Cross-Cultural Dissimilarities in the Perception of Brand Personality of Select Smart phones: Evidence from West Bengal, India and Bangladesh

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Abstract

The study has been conducted in the adjoining regions of West Bengal and Bangladesh (erstwhile East Bengal) among various respondent groups. Both the regions have been archetypally known to share multiple cultural commonalities. Notwithstanding, there exists divergences in the culture, which have been tested using Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Framework. Further, the study investigates whether there exist any divergences in how the personalities of the two smart phone brands, namely, Samsung and Xiaomi, are perceived in the two regions. An aggregate sample of 295 and 287 respondents have been selected conveniently from West Bengal, India and Bangladesh, respectively.

The current study primarily aims to probe into the cultural dissimilarities between the two contiguous regions of West Bengal (in India) and Bangladesh. Subsequently, the study investigates the probable impact of such cross-cultural dissimilarities on consumers' perception concerning the personality of select smart phone brands, specifically Samsung and Xiaomi. The study provides good empirical insight into the fact that despite the uniform positioning of the two smart phone brands in the two West Bengal and Bangladesh regions, their personality traits are perceived differently by consumers dwelling in these cultures. The analysis yields that respondents from West Bengal and Bangladesh demonstrated notable congruencies in perceiving Xiaomi as a 'responsible' and "aggressive' brand. However, Samsung is perceived as an 'aggressive' brand in Bangladesh and 'stable' in West Bengal. The perceptual deviations of the smart phone brands' personalities exist due to the cultural divergences between the two regions.

The current study is unique in that it offers a new-fangled perspective to looking at cross-cultural research by comparing politico-administrative units instead of countries at large. Yet, it is bound by imperfections, such as limited sample size, making it difficult to make more detailed comments on individuals' perceptions towards the brand personality dimensions of smart phones. Although adequate care has been taken to eliminate the "made-in image" of the Chinese smart phones, respondents were generally biased towards the product quality, brand acquaintance and their overall perceptions towards the personality of the said brands.

Brand personality plays an integral role in easing communications with customers. They can, resultantly, relate conveniently to the identity and the personality traits possessed by such brands. Marketing professionals can essentially aim to foster a brand-customer personality congruence, which would ideally enable them to position their product offerings accordingly and design tailored advertising and marketing communication messages. A well-defined brand personality initiates greater customer purchase willingness coupled with amplified emotional attachment, trust and loyalty, thereby enhancing the significance of branding to managers. They can help develop frameworks to analyze behavioral intentions concerning consumer perception of brand personality.

Keywords: Cross-cultural; Brand Personality; West Bengal; Bangladesh; Smart Phone Brands

Introduction

The idea of leveraging brands to create a distinguishing impact in the minds of target consumers is not new, especially since it helps gain formidable competitive advantage "(D. A. Aaker, 1991; Holt, 2010; Kapferer, 1996; Mason & Batch, 2009). In fact, consumers often look upon brands as valuable implements that assist them in expressing their personality employing their purchase decisions and actual purchase acts (Cătălin & Andreea, 2014; Kim et al., 2001). Hence, it is of new relevance for branding professionals to develop robust marketing communications programs, such that the target consumers can engage with their preferred brands, both meaningfully and efficaciously.

In this context, brand personality has often been used by marketers as a novel and valuable implement to distinguish their products from competing brands (Åberg, 2015; Kim et al., 2001), and consequently establish brand equity (Ahmad & Thyagaraj, 2015a; Gorbaniuk et al., 2015). Brand personality has been defined as "a set of human characteristics that are associated with a specific brand." (J. L. Aaker, 1997). Resultantly, consumers who strongly relate to the personality of their preferred brands can make improved and more informed brand choices and demonstrate better brand usage trajectories (Ambroise et al., 2004; Su & Tong, 2015; Tessa, 2018). Furthermore, brand personality as a construct helps marketing specialists to develop more effectual branding strategies by better comprehending the inherent emotive and symbolic connotations that are ascribed to brands by consumers. Research has observed that brand personality has a positive influence on active "customer engagement" (Yasin et al., 2020), as well as a significant influence on "brand love" (Anggraenia & Rachmanita, 2015; Roy et al., 2016). In recent times, the application of brand personality has been found extensively in the case of travel and tourism (Ekinci & Hosany, 2006; Usakli & Baloglu, 2011), as well as niche realms such as Islamic marketing (Ahmed & Jan, 2015; Zainudin et al., 2019). These explorations suggest that there remain several other product and service categories where the applications of brand personality are yet to be explored.

However, literature data continues to be lacking in the case of consumer electronics. Although brand personality scales have been previously applied to measure the authenticity of consumer electronics such as smartphones (Chung & Park, 2017), typically applying the frameworks advanced by J.L. Aaker (1997), such studies have focussed on the application of the scale in a specific regional context (Sundar & Noseworthy, 2016) or among students in a given institutional context (Ajilore & Solo-Anaeto, 2016). Several reasons justify the rationale for the selection of smart phones. Backed by rising income levels, India's holistic demand for consumer durables has been soaring. Other factors such as "rising rural incomes", "expanding urbanisation", an "emerging middle class", and "changing lifestyles" are expected to support demand growth in the market (Rajeswari & Pirakatheeswari, 2014; Sathya & Vijayasanthi, 2016). Today, across the world, the market for smart phones has been observed to be exceedingly competitive, especially in light of the breakneck technological innovations and product differentiations that have resulted in the dynamism visible in the industry (Cecere et al., 2015; Ngoc Anh, 2016; Paul & Cornelia, 2019). The market dominance rests in the hands of a few global smart phone brands, which try to position themselves uniformly within various regional market contexts (Khandelwal, 2019). Yet, one of the significant bottlenecks faced by managers of smart phone brands happens to be the proper understanding of cultural divergences that have a prospective influence on how the personality of such brands is perceived across two or more countries or geographic regions.

Interestingly, brand managers can develop a unique brand personality and position it uniformly across consumers in different cultures through the effective use of promotional tools, packaging strategies, signs, symbols and other brand artefacts (Staplehurst & Charoenwongse, 2012; Zadeh & Rose, 2018). The present study presents a unique opportunity to fathom the unique opportunities available to smart phone

brands in nurturing their businesses beyond a national boundary. Smart phone brands have genuinely become global brands today (Silver, 2019), and it is crucial to recognize the dynamics of customers dwelling in different nations and geographical regions in terms of several socio-demographic aspects, perceptions, attitudinal attributes, value and belief systems. Such a profound insight would aid in the comprehension of global smart phone brands such as Samsung, Xiaomi, Apple, among other brands.

In the current study, the neighbouring regions of West Bengal (India) and Bangladesh have been considered. The selection is primarily driven by the fact that the two cultures share relatively similar cultures, be it in terms of language, art or music. Several studies corroborate the rationale for the selection of the two regions '(Rahman et al., 2019). A profound insight into the smart phone markets of the two regions helps in strengthening the understanding of the rationale for selecting the two neighbouring regions, wherein the customer adoption and diffusion of smart phones has seen a significant surge since the last decade(Press Trust of India Report, 2020; Shifat, 2020). The trajectories of smart phone ownership in both regions are also similar in many ways. Around 74 per cent of the urban population of Bangladesh were found to own smart phones, out of which nearly three-fifths of the populace happened to possess internet-enabled devices (Bayes, 2019). On the other hand, 61 per cent of the urban population in West Bengal are known to use internet-enabled smart phones (Press Trust of India, 2013). West Bengal also accounts for an excess of 5 per cent of the entire smart phone production in India, with an estimated monthly production capacity of nearly 5 lakh smart phones(Raj, 2020).

From a theoretical perspective, it may be argued that regions bearing similar cultures may demonstrate commonalities in the manner in which the brand personality of consumer electronic products such as smart phones are perceived by consumers dwelling in both cultures (Hanel et al., 2018; J. Karlin & Weil, 2019; Norenzayan et al., 2002). Previous studies have shown that in regions with heterogeneous cultures, the personality of a specific brand may not be perceived uniformly in tandem with how the company initially conceived it because such cultural divergences have some bearing on the cultural connotations ascribed to the brand in respective regions (Chegini et al., 2016; Foscht et al., 2008a; Jansson, 2013; Tunkkari, 2017). Such inconsistencies in perceptions may pose a challenge for regiocentric and geocentric market-orientated companies to develop global marketing strategies to maintain an unswerving brand image to ensure success in world markets.

One of the most effective frameworks to probe into the cultural meaning of a specific region is the framework developed by Geert Hofstede in 1980, which has been accepted globally as a uniform paradigm to probe into inherent cultural divergences. There are six dimensions proposed in the framework, which mutually depict the cultural impact entrenched in a given region in terms of the value structures held by the members belonging to the said region. They are "Power Distance Index", "Uncertainty Avoidance", "Individualism vs Collectivism", "Masculinity vs Femininity", "Long-Term vs Short-Term Orientation", and "Indulgence vs Restraint". To comprehend the cultural connotations of the brand personality construct across the neighbouring regions of West Bengal and Bangladesh, it is also crucial to establish a liaison with Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Jansson, 2013; Matzler et al., 2016; Phau & Lau, 2000).

Research Objective

Accordingly, the current study attempts to probe into the following research questions:

RQ1: Are there any cultural dissimilarities between the two contiguous regions of West Bengal, India and Bangladesh?

Rq2: Is the personality of Samsung and Xiaomi smart phone brands perceived differently across the two cultures of West Bengal and Bangladesh?

RQ3: Do the cultural dimensions of each region (viz. Bangladesh and West Bengal) have any significant impact on the perception of brand personality of Samsung and Xiaomi?

Literature Review

The academic inquest in brand personality has acquired significant status in recent times, as marketing professionals seek to distinguish their brands from their rivals and develop a competitive advantage. Although global brands are positioned uniformly across diverse cultures, there are differences in how they are perceived across diverse cultures. The review of background literature has been categorized under the several extensive domains covered in the study.

Brand Personality Dimensions

Over time, there has been adequate evidence to establish that brand personality as a construct acts as a valuable implement in examining the behaviour of consumers (Bairrada et al., 2019; Chovanová et al., 2015). Brand personality is regarded as a crucial element of brand identity theory (Lindeberg et al., 2012; Phau & Lau, 2000; Rajagopal, 2012; Robertson et al., 2019; Shyle & Hysi, 2013), and it is defined as "the set of human personality traits that are both applicable to and relevant for brands" (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003). This definition encompasses not only demographic components such as age, gender and social class, but also distinctive personality traits such as "excitement", "ruggedness", "sincerity", "competence" and "sophistication" much like human beings (J. L. Aaker, 1997). It is not merely a means to establish the physical traits linked by consumers with their preferred brands, but a unique approach to uncover the brand preferences made by them coupled with their deep-rooted emotional states in correlation with specific brands (J. L. Aaker, 1997; Ahmad & Thyagaraj, 2015a; Bozbay & Ozkan, 2016).

Brands which possess unique personality traits are known to acquire profound meaning in the minds of the consumers, and thereby acquire human-like attributes over time (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017; Puzakova et al., 2009; Puzakova & Kwak, 2017). The only distinction is that unlike human personality, which is ordinarily deep-rooted and ingrained as a core component of individual behaviour itself, the personality of a brand, au contraire, is subject to how it is perceived by individuals in the process of brand contact, that is to say, from procuring and using the said brand (Ahmad & Thyagaraj, 2015b; Maehle et al., 2011; Milas & Mlačić, 2007; Pandey, 2009; Srivastava & Sharma, 2016). The representative personality traits are essentially shaped in the consumer of a said brand, as the versatile personality facets are transmitted to the brand in question (Arsena et al., 2014; Becheur et al., 2017; Sheena & Naresh, 2012). Furthermore, the distinctive attributes of the brand's top management are also rubbed off onto the said brand in many a few cases (Keller & Richey, 2006; Robertson et al., 2019). Such transmission of traits consequents in the personification of a brand, with a sui generis character of its own.

In the recent past, there have been an array of studies that have corroborated that the perception of brand personality varies according to multiple cultures (Geuens et al., 2009; Gondim Mariutti & de Moura Engracia Giraldi, 2019; Khandai et al., 2015; Kumar, 2018; Sung et al., 2015). For instance, in a study by Muniz & Marchetti (2012), a 28-item inventory of personality traits was derived in the Brazilian context instead of the scales developed in the milieu of other countries and cultures. Similarly, Srivastava & Sharma (2016) endeavoured to validate the Aaker's scale in India's telecom services, wherein they observed that the 'sophistication' dimension was not a robust fit with the theoretical model of brand personality. In yet another study by Bishnoi & Kumar (2016), it was concluded that ten items from Aaker's novel brand personality scale did not hold in their entirety in the context of bikes in India. The study reasoned that triggers such as product deviants and socio-cultural attributes were responsible for the inconsistency with the primal scale, with even archetypal human attributes not being validated to the brand in focus. Some of the critical papers have been summarized in Table 1.

Table - 1 : Key Papers on Brand Personality

Author(s) & Year	Research Objective(s)	Methodology	Main Conclusion(s)	Criticisms of the Study
Aaker, J. L. (1997)	Development of a theoretical framework of the brand personality construct by determining the number and nature of brand personality dimensions	Survey Method; Scale Development & Validation using PCA and CFA	Creation of a reliable and valid five-factor, 42-item measurement scale for brand personality (sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness)	[1] The scale is a crude measure of brand personality as it transposes human personality traits rather than using brands themselves [2] The model is American-specific as it did not always receive empirical substantiation across different cultural settings
Fournier, S. (1998)	[1] Examines the validity of the relationship proposition in the consumer-brand context [2] Development of a framework for characterizing the types of relationships consumers form with brands [3] Establish the concept of brand relationship quality	In-depth Cross-Case Study Analysis	[1] Holistic character of consumer-brand relationship phenomena [2] Insight into how brand personality is created, developed and changed over time	[1] Failure to accurately represent how consumers interact with brands [2] While consumers may attribute anthropomorphic traits to brands, it does not imply that socio-psychological aspects of interpersonal relationships are adequate to represent consumer-brand liaisons
Geuens, M., Weijters, B. & De Wulf, K. (2009)	Development of a new brand personality measure consisting of personality items only (as a clear amelioration over Aaker's BPS)	Survey method; Scale development & validation using EFA and CFA	Creation of a reliable, valid and generalisable five-factor, 12-item measurement scale for brand personality (responsibility, activity, aggressiveness, emotionality, simplicity)	[1] An exclusive data-centric approach to retain items resulting in the deletion of key traits as they did not associate with any dimension [2] The cross-cultural validity of the new BPS remains a problem [3] Nomological validity remains to be investigated
Heine, K. (2012)	[1] Attempt to define the personality of luxury brands [2] Outlining the requirements and selection criteria for luxury brand personality traits	A consumer-oriented qualitative method including Repertory Grid Method developed by Kelly, G. (1955); Content analysis to fathom personality dimensions	[1] Establishment of five personality dimensions to define luxury brands (modernity, eccentricity, opulence, elitism, and strength) [2] Creation of a framework for the analysis of emotional luxury brand images	[1] The study is German-focussed; hence its validity across other cultures is highly debatable [2] The study is biased, as it involves the researcher's subjective interpositions

The personality traits tend to differ across multiple cultural contexts because of the divergences in how they are positioned (Olsson & Sandru, 2006). Although branding professionals endeavour to sustain uniform patterns of marketing communications and other marketing strategies across the world, it is dubious whether a singular tone of voice developed by the concerned brand would yield desired results (Staplehurst & Charoenwongse, 2012). Hence, the key is to comprehend the cultural connotation in which the brands are expected to communicate with their target customers.

Cultural Dimensions

Culture may be understood as "the collective programming of the mind distinguishing the members of one group or category of people from others"(Hofstede, 2011). Culture as a construct encompasses an array of components such as language(Sepora et al., 2012), symbols(Shen, 2017), religion(Beyers, 2017), values,

norms, practices (Pereira et al., 2015), artefacts (Hopes, 2014) and standards. Such parameters have been identified to impact several facets of human behaviour and their decision-making competencies (Cronk, 2017; Ford, 1942; Wang et al., 2006). More importantly, culture has also been observed to significantly impact how individuals develop perceptual cues towards various product and service offerings (Overby et al., 2005; Shavitt & Barnes, 2020). Consumers belonging to a specific culture can better accept brands if the marketing communications and promotional programs of a given brand are in sync with their cultural perceptions of the said culture. However, one of the significant problems crippling cross-cultural research is that methodological issues and financial constraints render it highly arduous to assess the cultural impact in predicting the extent of individual purchase and consumption behaviour of the individuals in the said region (Caprar et al., 2015).

On this note, one of the pioneering studies that attempted to quantify multiple cultures across several dimensions was the framework developed by Hofstede (1980), which paved a new avenue to identify and analyze the divergences that may or may not exist among national cultures. Hofstede's seminal framework has been criticized heavily by several authors in the past (Eringa et al., 2017; Jones, 2007; McSweeney, 2002; Williamson, 2002), primarily since culture does not parallel with countries as such, and resultantly, the model culminates in oversimplifying the culture of a broad array of countries. Critics contend that it would be feasible only if individual social orders are secluded from one other. Yet, the framework stands tall today, as a widely accepted framework in academic and corporate circles, in competently measuring the dimensions of culture across multiple countries in the world (Zainuddin et al., 2018). The current study has adopted the 6-D Model of National Culture, which encompasses six dimensions highlighted by Hofstede in his updated framework on measuring national culture, namely "Power Distance Index", "Uncertainty Avoidance Index", "Individualism vs Collectivism", "Masculinity vs Femininity", "Long-Term Orientation vs Short-Term Orientation" and "Indulgence vs Restraint". It may be noted that the cultural dimensions reflect a representation of the self-directed predilections for one setup over another that helps differentiate countries. In fact, the scores obtained post measurement happen to be relative, and thus culture can essentially be utilized evocatively through such comparison. The six dimensions of the model are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2: Summary of Hofstede's Dimensions of
National Culture and their Primary Characteristics**

| Cultural Dimension	High Score	Low Score
Power Distance Index	Individuals accede to a hierarchical order wherein everybody has a place that requires no additional validation	Individuals strive to even out the power distribution and demand validation for disparities of power dynamics
Uncertainty Avoidance Index	Individuals are known to uphold unyielding belief systems and behavioural trajectories while demonstrating bigotry towards unconventional behaviours and ideas	Individuals are known to uphold a more easy-going attitude in which practice counts more than established ideologies
Individualism vs Collectivism	Individuals prefer to have an unrestricted social framework wherein they are expected to take care of solely themselves and their direct kin	Individuals prefer to have a compact societal framework wherein they can expect their kinsfolks or members of a precise ingroup to take care of them for wholehearted dependability
Masculinity vs Femininity	Individuals generally exhibit penchants for accomplishment, heroism, decisiveness, competitiveness and material rewards for success	Individuals generally exhibit preferences for consensus-centric activities, collaboration, diffidence, caring for the weak and quality of life
Long-Term vs Short-Term Orientation	Individuals are known to adopt more matter-of-fact tactics as they promote prudence and endeavours in innovative educational access as a means to make ready for the future	Individuals prefer to maintain longstanding traditions and norms while observing societal transformation with several misgivings
Indulgence vs Restraint	Indulgence-focussed societies are tolerant of moderately uninhibited gratification of rudimentary and innate individual drives associated with appreciating life and deriving exuberance	Restraint-focussed societies are known to subdue fulfilment of innate individual needs and controls them through the provision and implementation of stringent societal norms and practices

Relationship between Cross-Cultural Dimensions and Brand Personality

A selection of values and demands may be established within a specific cultural construct, which demonstrates the importance of brand perceptions, and consequently, culture-oriented variations in brand personality are expected to surface (Jansson, 2013). Specific attributes of brand personality may have an analogous connotation across cultures, while others may possess culturally unique meanings (Vellnagel, 2020). There also exist several cultural variations in terms of the symbolic usage of brands in different product and service contexts (Matzler et al., 2016). Further, in a study by Parks & Tong (2020), it was observed that the brand personality of lifestyle brands in Southern regions of the USA was perceived as "sophisticated", "casual", and "Southern". Furthermore, consumers from the Southern states of the USA are more inclined to procure regionalized products, and consumers perceive such brands as having propitious traits. Owing to specific backgrounds, lifestyles, and customs, a consumer's country of origin positively impacts their brand assessment and choice.

It is clear that existing literature that erstwhile studies have attempted to explain whether cultural differences exist among countries and whether such differences impact the perception of brand personality (Foscht et al., 2008a). However, it must be noted that given culture and a country are not synonymous. In other words, a country may possess multiple cultures. For instance, India is a country with multiple cultures and subcultures (Dheer et al., 2015). Yet, there exist commonalities in cultures between, say, Punjab in India and Punjab in Pakistan (Chordia, 2016) or between Kerala in India and Sri Lanka (Balachandran, 2006). Where earlier studies fall short by considering entire countries and nations as distinct cultural units, the current study attempts to make a bold leap by exploring the similarities and dissimilarities in culture between the politico-administrative state of West Bengal (in eastern India) and the neighbouring country of Bangladesh. More pertinently, the study is a first attempt to throw light on the differences in perception that may or may not exist between the two cultures concerning the brand personalities of two top smart phone brands and whether the cultural dimensions influence such perceptions. The conceptual framework ensuing from the study objectives have been delineated in Figure 1.

Figure : Conceptual Model adopted for the Study
(Source: Adopted from Geuens et al., 2009 & Hofstede, G. (2011)
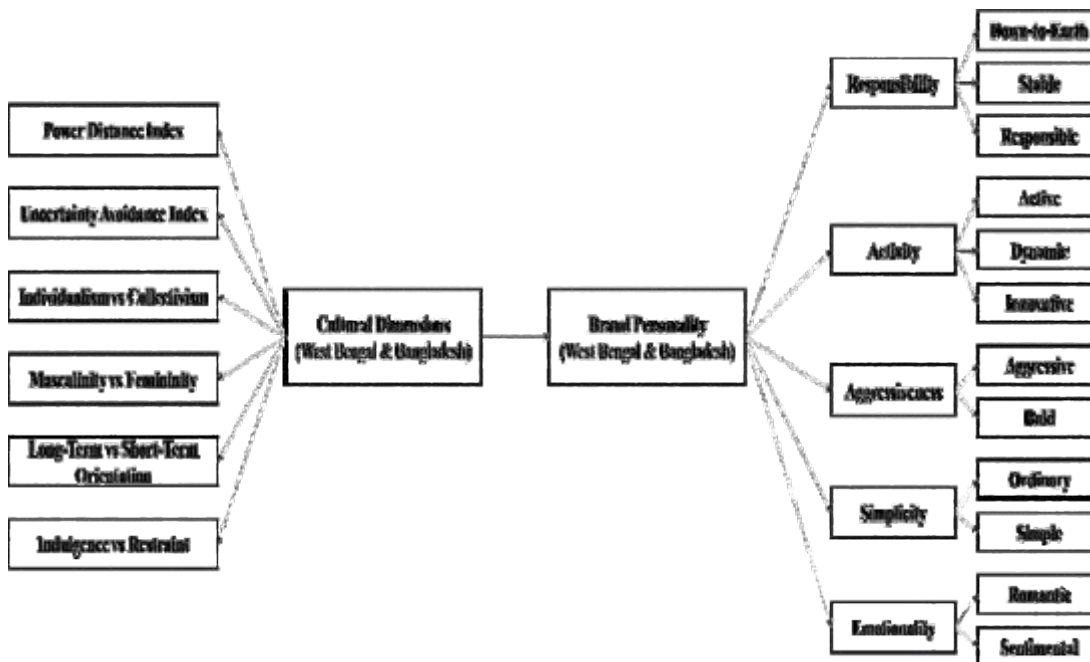
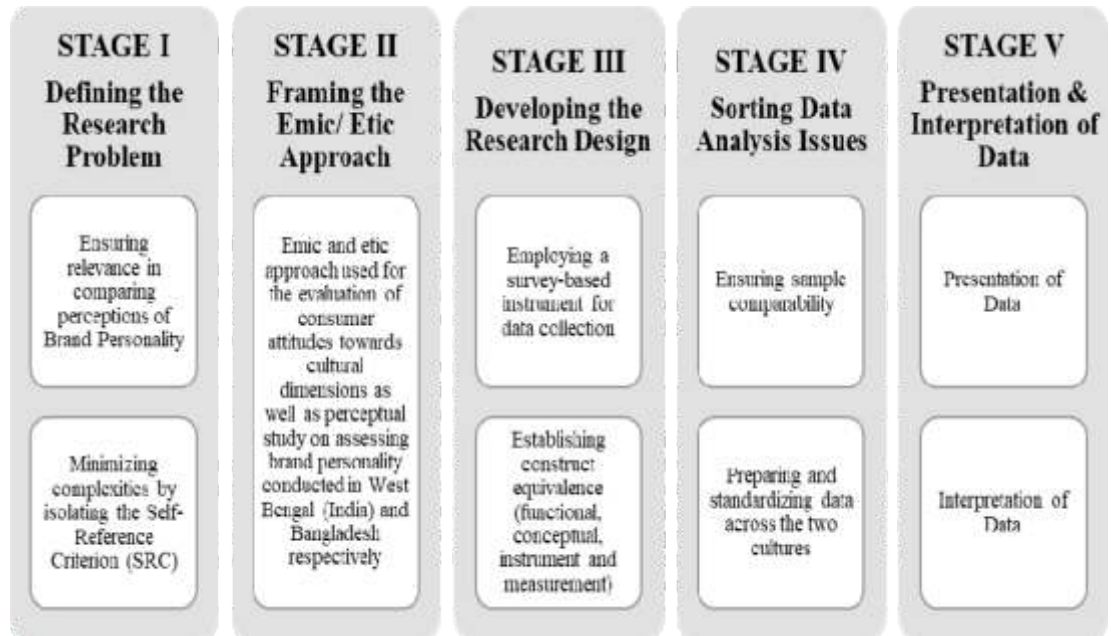As mentioned earlier, the study's primary purpose is to examine whether the cultural dimensions in the neighbouring regions of West Bengal and Bangladesh influence the perception of brand personality for the selected smart phones, namely, Samsung and Xiaomi. The study also probes into the viable differences between the perceptions of brand personality in the two regions and cultural dimensions.

Methodology

The current study employed a five-stage framework (Figure 1), based on the insights developed by Malhotra et al. (1996), to conduct the cross-cultural analysis in the two neighbouring regions of West Bengal and Bangladesh (Figure 2).

Figure : Methodology adopted in the Current Study
[Source: Based on the Framework developed by Malhotra et al. (1996)]

STAGE I	STAGE II	STAGE III	STAGE IV	STAGE V
Defining the Research Problem	**Framing the Emic/ Etic Approach**	**Developing the Research Design**	**Sorting Data Analysis Issues**	**Presentation & Interpretation of Data**
Ensuring relevance in comparing perceptions of Brand Personality	Emic and etic approach used for the evaluation of consumer attitudes towards cultural dimensions as well as perceptual study on assessing brand personality conducted in West Bengal (India) and Bangladesh respectively	Employing a survey-based instrument for data collection	Ensuring sample comparability	Presentation of Data
Minimizing complexities by isolating the Self-Reference Criterion (SRC)		Establishing construct equivalence (functional, conceptual, instrument and measurement)	Preparing and standardizing data across the two cultures	Interpretation of Data

The first methodological consideration was to ensure that the construct of brand personality is comparable across the two cultures, and more importantly, the two cultures may at all be comparable. West Bengal is a state in India, while Bangladesh is a country. Although it seems implausible that the two regions cannot be compared due to the apparent incongruity in political and administrative demarcations, there exists logical feasibility in comparing the two neighbouring regions. To understand the rationale, the historical backdrop of the two regions must be investigated. Notwithstanding, the most apparent reason for selecting Bangladesh and West Bengal is the manifest Bengali ethnicity among the majority of the populace. Although national divergences warrant discrete units of politico-administrative divisions, the two regions follow a dominant democratic political system. The year 1947 witnessed India gaining independence from British colonial rule. Concurrently, the British-Indian administrative province of Bengal was segregated, based on religious divergences, into the Hindu-dominant West Bengal and the Islam-dominant East Pakistan (which eventually became Bangladesh in the wake of the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971). Before the partition in 1947, the present-day region representing Bangladesh was referred to as East Bengal (or Purbô Bangla) —belonging to the same geographic region of British-administered India. Today, West Bengal and Bangladesh share multiple commonalities in terms of cultural variables. For instance, the two regions predominantly converse in the Bengali language, despite the apparent linguistic divergences in pronunciations, lexicons or morphology in the dialect.

To a great extent, even the food preferences in the two cultures are similar to each other. Both cultures

Table -3 West Bengal Vs. Bangladesh (Socio-Economic Variables)

Defining Element		West Bengal (India)	Bangladesh
Dominant Ethnicity		Bengali	Bengali
Political System		Parliamentary (Federal) Democratic Republic	Parliamentary (Representative) Democratic Republic
Official Language		Bengali; English	Bengali; English
Population		9. 3 crores (2011 est.)	14.23 crores (2011 est.)
Urban Population		2.91 crores (2011 est.)	4.44 crores (2016 est.)
Literacy Rate		76.26% (2011 est.)	47.68% (2011 est.)
HDI Value		0.641 (2018 data)	0.614 (2018 data)
Religion	Hinduism	70.54% (2011 est.)	8.54% (2011 est.)
	Islam	27.01% (2011 est.)	90.39% (2011 est.)
	Other	2.45% (2011 est.)	1.07% (2011 est.)
Minimum Wages (Monthly)	Unskilled	USD 109.89	USD 67.40
	Skilled	USD 146.27	USD 90.18

The study has been conducted from an emic as well as an etic perspective. When conducted in the context of Bangladesh, the study adopts an etic approach, as the researchers did not integrate or immerse themselves in the local culture being observed, despite the apparent commonalities. The key is to ensure that the indigenous culture is not interfered with during the conduct of the study. While the study remains anonymous and the respondent data is treated with utmost confidentiality, there remains a probability that respondents from Bangladesh might provide responses differently while being surveyed. Hence, the researchers have sought the assistance of two post-graduate students from Bangladesh in administering the survey and mitigate the difficulties associated with adopting an etic approach to a great extent.

On the other hand, when the study has been conducted in West Bengal, India, an emic assessment of culture has been adopted, where the inherent cultural idiosyncrasies relevant to the people of West Bengal have been focussed upon. Since the researchers themselves are inhabitants of West Bengal, a detailed probe into the societal norms and cultural beliefs of West Bengal have been considered, which might otherwise have been ignored. However, adequate care has been taken to ensure that, when adopting an emic perspective in conducting the research, self-reference criterion (SRC) does not emanate. This would potentially trigger significant cultural misinterpretations on account of the researchers' unconscious reference to their fundamental cultural values prevalent in West Bengal whilst exploring the culture of Bangladesh (Lee, 1966). Cross-cultural taxonomies tend to be either sheer inventories (Fan, 2000; Triandis, 1989) or exceedingly conjectural intricate arrangements (Chick, 1997). Since there exists a generally acknowledged dearth of a comprehensive and global structure within which national cultures may be envisaged, the framework conceptualized by Hofstede (1980, 2011) and Hofstede & Bond (1984) stands tall as one of the most effective measures for conducting cross-cultural analysis, while taming the prevailing issues of ethnocentrism and SRC.

Further, in the context of cross-cultural studies, it is almost imperative that construct equivalence be established in terms of its functional and conceptual attributes and measurement quantities (Kankaraš & Moors, 2010; Tomas et al., 1995; Trimble, 2010). Both West Bengal and Bangladesh are known to be heavy users of smartphone brands and hence tend to develop unique perceptions towards the personality of such brands. Functional equivalence exists because of the apparent commonalities in terms of demonstrated consumer behaviour in the two cultures, despite the possibility of behavioural divergences. Next, conceptual equivalence is also established, as the dimensions of culture developed by Hofstede remains uniform across the two cultures, in addition to the construct of brand personality. The research problem in the current study has thus been defined so that it is not culture-constrained and essentially remains conceptually equivalent for respondents in the two cultures being investigated (West Bengal and Bangladesh). Instrument equivalence has also been established by ensuring that the versatile items in the brand personality scale, response groupings and the inducements in the structured questionnaire (smartphone brands considered, consumer behaviour, positioning strategies of brands) are interpreted unvaryingly in the two cultures. Linguistic equivalence has been established as English has been used as the common medium of written and verbal communication in the questionnaire comprising items categorised under Hofstede's Cultural Framework and the brand personality scale. Translations into the

Bengali language were not necessitated for any of the respondents in the context of the current study. Finally, scalar equivalence has also been established in that the scores obtained from the respondents in West Bengal and Bangladesh share identical connotations and construal. In essence, it may be feasible to represent equivalences and conduct a cross-cultural analysis to investigate consumer perceptions towards the brand personality construct of smartphones in the adjoining geographical regions of West Bengal and Bangladesh(Buil et al., 2012; Malhotra et al., 1996).

Selection of Brands

Using the Counterpoint Research Report 2019 as a foundation, the current study considers two among the top five smartphone brands that are commonly used and recognized by respondents in both West Bengal and Bangladesh, namely, Samsung and Xiaomi (Choudhary, 2019; Jain, 2019). The top-selling smartphone brand in Bangladesh is "Samsung" (market share of 22% in Q1 2019), followed by "Symphony" (market share of 16% in Q1 2019), "Transsion" and "Walton" (market share of 9% each in Q1 2019). However, brands such as Symphony, Transsion and Walton are not available in West Bengal and the Indian market. The next most selling smartphone brand in Bangladesh is "Xiaomi" (market share of 7% each in Q1 2019). In the Indian context, the top smartphone brands happen to be "Xiaomi" (market share of 26% in Q3 2019), followed by "Samsung" (market share of 20% in Q3 2019). Since these two top-selling brands are common to both regions, they have been considered in the present study. The sample comprised participants from various age groups in the two regions, namely West Bengal (n=295) and Bangladesh (n=287). A fair and adequate share of participants from various age cohorts was profiled and surveyed, primarily since users of the two smartphone brands mentioned earlier are disseminated across such age segments. The respondents were administered a structured questionnaire comprising three segments, namely, Segment A (comprising questions about the demographic profile of respondents), Segment B (comprising questions on the Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions) and Segment C (comprising questions on the perceptions of respondents towards the brand personality of Xiaomi and Samsung smartphones). The scale comprises close-ended questions on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree"

Selection of Brand Personality Scale

As specified earlier, the novel scale developed by Geuens et al. (2009) has been used to measure brand personality instead of the Aaker's scale(1997). The superiority of the former measure has been deliberated upon in former studies(Alpatova & DallOlmo, 2011). The scale comprised of 12 items, as opposed to the 44-item instrument in the seminal study. The reliability statistics of the new brand personality scale have been summarized in Table 4. The five-brand personality factors considered in the study are "responsibility" (encompassing traits such as "down-to-earth", "stable", and "responsible"), "activity" (encompassing traits such as "active", "dynamic" and "innovative"), "aggressiveness" (encompassing traits such as "aggressive" and "bold"), "simplicity" (encompassing traits such as "ordinary" and "simple"), and "emotionality" (encompassing traits such as "romantic" and "sentimental"). A 62-item structured questionnaire based on the framework developed by Hofstede (2011) has been employed to measure the cultural divergences between West Bengal and Bangladesh. It would help determine how respondents perceive the culture in which they dwell. The questionnaire comprised of six segments, which are summarized below in Table 4:

Table 4: Reliability Analysis Results for the Variables in the Hofstede's Framework (2011)

Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha		No. of Items
	India	Bangladesh	
Variables in the Hofstede's Framework			
Power Distance Index	0.946	0.929	10
Uncertainty Avoidance Index	0.937	0.948	13
Individualism vs Collectivism	0.893	0.919	8
Masculinity vs Femininity	0.921	0.898	14
Long-Term vs Short-Term Orientation	0.932	0.921	9
Indulgence vs Restraint	0.918	0.973	8
Variables in the Brand Personality Scale			
Responsibility	0.897	0.797	3
Activity	0.932	0.872	3
Aggressiveness	0.839	0.891	2
Simplicity	0.837	0.913	2
Emotionality	0.893	0.938	2

The questionnaire also comprised questions about consumer behaviour in terms of smartphone purchases in the two regions. Respondents were preliminarily asked if they were current users of the Samsung or Xiaomi brands to ensure the robustness of the data generated. Slovin's formula is given as "$n = N / (1 + N \times e^2)$", where "n=sample size", "N=total population", and "e=margin of error". The present study determines its sample size with 95 per cent confidence with an error margin of 5 per cent. Accordingly, a sample size of approximately 277 participants in both West Bengal and Bangladesh is sufficient to draw meaningful generalizations in the study. The sample size in the present study is 295 respondents in the case of West Bengal and 287 in Bangladesh. The study has eliminated responses (n=12 for West Bengal and n=5 for Bangladesh) where consumers have used these brands at least six months earlier and have presently switched over to different brands. Respondents from both West Bengal and Bangladesh were selected conveniently from urban milieus. From West Bengal, participants belonged to urban conglomerates, namely, Kolkata (n=117), Asansol (n=66), Burdwan (n=49), Durgapur (n=31), Chandannagar (n=18) and Siliguri (n=14). From Bangladesh, responses were obtained from cities of Dhaka (n=73), Chittagong (n=62), Khulna (n=41), Gazipur (n=34), Barishal (n=25), Cumilla (n=19), Sylhet (n=19) and Rangpur (n=14). A complete picture of the demographic profile of the respondents in both West Bengal and Bangladesh has been portrayed in Table 5.

Table 5: Demographic Profile of Respondents Surveyed in West Bengal and Bangladesh

Component		West Bengal		Bangladesh	
		Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	146	49.5	144	50.2
	Female	149	50.5	143	49.8
	TOTAL	295	100.0	287	100.0
Age	Below 18	26	8.8	12	4.2
	18-25	59	20.0	44	15.3
	26-35	117	39.7	132	46.0
	36-50	73	24.7	62	21.6
	Above 50	20	6.8	37	12.9
	TOTAL	295	100.0	287	100.0
Occupation	Student	36	12.2	42	14.6
	Salaried (Government Service)	87	29.5	69	24.0
	Salaried (Private Service)	74	25.1	81	28.2
	Businessperson/ Self-Employed	69	23.4	62	21.6
	Professional	29	9.8	33	11.5
	TOTAL	295	100.0	287	100.0
Smartphone Used	Samsung	128	43.4	134	46.7
	Xiaomi	167	56.6	153	53.3
	TOTAL	295	100.0	287	100.0

Analysis and Discussion

The information obtained in the context of the current study suggests that marked divergences exist in terms of the cultural background and the purchase behaviours demonstrated by the study participants in West Bengal and Bangladesh.

Cultural Dimensions

Respondents in the two adjoining regions also exhibited distinct perceptual variances towards the personality of the Samsung and Xiaomi smartphone brands. The region-centric comparison in the context of the various cultural dimensions has been represented in Table 6. The items in the scale have been calculated on a traditional 5-point Likert scale ranging from "1" (Strongly Agree) to "5" (Strongly Disagree) since they only represent a fragment of the underlying perceptual repertoire and focus on mild degrees of consensus, thereby reducing fatigue and not representing those at the extremes(Leung, 2011).

Table 6: Comparing Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions among Respondents in West Bengal & Bangladesh

Variables in the Hofstede's Framework	West Bengal		Bangladesh	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Power Distance Index (PDI)	3.35	0.91	2.11	1.00
Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI)	3.52	1.12	3.58	1.21
Individualism vs Collectivism (IVC)	2.17	1.16	2.09	1.06
Masculinity vs Femininity (MVF)	3.23	0.80	2.38	0.84
Long-Term vs Short-Term Orientation (LSO)	3.69	1.22	3.87	1.08
Indulgence vs Restraint (IVR)	3.04	0.84	2.32	1.08

As observed in Table 4, Bangladesh scores higher ($\overline{x}$=2.11) than West Bengal ($\overline{x}$=3.35) in terms of the "Power Distance" dimension ($\overline{x}$=2.11). It may be understood from the results that the respondents in Bangladesh tend to acknowledge and presume that the dynamics of power and income, to a certain extent, are disseminated in a lopsided manner in their society. This is relative to their counterparts in West Bengal, where respondents have generally expressed their indifference to the same parameter. While it is posited that no two societies can be replicas of each other, in the context of the current study, the dimensions of power and inequality are more unevenly distributed in Bangladesh than in West Bengal.

At this point, it must also be mentioned that the association of the items in the dimension is typically statistical in nature instead of being absolute (Hofstede, 2011). In terms of the cultural dimension of "Uncertainty Avoidance", both West Bengal ($\overline{x}$=3.52) and Bangladesh have fared similarly ($\overline{x}$=3.58), and their scores imply that they have relatively lower degrees of tolerance for ambiguity. Although there is a little deviation in terms of the mean scores of the two regions, it would be unfair to state that Bangladesh fares weaker than West Bengal in terms of the Uncertainty Avoidance Index. Respondents across both cultures have been conditioned to experience comfort or discomfort in amorphous milieus that tend to present unorthodox and uncharted consequences. Both cultures are known to possess austere behavioural stipulations that shape their ability to mitigate the likelihoods of occurrence of such ambiguous circumstances under stringent regulations and legal conditions, as well as discontentment concerning aberrant views. In terms of the "Individualism vs Collectivism" parameter, both cultures are largely "collectivist" in nature. For the sake of comparison, Bangladesh ($\overline{x}$=2.09) exhibits a more collectivist culture than West Bengal ($\overline{x}$=2.17), based on the mean scores, implying that the respondents dwell in a society that is generally assimilated into groups.

In other words, people in both cultures (with Bangladesh at an advantage) do not prefer to care for themselves and their immediate family members merely. However, they encompass individuals who, despite the trend of familial disintegration into nuclear units of late, have been typically conditioned from an early age to cohabitate and take care of persuasive, staunch and cohesive extended families. Such units, archetypally comprising of grandparents and other kith and kin, are typified as individuals who shower their blessings and safeguard all family members unconditionally, for the wholehearted loyalty doled out to them. Again, Bangladesh is more "masculine" as a society ($\overline{x}$=2.38) when compared to West Bengal ($\overline{x}$=3.23). Women in West Bengal, which has been perceived as a relatively more "feminine" society, possesses unpretentious and considerate value structures, much like their male counterparts. However, in Bangladesh, which is perceived largely as a "masculine" society, women also express self-assuredness and competitiveness to a certain degree, in contrast to the male members. There is a discernible disproportion between the value frameworks across both genders in the Bangladeshi culture compared to West Bengal. There may even be a reference to fundamental values that may remain below the level of consciousness or may be too embarrassing or agonizing to be deliberated upon unambiguously. When the two cultures are compared in terms of their "Long-term vs Short-term Orientation", respondents in both West Bengal ($\overline{x}$=3.69) and Bangladesh ($\overline{x}$=3.87) agree that their respective cultures possess a "short-term" approach, given that they prefer to emphasize on the present-day or former states of affairs and reckon them to be more crucial than the future.

Here again, the mean scores demonstrate marginal deviation, although the Bangladeshi culture is more "short-term oriented" than that of West Bengal, merely for comparison. Respondents in both cultures attach immense significance to the fulfilment of social agreements and compliance with established customs, norms, traditions and prevailing social hierarchies. Finally, when the two cultures are compared, in light of the "Indulgence vs Restraint" parameter, West Bengal ($\overline{x}$=3.04) scores fairly higher in comparison to Bangladesh ($\overline{x}$=2.32), suggesting more "indulgence" than "restraint" on the members of the society. This indicates that respondents in West Bengal dwell in a societal milieu that consents to moderately emotional gratification of their rudimentary and innate desires associated with relishing life and deriving pleasure. In contrast, the gratification of individual needs is moderately controlled through stringent social norms in the culture of Bangladesh. In summary, it is clear that considerable divergences exist between the cultures of West Bengal and Bangladesh in terms of the specific dimensions of "Power Distance", "Masculinity vs Femininity", and "Indulgence and Restraint."

Brand Personality Dimensions

As evidenced above, there are apparent differences in the cultural dimensions between people in West Bengal and Bangladesh. The subsequent proposition that has been investigated is whether and how such cultural parameters impact how the respondents perceive the personality traits of the two smartphone brands (Samsung and Xiaomi) considered in the current study. In other words, the study has attempted to establish whether respondents in West Bengal and Bangladesh view the personality traits of the Samsung and Xiaomi brand contrarily. Multiple regression was conducted to determine the impact of the various cultural dimensions on the various personality items of the smartphone brands for both regions. The results have been summarized in Table 7.

Table 7: Multiple Regression Results of Brand Personality Items and Cultural Dimensions

Dimensions/ Items	West Bengal						Bangladesh					
	Samsung (128)			Xiaomi (167)			Samsung (134)			Xiaomi (153)		
	β	R²	Sig.	β	R²	Sig.	β	R²	Sig.	β	R²	Sig.
Brand Personality Dimensions/ Items												
Responsibility		p=0.031*			p=0.382			p=0.527			p=0.015*	
Down-to-earth	0.140	0.961	0.000*	0.286	0.872	0.121	0.172	0.780	0.008*	0.122	0.972	0.433
Stable	0.144	0.920	0.001*	0.548	0.723	0.040*	0.093	0.771	0.215	0.895	0.983	0.000*
Responsible	0.300	0.911	0.074	0.420	0.627	0.000*	0.048	0.709	0.203	0.194	0.840	0.026*
Activity		p=0.031*			p=0.011*			p=0.009*			p=0.423	
Active	0.019	0.734	0.000*	0.031	0.960	0.047*	0.270	0.751	0.013*	0.161	0.817	0.782
Dynamic	0.223	0.883	0.631	0.049	0.867	0.393	0.266	0.628	0.015*	0.830	0.827	0.000*
Innovative	0.403	0.862	0.010*	0.013	0.717	0.022*	0.234	0.907	0.339	0.894	0.798	0.048*
Aggressiveness		p=0.423			p=0.026*			p=0.025*			p=0.331	
Aggressive	0.011	0.911	0.004*	0.154	0.676	0.035*	0.236	0.893	0.212	0.148	0.757	0.468
Bold	0.020	0.853	0.000*	0.266	0.901	0.000*	0.289	0.783	0.000*	0.145	0.947	0.328
Stability		p=0.007*			p=0.544			p=0.429			p=0.238	
Ordinary	0.226	0.837	0.129	0.137	0.831	0.140	0.118	0.642	0.063	0.213	0.751	0.000*
Simple	0.258	0.843	0.006*	0.196	0.873	0.722	0.034	0.659	0.005*	0.192	0.910	0.304
Emotionality		p=0.338			p=0.421			p=0.524			p=0.021*	
Romantic	0.246	0.835	0.085	0.202	0.677	0.033*	0.080	0.975	0.440	0.114	0.662	0.000*
Sentimental	0.041	0.793	0.694	0.092	0.772	0.103	0.147	0.632	0.022*	0.878	0.786	0.001*
Significance of Linear Regression		p=0.007*			p=0.014*			p=0.021*			p=0.139	
Cultural Dimensions												
PDI	0.231	0.782	0.018*	0.391	0.929	0.292	0.122	0.830	0.024*	0.177	0.892	0.003*
UAI	0.031	0.810	0.024*	0.135	0.849	0.048*	0.192	0.725	0.000*	0.865	0.728	0.000*
IVC	0.024	0.922	0.311	0.072	0.853	0.320	0.085	0.765	0.035*	0.148	0.713	0.492
MVF	0.412	0.953	0.139	0.208	0.908	0.000*	0.250	0.639	0.193	0.289	0.692	0.526
LSO	0.239	0.924	0.000*	0.367	0.861	0.023*	0.163	0.629	0.235	0.815	0.872	0.007*
IVR	0.012	0.896	0.089	0.133	0.681	0.000*	0.263	0.886	0.007*	0.243	0.852	0.013*
Significance of Linear Regression		p=0.002*			p=0.068*			p=0.015*			p=0.102	

*significant at the 5 per cent level

It is clear from Table 6 that respondents in Bangladesh and West Bengal perceive the personality of Samsung and Xiaomi divergently. For instance, the Samsung brand in West Bengal was observed to be down-to-earth, stable, active, innovative, aggressive, bold and simple, as they were significant at the 5 per cent level. Contrastingly, for Bangladesh, personality traits such as down-to-earth, active, dynamic, bold, simple and sentimental were significant at the 5 per cent level. Four personality items, namely, down-to-earth, active, bold, and simple, were commonly attributed to the Samsung brand in both cultures (33 per cent commonality). Attributes such as sentimental and dynamic were far from significant for the Samsung brand in West Bengal, while the romantic and innovative personality traits of Samsung barely exhibited any significance in the context of Bangladesh.

For Xiaomi in West Bengal, only seven personality traits were found to be significant, namely, stable, responsible, active, innovative, aggressive, bold and romantic. Even in Bangladesh, seven traits proved to be significant: stable, responsible, dynamic, innovative, ordinary, romantic, and sentimental. The only commonly perceived traits in both cultures were stable, responsible, innovative and romantic. As in the case of the Samsung brand, the degree of commonality was 33 per cent. Brand personality traits such as dynamic and straightforward were not significant in West Bengal, while five traits, namely active, aggressive, down-to-earth, bold and simple, were barely significant in Bangladesh. Apparent differences exist in how the brands are perceived across the two cultures, despite the multiple similarities.

Culture Impact on Perception of Brand Personality

Thus, the corresponding question arises whether the dimensions of culture as a specific construct play any role in the perception of brand personalities in the two regions. The significance values have been considered to investigate the versatile associations between people's perception towards brand personality dimensions (dependent variable) and the various cultural dimensions (predictor variables). For instance, for the Samsung smartphone brand in the case of West Bengal, the cultural dimensions of "Long-Term vs Short Term Orientation" (β-value: 0.239; explaining 92.4 per cent of the variance) and "Power Distance Index" (β-value: 0.231; explaining 78.2 per cent of the variance) had the greatest significant impact on the perceptual inferences towards the personality dimensions. In terms of predicting the personality items, "innovative" and "simple" accounted for the highest amount of variation for the Samsung brand in West Bengal, explaining 86.2 per cent and 84.3 per cent of the variance proportion respectively by the various cultural dimensions. In contrast, for Bangladesh, the cultural dimensions of "Indulgence vs Restraint" (β-value: 0.263; explaining 88.6 per cent of the variance) and "Power Distance Index" (β-value: 0.122; explaining 83 per cent of the variance) were most significant in predicting the impact on the personality items of the Samsung brand such as "bold". "active" and "dynamic", which accounted for the highest variance (78.3 per cent, 75.1 per cent and 62.8 per cent respectively).

As observed from Table 4, West Bengal tends to have a relatively "short-term" approach, wherein individuals prefer to dwell in the present moment and value immediate results while striving to establish parity with their peers and other acquaintances. Hence, being "innovative" for any given brand is a key to survive and maintain a competitive advantage in the given cultural setting. People would naturally prefer smartphone brands that offer more practical value as opposed to aesthetic appeal. More importantly, the fact that West Bengal scores relatively lower than Bangladesh in terms of "power distance" cannot be discounted. Coupled with the "short-term" orientation of respondents, individuals demonstrate an inclination to approve of equality and parity, of course, concerning Bangladesh. Due to the more minor discrepancies in terms of salary structures and status, they would crave brands that convey "simplicity".

In contrast, it may be noted that Bangladesh has a relatively lower beta coefficient (β-value: 0.034), explaining lesser potency of the impact of the cultural variables on the personality dimensions. In the case of Samsung smartphone brands in West Bengal, consumers seek order and a well-defined arrangement of apt cultural and national symbols, as they perceive in the case of Samsung. For Bangladesh, it is observed that they dwell in a society where "restraint" is on the higher side, and more importantly, they score higher in terms of "power distance" as well, compared to West Bengal. Individuals in Bangladesh are conditioned by their belief systems guided by stringent societal norms and practices, and favourable emotions are communicated in a relatively less accessible manner. People in such a culture place less importance on individual control and freedom. Moreover, even the power dynamics are biased in favour of people occupying positions of power, as they are respected more and perceived to possess intrinsic traits that trigger better decision-making capacities. It is not unusual to see greater significance being cast on personality items such as "bold" (explaining 78.3 per cent variation), "active" (75.1 per cent variation) and "dynamic" (62.8 per cent variation).

Again, in the case of West Bengal, the cultural dimensions of "Long-Term vs Short-Term Orientation" (β-value: 0.548; explaining 86.1 per cent of the variance), followed by "Masculinity vs Femininity" (β-value: 0.208; explaining 90.8 per cent of the variance) were observed to have the highest significant impact on the perceptions towards brand personality items concerning Xiaomi. In contrast, "Indulgence vs Restraint" (β-value: 0.243; explaining 85.2 per cent of the variance) followed by "Power Distance Index" (β-value: 0.177; explaining 89.2 per cent of the variance) accounted for the highest amount of impact on the perceptions towards the brand personality of Xiaomi in Bangladesh. The personality items that had the greatest significant impact due to the cultural dimensions in West Bengal (for Xiaomi) were "stable" (explaining 72.3 per cent variation), "responsible" (62.7 per cent) and "bold" (60.1 per cent). Based on the scores, West Bengal possesses a "feminine" type of culture, typified by features such as affectionate and considerate towards others, gentleness and the joy obtained from the more minor things in life. West Bengal scores higher on the feminine count, which happens to be in sync with its low power distance score. This probably explains why respondents have preferred stability and responsibility as prime traits they find in their usage of the Xiaomi brand. As people in West Bengal prefer to communicate about power directly, the Xiaomi brand manufacturers need to focus on key technical specifications and

communicate them directly to their target group of consumers and develop their perceptions regarding the product. This illustrates why the individual personality traits of consumers rub off on the brand, and it is perceived as bold in West Bengal.

In contrast, Bangladesh accounted for items such as "ordinary" (84 per cent) and "responsible" (75.1 per cent), in the case of the Xiaomi brand. However, it was observed that culture did not significantly impact the overall perceptions of the personality items in the context of Bangladesh for the Xiaomi brand (insignificant at the 5 per cent level). In other words, it may be stated that culture, as a construct in Bangladesh, does not play any role in successfully predicting how the personality traits of the Xiaomi brand are perceived.

In summary, it may be stated that the cultural dimensions have a significant influence on how the Samsung smart phone brand is perceived in West Bengal and Bangladesh. However, the cultural dimensions have been observed to significantly influence the cultural dimensions (not items) of "responsibility", "activity", and "stability" in West Bengal, while they have significantly influenced "responsibility" and "aggressiveness" dimensions in Bangladesh. Similarly, for the Xiaomi brand, the cultural dimensions have significantly influenced the dimensions of "responsibility" and "aggressiveness" in West Bengal, while in Bangladesh, culture did not have any overall significant impact on the personality dimensions or traits.

Conclusion

The findings are consistent with the traits derived by the cross-cultural study conducted by Li et al.(2019). Parallels have also been detected with the study results conducted by Foscht et al. –(2008b), which discernibly substantiate the perceptual divergences of the "brand personality" construct in a cross-cultural context. Regardless of the indistinguishable positioning of the brand in the various cultural backdrops, clear differences were observed in terms of which the personality of the brand was perceived. In terms of mean score comparisons and variances, real divergences exist in the cultural perceptions by the consumer segments in the two adjoining cultures of West Bengal and Bangladesh. Samsung is perceived across both cultures as a responsible and trustworthy brand. It must be noted that "responsibility", in this context, does not necessarily refer to the social responsibility of a firm. It simply refers to the fact that the brand is perceived across both cultures as a dependable brand known to fulfil its promises towards target customers. This implies that if Samsung is desirous of establishing a uniform perception of the brand's personality in West Bengal and Bangladesh, they must develop unique brand positioning strategies that accentuate the attributes, thereby enabling target consumers to perceive Samsung analogously.

As a specific case in point, Samsung exhibited remarkable amounts of responsibility in its attempt to retrieve its brand identity after it was censured heavily for its flagship model "Samsung Galaxy Note 7" overheating and combusting or blowing up in a flurry of dispersed incidents (Moynihan, 2017). This prompted the aviation authorities in the USA, along with other airline organizations, to issue high-ranking caveats while urging passengers not to switch on or charge the specific brand of smart phone during ongoing flight journeys (Golson, 2016), and eventually banning the smart phone at the airport entry points(DOT Press Release, 2016). Notwithstanding, Samsung displayed immense responsibility by accepting accountability for the unfortunate incident and not blaming the battery manufacturers (ET Editorials, 2017).

However, there are divergences in the manner in which the brand is perceived otherwise. For example, while West Bengal additionally perceives that "activity" and "stability" are personality dimensions that define the Samsung brand adequately, respondents in Bangladesh feel that "aggressiveness" is a trait that is better suited to defining the identity of the brand. The smart phone market in Bangladesh has become overly aggressive in the recent past, with increased competition being injected by Chinese smart phone companies. Even homegrown brands such as Symphony have experienced condensed market shares, making the market for smart phones in Bangladesh extremely volatile. Consumers have found the Samsung brand to be bold and assertive in its communication strategies. Samsung has evolved as the market leader in the smart phone market of Bangladesh for the first time(StatCounter, 2019), with its sales volume witnessing a YoY surge of 203 percent in 2019 (Choudhary, 2019). Moreover, consumers have

borne testimony to an array of new models of Samsung smartphones in the last couple of years in response to the competition along with optimizations in terms of local assembly and manufacturing. Moreover, consumers in Bangladesh also witnessed the domination of Samsung in their respective price brands in terms of their diversified portfolio of smar tphone models. For instance, for every Samsung Galaxy J series of smart phones released at the lower end of the price spectrum, there is a Galaxy A and Galaxy Z series targeted to the mid-range and upscale consumers, with relatively more pricey features and materials.

The cultural dimension of "Power Distance Index" is observed as a common cultural dimension, influencing the perceptions of brand personalities in both the regions, although, Bangladesh has a higher PDI than West Bengal. Moreover, in West Bengal, the relatively "Short-Term" cultural perspective has also played a key role in shaping the perception of the Samsung brand personality as "stable", "active" and "responsible". The marketing communications as well as promotional strategies of Samsung have been tailored into traditional arrangements. It may be expected that Samsung attempts to reach out to a wide array of target audiences in West Bengal, especially to the middle-income segment, who are known to confer with their peers and acquaintances, the product benefits and other attributes, before arriving at a consent relating to purchase. It is crucial that Samsung endeavours to promote the tangible and intangible social benefits of their offerings more to their target customers, in order to make their decision-making process simpler. Bangladesh has also scored higher than West Bengal in terms of "restraint". Accordingly, customers of Samsung in Bangladesh must be au fait with not merely the social paybacks of the smart phones, but also get detailed insights relating to their practicality and how they fit into the prevailing social structure.

In the case of the Xiaomi brand, consumers in West Bengal found the personality traits "active" and "aggressive" to be appropriate in defining the brand, while those in Bangladesh perceived it to be possessing more of a "responsible" and "emotional" brand personality. The cultural parameters that were significant in predicting the personality dimensions in West Bengal were found to be "short-term orientation", "femininity", and "indulgence". Since West Bengal scores lower than Bangladesh in terms of masculinity, it may be regarded generally as a feminine culture. Xiaomi, a Chinese smart phone major, can use a polycentric approach to appeal to both men and women neutrally. In other words, respondents in West Bengal learn about products and their attributes under peer-centric conversations, conciliation, and arriving at a consensus.

Given that the brand is perceived to possess a "responsible" personality, it is clear that Xiaomi focuses on releasing its products by adopting a collaborative model that requires inputs from customer levels. It is one of the prime reasons why Xiaomi has become a global name in the mid-market smart phone segment. The company is known to take immense care of their customers' experiences, using crowdsourcing as a critical instrument. The company intends to learn about continually improving its product offerings by using cocreation as an implement, wherein they connect with their target customers through an indigenous platform called "MIUI forum". It justifies why the brand is typically perceived as responsible in the context of West Bengal.

The brand is aggressive to the extent of its pricing. It is also known to use the 'flash sale' concept online quite frequently, thereby pushing demand for the product. It competes at neck-to-neck margins with lower-range smartphone brands such as Lenovo and Samsung, to name a few, which makes it an aggressive brand. However, it must be remembered that aggression and responsibility coupled together triggers positive connotations, as they choose not to compromise with quality by using second-rate materials (ET Bureau, 2019). In Bangladesh, however, the impacting cultural dimensions are observed to be "restraint" and "higher power distance", but it does not impact the perception of brand personality dimensions. However, the individual dimensions that have a significant bearing are "responsible" and "emotionality". Due to the insignificant impact, it cannot be stated with confidence that culture has any role in shaping people's perceptions of the Xiaomi brand of smartphones in Bangladesh. However, it must be noted that "responsibility" is commonly perceived across both cultures otherwise.

Managerial Implications

The current study is unique in that it offers a new-fangled perspective to looking at cross-cultural research. For instance, it would not be an oddity to conduct the study in the context of Bangladesh and India, as they are established nations with autonomously functioning governments. However, the current study provides a breakthrough in establishing that cross-cultural studies can also be conducted in the context of two regions, which belong to different countries but share common cultures. The study first establishes how brand personalities are perceived differently due to cultural divergences that persist in the two aforementioned political regions. It is evident from the study results that significant differences exist in the manner in which the brand personality of the smart phones is perceived across the two adjacent regions of West Bengal and Bangladesh.

The study offers valuable insights into the fact that Samsung and Xiaomi, despite being global brands and positioned analogously in both the regions (and all other major global markets), there exist clear differences in the perceptions towards brand personality. It provides meaningful lessons to the global smart phone companies' brand managers to emphasise the identified personality traits. Further, detailed insights into the cultural dimensions can help marketing practitioners to improve their communications and promotional strategies and better connect with their target customers in the respective regions. Since there exists no infallible approach to utilize cultural diversity as an implement to drive marketing communications efficaciously, smartphone brands can make efforts to localize their promotions, which albeit pricey, can prove to be effective. The other alternative is for smartphone brands to risk the germination of incoherent brands. It is also important to note that smartphone manufacturers need not find it necessary to transform their overall identity across the regions they are operating in but develop an enhanced comprehension of the cultural divergences and traditions, norms, and practices of the counties smartphone brands are targeted. The study furnishes adequate evidence to support the fact that smartphone brands are highly likely to pay off if they consider culture when designing and implementing their marketing communications programs.

Marketers must investigate the most effective manner of determining when and where along the customer journey. It would be apt to acclimatize their tailored marketing communication programs to specific markets. The key is to shape, run-through and acquire an effective brand personality, brand imagery and other anthropomorphic elements to evaluate the differences in effectiveness in such promotional avenues. The study shall offer branding professionals practical insights in building stronger and more unique personalities for their brands to nurture more robust relationships with their target customers whilst staying true to their brand. More often than not, marketers of global brands tend to blend the line in terms of West Bengal and Bangladesh's cultural dimensions due to shared languages, mutual respect and admiration for art and literature, and other such socio-cultural similarities. The study demonstrates that despite such similarities, there are noteworthy divergences in how the two cultures are oriented and how they impact how perceptions are shaped. It further establishes the idea that instead of smart phone brands endeavouring to establish commonalities in brand personality traits and dimensions across culturally analogous regions, they must appreciate the divergences in terms of respondents' perception in the respective cultures. This would help the brands develop more robust and unique personalities. For instance, the Samsung brand is perceived as an "emotional" brand in both the regions of West Bengal and Bangladesh, and it is established in the study that cultural dimensions play a key role in significantly shaping such perceptions towards the said brand.

Hence, the company can shift its focus from developing the smart phone brand with "romantic" or "sentimental" traits and focus on, say, "responsibility", which is commonly perceived across both cultures. More importantly, the manufacturers can focus on positioning the Samsung brand with an "active" personality in West Bengal while maintaining an "aggressive" personality in Bangladesh, given its current market dynamics. Similarly, Xiaomi, a disruptive Chinese smart phone manufacturer, especially in the Indian and Bangladesh markets, can focus on positioning the brand as "aggressive" in West Bengal instead of focussing on building it as a "stable" or "emotional" brand yet. Simply put, such smartphone majors can prefer to accentuate a personality attribute that is sought-after in a specific region/ market, but not inevitably in the context of other regions/ markets. This would essentially help them shape

their brand as more pertinent and acceptable to the people in the said region, in that they would be able to construct a better idea of themselves (or personalities) from the prevailing beliefs about themselves, coupled with the feedbacks derived from others. This is notwithstanding that an incompatible brand image might crop up, even if the personalities are uniquely identified. This is critical, especially in today's era of globalization, where global brands strive to achieve scale efficiencies by focussing on standardization more than differentiation. However, since the brands are highly market-centric in their approach, the idea is to position the brand differently and cleverly by communicating different personality traits that are more appropriate in the said culture. For instance, Samsung has been an established player in the smart phone market of West Bengal, and given its wide array of products in the market, it is generally perceived as a "stable" brand, mostly because people have a relatively lower score on power distance spectrum and they generally possess a short-term cultural orientation. Keeping this view in mind, Samsung can focus on developing more female-centric models to target women buyers in West Bengal, and even for that matter, in India.

This is primarily of significance to brand marketers in the region because Samsung is typically perceived globally as a masculine brand (Matyszczyk, 2014). Interestingly, given the low power distance score in West Bengal, a strong marketing communications programme of Samsung with a female orientation might work well with male respondents unless marketed exclusively. Further, brand manufacturers must be careful not to price their products such that they become unaffordable. In such cultures like West Bengal, it would be a good idea for brand manufacturers to market their offerings by using noteworthy opinion leaders, which helps cement the brand's personality in the minds of the target audiences quite effectively. Brands that encourage consumers to value personal realization, and help them pursue activities that foster creativity and self-actualisation, often become successful in such cultures. However, before developing the personality traits and the brand's identity, a key question for marketers to probe into is whether or not such deliberations shall prove to be of any consequence in the long-term and whether such strategies would be cost-effective and practicable.

Limitations and Future Scope

Cross-cultural studies, inherently, are subject to their limitations and constraints. Although the current study attempts to bring about a new perspective to cross-cultural research by comparing politico-administrative units instead of countries at large, it is bound by multiple imperfections. For instance, the sample size is far too less to make more detailed and generalized comments on individuals' perceptions regarding the brand personality dimensions of smartphones. Larger sample sizes increase the confidence of making more informed decisions about the populations under consideration. One of the other issues faced in the current study was nationality bias, especially in Xiaomi smartphones in Bangladesh. Although adequate care has been taken to eliminate the "made-in image" of the Chinese smartphones, it was observed that respondents generally biased towards the product quality, brand acquaintance and their overall perceptions towards the personality of the said brand. The study can be expanded to determine the differences in the perception of brand personality among the SAARC countries and whether the respective cultures have any role in influencing such perceptions.

Further, the study makes use of the BPS developed by Geuens et al. (2009), which is an improvement over the seminal scale developed by J. L. Aaker (1997), may still not be considered as a universally accepted scale that appropriately defines brand personality '(George & Anandkumar, 2012, 2018). Hence, further studies may be required to validate the selected countries' scale if the new BPS is considered. Alternatively, new measures may be developed to assess the dimensions of brand personality in the context of multiple brands.

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