

Brand Narratives Reshaping Fashion and Style: Exploring the Determinants of Store Identity and Consumer Identity Construction in Pakistan

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Abstract

In the context of contemporary fashion retail in Pakistan, brands play a pivotal role in reshaping both store and consumer identities. This study examines how brand narratives, particularly through taglines and retail environments, influence the formation of consumers' personal and social identities. The findings suggest that consumers actively select brands that align with their desired self-image, indicating a significant impact of brand narratives on the formation of identity. The research also reveals that social identity construction is a stronger motivator in brand preference than personal identity. By analysing the behaviours and preferences of consumers of ten prominent fashion brands—Alkaram, Warda, Khaadi, Sapphire, Ethnic, Gul Ahmad, Junaid Jamshed, Nishat, Kayseria, and Generation—this study unveils the underlying factors that drive consumer decisions, with a focus on how brands promote a self-image through alignment with personal aspirations. The data, collected via a brief questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, highlights that elements such as store personality, variety of merchandise, and the behaviour of retail staff are key factors in shaping consumer perceptions. This research contributes to the development of the Brand-Consumer Identity Alignment Framework, which examines the layers of emotional and psychological connections between brands and consumers, highlighting how these connections influence the construction of consumer identity and brand loyalty within the Pakistani fashion industry.

Keywords: Fashion Store, Brand Personality Scales, Social Identity, Personal Identity.

Introduction

In an increasingly competitive fashion industry, branding has evolved beyond a marketing tool; it has become a means of identity construction for both consumers and retailers. According to Statista (2023), Pakistan's fashion market is projected to reach USD 7.6 billion by 2025, reflecting the rapid commercialisation and cultural convergence in the retail sector. The store's definition in the customer's mind is partly determined by its functional qualities and partly by an aura of psychological attributes (Martineau, 1958). Some stores are preferred over others, even if they have a level of similarity in terms of price, service, merchandise, and marketing activities (Martineau, 1958). The personality of a brand refers to a set of human characteristics that consumers associate with a specific brand. The personality of brands can be considered a store's personality (d'Astous and Levesque, 2003). The Store personality was discussed in marketing literature approximately 40 years ago (Aaker, 1997). The corporate identity can be defined as the set of

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meanings by which an object allows itself to be recognised and through which it enables people to describe, remember, and relate to it (Rekom, 1997).

Over the past few decades, the retail sector has undergone significant changes. New trends in modern retailing are favourable for superstores; while small stores without a distinct personality are becoming less important. Modern concepts have been introduced to make shopping at stores a pleasurable and engaging experience for customers. As a result, retailers nowadays tend to provide unique shopping experiences for customers (Wanninayake & Chovancova, 2012). Brand preference research has garnered the interest of marketing scholars since the early 1970s, when researchers began to investigate the precursors of brand preference across different product categories (Mulyanegara et al., 2009). As brand preference plays a vital role in shaping a store's personality, this area of research has gained significant attention. In brand preferences, the most crucial concept is self-congruity theory, which posits that a buyer's behaviour is partially determined by the comparison of their self-image with that associated with a stereotypical brand (Birdwell, 1969; Dolich, 1969; Grubb & Hupp, 1968). The luxury goods market experienced global growth from 1995 to 2007. Specifically, the (CAGR), i.e. Compound Annual Growth Rate, was 11 per cent from 1995 to 1999 (Bain & Company, 2009).

Aaker (1997) introduced the most widely accepted scale for determining the personality of a store, identifying five human characteristics attributed to a brand, and accepted these as measures of brand personality: excitement, sincerity, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. Just as wearing an Armani suit, drinking Moët & Chandon Champagne, or driving a Mercedes-Benz carries symbolic associations that these brands instil, so too does shopping at Macy's, Harrods, or Zara hold similar significance (Zentes, Morschett, and Schramm-Klein, 2008). People form an impression of others based on the kind of clothes they are wearing (Fennis & Pruyn, 2007). Shopping has become a complex process these days. Shopping experiences now involve a broader spectrum along with goods acquisition that comprises elaborate store design, educational events, recreation, and entertainment (Ann Marie Fiore, 2007).

Balmer and Gray (2003) maintain that fashionable and well-resourced shops attract customers magically. Although properties such as price, product range, store ambience, and staff behaviour explain a store's personality to some extent, it is still not entirely clear what determines a store's personality or how a retailer should go about building it. An established corporate identity can result in consumers forming stronger emotional ties to the store, leading to increased trust and loyalty. Similarly, Garton (1995) remarks, "we cannot formulate an accurate model of determining a store personality on a general scale by utilising Aaker's (1997) dimensions". So there is a need for further and detailed research. Garton asserts that many findings from store personality studies are too general to be of practical use to retailers.

Brands are also related to shoppers' personalities. Many researchers explained the association between brands and identity. Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998) demonstrate the dialectical relationship between self-identity and social identity, as well as their connection to brands. Similarly, Swaminathan et al. (2007) and Torelli et al. (2010) describe the brand and identity relation as follows: Based on social identity theory (Tajfel et al., 1979), the self can be conceptualised as comprising a personal identity and a group identity. Consumer-brand relationships are formed based on individual or group-level associations and connections. For example, a consumer's relationship with Mercedes might indicate their desire to express a unique personal identity, whereas their relationship with a local brand, e.g. Ford, might suggest a group-level or national connection. Brand choices reflect consumers' aspirational group memberships (Swaminathan et al., 2007). Attachment to brands and products is conceptualised as reflecting

consumers' desires to reinforce either type of identity depending on the product and the context (Torelli et al., 2010, p. 114)

According to Torelli et al. (2010), shoppers communicate their desired personal and group identities to others by selecting brands. Therefore, shoppers are very cautious about a fashion store's personality because it helps them in managing their personal and social identities. For them, brands help the shoppers to manage their social identities:

Studying brand iconicity² The degree to which a brand symbolizes the values, needs, and aspirations of the members of a particular cultural group provides further insights on the symbolic meanings of brands. Brands high in iconicity have the power to connect diverse elements of cultural knowledge and can act as reminders of culturally relevant values and beliefs. The cultural symbolism embodied in brands also has the potential to help consumers manage their social identities (Torelli et al., 119-120)

Cultural values and identities are embodied in brands. In Pakistan, particularly in urban areas, youth and middle-class shoppers make their fashion choices based on symbolic and aspirational meanings. Brands use narratives to shape their store identity and consumers' self-concept. Brands use taglines to appeal to evolving social identities. Consequently, understanding how fashion brands shape consumer behavior through storytelling retail environment and identity alignment is essential for retailers and academics alike.

This study explores the determinants of fashion store personality and examines how these determinants interact with brand narratives to influence consumer identity construction in Pakistan. It employs a mixed-methods approach using consumer interviews to assess how different variables- such as merchandise variety, pricing, staff behavior, and branding language, affect shopping choices and identity expressions.

Literature Review

The recent surge in social media, influencers, and personalised marketing has led consumers to focus on and promote their self-image and values. Kaufmann et al. (2012) provide various stages of consumers' brand-related behaviour. They propose a new categorisation of brands and their behaviour based on the stages of the consumer-brand relationship. They suggest that changes in shoppers' behaviour regarding brands play an important role in the socialisation system.

Various studies analysed clothing advertisements linguistically. A few key examples are discussed below to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under discussion. In particular, some studies have focused on a Brand's taglines to understand consumers' buying behaviour and the brand's persuasive techniques. A tagline serves as a vital element of advertising, often used to create a memorable connection with a brand (Zuliana et al., 2010). These short, catchy phrases or word sets are integral to marketing campaigns, playing a significant role in influencing people's lives (Tanjung & Hudrasyah, 2019). Taglines aim to capture attention and engage customers by motivating them to support a brand. According to the core function of advertising, as commonly understood, is to persuade the target audience to consider purchasing the advertised product or service. Several scholars (Kohli et al., 2007; Markman, 2010; Eisenhart & Johnstone, 2012; Farrukh & Shehzad, 2019) analysed the linguistic choices and rhetorical devices used in the taglines to persuade consumers. They emphasise the role of language in attracting consumer attention. However, none of them explored the brand's identity, consumers' identity construction,

²An iconic brand has such an identity that it does not need an introduction. It delivers universal values and iconic elements.

or the narrative techniques employed in reshaping Fashion, style, and consumer behaviour. Kim and Oh (2020) explore linguistic factors that influence consumer perception in building sustainable brand identities within fast Fashion. They conducted in-depth interviews and network analysis to identify keywords associated with brands such as H&M, Zara, and Uniqlo. They identified "eco-friendly" as the most significant keyword with 60 nodes and 629 links. In a follow-up survey, "eco-friendly fabric" was confirmed as a key factor in shaping sustainable brand image. At the same time, terms like marketing and campaign ranked higher for H&M and Zara.

In the digital age, narrative branding has become an essential strategy. Gensler et al. (2014) offer an overview of the impact of social media on brand management. They argue that consumers share brand stories through social media networks and firms should pay attention to consumer-generated brand stories. Holt (2016) contends that brand building has become very challenging in the era of YouTube and Facebook. A decade ago, companies were anxious about the golden era of branding; they hired creative agencies and technologists to embed their brands throughout the digital universe, but these efforts were not very successful. Trachuk et al. (2021) analysed the effective content used by the 10 most famous companies in the world on social networks. They observed the following primary strategies employed by a brand's content: storytelling, information strategy, entertainment, and interaction with consumers through well-known influencers or product users. They propose to use a customer-oriented approach for brand promotion. Gutierrez-Velasco et al. (2022) analysed digital marketing communication strategies as a means to enhance digital branding. They analysed 386 surveys through multiple linear regressions. The results indicate that digital communication, e-branding, and e-services have a significant impact on consumers' attitudes towards brands.

In South Asian contexts, Fashion is deeply intertwined with cultural identity. Gentina, Shrum, and Lowrey (2016) investigate teenage attitudes towards fashion brands in a cross-cultural context. This research focuses only on Fashion and clothing. They argue that "clothing is particularly relevant to the study of teenagers because of the value teens attach to appearance" (7). Consumers select brands based on their ability to signal social belonging and family values. Sharma (2020) examined the role of brand equity elements in shaping consumer-based brand equity by using Aaker's model. He surveyed in north India and found that brand awareness, brand personality, perceived quality, and brand loyalty are interdependent and positively influence consumer-based brand equity. Meanwhile, Khan and Malik (2019) employed Fairclough's model to explore linguistic dimensions of branding in Pakistan. They explained how rhetorical strategies in taglines affect consumer perception and behaviour.

These studies underscore the multifaceted nature of fashion branding, which encompasses linguistic, psychological, cultural, and experiential elements. However, there is limited empirical work that examines these factors holistically in the Pakistani context. This research aims to fill that gap by focusing on how fashion brands influence store identity and consumer identity construction through both tangible (e.g., merchandise) and intangible (e.g., narrative, ambience) determinants.

Theoretical Framework

This research examines the key aspects of fashion store personality as perceived by shoppers, focusing on how elements of a retail environment emulate human personality traits. The framework for this study builds upon the five dimensions of store personality identified by D'Astous and Levesque (2003): Quality of Goods, Pricing, Behaviour of Retailers and Staff, Variety of Merchandise, and Background Music. These dimensions offer a structured framework for analysing the determinants of store personality and their impact on consumer behaviour.

Store Personality Dimensions and Determinants

The study categorises store personality determinants into five primary categories: store atmosphere, merchandise, reputation, service, and location. Each category is further divided into subclasses that highlight specific cues influencing shoppers' perceptions of store personality:

Store Atmosphere

Ambient Factors (Baker et al., 1994): Surrounding environmental elements such as music and lighting. These factors create a pleasant shopping experience by attracting customers and enhancing their comfort. For instance, bright lighting and soothing music are significant contributors to a positive atmosphere.

Store Design Factors: Layout, style, and colour of the store. An aesthetically pleasing and well-organised store design increases its appeal and invites customers to explore further.

Social factors are the third dimension of the store atmosphere that significantly influences customer behaviour. Social factors refer to the interactions and presence of people within the store environment, particularly the sales staff. These factors encompass various elements, such as the number of salespeople available, the demeanour and behaviour of the sales staff, and their overall appearance.

Merchandise (Berry, 1969)

Includes cost, quality, variety, and brand reputation. Stores offering high-quality goods at reasonable prices, with a diverse product range and renowned brands, are more likely to attract customers.

Reputation

Comprises elements such as advertising, word of mouth, corporate social responsibility, and reliability. A strong reputation fosters trust and loyalty among shoppers, making the store a preferred choice.

Service (Cass & Grace, 2000)

Refers to direct interactions between staff and customers. Friendly and professional behaviour by sales staff enhances customer satisfaction and encourages repeat visits.

Location

Highlights the accessibility and prominence of the store. Conveniently located stores in central or easily reachable areas are more likely to attract shoppers.

The Baker Framework for Store Atmosphere

The study further incorporates insights from Baker et al. (1994) regarding ambient, design, and social factors as critical contributors to store atmosphere. These elements, along with other categories, form a comprehensive basis for understanding how store environments emulate human personality traits.

By integrating theoretical insights from Baker et al. (1994) and D'Astous and Levesque (2003), as well as other seminal works, this research identifies the primary cues that influence consumer perceptions of fashion store personality, offering a structured approach to studying the interplay between retail environments and shopper behaviour.

This research also adopts a discourse analysis framework to examine the linguistic practices in fashion retail. The conceptual framework incorporates two primary theories:

Narrative Theory in Branding

Escalas (2004) examines how brands utilise storytelling to establish emotional connections with consumers and shape their self-perception. She argues that narrative processing strengthens self-brand connections (SBCs) by helping individuals interpret their experiences as part of a story. When consumers encounter an advertisement with a narrative, they may relate it to personal stories in their memory, thereby creating a bond between the brand and their sense of self. According to her framework, a brand becomes more significant as it aligns more closely with an individual's self-concept. She defines this alignment in terms of SBCs, reflecting the degree to which consumers integrate the brand into their identity. Her experimental findings reveal that engaging with a narrative ad fosters stronger SBCs, which subsequently enhance positive attitudes toward the brand and increase the likelihood of favourable consumer behaviour.

Branding and Identity Theory

Aaker (1997) examines how brands use language and imagery to craft narratives that build identities appealing to consumers. Brand identity refers to the distinct set of associations that brand strategists aim to develop or sustain. This approach focuses on one of the four key components of brand equity (the others being brand awareness, loyalty, and perceived quality) and explores how these associations shape a brand's unique identity. Advertisements that align with a consumer's self-concept or reflect their social identity are more effective because they establish a personal connection.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework examines the relationship between store personality, consumer preferences, and identity construction in the context of fashion retail. It integrates insights from the following key components:

Store Personality Dimensions

Baker et al. (1994) suggested the following as key factors that determine a store's atmosphere:

Store Atmosphere: Environmental elements like lighting, music, and design create perceptions of sophistication and enthusiasm (Baker et al., 1994).

Merchandise: High-quality, diverse, and reasonably priced products enhance the brand's image of genuineness.

Reputation: Advertising, word-of-mouth, and corporate social responsibility build trust and authenticity.

Service: Positive interactions with professional staff increase customer satisfaction.

Location: Accessibility and prominence make stores more appealing to consumers.

The framework incorporates five dimensions of store personality, as identified by D'Astous & Levesque (2003):

Quality of Goods

Foundation of consumer trust and satisfaction.

Influences perceived value and long-term loyalty.

Pricing

Balances affordability and exclusivity, appealing to diverse consumer segments. Encourages retention through competitive pricing strategies.

Behavior of Retailers and Staff

Enhances the shopping experience through interpersonal engagement.
Builds emotional connections and strengthens brand reputation.

Variety of Merchandise

Caters to consumer desire for choice and experimentation.
Reflects a brand's ability to meet diverse aesthetic and functional needs.

Reputation and Location

Acts as a determinant of convenience and credibility.
Reinforces the brand's status in local and cultural contexts.

Background Music

Creates a pleasant ambiance but has minimal influence on primary decision-making.
Enhances the overall store experience as a complementary factor.

Linguistic Practices

The framework highlights how brands use language to frame their identity and consumers' identity: Narrative Theory in Branding (Escalas, 2004) and Branding and Identity Theory (Aaker, 1997) highlight the relationships between storytelling, narrative processing, self-brand connections, brand identity, emotional connections, and their influence on consumer attitudes and behavior.

Interplay between Store Personality and Consumer Identity

This segment explores how store personality influences consumer preferences and contributes to identity construction:

- a) *Influences on Consumer Preferences:* Consumers gravitate toward stores that align with their self-image or aspirations (e.g., sophistication or individuality).
- b) *Identity Construction through Consumption:* Shoppers use brands as tools to express personal and social identities, influenced by taglines and retail experiences.

IBCA Framework: Integrated Brand-Consumer Alignment Framework

To guide this study, a conceptual framework has been developed by synthesizing key elements from multiple theories explained above. This framework is uniquely constructed to address the specific objectives of the research and provide a comprehensive lens for analysis.

The IBCA framework combines store personality dimensions, linguistic practices, and consumer culture insights to:

1. Analyze how retail environments and communication strategies shape brand personality.
2. Understand how consumers perceive and construct identities through their engagement with stores.
3. Explore sociocultural and psychological factors affecting consumer-brand relationships.

This comprehensive approach provides valuable insights into the connections between retail branding, consumer behavior, and identity in the context of Pakistani fashion retail.

Figure 1: Illustrates the IBCA conceptual framework employed to analyze the relationship between store personality and consumer identity construction

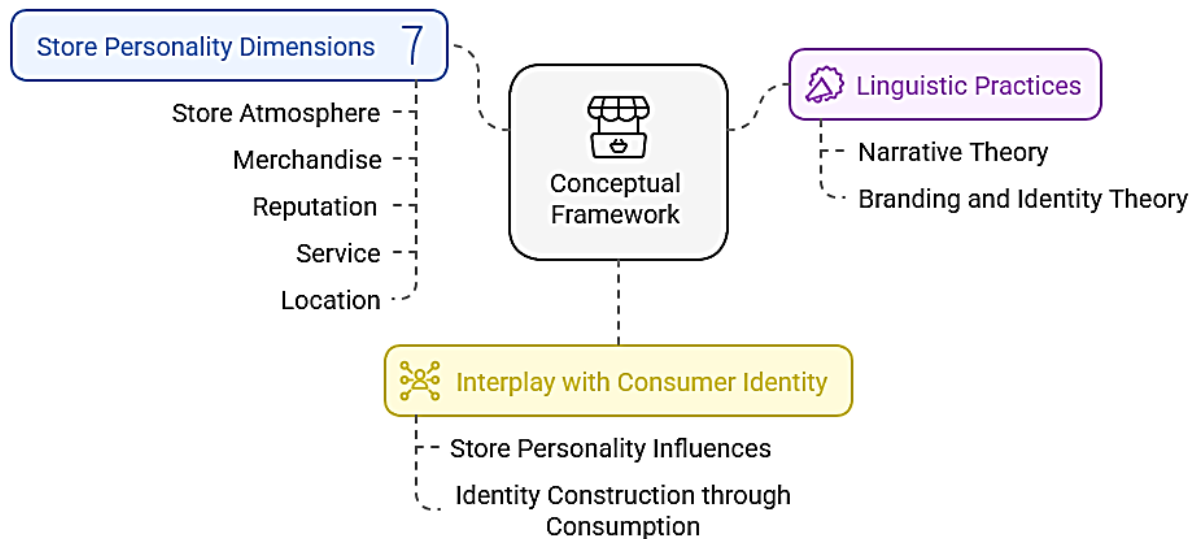


Figure 1 illustrates a conceptual framework that integrates store personality dimensions, linguistic practices, and their interplay with consumer identity to explain consumer behavior. A store's personality is defined by the following determinants such as atmosphere, merchandise, reputation, service, and location. These characteristics are reinforced by linguistic practices, including the use of narrative theory and branding strategies, which help create emotional connections and align the store's identity with the consumer's self-concept. This framework highlights the impact of a store's personality on consumer preferences and buying behavior. It emphasizes how this Brand-consumer alignment influences consumer identity construction.

Methodology

This study employs a descriptive research design to explore the determinants of a fashion store's personality and their influence on shopper preferences. The focus is on identifying the key attributes that shape store personality, as perceived by shoppers, and understanding the priority they assign to these attributes.

Participants

A total of 230 participants, aged between 20 and 23 years, voluntarily participated in the study. The survey questionnaire was collected from 200 participants. However, 30 respondents participated in the interviews. The participants were selected randomly in Islamabad, Pakistan, to gather a diverse range of opinions on shopping experiences, brand image, and consumer choices.

Data Collection

The data collection was conducted through individual interviews, where participants were asked to share their opinions on various determinants of store personality. The responses were recorded to evaluate their preferences across the following categories:

1. *Store Atmosphere*: Ambient factors (e.g., music, lighting) and store design (e.g., layout, style).

2. *Merchandise*: Cost, quality, variety, and brand name.
3. *Reputation*: Advertising, word of mouth, corporate social reliability, and trade name attitudes.
4. *Service*: Staff behavior and interaction quality.
5. *Location*: Accessibility and prominence of the store.

Measures

The participants' preferences were assessed for each determinant using a percentage-based evaluation. Their choices were categorized and analyzed to identify the most and least valued determinants. The following determinants were measured:

- a) *Quality of goods*: Assessed by the proportion of participants favoring high-quality products.
- b) *Price*: Evaluated based on participants' perceptions of affordability.
- c) *Behavior of retailer and staff*: Measured through participants' responses to the sales staff's interaction.
- d) *Variety of merchandise*: Assessed based on participants' opinions regarding the range of options available.
- e) *Reputation and location*: Examined for their influence on store visitation.
- f) *Background music*: Evaluated for its role in creating an appealing shopping environment.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed quantitatively to calculate the percentage of participants favoring each determinant. The findings were visually represented in a graph to highlight the relative importance of each factor. The determinants were ranked based on their priority levels as indicated by the participants.

Analysis of Themes and Narratives in Brand Taglines

Table 1: Analysis of themes in Brand Taglines

Brand	Tagline	Key Theme	Consumer Appeal
Khaadi	"Unleash your inner diva"	Empowerment	Bold self-expression
Gul Ahmed	"Embrace elegance, embrace Gul Ahmed"	Tradition & Elegance	Cultural pride, timeless appeal
Sapphire	"Be bold, be beautiful"	Confidence & Modernity	Individuality
Alkaram Studio	"Fashion that speaks for itself"	Exclusivity	Sophistication
Nishat Linen	"Experience timeless grace"	Heritage	Traditional values
Bareeze	"Where fashion meets comfort"	Comfort	Accessibility
Generation	"Celebrate your individuality"	Uniqueness	Self-expression
Sana Safinaz	"Dress to impress"	Trendiness	Contemporary, fashion-forward
Maria B.	"Elevate your style game"	Prestige	Social mobility
Élan	"Discover the art of fashion"	Sophistication	Exclusivity, artistry

"Unleash your inner diva" – Khaadi

Narrative: This tagline emphasizes empowerment and self-expression, encouraging consumers to embrace their confidence and individuality. In today's culture, there's a strong emphasis on personal empowerment and authenticity. The term "diva" resonates with the modern ideal of

women confidently asserting their identities, aligning with the broader societal movement towards self-empowerment and individuality.

"Embrace elegance, embrace Gul Ahmed" – Gul Ahmed.

Narrative: Gul Ahmed associates its brand with classic sophistication and timeless grace, suggesting that wearing their clothes embodies elegance. This tagline appeals to consumers who are seeking timeless elegance amidst the modern fashion trends that keep changing rapidly. Some consumers have difficulty keeping pace with the rapid fashion cycles, and they seek timeless, enduring style. The tagline suggests permanent elegance to its consumers.

"Be bold, be beautiful" – Sapphire

Narrative: As, 21st century celebrates, individuality and non-conformity, this tagline promotes assertiveness by encouraging consumers to step out of their comfort zones and feel confident in their appearance. This tagline aligns with the cultural shift towards embracing boldness and beauty, encouraging consumers to define their standards of attractiveness.

"Fashion that speaks for itself" – Alkaram Studio

Narrative: Alkaram Studio suggests that their designs are so compelling that they require no further explanation, emphasizing authenticity and effortless style. In a world where personal branding is prevalent, there's a desire for simplicity and authenticity. This tagline resonates with the modern preference for subtlety and refined taste, reflecting a move towards minimalist and meaningful fashion choices.

"Experience timeless grace" – Nishat Linen

Narrative: This tagline connects fashion to enduring beauty, suggesting that their clothing transcends fleeting trends. Amidst the fast-paced nature of modern fashion, there's a counter-movement valuing timelessness and sustainability. This message appeals to consumers seeking authenticity and longevity in their fashion choices.

"Where fashion meets comfort" – Bareeze

Narrative: Bareeze highlights the intersection of style and practicality, catering to the modern need for both aesthetic appeal and comfort. The contemporary consumer values functionality alongside style. This tagline reflects the modern desire to balance beauty with comfort, aligning with the trend towards versatile and comfortable fashion.

"Celebrate your individuality" – Generation

Narrative: This message promotes personal expression and authenticity, encouraging consumers to embrace their unique styles. The 21st century places a strong emphasis on individuality and diversity. This tagline taps into the cultural movement celebrating personal uniqueness and self-expression.

"Dress to impress" – Sana Safinaz

Narrative: This tagline suggests that fashion is a means of self-presentation, aligning with the idea that clothing can be a tool for social status and personal influence. In an era dominated by social media and curated personas, this message resonates with the desire to project a desired image and gain social validation through fashion choices.

"Elevate your style game" – Maria B

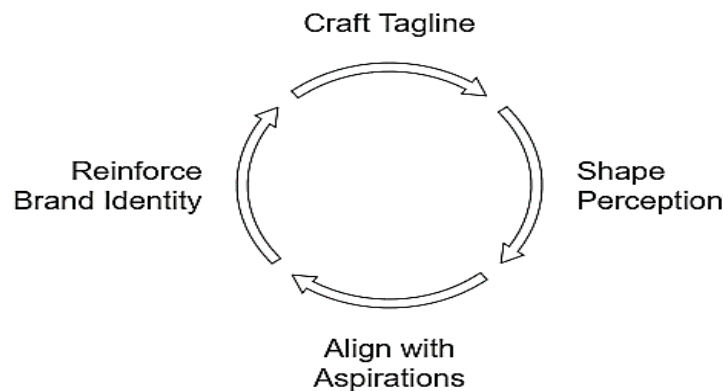
Narrative: Maria B. encourages consumers to raise their fashion standards and be more fashion-forward. Modern consumers are often engaged in a social style game to outperform others in creativity and fashion. This tagline calls for a competition in personal style in the contemporary fashion culture.

"Discover the art of fashion" – Élan

Narrative: This tagline promotes fashion by elevating it to the level of art. It suggests that fashion is a creative expression of beauty and culture. Consumers who value creativity and craftsmanship are attracted to and appreciate fashion as a form of art. This is an attempt to recognize fashion as a medium for artistic expression.

Figure 2: Shows taglines' impact on brand identity

Cycle of Tagline Impact on Brand Identity



Overall, taglines are more than just marketing tools, they are deeply interconnected to societal trends and cultural narratives. Consumers interpret these messages of individuality, authenticity, and timeless elegance by connecting them with the narratives shared and endorsed by celebrities, web bloggers, freelancers, media influencers, and common people etc. Brands that align their taglines with these narratives can connect with consumers on a deeper level. They make a more meaningful bond with their consumers by fostering a sense of identity and belonging.

Based on the qualitative data analysis, this study highlights how repetitive play of taglines shapes brands' identity. Taglines play a recurring impactful role in a cycle: they influence consumer perception by aligning with their aspirations, which in turn strengthens brand identity. Taglines that are tied to compelling narratives, shape consumer attitudes and behaviors by fostering a deeper connection. Narratives invoke consumers to create self-brand connections. These taglines inspire consumers to reflect on their self-image and aspirations which in turn reinforces the brand's identity.

Analysis: Determinants of Fashion Store's Personality

The interviews were collected from thirty participants, aged 20 to 23 years who voluntarily participated in this study conducted in Islamabad, Pakistan. Their opinions were collected

individually through interviews, focusing on shopping experiences, brand image, and consumer preferences. The responses provided deeper insights into the determinants shaping fashion stores' personality and their influence on shopper choices. The key findings, enriched with interview excerpts, are outlined below:

Quality of Goods

The majority of participants (85%) emphasized the importance of product quality in their shopping decisions.

"I always check the stitching and fabric quality before buying. If the quality is good, I don't mind paying a little extra," shared a university student.

Another participant remarked, "good quality means the clothes last longer, and I feel confident wearing them."

This finding highlights that shoppers prioritize durability and value over other determinants.

Price

Price emerged as the second most significant factor influencing shoppers' choices. Participants indicated that fair and reasonable pricing encourages loyalty.

A housewife explained, "I look for discounts and reasonable prices. If a store offers good deals, I tend to shop there frequently."

Similarly, a working woman noted, "affordable clothes that still look classy are what I prefer. It's about getting the best value for money."

The results show that competitive pricing attracts a broader customer base and fosters long-term patronage.

Behavior of Retailers and Brand Name

About 75% of participants valued the behavior of store staff and the influence of brand names.

"Friendly and helpful staff make the shopping experience so much better," said one participant.

Another commented, "If the brand has a strong reputation, I trust it without second-guessing my choice."

Positive interactions with staff and the established credibility of brand names create a welcoming atmosphere and boost shopper confidence.

Variety of Merchandise and Staff Services

The availability of diverse options and efficient service was cited as crucial by many participants.

A college student shared, "I love stores that offer a variety of styles. It makes shopping fun and allows me to experiment with different looks."

Another participant added, "quick and polite service makes a huge difference. I don't want to waste time waiting for assistance."

Stores offering wide-ranging merchandise and attentive service were described as more appealing and reliable.

Reputation and Location

The store's reputation and accessibility significantly influenced shopper preferences.

"If a store is located in a busy area, it's easier for me to drop by after work," remarked a working woman.

A university student commented, "I usually shop at stores that everyone talks about. A good reputation means they must be doing something right." The findings suggest that convenience and positive word-of-mouth are essential for attracting and retaining customers.

Background Music

Background music was the least favored determinant, with only 25% of participants considering it impactful.

"I don't go to a store for its music, but it's nice if it's there. It creates a pleasant vibe," shared a participant.

Another noted, "the music doesn't matter much as long as the products and services are good." While appreciated by some, background music alone was not a deciding factor in store visits.

The interview excerpts provide qualitative depth to the quantitative findings. Quality of goods, pricing, and staff behavior emerged as the most influential determinants, followed by merchandise variety, reputation, and location. While background music enhances the ambiance, it plays a minimal role in decision-making. Retailers can leverage these insights to align their strategies with shopper priorities, enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Table 2: reflects how each of the 10 brands is evaluated across different categories based on the determinant scores from the interviews

Brand	Quality of Goods (%)	Price (%)	Behavior of Retailer and Staff (%)	Variety of Merchandise (%)	Reputation and Location (%)	Background Music (%)
Alkaram	80	70	75	85	78	65
Warda	85	65	80	90	82	70
Khaadi	90	80	85	88	85	75
Sapphire	88	75	80	90	88	72
Ethnic	75	80	70	80	80	68
Gul Ahmad	78	65	72	85	82	60
Junaid Jamshed	90	85	88	92	90	78
Nishat	88	70	82	90	87	74
Kayseria	85	75	80	87	84	70
Generation	80	80	75	85	80	65

Explanation of Results

Quality of Goods: Khaadi, Junaid Jamshed, and Sapphire stand out as brands that are perceived to offer high-quality goods, with scores above 85%. Participants see them as offering superior products, which can influence their shopping behavior.

Price: Junaid Jamshed, with its higher price perception, leads at 85%. While brands like Warda and Gul Ahmad score lower, participants still find them affordable. Brands like Khaadi and Nishat also perform well in this category, indicating that price sensitivity varies among participants.

Behavior of Retailer and Staff: Junaid Jamshed and Khaadi scored highly in this category, with 88% and 85% of participants mentioning good customer interaction and staff behavior. This shows the importance of the personal touch in enhancing customer experience.

Variety of Merchandise: All brands, except Ethnic, score highly on the variety of merchandise. Khaadi, Warda, and Junaid Jamshed are especially known for their wide range of products, indicating that customers value variety when choosing a store.

Reputation and Location: Junaid Jamshed and Khaadi show a strong reputation and good store location, likely due to their established presence in major shopping districts. Participants seem to prefer stores that are both well-reputed and easily accessible.

Background Music: Khaadi and Junaid Jamshed score high on background music, suggesting that the ambiance plays a role in creating a pleasant shopping environment. Although not all participants rated music highly, it still plays a role in shaping their store perception.

Analysis: Brands Constructing Consumers' Identity

Table 3: Shows the mean ratings of brands in expressing personal identity and social identity, economic identity, traditional/ethnic identity, and fashion-forward Identity

Demographic Group	Personal Identity (%)	Social Identity (%)	Cultural Identity (%)	Economic Identity (%)	Traditional Identity (%)	Fashion-Forward Identity (%)
Housewives	60.5	40.2	70.1	50.0	80.4	35.0
Working Women	45.2	75.1	50.3	65.0	40.5	70.2
Students	55.3	65.4	55.7	60.1	30.2	75.3

The above table provides insights into how different demographic groups in Pakistan associate identity construction with their choice of brands. It reveals that:

Housewives prioritize traditional identity (80.4%) and cultural identity (70.1%) over other forms of identity. This indicates that housewives largely connect their brand choices to cultural and traditional values, using these as a medium to express their personal and collective heritage. However, they also display a notable inclination towards personal identity (60.5%) and economic identity (50.0%), suggesting that brands help them reflect their individual preferences and financial standing.

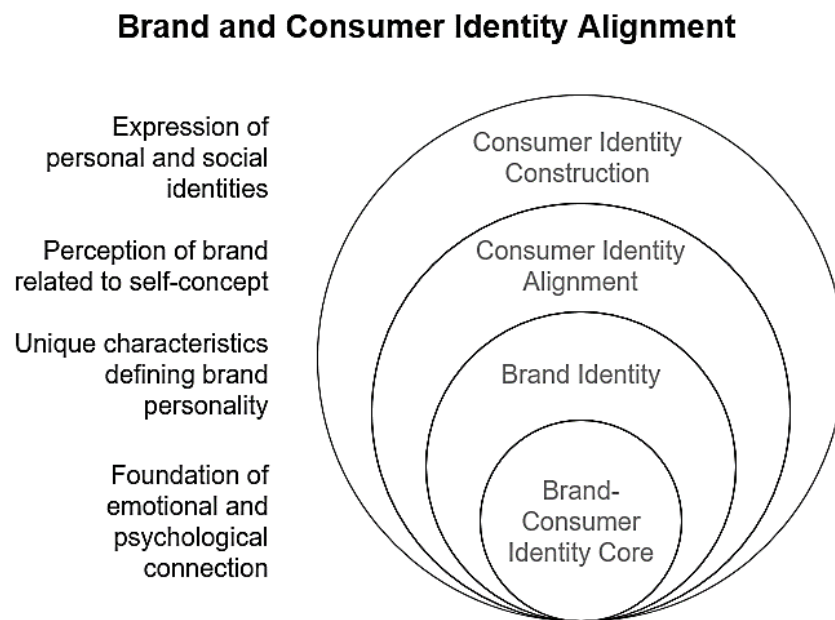
Working Women show a stronger inclination toward social identity (75.1%) and fashion-forward identity (70.2%), highlighting their preference for brands that project their social status and alignment with modern fashion trends. This group also values economic identity (65.0%), indicating that affordability and financial positioning play a significant role in their brand choices. However, their association with traditional identity (40.5%) is lower, suggesting a lesser reliance on brands to reflect traditional values.

Students demonstrate a balanced preference across multiple identities, with the highest emphasis on fashion-forward identity (75.3%) and social identity (65.4%). This reflects the importance of trends and peer influence in their brand selection. Their connection to personal identity (55.3%) and economic identity (60.1%) indicates that brands also serve as a means for self-expression and financial considerations among this group.

Across all groups, social identity and fashion-forward identity are dominant, especially among working women and students, emphasizing the role of brands in projecting social and trend-conscious personas. Traditional identity is highly significant for housewives, highlighting a

preference for brands that align with cultural and traditional values. The data confirms that brand choices are closely tied to multiple identity constructs, with varying emphases depending on demographic roles. Overall, this analysis underscores the multifaceted role of brands in reflecting and constructing personal, social, and cultural identities while also catering to economic and fashion-forward aspirations.

Figure 3: Shows the Brand and Consumer Identity Alignment Framework



The key insights gained from both the qualitative and quantitative data are used to create the brand and consumer identity alignment framework, which explains the layered relationship between brand identity and consumer identity. At its core is the brand-consumer identity core, representing the foundation of the emotional and psychological connection between a brand and its consumers. Surrounding this is brand identity, defined by the unique characteristics that give the brand its distinct personality. The next layer, consumer identity alignment, reflects how consumers perceive the brand and integrate it into their self-concept. The outermost layer, consumer identity construction, highlights the expression of personal and social identities shaped through alignment with the brand. Together, the framework illustrates how brands resonate with consumers by fostering alignment that influences identity construction and emotional connections.

Conclusion

Several researchers (e.g. Aaker, 1997) have critiqued the use of generalized scales for measuring brand personality. They raised their concerns for their applicability across different contexts (Austin, 2003). Similarly, there is a persistent debate about whether brands can be assessed effectively by using brand personality scales (Avis, 2009). However, some researchers (Levy 1986, Caprara et al. 2001, Batra and Homer 2004, and Rossiter 2002) highlighted the need for contextualized measurements of personality attributes.

Overall, respondents identify several key factors that contribute to a store's appeal and its ability to inspire a sophisticated persona: (1) A spacious and well-organized store filled with fashionable items is considered attractive. The presence of excellent, classy clothes from renowned brands enhances the store's appeal. (2) The attractiveness of a fashion layout is determined by cues such as famous brand garments and expensive cost labels. Merchandise in such stores typically excludes ordinary clothing, focusing on high-end products. (3) *Store Environment and Layout*: For a store to be stylish, it should be vast and have a well-organized environment. Superclass fashion stores are identified by their gorgeous internal layout and superior products, offering only high-quality brands and excluding cheap products. These stores prioritize brand over quality, with their credit based on unique qualities like a fine, charming store and quality clothing. (4) An exciting store is characterized by a multi-colored layout, sweet and welcoming music, and polite, mannered sales employees who respect customers' space. Shoppers expect to be served by welcoming staff in an atmosphere where they feel comfortable and at home. The behavior of shopkeepers and their staff is crucial; good behavior is considered essential. (5) A dynamic store provides a colorful interior with frequent design modifications to keep the store energetic and fresh. Arranging items differently maintains the shop's attractiveness and appeal to customers. An energetic fashionable layout can be identified by its colorful design, bright lighting, and soft music, all playing important roles in store personality. (6) *Music and Lighting*: The surrounding music makes shopping a relaxing and refreshing task for customers. Music that suits the style of the store and the target audience is an important factor to consider. Music with a slow tempo can cause the consumer to relax, leading to more time spent in the store, increased merchandise contact, and higher purchasing likelihood. Having music popular within the target market can also encourage consumers to linger longer, exposing them to more merchandise and influencing purchasing decisions. These elements collectively contribute to creating a store environment that attracts and inspires customers, fostering a sophisticated and engaging shopping experience.

The study also examined how different demographic groups (housewives, working women, and students) construct their identities through brands. Housewives associated brands with traditional and cultural identity, whereas working women focused more on social identity and fashion-forward identity. Students linked brands to fashion-forward identity and social identity, which reflects their preference for trendy and socially acceptable brands. The findings highlight the reciprocal relationship between brands and consumers' identities. Brands are considered an instrument for constructing desired personal, social, and cultural images.

Implications for Retailers

Fashion retailers in Pakistan should prioritize quality of goods, variety of merchandise, and service excellence, aligning their strategies with the cultural and social expectations of their target demographics. For housewives, emphasis on traditional and culturally resonant designs may enhance appeal. For working women and students, offering modern, fashionable options aligned with social and professional aspirations can drive engagement.

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