

Brand Equity and Consumer Response in the Food and Beverage Industry (Cafés) in Saudi Arabia

¹Dalia Diab, ²Tahreem Noor Khan, ³Raya Saad Almjnoni

¹Associate Professor, College of Business Administration, University of Hail, Saudi Arabia, d.diab@uoh.edu.sa

²Assistant Professor, College of Business Administration, University of Hail, Saudi Arabia, t.noorkhan@uoh.edu.sa

³Lecturer, College of Business Administration, University of Hail, Saudi Arabia, r.almjnoni@uoh.edu.sa

Abstract: In the competitive landscape of the food and beverage industry, brand equity and consumer response are crucial aspects influencing a café's success. This study investigates the impact of brand equity dimensions (brand awareness, brand association, brand loyalty, and perceived quality) on consumer response (purchase intention and brand preference) in the Saudi Arabian café industry. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected from 300 university students in Hail City through an electronic survey. The hypotheses were tested using multiple linear regression analysis in SPSS version 25.0. The findings revealed that brand loyalty and brand association significantly and positively influence overall brand equity, while perceived quality and brand awareness did not demonstrate a significant impact. A positive and significant correlation was also observed between overall brand equity and consumer response.

Keywords: Brand Association, Brand Equity, Brand Loyalty, Café, Consumer Response, Perceived Quality, Saudi Arabia.

1 INTRODUCTION

The food and beverage industry is one of the most competitive sectors globally, where businesses continuously strive to differentiate themselves and attract consumers. Within this industry, brand equity plays a significant role in shaping consumer perceptions and influencing purchasing decisions. Substantial brand equity enhances customer trust, fosters brand loyalty, and improves a company's long-term profitability. Particularly in the café sector, brand image and consumer experience are critical determinants of success, as consumers often develop emotional connections with their preferred brands.

Saudi Arabia has witnessed a rapid expansion of its café culture, driven by changing consumer lifestyles, urbanization, and increasing disposable income. Both international and local coffee brands compete in the market, making it essential for businesses to build strong brand equity to retain customers. However, limited research explores the impact of brand equity dimensions—brand awareness, brand association, brand loyalty, and perceived quality—on consumer responses such as purchase intention and brand preference within the Saudi Arabian café industry. Understanding these factors is crucial for cafés to develop effective branding strategies and sustain their competitive advantage.

Brand equity is commonly assessed using Aaker's model [1], which defines four key dimensions: brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. These dimensions collectively shape a brand's overall value and influence consumer behaviour. While previous studies have explored the impact of brand equity on consumer responses in various industries, their findings vary depending on market characteristics, cultural differences, and industry-specific dynamics. Therefore, examining whether these brand equity dimensions significantly affect consumer responses in the Saudi Arabian café industry is important.

This study aims to investigate the relationship between brand equity and consumer response among café customers in Saudi Arabia, focusing on university students in Hail City. A quantitative approach was adopted, collecting data from 300 respondents through an electronic survey. Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the significance of brand equity dimensions in shaping consumer purchase intentions and brand preferences. This research identifies the key factors that drive brand equity and consumer response in the café sector, providing valuable insights for café owners, marketers, and industry stakeholders. The findings contribute to the existing literature on brand equity and offer practical recommendations for enhancing brand positioning in a competitive market.

2 LITERATURE

Brand equity refers to the value a brand name adds to a product, ultimately influencing customer perception and generating profits [2]. Businesses must understand how consumers perceive their brand, as this directly impacts customer loyalty and market success [3]-[5]. In 1991, Aaker defines brand equity through four key dimensions: brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty [1]. These dimensions have been widely accepted and validated by researchers such as Yoo and Donthu [6], Washburn and Plank [7], and Pappu et al. [8], who emphasize their importance in brand management.

Brand awareness plays a crucial role in a brand's success by influencing its prominence in consumers' minds [9]. It consists of two aspects: depth (recognition and familiarity) and breadth (recall from memory when presented with relevant cues) [10][11]. Strong brand awareness is achieved through distinctive brand elements such as logos, slogans, product range, and advertising [12]. Research suggests that effective communication through television, social media, and word-of-mouth strengthens brand awareness, increasing the likelihood of consumers choosing a brand [13][14][15].

Brand associations influence a consumer's perception of a brand, shaping its image and purchase decisions [6]. These associations encompass functional, symbolic, experiential, and emotional attributes [1]. Strong brand associations emerge through consistent and relevant marketing, repeated exposure, and favorable consumer experiences [10]. Additionally, factors such as product attributes, pricing, endorsements, and competitive positioning further enhance brand associations [16][17][18]. Empirical studies confirm that brand association and awareness significantly contribute to brand equity and customer loyalty [19][8].

Brand loyalty represents a strong commitment by customers to a specific brand, reducing the likelihood of switching to competitors, even at a premium price [1][9][6]. Unlike other dimensions of brand equity, which exist before product usage, brand loyalty develops through prior purchase experiences [20]. Studies show that customer satisfaction and brand experiences are key drivers of brand loyalty [21]. Research in the café industry highlights that factors such as corporate brand image, service quality, and café atmosphere significantly influence customer loyalty [22]-[24]. Loyal customers also act as brand advocates, strengthening overall brand equity [14].

Perceived quality is a fundamental dimension of brand equity that reflects customers' assessments of a product or service compared to competitors [1]. High perceived quality enhances brand reputation and influences purchase decisions [25]. Service quality, pricing strategies, and product differentiation are key determinants of perceived quality [26]. Research suggests that improving café performance, offering unique experiences, and maintaining high-quality products contribute to stronger perceived quality [27][28]. In the Saudi context, cafés need to focus on automation, product innovation, and service excellence to enhance perceived quality [29]. Consumer response is a crucial aspect of brand equity, reflecting how customers engage with a brand. Two key responses considered in this study are purchase intention and brand preference. Purchase intention indicates a consumer's likelihood of buying a brand, influenced by factors such as brand loyalty, perceived quality, and positive brand associations [30][31][6]. Studies highlight that first impressions, store ambiance, and electronic word-of-mouth significantly impact purchase decisions [32]-[34].

Brand preference reflects the extent to which consumers favor a brand over competitors, contributing to long-term loyalty [21][35]. Factors such as brand experience, service quality, pricing, and location influence brand preference [36]-[38]. Research suggests that café ambiance, social engagement, and customer involvement in brand co-creation enhance brand preference and strengthen brand equity [39][40]. The brand equity dimensions—including brand awareness, brand association, brand loyalty, and perceived quality—play a crucial role in shaping consumer responses. Understanding these relationships provides a strong foundation for brand management in the café industry, particularly in competitive markets like Saudi Arabia.

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESIS FORMULATION

This study is based on Aaker's brand equity theory, which explains how brand equity generates value by incorporating brand loyalty, brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and other proprietary brand elements that provide a competitive advantage [1]. This research examines explicitly four dimensions of brand equity: brand awareness, brand association, brand loyalty, and perceived quality. These dimensions have been empirically tested in several studies [41]-[43]. Using Aaker's model, this study aims to reassess the measurement of customer-based brand equity and its influence on consumer response in the Saudi Arabian café industry [1]. The research framework is presented in Fig. 1.

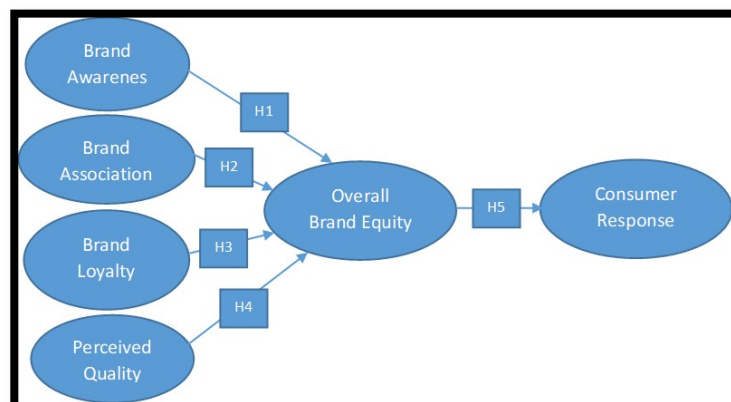


Fig. 1 Conceptual Framework of Brand Equity and Consumer Response

3.1. Hypotheses

The hypotheses considered in this work are listed below.

- **H1:** Brand awareness has a significant positive influence on overall brand equity in the food and beverage industry (cafés) in Saudi Arabia.
- **H2:** Brand association has a significant positive influence on overall brand equity in the food and beverage industry (cafés) in Saudi Arabia.
- **H3:** Brand loyalty has a significant positive influence on overall brand equity in the food and beverage industry (cafés) in Saudi Arabia.
- **H4:** Perceived quality has a significant positive influence on overall brand equity in the food and beverage industry (cafés) in Saudi Arabia.
- **H5:** Overall brand equity, which includes the cumulative positive effects of brand awareness, brand association, brand loyalty, and perceived quality, significantly influences consumer response in the food and beverage industry (cafés) in Saudi Arabia.

3.2. Research Methodology

This study uses a quantitative approach based on primary and secondary data. Data were collected through an electronic questionnaire administered to 300 university students in Hail City, Saudi Arabia, who were frequent café users. The questionnaire was developed using established scales from previous studies [1][10][44][42][45][8].

A structured, closed-ended questionnaire with a Likert scale was used. The data collection period lasted three weeks, and a convenience sampling method was applied to include male and female respondents aged 18 and above. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 25.0.

3.3. Results and Discussion

3.3.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Among the 300 respondents, 88.7% were female, and 11.3% were male. The majority (83.3%) were aged 18-24 years, and 65% were bachelor's degree students, while 35% were diploma students. In terms of brand preference, 45% preferred Dunkin' Donuts (international brand), 20% favored 8Oz Coffee (local brand), 19% chose Starbucks Coffee (international brand), and 16% selected Kyan Coffee (local brand). Regarding coffee purchasing frequency, 33.7% of respondents bought coffee once per week, 26% purchased twice per month, 22.6% bought daily, and 17.7% purchased once per month. The demographic information of the respondents is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristic Sample

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	%
Age	18 – 20	117	39
	21 – 24	133	44.3
	25 – 27	37	12.3
	28 or more	13	4.4
Gender	Male	34	11.3
	Female	266	88.7
Education Level	Diploma	105	35
	Bachelor	195	65
Favorite Brand	Starbucks	57	19
	Kyan	48	16
	Dunkin'Donuts	135	45
	8Oz	60	20
Purchase Frequency	Once per month	53	17.7
	Twice per month	78	26
	Once per week	101	33.7
	Once per day	68	22.6

3.3.2 Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's Alpha)

The Cronbach's alpha test was used to measure the internal consistency of the variables. All variables demonstrated acceptable reliability (>0.70) [46], as shown in Table 2.

3.3.3. Correlation and Regression Analysis

Table 3 presents the correlation between the four brand equity dimensions and overall brand equity. Brand loyalty showed the highest correlation with overall brand equity ($r = 0.701$), followed by brand association ($r = 0.635$), perceived quality ($r = 0.546$), and brand awareness ($r = 0.427$). A significant positive correlation was also found between overall brand equity and consumer response ($r = 0.621$, $p < 0.01$), confirming that stronger brand equity enhances consumer response.

Table 2. Scale Reliability Test

Items	Cronbach's alpha
Brand Awareness	0.814
Brand Association	0.910
Brand Loyalty	0.874
Perceived Quality	0.903
Overall Brand Equity	0.887
Consumer Response	0.850

Table 3. Correlation Test of brand equity dimensions, overall brand equity & consumer response

		Brand Awareness	Brand Association	Brand Loyalty	Perceived Quality	Overall Brand Equity	Consumer Response
Brand Awareness	r.	0.1					
	p.						
Brand Association	r.	0.515**	0.1				
	p.	0.000					
Brand Loyalty	r.	0.392**	0.629**	0.1			
	p.	0.000	0.000				
Perceived Quality	r.	0.483**	0.577**	0.615**	0.1		
	p.	0.000	0.000	0.000			
Overall Brand Equity	r.	0.427**	0.635**	0.701**	0.546**	0.1	
	p.	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000		
Consumer Response	r.	0.549**	0.639**	0.678**	0.662**	0.621**	0.1
	p.	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

Regression analysis (Table 4) indicates that brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.460, p < 0.000$) and brand association ($\beta = 0.264, p < 0.000$) significantly impact overall brand equity. However, perceived quality ($\beta = 0.075, p = 0.159$) and brand awareness ($\beta = 0.074, p = 0.112$) do not have a significant impact. The model explains 56.2% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.562, F = 94.803, p < 0.000$), suggesting that brand loyalty and brand association are the strongest contributors to brand equity.

Table 4. Dimensions of Brand Equity: Multiple Regression Analysis
 Dependent Variable: Overall Brand Equity

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-3.205	0.834	-	-3.843	0.000
	Perceived Quality	0.102	0.072	0.075	1.413	0.159
	Brand Loyalty	0.356	0.042	0.460	8.510	0.000
	Brand Association	0.297	0.061	0.264	4.830	0.000
	Brand Awareness	0.097	0.061	0.074	1.594	0.112

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Sig.
1	0.750 ^a	0.562	0.557	94.803	0.000

The results of hypotheses H1, H2, H3 and H4 are given in Table 5.

Table 5. Hypotheses Testing of Brand Equity dimensions to overall brand equity

No.	Statement of Hypotheses	Result
H1	Brand awareness has a significant positive influence on overall brand equity in the food and beverage industry (Café) in Saudi Arabia.	Rejected
H2	Brand association has a significant positive influence on overall brand equity in the food and beverage industry (Café) in Saudi Arabia	Accepted
H3	Brand loyalty has a significant positive influence on overall brand equity in the food and beverage industry (Café) in Saudi Arabia.	Accepted
H4	Perceived quality has a significant positive influence on overall brand equity in the food and beverage industry (Café) in Saudi Arabia.	Rejected

Regression results (Table 6) show a significant relationship between overall brand equity and consumer response ($\beta = 0.621$, $p < 0.000$), confirming H5. The model explains 38.6% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.386$, $F = 187.49$, $p < 0.000$). The result of hypothesis H5 is shown in Table 7.

Table 6. Overall Brand Equity: Multiple Regression Analysis
 Dependent Variable: Consumer response

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	58.847	2.520	-	23.355	0.000
	Overall Brand Equity	2.928	0.214	0.621	13.693	0.000

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Sig.
1	0.621	0.386	0.384	187.49	0.000

Table 7. Hypothesis Testing of Overall Brand Equity to Consumer Response

No.	Statement of Hypotheses	Result
H5	Overall brand equity, which encompasses the cumulative positive effects of brand awareness, brand association, brand loyalty, and perceived quality, can significantly influence consumer response in the food and beverage industry (Café) in Saudi Arabia.	Accepted

The findings confirm that brand loyalty and brand association significantly contribute to overall brand equity, while brand awareness and perceived quality do not have a direct impact. These results align with previous studies [19][38]. The significant role of brand loyalty is supported by research by Tu & Chang [22], which found that customer satisfaction and brand image enhance loyalty in coffee chains. Similarly, Wu emphasized the importance of effective brand experiences in fostering loyalty [23]. Moreover, the study confirms that overall brand equity strongly influences consumer response, supporting research by Cobb-Walgren et al. [31] and Chang & Liu [47], which found that higher brand equity leads to stronger purchase intentions and brand preference. These insights highlight the need for Saudi cafés to prioritize brand loyalty and association strategies, such as personalized customer experiences, loyalty programs, and strong brand positioning, to strengthen consumer engagement and market competitiveness.

4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are provided to guide café owners and managers in Saudi Arabia in strengthening brand equity, influencing consumer responses, and ultimately driving brand preference and purchase intentions.

4.1 Cultivating Brand Loyalty

The findings of this research confirm that brand loyalty and brand association significantly impact overall brand equity. Saudi consumers are willing to buy from their favorite cafés, even at a slightly higher price than competitors, which aligns with Ting and Thursamy's findings in Malaysia, where consumers are willing to pay a premium if they perceive added value [48]. Furthermore, Saudi consumers are likely to recommend their favourite cafés to friends, supporting Kandampully & Suhartanto's research that loyal customers tend to repurchase and actively promote brands [49]. While this study shows that Saudi customers are loyal to their preferred brands, local cafés must leverage this loyalty effectively. As suggested by Faridi & Naushad [50], local businesses should optimize operational and strategic efficiency to improve business performance.

The survey results indicate that Saudi consumers will continue patronizing their favorite cafés if they provide high-quality and satisfying products. Loyalty programs, personalized services, and consistent delivery of high-quality coffee and experiences can strengthen brand loyalty in Saudi Arabia. This aligns with Kurnianingsih and Riorini's emphasis on personalized services and high-quality experiences fostering customer loyalty [51].

4.2 Strengthening Brand Association

Dhar and Sherman found that uniqueness strengthens brand associations, enhancing brand equity [52]. This study confirms that Saudi consumers perceive their favorite cafés as having a unique brand image compared to competitors. The findings align with Aaker's assertion that brand association gives consumers strong reasons to choose a specific brand [53]. Additionally, Saudi consumers admire people who visit their favorite cafés. To strengthen brand association, café owners should identify the key attributes that resonate most with Saudi customers—whether it be social engagement, quality, innovation, marketing, or ambiance. As Keller [11] and Puspaningrum [19] emphasize, factors such as diverse product offerings, unique pricing, atmosphere, and brand attributes play a critical role in brand positioning.

Furthermore, social media marketing, traditional advertising, and brand co-creation strategies should be leveraged to maintain strong brand association [13][38]. Yoo et al. also emphasize the positive relationship between brand association and customer loyalty, suggesting that stronger associations enhance brand equity [42].

4.3 Monitoring and Improving Consumer Response

The study reveals a strong preference among Saudi consumers for their favorite cafés, reinforcing previous research on brand loyalty and customer retention [49][51]. Additionally, Saudi consumers perceive coffee from their favorite café as a wise decision, indicating a strong brand association with value and positive outcomes. This aligns with Dhar & Sherman's [52] and Aaker's [53] research, highlighting the importance of strong brand associations and differentiation in creating competitive advantages. However, overloading consumers with excessive differentiating factors may be counterproductive [54][55]. Instead, brands should focus on key attributes that align with consumer preferences. Given the significant correlation between overall brand equity and consumer response [21][56], continuous monitoring and feedback collection are essential. Café owners should implement strategies such as:

- Ongoing customer feedback surveys
- Qualitative and quantitative consumer research
- Regular assessments of brand equity metrics [57]

Further research should explore perceived quality dimensions (cognitive, sensory, and behavioral) and their influence on brand equity [6][21]. By actively listening to customers and implementing data-driven improvements, cafés in Saudi Arabia can enhance customer loyalty and brand preference.

4.4 Implementing Differentiation Strategies for Local Cafés

The study found that Saudi consumers prefer Dunkin' Donuts over local brands, suggesting that local café owners must adopt differentiation strategies to compete effectively. Differentiation can enhance brand equity by focusing on product innovation, unique branding, or exclusive promotions. Maspul suggests that staying informed about industry trends and being agile in adapting to market changes are essential for maintaining competitiveness [58]. Rashid et al. propose that cafés should offer more than just coffee, transforming into multifunctional spaces catering to various interests [59]. Potential differentiation strategies include:

- Creating spaces for business meetings, social gatherings, and study sessions
- Incorporating book corners, entertainment zones, or relaxing outdoor patios
- Hosting events and collaborations with local artists and influencers

By providing a unique and immersive experience, local cafés can attract a broader customer base and strengthen their brand presence in the Saudi market.

4.5 Exploring Alternative Strategies for Brand Awareness and Perceived Quality

While existing literature suggests that brand awareness and perceived quality positively influence brand equity [42], this study found no significant impact in the Saudi café industry. This indicates that alternative strategies are needed to enhance these dimensions. Although Kim and Kim found that brand awareness had the smallest effect on brand equity, they noted that it had the strongest direct impact on revenues [43]. Similarly, Aaker suggests that customers compare brands based on perceived quality, especially when a product offers a unique service or superior quality [1]. Moreover, product quality and service excellence are crucial factors in fostering customer loyalty, as they shape brand perceptions and influence long-term customer engagement [60]. Additionally, customer preferences in café consumption extend beyond product offerings to include brand image and overall experience, further emphasizing the need for a holistic approach to brand equity development [61]. To enhance brand equity beyond brand awareness and perceived quality, café owners can:

- Introduce specialty drinks, exclusive menu items, or innovative service elements [19].
- Investigate moderating factors such as customer demographics, café type (specialty cafés, casual dining, local vs. international), and social media engagement [38].
- Strengthen community engagement efforts, including partnerships with local organizations and sponsorship of community events [62].

By implementing these strategies, Saudi cafés can differentiate themselves in the competitive market and enhance brand equity effectively.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This study confirms that overall brand equity, which comprises brand awareness, brand association, brand loyalty, and perceived quality, significantly influences consumer responses in the Saudi Arabian café industry. Maintaining strong brand equity is crucial for a company's success, as it fosters long-term customer relationships and establishes loyalty as a competitive advantage. Coffee shop owners should prioritize strategies that enhance brand loyalty and association, as these dimensions have shown the strongest impact on overall brand equity. Building on Aaker's brand equity theory, this research highlights the importance of brand loyalty, awareness, association, and perceived quality in shaping brand value. Additionally, the study confirms that overall brand equity positively influences consumer responses, specifically purchase intention and brand preference.

These findings emphasize the need for cafés to strengthen their brand positioning and deliver consistent quality to attract and retain customers. To further improve the validity and applicability of these findings, future research should consider the following:

1. Expanding the Geographic Scope – This study focuses on Hail City; extending research to other regions of Saudi Arabia would provide a more comprehensive understanding of brand equity in the café industry.
2. Incorporating Qualitative Research – While this study employs quantitative methods, integrating qualitative techniques (such as interviews and focus groups) would offer deeper insights into consumer motivations and brand perceptions.
3. Diversifying the Sample Demographics – The current study primarily includes young adults aged 18-24. Future research should include older demographics, particularly those with greater knowledge of coffee quality and brand perception, to broaden insights and enhance the study's relevance.

By addressing these areas, future studies can provide a more holistic perspective on brand equity and offer valuable strategic insights for businesses in the food and beverage industry.

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ETHICS STATEMENT

This study did not involve human or animal subjects and, therefore, did not require ethical approval.

STATEMENT OF CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare no conflicts of interest related to this study.

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