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Brand Consciousness of BOP Consumers in South Africa

Pravina Devpersadh Oodith, *Sanjana Brijball Parumasur
College of Law and Management Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal (Westville campus), South Africa
Oodithdp@ukzn.ac.za, *brijballs@ukzn.ac.za

Abstract: Bottom of the pyramid (BOP) consumers are not just basing their purchase decisions on price and affordability but on the value derived from good-quality brands. Hence, this study assesses the brand-consciousness of South African BOP consumers in terms of brand awareness, differentiation, recognition, loyalty, trust and preferences for leading brands. The aim is to understand the brand consciousness of the South African BOP market so that suitable brand management strategies may be formulated to profitably serve the needs of this market. The population (2 556 422 elements) included BOP consumers living in relative poverty within the rural areas of South Africa from which a sample of 600 subjects was drawn using area sampling. Data was collected using a self-development questionnaire whose psychometric properties were statistically assessed and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings reflect that there is a high degree of brand awareness amongst BOP consumers, the majority of BOP consumers are able to easily differentiate between the various brands based on the brands' logos, design and/or coloring, a significant segment displays brand loyalty which alters when price becomes a factor for consideration and BOP consumers lack trust where new brands are concerned and prefer good quality brands. Furthermore, BOP consumers' brand consciousness and purchase decisions are influenced by education and income respectively. It can also be concluded that the majority of South African BOP consumers are brand-conscious; hence, brands play an influential role in their consumer decision-making process. Beneficial recommendations are presented for business organizations.

Keywords: *Bottom of the pyramid (BOP); brand consciousness; brand loyalty; brand awareness; brand recognition; brand trust*

1. Introduction

Prahalad (2005) advocates that the plight of approximately 4 billion people who survive on less than $2 per day can be alleviated by an unconventional approach to global poverty eradication. This approach involves the joint collaborative effort by government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), large domestic firms, multinational corporations (MNCs), as well as the poverty stricken citizens themselves. By co-creating unique solutions, Prahalad (2005) believes that the consumers residing at the bottom of the economic pyramid (BOP) will be able to derive the benefits of dignity, respect, choice and self-esteem and, hence, will be afforded the opportunity to break out of the poverty trap. The basis for this process of co-creation is that the poor are perceived as value-conscious consumers and joint problem solvers who collectively possess vast entrepreneurial potential and purchasing power. It is essential for profit-seeking businesses to develop an understanding of the needs of the BOP market in order to adapt their marketing approach to meet the characteristics of the consumers at the bottom of the pyramid. In order to actively engage with and service the needs of the BOP consumers, it is imperative for businesses to develop a commercial infrastructure that is suited to the needs and challenges of this market (Prahalad & Hart, 2002). Four elements (creating buying power, shaping aspirations, improving access and tailoring local solutions), which require innovation in technology and management processes; need to be taken into account in developing this commercial infrastructure (Prahalad & Hart, 2002). In retrospect, this multi-trillion dollar market segment requires business strategists to focus their efforts on providing low-cost but good quality products and harnessing creative and novel approaches in order to convert the problem of poverty into a lucrative business opportunity that benefits all constituents involved (Prahalad & Hart, 2002).

Prahalad (2012) posits that one of the foremost reasons for the reluctance of MNCs to serve the needs of BOP consumers is deeply rooted in the presumption that these consumers are unfamiliar with, nor have embraced the conception of branding due to their restricted education, access to information and purchasing power. However, the rapid growth in the adoption of modern technology (televisions, internet, mobile cell phones) is shaping consumer behavior and increasing product and brand awareness at the bottom of the pyramid (Prahalad, 2012). BOP consumers, who are becoming increasing brand conscious, are not basing their

purchase decisions on price and affordability but on the value derived from good-quality brands (Barki & Parente, 2010; Majumder, 2012; Nakata & Weidner, 2011; Neuwirth, 2012; Nyanga, 2015; Prahalad, 2012; Rijke, Diehl & Schoormans, 2009; Subrahmanyan & Gomez-Arias, 2008; Variawa, 2010).

Purpose of the article: This article purports to analyze the brand-consciousness of South African BOP consumers in terms of brand awareness, differentiation, recognition, loyalty, trust and preferences for leading brands, thereby, enabling the articulation of brand management strategies in order to profitably serve the needs of the South African BOP market. The study therefore, has the potential to contribute to understanding and better serving the South African BOP market thereby contributing to socio-economic perspectives and national and global imperatives.

2. Literature Review

Before delving into the theoretical framework of the BOP proposition and the brand-consciousness of BOP consumers, an understanding of the concept of branding and its constituents is necessary.

The Concept of Branding: Brands are crucial features of a product that can be described as the "verbal and physical cues" that assist consumers in identifying the products that they wish to purchase and these cues also influence consumers when deciding which alternatives to choose in the buying decision making process (Dibb, Simkin, Pride & Ferrell, 2012, p. 319). A brand can be defined as a name, term, symbol, sign, design, or a combination of these that are used to identify one seller's products and services from that of another and are especially valuable to marketers when they want to develop a brand identity that differentiates the firm's products and services from those of competitors (Keller, 2013). In addition, brands help consumers to evaluate the quality of products, reduce the perceived risk of purchase and offers psychological rewards and status appeals that originate from owning certain brands (Dibb et al., 2012). Brands benefit organisations in that they create value for the firm, act as a pertinent barrier to competition, have a favourable influence on consumers' perception of products, improve profits and provide the basis for brand extensions, in which new products are added to the existing brand (Jobber & Ellis-Chadwick, 2013).

Brand equity refers to the marketing and financial value of the brand and a brand that has a high level of awareness, brand loyalty and perceived quality, is likely to have high brand equity (Dibb et al., 2012; McDaniel, Lamb & Hair, 2013). According to Keller (2013), customer-based brand equity (CBBE) is the differential effect that brand knowledge has on consumer response to the marketing of that brand. Keller (2013) states that brand knowledge comprises brand awareness, which is itself a function of recognition and recall, and brand image, which reflects the associations that consumers hold for the brand in their memory. Building awareness necessitates the repeated exposure of consumers to the brand and being able to link the brand in consumer memory to its product category as well as to purchase, usage and consumption situations (Keller, 2013). Keller (2013) advises that creating a positive brand image requires establishing strong, favorable, and unique associations for the brand.

It is imperative for organisations to differentiate their brands from that of competitors. Brand differentiation is simply the means by which a firm is able to set its brands apart from the competition through superior quality, novel features and customer value. Consumer trust in a brand is developed through the positive reinforcement of his/her purchase decision, thereby fostering a feeling of security by the consumer that the particular brand will meet his/her desired expectations. Brand loyalty is the strongly motivated or consistent decision to purchase one brand over another in the same product category and enables organizations to retain existing customers and avoid having to spend large amounts of time and money in gaining new customers (Dibb et al., 2012; McDaniel et al., 2013). Keller (2013) believes that brand loyalty is of paramount importance to businesses as it results in repeat consumer purchases, reduced marketing communication costs, warrants premium-pricing and leads to positive word-of-mouth. McDaniel et al. (2013) further add that brand loyalty is critical in creating a barrier to market entry for competitors, forms a basis for a competitive advantage and makes it easier for the organization to engage in brand extensions.

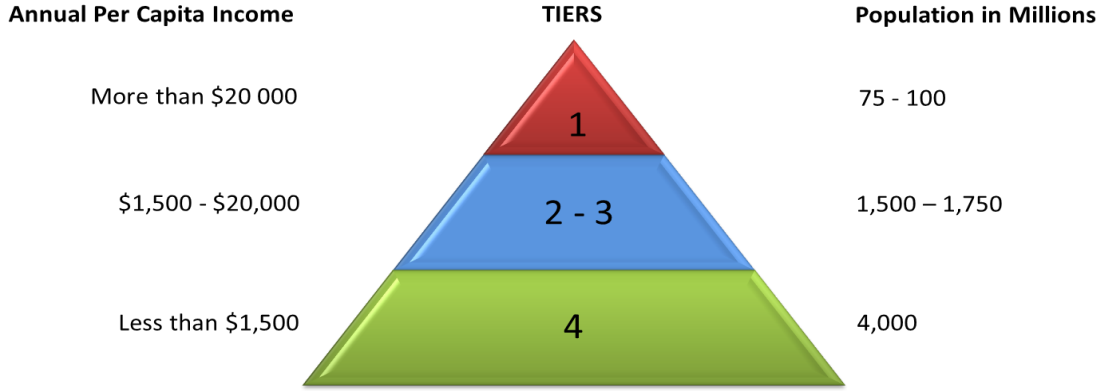
Dibb et al. (2012) outline that there are three distinct degrees of brand loyalty, namely, brand recognition, brand preference and brand insistence.

- *Brand recognition* is the mildest degree of brand loyalty and occurs when the consumer is aware of the brand's existence and views it as an alternative to purchase should the current preferred brand be unavailable.
- *Brand preference* is a stronger degree of brand loyalty than brand recognition and is characterized by a situation in which the consumer displays a definite fondness for the brand over competing brands. The consumer is highly inclined to purchase the brand should it be available but if it is unavailable, the consumer will then settle for the substitutes in order to avoid expending time and effort in search of the preferred brand.
- *Brand insistence* is the least common degree of brand loyalty in which the consumer displays a very intense preference for a specific brand and will take extra time and effort to find and purchase the desired brand as this consumer is unwilling to settle for a substitute brand.

It is crucial for organizations that want to explore the BOP markets to understand the needs and disposition of these consumers, as well as their purchase behavior, which embodies the concept of brand-consciousness.

The BOP market: Before delving into an elucidation of the nature of the BOP market, one needs to firstly understand the concept of poverty and the estimation thereof. An elementary definition of poverty is that it is a situation in which there is a shortage of sufficient resources that are required to obtain the vital necessities for survival. In addition, poverty can also be described as material or multi-dimensional (income, education, security, health) deprivation. According to Statistics South Africa (2007), an official poverty line should be created as a measure of the monetary income needed to attain a basic minimal standard of living. There are three basic approaches to estimating poverty lines, namely, an absolute, a relative and a subjective approach, each of which views poverty and the appropriate quantification thereof, differently. Relative poverty defines the basis for the South African BOP market in this article. IHS Global Insight Southern Africa, Regional eXplorer *ver 566* (2011, cited in the South African Institute of Race Relations Survey, 2010/2011, p. 307) defines people living in relative poverty as "those living in households with incomes less than the poverty income which varies according to household size and changes every year – the larger the household, the larger the income required to keep its members out of poverty". According to Prahalad and Hart (2002), a four-tiered economic pyramid can be used to represent the global distribution of wealth and the capacity to generate income (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The Economic Pyramid



Prahalad, C.K. & Hart, L.H. (2002). The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid. *Strategy+Business,* [Online]. 26. Accessed December 2, 2010, from the World Wide Web: http://www.cs.berkeley.edu/~brewer/ict4b/Fortune-BoP.pdf, p. 4.

Tier 1, which is positioned at the top of the pyramid, consists of wealthy individuals with plentiful opportunities to generate high levels of income. Tiers 2 and 3 (middle of the pyramid) comprise of individuals whose annual per capita income is between $1,500 and $20,000, which when converted to the South African rand as at the average rand-dollar conversion (1 US$ = 13.00 ZAR) as at 28 February 2017 is between R19 500 – R260 000 (Moneyweb, 28 February 2017). More than 4 billion people live at the bottom of the pyramid on less than $2 or R26 per day (conversion as per average rand-dollar conversion for 28 February 2017) and

this tier has been identified as the bottom of the pyramid (BOP) market which consists of impoverished individuals who transact predominantly in the informal market economy (Moneyweb, 28 February 2017). Prahalad and Hart (2002), who are renowned for initiating the concept of selling to the poor and for coining the term B24B (business-to-4-billion), state that there is voluminous untapped purchasing power at the bottom of the economic pyramid which accounts for approximately two thirds of the world's population. Large MNCs are best suited to lead the commercialization of this multitrillion dollar market by focusing on low profit margins and a large volume of sales. By selling to the poor, companies will be able to bring dignity, empowerment and prosperity to BOP markets by creating employment opportunities and thereby eradicating poverty (Prahalad & Hart, 2002).

Targeting the BOP markets has presented many challenges in terms of communication, distribution of goods and provision of credit due to the illiteracy or low levels of education, volatile income and poor infrastructure of BOP markets. Prahalad and Hart (2002) believe that these challenges can be overcome as MNCs have the necessary financial and physical resources, infrastructure, knowledge, expertise, experience and capabilities to:

- restructure their current business models to adapt to the needs of the BOP markets;
- design novel and inexpensive product and service offerings that will enhance lifestyles, nutrition and well-being of BOP consumers and
- Articulate business strategies that will not only increase profitability but also form the basis for establishing a competitive advantage and propagating market share at the bottom of the pyramid.

According to Prahalad and Hart (2002), MNCs need to alter their perceptions of the BOP markets in order to appreciate its true vibrant market potential. The BOP market was not considered a lucrative market based on certain assumptions that were made by MNCs that the poor cannot afford the products and services sold by MNCs and that the costs associated with serving this market will be exorbitant thereby eroding profits (Prahalad & Hart, 2002). In addition, meager and sporadic incomes, lack of infrastructure, absence of proper legal and political frameworks and insufficient information about consumer behavior at the bottom of the pyramid also serve as deterrents in targeting this market (Chipp, Corder & Kapelianis, 2012; Nakata & Weidner, 2011; Prahalad, 2012). Prahalad (2012) refutes the notion that BOP consumers purchase the cheapest products available to them on the market and do not indulge in the purchase of luxury products or branded items.

Brand-consciousness of BOP consumers: Evidence suggests that BOP consumers are often prone to purchasing products that are regarded as superfluous items and engage in the purchase of non-luxury items (also known as occasional and festival purchases) in order to satisfy traditional customs and in a bid to keep up with society (Banerjee, Deaton & Duflo, 2004; Banerjee & Duflo, 2007; Prahalad, 2005; Subrahmanyan & Gomez-Arias, 2008). In his book entitled, *The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid: Eradicating Poverty Through Profits*, Prahalad (2005) cites the success story of a large retailer in Brazil that sells premium-quality brands on credit to BOP consumers. Casas Bahia sells brands like Sony, Toshiba, JVC and Brastemp (Whirlpool) on credit to BOP consumers with meager and sporadic incomes, thereby affirming that BOP consumers are indeed brand-conscious (Prahalad, 2005). Michael Kline, the founder of Casas Bahia, believes that when BOP customers enter the company's store they have the intention of buying not just a top-quality television set or stove, but are buying a dream, and it is part of the company's mission to ensure that these dreams are fulfilled (Sadri & Sadri, 2011).

Neuwirth (2012) agrees with Prahalad (2005) that BOP consumers are in fact brand-conscious and are motivated to purchase products of a good quality and affirms that it will be a mistake to assume that poor consumers are naturally inclined to purchasing 'cheap' products because of their low and erratic incomes. Gordon (2008 cited in Louw, 2008) advises that it is imperative for businesses to note that the poor have similar aspirations towards branded consumer products and are just as susceptible to brand advertising as non-poor consumers with the only difference being that the poor lack funds and storage space to purchase large quantities. Variawa (2010) found, in a study of the South African BOP market, that these low-income consumers are very brand loyal to more expensive brands that are perceived to be of a better quality than the cheaper brands that are available to them. These low-income consumers enjoyed a more fulfilling brand experience with 'premium' brand products compared to that of 'cheaper' brand products (Variawa, 2010).

Moore (2006 cited in Louw, 2008) asserts that although poor consumers have meager incomes and cannot purchase very large quantities of goods, they are nevertheless still interested in good quality products, access to credit and the attraction to brand names as is the case with affluent consumers. Subrahmanyan and Gomez-Arias (2008) add that BOP consumers are sophisticated and creative in their needs and are not purely driven by survival and lower-order (physiological) needs but aspire to buy better products in order to satisfy their higher-level needs.

Bhan and Tait (2008) believe that low-income consumers prefer superior product brands, not because they are particularly brand conscious but desire value for money. Due to limited access to information about new products, BOP consumers are likely to rely upon positive word-of-mouth, the advice and opinions of people that they trust and respect and the favorable product experiences of family and friends has a strong influence on the goods and brands that they purchase (Bhan & Tait, 2008; World Economic Forum, 2009). Hamilton (2003) found that BOP consumers have a great preference for leading brands but that the inability to purchase them leads to frustration. It was also found that BOP consumers are hesitant to try new unfamiliar brands for fear of wasting valuable resources on under-performing products (Hamilton, 2003). The BOP consumers are smart shoppers who cannot afford to make mistakes in purchasing decisions and are, therefore, more inclined to purchasing branded products that are reputable and whose quality they can trust (Bhan & Tait, 2008, Louw, 2008; Prahalad, 2005 cited in Davidson, 2009; World Economic Forum, 2009). Louw (2008) found that this practice lead to high levels of brand trust and loyalty amongst BOP consumers. Varadarajan (2008) believes that the firm's use of promotional tools such as cents-off coupons and in-store specials may be vital in retaining the patronage of the price sensitive BOP consumers and can reduce the likelihood of brand switching. The lack of brand trust is an important challenge that businesses need to overcome in order to be successful in BOP ventures. Brand differentiation and awareness are crucial as BOP consumers are less likely to try new brands on the market. Therefore, businesses need to clearly demonstrate the merits of offering their brands to these consumers.

3. Methodology

Respondents: The population for this study included South African BOP consumers living in relative poverty within the rural areas of South Africa. Upon request to the South Africa Institute of Race Relations, the researchers were provided with a Desktop Research Service report which outlined the 2012 relative poverty statistics for the 278 districts and municipalities in South Africa. The population sizes and rates of poverty for each of the districts and municipalities (which were categorized according to provinces) were provided and based on these figures, the researchers were able to calculate the number of people living in relative poverty in each of these regions. The researchers defined the population for the study as those individuals residing in districts with a poverty rate of 70% or more but owing to the fact that there are provinces with a higher prevalence of poverty than others, the researchers further defined the population to include individuals from the top three municipalities with the highest poverty rates (above 70%) per province resulting in a population of 2 556 422 elements. The sample size for the study was calculated using an online Sample Size Calculator (Sample Size Calculator, 2014). The population for this study (2 556 422 elements), a confidence level of 95% and a confidence interval of 4% were used to generate a sample size of 600 subjects (Sample Size Calculator, 2014).

The area sampling approach was used for this study. According to Blumberg, Cooper and Schindler (2008), area sampling is the most important form of cluster sampling which involves the division of the entire population into groups of elements which can be randomly selected for the study. Sekaran and Bougie (2010) add that the area sampling technique is appropriately suited to research in which the goal is confined to a certain locality or area. Based on this sampling design, homogeneous clusters of BOP consumers in South Africa have been identified according to the different municipalities. Due to time constraints and exorbitant costs associated with data collection, the researchers decided to conduct fieldwork in the provinces with the highest prevalence of people living in relative poverty (Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo). The researchers acknowledged that the rural areas within these selected provinces housed predominantly Black South Africans and in order to gain a diverse perspective from the inclusion of another racial group in South Africa, Western Cape was included in the sample as the rural regions within this province consisted primarily of Colored South Africans.

As mentioned previously, the minimum sample for this study was calculated as 600 subjects. However, the researcher received 631 correctly completed questionnaires. The adequacy of the sample was further determined using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (0.826) and the Bartlett's Test of Spherecity (1788.895; p = 0.000) for factors relating to branding, which respectively indicated suitability and significance. The results indicate that the normality and homoscedasticity preconditions are satisfied. In terms of the composition of the sample, the highest percentage of respondents for this study was from the Eastern Cape (36.6%) and KwaZulu-Natal (36.5%). The Limpopo province had 22.2% of the respondents and 4.8% of the respondents for this study was from the Western Cape. There were more female (58.5%) than male (41.5%) respondents and the sample of this study comprised respondents from just two race groups. Black South Africans accounted for 95.2% of the respondents whilst Colored South Africans constituted the remaining 4.8% of the respondents of this study. The highest proportions of respondents were from the 30-39 years (22.3%) and 40-49 years (22.2%) age group categories. The 18-29 years age category had 20.9% of the respondents, followed by the 50-59 years (17.6%) and 60 years and over (17%) age categories. The majority of the respondents (37.9%) had a high school educational background. Thirty-five percent of the respondents were in possession of a primary school educational qualification whilst 15.2% of respondents had no formal education. Respondents who had diploma qualifications accounted for 9.4% of the sample and a meager 2.5% of the respondents of this study were graduates with degree qualifications. The majority of the respondents (26.5%) earned between R1001 and R1500 per month, followed by the R251-R500 (20.9%) and R501-R1000 (20.8%) monthly income categories. Respondents who earned between R1501 and R2000 per month comprised 11.3% of the sample whilst 10.9% of the respondents earned above R2000 per month. Respondents who earned below R250 per month accounted for 9.7% of the sample for this study. It should be noted that the population for this study is defined in terms of people living in relative poverty which means that these individuals reside in households with incomes lower than the poverty income and varies in accordance to household sizes. Evidently, the larger the size of the household, the more income is required in order to keep its members out of poverty.

Measuring instrument: Data was collected using a questionnaire. Sekaran and Bougie (2010) advice that the language of the questionnaire must suit the level of understanding of the respondents and that the choice of words selected must be dependent on the level of education of respondents. It is for this reason that the researchers compiled a very simple questionnaire with statements that were very easy to understand by the BOP respondents of this study. Further to this, the questionnaire was translated by a reputable company into three African languages of preference (isi-Zulu, Tshivenda and Xhosa) – certified, for the various provinces. Closed-ended questions were utilized in the questionnaire. The educational levels of respondents and the magnitude of this study (sample of 600 elements) warranted the use of closed-ended questions. The questions were both positively and negatively worded in order to avoid respondents mechanically circling responses on one end of the scale. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A of the questionnaire used a nominal scale to record the biographical details (age, highest educational qualification, monthly income, number of people living in a household, gender and race) of the BOP consumers. Section B of the questionnaire used an ordinal scale in which consumers were requested to rank certain variables in order of importance to them, as well as an interval scale in the form of a 5-point Likert scale. Statements 1 to 11 in Section B of the questionnaire related to the branding dimension of this study which was further categorized according to brand awareness, differentiation and recognition (statements B1, B2, B3), brand loyalty (statements B4, B5, B6), brand trust (statement B7, B8, B9) and preference for leading brands (statements B10, B11). A pilot test was conducted (prior to the actual commencement of the study) on a small group of 15 BOP consumers from the KwaZulu-Natal region to investigate the feasibility of the proposed procedure, as well as detect possible shortcomings and flaws in the measurement procedures. The suitability of the design of the questionnaire was also tested and the findings reflected that it was not necessary to implement any changes before the actual commencement of this study.

Research procedure: The research was only conducted after ethical clearance was obtained for the study and upon completion of the pilot study.

Measures/statistical analysis of questionnaire: *The validity of the questionnaire was statistically assessed* using Factor Analysis. When undertaking the Factor Analysis, only items with loadings greater than 0.4 were considered. Furthermore, when an item loaded significantly on two factors only that with the highest value was considered. The item loadings determining the factors are depicted in Table 1.

Table 1: Factor Analysis: Validity of the questionnaire assessing Branding

Component	1	2	3	4
B1	0.819	0.080	0.193	-0.051
B2	0.777	0.271	0.084	0.057
B3	0.790	0.004	0.237	-0.014
B4	0.369	0.194	0.632	0.083
B5	0.169	0.073	0.805	-0.048
B6	0.027	0.687	0.402	0.005
B7	0.096	0.193	0.713	-0.195
B8	0.105	0.742	0.150	-0.066
B9	-0.063	-0.072	-0.103	0.929
B10	0.199	0.813	0.005	-0.067
B11	0.591	0.115	0.087	-0.368
Eigenvalue	2.475	1.862	1.858	1.060
Percent of Total Variance	22.50	16.93	16.89	9.64

Table 1 indicates that 4 items load significantly on Factor 1 and account for 22.5% of the total variance. Three items relate to brand awareness, differentiation and recognition and 1 item relates to preference for leading brands. Since the majority of items relate to *brand awareness, differentiation and recognition*, Factor 1 may be labeled likewise. Table 1 indicates that 2 items load significantly on Factor 2 and account for 16.9% of the total variance. One item relates to brand trust and 1 item relates to preference for leading brands. Since there is a higher significance in the item relating to *preference for leading brands*, Factor 2 will be labeled likewise. Table 1 indicates that 4 items load significantly on Factor 3 and account for 16.9% of the total variance. Three items relate to brand loyalty and 1 item relates to brand trust. Since the majority of items relate to *brand loyalty*, Factor 3 may be labeled likewise. Table 1 indicates that 1 item loads significantly on Factor 4 and accounts for 9.6% of the total variance. Since this item relates to *brand trust*, Factor 4 may be labeled likewise.

Administration of measuring instrument: Questionnaires were administered personally and trained fieldworkers assisted respondents to complete the questionnaires. This approach was suitable owing to the fact that these respondents have limited education or is illiterate and required assistance in the completion of the questionnaire. A team of fieldworkers from the four selected provinces (Eastern Cape, Western Cape, Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal) were recruited and trained by the researchers in terms of the requirements of the data collection process. The advantage of having trained fieldworkers to assist respondents in completing the questionnaire was that a low-response rate and incomplete questionnaires were avoided in this study.

Statistical analysis of data: Descriptive statistics (mean, variance, standard deviation) and inferential statistics (correlation, Kruskal-Wallis One-way ANOVA, Mann-Whitney U-Test, Kruskal-Wallis t-Test) were used to evaluate the objectives and hypotheses of the study. These parametric and non-parametric statistics were selected to fulfill the aims of the study whilst establishing the extent to which the results may be generalized to the BOP market.

4. Presentation of results

The results obtained relating to the 'branding' dimension of the study will be presented using descriptive statistics (Table 2). BOP consumers were asked to rate their perceptions of the 'branding' dimension of the study using a 1 – 5 point Likert scale.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics: Branding Dimension of the Study

Key Dimensions of the Study	Mean	95% Confidence Interval for Mean Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Std Dev.	Min.	Max.
Branding	3.598	3.553	3.643	0.573	1.636	5.000

In terms of BOP consumers' perceptions of the key dimension of branding (Table 2), the higher the mean score, the more positively the sub-dimension is viewed. Against a maximum attainable score of 5, it is evident from Table 1 that South African BOP consumers are relatively brand conscious (Mean = 3.598). Their level of brand consciousness (Mean = 3.598) is a synthesis of their brand awareness, differentiation, recognition, loyalty, trust and preference for leading brands for which frequency analyses were undertaken.

The results of the study reveal that there is a high degree of brand awareness amongst BOP consumers as the majority (88%) are strongly aware of the existence of different brands of items that they purchase. In terms of brand differentiation, 55.3% of the BOP consumers agree and a further 28.5% strongly agree that they are able to easily differentiate between the various brands based on the brands' logos, design and/or coloring. The results of the study reveal that the majority of BOP consumers (86.1%) are able to easily recognize the packaging of the products that they customarily purchase. In terms of brand loyalty, 46.6% of the respondents agree and a further 27.1% strongly agree that they have purchased the same brand of an item in five consecutive instances and the results also reveal that 43.1% of the BOP consumers agree and a further 20% strongly agree that they do not change brands often. The degree of brand loyalty does alter once price becomes a factor for consideration, as 32.8% of the BOP consumers agree and an additional 17.3% strongly agree that they purchase their preferred brands irrespective of price increases; however, 27.4% of the respondents disagree that they continue to purchase their preferred brands once the prices have escalated. In terms of brand trust, 46% of BOP consumers agree and an additional 16.2% strongly agree that they prefer to purchase the same brands in order to avoid the potential risk of wasting money on unfamiliar brands that may be unsatisfactory. However, 20.1% of respondents disagree that they engage in repeat purchases of the same brands in an attempt to avoid the wastage of resources on untried brands.

In terms of deriving value-for-money from the purchase of customary brands, 45.3% of respondents agree and a further 13.3% strongly agree that they acquire good value-for-money from the purchase of their preferred brands. The results of the study reveal that there is a lack of trust where new brands are concerned, as 34.1% of the BOP consumers disagree and a further 16.5% strongly disagree that they are accustomed to purchasing new brands of products that have unfamiliar levels of quality. In terms of preference for good quality brands, 38.7% of BOP consumers agree and an additional 16.6% strongly agree that they do not mind paying premium prices for the brands that they consider to be of a good quality. However, 20.9% of respondents disagree that they are inclined to pay extra for brands that are perceived as good quality. The majority of respondents (75.1%) are convinced that using a good quality brand will enhance their confidence and self-esteem. Two important aspects of branding, namely, brand trial and brand switching were also assessed in order to determine whether or not there is potential for MNCs to create brand loyalty amongst BOP consumers (Table 3).

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics: Branding, Brand Trial and Brand Switching

Key Dimensions of the Study	Mean	95% Confidence Interval for Mean Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Std Dev.	Min.	Max.
Brand Trial	2.710	2.620	2.810	1.204	1.000	5.000
Brand Switching	3.390	3.300	3.490	1.189	1.000	5.000

In terms of the brand trial and brand switching sub-dimensions, the higher the mean score, the more positively the sub-dimension is viewed (Table 3). Against a maximum attainable score of 5, it is evident from Table 6.2 that BOP consumers engage in more brand switching (Mean = 3.39) than brand trial (Mean = 2.71). Frequency analyses were conducted in order to analyze how these BOP consumers view each of these sub-dimensions. The results of the study reveal that 34.1% of the BOP consumers disagree and a further 16.5% strongly disagree that they are inclined to purchase new brands of products that have unfamiliar levels of quality, thereby confirming that there is a lack of trust where new brands are concerned. When the prices of products that are usually purchased increases, 42.5% of the BOP consumers agree and a further 15.5% strongly agree that they switch to products that are cheaper in price; however, 16.5% of respondents disagree that they engage in brand switching. Two hypotheses were also tested regarding branding.

Hypothesis 1: There exists significant intercorrelations amongst branding and the other key dimensions (savings potential/ability to pay off debt, price/affordability, quality, appearance/acceptability, adaptability of existing products, functionality/performance, packaging/quantity, advertising/awareness, accessibility/availability and partnering with MNCs) of the study relating to BOP consumers (Table 4).

Table 4: Correlation: Branding and Other Key Dimensions of the Study

Key Dimensions of the Study	r / p	Branding
Branding	r	1.000
Savings potential/ability to pay off debt	r	0.255
	p	0.000*
Price/affordability	r	-0.083
	p	0.038**
Quality	r	0.099
	p	0.013**
Appearance/ acceptability	r	0.295
	p	0.000*
Adaptability of existing products	r	0.296
	p	0.000*
Functionality/ performance	r	0.232
	p	0.000*
Packaging/ quantity	r	0.004
	p	0.925
Advertising/ awareness	r	0.273
	p	0.000*
Accessibility/ availability	r	-0.231
	p	0.000*
Partnering with MNCs	r	0.084
	p	0.036**

*p<0.01, **p<0.05

Table 4 indicates that there is a significant relationship between branding and savings potential/ability to pay off debt, appearance/acceptability, adaptability of existing products, functionality/performance and advertising/awareness and, a significant but inverse relationship between branding and accessibility/availability, respectively, at the 1% level of significance. As evident in Table 4, there is a significant relationship between branding and quality and partnering with MNCs, respectively, at the 5% level of significance. Furthermore, there is a significant but inverse relationship between branding and price/affordability at the 5% level of significance. The implication is that BOP consumers who are more brand-conscious are less price-sensitive and strongly feel that a wide variety of products is inaccessible to them. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 may be partially accepted.

Hypothesis 2:

There is a significant difference in the perceptions of BOP consumers, varying in biographical profiles (age, highest educational qualification, monthly income and number of people living in a household, gender and race) regarding branding (Table 5 and Table 6).

Table 5: Kruskal-Wallis One-way ANOVA/Mann-Whitney U-Test/Kruskal-Wallis t-Test: Biographical Variables and Branding

Biographical Variables	Kruskal-Wallis One-way ANOVA/ Kruskal – Wallis T-Test Chi-Square	Mann-Whitney U	Z	P
Age	2.535			0.638
Highest Educational Qualification	36.318			0.000*
Monthly Income	21.832			0.001*
Number of People Living in a Household	29.219			0.000*
Race	2.034			0.154
Gender		44644.000	-1.640	0.101

*p<0.01 , **p<0.05

Table 5 indicates that there is a significant difference in the perceptions of BOP consumers varying in highest educational qualification, monthly income, number of people living in a household regarding branding at the 1% level of significance. As is evident from Table 5, no other significant differences exist. In order to assess where the significant differences lie, mean analyses were undertaken (Table 6).

Table 6: Mean Analyses: Biographical Variables and Branding

Biographical Variables		Mean	Std Dev.	N
Highest Educational Qualification	No education	3.313	0.562	96
	Primary school	3.592	0.611	221
	High school	3.659	0.522	239
	Diploma	3.783	0.480	59
	Degree	3.790	0.595	16
	Total	3.598	0.573	631
Monthly Income	Under R250	3.475	0.553	61
	R251-R500	3.448	0.572	132
	R501-R1000	3.670	0.563	131
	R1001-R1500	3.689	0.633	167
	R1501-R2000	3.522	0.450	71
	Above R2000	3.713	0.494	69
	Total	3.598	0.573	631
Number of People Living in a Household	1-3	3.549	0.530	184
	4-6	3.756	0.532	236
	7-9	3.503	0.590	153
	10 or more	3.359	0.661	58
	Total	3.598	0.573	631

Table 6 indicates that:

- The BOP consumers who have no education are comparatively less brand conscious than the consumers from the other educational qualification categories. The consumers from this category are more likely to switch brands and are more susceptible to purchasing new brands that are cheaper in price, irrespective of quality.
- Although BOP consumers from all monthly income categories are fairly brand-conscious, the BOP consumers, with a monthly income less than R500, are comparatively less brand-conscious than the BOP consumers from the other monthly income categories. These individuals are less likely to pay premium prices for good quality brands and are not as loyal to brands as the BOP consumers from the other monthly income categories are.

- Although BOP consumers from all household-size categories are fairly brand-conscious, the BOP consumers living in households consisting of 10 or more people are comparatively less brand-conscious than the BOP consumers from the other household-size categories. These individuals are unlikely to pay higher prices for better-quality brands and are comparatively less loyal to brands than the BOP consumers from the other household-size categories.

From the results reflected in Table 5 and Table 6, it is evident that Hypothesis 2 may be partially accepted.

Discussion of results: Several pertinent aspects of branding were examined in this study and the overarching evidence reveals that South African BOP consumers are indeed very brand conscious and that brands play a decisive role in their purchase decisions. This study's evidence concurs with Prahalad's (2005) contention that BOP consumers are brand-conscious and strikingly value-conscious by necessity. This finding is also supported by Majumder (2012 cited in Nyanga, 2015) who found that there is a growing degree of brand-consciousness amongst low-income consumers who are not basing their purchase decisions solely on price, but are seeking value-for-money from the brands that they purchase. However, a study conducted in three African countries by Dinica and Motteau (2012) found that these BOP consumers are not particularly interested in brands but acknowledge that certain brands are synonymous with good quality.

In terms of brand awareness, the findings of this study indicate that BOP consumers in South Africa are strongly aware of the existence of different brands of items that are available on the market. The high prevalence of brand awareness is pivotal in creating a favorable attitude towards a brand in a market that encompasses vulnerable consumers who are not easily prone to trusting unfamiliar brands and organizations. This outcome is congruent to the conclusions drawn by Nyanga (2015) and Prahalad (2005) that marketing communications efforts that create awareness of brands in BOP markets is of paramount importance in familiarizing BOP consumers with good-quality brands that will enhance their lifestyles. Rowley and Dawes (2000 cited in Nyanga, 2015) suggest that one of the reasons for BOP consumers disengaging themselves from certain products or brands is due to the lack of awareness of these brands and the value-added properties that they incorporate. Creating strong corporate brands in BOP markets is critical to success considering that BOP consumers are conspicuously brand-conscious (Dansk Industry International Business Development, 2007).

BOP consumers are not only exposed to the product attributes of competing brands but also to an array of brand-related stimuli such as, brand colors, shapes, slogans, background design elements, mascots and brand characters which assist with brand identification and the development of strong brand associations (Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2009 cited in Variawa, 2010). The outcomes of this study uncover that South African BOP consumers have a high propensity to easily distinguish brands from each other on the basis of the brands' logos, design and/or coloring and are able to effortlessly recognize the packaging of the products that they ordinarily purchase. This finding is particularly useful to marketers in that, there is assurance that South African BOP consumers will be able to distinguish premium-quality brands from lower-quality generic brands on the market. Marketers can take solace in the fact that South African BOP consumers, despite their low levels of education or illiteracy, are able to identify brand names and packaging of products and use these as a mechanism of recognizing trusted brands. The study by Dinica and Motteau (2012) corroborates this finding that BOP consumers use brand logos as a safety measure for judging the quality of brands. Viswanathan, Rosa and Harris (2005 cited in Nakata & Weidner, 2011) add that visual cues (pictures on packaging) are more relevant than written words in aiding product and brand identification, understanding and selection amongst BOP consumers who are barely able to read. Visual comprehension is able to strengthen BOP consumers' interest and understanding of products and invoke sentiments of trust and brand loyalty behavior (Sridharan & Viswanathan, 2008). According to Sehrawet and Kundu (2007), an effective choice of package shapes and features, brand colors, trademarks and logos will enable an organization to differentiate its offering from a plethora of competing products in BOP markets. In addition, easily-recognizable brand-related stimuli were found to have saved time and effort during the purchase process (Rijke, Diehl & Schoormans, 2009). However, the existence of generic brands that are similar or almost identical to premium brands in terms of names, logos, slogans and/or symbols can sometimes cause confusion amongst BOP consumers (Dansk Industry International Business Development, 2007). It is, therefore, crucial that organizations firmly safeguard their brands from copycat brands (Dansk Industry International Business Development, 2007).

The results of this study show that there is a high degree of brand loyalty amongst South African BOP consumers who have attested to purchasing the same brand of items in consecutive instances. Brand loyalty is further substantiated by the fact that a fairly moderate proportion of the South African BOP consumers are not inclined to frequently switch between competing brands of products. This outcome is espoused by the findings of Nyanga (2015) who discovered that BOP consumers were consistent in their purchase of specific brands of consumables and durables for well over a year and were hesitant to switch brands. Quality, brand experience and brand trust are vastly instrumental in BOP consumers building purchase loyalty and attitudinal loyalty towards certain brands, which subsequently contributes significantly to increased market share (Chauduri & Holbrook, 2001 cited in Neuwirth, 2012; Nyanga, 2015). Barki and Parente (2010) further state that, albeit limited budgets and lower self-esteem, BOP consumers are brand loyal and are driven by positive and personal relationships with organizations and/or business people when selecting consumption alternatives.

The findings of this study, however, reveal that the degree of brand loyalty becomes negligible once price increases become a factor for consideration, whereby, only half of the respondents affirm that they continue to purchase preferred brands despite the escalation in prices. This outcome is confirmed by Nyanga (2015) who found that despite price increases, BOP consumers still expressed willingness to purchase their preferred brand provided that they could still afford them. Nyanga (2015) also reported that quality, reliability, trust, satisfaction and brand experience were the dominant motivators for BOP consumers remaining loyal to their preferred brands despite price escalations. This notion is supported by Rijke et al. (2009) and Variawa (2010) who discovered that contrary to popular belief, BOP consumers place greater significance on branded products than generic brands, enjoy more satisfying brand experiences with premium brands than cheaper brands and favor higher quality over lower prices. Conversely, Chikweche and Fletcher (2010 cited in Nyanga, 2015) affirm that the constituents of the BOP markets are deal-prone consumers who are constantly searching for the lowest price and are, therefore, unlikely to be brand loyal. Furthermore, in today's business environment that is characterized by increased brand options and heightened price competition, brand loyalty amongst BOP consumers may become trivial, in that most consumers are variety-seekers who are likely to be multiple brand users (Aaker, 2012 cited in Nyanga, 2015; Kumar, Pozza & Ganesh, 2013 cited in Nyanga, 2015). Dinica and Motteau (2012) uncovered that BOP consumers in Africa are not brand loyal and do not feel a bond between themselves and brands. The plausible reason for this is that these BOP consumers are primarily focused on satisfying their elementary survival needs and simply cannot afford to be loyal to higher-priced branded goods in instances of extreme price-sensitivity. Karnani (2007) further indicates that although BOP consumers desire the same types of products that affluent consumers do, they are unable to afford these branded goods without having to forgo essential products that are indispensable to their health and survival. In addition, BOP consumers, with their insufficiency in education and knowledge, may be unethically lured into purchasing inconsequential products that may be detrimental to their survival.

In terms of brand trust, the outcomes of this study reveal that, a fairly moderate proportion of the South African BOP consumers have an inclination to purchase their preferred brands of products because they derive value-for-money from these purchases and want to avoid the potential risk of wasting money on new, unfamiliar brands that may be unsatisfactory. These results coincide with that of Barki and Parente (2010) who advocate that BOP consumers are more disposed to being loyal to branded products due to the excessive financial risk involved in making a mistake in their choice of brands. Due to the paucity of financial resources, BOP consumers are not prone to experimenting with new, unfamiliar brands and are more compelled to purchase 'tried-and-tested' brands that are long-lasting (Bhan & Tait, 2008; D'Andrea, Ring, Aleman & Stengel, 2006; Louw, 2008). According to Prahalad (2005) and Moriarty, Massen, Findlay and Kelusky (2011), BOP consumers do not have the means to purchase a replacement product in instances where they may have erred in terms of their purchase decision. Hence, purchasing a branded product will assure BOP consumers of an expected level of reliability, quality and performance at competitive prices. Nyanga (2015) and Rijke et al. (2009) add that BOP consumers' appreciation for good-quality brands stems from the fact that these brands are durable and need not be replaced regularly, thus saving them purchase time and money. Brands often translate into quality certificates and guarantees in BOP markets and building brand trust enables companies to reap tangible returns in terms of customer loyalty (Dansk Industry International Business Development,

2007; Rijke et al., 2009). D'Andrea et al. (2006) report that owing to BOP consumers' hesitancy to purchase unfamiliar value-brands, intermediate and leading brands represent the greatest share of purchases and are strongly preferred by these consumers. The absence of credible product information and the superfluity of fake, low-quality brands augment BOP consumers' reluctance to purchase new brands that have been launched onto the market (Neuwirth, 2012). Acknowledging that BOP consumers are extremely cautious about purchasing new brands due to the possibility of poor quality and unsuitability, Dubey and Patel (2004) suggest that small package sizes or sachets will be useful in encouraging trial purchase of new brands on the market. According to the World Economic Forum (2009), low-income consumers are generally more inclined to purchase an unfamiliar, new product if it carries a well-recognized brand name or is endorsed by a reputable and trustworthy organization. The conception of marketing branded products to BOP consumers has, however, raised skepticism and ethical concerns (Davidson, 2009). According to Davidson (2009), brands become widely recognized, trusted and preferred through intense and costly marketing communications efforts, the costs of which are absorbed by consumers in the form of increased product prices. Davidson (2009) questions whether this is feasible in a market that warrants lower product prices. Furthermore, Davidson (2009) argues that in functional terms, most branded products are almost identical to their generic unbranded counterparts and, therefore, does not impart any real value to BOP consumers.

According to the results of this study which relate to the preference for good-quality brands, an average proportion of the South African BOP consumers support the notion of paying premium prices for the brands that they consider to be of good quality. This finding validates Prahalad's (2005) affirmation that BOP consumers are undeniably value-conscious, aspire to purchasing superior-quality brands and are prepared to spend a little more on those products that they can derive maximum utility from. D'Andrea et al. (2006 cited in Nakata & Weidner, 2011) support this assertion as these authors have discovered that BOP consumers spend financial resources on leading brands in a bid to secure quality, reliability and value from their purchases. According to Prahalad (2005), two large retailers, Casas Bahia in Brazil and Elektra in Mexico, are highly profitable from the sale of branded consumer durables such as, televisions, washing machines, radios and other appliances to BOP consumers through agreed-upon incremental payment schemes. This corroborates the notion that since brands are a signal of quality, better performance and status, brand-loyal BOP consumers are intent on purchasing better-quality brands in order to attain a new and improved quality of life (Essoussi & Merunka, 2007; Lall, 2011; Louw, 2008; Nyanga, 2015; Prahalad, 2005, Variawa, 2010). In addition, research has shown that the susceptibility to brand advertising and brand preferences for consumables in the South African BOP market, closely mirrors that of the non-BOP market and that BOP consumers are constantly seeking the best possible price-performance offers (Chipp et al., 2012; Gordon, 2008 cited in Louw, 2008). This evidence echoes the sentiments of Jaiswal (2007) and Prahalad (2005) that rural consumers have become just as discerning about brands as the urban wealthy consumers, provided that these brands offer them acceptable value propositions, that is, greater quality at affordable prices. The findings of this study, however, contradict the arguments put forward by Karnani (2007) and Webster (2000 cited in Variawa, 2010) that the poor consumers, who are typically price-sensitive, often purchase the cheapest, lowest-quality brands that are available on the market because they are unable to afford premium brands. The results of this study demonstrate that the majority of the South African BOP consumers are convinced that using a good-quality brand will enhance their self-esteem and confidence.

The evidence of this study authenticates the conclusions drawn by Kempen (2004 cited in Barki & Parente, 2010) and Tripathi and De (2007) that poor consumers (particularly the youth) are willing to pay more for designer labels, have a strong inspirational attraction to high-quality brands that increase their self-esteem and view designer labels as symbols of status and a mechanism for integration with society. Marcoux, Filialtrault and Chéron (1997 cited in Essoussi & Merunka, 2007) have found that the desire for branded products is heightened amongst consumers in emerging markets as it empowers them to exhibit their social status. The proclamations of Barki and Parente (2010) indicate that BOP consumers demonstrate great concern in upholding their self-respect and being treated with dignity. These consumers, therefore, view the consumption of superior brands as a counterbalance for their inferiority complex and as a means of gaining social recognition and acceptance (Barki & Parente, 2010). In addition, Rijke et al. (2009) observed that BOP consumers are also fanatically concerned about the opinions of their neighbors and that being in possession of new and visibly attractive products tends to draw attention and admiration from others who perceive them as being 'wealthy' and in a comparatively superior position. This postulation was substantiated by the

findings of Mahajan (2008 cited in Variawa, 2010) and Rimmell (2008 cited in Variawa, 2010) that BOP consumers in South African townships often display good-quality branded detergents, like Unilever's Handy Andy, on counter-tops that are clearly visible by guests, in order to proudly convey the indication that they are utilizing status brands. Dubey and Patel (2004), however, caution that companies need to ensure that the images of premium brands are maintained when targeting low-income segments so as to not lose customers who purchase these brands as a status symbol. The outcome of this study refutes the evidence documented by Dinica and Motteau (2012) that BOP consumers are not riveted by brands or the status that they convey. Baudrillard (1998 cited in Majumder, 2012) analyzed the theory of consumerism by substituting use-values with that of sign-values and consequently, uncovered that some products do not add value but instead provide gratification from owning the brand or indulging in buying behavior. This raises an argument that it is unethical to fuel BOP consumers' desire for status through owning branded products as these high-priced 'luxuries' are not truly in their self-interest (Karnani, 2007). Davidson (2009) concurs with Karnani's (2007) viewpoint that BOP consumers should not be enticed to purchase branded products if they do not impart any real value in functional terms.

As per the results of this study, BOP consumers have a greater affinity to switch between known, competing brands than try new, unfamiliar brands that have been introduced on the market. During periods of price escalations, a fairly moderate proportion of South African BOP consumers attest to switching from their preferred brands to cheaper, generic brands due to the unaffordability of better-quality brands. This implies that South African BOP consumers are value-conscious, appreciate good-quality brands and are willing to purchase them, provided that the prices are affordable. This outcome corroborates with Nyanga's (2015) finding that, even though the majority of the BOP consumers are satisfied with their preferred brands, a moderate proportion of these consumers will engage in brand-switching in instances of price increases. According to the findings of the study, a below average proportion of South African BOP consumers steadfastly demonstrate reluctance to experiment with new brands of products that have an uncertain level of quality. This infers that BOP consumers are cautious about the brands that they spend their incomes on and want to avoid encountering tremendous dissatisfaction from choosing the wrong brand. The outcome of this study corroborates the findings that BOP consumers do not trust new and unfamiliar brands and display hesitancy to switch from their current brands to new brands (Barki & Parente, 2010; Bhan & Tait, 2008; D'Andrea et al., 2006; Louw, 2008; Mendoza, 2008). However, Prahalad and Hart (2002) state that single-serve packaging offers BOP consumers the benefit of switching brands each time they purchase. Dubey and Patel (2004) assert that single-serve sachets are suitable for encouraging trial usage of brands, particularly new introductions on the market, as it does not result in BOP consumers tying up too much of their financial resources in the purchase of large quantities. According to the results of this study, there are significant relationships between branding and the other key dimensions of this study.

Intercorrelations between branding and other key dimensions of the study

The results of this study indicate that there is a significant relationship between branding and savings potential/ability to pay off debt, quality, appearance/acceptability, adaptability of existing products, functionality/performance, advertising/awareness and partnering with MNCs and, a significant but inverse relationship between branding and price/affordability and accessibility/availability, respectively. The implications of the significant relationships are that South African BOP consumers who have a higher degree of brand loyalty have a greater propensity to collaborate with MNCs and save money for the future in order to secure better lifestyles. These consumers have a high appreciation for products that are of a superior quality, aesthetically appealing, durable, reliable and astutely designed for their adverse living conditions. Furthermore, brand-conscious South African BOP consumers are likely to be influenced by the brand preferences of trusted opinion leaders and reference groups (family and friends) when making their selection of brands. Research has found that brands are positively related to quality (Chauduri & Holbrook, 2001 cited in Neuwirth, 2012; D'Andrea et al., 2006; McKinsey & Company, 2012 cited in Nyanga, 2015; Prahalad, 2005; Rijke et al., 2009), functionality/performance (Nyanga, 2015; Rijke et al., 2009), appearance/acceptability (Nyanga, 2015) and advertising/awareness (Human, Ascott-Evans, Souter & Xabanisa, 2011).

The inferences of the significant but inverse relationships are that South African BOP consumers who are more brand-conscious are comparatively less price-sensitive and zealously believe that a suitable array of products is highly inaccessible to them. This outcome supports the findings that BOP consumers are willing to

pay extra for good-quality brands that will yield the best price-performance deal (Nyanga, 2015; Rijke et al., 2009, Variawa, 2010). Conversely, those BOP consumers who exhibit high price-sensitivity are unlikely to be brand loyal. According to research, BOP consumers who are highly price-sensitive are not brand loyal as they are constantly searching for the lowest prices (Aaker, 2012 cited in Nyanga, 2015; Chikweche & Fletcher, 2010 cited in Nyanga, 2015; Kumar, Pozza & Ganesh, 2013 cited in Nyanga, 2015; Webster, 2000 cited in Variawa, 2010). There are no other significant relationships between branding and the key dimensions of this study.

Influences of biographical variables on branding

As per the evidence of this study, branding is influenced by certain biographical variables of South African BOP consumers, namely, education, monthly income and the number of people living in a household. It is apparent from the findings of this study that South African BOP consumers who are better educated appear to have a higher intensity of brand-consciousness than those consumers with lower levels of education. Evidently, South African BOP consumers who belong to the lower monthly income categories and who live in households with a greater number of occupants are less cognizant of brands and their influences on purchase decisions.

Recommendations: Based on the findings of this study in terms of the South African BOP consumers' perceptions of branding, the following recommendations are suggested for business organizations:

- *Aim to ensure that the company's brand becomes synonymous with quality, reliability and durability*: Owing to the fact that South African BOP consumers are noticeably brand-conscious and steadfastly value-conscious, MNCs need to ensure that their brands offer maximum utility, value-for-money and enhancement of lifestyles to South African BOP consumers. In order to avoid brand-switching behavior, MNCs need to make certain that their good-quality brands are reasonably priced.
- *Utilize marketing communications efforts (such as, entertaining product road shows, billboards and product demonstrations) to ensure a high prevalence of brand awareness in the South African BOP market*: Driving brand awareness is pivotal in gaining brand recognition and creating a favorable attitude towards the brand.
- *Utilize mobile-marketing in order to build brand awareness in the South African BOP market*: As per the findings of this study, South African BOP consumers spend a considerable proportion of their incomes on telecommunications (airtime) which indicates that these consumers have embraced mobile technology and its life-enhancing attributes, such as, staying connected to the world around them and learning through information obtained via the internet. It is, therefore, pivotal for MNCs to use mobile technology in order to inform South African BOP consumers about new products or brand extensions via text messages or short video clips.
- *Encourage trial usage of newly-launched, unfamiliar brands through the use of free samples*: As evident from the findings of this study, South African BOP consumers have a very low propensity to engage in experimental purchases of new and unfamiliar brands. It is, therefore, imperative for MNCs to use sales promotion tactics, like free samples, to encourage trial usage of the brand and to convince these consumers of the superior level of quality of the brands.
- *Explicitly differentiate the company's brand through the use of highly pronounced brand-related stimuli (such as, logos, packaging, brand colors)*: According to the results of this study, South African BOP consumers display a clear ability to distinguish between competing brands based on brands' logos, design and/or coloring. Therefore, MNCs need to ensure that the use of brand-related stimuli (such as, brand colors, shapes, slogans, background design elements, mascots and brand characters) is distinct enough to aid brand identification and the promotion of robust brand associations.
- *Aim for trust and identity in branding through certification and labeling*: Certified products can assist companies in differentiating their offerings from that of competitors and increase consumer trust because a certified product is representative of a product that meets acceptable standards of quality. Once a company has established trust and strong brand recognition in these BOP markets, it can launch additional products and brand extensions (Oodith & Parumasur, 2014).
- *Promote continuous improvement in products' designs*: MNCs are required to add new features to existing products once they have established the trust and loyalty of BOP consumers. Enjoying the patronage of BOP consumers will enable MNCs to offer a variety of good-quality, low-cost products

that fully satisfy consumers' needs and enable these companies to secure long-term profitability and growth in market share (Oodith & Parumasur, 2014).

- *Ensure sustainable brand loyalty by offering good-quality brands at affordable prices*: As per the findings of this study, South African BOP consumers demonstrate intense brand loyalty provided that product prices are within their purchasing power. MNCs need to take cognizance of the affordability threshold of these consumers and guard against setting prices that lie beyond the threshold, as this will ultimately render their offerings unaffordable.
- *Develop loyalty points and money-back programs*: This will enable businesses to build brand loyalty and will increase the costs of switching brands for consumers in the South African BOP market. Loyalty points are earned through each purchase and the associated rewards or cash refunds will provide incentives for South African BOP consumers to engage in repeat purchases (Oodith & Parumasur, 2014).
- *Position the company's brand as a status symbol and as a means of enhancing self-esteem, confidence and social inclusion*: MNCs need to ensure that the desired brand imagery is created in the minds of South African BOP consumers in order to imbue these brands with qualities like status, prestige and social acceptance. Branding should be strongly linked to the organization's policy on social inclusion as this will enhance the brand image and the image of the organization.
- *Aim to build ardent brand loyalty amongst South African BOP consumers who are better educated, have higher levels of monthly income and who reside in households with fewer inhabitants*: Organizations need to target individuals who encompass these biographical variables as these groupings of individuals demonstrate a greater appreciation for good-quality brands and have a higher inclination to remain loyal to their preferred brands. Such an approach can become a fundamental aspect of the organization's communication strategy.

Future Research: It will be highly insightful to compare and contrast the South African Bop consumers' perception of branding from a provincial perspective in order to determine the similarities and disparities in terms of brand awareness, differentiation, recognition, loyalty, trust and preferences for leading brands.

5. Conclusion

The results of this study, in relation to the key dimension of branding, reveal that the majority of South African BOP consumers are brand-conscious; hence, brands play an influential role in the consumer decision-making process. South African BOP consumers are aware of competing brands on the market and able to differentiate between them based on brand-related stimuli (such as logos, packaging, brand colors). These BOP consumers use brand names, packaging and logos as a safety measure for judging the quality, reliability and performance of brands. South African BOP consumers are very loyal to their trusted brands and willing to pay premium prices for them. In addition, these consumers are value-conscious and are likely to switch to cheaper brands should their preferred brands become grossly unaffordable. The BOP consumers in South Africa do not trust new, unfamiliar brands on the market due to the uncertainty of their quality and are reluctant to purchase new brands for fear of wasting financial resources on unsatisfactory products. Furthermore, South African BOP consumers believe that using good-quality brands will boost their self-esteem, confidence and status.

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