



Impact Of Brand Benefits On Customer Satisfaction In Apparel Imphal City

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ABSTRACT

This research paper studies the relationship between brand benefits and customer satisfaction. The study investigates how specific apparel perceived brand benefits influence the satisfaction of customers. Over time, when a particular apparel brand consistently fulfills customer needs and satisfaction, that apparel brand develops a relationship with the customer. This study examines the influence of brand benefit on consumer satisfaction within the apparel sector in Imphal City, Manipur. In this research, the researchers administered questionnaires to 150 respondents, including males and females. They assessed the reliability of the gathered data using Cronbach's alpha value. The analysis encompasses descriptive and inferential statistics, including regression and correlation, facilitated by SPSS software. The study highlights that a relatively favorable brand benefit contributes significantly to shaping consumer satisfaction, as evidenced by regression coefficients and statistical significance.

Keywords: brand benefits, Consumer satisfaction, brand functional, brand symbolic, brand experiential

INTRODUCTION:

Building strong brand relationships with customers has become paramount for businesses aiming to sustain long-term success in today's competitive marketplace. Brand benefits, which refer to the value proposition offered to consumers, such as functional, symbolic, and experiential benefits (Keller, 1993), emotional appeal, and social status, play crucial roles in shaping customer perceptions and behaviors. Understanding how these elements influence satisfaction is essential for businesses seeking to cultivate enduring relationships with their target audience.

Values that arise from a product in terms of its durability, quality, or reliability are addressed by functional benefits. On the contrary, symbolic benefits deal with the self-expression and the social status associated with a brand that proves useful to consumers in identification or affiliation with a particular apparel. Experiential benefits arise from the recognition of the brand and what it represents or is associated with, that is, the general shopping and usage experience of the brand. Research indicates that brand benefits, whether functional or emotional, fulfill consumers' needs and desires, enhancing their overall satisfaction with the brand (Yoo & Donthu, 2001). Moreover, satisfied customers are more inclined to exhibit loyalty and satisfaction by making repeat purchases, advocating for the brand, and resisting competitive offerings (Reichheld, 1996). Determining the linkages between the various dimensions of brand benefits and consumer satisfaction can help brand managers and marketers strategize and enhance their offerings.

Statement of the problem

Despite the importance of brand benefits in influencing satisfaction, several gaps exist in the current literature. Firstly, there is a need for further research to elucidate the brand benefits that have the most significant impact on customer perceptions and behaviors across apparel segments. Additionally, the mechanisms through brand

benefits translate into customer satisfaction and warrant deeper exploration. Further, a dearth of studies explains how brand benefits influence customer satisfaction in smaller non-metropolitan regions. It can be depicted that in small towns, consumer behavior can vary a lot from metropolitan cities because local culture, economic factors, and limited premium brand exposure, among other factors, would affect purchasing decisions differently. This research will address this gap by examining how functional, symbolic, and experiential brand benefits interact and affect consumer satisfaction for branded apparel in a small-town setting.

Although brand advantages play a big role in determining consumer preferences, little is known about how the various aspects of brand benefits—functional, symbolic, and experiential—affect customer satisfaction in the branded clothing sector. It is critical to investigate how these unique brand benefits affect consumers' overall satisfaction as they seek out branded products for their identity, experience, and quality. By examining the connections between functional, symbolic, and experiential brand benefits and customer satisfaction with branded clothing, this study seeks to close the knowledge gap.

Research Question

The present study seeks to answer the following two research questions:

1. How do experiential, symbolic, and functional brand benefits affect customer satisfaction with branded apparel?
2. Which kind of brand benefit influences customer happiness the most?

Research Objective

The objective of the present study is to examine the effect of functional, symbolic, and experiential brand benefits on consumer satisfaction with branded apparel. Further, the study seeks to determine which type of brand benefits is most influential in driving consumer satisfaction in a small-town area – Imphal West District, Manipur, a small state in the northeast corner of India.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Brand benefits play a pivotal role in shaping consumer preferences and purchase decisions. Brand benefits encompass many tangible and intangible advantages consumers associate with a particular brand. Keller (1993) defines *brand benefits* as the functional, experiential, and symbolic attributes that meet the needs and desires of consumers. Functional refers to a product or service's tangible, utilitarian features that address consumers' practical needs and objectives (Keller, 1993). These benefits are typically associated with the product's performance, reliability, and specific features that fulfill functional requirements. For instance, a smartphone brand may highlight functional benefits such as battery life, processing speed, and camera quality to appeal to consumers seeking technological efficiency and convenience (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

Oliver (1999) emphasized that the ability of a product to meet functional needs such as product quality, performance, and reliability directly influences consumer satisfaction in apparel industries. Zeithaml (1988) stated that the perceived value and quality of a product's functional features, such as durability and performance, are important factors of satisfaction in the apparel segment, whereas product functionality, such as fit and comfort, directly impacts consumer satisfaction. Consumer satisfaction is often related to the perceived functional benefits of a product. Anderson and Srinivasan (2003) stated that when consumers perceive that a product's functional factors exceed their expectations, the customer is more likely to show higher satisfaction. Besides, functional benefits can influence repurchase intentions as consumers often search for consistency in the performance of the products they use (Oliver, 1999).

Symbolic benefit represents the intangible meanings and social identities associated with the brand, reflecting consumers' self-expression, aspirations, and social belonging (Aaker, 1997). These benefits encompass the symbolic meanings, values, and lifestyle associations attributed to the brand, influencing consumers' perceptions of status, identity, and belonging. For example, a sports car brand may embody symbolic benefits such as power, prestige, and success, appealing to consumers seeking to express their social status and personal identity (Kapferer, 2012). Keller (1993) also stated that symbolic brand benefits can significantly impact customer satisfaction by enhancing consumers' emotional and psychological connection to a brand, especially in fashion-related industries. Also, symbolic benefits, such as brand associations with identity and social status, can significantly affect consumer satisfaction, particularly in luxury or fashion segments, by enhancing satisfaction for certain consumers by emphasizing their self-concept and social identity (Schmitt, 1999) and (Escalas and Bettman, 2005).

Customer satisfaction is achieved through utility and arrangement with personal values and self-concept, as brands play a symbolic role in customer personal lives (Holt, 2004). Symbolic benefits contribute to consumer satisfaction by supporting social identity and enabling social difference (Tian et al., 2001). Vigneron & Johnson (1999) also stated that Consumers often derive satisfaction from brands that position them within specific social groups that perceived social status

Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello (2009) suggest that experiential benefits in the fashion industry, such as intellectual, sensory, affective, and behavioral benefits, contribute positively to brand satisfaction in fashion. Also, Pine and Gilmore (1998) stated that consumers regularly look for unforgettable experiences rather than just products. Apparel brands that give pleasant experiences give higher satisfaction, supporting the importance of experiential factors.

Schmitt (1999) states that Experiential benefit pertains to the emotional and sensory experiences the brand evokes, transcending mere functionality to create meaningful connections with consumers. These benefits encompass the pleasure, excitement, and enjoyment derived from interacting with the brand or consuming its products or services. For example, a luxury fashion brand may emphasize experiential benefits such as elegance, prestige, and exclusivity to induce consumers' feelings of luxury and sophistication (Belk, 1988). Experiential benefits are integral to customer satisfaction in industries where the customer experience is a central part of the value, such as in hospitality, entertainment, and luxury markets (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). The increase in experiential benefit marketing highlights the importance of creating memorable brand experiences that enhance customer satisfaction (Schmitt, 1999). Moreover, Experiential marketing theory by (Brakus et al., 2009) also suggests that when consumers engage with a brand on a sensory or emotional level, satisfaction increases as it creates a more memorable and enjoyable consumption experience. Experiential benefits also contribute to customer satisfaction by enhancing the quality of customer experience, particularly in terms of interactivity, personalization, and authenticity. Pine and Gilmore (1999) suggest that customers get satisfaction from unique experiences personalized to customer preferences.

Further review suggests that symbolic benefits may also work together with experiential benefits to improve customer satisfaction, as Schmitt (1999) stated. For some segments of customers in the fashion apparel industry, the symbolic appeal of a brand can be as significant as the experiential benefits. Moreover, Escalas and Bettman (2005) also suggest that functional benefits alone may not satisfy consumers. They suggested that symbolic and experiential benefit factors play equally critical roles when consumers view brands as expressions of identity. Again

The Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory proposed by Oliver (1980) states that customer satisfaction depends on comparing their expectations with their perceptions of a product or service's actual performance or outcome. The theory breaks down into expectation, perception, and disconfirmation and between expectations and perceptions. If the result performance surpasses expectations, then the customers are satisfied, and dissatisfaction occurs if performance falls below expectations. Yoo et al. (2000) offer a model that examines the impact of marketing mix elements on brand equity, by focusing on customer satisfaction. The model states that a combination of factors, including perceived quality, brand associations, and brand awareness, influences brand equity and contributes positively to customer satisfaction.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researchers employed the quantitative research design and formulated the hypothesis through the deductive technique. Respondents were chosen randomly from a population of people residing in the Imphal city. We divided the sample size according to household income, occupation, gender, and age.

Using a pretested questionnaire, primary data were collected from 150 respondents, who were asked 29 questions to measure the impact and relation between dependent and independent variables. We need demographic information to provide the overall background of respondents who buy products from apparel brands. The questionnaire also includes Likert scale questions, and respondents must score their choices on a 5-point scale that ranges from scale (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neutral, (4) Agree, and (5) Strongly Disagree.

Analysis

The demographic characteristic of the sample is presented in Table 1. The age group of the respondents is divided into three categories: 19-30 years old (61 respondents, 40.7%), 31-40 years old (52 respondents, 34.7%), and 51 years and older (37 respondents, 24.7%). Regarding gender, 50% of the respondents (78) were male, and 48% (72) were female. Most respondents 75, (50%) had completed a Master's degree, followed by 62 (41.3%) who had completed a Bachelor's degree. The remaining respondents had completed a PhD, secondary, or high school. Most of the respondents were students (42, 28%), followed by entrepreneurial and corporate employees (31, 20.7% and 36, 24%, respectively) and government employees (30, 20%). The majority of respondents (50, 33.3%) had an income of less than ten thousand, followed by 44 (29.3%) who earned 10000-30000, 23 (15.3%) who earned 30000-50000, and 16 (10.7%) who earned 50000-70000 per month. The remaining respondents belonged to the above 70000 earning group. (Table: 1)

Table 1 Demographic

Items With Groups		Frequency	Percent
Age	19-30	61	40.7
	31-40	52	34.7

	51 Above	37	24.7
Gender	Male	78	52.0
	Female	72	48.0
Education Background	High School	1	.7
	Secondary School	7	4.7
	Bachelor's Degree	62	41.3
	Master's Degree	75	50.0
	Ph.D	5	3.3
Occupation	Government Job	30	20.0
	Corporate	36	24.0
	Entrepreneur	31	20.7
	Student	42	28.0
	Home Maker	8	5.3
	Retired	3	2.0
Income	Below 10,000	50	33.3
	10001-30000	44	29.3
	30001-50000	23	15.3
	50001-70000	16	10.7
	70001-90000	6	4.0
	Above 90,001	11	7.3
	Total	150	100.0

Data Analysis:

Data collected were analyzed using SPSS in two ways. First, the Reliability statistics Cronbach's alpha coefficient test was calculated for each variable to assess reliability. Second, Pearson correlation and multiple regression measured the relationship of brand benefit with customer satisfaction

Multiple Linear Regression



FIGURE: 1 Conceptual Model

The hypothesis of the study:

Hypothesis 1:

H₀: Brand Functional Benefit has no impact on Customer satisfaction.

H₁: Brand Functional Benefit has a significant impact on Customer satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2:

H₀: Brand Symbolic Benefit has no impact on Customer satisfaction.

H₁: Brand Symbolic Benefit has a significant impact on Customer satisfaction

Hypothesis 3:

H₀: Brand Experiential Benefit has no impact on Customer satisfaction.

H₁: Brand Experiential Benefit has a significant impact on Customer satisfaction.

Analysis Result:

The Reliability results for the four items are as follows: Brand Attributes = 0.907, Brand Benefits = 0.926, and customer Satisfaction = 0.738. These results indicate that all the items are a good measure, as their *cronbach's* alpha are greater than 0.7 which is the accepted level (Table:2)

Table: 2 Reliability statistics

Reliability Statistics				
Sl. no	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
1	Brand benefits	0.924	0.926	19
2	Customer satisfaction	0.736	0.738	10

Results of brand benefit on customer satisfaction

The Pearson correlation measure the relationship between brand benefit and customer satisfaction. The study found that within the brand benefit the variable functional benefit has highest positive value correlation customer satisfaction at 0.688, followed by experiential Benefit at 0.579, and symbolic benefit at 0.565. Table 3. below shows these correlations

Table: 3 Pearson correlation

Sl.No.	Items	Pearson Correlation
1	Functional	0.688
2	Symbolic	0.565
3	Experiential	0.579

The researcher employed multiple regression analysis at 95% confidential intervals to analyse the hypothesis. The analysis showed a good model fit: $F = 51.369$, $P < 0.001$, $Adj R^2 = 0.504$ and $R^2 = 0.514$ and $R = 0.717$, indicating a moderately strong positive impact on customer satisfaction. Moreover, the model summary depicts that the model explains 51.4 % of the variance in consumer satisfaction (Table:4)

Table :4: Model Summary

Model Summary										
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. Change
1	.717 ^a	.514	.504	.27671		.514	51.369	3	146	<.001
a. Predictors: (Constant), Functional, Symbolic, Experiential,										
b. Dependent Variable: Customer satisfaction										

Table 5: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	11.800	3	3.933	51.360	<.000 ^b
	Residual	11.179	146	.077		
	Total	22.979	149			
a. Dependent Variable: Customer satisfaction						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Functional, Symbolic, Experiential,						

Table 6: Coefficient

Model		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Collinearity Statistics	
		Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)		4.793	<.001	0.553	1.328		
	Functional benefit	.494	6.096	<.001	0.311	.609	.508	1.970
	Symbolic benefit	.123	1.444	.151	-.029	.184	.460	2.174
	Experiential benefit	.180	2.138	.034	.010	.253	.470	2.125
a. Dependent Variable: Customer satisfaction								

The linear regression analysis shows that only functional Benefit significantly impacts Customer satisfaction ($\beta=0.494$, $t=6.096$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that when functional benefit increases, the impact on customer satisfaction also increases. Hence, null hypothesis 1 is rejected. Further symbolic Benefit ($\beta=0.123$, $t=1.444$, $p = 0.151$) indicates that the relationship with customer satisfaction is not statistically significant, suggesting that it may not significantly impact satisfaction. Thus, null hypothesis 2 is accepted. On the other hand, brand experiential ($\beta=0.180$, $t=2.138$, $p = 0.034$) indicates a moderate positive relationship with customer satisfaction, indicating that higher levels of brand experiential are associated with increased customer satisfaction. Hence, we reject the null hypothesis 3.

Overall, the model suggests that brand functional and brand experiential are significant predictors of customer satisfaction. At the same time, Symbolic may not play a significant role in explaining satisfaction in this context.

Finding:

1. Hypothesis 1 (Functional Benefit):

The standardized coefficient for Brand Functional Benefit is ($\beta=0.494$, $t=6.096$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that when there is an increase in functional Benefit, the impact on customer satisfaction also increases. Thus, we reject the null hypothesis 1

2. Hypothesis 2 (Symbolic Benefit):

The standardized coefficient (Beta) for Symbolic Benefit ($\beta=0.123$, $t=1.444$, $p = 0.151$) indicates that it is not statistically significant. Hence, we fail to reject the null hypothesis. This implies there is no significant impact of symbolic benefit on customer satisfaction.

3. Hypothesis 3 (Experiential Benefit):

The standardized coefficient for Brand Experimental Benefit is ($\beta=0.180$, $t=2.138$, $p = 0.034$), indicating that it is statistically significant. We reject the null hypothesis and conclude that experiential Benefits significantly impact consumer satisfaction.

Discussion and conclusion

The study shows an understanding of how functional, symbolic, and experiential benefits affect customer satisfaction in the apparel industry. However, the conclusions drawn from this research align with and contradict existing literature, providing both confirmation and challenge to the relationships between brand benefits and customer satisfaction.

The finding shows that functional benefits, such as product quality, performance and reliability, are frequently cited as primary determinants of customer satisfaction in apparel industries. Oliver (1999) emphasized that the ability of a product to meet functional needs directly influences consumer satisfaction and loyalty. Zeithaml (1988) also supports the statement that the perceived value and quality of a product's functional features, such as durability and performance, are important factors of satisfaction in the apparel segment, where product functionality, such as fit and comfort, directly impacts consumer satisfaction. However, in contradiction, Escalas and Bettman (2005) suggest that functional benefits alone may not satisfy consumers. He suggested that functional benefits are important, but symbolic and experiential benefit factors play equally critical roles in specific contexts, especially when consumers view brands as expressions of identity. Moreover, Holt (1995) also presents a contradictory opinion, emphasizing that the value consumers derive from brands is not only functional benefits but also symbolic and cultural, mainly in the fashion industry, where brands function as cultural symbols and identity markers.

The study shows that symbolic benefits do not significantly impact customer satisfaction. This result aligns with Park et al. (1986), who also suggested that symbolic benefits contribute to brand equity, but their direct influence on customer satisfaction may be limited in the apparel industry. On the other hand, contrary to the findings, Keller (1993) argues that symbolic brand benefits can significantly impact customer satisfaction by enhancing the emotional and psychological connection consumers feel toward a brand, especially in industries like fashion. Schmitt (1999) and Escalas and Bettman (2005) argue that symbolic benefits, such as brand associations with social status and identity, can significantly affect consumer satisfaction, particularly in luxury or fashion segments, by enhancing satisfaction for certain consumers by emphasizing their self-concept and social identity.

The result of the study also showed a significant impact of experiential benefits on customer satisfaction, and the findings align with the work of Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello (2009), who suggest that in the fashion industry sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioural dimensions contribute positively to brand satisfaction and loyalty in fashion. Also, Pine and Gilmore (1998) stated that consumers gradually seek memorable experiences rather than just products. Apparel brands that offer engaging and pleasant experiences can foster higher satisfaction and loyalty, reinforcing the importance of experiential factors. However, in contradiction, Schmitt (1999) suggests that experiential and symbolic benefits often collaborate to improve satisfaction.

The effect of symbolic Benefits on consumer satisfaction suggests that symbolic associations with the brand may not be important factors influencing consumer satisfaction. However, experiential benefits and functional benefits show high significance in customer loyalty.

Despite the findings, the study acknowledges the presence of possible variables and interactions that may further explore variations in consumer satisfaction. Thus, it allows future research to go deeper and highlight the understanding of consumer satisfaction's complexity.

Recommendations:

Future research should include a broader range of brand benefits, such as emotional, social, and environmental benefits, to better understand their collective influence on customer satisfaction by expanding the range of brand benefits. Imitating the study in different industries could test the generalizability of the findings and provide a more comprehensive view of how brand benefits impact customer satisfaction across sectors. Further studies should investigate potential interaction effects between functional, symbolic, and experiential benefits. This could help identify combinations of benefits that maximize customer satisfaction. Moreover, conducting cross-cultural studies would provide insights into how cultural factors influence the relationship between brand benefits and customer satisfaction, helping companies tailor their strategies for different

markets. Future research should ensure that a more diverse sample in terms of demographics, purchasing behavior, and brand loyalty is studied to capture a broader perspective on customer satisfaction.

Limitations:

- **Limited Scope of Brand Benefits:** The study focuses only on three types of brand benefits—functional, symbolic, and experiential. Other factors, such as emotional or social benefits, were not considered, which might influence customer satisfaction in the apparel industry.
- **Industry-Specific Focus:** The research is confined to the apparel industry. Therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to other industries where brand benefits may affect customer satisfaction differently.
- **Cross-sectional Design:** The study uses a cross-sectional approach, capturing data at a single point in time. This limits the ability to observe changes in consumer satisfaction over time or in response to evolving brand benefits.
- **Unexplored Interaction Effects:** The study does not explore potential interaction effects between different types of benefits. It is possible that the combination of functional, symbolic, and experiential benefits could have a more significant impact on each individual.
- **Geographical and Cultural Limitations:** If the study was conducted in a specific geographical region or cultural context, the findings may not apply to other regions or cultures where consumer perceptions of brand benefits might differ.
- **Self-Reported Data:** The reliance on self-reported data for customer satisfaction may introduce bias, as respondents may not always accurately assess their satisfaction or may be influenced by external factors not considered in the study.

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