

Mixed Method Research on The Role of Uncertainty Avoidance Functioned in the Evolution of Brand Equity of FMCG During Covid-19.

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This study is written in the context of consumer behavior of how consumers respond to branded products at the time of uncertainty. Uncertainty avoidance is one of the dimensions presented by Hofstede and discusses the acceptance and rejection of change and adaptability by society. This research paper holds mixed methods where quantitative and qualitative both analysis is used to signify the prevailing phenomena. The embedded method is used in which quantitative and qualitative questions are embedded in the same questionnaire. For quantitative analysis, structural equation modeling is used to analyze results. Whereas for qualitative analysis consumer's responses were interpreted through transcribe method. Due to the outbreak of COVID 19 various businesses in developed and developing countries have suffered low sales and less profit margin. Keeping this view, a large gap is found about how marketing activities and product /brand extensions would help other companies to sustain themselves in the market. The results of the quantitative analysis show uncertainty avoidance directly affect brand equity. In addition, with the mediation of brand awareness and brand loyalty, we found a significant impact. whereas, hypotheses on the mediation of brand image and perceived quality turned insignificant.

1. Introduction

UA is an important cultural dimension discussing how consumers of different countries make purchase decisions under unusual circumstances. UA describes cultural tolerance for any ambiguous Phenomenon, which is why it reflects how members of a society feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations (Khan et al., 2022). Many previous researchers have explored this cultural dimension and identified various sub-factors which could be associated with uncertainty as the consumer market is constantly changing. Yaveroglu and Donthu, (2002); Yenyurt and Townsend (2003); Telis et al. (2003) explained that UA leads to resistance shown by members of society in accepting change, innovations, and modifications in products of their use, their preferred brands. According to Hofstede's cultural dimensions if the "uncertainty avoidance" dimension is presented among society members then people of that society at large feel insecure and threatened by trying out new things, and innovation and the adoption of that change are less desired (Hofstede, 2017). However, uncertainty avoidance is difficult to identify because consumers respond differently to the purchase of different products but still in Pakistan its prevalence is calculated through the cultural dimension's index score and represents the intensity of prevalence of this dimension in Pakistani society. Pakistan's score on Hofstede's cultural index scored 70 which represents the intense presence of this dimension in Pakistani society. The greater the uncertainty avoidance the greater will be the tolerance for unforeseen (Hofstede, 2017).

On the contrary, the lesser the existence of uncertainty avoidance will be the tendency toward change. This research study is conducted by keeping the current situation of businesses and market performance vital for developing countries such as Pakistan, where consumers can trust only branded products. Due to uncertainty in all businesses, many domestic companies face closure where operating companies of FMCG products are still clueless about deciding their branding strategies which would be more influential in this specific period of time. Some basic research questions raised under this backdrop are what would be the impact of uncertainty on consumer response toward the purchase of FMCG products at the time of uncertainty? And what branding strategy would be influential at a time of uncertainty and contingency? The core objective of this research study is to identify how the uncertain situation affects consumers' cognition and preference level and so they think of avoiding risk associated with the purchase of branded and newly launched brands. Furthermore, this research also investigates the impact of uncertainty avoidance on brand equity while specifically the role of brand awareness, perceived quality, brand loyalty, and brand image played as mediators to develop brand equity at the time of high uncertainty. This research study is providing a combination of methodologies, concepts, and variables which were adopted to fill the gap of very less availability of research data on this topic. In addition, the disaster due to the Corona outbreak has never been experienced in the span of the last 100 years and its impact on the overall market and brands would also be analyzed.

Currently, the spread of the Coronavirus known as “Covid 19” affects thousands of people in almost 190 countries in various ways (Clemente-Suarez et al., 2020). The economy of many European and well-established countries have been devastated badly; it is under discussion these days how long it will take developed countries to bring their economy to the same pace as they had before Covid. Along with economic repercussions, many social, psychological, religious, and cultural aspects also touched down regular consumers’ buying behavior, as this virus is life-threatening and many countries are facing a greater death toll. In this scenario where the situation is completely threatening and unforeseen, the current discussion is pondering to find a cure for this virus medically. While economists, journalists, social scientists, and psychiatrists are evaluating and finding the financial, psychological, and economic hinges a country would face and how consumer behavior would be affected in various different ways due to this unusual scenario.

The virus took place in China’s province “Wuhan” and burst at the end of December 2019 (Chinazzi et al., 2020). That outbreak increased the number of infected people in China with the increasing numbers and consequence the deaths of almost 3700 people across China. The country declared a lockdown of all manufacturing industries and public and private services and non-service sectors. The spread of that spreading virus did not stop here rather it affect most Asian, & European countries and now become a pandemic (Banjamin et al., 2020). Because of its contagious and life-threatening nature, the world’s economy is facing an uncertain situation including a severe decrease in international trade. Against the backdrop of the current situation, big brands of FMCG products are using brand equity as a trump card. Where numerous domestic entrepreneurs get a chance to launch non-branded items offering the same features at low prices as branded products were offering.

2. Literature Review

As this dimension deals with the tolerance and ambiguity level of society and refers to the man’s efforts for searching the truth. This dimension indicates how culture impacts its members to feel comfortable or uncomfortable in certain situations. Two types of situations usually every human could face structured situations and unstructured situations. Structured situations are usual scenarios whereas unstructured situations are unusual, unexpected, and dissimilar from normal routine (Word Press, 2009). Individuals belonging to high UA belong to structural situations because they are less open toward modifications and innovations in comparison with those individuals of less uncertainty avoidance cultures. Countries where people plan ahead of any upcoming uncertainty show high UA. Whereas in lower (UA) societies where people are fun-loving and show less concern about any threatening and uncertain situation (Smith, 2016).

According to Hofstede’s cultural framework, the calculated score of Pakistan on this dimension is 79 (which is quite larger), showing that members of Pakistan’s society never feel intimidated by uncertain situations. Hodgetts et al., (2006) further explained this dimension as outward and in-word-directed consumer behavior. People who neither take responsibility for their

affairs nor believe that they control their outcome; consider that whatever has happened is away from their control and belongs to inward directed approach and vice versa. -----

In the brand management context uncertainty avoidance worked as a stimulus and risk-averse factor, resistance to change, and variety-seeking phenomenon. Rossiter (1987) explained risk in terms of health, the risk attached to spending uncertainty attached to buying products and services. When the uncertainty avoidance index is high prevalence then consumers look for more risk aversion and problem-solving solutions which would open up a venue for versatile strategic planning. In this case, where intense uncertainty avoidance affects consumer behavior *Functional brand image* would reduce the risk and solve the consumer's problem.

On the contrary, in a situation where low uncertainty avoidance is present in society, the risk aversion attitude will be declining, and consumers would be more prone to buy different ranges of products. UA affects brand awareness as product innovation or the launch of a new product especially when a new product is introduced in a different culture. Yin et al. (2019) Consumers' eagerness to buy new products shows the level of uncertainty avoidance they possess. Maheswaran and Shavitt (2000) explained the role of uncertainty avoidance in evaluating consumer behavior which was tapped unexplored and contributed as whenever a new product is launched consumers are always confronted with some level of uncertainty in regards to pricing, colors, quality, and durability. The risk associated with uncertainty impact purchase intentions. Familiarity with product features has shown a positive effect on product evaluation and leads to less uncertainty (Tan et al., 2022). UA has a robust impact on consumer morals, attitudes, observations, and actions especially when consumers belong to different cultures (Lam, 2008). However, Cultural values specifically impact marketers' decisions about product quality, pricing, distribution and communication, and consumer cognition. From the above explanation, we can postulate.

H1: prevalence of uncertainty avoidance positively affects brand equity.

2.1 Uncertainty Avoidance and Brand Awareness

Leo et al., (2015) described consumer behavior under high uncertainty avoidance where the consumer uses their own level of awareness about the brand to avoid uncertainty and risk factor associated with that. Under uncertainty avoidance, the consumer's level of awareness would be affected as variety-seeking consumers, on the contrary, would try to gain basic knowledge about new brands because such consumers have the tendency to buy products/brands on their impulse. As the prevalence of uncertainty avoidance highlights consumers who don't like to confront new situations and are unlikely to welcome new innovative brands or new offerings by brands. Because this behavior demonstrates a conservative style of living and shows a lesser tendency of uncertainty avoidance. Brand awareness at this stage would play a role as a preceding factor that assures consumers of the minimum risk of trying out new offerings from trusted brands or any new

brand. Because of the fact that brand awareness is among the strong factors that measure brand equity. If brand awareness is influenced by UA, then we can also postulate that

H2: Uncertainty avoidance affect brand awareness to develop brand equity

2.2 Uncertainty Avoidance and Perceive Quality

Matzler et al. (2016), explained the interchangeable nature of uncertainty avoidance and risk associated with branded products. Whereas, Aakko and Ninimaki (2022) linked the concept of perceived quality and risk associated with it to intrinsic and extrinsic demand by consumers and features, quality, color, shape, and prices of that brand. For this reason, perceived quality is very often interchangeably used as perceived uncertainty. Furthermore, Kumar et al. (2018) explained uncertainty as the main indicator of forecasting about product/ brand. Because of this elaboration, we can consider uncertainty is automatically inherited through the purchase of a product. Hofstede (2010) explained uncertainty avoidance as a situation under which contingency comes upfront, and risk comes next which is been called a predetermined probability of the specific outcome. Al-Imamy (2018) further elaborated the concept by highlighting consumer risk-reducing strategies to decrease the associated perceived risk that comes with the product/brand. A consumer's familiarity with the brand's features/attributes and overall quality and performance are granted as risk-reducing factors. As UA affects consumers' perception of the brand that's why it could also affect the decision of purchasing a brand. From the above elaboration, we can postulate:

H3: Uncertainty avoidance affect perceived quality to develop brand equity.

2.3. Uncertainty Avoidance and brand loyalty

Due to the common understanding of this dimension (UA) that reflects through consumer behavior as seldom acceptance of change, consumers mostly prefer those brands which they already used or they get feedback on that brand from close family and friends. Brand loyalty is the factor that develops through the experience of the brand. Schutte and Ciarlante (2016) explained the fact that lower uncertainty avoidance leads to less influence of branding strategies on consumers' impulses and their stimulation toward the purchase of any specific brand rather than make them stick with one brand and remain loyal to it. On the other hand, high uncertainty avoidance situations mold consumer behavior toward acceptance of risk and change which is why in high uncertainty avoidance situations brand loyalty may be on the lower side. From the above explanation we can hypothesize that:

H4: Uncertainty avoidance affect brand loyalty to develop brand equity.

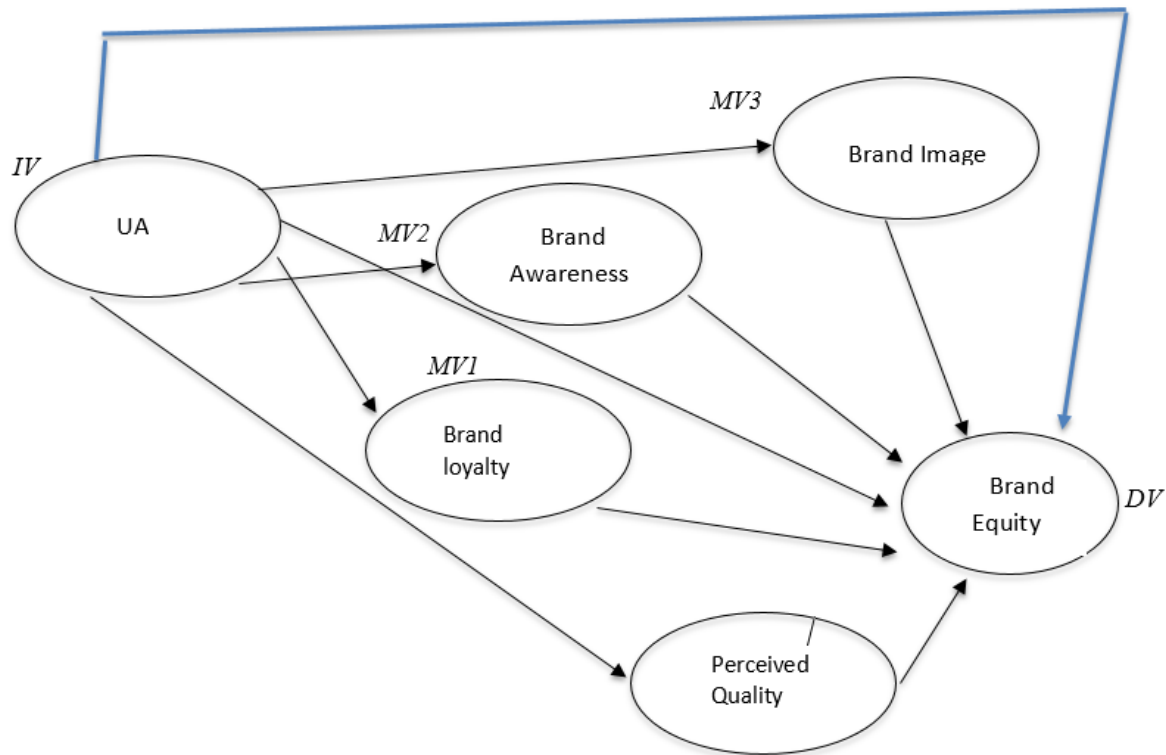
2.4. Uncertainty Avoidance and Brand Image

Brand image can be affected by the rise of uncertainty avoidance as DeWees & Lerner (2020) different influences on the brand image as the dimension of uncertainty avoidance intensely

and lightly prevails in society. Low uncertainty avoidance reflects the inception phase of product development where consumers don't know much about the upcoming product or innovation in an existing product whereas high uncertainty avoidance attitude is demonstrated at the stage of final purchase decision where consumers try to purchase known products. At this stage, the brand image would reduce the perceived associated risk of that product/brand. From the above discussion, we can hypothesize that

H5: Uncertainty avoidance affect brand image to develop brand equity.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

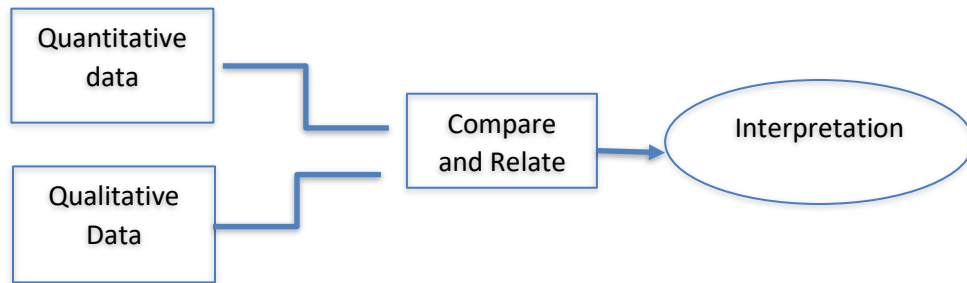


3. Methodology

This research study follows the philosophy of post-positivism. Post-positivism supports methodological pluralism under which it is assumed that the method of research study is selected on the basis of the type of research questions of the study (Dawadi et al., 2021). The topic of this study is quite new and required further understanding of preexisting phenomena of brand equity models with an outbreak of pandemic that makes post-positivism the most suitable research philosophy for this research. This research follows a mixed method under which “the embedded mixed method design “is more appropriate to transform quantitative results. In convergent parallel

research design quantitative and qualitative data are simultaneously collected and then merged to interpret the results to understand and answer the research problems (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Figure No 2: The research process



3.1 Study Design

To understand the in-depth topic, this study is being carried out using a convergent parallel, mixed-method design. In convergent parallel qualitative and quantitative methods are adopted to ascertain findings (QUAL+QUAN)' (Pardede, 2019). Hong et al. (2017) explained convergent parallel as when researchers use qualitative and quantitative methods in the same phase independently and interpret results together. With the purpose of corroboration and validation, the researcher aims to triangulate the methods by directly comparing the quantitative statistical results and qualitative findings. In the research process, two datasets have been obtained, analyzed separately, and compared.

3.2 Study Groups

3.2.1 Qualitative Study Groups

For qualitative study and validation of results achieved through quantitative tests, the same group of customers who were regular customers of FMCG products was asked some questions about changes in their preferences of brands after this pandemic situation started. the questions were embedded in the same questionnaire used for quantitative data collection and collected at the same time when quantitative data was collected.

3.2.2 Quantitative Study Group

A convenient sampling technique was used under the non-probability sampling method to determine the study group. The basic criteria for selecting participants were must be regular customers of branded FMCG products in their daily use. As numerous customers were available and the deficiency of the sampling frame leads to select participants ad hoc on the basis of their

availability. Both males and females were targeted as both often shop for monthly groceries. 388 was the sample size that was taken from Krejcie and Morgan's table for sampling.

3.3 Data Collection Tool

3.3.1 Quantitative/Qualitative Data Collection

For data collection, both qualitative and quantitative questions were embedded. Section 1 of the questionnaire comprise on 5-point Likert scale, and adapted questions were asked from already validated constructs.

For qualitative data collection, 5 main questions were asked to identify the depth of an issue and actual change in consumer shopping preference due to the pandemic situation. The steps for the qualitative data collection tool developed followed after the development of the tool with the help of experts' views. The item pools were created through the suggestions of experts, researchers, and marketers. For interviews, the main questions were about how consumers considered marketing strategies at the time of COVID.

3.4 Data Analysis

For qualitative data analysis, participants' responses were recorded as notes. And checked with the participants that if noted answers accurately represented what they have said. Later these notes were transcribed. After interviews, transcription, and field notes from observation were rechecked thoroughly to understand the issue from a holistic point of view.

3.5 Qualitative Data Analysis

The themes were coded initially from consumers' responses and then segregated on the basis of whether the individual's response supported the quantitative results taken out.

3.6 Sampling Techniques

The target population for this research is consumers of FMCG products in Pakistan from different renowned companies e.g., Unilever, P&G, Reckitt & Benckiser. As this research is based on the consumer response and purchasing behavior in uncertain situations that's why the subjective meaning of the consumer's response could not be neglected that is why concurrent sampling design is taken as the most suitable sampling technique under which the researcher is allowed to triangulate the results from quantitative and qualitative responses to further corroborate and cross-validate the findings of the research (Creswell et al., 2003, p. 229).

As consumer-based research usually does not follow the sampling frame unless any particular company's or product's consumers are investigated that's why the sample size is been taken from Krejcie & Morgan formula table under the assumption that if more than 50,000

consumers of any product and brand are assumed than the sample of 388 would be more appropriate to get the generalized result.

3.7 Instrument Selection

Detail of the questionnaire is given below. Responses are measured on a five-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Similarly, the response rate is calculated on a five-point Likert Scale

Table No 1: Detail of the questionnaire

Name of Variable	Author	No of Items
Brand Equity	Yoo & Donthu, 2001	7
Brand Awareness	Yoo & Donthu, 2001	5
Brand Loyalty	Odin, Odin & Valette- Florence, 2001	5
Brand Image	Hsieh, 2002	5
Perceived Quality	Vigneron & Johnson (2004)	5
Uncertainty Avoidance	Hofstede (2013)	5

4. Results

The results of the descriptive statistics are discussed below in Table 2

Table No 2: Reliability Analysis

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Brand Awareness	0.801	0.803	0.87	0.626
Brand Equity	0.803	0.814	0.91	0.835
Brand Image	0.716	0.731	0.839	0.635
Brand Loyalty	0.88	0.891	0.926	0.807
Perceived Quality	0.866	0.873	0.91	0.717
Uncertainty Avoidance	0.896	0.899	0.928	0.762

4.1 Discriminant Validity

Before testing the hypotheses distinctiveness and uniqueness of the constructs are necessary to be established. The results are depicted below in Table 3. Following the Former and Larcker's (1981) criterion all constructs have been found distinctive from each other.

Table No 3: Former and Larcker's

	BA	BE	BI	BL	PQ	UA
Brand Awareness	0.791					
Brand Equity	0.533	0.914				
Brand Image	0.661	0.431	0.797			
Brand Loyalty	0.7	0.555	0.527	0.898		
Perceived Quality	0.716	0.487	0.631	0.678	0.846	
Uncertainty Avoidance	0.559	0.462	0.356	0.615	0.562	0.873

Figure No 3: Measurement Model with Beta Value

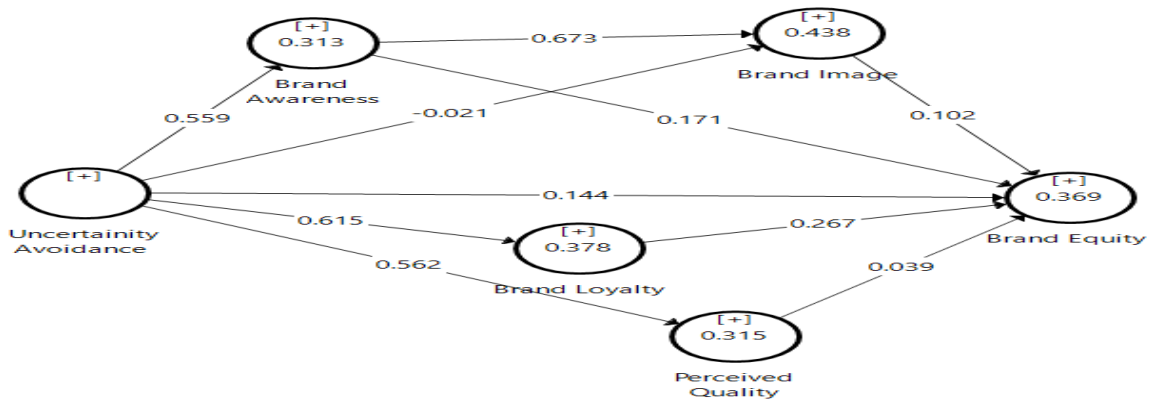
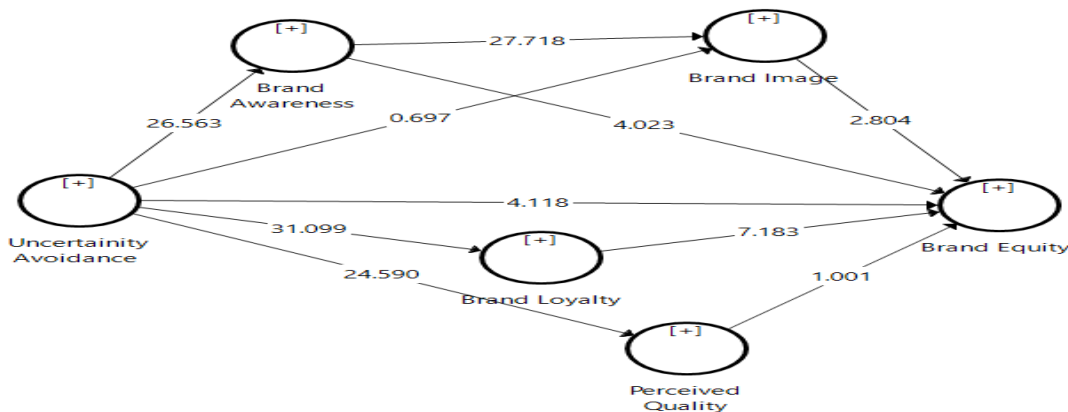


Figure No 3: Measurement Model with t Values



4.2 Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)

We tested the hypotheses using the bootstrapping approach. The predictive efficiency of the model is presented in the table below. Values presented in the table below represent adequate predictive power.

Table No 4: Values of R² and Q²

	R Square	R Square Adjusted	SS0	SSE	Q ² (=1-SSE/SSo)
Brand Awareness	0.313	0.312	4792	3869.19	0.193
Brand Equity	0.369	0.366	2396	1671.252	0.302
Brand Image	0.438	0.437	3594	2626.289	0.269
Brand Loyalty	0.378	0.378	3594	2513.987	0.301
Perceived Quality	0.315	0.315	4792	4792	0.224

The results suggested that R² values for brand awareness, brand equity, brand loyalty, and perceived quality are 0.313, 0.369, 0.438, 0.378, and 0.315. the R² values suggested medium predictive accuracy. The Q² test is used to check the predictive power. The Q² values are 0.193 for brand awareness, 0.302 for brand equity, 0.269 for brand image, 0.3012 for brand loyalty, 0.224 for perceived quality are found greater than 0, which shows that there are fewer chances of prediction error in this model, which also suggest the predictive accuracy (Sarstedt et al., 2019).

4.2.1 Hypothesis Results

Empirically six hypotheses have been tested our results support three direct and indirect hypotheses where two hypotheses have been rejected. With direct and indirect effects.

Table No 5: Results of the Hypotheses

	B	T Stat.	P Values	Results
U.A-> Br. Equity (H1)	0.144	4.191	0.000	Accepted
U. A. -> Br. Loyalty -> Br. Equity (H2)	0.164	6.825	0.000	Accepted
U. A. -> Br. Awareness -> Br. Equity (H3)	0.096	3.992	0.000	Accepted
U. A. -> B. Image -> Br. Equity (H4)	-0.002	0.641	0.522	Rejected
U. A. -> Per. Quality -> Br. Equity (H5)	0.022	0.954	0.340	Rejected

The direct impact of uncertainty avoidance on brand equity shows significant results as P-value=0.000, B-0.144, and T-statistics=4.191, the indirect impact of uncertainty avoidance where

brand loyalty is considered as mediators show significant results $B=0.164$, $T\text{-stat}=6.825$, $P\text{-value}=0.000$, the indirect relationship of uncertainty avoidance and brand equity where brand awareness is taken as mediator is also significant as $B=0.096$, $T\text{-statistics}=3.992$, and $P\text{-value}=0.000$, the indirect impact of uncertainty avoidance and brand equity is also significant where brand image is considered as mediator turns out insignificant as $B=-0.002$, $T\text{-statistics}=0.641$, $P\text{-value}=0.522$, the indirect impact of uncertainty avoidance on brand equity while perceived quality considered as mediator turns out to be insignificant as **$B=0.0222$, $T\text{-stat}=0.954$, $P\text{-value}=0.340$** .

4.3 Qualitative analysis

4.3.1 participants

Total 150 consumers

4.3.2 Views about Brand Awareness (BA)

A discussion guide on brand awareness has been developed to understand the level of awareness of product hygiene and usage, quality evaluation, and identification of brand names. 90% of the customers are aware of the basic hygiene products and their usage whereas 70% have them believe in the differentiated quality of the product. 90% of the consumers are aware of the branded products in the hygiene category. Consumers are ready to use antibacterial products)

4.3.3 Views about Brand Image (BI)

The understating of the brand line and the purpose of launching it is quite clearer among customers. According to the data gathered from 150 respondents, 30% of the respondents could identify the new product line extension of the same category. Where 80% can compare the new product offerings of the same brand in the same category? As Pakistan's consumer market tends to have high uncertainty avoidance that's why consumers are open to accepting change and always try new products (Hofstede, 2010), 65% of the customers are in favor of trying out a new modified version of existing brands with some differentiated features in them.

4.3.4 Views about Brand Loyalty (BL)

85% of the customers rehearse the repetitive buying of the same brand. where 90% of the customers prefer to buy any specific brand by following word of mouth.

4.3.5 Views about Brand Perception (BP)

76% of the customers have strong brand preference based on their perception and image of the brand and 28% would buy luxurious brands to justify their brand status.

4.4 Qualitative Analysis

As the embedded method is being used in this paper to validate the results. That is why data is been collected via interviews with customers in different shopping malls located in Karachi. 150 individuals agreed to be interviewed.

1. What impact brand would place on consumers' minds if they disclose that their brand is high in price but effective for corona protection?

During the Covid period, most consumers were keenly following the instructions given by Health organizations. Which shows their readiness to buy hygienic products? However, pricing is being a massive issue in PAKISTAN for a long being. As Pakistan is a developing country and the per capita income of an individual is barely fulfilling their basic requirements. Furthermore, the rapid inflation rate is being witnessed for the last 5 years and currently, it is being reached 13.37% in 2022. The results mentioned in the above table show that 90% of the customers are aware of basic hygiene and offered products.

Most of the customers discourage the high prices of selling corona protection products. As it becomes very difficult to fulfill necessities. Selling expensive hygiene products at a time of need puts a bad impression on customers.

1. Do you think that other brands like (Rivaj hand sanitizer, Protex hand wash by Colgate, Harpic germ protection cleaners, etc.) would get an opportunity to increase more product lines in hygiene and cosmetics?

Consumers understand the need for time and are promoting domestic companies to increase their product line into sanitized and hygienic products. Consumers at large are aware of the importance of the use of basic hygiene that's why easy and affordable availability of products, would develop a norm among consumers to frequently use such products.

2. What is your opinion about the overall brand image if they started their corona-free version of brands?

Most of the agreed that if the company extends their product line in the context of hygiene, then the brand image would be more glorious. However, 80% of the customers feel like companies should stick with their existing range of products. It's not necessary to cater to all the existing needs of the customer. This will dilute the company's image and also confuse customers about the company's current offerings.

3. How strongly, the name of the brand would impact the image of the brand?

20% of the customers think that brand name played a vital role in developing brand image. Whereas 80% of the customers do not agree with it as they highlight, the product's features,

performance, consistency, durability and prices are the most important factors which would develop the product's / brand' image.

4. Do you think the marketing strategies during COVID are adequate to develop awareness among consumers, as well as do you think those strategies were adequate enough to develop a positive perception of the brand?

Most of the customers perceived TV advertisements and other ATL and BTL activities as more informative during COVID times, however, most of the brands were comparing one another products. This comparison of brands with one another is somewhat confusing and create many underlying questions in consumers' mind as selling and marketing techniques during COVID times hardly develop customer loyalty. Most of the customers evaluated marketing strategies of that time as revenue-making techniques rather than customer welfare/and awareness strategies. AS consumer perception develops through the consistent provision of facilities and differentiated features to cater to them well. Through consistent positive provision profound brand image develops; eventually adding to brand loyalty.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the qualitative and quantitative analysis are having a significant impact on branding strategies on consumers' awareness levels as well as their loyalty to the brand and company's new offering in the health care and hygiene domain. The hypothesis that UA has a positive impact on brand equity in Pakistan is supported by several past studies. For example, a study by Chen et al. (2012) found that UA was positively correlated with brand equity in China. The researchers argued that this was because consumers in high-UA cultures are more likely to trust established brands that they perceive as being reliable and consistent. Another study by Kim et al. (2014) found that UA was positively correlated with brand equity in South Korea. The researchers argued that this was because consumers in high-UA cultures are more likely to be loyal to brands that they perceive as being familiar and trustworthy. The findings of these studies suggest that UA can have a positive impact on brand equity in Pakistan. This is because consumers in Pakistan are generally more likely to trust established brands that they perceive as being reliable and consistent. As a result, companies that operate in Pakistan may want to focus on building strong brand equity by investing in marketing and advertising campaigns that emphasize the reliability and consistency of their brands. Then the hypothesis that brand awareness and brand loyalty mediate the relationship between uncertainty avoidance (UA) and brand equity in Pakistan was accepted in our research and validated by previous studies (Raza, Abu Bakar & Mohamad, 2020). This means that there is evidence that brand awareness and brand loyalty play a role in explaining the relationship between UA and brand equity in Pakistan because consumers in Pakistan are more likely to be influenced by brand awareness and brand loyalty than consumers in other countries (Abdullah et al., 2018). This could be due to the cultural values of Pakistani consumers, the level of competition in the market, or the economic conditions in the country. This

research has provided valuable insights into the relationship between UA and brand equity in Pakistan.

The research's findings can help companies to better understand how to build strong brands in Pakistan, even if brand awareness and brand loyalty are not the only factors that mediate the relationship between UA and brand equity. The mediating role of brand awareness and brand loyalty is stronger in Pakistan could be since Pakistani consumers are more likely to be exposed to a wider variety of brands and to have more information about brands. As a result, they may be more likely to use brand awareness and brand loyalty as a way to make decisions about which brands to buy.

Brand image is a consumer's perception of a brand. It is based on a variety of factors, including the brand's logo, name, tagline, products, and advertising. Brand image can have a significant impact on brand equity, which is a measure of the value of a brand to a company (Zia Younus & Mirza, 2021). The hypothesis that brand image mediates the relationship between uncertainty avoidance (UA) and brand equity in Pakistan was rejected in our research. This means that there is no evidence that brand image plays a role in explaining the relationship between UA and brand equity in Pakistan. There are a number of possible explanations for this finding. One possibility is that the relationship between UA and brand equity in Pakistan is not mediated by any other factors. In other words, the relationship between UA and brand equity is direct (Hazeer et al., 2017), and there is no need to consider the brand image as a mediator. Another possibility is that the mediating role of brand image is weaker in Pakistan (Ali et al., 2020) than in other countries. This could be due to a number of factors, such as the cultural values of Pakistani consumers, the level of competition in the market, or the economic conditions in the country.

The role of perceived quality as a mediator in the relationship between uncertainty avoidance and brand equity has been explored in several studies (Ansary & Nik Hashim, 2018). These studies suggest that perceived quality can play a mediating role in linking uncertainty avoidance to brand equity. On the other hand, perceived quality would not function as a mediator when consumers in given market are highly price sensitive (Wang et al., 2020). Similarly, when consumer have strong association with a specific brand the perceived quality is not appropriately be called as a mediator (Nyadzayo & Khajehzadeh, 2016). In addition, social influences such as recommendations from peers or online reviews also neglects perceived quality as a mediator (Fu et al., 2020). However, it is important to consider the specific cultural and industry context in which these relationships are examined. Based on the findings of the present study, the research hypothesis that perceived quality mediates the relationship between uncertainty avoidance and brand equity in Pakistan was rejected. The results indicate that perceived quality may not be a significant mediating factor in this particular context, this is due to the cultural, economic, and other factors. Although the research hypothesis was rejected, these findings contribute to the existing literature on uncertainty avoidance, perceived quality, and brand equity. The study

highlights the importance of considering cultural and industry-specific factors when examining the mediating impact of perceived quality.

5.1 Area for further research

This research is mainly focusing on the customer's behavior regarding marketing tactics and selling products at the time of contingency. Due to the Covid outbreak, when people all around the world were psychologically, financially, and emotionally under stress. At the time what strategies have marketers adopted for the smooth running of businesses? For further research, there is a wide gap available in Pakistan that would people behave a similar way as they purchase during Covid, what other factors would be influencing factors to determine consumer behavior at the time of uncertainty? Another important aspect that is still under research is the implementation of uncertainty avoidance in different product/ brand categories. However, brand image and brand loyalty were found insignificant in mediating roles, so brand trust may be used mediating variable since it has a potential impact. The sample size of the study is limited, results may be far different if the sample size is higher. Another factor is that research design is a mixed method single research design that can be used as only qualitative or quantitative.

6. References

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