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## MARKETING | RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Determinants of brand loyalty in the apparel industry: A developing country perspective

Aobakwe Ledikwe<sup>1\*</sup>

**Abstract:** The study aims to investigate the determinants of brand loyalty in the apparel industry of Botswana. A descriptive quantitative design was followed, and data were collected from respondents using a self-administered questionnaire. A structured equation modelling technique was used to validate the hypotheses. The results indicated an array of positive significant relationships between brand awareness, brand image, brand trust, and brand loyalty. Additionally, brand commitment significantly moderated the influence of brand trust on brand loyalty. Therefore, it is important for the management of apparel brands to cultivate the levels of brand awareness, brand image, brand trust, and brand commitment in order to strengthen brand loyalty and, in turn, contribute to the longevity of apparel brands in Botswana.

**Subjects:** Brand Management; Relationship Marketing; Marketing Research

**Keywords:** brand awareness; brand image; brand trust; brand commitment; brand loyalty

### 1. Introduction

The apparel industry plays an important role in the economic growth of both developed and developing nations (Ministry of Trade and Industry [MTI], 2020). This industry is recognised as one of the oldest, largest, and most advanced export sectors in the world (World Bank, 2014). The

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### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Despite the extensive research conducted on the importance of the apparel industry across the globe, much is still unknown about how these businesses can strengthen their brand loyalty in an effort to achieve survival in the marketplace. This study attempted to address this limitation by examining the linkage between the determinants (i.e. brand awareness, brand image, brand trust, and brand commitment) of brand loyalty amongst apparel firms in a developing economy of Botswana. The results indicated positive significant relationships between brand awareness, brand image, brand trust, and brand loyalty, while brand commitment moderated the impact of brand trust on brand loyalty. Based on these findings, practical recommendations were made to the management of apparel brands on how to sustain brand loyalty in a competitive business environment. As time progresses, apparel brands will reap the rewards of improved brand loyalty with the aid of brand awareness, brand image, brand trust, and brand commitment.

global apparel industry generated 1,414 USD billion in revenue, contributed 1.9% of gross domestic product (GDP), and experienced an annual growth rate of 4.4% in 2017 (Marketline, 2018). Developing regions such as the Asia-Pacific and Africa account for about 60% of the global apparel retail industry value (Marketline, 2018). This has made the apparel industry the first manufacturing sector in which retail sales were dominated by developing countries (World Bank, 2014). This trend is similar to that in the developing economy of Botswana, where the apparel industry has assisted the manufacturing sector to contribute 5.4% of GDP, employs 4,183 workers, and accumulated 16.3 USD million in revenue in 2019 (Statistics Botswana, 2020). As a result, the apparel industry is the largest employer in the manufacturing sector and is one of the main contributors to Botswana's economic development (MTI, 2020). Although the apparel industry has been recognised as a driver of economic growth in Botswana, it faces numerous challenges that affect its competitiveness and sustainability. The reason is that most of the apparel brands exist to provide similar offerings and prices to customers, leaving little room for differentiation (MTI, 2020). For the purpose of this study, apparel brands refer to the brands that are owned and operated by retailers themselves and will thus be the focal point of this study. As a result, this creates an opportunity for customers to engage in switching behaviour, thus stifling competition among the players in the industry (MTI, 2020). This behaviour results in customers insisting on lower prices, higher-quality products, and consistent service delivery, making it more difficult for apparel brands to retain a loyal customer base (MTI, 2020). Consequently, to retain its customers in this competitive environment, a business should invest in the cultivation of brand awareness and brand image to enhance brand trust in order to stimulate brand loyalty, which ultimately assists in building stronger ties with customers and ensures survival in the marketplace (Chinomona, 2016; Das, 2016; Mathew & Thomas, 2018).

The underlying logic of brand awareness is to increase a brand's visibility and recognition in the minds of customers (Huang & Sarigollu, 2014). The development of brand awareness forges a stronger bond with customers and decreases price sensitivity, leading to the promotion of brand image (Tran et al., 2019). Notably, improved levels of brand awareness and brand image create a symbolic meaning and emphasise the product features and benefits of a business, contributing to the establishment of brand trust (Chinomona, 2016; Das, 2016). Brand trust also creates long-lasting relationships by reducing uncertainty and fear of opportunism, which further helps to sustain brand loyalty (Bennur & Jin, 2017). According to the empirical findings of Kaur and Soch (2018), brand commitment should be included as a moderator to strengthen the influence of brand trust on brand loyalty through generating feelings of attachment to a brand. Although the previous work of Das (2016), Kaur and Soch (2018), and Tran et al. (2019) has validated the interlinkages between brand awareness, brand image, brand trust, brand commitment, and brand loyalty, no research exists from the developing economy of Botswana on how these constructs relate together. A focus on Botswana provides a unique setting for exploring how customers' perceptions can provide insights into the interrelationship between brand awareness, brand image, brand trust, brand commitment, and brand loyalty in the apparel industry. Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate the determinants of brand loyalty among retail customers in the apparel industry of the developing economy of Botswana.

The current study contributes to the body of literature by providing an improved understanding of the interrelationship between brand awareness, brand image, brand trust, and brand loyalty among retail customers of selected apparel brands in the developing economy of Botswana. In addition, the study provides insights into how brand commitment moderates the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty in the competitive apparel environment. For this reason, the study is in line with a growing body of research (Chinomona, 2016; Tran et al., 2019) that is responding for a call on developing a conceptual model for uncovering the determinants of brand loyalty. To achieve this, the study proposes a valid and reliable parsimonious model that illustrates the determinants of brand loyalty and further explores the moderating role of brand commitment on the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty. In terms of practical significance, the study provides guidelines and strategies for how apparel brands can implement brand awareness to strengthen brand image, leading to enhanced brand trust and, in turn, promoting a higher level of brand loyalty.

In the light of that background, the sections that follow are contextualised within the rest of the study. First, a discussion is provided on the theoretical constructs to assist in the development of the theoretical model and the formulation of the research hypotheses. Emphasis is then placed on providing insights into the research methodology, the results, and the theoretical and managerial implications. The study concludes by noting its limitations and offering directions for future research.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Previous research on the determinants of brand loyalty

Research on the determinants (such as brand awareness, brand image, brand trust, and brand commitment) of brand loyalty within a developing country is limited (Das, 2016). A review of the literature uncovered that most studies related to the interrelationship between brand awareness, brand image, brand trust, brand commitment, and brand loyalty are concentrated on developed countries such as Vietnam, Turkey, and India (Erkmen & Hancer, 2019; Kaur & Soch, 2018; Tran et al., 2019). In addition, previous studies have explored the linkages between the determinants of brand loyalty in unique industry settings such as hotel, restaurant, and mobile technology, with little or no studies being conducted on the apparel industry (Bennur & Jin, 2017). From a developing country perspective, Izogo et al. (2017) and Petzer and Van Tonder (2019) discovered the association between relationship quality and brand loyalty in South Africa and Nigeria, with no previous research on Botswana's apparel industry. With this in mind, the literature points out that none of the studies both in developed and developing nations have explored the theoretical connection between brand awareness, brand image, brand trust, brand commitment, and brand loyalty in the apparel industry. These gaps in the literature make it necessary for the current study to investigate the determinants of brand loyalty in the apparel industry of Botswana.

### 2.2. Brand awareness

"Brand awareness" refers to the ability to recall and recognise a valued brand (Vasudevan & Kumar, 2019). For the purpose of this study, brand awareness is measured as the extent to which customers are familiar with and knowledgeable about a particular brand. Brand awareness significantly impacts the purchase decisions of consumers by emphasising product quality, providing genuine information about the product's attributes, and consequently reducing perceived risks (Huang & Sarigollu, 2014). Brand awareness also allows customers to be more familiar with a brand and to be able to recall it immediately when making a purchase decision (Mackay et al., 2013). Thus, the consumer's ability to identify a brand under distinct conditions is a result of his or her brand awareness (Hafez, 2018).

#### 2.2.1. The influence of brand awareness on brand image

Brand awareness is an essential element in the development of brand image (Su, 2016). The research work of Altaf et al. (2017) and Herrero-Crespo et al. (2016) found that brand awareness exerts a positive and significant impact on brand image. This finding is corroborated by San Martin et al. (2019), who established that customers' favourable perception of brand awareness can lead to increased levels of brand image. Therefore, the development of brand awareness can lead to a higher degree of brand image, leading to increased profitability and greater market share (Tran et al., 2019). Thus, it is hypothesised that:

*H<sub>1</sub>: Brand awareness has a positive significant influence on brand image*

#### 2.2.2. The influence of brand awareness on brand trust

Apparel brands that enjoy higher levels of brand awareness with customers have the ability to influence their degree of brand trust (Das, 2016). The empirical study of Mourad et al. (2010) discovered that brand awareness is significantly related to brand trust. Similarly, Lin and Lee (2012) contend that brand awareness influences brand trust by stimulating more familiarity with, and reducing risk perceptions about, the brand. Thus, brand awareness is an essential factor in building brand trust (Das, 2016). It is therefore hypothesised that:



*H<sub>2</sub>: Brand awareness has a positive significant influence on brand trust*

### **2.3. Brand image**

According to Raji et al. (2019) “brand image” is the overall perception of attributes, functions, and meanings that consumers associate with a brand. For the purpose of this study, brand image is measured as the evaluation of a brand’s offering in the minds of consumers. The goal of businesses is to create an enduring image that enables them to gain a competitive advantage (Cho & Fiore, 2015). This means that brands need to develop a strong image with consumers by consistently providing quality offerings, emphasising their key features and benefits, and building an emotional bond with them (Keller, 2008). Therefore, with a clear and powerful brand image, apparel brands are able to position their products as the first choice in consumers’ minds (Ghaderi et al., 2015).

#### *2.3.1. The influence of brand image on brand trust*

The creation of a solid image fosters customers’ trust in a brand by reducing risk perceptions and instilling confidence in its offerings (Alhaddad, 2015). Previous studies of Chinomona (2016) and Erkmen and Hancer (2019) revealed that the cultivation of brand image can significantly impact brand trust. Han et al. (2019) agree with this notion, pointing out that brand image can contribute positively to strengthening the level of brand trust in the marketplace. Thus, apparel brands should pay greater attention to creating a genuine image with their customers in an effort to build brand trust (Chinomona, 2016). Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

*H<sub>3</sub>: Brand image has a positive significant influence on brand trust*

### **2.4. Brand trust**

Huaman-Ramirez and Merunka (2019) describe “brand trust” as the extent to which customers expect a brand to deliver consistently on its promises. In line with the principles of this study, brand trust is measured as the propensity of customers to consider the claims made by a particular brand to be reliable. Brand trust signals customers’ confidence that a specific brand is honest, sincere, and reliable in addressing their concerns (Hawass, 2013). Furthermore, a brand that enjoys a high level of trust among its customers will have a sustainable relationship with them, leading to a high volume of transactions and increased profitability (Mckinney & Benson, 2013). Therefore, brand trust is an essential component in building and maintaining long-term relationships with customers, because it reduces uncertainty by fulfilling promises and delivering consistent product/service performance (Hegner & Jevons, 2016).

#### *2.4.1. The influence of brand trust on brand loyalty*

Brand trust arises as the strongest predictor of brand loyalty (Bilgihan, 2016). This notion is emphasised by Khan and Rahman (2016) and Lee and Jee (2016), who argue that brand trust is directly related to brand loyalty. Huang (2017) supports this view, arguing that brand trust is an essential catalyst in retaining a loyal customer base. Thus, a trustworthy brand helps to develop brand loyalty by consistently keeping promises about value and ensuring superior product performance (Bennur & Jin, 2017). It is therefore proposed that:

*H<sub>4</sub>: Brand trust has a positive significant influence on brand loyalty*

### **2.5. Brand commitment**

According to Chen (2017) “brand commitment” is the degree of attachment to a brand. For the purpose of this study, brand commitment is measured as the desire to maintain a mutual relationship with a preferred brand. Brand commitment is essential for the success of apparel brands, as it assists them to retain quality customers who invest maximum effort in protecting their relationship with the brand, and are less sensitive to negative information about their brand of choice (Byun & Dass, 2015). Moreover, customers with a higher level of brand commitment will distance themselves from competing brands, as they share common values

with their current brand and their choices are unaffected by switching costs (Byun & Dass, 2015). Therefore, the stronger the customer's brand commitment, the more likely they are to resist competitive inducements and to pay no attention to inconsistent information brought against their preferred brand (Choi & Ahluwalia, 2013).

### 2.5.1. The moderating role of brand commitment on the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty

Brand commitment improves the effect of brand trust on the level of brand loyalty by creating an emotional bond with customers (Ting & Yeh, 2014). According to the research evidence of Kaur and Soch (2018) and Nusair et al. (2013) brand commitment significantly moderates the impact of brand trust on brand loyalty. Cater and Cater (2010) validated this notion, arguing that the inclusion of brand trust as a moderator can strengthen the influence of brand trust in enhancing the degree of brand loyalty. Therefore, the possible association between brand trust and brand loyalty is improved by adding brand commitment as a moderating factor (Ting & Yeh, 2014). It is thus hypothesised that:

*H<sub>5</sub>: Brand commitment fully moderates the influence of brand trust on the level of brand loyalty*

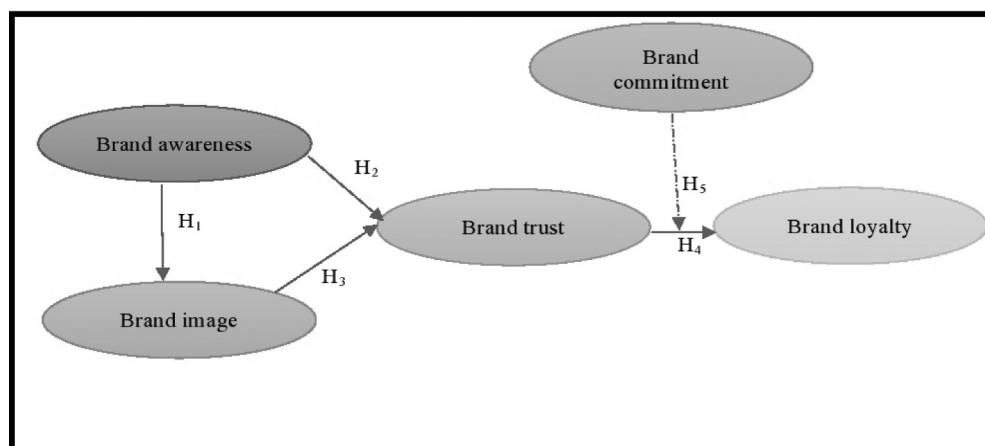
### 2.6. Brand loyalty

"Brand loyalty" refers to a deeply held commitment to patronise a preferred brand repeatedly and consistently in the future (Tweneboah-Koduah & Farley, 2016). In line with the principles of this study, brand loyalty is measured as the feeling of attachment and belonging to a brand. Brand loyalty is an important asset for apparel brands, as it contributes to the continuity of the consumer lifecycle and leads to a positive advocacy of the business (Erdogmus & Ergun, 2016). The importance of loyal customers lies in their continued and increased purchase of products and services from the same business over a period of time (Tweneboah-Koduah & Farley, 2016). Therefore, brand loyalty is a valuable asset for any brand, due to its distinctive features and benefits (Nguyen et al., 2011).

Figure 1 illustrates the hypothesised relationships between the selected constructs in this study.

**Figure 1. Proposed conceptual model.**

Indirect relationship (moderation) ----- and direct relationship \_\_\_\_\_.



### 3. Research methodology

The study followed a descriptive quantitative design to collect useful data to addressing the research hypotheses. The target population for this study included all the retail customers of apparel brands operating in the capital city of Gaborone in Botswana. Gaborone was selected

because it is the economic hub of Botswana, and it is where most apparel brands are located (MTI, 2020). As a result, a targeted sample of 450 retail customers who met the requirements of the study were invited to participate in this study.

The researcher made use of a non-probability convenience sampling method to draw a representative sample from the target population. Retail customers of selected apparel brands were surveyed on the basis of their accessibility and willingness to participate in the study (Hair et al., 2016). This sampling method offers the advantage of collecting a large number of responses at a low cost and within a short period of time, thus enhancing the adequacy of the sampling procedure (Hair et al., 2016).

A self-administered questionnaire was adopted as a relevant measurement instrument to collect data for the study. The questionnaire consisted of close-ended structured statements with response choices and was distributed by fieldworkers for completion. The questionnaire was divided into two sections, A and B. Section A collected the demographic information about the respondents, while section B assessed their perceptions of the constructs observed in this study. The measurement scales relating to the constructs in the conceptual model (see Figure 1) were adapted from existing empirical studies. Respondents were also asked to rate the statements, measuring each construct in this study on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Brand awareness was measured using the scale from Sasmita and Suki (2015) and included four measurement items. Brand image had five scale items and was sourced from Kremer and Viot (2012). Brand trust was measured using the previous scale of Zehir et al. (2011) and was composed of five measurement items. Brand commitment was made up of five scale items and was measured using the scale of Li et al. (2014). Brand loyalty was assessed by using the parsimonious scale of Choi et al. (2017) and included six measurement items.

After data collection had been finalised, the final realised sample for the study was 260. This sample size is considered to be valid, as recommended by Hair et al. (2016) since it falls within the minimum sample size range (200–500) for studying a model with five or more constructs. The collected data were then cleaned, edited, and analysed using multivariate statistical analyses on SPSS (version 24) and AMOS (version 24). This statistical procedure comprised descriptive statistics, reliability test, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and structural equation modelling (SEM). The reliability of the measurement instrument was assessed with Cronbach's alpha coefficient, while CFA via SEM was performed to examine the model's fitness and the hypothesised relationships between the constructs in this study. Therefore, SEM was the main statistical procedure for assessing the validity and reliability of the proposed conceptual model (see Figure 1) and the significance of the hypotheses.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Demographic profile of respondents

The demographic profile of respondents is presented in Table 1. It is evident from Table 1 that the majority of the respondents were female (51.50%) aged between 18 and 30 years old (49.20%), who were single (73.50%), and who possessed a university degree (52.69%) qualification. The most common form of employment among the respondents was full-time employment by an organisation (65.38%), and most of these participants had purchased branded apparel clothing (39.60%) between one and five times (62.69%) in the previous three months.

### 4.2. Reliability and validity of the measurement model

A CFA procedure via SEM was conducted to determine the overall goodness-of-fit of the specified model (see Figure 1). The results from the CFA indicated that the measurement model was an acceptable fit to the data. Table 2 supports this observation, as Chi-Square/degrees of freedom ( $\chi^2/df = 2.01$ ), the Tucker–Lewis index (TLI = 0.901), the Comparative Fit index (CFI = 0.919), and the



**Table 1. Demographic information of respondents**

<b>Demographic characteristics</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	126	48.5
Female	134	51.5
Total	260	100
<i>Age</i>		
18–30	128	49.20
31–40	87	33.50
41–50	36	13.80
51–60	7	2.70
61–70	2	0.80
Total	260	100
<i>Marital status</i>		
Single, never married before	191	73.50
Married or living with partner	59	22.70
Divorced, separated/widowed	10	3.80
Total	260	100
<i>Level of education</i>		
Some high school	11	4.23
High school completed	24	9.23
Post-Form 5 (matric) certificate or diploma completed	62	23.85
University degree	137	52.69
Post-graduate degree	26	10.00
Total	260	100
<i>Employment status</i>		
Self-employed (earning salary)	53	20.39
Full-time employed by an organisation	170	65.38
Part-time employed by an organisation	19	7.31
Full-time student (not earning salary)	4	1.54
Part-time student (earning salary)	5	1.92
Retired	4	1.54
Unemployed (not earning salary)	5	1.92
Total	260	100
<i>Frequency of purchase</i>		
1–5 times	163	62.69
6–10 times	66	25.39
More than 10 times	31	11.92
Total	260	100
<i>Nature of brand influence</i>		
I only buy branded clothes	103	39.60
I sometimes buy clothes not branded	93	35.80
Brands make no difference to me	64	24.60
Total	260	100

Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA = 0.075) were within the required limits recommended by Hair et al. (2016).

Face validity was confirmed, where the researcher made use of previously validated scales to measure the different constructs in the study. A pilot test was also conducted with a representative sample of 15 respondents to ensure the reliability of the measurement scale items.

In terms of reliability, the Cronbach's alpha and construct reliability scores for the selected constructs in this study were highly reliable as they were above the cut-off limit of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2016). This result suggests evidence of the reliability of the measurement instrument.

Convergent validity was determined by assessing the factor loadings and average variance extracted (AVE). The results in Table 2 indicate that the factor loadings and AVE values were above the acceptable norm (0.50), thus indicating supportive evidence for convergent validity. Discriminant validity was assessed by evaluating whether AVE values were higher than the shared variance among the observed constructs. The results from Table 2 suggest that all the AVE values were greater than the corresponding shared variance; hence, discriminant validity was achieved. Tables 3 and 4 provide statistical evidence for nomological validity, as all the hypothesised relationships between the constructs in this study were accepted.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the measurement model provided good fit statistics and confirmed the existence of construct validity. Once the measurement model had been found to be valid, the structural model was developed to test the hypotheses.

#### **4.3. Hypotheses testing of the structural model**

Following the confirmation of the reliability and validity of the measurement model, the structural model was assessed to validate the hypotheses (H<sub>1</sub>-H<sub>4</sub>) for this study. The proposed conceptual model (see Figure 1) was tested using SEM in line with the principles of maximum likelihood estimation. This included the assessment of path estimates through the observation of standardised beta ( $\beta$ ) coefficients and p-values (p). The path estimates are required to be significant at a 5% level in order to accept the hypotheses. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 provides evidence of significant relationships between brand awareness, brand image, brand trust, and brand loyalty. The results suggest that all the hypotheses for the study can be accepted. This implies that H<sub>1</sub> (brand awareness and brand image:  $\beta = 0.381$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), H<sub>2</sub> (brand awareness and brand trust:  $\beta = 0.447$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), H<sub>3</sub> (brand image and brand trust:  $\beta = 0.297$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) and H<sub>4</sub> (brand trust and brand loyalty:  $\beta = 0.469$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) are fully supported. Overall, the structural model indicated that brand awareness explained 62% of the variance in brand image of selected apparel brands in Botswana. In addition, brand awareness and brand image contributed 66% of the variance in brand trust of selected apparel brands in Botswana. Interestingly, brand trust explained 74% of the variance in brand loyalty held by selected apparel brands in Botswana.

Finally, the results from Table 3 provided evidence of acceptable model fit estimates ( $\chi^2/df = 1.984$ , TLI = 0.922, CFI = 0.931, and RMSEA = 0.064). The model therefore proved to have satisfactory goodness-of-fit within the data.

#### **4.4. Moderation analysis**

A bootstrapping procedure was conducted using AMOS to validate the significance of the moderating effect of brand commitment on the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty. The results of the moderation are shown in Table 4, and help to confirm H<sub>5</sub>.

Table 4 indicates that there is a positive and significant total effect of brand trust on brand loyalty ( $\beta = 0.302$ ,  $p = 0.010$ ). This indicates an overall direct impact of brand trust on brand loyalty.

**Table 2. Overall fit statistics of the measurement model**

Construct and items	Factor loadings	Composite reliability	AVE	Shared variance	Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ )
<b>Brand awareness</b>					
I am aware of the clothing retailer	0.817	0.861	0.624	0.421	0.862
I know what the clothing retailer looks like	0.869				
I can recall the symbol or logo of the clothing retailer	0.816				
I can recognise the clothing retailer among other competing brands	0.866				
<b>Brand image</b>					
I believe the clothing retailer fights for the customers' interests	0.880	0.895	0.630	0.421	0.896
I believe the clothing retailer offers good value for money	0.795				
I believe the clothing retailer is conveniently located	0.899				
I believe the clothing retailer offers a wide range of products to suit my needs	0.817				
I believe the clothing retailer's store offers a pleasant shopping experience	0.745				
<b>Brand trust</b>					
This clothing retail brand meets my expectations	0.762	0.848	0.619	0.421	0.849
I feel confident with the use of this clothing retail brand	0.881				
This clothing retail brand does not disappoint me	0.744				
I believe the clothing retail brand is sincere in addressing my concerns	0.802				
I can rely on this clothing retail brand to solve my problem	0.845				
<b>Brand commitment</b>					
I feel emotionally attached to this clothing retail brand	0.818	0.911	0.578	0.364	0.912
This clothing retail brand has a great deal of personal meaning for me	0.887				
I have a strong sense of identification with this clothing retail brand	0.871				
It would be hard for me to switch away from this clothing retail brand even if I wanted to	0.821				
It would be costly for me to switch from this clothing retail brand to other competing brands	0.900				

(Continued)

**Table 2. (Continued)**

Construct and items	Factor loadings	Composite reliability	AVE	Shared variance	Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ )
<b>Brand loyalty</b>					
If I had to do it all again, I would choose this clothing retailer again	0.796	0.942	0.677	0.421	0.943
I consider myself to be a loyal patron of this clothing retailer	0.849				
I believe my continued usage of the clothing retailer is the best choice for me	0.863				
I would recommend the clothing retailer to others	0.877				
I intend to keep buying clothing from the clothing retailer	0.865				
I intend to encourage other people to buy from this clothing retailer	0.893				
Model fit statistics					
$\chi^2/df$	2.010				
TLI	0.901				
CFI	0.919				
RMSEA	0.075				

**Table 3. Hypothesis testing and model fit results**

Hypotheses	Direct path estimates ( $\beta$ )	Probability value ( $p$ )	Hypothesis result ( $p < 0.05$ )	Variance explained ( $R^2$ )
H <sub>1</sub> Brand awareness and Brand image	0.381	0.000	Supported	0.620
H <sub>2</sub> Brand awareness and Brand trust	0.447	0.000	Supported	
H <sub>3</sub> Brand image and Brand trust	0.297	0.000	Supported	
H <sub>4</sub> Brand trust and Brand loyalty	0.469	0.000	Supported	0.740
Model fit statistics				
$\chi^2/df$	1.984			
TLI	0.922			
CFI	0.931			
RMSEA	0.064			

**Table 4. Bootstrapping results**

Total, direct and indirect effects	Path estimates ( $\beta$ )	Probability value ( $p$ )	Boot standard error (SE)	Boot lower confidence level	Boot upper confidence level
Direct effect of brand trust on brand loyalty					
Brand trust and Brand loyalty	0.469	0.000	0.042	0.537	0.767
Total effect of brand trust on brand loyalty					
Brand trust and Brand loyalty	0.302	0.010	0.063	0.569	0.794
Total moderation (indirect effect of brand commitment)					
Brand trust, Brand commitment, and Brand loyalty	0.771	0.022	0.031	0.895	1.014
Hypothesis conclusion					
	Indirect path estimates ( $\beta$ )	Probability value ( $p$ )	Hypothesis result ( $p < 0.05$ )	Variance explained ( $R^2$ )	
H <sub>5</sub> Brand trust, Brand commitment, and Brand loyalty	0.771	0.022	Supported	0.765	

When brand commitment is included as a moderating variable, the influence of brand trust on brand loyalty significantly improves ( $\beta = 0.771, p = 0.022$ ). This result thus highlights a total moderation of brand trust on the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty (Boot lower confidence limit = 0.895, Boot upper confidence limit = 1.014,  $p = 0.022$ ). This statistical evidence also supports H<sub>5</sub>, suggesting that brand commitment is an essential ingredient for maximising the impact of brand trust on brand loyalty within the apparel arena. Overall, the model suggests that **77%** of the variation in brand loyalty is explained by brand trust and brand commitment.

### 5. Discussion

First, a significant relationship was predicted between brand awareness and brand image. The results provided in Table 3 support H<sub>1</sub>. This suggests that the influence of brand awareness on



brand image is statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.381$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). This finding is consistent with the prior studies of Altaf et al. (2017) and San Martin et al. (2019), who established that brand awareness is directly related to brand image. Foroudi et al. (2017) profess that higher levels of brand awareness lead to improved levels of brand image amongst Islamic consumers. Marin-Garcia et al. (2019) opine that brand awareness is a significant predictor of brand image amongst Spanish retailers. This, therefore, suggests that building a favourable awareness can lead to the development of a stronger image in the marketplace.

Second, evidence was reported for the influence of brand awareness on the level of brand trust. This indicates that brand awareness ( $\beta = 0.447$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) exerted a positive impact on brand trust and is thus consistent with  $H_2$ . This result is congruent with the empirical findings of Das (2016) and Lin and Lee (2012), who found that brand awareness has a significant effect on brand trust. Mourad et al. (2010) discovered that brand awareness enhances familiarity and reduces risk perception towards a brand, leading to increased brand trust. Thus, building a genuine and improved brand awareness contributes to enhanced brand trust among retail customers in the apparel industry of Botswana.

Third, a direct association was predicted between brand image and brand trust. This highlights that brand image ( $\beta = 0.297$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) is positively correlated with brand trust, and thus  $H_3$  is supported. This finding is corroborated by Erkmen and Hancer (2019) and Han et al. (2019), who established that brand image has a significant impact on the level of brand trust. Alwi et al. (2016) concur that brand image directly influences brand trust amongst industrial buyers in Malaysia. This suggests that a stronger brand trust between apparel brands and their retail customers can be generated by fostering brand image.

Fourth, the results show that retail customers of selected apparel brands in Botswana perceived brand trust to influence the level of brand loyalty. More specifically, brand trust ( $\beta = 0.469$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) had a positive significant relationship on brand loyalty, so  $H_4$  was accepted. This finding is supported by Bennur and Jin (2017) and Khan and Rahman (2016), who found that brand trust contributes to increased brand loyalty. Sharma and Jain (2019) confirm that a direct and positive association exists between brand trust and brand commitment. The empirical study of Mishra et al. (2016) argues that brand trust is an essential element towards the establishment of brand loyalty in India. This further implies that the creation of brand loyalty is strengthened by the implementation of brand trust.

Last, the results established that brand commitment significantly moderates the impact of brand trust on brand loyalty among apparel brands in Botswana. The evidence from Table 4 supports  $H_5$ , contending that brand commitment ( $\beta = 0.771$ ,  $p = 0.022$ ) improved the overall effect of brand trust on brand loyalty. Research by Kaur and Soch (2018) and Ting and Yeh (2014) supports the findings of this study, suggesting that brand commitment is an important moderator in enhancing the effect of brand trust on brand loyalty. Nusair et al. (2013) provide empirical evidence for the moderating effect of brand commitment on stimulating the impact of brand trust on brand loyalty among Generation Y users. Therefore, brand commitment should be included as a moderator to stimulate the overall influence of brand trust on brand loyalty within the apparel environment.

## 6. Theoretical and practical implications

The current study contributes to the body of literature by providing useful measurement scales that can be explored in future studies for understanding the interrelationship between brand awareness, brand image, brand trust, brand commitment, and brand loyalty in different market settings. The proposed conceptual model has also been proven to be effective in eliciting empirical evidence on how the cultivation of brand awareness leads to improved brand image, thus contributing to enhanced levels of brand trust and, in turn, generating a stronger brand loyalty through the moderating influence of brand commitment.

From a practical standpoint, the results provide insights into how the owners of apparel brands can understand how the development of brand awareness has an impact on brand image, leading to improved brand image, thereby sustaining brand trust, and consequently attaining a higher level of brand loyalty. It is noteworthy that the influence of brand trust on brand loyalty can be strengthened by the inclusion of brand commitment as a moderator. The empirical study of Bennur and Jin (2017) suggests that the direction and significance of these interrelationships between the selected constructs will depend on whether the customers hold favourable perceptions about brand awareness, brand image, brand trust, and brand commitment in order to achieve brand loyalty. There is also the precedence of competitive pressures, economic instabilities, and a greater drive towards personalised offerings, which will influence consumers' behavioural response to how these selected constructs relate to each other (Kaur & Soch, 2018). This implies that apparel brands will need to focus more on building emotional bonds with their customers, making differentiated offers and providing a speedy service in order to enhance their competitive advantage. Considering this, apparel brands will reap the rewards of increased levels of brand awareness, brand image, brand trust, and brand commitment, thereby contributing to a stronger brand loyalty.

Based on the findings of this study, four theoretical contributions were realised. First, it provided evidence for the theoretical connection between brand awareness and brand image in the apparel industry of Botswana. This suggests that brand awareness is an important element in fostering the level of brand image. Consequently, this finding contributes to the current debate in the literature by illuminating an understanding of the direction of the relationship between brand awareness and brand image in the context of a developing market.

Second, the study provides improved knowledge of how brand awareness and brand image can lead to increased levels of brand trust. This is an important area in the literature, which requires the attention of researchers to understand the links between brand awareness, brand image, and brand trust in a competitive industry such as the apparel industry of Botswana. As a result, this contributes to the beginnings of new research to uncover how brand awareness and brand image could be cultivated in order to stimulate brand trust.

Third, the study offers a new perspective on the role of brand trust in contributing to enhanced brand loyalty. This finding suggests that brand trust is a critical element in the building of brand loyalty within the apparel environment. The direction of this relationship provides insights into, and understanding of, what constitutes brand trust and, in turn, how brand trust could be promoted internally to strengthen brand loyalty.

Finally, there is limited research on how brand commitment can moderate the effect of brand trust on brand loyalty. The study provided insights into how brand commitment can be included as a moderator to maximise the influence of brand trust on stimulating the level of brand loyalty. Notably, this is a new focus in the literature, as most studies have concentrated on how brand trust moderates the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty. Therefore, the study provides an updated conceptual model that validates how the impact of brand trust on brand loyalty can be strengthened by brand commitment, leading to higher levels of competitiveness and the improved survival of apparel brands.

## **7. Managerial recommendations**

The empirical studies of Das (2016) and Tran et al. (2019) amongst other numerous studies have explored the interrelationship between brand awareness, brand image, brand trust, brand commitment, and brand loyalty from a developed country perspective, with no emphasis on the apparel industry. However, no study has previously been conducted in a developing economy of Botswana that recommended strategies to the management of apparel brands to enhance the degree of brand loyalty with their customers. Considering this, the study aims to provide the following strategies to apparel brands to assist them in strengthening the linkages between brand awareness, brand image,

brand trust, and brand commitment in an effort to build a genuine and stronger brand loyalty. The provision of these strategies will also assist in addressing the research gap for the study.

First, the owners of apparel brands can enhance their brand awareness levels by improving the communication skills of employees to provide an effective service to customers. This can be done by offering regular and compulsory training to all employees in the areas of handling conflict, listening actively, delivering effective presentations, and communicating both in writing and verbal to ensure that their communication skills meet the required standards. The training can also determine the employees' level of communication skills and areas that need improving in order to build a satisfactory level of communication. This results in enhanced communication and will enable employees to serve customers better, thereby promoting a favourable awareness of the business, leading to enhanced levels of brand image and brand trust.

Second, the management of apparel brands can improve their brand image by creating an effective service inquiry system to enable customers to share their comments, suggestions, and queries in order to enhance their knowledge of the business. This can be achieved by creating an in-store computerised system (e.g., a self-service kiosk) that customers can use after interacting with employees, to rate the overall service and provide feedback within a few minutes. This information can be useful in building customer lists by gaining information about their contact details and the key areas of improvement in product quality and service delivery. This will generate a favourable image for the business, thereby fostering brand trust.

Third, the owners of apparel brands need to reward employees for providing superior services to customers in order to enhance their trust levels. This means deploying a reward programme that could include promotional opportunities, annual bonuses, or star awards to recognise their individual performance, which would incentivise employees to deliver excellent service and quality products to customers. This would motivate employees to strengthen their ties with customers, and would effectively address any customer concerns, thereby increasing customers' trust in the brand and securing a genuine loyalty towards the business.

Last, the management of apparel brands needs to seek thoughtful and novel ways to improve customers' commitment to the brand. This can be achieved by offering personalised services, flexibility in service delivery, providing professional advice to customers, treating them individually, and providing solutions that address the complaints of each customer, leading to increased commitment to the business. This, in turn, promotes co-operative behaviour and stimulates the interests of customers thereby increasing their trust in the brand and ultimately fostering their level of brand loyalty.

## **8. Conclusion, limitations and future research**

The aim of this study was to investigate the determinants of brand loyalty in the apparel industry in the developing economy of Botswana. The results were congruent with the extant literature, and thus supported all the hypotheses ( $H_1$ - $H_5$ ) in the study. From these results, it was confirmed that brand awareness is positively related to brand image. In addition, brand awareness and brand image exerted a significant influence on the level of brand trust. Interestingly, brand trust had a direct relationship with brand loyalty, and this relationship was moderated by brand commitment. The goal of this study was to develop practical recommendations for how apparel brands in Botswana can cultivate the levels of brand awareness, brand image, brand trust, and brand commitment in an effort to stimulate brand loyalty. Therefore, the application of these recommendations will enable apparel brands in the developing economy of Botswana to improve their product offerings and service delivery, and to build stronger ties with their customers through the promotion of brand awareness, brand image, brand trust, and brand commitment, thereby contributing to sustained brand loyalty.

Despite the usefulness of this study, a number of limitations have been identified. First, the study was limited to customers of apparel brands operating in the capital city of Gaborone, Botswana. It is possible that the information provided by the target sample is not a true reflection of the apparel industry, and it cannot be generalised to the entire population in Botswana. Also, the study did not examine other influential factors, as brand satisfaction, brand experience, brand engagement, and brand involvement, that can have an impact on brand loyalty. It is thus recommended that future studies on this topic be extended to other geographical areas across Botswana, to similar product industries (e.g., leather and textile), and to other developing economies to obtain greater insights into the interrelationship between these selected constructs. The proposed model and measuring instrument could also be cross-validated in other apparel industries around the world to test their reliability, relevance, and applicability.

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