EPH-International Journal of Business & Management Science

A COMPARATIVE AND INTEGRATIVE REVIEW OF AAKER AND KELLER: TOWARDS A THREE-LAYER FRAMEWORK OF BRAND EQUITY

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Article History
***Received :** 2026-04-14*
***Revised :** 2026-06-10*
***Accepted :** 2026-07-15*
***Published :** 2026-07-30*

ABSTRACT
This review paper develops an integrative framework that reconciles Aaker's asset-based model and Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) pyramid, two dominant but traditionally parallel perspectives in brand equity research. While prior studies have compared these frameworks, they have largely remained analytically separate. This study synthesises their theoretical foundations, structural differences, and areas of complementarity through an integrative review approach. Aaker conceptualises brand equity as a portfolio of strategic assets, whereas Keller frames it as a staged process of consumer relationship development. Building on this distinction, the paper proposes a three-layer framework integrating structural foundations, consumer processes, and market outcomes, with brand trust as a mediating mechanism. Ten theoretical propositions are derived to guide future empirical research across digital, cross-cultural, and sustainability contexts. By formalising the integration of asset-based and consumer-based perspectives, this review contributes to advancing brand equity theory and offers a structured basis for both academic research and managerial application.

***Keywords**: brand equity, Aaker model, Keller CBBE, integrative review, theoretical integration, brand trust*

1. Introduction

Brand equity is a cross-fertilization of strategic management and consumer psychology. Over the past few decades, there have been two models that have been the center of scholarly and practitioner discussion: Aaker's (1991, 1996) asset-based model, and Keller's (1993, 2001) Customer Based Brand Equity (CBBE) framework. Each is a different line of thought. Aaker, an ad man by trade, adheres to the strategic management and resource based theory (Barney, 1991; Wernerfelt, 1984) that sees equity as a stock of intangible assets that provide competitive advantage. Associative memory theory (Anderson, 1983; Collins & Loftus, 1975) is the basis for locating equity in consumer knowledge structures (Keller, 1987b).

Such models have been mostly regarded as independent paradigms. The academics tend to stick with one or another depending on their disciplinary background; the practitioners tend to follow which one would be appropriate for the measurement context they are currently in. The cost of this disconnection is also substantial in terms of ideas: each model highlights aspects that the other does not highlight; and considering them as competitors is a way of undermining theoretical advances. While there are previous comparisons of the two frameworks, most have focused on the ways in which they are congruent or discongruent, rather than seeking a formal integration with a common structural architecture.

Vol. 12 Issue 07 (July 2026)
ISSN: 2208-2190 Pages-116-126
DOI: https://doi.org/10.69980/73c18b62
This paper fills that void. We seek both to critically compare both models that are developed from their theoretical bases, conceptual definitions, dimensional structures and measurement methods, and to draw out their complementary mechanisms and to develop a three-layer integrative model, and to formulate ten theoretical propositions and a contemporary research agenda that further extends both models into digital, cross-cultural and sustainability contexts.

1.1Research Objective and Methodology
The general goal of this study is to overcome the traditional dichotomous treatment of Aaker's asset-based model and Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model to create an integrative perspective with a theoretical basis. Specifically, Aaker's five dimensions are considered to be the structure of the brand equity, and Keller's pyramid is understood as a process architecture for the development of the consumer relationship. Brand trust is proposed as a critical mediator between these basic components and market and behavioural outcomes.
In order to achieve this objective, the study adopts the integrative review approach, which aims at reviewing and consolidating the existing theoretical frameworks on brand equity. This is not only a comparison of the two frameworks, but it is also an identification of the convergence and divergence to develop a more complete conceptual understanding of the two.
It has been reviewed in three steps. The first stage was identifying the relevant literature, which was found by performing a search on the available academic sources such as Google Scholar, literature sources that are indexed on Scopus, and top marketing journals with the keywords, such as “brand equity,” “Aaker model,” “Keller model,” and “customer-based brand equity.”
The second step was to screen identified studies based on relevance, theory contribution and conceptualization. Articles selected were peer-reviewed, it was ensured that they were foundational and/or theoretical, while non-scholarly and redundant articles were not selected to preserve the academic rigor.
The third stage of the process involved a comparative analysis of the literature selected. The core elements, structures, and underlying assumptions of both frameworks were systematically analyzed to reveal their complementarities, overlaps, and limitations. This synthesis is essential for establishing the basis of an integrative framework that can bridge theory and practice with relevance to today's marketing contexts.

2. Theoretical Foundations
2.1 Disciplinary Roots and Epistemological Commitments
Aaker's framework was a product of strategic management practices of the late 1980s. In 1991, he published a book that combined the lessons of industrial organisation economics and resource-based theory, which viewed brands as intangible assets that would provide lasting competitive advantage. The intellectual project was practical – to provide managers with ideas to audit and utilise brand value. His five dimensions were developed by literature synthesis and logical deduction; not by formal testing of a theory, and this pragmatic epistemology helps to elucidate the continuing practitioner acceptance for the model.
The Keller's CBBE model is based on cognitive psychology theory, associative network memory theory (Anderson, 1983; Collins & Loftus, 1975). Brand equity is defined as a brand's "nodes and links" in the consumer's memory that flexibly capture such attributes as strength, favorability and uniqueness, and can be used to generate differential brand response. The CBBE model is the foundation of academic research because of this positivist epistemology that leads to falsifiable hypotheses, and the pragmatism of Aaker supports consulting adoption. This puts their boundaries in services, B2B and digital contexts in a business-to-consumer business setting, which is used for development, and makes sense to the limitations in those areas as they will be discussed further on in this paper.

2.2 Conceptualisation of Brand Equity
Brand equity, according to Aaker (1991, p. 15), is a 'set of brand assets and liabilities associated with a brand, its name and symbol, which add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service' The formulation is significant, because it's a formulation that benefits the firm and the consumer; equity is the result of both, and the asset/liability framework is an opportunity for a financial valuation. The definition places some emphasis on the object of the brand and some on the perception of the consumer, establishing a fruitful opposition between the objective and the subjective registers.
Keller (1993, p. 2) defines the customer based brand equity as 'the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand'. There are three elements that support this definition. The differential effect is a relational effect because it must be compared to an unbranded equivalent. Brand knowledge (awareness & image) is organized in an associative memory network. Consumer response refers to perceptions, preferences and behaviours that are triggered by marketing activity. This parsimonious definition

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ISSN: 2208-2190 Pages-116-126
DOI: https://doi.org/10.69980/73c18b62
places the whole concept of equity within the consumers' mind, making measurement of their brands easier and ignoring the institutional aspects of brand value. The literature indicates that the Aaker and Keller frameworks cover complementary aspects of brand equity; they can be synthesized and integrated.

3. Model Structures and Dimensions

3.1 Aaker's Brand Equity Model

According to Aaker (1991, 1996), brand equity can be viewed as five types of assets and liabilities. The parallel structure (building up all dimensions, not in sequence) provides strategic width: managers can go through each dimension separately or audit each dimension and develop interventions for each dimension.

Table 1: Aaker's Brand Equity Dimensions

Dimension	Definition	Strategic Function
Brand Awareness	Ability of potential customers to recognise or recall a brand within a product category	Consideration set inclusion; learning advantage; signals market commitment
Brand Associations	Any information linked in memory to the brand	Differentiation; information processing; basis for extension credibility
Perceived Quality	Customer's overall judgement of excellence or superiority relative to alternatives	Price premium justification; purchase consideration; extension credibility
Brand Loyalty	Attachment to a brand across a five-level taxonomy from switchers to committed buyers	Reduced marketing cost; competitive response time; entry barrier creation
Proprietary Assets	Patents, trademarks, channel relationships, and proprietary knowledge	Structural competitive protection; extension rights; resource-based advantage

These are all part of a series of trademark metrics tracked by Aaker (1996) that go beyond perception to market metrics like share, relative price indices, and distribution coverage. This system represents the most comprehensive application of his system.

3.2 Keller's CBBE Pyramid

Keller (2001, 2013) offers a four-stage hierarchical sequence for building brands. Each step is an objective that needs to be significantly accomplished before the next can be seriously considered. The pyramid's principle of logic is based on psychology; consumer relationship development is not instant or can be undone without conscious effort.

Table 2: Keller's CBBE Pyramid

Stage	Block	Core Construct	Key Sub-Dimensions
4-Relationship	Resonance	Intensity and depth of consumer-brand bond	Behavioural loyalty; attitudinal attachment; community; active engagement
3-Response	Judgements	Cognitive brand evaluations	Quality; credibility; consideration; superiority
3-Response	Feelings	Affective brand responses	Warmth; fun; excitement; security; social approval; self-respect
2-Meaning	Performance	Functional brand delivery	Primary characteristics; reliability; durability; style; price

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ISSN: 2208-2190 Pages-116-126
DOI: https://doi.org/10.69980/73c18b62

Stage	Block	Core Construct	Key Sub-Dimensions
2- Meaning	Imagery	Symbolic brand associations	User profiles; usage situations; personality; heritage
1- Identity	Salience	Depth and breadth of brand awareness	Category identification; needs satisfaction; recall context breadth

The ultimate stage is pyramid's peak resonance, in which consumers not only reorder the brand, but show attitudinal attachment with other users, and engage with the brand beyond the purchase. The Integrated Brands that provide strength on both rational (performance-judgements) and emotional (imagery-feelings) pathways show greater resonance than integrated brands that provide only one of these paths (Zarantonello and Schmitt 2010).

3.3 Structural Comparison

Table 3: Comparative Structure of the Two Frameworks

Feature	Aaker Model	Keller CBBE Model
Core metaphor	Brand as portfolio of assets	Brand as consumer knowledge structure
Architecture	Five parallel dimensions	Hierarchical pyramid - 4 stages, 6 blocks
Temporal logic	Dimensions co-exist; loyalty as outcome	Sequential; each stage depends on prior
Level of analysis	Brand as strategic resource	Consumer-brand relationship
Consumer orientation	Moderate shared with firm perspective	Primary all constructs consumer-based
Firm orientation	Strong includes market and financial outcomes	Moderate implied in resonance outcomes
Causal specification	Unspecified across dimensions	Implied hierarchical sequence
Theoretical precision	Moderate pragmatist	High positivist
Managerial accessibility	High intuitive categories	Moderate requires diagnostic process

Structural contrast shows complementarity and not competition. Aaker's parallel architecture allows for strategic breadth, and allows for dimensional auditing without interfering with one another, while Keller's hierarchy allows for a process depth, and will reveal any process bottlenecks in consumer relationship development. Aaker's approach is more comprehensive than Keller's, and includes structural strengths, such as proprietary assets, market performance, which are systematically underweighted by his consumer-only focus. Whereas Aaker's loyalty taxonomy forecasts, but doesn't fully explain, psychological progression dynamics and contemporary forms of relationships, community, and active engagement, Keller captures them.

4. Measurement Approaches

4.1 Aaker-Based Measurement

One of the most commonly-used operationalisations of the Aaker framework comes from Yoo and Donthu (2001), who demonstrated a multidimensional scale in both Korean and American samples. Because of high empirical correlation, brand awareness and brand associations were collapsed into one overall factor, as there was conceptual overlap, and questions regarding discriminant validity were raised. These measures were expanded by Netemeyer et al. (2004) who showed that they predicted purchase intention and willingness to pay, a finding that was also replicated with a measure of perceived uniqueness.

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ISSN: 2208-2190 Pages-116-126
DOI: https://doi.org/10.69980/73c18b62
Aaker's pragmatist approach means that measurement is flexible, and the dimensions can be customized to the context. This flexibility underpins the continued relevance of the Brand Equity Ten. The framework does not specify how dimensional changes impact overall equity; however, which reduces the ability to isolate the impacts of dimensional changes; and the lack of attention to proprietary assets in empirical studies creates a disconnect between the conceptual scope of the framework and the operational application.

4.2 Keller-Based Measurement

Keller (2001) suggests a range of stage-specific indicators along the CBBE pyramid such as recall indicators (salience), performance indicators (functional evaluation), personality indicators (imagery), attitudinal indicators, and behavioural indicators (resonance). Measurement usually incorporates both cognitive, affective and behavioural measures. While the CBBE pyramid is well conceptually developed, the full implementation of it in the form of an empirical pyramid is still limited. However, most studies measure only part of the relationships because of the complexity of the measurements, particularly for higher order constructs like feelings and resonance (Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2010). The empirical literature, therefore, focuses on testing pieces of the hierarchy instead of on the entire structure, limiting cumulative theory development.

5. Empirical Evidence and Critical Assessment

5.1 Validation Evidence

There has been significant validation of Aaker's dimensions in a variety of settings. Consistent positive associations between awareness, associations, perceived quality, loyalty, and financial brand performance are confirmed by meta-analytic evidence (O'Sullivan & Murphy, 2022). Dimensional stability is generally confirmed across all cultures, and its importance depends on the level of market maturity: In emerging markets, perceived quality is a key equity driver, whereas symbolic associations are more relevant in more saturated markets.

There has been some validation for Keller's model, specifically for the resonance construct. The higher the resonance score, the better the price premiums and retention rates (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). There is empirical evidence for the dual pathway (rational performance judgements; emotional imagery-feelings) structure resulting from various studies. Zarantonello and Schmitt (2010) found evidence showing that integrated dual pathway strength results in better resonance results. However, very few studies have tested the full staircase model, and it is still not fully confirmed with longitudinal data that each step of the model completely mediates the next step of the model.

5.2 Critical Assessment

There are three major disadvantages to Aaker's framework. First, causal linkages between dimensions are not specified in the absence of them, which decreases the theoretical precision, and limits the empirical testing of the mechanistic claims. Second, dimensional overlap, specifically the conceptual complexity of awareness, associations and perceived quality, is the problem with discriminant validity, as evidenced by the Yoo and Donthu's (2001) combined factor solutioning. Third, the proprietary assets dimension, which is crucial in the pharmaceutical and technology-intensive sectors, has not been studied very much in consumer research, thus leaving a niche between the broad conception of the model and its empirical application.

There are constraints on Keller's framework. This is a 6-construct, 4-stage model that requires lots of data to be implemented, so it is difficult to be practical with this model, especially in contexts with limited resources. The cultural assumptions ingrained in the pyramid, based on Western, individualistic consumer behaviour theory, may not be equally applicable to collectivist markets where brand community is a stronger force than individual attachment and social approval is given differently. Moreover, the linear perspective of brand building in the model does not offer much help for brands that are in a state of decline or need a brand rehabilitation, where the problem is pyramid regression instead of climb.

6. Synthesis and Integrative Framework Development

The second part, an extension of the literature synthesis, is an integrative framework that connects the two main strands. The role of brand trust as the mediating variable is justified since the literature has already identified brand trust as a link between cognitive brand evaluations and behavioral responses in situations where there is perceived risk and relational exchange. Other measures exist, like satisfaction and commitment, but trust is a more basic mechanism that can be used to link brand perceptions with enduring consumer reactions.

6.1 Conceptual Architecture

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The comparative study creates a definite platform for integration. The dimensions of Aaker and the constructs of Keller are complementary because the former describes the nature of brand equity as a strategic asset while the latter describes the stages in the process of building brand equity. These are not two competing accounts of the same phenomenon; but two different perspectives on the same phenomenon.

This integrative proposal is a three-layer structure. This layer is called "Brand Foundations" and consists of five dimensions: awareness depth, awareness breadth, association strength, association favourability, perceived quality, behavioural loyalty, attitudinal loyalty, and proprietary assets. The layers are: Layer 2, Brand Building Processes: identity and salience, meaning through performance and imagery, consumer responses through judgements and feelings, and relationship development through resonance. Brand Outcomes is taken up in the four consumer resonance components in Layer 3, as well as in market performance metrics like share and relative price, and financial value metrics like brand valuation and acquisition premiums.

Brand trust (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) is nestled between the Layers 1 and 2 and between the Layers 2 and 3. Trust is the mediator because as consumers move from one stage of the CBBE pyramid to another, credibility perceptions are connected to the process. For high-involvement and credence-based categories, where quality cannot be verified before purchase or even after, credibility is a crucial factor. Initial support for this mediating architecture comes from empirical research in pharmaceutical branding which has identified trust as a mediator between the dimensions of brand equity and consumer loyalty (Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2010).

The proposed framework will overcome a longstanding gap between strategic and behavioural approaches and connect structural resource-based elements with consumer-level psychological processes to extend the existing brand equity literature. This is a match-up which allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the construction and realisation of brand value in the organisational and consumer domains.

Table 4: Complementary Contributions of the Two Frameworks

Level of Analysis	Aaker Contribution	Keller Contribution
Strategic	Brand as competitive asset; dimensional portfolio	Sequential brand-building stages; long-term vision
Psychological	Association types; loyalty hierarchy	Memory structures; processing pathways
Operational	Dimensional tracking; market performance metrics	Diagnostic blocks; intervention points
Outcome	Brand value for firm and customer	Brand resonance as relationship strength

6.2 Theoretical Propositions

The following theory propositions are proposed in light of the integrative synthesis. A set of 10 theoretical propositions are presented from the integrative framework. Each defines a relationship, sets out boundary conditions and makes empirically testable hypotheses for further research.

Proposition 1 (Awareness–Salience Convergence): Brand awareness and brand salience jointly predict consideration set inclusion. Awareness breadth exerts stronger influence in low-involvement, high-frequency categories, while awareness depth is more consequential in high-involvement, infrequent purchase contexts.

Proposition 2 (Association–Meaning Linkages): Aaker's brand associations encompass both Keller's performance and imagery dimensions. Performance-related associations dominate in utilitarian and B2B contexts; imagery-related associations carry greater weight in hedonic and symbolic consumption settings.

Proposition 3 (Perceived Quality–Trust Mediation): The relationship between perceived quality and brand performance outcomes is mediated by consumer trust. Trust mediation is stronger in services and credence goods than in search goods, due to the inherent quality-verification asymmetry.

Proposition 4 (Resonance–Loyalty Hierarchy): Keller's resonance extends beyond and encompasses Aaker's loyalty construct. The resonance components exhibit sequential progression: behavioural loyalty precedes attitudinal attachment, which precedes community identification, which precedes active engagement.

Proposition 5 (Dual Pathway Synergy): The rational pathway (salience-performance-judgements-resonance) and emotional pathway (salience-imagery-feelings-resonance) interact synergistically. Brands simultaneously strong on both pathways generate higher resonance than brands optimising either pathway independently.

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Proposition 6 (Temporal Dynamics): The pyramid's sequential logic governs new brand building but applies differently to brand extensions, turnarounds, and crisis recovery. For extensions, meaning transfers from the parent; for turnarounds, brands require deliberate reconstruction at lower pyramid levels.
Proposition 7 (Proprietary Assets Moderation): Aaker's proprietary assets moderate the relationship between consumer-based brand equity and financial value. This moderating effect is strongest in technology-intensive and regulated industries, where imitation barriers amplify the financial returns to consumer equity.
Proposition 8 (Cultural Contingency): The dual pathways exhibit culturally patterned variation. Collectivist cultures (Hofstede, 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 1991) privilege the emotional pathway, while individualist cultures exhibit more balanced pathway utilisation. Community manifests as in-group identification in collectivist contexts and as voluntary affiliation in individualist ones.
Proposition 9 (Digital Acceleration): Digital environments alter the relative weight of Aaker's dimensions elevating digital experience as a perceived quality signal and engagement as the primary loyalty indicator and can accelerate pyramid progression through simultaneous multi-stage exposure via social and viral mechanisms.
Proposition 10 (Unified Model): Brand equity is optimally conceptualised as a three-layer phenomenon: foundational assets (Aaker), consumer relationship building processes (Keller), and market and financial outcomes. These relationships are partially mediated by trust and moderated by product category, cultural context, and digital environment.
As an integrative review, this study contributes by consolidating fragmented theoretical perspectives into a unified structure, thereby extending the explanatory scope of brand equity research.

7. Contemporary Challenges and Theoretical Extensions

7.1 Digital Transformation

Both frameworks are tested in structurally similar ways in the digital environment, and demonstrate their complementarity as diagnostic tools. According to Aaker, the digital presence has taken the concept of awareness away from the shelf and into search-share and algorithmic discovery is now a part of advertising. Online constructions built by means of these forums, leveraged on the user-generated content and the influence of others, and what could be referred to as community associations, are not predicted by Aaker's taxonomy. In the digital world, today usability of websites, functions of applications and consistency across different platforms convey as much of the competence as the physical characteristics of the product. Unlike repeat purchases, this loyalty is not only measured by repeat purchase, but by engagement variables like time on page, content sharing, engagement in community and more; thus, Aaker's five tier taxonomy has to be expanded.
In Keller's model, there are digital channels that work on all levels of the pyramid. Viral methods can rapidly create salience the space that used to take sustained advertising investment. Performance is encountered via digital interfaces and is a key product experience rather than a communication medium. Social media content and influencers are used to create imagery. The resonance of these aspects carries over to digital communities and online brand advocacy, encompassing content creation, forum engagement, and continued social interaction that surpasses the transaction. Managers of digital-native brands need both frameworks' extensions a set of monitoring metrics from Aaker's dimension and a set of diagnostics from Keller's pyramid, for the quality of digital consumer experience.

7.2 Sustainability and Purpose-Driven Branding

The landscapes of established brands are changing as environmental and social issues become a defining element of their associations, and new entrants are emerging with ‘environment and social issues’ as their core brand values. Sustainability becomes an association type in its own right in Aaker's framework, with growing salience, as it is part of what is evaluated as perceived quality (consumers consider, among other factors, the ethical nature of the production in their evaluation), and as a source of new loyalty based on value alignment, not just product preference. In Keller's model, sustainability adds performance to the mix by also committing to environmental endeavors and ethical sourcing, and imagery is now starting to include purpose positioning. Ethical judgments are also part of judgments these days, as consumers are not just concerned with whether a brand performs well, but they are also concerned whether there is a positive impact from the brand; feelings of pride and shared commitment strengthen the resonance through the formation of a community based on a purpose. Both models need additions in sustainability to be theoretically viable for handling contemporary brand management.

7.3 Cross-Cultural Validity

Both models were extracted from data of western consumer behaviors and their applicability in other cultures should be examined systematically. According to Aaker, the content of the association needs to be localized:

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ISSN: 2208-2190 Pages-116-126
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the meaning of brand can have a symbolic connotation in one cultural setting, while it has a semantic neutral or negative connotation in another (Hofstede, 2001). Cultural differences exist in the perceived quality standards as well as in the balance between durability and aesthetics in quality inferences. Loyalty is different in collectivist and individualist cultures: Markus and Kitayama (1991) show that interdependent self-construals in collectivist cultures lead to greater brand relationships with the community, whereas independent self-construals in individualist cultures encourage expressions of identity through brand choice.

In Keller's pyramid, the emotional route (imagery-feelings-resonance) is probably the most significant pathway in collectivist markets, where feelings of social identity and emotional bonds are the most important forces for consumption. The community resonance dimension is not the same: collectivist environments foster feelings of belonging to the in-group, individualist environments foster voluntary membership in an out-group. Keller's feeling taxonomy is based on western classifications of emotions and needs and will need to be adapted across cultures to be a universal diagnostic. These questions are a very important but underfunded research frontier.

8. Managerial Implications

8.1 Framework Selection Guidance

Managers are not required to make a choice between Aaker and Keller based on discipline, but should rather decide on the frameworks to use depending on the strategic question being asked. Based on the comparative analysis presented in the above sections the following guidance is provided.

Table 5: Model Selection Guidance for Managers

Strategic Objective	Primary Framework	Supplementary Framework	Rationale
Brand valuation	Aaker	Keller	Asset framing aligns with financial reporting; resonance metrics explain valuation drivers
Brand tracking	Aaker	Keller	Aaker enables efficient periodic measurement; Keller provides deep-dive diagnostics when tracking reveals issues
Brand building strategy	Keller	Aaker	Pyramid guides stage-specific investment; Aaker ensures competitive differentiation across dimensions
Extension planning	Aaker	Keller	Perceived quality predicts extension acceptance; imagery assessment evaluates symbolic fit
Crisis management	Aaker	Keller	Loyalty taxonomy identifies vulnerable segments; pyramid pinpoints damage location
Digital brand building	Integrated		Digital environments simultaneously implicate both frameworks' domains

8.2 Integrated Brand Management Process

This paper proposes a different approach that sequentially combines the two processes in five steps. The first step, Foundation Audit, is designed to determine baseline assessment as per Aaker's five dimensions: mapping awareness across segments and contexts, auditing associations for strength, favourability and uniqueness, assessing perceived quality relative to key competitors, profiling loyalty across Aaker's five levels and inventorying proprietary assets. In Step 2, Pyramid Diagnosis, the framework of Keller is used to pinpoint the obstacles to consumer relationships at each pyramid level. Gap Analysis (Step 3) involves comparing the actual brand profile with the desired position in the competitive arena and measuring the relative strength of the brand on rational and emotional levels. Steps 4: Strategy Development acknowledges gaps, develops foundational assets, creates meaning through performance investment and imagery cultivation, generates positive cognitive and affective responses, and deepens relationships through community and engagement initiatives. Step 5, Measurement Dashboard brings together all of these measures from both frameworks (awareness recall to attitudinal attachment), in addition to digital trace and market performance metrics.

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ISSN: 2208-2190 Pages-116-126
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9. Future Research Directions

This review highlights a number of priority research areas to enhance brand equity studies. First, there is less empirical support for the full CBBE pyramid, especially in terms of the full mediation of each stage by subsequent ones. Second, the interrelationships among Aaker's dimensions need to be explored, particularly in relation to the potential for cause and effect and for reciprocal effects. Thirdly, the mediation mechanism of brand trust needs to be tested systematically in different product categories and market situations.

Another important area of research is digital environments. Future research ought to explore whether brands that are digital-native develop bottom-of-the-pyramid equity differently from other brands and whether the sequential logic of equity building is compromised by the increased number and length of exposure stages. Cross-cultural validation is also needed, especially for the cross-cultural applicability of the emotional constructs developed by Keller, and for the validity of the dimensions of Aaker across cultures. Theoretical integration in sustainability also needs to be deeper, to find out if it is a new type of association or if it is included within the current dimensions.

Methodologically, there is a need to increase the use of digital trace data, experimental designs, and longitudinal designs to test temporal changes and causal relationships in the field. These methods can help reinforce the empirical basis of brand equity theory and help validate the integrative framework put forth in this study.

More recently, the concept of brand equity has been expanded to the digital and omnichannel realms, as the focus has shifted to interactive engagement, platform-based branding, and data-driven customer insights, all of which contribute to the brand's value.

Table 6: Future Research Priorities

Priority	Central Research Questions	Recommended Methods
Full CBBE pyramid testing	Does each stage fully mediate the pyramid progression? Can resonance form without traversing all stages?	Three-wave longitudinal SEM; experimental manipulation of pyramid levels
Aaker dimension interrelationships	Does perceived quality mediate the awareness-to-loyalty relationship? Are there reciprocal effects between dimensions?	Longitudinal panel data; field experiments; causal mediation analysis
Trust as mediating mechanism	Does trust mediate between brand building processes and outcomes across categories? How do brand transgressions differentially affect Aaker dimensions vs. Keller stages?	Multi-context survey studies; natural experiments exploiting brand crises
Digital-native brand building	Do digital-first brands follow different equity development pathways? Can viral mechanisms compress pyramid progression?	Digital ethnography; longitudinal tracking of digital-native brands; big data analytics
Cross-cultural invariance	Are Keller's feeling types and dual pathways valid in collectivist markets? Do Aaker's dimensions exhibit equivalent factor structures across cultural contexts?	Multi-group SEM; cross-national survey studies; qualitative comparative analysis
Sustainability as association type	Does sustainability function as a distinct association type or integrate with existing dimensions? Under what conditions does it generate resonance vs. mere positive judgement?	Experimental designs; longitudinal tracking; consumer segmentation studies

The proposed framework may be empirically tested using survey-based designs and structural equation modelling to examine the relationships among dimensions, process stages, and outcomes. Experimental and longitudinal approaches may further capture dynamic brand-building processes.

10. Conclusion

The findings of this study show that the asset-based model of Aaker and the Customer Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model of Keller are not conflicting, but complementary approaches which focus on different aspects of brand equity, namely structural and behavioural aspects. Aaker defines brand equity as a set of strategic assets, and Keller describes the path by which the assets can be converted to consumer perceptions and relationships. The study builds on these viewpoints to suggest a holistic framework of three layers: structural foundations, process architecture, and market outcomes, with brand trust as a pivotal mediating process. It is an integrative study in the sense that it provides a linking thread between the level of strategic asset of the firm and the level of consumer level brand response and thus addresses a gap in literature that had been present for a long time. The proposed framework is applicable for research and practice. It provides a context for empirical testing by scholars in a variety of contexts including a digital, cross-cultural and sustainability-oriented one. It emphasizes for the practitioners the importance of matching the internal brand-building process with the external process of the consumer's brand engagement in order to create continuous brand value. Although this study has its contribution, the study is conceptual in nature. The proposed framework can be tested empirically in future studies, and the effects of brand trust in other market conditions can be investigated, as well as its usefulness in new contexts of omnichannel marketing or data-driven marketing.

Conflict of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Ethical Approval: Not applicable.

Acknowledgements: The authors would like to acknowledge the academic environment and institutional support that contributed to the development of this research.

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ISSN: 2208-2190 Pages-116-126
DOI: https://doi.org/10.69980/73c18b62
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