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Developing and validating measures of facets of customer-based brand equity

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Abstract

This article presents four studies that develop measures of "core/primary" facets of customer-based brand equity (CBBE). Drawing from various CBBE frameworks, the facets chosen are perceived quality (PQ), perceived value for the cost (PVC), uniqueness, and the willingness to pay a price premium for a brand. Using numerous advocated scale developmental procedures, the measures of these facets showed evidence of internal consistency and validity over 16 different brands in six product categories. Results also suggest that PQ, PVC, and brand uniqueness are potential direct antecedents of the willingness to pay a price premium for a brand, and that willingness to pay a price premium is a potential direct antecedent of brand purchase behavior.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, customer-based brand equity (CBBE) has garnered considerable attention. Several conceptualizations of CBBE exist, and these conceptualizations have offered valuable insight into the processes that consumers evaluate and choose brands within a given product category. However, many CBBE facets have not been systematically measured or validated within a nomological framework. The purpose of this research is to measure "core/primary" facets of CBBE and examine their relationships with related brand associations and brand response variables (i.e., a "nomological net"). As further validation of the CBBE measures, we examine their relationships with actual brand purchase behavior in three product categories.

This article will proceed as follows. We first briefly review conceptualizations of CBBE and offer our rationale for the facets we have chosen to measure. Two studies are used to derive and initially validate measures of the CBBE facets. Two more studies test their ability to predict brand choice behavior. Finally, a discussion with implications for future research is presented.

2. Core/primary facets and related brand associations

Though the terms "CBBE" and "brand equity" have been used interchangeably, the present research will focus on "CBBE." Two frameworks that encompass the facets espoused in most CBBE conceptualizations, are those of Aaker (1996a) and Keller (1993).[1] Aaker views CBBE as a

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[1] As noted by Keller (1998), the concept of "brand equity" has been defined and operationalized in disparate ways. These include brand equity as financial strength, the profit and sales margins due to a brand relative to comparable brands, and conceptualizations focusing on consumer perceptions. Keller offers a concise review of the various conceptualizations of brand equity, as well as their similarities and differences. In this research, we limit our focus to the more consumer perception-based frameworks of "CBBE."

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set of assets (liabilities) linked to a brand's name and symbol that adds to (or subtracts from) the value provided by a product/service to the customer. A consumer perceives brand equity as the "value added" to the product by associating it with a brand name. Though this "value added" is a function of several facets, the "core" facets are the primary predictors of brand purchase intent and behavior. Core CBBE facets espoused by Aaker include "perceived quality" (PQ), "perceived value for the cost" (PVC), "uniqueness," and the "willingness to pay a price premium" of a given brand.

Keller (1993, p. 2) views CBBE as "the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand." He also views CBBE as a process whereby CBBE occurs "when the consumer is familiar with the brand and holds some favorable, strong, and unique brand associations in memory" (Keller, 1993, p. 2). The favorable, strong, and unique associations are termed "primary" associations that include brand beliefs and attitudes encompassing the perceived benefits of a given brand (Keller, 1993). These beliefs and attitudes can be functional and experiential (i.e., PQ and value relative to other brands) or more symbolic (i.e., its "uniqueness"). As with Aaker's framework, it is the "primary" brand associations of PQ, PVC, uniqueness, and the willingness to pay a price premium that are the strongest predictors of purchase intent and purchase behavior in Keller's framework. As such, the focus of our research will be on those "core" or "primary" CBBE facets common to the Aaker, Keller, and other frameworks.

Given this article's focus on measuring and validating the core/primary CBBE facets, it is useful to delineate related brand associations and concepts. Fig. 1 shows a nomological network where the core/primary CBBE facets are the most salient predictors of the brand response variables of purchase intent and brand choice behavior (as indicated by the solid line). Also note that the willingness to pay a price premium is posited as key linkage between the other core/primary CBBE facets of PQ, PVC, and brand uniqueness and the brand response variables. Five related brand associations are also included in Fig. 1. Brand awareness, familiarity, popularity, organizational associations, and brand image consistency are brand associations that are viewed as related to the core/primary CBBE facets (as indicted by the curved line) in several brand equity frameworks (Aaker, 1996a; Blackston, 1995; Farquhar, 1989; Keller, 1993, 1998).

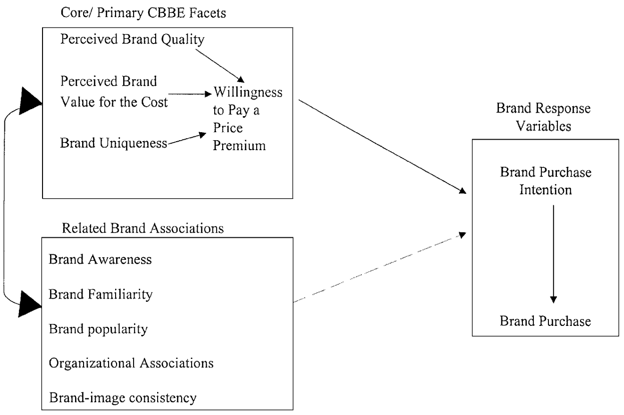

Fig. 1. Potential relationships with CBBE facets.

Consistent with these frameworks, brand awareness is viewed as the degree to which consumers automatically think of a brand when a given product category is mentioned (i.e., a top-of-the-mind awareness). Brand familiarity is viewed as the degree to which consumers are familiar with the brand name, and brand popularity reflects the degree to which consumers feel the brand is popular with and used by others. Organizational associations are those beliefs held by the consumer that the company that markets the brand is honest, trustworthy, and cares about its customers. Brand image consistency is viewed as the degree to which consumers feel the brand has a rich heritage/history and a consistent and positive image. Given that most of these brand associations will not be as predictive of the brand response variables as core/primary facets (as indicted by the dotted line in Fig. 1), we term them "related" brand associations. Still, these brand associations are important as they should be nomological correlates of the core/primary facets. As such, their relationships with the core/primary facets are examined in the studies that follow. We now offer the conceptual rationale for each of the core/primary facets.

2.1. Perceived quality

PQ is considered a "core/primary" facet across CBBE frameworks (Aaker, 1996b; Dyson et al., 1996; Farquhar, 1989; Keller, 1993). A definition that has gained some level of acceptance views PQ as the customer's judgment of the overall excellence, esteem, or superiority of a brand (with respect to its intended purposes) relative to alternative brand(s). PQ is at a higher level of abstraction than any specific attribute, and differs from objective quality as PQ is more akin to an attitudinal assessment of a brand—a global affective assessment of a brand's performance relative to other brands (Aaker, 1996b; Keller, 1993; Zeithaml, 1988). PQ is considered a core/primary CBBE construct because it has been associated with the willingness to pay a price premium, brand purchase intent, and brand choice. PQ may also be a surrogate for other elements of CBBE (i.e., PVC), and it is applicable across product classes (Aaker, 1996a; Keller, 1993, 1998).

Theories based in consumer memory, particularly the means–end chain model and expectancy value theory, offer useful frameworks for explaining how PQ judgments are formed. The means–end chain approach suggests that a consumer's cognitive structure holds brand-related information in memory at different levels of abstraction (Zeithaml, 1988). At the simpler levels are brand attributes suggesting "quality" benefits (i.e., functional/practical)

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