



RESEARCH PAPER

Retailers-Led Brand Value Co-Creation Behaviors: An Intervening Analysis

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ABSTRACT

There has been ample research on brand value co-creation (BVCC), but majorly it involved only one stakeholder (i.e., customers) as the source of co-creation. This paper aims to study employees' brand citizenship behaviors (EBCB) with retailers' brand value co-creation behaviors with a mediation mechanism of brand attachment in the FMCG sector. Scales were adapted from previous studies to measure EBCB, brand attachment, retailer-led feedback, retailer-led advocacy, and retailer-led helping. Data were collected through self-administered questionnaires, and PLS-SEM was used to analyze a sample of 189 salespersons and retailers. The findings support the complimentary partial mediation role of brand attachment in fostering retailers' BVCC behaviors by EBCB. This study offers comprehensive insights into employees' behaviors in cultivating retailers' co-creation behaviors. Firms and marketers may benefit by focusing on the behaviors of their employees, especially sales employees who frequently visit retail stores.

KEYWORDS Retailers' Brand Attachment, Employees' Brand Citizenship Behavior, Brand Value Co-Creation

Introduction

It is a widely accepted notion that value creation needs the active participation of passive stakeholders of the firm, which provides a competitive edge to survive in today's intense environment (Carvalho & Alves, 2023). Therefore, value co-creation has been an inordinate concern in the literature on brand management (Khajeheian & Ebrahimi, 2020). Brand value co-creation (BVCC) is referred to the collaboration of producers and different stakeholders in brand value creation processes (Merz, He, & Vargo, 2009). Several researchers have found that BVCC is prolific for all stakeholders, especially for firms. For instance, from the producers' perspective, it enhances product innovation (Chang, 2019), ripens competitive advantage (Ida, 2017), transforms brand meaning (Da Silveira, Lages, & Simoes, 2013), boosts brand equity (Kristal et al., 2016), develops brand image (Foroudi et al., 2019), fosters brand performance (Zheng & Lian, 2017), engenders customer satisfaction and positive word of mouth (Vázquez-Casielles, Iglesias, & Varela-Neira, 2017), augments relationship quality (Yu, Xiao-Hui, & Ze-Xun, 2017; Wu & Cheng, 2020), and amplifies customers' loyalty (Cossío-Silva et al., 2016).

Despite the imperativeness of BVCC, unfortunately, there is a dearth of studies that consider other stakeholders in the process of BVCC. Most of the literature provides insights about value co-creation from customers' perspective (e.g., Merrilees, 2016; Black & Veloutsou, 2017; Tajvidi et al., 2021; Merz, Zarantonello, & Grappi, 2018; Gill-Simmen et al., 2018; Foroudi et al., 2019; Iglesias et al., 2020). Although, few researchers have focused on

other stakeholders (e.g., suppliers) in the value-creation process (Lacoste, 2016; Sinkovics, Kuivalainen, & Roath, 2018; Bettiga & Ciccullo, 2019; Sarkar & Banerjee, 2019). However, despite the importance of retailers in the value delivery to final consumers (Rosenbloom, 2012), the understanding of the role of retailers in BVCC is still scant. Based on the argument, this study investigates the relationship between sales employees' brand citizenship behavior (EBCB) and BVCC from the perspective of retailers, because retailers are considered the strongest and most valid source of customers' expressions and feedback about the brand (Moreno, 2018; Nicasio, 2019). In this study, authors considered only small and medium-sized retailers because, most of the time, they interact directly with the salespersons of a firm. In contrast, the purchasing pattern of large-size retailers does not necessarily depend on personal interaction with salespersons. For instance, large retailers majorly deal in routine and bulk orders; therefore, they may directly deal with a firm or agency. While small and medium size retailers exist in large numbers and individually they deal in small orders that can not be placed directly to the firm; therefore, salesperson interaction is necessary to get their orders. Moreover, this study focuses on the FMCG sector in Pakistan a developing country. Due to the boom of spending in this sector, the FMCG market size was worth \$152 billion with an expected growth rate of 8.2% annually through 2016-2021 (South Asia Investor Review, 2020). Additionally, sales staff of firms interact with retailers; therefore, their behavior may be effective in transforming brand characteristics that will result in retailers' attachment to the brand. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the behaviors of internal employees and retailers toward brand value creation, with the mediation of retailers' brand attachment. Besides, this study draws these relationships through the lens of social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

Literature Review

Retailer Led Brand Value Co-Creation (BVCC)

BVCC is a concept derived from the phenomenon of value co-creation as value co-creation is referred to the combined efforts of customers and producers for the generation of ideas, design, and new product development (Vargo & Lush, 2004). Furthermore, the literature on retailing does not provide the retailers' initiated types of value co-creation. Therefore, it provides the leverage to extract similar types from the customer value co-creation construct. Value co-creation has been established as a multi-dimensional construct (Yi & Gong, 2013). This study utilizes the value co-creation concept of Yi and Gong (2013) from a retailer's perspective. For this purpose, this study adapted the best-suited definition for retailers-led value co-creation from the definition of customers' value co-creation: "Retailers-initiated brand value co-creation behaviors are the relevant retailers-led (extra-role) interactions between the retailers and the brand."

Concisely, this concept was given for customer-led value co-creation that includes eight types of co-creation (i.e., information seeking, information sharing, responsible behavior, personal interaction, feedback, advocacy, helping, and tolerance). Out of these eight types only a few were relevant to retailers-initiated value co-creation. For instance, the friendliness of customers with retailers may express customer-led co-creation, but retailers' friendliness with customers is mandatory for their successful retail business. As this study only focuses on retailers' initiated value co-creation types; therefore, only three dimensions were included in this study (i.e., feedback co-creation, advocacy co-creation, and helping co-creation).

Employees' Brand Citizenship Behaviour (EBCB)

EBCB is a concept derived from the literature on organizational citizenship behavior (Nyadzayo, Matanda, & Ewing, 2015), as "individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization" (Organ, 1988 p. 86). According to

this definition, Morhart, Herzog, and Tomczak (2009) concluded that brand citizenship behavior includes voluntary behavioral activities in favor of a specific brand. Moreover, EBCB demonstrates that there should be congruence between employees' behaviors and brand identity and promise (Burmamann & Zeplin, 2005). EBCB is a multidimensional concept because it includes both in-role and extra-role behaviors (Burmamann & König, 2011). Therefore, this study uses three dimensions of EBCB, which are brand compliance, brand endorsement, and brand development, because of the main focus of EBCB on voluntary activities. First, brand compliance – which includes the employees' compliance with brand-related policies, second, brand endorsement - related to brand advocacy, and third, brand development - linked to the active performance of employees to develop brands for different stakeholders (Graham, 1991; Van Dyne, Graham, & Dienesch, 1994).

Brand Attachment

Attachment is referred to a bond between people or people with objects (Ainsworth, 1973). To understand the magnitude of this bond, the attachment construct was developed and characterized as psychological connectedness (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980). According to Bowlby (1969), the attachment of an individual to a person/object forces him/her to maintain closeness with that specific person/object. As attachment affects the individuals' urge to favor an attachment figure, this construct has been widely used in marketing literature. Several researchers have produced evidence on brand attachment (Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005; Kressmann et al., 2006; Park et al., 2010; Matzler et al., 2011). According to Thomson, MacInnis, and Park (2005), brand attachment can be defined as the bond between people and brands based on affection for the brand. More specifically, this emotional bond between retailers and the brand is derived from rationales provided by the brand because, unlike the customers, in a business-to-business (B2B) environment, attachment is based on brand-associated benefits for the business (Roper & Davies, 2010). Thus, this study utilizes brand attachment as a utility perspective link between retailers' and producers' brands (Malär et al., 2011).

EBCB and BVCC

Employees' behaviors, especially in a retail business environment, are imperative in persuading retailers. Furthermore, retailers anticipate brands' value from the representation of employees. Specifically, the actions of any individual or group are based on various brand-related stimuli transferred from the employees' behaviors (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009). Oftentimes, a perception of brand-related benefits is formed from these stimuli (Roper & Davies, 2010). Correspondingly, in the retail sector, salespersons' behavior may transfer favorable stimuli about the brand, which may generate retailers' favorable attraction towards brands. As literature advocates, employees' behaviors substantially affect stakeholders' perception of the corporate brand (Hatch & Schultz, 2001; Mitchell, 2002; Anixter, 2003). For instance, employees' citizenship behaviors affect brand trust (Xie, Peng, & Huan, 2014), brand image (Nyadzayo, Matanda, & Ewing, 2015), and brand credibility (Jeng, 2016).

According to the above discussion, we argued that retailers evaluate the employees who provide them with brand-related services and extra services (Badrinarayanan & Sierra, 2018). After favorable evaluation, they consider the specific brand as the identity of their own retail business. Additionally, the behavior of employees also generates brand identity (Aslam et al., 2023), which further attracts stakeholders, and stakeholders get attached to the brand (Helmi, Bridson, & Cassidy, 2020) because they consider the brand as their self-identity. We argued that, to guard this identity, they get themselves involved in such activities which are in favor of the brand. More specifically, retailers provide firms the feedback about their brand, advocate the brand, and also they help others to solve their problems with the brand. Therefore, they will provide feedback to firms, advocate the

brand, and help customers and other stakeholders related to brand selection and brand problems. Consequently, the authors came up with the following hypotheses:

H1: EBCB is positively related to retailers-led BVCC.

H1a. EBCB is positively related to retailers-led feedback co-creation.

H1b. EBCB is positively related to retailers-led advocacy co-creation.

H1c. EBCB is positively related to retailers-led helping co-creation.

EBCB and Brand Attachment

Employees' behaviors substantially affect stakeholders' perception of corporate brands (Hatch & Schultz, 2001; Mitchell, 2002; Anixter, 2003). Retailers make a perception of the brand by interacting with their sales employees and experiencing their services. Moreover, retailers got attached to those employees who provide them with brand-related services and extra services as well (Badrinarayanan & Sierra, 2018). Additionally, the behavior of employees also generates brand identity (Aslam et al., 2023), which further attract stakeholders, and stakeholders get attached to the brand (Helmi, Bridson, & Cassidy, 2020) because they consider the brand as their self-identity. As a result, identity-relevant attachment develops between stakeholders and the brand. Thus, we draw based on social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) that behaviors of sales employees are stored in the mind of retailers as a representation of brands. This storage of behaviors decides retailers' intentions to get attached to the brand. Furthermore, we argue that when retailers observe employees' compliance with the brand, employees' endorsement of the brand, and employees' sincere efforts to develop the brand, then a clear brand identity and authenticity are developed in the mind of retailers. Consequently, retailers want to make this brand their identity and get attached to the brand. Thus, the aforementioned arguments derive the following hypotheses:

H2: EBCB is positively related to retailers' brand attachment.

Brand attachment and BVCC

Brand attachment is a bond (Ainsworth, 1973), which is based on brand affection and love (Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005). Brand attachment has various positive outcomes such as purchase intentions (Kaufmann et al., 2016b), brand loyalty (Loureiro, Sarmiento, & Le Bellego, 2017), and favorable behaviors (Holzer, Batt, & Bruhn, 2016). In the lens of social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), we propose that when retailers are attached to a brand, they consider themselves related to that brand and make it their identity. To guard this identity, they get themselves involved in such activities which are in favor of the brand. More specifically, retailers provide firms the feedback about their brand, advocate the brand, and also they help others to solve their problems with the brand. Thus, we developed the following hypotheses:

H3: Retailers' brand attachment is positively associated with retailers-led BVCC.

H3a: Retailers' brand attachment is positively associated with retailers-led feedback.

H3b: Retailers' brand attachment is positively associated with retailers-led advocacy.

H3c: Retailers' brand attachment is positively associated with retailers-led helping.

Brand attachment as a mediator between EBCB and BVCC

According to social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), we draw that retailers make a perception of the brand by interacting with their sales employees and experiencing their services. Moreover, retailers got attached to those employees who provide them with brand-related services and extra services as well (Badrinarayanan & Sierra, 2018). Additionally, the behavior of employees also generates brand identity (Aslam et al., 2023), which further attracts stakeholders, and stakeholders get attached to the brand (Helmi, Bridson, & Cassidy, 2020) because they consider the brand as their self-identity. As a result, identity-relevant attachment develops between stakeholders and the brand. After this attachment, they consider themselves related to that brand and make it their identity. To guard this utilitarian identity, they get themselves involved in such activities which are in favor of the brand. More specifically, retailers provide firms the feedback about their brand, advocate the brand, and help others solve their problems with the brand. Thus, we stated the following hypotheses:

- H4: Retailers’ brand attachment positively mediates the relationship between EBCB and Retailers-led BVCC.
- H4a: Retailers’ brand attachment positively mediates the relationship between EBCB and retailers-led feedback.
- H4b: Retailers’ brand attachment positively mediates the relationship between EBCB and retailers-led advocacy.
- H4c: Retailers’ brand attachment positively mediates the relationship between EBCB and retailers-led helping.

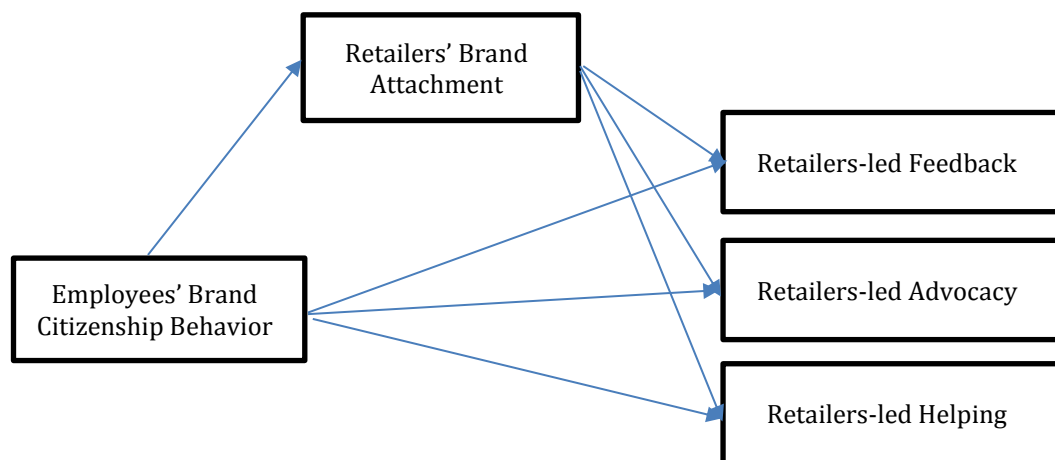


Figure 1. The framework

Material and Methods

Data Collection and Sample

Sample data were collected from 300 small and medium-sized retail stores and their corresponding salespersons through a self-administered questionnaire. Moreover, data were collected through convenient sampling from four major cities of Pakistan, i.e., Lahore, Islamabad, Faisalabad, and Karachi. These cities are best suited for the study sample because these cities are considered industrial cities of Pakistan with a vast population. Therefore, the retail sector from these cities contributes a significant amount to the total retail business of Pakistan (Nordea, 2020). Considering ethicality in data collection, each store owner was informed, and prior permission was taken for data collection. Moreover, each respondent was assured about the anonymity and confidentiality of their personal

information and responses. Additionally, data from salespersons were collected outside the retail stores so that, the effects of retail stores' environment on salespersons' responses and social desirability bias can be minimized to obtain genuine feelings and practices information.

Variables' Measurement

Pre-established scales were adapted to measure the study constructs as shown in Table 1. Firstly, three dimensions of EBCB were adapted from Van Dyne, Graham, and Dienesch (1994), Burmann, Zeplin, and Riley (2009), and Morhart, Herzog, and Tomczak (2009) as brand compliance, brand endorsement, and brand development behaviors were measured by four, five, and eight items respectively. Moreover, EBCB was measured as the second-order construct. Secondly, to measure brand attachment, a three-item scale was adopted from Swaminathan, Stilley, and Ahluwalia (2009). Lastly, the dimensions of BVCC were adapted from Yi and Gong (2013) in the context of retailer-led co-creation. Furthermore, retailer-led feedback, retailer-led advocacy, and retailer-led helping were measured by two, two, and three items, respectively. All responses were measured on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Table 1
Source of scale items

Constructs	Source of scale items
Brand compliance	Van Dyne, Graham, and Dienesch (1994) and Morhart, Herzog, and Tomczak (2009)
Brand endorsement	Van Dyne, Graham, and Dienesch (1994)
Brand development	Van Dyne, Graham, and Dienesch (1994), Burmann, Zeplin, and Riley (2009), and Morhart, Herzog, and Tomczak (2009)
Brand attachment	Swaminathan, Stilley, and Ahluwalia (2009)
Retailer-led feedback	Yi and Gong (2013)
Retailer-led advocacy	Yi and Gong (2013)
Retailer-led helping	Yi and Gong (2013)

Results and Discussion

Structural equation modeling by partial least squares in Smart-PLS (3) – a variance-based approach to test the hypothetical models, was used for data analysis. The authors utilized PLS-SEM for two reasons. First, it is more capable of determining the predicting power than the CB-SEM (Hair et al., 2017). Second, it has been widely used in marketing and management literature due to its predicting power in the implicit nature of the research (e.g., Ringle, Sarstedt, & Straub, 2012; Hair et al., 2012; Richter et al., 2016; Ali et al., 2018; Ringle et al., 2020). For data analysis, the authors run some preliminary analyses before the testing of proposed relationships. For instance, data were tested for missing values and outliers. After screening the data, the authors left with 189 responses in the data to test the study hypotheses.

Measurement Model

To test the measurement model, confirmatory composite analysis (CCA) was used to assess the reliability and validity of the study's measurement model, comprised of three dimensions of EBCC (i.e., brand compliance, brand endorsement, and brand development), brand attachment, retailer-led feedback, retailer-led advocacy, and retailer-led helping. Firstly, the authors measured item reliability based on their factor loadings on respective constructs. To retain items in their respective factors, a threshold value of 0.7 (Hair et al.

2012) was followed. According to this criteria, a few items were removed from the scales like one item from brand compliance, one item from the brand endorsement, and two items from the brand development scale were excluded. Secondly, Cronbach alpha coefficients and composite reliability (CR) were measured to confirm the construct reliability. Tables 2 and 3 depict that all values of Cronbach alpha and CR were greater than the concerned threshold value of 0.7 (Hair et al. 2012). Thirdly, for convergent analysis, AVE was collected, and found all values were greater than threshold point 0.5 (Hair et al. 2012), which confirms the convergent validity of measures. Furthermore, the authors used the HTMT criterion (see Table 4) to check the discriminant validity of constructs and found all values less than the threshold point .85 (Henseler et al. 2014). Hence, this shows that the proposed theoretical model is statistically fit, and therefore, SEM can be applied for hypotheses testing. Additionally, we used 5000 bootstrap samples to analyze the significance of parameters.

Moreover, EBCB was measured as a second-order construct and the embedded two-stage approach (Ringle, Sarstedt, & Straub, 2012) was utilized. Specifically, indicators of lower-level of components were eliminated from the second-order construct (Ringle, Sarstedt, & Straub, 2012) and the latent variable scores of reflective variables of brand compliance, brand development, and brand endorsement were used as the formative indicators of EBCB. Afterward, the authors checked the weights and loadings of formative indicators, which were significant: therefore, all indicators were retained. Lastly, all formative indicators were checked for multicollinearity by a variance inflation factor (VIF) all values were found below the threshold (VIF < 3).

Table 2
Cronbach Alpha, CR, AVE, Construct correlations

No.	Constructs	α	CR	AVE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	BC	0.868	0.919	0.791							
2	BE	0.858	0.907	0.723	.146						
3	BD	0.864	0.900	0.607	.691	.131					
4	BA	0.816	0.891	0.731	.675	.168	.698				
5	RLF	0.740	0.884	0.792	.609	.107	.694	.531			
6	RLA	0.888	0.947	0.899	.720	.189	.524	.563	.576		
7	RLH	0.833	0.900	0.750	.663	.145	.776	.618	.770	.620	

Table 3
Cronbach Alpha, CR, AVE, Construct correlations

No.	Constructs	α	CR	AVE	1	2	3	4	5
1	EBCB ^a	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2	BA	0.816	0.891	0.731	.751				
3	RLF	0.740	0.884	0.792	.707	.531			
4	RLA	0.888	0.947	0.899	.682	.563	.576		
5	RLH	0.833	0.900	0.750	.782	.618	.770	.620	

a = Formative measurement

Table 4
HTMT Criterion for Discriminant Validity

	BA	BC	BD	BE	RLA	RLF	RLH
BA							
BC	0.801						
BD	0.832	0.792					
BE	0.195	0.169	0.151				
RLA	0.660	0.821	0.596	0.218			
RLF	0.683	0.760	0.764	0.138	0.710		

RLH	0.751	0.779	0.914	0.174	0.719	0.782
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Table 5
Formative indicator evaluation

No.	Formative indicator	Weight	T-value	95% CI	Loading	T-value	95% CI	VIF	Condition index
1	BC	.512***	29.98	[.27; .61]	.912***	48.113	[.22; .44]	2.033	1.96
2	BD	.539***	23.14	[.51; .67]	.920***	69.162	[.43; .54]	2.025	1.96
3	BE	.131*	3.14	[.07; .21]	.561**	3.01	[.08; .25]	1.024	1.61

a. 95% confidence interval (95% CI) computed using estimate ± 1.96 SE from bootstrap distributions

b. Variance inflation factor

*P\0.05

**P \0.01

***P\0.001

Structural model

This model is proposed to test the relationship between EBCB and retailers’ BVCC. The study proposes that EBCB positively affects retailers’ BVCC behaviors. Moreover, this proposed that EBCB affects retailers’ brand attachment. Furthermore, brand attachment positively affects retailers’ BVCC behaviors, which are retailer-led feedback, retailer-led advocacy, and retailer-led helping. Furthermore, the hypothesized model depicts the underlying mechanism between these relationships by proposing brand attachment as a mediator.

The results of the study are in support of H1a, EBCB is positively related to retailers-led feedback co-creation ($\beta = 0.706, t = 10.162, p < .05$). H1b, EBCB is positively related to retailers-led advocacy co-creation was also supported by the results ($\beta = 0.601, t = 7.160, p < .05$). H1c, EBCB is positively related to retailers-led helping co-creation supported by results ($\beta = 0.724, t = 12.589, p < .05$). Moreover, H2, EBCB is positively associated with brand attachment is supported by the results ($\beta = 0.751, t = 20.678, p < .05$). Results also showed support for H3a, brand attachment is positively associated with retailer-led feedback ($\beta = 0.533, t = 10.181, p < .05$). H3b, brand attachment is positively associated with retailer-led advocacy supported by results ($\beta = 0.567, t = 10.217, p < .05$). Results also showed support for H3c, brand attachment is positively related with retailer-led helping ($\beta = 0.622, t = 13.526, p < .05$). In mediation analysis, results showed support for H4a, brand attachment positively mediates between the relationship of EBCB and retailer-led feedback ($\beta = 0.401, t = 7.885, p < .05$). Similarly, H4b, brand attachment positively mediates between the relationship of EBCB and retailer-led advocacy ($\beta = 0.421, t = 8.091, p < .05$). H4c, brand attachment positively mediates the relationship of EBCB and retailer-led helping ($\beta = 0.467, t = 9.268, p < .05$). Conclusively, all hypotheses of direct and indirect relationships were accepted by the results. Results are also depicted in Table 6.

Table 6
Direct and indirect effects

Hypothesis	B	t- values	p values	Remarks
EBCB → BA	0.751	20.678	.000	Supported
EBCB → RLF	0.706	10.162	.000	Supported
EBCB → RLA	0.601	7.160	.000	Supported
EBCB → RLH	0.724	12.589	.000	Supported
BA → RLF	0.533	10.181	.000	Supported
BA → RLA	0.561	10.217	.000	Supported
BA → RLH	0.622	13.526	.000	Supported

EBCB → BA → RLF	0.401	7.885	.000	Supported
EBCB → BA → RLA	0.421	8.091	.000	Supported
EBCB → BA → RLH	0.467	9.268	.000	Supported

Note: BC = Brand compliance, B, E = Brand endorsement, BD = Brand development, BA = Brand attachment, RLF = Retailer-led feedback, RLA = Retailer-led advocacy, RLH = Retailer-led helping

*P \ 0.05

**P \ 0.01

***P \ 0.001

Discussions and Implications for Research

It is evident from previous literature that retailers have been neglected part as the source of value creation, especially in the context of developing nations. Results confirmed that EBCB positively predicts BVCC behaviors of retailers and the results were consistent with recent literature (Assiouras et al., 2019). Moreover, this study has investigated the role of firms' employees' behaviors in the determination of retailers' behaviors toward brand value creation. In doing so, this study proposed that EBCBs positively predict retailers' BVCC behaviors (i.e., retail-led feedback, retail-led advocacy, and retail-led helping) with the mediation of brand attachment. The results of the study showed that EBCB is a strong predictor of brand attachment, which is consistent with similar literature (Schmalz & Orth, 2012; Kang et al., 2017; Gill-Simmen et al., 2018). Therefore, this study argued that employees' citizenship behaviors towards the brand would positively predict retailers' brand attachment. Additionally, this study has investigated the effects of brand attachment on BVCC behaviors, which are retailer-led feedback, retailer-led advocacy, and retailer-led helping. For this investigation, authors proposed that brand attachment will positively predict retailer-led feedback, retailer-led advocacy, and retailer-led helping behaviors. The results showed that brand attachment is a significant predictor of brand value co-creation behaviors. Existing literature also supports this stance (Kaufmann, Loureiro, & Manarioti, 2016a). Based on these results, this study argued that if retailers get attached to the brand, then they will act in favor of the brand to create its value. Lastly, this study proposed that brand attachment will serve as the mediator to build the relationship between EBCB and retailers' BVCC behaviors. For this purpose, the authors proposed that brand attachment positively mediates the relationship, and the results approved the effect. In this mediation analysis, results showed the complementary partial mediation of brand attachment in this relationship. This approval indicates that if employees represent brands with their positive behaviors, then their behavior transfers a positive image of the brand, which attracts retailers to be with the brand and co-create brand value.

This study contributes to the literature on brand management from various perspectives. First, this study investigated the role of employees; brand citizenship behaviors (EBCB) are categorized into three dimensions, as it is the combination of various behaviors. Second, this study put in the literature, retailers as the source of value co-creation with firms' employees, which is a significant addition to the literature because of the scarcity of knowledge on retailers' role in the value creation process. Third, this study adds to the literature on social identity theory from the retail perspective.

As the retail sector is the third largest sector of Pakistan (South Asia Investor Review, 2018; Nordea, 2020); therefore, this study has various implications for firms associated with retailers. Therefore, firms should put special focus on their sales employees, who interact with retailers and their employees. Firms should work on the enhancement of presentation methods to represent the brand in front of retailers. For instance, firms may arrange training sessions for their sales employees to modify their behaviors aligned with the perception of retailers. Moreover, employees' behaviors produce a psychological impact on retailers' perceptions. Therefore, firms may hire the services of a psychologist for their

sales employees to make them learn suitable responses in various situations. For instance, employees should always opt a proactive approach to meet the requirement of retailers. Therefore, firms must ensure that sales employees have complete data on retailers and their inventory. As this study found the significant role of brand compliance and brand development behaviors as instigators of retailers' favorable behaviors, firms must develop a mechanism to ensure the compliance of sales employees with brand rules and policies. For instance, firms may collect feedback from retailers. Moreover, firms should invest in understanding the needs, wants, and support required by sales employees to cultivate their brand-related citizenship behaviors. Additionally, firms must work on the ethicality and credibility of sales employees because personal characteristics are useful in cultivating someone's behavior.

Conclusion

This study aimed to study employees' brand citizenship behaviors (EBCB) with retailers' brand value co-creation behaviors with a mediation mechanism of brand attachment. The findings of this study highlighted the significance of sales employees' behaviors in deriving retailers' favorable behaviors for brand value creation in the FMCG sector of Pakistan. Results confirmed that EBCB positively predicts brand attachment and BVCC behaviors of retailers. Moreover, findings support the complimentary partial mediation role of brand attachment in fostering retailers' BVCC behaviors by EBCB. On the basis of the findings, this study concluded that if retailers get attached to the brand, they will act in favor of the brand to create its value moreover, if employees represent brands with their positive behaviors. In that case, their behavior transfers a positive brand image, attracts retailers to be with the brand, and co-create brand value.

Recommendations

This study is comprised of some limitations. The first limitation of our study is that we added to the literature of brand management by investigating brand attachment as a mechanism between EBCB and retailers' BVCC behaviors, but there can be some situational factors (e.g., brand love, brand image, brand equity, etc.), which may foster retailers' favorable behaviors. Therefore, in future studies, other situational and personal factors may be validated as a mechanism between EBCB and retailers' behavior. Second, this study utilizes employees' behaviors as direct predictors of brand attachment, but as theory suggests that behaviors transfer stimuli of brand attributes and brand-related benefits. Therefore, in the future, researchers should investigate brand-related variables like brand credibility, brand image, and brand prestige as intervening mechanisms between employees' behaviors and brand attachment. Similarly, researchers may identify some uncovered factors lying between brand attachment and BVCC behaviors. Third, this study is based on the sample drawn from the FMCG sector, although it is the third largest sector in the industry (South Asia Investor Review, 2020; Nordea, 2020). However, the generalizability to other sectors may be susceptible. So, future studies may consider other sectors to study the model, or a blend of various sectors in the sample of the study may also produce more generalizable results. Lastly, this study was an initial effort to fill the gap of retailers' inclusion in the brand value creation process. Therefore, more evidence should be produced from different cultures in the future.

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