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Drivers of Consumer Based Brand Equity (CBBE) Of E-Tailers - A Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) Approach

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ABSTRACT

Consumer Based Brand Equity (CBBE) is a construct that unlocks various avenues of value creation. Given the kind of rivalry that one can witness in E-tailing space, value creation is a bulwark through which a player in this space can not only defend its position but also thinking of expanding its market share. Here, the researcher, by constructing a model, tries to find out dynamics between various marketing activities and their impact on CBBE. The ultimate focus of this research is to find out the marketing activities that exert significant impact on the brand equity. Hereby, the researcher would also like to know whether a marketing activity, in any way, influences other marketing activity. The model which is used in the research considers marketing activities of E-Tailers like Functionality, Fulfillment, Customer Service & Support,

Perceived Advertisement Spending and Price Deals as factors of prediction and CBBE as its outcome variable. By constructing this model and trying to fit this model with the collected data, the researcher attempts to discover how these factors help E-tailers to create and offer value to consumers. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) is used to test the model.

Key Words: Consumer Based Brand Equity (CBBE), E-Tailing, Drivers (Marketing Activities), Structural Equation Modelling (SEM).

Introduction

E-tailing is selling of goods and services via electronic media, particularly through the internet, and facilitating exchange of detailed information between buyers and sellers. E-tailing includes business communications and transmissions over networks and through computers, specifically for the buying and selling of goods and services, and for the transfer of funds through digital communications (Hutt & Speh, 2004). The size of the India E-tailing market in 2016 was USD 16.8 billion. It is expected to grow at a CAGR (Compound Annual Growth Rate) of 44.77% from 2016-2020 to touch USD 63.7 billion by 2020. (IBEF, 2017). The Internet users in India are expected to increase at CAGR of 15.6% from 432 million at the end of 2016 to 700 million by 2020. This huge increase in the Internet penetration is expected to propel the growth of E-tailing. The above mentioned scenario portrays that E-tailing will sustain itself as a viable business opportunity not only for established companies in this space but also even for start-ups. It is well proved fact that higher the internet penetration among the population more the possibility of rapid growth in E-tailing. The Indian Government's initiatives like Digital India are continuously exposing people to online modes of commerce. As the usage of the Internet is increasing, E-tailing will attract more people into its fold. The people from the various walks of life viz. sellers, buyers, users, investors will be accustomed to online mode of commerce. With favorable FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) policies, increasing FDI inflows, domestic investment, and support from key industrial players are driving the growth of the Indian E-tailing market. Out of 444 million Indian urban population, 269 million (60%) are using the internet as of 2016. Whereas, out of 906 million Indian rural population, only 163 million (17%) are the internet users. Hence, there is a great opportunity for increasing internet penetration in the rural areas. The younger generations are the most prolific users of the internet, in urban as well as in rural India. In the backdrop of these facts, the penetration of online retail in India into the total retail market is expected to rise from 2.5% in 2016 to 5% by 2020. In terms of Gross Merchandise Value (GMV), the worth of the Indian E-tailing market is around USD 12 billion as of 2016. Electronics is the largest segment with a share of 47% and is expected to grow at a CAGR of 43% by 2020 and it is followed by the apparel segment whose share is 31%. Presently, in E-tailing, 1-1.2 million transactions are happened per day. As of 2017, there are about 100 million on line shoppers and this number is expected to go up to 175 million by 2020. The National youth policy 2014, defines 'youth' as persons belong to the age group of 15-29 years. According to 2011 census, the size of the Indian youth population is 42.2 Crores which constitutes around 34.8% of the total population. According to a population projection by World Bank, by 2021, the size of the youth population would be around 47.9 Crores which constitute 34.1% of the total population. Major chunk of the online consumers belong to this group. The availability of the internet content in vernacular languages, rapid growth in demand from non-metro cities, growth in mobile commerce thanks to rise in smartphone usage, proliferation of cashless transactions and growth of logistics and warehousing facilities are putting the E-tailing business on the sustainable growth trajectory. If one invokes the Porter's (2008) five forces framework to analyze the E-tailing market, the following insights can be drawn: Competition among major players is very high, as there is no switching cost for customers. The players are constantly competing on the basis of price as well as other factors that influence consumers' choice like offers, customer service, etc., Threat of new entrants to the market is very high, as there is not much cost involved in launching an E-tailing website. As there are a lot of sellers with similar products and services and there is no switching cost for customers, threat of substitutes is very high in this market. There are many suppliers for the E-tailing market. Hence, the companies have the power to choose their suppliers. Therefore, the bargaining power of suppliers is low. There are many players in the market with similar products and there is no switching cost for the consumers. Consumers prefer the company that offers the best price among other ancillary services. Therefore, the bargaining power of consumers are very high in this market. The above given analysis shows the importance of giving unassailable value to consumers by a player in this market to build a sustainable business. Building Brand Equity, particularly, Consumer Based Brand Equity (CBBE) is a sure and sustainable way to give value to customers which in turn make the companies not only fending off the competition effectively but also carving a favorable niche in consumers' mind. In this context, this study traces various marketing efforts (drivers) of online shopping companies and their relative impact on the CBBE.

Table No: 1
Definitions of Brand Equity in the Context of E-Tailing

Sl. No	Name of the Author	Year	Definition of Brand Equity
1	Carpenter	2000	Set of assets and liabilities linked to that brand that can add or subtract additional value to the product or service.
2	Page and Lepkowskawhite	2002	Web equity: Consumer familiarity and perceptions about dot.com's website
3	Christodoulides and de Chernatony	2004	A set of associations and behaviours on the part of brand's consumers, channel members and parent corporation that enables a brand to earn greater volume or greater margins that it

			could without the brand name and, in addition, provides a strong, sustainable and differential advantage
4	Argyriou, Kitchen and Melewar	2005	The differential response by consumers, customers, employees, other firms, or any relevant constituency to the words, actions, communications, products or services provided by an identified corporate brand entity.
5	Na & Marshall	2005	Cyber brand power relates to the likelihood of online customers using a particular site because of its particular configuration of relevant evaluation criteria
6	Srinivasan, Park and Chang	2005	The incremental ($) contribution/ year obtained by the brand in comparison to the same product (or service) at the same price but with no brand-building efforts.

Review of Literature

Heeter (2000) defined functionality as the website design elements that make the interaction a fun and enjoyable web experience. Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Malhotra (2002) and Dabholkar (1996) were in the opinion that functionality included website design, ease of use and ease of navigation. Choate (2000) stipulated that it was all about quality of the order process. Berry (2000) and Ranganathan and Shobha Ganapathy (2002) posited that functionality could exert greater impact on brand awareness and loyalty. Page and Lepkowska-White (2002) through their research established that a good web experience included the existence of the following factors: Storing of shopper's credit card & shipping information and facilitating subsequent purchases with easiness and swiftness. To create interest for a shopping website, its navigation must be easy (Leung, 2003). Chou and Lin (1998), Chang, Wang and Yang (2009) and Trumbull and Gay(1992) came to the conclusion that the way to create value to consumers through the functionality of a website was to provide navigation aids on a shopping website as it could reduce cognitive load, searching steps and confusion for shoppers. Piccoli et al (2004) reported that if the design of a shopping website had functioned as per the expectations of consumers, it would have made them more loyal to that shopping site. The studies did by Yoo and Donthu (2001), Wolfinbarger and Gilly (2003) and Roy, Dewit and Aubert (2001) validated the above relationship reported by Piccoli et al (2004). Gummerus et al., (2004), Chau et al., (2006), Pennanen, Tiainen and Luomala (2007) by conducting interviews with online shoppers stumbled upon a fact that consumers would repose trust on the website based on quality of its functionality as it indicated, from the perspective of consumers, competence of the shopping site's business. According to Maltz, Rabinovich and Sinha (2005) fulfilment was about the delivery related aspects of the purchasing process. From the perspective of online shoppers (Gronroos, 1996) fulfilment meant that delivery of the product as promised by an online business. Ariely and Carmon (2000) observed that the repeat purchase or loyalty of an online shopper based on the last part of the (delivery) shopping experience that he/she had previously with that shopping website. Tarn et al (2003) posited that a good delivery or fulfilment was important to have a strong positive association with a shopping site in the minds of consumers and it brought about the loyalty also. If there was fulfilment related problems that could eventually precipitate into customer dissatisfaction and mistrust. Realizing this fact that some online shopping companies (Pitta, Franzak and Fowler, 2006) had come up with certain levels of service guarantee. Wolfinbarger and Gilly (2003) declared that customer's satisfaction, loyalty and positive attitude toward a shopping website were strongly decided by the factors like website design, fulfilment, privacy, security and customer service. McCole (2002) said that fulfilment was a strong determinant in creating trust and loyalty. Brodie, Glynn and Little (2006), Gronroos (1996), Davis, Buchanan-Oliver and Brodie (2000) argued that fulfilment aspect of an online shopping company was a source of striking a long lasting relationship with consumers and creating value for consumers and companies. Kim and Stoel (2005) defined customer service as a business's ability to meet consumers' needs and wants. They emphasised that an alternative way of supporting consumers throughout the different stages of the purchasing process was necessary. Links to FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions), toll free numbers were useful assistance to customers in the process. Gommans, Krishnan and Scheffold (2001) found that customer service and support indeed reduced the insecurity among consumers whenever they bought over the internet. With a solid support of their research, Pitta, Franzak and Fowler (2006) posited that for an online shopping company to create a lasting bond with its customers by reducing the barriers to trust and create loyalty was to dispel doubts of customers through an easily contactable real person through E-mail, Toll free numbers, etc., Past researches showed that there was a significant relationship among online loyalty, purchase intention, trust, satisfaction and customer service & support (Kim and Lee, 2006), Tih and Ennis(2006), Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Malhotra (2002) and Gummerus et al (2004). Tariq et al. (2014) found that advertising was successful in generating brand equity. Cobb-Walgreen, Beal and Donthu (1995) came to the insight that the dollar amount spent on advertisements had positive effects on brand equity and its various dimensions. Kirmani and Wright (1989) posited that heavy advertising spending showed that the firm was investing in the brand which in turn denoted superior quality. Aaker and Jacobson (1994) found a positive relationship between advertising and perceived quality which ultimately led to higher brand equity. Birger Wernerfelt, John Hauser (1990) established that advertisements played an important role in increasing brand awareness and creating strong brand associations. Villarejo–Ramos, Sanchez-Franco (2005) in their research on the impact of marketing communication and price promotion on brand equity found that price deals as incentives to induce sales proved to have a negative effect on brand equity. Shimp (1997) opined that frequent price deals did not establish a long term brand associations. Gupta (1988) explained that though price deals were found to increase temporary brand switching it did not consider to be related to brand loyalty. Yoo, Donthu and Lee (2000) conducted a study on brand equity and described the concept in terms of the distinction in consumer choice among a branded and an unbranded product or service, amidst similar characteristics. The difference was measured through the intention to purchase or preferring the brand in comparison to the sale of an unbranded product. A high equity showed that customers had positive and strong association pertaining to the brand. They also remained loyal to the particular brand due to the perception of high quality. They considered the influence of five marketing mix drivers in three product categories viz. camera film, athletic shoes and colour TV. The drivers of brand equity (marketing mix) were store image, price, spending on advertisement, distribution intensity and price deals promotions. Each driver was studied to find its influence on brand equity sources viz. brand awareness, association, quality and loyalty. Their results revealed that good store image, high price, high intensity distribution and high advertising image influenced perception of quality by consumers about awareness, loyalty and quality. The drivers were significant in the incidental influence on brand equity. Lower level of brand equity was related with price promotions such as price deals done often by the companies. Frequent price deals also had negative impact on quality perception of customers.

Carpenter (2000) took six online businesses for his study to distil best practices in that business. He posited that proper application of E-Commence branding principles were responsible for online success. The online businesses he took for his study were: iVillage, CDNow, Barnsandnoble.com, Yahoo!, Onsale and FogdogSports. He suggested nine practices to build a strong online brand. They were: Marketing tactics like advertising, guerrilla marketing and public relations should be used to the hilt to create wide spread brand awareness, by devising ingenious loyalty programs and creating online consumer communities, the company could make a close contact with the customer and subsequently cultivate customer commitment, by cultivating win-win relationship with suppliers and Internet portals, by gaining the first mover advantage as quickly as possible, by understanding needs and wants of consumers ,with a view to closely understand consumers, by knowing ways in which consumers interact with brands and the website, by continuously adding and delivering value to customers and all other stake holders of the business, by respecting core brand elements, by coming up with a unique online version of an offline product and by striking a synergy between offline and online versions of a business. Dayal, Landersberg and Zeisser (2000) they equated positive brand equity outcomes with success of online branding. The factors like Web experience, personality, presence, value and performance were considered as sources of CBBE. They proposed the following as drivers of the brand equity: Promises made to consumers, web-design to fulfil those promises and an economic model required to earn profit. The study found that the Internet and its enormous capabilities were mainly responsible for building a strong online brand. Hence, by properly utilizing the capabilities of the Internet, online companies should give, right from visiting shopping websites, searching and comparing products, ordering and delivery of products, seamless experience to consumers. The combination of personality, presence and performance would ensure a good online shopping experience for customers and that ultimately led to positive brand equity outcomes.

Statement of the Research Problem

E-tailing market is one of the dynamic segments in the organized retailing of India. Hundreds of shopping sites vying for consumers' attention. Shopping sites with varying focus and business models are quite common in the market. Right from shopping sites offering various types of products to sites offering some specialized products like furniture exist in this market. The favorable government policies, rapid advancements in technology enable any person to start an online business without much initial outlay. Increased Internet penetration, enhanced online security measures, convenience of shopping in lives pressed for time and scores of retailers to choose from are a few factors that attract huge number of consumers to shop online. Around 75% of Indian internet users belong to the age category of 15-34 years.

The National Youth Policy, 2014, defines this group as 'Youth'. This category shops online more than the remaining population. Peer pressure, career growth with its concomitant high aspirations and acute sense of fashion encourage this segment to shop more than any other category in India. With this scenario, companies in this market have to face intense rivalry. Creating a sustainable business in the E-tailing segment is quite a daunting task. Unless a shopping site provides value, on continuous basis, to its customers, it cannot win over hearts and minds of them. A Consumer Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model that connects marketing efforts of these companies to the brand equity is a need of the hour as it shows the path to discover many ways to create value to consumers. Therefore building and sustaining online brand equity creates extra value to companies and improves marketing productivity by bringing about an understanding of consumer behavior in relation to the brand equity. The core focus of this research study is to explain the dynamics between various marketing efforts and the brand equity by building a model that connects these forces. The respondents for this study were taken from the very group that is actually responsible for accelerating the growth of the E-tailing market - youth segment. There is a belief that the main principles of how to develop the brand remains the same on the Internet (Rubinstein and Griffith, 2001) and that the Internet would make brands relevant as consumers would have a costless access to lot of information about product characteristics , including prices that tend to convert products into commodities (Bowen & Chen 2001). The limited amount of research on E-tailing sites and their impact on brand equity suggests that the Internet is not eliminating the power of the brand and that companies operating on the web need to differentiate even more given the large number of online companies. Lynch and Ariely (2000) found that consumers pay a premium for wines that are differentiated even if it was offered in the Internet. Smith, Bailey and Brynjolfsson (2000) discovered that consumers were willing to pay a premium price of 6.8% even for commodity products such as books and CDs when they bought from well-known E-tailing shopping sites like Amazon.com rather than other unfamiliar sites. The Internet, although a distinctive way of conducting business, has not invalidated conventional economic principles and may still affect product brands similarly, online and offline (Koch and Cebula, 2002). The significance of an online brand name has been confirmed (Strauss, Schoder and Gebauer, 2001) in a pan-European study where 71% of respondents who are ready to buy cars online consider the brand name to be important. Murphy (1992) conducted a census of the world's top brands to understand the value of domain names as a contributor to brand equity. Page and Lepkowska-White (2002) developed a theoretical framework to measure brand equity for online companies which they called web equity. The framework assumes that brand equity resides in two dimensions, namely image and awareness of the brand, and propose loyalty as an outcome of web equity. Ilfeld and Winer (2002) determined the factors that drive brand equity in the Internet space. They conceptualized brand equity as preference for the website. Brand equity was hypothesized to be driven by loyalty, quality, advertising and website visits the results show that an individual's Internet browsing behavior is best captured by a process involving awareness, then action (website visit) and finally effect (brand equity or preference). The most significant factor in building brand equity was website visits. Marketing activities such as advertising and publicity only produced an increase in brand equity through awareness and website visits. This study provided useful insight about the value of marketing efforts. The online businesses are mainly services and in such type of business "the source of the experience is the locus of brand formation" (Berry, 2000). In the Internet environment the company's website is the experience (Dayal, Landersberg and Zeisser, 2000; Taylor et al, 2007), which is different from the experience a consumer has in offline business environment where they can interact with people rather than technology. Brand equity would have some specific and differentiated drivers for online retail brands like the website design and wider product assortment among other features (Page and Lepkowska-White 2002). Given that the online businesses are mainly intangible and that it is difficult for a consumer to judge them from tangible cues, an association with trust must be created. Trust plays a critical role in this type of business and much more than with offline businesses where consumers can interact with physical tangible features to infer trust (Berry 2000). The aforementioned past research outcomes show that there is a dearth of a comprehensive study on the online brand equity that analyses the drivers and their interactions and their impact on the brand equity, particularly in Indian context.

The Research Gap Addressed by this Study

There is a dearth of a comprehensive study on Consumer Based Brand Equity (CBBE) of E-tailers in the Indian context. Given the significance of service component in the entire process of online shopping, virtually there is no comprehensive study that connects various drivers their dynamics and their impact on the CBBE. This research attempts to address this research gap.

Figure 1
The Research Framework
Drivers and Brand Equity – Covariance & Regression Path

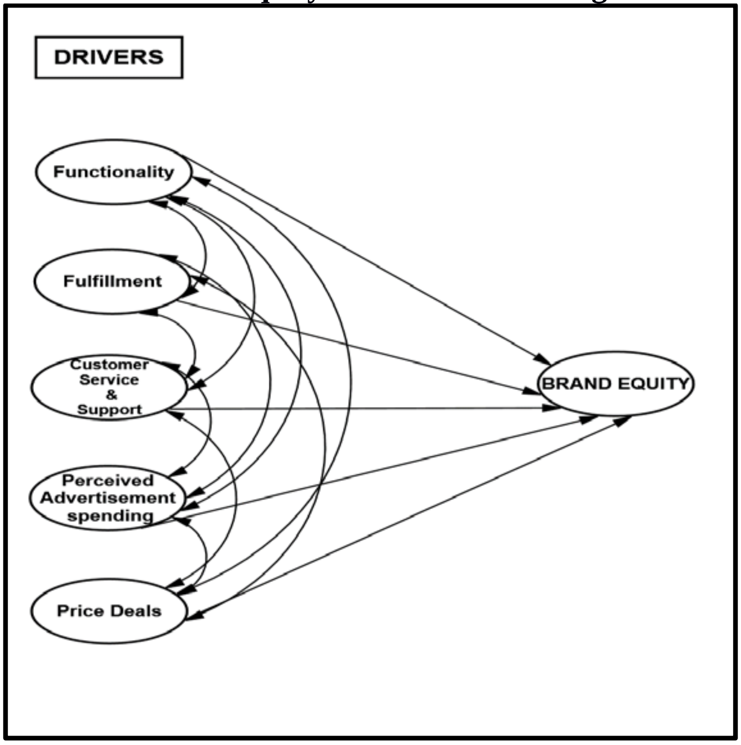

Table No: 2
Drivers of Brand Equity – Definitions

Sl. No	Name of the Driver of Brand Equity	Definition
1	Functionality	Ease with which a viewer can navigate a shopping site and obtain the information he/she is seeking. (Urvashi Tandon, Ravi Kiran, Ash N Sah, 2015)
2	Fulfillment	The steps involved in receiving, processing and delivering order to end customers. (Steve Bulger, 2017)
3	Customer Service & Support	It is a strategy for providing customer service to customers on online stores. It is delivered via a call centre, live chat, E-mail and other channels. It is resulted in more loyal customers, better conversion rate and an advantage over competitors.(zendesk,2017)
4	Perceived Advertisement Spending	Consumer perception of advertising frequency and expenditure.(Ha et al.2011, Hameed,2013)
5	Price Deals	A temporary reduction in the price. It is a Short term technique designed to achieve short term objectives, such as to stimulate a purchase, encourage shopping site traffic and build excitement for a product or brand. (Boonghee Yoo, Naveen Donthu, Sungho Lee, 2000)

Research Questions

- Which brand equity drivers have stronger effect on brand equity relatively?
- How do selected marketing efforts (drivers) contribute to create brand equity? (Drivers: customer service, web functionality, fulfilment, Perceived Advertisement spending, Price Deals)

Statement of Hypotheses

H1: There is a significant interaction among the drivers of Brand Equity
H2: Functionality affects Brand Equity
H3: Fulfillment affects Brand Equity
H4: Customer Service & Support affect Brand Equity
H5: Perceived Advertisement spending affects Brand Equity
H6: Price Deals affect Brand Equity

Need for the Study

In this dynamic technology driven era, E-tailing companies are also not exempted from competition. They need to continuously be updated and attract customers to be ahead in the race. They have automatic global presence irrespective of markets as the business is online and across all categories of products and services. Traditional business challenges are applicable to E-tailing firms also in terms of marketing efforts, customer retention, value added services, product or service offerings, discounts, bundle offers, low pricing, advertisements and usage of productive marketing strategies. Customer Based Brand Equity is a dynamic concept and keeps on changing with constantly changing technological developments. The way of handling customer activities also plays a major role in building brand value and equity for the online brands. There is an increasing need for an ongoing marketing framework to keep the websites updated and convenient thus make them work better than their competitors. This can help them to manage turbulent changes and crisis situations so that they can respond well ahead of their counterparts in all marketing aspects. All this, evidently, leads to the fact that today's E-tailers have to become real marketing focused organizations with holistic strategies in all aspects to build a sustainable customer base to combat competition. It is in this context; the present study is carried out with a broader aim of exploring the applicability of Customer Based Brand Equity concept in the E-tailing industry by taking into account perceptions of students who pursue MBA at business schools in Coimbatore city about various aspects of online shopping business. As majority of online shopping consumers belong to the youth category and MBA students represent well–

informed section of the youth population, this group was considered for sampling. A systematic study on the Brand Equity drivers and the effect of various marketing factors for websites dealing with multiple products and services and the related areas will enable the researcher to suggest practical means for creating better websites and design of marketing efforts for the E-tailing industry. There were not many studies found on the practical application of Brand equity concept in the literature. The earlier studies on E-tailing industry also lack emphasis on their detailed marketing processes. E-tailers need a dedicated marketing workforce to deal with competition and branding issues especially the drivers for effective operations. It helps in devising suitable strategies in specific areas of marketing by knowing the lacunae. Hence this study is taken up on the Brand Equity drivers in the E-tailing industry. It identifies and analyses the applicability of Brand Equity model in the market and drivers of Brand Equity of the E-tailers. It is worthwhile to investigate the various drivers of the brand equity of these companies since they should become the part of good brand equity promoting organizations which ultimately make them sustainably successful in the competitive market. This industry is chosen for study as the need for the development of brand equity is higher than earlier in this era of hyper competition and the firms have to make their marketing work better and faster than their competitors to survive and grow in business.

Scope of the Study

This study analyses the interactions of drivers of brand equity of E-tailers and their impact on the brand equity. They will understand how various marketing efforts contribute to the brand equity. As nurturing and sustaining the brand equity is an assured way to provide value to customers and build strong brands, online retailers, with a help of this study would gain essential insights about these aspects. By poring over this report, the persons from academic fraternity, management students, brand managers will understand Indian E-tailing market scenario, brand equity and its importance and drivers of brand equity of online shopping companies, their interactions and their impact on the brand equity, the ways and means to build a strong online brand, create and nurture a sustainable online business by giving unique value to customers through the brand equity.

Research Objectives

- To identify marketing efforts (drivers) that have stronger effect on Brand Equity.
- To examine the interaction among the drivers of the brand equity.
- To offer suggestions to E-tailers to improve their Brand Equity.

Research Methodology

This research is descriptive in nature. This study took students, pursuing their MBA at business schools in and around Coimbatore city which were affiliated to Bharathiar University, Coimbatore, as its respondents. The term 'business schools' includes all types of MBA institutions, viz. standalone business schools, business schools within the college campus and MBA departments in affiliated colleges. According to details given in the website (www.b-u.ac.in) of Bharathiar University, Coimbatore, there are 16 aided colleges and 88 self-financing colleges affiliated to the university. Among them, there are 23 business schools which are located in and around Coimbatore city. In these business schools, there were 3600 students pursuing their MBA. Therefore, the size of the population for this study was: 3600. The data were collected over a year, during the period of January 2018 to December 2018. Area of the study was confined to Coimbatore (Tamil Nadu, India) city, as business schools are located in various areas in and around the city. In the light of this clearly defined population size, the researcher decided to fix a requisite sample size by using a formula provided by Mr. Taro Yamane. In his book "*Statistics, An Introductory Analysis*" (Taro Yamane, 1967), he proposed the following formula to determine the sample size for a study when the population size was clearly known:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where n is the sample size, N is the population size, and e is the level of precision. By substituting the population size of 3600, @ a 96% confidence level, with value of e = 0.04, in the formula, the requisite sample size was arrived, which stood at 530. Therefore, the sample size for this study was: 530. To collect sample elements, the researcher adopted Multistage sampling method, one of the probability sampling techniques. The sample included 345 male students and 185 female students from different social class backgrounds. In this study, a survey, one of the methods to collect primary data, was adopted to collect the data. The study used a structured questionnaire as the data collection instrument. Based on the review of various research articles on brand equity and discussions with brand equity experts, this part of the questionnaire was designed. The drivers are: Functionality (4 items), Fulfillment (4 items), Customer Service & Support (4 items), and Perceived Advertisement spending (7 items) and Price Deals (7 items). A five point Likert scaling technique, one of the non-comparative itemized rating scaling techniques, ranging from "Strongly Agree = 5", "Agree =

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4”, “Neither Agree nor Disagree = 3”, “Disagree = 2” to “Strongly Disagree = 1” was used to measure these items.

Limitations of the Study

- The study was done in the context of Indian E-tailing market and the findings cannot be generalized to other markets.
- The respondents were drawn from the group of students who pursue their MBA at business schools in Coimbatore city. Though this group represents the youth segment of Indian population, as it does not include other segments of online buyers, the results of this study can be generalized only to this group of the population.
- The sampling elements for the survey were drawn by using multistage sampling procedure and the researcher has used the questionnaire as a tool for the collection of primary data, other methods like focus group, in-depth interviews, and discussion forum have not been used. Hence, due to these factors, the generalizability of the study is limited.

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to know dynamics among the drivers of brand equity and their impact on the brand equity through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA):

Table No: 3
The Model Goodness –Of-Fit Statistics

Sl. No	Name of Fit Statistics	Value of the Default Model	Acceptable Range of Values	Description
1	**CFI** (Comparative Fit Index)	0.899	Range from 0-1 with values close to 1 being indicative of good fit (McDonald and Marsh 1990)	Good fit of the model
2	**GFI** (Goodness of Fit Index)	0.946	Range from 0-1 with values close to 1 being indicative of good fit. (Joreskog and sorbom, 1993)	Good fit of the model
3	**AGFI** (Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index)	0.914	Range from 0-1 with values close to 1 being indicative of good fit. (Joreskog and sorbom, 1993)	Good fit of the model
4	**NFI** (Normed Fit Index)	0.950	Value more than 0.90 indicates a well-fitting model (Bentler, 1992)	Good fit of the model
5	**RMSEA** (Root Mean	0.044	RMSEA of about 0.05 or less would indicate a close fit of the	Good fit of the model

	Square Error of Approximation)		model. (Joreskog and sorbom, 1996)	

Figure No: 2
The Output Path Diagram

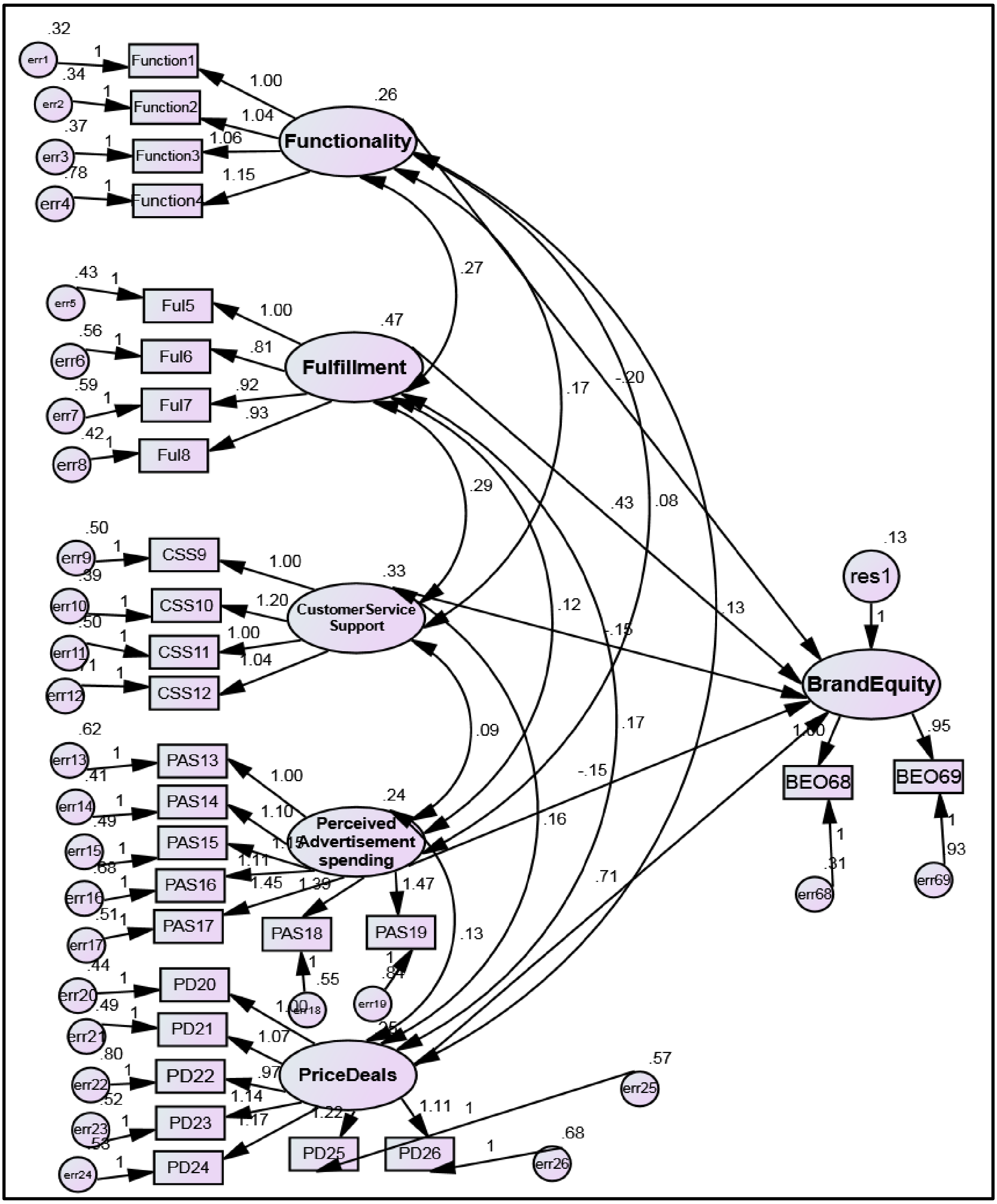

Table No: 4
Parameter Estimates

Direct Effect	Significance Value (r)	Standard Error	z Value	P value/ Indication	Rejection or the Confirmation of the hypothesis
Functionality <--> Price Deals	0.129	0.018	6.951	***	Confirmation
Functionality <--> Perceived Advertisement spending	0.082	0.016	5.071	***	Confirmation
Functionality <--> Customer Service & Support	0.169	0.022	7.516	***	Confirmation
Functionality <--> Fulfillment	0.267	0.029	9.283	***	Confirmation
Fulfillment <--> Price Deals	0.169	0.024	7.106	***	Confirmation
Fulfillment <--> Perceived Advertisement spending	0.119	0.022	5.529	***	Confirmation
Fulfillment <--> Customer Service & Support	0.285	0.032	8.837	***	Confirmation
Customer Service & Support <--> Price Deals	0.157	0.022	7.219	***	Confirmation
Customer Service & Support <--> Perceived Advertisement spending	0.089	0.018	4.943	***	Confirmation
Perceived Advertisement spending <--> Price Deals	0.126	0.019	6.741	***	Confirmation
Brand Equity <--- Functionality	0.198	0.134	1.474	0.141	Rejection
Brand Equity <--- Fulfillment	0.430	0.128	3.354	***	Confirmation
Brand Equity <---Customer Service & Support	0.149	0.115	1.298	0.194	Rejection
Brand Equity	0.154	0.083	1.842	0.065	Rejection

Direct Effect	Significance Value (r)	Standard Error	z Value	P value/ Indication	Rejection or the Confirmation of the hypothesis
<--- Perceived Advertisement spending					
Brand Equity <--- Price Deals	0.709	0.112	6.305	***	Confirmation

From the above table it is understood that the covariance among the drivers of online shopping companies are significant and positive. It implies that every driver impacts the other driver in a positive way. Hence, H_1 is accepted. The above table also reveals that in the back drop of interactions among the drivers of the brand equity, the direct effect of the Fulfillment on the Brand Equity is significant (r = 0.430, z = 3.354). Therefore, the H_3 is accepted. In this context, the direct effect of the price deals on the brand equity is also significant (r = 0.709, z = 6.305). Hence, the H_6 is accepted. The drivers, Functionality, Customer Service & Support and Perceived Advertisement spending do not exert a significant direct effect on the brand equity. In the light of this fact, one has enough reasons to reject the hypotheses H_2, H_4 and H_5.

Findings

The brand equity drivers like, 'Price Deals' and 'Fulfillment' are greatly contributing to the brand equity of online shopping companies. In the back drop of interactions among the drivers of the brand equity, the direct effect of the Fulfillment and price deals on the CBBE are significant. However, Functionality, Customer Service & Support and Perceived Advertisement spending do not exert a significant direct effect on the CBBE directly, in the light of the entire dynamics of interaction among the drivers.

Discussions and Suggestions

Online companies should always proactive enough to re-engineer their websites, then and there, as the technology evolves to improve user friendliness and customer data security. The website should be expansive enough to accommodate certain specialized features to provide a few customer centric services. Judicious deployment of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Virtual Reality (VR) will improve the quality of customer interface with the website. These technologies enable the online shopping companies to show their products to customers in three dimensional ways and suggest suitable products to customers based on their demographic, psychographic and behavioural profiles. Accessibility of the website through any mode, namely, desktop, mobile internet and mobile app will improve the functionality of the site. Innovation should be a buzzword for an online shopping company, as it makes them keeping tab on emerging technologies and grapping them at the first opportunity. Big data as well as meta data based Artificial Intelligence with 3D printing technologies will going to radically change the way in which online shopping transactions are done. The websites of online shopping companies should immediately imbibe these technologies, once they become a practical possibility. This pro-activeness will improve website functionality of online shopping companies manifold.

Effectiveness of fulfillment is the resultant effect of the presence of robust logistics system and effective supply chain management practices. As these things ensure efficient last-mile delivery, from the perspective of an online shopping company, these things go a long way in giving world class customer experience at the least possible cost. Drastic reduction in timeline being involved in Order-to-Payment (OTP) cycle, which increases satisfaction of customers, can be achieved by making the logistics system more agile and the supply chain sensitive to the varying and unpredictable nature of customers' demand. As mismatch between product description and the product that actually delivered leads to customer dissatisfaction, symbiosis between efficient logistics and supply chain system will ensure perfect match between product description and actual delivery of the product. Ensuring accessibility of the website through any mode, namely, desktop, mobile internet and mobile app, will help the company to interact with customers on real time basis like sending order confirmation through an e-mail or an SMS at once whenever an order is made, etc.

It makes sense for online shopping companies to implement content-led marketing extensively as a part of their Customer Service & Support initiatives. Customers today are not just seeking basic product related information like price and features, but also expecting deeper information about the product. For instance, a customer is more likely to buy products of a fashion site that gives him/her detailed information and guidance about what to wear for a party, including sample looks and a wide-ranging catalogue of garments, footwear and other accessories. Predictive algorithms is another one cutting edge tool that will come handy for the companies to offer customized services to customers. Recommender engines are based on this algorithm. It customizes recommendations for each customer based on his/her digital footprint. However, it requires extensive data about customers, the well established players, with their huge customer data base, can make a difference in this respect. By invoking one of the human psychological concepts, ‘Sunk Cost Fallacy’, the online shopping companies can not only create captive bunch of customers, but also it can give customer specific service and support. According to this fallacy, when a customer has spent money on something, there is every possibility, he/she will want to ensure that money is not going to be wasted and will have a greater inclination to spend. By aligning this concept, online shopping companies can offer annual subscription options for a nominal fee wherein customers can avail benefits like free shipping and other free customized value added services. As a part of customer service and support, apart from basic services like responding to queries of customers quickly, offering alternative customer supports like toll free numbers, interaction through e-mail, etc., online shopping companies should put in place a sound reverse logistics system to take back product returns. It is the most important grey area in customer support and service, addressing this with well-placed reverse logistics system will enhance the image of the company’s customer service and support manifold. By the same token, online shopping companies should ensure that there is no glitches in their payment gateways due to the failure of technology. Normally snags in this aspect will alienate even a loyal customer from the company. All in all, responding to customer queries and grievances and addressing them swiftly is the most important aspect of the customer service and support.

This research validates an age old wisdom, “Advertisements always pay off as long as it is being used creatively and sensibly”. It applies to online shopping companies also. Just because there are in the internet, it does not obviate online companies spending on advertisements. By and large, customers have a good opinion about the kind of advertisements run by online shopping companies in mainstream or mass media like newspapers and television channels. True to this legacy, with judicious media mix, online companies can go for Above The Line (ATL) and Below The Line (BTL) media to communicate to potential customers about their offer and the kind of value they give to customers. Prima facie, to create wide spread awareness and make customers to see value in their business, running advertisements optimally through ATL and BTL media is imperative. It is a sure bet to improve the CBBE of online companies. As far as, social media advertisements are concerned, on line shopping companies should follow a broad-based strategy. Instead of relying on one or two social media platforms, they should consider whole universe of them which includes Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, StumbleUpon, etc. It proves beneficial for online shopping companies as these social media platforms increasingly more aligned to help businesses derive value from their platforms through greater utilities and analytics. To maximize the effectiveness of the messaging in these platforms, online shopping companies should work on different strategies for varying customer segments and products. Now, mobile marketing as a channel of advertising is a practical possibility thanks to wide spread adoption of smartphones. Online shopping companies will surely gain by having a holistic approach where the web and mobile site is complemented with an app.

Going by the results of this study, price deals are proved to give value to customers. Customers are satisfied with the kind of price deals offered by online shopping companies. However, going by the findings of many past research studies on price deals & customer loyalty in online shopping context, though price deals are effective in increasing awareness about the website and Daily Active Users, when it comes to customer loyalty, it only brings about large number of spuriously loyal customers. These customers will switch their loyalty whenever they find better price deals in other online shopping companies. By and large, online shopping companies resort to price deals, despite it leads to cash burn and loss, to increase their customer base. In reality, instead of increasing stable customer base, it in fact encourages customer switching. To stem this rot, online shopping companies should find a trade-off among reducing the price (price deals), increasing the profit and retaining customers. To achieve this, they can consider Every Day Low Pricing (EDLP) strategy. According to this strategy, these companies can offer products at competitive prices and still they can earn decent profit. As EDLP makes these companies offer products, across all categories, at competitive prices, over a period of time, customers will realize the value of these offers and it ultimately increases their stickiness towards the site. To make EDLP practical possibility, they should reduce their cost of operations without compromising on quality with a help of cutting edge technology and highly streamlined logistics and supply chain management systems.

Conclusion:

Given the dynamic nature of Indian E-tailing, it is important for an E-tailer to improve and strengthen its CBBE. The kind of brand equity model adopted in this study unlocks a few nuances of CBBE of E-tailers. It analyses how possible marketing efforts, namely, functionality of websites, fulfillment, customer service & support, perceived advertisement spending and price deals, of these companies can build the CBBE. In E-tailing, winner is a one who has the base of large chunk of loyal customers. With a help of this study an E-tailer can genuinely solve problems of customers as they transact through its website, in the wake of this process, it can not only bring about 'customer satisfaction' but also make them lifelong customers of their business.

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