

Affirmative Strategic Association of Hedonic, Functional and Symbolic Perspectives on Brand Loyalty: A Structural Equation Model (SEM) Approach

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ABSTRACT

The complicated and poorly understood relationships that exist between customers and brands in retailing persist despite the abundance of works on the subject. This study examines the direct relationships between three distinct relationship variables—brand trust, brand affect, and brand commitment—and the hedonic, symbolic, and functional aspects of brand images. Additionally, it looks into how they indirectly affect two kinds of loyalty—behavioural and attitude—in relation to face care products. 551 users of face care products in the North Karnataka region provided us with the data. The data was validated using the Smart-PLS software 4.0.9.9 and PLS-SEM. For the FMCG sector, the findings have significant managerial repercussions.

Keywords: Face care, hedonic, symbolic, and functional brand trust, brand affect, brand commitment, attitudinal loyalty and behavioural loyalty.

1. Introduction

India is drawing clients from all over the world, and its consumers are clearly divided into urban and rural sectors. According to (Gupta, 2023) By 2025, spending is expected to rise dramatically due to the presence of the region's sizable white-collar class, sizable affluent class, and small percentage of those in financial difficulties. The fact that cosmetics continue to draw attention from consumers worldwide is a clear indication of the ongoing need for these products (Feldmann & Hamm, 2015). According to (Punniyamoorthy, 2015) this industry is characterized by developed networks of distribution and intense rivalry between the organized and unorganized sectors. In India, FMCG has a strong and competitive MNC presence across the whole value chain. A recent study by the (*The Beauty Market in 2023: New Industry Trends | McKinsey*) predicts that The beauty industry, which includes skincare, fragrance, cosmetics, and haircare, generated around \$430 billion in sales in 2022. In the present era, beauty is expanding in all its forms. According to (Jewargi et al., 2022) the target market for skin care products has changed, with younger people now making up the majority of the demand. Attempting to delay the aging process, people are starting to take care of their skin at a younger and younger age. According to (Keller, 1993) as a collection of solid, favourable, and distinctive brand associations that are kept in customers' memories. The brand has sustained differentiation advantage and brand equity because of these brand linkages.

One of the key elements in building brand loyalty is brand image. However, a closer examination of earlier research by (Diallo et al., 2020) indicates that they had considered hedonic image (HI) functional image (FI) and symbolic image (SI), it never discussed the impact of the same on the different forms of loyalty like attitudinal loyalty (AL) and behavioural loyalty (BL) which was explained in the study by (Dahlgren, 2011). Here we have considered the mediation of brand trust (BT) brand affect (BA) and brand commitment (BC). (Diallo, 2015), (Burlison & Oe, 2018) and (Narteh & Braimah,

2019). They have even taken into consideration experimental, functional, and symbolic in one additional study. According to (Park et al., 1986) Functional associations describe a brand's capacity to address a certain concrete issue. Upon reviewing more research, we discovered that the (HI), (FI), and (SI) aspects of brand purchase as well as brand attitude were taken into account. (Babin et al., 1994) demonstrated because in actuality, hedonic dimensions are sensory attributes of the experience kind linked to a sense of fulfilment. (Voss et al., 2003) Hence, the interaction with the brand is referred to as "emotional" and has both hedonic and experiential components. When the relationship is mostly about functional or utilitarian rewards, it is called cognitive (Thomson et al., 2005).

The four main gaps in the literature that motivate this endeavour are as follows. Firstly, previous research examining the connections between brand value and consumer loyalty has adopted, but it has not addressed (BL) or (AL). (Kim et al., 2019) Second, this study looks at how brand linkages with perceived quality, both functional and symbolic, contribute to brand loyalty (Elmashhara & Soares, 2019). Third this study aims to investigate how functional and symbolic factors may indirectly affect brand loyalty (He & Lai, 2014) Fourth, helps to comprehend the relationships between and effects of customers' serviceable and epicurean attitudes on loyalty and trust (Akhgari et al., 2018). In most of the studies all the images like (HI), (FI) and (SI) were not considered. If considered they have ignored how it affects the (AL) and (BL). Three main objectives of conducting the study were First, we wanted to check the relationship between types of brand image towards the loyalty. Second was to check how the mediating factors affect the loyalty and the third aim was to check does (AL) has an impact on (BL).

This study focuses on three essential components of brand relationships—trust, affect, and commitment—that result in consumers becoming loyal to a company. They are regarded as essential to the interaction between brands. How they impact the connections between various forms of loyalty and brand image dimensions is still unknown, though. Consequently, this article's explicit goal is to examine how distinct brand images—hedonistic, functional, and symbolic—impact three relationship constructs: commitment, affect, and brand trust. It also examines how these effects indirectly affect two forms of brand loyalty: behavioural and affective. First, we anticipate that hedonic, functional, and symbolic dominant imagery will influence and determine brand trust affect and commitment (Narteh & Braimah, 2019). Second, this research recognizes the significance of the connections between consumers and brands, particularly in retailing, by incorporating a normative dimension of these relationships (Osei-Frimpong, 2019). Third, this study looks into how brand trust, affect and commitment affects the links between various forms of brand loyalty and brand image dimensions (Elmashhara & Soares, 2019). Prioritizing retail actions in customer relationship management will also be feasible thanks to the particular mediation routes that have been found (Alnawas & Hemsley-Brown, 2018).

2. Conceptual framework and hypotheses

2.1 Brand loyalty

Loyalty is a crucial element of brand equity (Aaker, 1996). According to (Jewargi et al., 2023) having a loyal brand helps you build lasting relationships with your customers. The loyalty that a customer has for a brand (Chahal & Bala, 2010) The pinnacle of brand equity is known as brand loyalty, which endures even after changes to the product's features or price. (Hsu et al., 2012) defines loyalty as a biased behavioural purchasing activity that is the outcome of a psychological process; it does not include haphazardly making the same purchases again (Homburg & Giering, 2001). Because they think a brand is superior to the alternatives, loyal customers are very devoted to it (Holland & Baker, 2001). According to (Lee et al., 2009), customers' beliefs, attitudes, and intention structures toward a certain brand are referred to as brand loyalty. Another perspective holds that consumers who have a lot of experience and are deeply involved in a particular product category would typically be brand loyal (Holland & Baker, 2001).

2.2 Hedonic image

According to (Bruhn et al., 2012) beyond that, a brand's image represents the associations that people have with it. There are two categories of these associations: hedonistic and utilitarian brand image. The concept of hedonic brand image refers to the meaning, emotions, or perceptions that customers derive from abstract and imagery-related factors that are not always connected to the brand's performance, qualities, or utilitarian purposes (Gensler et al., 2013). Customers who have emotion towards the brands and the products will be loyal towards the brands. The customers will continue to be loyal with the brands and the products as per the perception. But once the perception changes towards the products loyalty also changes.

2.3 Functional image

A brand's functional values are related to the observable, logically evaluated benefits of product performance that meet customers' real-world needs (Bhat & Reddy, 1998). (De Chernatony et al., 2000) point out that while fostering functional distinctions within the brand is crucial, symbolic values are a

more durable means of differentiation than functional values. Consumer associations with brands operate as informational nodes that are connected to brand nodes in the consumers' cognition, and they create meaningful information about the worth and quality of the brand, as demonstrated by functional brand images

2.4 Symbolic image

According to (Park et al., 1986), (SI) is the benefit that comes from using a product that is not tied to its features and is essentially connected to the need for personal expression or societal acceptability. Consumers choose to engage in a connection with brands that have favourable symbolic images since they stand to gain from it in terms of their sense of self and their ability to improve. They also demonstrate their commitment to the brand. Social motive behind a brand is very significant in collectivist countries. According to (Robinson, 1996), companies that promote group membership and connection are more appealing to consumers in a collective society.

2.5 Brand Trust

Research has shown that (BT) is a key component in several research (Doney & Cannon, 1997) and (Moorman et al., 1992). Its importance is understood as a crucial element influencing a company's success (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). The definition of brand trust, according to (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2008), is "the degree to which the typical customer is prepared to depend on a brand's capacity to fulfil its stated purpose." Customers' assessments of the goods and services of the business result in the development of this trust. Companies can build brand trust by communicating to customers that they are trustworthy, honest, and safe when it comes to their brands. Essentially, it is moulded and reinforced by consumers' firsthand interactions with brands.

2.6 Brand Affect

Both brand affect and brand trust are related concepts that have been thoroughly examined in the marketing literature. The ability of a brand to exploit its usage to cause a positive emotional response in the ordinary customer, according to (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001) Said another way, it describes the feelings that customers have for a product based on their interactions with it. This implies that a strong connection to the brand fosters the growth of brand affect. Positive and uplifting feelings are associated with a high degree of brand loyalty, according to reliable research (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001)

2.7 Brand Commitment

Affective and continuous commitment are the two types of commitment. An emotional bond with the brand that reflects a strong feeling of self-identification is known as affective commitment. Recognition of and adherence to the brand's ideals serve as the foundation for affective brand loyalty (Pring, 2007). (McAlexander et al., 2002) evaluated affective commitment for important brands and concluded that it clarifies the strong add-on to the targeted brands. (Verhoef, 2003) discovered that repurchase intention is directly impacted by affective commitment in a study on banking services. Furthermore, even though they had no direct effect on customer behaviour, positive antecedents of affective commitment included brand satisfaction, brand equity, and perceived brand value.

2.8 Attitudinal loyalty and Behavioural loyalty

Behaviour and attitude are the two areas into which brand loyalty has been separated in the research (Chahal & Bala, 2010b); (Woo Gon Kim et al., 2008). According to behavioural definitions of brand loyalty is defined as the volume, frequency, duration of repeat purchases made over time (Yang & Peterson, 2004). In other words, behavioural loyalty alone cannot account for the fact that consumers choose to buy the same brand in various purchase contexts. Therefore, one must respond to behaviour with positivity. According to (Chahal & Bala, 2010b), affective loyalty is influenced by significant cognitive components that contribute to attitudinal loyalty. Conative loyalty, which results from consumers' intents or devotion to certain distinctive brand values, is influenced by affective loyalty as well (Lewis & Soureli, 2006).

2.9 Hypothesis

H1a, H1b and H1c: Hedonic image and brand affect, brand commitment, and brand trust are positively correlated.

H2a, H2b and H2c: Functional image and brand affect, brand commitment, and brand trust are strongly associated.

H3a, H3b and H3c: Symbolic image and brand commitment, brand affect, and brand trust are associated with each other.

H4: The hedonic image and the functional image are associated positively.

H5: A positive correlation exists between the symbolic and functional images.

H6: The correlation between brand trust and brand affect is good.

H7: Brand commitment and brand affect are in a positive relationship.

H8a and H8b: Brand trust and behavioural and attitudinal loyalty are strongly related.

H9a and H9b: Brand affect and behavioural and attitudinal loyalty are significantly correlated.

H10a and H10b: There is a positive relationship between brand commitment and attitudinal & behavioural loyalty

H11: There is a positive relationship between attitudinal loyalty and behavioural loyalty

3. Research methodology

3.1 Context and data collection

This study is being conducted in the North Karnataka region, where face care retail enterprises have made relationship marketing a key priority in recent years. Market research used a questionnaire to administrate the collection of data. Because it aligns well with the three primary pathways examined in the conceptual model, the writers chose the topic of inquiry to be face care products and beauty. Beauty and face care products are also fascinating subjects to research in the broader context of the global financial crisis. To verify the behavioural aspect of loyalty, participants in an experimental study were asked to list the three product categories they most commonly bought. Next, desk research was utilized to determine which items aligned with the three brand image dimensions that were examined (functional, hedonic, and symbolic). Three distinct products were chosen as the subject of this inquiry based on the findings: face wash (functional), lip care (hedonistic), and face cream (symbolic).

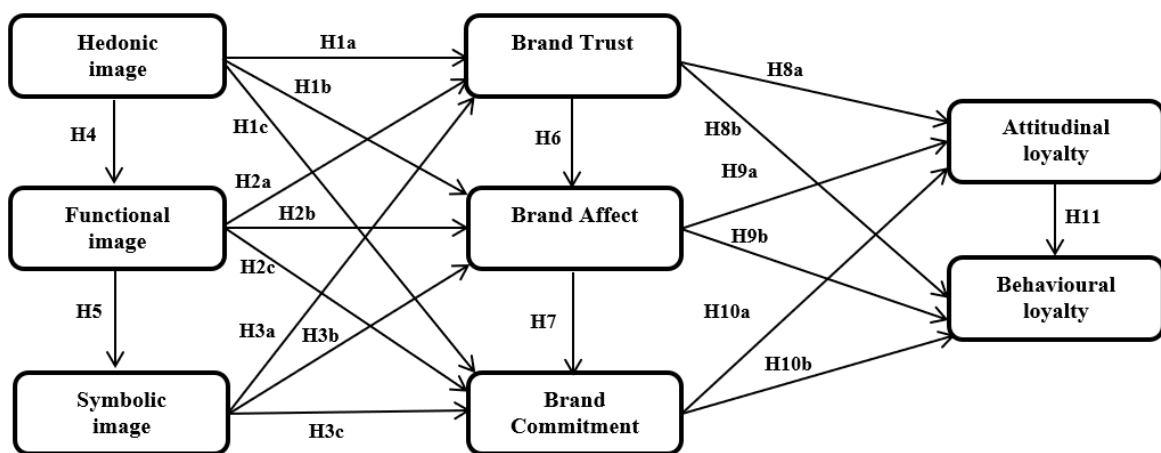


Figure No. 1: Conceptual Framework for the Study

In the primary research, participants were requested to select one of the three examined goods according to their level of knowledge. Prior to responding to the questionnaire, they were required to disclose the brand they primarily buy. In order to prevent display bias, the investigators did not display any brand images due to the diversity of brands that the respondents had purchased. A final sample of 551 men and women, all over the age of 18, who were recruited from North Karnataka were used for the study. The selection of North Karnataka allowed for a more homogeneous sample (similar access to the brands and same geographic region). Thus, it was essential to employ both confirmatory and exploratory factor analyses to determine whether they were suitable in compliance along with (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988).

3.2 Measurement and data analysis approach

We used a quantitative approach in this investigation, looking at the correlations between the variables listed by using the relevant statistical techniques. To help respondents express their choices, a Likert scale with a range of one to seven points is used in the survey. The Partial Least Square (PLS) approach along with the Structural Equation Model (SEM) is selected as the analytical tool, and Smart-PLS software is used to conduct the study. Nowadays, smart-PLS is a popular analytical technique used in many different types of scientific study since it can produce accurate results. Using resampling and bootstrapping, the sample size is determined depending on the PLS hypothesis testing criteria. Convenience sampling is a technique used in this study that involves giving questionnaires to consumers of particular face cream brands who just so happen to use the product (Kriyantono, 2012)

4. Analysis and results

4.1 Reliability assessment

We used composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha to assess the study's dependability. The constructs' Cronbach's alpha values were determined to be good and acceptable, and the paradigms' satisfactory inner reliability was shown by the CR values, which had to be greater than 0.70. (Hair et al., 2012) and (Bagozzi et al., 1991). Table 1 provides an overview. All of the independent variables' Cronbach's alpha values were over 0.70, indicating the reliability of their internal consistency. In a reflective model, AVE provides both convergent and divergent validity. It essentially depicts the typical communality for each individually latent aspect (Avkiran, 2018). In a reliable model, AVE

should surpass 0.5. AVE below 0.5 suggests that error variance exceeds the explained variance (Et.al, 2021). Table 1 indicates that all variables exhibit commendable AVE values.

Table 1: Reliability Assesment

Construct/Item	Factor Loadin g	Cronbach' s alpha	CR	AVE
Hedonic image				
This brand Fun/Not Fun (HI1)	0.729	0.769	0.868	0.688
It is Functional/Not Functional (HI2)	0.886			
It is Necessary/Unnecessary (HI3)	0.864			
Functional image				
This brand consistently provides high-quality goods. (FI1)	0.808	0.795	0.880	0.710
This brand's quality standards are respectable. (FI2)	0.854			
The brand's purpose is evident. (FI3)	0.864			
Symbolic image				
I feel more acceptable when I wear this brand. (SI1)	0.765	0.710	0.839	0.636
I make a favourable impression on others when I use. (SI2)	0.884			
I have better social relations with this brand. (SI3)	0.735			
Brand Trust				
This brand fulfils my expectations. (BT1)	0.796	0.782	0.873	0.697
I perceive this brand as trustworthy (BT2)	0.860			
I regard this brand as a safe choice for use. (BT3)	0.847			
Brand Affect				
I am satisfied with the eminence of the brand. (BA1)	0.811	0.781	0.872	0.694
I am satisfied with the experience of the product (BA2)	0.821			
I am satisfied with the price. (BA3)	0.865			
Brand commitment				
I feel expressively attached to this brand. (BC1)	0.851	0.760	0.862	0.676
It has great deal of personal connotation for me. (BC2)	0.827			
I feel strong sense of belongingness. (BC3)	0.787			
Attitudinal loyalty				
I would enthusiastically endorse this brand to my acquaintances (AL1)	0.817	0.780	0.871	0.693
I believe I am a dedicated customer to my preferred brand. (AL2)	0.819			
My preferred brand's name instantly comes to mind when I'm asked about this product category. (AL3)	0.860			
Behavioural loyalty				
I anticipate to endure purchasing this brand. (BL1)	0.858	0.759	0.856	0.665
I perceive the quality of my favourite brand to be superior to others. (BL2)	0.759			
Despite receiving conflicting information about my preferred brand, I would still choose to purchase it (BL3)	0.827			

Source: Results of data processing

4.2 Discriminant assesement

The study uses the PLS approach for analysis, determining structural calculations based on disagreement with the help of the Smart-PLS version 4 application. (Ab Hamid et al., 2017) Vital validity testing is part of the first step. The Fornell-Lacker criterion is then used to assess discriminant validity. (Fornell-Lacker, 1981) which contrasts the latent factor with the AVE standards' square root. Specifically, the AVE's square root needs to be greater than its highest correlation with any other component(Hair et al., 2012). Table 2 discloses that the square root of AVE for insightful constructs, such as (HI) (FI), (SI), (BT), (BA), (BC), (AL) and (BL) were superior than the equivalent correlation with latent variables. Thus, the discriminant validity of these constructs was important. The structural model's outcomes are shown in Figure-2 and Table 2.

The results shown in Table 2 demonstrated that every component satisfies the criteria for discriminant validity, and no factor is rejected or overlapped.

Table 2: Discriminant Validity

Construct	AL	BA	BC	BL	BT	FI	HI	SI
AL	0.832							
BA	0.271	0.833						
BC	0.029	0.117	0.822					
BL	0.159	0.053	0.103	0.816				
BT	0.261	0.294	0.609	0.113	0.835			
FI	-0.006	0.059	0.696	0.081	0.559	0.842		
HI	0.086	0.156	0.693	0.027	0.674	0.75	0.829	
SI	-0.014	0.039	0.629	0.029	0.576	0.751	0.69	0.798

Source: Results of data processing

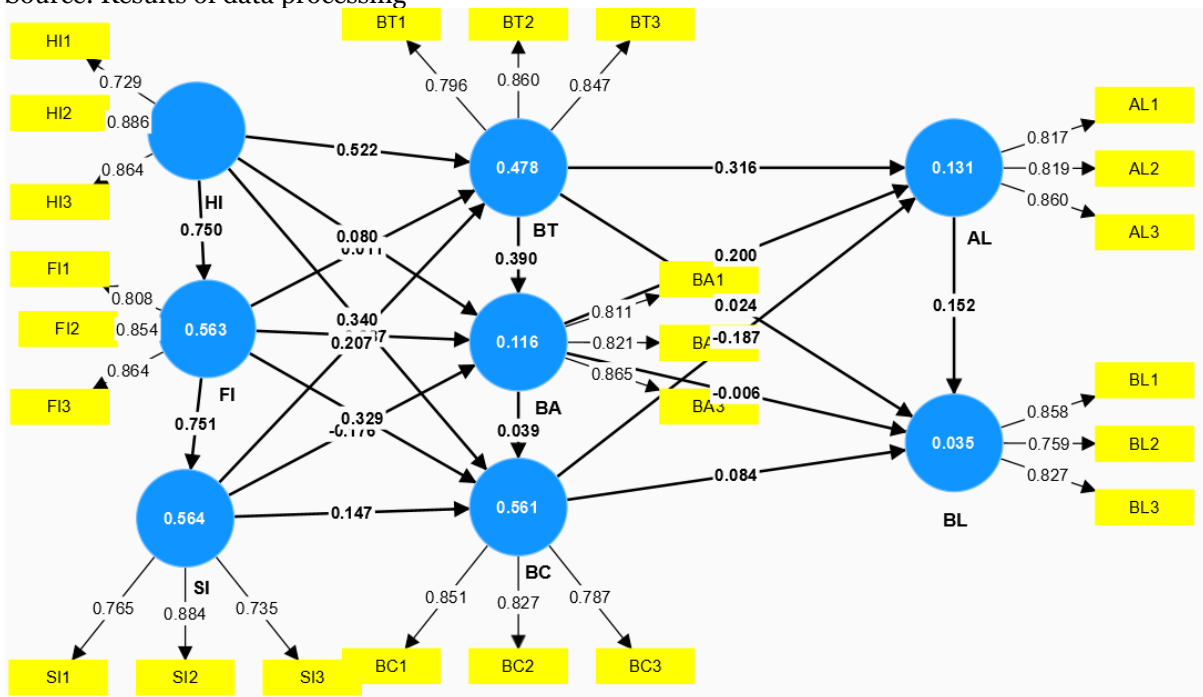


Figure 2: Results of the Structural Model (PLS-SEM)

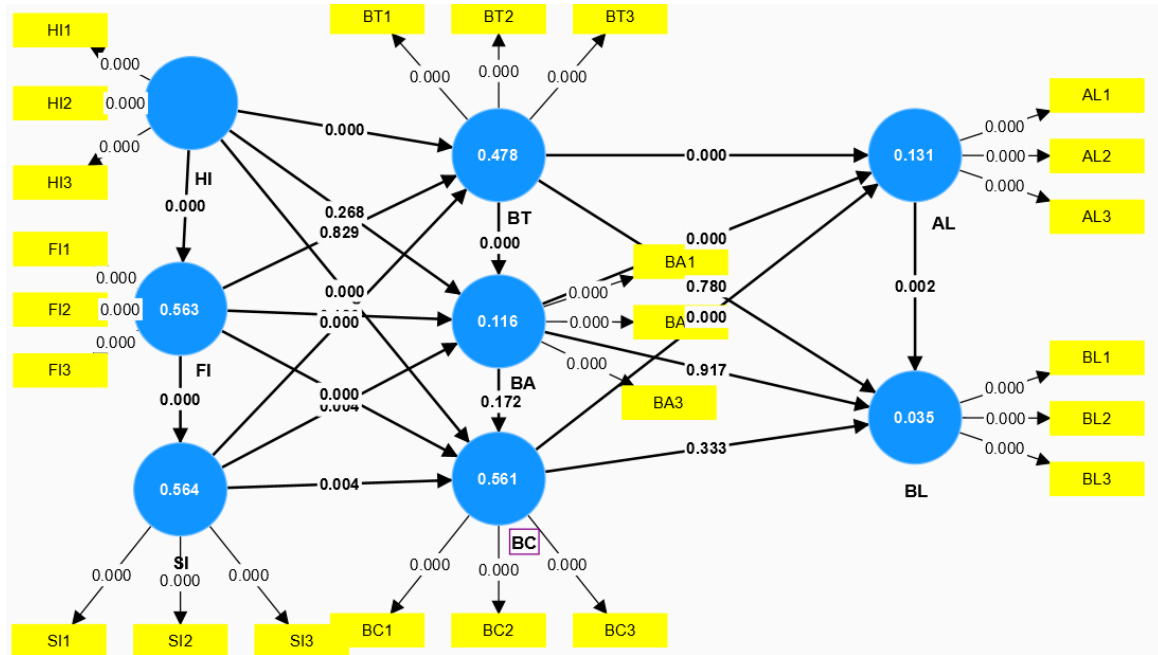


Figure 3: Results of Bootstrapping (PLS-SEM)

4.3 Hypotheses testing

The findings from hypotheses testing are presented in Table 3. The results of bootstrapping, Figure-3 conducted with 5000 resampling's, for the connections among the components in the projected research model verified that the next phase in the inner model test involves recognising the path coefficient values, which indicate the significance level of the projected hypotheses. In this study, a confidence level of 5% is set for the error. As shown in Table 4, H1b, H2a, H2b, H7, H8b, H9b and H10b are rejected as it does not meet the confidence level. However, rest all are accepted.

Table 3: Hypotheses Testing Results

Items		T statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values	Hypothesis
H1a	HI -> BT	11.675	0.000	Accepted
H1b	HI -> BA	1.107	0.268	Rejected
H1c	HI -> BC	5.883	0.000	Accepted
H2a	FI -> BT	0.215	0.829	Rejected
H2b	FI -> BA	1.322	0.186	Rejected
H2c	FI -> BC	5.137	0.000	Accepted
H3a	SI -> BT	4.187	0.000	Accepted
H3b	SI -> BA	2.885	0.004	Accepted
H3c	SI -> BC	2.881	0.004	Accepted
H4	HI -> FI	32.812	0.000	Accepted
H5	FI -> SI	33.359	0.000	Accepted
H6	BT -> BA	7.233	0.000	Accepted
H7	BA -> BC	1.365	0.172	Rejected
H8a	BT -> AL	6.462	0.000	Accepted
H8b	BT -> BL	0.279	0.780	Rejected
H9a	BA -> AL	4.508	0.000	Accepted
H9b	BA -> BL	0.104	0.917	Rejected
H10a	BC -> AL	3.711	0.000	Accepted
H10b	BC -> BL	0.968	0.333	Rejected
H11	AL -> BL	3.037	0.002	Accepted

Source: Results of data processing

The results of this study largely confirm the variable relationships identified in some previous studies (Chahal & Bala, 2010a). The impact relation of HI → BA, FI → BT, FI → BA, BA → BC, BT → BL, BA → BL and BC → BL all were insignificant as the P value was exceeding 0.05. Whereas when checked for HI → BT, HI → BC, FI → BC, SI → BT, SI → BA, SI → BC, HI → FI, FI → SI, BT → BA, BT → AL, BA → AL, BC → AL, AL → BL were significant as the P value was not exceeding 0.05. So, it is evident that attitudinal loyalty has a strong relationship with behavioural loyalty.

5. Conclusions, discussion and implications

The research's theoretical and managerial implications are covered in the part that follows, along with the study's shortcomings and potential directions for further research.

5.1 Discussion

The study's proposed model adds to the body of knowledge previously available on consumer loyalty by offering a more accurate explanation of loyalty behaviour, which is not always a linear phenomenon. A number of the connections being examined here have either only been partially investigated or have not taken into consideration the ongoing mediation mechanisms. For instance, showed that there are two parallel routes (functional and symbolic) of customer loyalty that may be used to comprehend how customers connect with brands, products, or services; however, a third, hedonistic route has never been investigated in conjunction with the other two. (AL) and (BL). Therefore, the primary contribution of this study is to distinguish between two forms of loyalty and then demonstrate how the three aspects of brand image—(FI), (HI) and (SI)—influence them via the mediation of particular relationship factors (BT), (BA) and (BC).

5.2 Managerial implications

The investigation's findings allow for the recommendation of various managerial ramifications for merchants. The implications of loyalty types, both directly and indirectly and the brand image dimension are demonstrated by the existence of mediation effects between them. (AL) on (BL). Overall, the research's findings imply that brand managers in the retail industry need to be very explicit about the kind of relationships they hope to build with customers. The objective is to enhance (AL); retail managers want to concentrate on both (BT) and (HI). Strong correlations have been found between (HI), (BT), and (AL), indicating that supervisors should work together to combat hedonic affect in the process of loyalty. Retail brand managers, for instance, might highlight the brand personality attributes that relate to hedonism (fun, excitement, and joy) as well as affect (good feeling, comfort, and affinity). Customers will be better able to identify the personality attributes connected to the brand and increase (BL) with the aid of such a brand strategy. In addition, brand managers should emphasize brand values that transcend beyond basic facial care, forging deep emotional connections with a devoted clientele that foster positive word-of-mouth.

5.3 Limitation and future research

There are various shortcomings in this study that present chances for further research into the connections between consumer brands and brands.

Firstly, because the mass market face care is the main topic of this essay, it would be fascinating to verify the concept experimentally or expand it to other industries/sectors, such as cars and electronics. For example, historically, great brands like Apple and Volvo have been linked to electronics and autos. However, when less well-known companies gain popularity on social media and as more brands from emerging markets are introduced, consumer views of brand image dimensions may change. Using our study paradigm, future studies might compare various companies according to their place of origin or level of social media presence.

Second, the model may incorporate customer commitment with its three dimensions (BT), (BA), and (BC). In a similar vein, the type of word of mouth may have an impact on brand relationship factors. Research on word-of-mouth marketing has highlighted how important it is in enhancing or detracting from a brand's position. As a result, future studies could look at which particular brand image aspects are more susceptible to negative publicity and how it influences particular loyalty characteristics.

Third, individual factors like brand sensitivity in the product category, which may significantly moderate the effects of some model linkages, could not be tested due to model parsimony concerns. For luxury goods, for example, there may be differences in the influence of brand image dimensions on particular faithfulness dimensions. In a luxurious setting, the affect and commitment routes would be greater than the trust. Using our study paradigm, subsequent investigations should elucidate such a claim.

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