

Brand Loyalty with Hospitality Brands: The Role of Customer Brand Identification, Brand Satisfaction and Brand Commitment

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Abstract

Hotel operators struggle to satisfy the wants of their customers and subsequently retain them by attempting to know the factors that could build up a strong brand relationships and loyal customer base. Over the recent decade, practitioners have engaged in making and maintaining future connections with customers and regard brand loyalty as their main goal in developing business methods attributable to the increasing market competition. Hospitality brands have progressively recognized that business strategies represent a strategic weapon to secure a competitive edge in the global hotel industry. To extend current understanding of hotel brand management, this study investigates to evaluate the relationships between the four marketing perspectives namely customer brand identification, brand satisfaction, brand commitment and brand loyalty. The data was collected through self-administered survey from 180 respondents of hospitality brands (four and five star hotels) of Jammu and Kashmir, India. Simple random sampling approach was adopted in the study. This paper incorporates the factors that regulate to brand loyalty in marketing literature and provides strategies to hospitality managers for increasing brand loyal customers. The findings reveal that the four variables are significantly related to one another and are useful for hotel operators to promote long-term business success, generate competitive advantages, and differentiate from its competitors in building and maintaining long term relationship with customers of hospitality brands of Jammu and Kashmir, India.

Keywords: brand loyalty, customer brand identification, brand satisfaction, brand commitment, hospitality brands

Introduction

Due to the number of benefits of a loyal customer base, the concept of brand loyalty has gained interest between academics and professionals over recent years (Kim, 2011; Kucukusta et al., 2013; Wilkins et al., 2009). In hospitality research, achieving and sustaining brand loyalty is the future of hospitality business (Shoemaker and Lewis, 1999). In the highly competitive hotel brands, where products and services have reached “commodity” status (Mattila, 2006), hoteliers are required to find ways to set their products and services apart from others (Choi and Chu, 2001). This need has given rise to the use of branding strategies as a source of differentiation (Pappu et al., 2005) and competitive advantage (Kim and Kim, 2005), making branding one of the most dominant trends in the global hotel industry (Kayaman and Arasli, 2007). From the hotel's context, a strong brand increases the property's

market value (O'Neill and Xiao, 2006), financial performance (Kim and Kim, 2005; Kim et al., 2003; Kwun and Oh, 2007), creates value for both the firms and the customers (So et al., 2013) and other key performance indicators such as average price, occupancy, revenue, and return on investment (Forgacs, 2003).

However, there is no consensus on the factors that create greater brand loyalty on the part of customers (Mason et al., 2006; Wilkins et al., 2009). Within the academic field previous studies have analyzed the antecedents and outcomes of brand loyalty in the hospitality context (Mason et al., 2006; Narteh et al., 2013; So et al., 2013; Sui and Baloglu, 2003; Tandford et al., 2011; Wilkins et al., 2009). The topic of brand loyalty has been researched extensively, with studies largely focused on the examination of key marketing concepts that serve as brand loyalty antecedents, as brand satisfaction (Back and Lee, 2009; Back and Parks, 2003; Li and Petrick, 2008; Ryu et al., 2008), customer brand identification (Algesheimer et al., 2005; Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; He and Li, 2011; He et al., 2012; Homburg et al., 2009; Kuenzel and Halliday, 2010; Underwood et al., 2001) and brand commitment (Fullerton, 2003; Garbarino and Johnson, 1999; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Narteh et al., 2013; Verhoef et al., 2002). These studies have contributed to increase our knowledge on how hoteliers can enhance brand loyalty but nevertheless a very limited number of studies have included social identification antecedents in hotel brand loyalty (Choo, Park and Petrick, 2011). Furthermore, scholars have emphasised the importance of customer satisfaction in developing their brand loyalty and positive behaviours in the hospitality business. However, mere satisfaction is insufficient for brand loyalty (Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello, 2009; Han and Ryu, 2009) because of the intangible, inseparable and heterogeneous nature of the services provided (Ali, Khan and Rehman, 2012). Service providers are always looking to offer layered and holistic experiences that not only satisfy the customers, but also bond customers emotionally that is brand commitment to the service providers (Walls et al., 2011). In view of the research deficiency, the aim of this study is to examine the relationship among brand loyalty, customer brand identification, brand satisfaction and brand commitment with hospitality brands in Jammu and Kashmir, India (see Figure 1). Hospitality brands that are struggling to deliver loyal customer base need to move beyond features, products and processes by creating a positive valued relationship, generate positive brand identity derived from engagement enabled strategies, build desire based attachments that is commitment, establish positive brand evaluations that is satisfaction and quality experiences. Increasing and maintaining loyal customers has become an essential issue for long-term success of businesses. For many years, the development and sustainment of brand loyalty has been the

ultimate goal of marketing activities of many organizations. As a result, successful marketing strategies depend on long-term customer relationships rather than improvements in tangible service benefits such as price or quality.

Literature Review

Brand Loyalty

Sui and Baloglu (2003) have argued that the building and maintaining of brand loyalty based on relationship marketing has become an important business strategy especially in the hotel industry. Brand loyalty is a multifaceted construct and has been perceived as a three dimensional concept including behavioral, attitudinal, and composite (Backman and Crompton, 1991; Bowen and Chen, 2001). Researchers holding a behavioral approach is related to brand loyalty that has been operationally characterized as repeat purchase intentions, purchasing behaviors (such as frequency, intensity, proportion), and word-of-mouth recommendations (Baloglu, 2002). Behavioral measures as the sole indicator of loyalty have been criticized as being unable to distinguish between true loyalty and spurious loyalty (Odin et al., 2001). Researchers also view brand loyalty from attitudinal perspective measures, which is affection toward a brand through indicators such as trust, emotional attachment, and commitment (Baloglu, 2002; Bowen and Shoemaker, 2003; Morgan and Hunt, 1994). While consideration of the attitudinal aspects of loyalty allows the researcher to distinguish brand loyalty from repeat buying, it focuses on consumer declarations rather than on actual purchases and thus may not be an accurate representation of reality (Mellens et al., 1996; Odin et al., 2001). Other proponents of loyalty known as the composite or contingency approach to brand loyalty which includes both behavioral and attitudinal measures, because the composite view provides a holistic understanding of the loyalty concept, it has been examined and supported in several brand loyalty studies (Harris and Goode, 2004; Li and Petrick, 2008) and consequently adopted here.

Customer Brand Identification (CBI) and Brand Loyalty

From a customer perspective, identification is an individual's "perceived oneness with or belongingness to an organization" (Bhattacharya et al., 1995), and at the brand level, identification occurs when the customer sees his or her self-image as overlapping the brands image (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006). Furthermore customer identification originating from social identity theory, can lead to a range of consumer outcomes, including brand loyalty (He et al., 2012). Empirical research also supports the effect of customer identification on brand loyalty (He and Li, 2011; He et al., 2012; Homburg et al., 2009; Kuenzel and Halliday, 2010). Therefore, customers identified with a company will

not only acquire products sporadically but also establish a closer relationship with the company (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003) developing a sense of loyalty. Within the hospitality brands a recent study by So et al. (2013) demonstrates that customer identification is an important predictor of hotel brand loyalty. Hence, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Customer brand identification will positively influence hotel brand loyalty.

Brand Satisfaction and Brand Loyalty

Satisfaction has been a locus of marketing from last few decades and customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction has become a core marketing concept which can be attributed to the organizations long-term competitive advantage (Heitmann et al., 2007; Patterson et al., 1997). According to Song et al. (2011), the level of satisfaction pertaining to a product or service is determined by the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction experienced by the customer. Thus, by enhancing the satisfaction level of customers, the hotel can have a competitive edge over its rivals (Mittal and Kamakura, 2001; Patterson et al., 1997). Customer satisfaction is defined as a customer's overall evaluation of the performance of an offering to date (Johnson and Fornell 1991). A great deal of previous research has shown empirical evidence of a positive relationship between satisfaction and loyalty (Fornell et al., 1996; Han and Ryu, 2009; Kandampully and Suhartanto, 2000; Mittal and Kamakura 2001). We therefore suggest that brand satisfaction influences brand loyalty. Therefore, leads to hypotheses

H2: Brand satisfaction has a positive association with hotel brand loyalty.

Brand Commitment and Brand Loyalty

Commitment is one of the central concepts in relationship marketing research (Fullerton, 2003) and can be defined as "an enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship" (Moorman et al., 1992). Many researchers have found commitment to be the key component of establishing and maintaining long-term relationships between business partners (Dwyer et al., 1987; Geyskens, Steenkamp et al., 1996; Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Customers having strong levels of commitment, who have nurtured strong relationships with their brand, tend to see strong connections between themselves and the brand (Escalas and Bettman, 2003) and consider the brands to be an integral part of their lives (Fournier, 1998). Within the hospitality business, commitment have been found to be important drivers of brand loyalty for hotels (Bowen and Shoemaker, 1998; Mattila, 2006; Narteh et al., 2013; So et al., 2013; Tandford et al., 2011; Wilkins et al., 2009). Hence, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3: Brand commitment is positively related to hotel brand loyalty.

Research Methodology

Objective of the study

To investigate interrelationship among customer brand identification, brand satisfaction, brand commitment and brand loyalty with hospitality brands in Jammu and Kashmir, India.

To suggest the suitable marketing strategies for the enhancement of brand loyalty with hospitality brands in Jammu and Kashmir, India.

Sampling Design and Sample Size

The study used simple random sampling technique to collect the data from four star and five star hotels. Sample size is decided according to the number of items used to study the constructs. Every item requires minimum 5 respondents and maximum 10 respondents (Hair et al. 2008). As the study's construct contained 18 items, so it was decided to take 180 as the sample size.

Methods of Data Collection

The questionnaire was the data collection tool. The questionnaire was divided into two main sections. Section one was subdivided into four parts and focused on issues relating to the four marketing constructs. The second section enlisted demographic information on age, gender, income, occupation and nationality of the respondents.

Research Tools and Scale Measures

The questions were developed on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 7 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). Descriptive statistics was used to compute the mean and standard deviation of the variables. Correlation, Simple/Multiple regression was finally used to test the relationships. The variables of the questionnaires were adopted from the literature and, where possible, were modified to suit the hospitality brands. Customer brand identification were adopted from So et al. (2012) were measured with four items, and brand loyalty were also adopted from So, King and Sparks, (2012) with four items and Bowden, (2011) with two items, respectively. Brand satisfaction was adopted from Ali and Amin (2014), and was represented with four items. Brand commitment was adapted from Gabarino and Johnson (1999) measured with four items.

Scope of the Study

The target population for this study was limited to those guests who had stayed at Jammu and Kashmir's four and five star hotels at least once for a night or more. A list of four and five star hotels operating in Jammu & Kashmir was procured

from the Tourism Departments of Jammu and Kashmir. Research indicates that this higher priced segment is highly competitive with low switching costs (Wilkins et al., 2009) making it difficult to achieve brand loyalty. We, therefore, considered it a strategic necessity to investigate interrelationship among these marketing constructs/practices in the hospitality brands which has been under-researched in Jammu and Kashmir, India.

Analysis

Demographic Information

A descriptive analysis of the respondents indicates that 54% were male while 46% were female. An overwhelming 37% of the respondents were between 31 and 40 years, 27% of the respondents were between 41 and 50 years, 20% of the respondents were between 20 and 30 years and 16% of the respondents were above 51 years of age. 61% of customers are from India, 5.6% of tourists coming from USA, 5.6% from UK and Russia, 5.6% Bangladesh, 4.6% from Srilanka etc. In addition, 61% of the respondents were based in the four-star hotels while 39% of the respondents were based in the five-star hotel. 58% respondents are first time and 42% are repeated customers of the hotels. The results are presented in table 1.

Descriptive statistics

The descriptive statistics of the dependent and independent variables are given in table 2. It was found that customers were positively influenced by customer brand identification, customer satisfaction, commitment and brand loyalty. The mean values of customer brand identification range from 3.72 to 5.12. This means that most of the statements respondents somewhat agree on its variables. The mean values of brand satisfaction range from (5.19 to 5.31), which indicated that most of the respondents have moderate to greater loadings. While as in commitment, mean values range from (4.98 to 5.11), this means that most of the respondents have moderate loadings. In brand loyalty also the mean values of the variables range from (5.12 to 5.86) that give the idea that the most of the statements have moderate to greater loadings. The results are presented in table 2.

Reliability and Validity

The internal consistency of the research instrument should be tested by reliability analysis (Hair et al., 2008). The criterion was followed by Cronbach's α statistics to measure the form of reliability. The constructs are considered adequate when the Cronbach's α scores are above the minimum recommended value of 0.6 (Hair, et al., 2008). Based on the research finding as indicated in table 2, the values of Cronbach's α for all the constructs are more than the value of 0.6, ranging from the lowest value of Cronbach's α (Customer brand identification = 0.88)

to the higher value of Cronbach's α (Brand satisfaction = 0.97). All α scores were above the recommended .60 point and indicate that the scales were reliable (Hair, et al., 2008). Further reliability analysis was run to retain reliable items based on item to total correlation (greater than 0.15) and inter-item correlation (greater than 0.30). Validity can be measured with the help of the KMO value which is higher or equal to 0.50. They are valid (Hair et al. 2008). KMO value was 0.919; Barlett's test chi-square = 4296.112, $df = 153$, $p = .000$. So, data was valid.

Correlation and Regression Analyses

Correlation (table 3) and multiple regression analyses (table 4) were run to examine hypotheses. The findings reveal that there is a positive correlation between the key constructs. The regression model was conducted to test the relationship between the brand loyalty, customer brand identification, brand satisfaction and brand commitment. The results, as shown in Table 4, indicate that the proposed model for all the three hypotheses is fit, as $R^2 = .696$ and $p < .001$. This model shows that the 69% variance of brand loyalty can be explained customer brand identification, brand commitment and brand satisfaction as independent variables. The results for Hypothesis 1 indicates that customer brand identification significantly and positively influenced the level of brand loyalty ($\beta = .254$, $p < .05$). Moreover, it also shows that brand satisfaction has a significant and positive relationship with brand loyalty ($\beta = .182$, $p < .05$) that supports H2. In addition, regression model indicates that brand commitment is another factor that influences brand loyalty. The results indicate that a one-unit increment in commitment increases the level of loyalty by .5 units ($\beta = .512$, $p < .05$), that supports H3. It is also significant to note that all the hypotheses were supported by the analysis and the results are presented in table 4.

Discussion and Conclusion

Marketing managers in all service industry major focus is brand loyalty (Mauri, 2003). This study contributes to the hospitality literature by demonstrating the role and influence of customer brand identification (CBI), brand satisfaction and brand commitment in enhancing brand loyalty with hospitality brands. Achieving brand loyalty in business has become a central issue to both managers and researchers. Researchers have demonstrated that the benefits of loyal customers are enormous. Loyal customers increase the overall profitability of service providers such as hotels (Reichheld, 1996). The results reveal that there is a positive and significant relationship between all the underlying constructs. It is also significant to note that all the hypotheses were supported by the analysis. This study concluded that there are strong interrelationships between the four key marketing perspectives with hospitality brands. Consistent with most of the findings in the previous

empirical researches that also supports the influence of customer brand identification on brand loyalty (He et al., 2012; Homburg et al., 2009; Kuenzel and Halliday, 2010), brand satisfaction on brand loyalty (Han and Ryu, 2009; Kandampully and Suhartanto, 2000) and brand commitment on brand loyalty (Bowen and Shoemaker, 1998; Mattila, 2006; Narteh et al., 2013). As such, with the knowledge of how one marketing perspective influences another, hotel operators could take the necessary action to achieve the goals (profit, loyalty etc.) by improving the customer brand identification, the level of satisfaction, the desire based attachment (commitment) which ultimately leads to the brand loyalty. Hotel operators should also focus on demands and desires, customer needs and wants that influence satisfaction and commitment, and promote long-term business growth by creating positive identity and building up their customer base. The results of our study do suggest that when customers positively identify with the hotel brand, their evaluations and desires based attachments with hotel brand are enhanced. Such positive hotel brand evaluations and attachments in turn determine brand loyalty level with the brand.

Implications of the Study

This study has several implications for hotel brand loyalty management. From a theoretical perspective, this research extends the current understanding of hotel brand loyalty by examining the role of customer brand identification, brand satisfaction and brand commitment. These constructs are keys to the development of customer brand loyalty in the service industry and a significant source of competitive advantage (Ballantyne, 2005). From a practical point of view, results recommend that in building and sustaining strong brand loyalty, hotel brand managers should produce positive customer perceptions of the service expertise. These brand management aspects represent the essential practical components that hotels should satisfy to meet customer expectations. The practical implications to four and five star hotels are that, they must place a lot more emphasis on the building and maintenance of valued relationships. The hotel managers would consequently need to focus on social bonding tactics to maintain and improve commitment levels and create a higher level of customer satisfaction, brand identity and brand loyalty. They should also offer personalized services to meet customer needs where necessary. Factors such as willing to maintain relationship with the hotel, customer intention to say positive things about hotel to other people, would do more business with the hotel in the next few years, recommend hotel to someone who seeks advice and would encourage friends and relatives to do business with the hotel are

emerged as the most significant indicators of customer loyalty. Moreover, in this study, the evaluation/regression coefficients of customer brand identification (CBI) was low suggesting that customers currently may not identify strongly with hotel brands. From that perspective, additionally to strain for service excellence hotel operators should make a substantial effort to develop a distinct brand identity that resembles with customers but also clearly differentiate that brand from its competitors. Creating a unique and clear identity that target customer segments desire allows a sustainable differentiation of the brand and helps to enhance customer's identification with the brand (Baumgarth and Schmidt, 2010). Therefore, to intensify brand loyalty and create competitive advantages, and differentiate from its competitors our results imply that star hotel managers should pay more attention to satisfaction, CBI and commitment to retain existing and prospective customers in building and maintaining long term relationship with customers of hospitality brands of Jammu and Kashmir, India.

Limitations and Future Research

However, an evaluation of the findings must acknowledge several limitations. First, like previous related studies, this research uses cross-sectional data, which means that the results can suggest only an association between the constructs under investigation rather than a causal relationship. Second, as the sample products were selected from four and five star hotels categories, the lower category (two three) hotels may have affected the results because a customer is less likely to have high customer brand identification with an economy hotel brand. Third, it is not clear whether the same findings will emerge if survey respondents were differentiated according to frequency of travel/hotel stay or usage, which should be the subject of future investigations.

The current study considers brand loyalty as a uni-dimensional construct comprising both attitudinal and behavioral aspects, future research might investigate the effects of customer brand identification, brand satisfaction and brand commitment on different aspects of brand loyalty (i.e., cognitive, affective, conative, and action-oriented), thereby offering additional insight into the impacts of CBI, satisfaction and commitment on different facets of the loyalty construct. Finally, a worthwhile undertaking for future investigation would be to identify other determinants of hotel brand loyalty such as customer brand engagement, customer brand experience, brand attitude, brand trust and brand value and brand involvement. Future research should aim to find empirical evidence for these perspectives.

Figure 1 Theoretical framework.

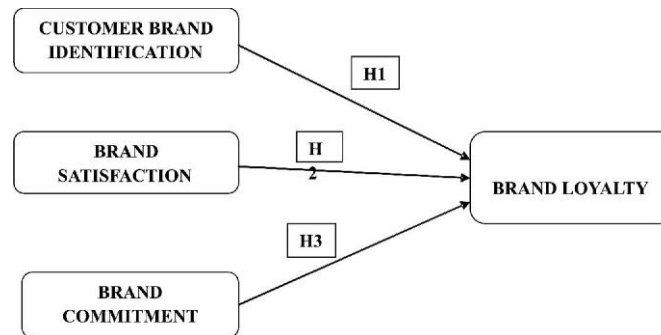


Table 1 Demographic and Travel Behaviour of Customers

Demographics		Travel Behaviour	
Gender		Nature of visit	
Male	(54%)	Recreation & Entertainment	(60%)
Female	(46%)	Adventure	(24%)
Age of customers in (years)		Religious	(11.6%)
20 – 30	(20%)	Official visit	(4%)
31 – 40	(37%)	Others	(0.4%)
41 – 50	(27%)	Frequency of stay at hotel	
Above 51	(16%)	First time	(50%)
Qualification of customers		Once in a year	(39%)
Matriculation	(3%)	Twice in a year	(6%)
Graduation	(55%)	More than twice in year	(5%)
Post-graduation	(36%)	Duration of stay (days)	
Others	(6%)	Less than 3	(48%)
Income (Annual) INR (lakhs)		4– 6	(45%)
Below 5 Lakhs	(13%)	More than 7	(7%)
5 lakh – 10	(14%)	Source of information about the hotel	
10 lakh – 15	(27%)	Friends/Relations	(22%)
Above 15	(46%)	Previous visit	(30%)
Occupation of customers		Tour operator /Travel agent	(13%)
Business	(31%)	Tourist information centre	(7%)
Service	(30%)	Internet	(28%)
Professional	(33%)	Travel companion/s	
Others	(16%)	Alone	(3%)
Nationality of customers		Family	(57%)
Indian	(61%)	Friends	(25%)
USA	(5.6%)	Relatives	(6%)
UK	(5.6%)	Partners	(5%)
Russia	(5.6%)	Tour group	(4%)
Bangladesh	(5.6%)	Customer status	

Dubai	(2.8%)	First time customer	(58%)
Srilanka	(4.6%)	Repeat customer	(42%)
Saudi Arab	(2.8%)	Revisit intentions	
France	(1.6%)	Yes	(89%)
Indonesia	(1.6%)	No	(1.6%)
Canada	(1.6%)	Maybe	(9.5%)
Denmark	(1.6%)		

Table 2 Internal Consistency Reliability and Descriptive Statistics

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	SITCS	SMCs
CUSTOMER BRAND IDENTIFICATION ($\alpha = .88$)				
When someone criticizes this hotel, it feels like a personal insult	3.72	1.17	.77	.63
When I talk about this hotel, I usually say “we” rather than “they”	4.08	1.21	.79	.66
This hotel successes are my successes	4.36	1.13	.73	.55
When someone praises this hotel, it feels like a personal compliment	5.12	0.89	.66	.44
BRAND SATISFACTION ($\alpha = .97$)				
I am satisfied with my decision to visit this hotel	5.31	0.94	.94	.89
My choice to choose this hotel was a wise one	5.18	0.92	.94	.93
I feel that my experience with this hotel has been enjoyable	5.30	0.90	.88	.79
I think I did the right thing to visit this hotel	5.19	0.92	.95	.94
BRAND COMMITMENT ($\alpha = .95$)				
I feel committed to this hotel	5.06	0.94	.90	.94
I am proud to belong to this hotel	4.98	0.82	.85	.77
I am a loyal customer of this hotel	5.08	0.97	.92	.94
I care long-term success of this hotel	5.11	0.85	.84	.76
BRAND LOYALTY ($\alpha = .90$)				
I would recommend this hotel to someone who seeks my advice	5.86	0.46	.82	.95
I would encourage friends and relatives to do business with this hotel	5.84	0.47	.83	.95
I would say positive things about this hotel to other people	5.69	0.72	.79	.68
I would do more business with this hotel in the next few years	5.29	0.96	.80	.67
I am a loyal customer of this hotel	5.12	0.93	.72	.61
I am willing to maintain my relationship with this hotel	5.45	0.76	.77	.66

Note : Note: *7 point Likert scale was used (1 —Strongly Disagree, 2—Disagree, 3 – Some What Disagree, 4—Neither Disagree Nor Agree,5—Some What Agree 6—Agree, 7—Strongly Agree).

M= Mean; SD= Standard Deviation; Square Item to Total Correlation (SITCs); and Squared Multiple Correlations (SMCs).

Table 3 Pearson Correlation Analysis

	CBI	CC	CS	BL
CBI	1	0.494**	0.633**	0.622**
BC	0.494**	1	0.797**	0.783**
BS	0.633**	0.797**	1	0.751**
BL	0.622**	0.783**	0.751**	1

Note. CBI=customer brand identification; BC=brand commitment; BS=brand satisfaction; BL= brand loyalty; **Correlation is significant at the .01 level (two-tailed).

Table 4 Multiple Regression Analysis

Dependent variable	Independent variable	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	B	Beta	t-value	p-value	T	VIF	Conclusion
BL	CBI	0.696	0.690	134.048	0.165	0.254	4.724	0.000	0.598	1.67	Accepted
	BS				0.127	0.182	2.356	0.020	0.288	3.47	Accepted
	BC				0.372	0.512	7.423	0.000	0.364	2.74	Accepted

Note. CBI=customer brand identification; BC=brand commitment; BS= brand satisfaction; BL= brand loyalty; R²= R square, B= unstandardized coefficient.

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