ABSTRACT

This study aims to empirically examine the application of a consumer-based brand equity model in the fast fashion market. Based on the brand equity literature and the empirical data from 242 fast fashion consumers, this study employed structural equation modeling to investigate the contribution of the six dimensions of brand equity (brand awareness, perceived quality, perceived value, brand personality, organizational associations, and brand loyalty) to overall brand equity. The findings conclude that brand loyalty, perceived value, and organizational associations are influential dimensions of brand equity, directly and positively impacting overall brand equity. The study provides implications to fashion industrial practitioners.

KEYWORDS: Brand equity, Consumers, Fast fashion

INTRODUCTION

Almost every marketing activity works, successfully or unsuccessfully, to build, manage, and exploit brand equity (D. A. Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993, 2008; Yoo & Donthu, 2001). Brand equity is regarded as a very important concept in business practice as well as in academic research because marketers can gain competitive advantages through strong brands (D. A. Aaker, 1996a; Keller, 1993, 2008). A strong brand with positive brand equity has several advantages such as higher margins, brand extension opportunities, more powerful communication effectiveness and higher consumer preferences and purchase intentions (Buil, Chernatony, & Martínez, 2008; Cobb-Walgren, Ruble, & Donthu, 1995; Keller, 1993; Netemeyer et al., 2004; Wang, Wei, & Yu, 2008). Recently, research has focused on understanding how to build, measure, and manage brand equity (Keller, 1993, 2008).

Developing further insights into the measurement of consumer-based brand equity is important in the face of the prominence of branding (Keller, 1993, 2008). Branding is a powerful means of differentiation (Pappu, Quester, & Cooksey, 2005). Differentiation is one of the key competitive positioning strategies suggested by Porter (1980). That is, if consumers perceive a particular brand favorably, then the firm may have a competitive advantage. Hence, it becomes vital for brand managers to have access to valid and reliable consumer-based brand equity instruments. Hence, a better understanding of brand equity measurement is essential for an enriched practice of brand management.

Fast fashion has experienced a decade of blistering growth and is fast becoming the way of the retail world as more and more brands move to the model and work on ways to improve operational strategies (Donaldson, 2013, December 12). Fast fashion provides the latest fashion trends along with agile response to consumer demand with reasonable prices (Jin, Chang, Matthews, & Gupta, 2012). Fast fashion’s target market is large population of mobile young people – the target for fashionable fast fashion clothes. This study aims to understand the
relationship between brand equity and brand equity dimensions in the fast fashion brands context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE)

When reflecting a consumer perspective, brand equity is referred to as consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) (Pappu et al., 2005). Researchers have argued in favour of a consumer-based measurement of brand equity. Since only if there is value for the consumer, there is value to the business firm (e.g. manufacturer and retailer) (Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995). Two main frameworks conceptualize brand equity. Keller (1993, p. 2) viewed CBBE as “the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand.” It is an additional effect in a consumer’s response to a brand that stretches beyond the product itself and its attributes (Keller, 1993). Keller's (1993) conceptualization focuses on brand knowledge and involves two components: brand awareness and brand image. By contrast, D. A. Aaker (1991) viewed CBBE as a set of assets (liabilities) linked to a brand's name and symbol that add to (or subtract from) the value provided by a product/service to the customer. Using a consumer-based behavioral view of brand equity, Yoo and Donthu (2001) defined brand equity as consumers’ different response between a focal brand and an unbranded product when both have the same level of marketing stimuli and product attributes. The difference in consumer response may be attributed to the brand name and demonstrates the effects of the long-term marketing invested into the brand.

Conceptual Dimensions of CBBE

Although it is apparent that consumer-based brand equity has multiple dimensions, there is no general agreement in current marketing literature as to the nature and content of these dimensions. D. A. Aaker (1991) provided the most generally accepted core CBBE dimensions: brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations and brand loyalty. Yoo et al. (2001) treated consumer-based brand equity as a three-dimensional construct, combining brand awareness and brand associations into one dimension. Yoo and Donthu's (2001) CBBE scale was later validated by Washburn and Plank (2002). Netemeyer et al. (2004) suggested that brand equity should be measured by three elements including perceived quality/perceived value, uniqueness, and willingness to pay a price premium. Recently, Pappu et al. (2005) and Buil et al. (2008) provided empirical evidence of the multidimensionality of CBBE, supporting D. A. Aaker’s (1991) and Keller’s (1993) conceptualization of brand equity. Tong and Hawley (2009) found that brand association and brand loyalty are influential dimensions of sportswear brand equity while weak support was found for the perceived quality and brand awareness dimensions.

Yoo and Donthu (2001), Washburn and Plank (2002), Pappu et al. (2005), and Buil et al. (2008) have highlighted the need to refine the dimensionality of CBBE and they also advocated that researchers focus on the distinction between the dimensions of brand awareness and brand associations (Pappu et al., 2005). Further, Washburn and Plank (2002) and Pappu et al. (2005) urged researchers to reevaluate the items included in Yoo and Donthu’s (2001) CBBE scale to “suggest more discriminating indicators” (Pappu et al., 2005). Thus, there is scope to enrich the measurement of consumer based brand equity.

Brand Awareness
The extant literature shows that effect of awareness occurs in building brand equity and serving as guidelines for a strategy formulation for enhancing customer mind-set brand equity. When consumers are uncertain about product attributes, brands can be used to inform them about product positions and to ensure them that product claims are credible. The reduced uncertainty can lower information costs and perceived risk by consumers but increase consumers’ expected utility (Wang et al., 2008). Brand awareness, refers to “the ability of a potential buyer to recognize or recall that a brand is a member of a certain product category” (Aaker, 1991, p. 61). This construct is related to the strength of a brand’s presence in consumers’ minds and is usually measured through brand recognition and recall under different circumstances (D. A. Aaker, 1996b; Keller, 1993).

**Perceived Quality**

Perceived quality is defined as “the consumer’s judgment about a product’s overall excellence or superiority” (Zeithaml, 1988, p. 3). Consumer views perceived quality as the customer’s judgment of the overall excellence, esteem, or superiority of a brand (with respect to its intended purposes) relative to alternative brand(s). It is not the objective quality of the product but consumers’ subjective evaluations which depend on their perceptions (Buil et al., 2008; Zeithaml, 1988). Perceived quality is at a higher level of abstraction than any specific attribute, and differs from objective quality as perceived quality is more akin to an attitudinal assessment of a brand—a global affective assessment of a brand’s performance relative to other brands (D. A. Aaker, 1996b; Keller, 1993; Netemeyer et al., 2004; Zeithaml, 1988). Perceived quality is a primary dimension in brand equity models because it has a strategic effect on brand equity, by reducing the perceived risk (D. A. Aaker, 1991; Keller, 2008). It also creates a basis for brand differentiation and extension (Pappu et al., 2005), and offers a price premium advantage for firms (Keller, 1993; Netemeyer et al., 2004). There is a general consensus that perceived quality is among the fundamental constructs of brand equity.

**Brand Associations**

Both Keller (1993) and D. A. Aaker (1991, 1996) stated that the core role of brand associations is to create meaning for consumers. Keller (1993) discussed this construct under brand image and classified these associations into three major categories: attributes, benefits, and attitudes. According to Keller (1993), “customer-based brand equity occurs when the consumer is aware of the brand and holds some favorable, strong, and unique brand associations in memory” (p. 17). D. A. Aaker (1991) argued that a brand association has a level of strength, and that the link to a brand (from the association) will be stronger when it is based on many experiences or exposures to communications, and when a network of other links supports it. Further, D. A. Aaker (1991) suggested that brand associations could provide value to the consumer by providing a reason for consumers to buy the brand, and by creating positive attitudes/feelings among consumers. Together, both of these writers focus on measuring brand equity in terms of consumer perceptions of the brand, and emphasize the importance of consumer knowledge and brand associations as fundamental building blocks of brand image (Till, Baack, & Waterman, 2011).

While a brand may derive associations from a range of sources, perceived value, brand personality and organizational associations are the three most important types of brand associations, which influence the brand’s equity (D. A. Aaker, 1996b; Buil et al., 2008; Pappu et al., 2005). Perceived value is defined as the customer’s overall assessment of the utility of the brand based on perceptions of what is received (e.g., quality, satisfaction) and what is given
(e.g., price and nonmonetary costs) relative to other brands (Netemeyer et al., 2004). Perceived value involves the trade-off of “what I get” (i.e., functional and emotional benefits) for “what I give” (i.e., time, money, and effort) (Kirmani & Zeithaml, 1993). Brand personality is defined in terms of the various traits or characteristics that brands can assume from the perception of consumers (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993). In the present study brand personality is defined as “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (J. L. Aaker, 1997, p. 347). Brand personality is considered a sub-dimension of brand associations and is supposed to contribute to brand equity (D. A. Aaker, 1996b). Yoo and Donthu’s (2001) CBBE scale does not include brand personality measures. In fact, Yoo and Donthu advocated the inclusion of brand personality measures into CBBE, as a future research direction. Another dimension of brand associations is the brand-as-organization perspective, which considers the organization (people, value, and programs) that lie behind the brand (D. A. Aaker, 1996b). Organizational associations that are often important bases of differentiation and choice include having a concern for customers, being innovative, striving for high quality, being successful, having visibility, being oriented toward the community, and being a global player (D. A. Aaker, 1996b).

**Brand Loyalty**

Aaker (1991, p. 39) defined brand loyalty as: “the attachment that a customer has to a brand”. Oliver (1999, p. 34) defined brand loyalty as: “a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having potential to cause switching behavior”. Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001, p. 82) argued that “attitudinal brand loyalty includes a degree of dispositional commitment in terms of some unique value associated with the brand”. From an attitudinal perspective, Yoo and Donthu (2001, p. 3) maintained that brand loyalty was “the tendency to be loyal to a focal brand, which is demonstrated by the intention to buy the brand as a primary choice”. Brand loyalty is a major component of brand equity (Pappu et al., 2005).

**RESEARCH MODEL AND HYPOTHESES**

In order to understand the nature of the relationships between the various dimensions of consumer-based brand equity and the overall consumer-based brand equity, we followed previous researchers’ suggestion. Yoo and Donthu (2001), Washburn and Plank (2002), Pappu et al. (2005), and Buil et al. (2008) have highlighted the need to refine the dimensionality of consumer-based brand equity. We included brand awareness and brand associations as two separate constructs of brand equity, and we included three kinds of associations widely recognized in the literature: perceived value, brand personality, and organizational associations.

Based on the literature review, a research conceptual model is proposed in this study (see Figure 1). We propose that consumer-based brand equity includes six dimensions: brand awareness, perceived quality, perceived value, brand personality, organizational associations, and brand loyalty. They all contribute to the overall consumer-based brand equity. Therefore, the research model encompasses the following six hypotheses:

- **H1**: Brand awareness has a significant positive direct effect on overall CBBE.
- **H2**: Perceived quality has a significant positive direct effect on overall CBBE.
- **H3**: Perceived value has a significant positive direct effect on overall CBBE.
- **H4**: Brand personality has a significant positive direct effect on overall CBBE.
- **H5**: Organizational associations have a significant positive direct effect on overall CBBE.
- **H6**: Brand loyalty has a significant positive direct effect on overall CBBE.
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Empirical survey-based research method was used to investigate conceptual model as shown in Figure 1. A survey instrument in the form of a structured questionnaire was designed based on a review of pertinent literature. The instruments incorporate seven constructs: brand awareness, perceived quality, perceived value, brand personality, organizational association, brand loyalty, and overall consumer-based brand equity. The items tapping the theoretical constructs were developed based on an extensive review of the scholarly literature to establish the content validity of each construct and associated scales. To increase measurement accuracy, multiple indicators have been used to represent unobservable constructs and existing scales are employed where possible. The items are measured using a five-point Likert-type scale. The survey instrument was developed incorporating a pool of 21 items compiled from the literature. Specifically, three items measuring brand awareness were obtained from Buil et al. (2008), Yoo and Donthu (2001), and Tong and Hawley (2009); three items measuring perceived quality were obtained from Buil et al. (2008), Yoo and Donthu (2001), and Netemeyer, et al. (2004); while three measures of perceived value were from Netemeyer, et al. (2004) and D. A. Aaker (1996b). Two items were used to measure brand personality (Aaker, 1997). Three measures of organizational association were obtained from Buil et al. (2008) and Aaker (1996). Three measures for brand loyalty were from Buil et al. (2008) and Yoo and Donthu (2001). Finally, four measures of the overall consumer-based brand equity were from Yoo and Donthu (2001).

Data Collection

A pretest of the questionnaire was conducted prior to the actual survey to enable the refinement of the measurement scales and the checking for any ambiguous or loaded questions. The pretest was conducted among 45 undergraduates at a large northeastern university in the USA. The final questionnaire was administered to students enrolled at the university. Respondents
were first asked to pick one fast fashion brand from a list of 6 popular fast fashion brands (Zara, H & M, Mango, Topshop, Forever 21, Uniqlo) they were most familiar with; then the participants were asked to evaluate the pool of the 21 items compiled from the literature and measuring different dimensions of brand equity and overall consumer-based brand equity using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

A total of 272 copies of the questionnaire were received, and 242 responses were found usable. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 40 (46.97% between 18-20; and 49.8% between 21-25). Ninety-one percent of the sample were female. The most prevalent ethnic group was Caucasian (74.8%), followed by Asian (8.7%), African-American (8.7%), and Hispanic (3.3%). We used a sample of college students in this study, because fast fashion's target market is large population of young people – the target for quick, cheap, fast fashion clothes.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The Measurement Model

Evaluation of the measurement model was conducted using confirmatory factor analysis to examine the relationships between the indicator variables and their respective underlying factors. Table 1 shows the fit indexes used in assessing measurement model fit. Multiple fit indexes were used to examine the model fit and a satisfactory fit is achieved for the measurement model (Kelloway, 1998): the $\chi^2/(df) = 1.78$, less than 2.00; the root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.057; the goodness-of-fit index (GFI) = 0.90; non-normed fit index (NNFI) = 0.98; comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.99 (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fit Indices for the Measurement Model</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Recommended Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chi-square / degrees of freedom</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>≤ 2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation (RMSEA)</td>
<td>0.057</td>
<td>≤ 0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normed Fit Index (NFI)</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>≥ 0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonnormed Fit Index (NNFI)</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>≥ 0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparative Fit Index (CFI)</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>≥ 0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>≥ 0.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A summary of the factor loadings (standardized), standard errors, t-values, and reliability analysis in the measurement model is shown in Table 2. The t-values of all the path parameter estimates for each factor in the measurement model are greater than 2.58; therefore, all the path parameter estimates are statistically significant with $p < 0.01$. Reliability and validity analyses were conducted using the average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability coefficient for a given construct. As shown in Table 2, all the composite reliability coefficients vary from 0.745 to 0.930 and are far above the acceptable guideline 0.70 which Nunnally (1978) suggested, indicating strong support for the construct reliability. The AVEs vary from 0.592 to 0.804 and are greater than the criteria of 0.50, suggesting adequate convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).
Table 2 Factor Loadings, t-values, R² and Reliability Coefficients in the Measurement Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator Variables and Their Underlying Factors</th>
<th>Standardized Factor Loading</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>Composite Reliability</th>
<th>AVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand Awareness (BA)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V1 - I am aware of X.</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>11.74</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.848</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V2 - When I think of fast fashion, X is one of the brands that comes to mind.</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>15.77</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V3 - X is a brand of fast fashion I am very familiar with.</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>15.80</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perceived Quality (PQ)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V4 - X offers very good quality products.</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>16.82</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V5 - X offers products of consistent quality.</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>14.87</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V6 - X offers very reliable products.</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>16.45</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perceived Value of the Cost (PV)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>V7 - X is good value for money.</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>15.92</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V8 - All things considered (price, time, and effort), X is a good buy.</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>16.72</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V9 - What I get from X is worth the cost.</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>17.42</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand Personality (BP)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V10 - I perceive X as being exciting.</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>10.68</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V11 - I perceive X as being fashionable.</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>13.43</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organization Associations (OA)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V12 - I trust the company which makes brand X.</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>17.60</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V13 - I like the company which makes brand X.</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>18.27</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V14 - The company which makes brand X has credibility.</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>16.76</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand Loyalty (BL)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V15 - I consider myself to be loyal to X.</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>16.86</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.845</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V16 - X would be my first choice when considering fast fashion.</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>16.98</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V17 - I will not buy other brands of fast fashion if X is available.</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>10.42</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall Consumer-based Brand Equity (OCBBE)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V18 - It makes sense to buy X instead of any other brand, even if their products are the same.</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>17.11</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V19 - Even if another brand has the same features as X, I would prefer to buy X.</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>17.99</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V20 - If another brand is not different from X in any way, it seems smarter to purchase X.</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>16.50</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V21 - If there is another brand as good as X, I prefer to buy X.</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>16.36</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. All t-values are statistically significant at p < 0.01. Valid N=240.

Convergent validity is established since all the t-values of the factor loadings are significantly different from zero (Table 2) and each loading is in the anticipated direction and magnitude, indicating that all indicators are effectively measuring the same construct. Discriminant validity is obtained by the fact that all construct AVE estimates are larger than the corresponding squared interconstruct correlation estimates (Table 3). The results from evaluation of the measurement model indicate that the measurement model is adequate for testing the proposed structural model.
Table 3 Discriminant Validity of the Measurement Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Brand Awareness (BA)</th>
<th>Perceived Quality (PQ)</th>
<th>Perceived Value (PV)</th>
<th>Brand Personality (BP)</th>
<th>Organization Association (OA)</th>
<th>Brand Loyalty (BL)</th>
<th>Overall Consumer-based Brand Equity (OCBBE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BA</td>
<td>0.652</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PQ</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>0.740</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>PV</td>
<td>0.281</td>
<td>0.212</td>
<td>0.763</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BP</td>
<td>0.348</td>
<td>0.327</td>
<td>0.449</td>
<td>0.510</td>
<td>0.804</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OA</td>
<td>0.270</td>
<td>0.325</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.410</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BL</td>
<td>0.384</td>
<td>0.203</td>
<td>0.504</td>
<td>0.303</td>
<td>0.578</td>
<td>0.649</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCBBE</td>
<td>0.102</td>
<td>0.230</td>
<td>0.360</td>
<td>0.152</td>
<td>0.410</td>
<td>0.548</td>
<td>0.770</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:
1. The elements on the diagonal are AVEs. AVE (BA) = 0.652; AVE (PQ) = 0.740; AVE (PV) = 0.763; AVE (BP) = 0.510; AVE (OA) = 0.804; AVE (BL) = 0.649; AVE (OCBBE) = 0.770.
2. The elements below the diagonal are squared inter-factor correlation estimates (SIC).

The Structural Model

The results from evaluation of the structural model are shown in Figure 2. The relationship stated in the H6 (standardized path coefficient = 0.63, p < 0.01) demonstrates that brand loyalty has a significant positive direct effect on overall consumer-based brand equity. The structural equation model also supports the relationships stated in the H3 (standardized path coefficient = 0.16, p < 0.10) and H5 (standardized path coefficient = 0.17, p < 0.10), demonstrating that perceived value and organizational associations contribute to the overall consumer-based brand equity. However, support is not found for the H2 (the relationship between perceived quality and overall consumer-based brand equity, standardized path coefficient = 0.08, non-significant), nor for H4 (the relationship between brand personality and overall consumer-based brand equity, standardized path coefficient = -0.08, non-significant). The result of the H1 shows brand awareness has a negative strong direct effect on overall consumer-based brand equity (standardized path coefficient = -0.20, p < 0.05).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This research aims to understand the contribution of the various dimensions of consumer-based brand equity to the overall brand equity in the fast fashion brands context. Based on the data analysis results, several key insights emerge, which lead to discussion of the findings and the theoretical and managerial implications.

The direct, significant and positive relationship between brand loyalty and brand equity empirically validates the assertions made by previous research that brand loyalty is a major component of brand equity (D. A. Aaker, 1996b; Buil et al., 2008; Keller, 1993, 2008; Pappu et al., 2005; Tong & Hawley, 2009; Yoo & Donthu, 2001). Loyalty demonstrated the strongest impact (the standardized path coefficient between brand loyalty and overall brand equity is the highest among all the path coefficients of various components of brand equity), indicating the essential role of developing brand loyalty in building brand equity in fast fashion market. This result confirms other research findings, such as Yoo, Donthu, and Lee (2000) and Tong and Hawley (2009).
The results show that perceived value and organizational associations are positively related to brand equity. These mean that, consistent with previous studies, strong associations that support a competitively attractive and distinct brand position could create a favorable feeling and behavior toward a brand and lead to a strong fast fashion brand.

The data analysis results in the study did not provide enough support for the positive and direct relationship between perceived quality and overall brand equity. This result is in line with the study result of Tong and Hawley (2009), indicating that having high quality alone is not a guarantee of a successful brand in the fast fashion industry. The empirical data and statistical tests in the study did not provide strong support for the proposed linkage between brand personality and overall brand equity. There is evidence that brand personality impacts consumers’ relationship with a brand (e.g. trust, and attachment) (Louis & Lombart, 2010; Sung & Kim, 2010). However, previous research didn’t empirically examine the contribution of brand personality to overall brand equity. One possible explanation could be that brand personality might affect brand equity by influencing other dimensions first. The current study provides an interesting yet surprising result that warrants further investigation.

Another surprising finding from this study is that brand awareness was found to have a negative and direct effect on brand equity. This is contrary to literature. One possible explanation may be
related to the fact that fast fashion brands are perceived as trendy products with affordable price and its target consumers are mobile young consumers (e.g. college students). Having a brand name alone is not a guarantee of a successful brand, but instead the brand name leads to negative consumer’s response and create a set of liabilities linked to the brand’s name and symbol that subtract from the value provided by the fast fashion product to the customer.

Findings from the study show that different brand equity dimensions contribute to overall brand equity in different ways. Since brand managers and marketing practitioners often have limited resources to implement marketing/branding strategies, these findings can help them prioritize and allocate resources across the dimensions. Fast fashion marketing and branding managers should consider the relative importance of different brand equity dimensions and should concentrate their effort on building brand loyalty and enhancing perceived value and organizational associations.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has several limitations. First, it is limited to the fast fashion market in the US. Future research needs to be done to examine whether the effect of each brand equity dimension on overall consumer-based brand equity was invariant across different countries and among other products and services. Second, this study uses a convenient sample of college students from one major US university. Although college students are the major target markets for fast fashion brands, it would be encouraged for future researchers to use probability samples in any further study of brand equity. Third, future research should further investigate the non-supported relationships in the current study. Finally, from both an academic and practical standpoint, it would also be interesting to examine the causal relationships among different dimensions of brand equity. Therefore, future studies could examine what the causal linkages among brand awareness, brand personality, perceived quality, perceived value, organizational associations and brand loyalty exist and how they impact consumer satisfaction and purchase intention towards fast fashion brands. These future endeavors will shed light on how to create brand equity through a variety of marketing mix strategies and approaches.

REFERENCES


