groups (1. Not enough aligned, 2) Too much aligned) were compared with aligned group which comprised of respondents

where difference value was zero. Table 5.14 presents the measurement scale for frontline employee-brand personality delta.

Table 5.14 Measurement items for frontline employee-brand personality delta

I would describe this brand personality as							I would describe fle personality as						
<i>Sincere (Brand)</i>							<i>Sincere (Employee)</i>						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>Exciting (Brand)</i>							<i>Exciting (Employee)</i>						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>Competent (Brand)</i>							<i>Competent (Employee)</i>						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>Sophisticated (Brand)</i>							<i>Sophisticated (Employee)</i>						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>Rugged/Casual (Brand)</i>							<i>Rugged/Casual (Employee)</i>						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

5.3.2.7. Interaction duration

The duration of interaction was measured in terms of time spent by customer with frontline employee during an interaction. This interaction time was measured in terms of minutes. Respondents were asked to “Specify the duration of interaction in terms of (1)Less than 10 Minutes, (2) 10-20 Minutes, (3) 20-30 Minutes, (4) 30-40 Minutes, (5) 40-50 Minutes, (6) 50-60 Minutes, and (7) More Than 60 Minutes.

5.3.2.8. Control variables

Apart from main variables tested in hypothesized relationships, this research includes a number of control variables. Prior research included employee-customer similarity as a moderator for relationships in service profit chain, where employee-customer similarity was considered on the basis of age and gender similarity (Homburg et al., 2009). On this basis, we included under-researched variables as control variables in the structural model. In this research, we included age and gender of customer and age and gender of service employee as control variables. For path

analyses, both employee and customer gender was categorized “1” for male “2” for female, whereas age was coded by distributing in different age groups e.g. “1” for age interval 0-18 years, “2” for 18-25 years, “3” for 26-32 years, “4” for 33-40 years, “5” was coded for 41-50 years, “6” was coded for 50-60 years and “7” was coded for 60 years and above.

Appendix A-1 presents the complete questionnaire which includes all the measurement scales of variables included in the investigated model such as, frontline employee brand alignment, interaction quality, brand evaluation, customer based brand equity, brand familiarity, interaction duration and employee authentic behavior.

5.3.3. Reliability and validity

Generally, it is assumed that the research process encompasses some flaws, it is difficult to conduct a perfect research project, yet, without research and theoretical advancements in social sciences would not happen. Resultantly, the social science scholars and practitioners required to be confident that theoretical findings are arrived at through both sound conceptual arguments and the applications of rigorous and relevant methodological techniques. Within the social science research, SEM technique has gained considerable attention of both researchers and practitioners (Baumgartner & Homburg, 1996; Steenkamp & Van Trijp, 1991). The assessment of scale is often linked with the EFA or CFA, in addition to that testing to establish the validity of measures such as convergent and discriminant validity.

Researchers are also concerned about the reliability and validity of the construct. The reliability of a construct can be measured through Cronbach’s alpha coefficient where the value of $>.70$ is considered as excellent. Convergent and discriminant validity is measured to further ascertain the internal and external consistency of the construct. To verify the convergent validity among our study constructs, in our case, we confirmed that all variables convergent validity Rho,

VC is $>.50$, it is required to have threshold level which is greater than 0.50 and averaging out to greater than 0.70 for each factor.

For testing of discriminant validity explains that the extent to which factors are different. The rule is that variables should relate more strongly to their own factor than to another factor, however, Maximum Shared Squared Variance: MSV should be less than Average Variance Extracted: AVE (J. Hair et al., 2010), accordingly results revealed that the value of MSV are less than AVE of all our constructs in their respective sections. The measurement model also satisfies the Fornell and Larcker criterion, which states that smallest variance extracted should be greater than the highest shared variance (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 5.15 presents the reliability and validity measures and their threshold level.

Table 5.15 Reliability & Validity Criteria and threshold levels

Measures	Fit Indices	Threshold
	Cronbach's Alpha Cronbach, (1951)	$> .70$ good
Reliability	Composite Reliability (CR) Nunnally & Bernstein, (1994)	$>.90$ great; $> .80$ good; $> .70$ fair
Convergent Validity (Accuracy of instrument)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE) (Linn, 2000; Stewart-Brown et al., 2009)	$AVE > .50$
Discriminant validity	Maximum Shared Squared Variance (MSV) Fornell and Larcker criterion Fornell & Larcker, (1981)	$MSV < AVE$

5.3.4. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

EFA is a multistep and complex process. It is a widely used statistical technique in social sciences to develop and validate new instruments (Lovett, Zeiss, & Heinemann, 2002). EFA is used to explore new latent factors or to establish a new theory which best corresponds to the manifest variables (Henson, Templin, & Willse, 2009). EFA not only helps to reduce number of variables but also merge the variables which are highly correlated. An EFA is always conducted on a new

data set where number of variables are yet to be determined on the basis of their correlation. EFA has the ability to spot problematic variables because no prior assumption is made for the items and their corresponding variables (Gaskin, 2012). We conducted EFA to develop and further validate new measurement for frontline employee brand alignment. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was performed and it yielded the value of 0.850. The value of KMO is above the meritorious threshold which confirms that sample is adequate to run EFA. Bartlett's test of sphericity shows the significance level < 0.05 , which means that variables have an appropriate relationship to run an EFA.

5.3.5. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

In confirmatory factor analysis, the factors structure extracted in exploratory factor analysis is confirmed. It is a type of statistical technique which confirms the relationship between latent variables and indicators or observed measures. The main objective to perform CFA is to account the covariation among indicators (Brown & Moore, 2012). As compared to EFA, it is used to confirm an existing theory. CFA confirms that the hypothesized model fits with the data (Bandalos, 1996). CFA can be used for other purposes such as, to calculate measurement invariance (Brown & Moore, 2012). Raykov, (2001) recommends CFA as an important tool to estimate scale reliability. CFA has the ability to model the relationship among indicators which is not possible in EFA (Brown & Moore, 2012).

Sample size to perform structural equation modeling (SEM) remains a debatable issue among researchers. Authors (e.g. Anderson & Gerbing, 1988) suggest that 150 responses are adequate to perform SEM. However, Boomsma, (1982) suggested that a sample of 400 is necessary to perform SEM. However, Weston & Gore Jr, (2006) suggested that a sample size of 200 is enough for conducting analysis on SEM. We conducted CFA to confirm the measurement model.

However, after the specification of measurement model, the validation of model is necessary to confirm if model fits the data or not.

To confirm/validate the model, researchers has suggested many model fit indices. There is no consensus on the model fit indices (Ping Jr, 2004). However, there are few model fit indices which considered more important such as, CMIN/DF, Goodness of fit index (GFI), Adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). To find out the common method bias, common latent factor approach was used. This method was proposed by (Podsakoff et al., 2003). A common latent factor was added in the model to verify the common method bias. This method estimates that how much a single factor can explain the model. After Confirmatory factor analysis, all the variables are connected to a common variable and a constrained model is run to check the common method bias. Common latent factor is one of the sophisticated approach to detect the common method bias in the model (Gaskin, 2016). Table 5.16 presents the global model fit indices and their respective threshold level.

Table 5.16 Model fit Indices & threshold levels

Measures	Fit-Index	Cut-offs
Confirmatory Factor Analysis	χ^2/df	< 2 great; < .30 good
	GFI	>.95 great; > .90 good
	AGFI	>.95 great; > .90 good
	Comparative fit index (CFI)	>.95 great; > .90 good
	Tucker-Lewis Index(TLI)	>.95 great; > .90 good
	Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)	<.05 great; < .08 good
	Standardized root mean residual (SRMR)	<.05 great; < .08 good
	PCLOSE	>.05 great

Source: Hu & Bentler, (1999)

5.4. Test of hypothesis

5.4.1. *Structural equation modeling*

During recent years, structural equation modeling (SEM) has emerged as a popular data analysis technique. The primary factor in SEM adoption is its capability to address complex methodological issues. SEM has proven to be useful in both experimental and non-experimental settings because it combines several statistical techniques such as, confirmatory factor analysis, path analysis. This technique allows researchers to have results for both measurement model and structural model. SEM also allows researchers to determine that whether different groups are invariant in terms of measurement or structural parameters (Tomarken & Baker, 2003).

For example, researchers (e.g. Anthony, Lonigan, & Hecht, 1999; Brown, Chorpita, & Barlow, 1998; Cole, Martin, Powers, & Truglio, 1996) have used SEM to address measurement issues and construct validity. Finn, Sharkansky, Brandt, & Turcotte, (2000) and Trull, (2001) used SEM to test hypothesized casual relationships. Other authors (e.g. D. W. King, King, Gudanowski, & Vreven, 1995; Wills, Sandy, & Yaeger, 2002) utilized SEM to investigate that whether measurement or causal parameters are invariant across distinct groups. This study uses AMOS-22 to employ structural equation modeling technique to test measurement and structural model.

5.4.2. *Bootstrapping*

Bootstrapping has received a growing advocacy in literature as an assessment of indirect effects (Bollen & Stine, 1990; Lockwood & MacKinnon, 1998; MacKinnon, Lockwood, & Williams, 2004; Preacher & Hayes, 2004; Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007; Shrout & Bolger, 2002). Bootstrapping is a resampling strategy for hypothesis testing and estimation. A pseudo-population of the sample is conceptualized in bootstrapping to represent the broader population from which sample was derived. No further assumption about the sampling distribution is necessary while conducting inferential test using bootstrapping (Preacher et al., 2007). . For hypothesis testing, the

null hypothesis of no indirect effect is rejected at the level of significance if 0 lies outside the bootstrap confidence interval and these confidence intervals are represented through upper and lower bound values (MacKinnon et al., 2004; Preacher et al., 2007).

Bootstrapping method can also be used to test conditional indirect effects and no further assumption about the sampling distribution is necessary in moderated mediation as well. A conditional indirect effect is an interaction of estimated casual paths, therefore, bootstrapping can be applied without making further assumptions (Preacher et al., 2007). Hence, bootstrapping is considered as an alternative analytic technique to test mediation (Lockwood & MacKinnon, 1998; MacKinnon et al., 2004; Preacher & Hayes, 2004; Preacher et al., 2007; Shrout & Bolger, 2002). This study used 5000 bootstrap samples at 95% confidence interval.

5.4.3. Interaction term moderation

Moderation is a term used when impact of one variable on other variable varies as a function of a third variable. Interaction term moderation is statistically modeled as an interaction between two variables and this interaction is quantified as the product of independent and moderator (Preacher et al., 2007). This interaction term is included in regression equation. If the impact of interaction term on depending variable is significant then the relationship of independent and dependent variable is conditioned by the level of moderator (Crandall, Preacher, Bovaird, Card, & Little, 2012). Aiken, West, & Reno, (1991) describe procedure to provide a visual interpretation of moderating impact by taking estimated regression weights and plotting those implied regressions. This study used *stats tool packages* to plot the moderating impacts (Gaskin, 2012).

Moderation helps to understand that how and when a process functions in the presence of a moderator. Mediation and moderation can be combined while analyzing these relationships (Hayes, 2009). Recent analysis treatments focus on the estimation of interaction of pathway that defines indirect impact and moderator (Edwards & Lambert, 2007; Muller, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2005;

Preacher et al., 2007). Preacher et al., (2007) refer it to *conditional indirect effect* where these impacts are conditioned on the value of moderator. These moderators can be continuous or categorical (unlike Multigroup approach). These moderated mediation models can be tested by various approaches including bootstrap method for conditional indirect effects (Palomares, 2008).

5.4.4. Multigroup moderation

Moderation and mediation can be analytically combined (Muller et al., 2005). For example, an independent variable exerts its impact on dependent variable through a mediating variable. However, this relationship can be stronger for men than women, or there can be a linear increment as a function of age, educational qualification or any other factor. Such process can be modeled through multi-group structural equation modeling by dividing the sample into two or more than two groups for further analysis. These models are compared on the basis of equality constrained or relaxed paths across groups for direct or indirect effects. If a model has a worse model fit with equality constraints on the paths across groups and the paths vary between groups, this ascertains that direct or indirect effects are different across groups. Hence, group is considered as a moderator for one or more paths (Preacher et al., 2007).

The assumption of multi-group moderation is that groups should be invariant and level of measurement invariance is necessary to be calculated for further statistical analysis. There are many forms of measurement invariance such as, Configural, metric. These invariance can be achieved in full or at partial level (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998). Based on Thurstone's principle, Configural invariance is based on the assumption that structure of a measurement instrument is based on pattern of zero and non-zero (salient and non-salient) loadings (Horn, McArdle, & Mason, 1983). If the model with salient factor loadings fits the data and construct shows discriminant validity across groups, this suggests that Configural invariance is achieved (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998).

Metric invariance is a stronger test for invariance because it implies the concept of scale intervals and equal metrics across groups. On other hand, Configural invariance has a limitation that it does not consider if respondents from different groups respond to the items in the similar way and obtained ratings may not be comparable across groups (Rock, Werts, & Flaughner, 1978; Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998). If metric invariance is achieved, score on items can be meaningful across groups and metric invariance can be tested by constraining the loadings to be the same across groups (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998).

The debate on level of invariance suggest that if the assumption of full invariance is not satisfied then researchers should ascertain at least partial invariance for further statistical analysis (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998). A subset of factors under consideration can still be found invariant across groups, where different factor structure emerge from an analysis. This condition is referred as partial Configural invariance. Hence, Lastovicka, (1982) relaxed the assumption of full Configural invariance. Researchers (e.g. B. M. Byrne, Shavelson, & Muthén, 1989; Reise, Widaman, & Pugh, 1993) proposed that instead of compromising on complete lack of measurement invariance and full measurement invariance, partial measurement invariance at least be achieved. B. M. Byrne et al., (1989) argued that full metric invariance is not necessary for further statistical analysis such as comparison of means across groups can be meaningful. However, one item other than the fixed on unity for each latent construct should be metrically invariant.

Form of invariance to be achieved is linked with the goal of study (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998). There are examples where researchers (e.g. Childers & Rao, 1992; Dahlstrom & Nygaard, 1995; Dawar & Parker, 1994; Verhage, Yavas, & Green, 1990) did not assess metric invariance before group comparisons. However, many researchers (e.g. Durvasula, Lyonski, &

Andrews, 1993; Kumar, Scheer, & Steenkamp, 1995) assessed metric invariance before conducting group comparisons. This study achieved both Configural and metric invariance before conducting further statistical analysis.

Chi-square difference test is applied to check the group differences. This test is widely used and accepted to check differences across groups (Gaskin, 2012). The difference of chi-square values and degrees of freedom values for both constrained and unconstrained models is calculated. Groups are considered different if the chi-square difference is significant. Hence, unconstrained model with free parameters is considered to fit the data well as compared to the constrained model where parameters are fixed (Bollen, 1998; Kline & Santor, 1999; Schermelleh-Engel, Moosbrugger, & Müller, 2003). This study used AMOS built in multi-group function to calculate chi-square difference and to determine its significance level (Gaskin, 2012).

Conclusion

Chapter 5 presented the overall methodology for study 1 and study 2. These two quantitative studies are conducted to develop the measurement scale and test the hypothesized relationships. This methodology includes the data screening and purification process. It also presents the relevant literature on quantitative techniques i.e. exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis. It also includes their threshold values for a good model fit. Furthermore, it provides information on all the measurement scales used in the quantitative studies. The next chapter provides the results for measurement scale development and predictive validity of frontline employee brand alignment.

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CHAPTER 6

**STUDY 1 RESULTS: TOWARDS DEVELOPING AN
INDIRECT MEASUREMENT OF FLE BRAND
ALIGNMENT**

CHAPTER 6

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Chapter 6

Study 1 Results: towards developing a direct measurement of FLE brand alignment

This chapter discusses the data analysis and results of quantitative study 1. This includes the results of descriptive statistics, data screening, exploratory factor analysis (EFA), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and predictive validity of the scale through structural equation modeling (SEM). This main objective of this study is to develop a direct measurement of frontline employee brand alignment. It also presents the predictive validity of the developed measurement scale by testing the relationship between frontline employee brand alignment and outcome variables such as, brand evaluation and customer-based brand equity. Two dimensions of frontline employee brand alignment were extracted and this measurement showed high predictive validity.

6.1. Data screening (Quantitative study 1)

The process of data screening focuses on the quality of data and scrutiny of errors. This screening helps researcher to fix the problems in the data before moving to the data analysis phase. This screening may include missing value detection and treatment, identification of outliers and unengaged responses. This screening process helps researcher to take precautionary measures and fulfill the assumptions of further data analysis.

6.1.1. Missing values

In examining the missing values, we performed an analysis by using SPSS-22 and tested the frequency of each variable of each item and it was found that 30 respondents were missing for some of the variable measurement section and these missing values are reported in appendix B-1 under their unique IDs which were allotted during data entry process. Since, we had a sufficient data set, so we decided to remove these values from dataset rather replacing these values by

imputation. After omitting of 30 cases, a total 567 usable cases were retained for further analysis to identify the outliers and normality of data. Thus, detection of missing values is essential to ensure the quality of data for further analysis (J. Hair et al., 2010; J. F. Hair et al., 1998). Therefore, we deleted the missing value responses from our data set.

6.1.2. Outliers

Although, many univariate outliers appear in graphical representation through box plot (see appendix B-2), it is not a big problem in likert scale responses (Gaskin, 2016). We also checked the multivariate outliers by calculating Mahalanobis distance (see appendix B-3).

6.1.3. Normality of data

This research followed the widely used criteria of acceptable indices of limits (+2 / -2) (Fidel, 2000; George & Mallery, 2010; Gravetter & Wallnau, 2016; Trochim & Donnelly, 2001). Appendix B-4 shows the result of skewness and kurtosis for each variable. To further ensure the normal distribution of data, a visual representation through histogram is generated in SPSS. It is a visual confirmation of normal distribution of data. This confirmation is done by inspecting the graphs to seek a normal curve in the distribution of data. This normal curve is an indication that data is in acceptable shape for further analysis. Appendix B-5 shows the histograms for the concerned variables.

6.1.4. Assumption of multicollinearity

Data collected for study 1 satisfies the both conditions of multicollinearity. Our data shows $VIF < 3$. However, $VIF < 10$ is also acceptable threshold (J. F. Hair et al., 1998). Appendix B-6 presents the result of multicollinearity diagnosis.

6.2. Two dimensional measurement of frontline employee brand alignment

6.2.1. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

We conducted EFA to develop and further validate new measurement for frontline employee brand alignment. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was performed and it yielded the value of 0.811. The value of KMO is above the meritorious threshold which confirms that sample is adequate to run EFA. Bartlett's test of sphericity shows the significance level < 0.05 , which means that variables have an appropriate relationship to run an EFA. Table 6.1 presents the result of KMO test of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity.

Table 6.1 KMO & Bartlett's test result (study 1)

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.811
	Approx. Chi-Square	1640.424
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	df	15
	Sig.	.000
KMO Threshold: Marvelous: .90s, Meritorious: .80s, Middling: .70s, Mediocre: .60s, Miserable: .50s, Unacceptable: <.50		

Alignment can be measured through two dimensions 1) expectancy and 2) Relevancy. To increase its predictability for the frontline employee brand alignment, we developed the measurement scale on the basis of both dimensions. A total number of nine items were developed for the direct measurement of frontline employee brand alignment. Two dimensions of frontline employee brand alignment were extracted during EFA and maximum likelihood method was used for factor extraction. It is best to use maximum likelihood extraction method if further analysis is to be performed through AMOS because it uses the same extraction method (Gaskin, 2016). Two items *Align7* and *Align9* were excluded on the basis of their respective loadings of 0.536 and 0.479. Third item, *Align2* was expected to load in the expectancy dimension. However, it loaded in relevancy dimension with the factor loading of 0.644. Therefore, it was excluded from further

analysis. The cumulative percent of variance explained by two factors is 76.69% and percent of variance explained by relevancy is 57.968% and expectancy explained 18.731% variance. These two factors show the correlation of 0.514 with each other. The factors were extracted on the basis of Eigen values above 1 and two factor model was extracted on the Eigen value of 1.044. These two factors were then analyzed for further validity and reliability in confirmatory factor analysis in a measurement model. The further section explains the result of measurement model. Table 6.2 presents the result of exploratory factor analysis.

Table 6.2 EFA factor loadings (study 1)

Dimension	Codes	Direct Measurement Items	Factor Loading	% of Variance
Expectancy	Align1	<i>Knowing XX and its specificities, you were expecting to interact with the FLE that served you.</i>	.792	18.731%
	Align3	<i>Going at XX, you were expecting to interact with the FLE that served you.</i>	.930	
Relevancy	Align4	<i>Knowing XX and its specificities, you think FLE is appropriate.</i>	.818	57.968%
	Align5	<i>FLE of XX goes well with XX stores and its specificities.</i>	.821	
	Align6	<i>FLE of XX is well adapted to XX stores.</i>	.746	
	Align8	<i>FLE of XX corresponds to XX and its specificities.</i>	.769	
	Align7	<i>FLE of XX convey what characterize XX.</i>	(.536)	
	Align9	<i>FLE of XX is typical of XX.</i>	(.479)	
	Align2	<i>Knowing XX, you were expecting that FLE were as they were</i>	(.644)	

6.2.2. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

The measurement model yielded appropriate model fit indices. Cronbach's alpha for the both factors is greater than 0.70. Composite reliability (CR) is greater than 0.80 and Average variance extracted (AVE) is greater than 0.50. Whereas, Maximum shared variance (MSV) is less than Average variance extracted. Therefore, measurement model also satisfies the Fornell and Larcker criterion, which states that smallest variance extracted should be greater than the highest shared

variance (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Hence, a good model fit is achieved for further analysis of structural model. Table 6.3 presents the factor loading, reliability and validity parameters.

Table 6.3 Reliability, validity & factor loadings of fle brand alignment (study 1)

Variable		Factor Loadings		Alpha/ No. of items	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR (H)	Correlation/ $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$	
		Code	Loading						Exp	Rel
	Expectancy	Align1	.886	.846 (2)	.847	.735	.293	.853	.857	
		Align3	.827							
FLE Brand Alignment	Relevancy	Align4	.813	.868 (4)	.868	.623	.293	.870	.541***	.789
		Align5	.817							
		Align6	.750							
		Align8	.774							

The measurement model was validated which included three main variables 1) second order analysis of frontline employee brand alignment (Expectancy & Relevancy), 2) brand evaluation and 3) customer loyalty. Table 6.4 presents model fit indices for the measurement model. To further ascertain the robustness of scale, a common latent factor was added in the model to verify the common method bias. The Chi-square difference test has shown that the amount of shared variance across all variables is not significant from zero (Gaskin, 2016). Appendix D-2 presents the figure of common latent factor. Appendix D-1 presents the graphical representation of measurement model.

Table 6.4 Measurement model fit indices & threshold level (study 1)

Measures	Fit-Index	Cut-offs	Model Fit Indices
CFA (Study 1)	χ^2/df	< 2 great; < .30 good	2.937
	GFI	>.95 great; > .90 good	0.960
	AGFI	>.95 great; > .90 good	0.934
	Comparative fit index (CFI)	>.95 great; > .90 good	0.970
	Tucker-Lewis Index(TLI)	>.95 great; > .90 good	0.959
	Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)	<.05 great; < .08 good	0.058
	Standardized root mean residual (SRMR)	<.05 great; < .08 good	0.0380
	PCLOSE	>.05 great	0.100

Source: Hu & Bentler, (1999)

6.3. Predictive validity model with two dimensions of FLE brand alignment

Based on the results of confirmatory factor analysis, a structural model is estimated to determine the predictive validity of the direct measurement of the frontline employee brand alignment. The fit indices for the structural model were as followed.

Table 6.5 Predictive validity model fit indices & threshold level (study 1)

Measures	Fit-Index	Cut-offs	Model Fit Indices
Predictive validity model (Study 1)	χ^2/df	< 2 great; < .30 good	3.312
	GFI	>.95 great; > .90 good	0.947
	AGFI	>.95 great; > .90 good	0.920
	Comparative fit index (CFI)	>.95 great; > .90 good	0.959
	Tucker-Lewis Index(TLI)	>.95 great; > .90 good	0.947
	Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)	<.05 great; < .08 good	0.064
	Standardized root mean residual (SRMR)	<.05 great; < .08 good	0.0404
	PCLOSE	>.05 great	0.010

Source: Hu & Bentler, (1999)

The direct measurement of frontline employee brand alignment showed higher predictive validity. Based on the results of the structural model, the value of R^2 for brand evaluation is 0.38 and for

customer loyalty is 0.25. Frontline employee brand alignment has a significant positive impact on brand evaluation ($\beta = .62, p < .001$) and it also has significant positive impact on customer loyalty ($\beta = .50, p < .001$). Hence, this result shows that frontline employee brand alignment is an important concept and a comprehensive measurement is required to understand its impact on outcome variables. However, only two items for expectancy dimension has been extracted. Therefore, an improvement is required in the measurement scale to better understand its impact on outcome variables such as brand evaluation, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and customer-based brand equity.

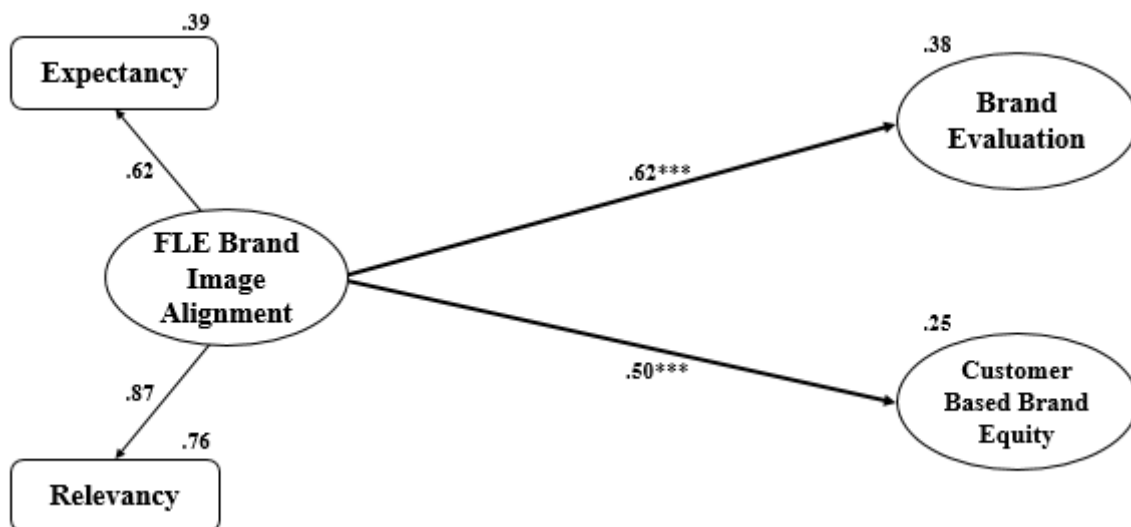


Figure 6.1 Predictive validity model (Study 1)

Conclusion of chapter 6

This study was conducted to develop the measurement scale for frontline employee brand alignment. It describes the data screening process, results from exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis for quantitative study 1. Based on the results of quantitative study 1, two dimensions of frontline employee brand alignment are yielded with two items for expectancy and five items for relevancy. The measurement scale shows good predictive validity. However, further enhancement of measurement scale is required and the subsequent quantitative study 2 is conducted for the said purpose. Thus, next chapter provides the results for exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis. The next chapter also includes the results on hypothesized relationships.

CHAPTER 7

**STUDY 2 RESULTS: MODELING BRAND
ALIGNMENT, ITS ANTECEDENTS,
CONSEQUENCES AND BOUNDARY
CONDITIONS OF ITS EFFECT**

CHAPTER 7

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Chapter 7

Study 2 results: modeling brand alignment, its Antecedents, consequences and boundary conditions of its effect

Chapter 7 discusses the data analysis and results of quantitative study 2. This chapter presents the results of empirical study which includes the results of descriptive statistics, data screening, exploratory factor analysis (EFA), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and model testing through structural equation modeling (SEM) which further includes interaction term and Multigroup moderation results. This main objective of this study was to develop and test direct and indirect measurement of frontline employee brand alignment and its boundary conditions. It also presents the predictive validity of the developed measurement scale and the relationship between frontline employee brand alignment and outcome variables such as, brand evaluation and customer-based brand equity by comparing the results of direct and indirect measurements. Two dimensions of frontline employee brand alignment were extracted for direct measurement and this measurement showed high predictive validity than indirect measurement. Statistical Softwares, SPSS 20 and AMOS version 22 were used for data analysis.

7.1. Data screening (Quantitative Study 2)

Study 2 also followed the rigorous approach towards data screening. Same precautionary measures were taken to clean the data for further statistical analysis. This screening may include missing value detection and treatment, identification of outliers and unengaged responses. This screening process helps researcher to take precautionary measures and fulfill the assumptions of further data analysis.

7.1.1. Missing values

As mentioned in previous chapter, we used SPSS 22 to check the missing values. Therefore, we deleted the missing value responses from our data set. Missing values. As per the frequency of missing values, 20 cases were found with missing values. Appendix C-1 presents the missing value cases along with their cases IDs. 432 responses were kept after removing the missing value cases.

7.1.2. Outliers

Appendix C-2 presents univariate outliers. Box plots were generated through SPSS 22 to identify the univariate outliers. it is not a big problem in likert scale responses (Gaskin, 2016). Multivariate outliers were identified by calculating Mahalanobis distance (see appendix C-3). Since the model yielded a good fit, therefore we kept those responses for further analysis.

7.1.3. Normality of data

This research followed the similar criteria used in study 1 to check the normality of data in study 2. Where acceptable indices of limits were (+2 / -2) (Fidel, 2000; George & Mallery, 2010; Gravetter & Wallnau, 2016; Trochim & Donnelly, 2001). Appendix C-4 shows the result of skewness and kurtosis for each variable. To further ensure the normal distribution of data, a visual representation through histogram is generated in SPSS. Appendix C-5 shows the histograms for the concerned variables.

7.1.4. Assumption of multicollinearity

Data collected for study 2 shows $VIF < 3$. Thus, it satisfies the conditions of multicollinearity. Appendix C-6 presents the result of multicollinearity diagnosis. This result shows that data is fit for further statistical analysis. Results from exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis are presented in next section.

7.2. FLE brand alignment measurement

Frontline employee brand alignment can be measured through direct and indirect way. We developed and validated both direct and indirect measurements of frontline employee brand alignment. The next section presents the results of exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis and predictive validity comparison of both direct and indirect measurements.

7.2.1. Direct measurement

Alignment can be measured in two ways, direct or indirect. Direct approach to alignment measurement is used much more frequently. Direct measurement refers to “*explicitly asking respondents to rate a measurement scale whether the combination of two entities goes well together. However, indirect measurement refers to the potential sources of congruence (Maille & Fleck, 2011, p. 88)*”. (Maille & Fleck, 2011). Direct method measures a broader perception of alignment. For direct method, many ad hoc measures are available in literature and these are more often one dimensional focused on relevancy of the entities.

7.2.1.1. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

Exploratory factor analysis was conducted to validate the measurement scale of frontline employee brand alignment. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was performed and it yielded the value of 0.933. The value of KMO is above the meritorious threshold which confirms that sample is adequate to run EFA. Bartlett's test of sphericity shows the significance level < 0.05 , which means that variables have an appropriate relationship to run an EFA. Table 7.1 presents the result of KMO test of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity.

Table 7.1 KMO & Bartlett's test result (study 2)

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.924
	Approx. Chi-Square	2998.656
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	df	66
	Sig.	.000
KMO Threshold: Marvelous: .90s, Meritorious: .80s, Middling: .70s, Mediocre: .60s, Miserable: .50s, Unacceptable: <.50		

A total number of nine items were developed for the direct measurement of frontline employee brand alignment. Two dimensions of frontline employee brand alignment were extracted during EFA and maximum likelihood method was used for factor extraction.

Table 7.2 EFA factor loadings (study 2)

Dimension	Codes	Direct Measurement Items	Factor Loading	% of Variance
Expectancy	Expty1	<i>Knowing the brand and its image, you were expecting to interact with the service employee that served you.</i>	.802	14.397%
	Expty2	<i>Knowing the brand and its image, you were expecting that service employee were as they were.</i>	.678	
	Expty3	<i>Going at the brand store, you were expecting to interact with the service employee that served you.</i>	.798	
	Expty4	<i>I am not surprised that this brand has this service employee.</i>	.827	
	Expty5	<i>One would expect this brand to have this service employee.</i>	.822	
	Expty6	<i>It was predictable that this brand would have this service employee.</i>	.707	
	Expty7	<i>I do not find it surprising that this brand has this service employee.</i>	.787	
Relevancy	Relvy1	<i>Knowing the brand and its image, you think service employee is appropriate.</i>	(.613)	51.505%
	Relvy2	<i>Service employee of the brand goes well with the brand's image.</i>	.887	
	Relvy3	<i>Service employee of the brand is well adapted to the stores of the brand.</i>	.779	
	Relvy4	<i>Service employee of the brand conveys what characterize the brand.</i>	.858	
	Relvy5	<i>Service employee of the brand corresponds to the brand and its image.</i>	.836	
	Relvy6	<i>Service employee of the brand is typical to the brand.</i>	.792	
	Relvy7	<i>The service employee fit with the company's brand image.</i>	.829	
				Total: 65.903%

Relvy1 is excluded on the basis of low factor loading of 0.613. The cumulative percent of variance explained by two factors is 65.903% and percent of variance explained by relevancy is 51.505% and expectancy explained 14.397% variance. These two factors show the correlation of 0.551 with each other. The factors were extracted on the basis of Eigen values above 1 and two factor model was extracted on the Eigen value of 1.728. These factors were then analyzed for further validity and reliability in confirmatory factor analysis in a measurement model. Table 7.2 presents the results of exploratory factor analysis and further section explains the result of measurement model.

7.2.1.2. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

The measurement model for frontline employee brand alignment yielded appropriate model fit indices. Three items *expty3* (.629), *relvy3* (.684) and *expty1* (.696) are excluded on the basis of low factor loadings. Cronbach's alpha for the both factors is greater than 0.70. Composite reliability (CR) is greater than 0.80 and Average variance extracted (AVE) is greater than 0.50. Whereas, Maximum shared variance (MSV) is less than Average variance extracted. Therefore, measurement model also satisfies the Fornell and Larcker criterion, which states that smallest variance extracted should be greater than the highest shared variance (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Hence, a good model fit is achieved for further analysis of complete measurement model which includes all the variables.

Table 7.3 Reliability, validity & factor loadings of fle brand alignment

Variable	Factor Loadings		Alpha/ No. of items	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR (H)	Correlation/ $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$	
	Code	Loading						Exp	Rel
FLE Brand Alignment	Expectancy	Expty2	.842	.885 (5)	.878	.590	.447	.883	.768
		Expty4	.720						
		Expty5	.779						
		Expty6	.762						
		Expty7	.730						
	Relevancy	Align2	.821	.893 (5)	.894	.628	.447	.897	.792
		Align4	.771						
		Align5	.793						
		Align6	.742						
		Align8	.831						

The measurement model was validated which included second order analysis of frontline employee brand alignment (Expectancy & Relevancy). The model fit indices for the measurement model were as followed in table 7.4.

Table 7.4 CFA model fit indices & threshold levels of fle brand alignment

Measures	Fit-Index	Cut-offs	Model Fit Indices
CFA (FLE brand alignment)	χ^2/df	< 2 great; < .30 good	2.214
	GFI	>.95 great; > .90 good	0.967
	AGFI	>.95 great; > .90 good	0.945
	Comparative fit index (CFI)	>.95 great; > .90 good	0.984
	Tucker-Lewis Index(TLI)	>.95 great; > .90 good	0.978
	Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)	<.05 great; < .08 good	0.053
	Standardized root mean residual (SRMR)	<.05 great; < .08 good	0.0309
	PCLOSE	>.05 great	0.357

Source: Hu & Bentler, (1999)

The full measurement model yielded appropriate model fit indices. Cronbach's alpha for the both factors is greater than 0.70. Composite reliability (CR) is greater than 0.80 and Average variance extracted (AVE) is greater than 0.50. Whereas, Maximum shared variance (MSV) is less than Average variance extracted. The measurement model also satisfies the Fornell and Larcker criterion, which states that smallest variance extracted should be greater than the highest shared variance (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Hence, a good model fit was achieved for further analysis of structural model.

Table 7.5 Reliability, validity of measurement model

Sr #	Variable	Alpha/No. of items	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)
1	Brand Evaluation	.917 (5)	.918	.691	.435	.922
2	Customer-Based Brand Equity	.866 (3)	.867	.686	.402	.877
3	FLE Brand Alignment	Expectancy	.885 (5)	.590		
		Relevancy	.893 (5)	.628		
		2 nd Order	.801	.669	.435	.802
4	Interaction Quality	Appearance	.870 (3)	.691		
		Attitude	.898 (2)	.815		
		Behavior	.865 (2)	.780	.377	.976
		Expertise	.878 (3)	.707		
		2 nd Order	.907	.726		

Table 7.6 Discriminant validity among variables (Correlation/ \sqrt{AVE})

Sr #	Variable	FLE Brand Alignment	Brand Evaluation	Customer-Based Brand Equity	Interaction Quality
1	FLE Brand Alignment	0.818			
2	Brand Evaluation	0.660***	0.831		
3	Customer-Based Brand Equity	0.613***	0.634***	0.828	
4	Interaction Quality	0.614***	0.432***	0.361***	0.852

Discriminant validity is also an issue of importance while evaluating a scale. It can be assessed through square root of correlations among variables. A value of .85 or below shows that

discriminant validity exists among variables (Campbell, D. T., & Fiske, D. W., 1959). Thus, all the values meet the criteria of discriminant validity threshold.

The complete measurement model was validated which included four main variables 1) second order analysis of frontline employee brand alignment (Expectancy & Relevancy), 2) brand evaluation and 3) customer-based brand equity and 4) interaction quality (appearance, attitude, behavior and expertise). Appendix D-3 presents the figure of measurement model. The model fit indices for the measurement model were as followed. To further ascertain the robustness of scale, a common latent factor was added in the model to verify the common method bias. The Chi-square difference test has shown that the amount of shared variance across all variables is not significant from zero (Gaskin, 2016). Appendix D-4 presents the figure of common latent factor.

Table 7.7 Measurement model fit indices & threshold levels

Measures	Fit-Index	Cut-offs	Model Fit Indices
CFA (Measurement Model)	χ^2/df	< 2 great; < .30 good	2.062
	GFI	>.95 great; > .90 good	0.903
	AGFI	>.95 great; > .90 good	0.883
	Comparative fit index (CFI)	>.95 great; > .90 good	0.959
	Tucker-Lewis Index(TLI)	>.95 great; > .90 good	0.954
	Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)	<.05 great; < .08 good	0.050
	Standardized root mean residual (SRMR)	<.05 great; < .08 good	0.0743
	PCLOSE	>.05 great	0.539

Source: Hu & Bentler, (1999)

7.2.1.3. Predictive validity model for direct measurement (Study 2)

Based on the results of confirmatory factor analysis, a structural model is estimated to determine the predictive validity of the direct measurement of the frontline employee brand alignment. It has a significant positive impact on brand evaluation ($\beta = .70$, $p < .001$) and customer-based brand

equity ($\beta = .62$, $p < .001$). Appendix D-6 presents the figure of structural model for direct measurement.

Table 7.8 Predictive validity model fit indices & threshold levels (direct measurement)

Measures	Fit-Index	Cut-offs	Model Fit Indices
Predictive Validity (direct)	χ^2/df	< 2 great; < .30 good	2.101
	GFI	>.95 great; > .90 good	0.887
	AGFI	>.95 great; > .90 good	0.864
	Comparative fit index (CFI)	>.95 great; > .90 good	0.945
	Tucker-Lewis Index(TLI)	>.95 great; > .90 good	0.938
	Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)	<.05 great; < .08 good	0.051
	Standardized root mean residual (SRMR)	<.05 great; < .08 good	0.0718
	PCLOSE	>.05 great	0.415

Source: Hu & Bentler, (1999)

7.2.2. Indirect Measurement

Indirect method of measuring alignment rely on predetermined dimensions and images which respondents might not consider while evaluating the concept. Thus, indirect method is more focused on objective measurement of alignment. However, direct method measures a broader perception of alignment (Sirgy et al., 1997). Indirect method is more focused on the relevancy dimension and do not consider expectancy aspect of alignment.

7.2.2.1. Developing indirect measurement

For indirect method, Aaker, (1997) brand personality dimensions (1. Sincere, 2. Excitement, 3. Competent, 4. Sophisticated and 5. Rugged) are taken as reference point for alignment. Respondent rated the employee on brand personality scale then respondent rated the brand personality on the same scale. To calculate Frontline employee brand personality Alignment, the absolute difference scores between each customer's perceptions of employee personality and their perception of the corresponding brand personality score. Authors (e.g. Johar & Sirgy, 1991; Kressmann et al., 2006;

S. Gammoh, L. Mallin, & Bolman Pullins, 2014; Sirgy, 1982) have used similar methods to measure alignment indirectly.

7.2.2.2. Predictive validity model for indirect measurement (Study 2)

Based on the results of confirmatory factor analysis, a structural model is estimated to determine the predictive validity of the indirect measurement of the frontline employee brand alignment. It has a positive impact on brand evaluation ($\beta = .14$, $p < .001$) and customer-based brand equity ($\beta = .12$, $p < .001$). Appendix D-7 presents the figure of structural model for indirect measurement. The fit indices for the structural model were as followed.

Table 7.9 Predictive validity model fit indices & threshold levels (Indirect measurement)

Measures	Fit-Index	Cut-offs	Model Fit Indices
Predictive Validity (Indirect)	χ^2/df	< 2 great; < .30 good	1.902
	GFI	>.95 great; > .90 good	0.929
	AGFI	>.95 great; > .90 good	0.906
	Comparative fit index (CFI)	>.95 great; > .90 good	0.968
	Tucker-Lewis Index(TLI)	>.95 great; > .90 good	0.961
	Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)	<.05 great; < .08 good	0.046
	Standardized root mean residual (SRMR)	<.05 great; < .08 good	0.0597
	PCLOSE	>.05 great	0.846

Source: Hu & Bentler, (1999)

7.2.3. Comparing direct and indirect measurement

Based on the results of the structural model, we compare the predictive validity of both direct and indirect measures of frontline employee brand alignment. The value of R^2 for indirect measurement of frontline employee brand alignment is .03, brand evaluation is 0.21 and for customer-based brand equity (CBBE) is 0.15. Frontline employee brand alignment has a positive impact on brand evaluation ($\beta = .14$, $p < .001$) and it also has positive impact on customer-based brand equity ($\beta = .12$, $p < .001$).

Based on the results of the structural model, the direct measurement of frontline employee brand alignment showed higher predictive validity. The value of R^2 for frontline employee brand image alignment is .38, brand evaluation is 0.49 and for customer-based brand equity is 0.39. Frontline employee brand alignment has a significant positive impact on brand evaluation ($\beta = .70$, $\rho < .001$) and it also has a significant positive impact on customer-based brand equity ($\beta = .62$, $\rho < .001$). The structural model for direct measurement showed full mediation with the insignificant paths from interaction quality to brand evaluation and customer-based brand equity. Table 7.10 presents the predictive validity comparison of direct and indirect measurement.

Table 7.10 Predictive validity comparison (Direct & indirect measure)

Path	Direct Measure		Indirect Measure	
	B	R2	B	R2
Brand Evaluation <----Alignment	.70***	.49***	.14***	.21***
CBBE<----Alignment	.62***	.39***	.12***	.15***

7.3. Correlation among variables

The results of bivariate correlations revealed that employee authentic behavior is not correlated to brand evaluation ($r = -.046$, $\rho > .05$) and also not correlated to customer-based brand equity ($r = .015$, $\rho > .05$). Brand familiarity is positively related to brand evaluation ($r = .622$, $\rho < .01$) and customer-based brand equity ($r = .506$, $\rho < .01$). Thus, we excluded brand familiarity from further analysis on the basis of its higher correlation with outcome variables and do not test hypothesis H4c and H4d.

However, interaction duration is not correlated to brand evaluation ($r = .036$, $\rho > .05$) and also not correlated to customer-based brand equity ($r = -.025$, $\rho > .05$). Frontline employee brand image alignment is positively related to brand evaluation ($r = .539$, $\rho < .001$), customer-based brand

equity ($r = .495, \rho < .001$) and employee-brand personality alignment ($r = .369, \rho < .001$). Similarly, brand evaluation showed positive association with customer-based brand equity ($r = .570, \rho < .001$) and employee-brand personality alignment ($r = .193, \rho < .001$). Customer-based brand equity also revealed positive association with employee-brand personality alignment ($r = .176, \rho < .001$). Table 7.11 presents correlations among all the variables.

Table 7.11 Correlations matrix

Variables	Authentic Behavior	Brand Familiarity	Interaction Duration	Interaction Quality	FLE Brand Alignment	Brand Evaluation	Customer-Based Brand Equity	Employee-Brand Personality alignment
Authentic Behavior	1							
Brand Familiarity	-.010	1						
Interaction Duration	.069	.009	1					
Interaction Quality	.057	.317**	.000	1				
FLE Brand Alignment	.008	.420**	-.006	.570**	1			
Brand Evaluation	-.046	.622**	.036	.429**	.539**	1		
Customer-Based Brand Equity	.015	.506**	-.025	.381**	.495**	.570**	1	
Employee-Brand Personality alignment	.099*	-.040	-.012	.196**	.369**	.193**	.176**	1

**= $\rho < .001$, *= $\rho < .005$

7.4. Results of hypothesized relationships

Hypothesized relationships were tested through structural equation modeling. Bootstrap method was also used to examine the mediating impacts. Furthermore, interaction terms were introduced to investigate the moderating impacts of employee authentic behavior and interaction duration. The moderating impact is said to be present when impact of product term on dependent variable is significant. Then, interaction graphs were plotted using Gaskin, (2012) stats tool packages. Next

section presents the results of path analysis and interaction moderation through moderation graph plots. A structural model is estimated to investigate the hypothesized relationships among independent, mediating, moderating and dependent variables. A bootstrap analysis was performed at 5000 bootstrap samples and 95% confidence interval to examine the mediating impacts. The fit indices for the structural model are as followed.

Table 7.12 Structural model fit indices & threshold levels

Measures	Fit-Index	Cut-offs	Model Fit Indices
Structural Model	χ^2/df	< 2 great; < .30 good	2.274
	GFI	>.95 great; > .90 good	0.866
	AGFI	>.95 great; > .90 good	0.839
	Comparative fit index (CFI)	>.95 great; > .90 good	0.922
	Tucker-Lewis Index(TLI)	>.95 great; > .90 good	0.912
	Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)	<.05 great; < .08 good	0.054
	Standardized root mean residual (SRMR)	<.05 great; < .08 good	0.0724
	PCLOSE	>.05 great	0.035

Source: Hu & Bentler, (1999)

7.4.1. Interaction quality to FLE brand alignment

The results of structural model revealed interaction quality as strong predictor of frontline employee brand alignment. While considering interaction quality as second order construct, appearance yielded a low score of .40. Although, we investigated a dimension based impact of interaction quality on frontline employee brand alignment but we only discuss the results of second order construct of interaction quality. However, we will discuss these results in discussion. Appendix D-9 presents the graphical representation of dimension based structural model. The results of second order construct of interaction quality indicated significant positive impact of interaction quality on frontline employee brand alignment ($\beta = .61$, $\rho < .001$; $R^2 = .37$). These results support our hypothesis H1.

H1: Frontline employee brand alignment is considered to be greater when interaction quality is higher. (*Confirmed*)

The confirmation of hypothesis 1 shows that interaction quality which includes appearance, attitude, behavior and expertise of frontline employee have an important role in determining brand alignment of frontline employee. Customer perceived frontline employee brand alignment is greater when interaction quality is higher.

7.4.2. *FLE brand alignment to brand evaluation & customer-based brand equity*

The results of structural model also revealed frontline employee brand alignment as strong predictor of brand evaluation and customer-based equity. The results indicated significant positive impact of frontline employee brand alignment on brand evaluation ($\beta = .72, \rho < .001; R^2 = .52$). The results also yielded significant positive impact of frontline employee brand alignment on customer-based brand equity ($\beta = .63, \rho < .001; R^2 = .42$). These results support our hypothesis H2a and H3a.

H2a: Frontline employee brand alignment is positively related to brand evaluation. (*Confirmed*)

H3a: Frontline employee brand alignment is positively related to customer-based brand equity. (*Confirmed*)

Result of hypothesis 2a and 3a show that frontline employee brand alignment has a significant positive impact on brand evaluation and customer-based brand equity. The confirmation of these hypothesis reflects the positive influence of brand alignment concept.

7.4.3. *Mediating effects of FLE brand alignment*

The structural model showed full mediation while 5000 bootstrap samples were introduced at 95% confidence level. The bootstrap procedure indicated significant indirect effect of interaction quality on brand evaluation ($\beta = .436, \rho < .001$) at 95% bootstrap confidence intervals (.325 to .551) and interaction quality on customer-based brand equity ($\beta = .380, \rho < .001$) at 95% bootstrap

confidence intervals (.282 to .482). As the value of bootstrap confidence intervals is above zero, full mediation is confirmed. The procedure also indicated insignificant paths from interaction quality to brand evaluation ($\beta = .043, p = .444$) and from interaction quality to customer-based brand equity ($\beta = -.022, p = .672$). The bootstrap confidence intervals at 95% for interaction quality to brand evaluation were (-.150 to .197) and for interaction quality to customer-based brand equity (-.245 to .135). Figure 7.1 presents the diagram of structural model. These results support our hypothesis H2b and H3b.

H2b: Frontline employee brand alignment mediates the relationship between interaction quality and brand evaluation. (Confirmed)

H3b: Frontline employee brand alignment mediates the relationship between interaction quality and customer-based brand equity. (Confirmed)

Confirmation of Hypothesis 2b and 3b shows that frontline employee brand alignment mediates the relationship between interaction quality and outcome variables (brand evaluation, customer-based brand equity). This mediation is an assertion of our claim that frontline employee brand alignment has strong implications for service brands.

Table 7.13 Results of path analysis

Path	B	R2
FLE Brand Alignment<----Interaction Quality	.61***	.37***
Brand Evaluation <----Alignment	.72***	.52***
Customer-Based Brand Equity<----Alignment	.63***	.42***
Brand Evaluation <----Interaction Quality	Full Mediation	
Customer-Based Brand Equity <----Interaction Quality	Full Mediation	

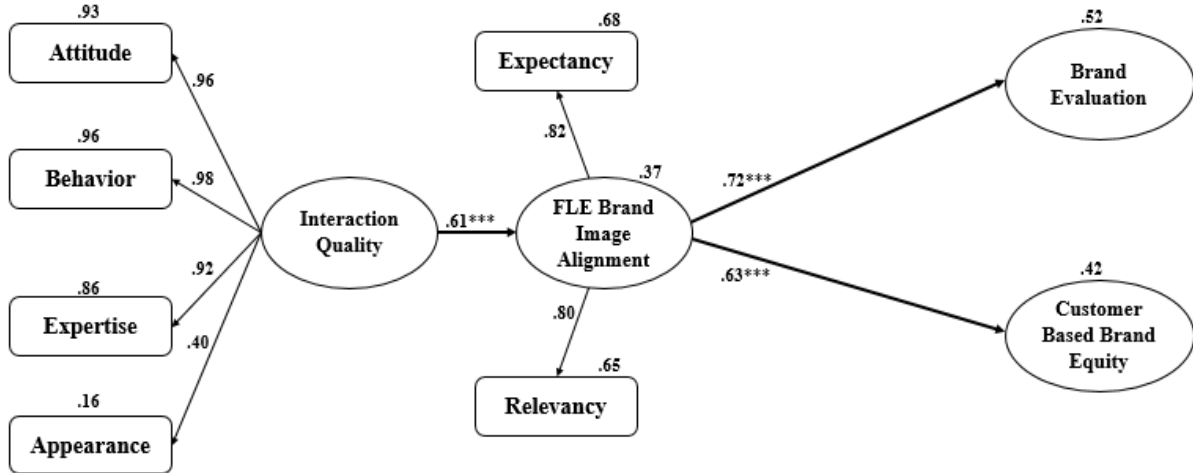


Figure 7.1 Structural model

7.4.4. Boundary conditions of FLE brand alignment

7.4.4.1. Moderating effect of employee authentic behavior

Employee authentic behavior moderated the relationship between frontline employee brand alignment and brand evaluation, Where product term of frontline employee brand alignment X employee authentic behavior indicated ($\beta = .171, p < .001$). Confirmation of hypothesis 4a and 4b shows the importance of authentic behavior of frontline employees. Employee authentic behavior enhances the positive relationship between frontline employee brand alignment and outcome variables (brand evaluation, customer-based brand equity), which shows that impact of frontline employee brand alignment can be more enhanced through authentic behavior of frontline employee. Figure 7.2 presents the graph plot for moderating effect of employee authentic behavior on brand evaluation.

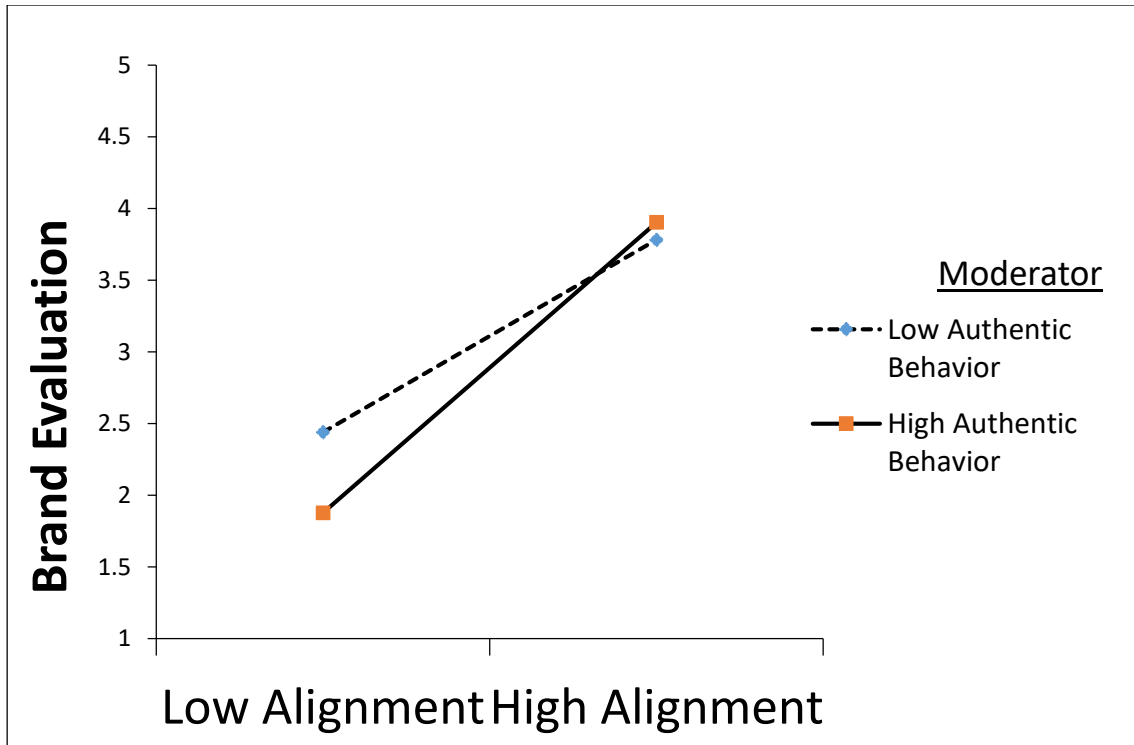


Figure 7.2 Moderating effect of employee authentic behavior on brand evaluation

H4a: Employee authentic behavior will moderate the impact of frontline employee brand alignment on brand evaluation, such that the impact of frontline employee brand alignment will be more positive at high levels of employee authentic behavior than for low levels of employee authentic behavior. (*Confirmed*)

Employee authentic behavior also moderated the relationship between frontline employee brand alignment and customer-based brand equity, Where product term of frontline employee brand alignment X employee authentic behavior indicated ($\beta = .097, p < .005$). Figure 7.3 presents the graph plot for moderating effect of employee authentic behavior on customer-based brand equity.

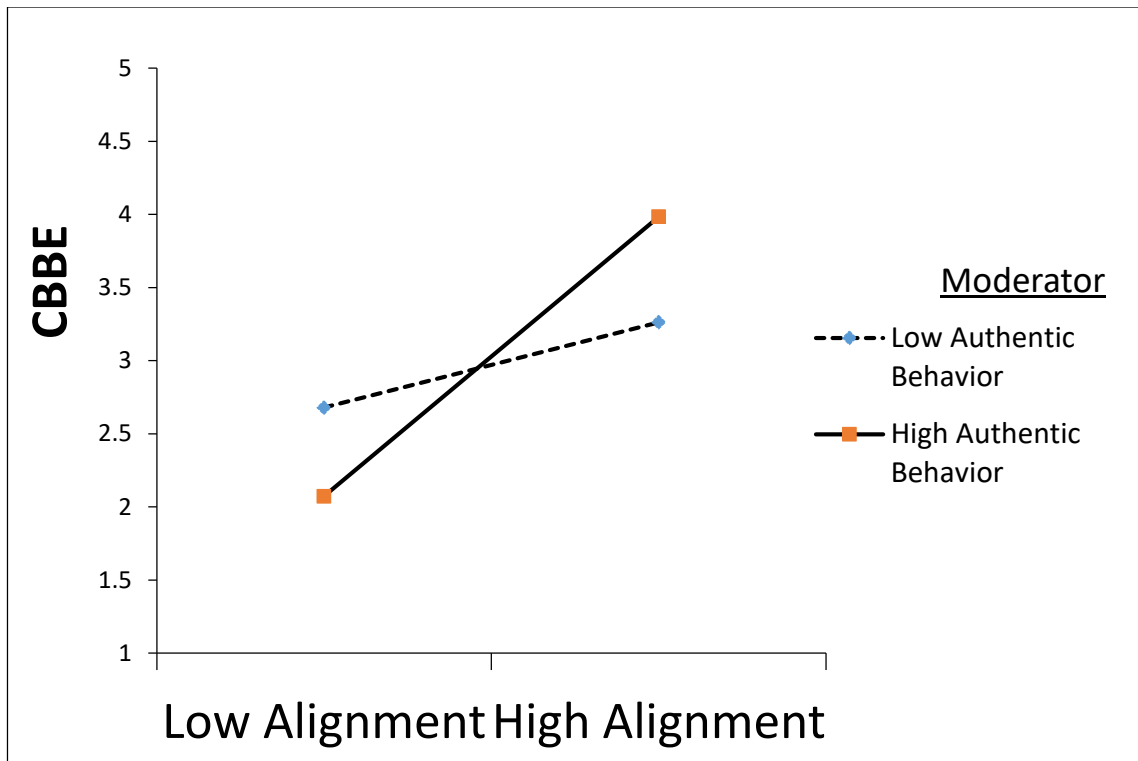


Figure 7.3 Moderating effect of employee authentic behavior on customer-based brand equity

H4b: Employee authentic behavior will moderate the impact of frontline employee brand alignment on customer-based brand equity, such that the impact of frontline employee brand alignment will be more positive at high levels of employee authentic behavior than for low levels of employee authentic behavior. (*Confirmed*)

7.4.4.2. Moderating effect of interaction duration

Interaction duration does not moderate the relationship between frontline employee brand alignment and brand evaluation, Where product term of frontline employee brand alignment X interaction duration indicated ($\beta = -.084$, $p = .08$). Although, hypothesis 5a and 5b are not confirmed but still this result has a strong implications because it shows the importance of frontline employee training. Service firms may emphasize on the training of frontline employees so that

they can put a brand aligned act for longer period of time. Figure 7.4 presents the graph plot for moderating effect of interaction duration on brand evaluation.

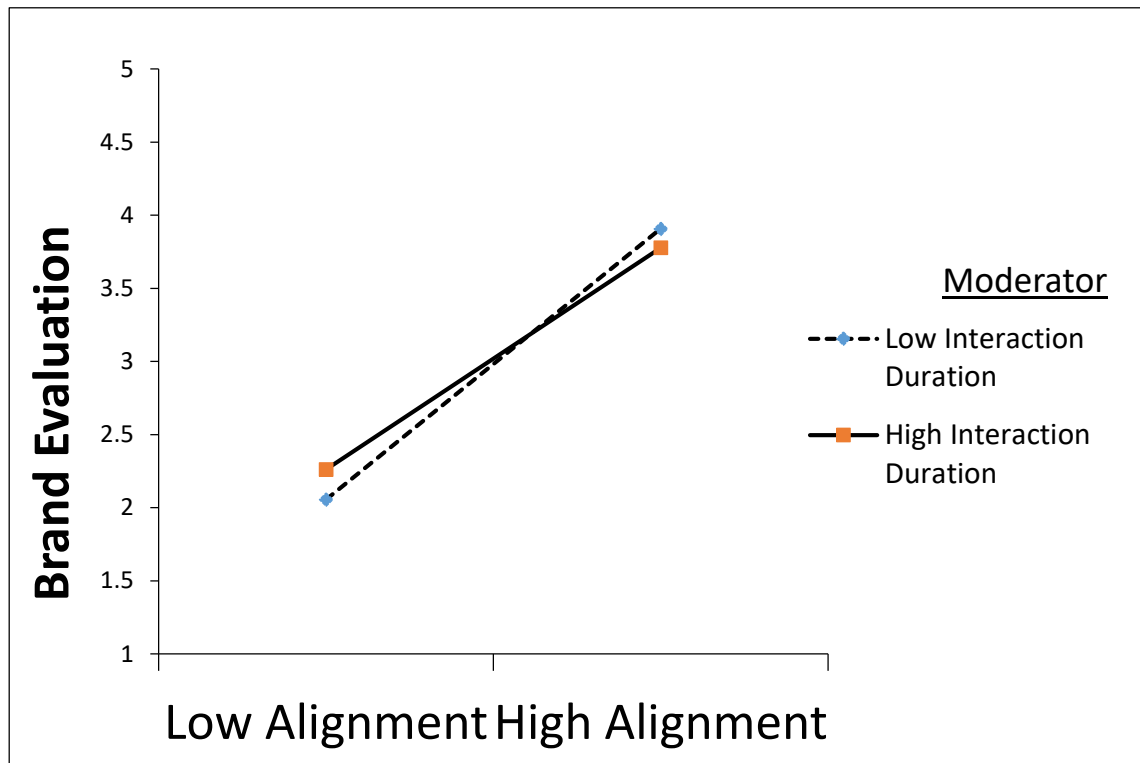


Figure 7.4 Moderating effect of interaction duration on brand evaluation

H5a: Interaction duration will moderate the impact of frontline employee brand alignment on brand evaluation, such that the impact of frontline employee brand alignment will be more positive at high levels of interaction duration than for low levels of interaction duration.

(Not Confirmed)

Interaction duration also moderated the relationship between frontline employee brand alignment and customer-based brand equity, Where product term of frontline employee brand alignment X employee authentic behavior indicated ($\beta = -.161, p < .001$). Figure 7.5 presents the graph plot for moderating effect of interaction duration on customer-based brand equity.

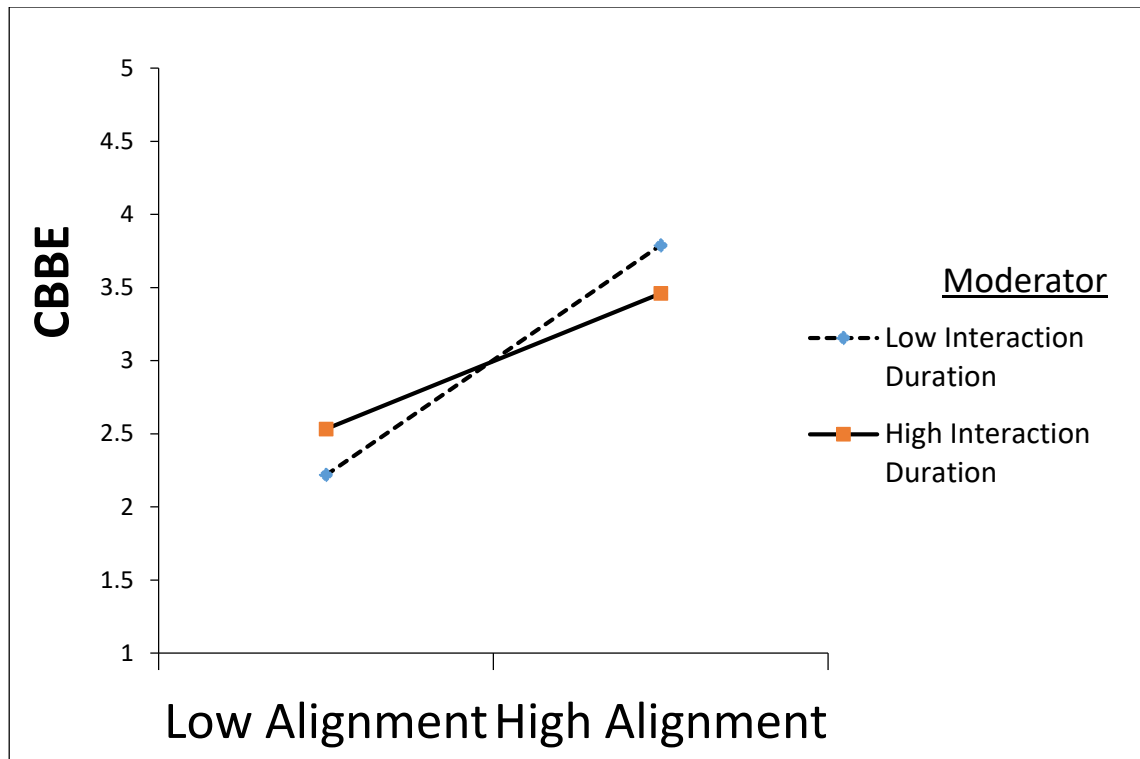


Figure 7.5 Moderating effect of interaction duration on customer-based brand equity

H5b: Interaction duration will moderate the impact of frontline employee brand alignment on customer-based brand equity, such that the impact of frontline employee brand alignment will be more positive at high levels of interaction duration than for low levels of interaction duration.

(Not Confirmed)

7.4.4.3. Aligned vs misaligned Group

As described in the methodology section, respondents rated employee personality and brand personality on the basis of brand personality dimensions (sincere, excitement, competent, sophisticated and rugged) developed by Aaker, (1997). The difference of employee personality and brand personality was calculated and it was further divided into two type of groups. One type of group was formed on the basis of two categories “aligned vs misaligned”, where aligned category included the positive difference values and also the difference value of zero. Hence,

negative values were considered in misaligned category. Furthermore, one other group was formed where difference value of zero was treated as “aligned” and negative value of difference was considered as “not enough” aligned category. There was a third category where positive difference values were called “too much aligned”. Furthermore, these groups were compared with each other on the basis of significance level of chi-square difference test. Configural and metric invariance was also achieved for group comparisons. The results of multigroup moderations are presented in the next section. Based on the groups, following hypothesis are developed for multigroup moderation.

First of all, invariance was calculated which is a prerequisite to perform multigroup moderation. The very first type of invariance calculated was configural. An unconstrained measurement model was estimated. The fit indices for the unconstrained model for configural invariance were as followed.

Table 7.14 Unconstrained model fit indices & threshold levels (Aligned vs misaligned)

Measures	Fit-Index	Cut-offs	Model Fit Indices
Unconstrained model (Aligned vs misaligned)	χ^2/df	< 2 great; < .30 good	1.831
	GFI	>.95 great; > .90 good	0.898
	AGFI	>.95 great; > .90 good	0.864
	Comparative fit index (CFI)	>.95 great; > .90 good	0.959
	Tucker-Lewis Index(TLI)	>.95 great; > .90 good	0.951
	Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)	<.05 great; < .08 good	0.044
	Standardized root mean residual (SRMR)	<.05 great; < .08 good	0.0408
	PCLOSE	>.05 great	0.944

Source: Hu & Bentler, (1999)

All items have sufficient loading in at least one group. Thus, they should not be deleted, since they are good indicators in one group at least. The measurement model meets all absolute and relative fit indices. Configural Invariance across groups is achieved. Furthermore, a constrained model was

estimated to calculate metric invariance. The fit indices for the constrained model for configural invariance were as followed.

Table 7.15 Constrained model fit indices & threshold levels (Aligned vs misaligned)

Measures	Fit-Index	Cut-offs	Model Fit Indices
Unconstrained model (Aligned vs misaligned)	χ^2/df	< 2 great; < .30 good	1.796
	GFI	>.95 great; > .90 good	0.895
	AGFI	>.95 great; > .90 good	0.867
	Comparative fit index (CFI)	>.95 great; > .90 good	0.959
	Tucker-Lewis Index(TLI)	>.95 great; > .90 good	0.953
	Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)	<.05 great; < .08 good	0.043
	Standardized root mean residual (SRMR)	<.05 great; < .08 good	0.0452
	PCLOSE	>.05 great	0.969

Source: Hu & Bentler, (1999)

The chi-square difference test results for constrained vs unconstrained measurement model were ($\Delta\chi^2=12.678$), (df=12) and ($\rho= .393$). In case of invariance calculation, an insignificant P-value shows that metric invariance is achieved. If full metric invariance is not achieved then constrained paths are relaxed one by one till the partial invariance is achieved (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998). In this case, paths of following indicators were relaxed (breval4, cbbe1, rlvny5, rlvny7). Hence, partial metric invariance was achieved.

Finally, a structural unconstrained model was run against a constrained model. The chi-square difference test results for constrained vs unconstrained structural model were ($\Delta\chi^2=71.180$), (df=17) and ($\rho< .001$). Hence, a significant P-value of chi-square difference test indicates that there is a difference at group level and there is moderation for aligned vs misaligned categories.

Afterwards, a path level moderation is investigated. A constrained model is estimated where only the concerned path is constrained to examine the path level moderation. The fit indices

for the constrained structural model where frontline employee brand alignment to brand evaluation path is constrained, are presented in table 7.16. The chi-square difference test results for constrained vs unconstrained structural model were ($\Delta\chi^2=15.942$), (df=1) and ($\rho < .001$). Hence, a significant result of chi-square difference test indicates that there is moderation for the concerned path.

Furthermore, a constrained model is estimated where frontline employee brand alignment to customer-based brand equity path is constrained. The fit indices for the constrained structural model are presented in table 7.16. The chi-square difference test results for constrained vs unconstrained structural model were ($\Delta\chi^2=18.280$), (df=1) and ($\rho < .001$). Hence, a significant result of chi-square difference test indicates that there is moderation for the concerned path. Table 7.16 presents the results for group level and path level group comparisons.

Table 7.16 Chi-square difference results (Group: aligned vs misaligned)

<i>Models/ Fit Indices</i>	<i>CMIN</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>CMIN/df</i>	<i>SRMR</i>	<i>GFI</i>	<i>AGFI</i>	<i>TLI</i>	<i>CFI</i>	<i>RMSEA</i>	<i>PCLOSE</i>
Unconstrained Model	494.139	260	1.901	.0535	.893	.860	.947	.955	.046	.870
Constrained Model	565.319	277	2.041	.0639	.878	.849	.939	.944	.049	.582
Model Comparison	71.180	17	.000							
Align to Brand Eval.	510.080	261	1.954	.0570	.890	.856	.944	.952	.047	.779
Model Comparison	15.942	1	.000							
Align to CBBE	512.419	261	1.963	.0555	.890	.856	.943	.951	.047	.761
Model Comparison	18.280	1	.000							

Frontline employee brand alignment impacts brand evaluation less ($\beta = .652$, $\rho < .001$) than aligned category ($\beta = .843$, $\rho < .001$). Similarly, Frontline employee brand alignment impact is higher on customer-based brand equity for aligned category ($\beta = .766$, $\rho < .001$) than misaligned category ($\beta = .673$, $\rho < .001$). Hence, result of multigroup moderation suggest that frontline

employees should always be aligned with the brand which in return can benefit service organization financially. Table 7.17 presents path coefficients for the structural model of group comparisons.

Table 7.17 Path coefficients (Group: aligned vs misaligned)

Group: Employee-Brand Personality Delta				
Path	Misaligned		Aligned	
	β	Sig.	β	Sig.
Brand Evaluation<---FLE Brand Alignment	.652	.000	.843	.000
Customer-based Brand Equity<--- FLE Brand Alignment	.673	.000	.766	.000

7.4.4.4. Not enough aligned vs aligned group

A structural unconstrained model was run against a constrained model for not enough aligned vs aligned category. The fit indices for the unconstrained structural model and constrained structural model are presented in table 7.18. The chi-square difference test results for constrained vs unconstrained structural model were ($\Delta\chi^2=25.773$), (df=17) and ($\rho= .079$). Hence, a significant P-value of chi-square difference test indicates that there is a difference at group level and there is moderation for not enough aligned vs aligned category.

Afterwards, a path level moderation is investigated. A constrained model is estimated where only the concerned path is constrained to examine the path level moderation. The fit indices for the constrained structural model where frontline employee brand alignment to brand evaluation path is constrained, are presented in table 7.18. The chi-square difference test results for constrained vs unconstrained structural model were ($\Delta\chi^2=.934$), (df=1) and ($\rho= .334$). Hence, an

insignificant result of chi-square difference test indicates that there is no moderation for the concerned path.

Furthermore, a constrained model is estimated where frontline employee brand alignment to customer-based brand equity path is constrained. The fit indices for the constrained structural model are presented in table 7.18. The chi-square difference test results for constrained vs unconstrained structural model were ($\Delta\chi^2=.531$), ($df=1$) and ($p=.466$). Hence, an insignificant result of chi-square difference test indicates that there is no moderation for the concerned path. Table 7.18 presents the results for group level and path level group comparisons.

Table 7.18 Chi-square difference results (Group: not enough aligned vs aligned)

<i>Models/ Fit Indices</i>	<i>CMIN</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>CMIN/df</i>	<i>SRMR</i>	<i>GFI</i>	<i>AGFI</i>	<i>TLI</i>	<i>CFI</i>	<i>RMSEA</i>	<i>PCLOSE</i>
Unconstrained Model	526.904	260	2.027	.0535	.834	.782	.922	.934	.060	.012
Constrained Model	552.677	277	1.995	.0547	.828	.788	.925	.932	.052	.017
<i>Model Comparison</i>	<i>25.773</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>.079</i>							
Align to Brand Eval.	527.838	261	2.022	.0532	.834	.783	.923	.934	.060	.013
<i>Model Comparison</i>	<i>.934</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>.334</i>							
Align to CBBE	527.435	261	2.021	.0530	.834	.783	.923	.934	.060	.013
<i>Model Comparison</i>	<i>.531</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>.466</i>							

Frontline employee brand alignment impacts brand evaluation less for not enough aligned category ($\beta = .65, p < .001$) than aligned category ($\beta = .70, p < .001$). Similarly, Frontline employee brand alignment impact is higher on customer-based brand equity for aligned category ($\beta = .60, p < .001$) than not enough aligned category ($\beta = .67, p < .001$). The results of path coefficients are presented here. However, result of multigroup moderation suggest that there is no moderation on the path level. Table 7.19 presents path coefficients for the structural model of group comparisons.

Table 7.19 Path coefficients (Group: not enough aligned vs aligned)

Group: Employee-Brand Personality Delta				
Path	Not Enough Aligned		Aligned	
	β	Sig.	β	Sig.
Brand Evaluation<---FLE Brand Alignment	.65	.000	.70	.000
Customer-based Brand Equity<--- FLE Brand Alignment	.67	.000	.60	.000

7.4.4.5. Too much aligned vs aligned group

A structural unconstrained model was run against a constrained model for too much aligned vs aligned category. The fit indices for the unconstrained structural model and constrained structural model are presented in table 7.20. The chi-square difference test results for constrained vs unconstrained structural model were ($\Delta\chi^2=38.661$), (df=17) and ($p < .005$). Hence, a significant P-value of chi-square difference test indicates that there is a difference at group level and there is moderation for too much aligned vs aligned category.

Afterwards, a path level moderation is investigated. A constrained model is estimated where only the concerned path is constrained to examine the path level moderation. The fit indices for the constrained structural model where frontline employee brand alignment to brand evaluation path is constrained, are presented in table 7.20. The chi-square difference test results for constrained vs unconstrained structural model were ($\Delta\chi^2=9.610$), (df=1) and ($p < .005$). Hence, a significant result of chi-square difference test indicates that there is moderation for the concerned path. Table 7.20 presents the results for group level and path level group comparisons.

Furthermore, a constrained model is estimated where frontline employee brand alignment to customer-based brand equity path is constrained. The fit indices for the constrained structural model are presented in table 7.20. The chi-square difference test results for constrained vs unconstrained structural model were ($\Delta\chi^2=12.739$), (df=1) and ($p < .001$). Hence, a significant result of chi-square difference test indicates that there is moderation for the concerned path.

Table 7.20 Chi-square difference results (Group: too much aligned vs aligned)

<i>Models/ Fit Indices</i>	<i>CMIN</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>CMIN/df</i>	<i>SRMR</i>	<i>GFI</i>	<i>AGFI</i>	<i>TLI</i>	<i>CFI</i>	<i>RMSEA</i>	<i>PCLOSE</i>
Unconstrained Model	431.580	260	1.660	.0541	.829	.775	.923	.934	.055	.203
Constrained Model	470.241	277	1.698	.0721	.814	.770	.918	.926	.056	.125
Model Comparison	38.661	17	.002							
Align to Brand Eval.	441.190	261	1.690	.0590	.825	.771	.919	.931	.056	.144
Model Comparison	9.610	1	.002							
Align to CBBE	444.319	261	1.702	.0608	.824	.769	.918	.930	.056	.125
Model Comparison	12.739	1	.000							

Frontline employee brand alignment impacts brand evaluation less for aligned category ($\beta = .70$, $p < .001$) than too much aligned category ($\beta = .89$, $p < .001$). Similarly, Frontline employee brand alignment impact is higher on customer-based brand equity for too much aligned category ($\beta = .80$, $p < .001$) than aligned category ($\beta = .60$, $p < .001$). Hence, result of multigroup moderation suggest that frontline employees should always be highly aligned with the brand which in return can benefit service organization financially. Table 7.21 presents path coefficients for the structural model of group comparisons.

Table 7.21 Path coefficients (Group: too much aligned vs aligned)

Group: Employee-Brand Personality Delta				
Path	Too Much Aligned		Aligned	
	β	Sig.	β	Sig.
Brand Evaluation<---FLE Brand Alignment	.89	.000	.70	.000
Customer-based Brand Equity<--- FLE Brand Alignment	.80	.000	.60	.000

H6a: The impact of frontline employee brand alignment on customer-based brand equity and brand evaluation is higher when frontline employee is aligned with the brand personality. (*Confirmed*)

H6b: The impact of frontline employee brand alignment on customer-based brand equity and brand evaluation is higher when frontline employee is aligned rather than too much aligned with the brand personality.

(*Not Confirmed*)

The results of multigroup moderation show that frontline employee brand alignment is an efficient strategy for service brands and confirmation of hypothesis 6a ascertain that. However, result of hypothesis 6b show that this strategy is more efficient when frontline employee is too much aligned with brand.

Conclusion of part II: Synthesis of validated hypothesis and test of the model

The results of structural model revealed interaction quality as strong predictor of frontline employee brand alignment. The results indicated significant positive impact of interaction quality on frontline employee brand alignment ($\beta = .61, \rho < .001; R^2 = .37$). These results support our hypothesis H1. The results of structural model also revealed frontline employee brand alignment as strong predictor of brand evaluation and customer-based equity. The results indicated significant positive impact of frontline employee brand alignment on brand evaluation ($\beta = .72, \rho < .001; R^2 = .52$). The results also yielded significant positive impact of frontline employee brand alignment on customer-based brand equity ($\beta = .63, \rho < .001; R^2 = .42$). These results support our hypothesis H2 (a,b) and H3 (a,b).

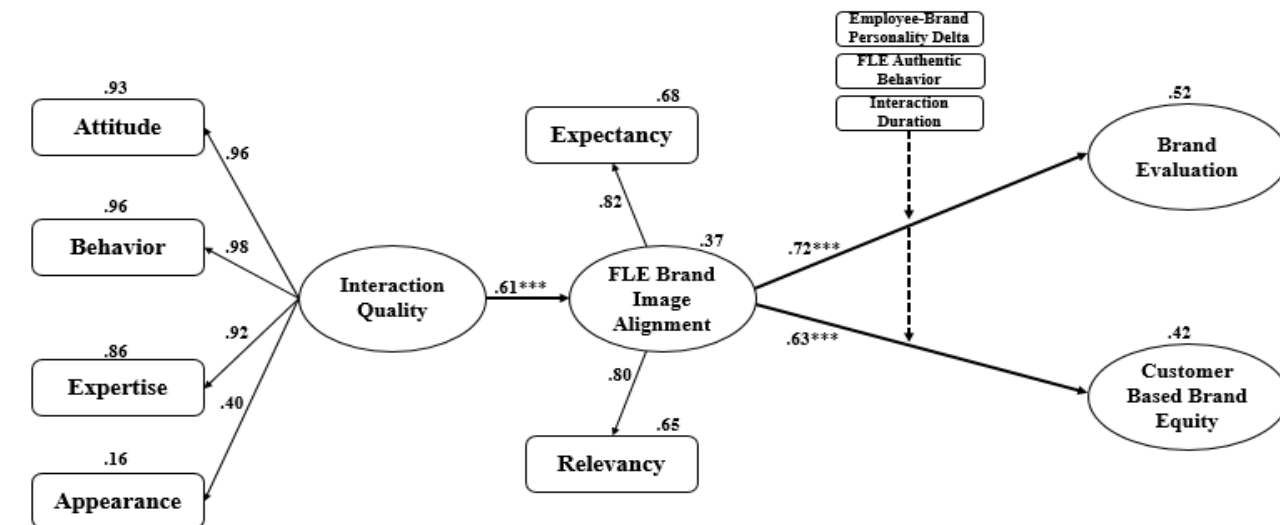
The structural model showed full mediation while 5000 bootstrap samples were introduced at 95% confidence level. The bootstrap procedure indicated significant indirect impact of interaction quality on brand evaluation ($\beta = .436, \rho < .001$) at 95% bootstrap confidence intervals (.325 to .551) and interaction quality on customer-based brand equity ($\beta = .380, \rho < .001$) at 95% bootstrap confidence intervals (.282 to .482). As the value of bootstrap confidence intervals is above zero, full mediation is confirmed. The procedure also indicated insignificant paths from interaction quality to brand evaluation ($\beta = .043, \rho = .444$) and from interaction quality to customer-based brand equity ($\beta = -.022, \rho = .672$). The bootstrap confidence intervals at 95% for interaction quality to brand evaluation were (-.150 to .197) and for interaction quality to customer-based brand equity (-.245 to .135). These results support our hypothesis H4a and H4b.

Employee authentic behavior moderated the relationship between frontline employee brand alignment and brand evaluation, Where product term of frontline employee brand alignment X employee authentic behavior indicated ($\beta = .171, \rho < .001$). Employee authentic behavior also moderated the relationship between frontline employee brand alignment and customer-based brand

equity, Where product term of frontline employee brand alignment X employee authentic behavior indicated ($\beta = .097, p < .005$). Interaction duration moderated the relationship between frontline employee brand alignment and brand evaluation, Where product term of frontline employee brand alignment X interaction duration indicated ($\beta = -.084, p = .08$). Interaction duration also moderated the relationship between frontline employee brand alignment and customer-based brand equity, Where product term of frontline employee brand alignment X employee authentic behavior indicated ($\beta = -.161, p < .001$).

Frontline employee brand alignment impacts brand evaluation less ($\beta = .652, p < .001$) than aligned category ($\beta = .843, p < .001$). Similarly, Frontline employee brand alignment impact is higher on customer-based brand equity for aligned category ($\beta = .766, p < .001$) than misaligned category ($\beta = .673, p < .001$). Frontline employee brand alignment impacts brand evaluation less for not enough aligned category ($\beta = .65, p < .001$) than aligned category ($\beta = .70, p < .001$). Similarly, Frontline employee brand alignment impact is higher on customer-based brand equity for aligned category ($\beta = .60, p < .001$) than not enough aligned category ($\beta = .67, p < .001$). The results of path coefficients are presented here. However, result of multigroup moderation suggest that there is no moderation on the path level. Frontline employee brand alignment impacts brand evaluation less for aligned category ($\beta = .70, p < .001$) than too much aligned category ($\beta = .89, p < .001$). Similarly, Frontline employee brand alignment impact is higher on customer-based brand equity for too much aligned category ($\beta = .80, p < .001$) than aligned category ($\beta = .60, p < .001$).

S #	Summary of hypothesis testing	Status
H1	Frontline employee brand alignment is considered to be greater when interaction quality is higher.	<i>Confirmed</i>
H2a	Frontline employee brand alignment is positively related to brand evaluation.	<i>Confirmed</i>
H2b	Frontline employee brand alignment mediates the relationship between interaction quality and brand evaluation.	<i>Confirmed</i>
H3a	Frontline employee brand alignment is positively related to customer-based brand equity.	<i>Confirmed</i>
H3b	Frontline employee brand alignment mediates the relationship between interaction quality and customer-based brand equity.	<i>Confirmed</i>
H4a	Employee authentic behavior will moderate the impact of frontline employee brand alignment on brand evaluation, such that the impact of frontline employee brand alignment will be more positive at high levels of employee authentic behavior than for low levels of employee authentic behavior.	<i>Confirmed</i>
H4b	Employee authentic behavior will moderate the impact of frontline employee brand alignment on customer-based brand equity, such that the impact of frontline employee brand alignment will be more positive at high levels of employee authentic behavior than for low levels of employee authentic behavior.	<i>Confirmed</i>
H5a	Interaction duration will moderate the impact of frontline employee brand alignment on brand evaluation, such that the impact of frontline employee brand alignment will be more positive at high levels of interaction duration than for low levels of interaction duration.	<i>Not Confirmed</i>
H5b	Interaction duration will moderate the impact of frontline employee brand alignment on customer-based brand equity, such that the impact of frontline employee brand alignment will be more positive at high levels of interaction duration than for low levels of interaction duration.	<i>Not Confirmed</i>
H6a	The impact of frontline employee brand alignment on customer-based brand equity and brand evaluation is higher when frontline employee is aligned with the brand personality.	<i>Confirmed</i>
H6b	The impact of frontline employee brand alignment on customer-based brand equity and brand evaluation is higher when frontline employee is aligned rather than too much aligned with the brand personality.	<i>Not Confirmed</i>



MODELS/ THRESHOLD VALUE	CMIN	df	CMIN/df 1-3	SRMR <0.08	GFI >0.90	AGFI >0.80	TLI >0.95	CFI >0.95	RMSEA <0.06	PCLOSE >0.05	Bootstrap Sample
Structural Model	1261.994	555	2.274	.0724	.866	.839	.912	.922	.054	.035	5000

Figure of Structural Model

DISCUSSION

Discussion

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Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand the concept of frontline employee brand alignment and how it impacts the perception of customers towards a service firm. In total, three studies were conducted to enhance this understanding. At first, a qualitative study was conducted to comprehend the concept of alignment and identify different factors which play an important role to convey this alignment to the customers. These factors were employee attitude, behavior, expertise and appearance. This is also a main contribution of this research because previous studies mainly focus on the alignment part but not on the factors that determine this frontline employee brand alignment.

Secondly, a quantitative study was conducted to develop a better understanding and to operationalize the frontline employee brand alignment. This quantitative study was a milestone for the third study which was also quantitative in nature. Quantitative study 2 not only operationalized the concept but also the findings suggested that frontline employee brand alignment is an important concept which has a strong relationship with customer based brand equity and customer loyalty.

The third study enhanced the already developed scale but also compared different approaches for the measurement of frontline employee brand alignment. These different direct and indirect approaches can be based on frontline employee brand personality alignment or frontline employee brand image alignment. Quantitative study 2 also considered brand evaluation and customer-based brand equity as consequences of frontline employee brand alignment. Whereas, employee authentic behavior, brand familiarity and interaction duration are considered as boundary conditions of frontline employee brand alignment and its effect on brand evaluation and customer-based brand equity.

Important and surprising results

Apart from other results, our research yielded few unexpected and counter intuitive results. It is very common understanding that service employee attributes (i.e. attitude, behavior, expertise and appearance) influence the customer perception of a service brand. A lot of research is focused on this area. Surprisingly, the results of our study show that frontline employee brand alignment fully mediates the relationship between interaction quality and brand evaluation and customer-based brand equity. These two outcome variables have both emotional aspect as well as financial implications for a service brand. The literature on the notion that service employee attributes impact the brand evaluation and customer-based brand equity is a very much available in the literature. However, one of the surprising result of this study shows that these service attributes do not impact outcome variables directly. This research offers a comprehensive model of frontline employee brand alignment, outcome variables and effect of its boundary conditions.

Furthermore, we considered the idea of interaction duration and developed the hypothesis that the impact of frontline employee brand alignment will be higher when interaction duration is higher. However, it came as a surprise that the results came otherwise. Longer interaction duration reduced the impact of frontline employee brand alignment on outcome variables. There can be a possibility that the act which is put by frontline employee during the service encounter may become diluted and they cannot continue their act for a longer period of time. This shows the importance of training. Frontline employees may be trained in a way that they can control their emotions to become normal and keep putting on a brand aligned act. This is discussed in detail in next section.

Moreover, respondents considered the idea of frontline employee brand alignment as an important factor during service encounters. The results show that it is always good to be highly

aligned with the brand. When we examined three type of groups and found that it is better to be aligned than misaligned. Furthermore, it was found that it is good to be too much aligned than aligned. This shows that people perceive too much aligned frontline employees in a good way. Therefore, it is suggested to the service managers to work on the alignment of frontline employees and make them highly aligned with the positive associations of the brand.

Additionally, this study sheds light on the critical importance of service employee appearance for the frontline employee brand alignment. Although, a lot has been discussed about the importance of service employee appearance and it is very obvious that it has an impact on customers. However, the service quality and interaction quality literature is less incorporated with a comprehensive examination of appearance and other attributes of service employees during service encounter.

Our research not only contributes theoretically but also have some important managerial implications. Based on the findings, theoretical contributions and managerial implications of this research are discussed in detail in next section. Furthermore, limitations and future research directions are also presented after theoretical contributions and managerial implications.

1. Theoretical Contribution

1.1. Frontline employee brand alignment: concept and measurement

The main focus of this research and its key contribution is to define the concept of frontline employee brand alignment and to develop its measurement. Hence, we define frontline employee brand alignment as the “level of congruence between the employee's attitude, behavior, expertise & appearance and the overall brand image which evidently conveys the brand meaning to customers and enhance overall brand evaluation and customer-based brand equity”. While most studies are focused on the employee behavior, this study also contributes in terms of explaining the concept of frontline employee brand alignment not only in terms of behavior but also attitude,

expertise and most importantly appearance. The findings of our research suggest that there are many ways to define the concept of frontline employee brand alignment.

Thus, frontline employee brand alignment can be of many types. 1) Frontline employee alignment with brand personality is defined as “level of congruence between the employee's behavior and the brand personality” (Sirianni, Bitner, Brown, & Mandel, 2013). 2) This definition also corresponds to the definition of Barlow & Stewart, (2004) “branded customer service refers to the strategic alignment of employee behavior with the brand personality to believably embody the brand's espoused image and thus, credibly deliver on brand promises during customers' service experiences, thereby resulting in increased customer perceptions of brand authenticity and customer-based brand equity”.

Furthermore, 3) Muchinsky & Monahan, (1987) defined employee firm fit as the degree of customers' perception of how effectively employees convey the firm's image. They argued that employee firm fit exists when employee and firm possess similar characteristics. Therefore, this definition of employee firm fit suggests that firm characteristics (e.g. culture, norms and values) enhance employee characteristics (e.g. attitudes, personality and values), and vice versa (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). Frontline employee brand alignment can be differentiated into three types. 1) Frontline employee alignment with brand personality, 2) frontline employee alignment with brand image and 3) frontline employee alignment with brand positioning.

This study also contributes to literature in terms of measurement development of frontline employee brand image alignment. This scale is based on two dimensions of alignment. 1) Expectancy and 2) Relevancy. We also developed the indirect measurement for the frontline employee brand image alignment and compared both approaches. Hence, this is also a significant contribution of this research. The direct measurement scale developed in this research is as follows.

Expectancy: 1) *Knowing XX, you were expecting that FLE were as they were.* 2) *I am not surprised that this brand has this FLE.* 3) *One would expect this brand to have this FLE.* 4) *It was predictable that this brand would have this FLE.* 5) *I could have predicted the association between this brand and this FLE.* Relevancy: 1) *FLE of XX goes well with XX stores and its specificities.* 2) *FLE of XX convey what characterize XX.* 3) *FLE of XX corresponds to XX and its specificities.* 4) *FLE of XX is typical of XX.* 5) *The employee fit with this company's brand image.*

Primarily, alignment is conceived as relevancy. Authors (e.g. Aaker & Keller, 1990; Park, Milberg, & Lawson, 1991) explicitly considered relevancy to define alignment and referred it as consistency between a parent brand and brand extension. Other authors in brand extension context took the same position. For instance, alignment is defined as a logical relationship between sponsored entity and its sponsor (Weeks, Cornwell, & Drennan, 2008). Although, Kamins & Gupta, (1994) do not explicitly define the concept but they share the similar conception in their measurement.

Secondly, conception of alignment defines it in relation to both expectancy and relevancy. According to Goodman, (1980), this bi-dimensional conception can be traced back to psychology and then marketing (Maille & Fleck, 2011). Thus, Heckler & Childers, (1992) define relevancy as “the extent to which the information contained in the stimulus contributes to or detracts from the clear identification of the theme or primary message being communicated.” Hence, mutual meaning and semantic link among entities is the base of this conception of relevancy. For example, Kenzo (famous for floral fabric) launches a perfume “Flower by Kenzo” and sponsors a botanical exhibition, could be viewed as relevant. The Dior Rose Bagatelle jewelry collection and Dior Joaillerie sponsoring the Bagatelle international competition for new roses is another example of relevancy.

Expectancy is defined by Heckler & Childers, (1992) as “the degree to which an item or piece of information falls into a predetermined pattern or structure evoked by this theme.” Thus, understanding of alignment is gained through a learning process which is dependent on prior experiences with the entity. Therefore, Dior sponsorship to a rose competition and Kenzo sponsoring a botany exhibition may seem relevant but rather unexpected. Thus, many authors followed the notion of alignment as bi-dimensional concept given by Heckler & Childers, (1992).

In marketing literature, dimensions of alignment (relevancy and expectancy) are mostly analyzed or measured separately. However, the combination of both dimensions can be distinguished into four types of aligned/misaligned relationships. 1) When association is expected and relevant 2) when association is unexpected and not relevant 3) When association is moderately expected and relevant and 4) When association is moderately unexpected and not relevant. Two intermediate types vary in levels because expectancy and relevancy of all characters lie on a continuum (Maille & Fleck, 2011). Thus, the disagreement is not only in the definition of alignment but also on the level of alignment/mialignment. Therefore, Dior sponsoring rose competition may be considered as congruent as per relevancy but incongruent on the basis of expectancy.

Thus, frontline employee brand alignment can be measured in two ways, direct or indirect. Direct measurement refers to “explicitly asking respondents to rate a measurement scale whether the combination of two entities goes well together. However, indirect measurement refers to the potential sources of alignment”. Indirect measurement is used in many contexts. Sirgy, (1982) investigated the similarity of perceptions between two entities. Other researchers (e.g. Basil & Basil, 2003; Gwinner & Eaton, 1999) explored similarity between entities and their attributes. However, direct approach to alignment measurement is used much more frequently.

Indirect method of measuring alignment rely on predetermined dimensions and images which respondents might not consider while evaluating the concept. Thus, indirect method is more focused on objective measurement of alignment on the basis of predefined items by the researcher. However, direct method measures a broader perception of alignment (Sirgy et al., 1997). On the contrary, indirect method is more focused on the relevancy dimension and do not consider expectancy aspect of alignment. For direct method, many ad hoc measures are available in literature and these are more often one dimensional focused on relevancy of the entities. Furthermore, these measures do not follow the recommended procedure of Churchill Jr, (1979) measurement development.

Researchers (e.g. Sirianni et al., 2013) have developed ad hoc one dimensional measure with only one item to conduct their experimental studies. Maille & Fleck, (2011) mentioned in their meta-analysis on alignment that only two measures followed the comprehensive validation process. One of the measure is developed by N. D. Fleck & Quester, (2007) in the context of sponsorship and other is developed by Galan, (2009) and validated for advertising music context. Maille & Fleck, (2011) suggest to develop comprehensive scales for alignment to be validated in different marketing contexts. They also recommend that expectancy should be measured first and then relevancy. It is suggested because evaluation of relevancy may create biases for the expectancy measurement.

This research followed the Churchill Jr, (1979) guidelines for scale development. The items for direct measurement of alignment are developed for both expectancy and relevancy. For example, expectancy is measured by the items such as, “Knowing the brand and its image, you were expecting that service employee were as they were” and relevancy is measured through items such as, “Service employee of the brand goes well with the brand’s image”. Respondents rated the

items on seven point likert scale of 1-strongly disagree to 7-strongly agree. All items for both dimensions can be found in the appendix section.

For indirect method, Aaker, (1997) brand personality dimensions (1. Sincere, 2. Excitement, 3. Competent, 4. Sophisticated and 5. Rugged) are taken as reference point for alignment. Respondent rated the employee on brand personality scale then respondent rated the brand personality on the same scale. To calculate Frontline employee brand personality Alignment, the absolute difference scores between each customer's perceptions of employee personality and their perception of the corresponding brand personality score. Previous researches have used this method to measure alignment indirectly. We examined the predictive validity for both measures.

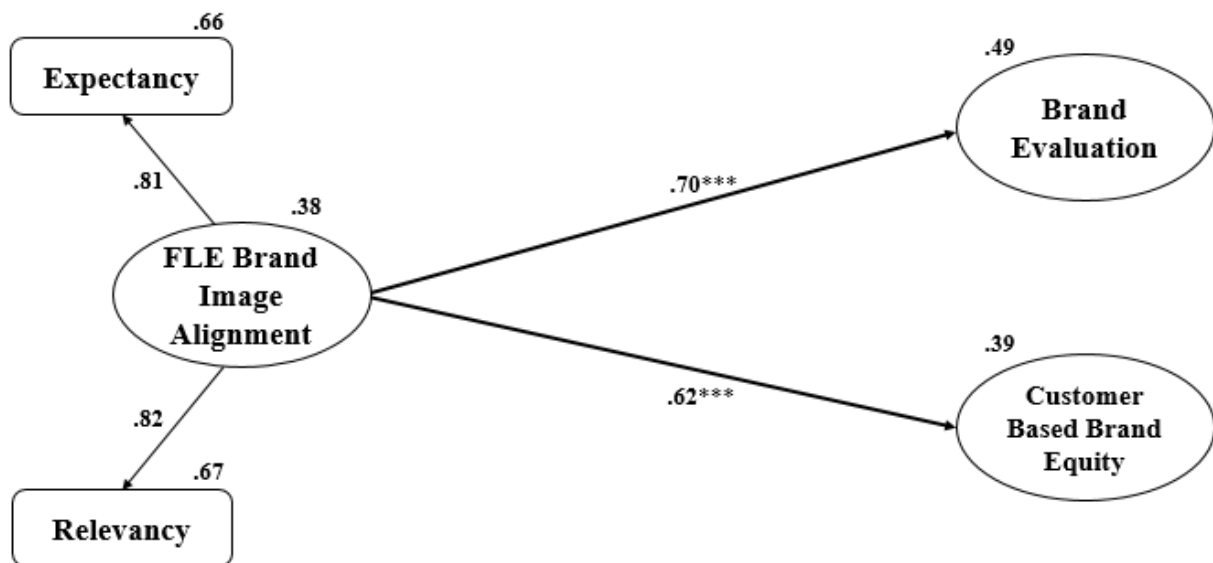
Predictive validity comparison (Direct & indirect measure)

Path	Direct Measure		Indirect Measure	
	B	R2	B	R2
Brand Evaluation <----Alignment	.70***	.49***	.14***	.21***
CBBE<----Alignment	.62***	.39***	.12***	.15***

These findings are important in expanding the current definition of branded customer service to include the service employee working to maximally support the brand image claims made in brand positioning messaging, the critical importance of believability in employees' brand-aligned performances, and the impact of employee-brand alignment on consumer perceptions of brand authenticity and evaluations of customer-based brand equity.

1.2. FLE brand alignment as a driver of CBBE and brand evaluation

Our research also contributes by examining that it is justified that frontline employee brand alignment may also play a pivotal role in relationship marketing context and its key components such as brand evaluation and customer-based brand equity. Yet, lot of authors empirically studied alignment in terms of relationships between supplier and firm, manager and salesperson, or seller and buyer. There has been very few studies which explored the customer perspective on frontline employee brand alignment in service sector. We found a strong relationship between frontline employee brand alignment and its consequences such as brand evaluation and customer-based brand equity. Figure below presents the strength of relationship between frontline employee brand alignment and its consequences.



MODELS/ THRESHOLD VALUE	CMIN	df	CMIN/df 1-3	SRMR <0.08	GFI >0.90	AGFI >0.80	TLI >0.95	CFI >0.95	RMSEA <0.06	PCLOSE >0.05	Bootstrap Sample
Structural Model	1261.994	555	2.274	.0724	.866	.839	.912	.922	.054	.035	5000

Modelization of frontline employee brand alignment and its consequences

In addition to the aforesaid role of alignment in marketing literature, several other reasons show that frontline employee brand alignment also has significant implications for services sector. First of all, consumer behavior literature posits that not only functional characteristics but also emotional characteristics of a product are also important for consumer purchase behavior. Therefore, in a services context, frontline employees fill the gap of less tangible emotional attributes. Embedded in organizational behavior studies, it is argued that similar expectations and common interpretation of events may result when service employees and customers hold the same values. Consequently, this common interpretation can improve interpersonal relationships between service employees and customers which ultimately results in reduced uncertainty.

Third, service employees are critical success factor for a service brand and it is suggested to align their values and of the brand. The focused position and consistency of frontline employees is the most important factor in a service encounter. Furthermore, Baker, Rapp, Meyer, & Mullins, (2014) emphasized on the importance brand value congruence of service employees to enhance their performance. A most recent study by Sirianni et al., (2013) suggested that service brands can enhance their customer-based brand equity and brand evaluation by aligning their frontline employees with the brand personality.

This research makes several important contributions to the marketing literature. First, it adds to branding knowledge by providing evidence that employee-customer transactions can positively impact customer-based brand equity, which offers a deeper understanding of how brands and its linked entities interrelate. Prior research has linked the brand to people outside of the firm including celebrity endorsers (Agrawal & Kamakura, 1995), which can contribute to issues with source credibility (McCracken, 1986) and result in damaging effects to the brand. In contrast, this

research explored a way that firms can link their brands to their own frontline employees who are more central to consumers' actual brand experiences, and as such, offer a more meaningful source of brand meaning that can have a powerful impact on customers' evaluations of brand equity.

Next, by aligning frontline employee's attitude, behavior, expertise and appearance with the brand image, this study empirically tests the impact of frontline employee brand alignment on brand evaluation and customer-based brand equity for multiple sectors such as, retail, restaurants. Further, the multiple brand personality groups to test the effects between different types of brand personality and brand performance conditions to shed light on situations when employees can be most influential as brand builders in their customer-facing roles. This is a novel contribution to the brand equity literature, as the retail brands are growing fast and their share in service sector is increasing day by day. However, little empirical work has been done in the area of frontline employee brand alignment and their role in developing brand equity by increasing brand evaluation.

On the contrary, other factors such as, physical store appearance, pricing formats, advertising, product quality, convenience, and merchandise assortment are always discussed in the empirical work (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004; Mazursky & Jacoby, 1986). However, role of frontline employees to develop brand equity and to increase brand evaluation has been explored less in service sector. This research also fills this gap by empirically investigating this relationship.

1.3. Enlarging the conceptualization of interaction quality by including appearance

This research contributes to the existing literature on alignment by identifying interaction quality as an important determinant of frontline employee brand alignment. Previous researches have measured alignment at a superficial level. However, this research is the first one to investigate the concept in terms of its antecedents. Based on the findings of our qualitative study, we conclude that consumer perception can be influenced by improving the level of interaction quality. However, this interaction quality is previously referred to as service employee's attitude, behavior and expertise. Based on the findings from our qualitative study, we also contribute to marketing literature by enlarging the conceptualization of interaction quality by including appearance as an important factor.

A comprehensive model of service quality was proposed by Brady & Cronin Jr, (2001). They integrated various perspectives and proposed a new comprehensive measure for service quality. Their hierarchical model of service quality has three primary dimensions: interaction quality, physical environment quality, and outcome quality. Furthermore, they divided these three primary dimensions into several sub-dimensions. Thus, their hierarchical model of service quality can be considered as most comprehensive service quality model because it is a synthesis of all prior conceptualizations.

Interaction quality is considered as an important component of service quality which was proposed by the Nordic School scholars. They found that the concept of interaction quality is similar across different service sectors. Furthermore, Brady & Cronin Jr, (2001) through their extensive literature review identified three distinctive characteristics that shape the customers' perception of interaction quality: (1) service employee behaviors (e.g., helpfulness); (2) service employee attitudes (e.g., willingness to serve); and (3) service employee expertise. Lovelock,

(1983) argues that customers are involved to a greater extent in service delivery process in people based services. This, consequently, highlights interaction quality as a key component for such services.

Attractive individuals are perceived as more successful, happier and sociable than those who are less attractive. Attractiveness of an individual has a key role in his/her level of persuasiveness during social interaction (Chaiken, 1979) which can have a significant impact on marketing and sales initiatives. Mulford, Orbell, Shatto, & Stockard, (1998) suggests that people tend to cooperate more with the attractive individuals during social interactions and physical attractiveness also increases the evaluation of social skills.

Based on evidence from literature, it is suggested that a physically attractive server has a greater impact on tip size than the delivered service quality. Barnes et al., (2016) also emphasize on the importance of appearance and attractiveness of service employees. Sirianni et al., (2013) suggests that frontline employee brand alignment can reinforce brand meanings during service encounters and this alignment can be achieved by various elements, such as, appearance, behavior and manner. For example, avid runners and yoga practitioners are strategically hired at lululemon athletica to promote their physically active brand image with their employees' physically fit brand aligned appearances. Sirianni et al., (2013) also recommended to investigate the impact of employee appearance on perceived authenticity of frontline employee brand alignment.

The concept of matching frontline employee appearance with brand is also referred as aesthetic labor (Warhurst & Nickson, 2003). “Aesthetic labor practices involve strategically controlling human aesthetics in an effort create a predefined physical appearance profile that becomes part of the value proposition” (Pounders, Babin, & Close, 2015, p. 670). These aesthetic labor practices are implemented in various industries predominantly in cosmetic or fashion

industry, to convey a clear brand image. However, this practice can also be found in other sectors such as airlines and restaurants. Hence the findings of this research suggest that along with attitude, behavior and expertise, service firms should also focus on the appearance of the service employee. This appearance not only includes the physical appearance but also uniforms and other brand related things employee wears.

We also investigated the direct impact of appearance on frontline employee brand alignment. Appearance yielded 0.40 loading in second order analysis. However, it yielded 0.47 beta coefficient while investigated separately. Therefore, it gives more strength to our claim that appearance has a very significant role as a determinant of frontline employee brand alignment. The strong relationship between frontline employee brand alignment and employee appearance suggests that more focus on employee appearance can help service firms to convey their brand meaning to the customers in a better way. Appendix D-9 presents the figure of structural model.

1.4. Boundary conditions of frontline employee brand alignment

The study suggests that employee authentic behavior in service role play can influence the customer's perception about the brand. This study also emphasizes on the significance of training the employees for their brand aligned performances. Service organizations control and direct how frontline employees present themselves to consumers. However, all brand aligned frontline employee behavior may not result in the same level of brand evaluations. An unfelt brand aligned behavior may generate low level of brand evaluation than an authentic brand aligned behavior. These authentic and inauthentic behaviors can be studied through the concept of "emotional labor" which is described as a display of organizationally desired emotions while managing one's feelings during service encounter (Hochschild, 2012).

Sirianni et al., (2013) defines "employee authenticity as the degree to which customers have confidence in the sincerity of an employee's brand-aligned behavior". This authentic behavior

occurs when employees express their true nature while acting in accordance to their espoused values. Our research examined that how the overall brand evaluations and customer-based brand equity is affected by the authenticity of employees' brand aligned behavior. Our findings suggest that it is very important for frontline employees to internalize the brand's specific elements while altering their behavior for their service role play.

This research also contributes to the literature by adding interaction duration as a boundary condition of frontline employee brand alignment. Service employees may undergo emotional labor as the duration of interaction increases. Hence, the longer duration increases the chance of dilution of act put on by the service employees. Therefore, service firms must focus on the training aspect of service employees so that they can maximize their ability to perform their brand aligned act as long as possible. This study also contributes to the emotional labor and alignment literature by identifying the importance of interaction duration.

This research also contributes to prior theory on emotional labor and the customer experience. In that, we demonstrate that types of emotional labor strategies enacted by employees (deep versus surface acting) in their brand aligned performances differentially impact employee's perceived authenticity. As a result, this affects brand evaluation and customer-based brand equity. In addition, these results also build a link between Hochschild, (1983) theory of emotional labor and branding, in that this research examines how frontline employees can alter their behavior to perform to brand display rules, which is a topic that has been largely ignored by prior emotional labor research.

This research also contributes by adding brand personality delta as multigroup moderation. The difference was calculated of consumer's perception of frontline employee brand personality alignment scores and consumer's perception of brand personality on the basis of Aaker, (1997)

brand personality dimensions (1. Sincere, 2. Excitement, 3. Competent, 4. Sophisticated and 5. Rugged). Groups were formed on the basis of negative (negative fle-brand personality delta) and positive (positive fle-brand personality delta) value of difference.

Two types of groups were formed on the basis of difference. One Multigroup analysis was performed where two groups (Aligned Vs Misaligned) were formed where difference value of zero was included in aligned group. Further two groups (1. Not enough aligned, 2) Too much aligned) were compared with aligned group which comprised of respondents where difference value was zero. The result for multigroup moderation suggest that impact of frontline employee brand alignment is higher on brand evaluation and customer-based equity when employee is aligned with the brand personality than misaligned. It is further ascertained that impact of frontline employee brand alignment on the brand evaluation and customer-based brand equity is higher when employee is too much aligned with brand personality. Hence, it is suggested that service companies may invest resources to make their employees aligned with the brand to have a higher brand evaluation and stronger brand equity.

2. Managerial Implications

In today's competitive environment, firms continuously struggle to achieve competitive advantage. This struggle has ensued in exceptional service quality regardless of whether company's actual product is a service or physical good (Henkoff & Sample, 1994). Thus, a shift towards a new dominant logic of marketing is seen, where service provision is the fundamental of economic exchanges as opposed to the product-centric marketing. Therefore, the replication of something that involves service employees as human capital comes with an inherent difficulty and creates new challenges for marketers (Sundaram & Webster, 2000). The topic of branded customer service should be of great significance to retail and service-providing firms who cannot rely on expressive packages and displays alone to convey their intended brand meaning, so instead, they depend on rich customer experiences to shape their brand images and customer-based brand equity.

While traditionally employees are managed by human resources department, they have been considered as essential organizational asset and their role is acknowledged in the realization of organizational objectives and goals (King & Grace, 2009). The essential role of service employees in realizing marketing strategies is to be acknowledged by marketers (Gronroos, 1990). Therefore, it is wise for marketers to harness power of employees in order to move forward in their quest for the holy grail of competitive advantage.

2.1. Evaluate the alignment with the brand positioning

The results of our study suggest that consistent with the delivery of excellent service quality, an edge over competitors is manifested in the provision of investment in the firm's brand which can be used as a strategic weapon. Organizations actively invest in their brands to define and differentiate themselves with respect to their competitors. In doing so, organizations promote

implied promises to the consumers to deliver a bundle of benefits. Thus, it is not the only responsibility of the service employee to deliver the exceptional service but employee is also expected to ensure the delivery of intended brand promise. This means that employees are to be clear in terms of their expected roles and responsibilities and develop a better understanding of the organization's brand meaning. Therefore, it gives increase prominence to the pivotal and essential role of service employees in service brand delivery.

By adopting internal brand management practices, organizations can align their networks, systems and culture to meet the customer expectations that are formed through brands (Vallaster, 2004). Service employees comprehend their desired role during a service encounter from the cues and settings provided by the organization and these cues can be implicit and/or explicit in nature. In order to determine the appropriate behaviors during a service encounter, a brand can be considered as a common script.

However ideally, a business continuously acquires new customers. Therefore, organizations cannot expect that all the customer are familiar with their role during service encounter (J. Bateson, 2002). Thus, organizations must help their employees to align their values and performance in accordance to the brand and subsequently customer expectations through increased brand knowledge and internal brand management practices. Hence, brand is a representation of the relationship between organization, its employees and customers.

In addition to the aforesaid role of alignment, several other reasons show that frontline employee brand alignment also has significant implications for services sector. First of all, not only functional characteristics but also emotional characteristics of a product are also important for consumer purchase behavior. Therefore, in a services context, frontline employees fill the gap of less tangible emotional attributes.

Secondly, heterogeneity characteristic of services which results from human interaction between customers and service employees (Wilson et al., 2012). Embedded in organizational behavior studies, it is argued that similar expectations and common interpretation of events may result when service employees and customers hold the same values (Kalliath et al., 1999). Consequently, this common interpretation can improve interpersonal relationships between service employees and customers which ultimately results in reduced uncertainty. Therefore, managers must emphasize on the communication of same brand values to employees and customers.

Third, service employees are critical success factor for a service brand and it is suggested to align their values and of the brand. A focused position and consistency are the most important factors. Furthermore, managers must emphasize on the importance brand value congruence of service employees to enhance their performance. A most recent study by (Sirianni et al., 2013) suggested that service brands can enhance their customer-based brand equity and brand evaluation by aligning their frontline employees with the brand personality. Our research also focused on the frontline employee brand alignment and results suggest that an alignment between employees and brand may yield better results.

2.2. Building strong brands through frontline employee brand alignment

Understanding how frontline employees can shape brand equity and should be especially critical for managers because they must create strong brand images and customer experiences in order to compete with manufacturer, or national brands. If employees are not trained on how to consistently make brand imagery more tangible to consumers, this could serve to weaken consumer brand impressions, and thus, customer-based brand equity. Higher level of brand equity is the basis of classification for successful brands (King & Grace, 2009). Brands with higher equity display characteristics such as higher brand awareness, strong customer loyalty, stronger brand association, perceived quality, trust and credibility. Thus, value of an organization's brand is a

combination of financial measures Such as market share or future earnings and customer based non-financial measures mentioned above.

Fundamentally, brands work as a marker for a firm's offering. Along with their other valuable functions for customers, brands can help customer to reduce risk by assuring a certain quality level, simplify their product choice, and stimulate trust. A comprehensive marketing strategy, product or service consumption by consumers and product or service itself can help in building strong brands. Thus, brands are the reflection of complete customer experience with the product or service. The effectiveness of frontline employee brand alignment can be determined through the customer response towards the brands.

While concept of a brand is similar for products and services (Vargo & Lusch, 2004b), branding has a significant importance in the services context (Berry, 2000). Due to intangibility characteristic of services and heterogeneity in service encounters, there is always a dire need to develop trust in the minds of customers. Consistency between delivered brand experience and communicated brand promise is fundamental to realize strong service brands. By providing empirical evidence of how, when and why branded customer service operates, this research provides guidance for how service brand managers can extend their brand positioning efforts to their customer-facing employees to more effectively shape brand equity.

Service designers and managers must understand how to create emotional attachment and positive service experience for the customers. Thus, relational context has an utmost importance to determine emotional response of customers towards a service brand. Emotional service experience should be managed throughout all the stages of the service interaction (pre, core and post experience) from a strategic point of view. Conventional relationship management strategy

has been less effective to generate customer satisfaction and loyalty in service context and the emphasis is needed on a more collective approach towards customer experience management.

Likewise, our research suggests for a shift from traditional relationship management approach to a more holistic view of customer experience management. Service marketing literature shows a significant interest to enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty through service encounter management. Many authors posit that consistent service experience is focal to maintain positive customer perceptions about the brand. Extraordinary experience occurs when customers experience higher emotional intensity over a period of time.

Successful experiences are memorable and unique which customers wants to repeat and generate positive word of mouth. These memorable and unique experiences create emotional connection between customers and brand and this is highly dependent on service employees. Through this emotional connection, customers feels satisfied and repeatedly buys with the same service brand (Morrison & Crane, 2007). Specifically, this research offers guidance to brand managers that hiring and training employees to credibly deliver brand aligned service delivery can serve to build strong brand equity from customer's first experiences with their brands that rivals the brand equity of their competitors. Service managers must realize the importance of frontline employees that they perform successfully during those initial brand encounters.

2.3. Transfer the positioning of the brand into actions through attitudes, behavior, appearance and expertise of frontline employee

Interaction quality is an important factor to influence the perception of service consumers during service encounters. Service managers must focus on the management of interaction quality. This service quality includes attitude, behavior, expertise and appearance of frontline employee. The result of our research suggest that brand aligned behavior of frontline employees can significantly influence the evaluation of service brands. Brand specific attitude and behavior is an important

factor during service encounters to convey brand meaning. At the same time, expertise of a service employee plays a significant role as well. From a managerial point of view the research tends to show that service branding is impacted by frontline employee brand alignment, especially the way they appear and behave. Based on evidence from observation, employee expertise can reinforce the brands' image. For example, people consider apple and fnac as an advance technological brand and frontline employees can enhance the brands' image by presenting their expertise with advance product and technological knowledge.

Hence the findings of this research suggest that along with attitude, behavior and expertise, service firms must focus on the appearance of the service employee. This appearance not only includes the physical appearance but also uniforms and other brand related things employee wears. Service managers must strategically focus on the appearance of frontline employees. For example, Sephora not only focus on the uniforms of their employees but also make sure that they have proper make up on their faces. This builds a strong perception about the brand in the minds of service consumer. Appearance has a strong connection with the evaluation of service encounter. Hence, attractive individuals can gain higher evaluations.

2.4. Authenticity of employee behavior is crucial

To demonstrate brand authenticity to consumers, marketing managers must shift their thinking about the brand to include the organization's frontline employees and the internal partners with which they must coordinate so that the entire firm works together seamlessly in brand-building efforts. Unfortunately, this type of coordination is not commonplace in today's service firms, as many companies have no clear process for achieving this synergy. Typically, the operations group owns the internal values of a service organization and marketing owns the values the company wants customers to experience. If these two groups continue to work independently, this could serve to confuse employees and eventually, disappoint customers in their actual brand experiences.

Instead, these functional groups should build a solid partnership that strengthens the company's efforts to bring the brand to life.

However, the customer perspective is missing because consumer service sector is dominated by operations focused models. These models focus more on controllable and functional dimensions and prone to suffer from flaws of not focusing on emotional, intangible and interpersonal components. Apart from technical expertise, interpersonal characteristics such as commitment and trust are also important attributes for service encounters in professional services. The most important and influential components to build a strong professional service brand include day to day customer employee interactions.

In many consumer-oriented services, service encounter is scripted and based on an operating manual. Although, this encounter is easy to predict and relatively simple but it is dealt in a functional approach. For example, it is very normal to hear the scripted phrase in telecommunication call centers that “*Is there anything else I can help you with?*”, when the call center employee has not even solved your actual problem (Meyer & Schwager, 2007). This kind of service experience remains inconsistent with actual brand promise. Authenticity is very important for service brands. Due to lack of responsiveness and genuine personality, scripted or fake employee behavior backfires both emotionally and functionally. Many service organizations impose strict control over the script of service encounter and loose the brand promise comprehension. In contrast, opposite approach to convey clear brand promise and encourage service employees to act naturally is opted by most successful and celebrated service brands.

2.5. Remain authentic for a longer interaction duration

The findings of our research also suggests that frontline employees should be trained in a way that they can perform authentic brand aligned behavior for a longer period of interaction. It is easy to perform in accordance with the brand aligned behavior in shorter duration. However, an employee

may lose his act in a longer duration or service employee may become normal during the longer period of interaction duration. If a service employee put an act in first few minutes which brand aligned and he becomes normal in subsequent time. It may decrease the evaluation of that encounter and subsequently impact the brand evaluation.

The findings of our research suggest that service organizations must work closely with frontline employees to deliver a brand aligned performance but also an authenticity in their behavior. Customers have very strong senses during service encounters. They can easily assess whether the employee's behavior is authentic or fake. Thus, service managers must focus on the emotional labor aspect of service employees. They should be trained in a way that they can display authentic emotions during service encounters for a longer period of time.

2.6. Strong culture, strong brands

Corporate brand culture is based on a distinctive and relevant brand promise to the customers (Balmer et al., 2001; L. D. Chernatony et al., 2006). This distinctive and relevant brand promise is critical in building strong service brands. The preferred frontline employee behavior is embedded in strong corporate brand culture where core brand values are clearly defined. This clarity of service brand promise and alignment of frontline employee behavior with functional and emotional brand values helps to position a brand and to develop its image and personality. By appropriate communication of service brand vision, brand promise and customer expectations, frontline employees can better recognize their role as brand builder.

The likelihood of brand consistent service encounter can be enhanced through coordinated service delivery and strong corporate culture that encourages shared values in service employees. A higher customer satisfaction, positive customer perceptions and a holistic brand image is reinforced through congruency of actual and perceived brand promise. This brand alignment of

frontline employee develops a long-term trust worthy relationship between customers and service brands, which also results in higher customer based brand equity.

2.7. Brand aligned recruitment and brand specific training

Service employees can fulfil the inherent implicit and explicit brand promises through brand internalization (Miles & Mangold, 2004). A clear direction to realize organizational goals is necessary and desired brand values and behaviors should be clarified and defined for the service employees. The ability of service employees to deliver desired brand experience is highly unlikely without such brand internalization. Any external brand-building activities are likely to be unsuccessful in such situations. Employees are source of brand power (Berry, 2000).

Thus, committed and informed employees have the inherent ability to deliver brand promise. Hence, informed service employees have the ability to transform brand vision to reality. Further, it has been suggested that contemporary culture makes it increasingly difficult to distinguish between image and substance, so people will continue to spend time, energy, and money in search of authentic experiences. In order for service firms to provide genuine brand experiences for their customers, they need to deliver, via customer service, on the brand promises they have made in advertising and other forms of brand messaging.

Additionally, this research suggests that brand managers of familiar, market-leading brands can also benefit from hiring and training employees to believably embody the brand in their interactions with customers, because this can serve to buffer the brand against negative equity evaluations after inevitable brand failures. Thus, although firm investment in brand aligned recruiting and selection, and brand specific training for frontline employees can be expensive and risky due to the high turnover in those positions. However, the results of our research suggest that it is a worthwhile attempt to gain competitive advantage.

To build a strong service brand, it is crucial for companies to comprehend all the facets of customer experience and manage it in accordance to customer expectations. Every service encounter and consumption communicates customer experience which creates perception of brand in the minds of customers. Thus, companies are deprived of the luxury to decide that whether or not to involve in experience management.

Although there is an increased realization of the crucial importance of customer experience for successful service brands, companies still struggle to assess the quality of their customer experience with respect to the perception of their customers. As for the physical context plays much smaller role in fostering emotional attachment than relational context, powerful and more stronger positive customer emotions can be generated through the relational context. These positive emotions are primarily an outcome of personalized and extended direct customer interaction with service employees. A perfectly designed service scape is important, but service encounter cannot be transformed into an emotional connection and memorable service experience without appropriate employee training to perform desired customer service.

The attempt to deliver a consistent total customer experience is always effected by the complexity of service interaction. Both interpersonal and operational dimensions of a service remain a point of concern for service brands. However, service organizations are more focused and feel confident about the management of operational dimensions. Training, automation and service quality measurement make it more conducive for service brands to manage repetitive operational complexities. Thus, consistency in functional areas of a service brand is found as a key factor for successful service brands.

Thus, role of service employee to create brand differentiation does not limit to positive service attitude. Along with consistent positive service attitude, a particular distinctive service

style generated through strong emotional values is fundamental to differentiated and sustainable service brands. It is easy for competitors to copy operational and functional components. However, it is far more difficult to imitate intangible characteristics of a service experience.

Although functional components of a service experience are an important source of competitive advantage, but competitors can easily copy those functional characteristics. Even a new operating model is developed, the lead time before you are being copied is becoming increasingly narrow. For example, Easyjet became successful by developing a low cost operating model, it is only a matter of time that competitors like Ryan Air beat you at your own game (King & Grace, 2009). Evidently, the point of similarity in all successful service brands is the focus on service employee to deliver a distinctive service experience. Joseph Michelli concluded in his study of *“Starbucks Experience”* that *“While seemingly endless details go into producing the emotional bond that loyal Starbucks customers feel, often the most important aspect of this bond is the personal investment of Starbucks partners [employees] (Michelli, 2006).”*

Competitors can easily copy products but it is difficult to imitate service. Although, it is difficult to develop strong, successful and sustainable service, however once developed, competitors face difficulty to copy them because of their dependence on employee training, strong organizational culture and service employee attitude and behavior. *“service is perhaps the most sustainable differential advantage in building successful brands”* (Doyle, 1990, p. 87). It is referred as a self-reinforcing process where service organizations have an ability to convey brand vision to its consumers and also to focus on service employees as responsible to deliver that vision. He ascertained that these practices are necessary for successful service brand management.

Conclusion

Service organization must focus on employee commitment which is core to such self-reinforcing processes. In order to obtain service employee commitment, service organizations should first develop synergy in all organizational processes and practices to help service employees in performing their roles and responsibilities during service encounter (Quinn & Paquette, 1990). For this reason, the organizational pyramid should be turned upside down in service organizations because service brands are heavily dependent on customer service as compared to product brands. It is suggested to shift the focus on service employee effectiveness by matching processes and practices in order to help them while performing their role. Thus, the focus on service employee empowerment can be more effective in service brand management than a production-line approach because of its focus on both operational processes and service employee's mindset. This employee empowerment must include fair rewards, sufficient information and autonomy to perform discretionary actions on the behalf of customers (De Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003).

In summary, service branding has strong relevance to the following important issues such as: 1) the significance of the service encounter; 2) that service employees are an important medium to deliver the service vision to consumers; 3) the necessity for frontline employee responsiveness; and 4) the need of service employee empowerment mechanisms to attain such responsiveness. Indeed, frontline employees play key role in delivering service experience in consumer oriented service brands as well as in professional service businesses like, medical services, financial services, law and accountancy. Interpersonal complexity exists as standard in such businesses. Service employee knowledge, expertise and ability to connect with customers is central to value creation process (Barber & Strack, 2005; Drucker, 2002). Most professional service organizations gain competitive advantage with respect to expertise and specialist knowledge of their employees.

Extending brand positioning efforts to include experiences between firm customers and employees is one way to accomplish this task, and findings from this study have managerial implications for the brand aligned recruiting and selection of service employees, as well as the development of brand specific training and internal marketing programs which should serve to help marketing managers better manage their brands from the inside out. This research also raises questions about the ethical issues regarding hiring discrimination. For example, it is highly unlikely to see a fat airhostess. Most cosmetic brands hire girls with a pretty face. This discrimination can raise some serious questions about ethical code of conduct in company's hiring policy.

3. Limitation and future research recommendations

This research adds to the service branding and alignment literature. However, there are few limitation as well. These limitations and future research directions are presented in the next section.

3.1. Expert interviews

As this research was conducted to explore customer perspective, we conducted adequate number of qualitative interviews from customer. However, we could not interview sufficient number of marketing experts for the qualitative interviews. These experts can be from industry as well as the marketing professors which may shed some more light on the concept of alignment and its implications in the industry and academia. The concept of alignment may be perceived differently by experts than customers and it can also be explained further through their comprehensive comments. Therefore, future research may focus on the expert perspective because they might provide some significant insights of frontline employee brand alignment which can be more useful for the service organizations.

3.2. Qualitative analysis

Although, qualitative interviews were transcribed and content analysis was performed carefully on those interviews. The coding is done and quotations are labeled. There is a limitation based on the qualitative analysis. Currently, many sophisticated softwares are available for qualitative analysis. Researchers may utilize these softwares to do qualitative analysis which can provide more valuable information from the qualitative interviews. These softwares include i.e. Nvivo.

3.3. Consequences of alignment

Our research mainly focused on measurement development and we took brand evaluation and customer-based brand equity as outcome variables. There is no doubt that these outcome variables have an important relationship with FLE brand alignment. However, there are many other outcome variables which can be explored to better understand the importance and implications of brand alignment concept. Future researchers can take other outcome variables such as, customer-company identification and customer satisfaction. Future researchers may also explore the real time impact of FLE brand alignment by investigating the service organization's financial performance before and after the implementation of brand alignment concept.

3.4. Boundary conditions of fle brand alignment

This research took employee authentic behavior, brand familiarity and interaction duration as boundary conditions of FLE brand alignment. However, there are many other boundary conditions which may have strong regulatory impact on the relationship of FLE brand alignment and other outcome variables. Although, we included multiple boundary conditions. However, further research can focus on other boundary conditions of frontline employee brand alignment such as, employee-customer similarity and length of relationship.

3.5. Dimensions of brand personality

We performed a comprehensive quantitative analysis. However due to complexity of the quantitative analysis, we collected data on the main dimensions of brand personality (sincere, excitement, competent, sophisticated, rugged) and performed multigroup moderation (see annexure D-1). Researchers can collect data which includes the sub-dimensions (i.e. honest, wholesome, cheerful, daring, spirited, imaginative, reliable, intelligent, upper class, charming, casual) of brand personality as well.

3.6. Longitudinal data collection

Our research was focused on customer perspective and we collected cross sectional data for the tested model. This cross sectional data may have caused the bias in the results. Future research may focus on the longitudinal data collection to better understand the concept of alignment and its implications. This data collection can also be done with time 1 and time 2 type. It can help to understand the impact of certain campaign or after training the employees to deliver the brand promise. This analysis will help to understand the real time difference made by the implementation of brand alignment concept.

3.7. Sectors and brands

We focused on the multiple sectors such as, retail, restaurants and others. One limitation can be the overall investigation of FLE brand alignment concept. The impact of FLE brand alignment may have different implications in different sectors. For example, the impact of appearance may have stronger impact in cosmetic industry and expertise of a FLE may have more importance in technical services. At the same time, FLE brand alignment may generate different results for premium brand and budget brands in the same service sector. Therefore, further research is needed in this area on the basis of different sectors and brands. This research may generate some interesting results.

3.8. Hallow effect

Although, we followed a very rigorous method of data collection and analysis. However, there can be an issue of hallow effect in the results. We used critical incident technique to collect data and there may be a possibility that customers only recalled the positive incidents. However, there is also a possibility that respondents recalled the negative experience as well. Further research may conduct some experimental studies where they take low brand image and chic employee to understand whether result differ from our study or not.

3.9. Dimension based impact of interaction quality

The focus of this research is to develop the measurement of frontline employee brand alignment and further investigate its role to enhance brand evaluation and customer-based brand equity. Therefore, we did not examined the dimension based impact of interaction quality on frontline employee brand alignment. It is recommended for future research direction that dimension based impact of interaction quality may be examined to better understand that which dimension has more influence on the customer perception of frontline employee brand alignment. Appendix D-9 presents the figure of structural model where appearance is handled as a separate variable.

3.10. Ethical issue

Frontline employee brand alignment appears to be an important concept in service branding. However, it raises some ethical issues for the service industry. Although, we did not investigate it, but this research raises questions about the ethical issues regarding hiring discrimination. For example, it is highly unlikely to see a fat airhostess. Most cosmetic brands hire girls with a pretty face. This discrimination can raise some serious questions about ethical code of conduct in company's hiring policy.

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APPENDIX

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Appendix

Appendix A-1 Survey Questionnaire

We are conducting research on Frontline employees (Customer Contact Staff). Please spare 10-15 minutes of your valuable time to contribute in this research. Your cooperation will be highly regarded.

Please recall an interaction you had with A Frontline Employee (Customer Contact Staff) in last one month and answer the following questions.

1. Please specify “*when*” your interaction with service employee happened.

☐ Within 24 Hours ☐ within 1 Week ☐ within 1-2 Weeks ☐ within 2-3 Weeks ☐ within 3-4 Weeks

1.1 Please specify “*medium*” of your interaction with service employee.

☐ Face-to-Face ☐ Call Centre ☐ Email ☐ Online ☐ _____

2. Please select the “*sector*” where you had interaction with Frontline Employee (Customer Contact Staff).

☐ Banking ☐ Restaurants ☐ Transport ☐ Hotel ☐ Telecom ☐ Retail ☐ Others _____

3. Please Specify “*Brand Name*”: _____

4. Please Specify the “*Gender of Service Employee*”: _____

5. Please Specify the “*Age of Service Employee*”: _____

6. Please specify in which “*country*” this interaction happened: _____

7. How long you have been customer of this brand? / What is your “*Length of Relationship*” with this brand?

☐ Less than 1 years ☐ 1-2 years ☐ 2-4 years ☐ 4-6 years ☐ 6-8 years ☐ 8-10 years ☐ More Than 10 years

8. Please describe your “*interaction with service employee*” in few sentences?

8.1 Please describe your “*perception of brand’s image*” in few sentences?

9. Interaction Quality							
9.1 Service Employee Appearance	Strongly Disagree ← - - - → Strongly Agree						
1. The employee I met is very good looking.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. The employee I met has an attractive appearance.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. The employee I met would generally be thought of as beautiful/handsome.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. The employee I met was wearing proper uniform/dress.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. The employee I met was wearing other brand related things. (i.e. Cap, Bracelet, Badge)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9.2 Service Employee Attitude	Strongly Disagree ← - - - → Strongly Agree						
1. You can count on the employees at this brand for being friendly.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. The attitude of this brand's employees demonstrates their willingness to help me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. The attitude of this brand's employees shows me that they understand my needs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9.3 Service Employee Behavior	Strongly Disagree ← - - - → Strongly Agree						
1. I can count on this brand's employees for taking actions to address my needs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. This brand's employees respond quickly to my needs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. The behavior of this brand's employees indicates to me that they understand my needs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9.4 Service Employee Expertise	Strongly Disagree ← - - - → Strongly Agree						
1. You can count on this brand's employees for knowing their jobs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. This brand's employees are able to answer my questions quickly.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. The employees of this brand understand that I rely on their knowledge to meet my needs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. FLE Brand Image Alignment							
10.1 Expectancy	Strongly Disagree ← - - - → Strongly Agree						
1. Knowing XX and its specificities, you were expecting to interact with the FLE that served you.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. Knowing XX, you were expecting that FLE were as they were.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Going at XX, you were expecting to interact with the FLE that served you.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. I am not surprised that this brand has this FLE.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. One would expect this brand to have this FLE.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. It was predictable that this brand would have this FLE.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. I could have predicted the association between this brand and this FLE.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10.2 Relevancy	Strongly Disagree ← - - - → Strongly Agree						
1. Knowing XX and its specificities, you think FLE is appropriate.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. FLE of XX goes well with XX stores and its specificities.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. FLE of XX is well adapted to XX stores.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. FLE of XX convey what characterize XX.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

5. FLE of XX corresponds to XX and its specificities.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. FLE of XX is typical of XX.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. The employee fit with this company's brand image.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

11. Brand Personality & Frontline Employee Personality																	
I would describe this brand personality as									I would describe FLE personality as								
Sincere (Brand)									Sincere (Employee)								
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Exciting (Brand)									Exciting (Employee)								
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Competent (Brand)									Competent (Employee)								
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Sophisticated (Brand)									Sophisticated (Employee)								
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Rugged/Casual (Brand)									Rugged/Casual (Employee)								
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

12. Brand Evaluation

a) Overall, how do you feel about the brand?

Dislike ← ----- → Like							
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not at all trustworthy ← ----- → Very trustworthy							
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Very low quality ← ----- → Very high quality							
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not at all desirable ← ----- → Very desirable							
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

b) How likely are you to shop with the brand?

Not at all likely ← ----- → Very likely							
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

13. Customer Based Brand Equity	Strongly Disagree ← - - - → Strongly Agree						
1. The brand is the best brand in its product class.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. The brand really "stands out" from other brands.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. I am willing to pay more for the brand than other comparable brands.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Compared with other brands, the brand is a good value for the money.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

14. Employees' Authentic Behavior	Strongly Disagree ← - - - → Strongly Agree						
1. The employee was faking how she or he felt in this interaction.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. The employee was pretending/putting on an act in this interaction.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

15. Brand Familiarity

Please rate the following on the basis of your familiarity, experience and knowledge about the brand.

<i>Unfamiliar</i>		←-----→					<i>Familiar</i>
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
<i>Inexperienced</i>		←-----→					<i>Experienced</i>
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
<i>Not Knowledgeable</i>		←-----→					<i>Knowledgeable</i>
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

16. Demographic Details

Please complete the following demographic information, giving your best knowledge where exact answers are not known. Your information will be kept strictly confidential and will only use by the researcher for academic purposes:

- Gender ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Others_____
- Marital Status ☐ Married ☐ Unmarried ☐ Others_____
- Age: _____
- Nationality: _____
- Email: _____
- Education ☐ Undergraduate ☐ Masters ☐ MS/M.Phil. ☐ Ph.D.
- Occupation:
- Income:

Thank You...

Appendix A-2 Qualitative interview guide

Name:

Age (in years):

Question 1: Tell me about a service brand you really like and tell me why?

Question 2: Do you think that frontline employees can represent brand image or its key values? Please give details and examples?

Question 3: share a service experience where you encountered a service employee who highly fit or was highly aligned with the brand image? Tell me in detail why you consider frontline employee fit or was aligned with the brand image?

Question 4: share a service experience where you encountered a service employee who weakly fit or was weakly aligned with the brand image? Tell me in detail why you consider frontline employee weakly fit or was weakly aligned with the brand image?

Question 5: In which service or sector you think it would have the most impact on you?

Appendix A-3 Alignment measurement scale items

Items for measurement development

1. Knowing XX and its specificities, you were expecting to interact with the FLE that served you.
 2. Knowing XX, you were expecting that FLE were as they were.
 3. Going at XX, you were expecting to interact with the FLE that served you.
 4. I am not surprised that this brand has this FLE.
 5. One would expect this brand to have this FLE.
 6. It was predictable that this brand would have this FLE.
 7. I could have predicted the association between this brand and this FLE.
 8. I do not think it original, for this brand to have this type of FLE.
 9. The idea I had of this brand could not help me imagine this FLE.
 10. I do not find it surprising that this brand has this FLE.
 11. Knowing XX and its specificities, you think FLE is appropriate.
 12. FLE of XX goes well with XX stores and its specificities.
 13. FLE of XX is well adapted to XX stores.
 14. FLE of XX convey what characterize XX.
 15. FLE of XX corresponds to XX and its specificities.
 16. FLE of XX is typical of XX.
 17. The employee fit with this company's brand image.
 18. That this brand have this FLE tells something about the brand.
 19. When I see this FLE, I understand the brand image better.
 20. With this FLE, I discover a new aspect of this company's brand image.
 21. That this brand has this FLE makes sense to me.
 22. I understand why this brand has this FLE.
 23. It is meaningful to see this FLE associated with this brand.
 24. I find it relevant for this brands' image to have this FLE.
 25. It is sensible for this brand to have this FLE.
 26. I can see a direct link between the brands' image and its FLE.
 27. The message intended by this brand by having this FLE is clear to me.
-

Appendix A-4: Quotes for determinants of frontline employee alignment during interaction

Category	Quotations (R=Respondent)
Attitude	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Frontline employees represent brand image, they are the most important ambassadors for the company. The customer experience often start with the meeting of the frontline employees and it is crucial for a company to represent them well to get the customer to come back and buy. (R1) 2. I work at the Swedish bank SEB (Skandinaviska Enskilda Banken) and their core vision is to deliver “world class service”. Those who work with customer service are the ones who represent the company to the customer and they should always try to incorporate the bank’s vision when dealing with customers. (R3) 3. The battery on my iPhone was starting to become weak so went to an Apple store to get help with fixing it and changing the battery. The person working their immediately tried to help me by checking out the phone. (R3) 4. Frontline employees can be the main reason why I choose that particular product. For example, makeup stores like Sephora where you can directly notice if the frontline employees have an interest in the products they sell or not.(R4) 5. The way the air hostess treats you speaks a lot about the airlines values.(R5) 6. Amazon prides itself on being one of the most custom centric companies and their Frontline employees who are in charge of customer service rarely disappoint in this regard. They have always listened carefully and provided the appropriate help every time.(R6) 7. The person at the reception was over a call with another guest. I had to wait at the counter for 5 minutes before the call was over and she could attend to me. Though I would be fine with this at a normal hotel, the service should be better at a luxury hotel.(R6) 8. AVIS rent a car, the company stands for hassle free travel and treats the customers like the boss. The car is always before time and the driver ensures that if he reaches 15 minutes before the time specified. The driver will also be courteous in every way possible.(R7) 9. For example, Southwest Airlines in United States has developed a brand image of a company which they treat others with respect and deliver world-class hospitality services. The work and the way they treat their customers reflects these core values.(R2) 10. I have been using Axis Bank’s service for my primary banking needs for many years now and the bank and its employees take care of the needs and provide service of the utmost quality.(R8) 11. Advertising for fast food, are always based on the fact that the restaurant is friendly, and employees are helpful and give you a warm welcome. In reality, employees need to be fast, and don’t really pay attention to the customers. They are trying to build their brand image on the fact you will feel like you are at home. I think for example to Macdonalds, when they said in France “Venez comme vous êtes” (Come as you are) but actually they don’t treat you very well.(R15) 12. When you go to a Nespresso shop you are always very welcomed well. The employees are very helpful when it comes to choose the perfect coffee.(R17) 13. I like Jet Airways, India as they have an amazing friendly staff who always smile. The hospitality industry requires the company to have a

-
- warm and hospitable image. Jet Airways tick marks most of the criteria when it comes to being warm and friendly.(R19)
14. When I visited the local Adidas showroom, the frontline employee was really empathetic in listening to my complaint. He helped me get a refund and from then I became a lifelong loyal customer of Adidas.(R25)
 15. I met a bank employee of HDFC bank India to know the procedure for acquiring a loan. He firstly asked about my requirements and then guided as well as helped me with all my queries. He also gave me different options and suggestions that would fit my requirements. The best thing about him was he was calm, listened to what i needed and accordingly gave best output.(R26)
 16. any superior Hotel say Marriot , Hyatt always portray friendly attitude and are specifically trained to showcase customer friendly and cooperative attitude.(R27)
 17. Front line employees at Decathlon are super awesome in terms of their commitment to better serve their customers. They are highly knowledgeable, well spoken, well-groomed and humble individuals who will not only provide you what you need but will also make your buying experience smooth.(R30)
 18. I really like AirFrance. I like this service brand because I love travelling, and Airfrance make me love it more. When I travel with this company, I feel good. They take good care of us, I know that I can always trust this company, the personal is always warmful, smiling, classy.(R38)
 19. People who interact directly with a customer must have a skillset and mindset to meet or exceed a customer's expectations. Some of the more important traits and abilities might be friendliness, empathy, communication skills, problem solving, patience.(R46)
 20. In airline companies, flight attendants represent the brand by trying to help passenger have a nice and easy flight.(R54)
 21. Jet airways. The staff at the counter is very friendly and welcoming. They offer assistance starting from Security screening of baggage and make you feel welcome. While entering the aircraft we were warmly welcomed by the cabin crew. The cabin crew were very polite and listened to the passenger's problem very patiently.(R57)

Behavior

1. Employee kept postponing the appointment and I was in contact with them maybe ten times on the phone.
2. When I went to enquire about the class, the employee there explained everything to me in detail – not just about the class, but also about other courses, foreign education, colleges, etc. She was extremely courteous and helpful and was genuinely providing information and not just trying to make me join the class.(R5)
3. A bad service experience I had was with Vodafone. Vodafone employees did not expedite the process even after explaining them my situation. Vodafone for me always meant good service and trust but this experience has changed that for me and I will most likely shift to some other service provider.(R5)
4. The frontline employees play a big role in ensuring brand image is maintained. Especially the air hostess behavior can make or break a customer's beliefs about the flight and the company.
5. Airtel is often ranked among the most trusted brands but it's Frontline employees are often uninterested in helping and do not make you feel like going into a customer service center.(R6)

Behavior

6. If I were to give an example, it could be Southwest airlines. Here the brand provides a service of travel. The frontline employees, the air host/hostess as well as pilots ensure that the customers get a unique and fun traveling experience - the values that the airline stands for.(R7)
7. This experience was with an Ola driver when the driver was very rude and cancelled the cab after coming to the location. Even the call center services were poor and I had to follow up a lot to get refund of the cancellation fee.(R7)
8. I had an emergency and needed the demand draft within fifteen minutes and I also did not have the cheque. The employee got a leaf cheque issued and also processed it within fifteen minutes which truly highlights company's value of customer centricity. (R2)
9. If a train is delayed, I can miss a very important appointment or a student can miss an exam just because of that. For me it is not just about money but also about the quality of a product. Because it can be stressful to miss a train, I expect that the employees can understand the situation and show comprehension and empathy. But most of the time, they are very cold and stressed too.(R12)
10. I was on holidays in Barcelona in Spain, and I went to a hotel for the last night before I came back to France. We had a reservation for a room that we made from internet. So we went to see the employee at the reception and this employee looked very tired and aggressive.(R16)
11. I was taking a plane to go to Argentina in a company named Air France. As soon as I enter in the plane I felt good, the stewardess was good looking and she was sweet to me. She asked me if I needed something and gave me a coke. Then during the flight, she was helpful with everybody, the kids that wanted to play video games on their personal screen or the old ones that wanted to read a book. At the morning she woke us up with some breakfast and when we left she was smiling and still sweet and helpful after an 11 hours journey.(R18)
12. In the restaurant. I know that if I take a coffee in a coffee bar and the waitress propose me something else in a kind way I will always take it and let a tip when I leave. It's the same in a restaurant, if the employee is gentle and make the experience even greater, I'll recommend the restaurant to my friends and I'll come back.(R18)
13. First impressions are the most lasting and frontline employees can contribute to represent the brand image or any of its key values. For instance, friendly and helpful staff leaves a lasting impression on a customer who would prefer taking service from the brands where they have had good experiences in the past.(R19)
14. I requested the stewardess for hot chocolate instead of tea/coffee. She was very polite by not directly saying a no as it was only available for business class passengers but said that she would try to see what can be done. After 30 minutes, she came with a warm cup of hot chocolate. I really like the approach of the Jet Airways employees as they are polite and always try to meet passengers' requests and do not directly saying a no.(R19)
15. Turkish Airways to Paris for my exchange program, I had an unpleasant experience. The stewardess in the flight seemed to be frustrated and hostile towards Asian passengers. They never smiled and gave rude answers when they were asked any questions. Such behavior in the hospitality sector is uncalled for and leads to a negative impression about the service provider.(R19)
16. I stayed at the Ascott Hotels in Philippines which was a major 5 star hotel. At the breakfast each day, the waiters would ask me if I miss

home, if I am liking my work and they would get my preferred breakfast without fail each day. The employees were a great fit with the brand image of Ascott which provides high quality service apartments.(R21)

17. The way the employee of ICIC bank india helped me getting a loan and also cooperated with me in submitting the paper work which is always a task for the customer. But the way the employee helped me take through the process was something that every customer will look forward to.(R31)
18. Air Indigo in India is known for its low-cost flights and the punctuality of low turnaround times. The flight attendants and staff are known for their customer friendliness. Last month my flight to Delhi from Vadodara got delayed by 2.5 hours and had to land at Jaipur in middle of journey due to fuel tank issues. The staff misbehaved the angry customers and couldn't answer their queries.(R42)
19. For example, if the first contact in a restaurant is with a server that is rude and impolite, no matter the food quality, the client will not enjoy the experience and might not come back.(R47)
20. Flight attendant during an Air France flight. He had no patience with the other passengers he seemed irritated during the whole flight.(R54)

Expertise

1. When I moved to a new house and had a problem with the broadband, which gives us the TV and wireless Internet at the house. I called the company responsible but they could not figure out the problem. (R3)
2. When I was in New York and used LYFT, I had a really bad driver that was very late and made us almost miss our flight and of course I complained about this and LYFT personally contacted me and gave me back 50% of the money which doesn't make up for the bad experience.(R4)
3. In a makeup store, where I had an appointment for make-up consultation where I ended up looking like a clown and had to remove all of the makeup and the money was wasted. If they don't have more knowledge about their products than me then I could just order online. (R4)
4. They had missed their flight after layover in Istanbul due to airline's dis-coordination and the person of contact on the counter did not coordinate with them properly for booking another flight for them because of which they had to spend more than 15 hours on Istanbul Airport. (R3)
5. My bank adviser contacted me for helping me with the creation of new bank account, action that I have appreciated. When I arrived here, I was disappointed. First my bank adviser was late, about 20 minutes without any apologizes. Because I'm young she was talking and acting on a familiar way with me, thing that I did not like. We were interrupted several times by people knocking at the door or calling at the phone. I felt that her behavior was not at all in harmony with my perception on a bank image.(R11)
6. There is an "orange" shop closed to my home where the employees are very nice but not qualified at all. I am 58 years old and it can be complicated to get used to all the telephonic innovations and equipment so when I move to a shop it is for having answers to my questions. Sadly, the employees cannot answer because they are not training at all. Even if employees are nice and they do their best, they are just no qualified enough.(R12)
7. I want to tell you about Scotto which is a brand selling music instruments and classes. I bought a guitar and a ukulele, and now in

Expertise

- their new shop I have purchased an expansive guitar and an amplifier and I have never been disappointed because I trust the brand and the employees are good adviser.(R13)
8. Employee explained me about the different interest rates i would be liable to pay under different schemes which could reduce my cost. It was a proper picture why HDFC bank ranks in top 100 of most valuable brands.(R26)
 9. Just few months back I started facing network issues with my I Phone only after which I visited the Apple store. My experience with the apple employee was very positive. He checked my phone patiently asked me the issues I was facing. He had a very good knowledge and almost solved all the issues I had.(R27)
 10. Just a year back I had ordered a television set. The brand which I got has this policy of giving a demo for use of the TV so that the user gets to know about all the inbuilt and add on features about the television. First of all when the product was delivered we had to ask for the demo. Even after many repeated calls the Customer Service Executive appeared to give the demo. In the demo he himself was not aware of the features and said that he will get back to us on the same which he never did.(R27)
 11. This happened recently in a subway we went in Paris. The employee couldn't understand my needs for a subway sandwich and filled in improper amount of vegetables. She couldn't acknowledge the fact that I was a vegetarian and had particular needs.(R29)
 12. For instance, a driver for an Uber car, who happens to be the frontline employee, makes a lot of difference to the service perception. A driver with on time arrival, safe driving skills, effective communication and good know how about the geography makes for an excellent brand reflection to the customer.(R32)
 13. The first time I went to Orange to get a new French SIM card, people there were very helpful and happy to sell me their service, but when I returned to inquire about my SIM card that does not seem to work with my phone, nobody could tell me what was the problem and how to fix it.(R47)
 14. In Fnac (a multimedia store), sellers are expert and know everything about the products, they can advise and guide any customer in their request and asks, they represent the brand and it is why la Fnac is so strong.(R50)
 15. Apple store: they want to create a world in their shop, they have a special dress code, use all Apple's products. They are well recognizable and are experts in Apple products: you can ask any advices, can respond to any problems, they know how to use products and software. They even organize lessons on how to use Apple's products.(R50)

Appearance

1. If you see a worker with bad makeup at cosmetic store on you wouldn't really trust their recommendation and therefore probably not buy products. This has happened to me and I immediately went to another store where I could find better competence. (R4)
 2. There are a few codes that can be displayed, which includes the dressing style of the employees as well. For example, the employees who welcome the guests at the entrance in Taj Hotels India are dressed in traditional attire.(R6)
 3. For example, in Sephora shops, the saleswoman are all dressed with black cloth with hair tied back and red lipstick for having a good and fancy image in order to fit with the image of a make-up brand. (R11)
-

Appearance

4. I like going on luxury boutique like Chanel, Longchamp or Dior. Because it is about luxe, I expect a very pure and luxury decoration, with very well dressed and very polite employees.(R12)
5. The salesman in Paris shop is totally representative of the brand. When I think about “Thomas Sabo” I see this very stylish man. He is wearing a lot of brand’s jewellery that look very nice on him so it pushes me to buy some of them. Moreover, he is an excellent adviser, because of the large range of products I get lost easily and he is competent for helping me to mix the “charms” in function of my tastes and for that the final bracelet look stylish.(R12)
6. I think frontline employees represent the brand image, for example I was happy to see an employee with a rock look at a musical instrument shop.(R13)
7. If you take the example of Abercrombie, the model who are present in front of but also inside the shop represent the values of the brand: being fit, and handsome. The clothes are made for fit, skinny, or normal people, unfortunately not for “fat” people.(R14)
8. Footlocker is shop specialized in sport equipment. When you enter in Footlocker, all the employees are wearing the same clothes. Those clothes refer to the sport and it allows for the customers to feel like they are in a specific shop, which is Footlocker. When you see a employee with those clothes, you automatically think about this particular brand.(R14)
9. Owner of the Bud skateshop fit perfectly with the brand image, he always wears skate clothes with famous skate brands such as Vans, Primitive or Nike SB. Sometimes he skates with us at the mini ramp, showing that he is just like all the skaters.(R16)
10. Employees of Nespresso represent very well the brand image. They are all dressed with black shirts or black and white suits. They are good looking and very helpful when it comes to choose the perfect coffee.(R17)
11. I think that they do, that’s why the sellers in the shops are always dressed according to the image of the brand. The frontline employees represent the brand, they are the first contact that the customer has with the brand, the first image that the customer receive. We can take as an example the brand Nike. When we enter in a shop, all the sellers have sports clothes.(R37)
12. Abercrombie & Fitch : the sellers are chose depending on the style they have, and depending on the physical appearance, and it’s attractive for the customers because it creates a kind of « ambiance » in the shop.(R37)
13. I encounter at the ZARA showroom they are very much conscious about their brand all the employee where at least wearing one apparel of ZARA.(R43)
14. Recently while I was there at an apple store the service employee was properly dressed and reflected brand image and as apple provides us with consumer friendly products even the employees are customer friendly.(R44)
15. For example, the brand Red Bull are well-known to employ their “wings” just regarding to their physical aspect but they are very well paid and have a lot of advantages. They pass red bull cans in different events and attracting people like this. So they are a real ambassador of the brand.(R50)
16. I think that the frontline employees are representing the brand image and they have professional requirements. For example, I’m currently working at Bio C’Bon (A biological shop in Castellane) and we have

Appearance

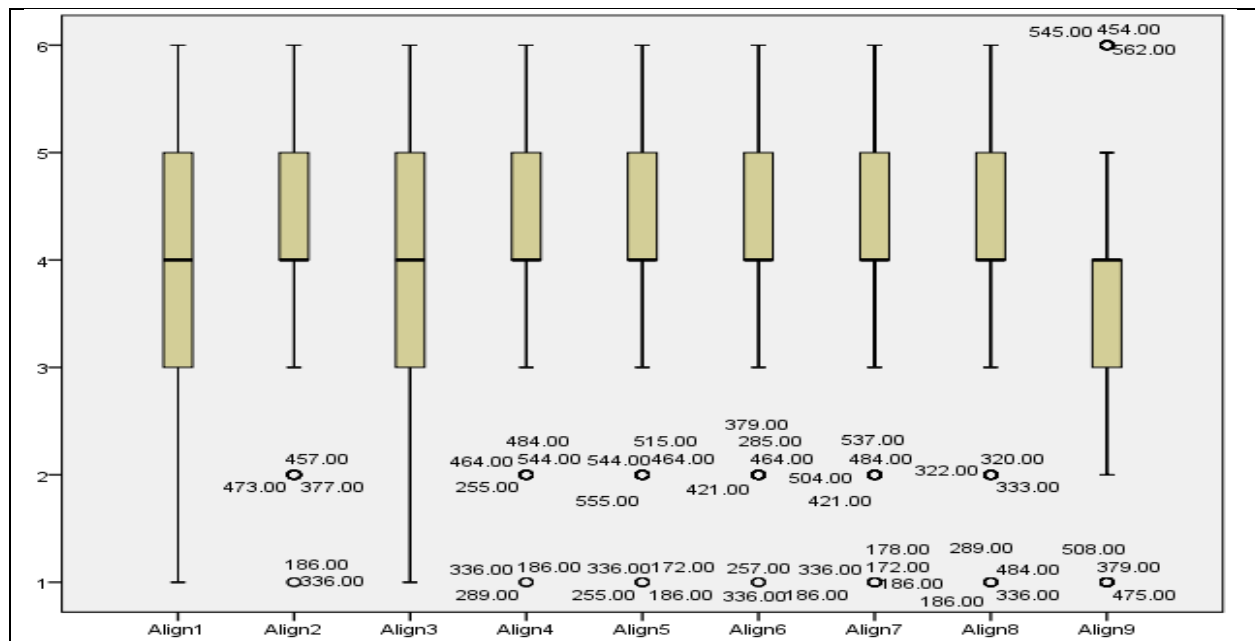
- to speak well, wear green clothes and others obligations as making the client laugh.(R51)
17. My experience in the Galleries Lafayette was for sure the best of all. The employees were so nice with me, had interesting advice. The dress code was chic and sober as the brand image for me. The client service is almost like a luxury shop.(R51)
 18. The service experience where I encountered a service employee who highly fit with the brand image it's on M.A.C store. The makeup artist was reflecting the brand because of her make-up and her clothes. When she did my make-up it was classy and sober as the brand image to my mind.(R53)
 19. While shopping at MAC Cosmetics the front line lady had put on a lot of makeup and was immaculately dressed representative of the brand's image.(R62)
 20. Starbucks employees represent very well the image of the brand, they are dressed with the colors of the company and they are really friendly with customers.(R64)
 21. Their dress code must show that they belong to the company, they are the visible face of the company and they also convey pretty well the values of the company. (R65)
 22. Abercrombie: they sell casual clothes for women and men. It's typical example because it's an international brand, employees wear the cloth that they sell. Employees are fit and beautiful. (R67)
 23. Abercrombie usually hires young, sportive sales assistant to communicate directly with the customers and this reflects the brand image.(R75)
-

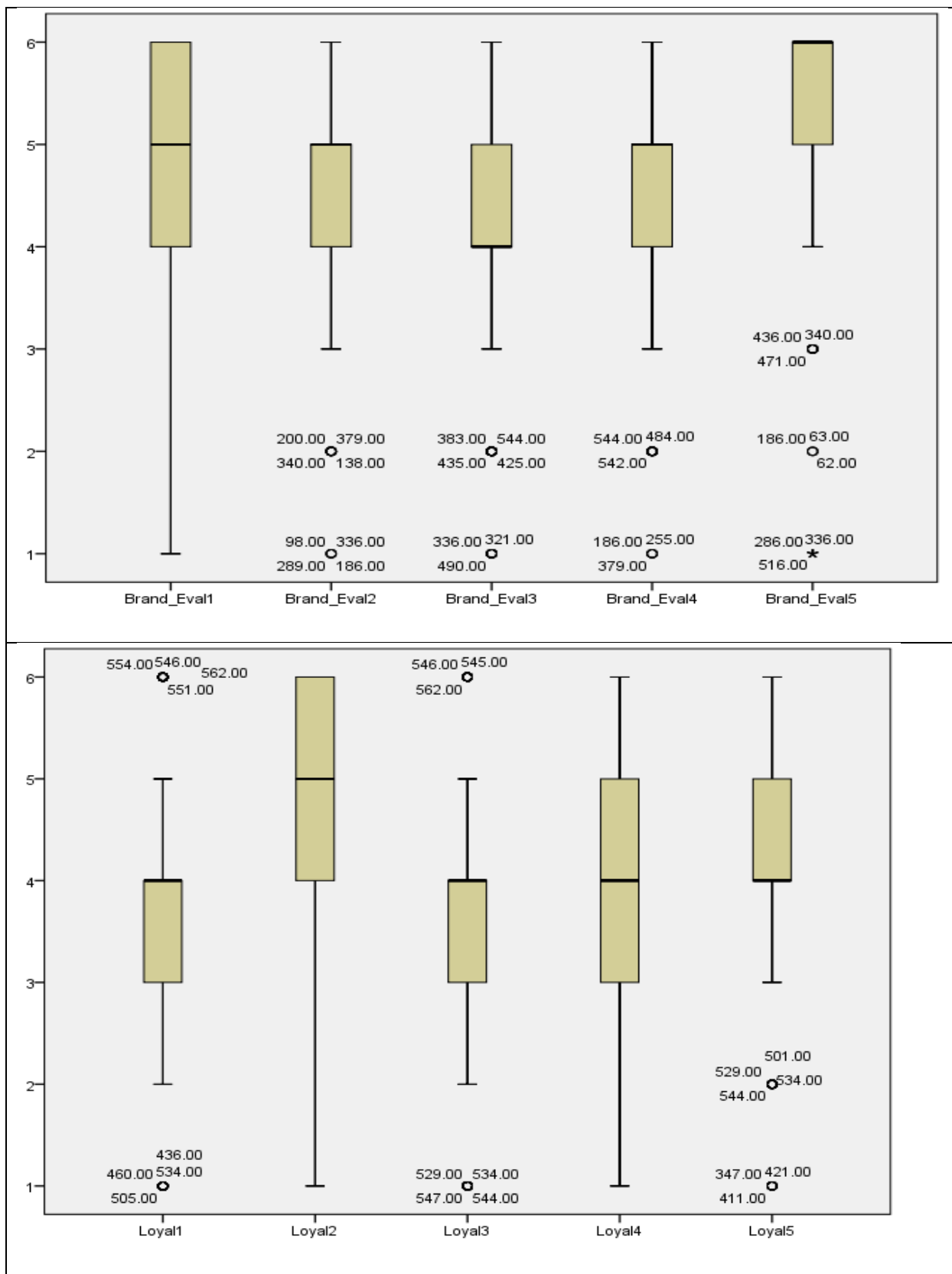
Appendix B

Appendix B-1: Missing values (study 1)

S #	Case ID	Number of missing data	S #	Case ID	Number of missing data
1	8	1	16	62	1
2	18	2	17	63	1
3	24	1	18	76	2
4	34	1	19	77	2
5	35	2	20	78	2
6	36	4	21	79	2
7	37	4	22	88	1
8	38	6	23	89	1
9	39	1	24	90	1
10	40	4	25	96	1
11	46	3	26	97	4
12	48	1	27	98	4
13	49	1	28	105	1
14	55	1	29	106	1
15	61	1	30	112	1

Appendix B-2: Univariate Outliers (Quantitative Study 1)





Appendix B-3: Multivariate Outliers (Quantitative Study 1)

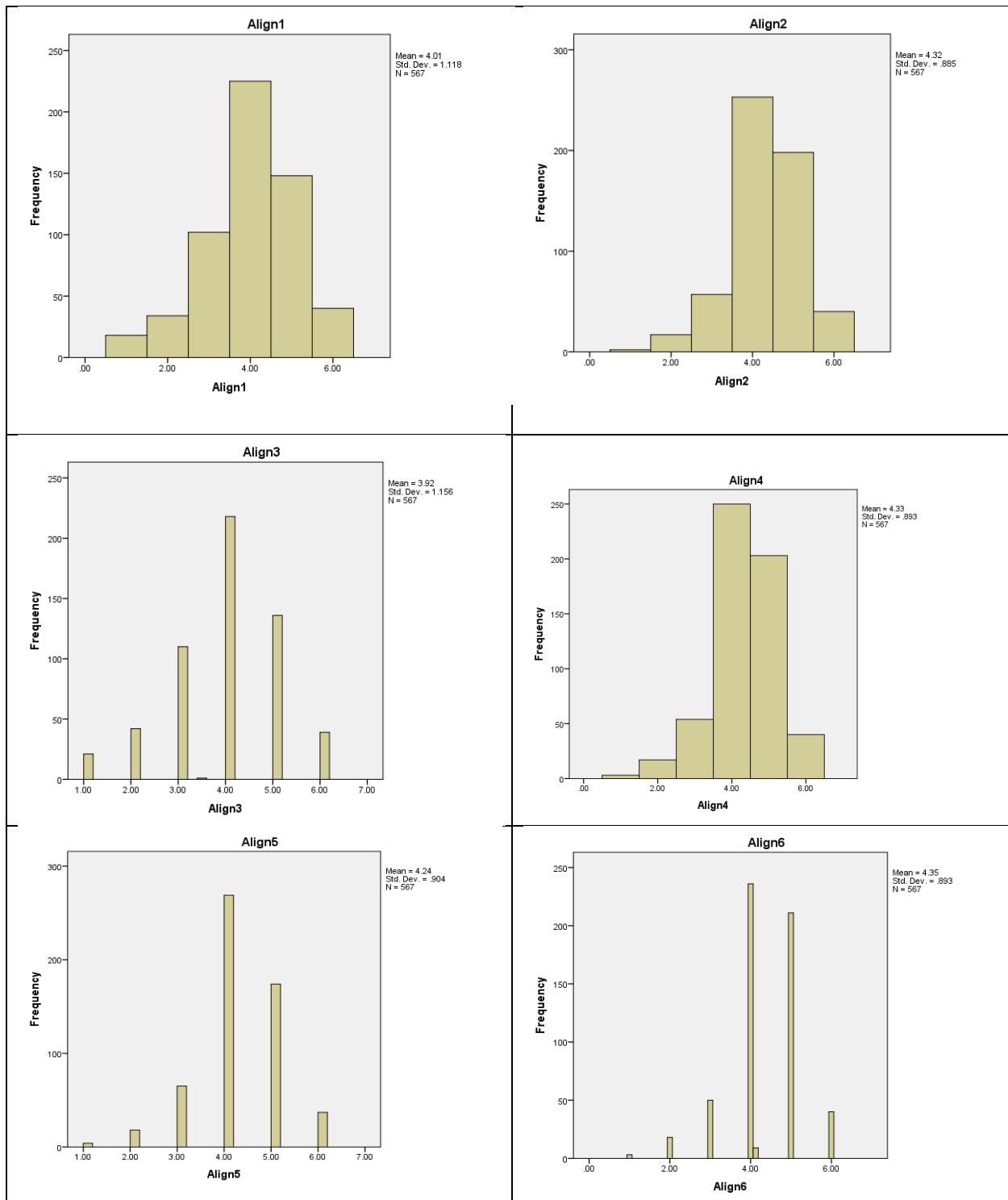
Observation number	Mahalanobis d-squared	p1	p2
255	102.012	.000	.000
158	76.333	.000	.000
257	70.023	.000	.000
289	69.734	.000	.000
66	56.527	.000	.000
172	52.638	.000	.000
178	51.841	.000	.000
186	49.850	.000	.000
379	49.748	.000	.000
555	47.216	.000	.000
98	44.304	.000	.000
391	43.603	.000	.000
484	41.836	.000	.000
320	40.103	.000	.000
332	39.269	.000	.000
269	38.643	.000	.000
199	38.173	.000	.000
219	37.992	.001	.000
473	36.852	.001	.000
421	35.786	.001	.000
347	35.444	.001	.000
13	34.037	.002	.000
36	33.762	.002	.000
64	33.038	.003	.000
491	32.784	.003	.000
167	32.445	.003	.000
508	32.147	.004	.000
457	32.020	.004	.000
262	31.983	.004	.000
43	31.843	.004	.000
47	31.843	.004	.000
50	31.843	.004	.000
56	31.843	.004	.000
122	31.793	.004	.000
285	31.773	.004	.000
161	31.543	.005	.000
306	31.385	.005	.000
321	31.282	.005	.000

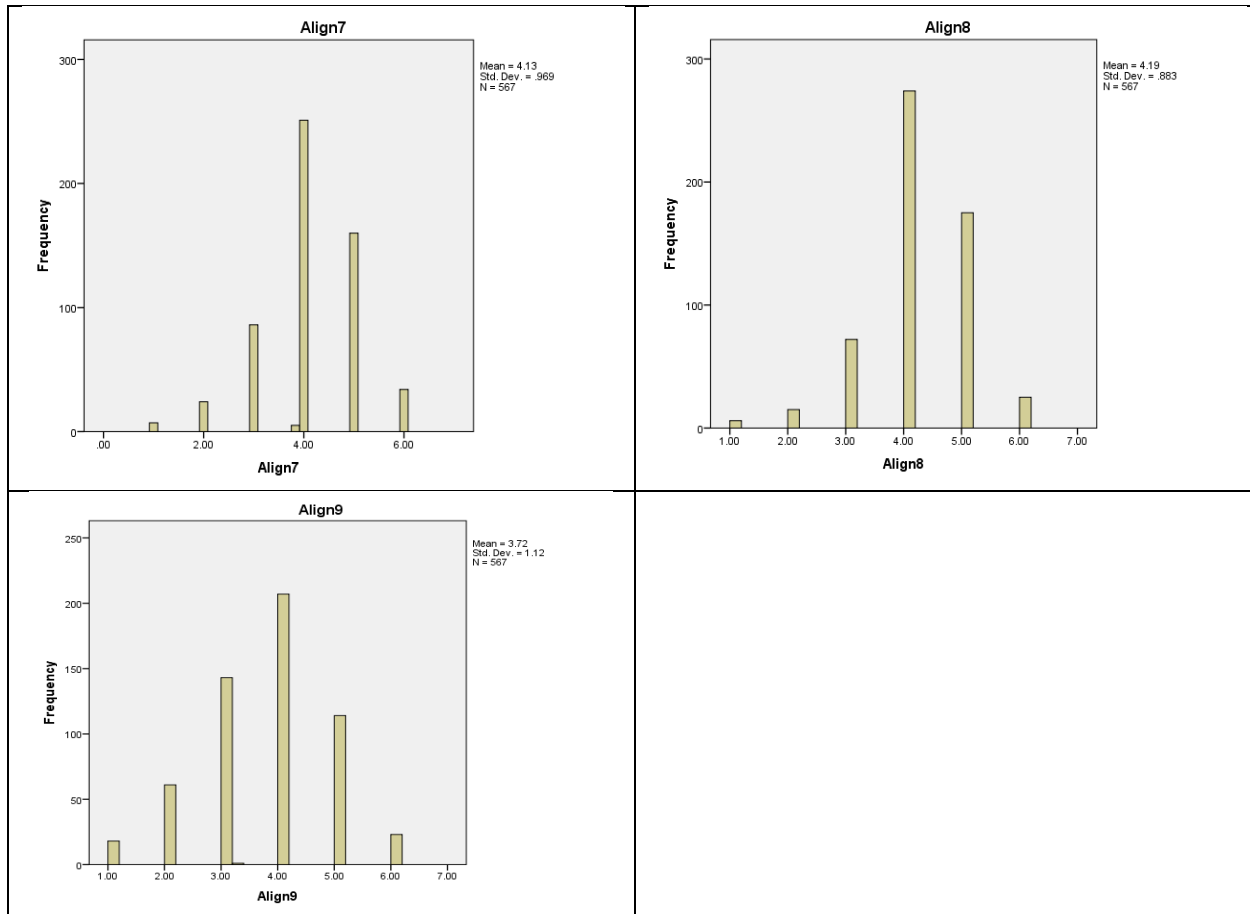
Appendix B-4: Normality (Quantitative Study 1)

		Normality								
		Align1	Align2	Align3	Align4	Align5	Align6	Align7	Align8	Align9
N	Valid	567	567	567	567	567	567	567	567	567
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		4.0071	4.3192	3.9232	4.3280	4.2383	4.3477	4.1273	4.1852	3.7185
Std. Deviation		1.11841	.88492	1.15569	.89263	.90427	.89325	.96946	.88324	1.12036
Skewness		-.516	-.440	-.449	-.528	-.445	-.594	-.466	-.587	-.260
Std. Error of Skewness		.103	.103	.103	.103	.103	.103	.103	.103	.103
Kurtosis		.297	.687	.083	.900	.884	.990	.645	1.239	-.200
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.205	.205	.205	.205	.205	.205	.205	.205	.205

		Normality									
		Br_Eval1	Br_Eval2	Br_Eval3	Br_Eval4	Br_Eval5	Loy1	Loy2	Loy3	Loy4	Loy5
N		567	567	567	567	567	567	567	567	567	567
Mean		4.8219	4.5840	4.1524	4.4938	5.3236	3.7174	5.0998	3.6785	3.5923	4.2857
Std. Deviation		.97405	.91988	1.03331	1.01147	.89952	1.2409	.9795	1.26483	1.4443	1.1260
Skewness		-.800	-.597	-.465	-.461	-1.582	-.240	-1.156	-.098	-.026	-.452
Std. Error of Skewness		.103	.103	.103	.103	.103	.103	.103	.103	.103	.103
Kurtosis		1.029	1.228	.425	.293	3.384	-.170	1.810	-.370	-.806	.152
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.205	.205	.205	.205	.205	.205	.205	.205	.205	.205

Appendix B-5: Histograms (Quantitative Study 1)





Appendix B-6: Multicollinearity (Quantitative Study 1)

Multicollinearity

Variable	VIF
Relevancy	1.279
Brand Evaluation	2.058
Loyalty	1.804
Constant: Expectancy	--

Multicollinearity

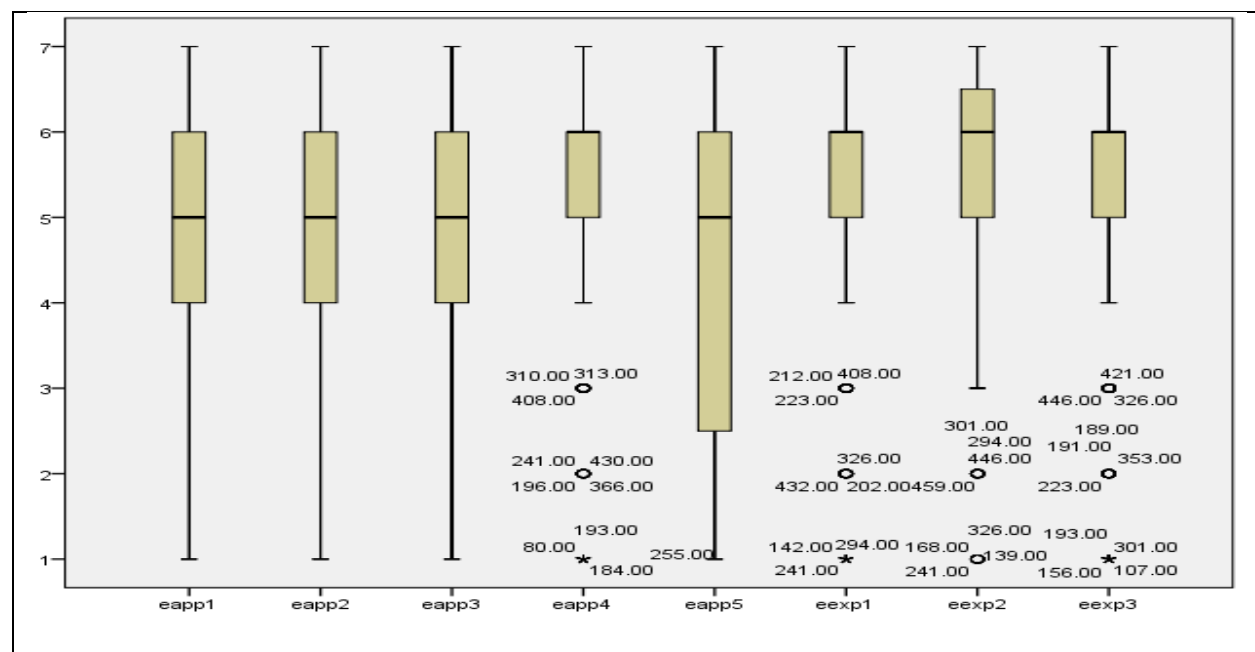
Variable	VIF
Expectancy	1.127
Brand Evaluation	1.839
Loyalty	1.842
Constant: Relevancy	--

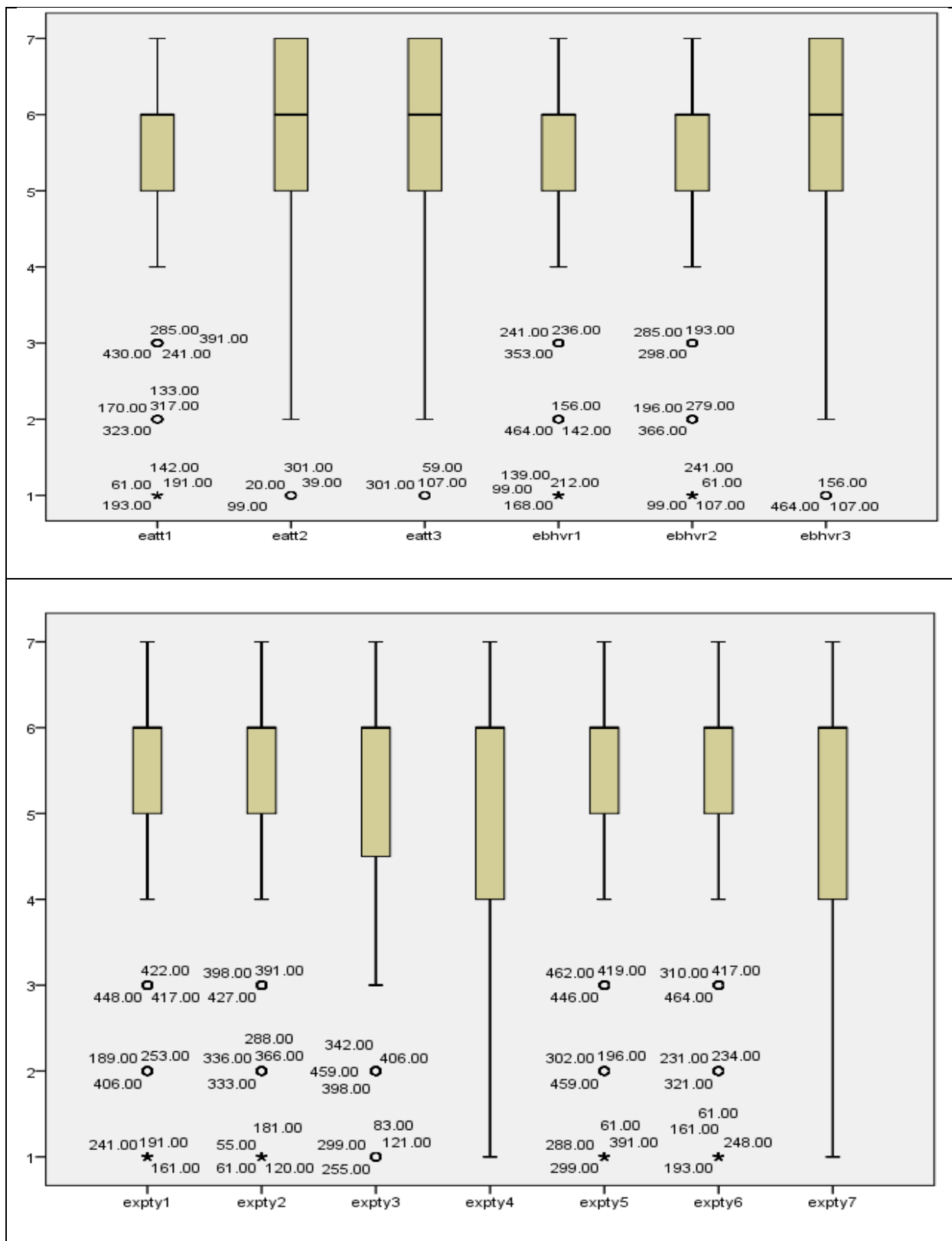
Appendix C

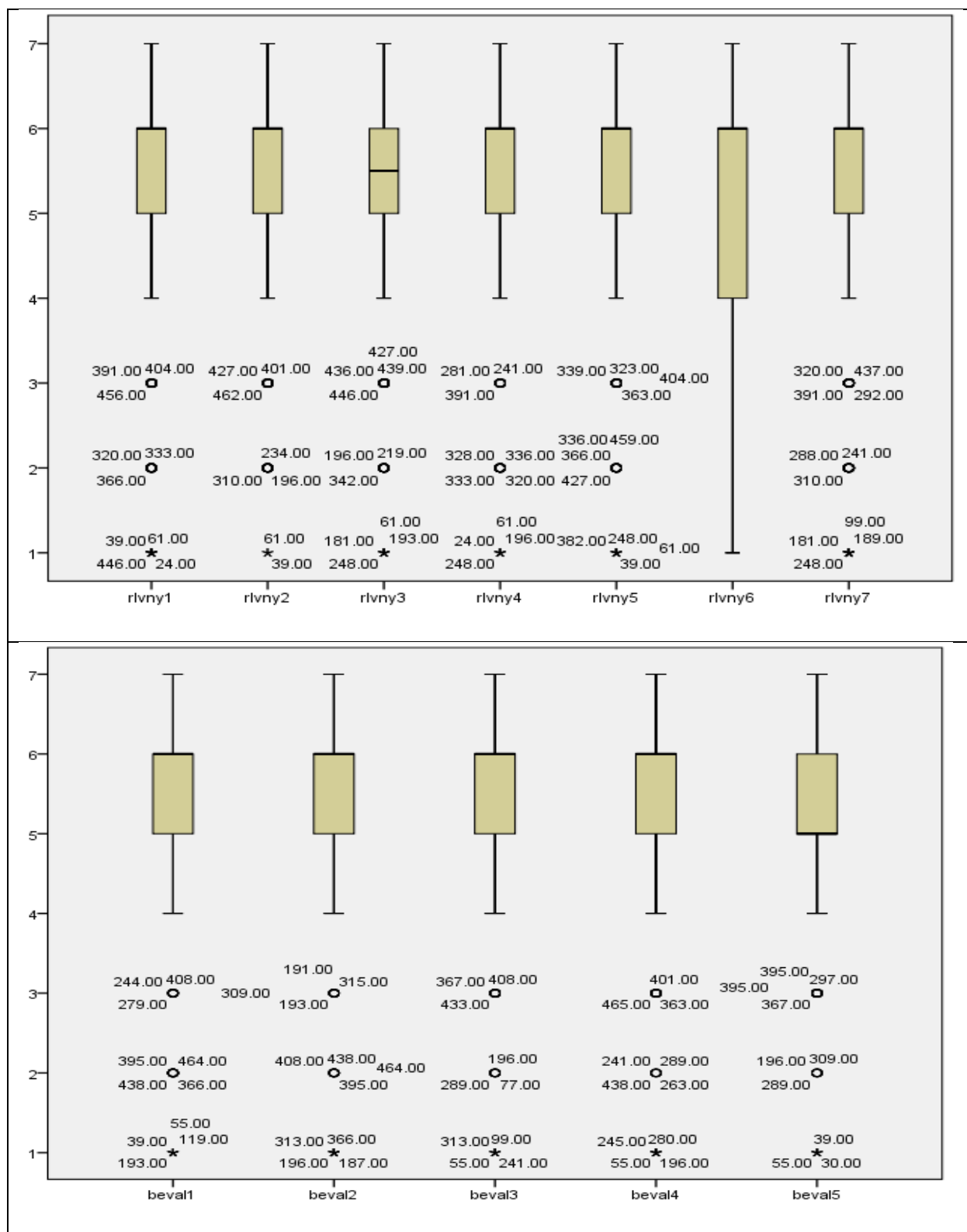
Appendix C-1: Missing values (study 2)

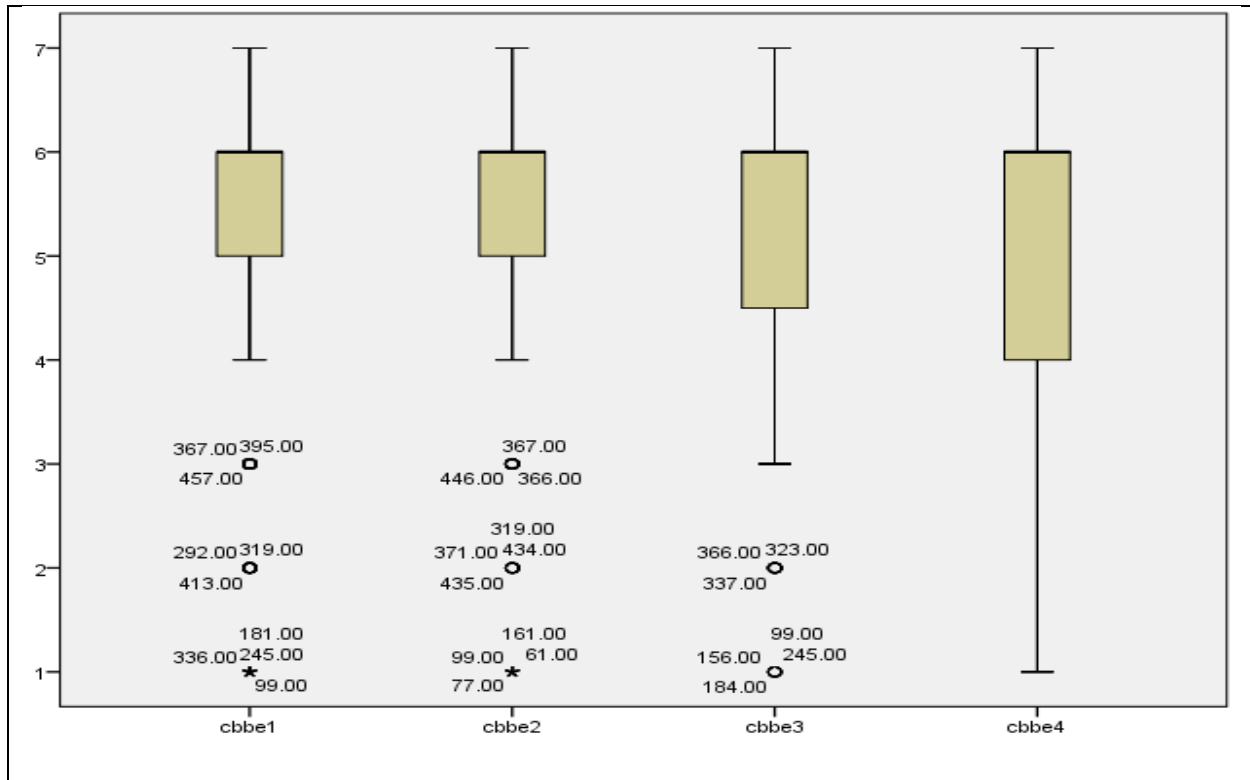
S #	Case ID	Number of missing data	S #	Case ID	Number of missing data
1	68	18	11	387	1
2	92	18	12	388	1
3	97	18	13	389	1
4	99	18	14	390	1
5	139	2	15	391	1
6	159	18	16	392	1
7	267	18	17	393	1
8	300	18	18	394	1
9	340	18	19	395	1
10	363	2	20	396	1

Appendix C-2: Univariate Outliers (Quantitative Study 2)









Appendix C-3: Multivariate Outliers (Quantitative Study 2)

Observation number	Mahalanobis d-squared	p1	p2
119	185.567	.000	.000
186	119.885	.000	.000
303	111.755	.000	.000
52	111.127	.000	.000
326	110.252	.000	.000
246	106.318	.000	.000
180	105.070	.000	.000
281	103.511	.000	.000
243	102.611	.000	.000
191	99.963	.000	.000
39	98.677	.000	.000
165	98.008	.000	.000
106	97.181	.000	.000
429	96.953	.000	.000
349	92.780	.000	.000
87	92.271	.000	.000
169	89.132	.000	.000
415	87.619	.000	.000
426	84.725	.000	.000

Observation number	Mahalanobis d-squared	p1	p2
55	84.592	.000	.000
30	84.198	.000	.000
289	84.115	.000	.000
274	83.142	.000	.000
24	82.777	.000	.000
61	81.928	.000	.000
31	81.086	.000	.000
370	80.653	.000	.000
332	79.870	.000	.000
185	79.780	.000	.000
430	79.062	.000	.000
373	73.507	.000	.000
132	70.960	.000	.000
403	70.295	.001	.000
59	69.986	.001	.000
99	69.664	.001	.000
323	69.510	.001	.000
194	69.045	.001	.000
431	68.129	.001	.000
229	68.117	.001	.000
210	66.742	.001	.000
189	66.494	.001	.000
53	66.222	.002	.000
155	65.942	.002	.000
291	64.964	.002	.000
83	63.893	.003	.000
362	63.747	.003	.000
382	63.036	.004	.000
80	62.192	.004	.000
91	62.069	.004	.000
40	61.992	.005	.000
111	61.957	.005	.000
239	61.910	.005	.000
188	61.580	.005	.000

Appendix C-4: Normality (Quantitative Study 2)

		Normality							
		eapp1	eapp2	eapp3	eapp4	eapp5	eatt1	eatt2	eatt3
N	Valid	432	432	432	432	432	432	432	432
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		5.0532	5.0579	4.8773	5.4190	4.4144	5.4954	5.5949	5.5694
Std. Deviation		1.35538	1.35348	1.31430	1.34627	1.83977	1.26527	1.46110	1.45458
Skewness		-.698	-.822	-.536	-1.162	-.358	-1.512	-1.188	-1.286
Std. Error of Skewness		.117	.117	.117	.117	.117	.117	.117	.117
Kurtosis		.017	.449	.060	1.273	-1.149	2.349	.798	1.036
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.234	.234	.234	.234	.234	.234	.234	.234

		Normality					
		ebhvr1	ebhvr2	ebhvr3	eexp1	eexp2	eexp3
N	Valid	432	432	432	432	432	432
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		5.4815	5.5741	5.5787	5.5370	5.5486	5.3981
Std. Deviation		1.36907	1.31706	1.46048	1.36700	1.39686	1.40063
Skewness		-1.187	-1.481	-1.254	-1.187	-1.278	-.948
Std. Error of Skewness		.117	.117	.117	.117	.117	.117
Kurtosis		1.334	2.306	1.080	1.112	1.357	.533
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.234	.234	.234	.234	.234	.234

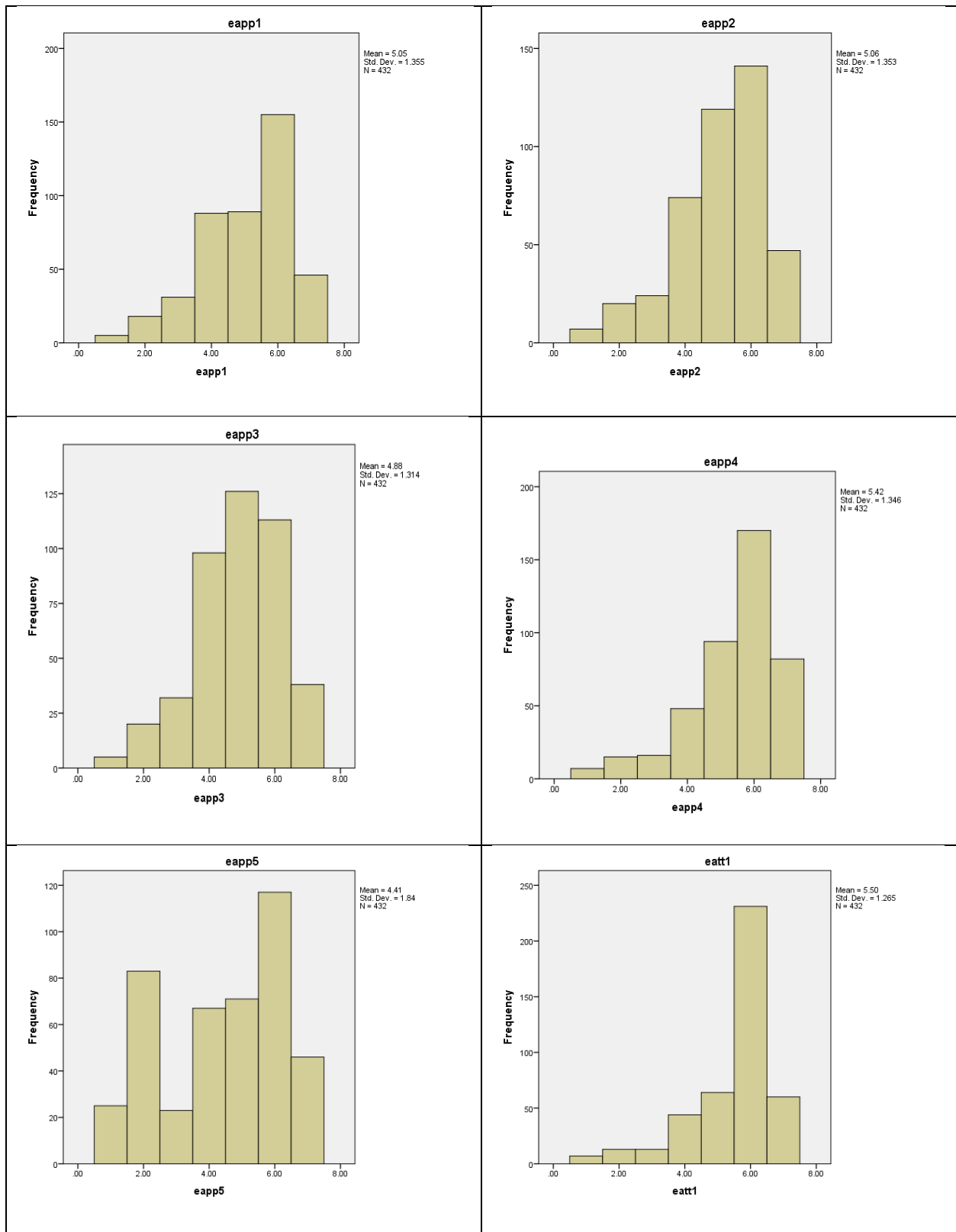
		Normality						
		expty1	expty2	expty3	expty4	expty5	expty6	expty7
N	Valid	432	432	432	432	432	432	432
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		5.3796	5.3218	5.1875	5.0394	5.3519	5.1829	5.0602
Std. Deviation		1.45285	1.43399	1.44971	1.47864	1.39149	1.34229	1.48342
Skewness		-1.146	-1.066	-1.147	-.916	-1.130	-1.228	-1.004
Std. Error of Skewness		.117	.117	.117	.117	.117	.117	.117
Kurtosis		.968	.698	.715	.089	1.166	1.245	.323
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.234	.234	.234	.234	.234	.234	.234

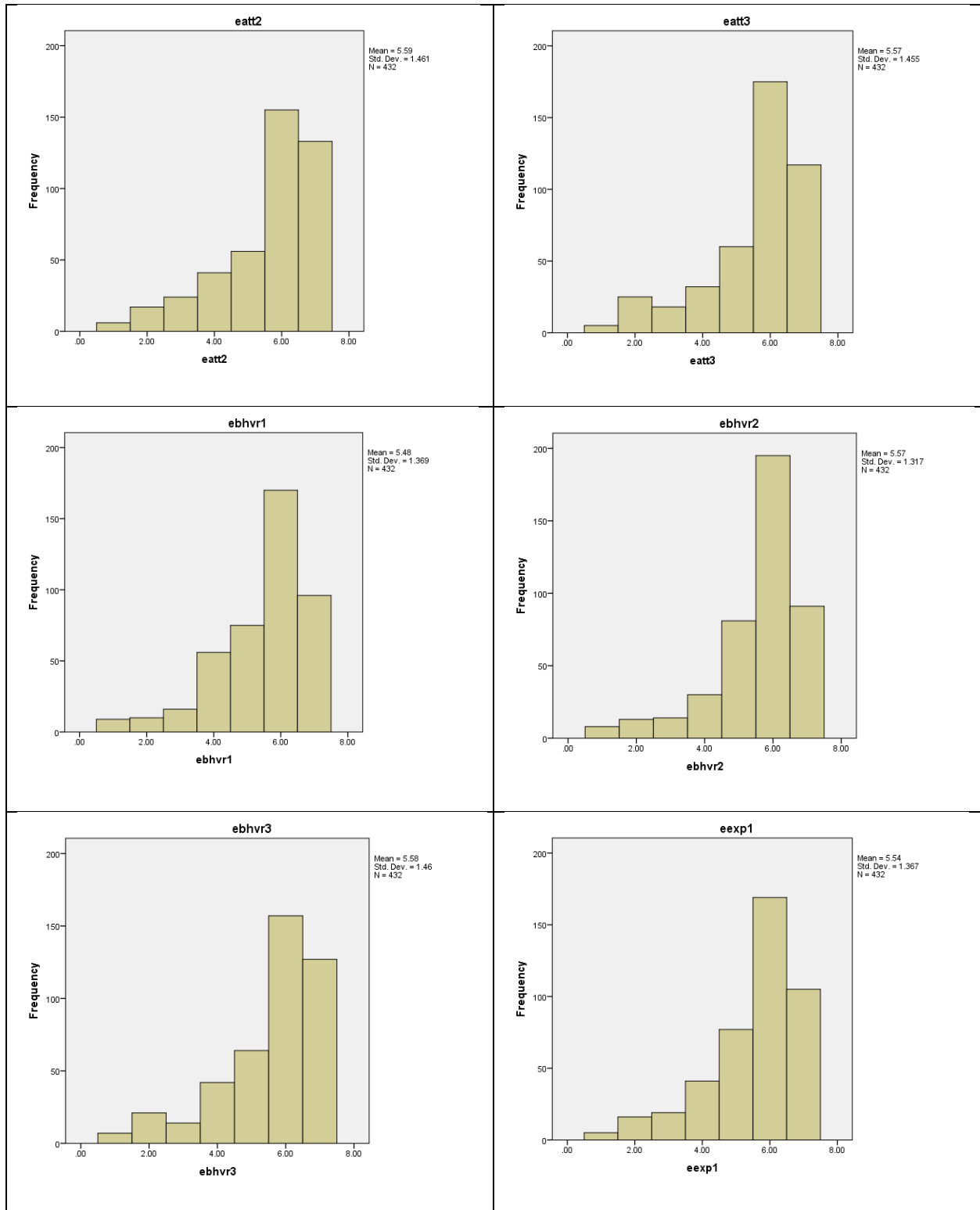
		Normality						
		rlvny1	rlvny2	rlvny3	rlvny4	rlvny5	rlvny6	rlvny7
N	Valid	432	432	432	432	432	432	432
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		5.2106	5.4491	5.2292	5.3935	5.3634	5.1991	5.3449
Std. Deviation		1.41735	1.29149	1.30350	1.26629	1.32611	1.39844	1.38236
Skewness		-1.158	-1.186	-.993	-1.199	-1.182	-1.075	-1.271
Std. Error of Skewness		.117	.117	.117	.117	.117	.117	.117
Kurtosis		.748	1.041	.839	1.434	1.091	.645	1.240
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.234	.234	.234	.234	.234	.234	.234

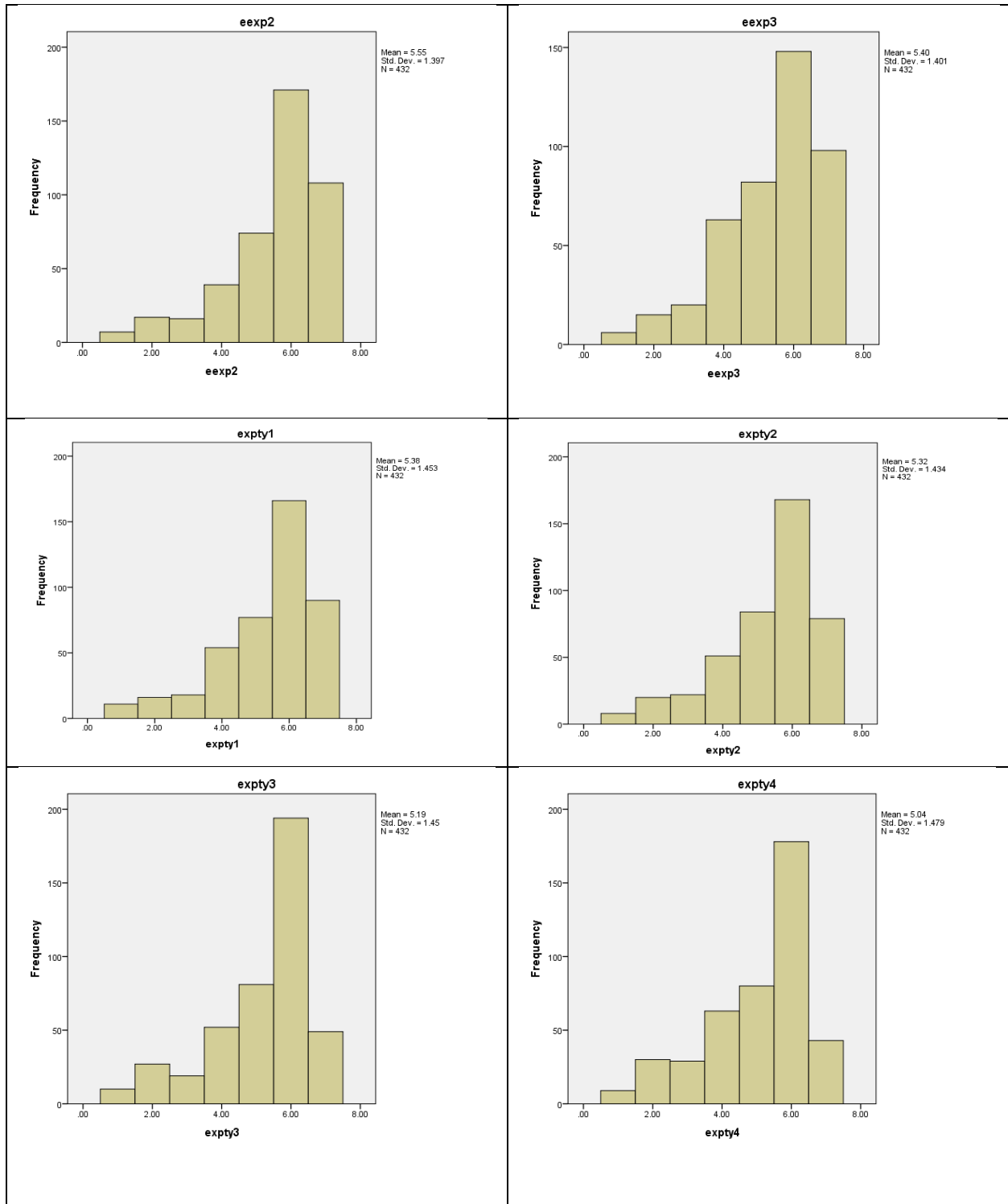
		Normality				
		beval1	beval2	beval3	beval4	beval5
N	Valid	432	432	432	432	432
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		5.5162	5.5579	5.5764	5.4769	5.4120
Std. Deviation		1.31904	1.22858	1.15149	1.18944	1.23433
Skewness		-1.086	-1.447	-1.337	-1.104	-.771
Std. Error of Skewness		.117	.117	.117	.117	.117
Kurtosis		1.154	2.589	2.374	1.641	.828
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.234	.234	.234	.234	.234

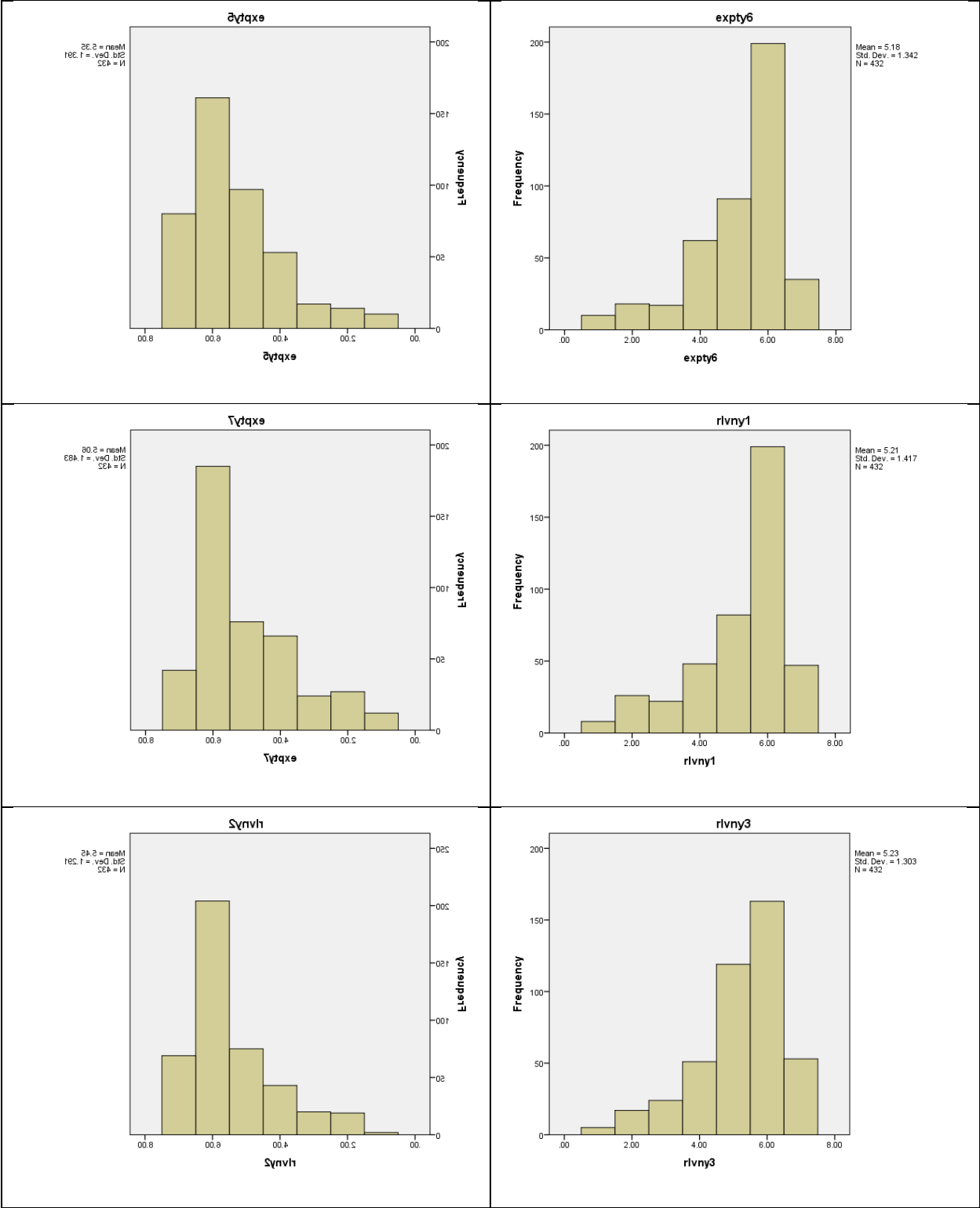
		Normality			
		cbbe1	cbbe2	cbbe3	cbbe4
N	Valid	432	432	432	432
	Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean		5.2616	5.5880	5.2662	5.2639
Std. Deviation		1.29558	1.31444	1.31772	1.36743
Skewness		-1.248	-1.221	-1.093	-1.103
Std. Error of Skewness		.117	.117	.117	.117
Kurtosis		1.271	1.458	.860	.749
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.234	.234	.234	.234

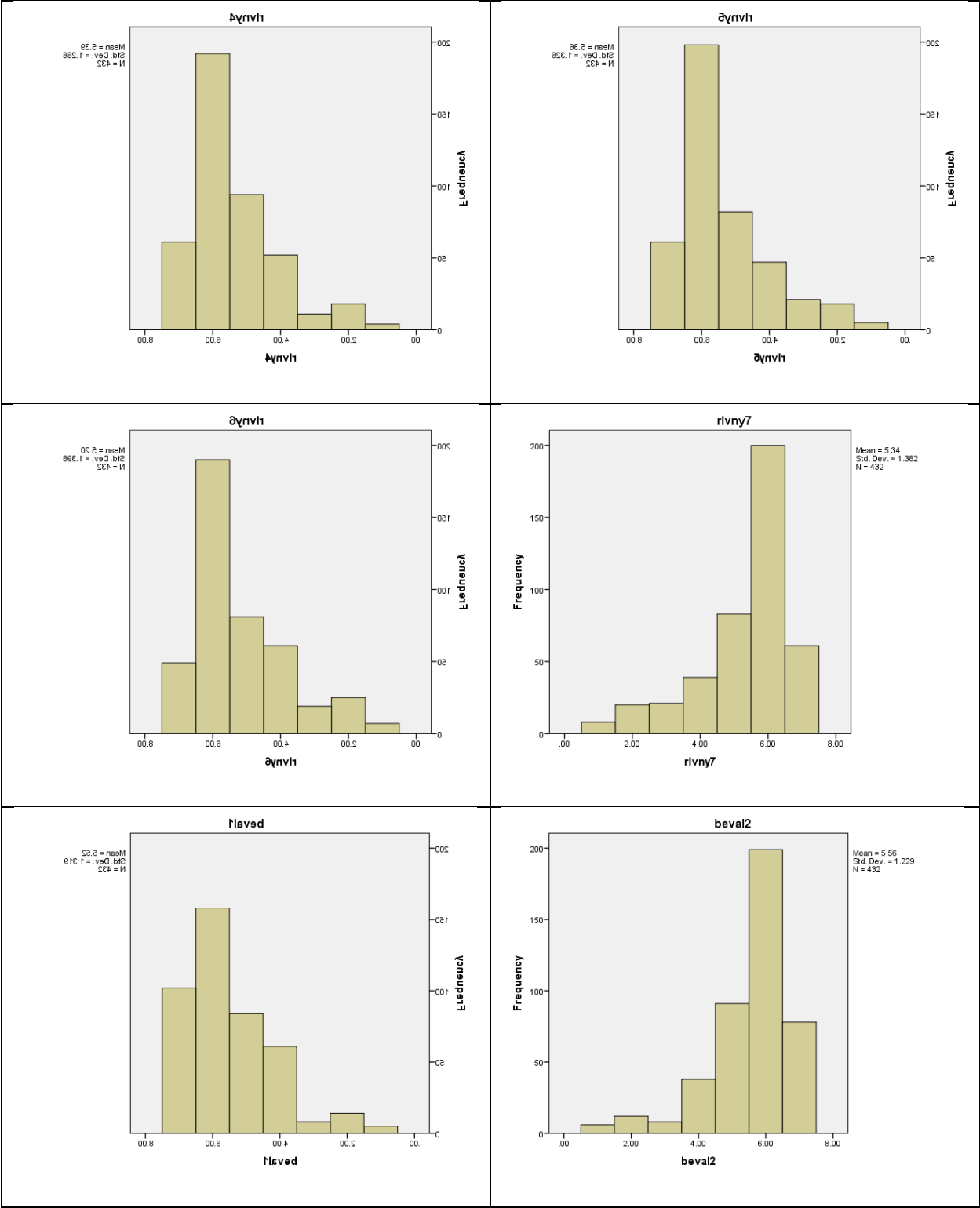
Appendix C-5: Histograms (Quantitative Study 2)

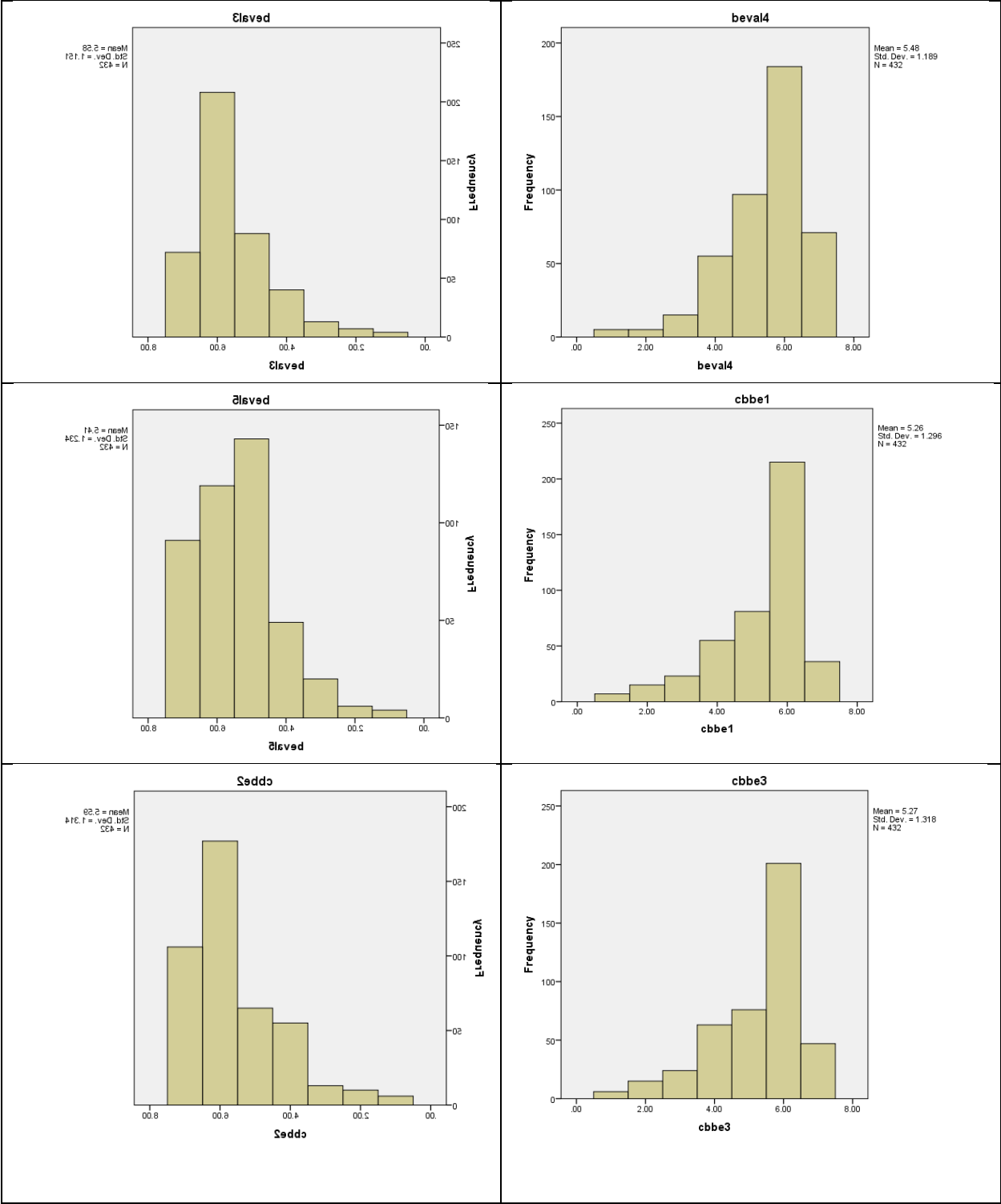


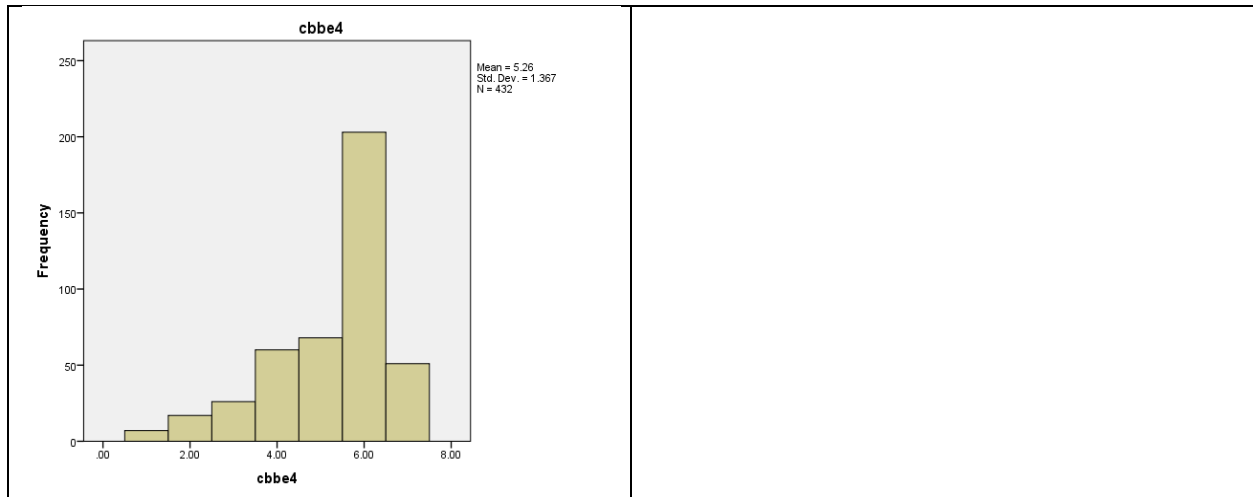












Appendix C-6: Multicollinearity (Quantitative Study 2)

Multicollinearity

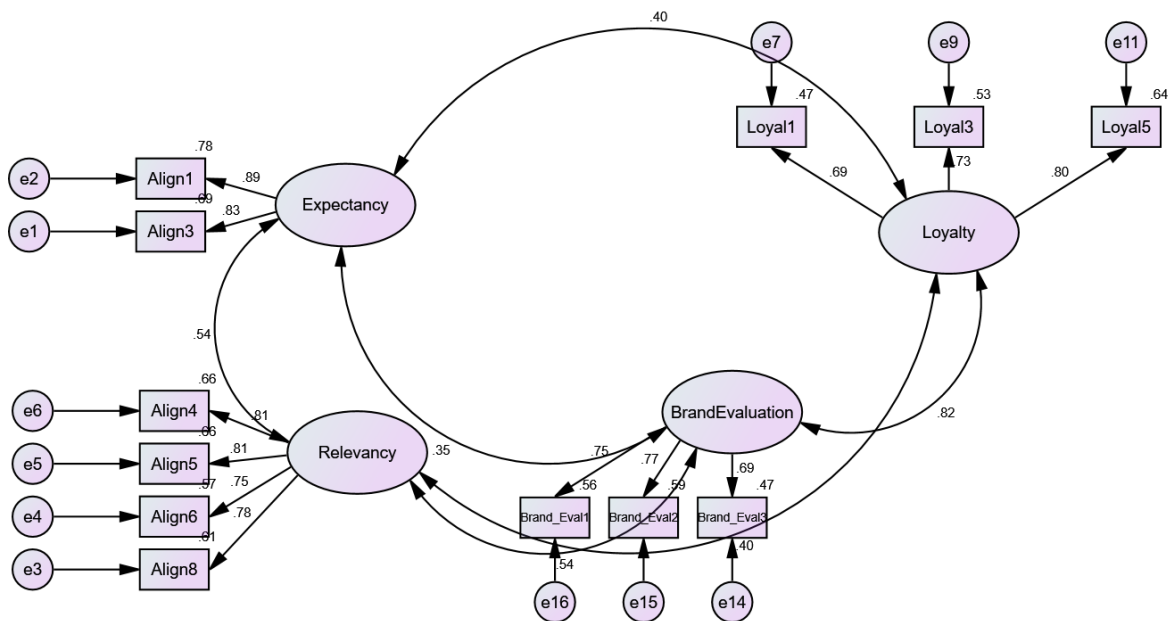
Variable	VIF
FLE Brand Alignment	1.521
Brand Evaluation	1.700
CBBE	1.598
Constant: Interaction Quality	--

Multicollinearity

Variable	VIF
Interaction Quality	1.269
Brand Evaluation	1.605
CBBE	1.532
Constant: FLE Brand Alignment	--

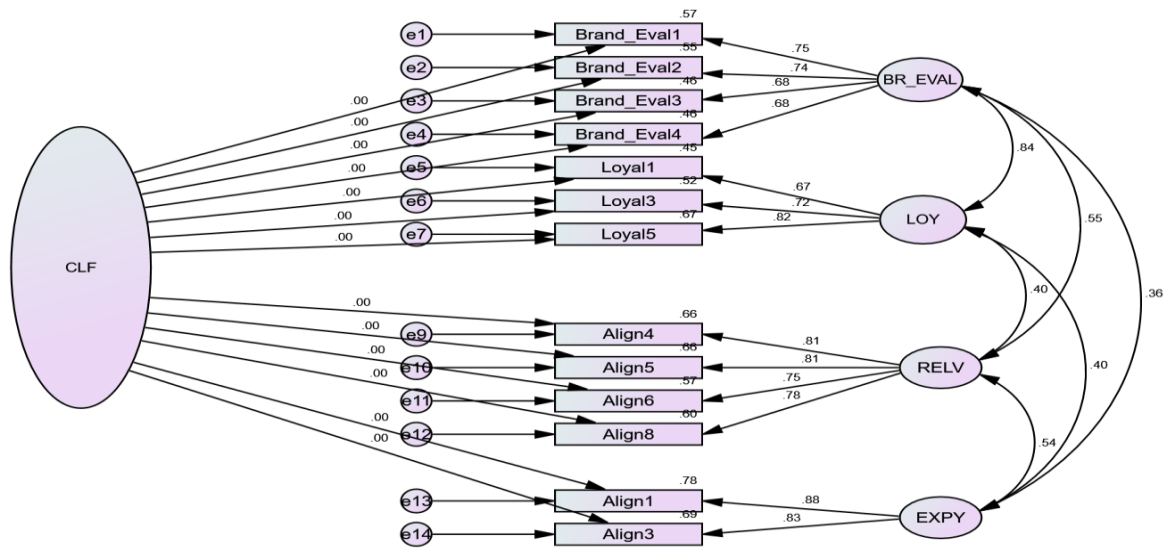
Appendix D

Appendix D-1: Measurement model (Study 1)



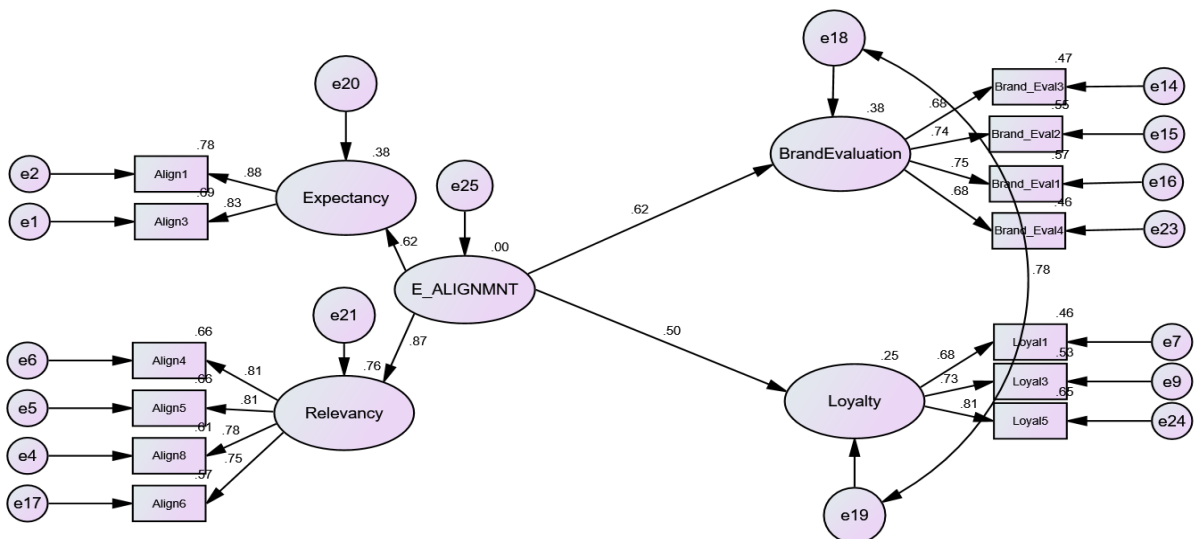
Measurement model (Study 1)

Appendix D-2: Common latent factor (study 1)



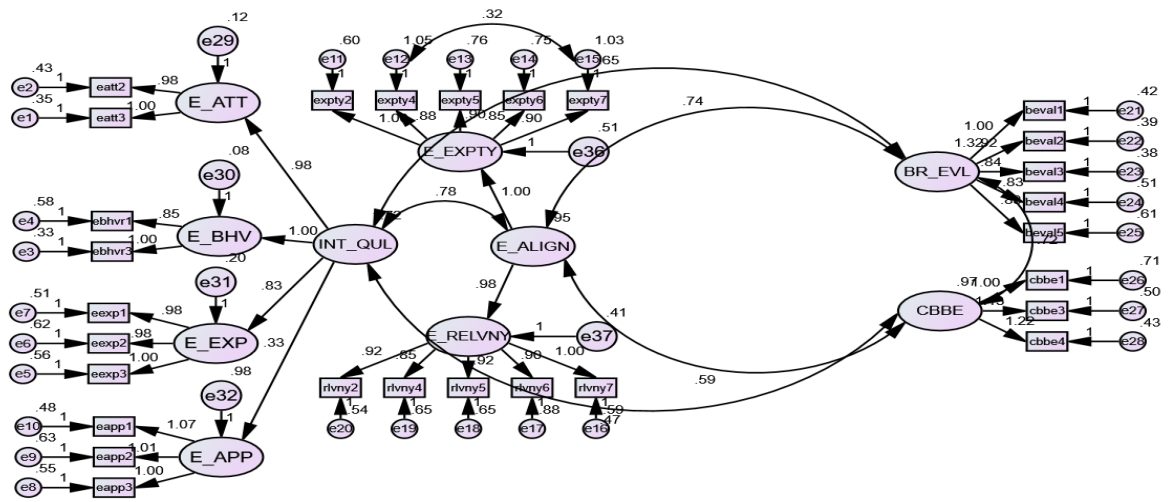
Common latent factor (Study 1)

Appendix D-3: Structural model (Study 1)



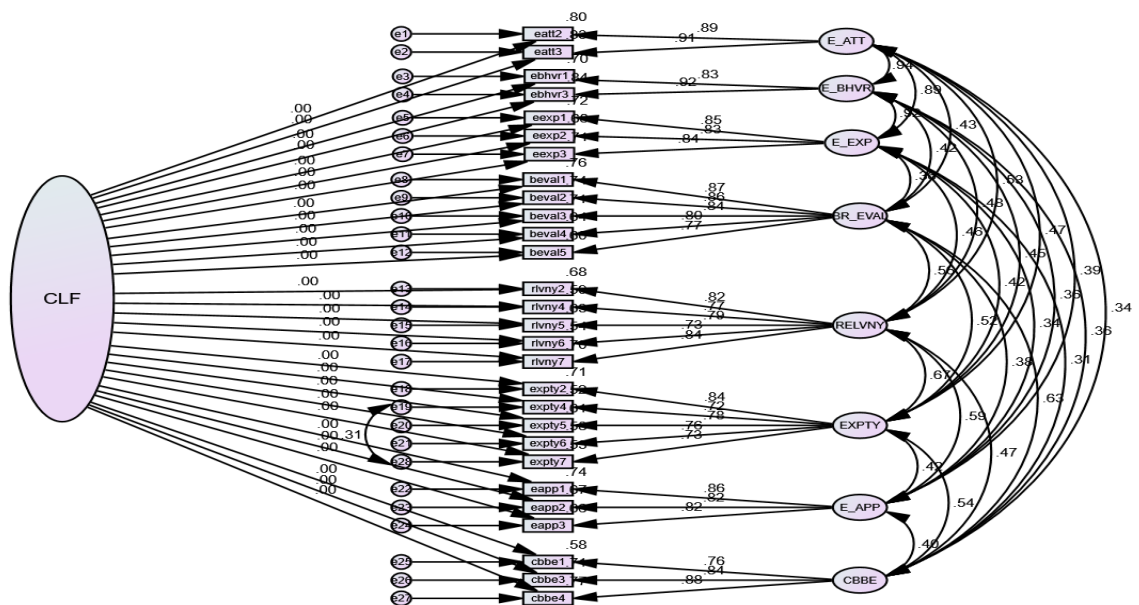
Structural model (Study 1)

Appendix D-4: Measurement model (Study 2)



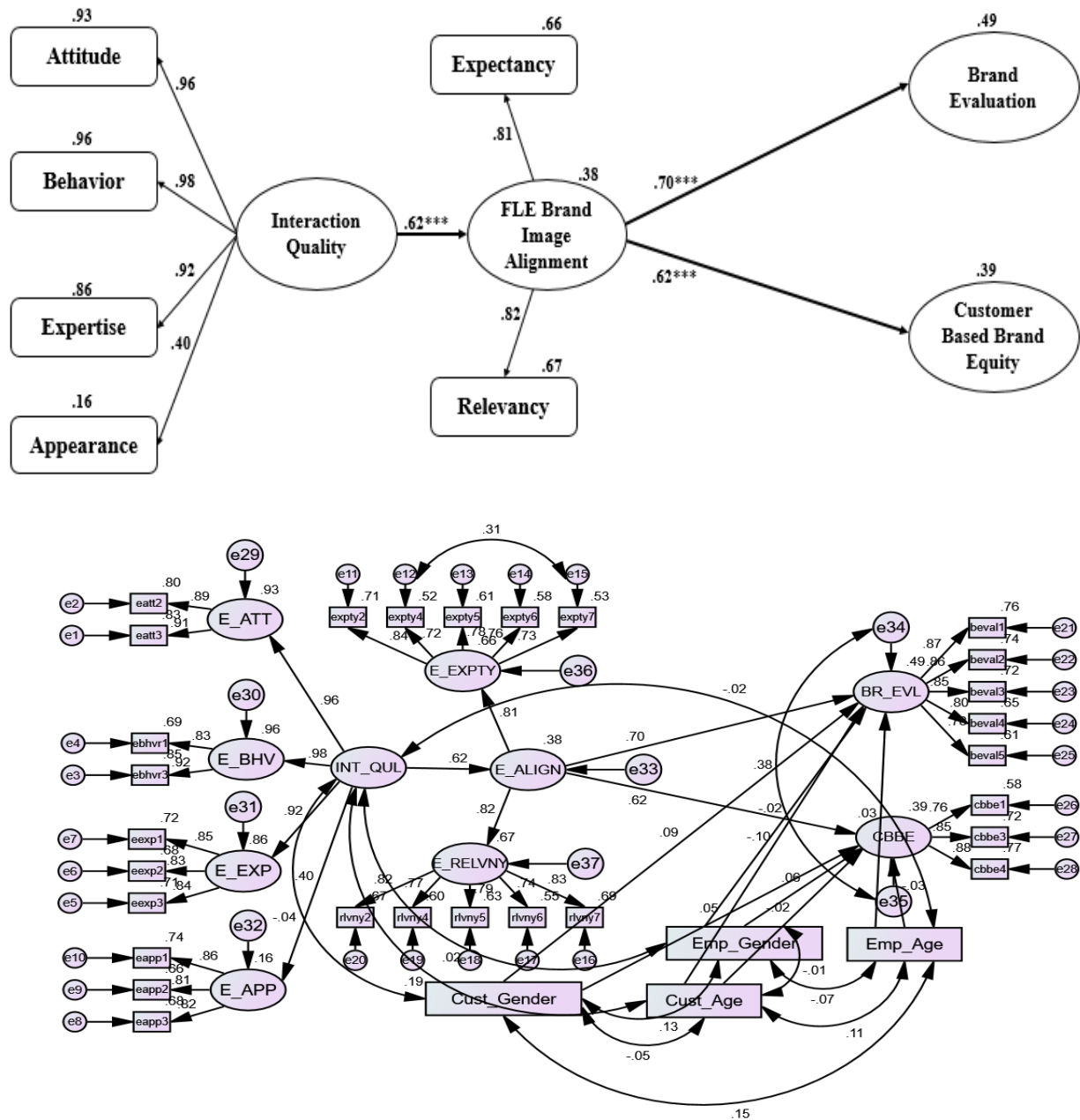
Measurement model (Study 2)

Appendix D-5: Common latent factor (study 2)



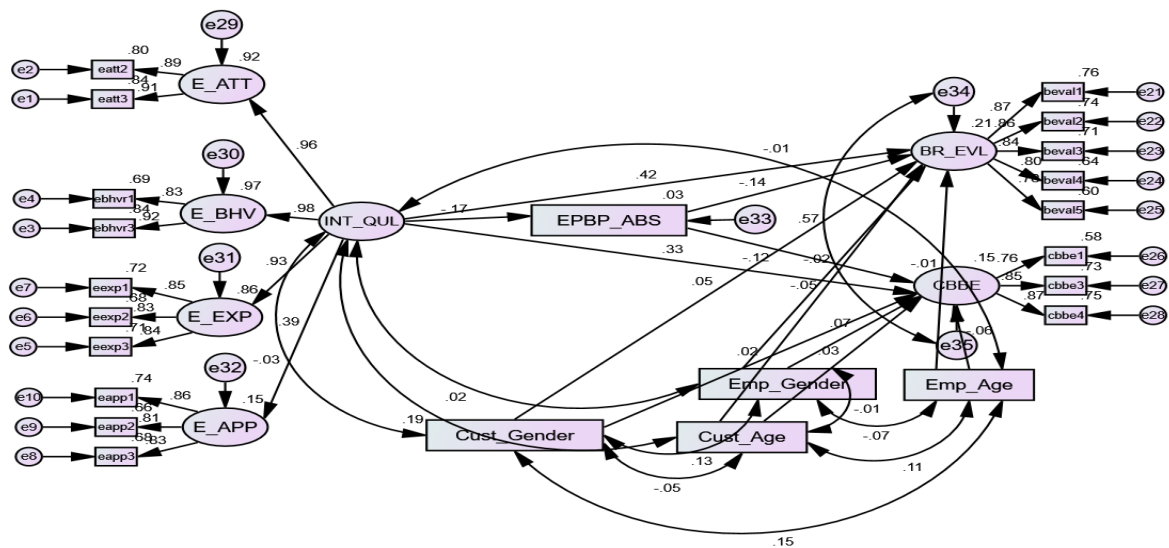
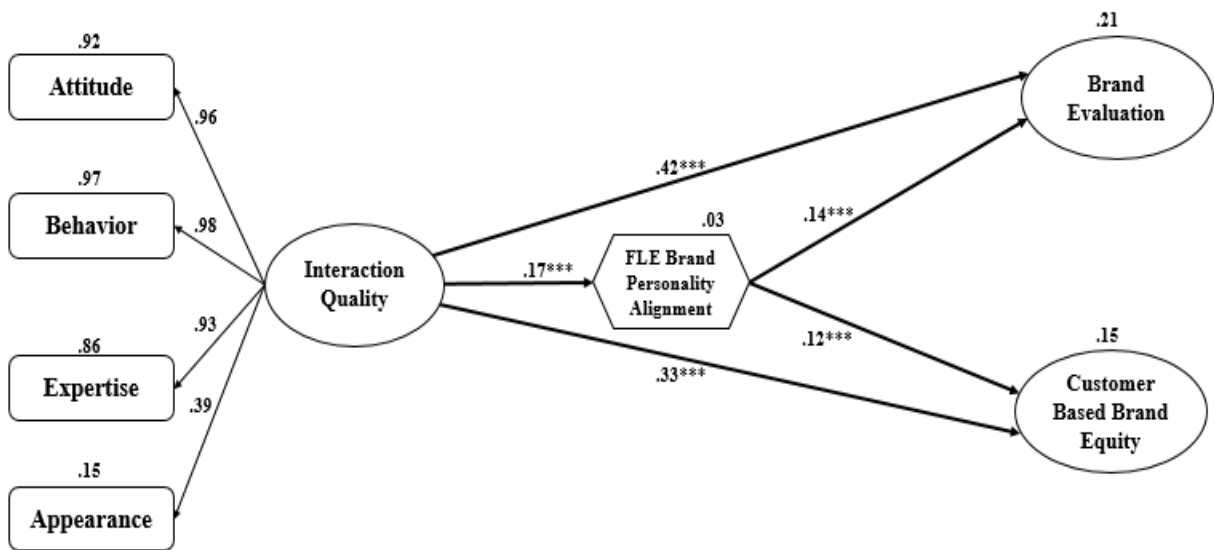
Common latent factor (Study 2)

Appendix D-6: Predictive validity model (Direct measurement)



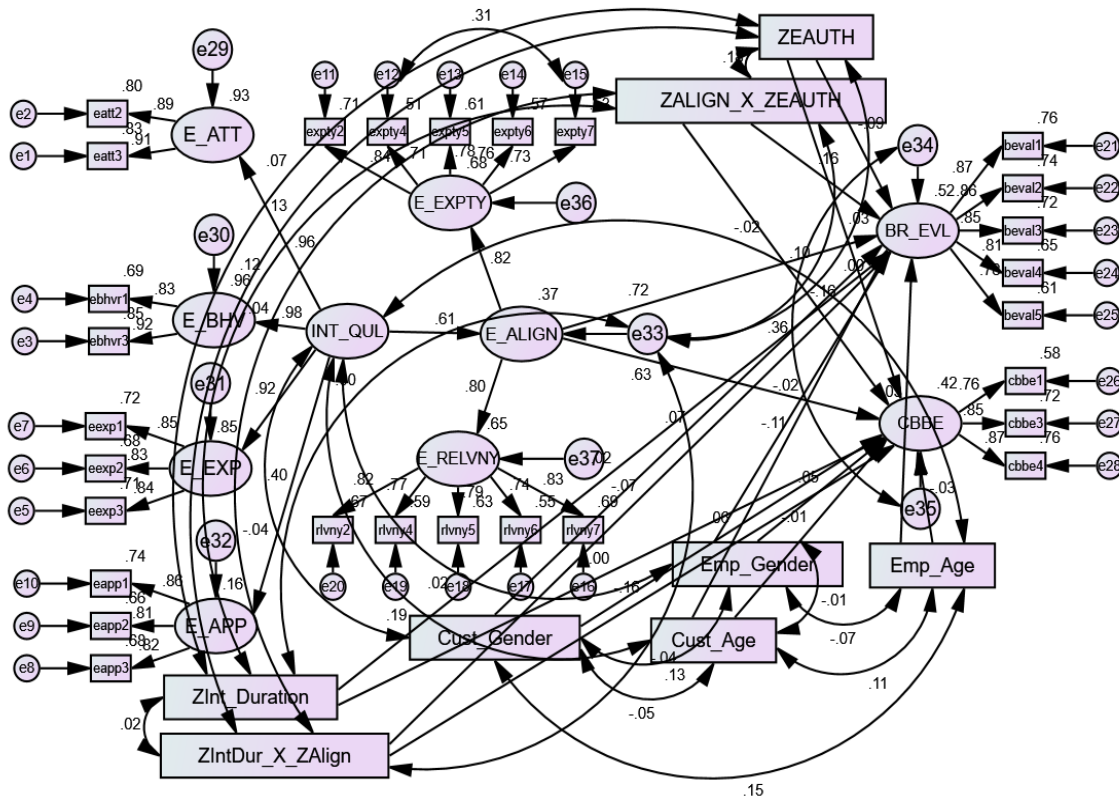
Predictive validity model (Direct measurement)

Appendix D-7: Predictive validity model (Indirect measurement)



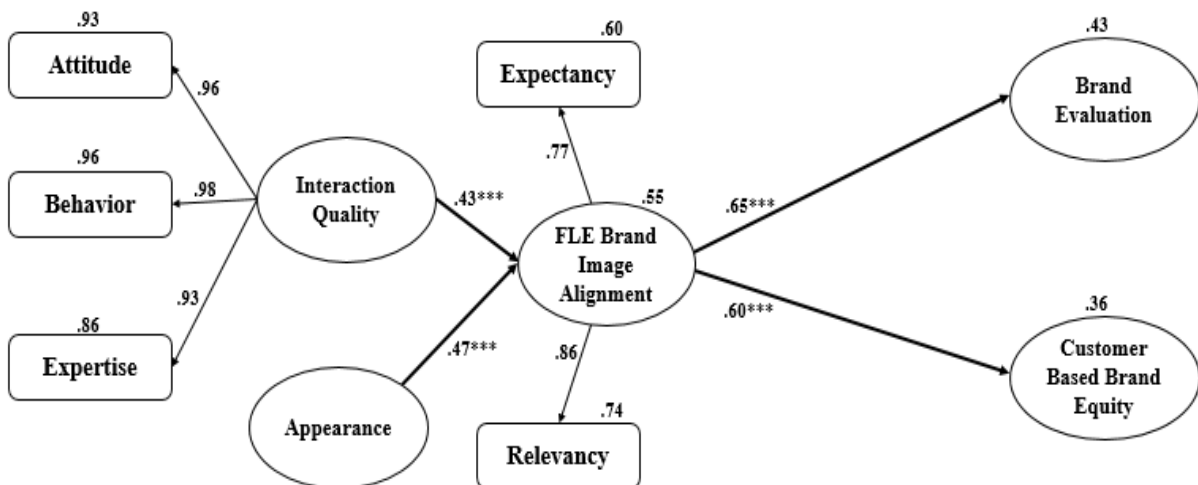
Predictive validity model (Indirect measurement)

Appendix D-8: Structural model (Study 2)



Structural model (Study 2)

Appendix D-9: Structural model (Appearance as first order construct)



Appendix E

Appendix E-1: Dimension based multigroup moderation of brand personality

Sincere brand personality group

First of all, invariance was calculated which is a prerequisite to perform multigroup moderation. The very first type of invariance calculated was configural. An unconstrained measurement model was estimated. The fit indices for the unconstrained model for configural invariance were as followed: ($\chi^2=468.782$), ($df=256$), ($\chi^2/df=1.819$), ($SRMR=0.0328$), ($GFI=0.898$), ($AGFI=0.863$), ($TLI=0.953$), ($CFI=0.960$), ($RMSEA=0.044$), ($PCLOSE=0.953$). All items have sufficient loading in at least one group. Thus, they should not be deleted, since they are good indicators in one group at least (Appendices). The measurement model meets all absolute and relative fit indices. Configural Invariance across groups is achieved.

Furthermore, a constrained model was estimated to calculate metric invariance. The fit indices for the constrained model for configural invariance were as followed: ($\chi^2=484.515$), ($df=274$), ($\chi^2/df=1.768$), ($SRMR=0.0335$), ($GFI=0.894$), ($AGFI=0.865$), ($TLI=0.955$), ($CFI=0.960$), ($RMSEA=0.042$), ($PCLOSE=0.982$). The chi-square difference test results for constrained vs unconstrained measurement model were ($\Delta\chi^2=18.975$), ($df=18$) and ($p=.393$). In case of invariance calculation, an insignificant P-value shows that metric invariance is achieved. If full metric invariance is not achieved then constrained paths are relaxed one by one till the partial invariance is achieved (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998). Hence, partial metric invariance was achieved.

Finally, a structural unconstrained model was run against a constrained model. The fit indices for the unconstrained structural model were as followed: ($\chi^2=471.934$), ($df=258$), ($\chi^2/df=1.829$), ($SRMR=0.0667$), ($GFI=0.896$), ($AGFI=0.863$), ($TLI=0.952$), ($CFI=0.959$), ($RMSEA=0.044$),

(PCLOSE=0.946). The fit indices for the constrained structural model were as followed: ($\chi^2=499.581$), ($df=275$), ($\chi^2/df=1.817$), (SRMR=0.0881), (GFI=0.888), (AGFI=0.864), (TLI=0.953), (CFI=0.957), (RMSEA=0.044), (PCLOSE=0.960). The chi-square difference test results for constrained vs unconstrained structural model were ($\Delta\chi^2=27.647$), ($df=17$) and ($p < .049$). Hence, a significant P-value of chi-square difference test indicates that there is a difference at group level and there is moderation for aligned vs misaligned categories.

Afterwards, a path level moderation is investigated. A constrained model is estimated where only the concerned path is constrained to examine the path level moderation. The fit indices for the constrained structural model where frontline employee brand alignment to brand evaluation path is constrained, were as followed: ($\chi^2=477.169$), ($df=259$), ($\chi^2/df=1.842$), (SRMR=0.0728), (GFI=0.894), (AGFI=0.861), (TLI=0.951), (CFI=0.959), (RMSEA=0.044), (PCLOSE=0.936). The chi-square difference test results for constrained vs unconstrained structural model were ($\Delta\chi^2=5.235$), ($df=1$) and ($p < .022$). Hence, a significant result of chi-square difference test indicates that there is moderation for the concerned path.

Furthermore, a constrained model is estimated where frontline employee brand alignment to customer-based brand equity path is constrained. The fit indices for the constrained structural model were as followed: ($\chi^2=498.943$), ($df=274$), ($\chi^2/df=1.821$), (SRMR=0.0885), (GFI=0.891), (AGFI=0.864), (TLI=0.952), (CFI=0.957), (RMSEA=0.044), (PCLOSE=0.957). The chi-square difference test results for constrained vs unconstrained structural model were ($\Delta\chi^2=27.010$), ($df=16$) and ($p < .041$). Hence, a significant result of chi-square difference test indicates that there is moderation for the concerned path. Table 8.12 presents the results for group level and path level group comparisons.

Table Chi-Square Difference Results (Group: Sincere Brand Personality)

<i>Models/ Fit Indices</i>	<i>CMIN</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>CMIN/df</i>	<i>SRMR</i>	<i>GFI</i>	<i>AGFI</i>	<i>TLI</i>	<i>CFI</i>	<i>RMSEA</i>	<i>PCLOSE</i>
Unconstrained Model	471.934	258	1.829	.0667	.896	.863	.952	.959	.044	.946
Constrained Model	499.581	275	1.817	.0881	.891	.864	.953	.957	.044	.960
Model Comparison	27.647	17	.049							
Align to Brand Eval.	477.169	259	1.842	.0728	.894	.861	.951	.959	.044	.936
Model Comparison	5.235	1	.022							
Align to CBBE	498.943	274	1.821	.0885	.891	.864	.952	.957	.044	.957
Model Comparison	27.010	16	.041							

Frontline employee brand alignment effects brand evaluation less ($\beta = .436, p < .001$) than aligned category ($\beta = .693, p < .001$). Similarly, Frontline employee brand alignment effect is higher on customer-based brand equity for aligned category ($\beta = .649, p < .001$) than misaligned category ($\beta = .450, p < .001$). Hence, result of multigroup moderation suggest that frontline employees should be aligned with the brand which in return can benefit service organization financially. Table 7.10 presents path coefficients for the structural model of group comparisons.

Table Path Coefficients (Group: Sincere Brand Personality)

Group: Sincere Brand Personality Delta				
Path	Misaligned		Aligned	
	β	Sig.	β	Sig.
Brand Evaluation<---FLE Brand Alignment	.436	.000	.693	.000
Customer-based Brand Equity<--- FLE Brand Alignment	.450	.000	.649	.000

Excitement brand personality group

First of all, invariance was calculated which is a prerequisite to perform multigroup moderation. The very first type of invariance calculated was configural. An unconstrained measurement model was estimated. The fit indices for the unconstrained model for configural invariance were as followed: ($\chi^2=451.791$), ($df=256$), ($\chi^2/df=1.765$), ($SRMR=0.0581$), ($GFI=0.904$), ($AGFI=0.872$), ($TLI=0.955$), ($CFI=0.962$), ($RMSEA=0.042$), ($PCLOSE=0.980$). All items have sufficient loading in at least one group. Thus, they should not be deleted, since they are good indicators in one group at least (Appendices). The measurement model meets all absolute and relative fit indices. Configural Invariance across groups is achieved.

Furthermore, a constrained model was estimated to calculate metric invariance. The fit indices for the constrained model for configural invariance were as followed: ($\chi^2=472.715$), ($df=268$), ($\chi^2/df=1.770$), ($SRMR=0.0655$), ($GFI=0.900$), ($AGFI=0.872$), ($TLI=0.954$), ($CFI=0.960$), ($RMSEA=0.042$), ($PCLOSE=0.980$). The chi-square difference test results for constrained vs unconstrained measurement model were ($\Delta\chi^2=20.924$), ($df=16$) and ($p=.181$). In case of invariance calculation, an insignificant P-value shows that metric invariance is achieved. If full metric invariance is not achieved then constrained paths are relaxed one by one till the partial invariance is achieved (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998). In this case, paths of following indicators were relaxed (expty7, rlvny4, cbbe3, beval4, expty4, expty5, rlvny7). Hence, partial metric invariance was achieved.

Finally, a structural unconstrained model was run against a constrained model. The fit indices for the unconstrained structural model were as followed: ($\chi^2=486.912$), ($df=260$), ($\chi^2/df=1.873$), ($SRMR=0.0511$), ($GFI=0.896$), ($AGFI=0.863$), ($TLI=0.948$), ($CFI=0.956$), ($RMSEA=0.045$),

(PCLOSE=0.906). The fit indices for the constrained structural model were as followed: ($\chi^2=534.799$), ($df=277$), ($\chi^2/df=1.931$), (SRMR=0.0510), (GFI=0.886), (AGFI=0.860), (TLI=0.945), (CFI=0.950), (RMSEA=0.047), (PCLOSE=0.830). The chi-square difference test results for constrained vs unconstrained structural model were ($\Delta\chi^2=47.886$), ($df=17$) and ($p < .001$). Hence, a significant P-value of chi-square difference test indicates that there is a difference at group level and there is moderation for aligned vs misaligned categories.

Afterwards, a path level moderation is investigated. A constrained model is estimated where only the concerned path is constrained to examine the path level moderation. The fit indices for the constrained structural model where frontline employee brand alignment to brand evaluation path is constrained, were as followed: ($\chi^2=493.904$), ($df=261$), ($\chi^2/df=1.892$), (SRMR=0.0507), (GFI=0.895), (AGFI=0.862), (TLI=0.947), (CFI=0.955), (RMSEA=0.046), (PCLOSE=0.882). The chi-square difference test results for constrained vs unconstrained structural model were ($\Delta\chi^2=6.991$), ($df=1$) and ($p < .008$). Hence, a significant result of chi-square difference test indicates that there is moderation for the concerned path.

Furthermore, a constrained model is estimated where frontline employee brand alignment to customer-based brand equity path is constrained. The fit indices for the constrained structural model were as followed: ($\chi^2=492.360$), ($df=261$), ($\chi^2/df=1.886$), (SRMR=0.0501), (GFI=0.895), (AGFI=0.862), (TLI=0.948), (CFI=0.955), (RMSEA=0.045), (PCLOSE=0.890). The chi-square difference test results for constrained vs unconstrained structural model were ($\Delta\chi^2=5.447$), ($df=1$) and ($p < .020$). Hence, a significant result of chi-square difference test indicates that there is moderation for the concerned path. Table 8.12 presents the results for group level and path level group comparisons.

Table Chi-Square Difference Results (Group: excitement Brand Personality)

<i>Models/ Fit Indices</i>	<i>CMIN</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>CMIN/df</i>	<i>SRMR</i>	<i>GFI</i>	<i>AGFI</i>	<i>TLI</i>	<i>CFI</i>	<i>RMSEA</i>	<i>PCLOSE</i>
Unconstrained Model	486.912	260	1.873	.0511	.896	.863	.948	.956	.045	.906
Constrained Model	534.799	277	1.931	.0510	.886	.860	.945	.950	.047	.830
Model Comparison	47.886	17	.000							
Align to Brand Eval.	493.904	261	1.892	.0507	.895	.862	.947	.955	.046	.882
Model Comparison	6.991	1	.008							
Align to CBBE	492.360	261	1.886	.0501	.895	.862	.948	.955	.045	.890
Model Comparison	5.447	1	.020							

Frontline employee brand alignment effects brand evaluation less ($\beta = .685, \rho < .001$) than aligned category ($\beta = .879, \rho < .001$). Similarly, Frontline employee brand alignment effect is higher on customer-based brand equity for aligned category ($\beta = .730, \rho < .001$) than misaligned category ($\beta = .683, \rho < .001$). Hence, result of multigroup moderation suggest that frontline employees should be aligned with the brand which in return can benefit service organization financially. Table 7.10 presents path coefficients for the structural model of group comparisons.

Table Path Coefficients (Group: excitement Brand Personality)

Group: Excitement Brand Personality Delta				
Path	Misaligned		Aligned	
	β	Sig.	β	Sig.
Brand Evaluation<---FLE Brand Alignment	.685	.000	.879	.000
Customer-based Brand Equity<--- FLE Brand Alignment	.683	.000	.730	.000

Competent brand personality group

First of all, invariance was calculated which is a prerequisite to perform multigroup moderation. The very first type of invariance calculated was configural. An unconstrained measurement model was estimated. The fit indices for the unconstrained model for configural invariance were as followed: ($\chi^2=426.620$), ($df=256$), ($\chi^2/df=1.666$), ($SRMR=0.0625$), ($GFI=0.908$), ($AGFI=0.877$), ($TLI=0.960$), ($CFI=0.967$), ($RMSEA=0.039$), ($PCLOSE=0.997$). All items have sufficient loading in at least one group. Thus, they should not be deleted, since they are good indicators in one group at least (Appendices). The measurement model meets all absolute and relative fit indices. Configural Invariance across groups is achieved.

Furthermore, a constrained model was estimated to calculate metric invariance. The fit indices for the constrained model for configural invariance were as followed: ($\chi^2=447.476$), ($df=270$), ($\chi^2/df=1.657$), ($SRMR=0.0887$), ($GFI=0.902$), ($AGFI=0.876$), ($TLI=0.961$), ($CFI=0.965$), ($RMSEA=0.039$), ($PCLOSE=0.998$). The chi-square difference test results for constrained vs unconstrained measurement model were ($\Delta\chi^2=20.856$), ($df=14$) and ($p=.105$). In case of invariance calculation, an insignificant P-value shows that metric invariance is achieved. If full metric invariance is not achieved then constrained paths are relaxed one by one till the partial invariance is achieved (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998). In this case, paths of following indicators were relaxed (rlvny5, beval3, beval4, expty2). Hence, partial metric invariance was achieved.

Finally, a structural unconstrained model was run against a constrained model. The fit indices for the unconstrained structural model were as followed: ($\chi^2=462.328$), ($df=260$), ($\chi^2/df=1.778$), ($SRMR=0.0474$), ($GFI=0.900$), ($AGFI=0.868$), ($TLI=0.953$), ($CFI=0.960$), ($RMSEA=0.043$),

(PCLOSE=0.976). The fit indices for the constrained structural model were as followed: ($\chi^2=478.777$), ($df=277$), ($\chi^2/df=1.765$), (SRMR=0.0473), (GFI=0.894), (AGFI=0.869), (TLI=0.954), (CFI=0.958), (RMSEA=0.042), (PCLOSE=0.984). The chi-square difference test results for constrained vs unconstrained structural model were ($\Delta\chi^2=26.449$), ($df=17$) and ($p < .067$). Hence, a significant P-value of chi-square difference test indicates that there is a difference at group level and there is moderation for aligned vs misaligned categories.

Afterwards, a path level moderation is investigated. A constrained model is estimated where only the concerned path is constrained to examine the path level moderation. The fit indices for the constrained structural model where frontline employee brand alignment to brand evaluation path is constrained, were as followed: ($\chi^2=465.867$), ($df=261$), ($\chi^2/df=1.785$), (SRMR=0.0470), (GFI=0.899), (AGFI=0.867), (TLI=0.953), (CFI=0.960), (RMSEA=0.043), (PCLOSE=0.973). The chi-square difference test results for constrained vs unconstrained structural model were ($\Delta\chi^2=3.539$), ($df=1$) and ($p < .060$). Hence, a significant result of chi-square difference test indicates that there is moderation for the concerned path.

Furthermore, a constrained model is estimated where frontline employee brand alignment to customer-based brand equity path is constrained. The fit indices for the constrained structural model were as followed: ($\chi^2=465.563$), ($df=261$), ($\chi^2/df=1.784$), (SRMR=0.0470), (GFI=0.899), (AGFI=0.868), (TLI=0.953), (CFI=0.960), (RMSEA=0.043), (PCLOSE=0.974). The chi-square difference test results for constrained vs unconstrained structural model were ($\Delta\chi^2=3.235$), ($df=1$) and ($p < .072$). Hence, a significant result of chi-square difference test indicates that there is moderation for the concerned path. Table 8.12 presents the results for group level and path level group comparisons.

Table Chi-Square Difference Results (Group: Competent Brand Personality)

<i>Models/ Fit Indices</i>	<i>CMIN</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>CMIN/df</i>	<i>SRMR</i>	<i>GFI</i>	<i>AGFI</i>	<i>TLI</i>	<i>CFI</i>	<i>RMSEA</i>	<i>PCLOSE</i>
Unconstrained Model	462.328	260	1.778	.0474	.900	.868	.953	.960	.043	.976
Constrained Model	488.777	277	1.765	.0473	.894	.869	.954	.958	.042	.984
Model Comparison	26.449	17	.067							
Align to Brand Eval.	465.867	261	1.785	.0470	.899	.867	.953	.960	.043	.973
Model Comparison	3.539	1	.060							
Align to CBBE	465.563	261	1.784	.0470	.899	.868	.953	.960	.043	.974
Model Comparison	3.235	1	.072							

Frontline employee brand alignment effects brand evaluation less ($\beta = .685, \rho < .001$) than aligned category ($\beta = .879, \rho < .001$). Similarly, Frontline employee brand alignment effect is higher on customer-based brand equity for aligned category ($\beta = .730, \rho < .001$) than misaligned category ($\beta = .683, \rho < .001$). Hence, result of multigroup moderation suggest that frontline employees should be aligned with the brand which in return can benefit service organization financially. Table 7.10 presents path coefficients for the structural model of group comparisons.

Table Path Coefficients (Group: Competent Brand Personality)

Group: Competent Brand Personality Delta				
Path	Misaligned		Aligned	
	β	Sig.	β	Sig.
Brand Evaluation<---FLE Brand Alignment	.713	.000	.819	.000
Customer-based Brand Equity<--- FLE Brand Alignment	.687	.000	.777	.000

Sophisticated brand personality group

First of all, invariance was calculated which is a prerequisite to perform multigroup moderation. The very first type of invariance calculated was configural. An unconstrained measurement model was estimated. The fit indices for the unconstrained model for configural invariance were as followed: ($\chi^2=406.258$), ($df=254$), ($\chi^2/df=1.599$), ($SRMR=0.0355$), ($GFI=0.913$), ($AGFI=0.883$), ($TLI=0.965$), ($CFI=0.971$), ($RMSEA=0.037$), ($PCLOSE=0.999$). All items have sufficient loading in at least one group. Thus, they should not be deleted, since they are good indicators in one group at least (Appendices). The measurement model meets all absolute and relative fit indices. Configural Invariance across groups is achieved.

Furthermore, a constrained model was estimated to calculate metric invariance. The fit indices for the constrained model for configural invariance were as followed: ($\chi^2=443.062$), ($df=272$), ($\chi^2/df=1.629$), ($SRMR=0.0359$), ($GFI=0.904$), ($AGFI=0.869$), ($TLI=0.963$), ($CFI=0.967$), ($RMSEA=0.038$), ($PCLOSE=0.999$). The chi-square difference test results for constrained vs unconstrained measurement model were ($\Delta\chi^2=5.748$), ($df=16$) and ($p=.991$). In case of invariance calculation, an insignificant P-value shows that metric invariance is achieved. If full metric invariance is not achieved then constrained paths are relaxed one by one till the partial invariance is achieved (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998). In this case, none of the indicator paths were relaxed. Hence, partial metric invariance was achieved.

Finally, a structural unconstrained model was run against a constrained model. The fit indices for the unconstrained structural model were as followed: ($\chi^2=475.613$), ($df=260$), ($\chi^2/df=1.829$), ($SRMR=0.0464$), ($GFI=0.898$), ($AGFI=0.865$), ($TLI=0.951$), ($CFI=0.958$), ($RMSEA=0.044$), ($PCLOSE=0.947$). The fit indices for the constrained structural model were as followed:

($\chi^2=510.250$), (df=277), ($\chi^2/\text{df}=1.842$), (SRMR=0.0492), (GFI=0.890), (AGFI=0.864), (TLI=0.950), (CFI=0.955), (RMSEA=0.044), (PCLOSE=0.943). The chi-square difference test results for constrained vs unconstrained structural model were ($\Delta\chi^2=34.637$), (df=17) and ($p<.007$). Hence, a significant P-value of chi-square difference test indicates that there is a difference at group level and there is moderation for aligned vs misaligned categories.

Afterwards, a path level moderation is investigated. A constrained model is estimated where only the concerned path is constrained to examine the path level moderation. The fit indices for the constrained structural model where frontline employee brand alignment to brand evaluation path is constrained, were as followed: ($\chi^2=476.979$), (df=261), ($\chi^2/\text{df}=1.828$), (SRMR=0.0465), (GFI=0.898), (AGFI=0.866), (TLI=0.951), (CFI=0.958), (RMSEA=0.044), (PCLOSE=0.948). The chi-square difference test results for constrained vs unconstrained structural model were ($\Delta\chi^2=1.366$), (df=1) and ($p<.243$). Hence, an insignificant result of chi-square difference test indicates that there is no moderation for the concerned path.

Furthermore, a constrained model is estimated where frontline employee brand alignment to customer-based brand equity path is constrained. The fit indices for the constrained structural model were as followed: ($\chi^2=476.029$), (df=261), ($\chi^2/\text{df}=1.824$), (SRMR=0.0462), (GFI=0.898), (AGFI=0.866), (TLI=0.951), (CFI=0.958), (RMSEA=0.044), (PCLOSE=0.951). The chi-square difference test results for constrained vs unconstrained structural model were ($\Delta\chi^2=0.416$), (df=1) and ($p<.519$). Hence, an insignificant result of chi-square difference test indicates that there is no moderation for the concerned path. Table 8.12 presents the results for group level and path level group comparisons.

Table Chi-Square Difference Results (Group: Sophisticated Brand Personality)

<i>Models/ Fit Indices</i>	<i>CMIN</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>CMIN/df</i>	<i>SRMR</i>	<i>GFI</i>	<i>AGFI</i>	<i>TLI</i>	<i>CFI</i>	<i>RMSEA</i>	<i>PCLOSE</i>
Unconstrained Model	475.613	260	1.829	.0464	.898	.865	.951	.958	.044	.947
Constrained Model	510.250	277	1.842	.0492	.890	.864	.950	.955	.044	.943
Model Comparison	34.637	17	.007							
Align to Brand Eval.	476.979	261	1.828	.0465	.898	.866	.951	.958	.044	.948
Model Comparison	1.366	1	.243							
Align to CBBE	476.029	261	1.824	.0462	.898	.866	.951	.958	.044	.951
Model Comparison	.416	1	.519							

Frontline employee brand alignment effects brand evaluation less ($\beta = .730, \rho < .001$) than aligned category ($\beta = .801, \rho < .001$). Similarly, Frontline employee brand alignment effect is higher on customer-based brand equity for aligned category ($\beta = .730, \rho < .001$) than misaligned category ($\beta = .692, \rho < .001$). Hence, result of multigroup moderation suggest that there is no moderation for sophisticated brands. Table 7.10 presents path coefficients for the structural model of group comparisons.

Table Path Coefficients (Group: Sophisticated Brand Personality)

Group: Sophisticated Brand Personality Delta				
Path	Misaligned		Aligned	
	β	Sig.	β	Sig.
Brand Evaluation<---FLE Brand Alignment	.730	.000	.801	.000
Customer-based Brand Equity<--- FLE Brand Alignment	.730	.000	.692	.000

Rugged brand personality group

First of all, invariance was calculated which is a prerequisite to perform multigroup moderation. The very first type of invariance calculated was configural. An unconstrained measurement model was estimated. The fit indices for the unconstrained model for configural invariance were as followed: ($\chi^2=419.578$), ($df=256$), ($\chi^2/df=1.639$), ($SRMR=0.0359$), ($GFI=0.903$), ($AGFI=0.871$), ($TLI=0.959$), ($CFI=0.966$), ($RMSEA=0.040$), ($PCLOSE=0.993$). All items have sufficient loading in at least one group. Thus, they should not be deleted, since they are good indicators in one group at least (Appendices). The measurement model meets all absolute and relative fit indices. Configural Invariance across groups is achieved.

Furthermore, a constrained model was estimated to calculate metric invariance. The fit indices for the constrained model for configural invariance were as followed: ($\chi^2=440.410$), ($df=271$), ($\chi^2/df=1.625$), ($SRMR=0.0364$), ($GFI=0.899$), ($AGFI=0.872$), ($TLI=0.960$), ($CFI=0.965$), ($RMSEA=0.040$), ($PCLOSE=0.996$). The chi-square difference test results for constrained vs unconstrained measurement model were ($\Delta\chi^2=20.832$), ($df=15$) and ($p=.142$). In case of invariance calculation, an insignificant P-value shows that metric invariance is achieved. If full metric invariance is not achieved then constrained paths are relaxed one by one till the partial invariance is achieved (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998). In this case, the paths of indicator were relaxed (beval4, beval3, rlvny5). Hence, partial metric invariance was achieved.

Finally, a structural unconstrained model was run against a constrained model. The fit indices for the unconstrained structural model were as followed: ($\chi^2=456.308$), ($df=260$), ($\chi^2/df=1.755$), ($SRMR=0.0484$), ($GFI=0.895$), ($AGFI=0.861$), ($TLI=0.952$), ($CFI=0.959$), ($RMSEA=0.044$), ($PCLOSE=0.947$). The fit indices for the constrained structural model were as followed:

($\chi^2=486.470$), (df=277), ($\chi^2/\text{df}=1.756$), (SRMR=0.0505), (GFI=0.886), (AGFI=0.860), (TLI=0.952), (CFI=0.956), (RMSEA=0.044), (PCLOSE=0.952). The chi-square difference test results for constrained vs unconstrained structural model were ($\Delta\chi^2=30.162$), (df=17) and ($p < .025$). Hence, a significant P-value of chi-square difference test indicates that there is a difference at group level and there is moderation for aligned vs misaligned categories.

Afterwards, a path level moderation is investigated. A constrained model is estimated where only the concerned path is constrained to examine the path level moderation. The fit indices for the constrained structural model where frontline employee brand alignment to brand evaluation path is constrained, were as followed: ($\chi^2=457.142$), (df=261), ($\chi^2/\text{df}=1.752$), (SRMR=0.0487), (GFI=0.895), (AGFI=0.862), (TLI=0.952), (CFI=0.959), (RMSEA=0.043), (PCLOSE=0.950). The chi-square difference test results for constrained vs unconstrained structural model were ($\Delta\chi^2=0.834$), (df=1) and ($p < .361$). Hence, an insignificant result of chi-square difference test indicates that there is no moderation for the concerned path.

Furthermore, a constrained model is estimated where frontline employee brand alignment to customer-based brand equity path is constrained. The fit indices for the constrained structural model were as followed: ($\chi^2=456.524$), (df=261), ($\chi^2/\text{df}=1.749$), (SRMR=0.0484), (GFI=0.895), (AGFI=0.862), (TLI=0.952), (CFI=0.959), (RMSEA=0.043), (PCLOSE=0.952). The chi-square difference test results for constrained vs unconstrained structural model were ($\Delta\chi^2=0.216$), (df=1) and ($p < .642$). Hence, an insignificant result of chi-square difference test indicates that there is no moderation for the concerned path. Table 8.12 presents the results for group level and path level group comparisons.

Table Chi-Square Difference Results (Group: Rugged Brand Personality)

<i>Models/ Fit Indices</i>	<i>CMIN</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>CMIN/df</i>	<i>SRMR</i>	<i>GFI</i>	<i>AGFI</i>	<i>TLI</i>	<i>CFI</i>	<i>RMSEA</i>	<i>PCLOSE</i>
Unconstrained Model	456.308	260	1.755	.0484	.895	.861	.952	.959	.044	.947
Constrained Model	486.470	277	1.756	.0505	.886	.860	.952	.956	.044	.952
Model Comparison	30.162	17	.025							
Align to Brand Eval.	457.142	261	1.752	.0487	.895	.862	.952	.959	.043	.950
Model Comparison	.834	1	.361							
Align to CBBE	456.524	261	1.749	.0484	.895	.862	.952	.959	.043	.952
Model Comparison	.216	1	.642							

Frontline employee brand alignment effects brand evaluation less ($\beta = .730, \rho < .001$) than aligned category ($\beta = .801, \rho < .001$). Similarly, Frontline employee brand alignment effect is higher on customer-based brand equity for aligned category ($\beta = .730, \rho < .001$) than misaligned category ($\beta = .692, \rho < .001$). Hence, result of multigroup moderation suggest that there is no moderation for rugged brands. Table 7.10 presents path coefficients for the structural model of group comparisons.

Table Path Coefficients (Group: Rugged Brand Personality)

Group: Rugged Brand Personality Delta				
Path	Misaligned		Aligned	
	β	Sig.	β	Sig.
Brand Evaluation<---FLE Brand Alignment	.730	.000	.801	.000
Customer-based Brand Equity<--- FLE Brand Alignment	.730	.000	.692	.000

Appendix F-1

ABSTRACT

Services are intangible and frontline employees are their face. The frontline employees have an important role in building the confidence of consumers in service brands. The employees can be equipped to fulfil the implicit and explicit brand promises by internalizing brand image. In order to explore and investigate the dynamics of frontline employee Brand image alignment in service sector, this study adopted a mix method approach. A qualitative study was conducted to explore the antecedents of frontline employee brand alignment. Data was collected by conducting observations and customer interviews. A total number of 8 observations and 92 customer interviews were conducted. Semi structured interviews were conducted by using Critical incident protocol technique. Based on these observations and interviews, our results indicate that frontline employee brand image alignment is perceived through their interaction quality which not only consist of their attitude, behaviour and expertise but also appearance of frontline employee. Subsequently, two quantitative studies were conducted to develop and test the frontline employee brand alignment measurement. A total number of 567 responses were analysed for study 1 and 432 for study 2. A structural model was tested with outcome variables such as, brand evaluation and customer-based brand equity. Authentic employee behaviour and interaction duration were taken as boundary conditions. Authentic employee behavior positively moderates the relationship between FLE brand alignment and outcome variables. Whereas, interaction duration negatively moderates the relationship between FLE brand alignment and outcome variables. Frontline employee brand alignment appears to be an important concept in service branding. From a managerial point of view the research tends to show that service branding is impacted by frontline employee brand alignment, especially the way they appear and behave. This study not only explains the concept of frontline employee brand alignment but also proposes the determinants to measure the alignment. Furthermore, this study adds to the existing literature of interaction quality.

Keywords: *Frontline employee (FLE), Brand alignment, Interaction Quality, Appearance, Service branding*

Appendix F-2

RÉSUMÉ EN FRANÇAIS

Résumé

Les services sont intangibles et le personnel en contact leur visage. Les employés doivent remplir les promesses implicites et explicites de la marque en internalisant l'image de marque. Mais jusqu'à quel point ? Est-il toujours souhaitable pour une marque d'avoir un personnel aligné avec les éléments saillants de son image ? Afin d'explorer et d'étudier la dynamique de l'alignement du personnel en contact dans le secteur des services, cette recherche a adopté un design mêlant analyse quantitative et analyses quantitatives.

Une étude qualitative a été menée pour explorer les antécédents de l'alignement de la marque du personnel en contact. Un total de 8 observations et 92 entretiens avec des clients ont été menés. Les répondants devaient raconter des histoires personnelles d'alignement et de non alignement du personnel en contact avec la marque et expliquer pourquoi ils avaient cette perception. L'analyse de ces entretiens permet d'identifier les déterminants à l'alignement à la marque. Les résultats montrent que l'alignement est perçu à travers leur qualité d'interaction qui comprend non seulement leur attitude, leur comportement et leur expertise, mais aussi l'apparence du personnel en contact.

Par la suite, deux études quantitatives ont été menées pour développer et tester la mesure de l'alignement de la marque du personnel en contact et tester le modèle de la recherche. 567 réponses ont été analysées pour l'étude 1 et 432 pour l'étude 2. La première étude permet de construire une mesure directe à deux dimensions de l'alignement à la marque. L'étude 2 permet d'améliorer cette mesure et propose une mesure indirecte de l'alignement. Un modèle structurel permet de tester la chaîne de conséquence : Qualité Interactionnel – alignement – évaluation globale de la marque et sa valeur. L'alignement joue un rôle médiateur dans cette relation. Par ailleurs dans la relation alignement-évaluation globale de la marque et sa valeur, les effets modérateurs de l'authenticité perçue du personnel, la durée de l'interaction et du suralignement sont identifiés.

Les résultats de la recherche sont enfin mis en perspective dans une partie conclusive en faisant apparaître les implications théoriques, managériales ainsi que les limites et perspectives de recherche.

Mots clés: *Marque de service, personnel en contact, l'alignement à la marque, Qualité de l'interaction, Apparence*

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