Are brands forever?
How brand knowledge and relationships affect current and future purchases

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to develop a comprehensive model that combines brand knowledge and brand relationship perspectives on brands and shows how knowledge and relationships affect current and future purchases.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper uses structural equation modeling to test the significance of the overall model and the specified paths.

Findings – It is found that current purchases are affected by brand image mostly directly and by brand awareness mostly indirectly. In contrast, future purchases are not affected by either dimension of brand knowledge directly; rather, brand knowledge affects future purchases via a brand relationship path that includes brand satisfaction, brand trust, and attachment to the brand. Thus, brand knowledge alone is not sufficient for building strong brands in the long term; brand relationship factors must be considered as well.

Research implications/limitations – The present study did not examine feedback effects and included consumer categories only and no individual-differences variables. It is recommended that future research examine feedback effects and include additional consumer categories, B2B categories and individual-differences variables such as variety seeking and innovativeness.

Practical implications – Brand managers spend considerable resources on measuring brand awareness and brand image. It is recommended that practitioners also use brand relationship measures and develop strategic and tactical initiatives that ensure that consumers are satisfied with the brand, trust it and feel attached to it.

Originality/value – The paper is a cross-paradigm paper: it is the first that combines the two separate broad-based perspectives on brands into a simple comprehensive model for researchers and brand managers.

Keywords Brand awareness, Brand management, Brand equity, Consumer behaviour

Paper type Research paper

An executive summary for managers and executive readers can be found at the end of this article.

Introduction

Building strong brands is one of the most important goals of product and brand management. Strong brands result in higher revenue streams, both short term and long term (Aaker, 1991, 1996; Kapferer, 2004; Keller, 2003). Therefore, the stated goal of strategic brand management is to build brands that last for decades and can be leveraged in different product categories and markets (Aaker, 1996).

Brand researchers have developed several conceptualizations of brands and how brands affect consumer behavior (current and future purchases). Earlier models – such as Aaker's brand equity model and Keller's customer-based brand equity model – have focused heavily on how consumer perceive and evaluate brands by investigating certain knowledge structures such as brand awareness, image and personality (Aaker, 1991; Aaker, 1997; Keller, 1993). More recently, researchers have argued that it is important to consider how consumers build brand relationships and form brand communities similar to how they build relationships and communities in their personal lives (Fournier, 1998; Grossman, 1998; McAlexander *et al.*, 2002; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001).

Brand practice, to some degree, has followed a similar path. For a long time, establishing brand awareness and image have been key goals of brand management. Brand marketers, especially in fast moving consumer goods such as food items as well as mass market sports, apparel and electronics items, spend considerable resources to assess and track consumer awareness of brands and brand image. Recently, sophisticated and forward-looking marketers and research agencies have moved into brand relationship domains incorporating relationship-based ideas such as trust and bonds with a brand into brand management and measurement.

Yet, what is missing in both the research and practical approaches, is a comprehensive model that includes

perceptual/cognitive and relationship variables at the same time and shows how these variables are interrelated and contribute to the ultimate goal of brands – to produce strong current and future purchases. Unfortunately, there has not been much interaction between the two perspectives and no attempt to bring the two perspectives together. In fact, the perceptual and brand relationship perspectives are guided by two different research paradigms. While brand knowledge is typically conceptualized and tested using experiments and empirical modeling, the brand relationship perspective has been guided by an interpretative paradigm, combining sociological, anthropological and cultural theory with qualitative data collection.

In this paper, we provide a conceptual model that specifies how perceptual/cognitive and relationship variables are interrelated and how they jointly affect current and future purchase behavior. To do so, we focus on three sets of variables that we believe must be of concern for both researchers and practitioners: Brand knowledge variables that assess how customers perceive and evaluate brands; brand relationship variables that measure the bond between the consumer and the brand; and behavioral outcome variables that assess current and future consumer behavior. Next, we develop hypotheses about how brand knowledge and relationship concepts are empirically related and how they affect behavioral outcomes. We subsequently test our framework using an AMOS model.

Brand knowledge and purchase behavior

Different authors have presented different perceptual and cognitive factors that influence purchase. Aaker (1991), in his seminal book *Managing Brand Equity*, identified three key perceptual/cognitive variables: name awareness, brand associations, and perceived quality. All three are seen as key determinants of brand loyalty. Feldwick (1996) and Chernatony and McDonald (2003) have distinguished six types of brand attributes:

1 awareness;
2 image;
3 perceived quality;
4 perceived value;
5 personality; and
6 organizational associations.

Aaker (1997) distinguished five dimensions of brand personality, viewed as traits associated with the brand:

1 sincerity;
2 excitement;
3 competence;
4 sophistication; and
5 ruggedness.

One of the most widely used, and, in our view, most parsimonious, models today is Keller's (1993, 2003) customer-based brand equity model. Keller (1993, p. 2) conceptualizes customer-based brand equity as "the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand". Customer-based equity occurs when the consumer is aware and familiar with the brand and holds positive associations about the brand in memory. That is, there are two distinct types of brand knowledge: brand awareness and image. These two dimensions of brand knowledge have been generally confirmed in prior marketing research (Agarwal and Rao, 1996; Mackay, 2001; Pappu *et al.*, 2005).

Brand awareness refers to the strength of the brand node in memory, i.e. how easy it is for the consumer to remember the brand (Keller, 1993). Brand recall is the most common way to measure brand awareness. In a study including various brand knowledge and behavioral variables, using one product category, "candy bars," Agarwal and Rao (1996) found support for a two factor solution: one factor clearly represented unaided recall. Brand image refers to strong, favorable and unique brand associations in memory (Keller, 2003), which result in perceived quality, a positive attitude and overall positive affect. Indeed, many of the brand factors identified as different aspects of brand equity by other authors (such as perceived quality, personality and organizational associations) may be viewed as belonging to the overall category of brand image and its immediate effects.

According to Keller (1993), brand awareness is a necessary condition for the creation of a brand image. When a brand is well established in memory, it is easier to attach associations to the brand and establish them firmly in memory. As Schuiling and Kapferer (2004) showed that awareness is indeed significantly correlated with many valuable image dimensions. Thus we predict:

H1. Brand awareness has a positive effect on brand image.

Moreover, perceptual and cognitive models assume that brand knowledge (i.e. brand awareness and image) affects consumer response to the brand, defined as perceptions, preferences and, most important, behavior arising from marketing mix activity. To assess this brand impact, we propose to distinguish two dimensions of consumer behavior: current behavior and intended future behavior. Current behavior can refer to the purchase of the brand as well as its usage; future behavior refers to intentions to purchase the brand in the future. Following the customer-based brand equity model, we predict that brand knowledge (awareness and image) affects current purchase and usage of brands.

H2. Brand awareness has a positive effect on current purchase.

H3. Brand image has a positive effect on current purchase.

Moreover, it has been argued that brand equity does not have only immediate value but also long-term value by guaranteeing future revenue streams (Aaker, 1991; 1996). Therefore, we expect brand knowledge (awareness and image) to affect intended future behavior as well.

H4. Brand awareness has a positive effect on future purchase.

H5. Brand image has a positive effect on future purchase.

Brand relationships and purchase behavior

Research on brand relationships offers a different perspective: brands affect consumers not only because of the knowledge systems that consumers carry about brands in their heads; they are also part of a psycho-social-cultural context (Fournier, 1998). Consumers therefore engage in certain types of relationships with brands, similar to personal and intimate relations they form with other people. Brand relationships may be the result of imagination or actual participation in brand communities, so-called "subcultures of consumption" (Fournier, 1998; Fournier and Yao, 1997;

McAlexander *et al.*, 2002; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). The relationship process can generate cognitive benefits as well as positive affect and emotions that result in a bond between the brand and the consumer (Fournier, 1998).

What are the key concepts of brand relationships that can be used as empirical variables in our model? In the brand relationship literature, we do not find easily clearly defined and operationalized constructs, similar to brand awareness and image. Research on brand relationships is usually conducted using interpretive frameworks and qualitative methodologies that offer the depth of individual case study insight rather than standardized concepts and measurement scales. For example, Fournier (1998) has categorized 15 different brand relationship forms based on in-depth interviews of three women: committed partnership, marriage of convenience, arranged marriage, casual friendship, close friendship, compartmentalized friendship, kinship, rebound relationship, childhood friendship, courtship, dependency, fling, adversarial relationships, and enslavement.

It is difficult to construct reliable and valid measures of all 15 brand relationships. A more manageable framework has been provided in social psychological research where a distinction has been drawn between two different types of relationships, exchange and communal relationship (Clark, 1984; Clark and Mills, 1979; Clark *et al.*, 1986).

This distinction has been applied as well in recent studies in consumer behavior (Aggarwal, 2004). In fact, most of Fournier's 15 brand relationships may be viewed as specific subcategories of exchange and communal relationships. In commercial settings, and in close relationships over time, it is useful to view these relationships not necessarily as mutually exclusive, but rather as different aspects or facets of one overall relationship, i.e. as the exchange aspects of a relationship and the communal aspects of a relationship.

Exchange aspects of a personal relationship involve economic factors and offer primarily utilitarian benefits. Exchange relationships are quid-pro-quo: people are concerned with how much they receive for what they give. If a comparable reward is not forthcoming, a person is less likely to be responsive to the person. The primary positive outcome of an exchange relationship is satisfaction. Hence, in a commercial context, brand satisfaction may be defined as a cognitive evaluation of whether or not the exchange relationship with the brand is rewarding.

In contrast, communal aspects of a relationship involve feelings about other people; they transcend self-interest. Trust is an essential outcome of such relationships. In prior research, it has been shown to be the cornerstone of close relationships, both in psychology and marketing (Delgado-Ballester, 2004; Garbarino and Johnson, 1999; Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Brand trust is affect-based, referring to a feeling that is the outcome of a communal relationship with a brand. In our model, we thus include brand satisfaction and brand trust to represent cognitive and affective outcomes of the two types of relationships.

Since relationships are, by definition, interactions over time, the essence of a relationship is some kind of interdependence between the entities involved. We therefore include an additional construct that signifies this interdependence: brand attachment (Thomson *et al.*, 2005). We view brand attachment as a longer-lasting, commitment-inducing bond between the brand and the consumer. In the social developmental literature in psychology, attachment refers to a bond between a person and a specific object.

Attachment relations are formed first early in childhood (between a child and his or her mother). The formation process continues throughout lifetime: people form attachments to friends, pets, places, and celebrities. Attachment is detected in early years when a child shows separation anxiety and distress as soon as a parent or significant other is no longer present. Similarly, attachment to objects can result in a feeling of regret and sorrow when the object is no longer present or available.

What empirical relations do we expect among the three different relationship constructs – brand satisfaction, brand trust and brand attachment – and how are they related to brand awareness and brand image? Beginning with the latter issue, we expect brand awareness and brand image to be antecedents to brand satisfaction and brand trust. That is, both brand satisfaction and brand trust require brand knowledge; unless a consumer has a representation of the brand in memory – including awareness and a positive image – he or she cannot be satisfied by the brand or trust the brand.

H6. Brand awareness has a positive effect on brand satisfaction.

H7. Brand awareness has a positive effect on brand trust.

H8. Brand image has a positive effect on brand satisfaction.

H9. Brand image has a positive effect on brand trust.

Moreover, regarding the relationship among the relationship constructs, we expect brand satisfaction and brand trust to be the result of exchange and communal relationships and consider brand attachment as a reflection of the brand relationship over time. Thus, while we hypothesize no significant relation between brand satisfaction and brand trust, we expect brand satisfaction and brand trust to result in brand attachment. That is, only if a brand results in satisfaction and is trusted by the consumer, will there be the development of attachment.

H10. Brand satisfaction has a positive effect on brand attachment.

H11. Brand trust has a positive effect on brand attachment.

Finally, we expect the ultimate, long-term outcome of brand relationships – namely brand attachment – to be a determinant of both current purchase behavior and future purchase intention. As psychological research has shown, attachment results in approach behavior and a desire to be with the person one is attached to, both now and in the future. In the context of brands, it has been shown that a commitment to a brand saves a customer the cost of seeking new relations with other brands (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001).

Moreover, brand attachment, i.e. bonds, connections and identifications with the brand strongly predict how often the brand was purchased in the past and will be purchased in the future (McAlexander *et al.*, 2003; Thomson *et al.*, 2005). Thus, we predict:

H12. Brand attachment has a positive effect on current purchase.

H13. Brand attachment has a positive effect on future purchase.

Our final prediction concerns the relationship between our two key endogenous variables: current purchases and future purchases. We expect current purchases to affect future purchase intention (see Figure 1).

H14. Current purchase has a positive effect on future purchase.

Figure 1 Conceptual model
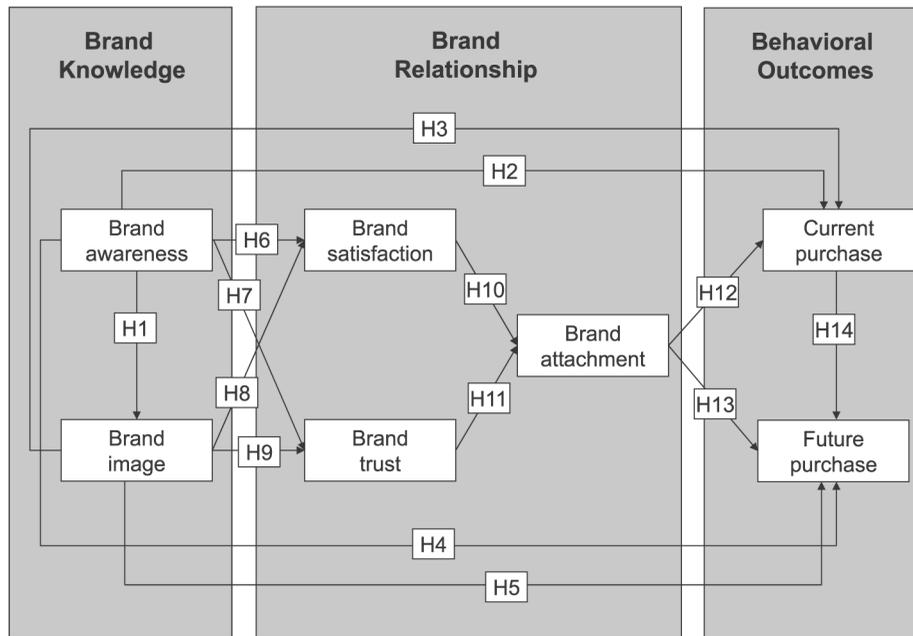
Method

A total of 400 business students from a large European university (with an equal number of males and females) participated in the study. Because of missing data, 45 questionnaires had to be excluded from further analysis.

The product-category focus of the study was consumer products. To represent both relatively high and low involvement products in the consumer product category, we selected two categories that had low and high ratings on a product category importance scale and were significantly different from each other ($p < 0.05$): athletic shoes and chocolates ($M = 3.62$ vs 2.72). We then conducted a pretest ($n = 40$) to determine the brand strength of several brands in these two categories. The pretest was conducted to select strong and weak brands within each category. Brand strength was operationalized by number and uniqueness of associations. As a result of the pretests, four brands were selected for the main study: Milka as a strong chocolate brand and Alpia as a weak one; Adidas as a strong athletic shoe brand and Fila as a weak one. In comparison to Alpia and Fila, Milka and Adidas had significantly more associations (151 and 193 vs 238 and 234, respectively) and more unique associations (60 and 71 vs 105 and 110, respectively), all ps < 0.05.

Participants received a paper-and-pencil questionnaire that contained the relevant scales. In an introductory part, participants were informed about the nature of the study, a research study on the perception and responses toward various brands. At the end of the questionnaire, demographic information was collected.

Brand knowledge measures

Brand awareness was measured by unaided recall (Rossiter and Bellman, 2005). Participants were asked the open-ended question "Which brands do you know in the product category of X". Only the responses of participants that could recall the pre-selected brands were included in subsequent analyses. The position of the brand on the recalled list was coded on a ten-point scale (10 for the first brand in the category, 9 for the second brand etc). Brand image included three measures: overall attitude towards the brand, the perceived quality of the brand and the brand's overall affect, each on a five point scale (Low and Lamb, 2000).

Brand relationship measures

Brand trust was measured on two five-point scales with the items "I rely on the brand" and "I trust the brand" ($1 = $ I disagree, $5 = $ I agree). Brand satisfaction was measured, following Mittal and Kamakura (2001) and Bloemer and Lemmink (1992) on a single five point scale, with the question "Based on your own experience how would you rate your satisfaction with this brand?" ($1 = $ very dissatisfied, $5 = $ very satisfied). Brand attachment was operationalized via the item "I feel strongly connected to the brand" and via another item focusing on the separation anxiety aspect of attachment "I would strongly regret it if the brand was withdrawn from the market" ($1 = $ disagree, $5 = $ fully agree).

Behavioral outcome measures

Current purchase was measured by two items focusing on current purchase and usage patterns: "How often have you bought the brand in the past?" ($1 = $ not at all, $5 = $ very frequently) and "How often do you consume/use the brand" ($1 = $ not at all, $5 = $ very frequently). Future intended purchase was measured by "Do you intend to buy the brand in the future?" ($1 = $ not at all; $5 = $ very likely).

Results

Structural equation modeling (AMOS 5.0) was used to test the model and hypothesis shown in Figure 2. The model was

Figure 2 Estimated model (standardized estimates)

** = p < 0.01; *** = p < 0.001
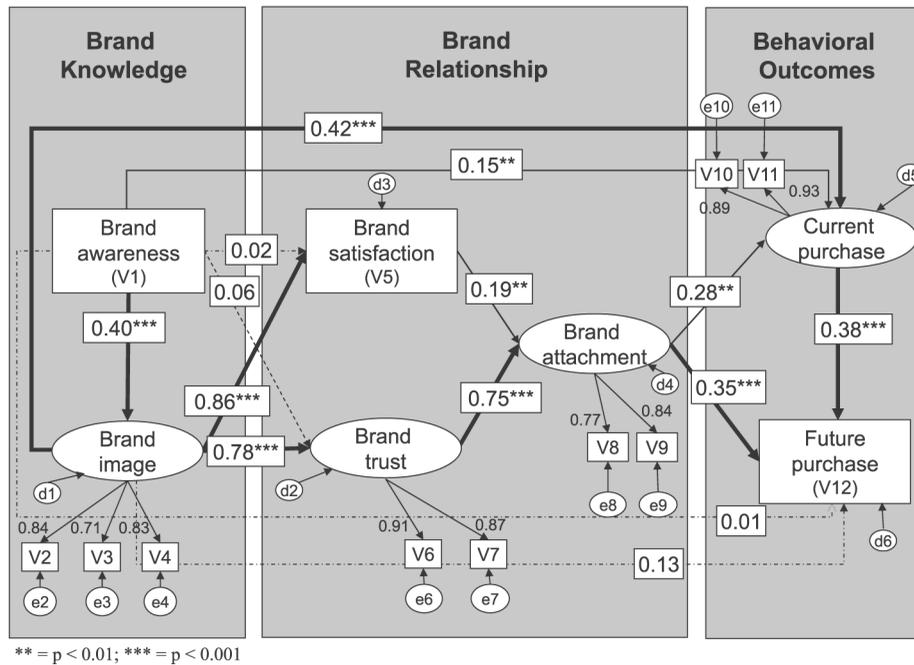
estimated using the maximum likelihood method. A total of 14 structural paths were estimated for the model containing the seven constructs (see Table I). The model's estimation resulted in the following fit statistics: RMR = 0.053, RMSEA = 0.056; GFI = 0.960; NFI = 0.969; CFI = 0.984; BIC = 294.040 (BIC$_{saturatedmodel}$ = 456.247); CAIC = 329.040 (CAIC$_{saturatedmodel}$ = 534.247). These fit statistics indicate a good fit of the model with the data.

Standardized path coefficients for the model are depicted in Table II. Four of the tested paths (brand awareness → future purchase; brand image → future purchase; brand awareness → brand satisfaction, brand awareness → brand trust) were not statistically significant (p > 0.10). Hence, H4, H5, H6, and H7 were not confirmed. That is, the two brand knowledge dimensions, brand awareness and brand image, did not affect future purchases directly. Moreover, brand awareness did not significantly affect brand satisfaction and brand trust.

All other paths were statistically highly significant (p < 0.01). Furthermore, all these paths met the proposed causal directions. Thus, H1, H2, H3, and H8 through 14 were fully confirmed. The model explains 53 per cent of the variance in current purchase and 59 per cent of the variance in future purchase.

As Figure 2 shows, brand image plays a central role in the model. A consideration of the standardized total effect shows that brand image has a total effect of 0.63 on current purchase and 0.62 on future purchase. Of these total effects, the majority is direct (0.42) for current purchases, yet indirect via the relationship path for future purchases (0.50). In comparison, the standardized total effect of awareness on current purchase is 0.41 and future purchase is 0.34; in both cases indirect effects are larger than direct effects. Relationship variables are thus critical for predicting future purchase as well as current purchases. A central relationship construct in the model is brand attachment, with a total standardized effect on future purchases of 0.45.

Table I Covariance matrix

	V1	V5	V12	V11	V10	V8	V9	V6	V7	V4	V3	V2
V1	12,568											
V5	1,315	1,009										
V12	1,566	767	1,611									
V11	1,525	699	954	1,349								
V10	1,862	757	1,048	1,275	1,771							
V8	1,153	649	817	731	693	1,342						
V9	1,683	838	1,091	839	947	1,017	1,953					
V6	1,457	775	818	711	700	895	1,164	1,457				
V7	1,309	750	831	671	712	797	1,052	1,152	1,444			
V4	1,306	750	781	728	769	695	873	755	752	1,108		
V3	1,071	577	556	445	543	488	577	568	597	545	865	
V2	1,122	758	719	605	658	644	762	712	723	773	604	1,085

Table II Standardized path coefficients

Hypothesis				Standardized coefficient	Significance level
H1	Brand awareness	→	brand image	0.40	*p* < 0.001
H2	Brand awareness	→	current purchase	0.15	*p* < 0.01
H3	Brand image	→	current purchase	0.42	*p* < 0.001
H4	Brand awareness	→	future purchase	0.01	*p* = 0.753
H5	Brand image	→	future purchase	0.13	*p* = 0.112
H6	Brand awareness	→	brand satisfaction	0.02	*p* = 0.543
H7	Brand awareness	→	brand trust	0.06	*p* = 0.174
H8	Brand image	→	brand satisfaction	0.86	*p* < 0.001
H9	Brand image	→	brand trust	0.78	*p* < 0.001
H10	Brand satisfaction	→	brand attachment	0.19	*p* < 0.01
H11	Brand trust	→	brand attachment	0.75	*p* < 0.001
H12	Brand attachment	→	current purchase	0.28	*p* < 0.01
H13	Brand attachment	→	future purchase	0.35	*p* < 0.001
H14	Current purchase	→	future purchase	0.38	*p* < 0.001

Conclusion

The purpose of the current research was to provide a comprehensive model that combines the brand knowledge and brand relationship perspectives and shows how brand knowledge and relationships influences consumer behavior. Our findings confirmed our prediction that brand awareness affects brand image and that both aspect of brand knowledge are direct determinants of current consumer purchase behavior. Brand image, in particular, exercises a strong direct influence on current brand-loyal purchase behavior. However, contrary to our predictions, brand knowledge does not affect future intended purchase directly. As our results indicate, to secure future purchases, a familiar brand with a positive image must build a positive brand relationship with the consumer. The different facets of that relation include cognitive and affective components – brand satisfaction and brand trust – that culminate in brand attachment, which is a key antecedent of current and future purchases.

The present model did not include feedback effects among the variables. Rather we presented a model that in a one-direction linear fashion proceeds from brand knowledge to relationships to behavioral outcomes. It is quite possible that some variables also influence preceding variables. In particular, there may be feedback effects from the behavioral outcome variables to brand relationships and from relationships to brand image. For example, the mere fact that a consumer purchases a product on a regular basis (perhaps out of habit) may at times result in brand attachment and in turn positively influence the brand image, via the so-called "mere exposure" effect (Zajonc, 1968).

There are several limitations that need to be addressed in future research. First, while our research employed a relatively small number of simple scale items that can easily be used by practitioners, future research should test subcomponents of the model using more scale items and perhaps additional constructs. For example, in recent research brand attachment has been split into three sub-constructs and scales – connection, affection, and passion (Thomson *et al.*, 2005). Also, the measurement of brand knowledge may be enriched by extending the Keller (1993) framework to include brand personality as an additional customer-based brand equity construct, as has been done in recent research (Pappu *et al.*,

2005). Second, we have tested our model with four brands in two consumer categories (chocolate and athletic shoes). Future research should test our model on additional consumer goods categories (e.g. luxury goods) and also in B2B markets. For luxury goods, brand knowledge, and in particular brand image, may exhibit the direct effect on future purchase that we failed to find in the present study. In B2B markets interpersonal relations are more important than in B2C markets and therefore brand relationship factors may be even more pronounced than in the present study, resulting perhaps in indirect relations only between brand knowledge and current and future purchases. Finally, we did not consider individual differences such as variety seeking or consumer innovativeness that may change some of the relationships observed in the present study. For example, consumers high in variety seeking or innovativeness may be less affected in their current purchases by brand attachment than those low in variety seeking or innovativeness.

Managerial implications

In brand management practice, brand image and brand awareness are considered the central brand variables for assuring the effectiveness of marketing campaigns. However, our results show that it is not sufficient to focus only on these two variables – especially when brands are supposed to last forever. For long-term brand success, brand relationship variables such as brand trust, brand satisfaction and brand attachment play an important role in buying behavior. Therefore, brand managers are well advised to use measures of brand relationships in addition to brand knowledge measures. They should also develop strategic and tactical initiatives that ensure that consumers are satisfied with the brand, trust it and feel attached to it. This may require that managers employ not only standard marketing mix and communication techniques but also experiential marketing techniques, which result in increased interactions and emotional connections between the customer and the brand (Schmitt, 1999).

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Executive summary

This executive summary has been provided to allow managers and executives a rapid appreciation of the content of this article. Those with a particular interest in the topic covered may then read the article in toto *to take advantage of the more comprehensive description of the research undertaken and its results to get the full benefit of the material present.*

Longevity requires more than a focus on brand image and awareness

Just what does constitute successful brand management? What needs to be concentrated on to ensure lasting success?

For brand managers, focusing on brand image and awareness is usually seen as central to the success of marketing campaigns. However, as Esch, Langner, Schmitt and Geus have identified from their research and experiences, this is simply not enough. For long-term brand success relationships are the key. In branding terms this means fostering brand trust, brand satisfaction and brand

attachment among customers and target groups. It is not a quick fix, but it is a way to the creation of lasting value. Brand building has never been about the short-term, always about a longer view and generating revenue over the long-term.

Brand managers need to think about the relationships they have with people. They are rarely easy, but often ultimately rewarding. People are people. They do not change who they are when given the label "consumer".

To be truly successful marketers must now move beyond the standard notions of the marketing mix and become obsessed with developing initiatives, both strategic and tactical, that ensure customer satisfaction with the brand, reinforce their trust in it, and foster a sense of meaningful emotional attachment. Customer relationship management has grown up and come of age. But what, in practical terms, needs to be considered?

Brand attributes and personality

The literature on brand management has grown in proportion to its increasingly significant profile in organizational success. Two helpful contributions are from Chernatony and McDonald who identified six types of brand attributes, and from Aaaker who distinguished five dimensions of brand personality.

Chernatony and McDonald's six brand attributes are:

1 awareness;
2 image;
3 perceived quality;
4 perceived value;
5 personality; and
6 organizational associations.

Brands awareness and brand image are part of the picture, yet they provide merely a visible tip to a much deeper iceberg. Aaaker's notions of brand personality go deeper still and break down into:

- sincerity;
- excitement;
- competence;
- sophistication; and
- ruggedness.

A glance at the above highlights the false simplicity of current approaches. These various categories are helpful in identifying just how limited most current approaches to brand development can be, and the range of other areas that need to be explored if truly successful brands are to be maintained. Clearly a more multifaceted approach needs to be developed. However, for forward thinking marketers the rewards are there to be taken for such smart endeavour.

Understanding brand relationships

So much current assessment of brand performance takes a simplistic view, and misses the depth of response that there can be from customers towards brands. It is not dissimilar to personal relationships, and just as between people, can be both imaginary and as a result of active participation. Still waters do indeed run deep.

It is a different, but potentially very rewarding way to look at brands, and raises the following considerations:

- Exchange aspects of relationships involve give and as well as take and people tend to feel satisfied when there is a sense of fair exchange. So too with brands where customers evaluate whether the relationship with the brand brings fair rewards.
- Communal aspects of relationships are about having trust in each other. It takes time and must be worked at, for people as for brands.
- Interdependence is a cornerstone of successful relationships. The work when we need each other. Brand attachment is the consideration that emerges from this interrelationship.

Selfish partners can wreck a relationship. Affairs and one-night stands can cause breakdowns in trust that are never rebuilt. And if partners feel they no longer need each other then it is game over.

Yet the corporate world is littered with devastating stories of corporations playing fast and loose with the emotions of their loyal customer base. It can be sudden price hikes, ill-conceived and poor quality brand extensions, or making customers feel unwanted through shoddy customer service.

Embracing the opportunity

Brand awareness is important, but a limited measure of success. A robust brand image will only be created and maintained if it reflects the reality of all of the customer's emotions. Brand satisfaction and brand trust lead directly to brand attachment, and there lies the opportunity.

Customer lifetime value and the interrelated interest in customer relationship management are driving marketing today. New thinking is being aided by new technology in bringing companies closer to their mass base of consumers than ever before. In business-to-business (B2B) markets, relationships have always been key. B2B enterprises have tended to invest heavily in sales forces and people able to negotiate the labyrinth of complex decision making units. Successful sales people have always been relationship builders – networking thinking stemmed from this simple fact. In building these relationships they seek to be seen as fair, trustworthy and helpful. These are good old-fashioned values that just happen to be the key to the modern age.

Business-to-consumer (B2C) marketing is embracing the relationship message to its heart. Relationships are not forged instantly, but they do provide the basis for a rich experience of life. It is both catch-up and cutting edge. Brand managers are used to looking to the long term and having to fend off corporate financial short-termist arguments.

Here is the challenge. Reject any initiatives that have even a slight scent of rip off. Reject anything that could be considered a breach of consumer trust. Recognize your interdependence with your customers. Do the right thing consistently. The groundwork is then in place for customer retention, repeat purchasing and referral business to soar.

Look beyond measures of brand awareness and brand image. These dimensions are necessary but also insufficient measures of the success of brand marketing campaigns.

(A précis of the article "Are brands forever? How brand knowledge and relationships affect current and future purchases". Supplied by Marketing Consultants for Emerald.)