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Brand and customer management mindsets creating brand relationships and equity in young adults

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Purpose: Players in the highly competitive smartphone industry can use either brand management mindset (BMM) or customer management mindset (CMM) to build consumer-brand relationships and ultimate customer-based brand equity (CBBE) in different market segments. This research integrates three models to examine pathways by which CBBE sources (BMM) and consumption values (CMM) drive three consumer-brand relationships (brand satisfaction, love and loyalty) to determine brand equity.

Design/methodology/approach: Descriptive research design was used to study a global smartphone brand by surveying young adult consumers. Quantitative data were collected from a non-probability sample of 651 respondents. The questionnaire used previously validated measurement scales. Structural equation modelling was used to analyse data.

Findings/results: Results revealed that symbolic value, monetary value (CMM), perceived quality, brand image and loyalty (BMM) directly impacted CBBE. Indirectly, brand awareness, image, perceived quality, monetary and functional values impacted brand satisfaction, which drove brand love. Brand love influenced brand loyalty, which had a strong impact on CBBE.

Practical implications: Marketers can use the integrated model to gauge outcomes of their BMM and CMM strategies. The model can be adopted by other global brands entering the African market to test how their strategies yield consumer-brand relationships and equity successes.

Originality/value: The study enriches consumer behaviour, product and brand management literature by examining the predictive powers of BMM and CMM. It integrates three models to show how executing two strategy mindsets can generate consumer-brand relationships and equity for a global brand operating in Africa.

Keywords: customer-based brand equity; consumption-values; consumer-brand relationship; young adults; Samsung-smartphone.

Introduction

All brands of smartphones can be used for communication, e-marketing, e-banking, networking, Internet access and downloading various applications (Lepp et al., 2015; Mishra et al., 2020). However, the Samsung smartphone brand is garnering preference globally. For example, in 2018, the Samsung brand captured 20.9% market share, followed by Huawei (15.8%) and Apple (12.1%) (Park et al., 2019). In 2023, and in terms of the demand and resultant shipments (i.e. 258 units for Samsung compared to Apple's 225 units), Samsung was the smartphone brand leader by capturing the largest share of the global smartphone market followed by the Apple brand (Laricchia, 2023). The growth of the Samsung brand is still prevalent in 2025. According to the Canalys Report, Samsung occupied the leading position with a market share of 20% followed by Apple at 19%. In South Africa, the preference for Samsung is also high, especially among young adults. For example, a study conducted by Diniso and Duh (2021) revealed that 86% of young adults (18–25 years old in 2017) preferred and owned a Samsung smartphone brand. The drivers of these young adults' preferential or differential response to the Samsung brand relative to other brands need examination for enhanced brand management and offerings.

Keller (2013) terms consumers' differential response to a brand as customer-based brand equity (CBBE). He defines CBBE as 'the differential effect that brand knowledge has on consumer response to the marketing of that brand' (Keller, 2013, p. 69). Brands with a strong CBBE do have a strong brand distribution presence, provide normznce, make brand extensions easy and successful, guarantee market share capturing, reinforce price insensitivity and resultant profitability (Ansary & Hashim, 2018). Troiville et al. (2019) group the benefits into

product-market benefits such as brand preference, brand passion, repurchase intentions, positive word-of-mouth, better competitiveness; and financial-market benefits such as high sales revenue, price premium, profits and share of wallets. To sustain these CBBE benefits, its determinants need to be studied. Esch et al.'s (2006), Albert et al.'s (2013), Machado et al.'s (2019) and Steinhobel et al.'s (2024) models show that customer–brand relationship factors such as brand trust, satisfaction, love and loyalty are strong determinants of these benefits. If customer–brand relationships are important for these benefits, Duh and Pwaka (2023) question the strategic brand management mindsets (BMMs) to be implemented to guarantee customer–brand relationships.

Investigating marketing strategy mindsets to be used to generate more profits, Han et al. (2021) suggest the testing of two mindsets: the BMM and customer management mindset (CMM). With BMM, the marketer focuses on brand building, positioning, strength and resultant long-term brand relationships, including brand likeness and love (Han et al., 2021). Brand love can lead to brand loyalty (Rahman et al., 2021). For masstige brands such as smartphones, the brand love-loyalty relationship directly generates brand equity (Robertson et al., 2022). Regarding CMM, the marketer's focus is understanding customer needs, developing strategies to acquire and retain customers, and continuously providing superior consumption values or benefits for satisfaction and loyalty (Han et al., 2021). While Han et al. (2021) found that it is a CMM that produces better profits for retailers, Duh and Pwaka (2023) found that for customer–brand relationship building and ultimate CBBE, both BMM and CMM are needed. Despite this finding, most studies have predominantly used only the BMM through the seminal work of Aaker (1991) to suggest that CBBE sources are brand awareness, brand image, perceived quality and brand loyalty. Buil et al. (2013) specifically show that Aaker's (1991) CBBE sources interrelate to determine overall CBBE. For Tran et al. (2021) model, the CBBE sources will first lead to customer–brand relationship constructs, such as brand satisfaction and loyalty, before CBBE is generated. However, CBBE sources are diverse and not limited to those in Aaker's (1991) model (Duh & Pwaka, 2023).

In the current era of consumer-brand co-creation and co-ownership, brand equity and customer-brand relationships are increasingly dependent on CMM, especially as brand meaning and value lie in what consumers think, feel, belief and benefit from the brand in terms of consumption-values (Diniso & Duh, 2021; Keller, 2013). While the BMM plays its role in brand identification, image, and differentiation, the CMM manages a brand's functions or skills in satisfying consumers' needs, wants and providing required benefits (Mohan et al., 2017). In various product or service categories, a brand performs or delivers by providing utilitarian, economic and aesthetic benefits to customers (Keller, 2013; Park et al., 2022). This performance has been 'the foundation of strong brands like Nike and Apple' (Mohan et al., 2017, p. 478). Diniso and Duh (2021) and Park et al. (2022) conceptualise brand performance in terms of consumption-values enjoyed, such as monetary, functional and symbolic values. They suggest that the three consumption-values can lead to customer–brand relationships and brand equity. Thus, the objectives of this study are twofold:

1. Integrate ideas from Aaker's (1991), Diniso and Duh (2021), Park et al.'s (2022), and Tran et al. (2021) models to propose an integrated CBBE model for the examination of how much both the BMM and CMM create three customer–brand relationships (brand satisfaction, love and loyalty) to determine CBBE. The study also applies the stimulus-organism-response theory to suggest the relationships amongst the customer–brand relationship factors.
2. Empirically test the integrated conceptual model with young adult South Africans so that the sources of Samsung smartphones' overall brand equity in young adults' perspectives can be measured.

Although Esch et al. (2006) and Steinhobel et al. (2024) suggest that consumer–brand relationships and subsequently brand loyalty are built from brand satisfaction, trust, and love, we did not study brand trust. This was because Zha et al. (2025) found that the brand loyalty of products such as cell phones having audio, visual and tactile clues can be generated from brand satisfaction and love, which incorporates trust and respect. The study starts by describing South African young adults, and it then develops hypotheses and an integrated model from the BMM and CMM theoretical framework and the four selected models. The study then discusses the methods used to test the hypotheses, followed by the presentation of the results. The study ends with discussions and implications of the findings.

Literature review

The South African young adults

The South African young adults aged between 18 years and 25 years old by 2017 constituted about 25% of the country's population. Although most of them are students, they have some disposable income earned mostly from full and part-time jobs, parents, or scholarship funding. The young adults' spending power exceeds that of some working adults (Duh & Struwig, 2015; Makgopa, 2018) considering that they are yet to start raising children or financially spending on family responsibilities. Duh and Struwig (2015) indicate that South African young adults spend approximately R104 billion ($7.6 billion) yearly. Like their global counterparts, Muposhi and Chuchu (2022) found that the South African young adults hold materialistic and symbolic values, all of which create brand consciousness. Marketers continuously seek to understand factors driving brand loyalty and equity from these large, lucrative, but fickle young adult consumers (Girard et al., 2017; Lazarevic, 2012).

Theoretical framework and hypotheses development

This section discusses how BMM and CMM implemented through Aaker's (1991), Diniso and Duh's (2021), Park et al.'s (2022), and Tran et al.'s (2021) models impact

brand equity and customer–brand relationships (brand satisfactions, love, loyalty). It also discusses the application of the stimulus-organism-response theory to explain the relationships among the customer–brand relationship factors (Figure 1).

Figure 1 depicts our developed integrated conceptual model, delineating the proposed hypotheses as formulated in the next subsection.

The brand management mindset through Aaker's (1991) model factors (brand awareness, brand image, brand perceived quality) and brand equity

Brand owners holding a BMM have predominantly used Aaker's (1991) model to measure and identify the determinants of brand equity (Han et al., 2021; Parris & Guzman, 2023). For example, from a 20-year-study of the most cited antecedents of brand equity in 24 top-ranked marketing journals, Parris and Guzman (2023) found that Aaker's dimensions of brand awareness, image, perceived quality and loyalty have been the most frequently studied antecedents of brand equity.

Relationship between brand awareness, image, perceived quality and brand equity

Brand awareness is the strength of a brand in consumers' memory stemming from how well they are familiar with, can recognise, identify, and recall the brand in various situations (Girard et al., 2017; Keller, 2013). Consumers usually choose to buy products they are familiar with, and therefore, brand awareness is an essential factor in getting the product included in the consumer's choice set for ultimate purchase decision (Keller, 2013) and for it to generate brand equity (Tung & Vineron, 2024). Brand image is the 'perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory' (Keller, 1993, p. 3). The brand associations, which can be brand attitudes, product-related and non-product-related attributes and benefits such as functional, symbolic and financial benefits (Keller, 1993) are significant contributors towards building brand equity (Park et al., 2022). While brand awareness is an important starting point in building perceived quality, loyalty and ultimate brand equity (Balaji, 2011; Girard et al., 2017), brand image implants positive and unique feelings about the brand among consumers (Ansary & Hashim, 2018; Keller, 1993). It then leads to brand equity (Tung & Vigneron, 2024).

Brand perceived quality is when consumers judge the overall superiority, quality and performance of a brand to be meeting or exceeding its intended purpose. This impacts brand preference and the motivation to differentially choose a brand (i.e. brand equity) (Liu et al., 2017). Buil et al. (2013) also suggest that perceived quality can directly or indirectly impact brand equity through brand loyalty. Brand Loyalty is the 'attachment or deep commitment to a brand' (Buil et al., 2013, p. 64). Testing the BMM through Aaker's (1991) CBBE model, Buil et al. (2013) and Cifci et al. (2016) found that

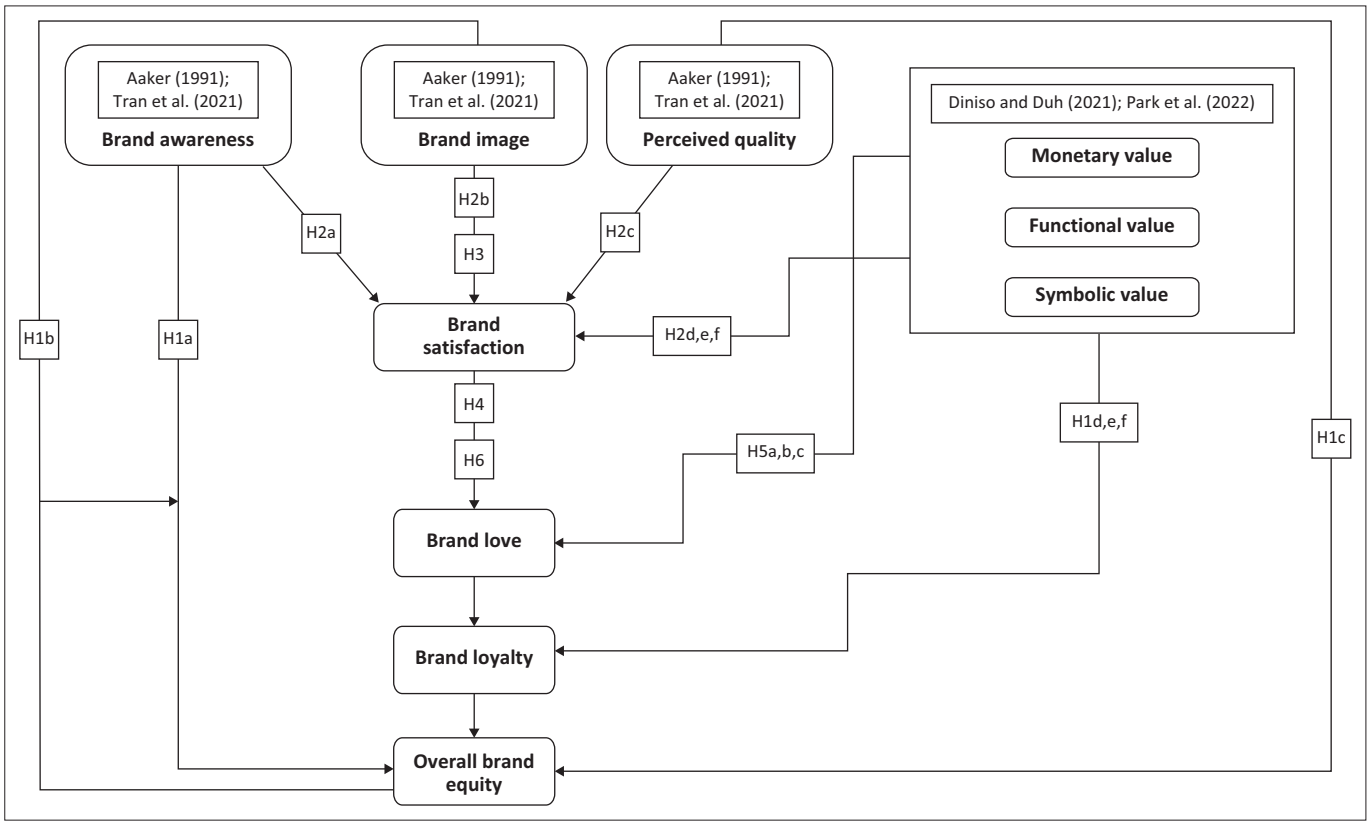

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FIGURE 1: The conceptual model of this study.

brand awareness, brand image, perceived quality and brand loyalty contribute significantly to the creation of overall brand equity. For brands that provide prestige to a mass group of consumers (i.e. masstige brands), such as Samsung smartphones, Park et al. (2022) contend that brand owners should rethink their brand management strategies beyond Aaker's (1991) factors as predictors of overall CBBE.

Customer management mindset and Park et al.'s (2022) model factors (monetary, functional and symbolic values) and brand equity

Taking a CMM approach and suggesting that both utilitarian and hedonic consumption-values are important for CBBE, Park et al. (2022) developed a model. The model suggest that functional, financial or monetary and social or symbolic values drive masstige brand equity. Park et al.'s (2022) model demonstrates that masstige brands from various origins provide different masstige consumption-values to regional mass consumers (e.g. South African young adults) for brand equity to be achieved.

Relationships between functional, symbolic and monetary values and brand equity

Deriving from Sthapit et al.'s (2019) definitions, we define functional value as the utilitarian performances of a product, brand or service offerings. Symbolic value is the perceived utility resulting from a relevant social group-appreciation of a person's usage of a product, brand or service. Monetary value is obtained when a customer perceives that he or she pays less to get the same or more value from a product, brand or service (Alzoubi et al., 2019). Consumers tend to buy products with a positive image and those which can cause them to be admired or idolised by their peers and society at large (i.e. with symbolic value) (Albert et al., 2013). In addition to the symbolic value, other studies (e.g. Veloutsou, 2015) see functional value as an important dimension impacting consumers' choice and overall brand equity. The influence of monetary value on brand equity is emphasised by Tasci (2016), who states that when the benefits of possessing a product surpass the monetary costs associated with owning it, consumers tend to be willing to pay more for a brand and become resistant to switching to competing brands. When all, or some of the brand benefits (i.e. functional, monetary and symbolic) are enjoyed, they lead to a flow of positive experiences (Aggarwal et al., 2024) to drive CBBE (Keller, 1993, 2013; Park et al., 2022). Based on these arguments, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1a–H1c: Brand equity is positively influenced by (a) brand awareness, (b) brand image and (c) perceived quality of Samsung smartphones by South African young adults.

H1d–H1f: Brand equity is positively influenced by (d) the monetary, (e) functional and (f) symbolic values derived from Samsung smartphones.

Impact of brand management mindset factors (brand awareness, brand image, brand perceived quality) on brand satisfaction – Tran et al. (2021) model

Based on BMM, Tran et al.'s (2021) model suggests that a strong perception of brand quality, brand awareness and image leads to customer–brand relationships such as brand satisfaction and loyalty. Their model also shows that brand satisfaction leads to brand loyalty. Fernandes and Moreira (2019) conceptualise the customer–brand relationship to be either functional and emotional, or exchange and communal. The functional and exchange relationships are built from the brand's ability to provide objective benefits such as reliability, efficiency, quality and utilitarian tasks performance. This type of relationship usually leads to brand satisfaction and resultant loyalty (Duh & Pwaka, 2023).

Emotional and communal relationships are built from the brand's ability to provide symbolic benefits from the 'social desirability of the brand and its self-expressive value, that satisfy consumer's high-level needs'. This can lead to the formation of passionate emotional brand attachments, such as brand love (Fernandes & Moreira, 2019, p. 277) and resultant brand loyalty (Bicakcioglu et al., 2018). With these types of customer–brand relationships, it is questionable how much the BMM strategy can contribute. Tran et al.'s (2021) model shows that the BMM factors: brand image, awareness and perceived quality lead to the functional or exchange customer–brand relationships such as brand satisfaction and loyalty. The awareness of a brand's availability, features, quality and functions is found to impact consumers' satisfaction (Bilal & Malik, 2014).

Liu et al. (2020) suggest that brand awareness and image drive non-financial brand performances such as positive brand attitudes, satisfaction and loyalty. In addition to brand awareness and image, Song et al. (2019) and Tran et al. (2021) see a brand's perceived quality as important drivers of brand satisfaction. A brand's perceived quality in terms of overall superiority can command respect, drive customer satisfaction (Balaji, 2011), and lead to sustained brand purchase or loyalty (Tran et al., 2021). However, Diniso and Duh's (2021) model shows that functional or exchange (brand satisfaction) and symbolic or communal (brand love) customer-brand relationships emanate from a CMM.

Impact of customer management mindset factors (monetary, symbolic and functional values) on brand satisfaction –Diniso and Duh's (2021) model

The CMM is premised on the social exchange and consumption-values theories that posit that like in any other human relationships, if a brand provides some valuable offerings or benefits to the satisfaction of consumers, they will buy the brands and be loyal to it (Duh & Pwaka, 2023; Han et al., 2021). In relation to electronic devices such as smartphones, the offerings according to Diniso and Duh's (2021) model should be functional, monetary and symbolic benefits if brand satisfaction is to be achieved. Diniso and Duh's (2021) model also shows that when all three consumption-values or benefits are enjoyed, the brand satisfaction received leads to brand love.

Japutra and Molinillo (2019, p. 3) define brand satisfaction as the outcome of a subjective evaluation that a chosen brand meets or exceeds expectations. This definition indicates that

consumers are expectant of what the brand provides them in terms of functional, monetary and symbolic values or benefits (Diniso & Duh, 2021). Rahman et al. (2021) assert that a brand image can be cognitively and subjectively evaluated from its associations with functional, communicative (e.g. symbolic) and sensory benefits, all of which they suggest can impact brand satisfaction. Thus, brand benefits such as functional, sensory and symbolic benefits play satisfactory roles (Krystallis & Chrysochou, 2014; Rahman et al., 2021). Out of these brand benefits, Popp and Woratschek (2017) and Sohail and Awal (2017) opine that the symbolic benefit is more important than the functional benefit. According to Lee et al. (2016), it is monetary benefits or perceived monetary value that drive brand satisfaction. Overall, consumers' perception of a brand providing certain values or benefits will lead to brand satisfaction (Tasci, 2016). Thus, the following hypotheses are posited:

H2a–H2c: Brand satisfaction is positively impacted by (a) brand awareness, (b) brand image and (c) perceived quality of Samsung smartphones among South African young adults.

H2d–H2f: Brand satisfaction is positively impacted by (d) monetary, (e) functional and (f) symbolic values derived by South African Young adults from the Samsung smartphones.

The stimulus-organism-response theory and relationships between brand satisfaction, brand love and brand loyalty

The stimulus-organism-response theory, as Vieira (2013) presents, states that before a stimulus triggers a behavioural response, an organism (a person) needs to first develop feelings or emotions to a point that relationships are built. In line with this theory, Rahman et al. (2021) propose that stimuli such as brand communications and functional uniqueness impact behavioural responses, including brand loyalty, through an organism's inner processes or relationship factors like brand satisfaction and brand love. Brand love is defined as 'the degree of passionate emotional attachment that a satisfied consumer has for a particular brand' (Machado et al., 2019, p. 378). Viewing brand love as the most intensive consumer–brand relationship indicator from which various behavioural outcomes (e.g. brand loyalty, price premium and positive word-of-mouth) are gained, Rahman et al. (2021) proposed and found that brand satisfaction leads to brand love, which in turn strongly drives brand loyalty. This confirms Veloutsou's (2015) finding that showed that brand satisfaction is an important driver of brand loyalty. These findings are indicators that an intense consumer–brand relationship (brand love) can be built from brand satisfaction to guarantee brand loyalty (Diniso & Duh, 2021; Rahman et al., 2021; Song et al., 2019).

According to Esch et al. (2006) and Rahman et al. (2021), there is an important consumer–brand relationship factor that needs to facilitate the brand satisfaction-loyalty relationship. The facilitator is brand love or attachment according to Esch et al.'s (2006) model. Therefore, a sustained market share guaranteed by brand loyalty does not only emanate from satisfied customers but also from consumers who are emotionally connected or attached to a brand (brand love) (Bicakcioglu et al., 2018). Building brand loyalty through this path generates the willingness to pay a premium price, recommend a brand to peers and family members and even willingness to forgive brand mistakes (Rahman et al., 2021). From these suggested interrelationships, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: South African young adults' brand satisfaction with the Samsung smartphone positively impacts their brand love.

H4: South African young adults' brand love of the Samsung smartphone positively influences their brand loyalty.

Relationships between monetary, functional, symbolic values and brand loyalty

Researchers not only search relational factors such as brand satisfaction and love to predict brand loyalty, but also examine stimulus factors such as the consumption-values or benefits that may stimulate purchase and keep consumers loyal to brands (Rahman et al., 2021). Following Dwivedi's (2015) assertion that brand value dimensions (e.g. monetary, functional and symbolic values) are contributors to the development of brand loyalty, Giovanis and Athanasopoulou (2017) examine the extent to which the brand values impact loyalty to emerging devices. They found that the functional, monetary, symbolic and other values contribute to overall brand value to positively impact brand loyalty. Of note is the finding that when consumers enjoy both functional benefits and symbolic or social status from brands, they will likely trust the brand and resist competitors' products and become brand loyal (Furukawa, 2022; Giovanis & Athanasopoulou, 2017; Yeh et al., 2016). The relationships between functional, symbolic, emotional, social values and brand loyalty have also been suggested by Kim et al. (2019) and Cifci et al. (2016). From the foregoing, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H5a–H5c: Brand loyalty is positively impacted by (a) monetary, (b) functional and (c) symbolic values enjoyed by South African young adults from Samsung smartphones.

Relationship between brand loyalty and brand equity

Brand loyalty is one of the most important dimensions and predictors of brand equity (Buil et al., 2013; Joseph et al., 2020). Brand loyal consumers purchase their preferred brand habitually, are less likely to switch to competing brands and are willing to pay a premium price for the brand – all of which lead to overall brand equity (Buil et al., 2013; Liu et al., 2017). Organisations with brand loyal consumers increase the value of the brand (Krystallis & Chrysochou, 2014; Lee & Robb, 2022), making brand loyalty a strong driver of brand equity (Balaji, 2011; Buil et al., 2013), especially with South Africans' high preference for South Korean smartphones (Lee & Robb, 2022). Thus, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H6: South African young adults' brand loyalty to the Samsung smartphone positively impacts brand equity.

Methodology

Target population and sampling

Young adults (i.e. 18–25 years old in 2017) South African Samsung smartphone users were the primary target

population of this study considering that about 86% of them reportedly preferred and used the brand in South Africa (Diniso & Duh, 2021). The sampling frame was the undergraduate and postgraduate students between 18 years and 25 years old, who Gutter and Copur (2011) term as young adults. We surveyed the young adult students from two culturally and socio-economically diverse universities in Johannesburg. The university-aged respondents were the focus of this study because they are more exposed to technology and use smartphones, among other platforms, to communicate, for leisure, networking and accessing the internet (Bhave et al., 2013; Lepp et al., 2015). University students in South Africa also use smartphones for their studies, especially as most of them cannot afford laptops. Thus, they can better appreciate all the benefits that a smartphone provides. Moreover, globally, 79% of university-aged young adults own a mobile phone (Potgieter, 2015).

Considering that the exact number of respondents was not known for a probability sampling method, a judgement (purposive) (to obtain young adults) non-probability sampling technique was adopted to collect data. Despite the respondents not being representative of the entire population, they possess characteristics related to the study and are likely to provide comprehensive and relevant information to answer the research question/s (Rahman, 2023). Thus, only users of the Samsung smartphone who are young adults were the main consideration for inclusion in the sample.

Because of the use of structural equation modelling (SEM) to analyse data, the sample size was informed by the number of constructs in the final questionnaire. Siddiqui (2013) recommends that conceptual models with 10–15 constructs require sample sizes between 200 and 400 or more respondents to perform the SEM analysis. This study's final questionnaire had 10 constructs and therefore, a sample size of 651 respondents attained in this study was deemed adequate. Among the respondents, 41% identified themselves as males and 59% were females. Most of the participants were black African people (75.7%), followed by white people (11.2%), Indian people and Asian people (7.4%) and mixed race (5.7%), all reflecting South Africa's population structure (Statistics South Africa, 2019, pp. 5–6). In terms of age, respondents were between 18 years and 25 years old, stemming from the purposive sampling and a screening question that targeted this age group. Most respondents (89%) were in the 18–21 age category. These should be undergraduates, who are the majority at universities.

Construct measures

The items used to measure the 10 constructs were selected based on the following previously validated scales: brand awareness (Severi & Ling, 2013; Shen et al., 2014); brand image (Severi & Ling, 2013; Shen et al., 2014); perceived quality (Baalbaki & Guzman, 2016); brand loyalty (Shen et al., 2014); brand satisfaction (Diniso & Duh, 2021; Lee et al., 2015); brand love (Wallace et al., 2014); monetary, functional and symbolic values (Choo et al., 2012; Deng et al., 2010; Diniso & Duh, 2021; Krystallis & Chrysochou, 2014); and overall brand equity (Buil et al., 2013; Yoo & Donthu, 2001). These constructs were measured on a five-point Likert scale anchored by 1 being 'strongly disagree' and 5 being 'strongly agree'. D'Alessandro et al. (2020) recommend that a pilot study using 6–12 respondents should be conducted to reduce the risk of conducting a full study using a flawed measurement instrument. In line with this caution, the questionnaire was pilot-tested with 32 respondents identical to the study's target population (i.e. young adults). Minor changes were effected based on the comments provided by the respondents. Some items with low reliability scores were deleted from the final measurement instrument. Subsequently, the internal consistency of the final questionnaire's scale items was measured using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values.

Data collection and analyses

After receiving the ethical clearance certificate, a self-administered structured questionnaire (paper-based and online versions) was used to collect data in 2017. The questionnaire, which can be obtained on request, started with a cover letter in which the researcher, study title and purpose were introduced. Respondents were informed of the anonymity and confidentiality of the study. Following the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) rule, consent is assumed when respondents decide to participate in the study, and this was stated in the cover letter.

Considering the multivariate nature of the study with 10 constructs, SEM was the main method used for data analyses. According to Ali et al. (2018, p. 515), SEM can simultaneously examine a series of interrelated dependence relationships between sets of constructs represented by multiple variables. Furthermore, Hasyim (2018) states that for studies with formative theoretical models, the covariance-based structural equation modelling (CB-SEM) method should be adopted as opposed to partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM). Therefore, CB-SEM with Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) version 26 program was used to analyse data. The analyses started with a measurement model, which assesses scale validity and goodness-of-fit followed by hypotheses tests with a structural model (Jain & Bariar, 2019).

Both convergent and discriminant validities were assessed. Factor loadings and the average variance extracted (AVE) were used to assess convergent validity, while discriminant validity was assessed with a correlation matrix and the square root of the AVE. The model's goodness-of-fit was established with normed *Chi-square* (χ^2/degrees of freedom [*df*]), goodness-of-fit-index (GFI), comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) methods.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct the study was obtained from the University of the Witwatersrand Human Research Ethics Committee (H16/07/05). The collection of data and publication of results was executed in compliance with the outlined prescripts.

Results

Measurement model

The reliability, validity and model fit results are presented in Table 1 and Table 3.

Table 1 demonstrates that the Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values ranged between 0.628 and 0.939, which according to Hair et al. (2017), are acceptable for consumer behaviour-related studies. Furthermore, the factor loadings and AVE values displayed in Table 1 are all above the acceptable 0.4 and recommended 0.50, thus confirming convergent validity (Hair et al., 2017). The discriminant validity, which establishes if a particular construct is different from other constructs (Voorhees et al., 2016), was achieved because the correlation coefficients between the constructs are below 0.85 (Panzeri et al., 2024) (Table 2). In terms of the model fit, Table 3 shows that χ^2/df = 1.418; GFI = 0.92; CFI = 0.98; TLI = 0.98; RMSEA = 0.025. All these values were above the threshold levels recommended by Wong et al. (2020).

Hypotheses testing

The structural model fit was first established. The results in Table 3 show that a good fit was obtained. The hypotheses testing results are presented in Figure 2 and Table 4.

The first hypotheses examined the relationships between brand awareness, brand image, perceived quality, monetary, functional, symbolic values and brand equity. The results revealed that brand image (β = 0.09; $p < 0.05$), perceived quality (β = 0.08; $p < 0.05$), monetary value (β = 0.09; $p < 0.05$) and symbolic value (β = 0.24; $p < 0.001$) had a positive and significant influence on brand equity. Therefore, H1b, H1*c*, H1*d*, H1*f* are accepted. The relationships between brand awareness (β = 0.07; $p > 0.05$) and functional value (β = 0.02; $p > 0.05$) and brand equity were not significant. Consequently, H1*a* and H1*e* are rejected. Hypothesis 2 posited the relationships between brand awareness, brand image, perceived quality, monetary value, functional value, symbolic value and brand satisfaction. The results in Table 4 reveal that brand awareness (β = 0.25; $p < 0.001$), brand image (β = 0.21; $p < 0.001$), perceived quality (β = 0.20; $p < 0.001$), monetary value (β = 0.12; $p < 0.001$), functional value (β = 0.49; $p < 0.001$) significantly impacted brand satisfaction. This means that H2*a*, H2*b*, H2*c*, H2*d* and H2*e* are accepted. Symbolic value did not significantly impact brand satisfaction, but it did brand equity. Thus, (H2*f*) is rejected (β = 0.03; $p > 0.05$). Hypotheses 3 and 4 proposed relationships between brand satisfaction, brand love and brand loyalty. Table 4 shows that the relationship between brand satisfaction (β = 0.92; $p < 0.001$) and brand love is positive and significant. In turn, brand love (β = 0.91; $p < 0.001$) significantly impacted brand loyalty. Therefore, H3 and H4 are accepted.

Hypothesis 5 examined the impact of monetary, functional and symbolic values on brand loyalty. Table 4 shows that only monetary value (β = 0.13; $p < 0.001$) significantly impacted brand loyalty, meaning H5*a* is accepted but not H5*b* and H5*c* with functional value (β = –0.03; $p > 0.05$) and symbolic value (β = 0.01; $p > 0.05$). Hypothesis 6 examined the relationship between brand loyalty and brand equity. Table 4 indicates that brand loyalty (β = 0.63; $p < 0.001$) significantly impacted brand equity, hence H6 is accepted.

Figure 2 provides the R^2 values showing the explanatory powers of the independent variables and the overall model. Brand awareness, brand image, perceived quality, monetary value and functional value altogether explain 71% of the variance in brand satisfaction. Brand satisfaction explains 64% of brand love. Brand love, monetary, functional and symbolic values explain 64% of brand loyalty. Brand loyalty explains 51% of brand equity. Cumulatively, the integrated model explained 56% of the variance in CBBE. This percentage, according to Chin et al. (2003) and Hair et al. (2014), is substantial for a consumer behaviour-related study.

Discussion and research implications

This study integrated ideas of Aaker's (1991), Diniso and Duh's (2021), Park et al.'s (2022) and Tran et al.'s (2021) models to develop a holistic model showing how both BMM and CMM can be used to measure the sources of Samsung's smartphone customer–brand relationships and CBBE among South African young adults. The results revealed that both the CMM (symbolic and monetary values) and BMM (brand perceived quality, brand image and loyalty) directly lead to CBBE. With the exception of brand awareness and functional value, these findings support Aaker's (1991) and Park et al.'s (2022) models. Indirectly, CBBE is influenced when brand awareness, brand image, perceived quality (BMM); monetary and functional values (CMM) positively impact brand satisfaction, which significantly drives brand love. Brand love then significantly influences brand loyalty, which in turn impacts CBBE. Thus, Tran et al.'s (2021) and Diniso and Duh's (2021) models are supported except for the insignificant symbolic value-brand satisfaction relationship. The integrated model explained 71% of brand satisfaction, 64% of brand love, 64% of brand loyalty and 56% of CBBE variances. These are high explanatory powers for a consumer behaviour study.

It was surprising that brand awareness did not directly and significantly impact overall CBBE. Although this finding is consistent with Switala et al.'s (2018) study in Poland, it contrasts with previous studies in the Croatian mobile phone and Vietnam tourism industries, which showed that brand awareness is an important direct driver of brand equity

TABLE 1: Means, reliability, validity and factor loadings.

Research construct	Descriptive statistics				Cronbach's test		CR values	AVE values	Factor loadings
	Mean		SD		Item-total	Alpha values			
	Value	Average	Value	Average					
BA3	4.147	3.779	0.962	1.125	0.400	0.628	0.679	0.426	0.45
BA5	3.684		1.235		0.532				0.80
BA7	3.507		1.178		0.437				0.66
BI1	3.200	3.754	1.168	1.056	0.484	0.792	0.818	0.430	0.63
BI2	3.782		1.004		0.644				0.71
BI3	3.705		1.132		0.559				0.52
BI4	4.015		0.938		0.630				0.68
BI6	4.069		1.041		0.584				0.72
PQ1	3.897	3.876	0.961	0.943	0.702	0.891	0.890	0.537	0.79
PQ2	3.882		0.930		0.725				0.74
PQ3	4.132		0.836		0.657				0.66
PQ4	4.009		0.886		0.711				0.74
PQ5	3.905		0.946		0.722				0.77
PQ6	3.828		0.963		0.724				0.77
PQ7	3.478		1.079		0.597				0.66
BL1	3.565	3.610	1.365	1.319	0.816	0.915	0.928	0.720	0.83
BL2	3.558		1.325		0.782				0.85
BL3	3.559		1.301		0.832				0.87
BL4	3.467		1.415		0.768				0.83
BL5	3.900		1.189		0.719				0.87
BS1	3.842	3.956	0.994	1.020	0.774	0.939	0.935	0.707	0.82
BS2	3.911		1.013		0.825				0.88
BS3	3.974		1.010		0.778				0.78
BS4	4.026		1.028		0.833				0.86
BS5	4.008		1.041		0.863				0.86
BS6	3.977		1.034		0.832				0.84
BLO1	3.653	3.703	1.116	1.120	0.791	0.928	0.926	0.677	0.84
BLO2	3.810		1.136		0.828				0.84
BLO3	3.829		1.074		0.841				0.88
BLO4	3.470		1.164		0.835				0.86
BLO5	3.441		1.257		0.765				0.79
BLO6	4.015		0.975		0.691				0.74
MV1	4.051	3.995	0.955	0.963	0.727	0.883	0.871	0.578	0.77
MV2	4.000		0.928		0.704				0.84
MV3	4.035		0.893		0.772				0.83
MV4	3.889		1.063		0.686				0.60
MV5	3.998		0.976		0.719				0.75
FV1	3.906	3.887	0.962	0.997	0.759	0.920	0.922	0.665	0.83
FV2	3.892		0.994		0.820				0.87
FV3	3.834		1.057		0.735				0.78
FV4	3.857		1.023		0.786				0.83
FV5	3.854		0.982		0.783				0.80
FV6	3.977		0.964		0.751				0.78
SV1	2.980	3.197	1.208	1.216	0.655	0.864	0.929	0.658	0.88
SV2	4.020		0.996		0.400				0.68
SV3	3.618		1.098		0.696				0.83
SV4	3.224		1.251		0.784				0.81
SV5	3.077		1.299		0.746				0.87
SV6	3.066		1.220		0.776				0.88
SV7	2.396		1.440		0.455				0.51
OBE1	3.530	3.201	1.247	1.349	0.626	0.868	0.859	0.605	0.77
OBE2	3.321		1.342		0.767				0.87
OBE3	3.040		1.389		0.780				0.79
OBE4	2.912		1.420		0.710				0.68

BA, brand awareness; BI, brand image; PQ, perceived quality; BL, brand loyalty; BS, brand satisfaction; BLO, brand love; MV, monetary value; FV, functional value; SV, symbolic value; OBE, Overall brand equity; SD, standard deviation; CR, composite reliability; AVE, average variance extracted.

(Chi et al., 2020; Sirola & Gallopeni, 2020). Our not significant direct brand awareness-CBBE relationship could emanate from the fact that because there is already high awareness of the Samsung smartphone brand among the young adults, awareness becomes unimportant for CBBE formation. The young adults are rather enthused by the Samsung

TABLE 2: Correlation coefficients between constructs.

Constructs	BA	BI	PQ	BL	BS	BLO	MV	FV	SV	OBE
BA	1.000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
BI	0.583**	1.000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
PQ	0.533**	0.677**	1.000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
BL	0.634**	0.642**	0.616**	1.000	-	-	-	-	-	-
BS	0.549**	0.675**	0.741**	0.756**	1.000	-	-	-	-	-
BLO	0.571**	0.706**	0.676**	0.792**	0.797**	1.000	-	-	-	-
MV	0.461**	0.519**	0.540**	0.561**	0.591**	0.610**	1.000	-	-	-
FV	0.520**	0.659**	0.766**	0.651**	0.802**	0.754**	0.602**	1.000	-	-
SV	0.411**	0.521**	0.452**	0.466**	0.453**	0.576**	0.393**	0.492**	1.000	-
OBE	0.509**	0.526**	0.531**	0.712**	0.618**	0.658**	0.509**	0.554**	0.523**	1.000

BA, brand awareness; BI, brand image; PQ, perceived quality; BL, brand loyalty; BS, brand satisfaction; BLO, brand love; MV, monetary value; FV, functional value; SV, symbolic value; OBE, Overall brand equity.

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

TABLE 3: Model fit indices of the study's confirmatory factor analysis' measurement model and structural model.

Fit indices	Abbreviation	Initial model	Re-specified measurement model	Fit indices for structural model
Normed-*Chi-square*	χ^2/df	3.058	1.418	1.587
Goodness-of-fit	GFI	0.770	0.916	0.924
Tucker–Lewis index	TLI	0.871	0.978	0.975
Comparative fit index	CFI	0.878	0.982	0.952
Root mean square error of approximation	RMSEA	0.056	0.025	0.028

phone's good image, perceived quality, value-for-money (i.e. monetary value), and to show off to friends in terms of symbolic benefit. In terms of perceived quality, Sirola and Gallopeni (2020) and Chi et al. (2020) also found its direct impact on brand equity.

Our study supports Sanchez-Casado et al. (2018) who found that among the various consumption-values, the social and symbolic value which enhances consumers' status among members of the community, and monetary benefits are what drive the brand equity of Italian and Spanish brands sold on social media platforms. Thus, while functional benefits are always important, because everyone will expect a brand to perform their utilitarian functions, the benefits that would directly motivate young adult consumers to choose one brand over another are the monetary and symbolic benefits. However, when assessing the predictors of brand satisfaction of South African young adults, this study revealed that it is functional and monetary values and not symbolic value that are important. These findings are consistent with previous studies. For instance, Chen and Ann's (2016) and Deng et al.'s (2010) studies in the mobile phone industry in Taiwan and China, respectively, found that functional and monetary benefits are drivers of brand satisfaction. While symbolic benefit was not important for brand satisfaction in Deng et al.'s (2010) study and the current study, symbolic value in other industries like cosmetics, tourism and clothing was found to be influential for consumers' satisfaction (Chen et al., 2016; Hur et al., 2014; Sondoh et al., 2007). Symbolically, the young adults may prefer the iPhone to be brand satisfied.

Brand satisfaction, as found in this study, strongly impacted brand love. The brand love, as also found by Tasci (2018) and Cho et al. (2018), directly influenced brand

TABLE 4: Path coefficients and *p*-values.

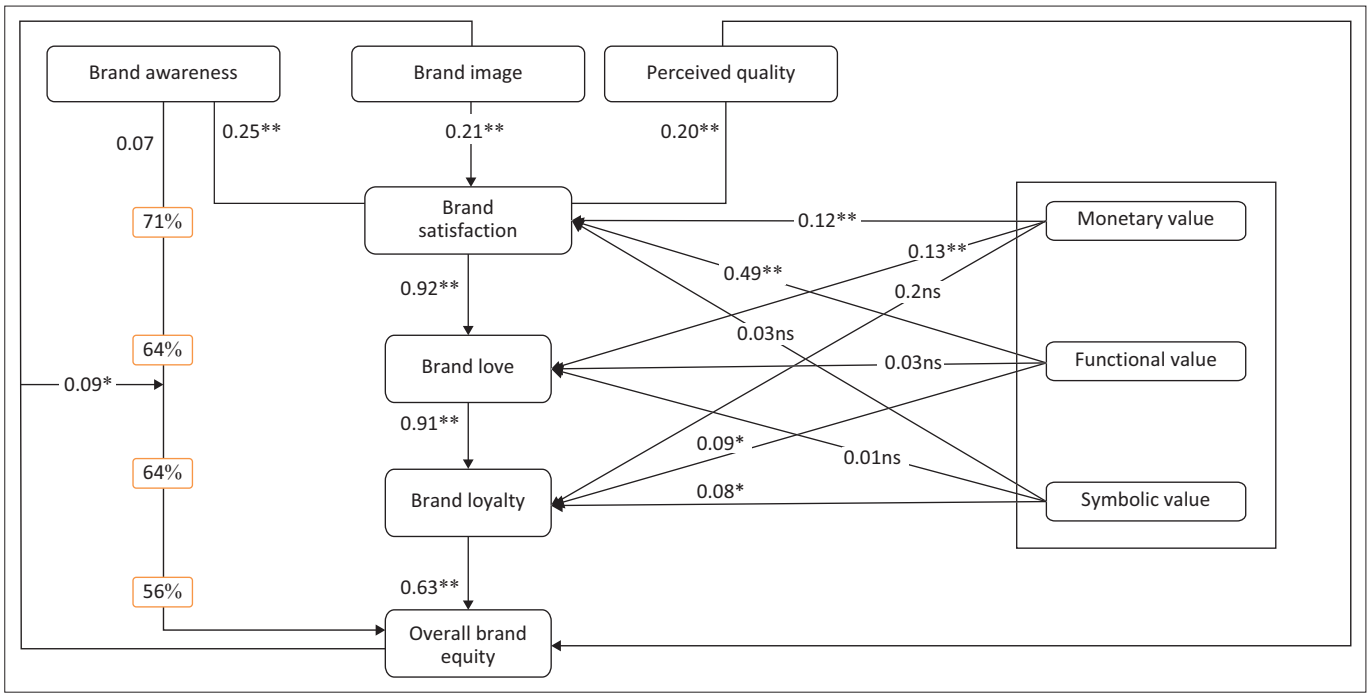
Structural paths	Co-efficient	*t*-values	*p*-values
BS ← BA	0.251	4.935	0.000**
BS ← BI	0.211	7.347	0.000**
BS ← PQ	0.195	7.415	0.000**
BS ← MV	0.123	5.146	0.000**
BS ← FV	0.488	14.93	0.000**
BS ← SV	0.025	1.208	0.227
BLO ← BS	0.916	16.236	0.000**
BL ← FV	0.026	0.706	0.480
BL ← SV	0.009	0.322	0.747
BL ← MV	0.128	3.967	0.000**
BL ← BLO	0.905	14.323	0.000**
OBE ← MV	0.085	2.291	0.022*
OBE ← FV	0.020	0.528	0.597
OBE ← SV	0.239	6.775	0.000**
OBE ← BL	0.628	10.879	0.000**
OBE ← BA	0.071	1.043	0.297
OBE ← BI	0.092	2.248	0.025*
OBE ← PQ	0.083	2.206	0.027*

BA, brand awareness; BI, brand image; PQ, perceived quality; BL, brand loyalty; BS, brand satisfaction; BLO, brand love; MV, monetary value; FV, functional value; SV, symbolic value; OBE, Overall brand equity.

*, Significant at 0.05 significance level; **, Significant at 0.01 significance level.

loyalty. Brand loyalty in this study was not only influenced by brand love but also by monetary value. This does not fully support Dwivedi's (2015) results that revealed that in addition to monetary value, functional and symbolic values also impact brand loyalty among mobile phone consumers in India. While Chen and Ann (2016) and Mishra et al. (2014) found that it is when a smartphone is efficient, functional and easy to use (functional value) that consumers become brand loyal, we found that loyalty is gained only when the functionality is reasonably priced (monetary value). This could be that the young adults find many other smartphone brands to have the functional value and may not base their loyalty and differential response (brand equity) on this attribute. Not earning so much though at this age bracket, monetary value is important for their loyalty and brand equity.

The retention of customers through their brand loyalty is important following this study's finding regarding the strong and positive relationship between brand loyalty and brand equity. This confirms results of previous studies in the tourism, hair care, mobile phone, electronics,



ns, not significant.
*, Significant at 0.05; **, Significant at 0.01.
FIGURE 2: Structural model with paths coefficients and variance explained.

sportswear, motor and beverages industries (Buil et al., 2013; Chi et al., 2020; Jain & Bariar, 2019; Sasmita & Suki, 2015; Torres et al., 2015). These findings imply that loyal consumers will not only be committed to buying a brand over time but will discriminately do so.

Our findings have significant theoretical and practical implications.

Theoretical implications

Aaker's (1991) CBBE models have been extensively used to examine the sources of CBBE across various industries and cultures. This seminal author provides important brand-related and BMM sources of CBBE (i.e. brand awareness, brand image, perceived quality and brand loyalty). However, other influential CBBE drivers are emerging, especially with the CMM and for the well-informed, unique, large, complex and digital natives such as young adults or Generation Y-ers, as Giovanis and Athanasopoulou (2017) term them. Starting with Aaker's CBBE foundational model, we integrated other models to examine whether, in addition to using brand-related sources with a BMM, a CMM using consumption-values (i.e. monetary, functional and symbolic values) and consumer–brand relationship factors (brand satisfaction, brand love and loyalty), the sources of Samsung's CBBE among young adults can be holistically explained. With the high explanatory power of the integrated model, the pathways of how CBBE can be built among young adults in an emerging market setting are revealed. The study also borrows from the product and brand management and consumer behaviour disciplines to enrich the explanation of CBBE. Aaker's (1991) traditional model is also enriched for an interdisciplinary or multifaceted understanding of CBBE and brand management. Having tested with young adults and with high explanatory power obtained, the integrated model can be replicated for the holistic measurement of CBBE sources of various brands in different product categories, with other samples and for diverse countries.

Young adult consumers are found to be indecisive and notoriously disloyal towards brands (Lazarevic, 2012). Notwithstanding, this study exposes paths to gaining brand loyalty for a highly switchable product category – smartphones. Interestingly, our study revealed that 58% of the young adults viewed as a disloyal consumer segment have owned their Samsung phone for more than 5 years. In addition, 70% of them were found to be willing to recommend the brand to family members and friends. Following the recommendation to invest in understanding drivers of brand relationships built by young adults (Bilgihan, 2016), our study contributes by exposing the specific consumer–brand relationship factors and their determinants. This will be important for the development of appropriate marketing strategies for capturing and retaining this fickle but lucrative consumer market segment.

The study also contributes by uncovering the types of benefits that the large and profitable young adult consumer segment seeks for the development of various types of consumer–brand relationships. For example, we uncovered that functional and monetary values are needed to gain brand satisfaction, monetary value is needed to gain brand loyalty, and symbolic and monetary values are needed to gain brand equity. The common denominator is monetary value if brand owners,

especially the smartphone owners are to build brand relationship with young adults. The consumer–brand relationship can lead to benefits like positive word-of-mouth, brand citizen behaviour, willingness to pay a premium price, quick forgiveness of brand failures and resultant profits (Albert et al., 2013). These are indications that using both the BMM and CMM can generate both product-market and financial-market benefits, as Han et al. (2021) and Troiville et al. (2019) predict.

Practical implications

In this study, it is found that South African young adult consumers are satisfied (M = 3.956), love (M = 3.703) and are loyal (M = 3.610) (Table 1) to the Samsung smartphone brand. About 86% prefer and own a Samsung smartphone (Diniso & Duh, 2021). These figures are good news for Samsung brand owners, especially considering that the young adults are not only large in numbers but are increasingly entering the workforce with accompanying high disposable income and spending potential (Young et al., 2013). However, Giovanis and Athanasopoulou (2017) warn that not understanding and prioritising the determinants of the brand choice, loyalty and differential response can shorten the favourable response sustainability. This study makes a practical contribution by exposing the brand-related (perceived quality, brand awareness, image and loyalty), consumer–brand relationship (brand satisfaction, brand love and brand loyalty) and consumption-related (monetary, functional and symbolic values) determinants.

Thus, when investing various resources to capture this large and lucrative young adult consumer market, the determinants and how they relate to building brand loyalty and equity need to be noted and prioritised. This is particularly important because, contrary to the expectation that young adults will own a Samsung smartphone for symbolic benefits, our findings show that functional and monetary values are their attraction. For functional value to lead to brand loyalty, brand satisfaction needs to be gained first. Consequently, Samsung brand marketers should not 'rest on their laurels'. Knowing that young adults are well-informed and cherish monetary value (value-for-money), innovative, user-friendly, reliable, durable and quality smartphone features need to be constantly upgraded at reasonable prices. Together with the traditional CBBE sources (perceived product quality, brand awareness and image), also revealed in this study as strong predictors of brand satisfaction, which is a strong driver of brand loyalty, sustainable consumer-brand relationships can be built for sustained differential response to the brand (i.e. brand equity). From these, market share and financial benefits can be stretched to the future.

Conclusion

Limitations and directions for future research

This research, as with any study, has some limitations, which present an opportunity for future research. This section presents limitations and corresponding suggestions for future research.

The first limitation is the focus on only university-attending young adults, who Gutter and Copur (2011) consider to be newly entering the job market with unique attitudes and high luxury goods purchasing ability. By not studying the non-university young adults, most of whom may not have the hope of earning income levels like the university-attending young adults, raises questions as to whether the Samsung brand would have been the preference in the first place. This question can be answered by studying the non-university students in future studies. Moreover, since data was collected in 2017, the views of the young adults (18–25 years old) then and the ones now have changed. Thus, it would be interesting to study the current young adults for any divergent views and perceptions.

The second limitation relates to the focus on the mobile phone industry. This implies that the findings may be restricted and applicable not only to this industry, but also to one mobile phone brand. Hence, future research should ascertain if different insights pertaining to the sources of CBBE can be uncovered by testing the holistic model with other mobile phone brands and in other industry sectors.

The third limitation is about the nature of the study, which was cross-sectional. New developments constantly take place in markets. For example, competitors introduce new smartphones and features in the market. Consumers rapidly change brand preferences, and socio-economic conditions now change rapidly. These may require a longitudinal study and present an opportunity for future researchers to replicate this study using the integrated model in different contexts to determine if the results found in this study will continue to be applicable to young adults and other consumer segments.

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Competing interests

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Authors' contributions

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Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, C.D. upon reasonable request.

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