

Emotional or Functional Positioning? Exploring the Motivation to buy High-end Consumer Brands

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Abstract

This research study aims to investigate the impact of functional and emotional benefit positioning on purchase intention with the mediating role of brand attitude and moderating role of subjective norms. This quantitative, hypothesis testing study has been conducted on high end clothing brands catering to the female target audience. Data was gathered from a sample of 200 female users of these brands and analysis was done using Process macro by Hayes moderated mediation model 14 in SPSS. Results of the analysis supported five of the proposed hypotheses showing that functional benefit has the strongest relationship with purchase intention, followed by emotional benefits. The moderator subjective norms and mediator brand attitude did not have a significant impact which implies that choice of selecting clothing brands is mainly influenced by the quality, design, functional attributes and qualities. Furthermore, consumers value those emotional benefits which satisfy their social expression needs. Consumers buy their favorite, well known brands mainly on the basis of brand performance as compared to influence by subjective norms, i.e., opinion of family or friends. Our research provides a theoretical contribution by applying the renowned Theory of reasoned action to a new avenue of study. It also widens the range of factors that can help brands in adopting positioning strategies. It enhances knowledge and understanding of the variables and their relationships which can help in devising actionable strategies that can be used by brands.

Keywords: Emotional Positioning; Functional Positioning; Subjective norms; Purchase intention; Reasoned action

JEL Codes: M00, M1, M31.

1. Introduction

Brand positioning strategy is a diverse phenomenon that has grasped the attention of numerous scholars over the years. While a considerable number of research articles are available on the subject (Wang et al., 2022; He et al., 2022; Rua et al., 2022; Gilal et al., 2022; Olsen et al., 2022), there has been either a repetition of the variables being studied with it or there have been some dimensions that have not been fully investigated. Hence, through focusing the current research on the chosen variables, this reach aims to demonstrate, investigate and explain the relationships that exist amongst them. It will enhance the understanding on how the impact of functional and emotional strategies influences purchase intention and next to explore the moderating role of subjective norms in association to brand attitude (mediator). Results will emphasize the significance of the study variables from the consumer's viewpoint and under the context of the Theory of reasoned action. Brands can use the findings of this research to better

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understand the art of creating higher quality and uniqueness of product for their customers.

2. Literature review and hypothesis development

In brand management studies, functional benefit positioning is defined as “The exchange of key utilitarian benefits gained through usage of a product” (Crawford, 1985; Keller, 1993). Literature also indicates that “It is mostly gained from features of a product or brand and is likely to be functional in nature” (Keller, 1993; Gutman, 1982).

Functional benefits relate with the particular performance of the good or service. Utilitarian attributes relate with tangible features of the product that fulfill practical or functional needs. Nevertheless, it is difficult to distinguish a good product based on its tangible and utilitarian attributes in a competing market environment and hence consumers shift their attention to the cost of owning the product (Ahmad et al., 2015). Moreover, when the cost of shopping is less, the normal utilitarian advantage per gaining cost increases. (Kumagai and Nagasawa, 2018). Hence, functional attributes of a brand refer to all the tangible benefits offered by the brand, for example, the capability to perform better than other products.

Several discussions within the literature divide added values into two aspects, with a brand offering emotional and functional value. We now take a look at literature relevant to our second independent variable, emotional benefit positioning. It is seen that emotional values relate with the brand that are also termed and known as symbolic values, relating to intangible aspects, feelings and symbolic values which fulfill the needs of consumer’s self-expression (Bhat & Reddy, 1998; Nguyen et al., 2017). It is the emotional benefits inherent in the brand which gives social signals on behalf of their target consumers (Azmawani, et al., 2015). Hence, the emotional values relate to the personality of consumers that consists of freedom of expression, style, fashion, status, happiness, leisure and exclusiveness (Bhat & Reddy, 1998). With regard to the evaluation of emotional brands, brands that score high on the intangible characteristic or attributes involve preference for recommendations by family, friends and relatives regarding what to purchase from a specific brand.

In past research, it is argued that both emotional and functional benefits are important facets that impact the brand attitude (Baumann et al., 2015). Emotional benefit and functional benefits both show egoistic value goals (Hartmann & Ibanez, 2012). Past research outlines that the issue of brand marketing communication may not be important when customers are concerned only about the utilitarian benefit of brands and ignore whether the marketing activities are in accordance with the brand or product (Amin et al., 2011). Products that differ in terms of emotional value and provide similar functional benefits generate significant difference in purchase intention. That is, purchasers are not influenced by various brands rather, they are attracted to utilitarian benefits which shows some persistence or stability of utilitarian qualities in brand development. (Steg et al., 2014). Literature on brand attitude also demonstrates that

consumers consider the value attached to the emotional benefits of the product (Braun et al., 2016). This distinction may become visible when the product associates with and fit into group disposition and individual characteristics. (Batra et al., 2012; Park et al., 2012).

Hence, applying symbolic positioning may be effective for hedonic items including garments and expensive vehicles (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000; Schmitt, 1999; Yu et al., 2018). Conversely, functional goods group may include a reliable washing machine, laptops or electronic equipment (Keller et al., 2002). These functional products are very consistent with utility focused consumer's needs and hence, also additionally effective than experiential benefits (Aaker & Shansby, 1982; Abzari et al., 2014; Matthes et al., 2014).

Previous studies outline that both emotional and functional benefits are essential to the positioning of brands (Fuchs et al., 2010). However, self-expressive or emotional benefits have a symbolic and socialization impact which lasts in the mind of consumers (Lin et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2020). Taking a view into the literature pertaining to our mediating variable brand attitude, it is a psychological proclamation that asserts positive or negative influence on the customer. Brands are important to companies since they impact customer choice/preferences (Bairrada et al., 2018). Accordingly, brands need to have the correct marketing and branding strategy to develop a favorable brand attitude in the heart and mind of customers. Strong brands give a good impression in the mind of shoppers (Kartika & Kusuma, 2016).

Brand attitudes are valuable in anticipating customer intention to purchase. How brand attitude is formed and how it can impact significant behavior have been discussed in depth in the available literature (Olsen et al., 2014; Park et al., 2012; Schuitema et al., 2015; Singh et al., 2018). Past research outlines that there is a significant impact of brand attitude on buying intention. The variable of Brand attitude is the result of evaluation of the brand, which incorporates factors, for example, brand image, awareness, and relationship of qualities, features, benefits and attributes (Mohseni et al., 2018; Sangroya et al., 2017).

Discussing the dependent variable purchase intention, it is explained in the literature as the "possibility of purchasing a brand" (Esch et al., 2006; Wu et al., 2011). Several literature studies support that buyer attitude is positively related to purchase intention (Kim & Chung, 2011). When customer assesses new product knowledge, this influences their inclusion toward the product and may impact their buying intention. When customers acquire more information related to the product, the likelihood of their buying a specific product is considerably higher (Adis et al., 2015; Augusto et al., 2018).

In terms of connection between buying intention and attitude toward the brands and product or service, the result of studies shows that attitude toward the brand positively influences buying intention. (Hsu, 2019). Studies have explored that attitude toward

brands reflects consumer brand choice and preference of the brand. The behavior intention model is generally used to measure buyers' attitude and intention (Andrews et al., 2017). It outlines that a robust relation exists among intention and attitude; hence, attitude is viewed as essential for anticipating behavior intention (Gustin & Ha, 2014).

Discussing the theoretical underpinnings of this research, our study extracts the variable of subjective norms from the renowned 'Theory of Reasoned Action' (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1983). Subjective norms act as a moderator in our framework, which have been introduced to social sciences through the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1983). According to the theory of reasoned action, individual behavioral intention rests on two factors: attitude toward some behaviour and perception of societal pressures to act or not to act in a particular manner, stated to as the subjective norms (Garg et al., 2018). Going further into our review of subjective norms, it reflects the part of the theory of reasoned action that embodies social influence (Ajzen, 1988). As per literature, subjective norms reflect social pressure and influence that can be positive or negative (Ansary et al., 2017). Many past studies have explored subjective norms to impact buying intention (Bahar et al., 2017). It is the degree of one's own feeling about social pressure from other individuals or groups. Former research studies investigated that positive associations exist among behavioral intention and subjective norms. (Ajzen, 1991).

Subjective Norms are one's own feeling about social pressure from other individuals or groups. (Butler et al., 2012). Subjective norm is individual perception of behavior which is affected by other influencers. In existing studies, it has been shown that customers' behavioral intention to perform a specific activity are an element of subjective norms (Amaro et al., 2015). It is an individual's perception of the social pressure to act in a specific way or manner (Yang & Jolly, 2009). Companions, family, relatives and groups are the ones which help in structuring up the subjective norms. The intent to act in a specific way depend upon such classification of individuals. Subjective norms are recognizable opinions of individuals who are significant for an individual and influence their decision-making process. Furthermore, they also force a person to act or not to act out a specific kind of activity (Garg et al., 2018). These subjective norms can be a result of the experience of a person or the learnings that she or he has gained cumulatively (Chen et al., 2012).

In light of the above literature review, the following hypotheses are devised:

- H1:** There exists a significant relation between Functional Benefit and Brand Attitude
- H2:** There exists a significant relation between Emotional Benefit and Brand Attitude.
- H3:** There exists a significant relation between Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention
- H4:** Subjective Norms moderate the relation between Brand Attitude and Purchase intention
- H5:** Brand Attitude mediates the relation between Functional Benefit and Purchase intention

H6: Brand Attitude mediates the relation between Emotional Benefit and Purchase intention

H7: There exists a significant relation between Functional Benefit and Purchase intention

H8: There exists a significant relation between Emotional Benefit and Purchase intention

The following theoretical framework stems from the above hypotheses and literature review presented earlier.

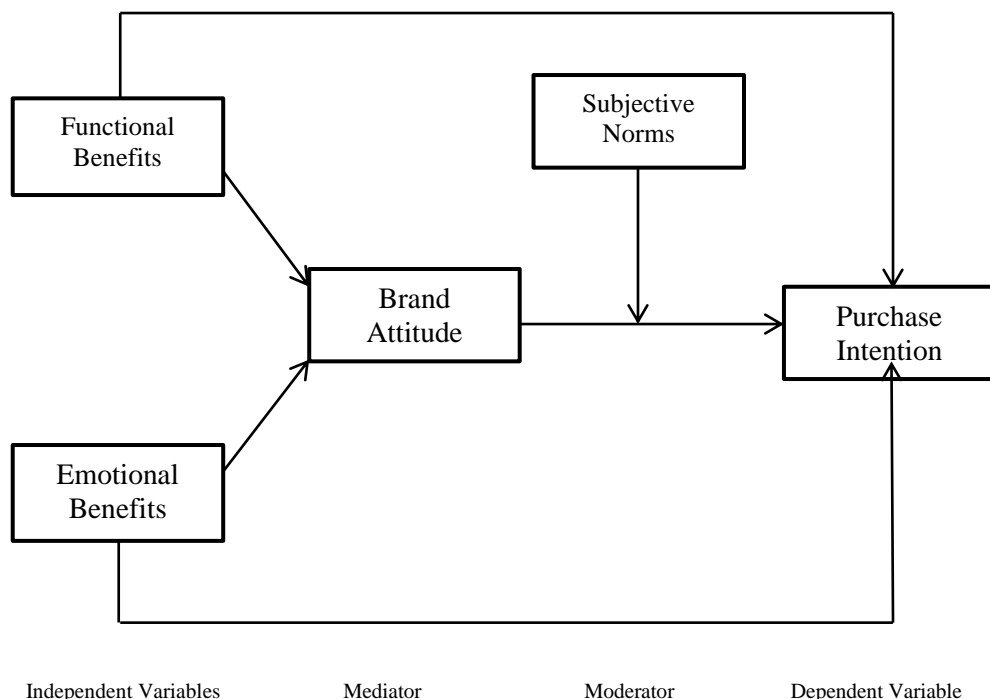


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

3. Research Design

In order to collect data for this hypothesis testing study, survey questionnaires were employed, with items adopted from various research studies. Responses were recorded anonymously to ensure the confidentiality of respondents. Half of the questionnaires were distributed by hand and half were filled online. The online data collection was done through google forms. Quantitative approach was employed in this research due to the use of empirical approach for the testing of the study's hypothesis model. Cross sectional design was utilized to collect data in a single shot from respondents, through their voluntary participation.

The variables of this study were measured at an individual level and consumers of the brand were used to collect responses. This research's study setting was Natural, conducted in a non-contrived setting of consumers to avoid any bias or manipulation. Convenience sampling technique was used with a sample of 200 respondents who were regular consumers of high end, leading clothing brands. The sample size was deduced on the basis of item response theory, i.e., Nunnally's (1978) formula ($20*10=200$), with 200 as the final number to have adequate responses. Data Analysis was done through SPSS software, using Reliability, Correlation and Model 14 of PROCESS Macro by Hayes.

3.1 Defining the study variables:

3.1.1 Functional Benefit

It is understood as exchange of the key benefit gain through usage of product or owning a brand" (Crawford, 1985; Keller, 1993). It is mostly gained from features of the product or brand and is likely to be functional in nature (Keller, 1993; Gutman, 1982). The selection of Functional benefits is highly relevant for our study due to it's immense practicality in the latest contemporary research on the topic (Wang et al., 2022; Gilal et al., 2022; He et al., 2022)

3.1.2 Emotional Benefit

Emotional values relate with the brand, that are also termed as symbolic values, relating to intangible aspects, feelings and symbolic values that fulfill the needs of consumers self-expression. It includes benefits that satisfy or provide symbolic values; provide consumers with a positive perception or feelings of self-fulfillment (Bhat & Reddy, 1998). This variable is worthy of exploration in relation to purchase intention, as evident from latest research articles (Olsen et al., 2022; Rua et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2022)

3.1.3 Purchase intention

"The possibility of purchasing a brand is said to be buying or purchase intention" (Esch et al., 2006) (Wu et al., 2011). Purchase intention has been studied in great detail in various sectors (Chakraborty et al., 2022; Narayanan et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2022; Bu et al., 2022) but is yet under explored for high end clothing brands in the study country

3.1.4 Subjective Norms

Subjective Norms mean the perceived social pressure either to act or not to act with influence of others (Ajzen, 1991). However, it is also one's feeling about social pressure from other individuals or groups. (Butler et al., 2012). Subjective norms has been selected as a moderator due to its relevance in social sciences as evident from a number of contemporary articles (Winter et al., 2022; Roh et al., 2022; Izquierdo et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2022)

3.1.5 Brand Attitude

Studies define brand attitude as a customer's overall favorable or unfavorable valuation of a certain brand or product. It is a consumer's response or behavior to a particular

brand or product (Lee, 2008). This variable has been selected due to its immense practicality in brand management research (Vidyanata et al., 2022; Hwang et al., 2022; De Keyzer et al., 2022; Zanger et al., 2022; Haryanto et al., 2022)

3.2 Measures

3.2.1 Functional and Emotional Benefits

The measurement of functional and emotional benefits was carried out separately by using Woo & Kim's (2018) 3 item measure, which has been used by other researchers as well. All items were appraised through a five-point Likert scale, ranging from (1) Always to (5) Never.

A sample item for functional benefit is "Buying from this brand offers value for money" while a sample item for emotional benefit is "I feel relaxed after purchasing from this brand"

3.2.2 Purchase Intention

The measurement of this variable was carried out by using a 4-item measure by Watanabe, (2014). All items were appraised through a five-point Likert scale, which contains a range from (1) Strongly Disagree to (5) strongly Agree. A sample item for purchase intention is "I am likely to buy again from this brand"

3.2.3 Subjective Norms

The measurement of subjective norms was carried out by using a 3-item measure (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1980),(Supanat, 2012) through a five-point Likert scale which contains a range from (1) Strongly Disagree to (5) Strongly Agree. A sample item for subjective norms is "My friends would think that I should choose this brand"

3.2.4 Brand Attitude

The measurement of brand attitude was carried out by using a 3-item measure (Colliander & Dahlen 2011) through a five-point Likert scale. A sample item for this variable is "This brand is favorable".

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Reliability Analysis

Reliability analysis is then carried out on the collected data, to compute and judge the internal consistency of variables. The summary of results is given below.

4.1.1 Interpretation:

Cronbach alpha values of above 0.7 indicate good reliability. The table above portrays that all five variables; Functional benefit, Emotional Benefit, Brand Attitude, Subjective Norms, Purchase intention have Chronbach's Alpha values above 0.7, hence, all variables are reliable. Functional benefits is reliable with Cronbach's Alpha value of .713. Emotional benefits is reliable with Cronbach's Alpha value of .765. Brand Attitude is at .701. Subjective norm is reliable with Cronbach's Alpha value of .751 and purchase intention is at .713.

Table 1. Reliability of the instrument

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	N items
Functional benefit	.713	3
Emotional Benefit	.765	3
Brand Attitude	.701	3
Subjective norms	.751	3
Purchase intention	.713	4

4.2 Correlation Analysis

The Correlation matrix results are shown in the table below.

Table 2. Correlation Matrix

	Functional Benefit	Emotional Benefit	Brand Attitude	Subjective Norms	Purchase Intention
Functional Benefit	1				
Emotional Benefit	.379**	1			
Brand Attitude	.532**	.548**	1		
Subjective norms	.360**	.341**	.481**	1	
Purchase Intention	.563**	.478**	.674**	.527**	1

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

4.2.1 Interpretation:

The correlation of the study variables is shown as above. It is seen that all the variables demonstrate a significantly positive correlation; at $p < 0.01$. The correlation between functional and emotional benefit is .379 so there is moderate positive correlation between functional and emotional benefit. The correlation between functional benefit and brand attitude is .532 which shows moderate to strong correlation. The correlation between functional and subjective norms is moderate at .360. The correlational between functional and Purchase intention is .563 while correlation between emotional benefit and brand attitude is .548; both are strong. The correlation between emotional benefit and subjective norms is .341 which indicates moderate correlation. The correlation between emotional benefit and purchase intention is .478 which shows moderate correlation. The correlation between Brand attitude and subjective norm is .481 which

also shows the moderate correlation. The correlation between brand attitude and purchase intention is strong, i.e., .674. Same is the case for subjective norms and purchase intention which has strong correlation of .527

4.3 Regression Analysis of Hypotheses Statements

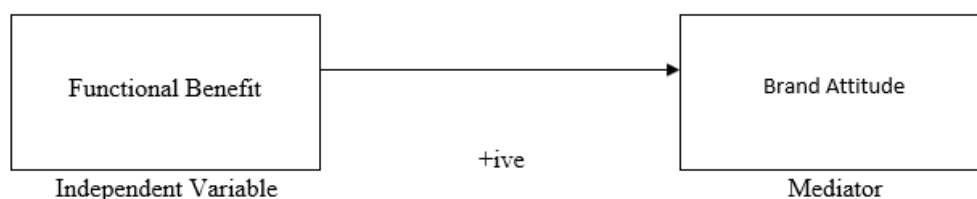
The proposed hypothesis of the study, Regression analysis is carried out. Model 14 of Process (Preacher & Hayes, 2005) has been utilized. The bootstrap level has been kept at 5000 and the confidence interval 95%

4.3.1 Model 1 Summary:

The value of R shows that the correlation is 53.1% between brand attitude and Functional benefit positioning. The value of R square is 28%, which shows that the amount of variation in Brand attitude, due to functional positioning, is 28%. The value of f (F=77.99) and p=0.000, shows that the model is good fitted.

4.3.2 Hypothesis 1

This hypothesis is supported as p value is 0.00. Indicating positive and significant relation between functional benefit and brand attitude .1 unit increase in functional benefit would lead to .48 increase in brand attitude.



4.3.3 Model 2 Summary:

The value of R shows that the correlation between purchase intention and other variables is 74.8%. The value of R square is 55.9 %, which shows that there is 55.9% variation in purchase intention due to interaction with other variables. The value of F (F=61.9332) and p=0.000 show that the model is good fitted.

4.3.4 Hypothesis 3

This hypothesis is supported as p value is 0.00. Indicating positive and significant relation between brand attitude and purchase intention .1 unit increase in brand attitude would lead to .1229 increase in Purchase Intention.

4.3.5 Hypothesis 7

This hypothesis is supported as p value is 0.00. Indicating positive and significant relation between functional benefit and purchase intention .1 unit increase in functional benefit would lead to .209 increase in brand attitude.

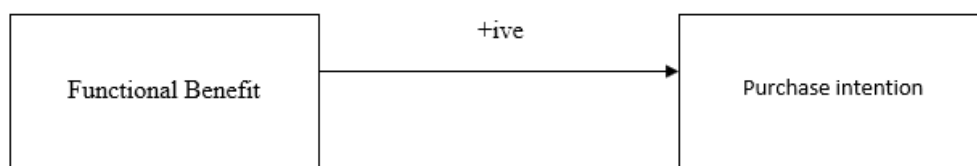
4.3.6 Hypothesis 4

The p value of Int_1 is 0.095 and LLCI (-.0214, ULCI (.2903) .which shows that there is no moderation. Subjective norm does not have a significant impact. Interaction term between moderator subjective norm and dependent variable (purchase intention). We hypothesis

Highest order unconditional interaction shows that the interaction explains .0065 conditional variant of purchase intention.

4.3.7 Direct effect of X on Y

The results show an interaction value of ULCI (.3029) and LLCI (.1169), and since both values are positive, the hypothesis is supported. Furthermore, (p=0.000 < 0.05). Direct effect of Functional benefit on purchase intention their p value .0.000 show the significant relation.

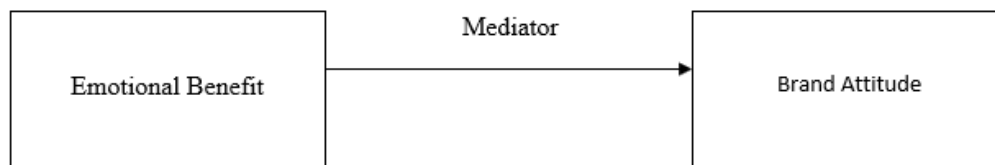


4.3.8 Indirect effect

The values of Boot UCLI (.1432) and Boot LLCI (-.0061) indicate that the indirect influence of Functional benefit (X) on purchase intention (Y) through the mediation of subjective norm is positive and insignificant as both values are not positive. This result does not support the hypothesis that brand attitude plays a mediating role between Functional benefit and intention to purchase.

4.3.9 Model 1 Summary:

The value of R shows that the correlation is 54.7% between brand attitude and emotional benefit positioning. The value of R square is 30%, which shows that the amount of variation in Brand attitude, due to emotional positioning, is 30%. The value of f (F=84.861) and p=0.000, proves that the model is good fitted.



4.3.10 Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 (Emotional benefit is positively related to Brand attitude) is supported, with results showing an interaction value of ULCI (.5626) and LLCI (.3642), hence, the positive values support the first hypothesis. Moreover, (p=0.000 < 0.05) and the

coefficient value of 0.4634 indicates a positive and significant relationship between emotional benefit and Brand attitude i.e., one unit change in emotional benefit results in a change of Brand attitude by 0.463.

4.3.11 Model 2 Summary:

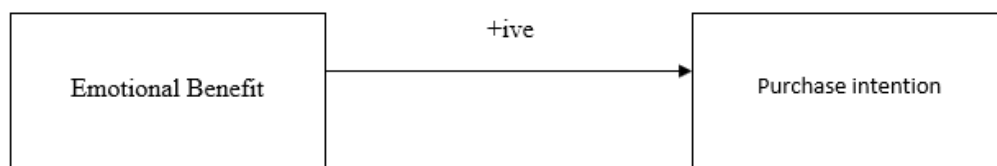
The value of R shows that the correlation between purchase intention and other variables is 72.4%. The value of R square is 52.5 %, which shows that there is 55.2% variation in purchase intention due to interaction with other variables. The value of F (F=54.0000) and p=0.000 show that the model is good fitted.

4.3.12 Hypothesis 8

This hypothesis is supported as p value is 0.03. Indicating positive and significant relation between emotional benefit and purchase intention. One unit increase in functional benefit would lead to .09 increase in purchase intention. The p value of Int_1 is .1247 and LLCI (-0353, ULCI (.288) .which shows that there is no moderation. Subjective norm does not have a significant impact. Interaction term between moderator subjective norm and dependent variable (purchase intention). We hypothesis Highest order unconditional interaction shows that the interaction explains .0058 conditional variant of purchase intention.

4.3.13 Direct effect of X on Y

The results show an interaction value of ULCI (.1868) and LLCI (0.0059), and since both values are positive, the hypothesis is supported. Furthermore, (p=0.03< 0.05) .Direct effect of emotional benefit on purchase intention their p value .036 show the significant relation.



The values of Boot UCLI (-.0216) and Boot LLCI (0.1472) indicate that the indirect influence of emotional benefit (X) on purchase intention (Y) through the mediation of subjective norm is positive and insignificant as both values are not positive. This result does not support the 5th hypothesis of the study, according to which, brand attitude mediates the relationship between emotional benefit and purchase intention.

4.4 Summary of Hypotheses Results

The following table depicts a summary of hypothesis results:

Table 3. Summary of Hypotheses Results

	Hypothesis Statements	Results
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H ₁	There exists a significant relation between Functional Benefit and Brand Attitude	Supported
H ₂	There exists a significant relation between Emotional Benefit and Brand Attitude.	Supported
H ₃	There exists a significant relation between Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention	Supported
H ₄	Subjective Norms moderate the relation between Brand Attitude and Purchase intention	Not Supported
H ₅	Brand Attitude mediates the relation between Functional Benefit and Purchase intention	Not Supported
H ₆	Brand Attitude mediates the relation between Emotional Benefit and Purchase intention	Not Supported
H ₇	There exists a significant relation between Functional Benefit and Purchase intention	Supported
H ₈	There exists a significant relation between Emotional Benefit and Purchase intention	Supported

5. Discussion

The key purpose of this research is to test the framework that has been proposed by this study. This framework has been developed with the help of previously existing literature, demonstrating possible links between the study variables; functional and emotional positioning, subjective norms, brand attitude and intention to purchase. In order to empirically examine and analyze these relationships, survey questionnaires were employed to gather data from respondents, consisting of consumers of the brands. The results of the analysis turned out to be both supportive and not supportive of the claims made by this study. Functional benefit has a stronger effect than emotional benefit because the customers are more effected by the quality and designs of clothing brand. Features of the brand are more important for the consumers. Following is a discussion on each of the hypothesis, separately.

The first hypothesis of the study “There is a significant relationship between Functional Benefit and Brand Attitude” was supported by the data analysis. The regression analysis

conducted on the data established a significantly positive relation amongst the two variables. Hence, companies must strive to build more utilitarian and unique features in their products.

The second hypothesis of the study “There is a significant relationship between Emotional Positioning and Brand Attitude” was supported by the data analysis. The regression analysis conducted on the collected data established a significantly positive relationship between the variables. Past research shows that more frequently, people make decisions to choose a brand or product on the basis of emotional benefits. In order to build a strong brand attitude and to differentiate a brand, it must set a strong emotional relation with the consumers. On one hand this requires the consistent monitoring of competitive activities and on the other hand, an in-depth understanding of the consumers emotional needs (Janiszewska & Insch (2018)

The third hypothesis of the study “There is a significant relationship between Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention” was supported by the data analysis. The regression analysis conducted on the data established a positive and significant relationship between the two variables. Consumers, by altering their consumption level and patterns will find solutions to their needs and wants. (Rehman & Khyzer, 2013). Brand attitude and quality are the components of the brand where upon purchase intention is dependent (Tariq et al,2013). These functions of the brand have a robust impact on intention to purchase. In terms of the connection between brand attitude and purchase intention, the result of studies showed that brand attitude is positively influenced by buyer intention (Hsu, L.- C. 2019; Themba et al., 2019).

The fourth hypothesis of our research “Subjective Norms moderate the relationship between Brand Attitude and Purchase intention” was not supported by the results. The regression analysis conducted on the collected data established an insignificant relationship between the two variables. Previous research studies have shown that the role of subjective norms in shaping intention is weaker as compared to the influence caused by attitude. In addition, the research study of (Krueger, & Carsrud, 2000) finds that subjective norms are not linked with attitude and intentions of people. Icek Ajzen (1991) who is the writer of the theory of planned behavior, elaborates this perspective by stating that intentions have a deep association with intrinsic factors like behavioral control and negative attitude. Individual behavior is effected by a variety of factors including past experiences regarding purchase of a particular product or brand, convenience perceptions, monetary restrictions, and several other factors, that increase or decrease the degree of intensity of this behavior. These are the possible reasons for the insignificant role of subjective norms.

The fifth hypothesis of our research “Brand Attitude mediates the relationship between Functional Benefit and Purchase intention” was not supported by the results. Our regression analysis conducted on the collected data established brand attitude to play an insignificant role of mediation between functional benefits and purchase intention. This can be attributed to consumers previous positive experience with the brand and presence of high degree of brand loyalty and trust which can be a latent variable for future studies.

The sixth hypothesis of our research “Brand Attitude mediates the relationship between Emotional Benefit and Purchase intention” is not supported in this study. The relation turned out to be insignificant. Negative information/publicity negatively affects consumers’ attitudes toward the brand. Such publicity may be quite common for the clothing industry. Any kind of negativity can harm the customer’s relationship with brand. Hence, based on the findings of our research, it can be implied that negative image of the brand or company can be considered as a homogeneous variable that hurts brand attitude. (Jung et al., 2016).

The seventh hypothesis of our research “There is a significant relationship between Functional Benefit and Purchase intention” was supported by the data results. Our regression analysis conducted on the data established a significantly positive relation amongst the two variables. Functional benefits relate with the particular performance of the goods and service. They are targeted towards meeting basics needs among consumers, to such an extent that their requirements are fulfilled with the usage of the products. Utilitarian attributes relate with a brand’s tangible features of the product that fulfill the user’s functional needs. (Kumagai and Nagasawa, 2018).

The eighth hypothesis of the research “There is a significant relationship between Emotional Benefit and Purchase Intention” was supported by the data results. The regression analysis conducted on the data established a significantly positive relation amongst the two variables. When customers witness promotional ideas from a large number of brands having same functional attributes and qualities, they will value the emotional benefits which satisfy their social expression needs, leading to purchase intention.

Both functional and emotional/symbolic benefit positioning strategies of brand develop purchase intention. (Kumagai and Nagasawa, 2018). Keeping in view the above discussion, this research also compliments previous credible research studies on the subject of Marketing, branding and positioning (Olsen et al., 2022; Rua et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2022; Vidyanata et al., 2022; Hwang et al., 2022; De Keyzer et al., 2022; Zanger et al., 2022; Haryanto et al., 2022; Gilal et al., 2018, 2020, 2022; Li et al., 2022).

6. Implications of the study

It is pertinent to mention that our research has multiple implications for scholars and practitioners. As highlighted earlier, our study extracts the variable of subjective norms from the renowned 'Theory of Reasoned Action' (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1983). According to the theory of reasoned action, individual behavioral intention rests on two factors: attitude toward some behaviour and perception of societal pressures to act or not to act in a particular manner, stated to as subjective norms (Garg et al., 2018). However, in our findings, subjective norms do not moderate purchase intention as in case of premium or high end consumer brands, the brand equity or image may have a relatively major role to play in purchase intention. Hence, it is implied that if the brand image and goodwill is strong, other factors like price or subjective norms will have less of an impact. This finding is also an addition to the current theory of reasoned action as it explores a new dimension of the theory. It also presents an important implication for practitioners to focus on building long term brand equity and also for scholars to further explore the role of brand image and brand equity as moderators.

7. Limitations

- 1) Since this study specifically focused on only two positioning strategies, hence the sample selected for data collection only comprised of consumers that understand the concept of these strategies. Those who evaluate brand through any other platforms were not included including variables like brand trust and brand love.
- 2) The current study has a cross-sectional time frame, which means that data collection took place at a single moment in time. Along with the chances of common method bias being present, the chances of the responses being changed over time is also possible.
- 3) The study was conducted in the pandemic era. Results may vary in more normalized conditions.

8. Future Directions

- 1) Since subjective norms and positioning strategies both are diverse concepts, future research can study the addition of novel variables in a mediating role, for example, socio economic classification of consumers.
- 2) Future studies can also employ longitudinal studies to carry out their research in a more evaluative way.
- 3) The study could be carried out in different sectors as well.
- 4) Brand trust variable can be added to the relation of our current research model.

9. Conclusion

This research was aimed at giving conclusive knowledge regarding the dynamics around how functional and emotional positioning strategies impact purchase intention

while exploring subjective norms in a moderating role and brand attitude as a mediator. The data collected from consumers of the brand, through survey questionnaires, helped in showing and explaining the roles that the variables played. Numerous prior studies have been used to explain these relationships with many prior findings supporting the current study's proposed hypothesis. This paper widens the research on these relationships by adding in subjective norms, which is a variable that has not been the center of focus for research scholars in the past. The results of the study will also help brand leaders in choosing the most suitable strategies for the brands to compete in their respective markets.

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