Brand loyalty for domestic and global Brands: A case of Thai fast-moving consumer goods

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Abstract: The purpose of this research was to study potential differences in the formation of brand loyalty for domestic and global brands in Thai consumer groups through brand equity, consumer satisfaction, and country of origin effects. The study compared two well-known brands of a consumer product (shower gel), one of which presented as a local brand and the other of which had global branding. (Both brands are in fact manufactured by the same company and have similar functional and quality characteristics.) A convenience sample of Thai consumers (n = 400) was selected from shopping centers in and around Bangkok for a consumer survey about brand image and perceptions of the two brands. Factors in the formation of brand loyalty were then explored using structural equation modelling. The analysis showed that the effects of brand awareness and brand associations were similar for domestic and global brands. However, domestic brands had higher effects from customer satisfaction than perceived quality, while this relationship was reversed for global brands. The implication of this study is that domestic and global brands may be evaluated differently by consumers in some contexts, even if they are functional substitutes for each other. Consumers placed more emphasis on perceived quality than the brand experience for global brands. This could create problems for domestic brand marketers and those developing new domestic brands. However, this study only included a single product category. These results cannot be generalized across all consumer categories.

1. Introduction

One of the peculiarities of consumer choice is the role of perceived country of origin (COO) in the purchase decision. A meta-analysis of studies on COO effects demonstrated that COO influences perceived quality of products, as well as attitudes and purchase intention (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). This study showed that historically, brands positioned as being from a country with an advanced economy are perceived more positively than those from developing economies (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). This review of early studies provides the basis for understanding the effect of COO on consumer decisions. A more recent review has supported the importance of COO for consumer decision making (Phau & Chao, 2008). However, there are still unanswered questions about consumer decision making in relation to COO of specific brands.

One of these unanswered questions stems from the rise of globalized brands with no specific COO. Traditionally, a global and standardized brand has been associated with a generic, one size fits all approach that is unattractive to consumers (Holt, Quelch, & Taylor, 2004). However, in the mid-1990s to mid-2000s, a new class of global brands

arose, which carried with them carefully targeted campaigns that to some extent eliminated the COO effect of previous brands (Pharr, 2005). During this period, global consolidation in fast-moving and durable consumer goods industries meant that increasingly, brands no longer had a strong COO (Pharr, 2005). At the same time, these consolidated global companies began to localize their brands, either by creating new brands associated with a domestic COO or by acquiring existing local brands (Pitta & Franzak, 2008). This practice of localization often resulted in products that were very similar to existing global products, but which were designed to appeal to consumer preferences for domestic brands (Pitta & Franzak, 2008). Thus, in the new COO landscape, there are many different possibilities: local brands, localized brands of international manufacturers, 'stateless' international brands with no specific COO, and international brands that retain their COO. There is evidence that COO effects occur whether the consumer's perception of the product's COO is accurate or not (Magnusson & Westjohn, 2011). This suggests that local brands and localized brands should both retain their domestic COO effects. However, there is much less evidence in the literature comparing domestic COO brands and the 'stateless' globalized brands.

The purpose of this research is to examine how Thai consumers respond to brands with a domestic COO compared to those with a non-specific, 'stateless' COO. To do so, a consumer survey was developed to evaluate brand loyalty formation for two brands of a commonly purchased fast-moving consumer good (shower gel). Both brands are made by the same global manufacturer, and there are minimal differences in functional qualities. However, Brand A is a traditional Thai brand, while Brand B is a global brand with a non-specific COO.

2. Literature review

2.1. Brand equity and brand loyalty

The model of brand loyalty formation used in this research is Aaker's (1991) brand equity model. This model proposes that brand loyalty is formed through three factors, including brand awareness, brand associations, and perceived quality (Aaker, 1991). Brand loyalty refers to both behavioral loyalty (habitual repurchase of products or services from the brand and recommendations to others) and attitudinal loyalty (for example, self-identification with the brand) (Aaker, 1991). Brand awareness refers to the ability of the consumer to recall the brand's characteristics, while brand associations refers to the consumer's understanding of the brand and its attributes (Aaker, 1991). Finally, perceived quality refers to the extent to which the consumer believes the brand is suitable for its intended purpose (Aaker, 1991).

Brand awareness and brand loyalty

The first factor proposed by Aaker (1991) to influence brand loyalty is brand awareness. Several studies have shown a relationship between brand awareness and brand loyalty, which is typically relatively strong and positive (Chi, Yeh, & Yang, 2009). A study of mobile phone buyers in Taiwan showed that brand awareness has a strong, positive effect on both action loyalty (behavioral loyalty) and affective loyalty (attitudinal loyalty) (Chi et al., 2009). Brand awareness also had a significant effect on perceived quality and purchase intentions (Chi et al., 2009). However, not all products are the same. Another study

examined the formation of brand loyalty for milk products in Pakistan (Subhani & Osman, 2011). As these authors noted, milk products are substitutable, low-involvement and low-cost products and consumers may frequently switch between brands depending on availability and cost. Therefore, it is not surprising that there was no significant relationship between brand awareness and brand loyalty in this context (Subhani & Osman, 2011). Thus, there is a question as to whether the product category examined will be considered substitutable (in which case brand awareness may not affect brand loyalty) or non-substitutable (in which case it may).

Based on the evidence from these studies, and the assumption that shower gels will have differentiating characteristics, the first hypothesis is proposed as:

Hypothesis 1: *Brand awareness will influence the formation of brand loyalty.*

Brand associations and brand loyalty

The second category of cognitions thought to influence brand loyalty is brand associations. Brand associations include the brand identity and the brand personality, establishing not just the functional characteristics of the brand but also its social and affective characteristics (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009). Simply, the brand associations establish what - and who - the brand is for, which could affect the formation of brand loyalty. Brand associations also must fit with the individual's self-identity (identity congruence) to effectively create conditions for brand loyalty to form (Lin, 2010). Consumers whose self-identities do not fit with the brand identity they perceive may not be willing to try the product. Brand associations may have a two-way relationship with brand loyalty, as consumers with stronger behavioral brand loyalty have also been shown to have a stronger set of brand associations (Romaniuk & Nenycz-Thiel, 2013). Thus, the effect of brand associations on brand loyalty is more complicated than the effects of brand awareness or perceived quality, which are relatively straightforward in comparison. This research takes the approach that brand associations will have a direct, positive influence on brand loyalty:

Hypothesis 2: *Brand associations will influence the formation of brand loyalty.*

Perceived quality and brand loyalty

Perceived quality can influence brand loyalty because it related to the degree of suitability of the product for its intended purpose (Aaker, 1991). Simply, consumers are likely to prefer products that are more suitable for their needs. Several studies have demonstrated that perceived quality does affect brand loyalty. For example, Chi et al. (2009) showed a significant, positive effect of perceived quality on brand loyalty, although this effect was lower than the effect of brand awareness. A study of fashion brand loyalty in Turkey also demonstrated the importance of perceived quality (Erdoğmuş & Büdeyri-Turan, 2012). These authors showed that perceived quality, for example fit, material quality, and design, had the strongest influence on brand loyalty for their selected fashion brands (Erdoğmuş & Büdeyri-Turan, 2012). A validation study for a model of fast-moving consumer goods also showed the importance of perceived quality (Moolla & Bisschoff, 2012). These authors showed that perceived quality was a significant factor in perceived value of the product, which in turn had a strong and significant effect on brand loyalty in this product category (Moolla & Bisschoff, 2012). Thus, taken together, there is evidence that

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perceived quality directly influences brand loyalty formation Based on these studies, this research will explore the hypothesis that:

Hypothesis 3: Perceived quality will influence the formation of brand loyalty.

2.2. Consumer satisfaction and brand loyalty

Consumers are not only influenced by external factors such as brands, but also by their actual experience with the brand, or their brand experience (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009). Brand experience is the emotions, thoughts, and feelings that stem from the consumer's interaction with the brand, for example use of the products or in-store experiences (Brakus et al., 2009). One type of evaluation of the brand experience is consumer satisfaction, or the perception that the brand experience met the consumer's expectations (Brakus et al., 2009).

The relationship of consumer satisfaction and brand loyalty is complicated, and changes over time as the consumers' experiences and needs for the brand change (Oliver, 1999). As Oliver (1999) explains, consumer satisfaction is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the formation of consumer loyalty to a brand. It is particularly important for the initial formation of brand loyalty, but over time consumers may depend less on explicit evaluation of satisfaction and more on other factors such as predetermined buying patterns (Oliver, 1999). Furthermore, even highly satisfied consumers may not always purchase known good brands, out of motivations like changing needs or a desire for novelty or variety (Shirin & Puth, 2011). However, there is also strong evidence that consumer satisfaction does influence loyalty. For example, one study examined customer loyalty for protected designation of origin (PDO) food products (Espejel, Fandos, & Flavián, 2008). These authors examined the formation of consumer loyalty for a specific PDO food product (a Spanish olive oil). They found that perceptions of the product, including its geographical region and terroir, quality controls, and other product quality aspects implied by the PDO influenced customer satisfaction with the product. The level of customer satisfaction in turn influenced the consumer's brand loyalty for the product (Espejel et al., 2008).

Given this body of research, it is possible to state that while consumer satisfaction and brand loyalty have a complex relationship, consumer satisfaction is likely to have a positive influence on brand loyalty. Therefore, the fourth hypothesis is stated as:

Hypothesis 4: *Consumer satisfaction will influence the formation of brand loyalty.*

2.3. Country of origin effects and brand loyalty

The final hypothesis concerns the influence of COO effects on the formation of brand loyalty. An early meta-analysis of COO effects showed that they had the strongest impact on perceived loyalty, although it also affected other aspects of brand loyalty (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). However, several studies have complicated that finding for global brand. One author found that perceived COO has an effect whether it is correct or not; thus, consumers who perceive a brand as domestic will respond as if it were (Magnusson & Westjohn, 2011). Another study showed that international brands may have an advantage in developing markets, even if the COO of these brands is what the authors termed "image appeals (Zhou, Yang, & Hui, 2010, p. 202)" rather than more concrete

COO claims such as made-in or even designed-in. Thus, there is evidence for a COO effect on consumer choice and brand loyalty, even if it is not correct.

One possible way in which COO effects could create differences in brand loyalty and preference is if brand confusion is present (Samiee, Shimp, & Sharma, 2005; Zhuang, Wang, Zhou, & Zhou, 2008). Both studies demonstrated that under conditions where the consumer is uncertain about the COO origin of a given brand, they may instead select brands with clear domestic COOs. Another study showed that perceived brand globalness, or the extent to which a brand is viewed as being a global rather than localized entity, has a positive effect on perceived quality and brand prestige in emerging markets (Akram, Merunka, & Akram, 2011). Thus, there are some clear differences in domestic and globalized brands, although there may be conflicting forces that influence consumer effects.

Although there is limited evidence to compare brands with a distinct COO and those without one, the existing research does suggest that a strong COO effect (whether correct or not) can influence consumer's product perceptions, especially perceived quality. This research will study the effects of perceived COO on the relationships of all four determinants of brand loyalty:

Hypothesis 5: *Perceived COO will influence the formation of brand loyalty through brand awareness, brand image, perceived quality, and consumer satisfaction.*

FIGURE 1. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY
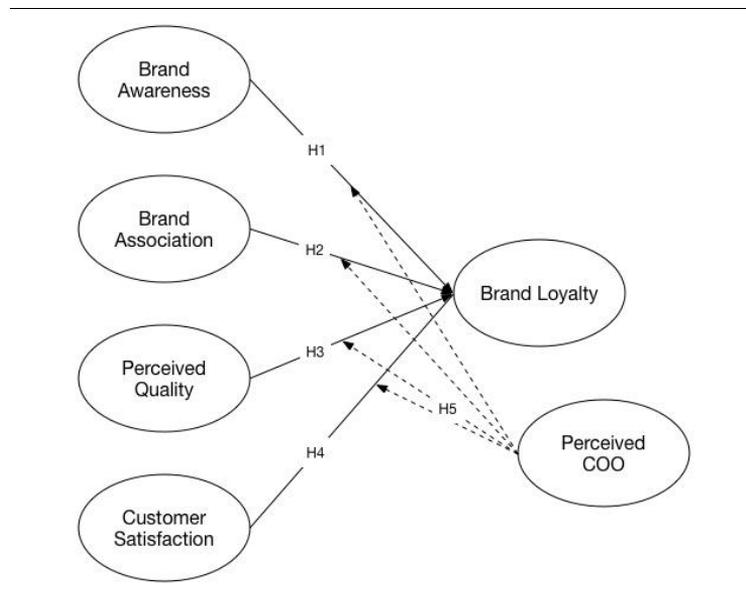
3. Data and methods

This research drew on Thai consumers located in Bangkok. Only consumers in Bangkok were included because the Bangkok metropolitan area has different socioeconomic characteristics to much of the rest of the country. The sample of consumers (n = 400) was

selected using convenience sampling from shopping centers, malls, and supermarkets in and around Bangkok over a period of one month. This sample size was chosen based on the sample size requirements for SEM, which require a larger sample than other techniques (Westland, 2010). Demographic characteristics of the sample are shown below (Table 1).

TABLE 1. SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

	N	%
GENDER		
Male	188	47.0%
Female	212	53.0%
AGE		
18-25	109	27.3%
26-35	87	21.8%
36-45	92	23.0%
46-55	75	18.8%
56+	37	9.3%
EDUCATIONAL LEVEL		
Below high school	24	6.0%
High school or diploma	97	24.3%
Bachelor	212	53.0%
Master	55	13.8%
Above Master	12	3.0%
INCOME		
Under 20,000 baht/month	106	26.5%
20,000 to 50,000 baht/month	132	33.0%
50 to 100,000 baht/month	120	30.0%
Above 100,000 baht/month	42	10.5%
OCCUPATION		
Student	103	25.8%
Private employee	158	39.5%
Public employee	98	24.5%
Company owner	22	5.5%
Unemployed or retired	19	4.8%

The questionnaire measured five constructs (Brand Awareness, Brand Associations, Perceived Quality, Consumer Satisfaction, and Brand Loyalty) on a five-point Likert scale. Three items were included for each of the five items. Analysis is based on unweighted scale indices for each of the scales. Consumers were asked to complete the questionnaire for two well-known brands of shower gel, Domestic and Global. These brands are both readily available and well-known to Thai consumers.

Analysis was conducted in SPSS AMOS. Individual data sets were constructed for Domestic and Global brand data. A structural equation modelling (SEM) approach was used to evaluate and test the model. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to test the model structure and hypothesized relationships. Model fit factors including CFI, NFI, and RMSEA were used to evaluate goodness of fit, with modification indices used to adjust dimensions were required to improve model fit (Byrne, 2016). Path analysis then drew on the regression estimates (structural paths) to determine causal effects. These

effects were evaluated at p < .05. Results are compared between responses for Domestic and Global brands to determine whether there are noticeable differences in causal relationships, such as significance or path loading.

4. Findings

4.1. Descriptive statistics and model fit

Descriptive statistics and correlations are shown in Tables 2 and 3 respectively. Descriptive statistics show that the variables were normally distributed for both Domestic and Global datasets (Kurtosis and Skewness between -2 and +2 for all variables). The correlations show that there are relationships within the data, as expected since the constructs are interrelated. However, none of the data shows signs of full covariation.

TABLE 2. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

	BAW	BAS	PQ	CS	BL
DOMESTIC BRAND					
Mean	3.50	3.59	2.41	3.50	3.14
S.D.	1.199	1.175	1.177	1.243	0.979
Kurtosis	-0.827	-0.916	-0.305	-0.850	-0.842
Skewness	-0.425	-0.374	0.603	-0.441	0.434
GLOBAL BRAND					
Mean	2.99	3.05	3.48	3.04	4.17
S.D.	1.267	1.264	1.059	1.268	0.914
Kurtosis	-1.054	-1.018	-1.207	-1.015	0.082
Skewness	0.001	0.003	0.123	0.016	-0.947

Note: BAW = Brand awareness, BAS = Brand association, PQ = Perceived quality, CS = Customer satisfaction, BL = Brand loyalty.

TABLE 3. CORRELATIONS

DOMESTIC BRAND					
	BAW	BAS	PQ	CS	BL
BAW	1				
BAS	0.595	1			
PQ	0.297	0.301	1		
CS	0.604	0.629	0.278	1	
BL	0.317	0.225	0.326	0.288	1
GLOBAL BRAND					
	BAW	BAS	PQ	CS	BL
BAW	1				
BAS	0.604	1			
PQ	0.536	0.528	1		
CS	0.582	0.611	0.499	1	
BL	0.399	0.399	0.333	0.424	1

Note: BAW = Brand awareness, BAS = Brand association, PQ = Perceived quality, CS = Customer satisfaction, BL = Brand loyalty.

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Model fit characteristics were similar for the Domestic and Global brand data (Table 4). The structural model was well fitted for exact and relative goodness of fit measures for both Domestic and Global data, although the precise fit did vary between the two models. Thus, the final model was found to fit both sets of data. The model R^2 was similar for both models, demonstrating that the model explained about 60% to 70% of variance for both brands.

TABLE 2. MODEL FIT

FIT CRITERION	DOMESTIC	GLOBAL
χ^2	1.413	1.298
(p)	(.792)	(.882)
CFI	.964	.958
NFI	.972	.962
RMSEA	.045	.048
Model R^2	.625	.692

4.2. Path analysis

Standardized coefficients were used to evaluate the regression outcomes (Table 5). As expected, all four factors had a significant, positive effect on brand loyalty for both the Domestic brand and the Global brand. However, there were differences in the effects size of these factors for the different brands in two notable areas - PQ and CS. For the Domestic brand, the effect of PQ was smaller than the effect of CS. This situation was reversed for the Global brand, where the effect of CS was smaller than the effect of PQ.

TABLE 3. REGRESSION ANALYSIS FOR CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK (DOMESTIC)

Path	DOMESTIC BRAND		GLOBAL BRAND	
	Standardized estimate (β)	P	Standardized estimate (β)	P
BL ← BAW	.467	.008**	.491	<.001***
BL ← BAS	.322	.015*	.318	.016*
BL ← PQ	.178	.031*	.392	.005**
BL ← CS	.376	.002**	.216	.021*

Notes: BAW = Brand awareness, BAS = Brand association, PQ = Perceived quality, CS = Customer satisfaction, BL = Brand loyalty. * - p < .05 ** - p < .01 *** - p < .001

5. Discussion

All five of the hypotheses proposed for the research were supported by the findings. Components of brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and customer satisfaction had significant positive effects on the formation of brand loyalty for both Domestic and Global brands of shower gel. The results also showed that there were some differences in the effect of perceived quality and customer satisfaction in the formation of brand loyalty for these two brands.

The study findings did support Aaker's (1991) model of brand equity and the interrelationships of brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. This was consistent with findings in studies from several previous authors (Chi et al., 2009; Erdoğmuş & Büdeyri-Turan, 2012; Lin, 2010; Moolla & Bisschoff, 2012). Thus, the basic framework of brand equity was effective at modeling the formation of brand loyalty. However, there were some differences from other consumer fast-moving consumer goods, such as milk (Subhani & Osman, 2011). While Subhani and Osman (2011) did not find that consumers responded to brand awareness or other characteristics in formation of brand loyalty for milk, this study showed that consumers for shower gel did respond to brand awareness and brand associations. This may be because of differences in the product characteristics; shower gels, which vary in consistency, ingredients, and scent and other sensory characteristics, are not as uniform a product as milk. Thus, the findings in this area were as expected.

Perceived quality was consistent as expected, with a positive and strong relationship. As other studies have shown (Erdoğmuş & Büdeyri-Turan, 2012; Moolla & Bisschoff, 2012), perceived quality is one of the major determinants of brand loyalty. Consumers respond to perceived quality and prefer products that have a higher perceived quality, choosing those products rather than products with lower quality.

The effects of consumer satisfaction were also consistent with the existing literature (Espejel, Fandos, & Flavián, 2008; Oliver, 1999). Simply speaking, consumers pay attention to their own brand experience when forming brand loyalty relationships (Brakus et al., 2009). Thus, the consumer's satisfaction with their brand experience is a powerful motivator for formation of attitudinal and behavioral brand loyalty. This research supported these findings, with both Domestic and Global brand loyalty strongly influenced by consumer satisfaction.

The novel aspect of this research is the comparison of the domestic-appearing brand and the global brand with no specific country of origin. Findings showed that there were two key differences between the two brands. In both cases, effects of consumer satisfaction and perceived quality had a significant, positive effect on brand loyalty. However, for the Domestic brand, the effect of perceived quality was lower than the effect of consumer satisfaction, while for the Global brand, the effect of consumer satisfaction was lower than the effect of perceived quality. This implies that consumers who chose the Domestic brand were more concerned with their own experience o the product, while those who chose the Global brand took into account the perceived quality of the product. There is no reason to believe that consumers viewed the Domestic brand as other than domestic, despite its international ownership (Magnusson & Westjohn, 2011). In keeping with the findings of Zhou et al. (2010), the descriptive statistics did show stronger perceived quality and brand loyalty for the Global brand, compared to the Domestic brand. However, the Domestic brand showed higher customer satisfaction. The effect of COO confusion with the Global brand could cause consumers to choose the Domestic brand (Samiee et al., 2005; Zhuang et al., 2011). However, Akram's (2011) notion of perceived brand globalness is more consistent with the findings, as consumers appeared to be more likely to choose these brands.

6. Conclusion

This study has examined the formation of brand loyalty under conditions of globalized competition in the fast-moving consumer goods industry of Thailand. It studied two

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rarely-examined categories of brand COOs - the localized brand and the global, non-specific brand. The findings showed that Aaker's (1991) model of brand equity explained the formation of brand loyalty for two brands of shower gel, a Domestic brand and a Global brand. In practice, these products are manufactured by the same international company, and have very similar functional product characteristics. However, this study showed that consumers responded to the products in different ways. While loyal Domestic brand consumers relied more on satisfaction with their own consumption experience, loyal Global brand consumers were more influenced by perceived quality. The implication of this research for marketers is that consumers do have different preferences for domestic and globalized brands, and that their brand loyalty and buying decisions may be influenced by different brand characteristics. These differences can be explored through comparative marketing research to understand specific differences in consumer goods categories.

This study did not fully explain differences in brand loyalty for Domestic and Global brands, but it does point out that this difference does exist. Thus, there is an opportunity for additional research to develop a theory of COO-based brand equity formation. The study also only examined a single product category, which relies heavily on perceived brand differences to market relatively (though not completely) substitutable products. Thus, a broader study of consumer products, incorporating concepts including consumer involvement (for example, through cost or social status) would help shed light on the differences between brands with domestic COOs and those with indeterminate, 'stateless' COOs.

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