Managing the consumer-based brand equity process: A cross-cultural perspective

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ABSTRACT

Most consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) models are linear and fail to capture the complexity of the brand equity construct and its benefits in terms of key consumer behavioral outcomes. More complex and dynamic models focusing on CBBE as a process often lack empirical support particularly from more than one country. This study builds on and extends previous research by empirically examining the configural nature of the CBBE building process cross-nationally, and by investigating differences vis-a-vis key consumer behavioral outcomes (namely, willingness to pay a price premium, brand recommendation and repurchase intention). These differences are postulated and explained through culture theory particularly the cultural dimension of individualism/collectivism. Using fuzzy-set/Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fs/QCA), survey data from Greece and Germany support the robustness of the extended CBBE model. The model shows that overall brand equity and consumer behavioral outcomes are created through the brand building, brand understanding, and brand relationship blocks, and identifies core causes and common patterns across countries providing a useful diagnostic tool for international brand management.

1. Introduction

Building strong brands and understanding their effect on consumer behavior is one of the most challenging tasks facing firms in today's dynamic international environment (Talay, Townsend, & Yeniyurt, 2015). Typically, the overall strength of a brand operating in one or more national markets is measured by its brand equity (Hsieh, 2004). Identifying the most effective strategy to maximize their brand equity across countries constitutes a strategic priority for international businesses who want to build their products' global brand architecture (e.g., Townsend, Yeniyurt, & Talay, 2009) and make concomitant decisions about the standardization/adaptation of branding activities (e.g., Ford, Mueller, Taylor, & Hollis, 2011; Schmid & Kotulla, 2011).

The brand equity concept reflects a brand name's value added to an offer relative to an identical but unbranded offer (Farquhar, 1989) and thus is an important diagnostic tool for managing brands. However, brand equity is not the end goal in itself as this value needs to translate into benefits for firms, for example, in terms of consumer behaviors (Cobb-Walgren, Ruble, & Donthu, 1995). This intangible asset leads to a plethora of desirable consumer outcomes, including brand preference, positive word-of-mouth, (re)purchase intention, reduced switching

intention and acceptance of higher-price premium and brand extensions (Buil, Martínez, & de Chernatony, 2013; Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995; Keller, 2001; Rambocas, Kirpalani, & Simms, 2018), which ultimately allow a brand to earn greater volume or margins (Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2010). Although research has examined brand equity from various stakeholders' perspectives, such as firms or employees, consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) dominates the pertinent literature because consumers are key stakeholders around whom actionable strategies can be devised (Keller, 1993).

A review of the pertinent literature demonstrates that: (a) despite the rich literature on CBBE, a lack of consensus on its conceptualization and operationalization remains (Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2010; Datta, Ailawadi, & van Heerde, 2017); (b) there are relatively few studies that empirically explain the specificities of the CBBE formation process in an international environment (Broyles, Leingpibul, Ross, & Foster, 2010; Hsieh, 2004; Zhang, van Doorn, & Leeflang, 2014) and/or examine the role of culture in this process (Erdem, Swait, & Valenzuela, 2006; Yoo & Donthu, 2002) (c) most of the studies focus on a limited number of CBBE facets (Aaker, 1991; Buil, Martínez, & de Chernatony, 2008; Christodoulides, Cadogan, & Veloutsou, 2015; Çifci et al., 2016; Yoo & Donthu, 2001) thus failing to provide a more holistic view of the

CBBE formation process. Attempts to understand this phenomenon more holistically have, so far, resulted in models which are purely conceptual (Keller, 2001) or lack empirical support from more than one country (Chatzipanagiotou, Veloutsou, & Christodoulides, 2016); (d) there is a scarcity of studies that integrate key consumer behavioral outcomes into the CBBE formation process (Buil et al., 2013; Rambocas et al., 2018); and finally (e) the majority of the studies adopt regression-based methods and their basic assumptions (e.g., uniformity of causal effects, unit homogeneity, additivity, causal symmetry) (Vukasović, 2016, Heinberga, Ozkayab, & Taubec, 2018; Lehmann, Keller, & Farley, 2008), which arguably cannot fully capture the admittedly complex, idiosyncratic, and multiple-faced nature of CBBE (Lehmann et al., 2008).

In line with the critical gaps in the literature, this article adopts a holistic approach and recognizes CBBE as a complex system of three building blocks, the brand building block (BBB), the brand understanding block (BUB), and the brand relationship block (BRB) (Chatzipanagiotou et al., 2016) to empirically assess the CBBE formation process in two different national contexts. In addition, the study aims to illuminate the link between the CBBE formation process and the key consumer behavioral outcomes of consumers' willingness to pay a price premium, brand recommendation and repurchase intention identifying cross-cultural similarities and differences. Furthermore, this work leverages the advantages of fs/QCA, which is a 'synthetic' methodological approach that bridges qualitative and quantitative research (Ragin, 1987, p. 84), and is particularly suited to the complex, idiosyncratic, and dynamic nature of international CBBE.

Therefore, the study aims to make four theoretical and managerial contributions to the international branding literature. First, it responds to calls for research on the development and testing of holistic, advanced tools to successfully build and manage brands globally (e.g., Ford et al., 2011) by providing a fine-grained assessment of the CBBE formation process and some of its key outcomes across countries (Broyles et al., 2010; Zhang et al., 2014). Second, the study delineates the diagnostic capabilities to monitor and manage international brands by helping businesses identify core causes and common patterns among different countries while also unfolding the idiosyncrasies in each country. Third, it demonstrates the potential applicability of the model in explaining, in branding terms, key consumer behavioral outcomes. Fourth, it identifies differences in regard to the CBBE formation process and its key consumer behavioral outcomes on the basis of culture, specifically the cultural dimension of individualism/collectivism, which constitutes a key indicator of cross-country differences in consumer perceptions and behavior in regard to brands (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010, 2011).

The paper begins with a review of the literature on CBBE and the way national and international studies have captured it. Next it unfolds the need for a process-based approach to conceptualize the creation of overall CBBE in a multi-country context and presents details of the methodology used to test the configural nature of CBBE cross-nationally. Finally, it discusses the findings together with the theoretical and managerial implications of the research.

2. Literature review

2.1. CBBE's conceptualization, measurements and behavioral outcomes

The literature on CBBE is dense, and most studies approach the concept as a complex construct (Keller & Lehmann, 2006) that consists of multiple dimensions (Datta et al., 2017; Lehmann et al., 2008). Despite overall consensus that the concept of CBBE is multidimensional, little agreement exists on its dimensionality (Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2010). Most empirical studies employ Aaker (1991) conceptualization, in which brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, and brand loyalty constitute the consumer-based dimensions of brand equity.

Research has spawned several approaches to CBBE's measurement, including direct, indirect, and practitioner measures (Agarwal & Rao, 1996). Direct measures attempt to gauge the phenomenon directly by focusing on consumer preferences (Park & Srinivasan, 1994) or utilities (Erdem & Swait, 1998), while indirect measures operationalize CBBE through its demonstrable sources and are deemed superior from a diagnostic perspective. Parallel to the academic measures, several proprietary models based on worldwide market research seek to measure brand equity (e.g., Young & Rubicam's Brand Asset Valuator) (Mizik & Jacobson, 2008), but again these share little in common in terms of their constituent dimensions.

The issue of operationalizing CBBE in an international context is even more challenging for managers who aim to capture the complexity of CBBE through their tracking systems while producing comparable diagnostic results to manage their brands across countries. A small number of studies focus on the operationalization of CBBE in more than one country (see Table 1) and these studies are not free of limitations.

As Table 1 demonstrates, a group of researchers adopt a unidimensional approach to capture CBBE (i.e., Heinberga et al., 2018; Lieven & Hildebrand, 2016; Zhang et al., 2014); an approach that is not in line with the multifaceted nature of the phenomenon. Another group of researchers deviate from unidimensional measures and, instead, gauge CBBE through multiple dimensions commonly based on Aaker's conceptualization (i.e. Buil et al., 2008; Christodoulides et al., 2015; Çifci et al., 2016; Yoo & Donthu, 2001) which, however, is not void of critique. For instance, prior research points out the lack of a unifying theory to bring Aaker's dimensions together (McWilliam, 1993) and lack of discriminant validity amongst key dimensions namely awareness and associations (Christodoulides et al., 2015). In addition, the majority of studies focus on preselected brands (Vukasović, 2016; Broyles et al., 2010) an approach which encompasses difficulties in relation to the generalization of findings. Finally, all existing studies examining CBBE in a cross-national context employ a linear approach to its operationalization, thus failing to capture the complexity surrounding the phenomenon.

In addition, and while the effect of consumers' OBE on behavioral outcomes has long been acknowledged (Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995; Keller, 2001) there remains a lack of studies allowing a thorough understanding of this relationship, especially under particular cultural variations. Most of the studies focus on specific aspects of the brand or brand equity and consumers' behavioral outcomes. For instance, a limited number of studies empirically examine the relationship of CBBE with behavioral outcomes, such as brand preference (Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995; Buil et al., 2013), positive word-of-mouth (Buil et al., 2013; Rambocas et al., 2018), repeat purchase (Rambocas et al., 2018), purchase intentions (Buil et al., 2013; Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995), and price premium (Buil et al., 2013; Rambocas et al., 2018).

The lack of consensus regarding the conceptualization and operationalization of CBBE and its effect on consumer behavioral outcomes has left many questions unanswered as to how strong brands can be built and consequently managed, especially in different national contexts (Hsieh, 2004). This issue highlights the need to move beyond the examination of CBBE measures or different aspects of it to a more holistic, advanced, and actionable CBBE model that (a) can be successfully operationalized in different countries and (b) is versatile enough in design to enable the examination of the idiosyncrasies of brands and industries in different national contexts (Keller, 2001).

2.2. The configural nature of the CBBE process

Academic theorizing increasingly argues that, overall, CBBE should be conceptualized as a multistage phenomenon that should be approached as a process rather than a construct (Keller, 1993, 2001; Lehmann et al., 2008). Several studies have focused on CBBE as a process -consisting of specific development stages and multifaceted factors (Keller, 1993, 2001; Mishra, Dash, & Cyr, 2014) - that is

Table 1
Summary of International Studies on CBBE.

Study	Country	Product Category	Conceptualization of CBBE	Data analysis
Heinberga et al. (2018)	India and China	36 brands in China and 55 brands in India	One dimensional overall brand equity adopted from Yoo, Donthu, & Lee, 2000	Structural equation modeling
Vukasović (2016)	Slovenia and Croatia	Six preselected brands from the food industry	Aaker's dimensions (Brand Loyalty, Perceived Quality, Awareness and Associations) and overall brand equity	Structural equation modeling
Çifci et al. (2016)	Turkey and Spain	Global fashion retailer (Turkey), Private Labels (Spain)	Used Yoo and Donthu (2001) and Nam et al.'s (2011) measures	Confirmatory factor analysis
Lieven and Hildebrand (2016)	Australia, Brazil, China, Germany, France, India, Japan, Russia, Sweden, USA	20 preselected brands across eight product categories	One dimension adopted from Brady, Cronin, Fox, and Roehm, (2008)	Linear mixed effect models
Christodoulides et al. (2015)	UK, Germany and Greece	Free choice of most/least favorite brand of: goods, services and Internet	Aaker's dimensions (Brand Loyalty, Perceived Quality, Awareness and Associations)	Confirmatory factor analysis
Zhang et al. (2014)	China and the Netherlands	Unspecified banks and supermarkets	One dimension of brand equity	Regression
Ioannou and Rusu (2012)	USA, China, Moldova, and Cyprus	Unspecified brands of cars	Brand image, brand associations, perceived value, trustworthiness, performance, perceived quality, social image, brand loyalty)	Descriptive
Broyles et al. (2010)	US and China	Preselected brand (KFC)	Functional aspect (perception of a brand's performance, perceived performance, perceived quality) Experiential component (brand's resonance, imagery)	Structural equation modeling
Lehmann et al. (2008)	US and China	*Study 1:* Preselected brands (Soft drinks) *Study 2:* Preselected brands (Soft drinks, Toothpaste, Fast Food)	27 dimensions of brand performance were suggested. They were generated from the literature and reports from commercial brand tracking approaches, including Young and Rubicam's Brand Asset Valuator (BAV), Millward Brown and Research International.	Correlations, t-tests, factor analysis, regression analysis
Buil et al. (2008)	UK and Spain	Preselected brands (soft drinks, sportswear, cars, consumer electronics)	Adapted Aaker's dimensions (Brand awareness, Perceived quality, Brand loyalty, Brand associations: perceived value, Brand associations: brand personality, Brand associations: organization)	Multi-group confirmatory factor analysis
Hsieh (2004)	Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Mexico, The Netherlands, Russia, South Korea, Spain, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, UK and US	Preselected brands (Cars)	Data from a data set owned by MORPACE International, a multinational research firm (Brand recognition, Brand attachment, Market size)	Modeling aiming to measure Global Brand Equity
Yoo and Donthu (2001)	US and South Korea	Preselected brands (athletic shoes, film and colour TV sets)	Adapted Aaker's dimensions (Brand Loyalty, Perceived Quality, Awareness/associations)	Confirmatory factor analysis

underpinned by a hierarchy comprising several types of ordering (Lehmann et al., 2008).

Keller (2001) was the first to provide the idea of brand building blocks in the CBBE process, whereby different interrelated brand concepts coexist. The architecture of this block modeling follows a hierarchical structure, a "brand pyramid," in which the success of each block depends on the successful attainment of the previous block. Despite its usefulness, the model focuses on the description of the process itself and lacks empirical validation. Although the complex interdependencies within and among the brand blocks are implied, it is unclear how this process takes place to allow the transition and evolving transformation from one brand building block to the next and, eventually, to overall brand equity. The model, though constructive, still lacks empirical documentation and thus has limited applicability to explain the CBBE building process in different countries.

In addition, other researchers operationalize CBBE as a memory-associative model or network of the multitude of consumer associations with the brand (e.g., Christensen & Olson, 2002; Henderson, Iacobucci, & Calder, 2002; John, Loken, Kim, & Monga, 2006; Teichert & Schöntag, 2010). The idea of memory-associative models is widely accepted and adopted in the branding (Keller, 1993) and global branding (Hsieh, 2002; Madden, Roth, & Dillon, 2012; Özsomer & Altaras, 2008; Özsomer, 2012) literature streams. These studies employ several methods, ranging from free associations and free response (Krishnan, 1996) to more structured and analytical techniques (e.g., repertory grid, brand concept mapping; Henderson, Iacobucci, & Calder, 1998, 2002; John et al., 2006; Schnittka, Sattler, & Zenker, 2012). However, they tend to elicit consumers' idiosyncratic associations with specific brands and do not easily permit generalization of their results in different brand, national, and especially international contexts. Much of the work that adopts the process approach has centered mostly on mapping specific brand structures or on an array of branding structures and effects (e.g., cobranding, brand confusion, cannibalization; Henderson et al., 1998, 2002) rather than on the CBBE creation process itself.

Capitalizing on the idea of block modeling and the operationalization of CBBE as a memory-associative network, Chatzipanagiotou et al. (2016) identify CBBE as a complex system comprising the three building blocks of BBB, BUB, and BRB (e.g., Henderson et al., 1998; Keller, 1993, 2001). The model adopts a high level of abstraction and includes a parsimonious set of well-known brand concepts as central structural ingredients or "nodes" in each building block. Specifically, the BBB comprises both imagery (e.g., brand personality, heritage, nostalgia) and functional attributes of the brand (e.g., quality,

competitive advantage, leadership), which serve as structurally interrelated components of the brand's initial building. The BUB consists of brand awareness, reputation, associations, and brand–self connection as essential knowledge structures that reflect consumers' cognitive responses to the brand. The BRB subsumes the closely interconnected, relational nodes of relevance, intimacy, partnership quality, and trust to capture the different aspects of consumers' overall relationship with the brand. By including well-established brand concepts as central nodes, the model is arguably applicable to all brands, industries, and national contexts for both constructive and, especially, comparative purposes.

The model builds on the notion of multiple conjectural causation, which is context sensitive and emphasizes a combination (configuration) of causes included in each of the three building blocks that can predict the outcome of interest in the next stage ('recipe' principle) (Ragin & Rihoux, 2004; Ragin, 2008; Rihoux & Marx, 2013). Premised on the idea of equifinality, in which "a system can reach the same final state from different initial conditions and by a variety of different paths" (Katz & Kahn, 1978, p. 30), the model detects all the theoretical causal combinations that can explain an outcome of interest and therefore embraces the idiosyncrasies of both consumers and brands. Managers can then identify various design choices that can lead to the same desired outcome (e.g., Fiss, 2011; Short, Payne, & Ketchen, 2008). Furthermore, the role of each of the causes included in the derived causal combinations that can predict an outcome is conjecture sensitive and thus is explained in relation to the context of the other included causes. This model can explain, for example, why the same brand positioning elements may have a differential effect on different consumers (Lieven & Hildebrand, 2016; Özsomer, 2012) or on the strength of the brand in different countries (Broyles et al., 2010). Thus, by design, the configural nature and the operationalization of the CBBE model embody the inevitable variations that emerge from consumers, brands, and different contexts, in recognition that it is not only the structurally powerful brand concepts *per se* that can explain the phenomenon but also the manner in which these brand ingredients are linked to explain CBBE under the reflections of the aforementioned variations and idiosyncrasies. However, the real power of CBBE comes from its ability to motivate consumers' favorable responses (Aaker, 1991; Buil et al., 2013; Keller, 2001). From the various behavioral outcomes, the consumers' repurchase intention (Buil et al., 2013; Rambocas et al., 2018), the willingness to pay a price premium (Buil et al., 2013; Rambocas et al., 2018), and to speak positively or recommend the brand to others (Buil et al., 2013; Rambocas et al., 2018), are of significant importance for managers. Therefore, these are the three behavioral outcomes that this study examines.
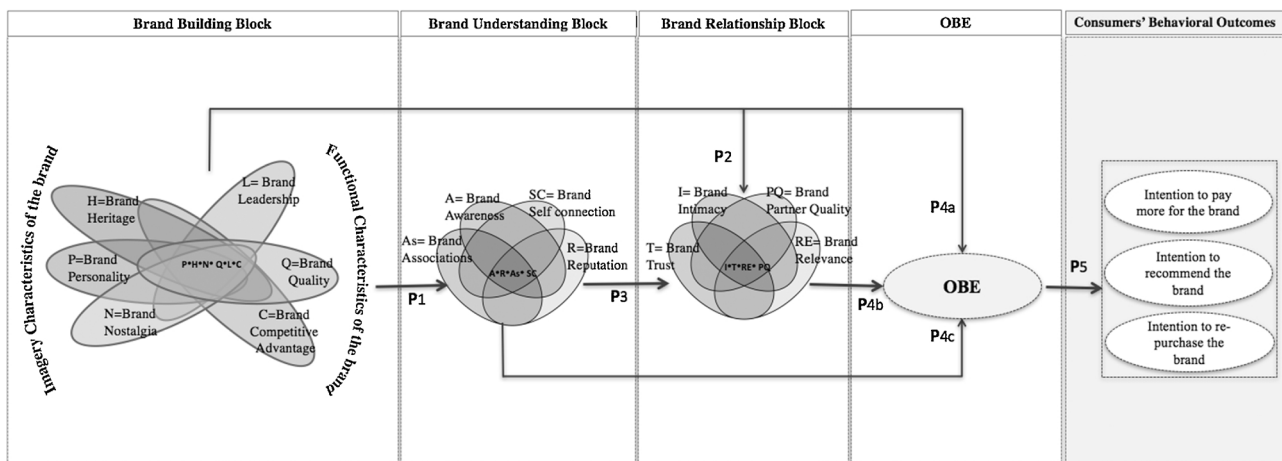

Fig. 1. The study's conceptual framework.
Adapted from Chatzipanagiotou et al. (2016)

2.3. The structural power of the model in different countries

Fig. 1 depicts the rationale of the model using Venn diagrams to demonstrate the combinatorial nature of the causes within the different blocks; the arrows indicate the major flows of configural relationships among them. The first building block in the model, BBB, embodies brand imagery and functional attributes of brands. Brand managers use various marketing tools and activities to create and promote both types of brand characteristics. Proper management of these characteristics affects brands' differential positioning and shapes consumers' responses: opinions (BUB) and feelings (BRB) (Keller, 2001). For example, both imagery and functional attributes of the brand can evoke different levels of consumers' brand awareness and brand associations. According to the model, high levels of awareness arise when consumers clearly recognize and conceive the brand using the set of characteristics. Part of consumers' understanding of the brand lies in the way they identify themselves in relation to the brand characteristics (brand-self connection) (Smit, Bronner, & Tolboom, 2007).

Understanding is also achieved by "the overall value, esteem and character of a brand as seen or judged by people in general" (Chaudhuri, 2002, p. 34). Thus, consumers' cognitive responses work together to capture their understanding and appreciation of the features of a brand (Lehmann et al., 2008), thus enabling them to understand brand meaning—that is, what the brand is characterized by and stands for (Keller, 2001). Therefore, we propose that the underlying process explaining BUB components also takes place in different countries.

H1. Sufficient configurations of the components constituting the BBB lead to high scores in the individual components of BUB in different countries.

Brand imagery and functional attributes (BBB) as well as the establishment of consumers' understanding of the brand meaning (BUB) lead consumers to another critical stage in the CBBE building process: the relationship with the brand (BRB) (Keller, 1993, 2001). Researchers have recognized consumers' relational bonds with brands as an essential stage in the CBBE building process (Christodoulides, de Chernatony, Furrer, & Abimbola, 2006; Lehmann et al., 2008). The BRB includes closely interrelated brand concepts, including brand trust, intimacy, relevance, and partner quality, to capture the different aspects and consumers' feelings about the brand. We further propose that the structural power of the model to explain BRB components holds in different countries.

H2. Sufficient configurations of the components constituting BBB lead to high scores in the individual components of BRB in different countries.

H3. Sufficient configurations of the components constituting BUB lead to high scores in the individual components of BRB in different countries.

Each of the building blocks contributes to the formation of overall brand equity. In contrast with Keller (2001), who identifies "brand resonance" as the broader and final stage in the CBBE building process (including brand relationships but also behavioral aspects, such as loyalty), the proposed model identifies overall brand equity as the overall strength of the brand (Yoo & Donthu, 2001) and the final stage in the CBBE process. The measurement of overall brand equity includes indicators of the relative strength of the brand in relation to other brands that have been established in previous studies (e.g. Rambocas et al., 2018; Yoo & Donthu, 2001). Thus, each brand building block contributes to the formation of overall brand equity in different countries.

2.4. The role of national culture (individualism/collectivism) in the formation of consumers' OBE and behavioral outcomes

Culture could be viewed as the metaphorical lens through which consumers perceive brands, decide information processing strategies and cognitive structures that shape their choices (Hofstede, 1980; McCort & Malhotra, 1993), especially in the form of means-ends brand value hierarchies (Bock, 1994; Kim, Park, & Park, 2000; Overby, Woodruff, & Gardial, 2005).

A large number of studies in international business explain the impact of cultural variations and unveil the dominant role of individualism/collectivism in decoding consumers' brand perceptions (Aaker & Maheswaran, 1997; De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010, 2011; Laroche, Kalamas, & Cleveland, 2005; Sung & Tinkham, 2005), brand understanding (Monga & John, 2006; Roth, 1995) and brand relationships (Samaha, Beck, & Palmatier, 2014). Despite agreement from researchers that a configuration of brand-related structures could provide a better understanding of brands in international contexts (Aaker & Maheswaran, 1997; Torres, Augusto, & Godinho, 2017), there is a scarcity of studies regarding the mechanisms by which these brand-related structures are combined in order to lead to consumers' OBE and behavioral outcomes.

Consumers' brand perceptions play a critical role in the way consumers recognize and understand brands. Researchers highlight that cultural differences modify the way consumers perceive, categorize and attach to objects. For instance, in individualistic cultures consumers categorize objects/brands based on rules and properties (Choi, Nisbett, & Smith, 1997). They recognize easily the abstract values that are related with brands while jointly considering their functional attributes following a more analytic thinking (Nisbett, Kaiping, Incheol, & Norenzayan, 2001). Their attachment with the brand revolves around their self-image, which is built on the basis of self as an autonomous entity independent of general social groups and norms (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). They tend to focus on brands which are consistent with their self-image and could reflect their individuality and parts of the social discourse (Tuškej, Golob, & Podnar, 2013; Aaker & Schmitt, 1997). Individualists build relationships primarily for self-serving reasons (Steensma, Kevin, Marino, Weaver, & Dickson, 2000) rather than for mutually beneficial purposes (Wuyts & Geyskens, 2005). They develop, maintain, and value relationships that can better serve and demonstrate their individual ideas, goals, and achievements (1995, Triandis, 1989).

In contrast, collectivists typically engage in closer or more profound and longer lasting relationships compared to their individualist counterparts (Triandis, 1995). They are receptive to social bonding (Triandis, 1995) and their identity is intertwined with the values of the social system to which they belong (Steensma et al., 2000). They could be characterized as holistic thinkers, who focus on relationships (Masuda & Nisbett, 2001) rather than abstract brand values whilst they prioritize the relational, social product benefits rather than the functional ones (Paul, Hennig-Thurau, Gremler, Gwinner, & Wiertz, 2009).

Hence, culture influences not only the meaning or the relevant importance of each of the aforementioned brand components, but also the structure in which these elements are combined toward consumers' OBE (Overby et al., 2005). Thus, we hypothesize that:

H4. Different configurations (core/periphery models) of BBB, BUB and BRB components contribute directly to produce high scores in OBE in countries with different cultural dimensions (individualism/collectivism).

The literature on CBBE appreciates that strong brands lead consumers to react more favorably toward them (Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995; Keller, 2001). However, a limited number of studies empirically

examine the direct relationship of CBBE with behavioral outcomes, such as brand preference, positive word-of-mouth, repeat purchase, and price premium (Buil et al., 2013; Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995; Rambocas et al., 2018), especially in different countries (Buil et al., 2013; Rambocas et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2014). Instead, more studies focus on individual components of CBBE and their link with specific consumers' behavioral outcomes. For instance, prior research highlights the role of brand self-identification and brand relationships in consumers' behavior and empirically shows that consumers tend to re-purchase a brand that they strongly identify with (Aaker & Schmitt, 1997). In addition, previous research demonstrates that in the context of brand relationships consumers follow reciprocity norms and cycles, which lead them to express extra-role behaviors (Elbedweihy, Jayawardhena, Elsharnouby, & Elsharnouby, 2016) including positive brand recommendations to others (Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar, & Sen, 2012; Tuškej et al., 2013) and willingness to pay more (Davvetas & Diamantopoulos, 2017; Haumann, Quaiser, Wieseke, & Rese, 2014; Park, Eisingerich, & Park, 2013). Despite the importance of the above studies, to our knowledge none of these provides a holistic explanation as to how consumers in different cultures organize CBBE structures (brand perceptions, knowledge and relationships) toward specific behavioral outcomes.

Several researchers highlight that consumers in individualistic cultures need a consistency among their brand perceptions, feelings and behaviors (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2011), which is in line with their more analytic way of thinking (Nisbett et al., 2001). They seem to follow more structured decision-making models including consciousness regarding the brand, price, and quality (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2011). For individualists, brand self-identification serves mostly individualistic purposes and, therefore, their brand recommendations are motivated on the basis of their opinion leadership to others (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004; Samaha et al., 2014). On the contrary, brand feelings and relationships mostly drive collectivistic consumers' behavior (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2011) as they focus highly on the social product benefits in order to make repurchase decisions (Paul et al., 2009). For collectivists, positive brand recommendation is arguably the result of a mutually beneficial relationship developed with the brand, which generates reciprocity in the form of gratitude toward the brand/company (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Samaha et al., 2014). Therefore, culture not only unpacks the salient components of the CBBE formation process in different national contexts, it may also modify the way that these CBBE structures are organized toward significant behavioral outcomes. Based on the above discussion, we hypothesize that:

H5. Different configurations (core/periphery models) of the CBBE components constituting of BBB, BUB and BRB contribute directly to produce high scores in consumers' (a) willingness to pay price premium (b) brand recommendation (c) repeat purchase in countries with different cultural dimensions (individualism/collectivism).

3. Methodology

3.1. Data collection

This project was part of a wider funded project focusing on a European context and the selected countries represented different backgrounds within the wider context. Data were collected from Greece and Germany; two countries which, even though they belong to Europe, have been categorized as countries with clear cultural differences (Brodbeck et al., 2000; House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004). In addition, these countries demonstrate significant differences in relation to the cultural dimensions of Hofstede's model (Hofstede, 1984; Hofstede Insights, 2018), especially in terms of individualism/collectivism (GR = 35; GE = 67), which constitutes one of the most relevant dimensions for understanding cross-national variation in CBBE formation process and consequent consumer behavior (Hsieh, 2004;

Zhang et al., 2014). Furthermore, the two countries are dissimilar not only in terms of culture, but also in terms of size and economic environment, which further serves the purposes of this study since it may drive consumers to respond differently to brands.

The data were collected face-to-face with the help of trained fieldworkers. We asked the fieldworkers to recruit respondents who were residents in each of the countries and resided in multiple areas in each country. To collect data that represented the national population of the two countries, we set quotas for age and gender using census data from Germany and Greece. Table A1 in the Appendix lists the consumers' demographic profiles.

Each respondent was asked to pick a product category from a provided list (shampoo, consumers' electronics, coffee houses, mobile networks, banks, and internet retailers) and to identify their favorite brand from that category. Table A2 in the Appendix provides consumers' responses regarding the different product categories. Consumers were then invited to respond to subsequent questions about their chosen brand. Different types of brands emerged from this exercise. The data collection took place simultaneously in Germany and Greece over a two-week period and produced 301 responses from Germany and 312 responses from Greece. To increase their willingness to participate, survey respondents in each country had the chance to win one of two gift cards worth \$130 (€100).

We adopted all items for the brand building blocks and the overall brand equity from previous research in line with Chatzipanagiotou et al. (2016), the willingness to pay a premium was measured with three items adapted from Netemeyer et al. (2004), brand recommendation intentions was measured with three items adapted from Arnett, German, and Hunt, (2003) and purchase intention was measured with one item consistent with Graeff (1997). The study items were measured on seven-point scales (see Table A3 in the Appendix). To ensure the accuracy of the translation, the questionnaire was translated from English to Greek and German by bilingual speakers and then back-translated into English by colleagues fluent in both languages (Brislin, 1980). We secured the clarity of the wording in German and Greek through pilot tests in both settings and made minor modifications when appropriate. The study items were measured on seven-point scales (see Table A3 in the Appendix). To ensure the accuracy of the translation, the questionnaire was translated from English to Greek and German by bilingual speakers and then back-translated into English by colleagues fluent in both languages (Brislin, 1980). We secured the clarity of the wording in German and Greek through pilot tests in both settings and made minor modifications when appropriate.

We assessed the common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003) through the shorter version of the social desirability scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960). Specifically, we used the scale Fischer and Fick (1993) developed as a marker variable in the first part of the questionnaire (Lindell & Whitney, 2001; Williams, Hartman, & Cavazotte, 2010). Furthermore, we checked all the study's measures for configural, metric, and factor invariance (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998). The results of the multi-group confirmatory factor analysis show evidence of configural, metric, and factor invariance (Brown, 2000; Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998) between the German and Greek samples (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002) for all the study's constructs of interest. Next, we employed a marker variable confirmatory factor analysis for the independent measures; the results provide evidence that common method variance does not pose a serious threat in this study.[1] Finally, we assessed the internal consistency of the scales for both samples (see Table A3 in the Appendix), ensuring the internal consistency of the study's measures.

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[1] We do not present the analyses results because of space constraints, but they are available on request.

Table 2
Core Periphery Models of BBB Predicting High Scores in BUB (H_1).

A. Greece

BBB	Brand Awareness (1)	Brand Reputation (1)	(2)	Brand Associations (1)	(2)	Brand–Self Connection (1)	(2)
Brand Personality	●		•	●	●		
Brand Heritage	●			●			
Brand Nostalgia			•		●	●	●
Brand Quality	●	●	•	●	•		
Brand Com_ Advantage	●	●	●	●	●		●
Brand Leadership	●	●		●		●	
Raw Coverage	.33	.50	.36	.36	.36	.54	.57
Unique Coverage	.33	.16	.02	.05	.05	.07	.10
Consistency	.80	.88	.93	.86	.87	.83	.85
Overall Consistency	.80	.87		.84		.82	
Overall Coverage	.33	.52		.42		.65	

B. Germany

BBB	Brand Awareness (1)	(2)	Brand Reputation (1)	(2)	(3)	(4a)	(4b)	Brand Associations (1)	(2)	(3)	Brand–Self Connection (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Brand Personality	●	●			•	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Brand Heritage	●	•	●				•			●				●
Brand Nostalgia				•	•	•	●	●			●	●	●	●
Brand Quality	●		⊗	●		●	•	⊗	•		⊗			
Brand Com_ Advantage	●		●	●	●	•			•			⊗		
Brand Leadership	●	●		●	●			●		●			●	
Raw Coverage	.44	.31	.20	.49	.32	.33	.27	.21	.35	.28	.25	.18	.38	.40
Unique Coverage	.16	.02	.06	.17	.02	.01	.01	.10	.14	.03	.02	.00	.05	.04
Consistency	.83	.82	.81	.89	.95	.95	.95	.82	.85	.83	.81	.80	.87	.89
Overall Consistency	.82		.85					.81			.84			
Overall Coverage	.47		.68					.54			.55			

Note: The black circles indicate the presence of a condition, and circles with "x" indicate its absence. The large circles indicate core conditions; the small circles indicate peripheral conditions. Blank spaces in a pathway indicate "don't care." The analysis of necessary conditions (NC) does not confirm the existence of any NC.

3.2. Fuzzy Set/Qualitative comparative analysis (fs/QCA)

The study adopts fs/QCA, which is uniquely suited for examining the configurational nature of the model's research hypotheses (2008, Ragin, 1987). By embodying key strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods, QCA has received considerable attention in the business literature (e.g., Gounaris, Chatzipanagiotou, Boukis, & Perks, 2016; Ordanini, Parasuraman, & Rubera, 2014; Woodside, 2013, 2014). Fs/QCA, as a set theoretic method, allows for a holistic approach that identifies each individual case as a complex entity of causes and outcomes of interest in terms of set memberships (Berg-Schlosser & De Meur, 2009; 2008, Ragin, 1987). It uses set logic and fuzzy-set algorithms (e.g., "truth table") to model relationships among the causes and the outcomes of interest in a systematic, cross-case analysis. The first step in fs/QCA is calibrating the measures, so that transformation of the variable raw scores into set measures occurs. We calibrate the data on the basis of the direct method of calibration and use three qualitative anchors (1.0 = full membership, 0 = full non-membership, and 0.5 = the crossover point of maximum ambiguity regarding membership) in each of the samples and in a similar way for each of the model's conditions.

Next, we identify the property space, or truth table, to examine each of the study's research hypotheses; doing so allows us to detect all the logically possible combinations of relevant causal conditions that can lead to the outcome of interest. Construction of the truth table is based on the formula of 2^k (where k represents the number of the antecedent conditions we assume can predict the outcome of interest) and allows the detection of "necessary" and "sufficient" causal configurations that can predict the outcome of interest (for a detailed discussion of the fuzzy-set algorithm of the truth table, see Ragin (2008); Rihoux & Ragin, 2008; Goertz & Starr, 2003). In addition, the estimation of these set relationships is based on consistency and coverage indices (Ragin, 2008; Wagemann & Schneider, 2010; Woodside, 2013). The measures of consistency and coverage are analogous to the correlation coefficient and coefficient of determination, respectively (Ragin, 2008). We employ 0.80 as the minimum threshold for consistency consideration and use two cases to be included in a truth table for further analysis. Alternative tests of cases frequencies (one, three) and levels of consistency (ranged from 0.81 to 90) were performed (Skaaning, 2011). The number of the derived solutions did not warrant substantively different interpretations.

In addition, to further understand the empirical relevance of each of the antecedent conditions to the outcome of interest, we follow Fiss (2011) and Ragin and Fiss (2008) rationale in the identification of core and periphery models. Specifically, the analysis allows for the identification of *core causes*, or the conditions with a strong causal relationship to the outcome of interest, and *periphery causes*, in which the evidence of the causal relationship to the outcome is weaker, and thus these causes can be characterized as less important conditions. Accordingly, the results are grouped in solutions based on the core causal conditions (Fiss, 2011).

4. Data analysis

Table A4 in the Appendix provides the descriptive statistics of the conditions included in the study's configural model and the symmetrical results of the correlation among them. The results indicate that the correlation coefficients among these conditions do not meet the 0.80 threshold, leading us to infer that these relationships are not symmetrical (Woodside, 2013, 2014). Next, we performed quintile analysis between the causal conditions and the outcomes of interest to further enlighten the nature of these relationships. In both samples the *phi* coefficient indicates a positive effect size among antecedent conditions and the outcomes of interest, though both positive and negative cases occurred. Thus, we proceeded with fs/QCA as the most appropriate way to investigate the study's research hypotheses (Woodside, 2014).

4.1. Results from the investigation of the structural power of the proposed model

Tables 2 and 3 summarize the results of H_1 and H_2, which suggest that configurations of the antecedent conditions included in the BBB (brand personality, heritage, nostalgia, quality, competitive advantage, and leadership) sufficiently lead to each of the components of BUB (H_1) and BRB (H_2) in both the German and Greek samples. Specifically, the results show that consumers use imagery and functional attributes of the brand which, in either core or peripheral role, sufficiently lead to consumers' brand understanding and brand relationships in both samples (the consistency in all solutions is above 0.80).

As expected due to idiosyncrasies of consumers, brands, and national contexts, few common causal patterns are detected at this level of analysis and are shaded for emphasis. Table 2 identifies two common, causal patterns with regard to brand awareness and brand reputation. Specifically, solution 1 in both Greece and Germany indicate that high scores in brand personality and heritage in combination with the functional characteristics of the brand (quality, competitive advantage, and leadership) predict high scores in consumers' brand awareness in both countries. In addition, solution 1 in Greece and solution 2 in Germany demonstrate that a constellation of the functional

Table 3
Core Periphery Models of BBB Predicting High Scores in BRB (H_2).

A. Greece

BBB	Brand Trust (1)	Brand Trust (2)	Brand Intimacy (1)	Brand Relevance (1)	Brand Partner Quality (1)	Brand Partner Quality (2)
Brand Personality		•	•			
Brand Heritage						•
Brand Nostalgia		•	●	●	●	●
Brand Quality	•	•	•	●	•	
Brand Com_ Advantage	●	●	•			
Brand Leadership	•		●			
Raw Coverage	.52	.37	.31	.54	.52	.51
Unique Coverage	.18	.03	.31	.54	.13	.12
Consistency	.87	.91	.87	.84	.85	.87
Overall Consistency	.87		.87	.84	.83	
Overall Coverage	.56		.31	.54	.65	

B. Germany

BBB	Brand Trust (1a)	(1b)	(2)	Brand Intimacy (1)	(2a)	(2b)	(3)	Brand Relevance (1)	(2)	Brand Partner Quality (1)	(2a)	(2b)	(3)
Brand Personality		•	●		•	●			●	●	⊗	•	•
Brand Heritage	•		⊗		●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●
Brand Nostalgia			●	•		•		●	●	●		•	●
Brand Quality	●	●	●	●		•	●	●		•			
Brand Com_ Advantage	●	●	●			•	•			•	●	●	●
Brand Leadership	●	●					⊗			●	●		●
Raw Coverage	.40	.39	.12	.45	.37	.15	.35	.47	.39	.35	.29	.15	.25
Unique Coverage	.09	.03	.02	.15	.08	.01	.05	.17	.09	.07	.02	.11	.03
Consistency	.89	.89	.86	.84	.86	.83	.87	.86	.90	.90	.92	.87	.92
Overall Consistency	.87			.81				.86		.88			
Overall Coverage	.51			.64				.57		.51			

Note: The black circles indicate the presence of a condition, and circles with "x" indicate its absence. The large circles indicate core conditions; the small circles indicate peripheral conditions. Blank spaces in a pathway indicate "don't care". The analysis of necessary conditions (NC) does not confirm the existence of any NC.

characteristics of the brand (quality, competitive advantage, and leadership) lead to high scores in brand reputation.

Furthermore, Table 3 demonstrates another common causal pattern with regard to consumers' brand relevance (solution 1 for both Greece and Germany), which indicates that a combination of brand nostalgia and quality can lead consumers to build their relevance toward brands in both countries.

The results also detect common core causes between the Greek and the German samples for each outcome of interest. For example, in the case of brand associations (Table 2), in which brand personality plays a core causal role in all configurations, consumers from both countries build their brand associations mainly on brand personality. In addition, brand nostalgia which, in combination with other BBB conditions, contributes to consumers' brand-self connection in both countries. The results further stress that despite the existence of common causal conditions, it is the 'recipe' and not solely the brand ingredients that can successfully lead to consumers' brand understanding and brand relationship in different countries.

The consistent way that BBB predicts consumers' BUB and BRB for different brands and in different countries highlights the proposed model's ability to embrace both common and idiosyncratic patterns of consumers' understanding and relationship building, providing a bridge between cross-national and case-study analysis.

Table 4 summarizes the results of H_3, which indicates that consumers' understanding in terms of brand awareness, associations, reputation, and brand–self connection can sufficiently (all the solutions' consistency scores are above 0.80) lead to a relationship with the brand.

Consumers' brand–self connection plays a dominant role as a core cause in both countries, such that, in combination with their brand awareness, favorable brand associations and brand reputation in either the core or peripheral role produce consumers' relationship with the brand, in support of H_3.

4.2. Predicting high scores in OBE and consumers' behavioral outcomes: similarities and differences between countries

Table 5 summarizes the results for H_4, which suggests that the three building blocks of BBB, BUB, and BRB sufficiently predict consumers' OBE. In both countries, a configuration of the elements of BBB, BUB and BRB (Greece: overall coverage = 0.50, overall consistency = .83, Germany: overall coverage = .49, overall consistency = .87) leads to high scores in consumers' OBE providing support to H_4.

Multiple combinations of BBB, BUB and BRB elements lead to high scores in consumers' OBE in both countries highlighting the idiosyncratic nature of the phenomenon. The results detect three solutions in both Greece and Germany that lead to high scores in consumers' OBE in both countries. More importantly, the first solution in both Greece and Germany constitutes the most empirically relevant one with high consistency (Greece = 0.88; Germany = 0.86), coverage (Greece = 0.44; Germany = 0.42), and unique coverage (Greece = 0.19; Germany = 0.16). Solution 1 demonstrates that the OBE building process remains the same in both countries in terms of the contribution of brand elements from BBB, BUB and BRB blocks. However, the detection of the core and periphery models further inform us about the

Table 4
Core Periphery Models of BUB Predicting High Scores in BRB (H_3).

A. Greece

BUB	Brand Trust (1)	Brand Intimacy (1a)	(1b)	Brand Relevance (1)	(2)	Brand Partner Quality (1)	(2)
Brand Awareness		•		•		•	
Brand Reputation	•	•	•	•	•		•
Brand Associations	●		•			●	•
Brand–Self Connection	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Raw Coverage	.44	.40	.46	.39	.47	.37	.43
Unique Coverage	.44	.05	.12	.05	.13	.05	.11
Consistency	.83	.92	.92	.89	.91	.90	.89
Overall Consistency	.83	.91		.90		.89	
Overall Coverage	.44	.52		.53		.48	

B. Germany

BUB	Brand Trust (1)	(2)	Brand Intimacy (1)	(2)	Brand Relevance (1)	(2)	Brand Partner Quality (1)	(2)
Brand Awareness	●	•	●			•	●	
Brand Reputation	•	•		●	●		●	●
Brand Associations	●			●	●			●
Brand–Self Connection			●	●	●	●	●	●
Raw Coverage	.31	.44	.41	.42	.56	.37	.34	.44
Unique Coverage	.02	.16	.11	.12	.26	.06	.03	.13
Consistency	.82	.83	.85	.83	.82	.87	.89	.87
Overall Consistency	.82		.82		.81		.87	
Overall Coverage	.47		.53		.63		.48	

Notes: The black circles indicate the presence of a condition, and circles with "x" indicate its absence. The large circles indicate core conditions; the small circles indicate peripheral conditions. Blank spaces in a pathway indicate "don't care". The analysis of necessary conditions (NC) does not confirm the existence of any NC.

Table 5

Core Periphery Models of BBB, BUB, and BRB Predicting High Scores in consumers' OBE and consumers' behavioral outcomes (H$_4$, H$_5$).

A. Greece

	OBE			Intention to pay more		Recommendation			Intention to re-purchase	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)
Brand Imagery	•	•		•	•	•	•			
Brand Functional	•		•	•	•			•		
Brand Awareness		•	•		•					
Brand Reputation	•	•	•		•		•	•	●	
Brand Associations	•	•	•		•		•	•	●	
Brand–Self Connection	●	●	●	•	●	•			•	●
Brand Trust	●	●	●		•	●	●	●		
Brand Intimacy	●		●	•	●	•				●
Brand Relevance	●	●		•	•	•		●		●
Brand P_Quality	●	●			●	●				
Raw Coverage	.44	.25	.25	.55	.17	.45	.32	.32	.47	.52
Unique Coverage	.19	.01	.01	.38	.00	.14	.03	.03	.13	.18
Consistency	.88	.87	.86	.83	.88	.89	.87	.92	.84	.80
Overall Consistency	.83			.83		.86			.80	
Overall Coverage	.50			.55		.54			.66	

B. Germany

	OBE			Intention to pay more			Recommendation		Intention to re-purchase		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)	(3)
Brand Imagery	•		•	•		•	●	●			
Brand Functional	●	●	●	●	•	•	•		●	●	●
Brand Awareness								●			
Brand Reputation	●	•		●	●		•		●	●	●
Brand Associations	•				●	●			•		•
Brand–Self Connection	●	●	•	●	●	●	●	●			
Brand Trust	●	●	●			●	•	•	●	●	•
Brand Intimacy	•	•		●			•	•			
Brand Relevance	●	●	●	●		●	•	•	●	●	
Brand P_Quality	•		•	●		●	•	•	●		
Raw Coverage	.42	.30	.29	.35	.28	.27	.31	.19	.37	.27	.19
Unique Coverage	.16	.03	.02	.11	.04	.03	.23	.11	.11	.03	.01
Consistency	.86	.93	.96	.82	.86	.86	.83	.83	.83	.83	.85
Overall Consistency	.87			.81			.84		.84		
Overall Coverage	.49			.47			.43		. 52		

Note: The black circles indicate the presence of a condition. The large circles indicate core conditions; the small circles indicate peripheral conditions. Blank spaces in a pathway indicate "don't care". The analysis of necessary conditions (NC) does not confirm the existence of any NC.

substantial differences in the OBE building process between Greece and Germany. Fig. 2 provides a diagrammatical representation of these results. Specifically, in Greece brand-self connection and consumers' relationship with the brand in terms of brand trust, intimacy, relevance and partner quality constitute core causes towards high scores in consumers' OBE. The results further suggest that Greek consumers recognize as strong those brands that have a personal meaning to them and have, over time, developed a relationship with them.

In contrast, the CBBE building process in Germany highlights the core role of brand functional characteristics, consumers' brand-self connection, brand reputation and the relational components of brand trust and relevance. In other words, building strong brands in Germany is based on the functional brand characteristics of quality, competitive advantage and leadership around which consumers' perceptions revolve. Thus, the CBBE building process in Germany is grounded on consumers' attention to the superiority of the brand's functional characteristics, which signal reputable brands that consumers' find closer to the way they recognize themselves and build their relationship with the brand in terms of brand trust and relevance.

In addition, Table 5 summarizes the results for H$_5$, which suggest that OBE in terms of the elements included in the aforementioned CBBE processes can sufficiently predict consumers' behavioral outcomes in both Greece and Germany. Two solutions in Greece and three in Germany can sufficiently explain consumers' intention to pay a premium price. As Fig. 2 demonstrates, solution 1 in both countries is the most empirically relevant with high consistency (Greece = 0.83; Germany = .82), coverage (Greece = .55; Germany = .35), and unique coverage (Greece = .38; Germany = .11) explaining the majority of consumers' intention to pay more for a brand in both countries. The results demonstrate that consumers' intention to pay a premium price presupposes the development of a close relationship with the brand in terms of brand intimacy and relevance in both countries.

Specifically, the results show that Greek consumers are willing to pay a premium price only for brands they have already developed a relationship with in terms of brand relevance and intimacy. In contrast, German consumers are willing to pay a premium price only for well-regarded brands with superior functional characteristics, which have a personal meaning to them and with which they have developed relational ties in terms of brand trust, intimacy and partner quality. The latter demonstrates another aspect in their relationship with the brand, which highlights that the majority of German consumers' need to feel that the brand treats them as valued customers and that they haven't felt dissatisfied with any brand episodes for a long time (partner quality).
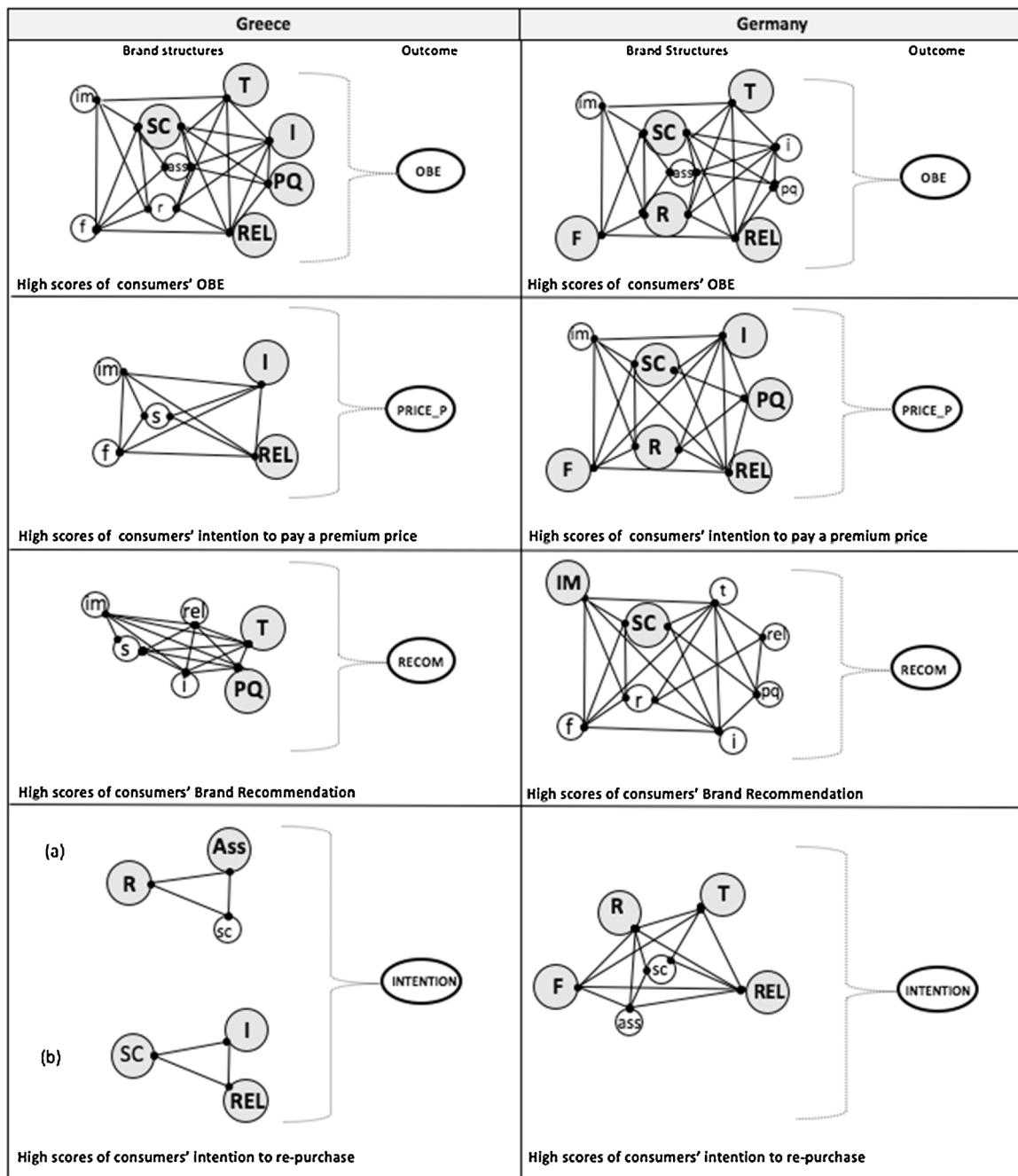
Fig. 2. Diagrammatic representation of the most empirically relevant Core Periphery Models of BBB, BUB, and BRB Predicting High Scores in consumers' OBE and consumer behavioral outcomes in Greece and Germany (H₄, H₅).

Notes: The large circles and letters represent core causal conditions whilst the small circles and letter demonstrate peripheral conditions.

IM = Imagery brand characteristics; F = Brand functional characteristics; R = Brand reputation; AW = Brand awareness; ASS = Brand favorable associations; SC = Brand-self connection; T = Brand trust; REL = Brand relevance; I = Brand intimacy; PQ = Brand partner quality.

In addition, brand recommendation has a different building process in both countries. The results detect three solutions in Greece and two in Germany that can sufficiently explain consumers' brand re-commendation. Solution 1 in Greece (consistency = 0.89; coverage = 0.45; and unique coverage = 0.14) demonstrates that Greek consumers recommend brands that they can strongly rely on and feel that they continually treat them as valued customers. Therefore, Greek con-sumers' recommendations could be viewed as an action of appreciation and gratitude towards a brand/company that has treated them as va-lued customers over time. In contrast, solution 1 (consistency = 0.83; coverage = .31; and unique coverage = .23) in Germany indicates that

the majority of German consumers engaged in a recommendation ac-tivity only for brands that have a personal meaning for them, especially in terms of the brand abstract and imagery characteristics (brand per-sonality, nostalgia and heritage).

Finally, two solutions in Greece (overall consistency = 0.80; overall coverage = 0.66) sufficiently explain Greek consumers' intention to re-purchase the brand. Specifically, the results demonstrate that con-sumers in Greece decide to re-purchase a brand based either on a combination of brand reputation and their favorable associations with the peripheral role of brand-self connection (solution 1, raw con-sistency = 0.84; raw coverage = 0.47; unique coverage = 0.13) or base

their re-purchasing decisions on the fact that these products are personally relevant to them and they feel emotionally attached to them (solution 2, raw consistency = 0.80; raw coverage = .52; unique coverage = .18). In Germany solution 1 constitutes the most empirically relevant solution (raw consistency = .83; raw coverage = .37; unique coverage = .11), which explains that German consumers make a re-purchase decision for highly regarded brands in terms of their functional characteristics, with which they have also developed relational ties in terms of brand trust and relevance.

In a nutshell, the results demonstrate the way that consumers' perceptions regarding different brand qualities interact in order to produce OBE and behavioral outcomes. Greek consumers focused mainly on their relational bonds with the brand in order to make brand–related decisions, demonstrating the importance of their personal attachment with the brand in any effort to build OBE and behave in a favorable way towards the brand. In contrast, German consumers use, in most cases, a combination of BBB, BUB and BRB elements in order to build OBE and make brand decisions demonstrating a well-structured, integrated cognitive-affective-conative approach in all their decisions, except brand recommendation. Recommending a brand in Germany is seen as an expression and enhancement of consumers' self-image which is grounded mainly on the abstract characteristics of the brand.

5. Discussion

5.1. Theoretical implications

This study builds on and extends a recently published, process-focused CBBE model in a cross-national context with a view to (a) test its robustness in an international environment and assess its usefulness as a diagnostic tool for monitoring and managing brands internationally; and (b) illuminate the underlying mechanism by which the CBBE process results in key consumer outcomes and identify cross-country differences. We tested the proposed CBBE model with data from two national contexts (i.e., Germany and Greece). The results show that the model remains robust in explaining CBBE across the two countries. The confirmation of the research hypotheses underlying the model's rationale underscores the structural power and operationalization of each of the three building blocks—BBB, BUB, and BRB—throughout the entire CBBE building process in relation to different national contexts. The findings indicate that the architecture of this process is not necessarily stepwise but rather dynamic, allowing the effects of each building block to contribute directly to the building of overall CBBE.

The study's results, which reveal the differences and similarities between the national contexts and among consumers within these contexts, highlight the idiosyncratic nature of the various brand equity components and overall CBBE in an increasingly global environment. Specifically, brand-self connection, relevance and trust are identified as common core causes of CBBE in both Greece and Germany. Nonetheless, Greek consumers follow a more relational pathway to CBBE whilst German consumers kick off the CBBE process with an evaluation of the brand's functional characteristics that subsequently informs the brand's reputation assessment. This is consistent with previous research (e.g., Laroche et al., 2005) highlighting that collectivistic cultures, such as Greece, tend to pay attention to relationships and base their purchase decisions more on feelings and trust while individualistic cultures, such as Germany, are more information-focused (Choi et al., 1997) and gravitate toward a brand's added values and abstract personality traits (Laroche et al., 2005).

Acknowledging that CBBE is rarely an end goal in itself, this study shows that the CBBE building process is capable of predicting significant consumer behavioral outcomes (i.e., intention to pay a price premium, to recommend, and to purchase). Nonetheless, no single theoretical solution is able to predict all three outcomes; instead,

different constellations of brand concepts emerge as core causes for each outcome (and in each country) further attesting to the complexity of the phenomenon. Greek consumers, consistent with collectivistic cultures, are more willing to pay a premium for brands they have a close relationship with. German consumers follow a more integrated pathway to price premium intention that combines elements from all three CBBE building blocks, suggesting a more rational and informed way of making this type of decision consistent with individualistic nations (Choi et al., 1997; Stern & Resnik, 1991). Similar to price premium intention, Greek consumers intend to recommend brands based on relational CBBE elements. Interestingly, the role of functional characteristics is less pivotal in German consumers' intention to recommend a brand where imagery brand characteristics and brand-self connection are key considerations. Brand recommendation arguably occurs as an action of a personal statement for Germans since they are willing to recommend brands that portray and reinforce their identity through brand imagery, symbolic characteristics, which are perceived by them to be similar to their own self-image (Tuškej et al., 2013). Finally, Greek consumers follow one of two pathways to repurchase a brand – one relational, and one more cognitive pathway based on brand associations and reputation. Consistent with individualistic cultures who are more likely to gravitate on information and the properties of brands (Laroche et al., 2005), German consumers once again anchor on the functional characteristics of the brand via which the reputation of the brand is built which ultimately leads to a relationship.

This research also contributes to the debate on standardization versus adaptation by showing that when it comes to brand strategies, standardization and adaptation could harmoniously coexist (Theodosiou & Leonidou, 2003) for high levels of overall brand equity. The results provide theoretical substantiation to the fundamental issue that researchers have recognized but so far neglected to investigate by insisting on a "one-size-fits-all" linear solution. The findings complement and extend previous research that suggests that it is irrational for brands to totally standardize their approach, except under a clearly defined set of circumstances and in certain contexts and product categories (Alashban, Hayes, Zinkhan, & Balazs, 2002; Douglas & Wind, 1987; Vrontis, Thrassou, & Lamprianou, 2009).

5.2. Managerial implications

The proposed model provides a pre-eminence in terms of managerial implications, indicating multiple solutions to manage strong brands at both the national and international levels. Specifically, this study is the first to empirically show that though strong brands have some ingredients of brand success in common (e.g., brand-self connection, relevance, and trust), it is the 'recipe' and not the ingredients *per se* that allow them to build their own brand success story. Thus, the study significantly contributes to international businesses' strategic objectives to build a global, strong brand on the basis of international core elements of success (i.e., common patterns among different national contexts) and to sustain a successful competitive brand positioning by identifying and managing their own 'recipe' of success.

The rationale of the CBBE model can also help brand managers overcome the difficulties in implementing the mission of globally successful brands (e.g., "think globally, act locally") by providing an optimum diagnostic tool. By supporting the idea of brand success uniqueness under the prism of global common patterns, the CBBE can aid managers in mapping and designing new international and national brand landscapes, including specificities of the national context, competitive brands, and their own brand. This is essential and can further support brand managers' desire to achieve brand success in the international business environment. Differences between Greek and German consumers, as suggested by the findings, necessitate brand managers to (a) highlight the relational elements of the CBBE process in

collectivistic cultures, and (b) emphasize the functional brand characteristics in individualistic cultures.

Finally, the study contributes to building and managing global brand architecture by offering a tool that can inform decisions about the management of brand portfolios across countries. Applying the model to different units of analysis, for example product category, helps brand managers identify common patterns or their brands' differential positioning. In addition, brand managers could detect brands within their portfolio that are probably too similar in terms of their brand equity structure and, as such, could cannibalize each other. At the same time, managers could use this tool to structure international brand management teams in a customer-centric way by identifying and grouping markets on the basis of similarities of their brand equity composition.

5.3. Limitations and suggestions for further research

The study's results advance the discussion on brand equity by encouraging researchers to rethink CBBE as a complex and dynamic process that leads to significant consumer behavioral outcomes and by providing insights into its applicability in the international environment. However, given that the focus of this study is on consumers' most favorable brand choice, replicating the study using a group of specific competitive brands or particular brand cases would be beneficial and add to the model's robustness and usefulness in offering managerial implications. This study focuses on a cross-sectional research design. However, the dynamic nature and longer-term perspective of CBBE makes a longitudinal assessment of the initial CBBE building process of new brands in the market an essential future research priority. How stable is this process over time, and what elements in the environment other than national culture affect the significance of the ingredients within each block? Which 'recipes' are stable over time, and which are more temporal or prone to environmental or situational factors?

Appendix A

Another limitation of the present study concerns the focus on a single cultural dimension (individualism/collectivism) to explain cross country differences vis-à-vis the CBBE development process and the configurations that lead to key consumer behavioral outcomes. Other dimensions of culture, such as uncertainty avoidance and power distance previously linked to cross-cultural patterns of brand perceptions and choices may further illuminate the role of culture in the development of CBBE and consumer behavioral outcomes. While we recognize that different approaches exist to capture culture, this study employs Hofstede (1984), Hofstede Insights (2018) scores to classify Greece and Germany as two countries with dissimilar scores on individualism/collectivism. Other studies are encouraged to replicate these findings by measuring culture at the individual consumer level.

Furthermore, the potential applicability of the proposed model's rationale in other branding phenomena (e.g., negative CBBE, corporate branding, cobranding, brand cannibalization) would provide insightful ideas toward the substantial improvement of brand theory and practice. This study focuses on consumers' favorite brands (i.e., successful brands). Of relevant interest would be to examine negative CBBE to determine whether this is an outcome of poor scores in the building blocks or whether a different process underlies the construct in both national and international markets.

Finally, research could adopt the same methodology to develop similar frameworks to understand brand equity from the perspective of other stakeholders, such as employees. This would be particularly useful for multinational enterprises as it could help inform adaptations to internal branding programs and other human resource initiatives delivered to internal stakeholders in different countries.

Funding

Table A1
Samples' Demographic Profiles.

		Germany (n = 301)		Greece (n = 312)	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	138	45.8	159	51
	Female	163	54.2	153	49
Age	18–24	46	15.3	54	17.3
	25–44	94	31.2	113	36.2
	45–64	87	28.9	85	27.2
	65+	74	24.6	60	19.2
Education	Higher degree and postgraduate qualification	10	3.3	25	8.0
	Degree or degree equivalent	71	23.6	120	38.5
	School leaving certificate	187	62.1	107	34.3
	Other	33	11.0	57	18.3
Income	Lower than €10,000	74	24.6	122	39.1
	€10,000–20,000	71	23.6	97	31.1
	€20,001–30,000	39	13.0	49	15.7
	€30,001–40,000	29	9.7	22	7.1
	€40,001–50,000	38	12.6	11	3.5
	€50,001–60,000	32	10.6	6	1.9
	€60,001–70,000	17	5.6	5	1.6
	€70,000+	1	.3	–	–

Table A2

Consumers' Responses to Different Product Categories.

	Germany (n = 301)		Greece (n = 312)	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Shampoos	109	36.2	79	25.3
Consumer Electronics	35	11.6	48	15.4
Coffee Houses	40	13.3	30	9.6
Mobile Networks	53	17.6	75	24.0
Banks	46	15.3	60	19.2
Internet Retailers	18	6.0	20	6.4
Total	301	100	312	100

Table A3

Study's Measures.

Constructs		Items
Brand Building Block (BBB)	Brand Heritage	This is a brand whose history is important. This brand has a long history. This brand has been around for a long time GE = .915; GR = .906
	Brand Personality	This brand has a strong personality. This brand has a distinct personality. I can describe this brand with adjectives I would use to describe a person. GE = .828; GR = .788
	Brand Nostalgia	This brand reminds me of things I have done or places I have been. This brand reminds me of a certain period of my life. GE = .865; GR = .872
	Brand Perceived Quality	This brand is good quality. This brand has excellent features. Compared to other brands in its category, this brand is of very high quality. GE = .831; GR = .854
	Brand Leadership	This brand is a leading brand in its category. This brand is leading its category. This brand tends to outperform its competitors. GE = .814; GR = .885
	Brand Competitive Advantage	This brand has a clear advantage over competitive brands. There is a distinct benefit from using this brand over other brands. This brand is superior to other brands in its category. GE = .898; GR = .899
Brand Understanding Block (BUB)	Brand Awareness	I have heard of this brand. I am quite familiar with this brand. I can recognize this brand among other brands. GE = .754; GR = .737
	Brand Associations	This brand has strong associations. This brand has favorable associations. It is clear what this brand stands for. GE = .842; GR = .890
	Brand Reputation	This brand is highly regarded. This brand has status. This brand has a good reputation. GE = .820; GR = .843
	Brand-Self Connection	This brand and I have lots in common. This brand reminds me of who I am. GE = .908; GR = .880
Brand Relationship Block (BRB)	Partner Quality	This brand has always been good to me. This brand treats me as important and valuable customer/user GE = .802; GR = .786
	Brand Intimacy	I really empathize with this brand. It feels like I know this brand for a long time. GE = .810; GR = .807
	Brand Trust	This brand delivers what it promises. This brand's product claims are believable. This brand has a name you can trust. GE = .852; GR = .880
	Brand Relevance	This brand is relevant to my family and/or close friends. This brand fits my lifestyle. This brand has personal relevance to me. GE = .858; GR = .903
Overall brand equity		It makes sense to buy this brand instead of any other brand, even if they are the same. Even if another brand has the same features as this, I would prefer to buy this brand. If there is another brand as good as this, I prefer to buy this brand. If another brand is not different from this in any way, it seems smarter to purchase/use this one. GE = .918; GR = .921
Intention to pay more		The price of this brand would have to go up quite a bit before I would switch to another brand in this category I am willing to pay a higher price for this brand than for other brands in this category I am willing to pay a lot more for this brand than other brands in this category GE = .870; GR = .801
Brand Recommendation		I would recommend this brand to friends and relatives I will speak positively about this brand I intend to encourage other people to buy this brand GE = .894; GR = .911
Intention to re-purchase		It is very unlikely/very likely to repurchase this brand

Table A4
Correlations among the Study's Conditions.

Germany	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Heritage	4.55	1.68	1																	
Personality	4.57	1.45	.286**	1																
Nostalgia	2.92	1.81	.252**	.372**	1															
Quality	5.57	.94	.388**	.342**	.154**	1														
Comp_adv	5.00	1.27	.393**	.491**	.210**	.627**	1													
Leadership	5.17	1.16	.370**	.384**	.238**	.538**	.645**	1												
Awareness	6.05	1.06	.133*	.210**	.089	.264**	.246**	.292**	1											
Reputation	4.76	1.29	.511**	.531**	.301**	.510**	.665**	.602**	.180**	1										
Self_con.	2.87	1.58	.370**	.471**	.684**	.278**	.287**	.285**	.040	.434**	1									
Associations	4.89	1.45	.265**	.467**	.348**	.317**	.343**	.339**	.497**	.403**	.300**	1								
Intimacy	3.82	1.61	.490**	.440**	.471**	.453**	.466**	.443**	.274**	.485**	.634**	.369**	1							
Partner_q	4.18	1.66	.427**	.421**	.446**	.452**	.464**	.439**	.159**	.490**	.597**	.357**	.627**	1						
Relevance	4.08	1.66	.497**	.485**	.529**	.465**	.472**	.415**	.176**	.539**	.581**	.384**	.591**	.673**	1					
Trust	5.52	1.01	.421**	.275**	.209**	.656**	.536**	.495**	.417**	.487**	.258**	.394**	.467**	.469**	.485**	1				
OBE	4.13	1.61	.410**	.419**	.407**	.503**	.529**	.515**	.266**	.494**	.506**	.348**	.606**	.617**	.621**	.516**	1			
Price_p	3.46	1.56	.262**	.337**	.496**	.420**	.474**	.370**	.222**	.380**	.497**	.330**	.492**	.529**	.509**	.369**	.642**	1		
Recomm.	4.59	1.33	.224**	.471**	.338**	.407**	.389**	.302**	.196**	.364**	.495**	.325**	.398**	.469**	.454**	.411**	.570**	.394**	1	
Re-purchase	6.05	1.25	.065	.147	.090	.347**	.313**	.204**	.156*	.138*	.175**	.256**	.238**	.277**	.250**	.406**	.349**	.280**	.319**	1

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Heritage	5.64	1.23	1																	
Personality	5.59	1.15	.545**	1																
Nostalgia	3.79	1.87	.341**	.307**	1															
Quality	5.79	1.05	.487**	.528**	.282**	1														
Comp_adv	5.36	1.24	.551**	.604**	.326**	.700**	1													
Leadership	5.63	1.07	.592**	.614**	.303**	.660**	.756**	1												
Awareness	6.07	.97	.356**	.466**	.147*	.471**	.424**	.492**	1											
Reputation	5.80	1.12	.619**	.659**	.342**	.702**	.733**	.701**	.454**	1										
Self_con.	4.05	1.74	.409**	.367**	.688**	.367**	.375**	.345**	.142*	.403**	1									
Associations	5.01	1.52	.424**	.537**	.380**	.486**	.520**	.471**	.465**	.507**	.333**	1								
Intimacy	4.72	1.52	.469**	.520**	.558**	.515**	.502**	.455**	.264**	.549**	.747**	.460**	1							
Partner_q	4.81	1.52	.460**	.433**	.599**	.476**	.493**	.491**	.266**	.502**	.654**	.364**	.691**	1						
Relevance	4.38	1.71	.452**	.414**	.651**	.449**	.481**	.424**	.235**	.472**	.736**	.441**	.716**	.701**	1					
Trust	5.74	1.00	.533**	.575**	.356**	.742**	.673**	.641**	.476**	.688**	.406**	.517**	.538**	.601**	.535**	1				
OBE	5.03	1.44	.504**	.542**	.440**	.503**	.587**	.551**	.278**	.481**	.515**	.445**	.574**	.571**	.640**	.611**	1			
Price_p	4.24	1.50	.445**	.397**	.550**	.337**	.517**	.468**	.207**	.416**	.524**	.390**	.504**	.539**	.598**	.502**	.650**	1		
Recomm.	5.44	1.26	.462**	.538**	.394**	.390**	.584**	.605**	.347**	.555**	.486**	.501**	.521**	.581**	.608**	.728**	.690**	.586**	1	
Re-purchase	5.91	1.41	.370**	.349**	.169**	.362**	.411**	.439**	.382**	.381**	.276**	.376**	.296**	.299**	.364**	.539**	.516**	.368**	.525**	1

Notes: OBE = Overall brand equity; Price_p = consumers' intention to pay more; Recomm. = consumers' intention to recommend the brand; Re-purchase = consumers' intention to re-purchase the brand.
  * Correlations are significant at the 0.05 level.
  ** Correlations are significant at the 0.01 level.

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