BRAND TRUST-A STUDY OF THE FACTORS IN THE NEW DIGITAL MEDIUM OF MARKETING

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Abstract

There has been a rapid increase in the deployment of the internet and especially the World Wide Web for conducting electronic transactions. Hence, the interest of researchers has also turned to examining trust as an important element in successful online businesses. The purpose of this paper is to show that trust is an important factor for successful online transactions. Although the importance of trust has been examined from various perspectives, the studies on online trust have been fragmented in nature and are still in their infancy. Unlike the traditional bricks-and-mortar marketplace, the online environment includes several distinct factors that influence brand trust. As consumers become savvier about the Internet, the author contends they will insist on doing business with Web companies they trust. This study examines how brand trust is affected by the following Web purchase-related factors: security, privacy, brand name, word-of-mouth, good online experience, and quality of information. The author argues that not all e-trust building programs guarantee success in building brand trust. In addition to the mechanism depending on a program, building e-brand trust requires a systematic relationship between a consumer and a particular Web brand. The findings show that brand trust is not built on one or two components but is established by the interrelationships between complex components. By carefully investigating these variables in formulating marketing strategies, marketers can cultivate brand loyalty and gain a formidable competitive edge.

Key words: Brand Trust, Internet Marketing, Brand Strategies, Digital Paradigm.

Introduction

Brands are everywhere – and their importance to marketing success is undisputed. A familiar brand guarantees the consumer a certain level of quality and satisfaction. A strong and reliable brand can boost a company's products (Norback, 2005), and build up the corporate image: strong brands should eventually result in higher revenue streams (Aaker, 1991), and bring significant cost savings and brand-extension opportunities (Keller, 2005). Branding gives marketers the opportunity to attract and capture a set of intense and active loyal customers (Keller, 2005). One of the major aims of building brand trust

is to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage and thereby enhance a business performance. Many researchers have conducted a general consensus-that brand trust is established through a combination of familiarity, security, privacy, word-of-mouth, advertising, and brand image (Chow and Holden, 1997; Delgodo-Ballester and Munuera-Alema´n, 2001; Garbarino and Johnson, 1999; Hoffman et al., 1998; Wernerfelt, 1991). These studies, however, have not explored building brand trust on the Web. While it may be argued that brand trust is an underlying dimension of brand loyalty, the latter is composed of such a vast number of components that it would be futile to consider it only in general terms. Indeed, brand trust is extremely important for increasing customers' loyalty towards brands on the Web. For example, an auction site such as eBay.com may have very reasonable pricing, but the potential consumer may find the product performance questionable. As a result, a low brand trust may counterbalance high brand satisfaction to reduce the probability of purchase of a product or service on the Web. In contrast, a high level of brand trust may ultimately convert a satisfied customer into a loyal one. Thus, brand trust and its individual determinants constitute the specific objective of this study.

A second line of research closely related to brand trust on the Web is familiarity analysis- when building the trusting brand relationship (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Garbarino and Johnson, 1999; Hoffman et al., 1998; Tractinsky et al., 1999; Urban et al., 2000). Brand familiarity is a continuous variable that reflects a consumer's level of direct and indirect experiences with a product (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987). According to Kania (2001), familiarity with a company or brand generates higher trust, unless a person has a negative perception of a brand. In a joint research study conducted by Cheskin Research and Sapient (1999), responses indicated a strong correlation between familiarity and trust. However, many dot-com brands have not yet achieved the level of familiarity necessary to achieve trust. In contrast, some of that literature suggests that trust may not be so dependent on familiarity (McKnight et al., 1998). However, the researcher believes that in the context of e-tailing, consumers' positive experiences directly affect brand familiarity. The high level of brand familiarity based on consumer experience might strongly influence brand trust on the Web (Smith and Wheeler, 2002). With only a few exceptions like Hoffman et al. (1998) and Papadopoulou et al. (2001), since very little research has been conducted on factors affecting brand trust associated particularly with e-commerce, literature on familiarity with Web is the basis of testable hypotheses that describe the relationship between brand trust and the factors affecting it. The major goal of this research is to assist practitioners and researchers who are interested in the strategic aspects of both brand trust and familiarity on the Internet. In particular, the present research is important for practitioners and academics because much of the work on trust has been theoretical rather than empirical and there has even been empirical work on trust online (McKnight and Kacmar, 2002; Jarvenpaa et al., 2000). Furthermore, factors that affect trust online could be different from those that affect it in a bricks and mortar context (Liang and Huang, 1998).

Theoretical framework and hypotheses

In the present study, we define brand trust as the willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Both Doney and Cannon (1997) and Moorman et al. (1992) also stress that the notion of trust is only relevant in situations of uncertainty. Specifically, e-trust reduces the uncertainty in an environment in which

consumers feel vulnerable because they know that they can rely on the trusted brand (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). The development and maintenance of consumer brand trust on the Web is at the heart of companies' marketing plans, especially in the face of highly competitive markets with increasing unpredictability and decreasing product differentiation (Fournier and Yao, 1997). At a basic level, brand trust is simply the trust a consumer has in that specific brand. Brand trust recognizes that brand value can be created and developed with management of some aspects that go beyond consumer's satisfaction with functional performance of the product and its attributes (Aaker, 1996; Lasser et al., 1995). The same idea is pointed out by Blackston (1995), Gurviez (1996), and Heilbrunn (1995) for whom the study of trust could offer an appropriate schema to conceptualize and measure a more qualitative dimension of brand value. This dimension includes other characteristics and qualities of the brand that also have meaning and add value for the consumer.

In this same sense, Ambler (1997) conceptualizes brand value as a function of the existing relationship between the consumer and the brand, trust being one of the most important ingredients in this relationship. In particular, trust is crucial because it influences several factors essential to online transactions, including security and privacy. Without trust, development of e-commerce cannot reach its potential (Cheskin Research and Sapient, 1999). Although brand trust has a long history of being the focus on management literature, the concept has only become a common topic in consumer behavior literature in the 1990s. Despite its recent growth in use and popularity, the inherent uncertainty in the emerging electronic consumer environment brings the issue of brand trust to the forefront of marketing research, along with many interesting implications for practice and theory.

In this study, the first factor to be investigated is security. Wilson (1998) and Ratnasingham (1998) who used e-trust models as a sociological example (e.g. e-communities) to demonstrate that a "Web of trust" is in fact no easier and less intrusive on personal security than a "public key
infrastructure" where key holders are identified and authenticated by third-party certification authorities. The effect of security on brand trust has been investigated by Hoffman et al. (1998), Keeney (1999), Reichheld and Schefter (2000), Salisbury et al. (2001) Tan (1999). In particular, Tractinsky et al. (1999) argued that a core capability between reputation and security is brand trust. According to Ha (2002), brand reputation affects perceived risk and we would expect security decrease risk perceptions (Mayer et al., 1995). On the other hand, Krishnamurthy (2001) also found that consumers who experience positive security leads to improvements in the levels of familiarity on the Web. Accordingly, security should affect brand trust as well. The first hypothesis of this study is as follows:
H1. The lower the security, the higher the brand trust.

In addition to security, privacy must also be a key factor affecting brand trust since it, affects brand loyalty on the Web. Hoffman et al. (1998) showed that top online shopping concerns of Web consumers relate to control over information privacy and trust. Their studies also found that the most important reasons non-buyers, who are uninterested in online shopping, give for not shopping online are not functional, but related to issues of control over personal information. Furthermore, individuals have serious and legitimate concerns about the privacy of information they provide to favorable direct marketers (Hoffman et al., 1997; Phelps et al., 2000). In addition, when Internet consumers are

concerned about their privacy, they are much more likely to provide incomplete information to Web sites and notify Internet Service Providers (Franzak et al., 2001; Kim and Hoy, 1999). Furthermore, privacy on the Web means risk perceptions towards exposing the consumer's own information. In other words, negative consequences may arise from distribution of private information, and Web site protection would reduce the perception of such risk. The hypothesis stating this is:

H2. If a Web site protects individual's private information, the Web site is perceived as having higher levels of brand trust.

Another factor is the name of the Web site from which the product or the service is purchased or recognized. Keller (1998) states that brand name is one of the factors facilitating the development of brand awareness or familiarity. The effects of brand name or store name regarding familiarity were investigated by Bogart and Lehman (1973), Fournier (1998), Moorman et al. (1993), Morrin (1999), Muniz and O'guinn (2001),Woodside and Wison (1985). In general, the more specialized and reputable a brand is in selling or recognizing the product or the service, the more highly will its brand trust be perceived. Similar finding were obtained by an earlier study on brand name familiarity (Hoyer and Brown, 1990) demonstrating that when inexperienced decision makers are faced with a choice in which a known brand competes with unknown brands, they are considerably more likely to choose the familiar brand. Tractinsky et al. (1999) also have shown that consumer's brand trust affects the store's perceived reputation. This finding means that the consumer perceived the Web store's reputation as favorable brand name. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H3. Perceptions of favorable and reputable Web site as a brand on the Web are associated with higher levels of brand trust.

Word of mouth (WOM) is commonly defined as informal communication about the characteristics of a business or a product which occurs between consumers (Westbrook, 1987). Most importantly, it allows consumers to exert both informational and normative influences on the product evaluations and purchase intentions of fellow consumers (Bone, 1995; Ward and Reingen, 1990). Consumers can acquire information for buying specific products through WOM communication called "cyberbuzz" on the Internet (Herr et al., 1991). Research generally supports the claim that WOM is more influential on behavior than other marketer-controlled sources (e.g. advertising). WOM has been shown to influence awareness, expectations, perceptions, attitudes, behavioral intentions and behavior. In particular, a further determinant of brand trust is WOM communication. Many researchers (Dolinsky, 1994; Fournier, 1998; Iglesias et al., 2001; Martin, 1996; Parasuraman et al., 1988; Reichheld and Schefter, 2000; Tractinsky et al., 1999; Ward and Lee, 2000) found that WOM communication affects brand trust. More recently, researchers showed that building online communities is closely related to e-trust (McWilliam, 2000; Williams and Cothrel, 2000). The study assumes that WOM among satisfied community members will improve e-trust on a particular Web site. In this way, positive WOM communication helps consumers cultivate favorable brand trust on the e-commerce. The corresponding hypothesis tested was:

H4. The Web sites built by positive WOM are perceived as having higher levels of brand trust than marketing-controlled advertising.

Consumers tend to remember best the last experience (the "recency effect"): thus one positive experience may be sufficient to alter perceptions of more than one preceding negative experience, and vice versa. This suggests the important influence that experience can have on customer satisfaction and, the more satisfied the customer, the more durable is the relationship (Buchanan and Gillies, 1990). Relationship depends on a consumer's experience. Similarly, brand trust can be related to experience. In the model of "trusting behavior", Mitchell et al. (1998) see experience as an important variable as it plays a role in trust by making it possible to compare the realities of the firm with preconceived expectations. Ganesan (1994) goes further, and views experience as an antecedent of brand trust. In the context of online retailing, customers usually expect Web sites to offer them not just a message, but a positive experience. Many researchers (Dholakia et al., 2000; Kenny and Marshall, 2000; McWilliam, 2000; Reichheld and Schefter, 2000; Shankar et al., 2000) have investigated a good online experience associated with familiarity of the Web communities. Particularly, extensive home-shopping experience was found to have a positive effect on shoppers' brand trust and buying intentions regardless of the strength of the brands involved (Balabanis and Vassileiou, 1999). In addition to Web community and shopping, a vivid, engaging, active and affective virtual experience- possibly including chat, games, and events- might help customers enjoy various impressive experiences relevant to brand trust (Kania, 2001; Li et al., 2001). More specifically, van Dolen and Ruyter (2002) find that consumers' chat in a new e-service encounter affect perceived enjoyment and customer satisfaction. It is reasonable to assume that such as engaging, interactive Web site will likely enhance the possibility of "flow", which has been described as an enjoyable state of mind that results from a seamless online experience (Janda et al., 2002; Novak et al., 2000). Thus, four types of experience methods were compared: community, chat, game, and event. This facilitated to arrive at the fifth hypothesis of this study:

H5. Experiences that are enjoyed through specific Web sites are perceived to have the highest level of brand trust.

Providing effective information does lead to improved awareness and brand perception (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000; Ha, 2002; Keller, 1998), particularly for individuals with high brand trust (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998; Kania, 2001; Smith and Wheeler, 2002; Tellis, 1988). Krishnamurthy (2001) argues that consumers on the Web are greatly interested in the associated messages. Indeed, Ha (2002) has shown that Internet users are very interested in customized information offered by Web sites. More specifically, Meyvis and Janiszewski (2002) reveal that irrelevant information weakens consumers' belief in the product's ability to deliver the benefit. Hence, whether perceived quality of information is provided and, if it is provided, the quality of customized information for customers, also influence the level of brand trust on the Web.
The related hypothesis is:
H6. The perceived level of brand trust increases with the quality of information offered by the Web sites.

Finally, on offline, brand trust leads to brand loyalty or brand commitment because trust creates exchanges in relationships that are highly valued. The concept of brand commitment is related to the loyalty of consumers towards a particular brand in a product class and is gaining increasing weight in consumer behavior (Martinand and Goodell, 1991). As with brand trust, brand commitment is an essential ingredient for successful long-term relationships (Dwyer et al., 1987; Morgan and Hunt, 1994).

According to recent research, brand trust plays a key role as a variable that generates customers' commitment (Delgodo-Ballester and Munuera-Alema´n, 2001). On the Web, therefore, brand trust might affect brand commitment of the Web sites. This allows us to arrive at the final hypothesis of this study:

H7. The higher the brand trust on the Web, the higher the brand commitment.

Figure 1 shows a structural model of this study.

Methodology

Overview

In order to investigate these hypotheses, two online shopping websites (e.g. Flipkart.com and Jabong.com) were selected. As online shopping is now very popular, and most individuals, especially the students have had the opportunity and experience of purchasing from such Web sites, respondents with the appropriate background to be surveyed were not hard to find. Both sellers and buyers on such shopping websites are given specific feedback ratings. Feedback ratings must relate to specific titles and be designated as positive, neutral or negative. Furthermore, shopping websites are a relevant site to test for brand trust because they are broadly used by many users.

Pretest

I examined consumer perceptions of online-shopping websites. The study restricted to two online-shopping websites because: (1) they are among most popular sites in the e-marketplace; and (2) such restriction simplifies the respondent and analyst tasks. To raise efficiency and reliability of the response, a pre-test was carried out. Graduate students (n=16; male=11; mean age =20:5; female=5; mean age=19.5) in Noida were shown a set of purchase situations with respect to Web purchases. Their primary task was to examine data items affecting brand trust through relationship with Web retailer. As a result of this process, a total of 19 items were obtained. All of the variables considered were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree and 5= strongly agree or 1= very unimportant and 5 = very important). The scaled 19 items were immediately followed by questions asking how much they perceived each of the 19 items.

Data sample

The information necessary to carry out the empirical study was collected in data sample through e-mail to a number of the members of the Internet marketing research homepage during two weeks in Noida during August 2013. A total of 680 personal messages were sent randomly; 93 of the respondents (13.7 percent) resulted in valid surveys. Additional data was collected because the first sample size was very small. Accordingly, 105 respondents were added. After elimination of 23 out of the original 128 returned questionnaires because of incomplete information, the final sample consisted of 198 respondents. There were 91 (45.9 percent) men and 107 (54.1 percent) women in the sample. Their ages ranged from 19 to 47, with a mean of 28.7 years (SD =4:70: Given Anderson and Gerbing's (1988) recommendation of a minimum sample size of 150 when testing a structural model via AMOS, a sample size of 198 appears to be adequate.

Figure 1: Brand Trust and Commitment formation Model
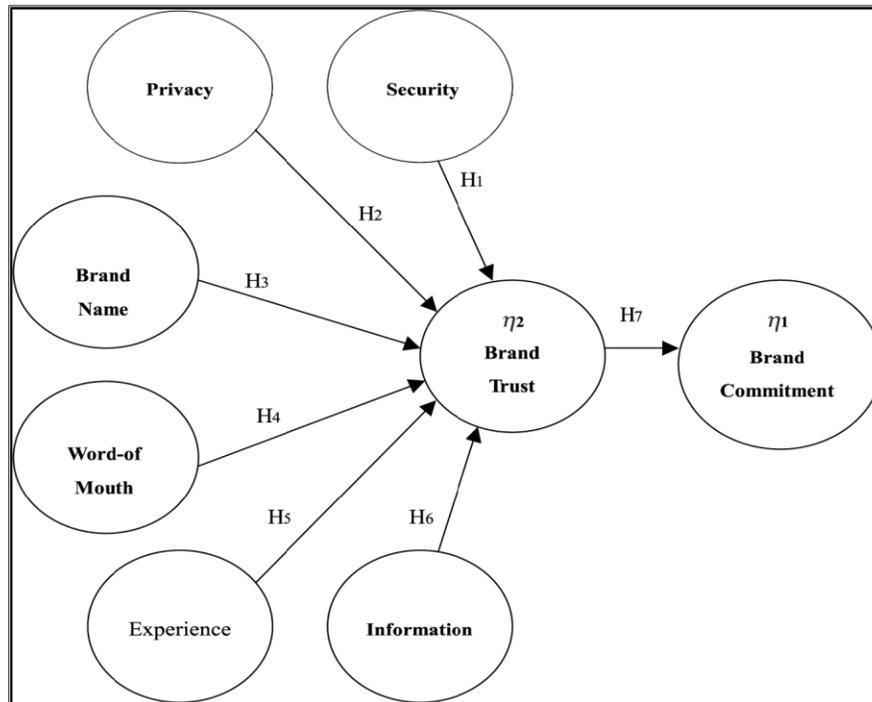
Checks for respondent bias

A key concern with using a single data is that customers who filled out the survey may be systematically different than the other respondents. From a theory-testing perspective this is not a key concern. Although the absolute level of variables might differ for Web members and non-members (e.g. more delighted people may be more responsive), there is no reason to suspect that the hypothesized relationships would be different. For example, Mittal et al. (1999) and Westbrook (1981) find that members were more critical in evaluating their satisfaction with restaurants than non-members were. Therefore, to check for respondent bias, the following steps were taken: Two random samples of 30 respondents each were obtained, for the two waves of the survey. Then the sample of 198 respondents was compared with the first and second wave sample. These comparisons were made on the basis of demographics and the overall Web experience and trust scales used in the study. There were two comparisons: the first between the member and the initial consumption survey sample (198 vs 30) and the second between the member and later consumption survey sample (198 vs 30). Both comparisons showed that the demographic profiles of the members were similar (all ps > 0.19) and that the ratings on the overall Web experience and trust scales were statistically the same (all ps >0.19). Thus, it is reasonably assured that the data set used in the present study is not biased.

Results

Construct measures affecting brand trust under Internet environments are characterized as follows:

(1) Security (Salisbury et al., 2001);

(2) Privacy (Franzak et al., 2001; Nowak and Phelps, 1997);

(3) Brand name (Morrin, 1999; Rio et al., 2001);

(4) Word of mouth (Ha, 2002; Martin, 1996);

(5) Good online experience (Dholakia et al., 2000; van Dolen and Ruyter, 2002; Johnson and Mathews, 1997); and

(6) Quality of information (Krishnamurthy, 2001).

The reliability analysis of these scales yielded favorable results. The constructs exhibited a high degree of reliability in terms of coefficient alpha. Chronbach's alpha of 0.6 is not a valid cut-off (Nunnally, 1978). All of the values exceeded the recommended value of Cronbach's alphas 0.6 (Malhotra, 1993). Table I presents the result of reliability analysis. Factor analysis was used to explain groups among ratio scales. A series of separate confirmatory factor analyses on the construct measures and related items using an assessment of item path coefficients, residual terms, and the overall Cronbach's alpha values for the scales was performed. Table II shows the result of factor analysis for varimax rotation. According to the "break-in-the-roots" method explained by Gorsuch (1974), factors that contribute to total-variance of more than 5 percent are included in post-analysis. Most items were satisfied by the result. The magnitude of the variance explained by all factors is large, averaging 0.15. Keppel (1991) identified effect sizes of 0.15 or greater as large. All items satisfied evaluative criteria. The hypothesized structural model was tested using AMOS 4.0 (Arbuckle, 1999). Table III, presents an overview of the correlation among the main factors: security, privacy, brand name, WOM communication, good online experience, and quality of information. Table III shows a strong relationship between the privacy and WOM communication (r = 0:82). In addition, all of the main factors were found for the positive relationships. Next, a path analysis relating each of the dimensions affecting consumer perceptions of brand trust on the Web was performed. As viewed in Table IV, the results obtained for this model showed a good fit.

Table I: Result of Reliability Analysis

Table I Result of reliability analysis		
Parameters	**Source**	**Alpha**
Security	Salisbury et al. (2)	0.62
Privacy	Franzak et al. (2)	0.65
Brand Name	Morrin (2)	0.67
Word of Mouth	Martin and Ha (3)	0.69
Good online experience	Dholakia et al. (4)	0.83
Quality of Information	Ha (3)	0.82
Brand Trust	Delgado and Munuera (2)	0.76

<u>**Table II: The Result of Factor Analysis**</u>

Table II The result of factor analysis for dimension divisibility		
	Respondents n=198	
Measurement Item	**Mean (SD)**	**Variance explained**
Exogenous constructs		
Security		
Safety on sanction	4.71 (0.52)	0.15
Guarantee	3.92 (0.55)	0.06
Privacy		
Personal data	3.92 (0.70)	0.16
Credit card information	4.08 (0.63)	0.05
Brand name		
Goodwill	3.72 (0.79)	0.15
Reputation	3.84 (0.66)	0.06
WOM		
Recommendation	3.71 (0.64)	0.15
Reliance for information		
provider	3.49 (0.69)	0.06
Good online experience		
Community	3.52 (0.89)	0.25
Chat	3.31 (0.76)	0.06
Game	3.43 (0.75)	0.06
Event	3.07 (0.97)	0.03
Quality of information		
Benefit	4.12 (0.72)	0.25
Interested item	3.36 (0.68)	0.06
Attention	3.49 (0.73)	0.02
Endogenous construct		
Brand trust		
Familiarity	3.85 (0.82)	0.18
Preference	3.71 (0.71)	0.05

Table III Correlation coefficients among the factors affecting brand Trust (P < 0.01)

Factors	F2	F3	F4	F5	F 6
Security (F1)	0.18	0.39	0.28	0.47	0.17
Privacy (F 2)		0.14	0.82	0.36	0.35
Brand name (F 3)			0.31	0.25	0.37
WOM (F4)				0.49	0.52
Experience (F 5)					0.48
Information (F6)					

Table IV A model fit for examining the hypotheses

Structural equation model	
Chi-Square (x^2)	10.442
Degrees of freedom (df)	6
x^2/d.f.	1.74
CFI[a]	0.997
NFI[a]	0.986
IFI[a]	0.994
RFI[a]	0.981
TLI[a]	0.992
RMSEA[b]	0.087

H1. The lower the security, the higher the brands trust. H1 is supported by the data (p < 0:001; t=11:72). That is, the respondents tend to associate higher security feelings with a higher level of brand trust.

H2. If a Web site protects individual's private information, the Web site is perceived to have higher levels of brand trust. The hypothesis is supported with (p <0:005) (t = 4:02): It is obvious therefore that the customers' privacy policy of the specific Web sites is strongly and positively correlated with perceived levels of brand trust.

H3. Perceptions of favorable and reputable Web site as a brand on the Internet are associated with higher levels of brand trust. Again, the data support the hypothesis (p <0:001; t= 8:83). Specific Web sites enjoy the highest level of brand trust. Specific Web sites are recognized more by consumers' strong brand awareness than by consumers' lower brand awareness because brand name is one of the factors facilitating the development of brand awareness (Keller, 1998).

H4. The Web sites built by positive WOM are perceived to have higher levels of brand trust than marketer-controlled advertising. The data show that positive WOM communication helps the Web consumers cultivate concrete brand trust (p <0:001; t =7:28). This finding means that reliable WOM

communication is an increasingly important source for Web users because all tangible products or intangible services on the Web sites may be confirmed by consumers.

H5. Experiences that are enjoyed through specific Web sites are perceived as having the highest level of brand trust. Exciting Web sites apparently provide the best experience through which to stimulate consumers' interests as far as perceived brand trust is concerned ($p < 0:001$; t=7:08). Consumers who experienced delight in specific Web sites might expect more such experiences, which might affect brand trust of consumers. Thus, delightful experiences on the Web sites are found to have the least credibility in terms of brand trust.

H6. The perceived level of brand trust increases with the quality of information offered by the Web sites. The results show that brand trust on the online shopping websites is significantly affected by the quality of information offered by the Web sites ($p < 0:001$; t = 8:94).

H7. The higher the brand trust on the Web, the higher the brand commitment. H7 is supported by the data ($p < 0:001$; t =9:85). High level of brand commitment means that dot-com companies are maintaining ongoing relationships with their customers for the purpose of achieving brand trust and loyalty.

Discussions and marketing implications

The purpose of this study was to examine through empirical research what factors are affecting consumer perceptions on brand trust on the Web. As a pioneer study of its kind, this research has found that perceived brand trust is affected by a number of Web site-related attributes. With respect to security and privacy, it is suggested that traditional offline stores as well as online Web stores must address the issues of security and privacy. For example, the online audience expects Web sites to protect personal data, provide for secure payment, and maintain the privacy of online communication (Franzak et al., 2001). Therefore, along with a secure connection for transmitting credit card information, users want a highly visible privacy policy that tells them precisely how the company will use their data. To increase brand trust, first of all, marketers must guarantee the security of their Web sites and each individual's privacy at the same time.

 It was found that the brand name of a Web store is strongly and positively correlated with perceived levels of brand trust. That is, most customers are aware that favorable brand provides comfort, familiarity, and trust for them offline or online. The starting point of building e-trust is advertising and WOM. To build strong brands on the Web, therefore, the findings suggest that e-marketers must carry out effective offline advertising, as well as online alliance advertisements. To increase brand awareness, for instance, Flipkart.com and Jabong.com have increased their overall marketing budgets significantly and have shifted a majority of the media mix to traditional offline media such as TV, radio, and outdoor advertising. More specifically, in terms of the main effect of familiarity, Kent and Allen (1994) suggest that well-known brands have important advantages in marketplace advertising, because consumers appear to better remember new product information for familiar brands. Another example is Web advertising through strategic alliance with a number of partner sites. Although it pays a commission

according to purchase, building brand is an effective way, and it can acquire many new customer through alliance sites (Hoffman and Novak, 2000).

The fourth factor investigated was WOM communication. Impact of WOM communication exerts a strong effect on brand trust to customers on e-commerce. As it spreads much more quickly on the Web than in the offline world, negative WOM communication generates e-complaining (Harrison-Walker, 2001) and damages brand trust in each customer, thus marketing practitioners have a more difficult time managing communications and damage control. Moreover, their Web community is a good place for practitioners to spread positive cyber buzz like wildfire, building strong brand (McWilliam, 2000), and increasing solid relationships with their customers. Therefore, we suggest that marketing practitioners monitor, manage, and build up potentially thousands of linked sites, as well as their own sites. For good online experience, the data show that impressive experience on the specific Web sites significantly affects brand trust. In particular, the community, one of four items, is a keystone of brand trust (Muniz and O'guinn, 2001; McWilliam, 2000). As consumer-goods companies create online communities on the Web for their brand and trust, they are building strong relationships with their customers and enabling consumers to enjoy all of their contents. In the virtual environment, consumers are able to experience psychological states because the medium creates a sense of presence that results in augmented learning, altered behaviors, and a perceived sense of control (Hoffman and Novak, 1996). Thus, the research suggests that marketers conduct ongoing updates of their contents and manage their communities so that consumers are able to enjoy experiences from those communities. It is reasonable to assume that such a engaging, interactive Web site will likely enhance the possibility of "flow", which has been described as an enjoyable state of mind that results from a seamless online experience (Janda et al., 2002; Novak et al., 2000). Thus impressed and experienced consumers may help companies generate positive WOM, brand trust, and ultimately, brand loyalty.

Limitations and future research

Although our study provides some insight into the way in which factors affecting consumer perceptions on brand trust interact to influence brand trust outcomes, it has certain limitations. First, the research focused on the customers of just one particular Web industry: shopping stores. The findings need to be confirmed by other Web organizations. Second, the number of respondents is not high. A larger sample would have strengthened the results obtained. Finally, changing any of these study design factors may materially affect the empirical results. It is noted in particular that relative performance of consumers' brand trust has been observed to vary over time. Future studies should identify and analyze other antecedent factors affecting brand trust such as brand relationship or shared values with the brand image. Specifically, brand relationship on the Web could play an important role in a model of brand trust because it can signal trust towards the brand among prospects and customers who are risk perceptions on product buying. In addition, as the Internet is generating new technologies, a number of users are likely to modify their interests and behaviors, and then researchers must consider the changing of consumers' brand trust over time.

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