Impact of Differentiated Customer Service, Brand Trust, Brand Commitment, and Brand Salience on Brand Advocacy

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to extensively identify the impact of variables that tend to make the customers into advocates. Today companies have to focus on customers more frequently and consistently than they focus on advertisements and promotions because of competitive market. This study will help the brands to focus on what actually a consumer wants and why making advocates is necessary. In order to justify the developed hypotheses, young males and females from the population of the universities and offices of Islamabad are selected and convenience sampling has been used to gather data of the age group between 18 and 32 years who are more conscious about brands and want to share the knowledge of their favorite brands. Results shows that the variables like customer service, trust in brand developed through its quality products, brand salience (BS) significantly impact on turning customers into advocates. However, commitment with a brand is not always necessary as customers more often seeks variety and desire to try newer and newer brands. Results show that brand love moderates the relationship among differentiated customer service (DCS), BS, and brand advocacy (BA) but there is an insignificant moderating impact was found between brand commitment and BA. Our research was limited to the area of Islamabad Pakistan with a less and specific time frame and respondents. More extensive study could be done in future including other cities and industries.

Keywords: Brand Advocacy, Brand Salience, Brand Commitment, Brand Love, Differentiated Customer Service, Consumer Behavior
JEL Classifications: D3, L2

1. INTRODUCTION

Today brands play an integral role in developing good and long-term customer relationship as well as meeting sales goals. Consumers also desire for the brand that matches best with their personality and best suits them. Consumer brands today seek for building strong brand-consumer relationship by understanding and providing them with the product which they desire and which they think represent their personality. That allows the manufacturers and marketers to create a strong emotional bond and hence creating long-term successful relationship. It is important for companies today to build a positive image of their brands in order for customers to advocate their products and brand. Customers' positive attitude towards a product and his/her recommendation of that product to the others after experiencing it is termed as brand advocacy (BA) (Howard and Kerin, 2013).

BA further results in promotion of the brand in terms of its quality and traits; also it helps in developing purchase intention of the others and influences their attitude towards buying the products of that particular brand. Building customers' advocacy towards the brand is about building deeper relationship by earning trust, transparency and trust (Lawer and Knox, 2006). Customers advocate a brand when a brand expresses their identities. Once the customer find the exact brand which matches his personality and feels like the brand embodies who they are, strong connection is formed, positive perceptions are developed and finally those positive evaluations are conveyed to the others (Kemp et al., 2012).

Brand love (BL) can be expressed as human love. BL is about the affection of a consumer with the brand which is formed when a consumer finds a brand attractive and the traits of his personality in the brand. BL is not just about buying a brand's product in repeated manner but also having positive perception about it which

can be described in terms of how much a person loves the brands he prefers. When personality traits used to characterize a person and associated with a brand, strong relations are formed between brands and consumers (Louis and Lombart, 2010). It is necessary to build emotional bond between brand and customer in order to develop deep affection for the consumer brands. Not only it creates loyalty but also result in maintaining long-term successful customer relationship. Furthermore, face-to-face interactions with customers regarding their choice of brand provide them with good customer experience (Long-Tolbert and Gammoh, 2012).

BL can be in the form of loyalty that can form a unique bond between consumers and product's brand. Decisions to maintain a brand relationship and repurchase intentions, or switching to other brands is more related to emotions. Experiences of consumers with the brands the level satisfaction level and loyalty towards a brand (Nobre, 2011). Brand gives a person sense of identification as well as exhibits his personality and to a consumer, a brand recognizes the spring of the product which becomes a big accountability of the manufacturers to provide the assured product to create repeat purchases and building a strong bond (Grace and O'Cass, 2002). For this purpose it is important to find impact of differentiated customer service (DCS), trust on brand, brand salience (BS) and long-term brand commitment (BC) on BA in Pakistani society and also require consolidation with other countries findings. The prime objective of this research study is to investigate relationship among DCS, BS, BC and BA. The research question of this research study is to investigate the impact of brand trust (BT), DCS, BS and BC on BA. Furthermore, to check the moderating role of BL between these independent and dependent variables.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

While making any decision regarding purchase, what attributes a consumer looks for in a brand that satisfies his or her needs. The study also covers the variables that fall under the theory of consumer behavior which effect consumers buying behavior and the level of satisfaction and stand out position of the brands that in return make them advocates of the brand. Level of commitment, BS, BT on brand developed through quality services and product attributes are the variables that likely affect customer advocacy.

2.1. BA
It is very important for brands to have advocates for them. It is not necessary to hire someone to promote their product. BA is a positive attitude towards a product by a satisfied customer and his recommendation to others about that product (Howard and Kerin, 2013). Hawkins (2004), states that it is a psyche of human beings that they imitate each other socially and most importantly they talk about their experience with one another.

According to Lawer and Knox (2006), BA promotes traits and quality of a brand which creates buying intension of the customers and building customers' advocacy towards the brand is about building deeper relationship by earning trust, transparency and trust. Kemp et al. (2012) states that a brand advocates is created when a brand expresses a person's inner self and expresses his identity. After this strong bond is created between that person and

the brand, then that person communicates with others the positive things of that product which makes him brand advocate for that product and this process is called BA.

Hollebeek (2011) suggested that if the consumer loves a brand than they will communicate it to others that will include their relatives and friends about that brand. Consumers who are more strongly affianced with a brand are the ultimate promoters for that brand. In addition to communicating about the brands to other people, Du et al. (2007) declared that brand supporters are more likely to accept any new product of the brand and also pardon a brand for any kind of misbehavior. Also Senecal and Nantel (2004) argues that BA, includes word of mouth and brand recognition, and can be from multiple sources, comprising friends or peers.

According to Batra (2011), BA can also be termed as experiencing new products of the brand and talking about the new products of the brand. They are ready to forgive any mistakes held by the brand. The BL is found to explain eccentricity in consumer's positive word of mouth and struggle to hear any type of negative comments about the brand.

2.2. DCS
Coelho and Henseler (2012) define DCS as the quality of service that gives competitive edge to a brand among its competitors. Quality service provided by a brand to the customers plays a vital role today due to increased competition and also a brand today is differentiated by the service they provide.

Coelho and Henseler (2012) states that customers today are more focused towards the quality of service a brand provides and so, service differentiation plays a vital role considering this fact. It does not only gains the customers satisfaction but also proves to be a source of gaining competitive advantage. If the services are optimized according to the target segments, it results in customer loyalty and further result in spreading a positive word about the brand.

In addition to this, Vaerenberg et al. (2013) argue that service failures negatively affect customer satisfaction and behavior. According to the previous researchers, many studies highlighted that there must be a way to record the complaints of the customers regarding service quality and the issues they face must be resolved on priority as customers also observe and evaluate a brand on the basis of their seriousness to think about the customers as well as service providing gets a feedback regarding how much serious a customer is about their brand (Qureshi et al., 2014).

Service quality leads to better level of commitment with the brand. According to Ballou, (1999) customers interact with the brands only when they make purchase or either gives suggestions for the improvements. Service quality, attitude towards customers and the reception to the customers at this point is very much important to gain customers trust and to make them feel like the brand cares for them. The significance of customer service is getting its importance more and more the same way as competitive advantage is taking importance side by side.

H₁: DCS has a positive significant impact on BA.

2.3. BT

Becerra and Badrinarayanan (2013) defines trust as the willingness to rely on someone on the basis of beliefs and the characteristics of him. BT can be taken in same perspective, that is, willingness to rely on a brand on the basis of perceptions, beliefs and good characteristics of a brand despite of the uncertainty associated with the brand. According to Becerra and Badrinarayanan (2013), a person trusts a brand when he perceives a brand to be reliable, competent and consistent. BTs greatly influence a consumer's attitude towards purchase, loyalty and advocacy. BT has a great influence on customers' approaches and related behaviors like making purchases, loyalty, brand value, BC, and brand referrals. BT increases customers' purchase intentions.

AQ2 Reichheld (2003) argues that, as brand recommendation involves risking one self-reputation, customers only promotes a brand when they trust the brand to which confirm to their perceived expectations.

AQ2 Bowden (2009) argues that trust in brand is not just a matter of one time shopping or interaction with the brand but is developed with the passage of time and it's not just as easy as it looks. During last year's, very less attention has been given to building trust in a brand. But today in the market where competition is increasing day by day and the ratio of switching to another brand is very easy for customers, building trust in a brand has reached to its maximum importance on which today many brands are focusing on and successfully coping up with it.

AQ2 Ravi and Jillapalli (2014), states that brands today are focusing to build trust on their brands by the help of endorsing any personality whom people trust and follow. That is helping a lot to the brands as endorsement help them to give knowledge about their brands to the customers as well as to gain their trust on that brand.

AQ2 Rahman (2014) finds that competition in the market has increased a lot because of the fact that many brands are producing same type of products. People despite of this increased variety of brands, are also looking for the quality and genuine products. For this brands have to build an image and serve as a symbol of providing the best available product in the market and for this reason the brands are also competing with each other in terms of gaining customer's trust in their brand.

H₂: BT has a positive significant impact on BA.

2.4. BC

BC according to Li et al. (2014), is defined as the relationship that exists between the customer and a brand. BC is generated by the positive attitude and behavior that is developed when a brand exhibit the same characteristics what a consumers perceive should be there in a brand. This strengthens long-term relationship with a brand and further leads to its referral to the others.

East et al. (2008), also argue that this does not always happen that the customers remain committed to a brand forever even if the brand offers the products according to the needs of the customers. Newer and newer brands are showing up with a wide variety of trendy products that very much attracts consumers. Every consumer has different set of choices and preferences that keeps on changing with the trends and technology, it's not always necessary that a brand always keep up with them. So it's not always necessary for the customers to remain committed to a particular brand. Fast and changing trends might cause them to switch to the other brand that attract them more and offers the latest features according to the tremd.

AQ2 Abdel and Majid (1998), suggests that to secure long-term relationship of customers with a brand, building a good level of commitment is very necessary for a brand and to gain customer loyalty and build commitment brands must have to check the customer who is consistent, make repeat purchase with the brands and the product types they look for and cater their needs to make them loyal customers and to gain their commitment.

Keller (2009), states that the rapidly changing market and advance communication methods and flow of information through the social media, brands must work on what consumers think of their brand and how much knowledge they have about the brand as the level of their commitment greatly effects how much knowledge they have about the brand. Brands need to communicate about them to the consumers in order to know their brand well.

Knox and Walker (2001), argues that today in increased market competition, consumers look for vast variety and innovative products. Primary objective of every brand must be to have the products that go with the trend and keep on innovating their products. In the competitive environment today, consumers more often switch to the products which they think are better for them both in terms of innovation and affordability.

AQ2 Jan et al. (2006), states that the concept of BC has a great importance in current era. Brand marketers also seek for the increased level of commitment between the customers and a brand. Brands with more committed customers are more successful than the brands with less level of committed customers.

H₃: BC has a positive significant impact on BA.

2.5. BS

According to Remaud and Lockshin (2009), BS refers to the reflex **AQ2** in which a particular brand comes to mind when talking about to products related to the brand's products.

Alba and Chattopadhyay (1986) defined BS as the stand out level of **AQ2** a brand in memory which is associated with the emotional response leading to the expected increase in BS. BS is important because it greatly affects purchase intention of the customers when they are making choice regarding which brand's product or product to buy (Hong, Wang, Santos, 2008).

Miller and Berry (1998), states that better positioned products **AQ2** take advantage and develop customers purchase intent. Brand

which is the ultimate choice of a person and his utmost priority is also salient.

AQ2 Romaniuk and Sharp (2003), argues that there are other ways through which this salience can be expressed like the attributes of a brand, which means that a customer will recall and the brand would remain in his subconscious through the attributes that a consumer distinguishes are associated with the brand name and that would differentiate that brand to a competitor. Salience is abstracted as the possibility of what a customer think of the brand at some point when something comes in his mind.

BS (Shaw, 2010), is the tendency of the brand to be thought of by the consumers or in other words the prominence of a brand and its image which stands outs in the mind of consumers. According to Sharp (2003), BS is an important factor to be focused on by the brands today and plays a vital role in gaining customer loyalty and further results in advocacy and spreading positive words about that brand. It is, therefore, vital for a brand to remain in consumer's consideration as consumers are more likely to adopt the brand which they conceptualize as a distinctive and prominent brand. Today a brand has to be salient and stand out in an increasingly saturated and diverse brand race.

AQ2 Raisanen et al. (2012), states that salience is developed through the process of continuous innovation and according to the demand of the consumer. To stay competitive, brands need to focus on the changing trend and changing preferences of the consumers as rapidly changing trends and saturated competition in the market may allow a consumer to switch towards another brand in no time when he find the other brand offering more features which a consumer is seeking for and that helps the brands to differentiate among the competitors and build a positive image in the consumers mind and the brand becomes salient in consumers' mind.

H_4: BS has a positive significant impact on BA.

2.6. BL

AQ2 Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen (2010) defines BL as friendliness that is felt with full passion for a brand. BL is considered as an **AQ2** emotional concept. Lastovicka and Sirianni (2011), states that BL can be represented as actual love that includes passion, intimacy and commitment towards a brand. When a brand manages to reach a maximum level of friendliness with the consumer or the consumer feels sense of bonding with a brand than BL is developed. BL entails urge, affection, positive appraisals of the brand and positive feelings in response to the brand and statements of love for the brand.

Louis and Lombart (2010), states that BL can also be explained as human love. BL is all about the affection of a consumer for a brand that he adores in a way that it makes him feels good by using that brand. BL is not just about buying a brand's product in repeated manner but also having positive perception about it which can be described in terms of how much a person loves the brands he prefers.

When personality traits used to characterize a person and associated with a brand, strong relations are formed between brands and consumers (Louis and Lombart, 2010). According to Long-Tolbert and Gammoh (2012), it is important to build emotional binding between brand and customer in order to develop intense affection for the consumer brands. Not only it creates loyalty but also result in maintaining long-term successful customer relationship. Moreover, direct interactions with customers regarding their choice of brand provide them with good customer experience.

Batra (2012), states that the BL relationship is unlimited and **AQ2** ongoing to the extent that the loved brand is considered matchless. The consumer suffers when underprivileged of the brand for any extensive period of time. BL also leads creating positive perceptions of the brand. Batra (2012), also states that consumers' love for a brand consists of perceived quality, satisfaction and loyalty. The increased focus on BL has strengthened its conceptualization rather than its consequences.

Carroll and Ahuvia (2006), finds that the brands which shape **AQ2** consumer image results in more powerful emotional responses. BL defines as the extent of emotional attachment a satisfied customer has for a brand (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). This can also include the bareness a consumer feels when that brand is not with him. This can be explained as how much depressed a customer feels when he is not using that brand or that brand is not with him for some reason.

H_5: BL moderates the relationship among BT, DCS, BS, BC and BA.
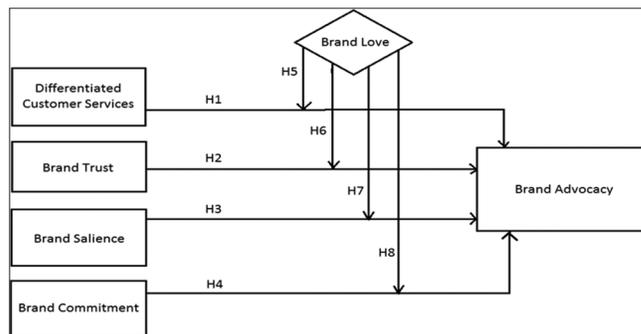
Theoretical model

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is quantitative in nature and the type of the investigation is causal study because it investigates the extent and nature of cause-effect relationship of variables and the purpose of the study is to test the developed hypothesis on the basis of previous literatures and current demographics. It investigates the relationship between different variables that were identified in the gaps of previous researches. In order to avoid biasness, a structured questionnaire was handed over to the respondents questions of which were adapted from the past research papers. The objective of the study is to check the relationship between the variables that were taken and the effect of moderator BL between independent and dependent variables.

Convenience sampling method has been used to collect data from the respondents. This sampling technique has been used to gather

the data from the respondents who are easily available and willing to provide the information. Youngsters are more willing to talk about their brands and like to give feedback. Clothing industry has been selected because there is saturation of clothing brands in Islamabad and youngsters are more conscious to wear the best suited brand. Data has been gathered from university students and offices. Both females and males were the respondents.

A total of 300 questionnaires were floated out of which 275 were received that were completely filled and valid. Frequency of males is 184 and frequency of females is 91. Total percentage of male respondents was 66.9% and of female was 33.1%. The major respondents were the youngsters of age 18-22 with frequency 132,

then 23-27 with frequency 109 and then were the respondents with age group of 28-32 with frequency 34.

4. RESULTS

To analyze the data, quantitative techniques are used and for that purpose Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 20 has been used to run the different tests. First of all instrument reliability has been checked which by results is reliable to gather further data for which pilot testing has been performed. In order to know about the reliability of the data, Cronbach alpha test has been used. And to test the hypotheses, correlation analysis is done in order to know about the level of relationship between independent, dependent and moderator variable (see Table 1). Also regression analysis is done in order to check the significance level of independent variables on dependent variable. Study took BL as a moderator and moderation test explained by Baron and Kenny has been applied to check BL moderating effect on independent variables.

In this study, two types of demographic information have been collected gender and age. The Figure 2 in the appendix shows that the frequency of male is 184 while frequency of female is 91. The total frequency of both males and female combined is 275. The percentage of male respondents is 66.9% while the percentage of females is 33.1%. The respondents having age group 23-27 their frequency is 109. The respondents having age group between 28 and 32 their frequency is 34.

Cronbach alpha has been used to check the inter item consistency. Cronbach alpha value of all the variables is >0.6 which shows that the instrument that has been used is reliable. The value of Cronbach alpha of BL is 0.747, Cronbach alpha value of BT is 0.774, the Cronbach alpha value of DCS s is 0.790, the Cronbach alpha value of BC is 0.766, the value of Cronbach alpha of BS is 0.839 and the Cronbach alpha value of BA is 0.674. The reliability of data must be >0.6 (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, and Tatham, 2006).

Table 1: Correlation matrix

	BT	DCS	BC	BS	BL	BA
BT	1	-	-	-	-	-
DCS	0.671**	1	-	-	-	-
BC	0.674**	0.536**	1	-	-	-
BS	0.546**	0.635**	0.428**	1	-	-
BL	0.663**	0.615**	0.496**	0.559**	1	-
BA	0.588**	0.638**	0.445**	0.808**	0.611**	1

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed). DCS: Differentiated customer services, BT: Brand trust, BS: Brand salience, BC: Brand commitment, BL: Brand love, BA: Brand advocacy

Table 2: Model summary

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Standard error of the estimate	Durbin–Watson
1	0.831[a]	0.691	0.687	0.38710	1.836

[a]Predictors: (Constant), BS, BC, DCS, BT

Table 3: Normality analysis

Construct	Skewness	Kurtosis
BT	1.32	0.95
DCS	0.912	0.71
BC	1.11	0.73
BS	1.43	0.99
BL	0.87	1.21
BA	1.57	0.87

Table 4: Coefficients[a]

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	T	Significant	Collinearity statistics	
	B	Standard error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1							
(Constant)	0.163	0.149		1.089	0.277		
BT	0.141	0.050	0.150	2.808	0.005	0.400	2.499
DCS	0.118	0.047	0.128	2.508	0.013	0.440	2.271
BC	0.000	0.037	0.000	−0.016	0.987	0.533	1.878
BS	0.677	0.047	0.645	14.406	0.000	0.570	1.756

[a]Dependent variable: BA. DCS: Differentiated customer services, BT: Brand trust, BS: Brand salience, BC: Brand commitment, VIF: Variance inflation factor

Hence, value for relialbility is >0.6 for all variables Skewness and kurtosis tells us the normality of the data. Skewness value should have to be between −1 to +1 and kurtosis value should have to be in between +3 and −3. Table 3 shows that the value of skewness and kurtosis lies in inacceptable range.

4.1. Hypotheses Testing

This section provides the results of the hypotheses testing for the current study based on regression analysis.

4.2. Regression Analysis

The regression analysis is a process of estimating relationship among variables. It also enables to check independent variables' impact on dependent variables. Tables 2 and 4 are showing the regression analysis values.

Table 2 shows the value of adjust R^2 which is 0.687 which shows that 69% variation can be occurred in the dependent variable due to independent variables.

The beta value for BT is 0.150 which shows that 15% variation will be occurred in the BA due to BT. It also explains the positive significant impact of BT on BA. The beta value for DCS is 0.128 which shows that 13% variation will be occurred in the BA due to BT. It also explains the positive significant impact of DCS on BA. The beta value for BC is −0.016 which shows that 6% variation will be occurred in the BA due to BT. It also explains the negative insignificant impact of BC on BA. The beta value for BS is 0.645 which shows that 65% variation will be occurred in the BA due to BT. It also explains the strong positive significant impact of BS on BA.

4.3. Moderation Analysis

The moderation results shows that BL moderates the relationship among BT, BS, DCS, and BA. Furthermore, insignificant relationship was found between BC and BA (Table 5).

5. CONCLUSION

This study has identified why it is necessary for brands to have their advocates. Many brands today offer same kind and quality of products. This research study help in identifying which factors should be considered by the top management while designing a marketing strategy. For instance, BT develops when the perceived product attributes and actual product attributes are same. That would create customer satisfaction and emotional attachment and turn customer into their advocates. This research study has multiple managerial implications for brands that are more focused towards making their brand advocates and wants to stay competitive in the market. They should consider these critical factors to be part of their marketing strategy.

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Privacy Statement:

Thank you for taking part in our research project. Provision of information is voluntary. We promise to protect your privacy and treat the information you give us as confidential. The information you provide will be used only for research purposes. Your decisions about participating in a study, responding to specific questions, or discontinuing participation will be respected without question.

Age group: (18-22) - (23-27) - (28-32)

Gender: Male/Female

I recommend my favorite clothing brand to the other people	OSD	OD	ON	OA	OSA
I talk directly to other people about my experience with the brand	OSD	OD	ON	OA	OSA
I will leave positive comments about my favorite clothing brand	OSD	OD	ON	OA	OSA
I would like to try new products introduced under this clothing brand name	OSD	OD	ON	OA	OSA
If my favorite clothing brand make something I didn't like I would be willing to give it another chance	OSD	OD	ON	OA	OSA
Using favorite clothing brand's products makes me feel happy	OSD	OD	ON	OA	OSA
This brand is totally awesome	OSD	OD	ON	OA	OSA
I love my favorite clothing brand	OSD	OD	ON	OA	OSA
The clothing brand I love is a pure delight	OSD	OD	ON	OA	OSA
I'm very attached to my favorite clothing brand	OSD	OD	ON	OA	OSA
I rely on my favorite clothing brand	OSD	OD	ON	OA	OSA
The clothing brand I love is honest in providing what they claim	OSD	OD	ON	OA	OSA
I have complete trust in my favorite clothing brand	OSD	OD	ON	OA	OSA
I would like to buy every new product of my favorite clothing brand because it is best for my situation	OSD	OD	ON	OA	OSA
I would recommend my favorite clothing brand to my friends because I trust my brand	OSD	OD	ON	OA	OSA
My favorite clothing brand offers me the services that satisfy my needs	OSD	OD	ON	OA	OSA
My favorite clothing brand provides me with the services that I couldn't find in another brand	OSD	OD	ON	OA	OSA
I would like to make repeat purchases because of good service quality of my favorite clothing brand	OSD	OD	ON	OA	OSA
I would like to recommend my favorite clothing brand to a friend due to good service quality	OSD	OD	ON	OA	OSA
If I choose another brand, I wouldn't obtain the services as I'm getting now from my favorite clothing brand	OSD	OD	ON	OA	OSA
I feel emotionally attached to my favorite clothing brand	OSD	OD	ON	OA	OSA
My favorite clothing brand has a great deal of personal meaning for me	OSD	OD	ON	OA	OSA
I feel a strong sense of identification with my favorite clothing brand	OSD	OD	ON	OA	OSA
It would be very hard for me to switch away from my favorite clothing brand even if I wanted to	OSD	OD	ON	OA	OSA
My life would be disrupted if I switched away from my favorite clothing brand	OSD	OD	ON	OA	OSA
My favorite clothing brand is a popular brand	OSD	OD	ON	OA	OSA
My favorite clothing brand is a comparatively recallable brand to me	OSD	OD	ON	OA	OSA
I can quickly recall the symbol or logo of my favorite clothing brand	OSD	OD	ON	OA	OSA
I do not have any difficulty in imagining my favorite clothing brand in my mind	OSD	OD	ON	OA	OSA

SD: Strongly disagree, D: Disagree, N: Neutral, A: Agree, SA: Strongly agree