

**Forerunners and outcomes of brand loyalty: A study of young consumers in Pakistan**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to empirically examine the consolidative conceptual model which tests the effect of perceived quality, brand awareness, perceived value and brand uniqueness on brand loyalty and the effect of brand loyalty on positive WOM. The study adopted a quantitative methodology involving data collection through structured questionnaire from 410 young consumers of national brands by adopting convenience sampling technique. Structured Equation Modeling was used to analyse the data through AMOS 24. The empirical results support the predictions of this study. The findings revealed that perceived quality, brand awareness, perceived value and brand uniqueness have a positive relationship with brand loyalty. Moreover, brand loyalty was positively related to the positive WOM. The current study makes its significant contribution to the field of brand management by investigating effects of four dimensions of brand equity on brand loyalty. In addition, the study provides new insights to literature and practice by investigating the effect of brand loyalty on positive WOM. The findings of this study will help brand managers and marketers to identify the appropriate and effective strategies to establish and improve the consumer brand loyalty.

*Keywords:* Perceived quality; Brand awareness; Perceived value; Brand uniqueness; Fashion brands; Brand loyalty; Positive WOM

Due to globalization and open business environment in today's world, the marketers are continuously trying to use all possible resources to convert the dreams of consumers into reality and to create brand loyalty among them. It would not be astonishing for the researchers and practitioners to perceive how brand loyalty should be increased. Not only does this have to be understood, but marketers and firms have to assess the effect brand loyalty has on their style of continuous purchase and recommendation intention. Therefore, marketers are eager in knowing the factors to create and increase brand loyalty among the consumers for sustainable profitable growth. When an organization creates a strong brand it attracts customer desire and builds a protective wall against competition (Doyle, 2001). Branding is thus all about creating differences in outcomes that arise from the 'added value' endowed on products and services (Keller & Lehmann, 2003). Brand equity is a very important concept in business practice as well as in academic research because companies can gain competitive advantages through well-built brands (Aaker, 1996a; Anselmsson et al., 2017; Çifci et al., 2016; Keller, 1993; Keller, 2008). Previous research contributes to a better understanding of brand equity measurement (Farquhar, 1989; Keller, 2008; Netemeyer et al., 2004; Sasmita & Mohd Suki, 2015; Tong & Hawley, 2009; Washburn & Plank, 2002). Brand equity increases the probability of brand choice, which leads to brand loyalty and encases the brand from measure of competitive threats (Pitta & Prevel Katsanis, 1995).

A brand's value is set by the degree of brand loyalty, as this involves a guarantee of future cash flows (Wood, 2000). Brand loyalty is a key discussion when placing a value on a brand because loyalty converts into a benefit stream (Aaker, 1992). Brand loyalty is the hypothetical variable which is a construct that cannot be observed directly (Sheth & Park, 1974). Consumers may be loyal and choose a brand as a primary choice and the firm may then have a competitive advantage in the market (Su & Chang, 2018). Organizations recognize the value of having strong brands in their portfolio, as this helps build a loyal customer base and to smooth the task of differentiating products (Macrae, 1996). In past decades, organizations have expanded their interest in building and holding the brands. The brands have become more valuable because consumers have more information and choices now than ever (Ashraf et al., 2018). If organizations want to maintain brand loyalty then they will offer the best services to customers because the business environment is highly competitive. Engaging with your customer through social media can help inform customers about new discounts and special deals. This way helps companies achieve more success. Positive perception and loyalty among customers increase the brand loyalty.

Nowadays, effective branding is a censorious success factor for all types of fashion brands and it can create equity, encourage consumer brand loyalty, and raise profitability (Choi, 2014). Fashion has always been closely related to having a lifestyle. The fashion industry keeps innovating and changing, especially for the women sector (Jang et al., 2012). In the fashion industry branding has become the dominant competitive approach for all successful businesses. Young individuals are very concerned about fashion adaption in today's world. In addition to the increased number of clothing brands available to consumers, fashion retailers also have to face changes in consumers' lifestyles (Kurtulus & Ertekin, 2015). The focal point of fashion clothing is significant because of both its economic value and significant social functions

(O'cass & Fenech, 2003). Chan, Berger, and Van Boven (2012) also provided an example related to the fashion industry where individuals may buy the same brand as their peers to indicate their need for goods. If the brand loyalty for a company in the fashion industry is low, they might experience a negative impact (Lekmat et al., 2018).

In the context of Pakistan, there is a dearth of research on brand loyalty toward fashion clothing brands and the results of the marketing efforts of different brands, which are completely different from the rest of the world (Shahzad et al., 2018). There is a large amount of information explaining the factors affecting brand loyalty and recommendation intention in the developed countries (Bıçakcıoğlu et al., 2018). However, the rapidly growing popularity of brands in developing countries is increasing the need to investigate the brand loyalty toward fashion clothing brands and positive WOM in the context of developing economies. The objective of this study is to find out the effect of brand awareness, brand uniqueness, perceived quality and perceived value on brand loyalty towards a fashion clothing brand. Furthermore, the study investigated the link between brand loyalty and positive WOM. Afterwards, concluding remarks and certain managerial implications are provided with some recommendations and limitations.

## Literature Review

### Consumer-Based Brand Equity

Brand equity is defined as the added value with which a given brand provides a product (Farquhar, 1989). Brand equity from an individual consumer's perspective is referred to as consumer-based brand equity and is reflected by the expansion in attitude strength for a product using the brand (Farquhar, 1989). Keller (1993) viewed consumer-based brand equity as the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand. Keller's (1993) conceptualization focuses on brand knowledge and involves two dimensions: brand awareness and brand image. Lassar, Mittal, and Sharma (1995) viewed brand equity as "the enhancement in the perceived utility and desirability a brand name confers on a product". Aaker (1991) defined brand equity as a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand name and symbol, which add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service and to customers. Clow (2005) stated that brand equity is a "set of characteristics that make a brand unique in the marketplace". Yoo and Donthu (2001) treated consumer-based brand equity as a three-dimensional variable, merging brand awareness and brand associations into one dimension. Netemeyer et al. (2004) indicated that brand equity should be measured by three basic dimensions, including perceived quality, perceived value, and uniqueness and willingness to pay a price premium. Recently, Buil et al. (2013) and Pappu et al. (2005) presented empirical proof of the multidimensionality of consumer-based brand equity, supporting Aaker (1991) and Keller's (1993) conceptualization of brand equity. In this study, we apply CBBE measures to fashion clothing brands. We focus on fashion brand CBBE from a marketing perspective and include CBBE dimensions, which represent consumer perceptions and reactions to fashion clothing brand. We consider the nature of the fashion industry and provide a description of the dimensions of the fashion clothing brand CBBE in the following sections.

### **Perceived Quality**

Perceived quality is the consumer's judgment about a product's overall supremacy or dominance (Zeithaml, 1988). Bhuian (1997) also considers perceived quality as a judgment on the consistency of product description or an assessment on included estimation of a product. Perceived quality is not the objective quality of the product but consumers' subjective assessments, which depend on their perceptions (Buil et al., 2008; Zeithaml, 1988). Perceived quality is a main dimension in brand equity models because it has a strategic effect on brand equity by diminishing the perceived chance (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 2008). Perceived quality is found to be the primary ancestor of brand loyalty (Biedenbach & Marell, 2010). Nguyen, Barrett, and Miller (2011) presented that there is a significant relationship between perceived quality and brand loyalty. Saleem, Rahman, and Umar (2015) supported that perceived quality shows variation in the brand loyalty. Alhaddad (2015) also revealed that perceived quality has positive effects on both brand image and brand loyalty. But more recent researchers like Su and Chang (2018) have presented the contrasting view that there is not a significant relationship between perceived quality and brand loyalty. Tong and Hawley (2009) and Buil et al. (2013) also indicate that having high quality alone is not a promise of a famous brand, which is what this study emphasizes.

#### **H1: Perceived quality has a positive effect on consumer brand loyalty**

### ***Perceived Value***

Perceived value is defined as the customer's overall evaluation of the utility of the brand based on perceptions of what is received and what is given relative to other brands (Netemeyer et al., 2004). Perceived value includes the trade-off of "what I get" for "what I give" (Netemeyer et al., 2004; Zeithaml, 1988). Perceived value is at a higher level of abstraction than any attribute or benefit of a brand. Consumer's perceived value includes their overall evaluation of the brand functionality or symbolic attribute and effort made by the consumer (Netemeyer et al., 2004). Customers view performance, stability and immunity within the service, and include time and money in the total cost experienced (Day, 2002). Updated looks and limited editions, along with the speed of their availability and inexpensive price, makes this industry more appealing to many young consumers (Joy et al., 2012). Ashraf et al. (2018) shows that perceived value has significant and optimistic power on brand loyalty. Ishaq et al. (2014) revealed that perceived value has a positive and significant impression on brand loyalty. Su and Chang (2018) also supported that perceived value strongly affects consumer brand loyalty. Therefore, based on the above discussion, we can use this as our hypothesis.

#### **H2: Perceived value has a significant positive impact on consumer brand loyalty**

### ***Brand Awareness***

Brand awareness is defined as the ability of a potential purchaser to recognize or recall that a brand is a member of a certain product group (Aaker, 1991). This construct is identified with the strength of a brand's presence in consumers' minds and is normally estimated through brand acknowledgment and viewed under various conditions (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1993). Brand awareness impacts choices and can be a prior thought base in a product category (Hoyer

& Brown, 1990). Brand awareness can assist consumers to recognize a brand from a product classification and settle on buy choice (Percy & Rossiter, 1992). Keller (1993) conceptualized brand awareness as both brand recall and brand recognition. When consumers select a product, they view the most famous brand as more dependable than the lesser known brand (Macdonald & Sharp, 2000). Globally, the remarkable development in the accessibility of different media and their coverage of fashion has contributed to the expansion in worldwide style awareness among young consumers (Sasmita & Mohd Suki, 2015). The purchasers' find out more about the brand through this way of advertising and obtain more detail about the product (Buil et al., 2013). Dumasi, Dhurup, and Mafini (2014) supported that there is an important association between brand awareness and brand loyalty. Su and Chang (2018) also viewed brand awareness positively and that it strongly affects consumer brand loyalty. Yoshida (2018) pointed out that brand awareness has more of an effect on brand loyalty for Thai consumers who are looking to buy from a new brand. Therefore, this research proposes the following hypothesis:

**H3: Brand awareness has a significant positive effect on consumer brand loyalty.**

#### ***Brand Uniqueness***

Brand uniqueness is the degree to which customers feel the brand is not the same as competing brands, rather how apparent it is relative to competitors (Netemeyer et al., 2004). As such, brand uniqueness is observed as a central consumer-based brand equity facet (Netemeyer et al., 2004). Keller (2010) states that purchasers' brand perceptions are driven by their awareness and the requirement for brand uniqueness, which are managed by individual experience. Netemeyer et al. (2004) considered that brand uniqueness offers diagnostic information by modifying the brand from others, providing a simplified "heuristic" that positively impacts consumer brand preference and their willingness to pay a more expensive rate for a brand. Brand uniqueness is considered the significant predictor of consumer brand loyalty by Su & Chang (2018). So, the next hypothesis can be proposed as:

**H4: Brand uniqueness has a significant positive impact on consumer brand loyalty.**

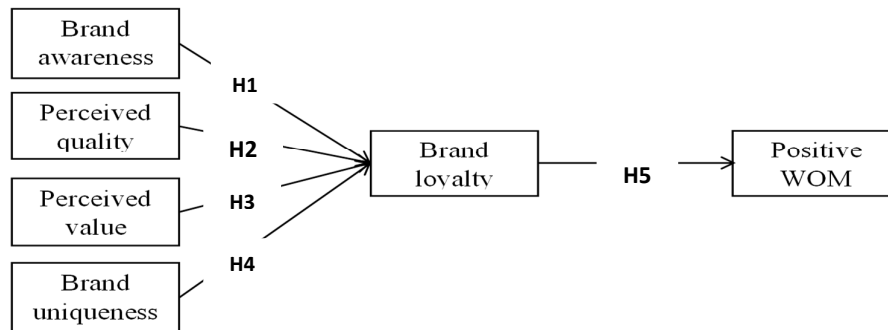
#### ***Brand Loyalty and Positive WOM***

Brand loyalty can be defined as "the attachment that a customer has to a brand" (Aaker, 1991). Aaker (1996) defined brand loyalty as "a core dimension of brand equity". Current studies declared that brand loyalty is an outcome of brand equity, and established that other brand equity dimensions affect brand loyalty (Buil et al., 2013; Çifci et al., 2016). Thus, it is suitable to view brand loyalty as the outcome of other brand equity dimensions. Generally, consumers do not speak negatively about a brand until they have had a disappointing experience (Richins, 1983). After having a positively good experience with a brand, consumers become loyal to that brand and are more likely to share their experience with others (Dick & Basu, 1994). WOM communication is considered the most reliable and credible (Gounaris & Stathakopoulos, 2004). Consumers develop a positive attitude toward the brand as a consequence of the received value. There are a few studies that have reported a positive relationship between brand loyalty and WOM (Amine, 1998; Bıçakcıoğlu et al., 2018; Dick & Basu, 1994). These studies suggest that recommendation of brand is the most expected behavioral result of brand loyalty. Hence, the next proposed hypothesis:

### H5. Brand loyalty is positively related to positive WOM.

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of this study. With regard to this research model, brand awareness, perceived quality, perceived value, and brand uniqueness are considered antecedents to brand loyalty, while positive WOM is defined as behavioral outcome of the consumer brand loyalty.

**Figure 1. Conceptual framework**



### Methodology

The study was explanatory in nature. Quantitative method was adopted to collect the data by conducting a survey on young buyers who have purchased and used the products of the brands. The survey instrument was in the form of a questionnaire and was designed in English. The survey consisted of six constructs: brand awareness, perceived quality, perceived value, brand uniqueness, brand loyalty, and positive WOM. In the initial section of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to provide general information, such as gender, education, age, and monthly household income. In the second part, items of the six constructs were given with a five-point Likert Scale that included indicators ranging between '1= strongly agree' to '5= strongly disagree'. The convenient sampling technique was the preferred method for conducting the survey.

The target population of this study was young consumers who were passionate about the specified fashion brand. In order to obtain the target sample, a question was included in the structured questionnaire to collect whether the participants make a purchase once a month or more frequently from the same brand. The brands used in the survey were the Pakistani brands that are well-known among young consumers. Before collecting the data from young buyers, the designed version of the questionnaire was reviewed by three scholars. Based on the feedback and suggestions from other scholars, certain modifications were made and a revised version of the survey instrument was used to collect the data from respondents. The questionnaire was distributed to 500 respondents through email and by hand. It was also uploaded on an online data collection software, and the link of the questionnaire was sent to respondents through social media tools like WhatsApp and Facebook. There were 90 consumers who did not fill the complete questionnaire or couldn't be included in the data pool. Therefore only 410 responses were used for data analysis. The scale used to measure brand

awareness and perceived quality was adopted from Buil et al. (2008). Perceived value was measured by using items obtained from Netemeyer et al. (2004). To measure brand uniqueness scale was adopted from Netemeyer et al. (2004). Consumer brand loyalty scale was based on Yoo and Donthu (2001) and positive WOM scale was adopted from Alexandrov, Lilly, and Babakus (2013).

### **Data Analysis and Results**

The descriptive analysis reveals the demographic characteristics of the respondents as 40.5% male and 59.5% female. All of the respondents were young consumers and out of the other three-quarters of them, 24% were 25-28 years old, 32% were 22-24 years old, and 44% were 18-21 years old. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) and Analysis of a Moment Structure (AMOS) were employed for data analysis. The reliability was checked for each construct, and the value of Cronbach's alpha was above 0.7 in the case of each construct, whose cutoff level was suggested by Hair et al. (1998). The composite reliability was also acceptable, as it was above 0.7. Hence the overall reliability of each construct was achieved (Hair et al., 1998).

The factor loadings of the items were in between 0.80 to 0.91 and the value of the average variance extracted a range from 0.65 to 0.68. All values are given in the Table 1. The two-step analysis approach was used as suggested by Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, and Tatham (2006). Firstly, the measurement model was tested by conducting confirmatory factor analysis to check the reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Secondly, the structural model was to test the relationship among the study variables. The model fit values of confirmatory factor analysis are GFI 0.863, AGFI 0.851, TLI 0.964, CFI 0.979 and RMSEA 0.054. All of these values show a good fit for the models, as the values were over the acceptance standard (Ahire & Devaraj, 2001; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Chin & Newsted, 1999; Tabachnick et al., 2007).



**Table 1. Reliability and Validity Measures**

Constructs	Items	Factor loading	Cronbach's $\alpha$	CR	AVE
Perceived Quality	PQ 1	0.86	0.93	0.92	0.68
	PQ 2	0.91			
	PQ 3	0.82			
	PQ 4	0.87			
	PQ 5	0.84			
Perceived value	PV 1	0.82	0.91	0.93	0.68
	PV 2	0.86			
	PV 3	0.89			
	PV 4	0.83			
Brand Awareness	BA 1	0.83	0.90	0.91	0.66
	BA 2	0.87			
	BA 3	0.83			
	BA 4	0.88			
Brand Uniqueness	BU 1	0.87	0.91	0.91	0.67
	BU 2	0.87			
	BU 3	0.84			
	BU 4	0.83			
Brand Loyalty	BL 1	0.83	0.88	0.88	0.66
	BL 2	0.83			
	BL 3	0.80			
	BL 4	0.80			
Positive WOM	PWOM	0.89	0.89	0.88	0.65
	PWOM	0.89			
	PWOM	0.80			

**Note:** PQ perceived quality, PV perceived value, BA brand awareness, BU brand uniqueness, BL brand loyalty, PWOM Positive Word of mouth.

The empirical results of this study, after examining the hypotheses through structural equation modeling, indicate that perceived quality is the significant predictor of brand loyalty with an estimated value of 0.444 at significance of less than 0.001. Perceived value was also found to be significantly associated with brand loyalty with an estimate of 0.512 at significance of less than 0.001. A strong relationship was found between brand awareness and brand loyalty with an estimated value of 0.459. Brand uniqueness was significantly associated with brand loyalty with an estimated value of 0.229. Moreover, brand loyalty was found to be the significant predictor of positive WOM with an estimated value of 0.218. The results are given in the Table 2.

**Table 2. Path coefficients and hypotheses testing**

<b>Hypothesis</b>	<b>Statement</b>	<b>Estimate</b>	<b>Significance</b>	<b>Results</b>
H1	Perceived quality has positive effect on brand loyalty	0.444	***	<b>Supported</b>
H2	Perceived value has a significant positive impact on brand loyalty	0.512	***	<b>Supported</b>
H3	Brand awareness has a significant positive effect on brand loyalty	0.459	***	<b>Supported</b>
H4	Brand uniqueness has a significant positive impact on c brand loyalty	0.229	***	<b>Supported</b>
H5	Brand loyalty is positively related to positive WOM.	0.218	0.002	<b>Supported</b>

\*\*\* Absolute value is less than 0.001

### **Conclusions and Discussion**

This study examined the effects of perceived quality, perceived value, brand awareness, and brand uniqueness on brand loyalty among young consumers in Pakistan. Further, the study tested the effect of brand loyalty on positive WOM. Empirical results via multiple regressions confirmed that perceived quality, perceived value, brand awareness, and brand uniqueness jointly influence brand loyalty among young consumers in Pakistan. More specifically, results indicated that the relationship between perceived quality and brand loyalty is positive and significant, which supports the results of Nguyen et al. (2011). Perceived quality is a dominant factor in young consumer's purchase decision because consumers are more interested in fashionable styles and quality. Further investigation of the study discovered that brand loyalty is also affected by perceived value, as shown in Table 2. Ishaq et al. (2014) and Ashraf et al. (2018) also prove the positive relationship between perceived value and brand loyalty. The choice of a fashion clothing item is more than satisfactory, so the perceived value of fashion clothing contributes to consumers' loyalty toward the fashion clothing brand.

This study also postulates that brand awareness significantly influences brand loyalty among young consumers. The results showed that brand awareness mostly affects brand loyalty in the sense that young customers' decision to buy a brand depends on their awareness of the product. They can clearly recognize the particular brand in comparison to competing brands and know how it looks, so enhanced brand recognition and brand recall will positively affect consumer loyalty toward a brand. The findings are consistent from previous studies (Dumasi et al., 2014; Yoshida, 2018) in which it was established that brand awareness among consumers positively affect brand loyalty. Likewise, brand uniqueness also turned out to be a significant predictor of brand loyalty as presented in Table 2. The results are consistent with Su and Chang (2018) who indicated that brand uniqueness has a positive effect on brand loyalty. Therefore, fashion brands, specifically the low-cost clothing collections, are perceived as trendy and unique, and therefore attract more consumers.

The current study establishes the factors that strongly influence brand loyalty among consumers, which is not covered much in the literature within the Pakistan context. In this

study, we investigated the relationships between young consumers' attitudes towards fashion clothing brands and their brand loyalty. Perceived quality, perceived value, brand awareness and brand uniqueness are the presenting dimensions of brand equity to building consumer brand loyalty. More specifically, this study shows that, all brand equity dimensions have the same impact in originating consumer loyalty toward a brand. The study will also provide the information about how brand loyalty is increased through perceived quality, perceived value, brand awareness and brand uniqueness. If the brand loyalty is achieved it will automatically lead to higher success for the organization.

Moreover, the study found that brand loyalty is positively related to positive WOM. The findings are consistent with the those of Bıçakcıoğlu et al. (2018), in which it was established that brand loyalty is positively associated with positive WOM. The findings of this study that consumer loyalty toward the brand enhances the consumer intention to repurchase the brand products and brand loyalty, is a source of positive WOM. This indicates that the more consumers are loyal, the more they deliver positive WOM to their family, close relatives, friends, and colleagues. The results indicate that the loyal consumers have the tendency to deliver positive suggestions and recommendations about the brand to other consumers. In other words, the brand loyalty intends to increase the level of positive words to others and therefore increase the level of loyal consumers.

### **Implications**

The results obtained in this study point out the interesting several implications for managers to build consumer brand loyalty and to increase positive WOM. Firstly, it is important for managers to understand the differences of the effects of brand equity and implement marketing mix strategies accordingly. This study offers managerial contributions for fashion marketers that focus to explore more about brand perception. It also offers significant insight into the fashion industry, providing tools to understand the role of brand loyalty in the fashion industry. The findings obtained in this article have important managerial implications illustrating the whole situation in which brand loyalty is built by brand awareness, perceived value, perceived quality, and brand uniqueness. Secondly, this study reveals a clear understanding of the dimensions that develop positive brand loyalty in order to generate positive outcomes. This study contributes to the growing research on the dimensions of brand equity and helps managers to understand their competitors to increase the degree of loyalty. Dimensions of brand equity are important to the extent perceived by managers and its effectiveness creates new opportunities in the market. Third, this study is beneficial to brand managers as it allows them to understand consumers' perception about the brand. Moreover, managers can develop strategies oriented to brand loyalty with an effective customer relationship management to improve the relationship with consumers. Loyal consumers are more likely to spread positive words about the brand and positive recommendations to others. This study fills a gap of the unexplored area of literature surrounding dimensions of brand equity and outcomes of brand loyalty from Pakistan.

### **Limitations**

This study has several limitations. First, research is conducted among 200 consumers from two cities in Pakistan, Lahore and Islamabad, and is limited to the fashion clothing brand; which infers the sample used is very narrow to generalize the whole population in Pakistan. Future research is counted desirable to increase the sample size to improve the generalizability issue. Second, the study is carried out on a convenience sample of young consumers, whereas the probability sampling technique ensures more precision. Third, the findings of this research depend largely on the honesty of the respondents to provide answers to the questionnaire that covered perceived quality, brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived value, and brand uniqueness. Future research should consider more dimensions of brand equity. Finally, this study selected national brands, which have more stores around Lahore. Further research would be recommended to compare the results with an international brand.

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