RESEARCH OF THE INFLUENCE OF QUALITY PERCEPTION, CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND BRAND IMAGE ON SPORTS FOOTWEAR BRAND LOYALTY

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to investigate the relationship between brand image, customer satisfaction, and perceived brand quality with brand loyalty and the relationship between perceived brand quality and brand image. Based on the literature analysis, a conceptual research model was created and hypotheses were proposed. To test the model and hypotheses, the structural equation modeling method (SEM) was used with the help of the SPSS AMOS 26 software package. For the purpose of data collection, a survey was conducted via the Facebook social network, and 201 correctly filled questionnaires were collected. The research results show: A) a positive association between brand image and brand loyalty, B) a positive association between perceived quality and brand image, and C) a positive association between brand image and customer satisfaction. A positive relationship between customer satisfaction and brand loyalty and between perceived quality and brand loyalty has not been established. The results of the research help in understanding the process of forming customer loyalty of sports footwear brands.

KEYWORDS: brands image, loyalty, customer satisfaction, perceived quality

1. INTRODUCTION

A simple definition defines a brand as a type of product manufactured by a specific company under a specific name. Selected elements of the brand (name, symbol, slogan, color...) determine the product and give it an identity that sets it apart from the multitude of the same or similar products. A more complete definition is given by Kotler and Armstrong [2018], stating that a brand is much more than just a name and a symbol, it represents the perception and feelings that customers have about the product and its performance, in this regard they emphasize that "products are created in a factory, and brand in the minds of consumers". Along these lines, the Economic Times [20/7/2023] states that brands are similar to living beings, they have their own identity and personality, their own culture, vision, emotion, and intelligence. What many definitions agree on is that a brand creates loyalty, trust, and attraction, three essential elements that set it apart and make it special. The goal of marketing is to instil or position this uniqueness in the consumer's mind. The goal of marketing is to instil or position this uniqueness in the consumer's mind. In the context of brand positioning, this paper

investigates the interrelationship of four factors (variables): brand image, perceived brand quality, brand loyalty, and customer satisfaction. The paper consists of five parts, after the introductory part, the review of the literature and the formation of hypotheses, the methodology is explained and the results of the research are analysed. The final part of the paper refers to the discussion, implications, and limitations of the research and presentation of the literature used.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Along with the concept of a brand and its meaning for both the company and consumers, there is also the concept of loyalty, which Nedović & Čabarkapa [2010] describes as the consumer's determination to buy the same brand continuously . Since the goal of the company and the brand is to have as long a life as possible, achieving the loyalty of its customers becomes the "condition sine qua non" of successful business and survival on the market. The repeat purchase ensured by loyalty strengthens the competitiveness of the brand and its further development.

Kotler and Armstrong [2018] put brand loyalty in a direct relationship with customer satisfaction. A satisfied customer not only buys again, but also conveys his satisfaction to others. The goal of the brand is to provide those values that will achieve and strengthen customer satisfaction, and thus loyalty to the brand. A factor that greatly impacts satisfaction and loyalty, and the brand's overall reputation or image, is its quality. By its very existence, a brand communicates a certain quality and is a guarantor of that quality. The task of marketing is to make that quality visible and implant it in the consumer's consciousness, and the literature often talks about perceived quality, which Zeithaml [1988] defines as the consumer's judgment of the overall excellence or superiority of the product.

Brand image, perception of brand quality, customer satisfaction, and brand loyalty are factors whose mutual relationship has been established through various research [Ghulam & Imran, 2020], [Mabkhot et al., 2017], [Neupane, 2015]. In this research, the model developed in their research by Ghulam & Imran, [2020] was tested. Based on the literature review, the conceptual research model [Figure 1] and proposed hypotheses were defined.

Figure 1. Conceptual research model
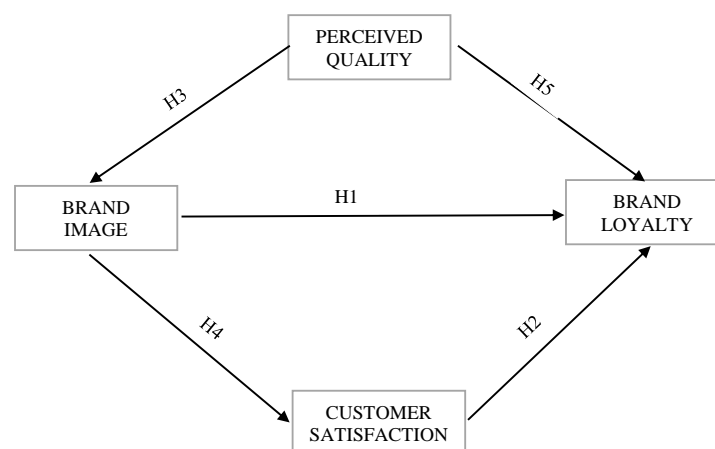
2.1. BRAND IMAGE AND BRAND LOYALTY

According to Drucker et al. [2008], there is only one valid definition of business purpose – creating customers. In this, the task of marketing is to create a brand that will be desirable and thereby make sales redundant. Lee et al. [2014], in the context of different definitions and measurements, define the brand image as the sum of customer perceptions of the brand generated by the interaction of cognitive, affective, and evolutionary processes in the customer's mind.

Along these lines, Zhang [2015] also considers the brand image as a key driver of brand value, which refers to the consumer's general perception and feeling about the brand and has an impact on their behaviour. Various studies investigate the connection between brand image and brand loyalty [Abdullah, 2015], [Ghulam, & Imran, 2020], [Puška et al.]. Based on previous research, hypothesis H1 was proposed.

H1: Brand image is positively related to brand loyalty.

2.2. CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND BRAND LOYALTY

Algesheimer et al. [2005] point out that customer loyalty is their willingness to buy products from a particular supplier and to commit to that supplier in the long term despite the potential benefits of switching suppliers. Kotler and Keller [2016] talk about "the deep commitment of a customer to buy a product or service from a particular company again in the future even if there are factors that can cause a behaviour change". On the other hand, customer satisfaction with a brand is the result of a subjective assessment that the selected brand meets or exceeds customer expectations [Syarifah and Muhti, 2020]. Various researches determined the connection between customer satisfaction and brand loyalty [Syarifah & Mukti, 2020], [Ghulam & Imran, 2020], [Mahmood et al., 2018], [Gautam, 2019]. Based on previous research, hypothesis H2 was formed.

H2: Customer satisfaction is positively related to brand loyalty.

2.3. PERCEIVED QUALITY AND BRAND IMAGE

Product quality is the basis of building a brand and is its guarantor. Quality and the guarantee of that quality to the brand, as stated by Aaker [1991], gives the possibility of differentiation from the competition, charging a higher price and the basis for further expansion, while customers get a good reason to buy and fulfil their expectations. Vidović [2018], in this context, emphasizes the role of quality in reducing the risk of a purchase. Therefore, it is important to view quality not only as technical performance (few failures, remarks, etc.) but as "the customer's perception of the superiority of the product or service concerning their purpose, compared to alternatives" [Zeithaml, 1988]. The positive association of perceived quality with a brand image is confirmed by various studies [Ghulam & Imran, 2020], [Alhaddad, 2015] [Vinh & Phuong, 2017]. In accordance with previous research, hypothesis H3 was proposed.

H3: Perceived brand quality is positively related to brand image.

2.4. BRAND IMAGE AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

More research establishes a positive relationship between brand image and customer satisfaction [Nugroho et al. 2021], [Ghulam & Imran, 2020], [Coung, 2020], [Mohammed & Rashid, 2018], however, some research finds this positive they do not find a connection

[Syaifuddin et al., 2022]. In connection with building a strong image, brand personality and its influence on customer satisfaction are also connected, given that individuals use this personality to build and emphasize their personality [Su & Tong, 2016]. In accordance with previous research, hypothesis H4 was proposed.

H4: Brand image is positively related to customer satisfaction.

2.5. PERCEIVED QUALITY AND BRAND LOYALTY

Civelek & Ertemel, [2019] state that quality perception can be defined as "the consumer's overall assessment of the risks and rewards associated with a particular brand and its products". The influence of perceived brand quality on customer loyalty is confirmed by various studies [Akoglu, Ozbek, 2022], [Ghulam, 2020], [Falahat et al., 2018], [Saleem et al., 2015], [Pappu et al., 2005]. In accordance with previous research, hypothesis H5 was proposed.

H5: Perceived brand quality is positively related to brand loyalty.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. SCALE DEVELOPMENT

Following the proposed conceptual model, the paper determined the connection between brand image, customer satisfaction, and perceived brand quality with brand loyalty, and the connection between perceived brand quality and brand image. The measurement scale developed by Ghulam and Imarn (2020) was used in the research. The questionnaire consisted of a total of 25 questions, of which 4 questions were general, while the rest represented statements where respondents determined their degree of (dis)agreement or disagreement through a five-point Likert scale. (1=do not agree at all, 5=completely agree). [Table 1] Respondents tied their answers to the brand of sports shoes that they indicated they preferred.

Table 1. Original measurement items

Construct	Measurement items	
Brand image	BI1	I think that this brand is friendly
	BI2	I think that this brand is modern.
	BI3	I think that this brand is popular.
	BI4	I think that this brand is useful.
	BI5	I think that this brand is gentle. *
	BI6	1 think that this brand is artificial. *
Brand loyalty	BL1	Brand loyalty creates commitment in the mind of consumers.
	BL2	Pricing strategies of the brand make the consumer more loyal to it.
	BL3	Proper communication between the brand and consumers promotes loyalty.
	BL4	Positive WOM generated by the consumers enhances brand loyalty.
	BL5	Firms with strong loyal customers have to spend fewer resources on marketing. *
Perceive quality	PQ1	X is of high quality.
	PQ2	The likely quality of X is exceptionally high.
	PQ3	The likelihood that X would be functional is very

		high.
	PQ4	The likelihood that X is reliable is very high.
	PQ5	X must be of outstanding quality.
Customer satisfaction	CS1	X brand makes me feel delighted.
	CS2	X brand gives me pleasure.
	CS3	X brand Increases my frequency of use.
	CS4	X brand makes me feel good.
	CS5	X brand prevents me from looking cheap and another brand. *

* Due to the low factor loading, questions BI5, BI6, BL5 and CS5 were omitted from further analysis.

3.2. DATA COLLECTION AND PARTICIPANTS

Empirical research was conducted with the help of a questionnaire created through Google Forms and distributed through the social network Facebook. The research took place in the period from May 15, 2023, to July 4, 2023, and 201 correctly completed questionnaires were collected. According to the demographic indicators, 45 (22.4%) men and 156 (77.6%) women participated in the research. Most respondents are in the age group between 18-25 years, 112 of them (55.7%), while in the group of 26-40 years, there are 75 of them (37.3%), in the group of 41-54 there are 9 of them (4.5%), in the group of 55 and over 4 (2%). There is only 1 respondent (0.5%) in the group under 18 years of age. According to work status, the majority of respondents have the status of employees, 95 (47.3%), while 93 (46.3%) are students. There are 10 (5%) unemployed respondents, 2 (1%) students, and 1 (0.5%) pensioner.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1. EXPLORATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS (EFA) AND RELIABILITY

The validity of the measuring instrument was determined by checking its construct, content, convergent, and discriminant validity. Construct and content validity was established by applying a theory-tested measuring instrument and by conducting exploratory factor analysis (EFA), which confirmed the preset factor structure. The consistency of data for conducting EFA was determined by Bartlett's test of sphericity and the Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin test of sampling adequacy (KMO). Factor analysis was performed with the help of the IBM SPS 23 statistical software package [Table 2].

Table 2. KMO and Bartletts test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test of sampling adequacy		,850
Bartlett's Test of sphericity, χ^2		2151,376
	Degrees of freedom (df)	171
	Significance (Sig)	,000

The Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin sampling adequacy test is greater than the reference limit of 0.6, while Bartlett's sphericity test is high ($\chi 2$ = 2151.376) and significant with a risk of less than 1% (Šram, 2014). The obtained results indicate the appropriateness of the implementation of the EFA analysis, which was carried out on 21 items of the measuring instrument. During the analysis, 4 items (BI5, BI6, BL5, and CS5) were excluded from further analysis due to low factor loading. Principal components analysis with varimax rotation (respecting the Kaiser-

Guttman criterion - each factor has eigenvalues greater than 1) identified 4 factors with factor loading greater than 0.5, explaining 65.410% of the total variance.

The internal consistency or reliability of the measuring instrument was measured by determining the Cronbach alpha coefficient, the value of which can range between 0 and 1, the closer the value is to 1, the more reliable the measuring instrument is. The determined values range between 0.758 and 0.922, coefficient values between 0.6 and 0.7 are considered acceptable, while values above 0.7 are desirable [Schmitt, 1996].

Convergent validity, with the purpose of checking the connection within the construct, was measured using the average extracted variance (AVE) whose value for an individual construct must be 0.5 or more [Ahmed et al., 2016], and using the composite reliability coefficient (CR) whose the value should be greater than 0.6 [Fornely & Larcker, 1981].

The results shown in Table 3 indicate that the reference criteria for determining the validity and reliability of the measuring instrument are met.

Table 3. Internal reliability and convergent validity

| Construct | Item | Internal reliability | | | Convergent validity | | | |
		Cronbach`s alpha)	Item- total correlation	Factor loading	Composite reliability	AVE	Mean	SD
Brand image	BI1		,469	,529			4,378	0,5969
	BI2	,758	,722	,896	,782	**,49***	4,535	0,5830
	BI3		,554	,506			4,637	0,5408
	BI4		,492	,783			1,259	0,5854
Brand loyalty	BL1		,600	,632			3,985	1,0123
	BL2	,796	,544	,533	,794	,50	3,930	0,9084
	BL3		,712	,903			4,229	0,8760
	BL4		,587	,709			4,308	0,8452
Perceived quality	PQ1		,795	,812			4,025	0,8743
	PQ2	,922	,834	,825	,918	,69	3,940	0,9146
	PQ3		,720	,745			4,164	0,7602
	PQ4		,803	,859			4,080	0,8328
	PQ5		,838	,910			3,766	0,9056
Customer satisfaction	CS1		,799	,886			3,896	1,0218
	CS2	,890	,783	,862	,892	,68	4,147	0,8450
	CS3		,711	,747			4,055	0,9284
	CS4		,755	,786			4,070	0,9824

* A slight deviation from the reference limit of 0.50 with respect to other indicators can be tolerated [Fornell, Larcker, 1981].

In order to confirm that the variables within a certain factor do not correlate strongly with the variables in another factor, the discriminant validity of the measuring instrument was tested with the help of the statistical program package IBM SPSS AMOS 26. It was determined that the square of the AVE value of each construct is greater than the correlation of that construct and either of any other construct [Kitchenham, Charters, 2007]. The result in Table 4 confirms good discriminant validity.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity

|	BI	BL	PQ	CS
BI	**0,700**			
BL	0,348	**0,707**		
PQ	0,469	0,247	**0,832**	
CS	0,486	0,291	0,486	**0,822**

4.2. MODEL VERIFICATION USING STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODELING (SEM)

To check the adequacy of the proposed model and test the hypotheses, the structural equation method (SEM) was used with the help of the SPSS AMOS 26 statistical software package. As a rule, the following fit indices are most often used: relative chi-square test and its correction with respect to the number of degrees of freedom (x2/df), GFI - goodness of fit index, NFI - normalized fit index, TLI - Tucker-Lewis index, CFI - comparative fit index, RMSEA - root mean square error of approximation, and SRMR - standardized root mean square residual. The results obtained after the implementation of the SEM analysis show a good agreement between the proposed model and the obtained real data. [Table 5] A graphic representation of the structural model and connections between factors is shown in Figure 2.

Table 5. Fit indices

| Fit indices	Test model	Recommended value	Source
Chi-square	197,746; df=104, p<0,001		
χ^2/df	1,904	< 5	Park & Kim, (2014)
GFI	0,893	>0,8	Halmi, (2016)
NFI	0,906	>0,9	Halmi (2016)
IFI	0,953	>0,9	Park & Kim, (2014)
TLI	0,938	>0,9	Kim & Han, (2014)
CFI	0,952	>0,9	Hu & Bentler, (1999)
RMSEA	0,067	0,03 to 0,08	Hair et al., (2014)
SRMR	0,063	<0,08	Hair et al., (2014)

Figure 2. Structural model – path analyse
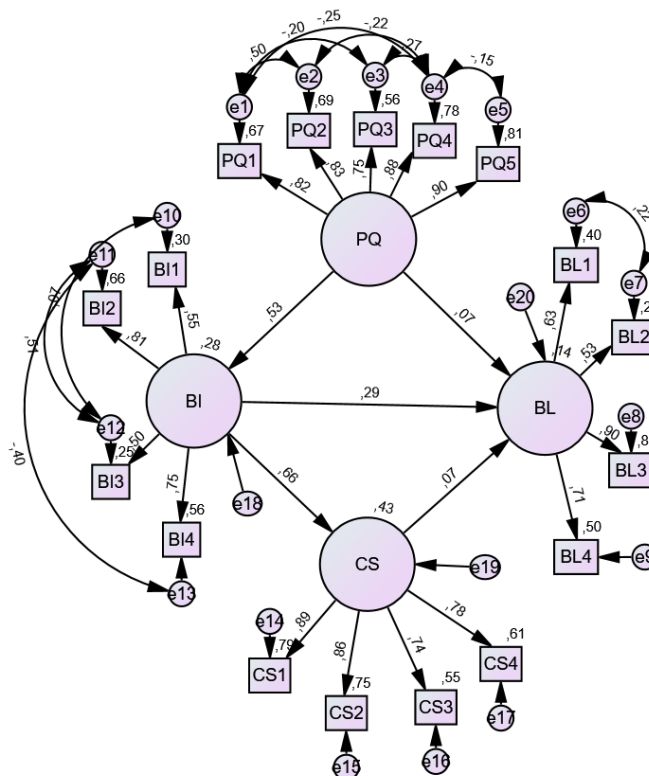
4.3. HYPOTHESIS TESTS

The proposed hypotheses were tested using the method of structural equation modeling (SEM). The test results are shown in Table 6 and Figure 3. According to the results, hypothesis H1 is confirmed, there is a positive relationship between brand image and brand loyalty (ß = 0.287, CR = 2.110, p <0.05). Hypothesis H2 was not confirmed, and a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and brand loyalty was not established (ß = 0.072, CR = 0.643, p >0.05). Hypothesis H3 is confirmed, there is a positive relationship between perceived quality and brand image (ß = 0.531, CR = 5.250, p <0.001). Hypothesis H4 was confirmed, there is a positive relationship between brand image and customer satisfaction (ß = 0.657, CR = 6.233, p <0.001). Hypothesis H5 was not confirmed, and a positive relationship between perceived brand quality and brand loyalty was not established (ß = 0.067, CR = 0.718, p >0.05).

Table 6. Results of hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Independent variable	Dependent variable	Standard estimate	CR	P-value	Supported
H1 (+)	BI	BL	0,287	2,110	0,035	Supported
H2 (+)	CS	BL	0,072	0,643	0,520	N/S
H3 (+)	PQ	BI	0,531	5,250	***	Suported
H4 (+)	BI	CS	0,657	6,233	***	Suported
H5 (+)	PQ	BL	0,067	0,718	0,472	N/S

Figure 3. Results of hypothesis testing
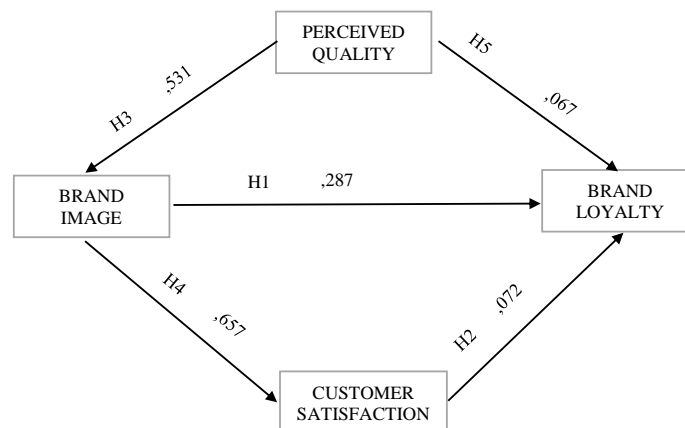
By implementing the structural equation modeling method, the coefficient of determination (R^2) was measured, the value of which can range between 0 and 1. The model is more representative if the value is closer to 1. The result shows that 0.143% of the variance of the dependent variable brand loyalty is explained by three independent variables (perception of quality, brand image, and customer satisfaction), 0.282% of the variance of the dependent variable brand image is explained by one independent variable (perception of quality), and 0.432% of the variance of the dependent variable customer satisfaction is explained by the independent variable brand image. [Table 7]

Table 7. Squared multiple correlation of the proposed research model

Construct	Values %
Brand loyalty (BL)	14,30 (0,143)
Brand image (BI)	28,20 (0,282
Customer satisfaction (CS)	43,20 (0,432)

5. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Within the defined goal of this research, the connection between brand image, customer satisfaction, and perceived brand quality with brand loyalty and the connection between perceived brand quality and brand image was determined.

The positive association of the brand image with brand loyalty was established and hypothesis H1 was confirmed. The result is in line with previous research [Abdullah, 2015], [Puška et al.], where the claim of Išoraitė [2018] is confirmed that a strong brand creates trust among customers, while trust encourages loyalty.

Unexpectedly, hypothesis H2 "Customer satisfaction is positively related to brand loyalty" was not confirmed. The association was not established, which is contrary to various previous research in different industrial fields [Ghulam, and Imran, 2020], [Syarifah & Mukti, 2020], [Mahmood et al., 2018], [AL-Msallam, 2015] where this connection is significant. This research focused on the sports footwear industry, and the result can be indicative in terms of customer retention and loyalty. Loyalty requires a constant examination of the value obtained by purchasing a particular brand. The obtained result certainly requires verification through further research on different samples of respondents.

A significant relationship (ß = 0.531) between perceived quality and brand image was confirmed (H3), which is consistent with earlier research [Ghulam & Imran, 2020], [Alhaddad, 2015], [Vinh & Phuong, 2017], [Ranjbarian et al., 2012]. According to the obtained results, it can be concluded that customers with a high perceived quality of a certain brand will choose a product with a good image [Setyawan et al., 2020].

Hypothesis H4, which assumed a connection between brand image and customer satisfaction, was confirmed, the connection exists and is very significant (ß = 0.657). The result is in accordance with previous research, [Nugroho et al. 2021], [Ghulam and Imran, 2020], [Coung, 2020], [Mohammed & Rashid, 2018]. The result indicates that the brand image of sports footwear affects customer satisfaction. The image represents the perception of a brand based on associations stored in customers' memories. If these associations are in line with customer expectations, they will positively influence their purchase decisions [Coung, 2020].

Unexpectedly, hypothesis H5 was not confirmed, there is no connection between the perception of brand quality of sports shoes and brand loyalty. The result is contrary to the results of previous research that emphasize the importance of perceived quality in building loyalty and the necessity that it is in line with real quality [Akoglu & Ozbek, 2022], [Ghulam & Imran, 2020], [Saleem et al., 2015]. The result can be indicative given that the respondents are mostly members of Generation Z (55.7%) and millennials (37.3%), who have their own specifics and certain value attitudes [Hassan & Rasel, 2018]. The result certainly requires additional verification through future research.

6. IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH

The primary goal of this paper is to determine the connection between the brand image of sports shoes and customer loyalty. In addition, the relationship between perceived brand quality and customer satisfaction with image and loyalty was investigated. The results of the research confirmed the positive association o brand image with brand loyalty and the positive association

of quality perception with image and image with customer satisfaction. A positive relationship between customer satisfaction and brand loyalty and a positive relationship between quality perception and brand loyalty has not been established.

The theoretical contribution of this research is reflected in the findings that support the authenticity of previous research models on the importance of the relationship between brand image and brand loyalty. The results of the research help in understanding the process of forming customer loyalty of sports footwear brands. The theoretical model requires constant verification, given that consumer behaviour constantly changes. This is indicated by the results of the research, especially the non-confirmation of hypotheses H2 and H2.

The research can also be helpful to practitioners who indicate the connection of key factors in customer behaviour that lead to repeat purchases and a longer customer retention time (their longer lifecycle), which ensures their competitiveness and longer survival on the market. These insights should be the backbone of their marketing plans, which will be directed towards improving the image of their brands, a positive image leads to greater satisfaction and desirable customer loyalty.

The research also has its limitations, primarily reflected in the size and structure of the sample of respondents and the use of one social network to distribute the survey questionnaire. Future research would be useful to target different generations of customers and investigate their perceptions of the quality and image of brands and the criteria for acquiring their loyalty.

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