

WHAT DRIVES USERS OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES TO FORWARD FASHION BRAND ADS? EXPLORING THE EFFECTS OF BRAND EQUITY DIMENSIONS

ŠTO POTIČE KORISNIKE DRUŠTVENIH MREŽA NA PROSLJEĐIVANJE OGLASA O MODNIM MARKAMA? ANALIZA UČINAKA DIMENZIJA TRŽIŠNE VRIJEDNOSTI MARKE

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to explore the influence of consumer-based brand equity dimensions (CBBE), namely brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, and brand loyalty, on the intention of users on social networking sites to forward fashion brand advertisements to their contact groups.

Design/Methodology/Approach – Quantitative empirical design with a convenient sampling procedure was employed in the research to collect data, using the structured questionnaire created based on the existing scientific literature. To test the hypotheses, structural equation modelling was performed using SmartPLS software.

Findings and implications – The research found brand loyalty to have a significant positive impact on forwarding intention, providing an additional insight from a scientific standpoint and prompting practical considerations for marketing managers. Other dimensions of

Sažetak

Svrha – Svrha rada jest istražiti utjecaj dimenzija tržišne vrijednosti marke iz perspektive potrošača, odnosno svjesnosti o marki, asocijacija na marku, percipirane kvalitete i lojalnosti marki, na namjeru korisnika društvenih mreža da prosljede oglase o modnim markama svojoj mreži kontakata na društvenim mrežama.

Metodološki pristup – Rad se oslanja na kvantitativno empirijsko istraživanje. Podaci za analizu prikupljeni su na prigodnom uzorku pomoću strukturiranog upitnika izrađenog na temelju postojeće relevantne znanstvene literature. Za testiranje postavljenih hipoteza provedeno je modeliranje strukturnih jednadžbi pomoću softvera SmartPLS.

Rezultati i implikacije – Utvrđeno je da lojalnost marki ima statistički značajan pozitivan utjecaj na namjeru prosljeđivanja oglasa pružajući novo saznanje sa znanstvenog stajališta korisno marketinškim menadžerima u kontekstu praktičnih razmatranja. Druge dimenzije

consumer-based brand equity proved to have no significant impact on the dependent variable in the context of social networking sites for fashion brands.

Limitations – Limitations of this study are related to the size of the sample and the sampling method, consequently, its findings could not be generalized. Additionally, the concept of brand awareness could be further deconstructed into brand recognition and brand recall to assess the effects individually.

Originality – This research study contributes to the existing knowledge on consumer behavior by empirically examining the influence of consumer-based brand equity dimensions on consumers' forwarding intentions for fashion ads in the context of social networking sites.

Keywords – brand equity, social networking sites, forwarding intention, fashion brands

tržišne vrijednosti marke iz perspektive potrošača nisu pokazale značajan utjecaj na zavisnu varijablu u kontekstu društvenih mreža za marke iz modne industrije.

Ograničenja – Ograničenja rada povezana su s veličinom uzorka i metodom uzorkovanja, stoga je rezultate teško generalizirati. Nadalje, koncept svjesnosti o marki mogao bi se dalje razraditi na prepoznavanje i prisjećanje na marku kako bi se utvrdili pojedinačni učinci.

Doprinos – Ovo istraživanje proširuje postojeća znanja o utjecaju dimenzija tržišne vrijednosti marke iz perspektive potrošača na ponašanje potrošača, odnosno konkretnije, na namjere prosljeđivanja oglasa u kontekstu društvenih medija. Rezultati istraživanja predstavljaju znanstveni doprinos temi, ali se isto tako direktno mogu praktično primijeniti.

Glavne riječi: tržišna vrijednost marke, društvene mreže, namjera prosljeđivanja oglasa, modne marke

1. INTRODUCTION

Social networking sites (SNSs), as the most popular type of online social media platforms, are considerably different from any other type of advertising platforms. They have been widely present only recently, during the last decades; however, the success of using SNSs in advertising has been observed to depend considerably on a user's intention to forward these ads in the shape of a social post or message to their contacts or followers (Kalyanam, McIntyre & Masonis, 2007). Looking backwards, before the era of internet and electronic communication, it was quite difficult to share ads of interest with family or friends. Some of the most basic examples included snippets from printed magazines and newspapers or engaging in pure verbal word-of-mouth (WOM) communication. WOM has received a substantial amount of attention in scientific studies within the field of marketing, particularly in the assessment of its impact on consumer behavior outcomes. WOM was initially defined as oral, person-to-person communication between a communicator and a recipient who perceives the respective message as non-commercial although the subject is a brand, product, or service (Arndt, 1967). That concept was later simplified by Kotler and Keller (2008), explaining it as verbal communication which involves customers, where customers choose to talk to others about products, services, and brands.

Furthermore, as the internet era enabled faster end-to-end user communication and electronic messaging scope and availability was growing, the body of research addressing the communication via electronic channels and readiness to forward the messages through some of those channels expanded as well (Dobele, Toleman & Beverland, 2005; Eckler & Bolls, 2011). Exchanging the messages and content on SNSs is even easier, and thus creates an opportunity for companies to spread the word by creating interactive and interesting content and encouraging SNSs members to forward that content to their contact groups (Berger & Iyengar, 2013).

According to Okazaki (2009), the intention to forward or re-share an ad can be defined as a subjective probability that a customer will engage in forwarding or recommending activity on SNSs. Since sharing the ads could be perceived as a specific version of WOM, in a digital environment it can be referred to as electronic WOM (eWOM). In turn, eWOM can be described as the act of meeting and sharing opinions with each other on the Internet, which provides usability, accessibility, and persistence for information that were unavailable in traditional offline WOM (Cheung & Lee, 2012). Scientific studies on forwarding intentions, in literature also known under the name of *pass on behavioral intentions* (Ketelaar, Janssen, Vergeer, van Reijmersdal, Crutzen & van 't Riet, 2016), have raised the interest in this topic only recently, and initially they mainly referred to WOM activities.

Conclusions highlighted that customers with a more positive attitude towards the advertised brand were more willing to spread the ads within their community (Squicciarini & Griffin, 2012). There is a number of research papers confirming the hypothesis that the probability of forwarding an ad can be dependent on the attitude towards the ad itself (Chu, 2011; Dobeles et al., 2005). The first research study on the motivation for forwarding the ads in an SNS context was authored by Ketelaar et al. (2016). According to its findings, a favorable attitude towards the brand, ad, and a favorable attitude towards the forwarding intention overall has a significant impact on the forwarding intention for the observed brand ad. Favorable attitude towards the forwarding intention overall was also proven by Yasin, Porcu, and Liebana-Cabanillas (2019) for company generated content on SNSs. Additionally, the study by Ketelaar et al. (2016) was aimed to establish the connection between social predictors (ad source and frequency of SNSs use) and forwarding intention but no significant connection could be proven for the selected brands.

Besides the attitude towards a brand and the attitude towards an ad, there might be other factors influencing the willingness of SNSs users to

share brand ads with their community. Identifying these drivers would help companies to understand which underlying mechanisms are in place to make sure their message gets spread to wider audiences. Based on the existing literature review, there is substantial amount of research papers answering the question on how consumer-based brand equity, as one of the most important concepts in brand management, and its dimensions (brand awareness, brand associations, brand loyalty, perceived quality) are being influenced by WOM (Balakrishnan, Dahnil & Yi, 2014; Audi, Massri & Ghazzawi, 2015; Seo, Park & Choi, 2020). The purpose of this paper is to approach this question from another angle and assess how brand equity dimensions might influence the forwarding intention, as one of the variants of eWOM.

Brand communication through the official brand's SNSs account used to be efficient and beneficial for brands; however, nowadays the recipients often consider that type of communication imposed and not authentic (Vander Schee, Peltier & Dahl, 2020). Consumers are more open to receiving various brand content from other consumers, as it gives them a feeling that there are more peers who have trust in brand communication. Considering that SNSs users interested in fashion are highly involved and very active in sharing the content, further research on forwarding intention in that particular industry would be very beneficial in an effort to expand extant knowledge and come up with practical recommendations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

2.1. Consumer behavior and forwarding intentions in social networking sites context

Social media presence has become an inevitable part of life for the majority of consumers. In essence, consumers predominantly use social networking sites for social interaction. They see

SNSs as personal platforms where they can disseminate and exchange their opinions, beliefs, perspectives, content, and more with like-minded individuals who share common interests (Kim & Yang, 2017). Consumers place their trust in each other, and SNSs possess the potential to serve as a medium for word-of-mouth communication when it comes to conveying messages and recommendations about products and services. The capacity to act as independent communicators and to exchange valuable information among themselves has empowered consumers, making them more influential (Diffley, Kearns, Bennett & Kawalek, 2011).

What consumers and SNSs users talk about on their accounts has been a matter of research since the beginnings of communication on these platforms. According to Urban (2005), thanks to the development of the internet and SNSs, consumers are able to look for information to support their decision-making process. In the same way, they are able to share their experiences related to purchased products with a wider community within minutes by using their personal accounts or so-called *profiles*. They seek responses and empathy by sharing their experiences, aiming to attain psychological satisfaction (Zhang, Chun & Huang, 2023). That can have both positive and negative implications. If consumers are dissatisfied, they can easily leave a review or a comment, warning other potential consumers about their bad experience. On the other hand, noticeable advantages of that type of communication in terms of positive WOM and the extent to which such consumer communication can reach can significantly extend the potential market reach for companies. It is also important to note that a person's social network may not just end with their immediate network, but the messages can be passed by from one network to another (Domingos, 2005). That said, there are strong relationships on SNSs, implying strong interpersonal ties and a strong emotional component that sustains these relationships; on the other hand, there are weak relationships, in which people are not really

closely connected but there is still some interest in maintaining them (Zhang et al., 2023). According to Muntinga, Moorman, and Smit (2011), overall social media behaviors can be classified into three levels: consuming, contributing, and creating. The lowest level of engagement is consuming, involving participate behaviors such as watching and reading. The middle engagement level is contributing, which implies interaction between users and content as well as the exchange between different users. Creating requires users to generate something new that they believe will appeal to their community. Similarly, interactions on currently most popular SNSs platforms – Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok – can be categorized into three distinct tiers (Kim & Yang, 2017). Firstly, the act of “liking” represents the lowest tier, requiring less commitment compared to other types of engagement on SNSs. “Commenting” on a post belongs into intermediate category of engagement, which already requires extra commitment or cognitive effort. Lastly, “sharing” a post may be considered the highest-level interaction, whether by producing a personal one or re-sharing, or forwarding the existing post, as it permanently stays on a consumer’s account and becomes a component of the user’s self-presentation (Kim & Yang, 2017). Those interactions might be motivated by the level of overall consumer brand engagement (CBE), defined as “a context-dependent, psychological state characterized by fluctuating intensity levels that occur within dynamic, iterative engagement processes” (Brodie, Hollebeek, Jurić & Ilić, 2011, p. 260). The literature shows three different dimensions of CBE (Hollebeek, Glynn & Brodie, 2014; Razmus, 2021; So, Li, King & Hollebeek, 2024), namely, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimension, referring to various observed stages during the interaction between a consumer and a brand. Cognitive dimension describes how much consumers think about and process information related to a brand during their interaction with it; emotional shows a level of positive feelings towards the brand, with behavioral dimension showing the amount of energy, effort, and time a consumer

is willing to invest during an interaction with a brand (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Razmus, 2021; So et al., 2024). Therefore, it is crucial to understand why SNSs users forward the content they consume on various platforms.

Numerous authors focused on the type of the post content itself (Berger, 2011; Dobeles, Lindgreen, Beverland, Vanhamme & Wijk, 2007; Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2014; Tellis, MacInnis, Tirunillai & Zhang, 2019), claiming that content which evokes physiological arousal, positive, or negative emotion is more likely to be forwarded. On the other hand, Berger (2014) posits that consumer sharing behavior is motivated by five key factors: impression management, emotion regulation, information acquisition, social bonding, and the persuasion of others. Additionally, Tellis et al. (2019) divide motivation to share in three categories: self-serving, social, and altruistic motivation. However, knowing that consumer behavior can be influenced by attitude, beliefs, and knowledge about a brand that is prominent in a post (Tariq, Abbas, Abrar & Iqbal, 2017; Kyguoliene & Zikiene, 2021), this research intends to address the gap in existing literature and assess how brand equity dimensions, explained in continuation, influence consumers’ ads forwarding intentions for fashion brands in the SNSs context. Additionally, forwarding intention in this paper encompasses any manner of sharing brand ads with the customer SNSs community, from sending a private message with a brand ad content to re-publishing it on the consumer’s individual account. While this may be observed as part of brand loyalty because loyal customers tend to recommend the brand more (Russell-Bennett & Parkinson, 2014; Eelen, Özturan & Verlegh, 2017), it has been found that the overall attitude towards forwarding the ads in the SNSs context impacts the intention to forward the ads (Ketelaar et al., 2016; Yasin et al., 2019). Customers loyal to a brand do not necessarily have a favorable attitude towards forwarding ads, suggesting that the ad forwarding intention should be observed as a separate variable.

2.2. Fashion brands

Fashion marketing relies on a number of techniques and business ideologies directed towards realizing the organization's long-term goals, mainly centered around current and prospective buyers (Easey, 2009). Therefore, developing and maintaining a fashion brand is often a strategically important activity. The term fashion brand encompasses all the brands in the fashion industry. Consumer-brand relationship is becoming increasingly important (Ismail & Spinelli, 2012) as a company's activities on SNSs play a significant role in demonstrating consumer-centric marketing practices, including engaging with the brand, providing the entertainment for users, and even co-creating with the brand (Kim & Sullivan, 2019). According to a recent McKinsey survey (The State of Fashion, 2023), current situation on the fashion market is marked by uncertainty. However, the main opportunity lies in consumers discovering new styles, tastes, and priorities, all of which offer routes to value creation. Brand marketing is anticipated to regain prominence by establishing emotional connections with consumers as marketers redefine strategies to prioritize long-term brand development. Recognizing the importance of consumer-brand interactivity, fashion brands are particularly relevant for analyzing customers' willingness to extend brand communication by sharing brand ads with their social circles on SNSs.

2.3. Brand equity

Brand equity, as a concept that attracted interest in scientific research at the end of the 20th century, immediately became one of the very popular and important concepts in marketing research and practice. It was mentioned in financial and accounting literature as a financial value of brand and in marketing as consumer-based brand equity, which relies on consumer knowledge about the brand. Aaker (1991, p. 5) defines it as a set of assets and liabilities associated with the brand, its name and symbol adding to or subtracting from the value that

the product or service in question provides to the company or the company's customers. He was the first one to identify several crucial dimensions of consumer-based brand equity which are still often used in scientific research (Azzari & Pelissari, 2020; Matin, Khoshtaria & Todua, 2022) but also in practice when defining brand strategies. Consumer-based brand equity consists of four dimensions: brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, and brand loyalty (Aaker, 1991), which will be explained further.

2.3.1. Brand awareness

According to Aaker (1991), brand awareness can be defined as the capability of a potential customer to recognize that a certain brand belongs into a certain category of products. Visually, it can be represented as an awareness pyramid, which is differentiated into four distinct levels. It starts at the bottom level with a general unawareness of a brand, progresses with brand recognition, continues with the ability to recall a brand, and reaches its peak with the top-of-mind position. Later, Keller (1993) enhanced the existing theory by further explaining the recall and recognition components, which are both equally important in contributing to sustainable brand equity. Brand recognition is based on brand strength in a consumer's mind and the ability to place a brand in a certain category, while brand recall represents a consumer's ability to retrieve a brand from memory on a mention of a product category or the needs satisfied by its purchase as a prompt. Tariq et al. (2017) concluded that the importance of brand awareness is reflected in the ability of brand awareness to influence consumer behavior. Barreda, Bilgihan, Nusair, and Okumus (2015) highlighted a positive impact of brand awareness on word-of-mouth by customers in the travel industry. Therefore, the first hypothesis posits that brand awareness influences the forwarding intention.

H1: Brand awareness has a statistically significant and positive effect on forwarding intention.

2.3.2. Brand associations

Brand associations are related to everything memorable about a brand (Aaker, 1991). They represent a meaning of the brand and very often stem from various sources as brand uniqueness, brand strength, and similar. Moreover, they include experiences, beliefs, feelings, and thoughts that a consumer associates with the brand (Kotler & Gertner, 2002). Other scholars, such as Rio, Vasquez, and Iglesias (2001) suggest that brand associations play a crucial role in the establishment and management of brand equity. In this context, it represents a crucial factor for consumers to develop favorable connections with the brand. If connections between the consumer and the brand are positive, it leads to an assumption that a consumer would like to be widely associated with that brand while also being willing to share the post about the brand with their SNSs contacts. Therefore, the second hypothesis assumes that brand associations have positive impact on forwarding intention.

H2: Brand associations have a statistically significant and positive effect on forwarding intention.

2.3.3. Perceived quality

Perceived quality was firstly defined as a customers' assessment of superiority and excellency of the products belonging to the brand (Zeithaml, 1988) which reduces the uncertainty in decision making while choosing a brand or product. Customers see perceived quality as a concept being closely connected to product characteristics and that can significantly influence customers' choice and behavior (Kyguoliene & Zikiene, 2021). Based on that, the third hypothesis assumes there is a relationship between perceived quality and forwarding intention.

H3: Perceived quality has a statistically significant and positive effect on forwarding intention.

2.3.4. Brand loyalty

Aaker (1991) defined the fourth dimension of brand equity, brand loyalty, as an attachment that a customer has to a brand. In the more

recent literature, brand loyalty has been observed through different perspectives. The first one is behavioral and defines brand loyalty as repetitive purchase activities (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001), while the second one highlights the cognitive approach and describes loyalty as a prioritization of a brand as the first choice when making purchase decisions (Yoo, Donthu & Lee, 2000). As loyal consumers have a strong preference for their brand, they feel like sharing good recommendations about the brand as well as helping and supporting their favorite brand (Eelen et al., 2017). Therefore, the fourth hypothesis assumes there is a relationship between brand loyalty and forwarding intention.

H4: Brand loyalty has a statistically significant and positive effect on forwarding intention.

3. METHODOLOGY

As part of this research, data was collected from SNSs users through convenience sampling and snowball sampling methods between September and November 2023. In terms of SNSs, users of all relevant platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, TikTok, and similar were of interest for this research. They needed to satisfy the criteria of following at least one fashion brand on SNSs and being able to recall at least one fashion brand's ad published by the brand they follow. Ads could be published in different formats, as textual posts, static images, videos, or any platform specific type of content.

A questionnaire consisting of three main sections was prepared based on the existing literature dealing with the topic of research. The first section contained elimination questions to ensure participants' adequateness for this research. Those questions were asked to confirm previously mentioned participation criteria. The second section consisted of validated scales adopted from the existing scientific literature. Four independent variables (brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, and brand loyalty) are a part of Aaker's consumer-brand

equity model, measured using the scales developed by Yoo, Donthu, and Lee (2000) and Schivinski and Dabrowski (2014). A forwarding intention measurement scale was adapted from Chu (2011) and Hsieh, Hsieh, and Tang (2012). A 7-point Likert scale format was used (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4 = neutral, 5 = somewhat agree, 6 = agree, 7 = strongly agree). The last section was aimed at collecting participants' demographic data such as age, education, etc.

4. RESULTS

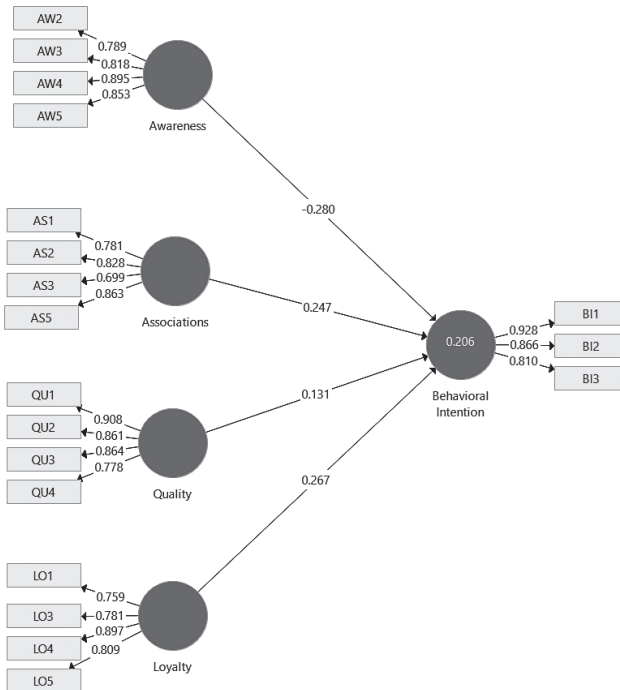
In total, 120 answers were collected, of which only 83 could be further used in data analysis as respective participants had answered appropriately to elimination questions. Out of these respondents, 67% were female and the remaining 33% male. In terms of their age, the majority of respondents were 30-34 years old (56%), followed

by 15% aged between 25 and 29. When it comes to the education level, 54% of respondents had a master's degree, 19% a bachelor's degree, 19% a high school diploma and lower, with 8% holding a doctorate. Participants were also asked about the frequency of their usage of social networking sites. The large majority responded that they used SNSs very often (60%), while 24% of the sample indicated that they used SNSs always.

Collected data was prepared, cleaned and analyzed in Microsoft Excel. For further data analysis, the SmartPLS statistical program was used to evaluate the measurement model, assess the structural model, and test the hypotheses.

Due to low Cronbach's alpha values, a few indicators needed to be removed from further analysis (BAW1 – I know brand X; BAS4 – I feel sympathy for brand X; BLO2 – I think I am loyal to brand X). Results of the second-order CFA are shown in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1: Second order CFA analysis



Source: Author's data, based on software output.

The indicators of construct reliability and validity are presented in Table 1 and Table 2. While Cronbach’s alpha can be considered the lower bound, composite reliability represents the upper bound of the true internal consistency reliability. According to Hair, Hult, Ringle, and

Sarstedt (2017), the value of composite reliability should be higher than 0,70, which is the case for all the variables observed. Convergent validity was assessed through the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which is higher than the critical value of 0.50 for all the variables.

TABLE 1: Mean, standard deviation, and outer loadings

Variable /indicator	Mean	Standard deviation	Outer loading
Brand awareness			
I know at least one brand X product	6.18	1.221	0.789
I easily recognize brand X among other brands	5.72	1.272	0.818
I recognize the logo of brand X	6.08	1.407	0.895
I know that there is a brand X	6.29	1.153	0.853
Brand associations			
I like brand X	6.23	0.928	0.781
I have good memories of brand X	5.78	1.279	0.828
Brand X has a good image	5.86	1.117	0.699
My memories associated with brand X positively influence my purchasing decisions	5.3	1.395	0.683
Perceived quality			
Brand X products are of better quality than the generic alternative	5.14	1.38	0.908
Although other brands’ products are good, I still think that brand X is better	4.9	1.376	0.861
Brand X products are of good quality	5.7	1.112	0.864
Brand X offers reliable products	5.59	1.048	0.788
Loyalty			
I am faithful to brand X	4.55	1.484	0.759
I think I am loyal to brand X	4.43	1.467	0.781
I am attached to brand X	4.11	1.448	0.897
If someone offered me a competitive brand, I would still buy brand X products	4.25	1.455	0.809
Forwarding intention			
I think this post is worth sharing with others	3.98	1.562	0.928
I will recommend this post to others	3.92	1.532	0.866
I will share this post with my friends through social networking sites	3.31	1.652	0.81

Source: Author’s analysis.

TABLE 2: Construct reliability and validity

Variable	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Brand awareness	0.884	0.905	0.705
Brand associations	0.813	0.872	0.632
Brand loyalty	0.836	0.886	0.662
Perceived quality	0.883	0.915	0.730
Forwarding intention	0.851	0.903	0.756

Source: Author's analysis.

The last evaluation criterion is discriminant validity, presented in Table 3. Since the factors are lower than 0.85, it can be concluded that the

constructs of this measurement model are reliable and valid.

TABLE 3: Discriminant validity

	BAS	BAW	PBI	BLO	PQ
BAS	0.795				
BAW	0.803	0.839			
PBI	0.327	0.080	0.869		
BLO	0.717	0.475	0.359	0.813	
PQ	0.854	0.663	0.296	0.704	0.854

Notes: BAS = Brand association, BAW = brand awareness, PBI = pass-on behavioral intention, BLO = brand loyalty, PQ = perceived quality.

Source: Author's analysis.

For the predictive capability, the values of f^2 were between 0.02 and 0.15 for brand associations, brand awareness and loyalty, which represents a medium effect size, whereas perceived quality had a value of 0.009, which is considered a small effect size as shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4: Predictive capability

f^2	Forwarding Intention
Brand associations	0.024
Brand awareness	0.050
Brand loyalty	0.048
Perceived quality	0.009

Source: Author's analysis.

Calculated VIF values are less than 5 for all the predictor constructs (lowest for BLO3 = 1.568

and highest for PQ4 = 3.697), which is considered good based on standard evaluation criteria. Expected R^2 values in social sciences should be above 0.2, as less than that is considered weak (Hair et al., 2017). With R^2 for forwarding intention standing at 0.206 in this model, it proved significant based on previously mentioned findings. Next to that, the Standardized Root Mean Squared index (SRMR) was calculated at 0.074, so it falls in the acceptable range for the SRMR index and confirms that the model has a suitable fit. The Normed Fit Index (NFI) value of 0.934 also confirmed a good model fit. Furthermore, based on the path coefficient analysis presented in Table 5, there is a significant positive effect of brand loyalty on forwarding intention, which means that hypothesis H4 has been accepted.

TABLE 5: Path coefficient values

	β	Sample mean	Standard deviation	t-statistic	p-value	Remarks
BAW – PBI	0.247	0.266	0.208	1.185	0.236	Not significant
BAS – PBI	-0.280	-0.255	0.219	1.279	0.201	Not significant
BLO – PBI	0.267	0.265	0.129	2.076	0.038	Significant
PQ – PBI	0.131	0.146	0.167	0.784	0.433	Not significant

Notes: BAS = brand association, BAW = brand awareness, PBI = pass-on behavioral intention, BLO = brand loyalty, PQ = perceived quality.

Source: Author’s analysis.

A standardized structural coefficient of 0.247 implies that the ‘forwarding intention’ variable will increase by 0.247 standard deviations if ‘brand loyalty’ increases by one standard deviation. Building further on the overall willingness to forward an ad, based on the collected dataset, participants who spend more time on social networking sites are more willing to demonstrate the intention to forward an ad. Other dimensions showed no significant influence on the dependent variable, so H1, H2, and H3 have not been accepted. Results will be discussed in the next chapter.

5. DISCUSSION AND LIMITATIONS

In the existing scientific literature, it has been concluded that various brand equity dimensions have an impact on different aspects of consumer behavior (Barreda et al., 2015; Eelen et al., 2017; Kyguoliene & Zikiene, 2021; Tariq et al., 2017). Examining solely the effects of brand equity dimensions on the intention to forward an ad represents a significant step in understanding consumer behavior in the SNSs context, given the wide range of constructs that it covers. Out of four consumer-based brand equity dimensions, a significant positive impact on forwarding intention was confirmed only for the brand loyalty dimension. Contrary to the expected outcome, brand awareness, brand associations, and perceived quality were not found to contribute to customer intentions to forward

brand ads in the SNSs context. Although brand awareness was identified as one of the key factors in word-of-mouth communication (Barreda et al., 2015), it appears that in the context of fashion brands, brand awareness alone is not sufficient to encourage customers to share brand ads within their SNSs community. Furthermore, if consumers have positive connections with a brand, it is assumed that they would want to be closely associated with it and share brand posts. In this research, the relationship between brand associations and ad forwarding intention was not strong enough to accept the second hypothesis. Lastly, according to Kyguoliene & Zikiene (2021), customers’ perception of brand quality can significantly influence their behavior; however, it had no impact on customers’ intention to forward brand ads in the SNSs context.

The significant positive relationship between brand loyalty and customers’ intention to forward brand ads was confirmed by this research. In line with previous research on brand loyalty, loyal customers are engaged with, believe in brand values, and are willing to share positive impressions within their environment (Russell-Bennett & Parkinson, 2014). Additionally, a wide base of loyal customers can be considered as a valuable asset for a brand, which encourages companies to constantly innovate in order to enhance it (Fuqiang & Jinxin, 2023). According to Eelen et al. (2017), even consumers loyal to a brand are much more willing to share good word of mouth in person than in online surroundings, which could explain the moderate

effect of brand loyalty on forwarding intention in the SNSs context. Furthermore, the same authors concluded that brands could encourage loyal consumers to disseminate positive messages about the brand by making them aware of the positive impact online brand advocacy can have. Loyalty could, consequently, be driven by the overall customer brand engagement, including its cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimension.

Managing the consumer-based brand equity is in the focus of marketing managers, as they need to understand each of the dimensions when developing marketing strategies (Calvo-Porrall, Lévy-Mangin, 2015). Therefore, this study also has practical implications for companies operating in the fashion industry. Loyal customers represent a valuable asset for companies, bringing many benefits such as a stable revenue stream, high profitability, and resilience. Additionally, that customer segment is willing to provide feedback and insights that can be used to further improve customer experience (Mothersbaugh, Hawkins & Bardi Kleiser, 2020). A best use case to leverage the findings of this research is creating viral advertising campaigns, such as online sharing of promotional messages by organizations, aiming to encourage their community to share it further (Reichstein & Bruschi, 2019). Drawing from these conclusions, having a well-managed brand loyalty could be one of the main drivers of success of viral marketing campaigns, as loyal customers

are willing to pass on the ads to their contacts. This implies that creating a base of loyal customers is the first step towards building promotional campaigns that will encourage brand followers on SNSs to share brand ads and increase the campaign reach.

This study also has some limitations which could be addressed in future research of this relevant and actual topic. The first one is related to the size of the sample and the sampling method, and consequently, the findings of the study cannot be generalized. Future studies could use a wider sample and insist on better age distribution of the sample, especially considering that younger generations use social networking sites in a more interactive way. Secondly, the concept of brand awareness could be further split into brand recognition and brand recall (Keller, 1993) to provide for more detailed understanding of the impact of brand awareness on forwarding intention. Furthermore, exploring various types and sources of loyalty would be beneficial in order to better understand how to expand the base of loyal customers. In parallel, further research on the effects of ad content types would assist companies in determining which ad characteristics to implement to ensure the success of viral marketing campaigns. Finally, this paper did not consider distinguishing between luxury and fast fashion brands, as they may show different levels of overall consumer brand engagement and brand equity, consequently influencing ad forwarding intentions.

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