

# Customer Orientation and Private Brand Loyalty

## A Moderated Mediation Model

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### Abstract

Managing private labels is unquestionably a challenge for retailers, as, for so many years, their only function has been distribution of products (Wu, Yeh and Hsiao, 2011<sup>[1]</sup>). Nowadays, retailers have a double function, distribution of products under national brands, while also offering products under their own insignia. For this reason, it is important to realize branding as a business strategy. Not just as retail, but also as strategic management of their own products. Using Structural Equation Modelling (the entire analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics v.20, and IBM SPSS Amos v.21), this research analysis the impact of customer orientation on brand loyalty, using brand trust and brand affect as mediating variables. The results show the conditions for getting loyalty behaviours.

**Keywords:** Private Label; Brand Loyalty; Customer Orientation; Brand Affect; Brand Trust; Customer Value.

### Introduction

Loyalty is a necessary condition for long-term relationships. In private labels, it becomes even more relevant due to the strong link between brand loyalty and store loyalty. Private brand managers must know how organizational behaviours generate loyalty because their relevance in the market is very high: according to PMLA (2018) <sup>[2]</sup>, private labels have a significant growth in all categories. Their market share is already above 40%-50% in Europe, especially in Portugal and Spain, with market shares of 41% and 52%, respectively. This paper focuses on the effects of private label customer orientation on loyalty, incorporating two variables as mediators, namely brand affect and brand trust.

### Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

In recent years there has been a growing interest in studying loyalty, and it has been associated with factors such as globalized competition, saturated markets, and the amount of information. And considering that the information available to customers is quite high, often times it is difficult for consumers to make the best choice. All these factors raise awareness towards the fact that the success of some brands, however long-lived, may be associated not only with brand price and quality, but with the ensemble of all these elements. Nowadays, customers have become more value-driven; they tend to be more selective in their choices, and more loyal and satisfied when they perceive a higher value. The brands' aim is to build

on these long-term relationships, based on attributes relevant to customers. Long-term relationships suppose brand loyalty.

Loyalty studies focus on the latent perspective, such as understanding when customers' loyalty is only psychological (attitudinal). But this variable does not translate into behaviours (Dick and Basu, 1994<sup>[3]</sup>; Ngobo, 2017<sup>[4]</sup>). In this particular way, the latent perspective is a problem for management. Thus the strategy should be to transform latent loyalty into true loyalty, were attitudes translate into behaviour, even in the presence of situational, competitive or financial barriers (Bove and Johnson, 2009<sup>[5]</sup>; Ngobo, 2017<sup>[4]</sup>). Brand loyalty is a result of the accumulation of positive associations over the course of successive purchasing experiences (Oliver, 1999<sup>[6]</sup>). In the case of private labels, this concerns not only the brand itself, but the point of sales as well.

Managers tend to underestimate the importance of customers perception of quality as a drive for loyalty and compliant behaviour. The orientation should be directed towards the consumer, encompassing a set of processes that comprise the creation of perceived value, satisfying consumers in the best way. However, such consumer orientation has to be perceived in order to be valued. Customer orientation has a direct and indirect relationship to loyalty (Há and John, 2010<sup>[7]</sup>). Schmidt, Mason, Steenkamp, and Mugobo (2017)<sup>[8]</sup>, use the expression "living the brand" to express management's commitment to and investment in the brand. Talking regularly about the brand is very important; creating brand-oriented behaviour rules should be implemented as well. Because of its impact, customer orientation in financial performance is clear. There is a need to recognize how consumers perceive the brand's products and services, and why (Hult, Morgeson III, Morgan, Mithas and Fornel, 2017<sup>[9]</sup>). In this sense, brand management variables should be considered, such as product quality, i.e., offering "good value for money" in order to increase private label purchase intentions (Calvo-Porrá and Lévy-Mangin, 2014<sup>[10]</sup>). Brand management requires brand investment and increased staff commitment (Mishra, 2010<sup>[11]</sup>). The creation of these variables should be clear from a presumption of brand-oriented behaviour (Schmidt et al., 2017<sup>[8]</sup>). Therefore, we propose:

H1: The greater the retailer's customer orientation, the greater the customer's private brand loyalty.

However, the impact of customer orientation upon brand loyalty may not be direct, as referred by Há and John, (2010)<sup>[7]</sup>. In the owner's point of view, brand affect and brand trust could be important mediating variables. Brand affect is the capacity of the "brand's potential to elicit a positive emotional response in the average consumer as a result of its use" (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001, p. 82<sup>[12]</sup>). This emotional response is the link between consumer awareness of the brand, and behaviours comprising the intent to purchase. They form the necessary stimulus to action. Trust, as an influential variable in the purchasing decision process, is the willingness of one party to depend on another, with the belief that this other party will not intentionally disappoint them (Deutsch, 1958<sup>[13]</sup>). The validity of the promises that a brand establishes with a consumer (Bagozzi, 1975<sup>[14]</sup>) is of particular relevance here. That is to say, whether the consumer is able to trust the brand and believe it will keep its commitments, be they guarantees regarding product performance or promises relating to the emotion associated with the [consumer's] experience of the brand and its use.

Customer orientation behaviours are part of the sales staff at the point of sale, and depend on the surroundings and on the actual characteristics of the purchasing situation. They

could generate positive results in cognitive and affective perspectives: (1) when the consumer receives the information of the product, and (2) as the consumer integrates all the information to produce an evaluation of the product (Sung and Kim, 2010<sup>[15]</sup>). Therefore customer orientation increases affect (Orth, Limon and Rose, 2010<sup>[16]</sup>) and trust (Moorman, Zaltman and Deshpande, 1992<sup>[17]</sup>), in both the cognitive and affective dimensions. Thus, we propose:

H2a: The greater the retailer's customer orientation, the greater the customer's brand affect.

H2b: The greater the retailer's customer orientation, the greater the customer's brand trust.

According to Dalhgren (2011, p. 28-29)<sup>[18]</sup> "brand trust leads to brand loyalty, because trust creates exchange relationships that are highly valued." So brand trust is one of the most important factors directly influencing brand loyalty. Trust arises from a developing relationship between the consumer and the brand, which comprises not only the emotional component, but also a knowledge component consisting on what the consumer knows about the brand.

Mabkhot, Shaar, and Salleh (2017)<sup>[19]</sup> point out that the development of brand trust can increase the level of brand loyalty - brand trust is a motivating source for customers to develop brand loyalty. The relevance of brand trust in private labels is also supported by Konuk (2018)<sup>[20]</sup>.

Brand affect is a more spontaneous construct than brand trust - more immediate -, and is realized with less consideration. Brand affect describes the relationship between consumers and the brand, and the impact of the consumers' general evaluations on the brand (Matzler, K., Krauter, S. G., and Bidmon, S., 2006<sup>[21]</sup>). Thus, this author considers brand affect as an important antecedent of brand loyalty. Geçti and Zengin (2013)<sup>[22]</sup> also mention that brand trust and brand affect are positively related to loyalty. Therefore,

H3a: The greater the customer's brand affect, the greater the customer's private brand loyalty.

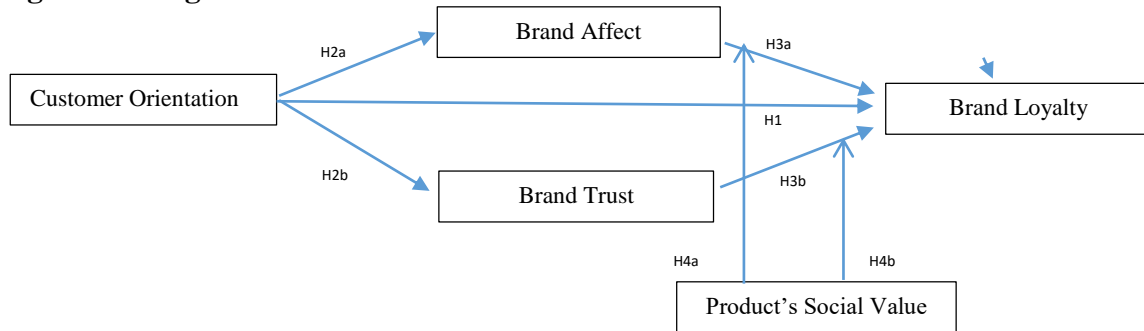
H3b: The greater the customer's brand trust, the greater the customer's private brand loyalty.

The use/consumption situation affects the perception of social risk. Sebri and Zaccour (2017)<sup>[23]</sup> state that the social component may be a barrier to the growth of private labels in developed countries, especially in products considered as hedonistic. For categories of product that are usually consumed in private settings, the perception of risk is lower than for those others that are often shared socially. In this context, the perceived social risk could inhibit the positive effect of affective variables in behaviours. Therefore, it is expected that in product categories with a higher implicit social risk, the positive effect of affective variables on buying and repurchasing behaviours will be lower. Due to the implicit value:

H4: The product category will moderate the strength of mediated relationships between customer orientation and brand loyalty, through brand affect (H4a), and brand trust (H4b), in such a way that the mediated relationship will be stronger under high social value than when it's low.

Based on a comprehensive review of the literature, we propose a research model that links Customer Orientation and Brand Loyalty, Customer Orientation and Brand Affect, Customer Orientation and Brand Trust, Brand Trust and Brand Loyalty, Brand Affect and Brand Loyalty, Customer Orientation and Brand Loyalty through Brand Affect and Brand Trust with Social Value, as depicted in Fig. 1.

**Figure 1. Integrated Research Model with the Product’s Social Value**



Source: Own elaboration

### Research Method

Our research focuses on three brands – two brands in Portugal, and one brand in Spain – examining the same product categories (namely cosmetics and DOC<sup>1</sup> wine, with different degrees of social value) in both countries. The study was conducted in 2015 using an updated sample of e-mails from residents in Portugal and Spain (according to the Private Label Manufacturers Association – 2018<sup>[2]</sup> – Portugal and Spain are two countries where the market share is above 40%). The sampling frame for this study was based on a database (2015).

Our database analysis shows that there are more individuals in our sample from Portugal (60.55%) than from Spain (39.45%). This has to do with the fact that the database that was purchased had a higher number of contacts from Portugal than from Spain. In total, questionnaires were distributed to 91,394 individuals. The e-mails were sent through a company, using the mandrill platform. However we only considered 2,900 valid answers. Table 1 shows the brand profiles by different products.

**Table 1: Brand profiles by different products**

	N	%	Valid per cent	Cumulative per cent
<b>Valid</b>				
Continente Face cream - Portugal	447	15,4	15,4	15,4
Mercadona Face cream - Spain	441	15,2	15,2	30,6
Pingo Doce Wine - Portugal	1534	52,9	52,9	83,5
Mercadona Wine - Spain	478	16,5	16,5	100,0
<b>Total</b>	<b>2900</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	

Source: Own elaboration.

<sup>1</sup> DOC – The Portuguese acronym for Protected Designation of Origin

In order to operationalize the variables, this study relies on previously validated scales, measured on seven-point scales (1=totally disagree; 7=totally agree). Firstly, Functional Customer Orientation was measured using 9 items adapted from Homburg, C.; Müller, M.; Klarmann, M. (2011) <sup>[24]</sup>. Secondly, Brand Affect was based on the approach of Chaudhuri, A.; Holbrook, M. B. (2001) <sup>[12]</sup> using 3 items. Thirdly, Brand Trust, was based on the approach of Kitapçı, H. Şahin A., Zehir C. (2012) <sup>[25]</sup>, using 6 items. Finally, Brand Loyalty was based on the approach of Zehir, C.; Sahin, A.; Kitapç, H.; Özşahin M., (2011) <sup>[26]</sup>, using 14 items.

The proposed mediation model was tested through an analysis of structural equations modelling (SEM). The strength of the causal relationships was studied in two different contexts of use/consumption of the product, proposing the social consumption/private consumption dichotomy as the relationship moderator. The particularities considered were crucial from the academic and managerial point of view. The research methodology performed was conducted in order to test our theoretical hypotheses with data collected in an empirical study. Firstly, the data collection procedure and measurement of the construct are described. Secondly, the conceptual models were tested with Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) analysis. All the analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics v.20, and IBM SPSS Amos v.21.

## Results

Firstly, we tested the existence of common method bias following two different tests. In the first test, based on the Harman one-factor test (Podsakoff and Organ 1986<sup>[27]</sup>), the results showed that a single general factor did not account for most variance in an exploratory factor analysis (only 30.33%), indicating that the presence of common method variance was unlikely to be significant. In the second test, based on the approach of Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee and Podsakoff (2003) <sup>[28]</sup>, a new model with all the observed variables loading on one factor was re-estimated, and the results were unacceptable (Chi-square=630,254.77; df=277; RMSEA=3.339). Altogether, these results suggested that common method bias was not a problem in this study.

Convergent validity and scale reliability were assessed with confirmatory factor analysis, following the guidelines of Anderson and Gerbing (1988) <sup>[29]</sup>. The results from the estimation of which are the inside conventional cut-off values (Vandenberg and Lance 2000<sup>[30]</sup>), so we deemed the model acceptable. Regarding reliability, all constructs presented acceptable levels of composite reliability, and extracted variance considerably exceeding the level of .60 and .50, respectively, as recommended by Bagozzi and Yi (1988) <sup>[31]</sup> (Table 1). To assess convergent validity, we examined the standardized factor loadings: all items load on their specified latent variables, and each loading is large and significant, thus indicating convergent validity (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988<sup>[29]</sup>; Hair, Hult, Ringle and Sarstedt, 2014<sup>[32]</sup>).

To assess discriminant validity we observed construct inter-correlations, and the results show that they were significantly different from 1, and that the shared variance between any two constructs (square of their inter-correlations) was less than the average variance, see Table 2.

**Table 2. Reliability and discriminant validity: Square Correlations between constructs and AVE**

Construct	1	2	3	4	AVE
Customer Orientation	0.896				0.636
Brand Affect	0.345	0.970			0.917
Brand Trust	0.078	0.547	0.944		0.738
Brand Loyalty	0,051	0,518	0,583	0.926	0.718
<b>Note: Composite Reliability on the main diagonal</b>					
<b>*p &lt; 0,01</b>					

Source: Own elaboration.

The SEM analysis was conducted to test our hypotheses. The comparison between the goodness of the fit and the parsimony of the three alternative models, shows that the most parsimonious model that best fits our data is the total mediation model.

We found support for the positive influence of customer orientation upon brand affect (0.214;  $p < 0.001$ ) and brand trust (0.289;  $p < 0.001$ ); and for the positive influence of brand affect (0.247;  $p < 0.001$ ) and brand trust (0.639;  $p < 0.001$ ) upon brand loyalty. Consumer orientation produces, through its mediators, a significant indirect effect upon brand loyalty (0.237;  $p < 0.001$ ), see Table 2.

**Table 3. Model fit summary and estimates (total mediation model)**

HYPOTHESES	Relationships	Standardized regression weights	Test
H1 Indirect effects	CO-BLOY INDIRECT	0.237***	Supported
H2a	CO-BAF	0.214 ***	Supported
H2b	CO-BTR	0.289***	Supported
H3a	BTR-BLOY	0.639***	Supported
H3b	BAF-BLOY	0.247***	Supported
<b>MODEL FIT SUMMARY</b>			
Chi-square= 3,148, df= 52			
CFI= 0,997; IFI= 0.997; TLI= 0.995; NFI=0.996			
RMSEA=0.027			
<b>Note: * p &lt;0.05; ** p&lt;0.01; *** p&lt;0.001; ns=not significant</b>			

Source: Own elaboration.

The moderator effect of the product category was tested by comparing, for each regression, the goodness of the fit for two rival models: the model with the free parameter for each product category, and the model with the parameter restricted to an identity between product categories. And they are supported in all categories (cream and wine). It was found that the moderation was more significant in the cream category: H4 BAF-BLOY(0.277,  $p =$

000), BT-BLOY(0 .686, p = 000). A lower degree of significance was found for the product category DOC wine, H4 BAF-BLOY (0.198, p = 000), BT-BLOY (0.616, p = 000). However, it should be noted that the moderating effect of the cream category was more prevalent in the relationship between brand affect and brand loyalty, see Table 3.

**Table 4: Moderation mediation model**

HYP		Relationships	Standardized regression weights <b>Cream</b>	Standardized regression weights <b>Wine</b>	Test
H4		Moderate category BAF-BLOY	<b>.277</b>	<b>.198</b>	Supported p=.000
H4		Moderate category BTR-BLOY	<b>.686</b>	<b>.616</b>	Supported p=.000

Source: Own elaboration.

### Conclusion

The results of this study confirm the adequacy of relationship marketing assumptions to the context of private labels. A direct relationship between brand affect and brand loyalty (Berscheid, 1983<sup>[33]</sup>; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001<sup>[12]</sup>) was noticed, as well as between brand trust and brand loyalty (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001<sup>[12]</sup>). However, this was not their main interest: the relevance of private label loyalty was greater if it was assumed that its effects could transcend the scope of product brand and extend to the retailer's brand, as shown by the studies of Koschate-Fisher, Cramer, and Hoyer (2017)<sup>[34]</sup>.

The main contribution of this study lies in considering consumer orientation of the retail chain as an antecedent to brand loyalty in a causal sequence mediated by the affect and trust that private labels arise in consumers. There is an indirect effect on the relationship between customer orientation and brand loyalty. This connection could only be explained through the moderation relationship of brand affect and brand trust, although this moderation was stronger through brand trust. The mediating effects were shown as moderate by product category.

Product category has been considered as a possible generator of differences according to the "context of consumption", contrasting between a social consumption context and a private consumption context. For this reason, affect and loyalty evaluations have been requested from consumers of two "high involvement" product categories in which the risk of brand change is high and loyalty strong (Chaudhuri, 1998<sup>[35]</sup>; Koschate-Fisher et al., 2017<sup>[34]</sup>), assuming that the degree of involvement with the category has no direct effect on the choice of a private label (Ruiz-Real, Gázquez-Abad, Esteban-Millat and Martínez-López, 2017<sup>[36]</sup>).

### International and managerial implications

Private brand managers - driven by academic research results and their own experience, should be aware that (1) loyalty to their brands, in addition to being positive *per*

se, amplifies its effects by generating loyalty to the store; and (2) the tools they have to manage their brands are, from several points of view, more extensive and effective.

Both possibilities allow them to implement consumer-oriented behaviours. While it should also be considered that retailers should have a market orientation that should also include price and the intrinsic characteristics of the product, in order to satisfy consumers' desires (Olbrich, 2017<sup>[37]</sup>).

The results of this research explain to decision makers in the retailer chain, how consumer orientation works in the development of long-term relationships. We invite them to use a tool with great potential in their field, and explain the sequence of its effects, highlighting the mediating role of affective variables.

This study also illustrates the issue of social risk related to private labels, and how it reduces the impact of brand affect in generating loyalty.

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