

The Identification of Gender Identity on Consumer Perception and Buying Decisions to Develop Brand Equity

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Abstract

The purpose of this research study is to highlight the current phenomenon of the interpolation of feminine and masculine characteristics that affect consumers' psychographs, as manifested in their shopping preferences and buying decisions. This research contains a mixed-method research design. The philosophy of post-positivism is implied. A survey method for data collection and interviews with the same participants have been taken to confirm their level of self-congruency with brand offerings. A convenience sampling technique is used. The sample size consists of 388 customers from various brands. For this research, SMART PLS is considered an analysis tool. This research study covers the geographical area of "Karachi" the mega city of Pakistan. This research study identifies the most prevailing issue in society. This research would help full for brand managers to better understand their customers based on their psychographic gender orientation and then mound their brand offerings.

Keywords: Gender identity, Marketing techniques, Mental orientation, Psychography

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INTRODUCTION

In marketing literature, “gender identification” concerning brand choice and preferences is turning into an interesting debate among marketers and strategy makers globally. Brands are famous for their branding strategies, logos, brand mantra, brand status, and brand personality. Still, people recognize tangibles from the brand's gender and their identities. For example, various perfumes could be distinguished from their fragrances. Similarly, the interchangeable identification of gender identity has become the most debatable topic these days. Previously many researchers in marketing and psychology domains have declared the strong impact of gender orientation on consumers' buying preferences. In addition, gender identities strongly impact consumer perception of any specific brand. For example, the specification of color and design are identified as men's and women's specific designs respectively (pink for girls and blue for boys). In contrast, consumer gender orientation is another contemporary issue that highlights the interchangeable perception of brand consumption and brand identification turning out to be among hot topics these days.

The marketing strategies currently practiced in Asian and South Asian countries have a very thick layer of gender centrism. The reason for this strong gender-specific marketing is the strong influence of culture in these regions. For example, color combinations, designs, fragrances, shapes, and types of products, and almost everything is designated to a specific gender. And people have huge acceptability of it. However, in current marketing practices, the brand offerings reflect a wide range of variety without any gender-specified concept. To explore the phenomena of how customer, perceive their gender identity, this research is intended to be undertaken. Keeping current marketing strategies in mind gender orientation lies under Hofstede's cultural dimensions as masculine and feminine proximity. According to Hofstede (2010) masculine and feminine are psychologically oriented dimensions rather it is considered biological differences among people.

A man could have feminine characteristics and behavior because feminine(culture) holds love, care, affection, family bonding, sacrifice, and importance or relations than self-centeredness and career-oriented personnel. The research objectives of this study are to explore the impact gender identity would have on customer perception and brand preference. What impact would gender identity have on brand equity? Is there any role of brand awareness at the time when gender identity impacts brand equity? Does gender identity affect consumer perception through which consumer preferences of brand and their buying decision have been changed? Previous research in this domain has discussed the marketing strategies concerning boy or girl culture distinctively. However, the importance of the psychographic orientation of customers would impact consumer perception and how consumers make buying decisions influenced by their psychographic gender orientation is an untapped area. This research would have a significant contribution to customer insight and would be beneficial for researchers and strategy makers to advance their segmentation strategies based on the gender identity of a customer.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender Identity in Masculine and Feminine Categorization

Male and female members behave differently and display different attitudes. Achievement, success, and high-order consideration are the main values of masculine culture. In contrast, the

most important values in feminine culture are higher life quality, love, and affection for others, especially close friends and family (Iskhakova, Hilbert, & Joehnk, 2021). In a masculine-oriented society, achievement and performance are valued more highly, and these qualities play a major role in building brand equity (Gupta, Parra, Dennehy, 2022). Moreover, (Agrawal, Bajpai & Khandelwal (2020) explain consumers may perceive brands as living, human-like entities, who attribute to brands demographic traits like age and origin (Klein et al., 2019); personality traits like competence and charisma and behavioral traits like consumer-brand interaction (Ashill, Semaan, & Williams, 2019). Ulrich & Tissier-Desbordes (2018) separate three types of sexual attributions to brands within the metaphor of the brand as a person: (1) brand sex as a demographic property, (2) brand gender as a personality characteristic, and (3) brand sexual orientation as a behavioral characteristic. The majority of scholars who study gender have acknowledged the overlap between sex and gender (Hyde et al., 2019).

Consumer Segmentation on Psychographic Orientation

Even though gender is determined by social, psychological, and cultural traits that reflect an individual's level of masculinity or femininity, sex is a binary distinction based on biological differences (classifying humans as either men or women) (Mazzuc et al., 2020). As a result, brand gender and brand sex should surely be separated. Moreover, brand gender is a set of personality characteristics described as "the set of human personality traits" associated with masculinity and femininity" relevant to "brands" (Jordan, Yoeli & Rand, 2021). Brand gender influences consumers' affective, attitudinal, and behavioral responses (César, Fonseca & Martins, 2021). Consumers commonly build, enhance, or attain their gender identities through the brands they pick and use (Machado et al., 2019). Studies on the cultural factors that influence brand equity have shown that brands with more masculine and feminine representation have significantly higher levels of brand equity than brands with no association with either gender (Pinar, Girard & Basfirinci, 2020). Men prefer more masculine brands than feminine ones, whereas women prefer more masculine brands (Champlin, et al., 2019).

Gender Identity and the Role of Culture

The formation of consumer identities is significantly influenced by the cultural system and consumerism (Rokka, 2021). There is no longer a gender distinction in modern ideology since it is no longer required to separate males from women (McMunn, Webb & Sacker, 2020). Nowadays, masculine and feminine are precollege concepts with overlapped meanings. According to (Strengers & Kennedy, 2021) men resist using such brands whose attributes are specific to females, whereas this trend is conversely noticed in females who tend to use male-specific products. The femininity and masculinity scales were essentially contrasted until the 1960s. In other words, it is generally believed that a person can exhibit either feminine or masculine personality qualities, but not both feminine and masculine personality traits (Gill, Stockyard, Johnson & Williams, 1987: 375). Bem (1974) created the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI), which assessed people on three dimensions: feminine (high femininity, low masculinity), masculine (high masculinity, low femininity), and androgynous (high masculinity, low femininity) (high femininity, high masculinity). In the years that followed, people were classified as feminine (high femininity, low masculinity), masculine (high masculinity, low femininity), androgynous (high femininity, high

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masculinity), or undifferentiated (low femininity, low masculinity) (Bem, 1977; Spence, Helmreich & Stapp, 1975).

Gender Identity Creates Brand Awareness

Gender identity is a depiction of several masculine and feminine cultural dimensions' actions, attitudes, and qualities. According to (Carnegie, McKinnon & Gibson, 2019), greater levels of masculinity in the social order are reflected in an individual's monetary possessions and the quantity or variety of the assets. Individuals from masculine societies would thus be more worried about new product debuts in the market (Hämäläinen, 2019). Furthermore, those products that are unfamiliar and relatively new to the market would assist them in demonstrating their success, power, and achievements. Büyükdag et al., (2020) explained that customer evaluations of the product will be influenced by culturally bound social and psychological attitudes. As a result, the masculine and feminine features of a brand affect both genders differently in different purchasing situations. Consumer brand recognition is also developed based on gender identity and psychographic orientation. Customers' conscious attempts to grasp freshly presented brands are reflected in brand innovation. More brand-conscious consumers would try to be more aware of product functionality and other related aspects as a result of these innovations' worth (Rahman et al., 2020). Hien, Phuong, Tran & Thang (2020) discussed how brand awareness influences consumer decisions. According to Zha et al. (2020), the client is the inert recipient of the information in maximal buying scenarios and spends the least amount of time using cognition to choose brands. Under this explanation, we can infer that:

H1: Gender identity created brand awareness based on psychographics orientation.

H1a: gender identity impact brand awareness to create brand equity.

Gender Identity Develops Consumer Perception of their Psychographic Orientation

Masculine and feminine cultural orientations are not sex-oriented rather these dimensions explain the attitude, behaviour, conduct, and social identity of people (Mazahir Khan, Yaseen, & Emaduddin, 2020). Consumer behavior was a qualitative variable in earlier studies and addressed as common consumers' behavior based on their preferences of brand and choice of style and carrying accessories. Later self-concept, physical difference, and social role; gender is thought to act as a moderator between product appraisal and product perception (Srivastava, Sivakumaran, Maheswarappa & Paul, 2022). Moreover, some companies advertise their products through celebrity endorsement and disclose the gender identity of that specific product (Guittar et al., 2022). In addition, individuals' subjective characteristics which encompass the product's target market as well also affect people's opinions. To support this argument, the concept of "Anthropomorphism" is defined as the phenomenon in which consumers link themselves with the features of a product, for as perceiving the shape of the human body as the shape of a bottle or any other thing (Leonidou et al., 2019).

In addition, Pieh, Budimir & Probst (2020) described gender as a variable among various other individuals noticing the physical appearance of other individuals. As a result, varied designs of different brands excite the gender perceptions, graphics, and attitudes of the brand's target audience

(Koech, Buyle & Macário, 2023). Furthermore, Shukla et al., (2022) added Consumers consider higher-end luxury qualities as makers of their social standing and identity. Yang, Agarwal & McGill, (2020) further describe "Anthropomorphism" as the phenomenon in which customers identify themselves with a product's attributes, such as viewing a person's body as a bottle or any other object's shape. Fernandes, Nettleship & Pinto, (2022) support this explanation by discussing the "Theory of people's perception" in which "gender" is the physical appearance of the people but gender identity is based on consumers' psychological appeal. As a result, various brand designs appeal to the gender perceptions, attitudes, and images of the target market for each brand.

H2: Gender identity affects consumer perception of the brand.

H2a: gender identity impacts consumer perception to create brand equity.

Gender Identity Creates Brand Loyalty on Psychographic Basis

Pressentin (2019) argued that masculine-oriented societies are less likely to display brand loyalty to a specific brand in contrast with feminine-oriented societies. Furthermore, Melović et al., (2021) explained females are more likely than males to acknowledge product attributes for personal affiliation. Moreover, Kim, Yim, Kim, & Reeves (2020) added that women are more loyal to one particular brand and consistently recommend products with consideration for both themselves and others. In conclusion "brand gender identity" and consumer personality contributes to these promising responses to the brand (de Kerviler & Rodriguez, 2019). Manko & Jose (2022) asserts that various gender-based customer motivations have an impact on client loyalty. Moreover, Karim, Nisa, & Imam (2021) explained that "men and women make different decisions and as a result, their commitment level varies. From the above explanation we are hypothesizing:

H3: Gender identity creates brand loyalty of a brand.

H3a: gender identity impacts brand loyalty to create brand equity

Gender Identity and Congruency in Product Offerings

Congruency between gender identity and brand preference is the utmost primitive factor that develops customer-brand relationships. To extend the concept of congruency, the "Self-congruency" theory explains individuals' reactions favorably to those brands that are likely to imitate their own- self (Cui,2020). It is assumed that gender identity develops an essential phase of self-concept, which is why it is among the most critical personality measurements (Kang, Keinonen, & Salonen, 2021). Similar is the case with products, and brands are also declared as gendered-based. Ozdemir & Akcay (2019) explained the gender of the brands carrying masculine and feminine characteristics. These characteristics have four personality traits, including male/female, androgynous, and undifferentiated. Hayat et al., (2020) explained that men and women are not equal in decisions, so their loyalty level also varies. female customers are inclined toward higher loyalty than male customers when the specific brand is there. The level of loyalty is reversed when it is any store, company, or group of people. Many previous theories depict men as individualistic and women as social figures. Men make more independent decisions, whereas women showed interdependence in making decisions (Dogan,2019).

interpret results together. With the purpose of corroboration and validation, the researcher aims to triangulate the methods by directly comparing the quantitative statistical results and qualitative findings. In the research process, two datasets have been obtained, analyzed separately, and compared.

Study Target population

For qualitative study and validation of results achieved through quantitative tests, the same group of customers who were regular customers of FMCG products was asked some questions about the change in their preferences of brands after this pandemic situation started. the questions were embedded in the same questionnaire used for quantitative data collection and collected at the same time when quantitative data was collected.

Quantitative Target Population

A convenient sampling technique was used under the non-probability sampling method to determine the study group. The basic criteria for selecting participants was must be regular customers of branded FMCG products in their daily use. As numerous customers were available and the deficiency of the sampling frame leads to selecting participants ad hoc based on their availability. Both males and females were targeted as both often shop for monthly groceries. 388 was the sample size that was taken from Krejcie and Morgan's table for sampling.

Data Collection Tool

Quantitative/Qualitative Data Collection

For data collection, both qualitative and quantitative questions were embedded. Section 1 of the questionnaire comprised on 5-point Likert scale, and adapted questions were asked from already validated constructs. For qualitative data collection, three main themes have been identified to validate the results gathered from quantitative analysis.

RESULTS & FINDINGS

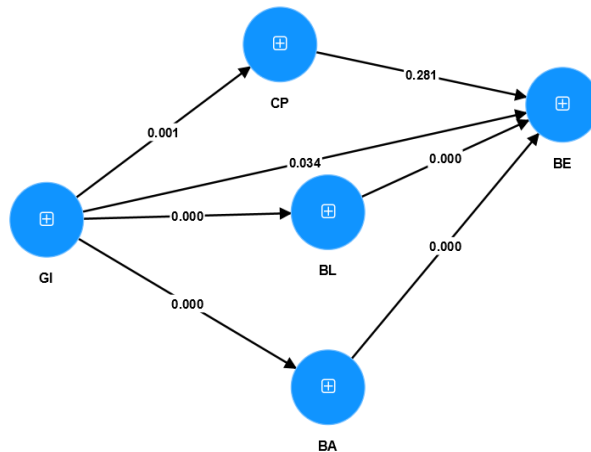


Figure 3: Measurement Model

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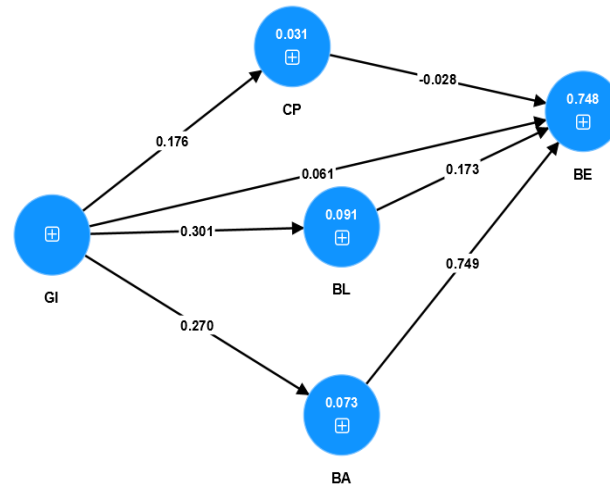


Figure 4: Structural Model

Table 1

Reliability and Outer loadings

Outer loadings	BA	BE	BL	CP	GI
BA1	0.936				
BA2	0.921				
BA3	0.927				
BA4	0.931				
BA5	0.801				
BA6	0.784				
BE1		0.739			
BE2		0.76			
BE3		0.889			
BE4		0.877			
BE5		0.876			
BE6		0.891			
BL1			0.447		
BL2			0.532		
BL3			0.865		
BL4			0.807		
BL5			0.847		
BL6			0.879		
CP1				0.798	
CP2				0.753	
CP3				0.783	
CP4				0.784	
CP5				0.565	

CP6	0.645
GI1	0.854
GI2	0.751
GI3	0.745
GI4	0.867
GI5	0.869
GI6	0.865

Table 1 represents the reliability of each item used in the questionnaire. The outer loadings values are greater than 0.6 reflecting sufficient reliable values.

Table 2

Construct Reliability and Validity

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	The average variance extracted (AVE)
BA	0.944	0.948	0.784
BE	0.916	0.916	0.707
BL	0.827	0.851	0.562
CP	0.801	0.786	0.508
GI	0.735	0.816	0.437

Table 2 represents the constructs' reliability and validity. The Cronbach alpha values are above 0.70 representing the significant reliability of the construct used. All average variance extracted (AVE) value are above 0.60, signifying the constructs do not deviate from the requirements of convergent validity. The results recommended that the constructs used in this research are unique and distinct since all AVE square root values are greater than Pearson correlation values.

Table 3

Discriminant Validity

	BA	BE	BL	CP	GI
BA	0.886				
BE	0.855	0.841			
BL	0.559	0.596	0.75		
CP	0.442	0.491	0.504	0.713	
GI	0.273	0.313	0.301	0.176	0.661

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Table 3 represents the values for discriminant validity reflecting each variable is distinct from the other variable. Fornell Lacker criteria is used. The values are showing each construct is sufficiently distinct from another variable.

Table 4

Results of Hypotheses

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
BA -> BE	0.749	0.748	0.03	24.832	0
BL -> BE	0.173	0.172	0.035	4.926	0
CP -> BE	-0.028	-0.025	0.026	1.078	0.281
GI -> BA	0.27	0.274	0.046	5.914	0.000
GI -> BE	0.061	0.06	0.029	2.125	0.034
GI -> BL	0.301	0.306	0.046	6.568	0.000
GI -> CP	0.176	0.184	0.051	3.475	0.001
GI -> BA -> BE	0.202	0.205	0.035	5.697	0.000
GI -> CP -> BE	-0.005	-0.005	0.005	0.934	0.350
GI -> BL -> BE	0.052	0.053	0.013	3.855	0.000

Table 4 represents the results of the hypotheses. The hypothesis on the direct relationship between brand awareness and brand equity (B=0.749, M=0.78, Std dev=0.03, T-value=24.832, P-value=0.000) shows a significant impact. Similarly, the direct relationship between brand loyalty and brand equity (B=0.173, M=0.172, Std Dev=0.035, T-value=4.926, P-value=0.000) shows a significant impact. The direct relation of consumer perception and brand equity (-0.028, M=-0.025, Std Dev=0.026, T-value=1.078, P-value=0.281) shows an insignificant impact. The direct impact of gender identity and brand equity (B=0.061, M=0.06, Std Dev=0.029, T-value=2.125, p-value=0.034) is also significant. The direct impact of gender identity and brand loyalty (B=0.301, M=0.306, Std Dev=0.046, T-value=6.568, P-value=0.000) shows a significant impact. The direct impact of gender identity and consumer perception (B=0.176, M= 0.184, Std Dev=0.051, T-value=3.475, P-value0.001) is significant. The indirect impact of gender identity on brand equity and brand awareness mediate turned significant as (B=0.202, M=0.205, Std Dev=0.035, T-Value=5.697, P-value=0.000). The indirect relation of gender identity on brand equity where consumer perception mediates turned insignificant as (B=-0.005, M=-0.005, Std Dev0.005, T-value=0.934, P-value=0.350). The indirect relationship of gender identity on brand equity where brand loyalty mediates turned out significant as (B=0.052, M=0.053, Std Dev=0.013, T-value=3.855, P-value 0.000).

Qualitative Inquiry

Some initial themes were identified to get a better understanding of the concept. While conducting the survey, the above questions were interviewed by the same respondents who were filling out the questionnaires. Mostly, the respondents youngsters aged between 15-30 years were willing to respond and give some extra time for further discussion. Sixty respondents gave answers to these specific questions. out of these sixty individuals thirty-five gave interesting answers. According to most of the respondents following are some factors that would help to identify what an actual individual perceives himself/herself.

Theme 1: Freedom of Expression

Some consumers perceive freedom of expression in all ways as the key factor to identify one's personality. Living styles distinguished one person from another person. In addition, people consider the color combination an individual choice, and mostly wear is another indicator to identify the personality type and it is one of the mediums to understand one's personality. Through the accessories, a person could express himself/herself. In the recent era, most people follow social media influencers, so their followers disclose their true choice, and definitely by using all the above-identified subthemes customer preferences for the specific brand would increase. The inclination of customer choices to any particular brand would have a positive impact on the development of brand equity. According to one of the customer:

"Primarily people's way of talking, point of views and body language used to understand self-identity". Now things have been changed and style, accessories, and freedom of expression is the key factor that determines people's actual self-concept and gender orientation".

Theme #2: Congruency

Most of the respondents describe "congruency" as a focal factor that helps to identify one's self-concept and orientation. "Congruency" is a synergy-creating factor between two entities. Most customers perceive congruency as a self-expressing factor. This self-expression is explained as the freedom to express their gender identity besides their biological gender. People believe that consumer perception of the brand should be similar and satisfy their intrinsic needs then they feel that "congruency" has been developed. According to one of the customer

"Congruency is not only explained by the complete match of choices, preferences, and likes and dislikes, but it also addresses the financial and physical attraction to the customers as well. These financial and physical attractions include promotional activities, discounts on brands, seasonal sales, variety of offerings. Hence from affordable to unique everything would add value in creating "congruency".

Theme#3: Gap between Perceived and Actual Brand

Most of the customers pointed out the difference in quality after buying the brand and their previous perception of the brand. At this point, customers identified various marketing hacks, marketers used to advertise their brands. These advertisements develop a perception of the brand

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and based on these previously developed perceptions consumers evaluate brands. If they found in the quality advertised and what they receive then the overall brand image becomes distorted. According to one of the customer

“If an individual does not receive what exactly they paid for, could be the biggest reason for brand failure. One bad experience lasts for several months unless brand repositioning is implemented”

Discussion

The results of the hypotheses presented in this research have given some positive direction to the existence of this phenomenon. Based on the concept of gender identity and consumers' psychography, the preferences and buying decisions are differentiated. The basic reason for such interpolating choices is the concept of "self-identity" among customers. To explore and identify the existence of this, the results of the hypotheses addressed the significant relationship of gender identity with brand awareness, and brand loyalty, whereas gender identity has an insignificant impact on consumer perception. The reason for this insignificant result is gender identity already is a psychographic orientation and is based on consumer perception of "oneself". The results have mentioned the significant relationship between gender identity on brand equity, brand awareness, and brand loyalty. Moreover, the indirect relationship of gender identity with the mediation of brand awareness and brand loyalty also turned significant, whereas the indirect relationship of gender identity on brand equity with the mediation of consumer perception turned insignificant.

Dabbous & Barakat (2020) in their research validate that the relationship between brand awareness and purchase intentions is harmonious with the results of this study on the specific relationship between brand awareness and brand equity. Ebrahim (2020) identified the positive impact of brand loyalty on brand equity by using trust as a focal factor. The results of this research are harmonious with the previous research as brand loyalty has a significant relationship with brand equity. Filler, Lin, D'Antone & Chatzopoulou, (2019) conducted a study on the effects of cultural orientations on brand equity in which they found a positive relationship between consumer perception belong to urban and rural areas positive but with different intensity, the results of this study are not aligned with previous research as in this study consumer perception has been taken as gender centric factor not cultural oriented. Lieven et al., (2015) indicated in their research that brand design develops the consumer perception of the brand gender, and based on their own gender identity, consumer develop their awareness about the brand. the results of this research are harmonious with the previous study as consumers search out more about those brands which are harmonious with their own gender identity.

Mehta (2020) identified the different levels of loyalty to the brand in different genders. The results of this research are aligned with previous studies. Pinata (2020) identified that gender identity has a significant relationship with buying intentions. The results of Pinna's research are harmonious with our study as in this it is assumed that consumer perception is among the important factors that develop buying intentions. Adding to the previous discussion about gender identity's effect on brand equity. Through the quality inquiry, it is been further identified that if consumers find congruency in what they desire to have intrinsically and the offering of the brand, then their intentions of buying would positively increase, and eventually brand equity of that brand increases.

CONCLUSION

Along with the theoretical and empirical contributions, there are some limitations. This research considers gender identity as a "consumer-centric" factor that has varied meanings according to consumers' self-views. Furthermore, the data has been collected from the shopping malls and brands that exist in the metropolitan city of Pakistan "Karachi". This research is limited to branded apparel, watches, and accessories only. To validate the concept this research should be carried on to different areas and geographical locations. The topic would be more comprehensively covered if pure qualitative research conducted on this topic. Different product lines like colour choice, body language, and common interests of consumers should be undertaken. Various other themes could be identified and applied concerning the psychography of the consumers.

Competing Interests

The authors did not declare any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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