

## **Consumer Perception of Sales Promotion Intensity, Marketing Activities on Social Media and Uniqueness of Brands**

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Intense competition and technological advancements have made it difficult for organizations to create brand differentiation. Along with organizations, consumers are also confused to make the right decision. Differentiation based on physical attributes is not lasting. It's time to create differentiation based on brand equity. The study is aimed to see the effects of perceived offline and online marketing activities on brand equity. A conceptual model based on previous literature developed and tested to verify the suggested hypotheses and relationships. Responses were collected from 385 respondents through convenience sampling. The model analyzed for SEM through AMOS. There were four hypotheses in the study, out of which one was rejected. Social Media Activities and Uniqueness are the significant predictors of Brand Equity whereas Sales Promotion Intensity does have insignificant effect on it. Brand Equity impact on Brand Attitude was also found to be significant.

**Keywords:** Uniqueness, Sales Promotion Intensity, Brand Equity, Brand Attitude, Perceived Social Media Marketing Activities.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In this era of technology, organizations are asserting more emphasis to use social media for brand marketing (Han, Nguyen, Song, Chua, Lee, & Kim, 2019). Sales promotion intensity attracts more consumers to specific brands (Carter, 2016). Market, in general, is filled with multiple brand options of a single product category and it seems a challenging task for brand managers to build brand preferences. Simultaneously, it is also a difficult task for consumers to select the right brand (Bashir, Ali & Jalees, 2017). So, here the brand equity i.e. the value of brand works. Brand equity is a measure of brand strength and a necessary aspect to work upon (Keller, 2006). Almost all the organizations have made brand equity their topmost priority (Schvinski & Dabrowski, 2015). Researches consider brand equity as an important aspect for the organization and have been working on it to understand different aspects regarding it. For having a better understanding of brand equity, it is equally important to know the roots of it. This

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understanding can help managers to know which areas are to be pondered upon for having strong brand equity (Aaker, 1996). The strong brands are formed by making the potential customers have proper knowledge regarding it, for which it is important to have proper knowledge regarding marketing (Keller, 2009).

There have been numerous changes in the media from the last ten years. In this era of web 2.0 technology, it is quite easier for the users to generate brand-related content, which can positively or negatively affect the marketing efforts of an organization. It is easier to develop a strong relationship with potential customers through technology usage and the uniqueness of the brand (Knight & Kim, 2007).

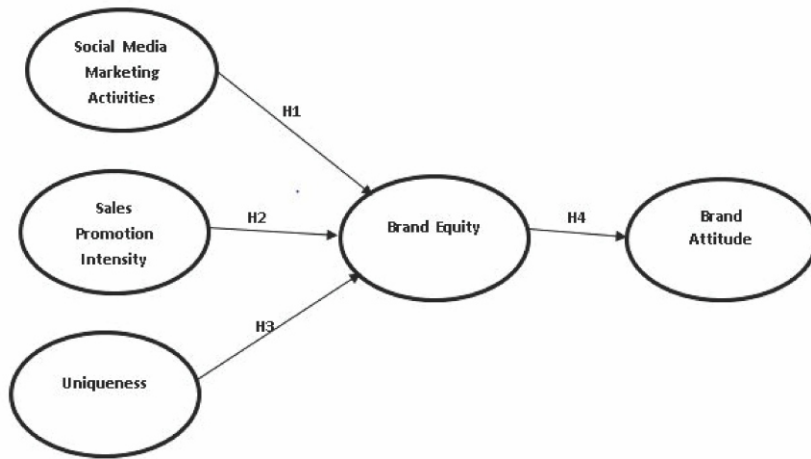
Now, the organizations are making changes in their priorities of using media and are shifting towards social media to make the interaction with consumers effective. It is the trend of using social networking websites now. Understanding the connection between brand equity and these other aspects of marketing is considered essential by many researchers.

Research stream is available on the topic of antecedents and consequences of brand equity. Most of the research discussed the impact of marketing mix elements (Moin, Baig, Iqbal, Aziz & Hussain, 2017; Liu, Zhang & Keh, 2018; Kumar & Patra, 2017) and social media marketing on brand equity (Godey, Manthiou, Pederzoli, Rokka, Aiello, Donvito & Singh, 2016; Bashir, Ayub & Jalees, 2017; Seo & Park, 2018). This study intends to measure the perception of consumers about marketing activities through social media, promotional intensity and its influence on brand equity. Similarly, different studies on brand attitude are taking the brand attitude as an antecedent to brand equity (Augusto & Torres, 2018). Whereas, the present study is considering the brand attitude as a consequence of brand equity.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Brand equity has been the most essential concept in the world of research and industry practice (Hanaysha & Hilman, 2015). It is considered important to analyze because it is a way towards knowing the extendibility of a brand well (Ailawadi, Donald & Scott, 2003).

This area of marketing is greatly discussed by researchers (Raji, Rashid & Ishak, 2018). There have been numerous research streams presented in the context of brand equity. The academic literature is filled with several definitions and explanations of brand equity and the factors affecting it. There are three important aspects to explain and understand the brand equity concept i.e. financial perspective, organization perspective, and consumer perspective (Farjam & Hongyi, 2015). Marketers have more interest to view and understand brand equity from the customer/consumer point of view. It portrays the real picture and value of the brand that exists in the consumers' mind (Keller, 2009). The most common and frequently used dimensions to understand and examine consumers' attitudes towards a brand are perceived quality, brand association, brand awareness and loyalty with the brand (Aaker, 1991). It is believed that consumers are the ones who generate the brand, and the brand generates consumers (Leone, Keller, Luo, McAlister & Srivastava, 2006). There are some offshoots of the brand equity concept from other researchers i.e. Consumer Based Brand Equity (CBBE) Keller, (1993) and overall brand equity. There has been a lot of stress to learn more about brand equity to elevate brand value. Brand equity is now the first priority of every organization.

**Fig. 1. Proposed Conceptual Model**

### **Brand Equity and Social Media Marketing Activities**

For young users, social media has been a tool for interaction. It is filled with many strategies by managers of modern businesses to interact with their potential customers online Facebook is the most commonly used social media site among young consumers through which they are strongly engaged with each other as well as with their liked brand (Bashir & Ali, 2016). Social media is being used for different purposes for organizations, such as a communication tool, sales promotion, customer service, and research. It is important for the content on social media to be relatable to the consumers otherwise it will be of no use. Brand awareness and brand liking have been increased by the use of social media, and it also enhances brand loyalty as well. However, believe that in order to have an optimal marketing mix, it is necessary to have traditional media as well as social media on the table. argue that organizations should not use social media in isolation with traditional media for brand and firm related marketing activities elucidate that businesses should be careful regarding their strategies of engagement on social media to enhance consumer-based brand equity. In light of the above literature, the following hypothesis is created:

H1: Social media marketing activities significantly affect brand equity.

### **Brand Equity and Perceived Sales Promotion Intensity**

The impact of marketing mix elements has been discussed in many types of researches. Brand equity is significantly influenced by sales promotion because it gives promotion to the knowledge of brand awareness However, there has also been a negative effect noted by research on brand equity because consumers may believe that continuous promotion is for compromised quality (Joseph & Sivakumaran, 2009). Still, the role of sale promotion intensity is ambiguous when it is compared to measure the influence on brand equity and many researchers have stressed upon making sure what these effects are

(Netemeyer, Krishnan, Pullig, Wang, Yagci, Dean, Ricks & Wirth, 2004; Bui, Nguyen & Pham, 2017). According to Llopis-Amorós, Gil-Saura and Molina (2018) marketing communications significantly affect the brand equity of events and organizations must plan their spending to build and enhance the brand equity, hence this hypothesis is developed:

H2: Intensity of promotional activities significantly affect brand equity.

### **Brand Equity and Uniqueness**

Uniqueness means the property of a brand where the brand provides some superior benefits and have exclusive characteristics than competing brands. Uniqueness is studied under the different aspects of brand equity. Advantages and Uniqueness are collectively considered suitable for measuring brand differentiation. Past research has discussed the uniqueness concept as the sub-dimension of differentiation (Netemeyer et al., 2003; Szöcs, & Berács, 2015). According to Netemeyer et al., (2004), uniqueness is positively associated with consumers' willingness to pay the premium price that ultimately ripens willingness to purchase. Uniqueness amount a brand's capability to stand out among others. Due to technology, the differentiation is lost somewhere because of the short time it serves in such a saturated market. Also, some brands do not consider much differentiating themselves from others in the market. The concept of uniqueness means that the brand has more and different to offer as compared to competitors.

H3: Uniqueness has a significant impact on Brand equity

### **Brand Attitude and Brand Equity**

Keller (1993) viewed the brand attitude as a base of customer's actions. It is a positive or negative personal evaluation, touchy feelings and tendency of behavior that kept by an individual. According to Keller (1993), an attitude towards a brand is based on brand association, however; Holiday (1996) established the association between brandimage ,brand attitude and brand preference. The image of a brand has an influence on attitude formationfor a brand Holiday (1996) According to brand, image positively influences brand attitude development. Marshall and Keller (1999) conducted a study to measure how brand attitude is influenced by brand image and brand awareness. According to Kwun and Oh (2007) perceived quality, brand awareness and brand image have a positive impact on the attitude of corporate image. Brand equity significantly predicts brand attitude (Zarantonello, & Schmitt, 2013). According to Faircloth et al. (2001), there is a relationship between brand equity and brand attitude considering later as an essential determinant of brand equity.Positive attitudes give promotions to brand purchase which is an outcome of brand equity.

H4: Brand equity has a significant impact on brand attitude.

## **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The target population of the study includes young consumers. As per Bharucha (2018), buying behaviours of young consumers greatly influenced by social media



activities as they are considered to be the substantial users of social media. Convenience sampling was employed to gather information from respondents. The sampling unit for the study was the consumers who make purchase decisions and observe the companies' communication messages online and on television. Data were collected from 385 respondents. A sample of 200 is the recommended SEM model, Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham (2010). All the constructs and scale items were taken from different studies and arranged on 5 points Likert scale. The following table presents the details of the constructs used.

Table 1

*Constructs*

Construct	Author	No. of items
Social Media Marketing Activities	Han &Shu, 2010; Kim, 2010	4
Sales Promotion Intensity	Yoo and Donthu, 2001	4
Uniqueness	Scoz& Lehman et al., 2008	4
Brand Equity	Yoo and Donthu, 2001	4
Brand Attitude	Burton et. Al., 1998	4

#### 4. DATA ANALYSIS

Various statistical tests were applied to the collected data, including descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, reliability analysis, CFA, and finally, the overall model fit through SEM.

##### 4.1. Descriptive Analysis

Chronbach alpha, Composite reliability and normality re-ascertained. The following table is showing the results.

Table 2

*Descriptive Analysis*

Construct	$\alpha$	CR	Mean	Std. Dev.	Kurtosis	Skewness
SMA	0.84	0.76	4.09	1.39	-0.19	-0.57
SPI	0.80	0.71	3.38	1.37	-0.30	-0.48
UN	0.88	0.74	3.90	1.44	-0.02	-0.83
BE	0.87	0.85	4.08	1.44	-0.24	-0.68
BA	0.89	0.77	3.90	1.42	-0.15	-0.85

Brand Attitude has the highest reliability ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ) followed by uniqueness ( $\alpha = 0.88$ ). The rest of the constructs also has well  $\alpha$  value and is ranging from 0.80 to 0.87. It is considered a good level of internal consistency (Bryman & Bell, 2011). For SEM, it is generally recommended to measure latent variable reliability i.e. Composite Reliability (Raykov, 1997).

The minimum threshold value for CR is 0.7 (Chin, Marcolin & Newsted, 2003). All the CR values are meeting the minimum threshold value i.e. 0.70. (Hair, 2010).

Table 3

*Correlation Analysis*

	SMA	SPI	UN	BE	BA
SMA	1				
SPI	0.51	1			
UN	0.66	0.65	1		
BE	0.72	0.53	0.71	1	
BA	0.58	0.56	0.68	0.69	1

**4.2. Convergent Validity**

Factor loadings of indicator variables i.e. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and criteria of fit indices were used to find out and analyze the convergent validity. As average variance extracted (AVE) exceeding its minimum threshold value i.e. 0.5 and the model fit indices are meeting the required threshold values, shows constructs qualify convergent validity (Hair et al., 2010).

**4.3. Discriminant Validity**

The constructs are distinct and unique since the square root of AVE is greater than the values of correlation values (Fornell & Larcker, 1981)

Table 4

*Discriminant Validity*

	SMA	SPI	UN	BE	BA
SMA	0.81				
SPI	0.51	0.79			
UN	0.66	0.65	0.86		
BE	0.72	0.63	0.71	0.85	
BA	0.58	0.56	0.68	0.69	0.86

**4.4. Emerging Model**

The overall SEM model inclusive of five variables is depicted in Figure 2. There are two endogenous variables and three exogenous variables in the model. The nine reporting indices are meeting the prescribed criteria limits and depicted in the below table.

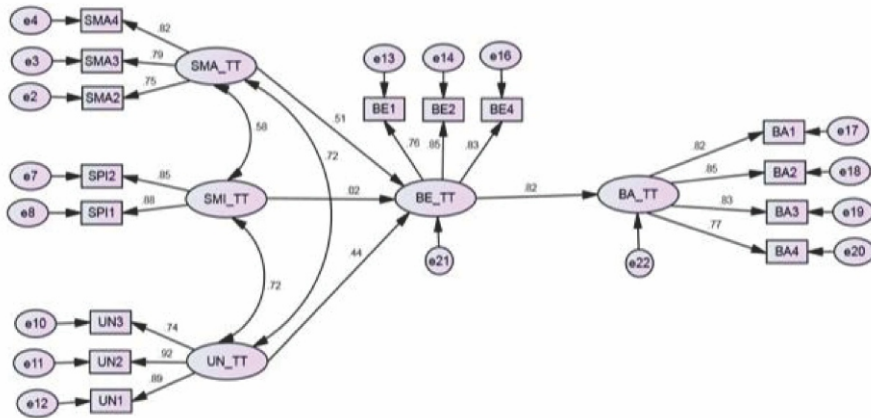
**Fig. 2. Emerging Model**

Table 5

*Fit Indices*

	Absolute					Relative			Parsimonious	
	X2	X2/df	DOF(P)	GFI	AGFI	CFI	NFI	IFI	PNFI	PCFI
Overall Model	255.013	3.072	83(.000)	0.919	0.883	0.958	0.939	0.958	0.742	0.757
Criteria	Low	<5.0	n/a	>0.90	>0.90	>0.90	>0.90	>0.90	>0.50	>0.50

In absolute category  $\chi^2 = 255.013$ ,  $DF = 83$ ,  $p = 0.000 < .05$ ,  $GFI = 0.919 > 0.90$  are significant. Value of  $AGFI = 0.883 < 0.90$ , not meeting the threshold value but is tolerable. In relative category  $CFI = 0.958 > 0.900$ ,  $NFI = 0.939 > 0.900$ , and  $IFI = 0.958 > 0.900$  meeting prescribed threshold values. In Parsimonious category  $PNFI = 0.742 > 0.50$  and  $PCFI = 0.757 > 0.50$  are within the prescribed criteria. Model fit is good as all of the fit indices are meeting the prescribed limits (Koubba, Tabbane & Chaabouni, 2014)

**4.5. Hypothesis Testing and Results**

Table 6 is showing the SEM output for hypothesis derived for the study, including standardized regression weights and critical values. Among the four hypotheses, three hypotheses were accepted and one was rejected as the p-value for the hypothesis was not less than 0.05.

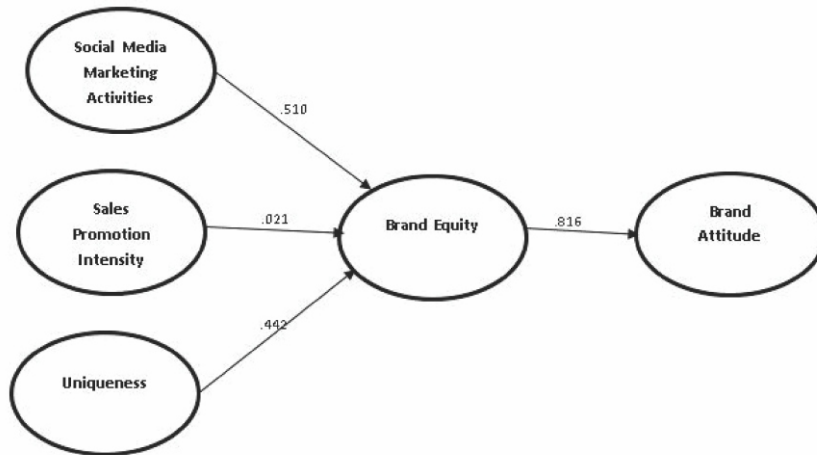
Table 6

*Summary of Hypothesized Relationships*

Relationship	SRW	SE	CR	P
Brand Equity <--- Perceived Sales Promo Intensity	.021	.048	0.376	.707
Brand Equity <--- Uniqueness	.442	.065	6.198	***
Brand Equity <--- Perceived Social Media Activities	.510	.069	7.678	***
Brand Attitude <--- Brand Equity	.816	.060	13.753	***

It is evident from the results that social media activities and uniqueness of the brand strongly predict the brand equity, and which in turn strongly predicts brand attitude. The intensity of sales promotion activities does not leave any significance on brand equity.

**Fig. 3. Standardized Estimates for the Model**



## 5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main aim of the study was to know the effects of uniqueness, social media activities, and sales promotion intensity on brand equity, and ultimately to what extent brand equity influences brand attitude. Four hypotheses were developed, three were accepted and one was rejected.

Four hypotheses were formulated for this study which examines the impact of uniqueness, social media marketing activities, and perceived sales promotion intensity on brand equity. Moreover,, to what extent brand equity impacts on brand attitude. All the hypotheses were accepted.

In the first hypothesis, the impact of social media activities on brand equity, the study finds significant impact of SMA on brand equity (  $\beta=.510, p<.05$ ), and study results are also supported by some previous studies, (Kim, 2012; As'ad, & Alhadid, 2014). Companies and the brand users generate content related to brand on social media that produce a significant impact on the overall brand equity of the brand (Schwinski & Dabrowski, 2015).

For the second hypothesis i.e. effect of sales promotion intensity on brand equity, this study finds an insignificant impact of SPI on brand equity (  $\beta=.021, p >.000$ ). In past researches , both the significant and insignificant effects were measured. Netemeyer et al. (2004) and Chu & Keh (2006) observed the insignificant impact of SPI on brand equity, whereas and Villarejo & Sanchez (2005) get the significant impact of SPI on brand equity. When a firm promotes a brand intensively, it is not the guaranty of brand success. It may develop a negative impression about the brand quality.

For the third hypothesis i.e. effect of uniqueness on brand equity, the study finds a significant impact of uniqueness on brand equity ( $\beta=.442$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Our findings are inconsistent with Szocs (2012) study, where the impact of uniqueness on brand equity was insignificant. Uniqueness is something that a brand offers more than a competing brand; hence, consumer develops a more favorable behavior and pays less attention to other common characteristics of competing brands. Uniqueness is measured by differentiation. Consumers to become self-expressive choose specific and unique brands.

For the last hypothesis i.e. effect of brand equity on brand attitude, we find a significant effect of brand equity on brand attitude ( $\beta=.816$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Findings are similar to Kwun and andwhere they found a positive impact of brand equity elements and brand image on brand attitude. According to Kotler (1999) brand attitude is a customer's favorable or unfavorable evaluations and feelings kept for a brand.

## 6. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

The study has some limitations. Data were collected from one city i.e. Karachi (a large metropolitan city) through convenience sampling; hence, generalizability is limited. The survey questionnaire method was used to collect the data. Future studies can be designed with these variables for specific product category, or culture/sub-culture settings to gain some more insights. Domain of the study can be stretched further in other cities, and also with other age brackets.

Technological advancement has shortened the product life cycle. Organizations have to innovate the products before the competitors do it. Consumers see it important that a brand must be present on social media. Organizations must change their communication strategy i.e. from traditional to digital. By adopting social media communication for branding activities an organization can better maintain and modify the brand equity. Social media provides the opportunity for the organizations to learn from the consumer when they share their insight through this medium. Through social media, managers can use the power of consumers to augments the attitude of other customers for their brand. Marketing efforts intensity found to be positively associated with brand value. With more marketing messages, consumers get more awareness and knowledge about the brand. Uniqueness also influences brand equity which keeps the competition away from the brand, and organizations can enjoy good profits. Strong brand equity will mold the consumer attitude towards the brand and organization.

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