



Influence of Perceived Quality and Brand Awareness on Brand Loyalty: Examining the Mediating Role of Brand Trust Within Biscuit Industry in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

Building and managing consumer brand relationships to foster Brand Loyalty is a challenge for marketers. As Biscuit manufacturing is a major industry in Sri Lanka, it is essential to investigate the behavior of consumer brand relationships. Furthermore, identifying the influencing ability of Perceived Quality on Brand Loyalty is an emergent need in the biscuit industry in Sri Lanka since there is a growing trend of investments in quality improvements without investigating the effectiveness in terms of Brand Loyalty. By referring to relevant literature and accepted theories, the conceptual framework of this research is developed in order to examine the influence of Perceived Quality and Brand Awareness on Brand Loyalty. The research also examined the mediating effect of Brand Trust on the relationship between Perceived Quality and Brand Loyalty, as well as the relationship between Brand Awareness and Brand Loyalty. This research follows the deductive approach and cross-sectional time horizon. The study was carried out under quantitative strategy through survey method by using a structured questionnaire. Subsequent to the assurance of validity and reliability measures of the scale through the pilot study, 389 respondents contributed to the final data collection. The data were analyzed by using the multiple regression method. The results indicate that there is no significant positive influence of Perceived Quality on Brand Loyalty, while there is a significant positive influence of Brand Awareness on Brand Loyalty. Similarly, there is a significant positive influence of Brand Trust on Brand Loyalty. In addition, the results emphasize that there is a full mediation effect of Brand Trust on the impact of Perceived Quality on Brand Loyalty, while it engages in the impact of Brand Awareness on Brand

Loyalty as a partial mediation. This research contributes to the literature on consumer-brand relationships with empirical evidence from Sri Lanka. Further, this study provides direction for marketers in the Biscuit Industry to enhance Brand Loyalty to become competitive in the market.

Keywords: *Brand Awareness, Brand Loyalty, Brand Trust, Perceived Quality*

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1. INTRODUCTION

In Sri Lanka, FMCG reached US \$3 billion in 2018, at a compound annual growth rate of 10%. The FMCG sector plays a vital role in Sri Lanka's economic status by contributing 30% to GDP and around 20% to the overall employment in Sri Lanka (NDB Securities Research Report 2017). Therefore, the FMCG sector requires rigorous studies on the ways and means of strategies to upgrade the market share within the dynamic business entity. While being the largest business sector in Sri Lanka, FMCG consists of different product categories. The biscuit industry occupies a special place by standing at the top of the first 10 FMCG brands in Sri Lanka (KANTAR/LMRB Report-2017). Even globally, the biscuit market is identified as one of the fastest growing sectors in the FMCG category, as it reached USD 106 billion in 2020 and is expected to reach a CAGR of 4.97% during 2021-2026 (Source: Mordor Intelligence Research Report). In the South Asian region, Sri Lanka is highlighted as the highest biscuit consumption country, reporting 4kg per capita. In comparison, India reports 2.1kg, even being the most populated country in South Asia (Source: Mintel). The Sri Lankan biscuit industry is a fast-growing industry that obtains a 2.4% growth rate, which is beneficial and sustainable growth for the leading players in the industry, even though there is head-to-head competition. To survive in this dynamic business environment, marketers must look for strategies to compete in the market. In order to increase sales revenue, marketers should make consumers purchase their products rather than their competitors'. As a marketing strategy,



Loyalty is a way of expressing customer satisfaction towards a brand in the long run (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Aleman, 2001). Moreover, strong brand loyalty reduces unpredictability in highly competitive markets (Fournier and Yao, 1997). Hence, there is an apparent need to investigate competitive marketing strategies that are brand loyalty oriented.

Previous researchers have examined the Brand Loyalty of biscuit consumers in different contexts. (Devi & Kavitha, 2014; Gomathi & Kothandapani, 2017; Katole, 2018; Rajarajeswari, 2017; Sakthivel, 2019). However, Brand Loyalty patterns of consumers are different based on different geographical locations, demographics, and cultural and socio-economic factors (Katole, 2018). But being the highest per capita biscuit consumer in the South Asian region, there are no published studies conducted to investigate the Brand Loyalty pattern of biscuit consumers in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, previous studies highlighted the need to study the impact of Perceived Quality on Brand Loyalty in Asian countries (Katole, 2018; Kieu, 2016). The findings of this research will disclose the dimensions which effectively enhance Brand Loyalty among Sri Lankan consumers.

Moreover, most of the published studies support the brand equity model proposed by Aaker (1991) by providing evidence for a significant positive relationship between Perceived Quality on Brand Loyalty (Alhaddad, 2015; Andrvazh, Shohani, Tamimi, Diyaleh & Alnasere, 2016; Chen and Tseng, 2014; Falahat, Chaun & Kai, 2018). But contrary to the Aaker's model, several studies have empirically proved that there is no significant influence of Perceived Quality on Brand Loyalty (Kieu, 2016; Listiana, 2015; Rahmatulloh, Yasri & Abror, 2018). The results of this research provide empirical evidence for this theoretical argument. Therefore, this research would be beneficial for theorists and researchers to fill the knowledge gaps in the aforementioned area.

In the Sri Lankan biscuit industry, manufacturers invest a significant amount of funds in quality improvements and huge emphasis on achieving quality awards and

certifications. However, the sales outcomes do not reflect the efforts that have been made by the organizations. Therefore, there are practice issues in Brand Awareness and Perceived Quality, which do not support to get the expected results in Brand Loyalty according to the Brand Equity theory. Hence, this study contributes to the knowledge for practice to fill the practice gap prevailing in the industry, which shows contradictory results from the theory.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of this study is rooted in Brand Equity theory. Aaker (1991) introduced a brand equity model with five pillars, namely brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association, brand loyalty, and other brand assets. In consort with Aaker's concept, Kevin Lane Keller introduced a model for Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) as a four-step pyramid. Keller defines CBBE as the differential impact of brand knowledge on consumer behavior towards a brand (Keller, 1993). Considering all the antecedents, Brand Loyalty acts as the main determinant of Brand Equity (Aaker, 1991; Atilgan, Aksoy & Akinci, 2005; Kim, Kim & An, 2003; Piaralal & Mei, 2015). At the same time, Brand Loyalty is identified as an essential factor for profit generation in cost-effective and sustainable companies (Limpasirisuwan & Donkwa, 2017; Moisescu & Allen, 2010; Molinillo, Ekinci & Japutra, 2017; Vera & Trujillo, 2017). Therefore, it has become an emergent requirement in the current marketing arena to investigate the factors effecting Brand Loyalty (Fortes, Milan, Eberle and Toni, 2019). Aaker (1991) has proposed that perceived quality, brand awareness and brand association are found to be significant with regard to the impact on brand loyalty. However, several previous studies have empirically investigated and concluded that brand association has a significantly weak influence on the performance of consumer brand loyalty, whereas perceived quality and brand awareness play a prominent role in brand loyalty behavior (Atilgan, Aksoy & Akinci, 2005; Selms, 2013). Therefore, the framework of this study is designed to consider the effect of Perceived Quality and Brand Awareness on Brand Loyalty.

Quality of a product or service has become a vital element in customers' purchasing decisions (Santy & Atika, 2020). Accordingly, many companies worldwide have converted customer-driven quality into a strategic weapon (Jalilvand, Samiei & Mahdavinia, 2011). Perceived Quality is defined as the customer's perception of the overall quality of a product or service (Aaker, 1991). Also, it is known as an embedded benefit of the product. Considering previous studies, it is notable that customers build up their own quality parameters in their minds after the first consumption of a particular product or brand. Moreover, they establish the level of quality of the experienced brand in their mind, and they recall it during their next consumption. However, there is an argument for the existence of two types of quality, such as objective quality and subjective quality (Brunso, Bredahl, Grunert and Scholderer, 2005). Objective quality refers to the technical superiority of a product, while subjective quality implies the consumer's judgment about the superiority of a product. As its name suggests, perceived quality is the ideological quality according to the customer. Nevertheless, it might differ from the objective quality (Zeithaml, 1988). According to most other research studies, objective quality is based on technically experimented results that are consistent regardless of who conducts the experiment, whereas perceived quality can be evaluated by consumers based on their own purchase experience (Chi, Yeh, & Yang, 2009). Customer satisfaction is also considered a critical component when being competitive in the market (Lin & Wang, 2006). In the current world, consumers pay more attention on quality perspectives rather than price variations (Kumar & Lakshmibala, 2019). Therefore, the consumer quality parameters assist in developing consumer satisfaction (Igau, Kassim, Al-Swidi, Harun & Shamsus, 2013). Previous researchers have practically examined and stated that there is a consistent relationship between customer satisfaction and perceived quality (Lee & Back, 2008). Similarly, previous literature suggests that customer satisfaction is the way of necessity to build up brand loyalty in the consumer mind (Bontis, Booker & Serenko, 2007). Hence, the ultimate achievement of customer satisfaction is brand loyalty.

Simplification of Brand Loyalty can be explained as how much a consumer is willing to pay more for a brand than its competitors' products, which have similar features (Aaker, 1996). Brand Loyalty was initially considered as a uni-dimensional concept and later identified as a variable consisting of two dimensions, such as Attitudinal Loyalty and Behavioral Loyalty (Kuikka & Laukkanen, 2012). Attitudinal loyalty can be defined as the consumer attitude that is driven by a psychological commitment towards the brand (Odin, Odin & Valette-Florence, 2001; Quester & Lim, 2003), while Behavioral Loyalty is presented as the observable outcome of Attitudinal Loyalty. Attitudinal Loyalty initiates through comparing brand features or quality parameters with their competitors and leads to a strong brand relationship (Rundle-Thiele & Bennette 2001). Accordingly, there are empirical evidence that proves a significant positive relationship between perceived quality and consumer brand loyalty (Falahat, Chuan & Kai, 2018; Bin, Kassim, Igau & Al-Swidi, 2013; Saleem, Rahman & Umar, 2015). Based on the previous findings, it is reasonably assumed that Perceived Quality has a significant positive influence on Brand Loyalty. Therefore, the research hypothesizes:

H1: There is a significant positive influence of Perceived Quality on Brand Loyalty

Brand Awareness is the strength of a brand's presence in consumers' minds (Jalilvand et al., 2011). According to Aaker (1991), Brand Awareness is the ability of a potential buyer to recognize or recall a brand, which effects on perception and attitudes of the customer. It emphasizes that the way of reflecting the brand in consumer's mind is determined by Brand Awareness. However, Aaker (1996) presents the measurements of Brand Awareness according to the different ways a consumer remembers a brand. It varies in terms of brand recognition (whether the consumer has ever been exposed to the brand), recall (whether the consumer remembers the brand in the product class), top-of-mind (the first brand remembered), and dominant (the only brand remembered) (Kayaman & Arasli, 2007). But empirically, it is proven that brand recognition and brand recall are prominent among the four elements (Chi et al., 2009).

Therefore, marketers use repeated advertisements as a strategy to retrieve brands in consumer's mind to influence consumer behavior (Berger & Mitchell, 1989).

Devoid of Brand Awareness, it is impossible to achieve profit goals (Haung & Sarigollu, 2012). Most of the time, consumers tend to purchase familiar and reputed brands in the market. The initial step of making a brand familiar to consumers is Brand Awareness (Patil, 2017). However, the ultimate goal of marketers is to achieve Brand Loyalty (Asgarpour, Hamid, Mousavi & Jamshidi, 2013) because a loyal consumer is an asset to a brand. At the same time, empirical investigations have determined that Brand Awareness is a crucial variable to influence Brand Loyalty (Altaf, Iqbal, Mokhtar & Sial, 2017; Eslami, 2020). Similarly, there is practical evidence from past studies that there is a significant positive relationship between Brand Awareness and Brand Loyalty (Chinomona & Maziriri, 2017; Zhao, Tong, Li, Ma & Wang, 2017). Therefore, according to the above findings, the research hypothesizes:

H2: There is a significant positive influence of Brand Awareness on Brand Loyalty

Previous studies have defined two main dimensions of brand trust, as cognitive-based and affective-based in nature. Cognitive-based influence originates through objective information and provides a strong positive relationship with Brand Loyalty as the decisional process is undergone rationally. Affective-based influence is considered to be subjective, and it needs a considerable time period to form a bond (Zur, Leckie & Webster, 2012). At the same time, Brand Loyalty is considered the key dimension of Brand Equity (Aaker, 1991; Atilgan et al., 2005; Kim et al., 2003; Piaralal & Mei, 2015). Brand Loyalty is a long-term task that needs to be achieved by companies with a proper approach to consumers. To develop Brand Loyalty, Brand Trust is identified as a successful strategic tool. Further, it creates a highly valued interactive relationship with the brand, which gradually leads to enhanced Brand Loyalty (Laroche, Habibi & Richard, 2013; Lee, Moon, Kim & Yi, 2015). Therefore, both academics and practitioners have determined that Brand Trust is an emergent

requirement to build Brand Loyalty (Matzler, Grabner-Krauter & Bidmon, 2008). Previous scholars have examined the behavior of Brand Trust and Brand Loyalty under different contexts and concluded that Brand Trust has a highly significant positive impact on Brand Loyalty (Ahmed, Rizwan, Ahmad & Haq, 2014; Alwi et al., 2016; Gecti & Zengin, 2013; Lam & Shankar, 2014). Further, it states that Brand Trust is a willing payback in return by consumers for the honest promises kept by companies. Therefore, based on the above empirical findings, the research hypothesizes:

H3: There is a significant positive influence of Brand Trust on Brand Loyalty

The foremost intention in the marketing discipline is the construction of a powerful bond between the consumer and the brand. To build a successful bond, Brand Trust acts as the main constituent (Delgado-Ballester, 2003). Brand trust is defined as the secure feeling delivered to the customer while interactions occur with the brand through developing the perception of brand reliability and responsibility (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003). Brand trust evolves through brand experience (Soh, Reid & King, 2009). When the consumer is involved with brand experience, it develops brand identity in the consumer's mind (Sahin, Kitapci, Altindag and Gok, 2017). Simultaneously, Brand Trust develops by forming a cognitive structure in the consumer's mind conjoining the information received and the brand experience (Dwyer, Schurr & Oh, 1987). Marketers use this strongly structured formation of Brand Trust as a weapon against brand crises to retain customers (Shin, Casidy, Yoon & Yoon, 2016). During this brand crisis, consumers who are interested in product information tend to seek the same product with higher perceived quality. Hence, they built their trust based on the quality aspects of the product. Eventually, the perceived quality leads for the development of brand trust in consumers (Rahmatulloh et al., 2018). Therefore, it is apparent to determine the strong impact of Perceived Quality on Brand Trust. Furthermore, several past studies have proved a strong positive influence of Perceived Quality on Brand Trust (Ahmed, Ahmad & Haq, 2014; Ercis,

Unal, Candan & Yildrum; 2012; Rahmatullo et al., 2018). By considering the above findings, the research hypothesizes:

H4: There is a significant positive influence of Perceived Quality on Brand Trust

Brand trust is a key variable that impacts consumer attachment to the brand (Sivarajah & Sritharan, 2014). In order to attach to the brand, the consumer needs to be familiar with the brand attributes. Familiarity and confidence can be built up in consumers' minds by creating positive attitudes and feelings towards the brand (Laroche, Kim & Zhou, 1996; Low & Lamb, 2000). The perpetual method used for decades to create positive attitudes and feelings towards a brand among consumers is Brand Awareness (Aaker, 1996). Specially, the method is effective for low-involvement goods such as FMCG products (Huang & Sarigollu, 2012). The reputation and familiarity of a brand develop trust within consumers, who seek risk aversion (Matzler, Krauter & Bidmoon, 2008). Therefore, the interrelationship between Brand Trust and Brand Awareness is an important element in brand relationships. Supporting this logic, empirical evidence from previous literature demonstrates a positive impact of Brand Awareness on Brand Trust (Xingyuan, Li & Wei, 2010). Therefore, based on the above discussion, the research hypothesizes:

H5: There is a significant positive influence of Brand Awareness on Brand Trust

According to past studies, many authors used Brand Love and Brand Trust as mediators related to brand relationship studies (Huang, 2017; Sihombing, 2019). However, Brand Love is identified as a component generated through Brand Trust (Zhang, Peng, Peng, Zang, Ren & Chen, 2020). Based on the recommendations of previous literature, Brand Trust plays an effective mediation role in Brand Loyalty with reference to brand relationship performance (Aurier & Lanauze, 2012; Kieu, 2016; Yasin & Shamim, 2013; Huang & Jian, as cited by Zhang, et al., 2020). In most circumstances, brand trust is generated due to the actions of other variables such as perceived quality, brand awareness, brand association, brand experience and so forth (Alwi et al., 2016; Dwyer et al., 1987). Therefore, Brand Trust inherently visualizes

as a mediator in Brand Equity concept. Similarly, empirical studies have demonstrated that Brand Trust falls at the center of all brand relationships (Hess, Story & Danes, 2011; Valta, 2013). According to previous findings, it is reasonably assumed that Brand Trust has a strong mediating effect on the relationship between Perceived Quality and Brand Loyalty. Therefore, the research hypothesizes:

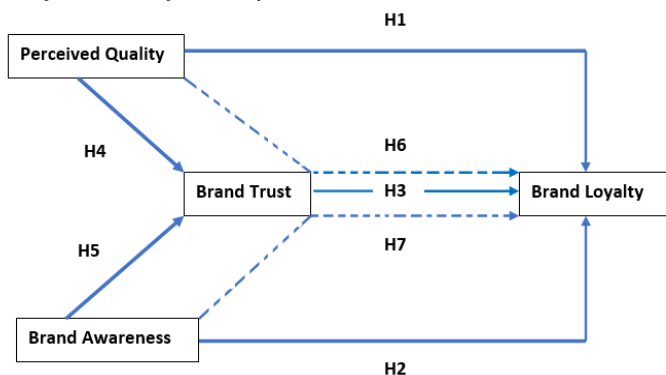
H6: Brand trust positively mediates the impact of Perceived Quality on Brand Loyalty

Consequently, Brand Trust is identified as a prominent mediator between brand related variables. Supporting to this rationale, many exploratory research studies have proved the successful performance of Brand Trust in similar contexts (Huang, 2017; Lassoued & Hobbs, 2015; Phan & Ghantous, 2013). Therefore, based on the previous findings, the research hypothesizes:

H7: Brand Trust positively mediates the impact of Brand Awareness on Brand Loyalty

According to the above discussion, the conceptual framework of this study is designed as follows (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the study



3. METHODOLOGY

The conceptual framework of this study is designed with the assistance of previous empirical research findings. There are seven hypotheses supporting the conceptual framework pertaining to the effect of Perceive Quality, Brand Awareness, and Brand Trust on Brand Loyalty and the relationship between these constructs. The philosophy of this research is positivism (Saunders, 2009). And the research design follows the deductive approach combined with the quantitative strategy. Primary data collection was carried out through the survey method. A structured questionnaire is used as the research instrument and it was prepared by reviewing prior research articles, which have empirically investigated the behavior of the same variables in diverse contexts. The operationalization of variables is tabulated below (Table 1). The study utilized a seven-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.”

A pilot study was carried out using 54 respondents prior to conducting the final data collection. The data was gathered through manual distribution of the questionnaire and an online method using Google forms. During the data collection, it was noted that the maximum time spent by a respondent to fill up the questionnaire was eight minutes. The collected data was used to test the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to estimate the internal consistency and reliability of measures (Malhotra & Birks, 1999). It is considered that Cronbach's alpha value greater than 0.7 is reliable. According to the reliability test in the pilot study, all the variables obtained greater than 0.7. Validity is also desired to be measured to ascertain the suitability of the scale to represent the constructs and to test the conceptualized relationships (Svensson & Emerita, 2011). During the pilot study of this research, four types of validity were tested. The face validity was tested by distributing the questionnaire manually and taking the respondents' feedback on time about the understandability of the language used, the structure of the questionnaire, etc. Based on the feedback, a few questions were simplified before the final data collection.

Table 1: Variable Operationalization Table

Variable	Code	Item/ Measures	Source
Perceived Quality The overall perception of consumers about brilliance and quality of products or services in compared with the rivalry offerings (Aaker, 1991; Al-Hawary, 2013; Chahal & Bala, 2012; Mishra, 2014; Kumar & Lakshmibala, 2019)	PQ1	High quality	Dwivedi, 2015 (Cited by 197 articles, including Harrigan, Evers, Miles and Daly, 2017; Leckie, Nyadzay & Johnson, 2016; Thakur, 2016)
	PQ2	Excellent product characteristics	
	PQ3	Reliability	
	PQ4	Consistent quality	
Brand Awareness Strength of a brand's presence in the consumer's mind. (Aaker, 1996; Davis, Golicic & Marquardt, 2008; Jalilvand et al., 2011; Xingyuan et al., 2010;)	BA1	Awareness on brand	Severi & Ling, 2013 (Obtain 123 citations including Jung, Bae, Moorhouse & Kwon, 2020; Poerwadi, Suyanto, Hidayat & Mustafa, 2019)
	BA2	Brand recognition	
	BA3	Brand identification	
	BA4	Recall of product characteristics	
	BA5	Brand recall	
Brand Loyalty A constructive mindset towards the brand, that leads to true commitment and	BL1	Loyalty towards brand	Delgado-Ballester, 2011 (Cited by 112 articles including Asano,
	BL2	Willingness for price premiums	

constant purchase of the brand over time (Aaker, 1991; Back & Parks, 2003; Quester & Lim, 2003; Zins, 2001)	BL3	Reach for brand	Cheng, Rhodes & Lok, 2019; Herjanto, 2019)
	BL4	Recommendation	
<p>Brand Trust</p> <p>The feeling of security held by the consumer in his interactions with the brand that is based on the perception that the brand is reliable and responsible for the consumer (Briliana, 2017; Dai, Qin & Ma, 2019; Delgado-Ballester, 2003; Upamannyu & Rajput, 2017).</p>	BT1	Level of expectation accomplishment	<p>Delgado-Ballester, 2004 (Cited by 211 articles including Gunawardane, 2020; Treiblmaier, 2013)</p>
	BT2	Confidence in the brand name	
	BT3	Disappointments toward the brand	
	BT4	Satisfaction towards brand	
	BT5	Honesty and sincerity	
	BT6	Reliance	
	BT7	Brand commitment to consumer satisfaction	
	BT8	Compensation for imperfections	

Several experts in the same field of research, reviewed the questionnaire to ensure the content validity of the survey before the data collection. Criterion validity defines as the consistency between scales tested within different groups of people or within different time periods, which have the same theoretical definitions (Svensson &

Emerita, 2011). It gives confidence that individuals in different groups or within different time frames perceive and interpret the test materials in the same way (Waege, 1996). Construct validity, the fourth validity type, is further subdivided into discriminant validity and convergent validity. Through Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), the discriminant and convergent validity of each scale are evaluated. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure (KMO) and Bartlett's test of the Sphericity were carried out for sampling adequacy. The KMO value greater than 0.5 is considered as the sample is adequate, while Bartlett's test for Sphericity is less than 0.001 ($P < 0.001$) is considered significant (Goni et al., 2020). The convergent validity test results give KMO values greater than 0.5, while the significant value of Bartlett's Test of Sphericity gives less than 0.05 for all the variables. Thus, the results confirm that the questionnaire is qualified for the final data collection according to the validity and reliability measurements. Thus, the questionnaire for final data collection is comprised of similar questions used for the pilot study, with several improvements considering comprehensibility for respondents.

This research focused on biscuit consumers in Sri Lanka. By considering the decision-making ability, the target population is comprised of all the people in Sri Lanka above the age of 5 years. Therefore, the total number is estimated as 19,811,000 considering the mid-year population in 2018 by excluding the kids below five years (Source: Department of Census & Statistics Report-2020). The sample size is determined by using the Morgan table to accomplish 95% confidence level with 5% margin of error. In this research, the target population is spread out all over Sri Lanka. Therefore, it is difficult to conduct probability sampling technique. For the feasibility of data collection, the research was conducted by using convenient sampling method that belongs to the non-probability sampling technique. The final data analysis was carried out by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23. 389 responses were considered for the final data analysis in this study. Multiple regression analytical method was used to check the direct relationships between variables. The Sobel test method was used to check the indirect effect of

independent variables on dependent variable. The study used both descriptive and inferential statistics to analyze the data.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

The final data analysis comprised 389 responses from different geographical locations in Sri Lanka. Prior to the final data analysis, it was discovered that there was no missing data and data omissions were not needed. In addition, the presence of outliers might disturb the smoothness of the normal distribution of the data set. However, those outliers are a sign of healthy scientific progress using a natural data set, which produces novel theoretical insights (Bailey, 2018). Accordingly, this study used the data set for statistical analysis by including outliers while ensuring the normal distribution.

Initially, the sample of 389 responses was analyzed according to their demographic characteristics. The sample profile analytics are important to determine the population in order to generalize the results, and it assures that the sample is a representative group of the desired population. Considering the demographic characteristics, it is noted that gender is equally distributed in the sample, representing 50.4% of males and 49.6% of females. And the majority of the respondents are from the age group 21- 30 years, which signifies 52.2%. The least reported age group is 05-10 years. Similarly, the educational levels are normally distributed among respondents by reporting the majority levels as Bachelor's Degree and undergraduate students, while representing the lowest number of respondents in schooling and other educational qualifications. The nominal categorizations of occupation of respondents reveal that the majority equally belong to students, government employee and private employee categories. And a considerably small amount divided into self-employee, businessman and other. Correspondingly, an equal distribution of income levels is reported in the data set. However, because there were a significant number of undergraduate students in the sample between the ages of 21 and 30, a considerable portion was occupied by dependents. Considering the residential districts of

respondents, the majority were reported from Colombo district, contributing 49.9% of the responses.

Reliability test was conducted to assure the internal consistency and homogeneity of the data set. Alpha coefficient method (Cronbach Alpha) is the widely used method to measure reliability. The Cronbach Alpha value of a scale ranges from 0 to 1, while the acceptable level of reliability measures indicates by $\alpha \geq 0.7$ (Durairatnam, Chong & Jusoh, 2020). The measurement of the scale's reliability is reasonable to attain the intended efficacy of a data survey. It guarantees greater statistical power by revealing the highest internal consistency of the items (Mapanga, Miruka & Mavetera, 2018). Each variable studied in this research was measured for Cronbach Alpha values and obtained values greater than 0.7. Therefore, it was considered that the scale used in this research is highly reliable. Validity of the data was tested by KMO value and Bartlett's test of Sphericity. The results indicate that the sample of the survey is adequate with respect to all four variables. All four KMO values were greater than 0.5 ($KMO > 0.5$), and all the Bartlett's test of Sphericity values were less than 0001 ($P < 0.001$).

4.1. Descriptive Analysis of variables

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics on Perceived Quality

Item	Code	Mean	Standard Deviation
High quality	PQ1	5.6787	1.29912
Excellent product characteristics	PQ2	5.2905	1.40523
Reliability	PQ3	5.5167	1.31324
Consistent quality	PQ4	5.5861	1.24392

Source: SPSS Analyzed Data 2020/2021

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics on Brand Awareness

Item	Code	Mean	Standard Deviation
Awareness on brand	BA1	5.4653	1.54885

Brand recognition	BA2	5.5630	1.44817
Brand identification	BA3	5.6067	1.37243
Recall of product characteristics	BA4	5.6350	1.37556
Brand recall	BA5	5.5604	1.55801

Source: SPSS Analyzed Data 2020/2021

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics on Brand Loyalty

Item	Code	Mean	Standard Deviation
Loyalty towards brand	BL1	4.9229	1.62906
Willingness for the price premiums	BL2	4.7866	1.64292
Reach for the brand	BL3	4.4447	1.82060
Recommendation	BL4	5.3162	1.48888

Source: SPSS Analyzed Data 2020/2021

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics on Brand Trust

Item	Code	Mean	Standard Deviation
Level of expectation accomplishment	BT1	5.3470	1.30636
Confidence in the brand name	BT2	5.4396	1.37525
Disappointments towards the brand	BT3	5.1388	1.49613
Satisfaction toward the brand	BT4	5.3548	1.32292
Honesty and sincerity	BT5	5.2802	1.27471
Reliance	BT6	5.3933	1.33241
Brand commitment to consumer satisfaction	BT7	5.2031	1.35745
Compensation for imperfections	BT8	4.9974	1.44039

Source: SPSS Analyzed Data 2020/2021

There are several assumptions to be accomplished by a sample to conduct a parametric test under statistical analysis for accurate interpretation. This study used

the test skewness and kurtosis to prove the normal distribution of the data set. Skewness can be defined as an asymmetry in a statistical distribution. The acceptable values for skewness range between (-3) to +3 (Griffin & Steinbrecher, 2013). Similarly, Kurtosis is referred to the height of the peak of the distribution curve. Kurtosis value that falls between +10 and (-10) is recommended for acceptable range (Griffin & Steinbrecher, 2013). The skewness and kurtosis of each variable in this study revealed that all the values are laid between the range. Further, the test of linearity, P-P plots, and histograms for regression standardized residuals and homoscedasticity visualized that the data set fulfills all the assumptions.

Another effect that hinders the proper analysis of independent and dependent variables is Multicollinearity (high correlation between independent variables). Multicollinearity can be determined by the Correlation Coefficient value and the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). According to previous literature, the favorable values for VIF are less than 5 ($VIF < 5$) (Ringle, Sarstedt, Mitchell & Gudergan, 2018), while the tolerance is greater than 0.1 (Kim, 2019). As all the VIF values of main constructs were below 5 and the tolerance of each variable was greater than 0.1, the results denote that there was no multicollinearity among the above constructs in the dataset. In addition to VIF value, correlation coefficient less than 0.80 ($R^2 \leq 0.80$) proves the unavailability of multicollinearity in the dataset (Kim, 2019). By referring to the correlation coefficient values presented below in Table 6, confidently concluded that there is no multicollinearity within the dataset.

Table 6: Pearson Correlation between main constructs

	Brand Loyalty (BL)	Perceived Quality (PQ)	Brand Awareness (BA)	Brand Trust (BT)
Brand Loyalty (BL)	1			
Perceived Quality (PQ)	0.637**	1		
Brand Awareness (BA)	0.634**	0.660**	1	
Brand Trust (BT)	0.784**	0.751**	0.731**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Source: SPSS Analyzed Data 2020/2021

4.2. Test of Hypotheses

The multiple Linear Regression method was used in this study to analyze the direct relationship between dependent and independent variables. In the multiple regression model, the p-value less than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$) indicates (at 95% confidence level) that the significant influence of the independent variable on the dependent variable, while the Standardized coefficient of Beta value demonstrates the amount of magnitude change in the dependent variable when one unit change in the independent variable. Further, it emphasizes that whether there is a positive or negative impact exists by the + or (-) sign of the Standardized coefficient of Beta value.

The Sobel test was used to analyze the indirect relationship between independent and dependent variables. Sobel test was carried out by multiplying coefficients and determining the ratio of the resulting value to standard error. This equation yields the Z score for the mediation effect. If the z-score is greater than 1.96, the mediation effect is considered statistically significant at the 0.05 level (Sobel, 1982).

Hypothesis 1

There is a significant positive influence of Perceived Quality on Brand Loyalty

According to the multiple regression analysis results (Table 7), it indicates that the p-value for Perceived Quality is 0.094 ($P > 0.05$). Thus, the hypothesis is not supported within this context and concluded that there is no significant positive influence of Perceived Quality on Brand Loyalty by considering the sample population.

Table 7: Multiple Linear Regression Analysis of Perceived Quality on Brand Loyalty

Variable	Standardized Coefficient of Beta	t	Sig.
Perceived Quality	0.082	1.679	0.094

Source: SPSS Analyzed Data 2020/2021



Hypothesis 2

There is a significant positive influence of Brand Awareness on Brand Loyalty

The P value of Brand Awareness in regression analysis is 0.020 (Table 8). Hence, it can be determined that there is a significant relationship between Brand Awareness and Brand Loyalty. Further, it indicates a positive relationship between the two variables, as the standardized Beta coefficient is reported as 0.111. Therefore, there is a significant positive influence of Brand Awareness on Brand Loyalty.

Table 8: Multiple Linear Regression Analysis of Brand Awareness on Brand Loyalty

Variable	Standardized Coefficient of Beta	t	Sig.
Brand Awareness	0.111	2.341	0.020

Source: SPSS Analyzed Data 2020/2021

Hypothesis 3

There is a significant positive influence of Brand Trust on Brand Loyalty

The results emphasize (Table 9) that the P value =0.000 ($P < 0.05$) at 95% confidence level and 0.641 of standardized coefficient of Beta value by indicating the magnitude of positive relationship of Brand Trust on Brand Loyalty. Therefore, the hypothesis is supported and it can be concluded that there is a significant positive influence of Brand Trust on Brand Loyalty.

Table 9: Multiple Linear Regression Analysis of Brand Trust on Brand Loyalty.

Variable	Standardized Coefficient of Beta	t	Sig.
Brand Trust	0.641	11.932	0.000

Dependent variable: Brand Loyalty

Source: SPSS Analyzed Data 2020/2021

Hypothesis 4

There is a significant positive influence of Perceived Quality on Brand Trust

According to the analysis results (Table 10), it is apparent that there is a significant positive influence of Perceived Quality on Brand Trust. The conclusion is evident by the $P = 0.000$ ($P < 0.05$), while the standardized coefficient of Beta = 0.476 (which indicates positive relationship among variables). Therefore, the hypothesis is supported.

Table 10: Multiple Linear Regression Analysis of Perceived Quality on Brand Trust

Variable	Standardized Coefficient of Beta	t	Sig.
Perceived Quality	0.476	12.104	0.000

Dependent variable: Brand Trust

Source: SPSS Analyzed Data 2020/2021

Hypothesis 5

There is a significant positive influence of Brand Awareness on Brand Trust

The result indicates (Table 11) a significant relationship between Brand Awareness and Brand Trust ($P=0.000$), while the standardized coefficient of Beta = 0.418. It implies that there is a positive relationship between the variables. Therefore, it is concluded that there is a significant positive influence of Brand Awareness on Brand Trust. Hence the hypothesis is supported.

Table 11: Multiple Regression Analysis of Brand Awareness on Brand Trust

Variable	Standardized Coefficient of Beta	t	Sig.
Brand Awareness	0.418	10.619	0.000

Dependent variable: Brand Trust

Source: SPSS Analyzed Data 2020/2021

Hypothesis 6

Brand Trust positively mediates the impact of Perceived Quality on Brand Loyalty

This study used Sobel test method to investigate the mediating effect among variables. The significance of the indirect effect was estimated by Z score value. By 95% confidence level, it indicates the Z score is 12.2783 ($1.96 < Z$), while the P value =0.000 ($P < 0.05$). Hence, it can be determined that Brand Trust positively mediates the impact of Perceived Quality on Brand Loyalty. However, hypothesis 1 is not supported by the sample population. Therefore, it is concluded that there is a full mediation effect (Pyun, Kwon & Lee, 2011; Sobel, 1982) of Brand Trust on the relationship between Perceived Quality and Brand Loyalty.

Table 12: Mediation effect of Brand Trust on Perceived Quality and Brand Loyalty

Coefficient	Test Statistics (Z score)	Std. Error	P-value
a	0.756		
b	12.27830844	0.04987332	0.000
Sa	0.034		
Sb	0.055		

Source: SPSS Analyzed Data 2020/2021

Hypothesis 7

Brand Trust positively mediates the impact of Brand Awareness on Brand Loyalty

The results of Sobel test demonstrate that the Z score value is 12.2923 ($1.96 < Z$), while the the P value =0.000 ($P < 0.05$). Therefore, with 95% confidence level it is concluded that the Brand Trust positively mediates the impact of Brand Awareness on Brand Loyalty. Furthermore, while hypothesis 2 is supported for the model, it is apparent that the role of Brand Trust on the relationship between Brand Awareness and Brand Loyalty is a partial mediation (Pyun et al., 2011; Sobel, 1982).

Table 13: Mediation effect of Brand Trust on Brand Awareness and Brand Loyalty



Coefficient	Test Statistics	Std. Error	P-value
a	0.706		
b	0.786	12.29228794	0.04571777
Sa	0.033		
Sb	0.053		

Source: SPSS Analyzed Data 2020/2021

Model Summary ensures the regression model fit, considering that the values are unbiased. R^2 represents scattered data points around the regression line, which indicates the percentage variation of independent variables effect on the dependent variable (Dhakal, 2018). Furthermore, adjusted R^2 either should be equal to the R^2 or less than R^2 . R^2 and adjusted R^2 of two regression models used in this study are presented in Table 14 and Table 15, which are in acceptable levels. To measure whether there is an autocorrelation between residuals Durbin- Watson value is estimated. It is recommended to obtain Durbin-Watson value between 1.7- 2.3 with 95% confidence level to be accepted (Rutledge & Barros, 2002). According to the tabulation (Table 14 and Table 15), the values were placed closer to 2, and it is assured that there was no autocorrelation in the regression analysis performed.

Table 14: Model Summary of Regression Analysis between Perceived Quality, Brand Awareness and Brand Trust; Dependent variable Brand Loyalty

R	R^2	Adjusted Square	R Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
0.791	0.625	0.622	0.85708	1.834

Source: SPSS Analyzed Data 2020/2021

Table 15: Model Summary of Regression Analysis between Perceived Quality and Brand Awareness; Dependent variable Brand Trust

R	R^2	Adjusted Square	R Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
0.814	0.663	0.661	0.70250	1.794

Source: SPSS Analyzed Data 2020/2021

5. CONCLUSION

Through survey data, descriptive statistics of respondents were revealed with respect to the population sample of the study. The resulting mean scores suggest that the perception of consumers towards all the items in all four variables is at a moderate level. However, under the Brand Loyalty variable (Table 4), Attitudinal Loyalty (the perception of consumer recommendation about the brand) is marginally greater than all other dimensions (which measured Behavioral Loyalty). Therefore, it is beneficial to promote behavioral loyalty through the use of new marketing strategies such as customer collaboration in product innovation. Similarly, 'compensation for imperfection' has a relatively low level of perception among customers in terms of Brand Trust dimensions (Table 5). Therefore, consideration must be given to the notion that there is a necessity to strengthen consumer interactions with the manufacturer through customer feedback centers to approach both positive and negative comments for the improvement of product quality as well as the brand image and to stay closer contact with consumers. Listening to consumers may support to enhance brand trust in the consumer's mind.

According to the statistical findings of the study, there is no significant influence of Perceived Quality on Brand Loyalty, as the P value of the multiple regression analysis expressed 0.094 (Table 7). Hence, it is concluded that there is no significant influence of Perceived Quality on Brand Loyalty among Sri Lankan biscuit consumers. Similarly, there is more empirical evidence representing the fashion industry (Kieu, 2016) and the banking industry that supports the same result (Rahmatulloh, et al., 2018). Importantly, the same outcome is reported by a study conducted on Cracker Biscuit Brands in Indonesia (Listiana, 2015). Therefore, this study recommends to amalgamate quality improvement initiatives with brand trust development strategies in order to achieve higher performance.

Subsequently, the second hypothesis is supported to the model, as the P value indicates $P=0.020$ ($P < 0.05$) (Table 8) at the 95% confidence level. Therefore, it can

be determined that there is a significant positive influence of Brand Awareness on Brand Loyalty. Similar results have been obtained in most of the previous literature, which has investigated the relationship between Brand Awareness and Brand Loyalty (Chi et al., 2009; Chinomona & Miziriri, 2017; Zhao et al., 2017). P value =0.000 ($P < 0.005$) implies that the third hypothesis is also supported to the model. Similarly, the Standardized Beta coefficient value is 0.641, which indicates a positive relationship between the constructs (Table 9). Therefore, there is a significant positive influence of Brand Trust on Brand Loyalty. Also, the same conclusion was presented in several other previous studies (Ahmed, 2014; Alwi et al., 2016; Gecti & Zengin, 2013; Lam & Shankar, 2014). Likewise, the fourth hypothesis was also supported to the conceptual framework by achieving $P = 0.00$ ($P < 0.05$) (Table: 10). Consequently, it was determined that there is a significant positive influence of Perceived Quality on Brand Trust. The same aforementioned conclusion was reported in other empirical investigations representing different contexts (Ahmed et al., 2014; Ercis et al., 2012; Rahmatulloh et al., 2018). Further, it was determined that there is a significant positive influence of Brand Awareness on Brand Trust by obtaining $P = 0.000$ ($P < 0.05$) (Table: 11). Similarly, there are published research that support similar conclusions (Alhaddad, 2014; Hou & Wonglorsaichon, 2014; Xingyuan et al., 2014; Yoon, 2002).

Subsequently, it was concluded that Brand Trust positively mediates the impact of Perceived Quality on Brand Loyalty. The result was evident by obtaining Z score greater than 1.96 and P value greater than 0.05. ($Z = 12.2783$, $P \text{ value} = 0.000$) at 95% confidence level. Previous researches in different contexts has also discussed the mediating role of Brand Trust in the relationship between Perceived Quality and Brand Loyalty (Kieu, 2016; Rahmatulloh et al., 2018) Furthermore, previously it has been determined that there is no significant positive influence of Perceived Quality on Brand Loyalty. Whereas it is reasonably concluded that there is a full mediation role of Brand Trust on the aforementioned relationship.

Similarly, when considering the mediation effect on the relationship between Brand Awareness and Brand Loyalty at 95% confidence level it was, both Z score ($Z=12.2923$) and P value ($P= 0.000$) obtained results to prove that the relationship is significantly mediated ($1.96 < Z, P=0.05$). Therefore, Brand Trust positively mediates the impact of Brand Awareness on Brand Loyalty. Supportively, previous studies prove a full mediation impact of Brand Trust on Brand Loyalty (Raut, Pawar, Brito & Sisodia, 2019). However, the result of hypothesis 2 proves that there is a significant positive influence of Brand Awareness on Brand Loyalty. Therefore, by examining the analytical outputs, it is reasonably concluded that Brand Trust plays a partial mediation role.

Table 16: Summary of the results of Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Result	Empirical Evidence
H1: There is a significant positive influence of Perceived Quality on Brand Loyalty	Not Supported	Kieu, 2016; Listiana, 2015 Rahmatulloh et al., 2018;
H2: There is a significant positive influence of Brand Awareness on Brand Loyalty	Supported	Chi et al., 2009;Chinomona et al., 2017; Zhao et al., 2017
H3: There is a significant positive influence of Brand Trust on Brand Loyalty	Supported	Ahmed, 2014; Alwi et al., 2016; Gecti & Zengin, 2013; Lam & Shankar, 2014
H4: There is a significant positive influence of Perceived Quality on Brand Trust	Supported	Ahmed et al., 2014; Ercis et al., 2012;Rahmatulloh et al., 2018
H5: There is a significant positive influence of Brand Awareness on Brand Trust	Supported	Hou & Wonglorsaichon, 2014; Xingyuan et al., 2014; Yoon, 2002
	Supported	Kieu, 2016;

H6: Brand Trust positively mediates the impact of Perceived Quality on Brand Loyalty		Rahmatulloh et al., 2018
H7: Brand Trust positively mediates the impact of Brand Awareness on Brand Loyalty	Supported	Raut et al., 2019

6. Future Research Directions

This research has several limitations which provide opportunities for future research studies. This study is designed in cross-sectional time horizon. Since this research is based on the behavior of consumers, it would be meaningful if it is conducted longitudinal research by implementing strategies to evaluate behavioral change. In addition, past literature describes that consumer Brand Loyalty is lower in rural areas than in urban areas (Chandrasekhar, 2012). 50% of the data collected for this study was contributed from the Colombo district, which is generally known as an urban area. Therefore, there is a lacking area which needs to be studied the behavior of the rural population with respect to Brand Loyalty. Besides, consumer Brand Loyalty in the biscuit industry should be further investigated in other macro contexts, such as consumer culture and the effect of social media. Furthermore, future research could extend the quantitative findings of this study by incorporating qualitative measures to obtain an in-depth understanding of consumer behavior and insights for industrial betterment.

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