

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BRAND IDENTIFICATION, BRAND TRUST, BRAND COMMITMENT AND BRAND LOYALTY: EVIDENCE FROM SUPERMARKET STORE FOOD BRANDS

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-Abstract-

This study aims at examining the relationship between brand identification, brand trust, brand commitment and brand loyalty among supermarket store brands. The study is located within a quantitative research paradigm, using a cross-section survey design through a convenience sampling method. The target population comprised male and female students from one university. 650 students were targeted, of which 499 agreed to participate and complete the questionnaire. The results of the Spearman's correlation coefficients show strong (significant) positive linear relationship between brand identification and brand loyalty, trust and loyalty, commitment and loyalty. The regression analysis showed significant predictive relationships between brand identification and brand loyalty ($p < 0.01$), brand commitment and brand loyalty ($p < 0.01$) and brand trust and brand loyalty ($p < 0.01$). The three independent variables (brand identification, brand trust and brand commitment), therefore, positively influence the dependent variable (brand loyalty). This research reinforces previous areas of research, which show the value of the influence of brand identification, brand trust and brand commitment of store brands on brand loyalty. The study may provide valuable insights to practitioners and management of supermarket chains in South Africa on the role of brand identification, brand trust and brand commitment of supermarket store brands on brand loyalty.

Keywords: Store brands, Brand identification, Brand trust, Brand commitment, Brand loyalty.

JEL Classification: M31

1. INTRODUCTION

In the highly competitive supermarket industry, where products and services have reached commodity status (Mattila, 2006), supermarket chains in South Africa are compelled to find ways to set their products and services apart from their competitors. This need has given rise to the use of branding as a tool and source of differentiation (Pappu, Quester & Cooksey, 2005). Through their branding, supermarkets provide a wider range of grocery retail products at relatively cheaper prices (das Nair & Chisoro, 2015), attract and retain consumers by promoting value, image, prestige or lifestyle (Kemp, Childers & Williams, 2012). There are four major supermarket groups operating from South Africa. Of the four, Shoprite Holdings is the largest, has been operating since 1979 and claims a 30 percent share of the market. Shoprite operates all over Africa, targets all income groups, has 2 653 stores and sells their products under the brand names Ritebrand, Checkers and 12 others. (Shoprite Holdings Ltd, 2017). The second largest group is Pick n Pay who has been operational since 1967 with 1 560 shops targeting all Living Standards Measure (LSM) income categories and claiming to have nine million customers (Pick n Pay, 2016). The Spar Group is the third largest supermarket group with 2 033 shops and two primary house brands that they sell. Spar has been operating since 1963 and also target all LSM income groups (Spar, 2017). Woolworths is the fourth largest supermarket group, operating since 1931 from 1 395 stores, and only targeting LSM 8-10 (higher) income earners (Woolworths, 2017).

The focus of the study is on store brands. Store brands are also referred to as own brands, retailer brands, private brands or private label brands. These are brands, which are owned and merchandised by a particular retailer and sold under the retailer's own name or trademark through their own outlets. Consumer reports reveal that the variety of cheaper-priced store brand products offered by retailers is important for consumers in deciding which store offers good value for money (Dursun, Kabadayi, Alan & Sezen, 2011). In addition, Juhl, Esbjerg, Grunert, Bech-Larsen and Brunso (2006) affirm that retailers have moved to a higher level in-store brand assortment and this has led to a more direct competition between manufacturers and retailers. According to Beneke and Carter (2015), private label merchandise is growing in prominence globally.

Manufacturer brands, on the other hand, refer to those brands that are created by producers, bear their chosen brand name and the brand is owned by the producer (Beneke, 2010; Tifferet & Herstein, 2010; Dursun et al., 2011). Currently store brands have closed the quality gap in manufacturer brands and in some situations, store brands have higher quality levels than the manufacturer brands (Martos-Partal & Gonzalez-Benito, 2011). Previous research indicates that once a consumer has purchased a store brand product and is satisfied with it, the likelihood of later purchase is higher (Sheau-Fen, Sun-May & Yu-Ghee, 2012).

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The main problem encountered by store brands is that customers perceive them as products of lower quality, when compared to manufacturer brands (De Wulf, Odekerken-Schroder, Goedertier & Ossel, 2005; Mendez, Oubina & Rubio, 2011) and judge them as substitutes to manufacturer brands in terms of quality (Sheau-Fen et al., 2012). This raises the question of how consumers' attitudes towards the store brand are affected by their perception of image of the stores whose name they carry (Liljander, Polsa & Van Riel, 2009). Previous related empirical studies on brand identification investigated products or services, many of which possess high levels of symbolic meaning, which evoke consumer commitment and emotional involvement, such as sports teams (Carlson, Donovan & Cumiskey, 2009), motor vehicles (Kuenzel & Halliday, 2008) and cosmetics (Papista & Dimitriadis, 2012) on brand loyalty. While the findings of these researchers contribute significantly to the current understanding of how brand loyalty can be generated from a consumer's perspective, it would be interesting to unearth brand loyalty development from a social identity perspective. However, a review of the literature has revealed that one of the components leading to a customer's identification with a company is the characteristics of the company (Ahearne, Bhattacharya & Gruen, 2005). Moreover, the proliferation of supermarket food brands requires a greater understanding of the role brand identification, trust and commitment play in creating customer-brand loyalty relationships. Despite the recognised importance of brand identification, its effects on trust and commitment in the development of brand loyalty remain relatively unexplored in relation to supermarket store brands (So, King, Sparks & Wang, 2013).

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Brand identification

Drawn from social identity theory, identification is a perception of oneness with a group of people or an organisation (Chou, 2013). Identification is essentially a

perceptual construct implying identity fit and identity matching (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). To extend the concept, brand identification can be described as a consumer who perceives the degree to which one defines oneself by the same attributes held by the brand. Brand identification is often referred to as self-image congruence or self-connection with a brand and is defined as, “the extent to which the consumer sees own self-image as overlapping the brand’s image” (Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2009). Earlier, Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) posited that in marketing contexts, customers create their social identity by associating themselves with brands that reflect and reinforce their self-identities. Previous research found that brand identification induces consumers’ favourable evaluation of a brand (Ahearne et al., 2005). Customer-brand relationship indicates that consumers engage in pro-brand behaviour because they identify with the focal brand and such brand identification arises largely due to the identity of the brand (Kuenzel & Halliday, 2010; He, Li & Harris, 2012). As succinctly put by Belk (1988:160) “we are what we have... what we buy, own and consume, define us to others as well as ourselves”. Hence, brands have the ability to embody, inform and communicate desirable consumer identities (Lam, Ahearne, Hu & Schillewaert, 2010).

Research has also shown that brand identification has a positive influence on brand loyalty (He et al., 2012). Kuenzel and Halliday (2010) posit that when consumers connect themselves with a well-known brand, positive brand identification is generated and this leads consumers to connect and become committed to well-known brands in order to increase their self-esteem. Hence, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H1: Brand identification of supermarket food store brands has a positive influence on brand loyalty.

3.2 Brand trust

Brand trust is defined as the willingness of consumers to rely on the power of the brand to realise its stated purpose (Marzocchi, Morandin & Bergami, 2013) and a belief that the brand is capable of achieving the promised benefits it acclaims (Lin & Lee, 2012). From a consumer stand point, brand trust is a psychological variable mirroring a set of accumulated presumptions involving the credibility, integrity and benevolence that a consumer attributes to the brand (Gurviez & Korchia, 2003). The key issue, then, is to identify specific features that form brand trust. Beliefs about the reliability of the brand, safety and honesty are important features of trust that people incorporate in their operationalisation of brand trust. Brand trust is the central component of any long-term relationship

(Punniyamoorthy & Prasanna-Mohan-Raj, 2007) evolving from past experiences and prior interactions because its development is described most often as an individual's experiential process of learning over time (Lee, Huang & Hsu, 2007). Prior research affirms that trust serves as a significant predictor of brand loyalty (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999) because it creates exchange relationships that a customer values (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Accordingly, this study proposes that:

H2: Brand trust of supermarket food brands has a positive influence on brand loyalty.

3.3 Brand commitment

Brand commitment refers to the economic, emotional and psychological attachments that a consumer may have towards a brand (Kemp & Bui, 2011). Brand commitment has also been described as having two primary elements, namely affective commitment and continuance commitment. Affective commitment is the consumer's emotional attachment to the brand, which symbolises the powerful sense of personal identification. Continuance commitment is the consumer's willingness to engage in advocacy intentions or it involves the consumer's intentions to continue a relationship because of alternatives and scarcity calculative costs (Kemp & Bui, 2011). Consumers with a stronger level of commitment who have set up strong relationships with the brand, tend to see a strong attachment between themselves and the brand and also consider the brand as an integral part of their lives. Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) posit that brand commitment positively influences brand loyalty and in line with this postulation, this study hypothesises that:

H3: Brand commitment of supermarket food brands has a positive influence on brand loyalty.

3.4 Brand loyalty

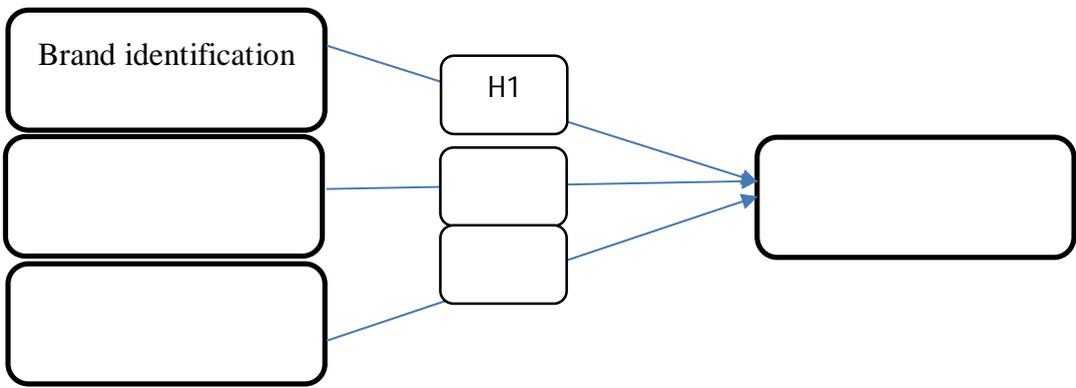
Brand loyalty exhibits a notion that customers will promote a company's products proactively and display loyal behaviours. The literature suggests that customers that are loyal to a brand will purchase more products and recommend them to others (Chou, 2013). Brand loyalty is expressed as, "the tendency to consistently choose a single brand among several brands in the same product group and continuously purchase that brand" (Ercis, Unal, Candan & Yildirim, 2012). If consumers are unhappy with the brand, the probability to change the brand and complain about the product and the store is high. Brand loyalty has also been described as having two primary elements: behavioural loyalty and attitudinal loyalty. Behavioural loyalty consists of repeated purchases of the brand, whereas

attitudinal loyalty is a customer's dedication to the brand through some value he/she connects with the brand and how well the brand is performing in relation to its competitors (O' Malley, 1998; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001).

Based on the above review of the literature and possible relationships between the constructs, the following conceptual framework is suggested.

4. PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Figure- 1: Conceptual framework



5. RESEARCH DESIGN

The study used a quantitative research design through a structured questionnaire. The design was suitable to solicit the required information related to brand identification, brand trust, brand commitment and brand loyalty. In addition, the approach enables one to examine the relationships between the constructs used in the study.

5.1 Sample and data collection

The study used a non-probability convenience sampling technique to obtain information from a conveniently selected sample of 650 students, income earners of the future, enrolled at one university. The total population of the study was 15 130 students. Prior to data collection, permission was attained from the university, participation in the study was voluntary and the questionnaires did not contain the names of the respondents who remained anonymous throughout the study. Of the 650 questionnaires distributed, 499 questionnaires with valid responses were used in the analysis. The data were collected over a four-week period in September 2016. The sample size was considered adequate for regression models containing five or fewer constructs (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham, 2006). The

survey instrument was a self-administered questionnaire consisting of 28 items compiled using measurement items generated from the literature and completed with the help of four post graduate students. These measurement items had been validated in previous studies producing high Cronbach alphas and, therefore, were considered appropriate for the study. The questionnaire was divided into five sections namely, demographic information of the respondents, brand identification, brand trust, brand commitment and brand loyalty. Minor adaptations were made to questionnaire items in order to fit the research context and purpose. To measure brand identification, scale items were adapted from, Kim, Han and Park (2001), Kuenzel and Halliday (2008) and Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen (2012). Brand trust measure scales were adapted from Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) and Alam and Yasin (2010), while a scale to measure brand commitment was adapted from Kemp and Bui (2011). Lastly, brand loyalty was measured using a scale adopted from Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001). All items regarding the constructs were measured using a five-point Likert-type scale (1= strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree).

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

6.1 Respondents profile

The majority of the respondents in the sample (n=251; 50.3%) were male and the remainder (n=248; 49.7%) were female. Black consumers comprised the majority in the sample (n= 253). The age composition of the sample states that 65.3 percent (n=326) of the respondents were between the ages of 18-29 years, 25.7 percent (n=128) were aged between 30-49 years and 9.0 percent (n=45) represented the aged group between 50-69 years.

6.2 Correlations analysis

The Spearman’s correlation coefficient (*r*) was applied to measure the degree of linear association between the variables as proposed (Malhotra, 2010). The correlation analysis is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Correlations: brand identification, trust, commitment and loyalty

Constructs	(BI)	BT	BC	BL
Brand identification (BI)	1.000	0.671 **	0.728 **	0.737 **
Brand trust (BT)	0.671 **	1.000	0.758 **	0.737 **
Brand commitment (BC)	0.728 **	0.758 **	1.000	0.786 **
Brand loyalty (BL)	0.737 **	0.694 **	0.786**	1.000

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tail)

The results of the Spearman's correlation coefficients show a strong positive linear relationship between brand identification and brand loyalty ($r=0.737$; $p<0.01$). According to Stephen and Coote (2005), bonds of identification between consumers and brand are difficult to break; a loyal customer base with a high level of consumer-brand identification is strategically valuable and is also a potential source of competitive advantage. So, Parstons and Yap (2013) posit that consumers identify themselves more strongly with brands that possess favourable identity. This resonates with the self-identity theory.

The relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty is positive ($r=0.737$; $p<0.01$), indicating that brand trust is positively associated with brand loyalty. Brand loyalty usually entails trust and trust becomes the key driver that combines the relationship between the brand and the customer over time (Ercis et al., 2012). So et al. (2013) demonstrate that when consumers have trust in a brand, they have confidence in the brand to meet their expectations continually; hence, they are more willing to be brand loyal. In other words, a consumer who has trust in the brand is more likely to remain loyal and pay a premium price for the brand (Tsiotsou, 2013). Becerra and Badrinarayanan (2013) affirm that when consumers identify with a particular retail brand, they trust and commit to the brand and become brand loyal.

The relationship between brand commitment and brand loyalty is positive ($r=0.786$; $p<0.01$) indicating that brand commitment has a strong association with brand loyalty. Albert and Merunka (2013) suggest that commitment leads to brand loyalty, which is the main objective of brand managers, because it creates greater resistance to competitors' marketing actions, positive word-of-mouth effects or reduced marketing costs. Ercis et al. (2012) conclude that both trust and commitment are essential in ensuring a long-term preference towards a firm's brand and they are considered as antecedents of loyalty and repurchase intentions. A study by Jones and Kim (2011) reveal that when consumers identify with a particular store brand they show strong brand commitment, which is a critical predictor of brand loyalty. In other words, brand commitment helps to create brand loyalty (Hwang & Ham, 2014). Therefore, commitment initiates an on-going process of continuing and maintaining a valued relationship that has been developed by trust. Morgan and Hunt (1994) and Ercis et al. (2012) affirm that commitment encourages consumers to continue their relationship with the brand in the future.

6.3 Regression analysis

Table 2 reports on the various regression models in order to assess the predictive relationship between the constructs. Collinearity diagnostics were also checked as part of the multiple regression procedure. This diagnostic tool is essential when analysing as it can pick up problems of multi-collinearity that may not be evident in a correlation matrix. First, correlations >0.80 (Field, 2005) were checked in the correlation matrix (see Table 2) to assess the existence of multi-collinearity. None of the set of correlations was above 0.80.

Model 1 reports on the regression analysis between brand identification and brand loyalty. The predictor and independent variable held constant was brand identification (independent variable) and the dependent variable that was entered into the prediction model was brand loyalty. On the examination of the relationship between brand identification and brand loyalty the adjusted $R^2 = 0.220$, indicating that brand identification explained approximately 22.0 percent of variance in the students' brand loyalty. The beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.471$) suggests that there is a strong positive relationship ($p < 0.01$) between brand identification and brand loyalty on store brands.

Model 2 reports the regression analysis between brand trust and brand loyalty. The predictor and independent variable held constant was brand trust and the dependent variable that was entered into the prediction model was brand loyalty. On the examination of the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty the adjusted $R^2 = 0.574$, indicating that that brand trust explained 57.4 percent of variance on students' brand loyalty. The beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.758$) suggests that there is a strong positive relationship ($p < 0.01$) between brand trust and brand loyalty on store brands. Lee et al. (2007) reveal that consumers' trust on a brand originates from past experiences and prior interactions, because its development is described most often as an individual's experiential process of learning over time.

Table 2: Regression analysis among study constructs

Model 1: Construct	Adjusted R^2	Beta (β)	t-value	p- level
Dependent: Brand loyalty Independent: Brand identification	0.220	0.471	20.541	0.000*
R= 0.471 $R^2 = 0.222$ B= 0.367 F =141.863 $p \leq 0.0000$				
Model 2: Construct	Adjusted R^2	Beta (β)	t-value	p- level
Dependent: Brand loyalty Independent: Brand trust	5.74	0.758	17.137	0.000*

R= 0.758		R ² = 0.574		B= 0.409		F = 670.717		p<= 0.000	
Model 3: Construct			Adjusted R ²	Beta (β)	t-value	p- level			
Dependent: Brand loyalty Independent: Brand commitment			0.603	0.777	37.224	0.000*			
R= 0.777		R ² = 0.603		B= 0.320		F =755.983		p<= 0.000	

Model 3 reports the regression analysis between brand commitment and brand loyalty. The prediction that was held constant was brand commitment (independent variable) and the dependent variable that was entered into the prediction model was brand loyalty. On examination of the relationship between brand commitment and brand loyalty, the adjusted R² =0.603, indicating that that brand commitment explained 60.3 percent of variance on students’ brand loyalty. The beta coefficient (β=0.777) suggests that there is a strong positive relationship (p<0.01) between brand commitment and brand loyalty on store brands. Previous studies reveal that brand loyalty reflects a customer’s commitment to remain in a long-term relationship with a brand, whereas, emotion denotes a customer’s feeling of connection, affection and passion towards a brand (So et al., 2013). Morgan and Hunt (1994) and Ercis et al. (2012) conclude that both trust and commitment are essential in ensuring a long-term preference towards a firm’s brand and they are considered as antecedents of loyalty.

7. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Table 3 provides a summary of the reliability values for the four dimensions. A Cronbach alpha coefficient test was undertaken to assess the reliability of the scales. The reliability values for the constructs ranged from 0.825 to 0.924, which were above the acceptable benchmark level of 0.70 (Malhotra 2004:268).

Table 3: Summary of Cronbach’s alpha reliability results

Scale	No. of items	Cronbach’s alpha
Brand identification	6	0.924
Brand trust	5	0.825
Brand commitment	5	0.912
Brand loyalty	6	0.894

Three validity measures were performed, namely content validity, convergent validity and predictive validity. Content validity measures validity to the extent which the instrument is able to cover the range of meanings within the concept that is being investigated and also in the light of the research objectives (McDaniel & Gates, 2010). This was undertaken through pilot testing (50 respondents that did not form part of the main survey) of the questionnaire and a review of the questionnaire by academics in the field of marketing and a statistician to make necessary changes such as deletion of items and rewording of questions. The pilot study was undertaken to determine the initial reliability of the questionnaire and the overall reliability of the scale was considered satisfactory, as the Cronbach coefficient was greater than the recommended level of 0.70.

The scale's convergent validity was assessed for statistical significance by using Pearson's correlation coefficients. The value of -1.00 depicts a perfect negative correlation, while, $+1.00$ represents a perfect positive correlation. Hair, Bush and Ortinau (2006) conclude that the higher correlation coefficient reflects a strong level of the relationship between variables. The study showed strong positive association among the study constructs and thus provides evidence of convergence.

Predictive validity was examined through applying regression analysis. The results of the regression models show high levels of predictive power between brand identification on brand loyalty, trust on brand loyalty and brand commitment on brand loyalty indicating the existence of predictive validity.

8. LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study makes significant contributions to both academia and practice, but has several limitations that offer opportunities for additional research. First, the study can be strengthened by increasing the sample size by including students from other universities situated in different geographical locations. Moreover, future research could be extended to other generational cohorts apart from university students, in a larger region, which may reveal similar or different outcomes influencing brand loyalty of store brands, as the sample may not necessarily reflect the pattern of brand loyalty across the spectrum of a wider population. In this way, a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between the identified constructs could be ascertained. Consequently, the results of the study should be viewed with caution, which limits generalisation until replicated in the future. Researchers should also attempt to replicate this study for manufacturer brands in the same region. Comparative analysis of this kind could yield augmented results through which researchers could develop richer models that

capture and explain differences with different store and manufacturer brands. Additionally, this research did not address products other than food and should be extended to other non-food products. Finally, the present study did not examine other factors such as, brand experience and brand image on brand loyalty, which could be included in future studies as antecedents to brand loyalty.

9. CONCLUSION

This research reinforces previous areas of research, which show the value of the influence of brand identification, brand trust and brand commitment of store brands on brand loyalty. The study supports preceding study findings on store brands with special emphasis on the South African context and gives results of the interrelationships amongst brand identification, brand trust, brand commitment and brand loyalty.

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