

# Building Customer-based Brand Equity of Domestic Brands: Role of Brand Equity Dimensions

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to develop a reliable scale for measuring the customer-based brand equity (CBBE) and empirically test Aaker's model for determining the role of CBBE dimensions in building brand equity for local brands in the Indian smartphone market. A multistep study involving exploratory factor analysis and linear regression was used. A total of 288 actual Indian smartphone users evaluated different smartphone brands, that is, both local and international. The empirical findings suggest that CBBE for smartphones consists of four dimensions, that is, brand association, brand awareness, brand loyalty, and perceived quality, and that Aaker's model of CBBE is generally supported. The findings suggest that brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty are not all influential dimensions of brand equity in the Indian smartphone market. Perceived quality and brand associations were found to have a positive and significant impact on brand equity with the impact of perceived quality being more profound than brand associations. Brand awareness and brand loyalty were not significant contributors to brand equity. Significant differences were found between perceived brand equity dimensions of local and global brands. This study adds value to the growing body of literature on CBBE and its creation by incorporating brand personality measures. The reliable measures developed in this study will help scholars and managers to monitor brand equity on a continuous basis.

## Keywords

Brand equity, customer-based brand equity (CBBE), brand loyalty, brand association, brand awareness, perceived quality

## Introduction

Brands are being considered to be the primary capital in many businesses; therefore, branding has become the centre of interest of both academia and industry. Due to significant intangible value of brands, companies of all sizes are focusing on managing and building brand equity<sup>1</sup>. Brands, therefore, form the core of any marketing strategy<sup>2</sup>, which is duly supported by the recognition given to the strategic importance of branding in the literature<sup>3</sup>.

The globalization of markets has led to global marketing activities by firms, with a tough competition between global and local brands. The perceptions of consumers are different towards these different brands even in the same category<sup>4</sup>. This phenomenon has gained momentum in developing countries such as India where consumers prefer international brands over local brands<sup>5</sup>, primarily because of the symbolic meanings being conveyed by these international brands<sup>6</sup>. Researchers have discussed Indian

consumers' willingness to pay premium for and high acceptance of global brands, irrespective of the country of origin of these brands<sup>7</sup>. This preference for global brands is more common if these brands are a symbol of conspicuous consumption and status<sup>8</sup>.

India has recently become a major player in the global economy. Forecasts suggest that by 2020, India will surpass Japanese GDP in terms of purchasing power parity (PPP) and that by 2050, Indian economy will join the leading world economic powers of the world, including the USA and China<sup>9</sup>. This significant economic resurgence and a prospective future has made the Indian market attractive for new entrants and critical for survival for many existing firms<sup>10</sup>. The firms in past have been attracted towards India, primarily for acquiring resources, accessing and securing low-cost supplies, etc.<sup>101</sup>, but the growth in income of local population is changing consumer trends and behaviour. This rapidly expanding Indian middle class, with an increasing purchasing power, is the primary market

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for global and local brands. Global brands which were earlier available for only rich consumers in India are now available to these middle-class consumers<sup>11</sup>.

Global brands are known to appeal to status conscious Indian consumers, whereas local brands have a competitive advantage of having deep knowledge of the tastes, preferences, and values of Indian consumers. Thus, global marketers need to focus more on understanding Indian consumer behaviour and adapt their branding strategies to local tastes and preferences<sup>98</sup>, whereas local marketers need to focus on innovation and superior offerings in the Indian market. Both global and local brands need to build and sustain strong brand equity for their brands. In today's highly competitive retail environment, the brand equity concept is important for scholars and marketers alike. Customer-based brand equity (CBBE) plays an important role for the successful brand management of a firm. Positive CBBE can lead to greater revenues, higher profits, lower costs<sup>12</sup>, charging premium, extending brands easily, increasing the effectiveness of firm's communication campaigns, increasing margins, and reducing the company's vulnerability to competition<sup>13</sup>, providing a trade leverage<sup>14</sup>, and designing effective programmes for marketing<sup>15</sup>.

There are few studies on preferences of Indian consumers between local and international brands<sup>16,17</sup>. Kumar et al.<sup>11</sup> have examined Indian consumers' perceptions towards US and local brands, but without using brand equity as a construct. Although plenty of literature exists regarding brand equity globally, few empirical studies have been conducted in the Indian market. The existing empirical research on consumer-based brand equity, especially in the Indian smartphone market, is still limited, although India has one of the largest and fastest growing population of smartphone users in the world after China<sup>18</sup>.

**The primary objective** of the current study is to test, empirically, brand equity model of Aaker<sup>19</sup> by understanding the relative strength of these dimensions in creating brand equity in the Indian smartphone industry. **The secondary aim** of this study is to test the reliability of CBBE scale by incorporating brand personality items to increase the scope of the study and using actual Indian smartphone users as respondents.

The objectives in general may be specified as follows:

1. To understand the role of each brand equity dimension in building CBBE for Indian and global brands in the Indian smartphone market;
2. To develop a reliable scale for measuring CBBE by using brand personality items in the scale; and
3. To understand the difference in perceptions of brand equity dimensions of Indian and global brands.

The following research questions will be addressed.

RQ1: Do different brand equity dimensions have different strengths and directions (positive or negative) in influencing brand equity?

RQ2: Is there any difference in consumer perceptions of different brand equity dimensions of local and global brands?

The end results of this research will provide theoretical and practical implications for scholars and practitioners in the Indian smartphone industry. The rest of the article is organized as follows. In subsequent sections, we analyse the pertinent literature on the brand equity and its dimensions and develop hypothesis followed by methodology, results, analysis, and discussions. Finally, we conclude the study after providing the managerial implications, limitations, and scope for further research.

## Literature Review

Brand equity has always been an important concept in the marketing area, especially in the last decade of the previous century when its importance has received more attention in the literature<sup>20</sup>.

Researchers have argued consistently that brand equity leads to increase in probability of choosing a brand, retention of customers as well as channel partners, firm's margins, consumers' willingness to pay premium, effectiveness of marketing communication, firms' brand licensing or franchising opportunities, and even brand extensions; it, however, reduces vulnerability to marketing actions of competitors and consumers' elastic responses to any price increases<sup>19,12</sup>. Firms can leverage brand equity through brand extensions and through geographical or even international expansions<sup>21,22</sup>. Thus, it is easy to extend a product with strong brand equity to products in relevant categories, and brands can be expanded geographically through licensing agreements and joint ventures. Brand equity plays a critical role in acquisition decisions<sup>23</sup>. To summarize, from a managerial perspective, firms get sustainable competitive advantages through brand equity<sup>24</sup>.

Understanding brand equity from the customer's perspective has been referred to as the CBBE<sup>25</sup>. Brand equity has also been referred to as the enhancement in the perceived utility and desirability conferred on a product by virtue of its brand name<sup>26</sup>. Aaker<sup>27</sup> defined brand equity as "a set of assets (or liabilities) linked to a brand's name and symbol that adds to (or subtracts from) the value provided by a product (or a service) to the customer". Brand equity can be considered as the situation where apart from strong, favourable, and unique brand associations, the consumers have high brand awareness and brand familiarity<sup>28,29</sup>. Thus, brand equity helps for explaining a brand's importance in the marketplace<sup>30</sup>.

The concept of consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) has been discussed across literature; however, there is hardly any consensus as to what constitutes brand equity<sup>28,31</sup>. Despite the fact that many authors have debated the concept of brand equity, the empirical research to test the brand equity constructs is limited<sup>32</sup>.

Pappu et al.<sup>33</sup> examined the determinants of brand equity by using the brand loyalty, perceived quality, brand awareness, and brand association dimensions, and thus supported Aaker's brand equity model by showing significant and positive effects of these dimensions on brand equity. They recommended that brand associations and brand awareness be considered as two different constructs. Yoo and Donthu<sup>34</sup> proposed a three-factor brand equity model in which they created a single dimension by combining brand awareness and brand associations. Other authors<sup>35</sup> supported these findings and proposed that future research should concentrate on distinguishing the dimensions of brand awareness and brand associations.

Jung and Sung<sup>36</sup> examined brand equity's three variables, that is, perceived quality, brand loyalty, and brand association/awareness, by collecting responses in Korea and America from South Korean participants. Tong and Hawley<sup>37</sup> used variables brand loyalty, brand associations, brand awareness, and perceived quality to investigate brand equity in Chinese sportswear market and found a direct significant impact of brand loyalty and brand association on CBBE, whereas there was no significant direct impact of perceived quality and brand awareness on brand equity. Wang and Li<sup>38</sup> found that among Taiwanese customers, brand equity in the mobile phone industry was affected positively and significantly by variables such as perceived quality, brand loyalty, brand awareness and association, perceived enjoyment, personalization, usability, identifiability, and purchase intentions. Thus, research in brand equity<sup>13,34,39</sup> in the past has led to an array of brand equity dimensions and that these common dimensions, that is, brand awareness, brand associations, brand loyalty, and perceived quality, are essential constituents of Aaker's<sup>19</sup> model.

A major portion of the available literature on measurement of brand equity has followed either a consumer-based or a firm-based approach. In firm-based approach, researchers have shown an association between perceived quality

and a firm's stock price<sup>40</sup>, while others have predicted a firm's stock value and future earnings<sup>41</sup>. In this research, we use CBBE for investigation rather than firm-based financial or economic brand equity.

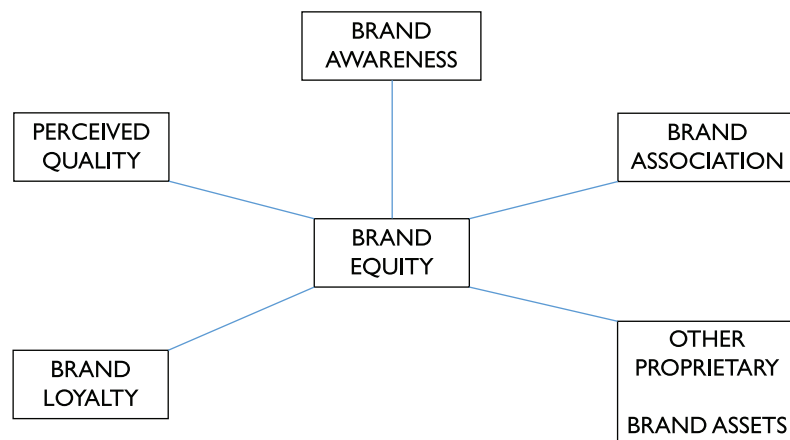
A brand equity literature review reveals that there are three dominant frameworks which help in brand equity measurement: Aaker's<sup>19</sup> managerial framework; Keller's<sup>12</sup> psychological, memory-based framework; and Erdem and Swait's<sup>100</sup> information economics and signalling theory framework.

Aaker<sup>19</sup> has suggested four main elements of brand equity: perceived quality, brand loyalty, brand awareness, and brand associations other than proprietary brand assets (Figure 1). Only these four dimensions have been frequently used by different researchers<sup>13,34,42,43,44</sup>. This study, therefore, conceptualizes brand equity based on the most generally accepted proposed model of Aaker<sup>19</sup>.

We now discuss relevant literature on these four brand equity dimensions and build hypotheses.

## Brand Awareness

Different brands present in consumers' minds have different relative strengths. This strength has been referred to as brand awareness and is an integral part of brand equity<sup>12</sup>. Brand awareness is, thus, the consumers' capability of brand identification or brand recognition<sup>27,45</sup>. Keller<sup>12</sup>, on the other hand, conceptualized that brand awareness consists of brand recognition as well as brand recall. Brand awareness can improve a brand's value by putting a brand in consumer's mind, and thus blocking the entry of new brands<sup>46</sup>; assuring and reinforcing a firm's commitment towards brand quality and finally giving an edge to the firm over channel partners<sup>47</sup>. A brand having high awareness will influence the consumer purchase decision<sup>48,49</sup> due to consumer's tendency to buy a familiar and well-known product<sup>50</sup>.



**Figure 1.** Aaker's Brand Equity Model

Source: Aaker<sup>19</sup>.

Consumers' attitudes towards global brands are heavily influenced by exposure to media<sup>51</sup>. Indian consumers may have developed positive attitudes towards certain global brands due to exposure to cultural influences through media such as movies, television shows, and even magazines leading to a high awareness level of global brands. These consumers' positive inclination towards global brands may, in turn, reduce their awareness of domestic brands. In fact, the Indian smartphone industry has been dominated by global brands, and the local brands have started dominating the market only recently. Overall, thus Indian consumers' awareness of local smartphone brands is expected to be low than the global brands.

Based on literature review, this study examines the following hypothesis:

- H<sub>1a</sub>:** There is a significant and positive effect of consumer brand awareness on brand equity.
- H<sub>1b</sub>:** There is a significant difference in the consumer brand awareness between local and global brands.

## Brand Associations

Brand associations refer to anything "linked" in the memory to a brand<sup>19</sup> and have been defined as informational nodes which have linkages to brand nodes in consumer's memory that contains the meaning of a brand for buyers<sup>28</sup>. The strength of these brand associations has different levels<sup>52</sup> which depends on consumer's exposures to frequency of brand communications<sup>19</sup>. Brand personality also contributes to brand equity. Both Aaker<sup>27</sup> as well as Keller<sup>12</sup> have recognized importance of brand associations such as brand personality. Studies have shown that consumers reward socially responsible brands by purchasing them frequently<sup>53</sup>. In the past, researchers have suggested the need for recognition of brand personality as a worldwide construct because of its important contribution to brand equity<sup>19,54</sup>. Personality stimulation assessments explain a consumer's emotional dependency on a particular brand<sup>55</sup>.

Brand associations create value for the firm and its customers by differentiating the brand and creating positive attitudes or feelings in the customers' minds. Consumers express their uniqueness through possession and display of original, innovative, and unique brands<sup>56</sup>. Indian consumers associate global brands as those with a personality of individualist, modern, and which do not conform to traditional value system<sup>57</sup>. Consumer may, thus, think that using global brands may set individuals apart, that is, enhance their uniqueness.

Based on literature review, this study examines the following hypothesis:

- H<sub>2a</sub>:** There is a significant and positive effect of brand association(s) on brand equity.
- H<sub>2b</sub>:** There is a significant difference in brand associations between local and global brands.

## Perceived Quality

Various researchers have defined perceived quality from the point of view of subjective judgement of consumers regarding the total excellence or superiority of a product<sup>48,58</sup>. The perceived quality of a brand influences the brand's inclusion and exclusion from the consumer's consideration set. It has also been found to influence the brand loyalty<sup>59</sup>. The perceived quality advantage provides the firm an ability to charge a premium which, in turn, may lead to increased profits and/or provide resources for reinvestment in the brand<sup>19</sup>. In addition, being a relative concept, perceived quality is influenced by situational-, comparative-, and even individual-specific variables that includes consumer's previous experience, education level, purchase purpose, time pressure, purchase situation, and social background<sup>60</sup>.

Several researchers have examined the construct 'brand perceived quality'<sup>61,62</sup>. Since perceived quality is an important brand value constituent<sup>58</sup>, a high perceived brand quality will lead to a customer choosing a particular brand and not that of the competitor. Hence, brand equity will increase to the extent consumers perceive quality of a brand.

Perceived quality plays an important role in determining customer preferences towards local and global brands<sup>63</sup>. Customers in developed as well as developing countries have preference for global brands due to their high quality<sup>43,64</sup>. This may be due to the fact that if a brand is available globally, it is assumed that its quality is accepted internationally. Therefore, consumers perceive that global brands possess high quality<sup>65</sup>. Additionally, Batra et al.<sup>16</sup> found that global brands carry appeal even to local consumers due to their higher perceived quality. Therefore, perceived product quality is essential for developing and implementing marketing strategies aimed at building brand image and improving market share. Aaker<sup>27</sup> also discussed the importance of perceived quality in order to build brand equity. Thus, perceived brands quality is important in influencing customer perception and ensuring the long-term success of firms and their brands<sup>66</sup>. Furthermore, Ramaseshan and Tsao<sup>67</sup> proposed that exciting brands with trendy styles and designs will be perceived to be of high quality because while making judgements about perceived quality, consumers assess a product's physical attributes such as its packaging, its style, and overall appearance.

This study, thus, examines the following hypothesis:

- H<sub>3a</sub>:** There is a significant and positive effect of consumer brand perceived quality on brand equity.
- H<sub>3b</sub>:** There is a significant difference in the consumer perceived quality between local and global brands.

## Brand Loyalty

Most of the businesses strive for creating, maintaining, and improving customer loyalty for its brands, products, or services<sup>68</sup>. The responses of loyal consumers to a brand are

expected to be more favourable than the consumers who are either non-loyal or keep on switching frequently<sup>69</sup>. It has been suggested that the companies which focus on building customer loyalty will benefit by having better profitability, less marketing expenditure, and better competitive advantage<sup>70</sup>Reichheld and Sasser, 1990). Brand loyalty has been defined as the measure of a customer's attachment towards a particular brand<sup>19</sup> or "the degree to which a buying unit e.g. a household, concentrates its purchases over time on a particular brand within a product category"<sup>71</sup>. Brand loyalty has been referred to as a consumer's sincere commitment for rebuying (or repatronizing) a preferred brand in the future, consistently, despite situational factors and competitor's marketing efforts<sup>72</sup>.

The brand loyalty concept has been discussed frequently in brand satisfaction context<sup>73,74</sup>. Jayasankaraprasad and Kumar<sup>75</sup> confirmed the relation between satisfaction and consumer intention to repurchase. Brand satisfaction depends upon user's brand experience and ultimately leads to customer retention and, hence, customer repurchase<sup>76</sup> which translates into sales, and hence improving the brand equity. Thus brand equity will increase depending upon the consumers' loyalty to the brand.

Consumers' attitudes towards brands help in determining brand loyalty. In general, positive attitudes of consumers will lead to strong loyalty<sup>77</sup>. Positive attitudes of Chinese consumers towards US clothing brands had a significant influence on their intentions to purchase US brands in clothing category<sup>78</sup>.

Based on literature review, this study examines the following hypothesis:

- H<sub>4a</sub>**: There is a significant and positive effect of consumer brand loyalty on brand equity.
- H<sub>4b</sub>**: There is a significant difference in the consumer brand loyalty between local and global brands.

The summary of the hypothesis is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Summary of Hypothesis**

HYPOTHESIS	DESCRIPTION
<b>H1a</b>	Significant and positive influence of consumer brand awareness on CBBE
<b>H1b</b>	A significant difference in consumer brand awareness between local and global brands
<b>H2a</b>	Significant and positive influence of brand associations on CBBE
<b>H2b</b>	A significant difference in brand associations between local and global brands
<b>H3a</b>	Significant and positive influence of consumer perceived brand quality on CBBE
<b>H3b</b>	A significant difference in consumer perceived brand quality between local and global brands
<b>H4a</b>	Significant and positive influence of consumer brand loyalty on CBBE
<b>H4b</b>	A significant difference in consumer brand loyalty between local and global brands

Source: Author's own.

## Measures of the Constructs

On the basis of items used in the literature, we generated a pool of sample measures (see Appendix 1) of brand equity and its dimensions. The brand awareness scale was adapted from Rajh<sup>79</sup> and Yoo et al.<sup>80</sup>, while the seven items constituting brand association scale were taken from previous researches of Yoo et al.<sup>80</sup>, Villarejo-Ramos and Sánchez-Franco<sup>81</sup>, and Hananto<sup>82</sup>. The scales of perceived quality (eight items) were borrowed from Yoo et al.<sup>80</sup> and Villarejo-Ramos and Sánchez-Franco<sup>81</sup>, and they measured consumers' subjective judgement about a brand's excellence or superiority. In the current study, the brand loyalty scale consisting of seven brand loyalty items captured the overall attitudinal extent of being loyal to a specific brand, rather than the behavioural aspects. The brand loyalty items were adapted from Yoo et al.<sup>80</sup>, Villarejo-Ramos and Sánchez-Franco<sup>81</sup>, and Hananto<sup>82</sup>. The overall brand equity scale consisting of five items was taken from the study of Yoo et al.<sup>80</sup>. This scale was used for measuring consumers' overall attitudinal disposition, including intention to choose a particular brand against its unbranded version. All these items reflected consumers' overall brand perception.

## Data Collection

The study employed personal survey technique to generate the necessary data. The questionnaire consisted items for measuring brand equity, its dimensions and demographics. We conducted the personal questionnaire survey in North India, including New Delhi, Noida, Gurgaon, and Faridabad. The respondents were actual users of the smartphones who were randomly given any of the six brands being studied and asked to respond to the questions. Three international brands, that is, Apple, Samsung, and Nokia, and three domestic brands, that is, Karbonn, Micromax, and Lava, were used based on the familiarity of respondents. A total of 310 personal interviews were conducted, which resulted in **288 valid surveys**. For international smartphones, there were 46 respondents of Apple (Table 2), 48 of Samsung, and 49 of Lenovo, while those of domestic smartphone brands included 50 for Micromax, 47 for Lava, and 48 for Karbonn. The survey included questions related to the consumers' evaluation of brand equity and its dimensions.

We used smartphones as the product stimuli since they are being used by the current set of respondents, frequently. In this study, we differentiate between feature phones and smartphones by referring a "smartphone" as a mobile phone which runs on a high-level mobile operating system (e.g., iOS, Android, Symbian, Windows) and which can run third party applications (apart from basic voice telephony services). We used non-probability sampling method, in general, and convenience sampling method, in particular. The questionnaires were administered to respondents personally. Both the genders had almost equal representation

**Table 2.** Types of Smartphones and Respondents

	Apple	Samsung	Lenovo	Micromax	Lava	Karbons	Total
<b>Male</b>	22	25	26	24	24	26	147
<b>Female</b>	24	23	23	26	23	22	141
<b>Total</b>	46	48	49	50	47	48	288

Source: Author's own.

(Appendix 2) in the sample. The data 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) was used for data collection.

## Data Analysis and Results

In September 2015, we initially collected responses through 50 pretest surveys from 5 corporate executives, 5 academicians, 5 research scholars pursuing PhD in marketing, and 25 management graduates. Accordingly, some of the items were refined to be more representative of the intended constructs, thus enhancing the scale's content validity. For the analysis of the measurement model, the two-step approach was followed<sup>83</sup>. In the first stage, we ensured reliability of the measures, while the hypotheses was tested in the second stage.

## Reliability

To check the scale reliability, we calculated the coefficient alpha<sup>84</sup> for items of each construct by using the cut-off

level of 0.70<sup>85</sup> as standard. We eliminated those items whose contribution to the scale reliability was insignificant. Recomputation of alpha values for the reduced sets of items led to further deletion of items and also improved corresponding alpha values. The high alpha values of constructs and the combined reliability of 0.807 (Table 3) for the 17-item scale was quite satisfactory.

## Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

We checked the values of Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett's test of sphericity. The sample and factors extracted were found to be adequate and appropriate as the KMO value (0.846) was more than 0.5 and Bartlett's test was significant (p-value = 0.000). By using principal component analysis (PCA) method for extracting the components, we retained the components with eigenvalues more than 1. The varimax rotation resulted, finally, in retention of 17 items (Table 3) corresponding to 4 unique dimensions, that is, brand

**Table 3.** Scale Reliability and EFA

Statement	Code	Mean	SD	CAC (NI)	FL	% var	EV
Even if another brand is identical to brand X, I would prefer brand X to other brand.	OBE1	3.663	1.130		.810	21.903	3.724
Even if another brand has same features as brand X, I would prefer to buy X	OBE2	3.716	1.041	0.818(4)	.806		
If there is another brand as good as X, I prefer to buy brand X	OBE3	3.832	1.038		.799		
It makes sense to buy brand X instead of some other brand even if they are the same	OBE4	3.736	1.069		.734		
Brand X would be my first choice	BLO1	3.356	.957		.792	14.823	2.521
I will buy brand X again	BLO2	3.438	.925	0.785(4)	.787		
I will suggest brand X to other consumers	BLO3	3.529	.987		.769		
I consider myself to be loyal to X brand	BLO4	3.361	.890		.765		
Brand X is a brand characterised by its continuous innovation	PRQ1	3.933	.888		.880	12.671	2.154
Brand X is of high quality	PRQ2	4.058	.855	0.833(3)	.844		
Brand X is a quality leader within its category	PRQ3	3.952	.936		.841		
This brand X is very well known to me	BAW1	3.760	.868		.883	11.44	1.945
I am acquainted with this brand X	BAW2	3.740	.927	0.821(3)	.874		
I can recognise brand X among other competing brands	BAW3	3.721	.834		.810		
Brand X has a strong personality	BAS1	3.644	.942		.880	8.613	1.464
I have a clear impression of the type of people who use Brand X	BAS2	3.587	.964	0.822(3)	.849		
I can quickly recall the symbol or logo of brand X	BAS3	3.514	.978		.773		

Key: SD: Standard Deviation; CAC (NI): Cronbach's Alpha of Construct (No. of Items) ; Var: Variance; EV: Eigen Value; FL: Factor Loadings

Source: Author's own.

Notes: SD: standard deviation; CAC (NI): Cronbach's alpha of construct (no. of items); Var: variance; EV: eigenvalue; FL: factor loadings.

**Table 4.** Correlations among constructs

	Construct Correlations				
	BLO	PRQ	BAW	BAS	OBE
<b>BLO</b>	1.000				
<b>PRQ</b>	0.023	1.000			
<b>BAW</b>	0.085	0.013	1.000		
<b>BAS</b>	0.084	0.139*	0.136*	1.000	
<b>OBE</b>	0.062	0.253**	0.027	0.356**	1.000

**Source:** Author's own.

**Notes:** \* significant at  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*significant at  $p < 0.01$ .

awareness (3 items), brand associations (3 items), perceived quality (3 items), and brand loyalty (4 items) other than overall brand equity (4 items).

The inter-correlations between different dimensions of brand equity, for example, between perceived quality and brand associations ( $\beta = 0.139$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ); between perceived quality and overall brand equity ( $\beta = 0.253$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ); between brand association and overall brand equity ( $\beta = 0.356$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ); and between brand awareness and brand association ( $\beta = 0.139$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) were significant and positive (Table 4). Similarly, all the inter-item relationships of different constructs (Table 5), namely between perceived quality items PRQ1, PRQ2, and PRQ3; between brand loyalty items BLO1, BLO2, BLO3, and BLO4; between brand equity items OBE1, OBE2, OBE3, and OBE4; between brand awareness items BAS1, BAS2, and BAS3; and between brand association items BAS1, BAS2, and BAS3 are all positive and significant.

## Relationships between Brand Equity and its Dimensions

To test our hypotheses regression analysis was conducted to test the proposed relationships (Table 1). The results provided strong support for all the hypothesis, which indicate the positive and direct role of brand associations ( $\beta = 0.328$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and perceived quality ( $\beta = 0.207$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) in affecting brand equity (Table 6). The influence of brand awareness and brand loyalty, however, in influencing brand equity was found to be insignificant. VIF (variance inflation factor) values (Table 6) of independent variables, less than the threshold level of three, indicate absence of multi-collinearity problem<sup>86</sup>.

Table 7 shows a statistically significant difference in the perceptions of different brand equity dimensions between Indian and foreign brands.

## Discussion

The study contributes to our understanding of consumer-based brand equity in the context of the national and international smartphone brands in India. Our findings provide empirical evidence to show that consumer-based brand equity is multidimensional, supporting Aaker's<sup>19</sup>

model. The four-dimensional construct observed in the present study is similar to that suggested by Cobb-Walgren et al.<sup>30</sup>

The two hypotheses, that is,  $H_{2a}$  (a positive direct significant relation between brand associations and brand equity) and  $H_{3a}$  (a positive direct significant relation between brand perceived quality and brand equity) were supported. However, the hypotheses  $H_{1a}$  (a positive direct significant relation between brand awareness and brand equity) and  $H_{4a}$  (a positive direct significant relation between brand loyalty and brand equity) were not supported in our study. The results indicate the positive and direct role of brand associations and perceived quality in decreasing order, in affecting brand equity.

The findings, that is, a significant and positive relationship between brand association and brand equity, are similar to those of many other researchers<sup>37,80</sup> who have found a similar relationship. Our findings do not, however, provide enough support for any significant relation between brand awareness and brand equity. These findings are similar to those of Bailey and Ball<sup>87</sup> who stated that a brand name alone does not guarantee success. Brand awareness has an impact up to an extent beyond which organizations need to build strong, favourable, and unique associations so as to ensure brand purchase. This illustrates the point that simply creating brand awareness is not enough but brand associations also play an important role at the same time for consumers. Our study also shows a positive and significant correlation ( $r = 0.136$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) between brand awareness and brand associations (Table 4) which is similar to many other previous studies<sup>32,33</sup>. Brand awareness has been found to influence customer purchase decision by influencing the strength of brand associations<sup>102</sup>. Further, high brand awareness levels have positive impact on brand image<sup>81,88</sup>. Despite an insignificant impact on brand equity, the important role of brand awareness in building brand equity cannot be, therefore, ignored completely.

Our study shows a positive and significant role of perceived quality in building brand equity. In their study, Yoo et al.<sup>80</sup> found that there was a positive relation between perceived quality and brand equity, but its relation with brand equity was not as strong as between brand loyalty and brand equity. Researchers in past<sup>12</sup> did not acknowledge the direct influence of perceived quality on brand knowledge. A possible explanation could be that perceived quality was simply considered to be a brand association that exists in consumer's mind. There have been, thus, differences among researchers regarding perceived quality and its influence on brand equity. Our findings, therefore, add a new perspective to brand equity research by showing perceived quality to be a significant predictor of brand equity.

Our study also shows a positive and significant correlation ( $r = 0.139$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) between perceived quality and brand associations (Table 4). The findings are similar

**Table 5. Inter Item Correlations of Constructs**

	Inter-Item Correlation Matrix																
	PRQ3	PRQ1	PRQ2	BLO1	BLO3	BLO2	BLO4	OBE1	OBE3	OBE2	OBE4	BASI	BAS3	BAS2	BAW2	BAW1	BAW3
<b>PRQ3</b>	1.000																
<b>PRQ1</b>	0.694	1.000															
<b>PRQ2</b>	0.571	0.610	1.000														
<b>BLO1</b>	0.062	0.017	-0.072	1.000													
<b>BLO3</b>	-0.002	-0.030	-0.059	0.512	1.000												
<b>BLO2</b>	0.047	0.054	0.017	0.473	0.482	1.000											
<b>BLO4</b>	0.085	0.063	-0.019	0.485	0.403	0.512	1.000										
<b>OBE1</b>	0.240	0.180	0.075	0.071	-0.018	0.100	0.017	1.000									
<b>OBE3</b>	0.305	0.260	0.196	0.085	0.014	0.022	0.017	0.656	1.000								
<b>OBE2</b>	0.164	0.136	0.116	0.058	-0.066	0.124	0.048	0.559	0.532	1.000							
<b>OBE4</b>	0.224	0.149	0.059	0.031	0.030	0.064	0.023	0.462	0.465	0.505	1.000						
<b>BASI</b>	0.139	0.145	0.008	0.146	0.090	0.074	0.068	0.282	0.176	0.207	0.199	1.000					
<b>BAS3</b>	0.207	0.157	0.039	0.082	0.019	0.118	0.087	0.306	0.252	0.263	0.265	0.582	1.000				
<b>BAS2</b>	0.160	0.069	-0.012	0.019	0.006	-0.007	-0.033	0.271	0.263	0.229	0.222	0.678	0.539	1.000			
<b>BAW2</b>	0.002	-0.021	-0.048	0.023	0.085	0.111	0.056	0.022	0.025	0.023	0.057	0.104	0.137	0.123	1.000		
<b>BAW1</b>	0.004	-0.034	-0.014	0.069	0.088	0.083	0.031	0.070	0.046	0.047	0.025	0.096	0.078	0.135	0.708	1.000	
<b>BAW3</b>	0.051	0.086	0.077	0.022	0.012	0.052	0.051	0.023	-0.004	-0.025	-0.099	0.064	0.052	0.108	0.550	0.561	1.000

Source: Author's own.



**Table 6.** Results of Regression Analysis

IV	DV	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig.	VIF	Hypothesis
		B	Std. Error	Beta					
<b>BAW</b>	<b>OBE</b>	-0.027	0.074	-0.023		-0.361	0.718	1.025	Not supported
<b>BAS</b>	<b>OBE</b>	0.343	0.068	0.328		5.021	0.000	1.044	supported
<b>PRQ</b>	<b>OBE</b>	0.230	0.072	0.207		3.209	0.002	1.020	supported
<b>BLO</b>	<b>OBE</b>	0.038	0.076	0.032		0.502	0.616	1.013	Not supported

**Source:** Author's own.

**Notes:** IV– Independent variable; DV– Dependent variable; BAW– Brand Awareness; BAS– Brand Associations; PRQ– Perceived Quality BLO– Brand Loyalty; OBE: Overall Brand Equity.

**Table 7.** Difference between Brand Equity Dimensions of Indian & Foreign Brands

Brand Equity Dimensions	Indian Brands		Foreign Brands		Sig
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
<b>PRQ</b>	2.761	0.728	4.043	0.573	0.000
<b>BLO</b>	2.214	0.851	3.687	0.796	0.000
<b>BAW</b>	3.433	0.814	4.378	0.505	0.000
<b>BAS</b>	2.990	0.764	4.192	0.687	0.000

**Source:** Author's own.

**Notes:** BAW- Brand Awareness; BAS- Brand Associations; PRQ- Perceived Quality; BLO-Brand Loyalty.

to those of the researchers<sup>12,19,33</sup> who suggested that consumers having favourable brand associations are also expected to have favourable brand quality perceptions and vice versa. Brand associations represent the meaning of a brand and its quality to its customers. There are numerous possible brand associations that a smartphone firm can build. Product attributes are an important type, but there can be other types of associations important for the customers. For example, association with brand imagery, lifestyles, and even country of origin can indicate a smartphone brand's quality.

This study shows the insignificant role of customer loyalty in building brand equity for smartphone brands. The findings are inconsistent with many previous studies which have shown brand loyalty to be a major determinant of brand equity<sup>89,90,91</sup>. One reason could be an increased transparency in transactions through internet, making comparison easier for consumers to find a better deal elsewhere. The customer may switch to the site offering same quality smartphone brands at a lower price. A decreasing customer loyalty also indicates that a smartphone is either not relevant enough or does not stand out from the competition; and the customer simply makes a rational purchase decision, rather than having any emotional connect with the brand. Consumers are loyal to a brand's engagement experience and once it disappears, the emotional connect between consumers and brand also disappears. By improving the perceptions of brand quality and helping customers in differentiating one brand from another, companies can improve financial gains by increasing customer's satisfaction.

A significant difference was found between the brand equity dimensions of Indian and foreign brands. All the dimensions had higher means for foreign brands than Indian brands. There is a significant difference in brand awareness and brand associations of local and global brands. Thus, hypotheses H1a and H1b are supported. Past studies have indicated that brand awareness is an important component of CBBE by itself and not along with brand association<sup>33</sup>. Brands with good country-of-origin images have high familiarity with consumers as these brands are perceived to be manufactured by producers of quality products<sup>103</sup>. This, in turn, helps in improved consumers' recall as well as recognition of brands depending upon country of origin<sup>99</sup>. Brand origin would affect brand associations because consumers with knowledge of a brand's country of origin would associate the brand positively or negatively<sup>92</sup>.

Our study supports hypothesis H3b (a significant difference in the consumer perceived quality between local and global brands). Past research shows that a brand's country of origin significantly influences its perceived quality<sup>93</sup>. Indian consumers have high quality perceptions of foreign brands than domestic brands<sup>17</sup>. Also, Kumar et al.<sup>11</sup> have found positive attitudes of Indian consumers towards US brands' perceived quality. Research also shows that consumers of less developed economies view quality of domestic brands to be inferior than their foreign counterparts<sup>94</sup>.

Our study supports hypothesis H4b (a significant difference in the consumer brand loyalty between local and global brands). Countries with favourable images have

high awareness levels combined with high perceived quality levels which in turn lead to high consumer brand loyalty levels<sup>95</sup>. Country's image has a "halo" effect, especially when there is a limited knowledge about the brand among consumers<sup>96</sup>.

To summarize, the research results indicate that different CBBE components impact the creation of brand equity positively but with different levels of intensity, and that there is a significant difference in the perceptions of brand equity dimensions between Indian and global brands.

## Managerial Implications

The measures developed in this study are reliable which will help brand managers monitor brand equity regularly. By using these measures as a tool to evaluate and track brand performance, managers can locate the strong and weak points of brands. This will, in turn, help them in making appropriate allocation of resources by maintaining a balance of brand equity dimensions so as to evaluate the impact of their brand-building efforts in the long run.

Our study found that among different brand equity dimensions, perceived quality was a significant positive contributor towards brand equity. Due to fierce competition and frequent new product launches in the market, consumers generally experience product knowledge through a wide range of better options available to them<sup>97</sup>, but the recent trends in smartphone industry are different. Every year, the smartphone industry is moving close to an optimal combination of attributes such as size, shape, weight, dimensions, features, and even performance. Companies are trying to differentiate their offerings by increasing the screen size and camera resolution, but such changes may not be perceptible to consumers or may be even undesirable from consumers' viewpoint. With the arrival of new technologies such as 4G, the voice quality of smartphone, which was earlier a prime differentiator, has lost its relevance in the period of instant messaging and social networking. Further, a strong need for more and more powerful batteries may not allow phones to be thinner or even lighter. In total, in recent years, the appearance and feel of smartphones has become homogeneous. Hence, there are now few visual cues to differentiate smartphone brands. Therefore, local smartphone firms and their managers need to create brand differentiation by focusing on product quality, in order to create inclination and preference for their brands.

Since perceived quality is consumers' subjective judgement, they will evaluate quality from their past experiences and feelings with the brand. Indian smartphone firms, therefore, have to focus on customer satisfaction through pleasant brand experiences of customers. This customer satisfaction will contribute towards the profitability of firm and, hence, its brand equity. However, managers of these firms need to understand that there is a correlation between price and perceived quality. They should avoid

frequent price deals or discounts because such activities negatively affect consumer's brand quality perceptions, particularly when consumers strongly relate price to product quality of a product category such as smartphone.

Managers also need to understand that consumers do not necessarily buy brands just for the conspicuousness of the brand name but also because of the superior quality reflected by that name. Consumers will have positive perceptions of quality only if there is some substance in the firm's quality claim regarding its brands. For creating high quality products, a firm needs to understand clearly the meaning of quality for its customers. Creating a quality product, however, may be only a partial victory; associations need to be created as well. Further, a company needs to achieve quality on those dimensions that consumers consider important and needs to ensure that adequate investments are made in product quality in those areas which resonate with consumers.

Our findings suggest that brand loyalty is a poor predictor of brand equity. One possible explanation could be that technical progress may not necessarily ensure commercial success. Rapid innovations in technology have provided consumers techniques to compare, evaluate, choose, and even experience brands. There are smartphone apps, for example, ShopSavvy, which can help in expanding consumers' choices instantly and even offering alternate products. By using these apps, consumers can also avail information through peer reviews and information on nearby stores. In other cases, customers are increasingly becoming loyal towards the channels (e.g., Amazon) and not to the brands or categories. Then there are comparison shopping sites, for example, naaptol.com, which provide consumers an opportunity to compare products and channels and entice the customers with better deals, hence reducing their brand loyalty. Such technologies are creating brand-agnostic consumers. Further, since tech-savvy customers will have preference for the latest and best brands, they have higher propensity to switch over to new brands.

Due to intense competition, developing and maintaining unique product features, while keeping costs low, is becoming difficult for Indian smartphone firms. A better option is, therefore, building a customer-brand relationship beyond product features. This will help in building a higher consumer commitment and decrease the vulnerability to the competing firms' offers. Traditionally, Indian companies have primarily focused on the functional aspects of the product while ignoring the emotional and value aspects, thus losing many customers in the long run. Managers need to systematically apply the new principles and tools (e.g., total customer experience) to ensure long-lasting customer loyalty. By developing such engaging and lasting total customer experiences as intangible assets, managers can build immeasurably high brand equity in terms of extended customer loyalty through referrals created by these customers.

Now, if the customers, especially the technology enthusiasts, are becoming less brand loyal, what can smartphone brand managers of Indian companies do? There is an urgent need to empower customers with digital technologies so as to reinforce the brand. Execution of a digital brand experience requires focus on new partnerships, new technologies, and even new platforms. In case, the managers fail to create such digital experiences, their smartphone brands will become more vulnerable to competitors, leading to declining brand loyalty.

The consumer will purchase a brand only if he/she is aware of this brand. A high brand awareness will lead to perceptions of better brand quality, which in turn will lead to brand loyalty. Therefore, when developing either a new brand or even a new market, managers cannot ignore brand awareness. Building unique brand associations and a distinct product image has important managerial implications. As the market place becomes more crowded and products are becoming more complex, the consumers rely more on the brand image than its actual attributes in buying decisions. Managers can think of creating a lot of relevant associations with their brand, for example, ensuring that the brand is distributed through good image retail outlets or even certain organizational associations such as innovation, quality driven, and a concern for the environment. The managers need to identify important and relevant attributes for a large consumer segment. These attributes should be unique to the firm or those which are not its competitors' forte.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to understand the role of brand equity dimensions in building consumer-based brand equity by using smartphones as product stimuli in the Indian market by testing Aaker's<sup>19</sup> model. In this study, we explored the relationships between dimensions of brand equity and overall brand equity by developing hypotheses based on the findings from previous studies. We operationalized the constructs and empirically examined the relationships between brand equity and its dimensions. The EFA yielded four different and unique dimensions. Perceived quality and brand associations were found to be positively and significantly related to brand equity, thus enhancing the generalizability of related findings from previous studies. The insignificant impact of brand loyalty on brand equity shows the changing technology trends and

consumer behaviour. The traditional concept of brand loyalty's impact on brand equity is losing its significance in a technological product category such as a smartphone. Apart from developing a reliable and parsimonious scale, an important contribution of our study is the empirical evidence that consumer-based brand equity is multi-dimensional, endorsing Aaker's<sup>19</sup> conceptualization of brand equity. Furthermore, the distinctiveness of this study is the incorporation of brand personality measures as part of brand association scale to enlarge the scope of brand associations. Since brand equity is rooted in these dimensions, academicians and brand managers can capitalize on the strength of these dimensions. This study provides a comprehensive tool for managers to keep a tab on the brand health through measurement of multiple brand equity drivers. Strategically, the outcomes of this study will provide marketers a clear path for building their brands most effectively.

## Research Limitations and Future Research

Our study has successfully explored the effects of brand equity dimensions in creating brand equity in the Indian smartphone market. This study is not free from limitations. The four-dimensional construct observed in the present study which contrasts with the findings of a few previous researchers. This requires further research focusing on the number of dimensions of consumer-based brand equity in the context of smartphones market. This study focused only on select cities of North India. Thus, to generalize these findings across the country, researchers need to conduct more replicative studies across different cities. This study has used different smartphone brands from the smartphones category as product stimuli. To broaden the scope, future research should incorporate diverse product categories. Moreover, Indian smartphone brands having global recognition also need to be investigated as opposed to other global brands. Using non-probability technique restricts generalization of the findings of the current study. Future researchers may preferably use more representative probability samples. To summarize, scholars and practitioners should be cautious while interpreting the results from this study. While many findings may be relevant to other product categories/cultures/countries, others could be only relevant to a specific context.

**Appendix 1.** Measures of Brand Equity & its Dimensions

Construct (No. of Items)	Item	Source	
Brand awareness (6)	I can recognize brand X among other competing brands	Yoo et al. <sup>79</sup>	
	I am aware of brand X		
	I know brand X	Rajh <sup>79</sup> .	
	This brand X is not known to me ®		
	I am acquainted with this brand X		
Brand association (7)	I know this brand X very well	Yoo et al. <sup>79</sup>	
	Some characteristics of brand X come to my mind quickly		
	I can quickly recall the symbol or logo of brand X	Villarejo-Ramos and Sánchez-Franco <sup>81</sup>	
	Brand X has a strong personality		
	I have a clear impression of the type of people who use X brand		
	Brand X is associated with sincerity		Hananto <sup>82</sup> .
	Brand X is associated with excitement		
Perceived quality (8)	Brand X is associated with sophistication	Yoo et al. <sup>80</sup>	
	Brand X is of high quality		
	The likely quality of brand X is extremely high	Villarejo-Ramos and Sánchez-Franco <sup>81</sup>	
	The likelihood that brand X is reliable is very high		
	Brand X must be of very good quality		
	Brand X appears to be of very poor quality ®		
	The likelihood that brand X will be satisfactory is very high		
Brand loyalty (7)	Brand X is a brand characterized by its continuous innovation	Yoo et al. <sup>80</sup>	
	Brand X is a quality leader within its category		
	I consider myself to be loyal to X brand	Villarejo-Ramos and Sánchez-Franco <sup>81</sup>	
	Brand X would be my first choice		
	I will not buy other brands if X is available at the store		
	Brand X fulfilled my expectations the last time I bought it	Hananto <sup>82</sup>	
	I will buy brand X again		
	I will suggest brand X to other consumers		
	The price of another brand would have to be considerably inferior to not choose brand X		
	Even in the case of not using it, I would like to buy brand X		
Overall brand equity (5)	I feel committed to brand X	Yoo et al. <sup>80</sup>	
	It makes sense to buy brand X instead of some other brand even if they are the same		
	If another brand is not different from brand X in any way, it would still seem smarter to buy X	Yoo et al. <sup>80</sup>	
	If there is another brand as good as X, I prefer to buy brand X		
	Even if another brand has same features as brand X, I would prefer to buy X		
	Even if another brand is identical to brand X, I would prefer X to other brand.		

**Note:** (r) reverse coded.

**Appendix 2.** Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Demographic Characteristics		(N = 288)	
		F*	%
<b>Gender</b>	Male	145	50.35
	Female	143	49.65
<b>Age (years)</b>	18–30	79	27.43
	31–40	68	23.61
	40–50	62	21.53
	51–60	46	15.97
	60–70	33	11.46
<b>Education</b>	High School	34	11.81
	Graduates	97	33.68
	Post-graduates	108	37.50
	Others	49	17.01

Demographic Characteristics		(N = 288)	
		F*	%
<b>Marital status</b>	Single	86	29.86
	Married & with Kids	82	28.47
	Married but no Kids	79	27.43
	Others	15	5.21
<b>Household annual income (in ₹***)</b>	Upto 10 lakhs (₹***)	96	33.33
	Between 10 lakhs and 20 lakhs	84	29.17
	Between 20 lakhs and 30 lakhs	72	25.00
	More than 30 lakhs	36	12.50
<b>City-wise breakup of respondents</b>	Delhi	87	30.21
	Gurgaon	65	22.57
	Noida	78	27.08
	Faridabad	58	20.14

Notes: \*F-Frequency; \*\*₹-Indian rupee.

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