

Customer Engagement through Love and Trust: Building Brand Equity in the Retail Industry

Sana Javed*

Kinnaird College for Women,
Lahore, Pakistan
Javed.sana0324@gmail.com

*Corresponding author

Dr. Usamah Iyyaz Billah

Kinnaird College for Women,
Lahore, Pakistan

usamahbillah@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

This research study examines retailer brand equity on the basis of customer brand engagement with the mediating effect of brand love and brand trust. The main objective of this study is to find how customer's engagement, interaction and trust lead to an increased Retailers Brand Equity.

The study has been conducted using a consumer lens whereby it also gives recommendations as to how a brand can control and utilize its customer brand engagement to develop superior customer intimacy and build long term brand equity. This research also exhibits how brand trust acts as a mediator to build strong relationships between the retailer and customer. One of the major aims of this study is to enrich the literature regarding the study variables and developing a clearer picture regarding their relationship with one another. Specifically, the path through the mediating role of Brand Love is a comparatively novel one, as previous researches mainly rely on brand intimacy and loyalty.

The data was collected through questionnaires from 300 respondents, consisting of consumers of leading retail chains. Data analysis was done using Process Hayes double mediation model 4 in SPSS. The study makes a theoretical contribution by applying the attachment theory to a new avenue of behavioural research. It will help understand how the interaction between brands/retailers and their customers contribute towards their long term bonding and mutual trust. Brands can use the findings of this research to better understand the art of creating valuable relationships with their customers.

Keywords: Retailer Brand Equity; Brand Love; Brand Trust; Customer engagement; Attachment theory

INTRODUCTION

In today's world, retailers are one of the most extensively used brands however research in the field of retailer brand equity is still limited. Either the current literature is too abstract or is too basic to understand the impact of various variables on the retailer brand equity (Pappu & Quester, 2006; Anselmsson et al., 2017).

Mostly studies analyze the impact of retailer brand equity's dimensions on Customer satisfaction and customer Loyalty while some deal with the conceptualization, measurement and scale validation of retailer brand equity. Some studies mainly focus on the improvement in retailer brand equity over the years. There are fewer studies conducted to study the antecedents of retailer brand equity (Sürücü et al., 2019). Retailer brand equity not only affects retail performance and retail management but it also positively influences consumer behavior, that is why investigating retailer brand equity is very valuable (Moliner-Velázquez et al., 2019; Troiville et al., 2019). Strategic research in retailing field needs to update frequently to enable retailers to deal with the competing environment and come up with

the up to date methods and differentiating strategies to deal with the increasing demand. The significance of studying retailer brand equity can be observed from the fact that retailing is a significant economic activity. (Anselmsson et al., 2017) argues that existing literature is deficient from the aspect that rather than exploring consumers' actions, feelings and actions it focuses on the outcomes of the retailer brand equity dimensions on loyalty or considering building brand a two-step process, of its dimensions leading to customer loyalty.

Even the variable, brand love has gained least attention of researchers in the Marketing field. Previous studies have barely focused on the antecedent and consequences of Brand love. The need is to study the antecedents of retailer brand equity, along with the mediating role of Brand love. In response to the above stated limitations in the literature, this work investigates the impact of customer brand engagement on retailer brand equity, along with the moderating impact of trust, and further examines the mediating role of brand love. Both of these variables are barely related to retailer brand equity in the literature. The aim of this work is to examine the retailer brand equity and to build a retailer specific measurement model. Hence, it analyzes the antecedents of retailer brand equity through recognizing retailers as 'proper brands'.

In summary, this research article aims to expand on the existing studies on retailer brand equity on the basis of three variables: customer brand engagement, Brand trust and Brand love. These are challenging concepts which need to be addressed.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

RETAILER BRAND EQUITY

In recent years, the emerging concept of retailer brand equity has gained the center of attention in Marketing literature. "Retailer equity", "store equity", "customer based brand equity", "customer based store equity", "store value" are some different terms used for retailer brand equity in the literature. The concept retailer brand equity has been derived from the the concept of 'brand equity'. While brand equity focuses on the product and services, retailer brand equity focuses on improving the equity linked to its brand, to gain desired consequences. There is an ongoing debate in retailing literature about retailer brand equity and brand equity; brand equity focuses on the product whereas, retailer brand equity focuses on added value by the retailer to the product. Yoo & Donthu (2001) mention that retailer equity is conceptually similar to brand equity.

Definition of retailer brand equity in the literature is: "Incremental utility or value added to a retailer by its brand name" (Wu & Tian, 2008). It is defined from a customer perspective as "a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service" (Aaker, 1991). Literature agrees that retailer brand equity is multidimensional, different authors' conflict with the number of dimensions of retailer brand equity. While loyalty and awareness are the dimensions of retailer brand equity (Gil et al., 2013), awareness, brand image and quality are the three dimensions of retailer brand equity (Sürücü et al., 2019). Other researches spot similar dimensions; Brand awareness, Brand love, perceived quality (Algharabat et al., 2019). It is revealed from most of the studies that image and awareness are the most important general dimensions of retailer brand equity.

ATTACHMENT THEORY

The theory used to explain the framework is Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1979). Attachment theory depicts the tendency of individuals to form strong bonds with objects and suggests that the nature of an individual's attachment with an object influences the individual's interaction with that object (Bowlby, 1969, 1979). Since long, Marketing researchers have applied the principal of attachment theory in the Marketing and branding field to explore and highlight the development, maintenance and end result of customers' attachment with the brands. Applying the tenets of attachment theory, marketing scholars have investigated the formation, maintenance, and consequences of consumers' attachment with the brands (e.g., Thomson et al., 2005; Park et al., 2010).

Two main factors studied in this article about Attachment theory are: emotional bond and trust formation. Firstly, customers' engagement with a brand, influences the attachment of the customer with its brand. In fact, authors has found that customers expect brands to acknowledge and respond to their attachment preference and that brands that understand, identify, and respond to customers' attachment desire are more victorious in customer accession and retention than others (Mende et al., 2013). Moreover, Fedorikhin et al. (2008) describe attachment as an emotional connection between an individual and an object, which influences emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses toward that object. Strong brand attachment relationships are seen when consumers positively engage themselves with a brand. Secondly, when brands respond quickly and consistently, customers understand that they can depend on the brand, which is essential in formation of attachment, hence trust is developed.

Customer Brand Engagement

Customer brand engagement is defined as "Consumer's positively valence cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity during or related to focal consumer-brand interactions" (Hollebeek et al., 2014). In simple words, customer brand engagement is a creation of emotional and meaningful connection between company and customers. Other terms used for customer brand engagement are "brand engagement", "customer engagement behavior", "online engagement", "brand community engagement", "consumer brand engagement", "brand engagement in self-concept", "Consumer engagement" or "engagement". A study conducted by (Gwin, 2009) investigated the effect of relationship marketing in B-to-C context by first talking on how Brand relationship quality and trust effect retailer brand equity. It tested the dimensions of Brand Relationship Quality (Fournier 1994, 1998), and according to past studies, higher levels of these dimensions cause higher quality relations between the brand and its consumers which leads to trust.

Swaminathan et al., (2007) carried out a research in which they examined the role of brand country-of-origin connection and self-concept connection in a unifying conceptual framework that allowed the examination of how and when these customer brand engagement dimensions are more salient or relevant in influencing the evaluations of brands. Veloutsou (2015) study attempted to examine the role of trust, engagement and satisfaction of brand and consumer relationship, in the formation of brand equity. This lays foundation to our first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive relationship between customer brand engagement and retailer brand equity.

Brand Love

Brand love is defined as "brand love is an emotional and passionate relationship between a consumer and a brand. It is 'experienced by some, but not all satisfied consumers" (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). In simple words, it is the long-lasting, deep affection of the customer for a particular brand. This concept is significant because it leads to positive outcomes on the customer-brand relationship. There are still fewer studies on antecedents of Brand love; which causes a love relationship between a brand and customers. A study reveals that brand characteristics, and brand quality leads to Brand love. The basic outcome of Brand love are: Brand love, customer satisfaction and brand equity (Batra et al., 2012; Albert & Merunka, 2013). Brand love includes positive feelings, evaluation, and positive behaviors towards a brand. In short, Brand love is a response of some satisfied consumers. Brand love is a new emerging construct in branding literature (Slaton et al., 2020; Roy et al., 2012).

Due to the lack of research in this field, the construct lacks in terms of conceptualization and measurement scales. In literature, other terms used for Brand love are: 'positive evaluation', 'love for the brand', 'brand attachment' and 'passion'. Customers experience Brand love due to their positive past experiences with the brand; this feeling surpass the 'attachment' level. Various outcome of brand love discussed in literature are: WOM, Brand love, customer satisfaction and Brand equity (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Literature focusing the predictors of Brand love are very few (Hwang & Kandampully, 2012).

Vernuccio et al., (2015) stated that “At the core of all strong brand relationships was a rich affective grounding reminiscent of concepts of love in the interpersonal domain”. It is stated in previous studies that love and passion are the core components of building long term brand relationships;

Wang et al. (2019) carried out an extensive research according to which, the ideal self-sub-brand congruence improved two antecedents of love; brand passion and brand intimacy. This review leads us to our second and third hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2: There is a positive relationship between Customer Brand Engagement and Brand Love.

Hypothesis 3: There is a positive relationship between Brand Love and Retailer brand equity.

Brand Trust

According to its definition, Brand trust is a confidence and willing to rely on the brand (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Brand trust is built through positive past experiences with the brand. Over the time, brands gain trust of their customers through the positive interaction and engagement.

The trust summarizes positive interaction with the company. The quality of the relationship is made up of satisfaction, trust and commitment, in terms of the consumer (Sahin et al., 2012). The positive feeling of the company by customers is actually the trust formed. The brand enjoys positive consequences, after gaining the trust of the customers. Customer satisfaction and loyalty are the end results of this variable. Rather (2019) carried out a research based on the perspectives of relationship marketing and the social exchange theory, which explored the effects of consumer engagement on consumer loyalty, trust, satisfaction and commitment, pertaining to the hospitality industry. This study aimed at investigating consumer engagement with other marketing constructs that are considered as higher-order, in the case of countries like India, that are non-Western. Findings highlighted the importance of consumer engagement especially when it comes to the building of relationships with consumers (Rather & Sharma, 2017).

In today's world, consumers search for and trust the contents of information online. Past studies have also revealed the influence of social media on word of mouth, i.e., WOM (Stojanovic et al., 2018; Ismail, 2017). Wisnalmawati (2019) concluded that consumer behaviour must be understood by online stores as consumers will carry out positive WOM only when online brands have a good name and reputation and are well-known on social media. Trust is an evaluation that the customer usually formed after consuming the product. The main ingredient to form beneficial relationship is to maintain the trust of the potentials (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2005). This leads to our fifth and sixth hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5: There is a positive relationship between Customer Brand Engagement and Brand Trust.

Hypothesis 6: There is a positive relationship between Brand Trust and Retailer brand equity.

Mediating Role of Brand Love

Previous research has revealed that Brand love enhances the relation between consumers and the brand. It is revealed that Brand love significantly influences the customer response of the brand. Recent studies reveal that it depends on how the customers engage with the brand, if the customers are having positive past experiences then it will positively influence brand loyalty. A recent study tested a model where the mediating role of brand loyalty relationship between brand love and positive WOM has been studied. The study highlighted how brand experience leads to brand love and further, Brand love leads to positive word-of-mouth. The study supported the hypothesis; and suggests that marketers should focus more on customer retention rather than customer acquisition (Bıçakcıoğlu et al., 2016). Previous studies investigate the relation of Brand love on retailer brand equity and it is found that both

have positive relationship and Brand love significantly and positively influence retailer brand equity. The Brand love is the main antecedent of retailer brand equity (Machado et al., 2019). Hence, we assume that Brand love positively influence retailer brand equity.

Zhou et al., (2020) investigate the influence of sports celebrities' brand on global brand equity and consumer's brand love. The findings revealed that trust acts as a mediator in a relationship between expertise and brand love. Whereas, product quality has a partial mediating effect on a relationship. The results show that the accurate use of sports celebrities' leads to formation of global brand equity and accelerates consumers' brand love. Machado et al., (2019) conducted a study, examining the relation between brand gender and retailer brand equity, whereas mediating role of brand love and Customer brand engagement was examined. As Brand love is a component of brand equity and one of the consequence of Brand love we assume that Brand love positively influence retailer brand equity (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Loureiro et al., 2012; Machado et al., 2019). Hence, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 4: The Brand Love mediates the relationship between the Customer Brand Engagement and the Retailer brand equity.

Mediating Role of Brand Trust

Rotter (1967) defines trust as 'the expectancy held by an individual or a group that the word, promise, verbal or written statement of another individual or group can be relied upon'. From a marketing perspective, trust can be regarded as an individual's belief, confidence or expectation regarding another individual's honesty, stemming from his/her expertise, trustworthiness, and intentionality about a change (Moorman et al., 1993). According to the definition of the trust in literature, when the service provider honestly offers a good product, consumers' trust is gained by seller. After that, the trust and confidence level (of customer) for the seller raises with every transaction made between both parties. Thus, trust is one of the main ingredients to form brand equity. Trust has two main affective elements: honesty and goodness. Trust is just like a snowballing process in measuring the consumption patterns of the customer. Consumer Trust is gained when the customer experience the benefits after purchasing goods or services (Laroche et al., 2012).

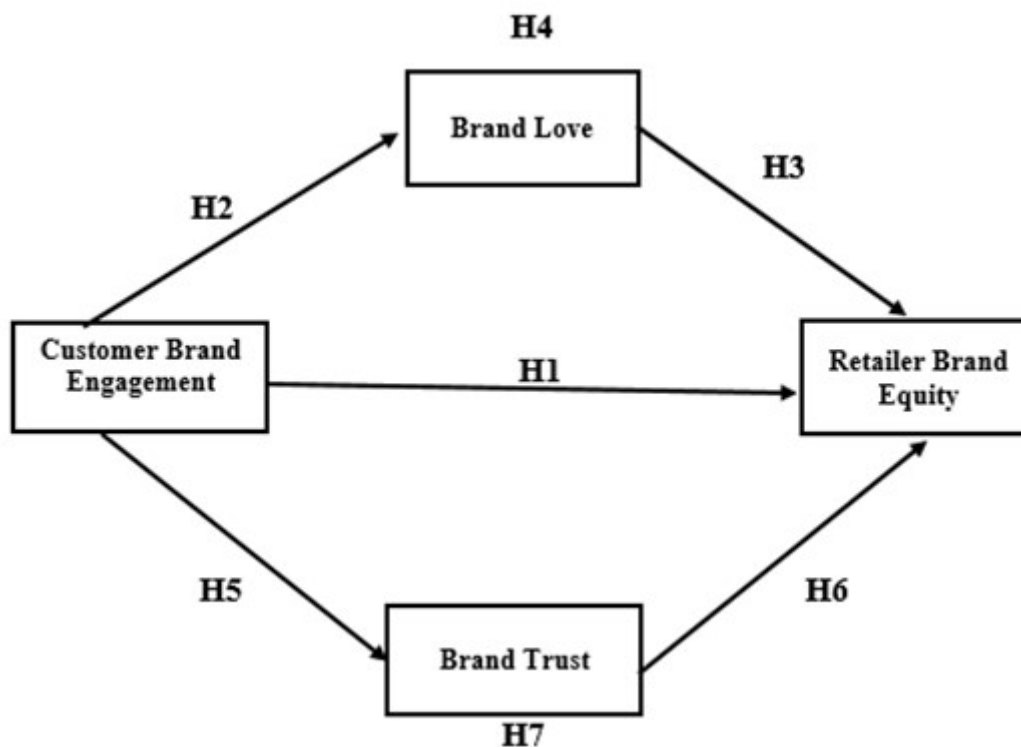
Trust has been studied in Marketing, science and other literature for many years. For the formation of social and Marketing relationships, trust is a vital ingredient. Trust has been defined as the confidence that relationship partners have in the reliability and integrity of each other (Morgan and Hunt 1994). Similarly, authors state trust as a faith that partners have in the credibility and assurance of each other.

Thus, we assume that the customers who perceive higher trust are more likely to enhance their brand engagement, loyalty and as a result retailer brand equity promotes. We therefore hypothesize:

Hypothesis 7: Trust mediates the relationship between Customer Brand Engagement and Retailer brand equity.

In light of the above literature review, the following theoretical framework is devised:

FIGURE 1:
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK



RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODOLOGY

Quantitative approach was employed in this research due to the use of empirical approach for the testing of the study's hypothesis model. In order to collect data from the consumers, survey questionnaires were employed, with items adopted from various credible researches. Responses were recorded anonymously to ensure the confidentiality of respondents. Half of the questionnaires were distributed by hand and half were filled online using google forms. Cross-sectional data was collected for this study; which means that it was collected in a single one moment in time. A sample of 300 respondents, consisting of consumers of leading retail chains were selected for the present research. The sample of our study were the retail consumers of more than 18 years, comprising of both male and female respondents. Female respondents were 52% as number of female consumers in the retail stores was larger as compared to males. The sample size was determined by principles set by the item response theory (Nunnally, 1978). The study setting was natural, conducted in a non-contrived setting of consumers to avoid any bias or manipulation.

Following is an overview of the sources of items:

TABLE 1:
ITEM SOURCES

| Variables | Number of items | Scale | Source |
|---------------------------|-----------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Retailer brand equity | 4 | 5 point Likert scale | Yoo & Donthu, 2001 |
| Customer brand engagement | 5 | 5 point Likert scale | Dwivedi, 2015 |
| Brand love | 6 | 5 point Likert scale | Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006 |
| Brand trust | 5 | 5 point Likert scale | Morgan & Hunt, 1994; |
| Total number of items | 20 | | |

SPSS was used to analyze the data. To examine the effect of independent variable (customer brand engagement) on dependent variable (retailer brand equity) and mediating role of trust and Brand love: correlational analysis, reliability tests, Pearson correlations, multiple regression was performed.

RESULTS

RELIABILITY ANALYSIS

Reliability analysis was carried out on the collected data, to compute and judge the internal consistency of variables. Table 2 depicts the reliability data:

**TABLE 2:
RELIABILITY OF DATA**

| Variable | Items | Alpha |
|---------------------------|-------|-------|
| Customer brand engagement | 5 | .90 |
| Brand love | 6 | .92 |
| Brand trust | 5 | .69 |
| Retailer Brand Equity | 4 | .82 |

Interpretation:

The table above portrays that all four variables; Consumer Brand Engagement, Brand Love, Brand Trust and Retailer brand equity have Chronbach's Alpha values above 0.69, hence, all variables are reliable.

Correlation Analysis

The Correlation Matrix (table 3) is given as follows:

**TABLE 3:
CORRELATION MATRIX**

| Variable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|-----------------------------|--------|--------|--------|---|
| 1 Customer Brand Engagement | 1 | | | |
| 2 Brand Love | .770** | 1 | | |
| 3 BrandTrust | .617** | .593** | 1 | |
| 4 Retailer Brand Equity | .784** | .787** | .594** | 1 |

Notes: * $P < 0.05$; ** $P < 0.01$

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Interpretation:

The results of the correlation analysis are indicating the presence of a strong positive correlation between Customer brand engagement and Brand love ($r=0.770$, $p<0.05$) which indicates Brand Love will increase when Customer Brand Engagement increases. The correlation between Customer Brand Engagement and Brand Trust is moderate positive ($r=0.617$, $p<0.05$), which indicates Brand Trust will increase when Customer Brand Engagement increases. There is a strong positive correlation between Customer Brand Engagement and Retailer brand equity ($r=0.784$, $p<0.05$), which shows Retailer Brand Engagement will increase when Customer Brand Engagement increases. The correlation

between Brand Love and Brand Trust is moderate and positive ($r=0.593$, $p<0.05$), which indicates when Brand love increases then Brand Trust will also increase. The correlation between Brand Love and Retailer brand equity is strong and positive ($r=0.787$, $p<0.05$) which shows that when Brand Love increases, then Retailer brand equity also increases. The correlation between Brand Trust and Retailer brand equity is moderate and positive ($r=0.594$, $p<0.05$) which shows that when Brand Trust increases then Retailer brand equity also increases.

Regression Analysis of Hypotheses Statements

In line with the proposed hypothesis of the study, Regression analysis is carried out. Model 4 of Process (Preacher & Hayes, 2005) has been utilized as there is double mediation in this study. The bootstrap level has been kept at 1000 and the confidence interval is 90%.

Following are the results:

Direct effect of X on Y (Hypothesis 1)

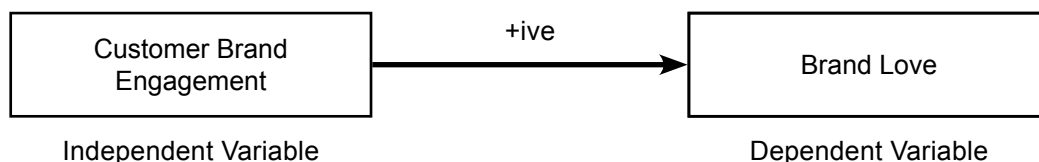
P-value is $0<0.05$ shows there is a significant relation between both variables. The results show an interaction value of ULCI (0.503) and LLCI (0.298), and since both values are positive, which shows there is a positive relation between both variables. Furthermore, the coefficient value (0.40) indicates that, if there is one percent increase in Customer Brand Equity then there is 40% increase in Retailer brand equity, keeping all the other variables constant.



Hypothesis 2

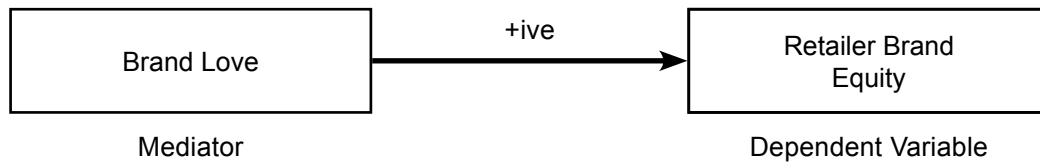
P-value is $0<0.05$ indicate there is a significant relation between both variables. 'R' is the correlation coefficient, which shows the correlation between variables which is 0.77, which indicates there is a strong correlation between Customer Brand Engagement and Brand Love. The value of f ($F=331.033$) shows that the model is good fitted.

Hypothesis 2 (Customer Brand Engagement is positively related to Brand Love) is supported, as the values of ULCI (0.906) and LLCI (.729) are positive. Hence, the positive values indicates there is positive relation between the variables. Moreover, the coefficient value is 0.818, which shows if there is one percent increase in customer brand engagement then there is 81.8% increase in Brand love, keeping all the other variable constant.



Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 (Brand Love is positively related to Retailer brand equity) is supported, (P-value is $0 < 0.05$) shows there is a significant relationship between Brand Love and Retailer brand equity and the results showing an interaction value of ULCI (0.106) and LLCI (.529). Hence, the positive values indicates there is positive relation between both variables. Moreover, the coefficient value= 0.718, which shows if there is one percent increase in Brand love then there is 71.8% increase in retailer brand equity, keeping all the other variables constant.



Indirect effect of X on Y (Hypothesis 4)

The values of Boot UCLI (0.417) and Boot LLCI (0.225) indicate that the indirect influence of customer Brand Engagement (X) on Retailer brand equity (Y) through the mediation of Brand Love is positive as both values are positive. The P-value is $0 < 0.05$ which shows that the variables have significant relation with each other. The value of R shows that the correlation between Retailer brand equity, customer brand engagement and Brand love) is 83.5%. The value of R square is 0.698, which shows that there is 69.8% variation in Retailer brand equity due to interaction with customer brand engagement and Brand love. The Beta value of customer brand engagement (0.4) and Brand love (0.387) shows the variation in retailer brand equity due to one unit increase in customer brand engagement and Brand love. It is shown from the results that the f-test has a positive result (262.211). However, the p-value is less than alpha ($0.000 < 0.05$). Thus, it can be concluded that the *model is a good fit*.

This result supports and proves the 4th hypothesis of the study, according to which, Brand Love mediates the relationship between Customer Brand Engagement and Retailer brand equity.



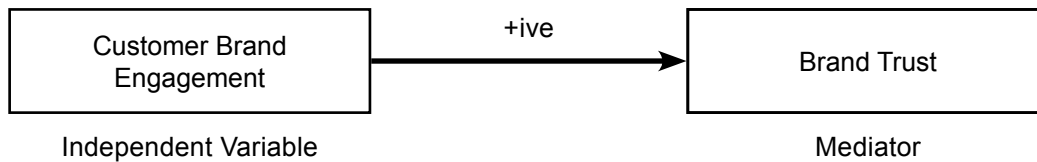
Direct effect of customer brand engagement on retailer brand equity (Hypothesis 1)

The P-value is $0 < 0.05$ shows there is a significant relation between variables. The results show an interaction value of ULCI (0.709) and LLCI (0.525), and since both values are positive, the positive relation exists between them. Furthermore, the coefficient value is 0.617, which shows if there is one percent increase in customer brand engagement then there is 61.7% increase in retailer brand equity, keeping all the other independent variable constant.

Hypothesis 5

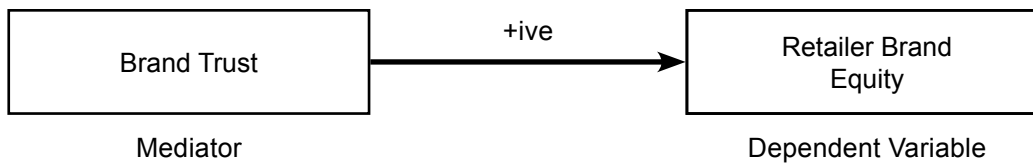
The p-value is (0) is less than alpha (0.05), which shows that both variables have significant relation. 'R' is the correlation coefficient, which shows the correlation between the variables. Here, 'R' is 61.7% which shows there is moderate, positive correlation between Customer Brand Engagement and Brand Trust. The value of R square is 38.1%. The coefficient value is 0.487, which shows if there is one percent increase in customer brand engagement then there is 48.7% increase in Brand trust, keeping all the other variable constant. The value of f (F=140.122) shows that the model is good fitted.

Hypothesis 5 (Customer Brand Engagement is positively related to Brand Trust) is supported, with results showing an interaction value of ULCI (0.568) and LLCI (0.406). Hence, the positive values support the hypothesis.



Hypothesis 6

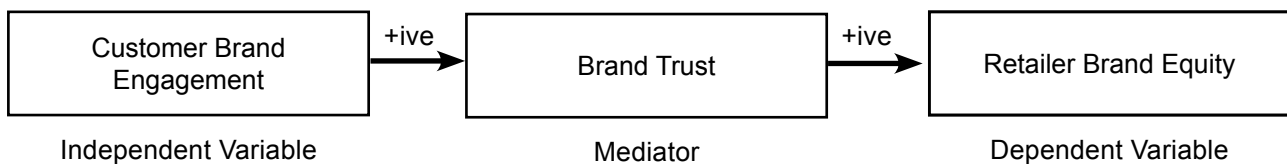
P-value is $0 < 0.05$ shows a significant relationship between Brand Trust and Retailer brand equity. The results show an interaction value of ULCI (1.9) and LLCI (1.3), and since both values are positive, the hypothesis is supported. Furthermore, the coefficient value is 0.617 which shows if there is one percent increase in BT then there is 61.7% increase in retailer brand equity, keeping all the other variable constant.



Hypothesis 7

The values of Boot UCLI (.044) and Boot LLCI (0.159) indicate the indirect influence of Customer Brand Engagement (X) on Retailer brand equity (Y) through the mediation of Brand Trust is positive and significant as both values are positive. 'R' shows the correlation between the dependent variable and the independent variables. Here 'R' is 0.797 which shows the correlation between retailer brand equity, customer brand engagement and BT is strong and positive. The value of R square is 0.635%, which shows that there is 63.5% variation in Retailer brand equity due to interaction with customer brand engagement and Brand trust. It is shown from the results that the f-test has a positive result (197.228). However, the p-value is less than alpha ($0.000 < 0.05$). Thus, it can be concluded that the *model is a good fit*. The P-value is $0 < 0.05$, which shows there is a significant relation between variables.

This result supports and proves the 7th hypothesis of the study, according to which, Brand Trust mediates the relationship between Customer Brand Engagement and Retailer brand equity.



Summary of Hypothesis Results

A summary of supported hypothesis is given in the table below:

**TABLE 4:
HYPOTHESIS RESULTS**

| | Hypothesis Statement | Results |
|----|--|-----------|
| H1 | There is a positive relationship between Customer Brand Engagement and Retailer Brand Equity | Supported |
| H2 | There is a positive relationship between Customer Brand Engagement and Brand Love | Supported |
| H3 | There is a positive relationship between Brand Love and Retailer Brand Equity | Supported |
| H4 | The Brand Love mediates the relationship between the Customer Brand Engagement and the Retailer Brand Equity | Supported |
| H5 | There is a positive relationship between Customer Brand Engagement and Brand Trust | Supported |
| H6 | There is a positive relationship between Brand Trust and Retailer Brand Equity | Supported |
| H7 | Trust mediates the relationship between Customer Brand Engagement and the Retailer Brand Equity | Supported |

DISCUSSION

The first and foremost purpose of this research is to test the framework that has been proposed by this study. This framework has been developed with the help of previously existing literature, developed by researchers that help in demonstrating possible links between the study's variables; Customer Brand Engagement, Brand Love, Brand Trust and Retailer brand equity. In this research study, the bond between Customer Brand Engagement was studied with two mediators; Brand Love and Brand Trust. Then, the relationship of the two mediators with Retailer brand equity was investigated between the dependent and independent variables. In order to empirically examine and analyze these relationships, survey questionnaires were employed to gather data from respondents, consisting of consumers of the brand. The results of the analysis turned out to be supportive of the claims made by this study.

The first hypothesis of the study "There is a significant relationship between Consumer Brand Engagement and Retailer brand equity" was supported by the data analysis. The regression analysis conducted on the data established a significant and positive relationship between the two variables. The correlation between the two variables was deduced to be strong positive, which proves that when Customer Brand Engagement increases between brands and consumers, Retailer brand equity between them will increase as well. The customers interact with the brand through different channels, like; social media, store outlets and other digital and non-digital platforms. Through the social media Consumer Engagement, brands are not only able to interact with their consumers, but it also increases the strength and quality of the relationship they have with their consumers. Both Customer Brand Engagement and Retailer brand equity were proved to be reliable variables through reliability analysis. Former research has proved that engagement between customers and brands establishes intimate bonds between them which prove to induce lasting relational exchanges between the two parties (Pralhad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

The second hypothesis of the study "There is a significant relationship between Consumer Brand Engagement and Brand Love" was supported by the data analysis. The regression analysis conducted on the collected data established a significant and positive relationship between the two variables. The correlation between the two variables was deduced to be strong positive, which proves that when Customer Brand Engagement increases, Brand Love will also increase. This means that when brands encourage engagement with its consumers, it will also increase Brand Love between them and their consumers. Now a days, engagement on social media sites, brand love is enabled, where consumers can have a direct communication with the brands and get the sense of closely knowing the brand (Stever & Lawson, 2013).

The third hypothesis of the study “There is a significant relationship between Brand Love and Retailer Brand Equity” was supported by the data analysis. The regression analysis conducted on the collected data established a significant and positive relationship between the two variables. The correlation between the two variables was deduced to be strong positive, which proves that when Brand Love increases, Retailer brand equity will also increase (Stever & Lawson, 2013).

The fourth hypothesis of the study “Brand Love mediates the relationship between the Customer Brand Engagement and the Retailer brand equity.” was supported by the data analysis. The regression analysis conducted on the collected data established Brand Love to play a significant and positive role of mediation between Consumer Brand Engagement and Retailer brand equity. All three variables proved to be reliable through reliability analysis. It shows that Brand Love between brands and consumers does explain the relationship between Consumer Brand Engagement and Retailer brand equity generated by consumers. Engagement on social media between the brand and its customers leads to quality relationships between them. This changes the traditional roles of brands and customers, where customers also add value due to content generation and become passionate advocates for the brand and have the ability to have an influence on other individuals’ purchase decisions. (Sashi, 2012).

The fifth hypothesis of the study “There is a significant relationship between Customer Brand Engagement and Brand Trust” was supported by the data analysis. The regression analysis conducted on the data established a positive and significant relationship between the two variables. The correlation between the two variables was deduced to be moderate positive, which proves that when positive Customer Brand Engagement between consumers and brands increases, the Brand Trust generated by consumers increases as well. Brand Trust has been found, through empirical findings, to be able to make consumers reluctant to switch brands, increase their intentions to repurchase, make them share their information with the brands and carry out WOM behaviors (Giovanis, 2016).

The sixth hypothesis of the study “There is a significant relationship between Brand Trust and Retailer Brand Equity” was supported by the data analysis. The regression analysis conducted on the data established a positive and significant relationship between the two variables. The correlation between the two variables was deduced to be moderate positive, which proves that when positive Brand Trust for brands increases, the Retailer brand equity is generated by consumers increases as well. Brand Trust has been found, through empirical findings, to be able to make consumers reluctant to switch brands, increase their intentions to repurchase, make them share their information with the brands and carry out WOM behaviors (Giovanis, 2016).

The seventh hypothesis of the study “Trust mediates the relationship between Customer Brand Engagement and the retailer brand equity” was supported by the data analysis. The regression analysis conducted on the collected data established Brand Trust to play a significant and positive role of mediation between Customer Brand Engagement and Retailer brand equity. It shows that Brand Trust does explain the relationship between Customer Brand Engagement between brands and consumers and equity generated by them. Attachment and commitment, that is caused by intimacy can be crucial and extremely beneficial for the brand in countless ways, also generating brand loyalty and making the customers advocates for the brand (Turri et al., 2013).

IMPLICATIONS

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The present study will firstly contribute towards important insights of researchers regarding the variables and their relationships being studied. It will also make contributions towards existing literature of the study variables. The research has tried to investigate and give thorough explanations to ensure an effective understanding is developed.

The current study proved the mediating roles played by Brand Love and Brand Trust, between Consumer Brand Engagement and Retailer brand equity. While there were some important studies that have studied Brand Love mediation roles with Customer Brand engagement as the dependent variable (Keiningham et al., 2018). On the other hand, Brand Trust was rarely connected with Brand equity and mostly, other variables like Loyalty were used more

popularly to study Brand equity. Brands that are completely different from a consumer will not be one the consumer engages with. Bonds are also always developed on some form of similarity and as the similarities increase, so does the strength of the bond. Feelings like Intimacy or Loyalty are also developed with brands that are similar to one's own identity.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study provides useful insights to the retail store managers, to retain customers by encouraging customer engagement. Managers needs to find new ways to create positive and comfortable integration with the customers, by creating experiences that aids in building strong and beneficial bonds between the customers and retail store. Managers can do so, by customizing the store features, based on the emotional preferences of the customers, which ultimately helps in creating connections with the customers. Various engagement strategies should be implemented to assure that customers are actively communicating with the retail store. These strategies are successful to interact young adults and millennials.

The current research will help managers of brands to recognize how these relationship mechanisms work. The findings from this study will help them transform their marketing and marketing related strategies so as to achieve the attraction of their target consumers and have interactions with them, so as to develop a strong and elevated Brand Engagement with them, along with feelings of Intimacy. These two, if developed efficiently, will then lead to the path of the initiation and generation of Brand Equity about the products or services of the brand and even the brand itself. This will also act as a value generation from the consumers of the products or services, as Brand Equity is known as one of the most effective ways of getting other people to retain customers. At the first level, managers should have a recognition of the fact that Retailer's Brand Equity is a construct that is multidimensional in nature, which has broad channels of communication, strengths etc. (Sutter, 2015; Jankowski, 2013). Grauer (2014) has argued that if consumers are kept extremely satisfied, this will act as an encouragement for them to spread word-of-mouth. Managers have this sort of thinking generally instilled in them and hence focus on customer satisfaction.

The current study is also somewhat based on similar phenomena, as if the consumer engagement process is not satisfactory for consumers, no bonds of feelings of intimacy will be formed in them for the brand and hence, Brand Equity. Where mostly customer satisfaction is used to measure consumer perceptions of their encounter with the brand (Aksoy, 2013), the current study has made use of Brand Trust and Brand Love as gauges of consumers' perceptions, which not only enhances their current knowledge and understanding on these variables, but also gives them new sources of measurement. The present research asserts this notion by showing the importance of sparking Intimacy and higher Brand Trust to encourage consumers to produce Brand Equity about the brand. Failure to do so can either lead to no Word-of-mouth or a negative one. According to Gustafsson et al., (2005) demonstration of reciprocity and involvement with a company can nurture affective commitment.

LIMITATIONS

The current study has a cross-sectional time frame, which means that the data was collected at a single moment in time. Along with the chances of common method bias being present, the chances of the responses being changed over time is also possible.

The data was collected during covid-19 pandemic, hence results may vary in more normalized conditions.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Huang et al. (2017) found that the customers feel shy to engage in a crowded retail store, thus they tend to engage through social media with the retail brand. This is also very interesting and can be a new subject for the new researchers. Future research can examine how shyness in a retail store, especially during peak shopping hours, influence customer engagement. Furthermore, future studies should investigate various different variables impact

on retail equity i.e., store unattractiveness, word of mouth, store attachment, store affect and store location. Future studies can also investigate the various outcomes of customer engagement i.e., shopper behavior, customer attitude.

Since Retailer brand equity is diverse concept, future research could study it in more depth and investigate other and more novel variables, like characteristics of consumers, that can act as mediators between these two, like

Future studies couple also employ longitudinal studies to carry out their research in a more evaluative way.

CONCLUSION

This research was aimed at giving conclusive knowledge regarding the dynamics around how Customer Brand Engagement with brands affects Retailer brand equity produced by consumers, through the mediation of Brand Love and Brand Trust, attachment theory was studied and incorporated to study the given framework. The data collected from consumers of the brand, through survey questionnaires, helped in showing and explaining the roles that the variables played.

The study explained how Brand Love and Brand Trust play mediating roles between Customer Brand Engagement (Independent variable) and Retailer Brand equity (Dependent variable). It explained how, Customer Brand Engagement, if increased by retailer brands, will cause an increase in the Brand love and Brand Trust that consumers have, which in turn will increase Retailers brand equity that consumers generate about the retailer brand. When consumers interact with a retailer regularly, they will develop bonds with the brand along with development of feelings of intimacy that they feel towards the retailer brand. The higher the quality and strength of bond and feelings of intimacy in the eyes of the consumers, the more he/she is likely to become advocates for the retailer by producing and carrying out Word-of-mouth and equity regarding the retailer brand itself or its products. A consumer is very unlikely to go around giving Word-of-mouth about a brand it has never interacted with much. When there hasn't been adequate engagement between the consumer and a retailer brand, there will be an absence of bond or any type of feelings towards the retailer brand. The sense of having a bond with a brand and feelings of intimacy is what acts as motivation and stimulus for consumers to carry out equity for the brand.

This current study has been able to clearly define and explain the variables and their relationships with each other and how the independent variable and the mediators effect the dependent variable. Numerous prior studies have been used to explain these relationships, with many prior findings supporting the current study's proposed hypothesis. The current study not only widened the research on these relationships, but it also enhanced the research by adding in Brand love, which is a variable that has stayed under the shadows of Brand Intimacy and had not received much attention from the researchers. This lead to the existence of novelty to some extent. The study demonstrated how increasing Customer brand Engagement can cause an increase in Brand Love and Brand trust that consumers have, which in turn increases the production of retailer equity by consumers about that particular retailer or its products and services. Hence the current study recognizes that to cause or increase retailer equity about them, brands are supposed to increase their Brand love and Brand trust through higher Customer Engagement.

Thus results supported the two main factors of Attachment theory: emotional bond and trust formation, and the impact of these two factors of store attachment on store equity. Thus the findings suggests that retailers can accelerate the retailers equity through delivering positive customer emotional experiences (Business Insider, 2017). The study concludes that the emotional bond of the customers with the brand is a strong predictor of shopper's behavior. Moreover, research found that brand engagement aids in the formation of customer satisfaction, trust and customer loyalty (Belaid & Behi, 2011).

REFERENCES

- Aaker, D. A. 1991. *Managing Brand Equity*. The Free Press, New York.
- Aksoy, L. 2013. How do you measure what you can't define? The current state of loyalty measurement and management. *Journal of Service Management*, 24(4), 356-381.
- Albert, N., & Merunka, D. 2013. The role of brand love in consumer-brand relationships. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 30(3), 258-266.
- Algharabat, R., Rana, N. P., Alalwan, A. A., Baabdullah, A., & Gupta, A. 2019. Investigating the antecedents of customer brand engagement and consumer based brand equity in social media. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 53.
- Anselmsson, J., Burt, S., & Tunca, B. 2017. An integrated retailer image and brand equity framework: re-examining, extending, and restructuring retailer brand equity. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 38, 194-203.
- Batra, R., Ahuvia, A., & Bagozzi, R. P. 2012. *Brand Love*. *Journal of Marketing*, 76(2), 1-16.
- Belaid, S., & Temessek, B. A., 2011. The role of attachment in building consumer-brand relationships: an empirical investigation in the utilitarian consumption context. *J. Prod. Brand Manag.*, 20(1), 37-47.
- Bowlby, J. 1969. *Attachment and loss*. (OKS Print.) New York: Basic Books.
- Bowlby, J. 1979. On knowing what you are not supposed to know and feeling what you are not supposed to feel. *Can. J. Psychiatry*, 24(5), 403-408.
- Business Insider. 2017. More than 3600 stores will close in 2018 – here's the full list. *Bus. Inside* (Available at). (<http://www.businessinsider.com/stores-closing-in-20182017-12>).
- Carroll, B. A., & Ahuvia, A. C. 2006. Some antecedents and outcomes of brand love. *Marketing Letters*, 17, 79-89.
- Delgado-Ballester, E., & Munuera-Alemán, J. L. 2005. Does brand trust matter to brand equity. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 14(3), 187-19.
- Dwivedi, A. 2015. A higher-order model of consumer brand engagement and its impact on loyalty intentions. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 24, 100-109.
- Fedorikhin, A., Park, C.W., & Thomson, M. 2008. Beyond fit and attitude: the effect of emotional attachment on consumer responses to brand extensions. *J. Consum. Psychol.*, 18(4), 281-291.
- Fournier, S. 1994. *A Consumer-Brand Relationship Framework for Strategic Brand Management*, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Florida.
- Fournier, S. 1998. Consumers and their brands: Developing relationship theory on consumer research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 24, 343-373.
- Gil-Saura, I., Ruiz-Molina, M. E., Michel, G., & Corraliza-Zapata, A. 2013. Retail brand equity: a model based on its dimensions and effects. *The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research*, 23(2), 111-136.
- Giovanis, A. 2016. Consumer-brand relationships' development in the mobile internet market: evidence from an extended relationship commitment paradigm. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 25(6), 568-585.
- Giovanis, A. N., & Athanasopoulou, P. 2018. Consumer-brand relationships and brand loyalty in technology-mediated services. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 40, 287-294.
- Grauer, Y. 2014. Three highly effective word-of-mouth marketing tactics. www.verticalresponse.com/blog/3-highly-effective-word-of-mouth-marketing-tactics/.
- Gustafsson, A., Johnson, M.D. and Roos, I. 2005, "The effects of customer satisfaction, relationship commitment dimensions, and triggers on customer retention", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 69 No. 4, pp. 210-218.
- Gwin, C. F. 2009. The impact of trust and brand relationship quality on perceived value and loyalty in a consumer goods environment. Retrieved April, 14, 2010.

- Hollebeek, L. D., & Chen, T. 2014. Exploring positively- versus negatively-valenced brand engagement: a conceptual model. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 23(1), 62-74.
- Hollebeek, L. D., Glynn, M., & Brodie, R. J. 2014. Consumer brand engagement in social media: conceptualization, scale development and validation. *Journal of Interactive Marketing* 28(2), 149-165.
- Huang, X., Huang, Z., & Wyer Jr, R.S., 2017. The influence of social crowding on brand attachment. *J. Consum. Res.* 44(5), 1068-1084.
- Hwang, J., & Kandampully, J. 2012. The role of emotional aspects in younger consumer-brand relationships. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*.
- İlter, B., Bıçakcıoğlu, N., & Yaran. I. O. 2016. How Brand Jealousy Influences the Relationship between Brand Attachment and Word of Mouth Communication. *Acta Universitatis Danubius. Communication*, 10(1).
- Ismail, A. R. 2017. The influence of perceived social media marketing activities on brand loyalty: The mediation effect of brand and value consciousness. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, 29(1), 129-144.
- Jankowski, P. 2013. 4 tactics to build your word of mouth. www.foretailerbrandequity.com/sites/pauljankowski/2013/03/13/4-tactics-to-build-your-word-of-mouth/#1e2722d72745 (accessed July 15, 2016).
- Keiningham, T. L., Rust, R. T., Lariviere, B., Aksoy, L., & Williams, L. 2018. A roadmap for driving customer word-of-mouth. *Journal of Service Management*, 29(1), 2-38.
- Laroche, M., Habibi, M. R., Richard, M. O. 2012. The effects of social media based brand communities on brand community markers, value creation practices, brand trust and brand loyalty. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 28(5), 1755-1767.
- Loureiro, S. M. C., Ruediger, K. H., & Demetris, V. 2012. Brand emotional connection and loyalty. *Journal of Brand Management*, 20(1), 13-27.
- Machado, J. C., Vacas-de-Carvalho, L., Azarc, S. L., André A. R., Santos, B. P. 2019. Brand gender and consumer-based brand equity on Facebook: the mediating role of consumer-brand engagement and brand love. *Journal of Business Research*, 96, 376-385.
- Mende, M., Bolton, R. N., & Bitner, M. J. 2013. Decoding customer–firm relationships: how attachment styles help explain customers’ preferences for closeness, repurchase intentions, and changes in relationship breadth. *J. Mark. Res.*, 50(1), 125-142.
- Moliner-Velázquez, B., Fuentes-Blasco, M. & Gil-Saura, I. 2019. Effects of value and innovation on brand equity in retailing. *Journal of Brand Management*, 26(6), 658-674.
- Moorman, C., Deshpande, R. & Zaltman, G. 1993. Factors Affecting Trust in Market Research Relationships. *Journal of Marketing*, 57, 81-101.
- Morgan, R. M., & Hunt, S. D. 1994. The commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 58(3), 20-38.
- Nunnally, J.C. 1978. *Psychometric theory*. (2nd edition). McGraw-Hill, New York.
- Pappu, R., & Quester, P. 2006. A consumer-based method for retailer equity measurement: results of an empirical study. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 13(5), 317-329.
- Pappu, R., Quester, P. G., & Cooksey, R. W. 2005. Consumer-based brand equity: improving the measurement – empirical evidence. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 14(3), 143-154.
- Park, C. W., MacInnis, D. J., Priester, J., Eisingerich, A. B., & Iacobucci, D. 2010. Brand attachment and brand attitude strength: Conceptual and empirical differentiation of two critical brand equity drivers. *J. Mark.* 74(6), 1-17.
- Prahalad, C. K., & Ramaswamy, V. 2004. Co-creation experiences: The next practice in value creation. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 18(3), 5-14.
- Rather, R. A. 2019. Consequences of consumer engagement in service marketing: An empirical exploration. *Journal of Global Marketing*, 32(2), 116-135.

- Rather, R. A., & Sharma, J. 2017. The effects of customer satisfaction and commitment on customer loyalty: Evidence from the hotel industry. *Journal Of Hospitality Application and Research*, 12(2), 41-60.
- Rotter, J. B. 1967. A new scale for the measurement of interpersonal trust. *Journal of Personality*, 35, 651-665.
- Roy, S. K., Eshghi, A., & Sarkar, A. 2012. Antecedents and consequences of brand love. *Journal of Brand Management*, 20(4), 1-8.
- Sahin, A., Zehir, C., & Kitapci, H. 2012. The effects of brand experience and service quality on repurchase intention: The role of brand relationship quality. *African Journal of Business Management*, 6(45), 11190.
- Sashi, C. M. 2012. Customer engagement, buyer-seller relationships, and social media. *Management decision*, 50(2), 253-272.
- Stever, G. S., & Lawson, K. 2013. Twitter as a way for celebrities to communicate with fans: Implications for the study of parasocial interaction. *North American journal of psychology*, 15(2).
- Stojanovic, I., Andreu, L., & Curras-Perez, R. 2018. Effects of the intensity of use of social media on brand equity. *European journal of management and business economics*.
- Sürücü, Ö., Öztürk, Y., Okumus, F., & Bilgihan, A. 2019. Brand awareness, image, physical quality and employee behavior as building blocks of customer-based brand equity: consequences in the hotel context. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 40, 114-124.
- Sutter, B. 2015, "5 ways to maximize word-of-mouth marketing", available at: www.entrepreneur.com/article/251576 (accessed July 15, 2016).
- Swaminathan, V., Page, K. L., & Gürhan-Canli, Z. 2007. My brand or our brand: The effects of brand relationship dimensions and self-construal on brand evaluations. *Journal of consumer research*, 34(2), 248-259.
- Thomson, M., MacInnis, D.J., Park, C.W. 2005. The ties that bind: measuring the strength of consumers' emotional attachments to brands. *J. Consum. Psychol.* 15(1), 77-91.
- Troiville, J., Hair, J. F., & Cliquet, G. 2019. Definition, conceptualization and measurement of consumer-based retailer brand equity. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* 50, 73-84.
- Turri, A. M., Smith, K. H., & Kemp, E. 2013. Developing affective brand commitment through social media. *Journal of Electronic Commerce Research*, 14(3).
- Veloutsou, C. 2015. Brand evaluation, satisfaction and trust as predictors of brand loyalty: the mediator-moderator effect of brand relationships. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*.
- Vernuccio, M., Pagani, M., Barbarossa, C., & Pastore, A. 2015. Antecedents of brand love in online network-based communities. A social identity perspective. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 24(7), 706-719.
- Wang, Y. C., Qu, H., & Yang, J. 2019. The formation of sub-brand love and corporate brand love in hotel brand portfolios. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 77, 375-384.
- Wisnalmawati, W., Rahadhini, M. D., Unnazir, M. F., Putra, P. A., & Hendrato, M. L. 2019. *Social Media Influence on Word of Mouth Mediated by Brand Awareness Online Retailers*. In ASEAN/Asian Academic Society International Conference Proceeding Series (pp. 32-37).
- Wu, J. F., & Tian, Z. L. 2008. The impact of selected store image dimensions on retailer equity: evidence from 10 Chinese hypermarkets. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 16(6), 486-494.
- Yoo, B., & Donthu, N. 2001. Developing and validating a multidimensional consumer-based brand equity scale. *Journal of Business Research*, 52(1), 1-14.
- Zhou, F., Mou, J., Su, Q., & Wu, Y. C. J. 2020. How does consumers' perception of sports stars' personal brand promote consumers' brand love? A mediation model of global brand equity. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 54(2).