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## Impact of a Brand on Consumer Decision-making Process

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### Abstract

With the modern development of economics and marketing, brands are having a more important place in our lives each day. We may neglect it, but we all find brands extremely attractive, whether it is because they make us feel wealthier or more self-confident, because we think they have a higher quality than generic ones, or for any other reason. Inspired by this psychological impact of brands on life and consumers, in this case consumer purchasing, the purpose of this article was to find out whether and how brands impact consumers' decision-making processes and do they (and why) prefer branded products over generic.

The data for this article was collected in the form of an online survey. 225 respondents took part in filling out the survey in the period of one month. 125 of the respondents were male, while 100 were female, all between the ages of 18 to 60. The results of the survey show that there is a high impact of branding on consumer decision-making processes and their purchasing decisions. More precisely said, consumers prefer buying branded products to generic for many reasons, and their choice is affected by the status of the product.

**Keywords:** brands, consumer behavior, consumer decision-making process.

### 1. Introduction

Nowadays one of the most attractive terms for researchers is "brand". The whole concept of branding is becoming very important in business, as well as in private lives of people. Among many brands there are always few to which customers decide to be loyal. The introduction will reflect on the fact that some brands have loyal customers, while others do not, and what are the key factors in having customers who will always remain loyal. Brands have some subcategories, which play the most important role in consumer decision-making processes and are explained in more details in the further parts of the article.

Brand history lets us know how the population has utilized the brand as a sign of identification. The beginning of usage of "brand" was to differentiate products from one producer to others. These days, brands are not used just to differentiate one from another, but also to justify decision-making processes. Many things describe brands, such as name, symbol and design. The key components that form a brand's toolbox include brand's identity, brand communication (such as logos and trademarks), brand awareness, brand loyalty, and various branding (brand management) strategies (Bhimrao M. Ghodeswar, 2008).

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In order to better understand the concept of branding, there are some terms necessary to be explained. Firstly, brand awareness is something that we all have unconsciously in our minds and can be defined as the degree to which a brand is perceived by potential clients and is accurately connected with a specific item. There is a wide range of approaches to advertise a brand with a specific end goal to show a specific picture in the brains of buyers. There can be a logo, a name, a specific color, etc., that connects itself to a brand in the psyche of the customer. A brand that is more understood than others will probably be chosen for purchase over a brand where little is thought about them. It is identified with the elements of brand personalities in buyers' memory and can be reflected by how well the consumers can distinguish the brand under different conditions (Keller, Kevin, 1993).

Brand awareness can be separated into two sections: brand recognition and brand recall performance. Brand recognition is the capacity of the customers to separate intentionally the brand that was already presented to them. Consumers earned previous experience in facing with a certain brand. This does not necessarily mean that the buyers recognize the brand name, it rather often implies that buyers can react to a certain brand after facing its visual packaging images (Percy, Larry; Rossiter, John, 1992). Brand recall alludes to the capacity of the customers to accurately produce and recover the brand in their memory (Keller, Kevin 1993). Shortly said, brand awareness goes about as an affirmation. As a result, customers' purchase choices rely on upon whether they have seen or known about the brand (Ya-Hsin, H., Ya-hei, H., Suh-Yueh, C., &Wenchang, F., 2014).

The next term is also something common for all people using the same branded product again and again. We can define brand loyalty as positive emotions towards a brand and commitment to buy the same item or service from the same brand again, paying little mind to opponent's activities or changes in the business environment. This idea of a brand shows symbolism and imagery for an item or scope of items. Brands can have the ability to connect with purchasers and make them feel emotionally attached.

Buyer's convictions and states of mind make up brand pictures, and these influence how they will see brands, how they come into contact with (Kotler, Burton, Deans, Brown & Armstrong, 2013). Repeatedly contact with products makes consumers more loyal and more experienced when a brand is in question. All encompassing encounters, such as sense, connection, acting and feeling, happen when one meets brands. The more grounded and more social these faculties are to the individual, the more likely repeat purchasing will happen. After contact has been made, mental thinking will happen, trailed by a purchase or not-purchase choice. This can bring in repeated purchase behavior, consequently causing the start of brand loyalty. It can be shortly described as 'behavioral willingness to consistently maintain relations with a particular brand' (Aaker, 1996).

The last but not least important term is brand design. The first thing that we notice about a product is its design, and if we like it, we are attracted immediately. So, we can say that strong brands make connections. Initial impressions are made in a moment, while more profound impressions are made through clear and predictable messages. Each organization on the planet that sees itself as a brand, from companies to nonprofit and sport groups, depends on its personality outline to speak of its character to the general population in a unique and memorable way. At the point when constructing a brand for a new firm, the main thing that must be considered is what sort of target audience you are focused on reaching. While emotion is a factor that is often overlooked, the thing that matters a lot is the message you want to convey and what you want it to present. It is very important to choose the name that perfectly represents a concept that you want to be conveyed. Afterwards, the logo outline comes, a graphic in which the right blends of picture and text style hues are picked out. Later, brand design will likewise comprise of accessories required by a company for their visual correspondence: paper, business accessories for clients and workers, brochures, packaging and so on. So the brand design makes a piece in the complete picture of a brand.

#### 1.1. Purpose of study

Moving from the past to the modern history, since the beginning of branding there is an impact of brands on consumers' minds in many different ways. Wherever we look we can find some reflection of brands. In food, clothes, information industry, furniture, car industry (industry in general), games, drugs, cosmetics, and so on, we see a competition between brands. They force us to shop, make us prefer one brand over another, and they make our decisions harder or easier. Usually people do not buy certain brands only for design and requirement, but also in an attempt

to enhance their self-esteem in the society (Leslie and Malcolm, 1992). Presently individuals see the brands as their acknowledgment, accomplishment, and materialistic trifle. On the other hand, Woods clarified that purchasers are sincerely appended to various brands of their decision (Wood, J. T., 1982).

For example, if a certain brand's representative is a big role-model to someone, or if s/he is a celebrity, the purchaser will buy that particular item only due to the fact that if he buys the product he will look more like that specific person. This just shows how people try to represent themselves to others through brands. This study will examine how and to what extent brands have an impact on consumers' decision-making processes when purchasing. Each section of the survey, explained into more detail in the third chapter, are questions related to a particular brand category. Consumers' loyalty, awareness and even how they feel when buying a certain product and does brand design play an important role in their decision-making processes will be examined. All these answers will help us figure out how consumers decide to buy one product over another and what is makes them purchase a certain product. It will be presented the results from surveys and their analysis so it will show us how consumers reacted to statements which are created to help us in discovering whether brands have an impact on consumers' decision-making processes. The final conclusion about what steps should a company take so they can have consumers who believe in their brand and products will be made.

## 2. Literature review

### 1.1. Basic Branding Concepts

Consumer perception towards brand represents an important aspect of marketing mix (Gabor & Conti, 2012). Jin and Weber (2013) asserted that, brands served primarily as a way for customers to identify and recognize goods and their manufacturer. Nowadays, brands perform two important functions. First, a brand represents a promise by a particular company about a particular product and it serves as a type of quality certification. Second, brands enable customers to better organize their shopping experience by helping them search out and find a specific product. Therefore, an important brand function is to make a distinction between a particular company's offering from all other offerings.

The sum of impressions a customer has for a brand is called the brand image, which is defined as perceptions about a brand as reflected by brand associations that consumers hold in their minds (Keller, 1998). On the other hand, we can define brand equity as the total value that accumulates to a product because of company's cumulative investments in the marketing of the brand. Kamakura and Russel (1993) describe brand equity as an intangible value, such as brand name association, which supports a product by virtue of its brand name.

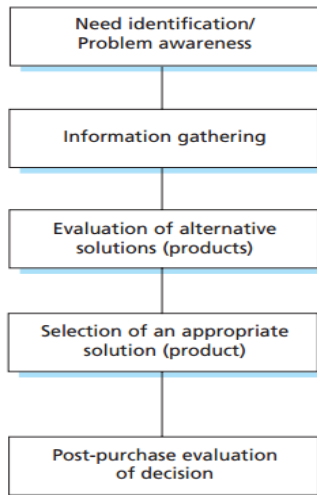
Consumers very often have a tendency to choose a brand that they consider congruent with their self-image. This means that every consumer will attempt to reflect his or her own identity through choice. When part of a larger social group, consumer choices move toward to converge to a certain pattern, consequently forming the fundamentals of an individuals' social identity (Cătălin, Andreea, 2014). In building up brand preference, consumers compare and rank different brands by focusing on their uniqueness. Brand preference can be defined as the extent to which the customer favors the designed service provided by his or her present company, in contrast to the designated service provided by other companies in his or her consideration set, with a consideration set alluding to brands that a consumer would consider buying in the near future (Jin & Weber, 2013).

### 2.2. Consumer Behaviour

Consumer behaviour can be characterized as the behaviour that consumers demonstrate in searching for, purchasing, using, evaluating, and disposing of products and services that they expect will satisfy their needs (Schiffman et al. 2008). It refers to how consumers choose to use their various resources like time or money on different products in order to meet their needs and it encompasses study of what, when, why and where they will buy their products and focuses on how often the consumers use the products and evaluate them after the purchase, as well (Schiffman, 2005).

Marketers are focused on understanding the way in which consumers purchase. This is a complex process as it includes understanding the set of decisions that consumers make over time (Hoyer & Mac Innis, 2001). Consumers do not know exactly what influences their purchases as

“ninety-five percent of the thought, emotion, and learning (that drive our purchases) occur in the unconscious mind – that is without our awareness” (Armstrong et al. 2007). Behavioural scientists regard the consumer decision-making process as a problem-solving or need satisfaction process. The act of making a consumer decision generally consists of five stages including need/problem identification, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and post-purchase behaviour (Jobber, 2012), as illustrated in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** The consumer decision-making process

Source: Blackwel et al., 2003

The purchasing process can take different forms because a consumer may not necessarily go through all the steps for every purchase he or she makes. Moreover, it can be distinguished between the purchase of a product or a service and various external (i.e. price and advertisement) or internal (i.e. colour and ingredients) product factors (Hansen & Solgaard, 2002). Another differentiation is based on the consumer’s level of involvement (Bauer et al., 2006). There are five stages of the consumer decision-making process, as shown in the illustration above.

The first stage is the needs identification. It refers to where the consumer actually has a need or desire that drives him to make a purchase. Kurtz (2012) added opportunity to this stage stressing that if supposedly a consumer is unhappy with a particular purchase, or just wanting to change from the same old brand to a new one, the recognition of this need can also get to be opportunity. The second stage is information search. Consumer behaviour research has discovered two types of search that buyers engage in as they make purchase decisions. The first one includes personal information search obtained from earlier experience and word-of-mouth or advice from friends and relatives, and a second type of search, which is non-personal or external in nature, for instance advertisements in print and electronic media, as well as travel agents. The third step includes the evaluation of alternatives or different brands that are capable of satisfying the need concerned. Here, the consumer goes about evaluating various brands in relation to the need identified. Kotler et al. (2008) assert that there is no single evaluation process applied by customers when making a buying decision. Customers generally look for a product that provides the best solution to their “problem” or a product offering them with benefits that they look for. The penultimate stage is purchase decision where the consumer then proceeds onwards to make the final purchase decision. As indicated by Kotler and Keller (2009), two factors can emerge in the middle of the purchase intention and the purchase decision. The first is the attitude of others in that, if someone important to the consumer thinks that a low-priced brand should be bought, then it decreases the likelihood of buying an expensive one. The second is the unpredicted situational factor where a consumer might have an intention to purchase a specific brand of car and there is an economic meltdown or a competitor severely decreases its prices and the purchase decision here can change in seconds. And finally the last stage is the post-purchase and at this stage there are two

things involved. The consumer is either satisfied or unsatisfied with the product. The prevailing factor for this lies between the consumer's expectation of the brand preceding the purchase and the actual performance that it delivers after the purchase has been made. If the actual performance of the product is equivalent to the expected outcome, the customer is satisfied, thus we can say that the larger the gap between expectations and performance, the greater the consumer's dissatisfaction (Kotler, Keller, 2009).

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Materials and Methods

As the background of this paper's content, the data was collected in a few different ways. Firstly, hard copy surveys located at the info desk in "Bellona" were distributed to consumers. Later, an online version of the survey was made with Google Forms, and it greatly contributed to the research paper. Due to the lack of participants, mostly because the hard copy survey requires a lot of time to be filled in, the survey was transferred to an online version as well.

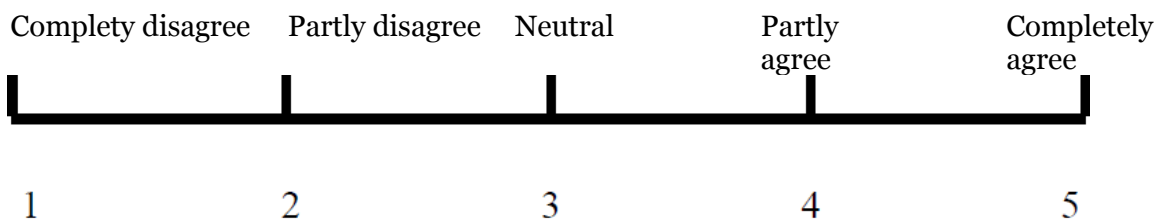
The quantitative method, i.e. survey, was used to get information of brand impact on consumer decision-making processes and to show what those factors actually are. This method was used in order to get a complete picture about consumer decision making-processes and to see whether there is impact of a brand on their choices.

#### 3.1.1. Survey

Above mentioned surveys were collected in the period of one month and few days, precisely speaking from the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June till the 29<sup>th</sup> of July, 2016. The total number of surveys is 225.

87 surveys were collected as a hard copy, while 138 responses were collected by the online version. It is important to emphasize that all hard copies were collected in the Bellona store from customers who were directly included in the decision-making process and were fully aware of the brand they are purchasing.

The survey included demographic data, as well as the "Likert" scale where participants were supposed to mark one of the five offered statements. All statements have five levels that show the participants' opinion about it. They are as shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** The Degree of Agreement Rating Scale

The survey-making process lasted for one whole month. Most of the questions were similar to the questions used in papers basing their research on similar topics, and because of that the pilot version of the survey was not issued. The questions were carefully chosen and adjusted where it was needed. The survey has three main sections:

1. Demographic data
2. Brand information
3. Dependent variables when making decisions while shopping.

Each section contains questions related to that particular part, while the second part, where information about the brand is found, consists of three subcategories:

1. Brand design
2. Brand loyalty and commitment factors when selecting a product
3. Brand awareness

Every subcategory consists of questions related to the topic.

**4. Data analysis and discussion**

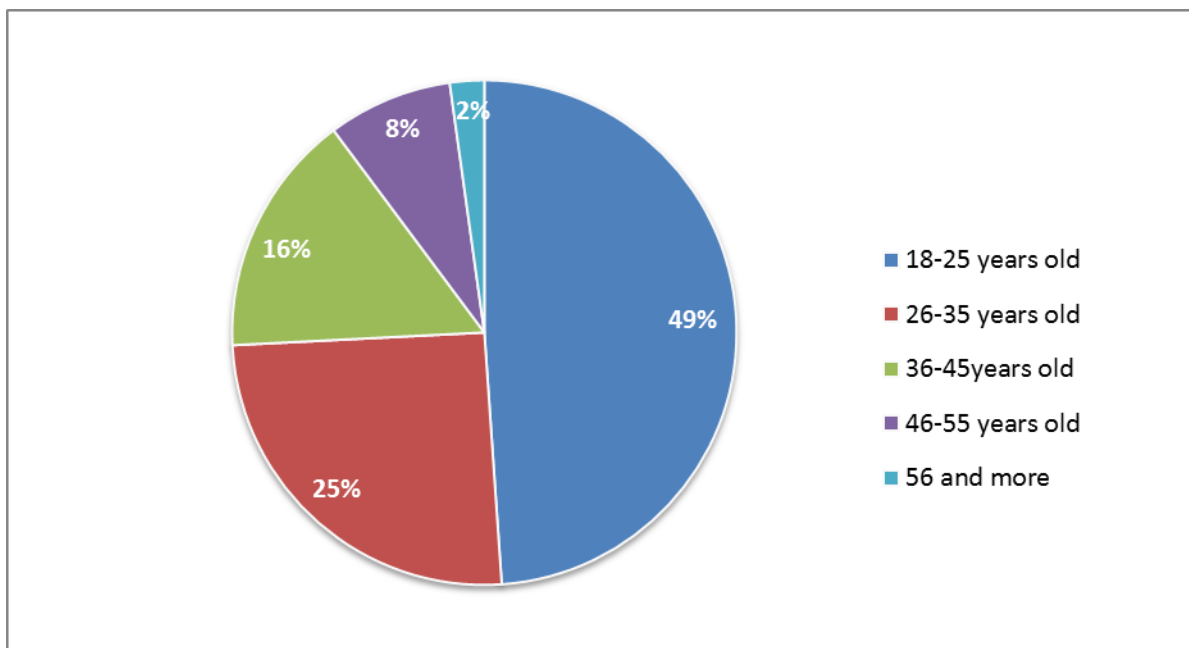
**4.1. Demographic Profile of Respondents**

In the first part of the survey, respondents were asked several demographic questions. The following tables show the summarized results obtained from those questions. Table 1 presents the gender distribution among the respondents; male respondents occupy a slightly larger portion compared to female respondents.

**Table 1.** Genders of Respondents

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	125	55.6	55.6
Female	100	44.4	100.0
Total	225	100.0	

Age distribution is shown in the form of a pie chart (Figure 3), where the majority of respondents fall in the category from 18 to 25 years of age, which takes about 49 %.



**Figure 3.** Age of Respondents

In the percentage rating related to the level of education majority of the respondents have a Bachelor degree (46 %), and the smallest portion of respondents have a PhD degree (2 %). High school diplomas have 34 % of participants while with master diplomas is 18 % of participants. According to the results about marital status, more than a half of the respondents are unmarried (60 %) while 40 % are married. Responses related to the work status are shows us that more than a half of the respondents are employed (59 %) while 41 % are unemployed. This part is concerned with calculating statistics including average, mean and standard deviation for the remaining 22 questions. All of the questions are asked in the same format – Likert scale.

**4.2. Validity of survey questions**

To test the validity of data, factor analysis was used. Four factors were extracted while I was suggested it will be four of them. In a *Rotated Component Matrix* only one question was in fifth factor („Q:I would rather buy a non-branded product than use delayed payment or take a loan in order to afford a branded product.“). Thus it was excluded from the further anlysis and was not considered to be an independent variable. Because of huge data to display and for better

understanding, I did use again factor analysis with already groped questions to display that in one smaller table. That four factors are:

1. Brand loyalty and commitment factors that influence purchasing
2. Brand awareness
3. Brand design
4. Dependent variables when making decisions while shopping

**Table 2.** Factor analysis

**Rotated Component Matrix<sup>a</sup>**

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
Brand_awareness	.147	.253	.265	.919
Brand_design	.110	.247	.927	.259
Dependent_variables_when_making_decisions_while_shopping	.985	.077	.096	.123
Brand_loyalty_and_commitment_factors_that_influence_purchasing	.086	.936	.241	.241

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 4 iterations.

We can see from the [Table 2](#) that every group of questions is in different factor with a huge differentiation from other questions value.

4.3. Reliability of survey questions

Each of four subcategories in survey will be tested for reliability. Under this paragraph will be presented all four categories were it could be possible to defined, according to Cronbach’s alpha, and see whether questions did reach level of reliability.

**Table 3.** Reliability of brand loyalty and factors that influence purchasing

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.902	.901	8

According Cronbach’s alpha of 0.902 which is higher than standard value of 0.60 we can see that all questions are reliable.

**Table 4.** Reliability for brand awareness

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.744	.747	6

From the table above we can see that brand awareness also is higher than 0.60 with Cronbach's alpha of 0.744. So it means that these questions also are reliable.

**Table 5.** Reliability for brand design

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.706	.691	4

From the table above we can see that all items are reliable according Cronbach’s alpha of 0.706 which is higher than standard value of 0.60.

**Table 6.** Reliability of dependent variables when making decisions while shopping

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.660	.661	3

From the table above we can see that all items are reliable according Cronbach’s alpha of 0.660 which is higher than standard value of 0.60.

4.4. Testing hypotheses

One of the most important steps is to see how certain variables influence on others. We will first check how independent variables (grouped questions) influence on dependent variables when making decisions while shopping. Tested hypothesis will be:

H1: Brand loyalty and commitment factors that influence purchasing plays an important role in making decisions while shopping.

H2: Brand awareness has a positive influence in decision making process while shopping.

H3: Brand design has impact on consumer decision making process in purchasing.

**Table 7.** Regression Testing hypotheses

Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.061	.341		6.050	.000
	Brand_design	.108	.086	.102	1.257	.210
	Brand_loyalty_and_commitment_factors_that_influence_purchasing	.029	.068	.034	.430	.668
	Brand_awareness	.287	.103	.227	2.772	.006

a. Dependent Variable: Dependent\_variables\_when\_making\_decisions\_while\_shopping

From the [Table 7](#) we can that only one of three independent variable has level of significance smaller than 0.05 (<0.05). So it means that we can say that only one hypothesis is accepted and it is one about brand awareness, H3. From the table we can also see that brand design and brand loyalty together with commitment factors have level of significance higher than 0.05 (>0.05) and we can state that these two hypotheses H1 and H2 are rejected.

From all the above we can see that only one variable has great influence on consumers decision-making process while purchasing.

In the rest of data analysis are provided tables according to demographic data and next hypotheses:

H4: There is a difference between age of respondents and loyalty to brand.



H5: There is no difference between genders of respondents and brand awareness.

**Table 8.** Age and brand loyalty

**ANOVA**

Brand\_loyalty\_and\_commitment\_factors\_that\_influence\_purchasing

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	7.877	4	1.969	2.104	.081
Within Groups	205.890	220	.936		
Total	213.766	224			

From the table above we see that the p-value is greater than 0.05, meaning there is no difference in age of respondents and loyalty to a brand. Thus, hypothesis H4 is rejected. In other words all age categories are equally loyal to certain brand.

**Table 9.** Genders and brand awareness

**ANOVA**

Brand\_awareness

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.285	1	.285	.650	.421
Within Groups	97.870	223	.439		
Total	98.155	224			

From the table above we see that the p-value is greater than 0.05, meaning there is no difference in genders of respondents and brand awareness. So it means hypothesis H5 is accepted. Both, males and females have similar awareness toward brands.

**5. Conclusion**

Through the whole research we could see how the concept of branding affects the consumers. The whole concept plays an important role in business, as well as in the private lives of people. From the main characteristics of a brand such are awareness, design and loyalty we could see that only awareness has an impact on the consumer decision-making process. Due to the results of the three main hypotheses, two new hypotheses were created to check whether demographic data contributes to those results. According to those tables, demographic data does not show significant contribution to different results for these three categories.

Even with only one main hypothesis confirmed, we still can say that brand at some level impacts consumer’s decision-making processes. Consciously or unconsciously, consumers’ awareness of a certain brand is forcing them to buy some products, making them more aware with every new product.

Brand is not a new concept; it is well known and probably still not researched enough. This research just investigated a small part of the whole concept called “brand”. It contributed to a better understanding of people’s psychological pictures and got us closer to understanding what makes some brands so successful.

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