

## The role of advertising and positive word-of-mouth in fabric brand equity: The mediating effect of brand awareness and brand image

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### Abstract

Enhancing brand equity by creating brand awareness and building brand image via advertising and positive word-of-mouth (PWOM) is vital in ensuring a successful brand. The study examined the mediating role of both brand awareness and brand image in the relationship between advertising and PWOM on fabric brand equity, within the Ghanaian context. A quantitative cross-sectional design was employed for the study. A sample of 230 Ghanaian fabric consumers were recruited for an online survey. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to analyse the data. The results showed that the construct validity and internal consistency of the measurement model was good. The structural model showed that brand awareness and brand image mediated the relationship between brand promotion (advertising and PWOM) and the brand equity of the fabric brands. The findings of the study highlight the need for fabric brands in Ghana and beyond to invest in advertising and other activities that builds PWOM, as these are more likely to enhance their brand awareness and brand image which is important for improving their brand equity.

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## Introduction

Brand equity is an important brand metric to businesses as it is one of the key measures of brand performance. The concept of brand equity has captured the interest of numerous researchers and businesses. The concept has been widely studied in business, marketing and other related areas. Brand equity has been examined in diverse fields such as cosplay (Ratna et al., 2017), banking industry (Hafez, 2018), hospitality (Sürücü et al., 2019), real estate (Vasudevan & Kumar, 2019), handicraft brands (Guha et al., 2021), brewing sector (Francioni et al., 2022), and disposable tableware brands (Mehdikhani & Valmohammadi, 2022). Extant literature suggests that brand equity is influenced by several antecedents. The concept has been studied in relation to brand/corporate image (Ansary & Hashim, 2018; Heinberg et al., 2018), brand love (Machado et al., 2019), brand personality (Luffarelli et al., 2019), brand experience (Iglesias et al., 2019), brand awareness, brand loyalty (Zia et al., 2021; Lang et al., 2022) among several others.

Fabric brands like any other business brands strive to be ahead of their competitors by implementing several strategies. These strategies include promotional strategies and engaging in activities that builds positive word of mouth (PWOM) of brands. Promotion of brands aims to imprint the presence of the brand in the minds of its consumers and to positively influence consumers' perception of the brands. It has been asserted that advertising, one of the commonest form of brand promotion plays a significant role in increasing brands awareness (Bruhn et al., 2012; Burns & Mullet, 2020) and brand image (Heinberg et al., 2018). Additionally, it has been established in literature that brand awareness (Vasudevan & Kumar, 2019; Guha et al., 2021) and brand image are the key drivers of brand equity (Heinberg et al., 2018; Zia et al., 2021), as well as one of the most studied branding concepts (Parris & Guzmán, 2022).

Despite the operations of fabric brands in Ghana and associated consumption behaviour of their consumers, little is known about the level of brand awareness and brand image which helps in determining the firms' brand equity. Brand equity is a significant metric for brands and an important outcome of PWOM (Mehdikhani & Valmohammadi, 2022), advertising (Vasudevan & Kumar, 2019), brand awareness (Lang et al., 2022), and brand image (Sürücü et al., 2019). It is prudent that these parameters are investigated in order to determine the performance of fabric brands in Ghana. Although several studies have investigated the relationship between the above-mentioned variables, few efforts to date have examined this relationship from a fabric business and consumption perspective. A study in this area can help fabric brands to improve their marketing and branding strategies in order to enhance their presence in the local and international markets, thus improving their global brand equity. Therefore, the study sought to investigate the impact of advertising and PWOM on Ghanaian fabric brand equity while assessing the indirect effect of brand awareness and brand image.

## **Brand equity**

Brand equity is defined as “the added or subtracted value of a brand that is created by the brand itself or co-created with stakeholders from the perceptual associations, symbolic meaning, relationships, and social impact of a product, service, idea, place, organization, person, or community, and/or the brand’s financial assets and liabilities” (Parris & Guzmán, 2022). This broad definition coined from extant literature suggests that brand equity is a multidimensional concept. Moreover, to build a comprehensive understanding of the concept of brand equity, it is imperative to examine how promotional and branding efforts by companies as well as consumers’ actions promote brand equity. It is imperative that brand equity should be studied in relation to brand awareness and brand image as past studies have shown that these key branding constructs are influenced by advertising (Lang et al., 2022) and PWOM (Mehdikhani & Valmohammadi, 2022). A scope of literature reveals that a brand equity model of advertising, PWOM, brand awareness, and brand image within the context of fabric business and consumption have not been fully cultivated in the branding literature. An empirical consumer survey was conducted to test this model and to assess its measurement and structural framework. The full hypothesised model is presented in Figure 1.

## **Advertising**

Advertising is one of the common promotional strategies through which businesses purchase time and space in the broadcast (television and radio) and print media (newspapers, magazines and billboards) respectively, in order to promote their products and services (Burns & Mullet, 2020). Other modern media that are used for advertising are social media (Guha et al., 2021), text messages, and websites (Tsekpo, 2020). Advertising play a crucial role in making brands recognizable (Burns & Mullet, 2020). It is an image-building effort used by companies to create favourable corporate image (Heinberg et al., 2018). Previous studies have shown a significant positive correlation between advertising and brand awareness (Nikabadi et al., 2015; Adam, 2019). Research by Lang et al. (2022) revealed a direct positive impact of advertising on brand equity. The above analysis suggests that advertising can impact brand equity within the context of Ghanaian fabric business. The present study therefore hypothesizes that:

**Hypothesis 1.** Advertising will have a significant relationship brand equity (BE).

## **Word-of-mouth (WOM)**

WOM is a vital form of information dissemination whereby consumers share their experiences with other consumers. WOM could be positive (PWOM) or negative (NWOM). Positive word-of-mouth (PWOM) is the act of informing other consumers about a consumer’s positive experience with a specific business, their products or

services (Mehmood et al., 2018). Good recommendations about a business is based on fulfilled psychological pacts and it is the most effective means of solving customer satisfaction issues (Ismail, 2022). PWOM has a significant positive impact on brand awareness (Ratna et al., 2017), brand image (Ansary & Hashim, 2018), green brand equity (Mehdikhani & Valmohammadi, 2022), customer repurchase intentions (Talwar et al., 2021) and persistently drives the intentions of consumers (Ismail, 2022). Based on the aforementioned reports, PWOM could also positively impact brand equity within the context of Ghanaian fabric business. The study therefore hypothesizes that:

**Hypothesis 2.** PWOM will have a significant relationship with brand equity (BE).

### **Brand Awareness**

Brand awareness is a brand's presence in the minds of its consumers (Foroudi et al., 2018) and it is used to evaluate consumers' level of knowledge about the existence of a brand and the extent to which the brand is part of the consumers' choice set (Vasudevan & Kumar, 2019). Research has shown that consumers are likely to recognize several brands but recall few or only one brand (Raddar & Huang, 2008). Brand awareness is created through advertising, social media mentions and user-generated content (Bruhn et al., 2012). Brand awareness has been found to have a significant positive effect on purchase decision (Ofosu-Boateng & Agyei, 2020) as well as brand equity (Guha et al., 2021; Lang et al., 2022). This phenomenon is likely to be observed within the context of Ghanaian fabric business. Based on the above theoretical analysis it is hypothesized that:

**Hypothesis 3.** Brand awareness (BAW) will mediate the relationship between advertising and brand equity (BE).

**Hypothesis 4.** Brand awareness (BAW) will mediate the relationship between PWOM and brand equity (BE).

### **Brand Image**

Brand image refers to consumers' general perception of a brand, and it has been seen to be a unique mental picture of a brand and summarizes its uniqueness compared to other existing brands (Ofosu-Boateng & Agyei, 2020). Brand image helps businesses to differentiate themselves from their competitors (Wu & Chen, 2019). Brand image has been found to have a significant positive influence on brand identification (Wu & Chen, 2019). Other studies have shown that brand image has a significant relationship with preference for a brand (Effah, 2020), purchasing decision (Ofosu-Boateng & Agyei, 2020) and brand equity (Heinberg et al., 2018; Guha et al., 2021). It has also been found

that brand image has a considerable brand equity relationship (Zia et al., 2021). It is likely that within the context of Ghanaian fabric business, this phenomenon would be observed. It is therefore hypothesized that:

**Hypothesis 5.** Brand image will mediate the relationship between advertising and brand equity (BE).

**Hypothesis 6.** Brand image will mediate the relationship between PWOM and brand equity (BE).

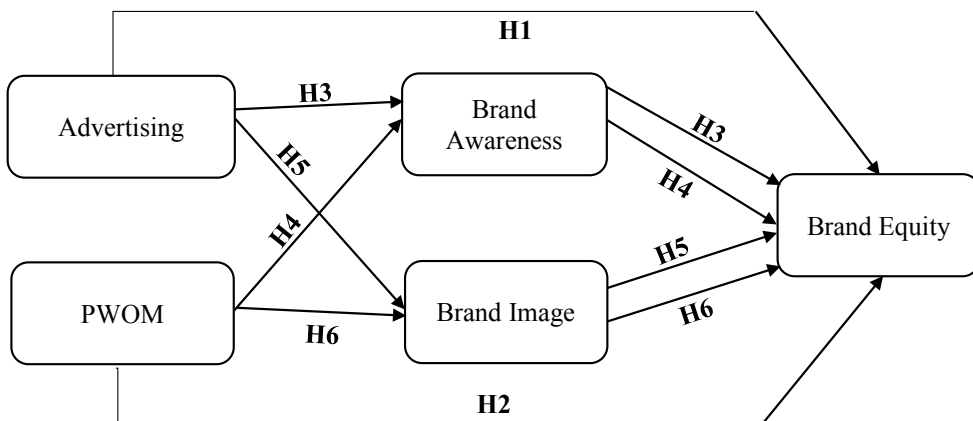


Figure 1: Hypothesised model

## Methods

### Study design and setting

A cross-sectional quantitative design was used for this study. This research design is appropriate as it allowed the researchers to examine the relationship among variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Thus, it enabled researchers to examine the direct and indirect relationships among advertising, PWOM, brand awareness, brand image, and brand equity within the context of Ghanaian fabric brands.

### Sample and sampling approach

A sample of 230 Ghanaian fabric consumers were selected for the study using a convenience sampling technique. This sampling approach was chosen for the study because it enabled researchers to collect data from readily available fabric consumers. A convenience sample of consumers have also been employed by seminal studies on brand equity (Hafez, 2018; Guha et al., 2021). Most of the research participants were young adults between the ages of 20-29 years (58.7%, n= 135). Two-thirds of the respondents

were females (68.7%, n= 158) whereas one-third were males (31.3%, n= 72). More than half of the fabric consumers had bachelor's degree (57.8%, n= 133). A little over one-third of the respondents reported that they worked in the public sector (34.3%, n= 79).

### *Measures*

An online structured questionnaire was designed for the survey. The first part of the questionnaire consisted of an introductory section which provided information about the purpose of the study and assurance of participants' confidentiality and anonymity. The second part of the questionnaire was made up of measures for assessing demographic characteristics, advertising, PWOM, brand awareness, brand image and brand equity.

### *Demographic characteristics*

Four (4) items were used to collect data on the research participants' age, gender, education and nature of job. The collection of this data was necessary in order to describe the research subjects' demographic profile.

### *Advertising*

The forms of advertisements used by fabric brands were assessed using 6 items. Five (5) of these items were adopted from Radder & Huang (2008) and 1 item was designed by researchers of this study. This item is "Billboard advertising for Ghanaian fabrics usually draws my attention". Fabric brands in Ghana utilise billboards as outdoor advertising to promote their brand and thus, it was necessary to add this to suit the context of the present study. The responses were scored on a 5-point Likert scale which ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The Cronbach alpha coefficient of the advertising scale yielded  $\alpha = 0.90$ .

### *Positive word-of-mouth*

Three (3) items were designed by researchers of this study to measure PWOM. The items were each developed based on Mehmood et al. (2018)'s description of PWOM which indicates that PWOM is the act of informing other consumers about a consumer's positive experience with a specific business, their products or services. The items were "People's recommendations about Ghanaian fabrics usually draws my attention", "The good things people say about Ghanaian fabrics usually draws my attention", and "The positive information people say about Ghanaian fabrics usually draws my attention". The PWOM items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The Cronbach alpha coefficient of the PWOM scale yielded  $\alpha = 0.93$ .

### ***Brand awareness***

Brand awareness was assessed using 7 items. Four (4) items were adopted from Hafez (2018) and 3 items from Guha et al. (2021). These items were modified to reflect Ghanaian fabric brands as the former was tailored to the banking industry and the latter to handicraft businesses. The responses were scored on a 5-point Likert scale which ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). In the present study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient of the brand awareness scale is 0.92.

### ***Brand image***

Brand image was assessed using 3 items that were adopted from Guha et al. (2021). These items were modified to suit the context of Ghanaian fabric brands. A five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was used for scoring the responses. The Cronbach alpha coefficient of the brand image scale in the current study is 0.96.

### ***Brand equity***

Brand equity was assessed using 4 items. One (1) item was adopted from Hafez (2018) and 3 items from Guha et al. (2021). These items were also modified to reflect Ghanaian fabric brands. The responses were scored on a 5-point Likert scale which ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). In the present study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient of the brand equity scale is 0.89.

### ***Procedure***

The questionnaire was hosted online using Google forms. Online surveys are new method of survey which can be effective and efficient with good response rate (Wu et al., 2022). According to Wu et al. (2022), the response rate of online survey can be improved when the survey is sent to a well-defined and well-refined target population. The authors also indicated that pre-contacting potential participants and reminding participants about the online survey via phone calls could lead to a higher response rate. Based on the aforementioned guide, fabric consumers were approached and informed about the study. The contact numbers or email addresses of the consumers who were willing to participate in the study were taken. The link to the Google form was then shared to the fabric consumers via their email and WhatsApp. These online distribution channels were chosen over others because these are personalised platforms and therefore, it was easier to get consumers to respond to the questionnaire on these platforms. Furthermore, reminders were sent via the participants contact numbers or email addresses to remind them to complete the online survey.



## Data analysis

IBM SPSS Statistics version 21, IBM SPSS Amos version 26 and Microsoft Excel Stats Tool Package were the software packages used for the data analysis. The demographic data were described using frequencies and percentages. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using maximum likelihood with promax rotation was carried out to determine the underlying factor structure, since the study utilised modified adopted items to suit its context. The appropriateness of the data and sample for factor analysis was tested using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO), Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, and correlation matrix. The pattern matrix from EFA was then subjected to Structural equation modelling (SEM).

According to Fan et al. (2016), SEM is a robust multivariate statistical procedure that is widely used in scientific studies. It comprises two statistical methods namely, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and path analysis (PA). CFA estimates latent variables whereas PA evaluates the causal relationship among the variables by generating a path model. Thus, SEM was employed to evaluate the validity of the constructs and to test the proposed framework. Cronbach's alpha coefficient ( $\alpha$ ) was used to assess the factors' reliability (internal consistency).

## Results

### *Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)*

The results of the initial investigation showed that the data and sample was suitable for factor analysis (KMO= .946,  $df= 253$ ,  $p= 0.00$ ). The KMO was greater than the minimum required value of 0.6. The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was also 0.00 which is significant at  $p < .05$ . Moreover, the correlation matrix revealed numerous coefficients  $>.3$  (Pallant, 2011). The EFA of the 23-items resulted in a four-factor solution which accounted for 74.88% of the total variance. The loadings ranged from .52 to .98 which is considered satisfactory. The minimum item loading is higher than the acceptable level of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2010). Brand awareness, brand equity, and brand image items loaded strongly on their construct. The advertising items from literature and the newly designed PWOM items loaded on the same factor. This indicates that these items collectively measure the same underlying variable within the context of this study. Based on the nature of the items, this construct was named advertising-PWOM (brand promotion).

## Measurement model

### *Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)*

The measurement model is presented in figure 2. The model shows that all the indicators are valid since their estimated standardized regression weights  $> 0.5$ . It ranged from 0.53 to 0.95. The items loadings are shown in Table 1. The measurement model resulting from the CFA yielded a good fit. The model fit indices were  $\chi^2 = 573.683$ ,  $p = 0.000 < 0.05$ ;



IFI= 0.93; TLI = 0.92; CFI = 0.93; RMSEA = 0.08. All the indices met the required threshold. Hafez (2018) noted that IFI, TLI, and CFI should be  $\geq 0.90$  and RMSEA should be  $\leq 0.08$ .

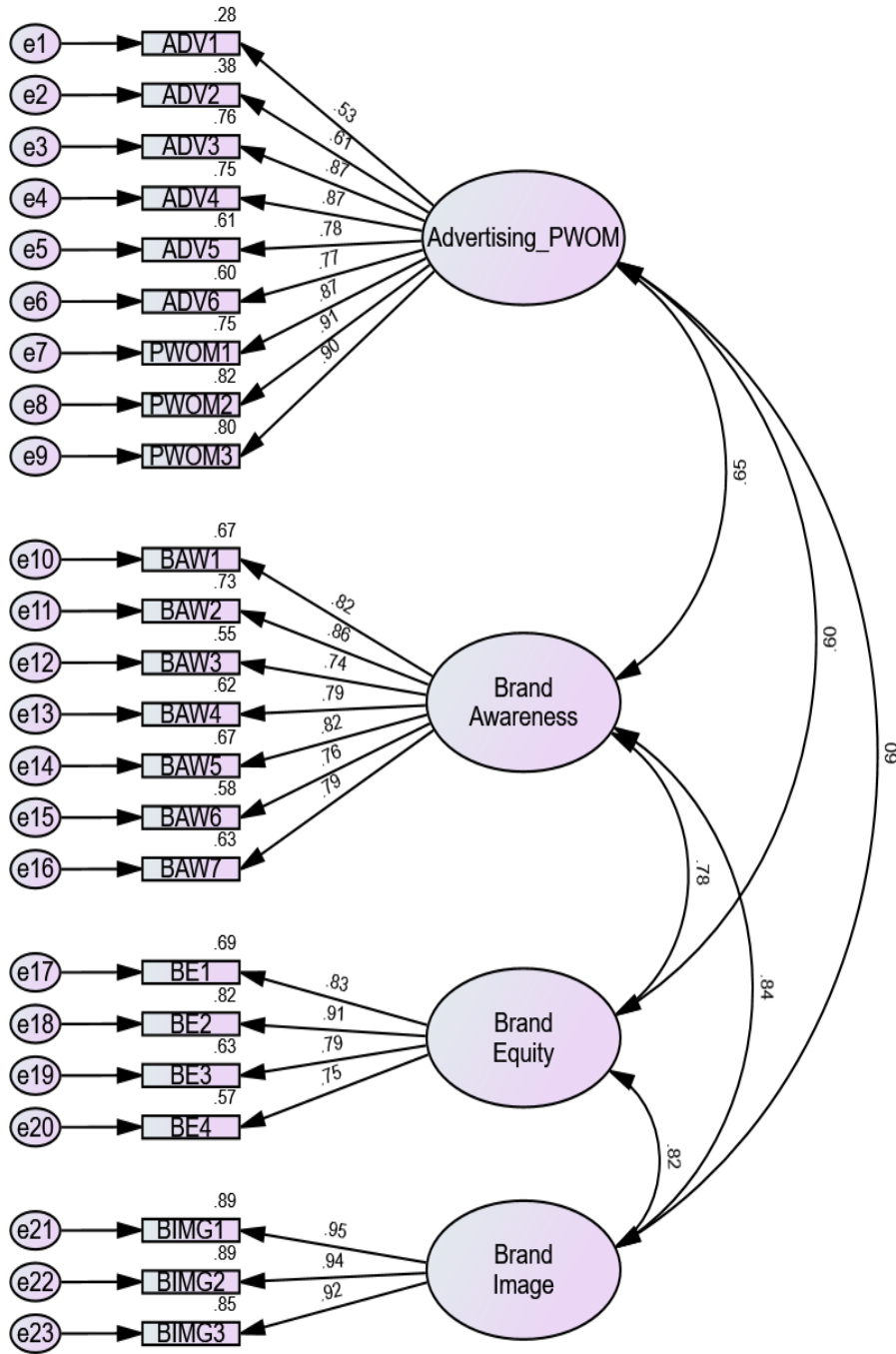


Figure 2: Measurement model

**Table 1:** Results of CFA and reliability

Factors/Items	$\beta$	$\alpha$
<b>Advertising-PWOM (Brand Promotion) N=9</b>		0.94
Newspaper advertising for Ghanaian fabrics usually draws my attention	.527	
Radio advertising for Ghanaian fabrics usually draws my attention	.614	
Television advertising for Ghanaian fabrics usually draws my attention	.871	
Bill board advertising for Ghanaian fabrics usually draws my attention	.869	
Internet advertising for Ghanaian fabrics usually draws my attention	.779	
In-store display of Ghanaian fabrics usually draws my attention	.775	
People's recommendations about Ghanaian fabrics usually draws my attention	.866	
The good things people say about Ghanaian fabrics usually draws my attention	.905	
The positive information people say about Ghanaian fabrics usually draws my attention	.897	
<b>Brand Awareness N=7</b>		0.92
I am familiar with Ghanaian fabric brands	.821	
I am aware of Ghanaian fabric brands	.856	
I can recognize Ghanaian fabric brands among competing foreign brands	.741	
I am aware about the particular brand which provides the best fabric	.789	
I can recognize my favorite fabric brand in comparison with the other competing brands	.821	
I can quickly recall symbol or logo of the Ghanaian fabric brand I buy	.761	
I know how my favourite Ghanaian fabric brand looks like	.793	
<b>Brand Equity N=4</b>		0.89
It makes sense to buy Ghanaian fabrics instead of any other brand, even if they are the similar	.829	
Even if another brand has the same features as Ghanaian fabrics, I would prefer to buy Ghanaian fabrics	.907	
If there is another brand as good as Ghanaian fabrics, I prefer to buy Ghanaian fabrics	.794	
If another brand's fabric is not different from Ghanaian fabrics in any way, it seems smarter to purchase Ghanaian fabrics	.755	
<b>Brand Image N=3</b>		0.96
Ghanaian fabric brands offer good quality products and consistent quality	.946	
Ghanaian fabric brands offer very reliable products	.943	
Ghanaian fabric brands offer products with excellent features	.921	

**Note:**  $\beta$  = Standardized regression weights; N= Number of items;  $\alpha$ = Cronbach's alpha; M= Mean score SD = Standard Deviation

The measurement model's convergent validity was established as the composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) (shown in Table 2) met the required threshold of  $CR \geq 0.7$  and  $AVE \geq 0.5$  (Boateng, 2020). Table 2 also presents results of discriminant validity based on Fornell-Larcker criterion (1981) which states that the  $\sqrt{AVE}$  should be  $>$  the inter-construct correlations. The results shows that the

discriminant validity was satisfied since the  $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$  of all constructs were larger than the inter-construct correlations. The established convergent validity and discriminant validity of the model suggests that the measurement model has a good construct validity. This implies that the items used in the study are valid and measured what they were intended to measure.

**Table 2:** Convergent validity and discriminant validity

	CR	AVE	1	2	3	4
<b>1. Advertising-PWOM</b>	0.939	0.639	<b>0.799</b>			
<b>2. Brand Awareness</b>	0.925	0.637	0.601**	<b>0.798</b>		
<b>3. Brand Equity</b>	0.893	0.678	0.559**	0.702**	<b>0.823</b>	
<b>4. Brand Image</b>	0.956	0.877	0.569**	0.785**	0.755**	<b>0.936</b>

Note:

CR= Composite reliability; AVE= Average variance extracted

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

## Reliability test (internal consistency)

The Cronbach alpha coefficients of the factors ranged from .89 to .94 [i.e. advertising-PWOM ( $\alpha=.94$ ), brand awareness ( $\alpha=.92$ ), brand equity ( $\alpha=.89$ ), and brand image ( $\alpha=.96$ ). These values are higher than the recommended minimum value of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2013). This implies that the internal consistency of the constructs were very good, and thus, the items are reliable measures of their respective constructs.

## Structural model

### Direct path analysis

The results of the initial direct path analysis is shown in Table 3. An observation of Table 3 reveals that advertising-PWOM have a significant direct effect on brand awareness ( $\beta=0.601, p < 0.001$ ) and brand image ( $\beta=0.569, p < 0.001$ ) but does not have a direct effect on brand equity ( $\beta=0.139, p > 0.05$ ). Brand awareness ( $\beta=0.229, p < 0.001$ ) and brand image ( $\beta=0.496, p < 0.001$ ) have a significant direct influence on brand equity. However, the model fit indices of this structure was not good. Therefore, further path analysis was conducted based on the suggestion in the modification indices. This resulted in the removal of the path from advertising-PWOM to brand equity.

The final structural model shown in Figure 3 was derived. The structural model fit indices were IFI = 0.989; TLI = 0.934; CFI = 0.989; RMR = 0.028. IFI  $\geq$  0.90, TLI  $\geq$  0.90 and CFI  $\geq$  0.90 is recommended (Hafez, 2018). Schreiber (2008) noted that the smaller the RMR, the better, and zero (0) indicates a perfect. The findings satisfied the required threshold which is an indication of a good structural model fit. A comparison of Table 3 and Figure 3 shows an improvement in the standardised regression weights of

the path from brand awareness to brand equity ( $\beta = 0.28, p < 0.001$ ). The path from brand image to brand equity ( $\beta = 0.53, p < 0.001$ ) was also strengthened.

## Mediation analysis

Bootstrap mediation analysis was used to test for the mediation/indirect effects using a bootstrap sample of 2000. Table 3 shows a full mediation relationship. Brand promotion (advertising-PWOM) have a significant indirect effect on brand equity through brand awareness and brand image ( $p \leq 0.001$ ).

**Table 3:** Direct and indirect path analysis

Direct effects			
Path Description	$\beta$	t-value	Hypothesis Testing
Advertising-PWOM--->Brand Awareness	0.601	11.392***	
Advertising-PWOM--->Brand Image	0.569	10.469***	
Advertising-PWOM--->Brand Equity	0.139	2.654	(H1 & H2) Unsupported
Brand Awareness--->Brand Equity	0.229	3.283*	
Brand Image--->Brand Equity	0.496	7.329***	

Indirect effects/ Mediation analysis			
	Advertising-PWOM	Brand Awareness	Brand Equity
Brand Awareness	0.000	0.000	0.000
Brand Image	0.000	0.000	0.000
Brand Equity	0.474***	0.000	0.000
Path Description			Hypothesis Testing
Advertising-PWOM--->Brand Awareness---> Brand Equity			(H3 & H4) Supported
Advertising-PWOM--->Brand Image---> Brand Equity			(H5 & H6) Supported

Note:

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$

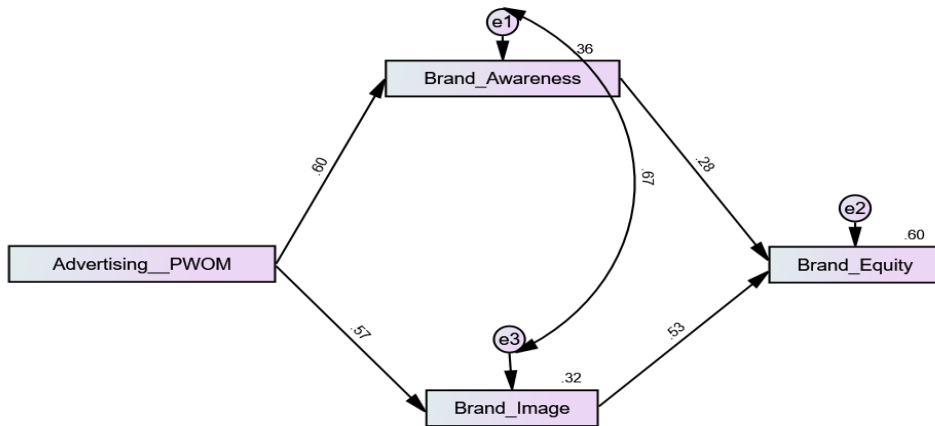


Figure 3: Structural model

**Discussion**

The purpose of the current study was to examine the direct and indirect effects of brand awareness and brand image on the association between advertising, PWOM, and brand equity within the fabric brand context using Ghanaian fabric brands. The findings showed that advertising and PWOM of fabric brands in Ghana played the same role, as these two variables were loaded on one factor (advertising-PWOM). The occurrence of this phenomenon is not surprising as both constructs are forms of brand promotion (Mehmood et al., 2018; Burns & Mullet, 2020). The results further revealed a significant relationship between brand promotion (advertising-PWOM) and brand awareness. These finding supports previous studies that have found a significant positive correlation between advertising and brand awareness (Nikabadi et al., 2015; Adam, 2019; Vasudevan & Kumar, 2019; Lang et al., 2022). Similarly, a significant positive relationship between PWOM and brand awareness had been reported elsewhere ( Ratna et al., 2017). This finding indicates that when brands increase their advertising efforts and their consumers also spread positive information about the brands to other people, the probability of this activities increasing the awareness of the brands is high. Probably, consumers are better able to recall and recognize the brands as a result of exposure to the brands’ advertisements and recommendations.

Advertising-PWOM was also found to have a significant direct relationship with brand image. This finding is not surprising as it has been established in literature that the promotion of brands through advertising and PWOM has a direct positive effect on brand image (e.g. Heinberg et al., 2018; Ansary & Hashim, 2018). These findings thus suggest that putting more emphasis on advertising and functions that improves PWOM is importance in building the image of fabric brands. It was also found in the study that brand awareness significantly influence brand equity. This findings corroborates previous

studies that have indicated that brand awareness has a significant positive effect on brand equity (Hafez, 2018; Sürücü et al., 2019; Guha et al., 2021; Lang et al., 2022). It is possible that the higher consumers are familiar with a particular brand, the higher it increases the value of the brand in the minds of its consumers over other fabric brands offering similar products and services. This finding further establishes that consumers are more likely to choose or purchase brands they are more aware of and those with the greatest gain than those they are less aware of.

Additionally, the results show a direct correlation between brand image and brand equity. This is consistent with some previous studies (e.g. Heinberg et al., 2018; Sürücü et al., 2019; Guha et al., (2021) that have revealed a significant relationship with between brand image and brand equity. This finding implies that when fabric brands build a positive image about their brand, this greatly enhances their brand equity. A brand's image is its promise of quality, authenticity, and consumer satisfaction (Keiser et al., 2022) and thus, a good brand image will positively influence consumers to include a brand in their choice set. Consequently, a consumer preference for an identified brand is likely to be higher than that of an unidentified brand. The study did not reveal a direct impact of brand promotion (advertising-PWOM) on brand equity. This finding indicates that any advertising strategy implemented by fabric brands or PWOM gained by the brands is less likely to positively enhance brand equity unless these strategies consistently creates awareness about the brand as well as build a good image about the brand. These findings contradict some previous studies that have indicated that there is a direct positive relationship between advertising and brand equity (Lang et al., 2022; Mehdikhani & Valmohammadi, 2022). The variation in the findings of the past and current studies could be that in the present study, advertising and PWOM were found to play the same role. A separation of these variables could produce difference outcome. This may be due to contextual difference in terms of culture and business type. Therefore, further studies within the fabric brands setting are required to confirm these observations.

Furthermore, brand awareness and brand image was found to mediate the association between brand promotion (advertising and PWOM) and brand equity in this study. These findings confirm the assertion that brand awareness and brand image are a significant outcome of word-of-mouth (Mehdikhani & Valmohammadi, 2022) and advertising (Vasudevan & Kumar, 2019), as well as the main drivers of brand equity (Vasudevan & Kumar, 2019; Guha et al., 2021). The absence of a direct relationship between advertising-PWOM and brand equity and the presence mediation effect by brand awareness and brand image implies that promotion efforts by Ghanaian fabric brands should be geared towards building and strengthening awareness and image of the brands. Since, this is likely to positively influence brand equity of fabric businesses.

### ***Theoretical and managerial implications***

This research contributes to theory by providing a further understanding of the multifaceted but important role of the advertising, PWOM, brand awareness, and brand image in the creation of brand equity, with evidence from fabric brands in Ghana. The findings suggest that businesses strengthen their advertising efforts as well as improve the quality of their products and services which contributes to PWOM. Since this would most likely increase the brands' awareness and image which is necessary for building a strong brand equity.

### ***Limitations and directions for future research***

The study was limited to Ghana fabric brands. Further studies can investigate the model within other contexts. Cross-national studies are also encouraged to determine the robustness of the model within diverse cultures or geographical locations. This would help improve the cross-cultural generalizability of the model. Although the sample size was adequate for the analysis, the finding of the present research may diver when a larger sample size is utilised. Last but not least, despite the several dimensions of brand equity, only the key drivers of brand equity (brand awareness and brand image) found in literature were considered in the present research. Therefore, future research should consider other dimensions such as brand loyalty, brand association, perceived quality, brand experience, brand love, and brand personality.

### **Conclusion**

The study was undertaken to examine the mediating role of brand awareness and brand image in the relationship between advertising and PWOM on fabric brand equity, within the Ghanaian fabric brand context. Even though, there was no relationship between advertising-PWOM and brand equity, the mediation analysis showed that advertising-PWOM had a significant indirect effect on brand equity through brand awareness and brand image. The finding highlights the importance of increasing advertising efforts by fabric brands and the need for fabric brands to provide products or services that meets the needs and expectations of consumers. A satisfied consumer would most likely recommend a brand to other consumers which is vital for strengthening PWOM on fabric brands. High levels of advertising and PWOM results in an increase in fabric brand awareness and fabric brand image and subsequently an improvement in fabric brand equity.

### **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).



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