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Shaping Brand Familiarity, Recognition, and Loyalty of a Place Through Brand Coolness

Fizzah Khalid Butt¹

ABSTRACT

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Brand coolness is under scrutiny, and its influence on cognitive and behavioral variables is being studied; therefore, this study aims to explore its effects in areas with little to no prior evidence. This study examines whether brand coolness influences brand familiarity, recognition, and loyalty in the tourism sector. It also examines whether familiarity and recognition transmit any effect of coolness on loyalty in the tourism industry, as embedded in the SOR model. Data was obtained from 402 tourists through purposive convenience sampling using a cross-sectional survey. SmartPLS software was employed for data analysis. The results revealed that brand coolness is supportive in influencing brand familiarity, brand recognition, and brand loyalty, and both familiarity and recognition are strong mediators and partially complement the mediation between coolness and loyalty. The findings contribute to the emerging literature on brand coolness by treating familiarity and recognition as distinct variables and outlining theoretical and practical implications. Research then provides empirical evidence of the consequences of brand coolness and suggests that destination managers need to focus on distinct coolness features to enhance place familiarity and recognition, thereby supporting loyalty.

1. Introduction

Consumers are choosing brands for their coolness and placing them into cool and non-cool categories, which is influencing brand market share (Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2022). Brand coolness is currently under research scrutiny across different contexts and perspectives and requires clarity both theoretically and contextually; therefore, it is suggested that studying coolness can identify its role as a predictor or mediator (Saha et al., 2026). There are multiple reasons for researchers' current focus on developing literature on brand coolness: prior literature was indistinct, constraining, narrow, and inadequate, conveying a limited understanding of the concept (Bagozzi & Khoshnevis, 2022; Tiwari et al., 2021). Since brand coolness has become an important concept in marketing (Bagozzi

¹Assistant Professor, Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), Islamabad. Fizzah@pide.org.pk



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& Khoshnevis, 2022), practitioners are interested in understanding its potential benefits. Recently, Bagozzi and Batra (2025) pointed out that brand coolness motivates consumers to react attitudinally or behaviorally and is a phenomenon with tremendous potential for practical and theoretical insights. Brand coolness can assist marketing strategists and practitioners in strategy formulation; therefore, more research on its consequences is required across industries and cultures (Loureiro et al., 2020). Hence, this study aims to extend the literature by exploring attitudinal and behavioral consequences, including brand familiarity, brand recognition, and brand loyalty, in the tourism sector. Investigating these relations benefits both research and practice for several reasons. Although existing literature has shown that coolness influences attitudes and behaviors across contexts, it remains unclear how it translates into brand loyalty. Further, similar ambiguity exists regarding the impacts of brand coolness on familiarity and recognition, and on their combined effects on brand loyalty. This ambiguity limits the theoretical understanding of how destination characteristics shape longer-term tourist–destination relationships.

One, in shaping customer–firm relationships, brand loyalty is an important factor (Aljumhani et al., 2022; Tian & Kamran, 2021). Brand loyalty, be it attitudinal or behavioral, is critical for firms (Supiyandi et al., 2022). Hence, researchers are keen to support practitioners by exploring potential constructs that may help frame brand loyalty. Al-Dmour (2023) has stated that the tourism sector has long pursued brand loyalty for its ability to enable repeat visits and referrals, and the question remains: how can this loyalty be increased? Further, Gupta (2025) has highlighted the importance of identifying the antecedents of loyalty in the tourism context, which can help destination marketers enhance their destinations amid increasing competition. This study, therefore, argues that brand coolness can be considered as an important antecedent of brand loyalty.

Second, customers are believed to positively rate, buy, and engage with brands they are already aware of (Yunpeng & Khan, 2021). Brand familiarity and brand recognition both provide strong evidence of brand awareness and have often been treated as a single construct in earlier studies. However, they differ in levels of consumer awareness, and recent literature emphasizes studying them separately, as they are inherently distinct (Muhammad et al., 2024; Ladeira et al., 2022). Conclusively, recognition is cue-based identification, whereas familiarity is broader, encompassing experiential and cognitive knowledge. Further, brand familiarity has proven to be a critical determinant of a brand's performance (Ruiz-Equihua et al., 2020). *It is assumed that familiarity influences consumer perceptions and behavioral intentions, helping to build long-term relationships.* Existing research has classified familiarity as an antecedent of loyalty (Li et al., 2020). *Though brand coolness can be beneficial for familiarity,* as debated by Warren et al. (2019), the literature remains limited on whether brand coolness influences brand familiarity. Hence, this study ponders the impact of brand coolness on brand familiarity. Furthermore, the mechanism by which brand coolness impacts brand loyalty via brand familiarity needs to be considered (Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2022). Henceforth, this study considers brand familiarity a possible mediator. Likewise, though the literature has debated whether brand recognition predicts brand loyalty (Arani & Shafiizadeh, 2019) Whether brand coolness can influence brand recognition warrants deliberation. Accordingly, this study also considers the relationship between recognition and loyalty.

Third, the linkages between brand familiarity, recognition, and loyalty have been debated. However, if brand coolness can positively affect loyalty via familiarity and

recognition is yet to be considered. Further, this study aims to empirically test the linkages between brand coolness and brand familiarity, recognition, and loyalty by grounding its analysis in the Stimulus-Organism-Response model, as used in similar studies (Butt & Muhammad, 2025). Accordingly, the study offers three related contributions: it distinguishes familiarity from recognition rather than treating them as interchangeable forms of awareness, examines both constructs simultaneously as mediating mechanisms, and extends the examination of brand coolness to the destination and tourism.

Finally, tourism has increased globally over time *and* is considered a substantial economic sector. Currently, *the* tourism industry is exceedingly competitive, leading to the adoption of brand techniques in the destination setting to win over the competition (Ahn & Back, 2020). Pakistan's tourism sector contributed 6.1% to GDP in 2024-2025, with leisure-driven tourism accounting for the largest share (PTDC, 2026). The way consumers react to a product may be different from their reaction to a place because consumers react differently when they're traveling (Holmes et al., 2021). Consequently, it has become inevitable to understand consumer brand relationships in tourism research (Gupta, 2026). Therefore, *the study's research context is the tourism industry.*

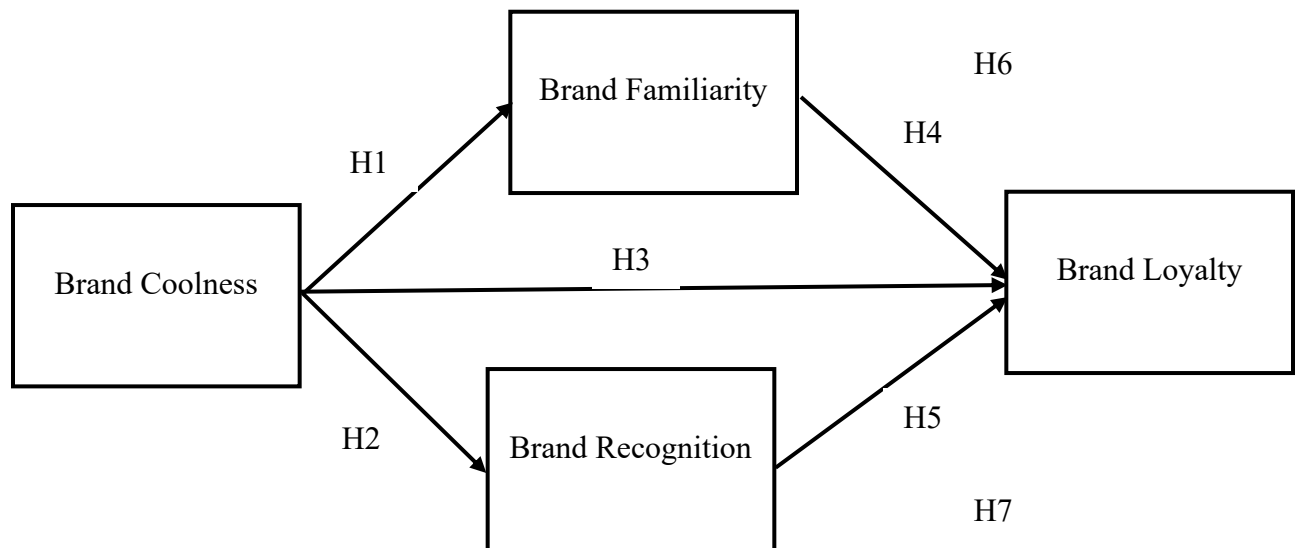


Figure 1: The theoretical model

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Building

2.1. SOR Model

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) model was proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974) and is widely used in consumer behavior. The SOR model explains how external stimuli influence internal attitudes and behaviors, eliciting a response (Alanadoly & Salem, 2022). In the SOR model, the stimulus (S) is first defined as any cue, attribute, or factor in the external environment. Afterwards, the organism reflects the consumer's internal, affective, and cognitive changes. Based on the stimulus and the organism's change, a response (R) is usually elicited as a behavior. SOR model is widely used in the tourism industry (Baber & Baber, 2023). The current research draws on the SOR model, treating a destination's brand coolness (S) as the external stimulus, as tourists evaluate a place based on its characteristics (e.g., iconic, original, aesthetically appealing). Through this external stimulus, tourists will evaluate and experience affective and cognitive changes

in the organism, such as familiarity and recognition of the place. Thus, brand familiarity (O) and brand recognition (O) are two proposed internal changes in the organism that may elicit a behavioral response, i.e., brand loyalty (R), the desired response. Figure 1 represents the theoretical framework.

2.2. Brand Coolness

The word cool is often used to express admiration and uniqueness; similarly, brand coolness is fresh, communal, meaningful, and fun (Bagozzi & Batra, 2025). Warren et al. (2019) introduced the concept as a multi-dimensional construct and conveyed that a brand is cool if it has these dimensions: “authentic, extraordinary, aesthetically appealing, energetic, original, rebellious, popular, high status, subcultural, and iconic”. Consistent with this, the current study considers all these dimensions of brand coolness and associates those with the destination.

Coolness is a desirable trait for consumers, and marketers seek a clearer understanding of how consumers conceive the concept of brand coolness (Khoi & Le, 2022) and how it can be used, and how needs are met, according to recent research (Bagozzi & Batra, 2025). Recently, researchers (e.g. Butt & Muhammad, 2025; Nutta et al., 2025) argued to explore the causes and effects of brand coolness. Prevailing research has largely focused on perceptions and intentions, but there has been limited scope for studies examining whether coolness can foster favorable knowledge and actionable behavior or merely leaves a good impression and image. To support this notion, the aim is to identify the consequences of brand coolness to help practitioners and researchers understand its influence on familiarity, recognition, and loyalty in the tourism industry.

2.3. Brand familiarity

Brand familiarity refers to a customer's high knowledge of a brand (Foroudi et al., 2016). Brand familiarity is a more functional and dynamic concept that can reduce consumers' cognitive effort (Li et al., 2020) by creating an instant connection with the brand (Wang & Yang, 2026). Brand familiarity has gained considerable importance because of its influence on consumer behavior and its usefulness in evaluating the effectiveness of marketing efforts (Bapat, 2017). This concept of familiarity is widely used in the destination sector too (Hahm & Severt, 2018). This study considers brand familiarity with a place, which allows tourists to get to know it better and to make judgments about it. Even though Warren et al. (2019) have tested brand coolness alongside brand familiarity, as discussed earlier, contexts and industries affect how relationships work. Therefore, it remains important to discuss whether a place's coolness, based on its multiple characteristics, can increase a tourist's knowledge and enhance their current level of familiarity. Drawing on the model, stimulus is sensed and assigned a meaning that brings a change in them. Based on this argument, the study implores that coolness can influence familiarity. Hence, it is proposed

H1: Brand coolness positively influences brand familiarity.

2.4. Brand Recognition

Brand recognition refers to the confirmation that an individual has previously encountered a brand (Keller, 1993; Pidhurska, 2020). Brands become more memorable through their unique features, enhancing consumers' ability to remember them (Norris et al., 2021). Moreover, an authentic brand, connected to its roots and its identity, contributes positively to brand recognition (Kim & Song, 2022). Currently, brand recognition is

operationalized as the means of distinguishing a destination through its associated memories and image. Brand recognition facilitates rational decision-making regarding a brand and influences future behavioral intentions, and marketers want to ensure it for long-term gains (Singh et al., 2023). Since the literature provides limited insight into the relationship between brand coolness and brand recognition, the SOR model offers a useful framework for establishing this linkage, whereby an external stimulus induces changes within the organism. When brand coolness stimulates a tourist, they may acquire greater knowledge and understanding of the brand, enabling them to identify a place through its characteristics and cues, thereby enhancing brand recognition. Accordingly,

H2. Brand coolness positively influences brand recognition

2.5. Brand Loyalty

Defined differently over time, brand loyalty is considered the future commitment to repurchasing and using a brand. Cetin (2020) discussed the frequent use of attitudinal loyalty in the service sector, i.e., tourism or hospitality, whereas other researchers mention that both attitudinal and behavioral aspects of brand loyalty exist simultaneously (Sultan et al., 2019). Parris and Guzmán (2023) emphasized the need to consider brand loyalty as a dynamic concept, as loyal customers now have more interactions with brands that affect them and feel a sense of ownership of the brand. Hence, for this study, brand loyalty will be defined as a dynamic relationship with the place that may have both attitudinal and behavioral aspects. Brand loyalty is immensely discussed (Rathnayake, 2021) across different contexts, but research on brand loyalty is still an interesting avenue. According to Hyun et al. (2022) coolness arouses positive sentiments that may lead to positive behavior. Similarly, Kock (2021) also stated that brand coolness can be significant in behavioral and attitudinal phenomena. Jiménez-Barreto et al. (2022) advocated the positive impact of brand coolness on brand loyalty in the music festival context, whereas *Chen and Chou (2019) couldn't empirically prove the relationship between brand loyalty and coolness, which makes it an interesting phenomenon to study*. As in the tourism industry, tourists behave differently, so it will be interesting to see whether a place's brand coolness can affect brand loyalty. Thus, it is proposed that,

H3. Brand coolness positively impacts brand loyalty.

2.6. Brand familiarity and brand loyalty

Brand familiarity aids in decision-making (Chi et al., 2020). The literature has shown that brand familiarity influences many brand relationships, including brand loyalty, with contradicting results (García-Salirrosas et al., 2022). Thus, reassessing the linkage between brand familiarity and brand loyalty will be interesting. The literature has shown brand familiarity to be an important mediator in many brand relationships and to serve as a prompt when consumers lack the motivation to make a decision (Yunpeng & Khan, 2021). Brand familiarity has also been shown to mediate the relationship between brand familiarity and brand loyalty (Rodríguez-López et al., 2023; Yu et al., 2021). Since the relationship is established but yields contradictory results, this may be due to the level of familiarity; appropriate familiarity can be helpful, whereas, as Shinkle (2004) stated, overfamiliarity can make things simple, which can create contradictory results. Consequently, based on the discussion, it will be interesting to see whether brand

familiarity mediates the relationship between brand coolness and brand loyalty in the destination context. Hence, it is worthwhile to ponder the mechanism by which brand coolness influences brand loyalty via brand familiarity. This mechanism can be supported by the SOR model. The model suggests that at first people observe the stimulus and assign a preconceived meaning to it. Finally, they respond according to that meaning. Once they are triggered by brand coolness, the organism may be affected by familiarity and then respond with brand loyalty. Therefore, based on these arrangements, it is hypothesized that;

H4: Brand familiarity is positively related to brand loyalty

H5: The relationship between brand coolness and brand loyalty will be mediated by brand familiarity

2.7. Brand recognition and brand loyalty

Brand recognition has played an important part in brand choices (Thoma & Williams, 2013). Over time, researchers have empirically demonstrated that brand recognition affects brand loyalty (Arani & Shafiizadeh, 2019). Brand recognition can prompt decisions and shape attitudes (Norman et al., 2020), or it may lead people to behave in ways that, in turn, affect their ideas about a brand. As mentioned, the linkage between coolness and recognition is missing, whereas the literature on the impact of brand recognition on brand loyalty exists. According to Singh et al. (2023), brand recognition can be an important mediator, but its use and understanding remain limited. Due to the distinct features of brand coolness, tourists may recognize the place by those features upon exposure, which may lead them to make repeat visits and become loyal. Intuitively, using the SOR model, brand recognition is the internal change in consumers based on the external stimuli, which is brand coolness, and the change can be translated into a response as brand loyalty. Therefore, to verify the claims, it is hypothesized that;

H6: Brand Recognition positively impacts brand loyalty

H7: Brand recognition mediates the relationship between brand coolness and brand loyalty

3. Methodology and Methods

The study used a quantitative approach, and data were collected through questionnaires from Pakistani tourists who may have visited any destination worldwide. The participants were asked an inclusion question in which they were asked to name a place they found cool to complete the survey. If they didn't have a cool place in mind, the survey ended for them; later, they were instructed to complete the survey with reference to that specific place. The respondents were further informed that participation is voluntary and that their anonymity will be maintained to avoid any bias. The survey instrument was adapted to test the proposed linkages. The scales were adapted to ensure that they had already been validated; brand coolness (BC) was adapted from Warren et al. (2019). The scales for brand familiarity (BF), brand recognition (BR), and brand loyalty (BL) were adapted from Foroudi (2019). Since the instruments were adapted, the term 'brand' was replaced with 'this place' because the research is set in a tourism context. To gather responses, a 5-point Likert scale was used. The sample size for the study was calculated by the use of the G*Power calculator. The power and effect size were set as 0.90 and 0.05, respectively. The minimum required sample was 288. Hence, more than 288 data points were collected. The online questionnaires were distributed by researchers with the support

of tourism service-providing firms. Purposive convenience sampling was employed, as tourist operators were approached and the questionnaire was further populated by those with travel experience. The reason for using purposive sampling was to reach the right kind of respondents who could meaningfully contribute to the study by appropriately evaluating the destination they consider cool. A total of 411 responses were received, since the tourism operators circulated the form; the number circulated remains unknown. Further, 9 responses were discarded, as the respondents' responses showed a lack of attentiveness and consideration, i.e., the same response for all questions, excessive missing values, and incomplete surveys; accordingly, they were not deemed fit for analysis purposes. Hence, a usable sample of 402 responses was used. To analyze the data, SEM was conducted using PLS software (version 4.0.8.5). PLS software is widely used in management science, marketing, and consumer behavior studies for its ability to perform complex statistical procedures (Butt & Muhammad, 2025).

4. Results

4.1. Respondent Profile

Table 1 presents the respondents' demographic characteristics. Male participants accounted for 60%, and about 55% of respondents were in the 18-25 age cohort. Most respondents chose adventure tourism as the type of tourism they find cool.

Table 1: Sample Demographics

Gender		Percentage
Male	240	60
Female	162	40
Education		
Bachelors	221	55
Post Grad	57	14
PhD	21	5
Masters	103	26
Age		
18-25	220	55
26-35	133	33
35-45	41	10
45 and above	8	2
Type of tourism		
Cultural	58	14
Adventure	256	64
Religious	36	9
Others	52	13

4.2. Common Method Bias

Common method bias refers to the variance attributed to the measurement method and can potentially compromise the findings (Podsakoff et al., 2012). In PLS, VIF values are used to detect common method bias. This study considered full collinearity VIF; Table 2 exhibits all the VIF values; all of the values are under the standard suggested value of 3.3 by Kock (2015).

Table 2: VIF for Common Method Bias

	BC	BF	BL	BR
BC	1		2.797	1
BF			2.196	
BL				
BR			2.798	

4.3. Measurement Model

It is pertinent to assess the reliability and validity of the measurement model (Hair et al., 2017). Brand coolness has been specified as a higher-order construct. When a higher-order construct is involved in the measurement model, an embedded or two-stage approach is recommended by Hair et al. (2017). In this approach, all lower-order components that pertain to the sub-dimensions are assigned to the higher-order construct.

The PLS algorithm was run to test reliability and validity. The outer loadings of 6 items (Ex1, Or1, SC1, BR2, BL2, and BL3) were less than the threshold value of 0.70. The items were deleted to enhance statistical performance, i.e., validity and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Items with very low scores, such as 0.48, were removed in 2 steps. After the items were deleted, the model was reexamined. Table 3 displays results on reliability. The values of composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha were higher than the standard acceptable level of 0.70, which satisfies the reliability of the constructs. To measure convergent validity, AVE was considered. As shown in Table 3, the AVE values for all measures are greater than 0.5, the acceptable threshold.

Table 3: Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Brand Coolness	0.893	0.918	0.526
Brand Familiarity	0.881	0.883	0.627
Brand Recognition	0.906	0.908	0.728
Brand Loyalty	0.861	0.869	0.589

Discriminant validity was assessed using the HTMT ratio criterion. (Hair et al., 2019). HTMT ratio criterion was considered for discriminant validity proposed by Henseler et al. (2015) and is considered a better approach. The acceptable HTMT ratio should be less than 0.90; the HTMT ratios for the model are all below 0.85, as shown in Table 4. These values indicate that the model's discriminant validity has been established. Once the measurement model was satisfactory, the structural model was assessed.

Table 4: Discriminant Validity

	BC	BF	BL	BR
BC				
BF	0.772			
BL	0.840	0.774		

BR 0.823 0.773 0.808

4.4. Structural Model

For the structural model, (R^2), (Q^2 predict), (f^2), and t values are evaluated (Hair et al., 2017). For assessing the t values, a bootstrapping procedure with 5000 replications was employed. The values of R^2 , Q^2 , and f^2 are important for assessing the model's relevance. Table 5 shows that the explained variance (R^2) values for exogenous variables BF (0.482), BR (0.593), and BL (0.638) are substantial, indicating a good explanatory power of the model. Q^2 prediction assesses the model's ability to reproduce observed values and indicates the predictive relevance of exogenous variables. The values above 0 show relevance, which was the case in the current study, i.e., BF (0.483), BR (0.595), and BL (0.554). Additionally, f^2 , which shows the impact of a construct on its endogenous construct, is also presented in Table 5. According to the standard, 0.02 is considered a small effect size, and 0.15 and 0.35 are considered medium and large, respectively (Muhammad et al., 2019).

Table 5 shows that all the direct relationships were supported. (BC) positively impacts brand (BF) ($\beta = 0.694$), (BR) ($\beta = 0.770$), and (BL) ($\beta = 0.362$). Brand familiarity and brand recognition have also shown positive impacts on brand loyalty, with BF to BL ($\beta = 0.227$) and BR to BL ($\beta = 0.293$).

Brand coolness appears to shape tourists' cognitive knowledge of a destination more strongly than it directly shapes loyalty. A cool place may first become easier to know, remember, and recognize, while loyalty is likely influenced by additional factors beyond coolness alone.

Table 5: Hypotheses Testing

Relationship	Hypotheses	β	SD	t values	Decisions	f^2	R^2	Q^2 predict
BC -> BF	H1	0.694	0.041	16.969	Accepted	0.931	0.482	0.483
BC -> BR	H2	0.77	0.037	21.105	Accepted	1.46	0.593	0.595
BC -> BL	H3	0.362	0.054	6.696	Accepted	0.129	0.638	0.554
BF -> BL	H4	0.227	0.051	4.468	Accepted	0.07		
BR -> BL	H6	0.293	0.055	5.338	Accepted	0.049		

Note: $p < 0.0001$

Table 6 shows the result of the mediation analysis. A 5000-re-sample bootstrapping procedure with a 95% confidence interval was employed for the mediation effects. Both hypotheses (H5 and H7) of mediation are accepted based on the confidence interval values. As suggested by Preacher and Hayes (2008), the confidence interval should not include zero for mediation to occur. Both mediations were partially complementary, with positive outcomes.

Table 6: Mediation Analysis

Relationship	Hypotheses	β	SD	t-values	Confidence Interval		Decision
					2.50%	97.50%	
BC -> BF -> BL	H5	0.158	0.038	4.207	0.088	0.238	Accepted
BC -> BR -> BL	H7	0.226	0.045	5.037	0.136	0.312	Accepted

Note: $p < 0.0001$

5. Discussion & Conclusion

The study aimed to explore the outcomes, uses, and impacts of brand coolness. In doing so, the SOR model was employed to examine whether brand coolness serves as a stimulus for brand familiarity, brand recognition, and ultimately brand loyalty. The study has revealed that the linkages among brand coolness, brand familiarity, brand recognition, and brand loyalty were supported. Additionally, the current study explored a mediation mechanism in which brand familiarity and brand recognition served as mediators, strengthening the relationship between brand coolness and brand loyalty. Since there has been increasing focus on tourism, it is very important that all these variables are studied in greater depth in the tourism sector. Overall, the findings suggest that brand coolness is not only an attractive symbolic characteristic of a place but also an important branding cue associated with tourists' cognitive evaluations and loyalty-related responses. The results indicate that when tourists perceive a place as cool, they are more likely to report higher familiarity, stronger recognition, and greater loyalty toward that place. This supports the SOR-based argument that perceived destination-brand cues can be associated with internal cognitive evaluations, which are then linked with behavioral responses.

The study's findings show that brand coolness has positively affected brand familiarity, consistent with the Stimulus-Organism (S-O) part of the SOR model. The findings are also consistent with Warren et al. (2019), where they developed a relationship between brand coolness and brand familiarity. As the theory states, first, people assign meaning to the stimulus. Contextually, the distinct features of brand coolness, i.e., adventurous, original, and authentic, may be identified by tourists and given meaning through repeated exposure, thereby fostering greater familiarity. Thus, when tourists find a cool place, they interpret the coolness by familiarizing themselves with it. Similarly, a significant positive influence on brand recognition has also been observed. Since the literature on brand coolness is scant, the SOR model posits that once tourists are exposed to cool places, they undergo an internal change and begin to recognize the place. Brand coolness is a dynamic concept with multiple dimensions (Warren et al., 2019); by catering to these dimensions, tourists can visit different places and recognize them according to their preferences. As distinctiveness and memorability associated with cool destinations can provide tourists with identifiable cues that make a place easier to notice, recall, and distinguish from competing destinations. From the SOR perspective, these coolness-related

cues operate as external stimuli that strengthen recognition as an internal cognitive evaluation.

Finally, brand coolness positively influences brand loyalty in the tourism industry. The findings of the study corroborate the study of Jiménez-Barreto et al. (2022) and contradict Chen and Chou (2019). The reason for the contradiction may include the assessment of self-identified places, which may be more strongly linked with tourists' personal meanings, destination memories, and symbolic associations, thereby showing a stronger association with loyalty. Coolness positively affects people's feelings and behaviors (Hyun et al., 2022). *Also, the positive impact of brand coolness on brand loyalty suggests that tourists can become involved with the place and remain loyal over time.* However, that loyalty can be attitudinal, i.e., considering a place a favorite among others, or behavioral, i.e., revisiting the place. Consistent with the arguments of Arani and Shafiizadeh (2019) and the Organism-Response (O-to-R) part of the SOR model, the current study has also found significant positive effects of brand familiarity and brand recognition on brand loyalty in the tourism industry.

Further, to evaluate whether brand coolness transmits its effect on brand loyalty via brand familiarity and recognition, the mediating roles of these variables were also tested. Based on the SOR model, the mediating roles of brand familiarity and brand recognition between brand coolness and brand loyalty have been supported. Chi et al. (2020) argued that familiarity affects brand loyalty; however, familiarity can lose salience over time, thereby decreasing brand loyalty, necessitating a countermeasure. Given the importance of steady brand familiarity, the dynamism of brand coolness can be utilized. As the current study suggests, brand coolness can continue to stimulate brand familiarity, which in turn can influence brand loyalty. It is worth noting that brand recognition has also been interplayed with brand coolness and brand loyalty; however, this interplay also requires generalization in the future. Familiarity may translate coolness into loyalty by increasing tourists' knowledge, reducing uncertainty, and making destination evaluation easier. Recognition may operate through a different mechanism by making the destination easier to identify, recall, and distinguish from competing places. These findings corroborate those of Tran et al. (2024), who explicitly noted the impact of brand coolness on mediators that further enhance behavioral intentions. Further, the relationships between brand coolness and both brand familiarity and brand recognition also deserve attention due to large effect sizes. These strong effects may be due to conceptual proximity between brand coolness and cognitive brand evaluations in the destination context. Several dimensions of brand coolness may make a place easier to notice, remember, recognize, and become familiar with, ultimately leading to consumer loyalty. Although the findings support the proposed SOR-based relationships, alternative explanations should also be considered. Respondents evaluated destinations that they had already identified as cool; therefore, their existing familiarity, recognition, favorable experiences, or loyalty may have influenced their perceptions of coolness. Moreover, well-known or frequently visited destinations may naturally receive higher recognition and familiarity evaluations. The strong relationships may also partly reflect the relatively young and adventure-oriented sample, as such tourists may respond more strongly to energetic, original, extraordinary, and aesthetically appealing destination characteristics.

5.1. Theoretical Implications

The study provided multiple theoretical implications. Foremost, it sought to contribute to research on brand coolness. Notably, brand coolness has positively influenced brand familiarity, brand recognition, and brand loyalty, which can help future researchers evaluate additional brand-related constructs. Secondly, the study tested new linkages between Brand coolness and brand recognition and added to the literature on brand recognition by providing a new antecedent, which is a very important, often-ignored brand dimension. Previous research has predominantly treated these constructs as outcomes of marketing communication, advertising exposure, or brand awareness initiatives. The present findings suggest that consumers' perceptions of a brand's coolness can independently stimulate familiarity and recognition, indicating that symbolic and experiential brand attributes may also serve as important antecedents of these cognitive brand evaluations. This broadens the theoretical understanding of how brand knowledge is developed and strengthened. Thirdly, the study has shown a mediation mechanism linking brand coolness and brand loyalty via brand familiarity and brand recognition, using the SOR model, which was missing from the literature. Fourthly, one of the study's intended contributions is contextual: it has used the idea of place as a brand and tested the effects of brand coolness on loyalty, familiarity, and recognition, thereby contributing to the tourism industry literature. Furthermore, the study also has some practical contributions.

5.2. Practical Contributions

Researchers have suggested the importance of establishing cool brands and their need for marketers (Khoi, 2022). Managers need to make the place and its services credible by highlighting the place's original feel. Tourism planners and managers should aim to make the place aesthetically appealing, enhance its uniqueness, and work on its cultural settings to make it cool; this will help make the place familiar and recognizable, as the findings suggested a very large effect size of coolness on familiarity and recognition. People tend to stay loyal when they're engaged in activities; tourism managers need to plan activities that align with the place and deliver a sense of uniqueness. Managers must enhance the place's coolness to make it known and memorable; tourism managers need to highlight its sophistication and originality while avoiding artificiality. This can be done by preserving places in their original form rather than giving them a new feeling. A place's history often plays an important role in shaping and communicating its culture. In this context, managers should develop iconic imagery that reflects the place's cultural identity and distinctive appeal. Such imagery can enhance place recognition and, consequently, strengthen the likelihood of developing loyalty among visitors and other stakeholders. The managers must plan information materials in a way that can influence people's decisions; this can be based on a place's attractive features, how beautiful it looks, its surroundings and services, and how it makes people feel about themselves. Further, it's important for tourism authorities to facilitate destination branding campaigns, encourage public-private partnerships, and ensure credible national tourism communications.

5.3. Societal, Economic, and Policy Implications

Given the significant involvement of the state in the tourism sector, the findings also offer important policy implications for government policymakers that will help increase the sector's economic and societal impact. The government needs to simplify travel routes and plans, as WTTC suggests, to improve tourism. Pakistan can promote its tourism by branding its beautiful northern sights, heritage tourism in Taxila and Harappa, and the newly developed beaches in Gwadar. TDCP needs to actively focus on public-

private partnerships in its marketing and branding planning to capitalize on the expansion of tourism facilities. The state must plan, like other South Asian countries, to promote its beaches locally and internationally.

5.4. Limitations and Future Research

Despite its contributions to literature, the study is not without limitations. First, this study didn't identify the effect of the individual dimension of brand coolness on the endogenous variables, leaving an avenue for future researchers to examine the impact of each dimension. Second, the study was cross-sectional, whereas longitudinal studies can be considered to align with or contradict its findings. Also, the study used purposive convenience sampling, which impacts the generalizability of the study; this is a limitation, and future studies should opt for probability sampling. Another limitation was that respondents chose the destination themselves; therefore, they may have selected destinations they favored, leading to self-evaluation bias that could obscure the true impact of variables to be considered in future studies. Also, because the data are provided by a large number of young, adventure-prone individuals, it can affect generalization. The study also acknowledges that, despite an acceptable VIF, there is a risk of common method variance due to an unknown target sample. Further, this study considered limited consequences and used the tourism industry as the context; in the future, researchers can use different industries and can increase the number of consequences such as brand engagement, brand advocacy, and brand associations.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Data Fabrication/Falsification Statement

The author(s) declared that no data has been fabricated, falsified, or manipulated in this study.

Participant Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection, and they were fully informed about the purpose of the study.

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