# THE IMPACT OF RETAILER BRAND NAME SUBSTITUTION ON CONSUMER TRUST

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| ARTICLE INFO | ABSTRACT |
|---|---|
| | **Purpose:** The aim of this article is to understand the impact of retailer brand name substitution on consumer trust.<br><br>**Theoretical Framework:** Drawing on existing research on product brand substitution, the paper introduces variables that could influence consumer trust in situations where a brand name is substituted.<br><br>**Design/Methodology/Approach:** To achieve this goal, a quantitative study was conducted among 351 Tunisian consumers to test the hypotheses and quantify the impact of each variable.<br><br>**Findings:** The results of this research highlight three variables that can contribute to building consumer trust during a retailer brand name substitution, namely: (1) communication about the change; (2) perceived similarity and (3) perceived benefits derived from the change. The results also indicated that consumer attachment has a moderating effect on the relationship between trust and its determinants. More precisely, the stronger the attachment to the initial retailer brand, the more the consumer's trust in the brand decreases after the brand substitution.<br><br>**Research, Practical & Social implications:** *This paper assists practitioners in identifying the key success determinants that can facilitate the transfer of consumer trust from the old retailer brand to the new one. It provides guidance for a successful retailer brand name substitution.*<br><br>**Originality/Value:** This research fulfils an identified need to study how consumers' trust in a brand can be transferred successfully in the case of a retailer brand name substitution. |
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## O IMPACTO DA SUBSTITUIÇÃO DA MARCA DO VAREJISTA NA CONFIANÇA DO CONSUMIDOR

**RESUMO**
**Objetivo:** O objetivo deste artigo é compreender o impacto da substituição de marca de varejista na confiança do consumidor.
**Estrutura Teórica:** Com base em pesquisas existentes sobre a substituição de marcas de produtos, o documento introduz variáveis que podem influenciar a confiança do consumidor em situações em que uma marca é substituída.
**Design/Metodologia/Abordagem:** Para atingir esse objetivo, foi realizado um estudo quantitativo entre 351 consumidores tunisinos para testar as hipóteses e quantificar o impacto de cada variável.

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**Constatações:** Os resultados desta pesquisa destacam três variáveis que podem contribuir para a construção da confiança do consumidor durante a substituição de uma marca de varejista, a saber: (1) comunicação sobre a mudança; (2) similaridade percebida e (3) benefícios percebidos derivados da mudança. Os resultados também indicaram que o apego do consumidor tem um efeito moderador na relação entre confiança e seus determinantes. Mais precisamente, quanto mais forte for a ligação à marca de retalhista inicial, mais diminuirá a confiança do consumidor na marca após a substituição da marca.

**Investigação, Implicações Práticas e Sociais:** Este documento ajuda os profissionais a identificar os principais determinantes de sucesso que podem facilitar a transferência da confiança do consumidor da antiga marca de varejista para a nova. Ele fornece diretrizes para uma substituição bem-sucedida de marca de varejista.

**Originalidade/Valor:** esta investigação responde a uma necessidade identificada de estudar como a confiança dos consumidores numa marca pode ser transferida com êxito no caso de uma substituição de marca de retalhista.

**Palavras-chave:** Substituição de Marca, Confiança, Comunicação, Benefícios Percebidos, Semelhança, Apego.


## EL IMPACTO DE LA REEMPLAZACIÓN DE LA MARCA DEL MINORISTA EN LA CONFIANZA DEL CONSUMIDOR

### RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** El objetivo de este artículo es comprender el impacto de la sustitución de la marca minorista en la confianza de los consumidores.

**Estructura Teórica:** Sobre la base de las investigaciones existentes sobre la sustitución de marcas de productos, el documento introduce variables que pueden influir en la confianza de los consumidores en situaciones en las que se sustituye una marca.

**Diseño/Metodología/Enfoque:** Para alcanzar este objetivo, se realizó un estudio cuantitativo entre 351 consumidores tunecinos para probar las hipótesis y cuantificar el impacto de cada variable.

**Conclusiones:** Los resultados de esta investigación destacan tres variables que pueden contribuir a la construcción de la confianza de los consumidores durante la sustitución de la marca de un minorista, a saber: (1) comunicación sobre el cambio; (2) similitud percibida y (3) beneficios percibidos derivados del cambio. Los resultados también indicaron que el apego de los consumidores tiene un efecto moderador en la relación entre la confianza y sus determinantes. Más precisamente, cuanto más fuerte es el vínculo con la marca inicial del minorista, menos confianza de los consumidores en la marca después de la sustitución de la marca.

**Investigación, Implicaciones Prácticas y Sociales:** Este documento ayuda a los profesionales a identificar los determinantes clave del éxito que pueden facilitar la transferencia de confianza de los consumidores de la antigua marca minorista a la nueva marca. Proporciona pautas para un reemplazo exitoso de la marca.

**Originalidad/Valor:** Esta investigación responde a una necesidad identificada de examinar cómo la confianza de los consumidores en una marca puede transferirse con éxito en el caso de una marca de un minorista de reemplazo.

**Palabras clave:** Reemplazo de Marca, Confianza, Comunicación, Beneficios Realizados, Similitud, Adjunto.

## INTRODUCTION

Retailer brand name substitution has become a popular topic for both researchers and practitioners in recent decades. This process involves replacing a brand with limited potential with a more strategically chosen one, aiming to instigate shifts in consumer attitudes, perceptions, and behavior (Kannou, 2021). While mergers and acquisitions stand out as common catalysts for this phenomenon, other factors, including the desire to give the brand a new image (Merrilees & Miller, 2008), reposition it in the market (Kaikati, 2003), or establish hegemony (Collange, 2015) also play an important role.

Nonetheless, opting for the substitution of a retailer brand is a very risky strategy that may entail severe consequences for the company. This is due to its impact on a fundamental

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aspect of the brand, namely, identification (Collange & Bonache, 2015). An undesirable or poorly implemented change of this nature has the potential to erode customer trust in the brand, leading to a significant decline in brand loyalty. Interestingly, despite the acknowledged centrality of trust in the literature review, it is noteworthy that there is a scarcity of studies examining the repercussions of brand trust in the context of retailer brand name substitution. Some studies delve into the analysis of brand image transfer from the old brand to the new one (Pauwels-Delassus & Fosse, 2012), establish typologies of brand substitutions (Aimé Granier and Laï, 2008), or seek to comprehend the intricacies of the rebranding strategy process (Lachaud et al., 2012).

The issue of consumer trust, particularly concerning the retailer's brand name substitution, stands out as a crucial concern for managers. If the new retailer brand fails to establish legitimacy with consumers, it faces the risk of losing credibility and experiencing market failure. In light of this, the research problem is framed as follows: What factors influence consumer trust in cases of retailer brand name substitution? Could an attachment to the original retailer brand lead to consumer resistance? Identifying the variables that contribute to consumer trust can assist in delineating the key success factors for a retailer brand substitution from the consumer's perspective.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Retailer Brand Name Substitution

Retailer brand name substitution has become nowadays a common managerial practice. According to Collange, (2008) brand name substitution is defined as "the replacement of at least one of the verbal denominations by another, accompanied by the disappearance of the previous denomination" (p.3). This definition is applicable to both product brand substitution and retailer brand substitution. Typically, this strategy entails discarding the old brand in favor of a new one with a revitalized identity and a meaningful connection to the market. Irrespective of the objectives behind retailer brand substitutions, consumers tend to exhibit resistance when faced with a change in brand names. In instances of retailer brand name substitutions, the primary challenge faced by consumers is the loss of familiarity, leading to confusion and resistance towards the alteration in the retailer brand name (Collange & Bonache, 2015).

Brand name substitution cover a wide range of heterogenous cases (Collange, 2008; Kapferer, 2007). In some instances, it involves a mere restructuring of the products' nominal identity with assurance (e.g., Chocolate Club renamed Maestro Club) or simplification (e.g.,

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Panzani's Spaghetti cooked sauces now simply called Panzani). For others, it involves brand substitution, where the initial brand name is abandoned and replaced with a new brand name that either already exists (e.g., food retailer Promogro renamed MG: Magasin général) or is completely unknown locally (e.g., oil company Oilibya called Ola Energy since 2018). Indeed, most changes appear to be essential for optimizing the brand portfolio, as confirmed by the literature (Aaker, 2003; Hill et al., 2005; Keller, 2007). These objectives hold true for both product brands (e.g., Nestlé) and retailer brands (e.g., Carrefour).

However, marketing literature has demonstrated that retailer brand substitution is more complex to implement than product brand substitution (Collin-Lachaud et al., 2012). It is distinguished from products name substitution by the scope of change and the different degrees of intervention involved (stores remodelling, increase in references, changes to assortments particularly in terms of M.D.D., pooled advertising communication, loyalty programme, etc.).In the context of retailer brand substitution, it seems that customers experience the change in a much more intense and varied way compared to the context of product brand substitution, making it more complex for customers to develop attitudes towards this change. Then, the success of a retailer brand substitution is largely attributed to the involvement of staff, a more challenging factor to control compared to the tangible factors linked to product brand substitution. Staff attachment to the culture of the old retailer brand can thus be a factor of resistance to change (Collin-Lachaud et al., 2012).

**Information About the Substitution**

A credible retailer brand is based on a solid reputation, which is essential for establishing a relationship of trust with the customer. To accomplish this, it is essential for the company to conduct itself professionally in terms of both communication and actions. In instances of retailer brand substitution, transparent and consistent communication regarding the change, the reasons behind it, and its advantages enables customers to perceive the company as reliable and serious.

According to Delassus et al. (2014), resistance may arise due to the absence of information on substitution and its benefits, a lack of comprehension regarding the decision's rationale, or the perception of conflicting arguments. Communication about the substitution, then, presents one of the most important factors for the substitution to be successful (Collange, 2015; Delassus & Descotes, 2018; Kannou, 2021). Therefore, by being informed in a transparent and progressive way about the retailer brand substitution and its benefits, consumers

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tend to accept the substitution easily. This improves trust in the new brand and thus limits the effect of negative reactions towards new retailer brand substitution (Lomax & Mador, 2006).

H1: Information about the retailer brand substitution has a positive impact on consumer trust.

**Perceived Benefits**

Perceived benefits encompass the aggregate of advantages that fulfill consumers' needs and desires (Wu, 2003). They refer to customers perception of what they receive (perceived benefits) for what they invest (perceived costs). In essence, perceived benefits represent the value that customers believe they gain in exchange for the expenditure on the product or service they purchase (Lendrevie & Levy, 2014).

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In the context of retailer brand substitution, perceived benefits can be understood as consumers' belief that they will gain an additional advantage from the change (Delassus & Descotes, 2018). These perceived benefits can be categorized into two types: utilitarian and non-utilitarian benefits (Loureiro, 2013; Zhang et al., 2013). Utilitarian benefits are associated with practical advantages, such as a diverse range of products at lower prices within the store. Non-utilitarian benefits, on the other hand, are linked to hedonic pleasure, providing consumers with a novel shopping experience.

Studies conducted on brand name substitution have indicated that perceived benefits resulting from the change can help minimize consumer resistance, foster positive word-of-mouth (Pauwels & Mogos, 2018) about the new retailer brand, and encourage other consumers to revisit it (Delassus et al., 2014). However, it is clear that a retailer brand substitution accompanied by additional benefits is likely to promote change and create consumer trust in the brand. If a consumer is satisfied with the benefits provided by the new retailer brand, they are likely to become a regular customer. The reverse is also true, if consumers do not really see the opportunity to realize the benefits derived from the change, this can create a certain mistrust, which can cause their dissatisfaction, or even prevent them from returning to other store brands.

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H2: The perceived benefits of the retailer brand name substitution have a positive impact on consumer trust.

**Perceived Similarity**

Indeed, it appears that information about the change and perceived benefits play pivotal roles in facilitating the transfer of consumer trust from the old to the new retailer brand. However, it's important to note that these two factors are not the sole contributors to this transfer of trust. In marketing literature, perceived similarity has been recognized as one of the key success factors in product brand substitution.

Certainly, perceived similarity plays a crucial role in transferring knowledge and attitude from a familiar stimulus to another (Grigoryan, 2020). The degree of similarity between two objects directly influences the extent of knowledge and attitude transfer from a highly familiar object to a less familiar one (Martin & Stewart, 2001; Bhat & Reddy, 2002). In the context of retailer brand substitution, the resistance exhibited by consumers can be elucidated through the theory of cognitive coherence, as proposed by Festinger (1957).

According to this theory, consumers consistently anticipate coherence, even in situations involving retailer brand substitution. If inconsistencies or something unexpected occur, a state of dissonance can be created which can lead to negative feelings. Nevertheless, consumers may attempt to manage such dissonance by adjusting their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors based on various cues. For instance, seeking similarity between the two retailer brands is one strategy (Martin & Stewart, 2001). In our case, the assessment of similarity relies on both retailer brands occupying an equivalent position in the market. Failure to meet this condition can result in negative emotions experienced by consumers, potentially eroding their trust and giving rise to consumer resistance (Descotes & Delassus, 2013).

H3: The perceived similarity between the old and the new retailer brand has a positive impact on consumer trust in the new retailer brand.

**Retailer Brand Attachment**

The marketing literature indicates that customers who resist change are often those with a strong attachment to the old brand. Brand attachment was defined as "a psychological variable that reflects a lasting and unalterable affective relationship (separation is painful) with the brand and expresses a relationship of psychological closeness with the latter" (Lacoeuilhe, 2000, p, 66). This definition refers to the painful separation: for a brand-attached individual, it is

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particularly difficult to stop consuming the brand, as they are psychologically close to it, based not only on its functional aspects, but also on emotional criteria.

The concept of attachment has been a focal point in numerous academic marketing studies, underscoring its strategic significance for companies (Lacoeuilhe, 2000; Japutra et al., 2014; Shimul, 2022). Brand attachment serves as a defensive mechanism for a company against competing brands. However, in the context of brand substitution, the dynamics of this attachment can undergo a shift, altering the rules of engagement.

While some studies view attachment as a hindrance to the acceptance of a new brand (Collange, 2008; Delassus & Descotes, 2013), other research, such as the work by Delassus and Gomez (2012), underscores its significance in the acceptance of a brand during substitution. Collange (2008) found that a lower level of consumer attachment to the original brand corresponds to a diminished evaluation and/or intention to purchase the brand that underwent a name change. Conversely, a high level of attachment to the replaced brand negatively influences the evaluation of the new brand. Ultimately, the author concluded that "a consumer with a strong emotional attachment to the previous brand will be particularly dissatisfied with its disappearance, regardless of the qualities of the substitute brand," potentially leading to a deterioration of brand trust.

Contrary to Collange's study in 2008, a study conducted in 2012 by Véronique Pauwels-Delassus and Marie-Hélène Fosse-Gomez on the substitution of two vegetable brands, Marie Thumas and Bonduelle, revealed that attachment indeed has a significant impact on the transfer process. In the study by Delassus and Gomez (2012), consumers with prior attachment to Marie Thumas were able to identify certain central and peripheral associations for Bonduelle. In contrast, consumers without attachment to Marie Thumas struggled to attribute any central association for Bonduelle, resulting in a less favorable image. These findings highlight the crucial role of attachment to the initial brand in facilitating the successful transfer of associations to the new brand. In essence, the results of both studies suggest that attachment to the initial retailer brand can function as both a hindrance and a facilitator in the transfer of central and peripheral associations to the new retailer brand.

H4: Attachment to the old brand plays a moderating role between:

H4a: Information about the retailer brand substitution and trust in the new brand.

H4b: The perceived benefit of the retailer brand name substitution and trust in the new retailer brand.

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H4c: Perceived similarity between the old and the new retailer brand and trust in the new brand.

Figure 1 – Conceptual model
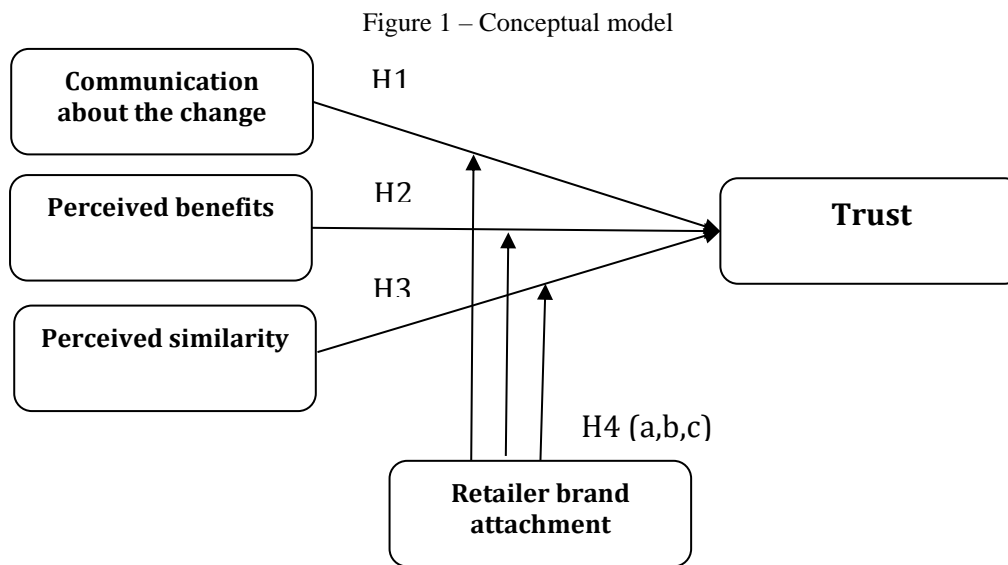


Source: Prepared by Authors (2023).

**RESEARCH METHOD**

**Sample and Data Collection**

To obtain the information needed to test the above-mentioned hypotheses, a quantitative survey including 340 consumers is performed. A questionnaire is designed to gather information on consumer perceptions about the variables selected based on the literature review. The questionnaire was conducted during face-to-face interviews with consumers who are familiar with the old and new retailer brands. The interviews took place along different days and times over one month in order to guarantee the sample representativeness. The sample characteristics are described in (Table 1). A large part of the sample was female (52.6%). 59% of consumers were between 25 and 60 years old. The buyers were divided according to their marital status (62% married and 38% single). The sample was fairly well educated, with 34.7% of consumers having completed college and 47.9% having obtained a university degree. All income brackets were well represented.

The study examines a case of retailer brand name substitution in the agri-food retail sector in Tunisia, involving the replacement of the 'Promogro' brand name with 'MG' (Magasin Général). This substitution aligns with the MG group's strategy to diversify its offerings and meet the daily expectations of its customers. The transition involves a significant shift in brand image and policy, including changes in brand positioning and pricing strategy.

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This retailer brand substitution was particularly risky because the retailer brand name substitution was accompanied by a radical change (direct change after 30 days of closure). In addition, MG did not communicate its retailer brand name substitution to the consumers. Indeed, consumers surveyed found it difficult to understand what went wrong with the old retailer brand name. For this reason, this retailer brand name substitution is of particular interest for our research, insofar as it was likely to lead to retailer brand trust loss.

Table 1 – Characteristics of the sample

| Categories | *N* | % |
|---|---|---|
| Gender | | |
| **Male** | 161 | 47,3 |
| **Female** | 179 | 52,6 |
| Age | | |
| **18 – 25** | 43 | 12,6 |
| **25 – 45** | 89 | 26,1 |
| **45 – 60** | 112 | 32,9 |
| **> 60** | 96 | 28,2 |
| Marital status | | |
| **Married** | 210 | 61,7 |
| **Single** | 130 | 38,3 |
| Income (per month) | | |
| **500 – 800** | 63 | 18,5 |
| **800 – 1200** | 116 | 34,1 |
| **1200 – 1600** | 84 | 24,7 |
| **1600 – 2000** | 51 | 15,0 |
| **> 2000** | 26 | 7,6 |
| Education | | |
| **High school or less** | 118 | 34,7 |
| **Bachelor level** | 126 | 37,0 |
| **Master/PhD** | 37 | 10,9 |
| **Others** | 59 | 17,3 |

Source: Prepared by Authors (2023).

**Measuring Scales**

The operationalization of constructs was founded on the use of measurement scales tested in the marketing literature. To measure communication about the change, 4 items from the scale of Delassus & Descotes (2018) were used. The perceived similarity between the two retailer brands was measured by 3 items adapted from Collange (2008) and Bhat & Reddy (2002). The perceived benefits derived from the change was measured by 3 items adapted from Wendlandt & Schrader (2007). The dependent variable trust was measured by 5 items adapted from Kaabachi (2015). To measure the retailer brand attachment, we used the Lacoeuilhe, (2000) scale applied to the retailer brand context. All items were measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree".

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**Results of Measurement Scales**

To confirm and validate our conceptual model, we resorted to confirmatory analysis (CFA) using the AMOS.21 software. We adopted the procedure of Fornell validity and Larcker (1981) to test unidimensionality and reliability; and to calculate the convergent and discriminant validity of each of the constructs. All scales were treated as first-order factors. The results indicate an acceptable value for the different factors (Table 2).

In order to check the reliability of our constructs, we used jointly the following two reliability indicators: Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha \geq 0.7$) (Evrard et al., 2003) and Joreskög's Rho ($p \geq 0.7$) (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The results presented in Table 3 confirm the reliability of the selected variables as they exceed the recommended minimum 0.7 threshold. Furthermore, we observe that the conditions of convergent validity were met as the values of the average extracted variance (AVE) (rVC) are above 0.5 (Table 3). As for the discriminant validity, the acceptance conditions are met given that the average extracted variance is greater than the square of the correlation between the latent variables (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Table 2 – Measurement scale of the unidimensionality results

| Unidimensionality Scale | GFI | AGFI | RMSEA | TLI | CFI |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Criteria | >0.9 | >0.9 | <0.08 | >0.9 | >0.9 |
| Trust | 0.993 | 0.996 | 0.045 | 0.991 | 0.991 |
| Communication about the change | 0.995 | 0.994 | 0.042 | 0.994 | 0.992 |
| Perceived benefits | 0.989 | 0.989 | 0.031 | 0.997 | 0.994 |
| Perceived similarity | 0.994 | 0.991 | 0.045 | 0.996 | 0.996 |
| Retailer brand attachment | 0.990 | 0.996 | 0.048 | 0.993 | 0.995 |

Source: Prepared by Authors (2023).

Table 3 – Results of scales' reliability and validity

| Variables | Cronbach alpha ($\alpha$) | Jöreskog Rho ($\rho$) | AVE |
|---|---|---|---|
| Trust | 0,831 | 0,857 | 0,768 |
| Communication about the change | 0,824 | 0,853 | 0,745 |
| Perceived benefits | 0,798 | 0,819 | 0,722 |
| Perceived similarity | 0,807 | 0,829 | 0,742 |
| Retailer brand attachment | 0,844 | 0,863 | 0,688 |

Source: Prepared by Authors (2023).

**Significance of Causal Links and Validation of Hypotheses**

The global structural model test is performed by first assessing its fit to the data. Then, the direct structural links are analyzed. The structural model fit is evaluated using the fit indices previously used in the context of the measurement model validation. We use the maximum likelihood estimation method on the covariance matrix (Kline, 2010). Table 4 shows that the

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model fits the data well for the overall sample; χ2/df 2.567; RMSEA 0.054; GFI 0.88; AGFI 0.89; TLI 0.97; NFI 0.94; and CFI 0.95. Only the GFI and AGFI values are below the 0.90 threshold. Yet, given that these two indices are sensitive to sample size and model complexity, they do not call into question the model's overall fit (Kline, 2010; Roussel & alii, 2002).

Table 4 – Structural equation modelling criteria and results

| Scale | Criteria | Authors | Values |
|---|---|---|---|
| **χ2/df** | <3 | Pedhazur and Pedhazur Schmelkin (1991) | 2.567 |
| **RMSEA** | <0.08 | Roussel et al., (2003) | 0.054 |
| **GFI** | >0.9 | Bentler and Bonett (1980) | 0,880 |
| **AGFI** | | | 0,890 |
| **NFI** | | | 0,940 |
| **CFI** | Between >0.8 and | Mulaik et al., (1989), Segars and Grover (1993), | 0,950 |
| **TLI** | 0.9>0.9 | Hair et al., (1998), Bentler and Bonett (1980) | 0,970 |

Source: Prepared by Authors (2023).

**Test of Direct Effects**

The results of the theoretical framework reveal that three hypotheses are validated (Table 5). The hypothesis is confirmed if the (p-value) < 0.05, which means that there is a significant influence between the independent variable and the dependent variable. On the other hand, the hypothesis is not confirmed if the (p-value) > 0.05, which means there is no significant effect between the independent and dependent variables.

57.6 per cent of the variance of consumer trust to the retailer brand name substitution is explained by the communication about the change ($\beta = 0.442$; $p < 0.05$), the perceived benefits of change ($\beta = 0.287$; $p < 0.01$), and the perceived similarity between the old and the new retailer brand ($\beta = 0.366$; $p < 0.01$).

Table 5 shows that information about the change has a positive and significant impact on trust in the new brand ($\beta = 0.442$; $p < 0.05$). Secondly, the relationship between perceived benefits and trust is highly appreciated ($\beta = 0.287$; $p < 0.01$). Finally, the results show a significant effect between perceived similarity and trust ($\beta = 0.366$; $p < 0.01$). It should be noted that these factors do not contribute in the same way to account for trust in the "MG" retailer brand. Indeed, our model reveals that the influence of communication about the change and the perceived similarity on trust in "MG" is relatively more important. Finally, the measurement model of this research then allows us to confirm the hypotheses H1, H2, and H3.

Table 5 – Relationship between trust and its determinants

| Hypotheses | Paths (VID → VD) | (Estimate/Standardized regression weight) β | C.R. | (*p*-value) |
|------------|------------------|-----------------------------------------|------|-------------|
| **H1** | COM → TRUST | 0,442 | 0,615 | ** |
| **H2** | PBFT → TRUST | 0,287 | 0,463 | *** |
| **H3** | PSIM → TRUST | 0,366 | 0,577 | *** |

**Note(s): Significant at: \*\*p, 0.05 and \*\*\*p, 0.001 levels (ns: not significant; COM: Communication about change; PBFT: Perceived benefits; SIM: Perceived similarity)**

Source: Prepared by Authors (2023).

**The Moderating Role of the Retailer Brand Attachment**

To verify the moderating role of retailer brand attachment at the communication level, the perceived benefits and the perceived similarity on trust, a full invariance multi-group analysis was conducted (Roussel et al., 2002). We identified 2 groups (high attachment versus low attachment) according to the classification of dynamic clouds (K-Means) (Vo & Jolibert 2005). The group of respondents with low attachment in the old retailer brand includes 162 individuals, while the group of respondents with high attachment in the old retailer brand includes 189 individuals. We will then use the Chi-square difference test to verify the presence of the moderating effect of the retailer brand attachment at the level of each relationship. We compare between groups and study the specificity of moderating effects in the case of test significance. The chi-square mean difference between the two models was significant ($\Delta\chi^2$ =53.502, *p*<0.05), suggesting that the links between the independent variables (communication, similarity, and perceived benefits) and the dependent variable (trust in the new retailer brand) depend on the retailer brand attachment. Therefore, we can accept hypothesis H4 (a, b, and c). In this regard, we can conclude that the retailer brand attachment has a moderating effect between trust and its determinants.

Table 6 shows that the impact of communication, perceived benefits, and similarity on trust in the new retailer brand is positive and significant for each of the two groups of respondents. Furthermore, the comparison between the two groups shows that the impact of three key determinants on trust is greater when the attachment level among individuals is low.

This means that the lower the attachment to the old retailer brand, the greater the impact of its three key determinants on trust. On the other hand, the higher the attachment level among consumers, the lower the impact of its three key determinants on trust. We can therefore conclude that attachment to the old retailer brand negatively moderates the relationship between trust and its key determinants.

Table 6 – Testing the moderating effect of the retailer brand attachment

| | | | Group 1: high attachment (N=189) | | | Group 2: low attachment (N=162) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **H4** | | | Standardized coefficients | CR | P | Standardized coefficients | CR | P |
| **TRUST** | <--- | **COM** | 0,187 | 1,812 | ** | 0,391 | 2,922 | ** |
| **TRUST** | <--- | **PBFT** | 0,174 | 2,231 | 0,014 | 0,322 | 2,511 | ** |
| **TRUST** | <--- | **PSIM** | 0,252 | 2,461 | ** | 0,374 | 3,019 | ** |

**Note(s): Significant at: **p, 0.05 and ***p, 0.001**

Source: Prepared by Authors (2023).

## DISCUSSION

This research aims to answer a key question: What are the determinants of consumer trust in the case of retailer brand name substitution? Can attachment to the old retailer brand generate consumer resistance? The empirical results related to the substitution of the retailer brand Promogro with MG, shows that in order to effectively transfer consumers' relationship towards the new retailer brand, the three most important key determinants (communication about change, similarity and perceived benefits) of trust must be present. These three key determinants represent the stepping-stone for the transfer of consumers' trust towards the new retailer brand, which in exchange is essential for successful retailer brand substitution.

Indeed, the empirical results of this study prove that the communication about the change has a positive and significant effect on consumer trust by producing a standardized coefficient (β) value of 0.442 and p-value < 0.05. These results show that information about the change is the most important factor that accounts for consumer trust in the new retailer brand. Consumers should be informed about the retailer brand name substitution so that they feel reassured that the service quality of the store will be maintained. This result is in line with the observations of Delassus and Descotes (2013), who verified the existence of a positive and significant effect of knowledge about the change on consumer trust in the case of the substitution of the biscuits brand name Taillefine with Belvita.

The findings show that the perceived similarity between the old and the new retailer brand has a positive and significant effect on consumer trust by producing a standardized coefficient (β) value of 0.366 and p-value < 0.01. Perceived similarity between the two retailer brands is the second most important factor that accounts for consumer trust in the new retailer brand. Indeed, when the two retailer brands appear as close as possible in the consumer's eyes, these consumers can transfer their trust from the initial retailer brand to the new one.

This finding complements the results of Collange (2008) which showed the positive and significant effect of perceived similarity on the consumer's evaluation and purchasing intention

in the case of a substitution of product brands. It is also close to the results of Jaju et al. (2006) which showed that consumers' evaluation of a merged company is greater when the two companies were perceived as being similar in terms of reputation.

Perceived benefits of change have a positive and significant effect on consumer trust by producing a standardized coefficient (β) value of 0.287 and p-value < 0.0. This means that the more a consumer perceives additional benefits derived from the change, the higher their confidence in the new brand. In other words, the presence of an additional benefit derived from the change makes it possible to evaluate the change positively if the consumer judges it relevant, i.e., if the consumer really perceives added benefits compared to what existed before change. These results are consistent with Park and Kim (2014) who showed in the context of social networks that the perception of perceived benefits significantly contributes to strengthening the relationship with the brand. Furthermore, Loureiro (2013) showed in the context of online banking services that perceived benefits contribute effectively to explaining trust. This author also concludes that these benefits are good predictors of trust, which is in turn a good predictor of notoriety, perceived quality, and perceived risks online.

The results of the multi-group analysis allowed us to note that attachment to the old retailer brand negatively moderates the impact of the communication about change, perceived similarity, and perceived benefit on consumer trust in the new retailer brand. These results find a clear explanation in the work of (Delassus & Descotes, 2013; Collange, 2015). Indeed, our results show that the impact of communication about change, perceived similarity and perceived benefit on consumer trust is greater when the level of consumer attachment is low. Indeed, the greater the attachment to the old retailer brand, the lower the consumer's trust in the brand after the retailer brand change. On the other hand, consumers with the strongest emotional ties to the old brand will not be satisfied with the name substitution. Consumers' attachment to their retailer brand can therefore be an obstacle, leading to resistance to change. This is in line with the observations of (Delassus & Descotes, 2013) that the customers with strong feelings towards the old retailer brand will resist the change and reject any transfer of quality, image, and loyalty. The results are consistent also with Collange (2015) who found that consumers' attachment to the initial brand negatively influences their product evaluations and buying intentions.

This study focuses on the key determinants that influence consumer trust in the case of retailer brand substitution. The data were obtained from a survey of 351 Tunisian consumers. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was performed to evaluate the research model. This

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research provides guidelines for companies that are implementing a retailer brand name substitution. In particular, it identifies three key factors that contribute to a better acceptance of retailer brand substitution.

**CONCLUSION**

The research attempts to present some key factors that managers should take into account in the case of a brand name substitution in order to foster consumer trust towards the new brand name. Therefore, this research has both theoretical and managerial implications. From a theoretical perspective, to extend previous research on brand substitution, we analogically propose a first reflection on the impact of brand name substitution on consumer trust. Thus, the integration of the retailer brand attachment as a moderating variable remains almost absent especially at the level of brand substitution studies. Therefore, highlighting this moderating variable constitutes an opportunity in favor of specifying the relationships between trust and its determinants.

From a managerial point of view, our research provides companies with a tool to guide them in the implementation of a brand substitution. Thanks to this tool, they could accurately estimate the extent to which consumer trust is transferable to the substitute brand. Indeed, our paper identifies the four conditions to be met for the brand substitution to be accepted by customers and to reinforce their loyalty to the brand: (i) the brand substitution must be communicated before and after the change, (ii) the perceived benefits must be present and more attractive than those of the old brand and (iii) the new brand must also be as close as possible to the old brand; and finally (iv) consumers must be weakly attached to the initial retailer brand.

Furthermore, the results of our study show that a high or low evaluation of the brand attachment can affect the cognitive and affective evaluations of the brand as well as the behaviour related to it. Indeed, our results suggest that the impact of communication, perceived benefits and similarity on trust is greater in cases where the level of attachment among individuals is low. On the other hand, consumers with the strongest emotional links to the old retailer brand will not be satisfied with the retailer brand change. To ensure a successful transfer of consumer trust from the old to the new brand, it then seems necessary that managers prioritize their efforts for this strategy by paying attention to this variable (old brand attachment). This variable deserves special attention on their part to optimize the relationship between consumers and the new retailer brand. More specifically, these managers must not forget the characteristics of the customers who frequent the old brand, by providing them with personalized

communication on the benefits of the new chain, offering specific explanations and reassuring them that the service quality will be maintained.

However, managers must try to make the new retailer brand legitimate to consumers to better elicit their trust. Managers are called in this case to play a driving role in the acceptance of the substitution. Indeed, when they organize a merger/acquisition operation, they must foresee what could cause negative reactions and try to limit them as much as possible.

This study has several limitations. First, it only focused on two retailer brand names in the agri-food sector (Promogro and MG). This choice allows us to generalize our results to a large part of retailer agri-food brands, but not to other types of brands such as *specialized* or *petroleum* retailer brands. Second, our respondents represented a convenience sample of consumers. Therefore, they are not representative of all Tunisian consumers. Finally, our research focused solely on the key determinants of success of a retailer brand substitution from the consumer's perspective, without incorporating the effect of the chosen substitution strategy. This can obviously influence the staff in contact with customers who work at the store, which is a more difficult factor to control.

Two research paths seem particularly interesting to us. Firstly, we deem important to expand the scope of our research to other brands such as *specialized* retail brands (Orange, Ooredoo, etc.). For example, the historical operator France Telecom decided to abandon this name to become Orange in order to have a new social identity that targets more coherence and simplicity. In addition, the petrol brand OiLibya has become OLA Energy. It would therefore be useful to expand the model we have developed to other cases of brand name substitution, taking into account their specificities. Finally, it is worth choosing a qualitative methodology that seems relevant to us to gain a better understanding of the different levers that can reduce consumer resistance to a brand substitution.

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