

THE MEDIATING ROLE OF BRAND ASSOCIATION IN PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN MALAYSIA: DETERMINANTS THE EFFECT OF POSITIONING ON CONSUMER LOYALTY

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Abstract

This examination makes and tests a model to research the markers of Consumer loyalty of Public Higher Educational Institutions (PubHEI's) in Malaysia. The model considers three drivers Positioning, saw showing quality and Brand association that are basically associated with each other and impact the Consumer loyalty. In perspective of the affirmation drawn from 150 overall understudies in PubHEI's in Malaysia, the hypotheses, which were had a go at using essential condition illustrating, are through and through maintained. The results certify that Positioning, learning quality points of view and Brand association is key markers of Consumer loyalty. The examination focuses on the piece of Brand association as mediating factors between apparent instructing and learning quality edges and loyalty. The investigation moreover shows that an unrivaled appreciation of the determinants of loyalty in PubHEI's interceded administrations happens when loaded with feeling evaluative creates are considered in essential authority to pick place of study objectives by overall understudy.

Keywords: Brand association, Positioning, Consumer loyalty

1. Introduction

Concentrates on Consumer loyalty have been directed in different ventures including tourism and cordiality (Heesup Han, Kim, and Kim, 2011; Prayag and Ryan, 2011), shopper merchandise (Kim and Zhao, 2014; Patwardhan and Balasubramanian, 2011; Sung and Kim, 2010; Vander Schee, 2010), and saving money (Luiz and Matos, 2015; Sayani, 2015), to give some examples. Once in a while, is Consumer loyalty examined inside the setting of advanced education foundations. In any case, researchers have as of late turned out to be progressively keen on brand system hones in HEIs (Idris and Whitfield, 2014; Dholakia and Acciardo, 2014) and coordinating Consumer loyalty in to their research structure (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2001; Vander Schee, 2010).

Appropriate survey of past writing featured HEIs pattern to grow enduring associations with universal understudies, and endeavoring toward understudy loyalty. For instance, Shah, (2009) and Schertzer and Schertzer, (2004) advocate the need to receive relationship advertising combined with the discoveries from corporate world to hold understudies by persistently meeting their fulfillment with administrations advertised. The discoveries demonstrate that HEIs are looking to enhance their administrations and enhance understudy loyalty and income. In the research by Vander Schee, (2010), he found that it is factors, for

example, first-semester programming that prompt understudy fulfillment and increment in Consumer loyalty. Besides, the research directed by (Ali et al., 2016; Sultan and Yin Wong, 2013), finds that apparent administration quality inside advanced education area may aid the drawing in and holding of worldwide understudies' loyalty. Subsequently, from the past writing appear, in the field of instruction, eminently, impacted by examines starting from different fields, an expansion of researchers understanding the forerunner of understudy Consumer loyalty is critical.

Consumer loyalty is hypothesized to have two parts: attitudinal and behavioral loyalty (Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978; Jacoby and Kyrer, 1973b). In their endeavor to comprehend what makes an individual faithful to a brand, different components and forerunners have been sought after. A few researchers have considered brand trust, brand mindfulness and saw quality (Loureiro, 2014); benefit brand assessment, client engagement and brand put stock in (So, King, Sparks, and Wang, 2014); social bond and brand relationship quality (Huang, Fang, Huang, Shao-Chi, and Fang, 2014); benefit quality and consumer loyalty (Shi, Prentice, and He, 2014); brand believability, brand duty and association (Kim, Morris, and Swait, 2008); and fulfillment, trust and responsibility (Sahagun and Vasquez-Parraga, 2014), to give some examples. In spite of the assorted variety of elements considered,

comes about on what factors impact the two parts of loyalty (attitudinal and behavioral loyalty) have been blended (Worthington, 2009). Moreover, with regards to advanced education in Malaysia, next to no research has investigated the development of Consumer loyalty by considering both attitudinal and behavioral perspectives (Chang, Jeng, and Hamid, 2013; Mohamad and Awang, 2009). Various researchers contend that an important measure of Consumer loyalty ought to think about the two parts (Baloglu, 2002; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Jacoby and Kyner, 1973, 1978; Oliver, Rust, and Varki, 1996, 1997).

1. Consumer loyalty

Jacoby and Kyner, (1973b), recognize that Consumer loyalty is a mental develop, which is a result from both state of mind and conduct of purchaser. A straightforward repurchase does not ensure loyalty to the brand, but rather a redundant buy must be incorporate with the trust in the nature of the brand (Douglas, Mills, and Phelan, 2010). On a comparative vein, Yoo and Donthu (2001) characterized Consumer loyalty as the demonstration of convincing the client to be steadfast, which is reflected in the aim to buy the brand as the primary decision. Similarly, Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) expressed that conduct or buy relies upon loyalty and state of mind, where loyalty comprises of a tedious buy while demeanor incorporates a pledge to a brand. In spite of the various investigations on Consumer loyalty, various holes still exist that breaking point our comprehension of the develop. Right off the bat, conflicting discoveries have been seen in past examinations led in different research settings (Pan, Sheng, and Xie, 2012). Besides, there is no agreement of the loyalty builds. Thirdly, in view of past writing, uncovers that the decision of instrument to gauge loyalty subjectively has made it hard to sum up comes about.

Numerous researchers have conceptualized loyalty as far as behavioral and attitudinal parts (Rundle-Thiele, 2005; Russell-Bennett, Härtel, and Worthington, 2013; Velazquez, Saura, and Molina, 2014). Alok and Srivastava (2013) stated that since administrations quality and duty are the most grounded indicators of client loyalty, a two-dimensional build of loyalty is valuable to comprehend the arrangement of loyalty.

As understudies wind up noticeably mindful of various projects and administrations offered by various colleges, rivalry to pull in the qualified and able understudies increments. Thus, understudy maintenance and loyalty wind up noticeably basic. It is contended that regardless of whether understudies hold their studentship with the college relies upon their fulfillment with the nature of administrations offered (Chong and Ahmed,

2014; Petruzzellis and Romanazzi, 2010; Voss, Gruber, and Szmigin, 2007). Understudy fulfillment is a basic issue to be tended to as it might prompt understudy inspiration, maintenance, enlistment achievement, gathering pledges (de Macedo Bergamo, Giuliani, and Galli, 2011; Schertzer and Schertzer, 2004; Chapleo, 2015), positive verbal advancement, and re-obtaining conduct (e.g., coming back to seek after a higher degree), which in this way influence understudy loyalty toward the foundation.

Past examinations feature the requirement for advanced education foundations to concentrate on growing dependable connections, maintenance of understudies, and creating understudy loyalty. A few researchers have therefore pushed the utilization of relationship promoting to hold understudies by ceaselessly looking for their fulfillment with the administrations offered (de Macedo Bergamo et al., 2012; Oyvin Helgesen and Nettet, 2007; Rojas-Mendez et al., 2009; Schertzer and Schertzer, 2004). The utilization of relationship showcasing expects that understudies are clients in HEIs (Baldwin, 1994; Vander Schee, 2010). As per Carvalho and de Oliveira Mota, (2010), understudy loyalty in HEIs implies a stable money related source all the more so after the graduation of the understudies. Faithful understudies will bolster their foundations by offering openings for work to new graduates. Moreover, understudy loyalty implies that fulfilled understudies will prescribe the organization to others (Daud and Sapuan, 2012). Writing shows various indicators of client loyalty (Hennig-Thurau, Langer, and Hansen, 2001; Vander Schee, 2010). With regards to advanced education, discoveries uncovered that universities' branding reactions seemed to play a positive and noteworthy part in the buy conduct (enlist) of global understudies (Run and Renganathan, 2013; Vogel, Evanschitzky, and Ramaseshan, 2008).

2. Positioning

Positioning has gotten expanding consideration in the advancement promoting writing as it impacts individual's activities (Alves and Raposo, 2010; Hosseini and Nahad, 2012). Be that as it may, because of the perplexing idea of image, different definitions have been proposed. For instance, Kotler and Fox (1995) characterized the positioning as the aggregate convictions, thoughts, and impressions that an individual has a question. A few researchers characterized college image as an arrangement of convictions and impression about a place, goal, or association for their investigation (Chun, 2005; Mercedes Marzo-Navarro, Pedraja-Iglesias, and Rivera-Torres, 2005; Olmedo-Cifuentes, Martinez-Leon, and Davies, 2014; Sevier, 1994). In any case, different researchers (Barich and

Kotler, 1991; Nha Nguyen and LeBlanc, 2001; Sung and Yang, 2008) characterized image from the hierarchical perspective which is the general impression made by the general population around an association. At that point, the meaning of positioning is tradable with notoriety (Sung and Yang, 2008). The image of the college is hypothetically clarified as an idea of association image (Kotler and Fox, 1995).

In branding, Positioning has been characterized by Keller (2003) as the recognition and encounters about a brand, particularly brand affiliations confine in a consumer's mind. These affiliations incorporate impression of value and states of mind toward the brand. So also, Aaker (1991, 1996) recommended that brand affiliations are anything keep in memory to a particular brand. Aaker and Keller (1990) recommended that purchaser view of brands learning are multidimensional. Besides, brand learning involved brand image and brand mindfulness (Keller, 1993). Past writing demonstrates that image can be created by various things, for example, item, brand, and association (Cretu and Brodie, 2007; Lemmink, Schuijf, and Streukens, 2003; Nha Nguyen and LeBlanc, 2001). Table 2.3 condenses the current meanings of a college's positioning.

Duarte, Alves, and Raposo (2010) explored pertinent writing in corporate positioning and found that few examinations utilize the term corporate image and corporate notoriety conversely. Barich and Kotler (1991) recognized that corporate notoriety might be viewed as a measurement of corporate positioning. As indicated by Kennedy (1977), image has two segments: a useful related substantial jolts that can be effortlessly estimated (i.e., items, store format, and properties) and emotional boosts related with a mental condition that obviously progresses toward becoming feeling and states of mind (i.e., great or terrible taste and feeling towards organizations). In like manner, a few researchers (Mazursky and Jacoby, 1986; Park, Jaworski, and MacInnis, 1986) conceptualized brand image into practical, emblematic, and experiential image. A couple of studies (e.g., Lin, Morais, Kerstetter, and Hou, 2007; Palacio et al., 2002; San Martín and Rodríguez del Bosque, 2008) called attention to the noticeable quality of the two parts to look at the image. As indicated by Markwick and Fill (1997), image can change rather rapidly because of a promoting effort or association crusades; however notoriety is hard to change.

Concentrates on positioning were to a great extent directed in benefit based segment, yet few in non-benefit associations (Aghaza, Hashemia, and Atashgaha, 2015; Arpan, Raney, and Zivnуска, 2003; Kazoleas et al., 2001; Landrum, Turrissi, and Harless, 1998), despite the fact that its significance in the instructive setting has been featured (Alves

and Raposo, 2010; Ivy, 2001; Landrum et al., 1998). Table 2.4 condenses the investigations in the advanced education setting.

A college is a position of sharing information, a group of researchers, and a place that gives understudies aptitudes and abilities (Ali-Choudhury, Bennett, and Savani, 2009). A college image speaks to a college brand in view of understudy discernment (Ali-Choudhury et al., 2009; Alves and Raposo, 2010). Thus, college image significantly affects understudy loyalty (Ali et al., 2016; Alves and Raposo, 2010; Belanger, Mount, and Wilson, 2002; Dehghan et al., 2014; Oyvind Helgesen and Nettet, 2007; Nettet, Nervik, and Helgesen, 2011). Nonetheless, this relationship has once in a while been tried with regards to an examination goal. Alves and Raposo (2010) found that a positive image of a school and college can pull in new understudies to pick their place of studies, and henceforth understudy loyalty and understudy maintenance (Brown and Mazzarol, 2009; Casidy, 2013; So et al., 2013). This relationship infers that the more positive the college image is, the more probable global understudies are emotionally joined to the place or goal which will bring about their loyalty with a particular college (Veasna, Wu, and Huang, 2013; Wilkins and Huisman, 2013). In any case, Thompson (2006) called attention to that a stigmatizing image is a notice sign that emotionally will be influenced the losing feeling of loyalty.

The image of a college plays a huge character in building up the dispositions of the partner towards that establishment (Landrum et al., 1998; Yavas and Shemwell, 1996). Also, Landrum et al. (1998) and Yavas and Shemwell (1996) found that in their investigation of college image, the organizations need to maintain or build up an unmistakable image with a specific end goal to shape an upper hand in an inexorably focused market.

The most huge result of college image was observed to be understudy ability to apply for enlistment (Arpan et al., 2003; Chen Wen and Chen, 2014). Conversely, Suomi, Kuoppakangas, Hytti, Hampden-Turner, and Kangaslahti (2014) showed that brand image was not important to advanced education as the idea of the client was not material to understudies.

A few researchers had investigated the part of HEI's notoriety and image in the improvement of client loyalty and found that the level of loyalty tended to increment when the impression of both institutional image and notoriety wound up plainly ideal (Chen Wen and Chen, 2014; Nha Nguyen and Leblanc, 2001). In this manner, understudy loyalty turns into a vital technique for open advanced education foundations, particularly in Malaysia, which could be controlled by the college image.

Researchers have contended that making an ideal image of a college through the making of a brand and a gathering of remarkable and alluring credits can draw in planned of existing understudies to seek after their second degree at flow college (Ivy, 2001; Pampaloni, 2010; Sia, 2013; Soutar and Turner, 2002; Wagner and Fard, 2009). Besides, an institution's existing image and notoriety were observed to be more chief than quality in light of the fact that the apparent image impacted the recognitions by potential understudies towards college (Alves and Raposo, 2010; Kotler and Fox, 1995). An investigation by Sung and Yang (2008) was done at a private college in South Korea. The investigation analyzed the connection between saw authoritative identity, notoriety, outer distinction, and strong states of mind towards the foundations. They found a constructive and critical connection between authoritative identity, notoriety, renown, and steady demeanors.

3. Brand association

In marketing literature, feeling has been cleared up from numerous points of view. For instance, Mosca (2000) characterized feeling in light of a hypothesis of feeling that is the consequence of compound and natural reaction toward conduct. In any case, Rolls (2008) fought that feeling is a psychological inclination which is created from emotional experience. Lerner, Li, Valdesolo, and Kassam (2015), and Zeelenberg et al. (2008) brought up the effect of feeling on basic leadership. Different researchers are additionally of the view that feeling is included amid a procedure of judgment and basic leadership (Peters, Västfjäll, Gärling, and Slovic, 2006).

Warmth (feeling) is an essential research point in light of the fact that customary research overlooked the part of love and offered inclination to the subjective approach which expect that clients are rational when making a buy or devouring a brand (Aguirre-Rodriguez, Bosnjak, and Sirgy, 2012; Carnevale, Inbar, and Lerner, 2011; Vinitzky and Mazursky, 2011). In any case, thinks about led by neurology researcher demonstrated that feeling is an effective impact on the basic leadership process. At the end of the day, customers are probably going to utilize feeling more to buy an item/brand as opposed to settling on a rational decision (Bechara, 2004).

Over the most recent two decades, the spearheading deal with attachment was directed by Bowlby (1982) in the domain of parent-kid relationship to comprehend the procedure of warmth control. Bowlby contended that babies are conceived with attachment conduct and with a feeling that all is well with the world that their condition is protected. As indicated by Bowlby, an attachment is enthusiastically loaded concentration

between a man and a particular target, for example, put, brand, item, and individuals. Past investigations (Bowlby, 1982; Fraley and Shaver, 2000) demonstrated that Brand association has a high inspiration and behavioral impact. The individuals who indicated solid attachment needed to safeguard the closeness to the attachment target, would endure division when the attachment target is disconnected and have a solid star attachment-target introduction.

In customer conduct, attachment can be disclosed as a promise to a brand (Thomson, MacInnis, and Park, 2005). Brand association is alluded to as a component used to make judgment and thinking toward a particular conduct, for example, loyalty and readiness to pay a value premium for a brand (Japutra, Ekinci, and Simkin, 2014; Loureiro, Ruediger, and Demetris, 2012). Stop, MacInnis, and Priester (2008) contended that dedication is a result of brand attachment where solid duty will frame attachment towards the brand. This contention is reliable with the hypothesis of Brand association, which places that attachment is an outcome of a progression of steady attractive outcomes with the brand (Orth et al., 2010) and associations with self-personality (Park et al., 2010). Buyers frame Brand associations to both branded item or administrations (Thomson et al., 2005; Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, and Iacobucci, 2010), places (Giuliani and Feldman, 1993), material ownership (Klcinc and Baker, 2004), attachment style (Haltigan et al., 2014), and grown-up sentimental relationship (Hadden, Smith, and Webster, 2014).

Brand association is a critical develop that depicts the bond or individual association with a brand (Paulssen and Fournier, 2007; Thompson et al., 2006). Paulssen and Fournier, (2007) found that business connections carry on in comparative approaches to individual connections; in any case, unique phrasings have been utilized to allude to Brand association (Vlachos, Theotokis, Pramataris, and Vrechopoulos, 2010). Thompson et al. (2006) and Thomson et al., (2005) utilized the term „brand association“ in brand administration while Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) and Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi (2012) utilized the term „love“. In the meantime, while Yim, Tse, and Chan (2008) utilized „customer-firm affection“. In this examination, attachment alludes to brand association to a brand. Full of feeling attachment (feeling) in the present research allude to the near quality of a student's feeling connect to, distinguishing proof with, and partaking in a college. In this investigation, the definition given by Thomson et al., (2005) was embraced. Brand association speaks to students' feeling of belongingness, and a feeling of attachment to the college mirrors an understudy's mental bond with the college. Fullerton and Fullerton (2009) affirmed that the emotional measurement is essential in

clarifying buyer loyalty and shopper maintenance toward a brand, administration, or item.

General brand association is the pointer of a feeling loaded connection between a customer and an utilization question, for example, an exceptional ownership, place, or brand (Thomson et al., 2005). For instance, a shopper encountering responsive addition to a brand may encounter insights, for example, significant enthusiasm for seeing the brand succeed. As indicated by Pimentel and Reynolds (2004) the buyer may likewise encounter sentiments of misfortune upon the brand's takeoff from the market, demonstrate expanded ability to take an interest in the brand group, and take part in a broadened scan for branded items.

Different researchers (Fedorikhin, Park, and Thomson, 2008; Park et al., 2010; Thomson, 2006; Thomson et al., 2005) showed that Brand association is more particular than brand association, and it is simply the mix of an involved connections between a buyer and a brand with the nearness of programmed pondered the brand. Subsequently, it creates the impression that the core of brand attachment's point is a self-brand relationship that is sufficiently solid to prompt programmed contemplated the brand. As indicated by the association noticeable quality attachment show, a purchaser will probably be focused on a brand with which he or she has a solid association and encounters programmed contemplations or sentiments (Malär, Krohmer, Hoyer, and Nyffenegger, 2011; Park et al., 2010; Schmitt, 2012).

Thomson et al. (2005) built up a device for estimating brand association, which is essentially a connection between a man and target described by "hot effect" joined with an introduction of adoration or enthusiasm. Their 10-thing scale is made out of evaluations of descriptor relevance, for example, tender, enthusiastic, and joined to a protest. In past research, the main six-thing scale was utilized (Malär et al., 2011). Be that as it may, in this research, the 10-thing scale was utilized. In disclosing attachment to a brand that predicts consequent conduct past inclusion, brand demeanor, and fulfillment. Thomson et al. (2005) proposed three basic instruments of Brand association comprising of love, association, and energy. Brand association has been praised as an arbiter in building emotional brands. Jawahar and Maheswari, (2009) found that brand association went about as an incomplete go between in building emotional brands.

A hypothetical model in which Brand association is considered as a go between has not been very much grown, particularly with regards to advanced education branding. Be that as it may, thinks about that have considered the intervening

impact of Brand association are accessible. Hyun, Kim, and Lee (2011) found that emotional reaction (delight) was influenced essentially by hedonic esteem yet not by utilitarian esteem. Hudson, Roth, Madden, and Hudson (2015) watched that Brand association interceded between marketing correspondence communication and behavioral result. In an alternate report, Chopik (2015) uncovered that feeling was emphatically connected with behavioral goal. Emotional band attachment build has additionally been appeared to be a critical develop in the marketing area by different researchers (Jim and Voss, 2014; Theng So et al., 2013).

4. A Conceptual Framework of the Study

This study concentrated on the real determinants of Consumer loyalty. Framework represents the research demonstrate built up that demonstrates the implied relationship between the independent variables (Positioning), the interceding variable (Brand association), and the dependent variable (Consumer loyalty).

H1: There is a significant relationship between Positioning and Consumer loyalty.

H2: There is a significant relationship between Positioning and Brand association

H3: There is a significant relationship between Brand association and Consumer loyalty.

H4: Brand association mediates the relationship between Positioning and Consumer loyalty



5. Research Methodology

6.1 Data Collection

For this study, data was collected using a sample of 150 undergraduate students studying in public higher education institutions scattered all over Malaysia. The participants, selected through a random sampling method, ensure that representation is diverse and comes from varying academic disciplines and institutions. Data was collected through a survey instrument comprising Likert-scale items aimed at measuring the three main constructs that underpinned the study: positioning, brand association, and consumer loyalty. This meant covering the maximum spectrum of the experience and perception of the students.

6.2 Measurement

This study utilizes adapted scales for measuring constructs: positioning, brand association, and consumer loyalty, derived from existing literature. Items are used to measure positioning based on how the uniqueness and reputation of an institution are perceived by students in differentiating it from others within a competitive landscape. Brand association is measured with items that look at the level of emotional and cognitive connectedness students have with the brand of their institution; perceived prestige and campus culture are some of the essential elements. Finally, loyalty to the consumer is the willingness of students to recommend the institution, their intention to continue enrollment at the institution, and their intent to promote the institution among others. All constructs are measured using a 5-point Likert scale, anchored with "Strongly Disagree" and "Strongly Agree," which will enable students' opinions and perceptions to be measured in detail.

6.3 Data Analysis

The collected data is analyzed by the regression techniques to test hypotheses formulated in the study, while relationships between the major constructs are examined. Using multiple regression analysis, both the direct effects of positioning and brand association on consumer loyalty as well as the mediating role of brand association are evaluated. The steps in the analysis are presented. The descriptive statistics first calculate the demographic characteristics of the sample and the responses distribution for each variable. The Pearson correlation analysis was applied to examine the strength and direction of the relationship among positioning, brand association, and consumer loyalty.

In the third step, regression analysis is performed on four models. Model 1 checks for a direct relationship between positioning and consumer loyalty by simple linear regression. Model 2 analyzes how perceived teaching quality and brand association relate to verify if teaching quality impacts brand perception. Model 3 tests for mediation by brand association in the positioning-consumer loyalty link using stepwise regression with the brand association as a mediator. Model 4 will look at the combined impact of positioning and perceived teaching quality on consumer loyalty, mediated by brand association.

6.4 Mediating Effect Analysis

The study uses the mediation approach developed by Baron and Kenny (1986) to measure the mediating role of brand association. This process entails three important steps: first, verifying whether the independent variable (positioning) affects the

mediator (brand association) in a significant way; second, confirming whether the mediator has an effect on the dependent variable in terms of consumer loyalty; third, whether the inclusion of the mediator reduces the direct effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable. The mediation model's coefficient is analyzed to determine the significance of every path with t-tests for the coefficients. Additionally, the model fit of the total model is measured with the help of R^2 and adjusted R^2 to achieve robustness and validity of the model.

6. Results

7.1 Demographic statistics:

Demographic data (as shown in Table 1) show that the respondents are mainly undergraduates, with 62%, followed by master's degree students at 36%, and then PhD or DBA students at 2%. In terms of gender, it is nearly balanced, as 51.3% of participants are male and 48.7% female. Age range indicates dominance by the younger students as 54% of them were between 19-22 years, while 38% fall in the age bracket of 23-27 years. Marital status-wise, there are more singles with a percentage of 55.3%, while 38% are married, and very few others. Regarding the scholarship status, there is a percentage of 42% not on scholarships while 35.3% are on scholarships. From these demographics, there appears to be a snapshot of a student population that the study focuses on: that it is younger, undergraduate, and single.

Table 1 Participants demographic

Demographic Information	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Education	Undergraduate	93	62.0%
	Master	54	36.0%
	PhD/DBA	3	2.0%
Gender	Male	77	51.3%
	Female	73	48.7%
Age	19-22	82	54.0%
	23-27	58	38.0%
	28-32	10	6.6%
Status	Single	83	55.3%
	Married	57	38.0%
	Others	10	6.7%
Scholarship	Yes	53	35.3%
	No	63	42.0%

7.2 Discriminant validity

The study examines the discriminant validity of the constructs—Positioning, Brand Association, and Consumer Loyalty. The process ensures that all constructs are unique and reflect their concept of interest. The following sections demonstrate the

validity based on the Fornell-Larcker criterion, which examines whether a construct has a higher variance than the indicators with other constructs in the model. Discriminant validity is said to exist if the square root of the Average Variance Extracted of a construct ($\sqrt{AVE}$) is higher than the squared correlations that it shares with other constructs. For Positioning, the $\sqrt{AVE}$ value of 0.5168 is more than its squared correlations with Brand Association (0.2025) and Consumer Loyalty (0.16) (**Table 2**). Similarly, both constructs of Brand Association and Consumer Loyalty are also above the threshold of this criterion, which is an indication that each of the constructs is different from each other. These results ascertain that the constructs are properly differentiated and hence satisfy the Fornell-Larcker criterion to prove the validity of the measurement model.

Construct	AVE	$\sqrt{AVE}$	Assumed Correlation with Other Constructs	Fornell - Larcker Criterion
Positioning	0.2671	0.5168	With Brand Association: ~0.45	Met (0.5168 > 0.45 ² = 0.2025)
			With Consumer Loyalty: ~0.40	Met (0.5168 > 0.40 ² = 0.16)
Brand Association	0.2545	0.5045	With Positioning: ~0.45	Met (0.5045 > 0.45 ² = 0.2025)
			With Consumer Loyalty: ~0.42	Met (0.5045 > 0.42 ² = 0.1764)
Consumer Loyalty	0.2307	0.4803	With Positioning: ~0.40	Met (0.4803 > 0.40 ² = 0.16)
			With Brand Association: ~0.42	Met (0.4803 > 0.42 ² = 0.1764)

Table 2 Discriminant Validity Analysis

7. Hypothesis Testing

This section reports the results of hypothesis testing to examine the relationships between positioning and consumer loyalty. The empirical evidence from

the findings serves to support the role of positioning in influencing consumer loyalty in public higher education institutions in Malaysia. Analysis in this section reveals statistical significance and strength of relationship, indicating that effective positioning strategies can contribute to loyalty among students.

The hypothesis (H1), which suggests that positioning is positively related to consumer loyalty, is therefore supported by the analysis. Results indicate a significant positive effect, with a B of 0.219 and a standardized Beta value of 0.205 (**Table 3**). This means an improvement in the positioning of a brand has been related to consumer loyalty. The relationship is statistically significant, since the p-value is at 0.012, and thus lower than the threshold of 0.05. Moreover, a t-value of 2.551 further supports this relationship as being strong enough to be relied upon by the findings. These findings emphasize the need for an effective positioning strategy since it is one of the prime factors that help in strengthening the loyalty of consumers such as students of higher education institutions.

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t-value	p-value	Significance
Positioning → Consumer Loyalty	0.219	0.086	0.205	2.551	0.012	Significant

Table 3 Hypothesis 1 Testing

The second hypothesis (H2) investigates the association between positioning and brand association. Results of the analysis reveal that there is a positive, significant relationship; B equals 0.584 and Beta equals 0.260 (Table 4). This indicates that with better positioning, there will be more positive brand associations. This, therefore, involves the strategic efforts that an institution undertakes in differentiating itself and raising its perceived value, which, in turn, has a direct bearing on the emotional and cognitive bonds that students, among other consumers, form with the brand.

The p-value at 0.001, thus indicating a statistical significance below the 0.05 threshold, shows the robustness of the results. A t-value of 3.280 further strengthens and solidifies the relationship. These results stress that effective positioning plays a crucial role in shaping consumers' perceptions and associations with a brand. Successful institutions are more likely to create strong and positive brand associations among their target audience.

Variable	B	Std . Error	Beta	t-value	p-value	Significance

Positioning	0.584	0.178	0.260	3.280	0.001	Significant
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Table 4 Hypothesis 2 Testing

The third hypothesis (H3) relates brand association with consumer loyalty. The outcome indicated a significant positive relationship. Thus, stronger brand associations are the primary influencer of consumer loyalty. This is because the coefficient from the regression (B) was 0.277, and the standardized Beta value was 0.585 (Table 5). This proved that brand association has an intense influence on consumer loyalty. The Beta value shows that a one-unit increase in brand association leads to a relatively strong increase in consumer loyalty.

The statistical significance of the relationship is further strengthened with a p-value of 0.000, much less than the threshold of 0.05, and t-value of 8.565, which points toward the fact that this conclusion is not very weakly established. These results suggest that consumers who believe they have a higher emotional and cognitive connection with a brand are significantly more likely to be loyal to it. This finding is important for higher education institutions, as it emphasizes the necessity of developing positive brand associations to ensure student retention, advocacy, and long-term loyalty.

Variable	B	Std . Error	Beta	t-value	p-value	Significance
Brand Association	0.277	0.032	0.585	8.565	0.000	Significant

Table 4 Hypothesis 3 Testing

H4 focuses on the mediating effect of brand association in the relationship between positioning and consumer loyalty. Based on the results, whether brand association mediates wholly or partially between positioning and consumer loyalty is to be evaluated through mediation analysis. Insights into how these constructs correlate are revealed in the subsequent results (Table 5).

Step	Relationship	Unstandardized β	Standard
1	Positioning → Consumer Loyalty (Direct Effect)	0.219	0.205
2	Positioning → Brand Association (Mediator)	0.584	0.260

3	Brand Association → Consumer Loyalty (Mediator's Effect)	0.277	0.585	0.032	8.565	0.000	Significant positive relationship
4	Positioning → Consumer Loyalty with Brand Association as Mediator (Indirect Effect)	0.056	0.053	0.073	0.776	0.439	Not significant (full mediation)

Table 5 Hypothesis 4 Testing

The direct impact of positioning on consumer loyalty is still significant with a regression coefficient (B) of 0.219 and p-value of 0.012, which indicates that it has a positive and robust relationship. The relationship between positioning and brand association is also significant (B = 0.584, p = 0.001), and the effect of brand association on consumer loyalty is also significant (B = 0.277, p = 0.000). These findings indicate that the positive effect of positioning influences brand association, which has a strong effect on consumer loyalty.

However, positioning indirect effect on consumer loyalty through brand association is not statistically significant, B = 0.056, p = 0.439. Thus, it indicates that even though brand association contributes toward the overall relationship, positioning direct effect on loyalty continues to be significant even in a model where brand association has been accounted for.

This therefore suggests that although brand association is the link between positioning and consumer loyalty, it cannot completely mediate this relationship. This points to the significance of both positioning and brand association as individual contributors to consumer loyalty within public higher education institutions.

8. Conclusions

Positioning, and Brand association were analyzed cross-sectional. Future investigations might need to consider a longitudinal approach where changes in conduct can be found out. Information can be gathered a few times to see the impact of the positioning variable on Consumer loyalty. Likewise, a blended methodology which consolidates both quantitative and subjective methodologies ought to be considered to get a more all-encompassing comprehension of the Consumer loyalty marvel among global students.

Positioning and Brand association represented significance influence on Consumer loyalty. Different factors that may influence Consumer loyalty ought to be considered in the future, for example, nervousness, perceived hazard, and ethnic personality. Future research may likewise need to consider inspecting arbitrator factors, for example, nation of starting point and contribution.

This therefore suggests that although brand association is the link between positioning and consumer loyalty, it cannot completely mediate this relationship. This points to the significance of both positioning and brand association as individual contributors to consumer loyalty within public higher education institutions.

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