

Dissertation Proposal

To Investigate the Relationship Between Brand Image and Brand Loyalty: An Analysis of Sainsbury

1. Introduction

Background of the Study

Brand image plays a crucial role in influencing consumer perceptions and purchasing decisions. A strong brand image not only differentiates a company from competitors but also fosters customer loyalty, leading to long-term business success (*Aaker, 1991*).

Sainsbury, one of the UK's leading supermarket chains, has built a strong brand presence over the years. However, with increasing competition from retailers such as Tesco, Asda, and Aldi, it is essential to assess how Sainsbury's brand image influences customer loyalty. This research aims to explore the relationship between Sainsbury's brand image and brand loyalty to understand the factors that drive customer retention.

Rationale

Despite extensive research on brand loyalty and brand image, there is a gap in understanding how these elements interact in the UK supermarket industry, particularly concerning Sainsbury (*Keller, 2008*). While several studies have explored brand loyalty in retail, few have specifically examined the role of brand image in shaping customer loyalty within this competitive market. This research seeks to bridge that gap by providing insights into consumer perceptions and the impact of brand image on loyalty in Sainsbury's context.

Research Aim

To investigate the relationship between brand image and brand loyalty in the context of Sainsbury's supermarket chain.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the factors contributing to Sainsbury's brand image.
2. To evaluate customer perceptions of Sainsbury's brand.
3. To analyze the impact of brand image on customer brand loyalty at Sainsbury.

Research Questions

1. What are the key factors influencing Sainsbury's brand image?
2. How do customers perceive Sainsbury's brand image?
3. How does brand image impact customer brand loyalty at Sainsbury?

2. Literature Review

Concept of Brand Image and Brand Loyalty

Brand image refers to the perception consumers hold about a brand based on its attributes, quality, and associations (*Aaker, 1991*). According to **Keller (1993)**, brand image is the **set of perceptions about a brand that exists in consumers' minds based on brand associations and experiences**.

Brand loyalty represents a consumer's commitment to repurchase or continue using a brand (*Keller, 2008*). **Oliver (1999)** defines brand loyalty as **a deeply held commitment to re-buy a preferred brand consistently in the future, despite situational influences and marketing efforts aimed at causing switching behavior**.

Critical Review of Literature

A critical review of brand loyalty research shows that various scholars highlight emotional attachment and habit formation as key loyalty drivers. However, recent studies suggest that brand loyalty can also be influenced by digital engagement and personalized marketing (*Huang & Huddleston, 2009*).

Customer Perceptions of Sainsbury's Brand

Customer perception is shaped by **product quality, service experience, and brand messaging** (*Kotler & Keller, 2016*).

- **Zeithaml (1988):** Customer perception is based on the perceived quality and value of the product.
- **Schiffman & Kanuk (2007):** Perceptions are influenced by **individual motivations, expectations, and experiences**.

The Factors Contributing to Sainsbury's Brand Image

Sainsbury's brand image is shaped by product quality, pricing strategy, store ambiance, customer service, and marketing communications. These factors influence customer perception and differentiate the brand from competitors like Tesco and ASDA.

1. **Product Quality** – Sainsbury's offers high-quality products, including its premium "Taste the Difference" range, reinforcing a reputation for excellence and trust.
2. **Pricing Strategy** – Positioned as a mid-tier supermarket, Sainsbury's balances affordability with quality. Promotions, discounts, and the Nectar loyalty program enhance value perception.
3. **Store Ambiance** – Well-designed stores with organized aisles, clean environments, and self-checkout systems create a pleasant and convenient shopping experience.
4. **Customer Service** – Friendly and well-trained staff contribute to positive interactions, while online support and social media engagement enhance customer satisfaction.

5. **Marketing Communications** – Emotional advertising campaigns, sustainability initiatives, and strong branding reinforce customer loyalty and differentiate Sainsbury's from rivals.

By maintaining consistency in these areas, Sainsbury's strengthens its brand image, fostering customer loyalty and trust.

The Impact of Brand Image on Customer Loyalty at Sainsbury's

A strong brand image fosters trust and emotional connections, leading to higher customer retention, while a weak image may result in brand switching.

1. **Trust and Reliability** – Consistently high product quality and ethical sourcing build consumer confidence and encourage repeat purchases.
2. **Emotional Connection** – Engaging marketing campaigns, especially festive ads, create strong brand affinity, making customers feel connected.
3. **Loyalty Programs** – The Nectar program incentivizes repeat purchases, rewarding customers and reinforcing their loyalty.
4. **Competitive Challenges** – In a price-sensitive market, Sainsbury's must balance quality and affordability to prevent customers from switching to budget retailers like Aldi.
5. **Brand Advocacy** – Positive customer experiences drive word-of-mouth marketing, strengthening brand credibility and attracting new shoppers.

By maintaining a positive brand image, Sainsbury's secures long-term customer loyalty and competitive advantage.

Research Gap

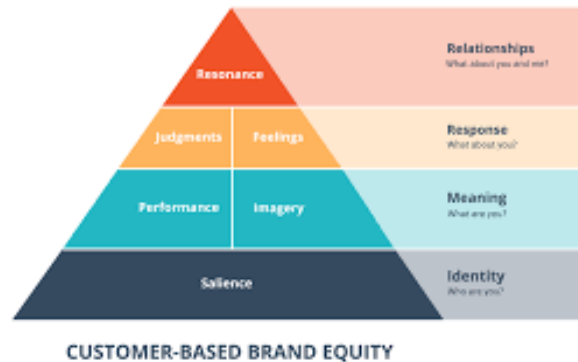
Most studies focus on general brand loyalty in retail but lack emphasis on the **role of brand image**. Many existing studies explore general brand loyalty factors but lack in-depth focus on the specific role of brand image in influencing consumer decisions. Most research concentrates on large global brands rather than supermarket chains like Sainsbury, making it necessary to study how its brand image impacts customer loyalty in the UK retail industry.

Theoretical Framework: Keller's Brand Equity Model

Keller's **Brand Equity Model (1993)** explains how strong brands create consumer loyalty through brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand associations.

Brief Description of the Model

Keller's Brand Equity Model suggests that strong brands build equity through consumer knowledge, including awareness and brand associations. It consists of **brand salience**, **brand performance**, **brand imagery**, **consumer judgment**, **consumer feelings**, and **brand resonance**.



Advantages of Keller's Model:

- Provides a structured approach to understanding brand strength.
- Helps in measuring customer perceptions of brand value (*Keller, 1993*).

Disadvantages:

- Does not account for external market influences.
- Focuses primarily on emotional connections rather than rational decision-making (*Keller, 1993*).

3. Research Methodology

Definition of Research Methodology

Research methodology refers to the **systematic process** used to collect, analyze, and interpret data (*Saunders et al., 2019*).

Research Approach

Research approaches can be broadly categorized into **quantitative** and **qualitative** methods, depending on the type of data collected and analyzed.

- **Quantitative Data** refers to numerical data that can be measured and analyzed statistically. It focuses on objective measurements and structured data collection methods, such as surveys and experiments, to identify patterns and relationships (*Bryman, 2016*).
- **Qualitative Data** involves non-numerical insights, such as opinions, behaviors, and motivations, collected through open-ended surveys, interviews, and observations. It aims to provide deeper understanding through thematic analysis (*Creswell, 2018*).

This study will adopt a **mono-method quantitative** approach, meaning that only **quantitative data** will be collected and analyzed. A structured online survey will be used to gather responses, allowing for statistical analysis of the relationship between brand image and brand loyalty. The results will provide measurable insights, ensuring objectivity and reliability in findings.

Sampling Strategy

- **Sample Size: 50 respondents** (How they will be accessed: online surveys via supermarket forums, social media, and in-store recruitment).
- **Sample Type:** Respondents aged **18-60** from urban and suburban areas in the UK.
- **Sampling Method:** A **random sampling technique** will be used to ensure unbiased respondent selection. This method allows every Sainsbury customer within the target demographic an equal chance of being chosen.

Data Collection Method

- This study will use a **structured online survey** to measure consumer perceptions of brand image and brand loyalty. The survey will be created using **Google Forms**, a widely used and accessible tool that allows for easy distribution and data collection.
- The survey will consist of **8-10 closed-ended questions**, primarily using **Likert-scale** and **multiple-choice** formats to ensure standardized responses that can be analyzed statistically. The questions will focus on key aspects of brand image, such as product quality, pricing, customer service, and emotional connection, as well as brand loyalty indicators like repeat purchases and brand preference.
- Participants will be given **7 days** to complete the survey, allowing sufficient time for responses while maintaining the research timeline. The estimated completion time for each respondent will be **5-7 minutes**, ensuring convenience and encouraging higher response rates.

Data Analysis Techniques

- **SPSS** will be used for data analysis.
- **Descriptive Statistics** (*Mean, Frequency, Standard Deviation*).
- **Correlation Analysis** (*Relationship between brand image and loyalty*).
- **Regression Analysis** (*Impact of brand image on customer loyalty*).

Research Ethics

- **Informed Consent:** Participants will voluntarily agree to take part.
- **Anonymity & Confidentiality:** No personal data will be disclosed.

4. Resources and Planning

Gantt Chart (Timeline of Research Activities)

TASK	WEEK															
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	12	13	14	15	16	
Introduction																
Literature Review																
Research Methodology																
Creating Survey Questions																
Collecting Data																
Analysis of Data																
Discussion																
Conclusion and Recommendation																

Figure X: Personal Gantt Chart (Created by Student, 2024)

Budget

The research will require funding for survey distribution and data analysis tools like **SPSS**.

5. Expected Contributions & Limitations

Contributions

This research will provide:

- Insights into **consumer perceptions** of Sainsbury's brand image.
- Empirical evidence on the **impact of brand image on brand loyalty**.

Limitations

- **Limited Generalizability:** The study focuses only on Sainsbury customers.
- **Response Bias:** Survey-based research may be subject to participant bias.

6. References

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