

Developing and validating a multidimensional consumer-based brand equity scale

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Abstract

Little systematic research has been done to develop a scale to measure consumer-based brand equity. The authors report the results of a multistep study to develop and validate a multidimensional consumer-based brand equity scale (MBE) drawn from Aaker's and Keller's conceptualizations of brand equity. A total of 1530 American, Korean American, and Korean participants evaluated 12 brands from three product categories (athletic shoes, film for cameras, and color television sets). Multistep psychometric tests demonstrate that the new brand equity scale is reliable, valid, parsimonious, and generalizable across several cultures and product categories. The authors discuss theoretical and practical implications of the study. © 2001 Elsevier Science Inc. All rights reserved.

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In the past decade, researchers have focused a tremendous amount of attention on the *brand equity* construct, which refers to the incremental utility or value added to a product by its brand name. Using a consumer-based behavioral view of brand equity, we define brand equity as consumers' different response between a focal brand and an unbranded product when both have the same level of marketing stimuli and product attributes. The difference in consumer response may be attributed to the brand name and demonstrates the effects of the long-term marketing invested into the brand.

Researchers have found that a product's brand equity positively affects future profits and long-term cash flow (Srivastava and Shocker, 1991), a consumer's willingness to pay premium prices (Keller, 1993), merger and acquisition decision making (Mahajan et al., 1994), stock prices (Simon and Sullivan, 1993; Lane and Jacobson, 1995), sustainable competitive advantage (Bharadwaj et al., 1993),

and marketing success (Ambler, 1997). Almost every marketing activity works, successfully or unsuccessfully, to build, manage, and exploit brand equity (see Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993; Yoo, Donthu, and Lee, 2000). However, despite this considerable amount of interest, research that identifies and attempts to understand brand equity phenomena has been hampered because there has been no agreement regarding what brand equity is and, more important, how it should be measured.

Although several studies have examined brand equity, their main focus was not on developing a brand equity measure. Currently, researchers use ad hoc measures such as price premium (Aaker, 1991), conjoint analyzed value of the brand name (Rangaswamy et al., 1993; Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995), composite multiattribute weighted scores of the brand name (Park and Srinivasan, 1994), a collection of consumer-based measures (Agarwal and Rao, 1996), and a scanner data-based measure (Kamakura and Russell, 1993). Other ad hoc measures include financial values of a brand, such as future earnings (Aaker, 1991), incremental cash flow (Simon and Sullivan, 1993), equalization price (Swait et al., 1993), and momentum accounting-based value (Farquhar et al., 1991). However, these measures were developed without rigorous psychometric tests, and they were not parsimonious enough to manage.

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The purpose of this study is to develop a multidimensional measure of consumer-based brand equity and assess its psychometric properties. Here, *consumer-based* means measurement of cognitive and behavioral brand equity at the individual consumer level through a consumer survey. In contrast, for firm-based measures, researchers collect financial market, accounting, and store-level scanner data without contacting consumers; these then identify dollar-metric and financial brand equity at the firm or brand level. Unlike most previous studies, this study develops a measure of brand equity that is reliable, valid, and parsimonious. In addition, the measure's latent structure is assessed for generalizability across multiple samples drawn from several cultures, specifically, Koreans, Korean Americans, and Americans. In particular, our measure is developed using the brand equity dimensions that Aaker (1991, also see 1996) and Keller (1993) suggest, which have been popularly accepted as valid and comprehensive. However, key questions about Aaker's and Keller's measurements remain unanswered, specifically, the structural validity of the measurement.

A consumer-based brand equity scale is beneficial in several ways. First, it offers a means to test brand equity theories. According to Aaker (1991), brand equity provides value to customers by enhancing their interpretation and processing of information, confidence in the purchase decision, and satisfaction. Brand equity also provides value to the firm by enhancing efficiency and effectiveness of marketing programs, prices and profits, brand extensions, trade leverage, and competitive advantage. Similarly, Keller (1993) proposes that enhancing brand equity results in the ability to command larger margins from consumers, elicits increased consumer information search, and improves marketing communication effectiveness, licensing opportunities, and consumers' responsiveness to brand extensions. A brand equity measure would allow investigation of the role of brand equity in Aaker's (1991) and Keller's (1993) models. Specifically, it may be used to measure the brand equity of existing brands, then to examine the relationship of brand equity to the resulting firm and consumer benefits.

Second, the measure would be more useful for testing consumer-based brand equity theories than other previous measures have been. A consumer-based brand equity study needs a measure that assesses an individual customer's brand equity. However, some of the previous measures are designed to measure brand equity of aggregate products at the industry or firm level (e.g., Simon and Sullivan, 1993; Mahajan et al., 1994). Others measure an individual customer's brand equity (e.g., Rangaswamy et al., 1993; Swait et al., 1993; Park and Srinivasan, 1994; Cobb-Walgreen et al., 1995), but the psychometric properties have not been reported or fully analyzed. As a result, the previous measures may not be appropriate to studies that examine consumer-based brand equity phenomena.

Many scale development studies take an emic approach, in which a scale is first developed in one culture, then

validated or replicated in other cultures (see Netemeyer et al., 1991; Durvasula et al., 1993). We develop a brand equity measure with an etic approach, in which a universal measurement structure across cultures is sought using multiple cultures simultaneously (Geertz, 1973). The outcome measure that an etic approach produces is functionally, conceptually, linguistically, and metrically equivalent across cultures, which provides the basis for generating valid cross-cultural comparisons (Berry, 1980; Leung and Bond, 1989; Meredith, 1993; Rosenzweig, 1994).

After surveying several cultures, we assess the universality of our brand equity measurement. Confirming the universality enables cross-cultural benchmarking of brand equity, because the measure is not bound to a particular culture or country. Cross-cultural benchmarking is useful for tracking performance and developing strategies in the domestic and international markets, and in the cross-cultural study of brand equity.

We collect data from South Korea and the US because these two countries show an adequate range of cultural variation. According to Hofstede's (1991) work, Koreans and Americans are different in every major cultural dimension. In comparison with Americans, for example, Koreans rate high on Confucian dynamism (long-term orientation), low on individualism, and high on uncertainty avoidance. Therefore, South Korea is a good counterweight to the US, and Korean responses should reduce potential bias that could result from developing and validating a measure using samples drawn only from a Western culture.

In the following sections, we first examine the brand equity construct and identify its relevant dimensions as proposed by Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993). Next, we discuss the procedures used to generate and select scale items in the pilot and main studies. Then, we assess internal consistency, validity, and cross-cultural metric equivalence. Finally, we discuss the implications of the final scale to both practitioners and researchers.

1. The brand equity construct

Brand equity has many definitions and forms, such as favorable impressions, attitudinal dispositions, and behavioral predilections (Rangaswamy et al., 1993); brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and other proprietary brand assets (Aaker, 1991); brand knowledge such as brand awareness and brand associations (Keller, 1993); loyalty and image (Shocker and Weitz, 1988); the added value endowed by the brand name (Farquhar et al., 1991); incremental utility (Kamakura and Russell, 1993); the difference between overall brand preference and multiattributed preference based on objectively measured attribute levels (Park and Srinivasan, 1994); and overall quality and choice intention (Agarwal and Rao, 1996). One important consensus among the definitions is that brand equity is the incremental value

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