

Brand resonance and planned behaviour: a framework to analyse the impact of brand preferences on customer loyalty

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Abstract

The research project combines empirical and theoretical approaches to define a variant of framework that analyses the impact of food values, subjective norm and brand preferences on customer loyalty in the pasta food sector. The framework integrates the constituent elements of Keller's *Customer-Based Brand Equity* model with Ajzen's *Theory of Planned Behavior*. A quantitative methodology was adopted to test the proposed model. In particular, a questionnaire was designed with the aim of gathering information relative to the socio-demographic, geographic and behavioural profile of the respondents and to all the dimensions and sub-dimensions underlying the framework. 510 valid responses were collected on which an Exploratory Data Analysis (EDA) was conducted in order to verify the correct functioning of the framework presented, to detect any significant relationships between the 61 variables of the dataset and to study the trend and homogeneity of the data collected. We observed a potentially good predictive capacity of the model and we believe that the same may represent – if its predictive validity is confirmed through the performance of a more specific statistical analysis conducted on a larger sample – a valid tool for marketing managers intent on concretely investigating the phenomenon of customer loyalty. The research project is therefore proposed as a work in progress whose data collection and analysis activities will continue in the near future. Companies would have a practically usable conceptual framework at their disposal through the conduct of researches developed specifically for their brand.

Keywords: brand equity, brand management, customer loyalty, CBBE model, brand resonance, planned behaviour.

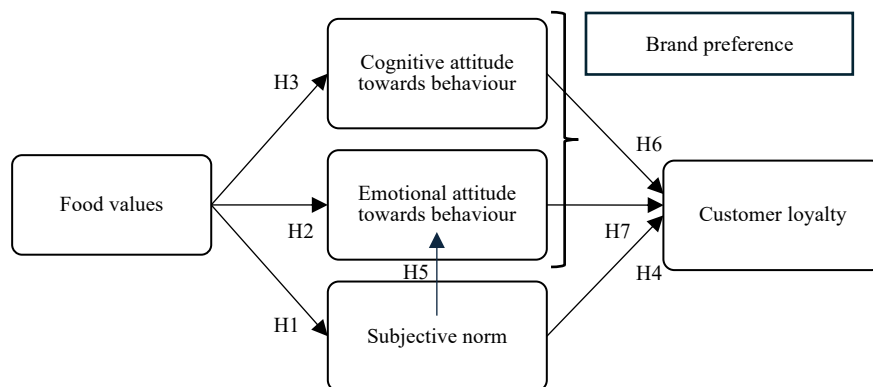
Purpose of the paper

The success of companies depends on the efficiency of strategic brand management implemented by marketing managers. The strategic brand management process is defined as «*the design and implementation of marketing activities and programmes suitable for creating, evaluating and managing brands in order to maximise their value*» (Kotler et al. 2022). The research project looks at this process from the management perspective as expressed by Keller (2001) in the well-known *Customer Based-Brand Equity* (CBBE) model and, by combining empirical and theoretical approaches, comes to define an innovative variant of framework (Izquierdo-Yusta et al. 2022) that analyses the impact of food values, subjective norm and brand preference on customer loyalty in a specific food sector. The framework integrates the constituent elements of the CBBE model with the logic of Ajzen's (1991) *Theory of Planned*

Behavior (TPB) in an attempt to transfer the predictive validity of the latter model to the former, providing marketing managers with a useful tool for the planning and execution of strategies and *marketing operations* aimed at enhancing the value of the brand, in terms of its resonance, enabling the prediction of loyalty in consumer purchasing behaviour. The framework allows the analysis of brand preference broken down into its cognitive and emotional parts and considers customer loyalty from the perspective of Keller and Kotler, who see it as the maturation over time by the customer of both a behavioural loyalty and an attitudinal loyalty towards the company. The originality of the proposed model also consists in the consideration of new predictors to the TPB – which are supposed to be able to predict customer loyalty behaviour – and in the methodological rigour followed for their construction: the behavioural segmentation criteria suggested by Kotler and the dimensions of the CBBE model suggested by Keller have been integrated. The TPB is in fact open to the inclusion of further predictors provided they can be shown to significantly explain intentions and behaviour (Ajzen 1991).

The framework is inspired by a model already existing in literature (Izquierdo-Yusta et al. 2022), modifying it in some variables considered by the Authors. Four variables are considered in particular, presuming them to be able to predict customer loyalty: food values, subjective norm, cognitive attitude towards behaviour and emotional attitude towards behaviour. The cognitive attitude and emotional attitude towards behaviour predictors constitute in an aggregate sense the brand preference variable, broken down in this way following the two paths – one cognitive and the other emotional – envisaged by Keller (2001) to achieve resonance. The customer loyalty contemplated by the model is to be understood as the summation of behavioural loyalty and attitudinal loyalty and thus as explained by Keller (2001) and Kotler (2022). The application of the model thus makes it possible to estimate the impact of the four variables on customer loyalty in both an aggregate and disaggregate sense. The graphical representation of the framework is reported and the correct interpretation to be assigned to the individual variables is explained.

Fig. 1: Proposed framework.



The proposed model looks at food values as a variable suitable for contextually representing brand performance and behavioural and control beliefs, since the latter can be understood in terms of attributes considered important by the individual in the evaluation of the execution of a given action (thus in the evaluation of the choice of one's favourite brand) and in terms of the evaluation of the presence or absence of the resources or opportunities necessary for the implementation of a given purchase behaviour (Ajzen 1991). In this sense we assume that food values are a measure of the perceived behavioural control by the individual. Consider in this regard, that the framework is experimented with a research developed within a specific food sector: that of pasta. The food values of this product undoubtedly have an influence on the choice one makes in the purchasing phase between the various existing brands and types. The more important the food attributes are for the individual and the more positively these are perceived when looking at the performance of one's favourite brand, the more one assumes the potential increase in customer loyalty in the reference sector. And since behaviour is influenced by attitude and subjective norm (Fishbein & Ajzen 1975), the influence of food values on these variables is also assumed. The proposed research hypotheses are, as a consequence of the stated assumptions, as follows:

H1. Food values exert a positive and significant influence on subjective norm.

H2. Food values exert a positive and significant influence on emotional attitude towards behaviour.

H3. Food values exert a positive and significant influence on cognitive attitude towards behaviour.

The subjective norm variable is understood in its proper sense as explained by Ajzen (1991), i.e. as social pressure perceived by the individual on choosing to perform or not a given behaviour. It has been shown in the literature that this is a construct capable of predicting food choices (Povey et al. 2000) and especially healthy ones (Chen, 2016; Van Loo et al. 2017). In the consumption contexts it has been shown that the choice of a particular brand is for the consumer a manifestation of their personality in their social context of reference (Wallace et al. 2014; Karjalainen 2016) and that brand preference is also maintained or not according to the people who have enough influence to exert social pressure on the consumer (Hengner et al. 2017). The concept of the subjective norm is extended to the influence exerted on consumers by influencers and opinion leaders. We assume that the subjective norm, by determining the possibility of amplifying or not the relationship with the brand, can be relevant in terms of repetition of purchasing behaviour over time in terms of loyalty. The research hypotheses are therefore as follows:

H4. Subjective norm exerts a positive and significant influence on customer loyalty.

H5. Subjective norm exerts a positive and significant influence on emotional attitude towards behaviour.

Finally, given the importance of both cognitive and emotional assessments made by the consumer in the purchasing decision-making process (Pessoa 2008; Adoplhs et al. 2012, Olivero et al. 2022), we assume that brand preference can influence customer loyalty and, in particular, we intend to investigate whether the cognitive or emotional dimension predominates. For these reasons, the latest research hypotheses are as follows:

H6. Cognitive attitude towards behaviour exerts a positive and significant influence on customer loyalty.

H7. Emotional attitude towards behaviour exerts a positive and significant influence on customer loyalty.

Literature review

From the company's view, brand equity is the added value endowed on products and services (Kotler et al. 2022). Clearly this is a partial view of what is meant by brand equity since it does not consider the consumer's point of view, it would be sufficient to add «assuming that this added value is perceived by the customer as such» to have a greater sense of completeness. The two perspectives – that of the company and that of the customer – are in fact inseparable because, as much as the company is interested in increasing profitability and market share, without customers there is no company (Kotler et al. 2022).

The concept of brand equity began to be frequently used in the 1980s and 1990s. There are numerous Authors who look at brand equity as the added value conferred by the brand to the product/service (Farquhar 1989; Aaker 1992), but brand equity is also understood, in a broader sense, in terms of an intangible asset resulting from the marketing efforts made by the company (Ambler 1997) capable of giving it a competitive advantage that represents a real barrier to competitors (Aaker 1991). In simpler terms, it is possible to understand brand equity as «*the simple difference between the value of a branded product, and the value of that product without that brand name attached to it*» (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al., 2015) and thus, if we want, it is a bit the “*why*” to be chosen by a consumer from the perspective of Simon Sinek’s Golden Circle (2009).

In order for the brand to have a value, it is necessary to act on specific dimensions so-called *brand equity dimensions*. The main ones have been classified as follows (Aaker 1995): brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality and brand associations. Each dimension has assumed a central role in the various models on brand value developed over time in order to provide useful tools for marketing managers to manage their brand – e.g. the BrandAsset® Valuator model (Young & Rubicam 1993), the BrandDynamics™ model (Alagon et al. 2011), the Equity EngineSM model (Leone et al. 2006). However, the research project looks at the dimensions of brand equity from the perspective of Keller's CBBE model (2022). The Author defines brand equity

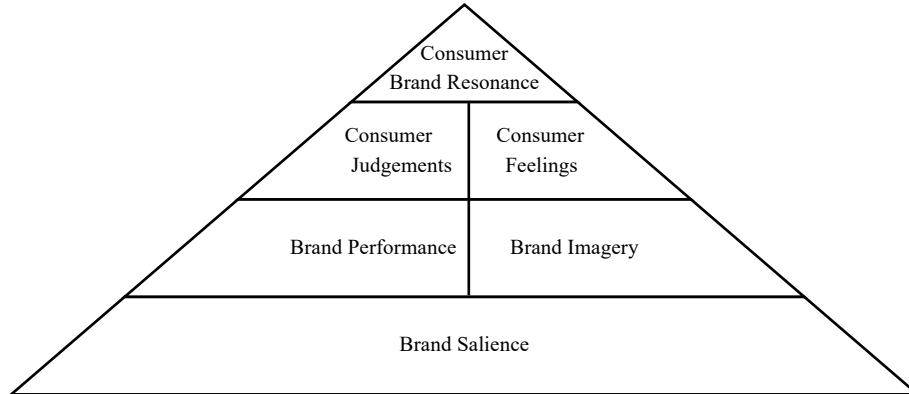
(Keller 2003) in terms of «*the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand*», thus offering a concept of brand equity based on the company but also and above all on the customer. Keller's studies show how brand equity is a concept closely related to that of customer equity: there is no brand equity if there is no brand equity perceived by the customer, there are no brands without customers and there are no customers without brands (Leone et al. 2006).

The CBBE model looks at the construction of brand equity from a pyramid perspective that illustrates the four steps that must be followed hierarchically for brand resonance to occur. It is an extremely practical model that was created with the objective of providing marketing managers with a guideline of the main activities to follow in order to meet the consumer's favour in the more than positive evaluation of their performance. The Author follows a holistic approach that considers value from the perspective of the company and of the consumer at every stage, thus constituting the heart and conceptual foundations of this project. The concepts outlined by Keller, which constitute the basis on which the theoretical approach of the framework rests, are briefly recalled here.

According to Keller, the four basic steps to follow are: (1) accurately establish the brand identity and ensure that customers acquire sufficient brand awareness; (2) create appropriate brand meaning through the construction of strong and unique tangible and intangible associations that allow the customer to fix in their mind what the brand represents; (3) elicit appropriate and positive brand response from the customer in terms of brand-related judgements and feelings; and (4) transform the reactions elicited in the customer into a brand relationship that is characterised by intense and active loyalty. Following these steps we arrive at the most important element of the model: brand resonance, which only occurs when all the activities set out in these four phases are functioning correctly, both in terms of the company's performance and in terms of reception by the customer. Each phase is decisive in achieving brand resonance. The customer who achieves the level of intense and active loyalty that Keller speaks of is a brand-loyal customer who manifests both behavioural and attitudinal loyalty and who lives unique experiences and emotions thanks to the company. Achieving brand resonance, and thus the apex of the pyramid, provides companies with numerous competitive advantages since the customer will have come to recognise the resonant company as an extra value firmly in his mind and heart.

The structure provided by the Author to explain how the four steps outlined should unfold is to divide them into six blocks, each representing a constituent element of brand equity. The pyramid can be understood as a pathway that leads the customer to forge an intense psychological bond with the brand: once the foundations of brand equity have been laid by congruently establishing its identity, the customer will acquire sufficient knowledge of it and will undertake two types of pathways in parallel. On the left of the pyramid, the path is cognitive-rational (performance and judgements), on the right the path is emotional-irrational (imagery and feelings). The six blocks are briefly explained.

Fig. 2: Customer-Based Brand Equity model.



Source: Keller, K. L. (2001)

Keller speaks of *brand identity* in terms of salience and explains that for a brand to be considered salient it is necessary to operate within the logic of brand awareness: a notion that encompasses all the possible primary and secondary associations that bring the brand to the consumer's mind and the intensity of these associations. By *brand awareness* we mean the result of the company's ability to have itself congruently identified by customer over time: it is not a matter of the mere brand-product association, it is a matter of succeeding in conveying the company's values and principles to the customer so that its *raison d'être* is perceived on the market.

Salience is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the customer to enter into a relationship with the company: what counts is the *brand meaning* attributed by the customer to the company and the brand image present in the mind of the consumer. The definition of the brand meaning dimension then implies that of *brand imagery*, understood as what the brand is or should be in the mind of the customer in terms of positioning. A brand can be many different things to the customer, both functional and abstract, tangible and intangible, and the company must be able to grasp these aspects. This is made possible by considering the sub-dimensions that make up brand meaning (brand performance and brand imagery). Firstly, when we speak of *brand performance* we refer to the company's ability to design and satisfy a product that fully reflects the customer's expectations or even exceeds them. This dimension therefore refers to the primary and secondary characteristics of the offer, the reliability, durability and functionality of the offer, effectiveness, efficiency and empathy in interactions with the customer, style and design, and finally price. In summary, therefore, brand performance must certainly include the basic elements of the offer plus all those elements that increase its value and performance. As far as *brand imagery* is concerned, since so many intangible elements can be associated by the customer with it, Keller emphasises some of them. The associations made by the customer may depend on at least four different aspects: the characteristics of the customer (understood as the sum above all of the demographic and psychographic ones); the specific situations and conditions in

which the customer buys or uses the product (this also has to do with the easy availability or not of the products, the type of channels used by the company, the specific shops frequented by habit by the customer, etc.); the customer's personality and their principles (and thus they may identify with a brand that they considers reliable, honest, sophisticated and so on, according to their way of being and thinking); finally, the associations may well depend on the customer's memory, on their memories of experiences with that brand, on having shared pleasant moments in life in the presence of that brand and also on the historical prominence of the brand on the market and the events it has organised over the years.

The *brand response* dimension refers to the customer responses elicited by the company through the marketing activities implemented: these may be responses more afferent to cognition or responses more afferent to emotion, in the awareness of the impossibility of distinguishing the two areas clearly, given the integration of the emotional-cognitive system (Pessoa 2008; Adoplhs et al. 2012). The first type of answers is made explicit in the pyramid in terms of *consumer judgements* about the quality, credibility, consideration and superiority of the brand, from their point of view and in comparison to others on the market. The second type of answers is made explicit in terms of *consumer feelings* in relation to the brand. Keller identifies certain feelings which certainly do not exhaust the category, but certainly represent it in a sufficiently explanatory manner. The reference is to feelings of warmth, fun, excitement, security, social approval and self-respect.

If these blocks of the pyramid were well addressed by the company from a strategic perspective deepening the knowledge of its target of current and potential customers, it would theoretically arrive at *brand resonance*. The concept of resonance expressed by Keller looks at the establishment of a relationship between company and customer such that the customer feels *synchronised* with the brand. The intensity and depth of the psychological bond created will be variable, as will be the attitudes and behaviour of the customers experiencing it. Hence the idea of combining this model with Ajzen's *Theory of Planned Behavior* (1991): trying to predict customer loyalty since this is the position of greatest interest to companies. A loyal customer is a customer who generates value over time and who increases this value by carrying out a series of activities that will spread his or her idea and perception of the brand to others, who, perhaps because they are influenced by the opinion they have heard, will in turn become customers (a concept that echoes Fishbein and Ajzen 1975's subjective norm). Such behaviour is of vital importance for companies especially in the presence of high market competitiveness. The Author breaks down the dimension of resonance into four categories: behavioural loyalty, attitudinal attachment, sense of community and active engagement.

Behavioural loyalty is understood in terms of the repetitiveness of purchases made over time, the amounts spent and the quantities purchased. *Attitudinal attachment* is understood in terms of personal attachment to the brand: for the customer the brand must be special, a mere positive attitude towards it, perhaps dictated by mere habit or

inertia, is not sufficient. This is what Kotler (2022) refers to when he speaks of attitudinal loyalty. By *sense of community* is meant the mechanism whereby the customer not only feels attached to the brand, but also to all those people who experience a similar relationship with the brand as his/her own. Finally, *active engagement* refers to the active participation of the customer in the activities of the company with an investment of time, energy and money far greater than those involved in the consumption or purchase phase of the brand. This is the highest identifiable level of loyalty, which sees the customer not only as the user of a certain offer, but also as the active participant in the creation of the offer itself.

The CBBE model is recognised (1) as a logical, well-founded and well-integrated model, (2) as a model that reflects the most established brand management theories and (3) as a versatile model that can be practically applied to different business contexts. Keller, in fact, guides marketing managers step by step towards the creation of a strong brand, providing a real road map and measures to ensure the success of the six blocks. The applications of the CBBE that have followed over time in the literature are numerous (e. g. Kuhn et al. 2008; Boo et al. 2009; Yousaf et al. 2017). For these reasons and the strong personal agreement with the model's logicity and completeness, the latter was chosen as one of the two pivotal points of the proposed framework for predicting customer loyalty. The second pivotal point is, as anticipated, Ajzen's (1991) TPB, which considers three variables as determinants of individuals' intention to act and thus as determinants of their behaviour: attitude towards the behaviour, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control.

In the CBBE's perspective, strong brands are those that excel in all four steps and thus in all six blocks, achieving relevance in the sense of resonance. The latter, Keller explains, «*reflects a completely harmonious relationship between customers and brand*» leading the customer not only to interact with the company but also to act on its behalf. The key point of the CBBE, the Author continues, is that «*the power of the brand and its ultimate value to the firm resides with customers*». All brands can benefit from the model, although Keller himself acknowledges that there are sectors which, due to their inherent characteristics, allow for stronger brands than those in other sectors.

Methodology

At the end of his work, Keller identifies a series of measures to be used in evaluating the six pyramid blocks, specifying that these are general guiding measures which need to be modified, refined and adapted to the individual needs of the user. We explain which measures were selected to conduct the survey and how they were adapted to the proposed framework.

A quantitative methodology was adopted to test the model. In particular, a questionnaire was designed with the aim of gathering information primarily on the socio-demographic, geographic and behavioural profile of the respondents and on all the

dimensions and sub-dimensions underlying the framework: food values, subjective norm, brand preference and customer loyalty. Each dimension was assessed through variables carefully selected from the existing literature and adapted to the research. The research stems from some of the Authors' suggestions (Izquierdo-Yusta et al. 2022) to which the framework directly refers. At the end of their paper, in fact, it is explained that carrying out the analysis with different food products and in other countries of the world would contribute to the generalisation of the results of the model. The analysis, therefore, originally carried out in Mexico, was carried out in Italy and sees as protagonist pasta instead of food products of the fast-food category. The reasons why this choice was made are easy to guess: it is the most loved and consumed food in Italy, to which Italians associate the pleasure of eating and sharing moments of joy with family, friends and colleagues. The per capita consumption of pasta in Italy is the highest in the world: with around 23 kilograms of pasta consumed per person per year, pasta is confirmed as the favourite food of one Italian in two (Unione Italiana Food 2024). With such an important food, we assume that Italians have brand preferences.

The structure of the questionnaire has been carefully studied in terms of terminology, order of administration of the various questions, layout, graphics and duration, aiming at the maximum intelligibility, clarity and simplicity possible. The evaluation of opinions expressed on items selected for adequate representation of model dimensions was carried out using 5-points Likert scales (Likert 1932; Delvecchio 1995), using items validated in literature, and by 11-point scale. The adopted Likert scales, modified in terms of terminology compared to the original version, were set as importance scales and agreement or disagreement scales while maintaining the decision of the Author to give the opportunity to the respondent to declare "indifferent" so that the data can be analysed on a symmetrical scale.

The questionnaire collected the following *socio-demographic and geographical information*: age in completed years; sex; highest level of education attained; number of members of the household with whom you live (1 in case of a person living alone or with persons other than family members); annual income for the family (or personal); employment status or not; position in the profession and area of residence in Italy. The questions related to the collection of this type of data were set following the definitions formulated and adopted by Istat and taking as reference the last report on consumption expenditure of Italian households (2023) with the aim to compare the information collected with national data so that a sufficient sample representativeness can be obtained.

As regards the *behavioural aspect*, the questionnaire allows a clear identification of the different status of the pasta users in Italy, also in relation to their brand loyalty and allows users to be differentiated according to the intensity with which they use the product. Kotler's definitions (2022) were adopted in this respect since they are considered the most reliable in the literature with reference to the topics under analysis: *heavy user* (consumption 5 times a week or more), *light user* (consumption 1 time a week) and *non-user* (never). The frequencies of use were determined based on the

average consumption of pasta in Italy (Unione Italiana Food 2024) and considering the importance of this product in traditional Italian diet. For these reasons, the average user (consumption 2 to 4 times per week) was also identified and defined, not mentioned in Kotler's original version, considering that for this food type the delineation of three different intensities of use is more appropriate. *The average user is precisely the one who uses the same frequencies as the national average.*

As regards *the dimensions of the proposed framework*, the attributes submitted to the respondents' assessment and the sources from which they were taken are summarised in tables, specifying that they have been adapted to the sector concerned. The questionnaire was administered exclusively in Italy, being a condition of participation in the survey being Italian residents in Italy. The sampling criterion adopted was non-probabilistic. The average estimated time of compilation for 613 respondents was 8 minutes.

Tab. 1: Questionnaire. Food values and brand performance.

FOOD VALUES ITEMS	REFERENCES	BRAND PERFORMANCE ITEMS	REFERENCES
IMPORTANCE LIKERT SCALE <i>"When thinking about pasta, which importance do you attribute to the following aspects?"</i>		AGREEMENT OR DISAGREEMENT LIKERT SCALE <i>"Compared to other pasta brands... your favourite one"</i>	
Genuineness	LUSK ET AL. 2009; LUSK 2011; IZQUIERDO-YUSTA ET AL. 2020; 2022)	Is the most genuine	KELLER, K. L. (2001); KOTLER ET AL. (2022)
Taste		Tastes best	
Price		Has the fairest price	
Quality of raw material		Offers the best quality raw material	
Convenience (e.g. cooking time)		Is the fastest to cook	
Nutrition values (e.g. amount of fat, proteins, carbohydrates)		Has the best nutritional values (e.g. amount of fat, proteins, carbohydrates)	
Respect for tradition (e.g. in processing methods, ingredients)		Is the one that most respects tradition	
Origin of raw material		Is the most reliable in terms of raw material sourcing	
Available alternatives (e.g. bio, gluten-free pasta, various formats)		Offers the most alternatives available (e.g. bio, gluten-free, various formats)	
Packaging appearance and characteristics (e.g. biodegradable)		Has the best packaging (e.g. biodegradable materials, colours, logo)	

materials, colours, logo)		
Appearance and characteristics of the product (e.g. holding in cooking, consistency)	Has the best characteristics (e.g. holding in cooking, consistency)	
Environmental impact of production	Is the one that is most environmentally friendly with its production	

Personal elaboration inspired by IZQUIERDO-YUSTA ET AL. (2022).

The *rational evaluation* carried out by the consumer is recorded following the CBBE model of Keller and therefore is broken down into *brand performance* and *consumer judgements*: the brand resonance is partly the result of the actual performance of the company and partly the result of how these are perceived by the consumer, therefore their personal cognitive judgments. The company's performance was assessed in relation to the twelve selected food values. Knowing the importance attributed to each attribute by the respondent, the analysis is completed by understanding what the consumer thinks of the performance of the company offering its favourite brand of pasta with reference to the same attributes. The approach described above was further developed with the aim of enabling customer value analysis (CVA) on behalf of the brands indicated in the questionnaire following the Fishbein approach.

Tab. 2: Questionnaire. Consumer Judgements.

CONSUMER JUDGEMENTS ITEMS	REFERENCES
How do you evaluate the price-quality ratio of your favourite brand of pasta?	KELLER, K. L. (2001)
How much <i>do you trust</i> the company that produces your favourite pasta?	
How likely <i>would you be to recommend</i> your favourite brand of pasta to friends or colleagues?	
How <i>superior</i> do you think your favourite brand of pasta is compared to the others?	REICHHELD, F. (2006)

Personal elaboration inspired by KELLER, K. L. (2001).

The four dimensions suggested by Keller (2001) in the appendix of his paper were used: quality, credibility, consideration and superiority. The final question on *brand superiority* is also a measure of customer satisfaction that leads to the Net Promoter Score (Reichheld 2003, 2006; Hanson 2011; van Doorn et al. 2013).

Tab. 3: Questionnaire. Brand Imagery.

BRAND IMAGERY ITEMS	REFERENCES
AGREEMENT OR DISAGREEMENT LIKERT SCALE	
<i>"I think my favourite brand of pasta..."</i>	
Is <i>among the most famous</i> pasta brands in Italy today.	KELLER, K. L. (2001)
Is <i>among the most popular</i> in Italian grocery shops and restaurants.	
Is a very <i>reliable and authentic</i> brand.	
Is an <i>historical</i> brand in Italy.	

Personal elaboration inspired by KELLER, K. L. (2001).

Brand imagery was evaluated according to the four categories highlighted by the Author: popularity, distribution, reliability and authenticity, brand historicity.

Tab. 4: Questionnaire. Consumer Feelings.

CONSUMER FEELINGS ITEMS	REFERENCES
AGREEMENT OR DISAGREEMENT LIKERT SCALE	
I feel <i>happiest</i> when I eat my favourite brand of pasta.	KELLER, K. L. (2001)
When I eat my favourite brand of pasta I feel <i>confident</i> in the quality I am eating.	
Buying this brand of pasta makes me feel <i>approved</i> by my acquaintances.	
My favourite brand of pasta evokes in me <i>good memories</i> and <i>good feelings</i> .	

Personal elaboration inspired by KELLER, K. L. (2001).

Consumer feelings about their favourite pasta brand were assessed based on the six likely responses and emotional reactions explained by Keller and choosing those that are more relevant to the consumption of pasta: happiness, safety and social approval. To these, the evaluation of the emotional impact was added with reference to the dimension of the memories and the feelings evoked by them, believing that it is possible to have matured a brand preference over time by virtue of past memories related to convivial moments spent at the table with family or friends.

Tab. 5: Questionnaire. Subjective norm.

SUBJECTIVE NORM ITEMS	REFERENCES
AGREEMENT OR DISAGREEMENT LIKERT SCALE	
Many people important to me (family and friends) <i>think that</i> my favourite brand of pasta is the best.	SEO ET AL. (2011); KIM ET AL. (2013); TENG ET AL. (2015); IZQUIERDO-YUSTA ET AL. (2022)
Many people important to me (family and friends) <i>have recommended to me</i> this brand of pasta.	
I <i>have heard</i> several people, whose opinion I value (on TV, radio, social media), <i>say that</i> they like this brand of pasta.	
In my favourite cooking programmes/videos I watch most often, <i>I have seen this brand of pasta used</i> .	

When I invite family, friends or colleagues for lunch or dinner, I prefer to have my favourite brand of pasta in the pantry, because <i>I feel more comfortable</i> with them that way.	
Some people <i>have pointed out to me</i> that this brand is the most sustainability and health conscious (e.g. it sells bio products)	

Personal elaboration inspired by IZQUIERDO-YUSTA ET AL. (2022) & KELLER, K. L. (2001).

The relevance of the need for social recognition and approval has been affirmed by numerous psychological studies (e.g. Maslow 1943, 1954; McGuire 1976) also in terms of the *heuristic of social validation* (Kahneman 2011; Tversy & Kahneman 1974; Olivero et al. 2022). Assuming that the subjective norm is decisive in predicting customer loyalty to a given brand (Izquierdo-Yusta et al. 2022), six items were built for the construction of this variable inspired by scientific studies developed on the theme (Seo et al. 2011; Kim et al. 2013; Teng et al. 2015; Izquierdo-Yusta et al. 2022) and considering the customs, habits and traditions of the Italian people.

Tab. 6: *Questionnaire. Customer loyalty.*

CUSTOMER LOYALTY ITEMS	REFERENCES
AGREEMENT OR DISAGREEMENT LIKERT SCALE	
If my favourite brand of pasta did <i>no longer exist</i> , I would feel a negative emotion or miss it anyway.	KELLER, K. L. (2001)
My favourite brand of pasta is a special brand for me and <i>I have no intention of abandoning it</i> .	KELLER, K. L. (2001)
In the future, I think <i>I will continue to buy</i> this brand of pasta.	KELLER, K. L. (2001); IZQUIERDO-YUSTA ET AL. (2022)
In the future, I think <i>I will buy</i> this brand of pasta <i>more and more often</i> .	KELLER, K. L. (2001); IZQUIERDO-YUSTA ET AL. (2022)

Personal elaboration inspired by IZQUIERDO-YUSTA ET AL. (2022).

In particular, the first two items assess attitudinal loyalty and the last two are a measure of behavioural loyalty (Keller 2022). The disaggregation of these two dimensions allows to study whether the model is able to predict only one of the two loyal behaviours or both, predicting in the latter case the customer loyalty attitudes.

Discussion

The questionnaire was administered in August of this year. The responses collected were 613 but only 510 of these were considered valid and suitable for data processing. Therefore, all the necessary data cleaning and data preparation operations have been carried out. The questionnaire is currently open, as the research presented is a *work in progress* study whose data collection and analysis will continue in the near future. Therefore, the analysis was mainly carried out to investigate and explore the dataset by conducting a wide Exploratory Data Analysis (EDA) in order to verify the proper functioning of the presented framework, identify any significant relationships between

the 61 variables in the dataset (12 qualitative and 49 quantitative) and study the trend and homogeneity of the data collected. Data were analysed using the statistical software R.

Data cleaning operations were aimed at removing from the initial sample (613) the 11 participants (2%) who declared they "never" eat pasta (non users). The 92 participants (15%) who stated that they had no brand preference (switchers) were also eliminated from the sample. The data analysis was therefore carried out on the remaining 510 valid responses. In the sample, 49% of the subjects eat pasta from two to four times a week (average users), 38% five or more times a week (heavy users) and only 13% declared they eat it one time a week (light users). The data collected are certainly in line with national averages (Unione Italiana Food 2024).

The sample is a non-probability and convenience sample. However, the high number of participants ensures that it is representative according to national averages (Istat 2023). The exploratory analysis of qualitative variables leads to the following observations. The age of 510 respondents ranges from 19 to 87 years old. Most people, however, are between 20 and 30 years old and between 50 and 60 years old. The average age is 45. 67% of the survey participants are female, compared to 33% male. The subjects sampled are mainly located in southern Italy or on the islands (84%), with negligible percentages of residents in the centre (7%) and northern Italy (9%). The sample mainly comprises employed persons (322) and students (82). The former report that they are, in terms of their predominant occupation, mostly managers/middle managers/employees (39%) or entrepreneurs/freelancers (15%). As regards education, 44% of the sample reports they have degree, 36% have stated they have a diploma, 16% hold at least a postgraduate degree and only 4% do not hold any or have one equal to or less than the average licence. Income received on an annual basis is between € 0 - € 5.000 for the 5% of the sample, € 5.001 to € 15.000 for the 15% of the sample, € 15.001 - € 28.000 for the 34% of the sample and € 28.001 to € 50.000 for the 33% of the sample and goes beyond € 50.000 for the 13% of the sample. The largest class in cumulative terms is that which receives from € 15.001 to € 50.000 (342 subjects, that is 67% of the total number). Finally, of the 510 respondents to the questionnaire 71 (14%) said they live alone or with people other than family members, 117 (46%) said they live in a two- or three-member household, 159 (31%) said they live in a four-member household and 46 (9%) said they live in a nucleus of five or more people.

As far as behavioural aspect is concerned, the 68% of the sample (349) said that they usually go food shopping for themselves (53), for themselves and their partner (84), for their family (39) and for their family and children (173). As mentioned, all 510 subjects sampled declare to have a preference for pasta brands (brand lovers). Each of them was asked to explicit it and the favourite brands by the majority of respondents are: Molisana (24%), Rummo (18%), De Cecco (14%) and Garofalo (11%). Barilla and Divella were preferred by the 10% and the 9% of the sample respectively. The percentages achieved by other brands in the original list and those not present in the same, but indicated by participants in "other" option, are negligible. Although all survey

participants have a brand preference, they do not show the same degree of loyalty to what they claim to prefer. They declare themselves very loyal (hard-core loyals) to their favourite brand in 71 out of 510 (14%): they buy/eat only and always that brand. Of the remaining, 67 out of 510 (13%) say they buy/eat a little all brands (shifting loyals) and 372 out of 510 (73%) buy/eat their favourite brand and at most two or three other brands (split loyals). Most respondents are certainly concentrated in the latter category.

Regarding the verification of the hypotheses presented, consider that the constructs – food values, subjective norm, cognitive attitudes towards behaviour (brand performance and consumer judgements) and emotional attitude towards behaviour (brand imagery and consumer feelings) – were evaluated with reference to items that emerged as most significant according to the average judgment given by respondents on the Likert scale. The same reasoning has been developed with regard to sub-dimensions of the construct related to customer loyalty (behavioural loyalty and attitudinal loyalty). The selection by arithmetic mean is valid because the coefficient of variation calculated for each of the selected items is much lower than 0.5, thus, with low variability within the variables, the mean is a good indicator. The items selected for each construct, the coefficient of variation and the mean are shown in the table:

Tab. 7: Items selection.

ITEM SELECTED	REFERENCE VARIABLE	COEFFICIENT OF VARIATION	MEAN
(...) Has the best characteristics (e.g. holding in cooking, consistency)	Food Values, Brand Performance (BP)	0.162	4.094
(...) Is a very <i>reliable and authentic</i> brand.	Brand imagery (BI)	0.143	4.049
How likely <i>would you be to recommend</i> your favourite brand of pasta to friends or colleagues?	Consumer Judgements (CJ)	0.151	8.308
When I eat my favourite brand of pasta I feel <i>confident</i> in the quality I am eating.	Consumer Feelings (CF)	0.171	3.880
When I invite family, friends or colleagues for lunch or dinner, I prefer to have my favourite brand of pasta in the pantry, because <i>I feel more comfortable</i> with them that way.	Subjective Norm (SN)	0.232	3.704
In the future, I think <i>I will continue to buy</i> this brand of pasta.	Behavioural loyalty (BL)	0.174	3.927
My favourite brand of pasta is a special brand for me and I	Attitudinal loyalty (AA)	0.267	3.492

have no intention of abandoning it.			
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Personal processing using R software.

Regarding the item selected with reference to consumer judgements, it is recalled that it coincides with the Net Promoter Score and specifies that an average NPS of 8 corresponds to the attitude of customers to be "passives satisfied" and therefore satisfied but not to the point of recommending the brand to friends and colleagues. Consider that, based on the opinions expressed by respondents via the Likert scale, 58% (294) of consumers shows a trend towards maintaining their brand attitudinal loyalty in the future and 83% (421) of consumers shows the trend towards maintaining its behavioural loyalty in the future.

To evaluate the relationships between constructs involved in research hypotheses, Spearman correlations were studied. The results are presented in a matrix:

Tab. 8: Correlation matrix (Spearman).

	BP	BI	CJ	CF	SN	BL	AA
BP	1	0.386	0.312	0.280	0.325	0.285	0.229
BI	0.386	1	0.311	0.425	0.319	0.340	0.278
CJ	0.312	0.311	1	0.323	0.255	0.361	0.313
CF	0.280	0.425	0.323	1	0.323	0.435	0.427
SN	0.325	0.319	0.255	0.323	1	0.396	0.450
BL	0.285	0.340	0.361	0.435	0.396	1	0.605
AA	0.229	0.278	0.313	0.427	0.450	0.605	1

Personal processing using R software.

The Spearman correlation index shows positive correlations between all variables. Compared to the research hypotheses, the most intense relationships present are those between: (H7) consumer feelings and behavioural loyalty; (H7) consumer feelings and attitudinal loyalty; (H4) subjective norm and attitudinal loyalty. These are slightly higher than 0.4 and can be described as moderately positive. There are further weak positive correlations of 0.4, in particular those between: (H2) brand imagery and brand performance; (H6) consumer judgements and behavioural loyalty; (H4) subjective norm and behavioural loyalty. The other values are not high enough to lead to acceptance of the remaining research hypotheses, although the absence of negative indices indicates a potentially good predictive capacity of the model. In this exploratory phase of data analysis, the research hypotheses H2, H4, H6 and H7 are accepted.

Managerial implications

The research conducted aims to contribute to the progress of literature on the application of TPB in the consumption contexts. In particular, we considered different predictors than those provided for by the original model and since their content was set strictly on the basis of the renowned studies of Keller (2001) and Kotler (2022), we believe that the model can represent a valid tool for marketing managers intending to investigate concretely the phenomenon of customer loyalty. Companies would have a

conceptual framework that could be used in practice by conducting research specifically developed for their brand. The intention is to go beyond the mere classification of customers according to their loyalty status, coming to understand how to set up marketing strategies aimed at retaining customers over time and, in particular, to the retention of customers more profitable for the company, being subjects that build a real relationship with the brand on both cognitive and emotional basis. In this specific case, the relevance of the research is immediate for companies operating in the pasta sector, either because the results include the absolute brand preferences stated by the respondents, either because the construction of the questionnaire was carried out considering the pasta product specifically: this makes the analysis replicable at an international level or replicable with reference to a specific pasta brand. Anyway the proposed framework is also adaptable to other sectors.

Research limitations

In order to demonstrate the predictive validity of the model and generalise the results, it will be necessary first to increase the sample. As mentioned, the questionnaire is still open and the research is therefore still in progress. More specifically, looking at the subjects sampled, for the purposes of generalising the results in relation to the Italian context, it will be necessary to homogenise the number of respondents from the North, Central and Southern Italy. It would also be advisable to homogenise the number of participants in the analysis with regard to the sex variable. The data collection phase will therefore need to be more incisive in these respects. Secondly, the predictive validity of the model could only be demonstrated through a more specific statistical analysis using methods and methodologies that take into account the characteristics of the analysed data. Finally, once the research is completed, it would be interesting and important to carry out the same analysis in other countries other than Italy, with other food products or with products belonging to other merchandise categories.

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