

Original Research Article

Assessing brand equity constructs of facecare products through smart PLS

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ABSTRACT

Facecare products are benefiting their users more and more. One of their beneficial outcomes was determining whether brand loyalty and brand equity remains same when customers buy products from organised stores. The considerable growth of organised stores indicates that North Karnataka has a very high level of purchasing. Thus, by examining the degree to which the relationship between brand trust, brand awareness, brand loyalty on brand equity is present, researchers are interested in finding out how consumers in North Karnataka choose brands from organised retailers. The fact that it is new research makes the discussion more engaging. We obtained the information from 379 North Karnataka face care product users. PLS-SEM and the Smart-PLS software 4.0.9.9 were used to validate the data. Every hypothesis is supported and statistically significant, according to the findings. It can be inferred that consumers will remain devoted to a brand whether they purchase it from an unorganised retailer or an organised retailer.

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1. Introduction

According to (India Skin Care Market Size, Share & Industry Report 2031, 2023) the market's greatest segment in terms of volume and value was facial care. During the projected period between FY2024 and FY2031, the market is anticipated to increase at a CAGR of 4.82% and reach USD 3.73 billion by FY2031. India has customers who are from rural areas who prefer buying products from (kirana stores) unorganised retail stores and urban people prefer buying products from organised retail stores. According to (Jewargi et al., 2022)^{1,2} younger individuals now make up the bulk of the demand for skin care products, looking at the availability of face care products in wide range. People are beginning to take care of their skin

at a younger age in an effort to slow down the aging process. According to (Keller, 1993)^{3,4} 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. According to (Punniyamoorthy, 2015)⁵ this business is distinguished by highly developed distribution networks and fierce competition between the organized and unorganized sectors. FMCG has a robust and competitive multinational presence in India throughout the entire value chain. The fact that people all around the world are still interested in cosmetics is proof positive that there is a continued need for these goods (Feldmann & Hamm, 2015).⁶ Due to the presence of a substantial white-collar class, a sizable affluent class, and a small number of those in financial troubles, expenditure is predicted to climb dramatically by 2025 (Gupta, 2023).⁷

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(BL) is one of the most important components in developing (BE). A closer look at past research,(Alhaddad, 1999)⁸ however, reveals that while they had taken into account brand image (BI) and (BL), they never talked about the mediating variables that contribute to the creation of (BE), as was stated in the study by (Chaudhuri, 1999).⁹ Here we have considered two factors (BT) and (BA). The model, for example, does not take into account the impact of marketing mix variables like promotion (Chaudhuri, 1997)¹⁰ or product class impacts apparent and monetary risk on (BE & BL) (Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995).¹¹

After looking through more studies, we found that the (BT), (BA), and (BL) (Bart et al., 2005).¹² for a long time, word-of-mouth marketing through traditional and online channels, repurchase behaviour, and brand loyalty have all been attributed to trust. (Liao, 2015)¹³ shown because, in reality, aspects of loyalty and trust are significant experience qualities connected to a feeling of fulfilment. A growing number of researchers like (Pizzutti & Fernandes, 2010)¹⁴ and (Jewargi et al., 2023) have highlighted the impact of customer satisfaction on trust, despite the fact that many earlier studies have concentrated on the direct influences of consumer happiness on immediate intention behaviours. According to (Komunda & Osarenkhoe, 2012). trust is an essential component of partnerships both rationally and practically. In a competitive environment, customers who lack faith in a seller are unlikely to remain loyal.

The three main gaps in the literature that motivate this endeavour are as follows. Firstly, previous research examining the connections between (BL) and (BE) has adopted, but it has not addressed (BT) and (BA) how it considers (BL) as mediating variable (Chaudhuri, 1999) and (Hossien Emari, 2012).¹⁵ Second, this study examines the relationship between (BA& BT) how it affects (BL) (Zia et al., 2021). Third, this study looks into the potential indirect effects that trust and awareness characteristics may have on brand equity (Foroudi et al., 2018).^{16,17} The primary goal of the study was to examine the relationship between (BT) and (BA) with respect to (BL). Understanding how mediating factor (BL) affect (BE) was the second goal. Third was to check if the customers loyalty and equity remains same if they shop from organised retail.

The three key elements of brand connections that lead to consumers building equity in a company—trust, awareness and loyalty—are the subject of this study. The main research objective of this study is to examine how trust and awareness relate to consumer brand equity through three different pathways, both directly and indirectly. As a result, this study has added to our current understanding of the relationships between consumers and brands in commerce. Our approach emphasizes mediating variable approaches to brand equity in terms of management. Consideration of factors related to trust and awareness can lead to more valuable customer loyalty. The specific mediation path that has been identified to prioritize retail operations.

2. Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis

2.1. Brand trust

- 1. H1: Brand trust has significant relationship with brand loyalty.
- 2. H2: Brand trust has significant relationship with brand equity.

The primary construct associated with equity that is thought to have the most influence over marketing antecedents on brand equity is brand trust. To start, a number of models pertaining to brand trust have been created based on earlier research (Hariandja & Suryanto, 2021), 18 (Haudi et al., 2022),¹⁹ (Ebrahim, 2020),²⁰ (Eslami, 2020)²¹ and (Doddy et al., 2020).¹⁵ These trust models demonstrated how perceived value, client pleasure, and commitment all affect trust (Ulfat, 2014).²² Purchase intention, brand equity, and brand loyalty follow from a trusted brand (Yeh & Hsieh, 2015). According to (Shekhar Kumar et al., 2013), customers will therefore be more committed and loyal to a brand when they perceive higher levels of trust toward that brand. One of the most important qualities for every long-lasting, fulfilling relationship is trust (Pizzutti & Fernandes, 2010). Additionally, trust will encourage intention (Komunda & Osarenkhoe, 2012). As mentioned, the qualities of the brand will strengthen its reputation for reliability and integrity, which in turn will enhance brand equity and loyalty.

2.2. Brand awareness

H3: Brand awareness has significant relationship with brand loyalty.

H4: Brand awareness has significant relationship with brand equity.

According to (BiLgiN, 2018) in any event, it refers to how well a customer understands, accepts, and remembers a specific brand. The researcher's common knowledge base or their own experience can provide the proper type of brand awareness understanding of customers and the category, or from, if the investigator is unclear (Rossiter, 2014).²³ How well-informed are consumers and future consumers about your company and its offerings. Even if a customer has no direct understanding of the product, they can nevertheless buy it based only on its name and logo (Foroudi, 2019). According to (Guest, 1942)²⁴ discern between decisions made with knowledge and those made without true awareness of the brands in question. One important factor in consumer behaviour is spontaneity, which increases the likelihood of purchasing a well-known brand (Laurent et al., 1995).²⁵ According to (Homburg et al., 2010)²⁶ it serves as a reliable indicator of supplier dedication and product quality. Additionally, by making a person more sensitive to such initiatives, awareness encourages other promotional activities (Jalleh et al., 2002).²⁷ According to (Ambolau et al., 2015)²⁸ it denotes educating the customer about the product category. It is the opinion that customers have about the general nature of a business.

2.3. Brand loyalty

H5: Brand loyalty has significant relationship with brand equity.

According to (Knox & Walker, 2001)²⁹ the phrase "repeat purchase behaviour" is axiomatic and describes how often customers repurchase the same brand after first using it. By making repeated purchases of particular products or services over a predefined period of time, consequently, the regularity of purchases of a specific brand (Yi & Jeon, 2003).^{30,31} According to (Kabadayi & Alan, 2012)³² the emotional reaction of customers to a brand following an encounter with the brand. According to (Tucker, 1964) largely dependent on how frequently and consistently a brand has been chosen in the past. Although the consumer may consistently prefer a particular brand over others, there is no brand commitment, minimal personal investment, and little emotional investment in this decision (Gounaris & Stathakopoulos, 2004).³³ According to (Gommans et al., 2001)³⁴ which in turn affects variables relevant to marketing outcomes, such as price elasticity and market share preservation. Behavioural loyalty will rise in tandem with an increase in attitudinal loyalty (Rundle-Thiele & Maio Mackay, 2001). According to (Mcconnell, 1968)³⁵ a brand's price elasticity of demand decreases and the demand function's slope is altered as brand loyalty increases. Integrative approaches are being used more frequently in brand loyalty research to simulate the factors that precede brand loyalty (He et al., 2012). According to (Alhaddad, 2015)³⁶ it can offer significant benefits for customers and companies alike.

2.4. Brand equity

According to (Lassar et al., 1995)³⁷ the assessment of a brand's marketing mix components may benefit from the measurement of brand equity. For more than ten years, (BE) has been the focus of scholarly research and interest as a crucial idea for modern businesses (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015). According to (Krishnan & Hartline, 2001)³⁷ depending on whether search, experience, or credence traits predominate, a service's brand equity will change. According to (Im et al., 2012) brand equity suggests that a key component in generating the value is brand awareness. to become well-versed in consumer brand knowledge frameworks in order to recognize and measure possible sources. The degree of brand loyalty exhibited by a company has an impact on its long-term stability and growth in revenues and profits, protecting it against external

threats (Keller & Brexendorf, 2019). As the variations in customer reactions between a product with a focus brand and one without, even when both have the same level of characteristics made up of cognitive dimensions(Jeon, 2017). Developing a strong brand with good equity has a favourable impact on consumers' reactions to brands, which in turn improves the success of businesses (Pina & Dias, 2021).³⁸ A key concept in marketing literature, brand equity and has significant ramifications for brand management (Buil et al., 2013)³⁹ and (Lieven et al., 2014).⁴⁰

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Context and data collection

The organized retail chains in North Karnataka are the study's location, where consumers have faith in the brands and where face care companies have established brand equity. We have employed a questionnaire to gather data for market research, and the results align well with the conceptual model. Products for facial care are very popular. We asked study participants about the two product categories they frequently purchased from the same brand in order to gauge their brand equity while purchasing face care goods from organized retail establishments. The goal of the counter-research was to identify the variables that contribute to equity, such as loyalty, trust, and awareness, (BE) is dependent variable. A number of items were chosen as the main subject of this inquiry for face care.



Figure 1: Conceptual framework for the study

Participants in the initial research were asked to rank one of the chosen goods based on their degree of expertise. Prior to responding to the questionnaire, they were required to disclose the brand they typically buy. To prevent display bias, the investigators did not display any brand descriptions because the respondents had bought goods from a variety of brands. For the research, an ultimate sample of 379 men and women who were all above the age of 18 and recruited from North Karnataka. By choosing North Karnataka, the sample might be more similar (having alike access to the brands from identical topographical zone). Therefore, it was imperative to utilize both confirmatory and exploratory factor analyses in order to ascertain their suitability for compliance.

3.2. Measurement and data analysis approach

In this study, we employed a quantifiable methodology, examining the correlations between the variables specified by the application of pertinent statistical practices. A Likert scale (Joshi et al., 2015)⁴¹ with a range of one to seven points is included in the survey to assist respondents in expressing their preferences. The investigation is carried out using Smart-PLS software and the Partial Least Square (PLS) technique in conjunction with the Structural Equation Model (SEM) as the analytical instrument (Wong, 2013).⁴² Because it may yield precise results, smart-PLS is currently a widely utilized analytical approach in a wide range of scientific studies. The sample size is established based on the PLS hypothesis testing criteria using bootstrapping and resampling (Streukens & Leroi-Werelds, 2016). In this study, (Krivantono, 2012) a technique known as convenience sampling is employed, in which consumers of specific face cream brands who just so happen to use the product are given questionnaires.

4. Analysis and Results

4.1. Reliability assessment

The investigator received 379 responses in total. Respondents' profile data in this questionnaire includes details about their age, gender, education and brands, as shown in Table-1 below. People who have transacted in organized retail stores are the primary target audience for the questionnaire linked with this research. Here in the below Table-1 and Figure-2, we can see that Himalaya brand is purchased more when compared to other brands. When asked the respondents during the collection of data they said that they trust the products of this brand when compared to other brands. So, they are loyal towards the brand. Here we can say how much loyalty the brand has gained. When we talk about the demographics, we had selected both men and women who buy facecare products. In this we can see that female customers are more when compared to male customers who bought the products. When we look at the age of the respondents the age range of 26-35, customers are more who prefer to shop the products. When asked the respondents they said they are comfortable buying the products and they will never switch the brands as they are vey much loyal towards the brand. When we loom into the education of the respondents most of the customers are educated with PG degree. So, collecting the data was very easy as they were comfortable in answering the questions asked by the researchers.

The authors of this study selected customers who shop face care products from organized retail stores located in the North Karnataka region. See and sense the close bond between organized retail and customers towards the brand, just as the author does. Given that the goal of this investigation was to ascertain the implications for (BL) and



Figure 2: Description of respondents of brands usage

whether (BT), (BA) had any effect on (BE). People who have made purchases at organized stores were the research subjects selected by the investigators for this study. As it was previously said, there are four variables in this study: (BT), (BA), (BL), and (BE). Where the dependent variable is (BE) and the independent variables are (BT, BA, and BL). The authors employ the Likert scale as a questionnaire measurement. According to (Wong, 2013), respondents can use the Likert scale, which has a range of 1 to 7(Joshi et al., 2015), to accurately answer the questions. Primary data can be gathered directly from sources and respondents through the use of surveys, questionnaires and interviews. Researchers used questionnaires to get information. To ascertain the indicators of additional independent variables (Hult et al., 2018).⁸ Researchers gathered secondary data from journal publications, textbooks on fundamental theory, internet pieces, and news stories. Based on theory (Zikmund, 2013), this research uses 12 indicators, as indicated in Table-2 below. Specifically, take the test, several models were employed by the researchers for the actual test, to test the hypothesis, the measurement model with the model fit. The researcher has employed the bootstrapping approach using SmartPLS to test the hypothesis.

2 and Figure-3 demonstrates that every factor loading value exhibits a value greater than 0.7 (Sarstedt et al., 2019)⁴³ it follows that any variable can account for the variation of every indicator that measures it. Additionally, the measurement is evident from the values of convergent validity (AVE), (CA), and (CR), which are shown in Table-2 below. Based on the composite reliability value and Cronbach's Alpha value, it can be inferred that all four measurement models are deemed reliable and that each of the four variables has a reliability value over 0.7 (Kriyantono, 2012), indicating that each variable can be accurately measured using specified indications. The stronger the correlation between the indicators that comprise a concept, the greater the convergent validity score. Table-2 AVE value demonstrates that each of the four latent variables has an AVE value greater than the minimal requirement of 0.5(Avkiran, 2018),⁴⁴ indicating that the convergent validity measure is good or that they have been met.

Table 1: Description of Respondents						
Brands	Total	Demographics	Category	Frequency	Percentage	
Nivea	96		Male	154	41%	
Lakme	67	Gender	Female	225	59%	
Mama Earth	42		18-25	26	7%	
Himalaya	116		26-35	293	77%	
Patanjali	25	Age	36-45	32	8%	
L'oreal	15		46-55	19	5%	
Dove	7		56 above	9	2%	
Olay	7		UG	20	5%	
Nykaa	4	Education	PG	333	88%	
			12th	26	7%	

Table 2: Reliability evaluation

Variables	Mean	SD	Factor Loading	Cronbach'salpha	CR	AVE
Brand Trust						
Brand meets my expectations. (BT1)	0.762	0.031	0.875			
I assume this brand is reliable. (BT2)	0.847	0.018	0.858	0.761	0.863	0.679
I prefer this brand to be safe to use.	0.857	0.017	0.834			
Brand Awareness						
This brand meets my expectations.	0.874	0.015	0.736			
(BA1)				0.818	0.891	0.732
The brand maintains quality (BA2)	0.857	0.018	0.959			
The brand maintains hygiene (BA3)	0.834	0.020	0.960			
Brand Loyalty						
I buy this brand as its worth (BL1)	0.874	0.015	0.848			
I am a dedicated customer to my preferred brand. (BL2)	0.857	0.018	0.893	0.806	0.886	0.721
I am happy to pay a premium for this brand (BL3)	0.834	0.020	0.805			
Brand Equity						
I have positive image towards the brand. (BE1)	0.959	0.960	0.763	0.863	0.920	0.794
The quality of the brand has never dropped (BE2)	0.960	0.960	0.848			
I feel comfortable buying my brand in organised store (BE3)	0.848	0.847	0.857			



Figure 3: Results of the structural model (PLS-SEM)

The Smart-PLS version 4 application is used to determine structural calculations based on the study, which employs the PLS technique for analysis. (Ab Hamid et

al., 2017)⁴⁵ testing for vital validity is a component of the first phase. The discriminant validity is then evaluated using the Fornell-Lacker criterion.(Kante et al., 2018)⁴⁶, which compares the square root of the AVE standards with the latent factor. More precisely, the square root of the AVE must exceed its maximum correlation with any other element. According to Table 3, the square root of AVE for perceptive constructions like (BT), (BA), (BL) and (BE) were better than the corresponding correlation using latent variables. It was crucial that these ideas had discriminant validity. The structural model results shown in Table-3 shows that all of the components meet the requirements for discriminant validity and that no factor is overlapping or rejected.

Among the indices put forth by (Sarstedt et al., 2019) is the goodness-of-fit index, states that it can be utilized as an operational solution to issues since it can be interpreted as

Table 5. Discriminant valuity						
Construct	BA	BE	BL	BT		
BA	0.856					
BE	0.546	0.891				
BL	0.618	0.468	0.849			
BT	0.624	0.636	0.475	0.824		

 Table 3: Discriminant validity

an index to validate the PLS model nationwide. An extra fit metric is represented by the normed fit index, or NFI. As a result, the model has numerous parameters and better results will be obtained if the NFI value is higher. NFI generates values between 0 and 1, with a better match occurring when NFI approaches 1. As stated by (Henseler et al., 2014),⁴⁷ an acceptably fit is typically indicated by an NFI value within 0.9. (Hu & Bentler, 1999)⁴⁸ used the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) to evaluate efficacy in their study, states that an adequate fit is defined by a value at SRMR <0.1.

Table 4	4:	Model	fit	summary
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	Saturated model	Estimated model
SRMR	0.081	0.081
NFI	0.615	0.615

 R^2 of (BE) is 0.454, this indicates that (BT), (BA) and (BL) respect account for 45.4% of (BE). However, R^2 for (BL) is 0.395, this indicates that (BT), (BA) and (BE) account for 39.5% of brand loyalty. According to the hypothesis (Henseler et al., 2014) and (Hair et al., 2012) it is subsantial value. As demonstrated in Table 5 below, the outcome of satisfies the requirements and has good predictive significance.

Table 5: R-squared

	R-square	R-square adjusted
BE	0.454	0.449
BL	0.395	0.392



Figure 4: Results of boot strapping (PLS-SEM)

Conclusions can be made based on the computation of the five hypotheses' outcomes, all of which are supported by the measurement results shown in Table-6 and Figure-4. Since (Jacqueline et al., 2024)⁴⁹ all of them have complied with the conditions (P-value <0.50), they each have a strong effect to support.

Table 6: Path anlysis and Hypothesis test					
Items	5	Original sample	T statistics	P value	Hypothesis
H1	BT -> BL	0.146	2.302	0.021	Accepted
H2	BT -> BE	0.463	9.267	0.000	Accepted
Н3	BA -> BL	0.527	9.393	0.000	Accepted
H4	BA -> BE	0.169	2.637	0.008	Accepted
Н5	BL -> BE	0.144	2.905	0.004	Accepted

The variable correlations found in certain earlier investigations are substantially confirmed by the findings of this investigation. Given that the P value did not exceed 0.05, the impact relations of BT -> BL, BT -> BE, BA -> BL, BA -> BE, and BL -> BE. All were significant. Thus, it is clear that all factors and (BE) have a close relationship.

5. Conclusions, Discussion and Implications

The section that follows discusses the theoretical and managerial implications of the research, as well as the study's limitations and future research prospects.

5.1. Discussion

There is a dearth of empirical research in the (BE) literature that examines the connections between consumer responses and consumer-based brand loyalty. In order to comprehend these linkages better, the current work puts forth and evaluates a model. This approach has evaluated the concept's contribution from the foundational aspects of brand equity. The data was validated using PLS-SEM and the Smart-PLS software 4.0.9.9. Additionally, the impact of total (BE) on consumers' (BA) and level of (BT) in the company has been examined. The findings suggest that there is a causal hierarchy involved in the development of (BE). First, (BL) and (BE) benefit from the influence of (BT & BA). Second, there is a substantial link between (BL) and (BE). The proposed model of the study delivers an additional precise explanation of loyalty and equity, which is not necessarily a direct spectacle, adding to the body of knowledge already accessible on consumer loyalty. Many of the linkages that are being looked at here have either only been partially studied or have not taken the ongoing mediation processes into account. For example, revealed that there are two ways to comprehend how customers feel about brands, products, or services: trust and awareness.

A third way, loyalty and equity, has never been studied in connection with organized retail stores buying face care products. Thus, the main contribution of this research is to determine the elements that cause (BL) and those that will affect (BE).

This demonstrates that when a customer has faith in a brand, they are not obligated to shop at established retailers; instead, they can purchase goods from any vendor of their choice. Customers are more likely to trust a brand because it has built loyalty than because of the brand's availability. Going back to the original point, though, it's not a given that customers will always purchase at the same location, even if they had a positive experience with a brand and develop trust in it. There are a few methods to get around this, one of which is to boost the brand's legitimacy, which will foster loyalty.

5.2. Managerial implications

The investigation's conclusions enable distinct management ramifications for merchants to be recommended. The mediation impact of loyalty demonstrates the consequences of trust and awareness, both directly and indirectly, as well as the (BE) component. Overall, the study's conclusions suggest that retail brand managers should be extremely clear about the kinds of connections they want to establish. Retail managers aim to focus on both (BL) and (BE), with the ultimate goal being to improve (BE). Strong connections between (BT), (BA) and (BL) have been discovered; these findings suggest that supervisors ought to collaborate in order to counteract the loyalty process. Retail brand managers, for example, may draw attention to the trust-related awareness traits. With the use of such a brand strategy, customers will be more able to recognize the loyalty traits associated with the brand and increase (BE). Furthermore, brand managers ought to stress awareness that goes beyond simple facial care, creating strong emotional bonds with loyal customers that encourage positive wordof-mouth.

5.3. Limitation and future research

This study has a number of limitations that offer opportunities for additional investigation into the relationships between consumer facial brands.

First, because the focus of this paper is mass market product face care, it would be interesting to test the idea through experiments or apply it to other markets or industries, such electronics and automobiles. For instance, historically, electronics have been associated with well-known companies like JBL and SONY. Consumer perceptions of awareness dimensions, however, may shift as new emerging market brands are introduced and as lesserknown businesses become more well-known on social media. Future research, utilizing our study paradigm, might be based on the products of their choice in organised retail chains.

Second, the third dimensions of customer commitment (CC) may be incorporated into the model. Similarly, brand relationship characteristics may be impacted by the commitment the customers have towards the brands, which have shown how crucial it is for either strengthening or weakening a brand's standing. Therefore, future research might examine whether specific parts of (BE) are more susceptible to negative publicity and its impact on particular loyalty attributes.

Third, prevented testing of specific components, such as brand sensitivity, which may dramatically mitigate the effects of some model connections. For luxury items, for instance, there might be variations in how certain faithfulness factors are influenced by (BL) dimensions. The impact and commitment pathways would outweigh the trust in an opulent environment. Further research endeavours ought to clarify this assertion by applying our study methodology.

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None.

7. Conflict of Interest

None.

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