

BRAND LOYALTY DETERMINANTS IN THE CONTEXT OF A SOFT DRINK BRAND

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Developing and keeping customers' loyalty in relation to the brand is a strategic requisite for well-succeeded business. Thus, our main purpose was to develop and validate a theoretical model concerning customers brand loyalty.

Originality/value: We explored perceived quality, brand awareness, brand personality, and brand love as brand loyalty determinants. In this sense, the focus of this study was to analyze the impact of some brand loyalty determinant constructs.

Design/methodology/approach: The study was implemented by means of a survey, applied to 284 customers of a soft drink brand from Northeast Brazil that was acquired by one of the biggest soft drink producers in the world. Data were analyzed through multivariate statistics and applying structural equation modeling technic.

Findings: It was possible to evidence that there is a positive relation between the constructs brand awareness and perceived quality and positive influence of brand personality over brand awareness, as well as perceived quality over brand love. Also, evidence showed that brand love influences brand loyalty and that consumption level is a meaningful moderator of this relation.

KEYWORDS

Perceived quality. Brand awareness. Brand personality. Brand love. Brand loyalty.

1. INTRODUCTION

Brand has achieved a crucial importance in the contemporary market and is taken as a means of establishing strong ties with customers, what can even generate brand loyalty, providing greater profitability, cost-effectiveness and sustainability for companies (Drennan, Bianchi, Cacho-Elizondo, Loreiro, Guibert, & Teravest, 2015; Pappu & Quester, 2016; Hegner, Fenko, & Teravest, 2017). Therefore, several conceptual brand elements have been introduced, as the search for a better understanding of brand personality, customers' awareness in relation to the brands, customers' attitudes in relation to a given brand, brands setting in the market through an adequate positioning and love, that is nourished by customers in relation to a given brand (Maehle & Shneor, 2010; Zainol, Omar, Osman, & Habidin, 2016). Specifically, the core of this study is brand loyalty, although some of its determinants have been contemplated, which will be approached later.

According to American Marketing Association – AMA (2017), a brand can be related to buyer experience (customer), and be represented by a set of images or ideas and, in greater part, be associated to a name, symbol, logo, slogan or design. These elements can be developed to represent implicit values, such as ideas or even brand personality. That is why customers use brands to represent stories about their lives and identities, as well as to position themselves in relation to culture, society and other people and social groups (Heding, Knudtzen, & Bjerre, 2009). More than a name, a brand is the personification of the product and/or service, that is, what it does (benefits it generates for the customer), how it does (or how it generates such benefits for the customer), who does it and how the customer feels by doing it (Pitta & Franzak, 2008).

The brand can be considered the most valuable asset for any company and has been widely recognized as an essential reason for customers' choices, besides serving as an element to verify differentiation between companies and their offers (product and/or services) and their singularities. In addition, brands can impact customer trust in relation to the companies and their offers and the established trust itself, on its turn, can facilitate the decision making process, attenuating problems associated to the lack or low customer experience in what concerns products and/or services, reducing perceived risks (Huang & Sarigollu, 2011; Emari, Jafari, & Mogaddam, 2012; Chung, Lee, & Heath, 2013).

Brands provide a means of choice for customers, generally taking them to create preferences bonds, revealing an affective emotional behavior



toward them. This situation constitutes a guarantee and reliable promise of their products and/or services performance in the customer perception (Aaker, 1996). The brand is a source of possible differentiation for a company, product or service in relation to other alternate suppliers and their offers to satisfy the same need, desire, expectation or demand of who consumes it (Aaker, 1996; Ahmad & Thyagaraj, 2014; Kaufmann, Loureiro, & Manarioti, 2016; Chinomona, 2016).

According to Aaker (1997), the brand has become an important element, mainly due to the fact that companies are facing a global and competitive market. Many target customers look at a brand that totally joins a variety of values and specific practices. This happens because customers' purchase intention is frequently related to their attitudes and lifestyle (Apaydin & Köksal, 2011). In this sense, the brand continues to be a potential differentiation alternative according to the features of the market it acts and its positioning facing the competitors. Thus, marketing managers must consider some dimensions related to products and/or services and to other aspects involved in the consumption and purchase decision process, which are vital for their market positioning, and may generate favorable, positive and strong associations, resulting in a single brand in the customers' mind (Loureiro, 2013; Giovanis, 2016; Bairrada, Coelho, & Coelho, 2018).

In more globalized markets, companies need to build brands that have appeal for global customers, even if their purchase decisions are national, regional or local (Borzooei & Asgari, 2013). Customers can evaluate similar or identical products and/or services and perform an effective distinction among them, depending on how brands are perceived among themselves, comparatively, what corroborates to the need of greater care with the brand positioning in customers' minds (Keller, 2003). Brands aggregate value to companies offers and give sense to the consumption and purchase decision process, having in mind the value that is perceived by customers or by the market as a whole. Brand value is, basically, the customers' perception on what concerns the value relative to it in terms of a greater association to items like quality, reliability, greater awareness, aggregate value and potential incidence or increase of customer loyalty (Sasmita & Suki, 2015; Pappu & Quester, 2016; Wu & Anridho, 2016). This means that customers choose products and services and their associated brands, not just due to their utilitarian benefits, but also to their symbolic ones (Albert & Merunka, 2013; Bairrada et al., 2018).

It is common that brands have deep meanings and serve to build a “self-concept” and an identity in customers, which desire to present to others or



even aim to reach their individual identity objectives or in terms of insertion in certain social groups according to the brand they choose to consume (MacCracken, 1989). The self-concept is formed from elements of a variety of the individual/customer existence fields (corporeal image, the culture they belong to, beliefs, religion, and others). Customers' point of view can be understood as the image they have of themselves and the way they express their identity, based on their self-perception, self-communication, self-motivation, self-control and self-evaluation activities (Burns, 1986). Thus, brands act as social signs, and there is relative congruence between the chosen brand and its user (the customer) or self-image itself, that is considered as a key motivational factor for customers' choices and preferences (Maehle & Shneor, 2010; Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013).

This way, brands help define customers' lives and develop a core role in people's buying behavior and/or consumption, bonding customers and their favorite brands, in such way that some of them can evolve to a real cult to the brands; putting it in another way, to develop an extreme devotion in the direction of one or more specific brands in relation to others (Belk & Tumbat, 2005). Previous researches verified that when studying customers' relations with brands we should consider that people's memories are organized in a set of nodes and connections. A brand's name is considered a node and the connections are functional associations (utilitarian) or emotional (symbolic or even hedonic) that customers have in their memories concerning them. Then, when a node is activated the associations or relations among the others also become active by means of a set of connections, which are based on information, knowledge or previous experiences (Erdogmus & Büdeyri-Turan, 2012).

The customer that has a positive perception in relation to a given brand will be inclined to develop a greater will or predisposition of buying it, usually proactively seeking for the product or service attached to it (Raska & Saw, 2012; Won-Moo Hur, Hanna, & Joon, 2016; Chang & Jai, 2015). Usually, brand growth is generated by loyal customers or clients, which also ends up encouraging other potential clients or customers, by incurring in positive word-of-mouth, to become effective buyers and, eventually, loyal to the brand. Such situation may occur due to the user personal satisfaction or based on the belief that the brand will provide substantial or superior benefits compared to alternate brands (Alloza, 2008; Schultz & Block, 2015).

In this sense, it appears that brand loyalty is a key element of interest for researchers and marketing professionals. In fact, it is a concept that has gained much relevance in recent decades. Accordingly, achieving customer

loyalty in relation to the brand has become a key objective for companies facing an increasingly competitive market (Khan, Rahman, & Fatma, 2016; Chinomona, 2016).

Considering the exposed, the purpose of this research is to develop and validate a theoretical model concerning customers brand loyalty, contemplating some determinants constructs, being them: perceived quality (Drennan et al., 2015), brand awareness (Sasmita & Suki, 2015; Thaichon & Quach, 2015; Molinillo, Japutra, Nguyen, & Chen, 2017), brand personality (Aaker, 1996, 1997; Clemenz, Brettel, & Moeller, 2012; Roy, Kahndeparkar & Motiani, 2016), brand love (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Roy, Khandeparkar, & Motiani, 2016; Bairrada et al., 2018) and brand loyalty (Erdogmus & Büdeyri-Turan, 2012; Molinillo et al., 2017), which emphasize a relational understanding between the brand and customers (Aaker, 1997; Drennan et al., 2015).

Briefly presented, the constructs that were contemplated and will be better-approached latter, it is relevant to highlight the context for this investigation. That said, the research target population has involved soft drink customers of the brand Guaraná Jesus, that is consumed mainly by the population of the State of Maranhão, in Brazil, and is in the market for over 80 years. Created by the pharmacist Jesus Norberto Gomes, the brand is, nowadays, a property of The Coca-Cola Company, second place in the regional market, ahead of other brands from the company like, for example, Fanta, Sprite and Guaraná Kuat.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

Firstly, with regard to the proposed theoretical model, it should be noted that the starting point was the understanding of the relationship between the determinants of brand loyalty. The tested model provided a nomological structure of the constructs that form the continuity of relationships with a given brand.

The literature concerning the theorization about brands has centered around the relation customer-brand, based on a metaphor that suggests that the customers create relations with brands the same way they create relations in a social context (Loureiro, 2013). However, a clear conceptual comprehension about customer-brand relations development requires the integration of both attitudinal and behavioral aspects in a predefined order to reflect the development and flux of events in the relation customer-brand, establishing

satisfactory results for both parties (company and customer) (He, Li, & Harris, 2012; Sreejesh, Roy, & Sarkar, 2016).

In the context of this relationship of building evolutionary process between companies and customers, the brand does not represent just a simple name, term, signal, symbol, drawing or a combination of these elements (Kaufmann, Loureiro, Basile, & Vrontis, 2012). In fact, brands develop a primordial role for customers in the formation of their identity and establish an emotional connection with them (Malär, Krohmer, Hoyer, & Nyffenegger, 2011). Customers tend to build relationships with brands which are compatible with their own personality (Molinillo et al., 2017). The brand has become an experience (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004), and the construction of strong, renowned and admirable brands has been transforming in one of the main research objectives of marketing professionals. In this sense, it is stressed that the marketing scenario has changed in the last two decades, because customers are no longer messages or companies content passive receptors and are now actively involved in interactive relationships with a great part of companies and their brands (Kaufmann et al., 2012; Limpasirisuwan & Donkwa, 2017).

That said, the first construct tested was brand awareness, that is related to the knowledge or recognition that customers have about a brand (and its products and/or services) (Thaichon & Quach, 2015), that is, how customers associate the brand with the specific product that they intend to buy or consume (Sasmita & Suki, 2015). In the same reasoning line, Keller (2008) comments that brand awareness comprehends what customers can remember or recognize in a specific brand, or simply if the customers know, or not, such brand. This aspect provides a kind of learning advantage for the brand, affecting customer decision making.

It is understood by brand awareness the capacity that a customer has in recognizing or remembering a brand and associate it to its categories or products and/or services lines, while perceived quality concerns the way customers judge a product and/or service global excellence (Pappu & Quester, 2006). According to Kan (2002), the higher the level of brand awareness, the higher customers quality evaluation, that is, their perceived quality tends to be greater or elevated.

As to the perceived quality, it is conceptualized as the customer judgment about a product and/or service general excellence or superiority in relation to the competitor offerings (Zeithaml, 1988), based on each individual subjective perceptions (Erdogmus & Büdeyri-Turan, 2012). Customers perceived quality relative to a product and/or service is considered as an

essential determinant in building their loyalty in relation to the brand (Pan, Sheng, & Xie, 2012; Akdeniz, Calantone, & Voorhees, 2014).

For Rubio, Oubiña, and Villaseñor (2014), brand awareness encourages perceived quality associated with the brand and, therefore, also its eventual credibility in the market due to the smaller perception of functional risk. However, the most conscious customers about a brand are more prone to perceive eventual functionality fails and, consequently, possible attributions of quality lack. Another element that conditions a product and/or service quality perception is the brand name itself, which can be considered as a causal association that many customers do between the recognized brand and the quality induced by brand awareness (Clemenz et al., 2012; Lu, Chang, & Chang, 2014). When the objective quality of an offer is difficult to be justified or understood, customers can appeal to more abstract signs, reinforcing the importance of strong and well market positioned brands (Perera & Dissanayake, 2013).

It is observed that brand awareness can be a predictor of brand perception, which involves customers perceived quality. Other researches verify that brand awareness has a positive influence on perceived quality, and the greater brand awareness, the greater the quality customers perceive in their products and/or services (Chi, Yeh, & Yang, 2009; Sasmita & Suki, 2015; Wu & Anridho, 2016). For so, the first research hypothesis emerges:

- H1: Brand awareness positively influences customer perceived quality.

Another brand loyalty determinant considered in the study was brand personality, that is another important customer behavior booster in a variety of contexts. It is understood by brand personality a set of “human” characteristics associated with the brand (Aaker, 1997; Aggarwal & McGill, 2012; Loureiro, 2013). In other words, its symbolic or self-expressive function easily allows customers to associate human personality traits with the brand. This way, brand personality tends to generate the perception of symbolic benefits by the customer that goes from social approval to social and self-esteem expression (Keller, 1993).

Brand personality is an inanimate object and associated to personality lines resulting from the interactions the customer has with the brand and tends to have a symbolic function and a self-expression format (Bouhleb, Mzoughi, Hadiji, & Ben, 2009). Thereby, it can represent one of the main components of a brand, along with physical attributes or elements, functional characteristics or benefits inherent to a brand adoption (Maehle & Shneor, 2010). It is important noting that a brand personification also includes

aspects connected to gender, age, socioeconomic class and psychographic and emotional characteristics that can be an efficient way to understand a brand performance and value aggregation within a certain target public with specific profiles (Gordon, Zainuddin, & Magee, 2016; Roy et al., 2016).

With competition intensification, brands innovation and the known personality effects about behavior in general, the interest concerning the symbolic meaning of human traits that customers attribute to brands as a result of emotional or affective connections with them has been stimulated (Rojas-Méndez, Murphy, & Papadopoulos, 2013; Ha & Janda, 2014; Gordon et al., 2016; Ahmad & Thyagaraj, 2017).

A review of works in this subject reveals a positive relation between brand personality and brand awareness, stressing that both constructs are considered essential for brand loyalty construction within customers (Sun & Tong, 2015; Wu & Anridho, 2016; Molinillo et al., 2017). Besides, brand personality, as the promoter of brand awareness, can equally affect the customer ability to recognize or recall a brand and associate it to its products and/or service category (Ahmad & Thyagaraj, 2014; Su & Tong, 2015; Molinillo et al., 2017). Based on the exposed, the second research hypothesis is presented:

- H2: Brand personality positively influences customer brand awareness.

Customers can evaluate the product more favorably if they realize that the selected brand personality or their preference in brand resembles the ones they appreciate the most (Nikhashemi, Valaei, & Tarofder, 2017). It is attested that brand personality is considered a prominent construct that predicts customers' preferences and choices and it is crucial for choosing a brand, for the probability of purchasing or repurchasing it and, lastly, for brand success in the market (Aaker, 1997).

Other studies have evidenced that, while brand personality performs a critical role in customer perception comprehension concerning the brand and its products and/or services, in quality instance, customers are more prone to consider a product and/or service quality as an intrinsic feature, and when customers identify and recognize brand personality traits, such features (or traits) will help them form judgments about the single experience provided by the brand and, this way, will affect perceived quality (Ahn, Lee, & Jeon, 2009; Ha & Janda, 2014; Nikhashemi et al., 2017).

According to Beldona and Wysong (2007), and Clemenz, Brettel, and Moeller (2012), the more brand personality corresponds to customers' personality, the greater perceived quality of products and/or service that



take its name (brand) will be. In this sense, the third research hypothesis emerges:

- H3: Brand personality positively influences customers perceived quality.

Brands are omnipresent in customers' daily lives (Albert, Merunka, & Valette-Florence, 2008). Recent researches sought to understand and explain the kind of relations that customers develop with brands. The great part of the researches about brand love has begun with interpersonal love theory and was applied to customer behavior.

Brand love, therefore, refers to customers love for brands, products and/or services. Consequently, it is understood as the degree of emotional connection and the passion level that the customer holds in relation to a certain brand (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). It is also highlighted that it tends to be higher for products and/or services that provide symbolic and hedonic benefits (Drennan et al., 2015; Rauschnabel, Krey, Babin, & Ivens, 2016).

From that, studies converge to the approximation of the constructs brand personality and brand love (Anggraeni & Rachmanita, 2015; Roy et al., 2016; Hegner et al., 2017). Theories that investigate this relation in the context of customers and their preferred brands, many times, are based on the supposition that customers attribute human traits to brands (Rauschnabel et al., 2016; Hegner et al., 2017) in a process called anthropomorphism (Aggarwal & McGill, 2012). Therefore, brand personality is attributed and formed by human personality features and/or characters associated to brands, allowing its buyers or users to express themselves through them and what they represent (Anggraeni & Rachmanita, 2015).

Customer love in relation to a brand is greater for brands that develop a meaningful role in forming customer identity (Loureiro, Kaufmann, & Demetris, 2012). For so, the authors suggest that an adequate brand personality increases customers willing and predisposition in investing in long term brands relationships (Aaker, 1997; Keller, 2003; Roy et al., 2016). Facing the exposed, the fourth research hypothesis is proposed:

- H4: Brand personality positively influences brand love.

According to Sarkar (2014), during decades researchers have studied customers' attitude facing brands, and have evolved a variety of useful concepts, such as customer satisfaction and brand loyalty. In the last years, researches have demonstrated an increase in the interest about customers' emotions when relating to brands and in the ludic, sensorial and emotional consumption, seeking to understand customer behavior about irrational



purchase decision in place of the initial domain vision of rational choice, substantiated in the merely utilitarian and transactional decision.

One key issue for marketing theory and practice in the last decades' concerns to brand loyalty construction, maintenance, and development, in which companies aim to obtain a sustainable competitive advantage, considering that marketing environment is dynamic and has an aggressive competition. For this reason, brand loyalty is considered essential for any company that intends to obtain long term satisfactory market and economic performance (Moisescu & Allen, 2010; Limpasirisuwan & Donkwa, 2017; Molinillo et al., 2017; Vera & Trujillo, 2017).

When empirically analyzing brand love relations with other constructs, more specifically, brand personality and brand loyalty, Roy et al. (2016) evidenced that brand love is an antecedent that positively affects brand loyalty. Such authors add, still, that greater part of the reference studies concerning brands highlight that brand loyalty is a result of brand love that customers feel, what is reinforced by other authors (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Roy et al., 2016; Limpasirisuwan & Donkwa, 2017). Considering the presented arguments, it is stressed brand loyalty importance, as well as brand love, in narrowing the relations between customers and a brand. This way, the fifth research hypothesis has been formulated:

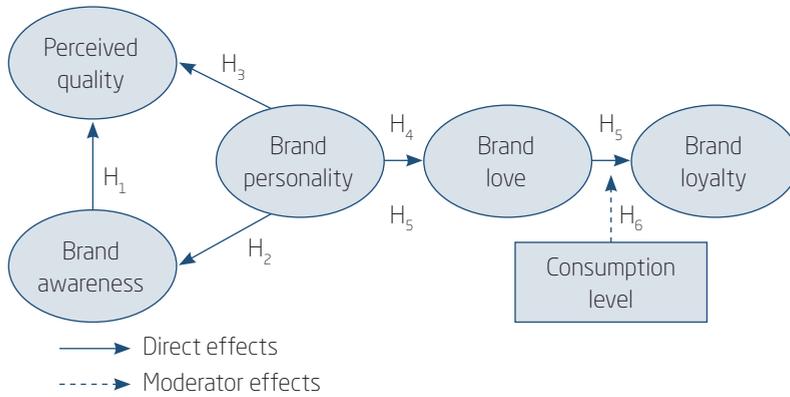
- H5: Brand love positively influences customer brand loyalty.

Finally, it will also be tested if consumption level presents a moderator effect in the relationship between customer brand love and brand loyalty. Customers beliefs or associations about the brand come from consistent attributes (Clemenz et al., 2012), not only from the brand experience but also from the customer evaluation to any direct and/or indirect contact with the brand and its products and/or services (Keller, 1993). This way, the sixth research hypothesis has been formulated:

- H6: Analyze the moderator effect of consumption level in the relation between brand love and loyalty.

Aiming at providing a better understanding of the proposed theoretical model and its respective hypotheses, Figure 2.1 is presented:

(Figure 2.1)
PROPOSED THEORETICAL MODEL



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

Related to the research, we performed a descriptive quantitative method, based on a structured data collection with the application of a survey, cross-sectional, applied to a sample based on a structured questionnaire (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010; Fink, 2013). Data analysis was performed using structural equation modeling technic, which is considered as an extension of various techniques and multivariate procedures (Kline, 2011; Byrne, 2016).

In this sense, the study was performed from the perspective of local customers of the Brazilian soft drink. To evaluate the proposed theoretical model, that is, the determinants of brand loyalty from the referred product, it was considered the fact that the population knows or has a strong bonding with the brand and the product chosen for this investigation, that has an estimated population of 1,091,868 inhabitants (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2018). Sample selection was performed based on a non-probabilistic sample, by convenience (Malhotra, Birks, & Wills, 2012).

To measure the constructs from the chosen scales, it was opted by using a seven-point Likert scale, where the extremes varied from 1 (“totally disagree”) to 7 (“totally agree”). It is stressed that this kind of scale has proven its applicability in a variety of research environments, including some related to brand loyalty context (Das, 2014; Khan & Rahman, 2016).

As for the investigated constructs operationalization, their respective scales are presented in Figure 3.1:

(Figure 3.1)
CONSTRUCTS OPERATIONALIZATION

Constructs	Variable labels	Scale items number	Authors
Brand awareness	BR_AWAR_1 to 4	04	Yoo, Donthu, and Lee (2000)
Perceived quality	PERC_QUA_1 to 3	03	Yoo, Donthu, and Lee (2000)
Brand personality	BR_PERS_1 to 5	05	Adapted from Aaker (1997) and Phau and Lau (2000)
Brand love	BR_LOVE_1 to 10	10	Carroll and Ahuvia (2006)
Brand loyalty	BR_LOY_1 to 3	03	Yoo, Donthu, and Lee (2000)

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

We opted for the direct form of data collection approach, which was conducted between September and October 2017, and data was mainly collected in Universidade Federal do Maranhão (UFMA – Federal University of Maranhão) *campus*, where there was access to students and administrative staff of the institution for the research purpose, by using the self-completion method (Fink, 2013).

Before analyzing the survey data, it was necessary to prepare them with the intention of detecting typing errors, missing data and outliers (atypical observations) (Davey & Savla, 2010). In the case of missing data, it was used the listwise deletion technique (Hair et al., 2010), for which only the questionnaires with complete data were considered, and 15 questionnaires were eliminated, coming to a total of 285 valid cases.

The next step was the verification of outliers. For that purpose, a combination of univariate and multivariate analysis was used (Malhotra et al., 2012). First, atypical univariate observations were detected by checking the standard scores (Z-scores) that showed values higher than $|3|$ (Hair et al., 2010), in which one case was eliminated. Multivariate outliers by calculating the Mahalanobis distance were also identified (D^2 , $p < 0.005$), considering the values with rates up to 3 (D^2/gf) (Hair et al., 2010; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2012). In this sense, no multivariate atypical observation was found, resulting in a final sample of 284 valid cases.

4. RESULTS PRESENTATION

4.1 Sample characterization

Final sample resulted in 284 valid cases (gender: male: 138 and female: 146; 76% with an average age between 18 and 25 years old). When questioned about Guaraná Jesus brand soft drink consumption frequency, it was verified that the greater part of the respondents consumes the product daily. In numbers, this means that 71.5% (203 respondents) consume Guaraná Jesus daily, 18% (51 respondents) two to three times a week, and 7.4% (21 respondents) once a week. The other respondents affirm to consume Guaraná Jesus once a month or rarely.

4.2 Constructs individual validation

The intention of individually validating the constructs is to validate the model integrated with its respective constructs (Hair et al., 2010; Kline, 2011). For the individual validation of the constructs, the unidimensionality, reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were analyzed. To verify the unidimensionality of the constructs, we proceed with the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) through principal components and by means of the Varimax orthogonal rotation, being the factor loads of EFA considered satisfactory, because they presented values above 0.50, which is considered very good (Hair et al., 2010). Furthermore, the values of the explained variance showed a minimum value of 70.50% (0.705). It was also verified that the Cronbach's alpha and the composite reliability showed minimum values of 0.630 and 0.810, where values higher than or equal to 0.70 are suggested or higher than 0.6 (Hair et al., 2010; Malhotra et al., 2012).

Then, the convergent validity of the constructs was calculated through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), considering the parameters as values above 0.5 (Kline, 2011; Byrne, 2016), as shown in Figure 4.2.1.

(Figure 4.2.1)

**CRONBACH'S ALPHA, COMPOSITE RELIABILITY,
AND EXTRACTED VARIANCE**

Constructs	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Extracted variance
Perceived quality	0.90	0.94	0.85
Brand awareness	0.63	0.84	0.58
Brand personality	0.90	0.91	0.67
Brand love	0.80	0.96	0.74
Brand loyalty	0.71	0.81	0.61

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

After this, the discriminant validity was verified by calculating the shared variances, considering the method proposed by Fornell and Larcker (1981), calculating the squared correlations between the constructs, taking into account that the variances extracted from the constructs are compared to the shared variances, as shown in Figure 4.2.2. The results showed adequate discriminant validity between the constructs.

(Figure 4.2.2)

DISCRIMINANT VALIDITY

Constructs	Perceived quality	Brand awareness	Brand personality	Brand love	Brand loyalty
Perceived quality	0.856				
Brand awareness	0.627	0.576			
Brand personality	0.219	0.220	0.519		
Brand love	0.416	0.334	0.497	0.740	
Brand loyalty	0.233	0.248	0.321	0.612	0.609

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

4.3 Theoretical and structural model validation

To evaluate the general model fit of the proposed theoretical model and verify if it has adequate representation of the tested relationships, three goodness-of-model fit measures were used, based on the classification of Hair et al. (2010): absolute measure fit (GFI and RMSEA = values between 0.05 and 0.08 are acceptable), incremental measure fit (AGFI, TLI, and NFI) and moderated measure fit (CFI), where values equal to or higher than 0.90 are considered good indexes.

According to Figure 4.3.1, except for the AGFI, that presented value slightly under the recommended in the literature (≥ 0.90), it is noted that the goodness-of-model fit measures have presented the satisfactory result to support the proposed structural theory. The AGFI value (0.861) is in the cut-off zone, superior to 0.800 and, then, can be accepted (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012; Grubor, Djokic, & Milovanov, 2017), having performed lesser than other measures (Figure 4.3.1).

(Figure 4.3.1)

MODEL FIT MEASURES

Model fit measures	Values
GFI	0.900
AGFI	0.861
RMSEA	0.052
AGFI	0.861
TLI	0.953
NFI	0.919
CFI	0.963

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

To test the proposed theoretical model hypotheses, it was verified the significance and magnitude of the regression coefficients, by means of path analysis, the non-patronized coefficients (b), standard errors, pattern coefficients (β), t-values, and probabilities, as shown in Figure 4.3.2.

(Figure 4.3.2)

HYPOTHESES TESTING

Hi	Path analysis	b	Error	β	t-values	P	Results
H1	BR_AWAR→PERC_QUA	0.657	0.186	0.240	3.524	$p < 0.001$	Supported
H2	BR_PERS→BR_AWAR	0.281	0.043	0.663	6.511	$p < 0.001$	Supported
H3	BR_PERS→PERC_QUA	0.769	0.769	0.665	8.616	$p < 0.001$	Supported
H4	BR_PERS→BR_LOVE	1.177	0.097	0.812	12.170	$p < 0.001$	Supported
H5	BR_LOVE→BR_LOY	0.311	0.055	0.695	5.623	$p < 0.001$	Supported

Significance level: 0.05.

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

According to the results, the six research hypotheses were statistically supported, being them: H1 (“Brand awareness positively influences customer perceived quality”, $\beta = 0.240$, $p < 0.001$), result found by Rubio et al. (2014) and Sasmita and Suki (2015); H2 (“Brand personality positively influences customer brand awareness”, $\beta = 0.663$, $p < 0.001$), convergent with Su and Tong’s (2015) study; H3 (“Brand personality positively influences customers perceived quality”, $\beta = 0.655$, $p < 0.001$), confirming the results found by Nikhashemi et al. (2017); H4 (“Brand personality positively influences brand love”, $\beta = 0.812$, $p < 0,001$), confirming Dagger and David (2012) and Anggraeni and Rachmanita’s (2015) results; and H5 (“Brand love positively influences customer brand loyalty”, $\beta = 0.695$, $p < 0,001$), as pointed out by Carroll and Ahuvia (2006).

Additionally, the determination coefficient (R^2) was analyzed to verify the hypotheses test effectiveness. For so, in Figure 4.3.3, the determination coefficients (R^2) resulting from the theoretical model are presented (Hair et al., 2010; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2012).

(Figure 4.3.3)

DETERMINATION COEFFICIENTS (R^2)

Constructs	Determination coefficient
Brand awareness	0.439
Perceived quality	0.711
Brand love	0.659
Brand loyalty	0.614

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Based on data presented in Figure 4.3.3, the determinants (or antecedents) of customers brand loyalty of the soft drink Guaraná Jesus have presented a determination coefficient (R^2) of 0.614, that is, 61.4% of brand loyalty of the soft drink investigated (Guaraná Jesus) can be explained by its determinant constructs (perceived quality, brand awareness, brand personality, and brand love). This result is high explanatory power to the constructs tested in the model (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2012).

4.4 The moderator effect of consumption frequency level

The moderator effect of consumption frequency level was performed through multi-group structural equation modeling, splitting the sample into two groups, being the high level compared to the low level. For so, the comparative tests between groups were performed, by means of the Critical Ratios for Differences between Parameters. It was considered the one indicated by Preacher and Hayes (2004), in which the differences between the groups with Z-scores must be superior to ± 1.96 , which indicates a significance level lower than 0.05 ($p\text{-value} < 0.05$) and 95% reliability.

Regarding the level of consumption, respondents were investigated on the frequency of consumption, taking into account daily, weekly, annual or rare consumption. To this end, the sample was separated once again into two groups: 1. high consumption frequency level, every day; and 2. low consumption frequency level, weekly, annually or rarely.

In the moderation test, the moderator effect of the respondents' consumption frequency level was analyzed. When it comes to hypothesis H6, daily consumption frequency has evidenced to be moderated in relation to brand love and brand loyalty ($p < 0.05$), presenting a Z-score = - 2.128. It is worth noting that the results point that the relation between brand love and brand loyalty is significantly stronger when the consumption happens every day, positively moderating the relation between constructs (β high level = 0.672 *versus* β low level = 0.490) (Figure 4.4.1).

(Figure 4.4.1)

MODERATOR EFFECT OF CONSUMPTION FREQUENCY LEVEL

Path analysis	Consumption level	b	Error	β	t-values	p	Z-scores
BR_LOVE→BR_LOY	High level	0.563	0.059	0.672	9.822	p < 0.001	- 2.128
	Low level	0.323	0.095	0.490	3.526	p = 0.001	

Z-Scores > 1.96.

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

5. CONCLUSION

The objective of the study was to understand the factors that determinate customer brand loyalty, which has been an important research agenda in the last decades, generating great academic and managerial interest, overall due to companies' market implications. In this sense, this study contributes to understanding the reasons that determinate such phenomenon, that is, brand loyalty.

The sequential chaining of the constructs demonstrates that, in a theoretical perspective, brand awareness is assumed as the ability a customer has in recognizing or remembering a brand and associate it to its product and/or service category (Keller, 2008; Lee & Jee, 2016) and perceived quality as a result of the comparison of customer expectations and the brand, product and/or service actual performance (Calvo-Porrall & Lévy-Mangin, 2017). This way, this study contributes to reinforcing previous researches findings, supporting that brand awareness is a central aspect to influence perceived quality (H1: BRAND_AWAR→PERC_QUA) (Rubio et al., 2014; Sasmita & Suki, 2015).

Another important factor that can affect brand awareness and perceived quality is related to brand personality congruence with the consumer agent, that is, with the set of human features associated to the brand and its customer profile (H2: BRAND_PERS→BRAND_AWAR, and H3: BRAND_PERS→PERC_QUA). This means that the greater the identification of the characteristic traits of a brand, the greater will the recognition or remembering brand capacity by the customer be, and also the greater the disposition to realize its inherent qualities (Su & Tong, 2015).

Besides, brand personality can be a strong tie to build substantial emotional relationships with customers (Aaker, 1996; Aaker, Vohs, & Mogilner,



2010; Roy et al., 2016), as for example brand love and its consequent brand loyalty formation. In this sense, as supposed, brand personality effect over brand love emerges, which has demonstrated to be significant (H4: BRAND_PERS→BRAND_LOVE).

Another contribution of the present study is the confirmation of H5 (BRAND_LOVE→BRAND_LOYAL), which denoted that brand love positively influences brand loyalty in the customer perspective. Corroborating with this evidence, recent researches demonstrate expressive results of the customer emotional ties in relation to a specific brand and, this way, it is ratified that stronger emotional ties with the brand (brand love) evidence greater degree of brand loyalty from customers (Kaufmann et al., 2016; Hegner et al., 2017).

In the contemporary context, competition is each time more evident in a global scale, therefore, consolidating a strong brand can reduce market risk and help companies' sustainability in the long term and in a scenario in which markets are characterized as highly competitive (Kumar & Patra, 2017).

First, it is highlighted that the implications extracted here reinforce the idea that a strong brand-building investment is one of the most important that a company can effect and, naturally, represents one of the most valuable assets for any company. Besides, the results attest that both the emotional elements (intangibles) and the functional elements (tangibles) develop an important role in building a range of customers loyal to the brand. In other words, customers when choosing a brand can seek not just for functional benefits from the interaction with it, but also emotional and affective benefits.

That said, it is emphasized this study's managerial implications contribution, which contributes to delineating organizations strategies, not mentioning that they can increase market share, recognizing the importance of sustaining the investments to foment customers brand loyalty; always realizing that this range of customers will be the brands frequent buyers and will be more prone to resist to situational factors and marketing efforts from the competition.

Another aspect to be considered by managers is the color and symbolism associated with the brand. In a unique way, considering this investigation's study object, due to the fact that Guaraná Jesus brand has a rosy tone and a sweet taste with a touch of cloves and cinnamon, giving an exotic value to the product/brand, managers can explore these elements as character traits of the exciting dimension. In addition, design and packaging aspects may provide, in addition to the distinctive capacity in the market associated with brand recognition, a convergence with traits of excitement, reliability or



even robustness for the customer. From this angle, when customers are inspired by a modern and sophisticated design and involved as part of this process, they begin to demonstrate the excitement, the enthusiasm, the characteristics of the product, and begin to consider the brand as reliable and safe.

It also is verified that customers that show brand love for a given brand tend not to just repurchase it but also to promote it for friends and family, and also feel distressed when not using it, making companies obtain financial gains (revenue, profit) in the long term. Due to this fact, managers should focus their attention not just to the utilitarian aspects of transactional exchanges inherent to the brand, product and/or service, but, specifically, to the behavioral aspects attached to customers' desires, emotions and feelings, to multisensory elements, consumption experiences, mainly the ones connected to hedonic consumption.

In this logic, organizations that develop the ability to make customers love their brands can more easily encourage them to spread positive word-of-mouth (Anggraeni & Rachmanita, 2015), both in the traditional and in the electronic context. Briefly, it is suggested to managers to recognize the importance of these arguments and the power of brand positioning, considering the cognitive and emotional aspects as a means to establish strong ties with customers, since it may be a solid basis to generate brand loyalty, and provide greater profitability, return and sustainability for the organization in the long term.

This study contributes to brand management literature, specifically by approaching brand loyalty determinants. However, it is considered that there was not research possibilities exhaustion. That said, it is suggested this study replication to another sample, or research context, for different brands (hedonic and/or utilitarian), in the same product and/or service category or in different ones, aiming at comparing results.

In a second moment, considering that other constructs, as example of brand experience, brand prestige, commitment to the brand, brand image, brand attachment, and purchase intention, besides customer involvement with the product or brand and perceived value, could be considered brand loyalty determinants, verifying alternate models that can have greater explanation power. Due to the exposed, future research opportunities are identified considering such possibilities, which could enrich the proposed and validated theoretical model or compose nested models or rival models. And given the multidimensional nature of the concept of brand loyalty, it is believed that its evaluation with two-dimensional or multidimensional

scales could capture other facets of customer interaction with the brand, which could promote new analysis perspectives, both with approaches like the one used in the research (structural equation modeling), and experimental studies implementation.

DETERMINANTES DA LEALDADE À MARCA NO CONTEXTO DE UMA MARCA DE REFRIGERANTE

RESUMO

Objetivo: Desenvolver e manter a lealdade dos consumidores em relação à marca é requisito estratégico para negócios bem-sucedidos. Nesse sentido, o presente estudo teve por objetivo analisar o impacto de alguns construtos determinantes da lealdade à marca.

Originalidade/valor: Exploramos a qualidade percebida, a conscientização da marca, a personalidade da marca e o amor à marca como determinantes da lealdade à marca. Nesse sentido, o foco deste estudo foi analisar o impacto de alguns construtos determinantes da lealdade à marca.

Design/metodologia/abordagem: O estudo foi implementado por meio de uma pesquisa do tipo *survey*, aplicada a uma amostra de 284 consumidores de uma marca de refrigerante do Nordeste do Brasil adquirida por um dos maiores fabricantes de refrigerante do mundo. Os dados foram analisados utilizando-se estatísticas multivariadas e mediante o emprego da técnica de modelagem de equações estruturais.

Resultados: Foi possível concluir, então, que há uma relação positiva entre os construtos consciência da marca e qualidade percebida, e a influência positiva da personalidade da marca na consciência da marca e da qualidade percebida no amor à marca. Obtiveram-se ainda evidências que mostram que o amor à marca tem influência sobre a lealdade à marca e que o nível de consumo é um moderador significativo dessa relação.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Qualidade percebida. Consciência da marca. Personalidade da marca. Amor à marca. Lealdade à marca.

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