Extended Signaling Theory and Role of Corporate Social Responsibility and Brand Personality

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This research has offered an extended signaling theory model, which has extended the body of corporate social responsibility (CSR) knowledge in the existing literature. This research examines the association between CSR and brand experience, corporate reputation, brand personality, brand loyalty & consumer trust. The mall intercept control group was used to carry out this research. For the data analyses, we employed an SEM-based multivariate approach and assisted the formulated hypotheses from respondents of smartphone users. The study's outcomes show that brand personality, corporate reputation, and brand experience positively influence consumer trust. The outcomes further demonstrated that corporate social responsibility significantly and positively impacts personality, brand loyalty, and customer trust. This research also examined the mediating effect of brand personality between corporate reputation and brand loyalty and between corporate reputation and consumer trust. Moreover, the mediation of brand personality between CSR and brand loyalty and between CSR and consumer trust. The outcomes demonstrate that brand personality mediates brand loyalty and corporate reputation loyalty relationship, consumer trust, and corporate reputation relationship. However, brand personality does not mediate CSR and brand loyalty and CSR and consumer trust relationships. This research has important managerial and theoretical implications for industry practitioners and scholars.

Keywords: *Brand Experience; SEM-Based Multivariate Approach; Brand Loyalty; Corporate Reputation; Customer Trust; Brand Personality; Corporate Social Responsibility.*

Introduction

Researchers have conducted several studies on business strategy and the development of brand loyalty in the last few decades. However, the researchers have recently demonstrated their keen interest in exploring the determinants of loyalty with corporate stratagem because of its increasing strategic relevance. Preceding literature has demonstrated that scholars must pay more attention to brand trust in CSR and corporate reputation (Park & Kang, 2020; Kim, 2019). However, the researchers also advocate that consumer trust is imperative in promoting loyalty, commitment, and actual purchase. Previous studies concluded that brand loyalty is a significant factor in business performance. Preceding literature has reported that brand loyalty has been shown to retain long-run customer associations (Ahmed *et al.*, 2023a; Kaur *et al.*, 2020) and increase positive word-of-mouth (Lee & Workman, 2021; Leal & Ferreira, 2020) increase customers repurchase intention (Aquinia *et al.*, 2021; Cornelia & Pasharibu, 2020), increase profits (Singh *et al.*, 2021), and enhance the inclusive financial performance of an organization (Liu *et al.*, 2021). Brand loyalty is an unseen force and is very difficult for marketers to identify. For many decades, it has

been a challenge for marketers to identify the essential factors influencing brand loyalty and its dimensions. Earlier studies have identified the significant antecedents of brand loyalty, for instance, customer satisfaction, brand image, trust, and commitment (Marliawati & Cahyaningdyah, 2020; Bernardo *et al.*, 2020). Scholars also claim that the more loyal the customers are to a brand, the longer the relationships will be (Erkmen & Hancer, 2019; Zhang *et al.*, 2020). Eventually, this will boost sales and generate affirmative word of mouth, motivating the supplier to pay a premium price and profits.

The problem statement highlights the importance of understanding these relationships for efficient marketing strategies. This research aims to examine the association between smartphones' brand experience, CSR, brand personality, brand loyalty, corporate reputation, and consumer trust. This research further analyzed the mediating effect of brand personality in the association between considered constructs. The study explores the interrelationships among smartphone brand experience, brand personality, CSR, corporate reputation, consumer trust, and brand loyalty. It provides new insights into the complex relationships among these variables, which can help managers develop effective marketing strategies. The study examines the relationships among multiple variables related to smartphone brands, including brand experience, personality, CSR, loyalty, customer trust, and corporate reputation. This research offers a novel conceptual framework and contributes to the current literature by providing new insights into the complex interrelationships among these variables (Ahmed *et al.*, 2023b; Khan *et al.*, 2022; Singh *et al.*, 2021)

The study plays a vital role in the current body of knowledge by examining the association between multiple variables related to smartphone brands. The results provide new insights into the complex interrelationships among these variables, which can help managers develop effective marketing policies. This research also focuses on the significance of corporate reputation for evolving a unique customer trust & brand personality. The study's contribution to neo-Schumpeterian economics lies in examining the relationships among smartphone brand experience, brand personality, CSR, brand loyalty, and customer trust. The findings highlight the importance of innovation in creating a unique brand personality that can enhance brand loyalty & consumer trust. It is coherent with neo-Schumpeterian economics, which emphasizes the significance of innovation and creativity in driving economic growth and progress (Hanusch & Pyka, 2007). Furthermore, the study's focus on CSR initiatives and their impact on brand loyalty contributes to the literature on neo-Schumpeterian economics, which recognizes the function of sustainability & social responsibility in driving innovation and growth (Bodrožić & Adler, 2018). The study suggests that companies involved in CSR initiatives can enhance brand loyalty, but they need to link these activities with trust and brand personality to be successful.

The rest of the paper comprises different sections; for instance, 1) section 2 contains on review of the literature, 2) section 3 consists of methodology, and 3) section 4 comprises results and findings. However, 4) section 5 contains discussions on findings & results, and 5) section 6 contains conclusions and implications.

Review of Literature and Propositions Development

Brand Loyalty

Molinillo, Japutra, Nguyen, and Chen (2017) claimed that brand loyalty is commonly perceived as a fundamental cause of competitive advantage. Streimikiene and Ahmed (2021) stressed the cogent influence of customers loyalty on organizational profitability and long-term success, while Coelho *et al.* (2018) claimed that those companies with a customer relationship-oriented attitude develop strong customer loyalty and retain their loyal customers for the long-term duration. For any business strategy, customer loyalty is " a consumer behavior, built on positive experience and value, which leads to buying products, even when that may not appear to be the most rational decision" (Ahmed *et al.*, 2023a). Similarly, Popp and Woratschek (2017) argue that attaining new consumers is costlier than retaining present ones. Many past research studies have explored customer loyalty, but the critical factors that engender customer loyalty still need to be explored (Khan *et al.*, 2022). Dai and Chen (2017) also confirmed that comprehending antecedents of loyalty is essential for retaining the customers' loyalty in business strategy and development.

Corporate Social Responsibility

Conspicuous consumers prefer brands that are more responsible ethically and socially; therefore, they demand quality products at a lower price when evaluating competing products (Glaveli, 2021). Liu *et al.* (2019) suggest that CSR activities promote the customers' positive attitude and develop a perception of a positive corporate reputation in customers' minds. CSR is essential for creating a competitive advantage for marketers (Yu *et al.*, 2017). Extant literature has explained the concept of CSR in various ways. It has been named "an obligation" (Khasanah *et al.*, 2022) to the customers' expectations. According to the European Commission (2001), CSR is "a concept whereby companies voluntarily integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operation and their interaction with their stakeholders." CSR has recently been explored as a significant contributor to customer loyalty and has been focused on by a few social and business relations studies. However, the construct started capturing the attention of academicians in the past few years (Iglesias *et al.*, 2020). CSR is "a perspective in which a business sees added value in serving a wider array of societal needs and expectations and perceiving net benefits to flow from socially responsible action (Iglesias *et al.*, 2020)." The business corporations that have appeared in the Fortune 500 are highly concerned about their CSR activities. These organizations hire third-party firms that manage CSR and corporate reputation (Streimikiene & Ahmed, 2021). Due to this reason, CSR has become the center of attention for organizations and academicians (Sang, 2022).

Signaling Theory

The signaling theory was redirected by Spence (1973), which posits that brands generate signals to help the customers to make inferences regarding the value and quality of brands' offerings. Kirmani and Rao (2000) defined the brand signal as "an extrinsic part of the brand offering that transmits information about the quality and value of the brand's offering." Since the brand signals are exclusive of detailed brand information and extrinsic to the brand, which helps the customers draw perceptions regarding the brand image, quality, and personality (Ahmed *et al.*, 2023b; Sang, 2022). Brand signals mainly focused on by the scholars are the brand name, price of goods and services, warranties, features, and customer services (Chatterjee *et al.*, 2005). Organizations have more knowledge about their brands than stakeholders, for instance, customers, suppliers, employees, and competitors; this state is called "information asymmetry" (Kirmani & Rao, 2000). It develops and promotes uncertainty, thus, making it challenging for customers to assess the brand's quality (Ahmed *et al.*, 2017). The researchers suggest that brand signals comfort the customers by ensuring that the company can fulfill its brand's promise (Ahmed *et al.*, 2023a). Signaling theory promotes the broadcast of brand signals through different signalers and channels to minimize the associated risks and help the employees to infer appropriate behaviors that should be associated with a brand. Since employees comprehend the significance of brand promise, they are expected to comply with it through their behaviors. Based on the previous concept, this study has developed a conceptual framework using signaling theory. The brand may use various tactics to deliver signals, like developing a strong corporate reputation and brand image, CSR, and loyalty programs.

Propositions Development

Brand Experience and Consumer Trust

Trust is demonstrated as a "tri-dimensional" concept ensuring benevolence, ability, and integrity (Ahmed *et al.*, 2023a; Han *et al.*, 2020). Some empirical studies have reported that brand trust develops as an outcome of brand experience (Bozic, 2017; Cui *et al.*, 2020). However, only some studies have empirically studied the association between brand trust and brand experience. Putra *et al.* (2020) suggest that a favorable and positive brand experience is a robust predictor of consumer trust, as positive brand-related experiences reinforce the customers' expectations that these brands fulfill their promises and offer the benefits expected. Moreover, a positive brand experience develops customers' perception of security, relief, and certitude (Huaman-Ramirez, & Merunka, 2019), thus boosting trust and confidence in the brand. Many favorable brand experiences show customers that the brand is consumer-oriented, sincere, and benevolent. Thus, we framed the following:

H1: Brand experience has a positive & significant relationship with customers' trust.

Brand Personality and Brand Loyalty

Prior literature claims that upbeat, distinctive, and unique brand features positively impact customer loyalty. When the customer's characteristics match the traits & personality of a brand, customers choose that specific brand for consumption (Kaushal & Ali, 2020; Liu *et al.*, 2021). Han *et al.* (2022) and Shetty and Fitzsimmons (2021) state that a unique brand personality positively influences brand loyalty. Moreover, in his study, Lin (2010) found that characteristics of brand personality, for instance, sophistication, clarity, compatibility, and competence, positively influence the attitudinal aspect of customer loyalty. However, the dimensions of sophistication, calmness, and competence of brand personality have been shown to significantly positively influence the behavioral dimension of customers' loyalty (Ahmed *et al.*, 2017). Prior literature has testified that brand personality significantly influences brand loyalty (Sop & Kozak, 2019; Kaushal & Ali, 2020). Additionally, studies have found that a well-defined and unique brand personality retains customers for longer and boosts brand loyalty (Garanti & Kissi, 2019; Liu *et al.*, 2021). Munasinghe (2018) also confirmed that brand personality significantly impacts brand preference. Since each brand has its unique personality, consumers may relate the brand personality with their personality (Aaker, 1996). Consumers prefer a brand with a more distinct personality and are familiar with the brands they prefer (Govers & Schoormans, 2005), enhancing the brand's loyalty. Similarly, Khan *et al.* (2022) examined the impact of brand personality on affection, consumer loyalty & brand preference, and buying behavior. The findings showed that brand personality promotes loyalty, affection, preference, and purchase intention. The brand's personality ought to be formed to retain loyal customers. According to Hussain *et al.* (2021), the customer's loyalty is distinguished from other competitors' brands. Thus, we have framed the following hypothesis:

H2: Brand personality has a significant and positive relationship with brand loyalty.

Brand Personality and Consumer Trust

Aaker and Biel (1993) demonstrate that brand personality creates differentiation within a product category and promotes brand preference. It eventually develops feelings within customers and increases fidelity and trust (Ahmed *et al.*, 2017; Davies *et al.*, 2018). Numerous research scholars have confirmed that brand personality promotes consumer's brand usage and preference (Munasinghe, 2018), develops the consumers' emotions (Hussain *et al.*, 2021; Aaker & Biel, 1993), and is positively associated with loyalty and trust (Molinillo *et al.*, 2017). Lacap *et al.* (2021) explained trust from the context of the consumer-brand association. They are "a psychological variable or more a state of faith or assumption that the brand, as a personified entity, commits to have a predictable action and conform to his expectations, and to maintain with benevolence this orientation in the duration." Brand personality's influence on consumer trust has been supported by many researchers (such as (Molinillo *et al.*, 2017; Tong *et al.*, 2018). However, most scholars have

employed Aaker's (1996) brand personality model; for instance, Purnamabroto *et al.* (2022) discovered that destination brand personality predicts customers' trust in the destination. The study's findings demonstrated that destination brand personality has several dimensions with sub-dimensions like sincerity, excitement, ruggedness, and sophistication. Previously, Hussain *et al.* (2021) and Sung and Kim (2010) also found that the two destination brand personalities are excitement and sincerity, which are significantly & positively linked with brand effect and trust. Similarly, Glaveli (2021), in their empirical study, found that sincere brand personality promotes employer brand trust. Moreover, Guèvremont and Grohmann (2013) claim that the sycophancy of a genuine brand enhances consumers' dissatisfaction, which decreases consumers' trust in the brand. However, the flattery of an exhilarating brand does not endorse the adverse brand's significance. Thus, we postulate:

H3: Brand personality has a positive & significant relationship with customers' trust.

Corporate Social Responsibility and Brand Loyalty

The corporate social responsibility of an organization can be reflected in various ways, such as the brand's concern for the community, environment, regulators, community, employees, and suppliers. A firm's CSR acts as an "insurance policy" for creating and promoting brand loyalty. However, Consumers' awareness regarding the unethical practices of a firm reduces brand loyalty (Aljarah & Ibrahim, 2020). Many past studies have shown that customers' perceptions regarding the CSR of an organization promote the development of a positive corporate reputation, further enhancing the brand image and thus leading to consumer loyalty (Rivera *et al.*, 2019; Pratihari & Uzma, 2018). However, Lacap *et al.* (2021) found that there is still a need for an in-depth analysis of corporate social responsibility influence on brand loyalty and conspicuous consumption. According to Islam *et al.* (2021) and Streimikiene and Ahmed (2021), corporate social responsibility is the best strategy, which endorses customer loyalty. Thus, many earlier research studies have found a significant & affirmative relationship between customers' perception of an organization's CSR and their attitudes toward organizational offerings (Akbari *et al.*, 2019; Ramesh *et al.*, 2019; Lee *et al.*, 2020; van Doorn *et al.*, 2017). Similarly, Rivera *et al.* (2019) and Islam *et al.* (2021) report that CSR practices develop a vigorous corporate reputation that enhances the brand image and delivers a positive message to the customers regarding the company's policies, promoting customer loyalty. Thus, we postulate:

H4: Corporate social responsibility has a positive & significant relationship with brand loyalty.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Brand Personality

Studies examining CSR and its effect on brand personality are less (Tarabashkina *et al.*, 2021; Coelho *et al.*, 2018). Brand personality includes consumers' various human qualities that eventually produce a robust brand image (Geuens *et al.,* 2009; Hussian *et al.*, 2021). The;

organizations create the brand personality to develop a distinct brand image, build strong brand loyalty and enhance licensing income (Hussain *et al.*, 2021). Organizations tend to devise brand strategies, and CSR is the most effective strategy for developing a distinct brand personality (Sang, 2022; Naidoo & Abratt, 2018). The existing literature also documents that positive CSR initiatives which are more socially responsible or innovative develop a strong brand personality (Chen *et al.*, 2018). Furthermore, Glaveli (2021) and Streimikiene and Ahmed (2021) state that CSR cannot promote brand personality aspects. However, it can increase more accountable & vigorous elements by signaling ethical orientations. Although CSR positively affects customers' perception of brand personality, the experimental proof of the CSR & brand personality relationship residues is vague, creating it more perplexing to examine the efficacy of CSR in shaping a significant brand personality. The signaling theory presumes that customers may perceive the CSR of an organization positively or negatively subject to the eminence of the signal conveyed (Glaveli, 2021; Sang, 2022). Hence, CSR will create a more assertive brand personality in customers' minds. Based on the above discussion, we assume that:

H5: Corporate social responsibility has a positive & significant relationship with brand personality.

CSR and Consumer Trust

CSR initiatives protect the organization and promote society's welfare, thereby developing consumer trust (Ahn & Kwon, 2020). The CSR initiatives are a fundamental cause of evidence regarding the organization's environment and values, which may aid in promoting consumer trust (Osakwe & Yusuf, 2020; Bugandwa *et al.*, 2021). Fatmawati and Fauzan (2021) have stated that the organization's ethical and social performance enhances consumer trust in the brand. Therefore, brands with a higher perceived ethical and social responsibility are highly trusted by their consumers (Glaveli, 2020; Abd-El-Salam, 2020). Customers' ethical perception regarding the organization shows a cogent impact in shaping a long-lasting, trustworthy association (Ahmed *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, firms tend to involve more in socially responsible and ethical actions to demonstrate their promise to the community and society (Han *et al.*, 2020). For example, Park and Kang (2020) assert that CSR is an essential strategy to improve among customers. Sang (2022) explained trust as "the expectation of ethically justifiable behavior." Moreover, Iglesias *et al.* (2020) concluded that CSR is a crucial factor of ethical capital. Several studies demonstrated that firms that aggressively participate in CSR activities receive long-term benefits such as good market value, trust, long-term customer loyalty, customer satisfaction, and significant brand image (Sang, 2022; Ashraf *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, conducting business operations by focusing on CSR positively affects the brand's image & enhances customer trust (Ahmed *et al.*, 2021; Wang, 2020). Thus, positive customers' perceptions of the brand about CSR promote consumer trust. Hence, we posit:

H6: Corporate social responsibility has a positive & significant relationship with customers' trust.

Corporate Reputation and Brand Personality

In past decades, many research scholars have emerged with various propositions regarding the corporate reputation and brand personality relationship. However, some researchers have used these two terms interchangeably, which has led to definitional and conceptual inconsistencies (Ahmed *et al.*, 2017). Similarly, other researchers have confused brand identity with a corporate reputation (Anggoro, 2022). Khan *et al.* (2022) demonstrated that both the constructs, for instance, brand personality and brand identity, are the determinants of corporate reputation. In contrast, Glaveli (2021) described corporate reputation as a multidimensional factor inclusive of brand personality, company offerings, brand image, and user image. Sang (2022) agreed with the latter view and claimed that corporate reputation is a holistic concept in which brand personality is linked. Aaker and Biel (1993) explained that corporate reputation is a set of hallmarks in which consumers are related to a firm; however, brand personality is an affective and emotional side of corporate reputation. Hence, the conceptualization of brand personality and corporate reputation needs to be clarified since the lack of empirical studies has affected the understanding these relationships (Hosany *et al.*, 2007). The researchers agree that a solid positive corporate reputation helps customers develop a perception of the brand personality that the organization wants (Ahmed *et al.*, 2021; Putra *et al.*, 2022). Hence, we framed the following hypothesis:

H7: Corporate reputation has a positive & significant relationship with brand personality.

Corporate Reputation and Consumer Trust

A positive corporate reputation is directly linked with developing and strengthening consumer trust. Streimikiene and Ahmed (2021) confirmed that a firm's reputation directly impacts consumers' brand trust. Furthermore, Purnamabroto *et al.* (2022) claimed that corporate reputation is a precursor to a consumer's trust panicle. Another demonstrated that corporate reputation positively influences brand trust (Sang, 2022). The investigation of brand trust and corporate reputation association has been studied in several fields (Streimikiene & Ahmed, 2021). Aljarah and Ibrahim (2020) conducted a study on Business Administration students. They found that a brand's reputation significantly influences brand trust, and both constructs, for instance, brand trust & corporate reputation, significantly impact brand loyalty. According to Streimikiene and Ahmed (2021), corporate reputation positively & significantly affects brand trust, customer loyalty, and customers' brand equity. Moreover, another research on green branding reported a positive & significant association between green corporate reputation, customers' trust, green brand satisfaction, green brand awareness & loyalty, and green brand perceived quality (Ahmed *et al.*, 2021; Rahmat & Kurniawati, 2022). Thus, we framed the following:

H8: Corporate reputation has a positive & significant relationship with customers' trust.

Mediating Relationships

Brand Personality as a Mediator between Corporate Reputation, Customer Trust & Brand Loyalty

Extant literature has proven that a positive corporate reputation develops a strong opinion of brand personality regarding the product in consumers' minds (Putra *et al.*, 2019; Khan *et al.*, 2022). The corporate reputation and brand personality relationship is a two-way relationship. Consumers who develop a favorable perception of the organization's reputation associate their personality traits with the brand personality (Ramaeseshan & Tsao, 2007). Hence, an upbeat brand personality leads to an intense corporate reputation, brand loyalty, and consumer trust (Aaker,1997). Thus, in this way, the brand personality enhances the relationship between corporate reputation and customers' trust. Similarly, brand personality intensifies the relationship between corporate reputation and brand loyalty. Several previous studies have exhibited that brand personality is a significant mediator between brand personality and corporate reputation & brand loyalty (Molinillo *et al.*, 2017; Azzahra & Fachira, 2022; Ramaeseshan & Tsao, 2007). Hence, it can be formulated the following two hypotheses:

H9(a): Brand personality has a positive & significant mediating relationship between corporate reputation and consumers' trust.
H9(b): Brand personality has a positive & significant mediating relationship between corporate reputation and brand loyalty.

Brand Personality as a Mediator between Corporate Social Responsibility and Consumer Trust & Brand Loyalty

Studies have documented that organizations are highly concerned about CSR programs that are more preferred by customers and develop a strong brand personality (Khan *et al.*, 2022; Ahmed *et al.*, 2017). The company's involvement in ethical practices towards the environment and community foster an affirmative brand personality perception in customers' mind (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003). Hence, the customers have associated their personalities with the brand personality, which enhances the relationship between CSR and customers' trust & brand loyalty. Thus, brand personality eventually develops long-term solid customer loyalty and customer trust. Several studies have demonstrated that brand personality is a significant mediator between CSR and customers' trust & brand loyalty (Tong *et al.*, 2018; Garanti & Kissi, 2019; Liu *et al.*, 2021; Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003). Therefore, we framed the following two mediating hypotheses:

H10(a): Brand personality has a significant and positive mediating relationship between CSR and consumers' trust.
H10(b): Brand personality has a significant and positive mediating relationship between CSR and brand loyalty.

Methodology

Research Design, Data Collection, and Estimation Techniques

This research is cross-sectional, and the study's research design is quantitative. This research aims to examine the association between CSR and brand experience, corporate reputation, brand personality, brand loyalty, and consumer trust. The study collects data from smartphone users through a five-point Likert Scale structured questionnaire. The study formulates hypotheses grounded on the research question and the theoretical framework. This research measures the direct association between CSR, brand experience, corporate reputation, brand personality, brand loyalty, and consumer trust. This research evaluates the mediation of brand personality between corporate reputation & brand loyalty and between corporate reputation & consumer trust. Moreover, the study examines the mediating effect of brand personality between CSR & brand loyalty and between CSR & consumer trust.

The study has examined eight direct effects and four mediating effects. We employed a five-point Likert scale, a structured questionnaire, to collect the data. The data was collected through the mall intercept, and we used a purposive sampling method from the smartphone users of Karachi, city. Eight enumerators were recruited to administer the questionnaire in the selected malls on weekdays and weekends. The sample size was 386, which we considered a 5 % margin of error.

We asked the respondents whether they use smartphones and how long they have been using them. We employed the structured & five–point Likert scale measurement scale with seven constructs. Each construct in the questionnaire had different items. The discussion and inclusion of the constructs are based on previous literature. We have derived the modified measurement scales by considering the current study's objectives. The measurement scales and their sources are presented in Annex 1.

The demographic statistics showed 56 % males and 44 % females in total 386 respondents. However, marital status showed that 45 % of respondents were married, and the rest, 55 % were single. However, the overall age brackets were from 16 to 60 years, in which 32 % of respondents were between the range of 16 to 30 years, and 34 % of respondents belonged to the age interval of 30 to 40 years. Although the rest of the rest, 34%, range between the ages of 45 to 60 years. Most respondents had intermediate education, i.e., 51 %, 23 % of respondents had bachelor's level education, and 26 % had a Master's level education.

For the analysis purpose, this research used PLS-SEM statistical modeling. PLS-SEM involves estimating the association between unobserved constructs & manifest constructs (indicators). We validated the taken measurement model & structural model to carry out the analysis. For the validation of measurement analysis, we used outer loading. From the outer loading, we examined factor loadings, composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE) & Cronbach's alpha. These techniques validate the convergent validities of constructs. We also employed the Fonell-Larcker criterion and AVE to determine and validate the discriminant validities of factors.

We employed coefficient of determination (R^2) and path coefficient analyses to validate the structural model. We also used descriptive statistics to measure the general characteristics of the constructs.

Estimations and Data Analysis

Descriptive Statistics

The Findings of Table 1 demonstrate the outcomes of descriptive analysis that exhibit the essential hallmarks of variables. The findings confirmed the univariate pattern of normality of the dataset & internal consistency of variables (SD & Skewness>±.1.5 & Kurtosis>±.3.0) (Ahmed *et al.*, 2023a). Moreover, Cronbach's alpha is higher than that of each construct. Therefore, it is confirmed that the internal consistency of each construct is validated (Streimikiene & Ahmed, 2021). Thus, it is established that the data follows the normality prerequisite to using SEM modeling (Hair *et al.*, 2020).

Assessment of Measurement Model

The outer loading establishes the individual factor loading of each item in PLS-SEM. For this purpose, we extracted the outer loading matrix (See Table 1), which exhibited that the factor loading of items ranges between 0.702–0.884. Therefore, the convergent validity of each item has been achieved (Ahmed *et al.*, 2023a; Hair *et al.*, 2020).

The outer loading of each item showed an association between the construct and its items, also referred to as convergent validity. Table 1 exhibited that each construct's composite reliability readings are higher than 0.70, and the average variance extracted (AVE) of each construct is more than 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Moreover, each factor loading is higher than 0.70 (see Table 1). Thus, the outer model's convergent validity has been proved (Hair *et al.*, 2020).

The discriminant validity is associated with the internal model, which links construct-to-construct, i.e., independent with dependent variables (Ahmed *et al.*, 2023b). Similarly, exogenous and endogenous variables are associated with mediation and moderating variables (Hair *et al.*, 2020). Table 2 demonstrated the Fornell and Larcker Criterion (1981), which showed correlation ranges between 0.327–0.862 and the squared root of AVE ranges between 0.719–0.892. Therefore, the AVE squared root values are more than the Pearson correlation of the similar construct (see the diagonal values of Table 2).

Assessment of Structural Model

The hypothesized structural model could be validated using the R-square value or the coefficient of determination (R^2) and path analysis of constructs, for instance, the direct and indirect relationship of constructs.

According to Ringle *et al.* (2015), the model's predictive power could be identified using R-square values. Hence, the R-square values showed the impact of exogenous factors on their respective dependent variable (Ahmed *et al.*, 2023a). The regression analysis exhibited that the R-square value of trust was 0.516; for brand loyalty, it was 0.433; for brand personality, it was 0.612. Therefore, the R-squared values exhibited that their respective dependent variables

experienced a change of 0.516, 0.433, and 0.612 due to the independent variables. We also determined the predictive power of variables by using Stone-Geisser's (Q^2) test. The findings showed that readings of Q^2 were higher than 0.338

>0 (Geisser, 1974). Therefore, it has been proven that our taken model shows predictive relevance (Hair *et al.*, 2020; Henseler *et al.*, 2015).

Table 1

Factor loadings, Descriptive Statistics, and Convergent Validity

Factors	Items	FL	CA	CR	AVE	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Brand Experience	BE1	0.781	0.744	0.828	0.501	4.096	1.125	1.513	-1.101
	BE2	0.771							
	BE3	0.714							
	BE4	0.810							
	BE5	0.702							
Brand Loyalty	BL1	0.710	0.908	0.930	0.689	4.876	1.354	1.970	1.213
	BL2	0.866							
	BL3	0.899							
	BL4	0.852							
	BL5	0.833							
	BL6	0.807							
Brand Personality	BP1	0.794	0.812	0.864	0.515	4.036	1.356	-0.999	-1.114
	BP2	0.761							
	BP3	0.718							
	BP4	0.742							
	BP5	0.726							
	BP6	0.716							
Corporate Social Responsibility	CSR1	0.706	0.765	0.840	0.517	3.824	1.436	-1.987	-1.651
	CSR2	0.729							
	CSR3	0.782							
	CSR4	0.803							
	CSR5	0.848							
-Customer Trust	CT1	0.774	0.931	0.945	0.710	4..157	1.268	1.888	-1.876
	CT2	0.850							
	CT3	0.862							
	CT4	0.874							
	CT5	0.884							
	CT6	0.867							
	CT7	0.778							
Corporate Reputation	CR1	0.832	0.833	0.881	0.559	3.486	1.373	1.999	1.119
	CR2	0.793							
	CR3	0.858							
	CR4	0.801							
	CR5	0.712							
	CR6	0.742							

Source: Authors' calculations

Table 2

Discriminant Validity

Constructs	BE	BL	BP	CSR	CT	CR
Brand Experience	**0.773**					
Brand Loyalty	0.711	**0.831**				
Brand Personality	0.603	0.724	**0.758**			
CSR	0.613	0.546	0.327	**0.719**		
Consumer Trust	0.71	0.863	0.737	0.496	**0.892**	
Corporate Reputation	0.597	0.668	0.543	0.554	0.656	**0.748**

Source: Authors' calculations

Table 3

The Direct and Indirect Hypothesized Relationship

Direct & indirect relationship	Beta	T Statistics	P Values	Decision
Direct Relationships				
Brand Experience -> Consumer Trust	0.285	9.149	0.000	Accepted
Brand Personality -> Brand Loyalty	0.611	5.05	0.000	Accepted
Brand Personality -> Consumer Trust	0.424	3.799	0.000	Accepted
CSR -> Brand Loyalty	0.346	4.445	0.000	Accepted

Direct & indirect relationship	Beta	T Statistics	P Values	Decision
Direct Relationships				
CSR -> Brand Personality	0.039	0.325	0.373	Rejected
CSR -> Consumer Trust	0.059	0.820	0.206	Rejected
Corporate reputation -> Brand Personality	0.521	4.263	0.000	Accepted
Corporate reputation -> Consumer Trust	0.223	7.178	0.000	Accepted
Indirect Relationships (Mediation)				
Corporate Reput -> Brand Personality -> Consumer Trust	0.221	2.273	0.012	Accepted
Corporate Reput -> Brand Personality -> Brand Loyalty	0.319	2.491	0.007	Accepted
CSR -> Brand Personality -> Consumer Trust	0.016	0.475	0.317	Rejected
CSR -> Brand Personality -> Brand Loyalty	0.024	0.413	0.340	Rejected

Source: Authors' calculations

Hypothesized Direct and Indirect Relationships

Table 3 exhibited the direct and mediating relationship among the constructs. The direct relationship demonstrated that brand experience positively impacts customer trust ($\beta=0.285$&$P=0.000$). The brand personality has an affirmative & significant impact on brand loyalty ($\beta=0.611$&$P=0.000$) and customer trust ($\beta=0.424$&$P=0.000$). The findings further demonstrated that CSR has an affirmative and cogent impact on brand loyalty ($\beta=0.346$&$P=0.000$). However, CSR has an insignificant but affirmative association with brand personality & and customer trust. The direct association also exhibited that corporate reputation has an affirmative & cogent impact on brand personality and customer trust. The outcomes of Table 3 also exhibited the mediating relationship among the constructs, the outcomes established that brand personality demonstrated an affirmative & significant mediation between corporate reputation and customer trust ($\beta=0.221$&$P=0.012$) & brand loyalty ($\beta=0.319$&$P=0.007$). However, brand personality does not have mediation between CSR and brand loyalty & customer trust.

Discussion

The research has measured eight direct hypothesized relationships and four indirect hypotheses. Our results found that a good smartphone brand experience and brand personality positively influence consumer trust. Also, it was revealed that smartphone brand personality influences brand loyalty. Childs *et al.* (2019) and Shetty and Fitzsimmons (2021) claim that customers associate themselves with a brand that has a unique and robust upbeat brand personality. When consumers attach to a brand, they trust it and cultivate a long-term relationship with brand loyalty. Furthermore, the research findings exhibited that CSR positively influences brand loyalty. The outcomes are coherent with past studies, for instance, Rahmat and Kurniawati (2022) and Purnamabroto *et al.* (2022). However, our results failed to establish the association amid corporate social responsibility and, consumer trust & brand personality. Similarly, brand loyalty has a robust behavioral orientation which is more linked to the purchase of a product. It was found that Smartphone brands, which are involved in CSR practices, are preferred by the customers and hence develop strong brand loyalty. On the other hand, smartphone brands engaged in CSR initiatives could have been more successful in establishing brand personality & consumer trust. According to proceeding studies, for example, Ahmed *et al.* (2021), Anggoro (2022), and Azzahra and Fachira (2022), it

could happen because brand personality and consumer trust are more linked to the products' attributes and consumers' experience. Smartphone consumers should have linked CSR activities with trust and brand personality. The results also found a strong association between corporate reputation, brand personality, and consumer trust. Previous literature also confirmed that a solid corporate reputation influences smartphone consumers to develop a perception of a unique brand personality leading toward brand commitment and a high trust level (Glaveli, 2021; Ahmed *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, it was also found that brand personality mediates corporate reputation and consumer trust relationship and corporate reputation and brand loyalty relationship. The outcomes are coherent with the preceding literature, for instance, Khan *et al.* (2022), Ahmed *et al.* (2023a), and Khasanah *et al.* (2022). This research also demonstrated that brand personality does not mediate customer trust & CSR and brand loyalty & CSR. The primary literature also demonstrated comparable outcomes (Ahmed *et al.*, 2023b; Sang, 2022; Anggoro, 2022).

Conclusion and Implications

The undertaken research has offered a novel conceptual framework based on signaling theory with eight direct and four indirect relationships. The findings of this research evaluated the influence of brand loyalty, corporate social responsibility, corporate reputation, brand experience, and brand personality in developing brand loyalty and consumer trust. We employed the PLS-SEM technique using the Smart-PLS 3.0 software to test the model. This research evaluated the association between smartphone brand personality, brand experience, CSR, corporate reputation, consumer trust, and brand loyalty. The results showed that an upbeat smartphone brand personality & brand experience lead to increased consumer trust, and a good brand personality positively impacts brand loyalty. Moreover, CSR has an affirmative impact on brand loyalty but failed to establish an association between CSR and consumer trust & brand personality. Corporate reputation strongly influences brand personality and consumer trust, leading to brand commitment and high trust levels. Brand personality also mediates the association between consumer trust & corporate reputation and brand loyalty. However, brand personality does not mediate the association between CSR and brand loyalty or consumer trust.

Theoretical Implications

The study contributes to the existing studies by evaluating the relationships among smartphone brand experience, brand personality, CSR, corporate reputation, consumer trust, and brand loyalty. The outcomes confirm that a positive brand experience and brand personality lead to increased consumer trust, and brand personality demonstrated a cogent impact on brand loyalty. CSR initiatives have an affirmative impact on brand loyalty, but the study did not establish an association between CSR & customer trust or brand personality. This research also confirms an association between corporate reputation, customer trust, and brand personality. It shows that brand personality mediates between corporate reputation, consumer trust, and brand loyalty. The findings provide new insights into the complex interrelationships among these variables, which can help managers develop effective marketing strategies.

Managerial Implications

This research has numerous practical & managerial contributions for marketing & brand managers of smartphones. Firstly, the outcomes suggest that an affirmative brand experience and a unique brand personality can increase consumer trust, which is crucial for developing brand loyalty. Hence, smartphone brands should focus on producing an affirmative brand experience & establishing a unique brand personality to build trust and loyalty. Secondly, CSR initiatives can enhance brand loyalty, but it is essential to link CSR activities with trust and brand personality to be successful. Smartphone brands involved in CSR initiatives should communicate their efforts to customers and link them to the product's attributes and customers' experiences. Finally, the study highlights the importance of corporate reputation for developing a unique brand personality and consumer trust. Managers should build a solid corporate reputation to enhance brand personality and trust, leading to brand commitment and loyalty.

Disclosure Statement

There is no impending conflict of interest has been narrated by the researchers

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Annex 1

Measurement Scale

Factors	Items	Statement	Citations
Brand Equity	BE1	1) A specific brand offers superior quality compared to a generic brand.	Azzahra and Fachira (2022); Aaker (1997); Ahmed *et al.* (2017)
	BE2	2) the alternative brand has better offerings, but I still prefer to use a particular brand.	
	BE3	3) The particular brand I use has a novel characteristic and excellent quality.	
	BE4	4) A specific brand offers durability and reliability in the long run.	
	BE5	5) Brand equity depends on quality, durability, competitive advantage, and brand choice.	
Brand Loyalty	BL1	1) I always use and am loyal to a particular brand.	Zeithaml *et al.* (1996); Aaker (1997); Brakus *et al.* (2009)
	BL2	2) Once I decide on a particular brand, I always stick to that brand.	
	BL3	3) I always use and recommend that particular brand in my circle.	
	BL4	4) If somebody suggests me a competitive brand, I refuse & use my selected brand.	
	BL5	5) I always purchase a particular brand that satisfies my desires.	
	BL6	6) Brand loyalty is a vital element for the progress of a particular brand.	
Brand Personality	BP1	1) I perceived a brand personality as the vital component of any brand, which initiates the brand's hallmarks & marketing strategies.	Ramaeseshan & Tsao (2007); Aaker (1997); Azoulay & Kapferer (2003)
	BP2	2) I compare brand personality in the shadow of human traits, which are valid for any specific brand.	

Factors	Items	Statement	Citations
	BP3	3) The consumer's evaluation of brand personality is grounded on traits usually used to define a person's personality.	
	BP4	4) I usually prefer to buy that brand that suits my personality.	
	BP5	5) Brand personality gives me comfort in using an X brand.	
	BP6	6) Brand personality is a major triggering factor in choosing any specific brand.	
Corporate Social Responsibility	CSR1	1) corporate social responsibility always fascinates me towards brand buying.	Khan *et al.* (2022); Streimikiene and Ahmed (2021); Lu *et al.* (2020); Fatima *et al.* (2014)
	CSR2	2) corporate social responsibility gives an affirmative image of a company & the brand.	
	CSR3	3) Society always responds positively to the company's CSR activities.	
	CSR4	4) CSR practices not only increase corporate image but also the brand image.	
	CSR5	5) CSR practices are crucial to any brand of the company.	
Customer Trust	CT1	1) I associate, trust, and have good feelings for any brand.	Sirdeshmukh *et al.* (2022); Singh *et al.* (2021); Ahmed *et al.* (2017); Kim and Kim (2017).
	CT2	2) brand X is a trustworthy brand because of consistent quality.	
	CT3	3) Brand trust is paramount when buying a product.	
	CT4	4) I have good associations with brand X because of brand trust.	
	CT5	5) Customer trust enhances the sales revenue of a brand.	
	CT6	6) Customer trust increases positive word of mouth.	
	CT7	7) Customer trust is the key factor in enhancing the corporate image.	
Corporate Reputation	CR1	1). Whenever I buy a brand, I always keep a corporate reputation in my mind.	Anggoro (2022); Streimikiene and Ahmed (2021); Lu *et al.* (2020); Ahmed *et al.* (2017)
	CR2	2). Corporate reputation is one of the most triggering factors in purchasing.	
	CR3	3). Corporate reputation provides the edge over competitors for long-term growth.	
	CR4	4). Corporate reputation significantly impacts consumers' minds while making buying decisions.	
	CR5	5) Corporate reputation enhances the brand image.	
	CR6	6) Corporate reputation increases the long-term competitive advantage.	

Source: Authors' calculations

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