

A STRUCTURAL MODEL OF THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN BRAND IMAGE, BRAND TRUST AND BRAND LOYALTY

Abdullah Alhaddad*¹

¹Marketing and International Trade Department, Higher Institute of Business Administration, Syria –Damascus.

ABSTRACT

Brand image, brand trust and brand loyalty are most important marketing concepts which has been discussed by both academicians and practitioners over the past decade. The Main purpose of this study is to discuss the importance of the relationships between the brand image ,brand trust and brand loyalty .The conceptual model illustrates the impact of brand image and brand trust on brand loyalty, and the effects of brand image on brand trust .In order to accomplish the objectives proposed , a model reflecting the effect of the relationships between the three concepts ,the model is tested by structural equations and the sample is 286 students from the higher institute of business administration (HIBA) ,the finding show that brand image has a positive effect on brand trust and both brand image and brand trust have a positive effect on brand loyalty .The study provides brand managers a holistic model to enhance the brand loyalty. Therefore, the research finding can be used by Mobile company in enhancing brand image, brand trust and brand loyalty.

Keywords: Brand image, Brand trust , Brand loyalty .

1. INTRODUCTION

Brand loyalty, brand image and brand trust are widely discussed in marketing literature because its play a more and more important role in the marketing.

Brand loyalty has several important strategic benefits to the firms, such as gaining high market share and new customers, supporting brand extensions, reducing marketing costs, and strengthening brand to the competitive threats. (Atilgan et al, 2005) and even more a loyal customer base represents a barrier to entry, a basis for a price premium, time to respond to competitor innovations and a bulwark against deleterious price competition.

Building and maintaining trust is at the core of brand equity, because it is a key characteristic of any successful long-term relationship (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999). In order to enjoy the substantial competitive and economic advantages provided by brand equity as a relational market-based asset, companies must build brand trust (Delgado and Munuera, 2005).

A positive and well-known image is an asset to all companies because the image is a powerful purchase influencer that affects the consumer's perception of the company and its communication. Brand image has four purposes; brand image communicates expectations, it influences the perception of a company's activities, brand image is a result of consumer's

experiences as well as their expectations and it affects the company internally (Grönroos, 2000).

2. Pervious Researches

2.1. Brand loyalty

In brand loyalty research, the main challenge centers on defining the brand loyalty construct and its measurement. Researchers have been challenged to define and measure brand loyalty because this dimension is formed by two different components: attitudinal and behavioral (Dick and Basu, 1994). Both components explain the formation of brand loyalty. On the one hand, the attitudinal component indicates that loyalty formation stems from a positive bond or commitment between consumer and brand, and this attitude, in turn, arises from the coincidence between the brand attributes and the consumer's preferences. On the other hand, from the behaviour component, loyalty formation is explained by the consumer's prior purchases which result in a certain purchase habit (Dick and Basu, 1994).

brand loyalty is defined as "a deeply held commitment to re-buy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same-brand set purchasing despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior" (Oliver, 1997). Brand loyalty is defined as "a situation which reflects how likely a customer will be to switch to another brand, especially when that brand makes a change, either in price or in product features (Aaker, 1991).

Brand loyalty has several important strategic benefits to the firms, such as regarded as an essential feature of brand value, cut down costs, less sensitive to price, bring in new potential faithful consumers, and benefit in global marketplace (Mao, 2010). Keller (2003), on the other hand, examines brand loyalty under the term "brand resonance" which refers to the nature of customer-brand relationship and the extent to which customers feel that they are "in sync" with the brand. Customers, with true brand resonance, have a high degree of loyalty, actively seek means to interact with the brand and share their experiences with others.

2.2. Brand Image

Brand image has been an important concept in consumer behavior research since the early 1950s. Brand image has long been recognized as an important concept in marketing (Keller, 1998). According to Mao (2010) Brand image plays an important role in brand building.

Aaker (1991) defines brand image as a "set of brand association that are anything linked in memory to a brand, usually in some meaningful way" and can be defined as the combination of the consumer's perceptions and beliefs about a brand (Campbell, 1993). On other hand, Kotler and Armstrong (1996) define brand image as "a set of beliefs held about a particular brand". This set of beliefs plays an important role in the buyer's decision making process when customers evaluate alternative brands. Bivainiené (2007) defines brand image as a "multifunctional set of tangible and intangible features, which allows the consumer to identify the product".

Esch et al. (2006) had confirmed the direct impact of brand image on a consumer's brand trust. Lehu (2001) confirmed that corporate image was a leading cause of high level of consumer trust. Additionally Ming et al, (2011) indicates that brand image has a positive

effect on brand trust. Corporate brand loyalty is an outcome of corporate brand image (Juntunen et al, 2011). Brand image was found to have positive effect on brand loyalty (Ogba and tan, 2009; Anwar et al, 2011; Chen and Tseng, 2010; Ming et al, 2011). Based on these the following hypotheses are proposed in this study:

Hypothesis 1: Brand image has a positive effect on brand loyalty.

Hypothesis 2: Brand image has a positive effect on brand trust.

2.3. Brand trust

Building and maintaining a trusting and long-lasting relationship with customers are critical to a brand's success in today's highly competitive global market. Because of its importance, Brand trust has drawn increasing attention from both practitioners and researchers in recent years. Moorman et al, (1992) defined trust as "a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence." Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) define brand trust as "consumer's willingness to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function".

Trust has several important benefits: trust is the willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). It is being seen as multidimensional in the majority of marketing studies (Raimondo, 2000), and trust is reported to be involved as part of brand credibility in brand equity acceptance (Keller and Aaker, 1992) and fundamental to the development of loyalty (Berry, 1993; Reicheld and Schefter, 2000) and perhaps the single most powerful relationship marketing tool available to a company (Berry, 1993).

Trust had been at the centre of studies that aimed to explain loyalty. The relationship between consumer trust and loyalty had been supported in several studies (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Mayer et al, 1995). According to Morgan and hunt (1994) brand trust leads to brand loyalty because trust creates exchange relationships that are highly valued. Rauyruen and Miller (2007) argued that in order to gain loyalty of customers, one must first gain their trust.

Hypothesis 3: brand trust has a positive effect on brand loyalty

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. The model

A research framework was designed to test the above hypothesized relationships, for the purpose, the Mobile market in Syria was targeted. The target population of interest was defined as the students of a local university. The model results from the hypotheses previously figure 1.

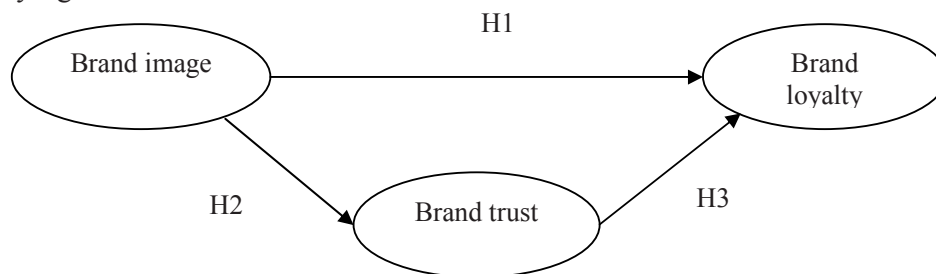


Figure 1. The research model

3.2. Sample's definition

In order to test the proposed model we select a sample of students because they are one of the most important customers of Mobiles. A total of 296 business students from the higher institute of business administration (HIBA) participated in the study. Because of missing data, 10 questionnaires had to be excluded from further analysis. The Demographic profile of the sample is given in table 1 .

Table 1: Demographic profile of the sample

		N	%
Gender	Male	134	46.9
	Female	152	53.1
	Total	286	100
Income (SP)	None	213	74.5
	<10000	73	25.5
	10000-20000	0	0
	>20000	0	0
	Total	286	100
Age	<20	145	50.7
	20 - 25	137	47.9
	>25	4	1.4
	Total	286	100
Education level	Under graduate	277	96.9
	Post graduate	9	3.1
	Total	286	100

3.3. Method of data obtainment

The questionnaire was designed as a survey instrument including all constructs of the proposed model to investigate the hypotheses of interest. The questions in the questionnaire are based on a review of the literature and researches. The survey questionnaire consists of four sections. The first section is designed to obtain sample characterization. The second section is designed to measuring the brand image with a four items using five-point Likert-type scale adapted from (Chen and Tseng, 2010). The third section deals with the measurement of brand loyalty with three items using a five-point Likert-type scale following (Yoo et al, 2000). The forth section is designed to measuring brand trust with three items using a five-point Likert-type scale following (Li et al, 2008). Respondents are asked to indicate their agreement level of each item of the sections on the 5-point Likert scale anchored by “strongly disagree (=1)” to “strongly agree (=5).”.

3.4. Analysis of result

In this section we will evaluate the measurements scales used in the research and then we will use the regression analysis to proceed an estimation of the structural model. Figure 2 shows the estimation model with the standardized regression weights.

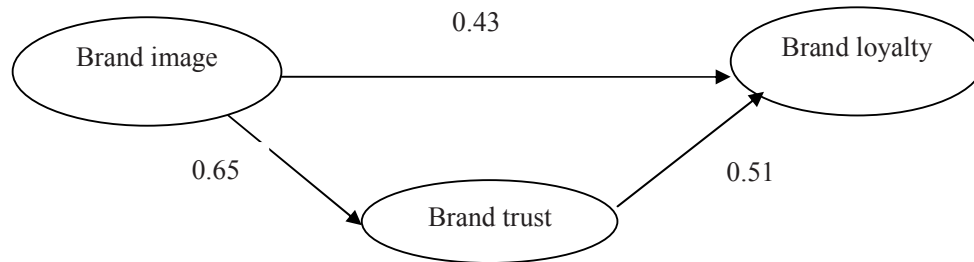


Figure 2. Final model

We applied Cronbach's alpha statistic to measure the consistence of each item under the same construct (supplied by the SPSS). Table 2 reveals the composed reliability of independent and dependent variables. We can notice that all constructs have greater than the suggested value of 0.6 recommended by (Malhotra, 2004).

Table 2: Construct reliability

Construct	Item number	Reliability
Brand image	4	0.855
Brand loyalty	3	0.861
Brand trust	3	0.829

Fit indices (supplied by the AMOS) calculated for the measurement model indicated a good fit between the structural model and data. The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) value below 0.08 indicates a reasonable error of approximation (Browne and Cudeck, 1993). As suggested for an acceptable model, both comparative fit index (CFI) and goodness of fit index (GFI) values are above 0.90 (Jaccard and Wan, 1996). The other fit measures like Normed Fit Index (NFI), is more than 0.9 which showed a well-fitting model (Bentler, 1992). Table 3 provides the value of the fit indices of the model.

Table 3: Fit indices of the empirical model

Test	Value
RMSEA	0.055
GFI	0.960
NFI	0.961
CFI	0.982

Regarding the hypothesis tests (supplied by the AMOS), as shown in Table 4, the three hypothesized relationships are supported in the estimated structural model. As shown in Figure 2, brand image has significant positive effects on both brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.43$, t -value = 4.11) and brand trust ($\beta = 0.65$, t -value = 8.416). Hence, H1 and H2 are supported. Furthermore, brand trust also has significant positive effects on brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.51$, t -value = 5.093), indicating that H3 is supported.

Table 4: Result of the structural model

Structural equations	Estimate	C.R.	P	Result
Brand image $\longrightarrow$ brand loyalty	0.43	4.110	***	Supported
Brand image $\longrightarrow$ brand trust	0.65	8.416	***	Supported
Brand trust $\longrightarrow$ brand loyalty	0.51	5.093	***	Supported

4. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Based on the results obtained in this study brand image has significant positive effects on both brand trust and brand loyalty. Brand trust also has significant positive effects on brand loyalty. We also observe that brand trust has the bigger impact on brand loyalty when compared with the brand image. The finding in this study consists with results of previous researches.

The more people trust your brand the more success you will have. Therefore there are a lot of ways to build brand trust. A great way to build trust with your customers is to let them know that you care about them more than just yourself. Another way to build brand trust is to be consistency and confidence, you should have strong levels of consistency in all parts of your business: price, performance and values. A confident business is easy to trust, so if you don't have confidence in your brand, don't expect anyone else to either. Also we can build brand trust through entertainment by provide value in a fun and creative way through daily content, videos and contests.

The brand image is important, therefore to build brand image we must building brand awareness and brand association by focus on marketing activity to help a certain mobiles brand become a customer's decision choice set. In other words, if customers are not aware of a certain mobile elements when they search for a certain mobile, then it is very unlikely for them to choose this mobile. Whereby brand awareness mostly enhance the brand association which create the brand image. Hence, Mobiles Company and brand managers are advised to look carefully at their brand marketing communication strategy to help maintain customer recognition and recall of a mobile's brand elements compared to its competitors.

This study also offers contributions to academicians in several ways. To date there have been number of studies in brand literature that focus largely on the brand image and brand trust and brand loyalty.

Summing up the results, the study goals were reached and the study provides a model to build brand image and brand trust and to enhance the brand loyalty and gives several important implications for strategic brand management.

5. RESEARCH LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

There are some limitations of the study. First, other variable needs to be studied, such as brand awareness, brand association, and perceived quality. Second, we should investigate this study in service industries. Third, the subject of this study is student. It is suggested that future research can expand its participants to general consumers. Finally we should try to replacing this study with more product categories.

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