

From Brand Awareness to Association: Exploring the Influence of Perceived Value and Mediating Role of Brand Image from the Telecom Industry

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ABSTRACT

Important factors in forming brand associations include perceived value—the consumer's assessment of a brand's value—and brand awareness, which is the identification and recall of a brand. With an emphasis on the mediating function of brand image, this research examines the relationship between brand awareness, perceived value, and brand association. The study intends to fill a gap in the literature, especially about developing countries like Pakistan. Data was collected from 493 valid respondents for this study via face-to-face interviews at retail malls by using the questionnaire adapted from the literature. The results demonstrate that perceived value and brand awareness have a significant impact on brand association. It is also proven that brand image plays a mediating function, with brand awareness influencing brand association indirectly via brand image. The research concludes that to improve brand association among users of mobile phones, marketers in the telecom industry should give priority to raising brand awareness and perceived value. Efficient use of social media and information technology may increase brand awareness, and a strong brand image can strengthen the brand association, enhance market positioning, and maintain a competitive edge in the telecom industry of underdeveloped economies like Pakistan.

Keywords: Telecom Brands Association, Brand Image, Brand Awareness to Association, Perceived Value.

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INTRODUCTION

A brand is a valuable asset for businesses since it plays a pivotal role in influencing buyer decision-making. It facilitates customers in comparing items and their distinctiveness, so promoting confidence and mitigating concerns connected to their expertise and reliability (Chung, Lee, & Heath, 2013; Huang & Sarigöllü, 2012). Brand value is established by the trust and confidence that people have in a brand, which in turn enables them to willingly pay a higher price for the goods (Lassar, Mittal, & Sharma, 1995). In general, the value of a brand plays a crucial role in both recruiting and maintaining consumers.

Brand awareness is the level of knowledge and engagement that a person has with a particular brand, allowing them to associate it with its product category (D. Aaker, 1991; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2005),

and it is the measure of how well a brand is recognized and remembered by consumers, and it is an essential aspect of brand knowledge (Hoyer & Brown, 1990). Brand awareness is determined by an individual's capacity to recognize distinct brand parts, such as the brand name, logo, image, character, packaging, and trademark, under different settings (Keller & Lehmann, 2003).

Brand image is influenced by brand association, which is a crucial element in good brand image readings (Boonghee Yoo, Naveen Donthu, & Sungcho Lee, 2000). Brand association is generally built on the familiar system paradigm, where links and hubs are utilized to represent ideas and goods (Farquhar, 1994). The association may be in all structures and can represent features of the product or perspectives regardless of the product itself (Keller, 2013), and the three dimensions of brand association that reflect brand image are favorability, strength, and originality (Keller, 1993).

In the 1960s, shoppers appreciated branded items, making them a key element in their purchase choices. Brands became an important aspect of marketing in the 1970s and 1980s, impacting the whole marketing discipline. Concepts like brand awareness, perceived value, brand image, and brand association have become vital components of branding and today's marketing (Hampf & Lindberg-Repo, 2011). However, literature is inadequate on these factors, particularly in underdeveloped nations like Pakistan because brand affiliations are developing internationally (Foscht, Maloles III, Swoboda, Morschett, & Sinha, 2008), and understanding customer views of them might differ based on variables driving brand association (Busch & Planas Rego, 2010). This research tries to explain the link between brand awareness and perceived value on brand association and the mediation of brand image.

This research examines brand image as a uni-dimensional construct, studying the elements that impact brand association and mediation effect, notably among shopping mall customers. These customers are essential to smartphone sales and are exposed to a broad variety of information product brands. The research tries to present a thorough model of the relevant links between brand image and outcomes, rather than concentrating on its dimensionality.

This research intends to analyze brand association and customer experience with information goods like mobile phones from different companies available in Pakistan. The research focuses on the mediation of brand image, which is a collection of traits associated with a specific brand. The study will explore the effects of brand awareness and perceived value on brand association, as well as the mediating effect of brand image on the link between brand awareness, perceived value, and brand association. The research attempts to find elements that might promote brand connection and propose solutions to improve customer experience with information goods.

LITERATURE REVIEW

How Does Brand Awareness Relate to Brand Association?

Brand awareness is essential for the value of a brand and may have a considerable influence on how customers perceive it, resulting in varied customer interactions within a certain product category (Kimpakorn & Tocquer, 2010). It is the first and most crucial component of consumer brand worth (Tong & Hawley, 2009). (D. A. Aaker, 1996) highlights the need to take brand awareness into account when assessing brand equity. Brand association and brand awareness are closely linked since brand association contributes to the evaluation of a brand (Huang & Sarigöllü, 2012). Strong brand associations are favorably influenced by high brand awareness, hence enhancing brand value, that's why brand associations are seen as indicators of excellence and commitment, compelling buyers to

embrace a brand and view it as a compelling reason to make a purchase (Marinova, Cui, Marinov, & Shiu, 2011).

Establishing brand awareness is essential for cultivating a robust and distinctive brand identity, as it profoundly impacts the formation of favorable and discerning brand connections (Davis, Golicic, & Marquardt, 2009). Brand awareness is strongly correlated with a favorable tendency towards a product or brand (Paswan, Kulkarni, & Ganesh, 2003). The effect of optimal, tangible, and distinctive relationships on consumer decision-making greatly affects their opinion of a company's success, including the quality of its products (Bendixen, Bukasa, & Abratt, 2004).

Brand awareness plays a significant part in influencing client decisions to purchase a certain product or brand and to prevent shifting to rivals (Boogy Yoo, Naveen Donthu, & Sungho Lee, 2000). Brand image, defined as a buyer's view and thoughts about a product of a certain brand, is a crucial mediator in brand association (Roy & Banerjee, 2007). Brand awareness is sometimes misrepresented and often misunderstood, even by seasoned managers. (Keller & Kotler, 2022) describe brand awareness as the capacity of prospective customers to recognize and appraise a brand as an individual from a given product class. Brand awareness is the primary stage in creating brand association, and it is a source of brand association. (Mohd Yasin, Nasser Noor, & Mohamad, 2007) suggest that brand awareness promotes an extraordinary degree of brand association. Brand awareness has been proven to have a favorable and substantial influence on brand association (Mishra & Datta, 2011).

Brand awareness greatly impacts client decision-making by altering the potency of brand associations in their brain (Boisvert & Burton, 2011). High image awareness leads to more grounded brand connections, making customers' image associations stronger (Homburg, Klarmann, & Schmitt, 2010). Brand image is an arrangement of beliefs held about a given brand, which plays a key role in the buyer's choosing process when judging elective brands (Chen & Tseng, 2010). Brand awareness, with the mediating influence of brand image, impacts brand association (Arora & Stoner, 2009). Brand awareness establishes connections for an object but with the mediation of brand image (Sasmita & Suki, 2015). Brand awareness is profoundly altering consumer decision-making, as customers typically utilize it as a choice heuristic, helping the administration of brand connections, so in reality, brand awareness will alter brand association with the mediation of brand image (Sasmita & Suki, 2015). Hence, the following hypotheses can be made from the above discussion:

H1. Brand awareness has a significant positive relationship with brand association.

H1a. Brand awareness has a significant positive relationship with brand association mediated by brand image.

How Does Perceived Value Relate to Brand Association?

Understanding how brand value is produced in the customer's brain and how it drives their behavior is vital. Studies reveal that perceived value is a prevalent kind of brand association for a specific product or brand (He & Li, 2010). Perceived value is the assessment made by purchasers on the benefits and expenses they anticipate while considering an item and it plays a vital role in establishing a brand's reputation and connection with consumers (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). Perceived value is a generally acknowledged notion that aids buyers in making educated judgments about a product (Woodruff, 1997). Quality, in this sense, refers to the disparity between the perceived cost and benefits. Nevertheless, the definition of value might be distinct and vary across individual buyers (McDougall & Levesque, 2000). Thus, the combination of a brand's perceived value and a robust brand image may provide an optimal corporate image.

The link between perceived value and brand association is mediated by the assumption that a buyer's assessment of the intrinsic features of product quality may lead to good brand association and high brand value for associations (Bell, Auh, & Smalley, 2005; De Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003). This has prompted some academics to assess perceived value as a basic aspect of a brand's association (He & Li, 2010). So, a favorable view of a product or brand results in a greater inclination to purchase and actively search for the product in stores. The value of a brand fosters a favorable connection with consumers, facilitated by the influence of brand image (Hamid, 2014). The perception of value establishes connections for a product, but this connection is influenced by the brand's image (Ahmad & Sherwani, 2015).

The research intends to evaluate consumer perceived value in mobile firms, seeking to better the assessment of perceived value in flexible commercial operations. It focuses on the influence of perceived value on brand associations, stressing its relevance in relationship marketing. The research also evaluates momentum and closes with a summary of the results. The research aims to understand consumer perceptions and their effect on brand connections. Since no research has been done on the mediating link between these three variables, the purpose of this study is to assess the hypothetical relationship between perceived value, brand association, and brand image, mediated by brand image.

H2. Perceived value has a significant positive relationship with brand association.

H2a. Perceived value has a significant positive relationship with brand association mediated by brand image.

How Brand Association Relates to Brand Image?

Brand image is the mix of a customer's thoughts and beliefs about a brand, impacting their relationship with a certain product or brand (Zia, Younus, & Mirza, 2021). This research focuses on the numerous aspects that drive brand association, including buyer experience, advertising correspondences, and informal contacts. Brand image may come from different sources, such as customer experience, advertising correspondences, and informal contacts (Siddiqui et al., 2021). Any data encountered in connection to the brand may be connected with the brand name in memory, making it part of the brand's image (Zha, Foroudi, Melewar, & Jin, 2022). Brand image is considered a set of features and connotations that consumers identify with the brand name (Popp & Woratschek, 2017).

Businesses need to do brand image research because it gives them a competitive edge. Research has shown that consumers' inclination to advocate and associate with a brand is positively correlated with its image (Xie, Bagozzi, & Grønhaug, 2019). In the flexible industry, image harmony has been proven to affect consumer loyalty, post-focusing behavior, and brand relationships. According to (Kwun & Oh, 2007) research, brand reputation is significantly shaped by brand-specific associations. According to (Ryu, Han, & Kim, 2008) research, in the "Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) Market", brand image influences brand association which is aligned with the above discussion and leads to a positive relationship between them.

When building a product's consumer base, brand image is equally important. (Dawar & Pillutla, 2000) highlighted that typical customer interactions and purchase expectations are mostly caused by brand image. The significance of brand image in fostering authentic interactions between a company and its consumers was also emphasized by Flavian et al. (2006). According to (Esch, Langner, Schmitt, & Geus, 2006), brand image has a direct mediating effect on customer relationships and an abnormal mediating effect on future purchases.

A brand's image is essential to its success because it facilitates consumers' processing of information, creates purchase incentives, helps consumers identify the brand, elicits favorable feelings, and encourages growth (Pongjit & Beise-Zee, 2015). Still, there's a lack of consensus about the significance of brand image. "Discernment around a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in purchaser memory" is the definition of brand image, which may vary in terms of quality, originality, and ideality (Lee, James, & Kim, 2014). Customers are more likely to recall and develop brand loyalty when they associate a brand with a product or service that is more firmly rooted in the market. The brand association establishes a connection between a product or brand and the customer (Uggla, 2006). Prior research has shown a robust and noteworthy correlation between brand image and brand association. To comprehend the significance of brand image in a business's success, the following hypothesis is put out.

H3. The brand association has a positive significant relationship with brand image.

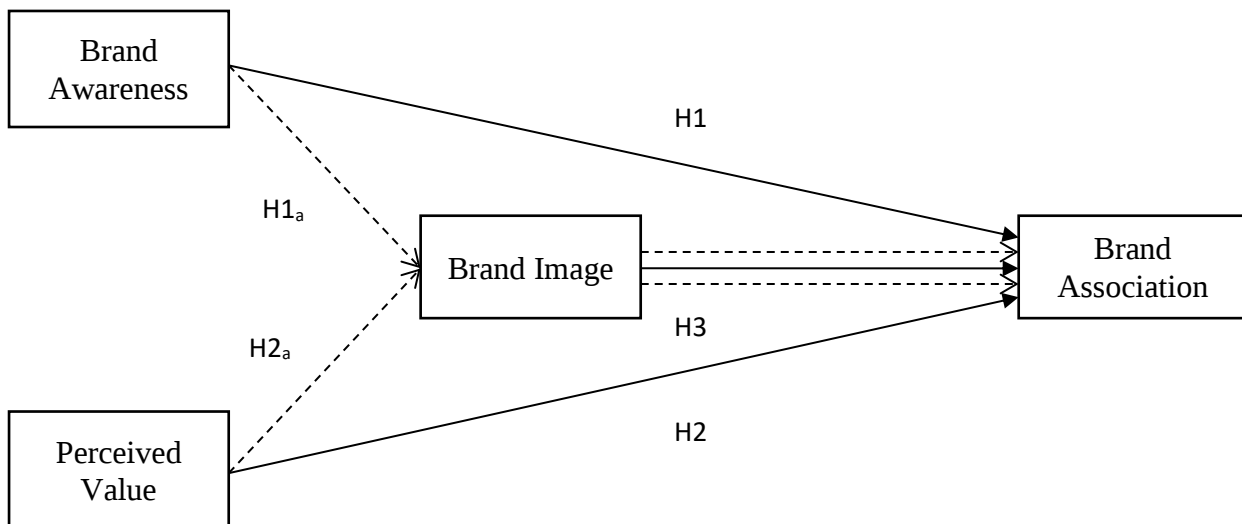


Figure 1: Research Model of Study

Note: Dotted Lines shows the mediating effect

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

The research used a questionnaire methodology to collect primary data on brand awareness, perceived value, brand image, and brand association at shopping malls throughout five districts of Punjab, Pakistan. The survey was conducted in person with customers using mobile phones in shopping malls. The gathered data was maintained in strict confidence and used for educational objectives. The researcher surveyed information items in Multan by visiting many shopping malls. The participants were provided with information on the purpose and significance of the research. They were also given background information about the linkage of brands with information goods such as Android mobiles

Participants and Research Procedures

This research specifically targets users of information products at shopping malls in the major cities of Punjab, using a convenience sample approach. A sample size of 540 respondents was selected, following the (Roscoe, 1969) recommendation of a suitable sample size ranging from 30 to 500. A total of 540 surveys were initially delivered at mobile phone retailers, however 14 were omitted from the analysis owing to missing results. An exploratory analysis was conducted to detect outliers, leading to the exclusion of 33 questions. A sample size of 493 was chosen for the study, guaranteeing a thorough comprehension of customer behavior at retail malls.

Measurement Scales

The measurement scales for the understudy constructs are adapted from the existing literature. The measurement scale for “Brand Image” is adapted from (Hair, JF, & J BB, 2010), the scale for “Brand Awareness” is adapted from (Yoo & Donthu, 2001), the scale for “Brand association” is adapted from (Biedenbach, Bengtsson, & Marell, 2015) and the “Perceived Value” is adapted from (D. A. Aaker, 1996). The values of “Cronbach's Alpha” are given below which show the reliability of the measurement instruments of study.

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha for Construct's Reliability

Measurement Scale	α
Brand Awareness	0.783
Perceived Value	0.716
Brand Image	0.641
Brand Association	0.735

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Respondents Profile

As shown in Table 2, the research examines demographic variables, including age, gender, income, marital status, and education, among a sample of mobile phone consumers in Pakistan. The findings indicate a notable disparity in the demographic characteristics of the respondents, with men being the majority of purchasers of mobile items. Specifically, 52.7% of the respondents at the shopping centers of Multan were male. 40.0% of mobile phone consumers are between the ages of 25 and 30, making them the largest age group. The research further discovered that those with higher levels of education exhibit a greater preference for and reliance on mobile phones compared to those with lower levels of education. Nevertheless, the proportion of individuals with a master's degree is smaller compared to those with fewer educational qualifications. The bulk of mobile subscribers are between the income range of 21000-30000, while 30.2% have an income level below 20000. Additionally, the survey revealed that families in the medium income bracket are purchasing mobile items at a higher rate compared to other families. However, a notable 30.2% of clients fall under the income bracket of less than 20000, which is a distinct contribution compared to earlier research. 9.7% of clients fall into the income bracket over 60000, indicating a higher likelihood of purchasing mobile devices as anticipated.

Table2: Demographics Distribution

Variable	Response Item	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	260	52.7
	Female	233	47.3
Age (Years)	25-30	197	40
	31-35	153	31
	36-40	91	18.5
	> 40	52	10.5
Education Level	Bachelors	203	41.2
	Master	257	52.1
	Above Master	33	6.7
Income Level (PKR)	Less than 20k	149	30.2
	21k-30k	159	32.3
	31k-40k	82	16.6
	41k-50k	25	5.1
	51k-60k	30	6.1
	>60k	48	9.7

Validation of Measurement Model Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

This study used the “principal component factoring (PCA)” technique to conduct the EFA on all 15 items of the instrument. The “Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin” (KMO) values of 0.773, 0.672, 0.685 and 0.654 for brand awareness, perceived value, brand image, and brand association with Bartlett’s test ($p < 0.05$) shows the suitability of data to conduct EFA on the dataset (Yong & Pearce, 2013).

All items are retained for further analysis because item loadings are above 0.4 (Yong & Pearce, 2013).

Detailed results of the EFA analysis are mentioned in Table 2.

Table 3: Factor loadings, convergent validity, and reliability of variable and items

Variable	Items	Loadings	α	C.R	AVE
Brand Awareness			0.783	0.641	0.576
	BAW1	0.752			
	BAW2	0.820			
	BAW3	0.787			
	BAW4	0.686			
Perceived Value	BAW5	0.724			
	PV1	0.788	0.716	0.681	0.417
	PV2	0.822			
	PV3	0.696			
Brand Image			0.641	0.716	0.456
	BI1	0.781			
	BI2	0.815			
	BI3	0.695			

Brand Association			0.735	0.681	0.416
	BA1	0.607			
	BA2	0.661			
	BA3	0.575			
	BA4	0.854			

Model Assessment

Direct and Indirect Effects

The research investigates the associations between independent and dependent variables, both with and without the presence of a mediator. Both pathways have significance, suggesting a kind of partial mediation. The independent factors, namely brand awareness and perceived value, have a substantial impact on the dependent variable, which is brand association. This effect is further mediated by the variable of brand image. The mediator, which represents the brand image, likewise shows a significant relationship with the dependent variable. Brand awareness (BAW) strongly influences brand association (BAS) ($\beta = 0.421$, $p < .05$), whereas perceived value (PV) is positively related to BAS ($\beta = 0.473$, $p < .05$). There is a strong connection between BAW and BAS, which is influenced by brand image (BI) ($\beta = 0.097$, $p < .05$). Additionally, PV has a notable influence on BAS, again mediated by brand image (BI) ($\beta = 0.044$, $p < .05$). Brand image has a strong impact on brand association, with a positive correlation ($\beta = 0.163$, $p < .05$).

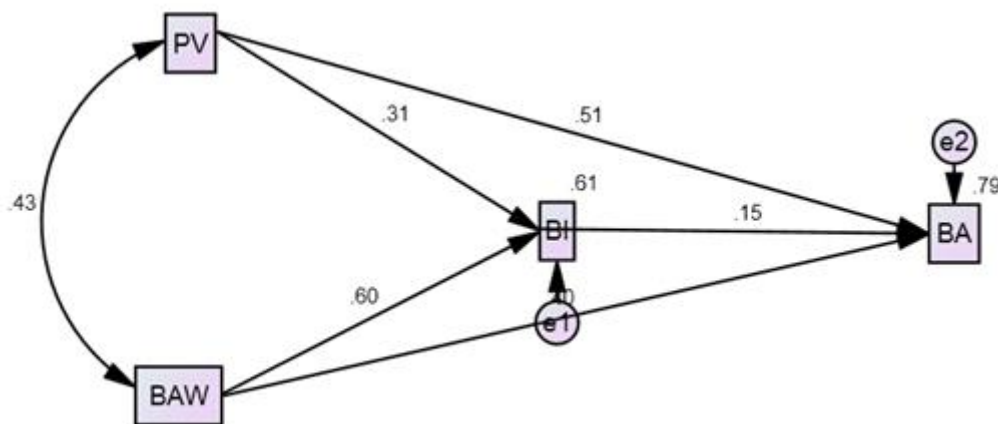


Figure 2: Structural Model path coefficients

Table 4: Direct Effects - Two-Tailed Significance

	Brand Awareness	Perceived Value	Brand Image
Brand Image	.002	.002	...
Brand Association	.002	.002	.005

Table 5: Indirect Effects - Two-Tailed Significance

	Brand Awareness	Perceived Value	Brand Image
Brand Image	...	...	...
Brand Association	.003	.003	...

Discussion of Results

The above results demonstrate that brand awareness has a substantial influence on brand association. Specifically, brand awareness (BAW) has a considerable effect on brand association (BAS) at a statistically significant level ($\beta = 0.421$, $p < .05$). This corroborates the findings of the literature study and suggests that brand awareness has a beneficial impact on brand association. The perception of value has a substantial impact on brand association. The perceived value (PV) is highly related to BAS at a significant level ($\beta = 0.473$, $p < .05$).

Indirect effects show that with the mediation of brand image, brand awareness positively impacts brand association ($\beta = 0.097$, $p < .05$). (Arora & Stoner, 2009) further indicate that brand awareness has favorable impacts on brand association with complete mediation of brand image.

(Arora & Stoner, 2009) discovered that a good view of a product or brand leads to a higher propensity to purchase and actively seek out the product in a shop. The research shows that there is a positive link between brand image and brand association ($\beta = 0.163$, $p < .05$), indicating that a better image may boost association. Prior research also demonstrates the link between brand association and brand image (Sasmita & Suki, 2015).

CONCLUSION

The study found that brand awareness and perceived value have the strongest influence on brand association among mobile phone consumers, with brand image playing a mediating role. Researchers and marketers should prioritize brand awareness and perceived value in persuading brand association among mobile phone consumers. Information technology, such as Twitter and Facebook, can help improve brand awareness through effective advertisements. A company with an auspicious brand image can enhance consumer association, improve market position, and sustain competitive advantage. Brand association is crucial for customer acceptance and enhances purchasing power. Media awareness plays a major role in educating consumers about different mobile brands and increasing their association with them. The study contributes to understanding the importance of brand association among mobile phone consumers and adds a novel forward indication to previous studies on brand association among mobile phone consumers in Pakistan.

Implications Research Findings

This research analyzes the notion of brand association, concentrating on the link between brand awareness, perceived value, and brand association. The study offers a new paradigm for analyzing the elements that drive brand association, specifically in the setting of mobile phones. Brand associations are utilized as stimulators to attract loyal consumers and serve as a foundation for future purchases. The brand image also plays a crucial part in consumer association, as it helps boost the value of a brand for loyal customers.

However, sustaining brand connections may be problematic owing to changing lives, habits, requirements, expectations, and preferences. As mobile phones continue to change, firms need to concentrate on brand awareness, perceived value, and brand image to completely acquire consumer connections.

The research has useful management implications for marketers and managers, highlighting the relevance of brand awareness and perceived value in developing brand connections. Managers should

work on boosting the brand image and strengthening the mobile brand image to guarantee client pleasure and reliability. Additionally, managers and brand marketers should analyze the interconnections between brand equity assessments, notably the link between brand awareness and brand association.

In conclusion, this research demonstrates the necessity of knowing and addressing the variables that drive brand association in this developing economy.

LIMITATION OF THE RESEARCH

- Limited independent variables: The research did not explore a broad variety of factors impacting brand association.
- Study area: The study focuses on the mobile market of a few cities in Punjab, Pakistan. Future studies might incorporate data from additional locations and cross-national analysis.
- Limitation of the narrow market: The research only included mobile phones, which might be broadened to include other information brands.
- Questionnaire list: The present list is small, limiting the possibility of meaningful outcomes.
- Demographic distribution: The research only includes customers with bachelor's to PhD degrees, which is not included in the demographic distribution.
- Despite limitations, the research adds well to the literature.

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