The affective aspects of the relationship with the store brand: for an integration of store's attributes

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Abstract:

The store brand represents, for the stores, an element of their identity that is explicitly communicated to consumers by the name and logo on the packaging of their products. While studies based on the concept of brand extension confirm the existence of cognitive transfers, there are no studies that have looked at the affective transfers that can exist between these two entities. However, that is an important element in the development of store equity. This empirical research aims to better identify the affective transfers between the store and its brand. To test our model, we have used a structural-equation model using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) regression technique. The results from 189 consumers put forward the attributes that are responsible for an affective relationship with the store and identify the existence of affectivetransfers between the store and its brand.

1. Introduction

A veritable representative for the stores, the store brand – private label which bears the name and logo of the store on its products - is fundamental for retailers. The store brands act as tools for increasing market share, higher margins and increased traffic in stores. They are also, for retailers, a positioning tool and therefore a means of differentiating themselves from their competitors. However, despite the store brand's importance and its increasing evolution, working on it is mainly limited to a cognitive approach (Diallo, 2013; Mathews & al., 2012). These studies do not allow us to understand the store brand as a whole, and drive to omit a part of their axes of differentiation and brand value creation. This leads us to complete the acquired knowledge related to the store brand by focusing more on its affective aspects that according to our knowledge, they have not much been studied in the literature. Since the store brand is narrowly linked to the store because of an identical logo, in our study, we seek to better assess, analyze, and understand the affective transfers from the store to the store brand. To perform this, we propose to study the components which can influence the consumer's affective relationship with the store.

2. Literature review and formulation of hypotheses

2.1 The affective aspects of the consumer-brand relationship

Previous researches suggest that relationship marketing is a means to improve customer loyalty (Xie & al., 2017). Rely on the seminal works of Fournier (1998), many studies have focused on the brand relationship quality as a multifaceted concept, including cognitive and affective aspects (Aaker & al., 2004; Chang & Chieng, 2006; Zhang & Bloemer, 2008). In recent times, some researchers distinguish the role of cognitive elements and the role of affective elements separately, which leads us to differentiate these two types of relationships (Pourazad & al., 2019; Robinot & al., 2021).

As our study deals with the affective aspects of the brand relationship, it seemed to us convenient to concentrate more on the affective part of this model, especially since it appears to have a powerful impact on the decrease of the propensity to leave the relationship (Smit & al., 2007) and attitudinal brand loyalty (Francisco-Maffezzolli & al., 2014).

Nyffenegger & al., (2015) define the affective relationship as « *the strength and intensity of a consumer's personal connection and closeness with a brand based on the positive feelings the consumer develops for that brand* » (Nyffenegger & al, 2015, p.91). Based on the triangular theory of love, (Sternberg, 1986), Nyffenegger & al., (2015) consider three main components

corresponding to this relationship that are passion, intimacy, and commitment. *Passion* – refers to an intense state of infatuation (Feybesse & Hatfield, 2019), which means the feelings of consumers' wants and desires to use a brand (Batra & al., 2012). *Intimacy* – describes feelings of emotional closeness and connection of a consumer toward a brand (Sternberg, 1986). *Commitment* – refers to the willingness of the consumer to uphold a relationship with the brand through good moments, but also bad ones (Fullerton, 2005).

2.2 The consumer's affective relationship with the store

Zentes & al., (2008), define the store as a set of points of sale owned by the same retailer and grouped under the same name, symbol, logo, or a combination of these elements. The store cannot only offer cognitive experiences such as the acquisition of knowledge and information, but like any brand, it is delicate to maintain with the consumer a relationship more affective (Iglesias & al., 2019; Prentice & al., 2019), especially through the in-store experience. This affective relationship is thereby the result of an external marketing process (communication the the corporate image to customers) and an interactive process (interaction between the point of sale and the customers creating the service experience) (Calonius, 1986) that we present the following.

Part of the store's image communication is going to encourage the development of intangible and abstract associations: feelings, personality, benchmark consumers and commitments. In terms of institutional communication, Sen (2007), has suggested that a company's corporate social responsibility (CSR) actions can help a consumer establish affective and heavy links with a company. The above associations are feasible to influence positively consumers' levels of love and attachment toward the store (Vlachos & Vrechopoulos, 2012). For this reason, in our first study, we have chosen to mobilize CSR. We as well highlighted that CSR can positively impact the affective relationship with the store, conceptualized in our study by passion (H1a), intimacy (H1b), and commitment (H1c).

The results of interactive marketing activities refer to the experiential context of the store (store experience) in which everything in the store has an impact on the consumer's environment. They contain design cues (visual characteristics of a store that can be functional: organization of merchandise or aesthetic organization: decoration, architecture), social cues (staff in contact), ambient cues (smell, music, lighting), and merchandise cues (product selection, quality, and supply). The literature also points out that the experiential context can elicit feelings and emotions from the consumer such as love (Prentice & al., 2019; Sarkar & al., 2019) or an emotional attachment (affection, passion, connection) to the store

(Badrinarayanan & Becerra, 2019; Hemsley-Brown & Alnawas, 2016). Indeed, an agreeable experiential context decreases the pressure and stimulates positive feelings and emotions of consumers toward the store (Jani & Han, 2015). Whereof, we can assume that design cues (H2a,b,c), social cues (H3a,b,c), merchandise cues (H4a,b,c), and ambient cues (H5a,b,c) positively influence passion, intimacy, and commitment.

Thus, the store seems to be able to develop an affective relationship with the consumer, in particular through the experiential context in the store, or through institutional and store communication such as CSR. Store shares a common name and logo with the store brand (Jara, 2021) and common image elements, these two links are supposed to lead to making different affective associations that we propose to study due to the work on brand extension.

2.3 Affective transfers from the store to the store brand.

While most researchers have studied cognitive transfers (attitude, belief) between the store and the products of the store brand (Dimitriadis, 1993), to the best of our knowledge, there is no study of the potential affective link between these entities. Yet, the literature agrees on the existence of affective transfers in the case of brand extensions (Fedorikhin & al., 2008). These transfers describe the process by which individuals' pre-existing affect toward a brand (parent brand) can transfer to a closely related brand/product (extension) (Shimp, 1981). Cognitive and affective associations form, within the semantic network that is the brand image, so many nodes of information that are connected to the main node that constitutes the brand image (Keller & Swaminathan, 2019). When a new stimulus triggers recall, the activation of the memory node can spread to connected nodes (Anderson, 1983). Considering the existence of affective transfers in the case of brand extension and considering the store brand's products as an extension of its store enjoying a strong fit with it, it seems interesting to transpose this concept to the store/store brand relationship. It is expected that the affective relationship with the store (parent brand) will transfer to the products of the store brand (extension). This relationship is conceptualized in our study by passion, intimacy, and commitment (H6a,b,c).

Individuals with previous knowledge about some products tend to perceive and analyze congruencies or incongruencies between brand extensions and parent brands much more readily than individuals with no previous product knowledge (Peracchio & Tybout, 1996). It is expected that consumers with a high level of knowledge about store brand products will be more influenced by affective transfers between the store and products of the store brand. Thus, we postulate that knowledge of the store brand's products moderates the affective brand/store brand relationship of passion (H7a), intimacy (H7b), and commitment (H7c).

2.4 *Affective relationship with the store brand and loyalty intention*

Loyalty is a key factor in gaining market shares (Han et al., 2018) and developing a sustainable competitive advantage (Song et al., 2019). It has also been noted that consumers with affection for a brand are more willing to be loyal to that same brand (Jang, 2021). Therefore, while considering that the consumer may have an affective relationship with the store brand, it is postulated that has a positive impact on the intention of loyalty to the store brand (H8).

3. Research Methodology

The survey data were collected using an online administrated questionnaire in a convenience sample. Respondents were asked to name a food store they liked. They were then asked to think of some products that have the name of that store on their packaging. Respondents were then interrogated to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with a series of statements about this store and the products of this store brand. The socio-demographic characteristics of the sample of 189 respondents revealed that 52% were female. The majority of them live in a city (44%), have a Bac +5 (42%), and have an average age of 34.

Before carrying out our analysis, we cleaned the data by removing observations with extreme values. By using a boxplot, 55 observations were removed from the 244 obtained questionnaires. We also performed a Principal Component Analysis (PCA) to purify the constructs. For the analysis of the data, we proceeded in two steps. After ensuring the reliability and validity of the measurement scales, we used a structural equation model to test the hypothesized relationships presented in the model. These analyses were performed using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) regression technique using SmartPLS4 software. This method was selected because it allows us to treat variables that do not follow a normal distribution with small sample sizes, for complex models accounting for both formative and reflective constructs (Tritah & Daoud, 2021).

Our conceptual model is composed of both formative and reflective constructs. This distinction is fundamental to the analysis since it implies different procedures for validating the measures. Regarding the formative constructs, we observed the factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The results obtained in table 1 enable us to confirm the reliability and convergent validity of the instruments of measurement.

Table 1: Factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, CR and AVE

Constructs		Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
Store commitment	SCOM1	0,899			
	SCOM2	0,960	0,914	0,925	0,852
	SCOM3	0,909			
Store Intimacy	SINT1	0,921	0,835	0,838	0,859
	SINT2	0,932			
Store Passion	SPASS1	0,906	0,805	0,811	0,837
	SPASS2	0,924			
Store Brand Commitment	SBCOM1	0,939			
	SBCOM2	0,945	0,933	0,934	0,882
	SBCOM3	0,933			
Store Brand Intimacy	SBINT1	0,956	0,906	0,906	0,914
	SBINT2	0,956			
Store Brand Passion	SBPASS1	0,964	0,916	0,922	0,923
	SBPASS2	0,957			
Store Brand Loyalty	SBLOY1	0,877			
	SBLOY2	0,889	0,869	0,883	0,791
	SBLOY3	0,902			
Knowledge of the store brand's products	KNOWSB1	0,828			
	KNOWSB2	0,917	0,842	0,853	0,760
	KNOWSB3	0,868			

Table 2: Discriminant valididy – Fornell-Larcker criterion

Variables	SCOM	SBCOM	KNOWSB	SBLOY	SINT	SBINT	SPASS	SBPASS
SCOM	0.923							
SBCOM	0.644	0.939						
KNOWSB	0.374	0.663	0.872					
SBLOY	0.480	0.725	0.634	0.889				
SINT	0.664	0.566	0.371	0.466	0.937			
SBINT	0.490	0.806	0.593	0.691	0.499	0.956		
SPASS	0.531	0.487	0.345	0.351	0.671	0.447	0.915	
SBPASS	0.431	0.744	0.565	0.615	0.420	0.768	0.502	0.961

Discriminant validity was tested using the criterion proposed by (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). For this purpose, we have compared the square root of the AVE related to each latent variable with the correlations of these variables with the other latent variables in the model (Chin, 2010). The results (Table 2) show that the square root of the AVE is greater than the estimated correlation between factors for all cases. In the case of the formative constructs, the absence of collinearity was verified by the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). The results we got, confirm a lack of collinearity since the values for each dimension of the formative constructs are below 5 (Table 3).

Table 3: Collinearity Statistics

	AMB1	AMB2	AMB3	AMB4	CONC1	CONC2	CONC3	MSES1
VIF	1,413	1,450	1,526	1,366	1,767	1,861	2,298	1,709

	MSES2	MSES3	SOC1	SOC2	SOC3	RSE1	RSE2	
VIF	1,902	1,578	1,304	2,757	2,479	1,344	1,344	

4. Results

Following the criteria of (Ringle et al., 2015), the *bootstrap method* was used with 5000 subsamples to ensure the stability of the results. This procedure has allowed us to evaluate the relationships proposed in this research and obtain the R^2 results. According to Chin (1998), R^2 values above 0.67 indicate high explanatory power, between 0.33 and 0.67 moderate, and between 0.19 and 0.33 low. The results of the conceptual model are summarized in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Results of the Conceptual Model

Note: N=189;*P<.05,**P<.01,***P<.001.
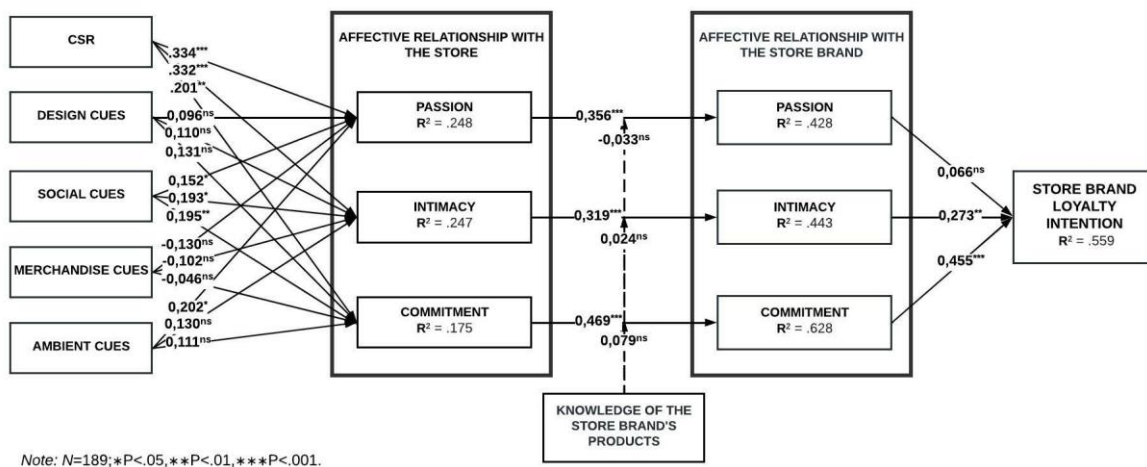
5. Discussion

The results of our study have permitted us to verify some propositions put forward in the literature regarding the affective relationship existing between the store and the consumer. It appears that CSR has a positive impact on the consumer's affective relationship with the store, which is consistent with the results observed in previous literature (Vlachos & Vrechopoulos 2012). According to the literature, it also appears, in our case, that social cues have a positive impact on the affective relationship to the store (Kumar & Kim, 2014). In addition, although ambient and design cues can provoke an affective relationship with the store, only ambient cues were found to have an impact on the relationship. Considering (Bettman, 1979) study that consumers exercise different levels of concentration when responding to multiple external stimuli, it can be hypothesized that consumers' attention to design cues may have been attenuated due to their stronger orientations to ambient cues. Then, in reverse to hypotheses in the literature, merchandise cues do not affect the affective relationship to the store. It seems that these cues can be factors that generate customer dissatisfaction in case of lack of the quality

of the products in particular, but do not necessarily create affect on customers, who already expect a high level of quality from the products presented in the stores (Walsh et al., 2011).

Over and above that, we were also able to identify affective synergies between the store and the store brand, which had not been studied in the literature. Note that knowledge of the store brand's products does not impact the passion, intimacy, and commitment dimensions of the affective relationship between the two entities.

Finally, we can note that passion for the store brand has no repercussions on loyalty to the store brand, unlike intimacy and commitment. This can be explained by the fact that a consumer can be passionate about several brands without necessarily being loyal to all of them, unlike intimacy and commitment, which refer to a certain sentimental closeness and a willingness to stay with a brand through good and bad moments (Fullerton, 2005; Lacoeuilhe, 2000; Sternberg, 1986).

6. Conclusion

Based on a quantitative study, this work has focused on identifying some of the elements that enable the consumer to develop an affective relationship with the store (CSR, ambient cues, and social cues). The absence of studies on the affective transfers between the store and the store brand, lets us provide information on the presence of affective transfers between these entities, resulting in a better understanding of the affective relationship consumer/store brand.

From a theoretical point of view, this study extends the field of work on the consumer-brand relationship, which until the present has been frequently devoted to national brands. Indeed, despite the tendency of retailers to seek to make the store brand a strong brand in its own right, on which they can capitalize, no studies have focused on its affective dimension conducting to overlook part of its potential differentiation axes. Our study also makes it possible to initiate an evolution of research on the brand extension by considering the store brand as an extension of the store. This point will be the subject of further specific studies.

From a managerial viewpoint, this study holds up the choice of distributors to select a store brand strategy. Indeed, if retailers are careful to a certain number of tangible (social and ambient cues) and intangible (CSR) components of the store to generate an affective relationship, this relationship can, by extension, be transferred to the store brand, which contributes to greater brand loyalty.

The first limitation of this study is that only one moderating effect was considered. Other moderators are likely to influence the affective transfers between the store and the store brand, such as the commerce type (integrated, independent, or discount) or likewise the degree of

affection of a consumer toward the store. Furthermore we do not control the type of store-brand products. However, it seems that functional products do not contribute, in the same way as experiential or symbolic products, to the development of an affective relationship between the consumer and this type of brand. These boundaries outline potential research directions for future and upcoming studies.

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