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Heritage Branding, Customer Loyalty, and Brand Equity of Marikina Shoes: Toward a Strategic Heritage-Driven Business Sustainability Framework

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ABSTRACT

The Marikina footwear industry represents one of the Philippines' most enduring heritage-based industries, recognized for its craftsmanship, cultural significance, and contribution to local economic development. Despite its historical prominence, the industry continues to face challenges arising from globalization, increasing competition, and the presence of imported footwear products. In response, heritage branding has emerged as a strategic approach for strengthening customer relationships and enhancing brand value. This study examined the influence of heritage branding on customer loyalty and brand equity among consumers of Marikina-made footwear and determined whether customer loyalty mediates the relationship between heritage branding and brand equity. Using a quantitative correlational research design, data were gathered from consumers who had purchased or owned Marikina footwear within the previous two years. Findings revealed that respondents positively perceived heritage branding, customer loyalty, and brand equity. Results further showed that heritage branding significantly influenced customer loyalty and brand equity, while customer loyalty significantly contributed to brand equity. Moreover, customer loyalty partially mediated the relationship between heritage branding and brand equity, indicating that heritage branding strengthens brand value both directly and indirectly through loyalty formation. The findings highlight the importance of heritage branding as a strategic resource capable of enhancing consumer relationships and sustaining competitive advantage. Based on the results, a Strategic Heritage-Driven Business Sustainability Framework was developed to support the long-term competitiveness and sustainability of Marikina footwear enterprises.

Keywords: *Heritage Branding, Customer Loyalty, Brand Equity, Marikina Footwear Industry, Business Sustainability, Heritage Marketing*

INTRODUCTION

Marikina City has long been recognized as the Shoe Capital of the Philippines, with its footwear industry serving as an important contributor to local economic development, employment generation, and the preservation of Filipino craftsmanship. Historically, Marikina established its reputation through generations of skilled shoemakers whose expertise transformed the city into the primary center of footwear production in the country. Beyond its economic significance, the industry embodies a rich cultural heritage characterized by artisanal knowledge, traditional craftsmanship, and community identity that have been transmitted across generations (David, 2021; Scott, 2007).

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Despite its historical prominence, the Marikina shoe industry continues to face significant challenges brought about by globalization, trade liberalization, and the increasing influx of low-cost imported footwear. These market pressures have intensified competition and diminished the comparative advantage once enjoyed by local footwear manufacturers. Consequently, many small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have experienced declining market share, reduced visibility, and difficulty sustaining competitiveness in an increasingly dynamic consumer environment (Department of Trade and Industry [DTI], 2021; Scott, 2007).

In response to these challenges, scholars and practitioners have increasingly emphasized the strategic value of heritage branding as a means of revitalizing traditional industries. Heritage branding refers to the deliberate utilization of a brand's history, traditions, values, and cultural narratives to create authenticity, trust, and meaningful differentiation in the marketplace (Urde et al., 2020; Hudson, 2015). Unlike conventional branding approaches that primarily focus on product attributes and promotional strategies, heritage branding highlights organizational legacy, craftsmanship, and continuity, allowing firms to develop deeper emotional connections with consumers. In industries characterized by strong cultural and historical foundations, heritage branding has emerged as a powerful mechanism for transforming historical assets into contemporary competitive advantages (Balmer & Greyser, 2007; Pecot & De Barnier, 2017).

The relevance of heritage branding is particularly evident in the context of Marikina-made footwear. The industry possesses distinctive heritage attributes rooted in craftsmanship, authenticity, local identity, and centuries-old shoemaking traditions. These attributes provide valuable opportunities for footwear brands to differentiate themselves from mass-produced and imported alternatives. Previous studies suggest that brands perceived as authentic and culturally meaningful are more likely to generate consumer trust, emotional attachment, and favorable evaluations (Beverland, 2005; Wiedmann et al., 2011). As consumers increasingly value authenticity and cultural significance in their purchasing decisions, heritage-oriented branding strategies may enable Marikina shoe manufacturers to strengthen market positioning and sustain competitiveness.

A critical outcome associated with effective heritage branding is customer loyalty. Customer loyalty encompasses both behavioral and attitudinal dimensions, including repeat purchase intentions, customer retention, positive word-of-mouth communication, and emotional commitment toward a brand (Oliver, 1999; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Loyal customers contribute significantly to organizational sustainability by reducing customer acquisition costs, generating advocacy, and fostering long-term relationships. Research indicates that consumers are more likely to remain loyal to brands that successfully communicate authenticity, trustworthiness, and shared cultural values, characteristics commonly associated with heritage brands (Frizzo et al., 2018; Wuestefeld et al., 2012). Consequently, customer loyalty may serve as a critical mechanism through which heritage branding creates enduring value for traditional industries such as footwear manufacturing.

Another important organizational outcome influenced by heritage branding and customer loyalty is brand equity. Brand equity refers to the value added to products and services through consumer perceptions, brand associations, perceived quality, trust, and loyalty (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 2020). Strong brand equity enhances customer preference, increases market resilience, supports premium pricing strategies, and contributes to sustainable competitive advantage. Heritage-related attributes such as continuity, craftsmanship, authenticity, and cultural significance have been shown to strengthen consumer perceptions and increase overall brand value (Wiedmann et al., 2011; Syam et al., 2023). When consumers recognize heritage brands as credible and meaningful, they tend to develop stronger emotional connections that ultimately reinforce brand equity.

The relationships among heritage branding, customer loyalty, and brand equity have received growing scholarly attention in international marketing and branding literature. Existing studies report that heritage branding positively influences customer attitudes and behavioral intentions through perceptions of authenticity, trust, and emotional value (Frizzo et al., 2018; Syam et al., 2023). Similarly, customer loyalty has consistently been identified as a major determinant of brand equity, reinforcing positive perceptions and strengthening long-term brand performance (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Oliver, 1999). These findings suggest the possibility that customer loyalty may function as an intervening mechanism through which heritage branding contributes to stronger brand equity outcomes.

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However, despite the growing body of international literature, empirical investigations examining these relationships within the Philippine context remain limited. Existing studies concerning Marikina footwear have primarily focused on historical development, production challenges, industry decline, and general marketing strategies rather than examining the combined influence of heritage branding, customer loyalty, and brand equity. Likewise, limited research has explored whether customer loyalty mediates the relationship between heritage branding and brand equity in heritage-based Philippine industries. This gap restricts understanding of how traditional industries can strategically leverage cultural heritage to strengthen consumer relationships and enhance market competitiveness.

Addressing this gap, the present study examines the influence of heritage branding on customer loyalty and brand equity among consumers of Marikina shoe brands in Metro Manila. Specifically, the study investigates the dimensions of heritage branding, assesses levels of customer loyalty and brand equity, determines the relationships among these constructs, and evaluates the mediating role of customer loyalty.

The findings serve as the basis for the development of a Strategic Heritage-Driven Business Sustainability Framework designed to support the long-term competitiveness of Marikina footwear enterprises. By extending heritage branding literature into the Philippine footwear sector, the study contributes to both academic discourse and practical efforts aimed at preserving cultural heritage while promoting sustainable business growth.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative correlational research design to examine the relationships among heritage branding, customer loyalty, and brand equity within the Marikina footwear industry. The design was deemed appropriate because the study sought to determine the extent to which perceptions of heritage branding influence customer loyalty and brand equity and to examine whether customer loyalty mediates the relationship between heritage branding and brand equity. Quantitative correlational research enables the systematic measurement of relationships among variables and facilitates the testing of predictive and mediating effects through statistical analysis.

Specifically, the study investigated the direct influence of heritage branding on customer loyalty, the direct influence of heritage branding on brand equity, the influence of customer loyalty on brand equity, and the mediating role of customer loyalty in the relationship between heritage branding and brand equity. The findings served as the foundation for the development of a Strategic Heritage-Driven Business Sustainability Framework for the Marikina footwear industry.

Research Locale

The study was conducted among consumers residing in Marikina City, Pasig City, and Quezon City. These locations were selected because of their proximity to Marikina's footwear manufacturing sector and their substantial consumer populations, providing access to individuals familiar with Marikina-made footwear products.

Participants and Sampling Technique

The respondents of the study consisted of consumers residing in Metro Manila who had purchased or owned at least one pair of Marikina-made shoes within the previous two years. Participants were required to be familiar with established heritage footwear brands operating in Marikina City to ensure that they could provide informed assessments regarding heritage branding, customer loyalty, and brand equity.

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select respondents who met the established inclusion criteria. This sampling method was considered appropriate because the study required individuals with direct purchasing experience and sufficient familiarity with Marikina footwear products. A minimum sample size of 200 respondents was targeted to provide adequate statistical power for correlation, regression, and mediation analyses.

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Research Instrument

Data were gathered using a structured researcher-developed questionnaire anchored on contemporary literature concerning heritage branding, customer loyalty, and brand equity. The instrument was designed to assess the perceptions and experiences of consumers regarding Marikina-made footwear products. The questionnaire constructs were developed from established theories and literature on heritage branding, customer loyalty, and brand equity (Aaker, 1991; Oliver, 1999; Urde et al., 2020).

The questionnaire consisted of four sections. The first section collected demographic information from the respondents. The second section measured heritage branding across four dimensions: craftsmanship and tradition, authenticity and cultural value, local identity and pride, and storytelling and heritage communication. The third section measured customer loyalty in terms of repeat purchase intention, customer satisfaction, word-of-mouth referrals, and retention likelihood. The fourth section measured brand equity through perceived quality, brand trust and credibility, emotional brand associations, and competitive distinctiveness.

All items were assessed using a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree). The use of a four-point scale encouraged respondents to provide clear evaluations and reduced the tendency toward neutral responses.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

To establish content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by experts in marketing, branding, and business research. Their recommendations were incorporated to enhance the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the survey items relative to the objectives of the study.

A pilot test involving 19 qualified respondents was conducted prior to the administration of the main survey. Reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.986 for the 60-item instrument, indicating excellent internal consistency and demonstrating that the instrument was highly reliable for measuring the constructs included in the study.

Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to data collection, the researcher secured the necessary permissions and approvals from relevant stakeholders. Qualified respondents were identified based on the established inclusion criteria and were informed about the purpose and objectives of the study. Participation was strictly voluntary.

The questionnaire was administered through both online and face-to-face modalities to maximize participation and accessibility among target respondents. Completed questionnaires were screened to ensure completeness and respondent eligibility. After data collection, responses were encoded, organized, and processed using Jamovi statistical software for analysis.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to accepted ethical standards governing academic research. Respondents were informed of the nature and purpose of the study before their participation. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and participation remained entirely voluntary. Respondents were assured that all information collected would be treated with strict confidentiality and anonymity. Data gathered during the study were used solely for academic and research purposes and were reported only in aggregate form to protect the identities of participants.

Statistical Treatment of Data

Both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were utilized to analyze the collected data.

The weighted mean was used to determine the level of heritage branding, customer loyalty, and brand equity as perceived by the respondents. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to determine the significance and direction of the relationships among the study variables. Multiple regression analysis was employed to determine the predictive influence of heritage branding and customer loyalty on brand equity. Finally,

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mediation analysis following the procedures proposed by Hayes (2018) was performed to determine whether customer loyalty significantly mediated the relationship between heritage branding and brand equity.

For the interpretation of weighted mean scores, the following scale was utilized:

Mean Range	Verbal Interpretation
3.26 – 4.00	Strongly Agree
2.51 – 3.25	Agree
1.76 – 2.50	Disagree
1.00 – 1.75	Strongly Disagree

Table 1. *Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Test of the Instrument*

Scale/Variable	Number of Items (k)	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Interpretation
Survey Instrument (Overall)	60	0.986	Excellent Reliability

Note. A Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.986 indicates excellent internal consistency of the survey instrument.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2. *Composite Summary of Heritage Branding, Customer Loyalty, and Brand Equity*

Variable	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Heritage Branding	3.14	0.54	Agree
Customer Loyalty	3.11	0.55	Agree
Brand Equity	3.12	0.53	Agree

The results indicate that respondents generally expressed positive perceptions across all major constructs of the study. Heritage branding obtained the highest mean score, followed by brand equity and customer loyalty. These findings suggest that consumers recognize the cultural, historical, and symbolic value of Marikina footwear brands while demonstrating favorable attitudes toward continued patronage and positive brand evaluation.

Heritage Branding of Marikina Footwear Brands

The results revealed that respondents generally perceived heritage branding positively, with an overall mean of 3.14 (SD = 0.54), interpreted as *Agree*. Among the dimensions, Local Identity and Pride obtained the highest mean (M = 3.16), followed by Storytelling and Heritage Communication (M = 3.15), while Craftsmanship and Tradition and Authenticity and Cultural Value both obtained means of 3.13.

These findings indicate that consumers strongly associate Marikina-made footwear with Filipino identity, cultural pride, and local heritage. The results suggest that heritage branding serves as a meaningful differentiator capable of creating emotional and cultural value among consumers. This finding supports the assertion of Urde et al. (2020) that heritage brands derive strength from their historical continuity, authenticity, and symbolic significance. Similarly, Hudson (2015) emphasized that heritage functions as a strategic asset capable of enhancing consumer trust and brand relevance.

Despite the positive perception of heritage branding, storytelling and heritage communication received relatively modest assessments compared with the strength of local identity and pride. This suggests that while consumers recognize the heritage of Marikina footwear, opportunities remain for brands to communicate their history and heritage more effectively through modern marketing channels. Such a finding reinforces the argument of Frizzo et al. (2018) that heritage must be actively communicated to strengthen customer-brand relationships and maximize branding outcomes.

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Customer Loyalty Toward Marikina Footwear Brands

The respondents demonstrated a positive level of customer loyalty, yielding a composite mean of 3.11 (SD = 0.55) interpreted as Agree. Among the dimensions, Customer Satisfaction registered the highest mean (M = 3.15), followed by Retention Likelihood (M = 3.14), Repeat Purchase Intention (M = 3.10), and Word-of-Mouth Referrals (M = 3.09).

The findings indicate that consumers are generally satisfied with Marikina-made footwear and exhibit favorable attitudes toward continued patronage. Satisfaction appears to be the strongest driver of loyalty, suggesting that product quality, customer experience, and perceived value play important roles in sustaining consumer relationships.

However, comparatively lower ratings for word-of-mouth referrals suggest that positive perceptions do not always translate into active advocacy. While customers appreciate Marikina footwear products, stronger engagement initiatives may be necessary to encourage consumers to actively recommend these products to others. This finding aligns with Oliver's (1999) conceptualization of loyalty, which distinguishes satisfaction from deeper attitudinal commitment and brand advocacy.

Brand Equity of Marikina Footwear Brands

Brand equity was positively perceived by the respondents, generating a grand mean of 3.12 (SD = 0.53) interpreted as *Agree*. Perceived Quality emerged as the strongest dimension (M = 3.15), followed by Brand Trust and Credibility (M = 3.13), Emotional Brand Associations (M = 3.12), and Competitive Distinctiveness (M = 3.08).

The results indicate that consumers generally trust Marikina footwear brands and recognize their quality and reliability. The strong ratings for quality and trust suggest that consumers associate these products with durable materials, skilled craftsmanship, and dependable performance.

Nevertheless, competitive distinctiveness registered the lowest mean among the brand equity dimensions. This finding implies that while consumers appreciate the quality and heritage of Marikina-made footwear, local brands may still face challenges in clearly differentiating themselves from imported competitors. The result supports previous literature emphasizing the need for heritage-based brands to develop stronger positioning strategies that communicate distinctiveness and unique value propositions.

Relationship Among Heritage Branding, Customer Loyalty, and Brand Equity

Table 3. *Summary of Hypotheses Testing Results*

Hypothesis	Statement	Statistical Basis	Decision
H_1	Heritage branding significantly predicts customer loyalty	$r = .668$, $p < .001$	Accepted
H_2	Heritage branding significantly predicts brand equity	$r = .677$, $p < .001$	Accepted
H_3	Customer loyalty significantly predicts brand equity	$r = .645$, $p < .001$	Accepted
H_4	Customer loyalty significantly mediates the relationship between heritage branding and brand equity	Indirect Effect = 0.291, $p < .001$	Accepted

The results demonstrated significant positive relationships among the three major constructs. Heritage branding exhibited a strong positive relationship with customer loyalty ($r = .668$, $p < .001$) and brand equity ($r = .677$, $p < .001$). Likewise, customer loyalty was significantly associated with brand equity ($r = .645$, $p < .001$).

These findings indicate that as consumers develop stronger perceptions of heritage branding, they are more likely to exhibit loyalty toward Marikina footwear brands and perceive greater brand value. The results affirm the propositions of Brand Heritage Theory and Brand Equity Theory, which suggest that authenticity, continuity, and craftsmanship strengthen consumer-brand relationships and increase overall brand value.

The results further support previous findings by Syam et al. (2023), who reported that brand heritage strengthens loyalty and equity through trust and emotional attachment. Similarly, Wiedmann et al. (2011)

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emphasized that heritage branding enhances perceptions of authenticity, credibility, and quality, resulting in stronger brand equity outcomes.

Mediating Effect of Customer Loyalty

Table 3. *Mediation Analysis of Customer Loyalty Between Heritage Branding and Brand Equity*

Effect	Estimate	SE	95% CI	p
Indirect Effect (a × b)	0.291	0.0409	[0.209, 0.368]	< .001
Direct Effect (c')	0.373	0.0556	[0.265, 0.482]	< .001
Total Effect	0.664	0.0479	[0.564, 0.753]	< .001

Percentage Mediated = 43.8%

The mediation analysis revealed that customer loyalty partially mediated the relationship between heritage branding and brand equity. The indirect effect was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.291$, $p < .001$), indicating that heritage branding contributes to brand equity through its influence on customer loyalty.

However, the direct effect of heritage branding on brand equity remained significant ($\beta = 0.373$, $p < .001$), indicating partial mediation. This means that heritage branding affects brand equity both directly and indirectly through customer loyalty. Customer loyalty explained approximately 43.8% of the relationship between heritage branding and brand equity.

The finding suggests that while loyalty strengthens the effect of heritage branding on brand equity, heritage itself functions as an independent strategic resource. Consumers may perceive greater brand value simply through their recognition of craftsmanship, authenticity, cultural significance, and historical legacy, even before loyalty-related behaviors fully develop.

CONCLUSION

The findings demonstrate that consumers positively perceive the heritage branding, customer loyalty, and brand equity of Marikina-made footwear. Heritage branding was most strongly associated with local identity and pride, while customer satisfaction emerged as the strongest dimension of customer loyalty. Perceived quality was identified as the most prominent component of brand equity.

The study confirms that heritage branding significantly influences both customer loyalty and brand equity. Consumers who recognize the craftsmanship, authenticity, and cultural heritage embedded in Marikina footwear are more likely to exhibit loyalty and develop favorable brand perceptions. Customer loyalty likewise contributes significantly to strengthening brand equity.

Furthermore, customer loyalty partially mediates the relationship between heritage branding and brand equity, indicating that heritage branding generates brand value both directly and indirectly through loyalty formation. Heritage branding therefore functions not merely as a symbolic attribute but as a strategic resource capable of enhancing consumer relationships and strengthening market competitiveness.

The study concludes that sustaining the competitiveness of Marikina footwear brands requires a strategic integration of heritage preservation, customer engagement, brand differentiation, and modern marketing practices. Heritage should be viewed as a dynamic business asset capable of generating long-term value when effectively communicated and experienced by consumers.

Overall, the study demonstrates that heritage branding remains a viable strategic mechanism for enhancing customer loyalty and brand equity within traditional Philippine industries. By leveraging cultural identity, craftsmanship, and heritage communication, Marikina footwear enterprises can strengthen competitive positioning, deepen customer engagement, and achieve long-term business sustainability in increasingly competitive markets.

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