Do Brand Experience and Customer Engagement matter for Brand love? A case of Apparel Industry of Pakistan

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ABSTRACT:

Objective: The current study investigates the impact of brand experience (BE), and customer engagement (CE) on brand love (BL) with the mediating effect of brand authenticity (BA) while brand involvement moderates the relationship between BA and BL.

Methods: The quantitative data has been gathered by applying convenience sampling using a questionnaire instrument from the apparel consumers of Karachi. The sample size has been based on 217 sample responses. Data analysis has been conducted by using PLS-SEM through SmartPLS 3.2.9.

Findings: The findings have shown that brand authenticity positively affects brand love, while experience and customer engagement have positively affected BL with the mediating role of BA. However, brand involvement has no moderating effect on BA-BLrelationship.

Implications: Managers can provide personalized services for affective and behavioral brand experiences. These tactics can help multinational brands become authentic, and businesses can get good input from customers, which adds to brand love. Similarly, managers can also develop brand recognition campaigns to promote a deeper and more long-term partnership between their products and their consumers, encouraging them to connect with them.

Keywords:

Brand Authenticity, Brand Love, Apparel Industry, Pakistan, PLS-SEM

1. INTRODUCTION

Brands have increasingly influenced consumers' lives. Consumers perceive brands as relationship partners, according to studies(Bairrada et al., 2018).Brand love is a relatively new research subject.Consumers consider loved objects to be a part of themselves and the universe in which they exist, with loved objects having a vital role in formingtheir world (Huang, 2017).Moreover, according to Manthiou et al. (2018), brand love is described as a long-term relationship between customers and products. According to a previous analysis, brand love is described as a consumer's affective attachment to a brand, which motivates them to show continual loyalty, repeated behavior against the brand, or a willingness to pay a premium for it.Furthermore, it is considered that brand love requires the most attention(Zhang et al., 2020).

Similarly, since Brakus et al. (2009) introduced the brand experience scale, the BE has gotten much attention in the branding world.The BE is a critical marketing technique that has taken on strategic significance in contemporary brand management.Marketers are now addressing obstacles and designing plans to provide customers with everlasting experiences at each touch-point(Safeer et al., 2020).Previously, in Europe, various concepts such as Brand loyalty, CE, good WOM, and customer loyalty were used to calculate the construct of BE and brand love(Ferreira et al., 2019; Rodrigues & Rodrigues, 2019). In Asia, effective engagement, brand loyalty, and behavioral intentions were used to assess brand experience and brand love(Gumparthi & Patra, 2020).As a result, it demonstrates that researchers are encouraged and inspired to investigate the various dimensions of BE and BL(Safeer et al., 2020).

Besides, the growing demand among consumers for authentic BE shows the value of BA in BL growth. As a result, authenticity has become an important subject that has attracted many academics(Rodrigues, 2018). Despite the importance of BE and authenticity in cultivating BL, there is a paucity of research on the topic(Das et al., 2019; Keiningham et al., 2019). Also, few studies exist in the Asian context, although Asian markets are an emerging and hotly debated subject(Safeer et al., 2020).Furthermore, in Asia, consumer experiences are becoming increasingly crucial for upcomingcorporateprogression(Tivasuradej & Pham, 2019). Therefore, the current study investigates the impact of brand experience, consumer perceived value, and customer engagement on brand love with the mediating effect of BA in the Pakistani context.

The introduction is included in the 1st section of the research. The literature review comprised the 2nd section, wherein the 3rd section deals with the methodology and 4th section provides the results and findings of the study. 5th section comprises discussions on the results/findings, and the 6th section of the paper provides implications and future research directions.

1. Literature review

This section deals with the theoretical linkage between variables and hypothesizing the relationship between variables based on the model framework.

Relationship between BA and BL

BA has a significant effect on BL, according to Govarchin (2019). According to the results, buyers trust that a brand's actions and attributes are actual and that the brand delivers on its promises to meet its customers' needs; thus, they become faithful to and enjoy the brand. Similarly, Mody and Hanks (2020) refer to authenticity as a core component of the BE that leads to BL and, as a result, brand evangelism. Moreover, Positive interpersonal relationships with brands and brand love can be achieved "by endowing the brand with a sense of authenticity from its roots and tradition, the vision of its owners, and its corporate culture, so that the brand-consumer feels a sense of kinship toward it" (Safeer et al., 2020).

H1. BA has a significant impact on BL.

Relationship between brand experience, BA, and BL

A brand must maintain its distinct and trustworthy appearance as well as provide consistent quality assurance in order to be authentic.It maintains its promises to earn clients' trust, increase their value, and induce optimistic emotions (Jian et al., 2019). Also,Robbins et al. (2009) discovered that authenticity was one of the most critical aspects of the BE that influenced consumer emotions positively. As a result, favorable brand experiences and brand authenticity inspire customers to become emotionally addicted and fall in love with a brand. Likewise, according to Manthiou et al. (2018), improved brand performance contributes to favorable customer brand experiences, boosting its authenticity. Thus, positive brand experiences result in genuine brand attributes and consistent brand behavior. Hence, we proposed:

H2a: BE has a positive effect on BA.

H2b: BE has a positive effect on BL with the mediation of BA.

Relationship between customer engagement, brand authenticity, and brand love

Consumers form a deep emotional relationship with a company, which leads to CBE. CBE strengthens the role of customers because they are active in the value co-creation process. Furthermore, CBE turns the customer into a brand fan due to the close relationships formed, which may contribute to him or her actively supporting the brand and its products (Grassi, 2020). Also, customers would be cognitively involved in the revealed knowledge about the brand and therefore build intimacy with it because they are cognitively engaged in the sense that they are present and centered on the brand and its associated qualities (Rosado-Pinto et al., 2020). Hence, we proposed the more engage the customers, the more they will perceive the brand as authentic, and therefore, it will eventually increase their brand love. Therefore, we stated:

H3a: CE has a positive effect on BA.

H3b: CE has a positive effect on BL with the mediation of brand authenticity.

Moderating role of brand involvement

According to Bloch (1981), brand involvement is the long-term customer's interest towards the product/brand based on the magnitude of the relationship between brand value and customer's need (Rosado-Pinto et al., 2020). It has been mentioned in the literature that brand involvement

has positive relationship with brand love (Albert et al., 2008). With the escalation of involvement, interest and familiarity with the brand also increases; searching for related information about the brand encourages customers to improve their knowledge and understanding of the brand. Herein, the congruence due to involvement leads to improve the extent of brand love (Song et al., 2020). Further, certain studies showed that involvement does not improves the brand love

directly but also the interaction with brand authenticity (Suh & Youjae, 2006). In this regards, the interaction of brand authenticity and brand involvement develops positive trends in brand love positing that the moderating role of brand involvement between brand authenticity and brand love (Ndasi & Akcay, 2020). Hence, the study has hypothesized the following relationship.
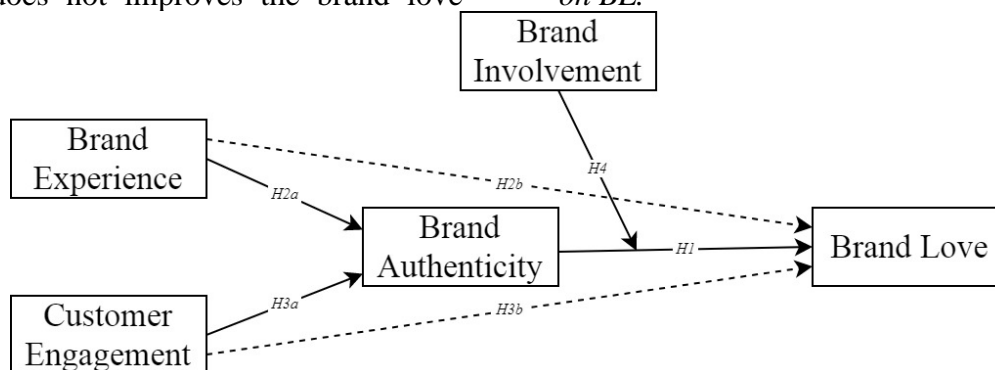*H4: Brand involvement moderates the effect of BA on BL.*

Figure 1: Research Model

2. Methodology
3.1. Sampling Design
The current research has aimed to target the apparelconsumers in the context of Karachi, Pakistan. The sample size estimation of this research has been conducted using a formula of *N5* items given by Bentler and Chou (1987), in which *N* is the number of items in the

questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of 41 items, and therefore this research has to gather at least 205 sample responses. Hence, this research has aimed to gather 217 samples from the target population; however, table 3.1 provides respondents' profiles. Besides, convenience sampling has effectively helped the researcher for data collection as it is relatively easy and efficient for gathering the data. Besides, convenience sampling provided effective and valuable data from relatively close people (Emerson, 2015).

Table 3.1

Respondents' Profile (n = 217)

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	172	79.3
	Female	45	20.7
Age Group	18 years to 23 years	131	60.4
	24 years to 30 years	86	39.6
Academic Qualification	Undergraduate	172	79.3
	Graduate	2	0.9
	Post-Graduate	43	19.8
Apparel Brands	Al-Karam	25	11.5
	Khaadi	31	14.3
	Gul Ahmed	27	12.4
	Junaid Jamshed	31	14.3
	Nishat Linen	18	8.3
	Sana Safinaz	24	11.1

Sapphire	29	13.4
Others	32	14.7

3.2. Data Collection

The data for the hypothesis-testing process has been gathered by applying a survey method using a self-administered questionnaire. The survey method helped the researcher in gathering an adequate dataset within efficient time. It appropriately targeted the respondent's attitude, behavior, and experience regarding the research objective (Groves et al., 2011). Similarly, the questionnaire has been developed based on a five-point Likert-scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The instrument helped the researcher in increasing the significance of the results (Baker, 2003).

3. Results

This section of the paper discusses the results and findings based on the PLS-SEM analysis using SmartPLS version 3.2.9. In this section, the study has estimated measurement model and structural model for data analysis, while the last segment of this section compares and contrasts its findings with the previous literature for an argumentative discussion on the results. The PLS-SEM analysis technique comprises two models: measurement and structural model that examine complex relationships (Hair et al., 2016). This technique helped the researcher identify the validity and reliability and the results based on hypotheses testing (Hair et al., 2011).

4.1. Measurement model

Hair et al. (2014) explained that the measurement (outer) model is used to estimate the theoretical relationship between indicators and latent constructs statistically. In this regard, Hair et al. (2011) recommended that indicator reliability should be higher than 0.70, alpha should be higher than 0.70, composite reliability (CR) should be higher than 0.80, and AVE should be higher than 0.50 for adequate estimation of the measurement (outer) model. The following table 4.1 shows the results of outer model estimation using the PLS algorithm.

Table 4.1

Measurement model and instrumentation

Constructs/Indicators		Loading	Source(s)
Brand Involvement *(Alpha = 0.861; CR = 0.930; AVE = 0.869)*			
BI1	This brand is important to me	*Drop*	
BI2	This brand is of relevance to me	0.894	(Fritz et al., 2017)
BI3	This brand matters to me	0.969	
Customer Engagement *(Alpha = 0.972; CR = 0.981; AVE = 0.946)*			
CE1	I am someone who enjoys interacting with like-minded others of this brand	*Drop*	
CE2	In general, I like to get involved in the discussions related to this brand	0.981	
CE3	In my interaction with this brand, I am immersed	0.963	(Li et al., 2020)
CE4	Anything related to this brand grabs my attention	0.974	
CE5	I am passionate about this brand	*Drop*	
CE6	I feel excited about this brand	*Drop*	
Brand Experience *(Alpha = 0.952; CR = 0.964; AVE = 0.818)*			
BE1	In my opinion, this brand strongly impacts my senses	0.929	
BE2	According to my sensory perceptions, this brand is exciting	0.686	(Safeer et al., 2020)
BE3	This brand persuades my sentiments and feelings	0.969	
BE4	This brand appeals emotionally	0.991	
BE5	While using, this brand engaged me in physical	0.877	

	actions and behavioral modes		
BE6	The outcome of this brand is physical experiences	0.941	
BE7	While facing, this brand involves me in much thinking	*Drop*	
BE8	This brand arouses my curiosity and solves problems	*Drop*	
Brand Love *(Alpha = 0.891; CR = 0.895; AVE = 0.682)*			
LOV1	This is a superb brand	0.749	
LOV2	This brand helps me in creating good feelings	*Drop*	
LOV3	This brand is fantastic	0.764	(Safeer et al., 2020)
LOV4	This brand helps to make me happy	0.904	
LOV5	I am passionate to get this brand	*Drop*	
LOV6	I have an excellent attachment to this brand	0.876	
Brand Authenticity/Continuity *(Alpha = 0.905; CR = 0.955; AVE = 0.913)*			
BAC1	I think brand is consistent over time	0.952	
BAC2	I think the brand stays true to itself	0.960	(Fritz et al., 2017)
BAC3	The brand offers continuity	*Drop*	
BAC4	The brand has a clear concept that it pursues	*Drop*	
Brand Authenticity/Originality *(Alpha = 0.871; CR = 0.918; AVE = 0.790)*			
BAO1	The brand is different from all other brands	0.934	
BAO2	The brand stands out from other brands	0.849	
BAO3	I think the brand is unique	0.881	(Fritz et al., 2017)
BAO4	The brand clearly distinguishes itself from other brands	*Drop*	
Brand Authenticity/Reliability *(Alpha = 0.831; CR = 0.919; AVE = 0.851)*			
BAR1	My experience of the brand has shown me that it keeps its promises	*Drop*	
BAR2	The brand delivers what it promises	*Drop*	(Fritz et al., 2017)
BAR3	The brand's promises are credible	0.890	
BAR4	The brand makes reliable promises	0.953	
Brand Authenticity/Naturalness *(Alpha = 0.767; CR = 0.892; AVE = 0.805)*			
BAN1	The brand does not seem artificial	0.941	
BAN2	The brand makes a genuine impression	*Drop*	
BAN3	The brand gives the impression of being natural	*Drop*	(Fritz et al., 2017)
BAN4	The brand gives the impression of being original	0.851	

Source: *Author's Estimation*

It has been manifested in table 4.1 that all indicators have higher reliability than the recommended threshold, while latent constructs have substantial reliability based on Cronbach (1951) alpha and composite reliability. Moreover, the latent constructs have also achieved a considerable degree of convergence between indicators based on AVE estimation. Hence, the measurement model shows that the theoretical relationship between indicators and latent constructs has been manifested statistically.
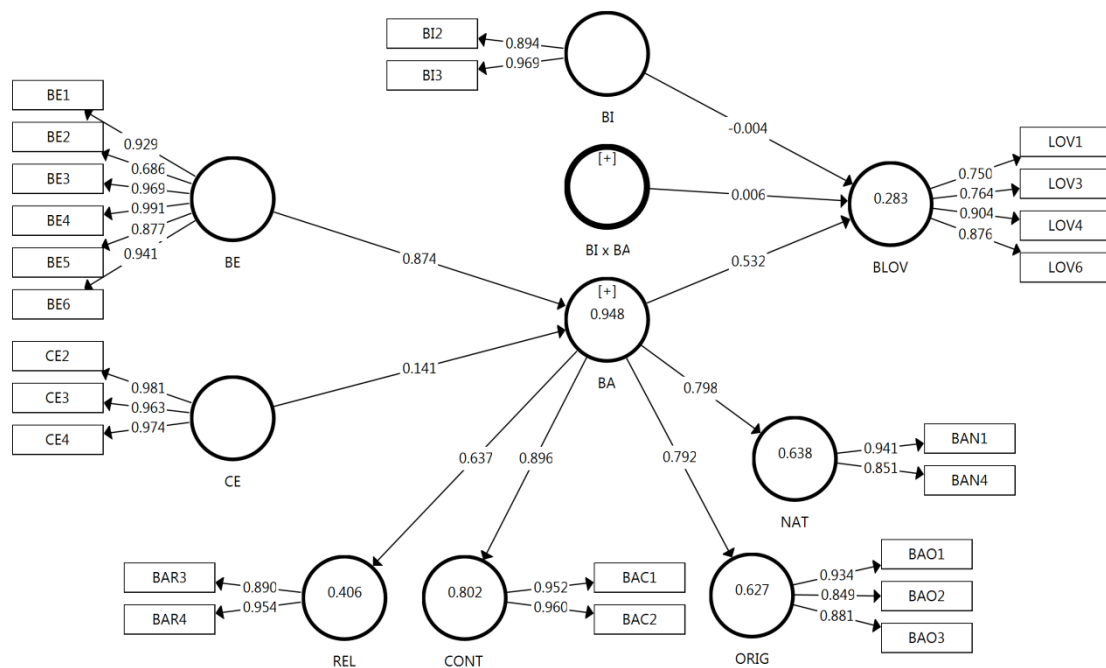
Figure 2: PLS Algorithm

Table 4.2

Discriminant validity using Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	BE	BI	BLOV	CE	CONT	NAT	ORIG	REL
BE	**0.904**							
BI	0.033	**0.932**						
BLOV	0.347	0.015	**0.826**					
CE	0.662	0.029	0.368	**0.973**				
CONT	0.890	0.039	0.267	0.899	**0.956**			
NAT	0.724	0.033	0.792	0.435	0.560	**0.897**		
ORIG	0.801	0.022	0.117	0.759	0.865	0.272	**0.889**	
REL	0.596	0.020	0.626	-0.023	0.243	0.817	0.171	**0.922**

BE = Brand Experience; BLOV = Brand Love; CE = Customer Engagement; CONT = Continuity; BI = Brand Involvement; NAT = Naturalness; ORIG = Originality; REL = Reliability

According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), the square-rooted coefficients of AVE, as mentioned in the bold diagonal values, should be higher than the correlation coefficients of other constructs to achieved considerable discrimination between constructs (Hair et al., 2016). Herein, table 4.2 shows that theoretically-unrelated constructs have been statistically different as well, and therein, discriminant validity using FLC has been achieved.

Table 4.3

Hypothesis-Testing using PLS-SEM

4.2. Structural model

Table 4.3 shows a comprehensive outlook of the structural (inner) model covering path modeling based on direct-effect analysis and specific indirect-effect analysis for hypothesis-testing (Hair et al., 2014), predictive power using a coefficient of determination (R^2), and cross-redundancy relevance (Q^2).

Endogenous Constructs	Brand Authenticity	Brand Love
Direct-effect analysis		
Brand Authenticity		$0.532 \ (13.784)^{***}$
Brand Experience	$0.874 \ (70.396)^{***}$	
Brand Involvement	$0.004 \ (0.067)$	
Customer Engagement	$0.141 \ (7.301)^{***}$	
Specific indirect-effect analysis		
Brand Experience		$0.465 \ (13.339)^{***}$
Customer Engagement		$0.075 \ (6.632)^{***}$
Moderation analysis		
Brand Involvement x Brand Authenticity		$0.006 \ (0.123)$
Predictive power and relevance		
R-Square	0.948	0.283
Adjusted R-Square	0.947	0.273
Q-Square	0.479	0.095

Source: Author's Estimation.
*Note: *** denotes that $p < 0.001$; values in parenthesis are t-Statistics while non-parenthesis values are standardized regression weights (beta coefficients). PLS bootstrapping at 5000 subsamples and a two-tailed test has been used for structural model estimations. Q2 is estimated using PLS-blindfolding at six omissions while R2, and Adjusted R2, are estimated using PLS-algorithm.*

Based on the hypothesis-testing findings, hypothesis-1 ($\beta = 0.532$, $p < 0.001$) has been accepted at 1 percent statistical significance, postulating that increase in the brand authenticity of apparel brands in Pakistan leads to improve its brand love. In addition to this, hypothesis-2a ($\beta = 0.874$, $p < 0.001$) and hypothesis-2b ($\beta = 0.465$, $p < 0.001$) have also been accepted at 1 percent statistical significance proposing that brand authenticity mediates the positive effect of BE on brand authenticity. Hypothesis-3a ($\beta = 0.141$, $p <$ 0.001) and hypothesis-3b ($\beta = 0.075$, $p < 0.001$) have been accepted at 1 percent statistical significance, manifesting that brand authenticity significantly mediates the effect of CE on BL in the apparel industry of Pakistan. Last of all, hypothesis-4 ($\beta = 0.006$, $p > 0.05$) has been rejected at 5 percent statistical significance positing that brand involvement does not moderates the effect of brand authenticity on brand love in the apparel industry of Pakistan.
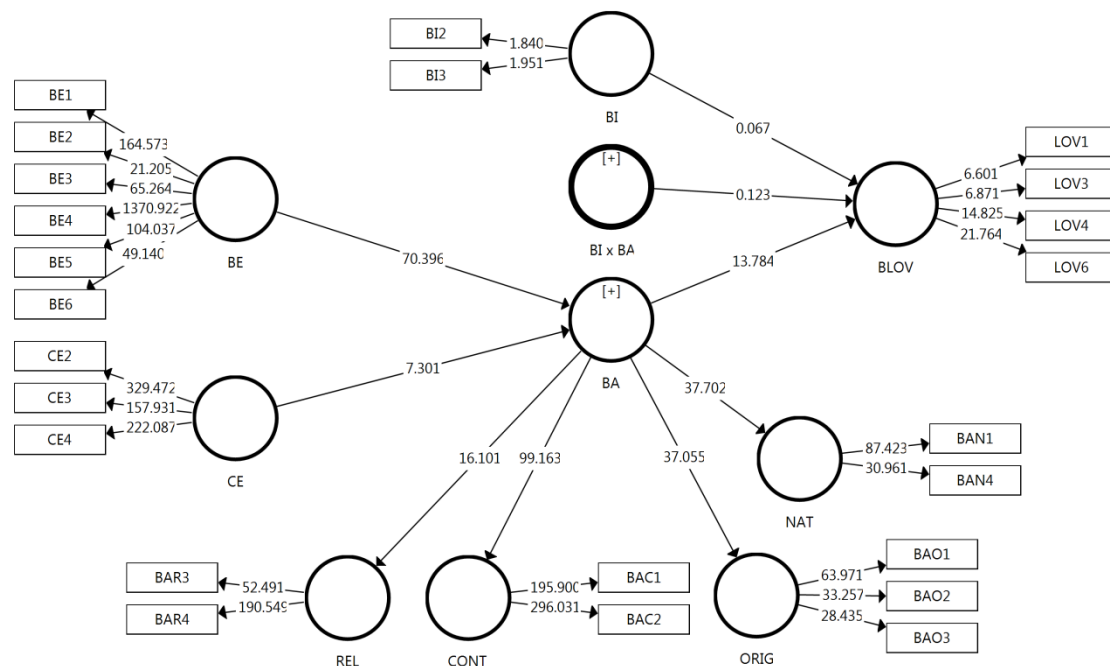
Figure 3: PLS Bootstrapping

4. Discussions

The idea of brand authenticity (BA) refers to the consumer's perspective that their brand is faithful and true to their values and is highly responsible for fulfilling their services (Wymer & Akbar, 2017). The current research has identified a positive effect between BA and BL. This result has been supported by various researches as mentioned in Safeer et al. (2020) that an increase in brand authenticity also increases the brand love in the customers.

Moreover, brand experience (BE) comprises such feelings that a customer feels regarding a specific product through different marketing strategies (Morrison & Crane, 2007). The current research has found that BE has a positive effect on BA. Various researches have examined this relationship and identified a significant result as well. For instance, Gilmore and Pine (2007) identified that compelling performances could help develop a good brand experience that eventually leads to enhanced brand authenticity.

However, this research has also identified that brand experience positively affects brand love by mediating brand authenticity. This result has been supported by Safeer et al. (2020) that BA mediates the relationship between BE and BL. Similarly,

(Joshi & Garg, 2021) examined research in which it identified that brand experience could proper significantly towards brand love in BA because it helps in having a trust factor between brand-customer relationship. The present scenario has identified that consumers are highly looking for holistic experiences in using their products to fulfill their emotional offerings (Brakus et al., 2009).

Furthermore, customer engagement (CE) refers to the commitment and loyalty to their brand by showing emotional and high purchasing decisions(Cheung et al., 2011). The current research has identified a positive effect between CE and BA. The current result has been identified in various researches conducted in different industries. Like, Eigenraam et al. (2021) identified that an increase in positive CE couldenhance their brand love through proper commitment and loyalty to their brand.

However, this research has also identified a positive effect of customer engagement on brand love with brand authenticity mediation. Rodrigues and Borges (2020)supported the engagement-love relationship was found significantly improved in BA. According to Nawaz et al. (2020), when customers were getting engaged with their brand, it eventually created BL because there was a high BA between the brand-customer relationship. Besides, Govarchin (2019) conducted research to identify a positive mediating effect of BA between CE and BL.

5. Implications and Recommendations

6.1. Implications

This study proposes a set of management guidelines for multinational marketers and brand managers to follow to grow brand-loyal customers in markets. Firstly, our findings revealed that BA had a significant impact on BL. Companies want to cultivate brand-loyal customers to develop and execute successful positioning campaigns that attract specific customers, as brand authenticity is a critical positioning tool.

Moreover, the mediating function of brand authenticity was shown in this research, and it has a significant impact on the relationships between multidimensional BE and BL.Companies are encouraged to use experiential marketing to establish and preserve brand authenticity by introducing different customer relationship techniques for cultivating brand-loving consumers.Alternatively, marketers can place their products through sensory and intellectual marketing strategies, depending on brand authenticity to attract customers cognitively. These tactics can be implemented using social media platforms such as Instagram, Fb, and Twitter to boost customer expectations and increase customer equity.

6.2. Future research directions

Firstly, brand authenticity in mediating the relationship between BE and brand love was discussed in this research. In this study, no moderator was used; therefore, future research may apply a moderator, such as consumer involvement, to this model. Secondly, this study used convenience sampling to collect data, andto generalize the results, future researchers may collect data on a large scale in Asian countries. Thirdly, a future study will attempt to increase the response rate to lend more credibility to the findings. The framework can also be tested in other industries and geographical regions.

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