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New challenges in brand management

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Nuevos desafíos en la gestión de marcas

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to help in the development of a better understanding of key brand-related terms and discuss the key challenges and trends in brand management.

Design/methodology/approach – This is an editorial based mainly on an extensive and broad literature review on brand management.

Findings – First, this work defines some key brand management terms and presents brand-related issues and concerns that remain unchanged over time. Then it discusses some of the brand management-related matters that are changing since the past few years. Challenges for the management of brands from the side of the companies that have introduced them are then presented. It finally provides a glimpse of the five papers selected for this special issue and then identifies avenues for further research.

Originality/value – This work and the whole special issue together help in the understanding of the dynamic nature of the management of brands over time with implications to the management and the academic engagement with brands.

Keywords Brands, Brand management, Brand identity, Brand image, Brand reputation, Brand meaning, Brand co-creation

Paper type Research paper

Resumen

Propósito – Este artículo tiene como único propósito ayudar en la obtención de una mayor comprensión de conceptos claves relacionados con la marca y presentar los desafíos y tendencias claves en la gestión de ésta.

Diseño/metodología/enfoque – Editorial basado principalmente una extensión y amplia revisión de la literatura relacionada con la gestión de la marca.

Resultados – En primer lugar, este Editorial define algunos conceptos clave de la marca y presenta una serie de cuestiones que han permanecido y permanecen invariables a lo largo del tiempo. Posteriormente, discute otra serie de aspectos y cuestiones que están cambiando en los últimos años para a continuación describir los principales desafíos actualmente existentes para la gestión de la marca desde la perspectiva de
las empresas. Este Editorial finaliza con una breve presentación de los cinco artículos seleccionados para este número especial así como una descripción de futuras líneas de investigación.

**Originalidad/valor** – Este Editorial y en su conjunto todo el número especial dedicado a la marca ayuda a una mayor comprensión de la naturaleza dinámica de la gestión de las marcas a lo largo del tiempo y de sus implicaciones académicas y empresariales.

**Palabras clave** – Palabras clave Marcas, Gestión de marca, Identidad de marca, Imagen de marca, Reputación de marca, Significado de la marca y co-creación de la marca

**Tipo de artículo** – Artículo de investigación

**Introduction**

Developing strong brands that customers will like, choose and support in multiple ways has been a key objective of most parties that introduce branded offers in various markets (Keller, 2016). The importance of brands as a primary identifier of an offer and a unique “spokesperson” to many publics is widely recognised and brands are seen as key company assets (Mitchell et al., 2001; Davcik et al., 2015). Clearly brands are a source of competitive advantage to the offer (Mitchell et al., 2001) and add value for all parties concerned (de Chernatony and Dall’Olmo Riley, 1998; Veloutsou et al., 2013). However, what the brand represents is often downplayed, and the popular belief is that the brand is primarily a name and a logo, a view that is far from the reality of what the brand really represents.

Brand is a complex entity that gives meaning to the offer it is associated with. It is not surprising that various experts do not seem to agree on what a brand should be defined as (Walker, 2010; Jones and Bonevac, 2013). When asked, academics and practitioners provided a number of different and diverse elements as key identifiers of a brand. Experts suggested that the brand can be approached as a set of characteristics that helps in the tactical and strategic decision-making and the offer’s positioning, a set of associations developed from various group’s thoughts about the brand, a transaction facilitator and a consumer–brand relationship contributor (de Chernatony and Dall’Olmo Riley, 1998; Mitchell et al., 2001). These statements are broad and represent different aspects of what the brand is and what its functions are. To many people that use the term, it is still unclear what the brand really is and what it represents. Some even argue that the meaning of the term brand differs depending on its use, the user and the audience (Jones and Bonevac, 2013), while researchers see the brand as a constantly evolving concept with high level of complexity (Veloutsou and Guzmán, 2017).

Brand as an entity exists with constituents and conditions that are stable over time and others that are highly dynamic. This work aims to help our understanding of brands and branding as evolved today. It aims to clarify some of the key brand-related definitions, present the more stable and dynamic thinking about the brands and their management and problematize in relation to managerial and academic concerns and priorities related to the current state of brands as entities. In addition to providing a summary of the papers presented in this special issue, this editorial will present some of the things that are the same over time, some of the things that are changing quickly, the challenges for companies that operate in the new conditions and some directions for future research in the area of brand management.

**Key brand-related definitions**

Given the complexity and the dynamic nature of brands, it is not surprising that many different approaches and definitions try to capture the term brand (de Chernatony and Dall’Olmo Riley, 1998; Jones and Bonevac, 2013). The most widely adopted definition of the Academy of Marketing that suggests that a brand is “a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller from those of competitors” is very limiting and dated. This definition presents the brand as a symbol with a
primary aim to communicate differentiation. Clearly this approach fails to explain the sources of the differentiation and is far from representing the complex entity that the brand is today.

Today we know that the brand is a “persona” that overlays and includes the offer in terms of its very well defined and measurable functional characteristics of the offer. It is the definition of the offer (Jones and Bonevac, 2013), the sum of fundamental values and attributes ascribed to it by various audiences. It goes over and above the offer’s symbols and images and it has become an entity that consumers construct from these symbols and images. Therefore, the brand will be defined in this work as:

[…] an evolving mental collection of actual (offer related) and emotional (human-like) characteristics and associations which convey benefits of an offer identified through a symbol, or a collection of symbols, and differentiates this offer from the rest of the marketplace.

Given that the brand can be perceived differently depending on the audience (Jones and Bonevac, 2013), it seems that it is not enough to define the term brand, but there is a need to better explain how the brand is considered from different audiences. Terms that are extensively used to represent what the brand is like “brand identity”, “brand image”, “brand reputation” and “brand meaning” are used interchangeably, and though no consensus exists on their real essence (de Chernatony, 1999; Csaba and Bengtsson, 2006; Walker, 2010), in general, branding researchers agree that all these terms describe the brand, but they also differ because they describe as connived from different groups of individuals or/and at different points in time. A clear definition of these terms is paramount to further engage with any brand-related discussion.

Brand identity represent an internal perspective of the brand (Balmer and Greyser, 2006), and it is representing the understanding of the brand that the managerial team and any other stakeholders supporting the brand development share. Therefore, as informed from relevant literature (Aaker, 1996; Coleman et al., 2011; Black and Veloutsou, 2017), brand identity is defined here as:

[…] the symbols and the set of the brand associations that represent the core character of the brand that the team supporting the brand aspire to create or maintain as identifiers of the brand to other people.

Brand image and brand reputation are related to the views that external stakeholders and audiences form about the brand (Walsh and Beatty, 2007; Walker, 2010; Siano et al., 2011; Black and Veloutsou, 2017). Brand image is seen here as:

[…] the perception formed to the mind of a member of the external audience about the brand after one real or mental encounter with the brand”. Brand reputation derives from the accumulation of brand images and is approached here as “an aggregate and compressed set of public judgments about the brand.

Brand meaning reflects internal and external stakeholders’ mind-set about a brand (Vallaster and von Wallpach, 2013) and, therefore, the term primarily incorporates both brand identity and brand reputation as well as brand image. Other terms have also been used to reflect the same concepts (Urde, 2016), but the clarification of all these terms goes beyond this editorial.

In the remainder of this work the terminology used will reflect the provided terms.

Things that remain the same
Some characteristics in the context of brand management have stayed the same for the past decades. The most prevalent element is that there are primarily two key parties that are involved and interested in brands when we think about their presence in the market: companies and customers. Each of these two main brand-interested parties try to achieve their own objectives that have significant dissimilarities.
Companies want strong brands that are assets and try to increase the strength of the brand and lead to favourable assessment and brand support from various groups, such as consumers and employees, providing market power (Davcik et al., 2015; Dwivedi et al., 2015; Poulis and Wisker, 2016). Developing brands with strong and favourable reputation is expected of the companies and their network of stakeholders (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993; Christodoulides and de Chernatony, 2010; Keller, 2016). Nurturing clear, strong and unique associations will improve the assessment of the brands in the mind of consumers, promote brand differentiation, facilitate the expansion of the company via means such as increase of sales of introduction of new products. For all these reasons, brand association development is one of the key priorities of companies (Chatzipanagiotou et al., 2016; Keller, 2016), and it is what companies try to achieve in all the markets they are operating in (Christodoulides et al., 2015). Companies aim to build commitment and loyalty and repeat purchase via brands (Veloutsou, 2015; Osuna-Ramirez et al., 2017), and see brands as income streams and try to measure the financial strength of the brand (Davcik et al., 2015; Nguyen et al., 2015). A clear and distinct position in consumers’ minds that make them feel and think positively about the brand transforms the brand into a clear corporate asset (Keller, 1993; Mitchell et al., 2001; Veloutsou et al., 2013; Keller, 2016). It is paramount in our understanding of the strength of the brand to move away from the historical approach used to assess brands and to evolve our thinking by considering over and above the past performance of a brand its predicted performance and its ability to generate future income flows, such as market brand equity (Schultz, 2016). From company side, brand is also seen as a protected property in terms of the characteristics of its symbol, and brand identity supports internal decision-making because it provides ongoing affirmation of the purpose of the brand and provides organisational alignment (de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley, 1998; Mitchell et al., 2001) while leading to stronger recruitment of new staff (Saleem and Iglesias, 2016).

For many years we have known that, in addition to saving time for search, consumers want to buy and use brands to gain certain psychological rewards. Individuals satisfy their functional, emotional, personal and social needs through the value these brands offer to them (Sheth et al., 1991), a view still widely accepted in the literature (Delgado-Ballester and Fernández-Sabiote, 2015; Palazón et al., 2015; Ruane and Wallace, 2015; Simon et al., 2016). Functional value is the extent to which an offer performs a desired function (Palazón et al., 2015); emotional value represents the overall assessment of the benefits and sacrifices; and social value represents the degree that the offer helps the individuals to associate with one or more specific social groups (Sheth et al., 1991). When the brand delivers the appropriate performance and quality, it is generally a brand that consumers have a tendency to engage to a relationship with (Hess et al., 2011). Individuals will have the willingness to consume brands that meet their expectations and maximize the overall utility they get through these brands. Consumers also want to use brands that have the appropriate functional and imaginary characteristics that can help them express who they are. They look forward to admire and find brands they can relate with (Fournier, 1998; Veloutsou, 2007), they assess brands, they develop feelings and form relationships with brands that vary in duration (Huber et al., 2015) and they express their brand feelings through their behaviour (Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009; Veloutsou, 2015; Giovanis, 2016). This is an ongoing process in the lives of most consumers that starts from a very young age (Veloutsou and McAlonan, 2012), and they look for these brands to allow them to relate both with the brand itself and with other consumers because of the brand (Veloutsou, 2009; Dessart et al., 2015, 2016).

What is also known is that different stakeholders have different mental associations related to the brand. The brand meaning can be very diverse depending on the individual or
the group that experiences the brand meaning. The view of the people who internally support the brand primarily and try to convey it externally (brand identity) is far more complex and has a greater detail in the associations rather than the view that is formed after one interaction (brand image) or the overall evaluation of the brand (brand reputation) in the minds of a member of an external audience. This is because of the dissimilar information and experiences that individuals might have about the brand and the differences in the processing and the assessment of the information and experiences.

Other things have changed
Although the basic approach of bringing together supply and demand and ensuring that sellers and buyers are happy and engaging in their exchanges, the way that these exchanges have materialised in the past few years has changed. There are a number of changes that influence the way that the brands are perceived, produced, purchased and consumed, as well as their role in the lives of the various stakeholders groups.

What is considered as a brand has changed over the years (Veloutsou and Guzmán, 2017). Now consumers and companies do not see only products and services as brands, but many other entities are also approached as branded entities. Humans in the form of celebrities (Kowalczyk and Pouders, 2016), politicians (Guzmán et al., 2015; Bigi et al., 2016), artists (Kucharska and Mikołajczak, 2018), managers (Bendisch et al., 2013) and celebrity CEOs (Scheidt et al., 2018), athletes (Carlson and Donavan, 2013), bloggers (Delisle and Parmentier, 2016) or as simple individuals (Guzmán et al., 2015) see themselves and are seen by others as brands in their own right. Countries, regions and cities are also seen as brands (Rojas-Méndez, 2013) and they are very complex in their makeup and approach.

In the past we used to think that the brand is an entity developed through a process primarily coordinated from the company and offered to the market (Veloutsou and Panigyrakis, 2001). Company employees were expected to manage brand meanings by developing and supporting brand identities (Harris and de Chernatony, 2001; Urde, 2016) and values (Kapferer, 2008) over time to the extent that some suggested that a framework with steps can be used to support the brand building effort (Centeno et al., 2013). Consumers had to be trained on what the brands mean, and the reputation of the brand in the minds of various external audiences was very much dependent on the elements of the internal brand identity that the brand support team had chosen to communicate to the market.

Brands today are independent entities in their own right, to the extent that they have been anthropomorphised (Aaker, 1997; Geuens et al., 2009; Azar, 2015; Delgado-Ballester et al., 2017), even in business-to-business markets (Veloutsou and Taylor, 2012). There is immense engagement in the literature in the latest developments of the phenomenon (Davies et al., 2018; Kumar, 2018; Rander, 2018). This is because brands develop their credibility and trustworthiness in the minds of the external audiences (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán, 2001; Li et al., 2015; Hegner and Jevons, 2016) that originate from information and impressions about the brand that come from multiple channels. The relationships consumers form with brand can become very strong and have positive nature expressed through brand love (Batra et al., 2012; Huber et al., 2015; Vernuccio et al., 2015; Karjaluoto et al., 2016; Delgado-Ballester et al., 2017; Hegner et al., 2017a) or be negatively presented as brand hate (Zarantonello et al., 2016; Hegner et al., 2017b; Zarantonello et al., 2018), brand aversion (Park et al., 2013) or brand sabotage (Kähr et al., 2016). This extreme passion that often leads to actions (Wallace et al., 2014; Zarantonello et al., 2016) is a phenomenon which is becoming increasingly encountered, especially when they are negative and can turn against the brand.

The developments of a brand’s mental connection as a part of the brand meaning in the minds of various groups of stakeholders (brand identity and brand reputation) are generated and
maintained involving more players than ever. Brand reputations are informed over time by images captured through company-controlled and uncontrolled signalling (Walker, 2010) and the input of uncontrolled or semi-controlled signalling is increasing. The views of managers in various personal matters influence brand reputation if they become public (Leak et al., 2015). In all sectors, consumers from passive observers have become active contributors to the development of the brand and its functional characteristics (Kristal et al., 2016) and its meaning (Black and Veloutsou; 2017), both when new offers are introduced and when existing offers are adjusted. Consumers want to actively contribute and co-create their desired brands (Kennedy, 2017) to the extent that co-creation managers are advised to consider co-creation as the attributions that consumers have about the brand (Kennedy and Guzmán, 2017). Starting from a very young age (Iyer et al., 2016; Rodhain and Aurier, 2016), consumers talk amongst themselves, interact with others in brand-related issues independently or at a collective level within social groups like the family (Iyer et al., 2016), their friends (Palazón et al., 2015), informal groups (Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009) or in groups with more formally constituted forms in brand communities (Dessart et al., 2015; Cova and Paranque, 2016; Kaufmann et al., 2016; Pasternak et al., 2017). Consumers live the brands and want to share their individual feelings with others (Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009; Veloutsou, 2009; Dessart et al., 2015; Pasternak et al., 2017), and research reports that they develop social links with the other members of brand communities and loyalty to the community itself (Hook et al., 2018). By participating in brand communities, individuals often express or even develop their individual identity through their active engagement with the brand and the other people who also admire the same brand (Black and Veloutsou, 2017).

Although consumers and customers seem to be the most significant contributors in the development of the brand and its meaning, they are not the only stakeholders involved in the brand meaning-creation network (Vallaster and von Wallpach, 2013). Since a very long-time advertising and other communication agencies have been playing a key role in brand creation (Veloutsou and Panigyrakis, 2001). Business partners, such as retailers and suppliers, are actively playing roles with the aim of contributing to the development of the brand identity and the decisions made in the brand team (Törmälä and Saraniemi, 2017). Linked entities, such as endorsers (Dwivedi et al., 2015), other brands (Davies et al., 2006; Delgado-Ballester and Hernández-Espallardo, 2008; Thomas, 2015) or products are sold under the same brand name, such as own labels (Marques dos Santos et al., 2016) and the country or origin (Lu and Xu, 2015; Yousaf and Li, 2015; Brodie and Benson-Rea, 2016). What the press and the media report about the brand and all the publicity produced by what is perceived as reliable sources are not unnoticed when consumers evaluate brands (Gendel-Guterman and Levy, 2017). The various stakeholders may see the brand differently from one another (Pino et al., 2015). Other brands and events associated with the brands are also influencing the brand meaning, with various activities ranging from co-branding (Ho et al., 2017) to placing brands in games (Vashisht and Pillai, 2017). Brand images are not produced primarily from the selected components of the brand identity that the company decides to project to the market and produce images to shape brand reputation. Brand reputation is extensively informed from inputs that are uncontrolled by the company (Figure 1). We are moving from the monolithic brand building originating from the company to a conversational branding that involves many contributors (Veloutsou and Guzmán, 2017).

In consumer markets, the brand consumption has also changed, in terms of the requirements and expectations from the side of individual consumers and their interaction with the brands. Consumers when thinking about brands are interested in not just the objects but in the total experience that the brand can offer them (Morgan-Thomas and Veloutsou, 2013), in terms of both hedonic and functional brand experiences (Merrilees, 2016). The experiential value that consumers receive from the brand appears to have become increasingly influential over the functional value in moving consumers to act (Delgado-Ballester and Fernández-Sabiote, 2015).
Experiences have become a key element in understanding the way that consumers understand, assess and react to brands (Andreini et al., 2018). Individuals engage a variety of senses to interact with the brand and assess it (Baxter et al., 2015), and sometimes, they even want to co-create these experiences (Riali et al., 2018). It is not uncommon for consumers to feel the need to share their experiences and stories in a way that influence the understanding of others about the brands (Hughes et al., 2016). It is known that a positive sensory brand experience strengthens the brands in the minds of consumers both directly and indirectly, through consumer engagement (Hepola et al., 2017), and leads to loyalty (Brakus et al., 2009) and equity (Mishra et al., 2014; Castañeda-García et al., 2018).

A number of consumers today decide not to just buy or use brands but to engage with them. Brand engagement is not a rare phenomenon and it signifies the importance of a brand to the consumers who decide to engage with it. When engaging with a brand, consumers want to come close and interact with their desired brand. Therefore, consumer brand engagement is a complex phenomenon that goes over and above visible interaction and has cognitive, emotional and behavioural components (Brodie et al., 2013; Dessart et al., 2015, 2016; Dessart, 2017). Clearly brand engagement is key when consumers have input in the co-creation of brands and brand meaning (Brodie et al., 2011), and it leads to various benefits for the company including brand trust, brand commitment and brand loyalty (Dessart, 2017). Although the interaction can happen face to face (Black and Veloutsou, 2017), most of the engagement is happening in online settings and often in social media (Dessart et al., 2015, 2016; Tafesse, 2016). This is because of the convenience that these settings provide, which is another indication of the power of technology on the shaping of brands in the current environment.

Contrary to what academia discussed at large, some signals from the market suggest the opposite. Research findings from the industry support that there is a huge general disaffection and disconnection between consumers and brands that it is not particular to a specific country or consumer segment and market. For example, the most worldwide recognized global survey Meaningful Brands® (2018) conducted by Havas Media with 1,500 global brands in 15 different industries and more than 300,000 interviews demonstrates that the vast majority of brands are meaningfulness because they do not provide significant personal, collective or functional benefits to their lives. As a result of this meaningfulness, in 2017, 74 per cent of consumers in the world would not care if brands disappear, and in 2013, the percentage was almost at the same level (73 per cent). Across geographical areas, the survey indicates that in Western Europe, North America and East Asia and Australia, the percentage of brands that are trusted...
varies from 25 per cent to 33 per cent, while in Latin America and Southeast Asia, this percentage is higher at 79 per cent and 81 per cent, respectively.

**Challenges for the brand management from the company perspective**

Companies have to operate and try to profit in the environment that has changed. Brand management teams have to work harder than ever to coordinate the brand building and support efforts and produce results (Dunes and Pras, 2017). Clearly brands cannot be managed through a well-structured and pre-determined process like the way that one would run a factory or operate a garbage disposal (Schultz and Schultz, 2004).

While some research suggests that brand management teams still have most of the control and a strong influence in the development and management of brand meaning (Urde, 2016), other research studies argue that the branding process has been transformed and the control of brand meaning has been mostly surrendered as brands are co-created with agents that do not work in the company (Cova and Paranque, 2016). The latter seems to be the case, and brands cannot belong, in a psychological sense of ownership, to any one or any firm. It is not just employees working in various positions and not direct members of the brand management team contributing to the formation of the brand meaning (Indounas and Arvaniti, 2015; Kaufmann et al., 2016) but often multiple stakeholders who develop a network of relationships. Brand teams realise that they increasingly lose control on the brand-building and brand-support processes. Brand management teams and their internal leaders are no longer in a position to unilaterally define and control brand meaning, but they need to perceive themselves as one actor among many (Vallaster and von Wallpach, 2013). The brand meaning is often negotiated and formed with the intensive input of other stakeholders (Black and Veloutsou, 2017).

Brand teams find it difficult to think about the integration of other players in the brand team. There are some attempts to work with various external agents to support brand building. The most notable attempt that some companies engage with are groups of consumers in terms of brand communities that could help in the development of the brand as a product or brand reputation (Black and Veloutsou, 2017). However, the majority of the companies neglect the need to support the brand network that includes other stakeholders in the system.

Brands need to meet a wide variety stakeholder needs involved in creation and consumption of these brands. For example, place brand is formed from inputs of the country and local authorities as well as all the actions of the people involved in the service of the place, from the taxi drivers to street cleaners. A place brand can be seen as a tourist destination brand (Pino et al., 2015; Rojas-Méndez et al., 2015; Balmer and Chen, 2016), a place to invest (Papadopoulos et al., 2016), a place to work (Pino et al., 2015) or a place to live (Kemp et al., 2012; Hakala et al., 2015; Pino et al., 2015). Brands can be used to support the selling of the brand, but employers also have to use their brands that attract employees (Sivertzen et al., 2013). Different audiences are assessing the same brand from discrete perspectives and they expect the brand to be able to satisfy their needs, which can be dissimilar from the needs of other groups that are also assessing the brand. When a brand is developed, the input of the various contributors is diverse and the demands of different involved groups in one sector are complex. The diversity and complexity in the processes associated with the brand make the management of brands and the support of a somewhat homogeneous, for all the parties involved, brand meaning a very difficult, if not impossible, task.

The environment is changing and becoming increasingly global faster than ever. The brand support team from the company side seems to not be able to cope with the speed of change. Markets have become more global, brands have become diffused across borders and cultures (Frank and Watchaviesringkan, 2016) and the technological advances have enhanced the cultural borrowing and the interaction of interested parties across the globe. The wide use of the internet
and social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest facilitates the process of consumers finding likeminded individuals that support the brands they like without any constrain of geographic boundaries (Dessart et al., 2015; Simon et al., 2016; Tafesse, 2016). Technology has played an important role in how consumers experience brands, as research in internet and social media context has proven (Dessart et al., 2015; Vernuccio et al., 2015).

One of the consequences of the facilitation of communication and the social media seems to be the ability of many to voice their assessments and feelings about the brands and reach a wide audience. Brand support teams try to find ways to more effectively manage crises situations (Jeon and Baeck, 2016), negative publicity (Gendel-Guterman and Levy, 2017), fake news (Berthon et al., 2018), online firestorms or collaborative brand attacks (Rauschnabel et al., 2016), brand sabotages (Kähr et al., 2016) and different types of negative engagement that consumers may have with a brand (Hollebeek and Chen, 2014), such as negative consumer reviews (Ullrich and Brunner, 2015), with an emphasis on adjusting to negative events depending on their nature (Liu et al., 2018). Developing skills to better handle publicity and reputation-damaging situations depending on the type of the crisis and the prior attitude of consumers towards the brand is vital for the prosperity of brands.

In today’s world, it is difficult for companies and brand teams to find ways to support their brands and secure long-term prosperity of the brand that can secure future income streams. Although many parties “owns” a piece of a brand, firms that have the legal ownership of the symbol get first claim on the financial returns. Brands that will not manage to produce enough income to pay a dividend to the owners or the managers will probably be removed from the marketplace. Most companies for years focus on the tactics, operation, every-day running of the business and the implementation of programs that can bring short-term financial results. This includes the adoption of new technologies and tactics, such as storytelling via the webpages (Delgado-Ballester and Fernández-Sabiote, 2016), without detailed assessment of the suitability that these methods have for the context and the brand. However, it seems that there is still limited strategic thinking related to the future development of brands.

Brands that lose their clear and relevant positioning are expected to fade and die. Securing that there is consistency amongst the views of all of them is of crucial importance for any organization (Biedenbach and Manzhynski, 2016; Saleem and Iglesias, 2016). However, brand managers cannot control the process as such, but they can try to coordinate the brand support and in some occasions they become observers of the changes that other stakeholders impose to the brand reputation.

A cultural change is needed that should help brands flourish in highly uncertain and ever-changing conditions. Brand management teams need to remember that consumers only reward those brands that provide them with the desired type of functional, emotional, personal or social value. This very basic principle remains the same. What changes over time is how consumers assess value and this is a big challenge in the current dynamic environment. The same brand management teams also have to accept that from brand guardians, they have become brand hosts, and very many internal and external stakeholders need to be influenced to help the development and the signalling of the brand to other audience as consistently as possible. Adopting complex scenario planning might help the brand team prepare for some of the uncertain and unpredictable conditions that brands may phase.

All in all, to make more meaningful connections between consumers and brands, managers have to go to the basics: understanding what matters most to people and what they expect from brands, such as healthy lifestyles, improving the environment, connectivity with relatives and friends, saving time or making their lives easier and happier. Without this knowledge building brand content and experiences and the appropriate mix of touch-points with the brand is pointless.
This special issue

With this in mind, in 2017, the Spanish Journal of Marketing announced a call for papers for this Special Issue based on the challenges in brand management. The aim of this Special Issue was to stimulate a substantial contribution to the better understanding of the developments and the directions of the brand management research and practice. In total, 17 papers were submitted. The papers that were eventually accepted went through a review process and they were read by reviewers at least twice. On that basis, 5 manuscripts from the original 17 submissions were accepted for publication in this Special Issue, less than a third of the original submissions.

The five articles of this special issue on new challenges in brand management include different context settings, methodologies and topics relevant to the understanding and management of brands. They include lovemark measure for high-technology products, determinants of store brands purchase and penetration, an extended brand equity model, customer identification and engagement with hospitality brands and political brand personality. All these papers have been written by scholars from Egypt, Greece, India, Malaysia and the UK, which reflect the international interest attached to branding themes.

The paper by Giovanis and Athanasopoulou entitled “Understanding lovemark brands: dimensions and effect on brand loyalty in high-technology products” is the first methodological and empirical contribution that develops and validates a lovemark measure that captures consumers’ perceptions of both functional (i.e. brand respect) and emotional (i.e. brand love) brand aspects. Findings from a large sample of 1,016 consumers of high-technology products demonstrate the theoretical and nomological validity of the proposed measure to better explain three loyalty manifestations. Interestingly, a key insight from this study is the utility of the measure to classify brands using the lovemark grid proposed by Roberts (2004) to better identify lovemarks. As such, managers should take cognisance of this methodological tool because it could be useful to track the positioning of their brands in the lovemark grid to better improving consumers’ experience with the brands through brand respect and love.

The second article by Jain, Chawla, Ganesh and Pich entitled “Exploring and consolidating the brand personality elements of the political leader” integrates the models of Aaker (1997) and Caprara et al. (2001) to propose a new framework that helps in developing political brand personality. The novelty of this article resides not only in the context setting (i.e. political marketing) but also in the identification of key traits of brand personality that might help a political leader to enhance the relationship with its voters.

In the third article entitled “Promoting customer brand engagement and brand loyalty through customer brand identification and value congruity”, Rather, Parrey and Tehseen use congruity and social identity theories to propose antecedents of brand engagement that go beyond company-based and traditional customer-based drivers such as value congruity and brand identification. Based on research findings, a number of management practices for hospitality brand marketers are proposed to develop strong and long-term relationships with customers.

The final two articles focus on store brands, an issue that never loses interest among researchers because of its importance for the retailing industry in profitability and its effects on strategic reactions of national-brand manufacturers. Specifically, the originality of the fourth article “Factors affecting consumers’ willingness to buy private label brands (PLBs): applied study on hypermarkets” by Mostafa and Elseidi, resides in context setting of the study because the authors analyse how consumers’ perceptions directly and indirectly affect their willingness to buy private label brands of hypermarkets and supermarkets in a developing market (Egypt) which is relatively new in introducing and developing private brands. The authors offer suggestions for international retailers being interested in entering Middle Eastern countries like Egypt.
For its part, the fifth article “Store brand adoption and penetration explained by trust”, Sarantidou focuses on a different factor to those analysed by Mostafa and Elseidi, when explaining store brand purchases. With a sample of 904 respondents and sample variety of food and non-food products, this study reveals that trust is a central driver of store brand purchases, and the levels of trust vary across different retailers and product categories. Having said that, interesting managerial implications are derived for both retailers and manufacturers of national brands.

These papers indeed give important insights on the issues that are of great interest for brand management, are dynamic and need further investigation. We hope that the papers in this special issue will be meaningful enough to satisfy the interest of the readers, the researchers and brand managers.

Directions for research in brand management
An account on the trends in the research themes in brand management research and lot of clear research directions in the area were recently provided in a paper that had exactly this focus (Veloutsou and Guzmán, 2017).

Clearly one would ask for more research on the areas that are emerging and the developments. This includes the co-creation, the intensive feelings, the effects of brand anthropomorphism and other relevant conceptual developments. Challenges from the environment and its dynamics, such as research on technology and its advancement and the effects of globalisation on brands, are also of interest to existing research.

Future research should not neglect issues related to relatively stable constituents and conditions and try to assess how they are influenced from the changes in other factors. We need to know how they adjust over time and how they are affected from changes on the more dynamic elements of the environment.

An area that has received relatively limited attention in the past few years and is needed relates to the internal practices for keeping the coordination of the brand development. Given that the brands receive ever-increasing input from a wide network of contributors, the roles of these contributors, the processes that can be used to support the brand building and others relevant to this theme issues should be on the top of the agenda for researchers in the future.

The last area that needs attention from academics is the further exploration of the possibility that brands are losing altogether their function and that they majority of brands might disappear. The strong message that some of the industries try to convey clearly needs far more attention. If there is some evidence that this can be the reality, then research should look for advice to practice that can secure that brands can develop relevance for the market meaning and can and will stay in the group of brands that will remain in the market.

Conclusion
Academic research is trying to keep on top of the developments, capture and present reality as accurately as possible, often adopting new data collection and data analysis methods to increase objectivity (Veloutsou and Guzmán, 2017). The brand-related developments reflect the trends in the society. Brands are powerful social drivers that give meanings and identity to what individuals use and buy helping them to build their own self-identity. Through brands, individuals express themselves in the society and convey their status and prestige in a language recognized and understood by others. Brands are also adding value-economic agents for the firms that introduce them. The growing interest in brands, the increasing desire to co-create them and the constant changes on what they represent echo the reality that we are living in and the increased acceptance of diversity that consumers experience via the interactions with dissimilar to them individuals.
This Special Issue comprises five papers plus an extended editorial on contemporary issues related to brands as seen from various stakeholders and their management. As guest editors, we hope that you will enjoy the content and you will find it mind-provoking. We certainly think that the work included in this issue is a small contribution to our better understanding of the complex and ever-changing landscape of brand management and that both academics and practitioners should continue their engagement with the area and they will not just continue but enhance their exchanges that could facilitate the overall understanding of the changes in the context and the conditions. This is really the only strategy that can facilitate quicker response to the developments that may lead to decisions and adoption of practices that can benefit all the parties in the brand network involved, primarily the companies and their customers but also other stakeholders.

We want to express sincere thanks to the authors and the knowledgeable and hardworking reviewers, and those others who have been directly or indirectly associated and involved with this special issue. Special thanks to the Editor who provided a lot of guidance and leadership to the Spanish Journal of Marketing, Carlos Flavian, the Editorial Board of the Journal and the whole publishing team at Emerald for their ongoing support for academic publishing and scholarly research in the field of marketing.

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Further reading


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Understanding lovemark brands
Dimensions and effect on Brand loyalty in high-technology products

Marcas lovemark
Dimensiones y efecto en la Lealtad a la marca en productos tecnológicos

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to develop and empirically test a lovemark measure that can be used to identify how brands of wireless-enabled computing devices are classified based on customers' respect and love toward them.

Design/methodology/approach – On evidence drawn from 1,016 consumers of wireless-enabled computing devices (e.g. netbooks and tablets) in Greece, partial least squares method is used to test the validity of the proposed hierarchical model.

Findings – Results show that a lovemark measure can be conceptualized as a third-order reflective construct having respect and love as its second-order dimensions. In turn, respect reflects on brand performance, trust and reputation, and love reflects on brand commitment, intimacy and passion. The proposed measure presents a very good external validity as it can explain big portions of variance in consumer responses including repurchase intentions, positive WOM and willingness to pay a price premium. Finally, the proposed measure is used to classify eight well-known devices as products, fads, brands and lovemarks and identify the love styles associated with brand relationships.

Originality/value – This paper provides empirical evidence for measuring and identifying lovemarks using a hierarchical model, which can be further used to develop a more effective strategy.
for managing the functional and emotional aspects of brands to strengthen consumer-brand relationships.

**Keywords** Branding, Brand love, Brand loyalty, Lovemarks, Brand respect, High-technology products

**Paper type** Research paper

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**Resumen**

**Propósito** – El objetivo de este estudio es el desarrollo metodológico y validación empírica de una escala para clasificar las marcas de productos tecnológicos en base a las dos dimensiones que caracterizan a las marcas Lovemark: el respeto y amor.

**Diseño/metodología/enfoque** – Con una base de datos recogidos de una muestra de 1,106 consumidores de productos tecnológicos (e.g., tablets y portátiles pequeños) en Grecia, se usa PLS para testar la validez del modelo jerárquico propuesto.

**Resultados** – Los resultados ponen de manifiesto que el concepto Lovemark puede ser conceptualizado como un constructo reflectivo de tres dimensiones siendo el respeto y el amor hacia la marca las dimensiones de segundo orden. A su vez, el respeto hacia la marca refleja el desempeño, la confianza y reputación de la marca mientras que el amor queda reflejado en conceptos tales como el compromiso, la intimidad y la pasión. La medida propuesta presenta una aceptable validez externa pues es capaz de explicar mayor porcentaje de la varianza de las intenciones de compra, la comunicación boca-oreja positiva y la disposición a pagar un mayor precio por la marca. Finalmente, se demuestra la utilidad de la medida propuesta para clasificar ocho marcas conocidas según los niveles de amor y respeto que los consumidores manifiestan hacia las mismas así como identificar los estilos de amor asociados a la relación que los consumidores mantienen con estas marcas.

**Originalidad/valor** – Este trabajo ofrece evidencias empíricas para medir e identificar las Lovemark usando un modelo jerárquico que puede ser utilizado posteriormente para desarrollar una estrategia más efectiva en la gestión de los aspectos funcionales y emocionales de las marcas como medio para fortalecer las relaciones marca-consumidor.

**Palabras claves** – Lovemark, Respeto hacia la marca, Amor a la marca, Lealtad, Productos tecnológicos

**Tipo de artículo** – Trabalho de investigación

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**1. Introduction**

Wireless-enabled computing devices are high-technology products that provide broadband wireless data access and support open software standards (Ha and Park, 2013). These products are now ever more pervasive in consumers' everyday life, as they provide them with continuous and ubiquitous connectivity to easily retrieve information from the network and to interact with it. Netbooks and tablets are typical products in this category.

The competition in the market of wireless-enabled computing devices has increased rapidly, as companies are competing hard against each other (Liu, 2007). This situation has certain consequences including the following: the consumer decision-making process for such products is made very complex (Sahadev and Jayachandran, 2004); customers are highly involved with wireless-enabled computing devices’ features to lower perceived risk (Ha and Park, 2013) and exhibit high levels of brand switching (Lam and Shankar, 2014; Stremersch et al., 2010).

The development of strong brands that develop long-term relationships with customers is used by firms to decrease brand switching. American Marketing Association (AMA) considers brand as a source of product identity and differentiation (Kotler and Keller, 2012). The significance of brand-based differentiation and its role in the development of strong consumer-brand relationships and in companies’ prosperity is well-recognized by business practice (Keller, 2009; Keller, 2013; Sreejesh and Roy, 2015). The consistent fulfillment of the brand promise made to consumers is of paramount importance and can be used for the establishment and maintenance of strong consumer-brand relationships (Fournier, 1988; Dall’Olmo Riley and de Chernatony, 2000; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001) that will
differentiate brands in the market. Aaker (2002) and Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) considers the functional and emotional value delivered by the brand as the mean for a brand to establish and maintain strong consumer-brand relationships and drive brand loyalty.

Differentiating products based on brand’s emotional benefits (e.g. relationships) is getting more and more significant in today’s market (Fournier, 1998; Roberts, 2004; Albert et al., 2008; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Rossiter and Bellman, 2012). Emotions play a significant role in consumers’ buying decision-making process, as consumption is based more on feelings and emotions than on superior product features and price worthiness (Pawle and Cooper, 2006; Cho et al., 2015). Emotions and reason are intertwined in purchasing situations. In buying decisions, however, emotions prevail when they are in conflict with reason or when consumers use pseudo-logic to support their emotional choices (Pawle and Cooper, 2006). Moreover, the basic difference between emotion and reason is that the former leads to actions, whereas the latter determines the conclusions (Pawle and Cooper, 2006). This is supported by the fact that satisfaction alone is not enough to sustain a strong customer-brand relationship as many satisfied customers switch to competitor brands. On the other hand, various studies suggest that emotional and passionate love with a brand is a prerequisite for the development and maintenance of strong consumer-brand relationships that lead to brand loyalty and better brand deliverables (Heinrich et al., 2012; Albert et al., 2013; Cho et al., 2015; Veloutsou, 2015; Sreejesh and Roy, 2015; Nyffenegger et al., 2015; Shuv-Ami., 2017).

However, not all brands can develop strong and long-term consumer-brand relationships. According to Roberts (2004) lovedmarks are brands, events and experiences that people passionately love. Certain brands are able to become lovedmark brands. The lovedmarks theory is developed by Roberts (2004) and suggests that “lovedmark brands” score high on two lovedmark dimensions “love” and “respect” that strengthen consumer-brand relationships and, in turn, positively affect brand loyalty. This relationship is termed a lovedmark experience (Cho et al., 2015). Given that a lovedmark is both an object (brand) and a relationship experience (Cho et al., 2015), the term lovedmark, in this study represents the lovedmark experience that a consumer enjoys by being in a relationship of love and respect with a brand, whereas the lovedmark object will be explicitly termed lovedmark brand.

Although, research lately tries to conceptualize lovedmark and its dimensions, there is no accepted scale that can be used in any related study. Research on the lovedmarks theory has been light and limited so far (Cho et al., 2015; Pavel, 2013; Pawle and Cooper, 2006; Shuv-Ami, 2017; Shuv-Ami et al., 2017; Veloutsou and Aimitaksa, 2017). The purpose of this study is to develop a hierarchical model for a lovedmark measure in the context of high-technology products and then to empirically investigate its theoretical and nomological validity by showing its association with three loyalty manifestations, namely repurchase intentions, positive WOM behavior and willingness to pay a price premium. The proposed measure is also used to identify lovedmarks and differentiate them from other types of brands. The study is conducted on evidence from Greece.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we review relevant literature and focus on the theoretical background. Then, we conceptualize the proposed model for measuring the lovedmark concept and describe the process followed to ensure the theoretical and nomological validity of the proposed measure; third, we explain the research methodology; fourth, we present and discuss results and finally, we conclude with theoretical and managerial implications, limitations and suggestions for further research.

2. Conceptual background and proposed model
2.1 Brands and lovedmark theory
A brand is a name, term, sign, symbol or design or combination of them which is intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from
those of competitors (Kotler and Keller, 2012). Furthermore, de Chernatony and Dall’Olmo (1997, p. 47) propose that a brand is the link between firms’ marketing activities and consumers’ perceptions of functional and emotional elements in their experience with the product/service and the way it is presented. Also, the brand can act as a relationship builder with customers (Dall’Olmo Riley and de Chernatony, 2000; Veloutsou, 2015; Veloutsou and Guzmán, 2017).

The development of consumer-brand relationships is based on the emotional connection of customers with brands and is used for differentiation purposes (Sreejesh and Roy, 2015; Veloutsou, 2015). Marketers nowadays face difficulties in differentiating their products solely based on their functional benefits (Pawle and Cooper, 2006), as products’ functional attributes (i.e. performance, quality and value) are getting similar with those of competing products because of technological advancements. Therefore, the role of emotional benefits is getting more and more significant in developing brand-based differentiation strategies (Fournier, 1998; Roberts, 2004; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Batra et al., 2012; Albert et al., 2008; Fetscherin et al., 2014; Sreejesh and Roy, 2015; Veloutsou, 2015).

However, not all brands create long-lasting relationships with customers. People tend to love some brands more than others. Certain brands become what we call lovemark brands. The lovemarks theory, introduced by Roberts (2004), CEO of Saatchi and Saatchi, suggests that two components of a “lovemark”, “love” and “respect”, are the main drivers of brand loyalty beyond reason. Respect represents the functional aspects of a brand and it basically reflects the brand’s performance, reputation and trust (Pawle and Cooper, 2006). Love, on the other side, represents the emotional attributes of a brand which are used by consumers to develop emotional relationships with it. Roberts (2004) suggests that brands can be classified based on these two relationship-related dimensions: love and respect and proposes a lovemark grid illustrated in Figure 1. Based on this grid we can distinguish four types of brands: lovemark brands, quality brands, brands that are fads and brands that are just products. “Lovemark brands” are highly desired brands that enjoy the love and respect of their customers. Brands with low love and high respect are “quality brands” but not highly desired brands. Brands with high love and low respect are “fads” that will eventually disappear. Brands with low love and low respect are merely available “products”.

The development of the lovemarks theory is strongly related to the evolution of branding theory and to the importance given to the development of consumer-brand relationships. Brands evolve into “lovemark brands” that are about building and strengthening emotional bonds between brands and consumers (Pawle and Cooper, 2006). It takes three key ingredients for a product to qualify as a lovemark brand: mystery, rendered through

![Lovemark grid](image)

Figure 1. Lovemark grid
impressive stories, ancient times, myths, dreams and a lot of inspiration, then the creation of a complete experience through the union of the five senses (sensuality), as well as a close relationship with the consumer (intimacy) provided by commitment and empathy (Roberts, 2004). The theory of “lovemarks” may explain why consumers feel loyal and attached to one brand and not to another. As Roberts described it, the loyalty for “lovemarks” is “loyalty beyond reason” (2005, p. 66) when citing a loyal Apple user – “After 14 years I am still in love. To be honest I don’t know why I feel that way…” (Roberts, 2004, p.200). Roberts (2004) defines lovemarks as “brands, events and experiences that people passionately love.” Also, Pawle and Cooper, 2006 (p. 39) describe lovemark brands very vividly by saying that:

Lovemarks deliver beyond expectations of great performance. Lovemarks reach the heart and gut, as well as the mind, creating intimate, emotional connections. Take a brand away and people will find a replacement. Take a Lovemark away and people will mourn its absence. Lovemarks are a relationship, not a mere transaction. You do not just buy Lovemarks, you embrace them with passion.

2.2 Brand love

Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) define brand love as “the degree of passionate emotional attachment that a satisfied consumer has for a particular trade name”. In contrast, Keh et al. (2007) define brand love as “the intimate, passionate, and committed relationship between a customer and a brand, characterized by its reciprocal, purposive, multiplex, and dynamic properties”. Moreover, Rossiter (2012) defines brand love as “achieved only when ‘Deep Affection’ and ‘Separation Anxiety’ are jointly felt in relation to the potential love object”. The concept of “brand love” has attracted much attention in recent years in the marketing literature (Sarkar, 2011; Batra et al., 2012; Rossiter, 2012; Rossiter and Bellman, 2012; Maxian et al., 2013; Patwardhan and Balasubramanian, 2013; Fetscherin et al., 2014; Fetscherin, 2014; Cho et al., 2015; Zarantonello et al., 2016; Delgado-Ballester et al., 2017). This stream of research has mainly focused on the conceptualization of “brand love” but has used different types and inconsistent measurement in relation to “brand love”.

The brand love concept is rooted in the assumption that theories of interpersonal love can be applied to the consumer-brand relationship context. Love can refer both to a social relationship and to an emotional state. When people, for instance, speak of lovers, then the love relationship between two individuals is emphasized. In social psychology, there are several theories (Freud, 1922; Lee, 1977; Maslow, 1962; Reik, 1944) that focus, among others, on the concept of love between individuals. One of the theories most often cited in literature that explicitly deals with love is Sternberg’s (1986, 1987, 1988, 1997) triangular theory of love. Sternberg’s (1986) triangular theory of love indicates that interpersonal love has three highly correlated dimensions, intimacy, passion and decision-commitment. Intimacy, the “warm” component, refers to “feelings of closeness, connectedness, and bondedness” (Sternberg, 1986). Passion, the “hot” component, reflects “the drives that lead to romance, physical attraction, and sexual consummation” (Sternberg, 1988). Decision/commitment, the “cold” component, represents the decision to love someone else in the short run and the commitment to maintain that love in the long run (Sternberg, 1986). Using various combinations of these three components, Sternberg (1988) creates a love typology which covers eight different types of interpersonal love: nonlove, liking, infatuated love, empty love, romantic love, companionate love, fatuous love and consummate love.

Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) develop a scale for measuring brand love in general. However, their scale deals with love itself and does not reflect the three different aspects of Sternberg’s complex idea of love. Also, Albert et al. (2008) identify 11 major dimensions of brand love, namely duration of the relationship, self-congruity, dreams, memories, pleasure, attraction, uniqueness, beauty, trust and declaration of affect. Hegner et al. (2017) use the theory of
planned behavior to understand brand love. Batra et al. (2012) proposes a new measurement of brand love that was harshly criticized by Rossiter (2012). Batra et al. (2012) distinguish between “love emotion” and “love relationship” and suggest that brand love as a “love emotion” is temporary and episodic whereas a “love relationship” can last for years. Finally, Heinrich et al. (2012), drawing on the interpersonal theory of love and Keh’s et al. (2007) theoretical perspective of brand love, conceptualize and empirically validate a construct of consumers’ brand love, reflecting consumers’ passion, intimacy and commitment toward a brand, and test its association with forgiveness and price tolerance. The same conceptualization to model the emotional brand properties in the service context was used by Nyffenegger et al. (2015) and includes consumers’ feelings and connections to the brand, as well by Bügel et al. (2011) to investigate the role of brand’s affective aspects in relationship maintenance in different sectors and in different customer life-cycle stages.

Overall, although various researchers look at the concept of brand love, there is no consensus on its measurement. Based on the findings of Aaker (2002), Fournier (1998), Keh et al. (2007) and Delgado-Ballester et al., 2017 that brands are considered to be relationship partners and that people assign human-like properties to brands and interact with them and the suggestions of Aaker (2002), Hwang and Kandampully (2012) and Veloutsou (2015), originating in social psychology, that consumer-brand relationships are similar to interpersonal relationships because they involve reciprocal exchanges (i.e. informational and emotional) between partners through a series of repeated actions, this study adopts the theoretical framework provided by Heinrich et al. (2012) and conceptualizes brand love using three highly correlated dimensions, intimacy, passion and commitment.

2.3 Brand respect
In addition to earning consumers’ love, products require respect to become lovemarks. Roberts (2004) states that:

Without respect there is no foundation for any long-term relationship. Without the sharp delineation of the axis format it was very easy for our ideas about love to float off into feeling with no practical edge (p. 146).

Brand respect expresses consumers’ positive perception toward a brand, based on their evaluation of brand performance (Roberts, 2004). Roberts (2004) states that brand respect is a combination of three elements: brand performance, brand trust and brand reputation. A brand creates respect by providing good performance, which, in turn, creates a sense of trust and builds a positive reputation (Roberts, 2004). Moreover, brand communication, the creation of unforgettable positive experiences with a brand or of personally relevant messages, may lead to brand respect. These messages, delivered through storytelling and the use of cultural myths and iconic characters, may build respect through an emphasis on the brand’s performance, trust and reputation. Hsu and Cai (2009) suggest that cognitive aspects of brand image can enhance brand trust by reducing risk and enhancing performance expectations, which in turn may increase consumers’ trust toward the brand. Brand respect is modeled as a second-order construct having brand performance, brand trust and brand reputation as its main dimensions. All these three concepts require a cognitive evaluation and reflect consumers’ perceptions about the cognitive aspects of a brand.

Brand performance is defined as a customer’s evaluation of a product’s cumulative excellence (Grewal et al., 1988). It refers to a consumer’s intangible perception of the whole quality or superiority of a product or service (Lee et al., 2011). Sweeney and Soutar (2001) consider perceived brand quality and expected brand performance as determinants of the functional value delivered to consumers through product consumption. Information about
brand features and other extrinsic cues (i.e. country-of-origin, brand name and price) may affect brand performance perception. Also, a brand which is associated with quality, can create a positive image in consumers’ mind and can motivate consumers to start a relationship with this particular brand (Lee et al., 2011).

Brand trust has attracted the attention of both practitioners and researchers because it is critically important for establishing and developing consumer-brand relationships, and for building brand loyalty and equity (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003; Li et al., 2008; Albert and Merunka, 2013; Veloutsou, 2015; Hegner and Jevons, 2016). There are several perspectives for brand trust conceptualization, leading to different definitions and associated operationalizations of the concept (Albert et al., 2013). Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001, p. 82) define brand trust as “consumers’ willingness to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function”. Based on such a conceptualization, they develop a uni-dimensional measurement scale that assesses trust through reliability and honesty. Delgado-Ballester et al. (2003, p. 37) provide a two-dimensional measurement scale for brand trust relying on the definition that brand trust is “the confident expectations of the brand’s reliability and intentions in situations entailing risk to the consumer”. Finally, Li et al. (2008) argue that brand trust exists when consumers place their confidence in the performance competence and/or benevolent intentions of a brand and conceptualize brand trust as a higher-order construct formatively measured by the previous two trust sub-components. Li et al. (2014, p. 773) argue that these three perspectives are closely related to each other as “reliability and honesty” are closely aligned to “reliability and intentions”, which, in turn, correspond to “competence and benevolence”. Lately, Hegner and Jevons (2016) add predictability as a third brand trust dimension, to express brand’s consistency in its behavior. In the field of consumer-brand management, trust is generally considered to be a key determinant of relationship development (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003; Albert and Merunka, 2013; Sreejesh and Roy, 2015; Veloutsou, 2015). Many previous studies suggest that customers are reluctant to commit themselves to a relationship unless they have confidence that the brand has the competence to do the job and is able to constantly meet their expectations in the future, and will avoid any behavior that will be harmful for them in the future (Li et al., 2008). In this study, trust is seen as the belief in the reliability, truth, ability and sincerity of the brand (Veloutsou, 2015).

Brand reputation expresses the overall perception of outsiders on the salient characteristics of brands (Fombrun and Rindova, 2000; Veloutsou, 2015). The development of a brand with a high reputation requires a positive brand evaluation by various audiences apart from keeping customers satisfied. Reputation serves as a determinant of brand quality, as it is used by consumers to form their expectations about the product carrying the brand name (Milewicz and Herbig, 1994; Cretu and Brodie, 2007). Brand reputation development is a continuous process and is determined by consumers’ brand experience and brand communication effectiveness (Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009). Brand reputation as an outcome of brand image plays a significant role in the establishment of consumer-brand relationships (Stuart-Menteth et al., 2006; Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009; Veloutsou, 2015). Reputable brands are more successful brands, as they are able to attract and retain more customers by lowering the perceived risk that consumers face during the consumer decision making process (Milewicz and Herbig, 1994; Herbig and Milewicz, 1995 Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009; Veloutsou, 2015). Furthermore, consumers tend to be more committed to relationships and are more likely to interact with brands for which they have a positive attitude (Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009). Moreover, numerous studies show that high brand reputation provides the brand with a favorable first impression and is interpreted in a positive manner while this is not the case for low reputation brands (Dahlén et al., 2009).
Taken together brand performance, brand trust and brand reputation form a brand relationship component reflecting consumers’ high confidence in and a positive evaluation of the brand’s performance.

2.4 The model
The proposed model suggests that a lovemark brand strengthens the relationship, consisting of brand love and respect, between consumers and a brand. Thus, the emotional aspects of a brand, that lead to the development of brand love, and the functional aspects of the brand, that lead to brand respect are the root causes of lovemark experience that will drive the consumer-brand relationship development process. These two constructs reflect the proposed lovemark measure which, in turn, will determine the nature of consumer-brand relationships. Thus, the proposed lovemark measure is modeled as a third-order reflective hierarchical model in which indicators are manifestations of the construct (Jarvis et al., 2003; Petter et al., 2007). The conceptualization and operationalization of the lovemark as a higher order construct enhances its theoretical parsimony and reduces the proposed model’s complexity (MacKenzie et al., 2005).

Apart from the theoretical justification of the lovemark measurement provided in the previous section, it is necessary to show the nomological validity of the proposed measure. Given that lovemark theory considers the achievement of “brand loyalty beyond reason” as the ultimate objective of emotional branding, thelovemark measure’s validity is tested against brand loyalty which is considered to be an important consequence of brand relationship development (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Albert and Merunka, 2013; Albert et al., 2013; Fetscherin et al., 2014; Veloutsou, 2015; Zarantonello et al., 2016; Shuv-Ami, 2017; Veloutsou and Aimpitaksa, 2017; Bairrada et al., 2018). As Roberts (2015, p. 13) postulates, the most important issues for marketers wanting to increase brand loyalty have less to do with functional elements and more to do with emotional fulfillment. Moreover, he argues that emotions for a brand is a predictor of loyalty to it, but a loyalty beyond reason, because “reason leads to conclusions but emotions lead to action”. When consumers make buying decisions, they ask themselves “how does this brand improve my life?” and “how do I feel about this brand?” Emotion that is calculating and casual has limited value. However, when emotion makes people feel something deeper, they are more likely to engage in a relationship with their preferred brand (Rossiter and Bellman, 2012).

Brand loyalty is defined as the extent of faithfulness of consumers to a particular brand, irrespective of the marketing activities of competitive brands (Oliver, 1999). Brand loyalty is included in the conceptualization of brand equity (Aaker, 2002; Keller, 2013), which is used in brand success assessment. It is also used by practitioners and brand consultants as the most-frequently cited consumer-based criterion of brand success (Kotler and Keller, 2012).

Previous research suggests that there are two types of brand loyalty: attitudinal and behavioral (Chiu et al., 2013). The current study focuses on attitudinal loyalty because customers who seem behaviorally loyal can also be spuriously loyal as they may make repeat purchases because of certain situational constraints. Attitudinal loyalty manifests itself with a variety of indicators among which are repurchase intentions; consumer willingness to recommend a service provider to other consumers and willingness to pay a price premium (Vázquez-Casielles et al., 2009; Bairrada et al., 2018). Repurchase intentions is defined as consumers’ motivation for repeating the behavior of buying the brand (Hellier et al., 2003). Positive word-of-mouth concerns the extent to which consumers spread positive recommendations about a brand to others (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Albert et al., 2013). Finally, willingness to pay a price premium is the amount of money consumers are willing to pay for their preferred brand over what they would pay for a comparable brand (Netemeyer et al., 2004). These three loyalty manifestations were selected to test the external validity of
the lovemark measure because they are strongly related to brand success measures such as share of purchase and revenue growth. A consumer willing to pay a price premium and to speak positively for a brand is also more likely to buy it repeatedly (compared to other brands), and this leads to a higher share of wallet and more revenues per customer. (Bowman and Narayandas, 2004; Nyffenegger et al., 2015).

Given that the consumption of a lovemark brand is expected to be an extremely gratifying experience that results in brand loyalty beyond reason (Roberts, 2004), and in accordance with the findings of recent studies (Shuv-Ami, 2017; Veloutsou and Aimpitaksa, 2017), the lovemark relationship is expected to encourage consumers to remain loyal to their brand, to accept higher prices than those of competing brands and to talk favorably to others about their beloved brand.

Figure 2 depicts the proposed model reflecting the proposed relationships among the first-, second- and third-order constructs.

3. Research methodology
A cross-sectional survey approach was adopted to test the lovemark measure for wireless-enabled computing devices (i.e. netbooks and tablets) in Greece. This section provides a description of the research instrument design, sampling procedure, data collection technique and data analysis method.

3.1 Measures and questionnaire development
To collect empirical data to assess the lovemark measure’s properties and test the validity of the proposed model, a self-administered questionnaire is developed based on related literature and the opinions of users and experts. Likert scales (1-7), with anchors ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” are used for all items to ensure statistical variability among survey responses for all items measured. The items of the questionnaire are adopted from existing and well-tested scales offered by the extant literature. In
particular, brand performance, reflecting the utilitarian benefits of a brand, is measured with the scale proposed by Sweeney and Soutar (2001). The scale used to measure brand trust is retrieved from the study of Veloutsou (2015) and that of brand reputation from the study of Morgan-Thomas and Veloutsou (2013). The scales used to operationalize brand commitment, brand passion and brand intimacy, are adopted from the studies of Heinrich et al. (2012) and Cho et al. (2015). Finally, repurchase intentions is measured with the scale drawn from the study of Verhoef et al. (2002) and WOM behavior and willingness to pay a price premium are measured with the scales retrieved from the studies of Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) and Albert and Merunka (2013).

The survey is administered in Greek. To ensure conceptual equivalence, all scales are translated through back-translation by professionals. The adequateness and appropriateness of the research instrument items were validated through conducting two focus-groups of experienced customers and providers, respectively. A pilot test of the questionnaire was also done with a convenience sample of 40 respondents, allowing for consideration of the length of the questionnaire, clarity of instructions, the lay-out and flow of questions.

3.2 Sampling and data collection
This study is undertaken in the Attica region, where about 50 per cent of the total Greek population lives. Given the difficulty to find a comprehensive sample, a convenient sampling method is used to reach research participants. The survey participants were visitors of big walk-in shopping malls in three different areas of Attica. The location of these places was carefully selected to reach much of the heterogeneous population, avoid location-based bias and ensure a wide spread of potential respondents. Thirty university students were involved in the data collection. Before sending volunteering students to collect data, they were trained to administer the questionnaires and were provided with a detailed instruction sheet to ensure consistency in questionnaire sampling and administration. The sample was targeted via the use of a modified mall intercept approach (Rice and Hancock, 2005) and interviewer-administered personal interviews. Visitors of shopping mall were approached and asked if they would be willing to participate in the survey developed for the study. In particular, the lounge area was used as the location for intercepting potential survey participants. Contacts were made according to a pre-specified time schedule at different times of the day and days of the week in order for day- and time-related bias to be eliminated.

The questionnaire was distributed to 1,050 consumers during the last three months of 2017. Of the 1,050 completed questionnaires, 34 questionnaires were eliminated because of incomplete data, leaving 1,016 questionnaires for data analysis. Using the Armstrong and Overton (1997) procedure, nonresponse bias was evaluated by comparing early respondents with late respondents for all constructs considered in this study. No significant differences were recorded at the 0.05 level of significance.

3.3 Data analysis method
The method of partial least squares (PLS) path methodology (Hair et al., 2011), an implementation of structural equation modeling (SEM) with Smart PLS 2.0 M3 (Ringle et al., 2005), is used to assess the proposed hierarchical model for the lovemark measure. The study applies PLS path modeling with a path-weighting scheme for the inside approximation (Wetzels et al., 2009). To obtain the standard errors of the estimates, this study applies non-parametric bootstrapping (Wetzels et al., 2009) as implemented in SmartPLS with 5,000 replications. The repeated indicators approach, as described in the study of Wetzels et al. (2009), is adopted to estimate the higher-order latent variables. In this
approach, the higher-order latent variables are set up through the repeated use of the manifest variables of the lower-order latent variables (Wetzels et al., 2009).

4. Findings

4.1 Sample profile
As seen in Table I, among the 1,016 survey participants, 50.2 per cent were female. In terms of age, 21.4 per cent were less than 24 years old; 28.9 per cent were in the 25-34 age group; 29.8 per cent were in the 35-44 age group and 19.9 per cent were more than 45 years old. In terms of educational background, 54.4 per cent of the respondents have college degree or higher. Also, 37.6 per cent of the respondents have a monthly income of less than €1,000; 25.2 per cent earn between €1,000 and €1,500; 14.8 per cent earn between €1,500 and €2,000 and 22.4 per cent have a monthly income of €2,000 or more. HP (20.9 per cent), Apple (15.1 per cent), Toshiba (15.1 per cent), Lenovo (14.6 per cent), Dell (12.4 per cent), Samsung (10.5 per cent), LG (5.8 per cent) and Asus (5.7 per cent) are the brands that were identified within the sample. Finally, 47.1 per cent of the respondents are related with the brand for less than 3 years, 27.5 per cent for 3-5 years and 25.8 per cent for more than 5 years.

4.2 Measurement model assessment (first-order constructs)
The test of the measurement model involves the estimation of reliability; convergent validity and discriminant validity of the first-order constructs included into the proposed lovemark

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>415</td>
<td>49.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>601</td>
<td>50.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>28.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>29.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>45 and above</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>19.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education level</td>
<td>Higher secondary school</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>31.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prof school graduate</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>College graduate</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Postgraduates</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>23.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly income</td>
<td>0-999 €</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>37.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.000-1.499 €</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>25.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.500-1.999 €</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.000+ €</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand name</td>
<td>Apple</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asus</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dell</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HP</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>20.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lenovo</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LG</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Samsung</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Toshiba</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand relationship age</td>
<td>&lt; 1</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>27.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table I. Customer profile (N = 1,016)
measure (Hair et al., 2011). The reliability of all constructs is examined using the Composite Reliability (CR) measure. Hair et al. (2011) suggest that a value of 0.70 provides adequate evidence for internal consistency. As shown in Table II, CR values of all measures included in the study are equal to or exceed 0.903 suggesting that all measures are good indicators of their respective components. The average variance extracted (AVE), indicating the amount of variance captured by the construct in relation to the variance because of measurement error, is used to assess convergent validity. As depicted in Table II, AVE values for all constructs are equal to or exceed 0.654, higher than the recommended cut-off value of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2011) suggesting satisfactory convergent validity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Loading</th>
<th>CR</th>
<th>AVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brand performance</td>
<td>The products of Brand X are of very good quality</td>
<td>0.879</td>
<td>0.932</td>
<td>0.775</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brand X offers products of consistent quality</td>
<td>0.879</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brand X offers durable products</td>
<td>0.867</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brand X offers products that perform consistently</td>
<td>0.896</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand reputation</td>
<td>X is a well-known brand</td>
<td>0.879</td>
<td>0.933</td>
<td>0.777</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brand X is one of the leading brands in the market</td>
<td>0.924</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brand X is reputable</td>
<td>0.884</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brand X is easily recognizable</td>
<td>0.837</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand trust</td>
<td>I have complete faith in the integrity of brand X</td>
<td>0.832</td>
<td>0.930</td>
<td>0.654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Promises made by brand X are reliable</td>
<td>0.859</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brand’s X communications do not make false claims</td>
<td>0.691</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brand X is credible</td>
<td>0.810</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brand X is sincere about its products</td>
<td>0.859</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I feel safe when I buy brand X</td>
<td>0.841</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brand X is genuinely committed to my satisfaction</td>
<td>0.754</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand commitment</td>
<td>I am committed to brand X</td>
<td>0.914</td>
<td>0.923</td>
<td>0.799</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I have solid support for brand X</td>
<td>0.910</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BC3. I can rely on this brand</td>
<td>0.856</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand passion</td>
<td>I am passionate about brand X</td>
<td>0.872</td>
<td>0.913</td>
<td>0.777</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>X is a captivating brand</td>
<td>0.913</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am enthusiastic about brand X</td>
<td>0.859</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand intimacy</td>
<td>Most of the time I feel very close to brand X</td>
<td>0.914</td>
<td>0.925</td>
<td>0.802</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There is a close connection between me and brand X</td>
<td>0.936</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There is a certain intimacy between me and brand X</td>
<td>0.834</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repurchase</td>
<td>I will repurchase brand X in the future</td>
<td>0.854</td>
<td>0.903</td>
<td>0.756</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intentions</td>
<td>I would love to use brand X continuously</td>
<td>0.865</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Even though brand X is sold out, I won’t purchase other brands</td>
<td>0.890</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness to</td>
<td>I would be prepared to pay more to be able to buy brand X again</td>
<td>0.912</td>
<td>0.934</td>
<td>0.826</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pay price</td>
<td>I would remain a customer of brand X even if it raised the prices of</td>
<td>0.912</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>premium</td>
<td>its laptops, as long as the price rise was reasonable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I would accept a reasonable price rise, because brand X provides</td>
<td>0.902</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>match my expectations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive WOM</td>
<td>I have recommended brand X to many people</td>
<td>0.944</td>
<td>0.958</td>
<td>0.885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I would recommend brand X to my friends</td>
<td>0.944</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If my friends were planning to buy a laptop I would tell them to buy</td>
<td>0.935</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table II. First-order constructs measurement assessment (reliability, convergence validity) 

Notes: CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted
Finally, the Fornell-Larcker criterion was used to assess the discriminant validity by comparing the square root of AVE extracted from each construct with the correlations among constructs. The findings provide strong evidence of discriminant validity among all first-order constructs. As seen in Table III, the square roots of AVE for all first-order constructs, provided in the diagonal of the table, are higher than their shared variances (Hair et al., 2011).

### 4.3 Measurement model assessment (higher-order constructs)

In Figure 3, we include the CR and AVE values of the measures in the higher-order constructs (i.e. brand respect, brand love and lovemark). These show that CR and AVE values for brand respect are equal to or exceed 0.927 and 0.810 respectively, those for brand love are equal to or exceed 0.938 and 0.834 respectively and those for lovemark are equal to or exceed 0.874 and 0.777 respectively. These figures show evidence of reliable second- and third-order measures (Wetzels et al., 2009). Moreover, all factor loadings concerning the two second-order constructs reflecting in the lovemark measure as well as the six first-order construct reflecting its two sub-dimensions are all statistically significant and their size are greater or equal to 0.855 which exceeds that the recommended cut-off value of 0.7 (Wetzels et al., 2009). Based on the above, the notion that the lovemark measure is a third-order construct is validated (Wetzels et al., 2009).

### 4.4 Assessing the nomological validity of the lovemark measure

To assess the nomological validity of our hierarchical construct model we embedded the lovemark measure in a nomological network with three consumer responses measuring brand loyalty manifestations such as repurchase intentions, willingness to pay a price premium and positive WOM behavior (Wetzels et al., 2009). As it is shown in Figure 3, the results support the role of lovemark as a significant antecedent of all three consumer responses. More specifically, there is a significant impact of lovemark on consumers’ repurchase intentions ($\beta = 0.801; t = 42.679$); consumers’ willingness to pay a price premium ($\beta = 0.737; t = 34.754$) and consumers’ engagement into positive WOM behavior ($\beta = 0.752; t = 36.270$). The variance explained by the model in terms of $R^2$ is 0.651 for repurchase intentions; 0.562 for willingness to pay a price premium and 0.560 for positive WOM behavior. The relatively high values of $R^2$ indicate that sizeable portions of the variance in the dependent variables are explained by the proposed lovemark measure. These

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Brand performance</td>
<td>0.880</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Brand reputation</td>
<td>0.683</td>
<td>0.881</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Brand trust</td>
<td>0.802</td>
<td>0.652</td>
<td>0.809</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Brand commitment</td>
<td>0.555</td>
<td>0.475</td>
<td>0.626</td>
<td>0.894</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Brand passion</td>
<td>0.436</td>
<td>0.372</td>
<td>0.515</td>
<td>0.720</td>
<td>0.881</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Brand intimacy</td>
<td>0.373</td>
<td>0.294</td>
<td>0.410</td>
<td>0.686</td>
<td>0.840</td>
<td>0.896</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Repurchase intentions</td>
<td>0.552</td>
<td>0.471</td>
<td>0.619</td>
<td>0.718</td>
<td>0.709</td>
<td>0.708</td>
<td>0.870</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Pay price premium</td>
<td>0.449</td>
<td>0.405</td>
<td>0.512</td>
<td>0.676</td>
<td>0.684</td>
<td>0.706</td>
<td>0.770</td>
<td>0.941</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Positive WOM</td>
<td>0.592</td>
<td>0.509</td>
<td>0.615</td>
<td>0.638</td>
<td>0.634</td>
<td>0.596</td>
<td>0.731</td>
<td>0.696</td>
<td>0.909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std Deviation</td>
<td>1.306</td>
<td>1.266</td>
<td>1.169</td>
<td>1.532</td>
<td>1.637</td>
<td>1.691</td>
<td>1.576</td>
<td>1.794</td>
<td>1.0610</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Fornell-Larcker criterion
results confirm the functionality of the proposed modeling framework for lovemark measurement in the wireless-enabled computing devices context.

Finally, by considering the significance of brand respect and love separately, we see that brand love has a greater association with all three consumer responses than brand respect, that is, repurchase intentions (0.779 vs. 0.623); positive WOM behavior (0.680 vs. 0.643) and willingness to pay a price premium (0.755 vs. 0.524).

4.5 Brand classification and Brand love styles determination
The lovemark measure can now be used for brand classification using the lovemark grid proposed by Roberts (2004). Figure 4 depicts the location of the eight brands in the Roberts’ lovemark grid. As it is shown, Apple and Samsung are classified as lovemarks. The picture for Apple is very clear because it scores very high in both lovemark sub-dimensions, whereas Samsung scores very high in brand respect but just exceeds the average in brand love. All other brands are classified as quality brands, as they all exceed the mean value for brand respect but they score low in brand love as consumers feel a low level of love-like feelings for them.

Based on the aforementioned finding that the lovemark measure mostly reflect brand love, the method, proposed by Heinrich et al. (2012), is used to discover the love styles that consumers develop with the brands of their devices. The proposed measurement model reveals that brand intimacy, passion and commitment are sub-dimensions of brand love.
Depending on the presence or absence of these three components, eight different kinds of love emerge. The terminology proposed by Sternberg (1997) is used for labeling these brand love styles.

The results, provided in Table IV, indicate that all eight kinds of brand love are identified for the brands under investigation. Moreover, 44 per cent of respondents have some type of love for their preferred brands. A total of 16 per cent of respondents are in consummate love with their devices brands. As such, these consumers feel an intimate relationship with their beloved brand, have a strong yearning to purchase or repurchase the brand and are committed, at least in the short term, to support the particular brand (Shimp and Madden, 1988; Heinrich et al., 2012). Among the brands that enjoy high levels of consummate love are Apple (38 per cent) and Samsung (24 per cent). Fourteen per cent of respondents consist of persons that feel an empty love for the brands they own. In other words, these consumers show neither high intimacy nor passion for the brand, but they are committed to the brand. Samsung (20 per cent), Asus (19 per cent) and Lenovo (18 per cent) are among the brands with customers exhibiting an empty love style toward the brand. Furthermore, seven percent (7 per cent) of respondents is characterized by a high level of passion and commitment but the absence of intimacy. This love style is called fatuous in the sense that a commitment is made on the basis of passion without the stabilizing element of intimacy (Sternberg, 1986). Apple (19 per cent) and LG (8 per cent) have customers of this type.

The biggest proportion of respondents (56 per cent), however, is labeled as non-love, as they show neither high intimacy nor passion or commitment for the brand. But non-love does not mean that consumers dislike the brand, but it probably suggests that consumers do not have any love-like feeling for their brand. Nevertheless, the consumer–brand relationship can be strong enough as a result of the high levels of respect that these
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brand love style</th>
<th># (%)</th>
<th>Intimacy (%)</th>
<th>Passion (%)</th>
<th>Commitment (%)</th>
<th>Apple (%)</th>
<th>Asus (%)</th>
<th>Dell (%)</th>
<th>HP (%)</th>
<th>Lenovo (%)</th>
<th>LG (%)</th>
<th>Samsung (%)</th>
<th>Toshiba (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non love</td>
<td>565 (56%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liking</td>
<td>9 (1%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infatuated love</td>
<td>35 (3%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empty love</td>
<td>142 (14%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romantic love</td>
<td>12 (1%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Companionate love</td>
<td>16 (2%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatuous love</td>
<td>72 (7%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consummate love</td>
<td>165 (16%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
consumers feel for the brand. Finally, the other four love styles of infatuated love (3 per cent), companionate love (2 per cent), romantic love (1 per cent) and liking (1 per cent) are identified, albeit at lower proportions, within our sample.

5. Discussion and implications

5.1 Summary of findings
The purpose of this study was to develop and empirically test a lovemark measure that can be used to identify how brands of high-tech consumer products are classified in consumers’ mind with respect to functional and emotional brand aspects. In an effort to answer this question, this study provides an empirical illustration by developing a third-order reflective hierarchical model using data from netbook and tablet owners in Greece.

This study shows that the assessment of a lovemark measure as a third-order construct is fully functional and is reflected in its second-order dimensions, that is, love and respect. Then, brand respect is reflected by brand performance, brand trust and brand reputation and brand love, in turn, is reflected by brand commitment, brand passion and brand intimacy. The nomological validity of the proposed higher-order lovemark measure is also empirically confirmed by predicting its strong impact on three consumers’ behavioral responses. The findings confirm the external validity of the lovemark modeling framework, as it explains sizeable portions of the variance in three customer responses, that is, consumers’ repurchase intentions, willingness to pay a premium price to buy the brand and engagement in positive WOM behavior.

The findings of this study have a number of important implications for both researchers and practitioners. Because the proposed model has not been used so far, it could be used to provide the theoretical foundation for future research leading to a better understanding of the way consumers relate to brands in the context of high-tech products. On the other hand, the understanding of the key elements in the proposed model will help firms in the development and commercialization of wireless-enabled computing devices to achieve better results in terms of customer retention/acquisition and revenue enhancement.

5.2 Theoretical implications
Lovemark is the “wannabe” position in the mind of consumers for all brands and for brands of high technology products in particular (Roberts, 2004; Pawle and Cooper, 2006). However, there are limited research efforts investigating this new marketing concept in this product category with high utilitarian characteristics. This study contributes to the brand management literature for high technology products by proposing a new hierarchical modeling framework for measuring lovemark experience and identifying lovemark brands by capturing consumers’ perception of two primary dimensions (i.e. respect and love) and six sub-dimensions (i.e. performance, trust, reputation, passion, intimacy and commitment). The results are in accordance with the lovemarks theory, proposed by Roberts (2004), that the lovemark measure reflects consumers’ perception about brand respect and brand love for high-technology products as well as with the definition of de Chernatony and Dall’Olmo (1997) that a high-technology brand is a cluster of functional and emotional elements that are used by consumers to assess it. With regard to brand respect that represents the functional aspects of a brand, the findings are in accordance with the suggestions of Roberts (2004) that a brand creates respect through good performance, which creates a sense of trust and builds a positive reputation. These three brand relationship quality concepts participate in the consumer-brand relationship establishment phase where the cognitive brand elements matter more.
(Sreejesh and Roy, 2015; Nyffenegger et al., 2016). Regarding brand love, which represents the emotional/affective aspects of a high-technology brand, the findings are in accordance with those of Heinrich et al. (2012) and Nyffenegger et al. (2012) in which brand love is reflected by three primary factors, namely brand passion, brand intimacy and brand commitment. The absence or presence of these three factors can be used to capture facets of brand love as described in Sternberg’s triangular interpersonal theory of love (Heinrich et al., 2012). Based on the study of Sreejesh and Roy, (2015) these three affective-related concepts of brand relationships are responsible for the advancement of consumer-brand relationships, as brand intimacy and passion primarily contribute to relationships augmentation and brand commitment to brand relationship maintenance.

The study also presents a methodological contribution, as it validates the lovemark theory by establishing a third-order reflectively measured hierarchical construct. This is highly recommended as the use of multidimensional constructs increases the granularity and detail on different aspects of the lovemark concept (Petter et al., 2007).

The results, in accordance with previous studies, also indicate that the proposed lovemark concept is highly related to three loyalty manifestations namely consumers’ repurchase intentions, positive WOM behavior and willingness to pay a price premium (Shuv-Ami et al., 2016; Shuv-Ami, 2017; Veloutsou and Aimpitaksa, 2017). Thus, when customers consider their wireless-enabled computing device as a lovemark brand, they will remain loyal even if the price of the device is higher than competitive brands and will spread positive recommendations to other customers. However, the brand love dimension has a greater impact on all three loyalty manifestations (Veloutsou and Aimpitaksa, 2017). This means that the relationship developed between customers and brands of wireless-enabled computing devices is more emotional than functional.

5.3 Practical implications

Based on the results of the empirical study, customers of wireless-enabled computing devices assess brands at an overall level, at a dimensional level and at a sub-dimensional level. For brand managers, this improves their understanding of how consumers of wireless-enabled computing devices evaluate functional and emotional brand aspects, which are then used for brand positioning in the lovemark grid as products, fads, quality brands or lovemark brands. In particular, brand managers that aim to develop a lovemark brand should focus on improving lovemark experience through brand respect and love and this can be achieved by improving their six sub-dimensions. For a brand to become a lovemark, it is not enough to deliver only functional benefits to customers in terms of high reputation, good performance and a sense of trust. Brand managers should address, in a coordinated manner, both the functional and emotional elements associated with a brand to have customers who are loyal beyond reason.

The results provide a useful brand-tracking tool for manufacturers of wireless-enabled computing devices that can be used during the brand development process to improve a particular brand element at different levels of abstraction. In particular, the proposed model helps brand managers determine the love styles that consumers feel for their brand and use this information to implement appropriate marketing strategies that will enhance consumer-brand relationships.

The results also confirm the strong association of the proposed lovemark measure with three loyalty manifestations. This suggests that brand managers should consider the development of lovemark brands as a strategic objective to: 1) ensure better retention rates, as it is highly possible that lovemark customers will replace their device within the same brand, 2) attract new customers via positive WOM behavior of existing customers that are
convinced about the superiority of the functional and emotional aspects of the brand and recommend it to others and to 3) avoid price reductions when facing high competition and price wars by focusing on the emotional value of the brand.

5.4 Limitations and future research proposals
Notwithstanding its contribution, this study is not without limitations, which in turn open new paths for further research. First, this is a cross-sectional study and therefore, it is not possible to consider temporal changes in the research constructs. A longitudinal study on the subject is necessary to clarify the effects of temporal changes. Second, the use of a non-probability sampling method, despite the big size of the sample used in this study, does not ensure the full generalization of results. The proposed model can be used for further research using a random sampling approach that will result in a more representative sample of the investigated population. Third, the model should be tested in product categories with lower perceived risks (i.e. Fast Moving Consumer Goods) or in hedonic products (i.e. cosmetics) to see if the results are different among product categories. Finally, because of globalization, it is important to test the model across various countries with different cultures, to identify differences or similarities because of culture.

References


**Further reading**


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Exploring and consolidating the brand personality elements of the political leader

Aplicación de las dimensiones de la personalidad de marca al líder político

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to examine brand personality and its application to political branding. This study focuses on the brand personality of a political leader from the BJP Party brand (Bharatiya Janta Party). The development of a strong political brand personality is crucial for success at the polls. Little research has been dedicated to this phenomenon particularly beyond Western political and post-election contexts.

Design/methodology/approach – The scope and development of the study required a qualitative approach. The theoretical frameworks of the study acted as the deductive base of the study. The insights of the respondents were the inductive base of the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with

The authors gratefully acknowledge the contribution of Meetu Chawla. Her thesis titled, “Exploring political brand personality and use of media in its creation and maintenance,” and the data therein were invaluable in the development of this study. The authors are also thankful to Vivek Goswami, research associate, MICA who supported referencing and formatting of the paper. Additionally, the authors would also like to appreciate the editor and the anonymous reviewers who helped them in enhancing the quality of the paper by providing them wonderful suggestions.
Findings – The brand personality dimensions such as sincerity; agreeableness, competence, energy, openness, conscientiousness and emotional stability were clearly associated with a political leader. Negative qualities such as dictatorial attitudes and arrogance affected the political leader’s brand personality. Religious partisanship was another strong negative trait affecting the brand personality of the political leader.

Originality/value – The study has an actionable framework for political brand personality in the post-election context. It offers negative qualities to be avoided in the development of the political brand personality of the leader. It offers insights about the political brand personality of the leader in terms of young digitally savvy voters.

Keywords India, Political marketing, Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP), Narendra Modi, Political brand personality, Political leaders

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction
‘Brand personality’ represents an increasing emphasis on the non-tangible, brand-oriented dimensions of products. It involves assigning human elements to brands (Aaker, 1997). The scope of these values is such that they can transcend a purely utility and result-oriented approach (Patterson et al., 2013). Brand personality has been applied to different areas such as corporate brand personality and market place (Keller and Richey, 2006), brand personality in British politics and party political personality. Existing studies have also focused on the application of brand personality to different political settings and contexts including the UK, Mexico and Turkey (Guzman and Sierra, 2009; Matzler et al., 2016). However, all of them have been from a quantitative orientation, which demands thorough qualitative investigations.

Historically, the political leader of a party has been the primary point of evaluation of the political party (Needham and Smith, 2015; Pich and Dean, 2015). It expanded to the point where the image and projection of the political leader could supersede the image and projection of the political party. Before the 1990s, ideological issues and centering were more
Important for political salience and engagement. This led to a greater focus on the political party and the leader (Pich and Dean, 2015). The political leader became the focal point for the political party. Specifically, the first element is that brand personality can define and modulate the individual's engagement and bonding with brands. This application extends to political brands as well. The role of brand personality can be solidified in the context of political branding in terms of the political leaders.

If the perception and reception of the political leader can be strengthened in terms of the voters, it must belong to the domain of political brand image (Jain et al., 2017). Thus, the objectives of this study include the development of an integrated and comprehensive framework to assess political brand personality and its strength. This strength is especially so in the case of the political leader. The next section will deal with necessary dimensions and aspects for this study. To achieve this, each section will carefully consider the contributions that the concepts can offer the study (Das et al., 2012).

2. Literature review
2.1 Political marketing
Political marketing and political branding have an important role to play in the modern democratic process (Ormrod and Henneberg, 2011). The word political marketing is widely used in the political domain. Thus, there are consolidated efforts to operationalize the same (Harris and Lock, 2010). This is very relevant because most political communication exercises are marketing and branding exercises. Their primary purpose is influencing voters. Going on, there is an emergence of an organic and sophisticated theoretical corpus dedicated to the specific demands of political marketing (Jain et al., 2017). One of the main areas of concerns is to supplement the existing quantitative focus of the studies in the area of political marketing (Smith and French, 2009; Peng and Hackley, 2009; White and de Chernatony, 2002) with a qualitative focus. This is supported by experts who are emphasizing on the symbolic and interactional domain in political marketing (Needham and Smith, 2015; Pich and Dean, 2015; Scammell, 2015). Going on, political marketing can establish “a basis for long term loyalty in an environment where products are fluid” (Needham, 2006: 180), as the processes of political marketing are both functional and emotional.

The salience of this enhancement is maximized because a study focused on the national referendum campaign in Scotland (Black and Veloutsou, 2017). Our study has an analogous application in terms of the brand personality and interactive potential of the political leader in the case of young voters. Finally, most political marketing research has been effected in the western contexts. There is limited and rigorous research in the eastern contexts. To address this issue, there are some common patterns that influence political marketing. The first pattern is considering voters as consumers.

The next pattern is the dominant usage of social media in political marketing based on three points: political information, interest and attention. There is a key related study that has deeply engaged with the creation of brand value for consumers. It also deals with how this meaning can be extended to include existing and new customers in the context of art. The study also considers how consumer brand selection is often based on the evaluation of how closely those brands reflect their own personalities (Kim et al., 2018). This study and Chibuwe (2017) represent attempts at understanding the consumers’ processes of seeking value from brands. Further, the latter study contextualizes the role of brand value by studying the case of Robert Mugabe, the former Zimbabwean President. The study of Mugabe revealed findings about traits of political leaders and their impact on the minds of voters. Yet, these studies have come close to and not allowed a crucial link with political
brand personality. Subsequently, we will overview the concepts of brand personality and political brand personality.

2.2 Brand personality and political brand personality

Brand personality is a scheme, which posits that brands can possess human-based characteristics. This is because consumers seek these qualities in brands to deal with the abstract and material dimensions of the world (Ahmad and Thyagaraj, 2015). These possibilities span both the dimensions of human perception and personality. Thus, the study of brand personality could be developed to a stage where certain dimensions could be considered almost universal. Specific characters such as warm, friendly and agreeable, competent, effective and efficient possess the possibility of universality (Davies et al., 2018). This exploration can be traced to the almost paradigmatic “set of human characteristics associated with a brand” provided by Aaker (1997, p. 347). These factors of sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness evolved after effecting a rigorous factor analysis of relevant adjectives (Caprara et al., 2001) integral to the alignment of personality attributes (Goldberg, 1990).

The applicability of Aaker’s (1997) brand personality scale and dimensions are seen in politics too. Studies have added to the basic five dimensions of brand personality. The first change was the addition of peacefulness to Aaker’s (1997) model. The dimension of peacefulness was exclusive for Japan; for Spain, passion was a predominant element; and ruggedness was the predominant element in the context of the United States of America (Aaker et al., 2001). There have been longitudinal studies of the use of brand personality to the leaders of the National Democratic Congress and the New Patriotic Party in Ghana (Tweneboah-Koduah et al., 2010), and the relevance of brand personality for international political politics has also been studied. In the case of the study in Ghana, it was realized that sincerity and ruggedness were the most important dimensions for a political brand personality (Tweneboah-Koduah and Adusei, 2016). A key study in this direction had seen that organizations have transitioned from mass communication to one-to-one communication. The study had also observed that consumers had transitioned from one-to-one communication to one-to-many communication (Veloutsou and Guzman, 2017; Hewett et al., 2016).

This means is a highly apposite method for the analysis of a political candidate’s personality (Guzman and Sierra, 2009). However, adding more human characteristics to the construct of brand personality would widen its applicability (Harris and Fleming, 2005). Thus, our study used the 42 brand personality traits established by Aaker (1997). Here, we used 25 candidate traits from Caprara et al.’s (2002) Five Factor Model. A trait that became redundant was “feminine,” as it is irrelevant in describing a political candidate (Bharatiya Janta Party, BJP’s, candidate Narendra Modi) who has always positioned himself as a tough operator evidencing manliness in decision-making. He has also appealed to certain of the traditional connotations of manliness such as decisiveness and a non-compromising discourse, which are a part of the traditional Indian patriarchal system (Srivastava, 2015). Hence, a composite of 62 traits have been engaged with to develop the personality framework for this study. This section will thus focus on the key learning(s) about political brand personality and brand personality in the context of political leaders.

2.3 Political brand personality and political leaders

There are highly limited studies focusing on political leaders and brand personality from the perspective of being a heuristic device for voters. Here, key studies and models have been developed to test the textual variations in brand personality (Slapin and Proksch, 2008) in addition to studying the relevance and importance of personality dimensions in politics (Yesil and Sozbilir, 2013). The lacuna in both the studies is that they do not focus on the post-election
scenario and brand personality development. Here, pivotal studies have focused on the interaction of brand personality, politics and websites (Papagiannidis et al., 2012). These studies, despite their contributions, still suffer from a shortcoming. This shortcoming is that they do not seriously focus on the extended use of social media platforms to strengthen the brand personality of a leader. Finally, most of the existing studies do not focus on the means of engaging young digitally savvy voters to develop a strong brand personality (Nielsen, 2017). To summarize, the key studies of political brand personality have found that brand personality helps categorize candidates as preferred candidates and non-preferred candidates (Menon et al., 1999).

The former refers to those political leaders whose brand personality traits are well received by the voters. The latter refers to those candidates whose traits are in opposition to the traits expected by the voters in a leader. A key study in this area has focused on the close correspondence between the elements of trust and political brands. It also extended its scope to include the questions of brand loyalty and brand transgression. These questions specifically dealt with the issues of Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and the question of stakeholders (voters) experiencing a reduction in loyalty. This reduction was evidenced after Rudd was not able to keep up his electoral politics. Here, the ‘let down’ caused by the political leader affected the entire political party thereon (Burgess et al., 2017). Yet, most studies that have concentrated on the application of brand personality in politics have suffered because of a distinct gap.

This gap is between the individuals’ perception of brand personality and the application of brand personality by practitioners. This is because studies have not yet commenced analyzing it at a level of integrated contexts (Haarhoff and Kleyn, 2012; Hoegg and Lewis, 2011). At the other end of the spectrum, there have been rigorous studies (Geuens et al., 2009) that have followed a psychological approach that reduced the non-personality matrices from and increased the applicability of Aaker’s (1997) model. Mattes and Milazzo (2014) have focused on instinctive instantaneous judgments on the long-term impressions of the candidates and the effect of qualities of leaders not related to policy and statecraft on voter perception. Therefore, the current study would primarily contribute to understanding the brand personality of the candidates; provide for a framework or a process to the political leaders that can help them to effectively connect with the voters, specifically with the digital, dynamic, new tech savvy individuals (Freling et al., 2011).

2.4 Development of connection with voters
Political brands have the potential of establishing “a basis for long term loyalty in an environment where products are fairly fluid” (Needham, 2006: 180) based on the voters’ connection to the political brand of the political leader and the party. If voters are engaged with as consumers, then the connection developed based on the political brand of the leader can lead to parties consolidating the affiliation and support of the voters (Pich and Dean, 2015; Scammell and Langer, 2006). Once such affiliation and support are set in place, the political leader can further cement the connection by positioning their communications to their affiliates and prospective in a manner which the former and latter feel relevant. Also, connections based on political brands have the potential of being shortcuts. These shortcuts can be used by the voters and prospective voters when they assay political leaders and parties. In summation, the political leader can be seen to be responsive and acting as a source of quality maintenance to the voters (Busby and Cronshaw, 2015). An influential study here had focused on how a campaign could synchronize with the responses and requirements of the user. This study also understood how platforms meant to measure social media platforms could help political parties and leaders deal with their competition. Here, the findings of our study could help develop an inclusive framework that could include key dimensions of our political brand personality framework and campaign management (Cornfield, 2017). The crux of this engagement is the
primacy and centrality of the political leader in terms of political brand personality. The subsequent section will deal with the same.

2.5 Primacy of the political leader
Political branding has gradually begun to reduce the use of ideology as its modus operandi (Kobak et al., 2016; Needham, 2006). This reduction has increased the engagement with the voters and prospects based on the characteristics of the political leaders. Once such values are determined, parties can aim to choose candidates around these values. The chosen candidate then nurtures and enhances the party’s image through his or her leadership and management style. Here, the engagement of the party and the leader can base on the most salient utilitarian and symbolic touch points in the context of the voters (Rayner, 2014; Ormrod and Henneberg, 2011). A related investigation was done by MacInnis and Folkes (2017) who considered brand anthropomorphism as a phenomenon that encourages consumers to attribute human qualities to their brands. The process involves the creation of symbolic meaning. This form of anthropomorphism could be used in the process of creating a strong political brand for the leader. Thus, the concept of political branding could receive its applicatory expansion through the branding of the political leader. In fact, the brand of a political leader who is prominent and possesses a large space in terms of coverage would benefit from the development of a strong brand personality (Ahmed et al., 2017; Rojas-Méndez et al., 2013). Finally, a summation of some of the most important studies of political branding and their key engagements has been provided in Table I. We will now discuss the methodology required for the study.

3. Methodology
The process of conducting exploratory brand research should be qualitative (Scammell, 2007). This is equally true when political brands need to be explored with a focus on brand personality in the digital context. These insights help capture the nuances developed from the respondents’ perspectives (Mohajan, 2018). Qualitative research can also ensure that the conjunction between deductive logic and inductive logic is perfectly maintained. This is made possible because the theoretical frameworks act as the deductive base (Roshan and Deeptee, 2009). The respondents’ insights become the inductive expansion of the investigation.

This conjunction extends to the development of codes, categories and themes. This development will ensure that the conceptualization to be developed will have a coherent and well-structured formalization (Gustafsson, 2017). The next section will deal with the first stage of the methodology.

3.1 Stage 1: Engagement with external stakeholders
Our study commenced with in-depth interviews with the respondents and the usage of projective techniques with the stakeholders outside the political party, i.e. the electorate (O’Cass, 2001). External stakeholders are key, as they were integral to considering the political brand personality of a leader (Schneider, 2004). External stakeholders and the elicitation of their responses were most amenable to the process of in-depth semi-structured interviews (Kang et al., 2016). They are open-ended and possess nondirect questions.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews also afford extended control to the respondents, as they can project their feelings and emotions related to the topic. We followed the steps of projective techniques with the focus of ensuring that brand personality is not restricted to a lexical dimension.

These techniques helped unearth “views and values that people have not thought about in a very conscious way and or do not normally admit to” (Scammell, 2007, p. 72). Thus, projective techniques were conducted in five stages: association, completion, construction,
expression and choice ordering (Hofstede et al., 2007). Respondents were encouraged to annotate drawings and offer greater through echoic probing for both the pictorial and verbal insights (Sung et al., 2015; Donoghue, 2000).

The framework required the selection of respondents who, as external stakeholders, were young people from urban areas through purposive sampling. Details of the samples are

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Title and year</th>
<th>Key summary</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dianne Dean, Robin Croft and Christopher Pich</td>
<td>Toward a Conceptual Framework of Emotional Relationship Marketing: An Examination of Two UK Political Parties: 2014</td>
<td>The study focused on the nature of economic and utilitarian forms of political communication and marketing. Specific attention focused on the importance of political leaders in political marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret Scammell</td>
<td>Politics and Image: The Conceptual Value of Branding: 2015</td>
<td>The study focused on the importance of image development and maintenance in the fields of political branding and marketing. Specific attention was directed to the necessity of qualitative research in developing closer bonds between the voters and political parties and leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Busby and Sue Cronshaw</td>
<td>Political Branding: The Tea Party and Its Use of Participation Branding: 2015</td>
<td>The study focused on the nature of nonaffiliated political interests and groups aligning for a common cause. Specific attention was focused on the nature of political movements that could be mobilized without a single figurehead but multiple engagement points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiffany Winchester, John Hall and Wayne Binney</td>
<td>Conceptualizing Usage in Voting Behavior for Political Marketing: An Application of Consumer Behavior: 2016</td>
<td>The study focused on understanding the usage of key marketing concepts such as marketing and image management in the field of political marketing. Specific attention focused on operationalizing the nature of consumer choice in political marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wojciech Cwalina and Andrzej Falkowski</td>
<td>Morality and Competence in Shaping the Images of Political Leaders: 2016</td>
<td>The study focused on the importance of understanding the nature of image management and political marketing. Specific attention was directed to the nature of image management in politics both in the national and local contexts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Tempest</td>
<td>The Charismatic Body Politics of President Putin: 2016</td>
<td>The study focused on the development of Vladimir Putin’s brand image based on his physical attributes. Specifically, the study focused on Putin’s image management in a context of almost no political opposition and a context of more dynamic politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caroline Lego Muñoz and Terri L. Towner</td>
<td>The Image is the Message: Instagram Marketing and the 2016 Presidential Primary Season: 2017</td>
<td>The study focused on the importance of image predominance in the context of political campaigning and marketing. It also tried to understand the processes by which the images used for the political candidates synchronized with the ideal images. Specifically, the study focused on the American candidates who had stood for the primary elections and the texts used to back up the images</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph (Jun Hyun) Ryoo and Neil Bendle</td>
<td>Understanding the Social Media Strategies of US Primary Candidates: 2017</td>
<td>The study focused on the social media strategies of the candidates contesting for the primary elections in the USA. It also dealt with the different modes by which the candidates used supplementary platforms to emphasize their candidature. Specifically, the study focused on which concerns of the voters were emphasized on during the campaigns</td>
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Table I. Key studies related to political branding
illustrated in Table II. This was further substantiated by the data released by the Election Commission of India. These data revealed that out of a total voting population of 0.8 billion, 0.23 billion voters were between the age of 18 and 19 years during the Lok Sabha Elections held in the year 2014 in India.

Around 0.12 billion people who were between the age group of 15 and 19 years during the 2011 elections became eligible to vote in 2014. Therefore, the study focused on a target population between 18 and 24 years from the three cities of Delhi, Mumbai and Ahmedabad. Delhi is the national capital of India. It is also the political capital of the nation. It has a population of 10 million. In addition, Delhi is the third largest user base of the internet in the country. Owing to its being the political center at the national and state level in tandem, the voting sample of Delhi is very politically vibrant. Mumbai is the hub of financial activity in India. It has had a very active and political history of over 60 years. Also, it has a population of 18 million people. Mumbai is one of the most culturally diverse cities in India. It has a wide linguistic base with Hindi, Marathi and English spoken quite widely. It has the highest internet base in India. This population makes Mumbai one of the most hard fought over political bases in India.

Owing to the wide internet penetration and its active political nature, the sample population offers unique insights about deeply political engaged voters who use the internet regularly to discuss and engage in political discussions. Ahmedabad has a population of 7 million. It has a literacy rate of 92 per cent for men and 83 per cent for women. It is the seventh largest urban area in India. Moreover, it is considered to be one of the strongholds of the BJP. Ahmedabad is the capital of the state of Gujarat. It is also believed to be the epicenter of a sea change in Indian politics with the victory of the BJP in 2004 (Indiaonlinepages.com, 2016; Indexmundi.com, 2016; Indian web2, 2016). The sampling technique was non-probability sampling, as it suited the qualitative and exploratory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Previously voted</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Education level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1D</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>New Delhi</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2D</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>New Delhi</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3D</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>New Delhi</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4D</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>New Delhi</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5D</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>New Delhi</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6D</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>New Delhi</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7D</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>New Delhi</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8D</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>New Delhi</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P1M</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mumbai</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2M</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mumbai</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3M</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mumbai</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4M</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mumbai</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5M</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mumbai</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6M</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Mumbai</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7M</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mumbai</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8M</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mumbai</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P1G</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Ahmedabad</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2G</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Ahmedabad</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3G</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Ahmedabad</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4G</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Ahmedabad</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5G</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Ahmedabad</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6G</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Ahmedabad</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7G</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Ahmedabad</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8G</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Ahmedabad</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table II. Details of external stakeholders
objective of this study. The research also aimed to investigate numerous variables related to
the independent yet subjective perceptions of the political brand personality of Narendra
Modi. This involved the researcher ceasing the exploration when the respondents have no
further and new data to offer. The collection of data for Phase 1 was culminated when we
realized that the respondents from each city provided us the requisite insights. The identity
of the respondents was kept confidential as a precondition to recruiting the respondents.

Each interview was conducted for 45 min and audio recorded for transcription and
thematic analysis by the researcher. Moreover, the expressions and illustrations generated
from the projective techniques were also thematically analyzed with the aid of qualitative
content analysis accompanied by the two-staged thematic approach (Soane et al., 2012). The
nomenclature of the data collected from the respondents can be seen in Table III. The
participants had been mobilized to encompass the three types of influential stakeholders for
political marketing: the voter, stakeholder and society (Ormrod et al., 2007).

3.2 Stage 2: Engagement with internal stakeholders

The interviews were coherent and based on theoretical assumptions and information
processes consistent with objectives of the study (Pich and Dean, 2015). Subsequently,
projective techniques were used in conjunction with the semi-structured in-depth interviews
with the internal stakeholders (refer Table IV) and nomenclature in Table V. These
techniques provided for greater description, richer understanding and spontaneity. A
concise presentation of the results of the projective techniques (picture association) featuring

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Internal stakeholder</th>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Senior Feature Writer (Digital Media)</td>
<td>Electric Goods</td>
<td>Delhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>Independent Online Blogger</td>
<td>Digital Platforms</td>
<td>Delhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>BJP Spokesperson</td>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>Gujarat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>BJP Digital Marketing Spokesperson</td>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>Gujarat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>Former National Creative Director</td>
<td>Advertising Agency</td>
<td>Delhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>Founder/Director</td>
<td>Advertising Agency</td>
<td>Gujarat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>Head Events</td>
<td>Advertising Agency</td>
<td>Gujarat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>Chairman and Managing Director</td>
<td>Advertising Agency</td>
<td>Gujarat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>External stakeholder</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1D</td>
<td>Participant one from Delhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P1M</td>
<td>Participant one from Mumbai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P1A</td>
<td>Participant one from Ahmedabad</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table III. Nomenclature used for citing/paraphrasing the verbatim for external stakeholder

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Internal stakeholder</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Digital Media Journalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>Independent Online Blogger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>BJP Spokesperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>Creative Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>PR Agency Head</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table IV. Details of internal stakeholders

Table V. Nomenclature example for citing/paraphrasing the verbatim for internal stakeholder
in the first phase of the research is given in Table VI. An outline of the results of the projective techniques (expressive) has been provided in Table VII. These internal stakeholders included candidates, party managers, politicians, media representatives and party workers of the BJP (OCass, 2001). Very importantly, semi-structured interviews were ideal for context that require in-depth investigative conversations that might help elicit deep insights. These characteristics when melded with a deep theoretical underpinning helped probe the complexities of political branding personality. For the purpose of data collection and verification, we conducted eight in-depth interviews. These perceptions were centralized on the brand personality of Narendra Modi.

The interviews were conducted with digital media journalists, bloggers, BJP spokespeople, digital media and PR (Public Relations) agency leaders. The interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personality traits</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daring</td>
<td>P1A, P1M, P2D, P3D, P6D, P3A, P6A, P8A, P2M, P7M, P5D, P7D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trendy</td>
<td>P3A, P7A, P3M, P1D, P8D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young</td>
<td>P8A, P6M, P8D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exciting</td>
<td>P4A, P5D, P1A, P2D, P3D, P7D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirited</td>
<td>P2A, P4D, P3A, P1D, P5M, P8M, P1A, P7A, P3M, P7M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imaginative</td>
<td>P6D, P4M, P6A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique</td>
<td>P4A, P5A, P5M, P2A, P7A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up-to-date</td>
<td>P2M, P6M, P5D, P4A, P8M, P4D, P6D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>P1A, P3A, P1M, P2M, P3M, P4M, P5M, P3D, P4D, P7D, P8D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemporary</td>
<td>P6A, P6M, P1D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brands/products chosen</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Reasoning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coke</td>
<td>P1A, P4D</td>
<td>Bring happiness, classic brand made for all yet young at heart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifebuoy with Glycerine</td>
<td>P1M</td>
<td>Has taken the charge to clean the system. Modern touch to a classic comfort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malboro</td>
<td>P1D</td>
<td>Negative interjection of politicians smoking away the resources of India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliance</td>
<td>P8A, P7D, P8M</td>
<td>Compared the life journey of Modi with Dhirubhai Ambani; Gujarati Origins; tough rugged and a classic brand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amul</td>
<td>P2A, P7A, P2D, P8D</td>
<td>Gujarati origins; diversifying to add a tint of modernity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaning Brush</td>
<td>P5A</td>
<td>Has taken the charge to clean the nation; low maintenance; modern and innovative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volkswagen</td>
<td>P2M</td>
<td>Tough rugged and stylish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idea Internet</td>
<td>P3A</td>
<td>Quick ideation, attaching to the grassroots just like in the ads; thinking about everyone’s benefits; modern and innovative just like IIM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>P3M</td>
<td>Smooth as a classic whiskey brand; rugged and strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dairy Milk</td>
<td>P4D</td>
<td>Sugar coated; smooth, loved by all; modern and innovative since coming up with variations like silk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sedan</td>
<td>P4A</td>
<td>Travels through rough terrains, trustworthy; modern yet comfortable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>P5D</td>
<td>Pro social media, loves to tweet, talks a lot; small quirky witty lines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crocin</td>
<td>P6A</td>
<td>Pain relieving, a fresh start to a painful end; classic comfort</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table VI.
Results – projective techniques – picture association

Table VII.
Results – projective techniques – expressive
were selected with a specific criterion. The criterion was that they needed to have been involved closely with the branding and communication exercises of the BJP. Importantly, they need to have been involved with these exercises for a minimum period of 10 years (Maigian et al., 2005). Finally, the representational base of the internal stakeholders offered an invaluable means of ensuring that the insights of the external stakeholders can be synchronized to ensure that unnecessary stakeholder effects are reduced (Hughes and Dann, 2009). Now, we can engage with the analysis of the study. The analysis covered two important aspects. The first aspect of the analysis dealt with the analysis of the data, coding and other relevant patterns. The second aspect of the analysis dealt with the consolidation and elevation of the insights into the development of our framework.

4. Analysis
The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using two-step thematic process (Lin and Himelboim, 2018). Initially, we conducted open coding where the data were broken down to individual units. Subsequently, axial coding was conducted for conceptualization at the micro level. These elements were coded in a manner by which they could be a part of a cyclic process. Then, we were able to reach the stage of stabilization, which was a reflection of the revalidation of the data. After conducting 24 interviews on the external stakeholders and validating the same with perspectives elicited from eight internal stakeholders and content analysis of the perspective provided by them, the framework was stabilized (Borgmann et al., 2016). This finalization was also in accordance with the constructs provided by Aaker (1997) and the respondents’ insights. Here, in the ‘coarse grained’ phase, the researchers familiarized themselves with the verbatim transcripts of the interviews (Pich and Dean, 2015). In the ‘fine grained’ phase, we used a more funneled approach of examining patterns and variations to develop themes leading to final mappings. Finally, the results developed needed to represent stabilization and saturation. This stabilization was achieved by triangulation. This synchronization allowed for the development of themes and categories.

Finally, the number of respondents for the study sufficed to develop the deep insights that developed into the findings of our study. The consolidation was further strengthened by using used three progressive and inclusive phases: initial design, in-course extension and full frame development. The first stage, which is initial design, was developed by using the deductive and inductive forms of reasoning. These forms were used to understand the complexities of political brand personality. The deductive logic was extremely useful in understanding the theoretical and conceptual joints of the study. In-course extension was achieved by choosing, amalgamating and operationalizing the respondents’ insights. The insights that might not add significant value to the study were also removed from the analysis. Finally, full frame development, i.e. a conceptual framework, was achieved by merging, integrating and separating the data gained from the respondents.

These processes were finally strengthened by aligning the data with the theoretical frameworks of the study. We also engaged with the most important dimensions’ imperative for an actionable framework to understand the dynamics of the political brand personality of a political leader from a qualitative perspective. The dimensions thus developed supplemented each other and culminated in the framework of the study.

5. Findings
5.1 External and internal stakeholder
The conceptualization of brand personality in our context has specific points of applicability. For example, the brand personality dimensions such as sincerity and agreeableness and the second competence and energy were present. Finally, the three
elements of openness, conscientiousness and emotional stability were added from Caprara et al.'s (2001) model based on the respondents’ insights. The key categories developed via the interviews and the projective techniques are presented in Figure 1.

5.2 Sincerity and agreeableness

External stakeholders provided varied responses about these categories. They were in line with the characteristics displayed by Narendra Modi during his campaign during the 2014 national elections. They related the personality traits under the category of sincerity and agreeableness with Modi. This category spanned out into themes, including Humble, Small Town, Honest, Sincere, Real, Loyal and Authentic.

A respondent from Delhi stated “He can reach to all the strata of the society” (P1D, 23 years, student). A participant from Ahmedabad expressed that “Since he knows where his roots are and knows people are aware of that he does not even try to portray himself to be a city based politician,” (P2A, 24 years, student). An analogous viewpoint was expressed by a participant from Mumbai, “He seems to be pretty modest about the fact that he is PM. He says, I do not suggest people to dream big. I tell them to act on it [. . .]” (P2M, 22 years, student).

Modi was acknowledged as being sincere in his efforts that make him “reach to the masses” (P1D, 23 years, student) more effectively. According to most of the Ahmedabad participants, Modi had exhibited the quality of sincerity as a Chief Minister over a period of three terms (15 years):

I personally think he is pretty sincere. I have been following his state politics as well and Gujarat has actually seen development be it in terms of HDI or general economy (P3M, 22 years, student).

On the contrary, a participant from Mumbai said that sincerity is just about applying efforts for development. The respondent also believed that it should include creating awareness efforts “I had no clues about Congress work regarding social issues or structuring of the central systems, I regularly follow Modi. I know the structures and processes more clearly now” (P5M, 25 years, student). External stakeholders clearly stated that his cheerful

Figure 1.
Brand personality perception of external stakeholders
behavior and cordial approach appealed to the masses. One of the participants from Mumbai cherished the experience of watching a speech by Modi “If you hear his speeches. Railway stations have a great infrastructure. This brings such joy in his eyes when he talks about nation development” (P6M, student). A participant from Delhi recalled an incident:

There was a cricketer from Bharuch who had many supporters in the Congress party...but when he took 3 wickets in a match played outside the country, Narendra Modi was the first person to call and wish his father. This is how close he can get to people to make them happy (P4D, 24 years, student).

5.3 Excitement
The respondents expressed strong views about this category. According to them, he had been aptly using social media to target the youth population. His presence online overshadowed that of any other competitor. According to one of the respondents from Delhi, “He posted one with the lotus. He posts selfies with them [...] he is sort of instilling people like us. He is trying to relate to them” (P3A, 23 years, student). This aspect was extended and supported when one of the respondents expressed the idea of an integrated social media campaign to target the youth. They particularly approved of the addition of “new technology like 3D rallies” (P7D, 26 years, student). This was especially so when he met global political leaders and updated the same on social media platforms. These became trending topics on Twitter. A Delhi-based respondent added:

In fact recently also if you saw Hyderabad meet with Obama...he was wearing a bandgala which had Narendra Damodar Das Modi written everywhere [...] He knows how to use and when to use technology to create trends (P7A, 26 years, student).

Going on, respondents compared Modi with the former Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh. They did so to praise the daring and exciting attitude of Modi. Here, daring referred to an enterprising nature and a proactive approach. According to a Mumbai-based participant, “He has made pretty daring moves like trying to create cordial relations with contradicting countries – Russia, China, US. So you are pretty daring” (P4M, 23 years, student). Another participant from Delhi added:

 [...] So if you look him in contrast to what Manmohan Singh...he just did not speak at all [...]. He is the first PM to start of this radio thing. All this seems very exciting (P2D, 24 years, student).

The categorization of Modi as a trendy, exciting and energetic personality was quite evident from the external stakeholders. A respondent from Mumbai held forth on Modi’s presence in the international stage. The participant cited an example of his speech in the USA seen on YouTube “[...] His personality is such that he is genuinely put India on a global map. He is a personality on his own” (P7M, 24 years, student). The responses projected Modi as an up-to-date politician in the central system “The way he chooses to be the Prime Minister and not because he is the Prime Minister” (P5A, 25 years, student). A participant from Delhi cited an example of his capabilities to support his ability to stay up-to-date “He actually asks all the relevant ministries to give him a 5 min presentation which has only 5 slides [...] call to action” (P6D, 24 years, student). These views were extended by the respondents by explicitly mentioning that he possesses characteristics of a dictator. This extension could be seen as the negative logical extreme polarity of the quality of excitement. We found that the dictatorial trait was clearly visible in his leadership style. A respondent stated “I am the big guy here” (P7D, 26 years, student). This was amplified by another respondent, “He is dictatorial” (P8D, 26 years, student). In the projection technique, the majority of the
respondents considered him to be cool and trendy. This clearly demonstrated their selection of the traits related to Modi’s personality. We were also able to discover that the leader should possess the qualities of being honest, direct and result oriented. The combination of these qualities when performativity aligned can be structurally segmented as desire to have things their way.

5.4 Openness

Many external stakeholders expressed their views about openness and its relevance in the case of Narendra Modi. Specifically, the category of openness translated into the quality of ideation. This was especially aided by the qualities of incisiveness, innovativeness and novelty of modern ideas. A participant from Mumbai appreciated Modi as a perfect client “He has to be creative and innovative enough […] he was creative enough to capture youth at all digital touch points” (P8M, 25 years, student). The participants who had been following his speeches online stated “He is sharp and original which captures the major strata of the society at the right time” (P7M, 24 years, student) and because of his presence of mind “He knows how to connect the dots and give a very solid answer” (P4D, 24 years, student). Thus, the participants were shown a large-sized Narendra Modi who was reducing the importance of other politicians. Most participants provided it a positive interpretation. They portrayed Modi as a strong achiever who is there to stay in “power” (P1M, 25 years, student).

The respondents highlighted the point of him being someone with a “modern outlook but not a westernized one” (P3D, 26 years, student). According to them, Modi presented himself as a “true Indian” (P8A, 24 years, student). This was similar to a respondent from Ahmedabad who added “Even though he shows desiness he is modern with the notions of moving India forward. His ‘Make in India’ seems to be a very smart move in this front” (P3D, 26 years, student).

5.5 Competence and energy

The majority of the participants related Modi’s personality traits to the categories of competence and energy. This was because he was considered as a “forward looking politician” (P4A, 24 years, student) who thrives on a success-oriented approach. Most of the respondents emphasized on his leadership qualities which included qualities such as being untiring, smart, determined and honest. However, some of these qualities have been seen as liabilities when they become excessive. This excess translated into negative traits most significantly identified as arrogance. However, the infrastructural success of Bus Rapid Transit System of Gujarat was praised by respondents from Mumbai “[…] It is conventional […] but the fact that he got it implemented successfully shows how deterministic and hardworking he is” (P8M, 25 years, student). The development of the Gujarat tourism industry “which sold off as hot pancakes shows off his intellectual strength” (P1A, 25 years, student) was cited as a point much appreciated. The majority of the respondents said that he showed two leadership styles – “strategic” (P5D, 24 years, student) and “corporate” (P5D, 24 years, student).

One of the respondents from Mumbai explained:

He is a strategic leader because he is timely targeting his audience and communicating with them like youth on social media and rural masses he comes out to be of corporate nature […] (P4M, 23 years, student).

Similarly, a respondent from Delhi noted about his corporate attitude at the national level and the enterprising efforts at the international level, “At a national level […] he has set timelines under which he wants things to be done in the government offices […]” (P4D, 24
years, student). In addition, his speed in “decision making process” (P7D, 26 years, student) was also appreciated by many participants. The “speed” (P1M, 25 years, student) in implementing the policies shows how “He has a timeframe to get everything done successfully” (P3A, 23 years, student).

To maintain ties with his old allies and continue building a positive image in front of the masses, he “Shrewdly he let RSS get away with certain things on the name of catering to the motherland officially or unofficially” (P2D, 24 years, student) and yet for the larger good of the country “with so many cultures […] differences and linguistics […] builds up his positive image to keep working towards a futuristic vision and inspires the same in us” (P2D, 24 years, student). According to a participant from Mumbai, “We need a guy like him who has a can do attitude too!” (P4M, 23 years, student). However, our respondents expressed that the leader becomes arrogant while delivering speeches, as his verbal projection is clearly exaggerated and not commensurate with the actual result. A respondent stated that “There is a sense of arrogance on his face” (P6D, 26 years, student). This was substantiated by another respondent, “He has projected a small thing and makes it look big” (P8D, 26 years, student). To summarize, a strong brand personality can be developed by a political leader by possessing active ideation capabilities. The combination of these qualities can be structurally segmented as the desire to express status and confirm identity.

5.6 Ruggedness

A majority of the participants associated Modi with the attribute of ruggedness. Here, attribute is should not be considered in its strict lexical meaning. Rather, it must be understood in a more psychological context. Thus, this category was further divided into the subcategories of subconscious and conscious qualities. Most participants associated a certain set of qualities with him. According to a participant, his work as a “RSS pracharak” (P2D, 24 years, student) has made him a more “pro hindu politician” (P2D, 24 years, student). This gave him a more non-secular outlook. However, a majority of participants credited him with being a person who was a “proud patriotic” (P7M, 24 years, student) politician. Additionally, masculinity was one of the traits that Modi possessed. This was with regards to his ability of being able to “get the work done by lazy officials” (P3M, 22 years, student). Most of the respondents related him with a rough-edged rock instead of a smooth one because of the same. One of the participants cited the reason as “he is rough […] because of his modest background […] he exudes this toughness” (P2A, 24 years, student). To summarize, we were able to clearly understand that a strong political brand of a leader possesses the quality of ruggedness. We were able to realize that the brand personality of the political leader also needs to possess the qualities of forward directedness and goal orientation.

5.7 Conscientiousness

A majority of the respondents approved of Modi’s efforts at propelling the nation toward the development. Thus, Modi was considered to be self-confident. Thus, one of the respondents from Delhi expressed, “This guy focuses more on what he did […] what he can do […] he seems quite optimistic and confident in that regard” (P5D, 24 years, student). However, this optimism should not become a vainglorious presentation of one’s achievements. Thus, a respondent stated, “Every attribute is exaggerated” (P8D, 26 years, student). More specifically, another respondent said, “He keeps harping about what he did in Gujarat (P2M, 22 years, student). Another respondent was equally direct:
I knew not much about him when he got nominated as the Prime Ministerial candidate of the BJP [...]. All I knew was how he keeps bragging about how he has done so much for Gujarat [...]. That’s all [...] (P4D, 24 years, student).

5.8 Sophistication
This category was felt to be a direct indication of the values that constitute the frame of Modi. Modi measured up to the expectations of the majority of the participants. They felt that he was “well groomed” (P6A, 23 years, student) and “traditional” (P3M, 22 years, student). However, he was perceived to be lacking in sophistication. Thus a participant from Delhi explained “No [...]. I wouldn’t say sophisticated. But it’s traditional and well groomed. I have never seen wearing him a suit [...] or a tuxedo [...].” (P7D, 26 years, student). In contrast, he was believed to have a charming and eloquent personality. He was even compared to the former Prime Ministers of the country “Nehru and Vajpayee” (P4A, 24 years, student) who were famous for being great orators. It was expressed by the participant that he was a “Prince charming to save the country rather than a wolf trying to eat the country alive” (P1M, 25 years, student). Thus, respondent from Mumbai said, “He carries himself well. I think he goes down to the deepest level of their understanding” (P8M, F, 25 years, student).

Most of them also perceived Modi as a middle-class man. In addition, he was believed to be an authoritative figure. The promises made to the masses about a glorious future full of anticipated achievements seemed realistic. A participant indicated that “We were remotely heading towards anarchy. With a vision and a past record who has resolved issues in the past, he has the confidence in our future” (P6A, 23 years, student). Supporting this, a participant from Mumbai added a perspective “He asked for their concerns [...] and found solutions for them. But to assuring people that there is someone out there to listen to your issues” (P4M, 23 years, student). Here, Modi resuscitated the Indian Postal Department by encouraging it “to tie up retailers to provide them postal services” (P6D, 24 years, student).

Thus, he helped the department function efficiently. According to a participant from Delhi, Modi will “Utilize your resources properly [...] increase the amount of investment coming in and reduce the expenditures” (P6D, 24 years, student). However, sophistication could easily cross bounds and take the form of manipulation. The respondent felt that the leaders become calculative and shrewd while delivering messages to the voters. Thus, a respondent stated, “Sometimes he comes across as if he is cunning. He is saying things because they are politically correct. There is a bit of insincerity, very calculative” (P1A, 25 years, student). We were able to discover that the political leader’s brand personality would need to possess the qualities of consistency and dedication. We discovered consistency, and dedication could be structurally segmented to lead to the desire to connect.

5.9 Religious partisanship
We had found that the trait of secularity was greatly feted by the respondents. The importance of this quality was seen when the respondents further expressed their views when they felt that this trait was traduced. This dimension was clearly visible when the respondents expressed their opinion about religious fanaticism and riots. Thus, a respondent, stated. “He was silent during the Godhra riots. It is like he hid behind the scenes” (P1A, 25 years, student). Another respondent again drew attention to the role of Modi during the riots, “There are questions about Godhra, and how much he did to develop Gujarat” (P5A, 25 years, student). Another respondent stated that the riots in Gujarat when Modi was the Chief Minister seem to be well hidden in the past, “With the riots comfortably behind him” (P7A, 26 years, student).
5.10 Validation through internal stakeholders

The categories developed here were used to evaluate the validity of the external stakeholders’ perceptions about Modi. The categories and the themes developed were validated by the discussions held with the internal stakeholders. According to an industry expert (Digital Advertising Agency), digital media was used to capture those “10 per cent of the literate voters” (P5, creative director, Delhi) who constituted the “opinion leaders” of that stratum. They used social media to stay informed. There was an additional focus on developing a strong brand image that would support the brand personality. This image was formed by associating and carefully crafting the content to create ‘brand value’ (P5, creative director, Delhi). This was done to affect the mindset of the voters. A participant stated, “When an advertising is done, better functionalities are promoted. There has to be a balance between bitterness and solution for tomorrow in media […] and hence establish a brand value” (P1, senior feature writer, Delhi). According to a BJP spokesperson, different communication means were used with the masses to reach the farthest corners to develop affiliations for Modi as a brand. In his words:

2 things he introduced that were very different during those campaigns were newly introduced 3D holograph rallies and campaign through Whatsapp. Messages were sent in vernacular and on the basis of region (P3, BJP spokesperson, Gujarat).

Similarly, the conduct of Modi was found to be of consequence in creating subtle connections with the audience. The respondents from a PR agency explained “there is an art of communication with the masses […] your body language […] matters […] all these are skills acquired by him […] this is called language of politics” (P7, Head events, Gujarat). The head of events from a PR agency explained how Modi donned different attires. The participant added “He wears kurta and pyjamas when he goes for a ceremonial he wears […] a turban […] when he goes for Vibrant Gujarat […]” (P7, head events, Gujarat). One of the digital media journalists explained how Modi succeeded in “creating events” (senior feature writer, Delhi) around him to capture attention. Thus, one of the participants expressed:

Every detail of the process starting from filing a nomination […] first visit to a village […] chai pe charcha (discussion over tea) […] all these become a brand event for him and so people support the brand (P2, online independent blogger, Delhi).

These ideas were carefully projected on social media by maintaining a fine balance between “promotion of his past experiences and new expectations” (P2, online independent blogger, Delhi). Thus, it validated the perceptions formed by external stakeholders.

More so, he continued to maintain his previously projected image during the Lok Sabha Elections. A BJP spokesperson explained:

Imagine yourself to be appointed today as the PM. What would you do the next day? Probably go late […] No. […] he doesn’t take any leaves […] Not in past 15 years […] (BJP Digital Marketing Spokesperson, Gujarat).

It was also found that the two forms of achievements played an important role in the formation of a common perception: they were visible achievements and anticipated achievements. The next section will deal with a deeper engagement with the dimensions of the framework.

6. Discussion

The purpose of this paper is to develop a comprehensive framework integral to the development of political brand personality. This development will be of greater significance,
as it is positioned in the context of post elections. This development has not been studied in earlier studies (Milewicz and Milewicz, 2014; Busby and Cronshaw, 2015). Thus, the significant contribution of this study was the development of a new framework of brand personality (Refer Figure 1) by integrating the models of Aaker (1997) and Caprara et al. (2001). Finally, they focused only on the positive or negative elements of brand personality. Therefore, this study provides a guide for the post-election scenario that can be applied to the case of young digitally savvy voters while balancing the positive and negative elements of brand personality. Our study could be used to enhance the contributions of one more specific line of research in political marketing. The findings of our study could be used to study how effectively the brand personality of the political leader and the party can be used as a differentiator. This is because the findings of the current study deal with the negative elements that could mar the brand personality of the leader (Rutter et al., 2018). Our study provides a framework (Refer Figure 1) to develop the brand personality of the leader and enhance the relationship with the new, young and tech savvy voters before the next election. Our study is novel, as it is one of the very few studies that have engaged with brand personality in the post-election era. Thus, we have developed Figure 1 based on the new variables that were added from this primary research. This model has identified seven key personality traits of a political leader. They are competence and energy, sincerity and agreeableness, excitement, openness, sophistication, ruggedness and conscientiousness. These qualities could be of extra ordinary use for political brands that wish to rebrand themselves through logos. There is current research being conducted on the emotional, attitude based and behavioral reactions to such rebranding. Our study could help understand the complexities of the political leader’s brand personality and use it for successful rebranding and logo creations (Yalley, 2018). However, we also found that religious partisanship is a negative personality trait of the political leader. The first traits of competence and energy have been associated with the qualities of hardworking, intelligent, dynamic, determined and other related qualities. The next traits are sincerity and agreeableness. Sincerity is related to cheerfulness, sentiments and friendliness. Agreeableness is associated with honesty, down to earth, authentic and humble. Excitement is associated with daring, contemporary, trendy and imaginative which lead to a youth-oriented appeal. Thus, one of the most important contributions of this study was to understand that the elements of brand personality developed by its framework were effective touch points between the voters (stakeholders) and the political leaders. Studies in this context have considered the 2016 presidential candidates of the USA and how they enhanced their social media marketing campaigns. Here, the study discovered that the political parties used the most ideal representation of the political leaders in the images used in digital marketing. Our study has certain key contributions in terms of understanding those qualities detrimental to the development of such a positive image (Muñoz and Towner, 2017).

Thus, the element of dictatorship leads the voters to either trust or distrust the political leaders as positive causal agents. The dimension of openness was related to sharp, creative, innovative, modern and original elements that lead to ideation. The dimension of sophistication was further divided into three elements, grooming leading to appearances, charming which was based on smoothness and eloquence and manipulation. The dimension of ruggedness includes toughness, pride and masculinity. Conscientiousness is related to the three elements of constancy, responsibility and efficiency. In some instances, the delivery of these results becomes over exaggerated and such exaggeration is bragging. More specifically, the tone of the leader is also seen as being arrogant while delivering these messages. These elements can negatively affect the brand personality of the leader.
Our study could also act as a strong base that could consolidate the political branding sphere and marketplace. This could be achieved by using the findings of our study to blend the aspects of social media campaigning in political branding and campaigning. Earlier literature has also studied political branding in silos. In continuation, political branding was further divided into functionality and expressiveness. This can especially be seen in the contexts of the literature stated that the political leader needs to be cordial, reliable and successful (Guzman and Sierra, 2009). In addition, political branding needs to be in accordance with time, cost and rewards. Therefore, the present study has integrated the elements of brand personality, political leaders and political branding and provided a structured and integrated approach to develop a strong political leader’s personality.

7. Overall implications
The current investigation has identified that a leader has competence and energy as basic personality traits. Branding campaigns need to have storyboards focused on the hard work, dynamism and determination shown by the leader in different scenarios. Our study has also discovered that sincerity and agreeableness are the key personality traits of the leader. Thus, political branding strategies can aim for cheerfulness, friendliness and sentiments, humility and honesty as their base.

We also found that when these qualities are carefully melded in the political strategy, they will lead to optimal likeability with regard to the leader’s political brand personality. However, there are certain negative elements such as religious partisanship, bragging and exaggeration of results, arrogance of the leader, dictatorial attitude and manipulation that should be avoided, as these elements can negatively affect the brand personality of the leaders. Another element integral to the strong brand personality of the political leader is that of sophistication. This element is directly related to grooming, appearances and charm. Another brand personality trait, excitement needs to be encapsulated to cover daring and contemporariness. These traits can be projected in the political campaigns by premising them on a youth-oriented appeal. Ruggedness can be imbibed to cover toughness, masculinity and pride. Finally, conscientiousness as a brand personality trait of the political leader can use consistency, responsibility and efficiency as core qualities.

8. Managerial implications and limitation of the study
The brand personality of the political leader can be used to better understand the nature of impression management. The reason for the same is that impression management directly deals with the perceptions of stakeholders. One of the best means of achieving this is reducing the dimensions of partisanship and religious bigotry. The subsequent parts will deal with the avenues for further exploration in the areas of brand personality for political leaders. The present study could be further strengthened by extending its format and scheme to make it longitudinal. Such a longitudinal study would allow for deeper examination of elements of correlation. The study could benefit from a comparison between political brand personality and sports team brands. The reason for the same is that the similarities and differences between them would strengthen future research.

The study could also be strengthened further by using the dimensions of this study to conduct a quantitative analysis. The scope of the current study precludes the inclusion of these elements. Now, the next section will closely engage with the various avenues that could be explored to ensure that the complexities of brand personality in politics can be effectively investigated.
9. Scope for extended research

Our model can be essentially used by the political leader to deconstruct their brand personality (if required). Subsequent studies can be carried out on brand personality and leadership traits, as they are closely associated, which is a limitation of the study. This study can be undertaken on other age groups such as middle-aged and old voters to understand how brand personality of the political leader emerges from this segment. Extensive content analysis of political leaders’ website, content on social media and other platforms can be undertaken as it formulates brand personality. These studies could also study the political brand personality of a leader in terms of human brands. This would mutually enrich the study of human brands and brand personality development as well. In addition, extended studies could also be dedicated to the study of political branding from a rural perspective. Additional studies could consider the correspondence of authentic brands and the brand personality of political leaders. Future studies could also focus on the brand personality development of female political leaders, a topic which remains under-developed and under-researched within political branding. Likewise, the field of political branding could be enriched by studying the nature of religion as a factor influencing the brand personality of political leaders. This represents huge scope for political branding to continue to develop and evolve as an established sub-discipline.

References


Further reading


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Promoting customer brand engagement and brand loyalty through customer brand identification and value congruity

Creación de la conexión emocional y lealtad con la marca a través de la Identificación marca-consumidor y congruencia de valores

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Abstract

Purpose – On the basis of the social identity and congruity theories, the present research aims to propose that value congruity directly affects customer–brand identification (CBI), affective brand commitment and customer–brand engagement (CBE), which, in turn, paves the way for advancing consumer relationships with hospitality brands, as measured through brand loyalty. As such, this study serves to enhance existing insight into customer relationship management dynamics, with a particular focus on hospitality brands.

Design/methodology/approach – The present study develops a theoretical framework that is empirically investigated by using confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling analyses. Data were collected by using a self-administered questionnaire of 340 customers of four- and five-star hotel brands in India.

Findings – The results suggest value congruity as an important driver of CBI, affective commitment and CBE within hospitality brands. The results also reveal CBI to act as a significant predictor of affective
commitment, CBE and brand loyalty. Furthermore, affective commitment and CBE are the significant drivers of loyalty to hospitality brands.

**Research limitations/implications** – The research is exploratory in nature and is restricted to four- and five-star hotel customers, thereby reflecting important limitations of this study. Given these issues, ample opportunities exist for further research to further explore and/or validate the reported findings.

**Practical implications** – The current research provides new insights for marketing practitioners planning or implementing long-term customer relationship management strategies that centre on customer–brand identification, customer–brand engagement and brand loyalty.

**Originality/value** – Despite existing insights, empirical investigation into the proposed conceptual relationships remains limited to date, particularly in the hospitality industry. By offering empirical evidence in this area, this study adds to the extant body of knowledge on CBI/CBE-centric customer relationship management.

**Keywords** Brand loyalty, Customer brand engagement, Affective brand commitment, Customer brand identification, Hospitality brands, Value congruity

**Paper type** Research paper

### 1. Introduction
The power of branding is well acknowledged in tourism as well as hospitality brands (So *et al.*, 2017; Rather, 2017). For many years, brands have been considered very essential in promoting strong relationships with consumers for achieving the long-term success of business. In today’s market, owing to great awareness of customers regarding brands, businesses have started to use the traditional media to promote brands. However, the
present global economic crisis has questioned regarding customer–brand engagement (CBE), and customer–brand identification (CBI) has become very crucial for brand management.

The customer–brand engagement concept has been defined as a customers’ motivationally driven volitional investment of operand/operant resources into brand interactions, and has been subject to rising scholarly attention in precedent decade (Hollebeek et al., 2016b). Customer–brand engagement is gaining rising attention, as engaged customers actively participate in new service and product development, are less price sensitive, resist switching and advocate for brands/firms (Brodie et al., 2013; Hollebeek et al., 2016b). Specified the engagement’s interactive nature, service brands and/or contexts have been heralded to have particular applicability for the concept (Hollebeek, 2018; Hollebeek et al., 2016b). However, despite burgeoning attention been given to the topic of customer–brand engagement by the practitioner as well as academic communities (Brodie et al., 2013; Dessart et al., 2016; Islam et al., 2017; Odoom et al., 2017; Rather, 2018; Rather and Sharma, 2017a, 2017b), essential knowledge gaps remain. For example, the Marketing Science Institute (2016) predicted customer–brand engagement as one of the top research priorities for service firms. Despite the rising interest in developing customer–brand engagement, empirical investigation is relatively sparse, and very less has been documented about customer–brand engagement in promoting consumer behaviours, such as loyalty in an isolated model (Hapsari et al., 2017; Islam et al., 2017; So et al., 2014). While scarce investigation has been performed in customer–brand engagement relating to hospitality brand context (Rather, 2018; So et al., 2014), more comprehension of this notion is important despite its recent emergence as an essential marketing variable (Dessart et al., 2015; Hapsari et al., 2017; Hollebeek and Chen, 2014; Islam et al., 2017; Odoom et al., 2017; Rather, 2018; Rather and Shakir, 2018).

Relatedly, the existing literature does not clearly highlight the difference between developed countries and developing countries with respect to customer engagement (Odoom et al., 2017). Thus, the theoretical models used in developed countries’ context usually reveal inconsistency in other countries that are less developed (Sheth, 2011); thus, studies have recommended to conduct such research in other countries using different theories as well as methodologies (Burgess and Steenkamp, 2013). Thus, the existing studies have highlighted the need to investigate customer–brand engagement across various other contexts and countries (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek et al., 2016b; Odoom et al., 2017; Rather, 2018). However, more research related to customer–brand engagement has been carried out in the context of developed and/or western countries such as Australia, New Zealand and the USA (Islam and Rahman, 2016; Rather and Sharma, 2017a; Vivek et al., 2014); thus, not many studies exist on this topic in developing countries including India.

The concept of customer–brand identification or consumer brand identification creates a comprehensive understanding regarding the development of customer–brand relationship (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; He et al., 2012; So et al., 2017; Rather, 2017; Tuskej and Podnar, 2018). Firms have been seeking ways to build enduring and long-term relationships with their consumers and are motivated by possible positive business outcomes that can occur owing to the efforts of relationship-building (Elbedweihy et al., 2016; Rather, 2017; Tuskej and Podnar, 2018). The brand relationship literature suggests that customers do not buy brands merely because they work well. Customers also buy brands because of the meanings the brands add to their lives (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003) and to express their self-concept (So et al., 2017; Tuskej et al., 2013). In the broader consumer context, empirical studies indicate that identification towards a brand or a company increases product use and repurchase frequency (Kuenzel and Halliday, 2008). Researchers also acknowledge that
consumer identification has a significant influence on individual consumer behaviour involving: consumer buying-related decisions (Ahearne et al., 2005), brand trust and loyalty (Rather, 2017), consumer satisfaction (Martinez and Rodriguez Del Bosque Rodriguez, 2013) and resilience to negative information (Elbedweihy et al., 2016).

Although past studies offer key insights regarding the process of consumer identification and associated constructs, future studies should still fill vital gaps in such investigation. First, despite the significance of customer–brand identification as a vital predecessor of consumer behaviour (Elbedweihy et al., 2016; Lam et al., 2013), research studies acknowledge little regarding the drivers of consumer brand identification (Elbedweihy et al., 2016; So et al., 2013; Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012; Tuskej et al., 2013; Tuskej and Podnar, 2018). However building strong relationships with consumers likely enhances their favorable attitudes and behaviors toward the brand, consumers’ motivations for entering into enduring relationships with brands remain unclear (Elbedweihy et al., 2016; Rather, 2017; So et al., 2017). Second, scholars highlighted the importance to further investigate the role of consumer’s identification and affective brand commitment (ABC) on brand loyalty (Rather, 2017; Tuskej et al., 2013). Third, understudied relationships between value congruence and consumer identification (Elbedweihy et al., 2016) and value congruity (VC) and customer–brand engagement (Islam et al., 2017) has emerged as a main issue in promoting hotel brand.

Previous studies have emphasised more on the service dominant logic and relationship marketing (Brodie et al., 2011; Hollebeek et al., 2016a), or social exchange theory (Harrigan et al., 2017), as underpinning theoretical bases to exploring the phenomena of customer–brand engagement. However, there is still also a need to analyse customer–brand engagement process from various theoretical viewpoints (Harrigan et al., 2017; Islam and Rahman, 2016). In the view of above-mentioned gaps, based on social identity and congruity theories, the present research develops a model that investigates the interrelationship among VC, customer–brand identification, affective brand commitment, customer–brand engagement and customer loyalty and will fill these gaps in branding, consumer behaviour and hospitality literature.

2. Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework, as represented in Figure 1 elucidates the antecedents and the consequences of customer–brand identification. It is based on social identity’s theories (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), along with notions from the marketing field on customer–brand

![Figure 1](image-url)

*Figure 1*

The conceptual model
identification (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; Rather, 2017) and customer–brand engagement (Harrigan et al., 2017; Islam et al., 2017; Rather, 2018). The present study model proposes that VC influences customer–brand identification, which, in turn, influences customer–brand engagement, affective brand commitment and loyalty.

2.1 Social identity theory
Social identity theory (SIT) provides the basic theoretical foundation for identification in marketing as well as in organisation studies (Elbedweihy et al., 2016; Lam et al., 2012). SIT states that persons classify themselves in various social categories to assist their definition of own-self (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). On the basis of SIT and organisational identification, Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) extended the identification’s concept in consumer–company relationship. Despite the theory enlightening relationship marketing success for several years (Ahearne et al., 2005; Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; Elbedweihy et al., 2016) and likely impacting on process through which consumer experiences unfold (Fujita et al., 2018), SIT’s role in marketing and hospitality has been mostly underexplored (Lam et al., 2013; Martinez and Rodriguez Del Bosque Rodriguez, 2013; Rather, 2017). Furthermore, a need exists to better recognise the strategies that are expected to facilitate customer–brand engagement, a subject of research that is still in its initial phase (Fujita et al., 2018; Hollebeek, 2018). Moreover, branding theory proposes that consumers likely to identify with the brands (hotels) in several means. In addition, customers could have multiple identities such as members of a hotel brand community. Therefore, the customer–brand identification concept is based on SIT, which defines brand identification as a perceptual construct (So et al., 2013), signifying identity matching as well as identity fit.

2.2 Congruity theory
A number of theories have attempted to examine the consumer–brand engagement and their positive behaviours and attitudes, including relationship marketing theory (Rather, 2018; Vivek et al., 2014) and service-dominant logic (SDL; Brodie et al., 2013; Hollebeek, 2011a; Hollebeek et al., 2016a). Both the relationship marketing and service-dominant logic consider consumers to be the critical factor for brand interactions (Vargo and Lusch, 2017), therefore revealing a theoretical alignment with interactive nature of consumer–brand engagements (Brodie et al., 2011).

Congruity theory explains a person is more likely to have positive attitudes towards the object when an individual perceives an object and/or a phenomenon is consistent with what he/she holds (Lee and Jeong, 2014). It happens because of the minimum dissonance between individuals own opinions and the object (Lee and Jeong, 2014). On the basis of the congruity theory, more consistency between the two beliefs will result into the higher preference for that object such as brand or event by the individual because it acts as a symbolic attribute that serve to strengthen and confirm the existing perceptions of individuals (Islam et al., 2017; Lee and Jeong, 2014). According to the perspective of congruity theory, the customers demonstrate positive behaviours for focal brands when they had observed some positive experiences with them.

2.3 Hypotheses development
VC refers to the match relating to the consumers’ own personal values and their perceptions of brands and/or the hotels’ values (Lee and Jeong, 2014; Zhang and Bloemer, 2011). VC is dependent on similarity attraction theory (SAT; Byrne et al., 1967). SAT-informed lens explains that persons are likely to maintain relationships with other people who are similar to them. Once the VC happens, consumers expected to have more positive attitudes towards the hotel brand rather than when congruity does not take place. The self-congruity theory
defines VC as a mental comparison, which customers make with respect to the dissimilarity and/or similarity of firm’s values as well as their own set of values (Johar and Sirgy, 1991). It is under the control of managers owing to marketing and positioning activities, and can facilitate consumers to satisfy their self-definitional needs for verification and/or continuity (Tuskej et al., 2013).

Researchers have proposed VC as a key notion to maintain and develop long-standing customer relationships towards the brand/provider (Islam et al., 2017; Lee and Jeong, 2014). Values can effect significantly on customer activities or actions, and perform as key linking factors between consumers and brands/hotels (Tuskej et al., 2013). Customers likely to interact with hotel brands which facilitate them to realise their self-beliefs and self-values as more engaging as such a match legitimises and empowers their sense of self (Islam et al., 2017; Tuskej et al., 2013). As discussed in SAT (Byrne et al., 1967), the role of VC (Zhang and Bloemer, 2011) envisions that consumers are expected more to have increased hotel brand commitment and attitudes towards the brand (hotel) when they recognise VC between themselves and brand/hotel. Therefore, based on above ideas:

H1. Value congruity has a positive influence to customer–brand identification

H2. Value congruity has a positive influence to customer–brand engagement.

H3. Value congruity has a positive influence to affective brand commitment.

Tourism and hospitality contexts and/or brands have widely used branding strategies to set their services and products different from rivals (Rather, 2017; So et al., 2013), highlighting the specific importance of customer–brand identification in exploring customer–brand relationships. In tourism and hospitality, customer–brand identification is defined as “an important but underutilised construct” (Martinez and Rodriguez Del Bosque Rodriguez, 2013, p. 91). Customer–brand identification indicates a strong psychological attachment, which is indicative of future behaviour and long-term relationship (So et al., 2013). As theoretical models have proposed customer–brand identification’s positive effect on customer–brand engagement (Van Doorn et al., 2010), empirical verification of this relationship remains in sufficient to-date (Romero, 2017; Tuskej and Podnar, 2018). Therefore, consumer identification can be a key antecedent of customer–brand engagement (Romero, 2017; Tuskej and Podnar, 2018; Van Doorn et al., 2010). Consumers who identify with a brand increase the engagement with the brand (Romero, 2017).

Research about customer–brand identification and hotel brand loyalty has been inconsistent thus far (Elbedweihiy et al., 2016; So et al., 2013). Service brands can act a facilitator of social identity expression and creation, and consumers can identify with a service brand that they perceive to match their self-concept (Elbedweihiy et al., 2016; Rather, 2017). It is owing to this that customers fulfil their self-definitional or verification needs, which, in turn, increases their attitudes or behaviours towards the service brand (Elbedweihiy et al., 2016; Tuskej and Podnar, 2018). Social identity can influence individual’s perceptions, cognitions and evaluations, and consumers’ strong identification with a brand or offering may lead to enhanced consumer outcomes, such as higher brand loyalty (Rather, 2017; So et al., 2013). Similarly, Su et al. (2016) establish that higher shared values between service brands and their customers promote commitment with the ongoing relationship:

H4. Customer–brand identification has a positive influence to customer–brand engagement.
**H5.** Customer–brand identification has a positive influence to brand loyalty.

**H6.** Customer–brand identification has a positive influence to affective brand commitment.

Affective commitment is an emotional factor, which develops through personal involvement or reciprocity that a consumer has towards the firm, which results in a greater level of loyalty and commitment (Fullerton, 2003; Rather, 2017). In high-tech industries, Ruyter et al. (2001) established that more the customers’ affective commitment greater is the loyalty towards suppliers. In its experimental study, Fullerton (2003) examined that greater the consumers’ affective commitment, more they were willing to pay and the lower are their switching intentions. Wu et al. (2011) found that more is the affective commitment higher is the customer’s loyalty in mobile communication operators. Recently, Fatma et al. (2016) identified that affective commitment is considered an essential determinant of brand loyalty; higher the affective commitment, the better customers tend to translate into higher loyalty towards retail service banks. In light of the above:

**H7.** Affective brand commitment has a positive influence to brand loyalty.

There exists a call to develop and test models, which explore the association among customer–brand engagement and other pertinent concepts within nomological networks (Islam et al., 2017; Rather and Shakir, 2018; Marketing Science Institute, 2016). In particular, the influence of customer–brand engagement on loyalty suggests a key confirmation of engagement’s accurate marketing influence (Islam et al., 2017). Brand loyalty represents a customer’s positive attitude towards a brand or offering, in addition to repeat buying behaviour (Liu et al., 2012; Rather, 2017, 2018). Especially as theoretical models have recommended customer–brand engagement’s positive influence on brand loyalty (Hollebeek, 2018; Van Doorn et al., 2010; Vivek et al., 2012), empirical confirmation of this relationship remains limited thus far (Hapsari et al., 2017; Harrigan et al., 2017; Islam et al., 2017; Sharma and Rather, 2016). Customers who engage with a brand and/or service-provider are expected to build positive attitudes most instantly than customers who are not engaged with the brand or provider (Harrigan et al., 2017; So et al., 2014). Such attitudes are most expected to be favourable that may guide to increased loyalty and/or patronage intent (Harrigan et al., 2017; Hollebeek, 2011b). On the basis of the above, the authors propose the following:

**H8.** Customer–brand engagement has a positive influence to brand loyalty.

**H9.** Customer–brand identification mediates the relationship between (a) VC and customer–brand engagement, (b) VC and affective brand commitment and (c) VC and brand loyalty.

### 3. Research methodology

#### 3.1 Sampling and data collection

Data collection was conducted by a survey method at different locations within 15 four- and five-star hotels in six cities and/or locations of India, namely, Amritsar, Jammu, Katra, Gulmarg, Srinagar and Pahalgam. These locations/cities are main tourist destinations of India. In addition, all the 15 four- and five-star hotels are located in these particular locations. Therefore, Radisson Blu, Vivanta by Taj, Khyber Resorts, Grand Lalith, Best Western, Holiday Inn, etc. were approached for data collection. The population for this research was confined to those respondents who had stayed at these hotels at least once. Hospitality context was selected for several of reasons. Firstly, the hospitality literature widely
recognises the identification and engagement benefits (Rather, 2017; Rather and Sharma, 2017a; So et al., 2013). Secondly, higher interaction levels among hospitality brands/providers and their guests can persuade customer–brand identification and/or engagement (Rather, 2017; Romero, 2017). Thirdly, hospitality consumption shares some main characteristics of services such as variability, intangibility and perishability. Inadequate sampling frame and coherent with previous studies (Martinez and Rodriguez Del Bosque Rodriguez, 2013; Parrey et al., 2018; Rather, 2017, 2018), a non-probability convenience sampling technique was used to select participants for the study. Questionnaires were circulated to 400 customers, out of which 340 were returned and considered fit for examination, indicating an 85-per-cent rate of response. The demographic characteristics of the respondents indicate that males and females were 55 and 45 per cent, respectively. The results are reported in Table I.

### 3.2 Measures

The survey items were developed on a seven-point Likert scale, (7 = strongly agree; and 1 = strongly disagree). The survey items designed to measure VC, customer–brand

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age (years)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 51</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Qualification</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matriculation</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-graduation</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nationality</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreigners</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reasons for travelling</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventure</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table I.** Demographic profile of respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hotel brand</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Four star</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five star</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
identification, customer–brand engagement, affective brand commitment and brand loyalty. VC modified from Islam et al. (2017), Lee and Jeong (2014) and Vivek et al. (2014) were measured by using four items that have previously shown decent reliability in a service context. Customer–brand identification was adopted and modified from Rather (2017), Romero (2017) and Tuskej et al. (2013), and were measured by using four items and has shown satisfactory reliability previously in hospitality contexts. Affective brand commitment was adopted from the Tuskej et al. (2013) and Vivek et al. (2014) were measured from four statements. Customer–brand engagement was measured with four items modified from topical literature (Hollebeek et al., 2014). Brand loyalty was adopted from Rather’s (2017), was measured using six items.

4. Results

4.1 Measurement model

A preliminary data analysis was performed initially, in which data accuracy, normality, missing values, outliers and multicollinearity of all variables were checked. After that, to assess the measurement model performance, the author performed a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) by applying AMOS with maximum likelihood estimation. Multicollinearity tests suggest that variance inflation factor (VIF) values ranged from 1.52 to 2.38, well below the conservative threshold of 5.3 (Hair et al., 2010), signifying that the results from regression models are not influenced by any multicollinearity effect. Further, Hair et al. (2010, p. 633) defines multicollinearity as “a problematic degree of correlation among the predictor variables, which complicates the ability to explain the individual effects of the factors included in the analysis, and which may affect the estimation of the focal coefficients and their statistical significance tests”. To test for multicollinearity in the data, the squared multiple correlations (SMCs) were evaluated. Particularly, multicollinearity is detected if the SMCs are close/equal to 1.0. The reported values indicated that all the values are below 1.0 (i.e. highest reported SMC was for CBE4 is 0.89), thus indicating that multicollinearity was not a significant issue in the data. The SMCs values are reported in Table II. Therefore, drawing on Anderson and Gerbing (1988), research data were analysed in two stages. Firstly, CFA was carried out to check goodness of fit, reliability and validity of measurement model. Model fitness indices attained from CFA: $\chi^2 = 577.474$, $\chi^2/df = 2.931$, NFI = 0.94; TLI = 0.95; CFI = 0.96; RMSEA = 0.075; GFI = 0.87; SRMR = 0.48, representing a satisfactory measurement model fit (Hair et al., 2010). The results are reported in Table II.

4.2 Reliability testing

All the values of reliability were higher than the threshold level of 0.70 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2010), confirming adequate internal consistency of scale items. Cronbach’s alpha as well as composite reliability values are reported in Table III.

4.3 Convergent validity testing

CFA evaluated both reliability and validity of the scales. On the basis of Fornell and Larcker (1981), convergent validity was confirmed. Standard factor loadings values for all the items have been greater than 0.70 ($p < 0.001$). Furthermore, all the average variance extracted (AVE) values were more than threshold value of 0.50, signifying convergent validity of constructs (see Table III).
### Table III.
**Discriminant validity, reliability values from CFA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>α</th>
<th>CR</th>
<th>AVE</th>
<th>BL</th>
<th>CBI</th>
<th>ABC</th>
<th>CBE</th>
<th>VC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BL</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.951</td>
<td>0.765</td>
<td>0.855</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBI</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.914</td>
<td>0.728</td>
<td>0.797</td>
<td>0.853</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.928</td>
<td>0.765</td>
<td>0.823</td>
<td>0.829</td>
<td>0.875</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBE</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.950</td>
<td>0.827</td>
<td>0.846</td>
<td>0.798</td>
<td>0.859</td>
<td>0.885</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VC</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.944</td>
<td>0.810</td>
<td>0.808</td>
<td>0.643</td>
<td>0.713</td>
<td>0.720</td>
<td>0.890</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** α = Cronbach’s alpha, AVE = average variance extracted, CR = construct reliability, CBI = consumer brand identification, VC = value congruity, CBE = customer–brand engagement, ABC = affective brand commitment and BL = brand loyalty. The bold diagonal factors are the square root of the variance shared between the research factors and its measures. Off diagonal factors are the correlations among the study factors.

### Table II.
**Measurement items, mean, standard deviation and squared multiple correlations**

#### Value congruity (VC)
- I have a clear understanding of the core values of this brand (VC1) 0.98 5.42 1.04 0.88
- I really support the intent of the core values of this brand (VC2) 0.97 5.46 1.01 0.87
- I have a great deal of agreement about what this brand’s core values represent (VC3) 0.73 5.87 0.41 0.53
- This brand is relevant to my values and needs (VC4) 0.90 5.48 0.94 0.80

#### Consumer–brand identification (CBI)
- I identify with this brand (CBI1) 0.81 3.09 1.46 0.64
- When I talk about this brand, I usually say “we” rather than “they” (CBI2) 0.86 3.98 1.42 0.73
- I feel that my personality and the personality of this brand are very similar (CBI3) 0.90 4.18 1.32 0.81
- I have a lot in common with other people using this brand (CBI4) 0.85 4.82 1.11 0.71

#### Customer brand engagement (CBE)
- I feel good when I use this brand (CBE1) 0.92 5.09 1.19 0.84
- Using this brand makes me happy (CBE2) 0.94 4.95 1.22 0.88
- Using this brand gets me to think about the brand (CBE3) 0.82 4.89 1.20 0.67
- Using this brand stimulates my interest to learn more about brand (CBE4) 0.95 4.99 1.13 0.89

#### Affective commitment (ABC)
- I get excited when I think of buying this brand (ABC1) 0.91 4.66 1.25 0.83
- I feel rewarded when I buy this brand (ABC2) 0.90 4.71 1.10 0.47
- I feel personally satisfied when I buy this brand (ABC3) 0.92 4.55 1.24 0.84
- I feel emotionally attached to this brand (ABC4) 0.95 4.56 1.23 0.87

#### Brand loyalty (BL)
- I would recommend this brand to someone who seeks my advice (BL1) 0.88 5.36 1.01 0.77
- I would encourage friends to do business with this brand (BL2) 0.92 5.24 1.10 0.85
- I would say positive things about this brand to other people (BL3) 0.93 5.15 1.14 0.87
- I would do more business with this brand in the next few years (BL4) 0.78 4.61 1.22 0.61
- I am a loyal customer of this brand (BL5) 0.85 4.55 1.30 0.72
- I am willing to maintain my relationship with this brand (BL6) 0.87 4.64 1.33 0.76

**Notes:** SL = standard loadings, M = mean, SD = standard deviation and SMC = squared multiple correlation
4.4 Discriminant validity testing
As shown in Table III, these conditions were met, suggesting reliability. Further, the square root of average variance extracted estimates for each variable was all more than the correlations of all other variables, offering evidence for discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; see Table III).

4.5 Structural equation model
Secondly, structural model was also evaluated applying structural equation model (SEM). Overall, the structural model fit indices obtained, $\chi^2 = 607.208$, df = 197, $\chi^2$/df = 3.82, TLI = 0.94, CFI = 0.96, NFI = 0.94, GFI = 0.87, RMSEA = 0.078 and SRMR = 0.062, indicate satisfactory model fit. The proposed model explains 78 per cent of variance in loyalty construct.

4.6. Hypothesis testing
The present research established significant and high impact of VC on customer–brand identification ($\beta = 0.67$, $t = 13.67$, $p < 0.001$), followed by customer–brand engagement ($\beta = 0.35$, $t = 7.47$, $p < 0.001$) and affective brand commitment ($\beta = 0.29$, $t = 6.28$, $p < 0.001$), that supports $H1$, $H2$ and $H3$. The $H4$, $H5$ and $H6$ were conducted to investigate the impact of customer–brand identification on customer–brand engagement ($\beta = 0.57$, $t = 10.89$, $p < 0.001$), customer–brand identification on brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.27$, $t = 3.92$, $p < 0.001$) and customer–brand identification on affective brand commitment ($\beta = 0.65$, $t = 12.49$, $p < 0.001$) and thus accepts all these hypotheses also. The $H7$ was performed to explore the impact of affective brand commitment on brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.21$, $t = 2.67$, $p < 0.01$) and thus supports $H7$. The $H8$ was conducted to study the influence of customer–brand engagement on brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.45$, $t = 6.47$, $p < 0.001$) and supports $H8$. The power of customer–brand engagement in determining brand loyalty has been established. Further, as customer engagement has a positive regression weights, demonstrating higher customer engagement can guide to higher levels of loyalty. The hypotheses testing result are displayed in Table IV.

4.7 Mediation effects
To study the mediating effect of customer–brand identification, the study evaluated the direct, indirect and total effects of customer’s perceptions on brand loyalty. It is important to note that testing the mediating effect in a SEM framework has previously been carried out in the hospitality and tourism literature (Rather, 2018; Su et al., 2016). To test this mediation, this study follows the suggestions of Zhao et al. (2010), which performed a full analysis of the covariance structural model using bootstrap method. The current analysis tested the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypotheses</th>
<th>Structural relationships</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>$T$ value</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1</td>
<td>Value congruity $\rightarrow$ consumer–brand identification</td>
<td>0.67***</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>13.67</td>
<td>Sig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2</td>
<td>Value congruity $\rightarrow$ consumer–brand engagement</td>
<td>0.35***</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>7.47</td>
<td>Sig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3</td>
<td>Value congruity $\rightarrow$ affective brand commitment</td>
<td>0.29***</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>6.28</td>
<td>Sig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4</td>
<td>Consumer–brand identification $\rightarrow$ customer–brand engagement</td>
<td>0.57***</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>10.89</td>
<td>Sig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5</td>
<td>Consumer–brand identification $\rightarrow$ brand loyalty</td>
<td>0.27***</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>Sig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H6</td>
<td>Consumer–brand identification $\rightarrow$ affective brand commitment</td>
<td>0.65***</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>12.49</td>
<td>Sig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H7</td>
<td>Affective brand commitment $\rightarrow$ brand loyalty</td>
<td>0.21*</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>Sig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H8</td>
<td>Customer–brand engagement $\rightarrow$ brand loyalty</td>
<td>0.45***</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>6.47</td>
<td>Sig</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: * = 0.01; ** = 0.05*** = 0.001

Table IV. SEM results
effects of an independent variable (VC) on dependent variables (customer–brand engagement, affective commitment and customer loyalty) through mediators (customer–brand identification). The findings show that the perception of VC towards hospitality service provider has a significant indirect impact on (customer–brand engagement, $\beta = 0.37, p < 0.001$, affective commitment, $\beta = 0.44, p < 0.001$ and customer loyalty, $\beta = 0.66, p < 0.001$) through customer–brand identification. Thus, hospitality VC practices/activities can produce customer–brand engagement, affective commitment and loyalty directly and indirectly, through customer–brand identification, supports H9a, H9b, H9c (Table V).

5. General discussion and implications

5.1 Theoretical implications

The current study contributes to the existing literature by improving our understanding regarding (i) the effects of VC as main driver for customer–brand identification in the context of hospitality brands (ii) the influence of VC on customer–brand engagement (iii) the effect of VC on affective brand commitment (iii) the contribution of customer–brand identification in enhancing the customer–brand engagement (iv) the importance of customer–brand identification in influencing the affective brand commitment (v) the impact of customer–brand identification on brand loyalty (vi) the contribution of affective brand commitment in enhancing the brand loyalty (vii) the importance of customer–brand engagement in developing brand loyalty and (vi) the mediating influence of customer–brand identification on customer–brand engagement, affective brand commitment as well as brand loyalty.

From perspective of theoretical contributions, the current study also adds to the growing research regarding the relationship between consumer and brand/hotel (Elbedwehy et al., 2016; Islam et al., 2017; Rather, 2017; So et al., 2017; Tuskej et al., 2013) by empirically addressing the relationships among VC, customer–brand identification, customer–brand engagement, affective brand commitment and brand loyalty. This research contributes extra support to previous literature by identifying consumers who perceive congruity influences towards hotel brands, are expected to have more favourable outcomes.

The present study also contributes to customer–brand engagement literature by using customer’s values and identification to attract customers to be involved with the brand and/or firm. The perspective moves beyond company-based antecedents (e.g. brand reputations, brand characteristics, employees; Kumar and Pansari, 2016) and traditional customer-based drivers (e.g. customer satisfaction, brand attachment and trust) to understand customer–brand engagement (van Doorn et al., 2010). Given the potential benefits resulting from customer–brand engagement, earlier research has focused on recognising proper marketing initiatives (Pansari and Kumar, 2017) to attract customer’s involvement with business. Marketing activities such as advertising (particularly celebrity endorsement) and sales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Direct effects</th>
<th>Total effects</th>
<th>Indirect effects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H9a Value congruity → consumer–brand identification → customer–brand engagement</td>
<td>0.353***</td>
<td>0.731***</td>
<td>0.378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H9b Value congruity → consumer–brand identification → affective brand commitment</td>
<td>0.288***</td>
<td>0.719***</td>
<td>0.431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H9c Value congruity → consumer–brand identification → brand loyalty</td>
<td>0.000***</td>
<td>0.663***</td>
<td>0.663</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table V. Mediation analysis

Notes: * = 0.01; **= 0.05; ***0.001
promotion could be costly to the company. The VC and customers identification perspective needs minimum effort from the brand firm to engage customers as both perspectives persuade volitional engagement in that customers wish to be engaged for their own benefits (Islam et al., 2017; Rather, 2017; Tuskej and Podnar, 2018).

The present study empirically reveals significance of customer’s identification as a basic psychological process, which assists in the development of committed and deep relationships with offerings/brands. Therefore, SIT serves as a lens to examine the consumer brand identification. Additionally, SIT has been used widely in tourism and hospitality research, and serves as an underpinning theory to study the customer behaviour and customer–brand identification. As a result, the customer–brand identification reinforces affective commitment, engagement and brand loyalty of the individuals.

Consistent with the research on VC and consumer identification by Tuskej et al. (2013), this study also reveals that VC positively impacts the customer–brand identification, then through identification, VC impacts customer–brand engagement, affective commitment and brand loyalty. The study finds that VC is an important predictor of customer–brand identification, brand engagement and affective commitment across hotel brands. This result shows the greater importance of VC in developing deep and enduring relationships with consumers.

Theoretically, the study model also offers a step towards the understanding of stated congruity influence on customer–brand engagement, which particularly remains missing in literature thus far. As past research has examined customer–brand engagement mostly from relationship marketing or service-dominant logic outlooks (Brodie et al., 2011; Vargo and Lusch, 2017), the study adopted congruity theory informed lens of customer–brand engagement provides additional theoretical knowledge of this conceptual association. In general, the present research adds to the literature of customer–brand engagement by validating the role of customer-perceived congruity effects in hospitality (hotel) contexts, which render customers likely to build favourable perceptions and/or strengthening positive behaviours towards their focal hospitality brand. Secondly, as the importance of congruity effects has been acknowledged in earlier research, incorporating retail (Zhang and Bloemer, 2011), health care (Erkutlu and Chafra, 2016) and online brand communities (Islam et al., 2017; Lee and Jeong, 2014), the role of congruity theory within hospitality contexts remained unexplored thus far. Therefore, the current research acts as a stepping-stone in offering increased understanding of the role of congruity effects on customer–brand engagement within hospitality brands/contexts.

Finally, the present research also contributes to literature of customer–brand engagement and brand identification owing to the conduction of its empirical work in an emerging or developing context, thus providing an early knowledge of hospitality brand-based identification and engagement in an emerging or developing context (Hollebeek, 2017; Rather, 2017).

5.2 Managerial implications

The present study also provides vital information for the process of customer–brand engagement and has provided some implications for making managerial choices in developing strong and long-term relationships with customers. As stated by Brodie et al. (2011, 2013), customer–brand engagement should focus on brand management directives and/or corporate strategies in present dynamic and interactive environments.

Customer–brand engagement is conceptualised as a prerequisite for financial profitability owing to increasing customer–brand relationship (Kumar and Pansari, 2016) and customer loyalty (Rather, 2018; Vivek et al., 2012). Hospitality brand marketers make every endeavour to engage customers for positive outcomes. Such endeavours (e.g. brand reputation techniques, aggressive promotions, premium customer service, creating online...
brand community, etc.) are usually costly to the brand firms and businesses. The finding that VC and customer–brand identification are significantly related to customer–brand engagement provides hospitality brand marketers a cost-effective approach to enhancing revenue by focusing on customer values and identification. The factors underlying these motives are self-identity, social status and concept. The value system effects customer’s decision-making throughout the purchasing process. Therefore, it is necessary for marketers to uncover these motives and design appropriate marketing practices/strategies relating these motives to reduce cost. Hospitality brand marketers should also go beyond business profitability focus to look into the positive consequences for individual customers.

The results suggests that VC positively influences customer–brand identification, customer–brand engagement and affective brand commitment, and therefore, hotel managers need to recognise the values that are believed to be important to their target consumers. The present study, thus, suggests that one way of getting customers to identify, to engage and to affectively attach towards the hotel brand could be by increasing VC. Marketing actions/activities can position the brand (hotel) as a salient category in customer’s minds, for instance, (i) taking initiatives to develop the hotel brand more appealing to target customers to satisfy their self-verification and/or self-definition needs and (ii) communicating the hotel brands’ values that appeal to and are coherent with customer’s values. Moreover, hotel brand managers require to identifying the importance of VC because it maintains a long-standing relationship across hotels and their customers. Thus, brand managers have to continuously monitor perceived values of both hotel brand and values of customers to investigate whether an overlap exists between them. The present study also advocates that to increase customer identification and customer engagement, brand managers have to make sure that their brands have strong VC and thereby serve customer’s interpersonal goals (Elbedweihy et al., 2016; Islam et al., 2017). This can take place not only because of the promoting of interactions among the brand (hotel) and focal customer through a multitude of approaches, from event marketing to product co-creation, but also because of interactions between customers around a brand, owing to brand communities, both virtual as well as physical (Veloutsou and Guzman, 2017; Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012; Tuskej and Podnar, 2018).

Customer–brand identification has become one of the key drivers for the strategic development of customer–brand engagement, affective brand commitment and brand loyalty. On the basis of the SEM results, brand identification positively influences customer–brand engagement, confirming that highly identified consumers are more expected to engage with offering/brand. Hospitality companies can build a consistent brand image that matches their customers’ identity using advertising and other communication tools. Both actions should increase customer engagement.

The present research suggests that one way of getting customers to engage actively into hotel brand activities can be by strengthening customer–brand identification. Similarly, the relationship between customer–brand identification and affective brand commitment is significant and positive, representing that higher the customer identification towards brand, better is the affective attachments with the brand. Favourable affective commitment is of high relevance in consumer–brand relationship. Customer affective commitment might be revealed owing to product and/or service buying behaviour (Ahearne et al., 2005). In the absence of favourable affective commitment, such a relationship cannot exist (Fatma et al., 2016). In addition, the relationship between customer–brand identification and brand loyalty is also significant and positive, representing that highly identified consumers are most likely to more loyal towards the brand. Today’s managers in the service brands face ever increasing challenges in promoting brand loyalty.
Moreover, measuring the customer–brand engagement effect on loyalty reveals psychological and/or behavioural processes and establishes the connection between consumers and a focal company and/or hotel brand. Such connection steers positive behavioural intentions and persuades re-patronising a hotel brand service. The results imply that customer–brand engagement construct, which is related to customer relationship marketing area, is proven to be an important construct to persuade loyalty within the hospitality brands. In the highly networked era nowadays, a real organisational challenge is the development of loyal customers (Hollebeek et al., 2016a). The current results recommend the espousal of a managerial customer–brand engagement orientation to maintain and build loyalty (Hollebeek et al., 2016a, 2016b; Rather, 2018). Loyalty, thus, contributes to survival and the growth of organisations (Reichheld, 1996). Customer’s loyalty effects both long-term as companies gain new consumers, thanks to their consumer’s advocacy and favourable comments those consumers make and in the short-term, as loyal customer’s likely to purchase more regularly (Reichheld, 1996).

Additionally, hotel brand managers should be aware of the mediation affects while developing their branding and/or marketing practices and strategies. For instance, customer–brand identification mediates the relationship between VC and customer–brand engagement, VC and affective commitment and VC and brand loyalty. This result underlines the need for hospitality brand management to be aware of the mediation influences while developing their marketing practices to win customer behaviours in the form engagement, affective commitment and brand loyalty.

6. Limitations and further research
Even though the present study offers various useful insights, some limitations exist. For example, it has used cross-sectional data; therefore, the future researchers can use a longitudinal study design. Future studies can test the proposed framework by using different methodologies. Researches may replicate the findings of this study under the context of various types of other brands including retail. Finally, the other conceptual frameworks apart from SIT and congruity theory comprising social exchange, social resource and social practice theories can be applied to study the customer–brand identification and customer–brand engagement within the context of hospitality brands. In addition, researchers could broaden their analyses by including additional relational constructs into their model, including co-creation, self-brand connection, brand equity, satisfaction, customer experience or others (Brodie et al., 2013; Hollebeek, 2017; Hollebeek et al., 2016a; Rather and Sharma, 2017b; Rather et al., 2018; Sharma and Rather, 2015).

References


Further reading


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Factors affecting consumers’ willingness to buy private label brands (PLBs)

Applied study on hypermarkets

Antecedentes de la predisposición de los consumidores a compra marcas de distribución

Una aplicación a los hipermercados

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Abstract

Purpose – The aim of this research is to investigate the factors affecting consumers’ willingness to buy private label brands (PLBs). The relationships among store image, familiarity with PLBs, consumers’ perceptions of PLB quality, risk, price consciousness and attitude towards PLBs are examined. Finally, the relationship between attitude towards, and willingness to buy PLB is explored.

Design/methodology/approach – Self-administered questionnaire was distributed to shoppers at Carrefour operating in Cairo, Egypt. The data obtained from 265 respondents were examined using structural equation modelling (analysis of moment structures) version 22, which empirically test the hypothesised relations established in the research conceptual model.

Findings – With the exception of perceived risk, the results suggest that all consumers’ perceptual and attitudinal factors affect directly or indirectly consumers’ willingness to buy PLB.

Research limitations/implications – This study is limited to international hypermarket/supermarket operating in Egypt. So the findings should be exercised with cautious while attempting to generalise the research results.
Practical implications – Retail managers should focus on the enhancement of both store image and familiarity with PLBs to leverage consumers’ perceptions with respect to PLBs quality and risk to achieve differentiation and to increase sales.

Originality/value – This is one of the few studies that investigate the role of familiarity with PLBs in a developing context. In doing so, it proposes that familiarity with PLBs directly affects consumers’ perceived quality and perceived risk, while it indirectly influences consumers’ willingness to buy PLBs.

Keywords Price consciousness, Risk, Quality, Store image, Private label, PLB familiarity

Resumen

Propósito – El propósito de este trabajo es el de analizar los factores que afectan a la predisposición de los consumidores a comprar marcas de distribución. Es por ello que se examina la estructura de relaciones existentes entre la imagen de la tienda, la familiaridad con las marcas de distribución, las percepciones de calidad y riesgo así como la conciencia de precio y su posterior efecto en actitudes hacia las marcas de distribución y la predisposición de compra.

Diseño/metodología/enfoque – Se distribuyeron cuestionarios auto-administrados entre compradores de la cadena Carrefour en El Cairo, Egipto. Los datos proporcionados por 265 individuos fueron analizados con ecuaciones estructurales (AMOS) para contrastar empíricamente las relaciones planteadas en el modelo conceptual propuesto.

Resultados – Los resultados obtenidos sugieren que todos los factores actitudinales y perceptuales de los consumidores afectan directa o indirectamente a la disposición de los consumidores a adquirir marcas de distribución, excepto la percepción del riesgo.

Limitaciones/implicaciones – Este estudio se limita a las cadenas de supermercados e hipermercados que operan en Egipto, por lo que los resultados obtenidos tienen una limitada generalización fuera de este contexto.

Implicaciones practice – Los directivos de los detallistas deben centrar sus esfuerzos en ensalzar la imagen de la tienda y la familiaridad con las marcas de distribución con el propósito de influir en las percepciones de calidad y riesgo que los consumidores tienen sobre ellas con el fin último de lograr una diferenciación y un incremento de las ventas.

Originalidad/valor – Este estudio es uno de los pocos que investiga el papel que ejerce la familiaridad con las marcas de distribución en países en vías de desarrollo. Propone que la familiaridad afecta directamente a la percepción de calidad y riesgo de los consumidores e influye indirectamente en la disposición de los consumidores a comprar las marcas de distribución.

Palabras clave – Marcas de distribución, Imagen de la tienda, Familiaridad, Percepciones de calidad y riesgo, Conciencia de precio, Hipermercados

Tipo de artículo – Artículo de investigación

Introduction

Private label brands (PLBs), also known as “store brands”, or “own brands”, are developed and managed to a particular retail chain (Levy and Weitz, 2012; Kumar and Steenkamp, 2007). Their main objective is to increase profit, differentiation and market share (Wu et al., 2011). PLBs have been widely investigated in the literature, with special attention to developed countries at the expense of developing ones (Lin et al., 2009; Hyman et al., 2010). The reason behind such paucity of studies is that consumers lack trust in private brands while being strongly loyal to manufactured and known ones (Nielsen, 2014). Low awareness of and the risk associated with the purchase of unknown brands create barriers for private labels’ growth, specifically in Asia and the Middle East (Nielsen, 2014). Egypt, as an African and Middle Eastern country, is no different.

Although Egypt’s retail business is still dominated by traditional grocers, recently, the business has been facing tremendous changes, where consumers are mirroring the western lifestyle in shopping (GAIN, 2015). This tendency towards modernisation has attracted multinational investors to Egypt, where the consumer market is characterised by being
large and expanding, owing to the increasing number of household with double income; moreover, third of the population falls between 20 to 39 years of age (GAIN, 2017).

Accordingly, the French firm Carrefour took the initiative and was the first hypermarket to open in Egypt back in 2002. It introduced the consumers to a new shopping experience via its network of hypermarkets, supermarkets and express stores spread across Egypt (GAIN, 2015).

Yet, in 2016, modern supermarket chains in Egypt accounted for less than 1 per cent of the establishments and 23 per cent of sales (GAIN Report, 2017). The hypermarket segment, which remains relatively small with only 37 outlets operating in Egypt, accounts for 4.5 per cent of total retail sales (GAIN Report, 2017). However, sales in modern supermarket and hypermarket chains are expected to continue to grow. Meanwhile, in developed and emerging countries such as Spain and the UK, hypermarkets market shares account for 60 and 24 per cent, respectively in 2012 (Nielsen, 2014).

As modern supermarket chains in Africa and the Middle East still operate at its infancy (Beneke, 2010), as do their PLBs, where they represent 1 per cent of dollar sales or less in all of Middle Eastern countries engaged in Nielsen (2014) global survey, Egypt was investigated. The survey revealed that more than 50 per cent of Egyptian respondents are willing to pay extra price for a manufacture known brand; another 56 per cent highlighted their loyalty to the manufacture brand they purchase, and a further 48 per cent ensured that, when speaking of quality, PLBs do not represent a suitable choice. Finally 55 per cent reported that testing new brands incur bearing the risk of losing money while trying new brand (Nielsen, 2014).

Researchers infer from a Nielsen (2014) survey findings that the reasons behind the slow growth and penetration of PLBs in Egypt are because of consumers’ perceptual factors regarding quality, risk and price. Despite Egyptian consumers being quite familiar with some store brands such as Carrefour, most of them still doubt PLBs in general and use them with caution as they are considered relatively new. As consumers of PLBs are price-conscious (Cho et al., 2015; Rubio et al., 2014; Nielsen, 2014), the level of risk associated with purchasing PLBs is quite high. Egyptian consumers are no different; they want to neither incur physical risk by trying PLB products, which may not rise to their expectations, nor bear the financial risks, even as the majority does not have enough disposable income to test new products (Nielsen, 2014).

However, 2017 has been a significant year for Egyptian consumers as they had to radically change their behaviour and to concentrate on the cost of products being bought; this is largely owing to the aftermaths of the Egyptian pound floatation (Nielsen, 2017). Accordingly, Egyptian consumers became even more price-conscious. Additionally, they have decided to lead a more simple life, where 88 per cent of respondents reported that they purchase lower-priced and less expensive products in the second quarter of 2017 as opposed to only 16 per cent during the same period in 2016. The research further revealed that 71 per cent of Egyptian consumers are currently looking for promotions during the second quarter of 2017, as compared to only 20 per cent during the same quarter in 2016 (Nielsen, 2017). Both the floatation of the Egyptian pound and Egyptian consumers leading more simple life style have provided private labels great opportunity for growth by introducing new products and serving options to match consumers’ altered needs (Nielsen, 2017).

Undoubtedly, culture plays a key role in the PLBs slow growth in Africa and the Middle East (Nielsen, 2014). Consumers in Eastern nations prefer using extrinsic cues in their buying decision, which make the manufacturer brands their preferred choice compared to PLBs counterparts (DeMooij and Hofstede, 2002; Nielsen, 2014). As a result, consumers perceptions of store image, familiarity with PLBs, quality and risk level of PLBs and price consciousness might justify the 1 per cent of the dollar sales or less of PLBs in Egypt, as reported by Nielsen (2014).

As a consequence, the researchers aim to address the extent to which the aforementioned perceptions, directly and indirectly, affect Egyptian consumers’ willingness to buy PLB products.
The remaining of this paper is organised as follows: firstly, we present an overview of the relevant literature from which the research framework and hypotheses are derived. Next, the methodology used to guide this research is briefly reviewed, and the research findings are outlined. We then conclude with a discussion of our results and their managerial implications. Finally, research limitations and suggestions for future research are highlighted.

**Theoretical framework and hypotheses development**

*Store image and private label brands perceived quality*

The store image concept has been attracting the attention of both academicians and professionals (Kumar et al., 2014). It is perceived as a source of competitive advantage (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2014). The vast majority of scholars widely refer to Martineau’s (1958) definition of store image (Wu et al., 2011; Liljander et al., 2009). Martineau defined store image as “The store personality or image – the way in which the store is defined in the shopper’s mind, partly by its functional qualities and partly by an aura of psychological attributes” (p. 47).

Drawing on the cue utilisation theory, consumers depend on extrinsic and intrinsic cues while making product quality decisions (Collins-Dodd and Lindley, 2003; Dick et al., 1996). However, extrinsic cues represented in store image, store name, price and product packaging are more often used as they are easier to recognise, as opposed to their intrinsic counterparts signified by product taste, smell and texture (Teas and Agarwal, 2000; Dick et al., 1996). Nevertheless, Sarkar et al. (2016) underscored that both extrinsic and intrinsic cues affect Indian consumers’ evaluation of PLB, specifically taste, ingredients, packaging, price, brand name and store name.

Consumers usually evaluate store image according to several aspects that include, but not limited to, merchandise quality, store atmosphere, merchandise layout, store service and convenience and product assortment (Ailawadi and Keller, 2004; Liljander et al., 2009; Bao et al., 2011; Beristain and Zorrilla, 2011; Diallo, 2012; Delgado-Ballester et al., 2014; Diallo and Cliquet, 2016; Gil et al., 2017). Hence, store image is perceived as a multi-dimensional concept (Richardson et al., 1996; Shen, 2010a).

Consequently, the existing research refers to store image as a set of extrinsic attributes that include store name, store services, quality of merchandise and knowledgeable sales people that shape consumers perception of and attitude towards the store, and, accordingly, its private brand. These cues are derived from the literature (Sebora et al., 2014) and, hence, emphasise that Carrefour Egypt provides its consumers with variety of products, responsive staff and ease of service.

Branding extension literature asserts that PLBs could be considered an extension to the brand name of the store (Collins-Dodd and Lindley, 2003; Ailawadi and Keller, 2004; Burt and Davies, 2010). In addition, Kremer and Viot (2012) indicated that PLBs are exclusive to the retailer chain and associated with it in a unique way, particularly when the two share the same brand name. Furthermore, Ruiz-Real et al. (2017) ensured that customers transfer retailers’ favourable image to their PLBs and trust them. Accordingly, Manzur et al. (2011) and Loureiro (2017) emphasise the importance of effectively communicating the extension of the store image to the image of the store products. As such, greater the store image is, the higher the perceived quality of its PLB.

For many years, consumers characterised PLBs as low quality compared to their national brand counterparts (Richardson et al., 1996). However, this idea is changing as the level of quality of store brand has been progressing and advancing since the mid-90s, therefore allowing for holding more favourable attitude towards private labels, specifically in Western countries where private brands are well developed (Battersby, 2013; Mayer and Vambery, 2013; Ter Braak et al., 2014). Hence, consumers holding favourable store image
are highly likely to perceive its PLB of high quality and vice versa (Bao et al., 2011). Such argument demolishes the stereotype that portrays PLBs as low quality and high risk when compared to national brands (Sheau-Fen et al., 2012).

The relationship between store image and PLBs’ perceived quality is well established in the literature, with many scholars reporting a positive association (Yoo et al., 2000; Semeijn et al., 2004; Vahie and Paswan, 2006; Liljander et al., 2009; Bao et al., 2011; Wu et al., 2011; Beristain and Zorrilla, 2011; Beneke and Zimmerman, 2014; Porral and Lang, 2015; Vo and Nguyen, 2015). Accordingly, we propose the following:

\[ H1. \] Greater store image results in higher private label brand perceived quality.

**Store image and private label brands’ perceived risk**

Bauer (1960) introduced the concept of “perceived risk” and its determinants, namely, uncertainty and negative consequences. Bauer (1960) believed that consumer behavior involves risk in the sense that any action of a consumer will produce consequences that he or she cannot anticipate with anything approximating certainty, and some of which are likely to be unpleasant” (Wu et al., 2011, p. 31). Additionally, Stone and Gronhaugh (1993) defined perceived risk as the subjective expectation of a loss.

There is a consensus among authors that perceived risk is a multidimensional concept, which includes different types of risks, as follows: financial, functional, psychological, time, social, physical and overall risks (Agarwal and Teas, 2001; Semeijn et al., 2004; Mieres et al., 2006; Laforet, 2007; Liljander et al., 2009; Beneke et al., 2013). Bhukya and Singh (2015) underscored an inverse significant association between four dimensions of perceived risk, namely, financial, functional, physical and psychological and PLB purchasing-intention among Indian consumers. Similarly, Kakkos et al. (2015) revealed a direct significant relation between lower perceived risk and PLB purchasing-intention among Greek consumers.

The literature assured that PLB perceived quality and perceived risk are interrelated, in which higher the former, lower is the latter (Girard et al., 2017). Hence, consumers can perceive PLBs of good store image as low risk.

The literature further indicated that good store image mitigates and relieves the perceived risk represented in the uncertainty and negative consequences associated with the purchase of PLBs (Semeijn et al., 2004; Aghekyan-Simonian et al., 2012).

In addition, number of studies revealed an inverse association between store image and different types of PLBs perceived risks, namely, psychological and functional risks (Semeijn et al., 2004); financial and social risks (Liljander et al., 2009); overall perceived risk (Diallo, 2012; Beneke et al., 2015); financial, functional and social risks (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2014); and product and financial/time risks in online store environment (Aghekyan-Simonian et al., 2012). Therefore, we hypothesise the following:

\[ H2. \] Greater store image results in lower private label brand perceived risk.

**Familiarity and private label brands’ perceived quality and perceived risk**

Familiarity with PLBs plays an integral role in consumers buying decision (Bettman and Park, 1980). As more the consumers are familiar with PLB, the less likely they will depend on extrinsic cues (e.g. store name, price, product packaging, etc.) to justify and assess its quality and risk levels (Richardson et al., 1996; Dursun et al., 2011). Despite its importance, Lin et al. (2009) and Sheau-Fen et al. (2012) ensured that familiarity with PLB is still largely under-researched.

Laroche et al. (1996) and Wang et al. (2013), among others, suggest that brand familiarity refers to the visual or mental impression of a product/brand or consumer experience, which,
in turn, shapes consumers favourable and/or unfavourable attitudes towards a brand, and their willingness to purchase. Usually, consumers become familiar with a brand either via personal experience (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987; Arens et al., 2012), word-of-mouth from family and friends (Trusov et al., 2009) or through regular marketing communications (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987; Arens et al., 2012). According to this finding, brand familiarity is the result of number of factors (Bapat, 2017). Consequently, the current research refers to familiarity with PLB as consumers being aware of Carrefour private brand can distinguish it among other brands, can associate Carrefour’s private brand with its characteristics, have experienced the brand and actually know the brand.

A number of researchers underscored the relationship between familiarity with PLB, perceived quality and perceived risk, among other variables and PLB purchasing intention and actual behaviour (Jin and Suh, 2005; Sheau-Fen et al., 2012; Calvo-Porral and Levy-Mangin, 2016). However, Vo and Nguyen (2015) reported insignificant association between familiarity with PLB and perceived quality among Vietnamese consumers. Nevertheless, a number of scholars emphasised that familiarity with PLB positively influences consumer perceived quality, and negatively affects its perceived risk, inferring that the perceived quality of PLBs lessens and diminishes its perceived risk and uncertainty associated with the intention to or the actual purchase of PLB (Richardson et al., 1996; Mieres et al., 2006; Dursun et al., 2011; Rubio et al., 2014; Beneke and Carter, 2015; Girard et al., 2017). Therefore, the study hypothesises the following:

**H3.** Greater familiarity with private label brand results in higher PLB perceived quality.

**H4.** Greater familiarity with private label brand results in lower PLB perceived risk.

*Antecedents and consequences of attitude towards private label brands*

The current study draws on Ajzen and Fishbein’s (1980) theory of reasoned action in identifying the antecedents and consequences of attitude towards PLB. The literature highlighted number of determinants affecting consumer attitude and willingness to purchase PLB. Among the most commonly researched predictors are PLB perceived quality, PLB perceived risk and price consciousness (Richardson et al., 1996; Burton et al., 1998; Collins-Dodd and Lindley, 2003).

Recently, Muruganantham and Priyadharshini (2017) reviewed PLB literature and grouped the antecedents and consequences involved in the private brand purchase. The authors identified three groups as antecedents affecting consumer attitude, namely, consumer consciousness (i.e. price conscious, value conscious and discount conscious), perceived characteristics include (i.e. perceived quality, perceived risk, perceived value for money and smart shopper self-perception) and evaluation criteria (i.e. familiarity, shelf space, packaging, store image, brand image, brand name and store atmosphere).

Goldsmith et al. (2010) defined consumer attitude towards PLB as “the understanding of private brand products that aids the consumer’s decision-making process”. In addition, Burton et al. (1998) defined PLB attitude as “a predisposition to respond in a favorable or unfavorable manner to PLBs owing to product evaluation, purchase evaluation and/or self-evaluation associated with store brand grocery products”. Recently, private brands have been pursuing a makeover and face-lifting. They no longer target low income level consumers. Yet, they have been competing with national brands on quality basis, and in lower prices (Lymeropoulos et al., 2010; Diallo, 2012); for instance, Tesco and Carrefour private brands, at UK and France, respectively, are very good examples (Kumar and Steenkamp, 2007). Such favourable attitude towards PLB is quite general and not product-specific.
According to the cue utilisation theory, price is considered an extrinsic cue that consumers refer to while making purchase decision (Beneke et al., 2013). Lichtenstein et al. (1993, p. 235) defined price consciousness as “the degree to which consumers focuses exclusively on paying low prices”, without considering the product distinctive attributes that justify any increase in price. So, low prices seem to be the most important factor that consumers are interested in while purchasing PLB. Therefore, shoppers of PLB are usually expressed as price conscious (Cho et al., 2015; Rubio et al., 2014). Accordingly, Thanasuta (2015) reported that Thai consumers are price conscious and are more likely to purchase PLB products. Recently, Santos et al. (2016) revealed that low price own-label brands lead to more buying decisions as opposed to high price national brands for the same product. Apparently, the good quality–low price equation stimulates and attracts shoppers’ attention and, hence, allows for the development of favourable attitude, further increasing shoppers willingness to purchase PLB (Moore and Carpenter, 2006; Lee, 2008; Wu et al., 2011; Diallo, 2012). On the basis of these evidences, the following hypothesis is advanced:

H5. Greater price consciousness of private label brand results in more positive attitude towards private label brands.

Despite PLB shoppers’ price consciousness, they also seek value for money. Private labels offer consumers “good quality” and “better value”. Usually, high quality brands provide consumers with confidence (Jaafar et al., 2012). Zeithaml (1988) conceptualises perceived quality as “the consumers global judgement of the brand or product’s overall excellence or superiority”. Further, Richardson et al. (1996) assert that consumers perception with respect to PLB quality determine its purchase level and market share. Yet, Thanasuta (2015) reported insignificant association between quality conscious Thai consumers and the purchase of PLB.

The relationship between consumer perception and attitude has long been established in the consumer behaviour literature. Recently, PLB perceived quality has constantly shown significant positive impact on consumers attitude (Richardson et al., 1996; Lin et al., 2009; Bao et al., 2011). The former finding disproves the long-standing stereotype that describes quality-conscious consumers as having negative attitude towards store brands (Veloutsou et al., 2004). Therefore, the following hypothesis is extended:

H6. Greater perceived quality of private label brand results in more positive attitude towards PLB.

Girard et al. (2017), among others, emphasised the interrelation between PLB perceived quality and perceived risk, in which higher the former, the lower the latter. In addition, the well-established positive association between PLB perceived quality and attitude (Bao et al., 2011) allows number of scholars to underscore an inverse relation between PLBs’ perceived risk and attitude. Although Thanasuta (2015) found insignificant association between Thai consumers and the purchase of PLB, Semeijn et al. (2004) reported a negative relationship between perceived psychological, functional and financial risks and consumers’ attitude towards PLB.

H7. Lower perceived risk of private label brand results in higher attitude towards private label brands.

Drawing on Ajzen and Fishbein’s (1980) theory of reasoned action, attitude is an antecedent of subsequent behaviour. The literature underscored significant positive association between attitude towards PLBs and willingness to purchase store brands (Burton et al., 1998; Jin and Suh, 2005; Diallo et al., 2013, 2015; De and Singh, 2017). In addition, Zielke and Dobbeltstein
(2007) assert that compared to a specific store brand, attitude towards store brands in general has less impact on customers’ willingness to purchase. Thus, we expect the following:

$H8$. More positive attitude towards private label brand results in higher willingness to buy private label brands

**Conceptual model**

Figure 1 depicts the study conceptual model. It illustrates the hypothesised relationships. It emphasises the determinants of consumer attitude towards, and willingness to buy PLBs. The factors under investigation are store image, familiarity with PLBs, perceived quality, perceived risk of PLBs and price consciousness. Accordingly, the researchers aim to examine the above-mentioned relationships and scrutinise their applicability on Carrefour private brand in a developing context, namely, Egypt.

**Methodology**

*Sample and data collection*

The research population consists of consumers who shop for PLB products at hypermarkets/supermarkets in Egypt. Specifically, this paper targets the French international hypermarket Carrefour, the first and largest hypermarket in terms of number of stores and revenues, which began operating in Egypt since 2002. Data were collected using an intercept sample from candidates outside three Carrefour hypermarkets stores in Cairo, the capital of Egypt. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed on weekdays and weekends during the spring of 2018 to obtain more information for different shopping patterns and crowds. Four trained and qualified research assistants helped the researchers in collecting the data. The questionnaires were given to respondents, who regularly purchase PLB products. Of the 340 questionnaires distributed to shoppers, 265 were returned. This represented 77.9 per cent of the total number of shoppers being approached.

*Measures*

To measure the proposed concepts of the study, the researchers adapted scales measures underlined in the preceding literature. Store image was measured using seven items, adapted from Grewal et al. (1998). To measure familiarity with PLB, five items have been adopted from Mieres et al. (2006) and Calvo-Porral and Levy-Mangin (2016). Perceived quality was measured using three statements used by Dodds et al. (1991), the same scale was later used by other authors (Beristain and Zorrilla, 2011). Price consciousness was measured using four items developed by Sinha and Batra (1999), and later, they have been extensively adopted in the context of private brand by Yang and Wang (2010), Wu et al. (2011) and Rubio et al. (2014).
Perceived risk scale was constructed by referring to the nine items scales developed by Jacoby and Kaplan (1972) and Roselius (1971), reflecting three types of perceived risk: functional risk (FPR), financial risk (FIPR) and physical risk (PPR). We adapt the measure for consumer attitude towards PLB, using six items, from the research of (Burton et al., 1998). Finally, we measured willingness to buy Carrefour PLB with five items combined and adapted from previous studies (Dodds et al., 1991; Grewal et al., 1998; Diallo, 2012).

Moreover, each item in the questionnaire was measured on a scale of 1 to 5 with anchors “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” for the constructs measures. To ensure questionnaire consistency, and to validate the interpretation of the scales used, it was translated into Arabic and then back into English by the researchers and a bilingual translator.

The final questionnaire consists of 3 sections, including 39 statements measuring the 7 constructs of the proposed model. The first section included a filter question asking respondents whether they have purchased Carrefour PLB before, in addition to some questions related to their shopping patterns and Carrefour products that they have been purchasing and their preferred store. The second section embraced some questions related to the proposed model and the measurement of the constructs. Finally, the third section emphasised some personal information and the participants’ demographics characteristic. Before the final distribution, the research instrument was pre-tested with 25 respondents to avoid any ambiguous questions and improve the measurement scales. As a result, few statements were modified for further clarification.

The descriptive analysis emphasised that the sample was skewed in favour of female respondents as they represented 74 per cent of the sample, another 70 per cent of the sample were relatively young as they aged from 20 to 40 years; further half of them held monthly income ranged from L.E. 1,200 to less than L.E. 3,200. Of the whole sample, 47.5 per cent were married with kids, as opposed to 37.4 per cent who were married without kids. In addition, more than half of the sample (55 per cent) worked on a full-time base versus 25 per cent, who worked part-time. The remaining of the sample included housewives and the unemployed. The analysis also shows that 35.3 per cent of the sample purchased Carrefour toilet papers and tissues, while another 30.2, 25.8 and 8.7 per cent purchased detergents, dry food and other food products, respectively.

Data analysis
The data analysis of this study was executed in two steps, as suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) for assessing the measurement and structural model by covariance-based structural equation modelling (SEM), using analysis of moment structures (AMOS) version 22.

Analysis of the measurement model
The measurement model comprising store image, familiarity, price consciousness, perceived quality, perceived risk, attitudes towards PLBs and willingness to buy PLB, was analysed using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) by AMOS, with maximum likelihood estimation method to address the issues of convergent and discriminant validity (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988; Jöreskog and Sorbom, 1993).

The CFA exposed the need to remove some items from the research constructs owing to their low standardised factor loading, which was below the minimum recommended cut-off point of 0.50. The items removed were as follows: two items from store image, attitudes towards PLB products and willingness to buy private brand constructs respectively. Another, one statement from familiarity and price consciousness and further four statements from perceived risk constructs. Table I reveals the confirmatory factor analysis
### Table I.
Confirmatory factor analysis and Cronbach alpha results for the measurement model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Factor loading</th>
<th>R-square</th>
<th>P-value</th>
<th>Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Store image (SI)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SI1</td>
<td>Carrefour provides good overall service</td>
<td>0.907</td>
<td>0.822</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>0.862</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SI2</td>
<td>Carrefour carries high-quality merchandise</td>
<td>0.591</td>
<td>0.349</td>
<td>***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SI3</td>
<td>Carrefour is close to my ideal store</td>
<td>0.746</td>
<td>0.556</td>
<td>***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SI4</td>
<td>Carrefour has helpful and knowledgeable salespeople</td>
<td>0.753</td>
<td>0.567</td>
<td>***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SI5</td>
<td>Carrefour provides attractive shopping experience</td>
<td>0.732</td>
<td>0.536</td>
<td>***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Familiarity with private label</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAM1</td>
<td>I can distinguish Carrefour brand products from other brands available at the point of sale</td>
<td>0.877</td>
<td>0.769</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>0.890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAM2</td>
<td>I am quite familiar with Carrefour brand products</td>
<td>0.500</td>
<td>0.372</td>
<td>***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAM4</td>
<td>I have plenty of experience in using Carrefour brand products</td>
<td>0.987</td>
<td>0.974</td>
<td>***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAM5</td>
<td>I know the available Carrefour brand products well</td>
<td>0.980</td>
<td>0.960</td>
<td>***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Price consciousness (PC)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PC1</td>
<td>I tend to buy the lowest-priced brand that will fit my needs</td>
<td>0.823</td>
<td>0.677</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>0.921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PC2</td>
<td>When buying a brand, I look for the cheapest brand available</td>
<td>0.950</td>
<td>0.903</td>
<td>***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PC3</td>
<td>When it comes to buying, I rely heavily on price</td>
<td>0.909</td>
<td>0.826</td>
<td>***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perceived quality (PQ)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PQ1</td>
<td>Carrefour brand products are high quality products</td>
<td>0.877</td>
<td>0.768</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>0.732</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PQ2</td>
<td>Carrefour brand products are trustworthy</td>
<td>0.719</td>
<td>0.517</td>
<td>***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PQ3</td>
<td>Carrefour brand products give me the result I am looking for</td>
<td>0.590</td>
<td>0.348</td>
<td>***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perceived risk (PR)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPR2</td>
<td>I am afraid that its resistance level may not be sufficient</td>
<td>0.860</td>
<td>0.740</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>0.889</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPR3</td>
<td>I am suspicious of the ingredients used in its manufacturing</td>
<td>0.767</td>
<td>0.589</td>
<td>***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIPR1</td>
<td>I think that buying Carrefour brand is a waste of money</td>
<td>0.660</td>
<td>0.435</td>
<td>***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIPR2</td>
<td>I am worried that it is not worth the money spent</td>
<td>0.979</td>
<td>0.958</td>
<td>***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPR2</td>
<td>I am afraid that it may damage your health</td>
<td>0.694</td>
<td>0.481</td>
<td>***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attitude toward private label brand (ATT)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATT1</td>
<td>Buying Carrefour brand products makes me feel good</td>
<td>0.850</td>
<td>0.723</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>0.857</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATT2</td>
<td>I love it when Carrefour brand products are available for the product categories I purchase</td>
<td>0.786</td>
<td>0.618</td>
<td>***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATT3</td>
<td>For most product categories, the best buy is usually Carrefour brand products</td>
<td>0.720</td>
<td>0.519</td>
<td>***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATT5</td>
<td>Considering value for the money, I prefer Carrefour brand products to national brands</td>
<td>0.743</td>
<td>0.552</td>
<td>***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Willingness to buy (WTB)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WTB2</td>
<td>I would purchase Carrefour brand product next time</td>
<td>0.589</td>
<td>0.347</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>0.773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WTB3</td>
<td>Although there are similar brands available, I would prefer to purchase Carrefour brand products</td>
<td>0.810</td>
<td>0.656</td>
<td>***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WTB4</td>
<td>There is strong likelihood that I will buy Carrefour brand products</td>
<td>0.798</td>
<td>0.637</td>
<td>***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cronbach alpha of all constructs is 0.791

**Notes:** SI – store image; FAM – familiarity with PLB; PC – price consciousness; PQ – PLB perceived quality; PR – PLB perceived risk; ATT – attitude towards PLB; WTB – willingness to buy PLB
results. All items of the research constructs loaded successfully on a single factor, and all standardised loadings are equivalent to or greater than 0.50 (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988) with values ranging from 0.50 to 0.987 at 95 per cent significant level that discloses strong convergent validity.

Additionally, CFA goodness-of-fit indices indicated satisfactory model fit were ($\chi^2 = 313.20, df = 303, p = 0.331$), GFI = 0.92, RMR = 0.029. Further, incremental fit indices results were as follows: CFI = 0.99; TLI = 0.99, NFI = 0.93, IFI = 0.98. Moreover, the parsimonious fit indices were PGFI = 0.73; PCFI = 0.86. All fit indices reached or exceeded the benchmarks suggested in previous studies (Jackson et al., 2009; Kline, 2010).

Cronbach’s alpha was calculated for each construct, the values ranged from 0.732 to 0.921, hence exceeding the minimum recommended value suggested by Nunnally (1978) and Hair et al. (2010). Further, the overall alpha value accounted for 0.791 (see Table I).

Table II hereunder demonstrates the final construct items along with their composite reliability (CR), the average variance extracted (AVE), the square roots of AVE for each construct and the maximum shared variance (MSV). It was noticed that all constructs exhibited acceptable composite reliability values, exceeding the threshold of 0.70 suggested by Bagozzi (1994). Additionally, the AVE values were greater than 0.5 for each construct (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), confirming internal consistency and convergent validity. Moreover, the square root of AVE of each and every construct was greater than the absolute value of the correlation between each pair of construct (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), hence confirming adequate discriminant validity. Furthermore, the AVE was found to be greater than the maximum shared variance (MSV) for all the research constructs, supporting another evidence of discriminant validity. Finally, following Bagozzi and Yi (1988), all the constructs were checked for normality using Skewness and Kurtosis tests. Table III shows the results where all the values fall within the acceptable ranging from −1.0 to +1.0, thus providing support for normality.

In fact, the measurement model test results of items reliability and construct validity provided satisfactory and acceptable evidence for researchers to proceeding with the analysis and evaluate the structural model.

### Analysis of the structural model
Having established that the measurement model presents a good fit, the hypothesised relationships among constructs were examined by estimating an SEM through the AMOS, version 22, using maximum likelihood estimate. The overall model fit was assessed using a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>CR</th>
<th>AVE</th>
<th>MSV</th>
<th>SI</th>
<th>FAM</th>
<th>PC</th>
<th>PQ</th>
<th>PR</th>
<th>ATT</th>
<th>WTB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SI</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>0.865</td>
<td>0.566</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>0.752</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAM</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>0.912</td>
<td>0.734</td>
<td>0.029</td>
<td>0.155**0.856</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PC</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>0.924</td>
<td>0.802</td>
<td>0.061</td>
<td>0.146<strong>0.038</strong>0.896</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PQ</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>0.778</td>
<td>0.545</td>
<td>0.023</td>
<td>0.148<strong>0.145</strong>−0.019*0.738</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>0.897</td>
<td>0.641</td>
<td>0.029</td>
<td>0.115*0.074</td>
<td>0.083**−0.0950.800</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATT</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>0.858</td>
<td>0.603</td>
<td>0.061</td>
<td>0.065***−0.171<strong>0.246</strong>0.151<strong>0.076</strong>0.776</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WTB</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>0.780</td>
<td>0.547</td>
<td>0.031</td>
<td>0.056*<strong>0.047</strong>0.005</td>
<td>0.108**−0.044*0.176**0.739</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Square roots of AVE are in diagonal italic cells; CR < 0.70, AVE > 0.5, MSV > AVE; **correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed); *correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed); SI – store image; FAM – familiarity with PLB; PC – price consciousness; PQ – PLB perceived quality; PR – PLB perceived risk; ATT – attitude towards PLB; WTB – willingness to buy PLB
number of measures, namely, the Chi-square goodness-of-fit test statistic, normed Chi-
square \( \chi^2/d\frac{df}{2} \leq 3 \), goodness-of-fit index (GFI) \( \geq 0.90 \), adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI) \( \geq 0.80 \), comparative fit index (CFI) \( \geq 0.90 \), root means square error of approximation (RMSEA) \( \leq 0.08 \), root mean square residual (RMR) \( \leq 0.10 \), parsimony comparative fit index (PCFI) \( \geq 0.60 \) and Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI) \( \geq 0.90 \), which are considered the most
important fit indices.

Table IV shows that Chi-square \( \chi^2 \) value of 319.987, with 313 degrees of freedom, was statistically insigni-

cant \( (p = 0.381) \) at 0.05 level. The results further exhibit that all fit indices obtained are satisfactory and within the suggested boundaries as follows: \( \chi^2/d\frac{df}{2} [1.022] \); GFI [0.92]; AGFI [0.90]; CFI [0.99]; TLI [0.99]; RMSEA [0.009]; RMR [0.034]; IFI [0.99]; PCFI [0.89], hence confirming an acceptable fit of the proposed structural model (see Table IV).

Table IV and Figure 2 both depict the path coefficients for the overall model. The results

Table III. Descriptive statistics and normality tests for the research constructs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. deviation</th>
<th>Skewness</th>
<th>Kurtosis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SI</td>
<td>SI1</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>0.765</td>
<td>0.570</td>
<td>0.557</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SI2</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>0.703</td>
<td>0.612</td>
<td>0.548</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SI3</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>0.736</td>
<td>0.212</td>
<td>-0.208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SI4</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>0.744</td>
<td>0.716</td>
<td>1.068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SI5</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>0.745</td>
<td>0.721</td>
<td>1.051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAM</td>
<td>FAM1</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>0.980</td>
<td>-0.265</td>
<td>-0.346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FAM2</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>1.067</td>
<td>-0.689</td>
<td>-0.118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FAM4</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>0.962</td>
<td>-0.398</td>
<td>0.017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FAM5</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>0.950</td>
<td>-0.332</td>
<td>-0.092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PC</td>
<td>PC1</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>0.761</td>
<td>-0.642</td>
<td>0.985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PC2</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>0.879</td>
<td>-0.853</td>
<td>0.896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PC3</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>0.903</td>
<td>-0.761</td>
<td>0.392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PQ</td>
<td>PQ1</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>0.742</td>
<td>-1.229</td>
<td>2.071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PQ2</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>0.719</td>
<td>-1.262</td>
<td>3.073</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PQ3</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>1.131</td>
<td>-0.305</td>
<td>-0.842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR</td>
<td>FPR2</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>0.791</td>
<td>1.192</td>
<td>1.157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FPR3</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>0.977</td>
<td>0.548</td>
<td>-0.232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FIPR1</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>0.815</td>
<td>0.501</td>
<td>0.121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FIPR2</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>0.845</td>
<td>0.841</td>
<td>0.780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATT</td>
<td>ATT1</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>0.918</td>
<td>-1.038</td>
<td>1.112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ATT2</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>0.888</td>
<td>-0.913</td>
<td>0.915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ATT3</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>0.895</td>
<td>-0.907</td>
<td>0.821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ATT5</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>0.951</td>
<td>-0.775</td>
<td>0.214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WTB</td>
<td>WTB2</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>0.693</td>
<td>0.821</td>
<td>0.277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WTB3</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>0.739</td>
<td>0.896</td>
<td>0.519</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WTB4</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>0.699</td>
<td>0.551</td>
<td>-0.068</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: SI – store image; FAM – familiarity with PLB; PC – price consciousness; PQ – PLB perceived quality; PR – PLB perceived risk; ATT – attitude towards PLB; WTB – willingness to buy PLB
Table IV highlights that price consciousness has the strongest significant positive impact ($\beta = 0.253, t = 3.783, p < 0.001$) on consumers’ attitudes towards PLB product as opposed to perceived quality ($\beta = 0.154, t = 2.203, p < 0.01$). This finding provides support for $H_5$ and $H_6$, respectively. However, perceived risk has negative and insignificant effect on consumers’ attitudes towards PLB product ($\beta = -0.084, t = 1.300, p = 0.194$), so $H_7$ is rejected. Lastly, the findings also show that consumers’ attitudes towards PLB products ($\beta = 0.177, t = 2.363, p < 0.05$) significantly and positivity influence consumers’ willingness to buy, thus confirming $H_8$.

**Discussion and conclusions**

The purpose of this study was to address to what extent consumers perceptual factors, directly and indirectly, affecting their willingness to buy PLBs, in the Egyptian hypermarkets and supermarkets, namely Carrefour. As a result, consumers’ perceptions of store image, familiarity with PLBs, quality and risk level of PLBs and price consciousness...
were scrutinised. The results lend support to seven hypotheses out of eight, as well as confirm attitudes towards PLB products as a critical determinant of consumers’ willingness to buy it.

Central finding of the study was that greater store image has positive effect on PLBs perceived quality. This finding is largely consistent with the work of number of authors (Bao et al., 2011; Wu et al., 2011; Beristain and Zorrilla, 2011; Beneke and Zimmerman, 2014; Calvo-Porral and Lang, 2015). In addition, the result is in line with the cue utilisation theory, which emphasises store image as extrinsic cue on which consumers depend while making product quality decisions (Collins-Dodd and Lindley, 2003; Dick et al., 1996). This finding further supports the notion that PLBs could certainly be perceived as an extension of the brand name of the store, where consumers consider it during the buying process (Ailawadi and Keller, 2004; Burt and Davies, 2010).

Meanwhile, contrary to our original supposition and inconsistent with the literature, the current study reveals an insignificant association between store image and PLBs’ perceived risk. This finding could be inferred to the fact that the Egyptian market is relatively new in introducing and developing private brands. Further, local consumers may not pay much attention to the perceived risk associated with PLBs products, as long as their quality level is acceptable.

Despite the importance of consumer familiarity with PLBs in the purchasing decision, few studies have investigated its relationship with PLBs’ perceived quality and perceived risk. The current research results support the notion that the more the consumer is familiar with the PLB, higher the PLBs’ perceived quality and lower its perceived risk. These findings are largely consistent with the literature (Beneke and Carter, 2015; Rubio et al., 2014; Girard et al., 2017). On the contrary, when consumers are less familiar with the private brand, they tend to treat it with doubt, uncertainty and mistrust. These findings emphasise that Egyptian consumers use both extrinsic and intrinsic cues to decide upon PLB quality and risk levels.

In consonance with the existing literature (Semeijn et al., 2004; Mieres et al., 2006; Lin et al., 2009; Bao et al., 2011), the hypothesised relationship between consumers perceptions of PLB quality and attitude was significant, and in the anticipated direction, where consumer perceptions towards PLB quality positively affected their attitude. This result infers that higher the PLB perceived quality, the more favourable the attitude is towards PLBs. This finding suggests that retailers should continue investing in leveraging their PLBs’ quality level.

Meanwhile, an insignificant relation was noticed between consumers’ perceptions of PLB risk and attitude. The rationale behind this result is that Egyptian consumers did not already associate store image with PLBs’ perceived risk. Such finding could be inferred to the fact that local consumers may not pay much attention to the perceived risk associated with PLBs products, as long as their quality level and price are at acceptable and affordable levels.

The results further suggest that Egyptian consumers perceive Carrefour private label products at the same footing with its national and/or manufacture counterpart with respect to quality and the associated risk. Thus, they suggest that when Egyptian consumers trusted the French hypermarket Carrefour, they extended the store name to its PLBs, became familiar with the brand and were encouraged to try it. Therefore, the uncertainty and risk associated with buying Carrefour PLBs were mitigated. This result is largely inconsistent with Nielsen (2014), hence demonstrating that Egyptian consumer perceptions towards PLBs cannot be generalised, although they are brand-specific given that there are other international private brands operating in Egypt, such as Sainsbury and Metro.
The relationship between price consciousness and consumers’ attitude towards PLBs was found, as expected, to be highly significant. This finding is supported by ample literature (Moore and Carpenter, 2006; Lee, 2008; Wu et al., 2011; Diallo, 2012; Rubio et al., 2014; Elseidi and Metawie, 2017), which affirm that lower prices are antecedent to consumers’ attitude towards PLBs. Finally, our finding demonstrates that attitude towards PLBs is a determinant of consumers’ willingness to buy PLBs. Our result is consistent with the body of literature (Collins-Dodd and Lindley, 2003; Ailawadi et al., 2008; Lin et al., 2009), proposing that willingness to buy PLBs is highly influenced by consumers’ favourable and/or unfavourable attitude towards the PLBs.

Overall, all the hypothesised relationships were found to be statistically significant, except for the relationship between store image and PLBs perceived risk, as well as PLB perceived risk and attitude. The results suggest that perceptual factors are key determinants of consumers’ willingness to buy PLBs.

Managerial implications
On the basis of the current research results, we suggest some insights for retailers. Firstly, our study supports store image as a significant cue influencing consumers’ perceived quality of the PLBs and their attitude and, ultimately, willingness to buy PLBs. This implies that retail managers should invest in enhancing store image to achieving differentiation via leveraging PLBs quality, thus increasing sales.

Retailers should also use other extrinsic cues to improve consumers perceived quality of PLB by using appealing packaging design, attractive labelling, displaying PLB next to the leading national brands or engaged in a strong partnership with suppliers to improve the quality of their products ingredients (Elseidi and Metawie, 2017). In addition, they should ensure conveying their favourable store image to their customers by increasingly expose them to their PLBs via different channels of communication.

Secondly, it is of significance to retailers to understand the extent to which PLBs familiarity affects consumers’ willingness to buy PLBs via the mediating effect of some perceptual (i.e. quality and risk) and attitudinal factors. As a consequence, retailers should encourage consumers to experiencing PLBs by offering in store promotions and spend regularly on marketing communications given that consumers become aware of PLB either via personal experiences or word-of-mouth from family and friends.

Third, retailers should capitalise on the interrelationships between PLBs perceived quality, perceived risk and price consciousness, and their clear and obvious effects on attitude towards PLBs and their willingness to buy. Retailers should consider segmenting consumers either according to price or perceived quality to effectively target each segment with appropriate strategies.

Finally, the aim of the afore-mentioned implications is to remind international retailers entering Middle Eastern countries such as Egypt of the importance of some consumer perceptual factors that ultimately affect local consumers’ willingness to buy PLBs, such as store image, familiarity with PLBs, quality and risk associated with PLBs and price consciousness.

Limitations and future research
Similar to any other research, this study suffers from some limitations that may suggest avenues for future research. Firstly, the current research was geographically bound to the city of Cairo, the capital of Egypt. Future research can examine and validate the research model in other Egyptian governorates, as well as other Middle Eastern countries, given that the majority of the existing research on PLBs focuses on Western countries (Diallo et al., 2013).
Secondly, the current study focuses on one hypermarket/supermarket namely Carrefour. It is advisable that future research examines other retail settings (e.g. discount stores, convenience stores, specialty stores, etc.), product categories, consumer level of involvement to explore and identify the similarities to and/or differences from the existing research.

Thirdly, although store image is a multi-dimensional construct, the variables considered in this research provide a simple store image counter to the real one. Thus, future studies may consider other variables. Fourthly, it would be useful for future research to investigate the moderating effect of socio-demographic (e.g. age, income, education, etc.) factors on the relationship between attitude towards PLBs and others antecedents or the actual purchase of the PLB.

Finally, the researchers hope that scholars would consider some of the above-mentioned suggestions to advance branding research in the area of PLBs, particularly in countries where PLBs are underdeveloped.

References


Further reading


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Store brand adoption and penetration explained by trust

La confianza como factor explicativo de la adaptación y penetración de las marcas de distribución

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to explain variations in store brand penetration using trust. It aims to help both retailers and manufacturers predict store brand purchases through an improved understanding of the impact of trust in store brands across 10 different store brand product categories and among nine different grocery retailers.

Design/methodology/approach – Data were collected through a telephone survey of 904 participants responsible for the household grocery shopping with a quota of 100 respondents from each of the nine leading grocery retailers in Greece.

Findings – The findings provide empirical support that store brand purchases are positively influenced by the consumers’ perceived level of trust toward the retailer’s store brands. Results also confirmed variations in store brand penetration across the ten product categories that were tested, variations among the retailers and variations in the level of trust.

Originality/value – This paper is adding to the store brand literature from a quantitative perspective and is contributing to the theory, as there is no clear theoretical view on the effect of trust on store brand purchases.

Keywords Greece, Trust, Private labels, Store brands, Grocery retailers

Resumen

Propósito – El objetivo de este artículo es explicar las variaciones que se producen en la adopción y penetración de la marca de distribución a partir de la confianza que los consumidores depositan en esta. Con ello se pretende ayudar tanto a los distribuidores como a los fabricantes en la predicción de las compras de marcas de distribución a través del impacto de la confianza en diez categorías de producto distintas y diferentes cadenas de distribución de alimentación.
Diseño/metodología/enfoque – Se recogen datos a través de encuestas telefónicas a una muestra de 904 individuos responsables de la compra de productos de alimentación en el hogar distribuidos equitativamente entre las nueve marcas líderes de distribución alimentaria en Grecia.

Resultados – Los resultados empíricos obtenidos apoyan el planteamiento del trabajo de que las compras de marcas de distribución están influidas positivamente por el nivel de confianza que los consumidores manifiestan hacia las mismas. Los resultados también confirman que la variación en el grado de penetración de las marcas de distribución en las distintas categorías de productos y cadenas de supermercados analizadas viene explicada por las variaciones en los niveles de confianza manifestados.

Originalidad/valor – Este trabajo contribuye a la literatura de las marcas de distribución no sólo en aspectos teóricos sino también empíricos al no existir hasta la fecha un posicionamiento teórico claro sobre el efecto de la confianza en la adquisición de las marcas de distribución.

Palabras clave – Grecia, Palabras claves Marcas de distribución, Marcas privadas, Confianza, Supermercados

Tipo de artículo – Trabalho de investigación

1. Introduction
One of the most significant changes in the grocery industry is the success and growth of store brands. Store brands have been growing in sales in both the US and European markets (Sethuraman and Gielens, 2014; Hökelekli et al., 2017). They have experienced a fast growth in their market share and have become key players in many markets around the world with a global value share of 16.7 per cent during 2016 (Nielsen, 2018). Recent researchers suggest that their perceived value for money positioning is a key driver to their wide acceptance (Beneke and Carter, 2015; Beneke et al., 2015; Rubio et al., 2015; Konuk, 2018). Because of their success, they are present in almost every product category, especially in Europe, store brands are present in more than 90 per cent of the product categories in consumer-packaged goods (Cuneo et al., 2015). Furthermore, European grocery retailers such as Tesco, Sainsbury and Asda have developed, for their store brands, similar brand management practices with those of the national brands. They are also trying to respond to environmental changes and to the changes in the brand management practices (Veloutsou and Guzmán, 2017). Overall, European grocery retailers are increasingly adopting a multi-tier strategy by offering in addition to their standard store brands a line of economy as well as a line of premium quality store brands (Hökelekli et al., 2017; Konuk, 2018). However, there are variations in their level of acceptance among regions, countries as well as product categories. In the US market, store brands have reached an 18.4 per cent dollar share in supermarkets during 2016 whereas in Europe their dollar share is at 31.4 per cent during the same period and within Europe their share ranges from a maximum of 42 per cent in Spain to 19 per cent in Italy (PLMA, 2017; Nielsen, 2018).

Store brands are being used by retailers as a tool to increase profit margin, increase their bargaining power with the national manufacturers, gain a competitive advantage over other retailers, help them to improve store image and increase store loyalty (Ailawadi et al., 2008; Coelho do Vale et al., 2016; Seenivasan et al., 2016). Because of their importance, to both retailers and manufacturers of national brands, there is a plethora of studies that have focused on identifying the driving forces behind store brand growth (Muruganantham and Priyadharshini, 2017). Some of the factors that have been identified by previous researchers are: market factors such as economic (Cotterill et al., 2000), retail concentration and geographic expansion (Myers and Alexander, 2007; Cuneo et al., 2015), consumer characteristics (Baltas and Argouslidis, 2007; Glynn and Chen, 2009; Muruganantham and Priyadharshini, 2017), store image (Tsung-Chi and Chung-Yu, 2008; Beneke et al., 2015; Ruiz-Real et al., 2017), perceived value and perceived quality of store brands (Beneke et al., 2013; Beneke and Carter, 2015; Beneke et al., 2015).
Despite all previous research on store brands, the impact of trust on store brand adoption and penetration has not been fully explored. A thorough search of the relevant literature yielded five related articles. Out of these, four study the influence of trust to the intention to buy store brands rather than store brand purchases (Chaniotakis et al., 2009 and 2010; Lymperopoulos et al., 2010; Konuk, 2018) whereas the other article studies the influence on both purchase intention and loyalty to store brands (Calvo Porral and Levy-Mangin, 2016). Among these five studies, there is no agreement on whether trust in store brands has a direct or an indirect impact to either the intention to buy or to loyalty toward the store brands. Furthermore, out of these five studies, three were limited to one single product category (Chaniotakis et al., 2009 and 2010; Lymperopoulos et al., 2010); one study was focusing on the general category of food products (Calvo Porral and Levy-Mangin, 2016) while the other was focusing on organic store brand food products (Konuk, 2018). Thus, none of these studies have tested the impact of trust on both food and non-food store brand purchases as well as among different retailers. This is an important gap because previous research has shown that different store brand product categories exhibit different levels of success and that store brand proneness is more category specific than consumer-specific (Muruganantham and Priyadharshini, 2017). In addition, previous research indicates that there are variations in consumers’ perceptions and preference across different retailers (Semeijn et al., 2004; Mieres et al., 2006; Baltas and Argouslidis, 2007; Muruganantham and Priyadharshini, 2017). So, in this context, the major contribution of this study is to examine whether consumers of nine different grocery retailers exhibit similarities in their store brand purchase behavior based on their level of trust on 10 different store brand product categories (seven food and three non-food categories).

Specifically, this research attempts to investigate and provide useful insights into:

1. the relationship between trust in store brands and store brand purchases;
2. the variations in the level of trust among several store brand product categories;
3. the variations in the behavioral attitude toward store brands across different retailers; and
4. the variations in the level of trust in store brands across different retailers.

To meet the objectives of this study, the next section of the paper presents the construct of trust as well as the theoretical links under investigation. It then explains the methods used for the data collection and analysis; it presents the results and discusses them in terms of their practical contribution and their limitations. Finally, it provides recommendations for further research.

2. Theoretical background and development of HH2.1 Trust

Trust is widely recognized as an important variable that affects human relationships at all levels and has received a great deal of attention in social sciences literature and particularly in the marketing literature (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman, 2005; Veloutsou, 2015). In marketing, we have witnessed a shift from the traditional activities of “attracting customers” toward “building relationships” with customers (Veloutsou and Guzmán, 2017). Therefore, trust is considered as a key element of the relationship marketing approach: a prerequisite for building long-term relationships between the company and its customers, intermediaries and suppliers as well as all other members in its micro-environment (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman, 2005; Veloutsou et al., 2013; Veloutsou, 2015).

Trust is recognized as being broad and diverse in nature (Li et al., 2015; Hegner and Jevons, 2016). Trust is subjective and exists when there is confidence that the other party is reliable (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Yannopoulou et al., 2011), credible (Doney and Cannon,
1997) and has the ability (Mayer and Davis, 1995). Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman (2001, p. 1242) defined brand trust as “[...] a feeling of security held by the consumer that the brand will meet his/her consumption expectations [...] brand reliability and brand intentions towards the individual”. This definition incorporates the dimension of reliability and the dimension of intentionality (or benevolence). Reliability is based on the belief that the brand will fulfill its promises and the intentionality on the belief that the brand will not take advantage of the consumer’s vulnerability and uncertainty. From a theoretical point of view, it is apparent that both dimensions are necessary for trust to exist (Li et al., 2015; Hegner and Jevons, 2016). Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) have added a behavioral dimension and conceptualized trust as “[...] the willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function”.

Overall, a review of the literature on trust reveals the diversity of definitions and approaches across disciplines. Lewicki et al. (2006) conducted a detailed review of the literature on trust and identified four theoretical approaches in conceptualizing trust: the behavioral approach, and the three psychological approaches (unidimensional, two-dimensional and transformational). In this study, the unidimensional approach was taken, and trust is considered as bipolar opposites (trust and distrust) of a single dimension. Thus, trust is conceptualized as “a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another” (Rousseau et al., 1998, p. 395). Absent from our definition of trust is the behavioral intention of “willingness” (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). We argue that this behavioral intention, as well as the reliability and intentionality, are implicit in the conceptualization of trust; once there is a feeling that the brand is “trusted”, willingness, reliability and intentionality are outcomes of trust (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Thus, trust in store brands is conceptualized as an aggregate evaluation of how a brand will fulfill expectations.

2.1 The role of trust in store Brand purchases

When we are referring to trust toward a brand then the construct of trust becomes part of the brand-consumer relationship and therefore part of the brand equity (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman, 2005; Veloutsou et al., 2013). There are several studies that emphasize the existence of different levels of consumer commitment or loyalty with the brand (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman, 2001; Ball et al., 2004). Brand trust is one of the strongest commitments, as it creates a highly valued brand-consumer relationship. Furthermore, the brand trust will influence the intention to continue purchasing the brand and gain higher market share. Thus, brand trust is expected to influence attitudinal and behavioral loyalty as well as the brand’s financial performance (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Veloutsou, 2015).

Relative to the store brands, Chaniotakis et al. (2009) in their study found that consumers’ intention of purchasing store brands is directly affected by their attitudes and that consumers’ attitudes are directly affected by the perceived benefits and indirectly by the consumer trust toward the store brands. This indirect positive effect on the consumers’ intention to buy store brands was confirmed by Lymeropoulos et al. (2010). Specifically, they found that trust in store brands has a direct positive effect on the perceived benefits which affect attitudes and then attitudes influence consumers’ intention to buy store brands. Another study contacted in the food category by Calvo Porral and Levy-Mangin (2016) in Spain, a market with high store brand high market share, found that consumer trust in store brands exhibits a moderating influence on store brand loyalty, that is, depending on the level of trust there are variations in the loyalty. Overall, consumers develop trust toward a brand based on positive beliefs and expectations and this is expected to influence their
evaluation as well as their purchase intention (Calvo Porral and Levy-Mangin, 2016; Konuk, 2018). Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

**H1.** The level of trust in Store Brands affects Store Brand purchases.

Furthermore, consumer perceptions for different product categories are different, as they are affected from the different characteristics of each category, which has a significant effect on their buying behavior (Veloutsou et al., 2004). Consumers’ purchase intentions are greatly influenced by the perceived value and the perceived risk associated with product purchases (Beneke et al., 2015; Rubio et al., 2015; Muruganantham and Priyadharshini, 2017; Konuk, 2018) and consumers exhibit higher perceived risk with store brands compared to national brands (Beneke and Carter, 2015). Moreover, there are variations in the perceived quality of different store brand categories and different product categories influence brand trust differently because of their different characteristics (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Konuk, 2018). Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

**H2.** The level of trust in Store Brands varies among product categories.

### 2.2 The role of the retailer in store Brand purchases

Traditionally, the retailer as a brand and the store brands are treated independently. Many researchers have explored the influence of store brands on variables that are related to retailer brand equity such as store loyalty and store satisfaction (Martenson, 2007; Ailawadi et al., 2008; Seenivasan et al., 2016). However, to achieve synergies, we expect to see a consistency between the overall retail brand strategies and the strategies for their store brands. For example, the low-price strategy of a discounter, which is based on offering low-priced products, must be accompanied by a low store brand price strategy.

Previous studies have found that there are variations in consumers’ perceptions and preferences for store brands across different retailers (Mieres et al., 2006; Baltas and Argouslidis, 2007). Consumers perceive different levels of risk when buying from different retailers (Sheinin and Wagner, 2003). Retailers, through their overall marketing strategies, could influence store brand sales and penetration to a large extent; they try to influence consumer evaluation toward their store brands, create confidence and reduce the perceived risk (Bao et al., 2011; Ipek et al., 2016). In addition, the retailer’s image has a positive impact on both the perceived quality, purchase intention and trust in store brands (Beneke et al., 2015; Konuk, 2018; Ruiz-Real et al., 2017). However, different retailers have a different image. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

**H3.** Store Brand penetration varies across different retailers.

**H4.** The level of trust in Store Brands will vary by retailer.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Empirical context

Grocery retailing in Greece was selected as the empirical context of the study for several reasons. First, the nature of grocery retailing is characterized as task-oriented with a short sales cycle. Second, the specific setting is very competitive with low loyalty levels with consumers patronizing multiple chains. Also, because of the economic crisis consumers have become more price-sensitive (IRI Topline Report, 2017). Third, the study is supported by a large grocery retailer that wants to investigate the level of trust in its store brands as well as on other retailers and the effect to store brand purchases.
3.2 Sampling and description of data
Data were collected through a telephone survey using the CATI process. The target population was those responsible for the household grocery shopping, who shop at the nine leading grocery retailers that sell store brands in Greece and live in the two largest cities in Greece (Athens and Thessaloniki). Respondents were asked to respond to the questions for the grocery retailer that they make most of their purchases. Because the study is focusing on those retailers that offer store brands, a non-proportional quota sample was selected to guarantee enough responses per retailer and thus to ensure the validity of our analysis at the level of the selected retailer. A total of 904 respondents were interviewed based upon a quota of 100 respondents for each of the nine retailers. Women represent 77.4 per cent of the whole sample whereas most of the respondents are in the age group of 25-64 (91 per cent). Comparing the demographic characteristics of the sample with the data from the National Statistics, we note that women and the age group of 25-64 are over-represented in the sample. This is to be expected, as the target population was those responsible for the household grocery shopping. The sampling frame was the electronic telephone directories for the two cities selected and CATI randomly selected and dialed the numbers.

3.3 Method of analysis
Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was selected for testing $H_1$ (The level of trust in Store Brands affects Store Brand purchases). PLS was selected as an appropriate method of analysis because the objective, in this case, is the prediction (Hair et al., 2011). Also, it was selected because we use formative indicators (the observed variables) as measures that form or cause the creation or change in the latent variable, and PLS can model formative indicators. In this study, SB purchases represent the dependent variable that is to be predicted by the level of trust in SBs. For the execution of the analyses, the SmartPLS 3.0 software was used (Ringle et al., 2015). In addition, the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 17.0 was chosen as the computer program for the univariate and bivariate data analysis.

Friedman’s Test was selected for testing $H_2$ (The level of trust in store brands varies amongst product categories). It was selected over the Repeated Measures ANOVA, as a nonparametric test is more robust, that is, more linear in conditions. Also, it is appropriate for testing differences between more than two conditions when the same participants have been used in all conditions. The Friedman’s Test ranks the data for each respondent, adds up the ranks for each condition and then calculates the test statistics $F_r$ (Diamantopoulos and Schlegelmilch, 1997; Field, 2009).

The one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was selected to test $H_3$ (Store brand penetration varies across different retailers) and $H_4$ (The level of trust in store brands will vary by retailer). In $H_3$, there are nine groups that are being compared (the nine grocery chains selected each one with a sample of 100 respondents) for variations in their store brand penetration. In $H_4$, we also have the nine grocery retailers that are being compared for variations in the level of trust with their store brands. In both cases, the level of measurement is an interval. Therefore, the one-way ANOVA is appropriate (Diamantopoulos and Schlegelmilch, 1997). The one-way ANOVA was selected to examine whether the mean values of the constructs among the nine groups are different (so the null hypothesis is that the group means are the same). To test the null hypotheses ($H_3$ and $H_4$), the amount of systematic variance in the data to the amount of unsystematic variance was calculated, that is, the $F$-ratio and to indicate the level of significance the effect size $\omega$ was added (Field, 2009).
3.4 Measures and instrument design
In line with our unidimensional definition of trust, we measured trust in store brands with a single-item scale. Thus, we measured expectations that were expressed in the form of beliefs about the trustworthiness of the retailer’s store brands (Selnes, 1998; Lewicki et al., 2006). A qualitative study was used for the selection of different store brand product categories for measuring the construct of trust in store brands. Ten product categories were selected to capture the scope of the construct based on five focus groups with consumers and three interviews with retail marketing managers. Specifically, seven store brand product categories were selected from the food category (Luncheon meat and cheese, soft drinks, dairy, juices, wine, beer, other food) and three from the non-food category (detergents, Shampoo, paper products). Therefore, we conceptualized the trust in food and the trust in non-food store brands as two interrelated constructs that can provide us with the overall level of trust in store brands. Respondents were asked to evaluate on a four-point Likert scale to what degree they trust the specific SB product category (from “trust a lot” = 4 to “do not trust at all” = 1). Thus, the level of trust was measured as the average level of trust (minimum of “1” to a maximum of “4”) for the 10 product categories. A four-point scale was selected because it is quick to administer and can be easily grasped by respondents over the phone. Also, there is no midpoint, so the respondents had to make a choice (O’Loughlin and Coenders, 2004).

Store brand purchases in the store were directly measured. Respondents were classified into two categories, purchasers and non-purchasers of store brands. Purchasers were all those that indicated purchase from any one of the 10 product categories. To measure the level of store brand penetration, we created a new variable, called “Store Brand Variety” that measures the level of store brand purchases. Depending on the number of product categories that respondents have purchased “Store Brand Variety” can range from a minimum value of “0” to a maximum of “10”. Respondents who do not buy store brand are represented with the minimum value and respondents who buy store brands are represented based on the number of product categories that they buy (e.g. “1” for those that buy one product category, “2” for two categories, etc.). Thus, we have an interval scale because we establish an ordered relationship between respondents with regard to the number of store brand categories that they buy (Diamantopoulos and Schlegelmilch, 1997; Hair et al., 2010).

4. Data analysis and results
4.1 Descriptive statistics
The study was conducted in Greece, which is an undeveloped market for store brands comparing with the other European countries. This is reflected in the findings, as only 60 per cent of the respondents indicated that they had purchased a store brand from any of the 10 product categories, and out of them approximately 30 per cent had purchased only from a single product category, whereas 35 per cent had bought store brands in more than four product categories. Furthermore, our results confirmed previous research on the variations in store brand penetration among grocery retailers (Mieres et al., 2006; Baltas and Argouslidis, 2007). As it was expected, the discount grocery retailer (Lidl) had the highest level of penetration (82 per cent of its customers indicated that had purchased at least one store brand).

The findings also confirmed significant differences in store brand penetration among the 10 product categories. Figure 1 illustrates that paper products and other food exhibited the highest level of acceptance (43 per cent and 38 per cent respectively of the respondents had purchased from these two categories). In contrast, store brand purchases in the wine and beer category showed the lowest level of acceptance (10 per cent and 11 per cent, respectively). In addition, Figure 1 illustrates that the product categories with the highest
The category with the highest level of trust is paper products, which is explained by the high penetration of this product category.

4.2 The level of trust in store brands affects store Brand purchases

The formative measurement model (outer) and the structural model (inner) were assessed following the suggested procedure by Hair et al. (2017). Overall, the construct measures of both the measurement model and the structural model proved to be valid and reliable.

In formative measurement models, it is required to assess collinearity before analyzing outer weights for their significance and relevance (Cenfetelli and Bassellier, 2009). To assess collinearity, the variance inflation factor (VIF) was computed. Initially, when assessing the collinearity between the indicators, the wine and beer were identified with a VIF value of 5.8 and 6.7 respectively, that is, above the threshold value of five. Thus, it was decided to remove the beer indicator and retest for collinearity (Cenfetelli and Bassellier, 2009). After removing this indicator all other indicators have a VIF below the threshold value of five; thus, collinearity is not an issue (Table I). Furthermore, to assess the contribution of the indicators to forming the construct, the bootstrapping procedure (1,000 samples) was followed. To deal with the low weight issue, because of the large number of indicators, trust in store brands was treated as a second-order construct (Cenfetelli and Bassellier, 2009). All the weights and t-values were found significant at a 5 per cent level except for two indicators in the food category (dairy and wine) indicating their low importance in forming the construct. Even though the weights for these two indicators were not significant, we retained the indicators to better capture the trust in food store brands construct and to possible managerial input.

The structural model provides us with measures of the relationships between the constructs; Table II presents the structural model results aggregated over all grocery retailers. The results indicate that the construct of trust in store brands ($R^2 = 0.233$) explains 23 per cent of store brand purchases (Hair et al., 2017). The findings indicate that
trust toward store bands is a moderate predictor of store brand sales and as suggested by Chin (1998) a moderate $R^2$ value can be accepted when a few exogenous latent variables are used to explain an endogenous latent variable. Furthermore, our results indicate that for the formation of the overall level of trust in store brands (second-order construct), the level of trust in nonfood has a higher impact ($\beta = 0.687, t = 6.373$) than the level of trust in food store brands ($\beta = 0.370, t = 2.773$). Thus, in relation to the impact of the level of trust in the store brand purchases, the level of trust in non-food has a higher impact than the trust in food store brands. Overall, the results indicate a positive impact of the level of trust in store brands on store brand purchases ($\beta = 0.457, t = 14.850$). Therefore, $H1$ can be supported.

Moreover, Table II presents the structural model results for four selected retailers (AV, Carrefour, Sklavenitis and Lidl). AV and Carrefour were selected as the two multinational retailers, Sklavenitis as a local strong player, and Lidl as a discounter. It is important to note that because store brands in Greece have a much lower market share than in other European countries (e.g. Germany, Spain, U.K), Lidl has adopted its strategy by displaying more products from manufacturer brands in Greece. The findings indicate that trust toward store brands is an important predictor of their store brand sales. Even though there are variations in the predictive power of the model across different retailers, the general direction and strength of the model are similar. Looking at the selected retailers, the predictive power of the model ranges from 39 per cent in the case of AV, to 22 per cent in the case of Sklavenitis.

### 4.3 The level of trust in store brands varies among product categories

In our hypothesis, we test differences in the level of trust between the 10 store brand product categories. Therefore, the sample of respondents (a single group) provides 10 different measurements, which are then contrasted. The null hypothesis is that there are no differences in the level of trust among the product categories. The level of trust can range from a minimum of one (“do not trust at all”) to a maximum of four (“trust a lot”). Therefore, we have 10 ordinal level measures, one per product category that needs to be compared to one another. The responses for each product category are ranked and the chi-square distribution with nine degrees of freedom (number of variables – 1) as well as the significance was calculated. Table IV shows the mean ranks in each condition and demonstrates that there are variations in the ranks across the conditions. Overall, the results indicate that there is a significant difference between the median levels of trust among the ten product categories, $X^2(9) = 581.203, p < 0.001$. Therefore, $H2$ can be supported (Table III).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>VIF</th>
<th>Path weights</th>
<th>t-values*</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>VIF</th>
<th>Path weights</th>
<th>t-values*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>food SBs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>non-food SBs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dairy</td>
<td>3.381</td>
<td>-0.047</td>
<td>1.347</td>
<td>Detergents</td>
<td>3.026</td>
<td>0.125</td>
<td>2.930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juices</td>
<td>3.257</td>
<td>0.268</td>
<td>6.939</td>
<td>Paper Products</td>
<td>2.252</td>
<td>0.402</td>
<td>4.917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luncheon meat/cheese</td>
<td>2.669</td>
<td>0.063</td>
<td>1.689</td>
<td>Shampoo and BF</td>
<td>2.961</td>
<td>0.249</td>
<td>7.097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other food</td>
<td>2.782</td>
<td>0.362</td>
<td>8.423</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft drinks</td>
<td>4.171</td>
<td>0.147</td>
<td>3.670</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wine</td>
<td>3.427</td>
<td>0.022</td>
<td>0.740</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *PLS $t$-values are based on bootstrapping with 1,000 samples
### Table II. Structural model results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>Total (All 9 RT)</th>
<th>AV</th>
<th>Carrefour</th>
<th>Sklavenitis</th>
<th>Lidl</th>
<th>AV</th>
<th>Carrefour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Path coefficients</td>
<td>0.233</td>
<td>0.388</td>
<td>0.228</td>
<td>0.218</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.388</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$t$-value*</td>
<td>Path coefficients</td>
<td>$t$-value</td>
<td>Path coefficients</td>
<td>$t$-value</td>
<td>Path coefficients</td>
<td>$t$-value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in SBs &gt;&gt; SB</td>
<td>0.457</td>
<td>14.859</td>
<td>0.587</td>
<td>4.416</td>
<td>0.451</td>
<td>5.238</td>
<td>0.391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in Food SBs &gt;&gt; Trust in SBs**</td>
<td>0.370</td>
<td>2.773</td>
<td>0.539</td>
<td>2.834</td>
<td>0.384</td>
<td>1.084</td>
<td>0.973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust in non-food SBs &gt;&gt; Trust in SBs**</td>
<td>0.687</td>
<td>6.373</td>
<td>0.577</td>
<td>3.092</td>
<td>0.701</td>
<td>2.181</td>
<td>0.049</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** *PLS $t$-values are based on bootstrapping with 1,000 samples; **Significance of first-order constructs to second-order
4.4 Store Brand penetration varies across different retailers

The results of our analysis are presented in Table IV. The table provides some descriptive statistics such as the group means, and standard deviation for each of the nine retailers. In addition, 95 per cent confidence intervals for each group means are indicated. For example, there is a 95 per cent confidence that the true value of the “Store Brand variety” mean for Carrefour is likely to be between 1.44 and 2.42. Regarding the variation of store brand penetration across different retailers, the total amount of variation is captured by the total sum of squares, that is,
SS_T = 6048.680 with df = 899. To identify how much of this variation can be explained by the different groups, the F-ratio needs to be calculated (Diamantopoulos and Schlegelmilch, 1997). Which is the variability between groups SS_M = 477.861, df = 8 over the variability within groups SS_R = 5570.819, df = 891. If the null hypothesis is accepted the F-ratio should be close to 1. The results indicate that the there is a medium variation on the “SB variety” across the nine retailers F(8, 891) = 9.597, p < 0.001, ω = 0.27. Therefore, H3 can be supported.

4.5 The level of trust in store brands will vary by retailer

The results of our analysis are presented in Table V. Regarding the variation in the level of trust in SBs across different retailers, the total amount of variation is SS_T = 461.608 with df = 627. The variability between groups is SS_M = 22.813, df = 8 while the variability within groups is SS_R = 438.795 df = 619; F (8, 619) = 4.023, p < 0.001, ω = 0.19. Thus, our results indicate that there is a medium variation in level or trust in SBs across the nine retailers. Therefore, H4 can also be supported.

5. Discussion

This paper investigates the impact of trust as a driver of store brand purchases, and through that explains the reasons for the observed differences in the level of store brand penetration among different retailers and product categories. Previous studies led us to expect a cause and effect relationship between the level of trust in store brands and store brand purchases. However, in comparison to previous studies (Chaniotakis et al., 2009 and 2010; Lymperopoulos et al., 2010; Calvo Porral and Levy-Mangin, 2016; Konuk, 2018), the contribution of this study is that it examines the impact of trust in multiple product categories (three in non-food and 7 in food) and in nine leading grocery retailers.

The findings of this study add to the literature by emphasizing the impact of trust in store brand purchases across all product categories as well as across all nine retailers. Thus,
heightened levels of trust are deemed to influence consumers’ evaluation and have a positive effect on their store brand purchases. This finding is consistent with the work of previous researchers which suggest that trust is a central variable to purchase intention and to the development of brand loyalty and that trust is a process that evolves from past experiences and interaction with the brand (Chaniotakis et al., 2010; Lyperopoulos et al., 2010; Veloutsou, 2015). While the variable of trust toward the store brands by no means can be considered as the only one that can accurately predict store brand penetration, it can provide with a good yardstick of how customers will react to their decision-making based upon their attitude towards the store brands.

The study also shows that there are significant differences in the level of trust among the product categories as well as substantial differences in the behavioral attitude toward the 10 product categories. Categories characterized by the lowest levels of functional and social or psychological risk exhibited the highest level of purchase. In contrast, categories that are mostly consumed within a social context and therefore exhibit a higher level of psychological risk (Semeijn et al., 2004) showed the lowest level of acceptance. The findings also indicate that there is a balance between the behavioral and the cognitive component of the attitude toward store brands. The product categories with the highest purchase rate also exhibit the highest level of trust. These differences in the level of trust and penetration among the different store brand product categories can be explained by the differences in the perceived risk. Previous researchers have indicated that if the perceived risk in a specific product category is low, consumers display greater price sensitivity and are more motivated to seek lower prices, that is, they might be more likely to purchase the lower-priced store brands in that product category (Sethuraman and Gielens, 2014).

Finally, another important finding of this study is that there are variations in the level of store brand penetration and in the level of trust among the nine different retailers. These variations among the different retailers can be explained with their different strategies (Calvo Porral and Lang, 2015; Schnittka et al., 2015; İpek et al., 2016; Hökelekli et al., 2017). Despite these variations, it was observed that there is a balance between the behavioral and the cognitive component of the attitude toward the retailers’ store brands. Thus, the results of the current research support the notion that the variations in the level of trust among the different retailers can explain the variations in the level of store brand penetration.

6. Managerial implications

In terms of the implications to retailers, the findings suggest that trust-building strategies is an appropriate way of influencing the behavioral attitude toward store brands. However, the challenge for retailers is to overcome consumers’ perceptions toward store brands as being homogeneous across retailers (Ailawadi et al., 2008). Retailers through their strategies should try to break this perception, differentiate their store brands and increase the level of trust for their own store brands rather than the overall category. They should try to create positive attitudes and perceptions toward their store brands so that customers feel secure that the brand will meet their expectations. They should promote their ability to offer quality store brands so purchase decisions will not be based on price alone. Each one of the nine retailers included in the study sells many different manufacturer brands and a wide assortment of store brands; each one has developed a different image in the consumer’s mind and a different store brand strategy. For instance, there are variations in how they have decided to brand their store brands. For example, AV and Carrefour show their retail brand name on their store brand packaging and follow a family brand policy for their store brands (e.g. AV uses the brand name “AV” in several product categories). On the other hand, Sklavenitis and Lidl use several different “phantom” brand names for their
store brands and their retail brand name is revealed only in the legal declarations on the back of the pack. Recent research indicates that store brand perceptions and attitude are more favorable when the retailer is using the chain-label and this effect is stronger for the standard rather than the economy store brands (Schnittka et al., 2015). Hence, consumers’ perceptions toward the retailer’s brand name can be transferred to the perceptions of the store brands that the retailer carries.

Furthermore, variations in the rate of adoption by product category and by a retailer, as well as variations in the level of trust in different store brand categories suggest that the development and implementation of store brand strategies should be retailer- and market-specific. Retailers must understand that there are different segments of shoppers (buyers vs non-buyers, light/medium/heavy store brand buyers) with different shopper behavior, different level of involvement with the purchase and different criteria for evaluating products. Thus, they should try to target them by implementing differentiated strategic approaches.

From the other side, manufacturers of national brands, in their effort to protect their market share, should try to maintain or increase the consumers’ level of trust towards their brand or to decrease the level of trust in store brands. Using communication effectively they should try to enhance the perceived value of their brands so that consumers will be willing to pay higher prices. According to Batra and Sinha (2000), the experience characteristics of a category positively affect sales of manufacturers’ brands rather than the search characteristics. Therefore, they should try to increase trust toward their brands by motivating consumers to form their own perceptions through trial rather than encouraging them to read the information provided on the packaging. To decrease the level of trust in store brands they should try to increase the uncertainty toward them and thus make it more difficult for consumers to purchase the lower-priced store brands. Moreover, because there are variations in the level of trust and penetration of the store brands among the different retailers, they need to assess the environment of each of their key retail customers and develop their strategies on a per customer basis.

7. Limitations and further research
The present study exhibits several limitations that might provide direction for future research. Methodologically, a choice was made to focus on the grocery store industry and the data were collected from the Greek market. Thus, the findings might lack generalizability to different national contexts or to different retail sectors. Also, in relation to the methodological choices, respondents were asked to indicate whether they buy store brands or not and if their response was positive, then they were asked to declare which store brand categories they buy (from the list of the 10 categories). This is a limitation because we are not measuring actual purchases, so future research might use actual data from supermarket scanners.

Another limitation is related to the way that trust was measured. For example, trust in store brands was measured by using a single item. A sensitivity analysis was conducted to see whether there were differences in the structural relationships of the model at different levels of trust and no difference was indicated. Even though the use of single-item measures is widely used in the marketing literature (Drolet and Morrison, 2001; Varki and Colgate, 2001), it is recognized that using a single item for measuring a complex construct such as trust probably constitutes a limitation. A single item measure has some important practical advantages (parsimony and easier administration) but it ignores the multidimensional nature of the construct and considers only the overall trust, that is, it ignores trust in specific aspects of the brand (Lewicki et al., 2006; Diamantopoulos et al., 2012; Li et al., 2015). Therefore, future research might measure trust using other established scales (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002; Guenzi, et al., 2009; Li et al., 2015).
Furthermore, although a score for the “overall level” of trust was obtained from the respondents, there was no indication as to the reason behind their response. Respondents were asked to indicate their overall trust perceptions, for the 10 product categories, without using any attribute specification. Therefore, future research might add more constructs in the model to see the effect they have on store brand trust and to explain how much trust can be explained from these constructs (e.g. store brand perceived quality and perceived value, the overall perceptions toward the specific retailer, the level of trust on the specific retailer). Another limitation is associated with the Likert scale used and to how the distances between the scale points are interpreted by the respondents (Lewicki et al., 2006).

Finally, another problem occurs because of the differences in how retailers are branding their store brands. A common strategy among discounters or economy store brands at service-oriented retailers is that their store brands are not chain labeled. In this case, respondents might not be able to recognize a store brand as belonging to the specific retailer (Schnittka et al., 2015).

References


Further reading


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