

# The moderating role of market mavens in explaining the impact of brand positioning strategies on brand love

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## Keywords

Brand positioning strategy, Brand love, Market maven.

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## Abstract

*Market mavens are people who voluntarily spread information regarding brands not expecting any rewards or appreciation in return. With the presence of increasingly similar products in high street fashion apparel retail industry, the real challenge is to steer marketing communication efforts in the direction of developing interpersonal consumer-brand bond and also acknowledging the crucial role of market mavens as a strong external influence. This study aims to (a) determine the relationship of each of the three brand positioning strategies namely; benefit brand positioning strategy, surrogate brand positioning strategy and feature brand positioning strategy with brand love, (b) understand whether market mavens moderate the relationships between the three brand positioning strategies and brand love, and (c) identify demographic characteristics of likely market mavens. Building onto extant literature, a theoretical model is proposed and empirically tested with the help of survey responses from 607 young consumers of private universities in Pakistan.*

*Results show that benefit brand positioning strategy, surrogate brand positioning strategy and feature brand positioning strategy have a relationship with brand love which is moderated by an interpersonal influence of market mavens. However, the interaction effects of all three brand positioning strategies vary in strength. Results of the study also draw up a demographic profile of market mavens suggesting that they are mostly females, well educated, slightly older consumers residing in metropolitan cities, thereby suggesting concrete practical implications towards the end.*

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## 1 Introduction

Importance of the concept of transmission of market information through interpersonal communication has long been acknowledged (Feick & Price, 1987). Market mavens are the people “who have information about many types of products, shopping places, price comparison and other related industry knowledge, and they disseminate both consumer and market knowledge to consumers” (Feick & Price, 1987). Past 30 years of research has shown that marketers have acknowledged and appreciated the role of early adopters, interpersonal sources, reference groups and opinion leaders in influencing consumer behaviour (Natarajan & Angur, 1997). However, market mavens can be classified as an emerging set of consumers who are just like other consumers but differ in their breath of market and consumer knowledge (Gauri, Harmon-Kizer, & Talukdar, 2016).

With the help of the market mavens, consumers become more informed without having to get involved in conscious decision making (Wiedmann, Walsh & Mitchell, 2001). With increasing competition and massive flow of marketing information, the importance of social interaction to marketers is growing; and therefore, market mavens who have the ability to disseminate that information are recognized for their role (Wiedmann, Walsh & Mitchell, 2001). Extant literature shows support for marketing communications being responsible for communicating brand positioning, however, this does not undermine the external influence of market mavens in creating brand positioning. A “confused by over choice” trait among consumers has been observed in many countries (Wiedmann, Walsh, & Mitchell, 2001). In this study, marketers would be well advised to realize the influential yet overlooked, role of market mavens (Kiani, Laroche, & Paulin, 2016).

The total revenue for Pakistani apparel retail industry was \$8.7 billion in 2014, demonstrating a compound annual growth rate of 9.1% between 2010 and 2014 (“Apparel Retail in Pakistan,” 2015). High street fashion retail brands are in a fierce competition in Pakistan. The competition is both from local and international brands. There are too many fashion brands offering the same generic products, for example

similar denim pants with different marketing campaigns (Ahmed, 2016). However, between 2014- 2019, the growth of the fashion apparel industry is expected to decline with an anticipated compound annual growth rate of 7.5% ("Apparel Retail in Pakistan," 2015). Given the forecasted turbulent period, fashion brands must be ready to face marketing challenges related to brand positioning strategy choices, market mavens and brand love.

The subject of how marketers can connect with market mavens has not been addressed adequately (Wiedmann, 2001). Thus far the role of market maven has been studied in two countries; and further empirical studies are required to establish and understand international generalizability of the role of market mavens with respect to brand positioning strategies (Barwise, 1995; Easley, Madden, & Dunn, 2000). Therefore, this study aims to propose a conceptual framework, contextualize it and empirically test the moderating role of market mavens between the brand positioning strategies (benefit brand positioning strategy, surrogate brand positioning strategy and feature brand positioning strategy) and brand love in Pakistani context. Wiedmann (2001), Geissler and Edison (2005) and Kiani, Laroche, and Paulin (2016) concluded "No clear demographic profile has emerged from previous market maven studies and little is known about how they approach decision making". Lack of consistency in the results of extant literature about market mavens has made it difficult to target market mavens and thus create marketing communications strategy to influence their independent opinion about brands and their related industry (Clark & Goldsmith, 2005; Geissler & Edison, 2005; Goldsmith, Clark, & Goldsmith, 2006; Clark, Goldsmith, & Goldsmith, 2008).

It is likely that the role of market mavens is relevant in context of Pakistani high street fashion retail industry because it is an active consumer market that offers consumers a variety of brand choices and information. Barnes and Pressey (2012) emphasize that market mavens are the most integral group of consumers because of their ability to spread positive and/ or negative word-of-mouth through their broad social network, hence making them an important target consumer for brands (Slama & Williams, 1990; Williams & Slama, 1995; Sundaram, Mitra, & Webster, 1998). This study is timely because market mavens are smart shoppers, information providers and advisors especially in the context of saturated industries, in this case, it is fashion retail industry (Slama, Nataraajan, & Williams, 1992; Walsh, Gwinner, & Swanson, 2004).

Research on market mavens is becoming widely popular in the domain of marketing. There are a few studies which have considered the demographic and psychographic profiles of market mavens (Abratt, Nel, & Nezer, 1995), personality characteristics of market mavens (Geissler & Edison, 2005; Clark, Goldsmith, & Goldsmith, 2008), purchasing criteria of market mavens (Williams & Slama, 1995), and the factors which motivate market mavens (Walsh, Gwinner, & Swanson, 2004; Clark & Goldsmith, 2005; Chelminski & Coulter, 2007), industrial market mavens (Nataraajan & Angur, 1997). However, what is lacking in extant research is an obvious absence of an understanding of the moderating role of market mavens between the relationships of three different brand positioning strategies and brand love.

In light of the findings reported in extant literature and its pitfalls, this study aims to address three questions; 1) what is the relationship of three different brand positioning strategies (benefit brand positioning strategy, surrogate brand positioning strategy and feature brand positioning strategy) with brand love? 2) do market mavens act as a moderator between a brand positioning strategy (benefit brand positioning strategy, surrogate brand positioning strategy and feature brand positioning strategy) and brand love? and 3) what are the demographic characteristics of market mavens in Pakistani high street fashion apparel retail market? (see figure 4.1)

## **2 Theory Development and Hypotheses**

### **2.1 Theoretical Perspective in Market Maven Research**

Market mavenism is an interdisciplinary concept, stemming from marketing, consumer behaviour, communications, psychology, sociology and political science. All these disciplines confirm the presence of market mavens, their role in acquisition and dissemination of brand related information (Feick & Price, 1987). The pioneering researchers of the concept of market mavens are Feick and Price (1987). Slama and Williams (1990) explained market mavens are "Individuals who have information about many kinds of products, places to shop and other marketplace information such as special sales, usual prices, product quality and product variety". Before the recognition of market mavens as a separate influential group

there were two traditional interpersonal influences on consumer behaviour; opinion leaders and early purchasers or early adopters (Feick & Price, 1987).

Opinion leaders are defined as individuals who act as information providers between marketing initiatives and the end consumers (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948). The concept of opinion leader is based on certain assumptions; they spread information about the product out of their own involvement in the product category (Feick & Price, 1987) and they are bound to a specific product category (Bloch & Richins, 1983). The other interpersonal influence, early purchasers can either exert a passive or an active influence on later purchasers (Feick & Price, 1987). Since early purchasers are among the first few to use the product, their information is driven using the product. Opinion leaders and early adopters and they influence consumers because of their product specific knowledge and this influence is independent of the marketing communications being practiced by fashion brands in-house. The importance of the influence early adopters can exert on consumers has been emphasized in extant literature (Baumgarten, 1975). The reason why opinion leaders might endorse a product can be a direct consequence of the influence that is exerted by early purchasers (Engel, Kegerreis, & Blackwell, 1969). Therefore, market mavens are considered to be different from influencers such as opinion leaders and early adopters as their activities encompass broad market knowledge and activities rather than relating to a particular product category (Feick & Price, 1987).

Market mavens accumulate and disseminate information on a wide variety of topics, and they believe it is their social obligation to spread the valuable information they have (Kassarjian, 1981). The concept of market maven has been defined by various researchers fully (Feick & Price, 1987; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). However, not much is known about the demographic, psychographic and behavioural traits of market mavens (Walsh, Gwinner, & Swanson, 2004).

Atkin (1972) found that the motivating factor behind market mavens spreading information about the product is their urge to engage with others socially. Some people get detailed access to market information because they know it will prove useful to others, market mavens do this on purpose (Dichter, 1966). Moreover, market mavens serve as a useful means of distributing brand information often with greater credibility than many traditional marketing communications sources (Barnes & Pressey, 2012). Sieber (1974) also pointed out a reason why market mavens might be keen about accumulating market information and that is to enhance their power in society by becoming more valuable to those with whom they interact.

## **2.2 Relationship between Brand Positioning Strategies, Market Mavens and Brand Love**

### **2.3 Brand Love**

Brand love is a recent marketing concept and has been shown to influence important marketing communications decisions (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012). Fournier (1998) explained that consumers can think about their relationships with brands in a way that is similar to their relationships with committed partnerships or best friends. The basis of brand love (i.e. consumers developing relationships with brands based on features, personality and symbolic attributes) is grounded in the theory of brand positioning literature (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017). The phenomenon of humanization of brands is the way consumers express themselves both personally and socially (Ahuvia, 2015).

Brand love has been defined by Shimp and Madden (1988) as a concept which derives its basis from the interpersonal theories in psychology and highlighted that interpersonal love and love for a product is similar. Sternberg and Barnes's (1986) triangular theory of love is the most frequently used framework by researchers to explain brand love. Shimp and Madden (1988) used triangular theory of love and defined brand love based on three parts; liking, yearning and commitment.

Ahuvia (1993; 2005) made a scale to empirically test the concept of brand love and reported findings about the consumers' ability to love a brand and its relationship with other relevant aspects of consumer behaviour. Ahuvia (2005) suggested that interpersonal love and consumer-brand love are similar. For example, consumers find certain brands attractive, they aspire to have those brands, long for their consumption and they feel that a certain brand is a natural fit to their personality. Consumers are willing to spend their resources on the brand because it is a part of themselves. This perspective is also consistent with Aron's (1986) self-expansion theory as applied to brands, where closeness is revealed in a venn diagram showing the self as overlapping with the brand (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017).

Batra, Ahuvia and Bagozzi (2012) on the other hand, opposed the existence and similarity of interpersonal relationships with consumer-brand bond. Batra, Ahuvia and Bagozzi (2012) defends his perspective by stating that consumer-brand love involves monetary exchanges, however, this is not the case with interpersonal love. Batra, Ahuvia and Bagozzi (2012) conceptualizes and empirically measures the concept of brand love based on the understanding of the process of development of brand love among consumers. Therefore, Batra, Ahuvia and Bagozzi (2012) highlights brand love as consumers' emotional attachment to brands and thereby categorizing brand love as a set of cognitions, feelings and behaviours.

Despite the existence of different theoretical perspectives about brand love, there is agreement with regards to the love that consumers can have with a brand which then becomes an important part of their life (Ballester, Palazón, & Muñoz, 2017). Although brand love has emerged as an important consumer-brand relationship construct, there is still a lack of understanding as to how the love relationship between a consumer and a brand is established and strengthened. Batra, Ahuvia and Bagozzi (2012) and Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) have reported that brand love may be influenced by brand positioning strategies, for example product features and/ or benefits of the product. This view of brand love provides one more reasoning for conducting this study.

#### **2.4 Brand Positioning**

The concept of branding is viewed as closely linked to the concept of brand positioning (Trout & Rivkin, 1999). Kapferer (2012) coined the phrase "brand as product", as one cannot choose to ignore the brand as an integral part of the product, and one cannot ignore the ability of brand positioning strategies to create a personal consumer-brand bond. Urde and Koch (2014) define brand positioning as "an inside-out approach that defines and implements an intended position with brand perception as its point of departure and continuing frame of reference". Brand positioning refers to a consumer level perception of the brand and is based on the subjective attributes and images the consumers have about the brand in their memory structure (Ries & Trout, 1972; Winer & Moore, 1989; Biel, 1993). While positioning a brand, external factors such as consumer trends and consumer influences should be given due consideration (Urde & Koch, 2014).

#### **2.5 Benefit Brand Positioning Strategy**

Benefit brand positioning strategy has been conceptually explained by many researchers. It "Communicates advantages of a brand; it refers to the personal value consumers assign to good or service; it is related to one's self than product attributes; it is not directly observable; it reflects whether a brand works as intended; it implies mostly attribute-based benefits, it refers also to problem solutions" (Aaker & Shansby, 1982; Crawford, 1985; Keller, 1993; Vriens & Hofstede, 2000; Tybout & Sternthal, 2005). Benefit brand positioning strategy has also been explained as "Benefits that satisfy experiential/ hedonic needs; benefits that are psycho-social consequences out of the use of the product that have a hedonic, expressive, or symbolic function; benefits that give consumers an indirect advantage of the consumption of a product; benefits that enhance perception of a self-image or a social-image of consumers" (Gutman, 1982; Olson & Reynolds, 1983; Crawford, 1985; Keller, 1993; Tybout & Sternthal, 2005).

Personification of brands depicts the brand as having human-like benefits, even when the image does not have a human-like form (Delbaere, McQuarrie, & Phillips, 2011). The purpose it to give consumers an experience of social and personal benefits by using the brand. Another way to communicate benefit brand positioning strategy is the representation of the brand as filling the role of a human character in a social setting (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017). Sometimes, brands can be positioned on associative secondary benefits such as fulfilling the roles of the "hero", performing miracles that other brands cannot (Mark & Pearson, 2001). Consumers are likely to form a love-like, inseparable consumer-brand bond i.e. brand love with brand that are perceived by them as providing benefits.

#### **2.6 Surrogate Brand Positioning Strategy**

Surrogate brand positioning strategy is "designed to create consumer associations about external aspects of a brand; it says something about the brand that allows the consumer to come to individual conclusions; it does not emphasize attributes and benefits; it is aimed at creation of inferred (secondary) associations between consumers and brand; it refers to intangible aspects of the brand" (Crawford, 1985; Friedmann & Lessig, 1987; Keller, 1993; Bridges, Keller, & Sood, 2000).

Giving the product a human name (Eskine & Locander, 2014; Waytz, Heafner, & Epley, 2014), describing the product in the first person (Aggarwal & McGill, 2007; Puzakova, Kwak, & Rocereto, 2013), and labelling the brand as gendered (Chandler and Schwarz, 2010; Waytz, Heafner, & Epley, 2014) increase consumers' tendencies to anthropomorphize brands and adopting surrogate positioning strategy is useful in this regard. Research also suggests that consumers can regard brands as partners in real life only if a brand's marketing communications are based on emotions and symbolic attributes of the brand (Napoli, Dickinson, Beverland, & Farrelly, 2014). Kwak, Puzakova, and Rocereto (2015) examined the effect of consumers' beliefs that the brand had a mind of its own. The more the brand is perceived as having a mind of its own, the more consumers are likely to perceive the brand as being favourable hence creating an inseparable consumer-brand bond of interpersonal love (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017).

### **2.7 Feature Brand Positioning Strategy**

Feature brand positioning strategy is defined in literature as "company highlights the concrete attributes of the brand in order to create a differential advantage; concrete attributes are characteristics of the brand advantage; they are objectively measurable, mostly tangible and typically "search features"; these features are also specific to the product category" (Aaker & Shansby, 1982; Olson & Reynolds, 1983; Keller, 1993; Plummer, 2000; Vriens & Hofstede, 2000; Hooley, Saunders, & Piercy, 2004). In general, consumers react more favourably towards brands whose brand positioning is based on features which are anthropomorphized (Aggarwal & McGill, 2007; Kim & Kramer, 2015). Therefore, consumers might be more likely to view a brand as similar/ different to or connected to other brands. Research suggests that feature brand positioning strategy based on anthropomorphized attributes prompts the inference that the brand has a human-like mind (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017).

### **2.8 Moderating Effect of Market Mavens**

Market maven is an external influence which has the ability to impact how consumers should perceive a brand as opposed to the image the brand has created for their consumers (Wangenheim & Bayón, 2007). Most of the previous studies focus on market mavens and their importance in moderating the relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty (Anderson & Mittal, 2000; Mittal & Kamakura, 2001). Market maven has also been studied as a moderator in relationship with marketing strategy and big five personality model (Vazifehdoost, Akbari, & Charsted, 2012). Market mavens' role as a moderator between the relationship of customer satisfaction and new customer acquisition has also been analysed (Wangenheim & Bayón, 2007). Among many consumer-brand relationship studies in prior literature; brand satisfaction (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006), brand trust, brand commitment (Fournier & Yao, 1997; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001), brand attachment (Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005), brand passion (Albert, Merunka, & Valette-Florence, 2013) and brand connectedness have been studied (Escalas, 2004). Brand love is proposed to be an important concept in marketing literature (Unal & Aydin, 2013) and there has been a lack of research proposing an integrated model of brand positioning strategies, market mavens and brand love. Wangenheim and Bayón (2007) called market mavens as 'marketplace influence' and suggested that they have a moderating effect between satisfaction and word-of-mouth. There is a greater tendency among market mavens to socially engage and give their independent expert opinion regarding a brand, therefore their influence in developing long-term relationship of consumers with a of brand via positioning strategy is critical (Kassarjian, 1981). Walsh, Evanschitzky, and Wunderlich (2008) support this viewpoint and have stated that "the moderating role of consumer tendency to spread brand related information must gain its due importance by now". Market mavenism has been researched as a mediator construct as well (Laroche, Pons, Zgolli, Cervellon, & Kim, 2003).

Feick and Price (1987) identified market mavens as a unique consumer group. The existence of market mavens and their influence in creating consumer-brand associations about different products and services has been repeatedly confirmed (Slama & Williams, 1990; Schneider & Rodgers 1993), and has been extended to international settings (Abratt, Nel, & Nezer, 1995) and to a business-to-business context (Natarajan & Angur, 1997). Many researchers have focused that market mavens are, in general, more likely than others to possess product information and transmit it to third parties, independent of their level of product involvement (Kassarjian, 1981). This self-imposed social responsibility of expressing their view point poses a major threat to fashion retail brands where in addition to the struggle of selecting the

most effective brand positioning strategy, brand managers now have to be watchful of an external influence that is likely to have an effect on the creation of brand love. This study, therefore, proposes that brand positioning strategies (practiced by marketers to create associations in the consumers' mind) is likely to have a direct effect on the development of interpersonal consumer-brand love, however, there might also be an indirect interaction of market mavens and different brand positioning strategies on the development of brand love.

The following hypotheses summarize the discussion done so far:

H<sub>1</sub>: Market mavens moderate the relationship between benefit brand positioning strategy and brand love.

H<sub>2</sub>: Market mavens moderate the relationship between surrogate brand positioning strategy and brand love.

H<sub>3</sub>: Market mavens moderate the relationship between feature brand positioning strategy and brand love.

### 3 Methodology

#### 3.1 Unit of Analysis

In order to empirically test the above stated hypotheses, cross-sectional self-administered survey methodology was used. The focus of this study was on consumers' perspective as recommended by Fuchs (2008). Extant research shows that private university students are frequent shoppers of high street fashion apparel brands (Anderson, James, & Carpenter, 2005). Prior brand positioning studies have frequently used student samples; therefore, they are equally appropriate for this study (Tepper, Kelly, William, & Hunter, 2001; Voss, Spangenberg, & Grohmann, 2003). Survey responses from both undergraduate and graduate students were collected. There was variability in the demographics of the based-on age, income and gender. Sample of eight universities was randomly drawn from a pool of private universities in Pakistan<sup>1</sup>.

Questionnaires were shared with the program offices of the selected private universities. Questionnaires were e-mailed to the prospective respondents from the sampling frame, 607 were received back in a period of 6 weeks. Sample size of 607 is justified by Bollen (1990) where it is mentioned that if the variables are reliable and the model is not overly complex, even smaller samples could suffice.

#### 3.2 Instrument

To be consistent with previous research about brand positioning strategies, brand love and market mavens, previously published measurement scales were re-worded and adapted for the current study. The scale for all three brand positioning strategies (benefit brand positioning strategy, feature brand positioning strategy and surrogate brand positioning strategy) was adapted from Fuchs (2008). The scale comprising of 10 items for brand love was adapted from Ahuvia (2015). The measurement scale for market maven was adapted from the 6 items original scale developed by Feick and Price (1987). The scale developed by Feick and Price (1987) have been used by many researchers measuring market maven (Ailawadi, Neslin, & Gedenk 2001; Barnes & Pressey, 2012). Using instruments developed and tested by prior researchers ensured validity and reliability. Data were collected via email, URL embedded, online questionnaire (Wiedmann, Walsh, & Mitchell, 2001).

As stimuli, print advertisements of high street fashion apparel retail brands were used. Use of print advertisements as stimuli to brand positioning strategy survey research has been advocated in prior researchers too (Crawford, 1985; Blankson & Kalafatis, 2004; Fuchs & Diamantopoulos, 2010). The objective of showing print advertisements as stimuli was to convey brand positioning of a particular brand's offerings. Prior literature justifies the use of print advertisements because of a widely accepted view that marketing communications are the tools to convey brand positioning (Crawford, 1985; Blankson & Kalafatis, 2004), and the frequent use of advertisements as stimuli in brand positioning research is common (Hartmann, Ibanez, & Sainz, 2005). The pool of print advertisements of fashion retail brands used in this study were similar to the ones used in the first and second study.

Before the print advertisements were made a part of the survey instrument as stimuli, their brand names were changed to fictitious brand names with the help of a design software, Adobe Photoshop CS6,

<sup>1</sup> List of private universities in Pakistan is available on the official website of Higher Education Commission (Source: <http://www.hec.gov.pk/Ourinstitutes/pages/Default.aspx>).

to encourage respondents to base their survey responses only on the textual and visual brand positioning information presented in the print advertisements. This practice minimizes confounding effects regarding the respondents' attitudes towards known brand names (Holden & Vanhuele, 1999). The questionnaire was divided in three sections, the first section had stimuli print advertisements of fashion retail brands. The second section explained the objective of the study along with identification of the respondent's most favourite fashion retail brand. Lastly, the third section of the survey had items about benefit brand positioning strategy, feature brand positioning strategy, surrogate brand positioning strategy, brand love and market maven. High street fashion apparel retail brands were focused in this study which are explained in Cambridge English Dictionary (2017) as fashion brands which are easily available in shopping malls and in fashion streets in cities for consumers and are in complete contrast with the custom-made fashion designer brands.

Most researchers do include consideration about the problem of common method bias in behavioural science (Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 2003). Common method variance is defined as "variance that is attributable to the measurement method rather than to the construct of interest. The term method refers to the form of measurement at different levels of abstraction, such as the content of specific items, scale type, response format, and the general context (Fiske, 1982). Common method variance also can influence the relationships between different variables (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000). Since common method bias can influence research findings, therefore, this study used AMOS 22.0 to measure common method variance. Common latent factor test was used to test presence of common method bias (Aulakh & Gencturk, 2000). For this purpose, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to test the hypothesis that a single factor can be responsible for all the variance in data collected (Iverson & Maguire, 2000). All items from all the constructs in the study were loaded on a single factor to determine whether the majority of the variance can be accounted for by one general factor. A single factor explained 29.3% of the variance in the model. The goodness-of-fit statistics indicators suggested a bad model fit since indices were outside the commonly accepted cut-off points; CMIN/ DF = 6.83 (cut-off point, 2 and 5), normed fit index (NFI) = 0.464, adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI) = 0.522, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.482, Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) = 0.501, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.210. All the indicators other than CMIN/ DF have a cut-off point of 0.7 and RMSEA should be less than 0.10 (Yang & Green, 2010).

Boatswain (2015) recommended pretesting to analyze the overall flow, clarity and comprehension of the research instrument. Advantages of pretesting include; 1) it is useful to check for any biases in the questionnaire, 2) whether the questionnaire was difficult to complete by the respondents (Feinberg, Kinnear, & Taylor, 2012; Fowler, 2013), and 3) it helps in estimating the time required to fill in the survey (MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012). A small sample of 32 private university students was used for pretesting. Respondents voluntarily completed the questionnaire. Responses were then analysed for descriptive statistics such as mean, mode, median and standard deviation in SPSS 22.0. It took almost fifteen minutes for the respondents to complete the questionnaire. Preliminary analysis suggested adequate comprehension of the research instrument.

## 4 Data Analyses

### 4.1 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with maximum likelihood estimation in AMOS 22.0 was used to test the model. The first step in SEM is confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) (Gerbing, David, & Anderson, 1988) and the second step is to test the fit of the structural model (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004). If the factor loadings of an item are greater than 0.70, it is considered to be reliable (Comrey & Lee, 1992) (see table 4.5). Also, unidimensionality of all the items was established by CFA (Gerbing and Anderson, 1988). CFA helped determine the fit of the measurement model along with an estimation of validity and reliability of the latent constructs (Shah & Goldstein, 2006). CFA was performed for all the constructs used in this study; benefit brand positioning strategy, feature brand positioning strategy, surrogate brand positioning strategy, brand love and market maven.

To measure the model fit, values of goodness-of-fit (GFI), comparative fit index (CFI), normed fit index (NFI), adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI) and Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) were used. The acceptable range for model fit indices is between 0 and 1, with values closer to 1 indicating a good model

fit (Mulaik et al., 1989; Hair et al., 2010). Value of root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) should be less than 0.1 and CMIN/DF should be between 2 and 5 (Yang, 2010). See table 4.5 for factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha (scale reliability), composite reliability (CR), goodness-of-fit statistics and average variance extracted of the proposed measurement model. Any value of cronbach's alpha above 0.70 is considered to be good measure for unidimensionality of the latent constructs (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). No items had to be dropped since all the factor loadings were greater than 0.70 (Comrey & Lee, 1992). Composite Reliabilities were higher than the cut-off point of 0.70 (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2012) and it is considered to be a superior test of reliability than cronbach's alpha (Hair et al., 2009).

The average variance extracted (AVE) for all the variables was greater than 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) implying that the constructs used in this study have convergent validity and these latent constructs were indicated by the measured items that reflected well the theoretical latent constructs. These results indicate the convergent validity and reliability of the scale is good (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 4.6 shows the discriminant validity of all the constructs. Correlations of a construct with all other constructs were compared with the square root of the AVE of the construct (Chin, 1998). Numbers in parenthesis on the diagonal show the square root of AVE of each construct. For discriminant validity to hold, numbers in each row and column should be smaller than the numbers in parenthesis in that row and column (Fornell & Larcker, 1981); and table 4.6 shows that condition was met by all the latent constructs in this study.

Table 1: Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Factor and Item	F.L. a	Cronbach's Alpha	CR <sup>a</sup>	AVE <sup>c</sup>
Benefit Positioning		.771	.769	.539
Makes me happy/ Does not make me happy	.881			
Boring/ Not boring	.711			
Exciting/ Not exciting	.713			
Fun/ Not fun	.876			
Gives no pleasure/ Gives pleasure	.852			
Cool/ Not cool	.698			
Surrogate Positioning		0.761	.782	.515
Help people feel accepted in society/ Does not help people feel accepted in society	.762			
Help improve the appearance of people/ Does not help people improve the appearance of people	.799			
Would look good on other people/ Would not look good on other people	.779			
Confidence boost/ No confidence boost	.716			
Would reflect people's personality/ Would not reflect people's personality	.810			
Feature Positioning		0.777	.759	.599
Purposeful/ Not purposeful	.779			
Effective/ Not effective	.851			
Useful/ Not useful	.695			
Practical/ Impractical	.791			
Brand Love		.789	.741	.518
The brand/s I shop from is a wonderful brand	.744			
The brand/s I shop from makes me feel good	.817			
The brand/s I shop from is totally awesome	.734			
I have neutral feelings about the brand/s I shop from	.767			
The brand/s I shop from makes me really happy	.712			
I am in love with the brand/s I shop from	.791			
The brand/s I shop from is a pure delight	.739			
I have no particular feelings about the brand/s I shop from	.700			
I am passionate about the brand/s I shop from	.783			
I am very attached to the brand/s I shop from	.717			
Market Maven		.764	.703	.598
People think of me as a good source of shopping information	.698			

I enjoy giving people tips on shopping	
I am somewhat of an expert when it comes to shopping	.793
My friends think of me as a good source of information when it comes to new products and sales	.811
If someone asked where to get the best buy on several types of products, I could tell him or her where to shop	.932
I like introducing new products and brands to my friends	.792
	.783

Goodness-of-fit statistics: CMIN/ DF = 3.01, NFI = 0.781, AGFI = 0.772, CFI = 0.713, TLI = 0.830, RMSEA = 0.081

Note: All are statistically significant,  $p < 0.05$ ;  $n = 607$ .

<sup>a</sup>Standardized Factor Loadings. <sup>b</sup>Composite Reliability. <sup>c</sup>Average Variance Extracted.

Table 2: Means, standard deviations and correlations

Constructs	Mean	S.D. <sup>a</sup>	BP	SP	FP	BL	MM
BP	3.21	.781	(.734)				
SP	2.84	1.03	0.32**	(.717)			
FP	3.06	1.22	0.33**	0.30**	(.774)		
BL	4.09	1.08	0.39***	0.41**	0.17**	(.712)	
MM	3.87	1.35	0.29**	0.34**	0.41**	0.37**	(.773)

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Numbers in parenthesis on the diagonal show the square root of AVE. For discriminant validity to hold, numbers in each row and column should be smaller than the numbers in parenthesis in that row and column.

<sup>a</sup>Standard Deviation

Labels: BF, Benefit positioning; SP, Surrogate positioning; FP, Feature positioning; BL, Brand Love; MM, Market Maven.

#### 4.2 Structural Model, Results and Discussion

In order to verify whether market mavens have a moderating effect on the relationships between the three brand positioning strategies and brand love, moderation analysis was conducted which shows that as the value for moderator changes, the nature of the relationship between a brand positioning strategy and brand love changes. The moderating effect of market mavens could be enhancing, where the increase in the moderator variable would strengthen the relationship between a brand positioning strategy and brand love; buffering where the increase in the moderator variable would weaken the relationship between a brand positioning strategy and brand love; or antagonistic, where increase in the values of the moderator would reverse the relationship between a brand positioning strategy and brand love.

Moderation analysis was done for three separate models; 1) Model 1 (M1) estimated the standardized beta coefficient between benefit brand positioning strategy and brand love. M1 also estimated standardized beta coefficient for the interaction effect of benefit brand positioning strategy with market maven on brand love, 2) Model 2 (M2) estimated the standardized beta coefficient between surrogate brand positioning strategy and brand love. M2 also estimated standardized beta coefficient for the interaction effect of surrogate brand positioning strategy with market maven on brand love, and 3) Model 3 (M3) estimated the standardized beta coefficient between feature brand positioning strategy and brand love. M3 also estimated standardized beta coefficient for the interaction effect of feature brand positioning strategy with market maven on brand love (see table 4.7).

The first step of data analysis is to test the structural model and estimate the relationships of benefit brand positioning strategy, of surrogate brand positioning strategy and of feature brand positioning strategy with brand love without the presence of market maven as a moderator. All the variables were standardized. Interaction variables (namely; benefit brand positioning strategy x market maven, surrogate brand positioning strategy x market maven and feature brand positioning strategy x market maven) were tested in the second step. The second step was to test the hypothesized model which included interaction of benefit brand positioning strategy and market maven with brand love, interaction of surrogate brand positioning strategy and market maven with brand love, and interaction of feature

brand positioning strategy and market maven with brand love. Satorra and Bentler (2001) suggested that the hypothesized moderation was to be considered as present if the interaction model is significantly better than the linear effects.

This study shows support for all three moderated hypotheses ( $H_1 - H_3$ ) where the hypothesized moderation model should be preferred to the linear model (Casidy & Wymer, 2016). Standardized beta coefficients for benefit brand positioning strategy, surrogate brand positioning strategy, feature brand positioning strategy with brand love were statistically significant ( $\beta_1 = .304$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\beta_2 = .393$ ,  $p < .05$  and  $\beta_3 = .497$ ,  $p < .05$ ) respectively (see table 4.7). Results were statistically significant in case of interaction of market maven with benefit brand positioning strategy, surrogate brand positioning strategy, feature brand positioning strategy ( $\beta_4 = .380$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\beta_5 = .461$ ,  $p < .05$  and  $\beta_6 = .618$ ,  $p < .05$ ) respectively. Goodness-of-fit statistics as shown in table 4.7 indicate that all three model (M1 - M3) were a good fit since they fall within the commonly accepted cut-off range.

Table 3: Standardized Structural Coefficients with Brand Love as Criterion Variable

Step 1: Relationship between IV and DV	
Sample Size: 607	
M1: Benefit positioning strategy and brand love	.304**
M2: Surrogate positioning strategy and brand love	.393**
M3: Feature positioning strategy and brand love	.497**
Step 2: Market maven (moderator)	
Hypotheses	
M1: $H_1$ (Benefit positioning strategy x Market maven) and brand love	.380**
M2: $H_2$ (Surrogate positioning strategy x Market maven) and brand love	.461**
M3: $H_3$ (Feature positioning strategy x Market maven) and brand love	.618**
M1: Goodness-of-fit statistics; $\chi^2/df = 2.15$ , NFI = .83, GFI = .84, CFI = .82, TLI = .87, RMSEA = .07	
M2: Goodness-of-fit statistics; $\chi^2/df = 3.02$ , NFI = .97, GFI = .90, CFI = .81, TLI = .91, RMSEA = .04	
M3: Goodness-of-fit statistics; $\chi^2/df = 3.49$ , NFI = .85, GFI = .88, CFI = .80, TLI = .92, RMSEA = .08	

Note: IV=Independent variable, DV=Dependent variable \*\* $p < 0.05$  level (2-tailed).

Results from this study imply that market mavens are a significant external influence on the creation of brand love in case of all three brand positioning strategies.  $R^2$  in case of M1 (without interaction) was 2% with p value being 0.05, whereas,  $R^2$  in case of M1 (with interaction) was 24% with p value being 0.05.  $R^2$  in case of M2 (without interaction) was 5% with p value being 0.05, whereas,  $R^2$  in case of M2 (with interaction) was 31% with p value being 0.05. Lastly,  $R^2$  in case of M3 (without interaction) was 3.5% with p value being 0.05, whereas,  $R^2$  in case of M3 (with interaction) was 35% with p value being 0.05. The results show that market mavens were likely to enhance the positive relationship of benefit brand positioning strategy, surrogate brand positioning strategy, feature brand positioning strategy with brand love.

Interaction plot (see figure 4.2 - 4.4) showed an enhancing effect suggesting that as the interaction between benefit brand positioning strategy and market mavens increase, so does the strengthening of the consumer-brand love bond. At low levels of benefit brand positioning strategy, and low influence of market mavens, brand love is also expected to be low. Brands incorporating benefit brand positioning strategy aggressively alongside market maven influence will experience extreme form of brand love. If a brand bases its brand positioning strategy on unique features (i.e. feature brand positioning strategy) alongside the external influence of market mavens, brand love is expected to be more. The results showed similar pattern for the interaction effect of surrogate brand positioning strategy and market mavens on brand love. If the fashion brands' positioning is based on intangible attributes of the product combined with an increased external influence of market mavens, the creation of an interpersonal love-like consumer-brand bond is likely to be stronger.

This study found that market mavens are a significant external influence in strengthening the relationship of brand positioning strategy with brand love in high street fashion retail brands. These findings are true for all three brand positioning strategies that were investigated (namely; benefit brand positioning strategy, surrogate brand positioning strategy and feature brand positioning strategy). Marketing communication tools help communicate brand positioning (Blankson & Kalafatis, 2004),

however, these tools are internal marketing efforts by brand managers. This study empirically tests the interaction effect of internal marketing efforts (three brand positioning strategies) and external interpersonal influence (market mavens) on brand love. Whether the brand positioning is based on tangible features, or perceived benefits or intangible symbolic attributes of a brand, for example the name of the designer who is associated with the brand, external interpersonal influence of an informed socially recognized consumer was likely to positively influence the development of a long lasting brand love among consumers of fashion retail brands.

These findings are consistent with the findings of Berman (2016) who reported that a recommendation from an influential person is weighed more by consumers than a paid advertisement. Out of the three brand positioning strategies, impact on brand love of the interaction between surrogate brand positioning strategy with market maven ( $\beta_5 = .461$ ,  $p < .01$ ) was in the middle. Lowest effect on brand love is of the interaction between benefit brand positioning strategy and market maven ( $\beta_4 = .380$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The highest impact on brand love is of the interaction between feature brand positioning strategy and market maven ( $\beta_6 = .618$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Findings about the positive impact of the interaction between benefit brand positioning strategy and market mavens are consistent with those reported by Laroche, Pons, Zgolli, Cervellon, & Kim (2003). Consumers whose perceptions about a fashion brand are based on association created by the interaction of feature brand positioning strategy and market maven are more likely to develop a long-lasting love-like consumer-brand bond.

Those fashion brands having the capacity to identify market mavens and incorporate their capability to alter the extent to which consumers will feel attached to a particular brand are more likely to achieve success in the fashion retail industry (Capon, 2007). Essentially, this study emphasizes that fashion brands managers need to focus not only on the communication incorporating brand positioning with the help of internally created advertising initiatives, but also they should focus on finding out the best possible ways to communicate and influence positively market mavens since market mavens have the ability to influence the creation of long-term consumer-brand bond.

### 4.3 Managerial Implications, Limitations and Future Research

The importance of the interaction of market mavens with the choice of brand positioning strategies and the resultant positive effect of such interactions on brand love has several implications for high street fashion retail brands and brand managers. Firstly, marketers must realise that market mavens are capable of swaying people's opinions about a fashion brand both ways. Their word-of-mouth can influence product choice of consumers (Kiel & Layton, 1981) making it a critical managerial issue to examine. Secondly, brand managers must make an effort to identify and target consumers who have the ability to act as a market maven and disseminator of product information (Sheth, 1971). Thirdly, fashion brands must be aware of the involvement of market mavens and their ability to share product information with others. Lastly, if brand managers focus their marketing initiatives on feature brand positioning strategy, along with an effort to approach market mavens, it is highly likely that a long lasting, romantic consumer-brand bond will be formed than in case of other brand positioning strategies. Market mavens must be communicated the unique features of the fashion brand which will urge them to socially talk about the brand in a positive light. This study is a step forward towards an integrated and systematic analysis of three brand positioning strategies, market mavens and brand love, however, it is subject to several limitations; and provide indications to interesting future research directions.

Firstly, influence and behaviour of market mavens can be studied across multiple channels of communications (on-line and traditional) (Barnes & Pressey, 2012). Secondly, a comparison between the types of marketing channels can be made in order to understand the most effective way to communicate with market mavens. Thirdly, while this study has added to the understanding of the demographic profile of market mavens in Pakistan, still investigation about personal characteristics, interests, values and the motivating factors of market mavens would be valuable in enhancing our understanding about this important group of consumers. Fourthly, it would be interesting to understand the role of market mavens in the context of online shopping given the role of social media in influencing the development of long-term consumer-brand bond. Lastly, market mavens' behaviour might vary amongst different cultures (Swaminathan, Stilley, & Ahluwalia, 2008), therefore it is expected to be useful to conduct a cross-cultural

study on understanding the interaction effect of market mavens and brand positioning strategies on brand love across different cultures in the context of multiple product categories.

Figure 1 Structural Model of Moderation

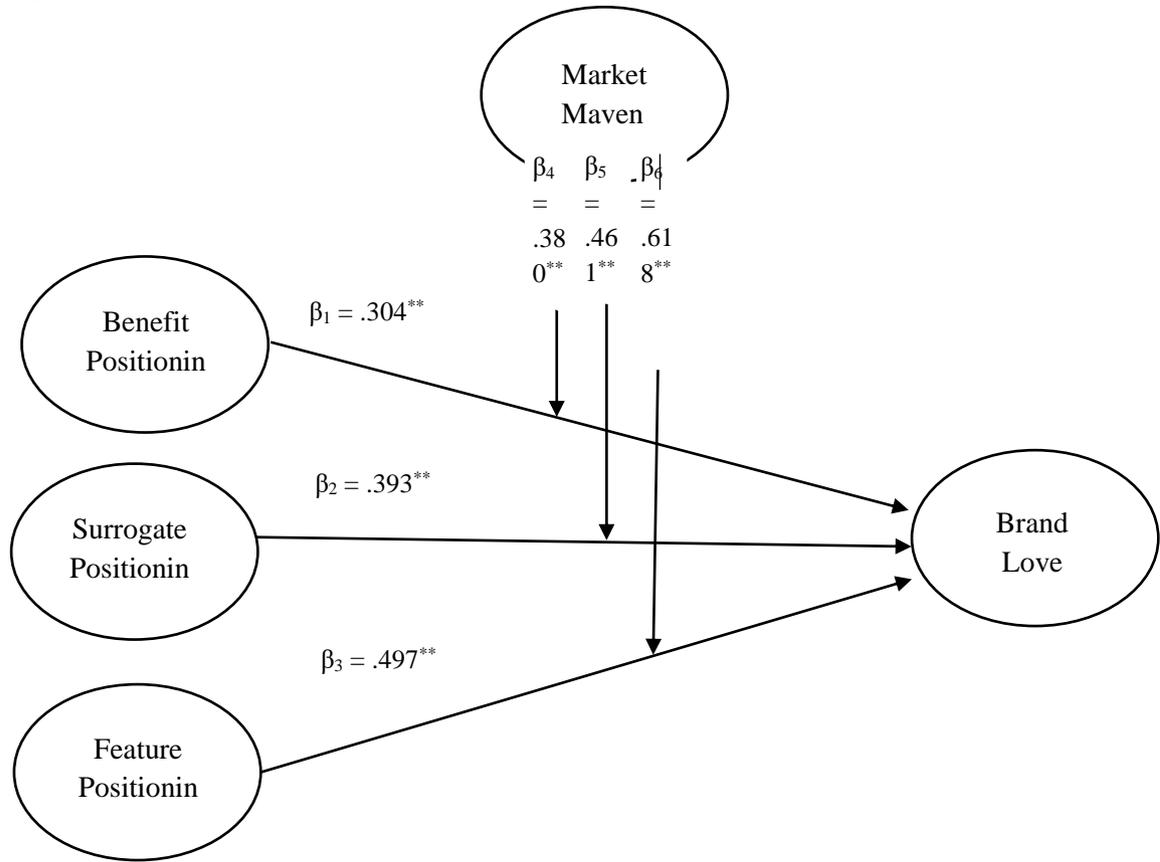


Figure 2 Interactive Effect of Benefit Positioning and Market Maven on Brand Love

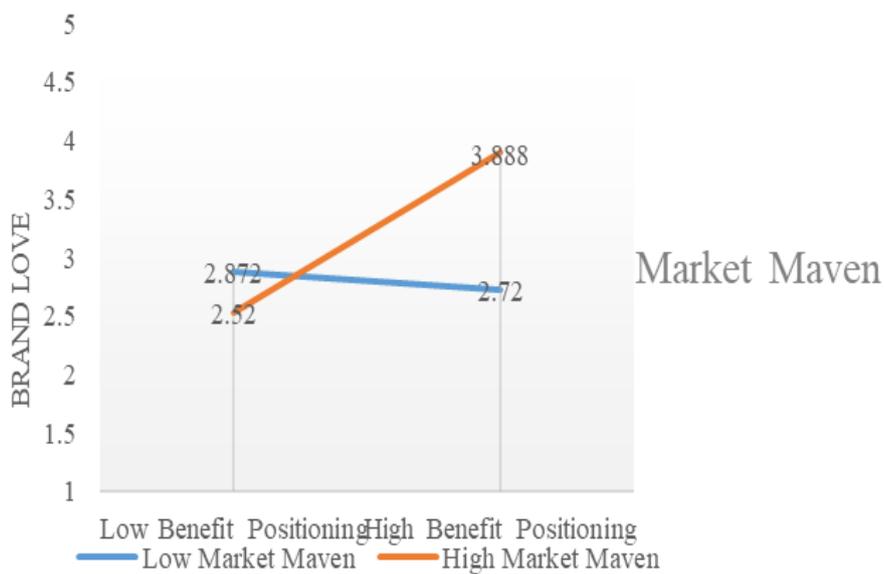


Figure 3 Interactive Effect of Surrogate Positioning and Market Maven on Brand Love

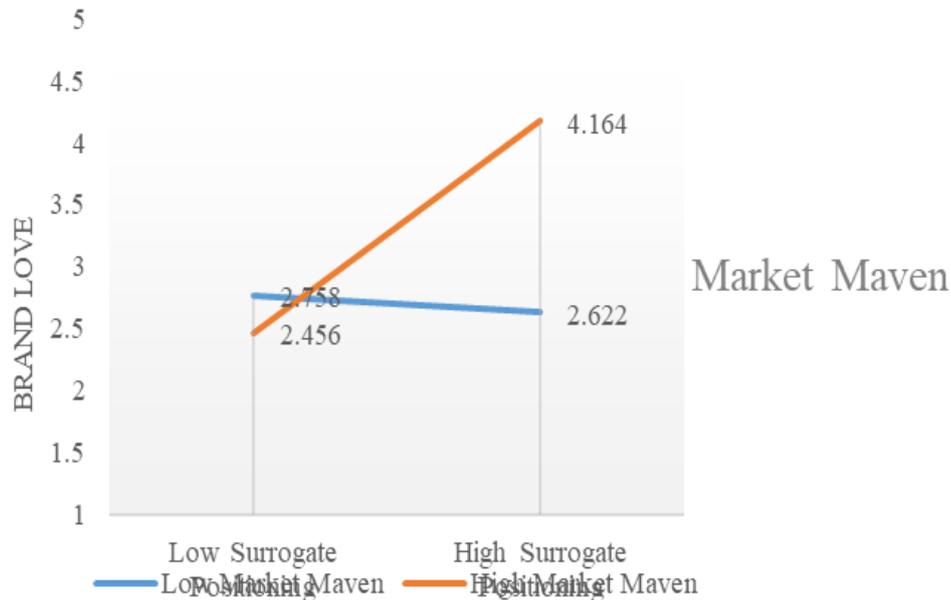
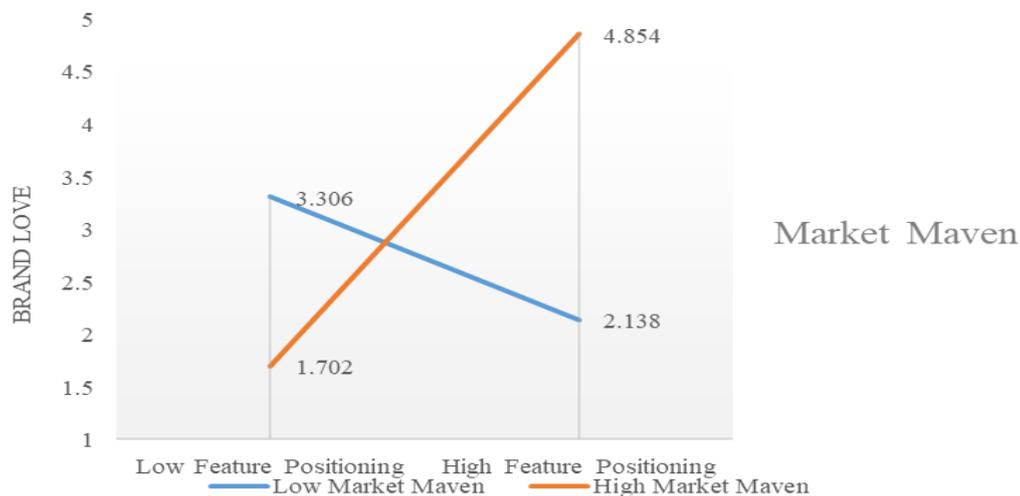


Figure 4 Interactive Effect of Feature Positioning and Market Maven on Brand Love



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