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BRAND EQUITY OF LAHORE FORT AS A TOURISM DESTINATION BRAND

Brand equity do Forte Lahore como uma marca de destino turístico

Brand equity del Fuerte Lahore como una marca de destino turístico

ABSTRACT

Studies that measure the brand equity of destination brands by using the Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model in a developing country context are scarce. The present study investigates the destination brand equity of the Lahore Fort by employing the CBBE model in a developing country context of Pakistan. Following the positivist tradition, we adopted a survey-based approach to collect data from 237 tourists visiting the Lahore Fort. Data were collected through a questionnaire developed to explain the relationship of brand awareness, brand image, brand association, and brand loyalty with Lahore Fort's overall brand equity. We used various robust statistical techniques such as correlation, regression and confirmatory factor analysis (using PLS method) to reach meaningful conclusions and found that brand image and brand associations positively contribute to brand loyalty. Furthermore, brand loyalty significantly contributes towards overall brand equity. Pragmatically, this study measures the customer based brand equity of the Lahore Fort, a destination brand. The results are useful as they suggest a few strategies that can help policy makers to enhance Lahore Fort's brand performance.

KEYWORDS | Customer-based brand equity, destination-branding, Lahore Fort, brand equity, Pakistan.

RESUMO

Estudos que medem brand equity de destino turístico utilizando o modelo Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) no contexto de países em desenvolvimento têm sido escassos. O presente artigo investiga a brand equity do Forte Lahore, empregando o modelo CBBE no Paquistão. Seguindo a tradição positivista, realizamos um levantamento com 237 turistas em visita ao Forte Lahore. Os dados foram coletados por meio de um questionário desenvolvido para explicar as relações do conhecimento de marca, imagem de marca, associação de marca, e fidelidade à marca com a brand equity do Forte Lahore. Utilizamos várias técnicas estatísticas robustas, como correlação, regressão e análise fatorial confirmatória (utilizando o método PLS) a fim de chegar a conclusões significativas. Descobrimos que a imagem e as associações da marca contribuem positivamente para a fidelização, por sua vez, contribui significantemente com brand equity. Pragmaticamente, o estudo mede a brand equity com base na percepção de clientes em relação ao Forte Lahore, uma marca de destino turístico. Os resultados são úteis na medida em que sugerem estratégias que podem ajudar responsáveis pelas leis do turismo local a melhorarem o desempenho da marca.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE | *Customer-based brand equity, destino turístico, Forte Lahore, brand equity, Paquistão.*

RESUMEN

Estudios que miden el valor de marca de marcas de destino utilizando el Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) modelos en el contexto de un país en desarrollo son escasos. El presente estudio investiga la marca de valor de destino del Fuerte Lahore empleando el modelo CBBE en el contexto de un país en desarrollo en Pakistán. Siguiendo la tradición positivista, adoptamos un enfoque basado en encuesta para colectar datos de 237 turistas visitando el Fuerte Lahore. Los datos fueron coletados a través de un cuestionario desarrollado para explicar la relación de conciencia de marca, imagen de marca, asociación de marca, y leadad de marca con el valor de marca total del Fuerte Lahore. Nosotros utilizamos varias técnicas estadísticas robustas como correlación, regresión y análisis de factores confirmativos (utilizando el método PLS) para alcanzar conclusiones significativas y descobrir que el imagen de marca y las asociaciones de marca contribuyen positivamente a la lealtad de marca. Además, la lealtad de marca contribuye significativamente hacia la equidad de marca en general. Pragmáticamente, ese estudio mide el valor de marca basado en el cliente del Fuerte Lahore, una marca de destino. Los resultados son útiles ya que sugieren algunas estrategias que pueden ayudar los responsables por la formación de políticas a aumentar el desempeño de la marca.

PALABRAS-CLAVE | *Customer-based brand equity, destino turistico, Fuerte Lahore, brand equity, Pakistán.*

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INTRODUCTION

The services sector has grown exponentially all across the globe. In Asia, a significant growth trend has been observed regarding tourist visits to various destination brands (Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride, 2011). However, these brands are facing place-branding challenges which need careful attention from researchers and practitioners. Branding is critical for the growth of destination brands because of the close substitutability of various destinations (Pike, 2005). Over the years, branding has been acknowledged as the means to differentiate one company's products and services among other competing firms (Aaker 1991; Keller, 2003). The brand management literature started to appear in the journals in the early 1940's (Guest, 1942). However, the concept of destination branding emerged as a discipline for marketing researchers in the late 1990's (Pike, Bianchi, Kerr, & Patti, 2010). Since then, branding researchers have started to highlight various issues pertaining to destination brands. A number of studies supported the notion that core branding principles can be replicated to investigate destination brands (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007). Although some significant research has been performed to unearth the nuances of destination brands, this field within the discipline of marketing is still in its infancy (Pike, Bianchi, Kerr, & Patti, 2010). A better understanding of brands from the perspective of consumers living in a developing country will surely help destination brand marketers to devise competitive strategies in order to sustain market share (Pike, 2009).

The core of branding a destination lies in creating memorable service experiences for customers, reducing risk and motivating them to revisit the destination again and again (Blain, Levy, & Ritchie, 2005). Meeting customer expectations has been central to the creation of a memorable service experience which will further strengthen the brand equity of a destination (Im, Kim, Elliot, & Han, 2012). The studies in destination branding have so far investigated the brand identity of destination brands, but the measurement of destination brand performance has been neglected (Pike, 2009). The measurement of brand performance has been pivotal to the success of destination brands due to two reasons. Firstly, there is an increase in competition as well as substitutability of destination brands where visitors now have more choices (Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride, 2002). Secondly, the investment made by destination brands has been held to higher accountability by stakeholders (Pike, 2005). These challenges trigger the need to investigate destination brand performance, which is rarely investigated in services (Kim, Kim, & An, 2003).

There are various branding matrixes championed to measure performance. However, contemporary researchers of service marketing have coined a new perspective to the measurement of brand equity: Employee Based Brand Equity (King & Grace, 2010). This perspective recognizes the critical role of employees in contributing to the brand equity of a service organization. However, the model lacks empirical generalization, and contemporary researchers recommend using CBBE to measure brand equity (Bianchi, Pike, & Lings, 2014).The Customer Based Brand Equity Model (CBBE) has been widely acknowledged (Pike et al., 2010; Im et al., 2012). It has been proposed by Aaker (1991, 1996) and Keller (1993, 2003) to measure the familiarity and superiority of brand identity. The model has four salient features: brand awareness, brand image, brand association, and brand resonance. The development of brand equity has been central to the success of brands, and managers must understand the customer's point of view concerning brand equity (Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011). However, the theory underlying brand equity and its application to destination brands from a measurement perspective is scarce (Pike et al., 2010).

There are various knowledge gaps which must be acknowledged. Firstly, brand measurement has been performed for cultural and heritage brands, but investigations presented only a developed country perspective (Balmer, 2011). Investigations from developing countries, such as the present study, will add a few new insights to the current understanding of services marketing (Frimpong & Wilson, 2013). Secondly, given the importance of creating competitive advantage for destination brands in an era of high substitutability and the lack of a sound theory to investigate brand equity for destination brands, the present study is aimed at extending the CBBE model to measure the brand performance of destination brands from a developing country context. The major contribution of this study lies not only in developing a destination brand equity model from a developing country context, but also in presenting the strength of Lahore Fort's brand equity. Pakistan has been an interesting country to investigate because of its people, culture, and traditions, all of which attract a large number of tourists. Pakistan is a Muslim state where a large number of places for spiritual and historical tourism exist, from shrines to places such as the Lahore Fort. It has been acknowledged that Muslims perceive brand promotions very differently and they must be considered a separate market for study (Behboudi, Vazifehdoust, Najafi, & Najafi, 2014). The country remains an excellent venue to investigate place branding, as no study has epitomized destination branding regarding the various destinations located all across Pakistan (Haq & Wong, 2010). The country differs from Western nations with regard to culture. Theoretically, people living in different parts of the world interpret brand equity based on their self-references (Atilgan,

Akinci, Aksoy, & Kaynak, 2009). People living in a collectivist cultural context interpret brands differently than their counterparts who score high on individualism and consider brand equity a context-specific phenomenon (Jerome, 2012). Since Pakistan is a collectivist society, we envision different results concerning the application of the CBBE model.

The Lahore Fort was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1981. The trapezoidal composition of the Lahore Fort reminds the era of Mughal emperors, who ruled the subcontinent for many centuries. The Lahore Fort was built by Mughal emperor Akbar in the years 1556-1605. The Fort attracts local as well as international tourists. Furthermore, there are various cultural and social events being organized at the Lahore Fort which also attract many tourists. However, no study has been initiated to measure the strength of Lahore Fort as a brand. This study will be useful for policy makers and other government officials in Pakistan to better position the Lahore Fort and other similar destinations in the minds of local and international tourists.

Given these theoretical and contextual gaps, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- What is the impact of brand awareness, brand image, brand association, and brand loyalty on Lahore Fort's brand equity as a destination brand?

- What is the 'model fit' for CBBE in destination brand in a developing country context?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Destination brands

The replication and extension of the branding concept took a path which emerged from product brands to nation brands. It has generated a debate concerning the brand theory and its adaptation to related constructs such as tourism (Kotler & Gertner, 2002). Destination marketing researchers in particular have challenged the replication of brand theory to investigate tourist destinations (Gartner & Ruzzier, 2011). These researchers believe that destination brands are complex to investigate and brand managers have very little control due to the involvement of many other stakeholders (Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride, 2002). Major stakeholders include: the government, international funding bodies, and the society. Despite this opposing view concerning replication, the investigation of destination brands has been well acknowledged in the literature (Pike et al., 2010). A critical review of literature on destination branding presents some critical success factors such as: brand identity and personality; selection of appropriate target market; brand positioning; and mutual relationships among the partners delivering the service (Im, 2003, p. 76). Baker and Cameron (2008) identified four critical success factors for a destination brand which include: (1) holistic orientation towards tourism planning; (2) managing the identity and image of the destination brand; (3) engagement and active participation of stakeholders; and (4) brand measurement.

There has been a growing interest of researchers and scholars to develop destination branding models by adapting the Keller (1993) CBBE model to tourism services (Boo, Busser, & Baloglu, 2009; Pike et al., 2010). Aaker (1996) holds the view that CBBE is a set of assets or liabilities to any brand name or symbol that add to, or reduce, the value of the brand in the minds of customers. These positive or negative associations predict consumer liking and disliking of any brand as well as purchase intentions. Keller (1993) conceived CBBE as "the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand". These classic models have been adapted by destination marketing researchers. Cai's (2002) model has been highly acknowledged by tourism marketers. The author concluded there was a 'brand mix' for the success of a brand which consisted of brand image, brand identity, and other marketing activities. The branding model proposed by Konecnik and Gartner (2007) focused primarily on presenting the brand dimensions that can create a healthy relationship between the customer and the brand. Furthermore, the researchers acknowledged the role of brand image in contributing positively to brand equity (Boo et al., 2009). Pike et al. (2010) tested a relationship among the destination brand dimensions of image, quality, loyalty, and salience. How positively the brand is perceived by consumers affects their behavior and is a predictor of brand success or failure (Tasci & Kozak, 2006). These authors emphasized not only brand image but also brand salience as means to foster strong customer-brand relationships that can be effectively employed by destination brand researchers.

Consumer-based destination brand equity

Brand equity studies consist of two broader categories. Firstly, the measurement of consumer perceptions of brand image, brand awareness, and brand associations. Secondly, the investigation of consumer behavior in destination brands, which includes customer attitudes toward a brand, such as loyalty (Baker & Cameron, 2008). Brand loyalty in destination brands has been measured by integrating four distinct constructs;

brand image, brand awareness, brand associations, and perceived quality (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1993). Destination marketing researchers have separated these four constructs (Qu et al., 2011). Brand awareness measures the extent to which consumers are aware of the branding elements, while brand image measures consumer perceptions of brand identity. Brand awareness is the extent to which a consumer can recall, recognize, and have sound knowledge of the brand (Aaker, 1996). Brand image has been a critical factor to the success of a brand. A low perceived difference between brand identity and brand image (consumer perceptions of destination brand identity) has been acknowledged as a strong element of a brand (Boo et al., 2009). On the other side, brand associations measure the attributes of a destination that strike the consumer's mind once the brand is exposed to him/her (Qu et al., 2011). Finally, perceived quality measures the extent of functional performance according to the perceptions of consumers. Marketing researchers have focused on these elements of a brand and been able to establish a few other models. For instance, Yoo, Donthu, and Lee (2000) developed a Multidimensional Brand Equity (MBE) scale based on the study of Aaker (1996). The results revealed a strong relationship among brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand associations. Hence, it can be inferred that Brand equity can be created and expanded through strengthening these four dimensions (Yoo et al., 2000).

Destination marketers need to focus on these four aspects in order to enhance the brand equity of a destination brand. Destination brands promote their differential image to consumers, and this differential image is based on its unique identity (Baker & Cameron, 2008). Tourists like to visit places which also compete and deliver on functional qualities such as gardens, parking, restaurants, and culture through history (Hanna & Rowley, 2011). All these images and associations are pivotal for the success of a destination brand. Researchers recommend incorporating these four elements while measuring the brand equity of a particular destination brand (Qu et al., 2011).

Brand awareness

When consumers are able to recognize the category membership of a brand, it is assumed that they have a certain level of brand awareness (Aaker, 1996). The first step to create brand equity is the generation of brand awareness in the minds of consumers, which is also true in the case of destination brands (Gartner & Ruzzier, 2011). Brand awareness plays a central role in the choice of a destination (Chon, 1992). Before visiting any destination, tourists form an 'awareness set', i.e., recognition of the available destination brands in consumers' minds (Kotler, Haider, & Rein, 1993). The 'awareness set' generally leads to developing a 'consideration set' that will assist in selecting a destination brand (Kotler et al., 1993). Once consumers attain more information about the brands, only a few brands remain to form a 'choice set' (Kotler et al., 1993). These are important facets for destination brand marketers, therefore they must be acknowledged in order to trigger destination brand choice (Boo et al., 2009). Destination marketers have stressed the need to impart brand knowledge, brand recognition, and brand recall, which are the determinants of brand awareness (Pike et al., 2010). A higher level of brand awareness positively contributes to destination brand equity, leading visitors to remain loyal (Boo et al., 2009). However, in a few cases, brand awareness does not directly lead enhancing brand equity. In case of destination brands, this is attributed to low spending in brand promotions (Blain, Levy, & Ritchie, 2005). A lesser focus of destination marketers on promotion through brand activities such as events can also lead to lower levels of brand awareness, which can affect brand equity (Hudson & Ritchie, 2009). Therefore, the path from brand awareness to brand loyalty can vary according to the destination brand under study, and this must be considered by destination branding researchers (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007). Generally, destination marketing studies support the notion that a strong brand loyalty is an indicator of higher levels of brand awareness, positive and favorable brand image, and is a signal of high perceived quality (Pike et al., 2010).

Brand associations

The role of brand associations is significant in the branding literature. Favorable brand associations offer several benefits to consumers which can be replicated to destination brand visitors. For instance, favorable brand associations influence consumers' intention to visit a historical place, generate references to others, and increase their willingness to pay a premium (Agarwal & Rao, 1996). Brand associations assist consumers in organizing and retrieving brand-related information from their memory, leading to the realization of a reason to buy a specific brand (Aaker, 1996). Brand associations are attributed to benefits sought attitudes towards the product/service/destination, the outlining of functional advantages, and brand personality, all of which contribute highly to enhance brand equity (Keller, 1993; Pappu, Quester, & Cooksey, 2005). Research in destination branding has been limited with regard to studies that empirically test the combined effects of all these elements of brand associations and their divergent effects on

brand equity (Im et al., 2012). These researchers recommend incorporating brand quality and brand attitude as strong predictors of brand associations in the case of destination brands. These two elements have been found to strongly impact overall brand associations (Aaker 1991). Brand quality is interchangeably used as 'customer perceived quality' which is defined as "the consumer's judgment about a product's overall excellence or superiority (Zeithaml, 1988, p. 3). Perceived quality is an effective tool against strong competition and provides consumers with a reason to buy a certain brand (Aaker 1991; Pappu et al., 2005). Visitor perceptions of brand quality can generate a positive attitude that is pivotal for enhancing destination brand equity (Boo et al., 2009). Generally, a favorable and highly positive attitude toward a destination brand helps enhancing overall brand equity (Pike et al., 2010). An understanding of what visitors perceive and feel about the quality of a destination brand helps in devising brand strategies to gain competitive advantages (Baker & Cameron, 2008).

Brand image

Brand image is the set of memory-based associations that consumers perceive about a brand (Keller, 1993). Some informational nodes are created in the memory which helps consumers assign meaning to the brands. Once a node is activated, it triggers some set of associations in a consumer's mind which determines the strength of the association (Aaker, 1991). Destination brands also work through the activation of nodes in the consumer's memory that help him/her define the brand in different situations (Pike et al., 2010). Destination brand image has been extensively researched and has been considered an important facet in enhancing destination brands'overall brand equity and loyalty (Cai, 2002; Boo et al., 2009). These researchers stressed the importance of brand image in the formation of a branding model for destination brands. Destination brand image is comprised of six elements; (a) facilities offered; (b) culture of the destination; (c) environment and nature; (d) hospitality; (e) comfort; and (f) other elements of brand such as food items (Boo et al., 2009). It is noteworthy that destination brand image is an integrated phenomenon, i.e., a brand image will be unique once the associations are well planned out and the identity is clear to destination brand promoters prior to being communicated to visitors (Qu et al., 2011). A positive brand image offers benefits such as high brand loyalty to destination brands in the view of marketers who highlight the critical role of brand image on destination brand equity (Cai, 2002).

Brand loyalty

Loyalty in branding has been defined in two ways: attitudinal and behavioral (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Consumers' individual dispositions toward a specific destination brand and their repurchase intentions form the attitudinal perspective to brand loyalty (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). These researchers also believed that visitors' satisfaction lead to positive attitude formation. On the other side, behavioral loyalty has been attributed to repeat purchase of a brand (Pappu et al., 2005). Loyalty has been extensively investigated in marketing studies; however, in destination branding, it is perceived as still in infancy (Pike et al., 2010). In tourism marketing studies, brand loyalty has been found to strongly influence tourist behavior during brand choice (Chon, 1992). Destination loyalty has been measured through visit intentions and the recommendation of various destinations to others (Baker & Crompton, 2000). However, brand loyalty is one element of brand equity which also encompasses brand attitude, awareness, performance, and image (Chen & Gursoy, 2001). It has been believed that a differential response toward brand communication should be understood as brand equity, while purchase intentions and loyalty are the outcomes of brand equity (Oppermann, 2000). Destination marketing researchers hold the view that perceived quality, brand loyalty, and brand awareness are the common characteristics of brand equity (Yoo et al., 2000). The consumer's positive intent towards these characteristics increase the overall brand equity of destination brands (Washburn & Plank, 2002). Brand awareness and image have been identified as core attributes which contribute to enhance destination brand equity (Boo et al., 2009; Gartner & Ruzzier, 2011). Hence, these elements are considered pivotal in studies where brand equity was measured for destination brands. Relying on existing knowledge, we proposed the following hypotheses:

H_1: Destination brand awareness positively contributes to destination brand loyalty.

H_2: Destination brand image positively contributes to destination brand loyalty.

H_3: Destination brand associations positively contribute to destination brand loyalty.

H_4: Destination brand awareness positively contributes to overall brand equity of destination brands.

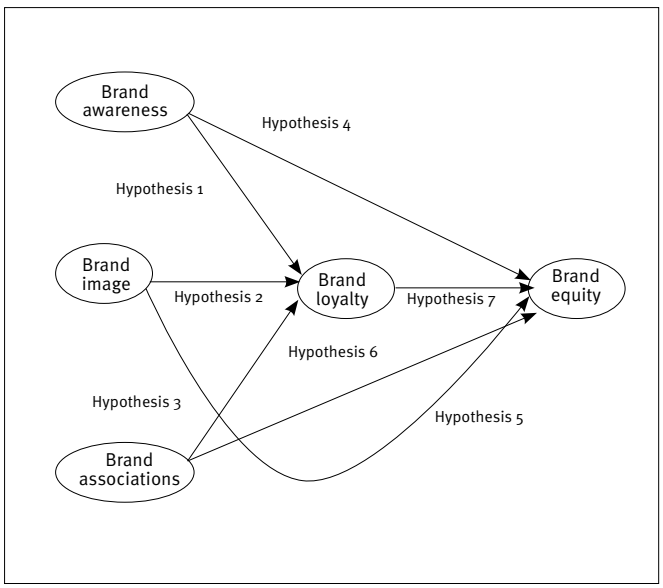
H_5: Destination brand image positively contributes to the overall brand equity of destination brands.

H_6: Destination brand associations positively contribute to the overall brand equity of destination brands

There are numerous studies where brand loyalty positively contributes to enhance overall brand equity (Pike et al., 2010; Washburn & Plank, 2002; Yoo et al., 2000). In this study, we used brand loyalty to mediate the relationship with overall brand equity; however, brand loyalty also affects directly overall brand equity. The following hypothesis explains the relationship proposed:

H_7: Destination brand loyalty positively contributes to overall destination brand equity.

Figure 1. **Research Model**



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study and its precincts

The current study was planned to understand the impact of each of the four dimensions of CBBE on the brand loyalty and overall brand equity of a destination brand. To achieve our objectives, we adopted a survey-based approach to measure Lahore Fort's brand strength. Pakistan was chosen as the context due to absence of a country-specific study measuring the strength of the world heritage site of Lahore Fort. The Lahore Fort was selected as a 'destination brand' for this study as it has been listed a UNESCO world heritage site, and a large number of local and foreign tourists visit this place. An already used scale was selected from the study of Im et al. (2012). The decision for this scale was made after judging face validity. We invited a panel of six experts in the field of marketing and brand management to comment the clarity and comprehensiveness of the instrument. The experts suggested minimal changes, which we incorporated, and the instrument was finalized.

Measurement

The scale used by Im et al. (2012) was employed, consisting of five constructs under CBBE: Brand Awareness, Brand Image, Brand associations, Brand Loyalty, and Brand Equity. The scale consisted of two parts: the five constructs under CBBE and visitor demographics such as gender and age. In total, there were 34 items, measured on a Likert scale where 1 = strongly disagree, and 5 = strongly agree. We adopted this scale over others due to several reasons. Firstly, the scale was developed in the Asian setting of Malaysia, which is also a Muslim country and a collectivist society. Considering brand equity as a context-specific phenomenon, the congruence of both countries on account of culture and religion (i.e., collectivist and Muslim) can be beneficial as proposed by contemporary researchers (Jerome, 2012). Secondly, the scale was developed specifically to measure the brand equity of a destination brand, which is also the purpose of this study. Thirdly, the scale has never been tested so far. Therefore, this study will add to the generalizability of this scale a heritage destination brand, i.e., the Lahore Fort. The measurement with the scale is explained in sections bellow.

Brand awareness

This construct consisted of three items, and interviewees were shown statements such as: "I am well aware of the Lahore Fort as a destination brand" and "I can recognize the Lahore Fort as a destination brand".

Brand image

This construct was measured by dividing it into two sub-themes: brand attitude and brand quality. In total, there were 20 items. Examples of the items are: "The Lahore Fort has a good infrastructure" and "The cleanliness of the Lahore Fort is good".

Brand associations

This dimension was measured through four items such as: "I think the Lahore Fort is a high quality tourist attraction".

Brand loyalty

This dimension was measured through four items. Examples of statements are: "The Lahore Fort is my first choice" and "I would like to recommend this destination to others".

Brand equity

This dimension was measured through four items such as: "Even if some other destination has the same image, I would prefer to visit the Lahore Museum" and "Given the other art places in the city, I think visiting the Lahore Fort is a smart move".

Data collection

For the purpose of this study, an on-site survey was operationalized to target the participants, who were visiting the Lahore Fort from September to October, 2013. The nature of our data collection is cross-sectional. The survey questionnaire was administered by a group of three well-trained research assistants working in a large private sector university where the main researcher is employed. The main researcher held several meetings with the research assistants where they were briefed about their responsibilities during data collection at the Lahore Fort. Respondents were qualified based on age and a certain level of understanding of the questionnaire, which was developed in English. All local respondents were selected because of their having a better understanding of local history and culture. We decided that everyone aged 20 years or more would be contacted to fill in the questionnaire as our core focus was to gain a feedback from people mature enough in age to respond. A total of 500 people were contacted and asked to voluntarily fill in the questionnaire, distributed personally by the assistants. The visitors were requested to spare a few minutes, on site, to fill in the questionnaire. Since a large number of people visits the Lahore Fort with their families and are reluctant to provide feedback to strangers, a low response rate was expected. After screening out the incomplete forms, 237 questionnaires were finalized with a response rate of 47 percent, which is acceptable in marketing studies. The strength of this survey lies in the fact that a non-student sample was selected, as used in previous studies to investigate destination brands (Boo et al., 2009).

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the results of respondent demographics. As to gender, 48.1 percent of the respondents were male, while 51.9 percent were females. This shows a relatively similar number of respondents from both genders. With regards to age, 43.9 percent of respondents were in the age group of 30 and below, and 39.7 percent were in the group of 31-45 years. Finally, 16.5 percent were in the bracket of 45 years and older. This shows that the sample represents a mix of various generations in terms of age. This mix of age and gender supports the purpose of study.

Table 1. **Respondent demographics**

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent	Variable	Category (age)	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	114	48.1	Age	Below 30	104	43.9
	Female	123	51.9		31-45	94	39.7
	Total	237	100.0		45 and above	39	16.5
					Total	237	100.0

Structural equation modelling using a Partial Least Squares (PLS) method was used to test the hypotheses. In order to run the analysis, the Smart PLS (Ringle, Wende, & Will, 2005) software was used by applying a bootstrapping technique to assess the significance of factor loadings and path coefficients. Before testing the structural model, validity and goodness of fit of the measurement model were estimated.

Measurement model

In order to refine all measures for the structural model, a measurement model was estimated. The initial 30 items developed for measurement were subjected to a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). Based on the results of CFA, five items were deleted because of low factor loadings that include BI4, BI5, BI6, BI12 and BI18. Later, the measurement model was tested for convergent validity. This was assessed through factor loading, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2005). Table 2 shows that all item loadings exceeded the recommended value of 0.6 (Chin, 1998) and are acceptable for further analysis. Composite reliability values depicting the extent to which the construct pointers indicate the latent construct exceeded the recommended value of 0.7 (Hair, Sarstedt, Ringle, & Mena, 2012), while the average variance extracted, which reflects the overall amount of variance in the indicators accounted for by the latent construct, exceeded the recommended value of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2012).

Table 2. **Validity and reliability for constructs**

Constructs	Items	Statements	Factor Loadings	CRa	AVEb	
Brand awareness	BA1	Looks like	0.815	0.681	0.865	
	BA2	Well aware	0.826			
	BA3	Cultural tradition	0.835			
Brand association	BAs1	High quality tourist attraction	0.728	0.672	0.89	
	BAs2	High quality	0.854			
	BAs3	High quality services	0.878			
	BAs4	Favorable attitude	0.812			
Brand equity	BE1	Prefer to visit	0.874	0.733	0.846	
	BE2	Smart move	0.839			
Brand image	BI1	Latest technology used	0.664	0.546	0.912	
	BI2	Good infrastructure	0.679			
	BI3	Shopping facility	0.666			
	BI7	Islamic culture	0.684			
	BI8	Halal food	0.690			
	BI9	Aesthetically appealing	0.606			
	BI10	Historical appealing	0.620			
	BI11	Friendly people	0.670			
	BI13	Entertainment is good	0.604			
	BI14	Accommodation is reliable	0.693			
	BI15	Barrier free communication	0.673			
	BI16	Good cleanliness	0.618			
	BI17	Staff guides	0.627			
Brand loyalty	BL1	First choice visit	0.779	0.699	0.874	
	BL2	Intention to visit	0.834			
	BL3	Strongly recommend	0.775			

[a] Composite reliability = (square of the summation of the factor loadings) / [(square of the summation of the factor loadings) + (square of the summation of the error variances)]

[b] AVE = (summation of squared factor loadings)/[(summation of squared factor loadings) + (summation of error variances)]

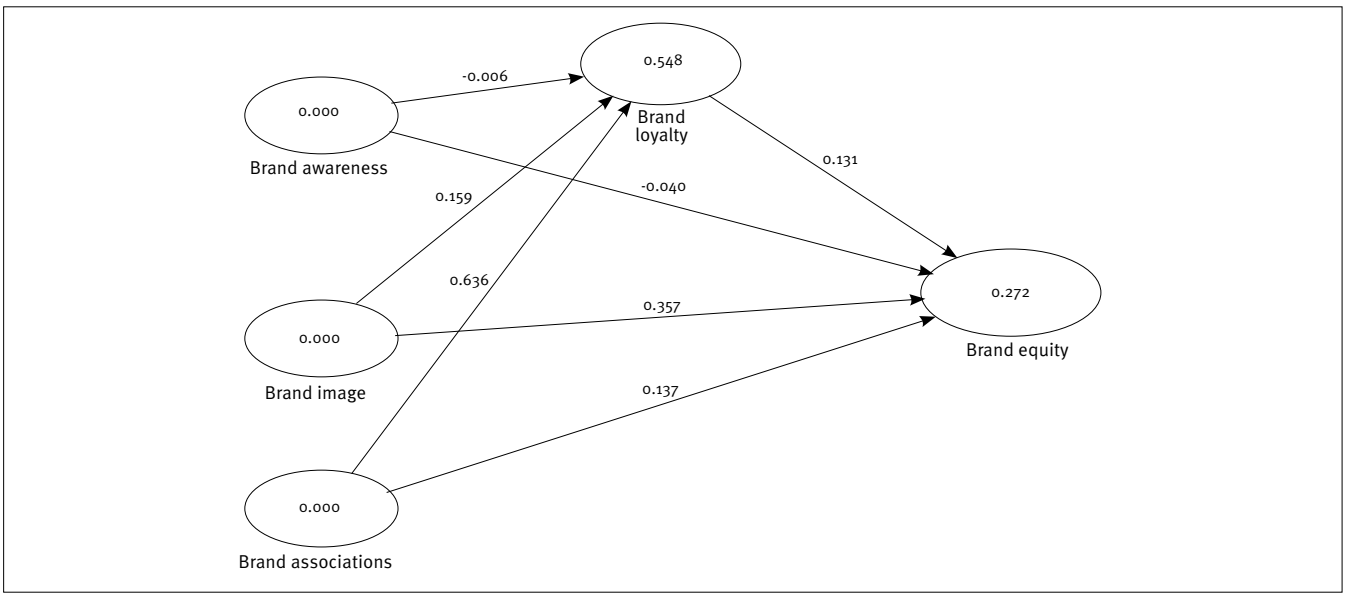
Table 2 shows that the square root of AVE (diagonal values) for each construct is larger than its corresponding correlation coefficients, pointing towards adequate discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2012). Since the square root of AVE between each pair of factors was higher than the correlation estimated between factors, its discriminant validity is thus ratified (Hair et al., 2012).

Structural model

Following the measurement model, the hypothesized relationships in the structural model were tested. In order to achieve meaningful findings, a bootstrapping procedure with 1000 iterations was performed to examine the statistical significance of the weights of sub-constructs and the path coefficients.

Figure 2, shows the results of the analysis. The corrected R^2 in the figure refers to the explanatory power of the predictor variable(s) in the respective construct. All the three independent variables (Brand Awareness, Brand Image, and Brand Association) explain 54.7 per cent of Brand loyalty (R^2 = 0.574), while these three variables and brand loyalty altogether explain 27.1 per cent of Brand equity (R^2 = 0.271). With regard to model validity, Chin et al. (2008) classified endogenous latent variables as substantial, moderate, or weak based on the R^2 values of 0.67, 0.33, or 0.19 respectively. Accordingly, Brand loyalty (R^2 = 0.574) can be described as moderate, while Brand equity (R^2 = 0.271) can be described as weak.

Figure 2. **Structural model**



The complete results of the structural model and hypotheses testing are shown in Table 3. Results show a strong support for five of the seven hypotheses of the study. H_1 hypothesized that brand awareness influences brand loyalty significantly, which was not supported by results (H_1: b = -0.006, t = 0.091, sig › 0.05). H2 hypothesized that brand image significantly affects brand loyalty, which was supported by results (H_2: b = 0.159, t = 2.266, sig ‹ 0.05). A strong support was also found for H3, which hypothesized a significant effect of brand association on brand loyalty (H_3: b = 0.636, t = 12.76, sig ‹ 0.01). Results did not support H4, which hypothesized that brand awareness predicts brand equity significantly (H_4: b = -0.040, t = 0.454, sig › 0.05). H_5 hypothesized that brand image significantly affects brand equity, which was supported by results (H_5: b = 0.357, t = 3.374, sig ‹ 0.01). Support was also found for H6, which hypothesized a significant effect of brand association on brand equity (H_6: b = 0.137, t = 2.313, sig ‹ 0.05). The last hypothesis was H_7, which hypothesized significant effect of brand loyalty on brand equity. Results supported this hypothesis (H_7: b = 0.131, t = 2.410, sig ‹ 0.05).

Table 4. **Structural estimates (hypothesis testing)**

	Hypothesis	Standard Beta	Standard Error	T Statistics	Result
H_1	Brand awareness ⇢ Brand loyalty	-0.006	0.062	0.091	Not supported
H_2	Brand image ⇢ Brand loyalty	0.159	0.070	2.266*	Supported
H_3	Brand association ⇢ Brand loyalty	0.636	0.050	12.76**	Supported
H_4	Brand awareness ⇢ Brand equity	-0.040	0.087	0.454	Not supported
H_5	Brand image ⇢ Brand equity	0.357	0.106	3.374**	Supported
H_6	Brand association ⇢ Brand equity	0.137	0.105	2.313*	Supported
H_7	Brand loyalty ⇢ Brand equity	0.131	0.092	2.41*	Supported

*P‹0.05; **P‹0.01

DISCUSSION

The present study is a scholarly response to the call for conducting some context-based marketing studies in developing countries (Frimpong & Wilson, 2013). The study provides an insight by measuring the brand equity of a cultural destination brand (the Lahore Fort) in a developing country context, i.e., the Pakistani context. This study empirically explored the impact of brand awareness, brand image, brand associations, and brand loyalty on brand equity, with brand loyalty as the mediating variable, by extending the CBBE model introduced by Aaker (1991, 1996) and Keller (1993, 2003). The Pakistani context, the case study of a classical historical place, i.e., the Lahore Fort, and the application of robust statistical and data analysis techniques are the major strengths and contributions of the present study.

Our results indicate some interesting findings: H_1 and H_4 were rejected, indicating that brand awareness does not lead to brand loyalty and brand equity for the Lahore Fort. These results initially contradict previous studies conducted to unearth the link between brand awareness and brand loyalty in tourism services (Pike et al., 2010). This can be attributed to a lack of brand promotion of the Lahore Fort as a destination brand in the minds of visitors. Even in previous studies, the lack of brand promotion has been found to cause lower levels of brand awareness (Hudson & Ritchie, 2009). This holds in the case of the Lahore Fort as explained before. The fort is a state-run organization, administered by ministerial efforts in Pakistan. Despite its existence over the centuries, the government has not been promoting it as a destination brand to local and international visitors. Therefore, people would lack awareness of the Lahore Fort as a destination brand. So brand awareness is lacking and it does not support the link between brand awareness and brand loyalty. The path from brand awareness to brand equity has also been recognized as a brand-specific phenomenon in previous studies (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007). These researchers found that a brand's high awareness does not always lead to higher levels of brand equity. Given the many historical places in the city of Lahore, such as the Shahi Mosque, the Anarkali Market, Shalamar Gardens, and many more, brand loyalty to the Lahore Fort as a first choice brand can be compromised. Another perspective is that the Lahore Fort may have sufficient levels of brand awareness, but the fort's functional performance may not be in accordance with visitor expectations. The substitutes available and visitors' focus on the functional attributes of a destination brand can be woven into a relationship in which higher brand awareness can lead to a lower level of brand equity (Hanna & Rowley, 2011). Thus, an understanding of brand awareness not supporting brand loyalty and equity in the case of the Lahore Fort can be justified.

The CBBE elements of brand image and brand association were hypothesized to positively contribute towards brand loyalty, and these hypotheses were supported. This means that the Lahore fort has a clear brand image and favorable brand associations in the minds of visitors. The results are in line with previous studies conducted to unearth tourism branding perspectives (Boo et al., 2009). Moreover, brand image has been found to contribute significantly towards brand success (Tasci & Kozak, 2006). H_2 assumed that brand image positively contributes to destination brand loyalty, while H_5 hypothesized a relationship between brand image and its positive contribution towards overall brand equity. The analysis concluded that brand image strongly contributes towards brand loyalty, with a beta value of 0.357 at highest significant level. This was consistent with previous studies conducted in the domain of destination marketing (Boo et al., 2009). The brand association construct has been acknowledged to contribute positively towards building strong brand equity (Aaker, 1991). The variable brand associations have been assumed to significantly contribute to brand loyalty and brand equity, as we found in H_3 and H_6. Results indicate that an increase in brand associations leads to an increase in brand loyalty, which will affect the number of tourists or customers visiting the historical site. Results reveal that 'brand quality' and 'brand attitude' positively contribute towards brand equity. These results are in line with previous studies where a positive 'brand association set' leads to forming positive opinions about a destination brand, ultimately working as a 'guard' against strong competition (Pappu et al., 2005). The path from destination brand loyalty to destination brand equity has been acknowledged in previous studies (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Pike et al., 2010). The results of this study also reveal that brand loyalty positively contributes to brand equity. Strong brand loyalty to a brand generates repeat purchase and a strong recommendation to other customers (Atilgan et al., 2005). Brand equity can be strong if consumers have a positive image and favorable associations about a particular destination brand.

CONCLUSION

In a great many studies, CBBE has been employed to investigate brand equity. However, the major contribution of the present research lies in the fact that a brand equity measurement of the Lahore Fort as a destination brand has been conducted for the first time. Furthermore, brand equity so far has been limited to the application of the CBBE model, however, with brand equity as a separate dimension, and without brand loyalty as a mediator (Yoo et al., 2000). Destination marketers and governments can extract some guidance from the results of this study, as it

provides useful insights about a popular destination brand in Pakistan. We suggest that several strategies be used to enhance the brand equity of the Lahore Fort as a destination brand, which will positively impact the number of visitors to the site. Our results indicate that brand image significantly contributes to destination loyalty and an overall brand equity. Therefore, destination marketers in Pakistan should focus on building an Islamic image of the destination, a safe and conducive environment, local hospitality, comfort for visitors, and other elements of a brand, such as food items. These were proposed by Boo et al. (2009) as the elements of brand image. Secondly, brand awareness should be enhanced through various communication strategies. The use of logos, slogans, brand colors, and other branding elements can help visitors feel more attached to the brand, and will surely influence their destination brand choice (Boo et al., 2009). In addition to that, it is worth noticing that merely increasing awareness levels may not work. The visitors to a destination brand also expect its functional attributes. Therefore, the functional elements highlighted in this study, such as parking facilities, cleanliness, overall guidance provided by staff, and good quality of food offered can improve the functional imagery of the Lahore Fort as a destination brand. Thirdly, brand loyalty to destination brands must be emphasized as it has been found to positively contribute towards brand equity. In order for this to happen successfully, destination marketers can segment the market according to the criteria outlined by Aaker (1996). The loyalty segments comprise consumers who are customers of competing brands, switchers, users of more than one brand, and the fully committed (Aaker, 1996, p. 22). Once identified, these customers must then be approached through a highly customized marketing program. Generally, a separate communication plan to attract locals and a separate promotion plan for international visitors can add to the brand equity.

Despite its significant knowledge contribution, this study has several limitations. Firstly, only one destination brand was selected for the purpose of this study, which limits the generalizability of results to other destination brands in Pakistan. Future studies are recommended to overcome this limitation and investigate brand equity for other destination brands in the country. Secondly, data for this study were cross-sectional, which can affect the attitude of visitors toward brand performance. Given the activities performed at the Lahore Fort in different weather conditions, a longitudinal design is suggested in order to analyze the differences of brand performance measurement over time. Holistically, the study incorporates the customers' point of view, which may not be enough to manage service brands. Therefore, another potential area to study is the employment of an Employee-Based Brand Equity scale, which can bring a more holistic perspective to the measurement of destination brand performance.

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