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The Mediating Role of Brand Advocacy: Investigating its Antecedents and Consequences in the Context of Smart Phone Users in Pakistan

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Abstract: Extant literature suggests that opinion leaders promote brand advocacy, an innovative tool for changing organizational culture. A few studies have explored the association between opinion leaders and brand advocacy but have not examined its antecedent and consequence in a single study. Given this gap and others discussed in the study, it has extended Two-Step Flow Model and developed a conceptual framework containing four direct, two mediating, and two moderating variables. The study has focused on the Facebook users of Pakistan as it is more popular than other social media. We non-randomly collected 431 samples based on a self-administered questionnaire adapted from past studies. The study used Smart PLS for data analysis, including reliability and validity analysis. We found opinion leadership and interpersonal influence are significant precursors of brand advocacy. And brand equity advocacy promotes brand equity and purchase intention. The result supports all mediating relationships except mediating effect of opinion leadership and purchase intention. The study also supports the moderating effect of brand ethicality on (i) brand association and brand equity and (ii) brand association and purchase intention.

Keywords: Opinion leadership, interpersonal influence, brand advocacy, brand equity, purchase intention, social media.

Introduction

Marketers in the present era of technological advancement and highly competitive markets face many challenges for growth and sustainability (Hensel & Deis, 2010). Thus researchers believe that firms cannot reach consumers effectively through conventional advertising. They must include social media in their advertising campaign as it is more effective and has a long reach than conventional advertising. Given its importance, many firms now spend considerable resources on social media. Guenther and Guenther (2022) documents that B2B spends 26% and B2C spends 22% of their marketing budgets on blogging and content marketing.

As the concept of brand advocacy is new and innovative, there is a need for more studies on it from different perspectives (Choi, Kroff, & Kim, 2021; Bhati & Verma, 2020;

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Wilk, Soutar, & Harrigan, 2021). Thus this study has examined the moderating and mediating role of brand advocacy and ethicality. Prior literature has widely focused on word of mouth. However, only a few papers have examined brand advocacy and its antecedents and consequences (Chiosa, Anastasiei, et al., 2018; Mathur, 2019), but they have not used brand ethicality as a moderator and brand advocacy as a mediator, which we have in this study. Based on a meta-analysis, examining the factors of communication networks in the studies of brand advocacy. Given this gap, this study has incorporated two key aspects of communication networks: opinion leaders and interpersonal influence in our conceptual framework.

Extant literature suggests that opinion leaders promote brand advocacy. However, few studies have explored the association between opinion leaders and brand advocacy (Mueller et al., 2020; Tobon & García-Madariaga, 2021). Thus this study aims to investigate the effect of opinion leaders and interpersonal factors on brand advocacy and its consequences, which past studies have not examined using Social Identity Theory. The literature review analysis has highlighted that most of the past studies have used Social Network Theory (Mathur, 2019), Social Identity Theory, Social Exchange Theory (Wilk, 2018), and the Theory of Reasoned Action to understand the concept of brand advocacy. However, it was recommended using the Two-Step Flow of Communication Theory for deeper insight into the brand advocacy phenomenon. Given this gap, the study has used the Two-Step Flow of Communication Theory to gain new insight into the discussed phenomenon.

The purpose/aim of the study is to examine the impact of antecedents (opinion leadership and interpersonal influence) on consequences (Brand advocacy. It also examines the impact of brand advocacy on the outcomes (Brand equity and purchase intention). It ascertains the mediating impact of brand advocacy on (i) opinion leadership and brand equity, (ii) opinion leadership and purchase intention, (iii) interpersonal influence and brand equity, and (iv) interpersonal and purchase intention. And it also ascertains the moderating role of ethicality on (i) brand advocacy and brand equity, (ii) brand advocacy purchase intention.

Literature Review

In the following sections, we have briefly discussed the variables used in the study, followed by theoretical underpinning and theoretical support for the articulated hypotheses.

Brand Advocacy

Brand advocacy is a term for persons who love and promote a brand by sharing their knowledge and experience with others (Choi et al., 2021). Past studies have documented that brand advocacy positively affects purchase intention and brand equity. Brand advocacy builds a network of innovative culture across the firms to engage stakeholders in promoting their brands and sustainability. Successful firms such as "Volvo Truck and

Bombardier Transportation by building an innovative culture using technology and brand advocates.

Opinion Leader

According to [Papagiannidis \(2022\)](#), opinion leaders are those others turn to for advice, direction, and information. They are often well respected and experts in different domains, and they informally change the attitudes and behaviors about a brand. Given their importance, marketers target opinion leaders to promote their brand.

Interpersonal Influence

Interpersonal influence is a type of social influence of group members that encourages or forces others to confirm the group's values. The other two types of social influence are normative and informative ([Bai, Yin, Yu, Wei, & Wu, 2021](#)). From a marketing perspective, interpersonal influence is important to increasing purchase intention and brand reputation.

Brand Equity

Brand equity, from a marketing perspective, refers to brand value. Consumers determine brand value based on their perception and experience with a brand. Consumers' positive perception of a brand means positive brand equity. A brand consistently disappoints consumers by delivering a poor value proposition may lead to negative brand equity. In case of negative brand equity, consumers avoid using it and discourage others from using it ([Hossien, Ali, & Mehdi, 2012](#)).

Purchase Intention

Purchase intention is consumers' intent to buy a good or service shortly. According to the Theory of Planned Behavior ([Choi et al., 2021](#)), precursors to purchase intention are subjective norms, attitudes, and perceived behavior control. Subjective norms are the influence of peers, family, and culture. Attitudes are customers' enduring perceptions of a brand or a person.

Brand Ethicality

An ethical brand does not harm the public good; rather, it contributes to the growth of public goods. Truthfulness, honesty, and accountability are important determinants of brand ethicality. Customers in the present era have become highly ethically conscious and expect the same from brands ([Yoganathan, Osburg, & Akhtar, 2019](#)).

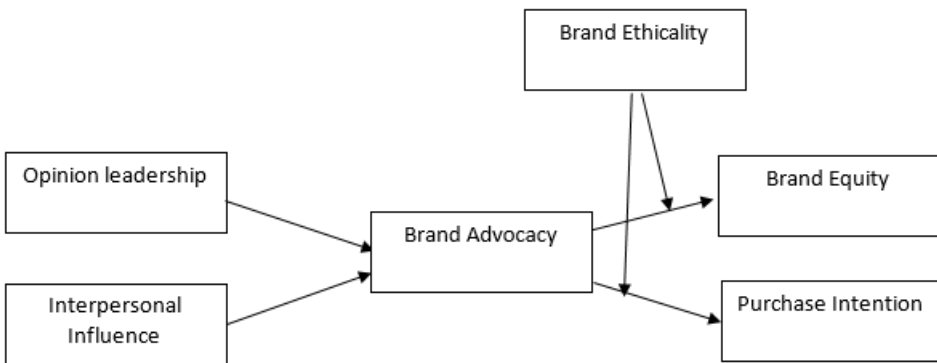
Theoretical Grounding

Two-Step Flow of Communication Theory

The two-step flow model examines the function of mass media in social influence and has received extensive research attention about WOM (advocacy), both online and offline. According to the model, media indirectly shapes people's attitudes as limited persons act as gatekeepers and spread a mass media message throughout their networks. These powerful people are known as opinion leaders, and they disseminate information and opinions to other members of their social groups. People consider them as reputable and knowledgeable individuals regarding particular topics. Individuals become opinion leaders based on personal involvement, product familiarity, and public individuation. The two-step flow model proposes that message dissemination to the general public occurs through opinion leaders, mediating the interaction between businesses and their audiences.

Mavens, a subcategory of opinion leaders, are experts in a certain field who interact with customers about goods or services. The interpersonal connections of opinion leaders are more credible than messages from impersonal media sources. Mavens are frequently sought after as opinion leaders by other consumers since they know so much about certain products. People are increasingly more prone to look to online opinion leaders, and information found online can significantly impact how they feel and think—especially when making judgments about purchases. As a result, research and application of the two-step flow method in advocacy through social media have increased during the past ten years ([Mathur, 2019](#)).

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework



Opinion Leader and Brand Advocacy

Opinion leaders have extensive knowledge about a firm's products, and others respect their opinion. [Anggraini \(2018\)](#) asserts that opinion leaders play a significant role in pro-

moting brands. Opinion leaders influence consumers' attitudes and behavior by providing guidance and advice (Flynn, Goldsmith, & Eastman, 1996; Mueller et al., 2020). Opinion leaders are, therefore, among the most crucial customer types that businesses should keep and seek out because they subtly shape others' attitudes and behaviors through conversations about the products they use. However, according to other experts, the power of brand advocacy is driven more by a vast number of easily swayed individuals than by opinion leaders (Watts & Dodds, 2007; Bao & Chang, 2014). Whether a review generates favorable or negative buzz, it can raise followers' awareness of a product or company, boosting sales (Agam, 2017). We, therefore, classify consumers who write reviews that cause the most consumer interaction as buzz-generating opinion leaders. Brand advocacy through social media is a dependable resource that offers useful information. In electronic commerce research (Tobon & García-Madariaga, 2021), trust is a significant issue because it is one of the primary factors influencing followers' decisions to seek advice from opinion leaders.

H_{1A}: Opinion leader has a positive impact on brand advocacy.

Interpersonal Influence and Brand Advocacy

Interpersonal influence is a component related to society that significantly impacts consumer decision-making and the adoption of new technologies (D'Rozario & Choudhury, 2000). Numerous research has demonstrated that when customers are open to interpersonal influence, brand advocacy may become the most effective source of information (Bai et al., 2021).

H_{1B}: Interpersonal Influence positively affects brand advocacy.

Brand Advocacy and Brand Equity

Advocacy is considered superior to all other promotional activities in the current market environment (Wong, 2023). Many marketers believe brand advocacy improves customer connections, boosts revenue, grows market share, and increases brand equity overall (Shailesh & Reddy, 2016). Extant literature documents that customer-based brand equity increases when people share positive thoughts and write favorable reviews and opinions (Mathur, 2019). Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman (1996) assert that maintaining a long-term relationship with satisfied customers is cheaper than attracting new ones. Satisfied and loyal customers convert to brand advocates who motivate consumers to buy the brands, enhancing sales and brand equity (Patel, Tiwari, Kumar, Samuel, & Sutar, 2020). Mathur (2019) asserts that brand advocacy is an important precursor of brand equity.

H_{2A}: Brand advocacy positively affects brand equity.

Brand Advocacy and Purchase Intention

Brand advocates share their pleasant experiences with consumers to enhance customer purchase intentions (Wilk et al., 2021). Choi et al. (2021) asserts that when a consumer forms a bond with a brand, it may lead to brand advocacy. Consumers often worry about not having sufficient information about the products and services. Brand Advocacy alleviates such worries and apprehension. Wilk et al. (2021) assert that brand advocacy significantly influences purchase intention since consumers believe their opinions are based on their experience and are not biased.

H_{2B}: Brand advocacy positively impacts purchase intention.

Opinion Leader, Brand Advocacy and Brand Equity

Arndt (1967) was the first to note that advocacy through the launch of new items benefited from the influence of opinion leaders (Taylor & Lamm, 2017). Social media platforms and online social networks have contributed to the growth of brand advocacy. High influencer advocates acting as opinion leaders promotes goods and services to potential customers. Companies must correctly identify opinion leaders for viral marketing efforts before allowing them to share content with their followers (Mathur, 2019). Consumers that are opinion leaders share information with others that affect their purchasing decisions (Tobon & García-Madariaga, 2021) by gathering pertinent data through research and forming their judgments before the general public.

Since it strengthens relationships with customers, increases sales, expands market share, and generally raises brand equity, many marketers place a lot of importance on brand advocacy. The advocacy strategy, which attempts to assist customers in selecting products and services wisely and maximizing their use, includes the position of trusted adviser (opinion leader) (Mathur, 2019).

H_{3A}: Brand Advocacy mediates the relationship between opinion leadership and brand equity.

Opinion leader, Brand Advocacy and Purchase Intention

Past studies indicate that opinion leaders, brand advocates, and purchase intention correlate highly (Fullerton, 2005; Choi et al., 2021). Mathur (2019) asserts opinion leaders change consumers' attitudes toward the brand by counseling and guiding them, affecting the brand image. When a user identifies with a brand, this affinity may motivate the customer to spread the word (advocacy) about the brand. Brand advocacy is more effective than other promotional mediums as unbiased sources generate it (Kim, Lavack, & Smith, 2001; Wilk et al., 2021). While purchasing a product or service, consumers are concerned about their information. Brand advocacy provides the required information and removes consumers' anxiety about the non-availability of the information.

H_{3B}: Brand advocacy mediates opinion leadership and purchase intention.

Interpersonal Influence, Brand Advocacy, and Brand Equity

Interpersonal influence and brand advocacy create and maintain social connections within their networks, promoting brand equity (Mathur, 2019). Social media users share useful product information and personal purchasing experiences that help other users in their purchase decision.

One social component that greatly impacts consumers' decisions is interpersonal Influence (D'Rozario & Choudhury, 2000; Bai et al., 2021) and its uptake of new technologies. Brand advocacy and interpersonal influence build sustainable relationships with customers and motivate other customers to become brand ambassadors, which is necessary for the growth and sustainability of a firm. Since advocacy strengthens relationships with customers, generates revenue, expands market share, and builds overall brand equity, many marketers place great importance on it. Zeithaml et al. (1996) assert that retaining existing customers is less expensive than attracting new ones.

H_{4A}: Brand ad mediates the relationship between interpersonal influence and brand equity.

Interpersonal Influence, Brand Association, and Purchase Intention

Many past studies have documented a positive correlation between interpersonal influence, brand advocacy, and purchase intention (Farias, 2017). A cross-cultural study found that brand advocacy has a stronger effect on interpersonal Influence in China than in the USA. Similarly, another study documented that interpersonal influence significantly affects brand advocacy in Taiwan. Extant literature documents that individuals in collective countries like Chinese, Taiwanese, and Latin American change their views to conform to the views of their societies (Farias, 2017). Therefore in such societies, the impact of interpersonal influence will be stronger on brand advocacy than in other cultures.

Interpersonal influencers and brand advocates extensively use social media to post their experiences and opinions about the products and services affecting purchase intention. Leskovec, Huttenlocher, and Kleinberg (2010) assert that consumers consider the opinions posted on social media unbiased and honest. Therefore, they may make their purchase decisions based on the feedback displayed on social media.

H_{4B}: Brand advocacy mediates the relationship between interpersonal influence and purchase intention.

Brand Advocacy, Brand Ethicality, and Brand Equity

Brand equity is an asset of a company that results from persistent long-term interactions between businesses and their consumers. Customer-based brand equity increases when people are keen to share positive thoughts about brands and are eager to offer positive evaluations and views (Iglesias, Markovic, Singh, & Sierra, 2019). Word-of-mouth promotion through social media, a form of brand advocacy, is more persuasive than advertising in changing negative brand perceptions into favorable ones (Bhati & Verma, 2020).

Since the last few years, consumers' concern about ethics has increased significantly. According to [Brunk \(2010\)](#), consumers are more likely to view a brand as ethical if it aligns with ethical values. Therefore, they expect the brands not to deviate from ethical values. [Bhati and Verma \(2020\)](#) also assert that brand ethicality has a varying effect on brand ethicality and brand association and brand equity.

H_{5A}: Brand ethicality moderates the relationship between brand association and brand equity.

Brand Advocacy, Brand Ethicality, and Purchase Intention

A powerful combination of brand advocacy and social media can change consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions. [Bhati and Verma \(2020\)](#) asserts that brand advocacy is more persuasive for changing consumers' attitudes toward a brand than advertising. Building a company as a moral and ethical brand boosts its recognition, faith, and trustworthiness. The demand from customers for goods and services produced and sold ethically is rising, doing ethical shopping a significant development ([Garanti & Kissi, 2019](#)). When consumers make ethical purchases, they speak for themselves, demonstrate their dedication to value orientation and contribute to a positive environment. Researchers assert that not all ethical purchase intentions translate into actual buying behavior ([Miotto & Youn, 2020](#)).

H_{5B}: Brand ethicality moderates the relationship between the brand association and purchase intention.

Methodology

Population and Sample Size

The target population for this study was Facebook users in Pakistan. According to an estimate, the number of Facebook users in Pakistan is 49.2 million (world population review, 2022). It is the most popular social media site in Pakistan. Researchers have suggested different sample sizes for the calculation of sample size. For example, [Bougie and Sekaran \(2019\)](#) recommend a sample of 30 will be appropriate for each variable used in a study. [Hair Jr, Matthews, Matthews, and Sarstedt \(2017\)](#) advise using 10 to 30 samples for each indicator. The study has calculated the minimum sample size based on the target population of 49.2 million, 95% confidence level, and 5% margin of error, which comes out to 385. However, we distributed 500 questionnaires and received 431 useful responses.

Sampling techniques fall into two categories which are probability and non-probability. A sample frame is necessary for probability sampling, which was unavailable for the target population. Therefore we used non-probability sampling. We collected the sample using google forms. The profile of the respondents is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Respondents' Profile

Variables	Percentage
Gender	
Male	64%
Female	36%
Age	
Less than 20 years	15%
21 - 30 years	35%
31 - 40 years	30%
41 - 50 years	15%
51 and above	5%
Qualifications	
Matriculation/O-Levels or below	15%
Intermediate/A-Levels	22%
Diploma	10%
Bachelors	27%
Masters and above	13%
Income Level	
50,000 PKR or below	24%
50,001 - 100,000 PKR	55%
100,001 - 150,000 PKR	15%
150,001 - 200,000 PKR	4%
200,001 PKR and above	2%
Marital Status	
Single	43%
Married	57%

Scale and Measure

The study has adopted the questionnaire from earlier studies. It has two parts; part one is related to demographics and has five questions. The questionnaire related to the main study has six latent and 38 indicator variables.

Table 2
Scales and Measures

Construct	Sources	Reliability in Earlier studies	Items
Opinion Leadership	Flynn et al. (1996),	0.720 - 0.763	11
Interpersonal Influence	Bearden, Netemeyer, and Teel (1989)	0.765 - 0.898	6
Brand Advocacy	Kim et al. (2001);	0.746-0.867	3
Brand Equity	Washburn and Plank (2002)	0.709 - 0.799	4
Purchase Intention	Grewal, Levy, and Kumar (2009)	0.785 -0.886	3
Brand ethicality	Brunk (2010)	0.707 -0.832	6

Table 2 below summarizes the constructs used in the study, their sources, and reliability values in earlier studies.

Data Analysis

For analyzing the data, the study used Smart PLS version 4. It includes reliability, validity, and descriptive analysis. Subsequently, we generated a structural model for the hypothesis results.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive results show that opinion leadership (Mean = 4.507, STD = 1.231, SK = 1.850) has the highest Skewness value, whereas interpersonal Influence (Mean = 3.500, STD = 1.560, SK = -0.800) has the lowest Skewness. Further, brand advocacy (Mean = 3.770, STD = 1.050, KR = 1.890) has the highest Kurtosis value, and brand equity has (Mean = 3.870, STD = 1.241, KR = -0.840) has the lowest Kurtosis. Skewness and Kurtosis lie between ± 3.5 , suggesting that variables have univariate normality.

Convergent Validity

The study used AVE values and composite reliability values for convergent validity. Table 3 presents the outcomes. Interpersonal Influence (Mean = 3.500, STD = 1.560, α = 0.856) has the highest Cronbach's Alpha values brand advocacy (Mean = 3.770, STD = 1.050, α = 0.758) has the lowest Cronbach's Alpha. The results suggest that the variables used in the study have acceptable internal consistency. The results show that opinion leadership (Mean = 4.507, STD = 1.231, CR = 0.827) has the highest composite reliability, whereas brand ethicality (Mean = 4.120, STD = 0.892, CR = 0.748) has the lowest. Further, brand equity (Mean = 3.870, STD = 1.241, AVE = 0.776) has the highest AVE value, and Brand Advocacy (Mean = 3.770, STD = 1.050, AVE = 0.501) has the lowest AVE value. Results show that AVE values are at least 0.50 and composite reliability values are at least 0.70, suggesting that the constructs in the study do not deviate from the requirement of convergent validity.

Table 3
Convergent Validity

	Mean	Std.Dev	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Opinion Leadership	4.50	1.231	0.780	0.827	0.601
Interpersonal Influence	3.50	1.560	0.856	0.748	0.507
Brand Advocacy	3.77	1.050	0.758	0.761	0.501
Brand Equity	3.87	1.241	0.795	0.781	0.776
Purchase Intention	3.99	1.432	0.786	0.779	0.603
Brand Ethicality	4.12	0.892	0.789	0.748	0.538

Discriminant Validity

The study used [Fornell and Larcker \(1981\)](#) criterion to assess the constructs' distinctiveness and uniqueness. We have displayed the outcomes in Table 4. The findings indicate that AVE square root values are large than the correlation values, suggesting that the variables are unique and distinct ([Fornell & Larcker, 1981](#)).

Table 4
Discriminant Validity

	B.Adv	B. Eq	B.Eth	I.Imf.	OL	PI
Brand Advocacy	0.775					
Brand Equity	0.593	0.712				
Brand Ethicality	0.484	0.651	0.708			
Interpersonal Influence	0.576	0.366	0.701	0.881		
Opinion Leadership	0.420	0.482	0.544	0.336	0.777	
Purchase Intention	0.619	0.668	0.577	0.486	0.534	0.733

Results of the Hypotheses

The study used bootstrapping of 5000 subsets to test the hypotheses. Table 5 presents the hypothesis results. The results support all the direct and indirect hypotheses except 3B, suggesting brand advocacy mediates opinion leadership and purchase intention.

Table 5
Statistical Results from SEM

	Beta	T Stat	P Values	Results
Opinion leadership → Brand Advocacy (H1A)	0.064	3.228	0.001	Accepted
Interpersonal Influence → Brand Advocacy (H1B)	0.129	4.858	0.000	Accepted
Brand Advocacy → Brand Equity (H2A)	0.169	3.727	0.000	Accepted
Brand Advocacy → Purchase Intention (H2B)	0.083	2.464	0.011	Accepted
Opinion Ldr → Br. Adv → Brand Eq. (H3A)	0.720	2.335	0.000	Accepted
Opinion Ldr → Br. Adv → Purchase Int. (H3B)	0.057	1.831	0.068	Rejected
Interpersonal Inf → Br. Adv. → Brand Eq. (4A)	0.543	2.630	0.000	Accepted
Interpersonal Inf → Br. Adv. → Purcha. Int. (4B)	0.520	2.204	0.000	Accepted
BA → Brand Eth. → Brand Eq. 5A)	0.560	3.648	0.000	Accepted
BA → Brand Eth. → Purchase Int. (5B)	0.433	2.458	0.000	Accepted

Discussion

The study has extended the Two-Step Flow of Communication Theory and developed a model containing four direct, two mediating, and two moderating relationships. The following sections depict the results of the hypotheses and their relevance to past studies.

Hypothesis 1 suggests that “opinion leadership positively affects brand advocacy,” which the study support. The finding aligns with the results of past studies (Yue, Men, & Berger, 2021; Tobon & García-Madariaga, 2021). Opinion leaders mostly generate positive advocacy, but negative information is more persuasive. Therefore, firms must ensure that consumers or opinion leaders do not generate negative messages about the products and services. The study found interpersonal influence positively affects brand advocacy, which is in line with the past literature (Bai et al., 2021; Choi et al., 2021).

Our study validates the findings of Mathur (2019), who also found brand advocacy promotes brand equity. Shailesh and Reddy (2016) recommend developing brand advocates as they improve customer connections, boost revenue, grow market share, and increase brand equity. Mathur (2019) asserts that customer-based brand equity increases when people are keen to share positive thoughts about brands and offer encouraging feedback and ideas. The study has extended the finding of Bai et al. (2021), who also documented that brand advocacy promotes purchase intention.

The study found that brand advocacy mediates opinion leadership and brand equity. Many marketers recommend focusing on brand advocacy because advocacy through opinion leaders improves customer relationships, boosts sales, increases market share, and promotes brand equity (Shailesh & Reddy, 2016). In recent years, social media platforms and online social networks have helped to increase brand advocacy. For viral marketing campaigns, businesses must appropriately identify opinion leaders to enhance brand equity through brand association and communication with consumers (Chiosa et al., 2018).

Contrary to past studies, we did not find support for the mediating role of brand association on opinion leadership and purchase intention. A brand polarises the market when it remains true to and persistently pursues its target segment. Some people grow to adore the brand, while others grow to dislike it, leading to negative advocacy, which may not necessarily be bad in the context of connections. In actuality, a brand occasionally needs bad publicity to encourage good publicity from others (Choi et al., 2021).

The study supported the mediating role of brand advocacy on interpersonal influence and brand equity. The position of trusted adviser is part of the advocacy strategy, which aims to help customers choose products and services wisely and make the most of them. To increase brand equity, firms should encourage customers to become brand advocates (Tobon & García-Madariaga, 2021).

The study's empirical results document that brand association mediates interpersonal influence and purchase intention. The findings align with past studies. Shailesh and Reddy (2016); Bai et al. (2021) assert that brand advocacy promotes social relationships in the social media network affecting the brand association and purchase intention. (Rahman, Moghavvemi, Suberamanaian, Zauddin, & Nasir, 2018) documents that shared personal experiences of interpersonal influencers directly and through brand association promote purchase intention.

The study supports the moderating role of brand ethicality on (i) brand association and brand equity and (ii) brand association and purchase intention. Quezado, Fortes, and Cavalcante (2022); Iglesias et al. (2019) found that brand ethicality positively and indirectly influences brand equity. Brand equity increases when customers promote brands by sharing their pleasant experiences and posting positive reviews on social media. Social media and brand advocacy can change consumers' attitudes, behaviors, and purchase intentions. Consumers with high morals and ethical orientation purchase ethical brands (Yoganathan et al., 2019).

Conclusion

The study developed a model examining the antecedents and consequences of brand advocacy. It also examined the indirect effect of brand advocacy and ethicality on brand equity. The study collected data from Facebook users in Pakistan, as it is more popular in Pakistan than other social media. We developed eight hypotheses, of which we found support for all the hypotheses except one indirect hypothesis, suggesting

We found opinion leadership and interpersonal significantly predict brand advocacy,

and brand advocacy promotes brand equity and purchase intention. The study also found brand advocacy significantly mediates (i) opinion leadership and brand equity and (ii) insignificantly mediates opinion leadership and purchase intentions. Also, we found brand advocacy mediates (i) interpersonal influence and brand equity and (ii) interpersonal influence and purchase intention. The study also supports the moderating effect of brand ethicality on (i) brand association and brand equity and (ii) brand association and purchase intention.

Implications

Ragini and Harsh (2020) recommend using the Two-Step Flow of Communication Theory in brand advocacy theories as past studies have not used it, and it is more relevant to the concept. By extending the theory, we articulated and tested eight theories and found support for all except one. The results have increased the generalizability of the theory. [Mueller et al. \(2020\)](#); [Tobon and García-Madariaga \(2021\)](#) suggest a dearth of studies on the association between opinion leaders and brand advocacy. Given this gap, we tested this relationship and found opinion leaders positively affect brand advocacy.

Brand advocacy is an important tool for the growth and sustainability of an organization. Firms must focus on the two important antecedents of brand advocacy: opinion leadership and interpersonal influence. These antecedents, directly and indirectly, affect brand equity and purchase intentions. Many researchers believe these antecedents are more effective than conventional advertising because consumers think their views are unbiased and based on their experience.

Limitations and Future Directions

Cultural values are important aspects in consumer-related studies, which other users can incorporate into our conceptual framework. A comparative study between two different social media may bring more insight into the issue. This study has focused on the Facebook users of Pakistan. The study has used brand ethicality as a moderator and brand advocacy as a mediator. We recommend that other researchers use other social media for brand advocacy studies. Other studies may use other brands and WOM-related drivers in their studies. Demographic factors have a varied effect on purchase intention and brand equity. Future studies may use them as a moderator in their studies.

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