



A double-blind, peer-reviewed, open-access, and an HEC-recognized Y-category Journal

Research Journal of Human and Social Aspects

Web link: <https://rjhsa.com/index.php/rjhsa>

P-ISSN: [3006-9696](#), E-ISSN: [3006-970X](#)

Volume 4, Issue 3, 2026, Page Rang: 133-149



Customer-Based Destination Brand Equity Formation in Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan: The Mediating Role of Perceived Value

Dr. Ibrahim Hussain¹ Mr. Dostdar Hussain²

¹ Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management, University of Baltistan, Skardu, Pakistan.

² Department of Business, Commerce and Economics, University of Baltistan, Skardu, Pakistan.

Correspondence Author: ibrahim@uobs.edu.pk

Article information

Article History:

Received: 2026-06-09

Received in revised form: 2026-07-03

Accepted: 2026-07-17

Published Online: 2026-08-08

Keywords:

Destination Brand Equity; Perceived Value; Destination Image; Destination Awareness; Destination Quality.

ABSTRACT

This research aims to investigate the linkages among destination brand quality, destination brand image, destination brand awareness and destination brand equity in the case of Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan, and to explore the mediating role of perceived value in explaining brand equity. The study used a quantitative research design and collected data from tourists at popular tourist spots in Gilgit-Baltistan via a structured questionnaire and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results suggest that perceived value significantly mediates the association between destination brand image, destination brand quality and destination brand equity. Destination brand equity is positively and significantly influenced by destination brand image, destination brand awareness, and destination brand quality. Moreover, destination image can enhance destination brand equity without depending on brand value. The findings provide empirical evidence to better understand the formation of destination brand equity in an emerging mountain tourism destination and offer practical implications for destination management organizations and policymakers.



© 2026 by the Authors. Licensee Hussain & Hussain. This article is an open-access distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) License <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Introduction

Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), Pakistan, is one of the most appealing travel destinations in the country that attracts international and domestic visitors with dramatic scenery, adventure sports, rich culture, and warm hospitality (Baloch, 2012). GB also has unique biodiversity, linguistic variety, and distinct ethnic communities (Saqib et al., 2019). Although GB has a lot to offer, Pakistan has not fully leveraged its tourism potential, which suggests a need for strong empirical research. With the multitude of global destination choices available to modern travellers, destination branding is necessary to be differentiated and to establish a competitive advantage (Pike, 2005). A review of how visitors actually experience a destination brand allows marketers to fine-tune their promotional strategies and hold market position over time (Pike, 2009), and importantly, a successful brand produces memorable experiences for visitors, reduce perceived risk and result in repeat visits (Blain, Levy, & Ritchie, 2005), while providing value and fulfilling or exceeding traveller expectations increases brand equity and results in long-term relationships with visitors (Im, Kim, Elliot, & Han, 2012). Considering these dynamics, it is important to evaluate destination brand performance (Kim, Kim, & An, 2003).

The Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model is the main framework used to measure brand strength (Pike et al., 2010; Im et al., 2012) and was first developed by Keller (1993), Aaker (1991) and with its four core dimensions being brand image, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand loyalty (Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011). It is essential for destination managers to recognize how tourists perceive these factors so that they can boost competitiveness and enable sustainable growth. Brand awareness is the level to which a buyer can identify or remember a brand within a product category (Aaker, 1991). This dimension of brand awareness is commonly used in tourism research (e.g., Frías-Jamilena et al., 2018; Dedeoğlu et al., 2019), and it implies the presence of a mental image in the mind of a potential traveller

(Gartner, 1994). Brand image is a mental picture based on brand associations stored in memory (Keller, 1993). In the literature, the terms association and image are frequently used interchangeably: Aaker (1991, p. 109) defines brand associations as "anything associated with a brand in memory" and brand image is one of the most widely researched dimensions in destination branding (Frías-Jamilena et al., 2017; Huerta-Álvarez et al., 2020). According to Tasci et al. (2007), destination image is a complex concept involving perceptions, emotions, visual memories, and intentions. Perceived quality states a consumer's overall perception of quality of an offering (Zeithaml, 1988), which can be synonymous with brand quality (Boo et al., 2009). Perceived quality is a local product, service, and experience evaluated by tourists (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007) and is contingent upon how the visitors perceive safety, cleanliness, hospitality service, infrastructure, and amenities (Pike et al., 2010; Bianchi et al., 2014). The overall value received by the tourist in comparison to the costs incurred is brand value and is the outcome of many factors (Parasuraman, 1997).

The insight on how perceived value mediates provides tourism marketers with a means to enhance the visitor experience and to retain tourists (Intuluck et al., 2023). The exact psychological mechanism through which these foundational dimensions of brand equity relate to overall brand equity is still unclear, and even less is known about how perceived value bridges these dimensions in remote mountain regions (Hussain and Hussain, 2026b).

Building upon the classic CBBE framework (see Figure 01), this investigation answers the following research questions for the case of Gilgit-Baltistan as an emerging mountain destination: How do perceived quality, brand image, and brand awareness interact with each other and to affect brand value and overall brand equity? What strategies should policymakers, government bodies, and destination managers consider for improving the brand image, attracting different types of tourists, and improving international competitiveness?

Figure 1: Research Model

Literature Review

Destination Brand Equity

The CBBE model is frequently employed by tourism researchers to evaluate destination branding (Pike et al., 2010; Boo et al., 2009). Brand equity is the collection of brand assets and liabilities that enhance value of a brand or diminish it in a consumer's mind (Aaker, 1996), which in turn influences their purchase decision (Keller, 1993). Based on this theoretical background, Cai (2002) proposed that successful destination branding relies on three factors: brand image, brand identity, and supporting marketing efforts, while Konecnik and Gartner (2007) highlighted brand dimensions that contribute to a stronger place-visitor relationship, with strong brand image being a critical factor in increasing overall destination equity (Pike et al., 2010; Boo et al., 2009). After all, the image of a place greatly influences future behavior (Tasci and Kozak, 2006), and a clear brand salience and a positive image are necessary to enhance long-term relationships with travelers.

Brand Awareness

Brand awareness is the ease with which customers can recognize a particular brand in a particular product class (Aaker, 1996), which is a basic function because individuals must first recognize a brand before they develop positive attitudes about it (Gartner & Ruzzier, 2011). Previous studies have found that brand awareness is one of the key factors in destination

selection (Chon, 1992), as travelers form an initial awareness set of destinations, which they then narrow down into a consideration set and a final choice set (Kotler et al., 1993), and if destination marketing managers concentrate on it can increase the chance that tourists choose their destination (Boo et al., 2009). In general, brand awareness is measured along three dimensions: brand knowledge, recall, and recognition (Pike et al., 2010). Strong brand awareness will generally increase overall destination brand equity through increased familiarity and confidence (Boo et al., 2009), whereas insufficient branding and promotional efforts will weaken this relationship (Blain et al., 2005), and a lack of marketing efforts (e.g., host events and campaigns) will diminish brand awareness and total brand equity (Hudson and Ritchie, 2009). Recent research on destination marketing continues to show that higher brand awareness leads to higher brand equity (Nikkhah-Farkhani & Zarenejad, 2025; Bettiga, 2025). Moreover, empirical investigations have demonstrated a strong association between brand awareness and brand value (Huang & Sarigöllü, 2012; Yoo & Donthu, 2001; Kim & Kim, 2004; Yoo & Donthu, 2001; Yoo et al., 2000; Barreda et al., 2016; Liu et al., 2015). The preceding discussion suggests the following hypothesis.

H1: Destination brand awareness has a significant positive effect on destination brand value.

Destination Image

Brand image is a fundamental component of CBBE (Keller, 2013b), referring to the set of consumer

perceptions that exist based on memory associations (Keller, 2013b). Instead of being based on actual features, a destination is evaluated by visitors by both rational logic and emotional judgment (Dobni and Zinkhan, 1990). In tourism literature, a destination image is considered as among the greatest influential factors in shaping the way visitors evaluate a destination (Konecnik and Gartner, 2007), as a positive image will attract tourists, increase perceived value, encourage repeat visitation (Phillips et al., 2013), and ensure a more competitive market position (Naidoo et al., 2012). Since destination brand image is not a physical attribute of a destination, managers must develop it through marketing campaigns and experiential encounters (Lin and Lin, 2007); thus, the construct has received considerable attention because of its influence on travel decisions and post-visit perceptions (Chon, 1990). While traditional frameworks often categorize brand image as cognitive, affective, and conative (Dann, 1996), in the present study, destination brand image is limited to two dimensions: destination brand association (DBA) and destination brand personality (DBP) (Davis, 2002); brand association is the specific functional benefit a brand offers to consumers, while brand personality describes human-like traits ascribed to the brand (Davis, 2002).

Early scholars often conceptualized brand image as a single, literal construct. On the contrary, the present study views image as a cognitive (i.e., DBA) and affective (i.e., DBP) construct, which is in line with the validation by Hussain and Hussain (2026a). Previous examination has demonstrated a positive significant association between brand image and brand equity (Tran, 2023; Bettiga, 2025) and brand image and overall brand value (Barreda et al., 2016), and even brand image has been identified as among the most important elements of CBBE (Faircloth et al., 2001). Furthermore, research in industrial markets has discovered a positive and significant association between brand image and brand value (Davis et al., 2008), and confirmed brand value as a crucial mediating mechanism (Liu et al., 2015). With this

theoretical background in mind, we hypothesize the following:

H2: A positive and unique brand image has a significant and positive effect on brand value.

Destination Quality

Perceived quality is how good and useful a product or service feels to the customer (Aaker, 1991), and it is an important brand association because it influences purchase decisions (Keller, 2013). Perceived quality is a subjective quality assessment based on feelings and beliefs; it is distinct from objective quality, which is based on technical performance (Zeithaml 1988). Therefore, a high-quality perception is a competitive advantage that can be sustained (Aaker 1991), and a source of long-term market success (Aaker 1991). This quality impression is especially used by consumers when they do not have time or interest to extensively compare products (Aaker 1991). Strong quality perceptions make shoppers willing to pay a premium, and this trust may transfer to other products in the brand (Aaker 1991). Moreover, perceived quality is also a factor that makes advertising more effective, as it strengthens brand confidence (Aaker 1991). Empirical evidence exists across various industries that found that perceived quality directly affects purchase intentions (Kwak and Kang 2009), and in a large-scale empirical research of 2,400 customers in four business sectors, it was demonstrated that superior service quality increases positive customer actions and decreases complaints (Zeithaml et al. 1996).

Perceived quality is also closely related to perceived value (Bianchi and Pike, 2011). Several studies have confirmed that perceived quality and perceived value are closely related (Zhang et al., 2013; Xu et al., 2020), and that brand value is a key mediating variable (Liu et al., 2015). In addition to value, perceived quality has a strong positive effect on brand loyalty and customer satisfaction, as well as indirectly enhancing brand trust and mental associations (Saleem, Rahman, & Omar, 2015). In addition, recent empirical evidence supports that perceived quality has a significant positive impact on brand equity (BETTIGA, 2025;

Oppong & Maama, 2026). According to these theoretical insights, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Destination brand quality significantly and positively produces destination brand value.

Perceived Value

Tourism marketing scholars recognize perceived value as a fundamental concept in tourism marketing and define perceived value as the overall judgment of benefits versus costs of a trip during various stages of the trip (Parasuraman, 1997). Whether visitors return to a location is also influenced by both monetary value and quality of experience (Mechinda et al., 2009). Earlier empirical investigations have demonstrated that perceived value leads to brand loyalty (Bojanic, 1996; Boo et al., 2009), and perceived value acts as a influencer in the loyalty formation process (Wang et al., 2022; Chang and Wang, 2011; Dedeoğlu, 2019; Jermisittiparsert et al., 2022). A positive association between brand value and brand equity has been demonstrated in past research (Jiao et al., 2018; Leone et al., 2006), and value is a significant underlying mediator (Songur, 2024; Bideli et al., 2024; Zhang, 2025), which can clarify its mediating role and propose practical implications for tourism marketers to enhance visitor experience and long-term retention (Intuluck et al., 2023). These empirical findings support the following hypotheses:

H4: Destination perceived value significantly affects destination brand equity.

H5: Destination perceived value mediates the association between destination brand awareness and destination brand equity.

H6: Destination perceived value mediates the association between destination brand image and destination brand equity.

H7: Destination perceived value mediates the association between destination brand quality and destination brand equity.

Research Methodology

A deductive, quantitative, and causal research design was employed to test the proposed

conceptual model, and data was collected from international tourists visiting Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan. Out of the 300 questionnaires distributed, 161 were returned, giving a response rate of 53%; after two problematic entries (identified using Mahalanobis distance) were removed, therefore, 159 valid responses were retained in the final dataset, demonstrating a valid response rate of 53.7% (which is within the acceptable empirical standards reported by Ali et al., 2021). All survey constructs were adapted from the existing literature, with measurement items drawn and refined from Han et al. (2008), Oliver (1997), Yoo and Donthu (2001), Hussain and Hussain (2026a), Back and Parks (2003), and Back (2005). The final questionnaire included 4 items for brand awareness, 7 for brand image, 8 for brand quality, 5 for brand loyalty, and 4 for brand equity, and responses were captured on a standard five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) to maintain measurement uniformities across all constructs.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The final sample contained 159 responses, with males (64.2%) being the majority of the participants. Geographically, 51.5% of the participants were from Asia, 24.5% were from Europe, and 23.9% were from other countries. Demographically, the majority of respondents were aged between 26 and 35 years (38.4%), a bachelor's degree (39.6%), had a master's degree (44.7%) and aged 36 to 45 years (26.4%), and were business owners (21.0%), professionals (43.3%), married with children (51.6%), high income (monthly income > PKR 500,000: 34.5%), stayed more than 15 days at the destination (44.6%), got destination information from friends (45.9%), had visited the destination once or twice (41.5%), and engaged in overseas travel once or twice a year (51.0%).

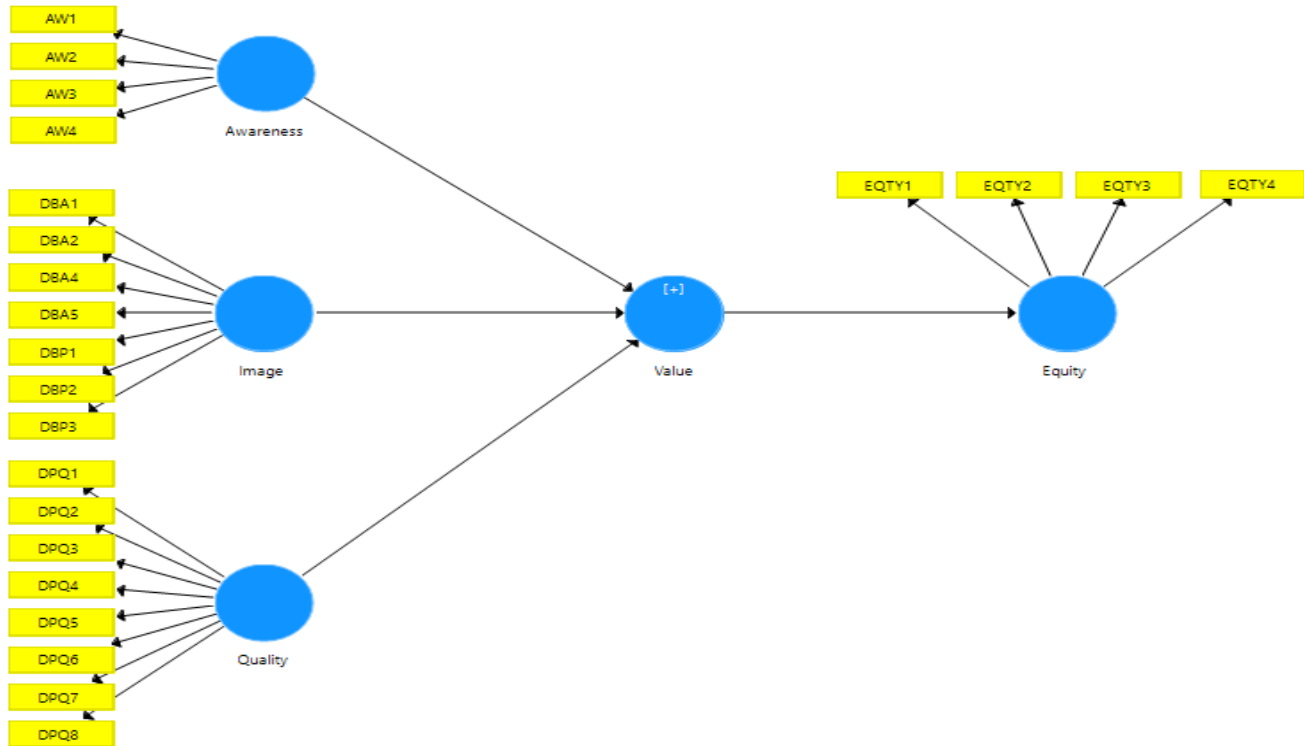
Assessment of Measurement Model

We conducted an inferential statistical analysis using SmartPLS version 3.3.3 (Ringle et al., 2005). Figure 2 displays our research model, which is

comprised of five latent constructs with 28 reflective indicators. In partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM),

assessing the measurement model is the crucial first step prior to assessing any structural relationships.

Figure 2: *Original Study Model in SmartPLS*



Indicators had loadings that ranged from 0.50 to 0.70, which are relatively moderate values (Hair et al., 2019), and loadings of 0.50 or greater are methodologically acceptable when they are statistically significant; all loadings met this baseline criterion, and no items were removed from the model. Average Variance Extracted was calculated for convergent validity and was 0.636

for brand awareness, 0.516 for brand image, 0.624 for brand quality, 0.699 for brand value, and 0.838 for brand equity, all of which exceeded the 0.50 recommended cut-off. Composite Reliability was calculated for internal consistency and all scores exceeded 0.80, which is the standard suggested by Hair et al. (2014), indicating that the indicator loadings were sufficiently strong (see Table 2).

Table 2: *Construct, items, Loadings, CR, AVE*

Constructs	Items	Loadings	CR	AVE
Brand Awareness	AW1	0.688	0.874	0.636
	AW2	0.788		
	AW3	0.860		
	AW4	0.842		
Brand Image	DBA1	0.722	0.881	0.516
	DBA2	0.781		
	DBA4	0.710		
	DBA5	0.645		
	DBP1	0.729		
	DBP2	0.776		
	DBP3	0.653		
Brand Quality	DPQ1	0.829	0.930	0.624
	DPQ2	0.749		
	DPQ3	0.677		
	DPQ4	0.832		
	DPQ5	0.807		
	DPQ6	0.837		
	DPQ7	0.697		
	DPQ8	0.872		
Brand Value	DPV1	0.777	0.903	0.699
	DPV2	0.843		
	DPV3	0.875		
	DPV4	0.846		
	DBL5	0.777		
Brand Equity	EQTY1	0.885	0.954	0.838
	EQTY2	0.930		
	EQTY3	0.932		
	EQTY4	0.913		

Discriminant validity considers whether each construct in a structural model is unique from the others, meaning that the square root of the AVE for each construct should be larger than the

correlation of that construct with all of the other constructs (Fornell and Larcker 1981). Our results indicate that our constructs are empirically distinct.

Table 3: Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	Awareness	Equity	Image	Quality	Value
Awareness	0.797				
Equity	0.431	0.915			
Image	0.208	0.605	0.718		
Quality	0.370	0.684	0.524	0.790	
Value	0.539	0.554	0.355	0.534	0.836

To determine discriminant validity, we also utilized the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations (Voorhees et al., 2016; Henseler et al., 2015), and every HTMT value remained below the suggested threshold of 0.90 (see Table 4), along

with the AVE and CR metrics being above their respective cutoff thresholds, which demonstrates that the constructs in our model are reliable and distinct (see Table 2).

Table 4: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

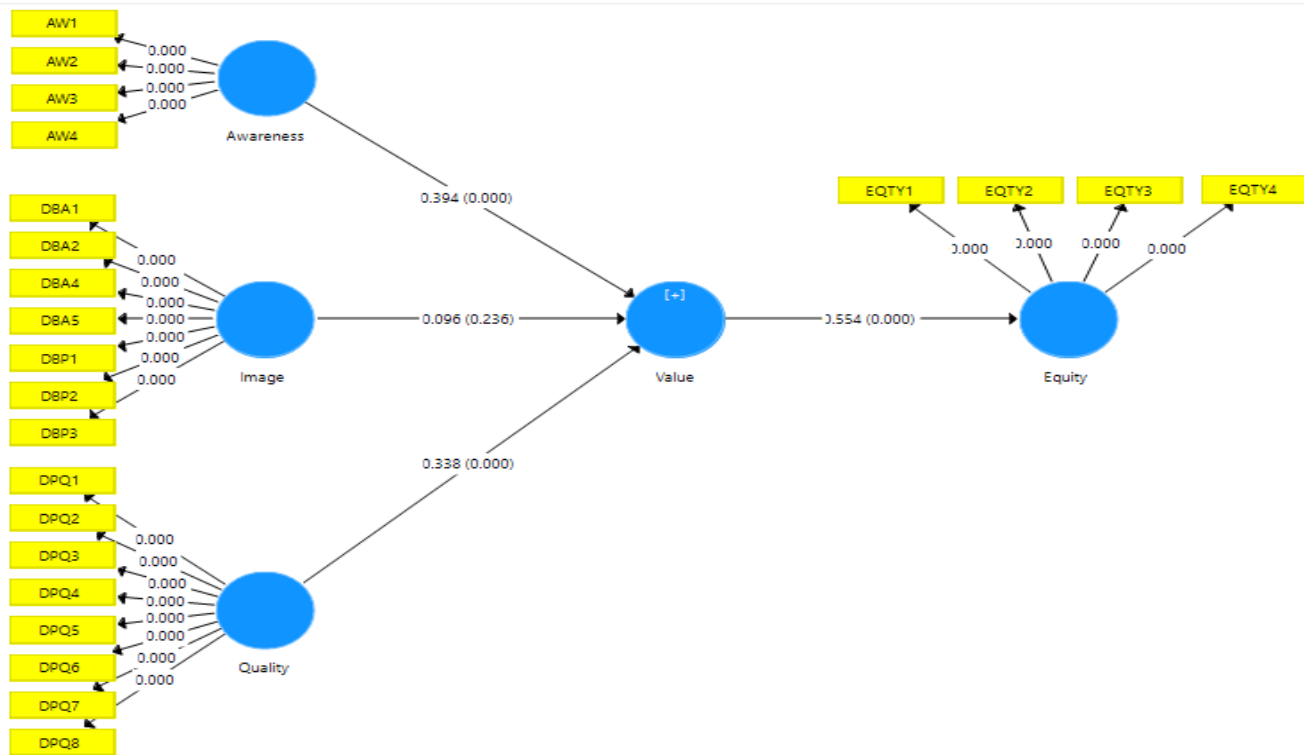
	Awareness	Equity	Image	Quality	Value
Awareness					
Equity	0.498				
Image	0.242	0.679			
Quality	0.430	0.739	0.600		
Value	0.637	0.617	0.392	0.600	

The measurement model met all evaluation criteria established by Hair et al. (2019), which ensured the reliability and validity of the variables and enhance confidence to proceed to evaluate the structural model.

Assessment of Structural Model

To test these hypotheses, we conducted a path analysis within a structural equation modeling

(SEM) framework, which uses path coefficients (β) to indicate the direction and strength of hypothesized association between variables, while determining statistical significance using *t*-values (Efron and Tibshirani, 1994; Bakshi and Krishna, 2009; Chin, 2010), where larger *t*-values demonstrate a more powerful causal relationship (Huang et al., 2007). For this investigation, structural model can be seen in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Structural Model

We assessed the structural model by examining multicollinearity among the independent constructs with Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), which is the ratio of how much multicollinearity reduces the stability and precision of the estimated relationships (Hair et al., 2011); as shown in Table 5, all VIFs were under the strict

limit of 3.3 (Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2006), demonstrating that multicollinearity was not a problem, and the predictor constructs and their regression coefficients remained fully independent, making the structural model suitable for hypothesis testing and conclusions.

Table 5: Inner VIF Values

	Awareness	Equity	Image	Quality	Value
Awareness					1.159
Equity					
Image					1.378
Quality					1.528
Value		1.000			

Because we did not encounter a collinearity issue, we assessed overall model explanatory power by evaluating the coefficient of determination (R^2) for each dependent construct (Shmueli & Koppius, 2011; Sharma et al., 2021); that is, we examined the proportion of variance in a target variable that the predictor variables explain. As demonstrated in Table 6, brand quality, brand image and brand

awareness explained 42.6% of the variance in brand value ($R^2 = 0.426$), and brand value accounted for 30.7% of the variance in brand equity ($R^2 = 0.307$). With reference to the benchmark guidelines provided by Henseler et al. (2009) and Hair et al. (2011), both R^2 values are well above the acceptable range for structural models.

Table 6: R-square Value

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Equity	0.307	0.302
Value	0.426	0.415

We also calculated effect sizes (f^2) based on changes in R^2 when individual variables were removed from the structural model, and the effect sizes (f^2) indicate that brand awareness had a medium-to-large effect size, brand quality had a moderate effect size, and brand image had a

smaller effect size, and brand value itself had a very strong effect size in the overall framework. Overall, brand awareness was the most influential antecedent of brand value, followed by brand image.

Table 7: f-square

	Awareness	Equity	Image	Quality	Value
Awareness					0.233
Equity					
Image					0.012
Quality					0.130
Value		0.443			

Table 8 demonstrates the structural model outcomes of the four hypothesized direct associations evaluated using PLS algorithm and bootstrapping procedures. Our analysis shows that brand awareness has a significant and positive impact on brand value ($\beta = 0.394$, $t = 5.633$), brand image has a positive while insignificant effect on brand value ($\beta = 0.096$, $t =$

1.184), brand quality has a positive and significant impact on brand value ($\beta = 0.338$, $t = 4.586$), and brand value has a positive and significant impact on brand equity ($\beta = 0.554$, $t = 10.422$). As three out of four hypothesized direct paths are positive and statistically significant, therefore, three hypotheses are accepted whereas one hypothesis is rejected.

Table 8: Result of relationships

Hypotheses		Original Sample (O)	T Statistics	P Values	Decision
H1	Awareness -> Value	0.394	5.633	0.000	Accepted
H2	Image -> Value	0.096	1.184	0.236	Rejected
H3	Quality -> Value	0.338	4.586	0.000	Accepted
H4	Value -> Equity	0.554	10.422	0.000	Accepted

*Significant at $p < 0.05$

Mediating Effect

All direct relationships with brand equity were significant before the mediating variable was introduced into the model: brand image positively affected brand equity ($\beta = 0.258$, $t = 4.517$) and did brand awareness ($\beta = 0.167$, $t = 3.438$), and perceived brand quality ($\beta = 0.187$, $t = 3.552$). After adding destination brand value as a mediator, the associations between both brand

awareness and brand quality with brand equity remained statistically significant ($t = 5.267$, $p = 0.000$ and $t = 3.977$, $p = 0.001$) respectively (see Table 9), confirming their respective hypotheses. However, the indirect path from brand image to brand equity via destination brand value was not statistically significant and the hypothesis was rejected.

Table 9: The indirect effect

Hypothesis		Original Sample (O)	T Statistics	P Values	Decision
H5	Awareness -> Value -> Equity	0.218	5.267	0.000	Accepted
H6	Image -> Value -> Equity	0.053	1.111	0.267	Rejected
H7	Quality -> Value -> Equity	0.187	3.977	0.000	Accepted

Brand awareness directly affects brand equity and through mediation and same is the case with brand quality. To determine whether this mediation was full, partial, or absent, we calculated the Variance Accounted For (VAF) methodologically as described by Hair et al. (2014), where a VAF above 80% is considered full

mediation, a VAF between 20% and 80% represents partial mediation, and a VAF under 20% considered no mediation effect, which in this case was 96.8% for the path from brand awareness to brand equity, and 100% for the path from brand quality to brand equity, suggesting a full mediation effect (see Table 9).

Table 9: Variance Accounted For

	Indirect	Total Effect	VAF	Type
Awareness->Equity	0.218	0.225	0.968	Full mediation
Quality->Equity	0.187	0.186	1.005	Full mediation

Discussion

The aim of this empirical investigation was to explore the structural association among destination brand awareness, brand image, brand quality, brand value, and overall brand equity of Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan, and the study also explored the mediating effect of destination brand value to explain the underlying theoretical mechanism.

To summarize, the structural model demonstrated satisfactory predictive relevance and explanatory power, with R^2 values of 0.426 for brand value and 0.307 for brand equity, which surpassed the recommended PLS-SEM benchmarks (Hair et al., 2011; Henseler et al., 2009). The three out of four hypothesized direct relationships were confirmed ($p < 0.05$), and the direct effects, before introducing the mediator, of brand awareness ($\beta = 0.167, t = 3.438$), brand image ($\beta = 0.258, t = 4.517$), and brand quality ($\beta = 0.187, t = 3.552$) on destination brand value were all significant and positive, with destination brand image being the most important direct predictor of destination brand equity, indicating that cognitive and affective associations (e.g., hospitality, unique culture, scenic beauty) are

important antecedents of brand equity. The addition of destination showed that this mediator fully mediated the association between brand awareness and brand equity (VAF=96.8%), demonstrating that while baseline awareness is necessary, its ability to produce long-term brand equity is virtually entirely dependent on if tourists view that awareness as translating into functional and emotional value. Brand value also exhibited full mediation between brand quality and brand equity (VAF=100%), and high perceived quality (e.g., transport infrastructure, guiding services, safety) does not automatically convert visitors into brand ambassadors unless it provides a favorable cost-to-experience trade-off. Interestingly, the indirect path from brand image through brand value was not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$), and brand image clearly drives equity directly, as strong imagery generates emotional and symbolic ties that lead directly to destination equity.

Conclusion

This study fills an important gap in destination branding literature by investigating how core branding dimensions translate into overall brand equity in an under-researched, resource-rich

emerging mountain destination. Raw assets such as the natural beauty and cultural heritage of Gilgit-Baltistan can be the first steps toward building a tourism destination, but they are not enough for sustainable competitive advantage. The results provide support for the standing of brand quality, image and awareness as drivers of destination success, and that perceived brand value is the main psychological bridge that enables brand awareness and brand quality to produce brand equity, and that brand value fully mediates these paths, meaning that destination marketing organizations cannot rely on promoting high quality or high awareness, they must deliver an experience that visitors consider "worth the investment".

Implications

This study expands the existing model of CBBE to emerging mountain tourism contexts and explores how brand value functions differently across the various cognitive and affective antecedents. The mediation analysis further contributes to the structural equation modeling literature by providing empirical evidence of full mediation for cognitive/evaluative dimensions (awareness and quality) along with a direct, unmediated path for affective dimensions (image). This study found that destination branding factors do not only influence destination brand equity through tourists' evaluations of functional value, but the destination image can also directly enhance destination brand equity without tourists' rational comparisons of costs and benefits (Hussain et al., 2026b).

A fair and transparent pricing strategy is required for destination awareness and high-quality services, which will strengthen destination loyalty and equity, so DMOs and government agencies in Gilgit-Baltistan should make sure that the pricing is fair, and that the quality of services is not only

good, but also perceived as good value for the money. Along with strong destination awareness and high-quality services, DMOs and government agencies in Gilgit-Baltistan should also develop emotional, experiential, and visual storytelling to build destination brand equity, and government authorities should have standards for quality for transportation, hospitality, and adventure tourism services so that tourists will have good experiences as well.

Limitations and Future Research Direction

There are many limitations to this investigation. It was performed in the region of Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan, which may represent an emerging mountain tourism destination, but the findings might not be valid to established urban or coastal destinations; this examination applied a cross-sectional research design, so it was not able to explain long-term causal relationships or changes in tourist behaviors and perception over time; and the investigation focused on international visitors, so studying domestic visitors with international visitors would likely yield a more comprehensive understanding of their divergent perceptions and behaviors.

We encourage future research to compare domestic and international tourists to test if value perception differences affect the proposed relationships, and we encourage researchers to employ longitudinal or experimental research designs to more clearly understand how destination brand equity evolves and shifts over time after tourists visit a destination and to include contextual factors (e.g., perceived safety, travel constraints, social media influence) as potential moderators in future studies to gain a better understanding of destination branding and tourist behavior in emerging tourism destinations.

References

Aaker, D. A. (1991). Managing Brand Equity. In *The Free Press New York London Toronto Sydney*.

Baloch, I. S. (2012). Tourism Development in Gilgit.

Baker, D. A., & Crompton, J. L. (2000). Quality, satisfaction and behavioral intentions.

- Annals of Tourism Research*, 27(3), 785-804. doi:10.1016/S0160-7383(99)00108-5
- Barreda, A. A., Bilgihan, A., Nusair, K., & Okumus, F. (2016). Online branding: Development of hotel branding through interactivity theory. *Tourism Management*, 57, 180–192. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2016.06.007>
- BETTIGA, D. (2025). Measuring industrial brand equity: unpacking the role of actual and potential customers' evaluations. *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*.
- Bianchi, C., & Pike, S. (2011). Antecedents of Destination Brand Loyalty for a Long-Haul Market: Australia's Destination Loyalty Among Chilean Travelers. *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, 28(7), 736–750. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2011.611742>
- Bianchi, C., Pike, S., & Lings, I. (2014). Investigating attitudes towards three South American destinations in an emerging long haul market using a model of consumer-based brand equity (CBBE). *Tourism Management*, 42, 215–223. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2013.11.014>
- Bideli, M., Monavarian, A., & Alikhani, F. (2024). The Effect of Brand Trust on Customer Loyalty by Mediating Brand Value and Modulating Respect, Fame and Love for the Brand in the Discount Store Industry. *Commercial Surveys*, 21(123), 127–143.
- Blain, C., Levy, S., & Ritchie, J. R. B. (2005). Destination branding: Insights and practices from destination management organizations. *Journal of Travel Research*, 43(4), 328-338. doi:10.1177/0047287505274646
- Boo, S., Busser, J., & Baloglu, S. (2009). A model of customer-based brand equity and its application to multiple destinations. *Tourism Management*, 30(2), 219-231. doi: 10.1016/j.tourman.2008.06.003
- Cai, L. A. (2002). Cooperative branding for rural destinations. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 29(3), 720-742. doi:10.1016/S01607383(01)00080-9
- Chon, K. (1990). The role of destination image in tourism: A review and discussion. *The Tourist Review*, 45(2), 2–9. <https://doi.org/10.1108/eb058040>
- Chon, K. S. (1992). The role of destination image in tourism: An extension. *Tourism Review*, 47(1), 2-8. doi:10.1108/eb058086
- Chaudhuri, A., & Holbrook, M. B. (2001). The chain of effects from brand trust and brand affect to brand performance: The role of brand loyalty. *Journal of Marketing*, 65(2), 81-93.
- Chen, J. S., & Gursoy, D. (2001). An investigation of tourists' destination loyalty and preferences. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 13(2), 79-85. doi:10.1108/09596110110381870
- Davis, D. F., Golicic, S. L., & Marquardt, A. J. (2008). Branding a B2B service: Does a brand differentiate a logistics service provider? *Industrial Marketing Management*, 37(2), 218e227
- Dann, G. M. S. (1996). Tourists' Images of a Destination-An Alternative Analysis. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 5(1–2), 41–55. https://doi.org/10.1300/J073v05n01_04
- Davis, S. (2002). Brand Asset Management Driving profitable growth through your brands. In Jossey-Bass.
- Dedeoğlu, B. B. (2019). Shaping tourists' destination quality perception and loyalty through destination country image: The importance of involvement and perceived value. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 29, 105–117. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2018.11.006>
- Dobni, D., & Zinkhan, G. M. (1990). In Search of Brand Image: A Foundation Analysis. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 17, 110–119.
- Faircloth, J. B., Capella, L. M., & Alford, B. L. (2001). The effect of brand attitude and brand image on brand equity. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 9(3), 61e75.
- Frías-Jamilena, D. M., Polo Peña, A. I., & Rodríguez Molina, M. A. (2017). The effect of value-creation on consumer-based destination

- brand equity. *Journal of Travel Research*, 56(8), 1011–1031.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287516663650>
 Frías-Jamilena,
- Gartner, W. C., & Ruzzier, M. K. (2011). Tourism destination brand equity dimensions: Renewal versus repeat market. *Journal of Travel Re-search*, 50(5), 471–481.
 doi:10.1177/0047287510379157
- Guest, L. P. (1942). The genesis of brand awareness. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 26(6), 800–808. doi:10.1037/h0055390
- Hair, J. F., Hult, G. T. M., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2014). A primer on partial least squares structural equation model (PLS-SEM). *Sage Publications, Inc.*
- Hair, J. F., Risher, J. J., Sarstedt, M., & Ringle, C. M. (2019). When to use and how to report the results of PLS-SEM. *European Business Review*, 31(1), 2–24.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/EBR-11-2018-0203>
- Hair, J. F., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2011). PLS-SEM: Indeed, a Silver Bullet. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 19(2), 139–152.
<https://doi.org/10.2753/MTP1069-6679190202>
- Hudson, S., & Ritchie, J. R. (2009). Branding a memorable destination experience: The case of ‘Brand Canada’. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 11(2), 217–228.
 doi:10.1002/jtr.720
- Huang, R., & Sarigöçollü, E. (2012). How brand awareness relates to market outcome, brand equity, and the marketing mix. *Journal of Business Research*, 65(1), 92e99.
- Hussain, I., & Hussain, D. (2026). Validating Scale for Measuring Destination Brand Image. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Social Sciences and Humanities*, 3(31–52).
- Hussain, Ibrahim, Hussain, D. (2026). Assessing Customer-Based Brand Equity of Gilgit-Baltistan as an Emerging Mountainous Tourist Destination. *Research Journal of Human and Social Aspects*, 4(2), 281–294.
- Huerta-´Alvarez, R., Cambra-Fierro, J. J., & Fuentes-Blasco, M. (2020). The interplay between social media communication, brand equity and brand engagement in tourist destinations: An analysis in an emerging economy. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 16, Article 100413.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2020.100413>
- Jiao, Y., Ertz, M., Jo, M.-S., & Sarigollu, E. (2018). Social value, content value, and brand equity in social media brand communities: A comparison of Chinese and US consumers. *International Marketing Review*, 35(1), 18–41.
- Jermisittiparsert, K., Sriyakul, T., Rattanasirivilai, S., & Horakul, P. (2022). Determining the brand loyalty of riceberry product in yasothon of thailand: moderating role of perceived quality. *Rmutt Global Business and Economics Review*, 17(1), 168–180.
- Keller, K. L. (2013). Strategic Brand Management, Building, Measuring, and Managing Brand Equity Global Edition. In *Pearson Education, Inc.*
<https://doi.org/10.2307/1252315>
- Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Marketing*, 57(1), 1–221.
- Keller, K. L. (2003). Strategic brand management. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Kim, H., Kim, W. G., & An, J. A. (2003). The effect of consumer-based brand equity on firms’ financial performance. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 20(4), 335–351.
 doi:10.1108/07363760310483694
- Kim, W. G., & Kim, H. B. (2004). Measuring customer-based restaurant brand equity. *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, 45(2), 115e131.
- Konecnik, M., & Gartner, W. C. (2007). Valor de marca de un destino: la perspectiva del consumidor. *Annals of Tourism Research En Español*.

- Kotler, P., Haider, D., & Rein, I. (1993). *Marketing places*. New York: Free Press.
- Kwak, D. H., & Kang, J. H. (2009). Symbolic purchase in sport: The roles of self-image congruence and perceived quality. *Management Decision*, 47(1), 85–99. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00251740910929713>
- Lin, N.-H., & Lin, B.-S. (2007). The Effect of Brand Image and Product Knowledge on Purchase Intention Moderated by Price Discount. *Journal of International Management Studies*, 2(2), 121–132.
- Liu, C.-R., Liu, H.-K., & Lin, W.-R. (2015). Constructing customer-based museums brand equity model: The mediating role of brand value. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 17(3), 229–238.
- Leone, R.P., Rao, V.R., Keller, K.L., Luo, A.M., McAlister, L. and Srivastava, R. (2006), “Linking brand equity to customer equity”, *Journal of Service Research*, Vol. 9 No. 2, pp. 125-138.
- Intuluck, W., Srisakun, C., & Tadawattanawit, S. (2023). The mediating role of perceived value, brand awareness, and brand loyalty in tourism revisit intention among high-quality tourists in Thailand. *Thammasat Review*, 26(2), 395–422.
- Mechinda, P., Serirat, S., & Gulid, N. (2009). An examination of tourists’ attitudinal and behavioral loyalty: Comparison between domestic and international tourists. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 15(2), 129–148. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356766708100820>
- Naidoo, P., Ramseook-Munhurrin, P., & Durbarry, R. (2012). The brand image of a small island destination. *Global Journal of Business Research (GJBR)*, 6(1), 55–64.
- Nikkhah-Farkhani, Z., & Zarenejad, Z. (2025). Investigating the effect of brand elements on brand equity: a study of consumer perceptions. *International Journal of Business and Emerging Markets*, 17(3), 357–373.
- Oppong, P. K., & Maama, H. (2026). Assessing Intangible Value: The Mediating Roles of WOM and Brand Credibility in Quality and Equity Nexus in Emerging Market. *International Review of Management and Marketing*, 16(1), 286.
- Oppermann, M. (2000). Tourism destination loyalty. *Journal of Travel Research*, 39(1), 78–84. doi:10.1177/004728750003900110
- Pappu, R., Quester, P. G., & Cooksey, R.W. (2005). Consumer-based brand equity: Improving the measurement - empirical evidence. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 14(3), 143-154. doi:10.1108/10610420510601012
- Pike, S. (2005). Tourism destination branding complexity. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 14(4), 258-259. doi:10.1108/10610420510609267
- Pike, S. (2009). Destination brand positions of a competitive set of near-home destinations. *Tourism Management*, 30(6), 857-866. doi: 10.1016/j.tourman.2008.12.007
- Pike, S., Bianchi, G., Kerr, G., & Patti, C. (2010). Consumer-based brand equity for Australia as a long-haul tourism destination in an emerging market. *International Marketing Review*, 27(4), 434-449. doi:10.1108/02651331011058590
- Qu, H., Kim, L. H., & Im, H. H. (2011). A model of destination branding: Integrating the concepts of the branding and destination image. *Tourism Management*, 32(3), 465-476. doi: 10.1016/j.tourman.2010.03.014
- Ringle, C. M., Wende, S., & Will, A. (2005). SmartPLS 2.0 (M3) beta. Hamburg: SmartPLS.
- Tasci, A. D. A., & Kozak, M. (2006). Destination brands vs destination images: Do we know what we mean? *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 12(4), 299-317. doi:10.1177/1356766706067603
- Tasci, A. D. A., Gartner, W. C., & Tamer Cavusgil, S. (2007). Conceptualization and operationalization of destination image. *Journal*

- of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 31 (2), 194–223. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1096348006297290>
- Phillips, W. J., Wolfe, K., Hodur, N., & Leistritz, F. L. (2013). Tourist Word of Mouth and Revisit Intentions to Rural Tourism Destinations: A Case of North Dakota, USA. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 15(1), 93–104. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jtr.879>
- Saqib, N., Yaqub, A., Amin, G., Khan, I., Faridullah, Ajab, H., Zeb, I., & Ahmad, D. (2019). The impact of tourism on local communities and their environment in Gilgit Baltistan, Pakistan: A local community perspective. *Environmental and Socio-Economic Studies*, 7(3), 24–37. <https://doi.org/10.2478/environ-2019-0015>
- Songur, A. (2024). The Effect of Smartphone Features on Customer Engagement: The Mediating Role of Brand Value. *Journal of Mehmet Akif Ersoy University Economics and Administrative Sciences Faculty*, 11(3), 1246–1264.
- Tran, N. K. H. (2023). Enhancing green brand equity through environmental reputation: The important of green brand image, green brand trust, and green brand loyalty. *Business Strategy & Development*, 6(4), 1006–1017.
- Washburn, J. H., & Plank, R.E. (2002). Measuring brand equity: An evaluation of a consumer-based brand equity scale. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 10(1), 46–62.
- Wang, J., Shahzad, F., Khan, D. I., & Siyal, A. W. (2022). Decision Making with an Alternative Mindset in Online Shopping Environment: Identifying User Intentions Toward F-Commerce. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 801.
- Xu, F., Bai, Y., & Li, S. (2020). Examining the antecedents of brand engagement of tourists based on the theory of value co-creation. *Sustainability*, 12(5), 1958.
- Yoo, B., Donthu, N., & Lee, S. (2000). An examination of selected marketing mix elements and brand equity. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 28(2), 195–211. doi:10.1177/0092070300282002
- Yoon, Y., & Uysal, M. (2005). An examination of the effects of motivation and satisfaction on destination loyalty: A structural model. *Tourism management*, 26(1), 45–56. doi: 10.1016/j.tourman.2003.08.016
- Yoo, B., & Donthu, N. (2001). Developing and validating a multidimensional consumer-based brand equity scale. *Journal of Business Research*, 52(1), 1–14. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0148-2963\(99\)00098-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0148-2963(99)00098-3)
- Zeithaml, V. A. (1988). Consumer Perceptions of Price, Quality, and Value: A Means-End Model and Synthesis of Evidence. *Journal of Marketing*, 52(3), 2–22. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1251446>
- Zeithaml, V. A., Berry, L. L., & Parasuraman, A. (1996). The Behavioral Consequences of Service Quality. *Journal of Marketing*, 60(2), 31–46. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1251929>
- Zhang, D. (2025). Research on the driving factors model and configuration of tourism destination brand equity: hybrid analysis based on SEM and fsQCA method. *Central European Journal of Operations Research*, 1–19.
- Zhang, H.; Zhang, W.; Wang, J.; Liang, Q. The Measurement Model of Tourist-based Destination Brand Equity: A Case Study of International Tourism Zone in South Anhui. *Tour. Sci.* 2013, 27, 52–63.
- Zhang, L. (2025). The Influence of Online Reviews on Consumers' Purchase Intentions for New Energy Vehicles: The Mediating Role of Brand Value. *RSU International Research Conference*.
- Parasuraman, A. (1997). Reflections on gaining competitive advantage through customer value. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 25(2), 154–161. <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf02894351>
- Bojanic, D. C. (1996). Consumer perceptions of price, value and satisfaction in the hotel industry: An exploratory study. *Journal of Hospitality and Leisure Marketing*, 4(1), 5–22. https://doi.org/10.1300/J150v04n01_02

Chang, H. H., & Wang, H.-W. (2011). The moderating effect of customer perceived value on online shopping behaviour. *Online*

Information Review, 35(3), 333–359.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/14684521111151414>.

Declaration of Conflicting Interest

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to research.

Funding Statement

No funding is received for this project.